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Other Times, Other Places

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Stepping out into the deserted street, Camden tugged at his hat brim and started across the plaza. The man standing on the corner stared at him as he passed and turned to watch his progress down the street. Camden thought perhaps it was a former customer until the man suddenly dashed into a video-booth. Shrugging and thinking how strangely spring affected some people, Camden continued on his way. The two sleek women, fashionable in their new metallic dresses, stopped their conversation as he approached. Looks of disgust tightened the flat planes of their faces, and they drew back against the building as he went by them.

“What can be the matter,” he wondered, furtively feeling of his zippers and then touching his collar and tie. No, nothing seemed amiss. He hurried to the curved modern shop front and tried to examine his image in the plastic of the molded window. As nearly as he could tell in the distorted reflection his appearance was unchanged. The short, plump silhouette of the businessman of 2154 A.D. seemed the same as ever. Perhaps a trifle too short and too plump, but after all that was the current trend. Everything seemed in order, but running his hand across his broad, perspiring forehead he gave a slight shudder. What could it be that had caused the two incidents, and why had they unnerved him so? “Better get home and calm down,” he thought.

He stepped to the curb and hailed a passing jetaxi, but as he started to open the door the driver stopped him. “Wait a minute, you. I don’t want any trouble; you’ll have to find some other cab. Go on! I’m not getting mixed up in this.” And a trail of vapor marked his departure. Camden stood amazed, his hand still extended in the air, as he watched the misty streak fade in the soft twilight of the April afternoon. Perplexed, he started once more walking along the avenue, but now the cold tide of panic was rising in his chest.

The group of boys at the curb didn’t seem to notice him at first. Then one suddenly pointed and said something to the others. Spreading out along the sidewalk they jeered as he passed and suddenly he knew! It was impossible, unbelievable, and yet it must be true. That
would explain everything, the man's startled look, the women's disgust, the cab driver's aversion. As his pace increased, something hit him on the shoulder, and he began to run.

Turning the corner, his breath coming in gasps, he nearly ran into the uniformed Constab just getting out of the automobile at the curb. "Look Sedal; there he is now!" the officer exclaimed, pointing at Camden. The other Constab glanced up and dashed around the front of the vehicle to cut off any possible escape. Slowly and carefully they approached, talking in low soothing voices that made Camden's flesh crawl.

"There now, we won't hurt you. How did you get off the reservation anyhow? No reports have come down from the Center yet; if someone hadn't called in, there's no telling what trouble you might have gotten into. Easy there, come along quietly and you won't be hurt. It's just for your own good." Strong hands gripped his arms, and Camden wept.

* * * * *

Rolling over in bed, Camden swore as he threw back the perspiration soaked sheet. "Gashi! What a dream!" he murmured as he flicked the switch for the morning news telecast and readjusted the air conditioning control; "It must be hell to be white.

Advice ...

Timbrel!
Cymbal!
Trumpet blast!
A shallow joy.

Wooing
Harp string!
Viaticum last.
So late my boy.

... Sherwood Snyder

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