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The Harvest

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THE HARVEST

BY ANNE IRGENS

The first thing I saw was faces of strangers. There was a boy of ten or twelve with a dirty face, several men either middle-aged or older dressed in working clothes, and a number of women all wearing dark, worn and out-of-style dresses. Each person in the group seemed to be searching for something as he or she mingled and moved about, only a few feet away from me.

I was enclosed in what resembled a telephone booth; it was a transparent plastic case, with frame supports. For a few moments it kept the group away, but it was not strong enough to hold when some of the people began pressing towards me. Their hands broke through the transparent casing, first one and then another. I could see their outstretched fingers reaching in toward my body, and their faces pressed against the casing. I shrank back as I felt their touch.

Fingers reached through the wall and nails dug into my skin. They picked at my body; I sensed rather than felt the tearing of my flesh. Their hands came in and picked like all hands that have a farmer's or a housewife's job to do, when shucking corn or pitting cherries. They came with earnestness and were not malicious or cruel.

The door of the booth opened then and I had room to move. I knew I must look at my body to see what they had done, to know what I was. I moved my arm into my range of vision. It was no longer an arm, but a skeleton, a skeleton arm and hand that somehow obeyed me.

Several older women brought me out from the casing. As they moved me I saw I had just emerged from a telephone booth, and seemed to be on a street corner of a large city. Beyond the curb, many cars flashed by, and a policeman stood in the middle of the thoroughfare.

Other people such as I, that had no flesh on their bones, were lying in a small heap on the corner. I could see a woman's mauve dress and her fleshless legs protruding from underneath her dress. She still wore shoes; she did not move. People were milling about searching among the bodies and picking at them.

My head was lowered somewhat, and I had the sensation that I was hanging from a rope fastened to the top of my head. Faces looked down at me. Their interest quickened and some began to pick at my head. I felt—it was soft, gentle—someone cut away both of my ears. They picked away my skin on my face, and then my hair. A fear suddenly seized me: they might take my eyes. In the next instant I saw fingers reaching toward my eyes and I could not move. Suddenly it was done but I could still see. Nothing had changed.

A newer power seemed to be born within me. I realized that I was no longer tied to my body. With arms that did not exist—that I could not see—I pulled my head out of my skull. I was free.

There on my knees on the pavement I felt naked at first. Only one woman turned her head as if she saw me. Her mouth was half open, strands of her greying hair fell in front of her ears. My freedom seemed to make no difference to her. I looked back at my head. It was only a white skull now, and somehow I knew it had been dead a long time and its eyes had become sightless long before.
