

Amazing Story · *Stephen Dobyns*

Disease of the spirit, disease of the mind—
a man is bored, terribly bored. All day
he works at a gravel pit separating
white stones from black stones. There are too many
white stones. The man feels ready to explode.
Here a stone, there a stone. One day a kid
rips by on a motorcycle, hits a patch
of oil and flips over right at the man's feet.
The kid is pretty badly smashed. He groans
and rolls around on the ground. He's in
great pain. No one else saw the accident.
The man starts to call an ambulance, then
stops to watch the kid a little longer,
moaning and twisting on the ground. You see,
he was so bored. Help me, says the kid.
In a minute, says the man. He thinks, Here
is a real life and death struggle. The kid
is bleeding from a hundred places. The man
has never seen a movie half so interesting.
He drags the kid off the road and goes back
to separating the stones. In just a moment,
I'll call an ambulance, he thinks. But he can't
bring himself to do it. This is the real stuff,
he thinks, this is what life is all about.
Time flies. In the evening after work, the man
drags the kid to his house in a wagon.
His wife is shocked. You brute, she says, he's
almost dead. All day she's been painting her nails.
She's nearly crazy with boredom. Don't call
the ambulance just yet, she says, let's see
what he does. They put him on a plastic sheet
on the living room floor. Both legs are broken.
His body's a wreck, his face is a mess
and he's missing an eye. It's fascinating,
says the wife. She serves dinner and they eat

on little TV trays on either side of the kid.
All evening they watch him bleed. That night
for the first time in months they make love.
In the morning the kid is dead. Oh damn,
says the wife, just when life was picking up.
The man sticks the kid back in the wagon
and drags him to the gravel pit. He tries
to think of all the interesting things
you can do with a corpse. By now the kid's
stiff as a board and sits straight up in the wagon.
The man thinks and thinks. Just like in the comics,
a huge question mark forms above his head.
It looks like half a mushroom shaped cloud.
Although facing each other, he and the kid
resemble bookends—maybe Rodin's *Thinker*,
maybe the monkey holding the human skull.
Between them appears the obligatory book.
Let's call it, *The Amazing Story of Mankind*.
Who can understand it? With a comparable
intelligence, the dead kid and living man
gaze at its covers, wondering what's inside.