

# THE RADIANT AVENGER

by **E. A. GROSSER**

(Author of "Habits Via Radio," "Blue Boy," etc.)

Gilbert Archer knew he wasn't breathing. He clasped his wrist and felt his pulse; there was none. He should be dead, yet he had never felt more alive, and his body glowed with an uncanny radiance!



**G**ILBERT ARCHER smiled and edged the car to the side of University Road when another car demanded raucously the right to pass.

"All right, Gil; laugh if you want to," growled Pug Wilson, sliding down in his seat. "But I'm telling you, you got Carmody over the barrel with that evidence, sure. If you think he'll stay there without a fight, you're crazy. Carry a gun, at least!"

The two men were in direct contrast to each other: Wilson, short and burly, with the hands and jaw of a prizefighter; Archer, lean, close to six feet tall with a good-humored mouth that was now

rather grim.

"We'll see what old Dean Hoskins has to say," he replied. "Maybe Carmody is through bossing Springfield. In that case I won't need a gun." He turned in his seat with a frown of irritation as the car behind honked again. He drew over farther to the side of the road and the car started to pass.

"But until then—" Pug started, then shouted, "Look out!"

The passing car swung in on them. Its rear wheel smashed into the front wheel of Archer's car. His car rocked with the crash, then went through the guard rail. For a long second the front of the car

seemed to hang motionless in the air, then it dropped and they started the long fall to the foot of the bluff.

The car struck once on the way down, bounded outward, and struck on its side. Archer smashed into Wilson. He felt his right arm crack like a brittle twig. The pain was red fire that ate up his arm to his shoulder. But he didn't lose consciousness.

He forced the door open and tossed the briefcase with the evidence out onto the ground. Then he started to drag Pug out of the wrecked car, but the looseness of his friend's body made him halt. He felt for the pulse. There was none.

"Pug! Pug!"

He shook his friend, as though that would revive him. Then he stared at the boneless wobbling of Pug's head. His hand slipped from his friend's shoulder and Pug folded over lifelessly.

Jaw set woodenly, he dragged himself out of the car and picked up the briefcase. Now there was another reason to get Carmody. A bullet smacked the earth beside him. He looked up at the road.

The other car had halted and three men were standing at the edge. One had a gun in his hand. He raised it again and another bullet thudded close to Archer. The precious briefcase in his left hand and his right hanging uselessly at his side, Archer shambled toward the trees that would shelter him.

The men above shouted. Archer glanced up and saw that they were coming down. He tried to run, nearly fell. In the late afternoon sunlight he saw the three men hurrying after him. They halted and more lead whined past him, then he was in the safety of the trees. He waded the small stream and started up the hill. The campus should be on the other side of the hill, and there Carmody's men wouldn't dare pursue him.

HE halted suddenly at a level place that had been gashed into the side of the hill. In front of him was a heavy gate. Then he understood. This was the shaft entrance to the underground chamber where the university had constructed its cyclotron. Down there would be help!

He staggered to the gate. It was open. He went in and tried to lock it after him but couldn't. He leaned against the wall, weak and dizzy. Then he stumbled down the crooked passage to the heart of the hill.

He stood in the entrance of the cyclotron room

and his heart sank. He could see no one. There was a giant electromagnet, the huge cyclotron chamber, some electrical equipment. But no men—no help!

There was a hum of power. His heart lifted. He staggered into the room. The operators must be on the other side of the equipment.

He started past the chamber. Tiny fingers seemed to be plucking at his nerves, trying to pull them from his flesh. The pain increased. He fell against the chamber. A metal shutter fell away under his shoulder and a stream of violet light swept over his body. He writhed with sudden agony. Then blackness poured into his mind.

ARCHER knew that he was dead. He was roasting with the heat, and all around him was black. He tried to open his eyes and couldn't. Then he heard one devil say to another:

"Gee! Look at him shine!"

"Yeah," agreed the other. "It's giving me the jitters."

"Me too," said the first. "I thought I was getting used to the stiffs but that don't go for this one. Leave it to some goofy professors to spring a new one on us."

Archer succeeded in opening his eyes. He found himself staring at a ceiling. It wasn't very interesting so he tried to sit up. He felt queer. That heat seemed to come from inside his body, but it wasn't unpleasant. He got his arm up and pushed himself to a sitting position.

"Jeeze, Joey! Lookut!"

Archer turned toward the voice, but he caught only a glimpse of two backs as they went through the door almost simultaneously.

He looked after them curiously for a moment then glanced around him. He was sitting on a stone table. And all around him were other tables, but a number of them were covered with sheets. And beneath the sheets must be human bodies—at least that's what the outlines looked like.

Then Archer's eyes narrowed and he slid to the floor. He knew now where he was. This was a morgue!

He stood with one hand on the table, looking around. They must have thought he was dead. It was true—he did feel plenty queer. But dead?—He'd never felt stronger in his life. And his senses were unnaturally keen. He could hear those two dev—men talking to someone, pleading with someone to come "and take a look." And his sight

was clearer. His sense of touch was so delicate that he could feel the roughness of the polished stone tabletop.

He wasn't dead, he exulted. He'd never been more alive in his life. And he would make Carmody pay for Pug's death. The joke was on Carmody and the doctors who had thought that cyclotron had killed him.

He was nude but he tossed his sheet over his shoulder and started toward the door, as an elderly man entered. The old man stopped short and behind his glasses his eyes widened. In back of him Archer caught a glimpse of two other men, younger and a lot more afraid than the first.

"Wh-what are you doing?" the old man asked.

"Leaving. I want some clothes."

"Bu-b-but—" the old man started, then halted. It seemed kind of silly to tell a man he was dead. Slowly his bewilderment left him and his eyes began to glow. "Come in here, will you?" he said eagerly.

He escorted Archer to an office and started a thorough examination.

"Where's the briefcase I had with me?" asked Archer, when one of the two frightened helpers came with his clothes.

"What briefcase?" the doctor mumbled, tapping his chest with a middle finger. "This is all you had." He nodded toward the clothes.

Archer's hopes sank. It was easy to guess what had happened. Those thugs had found him, probably after the cyclotron had been turned off and before the physicists had come. They had assumed he was dead, and had taken the briefcase. And with those papers had gone any hope of convicting Carmody.

Suddenly Archer remembered that he had had a broken arm. He lifted his right arm and clenched his hand. It certainly wasn't broken now. Then he stared at his hand. It glowed with a dull violet light.

The doctor raised his head from Archer's chest and looked at him with a frown.

"You're the deadest man I ever saw," he stated flatly.

Archer had to grin. "Nonsense!"

"It's true," insisted the doctor. "Your heart isn't beating. You aren't breathing. You are dead!"

**A**RCHER tensed. It was true! He wasn't breathing. He clasped his own wrist and felt for his pulse. There was none.

He stared down at his hands again. They glowed eerily with the violet light. But they were alive. He pinched his hand to make sure that he could feel. A piece of his own flesh came away between his fingers.

He looked at it. The bit of flesh was mashed to a pulp. He looked at the place from which it had come, to make sure that it was his own flesh. It hadn't hurt much and he couldn't be that strong. He had only tweaked himself. Then he watched the tiny wound with ever more bewilderment. It was healing right in front of his eyes!

And it wasn't scar tissue! The new flesh was exactly like the old. He couldn't tell where the wound had been.

He heard the doctor speak to one of the others.

"Did you phone Dixon?" The other nodded mutely.

"Dixon is in charge of that laboratory up there," the doctor informed Archer. "I knew he'd be interested, so I sent for him. Maybe he can explain it—I can't."

Dixon proved to be a rather young man for the post he held—he wasn't more than forty at the most and handsome in spite of graying hair. But neither he nor those who came with him could account for the change in Archer.

"I can't understand it," he admitted freely, glancing at his companions. They nodded their agreement, but one spoke up.

"It must be temporary," he said.

"You mean I'm dying?" asked Archer.

The other nodded solemnly. Archer reached for a heavy metal ashtray on the doctor's desk. He grasped it in both hands and twisted. With a groan the metal yielded. He passed it to the physicist with a brief smile.

"Pretty good for a dying man, don't you think?"

"Th-that was steel!" the doctor gasped.

"It still is," Archer said, then turned at a disturbance in the doorway. Joey, the doctor's helper, was there, playing Horatius at the bridge with a bunch of clamoring men.

"Reporters!" snorted Dixon. "There are more 'correspondents' at the university than students. They are as bad as a Fifth Column. Harkins, you handle them. But soften it a lot; you know how they are."

Harkins went out and he and Joey managed to get the door shut again. Archer turned again to the one who had said he was a dying man.

"You think that as soon as the activation of my body cells wears off, I'll die. Is that true?" The fellow nodded agreement. "Then how do you account for this?" Archer asked, pinching a good-sized chunk out of the fleshy part of his arm.

Dixon started to object, then they all stood transfixed watching the wound fill with new flesh. There was practically a concert of sighs when the healing was complete. But the doctor was the first to understand.

"Totipotency!" he gasped. The others looked at him for an explanation.

"It's the ability some of the lower animals have of growing new parts or members when mutilated," he said, still staring at the bit of flesh in Archer's hand. "But it isn't exactly the same, or that piece of your arm would grow a new man." He shook his head dazedly, as though it was too much for him. "Anyway, it proves that Archer isn't a dying man—that is, any more than we all are. In some way his body is running on radioactivity and until that wears down . . ."

"But that may be centuries!" Dixon objected.

"Then he'll live for centuries," the doctor stated. "And he needn't fear sickness, for no germ could live in him; and he doesn't have to worry about accidents because . . ." The doctor sat down abruptly as though stunned by his reasoning.

Archer smiled grimly. Now he knew how he was going to get Carmody. He was merely going to walk in and take possession of that evidence again. And no person, gun, or knife could stop him. Not even gas could halt him, for he didn't breathe. Nothing could stop him! He pulled his sleeve down again and slipped on his coat.

"Well, thank you, gentlemen," he said, still smiling.

"Wait!" called Dixon.

Archer halted and looked at the physicist.

"Where are you going?" Dixon asked.

"I . . . have some unfinished business to attend to."

"Can't it wait? Won't you come with us to the university where we have the instruments to take proper observations? Man, you must! Think of what it might mean to humanity!"

Archer hesitated. He like Dixon, and the physicist, had a genuine interest. And Carmody could wait for a time. He, Gil Archer, had plenty of that—centuries of it!

"Okay, let's go!" he agreed.

ARCHER saw more instruments in the next two hours than he had ever seen before. Dixon and his fellows observed, measured, and recorded, until Archer felt that even his strange condition didn't warrant such painstaking care.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he asked when Dixon halted for a brief moment.

"Dr. Haines must be right," Dixon admitted. "At least all the evidence points that way, and none disproves his assumption."

"How much longer will you take?" Archer asked.

"As long as you'll stay," Dixon said with youthful grin. "In fact you can have bed and board here for as long as you want—even if you don't need it. I wonder if you'll need sleep?"

"How would it be if I attended to my . . . business, then came back?" Archer suggested.

Dixon looked disappointed. "It's up to you, of course," he agreed. "But—"

The door burst open and a girl came in, struggling with the secretary. Her dark hair was in disarray, her blue eyes shining with eagerness and anger.

"Let me go!" she cried, trying to brush aside the secretary. "I must see them. I'm a friend of Mr. Archer's."

"Jeanne!" Archer cried, starting forward.

The secretary stepped aside and the girl ran to his arms. "Oh, Gil!" she choked. "I just saw the papers. I can hardly b-believe—"

Archer tried to comfort her. She had said that she was his friend, but that was stating it very mildly. Jeanne Wilson was the girl he had intended to marry. He blamed himself for not going to her immediately. As Pug's sister, and his fiancée, he owed her something. The poor kid had lost the only relative she had. And though she didn't know it, he himself might as well have remained dead. They could never marry. He knew radioactivity well enough to know that even now the rays from his body were burning through her. Prolonged exposure would mean death for her. Almost fearfully he pushed her away from him.

She looked at him with hurt eyes and caught her lip between her teeth. Archer started to explain, but she turned to Dixon.

"I—I want you to do the same thing to my brother," she said. "I want him back. It isn't right for him to be d-dead. He's young! Strong! You've got to help me!"

Dixon's eyes glowed immediately at the possibility. He turned to his secretary. "Get Haines on the phone," he ordered.

The secretary went out and Dixon paced eagerly to his desk. A few moments later he was talking to the doctor.

"Listen, Haines, I want you to bring Wilson up here. . . . The Wilson who was killed in the accident, of course. We're going to try to revive him. . . . Of course, we've got permission. Wait a minute." He turned to Jeanne. "Are you his closest relative?"

She nodded. "His only one," she almost whispered. She was trying not to look at Archer. The hurt in her eyes was hard for him to bear.

Dixon returned his attention to the phone and Archer faced Jeanne, though he didn't approach her.

"Jeanne, you don't understand. I know it looks—well, you know how it looks. But I still love you. Only I can't let you stay near me. It would kill you."

She didn't seem to understand and he tried to explain, but Dixon cradled the phone and announced, "He's coming."

**A**RCHER and Dr. Haines stood near Dixon in the control room when he closed the switches. Dixon had insisted that Jeanne go home, had refused to go on with the experiment unless she did. And the doctor had backed him up in the decision.

She had wanted to stay, but when Archer added his voice to theirs, she went. And Archer was glad, for he knew that it would be a gruesome business they had to do. And now Pug, stiff and cold with death, was strapped in position so the beam of subatomic particles from the cyclotron would strike him as it had Archer. From memory, he knew what was happening in the cyclotron chamber—or what he hoped was happening. The seconds passed with sticky slowness.

Dixon cut the power and his eyes met theirs. Wordlessly, they left the cadmium-shielded control room and hurried to the cyclotron chamber.

Pug's body was braced in front of the chamber. The doctor hastened to examine him. They waited tensely until the doctor looked up, then they knew their answer before he spoke.

"No," the doctor said briefly.

"Same settings—I can't understand it," said

Dixon. "Let's try again."

They started back to the control room, but one of the assistants came to them.

"Man outside to see Mr. Archer," he reported.

"Reporter?" Dixon asked suspiciously.

"No, a policeman," said the assistant.

They hesitated. "I'll go with you," said Dixon, and Archer knew that he had found a friend. The three of them went up to the surface.

The plainclothesman looked at them and hesitated. "Gilbert Archer?" he asked.

"That's my name," said Archer.

"Warrant for your arrest for the death of John Wilson."

"You're mad!" snapped the doctor. "That was an accident."

"Warrant says it was manslaughter," the man informed. "Are you coming peaceable?"

Archer shrugged and went with the man to his car.

**G**IL ARCHER sat in his cell, watching the play of the violet light over his arms. It was a rank frame-up, he knew. But there wasn't any sense in fighting the whole police force. It was better to bring the charge to a trial as quickly as was possible, and get it over with. No jury on earth would hold him guilty.

He raised his head when the jailer came to his cell door.

"Miss Wilson to see you," the jailer announced. "How about it?"

"Yes!" Archer agreed eagerly. He had only been in jail for one day, but he hadn't found it very exciting. He was puzzled, too. Why hadn't his father come? He could have understood it, if Jeanne hadn't come to see him. He'd been pretty clumsy in trying to explain why he didn't want her close to him.

Then she was at the cell door and the jailer was opening the lock. She came into the cell and ran toward him.

"Not too close," he warned and tried to smile. Life, even centuries of this wonderful new life that he possessed, didn't look so bright without her. And they were separated by a barrier that was more terrible than distance.

She halted uncertainly, twisting her handkerchief nervously in her hands. "I—I got a lawyer," she announced.

"You got a lawyer!" he burst out. "Where's

Dad?"

She didn't answer.

"Where's Dad?" he insisted.

"There . . . there was fire at . . ." Her voice trailed into silence.

Archer waited, afraid to think ahead of her words. He dreaded to hear what she would say; and yet, he had to hear.

"Well?" he prompted, his voice an ominous monotone.

"There was a fire at your house the same afternoon of the wreck," Jeanne said quietly. "Your father was home, and he . . ."

"Died!" Archer shouted. "Burned to death! Isn't that it?"

She nodded slowly. "I thought you knew, Gil. Or I would have told you before. I thought you didn't want to talk about it. I—I felt that way about . . . about . . ." She lowered her face to her hands.

Archer wanted more than anything else to go to her, and comfort her. But he didn't dare. If he did that, he would be killing the last thing on this earth that he cared for. Dad was gone—horribly. Pug was gone. He was condemned to a long life—centuries—of utter separation from his fellows and most of all, Jeanne. His anger formed like a diamond-hard lump within him, and his thought was for her.

"They failed?" he asked quietly.

She nodded, crying silently. Archer watched her without speaking, but his last hope died within him. He was not to have a companion. Those centuries of life would have been at least bearable if Pug could be with him. He remembered that freckled face, the pug-nose, bitterly keen wit. But Pug was gone!

The hard anger within him swelled. Carmody had done that. He had burned their house to burn the evidence. He had found out that Archer was on his way to the dean for advice and had sent his thugs after them. Pug had died. They had tried to kill him also, but had unintentionally condemned him to something worse than death.

"Get in the back of the cell," he said quietly to Jeanne.

She looked up at him quickly, frightened by the tone of his voice. She stared at his glowing face with apprehension.

"What are you going to do?"

He didn't answer her question. Instead, he repeated, "Get back."

She obeyed slowly, unwillingly, her eyes clinging to his. "Gil, what are you going to do?"

He didn't answer, but watched carefully to see that she didn't approach too close. Fear came into her face.

"Gil!" she cried. "Don't do anything! You'll only be killed. You're all I got left. Oh, God! Gil! Don't!"

But his hands were on the bars. The door was locked, but that made no difference. He gripped them tightly, pulled. And slowly they bent out of shape.

The cell door pulled away from its frame, and the lock snapped. It swung back and he was free. He went into the corridor and started toward the front of the jail. A sudden hush had descended over the prisoners. It seemed that even noises from the street were suddenly quiet. All seemed to watch as he strode toward freedom.

**T**HEN someone shouted hoarsely. The cry was echoed farther on, and there was the sound of running feet.

"Halt! Halt, or I'll shoot!" The policeman crouched in the doorway, pistol leveled at Archer's chest. But Archer strode closer. There was a tight grin on his lips. Now was the moment. Within the minute he would discover whether he was almost immortal, or not. He watched the policeman's finger tighten. The knuckle whitened.

"Halt!" he cried, and there was a pleading note in his voice. "You fool! Stop or I'll shoot."

"Gil!" Jeanne screamed shrilly and ran after him. She caught his arm, tried to make him stop and go back to the cell.

Gil Archer pushed her aside and forgot his new strength. She crashed into the cell bars and slipped to the floor. But he didn't notice. The policeman pulled the trigger.

The impact of the bullet rocked him back on his heels. Pain stabbed through his chest. His sight faded and he thought he was dying. So Dr. Haines had been wrong!

Then his sight cleared. There was only a dull ache in his chest where the bullet had torn. Then even that was gone. He smiled triumphantly.

The policeman stared, unable to believe his eyes. His face was pale when he shot again. And Archer felt that one, too. Then he struck the policeman on the jaw and the fellow dropped to the floor.

Archer went through the door. A half a dozen men were running toward him. Several raised pistols to shoot. The room rang with the explosions. Archer rocked to their force, then lowering his head, drove through them like a battering ram.

He was out on the street. The officers were running after him, but they didn't shoot. They were afraid of hitting the crowd.

Archer found a taxi, pulled the driver from the seat and got in. The car shot into the traffic and toward Carmody's palatial home.

The same grim smile twisted Archer's lips. His eyes burned with a mad fire. Only one thought was in his mind, but that drummed over and over. It was an insistent refrain: "Get Carmody . . . Get Carmody . . . Get Carmody!"

He felt that Dad and Pug were at his side, urging him on. He could feel their invisible presences. "Nothing to live for . . . Get Carmody . . . You've nothing to live for . . . Get Carmody!"

Sirens shrieked behind him. He held the gas to the floorboard. The taxi rocketed through town, skidding around turns with screaming tires. But he held the wheel firm. Not all the police in the state could keep him from Carmody.

**A**RCHER pulled the taxi into Carmody's drive by main force. The car skidded half around, but he straightened it out and sped toward the white house that showed through the trees.

Then he saw a large automobile speeding down the drive toward him. He tried to pull aside, to go around it. But the drive was narrow. The gravel slipped under the wheels of the taxi. The big automobile struck the side of the taxi with a jangling crash. The rear end lifted into the air. A figure erupted through the metal top and sailed through the air like a doll, to land heavily in the soft earth of the garden.

The automobile balanced on its nose, then fell back on its side. The taxi was a twisted mass of wreckage. The radiator of the big car had driven directly into the driver's seat.

Pain was a red flood that swept in ever higher tides over Archer. He lay in the wreckage, unseeing, unhearing. He could only feel.

His shoulder was twisted awry and a great hole torn in his chest. The air burned like fire in his vitals. His right hand clawed at his chest as though to tear away the pain.

Then slowly the pain ebbed away. He ceased to

writhe and lay still. It was as though he was waiting. He knew he was. He knew that he would either die, or recover. And he didn't care which it was.

He opened his eyes and could see. He looked down at his chest. It was healing rapidly. He caught a glimpse of the chauffeur's frightened face. The man's eyes were riveted on Archer's chest.

"How's your passenger?" Archer asked.

"I—I don't know," the fellow admitted. "Mr. Carmody—"

"Carmody!" Archer pushed himself up and crawled out the broken window. "Was that him?"

The chauffeur nodded. Archer got to his feet, straightened slowly, then went to the still body in the garden. It was Carmody all right. He looked at the flabby jowls. They were pasty now, almost like white clay.

The lowering wail of sirens was in his ears when he knelt at the side of the body. He lifted the body off the ground, shook it. And when the police came up to him he was laughing uncontrollably.

He saw them, and shook Carmody for their benefit. The head wobbled freely. "See!" he said. "See! Just like Pug. Someone phoned Carmody I was coming and he grabbed all those securities that I had for evidence and started to run away from me. And now he's just like Pug!"

One of the policemen followed Archer's pointing finger and saw the briefcase. It had burst open and the finely engraved bonds and securities were spilled over the garden.

"Jerusalem!" he gasped and he and another started to gather them while others took Archer back to town. He went with them willingly, almost gladly. Perhaps they could kill him.

**J**EANNE came to see him every day. She pleaded with him to make a defense, but he only shook his head with a grin.

"You didn't kill Carmody," she cried.

"Technicality," he answered quietly. "I intended to, and did accidentally."

"But they'll send you to the electric chair."

"That's where I want to go."

"But Gil, you have no right—"

"We can never belong to one another," he said quietly. "You will die if you stay near me; and I die when my body ceases to radiate so that you can."

"But maybe Dixon can—"

Archer shook his head. "My life-force is

different now. It can't be changed back."

"But maybe I can be like you!"

"No!" he said gruffly. "Remember, we couldn't help Pug."

"But put up a defense anyway," she pleaded. "If you try at all, they won't convict you. I've hired lawyers. I've done all I could—all I can! It depends on you now. Don't you realize that they are going to kill you?"

"But, Jeanne, I want to die."

She left him then. And he was alone. It was best that he should die. He knew that with a dreadful certainty. Living, he would be always alone—for centuries. Or he would kill those with whom he came in contact.

When the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, he smiled. And the same smile was on his lips when the judge sentenced him to the electric chair. He went to the state penitentiary with that smile. He was satisfied.

Jeanne came to see him less often. He was glad, though he missed her visits. He was afraid of injuring her, even though he made her stay a good distance away. The last three days he didn't see her at all.

Early in the morning, they came for him. He got up wearily. His smile was gone. The great experience ahead stifled humor. He wondered if it would be like the last time he had . . . died. He hoped so. There had been pain of course, but not too much to endure for a short time.

He marched into the small doorway, the slit legs of his trousers flapping with each step. He wondered if he would ever feel anything again. Everything had a new, wonderful significance . . . the shuffling of the guard . . . the warden had a cold and he sniffed . . . his own heels tap, tap, tapped on the floor. He could feel the jar in his ankles, and he liked it. If only he could be like others, and go on living! But he knew he couldn't.

He sat down. The electrodes were cold. The hood covered his eyes and he couldn't see. He resented that. He wanted to see and feel until the end. He wanted to savor each sense impression to the fullest.

He heard a stir among the seated watchers. Then everything was still. Not a sound came to his acute ears.

Then there was a humming sound and his wrists and ankles and scalp prickled. His arms and legs jerked spasmodically, but there was no pain. He

was an observer.

The prickling stopped. The doctor came and placed a stethoscope over his heart. And suddenly he wanted to laugh. Even they couldn't kill him. The state, millions of people, and they couldn't kill him. He was invulnerable!

"This man is dead," said a muffled voice.

Invulnerable! This man is dead! The words tangled in his mind and he choked with a sound that was halfway between a laugh and a sob.

There was the shuffling of many feet. A shout! Then someone ripped away the hood. Archer looked up to meet Dixon's eyes. The physicist was looking down at him with a queer smile.

"We couldn't get a pardon, Archer. I'm sorry." Then he bent forward. "Play dead," he whispered. "Jeanne is waiting. I know how—" He was jerked away and a guard forced him out of the room.

The doctor applied his stethoscope again. There was a puzzled frown on his forehead. He was muttering to himself. But Archer's mind echoed and re-echoed to the words, "Jeanne is waiting. I know how—*I know how*—"

Suddenly Gil Archer wanted very much to live. And they were preparing to send another current at thousands of volts through his body. It might kill him!

He struggled as they replaced the hood. But before he could break loose, the current was prickling at him again. He was already dead in the ordinary sense of the word, so it couldn't kill him. Suddenly he was positive that it couldn't. But they wouldn't let him go. Would they keep trying to kill him—sending jolt after jolt through his body? No! They would commute his sentence to life imprisonment. And life to him meant centuries! Centuries behind bars! Behind stone walls! Caged like an animal while generations were born, grew up and died in the outside world.

"*Play dead!*" The words flashed back into his mind suddenly. He sank back into the chair. He lay motionless. He must appear dead, for Jeanne was waiting for him.

The prickling ceased at last. The doctor came and applied every test. He was still muttering. He couldn't understand. The man should have been dead the first time.

Archer lay absolutely still. The doctor tested thoroughly, but he was testing for normal reflexes. Archer knew that his weren't normal.

At last the doctor straightened and Archer's



spirits soared when he heard: "This man is dead."

He lay still while the observers filed out. And he didn't move when he was lifted out of the chair and taken to the small building near the hospital. Nor did he move when hours later he was lifted again and put into an automobile. The automobile lurched, then drove him away.

**A** VOICE said: "All right, you can wake up now."

The automobile had stopped. Archer opened his eyes and met Dixon's. "Here's a visitor for you. I don't like her company up front," Dixon grinned and helped Jeanne into the back of the truck.

Archer rolled off his stretcher and stared at her. She smiled at him, and waited. Still Archer could do or say nothing. Her lovely, oval face was glowing with a dull violet light.

"What . . .? How . . .?"

"She sneaked into the cyclotron room when we weren't looking. Of course she was a damn fool, but she guessed right. She's like you, now."

Dixon watched them, then snorted with disgust. "I thought I was backward, but I could give you lessons!"

Archer woke up and drew Jeanne to him. He looked over her shoulder at Dixon. "Beat it," he

invited.

Dixon chuckled and slammed the door shut. A moment later the engine started again and the car rocked on the way. Archer met Jeanne's eyes and saw a promise of a longer lifetime of happiness than any man or woman had ever known. He lowered his lips to hers.

The spy-hole in the front opened suddenly and it framed Dixon's face. He laughed.

"And remember, Archer, you're dead. The university acquired your body legally and I'm going to study you. Then if you're very good, someday you can go away."

"One place is as good to hide as another," Archer grumbled. "But what about Jeanne?"

"If we take you, she'll follow," Dixon laughed. "Okay, I won't bother you anymore." He closed the spy-hole.

Archer looked at Jeanne. "Do you mind living there?"

"Not with you," she replied.

His lips were close to hers when the small door in front opened again. And Dixon's face showed again. He looked at them for a moment. "All right. I just wanted to tell you I wouldn't bother anymore."