

## The Pest

When asked "How are you," boring people reply with a detailed story. If you tell them to stop by sometime they do. These folks take everything literally.

Eugene was boring.

Susan and I belonged to a different category. We were cultured, socially useful, and engaging.

Though Eugene and I rented flats on the same floor, the lifelines on the palms of our hands were drawn in opposite directions. That is why his appearance on my threshold was unexplainable. It happened on one beautiful morning at 10:00 a.m.

Eugene told me that his electric shaver was broken. "I would use yours," he said, "but it is not for me to decide." I took him to the bathroom and placed my shaver in front of him. Then I went to the kitchen to try to write an essay. The difficulty was to try to come up with the first phrase. The electric buzz coming from the bathroom prevented my every attempt to concentrate.

Out of frustration I decided to eat. As I was pouring coffee, I heard Eugene behind me. "Would you like some?" I asked.

"It is not my decision," replied my neighbor. I moved a tall ceramic cup and everything else on the table closer to him.

He ate quickly in complete silence. In five minutes he finished everything including the sugar and bread. Then he picked up the newspaper and began to read. Something struck him funny, and he laughed.

I went into the living room to try to concentrate on my first phrase. I could hear him turning pages, overturning cups and dropping plates on the floor. I did not care about the broken china, but I was sorry for the time wasted so far.

Eugene felt sorry too. He apologized for the broken plates. I said, "It's nothing." He agreed with me.

My neighbor was content. He shaved, ate breakfast, and read the newspaper from the beginning to the end. Now he wanted to talk. He wanted someone to listen to him.

And talk he did! I found out about his job and how he lost it, the world news report and how to clean Vodka with permanganate natrium.

At that point, he stopped and lit a cigarette. We did not speak.

I watched the fiery circle move closer and closer to his lips. A column of ash was getting longer and longer. Eventually it became too long and fell. First it fell on his shoe and then rolled onto my carpet. For a few moments our eyes focused on the gray ash.

Eugene got up from the couch and shoved his hands in his pockets. His pants stretched tight across his emaciated ass. Now he decided to talk about women.

There were two women in his life. With one he felt good either with or without her; the other was bad to be with and worse to be without. After discussing his love life, he remarked about his friends, gossiped about relatives, and on and on and on.

Susan came home at 5:00. "Good evening," said Susan.

"It is!" agreed Eugene. (It certainly was a good evening!)

Susan was surprised at this strange greeting, the smoke, the ashes on the floor, the broken plates and me in the corner with no signs of life. It all looked strange, but Susan was polite.

"What's up?" asked Susan. He started from the beginning. He liked it when people were interested in him, but Susan was wearing an absent-minded mask and did not listen. Eugene lost interest and said, "See you later," and left. I knew he meant what he said.

Eugene left at five. Guests arrived at eight. They were nice people. They did not overturn cups, break plates, and did not talk about their relatives. They were talented and unique, and had original ideas and good taste.

Susan entertained the guests with singing, accompanying herself on the grand piano. She had a beautiful voice, almost mezzo soprano.

In the middle of her performance, the phone rang. Someone answered and after he hung up said, "It was Eugene. He's staying with you tonight."

Our guests were not only educated and talented, but they were also human. They could not possibly have fun when friends were in danger. Each of them tried to come up with the best excuse for us, but I did not want to lie and neither did Susan. She warned me that if Eugene spent one night in our apartment, it would not be easy to get rid of him.

We realized that we should keep him out at all costs. Suddenly, the doorbell rang. Susan quickly turned off the light. Everyone became very quiet. We decided to pretend that we were not at home.

In the meantime, Eugene put his thumb on the buzzer in case we did not hear. This agony lasted a few long minutes, then it was quiet again. Everything has its end, even Eugene.

"He left. . ." whispered Susan. I peeked outside. Eugene was

sitting on the floor next to the elevator. He took everything literally. If the owners are not home, they will come back. His face was sad and surprised at the same time. Next to him was a carton with a cake inside.

Four hours went by. The room was dark. We were silent. We could hear the refrigerator humming in the kitchen and the tick tock of someone's watch. Susan was sleeping on the sofa. She, like an astronaut, could sleep anywhere in and any position under any circumstances.

Others were trying to make use of chairs, armchairs and other articles of furniture.

Once again I found myself staring out the window still searching for that first phrase for my essay. But more than anything else, I wanted someone to ask me, "How are you?" Then I could tell them about myself and my guests who come not to see me, but come to my house because they have nowhere else to go. I could tell about my love that ended, and now that it has ended, looks as if it had never happened at all.

However, my guests were people with proper manners. No one asked questions. Ahead of us was a long night, and morning was far away.

Eugene was peacefully sleeping by the elevator. . .