

BAD LUCK PENNY

By Ray Gunn

The gritty street was rainbow slick with old gasoline and oil from the heavy traffic.

Kennedy stood at the corner waiting for the light to turn, trying to be eager to get to work, but failing. Cars and delivery trucks whooshed by on their cushions of air. The neon lights of advertisements filtered through the drizzle of rain harsh multi-hued glows pricking his eyes. He tried to think about the upcoming election, concerning himself with who he would vote for in an attempt to get his mind off of what really troubled him. The air-brakes of a city bus blew a warm gust in his face that would have been a relief from the damp if it weren't for the rank stink of it.

Kennedy watched a young white man push a dark-skinned woman with an armful of groceries out of the way. Tomatoes the size of softballs spilled out of the bag, red rolling into the street and drawing his attention to the crosswalk signal.

The little white man appeared in the metal box and he joined the throng shuffling to the other side. He stopped. Curses were muttered as the others pushed past. He bent down and picked up the penny.

He was an avid collector of lucky pennies. He'd found one and bumped his future wife when he stood up. He'd caught one falling through the air and stopped it from hitting his boss who gave him the promotion. One had stuck to his shoe the day he found out his wife was pregnant. Today he needed a bit of luck to stave off the pink slips they were handing out at the office.

He held it up to his scrutinizing eyes as he stood between the white walkway lines and marveled at the face embossed on its copper face. President Lincoln plain as day. Nothing unusual there.

Except he had never seen a penny with President Lincoln's face in a profile scream. Like the moment the man had been shot was forever captured in metal.

With one hand Kennedy held the coin, the other stroked his lip with a thumb, leaving a tang behind for his tongue to lick away.

"Hmm," he said to the empty walkway. "This is probably worth a fortune."

Perhaps his prayers had been answered and he wouldn't have to worry about pink slips. Behind him a car backfired and in the same instant a pain surged through the back of his head. He was flying.

While he was examining the penny, the light had turned green. The bus driver who was distracted by an argument in the backseats accelerated and hit the brakes when Kennedy's head cracked the glass.

Lincoln flew from Kennedy's hand and landed propped against the curb. He wasn't screaming anymore. As water rushed over him, Lincoln shed a tear for Kennedy.