

village view

by Andrea Leonard

[This is Part I of a two-part article. See next week's paper for Part II.]

While I was finishing up the supper dishes the other night, there came a knock at the kitchen door. At almost the same moment, the phone rang. I answered the phone while my husband, who had been reading the evening paper, went to the door.

The voice over the wire informed me I'd been chosen to receive subscriptions to several magazines as a prize. Recognizing a new twist to an old racket, I said I wasn't interested and hung up.

Turning, I found myself face to face with two of the weirdest-looking creatures I'd ever seen. They were stranger-looking than anything I'd ever even imagined.

Alike as twins, they appeared, and my first thought was that perhaps some neighborhood children were playing a trick on us, but a split-second later, I realized these were not children, whatever they might be.

Each was about forty inches tall and clothed from top to bottom in a dark loose-fitting garment with a glossy finish resembling pliable enamel.

Because their bodies were enveloped entirely with this ballooning material, whatever their shape was, it was hidden from us. The suits seemed to be in constant motion, undulating as though filled with liquid or gas.

Near the top of each suit was a window-like pane, similar to a diving mask. The pane was evidently a one-way mirror, for although we could see nothing through it, we soon discovered we were observed from within it.

From the bases of the two dark shapeless blobs came soft hissing sounds. It was disconcerting to realize neither one was touching the floor, but instead was floating a few inches above it, supported by a cushion of air like a hover-craft.

Behind them stood my husband, grinning delightedly, as though he'd produced for me a special treat. I thought he'd taken leave of his wits or that I was losing my own, but was so astonished I couldn't speak a word; I could only stare.

The two made no threatening moves; in fact, they didn't move at all. None of us did. We all remained silent while we took stock of the strangers and they of us.

A minute passed, perhaps two, before I became aware of sounds of music. The room seemed to fill with beautiful melody. A moment later I realized the air was scented with a delightful fragrance, one entirely unfamiliar, but so pleasing, fresh and invigorating, I felt years younger and experienced a remarkable sensation of well-being.

The combined effect quickly dispelled any initial fear; my body relaxed, a smile of delight burst over my face, matching that on my husband's. Involuntarily my hands and arms opened in a gesture of welcome, and the creatures glided smoothly into the family room.

I wanted to touch them but when I reached toward them, my hand met a firm invisible barrier about six inches from the surface of their suits. It was pleasantly warm, hard, and smooth as glass. It created a tingling feeling in the tips of my fingers.

Hardly trusting my voice, I suggested to my husband that we sit down and see what would happen next. I was overwhelmed with curiosity about our visitors, and not at all frightened. My mind seemed completely clear, and it was my impression my judgement was better than usual. I was even conscious that the soothing effect of the music and the fragrance was planned, that I was intended to respond as I did, but after initial amazement, calmly accepted it.

We sat; the creatures hovered near us, watching us with as much interest as we felt about them. Their mirrors flashed, reflecting our images and the room's furnishings, as they looked around. The music faded to a soft background level and was replaced by sounds of spoken words, words we couldn't understand.

We listened with blank expressions while various noises came to our ears from a source we couldn't identify, though we knew, of course, the creatures originated it. The words went on and on.

The volume increased until we both covered our ears with our hands and frowned. The noise level was instantly

reduced until it faded completely. Our disappointment showed on our faces; it then grew louder until our expressions showed we could hear it again.

We had begun to communicate with them!

The language sounds continued with great variety. We both knew an attempt was being made to beam some recognizable sounds to us, sounds that were meaningful to us as well as to our visitors.

Trying to sort sense from the babble assaulting our brains, we waited while the seemingly infinite number of languages was played. Then it came. Aye, bee see.

Aye, bee see! We both came alert, nodded our heads and repeated the sounds. The mirrors flashed, the babble ceased. Through a barely audible hum came a soft click, and a metallic toneless voice slowly pronounced English words.

There were no sentences, only a collection of verbs, nouns and adjectives, apparently meaningless. We both had difficulty understanding the ideas our visitors had come to deliver.

"Happy - mission - good - touch - thought - know - come - how - piece - make - bring - light - come - purpose - mechanic."

The voice stopped. The creatures faced us with an air of expectancy. We looked at each other.

"It doesn't make sense," my husband said.

"They think it should. How can we get them to play it again?" They understood no words; we didn't even know if they could hear.

We tried hand signals, twirling an imaginary disk with a forefinger. No response. Then we went back to "Aye, bee, see," and that did it. Again the sounds came to our ears, and we knew they, too, could hear.

"Let's write down each word this time."

Paper and pencil brought rapt attention from the two who were apparently unfamiliar with writing or writing tools. Intrigued and watching carefully, but touching nothing, they concentrated in silence as we made our list.

They seemed to have no limbs or appendages remotely resembling legs or arms, hands or feet, and communicated with us strictly through sound, smell and sight. With each other, they communicated soundlessly.

[Continued next week]