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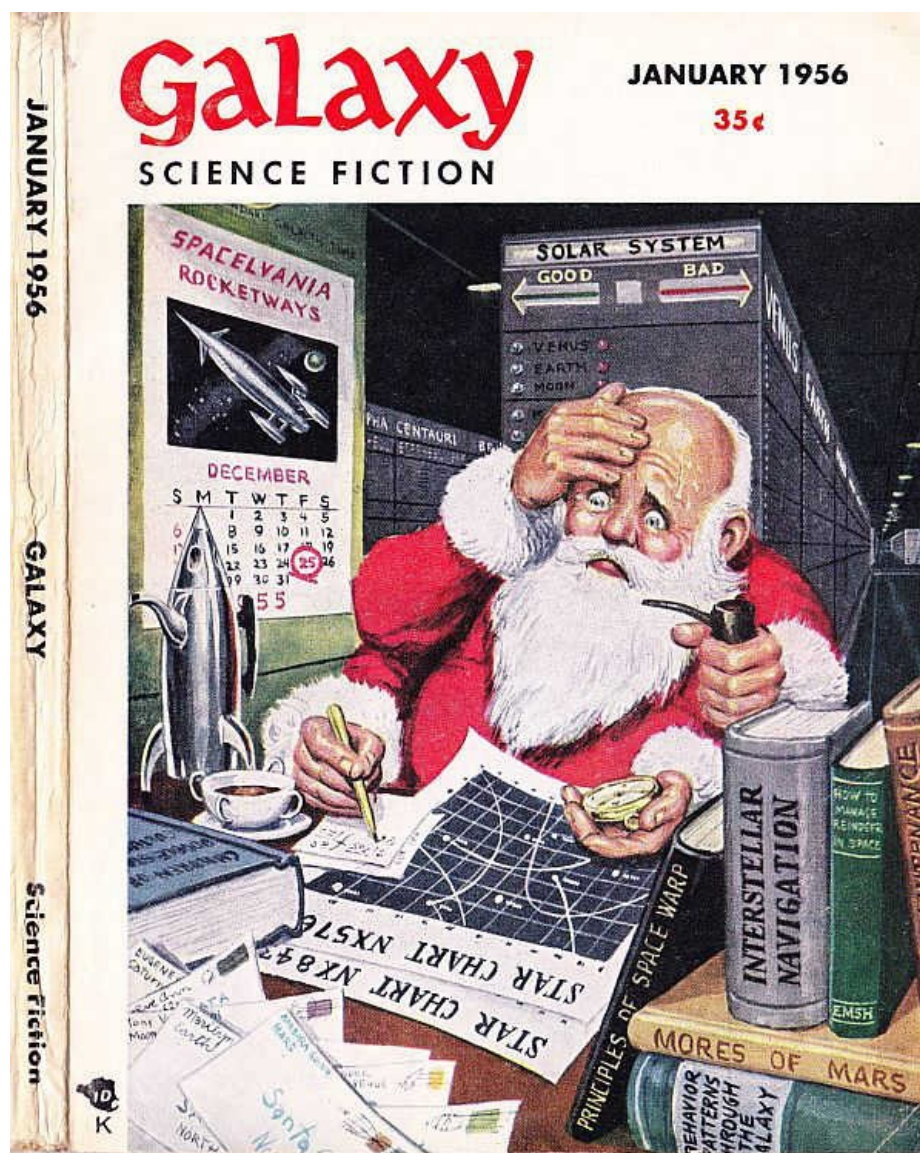
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DWINDLING YEARS ***

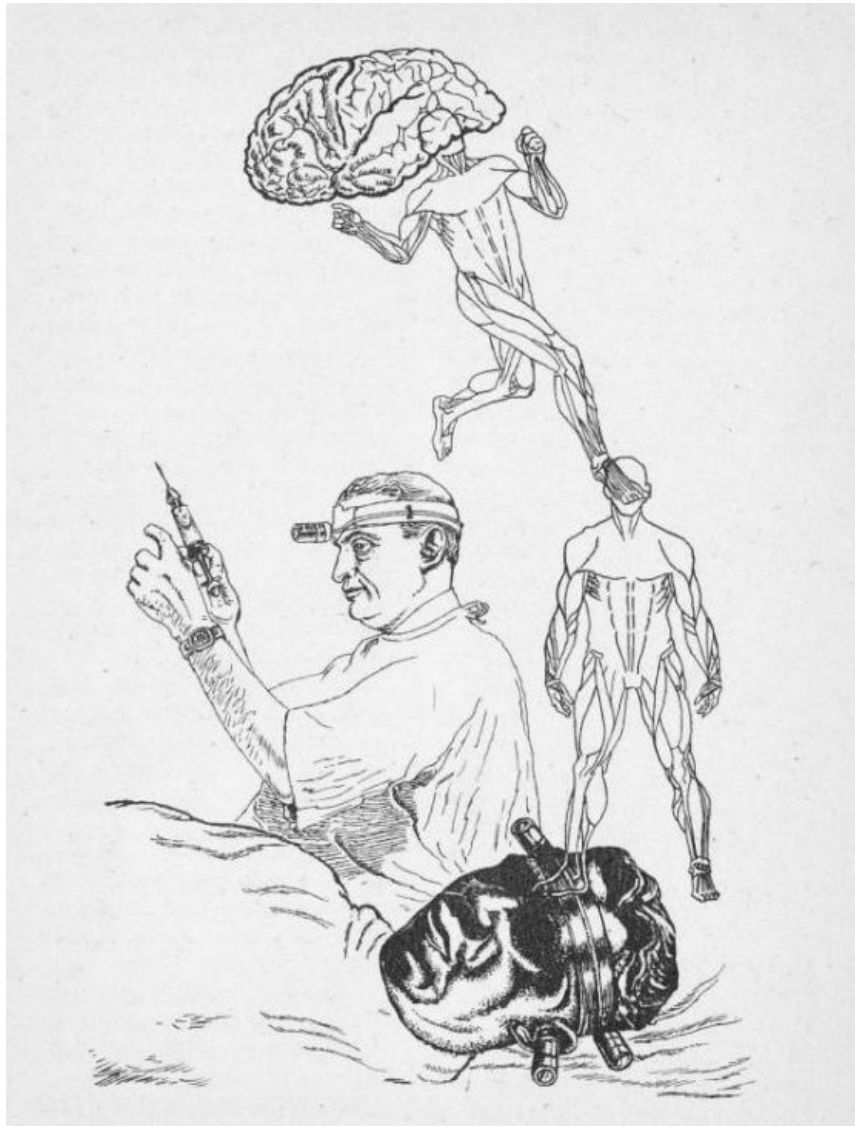


The Dwindling Years

*He didn't expect to be last—
but neither did he
anticipate the horror of
being the first!*

By LESTER DEL REY

Illustrated by JOHNS



NEARLY TWO hundred years of habit carried the chairman of Exodus Corporation through the morning ritual of crossing the executive floor. Giles made the expected comments, smiled the proper smiles and greeted his staff by the right names, but it was purely automatic. Somehow, thinking had grown difficult in the mornings recently.

Inside his private office, he dropped all pretense and slumped into the padding of his chair, gasping for breath and feeling his heart hammering in his chest. He'd been a fool to come to work, he realized. But with the Procyon shuttle arriving yesterday, there was no telling what might turn up. Besides, that fool of a medicist had sworn the shot would cure any allergy or asthma.

Giles heard his secretary come in, but it wasn't until the smell of the coffee reached his nose that he looked up. She handed him a filled cup and set the carafe down on the age-polished surface of the big desk. She watched solicitously as he drank.

"That bad, Arthur?" she asked.

"Just a little tired," he told her, refilling the cup. She'd made the coffee stronger than usual and it

seemed to cut through some of the thickness in his head. "I guess I'm getting old, Amanda."

She smiled dutifully at the time-worn joke, but he knew she wasn't fooled. She'd cycled to middle age four times in her job and she probably knew him better than he knew himself—which wouldn't be hard, he thought. He'd hardly recognized the stranger in the mirror as he tried to shave. His normal thinness had looked almost gaunt and there were hollows in his face and circles under his eyes. Even his hair had seemed thinner, though that, of course, was impossible.

"Anything urgent on the Procyon shuttle?" he asked as she continued staring at him with worried eyes.

SHE JERKED her gaze away guiltily and turned to the incoming basket. "Mostly drugs for experimenting. A personal letter for you, relayed from some place I never heard of. And one of the super-light missiles! They found it drifting half a light-year out and captured it. Jordan's got a report on it and he's going crazy. But if you don't feel well—"

"I'm all right!" he told her sharply. Then he steadied himself and managed to smile. "Thanks for the coffee, Amanda."

She accepted dismissal reluctantly. When she was gone, he sat gazing at the report from Jordan at Research.

For eighty years now, they'd been sending out the little ships that vanished at greater than the speed of light, equipped with every conceivable device to make them return automatically after taking pictures of wherever they arrived. So far, none had ever returned or been located. This was the first hope they'd found that the century-long trips between stars in the ponderous shuttles might be ended and he should have been filled with excitement at Jordan's hasty preliminary report.

He leafed through it. The little ship apparently had been picked up by accident when it almost collided with a Sirius-local ship. Scientists there had puzzled over it, reset it and sent it back. The two white rats on it had still been alive.

Giles dropped the report wearily and picked up the personal message that had come on the shuttle. He fingered the microstrip inside while he drank another coffee, and finally pulled out the microviewer. There were three frames to the message, he saw with some surprise.

He didn't need to see the signature on the first projection. Only his youngest son would have sent an elaborate tercentenary greeting verse—one that would arrive ninety years too late! Harry had been born just before Earth passed the drastic birth limitation act and his mother had spoiled him. He'd even tried to avoid the compulsory emigration draft and stay on with his mother. It had been the bitter quarrels over that which had finally broken Giles' fifth marriage.

Oddly enough, the message in the next frame showed none of that. Harry had nothing but praise for the solar system where he'd been sent. He barely mentioned being married on the way or his dozen children, but filled most of the frame with glowing description and a plea for his father to join him there!

GILES SNORTED and turned to the third frame, which showed a group picture of the family in some sort of vehicle, against the background of an alien but attractive world.

He had no desire to spend ninety years cooped up with a bunch of callow young emigrants, even in one of the improved Exodus shuttles. And even if Exodus ever got the super-light drive working, there was no reason he should give up his work. The discovery that men could live practically forever had put an end to most family ties; sentiment wore thin in half a century—which wasn't much time now, though it had once seemed long enough.

Strange how the years seemed to get shorter as their number increased. There'd been a song once—something about the years dwindling down. He groped for the lines and couldn't remember. Drat it! Now he'd probably lie awake most of the night again, trying to recall them.

The outside line buzzed musically, flashing Research's number. Giles grunted in irritation. He wasn't ready to face Jordan yet. But he shrugged and pressed the button.

The intense face that looked from the screen was frowning as Jordan's eyes seemed to sweep around the room. He was still young—one of the few under a hundred who'd escaped deportation because of special ability—and patience was still foreign to him.

Then the frown vanished as an expression of shock replaced it, and Giles felt a sinking sensation. If he looked *that* bad—

But Jordan wasn't looking at him; the man's interest lay in the projected picture from Harry, across the desk from the communicator.

"Antigravity!" His voice was unbelieving as he turned his head to face the older man. "What world is that?"

Giles forced his attention on the picture again and this time he noticed the vehicle shown. It was enough like an old model Earth conveyance to pass casual inspection, but it floated wheellessly above the ground. Faint blur lines indicated it had been moving when the picture was taken.

"One of my sons—" Giles started to answer. "I could find the star's designation...."

Jordan cursed harshly. "So we can send a message on the shuttle, begging for their secret in a couple of hundred years! While a hundred other worlds make a thousand major discoveries they don't bother reporting! Can't the Council see *anything*?"

Giles had heard it all before. Earth was becoming a backwater world; no real progress had been made in two centuries; the young men were sent out as soon as their first fifty years of education were finished, and the older men were too conservative for really new thinking. There was a measure of truth in it, unfortunately.

"They'll slow up when their populations fill," Giles repeated his old answers. "We're still ahead in medicine and we'll get the other discoveries eventually, without interrupting the work of making the Earth fit for our longevity. We can wait. We'll have to."

THE YOUNGER man stared at him with the strange puzzled look Giles had seen too often lately. "Damn it, haven't you read my report? We know the super-light drive works! That missile reached Sirius in less than ten days. We can have the secret of this antigravity in less than a year! We—"

"Wait a minute." Giles felt the thickness pushing back at his mind and tried to fight it off. He'd only skimmed the report, but this made no sense. "You mean you can calibrate your guiding devices accurately enough to get a missile where you want it and back?"

"What?" Jordan's voice rattled the speaker. "Of course not! It took two accidents to get the thing back to us—and with a half-light-year miss that delayed it about twenty years before the Procyon shuttle heard its signal. Pre-setting a course may take centuries, if we can ever master it. Even with Sirius expecting the missiles and ready to cooperate. I mean the big ship. We've had it drafted for building long enough; now we can finish it in three months. We know the drive works. We know it's fast enough to reach Procyon in two weeks. We even know life can stand the trip. The rats were unharmed."

Giles shook his head at what the other was proposing, only partly believing it. "Rats don't have minds that could show any real damage such as the loss of power to rejuvenate. We can't put human pilots into a ship with our drive until we've tested it more thoroughly, Bill, even if they could correct for errors on arrival. Maybe if we put in stronger signaling transmitters...."

"Yeah. Maybe in two centuries we'd have a through route charted to Sirius. And we still wouldn't have proved it safe for human pilots. Mr. Giles, we've got to have the big ship. All we need is *one* volunteer!"

It occurred to Giles then that the man had been too fired with the idea to think. He leaned back, shaking his head again wearily. "All right, Bill. Find me one volunteer. Or how about you? Do you really want to risk losing the rest of your life rather than waiting a couple more centuries until we know it's safe? If you do, I'll order the big ship."

Jordan opened his mouth and for a second Giles' heart caught in a flux of emotions as the man's offer hovered on his lips. Then the engineer shut his mouth slowly. The belligerence ran out of him.

He looked sick, for he had no answer.

NO SANE man would risk a chance for near eternity against such a relatively short wait. Heroism had belonged to those who knew their days were numbered, anyhow.

"Forget it, Bill," Giles advised. "It may take longer, but eventually we'll find a way. With time enough, we're bound to. And when we do, the ship will be ready."

The engineer nodded miserably and clicked off. Giles turned from the blank screen to stare out of the windows, while his hand came up to twist at the lock of hair over his forehead. Eternity! They had to plan and build for it. They couldn't risk that plan for short-term benefits. Usually it was too easy to realize that, and the sight of the solid, time-enduring buildings outside should have given him a sense of security.

Today, though, nothing seemed to help. He felt choked, imprisoned, somehow lost; the city beyond the window blurred as he studied it, and he swung the chair back so violently that his hand jerked painfully on the forelock he'd been twisting.

Then he was staring unbelievably at the single white hair that was twisted with the dark ones between his fingers.

Like an automaton, he bent forward, his other hand groping for the mirror that should be in one of the drawers. The dull pain in his chest sharpened and his breath was hoarse in his throat, but he hardly noticed as he found the mirror and brought it up. His eyes focused reluctantly. There were other white strands in his dark hair.

The mirror crashed to the floor as he staggered out of the office.

It was only two blocks to Giles' residence club, but he had to stop twice to catch his breath and fight against the pain that clawed at his chest. When he reached the wood-paneled lobby, he was barely able to stand.

Dubbins was at his side almost at once, with a hand under his arm to guide him toward his suite.

"Let me help you, sir," Dubbins suggested, in the tones Giles hadn't heard since the man had been his valet, back when it was still possible to find personal servants. Now he managed the club on a level of quasi-equality with the members. For the moment, though, he'd slipped back into the old ways.

GILES FOUND himself lying on his couch, partially undressed, with the pillows just right and a long drink in his hand. The alcohol combined with the reaction from his panic to leave him almost himself again. After all, there was nothing to worry about; Earth's doctors could cure anything.

"I guess you'd better call Dr. Vincenti," he decided. Vincenti was a member and would probably be the quickest to get.

Dubbins shook his head. "Dr. Vincenti isn't with us, sir. He left a year ago to visit a son in the Centauri system. There's a Dr. Cobb whose reputation is very good, sir."

Giles puzzled over it doubtfully. Vincenti had been an oddly morose man the last few times he'd seen him, but that could hardly explain his taking a twenty-year shuttle trip for such a slim reason. It was no concern of his, though. "Dr. Cobb, then," he said.

Giles heard the other man's voice on the study phone, too low for the words to be distinguishable. He finished the drink, feeling still better, and was sitting up when Dubbins came back.

"Dr. Cobb wants you to come to his office at once, sir," he said, dropping to his knee to help Giles with his shoes. "I'd be pleased to drive you there."

Giles frowned. He'd expected Cobb to come to him. Then he grimaced at his own thoughts. Dubbins' manners must have carried him back into the past; doctors didn't go in for home visits now—they preferred to see their patients in the laboratories that housed their offices. If this kept on, he'd be

missing the old days when he'd had a mansion and counted his wealth in possessions, instead of the treasures he could build inside himself for the future ahead. He was getting positively childish!

Yet he relished the feeling of having Dubbins drive his car. More than anything else, he'd loved being driven. Even after chauffeurs were a thing of the past, Harry had driven him around. Now he'd taken to walking, as so many others had, for even with modern safety measures so strict, there was always a small chance of some accident and nobody had any desire to spend the long future as a cripple.

"I'll wait for you, sir," Dubbins offered as they stopped beside the low, massive medical building.

It was almost too much consideration. Giles nodded, got out and headed down the hall uncertainly. Just how bad did he look? Well, he'd soon find out.

He located the directory and finally found the right office, its reception room wall covered with all the degrees Dr. Cobb had picked up in some three hundred years of practice. Giles felt better, realizing it wouldn't be one of the younger men.

COBBO APPEARED himself, before the nurse could take over, and led Giles into a room with an old-fashioned desk and chairs that almost concealed the cabinets of equipment beyond.

He listened as Giles stumbled out his story. Halfway through, the nurse took a blood sample with one of the little mosquito needles and the machinery behind the doctor began working on it.

"Your friend told me about the gray hair, of course," Cobb said. At Giles' look, he smiled faintly. "Surely you didn't think people could miss that in this day and age? Let's see it."

He inspected it and began making tests. Some were older than Giles could remember—knee reflex, blood pressure, pulse and fluoroscope. Others involved complicated little gadgets that ran over his body, while meters bobbed and wiggled. The blood check came through and Cobb studied it, to go back and make further inspections of his own.

At last he nodded slowly. "Hyper-catabolism, of course. I thought it might be. How long since you had your last rejuvenation? And who gave it?"

"About ten years ago," Giles answered. He found his identity card and passed it over, while the doctor studied it. "My sixteenth."

It wasn't going right. He could feel it. Some of the panic symptoms were returning; the pulse in his neck was pounding and his breath was growing difficult. Sweat ran down his sides from his armpit and he wiped his palms against his coat.

"Any particular emotional strain when you were treated—some major upset in your life?" Cobb asked.

Giles thought as carefully as he could, but he remembered nothing like that. "You mean—it didn't take? But I never had any trouble, Doctor. I was one of the first million cases, when a lot of people couldn't rejuvenate at all, and I had no trouble even then."

Cobb considered it, hesitated as if making up his mind to be frank against his better judgment. "I can't see any other explanation. You've got a slight case of angina—nothing serious, but quite definite—as well as other signs of aging. I'm afraid the treatment didn't take fully. It might have been some unconscious block on your part, some infection not diagnosed at the time, or even a fault in the treatment. That's pretty rare, but we can't neglect the possibility."

HE STUDIED his charts again and then smiled. "So we'll give you another treatment. Any reason you can't begin immediately?"

Giles remembered that Dubbins was waiting for him, but this was more important. It hadn't been a joke about his growing old, after all. But now, in a few days, he'd be his old—no, of course not—his young self again!

They went down the hall to another office, where Giles waited outside while Cobb conferred with another doctor and technician, with much waving of charts. He resented every second of it. It was as if the almost forgotten specter of age stood beside him, counting the seconds. But at last they were through and he was led into the quiet rejuvenation room, where the clamps were adjusted about his head and the earpieces were fitted. The drugs were shot painlessly into his arm and the light-pulser was adjusted to his brain-wave pattern.

It had been nothing like this his first time. Then it had required months of mental training, followed by crude mechanical and drug hypnosis for other months. Somewhere in every human brain lay the memory of what his cells had been like when he was young. Or perhaps it lay in the cells themselves, with the brain as only a linkage to it. They'd discovered that, and the fact that the mind could effect physical changes in the body. Even such things as cancer could be willed out of existence—provided the brain could be reached far below the conscious level and forced to operate.

There had been impossible faith cures for millenia—cataracts removed from blinded eyes within minutes, even—but finding the mechanism in the brain that worked those miracles had taken an incredible amount of study and finding a means of bringing it under control had taken even longer.

Now they did it with dozens of mechanical aids in addition to the hypnotic instructions—and did it usually in a single sitting, with the full transformation of the body taking less than a week after the treatment!

But with all the equipment, it wasn't impossible for a mistake to happen. It had been no fault of his ... he was sure of that ... his mind was easy to reach ... he could relax so easily....

He came out of it without even a headache, while they were removing the probes, but the fatigue on the operator's face told him it had been a long and difficult job. He stretched experimentally, with the eternal unconscious expectation that he would find himself suddenly young again. But that, of course, was ridiculous. It took days for the mind to work on all the cells and to repair the damage of time.

COBB LED him back to the first office, where he was given an injection of some kind and another sample of his blood was taken, while the earlier tests were repeated. But finally the doctor nodded.

"That's all for now, Mr. Giles. You might drop in tomorrow morning, after I've had a chance to complete my study of all this. We'll know by then whether you'll need more treatment. Ten o'clock okay?"

"But I'll be all right?"

Cobb smiled the automatic reassurance of his profession. "We haven't lost a patient in two hundred years, to my knowledge."

"Thanks," said Giles. "Ten o'clock is fine."

Dubbins was still waiting, reading a paper whose headlined feature carried a glowing account of the discovery of the super-light missile and what it might mean. He took a quick look at Giles and pointed to it. "Great work, Mr. Giles. Maybe we'll all get to see some of those other worlds yet." Then he studied Giles more carefully. "Everything's in good shape now, sir?"

"The doctor says everything's going to be fine," Giles answered.

It was then he realized for the first time that Cobb had said no such thing. A statement that lightning had never struck a house was no guarantee that it never would. It was an evasion meant to give such an impression.

The worry nagged at him all the way back. Word had already gone around the club that he'd had some kind of attack and there were endless questions that kept it on his mind. And even when it had been covered and recovered, he could still sense the glances of the others, as if he were Vincenti in one of the man's more morose moods.

He found a single table in the dining room and picked his way through the meal, listening to the conversation about him only when it was necessary because someone called across to him. Ordinarily, he was quick to support the idea of clubs in place of private families. A man here could choose his group and grow into them. Yet he wasn't swallowed by them, as he might be by a family. Giles had been living here for nearly a century now and he'd never regretted it. But tonight his own group irritated him.

He puzzled over it, finding no real reason. Certainly they weren't forcing themselves on him. He remembered once when he'd had a cold, before they finally licked that; Harry had been a complete nuisance, running around with various nostrums, giving him no peace. Constant questions about how he felt, constant little looks of worry—until he'd been ready to yell at the boy. In fact, he had.

Funny, he couldn't picture really losing his temper here. Families did odd things to a man.

HE LISTENED to a few of the discussions after the dinner, but he'd heard them all before, except for one about the super-speed drive, and there he had no wish to talk until he could study the final report. He gave up at last and went to his own suite. What he needed was a good night's sleep after a little relaxation.

Even that failed him, though. He'd developed one of the finest chess collections in the world, but tonight it held no interest. And when he drew out his tools and tried working on the delicate, lovely jade for the set he was carving his hands seemed to be all thumbs. None of the other interests he'd developed through the years helped to add to the richness of living now.

He gave it up and went to bed—to have the fragment of that song pop into his head. Now there was no escaping it. Something about the years—or was it days—dwindling down to something or other.

Could they really dwindle down? Suppose he couldn't rejuvenate all the way? He knew that there were some people who didn't respond as well as others. Sol Graves, for instance. He'd been fifty when he finally learned how to work with the doctors and they could only bring him back to about thirty, instead of the normal early twenties. Would that reduce the slice of eternity that rejuvenation meant? And what had happened to Sol?

Or suppose it wasn't rejuvenation, after all; suppose something had gone wrong with him permanently?

He fought that off, but he couldn't escape the nagging doubts at the doctor's words.

He got up once to stare at himself in the mirror. Ten hours had gone by and there should have been some signs of improvement. He couldn't be sure, though, whether there were or not.

He looked no better the next morning when he finally dragged himself up from the little sleep he'd managed to get. The hollows were still there and the circles under his eyes. He searched for the gray in his hair, but the traitorous strands had been removed at the doctor's office and he could find no new ones.

He looked into the dining room and then went by hastily. He wanted no solicitous glances this morning. Drat it, maybe he should move out. Maybe trying family life again would give him some new interests. Amanda probably would be willing to marry him; she'd hinted at a date once.

He stopped, shocked by the awareness that he hadn't been out with a woman for....

He couldn't remember how long it had been. Nor why.

"In the spring, a young man's fancy," he quoted to himself, and then shuddered.

It hadn't been that kind of spring for him—not this rejuvenation nor the last, nor the one before that.

GILES TRIED to stop scaring himself and partially succeeded, until he reached the doctor's office. Then it was no longer necessary to frighten himself. The wrongness was too strong, no matter how professional Cobb's smile!

He didn't hear the preliminary words. He watched the smile vanish as the stack of reports came out. There was no nurse here now. The machines were quiet—and all the doors were shut.

Giles shook his head, interrupting the doctor's technical jargon. Now that he knew there was reason for his fear, it seemed to vanish, leaving a coldness that numbed him.

"I'd rather know the whole truth," he said. His voice sounded dead in his ears. "The worst first. The rejuvenation...?"

Cobb sighed and yet seemed relieved. "Failed." He stopped, and his hands touched the reports on his desk. "Completely," he added in a low, defeated tone.

"But I thought that was impossible!"

"So did I. I wouldn't believe it even yet—but now I find it isn't the first case. I spent the night at Medical Center going up the ranks until I found men who really know about it. And now I wish I hadn't." His voice ran down and he gathered himself together by an effort. "It's a shock to me, too, Mr. Giles. But—well, to simplify it, no memory is perfect—even cellular memory. It loses a little each time. And the effect is cumulative. It's like an asymptotic curve—the further it goes, the steeper the curve. And—well, you've passed too far."

He faced away from Giles, dropping the reports into a drawer and locking it. "I wasn't supposed to tell you, of course. It's going to be tough enough when they're ready to let people know. But you aren't the first and you won't be the last, if that's any consolation. We've got a longer time scale than we used to have—but it's in centuries, not in eons. For everybody, not just you."

It was no consolation. Giles nodded mechanically. "I won't talk, of course. How—how long?"

Cobb spread his hands unhappily. "Thirty years, maybe. But we can make them better. Geriatric knowledge is still on record. We can fix the heart and all the rest. You'll be in good physical condition, better than your grandfather—"

"And then...." Giles couldn't pronounce the words. He'd grown old and he'd grow older. And eventually he'd die!

An immortal man had suddenly found death hovering on his trail. The years had dwindled and gone, and only a few were left.

He stood up, holding out his hand. "Thank you, Doctor," he said, and was surprised to find he meant it. The man had done all he could and had at least saved him the suspense of growing doubt and horrible eventual discovery.

OUTSIDE ON the street, he looked up at the Sun and then at the buildings built to last for thousands of years. Their eternity was no longer a part of him.

Even his car would outlast him.

He climbed into it, still partly numbed, and began driving mechanically, no longer wondering about the dangers that might possibly arise. Those wouldn't matter much now. For a man who had thought of living almost forever, thirty years was too short a time to count.

He was passing near the club and started to slow. Then he went on without stopping. He wanted no chance to have them asking questions he couldn't answer. It was none of their business. Dubbins had been kind—but now Giles wanted no kindness.

The street led to the office and he drove on. What else was there for him? There, at least, he could still fill his time with work—work that might even be useful. In the future, men would need the super-light drive if they were to span much more of the Universe than now. And he could speed up the work in some ways still, even if he could never see its finish.

It would be cold comfort but it was something. And he might keep busy enough to forget sometimes that the years were gone for him.

Automatic habit carried him through the office again, to Amanda's desk, where her worry was still riding her. He managed a grin and somehow the right words came to his lips. "I saw the doctor, Amanda, so you can stop figuring ways to get me there."

She smiled back suddenly, without feigning it. "Then you're all right?"

"As all right as I'll ever be," he told her. "They tell me I'm just growing old."

This time her laugh was heartier. He caught himself before he could echo her mirth in a different voice and went inside where she had the coffee waiting for him.

Oddly, it still tasted good to him.

The projection was off, he saw, wondering whether he'd left it on or not. He snapped the switch and saw the screen light up, with the people still in the odd, wheelless vehicle on the alien planet.

FOR A long moment, he stared at the picture without thinking, and then bent closer. Harry's face hadn't changed much. Giles had almost forgotten it, but there was still the same grin there. And his grandchildren had a touch of it, too. And of their grandfather's nose, he thought. Funny, he'd never seen even pictures of his other grandchildren. Family ties melted away too fast for interstellar travel.

Yet there seemed to be no slackening of them in Harry's case, and somehow it looked like a family, rather than a mere group. A very pleasant family in a very pleasant world.

He read Harry's note again, with its praise for the planet and its invitation. He wondered if Dr. Vincenti had received an invitation like that, before he left. Or had he even been one of those to whom the same report had been delivered by some doctor? It didn't matter, but it would explain things, at least.

Twenty years to Centaurus, while the years dwindled down—

Then abruptly the line finished itself. "The years dwindle down to a precious few...." he remembered. "A precious few."

Those dwindling years had been precious once. He unexpectedly recalled his own grandfather holding him on an old knee and slipping him candy that was forbidden. The years seemed precious to the old man then.

Amanda's voice came abruptly over the intercom. "Jordan wants to talk to you," she said, and the irritation was sharp in her voice. "He won't take no!"

Giles shrugged and reached for the projector, to cut it off. Then, on impulse, he set it back to the picture, studying the group again as he switched on Jordan's wire.

But he didn't wait for the hot words about whatever was the trouble.

"Bill," he said, "start getting the big ship into production. I've found a volunteer."

He'd been driven to it, he knew, as he watched the man's amazed face snap from the screen. From the first suspicion of his trouble, something inside him had been forcing him to make this decision. And maybe it would do no good. Maybe the ship would fail. But thirty years was a number a man could risk.

If he made it, though....

Well, he'd see those grandchildren of his this year—and Harry. Maybe he'd even tell Harry the truth, once they got done celebrating the reunion. And there'd be other grandchildren. With the ship, he'd have time enough to look them up. Plenty of time!

Thirty years was a long time, when he stopped to think of it.

—LESTER DEL REY

Transcriber's Note

This etext was produced from Galaxy January 1956. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

The cover belongs to the entire publication, and does not particularly relate to this etext.

Minor changes in presentation have been made from the layout of the original paper publication.

Punctuation has been normalized. Variations in hyphenation have been retained as they were in the original publication. The following assumed printer's errors were corrected:

positively —> positively

He'd developed one the finest —> He'd developed one of the finest

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DWINDLING YEARS ***

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