

STORY: INFESTATION

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PARANOIA

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Anecdote Editor
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With no warning from my receptionist the door opened and a slight, hesitant little man, fortyish, an obvious hayseed but freshly scrubbed and neat as a pin, entered, looked furtively backward along the hallway, and carefully closed the door. He presented a desperate prototypic stare and ill-disguised anxiety as he cautiously sat down on the edge of a chair. Before I could say good afternoon he blurted, "Doc, I got little live buggers coming outa me all over!" I assumed what I hoped was a receptive, understanding countenance, pushed back my chair to reaching distance of the phone and tried my darndest to recall the city ambulance number, "I'll show ya, Doc," and he produced a crumpled sack from which he drew three mayonnaise jars in succession and carefully lined them up on my desk. In none were the contents reassuring. In the first, toilet tissue, obviously not fresh, in another a jumbled mass of spotted white adhesive plaster, in the third a non-descript grayish solution with bits of black particulate matter floating on the surface. "Doc, they're all colors and shapes, these buggers, they pop outa my skin anywhere and they itch like crazy!" Like crazy was indeed my diagnosis on the spot as I very studiously inspected each jar. I don't exactly recall my mumblings of assurance that we would set to work and find out about all this, but I quickly collected the jars and ducked out across the hall to my lab. After a deep breath and lighting up a cigarette I cogitated on effective means of getting a man suffering such delusions and hallucination through a crowded waiting room and into safe custody. For some unexplained reason I turned first to the rather revolting mess in the jars, and, more with morbid than intellectual curiosity, emptied the contents from the adhesive tape sample onto filter paper. I placed the lot on a microstage, and peered through to examine what I expected to be fragments of twigs, gravel, hair and whatnot as it appeared grossly. When the first tiny object came into low-power focus I was thunderstruck! Beautiful varicolored crystals shimmering along the entire dorsum of an oblong brownish shape, at one extremity of which I saw something slowly, but most certainly - move! I was almost fearful and flicked the knob of the stage only to encounter a hoary, threatening prehistoric beast, unmistakably alive and silently opening and closing pincer jaws. On to the next, entirely different, a long black sluglike amorphous mass, but alive!

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Well, the nice little farmhand did indeed have a problem, and had devised his own NIH swab to identify it, and had made the simple interpretation that the beasties were emanating from rather than burrowing into his skin. The very alert pathologist in our office building laughed and commented, "Sure, arachnids at various developmental stages. I've even seen them removed at cystoscopy in an infested hermit type who bathed only once a cocn's age." Well, it was still news to me, and a lesson in observation and diagnosis I shan't soon forget! DDT did the trick!

Henry W. Blackburn, M. D.