

Why Can't Other People See Mr. Minchell?

Mr. Minchell stared at the glass (mirror), put out his hand, drew it back hastily.

He squinted. Inches away. There was a form now: vague, indistinct, featureless: but a form.

Now he understood why the elevator girl hadn't seen him, and why F.J. (Minchell's employer F. J. Diemel) hadn't answered him, and why the clerk at the drugstore and the bartender and Madge...

"I'm not dead."

"Of course, you're not dead – not that way."

" – tan your hide Jimmy Minchell, when he gets home."

Mr. Minchell suddenly wheeled and clicked the lock. He rushed out of the steam-filled bathroom, across the room, down the stairs, into the street, into the cool night.

A block from home, he slowed to a walk.

Invisible! He said the word over and over, in a half-voice. He said it and tried to control the panic that pulled at his legs, and at his brain, and filled him.

Why?

He walked on. As he did, forgotten things returned; they came and they left, too fast. He couldn't hold onto them.

He could only watch and remember. Himself, as a youngster, reading: the Oz books, and Tarzan, and Mr. Wells. Himself, going to the University, wanting to teach, and meeting Madge; then not planning anymore, and Madge changing, and all the dreams put away. For later. For the right time. And then Jimmy – little strange Jimmy, who ate filth and picked his nose and watched television, who never read books, never; Jimmy, his son, whom he would never understand...

He walked by the edge of the park now. Then on past the park, through a maze of familiar and unfamiliar neighborhoods. Walking, remembering, looking at the people and feeling pain because he knew that they could not see him, not now or ever again, because he had vanished. He walked and remembered and felt pain.

All the stagnant dreams came back. Fully. The trip to Italy he'd planned. The open sports car. The first-hand knowledge that would tell him whether he did or did not approve of bull-fighting. The book...

Then something occurred to him. It occurred to Mr. Minchell that he had not just suddenly vanished, like that, after all. No; he had been vanishing gradually for a long while. Every time he said good morning to that Diemel, he got a little harder to see. Every time he put on this

horrible suit he faded. The process of disappearing was set in action every time he brought his paycheck home and turned it over to Madge, every time he kissed her, or listened to her vicious unending complaints, or decided against buying that novel, or punched the adding machine (calculator) he hated so, or...

Excerpted from "The Vanishing American" by Charles Beaumont, 1957.
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