

village view

by Andrea Leonard

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

"Happy" we wrote, and that's how we were feeling; a good beginning. It was as though we and they were saying, "Glad to see you". "Mission" could mean errand, or by extension could be a missionary visit to bring something. It could mean aggression, as well, we agreed, but for some reason discarded the suspicion.

"Good" reinforced the happy feeling but we could make no sense of "Touch", at first, since touching seemed impossible for them and our touching them was prevented by their invisible shields. What other ways could "touch" be applicable?

We do get in touch through ideas, by telephone, by mail, without physical contact. We settled for that as a possible meaning, though saddened by the inability to feel physical contact.

"Thought" and "Know" seemed to mean similar things and we accepted the words together with "touch" as an explanation of the visit's purpose. "Come" following as it did, seemed reinforcement.

"How" implied a question, but initially we didn't see the connection with "piece". Then it came to both of us at once: "How may we come in peace to know thoughts?" A depth of meaning was now clear in this collection of words that had seemed randomly selected when we heard it for the first time.

"Make" and "Bring" followed by "Light", we interpreted, showed they were seeking to share further intelligence and knowledge with us. We were elated to be getting sense from the message.

"Come", "Purpose", and "Mechanic", we were uncertain about, except we assumed our visitors were looking for mechanical knowledge.

By now, of course, we were both convinced our twin guests were from outer space. We've been hearing for forty years, off and on, about unidentified flying objects. We've read accounts of people being whisked away in flying saucers, and being returned later, unharmed, but having no memory of what took place during their abductions.

And here we were, right in the middle of just such an experience ourselves. Unbelievable! But when you're sitting in your own home, perfectly sober, surrounded by familiar furnishings and your own husband, in his favorite easy chair, is just as intrigued by this unique experience as you are; you must, you have to believe it.

Why, only the other day we'd been reading in the paper about a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and an astronomer who spoke for members of his branch of science as a group. They firmly believe, he said, although their searches for radio signals from extraterrestrial beings have been fruitless up 'til now, that there are as many as a million intelligent civilizations among the stars of the Milky Way.

If they firmly believe it, they must have some basis for thinking so. And here it was, happening, that's all; credible or not.

Having translated, to our own satisfaction, the message we'd been given, we sat back, nodded pleasantly, and waited to see what was next on the program. The creatures waited too, their air cushions hissing softly, their mirrors darting light-flashes around the room.

"Now what? I asked.

"Don't know."

"Where do you suppose they came from?"

"Don't know." My spouse seemed contented just to gaze at them, and not at all disposed to conversation with me. My curiosity was growing.

"How do you suppose they got here?"

"Don't know."

I stood up and started on the floor. The hardly audible hummy sound increased in volume, an apparent warning. I sat again. The noise faded and the visitor's ballooning little shape resumed its previous place beside its companion.

"Why did you let them in?"

"Don't know."

It seemed, at the time, a logical answer. We were silent then, watchful, and beginning to feel apprehensive again. The creatures now appeared to communicate with each other although we could hear no sounds. Then came the little clicking noise again, and the same voice repeated one of the words in the earlier message. "Mechanic."

It sounded like a command, but all of the words had been uttered in the same expressionless tone. We recalled the last two words in the list had been purpose and mechanic. What sort of mechanic could we produce?

I looked about the room. Its walls were lined with bookcases filled with books and bric-a-brac. Above the desk the clock, a small souvenir cuckoo clock from Switzerland, ticked loudly. The clock was mechanical.

Standing, I reached out and stopped the pendulum. The ticking ceased. The creatures' mirrors were fixed on me and the clock. It was time to rewind it. Drawing the chain, gently and carefully to raise the weight, I wound the clock and re-started the pendulum swinging. The clock ticked contentedly.

The twins exuded fascinated interest and treated us to a few moments of celestial music. I received the distinct impression they would like to have my clock.

Lifting it from its nail, I offered it to them. They had no visible carrying equipment, however, so I was startled when the clock moved in my hand, drawn by an unseen force with the power of a strong magnet. It floated, for the tiniest space of time, as though on air, and then disappeared, as though swallowed, into the space surrounding one of the creatures.

I watched it slip from view, the dangling chain with the weight at the end soundlessly sucked into perfect transparent space without a trace.

"My clock! It took my clock!"

"You gave it to him."

All around us now we could hear the lovely music swell and swirl, and we could smell that heady fragrance, the odor of innocence, purity, perfect health and fields of blooming flowers. I sank back into my chair.

My husband's eyes were closed, his head tilted back, a soft and joyous smile flitted across his countenance. I hadn't seen him looking so young, rested and well in years.

My own eyelids were heavy; I drowsed into what seemed a dream of blissful peace. The music filled me with comfort and happiness. In my mind the refrain of the question repeated itself.

"How may we come in peace to learn and share thoughts?" And through the dreamy mists there seemed to come an answer, wafted on the wings of melodic sound and the zephyrs of cleanest purest air.

When we awoke, we were alone — just the two of us — and I had forgotten the answer.

The clock was gone.