

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

Walter Tevis

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*Adapted by
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I

He walked for two miles until he came to a town. At the side of the road was a sign. HANEYVILLE: POPULATION 1,400 it said. That was good: the town was a good size.

It was still early in the morning, and there was no one in the streets. He walked through the town in the weak light. Everything was so strange. He felt worried and frightened. He tried not to think about what he was going to do.

In the small shopping centre, he found what he wanted. It was a small shop called *The Jewel Box*. On the street corner nearby was a green wooden seat. He went and sat on it, his body hurting from the long walk.

A few minutes later he saw a human being: a woman in a dirty blue dress. She walked slowly towards him up the street. He quickly looked away, surprised. She did not look right. She was too small, about a head shorter than he was. And the look, the *feel* of her was strange.

It was very different from watching them on television.

Soon there were more people in the street. They all looked the same as the woman. He heard a man speak as he passed, '... like I say, they don't make cars like that any more.' The voice sounded different but he could understand the man easily. A few people noticed him, but this did not worry him. He was sure that his clothes were all right after seeing the others.

When the jewellery shop opened, he waited for ten minutes. Then he walked in. The shopkeeper was a small fat man wearing a tie and white shirt. He stopped cleaning a glass case. 'Yes, sir?' he said.

He felt too tall and suddenly very frightened. He opened his mouth to speak. Nothing came out. He tried to smile, but his face didn't change. Deep in him, something wanted to run away. He felt sick.

The man was still looking at him. 'Yes, sir?' he said again.

He forced himself to speak. 'I ... I wonder if you are interested in buying this ... this ring?' How many times have I planned that question in my mind, he thought. But now it sounds wrong.

The other man was still looking straight at him. 'What ring?' he asked.

'Oh.' Somehow he forced a smile. He pulled the gold ring from the finger of his left hand. 'I ... was driving through and my car broke down. It's a few miles down the road. I don't have any money. I thought perhaps I could sell my ring ... It's quite valuable.'

The man turned the ring over in his hands. 'Where did you get it?' he said at last.

He held his breath. Could there be something wrong? The colour of the gold? Something about the diamond? He tried to smile again. 'My wife gave it to me a few years ago.'

The man was still not sure. 'How do I know the ring isn't stolen?'

'Oh.' He could breathe again. 'My name is in it. And I have a passport.' He took the passport out and put it on the counter.

The man looked at the ring and read aloud, 'T. J. from Marie Newton, 1982'. He put the ring down and picked up the passport. 'You're English?'

'Yes. I'm a translator at the United Nations. This is my first time here and I'm trying to see the country.'

'Mmm,' the man said, looking at the passport again. 'I didn't think you were American.' When he found the picture, he read the name. 'Thomas Jerome Newton,' and then looked up again. 'No question about that. This is you, all right.'

He smiled again, and this time the smile was easier. He still felt light-headed, strange. There was always the great weight of his own body. The weight caused by the great size of this

world. 'Well, then,' he said slowly, 'are you interested in buying the ring ...?'

He got sixty dollars for it, and knew its value was much greater. But what he had now was more valuable to him than the ring. He had hundreds of rings just like that one. But now he had money.

With some of the money, he bought a pound of sausages, six eggs, bread, and a few potatoes. Ten pounds of food; that was all he could carry. No one asked him any questions, and he did not offer any answers. It didn't matter. He wasn't coming back to that Kentucky town again.

When he left the town he felt a little better. The weight was still there. So was the pain in his legs and in his back. But now he owned his first American money. That was the first step.

But as he walked through an empty field, a mile outside the town, he suddenly realized where he was. The danger, the strangeness, the pain and the worry in his body hit him. He fell to the ground and lay there. This place was too strange, too different. His body and mind cried out against it.

He was sick: sick from the long and dangerous journey. Sick with all the medicine, the pills, the injections. Sick with worry. And sick with carrying his own weight. For years I've studied and planned to be here, he thought. But it's so different, so strange. No one could be ready for this ... He went on being sick.

He was not a man. Yet he was very much like a man. He was six and a half feet tall. Some men are even taller than that. His hair was white and his eyes were blue, but his face was a light brown colour. His body was very thin and almost without hair. There was a fine boyish look to his wide intelligent eyes. He seemed quite young.

There were other differences too. His fingernails, for example, weren't real, for he had none by nature. There were only four toes on each of his feet. There were other differences under the skin. He weighed very little; about ninety pounds.

But for every difference there were many more things the

same. He was human, but not, really, a man. But he could feel love, fear, and pain like any human being.

After half an hour he felt better. He still felt sick, but he could look at the world around him. He sat up and looked across the field. The air was quite clear and the sky clouded over. The light was soft and did not hurt his eyes. He could see a small farm-house on the other side of some dark trees. Beyond the trees was a small lake. The sight of it made him catch his breath. He wasn't used to seeing so much water. Of course, he *knew* about the great seas and lakes and rivers. But the sight of so much water took his breath away.

He began to see a kind of beauty in the field too. Everything was strange, but he could enjoy the new colours, the sights and smells. Many sounds reached him, for his hearing was very good. He heard living things moving in the grass, and smaller sounds in the wet earth itself.

Suddenly the air was alive with black wings. There was a sad, hard calling as some large birds flew across the field. The Anthean watched them until they disappeared. Then he smiled. This will be a fine world after all, he thought.

His spaceship was in an empty part of eastern Kentucky. There was nothing but rocks and pieces of rough grass for miles around. Near some of these rocks was the grey ship.

He was tired when he got there – dead tired. He had to rest for a few minutes. After a while he opened the bag and took out the food. He was careful not to touch it with his hands. He put the food on to a small table. From under the table he took a small, metal machine. He looked for a moment at the eggs, potatoes, sausage and bread. The food seemed all right. But could he eat it?

He picked up the machine, and put the end of it into the sausages and began to study them.

Three hours later he made a fire and cooked the egg and potato. Most of the food was good – very strange, but good. He threw the sausage away. It contained something he wasn't certain about. But there was no danger. The potato tasted wonderful.

He was very tired, and he rested. This was the end of the second day on earth.

2

Farnsworth was listening to Mozart on his record-player. He sat back heavily in the armchair and looked towards the window. Outside and below ran Fifth Avenue and New York City.

When the music finished he looked over towards the doorway. His secretary was standing there waiting for him. Farnsworth looked at the clock and then back at the secretary angrily.

'Yes?' he said.

'A Mr Newton is here, sir.'

'Newton?' He didn't know any rich Newtons. 'What does he want?'

'He didn't say, sir.' Then she added, 'He's strange, sir. And he looks very . . . important.'

He thought for a moment, and then said, 'Show him in.'

The secretary was right; the man was strange. He was tall, thin with white hair and fine bones. The eyes were very strange. They seemed weak but with a look that was old and clever and tired. The man wore an expensive dark grey suit. He walked slowly to a chair and sat down carefully. Then he looked at Farnsworth and smiled. 'Oliver Farnsworth?'

'Will you have a drink, Mr Newton?'

'A glass of water, please.'

Farnsworth repeated this to the secretary. Then he looked at his visitor. 'Well, Mr Newton, what can I do for you?'

Newton didn't move. He held his long, thin, hands carefully in front of him. 'You are good with patents, I understand.'

'Yes,' said Farnsworth coldly, 'I have office hours, Mr Newton,' he added.

Newton didn't seem to hear this. His voice was warm and gentle. 'I am told you are the best man in the United States with patents. Also that you are very expensive.'

'Yes. I'm good.'

'Fine,' the other said. He reached down beside his chair and lifted his briefcase.

'And what do you want?' Farnsworth looked at the clock again.

'I want to plan some things with you.' The tall man was taking an envelope from his case.

'It's very late, Mr Newton.'

Newton opened the envelope and took out some dollar notes. He looked up and smiled. 'Will you come and get these, please? It is very difficult for me to walk. My legs.'

Farnsworth got up angrily from his chair and walked to the tall man. He took the money, returned and sat down. They were thousand-dollar notes.

'There are ten of them,' Newton said.

Farnsworth put the money away in his desk. 'This is all very exciting, but what's it for?'

'For tonight,' Newton said. 'I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say.'

'I listen to people for less than ten thousand dollars.'

'Yes. But I wanted you to realize the . . . importance of our talk.'

'Well,' Farnsworth sat back in his chair. 'Let's talk.'

'First,' said the thin man. 'How much money do you make a year, Mr Farnsworth?'

'All right. You've paid for it. Last year I made about one hundred and forty thousand dollars.'

'I see. You are rich?'

'Yes.'

'But you want to be richer?'

This is like a cheap television show, thought Farnsworth. But the other man is paying. He took a cigarette from a box and said, 'Of course I want more.'

'A lot more, Mr Farnsworth?' Newton said smiling. He was beginning to enjoy himself.

This was from television too, but Farnsworth got the idea. 'Yes,' he said.

'I can make you very rich, Mr Farnsworth,' said the man with

the white hair. 'But you must give the next five years of your life to me.'

Farnsworth said nothing, but lit his cigarette. His mind was working very quietly. Could this man be speaking the truth? There's a small chance he is, and he has money. I'll play his game for a bit longer. The secretary came in with glasses and ice.

Newton took his glass of water carefully and held it in one hand. He got out an aspirin box from his pocket with the other hand. He opened it with his thumb and dropped one of the pills into the water. The water turned white and cloudy. He held the glass and watched it for a moment. Then he began to drink very slowly.

Farnsworth was a lawyer. He had a careful eye. There was something strange about that aspirin box, thought Farnsworth. It seems to be a box of Bayer aspirin. But there's something wrong with it. And why is Newton drinking the water so slowly? He seems to think it's valuable.

Newton asked the secretary to take his briefcase to Farnsworth. 'There are some things in the briefcase that I want you to read.'

Farnsworth opened the bag and found a lot of papers. He pulled them out. The paper, he noticed, felt unusual. It was very thin and shiny. Strange drawings and scientific language covered the top piece of paper. It was all written in blue ink. He looked through the rest of the papers. They were full of plans and scientific drawings of different types. He thought he recognized something about some of the plans. He looked up. 'Electronics?'

'Yes. Do you know much about it?'

Farnsworth did not answer. He must know I'm a leading lawyer in electronics patents already, he decided. He began reading the papers. ...

Newton sat looking at him. He was smiling, but his whole body hurt. After a few moments he picked up the glass of water. 'All my life, water has been the most valuable thing at home, he thought. He drank very slowly and watched Farnsworth read. He began to feel better. This fat human with small eyes didn't

frighten him any more. The office didn't seem so strange. I have my man, he thought. I have come to the right place. . . .

More than two hours passed before Farnsworth looked up from the papers. During that time the lawyer drank three glasses of whisky. His eyes were pink at the corners. He looked up at Newton, his small eyes wide.

'Well?' Newton said, still smiling.

The fat man took a breath. When he spoke, his voice was soft and careful. 'I don't understand them all,' he said. 'I don't know anything about photographic films.' He looked back to the papers in his hand. 'I'm a lawyer, Mr Newton,' he said. 'I'm a lawyer.' And then suddenly his voice came alive. 'But I know electronics, yes. I know electronics. I think I understand your . . . loud-speaker and I think I understand your television, and . . .' He waited a moment. 'My God, I think they can be made.' He let out his breath slowly. 'I think they will work, Mr Newton.'

Newton was still smiling at him. 'They will work, all of them.'

Farnsworth took out a cigarette and lit it. His hand was shaking a little. 'I'll have to be sure. I must go through the plans and drawings . . . Good God, man, do you know what all this means? You have nine different patents here.' He lifted one paper in a pink hand. 'And that's just in this television. And . . . do you know what that means?'

Newton's face didn't change. 'Yes. I know what it means,' he said.

'If you're right, Mr Newton, you can have RCA, Kodak. My God, you can have Du Pont. Do you know what you've got here?'

Newton looked straight at him. 'I know what I've got here,' he said.

It took them six hours to drive to Farnsworth's country house. Newton tried to talk. But every time the car went faster his body was filled with pain. The pull of gravity and the car was too much for him. He had to tell the lawyer he needed to rest. The

air in the car was too warm for him, as well. It was like one of the hottest days at home.

At last they passed beyond the edge of the city. Now the car travelled more easily. He looked a few times at Farnsworth. The lawyer wasn't sleeping. He was still looking through the papers, with bright little eyes.

The house was very large. The building and the trees seemed wet in the grey morning light. This is very like the light of midday on Anthea, thought Newton. It was good for his tired eyes. He liked the woods and the quiet sense of life in them. Life and water are everywhere on Earth, he thought. Compare this to the dry empty waste of my own world. On Anthea, there is no sound between the empty cities. The only sound comes from the cold endless wind. That sound is like the pain of my own dying people. . . .

Farnsworth gave orders that there were to be no phone calls for three days. He showed Newton into the library.

The room was very big and contained expensive furniture. Two of the walls were covered in books.

Newton looked at Farnsworth. The lawyer looked away. Then after a moment he looked back. 'Well, Mr Newton what are your plans,' he said quietly.

Newton smiled. 'They aren't difficult. I want to make as much money as possible,' he went on. 'And I want to make it as quickly as possible.'

'You certainly know what you want, Mr Newton,' said Farnsworth. 'How much money do you have in mind?'

'How much can we make in, say, five years?' said Newton.

'That will be decided by two things,' said Farnsworth slowly.

'Yes?'

'Do you want to play fair, Mr Newton?'

'I want to act completely within the law,' said Newton.

'The second point is this,' said Farnsworth. 'What will I get?'

'You will get 10 per cent of all company holdings.'

'All right, Mr Newton,' said Farnsworth, smiling a little. 'I think I can make three hundred million dollars for you, within five years.'

Newton thought for a moment about this. Then he said, 'That won't be enough.'

Farnsworth looked straight at him for a long minute. 'It won't be enough for *what*, Mr Newton?'

Newton's eyes grew harder. 'I want to start a very expensive scientific ... centre.'

'"Very expensive" is right.'

'Suppose,' the tall man said, 'I could give you a new way of getting petrol from oil. A way that is twice as good. Will that bring the amount up to five hundred million?'

'Could this be started within a year?'

'Yes. In a year it will make more petrol than Esso. I suppose we could sell the idea to them?'

Farnsworth's eyes were wide open. 'We can start writing the patents tomorrow.'

'Good.' Newton got up slowly from his chair. 'We can talk more about our plans then. There are really only two important points. One is that you don't break the law. The second is that I don't want to see anyone except you.'

Newton's bedroom was upstairs. For a moment he thought he couldn't climb the stairs. But he got there a step at a time. Farnsworth climbed beside him, saying nothing. When they reached Newton's room, the lawyer looked at him. 'You're an unusual man, Mr Newton. Do you mind if I ask where you come from?'

The question came as a complete surprise. But Newton didn't show any surprise on his face. 'No, that's all right,' he said. 'I'm from Kentucky, Mr Farnsworth.'

'I see,' said the lawyer. Then he turned and walked heavily down the hall.

There was a television in his room. He gave a tired smile when he saw it. I'll have to watch it sometime, he thought. I suppose they get a better picture here than on Anthea. It'll be amusing to see some of the shows again. Most of the information I have about this world comes from the television. I haven't seen a television show for ... How long did the journey take ...? It must be about four months. And I've been on Earth for two months, getting ready and studying their diseases. I had

to get my voice just right. The meeting with Farnsworth was important.

He looked out of the window at the bright light of morning. Somewhere in the sky was Anthea. It was a cold place and dying. But he could feel homesick about it. There were people that he loved there. I won't see them for a very long time, he thought . . . But I'll see them again.

He closed the curtains at the window. Then he gently got his tired body into bed. He fell asleep within a few minutes.

Afternoon sunlight woke him. The bright light hurt his eyes – but he was feeling much better. He stayed in bed, thinking for a few minutes. Then he got up and went into the bathroom to wash. He watched the water running free, in wonder. He didn't use soap because it hurt his skin. Then he took his usual pills and changed his clothes. At last he went downstairs to begin getting five hundred million dollars. . . .

That evening, after six hours of talking and planning, he went to his room. He stood before the open window, enjoying the cool air. The stars and planets seemed strange in the black sky. He enjoyed looking at them from this new direction. Which one is Anthea? he wondered. I wish I knew. . . .

3

Professor Nathan Bryce pushed his chair back and looked around. His desk was covered in books and students' papers. He didn't move for about thirty seconds. His mind was empty. Then he got up to make some coffee.

The kitchen was full of dirty plates and pots, and open packets of food. He felt like shouting; but he did not. He just stood for a minute and then said softly, aloud, 'Bryce – life could be better.' He found a dirty cup and washed it out, and filled it with warm coffee.

He looked up at the picture on the kitchen wall. It was an

expensive copy of a Brueghel painting: *The Fall of Icarus*. A fine picture. The lines of Auden about the painting came into his head. He repeated them softly to himself:

*'... the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.'*

Bryce stood in thought for a while. Icarus... the boy who flew too close to the sun. The heat wrecked his wings, and he fell into the sea.

After drinking the coffee, he decided to go to a film. The day has not been a good one, he was thinking. I've been teaching for three hours and studying for another four. He still had a large amount of student papers to mark. He walked into town, hoping to find a good science-fiction film: *The Thing from Another World* perhaps. He liked watching old films – the sort of films where men from Mars attack the Earth and destroy it. But there was nothing like that on. So he decided to see a love story instead.

Before he went into the dark cinema he bought some sweets. A news film was showing pictures of a war somewhere. The picture changed to a line of rockets on the ground, built to carry H-bombs. Scientists made those, he thought. And I myself once worked on one of the first H-bombs. This was when Bryce was a student with a bright future as a scientist.

The big film, *The Shari Leslie Story*, came on in strong colours and loud music. Bryce tried to lose himself in the empty movement and colour, but he couldn't. He started to look at the photography. Suddenly he noticed that the pictures were very good. The photography was very clear and fine. He cleaned his glasses and began to look more carefully at the film. There was no mistake, the pictures were very good indeed. No, they were better than good, they were excellent. He knew something about photochemistry. Surely these effects are impossible with modern three-colour film, he thought. He watched the rest of the film with greater interest.

When he came out, he stopped to have a look at the notices

outside the cinema. It wasn't hard to find what he was looking for. Large red letters shouted the news to the world. 'NEW, NEW COLOUR WONDER - WORLD COLOUR.' There was nothing more than this except 'a W.E. Corp. patent' written in very small letters at the bottom. He thought of names to fit the letters. But all his ideas were stupid. Wet Elephants, Western Electricity, Weak Effects. It didn't matter. He put his hands into his pockets and began walking towards the heart of the little college town.

He didn't want to go back home and start marking those student papers.

Feeling a little angry at the world, he started looking for a student bar. And he found one, a small place called 'Henry's' with German beer glasses in the front windows. He knew the place quite well. On sad grey mornings he liked to get gently drunk there. That was something he discovered when his wife died, eight years before. But he always got drunk carefully, like a good scientist. Bad things could happen if you made a mistake. It was too easy to enjoy being sad. But he wasn't a stupid man. He knew about these things.

He opened the door of Henry's and was met by the sound of loud modern music. The place was full of tables crowded with students, and he walked through them to the bar. There was a small space near the bar. He stopped and ordered a glass of beer. Next to him, a white girl was talking to a black girl about art. This sort of talk made Bryce angry. These children think they know everything, he thought.

He finished his beer. Then he ordered another one, he didn't know why. He really wanted to get away from this noise. Drinking his beer he remembered the large word, WORLD-COLOUR. Perhaps the W of W.E. Corp. is the Worldcolour, or perhaps just World. What's the E for, then? Edge? Enemy? Or, he smiled to himself, Exit? He looked straight at the girl in the red jersey next to him. She was talking about the 'feeling' of language. She can't be more than eighteen, he thought. She gave him a look that said: 'Look, but don't touch'. This cut through him like a cold knife. She was so pretty. He stopped smiling, finished his beer quickly, and left.

It was eleven o'clock, but he still did not want to go home. For a moment he thought of calling Gelber, his one close friend in the university. But there was nothing to say. He didn't want to talk about himself, so he kept walking.

Just before midnight he stopped in front of an all-night chemist's shop. Something caught his eye in the window, next to the combs and soap. 'WORLD COLOUR: 35mm Camera Film.' This was written on a number of little blue boxes. It surprised him, he did not know why.

The shop was empty as he went in, except for an old man behind the desk. 'Let me see that film, please,' Bryce said.

'What film do you mean?' said the old man.

'The Worldcolour.'

The old man moved slowly over and pulled down a box of film. Saying nothing, he put it down on the desk in front of Bryce.

Bryce picked up the box and read the label. 'Worldcolour 35mm Camera Film. An automatic colour film.' And below this: 'A.S.A. film speed: 200 to 3,000.' *My God!* he thought, *the speed can't be that high!*

He looked up at the old man. 'How much is this?'

'Six dollars. That's for thirty-six pictures. It's two dollars seventy-five cents for twenty pictures.'

He felt the box, which was light in his hand. 'That's very expensive isn't it?'

'You don't have to pay for developing it.'

'Oh, I see. They develop it for you. You send it ...' He stopped. So somebody has made a new film. What did he care? He wasn't a photographer.

The old man waited a moment and then said, 'No. It develops itself.'

'What?'

'It develops itself. Look, do you want to buy the film?'

He didn't answer, but turned the box over in his hand. At each end were the words 'Self-developing'. He had a thought. Why haven't I heard of this new film in the chemistry magazines?

'Yes,' he said, still looking at the label. 'There at the bottom