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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BUTTERFLY 9 ***



Butterfly 9

By DONALD KEITH

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

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Jeff needed a job and this man had a job to offer—one where giant economy-size trouble had labels like fakemake, bumsy and peekage!

I

At first, Jeff scarcely noticed the bold-looking man at the next table. Nor did Ann. Their minds were busy with Jeff's troubles.

"You're still the smartest color engineer in television," Ann told Jeff as they dallied with their food. "You'll bounce back. Now eat your supper."

"This beanery is too noisy and hot," he grumbled. "I can't eat. Can't talk. Can't think." He took a silver pillbox from his pocket and fumbled for a black one. Those were vitamin pills; the big red and yellow ones were sleeping capsules. He gulped the pill.

Ann looked disapproving in a wifely way. "Lately you chew pills like popcorn," she said. "Do you really need so many?"

"I need something. I'm sure losing my grip."

Ann stared at him. "Baby! How silly! Nothing happened, except you lost your lease. You'll build up a better company in a new spot. We're young yet."

Jeff sighed and glanced around the crowded little restaurant. He wished he could fly away somewhere. At that moment, he met the gaze of the mustachioed man at the next table.

The fellow seemed to be watching him and Ann. Something in his confident gaze made Jeff uneasy. Had they met before?

Ann whispered, "So you noticed him, too. Maybe he's following us. I think I saw him on the parking lot where we left the car."

Jeff shrugged his big shoulders. "If he's following us, he's nuts. We've got no secrets and no money."

"It must be my maddening beauty," said Ann.

"I'll kick him cross-eyed if he starts anything," Jeff said. "I'm just in the mood."

Ann giggled. "Honey, what big veins you have! Forget him. Let's talk about the engineering lab you're going to start. And let's eat."

He groaned. "I lose my appetite every time I think about the building being sold. It isn't worth the twelve grand. I wouldn't buy it for that if I could. What burns me is that, five years ago, I could have bought it for two thousand."

"If only we could go back five years." She shrugged fatalistically. "But since we can't—"

The character at the next table leaned over and spoke to them, grinning. "You like to get away? You wish to go back?"

Jeff glanced across in annoyance. The man was evidently a salesman, with extra gall.

"Not now, thanks," Jeff said. "Haven't time."

The man waved his thick hand at the clock, as if to abolish time. "Time? That is nothing. Your little lady. She spoke of go back five years. Maybe I help you."

He spoke in an odd clipped way, obviously a foreigner. His shirt was yellow. His suit had a silky sheen. Its peculiar tailoring emphasized the bulges in his stubby, muscular torso.

Ann smiled back at him. "You talk as if you could take us back to 1952. Is that what you really mean?"

"Why not? You think this silly. But I can show you."

Jeff rose to go. "Mister, you better get to a doctor. Ann, it's time we started home."

Ann laid a hand on his sleeve. "I haven't finished eating. Let's chat with the gent." She added in an undertone to Jeff, "Must be a psycho—but sort of an inspired one."

The man said to Ann, "You are kind lady, I think. Good to crazy people. I join you."

He did not wait for consent, but slid into a seat at their table with an easy grace that was almost arrogant.

"You are unhappy in 1957," he went on. "Discouraged. Restless. Why not take trip to another time?"

"Why not?" Ann said gaily. "How much does it cost?"

"Free trial trip. Cost nothing. See whether you like. Then maybe we talk money." He handed Jeff a card made of a stiff plastic substance.

Jeff glanced at it, then handed it to Ann with a half-smile. It read:

4-D TRAVEL BEURO
Greet Snader, Traffic Ajent

"Mr. Snader's bureau is different," Jeff said to his wife. "He even spells it different."

Snader chuckled. "I come from other time. We spell otherwise."

"You mean you come from the future?"

"Just different time. I show you. You come with me?"

"Come where?" Jeff asked, studying Snader's mocking eyes. The man didn't seem a mere eccentric. He had a peculiar suggestion of humor and force.

"Come on little trip to different time," invited Snader. He added persuasively, "Could be back here in hour."

"It would be painless, I suppose?" Jeff gave it a touch of derision.

"Maybe not. That is risk you take. But look at me. I make trips every day. I look damaged?"

As a matter of fact, he did. His thick-fleshed face bore a scar and his nose was broad and flat, as if it had been broken. But Jeff politely agreed that he did not look damaged.

Ann was enjoying this. "Tell me more, Mr. Snader. How does your time travel work?"

"Cannot explain. Same if you are asked how subway train works. Too complicated." He flashed his white teeth. "You think time travel not possible. Just like television not possible to your grandfather."

Ann said, "Why invite us? We're not rich enough for expensive trips."

"Invite many people," Snader said quickly. "Not expensive. You know Missing Persons lists, from police? Dozens people disappear. They go with me to other time. Many stay."

"Oh, sure," Jeff said. "But how do you select the ones to invite?"

"Find ones like you, Mr. Elliott. Ones who want change, escape."

Jeff was slightly startled. How did this fellow know his name was Elliott?

Before he could ask, Ann popped another question. "Mr. Snader, you heard us talking. You know we're in trouble because Jeff missed a good chance five years ago. Do you claim people can really go back into the past and correct mistakes they've made?"

"They can go back. What they do when arrive? Depends on them."

"Don't you wish it were true?" she sighed to Jeff.

"You afraid to believe," said Snader, a glimmer of amusement in his restless eyes. "Why not try? What you lose? Come on, look at station. Very near here."

Ann jumped up. "It might be fun, Jeff. Let's see what he means, if anything."

Jeff's pulse quickened. He too felt a sort of midsummer night's madness—a yearning to forget his troubles. "Okay, just for kicks. But we go in my car."

Snader moved ahead to the cashier's stand. Jeff watched the weasel-like grace of his short, broad body.

"This is no ordinary oddball," Jeff told Ann. "He's tricky. He's got some gimmick."

"First I just played him along, to see how loony he was," Ann said. "Now I wonder who's kidding whom." She concluded thoughtfully, "He's kind of handsome, in a tough way."

II

Snader's "station" proved to be a middle-sized, middle-cost home in a good neighborhood. Lights glowed in the windows. Jeff could hear the whisper of traffic on a boulevard a few blocks away. Through the warm dusk, he could dimly see the mountains on the horizon. All was peaceful.

Snader unlocked the front door with a key which he drew from a fine metal chain around his neck. He swept open the front door with a flourish and beamed at them, but Ann drew back.

"Walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly," she murmured to Jeff. "This could be a gambling hell. Or a dope den."

"No matter what kind of clip joint, it can't clip us much," he said. "There's only four bucks in my wallet. My guess is it's a 'temple' for some daffy religious sect."

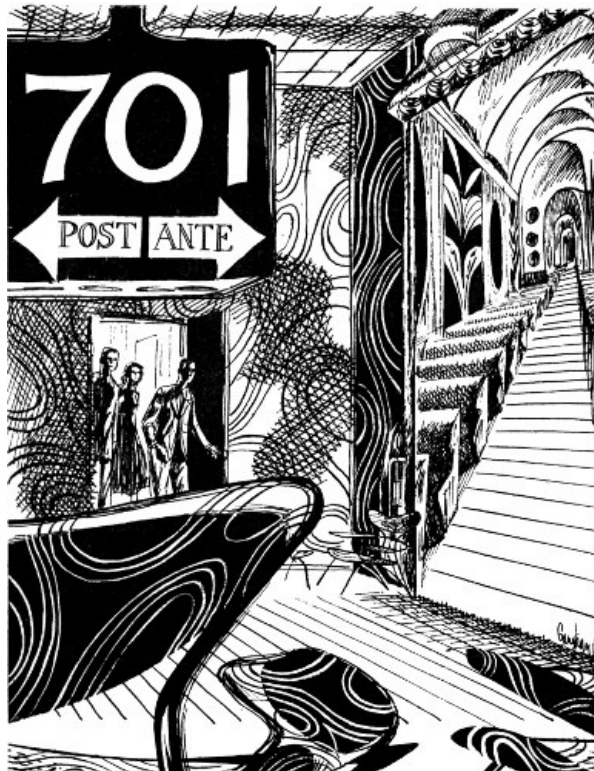
They went in. A fat man smiled at them from a desk in the hall. Snader said, "Meet Peter Powers. Local agent of our bureau."

The man didn't get up, but nodded comfortably and waved them toward the next room, after a glance at Snader's key.

The key opened this room's door, too. Its spring lock snapped shut after them.

The room was like a doctor's waiting room, with easy chairs along the walls. Its only peculiar aspects were a sign hanging from the middle of the ceiling and two movie screens—or were they giant television screens?—occupying a whole wall at either end of the room.

The sign bore the number 701 in bright yellow on black. Beneath it, an arrow pointed to the screen on the left with the word *Ante*, and to the right with the word *Post*.



Jeff studied the big screens. On each, a picture was in motion. One appeared to be moving through a long corridor, lined with seats like a railroad club car. The picture seemed to rush at them from the left wall. When he turned to the right, a similar endless chair-lined corridor moved toward him from that direction.

"Somebody worked hard on this layout," he said to Snader. "What's it for?"

"Time travel," said Snader. "You like?"

"Almost as good as Disneyland. These movies represent the stream of time, I suppose?"

Instead of answering, Snader pointed to the screen. The picture showed a group of people chatting in a fast-moving corridor. As it hurtled toward them, Snader flipped his hand in a genial salute. Two people in the picture waved back.

Ann gasped. "It was just as if they saw us."

"They did," Snader said. "No movie. Time travelers. In fourth dimension. To you, they look like flat picture. To them, we look flat."

"What's he supposed to be?" Jeff asked as the onrushing picture showed them briefly a figure bound hand and foot, huddled in one of the chairs. He stared at them piteously for an instant before the picture surged past.

Snader showed his teeth. "That was convict from my time. We have criminals, like in your time. But we do not kill. We make them work. Where he going? To end of line. To earliest year this time groove reach. About 600 A.D., your calendar. Authorities pick up when he get there. Put him to work."

"What kind of work?" Jeff asked.

"Building the groove further back."

"Sounds like interesting work."

Snader chortled and slapped him on the back. "Maybe you see it some day, but forget that now. You come with me. Little trip."

Jeff was perspiring. This was odder than he expected. Whatever the fakery, it was clever. His curiosity as a technician made him want to know about it. He asked Snader, "Where do you propose to go? And how?"

Snader said, "Watch me. Then look at other wall."

He moved gracefully to the screen on the left wall, stepped into it and disappeared. It was as if he had slid into opaque water.

Jeff and Ann blinked in mystification. Then they remembered his instruction to watch the other screen. They turned. After a moment, in the far distance down the long moving corridor, they could see a stocky figure. The motion of the picture brought him nearer. In a few seconds, he was recognizable as Snader—and as the picture brought him forward, he stepped down out of it and was with them again.

"Simple," Snader said. "I rode to next station. Then crossed over. Took other carrier back here."

"Brother, that's the best trick I've seen in years," Jeff said. "How did you do it? Can I do it, too?"

"I show you." Grinning like a wildcat, Snader linked his arms with Ann and Jeff, and walked them toward the screen. "Now," he said. "Step in."

Jeff submitted to Snader's pressure and stepped cautiously into the screen. Amazingly, he felt no resistance at all, no sense of change or motion. It was like stepping through a fog-bank into another room.

In fact, that was what they seemed to have done. They were in the chair-lined corridor. As Snader turned them around and seated them, they faced another moving picture screen. It seemed to rush through a dark tunnel toward a lighted square in the far distance.

The square grew on the screen. Soon they saw it was another room like the waiting room they had left, except that the number hanging from the ceiling was 702. They seemed to glide through it. Then they were in the dark tunnel again.

Ann was clutching Jeff's arm. He patted her hand. "Fun, hey? Like Alice through the looking-glass."

"You really think we're going back in time?" she whispered.

"Hardly! But we're seeing a million-dollar trick. I can't even begin to figure it out yet."

Another lighted room grew out of the tunnel on the screen, and when they had flickered through it, another and then another.

"Mr. Snader," Ann said unsteadily, "how long—how many years back are you taking us?"

Snader was humming to himself. "Six years. Station 725 fine place to stop."

For a little while, Jeff let himself think it might be true. "Six years ago, your dad was alive," he mused to Ann. "If this should somehow be real, we could see him again."

"We could if we went to our house. He lived with us then, remember? Would we see ourselves, six years younger? Or would—"

Snader took Jeff's arm and pulled him to his feet. The screen was moving through a room numbered 724.

"Soon now," Snader grunted happily. "Then no more questions."

He took an arm of each as he had before. When the screen was filled by a room with the number 725, he propelled them forward into it.



Again there was no sense of motion. They had simply stepped through a bright wall they could not feel. They found themselves in a replica of the room they had left at 701. On the wall, a picture of the continuous club-car corridor rolled toward them in a silent, endless stream.

"The same room," Ann said in disappointment. "They just changed the number. We haven't been anywhere."

Snader was fishing under his shirt for the key. He gave Ann a glance that was almost a leer. Then he carefully unlocked the door.

In the hall, a motherly old lady bustled up, but Snader brushed past her. "Official," he said, showing her the key. "No lodging."

He unlocked the front door without another word and carefully shut it behind them as Jeff and Ann followed him out of the house.

"Hey, where's my car?" Jeff demanded, looking up and down the street.

The whole street looked different. Where he had parked his roadster, there was now a long black limousine.

"Your car is in future," Snader said briskly. "Where it belong. Get in." He opened the door of the limousine.

Jeff felt a little flame of excitement licking inside him. Something was happening, he felt. Something exciting and dangerous.

"Snader," he said, "if you're kidnaping us, you made a mistake. Nobody on Earth will pay ransom for us."

Snader seemed amused. "You are foolish fellow. Silly talk about ransom. You in different time now."

"When does this gag stop?" Jeff demanded irritably. "You haven't fooled us. We're still in 1957."

"You are? Look around."

Jeff looked at the street again. He secretly admitted to himself that these were different trees and houses than he remembered. Even the telephone poles and street lights seemed peculiar, vaguely foreign-looking. It must be an elaborate practical joke. Snader had probably ushered them into one house, then through a tunnel and out another house.

"Get in," Snader said curtly.

Jeff decided to go along with the hoax or whatever it was. He could see no serious risk. He helped Ann into the back seat and sat beside her. Snader slammed the door and slid into the driver's seat. He started the engine with a roar and they rocketed away from the curb, narrowly missing another car.

Jeff yelled, "Easy, man! Look where you're going!"

Snader guffawed. "Tonight, you look where you are going."

Ann clung to Jeff. "Did you notice the house we came out of?"

"What about it?"

"It looked as though they were afraid people might try to break in. There were bars at the windows."

"Lots of houses are built that way, honey. Let's see, where are we?" He glanced at house numbers. "This is the 800 block. Remember that. And the street—" He peered up at a sign as they whirled around a corner. "The street is Green Thru-Way. I never heard of a street like that."

III

They were headed back toward what should have been the boulevard. The car zoomed through a cloverleaf turn and up onto a broad freeway. Jeff knew for certain there was no freeway there in 1957—nor in any earlier year. But on the horizon, he could see the familiar dark bulk of the mountains. The whole line of moonlit ridges was the same as always.

"Ann," he said slowly, "I think this is for real. Somehow I guess we escaped from 1957. We've been transported in time."

She squeezed his arm. "If I'm dreaming, don't wake me! I was scared a minute ago. But now, oh, boy!"

"Likewise. But I still wonder what Snader's angle is." He leaned forward and tapped the driver on his meaty shoulder. "You brought us into the future instead of the past, didn't you?"

It was hard to know whether Snader was sleepy or just bored, but he shrugged briefly to show there was no reply coming. Then he yawned.

Jeff smiled tightly. "I guess we'll find out in good time. Let's sit back and enjoy the strangest ride of our lives."

As the limousine swept along through the traffic, there were plenty of big signs for turn-offs, but none gave any hint where they were. The names were unfamiliar. Even the language seemed grotesque. "Rite Channel for Creepers," he read. "Yaw for Torrey Rushway" flared at him from a fork in the freeway.

"This can't be the future," Ann said. "This limousine is almost new, but it doesn't even have an automatic gear shift—"

She broke off as the car shot down a ramp off the freeway and pulled up in front of an apartment house. Just beyond was a big shopping center, ablaze with lights and swarming with shoppers. Jeff did not recognize it, in spite of his familiarity with the city.

Snader bounded out, pulled open the rear door and jerked his head in a commanding gesture. But Jeff did not get out. He told Snader, "Let's have some answers before we go any further."

Snader gave him a hard grin. "You hear everything upstairs."

The building appeared harmless enough. Jeff looked thoughtfully at Ann.

She said, "It's just an apartment house. We've come this far. Might as well go in and see what's there."

Snader led them in, up to the sixth floor in an elevator and along a corridor with heavy carpets and soft gold lights. He knocked on a door.

A tall, silver-haired, important-looking man opened it and greeted them heartily.

"Solid man, Greet!" he exclaimed. "You're a real scratcher! And is this our sharp?" He gave Jeff a friendly but appraising look.

"Just what you order," Snader said proudly. "His name—Jeff Elliott. Fine sharp. Best in his circuit. He brings his lifemate, too. Ann Elliott."

The old man rubbed his smooth hands together. "Prime! I wish joy," he said to Ann and Jeff. "I'm Septo Kersey. Come in. Bullen's waiting."

He led them into a spacious drawing room with great windows looking out on the lights of the city. There was a leather chair in a corner, and in it sat a heavy man with a grim mouth. He made no move, but grunted a perfunctory "Wish joy" when Kersey introduced them. His cold eyes studied Jeff while Kersey seated them in big chairs.

Snader did not sit down, however. "No need for me now," he said, and moved toward the door with a mocking wave at Ann.

Bullen nodded. "You get the rest of your pay when Elliott proves out."

"Here, wait a minute!" Jeff called. But Snader was gone.

"Sit still," Bullen growled to Jeff. "You understand radioptics?"

The blood went to Jeff's head. "My business is television, if that's what you mean. What's this about?"

"Tell him, Kersey," the big man said, and stared out the window.

Kersey began, "You understand, I think, that you have come back in time. About six years back."

"That's a matter of opinion, but go on."

"I am general manager of Continental Radioptic Combine, owned by Mr. Dumont Bullen." He nodded toward the big man. "Chromatics have not yet been developed here in connection with radioptics. They are well understood in your time, are they not?"

"What's chromatics? Color television?"

"Exactly. You are an expert in—ah—colored television, I think."

Jeff nodded. "So what?"

The old man beamed at him. "You are here to work for our company. You will enable us to be first with chromatics in this time wave."

Jeff stood up. "Don't tell me who I'll work for."

Bullen slapped a big fist on the arm of his chair. "No fog about this! You're bought and paid for, Elliott! You'll get a fair labor contract, but you do what I say!"

"Why, the man thinks he owns you." Ann laughed shakily.

"You'll find my barmen know their law," Bullen said. "This isn't the way I like to recruit. But it was only way to get a man with your knowledge."

Kersey said politely, "You are here illegally, with no immigrate permit or citizen file. Therefore you cannot get work. But Mr. Bullen has taken an interest in your trouble. Through his influence, you can make a living. We even set aside an apartment in this building for you to live in. You are really very luxe, do you see?"

Jeff's legs felt weak. These highbinders seemed brutally confident. He wondered how he and Ann would find their way home through the strange streets. But he put on a bold front.

"I don't believe your line about time travel and I don't plan to work for you," he said. "My wife and I are walking out right now. Try and stop us, legally or any other way."

Kersey's smooth old face turned hard. But, unexpectedly, Bullen chuckled deep in his throat. "Good pop and bang. Like to see it. Go on, walk out. You hang in trouble, call up here—Butterfly 9, ask for Bullen. Whole exchange us. I'll meet you here about eleven tomorrow pre-noon."

"Don't hold your breath. Let's go, Ann."

When they were on the sidewalk, Ann took a deep breath. "We made it. For a minute, I thought there'd be a brawl. Why did they let us go?"

"No telling. Maybe they're harmless lunatics—or practical jokers." He looked over his shoulder as they walked down the street, but there was no sign of pursuit. "It's a long time since supper."

Her hand was cold in his and her face was white. To take her mind off their problem, he ambled toward the lighted shop windows.

"Look at that sign," he said, pointing to a poster over a display of neckties. "'Sleek neck-sashes, only a Dick and a dollop!' How do they expect to sell stuff with that crazy lingo?"

"It's jive talk. They must cater to the high-school crowd." Ann glanced nervously at the strolling people around them. "Jeff, where are we? This isn't any part of the city I've ever seen. It doesn't even look much like America." Her voice rose. "The way the women are dressed—it's not old-fashioned, just different."

"Baby, don't be scared. This is an adventure. Let's have fun." He pressed her hand soothingly and pulled her toward a lunch counter.

If the haberdasher's sign was jive, the restaurant spoke the same jargon. The signs on the wall and the bill of fare were baffling. Jeff pondered the list of beef shingles, scorchers, smack sticks and fruit chills, until he noticed that a couple at the counter were eating what clearly were hamburgers—though the "buns" looked more like tortillas.

Jeff jerked his thumb at them and told the waitress, "Two, please."

When the sandwiches arrived, they were ordinary enough. He and Ann ate in silence. A feeling of foreboding hung over them.

When they finished, the clerk gave him a check marked 1/20. Jeff looked at it thoughtfully, shrugged and handed it to the cashier with two dollar bills.

The man at the desk glanced at them and laughed. "Stage money, eh?"

"No, that's good money," Jeff assured him with a rather hollow smile. "They're just new bills,

that's all."

The cashier picked one up and looked at it curiously. "I'm afraid it's no good here," he said, and pushed it back.

The bottom dropped out of Jeff's stomach. "What kind of money do you want? This is all I have."

The cashier's smile faded. He caught the eye of a man in uniform on one of the stools. The uniform was dark green, but the man acted like a policeman. He loomed up beside Jeff.

"What's the rasper?" he demanded. Other customers, waiting to pay their checks, eyed Jeff curiously.

"I guess I'm in trouble," Jeff told him. "I'm a stranger here and I got something to eat under the impression that my money was legal tender. Do you know where I can exchange it?"

The officer picked up the dollar bill and fingered it with evident interest. He turned it over and studied the printing. "United States of America," he read aloud. "What are those?"

"It's the name of the country I come from," Jeff said carefully. "I—uh—got on the wrong train, apparently, and must have come further than I thought. What's the name of this place?"

"This is Costa, West Goodland, in the Continental Federation. Say, you must come from an umpty remote part of the world if you don't know about this country." His eyes narrowed. "Where'd you learn to speak Federal, if you come from so far?"

Jeff said helplessly, "I can't explain, if you don't know about the United States. Listen, can you take me to a bank, or some place where they know about foreign exchange?"

The policeman scowled. "How'd you get into this country, anyway? You got immigrate clearance?"

An angry muttering started among the bystanders.

The policeman made up his mind. "You come with me."

At the police station, Jeff put his elbows dejectedly on the high counter while the policeman talked to an officer in charge. Some men whom Jeff took for reporters got up from a table and eased over to listen.

"I don't know whether to charge them with fakemake, bumsey, peekage or lunate," the policeman said as he finished.

His superior gave Jeff a long puzzled stare.

Jeff sighed. "I know it sounds impossible, but a man brought me in something he claimed was a time traveler. You speak the same language I do—more or less—but everything else is kind of unfamiliar. I belong in the United States, a country in North America. I can't believe I'm so far in the future that the United States has been forgotten."

There ensued a long, confused, inconclusive interrogation.

The man behind the desk asked questions which seemed stupid to Jeff and got answers which probably seemed stupid to him.

The reporters quizzed Jeff gleefully. "Come out, what are you advertising?" they kept asking. "Who got you up to this?"

The police puzzled over his driver's license and the other cards in his wallet. They asked repeatedly about the lack of a "Work License," which Jeff took to be some sort of union card. Evidently there was grave doubt that he had any legal right to be in the country.

In the end, Jeff and Ann were locked in separate cells for the night. Jeff groaned and pounded the bars as he thought of his wife, imprisoned and alone in a smelly jail. After hours of pacing the cell, he lay down in the cot and reached automatically for his silver pillbox. Then he hesitated.

In past weeks, his insomnia had grown worse and worse, so that lately he had begun taking stronger pills. After a longing glance at the big red and yellow capsules, he put the box away. Whatever tomorrow brought, it wouldn't find him slow and drowsy.

IV

He passed a wakeful night. In the early morning, he looked up to see a little man with a briefcase at his cell door.

"Wish joy, Mr. Elliott," the man said coolly. "I am one of Mr. Bullen's barmen. You know, represent at law? He sent me to arrange your release, if you are ready to be reasonable."

Jeff lay there and put his hands behind his head. "I doubt if I'm ready. I'm comfortable here. By the way, how did you know where I was?"

"No problem. When we read in this morning's newspapers about a man claiming to be a time traveler, we knew."

"All right. Now start explaining. Until I understand where I am, Bullen isn't getting me out of here."

The lawyer smiled and sat down. "Mr. Kersey told you yesterday—you've gone back six years. But you'll need some mental gymnastics to understand. Time is a dimension, not a stream of events like a movie film. A film never changes. Space does—and time does. For example, if a movie showed a burning house at Sixth and Main, would you expect to find a house burning whenever you returned to that corner?"

"You mean to say that if I went back to 1865, I wouldn't find the Civil War was over and Lincoln had been assassinated?"

"If you go back to the time you call 1865—which is most easily done—you will find that the people there know nothing of a Lincoln or that war."

Jeff looked blank. "What are they doing then?"

The little man spread his hands. "What are the people doing now at Sixth and Main? Certainly not the same things they were doing the day of the fire. We're talking about a dimension, not an event. Don't you grasp the difference between the two?"

"Nope. To me, 1865 means the end of the Civil War. How else can you speak of a point in time except by the events that happened then?"

"Well, if you go to a place in three-dimensional space—say, a lake in the mountains—how do you identify that place? By looking for landmarks. It doesn't matter that an eagle is soaring over a mountain peak. That's only an event. The peak is the landmark. You follow me?"

"So far. Keep talking."

The little man looked pleased. "Very well. In the fourth dimension—which is time—you do the same thing. You look around to see what is visible where you are. My contemporaries can see that freedom is unnecessary, that time travel is practical. Your people have not reached that place in time yet. But yours can see the technical facts about color television. Those facts are not visible yet to anyone here."

"You mean that these inventions—"

"Oh, no, no, no, Mr. Elliott," the little man said indignantly. "Don't call them inventions. There are no inventions. None. There are only truths—scientific principles waiting through eternity for someone to discover them."

"I must be dense, but—"

"Did your Columbus invent America? Did someone invent fire? The possibility of time travel, of color television, of any phase of social progress—these are facts. They stand up in the time dimension like mountains. Waves of humanity meander through the time dimension like caravans of immigrants crossing a continent. The first man in any wave to see the mountain peak claims that he 'invented' it. Soon it is clearly visible to everyone. While the people of my wave know of time travel, there are human caravans, following us many years back in time, just now discovering steam."

"Then the reason your people won't accept my money—"

"Yah." The little lawyer nodded. "Your money is an outgrowth of your history. It bears the name your people gave to the society they built—the United States. This has no meaning to a different wave of humanity, with a different history. These people here have reached this point in time six years behind the humanity you traveled with."

"Can I get back to my own time, my own wave of humanity?"

"Not unless you know how." The lawyer grinned. "To be perfectly frank, Mr. Elliott, there is no hope of your going back. Either work for Bullen or live out your life in a mental institution. No one else will give you work and no one will believe your story."

Jeff clamped his teeth. If a crook like Snader could move freely back and forth in time, there must be a way for Jeff to do it. Meanwhile, he would pretend to be a humble and obedient servant.

"Okay," he said to the lawyer. "I'm convinced. Get me out."

"Snader is waiting with a car," the man said. "He'll meet you and your wife outside. I'll free her at once, then go about my business."

Snader was standing beside the limousine. He looked Ann up and down. "I like you, little lady. Soon I know you better."

Jeff felt his temper rise. "You sure fooled us, didn't you, Snader?"

"I warned you. There was risk."

Ann's voice was steady. "Jeff, where are we going now?"

"Back to Bullen. I understand the setup now. Maybe we'd better play ball with him."

"Did you find out what place this is?"

"Yes—well, sort of. Here's a rough rundown. Incredible as it seems, we really are in a past time period—different from our own past. This period doesn't have color TV yet. Bullen wants to be first on the market with it. So he sent our pal Greet Snader here to pick a man in future time who had already mastered TV and sell him to Bullen as a captive scientist. I imagine Snader raids the future for many experts."

Snader stepped up to him with a dangerous smile. "All right, big wit. Tell me my business. Tell me all about it."

"You heard me. You're in the slave business." The blood throbbed in Jeff's head.

"You don't like?" Snader's scarred face looked fierce and gloating. "Maybe you shovel coal from now. Or wipe floors."

Jeff saw policemen watching from the jail entrance. He clamped his mouth shut.

"Don't be excitable or you get hurt," Snader advised. "We own you. We gave you a break. Remember that, wise boy. You ready now?"

Jeff nodded silently.

Snader playfully twisted Jeff's ear and shoved him into the limousine. "Don't tell me anything. Then I don't hurt you."

V

Between Snader and Ann in the front seat, Jeff held Ann's hand and winked encouragingly at her.

"Snader, I guess you're right," he said. "This is a good deal for me. I was sort of washed up in my own time."

"Now you smart," Snader said. "Your little lady? She smart, too?"

"Yep. By the way, how come you got us out so early? It's only nine o'clock. Bullen said he'd expect me at eleven."

"We go to time station first," Snader explained shortly. "I pick up documents there. Breakfast there."

"Good," Jeff said cheerfully. A plan was taking shape in his mind. "All I'm worried about is my speed-up pills. Can I get some at the station? I'm almost out." He pressed Ann's knee warningly.

"Speed-up pills?" Snader looked suspicious—but then, he always did. "What you mean?"

"Don't you have speed-up tablets?" Jeff put surprise in his voice. "Stuff to activate the half of the brain that normally doesn't work. You *must* have them."

"What they look like?"

Jeff fumbled for his silver pillbox. "They're the big red and yellow capsules." He handed the box to Snader. "Don't spill them. I only have three left. Where can I get more like those? I won't be nearly as good without them."

Keeping one hand on the wheel, Snader glanced down. The box had a jumble of black vitamin pills and red and yellow sleeping tablets.

"You say these big ones help brain?" he asked warily.

"They speed up the reflexes—they make everything seem clear and easy. Please give them back before you spill them."

Snader thumbed the red and yellow capsules out and handed the box back without them. "I keep these." He moved his head craftily to watch Jeff's face in the mirror.

Jeff was ready. He registered rage and fear. "Gimme those!" he shouted. "I need them."

Snader laughed. "Don't tell me orders. Easy now. You want to wreck car?"

"I'll wreck us all if you don't give those back!" He grabbed Snader's hand.

Ann screamed as the car swerved, and horns blared from behind. Snader clapped the capsules into his mouth and gripped the wheel with both hands.

"I take what I want," he said, gulping down the pills. "You give trouble, I turn you over to police."

Jeff slumped down with a groan and buried his face in his hands to hide a grin. It had worked. How long would the nembutal take to hit Snader? It might act too fast. Jeff wondered what he could do then.

Luckily, there was only a short distance to go. Even so, the car was weaving as they whirled off the express road into Green Thru-Way. When they pulled up in front of the barred house, Snader tumbled out and lurched up the walk without a glance at his prisoners.

Jeff and Ann followed, and Jeff stood close behind while Snader fumbled inside his shirt for the

key. When he found it and reached toward the door, his knees buckled and Jeff caught him.

"The key, Ann," Jeff whispered. "Pull the cord over his head and unlock the door."

Ann clawed at it while Jeff supported the weight of Snader's body. In a moment, she had the door open and they were inside.

The old housekeeper bustled in as Jeff half-dragged and half-lifted Snader across the living room.

"It's nothing serious," Jeff told her calmly. "He often has these attacks. He'll be all right in a few minutes, and then I'll start him off home."

"Oh, the poor man," she clucked. "Such a ghast. Can I get you anything?"

"Get us some hot water, mixed with mustard and soda," Jeff said, hoping this would keep her busy for several minutes. She hurried away.

Ann unlocked the door into the inner room and Jeff lugged the slave trader inside. On the two screens, the endless chair-lined corridors still fled toward them.

When the door clicked shut, Jeff let Snader slide to the floor. Swiftly he went through the man's pockets and felt in the lining of his clothes for hidden documents. Papers, wallet, car-keys, a big stiff card that seemed to be some kind of passport—Jeff stuffed everything into his own pockets.

"Hurry, Jeff," Ann begged. "Why waste time emptying his pockets?"

"So he can't come back and bother us," Jeff said. "I'm sending this joker on a one-way ride. He'll never be able to prove to the authorities who he is."

Several pictures hung on the wall. Jeff jerked them down and used the wire to tie Snader's feet and wrists. He tore some draperies to bind him tighter. When the body was trussed like a turkey, Jeff heaved it to his shoulder. With one lunge, he threw the unconscious man straight into the screen. Snader vanished.



"What happens when he wakes up?" Ann shakily wanted to know.

Jeff dusted himself off. "He's headed to the end of the line," he said harshly. "Remember? He told us about it. Without credentials, he'll land in the convict gang, down around the year 600 A.D. That's a bad time on this continent. Men who work there don't return—they help build back the time groove."

Ann smiled triumphantly. "Good for you! He deserved it. Imagine running a commercial kidnaping enterprise! And now we can ride home, can't we?"

Jeff, beginning to enjoy himself, shook his head. "Not just yet. First I've got a date with Mr. Bullen."

When they rapped on Bullen's door, Kersey welcomed them with an amused smile.

"We thought you would be back," he purred. "Where is Snader?"

Jeff brushed past him to the drawing room, where Bullen sat by the window.

"I've decided to help you, Bullen," Jeff said.

Bullen nodded his big head. "Naturally."

"But I name my own price. What do you pay Kersey?"

Bullen looked up with a grim smile. "Fifty thousand a year. I wonder now if he worths it."

"What's that? Dollars?"

"We call them fiscals. Probably somehow much the same. Why?"

"Listen, Bullen. If I help introduce color TV, there'll be big money in it. I won't be a hog. You pay me forty thousand a year until we go into production. Then we'll make a new deal, giving me a royalty on sales."

Kersey's face was scarlet. "You young greenhoot! Who do you think you are? You'll work for nothing, if we say so."

"Guess again," Jeff said. "Your slave trader won't be bringing any more engineers for you. So you take me at my price—or nobody."

The big man laughed. "You got rid of Snader, eh? Well, well. He was a rogue. I thought he would run into trouble soon or late."

Kersey swore, but Bullen seemed to grasp the situation and waved him to silence. "I like your fire, young man. With chromatics, we'll make millions, so you're worth forty thousand plus royalties. Am I true in thinking you won't want the apartment I reserved for you?"

"Right. We'll retain our home in my own time. I'll commute to work here every morning—it's quicker than commuting to the city in my own time."

"In your thorough way," Kersey said sarcastically, "you have doubtless figured out how you can spend our money back in your time."

"I've thought about it," Jeff agreed. "There will be something I can convert it into and carry back. Diamonds, maybe."

Bullen laughed again. "You're solid, my boy. Get his work papers ready, Kersey. These young people want to get home. I'll take Jeff to the factory when he comes workward in the morning."

Jeff stood up. "See you tomorrow, Bullen. Come on, Ann. We're going home—home to our own time."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BUTTERFLY 9 ***

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