



YOU COULD not blame me for being bitter. I work hard and I work all day; and when I came home that night, my wife was sitting on the sofa. She had been swimming in the lake, and she wore only a skimpy bathing suit which showed to best advantage the ivory fire of her young body.

A man was sitting with her, dressed in a pair of bathing shorts. His arms were around her. Her arms were around him.

I did not know the man.

I only knew that I wished he—wasn't. If he *wasn't*, then I could be happy with my wife. I'd be playing a game, it would be pretense, but I would be happy. *If* he wasn't; an intriguing idea.

Gloria got up, brushing her hair back with her hands. She said, "Don't make a scene, Gerald."

I smiled. "It was you who made the scene."

"Gerald, I didn't know you were coming."

"Oh. Oh, I see. That makes everything fine; you thought it would be all right if you did this behind my back. Strumpet—"

ENNUI

Pure fantasy, of course, but you must admit that it's quite logical, if you grant the basic premise . . .

By MILTON LESSER

The man stood up. He was bigger than I, taller, wider, stronger. "Don't get nasty," he said.

I wanted to get nasty. "You just shut up and leave this to my wife and me."

He didn't want to shut up. He told me it was his business, too—and I must have raised my hands as if to fight, because he hit me. It was a good solid blow on the side of the head, and I sat down hard. It took a while to focus my eyes, and when I did, he was standing over me, hands on hips, waiting for me to get up.

I did not get up. Now, in earnest, I wished he wasn't. This would be the ideal time to put into practice my theoretical thinking. I slid further back along the floor, and Gloria began to laugh. She told me I looked like seven different varieties of a worm.

I pointed my finger at the man. I said, "You don't exist."

Gloria screamed. "Phil!" she cried. "Phil! Where did he go so fast? He just disappeared..."

2

I WAS A theoretical solipsist long before that night in which I became a practical, practising solipsist.



Ennui

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2

WAS A theoretical solipsist long before that night in which I became a practical, practising solipsist. The idea is one with which nearly everyone toys at one time or another. You've done it yourself: you've thought — what if no one else exists, what if no one else really exists, what if I'm the only being in existence with an awareness of that existence? Everyone else, everything else is just a figment of my imagination, a plaything, an unreality created for my amusement. People, places, the car I drive in— everything. History, even history. It never happened. The records were there only for my amusement, like all else, phantom shadows in a phantom world, meaningless except where I would give them meaning.

You couldn't disprove it; if you wanted, it would keep gnawing at you all the time, because it was not a theory you could disprove. Of course everyone else would pretend, would make believe that he existed, too. He had to — it was for your amusement. But he was an automaton, less than an automaton. Your mind gave him a shadow of reality, and you could take it away any time you wanted.

I took it away for the first time that night. I told the man, Phil — who had been making love to my wife — that he did not exist. That particular segment of my imagination had grown odious, and I did not want it any more.

Phil disappeared; he was never heard from again.

Gloria never questioned it. She's a figment of my imagination which is beautiful, but not too bright. Phil had run out when she wasn't looking, she reasoned; the fact that she had been looking all the time did not disturb her — she took Phil's abrupt disappearance as a matter of course.

I didn't. It had opened a new world for me. There were many theoretical solipsists in the world, but I was the only practising solipsist. The reason for that was simple. I, alone, had real existence. The world was my plaything.

A week later, I made Tom Nugent disappear. I wanted his job at the brokerage firm, but he was a good man and his job was not one for the taking — unless he did not have it anymore. I told him he did not exist.

He did not.

Two weeks later, the boss was convinced that Tom had left town for one reason or another; I got the job.

Soon after that, Gloria began to bore me. Perhaps I had married her because it had been a challenge — there wasn't another woman in the city as beautiful as Gloria, as desirous. If I could keep her in the face of that, I'd have power.

Now the challenge was gone, and the power; if Gloria had another lover, I would make him disappear. I would see him and he would not exist. Just like that. I suddenly did not give a damn about Gloria. As a matter of fact, I might have more fun filling the role of the now non-existing Phil. But Gloria would object; Gloria was that not too-uncommon female who is on the one hand possessive, and on the other, a born maker of cuckolds.

"Gloria." I asked her one night, "do you have any other lovers?"

She shook her head. "Won't you please forget about Phil? It won't happen again."

“I know,” I said. “That particular episode won’t happen again, because Phil does not exist.”

A little sob escaped her throat, before she could stop it. “Oh! Is Phil dead?”

It was the same thing; I told her he was dead.

Even if I were bored with her, I still could admire her acting ability. The tears were brimming in her eyes, but they did not spilt. She said she hoped no one would be unhappy.

I was bored. I yawned, and Gloria suggested that we go to bed. In that respect, she had been a well trained little none-entity. She had suggested exactly what I would have wanted — last night or the night before. Or a year ago. I did not want it now.

“Gloria,” I said, “would you like a divorce?”

She blanched. “My gosh, no; what would I want a divorce for?”

“I don’t give a damn,” I told her. “You see, my dear— I want a divorce.”

She got up and walked up and down for a few minutes. I watched the smooth liquid motion of that which, without any challenge, had come to bore me. “I won’t give you a divorce,” she said; “there are no grounds, anyway.”

“There is Phil,” I reminded her.

She laughed. “Phil is dead. You said so, Gerald. Your word against mine now — and there are no grounds.”

I sighed.

I felt no recriminations. I had given her the way out — if she had wanted to take it. The fact that she did not, was none of my doing; besides, as an unreal being, she did not matter one way or the other.

In the outmoded theories, every existing item has two things. It has essence and quiddity. Or, put into more simple terms, it has whatness and thatness. Gloria, along with

everyone else, had whatness. She had an essence. But she lacked thatness — she had no quiddity.

I told her she did not exist. And as a mere essence creature with nothing of quid — she stopped existing, abruptly and painlessly. One moment Gloria was, the next, she wasn't.

3

THIS HAD unfortunate repercussions. It caused the death — I suppose it is the equivalent of death, you take away the quiddity and you take away all that is really important — of nearly every pretty girl in the vicinity. You see, I lacked one thing which, Phil had — I lacked his charm; so the girls spurned me. When they spurned me, I took their existence away. They had no right to spurn me, and thus did not merit their quiddity.

After a while, I became bored with the whole idea, anyway; what did a woman have to offer but the pleasures of the flesh? And are the pleasures of the flesh alone significant? That was silly, and, with some effort, I could show it to mankind.

I willed woman out of existence. All women. Everything that was human and at the same time female. Don't misunderstand — I did not hate women; I was just bored, and I wanted to show the world there was more to life.

I became aware of my oversight later. With no women there could be no reproduction, and I had, in effect, destroyed the human race. Then, I had to smile. What did it matter? They did not really exist. I alone existed, and from the very nature of my existence, alone in all the world, I was an inferred immortal. The destruction of a means of reproduction would be quite meaningless to me.

And meanwhile, I was amused by the situation. I don't know how many men went insane those first few days; suddenly, without reason, without explanation, all their

womenfolk were taken away. They ceased to exist. The human race was now uni-sexual — and it had only a limited number of years left, anyway.

Scientists tried to figure it out, but they got nowhere. Over one billion people — all female, suddenly disappeared. No one saw another female again, any place, any time; the scientists were stumped.

But some of the cultists had a holiday. We had been living the life of flesh and sin too long, and now we were being punished. Oh, this was not said by the true religions — they had no answer, and, like the scientists, they merely told us that God, in his infinite wisdom, did what was best. The scientists closed up shop and went home. At that point, perhaps sooner, they had begun to bore me— and I willed them out of existence. Every scientist. Every last one. And you'd be surprised to learn that that can take in a lot of people. With women gone, no one noticed the disappearance of the scientists as a unit.

4

IT IS AN odd paradox. I could destroy but I could not recreate, and, having destroyed, I wanted to repent. But there was no way I could recreate women.

The whole world, as a consequence, bored me. I went home that night and I got drunk; then I willed the world out of existence. All of it; all, of course, but me. I floated off into the void, and the sun had only eight planets.

My body became cumbersome. I just floated. I willed my body out of existence — it was only a figment of my imagination, anyway. Then I could travel at the speed of thought itself — I could leave that laggard, light, far far behind.

But first I had a job to do. I looked at Mercury. Scorched on one side, frozen on the other, it was dead. Venus was a world of swamps — primitive, uninteresting life. Mars had an old and a dead culture, a dying world now. Nothing beyond —

The solar system of eight planets bored me. I willed it out of existence.

The sun looked all alone. I destroyed it.

The Centauri double-star system was even worse. No life there at all, not even planets. I past it by in a huff, putting an end to its useless existence.

On a planet circling Deneb, hundreds of light years away, I found humanoid life. It was easy to will an essence-without-quiddity out of existence and take over its body. I did, but unfortunately, I did not know the ways of this world. They adjudged me insane and they put me in what I suppose was an asylum for the insane. It was interesting at first, but after a time, I became bored with it.

I destroyed it.

They became angry, and they marshalled all sorts of weapons against me. I destroyed the weapons. They became very angry indeed, but it was a meaningless, impotent anger.

I grew restless.

I destroyed them. Destroyed their world. Deneb seemed alone, as the sun had seemed. I destroyed Deneb.

Actually, I was amazed to find how many lifeless star systems there were, and how unsatisfying those that had life could be. I began to think that all this creation for my benefit had been a serious mistake. It could be rectified, of course; I willed the galaxy out of existence.

5

EVEN AT THE speed of thought — which is infinitely faster than the speed of light — it took time to reach the Andromeda galaxy, and more time to prove what I had thought would be the case all along. Some things there were a novelty but there was nothing which, after a time, did not bore me.

The Andromeda galaxy ceased to be.

I can't say how long it took me to Explore the nearest five hundred galaxies. Time ceased to have meaning for me. I was bored and restless, and nothing which I saw satisfied me. One galaxy after another, I willed them out of existence.

The universe was as disappointing as the earth had been. If only I could start over, from scratch...

There was the awful paradox, I could destroy but I could not create — and I was bored...

6

IN A FIT OF anger, I willed the entire universe out of existence. I was fed up. If there was nothing which could satisfy me, there was no point in all this foolish existence, I snuffed it out. I snuffed everything out.

I floated alone in space, a bodiless entity, all alone in an infinite sea of empty space. How monotonous...

I tried to create. I concentrated. My bodiless mind was tortured with the effort. I could not fashion one single hydrogen atom, not one atom to amuse me. It really did not matter. Soon it would have bored me.

There is nothing I can do, and everywhere I go, it is the same. Emptiness. For a time, I turned inside and explored my mind and found it interesting. Only for a time.

It became — boring. Nothing here for me, nothing to hold my interest.

I am not worthy of existence if I cannot hold my own interest.

This, surely, is as far as solipsism can go. Perhaps I, myself, am merely an idea in my mind, an idea with no real existence. But that does not seem possible. If I were an idea in my mind, then I would need a mind to have that idea. Then perhaps there would be an idea above that mind, and a mind above the new idea. It is hopeless...

Or David Hume could have had the answer. I am merely a collocation of ideas, with no real existence. Nothing exists. Everything which used to exist had been my idea, and I destroyed it. I destroyed it all because it bored me.

All that is left is me, and I am merely a collocation of ideas, with no real existence. A bundle of impulses, of less than impulses. That is, perhaps, the greatest joke of all. I destroyed everything because nothing pleased me — and now I find that my egoism was unwarranted, since I do not have real existence.

I float in emptiness, with nothing to do, and I am weary. I am horribly, terribly, endlessly bored. I must find the answer.

If I were to will myself out of existence, and if I ceased to exist, then I would know the final answer. Only nothingness, having no existence to begin with, is real. Quiddity is meaningless. Then, if I cease to exist, I'll know the answer. But I would not know it, because I would not be...

But I am bored and I must try it. Now...