

until there were none. Then there were just his eyes, watching the lights grow dim and sensing the sounds of traffic and night fade into nothingness, until the eyes lost their luster.

The fox's mate passed. She stopped to note the smell of death, then trotted on, intent on the night's hunt.

*Arthur Hill, Eng. Sr.*



## Projection

“MY, MY, another day,” sighed Mr. Allison as he contemplated himself in the bathroom mirror. “Hmm. Whiskers haven’t grown much. They haven’t been growing as much as usual for the past few weeks. Hardly need to shave some mornings. Maybe I’m getting old. Gonna be 68 this year. My, my. He reached in the cabinet for his razor and a tiny black blur darted around the toothpaste tube. Involuntarily he jerked. Grabbing a kleenex, he snatched up the bug and studied the writhing thing between his fingers. A filthy cockroach crawling over his things! How he hated it. His stomach tightened as he crunched it between his fingers and flung the thing into the waste basket. There. He smiled; satisfied. Though he hardly seemed capable of hating anything, bugs were the one and probably only thing in the world he hated. He had spent his life studying bugs — and hating them.

If only he could destroy every living bug. Wipe the hideous crawling things from the face of the earth. His hand shook as it clenched white around the razor. “Um-ouch! Bless you, razor. Wonder why my skin has been getting so dry and hard? Must be the cold weather.”

Mr. Allison’s pudgy, round face was usually nice and soft — and slightly pink.

Ahh, yes. Time for breakfast. Martha had the coffee perking. He rubbed his plump belly absently and his hand

brushed something. His breath caught. The protuberances on his side were still there. The doctor said these should be gone by now. That salve he gave him should do the trick, though. But they did seem larger. He'd wear a sweater and let his shirt hang loosely. Maybe no one would notice. He touched them again — the hard, unyielding knobs growing on him — and a shudder slid up his back and turned him cold. People were born with deformities but they didn't grow them.

Smoothing his halo of faded brown hair and donning his gold-rimmed spectacles, he shuffled downstairs to breakfast. He hoped Martha wouldn't notice.

"Good morning, Martha," he rasped. "Ahem, aHEM. . . my gracious. My voice is more hoarse today than ever. Heh, heh. Must be my second childhood — going through that high-pitched raspy stage again."

"Good morning, Ed. Sit down. Your oatmeal is ready. Perhaps that will help."

"My, my. I *am* hungry this morning," he said settling into his chair and reaching for the cream. He ate in silence for a few minutes until Martha said, "My goodness, Ed. Don't slump so. Sit up straight." What was Martha talking about? He wasn't slumping. He always held himself very erect. But he automatically said, "Yes, dear," and threw his shoulders back a little further. No need to make an issue of it.

"There. That was delicious, Martha." He smiled and turned out of his chair. Martha was just staring curiously at him. His smile faded as she turned back to the sink in embarrassment, and a strange apprehension came over him. For some reason he suddenly wanted to get out of there.

"Well, dear, think I'd better try to get to the store a little early today. Mr. Carsten was expecting a shipment of canned goods and we'll have plenty to do." He hurried into the hall, grabbed his hat and old brown coat, and hurried out the door.

The quiet little town was just coming to life, but Mr. Allison didn't notice anymore. For twenty-six years he'd seen the same thing as he walked to his job as clerk at Car-

sten's Home Grocery. All that changed were the children and the dogs, who passed on to adulthood or eternity. He just scurried along as usual — with his head thrust forward and his legs and arms hurrying frantically to catch up.

Suddenly a cluster of laughter and shouts came dashing around the corner. The neighborhoods' present generation of children was trouping to school. A chorus of "Good morning, Mr. Allison." "Hi, Mr. Allison." "Hello, Mr. Allison." greeted him. Most all of the kids knew him — and knew he usually carried a good supply of candy in his pockets. "Well, hello there, children. How are you this morning?" As usual the children clustered around while Mr. Allison dug deep into his pockets for the candy. But as he handed it to them, he noticed that a few smiles had faded to looks of puzzled curiosity. Timmy impatiently grabbed his cinnamon ball and looking up at him said, "Thanks, Mr. Allison. Say, Mr. Allison, whatsa matter with your eyes? Didja run into a door or somethin?"

Mr. Allison caught his breath, "Why no, Timmy. There's nothing wrong that I know of. J-J-Just your imagination. Well, you'd better run along to school now. Goodbye." He walked several steps before he heard them turn and go on.

For two blocks he pondered. What had they seen? What was happening to him? And why was it happening to him? In fury and frustration he smashed an ant that dashed onto the sidewalk. There. One less ant to gnaw and crawl and spread disease. But why was all this happening to him?

Suddenly a little bundle of barking black and white came trotting toward him, tail and tongue flopping. "Well hello, Pepper. Yes, I've got a biscuit fo . . ." Pepper had come happily up to him, sniffed a little, and then backed away — his hair bristling and a growl rising deep in his throat. He stopped about ten feet away and stood there growling until Mr. Allison walked on — with the biscuit unnoticed in his hand.

Mr. Allison walked the remaining six blocks to the store in blank bewilderment. He roused only when Mr. Carsten called, "Good morning, Ed. How are ya?" from the store entryway.

"Wha? Oh — yes — Mr. Carsten. Good morning sir. I'm fine, thank-you — yes — fine." He stopped. There crawling from the crack between the sidewalk and the store's foundation was a huge beetle; fully two inches long and all glistening black. Mr. Allison stared — fascinated by the disgusting thing. And he hated it — all the more for being so enormous — for having been allowed to live so long. The thing paused, twitched its feelers, and turned toward Mr. Allison. In sudden horror, he stepped on it, felt it crunch beneath his foot. "I'll kill you. I'll kill you, crawling thing," he hissed. He ground the broken thing into the sidewalk, twisting again and again until his body relaxed with relief. Mr. Carsten was staring at him. "Why, Ed, what's the matter? You don't look well. It's only a bug."

"Yes, yes. Just got carried away, I guess." Mr. Carsten's gaze followed him into the store.

While hanging up his coat he thought of the mirror in the washroom. Yes! Now he could find out what was wrong. He peered anxiously into its streaked surface, turned to every angle, but it was the same face he had always been looking at. Was everybody else insane or was he? He almost wished that he had seen something wrong. What had *they* seen? And why couldn't he see it?

Somehow the morning went by. He stacked pickles, found the anchovies for Mrs. Burton, sliced chicken loaf and worried. There weren't many customers, thank heaven. No one must see him. If they didn't see him they couldn't notice anything strange about him. But what *was* strange about him? The knobby things weren't noticeable beneath his clothes, but once he had turned around and caught Tom, the other clerk, staring at him; his dull eyes wide and unblinking. They had both turned quickly away. After that he kept as busy as possible stacking and sorting so Tom would have to wait on the customers. Only once did he think of the beetle he had crushed that morning. It was obviously of the genus Coleoptera, but what family? He would have to look that up tonight.

Finally noon came and he could go home. Martha was in a talkative mood; thank goodness. It was all he could do

to force an occasional "Yes" "No" or "I'm sure you're right, Dear,". She chattered on about nothing in general until it was time for him to return to the store. He was relieved to get away from her and the chance that she might notice whatever was wrong, and yet he dreaded going back to the store. What if other people noticed something wrong with him? What *was* wrong with him? If he could only see what the children and Tom and Martha had seen this morning.

But somehow the warm March sunshine, feather-strewn blue sky, and laughing children drew him into a happier mood. He walked slowly, savoring the beautiful day. And he smiled again, at nothing in particular. He was still smiling as he entered the store. "Good afternoon, Mr. Carsten. Lovely day isn't it? Ah yes. It's a pity we don't have more like this."

"Hello, Ed. Yes, it is nice out." The smile Mr. Carsten returned was brief and forced and he turned quickly back to his account books, but Mr. Allison hardly noticed.

The afternoon went along easily enough until about 4 o'clock. He was busily ringing up Mrs. Thorburg's groceries, not thinking of much but the item in hand, when he absently glanced up. Mrs. Thorburg was staring at him in disbelieving horror. A muscle jumped in Mr. Allison's jaw and fear gripped his stomach again. He turned, hurriedly totaled her bill, took her money and returned the change, not daring to look up again. She grabbed her groceries and hurried out without a word. He could see her looking at him through the front window as she walked away. His hand shook as he touched the things growing on his sides.

Mr. Allison left the store at the first stroke of five. He wanted to get away; to hide somewhere.

The children were still out playing by the sidewalk. Engrossed in a game of tag, they didn't notice him at first. Mr. Allison smiled paused, and then called, "Hello there Suzie and Barbara and Jeff." They stopped and smiled at him. "Hi, Mr. Allison," they chorused, almost together.

"Think I've got some more cinnamon balls here in my pocket, and they're not worth much sitting there." With the candy in his hand he stepped toward them. Their smiles

disappeared. They stared at him in complete silence for a moment, then edged around him, backed away, and then simultaneously dashed down the street. Mr. Allison stared after them — his hand still outstretched. Why should he terrify those children? Oh, Lord, What was wrong with him? He just shook his head and went on.

Only silence greeted him when he walked in the door. Oh, yes. There was a fund-raising supper and bazaar at the Church tonight. That meant a casserole for supper. Martha probably wouldn't be back til late.

On the way to the kitchen, he passed the hall mirror and stopped. He stood there for a moment, but somehow could not bring himself to turn and look. Not knowing might be better than knowing.

The casserole was one of his favorites, but he couldn't eat much of it.

Finished, he hurriedly rinsed the dishes and headed for the living room. But he had forgotten to pick up the paper on his way in that evening. Stepping out on the porch, he picked it up and his body tensed with fear. There sat another beetle, just like the one he had seen this morning only even larger. It ran a few steps and then stopped, its feelers twitching and its pupil-less eyes contemplating him. He *had* to kill it. He lunged forward and caught it beneath his foot. He heard its shell burst and it sickened him. He lifted his foot and nearly fainted. The monster stood there for a moment, still looking at him, and then turned and ran off the edge of the porch. Mr. Allison dashed into the house. Uncontrollably his body quivered. He slammed the door and locked it. Suddenly weak, he just stood there, leaning against the door, his breath coming in shallow gasps. And fear engulfed him — fear of something he had only despised and hated before.

Walking into the living room, he sank into his favorite easy chair. He had to know what it was. It should be pictured in the *Entomologist's Handbook*. There on page 22 was a duplicate of the creature — *Dytiscida* Coleoptera. Just as ugly and loathsome in the picture. The beetle made him angry just sitting there. The very fact that such a thing

lived made him furious. He he read on. Color: black. Size: Approx.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cm. He stopped. Those two bugs had been two or three inches long! There was no mistake, though. The beetles he had seen corresponded to the pictured *Dysticida* Coleoptera in every detail — except size. Fear gnawed at his stomach again. Quickly he put the book away and picked up the paper. He had to get the things off his mind. His body seemed to be tied in knots. Nerves probably. Yawning, he stretched his arms and legs. My but he was stiff. It had been a hard day.

But the newspaper did help. Soon he was completely absorbed in the editorials. And within twenty minutes he was snoring softly with the paper forgotten on the floor.

The clock chiming nine o'clock brought him awake with a start. He was covered with a cold sweat. The dream had been almost too real. He had dreamed about the beetle, only this was a giant beetle that towered over him, who was going to grind *him* to pieces. He had kept backing away faster and faster, but the thing only kept getting closer until finally it was so near that all he could see was black. But it was only a dream. Forget it and go to bed. He stretched, rose stiffly from the chair and shuffled upstairs.

He *was* tired. The bed felt delicious and he was soon sound asleep. He didn't even hear Martha walk upstairs or the bang as she closed the door to her room.

Next morning he awoke as usual at 7 o'clock feeling stiff and sore and just as tired as the night before. He lay there on his back for a moment struggling against sleep. As his eyes began to focus, he noticed that he could see only the headboard and part of the wall. His bewilderment turned to horror when he raised his hand to push back the covers and a stiff, black, three-fingered thing came from beneath the blanket. In speechless panic he leaped out of bed and fell to the floor — no not quite to the floor. Six black, horny legs about 18 inches long were supporting him. For a few minutes he just stood there unable to think or speak.

Slowly he crawled over to the dresser. Grasping the drawer pulls, he managed to pull himself upright. There, gazing back at him from the mirror was a huge black

beetle, a hideous thing at least five feet tall. But he was standing in front of that mirror — how — he was looking at himself. He was that hideous black thing. He had been transformed into a bug, a *Dytiscida Coleoptera*.

A shudder of disgust and horror slid up him, and he started to scream — but he could not even scream. Only great rasping churrepps came out. He tried to stop, but his great, jagged jaws kept convulsing open and closed, open and closed. With his claws he tore at the unyielding shell that encased him. Ripping and scratching, he fought to free himself from the smooth, shiny trap, but he could not. Suddenly he realized that he was not just trapped inside the shell, he *was* the shell; he was the bug.

He fought to control himself — fought to clear his mind. But he could only stand there clinging to the dresser and shaking. Now he knew what had been happening to him, but why? Why had it happened? He could only stand there gazing back at those glistening, motionless eyes.

*Gayle Anderson, Sci. So.*



## Paradox

GEORGE TANNER felt a growing warmth as he came down the alley toward the little house that stood on back of ol' man Cranley's lot. Cranley had been glad to rent the shack to George. And George had been glad to take it.

Marie met him at the door and took his hand. Took his hand, squeezed it and he felt the strength. And he smiled, an apologetic confused smile, but a smile. She put her head to his chest and said, "My husband is home. My husband."

"They laughed at me in church today, Marie. A couple women behind me kept talkin' about how I wasn't dressed to pray to the Lord."

A big man, George Tanner. Not tall, but very broad, his delicate green eyes had the look of an old dog who has just realized that the shotgun is not for rabbits this time.