

The strangers

Autor(en): **Anthony, Alan**

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THE STRANGERS

By Alan Anthony

A young man walked down the street in the late night fog. The fog had crept in from the ocean a couple of hours before he quit work in the restaurant parking lot where he was an attendant. Patches of it were so thick he felt as though he could touch it. It transformed the street into a dramatic, mysterious avenue, making him feel as though there were nothing in the whole city except him, the fog, and an occasional car passing. Until suddenly, he noticed the figure of a man standing in front of the lighted window of an art gallery. As the boy approached the gallery the man turned sideways and faced him. As he turned, the boy noticed the man's brown wavy hair, then the pipe that he was smoking. Then for the one second that their eyes met, he was aware of the man's commanding brown eyes. In the half second after their eyes parted, in the half second after he had passed, a fire cracker of recognition popped in the boy's head. The brown eyes: they were large and dark, and comprehending. He had met those eyes before.

He wasn't more than a foot past the man, yet somehow it seemed too late, or too impossible, to turn around and say, «Hello, Bob.» Perhaps he was too dazed to greet the man; perhaps he thought the man should greet him.

The boy continued down the street. A minute later the man began following, or possibly just walking down the street, heading for a destination that had been interrupted by a glance into the lighted window. For two blocks they walked, the man always several yards behind the boy. The boy could hear the steps behind him, but he never turned around or slowed his pace. He came to the traffic light on the intersecting boulevard and started across, but the light turned red. He waited on the curb for it to change, and as he waited the man caught up with him. He glanced at the boy, ignored the red signal, and crossed the boulevard and went into a bar on the corner.

As the man crossed the boulevard the boy watched him closely, straining his eyes through the fog to distinguish his features. «He's younger, he's better looking,» were his immediate observations. His hair seemed wavier; perhaps the damp fog made it that way. He noticed the pipe again, and marked the white buckskin shoes he was wearing. He remembered thinking it was somewhat unusual for a man in his thirties to wear white buckskins. But this man was in his late twenties. Still, it was unusual for a man out of college to wear buckskins. But what did that matter, anyway?

The boy crossed the street and sat down on a bench to await the streetcar. «Strangers meet, pause, and part, and still remain strangers,» he reflected. A month before, when college was just out for the summer, before he got the job of parking attendant, he went to a beach club to see about a job as a waiter. The interview had been in the evening, after bus service to the beach slackened, so the boy hitch-hiked back into the city. On his second ride, a stranger with whom he was to pause stopped for him.

He and the stranger talked about the pink crescent moon, the sound of the waves on the beach, and a recent movie. The man drove the boy home, and went with him to his room. It was when they turned on the light that the boy noticed that the man had large, dark brown, knowing eyes. Eyes that seemed to say, «I know. I realize. I am aware of the things I see.»

He had asked the man to stay longer, but he seemed to be in a hurry. «Work day tomorrow. You know how it is,» he said as he filled a pipe with tobacco.

The man had put on his hat and opened the door when the boy said, «My name is Kenneth. What is yours?»

«Bob,» the man replied, and the two shook hands.

«See you again, Ken,» he said as he went out the door.

The rickety streetcar was clanging down the boulevard. The boy was standing, waiting for it to near, when the man came out of the bar. He stood for a minute on the corner, and even through the fog the boy was sure he saw him glance in the direction of the car stop. But he turned around and walked down the boulevard, in the opposite direction. The boy watched him move away through the clouds of fog. He was taller, thinner, and more dashing. But there was the pipe, the white buckskins. And he knew that if he looked into his face there would be those large, deep brown knowing eyes.

The rattletrap streetcar stopped for the boy. He boarded and hastily deposited his fare, and ran to the window and peered out. He saw the man getting into a green Nash Rambler. The boy parked Nash Ramblers almost every day in the parking lot—green, tan, and blue ones. But he had never been inside of one until a month ago, when he hitch-hiked home from the beach. That Rambler was green, and he had remarked to the driver that it was a nice color.

The streetcar ambled down the boulevard in a straight line. The Nash Rambler turned a corner. The strangers were going in different directions, and the fog was moving farther into the city.

WHAT'S NEW IN SODOM?

You could have been in almost any of the half-dozen gay bars in Chicago on last New Year's Eve, and noticed no difference at all in the attitudes of the clientele. There was the usual amount of drunkenness, an occasional popping of a champagne bottle (domestic), a few sentimental renderings of 'Auld Lang Syne', and then the New Year came in much the same as always.

In one of the places, however, a tall lanky guy turned to a fluttery little companion as midnight struck, and grinned and said, «Well, we're legal now.»

«What d'yuh mean?»

The tall one shifted on the stool. «I mean,» he said, «that homosexuality is no longer a crime in Illinois, provided you're both over 18, and not forced into it, and do it in private—between consenting adults, in other words.»

«Oh, honestogod?» shrieked the fluttery one, and leaning over, kissed the tall one on the lips and groped him, thereby achieving the questionable distinction of being the first one to break the new relaxed Illinois code, which among other things says: «Thou shalt not lewdly fondle nor caress the body of another person of the same sex in public.»

The changes in the completely rewritten Illinois criminal code were known by a few persons as far back as September, 1961, but the information was perhaps the best-guarded secret of all time in Illinois. Those who through their lawyer friends or from other sources learned of the new code's omission of penalties for 'deviate' sexual conduct simply kept quiet about the whole affair. It