

THE OTHER WIFE

by Jack Finney

from *The Saturday Evening Post*

In a recent volume of considerable arrogance, ill-considered opinion, and unconsidering slovenliness of research, a British humorist with pretensions to critical judgment of science fantasy, one Kingsley Amis, refers to the (unnamed) writer of a story entitled "Of Missing Persons" as "an author who has yet to make his name."

"'Of Missing Persons,' " says Mr. Amis, "is one of those things that offer themselves for analysis with an almost suspicious readiness." I was not able to determine, in the three pages of quotes and comments that followed, just what analysis was being made, or whose readiness for what was under suspicion-but I may have been prejudiced by having read the story, several times, with great enjoyment, when it was included in the first annual volume of SF.

For the benefit of any readers who, like Mr. Amis, are unfamiliar with the author's work-the name is Finney. Jack Finney. And it has been a familiar one in science-fantasy since Robert Heinlein's 1951 anthology, "Tomorrow the Stars," first offered it to the specialty field.

*Mr. Finney's most recent books include *The Third level* (Rinehart and Dell Book) and *The Body Snatchers* (Dell First Editions).*

"... Will let me know the number of the pattern," my wife was saying, following me down the hall toward our bedroom, "and I can knit it myself if I get the blocking done." I think she said blocking, anyway-whatever that means. And I nodded, unbuttoning my shirt as I walked; it had been hot out today, and I was eager to get out of my office clothes. I began thinking about a dark-green eight-thousand-dollar sports car I'd seen during noon hour in that big showroom on Park Avenue.

"... kind of a ribbed pattern with a matching freggel-heggis," my wife seemed to be saying as I stopped at my dresser. I tossed my shirt on the bed and turned to the mirror, arching my chest.

"... middy collar, batten-barton sleeves with sixteen rows of smeddlycup balderdashes...." Pretty good chest and shoulders, I thought, staring in the mirror; I'm twenty-six years old, kind of thin faced, not bad-looking, not good-looking.

"... dropped hem, doppelganger waist, maroon-green, and a sort of frimble-framble daisystitch...." Probably want two or three thousand bucks down on a car like that, I thought; the payments'd be more than the rent on this whole apartment. I began emptying the change out of my pants pockets, glancing at each of the coins. When I was a kid there used to be an ad in a boys' magazine; "Coin collecting can be PROFITABLE," it read, "and FUN too! Why don't you start TODAY!" It explained that a 1913 Liberty-head nickel-"and many others!"-was worth thousands, and I guess I'm still looking for one.

"So what do you think?" Marion was saying. "You think they'd go well together?"

"Sure." I nodded at her reflection in my dresser mirror; she stood leaning in the bedroom doorway, arms folded, staring at the back of my head. "They'd look fine." I brought a dime up to my eyes for a closer look; it was minted in 1958 and had a profile of Woodrow Wilson, and I turned to Marion. "Hey, look," I said, "here's a new kind of dime-Woodrow Wilson." But she wouldn't look at my hand. She just stood there with her arms folded, glaring at me; and I said, "Now what? What have I done wrong now?"

Marion wouldn't answer, and I walked to my closet and began looking for some wash pants. After a moment I said coaxingly, "Come on, Sweetfeet, what'd I do wrong?"

"Oh, Al!" she wailed. "You don't listen to me; you really don't! Half the time you don't hear a word I say!"

"Why, sure I do, honey." I was rattling the hangers, hunting for my pants. "You were talking about knitting."

"An orange sweater, I said, Al-orange. I knew you weren't listening and asked you how an orange sweater would go with- Close your eyes."

"What?"

"No, don't turn around! And close your eyes." I closed them, and Marion said, "Now, without any peeking, because I'll see you, tell me what I'm wearing right now."

It was ridiculous. In the last five minutes, since I'd come home from the office, I must have glanced at Marion maybe two or three times. I'd kissed her when I walked into the apartment, or I was pretty sure I had. Yet standing at my closet now, eyes closed, I couldn't for the life of me say what she was wearing. I worked at it; I could actually hear the sound of her breathing just behind me and could picture her standing there, a small girl five feet three inches tall, weighing just over a hundred pounds, twenty-four years old, nice complexion, pretty face, honey-blond hair, and wearing-wearing-

"Well, am I wearing a dress, slacks, medieval armor, or standing here stark naked?"

"A dress."

"What color?"

"Ah-dark green?"

"Am I wearing stockings?"

"Yes."

"Is my hair done up, shaved off or in a pony tail?"

"Done up."

"O.K., you can look now."

Of course the instant I turned around to look, I remembered. There she stood, eyes blazing, her bare foot angrily tapping the floor, and she was wearing sky-blue wash slacks and a white cotton blouse. As she swung away to walk out of the room and down the hall, her pony tail was bobbing furiously.

Well, brother-and you, too, sister-unless the rice is still in your hair, you know what came next: the hurt, indignant silence. I got into slacks, short-sleeved shirt and huarachos, strolled into the living room, and there on the davenport sat Madame Defarge grimly studying the list, disguised as a magazine, of next day's guillotine victims. I knew whose name headed the list; and I walked straight to the kitchen, mixed up some booze in tall glasses and found a screw driver in a kitchen drawer.

In the living room, coldly ignored by what had once been my radiant, laughing bride, I set the drinks on the coffee table, reached behind Marion's magazine and gripped her chin between thumb and forefinger. The magazine dropped, and I instantly inserted the tip of the screw driver between her front teeth, pried

open her mouth, picked up a glass and tried to pour in some booze. She started to laugh, spilling some down her front, and I grinned, handing her the glass, and picked up mine. Sitting down beside her, I saluted Marion with my glass, then took a delightful sip; and as it hurried to my sluggish blood stream, I could feel the happy corpuscles dive in, laughing and shouting, and felt able to cope with the next item on the agenda, which followed immediately.

"You don't love me any more," said Marion.

"Oh, yes, I do." I leaned over to kiss her neck, glancing around the room over her shoulder.

"Oh, no, you don't; not really."

"Oh, yes, I do; really. Honey, where's that book I was reading last night?"

"There! You see! All you want to do is read all the time! You never want to go out! The honeymoon's certainly over around here, all right!"

"No, it isn't, Sweetknees; not at all. I feel exactly the way I did the day I proposed to you; I honestly do. Was there any mail?"

"Just some ads and a bill. You used to listen to every word I said before we were married and you always noticed what I wore and you complimented me and you sent me flowers and you brought me little surprises and"-suddenly she sat bolt upright-"remember those cute little notes you used to send me! I'd find them all the time," she said sadly, staring past my shoulder, her eyes widening wistfully. "Tucked in my purse maybe"-she smiled mournfully-"or in a glove. Or they'd come to the office on post cards, even in telegrams a couple times. All the other girls used to say they were just darling." She swung to face me. "Honey, why don't you ever-

"Help!" I said. "Help, help!"

"What do you mean?" Marion demanded coolly, and I tried to explain.

"Look, honey," I said briskly, putting an arm companionably around her shoulders, "we've been married four years. Of course the honeymoon's over! What kind of imbeciles," I asked with complete reasonableness, "would we be if it weren't? I love you, sure," I assured her, shrugging a shoulder. "Of course. You bet. Always glad to see you; any wife of old Al Pullen is a wife of mine! But after four years I walk up the stairs when I come home; I no longer run up three at a time. That's life," I said, clapping her cheerfully on the back. "Even four-alarm fires eventually die down, you know." I smiled at her fondly. "And as for cute little notes tucked in your purse-help, help!" I should have known better, I guess; there are certain things you just can't seem to explain to a woman.

I had trouble getting to sleep that night-the davenport is much too short for me-and it was around two forty-five before I finally sank into a kind of exhausted and broken-backed coma. Breakfast next morning, you can believe me, was a glum affair at the town home of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred E. Pullen, devoted couple.

Who can say whether the events of the night before affected those which now followed? I certainly couldn't; I was too tired, dragging home from the office along Third Avenue, heading uptown from Thirty-fourth Street about five-thirty the next evening. I was tired, depressed, irritated and in no hurry at all to get home. It was hot and muggy outside, and I was certain Marion would give me cold cuts for supper-and all evening long, for that matter. My tie was pulled down, my collar open, hat shoved back, coat slung over one shoulder, and trudging along the sidewalk there I got to wishing things were different.

I didn't care how, exactly-just different. For example, how would things be right now, it occurred to me, if I'd majored in creative botany at college instead of physical ed? Or what would I be doing at this very moment if I'd the job with Enterprises, Incorporated, instead of Serv-Eez? Or if I'd gone to Siam with Tom Biehler that time? Or if I hadn't broken off with what's-her-name, that big, black-haired girl who could sing "Japanese Sandman" through her nose?

At Thirty-sixth Street I stopped at the corner newsstand, planking my dime down on the counter before the man who ran it; we knew each other long since, though I don't think we've ever actually spoken. Glancing at me, he scooped up my dime, grabbed a paper from one of the stacks and folded it as he handed it to me; and I nodded my thanks, tucking it under my arm, and walked on. And that's when it happened; I glanced up at a brick building kitty-corner across the street, and there on a blank side wall three or four stories up was a painted advertisement-a narrow-waisted bottle filled with a reddish-brown beverage and lying half buried in a bed of blue-white ice. Painted just over the bottle in a familiar script were the words, "Drink Coco-Coola."

Do you see? It didn't say "Coca-Cola"; not quite. And staring up at that painted sign, I knew it was no sign painters' mistake. They don't make mistakes like that; not on great big outdoor signs that take a couple of men several days to paint. I knew it couldn't possibly be a rival soft drink either; the spelling and entire appearance of this ad were too close to those of Coca-Cola. No, I knew that sign was meant to read "Coco-Coola," and turning to walk on finally-well, it may strike you as insane what I felt certain I knew from just the sight of that painted sign high above a New York street.

But within two steps that feeling was confirmed. I glanced out at the street beside me; it was rush hour and the cars streamed past, clean cars and dirty ones, old and new. But every one of them was painted a single color only, mostly black, and there wasn't a tail fin or strip of chromium in sight. These were modern, fast, good-looking cars, you understand, but utterly different in design from any I'd ever before seen. The traffic lights on Third Avenue clicked to red, the cars slowed and stopped, and now as I walked along past them I was able to read some of their names. There were a Ford, a Buick, two Wintons, a Stutz, a Cadillac, a Dort, a Kissel, an Oldsmobile and at least four or five small Fierce-Arrows. Then, glancing down Thirty-seventh Street as I passed it, I saw a billboard advertising Picayune Cigarettes; "America's Largest-Selling Brand." And now a Third Avenue bus dragged past me, crammed with people as usual this time of day, but it was shaped a little differently and it was painted blue and white.

I spun suddenly around on the walk, looking frantically for the Empire State Building. But it was there, all right, just where it was supposed to be; and I actually sighed with relief. It was shorter, though-by a good ten stories at least. When had all this happened? I wondered dazedly and opened my paper, but there was nothing unusual in it-till I noticed the name at the top of the page. New York Sun, it said, and I stood on the sidewalk gaping at it; because the Sun hasn't been published in New York for years.

Do you understand now? I did, finally, but of course I like to read-when I get the chance, that is-and I'm extremely well grounded in science from all the science fiction I've read. So I was certain, presently, that I knew what had happened; maybe you've figured it out too.

Years ago someone had to decide on a name for a new soft drink and finally picked "Coca-Cola." But certainly he considered other possible alternatives; and if the truth could be known, I'll bet one of them was "Coco-Coola." It's not a bad name-sounds cool and refreshing-and he may have come very close to deciding on it.

And how come Ford, Buick, Chevrolet and Oldsmobile survived while the Moon, Willys-Knight, Hupmobile and Kissel didn't? Well, at some point or other maybe a decision was made by the men who ran the Kissel Company, for example, which might just as easily have been made another way. If it had,

maybe Kissel would have survived and be a familiar sight today.

Instead of Lucky Strikes, Camels and Chesterfields, we might be buying chiefly Picayunes, Sweet Caporals and Piedmonts. We might not have the Japanese beetle or the atom bomb. While the biggest newspaper in New York could be the Sun, and George Coopernagel might be President. If-what would the world be like right now, what would you or I be doing?-if only things in the past had happened just a tiny bit differently. There are thousands of possibilities, of course; there are millions and trillions. There is every conceivable kind of world, in fact; and a theory of considerable scientific standing-Einstein believed it-is that these other possible worlds actually exist; all of them, side by side and simultaneously with the one we happen to be familiar with.

I believed it too now, naturally; I knew what had happened, all right. Walking along Third Avenue through the late afternoon on my way home from the office, I had come to one of the tiny points where two of these alternate worlds intersected somehow. And I had walked off out of one into another slightly altered, somewhat different world of "If" that was every bit as real, and which existed quite as much, as the one I'd just left.

For maybe a block I walked on, stunned, but with a growing curiosity and excitement-because it had occurred to me to wonder where I was going. I was walking on with a definite purpose and destination, I realized; and when a traffic light beside me clicked to green, I took the opportunity to cross La Guardia Avenue, as it was labeled now, and then continue west along Thirty-ninth Street. I was going somewhere, no doubt about that; and in the instant of wondering where, I felt a chill along my spine. Because suddenly I knew.

All the memories of my life in another world, you understand, still existed in my mind; from distant past to the present. But beginning with the moment that I had turned from the newsstand to glance up at that painted sign, another set of memories-an alternate set of memories of my other life in this alternate world-began stirring to life underneath the first. But they were dim and faint yet, out of focus. I knew where I was going-vaguely; and I no more had to think how to get there than any other man on his way home from work. My legs simply moved in an old familiar pattern, carrying me up to the double glass doors of a big apartment building, and the doorman said, "Evening, Mr. Pullen. Hot today."

"You said it, Charley," I answered and walked on into the lobby; and then my legs were carrying me up the stairs to the second floor, then down a corridor to an apartment door which stood open. And just as I did every night, I realized, I walked into the living room, tossing my copy of the Sun to the davenport. I was wearing a suit I'd never seen before, I noticed, but it fitted me perfectly, of course, and was a little worn.

"Hi, I'm home," I heard my voice call out as always; and at one and the same time I knew, with complete and time-dulled familiarity-and also wondered with intense and fascinated curiosity-who in the world was going to answer; who in this world?

An oven door slammed in the kitchen as I turned to hang up my suit coat in the hall closet as always, then footsteps sounded on the wood floor between the kitchen and the living room. And as she said, "Hi, darling," I turned to see my wife walking toward me.

I had to admire my taste in this world. She was a big girl, tall and not quite slim; black-haired and with a very fair complexion; quite a pretty face with a single vertical frown line between her brows; and she had an absolutely gorgeous figure with long handsome legs. "Why, hel-lo," I said slowly. "What a posterously good-looking female you are!"

Her jaw dropped in simple astonishment, her blue eyes narrowing suspiciously. I held my arms wide then,

walking toward her delightedly, and while she accepted my embrace, she drew back to sniff my breath. She couldn't draw back very far, though, because my embrace-I simply couldn't help this-was tight and close; this fine-looking girl was a spectacular armful. "Now I know why I go to the office every day," I was saying as I nuzzled her lovely white neck, an extremely agreeable sensation. "There had to be a reason, and now I know what it is. It's so I can come home to this."

"Al, what in the world is the matter with you!" she said. Her voice was still astonished, but she'd quit trying to draw back.

"Nothing you can't remedy," I said, "in a variety of delightful ways," and I kissed her again.

"Honey," she murmured after a considerable time, "I have to fix supper," and she made a little token effort to get away.

"Supper can wait," I answered, and my voice was a full octave deeper, "but I can't." Again I kissed her, hard and eagerly, full on the lips. Her great big beautiful blue eyes widened in amazement-then they slowly closed and she smiled languorously.

Marion's face abruptly rose up in my mind. There in the forefront of my consciousness and conscience, suddenly, was her betrayed and indignant face, every bit as vivid as though she'd actually walked in through the door to discover this sultry brunette in my arms; and I could feel my face flame with guilt. Because I couldn't kid myself, I couldn't possibly deny the intensity of the pleasure I'd felt at this girl in my arms. I knew how very close I'd come to betraying Marion, and I felt terribly ashamed, and stood wondering-this long length of glorious girlhood still in my arms-how to end the situation, and with charm and grace. Now a moment later, her eyes opened, and she looked up at me questioningly, those full ripe moist lips slightly apart. "Hate to say this," I said then, sniffing the air thoughtfully, "but seems to me I smell something burning-besides me."

"Oh!"-she let out a little shriek, and as she ran to the kitchen I actually closed my eyes and sighed with a terrible relief. I didn't know how I'd walked into this other alternate world, or how I could leave it; but Marion was alive in my mind, while the world around me seemed unreal. In the kitchen I heard the oven door open, heard water run in the sink, then the momentary sizzle of cooking meat; and I walked quickly to the davenport and snatched up my copy of the Sun.

As I raised it to my face, the tap of high heels sounded on thai wood floor just outside the kitchen door. There was silence as they crossed the rug toward me, then the davenport cushion beside me sank; I felt a deliciously warm breath on my cheek, and I had to lower my trembling, rattling newspaper, turn and manage to smile into the sloe eyes of the creature beside me.

Once again-my head slowly shaking in involuntary approval-I had to admire my own good taste; this was not a homely woman. "I turned the oven down," she murmured. "It might be better to have dinner a little later. When it gets cooler," she added softly.

I nodded quickly. "Good idea. Paper says it's the hottest day in five hundred years," I babbled. "Doctors advise complete immobility."

But the long-legged beauty beside me wasn't listening. "So I'm the reason you like to come home, am I?" she breathed into my ear. "It's been a long time, darling, since you said anything like that."

"H'mm," I murmured and nodded frantically at the paper in my hands. "I see they're going to tear down City Hall," I muttered wildly, but she was blowing gently in my ear now; then she pulled the Sun from my paralyzed fingers, tossed it over her shoulder and leaned toward me. Marion! I was shrieking silently. Help! Then the raven-haired girl beside me had her arms around my neck, and I simply did not know

what to do; I thought of pretending to faint, claiming sunstroke.

Then with the blinding force of a revelation it came to me. Through no fault of my own, I was in another world, another life. The girl in my arms-somehow that's where she was now-was singing softly, almost inaudibly. It took me a moment to recognize the tune; then finally I knew, finally I recognized this magnificent girl. "Just a Japanese Sand-man," she was singing softly through her lovely nose, and now I remembered fully everything about the alternate world I was in. I hadn't broken off with this girl at all-not in this particular world! Matter of fact, I suddenly realized, I'd never even met Marion in this world. It was even possible, it occurred to me now, that she'd never been born. In any case, this was the girl I'd married in this world. No denying it, this was my wife here beside me with her arms around my neck; we'd been married three years, in fact. And now I knew what to do-perfectly well. Oh, boy! What a wonderful time Vera and I had in the months that followed. My work at the office was easy-no strain at all. I seemed to have an aptitude for it and, just as I'd always suspected, I made rather more money at Enterprises, Incorporated, than that Serv-Eez outfit ever paid in their lives. More than once, too, I left the office early, since no one seemed to mind, just to hurry back home -leaping up the stairs three at a time-to that lovely big old Vera again. And at least once every week I'd bring home a load of books under my arm, because she loved to read, just like me; and I'd made a wonderful discovery about this alternate world.

Life, you understand, was different in its details. The San Francisco Giants had won the 'Fifty-eight Series, for example; the Second Avenue El was still up; Yucatan gum was the big favorite; television was good; and several extremely prominent people whose names would astound you were in jail. But basically the two worlds were much the same. Drugstores, for example, looked and smelled just about the same; and one night on the way home from work I stopped in at a big drugstore to look over the racks of paper-back books and made a marvelous discovery.

There on the revolving metal racks were the familiar rows of glossy little books, every one of which, judging from the covers, seemed to be about an abnormally well-developed girl. Turning the rack slowly I saw books by William Faulkner, Bernard Glemser, Agatha Christie, and Charles Einstein, which I'd read and liked. Then, down near the bottom of the rack my eye was caught by the words, "By Mark Twain." The cover showed an old side-wheeler steamboat, and the title was South From Cairo. A reprint fitted out with a new title, I thought, feeling annoyed; and I picked up the book to see just which of Mark Twain's it really was. I've read every book he wrote- Huckleberry Finn at least a dozen times since I discovered it when I was eleven years old.

But the text of this book was new to me. It seemed to be an account, told in the first person by a young man of twenty, of his application for a job on a Mississippi steamboat. And then, from the bottom of a page, a name leaped out at me. " 'Finn, sir,' I answered the captain," the text read, " 'but mostly they call me Huckleberry.' "

For a moment I just stood there in the drugstore with my mouth hanging open; then I turned the little book in my hands. On the back cover was a photograph of Mark Twain; the familiar shock of white hair, the mustache, that wise old face. But underneath this the brief familiar account of his life ended with saying that he had died in 1918 in Mill Valley, California. Mark Twain had lived eight years longer in this alternate world, and had written-well, I didn't yet know how many more books he had written in this wonderful world, but I knew I was going to find out. And my hand was trembling as I walked up to the cashier and gave her two bits for my priceless copy of South From Cairo.

I love reading in bed, and that night I read a good half of my new Mark Twain in bed with Vera, and then afterward-well, afterward she fixed me a nice cool Tom Collins. And oh, boy, this was the life all right.

In the weeks that followed-that lanky length of violet-eyed womanhood cuddled up beside me, singing

softly through her nose-I read a new novel by Ernest Hemingway; the best yet, I think. I read a serious, wonderfully good novel by James Thurber, and something else I'd been hoping to find for years-the sequel to a marvelous book called *Delilah*, by Marcus Goodrich. In fact, I read some of the best reading since Gutenberg kicked things off-a good deal of it aloud to Vera, who enjoyed it as much as I did. I read *Mistress Murder*, a hilarious detective story by George S. Kaufman; *The Queen Is Dead*, by George Bernard Shaw; *The Third Level*, a collection of short stories by someone or other I never heard of, but not too bad; a wonderful novel by Alien Marple; a group of fine stories about the advertising business by Alfred Eichler; a terrific play by Orson Welles; and a whole new volume of Sherlock Holmes stories by A. Conan Doyle.

For four or five months, as Vera rather aptly remarked, I thought, it was like a second honeymoon. I did all the wonderful little things, she said, that I used to do on our honeymoon and before we were married; I even thought up some new ones. And then-all of a sudden one night- I wanted to go to a nightclub.

All of a sudden I wanted to get out of the house in the evening, and do something else for a change. Vera was astonished-wanted to know what was the matter with me, which is typical of a woman. If you don't react precisely the same way day after day after endless day, they think something must be wrong with you. They'll even insist on it. I didn't want any black-cherry ice cream for desert, I told Vera one night at dinner. Why not, she wanted to know- which is idiotic if you stop to think about it. I didn't want any because I didn't want any, that's all! But being a woman she had to have a reason; so I said, "Because I don't like it."

"But of course you like it," she said. "You always used to like it!"

You see what I mean? Anyway, we did go to this nightclub, but it wasn't much fun. Vera got sleepy, and we left, and were home before twelve. Then she wasn't sleepy, but I was. Couple nights later I came home from the office and was changing my clothes; she said something or other, and I didn't hear her and didn't answer, and we actually had a little argument. She wanted to know why I always looked at every coin in my pocket, like an idiot, every time I changed clothes. I explained quietly enough; told her about the ad I used to read as a kid and how I was still looking for a 1913 Liberty-head nickel worth thousands of dollars, which was the truth.

But it wasn't the whole truth. As I looked through the coins I'd collected in my pocket during the day-the Woodrow Wilson dimes, the Grover Cleveland pennies, the nickels with George Coopernagel's profile, and all the other familiar coins of the world I now lived in-I understood something that had puzzled me once.

These other alternate worlds in which we also live intersect here and there-at a corner newsstand, for example, on Third Avenue in New York and at many another place, too, no doubt. And from these intersecting places every once in a while something from one of these worlds-a Woodrow Wilson dime, for example-will stray into another one. I'd found such a dime and when I happened to plank it down on the counter of that little newsstand, there at an intersection of the two alternate worlds, that dime bought a newspaper in the world it belonged in. And I walked off into that world with the *New York Sun* under my arm. I knew this now, and I'd known it long since. I understood it finally, but I didn't tell Vera. I simply told her I was looking for a 1913 Liberty-head nickel. I didn't tell her I was also looking for a Roosevelt dime.

I found one too. One night, finally, sure enough, there it lay in my palm; a dime with the profile of Franklin D. Roosevelt on its face. And when I slapped it down on the counter of the little newsstand next evening, there at the intersection of two alternate worlds, I was trembling. The man snatched up a paper, folding it as he handed it to me, and I tucked it under my arm and walked on for three or four steps, hardly daring to breathe. Then I opened the paper and looked at it. *New York World-Telegram*, the masthead read,

and I began to run-all the way to Forty-fourth Street, then east to First Avenue and then up three flights of stairs.

I could hardly talk I was so out of breath when I burst into the apartment, but I managed to gasp out the only word that mattered. "Marion!" I said and grabbed her to me, almost choking her, because my arms hit the back of her head about where Vera's shoulders would have been. But she managed to talk, struggling to break loose, her voice sort of muffled against my coat.

"Al!" she said. "What in the world is the matter with you?"

For her, of course, I'd been here last night and every night for the months and years past. And of course, back in this world, I remembered it, too, but dimly, mistily. I stepped back now and looked down at the marvelous tiny size of Marion, at that wonderful, petite figure, at her exquisite and fragile blond beauty. "Nothing's the matter with me," I said, grinning down at her. "It's just that I've got a beautiful wife and was in a hurry to get home to her. Anything wrong with that?"

There wasn't; not a thing, and-well, it's been wonderful, my life with Marion, ever since. It's an exciting life; we're out three and four nights a week, I guess-dancing, the theater, visiting friends, going to night clubs, having dinner out, even bowling. It's the way things used to be, as Marion has aptly said. In fact, she remarked recently, it's like a second honeymoon, and she's wonderfully happy these days and so am I.

Oh, sometimes I'm a little tired at night lately. There are times after a tough day at Serv-Eez when I'd almost rather stay home and read a good book; it's been quite a while since I did. But I don't worry about that. Because the other night, about two-thirty in the morning, just back from The Mirimba, standing at my dresser looking through the coins in my pocket, I found it-another Woodrow Wilson dime. You come across them every once in a while, I've noticed, if you just keep your eyes open; Wilson dimes, Ulysses Grant quarters, Coopernagel nickels. And I've got my Wilson dime safely tucked away, and-well, I'm sure Vera, that lithe-limbed creature, will be mighty glad to see her husband suddenly acting his old self once again. I imagine it'll be like a third honeymoon. Just as-this time-it will be for Marion.

So there you are, brother, coin collecting can be profitable. And fun too! Why don't you start-tonight!

End.

Taken from The best of Sci-Fi 5
Mayflower-Dell paperback 1966

Scanned by E-book_Worm. Nov 2002.