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THE WORLD SHE WANTED

by Philip K. Dick

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THE VISITORS

by

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym C. H. Liddell.

First published *Science Fiction Quarterly*, May 1953

Some visions might not be simple projections from within...

The trouble is with the words. The thing is that only an insane man could write this because it could happen only to an insane man. And the barrier is hard to get past. I mean the barrier that has been built up around the real me. I can think clearly, but I never know when the compulsion comes, and then the wrong words come out on the paper—

Or else I don't bother to write at all. I'm like a wheel spinning so fast the balance is precarious. I was pretty well educated before this psychosis clamped down; I know a lot of the catch-phrases. The doctor's aren't sure yet what's wrong with me. There's only a tentative prognosis. It might be catatonia or schizophrenia—

IT IS A MOST DEADLY HOPELESS TRAP

Stop. I must try to be coherent, anyway. I'm the only one who can discriminate between the hallucinations and the reality. *I* can tell the difference, but naturally I can't make anyone else see it. They slip in among my hallucinations, and masquerade as delusions themselves. Even I find it difficult at times. I haven't got the anchor of sanity to cling to. I know I'm insane—that is, I know it when I'm halfway rational. When I'm on the skids, there is only this whirling, prisoning hell of sheer blinding darkness...

I can't even write this in a conventional form. I want to write it upside-down and backwards, and like a pallimpsest, all over the paper. The psychiatrists like everything neatly arranged, but my mind *isn't* as neat as all that: I AM INSANE!

Case history: Roger Harmon, 38, white, unmarried, early neurotic and psychotic history—

Something like this is on my chart. I don't remember too much about the early days. I have been in a sanitarium before; I remember that there was something wrong even when I was a kid. Memories don't work quite right, especially since time itself has warped a bit to let The Visitors through.

The Visitors are not hallucinations; they are realities among my delusions. They came only lately. No one else can see or hear them; they are in tune with the vibrations of my brain. They explained it all quite clearly to me. They said I could tell the doctors if I wished; the doctors would listen sympathetically, and ask me questions, and not believe anything. Auditory and visual hallucinations. Lord knows I had enough of those to begin with.

I saw demons. They were so conventional that I always knew, somehow, that they weren't real, even when they told me I had sinned. I heard them first. That was long before The Visitors came. The Visitors, as I say, are quite real, and they came from another space-time continuum. They wanted to visit and observe our time-sector without being noticed themselves: they needed a contact. You'd think they'd want somebody like Einstein, but that isn't the way it works. They don't want our race to know about them. I can imagine why. An

animal won't act naturally if it knows it's being observed; perhaps The Visitors don't want humans to know they're being watched. Or there may be other reasons.

They are short, horrible deformed men with veined, huge heads. They never walk; they couldn't, on those legs. They can float. How they do it I don't know. Of course they're not in this exact time-space sector at all; they just maintain a contact with me somehow, partly through a mental bridge. Much that they tell me I can't understand. Their language is telepathy, though I often hear it as a sound; and it's so radically different in thought-concept from ours, that sometimes it seems like Mother Goose, and sometimes like advanced physics or metaphysics.

The words change and shift and I cannot set down what happened in coherent order I think that rat fat hat sat running funning dunning

NO

I have a compulsion to rhyme. Is that echolalia? I know a few of the phrases... I suppose I feel that if I occupy my mind with meaningless rhymed words it will stop The Visitors from coming, and the others—

The others were terrible, too. All my life I have felt something vaguely wrong; there were things I wanted to do, though I couldn't have told why. There was the time I collected handkerchiefs. Meaningless. One day there were voices in my room.

"Roger Harmon is going to the window," they whispered. "He is going to fall out of the window. No, he isn't, but when he goes downstairs he will stumble and break his neck. He knows too much to live. We'll see that he doesn't live."

That was an auditory hallucination.

I MUST... STOP...

All right. That was a fairly bad time. I know they weren't real, but they seemed so, brightly-colored bugs crawling up my pajamas... I had to scream once. The orderly came. I was afraid I'd go into a wet pack again, but I shut my eyes and let them crawl, and in a minute it stopped. Mike—the orderly—asked me what was wrong. I said it was all right now.

But he had orders to give me a sedative if I needed one. I am still under observation. The doctors haven't quite decided on the nature of my psychosis. The delusions of persecution incline them toward paranoia, but there are complicating factors. I believe I know what they are. In the beginning, I had an ordinary psychosis; but then The Visitors came and upset the apple-cart. The gyroscope of my mind is oscillating wildly.

And words, the only means of communication, are a deadly barrier. The Visitors are clever. They masquerade as hallucinations, and appear only to a man who has hallucinations already.

I have been resting quietly on the bed. I could feel movement in my head. But my muscles were relaxing. Colored lights swirled through the darkness between my temples. I feel more rational.

Looking back, as I can do now, I realize that those voices in my room were the beginning of the real trouble. Before that, of course, the seeds of the psychosis were germinating within me. Some are born with a dangerous hereditary factor; others are warped by the environment. I had both troubles. I cannot remember too much, and I don't like to try. It isn't pleasant. Besides, the important things happened after I was completely insane.

Yet there was no ... terror ... until The Visitors came. Until then, I had at least a certain elation to sustain me, mixed at times with a black depression that left me utterly miserable.

The voices continued. Sometimes they said they would protect me; at other times they threatened. And often they told me I had sinned, and must be punished.

I have sinned. I must have. I don't know why. I must make amends somehow. The voices still come—

There were tactile hallucinations finally. It was monstrous to touch glass and feel fur. It was monstrous to feel my skin coated with gelid, icy substance. And after they brought me here, for a while, they put something in my food. Foul things. The voices warned me of poison. I would not eat. Now they prepare my food separately and sterilize it, so I can eat again.

There was a blackness far back in my mind. I always knew when it came. It didn't come often. It was shapeless and alien and curious. It grew from nothing, in a direction I could not understand, and I always felt it would engulf me utterly. But it never did. It merely watched. I called it the Cloud, and wondered what it was. I could never feel or taste or smell it. Nor could I see it, exactly. It has not appeared for a long time now, though the other things never leave me. The voices are subdued when The Visitors appear...

This is the way it was. After I came to this place, there was a long period of baths and wet packs and a few times in the restraining jacket—which was terrible, because it was hard to breathe, and the bright bugs crawled over my face. I learned, after a while, to accept these things. I realized that I was handicapped. The normal reliefs of normal men were not for me; I was insane; I was damned. I came to accept that. In my rational periods, I accepted it as I would have accepted the loss of my legs, or a broken back. There is a wall, and I was on the wrong side of it. The world I loved, the world I wanted to be a part of, was on the other side of that wall and I couldn't climb it.

Perhaps the doctors can cure me. But I think I was damned before I was born.

So I stayed here, for a long time—or perhaps it was another sanitarium. They are much alike. The faces are identical, with the same look of wary, watchful, half-friendly alertness. The voices spoke to me, and occasionally the Cloud loomed up out of the mistiness in my mind, and grew, and sat watchful for a while, and dwindled and vanished. I was released, I think. There was a bright memory—but then the voices shouted, and panic caught at my throat, and I ran. Then I was here again, with a needle jabbing my arm as I screamed.

Then The Visitors came.

Insanity doesn't necessarily mean dulled perception. I was often able to regard life with a detached, critical viewpoint, because I wasn't really a part of it. Many of the patterns of civilization, I saw, were meaningless. There was a sort of organized chaos about the life I watched. Poverty and booms and wars and new inventions; and the solid, striving mass of humanity moving relentlessly forward to some unknown goal. I could see that something else was to come. Something different. Perhaps something better.

I had forgotten it would be something alien.

I felt Them probing. There was trouble in the sanitarium that night; a homicidal patient broke loose, in the violent ward. The sedative orders were doubled. It was the peak of a cycle, apparently. Really, it was The Visitors searching for a contact.

I was alone in my room. The door was closed and locked. I had been watching the glass panel, with its chicken-wire let into the glass, waiting for the doctor to make his rounds. Then I felt a funneling something slip into my head, move away, and come back. It swirled and dug and grew larger. For a moment, I thought it was the Cloud coming but—but the Cloud is a

shapeless, quiet, watchful mass that never troubles me. This troubled me. I felt a high, singing tension of excitement.

They came out of the warped distances and hung in the air before me. A clear darkness surrounded them; it wasn't exactly darkness, for I could see the walls of the room past them. There were three. They looked at me and I could see the knotted blue veins on those huge heads throbbing.

Their minds spoke.

"He is suitable. His intelligence is above average. His psychosis is acceptable."

I knew immediately that they weren't hallucinations. I got up to call the orderly. They made me lie down on the bed again. I opened my mouth to scream, but they froze my throat.

"We will not harm you."

I said, in my mind, "You're real. You're real. You're real."

"We are real. We will not harm you. We want to use you to—"

The voices shouted from the corners.

YOU HAVE SINNED YOU HAVE SINNED YOU HAVE SINNED—

I screamed and screamed.

The Visitors came back later, but it took time before I could talk with them coherently. Once the doctor came in while they were there, but they didn't move. He didn't notice them. After he had gone—

"Are you invisible?"

"We aren't entirely in your space-time plane, Roger Harmon."

"How do you know my name?"

"We do not. We think of *you*, and your mind translates that into sound-symbols acceptable to your ego-consciousness. You automatically choose the thought-concepts most familiar and understandable to you. Your very mode of thought is different from ours."

"What do you want with me?"

"To market, to market, to buy a fat pig—"

"What?"

They couldn't make it clear; it sounded like nonsense. I asked them where they came from.

"Over the hills and far away. Time. The future. But in another space and another plane of probability as well. We are studying your world."

"You'll see little of it from here. I hardly ever leave this room."

"That doesn't matter." The blue veins pulsed on their heads. "Physically you may have to stay in this room. But we do not. Your mind gives us the..." A word I could not understand. "... to enable us to reach out anywhere in your time sector. You are the catalyst."

Fingers touched me. A Thing, red and terrible, was climbing up out of the floor. It hated me. The voices laughed. I closed my eyes and shrieked. I went spinning whirling vortexing—

The bad time passed. Some time later, The Visitors came back.

"We are learning about your world."

"Why me? Why choose me?"

"You could not understand our plans. Your civilization stands at a crossroad. Great powers have been discovered. The planes of probability are shifting. This is important to us, who are of the possible future."

“But why choose me?”

“We needed a contact. Your world must not know of us.”

“Why?”

“We are too alien to be acceptable to your people. Alien to you. To your race. Listen. There are many probable futures. None knows which exist in a certain plane of reality. There are many planes of reality; there are variations of probability. We must search the past to find what is the true reality, and if necessary to change that past.”

I couldn't understand much of this. All I knew was that The Visitors were alien.

“You will not be harmed; your world will not be harmed. Any changes we may make will seem perfectly natural.”

“But what about me?”

“We need you. You are our contact.”

“I can't stand it. Take someone else.”

“No. No one will believe you if you talk about us. We must remain unknown to your people.”

“But you're horrible—”

They were horrible. That was because they were alien. I came to know that they were utterly different from humanity, much more so than even their monstrous appearance indicated. Their thoughts moved in different channels. Their bodies were different, and worked on a different plan. Their neural structure was completely different. I could feel the energy pouring out of them. The tension was unendurable. Always, after they had stayed for a while, I began screaming.

The doctors were still puzzled. They often questioned me. I told them about The Visitors, and they exchanged baffled glances.

“You've never seen these Visitors until lately?”

“No. No. I haven't.”

“Are they like that Cloud you mentioned?”

“The Cloud has been with me for years, off and on. It never bothers me.”

“Are they like the voices? Do they sound like the same voices?”

“No. The voices are bodiless. The Visitors talk without words, really. They told me you wouldn't believe in them.”

“Oh, I don't know about that. Suppose you tell me a bit more about—”

“YOU DAMNED LIAR YOU DON'T BELIEVE A WORD I'M SAYING FOR GOD'S SAKE—”

But the doctors tried to help. They were discouraged. Until The Visitors came they had been optimistic. They had planned metrazol shock treatment, I think, and they were sanguine about its success. But, The Visitors brought in a new factor, and threw the psychosis into a new and undiagnosed pattern.

For a while The Visitors stopped coming. They explained why, but I couldn't understand it. After that, there were only the voices, and then a few other nasty things. And the doctors *did* start shock treatment. It was violent, but it helped.

My mind cleared.

Time is warped. I don't remember how long that went on. But the doctors were less restrained when they talked to me, and I could feel new hope in the air.

But The Visitors came back. The Cloud didn't, but The Visitors did, one night when I was in an open ward. I had been moved there three days before...

"Further investigations."

"No. Go away. Please. I can't stand it."

"We won't harm you."

"You're doing it. I can feel the ... tension ... pouring out of you. It's tightening me up inside."

"Curious. He's ordinary homo sapiens, of course, but specially receptive due to the psychosis. The pineal and the thalamus ... absorbing our up the hill to get a pail of water Jack fell down—"

The words. I couldn't understand the words. They were thinking in abstract terms alien to me, and I translated them into my nearest equivalent—which was pure nonsense.

"Get out. Go away. Leave me alone. I can't stand this."

"This particular contact is necessary. We must maintain our energy quotient in order to keep in touch with your time-sector. You happen to be especially receptive. In fact, if you weren't, we couldn't use you."

"How long will you be here?"

"Many cycles. We are embarking on a thorough study of—"

"What's the matter, Roger?"

The orderly's voice.

"Nothing. They're back."

"Who's back?"

"The Visitors. They won't go away. GET THEM OUT OF HERE!"

"Nurse. Better take a look at Harmon here—"

"We won't harm you. We are at present extending along a mental dimension to study the sub-basic patterns of nonsense nonsense nonsense—"

"DAMN YOU GET AWAY FROM ME FOR GOD'S SAKE—"

I was back in solitary.

There was no hope.

I was insane. The wall had been erected to shut me out from humanity. The doctors had stopped looking hopeful. As long as my psychosis followed more-or-less conventional patterns, they could expect to cure me sometime. Catatonia, schizophrenia, those can yield to metrazol or electric shock.

But apply a jolting variable factor violently to the gyroscope, and it's quite impossible to get it back in balance and keep it running smoothly and steadily.

The Visitors didn't mean me any harm. I knew that. But their very presence was enough to keep me in a psychotic state. They were aliens. They were something that may evolve on Earth or something like Earth sometime in a possible future. I used to sit down and think of this tiny speck of light—this time and space and planet—and all the gigantic unknown surrounding it, peopled with Lord knows what.

And I was just one man, alone, and handicapped to start with.

Suddenly, one day, I realized that The Visitors were doing it on purpose. They didn't want me cured. As long as I was insane, they could appear to me at any time, and it wouldn't matter if I talked. But if I were sane, I might possibly convince somebody else of their reality.

Although if I *did* talk, under those circumstances, I knew damned well I'd land right back in a wet pack.

I tried not to think. I tried to sink down into a dull, quiet grayness, where not even the voices could reach me. They were back again, worse than ever. The Cloud hadn't appeared and I rather missed it; it was one of the hallucinations that never upset me.

The Visitors kept coming. I grew worse. The doctors examined me again, and I could tell that they had given up hope.

That night I lay on my bed crying a little. There was no way out, I knew. I could already feel that singing tension beginning inside my head, and I knew The Visitors were coming. I was alone, utterly and completely alone. No one knows loneliness except the insane.

They came.

I begged them to leave me—for a while, anyway. They looked at me out of their cold eyes. The veins on their heads throbbed bluely.

“How long will he live?”

“Long enough.”

“I don't want to live,” I said. “I want to die; I'd rather be dead. You bring back everything—all the stuff that used to bother me. The voices. The taste in my food. I'm afraid to move. I can feel it, right now, that something that pours out of you. Maybe it's what keeps you alive. But I'm not built to stand it. Let me die.”

“You are unimportant. You are a useful tool—”

Very small and dim, far back in my mind, the Cloud started to come. I was glad. I hadn't felt the Cloud for months now. Not since The Visitors came. The familiar, swirling, smooth motion expanded within my head, and suddenly there was the Cloud, watchful as ever. The same Cloud that had been with me, from time to time, for years now. It was like an old friend.

Something happened then. There was a movement among The Visitors. I felt...

“What is this? Answer me! What is this?”

“It's the Cloud. I'm glad...”

But the Cloud was growing. It was all inside my head. Or, at least, I could see it only inside my head. Everything got vague and confused, and the voices began screaming from the walls.

And—

“The Cloud? What does he mean? I can feel—”

The Cloud grew. The Visitors shifted and swayed.

YOU FOOLS THIS MAN IS MINE!

My voice. No, the Cloud's voice. But the Cloud couldn't speak, could it?

The Visitors were screaming.

“We weren't the first! We weren't the first!”

They were going insane. The Cloud was all around them. I was shouting. The orderly was unlocking the door. Nurses were coming in.

They didn't see The Cloud. They didn't see The Visitors. But I saw. I SAW!

I knew. The Cloud had been using me, too, just as The Visitors had. But it hadn't harmed me. It was much wiser than The Visitors, and much more advanced. It didn't need to harm me to use me as a contact.

And it was far more alien than The Visitors. Alien even to them. It touched them, with its strange energies out of an unthinkable distant time and space and probability, and The Visitors

went insane as I watched, and screamed and were lost in a direction I could not follow or understand.

They could not harm me. I belonged to the Cloud. It guarded its property.

I heard the voices thundering from the walls. I felt ice crawl up my body. I smelled strange perfumes, and there was a new taste on my tongue and the Cloud filled the room and the hospital and the world and infinity beyond it and downswirling into white darkness beyond and far and not returning ever and ever—

Last week I was discharged, cured, from the sanitarium. The treatment took many months, but finally the board pronounced me sane, saner, *I* knew, than I had ever been. I do not think there will be any relapse.

They said they had cured me. The metrazol shock had jolted me back to sanity—that, and the other therapy. Fair enough. The Visitors never returned, at least. How could they?

As for the Cloud—

Like the Visitors, it had come out of space and time and probability to investigate this world. But it was more alien than The Visitors, and more powerful. Powerful enough to make me...

The Cloud, for its own obscure purposes, is an observer—

I have been pronounced sane; I walk in this world, and watch men build the future. But I know I am not sane. I gave the right answers to the psychiatrists; my reactions were those of a normal man. But they weren't *my* reactions. It wasn't I who gave the answers; it was someone else. Something else. It was because

BECAUSE

BECAUSE

BECAUSE

hard to write the truth hard to get past this barrier in my mind

And to make myself understood because my real self is still submerged under the shadow, the ether, the ombre the vapor the cumulus the

No. Pretending to be me pretending to be cured while the real me is helpless and still

UNDER THE

CLOUD

CLOUD

CLOUD

[The end of *The Visitors* by Henry Kuttner (as C. H. Liddell)]