

Richard Matheson has so far achieved his greatest popular success with his longer works; the screen version of THE SHRINKING MAN, indeed, accorded him the almost unheard-of honor of billing him in letters as large as those used for the producer. But Old Mathesonians—especially this one, who will never forget that fabulous day in 1949 when Born of Man and Woman turned up in the slush pile—feel that his most powerful and effective writing has been in shorter forms. Here is as short a story as Matheson has yet written—simple, direct, haunting . . .

Lemmings

by RICHARD MATHESON

"WHERE DO THEY ALL COME FROM?" Reordon asked.

"Everywhere," said Carmack.

They were standing on the coast highway. As far as they could see there was nothing but cars. Thousands of cars were jammed bumper to bumper and pressed side to side.

"There come some more," said Carmack.

The two policemen looked at the crowd of people walking toward the beach. Many of them talked and laughed. Some of them were quiet and serious. But they all walked toward the beach.

Reordon shook his head. "I don't get it," he said for the hundredth time that week. "I just don't get it."

Carmack shrugged.

"Don't think about it," he said. "It's happening. What else is there?"

"But it's crazy."

"Well there they go," said Carmack.

As the two policemen watched, the crowd of people moved across the gray sands of the beach and walked into the water. Some of them started swimming. Most of them couldn't because of their clothes. Carmack saw a young woman flailing at the water and dragged down by the fur coat she was wearing.

In several minutes they were all gone. The two policemen stared at the place where the people had walked into the water.

"How long does it go on?" Reordon asked.

"Until they're gone, I guess," said Carmack.

"But *why*?"

"You ever read about the lemmings?" Carmack asked.

"No."

"They're supposed to be rodents who live in the Scandinavian countries. They keep breeding until all their food supply is gone. Then they move across the country ravaging everything in their way. When they reach the sea they keep going. They swim until their strength is gone. Millions of them."

"You think that's what *this* is?" asked Reordon.

"Maybe," said Carmack.

"People aren't rodents!" Reordon said, angrily.

Carmack didn't answer.

They stood on the edge of the highway waiting but nobody appeared.

"Where are they?" asked Reordon.

"Maybe they've all gone in," Carmack said.

"*All* of them?"

"It's been going on for more than

a week," Carmack said. "People could have gotten here from all over. Then there are the lakes."

Reordon shuddered. "All of them," he said.

"I don't know," said Carmack, "but they've been coming right along until now."

"Oh, God," said Reordon.

Carmack took out a cigarette and lit it. "Well," he said slowly, "what now?"

Reordon sighed. "Us?" he said.

"You go," Carmack said. "I'll wait a while and see if there's anyone else."

"All right." Reordon put his hand out. "Goodby, Carmack," he said.

They shook hands. "Goodby, Reordon," Carmack said.

He stood smoking his cigarette and watching his friend walk across the gray sand of the beach and into the water until it was over his head. He saw Reordon swim a few dozen yards before he disappeared.

After a while he put out his cigarette and looked around. Then he walked into the water too.

A million cars stood empty along the beach.

