

## Prologue

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a trace or a special effect. I have at least a physical referent. I have bone and flesh and sinew and gristle. I have angers and passions. The problem is my intellect. People have a hard time seeing past it. They see my body as if it were just an effect of my mind, a magic-lantern projection, an image cast on a screen by a bright burning bulb. I am invisible, then, not because of some accident of biology, some genetic mishap, but because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of the people who look at me. They can't see the machinery in the darkness behind the bulb. Perhaps it is because the pupils in their eyes have narrowed to tiny points (the light is so very bright) and so they cannot focus beyond into the darkness.

Although it is often inconvenient and trying, I have learned to adapt to my peculiar circumstances. For although I remain invisible, some people believe they can get a pretty good image of who I am by getting me to respond to words. I suppose they fancy that they know me by what I say. My words become me, I suit them. I am a sort of sounding board, people bounce words off me and by what comes echoing back to them they know where I stand. People find me by a process of echo-location, and by where I stand they determine who I am. I am my own radar image.

I suppose this would not be so bad but that I often feel the need to move around, and so the echoes which bounce back might only show my position as it was. Then some people even accuse me of throwing my voice, of standing where I'm not. And they hurl streams of words at me in an attempt to find me. But this is only because they won't see my body. I can't help it if my mind wanders and throws off their words, sending them bouncing back from places my body won't, or can't, follow. It gets so I'm not sure where I stand myself, bumped and jostled in the eddies, whirlpools and undertows of this noisy current, awash in turbulence like a sneaker in a laundromat washer.

Before I learned the advantages of being invisible, before I knew how to get around in this jetstream, I would often bump up against people who, surprised at being bumped

and jostled by an invisible man, would cry out and shove me. I cannot blame them, when you think you know where someone stands, of course you get angry when they turn out to be somewhere else and you trip over them as you go about your business.

So I've taken to staying down here in my office. It's a basement office and I keep it dark and undecorated. Instead, I've filled it with radios and television sets, piled up on each other haphazardly, all tuned to different stations. University Power Inc. pays the bill, as well they should. I keep all the sets quiet. It throws off University power and I like the constant murmuring. They keep me in contact, I can keep track of things that way. I send out a constant stream of echoes so people know I'm still around, and they can monitor my progress. I said I like my office dark and that might seem strange, an invisible man liking darkness. But it is too much light that gets me in trouble. When things seem too clear, too well lit up, that's when people fancy they can pin-point my location. When the light burns brightest that's when it's hardest to slip away, keep moving, re-positioning.

But the light shines both ways. It's a double projector. The brightness also gives me tunnel-vision and I fancy that I have people well spotted; I believe I've found an audience for my words and I establish my position too firmly, forgetting that I'm invisible. That's when people start tripping over me and swearing.

I have to keep moving.

I know. I can hear you say "what irresponsibility, what laziness. Take a stand! Hold your ground, damn you!" Well I could not agree more. I am irresponsible. My irresponsibility is part of my invisibility. How can I take a stand without recognition? Responsibility rests upon recognition and recognition is a form of agreement. And how can I find common ground in this shifting, tumbling, jumbling stream? Just staying current is all I can do to keep my head above water.

But how did my face become just a trace? Bear with me.