

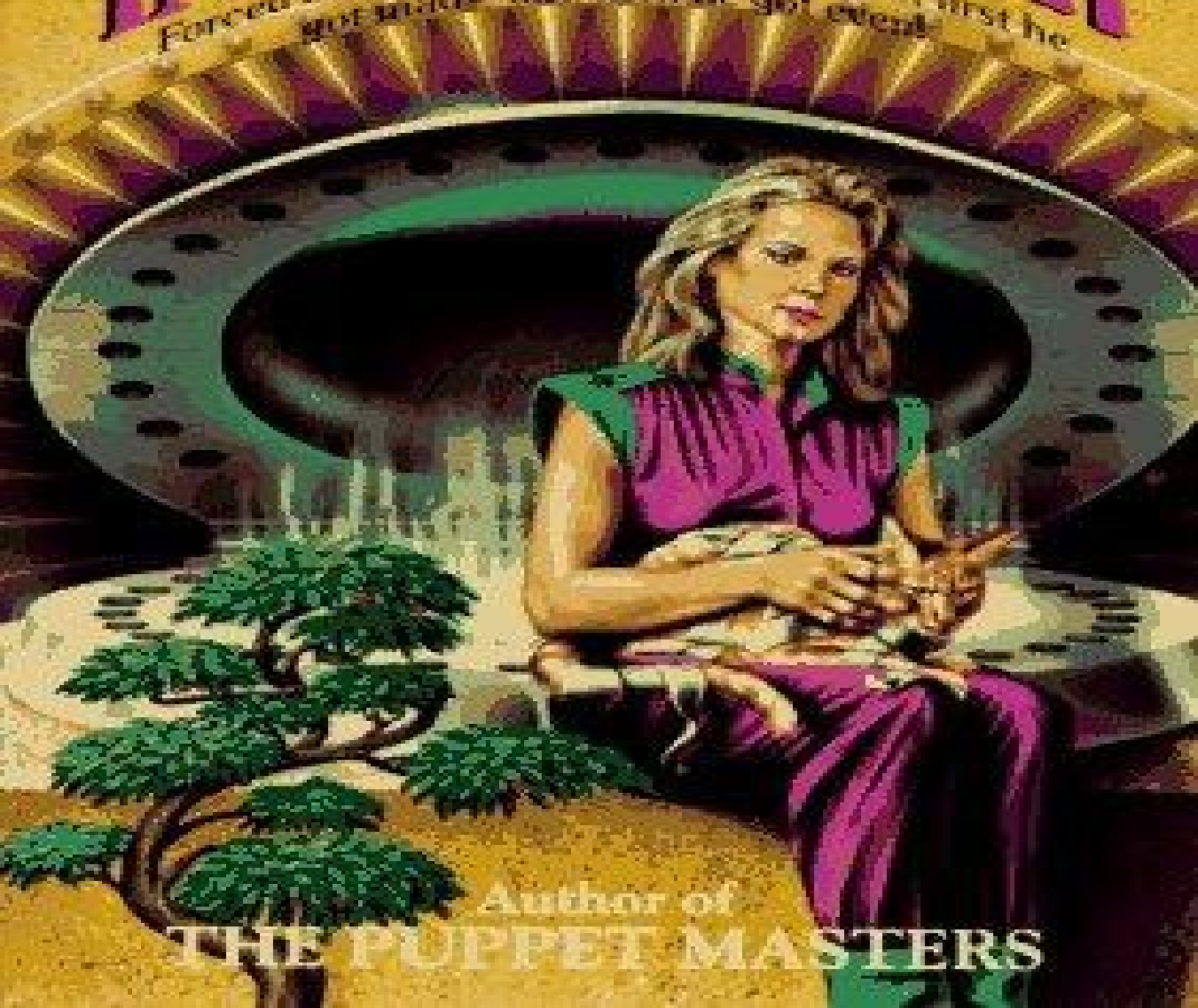
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Robert A. Heinlein

THE DOOR INTO SUMMER

Forced into a one-way trip to the future, first he got mad—and then he got even.



Author of
THE PUPPET MASTERS

The Door Into Summer

By

Robert A. Heinlein





"Damnation, no matter how many times you get your fingers burned, you have to trust people. Otherwise you are a hermit in a cave, sleeping with one eye open."

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CHAPTER 1

One winter shortly before the Six Weeks War my tomcat, Petronius the Arbiter, and I lived in an old farmhouse in Connecticut. I doubt if it is there any longer, as it was near the edge of the blast area of the Manhattan near miss, and those old frame buildings burn like tissue paper. Even if it is still standing it would not be a desirable rental because of the fall-out, but we liked it then, Pete and I. The lack of plumbing made the rent low and what had been the dining room had a good north light for my drafting board.

The drawback was that the place had eleven doors to the outside.

Twelve, if you counted Pete's door. I always tried to arrange a door of his own for Pete -in this case a board fitted into a window in an unused bedroom and in which I had cut a cat strainer just wide enough for Pete's whiskers. I have spent too much of my life opening doors for cats. I once calculated that, since the dawn of civilization, nine hundred and seventy-eight man-centuries have been used up that way. I could show you figures.

Pete usually used his own door except when he could bully me into opening a people door for him, which he preferred. But he would not use his door when there was snow on the ground.

While still a kitten, all fluff and buzzes, Pete had worked out a simple philosophy. I was in charge of quarters, rations, and weather; he was in charge of everything else. But he held me especially responsible for weather. Connecticut winters are good only for Christmas cards; regularly that winter Pete would check his own door, refuse to go out it because of that unpleasant white stuff beyond it (he was no fool), then badger me to open a people door.

He had a fixed conviction that at least one of them must lead into summer weather. Each time this meant that I had to go around with him to each of eleven doors, held it open while he satisfied himself that it was winter out that way, too, then go on to the next door, while his criticisms of my mismanagement grew more bitter with each disappointment.

Then he would stay indoors until hydraulic pressure utterly forced him outside. When he returned the ice in his pads would sound like little clogs on

the wooden floor and he would glare at me and refuse to purr until he had chewed it all out... whereupon he would forgive me until the next time.

But he never gave up his search for the Door into Summer.

On 3 December, 1970, I was looking for it too.

My quest was about as hopeless as Pete's had been in a Connecticut January. What little snow there was in southern California was kept on mountains for skiers, not in downtown Los Angeles -the stuff probably couldn't have pushed through the smog anyway. But the winter weather was in my heart.

I was not in bad health (aside from a cumulative hangover), I was still on the right side of thirty by a few days, and I was far from being broke. No police were looking for me, nor any husbands, nor any process servers; there was nothing wrong that a slight case of amnesia would not have cured. But there was winter in my heart and I was looking for the door to summer.

If I sound like a man with an acute case of self-pity, you are correct. There must have been well over two billion people on this planet in worse shape than I was. Nevertheless, I was looking for the Door into Summer.

Most of the ones I had checked lately had been swinging doors, like the pair in front of me then -the SANS SOUCI Bar Grill, the sign said. I went in, picked a booth hallway back, placed the overnight bag I was carrying carefully on the seat, slid in by it, and waited for the waiter.

The overnight bag said, "Waarrh?"

I said, "Take it easy, Pete."

"Naaow!"

"Nonsense, you just went. Pipe down, the waiter is coming."

Pete shut up. I looked up as the waiter leaned over the table, and said to him, "A double shot of your bar Scotch, a glass of plain water, and a split of ginger ale."

The waiter looked upset. “Ginger ale, sir? With Scotch?”

“Do you have it or don’t you?”

“Why, yes, of course. But-”

“Then fetch it. I’m not going to drink it; I just want to sneer at it. And bring a saucer too.”

“As you say, sir.” He polished the table top. “How about a small steak, sir? Or the scallops are very good today.”

“Look, mate, I’ll tip you for the scallops if you’ll promise not to serve them. All I need is what I ordered... and don’t forget the saucer.”

He shut up and went away. I told Pete again to take it easy, the Marines had landed. The waiter returned, his pride appeased by carrying the split of ginger ale on the saucer. I had him open it while I mixed the Scotch with the water. “Would you like another glass for the ginger ale, sir?”

“I’m a real buckaroo; I drink it out of the bottle.”

He shut up and let me pay him and lip him, not forgetting a lip for the scallops. When he had gone I poured ginger ale into the saucer and tapped on the top of the overnight bag. “Soup’s on, Peter.”

It was unzipped; I never zipped it with him inside. He spread It with his paws, poked his head out, looked around quickly, then levitated his forequarters and placed his front feet on the edge of the table. I raised my glass and we looked at each other. “Here’s to the female race, Pete -find ‘em and forget ‘em!”

He nodded; it matched his own philosophy perfectly. He bent his head daintily and started lapping up ginger ale. “If you can, that is,” I added, and took a deep swig. Pete did not answer. Forgetting a female was no effort to him; he was the natural-born bachelor type.

Facing me through the window of the bar was a sign that kept changing. First it would read: WORK WHILE YOU SLEEP. Then it would say: AND

DREAM YOUR TROUBLES AWAY. Then it would flash in letters twice as big:

MUTUAL ASSURANCE COMPANY

I read all three several times without thinking about them. I knew as much and as little about suspended animation as everybody else did. I had read a popular article or so when it was first announced and two or three times a week I'd get an insurance company ad about it in the morning mail; I usually chucked them without looking at them since they didn't seem to apply to me any more than lipstick ads did.

In the first place, until shortly before then, I could not have paid for cold sleep; it's expensive. In the second place, why should a man who was enjoying his work, was making money, expected to make more, was in love and about to be married, commit semi-suicide?

If a man had an incurable disease and expected to die anyhow but thought the doctors a generation later might be able to cure him -and he could afford to pay for suspended animation while medical science caught up with what was wrong with him -then cold sleep was a logical bet. Or if his ambition was to make a trip to Mars and he thought that clipping one generation out of his personal movie film would enable him to buy a ticket, I supposed that was logical too -there had been a news story about a cafe-society couple who got married and went right straight from city hail to the sleep sanctuary of Western World Insurance Company with an announcement that they had left instructions not to be called until they could spend their honeymoon on an interplanetary liner although I had suspected that it was a publicity gag rigged by the insurance company and that they had ducked out the back door under assumed names. Spending your wedding night cold as a frozen mackerel does not have the ring of truth in it.

And there was the usual straightforward financial appeal, the one the insurance companies bore down on: "Work while you sleep." Just hold still and let whatever you have saved grow into a fortune. If you are fifty-five and your retirement fund pays you two hundred a month, why not sleep away the years, wake up still fifty-five, and have it pay you a thousand a month? To say nothing of waking up in a bright new world which would

probably promise you a much longer and healthier old age in which to enjoy the thousand a month? That one they really went to town on, each company proving with incontrovertible figures that its selection of stocks for its trust fund made more money faster than any of the others. “Work while you sleep!”

It had never appealed to me. I wasn’t fifty-five, I didn’t want to retire, and I hadn’t seen anything wrong with 1970.

Until recently, that is to say. Now I was retired whether I liked it or not (I didn’t); instead of being on my honeymoon I was sitting in a second-rate bar drinking Scotch purely for anesthesia; instead of a wife I had one much-scarred tomcat with a neurotic taste for ginger ale; and as for liking right now, I would have swapped it for a case of gin and then busted every bottle.

But I wasn’t broke.

I reached into my coat and took out an envelope, opened it. It had two items in it. One was a certified check for more money than I had ever had before at one time; the other was a stock certificate in Hired Girl, Inc. They were both getting a little mused; I had been carrying them ever since they were handed to me.

Why not?

Why not duck out and sleep my troubles away? Pleasanter than joining the Foreign Legion, less messy than suicide, and it would divorce me completely from the events and the people who had made my life go sour. So why not?

I wasn’t terribly interested in the chance to get rich. Oh, I had read H.G. Wells’s *When The Sleeper Wakes*, not only when the insurance companies started giving away free copies, but before that, when it was just another classic novel; I knew what compound interest and stock appreciation could do. But I was not sure that I had enough money both to buy the Long Sleep and to set up a trust large enough to be worthwhile. The other argument appealed to me more: go beddy-bye and wake up in a different world.

Maybe a lot better world, the way the insurance companies would have you believe... or maybe worse. But certainly different.

I could make sure of one important difference: I could doze long enough to be certain that it was a world without Belle Darkin-or Miles Gentry, either, but Belle especially. If Belle was dead and buried I could forget her, forget what she had done to me, cancel her out... instead of gnawing my heart with the knowledge that she was only a few miles away.

Let's see, how long would that have to be? Belle was twenty-three-or claimed to be (I recalled that once she had seemed to let slip that she remembered Roosevelt as President). Well, in her twenties anyhow. If I slept seventy years, she'd be an obituary. Make it seventy-five and be safe.

Then I remembered the strides they were making in geriatrics; they were talking about a hundred and twenty years as an attainable "normal" life span. Maybe I would have to sleep a hundred years. I wasn't certain that any insurance company offered that much.

Then I had a gently fiendish idea, inspired by the warm glow of Scotch. It wasn't necessary to sleep until Belle was dead; it was enough, more than enough, and just the fitting revenge on a female to be young when she was old. Just enough younger to rub her nose in it-say about thirty years.

I felt a paw, gentle as a snowflake, on my arm. "Mooorre!" announced Pete.

"Greedy gut," I told him, and poured him another saucer of ginger ale. He thanked me with a polite wait, then started lapping it.

But he had interrupted my pleasantly nasty chain of thought. What the devil could I do about Pete?

You can't give away a cat the way you can a dog; they won't stand for it. Sometimes they go with the house, but not in Pete's case; to him I had been the one stable thing in a changing world ever since he was taken from his mother nine years earlier... I had even managed to keep him near me in the Army and that takes real wangling.