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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE ***



SCENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

By JAMES STAMERS

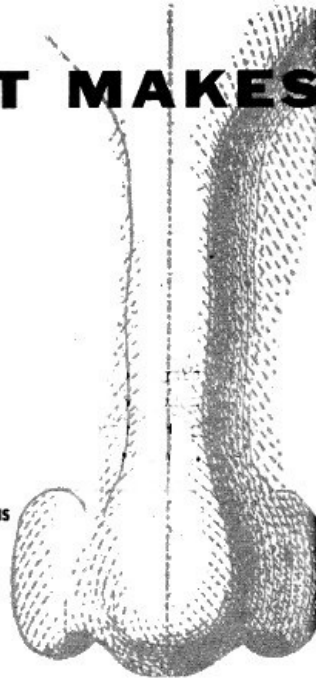
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SCENT MAKES

By JAMES STAMERS

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS



A DIFFERENCE

What I wanted was a good night's sleep. What I got was visitation rights with the most exasperating pack of sleepwalkers in history.

A fried egg came floating up through the stone steps of the Medical Center and broke on my shoe. According to my watch, it was time for the breakfast I didn't have that morning, so I waited a moment for the usual two rashers of bacon.

When they materialized, I hopped aside to avoid them and went back into the building, where the elevator took me straight up to the psychiatric floor, without asking.

"Your blood pressure, salts, minerals, vitamins, basal metabolism, brain pattern, nervous reflexes and skin temperature control are within accepted tolerances," it droned, opening the doors to let me off. "You have no clinical organic disorders; you weigh a hundred and fifty-two pounds, Earth, measure six feet one inch, and have a clear pallid complexion and an egg on your shoe."

I walked down the corridor to Dr. Doogle Spacio-Psycho Please Enter and went determinedly in.

"Name, please," said the blonde receptionist, tapping her nail eroder.

"Jones. Harry Jones."

"Mr. Harry K. Jones, the physicist?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no," she said, fiddling with the appointment list, "Mr. Harry K. Jones has just had his morning appointment and left."

"I know," I said. "An important piece of clinical data has just turned up. I have returned with an egg on my shoe."

"I think you'd better see the doctor."

I sat down to wait and took the little bottle of pills from my pocket. "From the Galaxy to you, through Dr. Doogle, Spacio-Psycho," it said on the label. "The last word in tranquilizers. Conservative Zen methods only, appointments any hour, first consultation free, no obligation, call personal transmitter DDK 51212-6790, Earth. Active ingredients oxylatohydrobenzoic-phephenophino, sugar, coloring to 100%."

The inner office door opened and Dr. Doogle smiled fatly at me from behind his expensive desk.

"Do come in," he called, "and tell me all about it."

"It's happened again," I said, going into his office.

"Well, why not, if you feel that way? Nurse, bring me Mr. Hing-humph's case history."

"Mr. Har-ry K. Jo-nes' film is in the transcriber, Doctor," said the receptionist. "Mr. Jones, the physicist."

"Ah, yes, of course. Please sit down, Mr. Jones. Now what exactly is the trouble? Hold nothing back, tell me all, reveal your intimate thoughts."

"The main entrance just served me the breakfast that your diet forbids," I said, sitting down.

"Plain case of wish fulfillment. Put it down to poltergeists, Mr. Jones."

"And what exactly do you mean by that?"

"Well, now," Dr. Doogle said, drumming his fat fingers, "I don't think we need to go into technicalities, Mr. Jones."

"Look," I said firmly. "I came to you to get a quiet night's sleep. No more insomnia, you said, leave your problems in the laboratory, let not the nuclei banish sleep, work hard, sleep hard, take tranquilizers and enjoy the useful recuperation of the daily wear on body tissues, deep dreamless sleep of the innocent."

He look at me suspiciously.

"It sounds like the sort of advice I might have given," he admitted.

"Well, at least I managed to keep my dreams in my head until I started your treatment. I have an urgent problem to solve that vitally affects national security. I can't have this sort of thing happening in the middle of an experiment."

I pointed to the fried egg on my shoe and shook it off on the pile of his green carpet.

"Yes. Well," he said, peering over the desk at it. "If you feel that strongly, Mr. Jones, perhaps you'd better give up the diet and just take the pills."

"I want to know how it happens," I said, and I settled firmly into the consulting chair.

Dr. Doogle coughed professionally. "Of course, of course. You are an intelligent man, Mr. Jones. One of our leading physical scientists. Naturally you wish to know the precise mechanism of such phenomena. Very commendable and entirely natural. Think no more about it."

"Dr. Doogle, do you know what you are doing?"

"Spacio-Psycho is still in its early stages, Mr. Jones. You are really privileged to be a pioneer, you know. We have had some most interesting results with that new tranquilizer. I hope you're not losing faith, Mr. Jones?"

"I accept the orthodox philosophy of Spacio-Psycho, it is only the basic philosophy of Ch'anna or Zen, and I had the routine scientific education, naturally."

"Ah," said Dr. Doogle with rapture, "the substratum of the universe is no-mind, and thus all material things are in constant unimpeded mutual solution. Ji-ji-muge, the appleness of an apple is indistinguishable from the cupness of a cup."

"And an egg on the shoe is the breakfast I didn't have," I said.

"Here," he said. "I think those pills are sending your sleeping mind down beyond the purely personal level of your own emotions and subconscious cerebrations. Take these, in a little water, half an hour before going to bed."

I stood up and walked over to the door.

"What are they?" I asked.

"Same as before, only stronger. Should send you right down to the root of things. Pass quiet nights in no-mind, Mr. Jones, sleep beyond the trammels of self, support yourself on the universal calm sea of no-mind."

"If these don't work, there'll be no-fee," I told him.

I took three of the stronger pills that night, turned off the light and lay back in bed, waiting for sleep to come and get me. The antiseptic odor of the Medical Center recalled itself, but nothing else happened, and I was still waiting to go to sleep when I woke up next morning. No dreams of a breakfast I couldn't eat, no dreams at all. I had been smelling the memory of formaldehyde and just slid off to sleep. I could still smell it, for that matter, as if it were coming from the slightly open bedroom window. I looked up.

"Hallo," said the tall skinny man in a doctor's coat on the window sill.

"Hallo yourself," I said. "Go away, I'm awake."

"Yes, you are. At least I assume you are. But I'm not."

I sat up and looked at him, and he obligingly turned his head to profile against the brightness of the window. He had a sharp, beaky face that was familiar.

"Haven't we met somewhere?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said, in a slightly affected voice.

"Well?"

"I don't know your name," he said, "but I have a very important post-operative case at present, and you keep charging around the ward when you're asleep. I just came over, as soon as I could get a few hours' sleep myself, to ask you to stop doing it, if you don't mind."

"I've done no such thing."

"You were doing it all last night, my friend."

"I was not," I said. "I spent last night here in my own bed. I didn't even dream."

"Ah, that probably accounts for it. Tell me, do you take drugs, tranquilizers, by any chance? We've had a lot of trouble with that. They seem to cause a bubble in the sequence of probabilities and things shift about. I've been taking a new one myself, while this case is on. I suspect that although I'm dreaming you, I think, you are not asleep at all. At least I wasn't when you made all that noise in my ward last night."

"No, I'm awake," I said. "Very much so."

"I see. Well, I shall wake up soon myself and go back to my own world, of course. But while I'm here, I suppose you haven't any advanced works on post-operative hyperspace relapse?"

"Pity," he said, as I shook my head.

"I suppose you have no information on the fourth octave of ultra-uranium elements?"

He shook his head. "Didn't even know they existed," he said. "I don't believe they do in my probable time. What are you, a physicist? Ah," he added, as I nodded, "I wanted to specialize in physics when I was in college, but I went in for medicine instead."

"So did I," I said, "medicine, I mean, but I never passed pharmacology with all those confusing extraterrestrial derivatives."

"Really?" he said interestedly. "It's my weakest subject, too. I'm a pretty good surgeon, but an awful fool with medications. I suppose that's how we got together. You won't come busting up the ward again, will you?"

"I'd like to be obliging, but if I don't dream and I don't know where I am when I'm asleep, I don't see what I can do to stop it. It's not as if I'm really there, is it?"

He crossed his arms and frowned at me. "Look," he said. "In my probable time, you're as much physically there as I am now in your time here. I'll prove it. I know I'm asleep in the emergency surgeon's room in my hospital. You know you're awake in your bedroom."

He held out his hand and walked across the floor to me.

"My name's Jones," he said.

"So's mine," I answered, shaking his solid hand. "This must be a very vivid dream to you."

We smiled at each other, and as he turned away, I caught sight of his reflection in the wall mirror beside my hairbrush on the cabinet.

"Good heavens!" I said. "In a mirror, you look exactly like me. Is your name Harry Jones?"

He stopped, walked over to the mirror and moved about until he could see me in it.

"Harold K. Jones," he said. "You've got the face I shave every morning, but I've only just recognized you. You're me."

"I prefer to think you are me," I said.

"So you did fail that final pharmacology exam, eh? And I didn't, in my probability. Well, well. I must admit it seemed more probable I would fail at the time, but I passed."

"It was that tramp Kate's fault. She said yes too easily."

He coughed and looked at his fingers. "She said no to me. And, as a matter of fact, after I passed I married her. She's my wife."

"I'm sorry. I meant nothing personal."

"You never married?"

"I never really got over Kate," I said.

"I wonder what would have happened if I had qualified and then not married her."

"You mean what *did* happen—to the Harry K. Jones who passed in pharmacology but did not marry Kate. He must be around in another probability somewhere, the same as we are. Good heavens," I shouted, "somewhere I may have solved the fourth octave equation."

"You're right, Harry. And I may have found out how to get hyperspace relapse under control."

"Harold," I said, "This is momentous! It is more probable that you-I and I-you will make a mess of things, but there must be other probability sequences where we are successful."

"And we can get to them," he shouted, jumping up. "Are you using oxylatohydrobenzoic-

pheophenophino?"

"Something like that."

"Three pills last thing at night?"

"Yes."

"Ever have foreign bodies materialize into your time-space?"

"Several breakfasts," I said. "The last egg was yesterday, on my shoe."

"It was Virginia ham with me, so I stopped dieting and increased the dosage."

"So did I," I said. "I suppose, apart from major points where a whole probability branches off, we lead much the same lives. But eggs don't dream. How did the ham get into your waking world?"

"Harry, really! I have a tendency to jump to conclusions, which you must control. How do you know eggs don't dream? I would have thought, though, that a pig was peculiarly liable to the nightmare that it will end up as a rasher—any reasonably observant pig, that is. But I don't think that is necessary. Obviously, we are dipping down to a stratum where things coexist in fact, and not merely one in fact and the other in mind, or one probability and not its twin alternative. Now, how do I get hold of the me that solved this hyperspace relapse business?"

"And I the ultra-uranium octave relationship," I added.

"Look out," he said. "I'm waking up. Good-by, Harry. Look after myself...."

He flickered, paused in recovery and then faded insubstantially away. I looked around my empty bedroom. Then, because it was time to go to work at the laboratory, I shaved, dressed and left my apartment, as usual.

Some high brass and politicians had been visiting the laboratory, showing off to their females how they were important enough to visit the top-secret bomb proving labs, and the thick perfume was hanging in the sealed rooms like a damp curtain.

"I wish they wouldn't bring women into the unventilated labs," I grumbled to my assistant.

"Never mind, Chief. If you can make this bomb work, they'll let you build your own lab in the Nevada desert, with no roads to it. Have you found the solution?"

"I'll tell you when I have," I said. "But I do have a new approach to the problem."

And as soon as I could, I left the labs and went back to my apartment downtown, took three pills and lay still, waiting for sleep. I could not get the smell of that perfume in the lab out of my nose. It was a heavy gardenia-plus-whatnot odor. I woke up in the middle of the night with the perfume still clinging to the air. The room was dark and I crossed my fingers as I leaned over to turn on the bedside lamp. If mental concentration on all the possible errors in my work was the key, the successful me should be here in the room, snatched from his own segment of probability.

I turned on the light. There was no one else in the room.

"Hell," I said.

Perhaps it just meant he, or that me, was not asleep, or was perversely not using tranquilizers. Or didn't that matter? No, I controlled this alone and had gone wrong.

"Did you say something, Harry?" asked Kate, stepping out of the bathroom and pulling the top of her nightgown into, I guess, place. "Ooo, fancy dreaming about you. This is odd."

I sat up and covered myself protectively in the bedsheets.

"Look, Kate," I said. "I don't want to see you. I'm not your husband, really. He's a pleasant fellow, I met him today, and he's not me. I never became a doctor. No doubt you remember what I was doing instead of studying."

That was a mistake, for she came and sat on the edge of the bed and ran her fingers into my hair.

"I thought it was odd I should dream about my husband," she said. "I'll believe you, because I don't know how I got here and you do look like the Harry I used to know, before he went all high scientific surgeon and no time for fun."

She curved more fully than she had when she was eighteen, but there was neat symmetry to her sine formulae, and she still had blonde hair. Her perfume was the same as the one in the lab I had been smelling all day, it was now reaching me at high amperage.

So that was the key, the evocative power of smell association. I sniffed deeply at the perfume in appreciation.

"Like it?" Kate asked, wriggling.

"Only for its scientific values," I said. "It suggests a most valuable line of research."

"I'm in favor," she said, and pressed me to the bed.

"Your husband is coming!" I shouted, and it worked. She disappeared. Presumably she woke up in her own probability time-space. And no doubt Kate's reflexes by now were trained to snap her awake and away at the suggestion that her husband was around. It was highly improbable that Kate would alter much.

I got up to make myself some coffee. There was no point in wasting sleep without a plan. Clearly, I had to take the pills and fix the appropriate smell in my mind, and when I woke up I would drag the proper slice of another probability with me. And then I would interview the me who had solved the ultra-uranium heavy element equation. And the bomb to end all bombs would be perfected. The test was ready, waiting for me to say, "Let's go, boys. We know what will happen this time."

But there was, it struck me, the difficulty of finding the right scent to evoke the right probable me.

I collected all the toothpaste, deodorant, shaving stick, aftershave lotion I could find in the bathroom and started on the toothpaste. I inhaled deeply and lay down, with the first tube on my chest. But after the coffee, I slept very briefly, and when I looked up there was only a toothbrush on the carpet. It was not mine in this world and I had no idea whose it was, or rather which probable me it belonged to.

But at least this established the principle. The smell produced the object—and, if I went deep enough in sleep, it would produce the whole Jones.

I dressed quickly and went out for a walk in the night air, breathing deeply and memorizing every scent I came across. Then I went back to the apartment, sniffed hard at the row of personal unguents, and lay down to sleep.

When I woke up, it was morning and the room was full of people.

There were about a dozen of me, some wearing very odd clothes, some scowling, others grinning unbecomingly, and some looking just plain stupid.



"Gentlemen," I said, standing up on my bed, "I am sorry to disturb your dreams but a matter of vital consequence has made me call you all here. I am Harry, or Harold K. Jones, and I became a physicist. I need your help. Do any of you know anything about the octaves of elements beyond uranium?"

There was a babble, through which I heard chiefly:

"The man's mad.... He says he's me.... Who are you, anyway?... No, you're not. *I'm* Jones...."

"Please, gentlemen," I said. "I don't expect we have much time before some of you wake up in your own probability. You, sir, in the armchair—yes, you in the tight pants—how about you?"

"Me?" he said. "I'm Captain Jones. Third Vector Spacefleet. Engineer rank. Who the galactic hellix are you, eh?"

Even from the bed, I could detect the smell of sweat and grease from his working uniform.

"I suppose you took up flight engineering at high school?" I suggested.

"Quite right," he snapped.

An early deviation, obviously. I remembered being enthralled with the arrival when I was a kid of the early space rockets, but my enthusiasm was daunted by old Birchall, who made us stick to airplanes. Obviously, his was not.

"How about you?" I asked, pointing to the thinnest me in the room.

"Penal colony on Arcetus," he said. "Eternal labor."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I wonder which time—well, how many physicists are there here, or physical chemists, or astronomers, or even general scientists?"

I walked around the room, detecting toothpaste brands A, B, C and Whitebrighter, and a range of toilet preparations with manly odors contributing to our popularity with friends, relatives, girls and bosses, but no other physicist. Not a trace of research in my line. And one or two of them were already showing signs of waking up elsewhere and disappearing from the room.

I was about to start tracing it back to the point when I abandoned a medical career, and I could still smell the formaldehyde, when Dr. Harold K. Jones appeared.

"Look," he said, "I want you to keep away from Kate. Perhaps I didn't make that clear yesterday.... Good heavens, where did you get all of these me from? Does anyone here know anything about post-operative hyperspace relapse?"

Disgustedly, I saw that more than half of them did. Perhaps I should have been a doctor, after all. The probabilities were heavily represented in medicine. I sat on the bed and stared at my toes while the doctors babbled excitedly together. I gathered that Dr. Harold K. Jones had solved his problem, anyway.

"Excuse me," said a thoughtful me in a very quiet voice. "I didn't want to make myself obtrusive, but I did do a certain amount of research on the theoretical possibilities of elements heavier than uranium. It seemed to me they might go on being discovered almost indefinitely."

"They are," I said quickly, "octave after octave of them. Tell me about it, please."

"Look," he said, "it was only an idea. I really specialized in biochemistry, but we do use trace elements, and the formula I worked out at the time was—let me see...."

"Please try to remember," I said.

"Ah, yes, it was this," he said, and the strain of remembering woke him up and he disappeared back to his own probability.

"This was damned well planned, Harry!" said Dr. Harold K. Jones enthusiastically. "I think we can save hundreds of people every year now. I always knew I had it in me."

"Listen, Jones," said Captain Jones of the Third Vector Spacefleet, pushing himself through the crowd. "I've been talking to one or two of the others, see, and if you have the galactic gall to disturb my sleep again, I'm going to blast you. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," I said.

"It's tricky out in space, you know. No hard feelings, but the fraction of a micro-error and *poof!* You see what I mean. I must get a sound sleep at stand-down."

"Don't forget what I said about Kate," Dr. Harold K. Jones remembered to warn me. "I know how to do it, too. And you can have an accident with my instruments—easily."

He disappeared. I watched as the others woke up and went, one by one, even the felon from Arcetus, until they were all gone and I was alone with dark thoughts on heavy elements. It was so improbable that I was the only me who had worked on these lines, and very probable that if two of us with similar minds did work on the same problem, we could between us find the answer. Look at Dr. Jones and his hyperspace relapse.

Thinking of Dr. Jones made me think of Kate, and I fell asleep again with the memory of her scent in my head, as if I were really smelling it. When I woke up again, halfway through the morning, there she was in my room. She was at least dressed this time, but she smiled familiarly at me.

"For God's sake, Kate," I said, "go back to your husband!"

She began to cry. "Oh, Haroldkin," she said. "I'm so glad to see you. I must be dreaming, because I know you're dead, but I've kept everything just the way it was. Look—I haven't even touched your messy desk."

"Are you sitting in a room?" I asked.

"I'm in your study, Haroldkin," she said, surprised. "Can't you see?"

"No, as a matter of fact, I can't."

"Oh! Then I can throw out all these old papers?"

"What old papers?"

"Oh, I don't know, Haroldkin," Kate said. "You made such a fuss about failing that silly medical exam that you never let me touch your desk when you graduated in physics."

"Physics!"

"Yes," said Kate, throwing paper after paper onto the carpet. She made sweeping motions in the air and dumped a mass of notes into her lap. They appeared on her fingertips, but they stayed in existence when she dropped them on the carpet.

"How did I die?" I asked, bending down and thumbing rapidly over the papers.

"A bomb went off," she said. "I really don't want to talk about it. But you were so *eminent*,

Haroldkin!"

I must have been very soft in the discrimination to have allowed that revolting nickname, I thought, but it was clear from the papers I was holding that I knew my physics. And there it was, printed in an issue of the *Commission's Journal* that never existed in my time-space, the whole equation I was looking for. It was so obvious when I read it that I could not understand how I failed to think of it for myself—for my own myself, that is.

When I looked up, this probable Kate had gone. I wanted to thank her, but the evening would do. Meanwhile, here was the ultra-uranium fourth octave equation.

I called the laboratory, read it off to my assistant, and told him to get on with the test.

"Right, Chief. I'll go down myself and give you a report when I get back."

I said fine and took the rest of the day off. It was the peak of my career so far, and from the widow Kate's comments, it seemed as if I had a great probable career to come. Of course, I would have to redouble our safety precautions at the labs and it would be best if I never went near the proving grounds. That other physicist me probably made some error that I would avoid, being forewarned.

By evening, I decided to try to locate that probable Kate again, to thank her, and to find out exactly how that poor me blew himself up with a bomb. With care, I recalled the perfume and also the musty smell of the papers, for I did not want Dr. Harold K. Jones' Kate appearing. Then I removed all other odoriferous substances from the bedroom, took three pills and was about to lie down to sleep when my assistant called to report on the test.

"That you, Chief? What a success! We're made. Your name's in lights, Chief! It was the most colossal explosion I've ever seen. It burned the area like toast. It even smelled like toast, with a touch of ozone and sulphur. Very strong smell...."

"Stop!" I screamed. "Stop!"

But it was too late. I could smell it clearly as he had described it. And now the pills are working. How in the name of heaven am I going to stay awake? Because once I fall asleep....

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SCENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE ***

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