Sam had led a peaceful and impecunious life —until a voice cut in on a phone and said:

Sam, this is You

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrated by MEL HUNTER

YOU are not supposed to believe this story, and if you ask Sam Yoder about it, he is apt to say that it's all a lie. But Sam is a bit sensitive about it. He does not want the question of privacy to be raised again—especially in Rosie's hearing. And there are other matters. But it's all perfectly respectable and straightforward.

It could have happened to anybody—well, almost anybody. Anybody, say, who was a telephone lineman for the Batesville and Rappahannock Telephone Company, and who happened to be engaged to Rosie, and who had been told admiringly by Rosie that a man as smart as he

was ought to make something wonderful of himself. And, of course, anybody who'd taken that seriously and had been puttering around on a device to make private conversations on a party-line telephone possible, and almost had the trick.

It began about six o'clock on July second, when Sam was up a telephone pole near Bridge's Run. He was hunting for the place where that party line had gone dead. He'd hooked in his lineman's phone and he couldn't raise Central, so he was just going to start looking for the break when his phone rang back, though the line had checked dead.

Startled, he put the receiver to his ear. "Hello. Who's this?"

"Sam, this is you," a voice replied.

"Huh?" said Sam. "What's that?"

"This is you," the voice on the wire repeated. "You, Sam Yoder. Don't you recognize your own voice? This is you, Sam Yoder, calling from the twelfth of July. Don't hang up!"

SAM hadn't even thought of hanging up. He was annoyed. He was up a telephone pole, trying to do some work, resting in his safety belt and with his climbing irons safely fixed in the wood. Naturally, he thought somebody was trying to joke with him, and when a man is working is no time for jokes.

"I'm not hanging up," said Sam dourly, "but you'd better!"

The voice was familiar, though he couldn't quite place it. If it talked a little more, he undoubtedly would. He knew it just about as well as he knew his own, and it was irritating not to be able to call this joker by name.

The voice said, "Sam, it's the second of July where you are, and you're up a pole by Bridge's Run. The line's dead in two places, else I couldn't talk to you. Lucky, ain't it?"

"Whoever you are," Sam said formidably, "it ain't going to be lucky for you if you ever need telephone service and you've kept wasting my time. I'm busy!"

"But I'm you!" insisted the voice persuasively. "And you're me! We're both the same Sam Yoder, only where I am, it's July twelfth. Where you are, it's July second. You've heard of time-traveling. Well, this is time-talking. You're talking to yourself—that's me—and I'm talking to myself—that's you—and it looks like we've got a mighty good chance to get rich."

Then something came into Sam's memory and every muscle in his body went taut and tight, even as he was saying to himself, "It can't be!"

But he'd remembered that if a man stands in a corner and talks to the wall, his voice will sound to him just the way it sounds to somebody else. Being in the telephone business, he'd tried it and now he did recognize the voice. It was his. His own. Talking to him. Which, of course, was impossible.

"Look," said hoarsely, "I don't believe this!"

"Then listen," the voice said briskly. And Sam's face grew red. It burned. His ears began to feel scorched. Because the voice—*his* voice—was telling him strictly private matters that nobody else in the world knew. Nobody but himself and Rosie.

"Quit it!" groaned Sam. "Somebody might be listening! Tell me what you want and ring off!"

The voice told him what it wanted. His own voice. It sounded pleased. It told him precisely what it wanted him to do. And then, very kindly, it told him exactly where the two breaks in the line were. And then it rang off.

HE sweated when he looked at the first of the two places. A joining was bad and he fixed that. It was where his voice had said it would be. And that was as impossible as anything else.

When he'd fixed the second break, Sam called Central and told her he was sick and was going home, and that if there were any other phones that needed fixing today, people were probably better off without phone service, anyhow.

He went home and washed his face, and made himself a brew of coffee and drank it, and his memory turned out to be unimpaired. Presently he heard himself muttering.

So he said defiantly, "There ain't any crazy people in my family, so it ain't likely I've gone out of my head. But God knows nobody but Rosie knows about me telling her sentimental that her nose is so cute, I couldn't believe she ever had to blow it! Maybe it *was* me, talking to myself!"

Talking to oneself is not abnormal. Lots of people do it. Sam missed out the conclusion to be drawn from the fact that he'd answered himself back.

He reasoned painfully, "If somebody drove over to Rappahannock, past Dunnsville, and telephoned back that there was a brush fire at Dunnsville, I wouldn't be surprised to get to Dunnsville and find a brush fire there. So if somebody phones back from next Tuesday that Mr. Broaddus broke his leg next Tuesday—why, I shouldn't be surprised to get to next Tuesday and find he done it. Going to Rappa-

hannock, past Dunnsville, and going to next Thursday, past next Tuesday, ain't so much difference. It's only the difference between a road-map and a calendar."

Then he began to see implications. He blinked.

"Yes, sir!" he said in awe. "I wouldn't've thought of it if I hadn't told myself on the telephone, but there *is* money to be made out of this! I must be near as smart as Rosie thinks I am! I'd better get that dinkus set up!"

He'd more or less half-heartedly worked out an idea of how a party-line telephone conversation could be made private, and just out of instinct, you might say, he'd accumulated around his house a lot of stuff that should have been on the phone company's inventory. There were condensers and transmitters and selective-ringing bells and resistances and the like. He'd meant to put some of them together some day and see what happened, but he'd been too busy courting Rosie to get at it.

NOW he did get started. His own voice on the telephone had told him to. It had warned him that one thing he had intended wouldn't work and something else would. But it was essentially simple, after all. He finished it and cut off his line from Central and hooked this gadget in. He rang. Half a minute later, somebody rang back.

"Hello!" said Sam, quivering. He'd broken the line to Central, remember. In theory, he shouldn't have gotten anybody anywhere. But a very familiar voice said "Hello" back at him, and Sam swallowed and said, "Hello, Sam. This is you in the second of July."

The voice at the other end said cordially that Sam had done pretty well and now the two of them—Sam in the here and now and Sam in the middle of the week after next—would proceed to get rich together. But the voice from July twelfth sounded less absorbed in the conversation than Sam thought quite right. It seemed even abstracted. And Sam was at once sweating from the pure unreasonableness of the situation and concious that he rated congratulation for the highly technical device he had built. After all, not everybody could build a time-talker!

He said with some irony, "If you're too busy to talk—"

"I'll tell you," replied the voice from the twelfth of July, gratified. "I am kind of busy right now. You'll understand when you get to where I am. Don't get mad, Sam. Tell you what—you go see Rosie and tell her about this and have a nice evening. Ha-ha!"

"Now what," asked Sam cagily, "do you mean by that 'ha-ha'?"

"You'll find out," said the voice. "Knowin' what I know, I'll even double it. Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

There was a click. Sam rang back, but got no answer. He may have been the first man in history to take an objective and completely justified dislike to himself.

But presently he grumbled, "Smart, huh? Two can play at that! I'm the one that's got to do things if we are both goin' to get rich."

He put his gadget carefully away and combed his hair and ate some cold food around the house and drove over to see Rosie. It was a night and an errand which ordinarily would have seemed purely romantic. There were fireflies floating about, and the Moon shone down splendidly, and a perfumed breeze carried mosquitoes from one place to another. It was the sort of night on which, ordinarily, Sam would have thought only of Rosie, and Rosie would have optimistic ideas about how housekeeping could, after all, be done on what Sam made a week.

They got settled down in the hammock on Rosie's front porch, and Sam said expansively, "Rosie, I've made up my mind to get rich. You ought to have everything your little heart desires. Suppose you tell me what you want so I'll know how rich I've got to get."

ROSIE drew back. She looked sharply at Sam. "Do you feel all right?"

He beamed at her. He'd never been married and he didn't know how crazy it sounded to Rosie to be queried on how much money would satisfy her. There simply isn't any answer to the question.

"Listen," said Sam tenderly. "Nobody knows it, but tonight Joe Hunt and the Widow Backus are eloping to North Carolina to get married. We'll find out about it tomorrow. And day after tomorrow, on the Fourth of July, Dunnsville is going to win the baseball game with Bradensburg, seven to five, all tied till the ninth inning, and then George Peeby is going to hit a homer with Fred Holmes on second base."

Rosie stared at him. Sam explained complacently. The Sam Yoder in the middle of the week after next had told him what to expect in those particular cases. He would tell him other things to expect. So Sam was going to get rich.

Rosie said, "Sam! Somebody was playing a joke on you!"

"Yeah?" Sam answered comfortably. "Who else but me knows what you said to me that time you thought I was mad at you

and you were crying out back of the well-house?"

"Sam!"

"And nobody else knows about that time we were picnicking and a bug got down the back of your dress and you thought it was a hornet."

"Sam Yoder!" wailed Rosie. "You never told anybody about that!"

"Nope," said Sam truthfully. "I never did. But the me in the week after next knew. He told me. So he had to be me talking to me. Couldn't've been anybody else."

Rosie gasped. Sam explained all over again. In detail. When he had finished, Rosie seemed dazed.

Then she said desperately, "Sam! Either you've t-told somebody else everything we ever said or did together, or else—there's somebody who knows every word we ever said to each other! That's awful! Do you really and truly mean to tell me—"

"Sure I mean to tell you," said Sam happily. "The me in the week after next called me up and talked about things nobody knows but you and me. Can't be no doubt at all."

Rosie shivered. "He—he knows every word we ever said! Then he knows every word we're saying now!" She gulped. "Sam Yoder, you go home!"

Sam gaped at her. She got up and backed away from him.

"D-do you think," she chattered despairingly, "that I—that I'm g-going to talk to you when s-somebody else—listens to every w-word I say and—knows everything I do? D-do you think I'm going to *m-marry* you?"

Then she ran away, weeping noisily, and slammed the door on Sam. Her father came out presently, looking patient, and asked Sam to go home so Rosie could finish crying and he could read his newspaper in peace.

ON the way back to his own house, Sam meditated darkly. By the time he got there, he was furious. The him in the week after next could have warned him about this!

He rang and rang and rang, on the cut-off line with his gadget hooked in to call July the twelfth. But there was no answer.

When morning came, he rang again, but the phone was still dead. He loaded his tool-kit in the truck and went off to work, feeling about as low as a man could feel.

He felt lower when he reported at the office and somebody told him excitedly that Joe Hunt and the Widow Backus had eloped to North Carolina to get married. Nobody would have tried to stop them if they had prosaically gotten married at home, but they had eloped to make it more romantic.

It wasn't romantic to Sam. It was devastating proof that there was another him ten days off, knowing everything he knew and more besides, and very likely laughing his head off at the fix Sam was in. Because, obviously, Rosie would be still more convinced when she heard this news. She'd know Sam wasn't crazy or the victim of a practical joke. He had told the truth.

It wasn't the first time a man got in trouble with a woman by telling her the truth, but it was new to Sam and it hurt.

He went over to Bradensburg that day to repair some broken lines, and around noon, he went into a store to get something to eat. There were some local sportsmen in the store, bragging to each other about what the Bradensburg baseball team would do to the Dunnsville nine.

Sam said peevishly, "Huh! Dunnsville will win that game by two runs!"

"Have you got any money that agrees with you?" a local sportsman demanded pugnaciously. "If you have, put it up and let somebody cover it!"

Sam wanted to draw back, but he had roused the civic pride of Bradensburg. He tried to temporize and he was jeered at. In the end, philosophically, he dragged out all the money he had with him and bet it—eleven dollars. It was covered instantly, amid raucous laughter. And on the way back to Batesville, he reflected unhappily that he was going to make eleven dollars out of knowing what was going to happen in the ninth inning of that ball game, but probably at the cost of losing Rosie.

HE tried to call his other self that night again. There was no more answer than before. He unhooked the gadget and restored normal service to himself. He rang Rosie's house. She answered the phone.

"Rosie," Sam asked yearningly, "are you still mad at me?"

"I never was mad at you," said Rose, gulping. "I'm mad at whoever was talking to you on the phone and knows all our private secrets. And I'm mad at you if you told him."

"But I didn't have to tell him! He's me! All he has to do is just remember! I tried to call him last night and again this morning," he added bitterly, "and he don't answer. Maybe he's gone off somewheres. I'm thinking it might be a—a kind of illusion, maybe."

"You told me there'd be an elopement last night," retorted Rosie, her voice wobbling, "and

there was. Joe Hunt and the Widow Backus. Just like you said!"

"It—it could've been a coincidece," suggested Sam, not too hopefully.

"I'm — w-waiting to see if Dunnsville beats Bradensburg seven to five tomorrow, tied to the ninth, with George Peeby hitting a homer then with Fred Holmes on second base. If—if that happens, I'll—I'll die!"

"Why?" asked Sam.

"Because it'll mean that I can't m-marry you ever, because somebody else'd be looking over your shoulder— and we wouldn't ever be by ourselves all our lives —night or day!"

She hung up, weeping, and Sam swore slowly and steadily and with venom while he worked to hook up his device again—which did not make a private conversation on a party line, but allowed a man to talk to himself ten days away from where he was. And then Sam rang, and rang, and rang. But he got no answer.

The following day, in the big fourth of July game, Dunnsville beat Bradensburg seven to five. It was tied to the ninth. Then George Peeby hit a homer, with Fred Holmes on second base. Sam collected his winnings, but grimly, without joy.

He stayed home that night, worrying, and every so often trying to call himself up on the device he had invented and been told—by himself—to modify. It was a nice gadget, but Sam did not enjoy it. It was a nice night, too. There was moonlight. But Sam did not enjoy that, either.

Moonlight wouldn't do Sam any good so long as there was another him in the middle of the week after next, refusing to talk to him so he could get out of the fix he was in.

NEXT morning, though, the phone woke him. He swore at it out of habit until he got out of bed, and then he realized that his gadget was hooked in and Central was cut off. He made it in one jump to the instrument.

"Hello!"

"Don't fret," said his own voice patronizingly. "Rosie's going to make up with you."

"How in blazes d'you know what she's going to do?" raged Sam. "She won't marry me with you hanging around! I've been trying to figure out a way to get rid of you—"

"Quiet!" commanded the voice on the telephone irritably. "I'm busy. I've got to go collect the money you've made for us."

"*You* collect money? *I* get in trouble and *you* collect money?"

"I have to," his voice said with the impatient patience of one speaking to a small idiot child, "before you can have it. Listen here. Where you are, it's Wednesday. You're going over to Dunnsville today to fix some phones. You'll be in Mr. Broaddus' law office about half-past ten. You look out the window and notice a fella setting in a car in front of the bank. Notice him good!"

"I won't do it," said Sam defiantly. "I ain't taking any orders from you! Maybe you're me, but *I* make money and *you* collect it. For all I know you spend it before I get to it! I'm quitting this business right now. It's cost me my own true love and all *my* life's happiness and to hell with you!"

"You won't do it?" his own voice asked nastily. "Wait and see!"

So, that morning, the manager told Sam, when he reported for work, to drive over to Dunnsville and check on some lines there. Sam balked. He said there were much more important lines needing repair elsewhere. The manager explained politely to Sam that Mr. Broaddus over in Dunnsville had been taken drunk at a Fourth of July party and fallen out of a window. He'd broken his leg, so it was a Christian duty to make sure he had a telephone in working order in his office, and Sam could get over there right away or else.

On the way to Dunnsville, Sam morosely remembered that he'd known about Mr. Broaddus' leg. He had told himself about it on the telephone.

At half-past ten, he was fixing Mr. Broaddus' telephone when he remembered about the man he was supposed to get a good look at, sitting in a car in front of the bank. He made an angry resolution not, under any circumstances, to glance outside of the lawyer's office. He meditated savagely that, by this resolution, the schemes of his other self in the future were abolished.

Naturally, he presently went to the window and looked to see what he was abolishing.

THERE was a car before the bank with a reddish-haired man sitting in it. A haze came out of the exhaust, showing that the motor was running. None of this impressed Sam as remarkable. But as he looked, two other men came running out of the bank. One of them carried a bag and both of them had revolvers out and they piled into the car and the reddish-haired man gunned it and it was abruptly a dwindling speck in a cloud of dust, getting out of town.

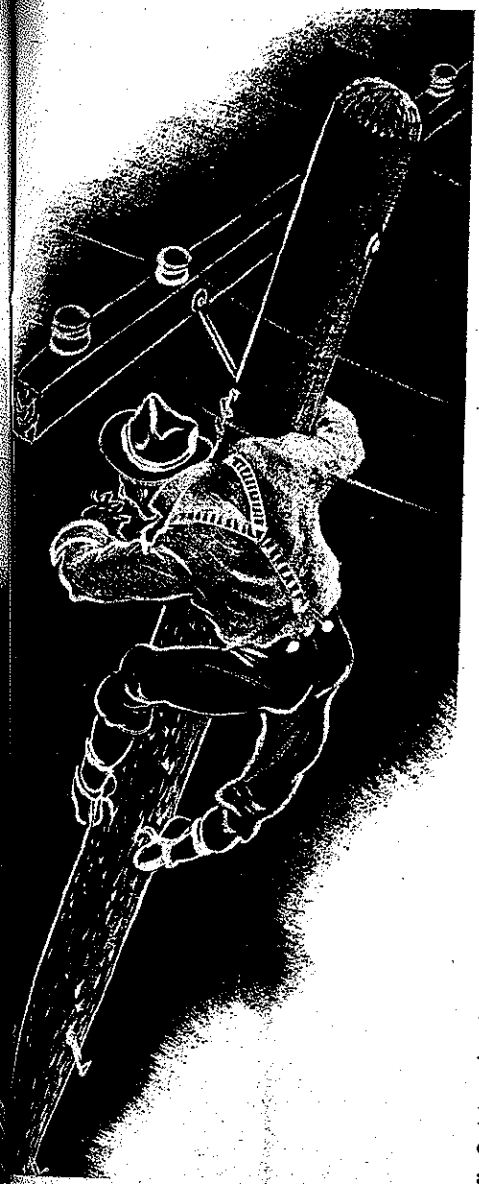
Three seconds later, old Mr. Bluford, president of the bank, came out yelling, and the cashier came after him, and it was a first-rate bank robbery they were yelling about. The men in the get-

away car had departed with thirty-five thousand dollars.

All of it had taken place so fast that Sam hardly realized what had happened when he went out to see what it was all about, and was instantly seized upon to do some work. The bankrobbers had shot out the telephone cable out of town with a shotgun, so word couldn't get ahead of them. Sam was needed to re-establish communications with the outside world.

He did, absorbedly reflecting on the details of the robbery as he'd heard them. He was high up on a telephone pole and the sheriff and enthusiastic citizens were streaking past in cars to make his labors unnecessary, when the personal aspect of all this affair hit him.

"Migawd!" gasped Sam, shocked. "That me in the middle of next week told me to come over here and watch a bank robbery! But he didn't let on what was going to happen so's I could stop it!" He felt an incredulous indignation come over him. "I woulda been a hero!" he said resentfully. "Rosie woulda admired me! *That other me is a born crook!*"



Then he realized the facts. The other him was himself, only a week and a half distant. The other him was so far sunk in dastardliness that he permitted a crime to take place, feeling no more than sardonic amusement.

And there was nothing he himself could do about it! He couldn't even tell the authorities about this depraved character! They wouldn't believe him unless he could get his other self on the telephone to admit his criminality. Even then, what could they do?

Sam felt what little zest had been left in living go trickling out of his climbers. He looked into the future and saw nothing desirable in it.

He painstakingly finished the repair of the shot-out telephone line, but then he went down to his truck and drove over to Rosie's house.

There was but one thing he could do.

ROSIE came suspiciously to the the door.

"I come to tell you good-by, Rosie," said Sam. "I just found out I'm a criminal, so I aim to go and commit my crimes far away

from my home and the friends who never thought I'd turn out this way. Good-by, Rosie."

"Sam!" said Rosie. "What's happened now?"

He told her about the bank robbery and how his own self—in the week after next—had known it was going to happen, and told Sam to go watch it without giving him information by which it could have been stopped.

"He knew it after it happened," said Sam bitterly, "and he could've told me about it before! He didn't, so he's a accessory to the crime. And he is me, which makes me a accessory, too. Good-by, Rosie, my own true love! You'll never see me again!"

"You set right down here," Rosie ordered firmly. "You haven't done a thing yet, so it's that other you who's a criminal. You haven't got a thing to run away for!"

"But I'm going to have! I'm doomed to be a criminal! It's that me in the week after next! There's nothing to be done!"

"Says who? *I'm* going to do something!"

"Like what?" asked Sam.

"I'm going to reform you," said Rosie, "before you start!"

SHE was a determined girl, that Rosie. She marched inside and put on her blue jeans, then went to her father's woodshed where he kept his tools and got a monkey wrench and stuck it in her hip pocket.

When she came to the truck, Sam said, "What's the idea, Rosie?"

"I'm riding around with you," replied Rosie, with a grim air. "You won't do anything criminal with me on hand! And if that other you starts talking to you on the telephone, I'm going to climb that pole and tell him where he gets off!"

"If anybody could keep me from turning criminal," acknowledged Sam, "it'd be you, Rosie. But that monkey wrench—what's it for?"

Rosie climbed into the seat beside him.

"You start having criminal ideas," she told him, "and you'll find out! Now you go on about your business and I and the monkey wrench will look after your morals!"

This tender exchange happened only an hour or so after the robbery and there was plenty of excitement around. But Sam went soberly about his work as telephone lineman. Rosie simply rode with him as a—well, it wasn't as a bodyguard, but a sort of M.P. escort—Morals Police. Where he worked on a line, he called the central office to report, and he heard about the hunt for the bank robbers, and told Rosie.

IT was good fortune that he'd been in Dunnsville when the robbery happened, because his prompt repair of the phone wires had spoiled the robbers' getaway plans. They hadn't gone ten miles from Dunnsville before somebody fired a load of buckshot at them as their car roared by Lemons' Store. They were past before they realized they'd been shot at. But the buckshot had punctured the radiator, and two miles on, they were stuck.

They pushed their car off the road behind some bushes and struck out on foot, and the sheriff ran right past their car without seeing it. Then rain began to fall and the bank robbers were wet and scared and desperate. They knew there'd be roadblocks set up everywhere and they had that bag of money—part bills, but a lot of it silver—and all of Tidewater was up in arms.

Taking evasive action, they hastily stuffed their pockets with small bills—there were no big ones—but dared not take too much lest the pockets bulge. They hid the major part of their loot in a hollow tree. They separated, going to nearby towns—while rain fell heavily and covered their trails—and went to bed with chest colds. They felt miserable. But the rain washed away the scent they had left and bloodhounds couldn't do a thing.

None of this was known to Sam, of course. Rosie had taken charge of him and she kept charge. She rode with him all the afternoon of the robbery. When quitting time came, he took her home and prepared to retire from the scene.

But she said grimly, "Oh, no, you don't! You're staying right here! You're going to sleep in my brother's room, and my pa is going to put a padlock on the door so you don't go roaming off to call up that no-account other you and get in more trouble!"

"I might mess things up if I don't talk to him," Sam objected.

"He's messed things up enough by talking to you! The idea of repeating our private affairs! He hadn't ought to know them! And I'm not sure," she said ominously, "that you didn't tell him! If you did, Sam Yoder—"

Sam didn't argue that point, for there was no argument to make. He was practically meek until he discovered after supper that the schedule for the evening was a game of cribbage played in the living room where Rosie's mother and father were.

He mentioned unhappily to Rosie that they were acting like old married people without the fun of getting that way, but he said that only once. Rosie glared at him. And when bedtime came,

she shooed him into her brother's room and her father padlocked him in.

He did not sleep well.

NEXT morning, there was Rosie in her blue jeans with a monkey wrench in her pocket, ready to go riding with him. She did. And the next day. And the next. Nothing happened. The state banking association put up five thousand dollars reward for the bank robbers and the insurance company put up some more, but there wasn't a trace of the criminals.

There wasn't a trace of criminality about Sam, either. Rosie rode with him, but they exchanged not one single hand-squeeze, nor one melting glance, nor did they even play footsie while they were eating lunch in the truck outside a filling station. Their conduct was exemplary and it wore on Sam. Possibly it wore on Rosie, too.

One day Sam said morosely, as he chewed on a ham sandwich at lunch, "Rosie, I'm crazy about you, but this feels like I been divorced without ever even getting married first."

And Rosie snapped, "If I told you how I feel, that other you in the week after next would laugh his fool head off. So shut up!"

Things were bad, and they got no better. For nearly a week, Rosie rode everywhere with Sam in his truck. They acted in a manner which Rosie's parents would in theory have approved, but didn't even begin to believe in. They did nothing the world could not have watched without their being embarrassed, and they said very little that all the world would not have been bored to hear.

It must have been the eleventh of July when they almost snapped at each other and Rosie said bitterly, "Let me drive a while. I need to put my mind on something that it don't make me mad to think about!"

"Go ahead," Sam invited gloomily. He stopped the truck and got out the door. "I don't look for any happiness in this world any more, anyway."

He went around to the other side of the truck while she slid to the driver's seat.

"Tomorrow's going to be the twelfth," she said. "Do you realize that?"

"I hadn't given it much thought," admitted Sam, "but what's the difference?"

"That's the day where the other you was when he called you up the first time."

"That's right," said Sam morbidly. "It is."

"And so far," added Rosie, jamming her foot viciously down on the accelerator, "I've kept you honest. If you change into a scoundrel between now and tomorrow—"

She changed to second gear. The truck jerked and bounced.

"Hey!" cried Sam. "Watch your driving!"

"Don't you tell me how to drive!"

"But if I get killed before tomorrow—"

ROSIE changed gear again, but too soon. The truck bucked, and she jammed down the accelerator again, and it almost leaped off the road.

"If you get killed before tomorrow," raged Rosie, "it'll serve you right! I've been thinking and thinking and thinking. And even if I stop you from being a crook, there'll always be that—other you—knowing everything we say and do." She was hitting forty miles an hour and speeding up. "So there'd still be no use. No hope, anyway."

She sobbed, partly in fury and partly in grief. And the roadway curved sharply just about there and she swung the truck crazily around it—and there was a car standing only halfway off the road.

Sam grabbed for the steering wheel, but there wasn't time. The light half-truck, still accelerating, hit the parked car with the noise of dozens of empty oil-drums falling downstairs. The truck slued around, bounced back, and then it charged forward and slammed into the parked car a second time. Then it stalled.

Somebody yelled at Sam. He got out of the truck, looking at the damage and trying to figure out how it was that neither he nor Rosie had been killed, and trying worriedly to think how he was going to explain to the telephone company that he'd let Rosie drive.

The voice yelled louder. Right at the edge of the woodland, there was a reddish-haired character screaming at him and tugging at his hip pocket. The words he used were not fit for Rosie's shell-like ears—even if they probably came near matching the way she felt. The reddish-haired man said more nasty words at the top of his voice. His hand came out of his hip pocket with something glittering in it.

Sam was swinging when the glitter began and he connected before the gun fired. There was a sort of squashy, smacking sound and the reddish-haired man lay down quietly in the road.

"Migawd!" said Sam blankly. "This was the fella in front of the bank! He's one of those robbers!"

He stared. There was a loud crashing in the brushwood. The accident had happened at the

edge of some woodland, and Sam did not need a high I.Q. to know that the friends of the red-haired man must be on the way.

A second later, he saw them. Rosie was just getting out of the car then. She was very pale and there wasn't time to tell her to get started up if possible and away from there.

One of the two running men was carrying a canvas bag with the words BANK OF DUNNSVILLE on it.

THE men came at Sam, meanwhile expressing opinions of the state of things, of Sam, of the Cosmos—of everything but the weather—in terms even more reprehensible than the first man had used.

They saw the reddish-haired man lying on the ground. One of them—he'd come out into the road behind the truck and was running toward Sam—jerked out a pistol. He was about to use it on Sam at a range of something like six feet when there was a peculiar noise behind him. It was a sort of hollow *klunk* which, even at such a time, needed to have attention paid to it. He jerked his head around to see.

The *klunk* had been made by Rosie's monkey wrench, falling imperatively on the head of the second man to come out of the woods. She had carried it to use on Sam, but she used it instead on a total stranger. He fell down and lay peacefully still.

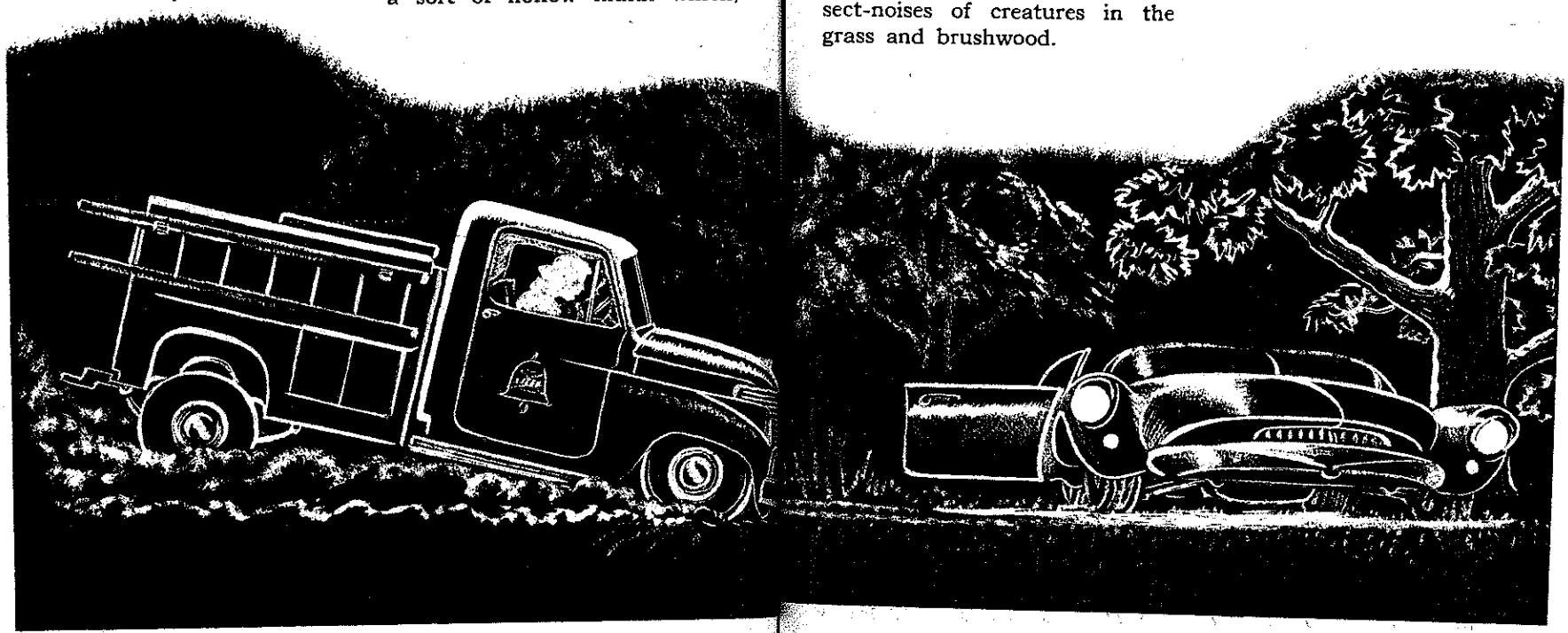
Then Sam swung a second time, at the second man to draw a pistol on him.

Then there was only the sweet singing of birds among the trees and the whirrings and other insect-noises of creatures in the grass and brushwood.

Presently there were other noises, but they were made by Rosie. She wept, hanging onto Sam.

He unwound her arms from around his neck and thoughtfully went to the back of the truck and got out some phone wire and his pliers. He fastened the three strangers' hands together behind them, and then their feet, and he piled them in the back of the light truck, along with the money they had stolen.

They came to, one by one, and Sam explained severely that they



must watch their language in the presence of a lady. The three were so dazed, though, by what had befallen them that the warning wasn't really necessary.

Rosie's parents would have been pleased at how completely proper their behavior was, while they took the three bank robbers into town and turned them over to the sheriff.

That night, Rosie sat out on the porch with Sam and they discussed the particular event of the day in some detail. But Rosie was still concerned about the other Sam. So Sam decided to assert himself.

About half-past nine, he said firmly, "Well, Rosie, I guess I'd better be getting along home. I've got to try one more time to call myself up on the telephone and tell me to mind my own business."

"Says who?" demanded Rosie. "You're staying locked up right here tonight and I'm riding with you tomorrow. If I kept you honest this far, I can keep it up till sundown tomorrow! Then maybe it'll stick!"

Sam protested, but Rosie was adamant—not only about keeping him from being a crook, but from having any fun to justify his virtue.

SHE shooed him into her brother's room and her father locked him in. And Sam did not sleep very well, because it looked as though virtue wasn't even its own reward.

He sat up, brooding. It must have been close to dawn when the obvious hit him. Then he gazed blankly at the wall and said, "Migawd! O'course!"

He grinned, all by himself, practically from head to foot. And at breakfast, he hummed contentedly as he stuffed himself with pancakes and syrup, and Rosie's depressed expression changed to a baffled alarm.

He smiled tenderly upon her when she came doggedly out to the truck, wearing her blue jeans and with the monkey wrench in her pocket. They started off the same as any other day and he told her amiably, "Rosie, the sheriff says we get five thousand dollars reward from the bankers' association, and there's more from the insurance company, and there's odd bits of change offered for those fellas for past performances. We're going to be right well off."

Rosie looked at him gloomily. There was still the matter of the other Sam in the middle of the week after next. And just then, Sam, who had been watching the telephone lines beside the road as he drove, pulled off the road and put on his climbing irons.

"What's this?" asked Rosie frightenedly. "You know—"

"You listen," said Sam, completely serene.

He climbed zestfully to the top of the pole. He hooked in the little gadget that didn't make private conversations possible on a party line, but did make it possible for a man to talk to himself ten days in the future.

Or the past.

"Hello!" said Sam, up at the top of the telephone pole. "Sam, this is you."

A voice he knew perfectly well sounded in the receiver.

"Huh? Who's that?"

"This is you," said Sam. "You, Sam Yoder. Don't you recognize your own voice? This is you, Sam Yoder, calling from the twelfth of July. Don't hang up!"

He heard Rosie gasp, all the way down there in the banged-up telephone truck. Sam had seen the self-evident, at last, and now, in the twelfth of July, he was talking to himself on the telephone. Only instead of talking to himself in the week after next, he was talking to himself in the week before last—he being, back there ten days before, working on this very same telephone line on this very same pole. And it was the same conversation, word for word.

WHEN he came down the pole, rather expansively, Rosie grabbed him and wept.

"Oh, Sam!" she sobbed. "It was you all the time!"

"Yeah," said Sam complacently. "I figured it out last night. That me back there in the second of July, he's cussing me out. And he's going to tell you about it and you're going to get all wrought up. But I can make that dumb me back yonder do what has to be done. And you and me, Rosie, have got a lot of money coming to us. I'm going to carry on through so he'll earn it for us. But I'm warning you, Rosie, he'll be back at my house waiting for me to talk to him tonight, and I've got to be home to tell him to go over to your house. I'm goin' to say 'ha-ha, ha-ha' at him."

"A-all right," said Rosie, wide-eyed. "You can."

"But I remember that when I call me up tonight, back there ten days ago, I'm going to be right busy here and now. I'm going to make me mad, because I don't want to waste time talking to myself back yonder. Remember? Now what," asked Sam mildly, "would I be doing tonight that would make me not want to waste time talking to myself ten days ago? You got any ideas, Rosie?"

"Sam Yoder! I wouldn't! I never heard of such a thing!"

Sam looked at her and shook his head regretfully. "Too bad. If you won't, I guess I've got to call

me up in the week after next and find out what's cooking."

"You—you *shan't*!" said Rosie fiercely. "I'll get even with you! But you shan't talk to that—" Then she wailed. "Darn you, Sam! Even if I do have to marry you so you'll be wanting to talk to me instead of that dumb you ten days back, you're not going to—you're not—"

Sam grinned. He kissed her. He put her in the truck and they rode off to Batesville to get married. And they did.

But you're not supposed to believe all this, and if you ask Sam Yoder about it, he's apt to say it's all a lie. He doesn't want to talk about private party lines, either. And there are other matters. For instance, Sam's getting to be a pretty prominent citizen these days. He makes a lot of money, one way and another. Nobody around home will ever bet with him on who's going to win at sports and elections, anyhow.

—MURRAY LEINSTER

Illustrated by STONE

COMPETITION

By JAMES CAUSEY

They would learn what caused the murderous disease—if it was the last thing they did!

GRETA

January 18, *Earth Time*

I WISH Max would treat me like a *woman.*

An hour ago, at dinner, John Armitage proposed a toast, especially for my benefit. He loves to play the gallant. Big man, silver mane, very blue eyes, a porcelain smile. The head of WSC, the perfect example of the politician-scientist.

"To the colony," he announced, raising his glass. "May Epsilon love them and keep them. May it only be transmittal trouble."

"Amen," Max said.

We drank. Taylor Bishop put down his glass precisely. Bishop is a gray little man with a diffident voice that belies his reputation as the best biochemist in the system. "Has Farragut hinted otherwise?" he asked mildly.