

A Box to Hide In

I WAITED till the large woman with the awful hat took up her sack of groceries and went out, peering at the tomatoes and lettuce on her way. The clerk asked me what mine was.

“Have you got a box,” I asked, “a large box? I want a box to hide in.”

“You want a box?” he asked.

“I want a box to hide in,” I said.

“Whatta you mean?” he said. “You mean a big box?”

I said I meant a big box, big enough to hold me.

“I haven’t got any boxes,” he said. “Only cartons that cans come in.”

I tried several other groceries and none of them had a box big enough for me to hide in. There was nothing for it but to face life out. I didn’t feel strong, and I’d had this overpowering desire to hide in a box for a long time.

“Whatta you mean you want to hide in this box?” one grocer asked me.

“It’s a form of escape,” I told him, “hiding in a box. It circumscribes your worries and the range of your anguish. You don’t see people, either.”

“How in the hell do you eat when you’re in this box?” asked the grocer. “How in the hell do you get anything to eat?” I said I had never been in a box and didn’t know, but that that would take care of itself.

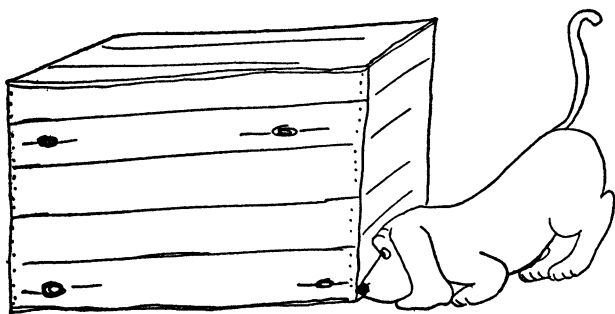
“Well,” he said, finally, “I haven’t got any boxes, only some pasteboard cartons that cans come in.”

It was the same every place. I gave up when it got dark and the groceries closed, and hid in my room again. I turned out the light and lay on the bed. You feel better when it gets dark. I could have hid in a closet, I suppose, but people are always opening doors. Somebody would find you in a closet. They would be startled and you’d have to tell them why you were in the closet. Nobody pays any attention to a big box lying on the floor. You could stay in it for days and nobody’d think to look in it, not even the cleaning-woman.

My cleaning-woman came the next morning and woke me up. I was still feeling bad. I asked her if she knew where I could get a large box.

“How big a box you want?” she asked.

“I want a box big enough for me to get inside of,” I said. She looked at me with big, dim eyes. There’s something wrong with her glands. She’s awful but she has a big heart, which makes it worse. She’s unbearable, her husband is sick and her children are sick and she is sick too. I got to thinking how pleasant it would be if I were in a box now, and didn’t have to see her. I would be in a box right there in the room and she wouldn’t know. I wondered if you have a desire to bark or laugh when someone who doesn’t know walks by the



box you are in. Maybe she would have a spell with her heart, if I did that, and would die right there. The officers and the elevatorman and Mr. Gramadge would find us. “Funny dog-gone thing happened at the building last night,” the doorman would say to his wife. “I let in this woman to clean up 10-F and she never come out, see? She’s never there more’n an hour, but she never come out, see? So when it got to be time for me to go off duty, why I says to Crennick, who was on the elevator, I says what the hell you suppose has happened to that woman cleans 10-F? He says he didn’t know; he says he never seen her after he took her up. So I spoke to Mr. Gramadge about it. ‘I’m sorry to bother you, Mr. Gramadge,’

I says, 'but there's something funny about that woman cleans 10-F.' So I told him. So he said we better have a look and we all three goes up and knocks on the door and rings the bell, see, and nobody answers so he said we'd have to walk in so Crennick opened the door and we walked in and here was this woman cleans the apartment dead as a herring on the floor and the gentleman that lives there was in a box." . . .

The cleaning-woman kept looking at me. It was hard to realize she wasn't dead. "It's a form of escape," I murmured. "What say?" she asked, dully.

"You don't know of any large packing boxes, do you?" I asked.

"No, I don't," she said.

I haven't found one yet, but I still have this overpowering urge to hide in a box. Maybe it will go away, maybe I'll be all right. Maybe it will get worse. It's hard to say.