## No Award

Roger Zelazny

Betty White of The Saturday Evening Post suddenly solicited a 3500-word story from me one day, so I did this one quickly and she bought it just as quickly. Then I asked her why she had wanted it. She told me that she had recently had her television set turned on and was occupied with something which did not permit her to change channels readily. A show called “Star Trek” came on and she watched it through and enjoyed it She had not known much about science fiction, she said, and she resolved to stop by her paperback book store the following day, buy a science fiction book at random and read it. It happened to be one of mine. She read it and liked it and decided to ask me for a story. I have since theorized that if she entered the shop and approached the far end of the science fiction rack my position in the alphabet might have had something to do with her choice. Whatever...

I entered the hall, made my way forward. I had come early, so as to get as close as possible. I do not usually push to be near the front of a crowd. Even on those other occasions when I had heard him, and other presidents before him, I had not tried for the best view. This time, however, it seemed somehow important.

Luck! A seat that looked Just right. I eased myself down.

My foot seemed asleep. In fact, the entire leg.... No matter. I could rest it now. Plenty of time ...Time? No. Darkness. Yes. Sleep ...

I glanced at my watch. Still some time. Some other people were smoking. Seemed like a good idea. As I reached for my cigarettes I remembered that I had quit, then discovered that I still carried them. No matter. Take one. Light it- (Trouble. Use the other hand.) I felt somewhat tense. Not certain why. Inhale. Better. Good.

Who is that? Oh.

A short man in a gray suit entered from the right and tested the microphone. Momentary hush. Renewed crowd noise. The man looked satisfied and departed.

I sighed smoke and relaxed.

Resting. Yes. Asleep, asleep ... Yes ... You ...

After a time, people entered from the sides and took ’seats on the stage. Yes, there was the governor. He would speak first, would say a few words of introduction.

That man far to my left, on the stage ... I had seen him in a number of pictures, always near the president, never identified. Short, getting paunchy, sandy hah- thinning; dark, drifting eyes behind thick glasses ... I was certain that he was a member, possibly even the chief, of the elite group of telepathic bodyguards who always accompany the chief executive in public. The telepathic phenomenon had been pinned down only a few years ago, and since then the skill had been fully developed in but a handful of people. Those who possessed it, though, were ideal for this sort of work. It took all the danger out of public appearances when a number of such persons spotted about an audience were able to monitor the general temper of a crowd, to detect any aberrant, homicidal thoughts and to relay this information to the Secret Service. It eliminated even the possibility of an attempt on the president’s life, let alone a successful assassination. Why, at this moment, one of them could even be scanning my own thoughts....

Nothing worth their time here, though. No reason to feel uneasy.

I crushed out the cigarette. I looked at the TV camera people. I looked over the audience. I looked back to the people onstage. The governor had Just risen and was moving forward. I glanced at my watch. Right on time.

Time? No. Later the award. He will tell me when. When ...

The applause died down, but there was still noise, ris-ing and falling. Rolling. At first I could not place it: then I realized that it came from outside the hall. Thunder. It must be raining out there. I did not recall that the .weather had been bad on the way in. I did not remember a dark sky, threatening, or—

I did not remember what it had been like outside at all—dark, bright, warm, cool, windy, still.... I remembered nothing of the weather or anything else.

All right What did it matter? I had come to listen and to see. Let it rain. It was not in the least important. — I heard the governor’s words, six minutes’ worth, and I applauded at their conclusion while flashbulbs froze faces and a nearby cheer hurt my ears and caused my head to throb. Time pedaled slowly past as the president stood and moved forward, smiling. I looked at my watch and eased back from the edge of my seat. Fine. Fine.

It seems to me that there is a gallery, with a row of faces atop crude cardboard silhouettes of people. Bright lights play upon them. I stand at the other end of the gallery, my left arm at my side. I hold a pistol in my hand. He tells me. He tells me then. The words. When I hear them I know everything. Everything I am to do to have the prize. 1 check the weapon—without looking at it, for I do not remove my eyes from the prospect before me. There is one target in particular, the special one I must hit to score. Without Jerking it, but rather with a rapid yet steady motion, I raise the pistol, sight for just the proper interval and squeeze the trigger with a force that is precisely sufficient. The cardboard figures are all moving slightly, with random jerkings, as I perform this action. But it does not matter. There is a single report. My target topples. I have won the award.

Blackness.

It seems to me that there is a gallery, with a row of faces atop crude cardboard silhouettes of people. Bright lights play upon them. I stand at the other end of the gallery, my left arm at my side. I hold a pistol in my hand. He tells me. He tells me then. The words ...

The cry of the man behind me.... A ringing in my ears that gradually subsided as the president raised his hand, waving it, turning slowly ... But the throbbing in my head did not cease. It felt as if I had just realized the aftermath of a blow somewhere on the crown of my head. I raised my fingers and touched my scalp. Therewas a sore place, but I felt no break in the skin. However, I could not clearly distinguish the separate forms of my exploring fingers. It was as if, about the soreness, there existed a general numbness. How couid this be?

The cries, the applause softened. He was beginning to speak.

I shook myself mentally. What had happened was happening? I did not remember the weather, and my head hurt. Was there anything more?

I tried to think back to my entry into the hall, to find a reason why I did not recall the gathering storm.

I realized then that I did not remember having been outside at all, that I did not recall whether I had gotten ^to this place by taxi, bus, on foot or by private vehicle, that I did not know where I had come from, that not only did I not recollect what I had had for breakfast this morning, but I did not know where, when or if I had eaten. I did not even remember dressing myself this day.

I reached up to touch my scalp again. As before, something seemed to be warning my hand away from the site, but I ignored it, thinking suddenly of blows on the head and amnesia.

Could that be it? An accident? A bad bash to the skull, then my wandering about all day until some cue served to remind me of the speech I wanted to attend, then set me on the way here, the attainment of my goal gradually drawing me away from the concussion’s trauma?

Still, my scalp felt so strange.... I poked around the edges of the numb area. It was not exactly numb....

Then part of it came away. There was one sharp little pain at which I jerked back my exploring fingers. It subsided quickly, though, and I returned them. No blood. Good. But there had occurred a parting, as if a portion of my hair—no, my scalp itself—had come loose. I was seized with a momentary terror, but when I touched beneath the loosened area I felt a warm smoothness of normal sensitivity, nothing like torn tissue.

I pushed further and more of it came loose. It was only at the very center that I felt a ragged spot of pain, beneath what seemed like a gauze dressing. It was then that I realized I was wearing a hairpiece, and beneath it a bandage.

There was a tiny ripple of applause as the president said something I had not heard. I looked at my watch.

Was that it, then? An accident? One for which I hadbeen treated in some emergency room—injured area shaved, scalp lacerations sutured, patient judged ambulatory and released, full concussion syndrome not realized?

Somehow that did not seem right. Emergency rooms do not dispense hairpieces to cover their work. And a man in my condition would probably not have been allowed to walk away.

But I could worry about these things later. I had' come to hear this talk. I had a good seat and a good view, and I should enjoy the occasion. I could take stock of myself when the event was concluded.

Almost twenty minutes after the hour...

I tried to listen, but I could not keep my mind on what he was saying- Something was wrong and J was hurting myself by not considering it. Very wrong, and not Just with me. I was a part of it all, though. How? What?

I looked at the fat little telepath behind the president Go ahead and look into my mind, I willed. / would really like you to. Maybe you can see more deeply there than I can myself. Look and see what is wrong. Tell me what has happened, What is happening. I would like to know.

But he did not even glance my way. He was only interested in incipient mayhem, and my intentions were all pacific. If he read me at all, he must have dismissed my bewilderment as the stream of consciousness of one of that small percentage of the highly neurotic which must occur in any sizable gathering—a puzzled man, but hardly a dangerous one. His attention, and that of any of the others, was reserved for whatever genuinely nasty specimens might be present. And rightly so.

There came another roll of thunder. Nothing. Nothing for me beyond this hall, it reminded. The entire day up until my arrival was a blank. Work on it. Think. I had read about cases of amnesia. Had I ever come across one just like this?

When had I decided to hear this speech? Why? What were the circumstances?

Nothing. The origin of my intention was hidden.

Could there be anything suspect? Was there anything unusual about my desire to be here?

I—No, nothing.

Nineteen minutes after the hour.

I began to perspire. A natural result of my nervousness, I supposed.The second hand swept past the two, the three ...

Something to do.... It would come clear in a moment. What? Never mind. Wait and see.

The six, the seven ...

As another wave of applause crossed the hall I began to wish that I had not come.

Nine, ten ...

Twenty minutes after.

My lips began to move. I spoke softly. I doubt that the others about me even heard what I said.

“Step right this way, ladies and gentlemen. Try your luck.”

“... Try your luck.”

Suddenly 1 was awake, in the gallery, my hand in my pocket. High up, before me, was the row of faces, the cutout cardboard bodies below them, lights shining upon them. I felt the pistol and checked it without looking down. The one in front was the target that had been chosen for me, moving slightly, with random jerkings.

I withdrew the weapon carefully and began to raise it slowly.

My hand! Who ...

I watched with a sudden and growing fear as my left hand emerged from my pocket holding a gun. I had no control over the action. It was as if the hand belonged to another person. I willed it back down, but it continued to rise. So I did the only thing I could do.

I reached across with my right hand and seized my own wrist.

The left hand had a definite will of its own. It struggled against me. I tightened my grip and pushed it downward with all of my strength.

As this occurred, I found myself trying to get to my feet. Snarls and curses rose unbidden to my lips. The hand was strong. I was not certain how much longer I could bold it.

The finger tightened on the trigger and my hands bucked with the weapon’s recoil. Fortunately, the muzzle was pointed downward when it went off. I hope that the ricochet had not caught anyone.

People were screaming and rushing to get away from me by then. Several others, however, were hurrying toward me. If I could only hold the hand until they got to me....They hit me, two of them. One tackled me and the other took me around the shoulders. We went down. As my left arm was seized, I felt it relax. The pistol was taken from me. Those two hands, such strangers, were forced behind my back and handcuffed there. I remember hoping that they would not break one another. They stop-

— ped struggling, however, hanging limply as I was raised to my feet.

When I looked back toward the stage, the president was gone. But the small chubby man was staring at me, dark eyes no longer drifting behind those heavy lenses as he began to move my way, gesturing to the men who held me.

Suddenly I felt very sick and weak, and my head was aching again. I began to hurt in the places where I had been struck.

When the small man stood before me he reached out and clasped my shoulders.

“It is going to be all right now,” he said.

The gallery wavered before me. There were no more cardboard silhouettes. Only people. I did not understand where everything had gone, or why he had told me the words, then restrained me. I only knew that I had missed my target and there would be no award. I felt my eye grow moist.

They took me to a clinic. There were guards posted outside my door. The small telepath, whose name I had learned was Arthur Cook, was with me much of the time. A doctor poked at the left side of my neck, inserted a needle and dripped in a clear liquid. The rest was silence.

When I came around—how much later, I am uncertain

—the right side of my neck was also sore. Arthur and one of the doctors were standing at my bedside watching me closely.

“Glad to have you back, Mister Mathews,” Arthur said. “We want to thank you.”

“For what?” I asked. “I don’t even know what happened.”

“You foiled an assassination plan. I am tempted to say single-handed, but I am not much given to puns. You were an unwilling party to one of the most ingenious attempts to evade telepathic security measures to date. You were the victim of some ruthless people, using highly sophisticated medical methods in their conspiracy.Had they taken one additional measure, I believe they would have succeeded. However, they permitted both of you to be present at the key moment and that was their undoing.”

“Both of me?”

“Yes, Mister Mathews. Do you know what the corpus callosum is?”

“A part of the brain, I think.”

“Correct. It is an inch-long, a quarter-inch-thick bundle of fibers which serves to join the right and left cerebral hemispheres. If it is severed, it results in the creation of two separate individuals in one body. It is sometimes done in cases of severe epilepsy to diminish the effects of seizures.”

“Are you saying that I have undergone such surgery?”

“Yes, you have.”

“... And there is another ‘me’ inside my head?”

“That is correct. The other hemisphere is still sedated at the moment, however.”

“Which one am I?”

“You are the left cerebral hemisphere. You possess the linguistic abilities and the powers of more complicated reasoning. The other side is move intuitive and emotional and possesses greater visual and. spatial capabilities.”

“Can this surgery be undone?”

“No.”

“I see. And you say that other people have had such operations—epileptics.... How did they—do—afterward?”

The doctor spoke then, a tall man, hawk-featured, hair of a smoky gray.

“For a long while the connection—the corpus callosum —had been thought to have no important functions. It was years before anyone was even aware of this side effect to a commisurotomy. I do not foresee any great difficulties for you. We will go into more detail on this later.”

“All right. I feel like—myself—at any rate. Why did they do this to me?”

“To turn you into the perfect modem assassin,” Arthur said. “Half of the brain can be put to sleep while the other hemisphere remains awake. This is done simply by administering a drug via the carotid artery on the appropriate side. After the surgery had been performed,you—the left hemisphere—were put to sleep while the right hemisphere was subjected to hypnosis and behavior modification techniques, was turned into a conditioned assassin—”

“I had always thought a person could not be hypnotized into doing certain things.”

He nodded.

“Normally, that seems to be the case. However, it appears that, by itself, the emotional, less rational right hemisphere is more susceptible to suggestion—and it was not a simple kill order which it received, it was a cleverly constructed and well-rehearsed illusion to which it was trained to respond.”

“Okay,” I said. “Buying all that, how did they make what happened happen?”

“The mechanics of it? Well, the conditioning, as I said, was done while you were unconscious and, hence, unaware of it. The conditioned hemisphere was then placed in a state of deep sleep, with the suggestion that it would awaken and perform its little act on receipt of the appropriate cue. Your hemisphere was then impressed with a post-hypnotic suggestion to provide that cue, in me form of the phrase you spoke, at a particular time when the speech would be going on. So they left you out in front and you walked iflto the hall consciously aware of none of this. Your mind was perfectly innocent under any telepathic scrutiny. It was only when you performed your posthypnotic suggestion and called attention to yourself moments later that I suddenly regarded two minds in one body—an extremely eerie sensation, I might add. It was fortunate then that you, the more rational individual, quickly saw what was happening and struggled to avert it. This gave us just enough time to move in on you.”

I nodded. I thought about it, about two of me, struggling for the control of our one body. Then, “You said that they had slipped up—that had they done one additional thing they might have succeeded,” I said. “What was that?”

“They should have implanted the suggestion that you go to sleep immediately after speaking the stimulus phrase,” he said. “I believe that would have done it. They just did not foresee the conflict between the two of you.”

“What about the people behind this?” I finally asked."Your right hemisphere provided us with quite a few very good descriptions while you were asleep.”

“Descriptions? I thought I was the verbal one.”

“True, basically. But the other provided some excellent sketches, the substance of which I was able to verify telepathically. The Service then matched them with certain individuals on whom they have files, and these persons have already been apprehended.

“But the other hemisphere is not completely nonverbal,” he went on. “There is normally a certain small amount of transference—which may be coining into play now, as a matter of fact”

“What do you mean?”

“The other you has been awake awhile now. Your left hand, which it controls, has been gesturing frantically for several minutes. For my pen. I can tell.”

He withdrew a pen and a small pad from his pocket and passed them to me. I watched with fascination as they were seized and positioned. Slowly, carefully, my left band wrote on the pad, Im sorry.

... And as I wrote, I realized that he —would not understand, could never understand now, exactly what I meant.

And that was what I meant, exactly.

I stared down at the words and I looked up at the wall. I looked at Arthur and at the doctor.

“I’d appreciate it if you would leave us alone for a while now,” I said.

They did, and even before they left I knew that no matter where I looked half of the room would have to be empty.