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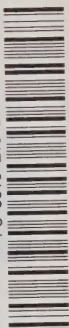
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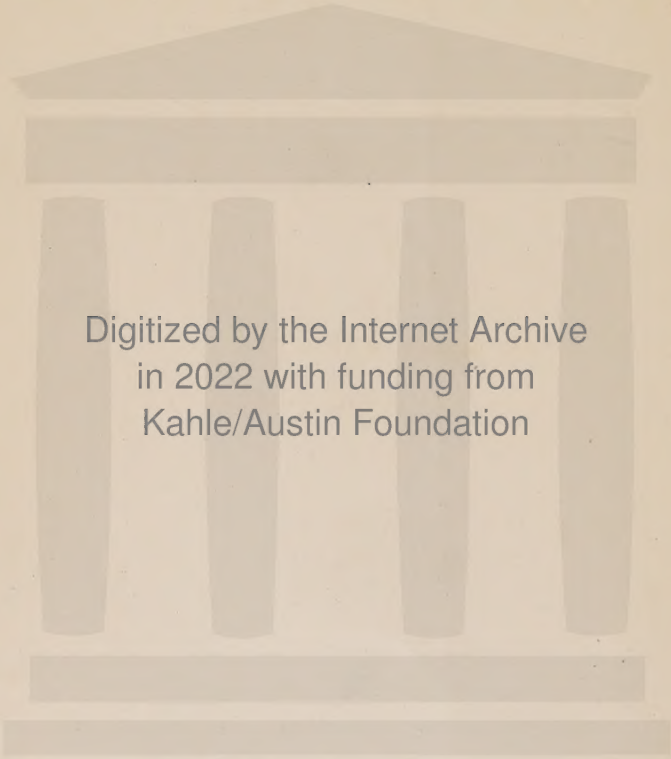
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Broken Necks

{ Containing More }
{ "1001 Afternoons" }

By BEN HECHT

Pascal Covici
Publisher 1926 Chicago

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CHICAGO

FIRST EDITION

Preface

I have never before allowed myself the intimacy of a Preface. I have never felt sufficiently sociable toward readers to address them informally behind the scenes.

I feel no more sociable now. But Mr. Covici, who already has many sins on his head, cajoles me. His telegraphic insistences woo a Preface out of me against all my inclinations and better judgments.

* * *

There must have been a time when Preface writing was an honest delight; when readers were charming and worthy persons. So it seems from the genuflections and caresses lavished upon the Dear Reader in the prefaces of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Perhaps the authors of that time were a more graceful and sociable crew. But I doubt it. I choose to believe that the people who once read books were, as a whole, once worthy of the literary mannerisms with which they were saluted on the opening of a volume.

* * *

An honest modern author about to play host to his

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PREFACE

reader, about to step into the vestibule with a hand of welcome and induct his reader into his work, must pause and shudder. There are so many fools reading books. Particularly modern books.

I doubt whether ever before in the history of literature has it been so cursed with reading. I mean false reading, empty reading, vanity reading, bounderish reading; in short, reading inspired by almost every motive except love, understanding or intelligent curiosity.

From all I have heard said and seen written about my own work it is obvious that two-thirds of my readers are simpletons—at least literary simpletons. They are people so intricately unfitted for any sort of cerebral stimulus, so congenitally obtuse and unmental that their praise is an even greater irritation than their censure.

I am not alone in my excitement. I have heard authors complain, not, as the cynical reader may think, of attack, of ridicule or of being ignored, but of “popularity.”

They, like myself, have no objection to selling books, nor to being read, nor to making money, nor to becoming famous. But to be read by people who have no idea what you are writing about or what

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they are reading; to be read by people in whose hands a book is as incongruous as a mirror in a blind man's room, is to grow sour toward one's "success."

* * *

The fungus-like growth of literacy in our Republic, responsible for all this horrendous book reading, can be laid to various sources. The most prolific source is Education. Art of any sort seldom survives in an educated country. The more people we teach to read the more bad books must be written to satisfy their parvenu appetite. And it is for some reason an aesthetic law that an audience grown too large and too active will drag the arts of its day down to its level.

If this does not appeal to you as true in the matter of literature, observe our music. With the popularization of music in the United States has come its death, creatively. Music was never so prevalent and never so worthless as in our Republic today.

* * *

There is also the modern book publisher. When books are advertised as liberally and profusely as so many two-dollar hats is it any wonder that the same sort of people will buy them? Advertising will sell

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anything in our Republic. It sells books and the sole person actually benefited by this is the publisher.

I feel certain that a good percentage of people who buy my books buy them because they are misled into buying them by advertising. To these I apologize. I never intended them to read what I write more than they ever desired to be annoyed by it. They, no less than I, are the victims of the commercialization which has overtaken the distribution of books and they suffer no more than I by it.

* * *

There is also to consider the inferiority complex which usually distinguishes the Neanderthalish soul of a democracy. The simpleton of today, not content with his simplicity, must read books and masquerade—among other simpletons, of course—as a man or woman of culture. To seem cultured has become, paradoxically, as important in our Republic as to appear intolerant, moralistic and otherwise half-witted and American. On all sides one hears imbeciles boasting of the fine books they have read and the fine music they have listened to and giving voice in the same breath to notions and obsessions so dull, so infantile, as to reveal that their souls have never

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thawed to a melody nor their minds ever opened to an idea.

* * *

And there is also the lust for romance and other dream escapes which burns in the hearts of a taboo-ridden people. Your moralist cocainizes himself, as a rule, by prodigious injections of magazine fiction. He spends about a third of his waking time reading about kisses and embraces, properly chaperoned by the editors of the innumerable fiction periodicals of the nation.

From this he stumbles upon novels. He grows adventurous and buys books whose titles he has seen commented on. Whereupon, without taste, without curiosity, without intelligence, he immerses himself in books, wanders pathetically through labyrinths of books whose meanings, purposes and very words remain mysteries to him.

There is a huge tribe of these readers who grow duller with every idea they encounter, who skim through thousands upon thousands of pages of literature with the same abstraction to be noted in idiots who sit tying countless knots in a piece of string. This apathy is peculiarly American.

* * *

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In pondering on the various nuisances among readers I have almost forgotten several distinctly modern phenomena, that is, phenomena which are less than fifteen years old.

For one, it is obvious that the squealing set up by one pack of fools that modern books are erotic has attracted another pack of fools whose major interest in reading is the hope of running across erotic passages.

I have noted that the simpletons who squeal over the obscenity of modern literature and the simpletons who rush to the book stores to buy only obscenity are members of the same lodge. They are both people whose normal stupidity is shocked by any deviation from the platitude in which their souls are buried. They are both creatures of malformed and boorish instincts which they have sugar-coated with ideals peculiar to all stupid, cowardly and dishonest natures.

The difference in them lies only in that the first species cannot tolerate the nausea it feels in the presence of anything resembling truth, gayety or mental activity; and the second species is able to transform an identical nausea into a sort of physical titillation.

* * *

PREFACE

My books are read also by a befuddled tribe of unloved wives and unloving husbands, who hope to find arguments in my work with which to harass one another; by obscene old maids, who often manage to ease their libido under cover of denouncing me; by pontifical dolts, who really wish to ascertain if literature is going to the dogs (I supply them with affirmative thunder); by well-wishers, forever on the lookout for signs of my decay and mental collapse.

* * *

For whom then can one write a Preface? To whom may one say welcome without worrying oneself over aesthetic compromise?

I am certain I know the names and addresses of nearly three-fourths of the intelligent men and women who read my books. I have at one time met them, received letters from them or read their comments—pro and con in the press. I would say they number in all about fifty. This I consider an excellent public.

* * *

There are relatively few people capable of digesting more than a dozen books in their lifetime. There are even fewer capable of understanding a single

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imaginative or lively work did they devote their entire energies to the study of it.

The generation which preceded us recognized this fact and made no bones about it. Indeed, it was inclined to boast of its illiteracy and inclined to look upon omnivorous readers as sissies.

I have no doubt but that the authors of that day hungered for a wider public and bewailed the limits of their fame and influence. Had I lived in their day I would, obviously, have joined them in their laments.

As it is I turn to the thought of the Fifty whose interest in my work I find flattering and charming and offer for their consideration these tales written mainly ten and twelve years ago. They will, I am certain, smile tolerantly upon some of their more obvious faults, remembering that they were the product of the first violences of youth. And it is my hope that I will seem to these readers to have lost none of the exuberance, tactlessness and delight in words which are to be found in these first tales of mine.

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BROKEN NECKS

Broken Necks

I stood on the corner that day adjusting certain important adjectives in my life. I had seen two men hanged and it was spring. How the wine ran through the little greedy half-dead swarming the streets. Yes, those endless, bobbing faces almost looked at each other, almost smiled into each other's eyes — insufferable and inhuman breach of democracy. But there was something immoral about the day. The music of dreams tugged at the endless shuffling feet. The music of desires — little starved and fearful things come out for a moment in the sun and wind — piped vainly for dancers. There was something vague and bewildered about the buildings and the people as if there were a great undying shout in the streets. What a panic this monotonous return of spring breeds among the little half-dead as they shuffle and bob along with a tingle in their heels and a blindness that comes suddenly into their eyes. For it is through the mists of greedy complacencies that the little half-dead are able to pick their steps with certainty and precision. Now comes this wine and this music and this disturbance as of a great undying

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shout sweeping the bristling shafts of stone, and the mists vanish for a moment. In the blindness which falls upon them is an undertow tugging at their feet.

I stood on the corner that day observing how in the spring the bodies of women were like the bodies of long, lithe animals prowling under orange and lavender, green and turquoise dresses, and how the men with their coats dangling across their arms were like hot beetles that had removed their shells. But as I watched the endless faces filled with half-startled and half-placid confusion, and as I noted what the poets call the gayety of spring in the hearts of men, there came to me out of the swarm and roar of the day the mockery which it is the duty of philosophers to hear. For I had seen two men hanged and had most properly come away a philosopher.

Where was he who might have been crawling along the treadmill of time, lighted today for another instant by the spring? The creature who had spat at the cross on the scaffold, whose perfect tusks had grinned out of the gloom above our heads an hour ago? Laughing in Hell, if death makes men wise. For Hell is a place of wise laughter. And the other one, who had died vomiting terror?

There was a group of us waiting patiently for the

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tall steel doors of the jail to open. Righteous men we were with stern, cold faces come to transact with proper dignity certain grave business in the interest of the little greedy half-dead who even here shuffled through the streets with the lie of spring in their heels. And after we had been admitted and our credentials cunningly examined, we were marched through barred corridors and told to enter a door and make ourselves comfortable inside. Within this door stretched the room which was to witness the hangings. It was a long and narrow room with towering walls. It could have been built only for one purpose—as a room in which to hang men. The grey plaster of its walls was unrelieved by any humanizing design. They formed, these walls, a geometrical monotone unbroken by windows or doors except the one through which we had entered. The floor was of stone.

Forty long benches such as picnickers use in groves, had been introduced into this vault of a room. They seemed puny wooden toys under the sweep and stretch of the towering, slot-like walls. We came walking slowly into the room. We were doctors, public officials, jail attendants and newspapermen. We sat down on the benches and faced the gallows.

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The timber of the gallows reached from the stone floor to the dark, forgotten ceiling. Fifteen feet above the floor was a platform. On this platform the men who were to be hanged were to stand until a part of its floor which was on hinges swung back and dropped them. Then they would be left dangling from the ropes. These ropes hung now from a cross beam fifteen feet above the floor of the platform. They were two bright yellow manila ropes. Each ended in a noose the size of a man's head. We on the benches stared with uncomfortable eyes at these ropes. In the gloom our faces floated like little pale discs above the benches. The ends of cigars and cigarettes made tiny red spots in the darkness and above our heads little grey and violet parasols of smoke opened and vanished. They were eager and efficient ropes and they had personality. They became, when we had scrutinized them for a long space, the strange and attenuated furniture entirely suited to this room. About their slim and elegant stretch there was something monstrous suggested. Things which are sometimes seen in a fever assume the grotesque dimensions of these ropes.

People do not think in these places. They sit with their mouths somewhat parted and smoke cigars and nod politely to each other as they talk. They stare

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about them as do children in a strange house, noting this and observing that. Indeed, it was not till an hour later that I became a philosopher and found it necessary to adjust adjectives.

There were two men on the scaffold platform. One was a stout man with snow colored hair. He was well dressed but we noticed with grave smiles that he seemed unduly conscious of his freshly shined patent leather shoes. He kept moving them about and we watched them closely like so many cats in the dark might watch two bewildered mice. At length achieving a comparative equanimity under our gaze, he thrust his hands behind him and stood stiffly facing the ropes. There was nothing left to think of about him other than that he was fat. The other man was a jail-guard.

Then we noticed simultaneously a little box-like shack which stood against the plaster wall at the rear of the gallows platform. It was just large enough to accommodate a man. We remarked in stern, sophisticated whispers to each other that the man who sprung the trap under the feet of the men about to hang was hidden in this enclosure. For a space we stared at a small circular window in the gallows shack, diverted by banal speculation. How did this man feel who actually did the thing which killed two

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men? As we stared a face, vague and dark, appeared in the little window and then vanished. We were content, and here and there in the gloom matches were struck and the faces of men lighting cigars remained in glowing prints upon the dark air.

Suddenly, as if greatly ahead of time, men started entering the room from the single door at the side of the gallows. Three public officials walked first. Behind them walked two priests in white and purple surplices. Between the two priests was a young man with a colorless face. He was in his shirt sleeves and without a collar. He looked as if he had been interrupted washing dishes. Following these were several jail-guards. We did not count their number. Behind the guards walked two priests in white and purple surplices. Between them walked the second man. For the first man without a collar who walked between the two priests we had no eyes. There was about him a lack of something which made him akin to us on the benches. He stopped and wobbled and his head rolled and from his lips issued a moan.

“ Oh, my Lord Jesus Christ,” he said.

His lips as he walked were peeled back in the manner of a man suffering from nausea. We did not look long at him. But the other — we stared and watched and forgot to puff on our cigars. He was a man with

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gaunt features and the face of an unbarbered Cæsar, lined like the wing of a bat. He had a lean and muscular neck and he walked high-shouldered like an Egyptian. To the drooping lines of his mouth and chin clung a dark, curling covering of hair like the beard on the paintings of the adolescent Christ. He walked with his jaw thrust forward, lean and hollow jaws like the jaws of a starving monk. His eyes, round and black, nestled deep in his head, black and burning like the eyes of a voodoo priest.

We watched this man and moved about on our benches. We knew his name and the deeds he had done in the world. He had moved among the little greedy half-dead with altogether curious inspirations. At night he had flattened himself against dark alley walls and waited with a gun in his hand for men to approach him, and he had gone prowling after them like a stoical coyote crept into the city out of the darkness beyond. Thus he had grown rich and careless and taken to darting through the streets by day as he had done by night. In the sun there came into his heart a joyous hate that had misguided him. It caused him finally to stand upon a street corner shouting and shooting into the swarm of things about him until the street grew lonely and strangely rid of all sounds but the whoop of his voice and the little

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bark of his gun. It was very sad, for the little heaped figures that lay strewn in the emptied street might have been our wives and our mothers. Eventually a tall red-faced man bristling with gold buttons, pounced upon him from the rear and held him as he continued to shout and wave a useless gun toward the high roofs of the crowded buildings.

Here he was walking up the slim wooden stairs that led to the gallows platform and here he was standing under the looped rope that dangled at his ear and beside another man who continued to moan, "My Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me. Forgive us all." But we did not look at this one. The platform was now crowded with men, but we did not look at them. They came forward with long black straps and proceeded to bind the man who was moaning. Then a priest came forward and stood beside the man who was moaning and rested an ivory crucifix upon his lips and opened a book under his rolling eyes. But our eyes, held as by some vast thing about to happen, that will any minute happen, remained upon the gaunt, unbarbered face with its Christ-like beard, with the mystic snarl in its eyes, of the man who stood under the other rope. An inexplicable fascination held our eyes upon him. And under our unblinking stares he grew and grew and became lop-

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sided and out of focus and the features of his face swam apart into the grimace of a man laughing.

Then our eyes cleared and we saw that his arms were strapped flat against his sides and his legs strapped tightly together at the ankles and the knees, and that a priest in a white and purple surplice, with a startled face, was offering an ivory crucifix for him to kiss. We watched him look at the crucifix, his eyes becoming filled with yellow lights; and watched his lips peel back and the teeth, exaggerated in their nakedness, shine in a grin. Suddenly he closed his mouth and spat at the crucifix. Beside him the man under the rope was moaning "Oh, my Creator. Let me see. Let me see." And his head wobbled toward the opened book the priest in front of him held to his eyes.

Of this we were conscious in an uninterested way. For a man had spat upon a crucifix and there was that in us which made us lower our heads and tremble and move uneasily. Other men stepped forward on the gallows platform and hung long white robes upon the two under the ropes. The robes fastened in a pucker about their necks and fell to the floor and were fastened in another pucker about their ankles. Then a man with unbelievable gestures slipped the rope over the head of the moaning one

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and drew the noose tight with unbelievable little jerks so that the knot fell under the man's ear.

"Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, my Jesus Christ, forgive me. Forgive us all," moaned the man, his face almost vanishing in the gloom.

About the neck of the other whom we were watching, as men watch something about to explode, the second rope was fixed and jerked into place. And then a voice shot from the platform. It came from the blur and flurry of men grouped behind the ropes.

"Have you anything to say," it inquired.

A cry answered from the one who was moaning. His words, blurred and buzzing, filled the room. "Oh, my Creator, my Creator," he sang. "I am going to my Creator."

And the man with the face that was lined like the wing of a bat remained silent, gazing with his glowing eyes down upon our heads. In his puckered white robe he loomed out of the gloom like some grotesque and stoical sage in masquerade, except for his teeth, which were bared and swimming in saliva. The faces above the ropes remained visible for several instants. Two men bearing white masks then approached them. The one who moaned was rolling his eyes up and down the towering, gloomy walls as if in frantic, helpless search. The other

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was staring down upon us in a strange, disinterested manner, his lips peeling back, his jaws thrusting forward. He drew a long breath and then vanished behind the white mask with a secret in his eyes.

Both men had disappeared. There were to be seen only two long white bundles curiously shapeless. We were silent. The moaning of the man who had kissed the crucifix suddenly resumed. It filled the room. It came louder and louder from the depths of the long white bundle, crawling over us and along the towering walls that had no windows. From the other white bundle came silence. The feet under it stared at us without movement. The moaning burst into words — “ Oh, my Creator ” — and was lost in a crash. The trap had banged down.

A great swaying howl rolled into the vault-like room. It swept like a curtain between us and the two white bundles that had shot through the trap. The two men were hanging. The howling came from the prisoners in the cells beyond in the jail, howling like the sustained cry of an army out of a wilderness. The two white bundles that were hanging, stirred. One of them turned slightly, with a certain idleness. The other began to expand and contract. A curious animation gradually took possession of it. Several minutes passed and the white bundles continued to

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bob and twitch. The one to the left which contained the man who had moaned began now to throb and quiver like a plucked and vibrating violin string. The rope above it hummed, filling the room with the whang of its monotone. The other bundle remained turning idly. A large group of men had risen from the benches in front. Several of them held black stethoscopes in their hands. They waited.

The rest of us stood to our feet. There was silence and the moments passed with our eyes unwavering. The two bundles seemed mysteriously wound up as if they would go on turning idly forever. Then they began to act as if some one were trying to blow them up from inside. Between the masks and the puckered tops of the white robes the necks of the two men hanging within the bundles became visible. Suddenly the turning ceased and the two bundles began to behave as if some one were jerking with an amazing violence on the ropes which supported them in mid air. They executed a frenzied and staccato jig.

The bundles hung motionless at the ends of the two ropes, limp, dead banners out of which the wind had died. A physician removing the stethoscope from his ears said something that ended with the

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words, "twelve minutes." A second physician repeated what he had said.

We crowded forward from the benches, gathering about the two figures which had dropped their white robes. They were no longer interesting. A certain fascination had gone out of them, out of the ropes, out of the tall, spectral timbers of the gallows. We passed them a few minutes later on our way out of the door. They were lying on two wheel cots. Their masks had been removed and their faces colored like stained glass watched us with mouths opened.

I had forgotten my hat. We had moved into the lobby of the jail and I hurried back after my hat. I stood for a moment gazing at the towering grey walls, the wood structure, the two strands of rope that dropped from the beam. They had been cut. There was no one in the room. I seized my hat, which was on a bench, and ran awkwardly after the men who had gone. Outside a man with a sharp beard said to me, shaking his head.

"Well, that boy died game, didn't he?"

The man was drawing deep breaths and looked about him bewilderedly in the sunny street.

I walked on until I came to the corner where the necessity of adjusting certain important adjectives

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in my life caused me to stop. Up and down the street swarmed the endless faces of the little greedy half-dead, lighted for a moment by the great sun. And having completed my philosophy, and because it was on this corner the gaunt and hollow-faced one had once stood, his heart swelled with a joyous hate, shouting at the buildings, I laughed and spat and eyed a woman whose body was like the body of a long, lithe animal prowling under a lavender and turquoise dress.

The Philosopher's Benefit

“Have you anything especially important to do next Saturday night?” inquired Feodor Mishkin. The journalist’s usually choleric voice was weary and his huge body sagged with the heat.

“Important, Mishkin? It all depends on how you use the adjective. I have long ago stopped doing important things.”

“Don’t try to talk to me philosophies, please. I ask you a simple question. Yes or no.”

“Why?”

“Why! Why! I should know better than to try to talk to you on a hot day. If it was for me I wouldn’t have bothered myself for a minute. Are you coming or not?”

“It all depends, Mishkin, on what and where you’re talking about.”

“The benefit! You haven’t heard from the benefit? It don’t matter how many years you are a newspaperman, you manage to keep ignorant of everything that’s going on.”

“So you are having a benefit?”

“I am having a benefit! Thanks. Who told you

THE PHILOSOPHER'S BENEFIT

that? Please, if you're going to be insulting write some editorials. I am having no benefit. The benefit is for Lefkowitz's son."

"The one who is a philosopher?"

"The one who is a loafer, a dumb head and a fool. You and I have different opinions about people."

"What has happened to Lefkowitz's son that he is being given a benefit? Has he been run over?"

"Nothing has happened except that in another month he will starve to death and disgrace the West Side. The benefit is Saturday night and you can buy two tickets for \$2. Bernstein's sisters are going to sing and—you'll enjoy."

"Who is giving the benefit, Mishkin? You?"

"Me! I should give benefits for such a fool like Lefkowitz's son. Who is giving the benefit? Nobody. He has forced it to be, that's all."

"But I thought he was so unpopular. You told me once."

"Listen, can you let a philosopher die no matter how unpopular he is? Unpopular? Yes? Everybody hates him. And why shouldn't they? When he goes to a Socialist picnic he makes a speech that the masses ain't of any consequence. When he attends a meeting in honor of Sholom Ash—you know who he

THE PHILOSOPHER'S BENEFIT

is? The greatest dramatist in America. What does he do? He makes another speech saying the dramas he writes are fit for little children and no more. He's a philosopher, that's all."

"Why give him a benefit? Why not get him a job instead?"

"Lefkowitz's son a job? You are crazy, nothing else. Who will he work for? Simonson who wants to take him in his store he calls an idiot. And when they finally get him a job in the Public Library he starts insulting everybody who takes out a book he don't approve of. 'You must be without sense to waste your time,' he says, 'reading such kind of books,' he says, 'an intelligent man or woman wouldn't ask for such a book,' he says, 'why don't you read Leibnitz or somebody with some sense to him?' he says."

"Then why this concern about him. Why not let him go his own way, Mishkin, instead of bamboozling your friends into attending a benefit in his honor?"

"In his honor, aha! Who says he's going to get any honor? It's a benefit and if we raise a few hundred dollars everybody will be satisfied. As usual, you don't understand what I'm saying. I'm saying that Lefkowitz's son has been a philosopher for ten years. Everybody hates him because he insults them

THE PHILOSOPHER'S BENEFIT

all and he looks down on everything they do and if you say anything he laughs in our face and answers you, 'aha! What of it? Do you think such little things are important?' So what are you going to do?"

"You are right, Mishkin, I don't understand the thing at all."

"It don't surprise me, so don't be so upset. If you were a member of the intelligentsia you would understand how it is embarrassing for a philosopher to starve to death in your back yard. Everybody is to him a commercial maniac. And everybody else is to him a low brow and a fool. And if you say to him, 'go to work,' what does he answer you. 'Ha, why should I work? Only fools work. I use my brain.'"

"I begin to see, Mishkin. He has become a myth."

"You begin to see! You are like Lefkowitz's son. You use your brain. The whole thing is that the West Side don't want it said that Lefkowitz's son, a great philosopher, had to die of starvation. That's all."

"What has he written in the way of philosophy?"

"What has he written? Who says he writes? Nothing. Speeches insulting people, that's his philosophy writing. If you come Saturday night you can judge for yourself."

THE PHILOSOPHER'S BENEFIT

“He’s going to recite something?”

“At his own benefit do you think he wouldn’t recite? A lot you know of him. He’s already read me the speech.”

“It should be interesting listening to a pessimist unbend in grateful acknowledgements. I think I’ll go.”

“You can stay away if you want to hear grateful acknowledgments. It’s going to be a disgrace bigger than any he has made. The speech he has written and is going to recite is an insult to the whole human race. He takes for his subject the idea that he should be living in such a neighborhood that makes it necessary for a philosopher like him to have benefits given in order that he should be able to keep alive. The whole speech is about benefits like that.”

“Mishkin, I suspect that you nurse a secret admiration for Lefkowitz’s son?”

“You suspect! Go on, suspect. Lefkowitz’s son means as much to me as my shoestring and no more.”

“Then why do you waste your time selling tickets to his benefit?”

“Because, there are a lot of people like you I want to come to this benefit to Lefkowitz’s son for one reason. And after he has gotten through with his insults you will understand why.”

Decay

Here in this street the half-dead begin to give forth an odor. The rows of sagging little houses are like the teeth in an old man's mouth. From them arise the exhalations of stagnant wood, of putrescent stairways, of bodies from which the sweats of lust have never been washed, of ulcerous shadows and soft, bubbling alleys. The stench is like a grime that leadens the air. In this street live men and women whose hungers are not complicated by trifles. In this alley they are, as they move, thick faced and unsmiling in the musty flatulent light of the neighborhood, somewhat different from the little greedy half-dead who have civilized their odors and made ethics of their hungers.

The people who live in this street walk as if they were being pushed in and out of the sagging houses. Shrieking children appear and sprawl about. They roll over one another, their faces contorted with a miniature senility. They urinate in gutters, throw stones at each other in the soft alleys, run after each other cursing and gesturing with idiot violence. They bring an awkward fever into the street. Oblivious

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to them and to the debris about them, barrel-shaped women strut with protuberant bellies and great flapping shoes over the pavements. They move as if unaccustomed to walking in streets.

It grows dark and the men from the factories coming home begin to crowd the streets. They walk in silence, a broken string of shuffling hieroglyphs against the red of the sky. Their knees bend, their jaws thrust forward, their heads wag from side to side. They vanish into the sagging houses and the night comes, an unwavering gloom picked with little yellow glows from windows. The houses lie like bundles of carefully piled rags in the darkness. The shrieking of the children has died and with it the pale fever of the day has passed out of the air. There are left only the odors, the invisible banners of decay that float upon the night. The stench of fat kitchens, of soft bubbling alleys, of gleaming refuse and of the indefinable evaporations from the dark bundles of houses wherein the little half-dead have packed themselves away, come like a thrust into the nose.

Later, drunken men appear and lurch into the darkness with cursings and mutterings. The smoke of the factory chimneys is now visible, but the chimneys, like rows of cylindrical minarets, make darker streaks in the gloom, and in the distance blast fur-

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naces gut the night with pink and orange flares. The figures of young women, not yet shaped like barrels, come out into the street and stand for long moments in the shadows. They move noiselessly into the depths of the soft bubbling alleys and vanish. As it grows darker the exhalations of these alleys and houses increase as if some great disintegration were stewing in the night.

It was in one of these houses that I once lived. At night I now sometimes recall things that used to happen in this house. When I grow weary with the interminable adjustment of adjectives these memories grimace in the blank spaces of my thought. And when I grow uncertain, moving in the streets where there are no odors, these memories surround me with the fugitive embrace of explanation.

There were eight children in Otto Muznik's family. They lived with Otto Muznik and his wife in three rooms. In summer and in winter these rooms were filled with a pungent bitter smell. There was a great noise in them also. The eight children screamed at each other. Otto Muznik and his wife screamed at them and at each other. One of the rooms was a kitchen. The two other were bedrooms filled with cots. The screams and the stench in the three rooms,

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the littered floors and devastated furniture told of activities.

Willy Muznik had a poisoned foot. A cat he had brought home had bitten him. It was night and Mrs. Muznik sat in the kitchen. She was a woman with a spreading, phlegmatic body and a round red and shining face. Her eyes were little. She went about with an unwavering stare, staring at this and at that. She sat in the kitchen now and stared at the stove, on which a black pot full of meat and soup was boiling. Willy was eleven. He sat in a corner doubled up like a contortionist and sucking on his bared, grimy foot. Mrs. Muznik stared at him.

“What did the doctor say?” she asked. She spoke in her own language and in a sharp, husky voice. She had come home a few minutes ago from her day’s scrubbing. During the day she moved on her knees down the corridors of a large office building, miles from the street in which she lived. Willy removed the foot from his mouth, and began to wail. Mrs. Muznik stared at him and waited.

“The doctor says he’ll maybe have to cut my foot off,” Willy finally answered. His mother stared at the foot. Through the grime below the instep she saw a curious discoloration. She wiped her eyes and sighed.

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“Your Pa’ll give it to you for bringing cats home,” she said. “He told you not to bring any more cats home.” Willy holding his foot in his hand rocked back and forth on the floor and wailed. Mrs. Muznik arose and looked into the black pot. She turned her eyes toward Willy crying on the floor and a bewilderment tightened her flat features.

“Willy,” she asked, “does it hurt?” For answer Willy increased his wail and Mrs. Muznik looked at him, shaking her head. She moved into another room. The gas light from the kitchen threw a faint glare among the shadows of this room. She sat down in a chair crowded between two cots. The sounds of someone gasping came to her and she stared about in the dark.

“Is that you, Joey?” she asked. The door leading into the street opened and Jenny, a girl of fourteen with a round red and shining face and a pair of long, almost withered, legs, rushed in screaming. In the dim light that dropped into the room from the street Mrs. Muznik saw her son lying on the floor. She rushed over and shook him.

“Don’t have a fit,” she cried. “Joey . . . Joey. Wait till your Pa goes. He can’t stand it.” Joey stiffened and rolled over on his face. He was fourteen.

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His head was bent under as if he were trying to stand on it. A fine foam bubbled on his lips.

“Get the cold water,” Mrs. Muznik ordered. Jenny rushed out of the room, singing a song she had learned in the alleys. She returned with a pot of water and Mrs. Muznik threw it over Joey’s head and shoulders. The voices of the two babies, suddenly awakened, filled the room with screams. The two babies were Munch and Sam. One of them, Munch, was sick. His hoarse fever-cry rose above his brother’s complaint. Mrs. Muznik lighted a gas jet and the stench and disorder of the room came flickering out of the shadow. She leaned over one of the cots and picked up Munch. He was covered with a few heavy rags. Through the cloth the dry heat of his body burned against Mrs. Muznik’s hands and bosom. She held the infant and cried to Jenny who was pulling a grimy cloth over the table in the kitchen.

“Where’s Fanny?” The screaming of the infants almost drowned the shriek of Jenny’s laughing shrill answer. “Fanny’s in the alley. Fanny’s in the alley.” Mrs. Muznik laid the hot little body on the cot beside the other screamer and went to a window. She thrust it open and leaned out in the darkness. Her little eyes stared into the alley below.

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“ Fanny,” she cried, “ you come in at once.” Her ears strained to catch sounds. She heard a boy’s voice whispering below and made out two figures moving about against the dark wall.

“ Fanny, Fanny,” she screamed. “ Come away. I’ll come after you with a whip.” There were more whisperings and then one of the figures detached itself from the gloom and floated into the depths of the alley.

“ All right, ma,” a voice answered. Mrs. Muznik sat down on the cot and stared at the two little bundles that screamed on the other side of the room. The door opened and Fanny entered. She was fifteen and had a ribbon in her hair. Her face was round and shining and as red as her mother’s. The two little black eyes were lighted. Her dress was crumbled and covered with alley dirt. Mrs. Muznik stared. From the kitchen Willy’s wailing came to her.

“ I can’t walk, ma, I can’t walk.” Willy came hopping into the room on one leg and fell across the floor. He lay screaming at Mrs. Muznik’s feet. Mrs. Muznik turned toward Joey who was sitting near her.

“ How do you feel? ” she asked. Joey’s thin compressed face smiled. He shook his head.

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“All right, now,” he said. “Can I have some lemon drops?”

“Here, Jenny,” Mrs. Muznik ordered. “Go out and buy a penny’s worth.” Jenny’s thin legs flashed out of the room into the street. Fanny had gone into the kitchen to look at the black pot on the stove. Mrs. Muznik stared out of the window and after a silence, during which the babies continued to scream, called out, “Fanny, what you been doing?” A laugh from the kitchen answered. The mother dropped her head and rocked slightly in her seat. The uneven floor about her was littered with clothes from which a heavy musty odor came. The walls were broken and smeared. The windows in front of her made two little grey clouds. The stench of the room came into Mrs. Muznik’s head and made her sleepy. She drew a long breath and continued to rock her body gently back and forth. First the children would eat and then she would wake up Otto. Otto worked nights in a steel mill. He did not have to leave the house for two more hours. The stench and noise of the room drifted away from Mrs. Muznik as she sat and rocked. Idle little thoughts crept into her head. Her body was tired. The shoulders ached and burned and the small of her back throbbed. She was afraid she was going to have another baby.

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Willy's foot would have to be cut off. Joey was sick. Munch, little Munch was sick. His hoarse fever-cry was growing softer. He lay whimpering, his hands moving over his face.

These things drifted through Mrs. Muznik's thoughts, keeping her awake as she rocked back and forth. She thought of Otto going to work in the darkness. He stood in front of an open furnace that roared with fire and fed melted steel into it. She had seen him once. He was almost naked. The memory of his body, reddened by the glare which spread out of the open furnace, remained always with her. Otto's muscles stood out, and in his loosely belted trousers he had seemed great and strong to her. The red light and the roar and the sputter of melted steel made him shine and changed him into a man with burning eyes and flaming skin. Whenever he left for work after that Mrs. Muznik remembered this, and a vague shiver passed through her.

Mrs. Muznik thought of the ache and throb of her back, as if they were memories. Willy hobbled past her into the kitchen. Jenny burst in through the door. She handed Joey lemon drops. "Give me a little bit," said Mrs. Muznik.

"Ma," Joey cried, "there's a rat. It's wiping its nose with its feet." He looked eagerly into the dark

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alley. Mrs. Muznik ate lemon drops. A warmth spread over her, making her feet hum. This hour of the night was her leisure. She was used to sit like this and rock back and forth and let little idle dreary thoughts creep through her mind. Behind her eyes there was a darkness that came between her thought at these times and the things she saw and heard. But this night the hoarse fever-cry of the baby on the cot chirped in her ears. Joey went into the kitchen and ate. He came back. Fanny followed him, skipping from one foot to another.

“Going out, ma,” she cried. Mrs. Muznik raised an arm toward the girl.

“Wait . . . wait,” she called.

Fanny appeared vague and dark in the alley below. Mrs. Muznik stared at her as she floated away into the gloom. She turned from the window and resumed her rocking. She heard, as from a distance, the voice of Willy wailing about his foot, and the voices of her two babies screaming again. Munch was sick. The doctor had said Munch might die. But Mrs. Muznik did not believe this. None of the others had died and they had all been sick. She sucked at the lemon drop in her mouth. The ache and burn in her shoulders were like hot voices bothering

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her brain. The hoarse fever-cry of the baby on the cot was another little hot voice in her brain.

“ Oh, ma,” cried Joey from the window. “ There’s Fanny with three boys in the alley.” Mrs. Muznik rocked. “ Never mind,” she murmured. The hot voices made her feel swollen within. Her feet felt as if they were resting in flames. Joey came to her and looked at her face.

“ Tired, ma? ” he asked. Mrs. Muznik lifted him into her lap. He was a thin, fragile boy. She put her arms around him and clung to him. He felt cool and sweet to her flesh beneath the dress. He was better than Willy, than Munch and Sam, than Jenny and Fanny, than Heine. Heine was in jail. He had done something. And Mary, her oldest, had gone away. Mary was wild like Fanny. Willy’s foot would be cut off. Munch was crying so weakly. Mrs. Muznik kissed Joey and rocked. It was dark outside and in her head it was dark. The smell of the room was another darkness, and the burn of her body another. She sat hunched over Joey, clinging to him, and as she clung a sweetness came into her. Her aches melted.

In a few minutes she would have to go to bed. It was wrong for her to sit up and hold Joey. She needed the rest in bed. The scrubbing was hard. It

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lasted all day. She rocked and the darkness in and around her grew deeper. Her ears fell asleep. She no longer heard the noises in the room. Jenny was tugging at her shoulder and crying in a loud voice.

“If Fanny can go out in the alley and play, why can't I? I can play if Fanny can go in the alley and play.”

Mrs. Muznik couldn't make out what Jenny was saying. She rocked. Jenny moved cautiously toward the door. She opened it softly.

“Ma,” cried Willy in a shrill voice from one of the cots, “Jenny's going out in the alley.” A breath of night air, laden with less intimate odors, struck at the room through the opened door. Fanny appeared, thrusting her face in and whispering hoarsely.

“Come on. Ma's asleep. I got some boys, three boys. Come on, don't be afraid. We're going over by the next alley. Ma's asleep.”

Jenny trembled and her withered legs in their torn black stockings knocked together. A warmth trickled through her flat body. Fanny seized her cold hand. She dragged her out of the room. The laughter of the two girls sounded from the street, and the quick whispers of boys' voices. The flurry and beat of many feet came into the room and died away.

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“Ma, ma,” Willy repeated. “Jenny’s gone. Jenny’s gone.”

Mrs. Muznik nodded her head and rocked. She dreamed Joey was falling out of her arms and awoke, startled. Joey was asleep. She whispered to him, kissing his ears. Lifting him to the cot she laid him down and knelt beside him, taking off his torn shoes.

“Jenny,” she whispered.

“Jenny went in the alley,” Willy cried, and resumed his moaning. “My foot hurts me worse, ma.”

Mrs. Muznik straightened to her feet and walked, with her little eyes staring, to the open door. Her voice sailed into the night.

“Jenny, Jenny, come here,” she screamed. The darkness held the sound of her voice for an instant and then grew silent. She closed the door and stood staring at the babies on the cot. Something impelled her toward Munch, and she lifted him. The dry heat of his body struck through her dress at her heavy bosom and at the hard skin of her arms. It was whimpering and moving its hands slowly and aimlessly over its face. Mrs. Muznik stood and rocked it in her arms . . . The baby stopped crying and lay quiet. She placed it next to Sam, who had also fallen asleep for the moment. It was time to wake up Otto, and she moved into the kitchen.

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She leaned over the black pot on the stove, thinking. Yet there were no words to her thoughts. They came, like little burns, into her brain, and she nodded her head slowly and aimlessly as they appeared. This and that, Fanny and Jenny, Munch and Willy, Heine, and the long corridors over which she crawled all day mingled with the stench of the room and the ache of her body, and she remained staring into the black pot that was boiling, and feeling the heat of the stove pass in waves over her face. A voice called to her from another room. She turned and saw the door of the other bedroom had opened. A stale bitter smell drifted into the kitchen. The figure of her husband, dressed in a suit of long dirty underwear and a pair of thick, hard socks, appeared in the doorway. His face was smeared with sleep. A growth of hair hid his chin and cheeks.

“Ma,” he called to her, stretching his arms, “come here a minute.”

Mrs. Muznik stared at him. “What for?” she asked. The familiar figure in the doorway was clouded in a darkness that burned behind her eyes. A grin overspread her husband’s face. His jaws thrust forward and his eyes began to shine. The grin passed and he remained glowering at Mrs. Muznik. Then he came, with his shoulders swaying, into

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the kitchen and seized her by the arm. Mrs. Muznik stared into the black pot on the stove. As Otto shoved her before him her mouth opened and her eyes turned to him.

“No, no,” she whispered. “No, Otto. You go to work. Willy’s having trouble with his foot.”

Otto continued to drag the heavy figure of his wife toward the bedroom. A glowering playfulness was in his face and gestures.

“No, Otto, not now. Let me be,” Mrs. Muznik cried. “You go eat.”

Otto laughed and struck her on the shoulders. Stepping behind her he cursed, and with a guffaw pushed her violently into the dark bitter smelling bedroom. She staggered toward one of the beds and dropped into it. Through the open door she watched her husband with round little staring eyes. He walked back to the sink and drew some water in a glass, and drank it. He was a short stocky figure in his dark tattered underwear. She remembered him before the furnace door in the steel mill, shining.

“Come on, Otto,” she called. Her voice was hoarse and thin. She sat on the edge of the bed and waited, staring now into the darkest part of the room. The darkness brought a sweetness into the burn of her body. She rocked gently back and forth. The

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room floated before her eyes as if the darkness were moving. The little burns came again into her brain, and the stench creeping from the walls and the beds confused her. Through the window she became aware slowly of a great pink and orange glow that hung and wavered in the distant night. It was from the factories. She eyed it as the darkness around her swayed back and forth. Her body leaned forward and she fumbled thickly with her shoe, her mouth open and her eyes intent upon this glow in the distance. The little burns had gone out of her brain. There was left nothing in her except a darkness in which rested a pink and orange glow. Her lips mumbled sounds and she sat repeating the name of her husband, "Otto, Otto." Then her body tumbled to one side and she lay across the bed as if she had been flung there.

Otto her husband came at last into the bedroom. He was gnawing on a bone and a piece of meat. He glowered down at the heavy figure on the bed that mumbled, "Otto, Otto."

"Move over there," he called in a thick voice. Mrs. Muznik stirred and in the gloom her white teeth suddenly flashed in a grin. From the front part of the house Willy's voice, shrill and frightened, was calling, "Ma, ma. Something's the matter with Munch. He's dead. Ma . . . ma . . ."

Mishkin's Idealist

“ He runs the elevator in the building on the West Side where I work sometimes,” said my Falstaffian friend, Mr. Feodor Mishkin, “ and if you want I will take you and see him.”

“ I am now an editor, Feodor, and am finished interviewing elevator men.”

“ Ha, you are finished with a lot of things, if you want me to tell the truth. But if you had any sense you would go see Sem before he moves.”

“ Where is he moving? ”

“ Where is he moving? What a question to ask! Where should he move? He is moving to Palestine. That's where he's moving.”

“ So you are still interested in Zionism, Feodor? ”

“ Who, me! Are you crazy? Who is talking about Zionism? If a man wants to move to Palestine, in your mind already he is a Zionist movement. And besides what have I got to do with where Sem is moving? ”

“ All right. Tell me about Sam.”

“ I'll tell you what, then. You come to the dinner

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which we are giving to Sem tomorrow night and you will see what a comedy this is."

"How does it happen, Feodor, you are giving a dinner to an elevator man?"

"It happens. That's how it happens. Maybe to you Sem is an elevator man. But to other people he is maybe something more. A comedy, a clown who makes them sigh, an idealist. Do you know what it is, an idealist?"

"It is hard to say, Feodor. There are so many different kinds of idealists."

"Oho, that's what you think. Well, everybody don't look on things the way you do. I've heard enough of people say that your point of view is more funny to them in a different way than Sem, the elevator man."

"At least when you are through insulting me, Feodor, you will cheer me up by telling me why this Sam is so funny. I want to laugh, too."

"I see. To you a man who is a comedy is somebody who will make you laugh. Well, if you expect Sem to make you laugh, you had better go to a vaudeville show instead. Because there are some comedies which make you cry just as much. Sem is an old man. He has been running this elevator in the building for

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ten years, maybe twenty years. Anyway, the elevator is his home. He eats there, he sleeps there, he meets his friends there. But the reason he is a comedy is because he can't read or write. You understand?"

"You mean he is a naive, Feoder?"

"Feh! Naive! Who said naive! If a man can't read or write he is naive by you. By me he is something else, something tragic and comic, and he has a soul and he lives in such a way that you laugh at him and feel sorry for yourself at the same time. I'll tell you Sem would have gone to Palestine long ago but there was no elevator for him to run. Now in Jaffa there is a building with an elevator. And so he is going finally. After twenty years of dreaming. Ah, he is a great Jew."

"The story sounds mixed up, Feodor. I must ask what and why and how is Sam a great Jew."

"Aha. You must ask! Go on ask. You will never find out. Because you will never understand. By you he has to do something to be a great Jew! Nobody can fool you. What has he done? And why is he great? Well, I'll tell you. He is a great man because he thinks he belongs to a great race. Don't in-

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terrupt me, please. It would do you good to know a man like Sem."

"I never doubt for a moment, Feodor, but that the Jews are a great race. Everybody admits it."

"All right. You know the whole story already. Hm, it is unnecessary to talk to you. In advance you know everything. But, believe me, Sem is somebody you don't know, smart as you are. He is an idealist. And why? Because to Sem everybody who does something important is a Jew. Mayor Dever is a Jew. President Coolidge is a Jew. And when you ask Sem who is the champion prize fighter of the world, he looks at you and grows happy and answers you, "Demskey, a great Jew."

"Delusions, eh?"

"Bah! Delusions. By you everything is delusions, smellusions. Why is it a delusion? Why isn't it a dream? When you say to Sem, 'Sem what do you think of Lloyd George?' he answers you, 'Say, mister, in the first place his name ain't Lloyd George. His real name is Levy George, and he is a great Jew.' So you see, everybody is to Sem a Jew. And he will spend a whole hour talking to you about John L. Solomon and William Jennings Hyman and Herman Ford."

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“I see the joke, Feodor, and——”

“Aha! To you everything is a joke. We laugh, yes; but we don't call it a joke. In his elevator Sem has a picture stuck up from the war. To him the picture is from General Pershinger, the great Jew general. I'll tell you something. To be an idealist like Sem is to be happy. He is a poor man and eats a little sandwich for noon. And maybe his head is a little bit wrong, but the world he lives in is better from mine or yours.”

“But why do you allow him to go to Palestine at his age, Feodor?”

“Because he thinks in Palestine there is a kingdom, a land of milk and honey. And for years already he has been talking about it, about the gold temples and the court where the King of the Jews lives. It is all like a fairy-tale to him, Palestine. And it would be wrong to keep him away from it.”

“But when he finds out, Feodor. Good Lord, he will die of a broken heart.”

“You think so, eh? Well, you know as usual—nothing. The doctor who we took him to for examination says he can live at the utmost less than a month. He has got a disease—heart failure. Well, what is there wrong? In two weeks he will be on a

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boat, a slow boat. And somewhere in the middle of the ocean he will die. Ah, you don't understand such things. But the whole West Side is already weeping and laughing for Sem. He will die like a true idealist. Come, can I sell you a pair of tickets for the banquet? "

The Bomb Thrower

Men and women swathed in streets and buildings; factories, avenues, houses and traffic winding them mummy fashion. He stood pressed against the wall of a skyscraper. Hatless, unshaven, thin-lipped and with the eyes of a frightened girl, he stood watching the people in the streets.

Their movement on the sidewalk in front of him was like the play of shadows. He might lose himself in these shadows. His legs inside their soggy trousers quivered pleasantly.

He raised his eyes toward the window-pitted altitudes. A patch of sky lay neatly balanced between the roof lines of the street. The curious smile of a man saying "yes" without knowing what it means loosened his lips.

He must look at people. Men were moving about in the city hunting him. They would come soon and take him away. In the meantime, he must fill his eyes with the sight of people, of stone pavements, of doorways and plate glass windows lettered with gold and porcelain. These things constituted freedom.

Curves of people, blur and drip of people; why did

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they seem different now? They were slaves and master—murderous, blood-sucking rich and sweating, back-broken poor. There was this tableau in the crowd; a strong lined terrible cartoon was in the crowd. But his eyes or his mind would not clear. He stared in vain.

The people were like rain on the sidewalk. He watched them vanish in gusts before him. He felt frightened at their vagueness. Round and round them was the smoke of chimneys, the noise of traffic and swirl of buildings. They were wound deep. Legs moved under the swathing. Faces wrapped in tons of stone, in miles of steel, drifted blindly. Life seemed lost within an effigy.

He removed a cigarette from his trouser pocket and lighted it, staring at the little pyramid of flame that danced at the end of his nose. Eventually the men who were hunting him would come to this corner. They would see him against the skyscraper—hatless, unshaved, smoking a cigarette. He told himself these things, taking pride in their lucidity. Then his lips loosened in the smile again.

No one was hunting the people on the sidewalk. And yet they hurried, running this way and that, darting under bars, in and out of doorways, while he who was being hunted stood motionless. Men

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were worming their way through the layers of the city like bewildered maggots wandering over a mummy case, hunting him. When they found him they would become suddenly large. They would take him by the wrists, twisting them sharply, and hold him among them at the curbing while a crowd gathered and a wagon, clanging vividly, came charging out of the traffic.

He came back to himself. He must deny himself the simplicity of fear. If he stepped into the crowd he would begin to run. He would run, knocking people over, jumping in and out among cars and wagons. His legs quivered pleasantly at the thought and the cigarette dried to his lips. It might be better than standing as he was, with unfocused thoughts nauseating his brain. Yet he held himself from running, his unwashed hands flattened against the cool stone of the skyscraper and his fear like the soul of a stranger scurried about in his body.

His thought became a dream that twisted itself before his eyes, addressing him with sudden intimate voices. He felt the city like a great dice box shaking about him. Men and women rolled and rattled out of it into the streets. Standing near the skyscraper he could observe the combinations—the changing hieroglyphs of dots. Now the city shook out combi-

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nations of yellow, blue and lavender hats; luscious curves of women and doubled fists of men swinging against the black angles of legs; faces that seemed like a soiled, unraveling bandage, and arrangements of wood and steel that were continually turning corners. And now it shook out the sound of laughter and the shriek of horns.

The intimate voices said to him there was no meaning to life. He had once been mistaken or perhaps insane. Now he was a man recovered from a delirium of mania and finding himself weak and calm in a sunny place. The things that had peopled his mania became a distant part of the dream before his eyes, an impossible and persisting yesterday. He watched them. There was the high hammering purpose of ideals that had been in his brain. There was the clear lust that had animated him. He had been moving all his life in the light of this lust. It had played like a searchlight before him, a searchlight on a tableau. Masters and slaves—exploiting, intolerable tyrants with red faces and definitely-shaped hearts; and humanity crucified in factories and slums. These things had been plain yesterday. Now they were far away and outside of him in a dream.

As he filled his eyes with the sight of people the impossible and persistent yesterday drifted contin-

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ually before him as if it no longer belonged to the world. The light of faith that had supported this yesterday had drained itself out of him. He saw himself stealing about through streets with a thing under his coat, entering a crowded building and casually hiding the thing under a long stone bench on which people were sitting. A few moments later amazing things were happening. Windows fell into the street. Walls flew through the air. The crowded building into which he had carried the thing became a confusion of stone and bricks.

He watched the yesterday again and saw himself standing on a corner with the noise of explosion still in his ears. It had remained in his ears as he walked away. He sought now to recapture it. But a silence remained. The explosion had been a noise heard by someone else. The yesterday in which it had occurred had been a yesterday inhabited by someone else.

From his position, pressed against the wall of the skyscraper, he, the man who had carried the thing under his coat, looked upon a world in which he had never lived before. The tableau and the patterns of yesterday were shuffled together and vanished. The philosophy by which he had read into its heart was vanished. Thought had become a fantastic shuffle of

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words, a flood of ink and a flood of sound that broke against the movement of crowds and vanished.

The city stared down at him with its geometrical cloud of windows. The streets wound themselves around him and the zigzag tumble of its dice played about his feet. Men were prowling through the city hunting him, peering into alleyways, ringing door bells, searching rooms, questioning scores who had merely known his name.. They would find him flattened against the wall of the skyscraper, smoking a cigarette.

He thought idly of the things he had planned to say with his capture. But they were things of another world—masters and slaves, dignity of murder, blasting a hole in the fat and purblind consciousness of the public through which it might see the vision of wrongs and crucifixions. The words of the thoughts he had prepared in the world that no longer existed lost themselves in the dream before his eyes.

He stared about him. There was something other hunting him than the police. A vision hunted him, demanding of him new words to give it life. But he could think only with his eyes. With his eyes he stared at the vision that had no meaning in his thought—women swaying under colored dresses, hips jerking as they moved; men with faces lowered,

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arms swinging as they moved; women whose faces were like lavender corpses—vividly dead things, painted, smeared with layers of powder; women with stiffened faces whose cheeks were hardened into tinsel; faces with sores showing blue and pink through a broken enamel; faces cherubically curved with lips that smiled and large, iridescent eyes that gleamed with impudence; faces like brooding gestures; old faces—men without teeth and women whose jaws quivered and whose eyes shed water; faces twisted out of human guise; faces like little whiskered dogs, cunning, sodden, deformed into vicious grimaces and stamped with enigmatic despairs and enigmatic elations; faces of youth—dull, empty, clear-eyed like little freshets of water. The vision of faces swept by him like the babble of a strange language. Over them were colors of hair, oily and rusted colors, blooming with purple, black, red, green and yellow hats. They bobbed by him—faces, hair and hats making queer lithographic masks running before his eyes.

He watched them with an intensity that made him dizzy. Hats of men like a stretch of crazily-slanted, tiny roofs fled before him and remained always present. Lean-handled buildings, swelling like great clubs at the top, cars clanging and crawling, and the

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flutter of windows, like a swarm of transfixed locusts, passed into his eyes and left his thought blank. There was no meaning to be read in them.

They were a vision for eyes alone. Life hunted the people in the street, pursuing them through the windings of pavements and corridors; an insensate life, like the bay of a galloping hound. Men and women in a churn, men and women rolling and rattling out of a dice box. There was no other pattern or tableau.

With the shortened cigarette warming his lips, he remained against the wall of the skyscraper. His shoulders had become hunched like those of a man stricken with cold. He seemed to have withered inside of his clothes so that the movements of his body, visible at his collarless neck and wrists, were like the rattle of a dead nut inside its shell. His coat and trousers hung from him like garments heavy with rain, giving him a soggy, voluminous exterior. The corkscrew bone of his neck slanted punily like a soft candle out of the grimy socket of his collar. His head had fallen forward as if he were dozing.

It was twilight and the signs over the sidewalks popped into vision with freshly-kindled lights. Names and slogans spelled themselves against the thin darkness. Commodities, luxuries, trades, food,

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drink, novelties and schemes of finance jutted their illuminated scrawls over the pavements, stretching in fantastic unrelation down the sides of the street. Under them the faces danced. Raising his eyes he looked again at the window-pitted altitudes now shot with discs of yellow. The patch of sky that had lain neatly balanced above them had withdrawn, leaving behind a devouring dark.

He would not be able to talk to the police as he had planned. The men who were hunting him would come soon and drag him away from the wall of the skyscraper. His cigarette was long finished. He searched idly for another. He began to mumble to himself. Where was everybody going? Everywhere in the world they were moving like this. He alone wasn't moving. He was not in the hunt. He had been mistaken or perhaps insane. There was no tableau but a hunt, a running of faces and hats; a running of legs and bodies and jerking hips.

A hand plucked at his elbow. His body became silent. A thought hurried from him like a frightened little dog. The street revolved into a blur of hats and windows. His legs inside their trousers rattled about. Moments later he recalled having heard a voice speaking sharply to him to move on. He remembered having been jerked by the elbow into the

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midst of the throng on the sidewalk. Move on! Then they were still hunting him. No one had found him. People shot by. The pleasant quivering of his legs attracted his attention. They were moving as if springs were shooting them upward. They were mounting something. And his arms were floating happily. He was running.

Down the street he ran, a hatless, unshaven figure in flapping trousers. His body jumped up and down and his legs moved as if they were being blown along. In and out, in and out, past yawning yellows of theaters and restaurants, past faces that vanished like unfinished words. His mind was at peace. The nausea was drained out of it. He was flying. Over cars and under wagons, down curbs and up little hills of bodies. Men were hunting him, streaming after him with the gallop and bay of hounds. He opened his mouth and let out the wildness of his heart.

A Nigger Who Was Hanged

After I had talked to him awhile in his cell I realized that he owed his impending death to his sideburns and his van dyke. They had crystalized the fatal illusion of his greatness.

A nigger about to be hanged is as a rule less interesting than a white man in a similar predicament. Mystery and terror seem not to denude the black of his character, but merely to accentuate it. Under their influence he grows mystical and tuneful. Emotion does not twist his face into dramatic awkwardness. Awaiting death he becomes like a child, graceful, poignant and expectant.

With the white man, the character changes are more vivid. He is wrenched out of the materialistic surfaces within which he lives and plunged into a character foreign to him. Terror and death are things he forgot ages ago. He finds no subtle affinity with his fate. Until the moment he drops through the gallows trap he struggles pitifully in a nightmare.

When I left the black in his cell I wondered if he were insane. Yet to label illusion insanity is a whole-

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sale evasion. The man had been educated in American schools. He had started out to be a physician. His soul had not kept pace with his intellect. In a curious way he had become awed of himself, of his learning and of the sideburns and van dyke that decorated his black face.

Gradually a duality had developed. He had begun referring to himself in the third person. He felt fearful and puzzled of this thing that was in his head—thought. His soul was like a naive face peering out of a dark and familiar wilderness. It watched this other thing striding authoritatively through a strange world. It watched men become respectful to this thing. It noted how there was a voice and a manner, a miraculous collection of words and ideas which the world deferentially greeted as Dr. Samuel Williams.

Nothing would have happened had it not been for this naive face peering out of the dark. But when Dr. Williams attired himself in a frock coat and a stiff white shirt and patent leather shoes, and when he turned his keen eyes and aristocratic beard to the mirror, the naive one in a transport of adulation began to whisper.

The adulation was too much for Dr. Williams. At

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first he was content to pose and preen before this awed and murmuring one. But slowly a curious thing happened. The soul of Dr. Williams tip-toed out of its exile and took possession of the frock coat, the van dyke and the strange thing in his head—thought. And there was no longer a separate Dr. Williams—a clever, shrewd and learned man. There was instead a gibbering and exultant noise behind an incongruous exterior. The noise proclaimed, “I am Prince Mulbo of Abyssinia, a man of royal blood. I will lead my people back to the dark and familiar place where I belong.”

Things happened rapidly after this. Dr. Samuel Williams, who had been a convincing exterior, vanished rather swiftly. In his place walked an Abyssinian Prince, exuding opulent phrases and making regal gestures with the frock coat, the sideburns and the van dyke.

The doctor's friends were not unduly surprised. A few negro business and professional men shook their heads dubiously. But the others responded excitedly to the transformation. They pointed out that Dr. Williams was merely using his great learning and genius for leadership in a new way. And thousands

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of them exultantly enrolled under his banner—for he had a banner—a colored bit of bunting which he identified as the flag of Abyssinia.

It was while marching under this banner in South State street that the trouble happened. The Prince was riding on a horse and to the frock coat he had added other regalia—medals, ribbons and royal haberdashery. A group of U. S. marines appeared. The police had received instruction to break up the parade. Fanaticism was considered dangerous in the neighborhood.

It was the Prince who started the firing. Astride his horse and giving vent to mysterious and exultant war cries he blazed away at the uniforms of the enemy. There were several killed.

I watched the Prince of Abyssinia when they led him into the towering, slot-like chamber of the County Jail in which the scaffold is from time to time erected. He was dressed in his frock coat. His van dyke had been carefully trimmed. He wore no collar—a necessary physiological formality.

When he walked up the steps to the scaffold I noted that he seemed somewhat surprised. His eyes looked with a certain naive questioning at the scene.

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His manner was restrained and apologetic as if he were an interloper. He regarded the sheriff with polite curiosity and when anyone whispered near him he turned quickly and stared at the person.

It was obvious that there was no Dr. Williams, nor even an Abyssinian Prince. The soul of the man that had been masquerading under the awesome exterior of the frock coat and van dyke had fled back to its origin. And now it was again peering naively out of the dark and familiar place in which it lived. It was watching something happen, something with which it had no connection. They were doing something to the awesome one who used long words and made magnificent gestures. They were fixing a rope about his neck.

“Have you anything you wish to say?” inquired the sheriff.

The naive and bewildered one retreated still further. They were not addressing him. They were merely talking to the frock coat and the sideburns. And the frock coat and the sideburns grew somewhat puzzled. They turned around and seemed to be looking for someone—a familiar. But the familiar had fled. The sheriff was nervous.

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“Anything you wish to say?” he repeated, stammering.

“No . . . not at this time,” the frock coat answered. The puzzled, questioning eyes of Dr. Williams opened for an instant to an incomprehensible scene and then vanished behind a white hood.

Dog Eat Dog

We were in a fine philosophical mood, my friend and I, and we walked in the avenue with portentous and sardonic steps. He with his shoulders lifted and his apish head wagging slowly from side to side. I with the proper Mona Lisa crook to my lips. Thus men walk when, as inviolable gods, they debate the puerilities and ironies of life.

There was about us in this avenue the paganism of women's buttocks moving under adroit silks, of round warm legs flashing their curves and luscious tints in the sun, of pear-moulded breasts dancing beneath tight fabrics. Bodies moving slowly toward some fantastic carnival, they seemed; faces rouged and stencilled for subtle and priapic rites. Continually they zigzagged by us, colored like totems, a shining barbaric procession of lusts in caricature. The marvel of it was that some halooing buck did not come bounding into this avenue and seize upon these legs and buttocks and breasts that promenaded in such elaborate and piquant masquerade. A thought worthy of philosophers. Here under the tall sunny buildings with their polished windows, here walled by the luxurious dignity of their great rectangular

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faces, what a saturnalian rape were possible. What a dancing and shouting and rolling about with the tom-tom of the traffic hammering out its quick, delirious monotone. What a wild racing up and down silk-strewn pavements, in and out of marble-corridorred grottos. What an insane and whimsical burlesque of passion.

Alas! these were merely the unwindings of philosophical fancy. Before us remained the vista of bobbing faces and hidden undulated bodies wedded to exotic plumage and lushent fabrics. From these corseted nymphs as they passed issued trailing perfumes that fell upon the nose as the cunning intimate whispers of a panderer might come into the ear. Toward some carnival they might be destined (there are still boudoirs in the world, it is said), but their faces remained as they floated by a succession of stencilled and unchanging blanks.

They stared now into the beaming windows of the avenue shops. Herein, behind sun-streaked panels of glass, lay oriental silks, gold and green and turquoise; Japanese bric-a-brac, little monsters of bronze; black and vermillion screens; scrolled porcelains. Here also they saw, as they passed, leather elegancies, little black velvet boxes of jewels, moon-white silvers, platters of gold, and occasionally

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groups of waxen mannikins garlanded with shining fabrics and postured in simpering mannerism. Tired of these windows they glanced now at each other or looked up in unimaginable conversations at the grey-faced, carefully mustached creatures who walked at their side. Delusions, all of them. Bodies of men bathed and shaved and tailored into puppets of commerce. White bodies of women reduced to piquant stuffings for silks.

We walked, my friend and I, with sardonic and portentous steps as befit the stride of gods who dot the unending processions of the little greedy half-dead. To our left the rubber-tired traffic purred and beat out its monotone, the whirling white and black of spokes pirouetted in the sun. To our right the grave and elegant geometries swooped into space. And having walked a goodly way between these things we paused and my friend improved the occasion with a snort. His head, as he stood contemplating the varicolored swarm of motion, began to wag with more deliberation, his face growing pregnant with words. By these animated preliminary silences did my friend attune the spirit of his listener for matters of vast and symbolic import. The darkness of his face grew and he raised his arm with a slow gesture and pointed his thumb over his shoulder toward the west.

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“ I keep thinking,” he said, “ I keep thinking of the gangs on the west side. The working people. The immemorial masses.”

The ominous drawl of his words and the manner of his face, and a fixed and flint-like convulsion, weighted this thing my friend said with the illusion of depth and sagacity which attended the most trivial of his comments. His voice continued, a voice which had about it the quality of a banjo played with bewildering slowness.

“ The immemorial masses on the west side,” he said, “ who live in stinking houses and sweat ten hours a day for the right to remain alive. They’re coming in this street. This crowd in silk can’t hold them back much longer. Look at them.” He stared into faces. “ Four civilizations have died,” he resumed, “ four civilizations have died because the gang on the west side never broke through. But they’re coming through this time. When I see all this . . . all this . . .” he made a slow contemptuous gesture toward the vari-colored swarm about us, “ I know the stage is set for the great act. When I look at the grey and painted faces and these unharnessed useless bodies, I get the breath of the gangs on the west side pushing through.”

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My friend paused and eyed the procession in the avenue with a dark and curious amusement. For there was a strange hate in the cerebations of my friend, and a stranger love. He moved through the day like some grim and ominous evangel and his chuckles invariably reminded me of guillotines. He had the eyes of a prophet, deep-set smoky eyes, fastened always upon distances, and his thought was like a slow fume that darkened the air about him. That afternoon, as he stood facing the polite and repressed bacchanal of the avenue, was the last I saw of him. And therefore I have told of it. He had consented to walk with me away from the grimy factory-strewn scenes where he was then leading a strike of garment workers.

“The immemorial masses,” he chuckled, and his eyes rested darkly on the dapper procession. “This crowd . . . this little string of marionettes . . . can’t cheat them much longer.” His fingers riveted my elbow. “I get the breath of them,” he said, “I get the breath of the gangs on the west side of the world pushing through into the sun.”

We shook hands and the storm of his thoughts remained like an uncanny shadow about me as he passed out of the avenue. During the days which followed my friend’s name appeared often in the

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newspapers. About him had rallied some five thousand workers, raising a great cry for wages and leisure. Once I went to the west side to see him, but found in his place a woman who spoke of him with eagerness. She was a dark-eyed creature with a smoulder in her voice. Walking with the rouged and dapper procession in the sunny avenue she would have seemed a strayed and bewildered animal. Here amid the sagging houses, the debris-covered street, the broken walls, her spirit was a luminous thing, her body arose from the earth with the bend of a far-flung defiance to her head. In her eyes, as in the eyes of my friend, there were also dark prophecies. And her words had about the same stillness, the same curious air of consecration.

She spoke of many things, of my friend, of poverty, of hovels in which men and women decayed, and of a mysterious dawn that was to break like a song through the dark places of the world. When she spoke of my friend there came into her voice an intimacy and an awe. Her body straightened as in some curious salute. Her eyes largened and there was tumult to her. Her soul seemed to precipitate itself into embraces unseen. More than ever she would have appeared a strayed and bewildered animal in the dapper procession of the sunny avenue.

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As her talk moved to topics beyond my friend her intensity changed and her words became more deliberate. She emitted them slowly and it was almost the banjo voice of my friend that spoke.

“I had no faith until I met him,” she said. “I had no faith in these people. But now they’re coming through. The little silk crowd can’t cheat us much longer. We’re coming through this time. The feet of armies have walked over us and we slept. Four civilizations have died because we slept. This sleep was because without faith we were without souls. But now we have faith in each other. The working people are standing together. From one end of the world to the other we have the faith that is bringing us to our feet in one mighty wave.”

In her words was a quality which weighted their awkward rhetoric with a compelling power. This quality remained with me after I left her. Faith . . . the faith of a woman’s eyes raised in the dark of a church, the faith of a man’s eyes resting in awe upon a face finer and slenderer than his own, the faith of my friend and his friend amid the ancient poverities and decays, they are not a part of philosophy. And yet I came away thinking wistfully of the gods that corrupt the reason of the ages. It is, after all, a lonely and profitless business to deny these gods.

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The faiths that boil in the souls of the race, the vari-shaped altars tended by the little greedy half-dead, there is in them perhaps the true solace for those who must find what they seek. My mood of that day on the avenue was gone. I walked now in ragged broken streets where the little half-dead seem to be moving always in vast and merciless defeat. In these streets I sought the faith of my friend. But the gods as ever eluded me. Here was merely a less colored masquerade than in the avenue. A great deal of soil and manure is needed to produce a flower, even such a flower as civilization. I watched the strikers gathering and talking, the men and women passing with intent and burning eyes, the half-naked children shrieking over the dirty pavements, and I came away with the memory of a purposeless, meaningless fever throbbing in the veins of the day.

And my friend died in this manner.

The summer sun had loosened the stench of the alleys when Nolan awoke. I have been in Nolan's home and have seen his wife moving about in the morning cooking the breakfast for the seven of them. Her body is fat with the humanless contour of a spider and her eyes seem always to be thinking of bruises. From morning until night she moves about, scrubbing, cooking, washing, straightening, feeding

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children, walking to grocery stores and butcher shops, haggling over pennies. The children scream and brawl and chase each other through lots and alleys. Just before noon Nolan sits up in his dark, bitter-smelling bed and stretches his arms.

On the morning of the day in which my friend died, Nolan sat up in his bed and stretched his arms. At noon he emerged in his stocking feet and walked about in the kitchen of his home, his suspenders hanging in two purple loops from the waist of his drooping trousers. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a somewhat reddened face. His face, usually vigorous and genial, wore a frown whenever he moved about in the small littered rooms of his home. He ate his breakfast in silence and listened to the complaint of his woman, a complaint which, by reason of its antiquity, fell now like meaningless noise on his ears. It was more money for the doctor, his woman needed; more money for the girl, who must have another dress; more money for the butcher. A depressing racket, this ancient complaint of his woman, a thing which went on summer and winter. Nolan ate and the frown of his face grew deeper. In silence he moved into the bitter-smelling bedroom and put on his blue uniform and his leather puttees. It was the uniform of the city's mounted police, kept

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by Nolan in some mysterious manner immune from the grime and the squalor of his home.

In this blue transforming uniform, freshly shaved and his neck ornamented with a white band of collar, Nolan waited patiently for his woman to cease her ancient complaint. Sixteen years of honest and faithful service were Nolan's, and yet the complaint of his woman had grown with each of these years, even as the smell of his home had thickened and acquired a personality.

"It'll be pay day tomorrow," said Nolan at length. "And what good'll that be?" said his woman, rubbing at her round fat face with her apron. "Maybe you think you're somebody in them clothes of yours. But will you look at the bills from the doctor and the butcher." And there followed the depressing racket that seemed to Nolan an inevitable companion of the musty bitter smell which stuffed his home. "It'll be pay day tomorrow," said Nolan, and he walked out of his home. Down the street he walked, and thought, as bitter as the smell of his bed, remained in his brain. Vague thought without outline, it was. He spat as he walked and cursed under his breath.

There was a horse in the police barns that was Nolan's, a shining brown, upstanding horse that

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whinnied at him as he came near. In silence Nolan placed the saddle on his horse and lifted himself into it. Into the street he jogged, his broad-shouldered figure in its resplendent uniform sitting stiff and careless atop the lively horse, his eyes frowning from under his ornamented cap. Riding so on his horse Nolan glowered down upon the traffic that grew thicker about him. Men jumped out of his way and wagons drew tactfully aside to give him unmolested passage. This sometimes brought cheer into Nolan's heart. But now the sound of his woman's complaint was in his ears, and the bitter smell of his home lay like rust in his nose. And if he was strong and broad and could ride along on his horse now, what in hell would he be doing to stop the complaint of his woman when he had grown old?

Nolan came out of the squad room and remounted. He had his orders for the day. He rode off at a leisurely pace toward the west side. There was a strike there and trouble, and Nolan rode to keep the city from coming to harm.

There were a thousand men and women gathered in the street. Policemen stood before the doors of the black, many-windowed factory building which stretched its flat face down the block. The crowd in the street shuffled about over the pavements in com-

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pact little groups, crying out words, waving their arms, their faces moving in tiny grimaces. They were the strikers that my friend was leading, stunted little men in humorously misfitting clothes, girls in heavy sagging dresses and grimy waists. They swarmed about, voluble and excited. Nolan and seven horsemen like himself watched them from the end of the street. The eight of them sat stiff and straight on their horses and frowned. Nolan turned abruptly to one of them and said, "What the hell, they're going to march. They ain't got a permit for marching."

They were going to march. There was a man who stood on a box in the center of the street surrounded by a growing mass of faces. He waved his arms and cried out in a slow far-reaching voice. This man was my friend. Nolan watched him with the frown deepening in his face. Slowly, as my friend cried out, the scattered crowd seemed to unravel itself into ranks. Symmetrical rows of faces appeared one behind the other. Men began to shout and push other men. There was quick, determined tumult. The noise then began to die away. In the silence that came into the street a long thick mass of men and women stood with their eyes raised toward my friend and curious eager light in their faces.

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“They’re going to march,” said Nolan to the horsemen around him, “and they ain’t got a permit.”

He spurred his horse up to my friend, who still stood on his box in the center of the street.

“Cut that,” said Nolan, “you ain’t got a permit to march.”

My friend looked at him and smiled. The ranks of men and women sagged and almost disappeared. The rows of faces became circles and half circles. But my friend on his little box threw up his arms.

“March,” he cried out, “comrades, mark time. We march to the city hall. We march through the avenues. We will give the little silk-crowds a look at us.”

The rattle and thud of feet striking the street sounded. The long thick mass grew mysteriously straight. The rows of faces flashed dully in even lines.

“Into the sun,” cried my friend. “Comrades, forward . . . march.”

The street moved. It lengthened and swayed. The beat of feet, like the long-drawn rattle of a drum, came into the air. Slowly, expanding and contracting, their shoulders swaying, the regiment of motionless faces and leaping eyes groped for a rhythm. It

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came and the regiment marched. Down the street it moved, an unwavering, indomitable mass of swinging arms and legs. Above the rhythmic lift of its heads appeared banners red and black and inscribed with the words, " Labor " . . . " Give us Bread " . . .

Nolan and his horsemen watched the swinging column approach. For a moment he stared at it, fascinated. The thought of his woman's complaint had gone from his head and with it the smell that had ridden in his nose. Under his bright blue uniform he felt himself grow warm and curiously alive. The blood swept through his body and a sweat like that of a strong juice came out of him. Oaths rushed from his lips and a lust whirled his head.

" Come on," he yelled, waving his arm, and his brown upstanding horse leaped forward. My friend and his immemorial masses were marching and Nolan and his seven horsemen were rushing down the street into the face of them. As the horses came nearer my friend grew large in front of the regiment. His voice arose clear and strident above the murmuring behind him and the wild sharp racket of the oncoming horses before him.

" Comrades," he shouted, " march, comrades. . . . Hold firm . . . and march . . . "

Nolan, his eyes swimming, heard the words and

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tugged at a rein in his hand. His brown leaping horse turned lightly. Rearing and plunging it shot forward and its iron hoofs cracked down upon the head of the man who had shouted the command. The thick ranks of the marchers disappeared and became a swarm of circling faces that melted into walls and vanished into little running groups. In the midst of the street, shouting and plunging, reared the seven horsemen. The street grew empty. Nolan bounced and cried out in his saddle as his horse, turning and prancing, leaped again and again upon the figure it had brought down. For a wild thing had burst in Nolan's heart and there was the music of a hammering drum in his ears. There were cries and shrieks about him and he felt a hate leaping into his throat, contracting the muscles of his body. His hand fumbled desperately at the figure that lay under the dancing feet of the horse. But the figure was silent and motionless. It lay in a disjointed posture, its face flattened and crushed into the grime of the street, its body bent and spread out like a wooden thing.

Nolan dismounted and stood with the seven horsemen at the curb. They were all thick-shouldered men with strong red faces. They held guns in their hands. They stood with their jaws thrust forward and with glowering eyes stared into the emptied street.

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“ We got them,” said Nolan in a thick voice. “ The dirty bums, a pack of god-damned sheenies and polacks.”

He glanced toward the figure that lay with its face crushed into the stone in the center of the street. There were several other figures moving feebly on their bellies. As he looked a woman came rushing toward the disjointed figure of my friend. She hurled herself with a cry across the twisted body and lay there stiff and silent. Nolan walked toward her, his head wagging from side to side. As he approached she raised her head and flung her fist toward him.

“ You killed him. You murdered him,” she shouted at Nolan. “ But it won’t do you any good. You can’t stop us. You can’t cheat us much longer. Do you hear? God strike you dead you . . . you . . . He’s dead. He’s dead. But you can’t keep us back. Do you hear? We’re coming through . . .”

Nolan stared at her without words, looked at the woman’s fist that remained shuddering in the air. And in the voice and gesture of the body there was something that brought back to Nolan’s thought the complaint of his woman, the complaint that went on from day to day for sixteen years. He darted forward and seized this one by the shoulder.

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“Stop your yowling,” he cried. “Get up, you bum. You’re under arrest.”

He shook her as she followed his grip to her feet. The smell of her brought back into Nolan’s nose the smell of his woman. He struck her with his fist.

“Come on,” he cried, his voice thick with the violence of his blood. “Get along.”

For a moment Nolan and the woman who had come to my friend remained staring into each other’s eyes, a hate burning between them and blackening their vision. Their faces, twisted and dark, came together. There were no words. With a great jerk Nolan tumbled the woman along after him toward the curb.

“Come on,” he growled. “If you try to break away I’ll club you to death.”

The Imposter

The soft crackle of the rain surrounded by umbrella. It is true. I now carry an umbrella. I find an increasing tendency when writing of myself to tell pleasant lies. And unless I watch closely the words I set down, the characteristics I describe or to which I confess pertain to a figure ten years younger than myself.

On this day as it rained I thought, "There are fewer and fewer things to do and places to visit in town." Then I recalled an old Jew who used to run a tin shop in a Maxwell street basement. A delightful old man. Calm, white bearded, clever fingered. It was his habit to talk about God. He had been educated as a Rabbi in his youth. The sense of humor which often turns Jews into sardonic and pessimistic creatures had blown up the pious soul of the rabbinical youth.

On holidays I would sit in the clean and tiny flat behind his shop and he would talk. I recall some of his sentences. . . . "I watch people in the street. They run around like little bugs. And when somebody or something steps on them they roll over on their backs and that is the end." Again I remember.

THE IMPOSTER

. . . “What do you suppose God is? A dream men have made up so as not to be afraid of sleep. Sleep is too dark, yes? We will fall asleep some time and have beautiful dreams. They say this to each other and feel better. . . .” One day he said to me: “How can anyone be angry or excited? Stop to think, and what happens? You always smile. I am happy because my mind tells me life is nothing and there is nothing important enough in the world to make me unhappy.”

It was raining and I walked curiously in Maxwell street, looking for a basement tin shop again. Years had passed. The street vaguely reminded me of an old suit I had once worn. Perhaps the old tinsmith had died. But he had had a wife, a stout woman ten or fifteen years younger than himself. A round face, small, twinkling black eyes and compressed lips, as if she were always on the verge of saying something. But I remembered her as a silent woman.

The place was where I left it almost eight years ago. The steps leading down from the sidewalk wobbled a bit more as I walked on them. And the old man was sitting behind his bench dozing.

He woke as I greeted him in Yiddish.

“Hello, Reb Duvid; come away from your dreams.”

THE IMPOSTER

He had allowed these familiarities because my Yiddish, remembered from an embattled ghetto childhood, contained only profane or scurrilous phrases. The old man opened his eyes and looked at me with a frown.

“Eh . . . eh?” he grunted. I saw he thought I was a customer.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“Don’t you remember me, Reb Duvid?”

He drew a pair of specs from his work apron and fitted them on his nose. After regarding me for a minute, he shook his head.

“Do you want something?” he repeated.

“We used to be friends,” I persisted. “Long ago. Eight years.”

“Ai yai,” he clucked his tongue. “So it is you? Ai yai.”

“Well, you haven’t changed much,” I began.

He continued to cluck and wag his head as he came from behind the counter.

“How is your father and mother?” he inquired. I looked at him with surprise. I was certain I had never mentioned my family to him.

“Very fine,” I answered. “And with you, how goes it?”

“Hm, all right.” He paused and stared at me

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again. "You . . . you want something?" he asked with a puzzled expression.

"Evidently you don't remember me," I explained.

He stroked his beard and pouted his old lips.

"It seems to me I do, and it seems to me I don't," he answered.

I explained to him my visits years ago and recalled our talks. He listened and nodded.

"That was before my wife died," he agreed. "Yes, I used to have the shop here. I've been here now for sixteen years. Eight years ago I was here, too."

"And I don't exist in your mind?" I pursued.

"It is some mistake," he smiled hopefully. "There is another man who has a tin shop on the other side of the street. He makes keys, too. I don't make keys. There is no money in it. Maybe it's that man."

I nodded as if agreeing.

"Yes, maybe I have made a mistake. But wait a minute. Perhaps you will remember when I say that I always called you Reb Duvid. It's not your name, but . . ."

"Names I have had called me so much," he answered, "that how can I remember one more than the other. It must be across the street you want him."

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“Thanks,” I said. “I’ll try across the street. Goodbye. I’m sorry I woke you up from your dreams, Reb Duvid.”

“Ai, yai,” he clucked, smiled and returned to his chair behind the work counter. I watched him as I opened the door. His bearded face was again lowered, his eyes closed and a smile over his lips. He was almost dozing.

The rain crackled softly around my umbrella once more.

“He’s forgotten me,” I thought, feeling more and more surprised over the misadventure. “This is curious. I remember almost every word of his talk and mine eight years ago. And to him I am part of a blur that includes customers, store, windows, rainfall. I felt like a dead man when I was talking to him now. He looked at me and said: “You are wrong, you never existed.”

I was walking rather pensively down the street when I noticed the sign of a tin shop. I stopped in front of it and stared into the gloomy basement interior. And old man with a white beard was puttering around. Curiosity led me down the steps. The old man, bent and shrivelled, looked up as I opened the door. His rheumy eyes watered, his hand shook.

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“Ah, hello, hello,” he exclaimed in a hoarsened voice. “My old friend. Well, well, come in. Where have you been? Ai, how many times I’ve thought of you.”

I stood looking at him. It was incredible. There was no vestige of my old friend the tinsmith in this figure. His face, body and voice had changed as if a new man had entered. As I shook hands with him he grew more and more unfamiliar. I felt there must be some involved mistake. I sat for a half hour with him in the tiny flat back of the shop, listening to his talk. And despite all logic and fact, I continued to feel a curious sense of loss as he talked. Somehow the dreamy old white-bearded one who didn’t know me remained in my mind the friend of my youth for whom I had been seeking. And this garrulous old woman, bent and trembling with age — a strange imposter.

Fragments

The curious and monotonous mystery of the city lies in my thought like forgotten music.

A man walking here. A man walking there. A horse standing at a curbstone with his head hanging. The oval-tinted face of a woman peering out of a taxicab window as it rushes by.

These things multiplied a million times . . .

And the houses. Mile upon mile of houses crowded and flattened, flung about with a certain precision, a geometrical smear.

Mile upon mile of houses shaped like churches, like jails, like cathedrals, like battlements. There are not enough adjectives in my mind to describe them. And yet they are identical as rain.

How many windows are there in the city? Windows through which people sometimes catch cinematographic glimpses of each other.

About these houses there is something which no one has ever said or written.

About these windows there is some weird phrase which has never been born.

Criss-cross of streets flanked with houses, stuffed with houses. And the signs lettered on the store

FRAGMENTS

windows. Names which I have never encountered in fiction.

Names which I find myself curiously trying to memorize.

There is something about the city, the inexhaustible wilderness known as a city, that I would say but it never comes to my tongue. Corners of streets, each a world's end.

I walk through streets, gazing with irritation; people and their perpetual houses.

Noting how men and women appear to be going somewhere.

Ah! these mysterious destinations as simple as my own. A million simplicities tangled into vastness.

What is there mysterious about me and about that which I know? I move. I have the most obvious of motives.

Homes that are filled with faces I shall never see. Things that are done from moment to moment that I shall never know.

All these haunt me more than the thought of angels in heaven.

I am aware of great and invisible agitations. What this woman dreams. What this man thinks.

Multiplied by a million, and the monotony of it becomes too intricate to penetrate.

FRAGMENTS

There is something about the whole shouting, sweeping, interlacing arrangement of eyes and masonry-lettered store windows and moving feet which accompanies me like an unborn dream.

The man walking here. The woman walking there. The crowd. The old horse and the cab which rushes by and carries away the oval-tinted face.

They become a part of my thought.

Multiplied by a million they shift and move within my brain, the simple and insufferable parts of chaos.

Of the Swede and the Dago who are digging in the street as I pass, I can make a picture.

They stand beside a fire they have made out of soap boxes, to thaw the ground. The flames caught by the wind twist like the scarves of a dancer.

The flames loosed by the wind stretch their innumerable little yellow claws upward in a deft and undulant scratching.

I take a notebook from my pocket and write down the line,

The fire is like a little golden fir tree in the night.

If I had time I would also jot down a line about the grave faces of the Dago and the Swede as they look at the soap boxes changing into flame.

Of such things I can make pictures.

In a thousand streets scattered criss-cross about

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and beyond me, through a thousand buildings people are moving. One this way. One that way.

My blindness overwhelms me.

I can see only a Dago and a Swede and a fire that made me think of a little golden fir tree and a horse standing at a curbstone with his head hanging.

The sorrow of one horse hanging his head is such a little thing.

Beyond my sight I am conscious of a press, a swarm, a jangle of houses, a wilderness of faces, a monstrous number of thoughts and dreams.

They are everywhere but within the peculiar solitude which I inhabit.

If there were but distance to the city. A horizon to solace the thought. To lend leisure and the placidity of illusion to my dreams.

But the solitude of the city is a solitude without horizon. Space and the broken, twisted vista of the city rush upon me.

A vista lacking infinitude and lacking finalities.

A hundred feet away life is lost in the simple and yet insufferable unknown.

An unknown to which architecture has given angles and dimensions.

And yet within them transpire murders and the births of Gods.

FRAGMENTS

Dimensions which do not enclose but conceal further that which is naturally hidden.

Such are houses. And streets.

Within them the great multiple of life is forever active. My solitude is a little basket with which I rush from corner to corner.

Each wall, each stone, each face is a guillotine for my eyes.

As blue water lifted into the hand becomes white, the chaos which falls into my little basket of solitude becomes solitude.

That which I seek is forever a part of me. And yet I rush, rush.

The monotonous lust with which the blood pumps in and pumps out of my heart has its brother lust in my brain, which pumps and pumps its thoughts into the greater and more multiple mechanism of this unknown.

And the neighborhoods that are always strange like strange countries with strange peoples when I enter them.

Here is a glistening, polished stretch of a street. A street carved out of stone.

People with the finish of marble.

There a street made out of rags. And the inevitable pretence of trees, or are they lamp posts?

FRAGMENTS

The lettered windows with some more names I have never seen. Houses in regimental masonry.

Houses embracing like drunkards. A new man. A new woman. A new horse.

Again the immobile and perpetual multitude. Again the fragments of the monstrous multiple.

There is something about them that has never been said.

What is the eternal unknown with its bogey-men compared to this vaster and more perfect physical oblivion?

The monstrous detachment from myself of each tiny thing about me is greater than the spaces of the stars.

And night. The embrace of unknowns.

I look at lights and down vanishing streets. At shadows which mock the illusion of emptiness.

The man and the horse and the color of day have disappeared. They have left behind a pregnancy.

Night. The Madonna of the spaces. The great adjective of dark. Night. The unknown barbarian.

With the same indefinable and helpless monotony with which the waves hurl themselves onward my thoughts beat from moment to moment against the night.

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Washing tirelessly toward the little lights, the big lights, the smear and zigzag of lights that men kindle.

Lights in the windows. Lights on the streets. Round, bald, staring, twinkling lights that are neither signals nor beacons nor the lamps of Aladdin.

Lights like the light that burns over my head in my room.

These lights are the unknown seen through the black windowed night.

What are the mystic fires that dance and flicker on the hill of dreams to these lights?

Those I can see with my eyes lure me and challenge more than the mystery of sun rising or stars shining.

But those others. Of which I do not even think. Lights behind walls. Behind houses. Around corners.

Who can think of a system of philosophy, looking at a light shining from a strange window in the night?

Philosophy — the manners of the soul. The profound and perspiring elimination of adjectives from life.

It yet remains that the little bourgeois family is an infinitesimal fragment through the lighted window.

Ah, the monotonous pantomime of figures seen through lighted windows.

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The multiple and monstrous pantomime of figures forever unseen.

It yet remains that the little bourgeois family is an infinitesimal fragment of the unknown. The everlasting unknown.

Thought and beauty. These are things which have been done.

Things of outline and soul.

There is no room in the unknown for things which have outline or soul.

The unknown contains only that which has never been said or thought.

I seek this in the city. It is forever rushing upon and by me.

I am forever questing the indefinable and unimagined illumination which will make all life a part of my solitude.

Thus in the city there are those without curiosity and who therefore know everything.

The solitude in which they move has horizons.

The unknown exists only for seekers.

He whose imagination, like a rat, nibbles day after day upon his brain shall know nothing that he wishes to know. Shall see nothing that he would see. He shall know only the hunger and unrest. The hunger and unrest of forgotten music.

Melancholia Preceding Seduction

“ I wonder whether the pleasure of confessing to this creature my actual opinions of her is a sufficient recompense for the loss of her favors which would result. It is always curiously satisfying to disillusion a woman concerning herself.

“ Yet I find a certain exhilaration in pretending to be deceived by the mask she wears. It is indeed unchivalrous to demand of a married woman of forty that she abandon the pretenses by which she manages to be interesting to herself and to conceal her shames and defeats from her world.

“ How charming she would be, however, if she collapsed under the influence of such reality as is left in her passion and revealed to me for a moment the secret which cowers behind the architecture of her poise. She will, however, remain an inspired Zionist, even while going through the bewildering ritual of removing her corset.

“ Alas, it becomes almost necessary to destroy the poor woman before facing her. I dislike secret pre-occupations. Thus by thinking of her now and satisfying myself concerning my intelligent penetration

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of her masks, I will be able with a clear intellectual conscience to admire and flatter her later.

“ She belongs to that type of Jewess whom the consciousness of race has stamped with a pathetic inferiority. She is ashamed of Jews, and in her mind the word Jews is secretly a synonym for social ostracism, loudness, vulgarity and things looked down upon by the world. Her being ashamed of her Jewishness has plunged her into her present Zionist fanaticism.

“ Her egoism has from the beginning covered before her shame. She has been unable to bear the knowledge that she was ashamed. And this has inspired her not to hide the fact that she is a Jewess, as so many bounders try to do, but to create for herself and others a concept of Jewishness of which she could make a public boast.

“ The result is that she spends most of her time informing others that the Jews are a beautiful, poetical and poignantly historical race. She is continually denouncing her fellow countrymen for not succumbing to the high dream of Zionism — for not unfurling their Jewishness to the world. She finds a certain revenge in reminding others, whom she fancies to be suffering from the same secret shame as herself, that they are Jews.

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“Also, it is easy to detect that her fanatic romanticizing of her race is no more than an oblique effort to make herself socially presentable. Every boast she makes of Jewish history, Jewish art and Jewish morality is a plea for her ‘social fitness.’ And, in the same manner, she is able to conceal her unworthy and inhospitable shame from herself by keeping up an interminable boasting. Her egoistic fear is not that she will be taken for a Jewess, but that people may sense that she is ashamed of being one.

“It is curious how strong characters such as she build up an entire artificial life for the sole purpose of concealing what in the beginning was no more than a minor weakness. The false architecture of this life has now completely devoured her. She will remain lost until her death within a labyrinth of pretenses and evasions. Yes, it would be exhilarating, in a way, to plunge through the concealments she offers me and place my hands upon the dwindling thing that lives somewhere inside her—the little germ from which this loud and confused structure she calls herself has grown.

“Undoubtedly I would find—nothing. Her defenses are too strong. Her ruses have been powerful enough to destroy her secret. And she exists today as a psychological monstrosity—like some fungus

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without root that feeds on itself and is proud of its swollen and unreal proportions.

“Ah—she has on the shawl I brought back from Jerusalem. And she is alight with excitement. She has obviously been attending a Zionist meeting and making speeches. And now she feels herself a historical figure—what with the talismanic shawl she wears. In the bedroom when I embrace her she will murmur of Ruth and Rachel and ask me to recite the Song of Solomon. . . . I was right. It is easier now to flatter her.

“ Good evening, Esther. You are, of course, late. Nevertheless, I will make my offering. A volume of poems by Bialek, the Hebrew poet. I am preparing a paper on him— an amazing genius. Come, we will read some of them in my apartment. . . .”

Life

The sun was shining in the dirty street.

Old women with shapeless bodies waddled along on their way to market.

Bearded old men who looked like the fathers of Jerusalem walked flat-footed, nodding back and forth.

“The tread of the processional surviving in Halsted street,” thought Moisse, the young dramatist, who was moving with the crowd.

Children sprawled in the refuse-laden alleys. One of them, ragged and clotted with dirt, stood half-dressed on the curbing and urinated into the street.

Wagons rumbled, filled with fruits and iron and rags and vegetables.

Human voices babbled above the noises of the traffic. Moisse watched the lively scene.

“Every day it’s the same,” he thought. “The same smells, the same noise and people swarming over the pavements. I am the only one in the street whose soul is awake. There’s a pretty girl looking at me. She suspects the condition of my soul. Her fingers are dirty. Why doesn’t she buy different

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shoes? She thinks I am lost. In five years she will be fat. In ten years she will waddle with a shawl over her head."

The young dramatist smiled.

"Good God," he thought, "where do they come from? Where are they going? No place to no place. But always moving, shuffling, waddling, crying out. The sun shines on them. The rain pours on them. It burns. It freezes. Today they are bright with color. Tomorrow they are grey with gloom. But they are always the same, always in motion."

The young dramatist stopped on the corner and, looking around him, spied a figure sitting on the sidewalk, leaning against the wall of a building.

The figure was an old man.

He had a long white beard.

He had his legs tucked under him, and an upturned tattered hat rested in his lap.

His thin face was raised, and the sun beat down on it; but his eyes were closed.

"Asleep," mused Moisse.

He moved closer to him.

The man's head was covered with long silky white hair that hung down to his neck and hid his ears. It was uncombed. His face in the sun looked like the face of an ascetic—thin, finely veined.

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He had a long nose and almost colorless lips, and the skin on his cheeks was white. It was drawn tight over his bones, leaving few wrinkles.

An expression of peace rested over him—peace and detachment. Of the noise and babble he heard nothing. His eyes were closed to the crowded, frantic street.

He sat, his head back, his face bathed in the sun, smileless and dreaming.

“A beggar,” thought Moisse, “asleep, oblivious. Dead. All day he sits in the sun like a saint, immobile. Like one of the old Alexandrian ascetics, like a delicately carved image. He is awake in himself, but dead to others. The waves cannot touch him. His thoughts. Ah, to know his thoughts and dreams.”

Suddenly the eyes of the young dramatist widened. He was looking at the beggar’s long hair that hung to his neck.

“It’s moving,” he whispered, half aloud. He came closer and stood over the old man and gazed intently at the top of his head.

The hair was swaying faintly, each separate fiber moving alone. . . .

It shifted, rose imperceptibly and fell. It quivered and glided. . . .

“Lice,” murmured Moisse.

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He watched.

Silent and asleep the old man sat with his thin face to the sun, and his hair moved.

Vermin swarmed through it — creeping, crawling, avid and infinitesimal.

Every strand was palpitating, shuddering under their mysterious energy.

At first Moisse could hardly make them out, but his eyes gradually grew accustomed to the sight. And as he watched he saw the hair swell like waves riding over the water, saw it droop and flutter, coil and uncoil of its own accord.

Vermin raised it up, pulled it out, streaming up and down tirelessly in vast armies.

They crawled furiously, like dust specks blown thick through the white beard.

They streamed and shifted and were never still.

They moved in and out, from no place to no place; but always moving — frantic and frenzied.

An old woman passed and, with a shake of her head, dropped two pennies into the upturned hat. Moisse hardly saw her. He saw only the palpitating swarms that were now racing, easily visible, through the grey-white hair.

Some ventured down over the white ascetic face, crawling in every direction, traveling around the lips

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and over the closed eyes, emerging suddenly in thick streams from behind the covered ears and losing themselves under the ever-moving beard.

And Moisse, his senses strained, thought he heard a noise — a faint, crunching noise.

He listened.

The noise seemed to grow louder. He began to itch, but he remained bending over the head. He could hear them, like a far-away murmur, a purring, uncertain sound.

“They’re shouting and groaning, crying out, weeping and laughing,” he mused. “It is life . . . life . . .”

He looked up and down the crowded, burning street, with its frantic crowd, and smiled.

“Life,” he repeated. . . .

He walked away. Before him floated the hair of the beggar, moving as if stirred by a slow wind — and he itched.

“But who was the old man?” he thought.

A young woman, plump and smiling, jostled him. He felt her soft hip pressing against him for a moment.

A child, running barefoot through the street, brushed against his legs. He felt its sticky fingers

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seize him for an instant, and then the child was gone. On he walked.

Three young men confronted him for a second time. He passed between two of them, squeezed by their shoulders.

A shapeless old woman bumped him with her back as she shuffled past.

Two children dodged in and out, screaming, and seized his arm to turn on.

The young dramatist stopped and remained standing still, looking about him.

Then he laughed.

“Life,” he murmured again; and

“I am the old man,” he added, “I . . . I . . .”

My Last Park Bench

There is always one drama in people's heads. They are older than they were and this fact is like a 'cello accompaniment to the inner and outer noises of the day.

On a leisurly spring afternoon I find it difficult to avoid turning into the boulevard. And once in this wide avenue a species of perfunctory gayety overtakes me. As I walk I notice my body and mind imitating memories of themselves.

In short, I grow younger. And this is a phenomenon I find full of pathos. For to "grow younger" means to mimic for a few moments the always enviable past, to taunt one's self with the illusion of immortality, to jingle imaginary coins in one's pockets.

Walking in the avenue, I look up at the buildings which no longer interest me, I invent similies for the window rows and the high rooftops. I notice once more the perspective trick which causes the buildings to seem wider at the crest than they do at the base, and that as I walk away looking back over my shoulder the skyscrapers in the distance expand slowly in size instead of decrease.

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And finally I cross the street and enter Grant Park. The gesture strikes me as a bit of plagiarism. This was once part of a romantic routine — to sit on one of the green benches above the I. C. tracks and confront the city and think: “The buildings look like the backdrop in a melodrama,” and then to enjoy the two-dimensional vista of Michigan avenue by transplanting it into an imagistic world.

All this I recall musingly. And as if to recapture the flavor of those days, I begin once more. . . . The People’s Gas building looks like a massive aquarium. One almost waits for fish to swim past the windows. The Wrigley tower looks like a Polish wedding cake. At night the Blackstone looks like a lantern hanging out of the dark sky. The automobiles moving down the avenue look like a procession of silk hats. The difference between man and Nature is that fifty feet away even a bank president becomes a shapeless, meaningless piece of fabric and a tree becomes more significantly a tree the farther one leaves it behind.

In the midst of such aimless thinking I stop and wonder what has become of all the metaphors with which I have entertained myself on this bench in the park. A few of them have gone into books and a few more into conversation. But most of them have gone nowhere. I cannot even now remember them. I re-

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call thinking how clever they were and even important, and I stare intensely again at the scene which engendered them.

New thoughts arise almost automatically in my mind. Like two well-trained animals, the phrases in one's head continue the performance with the curtain down and the footlights out.

“It is no more than a foolish waste of time to sit here,” I think. “The cinders are filling my shirt. My eyes are getting full of dust. My linen will be ruined and I will need a new shine on my shoes. It would be much more intelligent to put an end to this game of pretending the city panorama fascinates me as it once did.”

This confession is painful, for as I make it I recall the glow and excitement with which I once stared at this scene. I forget the many new and perhaps more important preoccupations of the present.

“Don't be a sentimental ass,” I think; “you are no longer writing imagistic sketches for the Little Review. You have quite outgrown that. You are now a belligerent philosopher, not to say a scientist. Very remarkable and far-reaching human phenomena now engage your attention.”

Futile reassurance. What was there more charming than the casual, pointless and limited enthusi-

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ams of youth? How much better off one is when one's mind, beginning to emerge from the darkness into which all minds are born, indulges in its first bombastic caracolings; when the phrases it invents seem vastly more important than the life which inspires them. All one's fancies at this time seem mysteriously vital and pregnant. And, like Narcissus, one kneels and stares fascinatedly into the unfolding wonders of one's mind.

These things I do not entirely figure out sitting on the bench. For several minutes' walking across the park and sitting down in the familiar place made me feel younger. Now I am paying the penalty for this dishonestly purchased youth. But, being entirely human, I manage to feel depressed over quite the wrong thing—the lesser qualities of the new “younger generation,” for instance, or the comparative dullness of the recent literary revolts.

“You will be able to write this tenuous incident in a pleasant and satisfactory manner,” I smile to myself. “And on the whole your work is improving. For as you grow older you acquire something in common with the humanities—a quality you have always rather lacked. You share a vast and human nostalgia for outlived selves. Behind the excitement of your critical intolerance the orchestra is beginning

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to play Auld Lang Syne and the effect is rather charming. You are, as a matter of fact, still younger than all but two of the 'newest' novelists and this pensiveness is, therefore, a pose which becomes you rather than betrays you."

With this in mind, I prepare to depart. A voice interrupts me. A young man who has sat down next to me is talking. He is a bit embarrassed and the eagerness of his manner is slightly confusing.

"Excuse me," he says. "I would like to ask you a question."

Feeling mistakenly flattered at being recognized, I nod. Whereat this young man continues:

"I was wondering why people come to sit alone on benches like this. You see, I'm a writer and I sometimes get curious about what people really have in their heads when they sit like you've been sitting, looking at the city. I've been looking at you for some time and wondering what sort of a man you were. Do you mind telling me what sort of work you do and—"

The young man pauses, an ingratiating smile on his face. For the moment I feel an impulse to talk, to match epigrams with him and smiles. But, I think it will be a better plan for him if I merely get

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up and walk away with an enigmatic expression on my face. And this I do.

I catch a glimpse of him following me with his eyes, excited, damn him, over the mystery and romance which lurk in every corner of the city, even on a cinder-covered bench in Grant Park. Let him sit till doom's day on this bench; he will never see me again. I have more important things to do than to collect cinders under my collar.

Depths

Crowds began to come out of the buildings.

They came in streams and broad waves, breaking in a black sweep over the pavements and spreading into a thick, long mass that moved forward. The glassy lights cut the twilight drizzle with their yellow fire. The tumult grew until up and down the street an unceasing din sounded—shrieking, roaring, elanging noises.

Moisse, the young dramatist, stood against one of the office buildings as the throngs spilled past him on their ways home. His eyes were fixed on the distant gloom of the sky, which hung beyond the drizzle and the fuzzy glare of light like a vast black froth.

“It is so silent,” mused Moisse. “Millions of miles without a sound. Man and his accomplishments are infinitesimal,” went on the young dramatist, as the swelling throng brushed and buffeted against him, “but his ego is infinite. Only by thought can he reach the stars.”

He was thoughtless for a moment, holding his position with difficulty as the crowds pressed past. Then he resumed:

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“None of them looks at me. None of them imagine I am thinking of the stars. How startled these fat, evil-smelling men and women would be if they could see my thought for a moment, as they crashed along their tiny ways. But nevertheless I don’t eat tonight,” he murmured suddenly, as if awakening. And the idea plunged him into a series of reflections, from which he emerged with a frown and looked about him.

A short thick man, with an unshaven face was shuffling past. His skin was broken with red and purple sores under his growth of beard. His mouth hung open, his eyes stared ahead of him and his head was bent forward. Moisse thought of the body concealed by the layers of caked rags which covered the man, and shuddered.

“He never bathes,” mused the young dramatist. “I wonder what a creature like that does.” And he followed him slowly.

At the corner the man stopped and blew his nose violently into his fingers. Another block and he stopped again, bending over in the midst of the crowd and straightening with a cigar butt in his hand. He eyed the thing critically. It was flattened at the end where feet had passed over it. The man thrust it between his lips and shuffled on.

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In a vestibule he extracted a blackened match from his pocket and with shaking fingers lighted the butt. When it burned he blew a cloud of smoke, and taking it out of his mouth regarded it with satisfaction.

Several in the throng noticed him, their eyes resting with disapproval, and sometimes hate, upon the figure. Once a crossing policeman spied him and followed him with his gaze until he was lost to view.

Moisse kept abreast of him and together they turned into an alley that led behind a hotel. The man's eyes never wavered, but remained fixed in the direction he was moving.

The alley was dark. In the court that ran behind the hotel were several large, battered cans that shone dully against the black wall. Debris littered the ground. Looking furtively at the closed doors the man made his way to one of the cans.

He lifted the cover cautiously and thrust his arm into its depths. For several minutes he remained with his arm lost inside the refuse can.

"He's found something," whispered Moisse.

The man straightened. In his hand he held an object on which sparks seemed to race up and down like blue insects.

He raised his find to his face and then thrust it into his pocket and resumed his shuffle down the alley.

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“To think,” mused Moisse, “of a man eating out of a garbage can. Either he is inordinately hungry or careless to a point of . . . of . . .”

He searched for a word that refused to appear, and he followed slowly after the man. In the dim light of a side street the man paused and took out his booty. It was evidently the back of a fowl.

Standing still the man thrust it into his mouth, gnawing and tearing at its bones. After he had eaten for several minutes he held it up to the light and started picking at shreds of meat with his fingers. These he licked off his hand.

The meal was at length finished. The man threw the gleaned bones way, blew his nose and walked on.

Through the dark tumbled streets Moisse followed. The shuffling figure fascinated him. He noted the gradually increasing degradation of the neighborhood, the hovels that seemed like torn, blackened rags, the broken streets piled with refuse and mud.

In front of a lighted house the man stopped. The curtains which hung over the two front windows of the house were torn. One of them was half destroyed, and Moisse saw into the room, in which a gas jet flickered, and which was empty.

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The man walked up the steps and knocked at the door. It was opened.

“A woman,” whispered Moisse.

She vanished, and the man followed her. The two appeared in a moment in the room with the gas light.

The woman was tall and thin, her hair hung down her back in skimpy braids. Her face was coated with paint and deep hollows were under her eyes.

The man walked to her, his open mouth widened in a grin.

“They’re talking,” murmured the young dramatist as he watched their haggard faces move strangely. He noted the woman was dressed in a wrapper, colorless and streaked.

“I wonder——” he began, but the scene captured his attention. He watched, absorbed. The woman was shaking her head and backing away from the man, who finally halted in the center of the room.

He lifted a foot from the floor and removed its shoe. Standing with the shoe in his hand his eyes glistened at the woman, who watched him with her neck stretched forward and a sneer on her lips.

The man put his hand in the shoe and brought out a coin.

“A twenty-five cent piece,” muttered Moisse.

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The man held it up in his fingers and laughed. His face distorted itself into strange wrinkles when he laughed. Moisse, who could not hear the laugh, saw only an imbecilic grimace. The woman took the coin, and left the room.

She returned in a moment holding out her arms to the man.

He seized her, crushing her body against him until she was bent backward. He pressed his face over her, his mouth still open, his eyes staring.

The woman stared back and laughed, fastening her lips suddenly to his.

Losing his balance, the man staggered and the woman broke from his grasp. He pounced on her, seizing her hand and jerking her against him.

As she held back he raised his fist and struck her fiercely in the face. She swayed for an instant and then stood quiet.

Her lips began to smile and move in speech. The man shook his head rapturously, rubbing his nose with a finger, and panting.

Moisse turned away and walked slowly toward the town.

“Good God,” he murmured, “he’ll take his clothes off and she . . .”

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His emotions began to trouble him. An unrest stirred his body.

“ I could have gone in there and taken her away from him,” he mused, and then, with a shudder, he walked on — smiling.

Rendezvous

She is very charming. She will wear violets and there will be lavender shadows on her cheeks. Dressed for the evening, she will seem as lifeless and secretive as a totem pole.

At half past six, she explained on the telephone. It is interesting how the telephone improves her voice. But then when she spoke to me she was in the midst of her effulgent toilet. How can a lover hope to rival the gentle Saturnalia through which a pretty woman passes before she arrives at the rendezvous?

I interrupted her in a happy infidelity when I telephoned. She was dressing, she said. And she spoke to me with an ecstasy borrowed from her mirror.

It is this faculty of regarding herself as an object of art which makes a pretty woman an involved and enigmatic companion. Her perfume bottle, her underwear, her hair comb, her silken stockings, her rouge box, powder puff and pointed shoes — these contribute toward a ritual as creative and abstract as obsesses the artist employed before a canvas.

When finally she covers herself with the dress, blotting out the intimate decorations which she has lavished on her body, she is like a votary who, depositing his gifts upon a hidden altar, leaves the scene

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warm with the sense that he has served the gods. It is this consciousness that in adorning herself she has offered and received a sacrifice, that she has knelt in perfect devotion before her own destiny, which renders her mysterious in the eyes of men.

The theory applies chiefly to virgins, however. To the others, the inferior destinations of their bodies serve to corrupt the serene passion which sex achieves when, still unconscious of itself, it undulates in a social and ornamental parade.

So, recalling how warm and painted with secret emotions her voice sounded as she was dressing, I arrive at the consoling illusion that she is a virgin. Yes, she was impatient as a mistress trembling to return to her lover's arms, while I spoke. Her laughter was flushed and a bit unfocused. I had intruded upon a ritual. And I offered a realistic and disillusioning breath upon her mirror world.

If tonight I can summon a sufficient number of phrases to my aid, she will admit sorrowfully that she loves me. With the admission she will become like the memory of a beautiful song. I shall, when we are alone in my rooms and our bodies conspire toward an elusive finality, I shall remember then how I waited these moments. Even as she will recall when the room grows light with dawn not the alarm-

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ing hour of her seduction, but the inexplicable rapture she feels at this moment as she stands finally clothed before her glass. It is not I of whom she thinks, but of herself. How lovely she is. How final and graceful seems the identity she bears.

Yes, to this memory her thought will return when she opens her eyes for the first time at my side. And she will understand, perhaps for the first and last time, that perfection is a tardy synonym for that which is unfulfilled. It is not the moral or sentimental reaction which will make her sad. She will weep, if she is clever enough, and her tears will be a reprimand to life that encroached its utility upon the decorations she once worshipped unreasonably.

She is here. I will speak to her with sadness. She will be thrilled to remember tomorrow that I anticipated her mourning for her chastity.

“ You are irresistible tonight. Yes, I have been waiting almost an hour. And I am sad because it is another hour I have lived without you. Shall we eat? The dining room is crowded and perhaps you would prefer—— Of course not. It will be charming to look at you against the futile background of others. And after we are through eating we will go for a walk. I desire to verify an impression I have that the night is smaller than you.”

Gratitude

The avenue bubbled brightly under the grey rain.

The afternoon crowd had melted from the sidewalk, washed into hallways and under awnings by the downpour.

It began to look like evening. A refreshing gloom settled over the street.

The wind leaped out of alley courts and byways and raced over the pavement, accompanied by spattering arpeggios of rain.

Moisse, the young dramatist, turned into the avenue. His voluminous black raincoat, reaching from his ears to his shoe tops, flapped in front of him.

By exercising the most diligent effort, however, he managed rather to saunter than walk, and he kept his eyes raptly fixed upon the deserted stretch of shining cement.

As he moved peacefully along he repeated to himself:

“The rain leaps and pirouettes like a chorus of Russian elves. It jumps. It bounces. It hops, skips, and runs. Flocks of little excited silver birds are

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continually alighting around my feet and chattering in a thousand voices. I should have been a poet."

Removing his gaze from the ground he looked at the faces which lined the buildings and floated like pale lamps in the darkened vestibules.

"Everyone is watching me," he thought, "for in my attitude there is the careless courage of an unconscious heroism. I stroll along indifferent to the rain. It splashes down my neck. It takes the crease out of my trousers. It trickles off the brim of my hat.

"And all this stamps me momentarily in these afflicted minds as an unusual human.

"That one with the side whiskers is wondering what a queer fellow I am.

"What can it be that engrosses my attention to the point of making me so oblivious to the rain?

"And that fat woman with the face like a toy balloon is certain I will catch my death of cold.

"The little girl with the wide eyes thinks I am in love.

"There is an infinite source of speculation in my simple conduct."

The water was making headway down the back of his neck, but Moisse hesitated and abstained from adjusting his collar more firmly.

"They will notice it," he thought, "and immedi-

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ately I will lose the distinctive aloofness which characterizes me now.”

So moving leisurely down the avenue, Moisse, the young dramatist, progressed, his eyes apparently unconscious of the scene before him, his soul oblivious to the saturated world, and his mind occupied with distant and mysterious thoughts.

The downpour began to assume the proportions of a torrent. Moisse persisted in his tracks.

Someone touched his elbow.

He turned and found a little old man with faded eyes and threadbare, dripping clothes, smiling earnestly at his side.

The little old man was bent in the shoulders. His shirt had no collar. His brown coat was buttoned to his neck.

His face, screwed up by a sensitiveness to the cataract of drops beating against it, was round and full of wrinkles.

It had the quizzical, good-natured look of a fuzzy little dog.

His wet eyes that seemed to be swimming in a red moisture peered at Moisse, who was frowning.

“ I’m hungry,” began the little old man, “ I ain’t had anything to eat —— ”

“ How much do you want? ” inquired Moisse.

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“Anything,” said the beggar.

The young dramatist felt in his pocket. A single half-dollar encountered his fingers.

“I’ve only got a half-dollar,” he said, “I’ll get it changed. Come on.”

The two of them walked in silence, Moisse still sauntering, the little man bent over and looking as if he wanted to speak but was afraid of dissipating a dream.

“Wait here,” Moisse said suddenly, “I’ll go in and get change.”

He stepped into the box office of one of the large moving-picture theaters on the avenue and secured change.

The little old man had followed him inside the building, his eyes watching him with an eager curiosity.

Moisse turned with the change to find the beggar at his elbow.

He handed him fifteen cents.

“What’s the matter?” he inquired. “Been drinking?”

“No, no,” said the beggar.

“Why haven’t you?” persisted Moisse frowning; “don’t you know there’s nothing for you but drink? That’s what drink is for. Men like you.”

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The faded eyes livened.

“Now, you go and get yourself three good shots of booze,” went on Moisse, “and you’ll be a new man for the rest of the day.”

The beggar had become excited.

His lips moved in a nervous delight, but he uttered no sound. With the fingers of his right hand he picked at the blackened and roughly-bitten nails of his other. He cleared his throat and then as if suddenly inspired removed his drenched hat and raised his eyebrows.

Touched by the sincerity of the little old man’s emotions, the young dramatist reached into his pocket and brought forth another ten-cent piece.

“Here,” he said, “buy two more drinks.”

The little man seemed about to break into a dance. His face became tinged with the pink of an old woman’s cheek.

The red moisture ran out of his eyes in two white tears. Moisse fastened his eyes upon the top of the little old man’s head, which seemed dirty and bald despite the pale hair, and alive.

“Perhaps you had ambitions and then some commonplace occurred and you lost them. And now you float around begging nickels. That’s interesting. A little old man begging nickels in the rain.”

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The beggar smiled eagerly and then ventured a slight laugh.

He came closer to Moisse and stood trembling.

“Asking for crumbs,” went on Moisse with a deepening frown. “Cursed at night, when alone, by memories that will not die. Eh?” He looked suddenly into the faded eyes and smiled.

The little old man nodded his head vigorously. He caught his breath and stood looking at Moisse with his mouth open and his cheeks wrinkled as if he were about to cry.

His breath struck the young dramatist who averted his nose.

“Strange,” resumed he, “now you have a quarter and I have a quarter and still we remain so different. Isn’t it strange, old man? Yet it is the inevitable inequality of men that makes us brothers.”

The beggar was about to speak. Moisse paused and looked with interest at the round face, the quivering nostrils and the lips that were twitching into speech.

“No one has talked to me like you,” he said, “no one.”

And he caught his breath and stared with a strange expression at his benefactor.

He bit at a finger nail and lowered his head. He

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seemed suddenly in the throes of a great mental struggle, for his face had become earnest.

It endured for a moment and then he looked at Moisse.

“ You — you want me to come along with you,” he said and he scratched at the back of his ear.

“ I’ll come along if you want me to,” he repeated.

“ Come along? Where? ” Moisse asked, his eyes awakening.

“ Oh, any place,” said the little old man. “ I ain’t particular, if you ain’t.”

He was breathing quickly and he reached for the palm of his patron.

A deep light had come into his face. His faded eyes had grown stronger. Their quizzical look was gone and they were burning in their wet depths.

They looked now with a maternal intensity into the eyes of Moisse and their smile staggered the sophistication of the young dramatist.

The little old man continued to breathe hard until he began to quiver.

He suddenly assumed command.

“ Come,” he said, seizing Moisse amorously by the palm and squeezing it. “ I know a place we can go and get a room cheap and where we won’t be disturbed. It ain’t so nice a place, but come.”

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He squeezed the palm he held for the second time. The deep light that had come into his little dog's face softened and two tears rolled again out of his eyes.

He caught his breath in a sob.

“ I— I don't drink,” he said; “ I'm hungry — but I can wait . . . until we get through.”

He was beaming coquettishly through his tears and fondling the young dramatist's hand.

“ I can wait,” he repeated, raising his blue lips toward Moisse, his face transfigured and glowing pink.

“ I see,” said Moisse, withdrawing his hand with an involuntary shudder. He was about to say something, but he turned, again involuntarily, and hurried away, breaking into a run when he found himself in the rain.

The little old man's face drooped.

He walked slowly staring after him.

He stood bare-headed while the rain bombarded his drenched figure and he looked at the young dramatist running.

While he stood gazing after him, his face, screwed up, was suffused with a strange tenderness and the tears dripped out of his eyes.

The New Skyscraper

It is almost completed now. Window washers are rubbing the chalk paint from the great checkerboard of windows. The carpenters, masons, iron workers and electricians have disappeared like bees into a hive. A mysterious activity continues within the towering white shell. But for us who pass in the street the engaging miracle is practically accomplished. There remains a tower to fit on—a pretty white ornament that will beckon gracefully to the clouds.

It is toward the thin scarlet lines of this skeleton tower that we now raise our eyes as we pass. They have not stopped adding to it yet. Who knows how high it will reach before the girder cranes are taken down? We in the street still feel hopeful about the tower. We watch its ribs balance themselves nearer and nearer to the sky. We will feel sorry when the cranes are taken away and the tower ceases to grow.

* * * * *

We who pass in the street pause and stare with a troubled and proprietary pride at the great shell of stone and glass that is to be known as the Temple

THE NEW SKYSCRAPER

Building. It seems almost as if this beautiful structure is a monument to our patience. Long ago when the wooden fence first went up around the debris of the tumbled little buildings we began our eager vigil. When there was nothing but mud and donkey engines, scoop shovels and teamsters bellowing at thick-bodied horses and wash-tub shaped motor trucks crawling up and down the wooden inclines—when there was nothing but a blurred and petty confusion behind the wooden fence we were already staring with troubled, fascinated eyes at the empty space above our heads.

With a foresight which we now proudly remember, we knew that out of this pattering of men in the mud and squealing of donkey engines a miracle would be born. And when the first red rectangles began to form their precise labyrinths over our heads we experienced our first thrill of possession—as if our anticipation had somehow assisted in the appearance of the girders.

* * * * *

Perhaps our keenest delight came during the days when the stone began to appear and the towering spider web of red painted steel began slowly to vanish behind a new symmetry. The girders were still mounting from the pavements and we who passed

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would stop and watch the huge pieces of steel disappear gently like floating match sticks into far away lands.

At this time our minds as we passed were still troubled with the curious wordless ideas that warmed our thought and made us for a moment forget our destinations. The scarlet geometry of the great skeleton became a challenge. Our eyes found a strange pleasure in mounting the metronomic patterns of steel. The vastness and symmetry of the design stirred an intangible emotion. And sometimes words formed themselves into little poems in our thought to celebrate this feeling. Passing, our eyes would linger and we would murmur troubledly to ourselves, "It looks like something . . . it reminds you of something . . . it reminds you of a red advertisement for a dream . . . it reminds you of magic ladders . . ."

* * * * *

The red advertisement and the magic ladders vanished. It appeared to happen all at once. There were only a handful of workmen to be seen — slow moving bodies puttering around in the air. We almost lost patience watching the unhurried gestures with which they placed the small white stones into position.

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Slowly and laboriously the pattering bodies erased the magic ladders. We passed one day and sighed, "it will be beautiful when it's done but it takes so long." And when we went away we remembered the half erased red pattern and the mounting surface of white and ornamental stone as a huge flower struggling slowly into bloom.

Then one day we passed again and the thing had burst. White lines shot an ornamental spray from the pavement almost to the clouds. Windows spread themselves in a silver flight. The red pattern had vanished. In its place, soaring and alive, a white building spread itself like a peacock's tail before our eyes.

* * * * *

Now it is almost completed. A few months more and our eyes will have inured themselves to the engaging miracle. We will pass as we pass other temples—looking only for addresses and pausing to stare only at trinkets behind plate glass.

But at least until the window washers have removed the chalk paint and the tower has ceased to grow there remains for us the warming proprietary emotion. This building which our anticipations seem to have reared and which, now that it is almost finished, fits so mysteriously into our senses—this

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building is more alive in our thoughts than all the books we have read and dramas we have seen in the theater. It is something that has bloomed out of the endless crowd that passed. Its white body is as delighting to our vanities as were the Triumphal Figures of Gods and Goddesses to the conquering legions returned to Rome.

It is part of the powerful and glittering sweep of walls which we who pass in the street mysteriously erect. High and white, an irreproachable monument, it has grown out of the little greeds and sordid obsessions consuming us from day to day. And passing now under its aloof face we raise our eyes in gratitude to another beautiful effigy that understands us.

Nocturne

It is easy to think in the streets at night. So I sometimes walk about the city long after the fat world has gone to sleep. I have, like a great many other people whom I do not know, a curious lack of emotion. This thing is called restlessness. In the streets at night my unrest becomes a mild and gentle sorrow, and gives birth to numerous adjectives. I walk on and on and the adjectives form themselves into remarkable thoughts that sometimes startle me and cause me to forget to listen to the castanets of my heels upon the lonely pavement.

The little greedy half-dead are in their beds. The night, like an army, possesses the city, swarms upon the buildings. In my walking I have a habit of likening the night to different things. It is a little game that diverts me, and also causes me to forget to listen to the sound of my heels upon the lonely pavement. Later I try to remember these images that came to me as I was walking, and curse myself for an idiot and a profligate. For the night has a way of making a careless and unselfish lover even of a poet.

On this night I walked with my thoughts full of the

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grimaces of the little greedy half-dead become now so preposterously silent. Through the empty labyrinths of stone the centuries sighed their desolation. Yellow and lonely advertisements burned here and there above invisible roofs, and I observed that the buildings which were so important by day, the great perforated rectangles of stone, the streets that fulfilled the mighty functions of traffic, lay under the stars like some gloomy, useless toyland. The city was an anachronism in the night. Silence with its dark and enigmatic face stared at the sky. The moon made inanimate blue fireflies of the windows.

What a racket there was in these streets by day. A rumble and a mumble and a bang, bang, bang. The shuffle of feet like the sound of a harsh wind. And I remember having watched the smoke of factories toppling at a precise angle out of chimney mouths and drawn in grey-black awning stripes across a blue sky, and the little greedy half-dead with their endless faces and their innumerable hats and their indomitable complacencies crawling as usual along the treadmill of time and vastly excited about it.

But now the immemorial smear of gestures had gone to bed. The millions had taken off their clothes and lay silent in the immemorial and hairy democracy of their skins. There was something beguiling

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in the thought that all the countless and unnecessary people I saw during the day were practically naked at that moment. Stretched on their bellies and their backs they lay in fantastic imitation of their sincerer brethren packed away under the earth.

It was night and the world was almost rid of its race. There remained only the figures like myself, the isolate and furtive figures of the night that move here and there in the shadows. What a melodramatic company we are. A few murderers standing like bold merchants on desolate street corners. A few prostitutes with the most practical of intentions. And a little scattered army of the uncatalogued. The fat world sleeps with its window cautiously opened three inches, for it is autumn and chill, the while we move about adventuring on the treadmill.

Perhaps I lied when I said I was a person with a curious lack of emotion, or boasted. For there was in me as I walked this night the knowledge that I had been growing older. My thoughts were such that I stopped to wonder, under the menacing shadow of what had been a great building, why it was that old people were not always weeping. Already I had begun to think of youth, a dreary omen.

I walked on until I came to the climax of architectural detail that is called the heart of the city. Here

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the night seemed broken into great lumps of shadows. The curious hollow pallor like the light of vacant silver eyes hung about the shafts of stone. It was as if the night had found itself unable to efface the rumble and the mumble and the endless faces of the day. They persisted in this dead and hollow gleam like a shout that has just died, or eyes that have just closed. The streets and their upward spread of fan-like temples, the bleak, glittering windows and the yellow advertisements burning above invisible roofs were lonesome for gestures and grimaces and noise.

We pass each other, we murderers, prostitutes, beggars, wanderers, vagabonds and thieves. We approach each other in the lonely, desolate streets, muscles tense, jaws set. We come up behind each other slowly, maliciously. For we are a different company than stuffs the street by day.

Thus I walked through the heart of the city, noting it to be a place of suspended thunders, a gloomy, useless toyland whose elaborate geometries were almost devoured by the night. Here the great hotels cast patches of light upon the empty sidewalks. A taxicab, behind which trailed the wild laugh of a woman, darted out of gloom and swept around a corner. The all-night restaurants were also lighted. They made each a little oasis in the night. Within

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could be seen, through the large, patient and effulgent windows, hunched and inanimate figures drinking coffee. Their faces were pale and they stared at their fingers.

I found myself before the entrance of a theater. Its grimy little facade lighted with innumerable yellow lamps strutted out of the darkness, a dirty and insolent gypsy amid the black tombstones in this funereal street. Gayety and entertainment here for the company that does not sleep at night. Sardonic lights and mocking lithographs, eternal joy and Saturnalian defiance; amid them in a little round office sat a fat-faced, blousy-eyed woman like some imperturbable exile selling tickets for the mysteries of Isis. It had grown chill, and a weariness had come over me. I was tired of my adjectives. Soon the little greedy half-dead would be stirring in their million beds, coming larva-like into these waiting streets. I thought of long brown roads flanked by red leaved trees and of the processional of great white-bellied clouds over the curving stagnant fields. What a strange thing is the city, a hard-faced witch babbling and stinking. And here the mysteries of Isis, the forbidden things before the triangular altar of Astarte. There were two of us, myself and a little man with a

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watery face, and we moved into the theater. The chill, ferruginous night of the city vanished.

I felt as if I had suddenly thrust my head under the heavy dress of an old beggar woman. A rusty lavender light filled the place, and the uncoiling tinsel of tobacco smoke moved in spectral clouds through the mephitic gloom. There was a sharp fish-like odor that swam before my eyes in a chlorinated mist. Beyond I could make out the glare and sparkle of the black and white shadows, and the click and whirr of the moving picture machine came to my ears. I sat down with a feeling of relief and the theater seemed to grow brighter. Heads of men and women grew out of the shadows and remained motionlessly sprinkled here and there among the rows of seats. On the moving picture screen three horses with furious muscles were galloping at breakneck speed over the crest of a sunlit hill. On the horses bounced three men, their heads stiffened and tucked down, their bodies reaching forward like claws in the wind.

We were quite distinct now in our seats, a silent, brooding, disinterested company of heads sprinkled here and there. The reek and stench of us dragged itself along the walls in ulcerated clouds and circled our heads in violet spirals. These figures sat in their seats as if they had been dropped from a great

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height. Their faces spotted the gloom with little luminous patches of grey. There were snores and coughs and a curious unceasing shuffling. The darkness continued to lift as if some half-hearted dawn were approaching. Little dog-faced men, old men with faces moulded out of phlegm, women with scarred, drawn skins, a shaggy, lifeless company here, whose heads, as I closed my eyes, remained in my thoughts a handful of little withered nuts gathering mould.

I opened my eyes, and against the wall in my row sat an old man with a long bony face. His ragged hat was pulled down over his forehead and his hair stuck out in wisps from under it. His head rested against the wall and with his mouth open he slept. His body was folded in a strange angularity in the seat. His coat was tied in front with a piece of yellow rope and his trousers were opened. In the lavender gloom his face had an ashen mutilation. It was the sunken, inhuman mask of one long unburied. The hands of this old man moved about as he slept. He was dreaming. His body twitched and his feet crawled with elaborate caution about on the floor. The odor which came from him, embracing me with polite neighborly insistence, was partially explained by the streaks of vomit on his clothes and the color

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of his hands. A line of Turgenieff entangled itself in my thought.

“How red, how red are the roses.”

On the moving screen a man with remarkable eyelashes was pointing a gun at a villain. In one arm this man held a clinging chrysanthemum-eyed girl. The moving picture machine from somewhere behind me whirred and clicked and spurted forth its flickering, glazed moonbeam. I look about me. Across the aisle, a row in front of where I sat, were two figures parted by several seats. The figure on the aisle was that of a woman. Her face seemed to be crudely carved out of rough red and grey stone. She had a wide mouth and a flat nose. She had decorously removed her hat, and her hair, grey and green under the violet light of the moving picture ray, was visible. A pair of short black cotton gloves were on her hands as she raised them one at a time to scratch at the back of her neck. She stared with round parrot eyes at the pictures in front of her, chewing vigorously, swallowing with great excitement and rubbing her nose with a forefinger as a climax to her enthusiasms. It was evident that the pictures were affecting her. I looked again at the moving picture screen.

The man with the remarkable eyelashes and the stiff cupid's-bow mouth had come to grief. He lay

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on a white sunny bed and appeared to be dying. His hair was carefully combed. The chrysanthemum-eyed girl was kneeling at his bedside. I recalled now having seen the fellow shot.

The old woman's chewing gained vigor and she began to weep. Tears moved unnoticed down her cheeks. Her forefinger remained in position under her nose, moving violently back and forth as the tears lost themselves in the black cotton of her glove. I became aware of a soft, deliberately spaced hiss. It came from the figure that sat several seats to the left of the old woman.

He was a stocky shouldered man with a black-haired leonine head and strong features. His flashing dark eyes were turned upon the old woman. He was hissing to her and making perceptible signals with his chin. There was something eager and amorous about this man, something solid and Rodinesque about his figure. And the old woman, noticing him through her tears, looked at him for several moments and screwed her hard slippery face into a hesitant smile. A strange animation came upon the man. His shoulders twitched, his massive head bobbed weirdly about. His eyes rolled in their sockets and his mouth opened and, shining with teeth, made clucking moist sounds. Twice his body shot forward

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as if about to crash into the seats and then straightened to remain shaking from side to side like the vibrations of a long rope.

The old woman returned her eyes to the picture, but she appeared to have lost her enthusiasm. Her black gloved forefinger rested in her lap. Through the corners of her eyes she observed the large-headed man at her left. He had, it was evident, changed his tactics. The flash and glitter of his previous emotion were gone from his face. Instead he had become nervous, querulous and pleading. He was making little mouths with his strong, large lips, and pouting like an aggrieved boy. He tossed his leonine head in little coquetries and then suddenly held up a single finger. The old woman staring at this elevated finger shook her head. Whereat two fingers appeared in the gloomy air and remained stiff and shaking like amazing words. The old woman's little parrot eyes turned full upon him and stared shrewdly and with curious disdain.

There was a violent coughing in my row. The old man with the bony face had awakened. He sneezed, coughed, rubbed his eyes and straightened. His body flopped about, and with a long, twisted finger he began to scratch behind his ear. His face turned dully toward me and his curious, gelatinous eyes rested on

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me as if I were not present. His face reminded me of the breast of a bird that had been plucked. As I looked at him his eyes moved from me and drifted across the theater. He began suddenly to wag his head and blink with his dead lids and his jaw rose on one side in a grin. The old woman across the aisle was looking at him and smiling. There was a shuffle and clatter in my aisle and the bony-faced one sprawled to his feet, his clothes hanging stiff and shapeless from him, moved by me, and I felt the thin little structure of his body under his loose rags as he shoved between me and the seat backs. An odor of herring and medicinal decay marked his passage. He walked up to the old woman, his feet shuffling along the floor and tapped her on the shoulder. The old woman cast a quick, contemptuous glance at the leonine head to her left, and rising with a chuckle, walked up the aisle after the shuffling, ragged figure. There was left the defeated one.

He sat with a look of wonder on his face that slowly darkened, and bit at the nails of his hands. As his teeth worked in a growing ferocity upon his nails a look of agony came into his eyes. His shoulders began to twitch. He lurched about like a man drunk. Then suddenly he disappeared.

Out of the row of seats came crawling a stump of

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a man whose body was fastened with straps to a square board on four little wheels. The head of this man, black-haired and leonine, barely reached to the tops of the seats. He propelled himself by swinging two ape-like arms back and forth. In his huge fists he held two flatirons. Slowly he rolled up the aisle and came opposite me, a half-born thing with his thick torso waving snake-like above the floor. He stopped and raised a pair of flashing eyes and glowered at me. His face worked into savage and undecided grimaces. His lips twisted and a drip appeared at their corners. For several instants he eyed me while his fury kept him silent. Then his voice burst forth, coming with a violent incongruity out of this half-man on the floor. It was a huge, gruff voice, that of a man fat and towering.

“ Did you see that? ” he demanded. His hands remained motionless, holding the flatirons to the floor. “ Did you see it? I had her first. I got her eye first. And then that stew butts in. Didn’t I have her first? ”

The face lifted toward me twitched and the fury passed out of it. In its place came a childlike despair. The legless man began to weep. His shoulders jumped up and down in sobs. His voice when he raised it again had become a whimper. He stared at

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me as the tears climbed out of his eyes and smeared themselves over his rugged face.

“ She beat it with that stew,” he said. “ Say, honest t’God, didn’t I have her first?” He rolled on up the aisle, swinging long ape-like arms.

Outside the night was vanishing. The chill morning air came like a scent of fresh water to my nose, dried by the odors of the theater. People were moving in the grey streets. At the end of the block they moved in a thin procession across the car tracks, a string of dark figures without faces and shaped like sevens. The city was waking. The rumble and the mumble and the bang, bang, bang had started again. The buildings stretched out of the early mists. From a corner came the shout of a man. I looked over and saw beside a stand heaped with fresh newspapers the heavy, dwarf-like stump of the legless man. He was selling papers. He raised his voice in a shout as we of the little thin procession moved by.

“ Extra here . . . All about . . .”

Evidently things had been happening in the night.

The Psychological Phantom

Curiosity led me to visit an ill-smelling rooming house in a broken part of the town where I had learned lived a man named Diennik. A few years ago this man had been released from the state penitentiary where he had been a prisoner for eleven years. His release had followed the discovery by the police that he was innocent of the crime for which he had been locked away.

The manner in which the police learned of Diennik's innocence is in itself a very strange story. A middle-aged man named Breitschide, arrested on suspicion of having robbed a grocery store, announced during a stern interrogation by the police that he was unable to bear the burden of his guilt any longer. He was innocent of robbing the grocery store, but fifteen years ago he had committed a series of crimes for which a man named Diennik had been arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to twenty-five years in jail. The crimes had been the result of an abnormality in his nature. He had felt impelled to molest young women in the street at night and for a year had terrorized a lonely neighborhood by attempting

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to rape every unescorted girl who passed in the dark highways.

For these attempts Diennik, an unmarried carpenter living and working in a basement in the district, had been arrested and identified by the victims. Breitschide explained to the police that the abnormality which had made a criminal of him had left his nature and that, having become religious, he felt unable to live without expiating his early wrongs, among which he numbered as the greatest the unjust imprisonment of Diennik. In his confessions Breitschide supplied the police with intimate details of his crimes, which, corroborated by his astonished victims, removed all doubt of the man's guilt.

* * * * *

I expected to find in Diennik a man of strange bitterness. Or perhaps, I thought, as I walked to the house in which he lived, he will have found a curious understanding of life through the terrible injustice which it had offered him.

He was, fortunately, in his room—an unsavory cubby hole overlooking an alley. It was evening. He opened the door to me—the first visitor who had ever knocked on it—with neither surprise nor curiosity in his face. He was a man of fifty, undersized and grey. His hands were the only vital looking part

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of him. They were large and fully developed and would have seemed more natural had they belonged to a man much heavier and stronger than Diennik.

I found it difficult to talk to him. He sat on the edge of a dirty bed and gave me no attention. So I paused and lighted a pipe and meditated that this man had been in prison for eleven years and like all humans lived more in the past than the present. Thinking this I began to ask him questions about his life as a prisoner and his thin, whitened face responded with a glint of enthusiasm.

After he had mumbled for some time a number of uninteresting remarks concerning the routine of his life in jail, the tasks to which he had been set, the hour at which he had risen, eaten and retired, I asked him:

“ But what did you feel during those years? You knew you were innocent and that an injustice had been done you? ”

To this he made no answer. I continued:

“ Did you grow angry when you thought of your innocence? Or did you become reconciled to the fact that something had been done to you that was wrong and unfair? ”

His near-sighted eyes became filled with confusion and his large hands began to grow restless as they

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lay on his knees. I felt that, strangely enough, he resented this kind of questioning and I thought at the moment that his hatred of society was so intense that he could not bear the spoken thought of it. I repeated to him Breitschide's confession and sought to point out to him that the world was now willing to make amends for its cruelty and that everyone who knew him considered him an unhappy and unfortunate man whose life had been stupidly violated by his fellows.

During my talk Diennik's confusion increased. His small, watery eyes blinked and a frown wrinkled his forehead. I paused, realizing that he was sitting before me in a curious helplessness, as if I were an affliction from which there was no escape. At length he interrupted me. He began to chuckle and to exclaim repeatedly:

“Ha! Huh! Well!”

His eyes now grew shrewd and regarded me with caution and amusement.

“You don't know nothin’,” he said. “Go on. What are you tryin' to do? Make me squawk and go back to the stir? Say, I got your number, Bill.”

These words surprised me. They seemed to come from someone other than the wizened grey-faced man sitting on the dirty bed. I assured him that I, as well

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as every one else, believed in his innocence and again he interrupted me.

“They do, huh? Well, they don’t know nothin’,” he said and became sullenly silent.

He looked at me closely for a few minutes and then stood up.

“Get out of here,” he cried. “I got your number. Go on, get out.”

I stood up and answered, “So you are really guilty of the crimes?”

“That’s all right, whether I am or not,” he went on. “Go on. Leave me alone. Leave me alone, will you?”

His voice had dropped into a whine, and his eyes were again filled with a strange confusion. I left the room and heard him locking the door from the inside. On the way down the stairs I met the landlady and spoke to her. She told me that the old fellow was a little queer and that he was hard to talk to.

“He’s got funny ideas,” she said mysteriously and tapped her forehead with her finger.

When I had arrived in the street the secret this man held in his head came to me. His manner as well as his words repeated itself in my mind and I saw that Diennik, who had spent eleven years in jail for crimes he had never committed, had become un-

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balanced. He had been able to survive the injustice society had inflicted upon him only by succumbing to the illusion that he was guilty of the crimes for which he had been imprisoned. The innocent Diennik had become a phantom and during the years of loneliness the poor man had yielded himself to a delusion. Now, released and free once more, the delusion still persisted. His own character had collapsed and evaporated under the assault and there was left a creature who believed in the false identity that had been given him and who, since there is nothing as mysterious as human nature, had grown proud of it.

Black Umbrellas

Little people hurry along in the dark street, their heads tucked away under black umbrellas that float jerkily like expiring balloons. Over them are the great buildings and the rain.

The day is darkened and the city is without faces. A symmetrical stream of little black arcs stretches from the distance to foreground as if emerging from a tunnel. The little people drift with precision through the wash of the rain, bundled together by the great buildings and the sacred puerilities. The tops of their umbrellas run like waves, clinging to each other, eddying blindly at the crossings and careening on again with precision.

All day long the umbrellas have been moving their black and endless little current through the rain — a monotone of precisions, an unvarying symbol of the unvarying. Beneath them the dresses of women stretch themselves into thin triangles and the trousers of men reach in unchanging diagonals for the pavement.

The little people clothed themselves in the morning with much care and there was a stir in the bed-

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rooms of the city, a standing before mirrors and a determination to have, some day, more captivating pieces of cloth to hide themselves in. Now the little triangles and diagonals make a swarm of patterns identical as the rain, and, like the rain, the little people are pouring out of yesterday into tomorrow.

Life with its head hidden in an umbrella—little people with bits of black cloth giving half outline to the impenetrable cells they exchange at death for wooden boxes—the rain drums and chatters about them and the day, like a dark mirror, ignores them. The great buildings, magnificent grandfathers of the little black-arched umbrellas, stand dutifully excluding the rain. Electric lights already spray their circles of yellow mist upon the air. The stunted little sky of the city—the corridor of trade and restaurant signs that almost brushes the tops of the black umbrellas—is prematurely ablaze. A checkerboard flight of windows gleams out of the spatula-topped skyscrapers. The eyes of people wandering beyond the dripping webs of umbrellas catch sudden glimpses through the yellow spaces of the checkerboard of little puppet worlds inhabited by parts of furniture and unexpected faces.

Thus the city looks and moves under an umbrella in the street. I move with it, an old dream like a

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fawning beggar at my elbow. It is the dream of the urge of life. It follows me with the eyes of dead years. I have already given to this dream too many alms. Yet it fawns for more. Sorrowful dream of the urge of life, insatiable mendicant at my elbow, its lips cajole, but its eyes, deep and empty as a skull's, stare with many deaths. We walk on and the rain carries a whimpering into my heart — the whimpering of an old dream asking alms.

I invent names for the half-hidden faces and give meanings to them. Adjectives are an antidote for the companion at my elbow, and perhaps some day, wearied of listening to them, he will abandon me.

There is a kinship among the black umbrellas bumping and scraping at each other. I observe this. And yet, beneath them there are only solitudes. The trousers of men and skirts of women move in solitude — precise little solitudes as identical as the black umbrellas and the rain.

Walking before me under an umbrella is a young woman. Her face, hidden from the rain, is that of a rouged nun, as are the faces of the young women of the city who mask their vacuity with roses. She has been hurrying, but now she moves more slowly. I invent a name for her and a meaning. She is unaware of this, for it is the common fancy of little peo-

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ple swarming in streets that their solitudes are impenetrable. Within them they move, brazenly giving themselves to the outrāgeous underworlds of thought.

So the young woman walks before me in the street, locked in her little depths, surrounded by the secret names and images of her yesterdays and tomorrows. I walk, following at her elbow as an old dream like a fawning beggar follows at mine. For it has occurred to me that the young woman is peering out of her solitude. She has become aware of the halloo of the rain as if it had just started.

It is obvious that she has been moving, aimlessly preoccupied, through the downpour, her words following lazily upon the pretty tracks of memory. And then the words suddenly jumbled and the pretty tracks became a circle in a void. It is this that makes hurrying little people abruptly slow their step and look up from the ground — as if to recover something.

The young woman, deserted by her solitude, looked quickly about her and perceived only the solitudes of others which, though identical, are always meaningless. I observe and understand. She has for the moment escaped from a cell, a pleasing enough cell of remembered and expected destinations, to find

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herself free in a world of cells. Umbrellas run by her. Legs and arms thrust themselves senselessly about her. It is a matter of little enough importance — a young woman standing bewildered in the rain. Yet I remain at her elbow. There is in her bewilderment opportunity for the employment of adjectives.

Something has amazed her. In her unoccupied brain the little world darting about under her eyes reflects itself as an unoccupied world; an unoccupied world stripped of destinations. In the umbrellas alone there seems a startling kinship and an even more startling superiority of purpose. They, perhaps, have meanings, but the little people under them have none. Their destinations have deserted them and they are moving with an incongruous hurry, having neither beginnings nor endings.

For moments the young woman stares. I do not know her thought, but I know that a lonesomeness has fastened upon her, that having lost her solitude she has lost the oblivious kinship of people in crowds. The intricate little furniture of life, her minutiae of preoccupation, have vanished from her as if a light that was shining on them had been shut off. So for this instant during which I have been observing her she is free of the world and there is in her the terrible premonition — for the world beats remorselessly on

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without her. The black umbrellas float jerkily like expiring balloons. The long V-shaped stretch of people crawls with continuous patience out of distance into distance. "Nowhere, nowhere," chatters the rain, and in the mouth of the young woman life lies suddenly tasteless. An old dream like a fawning beggar is at her elbow—the dream of the urge of life that but a moment ago was the reality of realities.

We walk on and the young woman, surrounded by an unaccountable emptiness, listens with foreign ears to the rain and with scrutinizing eyes regards the fantastic rim of her umbrella. The contours and noises of life seem not like the contours and noises of life, but like haphazard lines and sounds without content. I employ my adjectives and she, lost in a curious despair, feels the pain, the nostalgia for the unknown, slowly distend her breasts and sink thin-edged into the depths of her body. As she tries to think, little fears burst excitedly in warm clouds in her throat; keen mists lacerate and darken the little channels of her senses. Then words form themselves, and she is saying:

"I want something. Something."

The rain drums and chatters about us. The tides of umbrellas careen with precision along the base of

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the great buildings and the lights of the city, like bits of vivid pasteboard, drift over us in the downpour. The echo of the cry that rises from all endings burns in my heart. Cry of the dead, passionless fever of the emptied senses reaching for life beyond contours, I listen to the echo of its murmur in a city street and stare into a tangle of trousers and skirts. Life is a crafty beggar, masking its dead eyes with new dark-nesses.

Despair with thin fingers caresses the heart of the young woman and her senses sweep furtively the horizon of her little world and she searches in vain for the face of her longing. "Nowhere, nowhere," chatters the rain. The great buildings and the little black umbrellas say a nowhere and the long crowd in the street — the long crowd in the street runs away.

I know the thought of the young woman. It has hurried hopefully to the man from whose arms she has come. She images again the delicious, thrilling hour of his talk and caresses. But as she thinks of them quickly, frightenedly, they become a part of the puppet worlds that lie within lights shining out of building windows.

We walk on and the young woman stares into the dark mirror of the rain whose odors and lines give fugitive forms to the mystery of space. Under her

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umbrella the rouge of her cheeks, like a mask, slips away and her face is white. There is a whiteness in her heart, the gathering of fear of one who waits for unexpected things. The echo of the words of longing swims sickeningly in her body. From the underworld of her thought demoniac impulses raise a dizzying babble. Inanimate, they burst into wild flight and yet leave her motionless. The words of her longing have gone into her fingers and I watched her closed hand shiver; into her legs that plunge with violence beneath her skirt. She feels them almost coming to life in her breasts. So she is walking swiftly again, flying from an emptiness.

We walk on until the block is ended and the young woman pauses to smile expectantly into a shop window. She breathes deeply and moves her umbrella aside so that the rain may wet her face. I know of what she is thinking. There is a curious sense of guilt—the confused shame of little people who turn their backs for a moment upon life as upon a beggar, and for a moment give words to the cry that rises from all endings.

The young woman, penitent and again alive, whispers to herself it was the man from whose arms she has come. For there was no other something. Is not love one of the finalities? So her thoughts are again

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with him. Again he talks and caresses and there comes to her the glow, the keen yearning for satiety — for some completion — that she calls by the name of love.

There was nothing else she wanted. The rain made her dizzy. And yet the memory of the terror and elation that for an instant, beneath the black umbrellas, created a vacuum of her solitude clings to her like the ghost of a mysterious infidelity.

Away from the shop and it, too, is gone. The little black-arched umbrellas swarm about us as if trying to fly over each other. Under them are the faces of people safely and intelligently locked in little solitudes. The rain drums and chatters about them, dropping walls from their umbrellas and burying them deeper in their secret destinations. To the young woman the thing in the street is again explicable. It requires neither words nor thought. It is rain and people, buildings and umbrellas, lights and a shining pavement, and out of it rises the swift urge of life.

We walk on and her hand touches mine. Her fingers close prettily over it. We talk and her words are eager. She has been thinking of me, she says, and her eyes lie avidly. She struggles against a confidence, wondering what there is to tell. It blurts

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forth then adroitly in a laugh, a laugh that belongs to the orchestra of sweet sounds.

I am so happy, she says. I am so happy. The joy of return has made her buoyant, return into her solitude with its familiar little furniture, among which I stand, a decoration of the moment. She has forgotten the beggar who fawned in the rain at her elbow and things are explicable, things are clear, and have names and swing vividly through the dark day.

We walk on, hands together, and an old dream whimpers in my heart.

The Wrong "Front"

Some years ago I did this man a favor. He was, at the time, a sodden looking creature with a red nose and the remains of a vocabulary. I encountered him while looking for something to write about in one of the West Side flops.

It was winter time. He was cold, hungry and garrulous. Sitting in a restaurant we got to talking, and he talked about literature. This was interesting. He had been a gentleman once, and events coupled with atrocious habits had landed him on his nose. It was curious to sit next to a tramp with a past, and while he talked I noted the snobbishness he cherished toward his former estate. Despite his hunger and lack of money and lack also of hope, he apologized to me for his dirty collar and sought nervously to shove his filthy cuffs out of sight.

These things were impressive, and after I left him I told the thing as an anecdote to a man with philanthropic leanings. My seedy and red-nosed tramp, Bartels, was given a job and a new outfit. And to cap the thing, I wrote a story about him in which I romanticized some of the facts.

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Bartels had dropped out of my mind when one day a year later a rather distinguished looking gentleman, freshly barbered, red faced, newly lined and carrying a stick called on me at my office. It was Bartels. I failed to recognize him for a moment. And when I did, I became self-conscious.

“ Well,” I said, “ this is quite a transformation. What’s up? Anything wrong? ”

“ Oh, no,” Bartels answered, removing a pair of new gloves. “ Just thought I’d drop in.” And he sat down.

Somehow the conviction came to me that Bartels was in trouble, and wanted me to help him out. So to put him at ease I remarked cheerfully: “ I’m certainly glad to see the improvement.” He beamed, and I added, “ And if there’s anything I can do . . . ”

A frown came to his red face.

“ I suppose you figured when you saw me that I’d come up to panhandle,” he answered. I protested. “ Yes you did,” he insisted. “ I could tell. I’m awfully sorry you feel that way toward me. I just dropped in for a little chat with you—about books and things.”

I apologized for my mistake and we sat in silence for a time and grew mutually embarrassed. The cer-

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tainty had come to me that the man was a terrible bore.

“ Yes,” he resumed with a desperate note in his voice, “ I’m awfully interested in literature. You remember that talk we had in the cafe?”

I nodded.

“ Well,” he pursued, “ conversations such as that are wonderful. Would you mind coming out to lunch with me. I owe you a lunch, you know.” He paused and added, evidently to bribe me, “ I owe you more than that. I owe you all this.” And he indicated himself.

His gratitude was unconvincing and obviously designed to seduce me into a long-winded literary discussion. I told him I was busy and that I would be glad to lunch with him some other day—to call me up, etc. When he left he appeared annoyed and disappointed, and I worried about him for two days. I remembered also I had forgotten to inquire what he was doing and how he had made his “ comeback.”

Three months later, when I had again totally forgotten the man, he appeared a second time—as barbered and resplendent as before. There was more assurance in his manner and a hail fellow intimacy to his tone. Remembering my omissions on his last visit, I started to inquire about his “ return.” But

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the thought came to me that the fellow would be embarrassed to be reminded of his past and of the unhappy circumstances in which I had first found him, so I gave it up.

It turned out that he had no purpose in his visit other than a pleasant chat about books and writers and things. I did my best this time to talk, but Bartel's words seemed ridiculous evasions of something—as did my own. It dawned on me that whatever his present income and respectability the creature was still in my mind a tramp, and would always be one—and that anything I said to him would have to sound patronizing and dramatic. After fifteen minutes of ineffectual talk, his manner in fact seemed to collapse and he rose to go. Unfortunately, he left his cane behind, and I had to run after him, calling, "Just a minute," as he hurried to the elevator. "Here's your stick." This made an unhappy impression on both of us.

I have since passed Bartels on the street a half dozen times. We greet each other with a nervous and even frightened "Hello, there," and walk on. Whenever I see him I worry for several days over the fact that I owe him something which he has no right to expect. "If I could sit down and talk to him as I would like to," I think, "it would be easy.

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We would talk about his life as a tramp—and old times, so to say. But it would be cruel to do that, inasmuch as he wants me to know him as he is—a gentleman with an enthusiasm for literature.

In the mail that came this Christmas I received an interesting card from him. It was engraved and expensive looking and wished me the usual compliments of the season. Scribbled across its back in an old man's wavering hand was the sentence, "I would like to have a talk with you some time, but I presume this is impossible, for I am still 'out of character'."

The Yellow Goat

The grave, melodious shout of rain filled the night. The streets had become like dark and attenuated pools. The rain falling illuminated the hidden faces of the buildings and the air was silvered with whirling lines. Through the sparkle and fume of the rain-colored night the lights of the café signs burned like golden-lettered banners flung stiffly into the storm. About these lights floated patches of yellow mist, through which the rain swarmed in flurries of little gleaming moths. There were also the lights of the doors and windows beneath the burning signs. They, too, exhaled oblongs of yellow steam upon the darkness. The remainder of the street was lost in a wilderness of rain that bubbled and raced over its stone in an endless and bewildering detonation.

I had been in this street before and I knew it for a street of little grimy-fronted cafés and vicious haunts — crude and rococo gathering places for niggers, prostitutes and louts. But now as I walked with my shoes spurting water and the rain hanging from my clothes, there was about this street a curious unfamiliarity. The fuming, motionless rain

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filled the air with a mysterious presence. Beneath my feet ran the silver-tipped pool of the flooded pavement. Gleaming in its rain-splintered depths swam the reflections of the burning lamps overhead. These, as I walked, were the yellow script of another and wraith-like world staring up at me out of nowhere. The rest was darkness.

I hurried on as the sound of thunder crawled out of the sky. A vein of lightning opened the night and in the sudden blue pallor the street and its buildings etched themselves on the vanishing light—a monstrous and phosphorescent world. The rain flung itself for an instant in great opalescent sheets out of the lighted spaces. I caught a glimpse of a figure in the distance, hunched and stationary. The darkness and the desolate whirl of the rain resumed and I walked on, staring as after something vanished. A wind now entered the street, outlining itself in the wild undulations of the rain on the pavements. Clandestine notions held rendezvous in my thought as I pressed forward against the storm. Decidedly the street had an unfamiliar air and was full of dishevelled rain ghosts. The best of philosophers become wet in the rain. The roar of the flooded night, the leap and hollow blaze of the lightning, the sudden inanimate burst of pale violet outline in the chaotic

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dark, were things which seemingly isolated me from the normal contemplations which are my habit. I began to fancy myself, in this dilapidated, storm-ridden street, as some tiny wanderer through a strange and torturous world.

The little windows that trickled their yellow lights toward me seemed the glowing pasteboards of some forgotten illusion. What with the stumble of thunder in the dark and the tenacious lash of the rain, a burn had come into my body. I was moving prosaically enough toward the house of a friend. He had offered for my inspection several manuscripts purchased that day and scrawled with diverting cryptograms. In a pocket, tucked dry and safe out of the wet, I was carrying the work of a profound Englishman who had devoted his life to the unraveling of cryptograms. But now the churning of the wind and rain, the noise and the phosphorescent gulfs of light into which I was continually plunging, had brought me an intoxication in which manuscripts and friends and cryptograms seemed miserable things. I drew in with gulps the quickening odor of the storm—the spice of water-laden winds. I had felt at first a proper regard for my clothes, an ethical emotion which had gradually given way to relish of the storm. This in turn, as I moved on leaning against the wind

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and the pliant walls of water, was succeeded by an elation groundless and insane. The little adjectives I had been arranging for my lonely delight were seized by an incoherence. I began to ponder upon violent abstractions, and the thought of the routine ways of life became to me unbearable. The innumerable little meditations with which I usually beguile my solitary journeys offended this new reach of my spirit. I went plunging on, soaked and disheveled, curbing a desire to shout and dash about.

Moving thus through the storm, my thought became full of the tremblings of a dancer stiffened by the beat of furious music. What were not possible? Strange, irrational expectations left me smiling faintly. But the wild dance of the wind, the halloo of the night and the vast burst of water about me urged me on despite this snobbery with which all good logicians regard their emotions. How gladly we surrender our treasured philosophies at the first touch of ecstasy. Where and of what avail were the intrigues of reason in the hammering of a night like this — a night for poets and mystics, true fellows of all storms. What strange altar fires were those engulfing flickers of dead moonlight? A racket of what gods were those bounding sounds? Thus my thought continued to spurn the little tracts of reason and cir-

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cle in the profound and mystic abstraction of the wanderer in storms.

The night was growing wilder. My eyes straining toward unimagined things bored into the vapors and steam of the rain. Whereon a blinding gust of light brought me shuddering to a halt. The thunder filled the night suddenly with an amazing tumult, a horror of sound, and I remained stiff and staring as in a dream at a face that floated in a piercing light. I stood as one suspended in the rushing of winds. The world, but for this face which confronted me, had vanished. I saw it to be the face of a woman contorted into a stark and indescribable grimace of rapture. Its eyes gleamed like black and lavender tips of flame. Its teeth stood out white and skull-like against the red of an opened mouth. I was aware of a sound of laughter that seemed to come floating out of the roaring spaces about me.

A silence and darkness seized the world. I stood listening to the melodious detonations of the rain and the harmless sweep of the wind. Over my head burned a café sign, and I was gazing into a washed and emptied panel of glass. Within I saw figures jerking about in a dance and an orchestra of niggers playing. The yellow script overhead proclaimed me in the presence of the Yellow Goat.

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In the home of my friend it was quiet and cheerful. Outside the rain chattered in the darkness and the alto of the wind arose in long organ notes from the houses. We sat and smoked and exchanged elaborate phrases. But my eyes had evidently been affected by the lightning. When I closed them they still revealed to me the instant of piercing light and the face floating under the sign of the Yellow Goat. Seen thus in memory, there was an irritating familiarity about its features. I had not intended to, but I found myself after several moments telling my friend of the incident. I spoke with a great show of incorruptible logic of the thing, pointing out that what I had seen had been undoubtedly the face of an uncommonly beautiful prostitute surprised in a yawn by the gulp of lightning. But my friend is a creature given to making vast and melodramatic riddles out of such phenomena, and he differed from me.

“Stuff and nonsense,” I finally interrupted him. “If you’ll stop quoting the Cabala and cease your chattering about Sabbats and witches, I’ll discuss the thing with you as befits two civilized men.”

He stared with a faint smile at his shelves of books that, like erratic and colored teeth, stood out from the wall.

I resumed: “There was the face of a dancer

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whom I watched one evening on the stage. I remember now a curious gleam in her eyes and recall how I tried vainly to fit an emotion to such a gleam. There was the face of a hatless boy running through the streets one sunny morning who bumped into me and dashed on without begging my pardon. There was the face of a man I listened to once as he played the violin, and I remember, too, the face of a woman that I hesitated to kiss. Now the face I saw in the lightning reminded me of all these faces. There is often something curious. These faces I now remember possessed an identical contortion, an identical arrangement of features and somehow an expression identical to the one I have just told you of. Stark and inhuman. A furious and repulsive loveliness. It was gone in an instant. But I saw it so vividly that I see it now when I close my eyes . . . an insufferable gesture thrust out of the lightning. The faces of which I am reminded were not so definite. But they had the same light about them."

"I know the light you mean," said my friend. "I've noted it myself. If you watch closely you will catch an instant of it now and then shining through the grimace of a dancer or of a man laughing, or, as you say, playing the violin." He paused and his face became full of a curious sincerity. "Or of a woman in

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passion. Yes, I know what you mean. Dark and violent legends have been written about this light, for it has always been in the world and yet seemingly not of it. In demonology . . .”

Again I offered an interruption. “Let us not talk of demonology. Inasmuch as a demon is unimaginable, any adjectives we may arrange concerning it will be crude and futile. What I saw in the face in the storm I’ve seen before, and in places without storm. I’ve put it down as a maniacal gleam, the indication of a fugitive disorder of the brain. I’ve noticed vaguely that the expression is somehow connected with people in moments of inspiration. I recall a young poet I knew. His stare at times became like a wild laugh out of which mirth has passed and which has become full of something else. This phrase vastly exaggerated would describe the expression of the features I looked at tonight . . .”

I left my friend with the emotion of a man who has offended his own intelligence. This babbling over the face of a prostitute passed in the rain appealed to me as the vaporings of a weakened brain. Yet it pursued me. I found myself excitedly searching in the faces of the little half-dead who swarmed the streets, who rode in cars, who sat in restaurants. There were impressions I could not shake off by assuring myself

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of an innate idiocy. And therefore three nights later I jammed a cap over my ears and with the collar of my mackintosh properly raised I launched myself into another night lashed with wind and rain in quest of the Yellow Goat.

I was curiously nervous as I turned into the street of the grimy-fronted cafés—the golden-lettered street signs adrift in the storm, the vast wash of water illuminating the dark with its fugitive glint, the boiling pavements and the odor of wet winds. I pressed on, hoping for the lightning and the thunder. For, I assured myself, the quest demanded a certain footlighting to be real, and off-stage noises. But the darkness, swollen with rain and wind, remained unrelieved and thus the morbid sanity of my true philosophical nature arose in my thought to confuse me and to prepare me for disillusion. I would find no such face. In fact, the face did not exist. It had been the trick of lightning and jumbled nerves. And those other faces which I so obligingly remembered—auxiliary hallucinations, all of them. In any event, promenading on a night like this savored of idiocy, face or no face. The quest of mysteries indeed! The urge of spiritual hungers, to be sure! Behold a solemn ass walking, as was his privilege, through a pneumonia-breeding deluge . . .

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The wind bayed through the streets and the rain enveloped me in its monotonous rush. Staring ahead I saw gleaming in a little floating oasis of bright mist the sign of the Yellow Goat. There was magic in the sign. The promptings of sanity fled my thought and an exultation tangled my legs. After all, there were destinations in the city. There were the veils of Isis still, and the piles of stone that little hands reared had not lost their cunning to conceal unimaginative mysteries. I paused before the entrance of the Yellow Goat as the streaming door swung open and two figures darted out. They were by me and gone in an instant, and, as if in pursuit of them, rushed a rollicking lurch of sound. Into the night floated a strain of music and the laugh of a woman.

I entered the Yellow Goat and the night vanished behind me. I was suddenly in a strange world of lights and shouts and odors. Dancing bodies spun and jerked among the tables. Faces bounced amid layers of tobacco smoke that lay in undulent lavender sheets above the floor. Through streaks of color and movement came the bray of music—a melody leaping between the smash of trombones and the bursting staccato of drums. Five niggers with faces satin black were swaying over silver instruments and shouting as they played. Among the round-topped

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table the revels and contortions of the dancers threatened to annihilate all furniture. A waiter passed in front of me balancing a black tray laden with colored glasses. At the tables sat men and women with faces that seemed somehow out of focus, niggers, prostitutes, louts. The slant of red mouths opened with laughter, the movement of eyes and hands and white throats of women—these I saw as fragments through a mist. I moved through the room toward a table that seemed to me empty. The reek of wine and steaming clothes, the sting of perspiring perfumes, the bedroom odors of women's bodies dizzied me as I dropped into a chair at this table.

Opposite me sat a woman with a face cut out of scarlet, white and lavender cardboards. Her head was thrown back in a grimace of violent laughter. The red flesh of her opened mouth and throat stared at me behind the roll of sound that issued. I was conscious for the moment of being embraced by soft arms, and I felt the hot and opened mouth pressing almost on my face. About me men were banging glasses on the table and women were screaming laughter. To the music of the five shouting niggers couples were making feverish gestures with their bodies against the roar and haze of the room. The faces of drunken niggers, prostitutes and louts hung

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in the odor and smoke. I sat silent like some bewildered and forbidding stranger, wondering how this woman had appeared so abruptly opposite me. I was in these first moments walking again through the storm and beholding in a gulp of lightning the strange features of a woman behind the door of the Yellow Goat.

The music of the five niggers stopped and a sudden emptiness flooded the room. The confusion became a matter of men's and women's voices and scurrying waiters. The woman opposite me alone remained unchanged. She was gazing at me with eyes in whose swarthy depths moved tiny streaks of scarlet that were like wavering flame tips. Beneath her eyes her skin was darkened as if by bruises. A peculiarly sultry light glowed over their heavy discolorations. Her mouth had shut and her cheeks were without curves, following the corpse-like lines of her skull. They were paper white, but again I noted in them the curious sultry glow of her smeared and heavy eyes. Her lips were like the streaks of vermilion lacquer painted on an idol's face. She had thrust two bared arms across the table top and was leaning forward. She was regarding me with a smile.

To this extent am I able to describe her. The face of a malignant pierrette or a diabolic clown, stark

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and illumined as under some strong lavender ray; the gleaming and putrescent eyes haloed in a gelatinous mist, full of reptilian sorcery. These are simple things to recount. But these were merely the mask for a bewildering thing which held me silent in a strange inertia. This thing hovered between us like a third person. It was an animation creating waves in the air that were neither of light nor of sound. My thought grew dim and, during these moments that I sat returning her smile, an almost unbearable lust cried in my blood.

We arose and walked arm and arm out of the Yellow Goat into the night and rain. I was aware of faces turned toward me as we passed among the tables but they seemed the fragments of a foreign world. In the rain her body breathed against me, warming me with its hot flesh. My thought became like an echo forever escaping me. The woman tugged at my arm.

“Run, run,” she cried. She threw her head back and filled the night with her laugh. We ran.

We came breathless up a flight of stairs into a room lighted with a gas jet. The heavy sulphurous scent of tuberose stuffed the place but I could make out no flowers. I stood against the door we had entered. The woman's clothes had fallen from her as

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if blown from her body by a strong wind. Nude but for the black silken stockings she had not removed she turned toward me. Her white skin glistened with moisture and was covered in places with the faint colors of stained glass. She began to dance and throw her arms about and her mouth opened in a laugh. The room became saturated with her. She swept by me plunging about in her dance, posturing and shouting. The gleam of her eyes buried itself in my brain and left me crazed with desire for her.

It was this gleam and the rapturous grimacing of her face that awakened my thought. I recalled as from a distance that I had come in quest of something. This thing I saw now in her face as she tumbled about the malodorous room. It expressed torture. I had seen this light that burned from her, this curious contortion of features in the faces of the city, now for an instant in the inspiration of a dancer, now in the midst of a violin's wonder, now in the joy of a woman laughing. I had never seen it as I saw it now, but always as a fugitive and lunatic light that fixed itself upon the air, after it had vanished from the eyes of men and women. Here was this light in a nudity more intimate than the shine and odor of her body's flesh.

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She had ceased her dancing and thrown herself upon the grimy rumpled surface of a bed. Her laughter also had ceased. She lay with her arms extended toward me, her nakedness moving faintly like some thick white and undulant reptile. I saw that her eyes were closed but that there was nevertheless about her the stare of a terrible vision. A moan began to come from her and her fingers like claws scratched at the air. Her moving and the odors arising from her grew unendurable. I opened the door softly and ran. Pursuing me came the sound of laughter, rising in a howl.

Outside it still rained. The wind no longer blew. I hurried away and my thought so long tangled in emotion began to unwind itself.

“She is a disease,” I murmured to myself. “Her flesh is insane. She is the secret of ecstasy and of gods and of all things that are beautiful.”

About my feet the whirling lines of the rain burst upon the pavement forming innumerable little v's. In the proper course of time I would fashion adjectives out of the thing the woman of the Yellow Goat had revealed to me and thus perhaps add to the progress of my race. But now there drifted before me a white-torsoed phantom and in my nose there remained the hot smell of a decay.

Lenin and Wilson Talk Their New Language on Doorstep of Valhalla

The New Ones sit on the doorstep of Valhalla. After their deaths the New Ones make a long trip. And they rest for a time on the doorstep before entering Valhalla.

There sits a man with a short beard. He stares calmly out of the sky. Another man with a long face approaches. The long-faced one stops at the step on which the short-bearded one sits. After a pause he speaks.

The Long-Faced One: You are Nikolai Lenin.

The Short-Bearded One: Who?

The Long-Faced One: Nikolai Lenin, the bolshevik premier.

The Short-Bearded One: Perhaps.

The Long-Faced One: Strange you do not recognize me. You must have seen my picture often. It was printed more times than yours. I am Woodrow Wilson. I have had a long trip. Is this a place to sit down? Yes, you are Lenin, I recognized you from far away. What are you doing?

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The Short-Bearded One: One does only one thing here. One rests. And forgets.

The Long-Faced One: Perhaps you are forgetting the trouble you caused on earth.

The Short-Bearded One: Did I cause trouble? Where?

The Long-Faced One: In Russia. You did something to the Russians.

The Short-Bearded One: Russia—Russians? When I was a boy I went to a place with my grandfather. There were men in black boots and women in red and white dresses. They danced? Perhaps you have seen them, too? No. What trouble was there?

The Long-Faced One: [*He stares out of the sky with perplexed eyes*] I don't remember at the moment. But there was trouble of some sort.

The Short-Bearded One: Are you a Russian, Mr.—excuse me, your name? I forget.

The Long-Faced One: Woodrow Wilson. It is dizzy up here, is it not? No, I am not a Russian. I come from France, Lenin.

The Short-Bearded One: And my name, you say, is Lenin? Hm, it does not sound like anything—Lenin . . . Lenin. Did you cause trouble in France?

The Long-Faced One: Let me see. It was not

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France. It was somewhere else. There was a great deal of trouble.

The Short-Bearded One: Tell me. What was it happened?

The Long-Faced One: Let me see. I was thinking of you as I came here. And of others. We had a great deal of trouble, but it seems to have passed out of my mind. Do you recall a place named America?

The Short-Bearded One: No.

The Long-Faced One: Perhaps it was America I was from and not France.

The Short-Bearded One: You are tired, my friend. A moment ago you said you were a Russian. Now you speak of other things. It is confusing to remember what one has dreamed. Yesterday there was a man sitting beside me and weeping. When I asked him why he wept, he answered he had forgotten the reason for his weeping.

The Long-Faced One: I wept, too, as I came here. What was I saying about Russia?

The Short-Bearded One: You were telling me they wore black boots and red and white dresses. But it is not important.

The Long-Faced One: No. Something else. Let me see. Oh, yes, there was a war.

The Short-Bearded One: A war? Where?

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The Long-Faced One: It is hard to say. There was a great deal of trouble.

[*A group of figures have gathered about the two talkers.*]

A Figure Speaks: You, with the long face. You have just come. Tell me where you have come from, and what is this thing of noise I have forgotten?

The Short-Bearded One: Yes. Tell us. There is a story in my head and it keeps falling asleep.

A Figure Speaks: Life. Tell us about it. What is it? A dream still haunts me.

The Short-Bearded One: Tell us, friend. There was a little dream —

The Long-Faced One: It is hard. I knew a little while ago. But now I seem to have lost something. There was a great deal of trouble —

The Figures All Speak: Yes. This trouble, tell us of it. What was it happened? The noisy dream. You have just come from it. You will remember something. Think.

The Long-Faced One: I don't know. There was some trouble somewhere, and I was in it. But it has slipped my mind. May I not sit here with you in silence for a time? Look. There comes one way down the road. He is putting on a sword and helmet. He is weeping and covering his face. Wait — I know

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who he is. He is a Kaiser, and he had something to do with the trouble. When he arrives we will ask him to tell us.

[They sit and stare at the dim figure moving slowly toward them.]

The Short-Bearded One Whispers: What did you say was my name?

The Long-Faced One: Your name? Let me see. I forget. Yes, I forget your name.

[The Short-Bearded One rises and walks to the towering gate of the Hall. The gate opens and with a smile at those waiting on the doorstep, he steps across the threshold and vanishes.]

The Movie Maniac

I

In the beginning, Wilbur Omar Brown was a thin, saccharine gentleman whose words and deeds on remote occasions almost shed the stamp of asininity which seemed to be inherently theirs. He would, in the midst of his usual babbling, reveal a sudden shrewdness, a cunning, a knowledge perhaps of the population of Borneo, the date of the battle of Marathon, the height of the highest mountain in the world. But such unexpected illuminations from this Brown's brain served chiefly to reveal the natural darkness which inhabited it. Did he let loose one flash of humor, did he uncork one ray of intellect, it but provided vivid evidence of his general witlessness. He had two children, which, to a sensitive observer, was perhaps the most irritating thing about him.

These children, picturesque and buxom, furnished him with a fatuous pride. Himself thin, colorless, inutile, Brown pointed them out as his own, spoke vaingloriously and in his squeaking voice of inherited stamina, of untainted family physique handed down from generation to generation. In their pres-

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ence he swelled to heroic proportions, he assumed a faint virility of gesture, and discoursed darkly concerning primitive instincts.

“ We must not disparage the primitive instincts,” he would pipe, removing his thick-lensed glasses and throwing out his spavined chest.

“ We must not talk sneeringly of the evidences of the brute in man,” he would go on, stroking his skinny knees and regarding you with a vague, watery eye. “ Yes, sir; without our primitive instincts we should be an uninteresting lot! ”

Of such minor eccentricities, little derelicts knocking about within his more or less vacant soul, Brown had his fullest share. As for his vices, they were more uninteresting if possible than his virtues. He was, summing it up for the moment, one of these born wallflowers of life—

There are some people in whom virtue and vice are the direct results of cowardice. Thus you will find hypocrisy and honesty walking hand in hand; purity and nastiness occupying the same cells, nobility and meanness throbbing together within the same bosom—all forming the little empty enigma known as the bourgeoisie.

Thinking it over carefully, such a fellow was Brown.

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Of his private life there is this to say. In the beginning—take shrewd notice of the dramatic value of this clause—in the beginning he was a copy-reader on a Chicago newspaper. He sat at a flat-topped desk from 7 A. M. to 3 P. M. every day except Sundays. It was his duty to read a certain proportion of the stories turned in by the reporters of the paper to the city editor and handed over by that dignitary to the copy-desk. Reading these stories he would insert punctuation, correct grammar, delete dubious remarks, annihilate what might be libelous, add a few “it is saids,” and “it is allegeds” to statements which seemed too strong. This done he would crown his achievements by the construction of a heading.

Thus, if it was a story concerning the coldness of the day and the misery of the poor as observed by the reporter from a bench in the County Agent’s office, he, Brown, would with great concentration, counting of letters, biting of lips, inscribe:

B-R-R-R! Chicago Shivers.

Mercury Drop Brings Want.

Poor Plead for Fuel.

Woeful Scenes in County Agent’s Office While One

Woman Sobs Woe.

Cold Wave to Continue.

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If it were a story concerning some court proceedings, and most of them were alike, Brown would perpetrate:

Judge Raps Romeo.

Wife Sobs Woe in Court.

Sad Climax to Romantic Elopement.

Struck Her, Bride Alleges.

In the conduct of this business he was regarded, as are all unoriginal, unimaginative creatures, as a reliable and competent workman. His day's work over, Brown would gather under his arm half a dozen newspapers and depart for home. He seldom spoke to any member of the staff, although it was typical of him to pause for a few moments and listen to the ceaseless anecdoting among the men, inserting some illuminating remark before passing on, such as:

“ I hardly see how that man could have attended an embassy dinner in Hong Kong. There is no embassy there.”

At 4 o'clock he was home and thenceforth his life underwent a soothing expansion.

Mrs. Brown, a vivid looking, matter-of-fact minded woman of 30, was still in love with her husband. The two picturesque and buxom children greeted him loyally. Mrs. Brown kissed him, inquired if he were weary, instructed him concerning the midday doings

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of her neighbors, and leisurely busied herself about the preparations in the kitchen.

Her love for her husband was not a romantic fancy. Nor was it anything remotely lyrical.

She admired him in a homely way, as one admires a serviceable raincoat, a good brand of tobacco, a pleasing ride in an automobile. She was fond of his unruffled manner, was pleased with his quiet voice, his calm, his shyness in company, his modesty before friends.

Altogether, she saw in his weak effaciveness something she called dignity and reserve. In his general witlessness she saw the conservatism of a deep brain, in his impassive and unemotional conduct she perceived the respect and deference of a true gentleman.

During the course of her married life she had adjusted her ideals until they pleasantly coincided with the proportions of Wilbur, and she was happy in an aimless, unproductive manner. She had, however, observed of late a tendency of her husband to discourse concerning what he termed the primitive instincts of the race. It had begun with the war and with his planting of a patriotic garden in a patch behind their apartment building. This puny agriculture, Wilbur made known to his friends, was the grim working of the primitive instincts coming back into

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the world. After some slight irritation Mrs. Brown began to be vaguely proud of the idea, as she was of most of the intellectual advances made by her husband.

“They are nothing to disparage,” he quoted to her. “Patriotism, love, honor, all the fine things you know, as well as the brutal things, are nothing but primitive instincts. We ought all of us to be more natural. Civilization has done that, taken away our naturalness. We ought to exercise our primitive instincts more, so to speak, wherever we can do so honestly, conveniently, without injury.”

Then—I will skip the other myriad placidities of the fellow’s existence—then, by one of those haphazard strokes of fortune, Brown was selected by his editor to fill a vacancy left in the staff by the departure of Mr. Joe Corbin. Mr. Corbin had been the moving-picture critic. He had departed to become a scenario writer for a corporation whose work he had, as critic, ably and consistently admired.

Thus for no reason at all, except perhaps his general worthlessness for any task involving sparkle or ingenuity, Brown found himself seated at his new desk, a pile of press-agent communications under his nose, a pass to all the movie theaters in his pocket, a new future confronting him.

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It is the congenital conviction of ninety persons out of ninety-one — and I have never encountered the ninety-first — that they are peculiarly fitted for the career of dramatic critic. Your genial mono cell, hesitating over the composition of a letter to his congressman inquiring after seeds, your impassive yokel shuddering before the task of answering an invitation to the grand dinner and ball of Lodge 15, Local 21; your salt of the earth working himself into a lethal fever arranging an inquiry after some unwary domestic to be inserted in the want ad column of his favorite evening gazette, all these intricately illiterate persons will accept boldly, eagerly, merrily the position of critic of literature, art, drama on any daily, weekly, or monthly periodical, and do. Modesty, shyness, effaciveness perish in the birth of a miraculous assurance.

The anointed step forth from their oblivion. Culture, cunning, infallibility drop upon them from some Olympian height. They become, these troglodytes, by some process of cellular evolution too swift to follow with the naked eye, dictators of the nation's æsthetic values. Which merely goes to show that all of us are born critics — at the rate of one a minute.

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II

These remarks, though general and blurred, have yet a specific bearing upon the case of Wilbur Omar Brown.

Seated at his new desk, this Brown contemplated with a new, an almost brazen light in his little watery eyes, the future which had opened for him. Within him he felt hitherto untapped springs bouncing to the surface. He experienced in less than fifteen minutes a swift, radiant growth of power in his soul, of ability, of genius.

He had, like his innumerable counterparts, a vague notion concerning moving pictures, a vaguer notion concerning drama, an almost indistinct, unborn notion concerning art.

It was his habit to frequent the movie theaters once or twice a week and gaze with a vacuous interest upon the black-and-white animations before him, to listen with an insensible ear to the musical distortions of the orchestra whose clamor he confused with the merits of the film, to applaud with rare humor the advertisement of his favorite laundry when it was flashed upon the screen, to read aloud the significant epistle which the hero had a moment previously clutched despairingly and thrust from him in clenched fist, to rise solemnly when the aforesaid or-

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chestra played the national anthem, to prophesy shrewdly and in whispers the fact that the villain would be exposed and the old mother saved from a consumptive's grave by the antitoxin the hero had invented.

But these characteristics were of the past.

As he sallied from his new desk a spring was in his step. He thought of the millions awaiting his pronouncements, engaging in arguments over his opinions; he visioned his name upon ash barrels, ruined walls, and even awnings. In these speculations there was no feeling of dubiousness. He moved hungrily upon his first theater. He seated himself with dignity upon his first critical throne. He narrowed his eyes.

Undoubtedly, during those first minutes at this particular theater Brown's temperament and critical attitudes underwent their moulding. Standards came to life in his brain, even as love dawns in the heart of the unsuspecting savage. Dogmas, prejudices, tastes all materialized with the same swift certainty.

The play, it so happened, was one in which a wealthy, doting husband returns unexpectedly home, finds his wife in the arms of a stranger, overhears her remark of her child, "and its nose is just like

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yours, dearest" as she strokes the nose of the stranger, contemplates murder, is thwarted by a defective shell in the revolver, departs into a cold world, becomes a lumber-jack in the Far North and is known as Silent Jim, roams the forest primeval registering anguish with long toe-dragging steps, breaks down and weeps while chopping trees, cuts off his toe and faints, is carried to a hospital by the faithful, simple lumber-jacks, finds his wife has become a nurse in the same hospital, curses her, but learns to his bewilderment that the stranger who embraced her and whose nose she said the child's nose resembled, was none other than her long lost brother just returned from India.

At this point in the play Brown rubbed his little watery eyes with his handkerchief and with bated breath watched while the wife and husband, (whose sore toe underwent an instantaneous cure as a result of the aforesaid revelation concerning the brother from India) walked slowly toward the horizon, while the sun, setting quickly, left her a silhouette with wind-tousled hair upon a hilltop and him a silhouette pointing with spread fingers over a valley below, the caption for this twilight reconciliation being, "A New Dawn."

Never before, as has been perhaps painfully indi-

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cated, had Brown viewed such proceedings as at present.

“A play of primitive instincts,” he said to himself, “done with a wonderful attention to human nature, and full of fine details and thrills.”

He rambled on to himself in this vein and as he moved out of the lobby he held his head high, he walked with a peculiarly drawn-out step.

His review of this film masterpiece, as he called it, appeared in the paper the next day under his name. It was couched in those sober and pompous inanities which enrolled him at once as an able upholder of the ideals of his new profession.

III

Brown's pride in his success, the inevitable changes in his manner, occupied little of my attention. His was the usual inflation which comes into the souls of little men when they step out of their merciful anonymity. At home this inflation expressed itself in certain formalities of speech and conduct which he seemed to acquire overnight. A curious consciousness crept into his talk, an impressiveness freighted his utterance.

As the days passed the change became less apparent. His acquaintances forgot the colorless inutile

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Brown of the past and took the new creature of dignity and importance for granted.

Even in his home this subtle adjustment went on.

Mrs. Brown, at first somewhat confused in the process, soon added the fellow's new mannerisms to the other ideal qualities which he possessed. Of his writings, now appearing each day in the newspaper, she was modestly proud, clipping and pasting them in a large book, as behooved the helpmate of a literary genius.

"The screen," said Brown to her one evening (he never referred to the thing as the movies any more), "is the greatest single benefactor of the race. Art and life combine upon it. The primitive instincts of man and woman are revealed for the first time in the shadow drama. Heretofore these instincts have come to us in sugar-coated fashion through the artifices of the stage."

Just where Wilbur Omar Brown underwent the metamorphosis which ended in his domestic ruin is hard to determine. Undoubtedly it dated from the moment he sat himself down and fastened his eye upon his first screen drama.

In a month, however, the results of this metamorphosis became apparent.

Slowly, imperceptibly, Wilbur Omar Brown faded

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out of existence, leaving behind in this same slow and imperceptible way an automatic gesticulator—a Francis X. Bushman, a Bryant Washburn. Day by day this strange eradication of a personality increased.

I did not see Brown to speak to for several months after he got his new position. When I did see him I almost failed to recognize him. In those three months, my little watery-eyed, colored friend, Wilbur Omar Brown, had disappeared.

He greeted me in an uncanny manner. His eyebrows shot up, his mouth opened, a light dawned slowly over his face. He suddenly thrust out his hand, seized mine, placed his other hand upon my shoulder, and thus greeted me.

When he had concluded this operation he placed both hands on my shoulders, pushed me gently from him, stared into my eye with a mysterious rapture and ejaculated my name. For the moment I was baffled. There was something irritatingly familiar about his behavior. It was not Brown, and yet . . .

“How is Mrs. Brown?” I asked.

His reply, or rather the manner of it, left me bewildered.

He closed his eyes even as I was asking the question, the lids fluttering. His spavined chest rose in

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a fearsome sigh. The look of joy utterly vanished from his face. He raised one hand and with spread fingers covered his forehead and nose. His other arm he thrust out sideways, the fist half clenched and curled back. At the same instant he staggered from me two short steps.

“What!” I stammered. “I’m sorry, Brown. I didn’t know there was anything.”

The spearlike fingers dragged themselves slowly from his face, the extended arm fell limply to his side, the shoulders sank, in fact collapsed. Brown’s lips parted in a slanting laugh. He said nothing.

I chose to ignore the entire incident. It was a hot day. I put it out of mind. I began the conversation anew, picking out the most banal remark at my command.

“I got back two days ago,” I said. “Had an ordinary trip.”

Brown, who had turned slightly from me and had been staring into space with his watery eyes, wheeled abruptly. A clenched fist jumped to his right jaw; he retreated two short steps and riveted me with the exclamation, “No!!!”

“Yes!” I cried.

There was something contagious about this horse-play.

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Brown dropped a stiffened arm to his desk, the fingers of his hand extended. I perceived a peculiar tension about his entire figure. It gave him uncanny proportions.

We talked, and as we talked I watched him, fascinated. He had become, in short, a theatricalism. His eyes flashed, his head turned abruptly from side to side. Strange, inexplicable emotions contorted his face. His walk was a study in absolute artifice. I could ask him no question without bringing upon me the entire business of surprise, intelligence, doubt, hesitation, fear, and even anguish. His gestures were the ludicrous exaggerations of the movies. He had, it was evident, stepped out of the colorless routine of his copy-reading days into some magnificent limbo.

IV

At first my bewilderment and growing irritation prevented me from observing to the full the fellow's manner. But as we moved from his desk, I having accepted more or less dazedly an invitation to accompany him home, I perceived the proportions of his mania.

When we encountered acquaintances Brown bowed low, his face registering a confusion of emotions. He was continually gripping my arm, making startling

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remarks, wheeling upon passers-by and fastening a fiery eye upon them.

I was, nevertheless, unable to get any information out of him. I sensed something on his mind, but he seemed incapable of voicing any sane thought.

When we arrived at his home the secret was revealed. I found Mrs. Brown wasted away. A strange harassed glint was in her eyes. She bit her lip as Brown opened the door.

As for Brown, he stared at her for a moment and then thrust forward his arms in what seemed a mute appeal. Mrs. Brown lowered her head and a tear appeared on her cheek. Brown's arms fell to his side and he hesitated a moment. During this moment his face became contorted with emotions. Suddenly he advanced upon her, placing his left hand upon his heart, extending his other hand toward her, and exclaimed, " Good evening."

Mrs. Brown glanced at me appealingly, turned, and fled. Brown entered his home. His gesticulating, if possible, appeared now to have increased. He accented the most trifling words with vast movements of his limbs, and seemed altogether like some clown in a preposterous pantomime. Mrs. Brown appeared several times, her face pathetic in its pallor. After the dinner, which was as grotesque an af-

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fair as any I have ever attended, Mrs. Brown beckoned me aside. We left Brown sitting at his desk in the front room, composing, as he said, his critique for the morrow.

We were alone in her bedroom, whither she had led me. I noticed that a trunk stood packed against the wall, that the room was stripped.

“I’m going away,” Mrs. Brown said to me, “and I want to talk to you. Wilbur has frequently told me you were his friend. Your coming tonight may prove providential. I have already sent the children away. I was afraid he might affect them. But, I can’t stand it any longer. I must leave.”

She commenced to weep and I waited patiently until she resumed.

“It’s been this way for at least two months, and is growing worse every day. He’s got so he can’t do anything but strut and mimic the terrible movie actors. He wakes up like that, he comes home like that, he—he goes to sleep like that. He—he is terrible. If I could only tell you the things he does. They—they are shameful.”

Again the tears, again the wait, again the resumption.

“He’s so changed I don’t know him. He’s worse than a stranger. Oh, my nerves are gone. I shall die

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if I stay here with him. I can't ask him a question, I can't kiss him, I can't do anything but what he starts acting. It's those terrible moving pictures that have done it, just ruined and spoiled him. Can you do anything while I am away? I am going to my mother. Please try."

She ceased and put her hat on.

Before I could summon an answer which would be sufficiently ambiguous, she had started for the street.

"Here," she said, "give this to Wilbur. I don't want to see him again."

She handed me a letter and moved quietly out of the house.

I found Brown as I had left him, gesturing to himself, frowning and registering, in the usual ludicrous manner of the movies, "deep thought."

"Brown," I said, "your wife has just gone. She gave me this letter to give you."

He turned on me, springing to his feet. I settled back for an exhibition of unusual dramaturgy as he read the note. I was not disappointed. The fellow actually punctuated each sentence with the most insane struttings, walkings up and down and draggings of the toes, flourishings of the arms, bowings of the head, beatings of the bosom, I had ever seen.

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When he had finished he collapsed into a chair and sobbed.

I approached him sympathetically. He raised his face and beckoned me away with a stiff gesture. His grief was even as his other emotions—a thing of stilted and elaborate pantomime. I perceived that the artificiality which had possessed him had eaten its way into the depths of his consciousness.

“Ah,” he cried, “she is gone . . . gone . . . I should have known better than . . . to . . . release the brute in me. I must be careful. I must win her back.”

He arose and paced the room, gesturing, grimacing in a preposterous manner.

“The brute in me,” he murmured. “That is what comes of unleashing the primitive instincts . . . man naked . . . man unadorned . . .”

He paused trembling.

Removing his thick-lensed glasses he stroked his skinny knees, and suddenly rolled his eyes and fell forward in his chair.

I was about to spring to his assistance when I perceived that this final proceeding was merely another of his “registerings” and I paused.

Sure enough he raised himself, opened his eyes and murmured in his strange piping voice:

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“ Begone . . . begone . . . you are no true friend in my need. I would be alone. I would suffer alone. No one can help me. I must fight this fight alone and if I am victorious, if I succeed in killing the brute in me it will be by my own efforts.”

I left him to his primitive instincts. That was a month ago. Mrs. Brown has since obtained a divorce, charging — cruelty.

Caricature

I

The first thing that I remember noticing about him was that he was an elbow-steerer. This is nothing conclusive against a man. I have known elbow-steerers of excellent character, men who ripened with acquaintance into arresting and piquant companions. But always an elbow-steerer is to be accepted gingerly, with the eyes narrowed, with the lips pursed.

As I remember it, he appeared at the end of the marble hotel corridor, which in Chicago is still known, for all I can say, as Peacock Alley, an elbow-steerer in full action. His fingers were rigidly sunk into the lady's elbow. He guided her in a masterful manner down the deserted stretch to where I sat and waited. A pilot coming into port, a pathfinder, a mine-layer, the creature picked his way down the utterly vacant corridor, a corridor without obstruction, danger, or mystery, and I watched him with a sinking heart.

“So this,” thought I with that spiritual laceration which the sight of this particular lady once upon a

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time invariably aroused in me, "so this is what she's fallen for!"

I had been prepared to loathe the fellow when I first heard of his marriage to Helen. Offhand, sight-unseen, I had set him down in my mind as one to be accepted with suspicion and slow, careful reconnoitering.

But as the days passed and the blow lessened I had begun to think kindly of the man. Even his name, Joshua Briggs, had begun to lose some of its melancholy significance. After all, there was probably some quality to a man Helen would marry. She was a woman of taste, refinement, aye, genius. She could sing like a lark. I remember her sitting at the piano, singing as if the world were hidden from her, bringing purple distances into the little balcony room, her face like a little pool of moonlight in the dark, her voice throbbing, enchanting, pouring from her parted lips.

"Some day," I used to tell her, "I shall write as you sing. There is no one who sings like you. Calvé and Melba will some day sit at your feet."

These things I remember now very clearly, but more clearly I remembered them as I sat and waited for her and her new husband.

The honeymoon over, Helen had written me. The

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name at the foot of the brief letter had plunged me into that opalescent state peculiar to discarded suitors about to meet again their lost ones. I shaved, I massaged, I donned a festive tunic, I selected a cane of black lacquer, I sought the most delicate of stimulants, a rare yellow wine, and I sat myself at the far end of the corridor, as had been appointed, and mapped out repartee and epigram.

Would she be wistful when she saw me? Ah, what would I not give for just one little shadow in her eyes, I who had once aspired to the fires of love! What would I not give for one intimate tremor as her hand came into mine, one touch of salve for an outraged heart. Actually I had determined to be magnanimous, to shine with a joyous, steady light, to seize upon the fellow, to slap his back and pump his hand and whisper something about liquor. I should precipitate no crises. I should not mar the inexplicable joys of her love for another man by any exhibition of meanness. I should accept him. I should accept her, them, it. I was above the messiness of emotions. And then the creature appeared.

As I watched his portentous air, his grim solicitation as he progressed down the corridor, as I noted the wrapt and scientific manner in which he manipulated the elbow of her whom I had loved and lost, I

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knew him at once for what he was, an elbow-steerer superb, a Grand Proprietor. Know you, there are degrees and varieties of elbow-steerers. There are the dubious cavaliers who learned their manners from a dancing teacher, the professional escorts, the knightly ice-cream-soda fans. There are the shifty, hesitating, inexpert species, and, too, the maudlin roués who batten upon surreptitious caressings of funnybones. But he was none of these.

Do I seem too tolerant, too superficial in my judgments? And do you set my foment down to a petulance unworthy, perhaps an old man's prejudice? If so I will confide to you that all my life I have been a judger by symbols. A wink, a chuckle, a bow leg, a casual grimace for me have always determined character. Show me a man who affects brown tunics and scratches his nose when he speaks and I will prove you he is a snuff-maker's eldest son and not to be trusted. Show me a woman who wears long earrings and walks pigeon-toed and I will demonstrate to you that she is a trapeze performer.

To revert, he, the man who appeared in the marble corridor with his fingers sunk in the elbow of the lady I had loved and lost, he with his all-protecting air, his all-combating manner, was a Grand Proprietor. I saw the symbol and I knew the man.

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“So this,” thought I again, “is her choice. This is the person who succeeded where I failed, this the Turk in whose Yildiz she shall henceforward sing.”

To my horror, I remember it keenly, I noted further as they approached that he was also a spot-walker. Yes, by the Toothless Fates, a walker of spots, a creature who cunningly stepped upon precise and related points in the patterns of carpets, and corridors, who pounced upon cracks in the pavements.

I arose trembling.

“I have heard a great deal about you,” said the man, eyeing me with a calm and measuring gaze, slipping one foot cleverly over one of the diamond squares which formed the pattern of the marble flooring. “How do you do, Mr. Cour.”

“Mother,” said Helen, “and sister are waiting in the lobby.”

“Yes,” said the man, “they are anxious to meet you.”

I recovered my voice.

“As an old friend of the family,” I began, “I wish first to offer my congratulations.”

It was only the beginning of my speech. There were remarks of great weight and scintillation planned to follow. I do not remember saying them. In fact, the remainder of that entire evening is in a

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haze to me. There was a short fat woman whom Helen called mother. There was a tall acidulated thing she referred to as sister. And there was Josh Briggs. Ah, they were a family for you. Grim, joyless, shrewd, they seemed to me to be continually pouncing upon evils and wiping them out. Devastations surrounded them. And the most horrible thing was Helen in their midst.

II

A week I spent in the shadow of their presence. During that week I learned many things. It appeared that in marrying her, Josh had not only conferred upon Helen the joy of his love but that he had plucked her even as a brand from the burning. He had rescued her from godless ways. He had found her singing, laughing, thrilling at the touch of beauty, which is only one of the many masks of Satan, and he had enlightened her and saved her. She no longer sang. She no longer laughed. Nor did she thrill at the touch of beauty.

They had pointed out to her that song, except when uttered in the worship of the Lord, was a demoralizing power. It snared citizens into vice, it led its victims into theaters.

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It is difficult to describe all the details of the change which had befallen Helen. The three of them, indecently stupid, had captured and stripped her. They forbade her the society of strangers. Josh was their hero. Around him the two women gravitated. When he smiled they smiled, when he frowned their indignation blazed forth upon a helpless world. And of all the unmitigated asses, of all the banal, insufferably pompous hand-rubbers, Joshua Briggs was the most complete, the most perfect that ever flourished under the protection of an indulgent Republic.

There was nothing to do. I went about during that week catching now and then a glimpse of Helen, unsmiling, calm. Now and then we spoke to each other. But always there was a faraway sound to her words as if she were speaking from other worlds.

Sometimes we met — as we were living at the same hotel this was not difficult — for unexpected moments, — and remained silent awaiting the arrival of one of the Briggses. They were never long in arriving. They had appointed themselves the angels of the Lord and as such they hovered ever close to her whom they had saved. Evidently they deemed the process not complete. For one day I found her in tears. It was the seventh day.

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At first I passed on. She was sitting on the mezzanine floor of our hotel almost hidden from view behind a Chinese screen. The floor was deserted.

As I moved away rage seized me.

At the stairs I paused and turned.

I walked back to her and sat down at her side.

In that moment the determination to save her, to rescue her had matured. My mind was made up.

We did not speak for a moment. I waited until she had dried her eyes.

Then I said to her,

“ I want you to tell me about this thing you’ve got into. I think I can help you.”

She shook her head and answered,

“ You know what it is.”

“ I suspect,” I admitted. “ But why are you crying now? ”

Her eyes, still luminous with tears, became miserable.

“ Oh,” she said, “ I can’t see any way out of it. I married him and that’s all.”

“ What has he been doing now? ” I demanded. “ Tell me, Helen.”

As she made no reply, I placed my hand over hers and went on with an effort at optimism.

“ Come, come, it’s not so terribly awful. Matri-

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mony requires adjustments, you know, and all sorts of delicate work, all sorts of . . .”

Her hand tightening stiffly about my fingers brought an end to my efforts. She shuddered and began to talk in a low miserable voice.

“ He won’t let me sing, even to myself,” she said. “ It doesn’t seem possible. But his mother insists. She says it leads to Hell and perdition.”

“ Good God!” I interrupted.

“ They’ve forbidden me to see you since they learned you wrote poetry. And . . . and he’s burned my books.”

“ Helen,” I cried, “ what are you talking about!”

“ And there are other things, Billy,” she wailed.

“ I can’t stand it!”

“ You don’t have to!” I said savagely.

“ It is like being a prisoner and worse. I’ve had two months of it now and I can’t see any way out.”

III

I remained silent. No doubt my brain was somewhat staggered under this vision of Helen as a serf, shorn, stripped, imprisoned. No doubt I remembered her as she had been, the Helen who sang and laughed and made merry a dull world by the mere

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light of her eyes. There was something inexpressibly tragic at the moment.

Gradually the rage passed from me and an impatience gave way to an emotion which choked and confused my words.

After several ineffectual starts I managed, I remember, to say, "I love you, Helen, more than in the old days," and to fall silent again and shiver.

She bade me hush and I hushed.

But her hand remained in mine and my remark seemed to have caused her to stop weeping.

"It was all a mistake, Briggs and the marriage, and we can forget it," I whispered.

Womanlike she inquired what I meant, and manlike I stuttered with my sinful thoughts running riot in the back of my head.

Finally I blurted out,

"You can come away with me. It will be an escape for you and Heaven for me. There's no use throwing any melodrama into it. Let's take it calmly and sanely."

"Hush, Billy," she said.

"Do you want to?" I whispered.

"It's not a matter of what I wish to do," she answered.

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“ You mean something about morality, fidelity, as in lodges? ”

“ Call it by any odious name you wish,” she said.

“ Marriage,” quoth I, “ is a social institution. It has about as much to do with God or the spirit as political elections.”

“ I didn’t come to argue marriage with you, good Heavens. Please, Billy, spare me a debate. I’m not equal to it. I don’t want to debate. I don’t debate . . . anything.”

“ All right,” I agreed amiably. “ Let’s not debate anything. Let’s admit that marriage is whatever in Hell it is. I don’t know. But we shan’t debate it. Now to the facts. This witchburner of yours.”

“ Joshua is not a witchburner,” she interrupted.

“ Very well, this saint in caricature whose name you bear . . . ”

“ Billy,” she said desperately, “ there is no use in spending your time calling people names.”

“ Some people are best described, Helen, by cursing. Three great round oaths would give any one, any intelligent person, a fine analytical study of Joshua. Four snappy curses would reveal Joshua’s mother, full length. As for his sister . . . ”

“ Oh, Billy, be serious, please.”

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“ Serious,” I said. “ Do you suppose there is anything flippant in asking a married woman to elope with one . . . in seeing the woman you love butchered and murdered? ”

“ I won’t elope.”

“ Never mind that at this moment. We haven’t come to your answer yet.”

“ We have. And passed it.”

“ No, we haven’t. I want to know first before we really begin whether you have any love for this creature? ”

“ No.”

“ Any respect or sneaking admiration? ”

“ No.”

“ Then from what you tell me, and from what I’ve seen, you’re a sort of marital convict. You’re a spiritual slave. They’re a bunch of harpies feasting on your beautiful soul. How in the name of the hundred and seventy-five Gods of Intelligence did you ever happen to? ”

“ Billy! ”

Her voice had a dangerous ring.

I subsided.

I pressed her hand.

“ Forgive me,” I lied. “ I am not myself when I think of the fellow.”

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“ Don't think of him, Billy. You've done me a lot of good, Billy, in letting me talk as I have. And now forget it. Let's go.”

I clung to her hand.

“ It's your only chance, Helen,” I pleaded. “ Come along with me. You know me well enough to trust me, whatever happens. You can't go on living in this hell.”

“ No, Billy.”

“ You don't love him and every day you'll love him less. You'll hate him. He'll steal everything lovely from your life.”

“ I can't,” she said; “ I don't know why.”

“ Yes, you can,” I urged, “ I'll love you forever.”

“ It's too late.”

I could think of nothing else to say. My heart pounded within me. Rage and desire, love and hate swept me into a delirium.

I managed to repeat,

“ You can't go back to that mess. You're young, Helen — twenty-five. Think of it. Throwing yourself out of the world like this! And what about your voice and your dreams. Good God!”

The tears streamed from her eyes and she continued to shake her head as I continued to plead.

Suddenly she leaned toward me and her arms en-

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circled my neck. Her lips fastened themselves to mine and a panic of hope and joy shot through me.

“ Good-bye,” she said, “ and thanks.”

I sat in a daze and watched her rise.

She seemed to sway as she moved from me and at the other end of the floor I saw three figures.

They stood rigidly against the blazing lights of the hotel, three grim and merciless tyrants. Joshua was the first to see her and a prodigious frown swept his face. The mother was the second and her lips hardened into fearsome lines. The sister came forward. She reached out her hand and seized Helen by the arm and led her to Joshua’s side.

I could not hear them talk. I sat and watched them surround her, hovering about her, worrying her as a pack of hounds worries some fair quarry. She did not look back, and the last I saw of her was the back of her slim straight figure moving slowly toward the stairs, the fingers of her husband rigidly sunk into her elbow and steering her, ominously, portentously.

IV

And that memory of Helen I carried with me for thirty years. All that I have written I gradually forgot, as one forgets things in growing old. Sometimes there would come to me in the years memories of

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Helen at the piano, singing with her face raised like a little pool of moonlight in the dark, singing an enchantment into life. At the opera, at the concert, I recalled her, and sometimes in the presence of many women I recalled the sweetness and the beauty, the lighted eyes and laughing mouth which they never seemed to equal.

But always after such recollections there would come to me this other, this memory of Helen moving from me with the fingers of a man sunk in her elbow, an elbow-steerer — a curse upon the tribe, a murrain on the host of them!

It so happened that during those thirty years I never saw or heard more of Helen. As time passed I grew glad of this. With age there comes that peculiar intelligence which the philosophers call resignation.

I am now a thin, grey-faced man with neither tears nor laughter for the world. Upon the shelves of my library are scattered a few volumes which bear my name and in them I have told my histories.

I am not, however, one of those who pass into hiding with the event of age. Rather do I caper about, cackling witticisms in odd corners, shaming the young with epigrams remembered from their fathers. I still enjoy the savor of rage, the delicate lust of

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smiling. There are certain dignities which I insist upon, certain severe graces with which I ennoble sterile moments.

Thus I will omit these thirty years, merely waving the wand of assertion for you, and tell you how it came about that I remembered things forgotten for three decades, remembered them all minutely and savagely and with the zest of youth. It was at the home of Mrs. Lawson that the memory returned.

For some years, ever since I had come to London, in fact, I had pursued a habit of visiting the Lawsons the second evening of every month. George Lawson and his wife Harriet had grown into my life so as to become a part of the routine of my thoughts. The buxom regality of the lady invariably cheered and sustained me, the fine discrimination of the man always managed to soothe and charm me.

On the second evening of this last June I was sitting in the cool drawing-room of the Lawsons' house in Half Moon Street. There were several persons scattered about, a little woman with black hair and shining eyes dressed in a weird gray, a tall, dignified creature who seemed to be folded up as she sat upright in her chair. The others, a lemon-faced man, and a bulgy crony of mine host, occupied casual places. We talked about the war, about religion, and

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occasionally stopped to listen to a faint, irritating humming which came out of an inner room.

I looked at Lawson quizzically. It was unlike these evenings to have even the minor annoyance of some anxious amateur to contend with.

But the talk went on and Lawson, catching my gaze, nodded with a twinkle in his eye and remained silent. The persistent strumming of the piano, the out-of-tune chirpings which accompanied it finally startled my nerves out of calm.

I managed to whisper to Lawson,
“ Good Lord, what have we there? ”

As I spoke, Mrs. Lawson appeared and nodded toward the little group.

“ We’re going to have some music,” she said, and beamed with an amiable belligerence in my direction. I nodded.

“ Oh,” said Mrs. Lawson. “ You haven’t met her yet.”

“ Who — m — ? ” I inquired bluntly. I had an intimation that the strummer and chirper was intended.

“ You were a bit late,” said Mrs. Lawson; “ if you please.”

She beckoned me. I arose and followed.

In the inner room I perceived several women and

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a short, pompous man. But the woman who riveted my attention was the strummer, the chirper. She was a preposterously bulging creature, a caricature. She was dressed in green, a vicious shining green which smote the eyes as a blow. For the moment I could not remove my gaze from her dress. I stared at its loops, at its ribbons, at its laces and terrible confusion. Never had I seen so strange a dress in my life.

Then I encountered her face.

Her face was the face of an old woman, folded and wrinkled. But over it was smeared a layer of startling rouge and the eyes, heavy and flabby, were quickened with stencilings. Large earrings dangled from the tips of her ears. Hair red and flaming surmounted her head, and a litter of jeweled pins. When she came forward to meet me she cocked her remarkable head on one side in the manner of a parrot and extended a wizened, heavily ringed hand. Her voice greeted me with a horrible simper, a simulated girlishness. The whole figure was impossible. Never off the burlesque stage had I seen its equal.

“A woman of eighty, ninety,” flashed through my mind,” in the hideous masquerade of youth. Good God!”

I stared longer than was polite. I gasped more

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than was kind. I could only shake the little wizened hand and marvel at this bizarre apparition. The name utterly escaped me. I heard Mrs. Lawson mention that the creature was to sing and, fascinated, I watched her trip daintily towards the piano bench.

“ Mr. Cour, will you turn my music? ” she inquired sweetly.

Her rolling eyes turned themselves toward me in some uncanny attempt at coquetry. This caricature, this burlesque, giggled, arched her preposterous eyebrows, and inclined her head. The short, pompous man waddled to her side before I could recover sufficiently to reply. As she searched among her music Mrs. Lawson drew me aside and whispered,

“ Don’t you know her? Heavens! She’s quite the talk of the town. Bags of money since her husband died . . . a man named Joshua Briggs . . . surely you’ve heard of him. Made millions in leather . . . died just last year . . . I knew her then in America. . . . Don’t stare so . . . I know she’s ghastly . . . acts like a two-year-old . . . Heavens! She was perfectly splendid before Mr. Brigg’s death . . . splendid . . . one of the most exquisite and refined women I have ever met . . . I remember her at her home. . . . Oh, so sweet and charming . . . and now look at her . . . seems to have lost her reason utterly

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. . . in just one short year . . . and the worst of it is she insists on singing . . . Heavens! . . . Why, she has never sung in her life before. . . . I inquired . . . never . . . did you ever see such a fright, though, William, really, did you? She . . . she's going to start."

I had heard only fragments of Mrs. Lawson's talk.

It was Helen, Helen born again, liberated after thirty years, Helen renewing her youth.

I stared open-mouthed. I shuddered. A pain, the laceration of memory struck at my heart.

During the few moments which followed Mrs. Lawson's silence the truth swept in upon me. I saw her again moving toward the stairs, the fingers of her husband sunk rigidly into her elbow, swaying, vanishing. . . . I saw again the grim, terrible trio hovering about her, guiding her out of sight. And I dreamed in an instant the thirty years of her life.

"He has forbidden me to sing . . . he has burned my books . . . he thinks it is Hell and perdition."

Out of the years the words floated back to me.

With a half anile gesture, the tragically ridiculous creature at the piano straightened out the green dress, the flounces, thrust a withered silken ankle forward to the pedals, grimaced under the layers of rouge and stencilings, and struck at the keys. Out of

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the years came to me a song long forgotten, a song which does not live in the world any more.

The caricature at the piano was singing it. With her face raised, a grotesque panel under the yellow lights of the room, this woman sat and sang, her voice breaking, her throat tightening hideously.

Now and then a full round note slipped startlingly into the grating discords. The suddenly familiar words awakened a fear in me. She at the piano became some grotesque ghost of one I had known. Her hollow shoulders mocked at me. I watched her for a moment as, with her face raised and oblivious to the sneers of the room, she sat and sent forth a quavering voice in search of youth, sat and gestured and grimaced and preened over the keys. I saw her eyes roll with a ghastly coquetry toward me. . . . For that moment she became like some beribboned, be-rouged, and bespangled maniac.

I saw her as she was . . . Helen in quest of a youth buried and gone forever . . .

I rose and fled from the room.

The Policewoman's Daughter

I

It was not like Agatha to do this sort of thing. If you had told her mother that Agatha was waiting alone in a dismal parlor of a more or less sinister hotel for a man whom she had been forbidden to see at all, she, the mother, would have swooned. And Mrs. Orman was not a swooning woman. She was, on the contrary, one of those ladies who seem inhabited by the souls of the hippopotamus, the eagle, the blue-nosed mandril, and the Peruvian humming-bird. There was about her a spectacular equilibrium. Her exits and her entrances were all fraught with the circumstance of maneuvers. She gave forth an air of æsthetic gloom, and before her most people felt an unreasonable, an overwhelming, a paralyzing chill, as before some itinerant altar place.

Any further words concerning Mrs. Orman must not be viewed as digressions, but as direct and illuminating reflections upon Agatha. Widowed at thirty, Mrs. Orman had concentrated upon Agatha. She had surrounded, embraced, engulfed her daughter. If Mrs. Orman was a Frankenstein, Agatha was

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a marionette in her image. Together they moved through a suspicious and unholy world, Agatha enveloped in the sanctity her parent exuded, the parent with a shrewd and terrifying eye fastened upon Life. There was nothing in the phenomena of this Life which could have startled her eye. If God Himself had appeared before Mrs. Orman in a pillar of fire while she was powdering her nose in the bathroom, she would not have swooned. She would have removed her shoes with a precise and religious gesture. She would have thought first of her fire insurance, secondly of the Life to Come, and thirdly of Agatha and the possible effect of the apparition upon her.

But in this particular instance Mrs. Orman would have swooned, for, as has been intimated in a general way, she had personally superintended Agatha's most intimate conduct for twenty years. The matter had been even more important than the personal superintending of Agatha's mind. She had fitted her for life. She had purged her of sin. Her merest glance was a cathartic for devils. Since childhood she had impressed upon her that public reference to any parts of a young woman's body except her heels, her nose, and the back of her head, was immoral. She had protected her from the sight and sound of men who swore, women who were about to have babies,

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statues which struggled to disprove the general notion that human beings ended at the ankles and recommenced at the neck, children who were persistently asking embarrassing questions, and all literary works which were not rebound once a year in art craft covers and offered for sale at department stores as suitable Christmas gifts.

She had done all these things and Agatha had grown up to be a credit to her mother. Other mothers, when they looked upon and listened to Agatha, would shake Mrs. Orman solemnly by the hand and murmur, "How did you do it?" They referred to that young lady's delicately belligerent innocence, to her cloistral poise and her unsullied mind. They pointed out to Mrs. Orman that such attainments in an age when society was disporting itself in the guise of a hoochy-koochy-verein were nothing short of miracles.

She had done all these things, and from the time Agatha had passed eighteen she had redoubled her doing, her superintending.

With a firm though benevolent hand she had guided her daughter through that period which is usually such a nightmare to sensitive mothers, the period of the second, third, and fourth adolescences, when the female young begins to pose in front of mirrors,

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when it desires to marry a man with broad shoulders and a loud past, when it desires to be free, when it craves to hold hands, when it is full of subtle dreams.

In short, Mrs. Orman steered her child past all those intricate pitfalls which beset the unsullied at eighteen.

She had done these things efficiently, comprehensively, successfully, had Mrs. Orman, and yet, in the third month of her twentieth year Agatha waited in a back-street rendezvous for a prohibited admirer, and a singular calm was in her heart. And, such is the whimsical skein of the fates, at that particular moment Mrs. Orman was reclining in her inviolate home with a cold in her head and a sweet consciousness in her heart that Agatha was engaged in patriotic duties in a Red Cross shop.

II

Agatha had not yet removed her raincoat or her gloves. She was slightly out of breath. She had hurried because the sky looked as if it were going to rain, and now she was fully ten minutes early. She had found the place without difficulty. Fred had given her grave and explicit directions, and 3 o'clock was the hour he had set.

Agatha removed her raincoat. She removed her gloves. She sat down in a fat, bumpy chair and

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sighed. A little shiver trickled through her heart—just one little no-account shiver. It was followed by a glow which made her feel as if a warm pink light had been turned full upon her.

Under the influence of this glow Agatha felt herself thinking in the distance. That is, she experienced the sensation of one far removed from some turbulent phenomenon but who is yet a part of it. This double consciousness interested her. So also did the realization of her calm. She had looked forward to more violent emotions. She had expected to weep, to fall to her knees and pray, to think with great wrenching thoughts of her policewoman of a mother. Such disturbances would have been logical.

But instead of tumult, instead of those sinister lacerations which she had fearfully imagined, there was only calm. Little things about the sordid, unpleasant room focused themselves vividly for her. She noted with the temporary preoccupation of one who is emotionless the sepia print of a small lake with a boat leaning toward the horizon. It was in a decent brown frame. A red and green pin-cushion ball, which hung suspended by a dusty ribbon from a gilt gas-jet attracted her eyes.

She looked at her watch and found it was 3 o'clock. She opened the back of the thing idly and looked upon

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a small photograph of her mother with an expression which might be called curious. The familiar features, the never-to-be-forgotten expression, conjured up for her a world upon which she looked as a stranger — a vivid, intimate and yet alien world.

Fred would arrive at any moment. She turned her eyes toward the window and saw that the sky had grown much darker and that the flurrying whisper of rain was in the air. It was as if a great bat had spread its crooked wings out over the streets. As the darkness increased, Agatha felt the depressing room settle back into a cozy intimacy. There was an eeriness in the gloom outside — as if it were the ghost of some unburied night walking the roof tops blind and unaware.

A languor came to Agatha and with it a faint giddiness. She stretched herself out in the chair. Soon to her ears drifted the first intermittent tattoo of the rain upon the window. Agatha thought of Fred. She was in love with him. Her thoughts of him for the past month had been, as they were now, like aimless summer clouds floating enchantingly through her brain. She would end by murmuring to herself, "Aggie, Aggie, I love you, I love you." This declaration addressed to herself was like water to parched lips. It confused her brain, it released exquisite little

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tumults in her blood, and brought delicious little whirlpools into her heart.

She sat there and thought of Fred, her thoughts presenting themselves to her without sequence or volition. She kept thinking of how her mother had disapproved of Fred from the first. He played the violin. It was true that he came from an entirely presentable family, but in addition to playing the violin, he had black hair and slim fingers and once he had referred to Mischa Elman as being too passionate a performer to be an artist, and twice he had told anecdotes about an actress who had committed suicide, and three times Mrs. Orman had surprised him gazing upon Agatha in the unmistakable manner of a young man aware of more than the back of her head. Agatha acquired a clairvoyance in regard to her mother. She thought of the past in words which might well have been her mother's words. She detached herself and looked upon Fred as her mother had and she found herself ruminating upon the fact that he was a man to be discouraged, removed.

The task was no new one for her mother. She had removed parlor ruffians of this type before. And her removal of Mr. Carr, the same being Fred, had been almost a masterpiece. By devious subtleties she had poisoned Agatha's mind against him, revealing as

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she did, the basic indecency of his profession. She produced other young men whose red cheeks and firm business air contrasted almost maliciously with the lackadaisical unmanliness of the violinist. And at the psychological moment she had caused Fred to disappear from the pristine pastures in which her daughter browsed, a process requiring merely an instruction or two to the maid who answered the door and telephone bells.

III

With the rain now hammering persistently upon the windows, Agatha sat and thought of how curious it was that she should be waiting for this same Fred, curious though somehow natural. She did not seek to explain the matter to herself. She realized dimly that she had stepped out of one life into another, that she had passed through impregnable walls with the ease with which one walks out of a shadow. She pondered gently upon her own past. She marveled vaguely over the elation a man had given her by kissing her and protesting he loved her. She felt a sort of unemotional dislike for her mother, and the sense of freedom, self-will, revolt became suddenly an intoxicant which caused her to tremble.

It must have come from her father, this strength. Her father had died when she was a girl. The

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thought of him produced again the little no-account shiver. It was the probability of his spiritual existence which distressed her for the moment. What if he were in the room with her now?

It was fifteen minutes past 3 o'clock. Agatha sat up abruptly in the manner of one who sees a ghost. Where was Fred? She pattered to the window and looked out on the rain and the long darkly shining street. In the distance a figure moved, but it was going the other way. She addressed herself suddenly with, "Aggie, Aggie, I love you," and a panic keener than usual suffused her. For no reason at all she walked to the door and opened it quietly. The hall leading to the office was dark and deserted. She felt lonely. She desired to weep. She began to think that calamities had overtaken Fred, that signs had fallen upon his lovely head, automobiles hurled him out of his path, street cars mangled him. She walked up and down and repeated aloud, as if talking to another person in the room, "I must be calm!"

Reseating herself in the chair near the window she launched her mind into a familiar reverie. She rehearsed the events of the recent past. She kept repeating that she was loved romantically; she juggled with memories. Now and then a lyric emotion

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seized upon her and caused her to murmur almost fiercely, "Aggie, Aggie, I love you."

Everything was vague. She reached after half-defined images, gave herself over to dim and lovely phantoms, and now and then relapsed into a tender interlude in which she pictured Fred kissing her hand with spiritual humbleness.

But gradually behind the reverie, as behind a curtain which might rise at any moment, a terrible premonition took form. It was 3:30. She should have to leave in an hour. Her mother expected her home from the Red Cross shop at 5. She peered into the rain-washed street, penetrating rain-swirled distances with her eyes. The premonition that Fred was not coming, that she was to be in some hideous way betrayed, deserted, chilled her now with its unmistakable presence. The confusion fled from her thought and left her staring bewildered, struggling desperately against another confusion which was invading her.

Things which she had looked upon as the furniture of an alien land, things of her past, began to pop into terrible focus. The figure of her mother began to materialize before her. She beheld the familiar and dreadful face gazing at her out of the rain. And the voice of her mother began to echo in her, each tremen-

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dous inflection, each awful modulation. It was as the voice of God overtaking one who has turned his face toward Hell. With a horror-breeding distinctness it said to her, "Agatha, come home."

Agatha arose and swayed. The room had become abruptly a strange, intimidating place. Things unseen lurked in its corners.

With quick, nervous hands Agatha smoothed her hair. She had no conscious thought, only an increasingly persistent urge as though hands were seeking to hurl her about, to tear her away. She put her rain-coat on and seized her gloves. She looked around for something else. "Fred, Fred," she kept murmuring in a frightened way. Standing poised for flight, Agatha turned and rushed to the window.

IV

She collapsed in the chair and wept, and as she wept she cast a furtive tear-blurred glance at her watch. It was 3:45. Her tears continued to flow. Behind them the name "Fred" still rapped at her brain, fainter and fainter. Hate and fury spent themselves slowly in sobs.

As the tears began to roll more gently from her eyes, she felt a vague purifying presence creeping into her. This presence whispered to her that she

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had been providentially saved. It informed her in a sweet, soothing manner that God had rescued her from the clutches of a perfidious wretch.

The process which went on in Agatha was not so simple and immediate as it would appear. There were relapses, dangerous intermissions, during which protests formed and conjectures, amiable ones, raised their shining heads. But it was a steady process, requiring in all twenty minutes and a great outlay of tears. During this process, out of the chaos that had possessed her at 3:45, a new calm gradually was forming, a calm sweet and lovely as the silence of a Sabbath morning.

Slowly Agatha surrendered herself to it. She began to feel benedictions dropping upon her. She thought of her father's spirit, and raised her face bravely to the empty room and smiled.

The process achieved a sort of acceleration. It now proceeded to bring a peace into her heart, a beneficent, triumphant peace, and with this new calm came a tender adjustment as of one very tired and sinking back into a familiar embrace. It was the embrace of virtue, of the sense of innocence. "Mother, mother," she murmured, and the peace vanished and in its place came a great burning, a flame that caused

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her heart to writhe and wrenched little gasps from her lips. This was shame.

She wept again, violently, tumultuously, and murmured, "Mother, mother."

At each repetition of the magic word new flames reared their tongues in her soul. She gave herself over to this part of the process with a penitential fury, whipping her agonies with the deliberate remembrance of her sins.

Finally the process was complete. She arose trembling and put on her gloves. She felt the guidance of some great light in which her soul was bathing as in some wonderful prophylactic. She contemplated Fred coldly and with a vast hardness. She perceived his vileness. These were revelations, the final apocalypse given her by the process. She sank to her knees and raising her eyes she prayed. Her voice shook less and less as in answer to her words a joy came dancing into her being, the joy of a soul liberated. More than that—the joy of a darkness, a catastrophe averted. She stood up and without a glance at her watch, without a look out of the window, walked forth from the room. Her feet flew down the stairs in the acceleration of one running from horror-laden places.

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V

She reached the street and the rain enveloped her in its long grey threads. "Agatha," she murmured to herself, "you are going home."

There was happiness in the thought, and thankfulness. She loved her mother. The love she had for her mother clothed her about as an armor. She walked on with the step of a crusader marching upon Holy Land.

She walked until she came to the car line and here she stopped. No car was in sight. As she stood in the downpour waiting, her thoughts traveled impatiently to her home. She longed for it with the nostalgia of one in an alien country. She had other emotions, firm, hard emotions. She understood her mother with an acute clarity of understanding. She understood why her mother fought against all the insidious manifestations of evil. Previously she had not understood the matter clearly. The force of her understanding caused her to bite her lip and gaze with a prodigious frown upon a lone tree which decorated the corner.

The dim outlines of the car appeared through the rain. Agatha watched them and wondered about something. In the midst of this new and altogether incomprehensible wondering Agatha opened her

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mouth and cried, "Oh!" with the tips of her fingers against her teeth. It was Tuesday!

The thought struck a blow at her brain. It actually made her reel. She stared with her mouth open at nothing in particular and then began to laugh. It was a quick, hysterical laughter. She was still laughing when the car, with a great noise and spurt-ing of water from the tracks beneath, drew to a stop in front of her.

"Tuesday!" Agatha addressed the car. There was something in this word which was unbelievable. The conductor looked at her curiously, when she handed him her nickel. Agatha collapsed into a seat next a fat man. She felt a desire to tell him it was Tuesday. She felt an equally insane desire to announce the fact to the fourteen people in the car. Instead she chuckled to herself and murmured very low, "Aggie, Aggie, I love you, oh, I love you!"

The appointment had been for tomorrow.

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I

It was on this park bench that he had sat a summer night five years ago and with all the shrewdness and prophecy at his command decided that life without Helen would be a senseless, a miserable, and an unlovely thing. He sat now and looked at the elaborate mystery of trees in the night, and at the lanes that hid themselves behind the lilac bushes along the broken edge of the lagoon. Here and there on a distant bench, striping the moonlight with its laths, sat solitaries like himself, their figures folded into vague semblances of the figure 4. There were couples, too, men and women sitting close together, their embraces hidden by the dark, each imagining that life without the other would be a senseless, a miserable, and an unlovely thing.

Bennett smiled disparagingly at nothing in particular unless it was at his thoughts or the world.

“ Five years ago I fancied I couldn't live without her. And now I no longer love her and I doubt if she actually loves me. I haven't loved her for the last three years. I doubt, hang it, whether I ever

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loved her at all. And yet, good Lord, I sat on this same silly bench five years ago, determined to kill myself if she didn't give me the radiant privilege of living with her for the rest of my life."

Ah, the dolorous irony of life! Each day a mockery of yesterday's dreams!

Bennett lighted his pipe with the theatrical calm of a philosopher in the throes of inferior tragedy.

"The snows of yesteryear"—motif, though a theme somewhat old, was yet suitable for sapient speculation. Indeed, what else was there in life worthy the meditation of a philosopher? The roseate lies that had bloomed in the depths of his heart, the passionate masquerade that had tricked the processes of his reason, the delicate guillotine of the years that changed men into cadavers and all things into memories—a bit hackneyed to be sure, such contemplations, a trifle rococo for the mental operations of one whose name had become a synonym for vast and profound unfoldings of the spirit—yes, sorrow had a way of intruding its platitudes, where only genius trod. There was no escaping the wan pathos of the fact that five years ago he had——

He had allowed his pipe to go out.

Undoubtedly the thing wasn't drawing well. The habit of truth, so necessary to a philosopher, in-

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formed him, however, that the pipe was drawing as well as it ever had. Why not confront the fact of the matter? The thing had gone out for the sheerly natural reason that he had forgotten to smoke it after lighting it. The little pyramid of flame held his eye as he rekindled the tobacco.

For a moment he studied, with an impersonal air, the trembling of his hand and arm. Yes; he was a bit nervous. The thoughts that he had been thinking had come so naturally to him that he had, for the instant, overlooked their overwhelming revolutionary character. It had just dawned on him that he was thinking of separating from Helen. Strange he should be able to think about it for almost a half hour so coolly and calmly and then suddenly feel that the idea had entered his mind for the first time only an instant ago. Was he, as a matter of fact, actually thinking this thing, actually deciding to do what he was thinking of doing, or merely playing with the thought of it, boasting piquantly to himself?

With a gentle flourish of his hand Bennett unsuccessfully endeavored to extinguish the match in his fingers; raising his eyebrows he blew at the flame slowly and solicitously. He remained puffing enigmatically upon his pipe — enigmatically in the manner of a man sparring with himself for time to face

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the truth. Well, he might as well stand up and walk about a bit. It was somewhat chilly. Bennett smiled. He passed his long hand over his lean face. Why these inane subterfuges? He loathed walking and it was a splendid night for doing just what he was doing — sitting quite motionless on a park bench. Sitting quite motionless and thinking this thing out to the end, once and for all. He raised his eyes and started at the sweep of darkness above him. As he stared his thought drifted again into the past with the gentle persistence of a man who prefers the idle caress of sorrows to the more strenuous attentions of logic and decisions.

Yes, if someone had told him five years ago as he sat in this very place that there would come a time, while he was still young and possessed of his health, that he would look upon Helen as the most boring and unnecessary asset in his life, he would have snorted as at the vaporings of a darkened mind. Was he then still young? Thirty-five. The whole nub of the situation lay in the fact that he no longer loved this particular person whom he had once loved and . . . selah! Oh, most obvious of all retrospections — he had observed her once through the obfuscating mists of desire. She had appeared to him

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then . . . But why go over it, why harry himself with such useless prying into tombs?

Gently his thought again escaped his will, and busied itself dolorously with the contemplation of things of the past.

How deceived he had been first of all in her mind, in her character! Well, he had learned with some bitterness that bobbed hair does not necessarily argue a lengthened spiritual reach. What a radical little spitfire he had, in his insane blindness, fancied her! A little cherubic head bristling with frantic notions of life. A passionate seraph stuttering gloriously of revolt. My, yes. Revolting against this and against that, jumping up and down on the bourgeoisie, the poor intellectually-trampled-to-death bourgeoisie.

“Life is something bigger than all this . . . all this snatching greedily at trifles. Life is a . . . a dancing star, a glorious pageant. Oh, it's so tragic to see men and women piling themselves with conventions until there is nothing left for them but to stagger through . . . stumble through with their eyes to the ground. Life is an adventure of the emotions . . .”

And so it is, so it is. He smiled suddenly at this verbatim echo of the past. Life was, perhaps, all

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that she had, in her ignorance, proclaimed it to be. It had, at any event, greater possibilities than spending the rest of one's days virtually closeted with a fussy, ill-mannered, irritating little shrew. Again Bennett's thought extricated itself from the present and floated into memories. She had undoubtedly had talent—the precocious and incomplete talent of the intellectual woman. Her painting had not been so bad, at first. At least it had been better than the meaningless daubs which littered the house now.

The sound of some one walking down the graveled path which led by his bench caused Bennett to raise his eyes. A man and woman were approaching, arm and arm, heads inclined together. With a tolerant smile Bennett watched them pass. As they disappeared in the dark he was off again on elaborate theorizings on the sex instinct — the fantastic rigmarole of phrase and sigh and self-deception that accompanies the simple function of mating.

What a deceit, the whole of it! What a merciless ruse of nature! Thus they had walked, he and Helen, thus embraced with heads thus inclined. And they had come to the edge of the lagoon and remained spellbound before the dark and languid water. And they had solemnly taken each other by the hand and with an asinine profundity called upon a mysterious

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thing they referred to as God to witness then and there the union of their souls and their lives. No blithering priest to mumble words at them, no asthmatic organ to gurgle its Mendelssohn benediction, no half-witted friends to pelt them with rice and shoes. Just a fine, simple communion of radical souls, a frank and natural mating of spirits attuned. That had been their wedding.

Bennett thumped the ashes out of his pipe and laughed softly. His thought had suddenly slid out of the warm and enervating ruts of memory. He arose and shook down his trousers. He wasn't married. Delightful and indisputable fact. Holding hands over the lagoon on a summer night and panting some gibberish about souls and the higher life, fine and noble as it had appeared, did not in the sordid eyes of the law constitute matrimony.

With decided steps Bennett made his way out of the park. Why the pother and the doubt about it? He had mated with Helen as man and woman and not, in her own words, as one social unit with another. He was, by the terms of their own curious ceremony, free to depart when his finely attuned spirit cracked a bit under the strain. Well and good. He would depart. The finely attuned blamed foolishness had cracked. And if she saw fit to make a fuss, as she

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undoubtedly would, he would lead her solemnly down to the lagoon and holding her firmly by the hand call upon the selfsame Deity who had witnessed their union to witness now its severance. And finis! The thing would be accomplished in a logically idiotic manner.

In the manner of a true philosopher he had considered everything but the obvious in seeking a way out of his dilemma. The street was quiet and empty. Eight blocks to his home, but he would walk them, much as he loathed walking. There was come to him an exultation. He desired to indulge it. The thought of being freed from the senseless chatter of the woman even now awaiting him, of being rid of her persistent demands and shrewish cajolings had about it a magical quality. It transformed for him every color of his future. Life was an adventure of the emotions—when lived properly. Egad, he would feel like a new man, like a creature reborn.

Already he felt an influx of vigor. His body seemed mysteriously straightened his thought virulently alive. There was no mistaking it — the creature was a blanket on his mind, a darkness to his eye, a weight upon every sensitive fibre in him. They had had their happiness. They had exhausted for each other all each had to give. Why prolong the anticlimax

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into the insufferable monotony of a lifelong partnership? He wasn't, after all, an ordinary man. He had his work, his genius. Good Lord, if she couldn't see the common sense of the thing he'd drag her down to the lagoon and mumble the gibberish of five years ago and do the thinking for both of them. It would, undoubtedly, make a woman of her and give her a chance. Not that there was anything in her. But it would give her her chance to pose again as the lofty-minded radical, to parade once more her institutional chatter about free womanhood and fine living.

There was a light in the window. Bennett crossed the street and approached it firmly. She would listen politely enough. She would think the whole matter merely another argument. Well, it wouldn't take her long to wake up to the facts. He would be blunt. There was no use in wasting either rhetoric or epigram. The thing called for fine clean cuts.

He entered the room and observed with an ironical smile that she was reading thoughtfully and slowly "The Theory of the Leisure Class."

She raised her eyes as he walked in silence to a large chair opposite her. Her face, under the lamp-light, was firm and youthful. Her black hair, bobbed beneath her ears, added, as always, a roguish air to her appearance. Smiling back at her, Bennett went

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slowly about the business of refilling and lighting his pipe.

“Have a nice walk?” she asked at length. “You were gone long enough.”

Yes, the slave had exceeded his furlough — an hour each evening.

“No, I didn’t walk much. I went down to the park and sat around a bit.”

“You might have done your sitting around here with me.”

So he might. Exquisite privilege. He smiled at her again and, clearing his throat portentously, requested:

“Put the book aside, please. I’ve something rather important to talk about.”

She hesitated, with the air of one preparing for elaborate argument, slowly inserted a bookmark between the pages and placed the book on the window seat.

“What is it, George?”

He hesitated an instant.

“Before I begin,” he said, “I want you to promise that you’ll wait till I’m done before you say anything. I want you to understand that I’m not arguing but simply stating certain facts, certain things that are as inevitable as . . . as doom.”

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She looked at him fixedly. He returned her stare without wavering.

“Do you promise?”

“Yes.”

Did she know already? A curious mildness had come into her voice.

“Very well, Helen. I’ve decided that you and I have come to the end of our rope. I mean, that all things considered, the best thing we can do is to separate. I’ve been thinking of it for six months—if not longer. Our lives have degenerated into a monotonous exchange of unimportant trifles. We bore each other. Our intimacy has lost its charm. In short, we no longer care for each other. I couldn’t say this sort of thing to any woman but you. That is, I mean, you will be able to understand, if you don’t understand already and haven’t understood for the last year. When we mar—when we came together it was with the high purpose of living a . . . an exalted companionship. I don’t have to point out to you that our companionship in the last two years has been neither high nor exalted. Do I?”

He paused, somewhat taken back by her continued silence.

She had sunk into her chair and was staring at him with head lowered and eyes raised.

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“Are you agreed, Helen? Do you see what I mean? It’s hard, I know. But things change. Everything changes. What we had today we have not tomorrow. I mean, our love that once seemed so . . . so eternal was, like everything else in life, fleeting. If we would be true to that love . . . true to the fine things in ourselves, we must part. If only not to mar further that which has been . . .”

He paused again, somewhat bewildered. Try as he might, he couldn’t keep the gloat out of his voice. And he had no desire to gloat. He wished to be fair and decent. He stammered for a moment. There was a way of putting the thing calmly and sanely without resorting to this empty-sounding rhetoric.

“Helen,” he demanded, “what . . . what do you think? Anything I might add would be only repetition. Had I felt that you loved as you once did, that it was still the same for you I would never have spoken. But I’ve seen the change in you. A change as complete as that in me.”

His hands were trembling insanely as they rested on his legs. Bewildered by her unbroken silence he plunged on desperately.

“Habit — that’s all there is left between us. The habit of being together, of seeing each other, touching each other, depending upon each other. Is that

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something worthy? Is that on a par with your ideals? Tell me."

He arose from his chair and walked over and stood beside her. Her eyes did not follow him. They remained staring at where he had sat.

"Helen," he said softly, "come. I'm serious about this. It's for both our good. Don't you see? There's nothing to hinder us, you know. We've tried . . . and we've failed."

Why drag that in—the trying and failing? It had a dangerous ring to it. He bit his lip.

"Come," he commanded again, this time with an increased tenderness, "tell me. Am I right?"

He became silent and waited. She would begin now. He had tricked her. He had lured her away, used her and now wanted to throw her aside like an old glove. That was her reward for trusting him, marrying him upon his honor rather than submitting to the artifices of convention.

In his mind as he waited whirled her arguments—the inevitable arguments of womankind. He smiled firmly. At least she would see herself as she actually was in these words. She would see herself for the ordinary, stupid and conventional parasite that was her soul.

"Come, Helen, I'm waiting."

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The woman beside him arose slowly to her feet. Her face had become drawn. It looked almost old, and curiously beautiful, in the lamplight.

“It’s hard, Helen, I know. But . . . it’s for the best. We mustn’t falter because of . . . of . . .”

She interrupted him with a gesture.

Placing a hand on his shoulder, she raised her eyes and stared into his face. Her eyes were luminous with tears.

“Don’t,” she said.

Dropping her hand from his shoulder she walked slowly out of the room toward their bedroom.

“Don’t what?”

Bennett turned and pursued her with the question:

“Do you mean you don’t want me to leave, Helen? Wait. Listen a moment. Don’t you understand? If you mean that, say so, and we’ll . . . we’ll talk it over. . . .”

He was addressing an empty room. An irritation seized him.

“If that’s all you have to say,” he cried angrily, “why, the matter is closed. There’s only one thing for us. And that’s ending it. Each going his way. Do you hear?”

He waited for several minutes. No sound came from the adjoining room. Perhaps she was weep-

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ing. He strained his ears for a sound of it. Silence. A coldness passed through him. He remembered suddenly that his razor blades were in the room. She might . . . might do something.

“Helen,” he called.

He walked quickly after her. The bedroom was dark. Thrown across the bed, he could make out her figure. He approached and touched her on the shoulder.

“Please, Helen, we have to settle this. No hysterics. You’re too big a woman to have hysterics . . . on such an occasion.”

He tugged firmly at the shoulder.

A wan voice answered him.

“What do you want of me? Go away.”

He sat down carefully on the bed.

“Not like this, Helen. If you’ll only listen.”

“I’ve listened. Please. Don’t repeat it.”

He hesitated. A strange bewilderment had overtaken his thought. He desired to know what she thought. It would be impossible to leave without knowing this.

“Are you agreed,” he stammered. “If so . . . come. We’ll go down to . . . to the lagoon and, and . . .”

He stopped. She was crying. With her face buried

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in the coverlet she had started sobbing, her body shaking, her fingers clutching wild at the spread.

Why the devil had he mentioned the lagoon! It had undoubtedly set her off. It was at the lagoon they had stood a summer night five years ago, holding each other by the hand, vowing to the silence and the dark.

“Helen, please! Don’t cry. You’ll only make it worse. . . .”

His hand patted her shoulder timidly. A heart-broken little sentence drifted from the depths of the bed.

“I’ve been such a fool, oh, such a fool!”

“No, you haven’t. You’ve been . . . been splendid. It’s only something we can’t help . . . either of us. It’s the way things work out. Beyond our control. Beyond our vision. Come, now, don’t cry. We’ll talk about it.”

“Such a fool. Oh, God!”

“What do you mean, Helen?”

The increased sounds of her sobbing were his only answer. He sat in the dark of the room waiting. Withing him something mysterious, something inexplicable welled slowly to the surface. It passed into his throat, into his eyes, warming his body and confusing his thought.

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“Helen,” he murmured, “don’t think that. We loved each other . . . once.”

Yes, they had loved once. Once she had been for him everything that was desirable. To see her walking on the street was to behold all the beauty of life. To feel her arms upon him was to know all the happiness of the world. What transports, what exultations! They were still in the room, come now to stare with wan eyes at him. Their memories were still keen in his heart. Dead things that had, nevertheless, souls.

His hand slipped under her shoulder.

“Helen,” he whispered.

Tears stopped him. An odd, unexpected grief had come over him. Tears moistened his face. At the feeling of them the last bit of his reserve dissolved. Tears fell upon his hand, his tears. He leaned over and caressed the soft hair of the woman’s head. He pressed his tear-wetted cheek against her temple. They remained weeping together for several moments. Then a hand crept into his. Her voice, broken and far away, murmured:

“Don’t cry, George. It . . . it can’t be helped. If your . . . your love is dead . . .”

The hand in his slipped gently, weakly out of his

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grasp. He felt a violent laceration as its finger tips fell from his palm.

“It was so beautiful . . . so wonderful. But go, please . . . I can’t stand this. . . .”

His hand, creeping over her face, stopped her.

Everything was gone, broken. This was the miserable end of their romance. Lying in the dark, derelicts, two creatures defeated by the immutable turns of fate. This the horrible finale to their years together. . . . His arms suddenly encircled her.

“Good-bye . . . dearest. If it will help . . . you . . . Good-bye.”

“No!”

He held her wildly to him. A rush of memory was upon him. Little gestures of hers, little long-forgotten sentences, the tone of her voice in the days of the past, the laugh of her, the incidents of their home, intimate trifles — these crowded into his heart, ached in his thought. He embraced her more desperately, feeling dimly that he was bringing back to him things that had almost escaped him. A thousand memories of her were in his arms. He kissed her and felt upon his lips the rekindled warmth of the summer night at the lagoon, of nights that had followed and all things that had been.

“Helen,” he murmured, “I can’t. I was wrong.”

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He flung himself away from her and lay alone on the bed sobbing, his shoulders dancing in the darkness.

II

It was late morning when he awoke. A sense of adventure at once fell upon him. He turned his eyes and beheld Helen, fully dressed, sitting beside the window staring out upon the bright street.

He noticed that her face was white and that melancholy was in her eyes. Hearing him awake, she looked at him, a faint smile curving her lips. At the sight of her an enervation overpowered him. The memories of the night raced through his thought. She loved him—wildly, foolishly. He returned her smile with an effort at genial well being.

She shook her head.

“You look foolish, smiling like that,” she said wearily.

He beckoned her to the bed. He took her hand and raising it to his lips, kissed it.

“Don’t, George. I’m afraid. I couldn’t sleep. I’ve been sitting there—thinking. After all—perhaps you’re right. It isn’t fair to you.”

She turned her eyes full and clouded with tears upon him. He sat up gayly, and with a hilarious note in his voice, cried,

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“ Make way. The philosopher rises for his bath.”

“ I’m afraid, George.”

Bennett contemplated her, amusement in his eyes.

“ Silly,” he cried. “ After all our remarkable discussion last night.”

“ I know, but . . . you’ll feel that way again when you’re tired and overworked as you were and . . . and . . . oh, George, it can never be the same.”

“ Bah!” exclaimed the mysteriously elate philosopher. “ I’ve been thinking, too — massive, simple thoughts. Come, I’ve an announcement to make.”

He was out of bed and fumbling in the closet for a dressing gown.

“ This,” he cried, reappearing, “ is our wedding day, coming, as it should in all philosophically regulated homes, close upon the honeymoon.”

He laughed at the sally. Helen contemplated him intently.

“ Don’t look as if you were frightened out of your wits, young lady.”

Sinking with melodramatic mockery to his knee he extended his arm, one hand over his pajama jacket pocket, and cried,

“ Will you be mine, fair one? I cannot live without you! ”

“ George, don’t be silly. It isn’t nice.”

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He arose and with a sudden serious humility placed his hands on her shoulders and added,
“ I mean it.”

III

It was evening when they returned. They entered the house walking slowly. A number of sallies were on Bennett's lips. But the occasion seemed to have acquired suddenly a preposterous solemnity. A few minutes later they were seated as they had been the night before when he had started to . . .

Bennett sighed. Helen looked up, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling.

“ Wouldn't you like to take your walk, George? Now that we're stupidly married you needn't forego all the joys of unconventionality.”

“ Oh, no, I'd rather stay here. With you,” he added, somewhat hurriedly.

“ Don't be silly, George. Go for your walk.”

He arose with alacrity. He wanted to be alone, to think. He had been thinking most of the day, but somehow the process had been unsatisfactory. He stooped over and kissed his wife.

“ I'll be back soon,” he said.

She laughed.

“ You're funny,” she cried. “ Why, there'll be no

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living with you now that you're a respectably married man."

He thought as he passed out of the house that there was a vaguely unnatural note in her laugh. He walked on down the familiar stretch of street toward the park.

"A bit of a gloat," he murmured to himself.

He entered the park, searching out the bench he had occupied the night before. For long moments he sat staring vacantly at the sweep of darkness overhead. Bits of the ceremony recurred to him, the fat, red-faced judge, the vastly amused clerk. He frowned. The idiots! Why do people laugh at weddings? His eyes returned to the graveled path. A man and woman were walking arm in arm down the stretch toward the lagoon. He stared after them in a curious melancholy daze. As they vanished he jumped to his feet, an exclamation on his lips,

"Heavens — it's time I was going home!"

Jazz

I

In the fourth year of her married life Hazel Wombat experienced a desire to be free. She was married to an acute psychologist who specialized in primitive cultures. The fellow's name was Hubert Wombat, and he earned his bread by devoting three hours of each day, barring Sundays and Saturdays, to the enlightening of some two hundred addle-headed, rattle-brained, vaporous numbskulls who, such is the humor of life, were called students.

During these three hours Wombat was never himself. Naturally a quiet, kindly man given to agreeable and erudite pursuits, he became, when confronted with the classes over which he functioned as Professor of Anthropology, a creature disgruntled and embittered. A vast impatience with the ignorance of the world concerning the things which it had taken him twenty years to discover and memorize was the basis of Professor Wombat's metamorphosis in the classroom.

Daily the young men and women who grudgingly exposed themselves to the Professor's wisdom lis-

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tened with stoical ears to the bizarre expoundings of their instructor. Rising from his desk the Professor would fix them with a violent eye and hold forth:

“The Gorngai and Tungu are afraid to visit the places of the dead for fear the spirits will make them ill. The ground where dead are buried is often regarded as a good conductor of disease. In Tenimber and Timorlaut strangers are not buried for fear that sickness may thus spread over the country. From this idea comes the common objections to burial among early peoples, no less than in modern times, when cremation is becoming fashionable. The Masai do not bury people because, as they say, the body would poison the soil. Exactly the same practice and belief is found in East Central Africa. This idea, combined with the fear of ghosts, has helped to form the relatively late phenomena of ancestral and chthonian hierology.”

It was evident even to one of Professor Wombat's preoccupation that such enthralling statistics fell upon brains too inconsequent to be stirred, too trivial in their capacities to be illuminated by great truths. The knowledge of this would cause him to break off suddenly in his discourses, thrust forth his lower lip, tug twice upon his slight and pointed beard, and emit

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a snort in which were concealed the contempt and despair of a man harassed beyond reason by the fates.

But behind the daily hardship to which the specific stupidities of his students subjected him, lurked an irritation produced by an ignorance more general, a vapidness more colossal. It was the notion of these students that primitive peoples were a debauched and hopeless lot. In vain did Professor Wombat point out the elaborate taboos in Leti, Moa, and Lakor. Useless were his violences of diction concerning the degeneration of the marriage systems in modern life from the custom in Nizhegorod, where the bridegroom's attendant walked thrice around the bridal party, his back against the sun, holding an ikon until, placing himself in front of the participants in the ceremony, he scratched the ground with a knife, cursing evil spirits and evilly disposed persons; in British Guiana, where a young man before marriage undergoes an ordeal, his flesh being wounded and himself sewn into a hammock full of fire ants. Similarly he held forth concerning the practices among the Yezedees, where the bride is covered from head to foot in thick veils and when arrived at her home remains for three weeks in the corner of a darkened room before her husband is permitted to see her. But all in vain. The thousand

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and one instances of superior rituals among primitive peoples, the thousand and one illustrations of their religious, economic and social conventions which rendered them a more genuinely moral and less promiscuous set than the citizens of more recent civilizations, were received by his audiences as the perfunctory notions common to fuddy-duddies unacquainted with the ways of the real world.

By his ceaseless exhortings concerning the intricate regulations of early societies Professor Wombat achieved in the third year of his efforts at the University of Chicago the nickname of "Tabs" or "Taboo" Wombat. He was regarded by the student body, which in its ignorance fastened upon his course as a sinecure, to be a ranting, eccentric creature full of sneers and sarcasms and inexplicable angers. A certain respect was paid his tempers, a certain deference was shown to his unquestionable hatred of life in general and of the classroom in particular.

Among his fellow faculty members Wombat found a somewhat more congenial field for mental intercourse. Now and then a faintly diverting evening came about, during which he listened with courtesy to the laments of Molmon, the aged philologist, and during which he, in turn, theorized to his heart's

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content concerning the researches of his friend Frazer among the Babar Islands. But in the main his leisure was devoted to the pursuit of dim statistics, the assortment of mildewed facts, in anticipation of a volume he had been for five years preparing. The name of the volume was to be "The Psychic and Material Origins of Primitive Conventions."

He had married when he was thirty-six. The act had been attributed by his friends to his absent-mindedness, and his utter indifference to matters of contemporary importance. But, as a matter of fact, Wombat had married out of love.

He had encountered the woman in the University library, which he had disdainfully visited one evening in quest of Van der Tunk's "Bataksch Woordenboek," an exhilarating volume concerned with the manners current among the Battas of Sumatra. A familiar tome opened before the lady attracted his eye. She was reading W. Ellis' "Polynesian Researches" and a strange warmth entered the savant's heart. Unaware as he was of the fact that the young woman had plucked the tome haphazardly from the shelves, he stood beside her overcome by an absurd rush of sympathy. With the simplicity common to all great scholars, Wombat sat himself down beside the reader, talked, argued, expounded, and

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theorized. He left the astonished young woman with an emotion of lightness in his blood. The conversation had endured an hour.

Drawn by the memory of that hour, Professor Wombat sought the library on succeeding nights, wandering lonely about its corridors and through its rooms, his thoughts divided between the exogamous Melanesians and the person with dark hair and a somewhat snubbed nose with whom he felt an imperative desire to renew the happy discourse of the previous meeting.

Vague though his thoughts concerning this person remained, Wombat yet pursued her with the tenacity of a specialist in amours. Locating her on the third evening, he plunged at once into subjects close to his heart. With theories pointing out how the Kei Islanders, the Yumas, the Manyemas, the New Hebrideans, the Fijians, and the Ngurii had anticipated the inoculations of Jenner and Pasteur, he wooed her. In her attentiveness he found evidence of mental communion. In her smile, her frown, her silence he discovered indubitable proofs of the kinship existing between their souls. All his erudite cogitations he poured out to her.

Devoted since childhood to what had almost become his monomania, he had automatically avoided

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women. He had lived alone with his books. His diversion had been insect-haunted expeditions into plague-ridden lands. His chief social activities had been among the tattooed and disease-marked savages of African and Australian fastnesses. The repressed instincts of the man came now suddenly to the surface, and knowing not the words or gestures with which to clothe his dim yearnings, he exuded desperately his ethnological lore. It was during a discussion of the symbolical trial marriage customs found among the Halmahera, the Loanda, and the Wakuasi tribes that Wombat touched the young woman's hand and experienced the first moment of bewilderment that had come to him in all his anthropological researches.

The remainder of Wombat's courtship was swift and certain. The young woman, whose name was Hazel, whose age was twenty-five, whose occupation was a somewhat bored and aimless study of music at a wealthy uncle's expense, married him for reasons best known to herself.

Wombat was for plunging into a district occupied by the Chiriguanos and the Andamanese for his honeymoon, to obtain the first-hand evidence he needed to confound the preposterous theories of Ploss and Eyre. A tour through Greece with a short and

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wholly unsatisfactory sojourn in Morocco was effected as a compromise.

After the trip Wombat and his bride returned to the University.

II

For the first year Hazel Wombat found a certain piquancy in her life. Being a woman of keen if aimless discernments, she perceived the qualities of the good professor, enjoyed even his violences, found relish most of all in his almost childlike preoccupations. She did not make the mistake of understanding Wombat's erudition. By listening adroitly she managed to acquire a superficial smattering of the worlds in which the savant's thought circulated. By moulding her tastes with equal adroitness she managed to achieve a sympathy for the man's strange and often picturesque career. Their life at home became, after the first year, a placid state in which she kept weird jottings of vast benefit to her mate, and in which she agitated herself vaguely as his assistant in the compilation of "The Psychic and Material Origins of Primitive Conventions."

Gradually, however, an unrest seized upon Hazel Wombat. The memory of the world from which she felt herself effectually cut off returned to her. Originally neither capricious nor lusting after changing

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gaieties, the suppression of her instincts gave birth to certain violent longings in her. Not till well into the second year of her marriage, though, did she broach the subject with the Professor.

“It would be nice,” she said on this occasion, “to go out a bit to the theater or the cafés, Hubert. We really see no one and do so little.”

Wombat eyed her with no intelligence.

“Mm, mm,” he said. “Mm.”

“I mean it,” Hazel pursued. “What do you say to going downtown tomorrow night, just the two of us, and having a — spree?”

“A spree?” repeated Professor Wombat, narrowing his brown eyes and gazing up at the top shelf of his open bookcases. “Do you mean getting drunk?”

“No, no,” cried Hazel, laughing hurriedly. “I mean just enjoying ourselves.”

“Umph,” said Wombat. “What more joy than —”

And callously he proceeded to outline to the lady of his bosom the peculiar exhilarations to be found in the study of the Nootka Indians, in the contemplation of the Dieri ceremonies.

A full year passed before the subject was ventured again. This occasion, however, marked a definite change in the life of the Wombats. Smarting under

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the chagrined rebukings of her husband, Hazel repaired to her room and wept.

Although she had married the man as much out of curiosity and boredom as anything else, she had acquired an affection for him during the three years. His heartlessness therefore injured her. His indifference to her desires therefore lacerated her. She wept and dimly determined upon changing the conduct of her life, on asserting herself. Thereafter she intrigued desperately to uproot Wombat from his archipelagoes and jungles, to stir in him some social sense, some appreciation of modern excitements.

Against the calm, determined, lifelong mania of her husband she fought cleverly, creating, however, nothing but discord, and bringing about nothing but a state of bewilderment for the Professor and of unhappiness for herself. Wombat, chagrined by inexplicable tears and mysteriously inspired outbursts, sought futilely to reconcile her by inviting Molmon, the philologist, three consecutive nights to their home."

"I know he is rather old," he explained apologetically, "but the man has really a profound appreciation as well as a profound knowledge of Wachaga vowels."

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From which may be seen at a glance this Wombat's complete incompatibility.

Approaching the fourth anniversary of their wedded life, Hazel entered her husband's study one October evening, and sank dejectedly into a large leather chair. She had spent two days in seclusion. She had meditated upon matters as they stood, and as they might stand. She had reached a conclusion. Strange as it was, a love for Wombat had taken the joy from this conclusion and left her dejected, almost wavering."

"I have concluded," she said in a dry voice to Wombat, who looked up from his parchment at her entrance, "I have concluded, Hubert, to leave you."

"Yes?" said Wombat, smiling agreeably.

"You're not listening, Hubert. Please listen. It's important."

With a sigh, Wombat laid down his pen. He experienced a sense of something unpleasant about to happen. Of late, unpleasant things had grown more and more frequent. He thought of the eighth chapter incomplete before him, and sighed again.

"Hubert," resumed Hazel, "I have concluded to leave you. I can't stand living this way any longer. I'm not married to a man, but to a museum. You de-

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vote all your time to your savages. You have neither respect nor love, nor — nor anything for me.”

Staring with droll and bewildered eyes at the woman, Wombat opened his mouth and remained silent.

“ I want to be free, Hubert,” she said. “ I’m — I’m tired of being tied down as your shadow. I’m — I’m young and I want to enjoy myself.”

“ Good God!” exclaimed Wombat. “ Good God!”

“ I’m sorry, Hubert,” Hazel went on, tears in her eyes. “ I’ve tried hard. But you simply won’t understand. You’re so lost in your work that you simply haven’t any eyes for me, let alone intelligence. If only — ”

Wombat rose weakly from his chair. A sense of shame was uppermost in him. He remembered sorrowfully certain things he should have done, certain things which would have averted this particular scene.

“ I presume,” he said huskily, “ I presume I have been quite blind to — to this other.”

“ You have, Hubert,” said Hazel eagerly. “ You’ve just been lost in your own thoughts and never — never — paid any attention to me. I could have gone out myself but I didn’t want to. I thought

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maybe you'd change—but you haven't—I'm going back to my uncle—— ”

“ What,” said Wombat dazedly, “ can I do? ”

The question brought a burst of tears from his wife.

“ If there's anything I can do,” Wombat pursued, feeling vaguely that he was heading right, “ I'll do it. Merely tell me. Don't go away, Hazel. It's—it's terrible.”

“ It is,” moaned the woman. “ But you won't do it.”

Desperately Wombat cried, “ I will! ”

The evening concluded in a scene of tenderness, in vows exchanged between Hazel and Wombat, in a promise by Wombat to lend himself to the diversions of his wife two nights each week.

“ We'll start tomorrow night,” cried Hazel, again radiant. “ Just we two. We'll go to the theater and to some café.”

Wombat returned to Chapter Eight and held his pen over the closely written page.

With the woman and her tears out of the room, however, a lethargy came upon him. Composition no longer lured him. His brain trembled upon thoughts of the future. What had happened? To what impossible things had he sworn himself? How

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could a creature so happily endowed as Hazel become afflicted with the desire to mingle with the superficial mob? What in God's name had inspired her with a longing to indulge in shallow, empty diversions? Wombat shuddered.

There was in Wombat's attitude a clear premise. All his life he had regarded the vulgar disturbances surrounding him and known by the words Society, Pleasure and Business as the manifestations of an illiterate and colorless state of culture. Barring two concerts and the annual Haresfoot play at the University, which he as a matter of quixotic duty attended, he had never descended to the level of those of his fellow academicians who gave themselves over to the vulgarisms of the day. He had remained aloof, holding in contempt, as he held the vaporous numb-skulls of his classroom, the lures of the city. An excursion into the Greek drama, which he read in its original, a veritable debauch among certain exquisite French archeologists, comprised, outside his scientific travels, his activities beyond his chosen occupation.

Now he had vowed to accompany her to theaters and cafés, to mingle with all manner of witless cattle, to listen to the raspings and guffawings at these stupid rendezvous. There had also been some men-

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tion of dancing! By Wilyaru and the seven thousand tapus of Bogota, what malevolent destiny had brought about this thing? Chapter Eight remained as it was, and sinking back in his chair Professor Wombat gave himself over to the contemplation of a tragic future.

III

The air was chill and the night above the vanishing buildings tinged with the jaundice of many blazing lights when Professor Wombat and his wife stepped from the crowded street into the gilded and mawkishly festooned interior of the Madison Inn.

Hazel, her eyes alight, her face glowing, followed elatedly the pilot who had appeared at the entrance. Conscious of her new clothes, the fetching tilt of her hat, the effective flare of her long, velvet coat, she walked with the air of one given to conquests. Behind her trailed the Professor. His eyes swung nervously from table to table, some occupied with laughing, chattering eaters, others empty and offering immediate refuge. Vainly he sought to concentrate upon the Zafimanelos of Madagascar, the subject of his ninth chapter, but his thought darted to the Niamniam and the King of Monbutto appeared grotesquely in his vision to further his confusion.

After an unhappy interval Wombat found himself

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seated at one of the tables facing his wife, whom he was barely able to recognize. An unusual air was about the woman.

“Hubert,” she murmured, laughing, “do look at the menu. We must order.”

“You order,” said Wombat, and relapsed forthwith into a state of disordered lethargy. For this he had married! Regret consumed him. The Wombat that the two hundred unfortunates of the classroom knew came to the surface. Dishes appeared containing pale foods.

“Aren’t you hungry?” appealed the woman opposite him.

He raised his glowering eyes and transfixed her. A look of fear and pain spread over her face.

“Oh, Hubert!” she murmured.

Suddenly from a far end of the room Morey Stein’s Original Dixie Jazz Band struck up “The Livery Stable Blues.” Wombat’s mouth remained open and without speech, a habit of his when under the stress of surprise. To his ears came the guttural wailings of the saxophone, the monotonous clanging of the cymbals, the sob and blare of brasses. A strange expression came into Wombat’s brown eyes. Leaning forward in his chair he watched several couples arise from their tables and walk toward a clear

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space in the center of the Inn. The table of the Wombats bordered upon this clear space. His eyes opened wide and remained fixed upon the swaying bodies, the leaping shoulders, the abdominal gesturings which suddenly filled this space before him.

Women with bared shoulders and bared arms, with violent feet and wonderful contortions swept by him. Men bending, bowing, undulating, clung to them and wrestled with them. The movements grew wilder. The music remained hammering and wailing. Something familiar crept into Wombat's blood.

“ Good Lord ! ” he muttered.

As the tumult of the band increased and the dancing waxed more furious Wombat's muscles quivered. Unconsciously his fingers sought his notation pad.

“ In the Luang-Sermata Islands, ” he murmured, “ and Makiser — ”

He became silent, and a film seemed to come over his eyes. For the moment Wombat thought of the ngadhungi dances of the Busy-busynans. For the moment his brain raced back to a month amongst the Kurnai of Gippsland, a month spent in mastering each and every detail of the strange quicksteps performed there at the ceremonies of the ililika tabu. The wailings and snortings from the band across the room contributed an obbligato to his thoughts and

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memories. The crude staccato beat of the music, the brazen thumpings of the brasses kindled in his thought memories of the Perak drums of Malay and the Dyak tympani that beat among the hills to the whine and shiver of strange reeds.

“Hubert,” cried Hazel in alarm, “what is it?”

A moment later the diners at the Madison Inn witnessed a strange spectacle. They observed Hubert Wombat, Professor of Anthropology, clasping the figure of his wife in his arms, leaping about upon the polished space set off by the deserted tables, leaping with a certain curious rhythm, a striking curious grace in his leaps. Louder the music wailed, echoes of Jungle Land, echoes of blood-drinking villages beyond the Congo. Overcome with joy and pride, Hazel clung to the body of her husband. There was in his dancing something she had never felt before in the days when she had danced before their marriage, a peculiar exaggeration of the steps she had once learned, an almost fantastic amendment to the twistings she had mastered four years ago. Watching the admiring eyes that followed them about on the floor, Hazel spoke in her husband's ear, gasping and delirious:

“Hubert—I didn't know—you could dance—oh, I'm so glad—you dance wonderfully——”

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And Wombat, with the beating and wailing of the music stirring into life vivid memories, unfastening grimly mastered anthropological data in his brain, nodded his head and panted:

“ Yes — remarkable. Chapter Ten will be simple — and novel — a carefully traced theory on survivals — the survival of the Malekula ritual of — the eight naraks — in the modern dance — as well as music — we shall have to come often — I can trace directly — ”

The music ceased and Wombat's words were lost in a clatter of applause from the dancers. Standing suddenly inanimate upon the floor Wombat moved his hands violently against each other. Mrs. Wombat clung ecstatically to his arm.

“ I'll have to bring Molmon here,” he cried enthusiastically in her ear. “ We were talking of this very thing only eight years ago.”

The Man with One Wife

I

Moments come into every man's life when the consciousness of sin penetrates his sophistication and causes him to suffer. Hardened though he be, cynical of the moral standards of his fellow-men, into the innermost solitude of his being the nausea of guilt still manages to creep. And then, for the moment, he stands face to face with himself and knows himself as the gods he has denied and foresworn know him.

Thus Ezra Gimmil sat in the thirty-seventh year of his life staring out of the window of his home at the mountain which, like an eternal guardian, shut out the world from Provo, the city of his birth. He was a tall, gaunt man; a headstrong, cynically abandoned man. Yet, as he sat before the window gazing out upon the serene mountain, upon the lazy streets that stretched themselves under the afternoon sun, upon the low roofs and the quiet order of Provo, the torment which seeks men out, who crudely fancy they have hidden themselves from God, came into his heart.

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He thought, while he sat as motionless as some awkwardly carven image, of his father and his father's father, and of his mothers, plump and gentle women. All had been pious, law-abiding. The name Gimmil had been one of the prides of Provo. And now, here he was, Ezra Gimmil, a pariah among the righteous, an affliction in the thought of the godly.

In the midst of his thinking the door opened and a woman of twenty-five entered. Her hair was black and her face full. Her figure was strong and undulant. She stood regarding him for a space and, with a deep, curious laugh, moved toward him.

“ Why so sad, Ezra? ” she asked.

The sound of her voice fell across his emotion like a whip. He brought himself slowly to his feet. Here was the cause of his disgrace, here the reason for the disfavor that had overtaken the name of Gimmil. She it was who had caused him to deny the teachings of God, to fly in the face of his townspeople. Were it not for her and the insidious spell she exercised over him, he would have married Martha Dale and Eva Dale. Yes, he could have taken to himself Martha and Eva and Ruth and Mary, all of them beautiful and pious women who would have helped him to live properly in the eyes of God and of his fellow men, who would have reflected righteousness and glory

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upon his name, and by whom he would have had children, twenty-thirty children, as the Prophet of the Mormons had ordained.

She it was, standing now before him, who had placed her plump arms about his neck and in exchange for a sterile kiss caused him to sell his soul to the Devil. A hardened, malignant, headstrong sinner, Ezra Gimmil, yet as he stared at her he hated her and hated himself. He saw himself as the contemptible renegade whose name was fast becoming a byword in Utah.

“Get away!” he cried out to her. “Get away and leave me be!”

The woman who was his wife only smiled at him. She knew these periodic tempers of his. Slowly she continued to approach him. How much longer she would be able to hold him in the coils of her passion she could not tell. But, womanlike, she managed to smile most when thinking most bitterly. With tender, cautious strength she pulled him back into the chair.

“What is it, husband?” she asked softly. “Do you no longer love me? Do I no longer make recompense for the frowns of your neighbors?”

Her arms once more encircled him and upon his lips she fastened hers. Closing his eyes and his

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senses to the power of the woman, Ezra murmured, as in desperation :

“ My father was a good man in the eyes of his God and his people. He had twelve wives. His father, who was among the first to come to Provo, had fourteen wives. And I, who bear their name, live in sin with one wife, live in defiance of all that is holy and pure.”

Slowly, with eyes flashing, Ezra's wife removed her lips from his. She, too, was a Mormon and, like her husband, given to sudden outbreaks of conscience. Well she knew the emotions which the Elders of the Church entertained toward her husband, the manner in which the Apostles raised their eyes in scorn and prayer when he passed. Was it worth while, after all, this life of defiance? Would not, as the Elders preached, retribution, terrible and complete, overtake both of them?

Miami Gimmil sighed and straightened her body. As long as her husband spoke not of this thing, no thought of it came to disturb her. But seeing him lost in the torments which God sends to sinners, Miami, too, felt the still, small voice of conscience speaking faintly and divinely in her soul of souls. Silently she fell to her knees before her husband.

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“Go,” she whispered brokenly. “It is your . . . your duty.”

Her head fell into the lap of Ezra Gimmil and she wept.

Here, in order to understand and appreciate the sinister convolutions of Ezra Gimmil's thought, one must understand and appreciate the first great principle of all great egoists and sinners—no man to himself can long remain vile. Thus, although he had opened his heart for the moment to the consciousness of sin, Ezra Gimmil was not stirred out of the ways of evil by the shock. He had, during this moment of spiritual illumination, seen to the bottom of his being. With tortured senses he had observed his transgressions as if with the eyes of God Himself. But of so coarse a fiber is the soul of man, of so virile a substance the natural evil, once it comes uppermost, that it can, with the agility of a duck's back, shed the holiest of waters and the purest of thoughts.

Conscious of his returning weakness, aware of his renunciation of God and purity, Ezra Gimmil slowly gave himself over to the unhallowed tumult beginning to stir in his bosom. He felt, as he had on the day of his wedding in the Temple of Provo, the insidious lure of Miami. For a moment there circled in the back of his thought the vision of Elder Dale and

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his thirty-seven daughters. But he put this last effort of his fading virtue from him. An expression of unholy rapture lighted his narrow, evil eyes. His lips parted in a wild laugh. Truly, as he stood inanimate for an instant, facing his one wife, he was Ezra Gimmil as the elect of Provo deemed him, a man possessed by the Evil One, immune to the Gospels, oblivious to the laws of decency and righteousness.

“Miami,” he cried aloud, “come, I have love for you. And only you. What does it matter, the obloquy of the world? I shall brook no other’s trespassing upon our home. Let them cast me out. We shall go forth together, sinners in truth, but with the light of freedom in our hearts. What are the laws of God and of man compared to the laws of the heart? Miami, my own, tell me you do not wish for any wifely companions?”

A curious, abandoned note came into his voice, a wilder gleam into his eye. He raised his gaunt arm and shook it at the mountain that guarded the city of his birth, at the Temple wherein his fathers had worshipped.

“Miami,” he cried, “we will live as one, you and I. And there shall be no other.”

For a space Miami Gimmil shuddered before the

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violent sacrilege of her husband. Into her heart crept a dread. What manner of demon was this, her Ezra, to defy God and his people? What ominous retribution would overtake him? And her? Dared she continue?

Suddenly all that was female in her made answer. With a joyous cry she threw herself into her husband's arms.

It was at this significant instant that Elder Brigham Dale passed the front windows of the home of Ezra Gimmil. Elder Dale was a man advanced in years, white-bearded and with the stateliness which long virtue and long worship of the true God alone can give a man. He was short and heavy through the chest and stomach. But his legs were still firm and his eyes clear and vigorous.

Thus, passing the windows of Ezra Gimmil's home at this particular instant, he was able to see that which sent a shock into the depths of his being. There before him, shamelessly embraced in each other's arms, standing in the same light which shone upon the Temple, were the wanton Miami and the apostate Ezra.

Thirty-seven daughters had Elder Dale, each of them a plump and gentle maiden. And nine wives had Elder Dale, each of them a pious and wondrous

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helpmate. The youngest of his daughters was six, the eldest of them thirty; two of them were betrothed and two of them were married and thirty-three of them waited to be taken by good Mormons.

Raising his eyes the Elder murmured a prayer, which in his anger and horror he was unable to complete. He had known the father of Ezra Gimmil. He had known the wives of his father. All of them pious, scrupulous Mormons. And he, himself, had reared thirty-seven daughters. Ingrate, renegade, servant of Satan! Elder Dale shook his fist at the two embraced figures. Overpowered by his emotions, he dashed up the steps of Ezra Gimmil's home and burst into the room wherein the couple still stood. His first words separated the twain like some blow delivered from on high.

“Monogamist!” he shouted in his deep voice. “For this have we and our fathers led you into the true ways of God! For this! To be betrayed by you! To watch you flaunt your evil in our faces! To abide with you whilst you disown the fruits of our work! Where are your wives? Where are your pledges to the Apostles? Answer me, monogamist!”

Miami, at the sound of the booming voice of the Elder, slipped coweringly toward the opposite wall. In her face shame burned and her eyes were filled

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with terror. In this moment the teachings of her childhood, the holy things learned at her mother's knee, rushed to the surface, and raising her eyes she waited for God to strike.

As the Elder continued to speak, she stole a glance at her husband. Ezra was standing with his head thrown back, his lips drawn back in a snarl. She watched the Elder approach him slowly. She heard the Elder talking now in a calmer voice, an appealing voice.

“ Ezra Gimmil, the Apostles of the Temple have appointed me to speak with you. Are you of a mood to listen? ”

Indeed, for one so outraged and violent but a moment before, a curious change had come over the Elder. It had, moreover, its affect upon the apostate.

Shaking his head slowly, Ezra Gimmil answered, “ What speech can there be between us, Elder? You see me as I am, as I wish to be. What more can I say? ”

There was a note of sorrow in the voice of Ezra Gimmil, which the Elder was quick to hear.

“ Come with me to the Temple, ” the Elder went on more calmly than before; “ and we shall see what is to be seen. Better than that, come with me to my home. Provo has not abandoned you, my son, though

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you have abandoned it in your soul. Provo still remembers your father and his father. None fought so valiantly for the Saints, none worked so faithfully as they. Your sisters themselves will speak for that. Come with me to my home, Ezra, my son, and I will show you to my daughters. I am not one to condemn in sudden anger the waywardness of youth.”

A cloud came upon Ezra Gimmil's features. He continued to shake his head.

“No,” he answered, “it cannot be. It will not avail for me to look upon your daughters.”

II

The home of Elder Brigham Dale was divided into nine houses. Therein, in peace and humanly orchestrated harmony, lived his extensive issue. In the heart of the town of Provo were two stores which the Elder owned. He was, because of his good works and his reputed wealth, a man of power in the place, and for six years he had held a council seat. His thirty-seven daughters were indeed as so many fair monuments to his piety.

But together with the blessings which had been given him had been meted out his proper allotment of hardships. As may be easily inferred, the problems of thirty-seven daughters, with thirty-three of them

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yet to be given in wedlock, were not among the least of his declining years. Thus it was that his thoughts had of late centered about Ezra Gimmil. Could this strange renegade be won back into the faith of his fathers, a faith which he had not publicly renounced, he could be induced to take from the Dale home at least ten daughters.

Elder Gimmil had surrounded himself with twelve wives. That his son should find content with one in the face of the revelation of God and the laws of Holy Church was something which Elder Dale, with all his deep learning, could not understand. Rightfully he laid it to the ramified evil which had taken root in the soul and body of Ezra Gimmil.

After his futile visit in the Gimmil home the Elder, inspired by a lifelong virtue as well as an economic necessity — for his wealth under the strain of thirty-seven daughters was not now what it had once been — called a meeting of the Apostles in the Temple. Before the men who assembled, all venerable, all wise, and all virtuous Mormons, Elder Dale set forth the dangers which such a man as Ezra Gimmil introduced into the life of Provo. This was before the days when the tentes of faith began to weaken, when the youths of Provo, thirsting for adventure, began to slip quietly from the town, when the satraps of the

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government at Washington began to pry into the divinities of the great Creed.

But in laying before the assemblage in the Temple the facts and inferences and dangers, Elder Dale urged above all things caution. He had carefully meditated upon the matter. To drive Ezra Gimmil from his home and from the soil which his fathers had tilled and built upon would be a simple business. But in driving him forth would he not drive forth also the potential husband of his ten daughters? Few young men there were in Provo as wealthy at their age as Ezra Gimmil. His inheritance had been large. He had no brothers. Therefore, caution, urged Elder Dale. Prayers and meditation, faith and cajolery. Let them summon before them the woman Miami first and talk with her. Let them do all that could be done before taking violent measures to rid the town of its Devil's adherent.

Thus it came about that during the month which followed this assemblage the name of Ezra Gimmil was to be heard continually in the prayer of the righteous of Provo. Courtesy and kindness were shown to him everywhere. The Elders themselves bought heavily of his grain, which filled to bursting the three great barns behind his home. Yet these maneuvers fell insensibly upon the apostate. Since the day he

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had opened his heart to the torments of a consciousness of sin Ezra Gimmil had closely watched himself. There was in him the stubbornness which is to be noted in the characters of great sinners as well as in those of great saints, both of whom are identically of the stuff of martyrdom.

At night he often lay awake, scowling into the darkness. He had no precepts of God or man to excuse his weakness. Yet there was something within him greater than all the human and divine dictates he had been taught by his fathers to reverence. It was the voice of his flesh crying out against the voices of godliness and virtue. And this voice alone he would follow, let it lead him into the seventh perdition. He was a man and able to march upon Hell like a man—if only Miami would remain at his side. Let the Devil claim them both. . . .

It was after the services in the Temple one March evening that Elder Dale finally spoke the word of doom. He had waited long. He had done all that could be done. He had fought to the last moment. He leaped now into the pulpit and raising his arm above the heads of the congregation, burst forth in a booming voice:

“Brethren of God, children of the Latter Day Saints, hearken! I am to speak to you of that which

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all of you know. There is in our midst one who has foresworn the God of his fathers, one who has turned upon the laws of the land into which he was born. His name is Ezra Gimmil, son of Rufus Gimmil. We of the Temple have spoken with him and prayed for him. But the light of God will not enter a soul overshadowed by the breath of evil. For five years has Ezra Gimmil continued to live in flagrant monogamy with a wanton named Miami. For five years has this woman, with her eyes and her kisses, her words and her body, lured this man to continue to live in sin with her alone, to deny to the sisters of his Church the sanctity of his home. Inhospitable and abandoned, I denounce him as a menace to the morals of our Provo and a danger to the youth of our Church. Such an example of depravity is bound, if countenanced, to have an effect upon the immature among us. All kindness has failed. There remains but one thing, brethren . . .”

Through the gloomy streets of Provo, overshadowed by the guardian mountain which shut it off from the world, moved a silent procession. Fifty men there were in the procession, recruited from the most respectable and pious of the Temple's congregation. They moved through the dark streets with-

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out a murmur. In their midst five of them carried a long rough timber.

Ezra Gimmil, raising his eyes from a book he was reading, stared out of the window into the darkness. He had caught the sound of the tread of many feet. Instinct, which is the companion of evil no less than of virtue, had shot a message into his brain.

He darted to the window and peered out.

Silence and the night—but beyond, the slowly moving shadows of many figures.

They were coming after him.

Without a murmur Ezra Gimmil sped swiftly to the second floor of his home. In her bed, weary with the duties of her home, lay his wife Miami. He shook her and awakened her.

“Our time is come,” he whispered fiercely. “For our sins we are to be ridden out of Provo upon a rail at the hands of the Elders. Do you come with me.”

A terrified light shone from Miami's eyes. She rose and dressed. Noiselessly the two rushed down the stairs, slipped out of the back door, and scurried in the darkness toward the mountain. Beyond the mountain ran the stage coach. Ezra Gimmil had filled his pockets with coin. All else, his home, his animals and his lands, he had left behind.

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The fifty Elders of the Temple, bearing the long, rough timber found the home empty and cried out in wrath, sending their curses after the sinners who had fled.

III

In the city of Chicago, whither Ezra Gimmil and his wife Miami finally made their way, there was little to recall to their thought the harrowing experiences of their life in Provo. Here, Ezra Gimmil, with the same grimness which had characterized his defiance of his people, plunged himself into the activity about him. Within two months he had obtained a foremanship in a grain elevator on the river. He worked from 7 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, and each day he returned to the home his wife Miami kept for him, five little rooms in a huge building full of strange and heathen people.

But contentment did not come to him. Even as he had sat tormented one afternoon in the home of his fathers in Provo, did he sit now night after night, nursing the true torments of one who has been separated from land and people and God.

Each night Miami, too, sensing more and more the griefs which were consuming their happiness and parting them, spoke hopefully to her husband:

“ It is not too late, Ezra. Here, even in the land of

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the heathen, we may retrieve the favor of God. You can repent. See, I wish it, my husband. Come, let us look about us and find for our home at least two other wives. And I will write to the elders of Provo what you have done and they will forgive.”

But Ezra Gimmil, looking into the eyes of the woman for whom he had lost his earthly wealth and his divine soul, only shook his head.

“I cannot,” he said. “There is something within me that forbids. I was born dedicated to the Devil. I cannot fly against my destiny. In sin we have lived. In sin we must die. There is no retracing our ways . . .”

And because he was at heart a pious and reverent man, there was for Ezra Gimmil no consolation in the fact that the heathen among whom he worked and lived deemed him a worthy and righteous man. Nay, there was sin in his soul and he knew it. And so he lived and died—and went to Hell.

Infatuation

I

The dolorous night peered Madonna-like into the open windows of the café. At the little round tables, their arms resting on the black lacquered tops, their fingers clinging forgetfully to the stems of glasses, sat groups of idle celebrants. The wail of the café orchestra lost itself in the night noises that drifted through the windows—the noises from the little summer lake below, the heavy patches of wood beyond, and the amorous laughter of young men and young women walking across the darkened hotel lawns or congregated in the pavilion above the boat-house.

Lucian Walters stared about him for a moment in the café, removing his eyes with difficulty from the curious creature who sat opposite him at one of the little black lacquered tables. The heavy brooding eyes of middle-aged women sitting stiff and immobile in all the pompous finery of their summer wardrobe, encountered his. The lachrymose gaze of middle-aged men drifted by him to the opened windows and the alluring night. A sad lot, laughing now and then,

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talking aloud, humming the simple melodies of the orchestra, sipping at their glasses. A miserable company, vaguely frightened by the stiff little dreams that scratched timidly at their souls. Here and there a youthful couple, confronting each other with wine-glasses in their fingers and sinning ruthlessly with their frantic eyes. The little artificial scene, so piquantly located in the midst of the solemn wilderness about them, faded again from Walter's thought. His eyes with a start focused back upon the curious creature opposite him at the little table.

She looked like a cross between a macaw and a marionette. Luxurious, perverse, artificial, she sat facing him and the night about her, a sort of savagery in caricature. Her face was like a sentence full of unexpected adjectives—startling and meaningless. The bodice of her dress—curiously folded purples, golds and lavenders—was reminiscent of the Salome which Van Gogh never painted. Her skirt revealed no human lines, but spread about her in a flare of blue greens, ruffled and looped into the semblance of clumsy and exotic plumage. Her legs beneath its high hem stretched to the ground, straight and birdlike. They were encased in yellow silk embroidered with yellow rosettes above the ankles. They seemed the finely chiseled effort of some amor-

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ous goldsmith's art. The elaborated feet were stiffly corseted in little lyre-like amber-colored shoes.

Walters contemplated her darkly. In his contemplation was contained the doubt and self-disgust of a man who at the age of thirty-four discovers himself unreasonably, irrationally, unintelligently, and hopelessly in love. Until five days ago he had regarded himself in the flattering light of a man of precocious sanity and unassailable humour. His sophistication in the matter of women had been one of his most cherished prides. He had, during the course of numerous and intricate amours, proved to his satisfaction certain axioms and paradoxes concerning the sex. And for a matter of eight years he had devoted himself to the writing of novels in which he had left no convention unturned and no illusion intact. To find himself thus, at the zenith of his prowess and the apex of his career, bewilderingly absorbed in the contemplation of a seventeen-year-old imbecile, a creature devoid of any known glimmering of intellect, charm, or cunning, was, accordingly, a matter which darkened his eye and filled him with deprecating oaths.

He contemplated now her hat. It was a challenge, a green and silver gesture flung across her copper-

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tinted hair. It rose obliquely from her left ear, to which was attached a large coral earring, and concluded with a piratical slant high over and beyond her opposite shoulder. It was incredible that the wearer of such a hat could be an imbecile—a persistent and indubitable imbecile. Strange and sinister thoughts were to be expected from such a hat as this—Borgian convulsions, Saturnalian philosophies. And yet he had determined since his arrival at The Dells five days ago that in all his life he had never encountered man or woman of such unwearying and spontaneous ignorance.

Lured to her by an inexplicable attraction, he had concentrated upon the creature, plumbed the shallows of her soul, vivisected her whims, turned her few pathetic mental processes inside out, and submitted them to the microscopic eye of his widely renowned masterly mind. He was, within two days of such activities, prepared to pronounce her coldly and conservatively an imbecile, a vain, empty-headed, vacant-souled little flapper of the most unengaging type. And having determined this to the entire satisfaction of his critical mind, he had forthwith and insanely discovered her more alluring, more irresistible than any woman he had known during an intelligently sybaritic life.

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The whine of the café orchestra dissipated his painful meditations in a curious mist. For moments he sat staring at the girl opposite him, repeating in his mind her name, "Myra Lanier." The silent syllables affected him magically. He abandoned himself with the intensity of an amateur drunkard to the business in hand and poured forth a stream of lovesick inanities, amorous piffle. He was not more than half conscious of his words. He recovered as the last violin note quavered into silence and the cold laugh of a breathless youth dashing about somewhere in the night rocketed into the café. A wave of self-disgust overcame him. He turned miserably toward the open window, cursing to himself the orchestra, the wine he had consumed, the indescribable night, and the creature who was fast making as fatuous and whole-hearted an ass out of him as he had ever described in his own writings.

II

In the name of the thousand and one gods of sanity and upright living, how had he come by this thing, and why? What latent streak of idiocy or hereditary taint of imbecility had brought him, open-mouthed, shining-eyed, and giddy-headed, to the feet of a vapid little peacock; and he thirty-four, the

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author of three discriminating volumes and a man of aloof and sensitive poise! He turned his embittered smile upon her face, one side of which was concealed as by a carefully painted shadow. It was an arresting, impressionistic face of stenciled features, poster tints—provokingly immobile. There were visible only one of her eyes, one of her ears, one of her cheeks, an enigmatic section of her lips, and the whitened tip of her nose. It was not the face of an imbecile. Cleopatra would not have despised so mocking and esoteric a surface. Walters' long fingers caressed nervously the stem of the tall conical glass before him. The memories of the past five days overwhelmed him with a loathing. The manner in which he had danced kittenish attendance upon her disgusting coquetries! The manner in which he had . . . Face or no face, the creature was an infant and a fool!

She sat with her elbows planted on the black lacquered top of the café table, her forearms in their tight lavender and gold sleeves tilted forward like embracing and exotic serpents. Her palms were pressed together, the pink and waxen fingers interlaced. Her nails glistened like rubies on the backs of her hands. Her chin was lifted, her whitened throat presented a line of moonlight. Her bosom

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made two little ivory buckles above the purples, golds and lavenders of her bodice.

Walters observed these things cautiously, holding his emotions well in check. He wondered dimly just what he had said a moment ago that had so animated her usually expressionless face. The revulsion he was experiencing had become familiar to him during the five days of his infatuation. Hard upon moments of groundless intoxication similar revulsions had overtaken him. He seized upon them with a low sort of joy. They were respites, lucid, wonderful intervals during which he could most satisfactorily curse and belabor himself.

He sat now elate. What sort of a callow, poppy-cocking idiot was he becoming! Spending five days of his precious holiday bouncing along in the wake of this half-witted, giggle-cursed, inanely stupid, and insanely clothed infant! Submitting himself to the insufferable horseplay and companionship of a pack of barely-weaned bull calves who were his rivals for the maiden's accursed favor! Five days of mental and spiritual suicide! What, in the name of all the gods of fact and legend, had come over him? Arguing hotly with a mess of sleek-haired, grinning-faced undergraduates! Circumventing them by imbecile ruses! Sinking to the loathsome level of impas-

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sioned baby-talk! He, Lucien Walters! My God, the unmentionable idiocies, the horrifying banalities!

III

Myra's familiar high-pitched girl's voice came to him suddenly from across the table.

"I'm sorry," she was saying, "but I can't marry you. I'm only seventeen, y'know, and I don't want to marry yet."

She giggled. Walters waited stupidly for her to resume, moistening his lips and experiencing cold, blighting sensations in his stomach.

The giggle finished. Myra went on, suppressing with difficulty further and lustier giggles.

"You're really my first 'catch.' Nobody ever actually honest-Injun proposed to me before and asked my hand in marriage."

The giggles had their delighted way for the moment.

"Won't mama be proud. She's always telling me that no serious man would ever ask me to be his wife. Just wait till I tell her that——that . . ."

Walters nodded his head solemnly as the object of his mad passion, overcome for the nonce by a strange and delicious mirth, choked, coughed, and gurgled an interruption.

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“. . . that you did,” she went on. “And nobody can say you ain’t a serious man — even mama, who is so particular about such things. Because you are serious, aren’t you, Lucian?”

“Yes,” said Walters.

“I knew it,” cried the creature with an air of triumph, “I could tell.”

Again Walters nodded his head solemnly. It was just as well that she shouldn’t marry him. He would undoubtedly end by murdering her within a week if she did. And he had actually proposed! Well, perhaps this final evidence of his utter depravity would serve to shock him back into reason. My God, what an abominable voice! Would she never reach an end to this morbid chatter of hers? He stared at her desperately, half hearing her further remarks.

When she had finally ended a peculiar depression seized upon his spirit. The irrational impulses he had learned to dread, as a victim of mania dreads the first approaches of his hallucination, were struggling back to life in his thought. Baffling, mysterious, luring, a creature of insidious and overpowering fascination — she sat confronting him.

He gazed at her miserably. His rapid thoughts beat passionately about her, like drunken moths hurling themselves into flame. She was as myste-

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rious and provoking as a colored hieroglyph staring from a Phœnician ruin. She became, as he gazed, something daintily barbaric, something not quite a woman but a compound of exotic mysteries. He waited an instant after she had finished.

“But you must marry me,” he answered slowly. “I can’t live without you. Don’t you see?”

Thank God it was a safe topic! And it was the one topic on which she showed the remotest vestiges of intelligence. Hadn’t she refused him! He stared about him at the stiff blurred figures lingering in the café, middle-aged women with heavy, brooding eyes, men with sad little secrets upon their faces. He would tear himself away. He had unquestionably stepped into some hideously enchanted atmosphere. He would pack his trunk and leave in the morning as early as possible. He was interrupted in his resolves by a series of explosive giggles.

“I’m so sorry. Really so sorry. If there’s anything I can do . . .”

One of the hands that stared like a vacant little white head above the gold and lavender arm reached across the black table top and touched his wrist. He felt a chaotic elation. Even the falsetto of the unceasing giggle which accompanied the gesture of the hand upon his wrist was powerless to affect him. He

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surged and soared, freed at last from the cruelties of his self-disgust, his revulsion, his critical anguish.

“Myra,” he murmured, his voice become hoarse and choked. A heavy hand thumped him between his shoulder blades. The space about him became suddenly filled with violent howls. He perceived as in a mist the sprawling figures of four youths — the Bull Calves, the sleek-haired and grinning-faced creatures of the Dance Pavilion — his rivals! They were jumping around the table, hurling insults, convulsed in abominable laughters. One of them started singing the Wedding March from “Lohengrin.” Another struck the attitude of an outraged parent and launched into a mock tirade against his “darter’s elopement.”

Walters became conscious of the faces of his neighbors at the little tables. They were turned toward him, scowling, smiling appreciatively, laughing coarsely.

He staggered to his feet, extricated himself from the violent and horrible group that clustered about him and dashed headlong from the café. In his ears trailed the words, “We seen yuh — gosh ding it! We caught yuh!” And the joyous, hysterical laugh of a woman — Myra.

He reached the hotel after colliding fiercely with a

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forest of trees and barking his shins on a maze of croquet arches. Fronting the wide steps he ceased his plunging and pulled himself together. He mounted the steps with dignity. It was barely possible that his shame had not preceded him, and that the horrible scene in the café—why it was horrible he was unable to explain—was still unknown to the rocking-chair brigade on the dark veranda. He passed into the lobby without creating any further disturbance. A few minutes later he sat in his room overlooking the tops of vague and innumerable trees and the glint of the little lake below. He would pack at once and be off as early as possible.

And for the hundredth time in five days Lucian Walters contemplated himself and marveled. He wasn't in love. He had contracted a disease—a furious malady which had already unseated his reason and changed him from a shrewd, discriminating gentleman into an infatuated and imbecile schoolboy.

He undressed and lay in his bed, helplessly bewildered. Images of Myra floated before his weary eyes, Myra astride gorgeous-hued peacocks, Myra dancing before ivory idols, Myra riding in state upon elephants attended by himself in the guise of a bejeweled and wonderfully tunicated rajah. Her face,

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exaggerated in his fancies, became the mask of a priestess before the altars of Astarte.

He abandoned the notion of packing. He was in love. He had never been in love before. It was the fatuous whim of the gods who preside over such things to see that he should fall in love with a chattering, giggle-cursed, empty-headed imbecile seventeen years old. It was perhaps a divine punishment for his pride and prejudice in such matters.

He cursed, he tossed. And finally, as a silence settled upon the hotel and the wood noises racketed mysteriously outside, he fell asleep.

IV

It was early morning when Walters opened his eyes. He felt he had been violently drunk the night before. He remembered that he had asked Myra to marry him while sitting in the café. He sat up and experienced a sensation of emptiness in his heart. He remembered then that she had refused.

An hour later he had finished his breakfast and was walking mournfully about the gossip-echoing veranda. Men and women nodded with mysterious geniality at him.

“All the world loves a lover,” he murmured grimly to himself.

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He passed on to the lawn. He was, although not yet admitting it, heading for the boathouse and the bathing pier. He had, during the five previous days, painfully absented himself from this spot. Here the Bull Calves and Myra were wont to disport themselves during the forenoon, to splash water upon each other and leap and dive about. Being unable to swim and a man of peculiar sensitiveness in such matters, Walters had remained away.

He walked now with measured steps toward the flight of stairs that led to the foot of the hotel hill down to the bathing pier. Two or three figures were already on the scene. Myra and her companions had not yet arrived, however. He sauntered down the stairs in the grip of ungovernable impulses. To himself he repeated with the resignation of a suttee martyr, "What's the use? I'm in love. Why not own up? I can't escape it."

He arrived on the pier and sat down on a stone bench against the railing. Two feminine figures clothed in long capes appeared. His heart leaped toward them, and then leaped back again. Neither was Myra. They removed their long capes and stood, two shapely figures in their tight-fitting bathing suits.

Walters turned wearily away. His career was

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ruined. He would let this ungovernable infatuation run its course. He would overcome the creature and marry her. A damned fool and venomous destiny had ordained it. There was no escaping the inexplicable lure, the morbid fascination the imbecile exercised over him. Even now, as he sat and waited, his heart drummed in his ears and his head whirled.

Another figure was descending the flight of steps down the hill. It was Myra, her copper-tinted hair concealed beneath a violently green rubber cap, her figure hidden under a long voluminous cape. She approached down the pier and, spying him, came running to his side with the affected daintiness of a creature unaccustomed to bare feet.

“Going in? Oh, go get your things off. Come on. All the boys’ll be here in a minute.”

Walters cleared his throat twice and endeavored a remark. It failed. She was about to remove the voluminous cape. He stared brazenly, powerless to think or to conceal his emotion. With a mincing little step the creature separated herself from her single garment and stood before him, a slim, white-skinned girl, lithe-legged, lean-bodied, reed-throated. Under his gaze a blush crept into her cheeks.

Suddenly, as if awakened from a dream, Walters sprang to his feet, laughing. He walked without

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comment up the pier, turning once or twice to stare at the bewildered, shining figure of the nude girl. He mounted the stairs, chuckling and shaking his head. His brain seemed cleared of some horrible fume. He murmured to himself:

“What a funny kid! What a funny kid! Good Lord, I’ve been insane. I’ve been madly, horribly in love with a purple and gold dress and a green hat. Yes, sir. God, what a plot! What a plot!”

The brain of Lucien Walters exercised itself nimbly. Coldly and without a tremor it recalled the image of Myra in her ruteliant fabrics, garlanded and festooned in amazing colors — the dress with its unhuman lines, the curiously folded bodice of purples, golds, and lavenders, the green and silver hat, the yellow stockings, the amber-colored shoes.

“A sort of savagery in caricature,” he muttered carefully — for “the sorrows of life must ever be the joys of art.” A beauty that didn’t reach to the skin. Mystery exotics, enigmas — born in a dress-maker’s shop.”

He turned on top of the hill and gazed toward the pier. There, dipping her toes coquettishly into the placid water of the lake, stood slightly inclined the naked figure of Myra Lanier. Walters smiled and nodded his head with vigor.

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“What did I expect to see?” he abruptly questioned himself. “Something, something unimaginable? Not a bad-looking kid at that. A little too scrawny . . .”

He moved on, placing a cigarette between his lips.

“I’ll call the story simply, ‘Infatuation,’” he announced abruptly to the trees, “and let them draw their inferences.”

The Unlovely Sin

My great-grandmother sits in the room we have grudgingly given her and looks out of the window at the night. The shadows of the room are by Rembrandt. My great-grandmother is the work of Rops.

My mother and my grandmother sit in a room below and talk softly and eagerly of my great-grandmother's health. They think she will die soon. She is one hundred and one years old today. My father is reading a paper and scowling. He is a thin, short man with a temper. In his youth he was a brilliant writer of queer fictions. I know what he is thinking of now. I feel we are thinking of the same thing.

Neither of us can bear to eat at the table with my great-grandmother. There is an indecency about her.

A few minutes ago she raised herself to her feet with a cramped, bony gesture that was almost a cackle, and crawled out of the room. I stared at her shrunken, twisted body and at her face. One of her cheeks is yellow, the other is grey. Her features are gnarled and spotted. The skin in places is glossy. She has no hair and refuses to put on a wig. She wears a thin knitted brown shawl over her bare head.

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Her emaciation is like some distasteful caricature. I am always thinking adjectives in her presence. So is my father.

As she passed my father and me when she was crawling out of the room a few minutes ago she turned her little gelatinous eyes on us and smiled.

My father and I, who know her history very well, thought, "She will never die. She is living for spite."

"Poor thing," whispered my mother. "Won't you help her upstairs?"

I helped her climb the stairs to her room. It was my grandmother Ruth's idea, giving her a room on the second floor.

"You will be away from noises, dear Eva," she said.

And now my great-grandmother has to climb up and down.

I was solicitous with her in helping her up the stairs, despite the repugnance I felt at the touch of her stiff arm on my hand. I avoided her fingers. When we reached her door she desired to kiss me. I have a feeling she does these things maliciously.

I left her sitting at the window. I do not like to undress her for bed. Neither does my father. My grandmother insists on doing it herself. She is

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seventy-four years old. She assumes a certain ridiculous briskness in the presence of her mother. In youth she was tyrannized over by her. Among many things she was forced into marriage with a man who deserted her at the age of fifty. My great-grandmother sought to force her to marry again. My father wrote a morbid story about this which he has promised not to show to anyone until after Eva dies.

It was his idea, by the way, of celebrating Eva's hundred and first birthday at the dinner table to-night with a cake on which one candle burned.

"You are starting over again," he said to her.

In a thin, watery voice, my great-grandmother answered: "Thank you. I should like to live to be two hundred."

I shivered. My grandmother Ruth scowled.

My father raised his glass of wine and said: "May we all live long and prosper!"

When I came downstairs from my great-grandmother's room my mother was saying to her mother, Ruth:

"It won't be long now. We should really try to make her last days happier. She will be taken from us soon."

My grandmother answered:

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“ I’ll go before her, mark my words. You don’t know her as I do. She’ll live forever.”

My father raised his head and said to me, “ Zola.”

“ No, Anatole France,” I answered.

He was thoughtful for a moment. It is a way we have of giving our opinions to each other when not alone.

“ The early Huysmans,” my father said at last.

“ Wedekind,” I objected.

He laughed.

My grandmother looked at us suspiciously.

“ What are you talking about?” she asked.

My mother began to cry. Eva has been with us for two years now. My mother’s nerves are in a bad state.

“ Oh,” she remarked suddenly while I was thinking of what to say to Ruth, “ I don’t know what to do.”

It is apparent to me that all of us hate my great-grandmother.

My grandmother hates her because of the past. In the past Eva terrorized her, beat her into submission, and broke her will. In addition to this she hates her because she is impotent to avenge herself. Of late, in fact, she has developed a fear that she will die before Eva. When she was ill two months ago Eva sat

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at her bed and pretended to nurse her. My grandmother's eyes blazed with hate. My father and I discussed the situation at the time.

I have noticed also my grandmother's fear that she is being regarded in the same light as Eva, that my mother, father, and I think of the two of them as in the same condition of life. There is evidently a violent distinction in her own brain concerning this. Undoubtedly she remembers things tending to vivify this impression.

Once, also, when Eva said to me, "If you marry, boy, and have a baby, I will be a great-great-grandmother," Ruth fumed silently. Her mother turned to her and said calmly, "And then you could take my place as great-grandmother, Ruthie."

My mother hates her for a greater and more subtle variety of reasons. She is nervous and tender in her presence and worries continually lest Eva will read her mind. The strain of being cheerful and kindly over irksome and sometimes loathsome tasks has worn away her spirit. Added to these physical causes is a still burning memory of the past. She remembers Eva's objections to her marriage, the scandal she created by her gossip. The feeling of indignation has remained alive in her and now her grandmother's utter helplessness, her almost pious

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ugliness, are constant reproaches to her inner emotions.

I can also imagine, of course, her more intricate woman's reaction to the sight of that withered and palsied body.

Once my mother said:

“ I would hate to live that long, be so helpless and so . . . so . . . ”

And she cried at the thought — of many things.

My father hates my great-grandmother because he is an artist. He writhes in the presence of her elegant grotesquerie, as he phrases it. He is in business now and doesn't write any more, and she is an irritating reminder to him of his art. My father knew Verlaine in Paris and D'Lisle Adam. He spent many nights talking with Symons and he and Huysmans once got drunk together. He was young then, my father. After their marriage, my mother prevailed upon him to give up writing. He hates her, even as he hates Ruth and Eva. But through some elaborate process this hate has reached its highest point against my great-grandmother. He regards her as a source. He detects a malignancy in her every attitude. Once he said to me that he was sure the creature joyed in her own decomposition.

“ She is in love with her spotted complexion,” he

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said. "She takes pride in her horrible body. She knows we hate her, and is content. She has spent all her life overriding her family, dictating, commanding. Now she glories in the contrast, aware that her ridiculous helplessness is more imperious than her strongest commands were once. She nurses her tortures as one would polish his weapons. More than anything she knows that the sight of her is an uncanny revelation of the future. She keeps thinking, 'They will all be like me some time, and they know it.' God, it is almost impossible to imagine, without seeing, what the human body can come to!"

I myself hate her, but do not know why. I am interested, sometimes fascinated, by her. I watch her queer movements and appreciate her manners. In the last few years she has marvelously resumed the manners of her youth, those sweet, regal inanities of the past. She curtsies, attitudinizes, gestures with the air of a grand dame, which fill the room with visions of post-Colonial days. Of course, they are not her manners. They are the manners of old people in the days she was a girl, and she has suddenly remembered them to the smallest detail. Whether this remembering is a natural atavism or another manifestation of her dainty maliciousness I do not know, any more than I know why I hate her.

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The physical repugnance does not explain it. Yet I find myself wishing with a whole-hearted vigor at times that my great-grandmother were dead. When I left her in the dark a few minutes ago I had this feeling. I was afraid of her eyes. They struck me as being uncanny. I thought of witches and Black Sabbaths—and hurried down the stairs.

As the four of us sat in the room we were suddenly startled by a noise overhead, in my great-grandmother's room, a noise of something falling on the floor.

My grandmother stood up, her eyes eager, and sucked her lips excitedly.

My mother looked pale and remained with her mouth open as if she were holding her breath. A wild hope was in her eyes, which had suddenly started to gleam.

My father and I looked at each other. His face was full of suppressed smiles.

“Hurry,” gasped my mother.

We were all on our feet, listening with a strained, awkward attentiveness.

There was no further sound.

“Hurry,” my mother said again.

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My father went to her and patted her shoulder.

“If anything has happened,” he said, “we must be calm.”

I had an idea he was going to laugh boyishly.

My grandmother remained with her face intent, still listening as if fearful of hearing other sounds, even the faintest of stirrings from up there.

I left the room.

As I left I could feel the three of them whispering to themselves.

When I reached the stairs I heard my father’s voice with a queer unctuous intonation:

“Yes, darling, be calm . . . I think it is over . . . at last. . . . The excitement . . . the excitement of the birthday . . . the cake . . . wine . . . everything must have been too much for her heart. Wait . . .”

I opened the door of my great-grandmother’s room and stared against the dark.

After a few moments I made out her figure.

She was sitting in her chair at the window where I had left her. I felt her eyes turned toward me. A thin, watery voice came from her:

“I thought you’d come up. I dropped my shoe.

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You seem so excited, boy. You mustn't run up those stairs."

She laughed softly.

"No—it was only my shoe," she said with a sudden crispness. "And tell your grandmother I am ready to go to bed."

