

## Hyperpilosity

**"WE ALL KNOW** about the brilliant successes in the arts and sciences, but, if you knew all their stories, you might find that some of the failures were really interesting."

It was Pat Weiss speaking. The beer had given out, and Carl Vandercook had gone out to get some more. Pat, having cornered all the chips in sight, was leaning back and emitting vast clouds of smoke.

"That means," I said, "that you've got a story coming. Okay, spill it. The poker can wait."

"Only don't stop in the middle and say 'That reminds me,' and go off on another story, and from the middle of that to another, and so on," put in Hannibal Snyder.

Pat cocked an eye at Hannibal. "Listen, mug, I haven't digressed once in the last three stories I've told. If you can tell a story better, go to it. Ever hear of J. Roman Oliveira?" he said, not waiting, I noticed, to give Hannibal a chance to take him up. He continued:

"Carl's been talking a lot about that new gadget of his, and no doubt it will make him famous if he ever finishes it. And Carl usually finishes what he sets out to do. My friend Oliveira finished what he set out to do, also, and it should have made him famous, but it didn't. Scientifically his work was a success, and deserving of the highest praise, but humanly it was a failure. That's

why he's now running a little college down in Texas. He still does good work, and gets articles in the journals, but it's not what he had every reason to suspect that he deserved. Just got a letter from him the other day—it seems he's now a proud grandfather. That reminds me of my grandfather—"

"Hey!" roared Hannibal.

Pat said, "Huh? Oh, I see. Sorry. I won't do it again." He went on:

"I first knew J. Roman when I was a mere student at the Medical Center and he was a professor of virology. The J in his name stands for Haysos, spelled J-e-s-u-s, which is a perfectly good Mexican name. But he'd been so much kidded about it in the States that he preferred to go by 'Roman.'

"You remember that the Great Change, which is what this story has to do with, started in the winter of 1971, with that awful flu epidemic. Oliveira came down with it. I went around to see him to get an assignment, and found him perched on a pile of pillows and wearing the godawfullest pink and green pajamas. His wife was reading to him in Spanish.

"'Leesten, Pat,' he said when I came in, 'I know you're a worthy esstudent, but I weesh you and the whole damn virology class were roasting on the hottest greedle in Hell. Tell me what you want, and then go away and let me die in peace.'

"I got my information, and was just going, when his doctor came in—old Fogarty, who used to lecture on sinuses. He'd given up general practice long before, but he was so scared of losing a good virologist that he was handling Oliveira's case himself.

"'Stick around, sonny,' he said to me when I started to follow Mrs. Oliveira out, 'and learn a little practical medicine. I've always thought it a mistake that we haven't a class to train doctors in bedside manners. Now observe how I do it. I smile at Oliveira here, but I don't act so damned cheerful that he'd find death a welcome relief from my company. That's a mistake some young doctors make. Notice that I walk up briskly, and not as

if I were afraid my patient was liable to fall in pieces at the slightest jar . . . ' and so on.

"The fun came when he put the end of his stethoscope on Oliveira's chest.

"'Can't hear a damn thing,' he snorted. 'Or rather, you've got so much hair that all I can hear is the ends of it scraping on the diaphragm. May have to shave it. But say, isn't that rather unusual for a Mexican?'

"'You're jolly well right she ees,' retorted the sufferer. 'Like most natives of my beautiful Mejico, I am of mostly Eendian descent, and Eendians are of Mongoloid race, and so have little body hair. It's all come out in the last week.'

"'That's funny . . . ' Fogarty said. I spoke up: 'Say, Dr. Fogarty, it's more than that. I had my flu a month ago, and the same thing's been happening to me. I've always felt like a sissy because of not having any hair on my torso to speak of, and now I've got a crop that's almost long enough to braid. I didn't think anything special about it . . . '

"I don't remember what was said next, because we all talked at once. But when we got calmed down there didn't seem to be anything we could do without some systematic investigation, and I promised Fogarty to come around to his place so he could look me over.

"I did, the next day, but he didn't find anything except a lot of hair. He took samples of everything he could think of, of course. I'd given up wearing underwear because it itched, and anyway the hair was *warm* enough to make it unnecessary, even in a New York January.

"The next thing I heard was a week later, when Oliveira returned to his classes, and told me that Fogarty had caught the flu. Oliveira had been making observations on the old boy's thorax, and found that he, too, had begun to grow body hair at an unprecedented rate.

"Then my girl friend—not the present missus; I hadn't met her yet—overcame her embarrassment enough to ask me whether I could explain how it was that *she* was getting hairy. I could see that the poor girl

was pretty badly cut up about it, because obviously her chances of catching a good man would be reduced by her growing a pelt like a bear or a gorilla. I wasn't able to enlighten her, but told her that, if it was any comfort, a lot of other people were suffering from the same thing.

"Then we heard that Fogarty had died. He was a good egg and we were sorry, but he'd led a pretty full life, and you couldn't say that he was cut off in his prime.

"Oliveira called me to his office. 'Pat,' he said, 'You were looking for a chob last fall, ees it not? Well, I need an asseestant. We're going to find out about this hair beesiness. Are you on?' I was.

"We started by examining all the clinical cases. Everybody who had, or had had, the flu was growing hair. And it was a severe winter, and it looked as though everybody was going to have the flu sooner or later.

"Just about that time I had a bright idea. I looked up all the cosmetic companies that made depilatories, and socked what little money I had into their stock. I was sorry later, but I'll come to that.

"Roman Oliveira was a glutton for work, and with the hours he made me keep I began to have uneasy visions of flunking out. But the fact that my girl friend had become so self-conscious about her hair that she wouldn't go out any more saved me some time.

"We worked and worked over our guinea pigs and rats, but didn't get anywhere. Oliveira got a bunch of hairless Chihuahua dogs and tried assorted gunks on them, but nothing happened. He even got a pair of East African sand rats—*Heterocephalus*—hideous-looking things—but that was a blank, too.

"Then the business got into the papers. I noticed a little article in *The New York Times*, on an inside page. A week later there was a full-column story on page 1 of the second part. Then it was on the front page. It was mostly 'Dr. So-and-so says he thinks this nationwide attack of hyperpilosity' (swell word, huh? Wish I could

remember the name of the doc who invented it) 'is due to this, that, or the other thing.'

"Our usual February dance had to be called off because almost none of the students could get their girls to go. Attendance at the movie houses had fallen off pretty badly for much the same reason. It was a cinch to get a good seat, even if you arrived around 8:00 P.M. I noticed one funny little item in the paper to the effect that the filming of 'Tarzan and the Octopus Men' had been called off because the actors were supposed to go running around in G-strings, and the company found they had to clip and shave the whole cast all over every few days if they didn't want their fur to show.

"It was fun to ride on a bus about ten o'clock and watch the people, who were pretty well bundled up. Most of them scratched, and those who were too well-bred to scratch just squirmed and looked unhappy.

"Next I read that applications for marriage licenses had fallen off so that three clerks were able to handle the entire business for Greater New York, including Yonkers, which had just been incorporated into the Bronx.

"I was gratified to see that my cosmetic stock were going up nicely. I tried to get my roommate, Bert Kasket, to get in on them too. But he just smiled mysteriously, and said he had other plans. Bert was a kind of professional pessimist. 'Pat,' he said. 'Maybe you and Oliveira will lick this business, and maybe not. I'm betting that you won't. If I win, the stocks that I've bought will be doing famously long after your depilatories are forgotten.'

"As you know, people were pretty excited about the plague. But when the weather began to get warm the fun really started. First the four big underwear companies ceased operations, one after another. Two of them were placed in receivership, another liquidated completely, and the fourth was able to pull through by switching to the manufacture of tablecloths and American flags. The bottom dropped entirely out of the cotton market, as this alleged hair-growing flu had spread all over the world by now. Congress had been

planning to go home early, and was, as usual, being urged to do so by the conservative newspapers. But now Washington was jammed with cotton planters demanding that the Government *do something*, and they didn't dare. The Government was willing enough to Do Something, but unfortunately didn't have the foggiest idea of how to go about it.

"All this time Oliveira, more or less assisted by me, was working night and day on the problem, but we didn't seem to have any better luck than the Government.

"You couldn't hear anything on the radio in the building where I lived, because of the interference from the big, powerful electric clippers that everybody had installed and kept going all the time.

"It's an ill wind, as the prophet saith, and Bert Kafket got some good out of it. His girl, whom he had been pursuing for some years, had been making a good salary as a model at Josephine Lyon's exclusive dress establishment on Fifth Avenue, and she had been leading Bert a dance. But now all of a sudden the Lyon place folded up, as nobody seemed to be buying any clothes, and the girl was only too glad to take Bert as her lawful wedded husband. Not much hair was grown on the women's faces, fortunately for them, or God knows what would have become of the race. Bert and I flipped a coin to see which of us should move, and I won.

"Congress finally passed a bill setting up a reward of a million dollars for whoever should find a permanent cure for hyperpilosity, and then adjourned, having, as usual, left a flock of important bills not acted upon.

"When the weather became really hot in June, all the men quit wearing shirts, as their pelts covered them quite as effectively. The police force kicked so about having to wear their regular uniforms, that they were allowed to go around in dark blue polo shirts and shorts. But pretty soon they were rolling up their shirts and sticking them in the pockets of their shorts. It wasn't long before the rest of the male population of the United States was doing likewise. In growing hair the

human race hadn't lost any of its capacity to sweat, and you'd pass out with the heat if you tried to walk anywhere on a hot day with any amount of clothes on. I can still remember holding on to a hydrant at Third Avenue and 60th Street and trying not to faint, with the sweat pouring out the ankles of my pants and the buildings going round and round. After that I was sensible and stripped down to shorts like everyone else.

"In July Natasha, the gorilla in the Bronx Zoo, escaped from her cage and wandered around the park for hours before anyone noticed her. The zoo visitors all thought she was merely an unusually ugly member of their own species.

"If the hair played hob with the textile and clothing businesses generally, the market for silk simply disappeared. Stockings were just quaint things that our ancestors had worn, like cocked hats and periwigs.

"Neither Oliveira nor I took any vacation that summer, as we were working like fury on the hair problem. Roman promised me a cut of the reward when and if he won it.

"But we didn't get anywhere at all during the summer. When classes started we had to slow down a bit on the research, as I was in my last year, and Oliveira had to teach. But we kept at it as best we could.

"It was funny to read the editorials in the papers. The *Chicago Tribune* even suspected a Red plot. You can imagine the time that the cartoonists for the *New Yorker* and *Esquire* had.

"With the drop in the price of cotton, the South was really flat on its back this time. I remember when the Harwick bill was introduced in Congress, to require every citizen over the age of five to be clipped at least once a week. A bunch of Southerners were back of it, of course. When that was defeated, largely on the argument of unconstitutionality, the you-alls put forward one requiring every person to be clipped before he'd be allowed to cross a state line. The theory was that human hair is a commodity, which it is sometimes, and that crossing a state line with a coat of the stuff, whether

your own or someone else's, constituted interstate commerce, and brought you under control of the Federal Government. It looked for a while as though it would pass, but the Southerners finally accepted a substitute bill requiring all Federal employees, and cadets at the military and naval academies to be clipped.

"About this time—in the autumn of 1971—the cotton and textile interest got out a big advertising campaign to promote clipping. They had slogans, such as 'Don't be a Hairy Apel!' and pictures of a couple of male swimmers, one with hair and the other without, and a pretty girl turning in disgust from the hirsute swimmer and fairly pouncing on the clipped one.

"I don't know how much good their campaign would have done, but they overplayed their hand. They, and all the clothing outfits, tried to insist on boiled shirts, not only for evening wear, but for daytime as well. I never thought a long-suffering people would really revolt against the tyrant Style, but we did. The thing that really tore it was the inauguration of President Passavant. There was an unusually warm January thaw that year, and the President, the V. P., and all the Justices of the Supreme Court appeared without a stitch on above the waist and damn little below.

"We became a nation of confirmed near-nudists, just as did everybody else sooner or later. The one drawback to real nudism was the fact that, unlike the marsupials, man hasn't any natural pockets. So we compromised between the hair, and the need for something to hold fountain pens, money, and so forth, and our traditional ideas of modesty by adopting an up-to-date version of the Scottish sporran.

"The winter was a bad one for flu, and everybody who hadn't caught it the preceding winter got it now, so soon a hairless person became such a rarity that one wondered if the poor fellow had the mange.

"In May of 1972 we finally began to get somewhere. Oliveira had the bright idea—which both of us ought to have thought of sooner—of examining ectogenic babies. Up to now nobody had noticed that they began to de-

velop hair a little later than babies born the normal way. You remember that human ectogenesis was just beginning to be worked about then; test-tube babies aren't yet practical for large-scale production by a long shot, but we'll get there some day.

"Well, Oliveira found that if the ectogens were subjected to a really rigid quarantine, they never developed hair at all, at least not in more than the normal quantities. By really rigid quarantine, I mean that the air they breathed was heated to 800 degrees C, and then liquefied, and run through a battery of cyclones, and washed with a dozen disinfectants. Their food was treated in a comparable manner. I don't quite see how the poor little fellows survived such unholy sanitation, but they did, and didn't grow hair—until they were brought in contact with other human beings, or were injected with sera from the blood of hairy babies.

"Oliveira figured out that the cause of the hyperpilosity was what he'd suspected all along: another of these damned self-perpetuating protein molecules. As you know, you can't see a protein molecule, and you can't do much with it chemically because, if you do, it forthwith ceases to be a protein molecule. We have their structure worked out pretty well now, but it's been a slow process with lots of inferences from inadequate data; sometimes the inferences were right and sometimes they weren't.

"But to do much in the way of detailed analysis of the things you need a respectable quantity of them, and these that we were after didn't exist in even a respectable amount. Then Oliveira worked out his method of counting them. The reputation he made from that method is about the only permanent thing he got out of all this work.

"When we applied the method, we found something decidedly screwy—an ectogen's virus count after catching hyperpil was the same as it had been before. That didn't seem right: we knew that he had been injected with hyperpil molecules, and had come out with a fine mattress as a result.

"Then one morning I found Oliveira at his desk looking like a medieval monk who had just seen a vision after a forty-days' fast. (Incidentally, you try fasting that long and you'll see visions too, lots of 'em.) He said, 'Pat, don't buy a yacht with your share of that meelion. They cost too much to upkeep.'

"'Huh?' was the brightest remark I could think of.

"'Look here,' he said, going up to the blackboard. It was covered with chalk diagrams of protein molecules. 'We have three proteins, alpha, beta, and gamma. No alphas have exeeded for thousands of years. Now, you will note that the only defference between the alpha and the beta is that these nitrogens—' he pointed '—are hooked onto *thees* chain instead of that one. You will also observe, from the energy relations wreeten down here, that, if one beta is eentroduced eento a set of alphas, all the alphas will presently turn into betas.

"'Now, we know now that all sorts of protein molecules are being assembled inside us all the time; most of them are unstable and break up again, or are inert and harmless, or lack the power of self-reproduction—anyway, nothing happens because of them. But, because they are so beeg and complicated, the possible forms they take are very many, and it is possible that once in a long time some new kind of protein appears with self-reproducing qualities; in other words, a virus. Probably that's how the various disease viruses got started, all because something chogged an ordinary protein molecule that was chust being feenished and got the nitrogens hooked on the wrong chains.

"'My idea is thees: The alpha protein, which I have reconstructed from what we know about its descendants beta and gamma, once exeeded as a harmless and inert protein molecule in the human body. Then one day somebody heecupped as one of them was being formed, and presto! We have a beta. But the beta is not harmless: It reproduces itself fast, and it inheebits the growth of hair on most of our bodies. So presently all our species, wheech at the time was pretty apish, catch this virus, and lose their hair. Moreover, it is one of the viruses

that is transmitted to the embryo, so the new babies don't have hair, either.

"Well, our ancestors sheever a while, and then learn to cover themselves with animal skins to keep warm, and also to keep fire. And so, the march of civilizations it is commence! Chust theenk—except for that one original beta protein molecule, we should probably today all be merely a kind of gorea or cheempanzee—anyway, an ordinary anthropoid ape.

"Now, I feegure that what has happened is that another change in the form of the molecule has taken place, changing it from beta to gamma—and gamma is a harmless and inert leetle fellow, like alpha. So we are back where we started.

"Our problem, yours and mine, is to find how to turn the gammas with wheech we are all swarming back into betas. In other words, now that we have become all of a sudden cured of the disease that was endemic in the whole race for thousands of years, we want our disease back again. And I theenk I see how it can be done."

"I couldn't get much more out of him; he went to work harder than ever. After several weeks he announced that he was ready to experiment on himself; his method consisted of a combination of a number of drugs—one of them was the standard cure for glanders in horses, as I recall—and a high-frequency electromagnetic fever.

"I wasn't very keen about it, because I'd gotten to like the fellow, and that awful dose he was going to give himself looked enough to kill a regiment. But he went right ahead.

"Well, it nearly did kill him. But after three days he was more or less back to normal, and was whooping at the discovery that the hair on his limbs and body was rapidly falling out. In a couple of weeks he had no more hair than you'd expect a Mexican professor of virology to have.

"But then our real surprise came, and it wasn't a pleasant one!

"We expected to be more or less swamped by public-

ity, and had made our preparations accordingly. I remember staring into Oliveira's face for a full minute and then reassuring him that he had trimmed his mustache to exact symmetry, and getting him to straighten my new necktie.

"Our epoch-making announcement dug up two personal calls from bored reporters, a couple of phone interviews from science editors, and not one photographer! We did make the science section of the *New York Times*, but with only about twelve lines of type—the paper merely stated that Professor Oliveira and his assistant—not named—had found the cause and cure of hyperpilosity; not a word about the possible effects of the discovery.

"Our contracts with the Medical Center prohibited us from exploiting our discovery commercially, but we expected that plenty of other people would be quick to do so as soon as the method was made public. But it didn't happen. In fact, we might have discovered a correlation between temperature and the pitch of the bullfrog's croak for all the splash we made.

"A week later Oliveira and I talked to the department head, Wheelock, about the discovery. Oliveira wanted him to use his influence to get a dehairing clinic set up. But Wheelock couldn't see it.

"We've had a couple of inquiries," he admitted, "but nothing to get excited about. Remember the rush there was when Zimmerman's cancer treatment came out? Well, there's been nothing like that. In fact, I—ah—doubt whether I personally should care to undergo your treatment, surefire though it may be, Doctor Oliveira. I'm not in the least disparaging the remarkable piece of work you've done. But—ah'—here he ran his fingers through the hair on his chest, which was over six inches long, thick, and a beautiful silky white—"you know, I've gotten rather fond of the old pelt, and I'd feel slightly indecent back in my bare skin. Also, it's a lot more economical than a suit of clothes. And—ah—if I may say so with due modesty—I don't think it's bad-looking. My family has always ridden me about my

sloppy clothes, but now the laugh's on them; not one of them can show a coat of fur like mine!

"Oliveira and I left sagging in the breeches a bit. We inquired of people we knew, and wrote letters to a number of them, asking what they thought of the idea of undergoing the Oliveira treatment. A few said they might if enough others did, but most of them responded in much the same vein that Doc Wheelock had; they'd gotten used to their hair, and saw no good reason for going back to their former glabrous state.

"So, Pat," said Oliviera to me, "it lukes as though we don't get much fame out of our discovery. But we may steel salvage a leetle fortune. You remember that meelion-dollar reward? I sent in my application as soon as I recovered from my treatment and we should hear from the government any day."

"We did. I was up at his apartment, and we were talking about nothing in particular, when Mrs. O. rushed in with the letter, squeaking, 'Abre la! Open eet, Roman!'

"He opened it without hurry, spread the sheet of paper out, and read it. Then he frowned and read it again. Then he laid it down, very carefully took out and lit the wrong end of a cork-tipped cigarette, and said in his levellest voice, 'I have been stupid again, Pat. I never thought that there might be a time-leemit on that reward offer. Now it seems that some crafty *sanamabiche* in Congress poot one een, so that the offer expired on May first. You remember, I mailed the claim on the nineteenth, and they got it on the twenty-first, three weeks too late!'

"I looked at Oliveira, and he looked at me and then at his wife, and she looked at him and then went without a word to the cabinet and got out two large bottles of *tequilla* and three tumblers.

"Oliveira pulled up three chairs around a little table, and settled with a sigh in one of them. 'Pat,' he said, 'I may not have a meelion dollars, but I have something more valuable by far—a woman who knows what is needed at a time like thees!'

“And that’s the inside story of the Great Change, or at least of one aspect thereof. That’s how it happens that, when we today speak of a platinum-blonde movie star, we aren’t referring to her scalp hair alone, but the beautiful silvery pelt that covers her from crown to ankle.

“There was just one more incident. Bert Kasket had me up to his place to dinner a few nights later. After I had told him and his wife about Oliveira’s and my troubles, he asked how I had made out on that depilatory-manufacturer stock I’d bought. ‘I notice those stocks are back about where they started from before the Change,’ he added.

“‘Didn’t make anything to speak of,’ I told him. ‘About the time they started to slide down from their peak, I was too busy working for Roman to pay much attention to them. When I finally did look them up I was just able to unload with a few cents’ profit per share. How did you do on those stocks you were so mysterious about last year?’

“‘Maybe you noticed my new car as you came in?’ asked Bert with a grin. ‘That’s them. Or rather, it; there was only one, Jones and Galloway Company.’

“‘What do Jones and Galloway make? I never heard of them.’

“‘They make’—here Bert’s grin looked as if it were going to run around his head and meet behind—‘curry-combs!’

“And that was that. Here’s Carl with the beer now. It’s your deal, isn’t it, Hannibal?”