## Pawley’s Peepholes

John Wyndham

When I called round in the evening I showed Sally the paragraph in the Daniel City News.

“What do you think of that?” I asked her.

She read it, standing, and with an impatient frown on her pretty face.

“I don’t believe it,” she said, finally.

Sally’s principles of belief and disbelief are things I never got a line on. How a girl can dismiss a pack of solid evidence like it was kettle steam, and then go and fall for an ad. that’s phoney from word one as if it were holy writ, I never did . . . Oh, well, skip it—it just keeps on happening, anyway.

This para read:

MUSIC WITH A KICK

Patrons at a concert at the Adams Hall last night got a shock when they saw a pair of legs dangling knee-deep from the roof while the music was on. Seemingly everybody there saw them, and all reports agree that they were bare legs with some kind of sandals on the feet. They were visible for some three or four minutes during which they moved several times back and forth across the ceiling. Then, after some movement like kicking they disappeared upwards. Examination of the roof shows no traces, and the owners of the Hall are at a loss to account for the phenomenon.

“It’s just one more thing,” I said.

“So what?” said Sally. “What does it prove, anyway?” she added, apparently forgetful that she wasn’t believing it.

“I don’t know—yet,” I admitted.

“Well, there you are then,” she said.

Sometimes I get the feeling Sally doesn’t go a lot on logic.

Most people, if they’d noticed it at all, would be thinking the way Sally was then. I was acting cagey on account of experience has shown me that a lot of threads can fit screws that don’t belong, but already it looked like there were things happening that ought to be added together.

The first guy to bump up against it—the first I can find on record, that is—was one Patrolman Walsh. Maybe other fellows saw things before that and just put them down as a new kind of pink elephant. But Patrolman Walsh’s idea of a top-notch celebration rated around a couple of bottles of coke, so that when he found a head sitting up on the sidewalk on what there was of its neck he stopped to look at it pretty hard. The thing that upset him, according to the report he turned in when he’d run half a mile to the section-station and stopped gibbering, was that it looked back at him.

Well, it’s not good to find a head on the sidewalk, and 2 a.m. makes it kind of worse, but as for the rest, you can get a reproachful look from a cod on a slab if your mind happens to be on something else. Patrolman Walsh didn’t stop there, however. He said the thing opened its mouth “like it was trying to say something.” If it did, he shouldn’t have mentioned it; it just naturally brought the pink elephants to mind. On the other hand, why say it unless he thought it was so? But nobody in a respectable section-station wanted to hear a thing like that. However, he stuck to it, so after they’d bawled him out a bit and taken disappointing sniffs at his breath, they sent him back with another man to show just where he’d found the thing. Of course there wasn’t any head—nor blood—nor signs of cleaning-up marks. Nor did anyone later report the loss of a head, white race, sallow complexion, clean-shaven’, and mid-brown hair which was what he said it was. And that’s all there was about the incident—save, doubtless, a few curt remarks on the conduct-sheet to dog his future career.

### But Patrolman Walsh hadn’t a big lead. Two evenings later an apartment house was curdled by searing shrieks from a Mrs. Rourke in No. 35, and simultaneously from a Miss Farrell who lived above her. When the neighbours arrived, Mrs. Rourke was hysterical about a pair of legs that had been dangling from her bedroom ceiling, and Miss Farrell the same about an arm and shoulder that had stretched out from under her bed. But there was nothing to be seen on the ceiling, and nothing under the bed beyond a discreditable quantity of dust.

There were some other little incidents, too.

It was Jimmy Lindlen who works, if that isn’t too strong a word for it, in the office next to mine who drew my attention to the whole thing. Jimmy’s hobby is collecting facts. In this he is what you might call the reductio ad opposite absurdum of Sally. For him, everything that gets printed in a newspaper is a fact—poor fellow. He doesn’t mind much what subject his facts cover so long as they look screwy. I guess he once heard that the truth is never simple, and deduced from that that everything that’s not simple must be true.

He’s not the only one. There was a fellow called Fort who was the arch collector of the improbable. From the time he was a kid Jimmy has revered this Fort as the savant of the era. Right on at an age when most fellows are getting more improbability than they want from their girl friends, Jimmy’s desire to be baffled, bogged and bewildered never flags.

### Now this Fort guy’s method was to labour mightily with scissors and paste, present the resulting collation, and leave it to a largely indifferent world to judge whether nearly everybody wasn’t wrong about most everything. But Jimmy’s technique was different—and less cautious. I’ve never actually seen him at work on it, but at a guess I’d say he dealt himself a hand of cuttings in which there was one constant factor, discarded the awkward ones, and then settled down to astonish himself as much as possible with theories about the rest. I got used to him coming into my room full of inspiration, and didn’t take much account of it. I knew he’d shuffle and deal himself another hand that evening and stagger himself all over again. So when he brought in the first batch about Patrolman Walsh and the rest I didn’t ignite much.

But some days later he was back with more. Maybe work was slack, or maybe I was surprised by his playing the same type of phenomena twice running. Anyway, I paid more attention than usual.

“You see. Arms, heads, legs, torsos all over the place. It’s an epidemic,” said Jimmy. “There’s something behind. Something’s happening!” he said, as near as you can vocalise italics.

When I’d read a few I had to admit that this time he had got something where the vein of queerness was pretty constant.

A bus driver had seen the upper half of a body upright in the road before him—but a bit late. When he did stop and climb out, sweating, to examine the mess there was nothing there. A woman hanging out of a window watching the street saw another head below her, doing the same—but this one was ‘projecting out of the solid brickwork. There was a pair of arms which came out of the floor in a butcher’s shop, seemed to grope for something, and then withdrew into the solid cement without trace—unless you count some detriment to the butcher’s trade. There was the man on an erection job who became aware of a strangely dressed figure standing close to him, but in the empty air—after which he had to be helped down and sent home. Another figure was noticed between the rails in the path of a heavy freight train, but had vanished without trace when the train had passed. The dozen or so witnesses agreed that it was wearing some kind of fancy dress, but looked male.

### While I skimmed through these and some others Jimmy stood waiting like a bottle of seltzer. I didn’t have to say more than “Huh.”

“You see,” he said. “Something is happening.”

“Supposing it is,” I conceded cautiously. “Then what is it?”

“The manifestation zone is limited,” Jimmy said, impressively. “If you look where I’ve marked the incidents on the city plan you’ll see they’re grouped. Somewhere in that circle is the ‘focus of disturbance’.” This time he managed to vocalise the inverted commas, and waited for me to show that I was struck.

“So?” I said. “Disturbance of just what?”

He dodged that.

“I’ve a pretty good idea of the cause,” he told me, weightily.

I rarely knew Jimmy when he hadn’t, though it might be a different one an hour later.

“I’ll buy it,” I offered.

“Teleportation,” he announced. “That’s what it is. Bound to come sooner or later. Now someone’s on to it.”

“Huh,” I said again.

“But it must be.” He leaned forward earnestly. “How else’d you account for it?”

“If there could be teleportation, or teleportage, or whatever it is, I reckon there’d have to be a transmitter and some sort of reassembly station,” I told him. “You couldn’t expect a person or object to be kind of broadcast and then come together again any old place.”

“But you don’t know that,” he pointed out. “Besides, that’s part of what I was meaning by ‘focus’. It may be focused on that area.”

“If it is,” I said, “he seems to have got his levels and positions all to hell. I wonder just what happens to a guy who gets himself reassembled half in and half out of a brick wall?”

It’s details like that that get Jimmy impatient.

“Obviously,” he said, “it’s early stages. Experimental.”

It struck me as pretty uncomfortable for the subject, early stages or not, but I didn’t press it.

### That evening had been the first time I had mentioned it to Sally, and on the whole that was a mistake. After making it clear that she didn’t believe it, she went on to reckon that if it was true it would be just another invention.

“What do you mean, ‘just another invention’ ? Why, it’d be revolutionary,” I told her.

“Should be,” she said, “but not the way we’d use it.”

“Meaning?” I asked.

Sally was in one of her withering moods, I could see. She turned on that voice which she uses for the stupidities of people and the world.

“We’ve got two ways of using inventions,” she said. “One is to kill more people more easily: the other is to help short-sighted business goons to make quick easy money out of suckers. Maybe there are a few exceptions, like X-rays, but look at the line we’ve got with movies and radio. Look at airplanes, too. Can you or I just get a nice cheap little helicopter to keep in the backyard? Can we hell!”

Sal gets like that sometimes.

“Inventions!” she said, with as near a snort as she comes. “What we do with the product of god-given genius is first we ram it down to the lowest common denominator, then multiply by the vulgarest possible fractions. What a century! What a world! When I think of what other centuries are going to say of us it just makes me go hot all over.”

“I shouldn’t worry. You won’t be hearing it,” I said.

The withering eye was on me.

“I should have known. That remark is just about up to twentieth century standards.”

“You’re a funny girl,” I told her. “I mean, the way you think may be crazy, but you do do it. Now most girls’ futures are all cloud-cuckoo beyond next season’s hat or next year’s baby. Outside of that it might snow split atoms for all they care—though down inside’em they’ve got a feeling nothing’s ever changed or ever will.”

“A lot you know about what most girls think,” said Sally.

“That’s it. How could I?” I said.

She seemed to have set her face so firmly against the whole business that I dropped it for the evening.

### A couple of days later Jimmy looked into my room again.

“He’s laid off,” he said.

“Who’s laid off what?”

“This teleporting guy. Not a report later than Tuesday. Maybe he knows somebody’s on to him.”

“Meaning you?” I asked.

“Maybe.”

“Well, are you?”

He frowned. “I got it all figured out. I took the bearings on the map of all the incidents, and the fix came on All Saints Church. I’ve been all over the place, but I didn’t find anything. Still, I reckon I’m close—why else’d he stop?”

I couldn’t tell him that. Nor could anyone else. But that very evening there was a paragraph about an arm and a leg that some woman had watched travel along her kitchen wall. I showed it to Sally.

“Likely it’ll turn out to be some smart line in advertisement,” she said. “Kind of secret ad?” I suggested.

Then, seeing the withering look working up again:

“How about a movie?” I suggested.

It was overcast when we went in to the movie; when we got out it was raining hard. Seeing it was under a mile to her place and all the taxis in town were busy, we decided to walk it. Sally pulled on the hood of her slicker. I took her arm. For a bit we didn’t talk, then:

“Darling,” I said, “I know that I am regarded as an irritating cluck with a low ethical standard. But have you ever seriously thought what an opportunity there is here for reform?”

“Yes,” she said, decisively, and in quite the wrong tone.

“What I mean is,” I told her patiently, “if you happened to be looking for a good work to devote your life to, what could be better than reformation?

The scope is tremendous, now look at——”

“Is this a proposal of some kind?” Sally inquired.

“Some kind! I’d have you know that in spite of all my dubious ethics——Good God!” I broke off.

### We were in Tyler Street. A short street, as becomes a minor President, rainswept, and empty now except for ourselves. What stopped me was the sudden appearance of a kind of vehicle further along. I couldn’t make it out very clearly on account of the rain, but I got the impression of a low built truck with several figures in light clothes on it crossing Tyler Street quite swiftly, and vanishing. That wouldn’t have been so bad if there were any street crossing Tyler Street, but there isn’t; it just came out of one side, and went into the other.

“Did you see what I saw?” I said.

“But how on earth——?” she began.

We walked on a few steps to the place where the thing had crossed, and looked at the solid brick wall on one side and the house-fronts on the other. “You must have been mistaken,” said Sally.

“Well, for—I must have been mistaken!”

“But it couldn’t have happened, could it?”

“Now, listen, Honey——”

But at that moment a girl stepped from the solid brick, about ten feet ahead of us. We gawped at her.

I don’t know whether her hair was her own, art and science can do so much together, but the way she wore it, it was like a great golden chrysanthemum a foot and a half across with a red flower set in it a little left of centre. It looked terrible. She was wearing a kind of pink tunic. Maybe it was silk. It wasn’t the kind of thing you expected to see in Tyler Street on a filthy wet night, but in sheer coverage it would have got by in a show most any place. What made it a real shocker was the things that had been achieved by embroidery. I never would have believed that a girl could—oh, well, anyway, there she stood, and there we stood.

When I say “she stood,” she certainly did, but somehow she did it about six inches above ground level. She looked at us both, then she stared at Sally just as hard as Sally was staring at her. It must have been some seconds before any of us moved. The girl opened her mouth as if she were speaking, but no sound came. Then she made a forget-it gesture, turned, and walked back into the wall.

### Sally stood quite still. With the rain shining on her slicker she looked like a black statue. When she turned so that I could see her face under the hood there was an expression on it that was new to me. I put my arm round her, and found she was trembling.

“I’m scared, Jerry,” she said.

I was feeling more than a bit rattled myself, but she needed an act.

“No cause for that, Honey. There’s bound to be a simple explanation some place.”

“But it’s more than that, Jerry. Didn’t you see her face? She was exactly like me!”

“She was pretty much like,” I conceded.

“Jerry, she was exactly like. I-I’m scared.”

“Must have been some trick of the light. Anyway, she’s gone now,” I said.

All the same, Sally was right. That girl was the image of herself. I’ve often wondered about that since . . .

### Jimmy came into my room next morning with a copy of the Daniel City News. It carried a brief, facetious leader on the number of local citizens who had been seeing things lately.

“They’re beginning to take notice at last,” he said.

“How’s your own line going?” I asked.

He frowned. “I guess it’s not quite the way I thought. As I see it, it’s still in the experimental stage all right, but the transmitter may not be around here after all. This may be just the area he has it trained on for testing.”

“But why here?”

“How would I know. It’s got to be some place—and the transmitter could be any place.” He paused, looking portentous. “It could be mighty serious. Suppose the Russians had a transmitter, and could project things or people here by teleportation . . .?”

“Why here?” I said again. “I’d have thought Oak Ridge, or maybe Brooklyn Navy Yard—”

“Experimental,” he said, reprovingly.

“Oh,” I said, abashed. I went on to tell him what Sally and I had seen the previous night. “She sort of didn’t look the way I think of Russians,” I added.

Jimmy shook his head. “Might be camouflage. After all, behind that curtain they have to get their idea of the way our girls look from our magazines,” he pointed out.

Which was about as far as we got.

### Next day, after about seventy-five per cent, of its readers had written in to tell about the funny things they’d been seeing, the News dropped the facetious angle. In two days more the thing had become factional, dividing sharply into what you might call the Modern, and the Classical camps. In the former, schismatic groups argued the claims of teleportage against three dimensional projection or some theory of spontaneous molecular assembly: in the latter, opinions could be sorted to beliefs in a ghostly invasion, a suddenly acquired visibility of habitual wandering spirits, or the imminence of Judgement Day. In the heat of debate it was becoming difficult to know who had seen how much of what, and who was enthusiastically bent on improving his case at some expense of fact.

On Saturday Sally and I met for lunch. Afterwards we took the car en route for a little place up in the hills which seemed to me an ideal spot for a proposal. But at the crossing of Jefferson and Main the man in front of me jumped on his brakes. So did I, and the guy behind me. The one behind him didn’t quite. There was an interesting crunch of metal going on the other side of the crossing, too. I stood up to see what it was all about, and then pulled Sally up beside me.

“Here we go again,” I said. “Look!”

Slap in the middle of the intersection was a—well, you could scarcely call it a vehicle—it was more like a flat trolley or platform, about a foot off the ground. And when I say off the ground, I mean just that. No wheels. It kind of hung there from nothing. Standing on it, dressed in coloured things like long shirts or smocks were half a dozen men looking around them. Along the edge of the platform was lettered: PAWLEY’S PEEPHOLES. One of the men was pointing out All Saints Church to another; the rest were paying more attention to the cars and the people. The cop on duty was hanging a goggling face out of his little traffic-control house. He bawled, he blew his whistle, then he bawled some more. The men on the platform took no notice. He got out of his box and came across the road like he was a volcano that had seen a nice place to erupt.

“Hey!” he bellowed.

It didn’t worry them. When he got a yard or two away they noticed him, nudged one another, and grinned. The cop’s face went purplish; his language was a pretty line in fission. But they just watched him with amused interest. He drew his stick, and went closer. He grabbed at a fellow in a yellow shirt—and his arm went right through him.

The cop stepped back. You could see his nostrils kind of spread, the way a horse’s do. He got a hold on his stick and made a fine circular swipe at the lot of them. They grinned back at him as the stick went through them.

### I’ll hand it to that cop. He didn’t run. He stared at them a moment, then he turned and walked deliberately back to his box; just as deliberately he signalled the north-south traffic across. The guy ahead of me was ready for it, he drove right at, and through, the platform. It began to move, but I’d just have nicked it myself had it been nickable. Sally, looking back, said it slid away on a curve and disappeared through the front of the First National Bank.

When we got to the spot I’d had in mind the weather had come over bad; it looked dreary and unpropitious, so we drove around and then back to a nice quiet roadside restaurant just out of town. I was getting the conversation round to the mood where I wanted it when who should come over to our table but Jimmy.

“Fancy meeting you two,” he said. “Did you hear what went off at the Crossing this afternoon, Jerry?”

“We were there,” I told him.

“You know, Jerry, this is something bigger than we thought—a whole lot bigger. That platform thing. These people are technically way ahead of us. Do you know what I reckon they are?”

“Martians?” I suggested.

He stared at me. “Gee! Now how did you guess that?” he said, amazedly.

“I sort of saw it had to come,” I admitted. “But,” I added, “I kind of feel Martians wouldn’t be labelled ‘Pawley’s Peepholes’.”

“Oh, were they? Nobody told me that,” said Jimmy, and went away sadly.

But he’d wrecked the mood.

### On Monday Anna, our stenographer, arrived in the office more scatterated than commonly.

“The most terrible thing just happened to me. Oh my, did I blush all over!”

“All over?” inquired Jimmy, with interest.

She scorned him.

“I was in my tub this morning, and when I looked up there was a man in a green shirt standing watching me. Naturally, I screamed at once.”

“Naturally,” agreed Jimmy. “And what happened then, or shouldn’t——?”

“He just stood there,” Anna said, firmly. “Then he sniggered at me, and walked away through the wall! Was I mortified!”

In this particular case I wasn’t certain of the answer, but Jimmy said:

“Very mortifying thing, a snigger—and at you, too——”

“That’s not what I—what I mean is, things like that oughtn’t to be allowed,” Anna said. “If a man’s going to be able to walk through a girl’s bathroom walls, where’s he going to stop?”

Which seemed a pretty fair question.

The boss arrived just then. I followed him into his room. He wasn’t looking happy.

“What the hell’s going on in this damned town, Jerry?” he demanded. “I’d like to know,” I told him.

“Wife comes home yesterday. Finds two incredible girls in the sitting-room. Thinks it’s me. First bust-up in twenty years. Girls vanish,” he said, succinctly.

“Sure,” I said, sympathetically.

That evening when I went to see Sally I found her sitting on the steps of the house in the drizzle.

“What on earth——?” I began.

She gave me a bleak look.

“Two of them came into my room. A man and a girl. They wouldn’t go. They laughed at me. Then they started—acting as if I weren’t there. I—I couldn’t stay there, Jerry.”

Then, not altogether unaccountably, she burst into tears.

### From then on it stepped up. There was a brisk if one-sided engagement on Jefferson next morning. Miss Dotherby, who was quite Daniel City’s most respected D.A.R., was outraged in every lifelong principle by the appearance of four mop-headed girls who were giggling on the corner of Chestnut. Once she’d retracted her eyes and got her breath back, she knew her duty. She gripped her umbrella like it was her Grandad’s sabre, and charged. She sailed right through them, smiting right and left, and when she turned round they were laughing at her. She swiped wildly through them again, and they kept on laughing. Then she started babbling, so somebody called an ambulance to take her away.

By the end of the day the town was full of mothers crying shame and men looking staggered, and the mayor and the police were snowed under with protest and demands that somebody do something about it.

The trouble seemed thickest in that district that Jimmy had originally marked out. You could meet them elsewhere, but in that area you were liable any and every minute to encounter a gang, the men in coloured shirts, the girls with amazing hair-do’s and more amazing decorations on their shifts, sauntering arm-in-arm out of walls, and wandering indifferently through automobiles and people alike. They’d pause anywhere to point out things and people to one another and go into helpless roars of silent laughter. What tickled them most was when folks got riled with them. They’d make signs and faces at them until they got them tearing mad—and the madder the funnier. They ambled as the spirit took them through stores, banks, offices and homes without a care for the raging occupants. Everybody started putting up “Private: Keep Out” signs: that amused them a lot.

You couldn’t seem to be free of them any place in the area though they appeared to be operating on levels that weren’t always the same as ours. In some places it looked as if they walked on the ground or the floor, but in others they were inches above it, and elsewhere you’d find them moving along as if they were wading through the solid surface. It was very soon clear that they could not hear us any more than we could them, so there was no getting at them that way. No notice seemed to do anything but whet their curiosity.

### After three days of it there was chaos. In the worst affected parts there just wasn’t any privacy any more. At the most intimate moments they were liable to wander through visibly giggling and guffawing. Folks began to complain the way Anna had, only more extensively. It was all very well for the police to announce that there was no danger, that the visitants couldn’t do anything, so the best way was simply to ignore them. There are times and places when giggling bunches of youths and maidens take more ignore-power than the average guy’s got. It sent even a placid fellow like me wild at times, while the women’s leagues of this-and-that, the purity promoters and the like were living in a constant state of blown tops.

The news getting around hadn’t helped, either. Newshounds of all breeds burnt the roads into town. They overflowed the place. Pretty well every street was snaked with leads to movie cameras, television cameras, and microphones, while the press photographers were having the snappy-shot time of their lives, and, being solid, were more nuisance than the visitants themselves.

But there was more to come. Jimmy and I happened in on the first demonstration of it. We were on our way to lunch doing our best to ignore visitants, as instructed, by walking through them. Jimmy was subdued. He’d given up theories on account of his facts had kind of submerged him. Just short of the lunch-bar we noticed that there was some commotion further along Main Street seemingly coming our way, so we waited for it. After a bit it emerged from a tangle of stopped cars further down and came towards us at some seven or eight miles an hour. Essentially it was a platform like the one Sally and I had seen at the Crossing that Sunday, but this was de luxe. There were sides to it glistening with new paint, red, yellow and blue, enclosing seats set four abreast. Most of the passengers were young, though there was a sprinkling of middle-aged men and women dressed in a soberer version of the same fashions. Behind the first platform followed half a dozen others. We read the lettering on their sides and backs as they went past:

PAWLEY’S PEEPHOLES ON THE PAST—GREATEST INVENTION

OF THE AGE

HISTORY WITHOUT TEARS—FOR $10.00

SEE HOW GREAT GREAT GRANDMA LIVED

YE QUAINTE OLDE 20th CENTURY EXPRESSE

SEE LIVING HISTORY IN COMFORT—QUAINT DRESSES—

OLD CUSTOMS

EDUCATIONAL! LEARN PRIMITIVE FOLKWAYS—

LIVING CONDITIONS

VISIT ROMANTIC 20th CENTURY—SAFETY GUARANTEED

KNOW YOUR HISTORY—GET CULTURE—$10.00 TRIP

BIG MONEY PRIZE IF YOU IDENTIFY OWN GRANDAD/MA

Most of the occupants of the vehicles were turning their heads this way and that in gog-eyed wonder interspersed with spasms of giggles. Some of the young men waved their arms and addressed us with witticisms to the admiration of their companions. Others leaned back, bit into large yellow fruits, and munched. They cast occasional glances at the scene, but most of their attention was paid to the contents of their left arms. On the back of the next to last car was lettered:

WAS GREAT GREAT GRANDMA AS GOOD AS SHE SAID? SEE THE THINGS YOUR FAMILY HISTORY DIDN’T TELL YOU

and on the final one:

SPOT THE FAMOUS BEFORE THEY GOT CAREFUL—THE REAL

INSIDE DOPE MAY WIN YOU A BIG PRIZE!

As the procession moved away it left the rest of us looking at one another kind of stunned. Nobody seemed to have much left to say just then.

I guess that show must have been something in the nature of a grand premiere. After that you were liable almost any place about town to come across a platform labelled:

HISTORY IS CULTURE—BROADEN YOUR MIND

or:

KNOW THE ANSWERS ABOUT YOUR ANCESTORS

with full good-time loads aboard, but I never heard of a regular procession again.

The Mayor’s Office was tearing what was left of its hair and putting up big notices left, right and centre about what was not allowed to “tourists”—and giving them a big laugh. The thing grew more embarrassing. A lot of those on foot got to coming close up and peering at your face, and then consulting some book or piece of paper they were carrying—after which they looked disappointed and annoyed with you, and moved on. I calculated there was no prize at all for finding me.

Well, work has to go on. We couldn’t fix to do anything about it, so we had to put up with it. Quite a pack of families moved out of town for privacy and to spare their daughters from getting the new ideas about dress, and so on, but most of us had to keep on. Pretty near everyone you met those times looked dazed or scowling—except, of course, the “tourists.”

I called for Sally one evening about a couple of weeks after the trolley procession. When we came out of the house there was a ding-dong going on down the road. A couple of girls with heads that looked like globes of gilded basketwork were scratching the living daylight out of one another. There was a guy standing by looking mighty like a proud rooster, the rest were whooping things on. We went the other way.

“It just isn’t like our town any more,” said Sally. “Our homes aren’t our homes any more. Why can’t they go away and leave us in peace, damn them! I hate them!”

But outside the park we saw one little chrysanthemum head sitting on apparently nothing at all, and crying her heart out. Sally softened a little.

“Maybe they are human,” she said. “But why do they have to turn our town into a goddam Amusement Park?”

We found a bench and sat on it, looking at the sunset. I wanted to get her away out of it.

“It’d be grand to be off up in the hills now,” I said.

“It’d be lovely, Jerry,” she sighed.

I took her hand, and she didn’t pull it away.

“Sally, darling—” I began.

And then, before I could get any further, two tourists, a man and a girl, had to come and anchor themselves in front of us. I was angry. You might see the platforms any place, but you reckoned to be free of walking tourists in the park, where there was nothing to interest them.—Or shouldn’t have been. These two seemed to find something, though. They stood staring unabashed at Sally. She took her hand out of mine. They conferred. The man opened a folder he was carrying, and took a piece of paper out of it. They looked at the paper, then at Sally, then back at the paper. It was too much to ignore. I got up and walked through them to see what the paper was. There I had a surprise. It was a piece of the Daniel City News; obviously from a very ancient copy indeed. It was badly browned and tattered, and to keep it from falling to bits entirely it had been mounted inside some thin, transparent plastic. I looked where they were looking—and Sally’s face looked back at me from a smiling photograph. She had her arms spread wide, and a baby in the crook of each. I’d just time to see the headline: “Twins for City Councillor’s Wife,” when they folded up the paper, and made off along the path, running. I reckoned they’d be hot on the trail of one of their goddammed prizes—and I hoped it would turn around and bite them.

### I went back, and sat down again beside Sally. That picture had kind of spoiled things—“Councillor’s Wife” ! Naturally she wanted to know what I’d seen on the paper, and I had to sharpen up a few lies to cut my way out of that.

We sat on awhile; feeling gloomy, saying nothing.

A platform went by labelled:

PAINLESS CULTURE—

GET EDUCATED IN MODERN COMFORT

We watched it glide through the railings and into the traffic.

“Maybe it’s time we moved?” I suggested.

“Yes,” agreed Sally, dully.

We walked back towards her place, me wishing that I’d been able to see the date on that paper.

“You wouldn’t,” I asked her casually, “you wouldn’t happen to know any councillors?”

She looked surprised.

“Well, there’s Mr. Falmer,” she said, kind of doubtfully.

“He’d be a—a youngish man?” I inquired, off-handedly.

“Why, no. He’s ever so old. As a matter of fact, it’s his wife I know really.”

“Ah!” I said. “You don’t know any of the younger ones?”

“I’m afraid not. Why?”

I put over a line about a situation like this needing young men of ideas.

“Young men with ideas don’t have to be councillors,” she remarked.

There again, like I said, Sal doesn’t make a lot of bases on logic, maybe; but she’s her own ways of making a guy feel better.

### Next day found indignation right up the scale again. It seems there had been an evening service going on in All Saints Church. The preacher was just drawing breath to start his sermon when a platform labelled:

WAS GT. GT. GRANDAD ONE OF THE BOYS?—

OUR $10.00 TRIP MAY SHOW YOU

floated in, and slid to a stop in front of the lectern. The preacher stopped dead. For some seconds he stood regarding it in silence. Then he crashed his fist down on his desk.

“This,” he boomed, “this is intolerable. We shall wait until this object is removed.”

He remained motionless, glaring at it. And the congregation glared with him.

The tourists on their platform had an air of waiting for the show to begin. When nothing happened, they started passing round bottles and fruit to while away the time. The preacher kept right on glaring. When still nothing happened, the tourists began to get bored. The young men tickled the girls, and the girls giggled them on. Several of them began to urge the man at the end of their craft, after a bit he nodded, and the platform slid away through the west wall.

It was the first point our side had ever scored. The preacher mopped his brow, cleared his throat, and then extemporised the sermon of his life, on the subject of “The Cities of the Plain.”

### But no matter how many and how influential the tops that were blowing, there was a big zero getting done about it. There were schemes, of course. Jimmy had one of them: it concerned either ultra-high or infra-low frequencies that were going to shudder the projections of the tourists to bits. Maybe something along those lines might have been worked out sometime, but right then it wasn’t getting any further than being an idea. It’s darned difficult to know what you can do about what is virtually a movie portrait in three dimensions, unless you can find some way of cutting its transmission. All its functions are going on not where you see it, but some place where the origin is. So how do you get at it? What you are actually seeing doesn’t feel, doesn’t eat, doesn’t breathe, doesn’t sleep . . .?

It was while I was considering what it does do that I had my idea. It struck me all of a heap—so simple. I grabbed my hat in one, and took myself round to the Mayor’s Office.

By this time, a daily procession of highly carbonated citizens, threateners, and screwballs, had them acting pretty leary there, but I worked through at last to a man who got interested, though doubtful.

“No one’s going to like it,” he said, uneasily.

“No one’s meant to like it. But it can’t be much worse than this—and it’s likely to do something for trade, too,” I pointed out.

He brightened a bit at that.

“The Mayor has his restaurants,” I went on. “And I don’t see why the whole town shouldn’t make a bit on it, too, at that.”

“I’ll grant you’ve got a good why-not there,” he admitted. “Okay. We’ll put it up to him.”

### For all of three days we worked hard on it. On the fourth we went into action. Soon after daylight there were gangs out on all the roads into town setting up crossing-barriers at the city limits, and when they had those fixed, they put up big white boards lettered in red:

DANIEL CITY

THE COMMUNITY THAT LOOKS AHEAD

COME AND SEE

BEYOND THE MINUTE—NEWER THAN TOMORROW

SEE

THE WONDER CITY OF THE AGE

TOLL (NON-RESIDENTS) 25c.

### The same morning the television concession was revoked, and papers all through the State and beyond carried large display ads:

UNIQUE!—COLOSSAL!—EDUCATIONAL!

DANIEL CITY

presents the only authentic

FUTURAMIC SPECTACLE

WANT TO KNOW:

WHAT YOUR GREAT GREAT GREAT GRANDDAUGHTER WILL WEAR?

HOW YOUR GREAT GREAT GRANDSON WILL LOOK?

HOW CUSTOMS WILL CHANGE?

NEXT CENTURY STYLES?

WHAT A HUNDRED YEARS WILL DO?

COME TO DANIEL CITY AND SEE FOR YOURSELF

IT’S THE OFFER OF THE AGES

THE FUTURE FOR 25c.

We reckoned that with the publicity there’d been already we’d not need more detail than that—though we ran a few more specialised ads some places:

DANIEL CITY

GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS

THE SHAPES TO COME

SAUCY FASHIONS—CUTE WAYS

ASTONISHING—AUTHENTIC—UNCENSORABLE

GLAMOUR GALORE for 25c.

and so on. We took enough space to get mentions, too, in the news columns on account of those who like to think they are doing things for sociological, psychological, and other toney reasons.

And they came.

There’d been quite a few running into town to see the sights before, but now they learned it was something worth charging money for, the figures went up steeply—and the more they went up, the gloomier the City Treasurer got on account of we’d not made it 50c. or even a dollar.

Within a couple of days it got so that we had taken over all vacant lots, and some fields further out, for car parks. When it came to evenings, that wasn’t enough, and folk were parking far enough out for us to run a bus service to bring them in. The streets were so full of crowds stooging around and greeting any of Pawley’s platforms with whistles, jeers and raspberries that the regular citizens mostly stayed indoors, and kind of smouldered there.

The lists of protests at the Mayor’s Office grew longer each day, but he didn’t have the time for that to worry him a lot, being so busy arranging special convoys of food and beer for his restaurants. Nevertheless, a few days of it started me wondering whether Pawley wasn’t going to see us out, after all. The tourists didn’t like it much, one could see, but that hadn’t done a lot to curb their habits of wandering about all over the place, and now, in addition, we had trippers in their thousands whooping it up with pandemonium for most of the night. Tempers all round were getting short enough for real trouble to break.

Then, on the sixth night when several of us had begun to wonder whether maybe we oughtn’t to leave town for a while, the first crack showed—a man in the Mayor’s Office rang me up to say he’d seen several platforms with empty seats on them.

The next night I went down to one of their regular routes to see for myself. There was a well-seasoned crowd round there, jostling, shoving and exchanging cracks. I didn’t have long to wait. A platform slid out on a slant through the front of Al’s Place. The label on it read:

CHARM AND ROMANCE OF 20th CENTURY—$7.50

### It was good to see Pawley cutting his rates—and there were half a dozen empty seats at that.

The arrival of the platform brought a well-supported Bronx cheer, and a shrilling of whistles. The conductor remained indifferent as he steered through the people filling the street. His cargo looked less certain. Part of it did its best to play up. It giggled, and made motions of returning slap for slap and grimace for grimace with the crowd to start with. Maybe it was as well the tourist girls couldn’t hear the things the crowd was shouting to them, but plenty of the gestures were clear enough. I’d say it couldn’t have been a lot of fun gliding straight into the men who were making them. By the time the platform was clear of the crowd and disappearing into Hogan’s Store pretty well all the tourists had given up pretending it was, and some of them were looking kind of sick. By the expressions on one or two of the faces there I reckoned Pawley might be going to have a tough time explaining the culture aspect of it to a watch committee some place.

The next night there were more empty seats than filled ones.

The second night after that was busy on account of they didn’t show up at all, and we had to get down to the job of returning the 25c., and refusing claims for wasted gas.

And the next night they didn’t come, either; nor the one after that. So then all we had to do was to pitch right in with the job of cleaning up Daniel City—and the reputation it had been getting lately—and the thing was pretty well over.

At least, we say it’s over. Jimmy maintains that’s only the way it looks from here. According to him, all they had to do was to modify out the visibility factor that was causing the trouble, and it’s likely they’re still peeping around—here and other places.

Well, he could be right, at that. Maybe the guy Pawley, whoever he is, or will be, has a chain of Fun Fairs operating all around the world and all through history right now. We wouldn’t know—and just so long as he keeps them out of sight we’d not care a lot, either.

Pawley had been fixed as far as we were concerned. He had to be fixed some way—even the vicar of All Saints appreciated that; and he had something when he began his address of thanksgiving with: “Paradoxical, my friends, paradoxical are the uses of vulgarity.”

### And once it was fixed, I could find some time to go round and see Sally again. I found her looking brighter than she’d been in some weeks, and lovelier on account of it. She seemed pleased to see me, too.

“Hullo, Jerry,” she said. “I’ve been reading in the paper how you got it all fixed to fade them out. And I think it was just wonderful of you.”

A bit before, I’d maybe have taken that for a cue, but it didn’t trigger right now. I kind of kept on seeing her with armfuls of twins, and wondering how they got there, in a dead-inside way.

“Go to, honey! It wasn’t a lot. Any other guy might have hit the idea,” I told her, modestly.

“That’s maybe, but there’s a whole lot of people don’t think so. And I’ll tell you another thing I heard to-day. They’re going to ask you to stand for the Council, Jerry.”

“Me, on the Council, that’d be a big laugh——” I began. Then I stopped, kind of smitten. “If——Say, would that mean I’d be called ‘Councillor’ ?”

I asked her.

“Why—why, yes, I guess so,” she said, looking puzzled.

Things shimmered a bit.

“Er—Sally, sweetheart, there’s—er—something—something I’ve been trying to get around to saying to you for quite a while . . .” I began.

THE END