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A BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORIES

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TORONTO

A BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY SHORT STORIES

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With an Appendix on writing the Short Story by
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INTRODUCTION

WHEN the material was selected for *The Book of Modern Short Stories*, published by The Macmillan Company in 1928, the chief interest for several years in that field had been centred upon new devices in technique, as part of the reaction against standardization and formula. A story, it was pointed out, might have an emotional pattern instead of a plot; it might rely for its effect upon mood instead of action; it might drift off down the stream of consciousness instead of cracking the whip of the surprise ending. That collection, therefore, was planned to illustrate different ways of handling material, in stories ranging from one extreme to the other of the types once defined in a book review by Virginia Woolf: on the one hand, the self-sufficient and compact type, in the manner of the French masters, with no thread left hanging, the last sentence often lighting up the whole circumference of the tale; and on the other hand, the "loosely trailing rather than tightly furled" type, in the manner of Chekhov, the stories moving slowly out of sight "like clouds in the summer air, leaving a wake of meaning in our minds which gradually fades away."

Since the appearance of the 1928 collection, the annual volumes edited by Mr. E. J. O'Brien and the O. Henry Memorial Committee, besides all the anthologies that are occasional rather than perennial, have continued to take excellent care of the general run of interesting contemporary short stories. Meanwhile the preoccupation of critics has been shifting, as the third decade of the century has moved on into the fourth, from form to subject-matter; or rather—since no serious critic regards form and subject-matter in any other light than as two

aspects of the same entity—the emphasis has shifted. And with the shifting of emphasis there have developed sharp conflicts of opinion. Just as in politics it has become more and more difficult for the indifferent and the neutral to avoid being drawn to the Right or to the Left, so in criticism lines of battle have been formed on what had been only a pleasant parade-ground. The attack comes from the critics of the Left: from Marxians in *New Masses* and *International Literature* to such young revolutionary poets as Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis, they all have been insisting upon the obligation of the artist, especially the writer, to concern himself with the dominant issues of the day; with the way society is going, or might go, or should go. In any era this obligation exists, they say. But it is less binding during periods of relative stability. Stability, however, is far from characterizing our era, filled as it is with the prospects and portents of revolutionary change and counter-revolutionary regression.

The attack is met by those who disagree profoundly with such a view of the artist's obligation. To their mind his duty is to keep himself as far as possible detached from the current discontents and to remain beyond or above the battle. As the first group of critics urge descent into the Red Square of conflict—into the streets, comrades!—those of the opposing camp counsel retreat to an ivory tower of contemplation. The dust of the controversy gets into our eyes and settles on the books and pictures over which the dispute is waged. It is a small inconvenience in comparison with the mental stimulation of the battle, but it does demand that we do a good deal of dusting-off. Such an office this present anthology is intended to perform for certain kinds of stories. Here are the best examples the editor could find (without restriction as to country, so far as translations were available) of what may be roughly labelled ivory tower stories, and the best of those with

revolutionary themes or implications. After reading them and enjoying them and contrasting the two groups in theme and treatment, we shall have a better idea of the issues at stake in criticism.

In the introduction to Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley, George Wyndham says: "The older I get, the more do I affect the two extremes of literature. Let me have either pure Poetry, or else the statements of actors and sufferers." This quotation may serve as a formulation of the Ivory Tower, Red Square contrast. Actors and sufferers are more likely to be on the squares, fighting and making statements, than in the towers, distilling poetry from life. To those wide fields of literary expression in between the two extremes belong most of the stories in the 1928 collection. The experience they reflect has neither the remoteness we associate with ivory towers nor the immediacy of fighting at the barricades. They deal rather with those emotions and incidents that show very little fundamental change from generation to generation. One can read them without being bothered about where society is going and even without wondering very much about the social order that conditioned the particular experience. Such stories, recording physical and spiritual adventures that might happen to almost anybody, anywhere, in any period, lie between the extremes which divide the present collection into two parts.

In choosing stories illustrative of these extremes, I ruled out from "the statements of actors and sufferers" that direct advocacy of causes and theories which belongs to the platform, and that sensational—however authentic—violence of incident which belongs to the field of "reportage." And in the other group I set aside as not to my purpose the stylistic experiments where the poets talk to themselves rather than to the reader; I include no "pigeons on the grass, alas." I had no preconceived ideas about the differences that would appear when the two

groups were confronted, and I am going now to leave most of them for the reader to discover. But no one can miss the quality of remoteness from present urgencies in the first group; a remoteness of theme or mood or both, which comes from looking back to the past, near or distant; or from exploring rare emotional states, or very exceptional personalities; or from turning up the soil of primitive impulses and acts that lie beneath familiar surfaces, like the buried city of Miss Porter's story under the revolutionary disturbances of modern Mexico. Sometimes it derives merely from an atmosphere of withdrawn leisure in which the nice shades and the fine feelings may be tracked down and fixed in a lovely phrase or image. The tempo in this group is slower than in the other. The stories are longer: although there are but fourteen of them as against the twenty-two in the second section, the number of words in each section is about the same. It is interesting—and the result of no intention on the editor's part—that over half in the first group are concerned with the old, the dying, the very young. They are full of reverie, dreaming, retrospect; with few exceptions, the people in them have their eyes turned within rather than without. The people in the other group, however, are mostly adults in the full tide of living, with their gaze directed outward. And for riots, arrests, fighting, violent death, executions, mass excitements, we must leave the tower for the square.

Into the tower world, nevertheless, come echoes of the conflict in the square. Schnitzler lays the scene of his play, *The Green Cockatoo*, in a Paris tavern on the eve of the fall of the Bastille. To this tavern in the slums certain jaded aristocrats used to come in search of novel sensations, cleverly provided by the proprietor, an ex-actor. Each night he staged an apparently impromptu Grand Guignol kind of show, with crimes of passion enacted by players who appeared until the dénoûement to be au-

thentic bravos and prostitutes of the lower world. Such a performance was in progress on this night, as the mob gathered headway outside in the streets. By dramatic coincidence the mock intrigues of the play-world and a fatal complication of the real world, involving a marquis, a courtesan, and one of the actors, become so intertwined that the players themselves are lost between truth and illusion, and an actual murder is the climax. Even as a knife thrust kills the marquis, the thunder of triumphant revolution is at the door of the tavern.

In similar fashion we see in some of the stories of the first section the threat or the actual impact of an invading world of change and violence. *Puryear's Hornpipe* offers only a mild intimation, conveyed by the figure of the "relief lady" at the country store, of difficulties coming closer and closer to the mountain folk in the secluded Virginia valley. In *I Shall Decline My Head*, the old man, emerging briefly from the fantasy of wish-fulfillment which at last possesses him completely, takes part in a drawing-room discussion of impending revolutionary change; but his contribution is only: all this has been before—there is nothing new. Buchmendel, Stefan Zweig's old bibliographer, is destroyed by the cruel enmities of a world to the very existence of which his own rare gift had blinded him. In *The Old Chevalier* it is the Paris Commune of 1871 which creates the conditions and the atmosphere that make possible the adventure the old man recalls with such melancholy tenderness, though the adventure itself is purely romantic. And in *Rest Cure*, the writer on his Riviera terrace (an obvious prototype of D. H. Lawrence), fighting against the death he feels approaching, calls on his father to save him—the father he had always resented and thought he could do without, who has the miner's lamp strapped around his head and who brings with him the dark and blind strength of the world below the sunlit surface.

In the remoteness of theme and the elaboration of treatment that mark such stories as these, Left critics see at work an "escapist" psychology. The term conveys opprobrium and often irritates those to whom it is applied. So it becomes important to distinguish between the point of view of the author and that of the characters he has chosen to depict. The editor is making no allegations about escape to ivory towers on the part of the authors. They may share the belief that it is their duty to turn aside from the conflicts of the moment for the sake of affirming the eternal values. Or they may simply find "escapist psychology" in other people a fascinating theme for artistic interpretation. It may move them to pity or to poetry or to laughter, but is in no manner to be confused with their own way of meeting life. As a suggestion of how complicated a matter the author's relation with his theme may be, consider the reasons a writer like Naomi Mitchison gives for choosing to write about ancient Sparta, or Caesar's Gaul, or imperial Rome. Discussing historical fiction in *The Saturday Review* (April 27, 1935) she says: "Why then had I got to choose this period (first century B. C.)? Because my mind was all stirred up with the troubles in Ireland in my own year of grace—1921—and the injustices committed by the Black and Tan troops during the British military occupation. Yet I didn't want to write directly about Ireland. I didn't feel as though I could. The creative part of my mind jibbed at that, perhaps because it was too afraid—it wanted to keep out of the too real, too hard, too cruel world, for as long as I would let it. After all, I, with my generation, had been through the World War; we wanted rest from the present." But in many of her stories we are aware that Mrs. Mitchison, tracing out the old patterns of Sparta or Scythia, is making an indirect, yet penetrating, comment upon the present. In *Black Sparta*, for example, a story more absorbing and significant than the delicate idyl reprinted in

this collection, but too long for the limits set, the claim of his State upon the young Spartan's innermost thoughts and feelings arouses in him a resistance as inexplicable to himself as to those around him. He aids the escape of a helot, who had moved him to unauthorized compassion and to dangerous thoughts. His predicament—the struggle between loyalty to something within himself and loyalty to the State—is better understood now than then; volumes of ethical and political discussion are ranged on both sides of the question that tore at the young Spartan like the famous hidden fox of the legend. But though better understood, it is a no less bitter predicament for many thousands of the actors and sufferers in the contemporary class-divided State.

Mrs. Mitchison's tower, then, is rather like that described by André Gide in explaining his inability to take part in the political activities of Communism in spite of his sympathy with its aims: "I do not insist that the tower where I take refuge be of ivory. But I am worth nothing if I leave it. Tower of glass; observatory where I receive all rays of light, all waves of sound; fragile tower where I feel myself badly sheltered; sheltering I would rather be without; vulnerable on all sides; confident in despite of everything, with eyes set towards the east." (*Pages de Journal 1929–1932.*) Passages in Mrs. Mitchison's *Vienna Diary* dispel any notion that in turning to the past for her themes she is evading the challenge of the present.

All but half a dozen of the stories in this collection are strictly contemporary; they are of this decade of the 1930's; and of the remaining half a dozen only two are of a date earlier than the 1920's. A word remains to be said about the reason for including these two: *The Princess* by Anton Chekhov, and *The Altar of the Dead* by Henry James, both written before the turn of the century. James's story concludes the first section and Chekhov's

opens the second—and with intention. That altar blazing with candles, piously tended and consecrated to the dead, may be regarded as symbolic of values guarded in ivory towers. Few would wish those flames extinguished. And to keep them alight in the turmoils that threaten or are already upon us may exact as intensive and dedicated a purpose as that which animated Henry James's odd elderly hero. One can become a communist, said Lenin in a sentence placed as a reminder in a Crimean palace that is now a library and museum for citizens, one can become truly a communist only when the memory has been enriched with all that has been achieved by humanity. If the word communist makes of this too special a plea, put it this way: only on that condition can one go on into the future with hope.

What, beyond the personal salvation of his hero, did James intend to convey by his lighted altar? The story, he explains in his preface, grew out of the sense of personality lost in the dehumanizing atmosphere of the great mass. "It takes space to feel, it takes time to know; and great organisms as well as small have to pause . . . to possess themselves and to be aware. Monstrous masses are by this truth so impervious to vibration that the sharpest forces of feeling, locally applied, no more penetrate than a pin or a paper cutter penetrates an elephant's hide. Thus the very tradition of sensibility would perish if left only to their care. It has here and there to be rescued, to be saved by independent, intelligent zeal. . . . The sense of the state of the dead is but part of the sense of the state of the living; and congruously with that, life is cheated to almost the same degree of the finest homage . . . that we fain would render it. We clutch indeed at some shadow of these things . . . but our struggle yields to the other arrayed things that defeat the cultivation in such an air of the finer flowers—creatures of cultivation as the finer flowers essentially are."

He describes the "bloom of myriad many-colored relations" as a precious plant that becomes rare indeed in the multiplied contact and motion of the crowded life. *The Altar of the Dead* commemorates an imagined case of the "individual independent effort to keep it none the less tended and watered, to cultivate it, as I say, with an exasperated piety." Thus "the prime idea is that of an invoked, a restorative reaction against certain general brutalities."

James's altar, then, symbolizes the conscious effort to preserve the flowers of a special sensibility—those individual values that, in the recurrent nightmares of our more unhappy prophets, are threatened by the advance of the proletariat. James realized that the effort to preserve them had to fly in the face of conditions. He was thinking of London, of monstrous aggregations of people, and of the forgetfulness and callousness, not of the multitudes only, who are indifferent to the sight of a funeral train "bounding merrily by," but of the cultivated ladies and gentlemen with whom he dined and who were not immune to the general infection. What would he have thought of conditions such as some of our stories portray? Try to preserve a rare flower of personality in the white man's town in Georgia where Candy-Man Beechum is snuffed out just as a week-end precaution; or in Kentucky during a strike, where naïve liberals are caught in the No-man's land between warring classes; or on the Manchurian or Siberian frontier of tense watchfulness, espionage, and violence; or in the bare Hungarian village of *Wine*, or the starved Cuban countryside or the tax-ridden Italian montain hamlet; or in the midst of the civil war brutalities of Liam O'Flaherty's and Frank O'Connor's Ireland. It seems an impossible task. Yet we may note for consolation how precious individual values live on through the years of drab discipline, privation, long-suffering and long-hoping of the idealistic socialists de-

picted in *May-Day Celebration* and *A Wreath for Toni.* But at what cost!

And now for the reason for introducing the second group of stories with Chekhov's *Princess.* In the grounds of such a monastery near Moscow as the little princess used for a retreat when she wished spiritual dew to fall upon her delicate egotism, there is a cemetery where Chekhov, together with other writers, artists, and musicians more recently dead, is buried. It is a carefully tended place of grass, flowers, and trees. There are no more monks and no more princesses in retreat in the monastery and its grounds, but there is a day nursery for the children of workers in nearby factories; and they were playing or sleeping in the sun, with nurses to care for them, when I saw the place last summer. A little girl was proud to help us find Chekhov's grave. Much that he used to dream of as coming to pass in perhaps two hundred years has happened since he was buried there in 1904. Among his stories, *The Princess*, free of the more obvious miseries of the old order, yet tells as well as any of them why people were driven to act and suffer for a new order; why they had to destroy the intrenched and blinded privilege embodied in the not unsympathetic figure of the little princess. The story is a concrete illustration of a condition summed up in abstract terms by Harold Laski (*The State in Theory and Practise*): "It can never be said too often, especially of that material basis which is decisive in determining social relations, that men think differently who live differently, and that the unity which gives endurance and stability to a society is therefore unattainable where they live so differently that they cannot hope to see life in the same terms. It is the poison of inequality which has wrought the ruin of all great empires in the past. For what it does is to break the loyalty of the masses to the common life and thereby to persuade them, not seldom rightly, that its destruction

alone can clear the path to more just conceptions of statehood."

The Princess, which dramatizes the different thinking of those who live differently and diagnoses the poison of inequality working in a particular empire that presently came to ruin, serves well to introduce the stories which follow it. These range from east to west and north to south, though no effort has been made to include all countries or all phases of conflict. (The revolutionary emotions of Spain, for example, seem to find their best literary expression in poetry.) The stories are arranged in a progression, roughly, from passive suffering to active participation in struggles for a new order, and so on to problems of adjustment arising after a successful revolution—such problems finding a place only in Soviet stories, naturally enough, such as *Black Fritters* and *The Cherry Stone*. This last story has a not wholly achieved atmosphere of fantasy and introspection. It is open to adverse criticism in a way that a simple action story like *The Tiger* is not; it tries to do a harder thing and does not quite succeed. But it was deliberately chosen because it suggests how, after mass movements and overturns presumably fatal to all those rare flowers of Henry James's concern, and after Plans with all their imposed concentration upon mass objectives, individual sensibility raises its head; rather feebly; and struggles to express itself through a technique of reverie and image that is mastered even by the novices in the ivory towers. But the cherry stone is planted in the new garden; it will grow into the blossoming tree of the Invisible country; and it will be found to be, after all, a part of the Plan.

"It is the business of the artist," writes Stephen Spender in *The Destructive Element*, "to insist on human values. If there is need for a revolution, it is these human values that will make the revolution."

In that richly ornate old palace of the Muscovite tsars

within the Kremlin is a winding tower staircase with an intricately designed window in a deep stone embrasure. Through its panes of crimson, azure, topaz, and amber glass one looks out upon an incredible rainbow vision of domes and slender spires, twisted cupolas, and golden crosses; and beyond all that strange beauty of the past float the red banners over the Red Square. It is a pictorial juxtaposition of the processes of history that kindles the imagination. Ivory Tower and Red Square: let them stand for the human values which the stories in this collection record and celebrate.

DOROTHY BREWSTER

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NEW YORK CITY
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THE OLD CHEVALIER

by

Isak Dinesen

ISAK DINESEN *is the pen name of Baroness Blixen of Rungstedlund, Denmark. Baroness Blixen is carrying on a family tradition with her writing, for her father before her made a considerable contribution to Danish literature. Much of her life she has spent on a coffee plantation in British East Africa, now the Kenya Colony, where she went with her husband in 1914, the year of their marriage. After their divorce in 1921, she remained on the plantation for a little more than ten years—until the coffee market declined. Then she returned to her home in Denmark. It is her expressed hope to go back to East Africa.*

THE OLD CHEVALIER

MY father had a friend, old Baron von Brackel, who had in his day traveled much and known many cities and men. Otherwise he was not at all like Odysseus, and could least of all be called ingenious, for he had shown very little skill in managing his own affairs. Probably from a sense of failure in this respect he carefully kept from discussing practical matters with an efficient younger generation, keen on their careers and success in life. But on theology, the opera, moral right and wrong, and other unprofitable pursuits he was a pleasant talker.

He had been a singularly good-looking young man, a sort of ideally handsome youth, and although no trace of this past beauty could be found in his face, the history of it could be traced in a certain light-hearted dignity and self-reliance which are the product of a career of good looks, and which will be found, unaccountably, in the carriage of those shaking ruins who used to look into the mirrors of the last century with delight. In this way one should be able to point out, at a *danse macabre*, the skeletons of the really great beauties of their time.

One night he and I came to discuss an old theme, which has done its duty in the literature of the past: namely, whether one is ever likely to get any real benefit, any lasting moral satisfaction, out of forsaking an inclination for the sake of principle, and in the course of our talk he told me the following story:

On a rainy night in the winter of 1874, on an avenue in Paris, a drunken young girl came up and spoke to me. I

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was then, as you will understand, quite a young man. I was very upset and unhappy, and was sitting bareheaded in the rain on a seat along the avenue because I had just parted from a lady whom, as we said then, I did adore, and who had within this last hour tried to poison me.

This, though it has nothing to do with what I was going to tell you, was in itself a curious story. I had not thought of it for many years until, when I was last in Paris, I saw the lady in her box at the opera, now a very old woman, with two charming little girls in pink who were, I was told, her great-granddaughters. She was lovely no more, but I had never, in the time that I had known her, seen her look so contented. I was sorry afterward that I had not gone up and called on her in her box, for though there had been but little happiness for either of us in that old love affair of ours, I think that she would have been as pleased to be reminded of the beautiful young woman, who made men unhappy, as I had been to remember, vaguely as it was, the young man who had been so unhappy that long time ago.

Her great beauty, unless some rare artist has been able to preserve it in color or clay, now probably exists only within a few very old brains like mine. It was in its day something very wonderful. She was a blonde, the fairest, I think, that I have ever seen, but not one of your pink-and-white beauties. She was pale, colorless, all through, like an old pastel or the image of a woman in a dim mirror. Within that cool and frail form there was an unrivaled energy, and a distinction such as women have no more, or no more care to have.

I had met her and had fallen in love with her in the autumn, at the château of a friend where we were both staying together with a large party of other gay young people who are now, if they are alive, faded and crooked and deaf. We were there to hunt, and I think that I shall be able to remember to the last of my days how she used

to look on a big bay horse that she had, and that autumn air, just touched with frost, when we came home in the evenings, warm in cold clothes, tired, riding side by side over an old stone bridge. My love was both humble and audacious, like that of a page for his lady, for she was so much admired, and her beauty had in itself a sort of disdain which might well give sad dreams to a boy of twenty, poor and a stranger in her set. So that every hour of our rides, dances and *tableaux vivants* was exuberant with ecstasy and pain, the sort of thing you will know yourself: a whole orchestra in the heart. When she made me happy, as one says, I thought that I was happy indeed. I remembered smoking a cigar on the terrace one morning, looking out over the large view of low, wood-covered blue hills, and giving the Lord a sort of receipt for all the happiness that I should ever have any claim to in my life. Whatever would happen to me now, I had had my due, and declared myself satisfied.

Love, with very young people, is a heartless business. We drink at that age from thirst, or to get drunk; it is only later in life that we occupy ourselves with the individuality of our wine. A young man in love is essentially enraptured by the forces within himself. You may come back to that view again, in a second adolescence. I knew a very old Russian in Paris, enormously rich, who used to keep the most charming young dancers, and who, when once asked whether he had, or needed to have, any illusions as to their feelings for him, thought the question over and said: "I do not think, if my chef succeeds in making me a good omelette, that I bother much whether he loves me or not." A young man could not have put his answer into those words, but he might say that he did not care whether his wine merchant was of his own religion or not, and imagine that he had got close to the truth of things. In middle age, though, you arrive at a deeper humility, and you come to consider it of importance that

the person who sells or grows your wine shall be of the same religion as you yourself. In this case of my own, of which I am telling you, my youthful vanity, if I had too much of it, was to be taught a lesson very soon. For during the months of that winter, while we were both living in Paris, where her house was the meeting place of many *bel-esprits*, and she herself the admired dilettante in music and arts, I began to think that she was making use of me, or of her own love for me, if such can be said, to make her husband jealous. This has happened, I suppose, to many young men down through the ages, without the total sum of their experience being much use to the young man who finds himself in the same position today. I began to wonder what the relations between those two were really like, and what strange forces there might be in her or in him, to toss me about between them in this way, and I think that I began to be afraid. She was jealous of me, too, and would scold me with a sort of moral indignation, as if I had been a groom failing in his duties. I thought that I could not live without her, and also that she did not want to live without me, but exactly what she wanted me for I did not know. Her contact hurt me as one is hurt by touching iron on a winter day: you do not know whether the pain comes from heat or from cold.

Before I had ever met her I had read about her family, whose name ran down for centuries through the history of France, and learned that there used to be werewolves amongst them, and I sometimes thought that I should have been happier to see her really go down on all fours and snarl at me, for then I should have known where I was. And even up to the end we had hours together of a particular charm, for which I shall always be thankful to her. During my first year in Paris, before I knew any people there, I had taken up studying the history of the old hotels of the town, and this hobby of mine appealed to her, so that we used to dive into old quarters and ages

of Paris, and dwell together in the age of Abélard or of Molière, and while we were playing in this way she was serious and gentle with me, like a little girl. But at other times I thought that I could stand it no longer, and would try to get away from her, and any suspicion of this was enough, I imagine, to make her lie awake at night thinking out new methods of punishing me. It was between us the old game of the cat and the mouse—probably the original model of all the games of the world. But because the cat has more passion in it, and the mouse only the plain interest of existence, the mouse is bound to become tired first. Toward the end I thought that she wished us to be found out, she was so careless in this *liaison* of ours; and in those days a love affair had to be managed with prudence.

I remember during this period coming to her hotel on the night of a ball to which she was going, while I had not been asked, disguised as a hairdresser. In the 'seventies ladies had large chignons and the work of a *coiffeur* took time. And through everything the thought of her husband would follow me, like, I thought, the gigantic shadow, upon the white back-curtain, of an absurd little punchinello. I began to feel so tired—not exactly of her, but really exhausted in myself—that I was making up my mind to have a scene and an explanation from her, even if I should lose her by it, when suddenly, on the night of which I am telling you, she herself produced both the scene and the explanation, such a hurricane as I have never again been out in; and all with exactly the same weapons as I had myself had ready: with the accusation that I thought more of her husband than I did of her. And when she said this to me, in that pale blue boudoir of hers that I knew so well—the silk-lined, upholstered and scented box, such as the ladies of that time liked to keep themselves in, with, I remember, some paintings of flowers on the walls, and very soft silk cushions everywhere, and a lot of lilacs in

the corner behind me, with the lamp subdued by a large red shade—I had no reply, for I knew that she was right.

You would know his name if I told you, for he is still talked about, though he has been dead for many years. Or you would find it in any of the memoirs of that period, for he was the idol of our generation. Later on, great unhappiness came upon him, but at that moment—I believe that he was then thirty-three years old—he was walking quietly in the full splendor of his strange power. I once, about that time, heard two old men talk about his mother, who had been one of the beauties of the Restoration, and one of them said of her that she carried all her famous jewels as lightly and gracefully as other young ladies would wear garlands of field flowers. "Yes," the other said after he had thought it over for a moment, "and she scattered them about her, in the end, like flowers, *à la* Ophelia." Therefore I think that this rare lightness of his must have been, together with the weakness, a family trait. Even in his wildest whims, and in a sort of mannerism which we then named *fin de siècle* and were rather proud of, he had something of *le grand siècle* about him: a straight nobility that belonged to the old France.

I have looked since at those great buildings of the seventeenth century which seem altogether inexpedient as dwellings for human beings, and have thought that they must have been built for him—and his mother, I suppose—to live in. He had a confidence in life, independent of the successes which we envied him, as if he knew that he could draw upon greater forces, unknown to us, if he wanted to. It gave me much to think about, on the fate of man, when many years later I was told how this young man had, toward the end of his tragic destiny, answered the friends who implored him in the name of God, in the words of Sophocles's Ajax: "You worry me too much, woman. Do you not know that I am no longer a debtor of the gods?"

I see that I ought not to have started talking about him, even after all these years; but an ideal of one's youth will always be a landmark amongst happenings and feelings long gone. He himself has nothing to do with this story.

I told you that I myself felt it to be true that my feelings for the lovely young woman, whom I adored, were really light of weight compared to my feelings for the young man. If he had been with her when we first met, or if I had known him before I met her, I do not think that I should ever have dreamed of falling in love with his wife.

But his wife's love for him, and her jealousy, were indeed of a strange nature. For that she was in love with him I knew from the moment that she began to speak of him. Probably I had known it a long time before. And she was jealous. She suffered, she cried—she was, as I have told you, ready to kill if nothing else would help her —and all the time that fight, which was very likely the only reality in her life, was not a struggle for possession, but a competition. She was jealous of him as if he had been another young woman of fashion, her rival, or as if she herself had been a young man who envied him his triumphs. I think that she was, in herself, always alone with him in a world that she despised. When she rode so madly, when she surrounded herself with admirers, she had her eye on him, as a competitor in a chariot race would have his eyes only on the driver just beside him. As for the rest of us, we only existed for her in so far as we were to belong to her or to him, and she took her lovers as she took her fences, to pile up more conquests than the man with whom she was in love.

I cannot, of course, know how this had begun between them. Afterward I tried to believe that it must have arisen from a desire for revenge, on her side, for something that he had done to her in the past. But I had the feeling that it was this barren passion which had burned all the color out of her.

Now you will know that all this happened in the early days of what we called then the "emancipation of woman." Many strange things took place then. I do not think that at the time the movement went very deep down in the social world, but here were the young women of the highest intelligence, and the most daring and ingenious of them, coming out of the chiaroscuro of a thousand years, blinking at the sun and wild with desire to try their wings. I believe that some of them put on the armor and the halo of St. Joan of Arc, who was herself an emancipated virgin, and became like white-hot angels. But most women, when they feel free to experiment with life, will go straight to the witches' Sabbath. I myself respect them for it, and do not think that I could ever really love a woman who had not, at some time or other, been up on a broomstick.

I have always thought it unfair to woman that she has never been alone in the world. Adam had a time, whether long or short, when he could wander about on a fresh and peaceful earth, among the beasts, in full possession of his soul, and most men are born with a memory of that period. But poor Eve found him there, with all his claims upon her, the moment she looked into the world. That is a grudge that woman has always had against the Creator: she feels that she is entitled to have that epoch of paradise back for herself. Only, worse luck, when chasing a time that has gone, one is bound to get hold of it by the tail, the wrong way around. Thus these young witches got everything they wanted as in a catoptric image.

Old ladies of those days, patronesses of the church and of home, said that emancipation was turning the heads of the young women. Probably there were more young ladies than my mistress galloping high up above the ground, with their fair faces at the backs of their necks, after the manner of the wild huntsman in the tale. And in the air there was a theory, which caught hold of them there, that the jealousy of lovers was an ignoble affair, and that no

woman should allow herself to be possessed by any male but the devil. On their way to him they were proud of being, according to Doctor Faust, always a hundred steps ahead of man. But the jealousy of competition was, as between Adam and Lilith, a noble striving. So there you would find, not only the old witches of Macbeth, of whom one might have expected it, but even young ladies with faces smooth as flowers, wild and mad with jealousy of their lovers' mustachios. All this they got from reading—in the orthodox witches' manner—the book of Genesis backwards. Left to themselves, they might have got a lot out of it. It was the poor, tame, male preachers of emancipation, cutting, as warlocks always will, a miserable figure at the Sabbath, who spoiled the style and flight of the whole thing by bringing it down to earth and under laws of earthly reason. I believe, though, that things have changed by now, and that at the present day, when males have likewise emancipated themselves, you may find the young lover on the hearth, following the track of the witch's shadow along the ground, and, with infinitely less imagination, blending the deadly brew for his mistress, out of envy of her breasts.

The part which had been granted to me, in the story of my emancipated young witch, was not in itself flattering. Still I believe that she was desperately fond of me, probably with the kind of passion which a little girl has for her favorite doll. And as far as that goes I was really the central figure of our drama. If she would be Othello, it was I, and not her husband, who must take the part of Desdemona, and I can well imagine her sighing, "Oh, the pity of it, the pity of it, Iago," over this unfortunate business, even wanting to give me a kiss and yet another before finishing it altogether. Only she did not want to kill me out of a feeling of justice or revenge. She wished to destroy me so that she should not have to lose me and to see a very dear possession belong to her rival, in the man-

ner of a determined general, who will blow up a fortress which he can no longer hold, rather than see it in the hands of the enemy.

It was toward the end of our interview that she tried to poison me. I believe that this was really against her program, and that she had meant to tell me what she thought of me when I already had the poison in me, but had been unable to control herself for so long. There was, as you will understand, something unnatural in drinking coffee at that stage of our dialogue. The way in which she insisted upon it, and her sudden deadly silence as I raised the cup to my mouth, gave her away. I can still, although I only just touched it, recall the mortal, insipid taste of the opium, and had I emptied the cup, it could not have made my stomach rise and the marrow in my bones turn to water more than did the abrupt and fatal conviction that she wanted me to die. I let the cup drop, faint as a drowning man, and stood and stared at her, and she made one wild movement, as if she meant to throw herself at me still. Then we stood quite immovable for a minute, both knowing that all was lost. And after a little while she began to rock and whimper, with her hands at her mouth, suddenly changed into a very old woman. For my own part, I was not able to utter a sound, and I think that I just ran from the house as soon as I had strength enough to move. The air, the rain, and the street itself met me like old forgotten friends, faithful still in the hour of need.

And there I sat on a seat of the Avenue Montaigne, with the entire building of my pride and happiness lying around me in ruins, sick to death with horror and humiliation, when this girl, of whom I was telling you, came up to me.

I think that I must have been sitting there for some time, and that she must have stood and watched me before she could summon up her courage to approach. She

probably felt herself in sympathy with me, thinking that I was drunk too, as sensible people do not sit without a hat in the rain, perhaps also because I was so near her own age. I did not hear what she said, neither the first nor the second time. I was not in a mood to enter into talk with a little girl of the streets. I think that it must have been from sheer instinct of self-preservation that I did in the end come to look at her and to listen. I had to get away from my own thoughts, and any human being was welcome to assist me. But there was at the same time something extraordinarily graceful and expressive about the girl, which may have attracted my attention. She stood there in the rain, highly rouged, with radiant eyes like stars, very erect though only just steady on her legs. When I kept on staring at her, she laughed at me, a low, clear laughter. She was very young. She was holding up her dress with one hand—in those days ladies wore long trains in the streets. On her head she had a black hat with ostrich feathers drooping sadly in the rain and overshadowing her forehead and eyes. The firm gentle curve of her chin, and her round young neck shone in the light of the gas lamp. Thus I can see her still, though I have another picture of her as well.

What impressed me about her was that she seemed altogether so strangely moved, intoxicated by the situation. Hers was not the conventional advance. She looked like a person out on a great adventure, or someone keeping a secret. I think that on looking at her I began to smile, some sort of bitter and wild smile, known only to young people, and that this encouraged her. She came nearer. I fumbled in my pocket for some money to give her, but I had no money on me. I got up and started to walk, and she came on, walking beside me. There was, I remember, a certain comfort in having her near me, for I did not want to be alone. In this way it happened that I let her come with me.

I asked her what her name was. She told me that it was Nathalie.

At this time I had a job at the Legation, and I was living in an apartment on the Place François I, so we had not far to go. I was prepared to come back late, and in those days, when I would come home at all sorts of hours, I used to keep a fire and a cold supper waiting for me. When we came into the room it was lighted and warm, and the table was laid for me in front of the fire. There was a bottle of champagne on ice. I used to keep a bottle of champagne to drink when I returned from my shepherd's hours.

The young girl looked around the room with a contented face. Here in the light of my lamp I could see how she really looked. She had soft brown curls and blue eyes. Her face was round, with a broad forehead. She was wonderfully pretty and graceful. I think that I just wondered at her, as one would wonder at finding a fresh bunch of roses in a gutter, no more. If I had been normally balanced I suppose I should have tried to get from her some explanation of the sort of mystery that she seemed to be, but now I do not think that this occurred to me at all.

The truth was that we must both have been in quite a peculiar sort of mood, such as will hardly ever have repeated itself for either of us. I knew as little of what moved her as she could have known about my state of mind, but, highly excited and strained, we met in a special sort of sympathy. I, partly stunned and partly abnormally wide awake and sensitive, took her quite selfishly, without any thought of where she came from or where she would disappear to again, as if she were a gift to me, and her presence a kind and friendly act of fate at this moment when I could not be alone. She seemed to me to have come as a little wild spirit from the great town outside—Paris—which may at any moment bestow unexpected favors on one, and which had in the right moment sent her to me.

What she thought of me or what she felt about me, of that I can say nothing. At the moment I did not think about it, but on looking back now I should say that I must also have symbolized something to her, and that I hardly existed for her as an individual.

I felt it as a great happiness, a warmth all through me, that she was so young and lovely. It made me laugh again after those weird and dismal hours. I pulled off her hat, lifted her face up, and kissed her. Then I felt how wet she was. She must have walked for a long time on the streets in the rain, for her clothes were like the feathers of a wet hen. I went over and opened the bottle on the table, poured her out a glass, and handed it to her. She took it, standing in front of the fire, her tumbled wet curls falling down over her forehead. With her red cheeks and shining eyes she looked like a child that has just awakened from sleep, or like a doll. She drank half the glass of wine quite slowly, with her eyes on my face, and, as if this half-glass of champagne had brought her to a point where she could no longer be silent, she started to sing, in a low, gentle voice, hardly moving her lips, the first lines of a song, a waltz, which was then sung in all the music halls. She broke it off, emptied her glass, and handed it back to me. *À votre santé*, she said.

Her voice was so merry, so pure, like the song of a bird in a bush, and of all things music at that time went most directly to my heart. Her song increased the feeling I had, that something special and more than natural had been sent to me. I filled her glass again, put my hand on her round white neck, and brushed the damp ringlets back from her face. "How on earth have you come to be so wet, Nathalie?" I said, as if I had been her grandmother. "You must take off your clothes and get warm." As I spoke my voice changed. I began to laugh again. She fixed her starlike eyes on me. Her face quivered for a moment. Then she started to unbutton her cloak, and let

it fall onto the floor. Underneath this cloak of black lace, badly suited for the season and faded at the edges into a rusty brown, she had a black silk frock, tightly fitted over the bust, waist and hips, and pleated and draped below, with flounces and ruffles such as ladies wore at that time, in the early days of the bustle. Its folds shone in the light of my fire. I began to undress her, as I might have undressed a doll, very slowly and clumsily, and she stood up straight and let me do it. Her fresh face had a grave and childlike expression. Once or twice she colored under my hands, but as I undid her tight bodice and my hands touched her cool shoulders and bosom, her face broke into a gentle and wide smile, and she lifted up her hand and touched my fingers.

The old Baron von Brackel made a long pause. "I think that I must explain to you," he said, "so that you may be able to understand this tale aright, that to undress a woman was then a very different thing from what it must be now. What are the clothes that your ladies of these days are wearing? In themselves as little as possible—a few perpendicular lines, cut off again before they have had time to develop any sense. There is no plan about them. They exist for the sake of the body, and have no career of their own, or, if they have any mission at all, it is to reveal.

"But in those days a woman's body was a secret which her clothes did their utmost to keep. We would walk about in the streets in bad weather in order to catch a glimpse of an ankle, the sight of which must be as familiar to you young men of the present day as the stems of these wineglasses of ours. Clothes then had a being, an idea of their own. With a serenity that it was not easy to look through, they made it their object to transform the body which they encircled, and to create a silhouette so far from its real form as to make it a mystery which it was

a divine privilege to solve. The long tight stays, the whalebones, skirts and petticoats, bustle and draperies, all that mass of material under which the women of my day were buried where they were not laced together as tightly as they could possibly stand it—all aimed at one thing: to disguise.

"Out of a tremendous froth of trains, pleatings, lace, and flounces which waved and undulated, *secundum artem*, at every movement of the bearer, the waist would shoot up like the chalice of a flower, carrying the bust, high and rounded as a rose, but imprisoned in whalebone up to the shoulder. Imagine now how different life must have appeared and felt to creatures living in those tight corsets within which they could just manage to breathe, and in those fathoms of clothes which they dragged along with them wherever they walked or sat, and who never dreamed that it could be otherwise, compared to the existence of your young women, whose clothes hardly touch them and take up no room. A woman was then a work of art, the product of centuries of civilization, and you talked of her figure as you talked of her salon, with the admiration which one gives to the achievement of a skilled and untiring artist.

"And underneath all this Eve herself breathed and moved, to be indeed a revelation to us every time she stepped out of her disguise, with her waist still delicately marked by the stays, as with a girdle of rose petals.

"To you young people who laugh at the ideas, as at the bustles, of the 'seventies, and who will tell me that in spite of all our artificiality there can have been but little mystery left to any of us, may I be allowed to say that you do not, perhaps, quite understand the meaning of the word? Nothing is mysterious until it symbolizes something. The bread and wine of the church itself has to be baked and bottled, I suppose. The women of those days were more than a collection of individuals. They sym-

bolized, or represented, Woman. I understand that the word itself, in that sense, has gone out of the language. Where we talked of woman—pretty cynically, we liked to think—you talk of women, and all the difference lies there.

"Do you remember the scholars of the middle ages who discussed the question of which had been created first: the idea of a dog, or the individual dogs? To you, who are taught statistics in your kindergartens, there is no doubt, I suppose. And it is but justice to say that your world does in reality look as if it had been made experimentally. But to us even the ideas of old Mr. Darwin were new and strange. We had our ideas from such undertakings as symphonies and ceremonials of court, and had been brought up with strong feelings about the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate birth. We had faith in purpose. The idea of Woman—of *das ewig weibliche*, about which you yourself will not deny that there is some mystery—had to us been created in the beginning, and our women made it their mission to represent it worthily, as I suppose the mission of the individual dog must have been worthily to represent the Creator's idea of a dog.

"You could follow, then, the development of this idea in a little girl, as she was growing up and was gradually, no doubt in accordance with very ancient rules, inaugurated into the rites of the cult, and finally ordained. Slowly the center of gravity of her being would be shifted from individuality to symbol, and you would be met with that particular pride and modesty characteristic of the representative of the great powers—such as you may find again in a really great artist. Indeed, the haughtiness of the pretty young girl, or the old ladies' majesty, existed no more on account of personal vanity, or on any personal account whatever, than did the pride of Michelangelo himself, or the Spanish Ambassador to France. However much greeted at the banks of the Styx by the indignation

of his individual victims with flowing hair and naked breasts, Don Giovanni would have been acquitted by a board of women of my day, sitting in judgment on him, for the sake of his great faith in the idea of Woman. But they would have agreed with the masters of Oxford in condemning Shelley as an atheist; and they managed to master Christ himself only by representing him forever as an infant in arms, dependent upon the Virgin.

"The multitude outside the temple of mystery is not very interesting. The real interest lies with the priest inside. The crowd waiting at the porch for the fulfillment of the miracle of the boiling blood of St. Pantaleone—that I have seen many times and in many places. But very rarely have I had admittance to the cool vaults behind, or the chance of seeing the priests, old and young, down to the choirboys, who feel themselves to be the most important persons at the ceremony, and are both scared and impudent, occupying themselves, in a measure of their own, with the preparations, guardians of a mystery that they know all about. What was the cynicism of Lord Byron, or of Baudelaire, whom we were just reading then with the *frisson nouveau*, to the cynicism of these little priestesses, augurs all of them, performing with the utmost conscientiousness all the rites of a religion which they knew all about and did not believe in, upholding, I feel sure, the doctrine of their mystery even amongst themselves. Our poets of those days would tell us how a party of young beauties, behind the curtains of the bathing-machine, would blush and giggle as they 'put lilies in water.'

"I do not know if you remember the tale of the girl who saves the ship under mutiny by sitting on the powder barrel with her lighted torch, threatening to put fire to it, and all the time knowing herself that it is empty? This has seemed to me a charming image of the woman of my time. There they were, keeping the world in order, and

preserving the balance and rhythm of it, by sitting upon the mystery of life, and knowing themselves that there was no mystery. I have heard you young people saying that the women of old days had no sense of humor. Thinking of the face of my young girl upon the barrel, with severely downcast eyes, I have wondered if our famous male humor be not a little insipid compared to theirs. If we were more thankful to them for existing than you are to your women of the present day, I think that we had good reason for it.

"I trust that you will not mind," he said, "an old man lingering over these pictures of an age gone by. It will be, I suppose, like being detained a little in a museum, before a *montre* showing its fashions. You may laugh at them, if you like."

The old chevalier then resumed his story:

As I then undressed this young girl, and the layers of clothes which so severely dominated and concealed her fell one by one there in front of my fire, in the light of my large lamp, itself swathed in layers of silk—all, my dear, was thus draped in those days, and my large chairs had, I remember, long silk fringes all around them and on the tops of those little velvet pompons. Otherwise they would not have been thought really pretty—until she stood naked, I had before me the greatest masterpiece of nature that my eyes have ever been privileged to rest upon, a sight to take away your breath. I know that there may be something very lovable in the little imperfections of the female form, and I have myself worshiped a knock-kneed Venus, but this young figure was pathetic, was heart-piercing, by reason of its pure faultlessness. She was so young that you felt, in the midst of your deep admiration, the anticipation of a still higher perfection, and that was all there was to be said.

All her body shone in the light, delicately rounded and

smooth as marble. One straight line ran through it from neck to ankle, as through the heaven-aspiring column of a young tree. The same character was expressed in the high instep of the foot, as she pushed off her old shoes, as in the curve of the chin, as in the straight, gentle glance of her eyes, and the delicate and strong lines of her shoulder and wrist.

The comfort of the warmth of the fire on her skin, after the clinging of her wet and tumbled clothes, made her sigh with pleasure and turn a little, like a cat. She laughed softly, like a child who quits the doorstep of school for a holiday. She stood up erect before the fire; her wet curls fell down over her forehead and she did not try to push them back; her bright painted cheeks looked even more like a doll's above her fair naked body.

I think that all my soul was in my eyes. Reality had met me, such a short time ago, in such an ugly shape, that I had no wish to come into contact with it again. Somewhere in me a dark fear was still crouching, and I took refuge within the fantastic like a distressed child in his book of fairy tales. I did not want to look ahead, and not at all to look back. I felt the moment close over me, like a wave. I drank a large glass of wine to catch up with her, looking at her.

I was so young then that I could no more than other young people give up the deep faith in my own star, in a power that loved me and looked after me in preference to all other human beings. No miracle was incredible to me as long as it happened to myself. It is when this faith begins to wear out, and when you conceive the possibility of being in the same position as other people, that youth is really over. I was not surprised or suspicious of this act of favor on the part of the gods, but I think that my heart was filled with a very sweet gratitude toward them. I thought it after all only reasonable, only to be expected, that the great friendly power of the universe should mani-

fest itself again, and send me, out of the night, as a help and consolation, this naked and drunk young girl, a miracle of gracefulness.

We sat down to supper, Nathalie and I, high up there in my warm and quiet room, with the great town below us and my heavy silk curtains drawn upon the wet night, like two owls in a ruined tower within the depth of the forest, and nobody in the world knew about us. She leaned one arm on the table and rested her head on it. I think that she was very hungry, under the influence of the food. We had some caviar, I remember, and a cold bird. She began to beam on me, to laugh, to talk to me, and to listen to what I said to her.

I do not remember what we talked about. I think we were very open-hearted, and that I told her, what I could not have mentioned to anybody else, of how I had come near to being poisoned just before I met her. I also think that I must have told her about my country, for I know that at a time afterwards the idea came to me that she would write to me there, or even come to look for me. I remember that she told me, rather sadly to begin with, a story of a very old monkey which could do tricks, and had belonged to an Armenian organ-grinder. Its master had died, and now it wanted to do its tricks and was always waiting for the catchword, but nobody knew it. In the course of this tale she imitated the monkey in the funniest and most gracefully inspired manner that one can imagine. But I remember most of her movements. Sometimes I have thought that the understanding of some pieces of music for violin and piano has come to me through the contemplation of the contrast, or the harmony, between her long slim hand and her short rounded chin as she held the glass to her mouth.

I have never in any other love affair—if this can be called a love affair—had the same feeling of freedom and security. In my last adventure I had all the time been

worrying to find out what my mistress really thought of me, and what part I was playing in the eyes of the world. But no such doubts or fears could possibly penetrate into our little room here. I believe that this feeling of safety and perfect freedom must be what happily married people mean when they talk about the two being one. I wonder if that understanding can possibly, in marriage, be as harmonious as when you meet as strangers; but this, I suppose, is a matter of taste.

One thing did play in to both of us, though we were not conscious of it. The world outside was bad, was dreadful. Life had made a very nasty face at me, and must have made a worse at her. But this room and this night were ours, and were faithful to us. Although we did not think about it, ours was in reality a supper of the Girondists.

The wine helped us. I had not drunk much, but my head was fairly light before I began. Champagne is a very kind and friendly thing on a rainy night. I remember an old Danish bishop's saying to me that there are many ways to the recognition of truth, and that Burgundy is one of them. This is, I know, very well for an old man within his paneled study. But young people, who have seen the devil face to face, need a stronger helping hand. Over our softly hissing glasses we were brought back to seeing ourselves and this night of ours as a great artist might have seen us and it, worthy of the genius of a god.

I had a guitar lying on my sofa, for I was to serenade, in a *tableau vivant*, a romantic beauty—in real life an American woman from the Embassy who could not have given you an echo back from whatever angle you would have cried to her. Nathalie reached out for it, a little later in our supper. She shuddered slightly at the first sound, for I had not had time or thought for playing it, and crossing her knees, in my large low chair, she began to tune it. Then she sang two little songs to me. In my quiet room her low voice, a little hoarse, was clear as a bell, faintly

giddy with happiness, like a bee's in a flower. She sang first a song from the music halls, a gay tune with a striking rhythm. Then she thought for a moment and changed over into a strange plaintive little song in a language that I did not understand. She had a great sense of music. That strong and delicate personality which showed itself in all her body came out again in her voice. The light metallic timbre, the straightness and ease of it, corresponded with her eyes, knees, and fingers. Only it was a little richer and fuller, as if it had grown up faster or had stolen a march somehow upon her body. Her voice knew more than she did herself, as did the bow of Mischa Elman when he played as a *Wunderkind.*

All my balance, which I had kept somehow while looking at her, suddenly left me at the sound of her voice. These words that I did not understand seemed to me more directly meaningful than any I had ever understood. I sat in another low chair, opposite her. I remember the silence when her song was finished, and that I pushed the table away, and how I came slowly down on one knee before her. She looked at me with such a clear, severe, wild look as I think that a hawk's eyes must have when they lift off his hood. I went down on my other knee and put my arms around her legs. I do not know what there was in my face to convince her, but her own face changed and lighted up with a kind of heroic gentleness. Altogether there had been from the beginning something heroic about her. That was, I think, what had made her put up with the young fool that I was. For *du ridicule jusqu'au sublime*, surely, *il n'y a qu'un pas.*

My friend, she was as innocent as she looked. She was the first young girl who had been mine. There is a theory that a very young man should not make love to a virgin, but ought to have a more experienced partner. That is not true; it is the only natural thing.

It must have been an hour or two later in the night that

I woke up to the feeling that something was wrong, or dangerous. We say when we turn suddenly cold that someone is walking over our grave—the future brings itself into memory. And as *l'on meurt en plein bonheur de ses malheurs passés*, so do we let go our hold of our present happiness on account of coming misfortune. It was not the *omne animal* affair only; it was a distrust of the future as if I had heard myself asking it: "I am to pay for this; what am I to pay?" But at the time I may have believed that what I felt was only fear of her going away.

Once before she had sat up and moved as if to leave me, and I had dragged her back. Now she said: "I must go back," and got up. The lamp was still burning, the fire was smoldering. It seemed to me natural that she should be taken away by the same mysterious forces which had brought her, like Cinderella, or a little spirit out of the *Arabian Nights*. I was waiting for her to come up and let me know when she would come back to me, and what I was to do. All the same I was more silent now.

She dressed and got back into her black shabby disguise. She put on her hat and stood there just as I had seen her first in the rain on the avenue. Then she came up to me where I was sitting on the arm of my chair, and said: "And you will give me twenty francs, will you not?" As I did not answer, she repeated her question and said: "Marie said that—she said that I should get twenty francs."

I did not speak. I sat there looking at her. Her clear and light eyes met mine.

A great clearness came upon me then, as if all the illusions and arts with which we try to transform our world, coloring and music and dreams, had been drawn aside, and reality was shown to me, waste as a burnt house. This was the end of the play. There was no room for any superfluous word.

This was the first moment, I think, since I had met her

those few hours ago, in which I saw her as a human being, within an existence of her own, and not as a gift to me. I believe that all thoughts of myself left me at the sight, but now it was too late.

We two had played. A rare jest had been offered me and I had accepted it; now it was up to me to keep the spirit of our game until the end. Her own demand was well within the spirit of the night. For the palace which he builds, for four hundred white and four hundred black slaves all loaded with jewels, the djinn asks for an old copper lamp; and the forest-witch who moves three towns and creates for the woodcutter's son an army of horse-soldiers demands for herself the heart of a hare. The girl asked me for her pay in the voice and manner of the djinn and the forest-witch, and if I were to give her twenty francs she might still be safe within the magic circle of her free and graceful and defiant spirit. It was I who was out of character, as I sat there in silence, with all the weight of the cold and real world upon me, knowing well that I should have to answer her or I might, even within these few seconds, pass it on to her.

Later on I reflected that I might have had it in me to invent something which would have kept her safe, and still have allowed me to keep her. I thought then that I should only have had to give her twenty francs and to have said: "And if you want another twenty, come back tomorrow night." If she had been less lovely to me, if she had not been so young and so innocent, I might perhaps have done it. But this young girl had called, during our few hours, on all the chivalrousness that I had in my nature. And chivalrousness, I think, means this: to love, or cherish, the pride of your partner, or of your adversary, as you will define it, as highly as, or higher than, your own. Or if I had been as innocent of heart as she was, I might perhaps have thought of it, but I had kept company with this deadly world of reality. I was practiced in its laws

and had the mortal bacilli of its ways in my blood. Now it did not enter my head any more than it ever has to alter my answers in church. When the priest says: "O God, make clean our hearts within us," I have never thought of telling him that it is not needed, or to answer anything whatever but, "And take not your holy spirit from us."

So, as if it were the only natural and reasonable thing to do, I took out twenty francs and gave them to her.

Before she went she did a thing that I have never forgotten. With my note in her left hand she stood close to me. She did not kiss me or take my hand to say good-by, but with the three fingers of her right hand she lifted my chin up a little and looked at me, gave me an encouraging, consoling glance, such as a sister might give her brother in farewell. Then she went away.

In the days that followed—not the first days, but later—I tried to construct for myself some theory and explanation of my adventure.

This happened only a short time after the fall of the Second Empire, that strange sham millennium, and the Commune of Paris. The atmosphere had been filled with catastrophe. A world had fallen. The Empress herself, whom, on a visit to Paris as a child, I had envisaged as a female deity resting upon clouds, smilingly conducting the ways of humanity, had flown in the night, in a carriage with her American dentist, miserable for the lack of a handkerchief. The members of her court were crowded into lodgings in Brussels and London while their country houses served as stables for the Prussians' horses. The Commune had followed, and the massacres in Paris by the Versailles army. A whole world must have tumbled down within these months of disaster.

This was also the time of Nihilism in Russia, when the revolutionaries had lost all and were fleeing into exile. I thought of them because of the little song that Nathalie had sung to me, of which I had not understood the words.

Whatever it was that had happened to her, it must have been a catastrophe of an extraordinarily violent nature. She must have gone down with a unique swiftness, or she would have known something of the resignation, the dreadful reconciliation to fate which life works upon us when it gets time to impress us drop by drop.

Also, I thought, she must have been tied to, and dragged down with, somebody else, for if she had been alone it could not have happened. It would have been, I reflected, somebody who held her, and yet was unable to help her, someone either very old, helpless from shock and ruin, or very young, children or a child, a little brother or sister. Left to herself she would have floated, or she would have been picked up near the surface by someone who would have valued her rare beauty, grace, and charm and have congratulated himself upon acquiring them; or, lower down, by somebody who might not have understood them, but whom they would still have impressed. Or, near the bottom, by people who would have thought of turning them to their own advantage. But she must have gone straight down from the world of beauty and harmony in which she had learned that confidence and radiance of hers, where they had taught her to sing, and to move and laugh as she did, where they had loved her, to a world where beauty and grace are of no account, and where the facts of life look you in the face, quite straight to ruin, desolation and starvation. And there, on the last step of the ladder, had been Marie, whoever she was, a friend who out of her narrow and dark knowledge of the world had given her advice, and lent her the miserable clothes, and poured some sort of spirit into her, to give her courage.

About all this I thought much, and for a long time; but of course I could not know.

As soon as she had gone and I was alone—so strange are the automatic movements which we make within the hands of fate—I had no thought but to go after her and

get her back. I think that I went, in those minutes, through the exact experience, even to the sensation of suffocation, of a person who has been buried alive. But I had no clothes on. When I got into some clothes and came down to the street it was empty. I walked about in the streets for a long time. I came back, in the course of the early morning, to the seat on which I had been sitting when she first spoke to me, and to the hotel of my former mistress. I thought what a strange thing is a young man who runs about, within the selfsame night, driven by the mad passion and loss of two women. Mercutio's words to Romeo about it came into my mind, and, as if I had been shown a brilliant caricature of myself or of all young men, I laughed. When the day began to spring I walked back to my room, and there was the lamp, still burning, and the supper table.

This state of mine lasted for some time. During the first days it was not so bad, for I lived then in the thought of going down, at the same hour, to the same place where I had met her first. I thought that she might come there again. I attached much hope to this idea, which only slowly died away.

I tried many things to make it possible to live. One night I went to the opera, because I had heard other people talk about going there. It was clear that it was done, and there might be something in it. It happened to be a performance of *Orpheus*. Do you remember the music where he implores the shadows in Hades, and where Euridice is for such a short time given back to him? There I sat, in the brilliant light of the *entr'actes*, a young man in a white tie and lavender gloves, with bright people who smiled and talked all around, some of them nodding to me, closely covered and wrapped up in the huge black wings of the Eumenides.

At this time I developed also another theory. I thought of the goddess Nemesis, and I believed that had I not had

the moment of doubt and fear in the night, I might have felt, in the morning, the strength in me, and the right, to move her destiny and mine. It is said about the highwaymen who in the old days haunted the forests of Denmark that they used to have a wire stretched across the road with a bell attached. The coaches in passing would touch the wire and the bell would ring within their den and call out the robbers. I had touched the wire and a bell had rung somewhere. The girl had not been afraid, but I had been afraid. I had asked: "What am I to pay for this?" and the goddess herself had answered: "Twenty francs," and with her you cannot bargain. You think of many things, when you are young.

All this is now a long time ago. The Eumenides, if they will excuse me for saying so, are like fleas, by which I was also much worried as a child. They like young blood, and leave us alone later in life. I have had, however, the honor of having them on me once more, not very many years ago. I had sold a piece of my land to a neighbor, and when I saw it again, he had cut down the forest that had been on it. Where were now the green shades, the glades and the hidden footpaths? And when I then heard again the whistle of their wings in the air, it gave me, with the pain, also a strange feeling of hope and strength—it was, after all, music of my youth.

"And did you never see her again?" I asked him.

"No," he said, and then, after a little while, "but I had a fantasy about her, a *fantaisie macabre*, if you like.

"Fifteen years later, in 1889, I passed through Paris on my way to Rome, and stayed there for a few days to see the exhibition and the Eiffel Tower which they had just built. One afternoon I went to see a friend, a painter. He had been rather wild as a young artist, but later had turned about completely, and was at the time studying anatomy with great zeal, after the example of Leonardo.

I stayed there over the evening, and after we had discussed his pictures, and art in general, he said that he would show me the prettiest thing that he had in his studio. It was a skull from which he was drawing. He was keen to explain its rare beauty to me. 'It is really,' he said, 'the skull of a young woman, but the skull of Antinoüs must have looked like that, if one had been able to get hold of it.'

"I had it in my hand, and as I was looking at the broad, low brow, the clear and noble line of the chin, and the clean deep sockets of the eyes, it seemed suddenly familiar to me. The white polished bone shone in the light of the lamp, so pure. And safe. In those few seconds I was taken back to my room in the Place François I, with the silk fringes and the heavy curtains, on a rainy night of fifteen years before."

"Did you ask your friend anything about it?" I said.

"No," said the old man, "what would have been the use? He would not have known."

REST CURE

by

Kay Boyle

KAY BOYLE, *born in 1903 in St. Paul, Minnesota, has lived much since her marriage in France, England, and Austria. Her very early writing dealt with social conditions, "undoubtedly due to my mother's great interest in radical politics and pacifism." "I have never wholly liked the work of women with the exception of Gertrude Stein. . . . They don't write simply or violently enough for my taste. . . . The short story and the novel are adequate finger exercises, but I, for one, am working towards a broad and pure poetic form." (Quoted from* Authors Today and Yesterday.) *Among her novels are* Plagued by the Nightingale, Gentlemen, I Address You Privately, My Next Bride, *and* Death of a Man (*1936*). *Her short stories appear in book form under the titles:* The First Lover, Wedding Day, *and* The White Horses of Vienna.

REST CURE

HE sat in the sun with the blanket about him, considering, with his hands lying out like emaciated strangers before him, that to-day the sun would endure a little longer. Certainly it would survive until the trees below the terrace effaced it, towards four o'clock, like opened parasols. A crime it had been, the invalid thought, turning his head this way and that, to have ever built up one house before another in such a way that one man's habitation cast a shadow upon another's. The whole sloping coast should have been left a wilderness with no order to it, stalked and leafed with the great strong trunks and foliage of these parts. Cactus plants with petals a yard wide and yucca tongues as thick as elephant trunks were sullenly and viciously flourishing all about the house. Upon the terrace had a further attempt at nicety and precision been made: there his wife had seen to it that geraniums were potted into the wooden boxes that stood along the wall.

From his lounging chair he could reach out and, with no effort beyond that of raising the skeleton of his hand, finger the parched stems of the geraniums. The south, and the Mediterranean wind, had blistered them past all belief. They bore their rosy top-knots or their soiled white flowers balanced upon their thick Italian heads. There they were, within his reach, a row of weary washerwomen leaning back from the villainous descent of the coast. What parched scions had thrust forth from their stems now served to obliterate in part the vision of the sun. With

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arms akimbo they surrounded him: thin burned Italian women with their meager bundles of dirty linen on their heads. One after another, with a flicker of irritation for his wife lighting his eye, he fingered them at the waist a moment, and then snapped off each stem. One after another he broke their stalks in two and dropped them away onto the pavings beneath his lounging chair. When he had finished off what plants grew within his reach, he lay back exhausted, sank, thin as an archer's bow, into the depths of his cushions.

"They kept the sun off me," he was thinking in absolution.

In spite of the garden and its vegetation, he would have the last drops of sun. He had closed his eyes, and there he lay looking straight ahead of him into the fathomless black pits of his lids. Even here, in the south, in the sun even, the coal-mines remained. His nostrils were sick with the smell of them and on his cheeks he felt lingering the slipping mantle of the English fog. He had not seen the mines since he was a young man, but nothing he had ever done between would alter them. There he sat in the sun with his eyes closed, looking into their depths.

Because his father had been a miner, he was thinking, the black of the pits had put some kind of blasphemy on his own blood. He sat with his eyes closed looking directly into the blank awful mines. Against their obscurity he set the icicles of one winter when the war was on, when he had spent his twilights seeking for pinecones under the tall trees in the woods behind the house. In Cornwall. What a vision! How beautiful that year, and many other years, might have been had it not been for the sour thought of war. Every time his heart had lifted for a hillside or a wave, or for the wind blowing, the thought of the turmoil going on had beset and stricken him. It had lain like a burden on his conscience every morning when he was coming awake. The first light moments of day coming had

warned him that despite the blood rising in his body, it was no time to rejoice. The war. Ah, yes, the war. After the mines, it had been the war. Whenever he had believed for half a minute in man, then he had remembered that the war was going on.

For a little while one February, it had seemed that the colors set out in Monte Carlo, facing the Casino, would obliterate forever the angry memories his heart had stored away. The great mauve, white, and deep royal purple bouquets had thrived a week or more, as if rooted in his eyes. Such banks and beds of richly petaled flowers set thick as thieves or thicker on the cultivated lawns conveyed the wish. Their artificial physiognomies masked the earth as well as he would have wished his own features to stand guard before his spirit. The invalid lifted his hand and touched his beard. His mouth and chin, he thought with cunning satisfaction, were marvelously concealed.

The sound of his wife's voice speaking in the room that opened behind him onto the terrace roused him a little as he sat pondering in the sun. She seemed to be moving from one long window to another, arranging flowers in the vases, for her voice would come across the pavings, now strong and close, now distant as if turned away, and she was talking to their guest about some sort of shrub or fern. A special kind, the like of which she could find nowhere on the Riviera. It thrived in the cool brisk fogs of their own land, she was saying. Her voice had turned towards him again and was ringing clearly across the terrace.

"Those are beautiful ones you have there now," said the voice of the gentleman.

"Ah, take care!" cried out his wife's voice, somewhat dimmed as though she had again turned towards the room. "I was afraid you had pierced your hand," she said in a moment.

When the invalid opened his eyes, he saw that the sun

was even now beginning to glimmer through the upper branches of the trees, was lolling along the prosperous dark upper boughs as if in preparation for descent. Not yet, he thought, not yet. He raised himself on his elbows and scanned the sky. Scarcely three-thirty, surely, he was thinking. The sun can't be going down at once.

"The sun can't be going down yet awhile, can it?" he called out to the house.

He heard the gravel of the pathway sparkling and spitting out from under the soles of their feet as they crossed it, and then his wife's heels and the boots of the guest struck and advanced across the paving stones.

"Oh, oh, the geraniums—" said his wife suddenly by his side.

The guest had raised his head and stood squinting up at the sun.

"I should say it were going down," he said after a moment.

He had deliberately stepped before the rays of it and stood leaning back against the terrace-wall. His solid gray head had served to cork the sunlight. Like a wooden stopper, thought the invalid, painted to resemble a man. With the nose of a wooden stopper. And the sightless eyes. And the creases when he speaks or smiles.

"But think what it must be like in Paris now," said the gentleman. "I don't know how you feel, but I can't find words to say how grateful I am for being here." The guest, thought the invalid as he surveyed him, was very conscious of being a guest—of accepting meals, bed, tea, society—and his smile was permanently set beneath his nose.

"Of course you don't know how I feel," said the invalid. He lay looking sourly up at his guest. "Would you mind moving out of the sun?" As the visiting gentleman skipped out of the way, the invalid cleared his throat, dissolved the little pellet of phlegm which had leapt to being

on his tongue so as not to spit before them, and sank back into his chair.

"The advantage—or rather *one* of the advantages of being a writer," said the visiting gentleman with a smile, "is that he can settle down wherever the fancy takes him. Now a publisher—"

"Why be a publisher?" said the invalid in irritation. He was staring again into the black blank mines.

His wife was squatting and stooping about his chair, gathering up in her dress the butchered geraniums. She said not a word, but crouched there picking them carefully up, one by one. By her side had appeared a little covered basket, and within it rattled a pair of castanets.

"I am sure I can very easily turn these into slips," she said gently, as if speaking to herself. "A little snip in the right place and they'll be as good as new."

"You can make soup out of them," said the invalid bitterly. "What's in the basket," he said, "making a noise?"

"Oh, a *langouste!*" cried out his wife. She had just remembered. "We bought you a *langouste*, alive, at the Beausoleil market. It's as lively as a rig!"

The visiting gentleman burst into laughter. The invalid could hear him gasping with enjoyment by his side.

"I can't bear them alive," said the invalid testily. He lay listening curiously to the animal rattling his jaws and clawing under the basket's lid.

"Oh, but with mayonnaise!" cried his wife. "Tomorrow!"

"Why doesn't Mr. What-do-you-call-him answer the question I put him?" asked the invalid sourly. His mind was possessed with the thought of the visiting man. "I asked him why he was a publisher," said the invalid. What a viper, what a felon, he was thinking, to come and live on me and not give me the satisfaction of a quarrel! He was not a young man, thought the invalid,

with his little remains of graying hair, but he had all the endurance and patience of a younger man in the presence of a master. All the smiling and bowing, thought the invalid with contempt, and all the obsequious ways. The man was standing so near to his chair that he could hear his breath whistling through his nostrils. Maybe his eyes were on him, the invalid was thinking. It gave him a turn to think that he was lying there exposed in the sun where the visitor could examine him pore by pore. Hair by hair could the visitor take him in and record him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the gentleman. "I'm afraid I owe you an apology. You see, I'm not accustomed to it."

"To what?" said the invalid sharply. He had flashed his eyes open and looked suspiciously into the publisher's face.

"To seeing you flat on your back," said the gentleman promptly.

"You covered that over very nicely," said the invalid. He clasped his hands across his sunken bosom. "You meant to say something else. You meant to say DEATH," said the invalid calmly. "I heard the first letter of it on your tongue."

He lay back in his chair again with his lids fallen. He could distinctly smell the foul fumes of the pits.

"Elsa," he said, as he lay twitching in the light, "I would like some champagne. JUST BECAUSE," he said sitting up abruptly, "I've written a few books doesn't mean that you have to keep the truth about me to yourself."

His wife went off across the terrace, leaving the two men together.

"Don't make a mistake," said the invalid smiling grimly. "Don't make any mistake. I'm not quite finished. Not QUITE. I still have a little more to write about," he said. "Don't you fool yourself, my dear."

"Oh, I flatter myself that I don't," said the gentleman agreeably. "I'm convinced there's an unlimited amount still to come. And I hope to have the honor of publishing some of it. I'm counting on that, you know." He ended on a playful note and looked coyly at the invalid. But every spark of life had suddenly expired in the ill man's face.

"I didn't know the sun would be off the terrace so soon," he said blankly. His wife had returned and was opening the bottle, carefully and without error, with the end of her pliant thumb. The invalid turned on his side and regarded her: a great strong woman whom he would never forget, never, nor the surprisingly slim crescent of her flexible thumb. All of her fingers, he lay thinking as he watched her, were soft as skeins of silk, and tied in at the joints and knuckles by invisible satin bands of faintest rose. And there was the visiting gentleman hovering about her, with his oh-let-me-please-mrs-oh-do-let-me-now. But her grip on the neck of the bottle was as tenacious as a snake's. She lifted her head, smiled, and shook it at their guest.

"Oh, no," she said, "I'm doing beautifully."

Just as she spoke the cork flew out and hit the gentleman square in the forehead. After it streamed a geyser of purest gold.

"Oh, oh, oh," cried the invalid. He held out his hands to the golden spray. "Oh, pour it here!" he cried. "Oh, buckets of it going! Oh, pour it over me, Elsa!"

The color had flown into Elsa's face and she was laughing. Softly and breathlessly she ran from glass to glass. There in the stems played the clear living liquid, like a fountain springing upward. Ah, that, ah, that, in the inwards of a man, thought the invalid joyfully! Ah, that, springing again and again in the belly and heart! There in the glass it ran, cascaded in needlepoints the length of his throat, went whistling to his pulses.

The invalid set down his empty glass.

"Elsa," he said gently, "could I have a little more champagne?"

His wife had risen with the bottle in her hand, but she looked doubtfully at him.

"Do you really think you should?" she asked.

"Yes," said the invalid. He watched the unbelievably pure stuff flowing out all over his glass. "Yes," he said. "Of course. Of course, I should."

A sweet shy look of love had begun to arch in his eyes.

"I'd love to see the *langouste*," he said gently. "Do you think you could let him out and let me see him run around?"

Elsa set down her glass and stooped to lift the cover of the basket. There was the green armored beast lifting its eyes, as if on hinges, to examine the light. Such an expression he had seen before, thought the invalid immediately. There was a startling likeness in those small audacious eyes. Such a look had there been in his father's eyes: that look, and the long smooth mustaches drooping across the wee clefted chin, gave the *langouste* such a look of his father that he exclaimed aloud.

"Be careful," said Elsa. "His claws are tied, but still—"

"I must have him out," said the invalid. He gripped the *langouste* firmly about the hips. He looks like my father, he was thinking. I must have him out where I can see.

In spite of its shackles, the animal contrived to wave his wide pinions in the air as the invalid lifted him up and set him on the rug across his knees. There was the same line of sparkling dew-like substance pearling the *langouste's* lip, the same weak disappointed lip, like the eagle's lip, and the bold suspicious eye. Across the sloping shoulders of the beast lay a sprinkling of brilliant dust, as black as coal dust and quite as luminous. Just as his father had

looked coming home at night, with the coal dust showered across his shoulders like a deadly mantle. Just such a deadly cloak of quartz and mica and the rotted roots of fern. Even the queer blue toothless look of his father about the jaws. The invalid took another deep swallow of champagne and let it seep quietly through his flesh and blood. Then he lifted his hand and stroked the *langouste* gently. You've never counted, he was thinking mildly. I've led my life very well without you in it. You better go back to the mines where you belong.

When he lifted up the *langouste* to peer into his face, the arms of the beast fell ludicrously open as if he were seeking to embrace the ailing man. He could see his father very well in him, coming home with the coal dirt all over him in the evening, standing by the door that opened in by halves, opening first the upper half and then the lower, swaying a little as he felt for the latch of the lower half of the door. With the beer he had been drinking, or the dew of the Welsh mist shining on his long mustaches. The invalid gave him a gentle shake and set him down again.

I got on very well without you, he was thinking. He sipped at his champagne and regarded the animal upon his knees. As far as I was concerned. As far as I was concerned you need never have been my father at all. Slowly and warily the wondrous eyes and feelers of the beast moved in distrust across the invalid's lap and bosom. A lot of good you ever did me, he was thinking. As he watched the *langouste* groping about as if in darkness, he began to think of the glowing miner's lamp his father had worn strapped upon his brow. Feeling about in the dark and choking to death underground, he was thinking impatiently. I might have been anybody's son. The strong shelly odor of the *langouste* was seasoning the air.

"I've got on very well without you," he was thinking

bitterly. From his wife's face he gathered that he had spoken aloud. The visiting gentleman looked into the depths of his glass of champagne.

"Don't misunderstand me," said the guest with a forbearing smile. "I'm quite aware of the fact that, long before you met me, you had one of the greatest publics and followings of any living writer—"

The invalid looked in bewilderment at his wife's face and at the face of the visiting man. If they scold me, he thought, I am going to cry. He felt his underlip quivering. Scold me! he thought suddenly in indignation. A man with a beard! His hand fled to his chin for confirmation. A man with a beard, he thought with a cunning evil gleam narrowing his eye.

"You haven't answered my question," he said aggressively to the visitor. "You haven't answered it yet, have you?"

His hand had fallen against the hard brittle armor of the *langouste's* hide. There were the eyes raised to his and the canny feelers lifted. His fingers closed for comfort about the *langouste's* unwieldy paw. Father, he said in his heart, father, help me. Father, father, he said, I don't want to die.

PENTHOUSE

by

Raymond M. Weaver

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PENTHOUSE

I

ALEX and I got off the bus at Fiftieth Street and crossed over, along the shadow of the Cathedral, towards Madison Avenue. For some reason of his own that I had not particularly worried to figure out, Niles never invited Alex to come to see him without first booking me as a fourth of the party: a kind of chaperon to the Trinity, Suzanne used to say. And if Alex was not free, or indisposed for reasons of his own, there was no party. This chaperonage was no hardship to me, for I had come to be devoted to all three of them; and when so together, they struck sparks and fire as never in a larger company. Then, as at no other time, their barriers were lowered, and with frequent brilliance, they talked almost exclusively about themselves.

On this particular afternoon, as if from habit, Alex stopped to pick me up on the way down. And as usual he had swung at once into the topic that seemed never to lose its freshness and mystery to him: Niles' sudden and unannounced marriage to Suzanne, and the ensuing three years of apparent perfection of happiness.

"I suppose there's no reason on either side of Hell why they shouldn't be happy," Alex had gone on to say for yet another time; "and if none but the rich deserve the fair, they have got their full deserts. Even Suzanne can struggle along rather comfortably on Niles' income. And she is, moreover, an art-object worth an expensive housing. But —really!—and after all!" And he dwindled into dots and dashes.

"Well, and why not?" I asked. For there would have

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been no conversation had I agreed with him. "It seems to me all very wonderful. Blue Beard and the Happy Prince—"

"To Hell with faery tales! You know Niles as well as I do. He's without doubts and without scruples. He always seems to have known precisely what he wanted to get out of this world,—and with a cool eye coolly resolved to see that he gets it, and in solid reality. And invariably he does. Below the disarming surface of that 'sweetness' and 'charm' of his—lucidity and ice!—And that *he* should be married to Suzanne! I tell you it doesn't make sense! *Him*, listening adoringly to her brainless bilge—her '*poems*'! O Holy Jesus!—on 'Lilting Love and passion's red gardenia'—you've heard them, my God!—*Him*, seeing 'abstract plastic genius' in the 'transmigratory soul portraits' that she slaps together out of plaster and soap and shredded wheat! You've seen him smile sweetly, and without one apparent symptom of nausea, through her tirades on the 'anima' and the 'animus' and—what does she call it?—'the ghost-being of the double serpentine coil.' And the cases of first-rate Scotch that he pours down the stinking maws of the Gurus and the naturals and the moth-eaten that Suzanne keeps dredging up from God knows where! You remember that old girl at Suzanne's last farewell dinner party?—the one that ran her salad fork through her hair and talked about '*in senso mistico*'! Hell, what's the use! Undoubtedly I'm—but it doesn't matter. I like Niles,—and I like Suzanne. Hell, everybody knows it!"

Alex always succeeded in working himself up to this recantation of all venom by the time the bus stopped before the Cathedral.

"I wonder where Suzanne is at this instant," Alex said laughingly as we walked along. "I don't know precisely what time it is in Thibet, but I doubt if she is lunching with the Grand Llama. Maybe she's murmuring Um to

her own Himalaya, or maybe she's airing herself by a levitation over Ararat."

As we neared the entrance, Alex growled half under his breath: "Announce us to that damned officious doorman."

Silence in the elevator up the twelve flights to Niles' apartment on the roof. The first time I went calling with Alex he had elaborately denounced the impropriety of ever uttering a word in an elevator.

In the music-room, a Duo-Art grand piano was in the midst of the Romance of Chopin's Concerto in E-minor; and beyond the French windows, reclining under the clear June sky, and between hedges of Irish juniper and flowering mountain laurel, Niles Kley gazed out between the Cathedral spires.

Alex's sensibilities—especially to odors and sounds—were as acute as those imputed to certain insects and quadrupeds. Music and perfume seemed to provoke in him the smoulderings of an enraged and incandescent fascination. He paused by the piano and looked out at Niles.

"Let's not violate his most austere devotions," Alex said in a clipped tight-throated whisper.

But Niles had already heard us enter. Rising his full height, and with a Roman salute and a glitter of teeth, he hailed us out into the open.

"It lacks only Suzanne to be perfect," he said with resonant warmth. "But she is *really* here, no matter. You and Malcolm indulge me in my private assurances; so I have told Hyacinthe to lay the table for four."

With ostentatious self-absorption Alex played a phantom smile about his lips and eyes as he uncoiled the sprout of a giant fern and declaimed softly: "And there is pansies. That's for thoughts. But you must wear your tuberoses and your Parma violets with a difference."

"You must admit, Alex, that he really does," Niles

answered laughing. "He's got used to it and even seems to like it."

The key to this cryptic exchange of ideas was the butler with the name of Hyacinthe, alias Peter Merdesen. Suzanne's butlers came and went in multiple succession, and Hyacinthe's tenure at the beginning had threatened to be of the briefest, and all over an accident of nomenclature. "But I could never bring myself to repeat your name in public," Suzanne had protested at their first interview; "and if you should enter my mind when I was thinking in French—!" Suzanne had recounted it all to Niles and Alex and me. The poor man's face had gathered even more complexion. "O sanguine flower inscribed with woe": the Miltonic line had flashed into her mind as her eyes had rested in questioning sympathy upon his violet and troubled face, and to him, in triumphant illumination she had exclaimed: "I have it! 'O sanguined flower inscribed with woe', your name is emblazoned for me on your countenance! Your *true* name is Hyacinthe."—"But it is Merdesen, Madame,—Merdesen—" Suzanne had cut him short. "Hyacinthe, please!—spare me. You have rebaptized yourself in your own blood. *Consummatum est.* So now, Hyacinthe—."

Hyacinthe's stalwart bulk approached with cocktails.

Alex winked and raised his glass ironically "to Suzanne" and the ritual of the afternoon was begun.

"With us four, as usual," Niles said, "I can relax into being myself, and laugh at Alex's morbidities."

From this the conversation took its invariable shift to Suzanne. Niles had the evening before telephoned to her in Budapest. In her roadster she had crossed the Alps, fled through Austria, and was headed for the Carpathians and an indefinite seclusion in an abandoned Mohammedan mosque on the outskirts of some unpronounceable place in Poland. Thence, by widening digressions, a full circle was swung back again to Suzanne, and Alex and Niles.

"You know," Niles said, "most of the men that I have the closest dealings with down town are, I suppose, what would be rated as enviably successful. But look at them! When I do I am glad that Suzanne has sustained my courage to cross over to the other side. Each year they are a million or so older and flabbier and deader and deadlier: rank unburiable corpses. *Theirs* is at once a pathetic and an evil failure. To be swift fated is not always to be woeful beyond all. For youth—"

"To sentiment," Alex said, raising Suzanne's empty glass, "and another round of failures to Niles."

"No, Alex," Niles said; "sentiment *and* success indeed, to all four of us." He smiled across the table to Suzanne's vacant chair. "Isn't she this afternoon more radiant than ever before! If it were possible, a kind of utter frustration transfigured."

"Don't you see, Niles," Alex said, "while you are whiling away your semi-lucid intervals of 'failure' laughing at what you call so jauntily my 'morbidities,' Suzanne is sending echoes of ha-ha up and down the Polish Corridor, laughing at all of us—and at you in particular. But seriously—almost too damned seriously for this communion board of self-ostentation—you seem to me, Niles, the one and only really and miraculously fortunate man I've ever known. This is an offence few would be able to forgive in you. But the rot you talk on occasion—especially the cosy peeps you give me into that central refrigerating valve you point to as your heart—they give me a smart ache in the gut. Why can't you sit tranquil in your Eden, under the showers of Providence that have so generously sprinkled you, without sneaking in a few little badly painted snakes and then thinking to consternate your friends at your high-minded daring in wrestling with a whole zoo of boa constrictors. Your cool brazen condescension to gamble in fortunes with Wall Street 'failures': you, who have already 'failed' to the debasement of a

mere roof on the East Side—not to specify your other fiascos. Why don't you quit this back sliding into corruptible treasure? What with Suzanne, and your sensitive soul, and the Vale of Cashmir—"

"Alex," Niles said, "you're romantic with a guilty conscience. You are afraid to love anything—especially yourself. You simply cannot conceive the possibility of the kind of love between Suzanne and me—though I have no doubt that you've got it neatly lettered and diagrammed. And Suzanne's being away since our marriage for several months each year: I can hear you and the world at large concluding from that fact that a perfect love could dispense with such interludes. I'll grant you, that for myself I never would have proposed it. What faith and wisdom I have is Suzanne's. You have heard her speak of the renunciation that heightens love's glamor. That, to a romantic, must appear only rhetoric and self-deception: as if you can never come to think that you've been in love until you wake up to love among the ruins. What Suzanne says is true. And it is true, too, that I might retire tomorrow. But I shall not. That again would be playing the romantic. You, of course, are convinced there are truer and simpler and more obvious reasons. What do you think they are?—Frankly, and without kid gloves, out with them!"

Niles smiled gravely at Alex, waiting.

This I recognized to be my cue. For each evening that we spent together seemed to follow an essentially identical pattern. This friendship between Alex and Niles was one of the strangest I have ever seen. Patently, they were devoted to each other, and with what was doubtless the most intimate approach to friendship in the life of either. Only between themselves, and in the presence of me, were they ever known, apparently, to sit and hold their pulses and then to discuss the symptoms. In all their other contacts outside of this closed circle the reserves of each were

absolute. And yet, once together, and almost as if by perversity and a deeply veiled mutual resentment, they began reaching out probes into the quick of each other's souls. And I am sure that their affection for me grew in some large part out of my genuine interest in listening in upon their self-exposures without any tragic concern, alert to rescue them again to trivialities when poison and rapier seemed imminent.

On this evening, to the second when I was about to interrupt, the smothered buzz of the door bell instantaneously diverted Niles to an outspoken surprise at the strangeness of the intrusion.

We sat silent, listening, while Hyacinthe opened the front door, parleyed there for a moment, and in stately silence presented Niles with a silver tray bearing a cablegram.

"Didn't I tell you she was with us all along?" Niles exclaimed in glowing eagerness. "Wait and hear."

He tore open the envelope and read.

I saw the smile die from his eyes and lips, a barely perceptible single twitch at the corner of his mouth, and all color die from his face. An automobile horn tooted in the street far below. A faint breeze rustled the leaves of the mountain laurel outside.

Alex rose, and standing beside Niles reached out his hand towards the cablegram.

"Give it to me," he said, as if in anger.

With a curious kind of silent and angular precision, Niles rose, and with his eyes fixed upon Alex's, handed him the message.

It seemed that suddenly, and without warning, I had been plunged into some grotesque nightmare being enacted by automatons.

Niles walked around the table to Suzanne's empty place, and bent his white lips over as if to kiss her hair.

And still nobody said anything.

Alex read, and turning towards Niles encircled him with one arm. Niles recoiled, as if in infuriated contempt, and burying his face in his hands, sank upon his knees before Suzanne's chair, and with his face as if buried in her lap, sobbed uncontrollably.

By that time I had recovered myself sufficiently to be beside Alex. "Of course, I know it's Suzanne—but—"

"Bright of you to guess it!" Alex snapped me short. "Killed—But what's the idea of standing around like that! It's not decent for us to be here now. Come, let's get out."

"But—" This manly shame of Alex's—

Before I could finish even my thought, Alex had repeated his command that we leave.

In the doorway we met Hyacinthe bearing in the dessert.

"To Hell with you, too!" Alex exclaimed. "Ask no questions, but, God damn you, keep out of this room till you're called!"

Once out of the elevator and on the street, Alex said: "Well, Malcolm, that exhausts the conversation for this afternoon. So let's part here. I'm walking home. I want to get drunk—and I want to get drunk alone."

Little did I then guess that the ghastliness of the day was then but half fulfilled.

Still dazed, I stood before the entrance of Niles' apartment house, watching Alex walk up Madison Avenue until he disappeared. Had I but known that I would never see him again!—That night he would put a bullet in his head.

II

This double impact with death, and with death so wanton, and unnecessary, and insanely cruel, engulfed me in a turmoil of anxiety and guilt. I accused myself, of course, for letting Alex go off as he had, in that curious mood, alone; for leaving Niles so solitary in his grief, fearful, with

growing anxiety, of some last hideous and sudden disaster to him. The following afternoon, I called at Niles' apartment. My name was telephoned up to the twelfth floor, to bring back the curt announcement: "Not at home." Confident that this was a lie, I entered the first telephone booth, knowing that Hyacinthe would answer, and that at worst I could make an indirect contact.

Hyacinthe did answer, and with his characteristic imperturbability stated: "Sorry, Sir, but Mr. Kley is at business as usual."

"Impossible, Hyacinthe!" I protested, identifying myself and trying to explain my concern. "How does he seem?—And don't you think he ought to have someone there with him, especially of evenings?"

Hyacinthe assured me Niles was indeed at business, that there were no reports to be made of Niles' behavior, that Niles had left instructions that he was at home to none.

Futile as it seemed, I did succeed in extracting from Hyacinthe the promise that he would warn me promptly the moment that Niles relented his prohibition against all callers, or seemed in any way in need of help.

If Suzanne's marriage had been a choice morsel for speculation and amateur prophecy, her sudden death was an even more exhaustless and delectable item. Followed immediately, as it had been, by Alex's suicide, there was a renaissance of wonder and imagination in every congregation of her friends I entered. Only on one single point, however, was opinion unanimous: that Alex's had been a life embittered by a hopeless passion for Suzanne—a poignant agony during her life, but with her destruction an intolerable vacancy. On the surface of things, and by all the orthodox superstitions that enshroud the mysteries of the heart, this neat explanation was plausible enough. Though I had no very direct and cogent evidence to offer even to myself in refutation, it was my deepest conviction

nevertheless that it was false. But I soon learned the folly of betraying any intimation of my doubt.

"Angel child," Eva Taglibue had boomed forth to me in her deepest contralto, "if not for love of Suzanne, was it for a white and drifted passion for your own seraphic innocence?—Get me another cocktail, Malcolm, and tell me the latest bulletin of Niles."

Niles!

Unhampered by any first hand information, Niles' friends and acquaintances had haloed him with every glamor of romance, and bestowed upon him a kind of apotheosis. Transfigured into the mirror of husbands wedded and bereft, a perfect blend of all manly strength and manly tenderness, grief stricken, his very name became at once a benediction and an aphrodisiac. The Spartan stoicism with which he shielded from impious eyes the pageant of his bleeding heart! Daily, with invulnerable façade, he crossed the threshold of the sanctuary of his sorrow, and faced the world of men; but within that sanctuary, no mortal was privileged to tread.

Cut off from all direct communication with Niles, but lonely to see him, I had written him, but without provoking a syllable in reply; again I had telephoned Hyacinthe, to meet stolid and loyal evasion; once again I had even tried to call, but again Hyacinthe had effectively barred the way. Months passed, but still I nursed the hope that as the keenest edge of Niles' sorrow was subtly corroded by time, he would come to remember me, and let me see him as before.

In the early autumn, and to have my first immediate delight quelled to alarm, Hyacinthe telephoned me one morning, his voice freighted with doom: "I must see you, Sir," he said. "It is serious; too serious for any but his closest living friend to know." And this was all he would say. Further revelations he reserved for the privacy of bolted doors.

"Tell me, Hyacinthe, please, at once—what is it, Hyacinthe?" I began before he was fairly in my rooms.

He eyed me sedately, unperturbed by my haste.

Finally: "I beg your pardon, Sir, but the Sacrament of Baptism and the rights of legitimate birth—"

"Yes, yes, forgive me. It's—eh?"

"I'd like to be thought of as Merdesen, Sir, if you don't mind."

"Of course. Now, Merdesen—"

"It's a painful fact, and I've debated several months before telling it, and I mean no slander in saying it, and I've never said it before, but Mr. Kley is out of his mind."

"Out of his mind, Merdesen! It can't be, Merdesen! He's been going to business daily, hasn't he?—and the one thing that everybody who sees him says—"

"I've never seen him at business, Sir, so about that I have no convictions. It's when he's not at business that it's only me who sees him, Sir—so I'm the only person who can say what I might think about that."

"Please go on, Merdesen! When he comes home—?"

"I don't know if you are one of those, Sir, who believes in ghosts—"

"Keep your ghost stories for later, Merdesen.—When Mr. Kley gets home—?"

"I'm coming to that, Sir. But first I must say that I have no faith in ghosts myself. And when those about me begin behaving as if they were seeing them, I find myself being not quite comfortable either about myself or them. For either I have lost control of my own reason, or she that was Mrs. Kley is walking, or Mr. Kley is clean out of his head. You will understand that as butler, Sir, I have occasion to overhear much. And of evenings, after Mr. Kley has unlatched his own front door, and almost before he is well in his apartment, he calls out the first name of the late Mrs. Kley, and rushes into what used to be her room, and laughs, and talks, and rings for me to

bring in a vase for the flowers for Madame. Is that natural, Sir?—And he sends packages to her—which make me feel dishonest and confused to accept. All sorts of other things like that, Sir. And ever since that time when you three gentlemen dined at four places, Mr. Kley has sat alone at a table set for two—and once or twice, Sir, even for three. And there are times when he sits there by himself and talks more than he eats. Not so long ago, as I entered with the cheese, he turned to me and asked me abruptly, but with great earnestness: 'Hyacinthe, what do you think of all this? I suppose that you've decided quite positively that I'm lunatic, haven't you, Hyacinthe?' "

He swallowed with great effort.

"What did you answer, Merdesen?"

"It was an embarrassing question, Sir."

"Granted. But what did you say?"

"I waited for some further comment from Mr. Kley, Sir."

"And—?"

"He looked up as if he felt sorry for me, and rested his eyes on me rather pathetically for a moment—and then merely smiled.—That's the way he is, Sir. And what makes it all the more the pity is, except for his behavior that I've said, and his writing much of evenings at the desk of her that was Mrs. Kley, he's in every way himself."

"You're all on the wrong track, Merdesen. What you're calling madness—"

"I should be glad to think you were right, Sir. But if you had once seen for yourself—"

"Haven't I tried to, Merdesen? And who but yourself has seen to it very particularly that I did not get in?"

"Your pardon, Sir. That was then. But now—"

"This very evening," I exclaimed. And then in a burst of gratitude and enthusiasm that heightened Merdesen's complexion, I grasped his hand.

III

That night Hyacinthe was as good as his word. With a perfection of sardonic guile he admitted me beyond the doorman, and into the entrance of the apartment as if I were the merest casual uninvited stranger. Parading ahead of me, Hyacinthe stood at attention on the threshold of the music room, and like any major domo of a court reception, pealed forth my name.

In an instant all my misgivings were allayed. Niles greeted me with the warmest cordiality, as if indeed there had been no upheaval in his life, no interruption to our friendship, and as if he had been sitting in eager expectation of my arrival.

"How did you know that I was coming tonight?" I asked.

"Dear old transparent and invariable Malcolm!—Expect you tonight? You are the single person that Suzanne and I have never doubted. But don't behave as if you had broken in upon a *tête-à-tête*. Come—join us."

Niles led me out upon the roof.

In the late twilight, and in the midst of a glimmering space of huge copper-gold chrysanthemums, Niles had been lingering at table. I was immediately struck by the occasion of Hyacinthe's alarm: Niles had not dined alone. Hyacinthe was instructed to bring me a third chair.

I began without preamble.

"See here, Niles," I said, "you've got to stop this sort of thing. It's morbid. Cutting yourself off from all normal human contacts—going to business each day with the edge and warmth of a liquid air icicle—and coming home each evening to a solitary performance like this. Somebody's got to say it to you—so there it is. I don't want to mess around in your private affairs—"

"You couldn't, Malcolm," he said in cool contempt; "you don't know enough about them.—I'm sorry to have

said that, of course, and besides it's untrue after all. And besides, you have, for once, seen me stripped down to raw emotion, naked and ashamed. So try to pretend Suzanne's chair was never there, if it offends you."

"That's the trouble, Niles—always to pretend! Just for once, the novelty to me of the courage of a little truth!"

Silently his wide eyes were defensively upon me, waiting for me to proceed. It hurt me to wound him. But the circumstances were desperate, and for once I had dared to make the plunge. And now it was no longer possible for me to bob smilingly to the surface, toss the water from my hair, and call across to him as if both of us, afraid of the water, needed assurance we were safe within the ropes.

"While you've been shut up here, I've seen a lot of people; and everybody that knows you, and who knew Alex and Suzanne—"

I wished he would lose his temper—do anything to relieve me of the cruelty of going on. The most offensive way, I felt, would be the most summary and downright and clean. I started again, plunging more wildly. Anything to shatter that façade!

"Everywhere I go, you should hear how they are all saying how ideally married you and Suzanne were; how, but for you, Alex would not have killed himself, but might instead have married her himself just as happily as you did."

It was villainous to say this to him, I knew. Not a sound from him. In the growing darkness I could distinguish only a pale slit oval for his face.

"This is the point, Niles. I know as well as you do that all this gossip is nonsense. I don't of course know why Alex killed himself—but it doesn't seem to me that it was out of frustrated love for Suzanne. But she is dead, Niles. Alex is dead, and Suzanne is dead too. It's terrible, Niles, I know it. But to shut yourself up this way, with these

lugubrious dinner parties, with the mockery of all this pretence—"

"Shut up, God damn you! Close that dirty, lying, blasphemous mouth of yours, or I'll—I'll—"

His breath quivered, panting into silence, and in the darkness the pale luminosity of his hands blotted out his face.

"I'm sorry, Malcolm," he said finally, stemming the backwash of receding rage. "And yet"—there was a new vibrance in his voice, as if the whole lashing tide had turned to boil again upon him, "whose business is it whom Alex loved?—sweet God, the inalienable solitude of each of us! And those stinking, grinning jackals, with the heat, the hysteria, the gymnastics of their little recesses of passion, befouling Alex's name, or Suzanne's, and trying to mutilate all love to their pasture! The very blood of Alex is scarlet upon them. And they lust that I do as Alex did to seal and authenticate my love for Suzanne!"

He paused, struggling to master himself.

When he spoke again, his voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"Poor dead Alex," he said. "And yet their myths about him taint his memory less than the truth about him would. And you, Malcolm, if you had been only a little more, or a little less blind! I do not say this to pain you, you must believe me. But, Malcolm, hadn't you the eyes to see that Suzanne loved Alex when some years ago they first met? Suzanne herself has said so much to me. Did it mean nothing to you that Alex did all he could to avoid Suzanne until she was safely married to me?—were you not aware of his unaccountable resentment of me, both before and after I came to love Suzanne?—and his tortured intimacy with each of us after Suzanne and I were rated by the world as man and wife? Did all this mean nothing to you?—What happened in his heart the night he killed himself, that we shall never know. But in imagination I have

again and again tried to follow in his footsteps as he walked off alone that afternoon. The hideous suddenness of that cablegram—my own brutal rebuff of his attempt at sympathy—my burst of naked grief: how profoundly these could tear up one so haunted and so ingrown as himself! Then home, alone, and to get drunk—and with each drink feeling sorrier and sorrier for me, and Suzanne, and sorriest for himself, unloving and unloved. Till, melted to an orgy of self pity, and self loathing—"

Abruptly he paused, as if in horrified expectation. When he continued his voice had again receded.

"The blind, stupid malice of the world! Let them say he loved Suzanne. You are right, Malcolm—in *their* sense he certainly did not. Nor in my sense, either. In their sense, love to him was a grossness and a betrayal that he feared would leave his heart revolted and even more desolate. It was in friendship rather than in love that he more than half hoped to quench the aching irony of his solitude. But he never dared frankly to look into the eyes of the fact that this friendship which he craved was really but a disguised love—and a love with no possible fulfillment but in bitterness and shame. His murdered halves, lacerated between themselves—my God, Malcolm, did you never suspect that it was you that Suzanne hoped might rescue him from his guilt and fears? You are not to blame for the promiscuous clarity of your affections, Malcolm. Poor dead Alex!—And a grave, they say, is a fine and private place."

"But do you mean, Niles—," I began, in dazed turmoil.

"I mean what I say," he interrupted. "That it is obtuse and misguided insight on your part to try to persuade me that it is the part of humanity and wisdom to go back among vindictive sentimentalists that draw such sweet solace from the hope that love will crush me to death as its next victim, but with an agony more exquisitely prolonged than was Alex's. There I would be only a bored

alien. Am I so 'morbid' in this isolation? Each day I have many exciting contacts, vividly competitive, impersonal—an absorbing game. Then I come home here to Suzanne. Do you begrudge me that happiness, Malcolm? And does it seem to you so terribly 'unnatural' that in my love for Suzanne I might continue to grow, and prosper, and exult? Are even you blind to the fullness and glamor and truth potential in my love for Suzanne?"

Though he paused, I dared not answer.

"You were here, Malcolm, when I first learned of the crushing news of Suzanne's death. It nearly felled me. Under the initial impact of that, it seemed that her mortal destruction had left an aching void at the very core of the universe: a void which, when no longer filled by her serene and radiant loveliness seemed to leave the world to collapse into nothingness upon itself. Suzanne had always encouraged me to the faith that love is, in its final mystery, a resonance from within, and that all persons loved, at best an answering echo from without. Ah, Malcolm, this resonance, this echo, and the mystic blending into one perfect melody that love craves! And to know that between no two living separate souls can there ever be this miracle of consummation. Only solitude, and eternal duality. With Suzanne's death, and Alex's, every resonance and every answering echo seemed at first to have forsaken me. And yet, it was only in this dark night of my love that the full splendor and immortality of Suzanne began to gleam against the silent blackness. This little game I have been playing, this pretense you despise, this dining alone in company—it was my weakness to at first feel that I needed this to fortify my love. But now, Malcolm, and since you desire it, I can henceforth dispense with that too. Love, I now know, can be stronger than the accidents of life and death besides. Perfect love, I now know, is the fullness of joy, of life—and life with ever greater abundance. And death, I have now through sorrow learned,

can destroy only what divides us. Grief now would be blasphemy. For what have I lost that is essential to love, in lacking merely Suzanne herself?"

A black pool of shadow descended upon the table cloth opposite me, and the smothered sound of deeply indrawn breathing. In guilt, and shame, and inexpressible compassion, I bent towards Niles. But before I could touch him, his teeth glittering through a radiant smile, his whole manner transformed. With that smile it froze over me that Niles was beyond the need of friendship.

PURYEAR'S HORNPIPE

by

Leslie Dykstra

LESLIE DYKSTRA *has in her blood the mountain life of which she writes, for she is descended from pioneers of Tazewell and Smyth Counties near the western end of Virginia, where the state reaches into the mountains between West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. She spends her summers there and her winters in Washington, where her husband is a staff member of the National Emergency Council. She owns a fiddle, "hand-rived from the heart of a maple," which was played successively by her great-grandfather, grandfather, and father. Many of her poems have been published, but* Puryear's Hornpipe *is her first published story.*

PURYEAR'S HORNPIPE

JUDY could hear the doves calling, and on a sudden the sound was Granpy's fiddle.

She darted around the house and on to the porch, stopping in front of him with eager demand. "Scotched me a new jig-step by accident, outen the bean patch!"

Roused from his memories, he was pointedly surprised.

She made a heartsome picture for his faded eyes to study. Her hair was smoothed back into twin shoulder braids that held the gold light of sun on a brown leaf. Her eyes were gray-hazel, deep-set and pleasant, and her mouth seemed, like his, only wanting excuse to smile.

"Hit's a pippin; want to see?"

"Sure-certain," he said with fond interest.

"I reaches straight up, hopperin' high, and comes down twisty. Thisaway," she chirruped and made a sudden leap, appeared to fall, but then righted herself with a glib movement born of mountain grace, unmindful that her apron-slip threatened to fall off any minute. "Aim to weave it three spots in the hornpipe figure."

"Hit's foretold kain't no other youngun out-step my bantling," he said proudly.

"Uncle Steuben wonders him ifn I didn't win wide fame, come Festival time tomorrow," she owned. "Gin judges and Sutherland's so minded. Case-happen a medal, I'll pin it on your put-away suit, or a green-back dollar, mammy can spend."

"Now ain't that handsome! . . . and has Melia fixed victuals plentiful to last?"

"Victuals plentiful to stuff an army," answered the

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crisp voice of Judy's mother from behind her. She stood on the sunken sill, drying her hands on a starch-wilted apron. "If two fried rooster-birds, ham-meat, boiled eggs, strained greens, white bread, and new honey kain't spread far enough—" and she broke off tartly, fretted by cooking, "to keep four folks alive over two days—I'll declare!"

Melia was the widow of Peter's only son. She was a tall, comely person, with work-worn hands, but still unbowed, standing like some town lady in black silk. The weather-browned face might have been called sharp from its steadfast mien but for the eyes, deep-set and dark, that could sparkle with enjoyment of being.

"Do for a regiment!" She leaned over and smoothed the old man's long white locks that the breeze had riffled and took up his fiddle. "Seems like my conscious tells me Granpy's strength might fall short of the journey."

"Who you talkin' about—me?" Peter rose from his chair bridling. "Never felt more able-bodied," he declared, drawing himself up like an old soldier, but Judy pulled him down again.

"Rest yourself, Granpy; take ye plenty of rest. Would be nary a reason for travel did you fail to see me win Puryear fame." And she turned to Melia with anxious eyes. "Reckon he got peaked account'f no eggs for breakfast this long while?"

Peter snorted at such a notion. " 'Twas no hardship. But I hope they brought you good barter?"

"Fowls earned fair exchange," Melia said, "but eggs—not powerful. Mr. Bonwick, he says, 'Hope these eggs air fresh.' 'Fresh!' I tells him. 'Why, Judy has been hand-pickin' these yer fresh eggs from under our hens every single blessed day for nigh on three months' time!' "

"Got me a blue store dress and watered silk hair ribbons to match," Judy said and paused with her lips earnestly parted, showing even white teeth that had just finished

crowding out the baby set. "And blue socks, boy-style, and black sateen for dancin' drawers."

"Seems like that last item air a luxury," Melia told her. "But your white cotton ones bein' patched to pieces from skinnin' the cat on the gate bar, kain't have people scandalized."

"And no new brogues?" Peter asked.

"Kin dance a heap easier in old leather, anyhow," Judy declared, and went in a whirl of cartwheels across the porch, stirring a drift of leaves at the far end.

"Come, both," Melia said. "Contrive sleep now so to be up and ready for Steuben in the morning."

Steuben was Melia's brother. He lived over in the Garden settlement, and worked as a trucker, building roads. But he was faithful to plow and help her plant corn in the cleared patch and give seasonal advice.

Stars were paling when he drove his small truck up "Four-foot Road" and on to the narrow cattle trail that in old times was The Pike leading to Tennessee. There was a lemon-yellow light flushing the mountain rim, and by the fence where he stopped locust and aspen leaves drew silver from dawn.

Fresh hay was packed in the truck body and over it a straw mattress. It was a soft bed for Granpy to rest on with a bolster for his back against the driver's high seat where Melia climbed.

White mists bordered thickets of blackberry and sumac when the car got under way. Judy, facing the wide log cabin that was over-topped by giant sugar maples, felt the pang of great enterprise at leaving home. Beyond rose the slanting meadows, lush with bluegrass, where Jill and her colt and the feeder-steers grazed. The house, its rock chimneys, the encircling trees, the secret blue-green meadows, together formed a strategic defence, cupped lovely and remote, which she dimly felt and could find no words for.

At the first ravine crossing Steuben halted the car and filled two jugs at his favorite spring. The water came gushing from a rocky fissure, sparkled for a little way across a clearing, and mysteriously re-entered the dark earth.

"Won't find water God-freshened as this anywhers down yonder," he declared, and the sweep of his arm took in the world, with Burke's Garden-valley below that was beginning to shine like a colored patchwork quilt spread for an airing.

As they joggled on again Judy could hear Melia telling him how the fine green dress she wore had been come by.

"And the relief Lady entered whilst I bargained with that old smoothie—Bonwick. Came close, smiling kindly-handsome, a-lookin' on and a-listenin' in as if I might be her special business like the Coon Hollow folks. Made old Government-dawzzled Bonwick give half a yard more than measured. . . . Then she went rummagin' and outen a barrel of clothes, contributed me this, 'Here's a knitted suit, a bit too large for you maybe, but little worn. Would you like it?' Took me by surprise. Was near knocked speechless. But I held up the skirt, lookin' at it thisaway and that, and thinkin', 'Ain't no Puryear begged yet even from Government after wartimes.' But I took further thought: 'Ifn my old garments air *so* seedy a stranger pities, woe-me. I best accept the gift and cause no shame to Judy at the Festival.' Waited, clearin' my mind, 'twell Bonwick pushed forward. 'Well, do you want it?' he pressed, 'or *don't* you want it? Tell the Lady.' . . . So I said, 'Hit's mighty rump-sprung, ma'm, but I thank you just the same.'"

Judy had never seen beyond the green bowl of Burke's Garden. Now she found herself passing over its farther rim, only to meet with another valley and still another mountain and towns with names like early history. Ridin' fast, time kain't be measured, she thought. No sooner

leave one strange sight than another smacks you in the eye, and fades before its shape is known.

When they had dropped Chilhowie behind, Granpy stretched out flat and went to sleep, and Judy closed her eyes too, and only came awake when she heard Steuben saying "Konnarock!" Saying "Konnarock" as if 'twer a battle won. And then they started up the last long grade that would come out on Flat Top, journey's end.

Just ahead an unwieldy truck rattled, careless of Kingdom Come. Its wide bed grazed banks of shale on the one side and on the other overlapped sheer nothing. In it young women and men stood packed close together, laughing and swaying with every fearsome lurch.

Trailing Steuben was a shiny automobile that held fine town ladies who hid their faces in gay fluttering handkerchiefs against the churned-up dust. Their driver wore a special cap and yet looked worried; unlike Uncle, Judy thought, who could close-curve a downgone place at road's edge withouten qualms.

Then they were at road head, and a sentinel waved Steuben to a stop. There was a sound of loud voices and commotion.

"I'll pay you no dollar!" Steuben told him.

"I got to collect a dollar for every car passed," the man said.

"Been invited, and aim to fiddle."

"Show your ticket then and get goin'! You're holdin' up the line."

"Wasn't handed a ticket."

"In that case, pay me a dollar and go get a *re*tund from Sutherland," the man ordered and cussed Steuben good and plenty.

"See you in hell, first!" And Uncle, fightin' mad, braked the car and began to climb down.

"Aw, keep your hickory shirt on, friend," the stranger

said, changin' his tune just in time, and made out to laugh, passing them on; though whur else they could a passed to was a question, Judy pondered.

Steuben drove by a mort of cars drawn close together at a level place, paying other sentinels no mind, and took a grass-slippy track to summit, a short journey on, there to strike camp. All was happy excitement.

"Sis honey, redd yourself up now," Melia said, sweeping them all free of dust and then filled a tin basin with jug water. "Wash face and hands. . . . Hi, Granpy, how you feelin'?"

"Fine as a fiddle, new-strung."

"Here, swallow this drop o' pick-me-up, and I hope it won't knock you off'n a cliff backward. . . . Steuben, light into the victuals now and eat hearty."

Steuben was grumbling, half boastfully, "You heered me tell him! 'Unused mountain-tops air free for all.'"

"Steub, he's too quick on the trigger," Melia said laughing. "But a dollar a car—gracious! Who-all gets the money?" And Granpy said, "Man whut owns the mountain, likely, and no wonder he failed to put a fence around it!" And Steuben laughed fit to bust.

Then he stood Judy on a high rock where five States could be seen on a clear day. "But we'd best brogue it down to the doin's now," he said. "Might-nigh time for the music. I'll guide Granpy whilst you-all tag clost."

It didn't take long to get to the Festival tent, but there was a great stir of people in and out of the entrances and going back and forth from the refreshment shelter. After much pushing they found themselves on one side of the platform with other mountain talent, but the four rows of benches were already taken, and they had to stand alongside; authorities and music judges sat in a row of chairs opposite.

Jim Sutherland, red-faced and breathing hard, rushed up to check Steuben's name on a paper, together with

Judy's who would dance to his fiddling. Though mountain born, Jim had the dress and manners of town, and it was said he had got himself in a spraddle-fix, with one foot set on a mountain and t'other in a city, and him not knowin' which way to jump. He played a tricky banjo himself, and today served well as linkster, coupling mountain and city understanding, for the music promoters.

But he was a good showman, and now he started off the preliminary contests in banjo, ballad-singing and fiddle music by introducing a man who gave them a party-piece, quick and devilish:

> When a man falls in love with a little turtle dove,
> He will linger all around her under jaw;
> He will kiss her for her mother and sister and brother
> Until her daddy comes and kicks him from the door,
> Draws the pistol from his pocket,
> Pulls the hammer back to cock it,
> And vows he will blow away his giddy brains;
> Oh, his ducky says he mustn't
> 'Tisn't loaded, and he doesn't,
> And they're kissing one another once again.

Everybody applauded, even those jammed in the walkways below where no breeze could wend through.

Next came an infare song, then a sorrowful strain that gave way in turn to a wistful air of love.

Judy knew many of them and joyfully called each by name to Granpy. "That's 'Leather Britches,'" and "that's 'Cripple Creek,'" and "that's 'Herald's Murder'"; and even town folks, who had come to listen, joined in singing the old favorite, "Barbara Ellen," a courting song that began gayly enough, and ended in heart-break.

Songs followed one after another so fast it left no time betwixt to think on a one. There were quick tunes made you feel upsy-daisy, and others like the crack o' doom; verses fast as skip-the-rope, and songs with many stanzas

weary as freight cars—empties foldin' back on theirselves; but Granpy clapped his hands for each singer till he was tuckered, and a fat woman gave him her part of a bench with room for Judy too.

Jim Sutherland, in a nimble bearm, prodded singers forward, one by one, only to hold the watch on each, bound to finish and make way for the next, even though applause was lavish, and compliments plentiful.

But now to the central chair of honor came a strong yet gaunt mountain man that would not be hurried. The very sight of his kind homeliness smoothed Judy's spirit.

He took a firm position, squared to the world, his great head fixed like a winter-weary hound that sits in pale sunlight sniffing at spring. Two long ginger-colored locks of hair covered his ears, and his eyes, that were mild and brown, drooped at the outward corners. Beneath them hung dewlaps of paunchy skin.

He hummed no note before. His mouth opened, and began the tune on a midway pitch. With the timeless air of a large soul he sat, and his voice gathered full volume to the vibrant chord of his guitar, and then quieted down to the end of each stanza. He was no more conscious of listening people than distant waters of a creek's flowing; and as the ballad glided to its due crest, Judy glided with it, carried away by the melancholy twang whose repetition was the secret of spellbinding, felt only by those with minds easy enough to give over. The words were not so important as the feeling invoked, with colors of fantastic pioneer romance and all that darkling mountain memory held.

Judy saw two lovers by a graveside. The air seemed fragrant with cinnamon pinks. A survigrous sun burst through racing clouds and orange-lighted a glimmery tombstone. Slowly the lovers embraced beside it, and slowly moved away. Smiling—sad, then happy, they

took a leafy crested Pike beyond—The Wilderness Road. In mind's eye, she saw them walking steadily through misty woodland and purple glen amid the wayside flowers and rare bird-twitter. Two lovers, lovely forevermore, haunting The Wilderness Road. . . .

The rapt child was fere with the singer. . . . But suddenly the spell was broken.

Jim Sutherland had stepped forth, and stood whispering in one majestic ear; and the people out front restlessed on their bench seats, and those standing in walkways were wilting.

But the singer would not be hindered. Another verse began and traveled on, though the lovers were lost now and the colors faded. Judy felt indignant at Sutherland for shummacking with papers in his hand, and Granpy whispered, "That singer holds to his spoiled song, clamped resolute as a hound to a wild shoat's ear!" And not till it came to a proper ending did the man leave off and bow himself away.

Hardly any but home folks clapped their pleasure, and Granpy's hands were the last to quit, because he felt sorry for the big man.

"That Sutherland's an unmannerly cuss," he said, and his neighbor answered, "Might better kick him offen 'n' outthrust rock as pointedly stop a singer plumb in the midst."

But now a fiddler with a rakish air came and struck up a lusty tune.

"'Way Up On Clinch Mountain'," Judy named, her eyes dancing, and Granpy unkinked himself and stood up. "Hit's like a gift from home," he said, and everywhere feet began to tap the ground.

> I'll tune up my fiddle, I'll rosin my bow
> I'll make myself welcome where ever I go.

And folks yelled, "Yip-ee!" and joined in the refrain.

Lay down boys and take a little nap,
Lay down boys and take a little nap,
Lay down boys and take a little nap,
They're raisin' hell in Cumberland Gap.
Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how slee-py I feel
Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how sleep-y I feel!

And Judy swayed with the others.

Cumberland Gap is a noted place
There's three kinds of water to wash your face.

"Wow!" voices called. "Yip-ee!"

Cumberland Gap with its cliffs and rocks,
Home of the panther, bear and fox

And again the people joined in, singing the refrain.

Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how slee-py I feel
Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how sleep-y I feel!

But at last Jim Sutherland filled the platform with his ownself, full of eager talk, giving and taking thanks, "Until after dinner. . . . More talent than time for. . . ." And folks streamed outside making out to hiccup, "How slee-py I feel!"

"No sense in Granpy broguin' all the way to summit and back," Melia told Judy. "Steub and I'll fetch victuals and drink, whilst you stay by him and mind he takes a nap o' sleep." And Granpy stretched out under a tree and Judy rested by turns, between practice of Hornpipe steps, so to be ready when called.

The sun was hot but the air stayed cool, and she felt terribly hungry, and the meat and bread and Steuben's bought pop-water tasted better than any victuals known. After his sleep Peter was up-and-coming, and he got him a special chair with a back so to keep rested while the tent was filling. Soon it had over-flowed, and common folks kept sitting down in chairs opposite the mountain

talent, and were asked to get up again; but none bothered Granpy till two men began to push, making way for music-judges to pass in.

Then, at row's end, a lady in a sleezy-silky dress, yellow as a daffodil, stood behind him with her red lips puckered, and her suitor-man laid impatient hands on the chairback.

"You'll have to get up; these seats are reserved."

But Peter was puzzled and turned around, and the fellow took firm hold and lifted him to his feet so the lady could have her place. And Steuben, with his face colored by a certain fierceness of blood, rushed up and warned him, "Hi-you!" in a smoulder. "Take keer how you quick rough-handle a grandsir, mister, happen you prize tomorrow's grace!" But the man only smiled and turned his back on Steuben and begged pardon of the lady as if he asked pardon for Steuben. And she smiled back at him and sat down. And Jim Sutherland rushed up in another bearm, telling Uncle, "Cross over."

So Steuben took Granpy's arm and drew him to his old place with other mountain folks, and a girl gave him her bench-seat and excitement died down. Yet there was muttering, and some spoke their minds out loud with downright displeasure. "No able-bodied young woman, however fine, need bid an aged man stand."

Judy felt downcast till a fiddler began to play and two young fellows clogged in white canvas shoes. The music made her toes tingle, and Granpy perked up happily. Other tunes and dances followed, and she stood like a race-colt straining at the rope barrier, hardly able to hold back. "I'll be next," she thought each time a dancer was called.

A small girl with a red cotton dress danced buck-and-wing; her shiny black shoes had cut out places in front and they stepped it proud, and it seemed the tent would split open to rid itself of sound when people clapped their compliments. Judy's heart pumped and swelled with

pride for the stranger. "Now!" she told herself, bubbling over. "My time, certain." But still another was called, and Judy had never seen anything like her outside an almanack. Surely a dolly cherished for her beauty. A city creature strayed to the mountains by mischance. Dress and drawers were a short smother of pink ruffles matching the pink of plump bare legs ending in pink leather. Her eyes were wide morning glory-blue, and her hair new cornsilk-yellow. The small feet tapped out a simple story, but their meaning was less clever than the wide silken bow that poised like a butterfly on her head and made a flutter-dance all its own.

"Such loveliness would shame a flower-thing jigging on its roots," she thought, adoring even as her heart sank recalling her own dark looks. That this small dolly would win the medal was not a matter of doubt. Yet polite noise that followed was less than prodigious.

Wave after wave of banjo and fiddle music fared forth, and Peter sat with his eyes closed and a happy smile on his face.

"Pore Granpy. A-lovin' music so and disabled to play more. . . . Yet just happy to be and not in a swivet to do," she tried to whisper Uncle who paid her no attention. And even while figuring thus, she saw Granpy's fingers begin to twitch and he cupped an ear forward as if doubting a rumor heard, and his eyes strained hard like a man on a far peak searching home's familiar landmark.

Then it came to Judy that the tune begun the moment past was none other than the Puryear Hornpipe—Granpy's own!—the tune woven inside his own head when he was young and the same later taught to Steuben, who meant to play it here for her to dance.

A handsome young man was fiddling it with passion, and as Granpy's glory of youth was unravelled, the ground began to quake with heel-stomping and the platform quivered.

Granpy got up from the bench liken a man gone agley, and Uncle Steuben came and whispered and got hold of Jim Sutherland and whispered, and the music stopped on a sudden, and people clapped the tent upside down. The fiddler bowed and stepped quickly back, and the noise went on, louder than before, while Sutherland and Steuben brought him over to Granpy. And the old man's gray eyes peered into the young man's face, and he stammered, "Be you Christopher Buchan?"

"Christopher's grandson, sir; my name is Charles Buchan." And the fiddler took Granpy's hand in a tight clasp, saying, "Can it be true that Peter Puryear, the man my grandsir loved above all other men, is found at last?"

"'Tis a miracle," Peter said, and his eyes went misty and the two stood there still clasping hands whilst people called and whistled.

Then Sutherland prodded Charles Buchan out to the front, and again the Hornpipe sounded, and people swayed to its magic rhythm as before, and all of Judy's body was just one crave to dance. "I wish, I wish," tap-tapping in her heart to the music's beat.

Uncle Steuben, good player though he was, would never fiddle the same piece after this master, she knew, and a bold thought struck her. Should I leap right out in face of reason, could not a soul stop my heel-and-toe. And her feet, near past control, would have done that sin of brazenness directly had not the music closed in mid-air. But this time Charles, with up-raised hand, put a stop to clamor. And the tent grew quiet as a church.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said in a voice held-back and dream-struck. "I wish to give you thanks for heartening praise. . . . The music you seem to favor is a piece called Puryear's Hornpipe, and it was composed by a man of that name. Now Peter Puryear was the greatest fiddler of his day, and my grandsir's beloved friend of

long ago. They traveled far together, shared many strange adventures, till my kinsman married and settled down, and Peter shogged off on another road and lost himself to sight; but my grandsir kept his memory green, and taught me the famous Hornpipe when I was still a youngun. . . .

"Friends, they-two will n'er meet again on any mountain road of earth, though here at this Folk Festival today I feel them near united. But—"

And the people waited in deep quiet as Charles stepped swiftly backward. He put one strong young arm around frail Granpy's shoulder and brought him slowly forward.

"Friends, I want you to meet that famous man—Peter Puryear, right now."

There was a moment of hushed surprise, then such a thunder of approval as made old Peter sway. Men threw up their hats, careless of how their property fell, and women waved bright pocket handkerchiefs. "Hurrah! Hurrah for Peter Puryear!" they called, and Judy was dizzy with pride.

Granpy touched his eyes with the clean blue handkerchief Melia had given him three years ago come Christmas; then, mistily smiling, he gave them a low bow of ancient manners, and let Charles guide him back to his platform place.

"Now for me," Judy thought excitedly. "I'll do Granpy so proud he'll ne'er again have cause to mourn havin' no son with talent of a sort. I kain't fiddle, but I *kin* dance good as any yet seen, 'spite o' my looks."

Applause that had died down started up once more, the people clapping out a rhythm of their own invention, slow yet pleasantly determined not to give over until Charles would come back to play the Puryear Hornpipe.

Sutherland and Uncle were whispering together. Undoubtedly they were planning for Judy to dance while Charles pleasured the folks. She smoothed her dress,

quivering like a leggy high-breed before it leaps in pasture.

But close on the heels of this happening, all fiddlers were judged, and the people's choice easily giving Charles Buchan first prize, he pinned the medal on Granpy's coat without ado, declaring he himself owned medals enough for any man, and this one was earned by the Hornpipe more than the fiddling.

Judy could hardly believe there was nothing more to come, until she found herself lagging behind Melia, in a daze, as they went toward summit.

"Come, baby," Melia was saying, "we'll hurry ahead and lay out victuals for the men folks." But there were little spiders weaving first webs in Judy's heart, closing out sunlight, so that she, so light-stepping by wont, brogued slow, as though blinded.

Then they were at the truck, where Charles Buchan drank many toddicks of pure home-brew with Uncle and Granpy, celebrating inherited friendship, till Melia called them to sup, and she told how Judy's dance had got lost in the shuffle. And the visitor said it was a shame, and she would have to dance to his playing when he came soon to visit with Granpy and talk family history. But she felt empty as a skeleton leaf that can make no whisper of song; and before she could gather breath for a word of politeness, he was gone, and Uncle Steuben said Charles was a popular man and company awaited him.

Later Melia fixed blankets and pillows, and Granpy was hoisted into the truck bed, with Melia and Judy on either side, and Steuben went off in search of cronies. It was cold on this high peak, and she pulled up the quilts saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord—" but then thought fearfully, "maybe God doesn't love me any more," yet sleep came soon as head touched pillow, and dreams:

"Your turn next," said the lady-judge, dressed in dove-

gray, and next thing Judy was dancing; but her leather shoes that curled up slightly at the toes began to grow longer and tripped her up at last.

Quivering, Judy sat up on the straw bed in the truck and came wide awake. The sky was a silver meadow, yet brimmed with sadness, and a sorrow hammered on her heart to be loosed. The prime reason for her folks coming here had been to see her dance. But afterward, foreign thoughts seemed to crowd her out of their minds much as she had been forgotten by the program makers.

Melia and Uncle had scarcely named her disappointment to her, and even Granpy was like a stranger, and she was lost in misery, wishing herself safe home on her own mountain.

Thin ribbons of cloud drifted across the moon, yet it lighted the dark shapes of trees whose limbs stuck straight out or downward, uncaring to shelter a body like home maples; trees that made themselves small, wary as men on a height, marked for target. And the mountain itself was unfriendly, standing apart from fellow-peaks. Small wonder if common-sweet posies feared to grow a-top, and flowing water kept hid. 'Twould be a poor place for a morning ramble in the dew.

"Here be I—Judy Puryear, traveled to the tallest summit, only to get me a hurt. . . . Grandling of a famous man, and me only a one to laugh at." Then she saw that Peter's eyes were wide, staring up at the violet-silver sky.

"Granpy, you see yon flying moon?" she asked, choking back a sob. And when he answered her with, "*Three* moons, I been seein', come moon time, this long while, 'count o' short-sightedness," she said, "Must be a star for each and every gathered on this yer Mount. See ary a one singly?"

"They flow together in my sight; but ifn you glimpse one fairer than all others, 'twell bear the name of Nancy

Wynne—her that chose my best friend, Christopher Buchan, for a bridegroom."

"Now ain't that a sompin'," Judy thought, recalling how Granpy's own true wife-woman was birth-named Martha Stone. And she said, "Granpy, was that why you shogged off on another road?"

"Reckon," he said, closing his eyes peacefully. "Sheep's in meadow, and cow's in corn."

Two weeks had passed in special quiet since the journey, and Granpy still counted on Christopher Buchan's grandson, now a day overdue. But a cattle-buyer who combines business with fiddling cannot be expected to toe a calendar mark.

The mountainside flourished with green and hot suns drank up heavy fogs, for nights were cool, with much rain fallen.

Melia had put off the green store-suit, and with it bundled out of sight all dreams of rich dress goods and lowland women's finery, and contented herself with braiding a rug. Judy could see how she rejoiced in each new round of sameness.

Granpy vegetated in the shade for such long hours unmoving, "Hit wouldn't surprise me none were his head to send up silver sprouts," she told Judy. "I misdoubt me he's ailing some. A body'd never devyse, for all he'd tell, unwishful to cause me trouble."

Peter came to life on a sudden and his mouth puckered into a denial; but after a puff or two of smoke he put the pipe down. "Baccy distastes me somehow."

So Melia went to the spring-shelter, chose a dew-rimmed jug small as a syrup pitcher, and plucked a sprig of mint.

"Might's well get the good of this now as ever," she said, offering his glass with the manner of politeness that had always held between them, and sat down for a gossip.

He took a sip. "Whoo-*ee!* M-m. . . . I rate that master. Must save some for Charles and Steuben."

"Steub's in love," she said, and Peter stared. "Hit beats all. Here was he, a counted-on bachelor, payin' him no mind to home girls. Standin' word-haltered and lackluster frontin' the prettiest. Had to go climb the highest mount to come on romance."

Granpy tilted back, suddenly jubilant at this piece of news. "Mankind! What like?"

"A stylish one from over near Baptist Valley. No whit better-favored than ary a home girl. First claps eyes on her, whispers me, 'There's my woman!' Courtship traveled faster'n a March hare. Tips her a 'howdy' at noontime, and the same night bespeaks her to wed."

"That's *courtin'!* . . . What I mean: courtin'. . . . 'Twas the starlight. . . . Music."

"Aims to go see after her next week."

Peter's eyes glowed with interest. "We'll have another party." And he lifted his head lilting:

"We'll give the bride-and-groom a happy wedding-infare—" And broke off to laugh with childish delight.

"Granpy, my gracious! You're a scandal," she said smiling and brought him his fiddle.

"Then my old age ain't wasted," he made boast, immensely pleased. "Melia-girl, I been a-studyin' over Government news-tales Steub told us, and wove words to fit, steppin' up an old ballad to match new times. Seems as though our songs air too behind. Heark now." And he swept the bow across strings with unwonted ease and sang to the tune of Cumberland Gap:

> Wake up boys, you been too long a nappin',
> Ain't a thing in Cumberland likely now to happen.

"Wouldn't wonder me you could fight yore weight in wildcats this minute," Melia said laughing. And Peter

paused and took another sip, and his voice got strong and he sawed right on through six-to-a-dozen stanzas:

Rise up boys, big times are gone,
Hell's done moved up to D.C.-town.
Make yourselves welcome to Roos-e-velt
With a coonskin cap and a panther-pelt.
Fetch along a fiddle, a Clinch Mountain fox,
Horn full o' powder with your old flintlocks
And three kinds of water to wash your face
When you arrive at the President-place.
Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how slee-py I feel
Hic-cup! Oh, Lor-dy, how sleep-y I feel.

Melia was bent over with laughter when he put down his fiddle, scant of breath. "Whur at's Judy?"

"Settin' right behind ye."

"What makes her so quiet?"

"I'm unknowin'. That child no longer contents herself. She's a worry. Past starvation, yet withouten room for good corn bread. Seems like we all got benefitted by the Music Festival except my lambkin. I sells my rug—ain't nobody goin' to climb these yere back hills a-searchin' out my handiwork, Steub finds himself a wife-woman, and you get bestowed a medal."

Judy rose from the steps and started moseying along on the smoke-house path where a hantle of chickens roamed, separately gawking. The close dappled shadows of branches turned gray, and the sun moved over toward Tazewell, making a fozy smear in the distant sky.

But Melia called, "Jude" in a tone that best be obeyed. "Come stay by Granpy."

So she moseyed back, and stood leaning against the old man's chair.

"I'm a tunin' up fer a hornpipe," he wared her invitingly. But she was heedless of music.

"Heark now to the voice of my fiddle; guess what like is this?"—and Peter drew his bow again and the strings answered with a lilting lament: "Whip!——whip! whip!—

whip-*ee*-r-will," and the sound was so blithesome-lonely it made her heart skip a beat.

"Hit's the long-lost, askin' why," she said.

"'Tain't so," and his smile twinkled. "Baby, sposen you cut me a caper? Remember the jiggin' step you scotched outen the bean patch, day before journey?"

"Kain't recall. Anyways I aim to sew me a seam and get grown, leavin' off dancin'."

"Leave off dancin'!" The old man stared in unbelief. Then he drew her head down to rest on his shoulder. "Why, you got a lifefull o' dancin' before you. 'Course by courtin' time you'll leave off hornpipe antics, and'll swing yore partner; and later join in play-games with the olduns. But a bonnie lass, light-footed and glad-hearted by nature, air bound to reel it 'twell she's trembly." And he began a shaking movement with his foot like a jiggery ancient, and Judy was obliged to laugh; but she held onto downgone feelings that could no more be named than the name of straw-flowers in general.

"Kain't dance theseadays. Do I try, my feet get tangled. Old ankle bones won't rock me clever."

"Ifn you would dance, yore spirit would ease."

"You darling Granpy," she said, giving him a quick hug. "Guess I'll go fix a mash-feed for Jill."

The sun came back, and Granpy stared downward at the Garden-valley as if his thoughts had turned wandery; but when Judy was half-way up the slant meadow she could hear his fiddle speaking lonesomely; calling, "Whip! whip!—whip—*ee*-r-will—?"

The dusk was like every other, with birds here and there in the trees and a dewy perfume of roses stirred by a faint wind.

But when Judy went to the porch to say supper was ready she found he was asleep. He sat in his chair, propped by the fiddle, with his chin resting on the smooth wood, as if ready to pitch a new tune.

So she tiptoed away; but when Melia came, she knew he would never wake more.

"Withouten a sound, or a chime o' warnin'," she whispered, "more than the ghostly call o' a whippoorwill."

The nearest settlement preacher being smit with an illness, 'twas left for Steuben to carry the funeral service bravely forward. Near-boundary neighbors were seated on chairs and boxes in the long front room, waiting while he studied what, for a sermon. The day was beautiful with sun and lively chirping and the whir of a lone katydid, but inside gloom crept over Judy.

Steuben failing of words to begin, the company saw his trouble, and some one pitched a tune, and all lornly voices raised a doleful hymn. And when the dreary notes had sighed themselves to a close, silence grew, with the mourners staring straight ahead as if they, too, failed of thinking.

Then another melancholy tune was begun. It bade all wicked sinners heed and offered lasting torment.

And when it seemed he would speak at last, a widow-cumberworld in sable weeds put up her frousty veil and picked her a ballad to suit her mind's condition; she stretched her neck and quavered a note, and neighbors took the pitch and carried it forward. The words were roundabout and awesome. They dug up smouldering sorrows best left be, and the long-drawn chant made Judy sob, and Steuben frowned like a thunderstorm. He loomed by the windowside, both hands thrust into britches pockets, as might a man wrestling in outer darkness. Then he stepped free on a sudden, and his face cleared and the wailing was cut off.

"Friends," he said simply, "hit's hard to speak private feelings in public, and I'm fair puzzled to choose a text fitten for Uncle Peter. But my religion tells me there's no call for high palamity of grief. Seems how such a

gladsome spirit owns far less need o' prayer than our own frecket souls. . . . You'll bear me out, remembering his golden rule: 'Be happy—case bein'-so runs up no bill for other men to foot.' . . .

"I got no fear he'll fail o' heaven. I'm bold to believe he got a call from there. . . . Must be a mort o' folks been broguin' the golded streets, cravin' a change from hymns, might petition the Lord for Peter Puryear, with his mountain-fetched fiddle that he hand-rived from the heart o' a maple . . . cronies, and folks what 'balanced all'—dancin' when here, to his tune times unnumbered." . . .

The mourners were not scandalized at this, but listened solemnly, as if considering how well the words might be taken.

And Steuben was suddenly drawn up into something finer than his own rough-hewn self. His voice, by nature harsh and contentious, now richened, full of persuasion, and grew deep with feeling.

"What I aim to say: hit's certain-sure St. Peter won't leave his namesake standin' outen whilst he gives him word-o'-a-sort. No. . . . All is—when Peter, fiddler and happy spinner of tales, stands before Peter, serious Saint, he'll hear, '*Enter withingates.*' And might even call, '*Choose yore partners; we'll run a set.*'"

And "Amen!" "Fair enough," and "Likely-undoubtedly," was answered.

"Folks—say we give Uncle Peter a happy outfare? . . . Ifn his spirit lingers close, regretful of leavin' his homeplace, say we fiddle him close to the pearly gates with music that matched him?"

And the company gathered Steuben's meaning wholesomely and only waited to rejoice with him.

Straight-off he settled himself and started a galloping ballad-song commonly known and enjoyed. And with this change of music, the room's funereal darkness became

festal; grief brightening into gladness, and fear into hope—all growing together as if to show how like are gay things and sorrowful.

Judy's tears had stopped, yet her own heart was still lavish with grief, recalling how she had denied Granpy when he bade her cut a caper but two days gone. And not till Uncle Steuben shogged off into a lively jig-tune did the hurt give over. Feet softly tapped the floor in a wide half-circle, and her own black leather brogues tapped with company.

When the tune was near done a latecomer entered quietly. He paused for a moment beside the smooth-boarded box that rested at the farther hearth, then turned to Steuben, who took his hand in a fervent grasp.

Judy's eyes blinked in amaze at seeing Charles Buchan once again.

"I come too late," he said regretfully.

"Happen not," Steuben said, offering the fiddle to Charles.

"I'd be proud," Charles answered, and directly the strings sang with a melody of woodland sounds. And every stroke of the bow conjured something new: tree-tops in a gale, music of bubbling rain, waterfalls rushing, myriad voices of birds.

Then, as if this Forest Medley had served him only to test the instrument, he waded point-blank into the Pur-year Hornpipe; and as Charles Buchan played, the tone of Peter's beloved fiddle grew proud and full. The box quivered and came fully alive and gave out everything it had to master hand. Company's heels were set afire keeping time to that marvelous beat, and Judy felt lifted and spun in a sudden dizziness, light as a leaf in a puff of wind.

"Oh! I crave to pleasure my Granpy too," she cried, and Uncle nodded.

Next thing, radiant, she leaped to front and went

whirling east and west across the floor like the flicker of a dancing sunbeam.

It was almost as if Granpy had laid his summons on her spirit; for she danced religiously, obeying harmony's pure demand. And as the rhythmic waves of hilarious sound pulsated through her being, Judy could feel a Holiness above her. Each sportive leap in the Hornpipe figures was begun with her arms wide as if they were broad fans of a fairy angel opening for flight.

The mourner's faces shone with reverence for the child's unconscious act of grace and simplicity—their healthy mountain senses rejoicing in the natural. They watched, whispering, two and two,—of Charles and Judy:

"Fiddlin' and dancin' Peter's spirit up to the pearly gates."—"Never seen a service more fitten to a body's character."

"And she, spry as a hopper a-scizzorin' air."—"Leaped so high, feared me she'd get herself hung from the rafter—time that long string o' herbs wropped her round."

"Could no angel tap out sweeter hallelujahs though did they come down to earth and try."—"Unless inspired by that one's music."

"'Twould make a gouty oak tree hobble."—"Way she ankles it cautions me go limber up my ownself before life's fire quenches."

And when, at last, the Hornpipe bade her reel in a magic rope, all the little spiders that had enshrouded Judy's heart wound up their silken threads and were blown away.

SILENT SNOW, SECRET SNOW

by

Conrad Aiken

CONRAD AIKEN *was born in 1889 in Savannah, Georgia. At Harvard University he distinguished himself in poetry, and in 1930 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his* Selected Poems. *Although primarily a poet, he has written a novel,* Blue Voyage, *that displays mastery of the "stream of consciousness" technique, and many distinguished short stories.*

SILENT SNOW, SECRET SNOW

I

JUST why it should have happened, or why it should have happened just when it did, he could not, of course, possibly have said; nor perhaps would it even have occurred to him to ask. The thing was above all a secret, something to be preciously concealed from Mother and Father; and to that very fact it owed an enormous part of its deliciousness. It was like a peculiarly beautiful trinket to be carried unmentioned in one's trouser-pocket,—a rare stamp, an old coin, a few tiny gold links found trodden out of shape on the path in the park, a pebble of carnelian, a sea shell distinguishable from all others by an unusual spot or stripe,—and, as if it were any one of these, he carried around with him everywhere a warm and persistent and increasingly beautiful sense of possession. Nor was it only a sense of possession—it was also a sense of protection. It was as if, in some delightful way, his secret gave him a fortress, a wall behind which he could retreat into heavenly seclusion. This was almost the first thing he had noticed about it—apart from the oddness of the thing itself—and it was this that now again, for the fiftieth time, occurred to him, as he sat in the little schoolroom. It was the half hour for geography. Miss Buell was revolving with one finger, slowly, a huge terrestrial globe which had been placed on her desk. The green and yellow continents passed and repassed, questions were asked and answered, and now the little girl in front of him, Deirdre, who had a funny little constellation of freckles on the back of her neck, exactly like the Big Dipper, was standing up and

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telling Miss Buell that the equator was the line that ran round the middle.

Miss Buell's face, which was old and greyish and kindly, with grey stiff curls beside the cheeks, and eyes that swam very brightly, like little minnows, behind thick glasses, wrinkled itself into a complication of amusements.

"Ah! I see. The earth is wearing a belt, or a sash. Or someone drew a line round it!"

"Oh no—not that—I mean—"

In the general laughter, he did not share, or only a very little. He was thinking about the Arctic and Antarctic regions, which of course, on the globe, were white. Miss Buell was now telling them about the tropics, the jungles, the steamy heat of equatorial swamps, where the birds and butterflies, and even the snakes, were like living jewels. As he listened to these things, he was already, with a pleasant sense of half-effort, putting his secret between himself and the words. Was it really an effort at all? For effort implied something voluntary, and perhaps even something one did not especially want; whereas this was distinctly pleasant, and came almost of its own accord. All he needed to do was to think of that morning, the first one, and then of all the others—

But it was all so absurdly simple! It had amounted to so little. It was nothing, just an idea—and just why it should have become so wonderful, so permanent, was a mystery—a very pleasant one, to be sure, but also, in an amusing way, foolish. However, without ceasing to listen to Miss Buell, who had now moved up to the north temperate zones, he deliberately invited his memory of the first morning. It was only a moment or two after he had waked up—or perhaps the moment itself. But was there, to be exact, an exact moment? Was one awake all at once? or was it gradual? Anyway, it was after he had stretched a lazy hand up towards the headrail, and yawned, and then relaxed again among his warm covers, all the more

grateful on a December morning, that the thing had happened. Suddenly, for no reason, he had thought of the postman, he remembered the postman. Perhaps there was nothing so odd in that. After all, he heard the postman almost every morning in his life—his heavy boots could be heard clumping round the corner at the top of the little cobbled hill-street, and then, progressively nearer, progressively louder, the double knock at each door, the crossings and re-crossings of the street, till finally the clumsy steps came stumbling across to the very door, and the tremendous knock came which shook the house itself.

(Miss Buell was saying "Vast wheat-growing areas in North America and Siberia."

Deirdre had for the moment placed her left hand across the back of her neck.)

But on this particular morning, the first morning, as he lay there with his eyes closed, he had for some reason *waited* for the postman. He wanted to hear him come round the corner. And that was precisely the joke—he never did. He never came. He never had come—*round the corner*—again. For when at last the steps *were* heard, they had already, he was quite sure, come a little down the hill, to the first house; and even so, the steps were curiously different—they were softer, they had a new secrecy about them, they were muffled and indistinct; and while the rhythm of them was the same, it now said a new thing—it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep. And he had understood the situation at once—nothing could have seemed simpler—there had been snow in the night, such as all winter he had been longing for; and it was this which had rendered the postman's first footsteps inaudible, and the later ones faint. Of course! How lovely! And even now it must be snowing—it was going to be a snowy day—the long white ragged lines were drifting and sifting across the street, across the faces of the old houses, whispering and hushing, making little triangles of white in

the corners between cobblestones, seething a little when the wind blew them over the ground to a drifted corner; and so it would be all day, getting deeper and deeper and silenter and silenter.

(Miss Buell was saying "Land of perpetual snow.")

All this time, of course (while he lay in bed), he had kept his eyes closed, listening to the nearer progress of the postman, the muffled footsteps thumping and slipping on the snow-sheathed cobbles; and all the other sounds—the double knocks, a frosty far-off voice or two, a bell ringing thinly and softly as if under a sheet of ice—had the same slightly abstracted quality, as if removed by one degree from actuality—as if everything in the world had been insulated by snow. But when at last, pleased, he opened his eyes, and turned them towards the window, to see for himself this long-desired and now so clearly imagined miracle—what he saw instead was brilliant sunlight on a roof; and when, astonished, he jumped out of bed and stared down into the street, expecting to see the cobbles obliterated by the snow, he saw nothing but the bare bright cobbles themselves.

Queer, the effect this extraordinary surprise had had upon him—all the following morning he had kept with him a sense as of snow falling about him, a secret screen of new snow between himself and the world. If he had not dreamed such a thing—and how could he have dreamed it while awake?—how else could one explain it? In any case, the delusion had been so vivid as to affect his entire behaviour. He could not now remember whether it was on the first or the second morning—or was it even the third? —that his mother had drawn attention to some oddness in his manner.

"But my darling—" she had said at the breakfast table—"what has come over you? You don't seem to be listening. . . ."

And how often that very thing had happened since!

(Miss Buell was now asking if anyone knew the difference between the North Pole and the Magnetic Pole. Deirdre was holding up her flickering brown hand, and he could see the four white dimples that marked the knuckles.)

Perhaps it hadn't been either the second or third morning—or even the fourth or fifth. How could he be sure? How could he be sure just when the delicious *progress* had become clear? Just when it had really *begun?* The intervals weren't very precise. . . . All he now knew was, that at some point or other—perhaps the second day, perhaps the sixth—he had noticed that the presence of the snow was a little more insistent, the sound of it clearer; and, conversely, the sound of the postman's footsteps more indistinct. Not only could he not hear the steps come round the corner, he could not even hear them at the first house. It was below the first house that he heard them; and then, a few days later, it was below the second house that he heard them; and a few days later again, below the third. Gradually, gradually, the snow was becoming heavier, the sound of its seething louder, the cobblestones more and more muffled. When he found, each morning, on going to the window, after the ritual of listening, that the roofs and cobbles were as bare as ever, it made no difference. This was, after all, only what he had expected. It was even what pleased him, what rewarded him: the thing was his own, belonged to no one else. No one else knew about it, not even his mother and father. There, outside, were the bare cobbles; and here, inside, was the snow. Snow growing heavier each day, muffling the world, hiding the ugly, and deadening increasingly—above all—the steps of the postman.

"But my darling—" she had said at the luncheon table—"what has come over you? You don't seem to listen when people speak to you. That's the third time I've asked you to pass your plate. . . ."

How was one to explain this to Mother? or to Father? There was, of course, nothing to be done about it: nothing. All one could do was to laugh embarrassedly, pretend to be a little ashamed, apologize, and take a sudden and somewhat disingenuous interest in what was being done or said. The cat had stayed out all night. He had a curious swelling on his left cheek—perhaps somebody had kicked him, or a stone had struck him. Mrs. Kempton was or was not coming to tea. The house was going to be house cleaned, or "turned out," on Wednesday instead of Friday. A new lamp was provided for his evening work—perhaps it was eyestrain which accounted for this new and so peculiar vagueness of his—Mother was looking at him with amusement as she said this, but with something else as well. A new lamp? A new lamp. Yes Mother, No Mother, Yes Mother. School is going very well. The geometry is very easy. The history is very dull. The geography is very interesting—particularly when it takes one to the North Pole. Why the North Pole? Oh, well, it would be fun to be an explorer. Another Peary or Scott or Shackleton. And then abruptly he found his interest in the talk at an end, stared at the pudding on his plate, listened, waited, and began once more—ah how heavenly, too, the first beginnings—to hear or feel—for could he actually hear it?—the silent snow, the secret snow.

(Miss Buell was telling them about the search for the Northwest Passage, about Hendrik Hudson, the Half Moon.)

This had been, indeed, the only distressing feature of the new experience: the fact that it so increasingly had brought him into a kind of mute misunderstanding, or even conflict, with his father and mother. It was as if he were trying to lead a double life. On the one hand he had to be Paul Hasleman, and keep up the appearance of being that person—dress, wash, and answer intelligently when spoken to—; on the other, he had to explore this new world which

had been opened to him. Nor could there be the slightest doubt—not the slightest—that the new world was the profounder and more wonderful of the two. It was irresistible. It was miraculous. Its beauty was simply beyond anything—beyond speech as beyond thought—utterly incommunicable. But how then, between the two worlds, of which he was thus constantly aware, was he to keep a balance? One must get up, one must go to breakfast, one must talk with Mother, go to school, do one's lessons—and, in all this, try not to appear too much of a fool. But if all the while one was also trying to extract the full deliciousness of another and quite separate existence, one which could not easily (if at all) be spoken of—how was one to manage? How was one to explain? Would it be safe to explain? Would it be absurd? Would it merely mean that he would get into some obscure kind of trouble?

These thoughts came and went, came and went, as softly and secretly as the snow; they were not precisely a disturbance, perhaps they were even a pleasure; he liked to have them; their presence was something almost palpable, something he could stroke with his hand, without closing his eyes, and without ceasing to see Miss Buell and the school-room and the globe and the freckles on Deirdre's neck; nevertheless he did in a sense cease to see, or to see the obvious external world, and substituted for this vision the vision of snow, the sound of snow, and the slow, almost soundless, approach of the postman. Yesterday, it had been only at the sixth house that the postman had become audible; the snow was much deeper now, it was falling more swiftly and heavily, the sound of its seething was more distinct, more soothing, more persistent. And this morning, it had been—as nearly as he could figure—just above the seventh house—perhaps only a step or two above: at most, he had heard two or three footsteps before the knock had sounded. . . . And with each such narrowing of the sphere, each nearer approach of the limit at

which the postman was first audible, it was odd how sharply was increased the amount of illusion which had to be carried into the ordinary business of daily life. Each day, it was harder to get out of bed, to go to the window, to look out at the—as always—perfectly empty and snowless street. Each day it was more difficult to go through the perfunctory motions of greeting Mother and Father at breakfast, to reply to their questions, to put his books together and go to school. And at school, how extraordinarily hard to conduct with success simultaneously the public life and the life that was secret. There were times when he longed—positively ached—to tell everyone about it—to burst out with it—only to be checked almost at once by a far-off feeling as of some faint absurdity which was inherent in it—but *was* it absurd?—and more importantly by a sense of mysterious power in his very secrecy. Yes: it must be kept secret. That, more and more, became clear. At whatever cost to himself, whatever pain to others—

(Miss Buell looked straight at him, smiling, and said, "Perhaps we'll ask Paul. I'm sure Paul will come out of his day-dream long enough to be able to tell us. Won't you, Paul." He rose slowly from his chair, resting one hand on the brightly varnished desk, and deliberately stared through the snow towards the blackboard. It was an effort, but it was amusing to make it. "Yes," he said slowly, "it was what we now call the Hudson River. This he thought to be the Northwest Passage. He was disappointed." He sat down again, and as he did so Deirdre half turned in her chair and gave him a shy smile, of approval and admiration.)

At whatever pain to others.

This part of it was very puzzling, very puzzling. Mother was very nice, and so was Father. Yes, that was all true enough. He wanted to be nice to them, to tell them everything—and yet, was it really wrong of him to want to have a secret place of his own?

At bedtime, the night before, Mother had said, "If this goes on, my lad, we'll have to see a doctor, we will! We can't have our boy—" But what was it she had said? "Live in another world"? "Live so far away"? The word "far" had been in it, he was sure, and then Mother had taken up a magazine again and laughed a little, but with an expression which wasn't mirthful. He had felt sorry for her. . . .

The bell rang for dismissal. The sound came to him through long curved parallels of falling snow. He saw Deirdre rise, and had himself risen almost as soon—but not quite as soon—as she.

II

On the walk homeward, which was timeless, it pleased him to see through the accompaniment, or counterpoint, of snow, the items of mere externality on his way. There were many kinds of brick in the sidewalks, and laid in many kinds of pattern. The garden walls too were various, some of wooden palings, some of plaster, some of stone. Twigs of bushes leaned over the walls: the little hard green winter-buds of lilac, on grey stems, sheathed and fat; other branches very thin and fine and black and desiccated. Dirty sparrows huddled in the bushes, as dull in colour as dead fruit left in leafless trees. A single starling creaked on a weather vane. In the gutter, beside a drain, was a scrap of torn and dirty newspaper, caught in a little delta of filth: the word ECZEMA appeared in large capitals, and below it was a letter from Mrs. Amelia D. Cravath, 2100 Pine Street, Fort Worth, Texas, to the effect that after being a sufferer for years she had been cured by Caley's Ointment. In the little delta, beside the fan-shaped and deeply runnelled continent of brown mud, were lost twigs, descended from their parent trees, dead matches, a rusty horse-chestnut burr, a small concentration of sparkling gravel on the lip of the sewer, a fragment of egg-shell, a

streak of yellow sawdust which had been wet and now was dry and congealed, a brown pebble, and a broken feather. Further on was a cement sidewalk, ruled into geometrical parallelograms, with a brass inlay at one end commemorating the contractors who had laid it, and, halfway across, an irregular and random series of dog-tracks, immortalized in synthetic stone. He knew these well, and always stepped on them; to cover the little hollows with his own foot had always been a queer pleasure; today he did it once more, but perfunctorily and detachedly, all the while thinking of something else. That was a dog, a long time ago, who had made a mistake and walked on the cement while it was still wet. He had probably wagged his tail, but that hadn't been recorded. Now, Paul Hasleman, aged twelve, on his way home from school, crossed the same river, which in the meantime had frozen into rock. Homeward through the snow, the snow falling in bright sunshine. Homeward?

Then came the gateway with the two posts surmounted by egg-shaped stones which had been cunningly balanced on their ends, as if by Columbus, and mortared in the very act of balance: a source of perpetual wonder. On the brick wall just beyond, the letter H had been stenciled, presumably for some purpose. H? H.

The green hydrant, with a little green-painted chain attached to the brass screw-cap.

The elm tree, with the great grey wound in the bark, kidney-shaped, into which he always put his hand—to feel the cold but living wood. The injury, he had been sure, was due to the gnawings of a tethered horse. But now it deserved only a passing palm, a merely tolerant eye. There were more important things. Miracles. Beyond the thoughts of trees, mere elms. Beyond the thoughts of sidewalks, mere stone, mere brick, mere cement. Beyond the thoughts even of his own shoes, which trod these sidewalks obediently, bearing a burden—far above—of elaborate mystery. He watched them. They were not very

well polished; he had neglected them, for a very good reason: they were one of the many parts of the increasing difficulty of the daily return to daily life, the morning struggle. To get up, having at last opened one's eyes, to go to the window, and discover no snow, to wash, to dress, to descend the curving stairs to breakfast—

At whatever pain to others, nevertheless, one must persevere in severance, since the incommunicability of the experience demanded it. It was desirable of course to be kind to Mother and Father, especially as they seemed to be worried, but it was also desirable to be resolute. If they should decide—as appeared likely—to consult the doctor, Doctor Howells, and have Paul inspected, his heart listened to through a kind of dictaphone, his lungs, his stomach—well, that was all right. He would go through with it. He would give them answer for question, too—perhaps such answers as they hadn't expected? No. That would never do. For the secret world must, at all costs, be preserved.

The bird-house in the apple-tree was empty—it was the wrong time of year for wrens. The little round black door had lost its pleasure. The wrens were enjoying other houses, other nests, remoter trees. But this too was a notion which he only vaguely and grazingly entertained—as if, for the moment, he merely touched an edge of it; there was something further on, which was already assuming a sharper importance; something which already teased at the corners of his eyes, teasing also at the corner of his mind. It was funny to think that he so wanted this, so awaited it—and yet found himself enjoying this momentary dalliance with the bird-house, as if for a quite deliberate postponement and enhancement of the approaching pleasure. He was aware of his delay, of his smiling and detached and now almost uncomprehending gaze at the little bird-house; he knew what he was going to look at next: it was his own little cobbled hill-street, his own

house, the little river at the bottom of the hill, the grocer's shop with the cardboard man in the window—and now, thinking of all this, he turned his head, still smiling, and looking quickly right and left through the snow-laden sunlight.

And the mist of snow, as he had foreseen, was still on it—a ghost of snow falling in the bright sunlight, softly and steadily floating and turning and pausing, soundlessly meeting the snow that covered, as with a transparent mirage, the bare bright cobbles. He loved it—he stood still and loved it. Its beauty was paralyzing—beyond all words, all experience, all dream. No fairy-story he had ever read could be compared with it—none had ever given him this extraordinary combination of ethereal loveliness with a something else, unnameable, which was just faintly and deliciously terrifying. What was this thing? As he thought of it, he looked upward toward his own bedroom window, which was open—and it was as if he looked straight into the room and saw himself lying half awake in his bed. There he was—at this very instant he was still perhaps actually there—more truly there than standing here at the edge of the cobbled hill-street, with one hand lifted to shade his eyes against the snow-sun. Had he indeed ever left his room, in all this time? since that very first morning? Was the whole progress still being enacted there, was it still the same morning, and himself not yet wholly awake? And even now, had the postman not yet come round the corner? . . .

This idea amused him, and automatically, as he thought of it, he turned his head and looked toward the top of the hill. There was, of course, nothing there—nothing and no one. The street was empty and quiet. And all the more because of its emptiness it occurred to him to count the houses—a thing which, oddly enough, he hadn't before thought of doing. Of course, he had known there weren't many—many, that is, on his own side of the street, which

were the ones that figured in the postman's progress—but nevertheless it came to him as something of a shock to find that there were precisely *six*, above his own house—his own house was the seventh.

Six!

Astonished, he looked at his own house—looked at the door, on which was the number thirteen—and then realized that the whole thing was exactly and logically and absurdly what he ought to have known. Just the same, the realization gave him abruptly, and even a little frighteningly, a sense of hurry. He was being hurried—he was being rushed. For—he knit his brows—he couldn't be mistaken—it was just above the *seventh* house, his *own* house, that the postman had first been audible this very morning. But in that case—in that case—did it mean that tomorrow he would hear nothing? The knock he had heard must have been the knock of their own door. Did it mean—and this was an idea which gave him a really extraordinary feeling of surprise—that he would never hear the postman again?—that tomorrow morning the postman would already have passed the house, in a snow by then so deep as to render his footsteps completely inaudible? That he would have made his approach down the snow-filled street so soundlessly, so secretly, that he, Paul Hasleman, there lying in bed, would not have waked in time, or, waking, would have heard nothing?

But how could that be? Unless even the knocker should be muffled in the snow—frozen tight, perhaps? . . . But in that case—

A vague feeling of disappointment came over him; a vague sadness, as if he felt himself deprived of something which he had long looked forward to, something much prized. After all this, all this beautiful progress, the slow delicious advance of the postman through the silent and secret snow, the knock creeping closer each day, and the footsteps nearer, the audible compass of the world thus

daily narrowed, narrowed, narrowed, as the snow soothingly and beautifully encroached and deepened, after all this, was he to be defrauded of the one thing he had so wanted—to be able to count, as it were, the last two or three solemn footsteps, as they finally approached his own door? Was it all going to happen, at the end, so suddenly? or indeed, had it already happened? with no slow and subtle gradations of menace, in which he could luxuriate?

He gazed upward again, toward his own window which flashed in the sun: and this time almost with a feeling that it would be better if he *were* still in bed, in that room; for in that case this must still be the first morning, and there would be six more mornings to come—or, for that matter, seven or eight or nine—how could he be sure?—or even more.

III

After supper, the inquisition began. He stood before the doctor, under the lamp, and submitted silently to the usual thumpings and tappings.

"Now will you please say 'Ah!'?"

"Ah!"

"Now again please, if you don't mind."

"Ah."

"Say it slowly, and hold it if you can—"

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h—"

"Good."

How silly all this was. As if it had anything to do with his throat! Or his heart or lungs!

Relaxing his mouth, of which the corners, after all this absurd stretching, felt uncomfortable, he avoided the doctor's eyes, and stared towards the fireplace, past his mother's feet (in grey slippers) which projected from the green chair, and his father's feet (in brown slippers) which stood neatly side by side on the hearth rug.

"Hm. There is certainly nothing wrong there . . ."

He felt the doctor's eyes fixed upon him, and, as if merely to be polite, returned the look, but with a feeling of justifiable evasiveness.

"Now, young man, tell me,—do you feel all right?"

"Yes, sir, quite all right."

"No headaches? no dizziness?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Let me see. Let's get a book, if you don't mind—yes, thank you, that will do splendidly—and now, Paul, if you'll just read it, holding it as you would normally hold it—"

He took the book and read:

"And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea. . . . For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hast throned herein this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids. . . . O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds."

He stopped, tentatively, and lowered the heavy book.

"No—as I thought—there is certainly no superficial sign of eye-strain."

Silence thronged the room, and he was aware of the focused scrutiny of the three people who confronted him. . . .

"We could have his eyes examined—but I believe it is something else."

"What could it be?" This was his father's voice.

"It's only this curious absent-mindedness—" This was his mother's voice.

In the presence of the doctor, they both seemed irritatingly apologetic.

"I believe it is something else. Now Paul—I would like very much to ask you a question or two. You will answer them, won't you—you know I'm an old, old friend of yours, eh? That's right! . . ."

His back was thumped twice by the doctor's fat fist,—then the doctor was grinning at him with false amiability, while with one finger-nail he was scratching the top button of his waistcoat. Beyond the doctor's shoulder was the fire, the fingers of flame making light prestidigitation against the sooty fireback, the soft sound of their random flutter the only sound.

"I would like to know—is there anything that worries you?"

The doctor was again smiling, his eyelids low against the little black pupils, in each of which was a tiny white bead of light. Why answer him? why answer him at all? "At whatever pain to others"—but it was all a nuisance, this necessity for resistance, this necessity for attention: it was as if one had been stood up on a brilliantly lighted stage, under a great round blaze of spotlight; as if one were merely a trained seal, or a performing dog, or a fish, dipped out of an aquarium and held up by the tail. It would serve them right if he were merely to bark or growl. And meanwhile, to miss these last few precious hours, these hours of which each minute was more beautiful than the last, more menacing—? He still looked, as if from a great distance, at the beads of light in the doctor's eyes, at the fixed false smile, and then, beyond, once more at his mother's slippers, his father's slippers, the soft flutter of the fire. Even here, even amongst these hostile presences, and in this arranged light, he could see the snow, he could hear it—it was in the corners of the room, where the shadow was deepest, under the sofa, behind the half-opened door which led to the dining-room. It was gentler here, softer, its seethe the quietest of whispers, as if, in deference to a drawing-room, it had quite deliberately put on its "man-

ners"; it kept itself out of sight, obliterated itself, but distinctly with an air of saying, "Ah, but just wait! Wait till we are alone together! Then I will begin to tell you something new! Something white! something cold! something sleepy! something of cease, and peace, and the long bright curve of space! Tell them to go away. Banish them. Refuse to speak. Leave them, go upstairs to your room, turn out the light and get into bed—I will go with you, I will be waiting for you, I will tell you a better story than Little Kay of the Skates, or The Snow Ghost—I will surround your bed, I will close the windows, pile a deep drift against the door, so that none will ever again be able to enter. Speak to them! . . ." It seemed as if the little hissing voice came from a slow white spiral of falling flakes in the corner by the front window—but he could not be sure. He felt himself smiling, then, and said to the doctor, but without looking at him, looking beyond him still—

"Oh no, I think not—"

"But are you sure, my boy?"

His father's voice came softly and coldly then—the familiar voice of silken warning. . . .

"You needn't answer at once, Paul—remember we're trying to help you—think it over and be quite sure, won't you?"

He felt himself smiling again, at the notion of being quite sure. What a joke! As if he weren't so sure that reassurance was no longer necessary, and all this cross-examination a ridiculous farce, a grotesque parody! What could they know about it? these gross intelligences, these humdrum minds so bound to the usual, the ordinary? Impossible to tell them about it! Why, even now, even now, with the proof so abundant, so formidable, so imminent, so appallingly present here in this very room, could they believe it?—could even his mother believe it? No—it was only too plain that if anything were said about

it, the merest hint given, they would be incredulous—they would laugh—they would say "absurd!"—think things about him which weren't true. . . .

"Why no, I'm not worried—why should I be?"

He looked then straight at the doctor's low-lidded eyes, looked from one of them to the other, from one bead of light to the other, and gave a little laugh.

The doctor seemed to be disconcerted by this. He drew back in his chair, resting a fat white hand on either knee. The smile faded slowly from his face.

"Well, Paul!" he said, and paused gravely, "I'm afraid you don't take this quite seriously enough. I think you perhaps don't quite realize—don't quite realize—" He took a deep quick breath, and turned, as if helplessly, at a loss for words, to the others. But Mother and Father were both silent—no help was forthcoming.

"You must surely know, be aware, that you have not been quite yourself, of late? don't you know that? . . ."

It was amusing to watch the doctor's renewed attempt at a smile, a queer disorganized look, as of confidential embarrassment.

"I feel all right, sir," he said, and again gave the little laugh.

"And we're trying to help you." The doctor's tone sharpened.

"Yes sir, I know. But why? I'm all right. I'm just *thinking*, that's all."

His mother made a quick movement forward, resting a hand on the back of the doctor's chair.

"Thinking?" she said. "But my dear, about what?"

This was a direct challenge—and would have to be directly met. But before he met it, he looked again into the corner by the door, as if for reassurance. He smiled again at what he saw, at what he heard. The little spiral was still there, still softly whirling, like the ghost of a white kitten chasing the ghost of a white tail, and making as

it did so the faintest of whispers. It was all right! If only he could remain firm, everything was going to be all right.

"Oh, about anything, about nothing,—*you* know the way you do!"

"You mean—day-dreaming?"

"Oh, no—thinking!"

"But thinking about *what?*"

"Anything."

He laughed a third time—but this time, happening to glance upward towards his mother's face, he was appalled at the effect his laughter seemed to have upon her. Her mouth had opened in an expression of horror. . . . This was too bad! Unfortunate! He had known it would cause pain, of course—but he hadn't expected it to be quite so bad as this. Perhaps—perhaps if he just gave them a tiny gleaming hint—?

"About the snow," he said.

"What on earth!" This was his father's voice. The brown slippers came a step nearer on the hearth-rug.

"But my dear, what do you mean!" This was his mother's voice.

The doctor merely stared.

"Just *snow*, that's all. I like to think about it."

"Tell us about it, my boy."

"But that's all it is. There's nothing to tell. *You* know what snow is?"

This he said almost angrily, for he felt that they were trying to corner him. He turned sideways so as no longer to face the doctor, and the better to see the inch of blackness between the window-sill and the lowered curtain,—the cold inch of beckoning and delicious night. At once he felt better, more assured.

"Mother—can I go to bed, now, please? I've got a headache."

"But I thought you said—"

"It's just come. It's all these questions—! Can I, mother?"

"You can go as soon as the doctor has finished."

"Don't you think this thing ought to be gone into thoroughly, and *now?*" This was Father's voice. The brown slippers again came a step nearer, the voice was the well-known "punishment" voice, resonant and cruel.

"Oh, what's the use, Norman—"

Quite suddenly, everyone was silent. And without precisely facing them, nevertheless he was aware that all three of them were watching him with an extraordinary intensity—staring hard at him—as if he had done something monstrous, or was himself some kind of monster. He could hear the soft irregular flutter of the flames; the cluck-click-cluck-click of the clock; far and faint, two sudden spurts of laughter from the kitchen, as quickly cut off as begun; a murmur of water in the pipes; and then, the silence seemed to deepen, to spread out, to become world-long and worldwide, to become timeless and shapeless, and to center inevitably and rightly, with a slow and sleepy but enormous concentration of all power, on the beginning of a new sound. What this new sound was going to be, he knew perfectly well. It might begin with a hiss, but it would end with a roar—there was no time to lose—he must escape. It mustn't happen here—

Without another word, he turned and ran up the stairs.

IV

Not a moment too soon. The darkness was coming in long white waves. A prolonged sibilance filled the night—a great seamless seethe of wild influence went abruptly across it—a cold low humming shook the windows. He shut the door and flung off his clothes in the dark. The bare black floor was like a little raft tossed in waves of snow, almost overwhelmed, washed under whitely, up again, smothered in curled billows of feather. The snow

was laughing: it spoke from all sides at once: it pressed closer to him as he ran and jumped exulting into his bed.

"Listen to us!" it said. "Listen! We have come to tell you the story we told you about. You remember? Lie down. Shut your eyes, now—you will no longer see much—in this white darkness who could see, or want to see? We will take the place of everything. . . . Listen—"

A beautiful varying dance of snow began at the front of the room, came forward and then retreated, flattened out toward the floor, then rose fountain-like to the ceiling, swayed, recruited itself from a new stream of flakes which poured laughing in through the humming window, advanced again, lifted long white arms. It said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold—it said—

But then a gash of horrible light fell brutally across the room from the opening door—the snow drew back hissing—something alien had come into the room—something hostile. This thing rushed at him, clutched at him, shook him—and he was not merely horrified, he was filled with such a loathing as he had never known. What was this? this cruel disturbance? this act of anger and hate? It was as if he had to reach up a hand toward another world for any understanding of it,—an effort of which he was only barely capable. But of that other world he still remembered just enough to know the exorcising words. They tore themselves from his other life suddenly—

"Mother! Mother! Go away! I hate you!"

And with that effort, everything was solved, everything became all right: the seamless hiss advanced once more, the long white wavering lines rose and fell like enormous whispering sea-waves, the whisper becoming louder, the laughter more numerous.

"Listen!" it said. "We'll tell you the last, the most beautiful and secret story—shut your eyes—it is a very small story—a story that gets smaller and smaller—it comes inward instead of opening like a flower—it is a

flower becoming a seed—a little cold seed—do you hear? we are leaning closer to you—"

The hiss was now becoming a roar—the whole world was a vast moving screen of snow—but even now it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep.

BUCHMENDEL

by

Stefan Zweig

STEFAN ZWEIG (1881–) *is Viennese by birth. He is internationally known for his biographical and critical writing* (Adepts in Self-Portraiture, Three Masters, Mental Healers, Joseph Fouché, Marie Antoinette, Romain Rolland, *etc.*)*; his plays* (Jeremiah, Volpone); *and his novelettes and short stories, in such collections as* Conflicts *and* Kaleidoscope.

BUCHMENDEL

HAVING just got back to Vienna, after a visit to an out-of-the-way part of the country, I was walking home from the station when a heavy shower came on, such a deluge that the passers-by hastened to take shelter in doorways, and I myself felt it expedient to get out of the downpour. Luckily there is a café at almost every street-corner in the metropolis, and I made for the nearest, though not before my hat was dripping wet and my shoulders were drenched to the skin. An old-fashioned suburban place, lacking the attractions (copied from Germany) of music and a dancing-floor to be found in the centre of the town; full of small shopkeepers and working folk who consumed more newspapers than coffee and rolls. Since it was already late in the evening, the air, which would have been stuffy anyhow, was thick with tobacco-smoke. Still, the place was clean and brightly decorated, had new satin-covered couches, and a shining cash-register, so that it looked thoroughly attractive. In my haste to get out of the rain, I had not troubled to read its name—but what matter? There I rested, warm and comfortable, though looking rather impatiently through the blue-tinted window panes to see when the shower would be over, and I should be able to get on my way.

Thus I sat unoccupied, and began to succumb to that inertia which results from the narcotic atmosphere of the typical Viennese café. Out of this void, I scanned various individuals whose eyes, in the murky room, had a greyish look in the artificial light; I mechanically contemplated

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the young woman at the counter as, like an automaton, she dealt out sugar and a teaspoon to the waiter for each cup of coffee; with half an eye and a wandering attention I read the uninteresting advertisements on the walls—and there was something agreeable about these dull occupations. But suddenly, and in a peculiar fashion, I was aroused from what had become almost a doze. A vague internal movement had begun; much as a toothache sometimes begins, without one's being able to say whether it is on the right side or the left, in the upper jaw or the lower. All I became aware of was a numb tension, an obscure sentiment of spiritual unrest. Then, without knowing why, I grew fully conscious. I must have been in this café once before, years ago, and random associations had awakened memories of the walls, the tables, the chairs, the seemingly unfamiliar smoke-laden room.

The more I endeavoured to grasp this lost memory, the more obstinately did it elude me; a sort of jellyfish glistening in the abysses of consciousness, slippery and unseizable. Vainly did I scrutinize every object within the range of vision. Certainly when I had been here before the counter had had neither marble top nor cash-register; the walls had not been panelled with imitation rosewood; these must be recent acquisitions. Yet I had indubitably been here, more than twenty years back. Within these four walls, as firmly fixed as a nail driven up to the head in a tree, there clung a part of my ego, long since overgrown. Vainly I explored, not only the room, but my own inner man, to grapple the lost links. Curse it all, I could not plumb the depths!

It will be seen that I was becoming vexed, as one is always out of humour when one's grip slips in this way, and reveals the inadequacy, the imperfections, of one's spiritual powers. Yet I still hoped to recover the clue. A slender thread would suffice, for my memory is of a peculiar type, both good and bad; on the one hand stub-

bornly untrustworthy, and on the other incredibly dependable. It swallows the most important details, whether in concrete happenings or in faces, and no voluntary exertion will induce it to regurgitate them from the gulf. Yet the most trifling indication—a picture postcard, the address on an envelope, a newspaper cutting—will suffice to hook up what is wanted as an angler who has made a strike and successfully imbedded his hook reels in a lively, struggling, and reluctant fish. Then I can recall the features of a man seen once only, the shape of his mouth and the gap to the left where he had an upper eye-tooth knocked out, the falsetto tone of his laugh, and the twitching of the moustache when he chooses to be merry, the entire change of expression which hilarity effects in him. Not only do these physical traits rise before my mind's eye, but I remember, years afterwards, every word the man said to me, and the tenor of my replies. But if I am to see and feel the past thus vividly, there must be some material link to start the current of associations. My memory will not work satisfactorily on the abstract plane.

I closed my eyes to think more strenuously, in the attempt to forge the hook which would catch my fish. In vain! In vain! There was no hook, or the fish would not bite. So fierce waxed my irritation with the inefficient and mulish thinking apparatus between my temples that I could have struck myself a violent blow on the forehead, much as an irascible man will shake and kick a penny-in-the-slot machine which, when he has inserted his coin, refuses to render him his due.

So exasperated did I become at my failure, that I could no longer sit quiet, but rose to prowl about the room. The instant I moved, the glow of awakening memory began. To the right of the cash-register, I recalled, there must be a doorway leading into a windowless room, where the only light was artificial. Yes, the place actually existed.

The decorative scheme was different, but the proportions were unchanged. A square box of a place, behind the bar—the card-room. My nerves thrilled as I contemplated the furniture, for I was on the track, I had found the clue, and soon I should know all. There were two small billiard-tables, looking like silent ponds covered with green scum. In the corners, card-tables, at one of which two bearded men of professorial type were playing chess. Beside the iron stove, close to a door labelled "Telephone," was another small table. In a flash, I had it! That was Mendel's place, Jacob Mendel's. That was where Mendel used to hang out, Buchmendel. I was in the Café Gluck! How could I have forgotten Jacob Mendel. Was it possible that I had not thought about him for ages, a man so peculiar as wellnigh to belong to the Land of Fable, the eighth wonder of the world, famous at the university and among a narrow circle of admirers, magician of book-fanciers, who had been wont to sit there from morning till night, an emblem of bookish lore, the glory of the Café Gluck? Why had I had so much difficulty in hooking my fish? How could I have forgotten Buchmendel?

I allowed my imagination to work. The man's face and form pictured themselves vividly before me. I saw him as he had been in the flesh, seated at the table with its grey marble top, on which books and manuscripts were piled. Motionless he sat, his spectacled eyes fixed upon the printed page. Yet not altogether motionless, for he had a habit (acquired at school in the Jewish quarter of the Galician town from which he came) of rocking his shiny bald pate backwards and forwards and humming to himself as he read. There he studied catalogues and tomes, crooning and rocking, as Jewish boys are taught to do when reading the Talmud. The rabbis believe that, just as a child is rocked to sleep in its cradle, so are the pious ideas of the holy text better instilled by this rhythmical and hypnotizing movement of head and body. In

fact, as if he had been in a trance, Jacob Mendel saw and heard nothing while thus occupied. He was oblivious to the click of billiard-balls, the coming and going of waiters, the ringing of the telephone bell; he paid no heed when the floor was scrubbed and when the stove was refilled. Once a red-hot coal fell out of the latter, and the flooring began to blaze a few inches from Mendel's feet; the room was full of smoke, and one of the guests ran for a pail of water to extinguish the fire. But neither the smoke, the bustle, nor the stench diverted his attention from the volume before him. He read as others pray, as gamblers follow the spinning of the roulette board, as drunkards stare into vacancy; he read with such profound absorption that ever since I first watched him the reading of ordinary mortals has seemed a pastime. This Galician second-hand book dealer, Jacob Mendel, was the first to reveal to me in my youth the mystery of absolute concentration which characterizes the artist and the scholar, the sage and the imbecile; the first to make me acquainted with the tragical happiness and unhappiness of complete absorption.

A senior student introduced me to him. I was studying the life and doings of a man who is even today too little known, Mesmer the magnetizer. My researches were bearing scant fruit, for the books I could lay my hands on conveyed sparse information, and when I applied to the university librarian for help he told me, uncivilly, that it was not his business to hunt up references for a freshman. Then my college friend suggested taking me to Mendel.

"He knows everything about books, and will tell you where to find the information you want. The ablest man in Vienna, and an original to boot. The man is a saurian of the book-world, an antediluvian survivor of an extinct species."

We went, therefore, to the Café Gluck, and found

Buchmendel in his usual place, bespectacled, bearded, wearing a rusty black suit, and rocking as I have described. He did not notice our intrusion, but went on reading, looking like a nodding mandarin. On a hook behind him hung his ragged black overcoat, the pockets of which bulged with manuscripts, catalogues, and books. My friend coughed loudly, to attract his attention, but Mendel ignored the sign. At length Schmidt rapped on the table-top, as if knocking at a door, and at this Mendel glanced up, mechanically pushed his spectacles on to his forehead, and from beneath his thick and untidy ashen-grey brows there glared at us two dark, alert little eyes. My friend introduced me, and I explained my quandary, being careful (as Schmidt had advised) to express great annoyance at the librarian's unwillingness to assist me. Mendel leaned back, laughed scornfully, and answered with a strong Galician accent:

"Unwillingness, you think? Incompetence, that's what's the matter with him. He's a jackass. I've known him (for my sins) twenty years at least, and he's learned nothing in the whole of that time. Pocket their wages—that's all such fellows can do. They should be mending the road, instead of sitting over books."

This outburst served to break the ice, and with a friendly wave of the hand the bookworm invited me to sit down at his table. I reiterated my object in consulting him; to get a list of all the early works on animal magnetism, and of contemporary and subsequent books and pamphlets for and against Mesmer. When I had said my say, Mendel closed his left eye for an instant, as if excluding a grain of dust. This was, with him, a sign of concentrated attention. Then, as though reading from an invisible catalogue, he reeled out the names of two or three dozen titles, giving in each case place and date of publication and approximate price. I was amazed, though Schmidt had warned me what to expect. His vanity was tickled by my surprise,

for he went on to strum the keyboard of his marvellous memory, and to produce the most astounding bibliographical marginal notes. Did I want to know about sleepwalkers, Perkins's metallic tractors, early experiments in hypnotism, Braid, Gassner, attempts to conjure up the devil, Christian Science, theosophy, Madame Blavatsky? In connexion with each item there was a hailstorm of book-names, dates, and appropriate details. I was beginning to understand that Jacob Mendel was a living lexicon, something like the general catalogue of the British Museum Reading Room, but able to walk about on two legs. I stared dumbfounded at this bibliographical phenomenon, which masqueraded in the sordid and rather unclean domino of a Galician second-hand book dealer, who, after rattling off some eighty titles (with assumed indifference, but really with the satisfaction of one who plays an unexpected trump), proceeded to wipe his spectacles with a handkerchief which might long before have been white.

Hoping to conceal my astonishment, I inquired:

"Which among these works do you think you could get for me without too much trouble?"

"Oh, I'll have a look round," he answered. "Come here tomorrow and I shall certainly have some of them. As for the others, it's only a question of time, and of knowing where to look."

"I'm greatly obliged to you," I said; and, then, wishing to be civil, I put my foot in it, proposing to give him a list of the books I wanted. Schmidt nudged me warningly, but too late. Mendel had already flashed a look at me—such a look, at once triumphant and affronted, scornful and overwhelmingly superior—the royal look with which Macbeth answers Macduff when summoned to yield without a blow. He laughed curtly. His Adam's apple moved excitedly. Obviously he had gulped down a choleric, an insulting epithet.

Indeed he had good reason to be angry. Only a stranger, an ignoramus, could have proposed to give him, Jacob Mendel, a memorandum, as if he had been a bookseller's assistant or an underling in a public library. Not until I knew him better did I fully understand how much my would-be politeness must have galled this aberrant genius—for the man had, and knew himself to have, a titanic memory, wherein, behind a dirty and undistinguished-looking forehead, was indelibly recorded a picture of the title-page of every book that had been printed. No matter whether it had issued from the press yesterday or hundreds of years ago, he knew its place of publication, its author's name, and its price. From his mind, as if from the printed page, he could read off the contents, could reproduce the illustrations; could visualize, not only what he had actually held in his hands, but also what he had glanced at in a bookseller's window; could see it with the same vividness as an artist sees the creations of fancy which he has not yet reproduced upon canvas. When a book was offered for six marks by a Regensburg dealer, he could remember that, two years before, a copy of the same work had changed hands for four crowns at a Viennese auction, and he recalled the name of the purchaser. In a word, Jacob Mendel never forgot a title or a figure; he knew every plant, every infusorian, every star, in the continually revolving and incessantly changing cosmos of the book-universe. In each literary specialty, he knew more than the specialists; he knew the contents of the libraries better than the librarians; he knew the book-lists of most publishers better than the heads of the firms concerned—though he had nothing to guide him except the magical powers of his inexplicable but invariably accurate memory.

True, this memory owed its infallibility to the man's limitations, to his extraordinary power of concentration. Apart from books, he knew nothing of the world. The

phenomena of existence did not begin to become real for him until they had been set in type, arranged upon a composing stick, collected and, so to say, sterilized in a book. Nor did he read books for their meaning, to extract their spiritual or narrative substance. What aroused his passionate interest, what fixed his attention, was the name, the price, the format, the title-page. Though in the last analysis unproductive and uncreative, this specifically antiquarian memory of Jacob Mendel, since it was not a printed book-catalogue but was stamped upon the grey matter of a mammalian brain, was, in its unique perfection, no less remarkable a phenomenon than Napoleon's gift for physiognomy, Mezzofanti's talent for languages, Lasker's skill at chess-openings, Busoni's musical genius. Given a public position as teacher, this man with so marvellous a brain might have taught thousands and hundreds of thousands of students, have trained others to become men of great learning and of incalculable value to those communal treasure-houses we call libraries. But to him, a man of no account, a Galician Jew, a book-pedlar whose only training had been received in a Talmudic school, this upper world of culture was a fenced precinct he could never enter; and his amazing faculties could only find application at the marble-topped table in the inner room of the Café Gluck. When, some day, there arises a great psychologist who shall classify the types of that magical power we term memory as effectively as Buffon classified the genera and species of animals, a man competent to give a detailed description of all the varieties, he will have to find a pigeonhole for Jacob Mendel, forgotten master of the lore of book-prices and book-titles, the ambulatory catalogue alike of incunabula and the modern commonplace.

In the book-trade and among ordinary persons, Jacob Mendel was regarded as nothing more than a second-hand book dealer in a small way of business. Sunday after

Sunday, his stereotyped advertisement appeared in the "Neue Freie Presse" and the "Neues Wiener Tagblatt." It ran as follows: "Best prices paid for old books, Mendel, Obere Alserstrasse." A telephone number followed, really that of the Café Gluck. He rummaged every available corner for his wares, and once a week, with the aid of a bearded porter, conveyed fresh booty to his headquarters and got rid of old stock—for he had no proper bookshop. Thus he remained a petty trader, and his business was not lucrative. Students sold him their textbooks, which year by year passed through his hands from one "generation" to another; and for a small percentage on the price he would procure any additional book that was wanted. He charged little or nothing for advice. Money seemed to have no standing in his world. No one had ever seen him better dressed than in the threadbare black coat. For breakfast and supper he had a glass of milk and a couple of rolls, while at midday a modest meal was brought him from a neighbouring restaurant. He did not smoke; he did not play cards; one might almost say he did not live, were it not that his eyes were alive behind his spectacles, and unceasingly fed his enigmatic brain with words, titles, names. The brain, like a fertile pasture, greedily sucked in this abundant irrigation. Human beings did not interest him, and of all human passions perhaps one only moved him, the most universal—vanity.

When someone, wearied by a futile hunt in countless other places, applied to him for information, and was instantly put on the track, his self-gratification was overwhelming; and it was unquestionably a delight to him that in Vienna and elsewhere there existed a few dozen persons who respected him for his knowledge and valued him for the services he could render. In every one of these monstrous aggregates we call towns, there are here and there facets which reflect one and the same universe in miniature—unseen by most, but highly prized by con-

noisseurs, by brethren of the same craft, by devotees of the same passion. The fans of the book-market knew Jacob Mendel. Just as anyone encountering a difficulty in deciphering a score would apply to Eusebius Mandyczewski of the Musical Society, who would be found wearing a grey skull-cap and seated among multifarious musical MSS., ready, with a friendly smile, to solve the most obstinate crux; and just as, today, anyone in search of information about the Viennese theatrical and cultural life of earlier times will unhesitatingly look up the polyhistor Father Glossy; so, with equal confidence did the bibliophiles of Vienna, when they had a particularly hard nut to crack, make a pilgrimage to the Café Gluck and lay their difficulty before Jacob Mendel.

To me, young and eager for new experiences, it became enthralling to watch such a consultation. Whereas ordinarily, when a would-be seller brought him some ordinary book, he would contemptuously clap the cover to and mutter, "Two crowns"; if shown a rare or unique volume, he would sit up and take notice, lay the treasure upon a clean sheet of paper; and, on one such occasion, he was obviously ashamed of his dirty, ink-stained fingers and mourning finger-nails. Tenderly, cautiously, respectfully, he would turn the pages of the treasure. One would have been as loath to disturb him at such a moment as to break in upon the devotions of a man at prayer; and in very truth there was a flavour of solemn ritual and religious observance about the way in which contemplation, palpation, smelling, and weighing in the hand followed one another in orderly succession. His rounded back waggled while he was thus engaged, he muttered to himself, exclaimed "Ah" now and again to express wonder or admiration, or "Oh, dear" when a page was missing or another had been mutilated by the larva of a book-beetle. His weighing of the tome in his hand was as circumspect as if books were sold by the ounce, and his snuffling at it

as sentimental as a girl's smelling of a rose. Of course it would have been the height of bad form for the owner to show impatience during this ritual of examination.

When it was over, he willingly, nay enthusiastically, tendered all the information at his disposal, not forgetting relevant anecdotes, and dramatized accounts of the prices which other specimens of the same work had fetched at auctions or in sales by private treaty. He looked brighter, younger, more lively at such times, and only one thing could put him seriously out of humour. This was when a novice offered him money for his expert opinion. Then he would draw back with an affronted air, looking for all the world like the skilled custodian of a museum gallery to whom an American traveller has offered a tip—for to Jacob Mendel contact with a rare book was something sacred, as is contact with a woman to a young man who has not had the bloom rubbed off. Such moments were his platonic love-nights. Books exerted a spell on him, never money. Vainly, therefore, did great collectors (among them one of the notables of Princeton University) try to recruit Mendel as librarian or book-buyer. The offer was declined with thanks. He could not forsake his familiar headquarters at the Café Gluck. Thirty-three years before, an awkward youngster with black down sprouting on his chin and black ringlets hanging over his temples, he had come from Galicia to Vienna, intending to adopt the calling of rabbi; but ere long he forsook the worship of the harsh and jealous Jehovah to devote himself to the more lively and polytheistic cult of books. Then he happened upon the Café Gluck, by degrees making it his workshop, headquarters, post-office—his world. Just as an astronomer, alone in an observatory, watches night after night through a telescope the myriads of stars, their mysterious movements, their changeful medley, their extinction and their flaming-up anew, so did Jacob Mendel, seated at his table in the Café Gluck, look through his

spectacles into the universe of books, a universe that lies above the world of our everyday life, and, like the stellar universe, is full of changing cycles.

It need hardly be said that he was highly esteemed in the Café Gluck, whose fame seemed to us to depend far more upon his unofficial professorship than upon the godfathership of the famous musician, Christoph Willibald Gluck, composer of *Alcestis* and *Iphigenia*. He belonged to the outfit quite as much as did the old cherrywood counter, the two billiard-tables with their cloth stitched in many places, and the copper coffee-urn. His table was guarded as a sanctuary. His numerous clients and customers were expected to take a drink "for the good of the house," so that most of the profit of his far-flung knowledge flowed into the big leathern pouch slung round the waist of Deubler, the waiter. In return for being a centre of attraction, Mendel enjoyed many privileges. The telephone was at his service for nothing. He could have his letters directed to the café, and his parcels were taken in there. The excellent old woman who looked after the toilet brushed his coat, sewed on buttons, and carried a small bundle of underlinen every week to the wash. He was the only guest who could have a meal sent in from the restaurant; and every morning Herr Standhartner, the proprietor of the café, made a point of coming to his table and saying "Good morning!"—though Jacob Mendel, immersed in his books, seldom noticed the greeting. Punctually at half-past seven he arrived, and did not leave till the lights were extinguished. He never spoke to the other guests, never read a newspaper, noticed no changes; and once, when Herr Standhartner civilly asked him whether he did not find the electric light more agreeable to read by than the malodorous and uncertain kerosene lamps they had replaced, he stared in astonishment at the new incandescents. Although the installation had necessitated several days' hammering and bustle, the in-

troduction of the glow-lamps had escaped his notice. Only through the two round apertures of the spectacles, only through these two shining and sucking lenses, did the milliards of black infusorians which were the letters filter into his brain. Whatever else happened in his vicinity was disregarded as unmeaning noise. He had spent more than thirty years of his waking life at this table, reading, comparing, calculating, in a continuous waking dream, interrupted only by intervals of sleep.

A sense of horror overcame me when, looking into the inner room behind the bar of the Café Gluck, I saw that the marble top of the table where Jacob Mendel used to deliver his oracles was now as bare as a tombstone. Grown older since those days, I understood how much disappears when such a man drops out of his place in the world, were it only because, amid the daily increase in hopeless monotony, the unique grows continually more precious. Besides, in my callow youth a profound intuition had made me exceedingly fond of Buchmendel. It was through the observation of him that I had first become aware of the enigmatic fact that supreme achievement and outstanding capacity are only rendered possible by mental concentration, by a sublime monomania that verges on lunacy. Through the living example of this obscure genius of a second-hand book dealer, far more than through the flashes of insight in the works of our poets and other imaginative writers, had been made plain to me the persistent possibility of a pure life of the spirit, of complete absorption in an idea, an ecstasy as absolute as that of an Indian yogi or a medieval monk; and I had learned that this was possible in an electric-lighted café and adjoining a telephone box. Yet I had forgotten him, during the war years, and through a kindred immersion in my own work. The sight of the empty table made me ashamed of myself, and at the same time curious about the man who used to sit there.

What had become of him? I called the waiter and inquired.

"No, Sir," he answered, "I'm sorry, but I never heard of Herr Mendel. There is no one of that name among the frequenters of the Café Gluck. Perhaps the head-waiter will know."

"Herr Mendel?" said the head-waiter dubiously, after a moment's reflection. "No, Sir, never heard of him. Unless you mean Herr Mandl, who has a hardware store in the Florianigasse?"

I had a bitter taste in the mouth, the taste of an irrecoverable past. What is the use of living, when the wind obliterates our footsteps in the sand directly we have gone by? Thirty years, perhaps forty, a man had breathed, read, thought, and spoken within this narrow room; three or four years had elapsed, and there had arisen a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. No one in the Café Gluck had ever heard of Jacob Mendel, of Buchmendel. Somewhat pettishly I asked the head-waiter whether I could have a word with Herr Standhartner, or with one of the old staff.

"Herr Standhartner, who used to own the place? He sold it years ago, and has died since. . . . The former head-waiter? He saved up enough to retire, and lives upon a little property at Krems. No, Sir, all of the old lot are scattered. All except one, indeed, Frau Sporschil, who looks after the toilet. She's been here for ages, worked under the late owner, I know. But she's not likely to remember your Herr Mendel. Such as she hardly know one guest from another."

I dissented in thought.

"One does not forget a Jacob Mendel so easily!"

What I said was:

"Still, I should like to have a word with Frau Sporschil, if she has a moment to spare."

The "Toilettenfrau" (known in the Viennese vernacular

as the "Schocoladefrau") soon emerged from the basement, white-haired, run to seed, heavy-footed, wiping her chapped hands upon a towel as she came. She had been called away from her task of cleaning up, and was obviously uneasy at being summoned into the strong light of the guest-rooms—for common folk in Vienna, where an authoritative tradition has lingered on after the revolution, always think it must be a police matter when their "superiors" want to question them. She eyed me suspiciously, though humbly. But as soon as I asked her about Jacob Mendel, she braced up, and at the same time her eyes filled with tears.

"Poor Herr Mendel . . . so there's still someone who bears him in mind?"

Old people are commonly much moved by anything which recalls the days of their youth and revives the memory of past companionships. I asked if he was still alive.

"Good Lord, no. Poor Herr Mendel must have died five or six years ago. Indeed, I think it's fully seven since he passed away. Dear, good man that he was; and how long I knew him, more than twenty-five years; he was already sitting every day at his table when I began to work here. It was a shame, it was, the way they let him die."

Growing more and more excited, she asked if I was a relative. No one had ever inquired about him before. Didn't I know what had happened to him?

"No," I replied, "and I want you to be good enough to tell me all about it."

She looked at me timidly, and continued to wipe her damp hands. It was plain to me that she found it embarrassing, with her dirty apron and her tousled white hair, to be standing in the full glare of the café. She kept looking round anxiously, to see if one of the waiters might be listening.

"Let's go into the card-room," I said, "Mendel's old room. You shall tell me your story there."

She nodded appreciatively, thankful that I understood, and led the way to the inner room, a little shambling in her gait. As I followed, I noticed that the waiters and the guests were staring at us as a strangely assorted pair. We sat down opposite one another at the marble-topped table, and there she told me the story of Jacob Mendel's ruin and death. I will give the tale as nearly as may be in her own words, supplemented here and there by what I learned afterwards from other sources.

"Down to the outbreak of war, and after the war had begun, he continued to come here every morning at half-past seven, to sit at this table and study all day just as before. We had the feeling that the fact of a war going on had never entered his mind. Certainly he didn't read the newspapers, and didn't talk to anyone except about books. He paid no attention when (in the early days of the war, before the authorities put a stop to such things) the newspaper-venders ran through the streets shouting, 'Great Battle on the Eastern Front' (or wherever it might be), 'Horrible Slaughter,' and so on; when people gathered in knots to talk things over, he kept himself to himself; he did not know that Fritz, the billiard-marker, who fell in one of the first battles, had vanished from this place; he did not know that Herr Standhartner's son had been taken prisoner by the Russians at Przemysl; never said a word when the bread grew more and more uneatable and when he was given bean-coffee to drink at breakfast and supper instead of hot milk. Once only did he express surprise at the changes, wondering why so few students came to the café. There was nothing in the world that mattered to him except his books.

"Then disaster befell him. At eleven one morning, two policemen came, one in uniform, and the other a plain-clothes man. The latter showed the red rosette under

the lapel of his coat and asked whether there was a man named Jacob Mendel in the house. They went straight to Herr Mendel's table. The poor man, in his innocence, supposed they had books to sell, or wanted some information; but they told him he was under arrest, and took him away at once. It was a scandal for the café. All the guests flocked round Herr Mendel, as he stood between the two police officers, his spectacles pushed up under his hair, staring from each to the other bewildered. Some ventured a protest, saying there must be a mistake—that Herr Mendel was a man who wouldn't hurt a fly; but the detective was furious, and told them to mind their own business. They took him away, and none of us at the Café Gluck saw him again for two years. I never found out what they had against him, but I would take my dying oath that they must have made a mistake. Herr Mendel could never have done anything wrong. It was a crime to treat an innocent man so harshly."

The excellent Frau Sporschil was right. Our friend Jacob Mendel had done nothing wrong. He had merely (as I subsequently learned) done something incredibly stupid, only explicable to those who knew the man's peculiarities. The military censorship board, whose function it was to supervise correspondence passing into and out of neutral hands, one day got its clutches upon a postcard written and signed by a certain Jacob Mendel, properly stamped for transmission abroad. This postcard was addressed to Monsieur Jean Labourdaire, Libraire, Quai de Grenelle, Paris—to an enemy country, therefore. The writer complained that the last eight issues of the monthly "Bulletin bibliographique de la France" had failed to reach him, although his annual subscription had been duly paid in advance. The jack-in-office who read this missive (a high-school teacher with a bent for the study of the Romance languages, called up for "war-service" and sent to employ his talents at the censorship board instead of wasting

them in the trenches) was astonished by its tenor. "Must be a joke," he thought. He had to examine some two thousand letters and postcards every week, always on the alert to detect anything that might savour of espionage, but never yet had he chanced upon anything so absurd as that an Austrian subject should unconcernedly drop into one of the imperial and royal letter-boxes a postcard addressed to someone in an enemy land, regardless of the trifling detail that since August 1914 the Central Powers had been cut off from Russia on one side and from France on the other by barbed-wire entanglements and a network of ditches in which men armed with rifles and bayonets, machine-guns and artillery, were doing their utmost to exterminate one another like rats. Our schoolmaster enrolled in the Landsturm did not treat this first postcard seriously, but pigeon-holed it as a curiosity not worth talking about to his chief. But a few weeks later there turned up another card, again from Jacob Mendel, this time to John Aldridge, Bookseller, Golden Square, London, asking whether the addressee could send the last few numbers of the "Antiquarian" to an address in Vienna which was clearly stated on the card.

The censor in the blue uniform began to feel uneasy. Was his "class" trying to trick the schoolmaster? Were the cards written in cipher? Possible, anyhow; so the subordinate went over to the major's desk, clicked his heels together, saluted, and laid the suspicious documents before "properly constituted authority." A strange business, certainly. The police were instructed by telephone to see if there actually was a Jacob Mendel at the specified address, and, if so, to bring the fellow along. Within the hour, Mendel had been arrested, and (still stupefied by the shock) brought before the major, who showed him the postcards, and asked him with drill-sergeant roughness whether he acknowledged their authorship. Angered at being spoken to so sharply, and

still more annoyed because his perusal of an important catalogue had been interrupted, Mendel answered tartly:

"Of course I wrote the cards. That's my handwriting and signature. Surely one has a right to claim the delivery of a periodical to which one has subscribed?"

The major swung half-round in his swivel-chair and exchanged a meaning glance with the lieutenant seated at the adjoining desk.

"The man must be a double-distilled idiot" was what they mutely conveyed to one another.

Then the chief took counsel within himself whether he should discharge the offender with a caution, or whether he should treat the case more seriously. In all offices, when such doubts arise, the usual practice is, not to spin a coin, but to send in a report. Thus Pilate washes his hands of responsibility. Even if the report does no good, it can do no harm, and is merely one useless manuscript or typescript added to a million others.

In this instance, however, the decision to send in a report did much harm, alas, to an inoffensive man of genius, for it involved asking a series of questions, and the third of them brought suspicious circumstances to light.

"Your full name?"

"Jacob Mendel."

"Occupation?"

"Book-pedlar" (for, as already explained, Mendel had no shop, but only a pedlar's license).

"Place of birth?"

Now came the disaster. Mendel's birthplace was not far from Petrikau. The major raised his eyebrows. Petrikau, or Piotrkov, was across the frontier, in Russian Poland.

"You were born a Russian subject. When did you acquire Austrian nationality? Show me your papers."

Mendel gazed at the officer uncomprehendingly through his spectacles.

"Papers? Identification papers? I have nothing but my hawker's license."

"What's your nationality, then? Was your father Austrian or Russian?"

Undismayed, Mendel answered:

"A Russian, of course."

"What about yourself?"

"Wishing to evade Russian military service, I slipped across the frontier thirty-three years ago, and ever since I have lived in Vienna."

The matter seemed to the major to be growing worse and worse.

"But didn't you take steps to become an Austrian subject?"

"Why should I?" countered Mendel. "I never troubled my head about such things."

"Then you are still a Russian subject?"

Mendel, who was bored by this endless questioning, answered simply:

"Yes, I suppose I am."

The startled and indignant major threw himself back in his chair with such violence that the wood cracked protestingly. So this was what it had come to! In Vienna, the Austrian capital, at the end of 1915, after Tarnow, when the war was in full blast, after the great offensive, a Russian could walk about unmolested, could write letters to France and England, while the police ignored his machinations. And then the fools who wrote in the newspapers wondered why Conrad von Hotzendorf had not advanced in seven-leagued boots to Warsaw, and the general staff was puzzled because every movement of the troops was immediately blabbed to the Russians.

The lieutenant had sprung to his feet and crossed the room to his chief's table. What had been an almost friendly conversation took a new turn, and degenerated into a trial.

"Why didn't you report as an enemy alien directly the war began?"

Mendel, still failing to realize the gravity of his position, answered in his singing Jewish jargon:

"Why should I report? I don't understand."

The major regarded this inquiry as a challenge, and asked threateningly:

"Didn't you read the notices that were posted up everywhere?"

"No."

"Didn't you read the newspapers?"

"No."

The two officers stared at Jacob Mendel (now sweating with uneasiness) as if the moon had fallen from the sky into their office. Then the telephone buzzed, the typewriters clacked, orderlies ran hither and thither, and Mendel was sent under guard to the nearest barracks, where he was to await transfer to a concentration camp. When he was ordered to follow the two soldiers, he was frankly puzzled, but not seriously perturbed. What could the man with the gold-lace collar and the rough voice have against him? In the upper world of books, where Mendel lived and breathed and had his being, there was no warfare, there were no misunderstandings, only an ever-increasing knowledge of words and figures, of book-titles and authors' names. He walked good-humouredly enough downstairs between the soldiers, whose first charge was to take him to the police station. Not until, there, the books were taken out of his overcoat pockets, and the police impounded the portfolio containing a hundred important memoranda and customers' addresses, did he lose his temper, and begin to resist and strike blows. They had to tie his hands. In the struggle, his spectacles fell off, and these magical telescopes, without which he could not see into the wonderworld of books, were smashed into a thousand pieces. Two days later, insufficiently clad (for

his only wrap was a light summer cloak), he was sent to the internment camp for Russian civilians at Komorn.

I have no information as to what Jacob Mendel suffered during these two years of internment, cut off from his beloved books, penniless, among roughly nurtured men, few of whom could read or write, in a huge human dunghill. This must be left to the imagination of those who can grasp the torments of a caged eagle. By degrees, however, our world, grown sober after its fit of drunkenness, has become aware that, of all the cruelties and wanton abuses of power during the war, the most needless and therefore the most inexcusable was this herding together behind barbed-wire fences of thousands upon thousands of persons who had outgrown the age of military service, who had made homes for themselves in a foreign land, and who (believing in the good faith of their hosts) had refrained from exercising the sacred right of hospitality granted even by the Tunguses and Araucanians—the right to flee while time permits. This crime against civilization was committed with the same unthinking hardihood in France, Germany, and Britain, in every belligerent country of our crazy Europe.

Probably Jacob Mendel would, like thousands as innocent as he, have perished in this cattle-pen, have gone stark mad, have succumbed to dysentery, asthenia, softening of the brain, had it not been that, before the worst happened, a chance (typically Austrian) recalled him to the world in which a spiritual life became again possible. Several times after his disappearance, letters from distinguished customers were delivered for him at the Café Gluck. Count Schönberg, sometime lord-lieutenant of Styria, an enthusiastic collector of works on heraldry; Siegenfeld, the former dean of the theological faculty, who was writing a commentary on the works of St. Augustine; Edler von Pisek, an octogenarian admiral on the retired list, engaged in writing his memoirs—these

and other persons of note, wanting information from Buchmendel, had repeatedly addressed communications to him at his familiar haunt, and some of these were duly forwarded to the concentration camp at Komorn. There they fell into the hands of the commanding officer, who happened to be a man of humane disposition, and was astonished to find what notables were among the correspondents of this dirty little Russian Jew, who, half-blind now that his spectacles were broken and he had no money to buy new ones, crouched in a corner like a mole, grey, eyeless, and dumb. A man who had such patrons must be a person of importance, whatever he looked like. The C.O. therefore read the letters to the short-sighted Mendel, and penned answers for him to sign—answers which were mainly requests that influence should be exercised on his behalf. The spell worked, for these correspondents had the solidarity of collectors. Joining forces and pulling strings they were able (giving guarantees for the "enemy alien's" good behaviour) to secure leave for Buchmendel's return to Vienna in 1917, after more than two years at Komorn—on the condition that he should report daily to the police. The proviso mattered little. He was a free man once more, free to take up his quarters in his old attic, free to handle books again, free (above all) to return to his table in the Café Gluck. I can describe the return from the underworld of the camp in the good Frau Sporschil's own words:

"One day—Jesus, Mary, Joseph; I could hardly believe my eyes—the door opened (you remember the way he had) little wider than a crack, and through this opening he sidled, poor Herr Mendel. He was wearing a tattered and much-darned military cloak, and his head was covered by what had perhaps once been a hat thrown away by the owner as past use. No collar. His face looked like a death's head, so haggard it was, and his hair was pitifully thin. But he came in as if nothing had happened, went

straight to his table, and took off his cloak, not briskly as of old, for he panted with the exertion. Nor had he any books with him. He just sat there without a word, staring straight in front of him with hollow, expressionless eyes. Only by degrees, after we had brought him the big bundle of printed matter which had arrived for him from Germany, did he begin to read again. But he was never the same man."

No, he was never the same man, not now the miraculum mundi, the magical walking book-catalogue. All who saw him in those days told me the same pitiful story. Something had gone irrecoverably wrong; he was broken; the blood-red comet of the war had burst into the remote, calm atmosphere of his bookish world. His eyes, accustomed for decades to look at nothing but print, must have seen terrible sights in the wire-fenced human stockyard, for the eyes that had formerly been so alert and full of ironical gleams were now almost completely veiled by the inert lids, and looked sleepy and red-bordered behind the carefully repaired spectacle-frames. Worse still, a cog must have broken somewhere in the marvellous machinery of his memory, so that the working of the whole was impaired; for so delicate is the structure of the brain (a sort of switchboard made of the most fragile substances, and as easily jarred as are all instruments of precision) that a blocked arteriole, a congested bundle of nerve-fibres, a fatigued group of cells, even a displaced molecule, may put the apparatus out of gear and make harmonious working impossible. In Mendel's memory, the keyboard of knowledge, the keys were stiff, or—to use psychological terminology—the associations were impaired. When, now and again, someone came to ask for information, Jacob stared blankly at the inquirer, failing to understand the question, and even forgetting it before he had found the answer. Mendel was no longer Buchmendel, just as the world was no longer the world. He could not now

become wholly absorbed in his reading, did not rock as of old when he read, but sat bolt upright, his glasses turned mechanically towards the printed page, but perhaps not reading at all, and only sunk in a reverie. Often, said Frau Sporschil, his head would drop on to his book and he would fall asleep in the daytime, or he would gaze hour after hour at the stinking acetylene lamp which (in the days of the coal famine) had replaced the electric lighting. No, Mendel was no longer Buchmendel, no longer the eighth wonder of the world, but a weary, worn-out, though still breathing, useless bundle of beard and ragged garments, which sat, as futile as a potato-bogle, where of old the Pythian oracle had sat; no longer the glory of the Café Gluck, but a shameful scarecrow, evil-smelling, a parasite.

That was the impression he produced upon the new proprietor, Florian Gurtner from Retz, who (a successful profiteer in flour and butter) had cajoled Standhartner into selling him the Café Gluck for eighty thousand rapidly depreciating paper crowns. He took everything into his hard peasant grip, hastily arranged to have the old place redecorated, bought fine-looking satin-covered seats, installed a marble porch, and was in negotiation with his next-door neighbour to buy a place where he could extend the café into a dancing-hall. Naturally while he was making these embellishments, he was not best pleased by the parasitic encumbrance of Jacob Mendel, a filthy old Galician Jew, who had been in trouble with the authorities during the war, was still to be regarded as an "enemy alien," and, while occupying a table from morning till night, consumed no more than two cups of coffee and four or five rolls. Standhartner, indeed, had put in a word for this guest of long standing, had explained that Mendel was a person of note, and, in the stock-taking, had handed him over as having a permanent lien upon the establishment, but as an asset rather than a liability.

Florian Gurtner, however, had brought into the café, not only new furniture, and an up-to-date cash register, but also the profit-making and hard temper of the post-war era, and awaited the first pretext for ejecting from his smart coffee-house the last troublesome vestige of suburban shabbiness.

A good excuse was not slow to present itself. Jacob Mendel was impoverished to the last degree. Such banknotes as had been left to him had crumbled away to nothing during the inflation period; his regular clientele had been killed, ruined, or dispersed. When he tried to resume his early trade of book-pedlar, calling from door to door to buy and to sell, he found that he lacked strength to carry books up and down stairs. A hundred little signs showed him to be a pauper. Seldom, now, did he have a midday meal sent in from the restaurant, and he began to run up a score at the Café Gluck for his modest breakfast and supper. Once his payments were as much as three weeks overdue. Were it only for this reason, the head-waiter wanted Gurtner to "give Mendel the sack." But Frau Sporschil intervened, and stood surety for the debtor. What was due could be stopped out of her wages!

This staved off disaster for a while, but worse was to come. For some time the head-waiter had noticed that rolls were disappearing faster than the tally would account for. Naturally suspicion fell upon Mendel, who was known to be six months in debt to the tottering old porter whose services he still needed. The head-waiter, hidden behind the stove, was able, two days later, to catch Mendel red-handed. The unwelcome guest had stolen from his seat in the card-room, crept behind the counter in the front room, taken two rolls from the bread-basket, returned to the card-room, and hungrily devoured them. When settling-up at the end of the day, he said he had only had coffee; no rolls. The source of wastage had been traced, and the waiter reported his discovery to the pro-

prietor. Herr Gurtner, delighted to have so good an excuse for getting rid of Mendel, made a scene, openly accused him of theft, and declared that nothing but the goodness of his own heart prevented his sending for the police.

"But after this," said Florian, "you'll kindly take yourself off for good and all. We don't want to see your face again at the Café Gluck."

Jacob Mendel trembled, but made no reply. Abandoning his poor belongings, he departed without a word.

"It was ghastly," said Frau Sporschil. "Never shall I forget the sight. He stood up, his spectacles pushed on to his forehead, and his face white as a sheet. He did not even stop to put on his cloak, although it was January, and very cold. You'll remember that severe winter, just after the war. In his fright, he left the book he was reading open upon the table. I did not notice it at first, and then, when I wanted to pick it up and take it after him, he had already stumbled out through the doorway. I was afraid to follow him into the street, for Herr Gurtner was standing at the door and shouting at him, so that a crowd had gathered. Yet I felt ashamed to the depths of my soul. Such a thing would never have happened under the old master. Herr Standhartner would not have driven Herr Mendel away for pinching one or two rolls when he was hungry, but would have let him have as many as he wanted for nothing, to the end of his days. Since the war, people seem to have grown heartless. Drive away a man who had been a guest daily for so many, many years. Shameful! I should not like to have to answer before God for such cruelty!"

The good woman had grown excited, and, with the passionate garrulousness of old age, she kept on repeating how shameful it was, and that nothing of the sort would have happened if Herr Standhartner had not sold the business. In the end I tried to stop the flow by asking

her what had happened to Mendel, and whether she had ever seen him again. These questions excited her yet more.

"Day after day, when I passed his table, it gave me the creeps, as you will easily understand. Each time I thought to myself: 'Where can he have got to, poor Herr Mendel?' Had I known where he lived, I would have called and taken him something nice and hot to eat—for where could he get the money to cook food and warm his room? As far as I knew, he had no kinsfolk in the wide world. When, after a long time, I had heard nothing about him, I began to believe that it must be all up with him, and that I should never see him again. I had made up my mind to have a mass said for the peace of his soul, knowing him to be a good man, after twenty-five years' acquaintance.

"At length one day in February, at half-past seven in the morning, when I was cleaning the windows, the door opened, and in came Herr Mendel. Generally, as you know, he sidled in, looking confused, and not 'quite all there'; but this time, somehow, it was different. I noticed at once the strange look in his eyes; they were sparkling, and he rolled them this way and that, as if to see everything at once; as for his appearance, he seemed nothing but beard and skin and bone. Instantly it crossed my mind: 'He's forgotten all that happened last time he was here; it's his way to go about like a sleepwalker noticing nothing; he doesn't remember about the rolls, and how shamefully Herr Gurtner ordered him out of the place, half in mind to set the police on him.' Thank goodness, Herr Gurtner hadn't come yet, and the head-waiter was drinking coffee. I ran up to Herr Mendel, meaning to tell him he'd better make himself scarce, for otherwise that ruffian" [she looked round timidly to see if we were overheard, and hastily amended her phrase], "Herr Gurtner, I mean, would only have him thrown into the street once more. 'Herr Mendel,' I began. He started, and

looked at me. In that very moment (it was dreadful), he must have remembered the whole thing, for he almost collapsed, and began to tremble, not his fingers only, but to shiver and shake from head to foot. Hastily he stepped back into the street, and fell in a heap on the pavement as soon as he was outside the door. We telephoned for the ambulance, and they carried him off to hospital, the nurse who came saying he had high fever directly she touched him. He died that evening. 'Double pneumonia,' the doctor said, and that he never recovered consciousness—could not have been fully conscious when he came to the Café Gluck. As I said, he had entered like a man walking in his sleep. The table where he had sat day after day for thirty-six years drew him back to it like a home."

Frau Sporschil and I went on talking about him for a long time, the two last persons to remember this strange creature, Buchmendel: I to whom in youth the book-pedlar from Galicia had given the first revelation of a life wholly devoted to the things of the spirit; she, the poor old woman who was caretaker of a café-toilet, who had never read a book in her life, and whose only tie with this strangely matched comrade in her subordinate, poverty-stricken world had been that for twenty-five years she had brushed his overcoat and had sewn on buttons for him. We, too, might have been considered strangely assorted, but Frau Sporschil and I got on very well together, linked, as we sat at the forsaken marble-topped table, by our common memories of the shade our talk had conjured up—for joint memories, and above all loving memories, always establish a tie. Suddenly, while in the full stream of talk, she exclaimed:

"Lord Jesus, how forgetful I am. I still have the book he left on the table the evening Herr Gurtner gave him the key of the street. I didn't know where to take it. Afterwards, when no one appeared to claim it, I ventured

to keep it as a souvenir. You don't think it wrong of me, Sir?"

She went to a locker where she stored some of the requisites for her job, and produced the volume for my inspection. I found it hard to repress a smile, for I was face to face with one of life's little ironies. It was the second volume of Hayn's *Bibliotheca Germanorum erotica et curiosa*, a compendium of gallant literature known to every book-collector. "Habent sua fata libelli!" This scabrous publication, as legacy of the vanished magician, had fallen into toilworn hands which had perhaps never held any other printed work than a prayer-book. Maybe I was not wholly successful in controlling my mirth, for the expression of my face seemed to perplex the worthy soul, and once more she said:

"You don't think it wrong of me to keep it, Sir?"

I shook her cordially by the hand.

"Keep it, and welcome," I said. "I am absolutely sure that our old friend Mendel would be only too delighted to know that someone among the many thousand he has provided with books, cherishes his memory."

Then I took my departure, feeling a trifle ashamed when I compared myself with this excellent old woman, who, so simply and so humanely, had fostered the memory of the dead scholar. For she, uncultured though she was, had at least preserved a book as a memento; whereas I, a man of education and a writer, had completely forgotten Buchmendel for years—I, who at least should have known that one only makes books in order to keep in touch with one's fellows after one has ceased to breathe, and thus to defend oneself against the inexorable fate of all that lives—transitoriness and oblivion.

THE MARCHESA

by

K. Swinstead-Smith

K. SWINSTEAD-SMITH *has had stories published in* Lovat Dickson's Magazine, Everyman, The Tatler, *and* The English Review, *but* The Marchesa and Other Stories *is her first published book. Calabria, which she knows well, is the scene of some of her most interesting stories.*

THE MARCHESA

MARY was wakened by Viti.

"Come," he whispered. "It is being born."

On his brooding Italian little face there was mingled mystery and awe. His eyes, with their blue whites and starry brilliancy, pleaded and impelled at the same time. His pyjama legs were falling off, and he clutched at them with one hand.

Mary had no need to be told what was being born. All day yesterday the children had talked of nothing but Méline, the cow; and Giacomo, the eldest boy, to whom she belonged, had sat with her until half past ten stroking her silky ears. As Mary put on her kimono and twisted her golden plait of hair into a knot, she felt Viti's eager little hand pulling her towards the doorway.

"I'm coming, dear," she said, feeling for his hand in the dark.

Outside, Calabria lay grey and unawakened. Soon the sun would come out of the Ionian Sea, turning the dead waters to living pearl and then to aquamarine and azure; the grass round the olive trees would renew its emerald perfection, and the lizards who lived there would wake up and dart from tree to tree like green lightning; the colour would flow back into the little blue gentians, and the old stone villa in which Mary was staying would glow with a golden warmth. Life—throbbing, pulsing life. This would the sun accomplish. Now life was smudged and dreamy; only below in one of the huts Mary heard a faint lowing, and knew that even in this greyness new life was struggling.

From *The Marchesa and Other Stories*, by K. Swinstead-Smith, published by The Hogarth Press, London, 1936, and reprinted by permission of The Hogarth Press.

"Listen how she cries!" whispered Viti as they went carefully down the stone stairs together, Mary carrying a candle because it was dark still. They passed out through the three-hundred-year-old stone doorway into the modern garage. Two tiny, yellow-breasted birds flew out from the eaves and vanished, tweeting, into the greyness beyond.

The barn was a poor, tumble-down place, very like the adjoining huts, which were occupied by the Marchesa's peasant workers. A white mule and a brown horse were tethered to a piece of fence, and listened, turning restless, frightened eyes, to the dull lowing within.

Giacomo, who was nearly twelve, came up to them. He looked like an angel in the light of the candle he carried; the sweet brooding adolescence of his face was heightened by a look of anguish; he would throw a stone at a stray dog, but the cow Méline was his, and he suffered with her. Mary understood this, and did not speak to him.

Round the barn stood a silent group of people. In the dark grey dawn and against the star-strewn sky they looked indeed as if they were waiting for a message. Mary knew them all, but in the drama of this early morning they were all different. There stood seventy-year-old Seraphina, wrinkled and yellow, her head tied up in its black rag, motionless, her claw-like hands grasping a stump of candle. Next to her was Maria, her daughter, a superb Calabrian peasant woman. How often Mary had seen her swinging through the olives, her lusty baby on her back, and half a ton of water balanced fearlessly on her head. Now she stood like a Greek statue, her naked feet planted deeply into the earth, holding her great soft breast to her child, her eyes fixed attentively on the closed door of the barn.

So they all stood and waited.

"It won't be long now, Miss Graham," whispered the Marchesa.

She had a black coat wrapped round her up to the chin —her dusty, badly kept hair hung down on either side of her white, heavy, youngish face. She spoke English huskily with a beautiful accent.

She took Viti's hand and felt it quivering.

"Little excited boy," she said, smiling her strange, slow smile.

Viti struggled to get his hand away, his eyes fixed on the barn.

The elder boys were creeping in and out of the barn. They had always known the meaning of birth and death.

"I want to see, too," said Viti, breathlessly, turning up his eyes to Mary. "Let me go."

She let him go and he darted away. Presently he came back breathing rather hard. Mary put her arm round him; he was trembling—he was only seven.

Luigi, the second boy, left off going into the barn. He stood among the peasants, his heavy, cupped, dark eyes half shut. He looked older than Giacomo, although he was only ten. Once he picked up a stone and hurled it at the little pariah puppy that was standing shivering at the entrance of the vineyard.

"*Basta,*" said Mary under her breath at him. "*Capite, basta.*"

He looked her up and down with his somnolent brown eyes.

Mary drew her kimono tighter round her and bent to speak to Viti. Luigi must never know that she minded his eyes—a child of ten—it was ridiculous!

Suddenly Brunone came out of the barn smiling. He was brown as the earth, and he had a strange grace about him.

"*Ecco,*" he said straightening himself. "*Tutto è bene, Signora Marchesa. Com'e carina la vitella!*" and he went away to the well to wash his hands.

Each in turn they went into the dark fœtid barn to see the little new life. Giacomo stood in the doorway, and

the peasants took their orders from him quietly and docilely. Viti went in with Mary. Méline stood tied up at one end of the barn, her eyes still rolling with fright. In the dark hay lay the little calf trembling with new life. Viti stood rigid, looking down at it.

"Born," he said wonderingly, and gave a great shuddering sigh of delight.

Going back to the house, Mary saw that the sun was already up. Viti had left her suddenly, tearing away to join the others. She knew that it was no use going to bed again, for soon the children would go shouting into the strange primitive bathroom and the tutor would turn on the shower. She had not seen the tutor at the barn—perhaps, poor young man, he had no dressing-gown. But surely such a little thing as that would not matter in Calabria. Still, he was very shy. She washed and dressed. It was time to go and bath Viti, if Seraphina had got the stove going, throwing in twig after twig with her old gnarled hands as if for a sacrifice.

She had to go through the Marchesa's room to get to him, for all the rooms in the house led out of one another. The Marchesa had evidently been to sleep again, for as Mary went in she was waking up, pushing the blue crêpe de Chine sheets down to her waist, shaking her dull hair out of her eyes, stretching and yawning again and again, her large white teeth snapping between every yawn. With her long white Italian hand she began to scratch her back and her right breast, large and curved under the soiled nightdress—Calabrian fleas were persistent, and although everyone in the house had scarves pinned round their beds, which kept off the multitude, there were always a few stray ones.

"Is that you, Miss Graham?" she said in her slow Southern drawl. She lay still, her hands clasped behind her neck, the long dark silky hairs in her arm-pits glistening with perspiration.

"I'm just going to bath Viti," said Mary.

"How excited he was—my baby." The Marchesa's great purple-blue eyes softened. "How am I going to leave them for a fortnight, Miss Graham?"

"What time is your train?"

"I leave here at twelve. I reach Naples tomorrow. If only it wasn't necessary for me to go! But I must go—I am going to try and get a man acquitted—a negro. My friends say, Why bother about a negro; but I say, a negro is a man, and he is in my service, and if he is convicted he will get ten years in prison, so my lawyers and I are going to make a fight."

"It's wonderful of you to take such an interest," murmured Mary.

"What else could a civilized person do."

A civilized person! Mary looked at her. No, she thought, intelligent, interesting, cultured even, but not civilized. Suddenly her eyes met those of the Marchesa. They had turned almost black, they held her mesmerized; they wandered from her golden plaits of hair neatly coiled to the fresh washing silk frock and the slim, straight-drawn silk stockings.

"Go and bath Viti now, please, Miss Graham," she said, smiling still, but hissing the words between her shut teeth. Quietly Mary went.

"She's like an animal," thought the English girl, as she stood looking out of the window in the bathroom with her back to Viti.

Viti was easily shamed.

"No, no, no, no, no," he cried as she turned round, clutching his pyjamas round his skinny little boy's body. He did not mind her ministrations when he was in the bath, for he thought the water covered him up, and by the time he was out of it he had forgotten to be ashamed.

"Why do I feel as if something is going to happen?" thought Mary, as she rubbed the little boy under his arms.

He stood like a baby Christ with his arms outstretched, his blue eyes mysteriously dark and brooding, his bright pink lips parted. He watched intently the little drops of water that fell plonk, plonk, on to the floor from his hair. He bent down and put his finger wonderingly into one of the drops, and then showed the finger to Mary and laughed. His tiny milk teeth were like a calf's. He jumped about the bathroom in his combinations, singing little bits, calling to himself, making little imaginary birds fly away from his fingers. Suddenly he came up to Mary and punched her with a doubled-up fist. She smacked his hand and he laughed again.

"Animals," thought Mary again, "interesting enough, but just animals."

As she came down to breakfast she caught glimpses at every window of the Ionian Sea, blue-purple now like a piece of rich cloth with a white selvage. She passed Brunone staggering into the kitchen with two water-barrels on his back. His eyes were bright blue in his brown face, his muscles rippled all over his body.

They were already seated at the long trestle table when she came in, except for the Marchesa, who breakfasted in bed.

This room had been a refectory in olden times; there were still frescoes on the walls, but the little cells of the monks had been turned into glass-pantries and linen-cupboards. Two slender carved pillars stood near together in the middle of the room and took the weight of the ceiling. Beside each of these stood a Sicilian water-barrel, brightly decorated, filled with decaying orange-peel and cigarette ends. These were never emptied from year's end to year's end. Everybody ate oranges—they lay about all over the house—the barrels were convenient for disposing of the peel. The tutor and the boys stood up when she came in. She said good-morning to the tutor in French, for he did not speak English, and her

Italian was still far from perfect. She would have liked to have spoken Italian with him for practice, but somehow she did not quite like to leave off speaking French.

He was a strange, quiet young man. He seemed to have no possessions except his Dante and commentary, and a pair of carpet slippers, which he kept under an old Italian grammar. Mary had to go through his room every time to reach the bathroom, but she never saw anything personal about. And yet he dressed quite well, but more like an estate agent than a tutor. He liked to dictate to the peasants, and was in his element dealing out the seeds to them, which he did once a week on the old brown table in the refectory where the seeds were kept. Sometimes he rolled his shirt-sleeves up to weigh them out, and his arms were boyish and thin and well-shaped. He always pulled them down directly Mary came into the room. His hair was exuberant and refused to lie flat, so he cut it very short, almost like a convict. He had full Italian lips and nice, kind, hazel eyes. He came from the north, from Milan. He used to cut figures out of magazines sometimes and made them walk about and talk. Viti would sit on the edge of his knee and watch these figures breathlessly, and sometimes he got quite as excited as the little boy. He had a framed medallion of the Virgin hanging over his bed, but he never appeared to go to Mass. He kept a photo of all the children in his pocket-book, but he boxed their ears for next to nothing, and he had much too violent a temper to be a good teacher.

"Good-morning, Miss," said Luigi. In his sleepy almond-shaped eyes there was a hint of mockery. "Viti, silly ass," he remarked in execrable English. They learnt those kinds of remarks in English very quickly.

"Good-for-nothing fool!" shouted the tutor. "Rude, saucy imp!"

Luigi grovelled, but recovered immediately.

"Beautiful Miss," he remarked over the top of his cup of coffee and milk.

Mary turned away and asked the tutor why he had not been at the barn, and Giacomo, feeding Ivan, the wolfhound, under the table with bread and marmalade, launched into a description of the little calf and the difficulty Méline had had in producing her. It seemed impossible to Mary that it was only three hours ago—that grey, dim silence. Through the window she watched five peasants move languorously across the fields, their soft, swinging limbs as rhythmical as the burling splash of the waves. In the distance two thin oxen had started their pitiful, blindfolded circle.

They had barely finished breakfast when the Marchesa came downstairs. She walked beautifully from the hips, and her large round breasts hung loose inside her dress. The dress had once come from the Rue de la Paix, but hard usage had sadly altered its lines; there were marks too down the front where she had spilt food. Mary wondered whether she had even brushed her hair, and her sleepy white face might or might not have seen water. And yet she was beautiful—strangely, terribly beautiful, as Calabria was beautiful. And with her came that strange disturbing atmosphere, that sense of tremendous vitality and power, that like an animal lay sleeping in the sun, but which could wake viciously, fiercely. And she always looks like this, thought Mary, thinking of the luxurious flat she had been to in Naples, of the Palazzo in Florence.

The Marchesa stood for a while lifting the little bags of grain on the grain table, opening some and letting the seeds trickle through her fingers. At intervals she asked the tutor some questions sharply, and then the boys came tumbling in and into the store-room to get their bicycles. Mary began to think that it was the incongruity of the life which fascinated her most. There they hung, those bicycles, in that tumble-down crumbling Calabrian barn,

a filthy place, crumbling as it had been crumbling since the fifteenth century, most likely, and now on the walls hung the bicycles like a Gamage's show-room, each on its proper rest, with its proper equipment lying beneath it. They should have been dirty and uncared for and rusty, and there they were, glistening and oiled and perfect. There was a great tinkling of bells, and out they came into the refectory, pedalling round and round the table like three furies, and the Marchesa and the tutor went on sifting little bags of grain, and only Mary wanted to laugh because everything was so mad.

"I have time to walk with you all to the drinking-pool and back," said the Marchesa, picking up a fox fur and slinging it round her shoulders. In it her swinging, stealthy walk seemed to become intensified, as if she had festooned herself with her prey.

"I'm being fantastic," thought Mary, but the thought persisted.

They went out into the bright sunlight.

"You know, I'm really more English than Italian," said the Marchesa to Mary, as they strolled along the little zigzag path through the olives. "I was always the favourite of the head-mistress when I was at school at Brighton—she used to ask me into her room on Sunday afternoons to pour out tea for her guests."

"Did you like Brighton?" asked Mary. The sun, the bitter-sweet smell of the olives, and the rhythm of the sheep-bells coming on little gusts of scented wind, made her drowsy and quiescent.

The tutor walked a little behind, his hands behind his back. Now and again he would stop and examine the tiny fruit of an olive tree. Every time he stopped, Ivan, the wolf-hound, stopped too. The young man never seemed to notice the dog, but the animal was always close beside him.

"Yes, everything English always—I feel I am half

English," went on the Marchesa, and her soft, slow voice seemed full of the sun. "How I wish I could have married an Englishman!"

Brunone and a boy passed them, leading the white horse loaded with faggots.

"Signora Marchesa," he murmured, bowing low and whipping the horse off the pathway.

"One moment we are in the twentieth century and the next in the Middle Ages!" thought Mary.

"He was a dreadful man, my husband," went on the Marchesa. "Sometimes he would bring home a carozza with nearly naked women in it. Just think of it—the humiliation!"

"You are not divorced?" asked Mary.

"No. One must think—the children. And then it is very difficult in Italy. We are separated—he lives in Paris, and I send him money that he may not disgrace our name. I care nothing for myself now—I live my life for my children."

They came bicycling back along the track, three mad things, beautiful with health.

"Mamma, Mamma," shrieked Viti, his feet on the handle-bars. "Look, look!" His eyes were like two blue gentians.

"They are splendid, yes?" said the Marchesa. "I should like them to go to Oxford—yes, very much. Now everything falls on me, and when one has property, Miss Graham, there is always so much to do, to see to ——"

They climbed to the old stone wall which bounded the Marchesa's estate. There was always, even on the hottest day, a clean strong wind blowing here from the sea. To the right in the distance lay a huddled black village, and behind lay the sea of olive trees and the old yellow house with its courtyard slumbering in the heat. They turned to the right, keeping to the top of the hill,

and then slowly descended. Now they were walking along a sinister path edged with giant cactus. One great leaf lay broken and rotting in the way. There was something terribly wicked about it, with its spikes like giant needles and its yellow, rotting, spongy pulp. Overhead the sky grew every minute more intense. Now there was no trace of the early morning purity; it looked like a great solid dome of purple-blue. But Mary, who knew the walk well, knew that soon the cactus walk would end and then would come the deliciousness of the surprise. Always when she came this way she held her breath and got the same thrill of beauty, for suddenly the cactus ended and the path wandered along the edge of the orange grove; and now all was young again like the setting of a fairy tale, for only fairies could dance in and out among those gentians and the little wild strawberry plants and the yellow flowers that had no name and the wild sweet clover and the brilliant fronds of fern. Some blue-and-white butterflies were playing here, and the bees were droning in the clover.

"How bewildering Calabria is!" said Mary suddenly, and then more suddenly came the thought—"and how like the Marchesa!"

It was nearly 11.30 when they got back to the house.

"I must pack," said the Marchesa. "Good fellow," she said to Ivan, stroking him, and then she told Mary how much Ivan loved her—"like my servants," she said, "they always adore me. Carlotta will be heartbroken when I go."

Suddenly the hand that was stroking him stopped its motion.

"This dog has not been groomed," she said, the soft laziness of her gone, her body rigid.

Brunone was in the corner of the garage. He stammered a few words, looking up at her blindly. She hit him across the cheek with her open palm. She was swept

with fury. She stood with her arms akimbo on her waist and her voice, out of control, shrieked and whispered. The children huddled behind the car, and Mary stood white-faced and trembling and disgusted. And then it was all over—her arms drooped, her black staring pupils burned into soft blue-purple once more. She shook her hair out of her eyes.

"These peasants!" she said to Mary, smiling. "Will you come and help me pack, Miss Graham?"

The lovely spoiled gowns were pushed into the two suitcases. The Marchesa put on a black travelling dress and a black hat with a veil—there were buttons missing, and Mary lent her safety-pins out of her work-bag.

"Such a nuisance having to dress well," said the Marchesa, "but when one has a position——" Her hair was bundled away under the veil, her strong white neck shone out of the black.

The boys crowded round her in the car to say good-bye. She kissed each one, tears in her eyes. The two maids came out to kiss her hand, and then she shook hands with the tutor. Mary stood trying to feel indifferent, trying to see how stupid and sentimental it all was.

"Good-bye, Miss Graham," said the Marchesa.

"We shall all miss you," said Mary, almost before she knew she had said it.

"But you are so wonderful with the children," the Marchesa's voice had turned honey-sweet. "I trust them with you so utterly——"

The car moved away and she was gone. The house seemed strangely different. Mary kept the children busy playing and reading, and in the late afternoon took them for another walk, for she felt restless and unable to settle to anything.

Evening came, a heavy dusk, as if the sky were thick blue-black powder; and with it came a strange smell, a

smell that came welling out of the volcanic earth like some strange incense—a slumberous, pagan smell.

Dinner was an hour late, and directly afterwards the children went to bed. Viti pranced backwards and forwards with the candle, now to put out his shoes for Seraphina in the morning, now through the yellow curtain into the bathroom to do his teeth. In the sitting-room, through the open door, Mary could see the tutor reading, his book near his eyes, the two candles in the forked brass candlestick flickering about in the draught made by the boys as they rushed in and out.

"Why aren't you two in bed?" he shouted at them.

"Going now, Professor," shouted Giacomo back to him.

Luigi poked his nose round the curtain of Viti's room and saw Mary sitting on the bed.

"Beautiful Miss," he said again, and his eyes looked at her sensually over the candle. Mary, with annoyance, found her colour rising.

"Go to bed *at once*, Luigi," she said, turning to open Viti's bed. "Little boys of ten should be asleep at this time."

Back came Viti from the bathroom, chattering to himself.

"Look, Miss," he piped. He gave one bound on to the bed, shrieking with laughter. He pushed his feet impatiently inside the bedclothes, threw out the pillow on to the floor, rolled on to his tummy, turned his head on one side, placed one grubby little hand beneath it. His black eyelashes fluttered and fell. Viti was asleep.

Mary went out softly through Luigi's room. He was sitting up in bed reading. He gave her the peculiarly sweet sensual smile that stirred her. She went to her room and brought him back two chocolates. After she had given them to him she wished she had not. She went back and got two more, and laid them by Viti's bed. She had meant

to give them all chocolates, of course. Viti would find his in the morning.

Passing through the sitting-room, she said good night to the Professor. He stood up politely, and then settled down again to his *Purgatorio*, holding the tiny print into the candle-light.

In the passage Giacomo was tying up Ivan for the night.

"How he howls, poor fellow!" he said. And then he added, for Mary's enlightenment, "They always do at this time of the year, you know."

Mary liked Giacomo. He looked almost like an English boy, with the candle-light showing up his fair hair and blue eyes.

"Do you require anything, Miss?" he asked. In his mother's absence, he was the head of the house.

"Nothing, thank you, Giacomo. Good night."

Mary opened her shutters. There was Brunone undressing in the dim yellow courtyard. A candle was burning in his hut, but he was outside it, letting the soft coolness play about him. With slow, lazy movements he lowered his blue dungarees and pulled the red jersey over his head. His shirt looked snow-white in the darkness. She saw his great arm go over his head and worry it off him, bending forward from the waist. He drew a stool out into the yard and sat there naked to the waist. Then he threw back his head and laughed, just for the full joy of living. He stretched out his legs and felt them carefully. In the dim shadow Mary could see him scratching his back, his thighs, his arms. Then suddenly he stretched and went into the hut.

In the middle of the night Ivan howled. The noise wakened Mary, and almost immediately afterwards she heard a car pull up somewhere on the road. Then everything was very still. She must have dozed again, and this time it was a light that waked her—a little aura of light, pale chrome yellow with a pin-prick of wavering fire in

the centre. Mary suddenly became wide awake. The dressing-room door was open, and in the doorway stood a man, and she saw that it was her candle that he was holding.

She sat up in bed.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she said in a whisper.

The man's face was white and long and inhuman in the candle-light. He spoke softly in English.

"I am the Marchese. I have come to see my son."

"The Marchese! But the Marchesa is in Naples. Besides, why have you come like this—like a thief?"

"It is seven years since I have seen him," said the man. "I am on my way to Sicily, and I thought—she has altered the house a good deal—this used to be the hall, I remember. I suppose I shouldn't have come in through the front door at all."

"No, we don't use it. But please go—the children are asleep; and besides—the Marchesa——"

"How many children are there now?" asked the Marchese, placing the candle on the table.

"How many? What do you mean? There are three, of course!"

"So—there is another! And you teach them, mademoiselle?"

He turned his head slowly as padding steps came along the passage.

"Signorina," came Brunone's hoarse voice on the other side of the curtain, "I thought I saw someone come in ——"

Mary saw his brown feet under the short curtain illuminated by the candle he carried.

"Yes, it is I, the Master," said the Marchese impatiently. He pulled the curtain back, and from the light of Brunone's candle Mary saw him for a moment clearly—a haggard, finely cut face and strange, restless eyes.

"Signore Marchese!" Brunone was on his knees kissing the long white hand. "Ah, Signore Marchese, to see you again—to touch you!" He had pulled on brown earth-yellow trousers over his nightshirt; his eyes were bright with sleep and very blue.

Softly the Marchese took his candle from him and held it close to his brown wild face.

"So she has gone at last to the very soil," he murmured.

"Is the third one yours, Brunone?" he asked.

"*Il bambino? Si, Signore Marchese*—the Marchesa did me the honour——" He cringed as if for a blow, but when it did not come he laughed.

Softly the door at the end of the passage opened. It was the Professor. His face looked wan and pinched in the shadowy light. He had put on a dressing-gown and slippers hastily, and the cord of the gown trailed behind him like a flail. He came towards the little group, holding his candlestick high and blinking near-sightedly.

"I thought I heard—is anything the matter, Mademoiselle?" He clutched his dressing-gown round him. His white young face looked drawn, as if he did not sleep too well at night.

"Why, it is the Professor," said the Marchese. "We are quite a party! And how is *your* son, Professor?" he added ironically. "He was three years old when I last saw him—took after his mother, I remember."

Mary still sat up in bed, too bewildered to move or speak. Was she dreaming that these three men were standing unconcernedly in her candle-lit bedroom in the middle of the night parcelling out the Marchesa's children amongst them? It was incredible, unbelievable!

"Now take me to my son," commanded the Marchese to the two men, picking up his candle. "I have not much time."

They passed out, and Mary, wrapping her kimono round her, followed the strange little procession.

Brunone went first and the Marchese followed, a worn, bent figure, holding his candle high and walking deliberately, as if he were performing some religious rite. It was as well that he did so, for the Professor, who came behind him, had forgotten his. He peered ahead of him, running his hand over his unshaven chin and unruly hair, his carpet slippers, which were too big for him, floundering along the floor.

Brunone held his candle negligently. He was smiling, perhaps at some dream he had had. He was perfectly happy. If the Signore Marchese had not been there he would have hummed a song. Like a lithe panther he walked soundlessly and magnificently, a mighty frame stored with sun and wind, untrampled and unconquered. As they passed through Viti's room he paused and looked at his child. He had many others, but this one, with its white night-clothes, its aristocratic little head, its delicate round baby cheeks—oh, he was proud of this one! He must not own it as his—did not want to own it. If the Signora Marchesa wished one night to come to his hut, he was her peasant; and besides, their bodies had been good together—that was all it was. He took one of Viti's hands in his own immense brown one. It lay there, small and grubby. He bent down and kissed it roughly. "Fine little Signore," he muttered and joined the others.

The Professor too had stopped, and stood gazing down upon the sleeping Luigi. "Mary, Mother of God," Mary heard him murmur, and knew him to be saying a prayer. Perhaps, she thought with surprise, he often prayed for his little boy. Even in sleep Luigi did not lose his mocking expression. Mary hoped very much that those heavy-lidded eyes would not open and rest upon her as she was. She flushed a little. "He's only ten," she thought, and shuddered. She saw the Professor make the sign of the Cross over the sleeping boy. A tear splashed on to the coverlet. For a moment it glittered and then soaked into

the cloth. Luigi stirred and threw out an arm. Did he subconsciously feel that tear—a tear, all that could ever pass from strange father to stranger son!

But the Marchese noticed none of these things. He walked stiffly into Giacomo's room and closed the door. He was there for ten minutes, and then he came out quietly and put out his hand to Mary.

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," he said. "I am very proud of him. When he is a little older I shall have him with me. Good-bye."

Brunone held his coat for him, and the tutor handed him his grey Homburg hat. The three men passed slowly down the passage. Brunone led the way again with the candle. Mary heard a door opening, a faint hum of voices, the engine of a car on the road.

She went back to her own room. The courtyard lay outside, a ghostly thing of black shapes, and beyond nothingness—a black void. A single star hung over the blackness that was the sea. The muffled sound of the waves was as regular as a heartbeat.

THE HAND OF GOD

by

Jane Culver

JANE CULVER *is one of the younger American writers, whose novel,* So Stood I, *was published in 1934. She was born in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and has, with her husband, Thomas Polsky, gone to Weaverville, N. C., where she is completing her second novel.*

THE HAND OF GOD

DARK leaves blew by the window, and far beyond, in the sky, the sunset ran. It was a deep time, Nancy thought, with doves and vespers in it. And she was all alone in the music room. She began to play a quite grave piece—"The Funeral March for a Pet Bird," it was named. And she was not nervous about the octaves, for Paula, who played so well, was not here to listen. She had gone to meet a train with someone on it whom she loved.

This morning Paula had come from New York, where she lived at a club and took music lessons from a famous teacher; she would be at home all the summer. And she had brought a rather large bottle of perfume for Nancy. "It's very heady and nice, I'm sure," Nancy's grateful voice had said. But Paula had not listened much while she was being thanked; she was practically nineteen and almost beautiful. She'd kept on looking thoughtful, spilling evening dresses over her bed for ever so long. For she owned perhaps a dozen evening dresses, velvet and chiffon, all different colors. She had chosen them herself, in a little room, while a salesgirl bowed round her. She hadn't felt exposed and looked at while their mother pinched the shoulder straps, wondering and worrying about her daughter's type. And Paula had worn the most exciting dress of all, and some man, with a moustache perhaps, had lifted his hand to his cheek and said she was lovely as some sort of flower. Then they'd gone off together, in a taxi, in a soft night that had a lemon of a moon at the top, to applaud a little, in their gloves, at a concert.

From *So Stood I*, by Jane Culver (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1934). Used by permission of, and by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Company.

Nancy understood; she knew the bright round shape of Paula's life. But Paula kept things very private. This afternoon she'd sat by her window giving herself a slow manicure, not noticing Nancy. And she had expected that Paula would be different this time. For Nancy was. She no longer wore Peter Thompsons, and rose only when much older women came into the room. She was going to a convent in the autumn. And she had read—"Jane Eyre" and "David Copperfield"—a good many classics.

Paula had not changed. She still patronized people and whispered Dear Gods. That was one thing about her that wasn't nice. She swore. And this morning she hadn't gone to church. She was simply devitalized, she had said—a poor excuse. Paula was sure to know in her intimate heart that that was a sin—sadder, more serious, than any sin of Nancy's.

Nancy looked at the sunset, at the leaves, and let a chord sing to them. She felt safe and good, as if she kept a warm secret with God, and He was remembering the sacrifices she had made about writing paper and ice-cream in order that she might light candles at the Virgin's altar. As if He were remembering how she thought of Him in the middle of dancing school, though the music did not match Him at all and her partner talked of fishing and Indians and things.

She dropped her hands and watched the shadows slanted on the rug, and realized, in a surprise, that she was hungry.

In the dim kitchen, with its smell of soap and summer, Effie sat, her hands folded round each other in their black silk gloves. She was going to church.

"Good evening, Effie. I thought I ought to have something to eat."

"Surely you'd ought to," Effie said.

Nancy got a large piece of cake and a bottle of ginger ale.

"Take care," warned Effie. "You'll spill. There'd ought to be a light on."

"Let's not, Effie. It's such a deep time."

"Well, take care." The voice sighed itself away.

The ginger ale was sweet and prickly. Nancy wanted it to last a long, long time. She was very comfortable, sitting by the table, drinking, watching the pattern of her voile dress repeat itself over her, almost to her ankles, in a rhyme she liked.

"Hardly anyone looks smart in Peter Thompsons, do they?"

But Effie seemed not to feel like talking.

Outside, the tall trees were standing under their dark umbrellas. It was very still; no sound was caught in the silence. And then a little wind began to comb the grass, to tip the dim flowers at the edge of the lawn. The evening, all softly lighted, came in to touch Nancy and Effie together.

"Look, Effie, what a nice night it is."

"Because it's Sunday."

And they were silent for a long time.

"Have you ever had a burning desire?" Effie whispered.

"I'm afraid I haven't." For she wasn't yet old enough; you had to be eighteen. "I expect Paula has, though."

"A desire to see God."

"Oh . . ."

That desire had happened to people Nancy's age. Saint Agnes had been martyred when she was fourteen; ashamed soldiers had put their swords away and waited for her death, and watched her pale, brave face, her eyes bright with wanting to see God, her hands of the same size and shape as Nancy's, folded on her breast like Nancy's.

She set the ginger ale down. She saw the trees pointing to the timid stars that lit the edge of heaven, that were the beginning of the beauty and music and God beyond them. And the warm wind paused. She knew.

"Yes, I have," she said.

"It's sweet," sighed Effie.

"Oh, I know. A dreadful heart-beating goes all through you and you're quite nervous in such a pleasant way."

"Well"—Effie rose—"I got to get going. It's quarter to."

"Would you light a candle for me?"

"Surely. I'd be glad to," Effie said.

Nancy went up to her room to get the money.

On her dressing-table was a small statue of the Virgin that had been brought from Italy. Long ago, before Nancy had begun to be pious, and had had it for one of her dolls, a hand had been broken off and lost. And now, when she saw the severed wrist and the serene face above it, she felt a sharp, sad pain. Then she lifted the statue. Underneath was hidden quite a lot of money—a dollar bill and several dimes. "I have enough for a mass, practically." It was wonderful to think about. She took a dime and put the rest of the money back.

She stood before the dressing-table and thought of nuns kneeling in yellow light, of catacombs, and tall candles burning, of the lambs and doves in heaven. And of the saints with lovely names—Cyprian and Damon and Magdalen—whose love of God had begun to bud like flowers when they lived on the earth. Now they were dividing with Him the harmony that lay in heaven, free of the spiders and puddles and illnesses that waited in the world for people.

Nancy noticed some favors she had kept from dancing school on the table-top, and a movie actor's photograph. She put these in a drawer. Then she crossed herself and said a Hail Mary because it was quite short and Effie was waiting. But after Effie had gone, she would come back and worship. Long prayers would sing through her.

She went down the back stairs because she had often

felt close to God in that steep darkness. She stopped and prayed, "Dear God." And then she remembered Paula's oath and pitied her.

Effie leaned by the kitchen door.

"Thank you very much," Nancy said.

"Surely," said Effie, opening the door.

Nancy asked her—it seemed a fearfully intimate thing at first, and not quite nice—to pray for her.

Slowly Nancy wandered across the kitchen, loving the cozy zest of worshipping. She opened her hand so that God might come and hold it. Then she went to the sink and washed her hands and dried them carefully on the roller towel in order that He might find them pure. She knew that He was here, in the pantry, beside her, and had taken her hand. She strolled with Him through the dining room, into the hall. It was the best thing by far that had ever happened to her. All through her life, when she was nineteen, and thirty-two, and an old woman, it would happen all over again.

And then Paula's voice, soft and intense as if she prayed, blew out to her from the music room. "But my love hasn't turned out to be pseudo, you know, even if yours has. If I'm expected to live out my life thinking up fancy sublimations and having good stares at the Rodin collection, instead—"

Nancy drew her hands over her ears to close out the words she knew were immodest, a mortal sin dark as adultery, because they, too, were forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. She asked God to remind Paula of the Judgment Day, for that at least would frighten her sin away . . . God risen from His throne, His hallowed head bent, His fingers pointing to the damned, His great voice telling them they couldn't live in heaven. Hundreds and hundreds of thieves with soiled, twisted faces, and gamblers in evening clothes, and all the women who had ever lived and had not been modest. The stillness after God

had spoken, with the rhythm of their scared hearts beating in it. And then their loud prayers for mercy roaring too late. Down the slow, reluctant steps into hell, where the day grew thick and smoke rose into it . . .

Nancy dropped her hands. She couldn't seem to help listening now, though she didn't want to, really.

A man's voice, sorry and tired, said, "But, Paula—"

She was not polite enough to let him finish: "For the love of God, *please* don't tell me again that I don't understand, as if we were in the movies. I ought to be bitter. I am. I'm terribly bitter. Oh, my dear—"

Nancy felt afraid that Paula was kissing him. And she was, standing by him in the middle of the music room. A blushing went over Nancy. She began to hurry through the hall.

They must have heard her, for they turned around.

"Hello," said Nancy.

"Hello." Paula seemed not nearly so embarrassed as Nancy would have been.

"Is she your little sister?" asked the young man.

"Yes." She waved her hand toward Nancy. "This is Mr. Morris."

Paula always introduced people by their last names, separating you from the world, with its taxis and gardenias, that she shared with them, leaving you to wonder if they were David or George or even Cyril, until at last she called casually the real name, and you felt a huge relief.

"Aren't you coming in?" The young man smiled at Nancy. He looked kind and dark and uncomfortable and would be quite tall if he stood straight. He was probably named David.

"Well, I don't know." She said it like a question.

"Please come in for a minute at least." He seemed so earnest, inviting her.

"Don't rush off," Paula said. She was being polite on

purpose for Mr. Morris; she didn't want her to come in really.

And Nancy walked into the music room, where Paula had been kissing the dark man, where God had not been thought of since she had played the piano. No one seemed able to think of anything to say.

Paula looked in magazines that were full of pictures of Asia. She pretended to be absorbed and mystified, and made her eyes wide to see. And her earrings trembled a little on their silver chains. (For she always wore earrings, even at noon. They were a wretched vanity of hers.)

Mr. Morris stood beside Nancy. "Won't you sit down?" he said. She chose a chair by the fireplace and folded her hands. She was afraid it was going to be one of those nervous times when she would have to clear her throat. And she could not seem to realize God just now.

At last Mr. Morris sat on a footstool and said, "She's rather like you, Paula."

"Do you think so?" Paula answered, not looking up. "Personally I've never been able to see the slightest resemblance."

You would think from Paula's voice that there was something the matter with the way Nancy looked. In the mirror by the piano she saw her image, and there was nothing wrong with it at all. Paula was unkind. Nancy would stay; she'd be in no hurry, for Paula of course wanted to be alone with Mr. Morris, though he didn't want to be alone with her.

After a while he asked if they would mind his smoking.

"Heavens, no," said Paula rather crossly.

He lighted a cigar.

"Are you going to smoke a cigar, Donald?" Paula asked.

He was called Donald. Nancy liked his name; it matched him very well.

He put his cigar out, but he didn't seem to mind. He smiled at Nancy.

"Rochester smoked cigars," she said, for no one else said anything. And she remembered him, walking on the veranda with white circles of smoke curling after him. And she thought how Jane Eyre had saved his life, waking him in his flamy bed. "Are you going to stay all night?"

Donald shook his head and smiled again. "I must be in Chicago in the morning."

"Do you have to be? I thought you might stay quite a long time. Didn't you bring a valise or something?" She pointed to the corner.

"I earn my living with that," he said. "It isn't a valise. It's what I play."

They had begun to talk at last. Donald seemed glad, and she was. He lighted a cigarette and looked more comfortable.

"Of course it is," Nancy laughed. "What a *faux pas* of me. It's some sort of a bass—affair, I suppose."

"It's called Charlotte, the virgin 'cello," said Paula.

Paula shouldn't say virgin in that open way. You prayed to virgins. Nancy thought of the statue on her dressing-table, and kept again a pity for the broken wrist. Soon she would be kneeling before it—after she had pushed Paula's impiety far behind in their talk.

"Why don't you play a piece?" Nancy asked Donald.

"Shall we? Shall we play together, Paula?"

Paula sat at the piano. If people passed on the terrace they'd perhaps have a feeling like poetry when they saw her. They'd think of Spanish countries late at night, and stars, and sighs, and so on, because her hair shone very black, and on her face the light touched carefully as if she were a painting. But they wouldn't have the least idea how she usually behaved. She did not even answer Donald now; instead she began to play softly.

"I know that," said Nancy. "That's a piece of mine."

And she could not help being pleased because Paula made it all grown-up and astonishing.

"It's by Debussy," Nancy explained to Donald. "It's called 'The Girl with Flaxen Hair.' "

"How silly you are, Paula." Donald rose and went over by the piano. "Why won't you believe that isn't why? I don't even know any blondes."

"It's a rather dumb piece," Paula said. "It's so soppy."

"I think I ought to go," said Nancy quietly.

Donald turned around to her. "Don't go." He seemed quite anxious. "We'll play something, won't we, Paula."

"Why don't you and Nancy play? She has a very snappy repertoire."

That was terribly rude of Paula. She was cruel and patronizing. And Donald had been listening. Nancy hated her. She wanted to fly at her and bite her arm until she screamed for mercy. But Nancy could only promise herself never to forgive. She couldn't even answer. In the morning, when Paula would try as usual to make peace, it would be too late. She would stroll yawning into Nancy's room, and sit on the bed, not thinking how pale she was, nor how uninteresting she looked in water waves. "Would you like these stockings, Nancy? They've never been worn." And she would display the price tag so that Nancy would not doubt her. (Mean people always expected you to be suspicious of them.) But Nancy would not look. (She was not looking at Paula now, nor listening to her music.) "Nancy, you know I didn't mean anything last night about your repertoire. I wasn't making fun." "I don't want your old stockings, Paula. Give them to the poor." . . . Nancy saw a quick picture of the poor, who knelt at the back of churches, reading prayer-books dark with germs. They were the people who always spoiled the holy water in the fonts because their fingers weren't clean . . . That was unchristian of Nancy, and so was her rage at Paula. She began an act of contrition in her

mind: "Oh, my God, I'm heart'ly sorry for having offended—"

But Donald interrupted. "I'd like you to play. I know you must play well, Nancy."

He made her name sound very nice, as if he liked it.

"She does play well. She's really talented." Paula tried to be agreeable at last. "Only she never practices. You know how they are at that age."

She had spoiled everything again.

Nancy rose. And she would have to say another act of contrition.

"Are you going?" Paula said. "Donald and I are going to play."

It was probably a sort of invitation. Nancy stayed, because it would be simple to find God to music. She looked at her empty hand and opened it.

Donald sat beside Paula and tuned his 'cello.

"It's the nicest time, I think, just before the music starts and everybody is getting their key. You always think it's going to be so beautiful then," Nancy said.

Donald said he thought so, too.

They were going to play Chopin nocturnes because they did not need notes for them, although Paula believed they were unpardonably sentimental.

"I like them, though, don't you, Nancy?" Donald said.

"Awfully well."

They began to play, and Donald looked at her and did not smile. He had dark, deep eyes that were beautiful, and she would remember them, because his thin face was not at all good-looking otherwise, there were so many lines in it, and she would like to think of him as being handsome as possible. There was a rim of light around his head because he sat near a lamp. It made a halo for him. If he had a beard he would look rather like God.

God became quite simple to realize. There were the shapes of the trees that His eyes saw, too, and the blue

color of the night. And this music, pleading as a dove's song, He knew about.

All of a sudden life seemed so good that it was hard to believe in, at first, as a marvelous surprise. Best of everything, of course, there was God. And then there was the world. People like Donald lived in it. And there was music in it like this, as if harmony reached over everything. It was very easy, not disappointing, even, to forgive Paula now. Her anger, too, lay underneath the music and did not matter . . . Nancy would grow older and be manicured in beauty salons. She would own slippers trimmed with ostrich feathers. She would be given gardenias by young men. And on some summer night she would go on the river in a canoe, and watch the willow trees leaning over the banks, and become engaged to a person who loved her. They would be happy ever afterwards and have many children. There'd be years and years as gay as light to live in. And then she would be lifted into heaven. The stars would lie beneath her then, and the world so far away that it would look like a map in a geography—colored countries with lines for rivers running through, and rough stripes of mountains, and spots of blue for oceans. It would be so far away that the wonder in it would not be real, only half-remembered, like a picnic she had had when she was very young, with nothing left over from it now, though she knew there had been grapes and sandwiches and wading . . .

It seemed a sad thing not to remember the times you had liked, to waste them with forgetting. But that would not happen any more to Nancy. She would make this scene real and keep it all her life. She would remember even the pictures on the walls, and Paula's earrings, and a theme of this song. And Donald's hands. They were narrow, with long, strong fingers that had round nails at the end. And they were very clean. She watched them for a long time, stretching on the strings, shaking out music.

When she said good night, she would take his hand for just a moment . . . And he would lock his 'cello in its case and close the door and go away. In Chicago he would laugh with people who had never heard of Nancy. He would keep their telephone numbers in a little book and call them any time he liked. He might never think of this night again . . . Very soon he would turn out to be only somebody Paula had once been in love with. Tomorrow and the day after she would play sad Scriabin things on his account. And then his picture would be put in a bottom drawer with ice skates and old music, and Paula would write letters to two or three men and one of them would come to visit her. They would stay in the music room, at night, until Paula had to be spoken to.

Their three lives, Donald's and Paula's and Nancy's, would all be different. They would be aware of Christmas and summer separately. But now they were together until the music stopped. This time was much realer than yesterday or tomorrow. Nancy listened, and watched Donald's hands, and thought of nothing but now, because it was a good way to be happy.

But after a little while Paula said they had had enough, and Donald leaned his 'cello against a chair.

" 'Cellos sound beautiful, I think," said Nancy.

"Another of the 'cello-minded," Paula said.

Nancy rose. She would go before anyone began to be cross.

Donald rose, too. She looked at his hands. They seemed remote and private, not for her.

"I'm glad we know each other," he said, and smiled at her.

"So am I. I'm awfully glad."

Finally she reached out her hand, and he took it. It had seemed too exciting to come true, but it was happening. His strong fingers reached around hers. His hand was warm and real. She looked at his face, and moved a little

toward him. Her heart began to beat faster, to make her nervous in a pleasant way. She wished he would say her name again.

"We'll see each other sometime, I know, Nancy."

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course." He answered as if he were sure.

She looked down at their hands. "I suppose I ought to go," she said.

"It's not very late."

"I know. I expect I'll read in bed . . . I wish I had a good French novel."

The immodest words hung shaking in the air; she could never, never draw them back again. But somehow she was not sorry.

The Virgin's statue was very cold when Nancy lifted it. She counted the money. If she asked someone for thirty cents she could buy some earrings at Fleming's. Tomorrow she'd have owned them for a whole day, and Paula would perhaps have asked to borrow them. For years Paula hadn't asked to borrow anything of hers, but when she did, she wouldn't be able to patronize Nancy any more. They would be equals . . .

But Nancy must think of God, of thorns and crucifixes, of the Pope's robes and rings. She saw them as if they were pictures on a postal card, raggedly printed, not nearly real enough to believe in. She thought of the church, stained with shadows now, a smell of old air over everything. Little red lights were burning in the gloom, and her candle had been a long time consumed. There was nothing left of it but a little pool of wax.

But what of the Poor Souls, who longed to have masses sung for them? She must think of the smoke, the poor choked voices crying. Nancy could not hear them. But downstairs Donald's voice was real.

For a test she opened her hand to see if God would come

to hold it. She waited quite a little while, but He didn't come. She closed it and caught again the warmth of Donald's hand.

But what about the Judgment Day?

It was as far away as God.

I SHALL DECLINE MY HEAD

by

Nancy Evans

NANCY EVANS (*Mrs. L. H. Titterton*) *was at the beginning of what promised to be an interesting career as a writer of fiction when she died in New York in April 1936. Her childhood was spent in Dayton, Ohio.*

I SHALL DECLINE MY HEAD

NOW in the warm afternoon he was wrapped in a cocoon of peace and the unfurled tree above the bench sheltered him. His life lay like a rosary in his hands. He looked about him and he was eased by the thought that to the nurses and the children he was a part of the place—no more than the gravel paths and the close-cut grass.

When he awoke that morning he had wondered what had happened. Then he remembered the tree. It had rained all night, falling through his sleep, and yesterday afternoon the buds were ready and warm to open. He rang the bell for Anne and before she could bring his glass of water he told her to pull the curtains. The sun rayed across the carpet and he thought that it was like the flashing of a sword. There could be no doubt! He raised himself, pressing his hands against the mattress, and while Anne gathered his clothes he felt his heart flutter as if it were blown by the wind. He made her hurry and he was not troubled by her gentleness with his frailty. The day expanded before him.

He always went out on fine days. He would be impatient with the ritual of breakfast and when Anne warned him not to tire himself he would nod obediently like a child angelic to be gone. And released he would walk happily, resting from time to time on his smooth stick. When it was windy he bent double to anchor himself to the pavement. The walk was very important and if denied it he felt aimless as he had in the old days when he stayed away from the office.

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He looked across at the house with the two boxed privets standing like sentinels at the door. But the outside was less powerful. Sitting there under the chestnut tree with the luminous flowers above him he felt aloof from his way of remembering and trying to fathom the past. It was like being a stranger to himself. When he was inside it was not so easy. The rooms were unchanged, they were just as they had been when Eugenia was alive, and they were like a spell laid upon him. Anne kept the house as she thought he wanted it to be and she did not know that the red and green portières, the Tiffany glass vases in the damask-walled drawing-room, and the painted fans made a monument to failure.

Stephen accepted the house and it did not occur to him to ask that it be different. Indeed he liked it as it was for it was his own, bought with his money, and the loneliness was his too, rightly his, as it had been before. But whenever he closed the leaf-frosted doors and stood above the wide steps he felt as if he were winged. The street was a curtain dropped on his life and if he remembered, it was as if he were puzzling over the meaning of some story remote and dim.

The square was an old friend. They shared a secret, the secret of change, and each though overshadowed was unshaken. Stephen respected the park and he felt dignified by the iron fence and the hedge closing out the mushroom buildings newsprung and arrogant like towers of Babel. Not even the predatory cleverness of real estate brokers had destroyed it. Children came through the gates shepherded by nursemaids who kept their keys in careful pockets, but there were few others. The apartment houses cast shadows, there was the sound of motor cars, and most of the old houses were gone, but the park remained. It was a confusion of time.

Sometimes he thought that it was an island lost in a strange sea. That was when he took the walk through the

warehouse lined streets, the streets noisy with trucks and men. He had been there today wandering, a pale anachronism, smelling it and taking it as he went along and foreseeing what would be his when he crossed the swift street and came to his corner. The park was there and when he saw it with the tree flowering it was a revelation.

The sun went through him like an X-ray. His hands were transparent, like the fins of a fish seen through water, and the veins made a design. The fingers were curved and knobbed and he thought the nails looked brittle like yellowed ivory. His stick lay beside him on the bench and his legs were crossed with his hands fallen upon them. They moved slightly with a life of their own and he wondered at them holding them in the air to examine. "The hands of an old man—*my* hands—" he said.

A boy bent over a wagon in the middle of the path, stooping there with his feet apart. He looked around and saw Stephen.

"I fixed it once and now it won't go!" he said.

Stephen leaned forward, "Bring it here," he said. "Perhaps I can help you." The boy stared at him as if amazed that he could speak. Another boy came along the path.

"Look, Peter, my wagon's broken!" he called. Then the two of them turned the wagon upside down disregarding Stephen. It looked odd like that, Stephen thought, helpless like a beetle on its back. He smiled watching them and he saw the way Peter's hair made a point in the little hollow at the back of his neck. He felt as if he were a part of them, limb of their limb, and feeling that he drowsed in the sun. After a while the sun changed and he lowered his head away from the glare.

Stephen saw himself as a young man—Stephen Prentiss, large-grown and straight. He saw himself fresh from the war and sorry it was ended when he met her in Virginia. (If he had gone home he might never have known her!

She might have lived, lived and died without him, and he would never have missed her!) But he could not comprehend his life lived without Eugenia. "How was I to know she would never forgive me?" he wondered. "Would I have been different if I had been born in Kentucky instead of Ohio?"

What was the relation between a man and the place where he was born? Well, he *had* been born above the Mason and Dixon Line and that was enough for Richmond. He was one of the enemy. He told them how his father came to settle on that piece of unsurveyed backland spread out on the folded hills, and he told them how he had worked and how he bought the land rightly from the government at public auction. But they didn't listen; it was enough for them to know that he, Stephen, was born there.

He remembered the time his father took him back to the place. He was ten or maybe twelve and they walked a long distance up a dry creek-bed careful to step on the steady rocks. Crows made flying shadows and they passed two or three poor clearings. Once they saw a girl in a blue dress sitting on the porch of a cabin. Her bare feet hung down to the ground and behind her a man sagged in the doorway. Neither of them answered his father's "Howdy!" and suddenly uneasy Stephen took his father's hand. He felt that he and not the girl, was sitting there silent. After that he marveled at his father who had taken them away from the back-country to the elm-grown town on the river.

When they got there they found the house like a derelict with plaster dropped from between the logs and the roof fallen. His father took him around to the side and showed him where the staircase to the loft had been and he told Stephen how he used to run down it and across the snow-covered yard to the warm kitchen. He carrried his clothes in a bundle and his feet would sting from the snow.

They pushed open the springhouse door hanging by one hinge and they saw a blacksnake stretched on the stones by the water. Sunlight fell through open places in the roof and made spots on its back. After that they went to the pine-ringed place on the hill and Stephen stepped around the mounds. He thought the earth would give way and he would fall through. He read the stones but he did not feel that they belonged to him. "To the memory of Hannah Prentiss, beloved wife of John Prentiss," he read his mother's stone and he thought that it leaned over as if it were tired. And he thought of his two brothers as two lambs like the carving on the stone. When he looked at his father he knew that he was forgotten.

Richmond taught Stephen Prentiss that he was a Yankee. It reminded him that the first station of the Underground Railway was in his town and it made him responsible for that too. After a while he knew what hatred was like. Living with Eugenia's people he was like a spy and he asked himself over and over why they had ever married. He felt himself hiding like a dog skulking under chairs and he could not remember why he was there. At first their life was a dream, but slowly, like poison, her mother's passion worked in her until she almost believed that Stephen was the murderer of her Confederate brother. Between them they robbed him of his manhood. And yet out of some knowledge he understood their hate and understanding that he knew more than he had ever thought to learn.

When finally he told her that he must go she went with him. But it was too late then. His father welcomed them to the brick house standing in the middle of placid lawns and Stephen was proud. "She will see that it is good," he thought. But Eugenia said, "It's as fine a prison as any!"

"She was like a queen," he thought. Anne had little of that long-limbed grace. Stephen wondered whether his son would have been like Eugenia. After Anne's birth

Eugenia said the doctor had warned her, but Stephen never forgot that he wanted a son. And in New York, where he made his own way, he had missed his son the most of all. Stephen Prentiss saw himself as a part of a great land, strong and forward, leading to a new world and he wanted his son to carry his name. John, he would call him for his father, John Prentiss. How else could he live? People said that Anne was like a son to him. Certainly she was an able woman—"one of the best publishers in New York"—and she was good too, a good woman, but it was not the same. Stephen could not imagine his son like Anne.

Anne was kind. She always wanted him at the head of the table, she said she was used to it that way, and he knew that she was proud of his rare age. She was proud of him and proud of her way of making him a part, and for her sake Stephen was glad of his unspotted clothes like the clothes of youth. He sometimes sat with a mirror and combed his beard until it was silk-smooth and, even though his fingers trembled, he knew how to eat without spilling his food.

Stephen's Latin had given Anne a new sort of respect for him; it was the sort of respect she would have for a precocious child. One day Stephen found some of the Latin books put aside in youth and he felt that they were an unfinished task before him. He opened one of them but the words were hieroglyphics. He turned to the title page and it was like an echo—

P. Virgilii Maronis
Bucolica, Georgica
ET AENEIS

The title page was dated 1857. Stephen thought back to what he would have been then. He read the preface by one Francis Bowen and he fingered through the supplement which had been arranged so that "the young student

may be able to read Virgil as a poet, and find pleasure in the task, instead of poring over the work of a crabbed and difficult exercise in Latin." That pleased Stephen and he ordered a Latin dictionary from the bookshop near the square. After that he worked tediously back and forth between the text and the supplement, the supplement and the dictionary, until finally the first page was his and the lines moved through his mind like a drum beating.

He often said the lines aloud partly to make his memory certain and partly for the exhilaration they made him feel. One evening before dinner he sat in the library saying them over and hearing their strange sound. He was facing the door and suddenly, silhouetted there by the light from the square, he saw Anne staring at him and he knew that she was afraid.

"Father!" she came forward. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, Anne, I'm saying my Latin, that's all."

She flashed on the lights and with his fingers between the pages of the book Stephen spoke to her—

> Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso,
> Quidve dolens, regina deum tot volvere casus
> Insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores
> Impulerit: tantaem animis coelestibus irae!

After that Anne would tell her guests—"He has taught himself, you know. And at his age! He'll be ninety soon—" Then they would look at him with wonder.

Stephen raised his head and saw the tree. It was like seeing infinity. He felt buoyant, as if the mistakes of his life belonged to someone else and he had no thought, only a sense of deep delight, the same feeling he had known as a child when he lay in bed watching the lighted steamboats go down the river. "O world!" he said. He sat like that long after the children and the nursemaids had gone across the streets and into the new buildings.

II

They were talking and Stephen forgot that he was a curiosity fragile and ancient as a mummy. He strained his hearing to the words that glimmered through his deafness. He could not always hear, and then he would pretend understanding, smiling when they smiled and looking grave when they were grave.

"We're in the midst of a revolution—a revolution against democracy," the red-faced author said. His starched shirt bowed out above his waistcoat. "Look at the farmers out in Iowa and think of what's happening down in Washington!"

"Yes, we've seen about enough of what uncontrolled individualism can do for us. It's nothing but exploitation."

"Jefferson never meant the people to have power," the young woman replied.

"We must have men who are strong enough to be ruthless," the lawyer said. "Democracy is impossible without a dictator—that's the anomaly! Someone has to force capital to share with labor or we're lost—a sinking ship."

"It can never be done. Labor can never consume its produce like a serpent eating its own tail," the author said.

Stephen leaned forward, feeling the carved arms of the chair beneath his hands. His face flushed and he saw Anne watching him, cautioning him. She tried to hold him back but he looked away. "My father had a fine business trading tobacco up and down the Ohio river," he said. "I was a boy during the first years of the war, and then before it was over I went too. When I came back he took me into the business and we doubled the profits." They were listening to him. "Everything was fine. I went to Cincinnati every two or three weeks—I traveled sixty miles on a river boat—to sell to the wholesalers." Stephen remembered what it was like walking down the brick-

paved path to the wharf. "I was very certain, and then suddenly it was all different." He stopped, out of breath.

"What happened?" the young woman asked. She sat at his right and when he turned toward her Stephen looked full into her eyes. He felt confused. What had happened? He felt as if he had forgotten his name. Then he knew again and the past broke over him like a wave.

"Banks failed—Jay Cooke failed—prices dropped and we couldn't sell to the eastern markets. That was in '73. After that people were out of work and there was trouble all over the country. Have you ever heard of the Molly Maguires? Workers organized and in '77 the country was paralyzed by the great railway strike. Nobody knew what would happen next, but finally it was settled and the forces of industry were in control." He paused. "The trouble was that the war was like a fever; it brought prosperity and then confusion and after that a panic." He knew there was more to say but he couldn't think what it was.

"It's different now," the lawyer said. "It's not the same—the whole world is upset."

Stephen thought of the time before Cleveland was elected. How he had despaired! He leaned forward and they were quiet before his quavering voice, "'Is there *any*thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new.'" He felt uplifted as if he were a prophet. He glanced triumphant about the table to see their acceptance of this wisdom. "Don't you see?" he was insistent. "The same things happen over and over—in every age—they happened in Egypt and Rome, they happened when I was a young man and now you have it all over again—the same old problems of bread and men."

The lawyer wiped his mouth, pursing his lips. He held his waterglass in the air. "Rome fell, sir, maybe that's our course too!" He smiled, making Stephen know that he was too old to have judgment as a man. He was a child

in the company of experience. Made irrelevant, he sat silent.

While they talked Stephen saw a procession of people following each other and the generations of men were like a frieze across his mind; he saw them making the same mistakes and he felt himself impotent, caught along in the parade, moving with that flow of people. "Does it always *seem* different and is it always the same?" he wondered. "Does it have to be done with blood blindly and are there forces over which man has no more control than over his own birth?"

He watched them, animated about the table, and he saw them powerless in the midst of life. They had no power to save themselves and they were afraid; like Lot's wife they could only turn and stare.

"I read somewhere that their Chancellor said, 'War is to man as motherhood is to woman!'"

"They're mad! All Europe is mad!" Anne said.

"It's more complicated than we know; it's rooted deep in the dissatisfaction of years. What do we know about Poland? It's a racial problem for which we have no parallel—we *might* have had if the Indians hadn't been quietly annihilated."

"The thing we won't face is that the powers of the world are bankrupt. All except Russia. At one time or another all of them have refused their obligations and now they're against the wall—" the lawyer said.

Stephen thought that their knowledge of their war had taught them to see the future as if it were already written in a book. How could they disregard those signs like clouds in the sky?

"An international government is the only solution."

"Impossible!" Anne exclaimed.

Stephen could not go on with the problem. It was a labyrinth and he had no thread to lead him to the light. He sought his memory of the tree; it was as if he needed a

landmark and he tried to sense it flowering above him. For an instant it was there and he put back his head and gazed at the white-yellow flowers glowing in clusters like lanterns.

After that he did not try to follow. They talked and he had no wish to hear what they were saying. Once or twice the young woman spoke to him, doling a suitable remark separately, and each time he felt humbled by her kindness.

Finally the women went away leaving their chairs disordered, and sitting there alone with the men Stephen was at peace. One of them, an Englishman, drew his chair close.

Stephen motioned to a box on the table. "The vices of an old man are limited," he said, "but I still have my cigar after dinner. I pride myself on their quality—perhaps you will have one with me?" He relished the man's surprise at his enthusiasm.

They talked of London and Stephen told him what it was like in 1887 at the time of the Queen's Jubilee. "My wife and I were there," he said. "We stood on the balcony of our room and watched the parade pass along the street. They raised the hotel rates, I remember that, and I remember I wanted to go on to Paris when they told me. But my wife wanted to stay!"

They laughed together in the way of men. "It was a fine sight to see," Stephen said.

III

They were gone! During the long waste of the evening Stephen had sat upright wondering whether Anne would notice if he were to leave them. He thought how he would go, quietly without making a stir. There was something he wanted to hear on the radio—what was it? He recalled checking the newspaper before dinner. He saw the library solitary and comforting and he longed to be in his leather chair. The newspaper was there on the table—What was

it he wanted to hear? Stephen frowned in his effort to remember and he saw Anne looking at him, solicitous. Yes, it *was* music, songs from *The Mikado*—"*a wandering minstrel I, a thing of shreds and patches*"—that was it! Did he dare?

But he sat on among them and at the end he got up and stood at the door with Anne.

Now they were gone. Stephen lay in bed and his eyes looked with satisfaction at the door closed between him and the hall. The light by the bed shone down and spotlighted his hands moving across the rough-surfaced quilt. Lying there in his bed, the bed of years, he felt secure in his being. The tall mahogany posts recognized him and acknowledged his identity. An elevated sounded and faded into the silence and Stephen thought that it was like a rocket spouting in a dark sky. He turned off the light and lay in the night.

"Eugenia," he said, "I saw a boy today—a boy with your eyes and your fair hair—"

His heart jerked and he sat startled in his sleep. What was wrong? He strained to hear but the house was quiet. Stephen waited taut like one about to run a race. Then, distinctly, there was the sound of sobbing. It came from the next room.

"John!" he called. "John! What's the matter?"

The sobs stopped. Stephen called Eugenia but she lay without moving. The sobs started again, louder now, and he felt himself jump out of bed and run to the nursery. The door was open and inside a nightlamp made a blot of light in the corner.

The room was silent except for the sobbing. Stephen saw himself dart to the bed and he leaned over it looking at John. He lay uncovered and his flannel pajamas were twisted about his body. His hair was damp and his eyes were black. When he saw Stephen he stopped with his mouth open.

"Are you ill, John?"

The sobs began once again. "No . . . I . . . had . . . a dream . . ."

Stephen was relieved and with that he began to tremble. "What did you dream, son?" he asked.

"It was about you—" John hesitated, looking up at him and then he turned over onto his stomach. "I dreamed you were an old man—I can't remember the rest," he said.

Stephen smiled, "Well, you *see* I'm not, and I guess I shan't be either for a long time. Why, you'll have a boy of your own before then!"

"Will I be old enough to run a train?"

"Yes, you'll be old enough to run a train and to sail a boat too."

John lay quiet, amazed with the future.

"Now John, how about some sleep?" Stephen said.

"I think I *could* go to sleep if I had something to eat—I'm hungry," John replied.

Stephen knew he should be firm. Eugenia would not allow it, but dreams were disturbing—"All right," he said, "if you're really hungry I'll get a glass of milk and some crackers. Cover up now while I go down to the kitchen." John smiled and pulled the blanket up to his chin.

Stephen stumbled over the stuffed spaniel lying stiff on the floor by the banisters. He shrank from it. What pleasure could Eugenia get from such an effigy of her dead pet? Stephen was surprised at himself seen angry in the mirror at the head of the stairs and he stepped softly, anxious not to wake Eugenia.

It was dark in the lower hall; it was as if he were in a strange house. He felt along the wall for the button and when the light came it was like a blow.

A pile of letters lay on the bench below the hatrack. The envelopes were small—Eugenia's. What did she say in those long letters to her family and the Richmond peo-

ple? "The only joy she ever feels is over the arrival of her mail," he thought.

The kitchen was a cave and he couldn't find the light cord. He felt like a thief. After a while he began to see by the light from the street and he found the cracker-tin in the pantry. He put it on the table and went to the icebox for the milk. "I must remember to tell him to drink it slowly," he thought.

He searched for John's mug, the china one with the cat for a handle, and when he had almost decided to do without it, there it was in the cupboard behind a pile of plates. It was like finding a treasure. He put it on a tray with the milk and some crackers.

Stephen started upstairs and then he stopped. "I guess I might as well have some too," he thought. He got himself a glass and somehow that made the thing more regular, less a conspiracy with John. They were both hungry, that was all.

He walked up the stairs to the first floor and when he reached the hall he heard voices in the dining-room. The red velvet curtains were drawn but he could just see them sitting about the table. Anne and her people and himself there at the end. They were talking and laughing while he looked on. Stephen felt elated like a truant and he tiptoed down the hall and past the drawing-room so they should not hear him. "They think they know," he thought. "Let them talk—*mine* not theirs—*my* John!"

He went up the second flight of stairs, past the library and on up to the floor above. The clock chimed twice as he opened the nursery door. He was surprised to find the room dark. Had Eugenia been there?

He pressed the button and put the tray on the table near the door. "Here we are, my man!" he said, "I'm going to have some with you." He opened the bottle. "It was quite an adventure getting it—*they* were there, and you should have seen the hatrack stare at me as I passed!"

John said nothing. Stephen took the mug in his hand and turned towards the bed. "Look!" he said, "I managed to find your mug—and what a search *that* was!"

But the bed was not there! Yes, it was there but not where it had been before—it stood empty against the wall, the covers smooth.

"John!"

Stephen put the mug on a chair and he felt himself stand like stone. Then he began to fumble about the room. He felt the curtains, he moved the chairs and he opened the wardrobe. All of the time he cried, "John! John! Where are you, John?"

"I must wake Eugenia, she will know," he thought and he stood gazing about the room. It ignored him, uncaring of his words as if he had no reason to be there. He called Eugenia with all his voice, louder and louder, until he sensed nothing but his own sound.

But she did not come and Stephen saw himself rooted there waiting. Finally he moved and he got to their room and looked at the bed. After that he sat on a low chair and bent over resting his elbows on his knees. He rocked slowly with his head in his hands, "John, my John," "John, John, my son," he repeated like a chant. When he got up he braced himself against the wall and moved along to the nursery door.

He stood there and he saw one glass of milk and a plate of crackers on a table by the hall door and there was another glass on a chair in the middle of the room. The milk had spilled on the seat and it made a wet ring. Stephen thought of the china mug and the glass blurred through his tears.

He stood like one in a dream. The faded animal parade marched around the walls of Anne's nursery as it had for fifty years and Stephen saw that the windowshades were pricked with points of light. "It's daybreak—I must try

to sleep," he murmured. "Anne would be worried if she found me."

Stephen got back to the bed and gripping the post he lifted himself. Stretched there with closed eyes it was as if he were dead. He thought of the glasses and the tray in the nursery, "If Anne should find them! Before her—I must get them in the morning—"

REJUVENATION THROUGH JOY

by

Langston Hughes

LANGSTON HUGHES *was born in 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. He is the author of* The Ways of White Folks, *a volume of short stories from which* Rejuvenation through Joy *is taken;* The Weary Blues (*poems*); Not Without Laughter, *a novel;* Mulatto, *a successful play of the 1935–1936 theatrical season in New York, etc. He has translated short stories and poems by Cuban, Mexican, and Haitian writers, and is a contributor to* New Masses, Esquire, Scribner's Magazine, The New Republic, *etc.*

REJUVENATION THROUGH JOY

MR. EUGENE LESCHE in a morning coat, handsome beyond words, stood on the platform of the main ballroom of the big hotel facing Central Park at 59th Street, New York. He stood there speaking in a deep smooth voice, with a slight drawl, to a thousand well dressed women and some two or three hundred men who packed the place. His subject was "Motion and Joy," the last of his series of six Friday morning lectures, each of which had to do with something and Joy.

As the hour of his last lecture approached, expensive chauffeured motors turned off Fifth Avenue, circled around from the Park, drew up at the 59th Street entrance, discharged women. In the elevators leading to the level of the hotel ballroom, delicate foreign perfumes on the breasts of befurred ladies scented the bronze cars.

"I've just heard of it this week. Everybody's talking about him. Did you hear him before?"

"My dear, I shall have heard all six. . . . He sent me an announcement."

"Oh, why didn't I . . . ?"

"He's marvellous!"

"I simply can't tell you . . . "

The great Lesche speaking.

As he spoke, a thousand pairs of feminine eyes gazed as one. The men gazed, too. Hundreds of ears heard, entranced: Relax and be happy. Let Lesche tell you

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how to live. Lesche knows. Look at Lesche in a morning coat, strong and handsome, right here before you. Listen!

At $2.50 a seat (How little for his message!) they listened.

"Joy," said the great Lesche, "what is life without joy? . . . And how can we find joy? Not through sitting still with our world of troubles on our minds; not through taking thought—too often only another phrase for brooding; not by the sedentary study of books or pamphlets, of philosophies and creeds, of ancient lore; not through listening to *me* lecture or listening to any other person lecture," this was the *last* talk of his series, "but only through motion, through joyous motion; through life in motion! Lift up your arms to the sun," said Lesche. "Lift them up now! Right now," appealing to his audience. "Up, up, up!"

A thousand pairs of female arms, and some few hundred men's, were lifted up with great rustle and movement, then and there, toward the sun. They were really lifted up toward Lesche, because nobody knew quite where the sun was in the crowded ballroom—besides all eyes were on Lesche.

"Splendid," the big black-haired young man on the platform said, "beautiful and splendid! That's what life is, a movement up!" He paused. "But not always up. The trees point toward the sun, but they also sway in the wind, joyous in the wind. . . . Keep your hands skyward," said Lesche, "sway! Everybody sway! To the left, to the right, like trees in the wind, sway!" And the huge audience began, at Lesche's command, to sway. "Feet on the floor," said Lesche, "sway!"

He stood, swaying too.

"Now," said Lesche suddenly, "stop! Try to move your hips! . . . Ah, you cannot! Seated as you are in chairs, you cannot! The life-center, the balance-point, cannot move in a chair. That is one of the great crimes

of modern life, one of the murders of ourselves, we sit too much in chairs. We need to stand up—no, not now, my friends." Some were already standing. "Not *just* when you are listening to *me*. I am speaking now of a way of life. We need to *live* up, point ourselves at the sun, sway in the wind of our rhythms, walk to an inner and outer music, put our balance-points in motion. (Do you not remember my talk on 'Music and Joy'?) Primitive man never sits in chairs. Look at the Indians! Look at the Negroes! They know how to move from the feet up, from the head down. Their centers live. They walk, they stand, they dance to their drum beats, their earth rhythms. They squat, they kneel, they lie—but they never, in their natural states, *never* sit in chairs. They do not mood and brood. No! They live through motion, through movement, through music, through joy! (Remember my lecture, 'Negroes and Joy'?) Ladies, and gentlemen, I offer you today—rejuvenation through joy."

Lesche bowed and bowed as he left the platform. With the greatest of grace he returned to bow again to applause that was thunderous. To a ballroom that was full of well-dressed women and cultured men, he bowed and bowed. Black-haired and handsome beyond words, he bowed. The people were loath to let him go.

Lesche had learned to bow that way in the circus. He used to drive the roan horses in the Great Roman Chariot Races—but nobody in the big ballroom of the hotel knew that. The women thought surely (to judge from their acclaim) that he had come fullblown right out of heaven to bring them joy.

Lesche knew what they thought, too, for within a month after the closing of his series of Friday Morning Lectures, they all received, at their town addresses, most beautifully written personal notes announcing the opening in Westchester of his Colony of Joy for the rebuilding of the mind, the body, and the soul.

Unfortunately, we did not hear Lesche's lecture on "Negroes and Joy" (the third in the series) but he said, in substance, that Negroes were the happiest people on earth. He said that they alone really knew the secret of rhythms and of movements. How futile, he said, to study Delsarte in this age! Go instead, he said, to Cab Calloway, Brick Top's, and Bill Robinson! Move to music, he said, to the gaily primitive rhythms of the first man. Be Adam again, be Eve. Be not afraid of life, which is a garden. Be all this not by turning back time, but merely by living to the true rhythm of our own age, to music as modern as today, yet old as life, music that the primitive Negroes brought with their drums from Africa to America—that music, my friends, known to the vulgar as jazz, but which is so much *more* than jazz that we know not how to appreciate it; that music which is the Joy of Life.

His letter explained that these rhythms would play a great part in leading those—who would come—along the path to joy. And at Lesche's initial Westchester colony, the leader of the music would be none other than the famous Happy Lane (*a primitif de luxe*), direct from the Moon Club in Harlem, with the finest Negro band in America. To be both smart and modern in approaching the body and soul, was Lesche's aim. And to bring gaiety to a lot of people who had known nothing more joyous than Gurdjieff was his avowed intention—for those who could pay for it.

For Lesche's proposed path to life was not any less costly than that of the now famous master's at Fontainebleau. Indeed, it was even slightly more expensive. A great many ladies (and gentlemen, too) who received Lesche's beautifully written letter gasped when they learned the size of the initial check they would have to draw in order to enter, as a resident member, his Colony of Joy.

Some gasped and did *not* pay (because they could not), and so their lives went on without Joy. Others gasped, and paid. And several (enough to insure entirely Lesche's first season) paid without even gasping. These last were mostly old residents of Park Avenue or the better section of Germantown, ladies who had already tried everything looking toward happiness—now they wanted to try Joy, especially since it involved so new and novel a course as Lesche proposed—including the gaiety of Harlem Negroes, of which most of them knew nothing except through the rather remote chatter of the younger set who had probably been to the Cotton Club.

So Lesche opened up his house on an old estate in Westchester with a mansion and several cottages thereon that the crash let him lease for a little or nothing. (Or rather, Sol, his manager, did the leasing.) Instead of chairs, they bought African stools, low, narrow, and backless.

"I got the best decorator in town, too," said Sol, "to do it over primitive—modernistic—on a percentage of the profits, if there are any."

"It's got to be comfortable," said Lesche, "so people can relax after they get through enjoying themselves."

"It'll be," said Sol.

"We're admitting nobody west of Fifth Avenue," said Lesche.

"No Broadwayites," said Sol.

"Certainly not," said Lesche. "Only people with souls to save—and enough Harlemites to save 'em."

"Ha! Ha!" said Sol.

All the attendants were French—maids, butlers, and pages. Lesche's two assistants were a healthy and hard young woman, to whom he had once been married, a Hollywood Swede with Jean Harlow hair; and a young Yale man who hadn't graduated, but who read Ronald

Firbank seriously, adored Louis Armstrong, worshipped Dwight Fisk, and had written Lesche's five hundred personal letters in a seven-lively-arts Gilbert Seldes style.

Sol, of course, handled the money, with a staff of secretaries, bookkeepers, and managers. And Happy Lane's African band, two tap dancers, and a real blues singer were contracted to spread joy, and act as the primordial pulse beat of the house. In other words, they were to furnish the primitive.

Within a month after the Colony opened in mid-January, its resident guests numbered thirty-five. Applications were legion. The demand for places was very great. The price went up.

"It's unbelievable how many people with money are unhappy," said Sol.

"It's unbelievable how they need what we got," drawled Lesche.

The press agents wrote marvellous stories about Lesche; how he had long been in his youth at Del Monte a student of the occult, how he had turned from that to the primitive and, through Africa, had discovered the curative values of Negro jazz.

The truth was quite otherwise.

Lesche had first worked in a circus. He rode a Roman chariot in the finale. All the way across the U. S. A. he rode twice daily, from Indianapolis where he got the job to Los Angeles where he quit, because nobody knew him there, and he liked the swimming at Santa Monica—and because he soon found a softer job posing for the members of a modernistic art colony who were modeling and painting away under a most expensive teacher at a nearby resort, saving their souls through art.

Lesche ate oranges and posed and swam all that summer and met a lot of nice, rich, and slightly faded women. New kind of people for him. Cultured people. He met, among others, Mrs. Oscar Willis of New Haven, one of

the members of this colony of art expression. Her husband owned a railroad. She was very unhappy. She was lonely in her soul—and her pictures expressed that loneliness. She invited Lesche to tea at her bungalow near the beach.

Lesche taught her to swim. After that she was less unhappy. She began a new study in the painting class. She painted a circle and called it her impression of Lesche. It was hard to get it just right, so she asked him to do some extra posing for her in the late afternoons. And she paid him very well.

But summers end. Seasonal art classes too, and Mrs. Willis went back East.

Lesche worked in the movies as an extra. He played football for football pictures. Played gigolos for society films. Played a sailor, a cave man, a cop. He studied tap dancing. He did pretty well as far as earning money went, had lots of time for cocktails, parties, and books. Met lots of women.

He liked to read. He'd been a bright boy in high school back home in South Bend. And now at teas out Wilshire way he learned what one ought to read, and what one ought to have read. He spent money on books. Women spent money on him. He swam enough to keep a good body. Drank enough to be a good fellow, and acted well enough to have a job at the studios occasionally. He got married twice, but the other women were jealous, so divorces followed.

Then his friend Sol Blum had an idea. Sol ran a gym for the Hollywood élite. He had a newly opened swimming pool that wasn't doing so well. He asked Lesche if he would take charge of the lessons.

"Don't hurt yourself working, you know. Just swim around a little and show 'em that it looks easy. And be nice to the women," Sol said.

The swimming courses boomed. The fees went up. Sol and Lesche made money. (Lesche got a percentage

cut.) He swam more and drank less. His body was swell, even if licker and women, parties and studio lights had made his face a little hard.

"But he's so damn nice," the women would say—who took swimming lessons for no good reason but to be held up by the black-haired Lesche.

Then one summer Lesche and Sol closed the gym and went to Paris. They drank an awful lot of licker at Harry's bar. And at Bricktop's they met an American woman who was giving a farewell party. She was Mrs. Oscar Willis, the artist—again—a long way from California.

"What's the idea?" said Lesche. "Are you committing suicide, Mrs. Willis, or going home, or what? Why a farewell party?"

"I am retiring from life," said Mrs. Willis, shouting above the frenzy of the Negro band. "I'm giving up art. I'm going to look for happiness. I'm going into the colony near Digne."

"Whose colony?" said Lesche. He remembered how much colonies cost, thinking of the art group.

"Mogador Bonatz's colony," said Mrs. Willis. "He's a very great Slav who can do so much for the soul. (Art does nothing.) Only one must agree to stay there six months when one goes."

"Is it expensive?" Lesche asked delicately. "I'm feeling awfully tired, too."

"Only $30 a day," said Mrs. Willis. "Have a drink?"

They drank a lot of champagne and said farewell to Mrs. Willis while the jazz band boomed and Bricktop shouted an occasional blues. Then Sol had an idea. After all, he was tired of gyms—why not start a colony? He mentioned it to Lesche when they got out into the open air.

"Hell, yes," said Lesche as they crossed Pigalle. "Let's start a colony."

From then on in Paris, Sol and Lesche studied soul

cults. By night they went to Montmartre. By day they read occult books and thought how much people needed to retire and find beauty—and pay for it. By night they danced to the Negro jazz bands. And all the time they thought how greatly they needed a colony.

"You see how much people pay that guy Bonatz?" said Sol.

"Um-huh!" said Lesche, drinking from a tall glass at Josephine's. "And you see how much they'll spend on Harlem jazz, even in Paris?"

"Yeah," said Sol, "we're spending it ourselves. But what's that got to do with colonies?"

"Looks like to me," said Lesche, "a sure way to make money would be, combine a jazz band and a soul colony, and let it roll from there—black rhythm and happy souls."

"I see," said Sol. "That's not as silly as it sounds."

"Let 'em be mystic and have fun, too," said Lesche.

"What do you mean, mystic?" asked Sol.

"High brow fun," said Lesche. "Like they get from Bonatz. What do you suppose he's got we can't get?"

"Nothing," said Sol, who learned to sell ideas in Hollywood. "Now, you got the personality. With me for manager, a jazz band for background, and a little showmanship, it could be a riot."

"A riot is right," said Lesche.

When they returned to America, they stayed in New York. Sol got hold of a secretary who knew a lot of rich addresses and some rich people. Together they got hold of a smart young man from Yale who prepared a program of action for a high brow cult of joy—featuring the primitive. Then they got ready to open a Colony.

They cabled Mrs. Willis at Digne for the names of some of her friends who might need their souls fixed up—in America. They sent out a little folder. And they had

the young Yale man write a few articles on *Contentment and Aboriginal Rhythms* for Lesche to try on the high brow magazines.

They really had a lot of nerve.

Lesche learned his lectures by heart that the college boy wrote. Then, he improvised, added variations of his own, made them personal, and bought a morning coat. Nightly he went to Harlem, brushing up on the newer rhythms. In November, they opened cold in the grand ballroom of the hotel facing the Park, without even a try-out elsewhere: Six lectures by Eugene Lesche on Joy in Relation to the Mind, Body, and Soul.

"Might as well take a big chance," said Sol. "Win or lose."

They won. In Sol's language, they wowed 'em. When the Friday Morning Series began, the ballroom was half full. When it ended, it was crowded and Sol had already signed the lease for the old Westchester estate.

So many people were in need of rejuvenating their souls and could seemingly still afford to pay for it that Sol gave up the idea for returning immediately to his gym in Hollywood. Souls seemed more important than bodies.

"How about it, Lesche?"

The intelligentsia dubbed their highly publicized efforts neo-paganism; others called it one more return to the primitive; others said out loud, it was a gyp game. Some said the world was turning passionate and spiritual; some said it was merely a sign of the decadence of the times. But everybody talked about it. The papers began to write about it. And the magazines that winter, from the *Junior League Bulletin* to the *Nation*, even the *New Masses*, remarked—usually snootily—but nevertheless remarked—about this Cult of Joy. (Harlem Hedonism, the *Forum* called it.) Lesche's publicity men who'd started it all, demanded higher wages, so Sol fired them.

The thing went rolling of its own accord. The world was aware—of Joy! The Westchester Colony prospered.

Ten days before the January opening of the Colony, the huge mansion of the once aristocratic estate hummed with activity. It looked like a Broadway theatre before a première. Decorators were working for big effects. (They hoped *House and Garden*, *Vogue*, or *Vanity Fair* would picturize their super-modernistic results.) The house manager, a former hotel-head out of work, was busy getting his staff together—trying to keep them French—for the swank of it.

The bed-rooms were receiving special attention. At Lesche's, sleep also was to be a joy. And each private bathroom was being fitted with those special apparatus at colonies necessary for the cleansing of the body—for Sol and Lesche had hired a doctor to tell them what the best cults used.

"Body and soul," said Sol. "Body and soul."

"Gimme the body," said Lesche, "and let the Yale man take care of the soul."

Occult assistants, chefs and waitresses, *masseurs* and hairdressers, began to arrive—for the house was to be fully staffed. And there were plenty of first-class people out of work and willing to take a chance, too.

Upstairs in a third floor room, Lesche, like an actor preparing for a rôle, studied his lectures word for word. His former wife listened to him daily, reciting them by heart, puzzling over their allusions.

In another room was the Yale man, surrounded by books on primitive art, spiritual guidance, Negro jazz, German eurythmics, psychoanalysis, Yogi philosophy, all of Krishnamurti, half of Havelock Ellis, and most of Freud, besides piles of spirituals, jazz records, Paul Robeson, and Ethel Waters, and in the midst of all this—a typewriter. There sat the Yale man creating lectures—

preparing, for a month in advance, twenty-minute daily talks for the great Lesche.

On the day when the Negroes arrived for their rehearsals, just prior to the opening of the place, Sol gave them a lecture. "Fellows," he said, addressing the band, "and Miss Lucas," to the blues-singing little coal-black dancer, "listen! Now I want to tell you about this place. This will not be no night club. Nor will it be a dance hall. This place is more like a church. It's for the rebuilding of souls—and bodies. It's for helping people. People who are wore out and tired, sick and bored, *ennui-ed* in other words, will come here for treatments, the kind of treatments, that Mr. Lesche and I have devised, which includes music, the best music, jazz, real primitive jazz out of Africa (you know, Harlem) to help 'em learn to move, to walk, to live in harmony with their times and themselves. Now, I want you all to be ladies and gentlemen (I know you are), to play with abandon, to give 'em all you got, but don't treat this like a rough house, nor like the Moon Club either. We allow only champagne drinkers here, cultured ladies, nice gentlemen, the best, the very best. Park Avenue. You know what I mean. . . . Now this is the order of the day. In the morning at eleven, Mr. Lesche will lecture in the Palm Garden, glass-enclosed, on the Art of Motion and Rhythm. You, Miss Tulane Lucas, and you two tap dancers there, will illustrate. You will show grace in modern movements, aliveness, the beat of Africa as expressed through the body. Mr. Lesche will illustrate, too. He's one of Bill Robinson's disciples, you know! You all know how tap-dancing has preserved Bill. A man of his age, past fifty! Well, we want to show our clients how it can preserve them. But don't do no stunts now, just easy rhythm stuff. We got to start 'em off slow. Some of 'em is old. And I expect some is Christian Scientists. . . . Then

in the late afternoon, we will have tea-dancing, just for pleasure. We want to give 'em plenty of exercise, so they won't be bored. And so they will eat. We expect to make money on our table, and on massages, too. In the evening for one hour, put on the best show you got, singing and dancing—every week we gonna bring up new specialties—send 'em to bed feeling happy, before Mr. Lesche gives his goodnight and sweet dreams talk. . . . Now, you boys understand, you'll be off early here, by ten or eleven. Not like at the Club. You got your own cottage here on the estate to live in, you got your cars. Don't mind you driving to town, if you want to, but I want you back here for the eleven o'clock services in the morning. And I don't want you sleepy, either. This house is dedicated to Joy, and all who work here have got to be bright and snappy. That's what our people are paying for. . . . Lesche! Where is Lesche, Miss Boxall?"

The secretary looked startled. "He was in the halls talking to the new French maids."

"Well, get him in here. Tell him to explain to these boys how he wants to fix up his routine for his lectures. Let's get down to business now."

"What kind of clothes you want us to wear?" Happy Lane, the Negro leader, asked.

"Red," said Sol. "Red is the color of Joy."

"Lord!" said the blues singer, "I'm too dark to wear red!"

"That's what we want," said Sol, "darkness and light! We want to show 'em how much light there is in darkness."

"Now, here!" said the blues singer to herself, "I don't like no white folks talkin' 'bout me being dark."

"Lesche," Sol called to his partner strolling in through the door, "let's get going."

"O. K.," Lesche said. "Where's my boy?" meaning the Yale man.

"Right here, Gene."

"Now, how does that first lecture go?"

"My Gawd!" said Sol.

The Yale man referred to his notes. "*Joy*," he read, "*Joy, springing from the dark rhythm of the primitive. . . .*"

"Oh, yes," said Lesche, turning to the band. "Now for that, give me *Mood Indigo*, you know, soft and syncopated, moan it soft and low. Then you, Miss Lucas," to the dancer, "you come gliding on. Give it plenty hip movement. I want 'em to learn to use their life-center. Then I'm gonna say . . . what's that, boy-friend?" to the Yale man.

"*See how the . . .* "

"Oh, yes . . . *See how the Negroes live, dark as the earth, the primitive earth, swaying like trees, rooted in the deepest source of life. . . .* Then I'm gonna have 'em all rise and sway, like Miss Lucas here. . . . That ought to keep 'em from being bored until lunch time."

"Lawd," said Miss Lucas, muttering to herself, "what is this, a dancing school or a Sunday school?" And louder, "All right, Mr. Lesche, sounds like it might be a good act."

"Act, nothing," said Sol. "This is the art of life."

"Must be, if you say so," said Miss Lucas.

"Well, let's go," commanded the great Lesche. "Let's rehearse this first lecture now. Come on, boys."

The jazz band began to cry *Mood Indigo* in the best manner of the immortal Duke Ellington. Lesche began to speak in his great soft voice. Bushy-haired Tulane Lucas began to glide across the floor.

"Goddamn!" said Sol, "It's worth the money!"

"Hey! Hey!" said Miss Lucas.

"Sh-ss-ss-s!" said Lesche. "Be dignified . . . *rooted in the deepest source of life* . . . er-r-r?"

". . . *O, early soul in motion* . . ." prompted the Yale man.

"*O, early soul . . .*" intoned Lesche.

The amazing collection of people gathered together in the Colony of Joy astounded even Lesche, whose very blasé-ness was what really made him appear so fresh. His thirty-seven clients in residence came almost all from families high in the Social Register, and equally high in the financial world. When Mrs. Carlos Gleed's check of entrance came in, Sol said, "Boy, we're made" . . . for of society there could be no higher—blue blood straight out of Back Bay.

The opening of the Colony created a furor among all the smart neurasthenics from Park Avenue right on up to New England. Dozens applied too late, and failed to get in. Others drove up daily for the lectures.

Of those who came, some had belonged formerly to the self-denial cults; others to Gurdjieff; others had been analyzed in Paris, Berlin, Vienna; had consulted Adler, Hirschfeld, Freud. Some had studied *under* famous Yogi. Others had been at Nyack. Now they had come to the Colony of Joy.

Up and down Park Avenue miraculous gossip flew.

Why, Mrs. Charles Duveen Althouse of Newport and Paris—feeling bad for years—is said to look like a cherub since she's gone into the Colony. . . . My dear, the famous Oriental fan-painter, Vankulmer Jones—he's *another* man these days. The rhythms, he says, the rhythms have worked wonders! And just the very presence of Lesche . . . Nothing America has ever known—rumor flew about the penthouses of the East River—nothing is equal to it. . . . The Baroness Langstrund gasped in a letter to a talkative friend, "My God, it's marvellous!"

Far better than Indian thought, Miss Joan Reeves, the heiress of Meadow Brook, was said to have said by her best friends. "The movement is amazing."

Almost all of them had belonged to cults before—cults

that had never satisfied. Some had even been injured by them. To a cult that based the soul-search on self-denial—deny what you like best, have it around you all the time, but never touch it, *never*—then you will be strong—Mrs. Duveen Althouse had belonged. She denied chocolates for a whole year; kept fresh candy sitting in each corner of her boudoir—resisted with all her soul—and at the end of a year was a wreck.

Mr. Jones, the fan-painter, had belonged to a group on Cape Cod that believed in change through change: that is, whatever you want to be, you can. And all the members, after they had paid their fees, were told by the Mystic Master to change their names to whatever they most wished to be, or whoever, past or present, they admired. Some, without much depth, chose Napoleon or Cleopatra. But others, Daphne or Zeus or Merry del Val. Mr. Jones chose Horse. He'd always wanted to be an animal, to possess their strength and calm, their vigor, their ways. But after a whole summer at the Cape he was even less of a horse than before. And greatly mosquito bitten.

Mrs. Ken Prather, II, a member of Lesche's group, had once spent entire months kneeling holding her big toes behind her, deep in contemplation. A most handsome Indian came once a week to her home on East 64th, for an enormous consideration, and gave her lessons in silence, and in positions of thought. But finally she just couldn't stand it any more.

Others of the Colony of Joy had been Scientists in their youth. Others had wandered, disappointed, the ways of spiritualism, never finding soul-mates; still others had gazed solemnly into crystals, but had seen nothing but darkness; now, they had come to Joy!

How did it happen that nobody before had ever offered them Rejuvenation through Joy? Why, that was what they had been looking for all these years! And who would

have thought it might come through the amusing and delightful rhythms of Negroes?

Nobody but Lesche.

In the warm glass-enclosed Palm Garden that winter, where the cupid fountain had been replaced by an enlargement of an African plastic and where a jazz band played soft and low behind the hedges, they felt (those who were there by virtue of their check books) all a-tremble in the depths of their souls after they had done their African exercises looking at Lesche—those slow, slightly grotesque, center-swaying exercises that he and Tulane Lucas from the Moon Club had devised. When they had finished, the movement, the music, and Lesche's voice, made them feel all warm and close to the earth, and as though they never wanted to leave the Colony of Joy or to be away from their great leader again.

Of course, there were a few who left, but their places were soon filled by others more truly mystic in the primitive sense than those whose arteries had already hardened, and who somehow couldn't follow a modern path to happiness, or sit on African stools. Clarence Lochard, for one, with *his* spine, had needed actual medical treatment not to be found at the Colony of Joy. And Mrs. J. Northcliff Hill, in the seventies, was a little too old for even the simple exercises that led to center-swaying. But for the two or three who went away, four or five came. And the house was full of life and soul. Every morning, *ensemble*, they lifted up their hands to the sun when the earth-drums rang out—and the sun was Lesche, standing right there.

Lesche was called the New Leader. The Negro bandmaster was known as Happy Man. The dancers were called the Primitives. The drummer was ritualized as Earth-Drummer. And the devotees were called New Men, New Women—for the Yale man had written in

one of the lectures, "*and the age-old rhythm of the earth as expressed by the drums is also the ever new rhythm of life. And all you who walk to it, dance to it, live to it, are New Men and New Women. You shall call one another, not by the old names but only New Man, New Woman, New One, forgetting the past.*"

They called Lesche, Dear New Leader.

"*For*," continued the gist of that particular lecture, "*newness, eternal renewal, is the source of all growth, all life, and as we grow from day to day here in this colony, we shall be ever new, ever joyous and new.*"

"Gimme sweet jazz on that line," Lesche had instructed at rehearsals. So on the thrilling morning of that lecture, the saxophones and clarinets moaned so beautiful and low, the drum beats called behind the palms with such wistful syncopation, that everybody felt impelled to move a new way as Lesche said, "Let us rise this morning and do a new dance, the dance of our new selves." And thirty-nine life-centers began to sway with the greatest of confidence in the palm court, for by now many inhibitions had fallen away, and the first exercise had been learned perfectly.

Who knows how long all might have gone on splendidly with Lesche and Sol and their Colony of Joy had not a most unhappy monster entered in to plague them. "The monster that's in every man," wrote the Yale man later in his diary, "the monster of jealousy—came to break down joy."

For the various New Ones became jealous of Lesche.

"It's your fault," stormed Sol. "Your fault. I told you to treat 'em all the same. I told you if you had to walk in the snow by moonlight, walk with your used-to-be wife, and leave the rest of these ladies alone. You know how women are. I told you not to start that Private Hour in the afternoon. I knew it would make trouble, create jealousy."

For out of the Private Hour devoted to the problems of each New One once a fortnight, where Lesche never advised (he couldn't) but merely received alone in confidence their troubles for contemplation, out of this private hour erelong, howls, screams, and recriminations were heard to issue almost daily. And in late March, New Woman Althouse was known to have thrown an African mask at New Leader Lesche because he kept her waiting a whole hour overtime while he devoted his attentions to the Meadow Brook heiress, New Woman Reeves.

"My Gawd!" said Sol, "the house is buzzing with scandal—I heard it all from Vankulmer Jones."

"These damn women," said Lesche, "I got to get rid of some of these women."

"You can't," said Sol. "They've all paid."

"Well, I will," said Lesche, "I'm tired! Why even my divorced wife's in love with me again. Fire her, will you?"

"Don't be foolish," said Sol, "she's a good secretary."

"Well, I'm gonna quit," said Lesche.

"You can't," said Sol. "I got you under contract."

"Oh, yeah?" said Lesche. "Too much is enough! And sometimes enough is too much! I'm tired, I tell you."

So they fell out. But Lesche didn't quit. It might have been better if he had, for Spring that year was all too sudden and full of implications. The very earth seemed to moan with excess of joy. Life was just too much to bear alone. It needed to be shared, its beauty given to others, taken in return. Its eternal newness united.

To the Colony, Lesche was their Leader, their life. And they wanted him, each one, alone. In desperation, he abolished the Private Hour. But that didn't help any. Mrs. Duveen Althouse was desperately in love with him now. (She called him Pan.) Miss Joan Reeves could not turn her eyes away. (He was her god.) Mrs. Carlos Gleed

insisted that he summer at her island place in Maine. Baroness Langstrund announced quite definitely she intended to marry him—whereupon Mrs. Althouse, who had thrown the mask, threatened, without ceremony, to wring at once the Baroness's neck. Several other New Ones stopped speaking to each other over Lesche. Even the men members were taking sides for or against Lesche, or against each other. That dear soul Vankulmer Jones said he simply couldn't stand it any more—and left.

In the city, the Broadway gossip columns got hold of it—this excitement over Joy—and began to wisecrack. Then suddenly a minister started a crusade against the doings of the rich at the Colony and the tabloids sent men up to get pictures. Blackmailers, scenting scandal, began to blackmail. The righteous and the racketeers both sprang into action. And violets bloomed in April.

Sol tore his hair. "We're ruined!"

"Who cares?" said Lesche, "let's go back to the Hollywood gym. We made plenty on this. And I've still got the Hispano Mrs. Hancock donated."

"But we could've made millions."

"We'll come back to it next year," said Lesche. "And get some fresh New Ones. I'm damn tired of these old ones." And so they bickered.

But the final fireworks were set off by Miss Tulane Lucas, the dusky female of the Primitives. They began over the Earth-Drummer, and really had nothing to do with the Colony. But fire, once started, often spreads beyond control.

The drummer belonged to Miss Lucas. But when Spring came, he got a bad habit of driving down to New York after work every night and not getting back till morning.

"Another woman," said Tulane to herself, "after all I've done." She warned him, but he paid her no mind.

One April morning, just in time to play for the eleven o'clock lecture, with Lesche already on the platform, the

little colored drummer arrived late and, without even having gone by the cottage to greet Tulane—rushed into the palm court and took his place at the earth-drums.

"Oh, no!" said Tulane suddenly from among the palms while all the New Ones, contemplating on their African stools, started at the unwonted sound. "Oh, no, you don't," she said. "You have drummed for your last time." And she took a pistol from her bosom and shot.

Bang! . . . Bang! . . . Bang!

Screams rent the palm court. As the drummer fled, bang! a bullet hit somewhere near his life-center, but he kept on. Pandemonium broke out.

"My Gawd!" said Sol. "Somebody grab that gun." But Mrs. Duveen Althouse beat him to it. From Tulane, she snatched the weapon for herself and approached the great Lesche.

"How right to shoot the one you love!" she cried. "How primitive, how just!" And she pointed the gun directly at their dear Leader.

Again shots rang out. One struck the brass curve of the bass horn, glanced upward toward the ceiling, and crashed through the glass of the sun court, showering slivers on everybody.

But by that time, Baroness Langstrund had thrown herself on Duveen Althouse. "Aw-oo!" she screamed. "You wretch, shooting the man I love." Her fingers sought the other's hair, her nails tore at her eyes. Meanwhile, Mrs. Carlos Gleed threw an African stool.

Mrs. Althouse fired once more—but Lesche had gone. The final bullet hit only the marble floor, flew upward through the piano, and sounded a futile chord.

By this time, Sol had grabbed the gun. The screams died. Somebody separated the two women. Little French maids came running with water for the fainting. Happy Lane emerged from behind the bass-viol, pale as an African ghost—but nobody knew where the rest of the

jazz band had disappeared, nor Lesche either. They were long gone.

There was no lecture that morning. Indeed, there were never any more lectures. That was the end of the Colony of Joy.

The newspapers laughed about it for weeks, published pictures and names of the wealthy inmates; the columnists wisecracked. It was all very terrible! As a final touch, one of the tabloids claimed to have discovered that the great Lesche was a Negro—passing for white!

THE POOR RELATION AND THE SECRETARY

by

Naomi Mitchison

MRS. NAOMI HALDANE MITCHISON, *born in England in 1897, is the author of a remarkable historical novel with a 3rd century* B. C. *Scythian-Greek-Egyptian setting,* The Corn King and the Spring Queen, *and several volumes of short stories, among them* Black Sparta, When the Bough Breaks, *and* The Delicate Fire; *also the novel* Cloud Cuckoo Land.

THE POOR RELATION AND THE SECRETARY

UNTIL they were a mile outside Rome, Claudia kept the curtains of the litter drawn. She did not like crowds and was bad at answering back if someone was rude. Those always seemed to be the moments the bearers chose to go slowest. Naturally she had been given the oldest and slowest bearers, but she did not expect anything else; she was lucky to have that. In the half light of the jolting litter, she looked through her tablets, considering the long list of things she was to do when she got to the country house. Which room Lady Quintilia was to have, and which Lady Rufa, and all the rest of them; what curtains were to go where; what provisions she was to get in; which of the country slaves were to be told to do what; she was to see that the fountains were started—no, Phillos could do that, it was a man's job—and have the aviary cleaned up and if necessary re-stocked; the garden was to look nice for the guests. And so on and so forth. She thought she could manage it all, though she had not been given much time. They wouldn't for instance notice about the aviary for days! But she was a competent person, as they all said. If one was a poor relation whose parents had been Unfortunate—as one always said—during the Civil Wars, it was as well to be competent. Or beautiful. But she was not that. And the family standard was particularly high. Was there not the exquisite Lady Norbana whom the Emperor himself—well, better not mention it perhaps, considering she was to be married next month. Some conventions are better kept up.

Once out on the road beyond the houses, she drew the

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curtains a little. Phillos, the secretary, was walking level with her. The baggage mules were behind. She looked out across acres of green vineyard, not very interesting, but still, the country would be pleasant after all these months in town. Phillos looked up and smiled a little, but said nothing; it was not his place to speak first. He seemed to be walking rather lame. She asked him if he would see to the fountains, and he said yes, but would she give him authority? The country slaves never saw any reason why they should do what he said. "It's bad enough with the bailiff," he said, "but at any rate they know I'm there to do accounts. Still, he makes it as difficult as possible."

Claudia leaned over the edge of the litter and laughed. "He's a horrid man!" she said, "but I don't mind dealing with him if there's any special difficulty, Phillos. He remembers father, so he's still got a little respect for me!"

"Thank you, Miss Claudia," said Phillos gratefully, "I think I may want a little help. It was bad enough last time. I can't work when he stands over me and grins."

A flock of sheep went by just then, raising a cloud of dust. She drew her curtains against it. The bearers swore and jolted worse than ever. She shut her eyes for a few minutes; she was sorry for her cousins' secretary. A dog's life, being a slave, if you had any kind of perceptions and fine feelings. She wondered if they were going to free him. Perhaps later on, when he was middle-aged; then he would stay on with them. Probably he was saving up to buy his freedom now, but it would mean a good deal of money, more than he was likely to have for a long time. Middle age. A grim business to grow old with no home of your own, no one to look after you or be kind to you. One would go on being competent up to middle age. But what about later on? When all the young cousins were married off, like Norbana, before or after the Emperor—well, well, she mustn't be catty about it! But it must be wonderful to have men wanting you like that. Anyone wanting you for

anything except—well, competence. Somebody wanting you just to be kind to them.

When she drew the curtains again, the hills were in sight. She cried out with pleasure: "Aren't they lovely, Phillos! So cool and big and shadowy! It makes one think one's a child again."

He looked at them unenthusiastically. Abruptly he said: "I'd like some day to see the Greek hills. My mother used to tell me about them. Much higher than these and more beautiful shapes. But I don't suppose I ever shall."

She hardly knew what to say to that. It was such an odd outburst, from Phillos of all people, who one never remembered was a Greek at all! Then she noticed he was really walking very lame. "What's the matter?" she said. "Have you cut yourself?"

"No," he said. "It's only my knee, Miss Claudia. It goes like that after a few miles."

"Does it hurt?"

"Not very much," he said, "thank you all the same for asking."

She was rather distressed, though; the man looked whiteish, like someone in pain. "You'd better get up into the litter for a mile or two; that'll ease it." She called down to the bearers to halt. "Get in at the other end; it'll take you easily."

Phillos protested, and so, more loudly, did the litter bearers, one of whom produced a sore shoulder.

"Nonsense," said Claudia. "Am I the mistress here, or not? No, you are merely being lazy! Change to the other pole. Men that can't carry a litter are only fit for field work—shall I tell Lady Quintilia that? Pretty it would be for your mistress's secretary to be lamed just because you are a set of good-for-nothing dogs! Up you get, Phillos." The litter jolted sullenly on again. "I've got *that* much authority," she said, satisfied. "Now, Phillos, what about

this knee? What's wrong with it? Why haven't I known before?"

"It's an old blow," he said. "Really Miss Claudia, you shouldn't have bothered! It's only the body. The stupid, unimportant body."

"Don't go trying any of your stoicism on me!" said Claudia. "I've read all the books. A pack of nonsense. One can't get away from the body. When was it done?"

"Some time ago," he said, "my last place. One *must* have some philosophy, and that's the only one for slaves."

"If I were you," said Claudia, "I should have a nice exciting mystery religion. However, I can't talk, I haven't got one myself! What about these Christians one's beginning to hear about?—wouldn't that be comforting?"

"A lot of dirty Jews!"

"Well, very likely. They're all much alike, I dare say. Or there's Isis. I've got a certain feeling for Isis myself. If one were the kind of person who liked religions.—But about this knee, did someone hit you?"

"Yes, Miss Claudia. My master. I suppose I'd been stupid. But he did know where to get one. My knee swelled and I was lame for a long time. Now it only gets me when I'm tired."

He put both hands down on his knee, pressing over it; he had broad, clean hands, each finger separately tensed. The other leg was curled under him and he sat rather upright, so as not to take up too much room. She reached over and handled the knee-cap herself; it was rather swollen. She was used to dealing with sick slaves—it was part of her job. But he leant back away from her, half shutting his eyes, as though abstracting himself, leaving nothing with her but the knee. His legs were very dusty from the road, but not stickily engrained like some of the slave skins she had to handle.

When they got to the villa, she became immersed in jobs, and was startled to find it was supper-time when they

came to tell her. She had rather enjoyed being busy and competent and talking to a lot of people; she wanted to go on talking. "Tell the secretary he is to have his supper with me," she said, "I've a lot to talk over with him." Phillos came in shyly, bringing in his tray, which looked rather unappetising. "This is very kind of you, Miss Claudia," he said. "Nonsense!" she said, rather surprised, because she had really had no idea of being kind, and told them sharply to bring him up the remains of the bird she was having. She told him all the things she had been doing and the obstacles which she had been successfully overcoming. He had started on the estate accounts, but was a little depressed about them. His knee seemed to have settled down again, and he didn't take her suggestion of a hot poultice. After a time they drifted into a rather pleasant philosophical discussion, seasoned with quotations. At dusk they wished each other good night and separated.

Claudia was enjoying herself. She liked having this large house to herself before the others arrived. She went through all the rooms with a lamp, talking to herself, welcoming or speeding imaginary guests, not quite daring to go the whole way and make herself husband or children. She wished the others weren't coming to-morrow to shatter her images against their own brilliant reality.

The next morning she got up early and went on putting things to order; she found Phillos had got the fountains to work, which reminded her to go and tackle the bailiff for him. The man was, as usual, being extremely rude and obstructive about his accounts, but caved in to her at once, with reminiscences of her father. They walked out of the room together and as he passed the secretary crouched over his desk and the rows of semi-legible figures, he tweaked his ear rather hard. Phillos said nothing, only frowned more deeply, and Claudia said nothing either, but it annoyed her. "That impudent little Greek!" said the

bailiff, "I can't stand the fellow. Why Lady Quintilia has a man like that! Ah, your father, now, he always stuck to his own people and didn't get cheated out of a quarter so much." But Claudia preferred to discuss with him the rapid bedding out of damask roses and blue daisies to fill up the gaps in the garden.

She put flowers in the rooms, changed her dress and prepared to receive the cousins, but instead got a messenger on mule-back with a letter to say that they weren't coming till the next day, after all. A party had materialized. They did hope she wasn't too bored! She sent the messenger in for a drink, and stood for a moment with the letter in her hand. No, she wasn't bored! She could have her own shadow party again to-night. And this afternoon? She would go out into the hills where she and her cousins had played hide-and-seek and teased the shepherds—a long time ago, when they were all equals, more or less. A long time ago, under old Emperor Claudius, before the worst of the Troubles. She picked up her cloak and started out through the garden, but she walked slower and slower and at last came to a stop. She had discovered that she was rather frightened of going by herself into the hills now. So many evil things had happened since those days; she couldn't go all alone and be play-haunted by herself fifteen years ago! She ran back suddenly to the house and into the old library where the secretary was still in the thick of accounts. "They are not arriving till to-morrow," she said, "and I am going to walk in the hills. Escort me, please. There are dogs." Obediently Phillos put his lists to one side and got up. They went through the garden and out into the hills. She found she remembered the paths wonderfully well. She was not frightened now.

Phillos followed a couple of paces behind, as was proper. Suddenly she wondered if it was bad for his knee, and turned sharply to look, at a crossways between hill pasture and olives. He did not seem to be walking lame, and he

had his hands full of flowers, the dry, long-stemmed summery things from the sides of the paths and cracks in the walls, coloured daisies and thin red and purple spikes. As she looked at them, his fingers closed on them with whitening knuckles. She smiled: "We'll go down through the fields here; there used to be a stream. You'll find more."

It was a beautiful pasture, with oaks and a few great rocks, not yet cropped dry. Half-way down she stopped in a patch of shade under one of the trees and lay down on the grass. Her hands fingered about among the warm grass blades, just as they had done fifteen years ago. The smell of wild dust and leaves was the same. Phillos stood in the edge of the shade, rubbing the bunch of pretty colours against his face. She beckoned him to come farther under the tree and sit down. He stretched out his knee a little stiffly among the grasses; she felt suddenly rather guilty and spoke friendlily to him about the country, and poked a cricket to jump towards his hand. He rolled over on to his face, his head turned away from her, and lay breathing in the summer out of the hillside. After a time she became aware, more by his silence than by any noise, that he was crying. He had probably strained the knee after all. She wondered how it had been damaged. The idiocy of some masters, spoiling a valuable possession, changing the thing from useful to less useful, the man from friend to enemy! Even women were sometimes both fools and cruel with their slaves, but at least they didn't, on the whole, do things to them when they were drunk!

She reached over and patted his head, which twitched and withdrew itself like a snail's eye. "My poor Phillos!" she said, "is it hurting so much?" A kind of negative movement appeared in the body. "Was it the bailiff then?" she asked. "You shouldn't take any notice of him. He's an uneducated man, honest, rough. He doesn't understand you're a person, at all." Phillos answered with

something quite inaudible, but that had the effect of a child's unhappiness. She moved nearer and put her hand on his head. For a moment it quivered, too; then lay passive under her fingers like a tame beast. "Poor thing!" she said, rubbing into the base of the hair and then down onto the forehead, a new surface, warmer and softer. It amused her to go on. Suddenly she remembered coming here before with a puppy the children had, and stroking it as it lay on the grass, panting after play; that was the touch that had come back into her fingers. They felt on, checking at a line of eyebrow, and stroked it to the corner of the eye; the skin stayed curiously still—she thought he must be holding his breath. Then at the corner of the eye they came on something fresh, the wet of tears, checking the finger tips with something new and unlike the puppy that had grown up into a big hound and died years and years ago. Something human.

"What is it?" she said, "has someone been unkind to you? Tell me, Phillos." And again: "You'd better tell me. Probably I can put it right." He was one of her cousin's most valuable slaves; she mustn't let him be damaged. A hand came up over the face and covered hers, pulling at it a little. For a moment she almost lost her balance, leaning over, but then recovered it. She felt his lips against the inside of her fingers: very odd, a man's lips, scarcely kissing, just touching in some very pathetic way, as the dog had dropped his muzzle into one's hand fifteen years ago. It was more dignified to let it be, not to withdraw it hurriedly. An uncomfortable position, all the same. The tension on her arm spread from wrist to shoulder. "Now, Phillos," she said, "that'll do. Sit up and tell me what you're crying about."

He obeyed almost at once, let go her hand and sat up. He must have lain with the flowers under his chin, for there were squashed petals and leaves on his neck still. "I'm sorry, Miss Claudia," he said, "but I don't

often have time off in the country. It gets one somehow."

"Sure it's not your knee?" she said. He shook his head, even smiling. "Or the bailiff?"

"No, no! At least, hardly. But I only save up so slowly."

"Save up—? To buy your freedom?" He nodded. "What would you do if you were free?"

It seemed a difficult question to answer. At last he said: "I'd stop being so lonely."

"But are you?" she asked, surprised. "In a big household like this? Surely you've got plenty of friends?"

"No," he said.

And she considered that, after all, he hadn't much in common with most of them—always looked out of it at the slaves' festival, the Saturnalia, when there were games and little presents, and she went round, encouraging them to laugh and sing and do things all together and be jolly. She had found him reading a book once that day, in a corner of the big library, hunched up between two chests of book rolls; she remembered how she had packed him out, cheerfully but firmly, and partnered him with one of the Lady Rufa's maids for a singing game.

"What would you do?" she repeated.

He said: "You'll think it silly, Miss Claudia." Then: "Well, I've got one friend, a Greek like me. He keeps a book shop by the new baths. You know it, perhaps. Meno's. He told me if I ever got free he'd give me a regular job there, copying or dictating or selling. There would be several of us working at it together. I'd like that. And perhaps some day to see Greece."

"Yes," she said, "it seems very sensible. Not terribly exciting perhaps. I'm sorry you feel so lonely, Phillos. We must see what can be done about it."

"Oh, don't bother, Miss Claudia," he said, "mostly I haven't time to bother myself. It was being out here. It's

very beautiful country. Is this really your home, Miss Claudia? It must be fine for you, coming back, and then to-morrow the others will come, too, and you'll be all together. You ladies will come out here, I suppose, to this field, and laugh and talk and remember times you've shared."

"I doubt it," said Claudia, dryly, and laughed a little. "No. You've got it wrong, Phillos. The others have got now: the present, all bright and sparkling and jolly. And this hill, this stupid hill is only then: the dull, unimportant past. So I'm alone on it."

"Are you?" he said, looking directly at her, for almost the first time, "but you're never lonely, Miss Claudia?"

She prepared to smile at this ridiculousness, but the smell of turf came up at her, making her act blindly and childishly. "You stupid!" she said, and beat on it with her fists. "Why did you think I made you come with me?"

He stared at her for nearly a minute, then dropped his eyes and began picking out the least squashed flowers. She watched his hands doing it and tried to forget what she had said. She saw them making a wreath, pretty and mixed and funny, a child's crown. He offered it uncertainly, but she bent her head for it, in some way glad to hide her face. "Now," she ordered, "you get me some." He jumped up and went quickly from patch to patch, moving in the sun mostly; she had never seen him moving so easily before. She put her hands up over her own cheeks; they were hot; she felt the corners of her mouth twitching and smiling and tried to compose herself to gravity—what was there to smile at? Her cousins' slave secretary doing what he was told? Because he was a slave, not because she was a woman. Obviously he was not regarding her in that light. Stupid to suppose he might be. And dangerous impudence if he did! But what would be happening if she had a face and figure like Norbana's?—

well, she wouldn't be sitting on a dry bank miles from Rome staring at a slave coming back with flowers—common, wild flowers—and thinking he needed a new pair of sandals!

He stood in front of her and dropped them into her lap; she began naming them to him—he did not know their country names. She stopped thinking about Norbana and what it would be like, and fell to threading the flowers together on a long grass. Her wreath was much better than his, thick and close and competently made so that it didn't come to pieces and hang over the left ear as the one on her own head was doing already! He knelt apologetically, to put it right, touching her hair; her head stayed tremulously still, determined not to slant itself towards a slave's hands. She put the last touches to her own wreath, admiring it as it dangled from her hand. He admired it, too, but from a distance, obviously refusing to consider in his own mind what she meant to do with it. "Here, Phillos!" she said, "take it, you stupid creature!" Even so, he did not dare duck his head for her to crown him, but took it in his hands and put it on himself. She jumped up. "You've got it quite crooked. Now, stand still, I'll do it." It was possible to retain an air of complete mastery still. She put it straight.

He had the right shaped head for it, as she had known, squarish, with hair that stood up springily under the leaves. The shadow of it seemed to brighten his eyes, too. He reached out, gently, hesitatingly, and took her hand and swung it for a moment in the sweet air between them. She asked him what books his friend published—poetry, history, astronomy, cookery books? He began very eagerly to tell her, and about the excitement of a new book, the polished tops of the rolls, the ruled lines in scarlet, bright and shiny, the thrill of who would come the first day to buy, reading it oneself and getting the points clear in one's head for customers who asked! And then the copying of

books, poetry especially, getting the feel of a new metre—some phrase that jumped out at one like a jewel! And fresh editions of the old: philosophy, mathematics. They talked about it all the way back, walking side by side along the hill paths this time.

The cousins came and everything went according to plan. And then, towards the end of their stay, something really awkward and annoying happened. Lady Norbana lost her sapphire brooch. The whole of the villa was turned upside down. Claudia worried about it dreadfully, feeling that its loss was a reflection on her own competence. As, indeed, it was in some odd way made out to be. She began to suspect any and all the slaves, had them up, questioned them, bullied them, searched their bedding. All no good. And then suddenly she found it herself in the box edging of a flower bed.

She picked it up and looked at it angrily for having given her so much trouble. It stared back out of her palm in the odd, calm way that round polished stones have; it had been there all the time, waiting, in no hurry. She liked handling jewels; it did not happen often. She tried it on herself, pinning it first on the shoulder of her mantle, then at the cross-over of her dress. Lady Norbana, her cousin, was already ceasing to fuss about it. A jeweller had come that morning from town, sent by her betrothed with an assortment of even more beautiful brooches for her to choose from; the only difficulty lay in the decision! Would she, after all, be so very glad to get this sapphire back?

What was it worth, Claudia wondered? The price of one of the rose terraces. The price of a painted summer-house. The price of a skilled slave. Some people would give their ears for it. She jumped it up and down in the palm of her hand. The price of a skilled slave. Supposing a slave had found it and not told, but sold it in Rome—at one of the little jewellers in the Suburra. Who would have been any

the worse? Not really Lady Norbana with her new one which was going to be the envy of all her friends! Perhaps the slave himself would be hurt: by the doing of something wrong and concealment of it. Wrong? Against the laws. The laws are there to defend property, to defend the owners, the innocent owners, the stupid owners, the careless owners who would just as soon have something else if they could get it! Supposing the slave who had found it and sold it used the money, not slavishly for mean little pleasures and gratifications of the body, but to buy his freedom and be a free man among his friends? Yes. Claudia pinned her cousin's sapphire brooch into her own dress under the belt, and went back to the house. Then she locked it in a box with her few valuable possessions and managed to forget about it quite successfully almost all the time. Norbana's taste had changed. She was tired of large, plain stones. She preferred them engraved; there was an amethyst with a winged cupid dancing and carrying torches—when you held it up to the light it seemed to waver with a translucent life and gaiety of its own: a piece of Alexandrian work. That was the final choice.

When the cousins were all there, Claudia had very little time to herself. There was a constant bustle and laughter and things to be arranged, or cleared up after they had been disarranged. On a quiet day, they wanted her usually to read aloud to them while they embroidered, all sitting under a holm oak by one of the fountains. She had a good voice with plenty of expression; she brought out the points. And there were so many books coming out now! Lady Quintilia had a taste for philosophy and the vaguer mathematics, but the others preferred poetry or poetic romances.

Phillos was busy, too. Between doing accounts and writing business letters he had to copy out their grandfather's memoirs of campaigning and politics in the early years of the Empire, occasionally expanding or annotating when they seemed too obscure. He was getting on with it

steadily, but there was plenty left. Every evening he had to bring out what he had copied that day to Lady Quintilia and read it aloud to her. Usually Claudia was there, too, and the others pretended to be interested sufficiently to come in from time to time and comment wittily. Occasionally Quintilia made corrections in the manuscript, which had then to be recopied. Claudia gave Phillos most of his orders, and there might be a few minutes' conversation, all very much as it should be, diffident from him and assured from her. He did not look at her directly during their interviews, but kept his eyes down on his tablets; and she would have been ashamed to do her hair more carefully or wear her new fringed mantle just to talk to the secretary! They were going back to Rome in a week.

Sometimes she regretted that she had seen no more of the hills. But it had not seemed possible. There had been occasional tours of the estate on mule-back, mostly by Lady Quintilia and herself, and one or two excursions to the lake by the whole party. But after all, why be uncomfortable? Hill paths are rough and dusty and tear one's best dress, and the garden was always expectant and delicious—the damask roses really the greatest success!—and one could keep in the shade, and send back to the house for anything one had forgotten, and feed the gold fish and tame swans, and everything was just so, and one felt deep in oneself that one had power over it. The garden with the fountains was man-made and docile and friendly like a beautiful riding-horse, but the hills were wild and separate from man, enemies, dark wild bulls with tossing crests like horns! Why try to get companionship out of such alien forms?

A few days after they got back, when the household was all settled in again, Claudia unlocked her box, took out the brooch, and went with it to the little shop in the Suburra which she had decided on. She wore a solid brown cloak and walked quickly; no one spoke to her. While the jewel-

ler handled and weighed the brooch, she sat on a stool beside his table, looking with quite a real interest at the specimens of his craftsmanship. She knew from Norbana about what the jewel was worth, but did not suppose she would get that. The first offer, of course, was ridiculously low, but she had always found bargaining quite pleasant and easy when it was a business matter: she had been the one to settle most of the estate business three years ago when Lady Quintilia had been so upset over the Troubles. The thing settled itself between her and the jeweller to their mutual satisfaction. She counted the money and put it into the purse she had brought with her.

On the way back she suppressed firmly all kinds of unpleasant images. The brooch recognised: the jeweller questioned: herself described. Nonsense. If she denied it completely—and they would hardly even have the face to accuse her!—it was her word against the jeweller's. There was nothing to be anxious about. The difficult part was over.

She sent for Phillos and gave him instructions about some letters he was to write. Then she said: "You still want to go and shop-keep with your book-seller friends?"

"Yes, Miss Claudia," he said, "but there's not much chance of it yet."

"How much have you saved so far?"

He told her, rather dully; it was all in the remote future and he was getting older every day; and they were back in Rome where he couldn't even look out over his desk at sunlight on blue daisies. "Another six or seven years, if I'm lucky."

"I think we can do better than that," she said, and slid the money out of her purse on to the table.

He stared at it and then at her, straight into her face this time. "Do you mean—you'll lend it to me, Miss Claudia?"

"No," she said, "it would take you too long to pay me

back. I'm giving it to you." He did not answer at all, only his eyes went back to the money and stared and stared; his hands began to shake and then his body; he shut his eyes. "Don't be stupid!" she said sharply, "it won't be as nice as you think, being free!"

"But why are you doing this," he said, "why, why? What do you get for it?"

"It's only some money that—came to me—lately," she said, "a windfall. I don't need it. I gathered that you did."

Then he slid suddenly down to his knees and took her hands and began kissing them. She disentangled one and laid it on his head; it was odd how she remembered the feel of his hair. This way, he could not look up suddenly and see her face. She could let it wear any expression it chose. She could let her other hand soak for a minute in these kisses, which were, rightly and properly, nothing but gratitude. Gratitude. A pretty emotion as between lady and slave. Kisses not of the lips and senses but of the whole mind and body. Looking down at him, it seemed to her that they were being shaken out from under his shoulders, from the heart itself. And all for Norbana's brooch! Her cousin's brooch and her own presence of mind: no one any the worse. Presence of mind and absence of fear: a slave's emotion. Phillos would have been too frightened to do it himself—even though he might think he was a Stoic!

The cousins would need to get a new secretary now. If she had not acted as she had, Phillos would still be their secretary for years and years, never go off to his book-shop and his Greek friends. She would still be seeing him every day, having that few minutes' talk. Not that it mattered. She would train the new secretary to take her orders just as quickly. Perhaps it would be better if they got a Latin of some kind, rather than a Greek. Better with the bailiff and the estate people. It would be the new secretary who

would stay for years and years: till she was old herself. Well, well, why think about unpleasant subjects?

"That'll do, Phillos!" she said cheerfully. Her right hand pulled itself away from his lips, her left hand from his hair. They would never stay like that again. "Now," she said, "we'll count the money. You must go to Lady Quintilia this evening and tell her you have the price. I think I would rather you did not say it had anything to do with me, Phillos. We'll get the Quaestor in to-morrow and free you. The next time I'm buying a book I shall certainly come to your book-shop. And I hope you will make a great success of it!"

MARÍA CONCEPCIÓN

by

Katherine Anne Porter

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER *was born in Texas in 1894. In the year after the publication of her volume of short stories,* Flowering Judas (*1930*), *she received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has since lived the greater part of the time in Paris. The new collection under the same title contains four new stories in addition to those printed in the original limited edition.*

MARÍA CONCEPCIÓN

MARÍA CONCEPCIÓN walked carefully, keeping to the middle of the white dusty road, where the maguey thorns and the treacherous curved spines of organ cactus had not gathered so profusely. She would have enjoyed resting for a moment in the dark shade by the roadside, but she had no time to waste drawing cactus needles from her feet. Juan and his chief would be waiting for their food in the damp trenches of the buried city.

She carried about a dozen living fowls slung over her right shoulder, their feet fastened together. Half of them fell upon the flat of her back, the balance dangled uneasily over her breast. They wriggled their benumbed and swollen legs against her neck, they twisted their stupefied eyes and peered into her face inquiringly. She did not see them or think of them. Her left arm was tired with the weight of the food basket, and she was hungry after her long morning's work.

Her straight back outlined itself strongly under her clean bright blue cotton rebozo. Instinctive serenity softened her black eyes, shaped like almonds, set far apart, and tilted a bit endwise. She walked with the free, natural, guarded ease of the primitive woman carrying an unborn child. The shape of her body was easy, the swelling life was not a distortion, but the right inevitable proportions of a woman. She was entirely contented. Her husband was at work and she was on her way to market to sell her fowls.

Her small house sat half-way up a shallow hill, under

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a clump of pepper-trees, a wall of organ cactus enclosing it on the side nearest to the road. Now she came down into the valley, divided by the narrow spring, and crossed a bridge of loose stones near the hut where María Rosa the beekeeper lived with her old godmother, Lupe the medicine woman. María Concepción had no faith in the charred owl bones, the singed rabbit fur, the cat entrails, the messes and ointments sold by Lupe to the ailing of the village. She was a good Christian, and drank simple herb teas for headache and stomachache, or bought her remedies bottled, with printed directions that she could not read, at the drugstore near the city market, where she went almost daily. But she often bought a jar of honey from young María Rosa, a pretty, shy child only fifteen years old.

María Concepción and her husband, Juan Villegas, were each a little past their eighteenth year. She had a good reputation with the neighbors as an energetic religious woman who could drive a bargain to the end. It was commonly known that if she wished to buy a new rebozo for herself or a shirt for Juan, she could bring out a sack of hard silver coins for the purpose.

She had paid for the license, nearly a year ago, the potent bit of stamped paper which permits people to be married in the church. She had given money to the priest before she and Juan walked together up to the altar the Monday after Holy Week. It had been the adventure of the villagers to go, three Sundays one after another, to hear the banns called by the priest for Juan de Dios Villegas and María Concepción Manriquez, who were actually getting married in the church, instead of behind it, which was the usual custom, less expensive, and as binding as any other ceremony. But María Concepción was always as proud as if she owned a hacienda.

She paused on the bridge and dabbled her feet in the water, her eyes resting themselves from the sun-rays

in a fixed gaze to the far-off mountains, deeply blue under their hanging drift of clouds. It came to her that she would like a fresh crust of honey. The delicious aroma of bees, their slow thrilling hum, awakened a pleasant desire for a flake of sweetness in her mouth.

"If I do not eat it now, I shall mark my child," she thought, peering through the crevices in the thick hedge of cactus that sheered up nakedly, like bared knife blades set protectingly around the small clearing. The place was so silent she doubted if María Rosa and Lupe were at home.

The leaning jacal of dried rush-withes and corn sheaves, bound to tall saplings thrust into the earth, roofed with yellowed maguey leaves flattened and overlapping like shingles, hunched drowsy and fragrant in the warmth of noonday. The hives, similarly made, were scattered towards the back of the clearing, like small mounds of clean vegetable refuse. Over each mound there hung a dusty golden shimmer of bees.

A light gay scream of laughter rose from behind the hut; a man's short laugh joined in. "Ah, hahahaha!" went the voices together high and low, like a song.

"So María Rosa has a man!" María Concepción stopped short, smiling, shifted her burden slightly, and bent forward shading her eyes to see more clearly through the spaces of the hedge.

María Rosa ran, dodging between beehives, parting two stunted jasmine bushes as she came, lifting her knees in swift leaps, looking over her shoulder and laughing in a quivering, excited way. A heavy jar, swung to her wrist by the handle, knocked against her thighs as she ran. Her toes pushed up sudden spurts of dust, her half-raveled braids showered around her shoulders in long crinkled wisps.

Juan Villegas ran after her, also laughing strangely, his teeth set, both rows gleaming behind the small soft

black beard growing sparsely on his lips, his chin, leaving his brown cheeks girl-smooth. When he seized her, he clenched so hard her chemise gave way and ripped from her shoulder. She stopped laughing at this, pushed him away and stood silent, trying to pull up the torn sleeve with one hand. Her pointed chin and dark red mouth moved in an uncertain way, as if she wished to laugh again; her long black lashes flickered with the quick-moving lights in her hidden eyes.

María Concepción did not stir nor breathe for some seconds. Her forehead was cold, and yet boiling water seemed to be pouring slowly along her spine. An unaccountable pain was in her knees, as if they were broken. She was afraid Juan and María Rosa would feel her eyes fixed upon them and would find her there, unable to move, spying upon them. But they did not pass beyond the enclosure, nor even glance towards the gap in the wall opening upon the road.

Juan lifted one of María Rosa's loosened braids and slapped her neck with it playfully. She smiled softly, consentingly. Together they moved back through the hives of honey-comb. María Rosa balanced her jar on one hip and swung her long full petticoats with every step. Juan flourished his wide hat back and forth, walking proudly as a game-cock.

María Concepción came out of the heavy cloud which enwrapped her head and bound her throat, and found herself walking onward, keeping the road without knowing it, feeling her way delicately, her ears strumming as if all María Rosa's bees had hived in them. Her careful sense of duty kept her moving toward the buried city where Juan's chief, the American archeologist, was taking his midday rest, waiting for his food.

Juan and María Rosa! She burned all over now, as if a layer of tiny fig-cactus bristles, as cruel as spun glass, had crawled under her skin. She wished to sit down

quietly and wait for her death, but not until she had cut the throats of her man and that girl who were laughing and kissing under the cornstalks. Once when she was a young girl she had come back from market to find her jacal burned to a pile of ash and her few silver coins gone. A dark empty feeling had filled her; she kept moving about the place, not believing her eyes, expecting it all to take shape again before her. But it was gone, and though she knew an enemy had done it, she could not find out who it was, and could only curse and threaten the air. Now here was a worse thing, but she knew her enemy. María Rosa, that sinful girl, shameless! She heard herself saying a harsh, true word about María Rosa, saying it aloud as if she expected someone to agree with her: "Yes, she is a whore! She has no right to live."

At this moment the gray untidy head of Givens appeared over the edges of the newest trench he had caused to be dug in his field of excavations. The long deep crevasses, in which a man might stand without being seen, lay crisscrossed like orderly gashes of a giant scalpel. Nearly all of the men of the community worked for Givens, helping him to uncover the lost city of their ancestors. They worked all the year through and prospered, digging every day for those small clay heads and bits of pottery and fragments of painted walls for which there was no good use on earth, being all broken and encrusted with clay. They themselves could make better ones, perfectly stout and new, which they took to town and peddled to foreigners for real money. But the unearthly delight of the chief in finding these wornout things was an endless puzzle. He would fairly roar for joy at times, waving a shattered pot or a human skull above his head, shouting for his photographer to come and make a picture of this!

Now he emerged, and his young enthusiast's eyes welcomed María Concepción from his old-man face, covered

with hard wrinkles and burned to the color of red earth. "I hope you've brought me a nice fat one." He selected a fowl from the bunch dangling nearest him as María Concepción, wordless, leaned over the trench. "Dress it for me, there's a good girl. I'll broil it."

María Concepción took the fowl by the head, and silently, swiftly drew her knife across its throat, twisting the head off with the casual firmness she might use with the top of a beet.

"Good God, woman, you do have nerve," said Givens, watching her. "I can't do that. It gives me the creeps."

"My home country is Guadalajara," explained María Concepción, without bravado, as she picked and gutted the fowl.

She stood and regarded Givens condescendingly, that diverting white man who had no woman of his own to cook for him, and moreover appeared not to feel any loss of dignity in preparing his own food. He squatted now, eyes squinted, nose wrinkled to avoid the smoke, turning the roasting fowl busily on a stick. A mysterious man, undoubtedly rich, and Juan's chief, therefore to be respected, to be placated.

"The tortillas are fresh and hot, señor," she murmured gently. "With your permission I will now go to market."

"Yes, yes, run along; bring me another of those tomorrow." Givens turned his head to look at her again. Her grand manner sometimes reminded him of royalty in exile. He noticed her unnatural paleness. "The sun is too hot, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Pardon me, but Juan will be here soon?"

"He ought to be here now. Leave his food. The others will eat it."

She moved away; the blue of her rebozo became a dancing spot in the heat waves that rose from the gray-red soil. Givens liked his Indians best when he could feel a fatherly indulgence for their primitive childish ways.

He told comic stories of Juan's escapades, of how often he had saved him, in the past five years, from going to jail, and even from being shot, for his varied and always unexpected misdeeds.

"I am never a minute too soon to get him out of one pickle or another," he would say. "Well, he's a good worker, and I know how to manage him."

After Juan was married, he used to twit him, with exactly the right shade of condescension, on his many infidelities to María Concepción. "She'll catch you yet, and God help you!" he was fond of saying, and Juan would laugh with immense pleasure.

It did not occur to María Concepción to tell Juan she had found him out. During the day her anger against him died, and her anger against María Rosa grew. She kept saying to herself, "When I was a young girl like María Rosa, if a man had caught hold of me so, I would have broken my jar over his head." She forgot completely that she had not resisted even so much as María Rosa, on the day that Juan had first taken hold of her. Besides she had married him afterwards in the church, and that was a very different thing.

Juan did not come home that night, but went away to war and María Rosa went with him. Juan had a rifle at his shoulder and two pistols at his belt. María Rosa wore a rifle also, slung on her back along with the blankets and the cooking pots. They joined the nearest detachment of troops in the field, and María Rosa marched ahead with the battalion of experienced women of war, which went over the crops like locusts, gathering provisions for the army. She cooked with them, and ate with them what was left after the men had eaten. After battles she went out on the field with the others to salvage clothing and ammunition and guns from the slain before they should begin to swell in the heat. Sometimes they would

encounter the women from the other army, and a second battle as grim as the first would take place.

There was no particular scandal in the village. People shrugged, grinned. It was far better that they were gone. The neighbors went around saying that María Rosa was safer in the army than she would be in the same village with María Concepción.

María Concepción did not weep when Juan left her; and when the baby was born, and died within four days, she did not weep. "She is mere stone," said old Lupe, who went over and offered charms to preserve the baby.

"May you rot in hell with your charms," said María Concepción.

If she had not gone so regularly to church, lighting candles before the saints, kneeling with her arms spread in the form of a cross for hours at a time, and receiving holy communion every month, there might have been talk of her being devil-possessed, her face was so changed and blind-looking. But this was impossible when, after all, she had been married by the priest. It must be, they reasoned, that she was being punished for her pride. They decided that this was the true cause for everything: she was altogether too proud. So they pitied her.

During the year that Juan and María Rosa were gone María Concepción sold her fowls and looked after her garden and her sack of hard coins grew. Lupe had no talent for bees, and the hives did not prosper. She began to blame María Rosa for running away, and to praise María Concepción for her behavior. She used to see María Concepción at the market or at church, and she always said that no one could tell by looking at her now that she was a woman who had such a heavy grief.

"I pray God everything goes well with María Concepción from this out," she would say, "for she has had her share of trouble."

When some idle person repeated this to the deserted

woman, she went down to Lupe's house and stood within the clearing and called to the medicine woman, who sat in her doorway stirring a mess of her infallible cure for sores: "Keep your prayers to yourself, Lupe, or offer them for others who need them. I will ask God for what I want in this world."

"And will you get it, you think, María Concepción?" asked Lupe, tittering cruelly and smelling the wooden mixing spoon. "Did you pray for what you have now?"

Afterward everyone noticed that María Concepción went oftener to church, and even seldomer to the village to talk with the other women as they sat along the curb, nursing their babies and eating fruit, at the end of the market-day.

"She is wrong to take us for enemies," said old Soledad, who was a thinker and a peace-maker. "All women have these troubles. Well, we should suffer together."

But María Concepción lived alone. She was gaunt, as if something were gnawing her away inside, her eyes were sunken, and she would not speak a word if she could help it. She worked harder than ever, and her butchering knife was scarcely ever out of her hand.

Juan and María Rosa, disgusted with military life, came home one day without asking permission of anyone. The field of war had unrolled itself, a long scroll of vexations, until the end had frayed out within twenty miles of Juan's village. So he and María Rosa, now lean as a wolf, burdened with a child daily expected, set out with no farewells to the regiment and walked home.

They arrived one morning about daybreak. Juan was picked up on sight by a group of military police from the small barracks on the edge of town, and taken to prison, where the officer in charge told him with impersonal cheerfulness that he would add one to a catch of ten waiting to be shot as deserters the next morning.

María Rosa, screaming and falling on her face in the road, was taken under the armpits by two guards and helped briskly to her jacal, now sadly run down. She was received with professional importance by Lupe, who helped the baby to be born at once.

Limping with foot soreness, a layer of dust concealing his fine new clothes got mysteriously from somewhere, Juan appeared before the captain at the barracks. The captain recognized him as head digger for his good friend Givens, and dispatched a note to Givens saying: "I am holding the person of Juan Villegas awaiting your further disposition."

When Givens showed up Juan was delivered to him with the urgent request that nothing be made public about so humane and sensible an operation on the part of military authority.

Juan walked out of the rather stifling atmosphere of the drumhead court, a definite air of swagger about him. His hat, of unreasonable dimensions and embroidered with silver thread, hung over one eyebrow, secured at the back by a cord of silver dripping with bright blue tassels. His shirt was of a checkerboard pattern in green and black, his white cotton trousers were bound by a belt of yellow leather tooled in red. His feet were bare, full of stone bruises, and sadly ragged as to toenails. He removed his cigarette from the corner of his full-lipped wide mouth. He removed the splendid hat. His black dusty hair, pressed moistly to his forehead, sprang up suddenly in a cloudy thatch on his crown. He bowed to the officer, who appeared to be gazing at a vacuum. He swung his arm wide in a free circle upsoaring towards the prison window, where forlorn heads poked over the window sill, hot eyes following after the lucky departing one. Two or three of the heads nodded, and a half dozen hands were flipped at him in an effort to imitate his own casual and heady manner.

Juan kept up this insufferable pantomime until they rounded the first clump of fig-cactus. Then he seized Givens' hand and burst into oratory. "Blessed be the day your servant Juan Villegas first came under your eyes. From this day my life is yours without condition, ten thousand thanks with all my heart!"

"For God's sake stop playing the fool," said Givens irritably. "Some day I'm going to be five minutes too late."

"Well, it is nothing much to be shot, my chief—certainly you know I was not afraid—but to be shot in a drove of deserters, against a cold wall, just in the moment of my home-coming, by order of that . . ."

Glittering epithets tumbled over one another like explosions of a rocket. All the scandalous analogies from the animal and vegetable worlds were applied in a vivid, unique and personal way to the life, loves, and family history of the officer who had just set him free. When he had quite cursed himself dry, and his nerves were soothed, he added: "With your permission, my chief!"

"What will María Concepción say to all this?" asked Givens. "You are very informal, Juan, for a man who was married in the church."

Juan put on his hat.

"Oh, María Concepción! That's nothing. Look, my chief, to be married in the church is a great misfortune for a man. After that he is not himself any more. How can that woman complain when I do not drink even at fiestas enough to be really drunk? I do not beat her; never, never. We were always at peace. I say to her, Come here, and she comes straight. I say, Go there, and she goes quickly. Yet sometimes I looked at her and thought, Now I am married to that woman in the church, and I felt a sinking inside, as if something were lying heavy on my stomach. With María Rosa it is all different. She is not silent; she talks. When she talks too much, I

slap her and say, Silence, thou simpleton! and she weeps. She is just a girl with whom I do as I please. You know how she used to keep those clean little bees in their hives? She is like their honey to me. I swear it. I would not harm María Concepción because I am married to her in the church; but also, my chief, I will not leave María Rosa, because she pleases me more than any other woman."

"Let me tell you, Juan, things haven't been going as well as you think. You be careful. Some day María Concepción will just take your head off with that carving knife of hers. You keep that in mind."

Juan's expression was the proper blend of masculine triumph and sentimental melancholy. It was pleasant to see himself in the rôle of hero to two such desirable women. He had just escaped from the threat of a disagreeable end. His clothes were new and handsome, and they had cost him just nothing. María Rosa had collected them for him here and there after battles. He was walking in the early sunshine, smelling the good smells of ripening cactus-figs, peaches, and melons, of pungent berries dangling from the pepper-trees, and the smoke of his cigarette under his nose. He was on his way to civilian life with his patient chief. His situation was ineffably perfect, and he swallowed it whole.

"My chief," he addressed Givens handsomely, as one man of the world to another, "women are good things, but not at this moment. With your permission, I will now go to the village and eat. My God, *how* I shall eat! Tomorrow morning very early I will come to the buried city and work like seven men. Let us forget María Concepción and María Rosa. Each one in her place. I will manage them when the time comes."

News of Juan's adventure soon got abroad, and Juan found many friends about him during the morning. They frankly commended his way of leaving the army. It was in itself the act of a hero. The new hero ate a

great deal and drank somewhat, the occasion being better than a feast-day. It was almost noon before he returned to visit María Rosa.

He found her sitting on a clean straw mat, rubbing fat on her three-hour-old son. Before this felicitous vision Juan's emotions so twisted him that he returned to the village and invited every man in the "Death and Resurrection" pulque shop to drink with him.

Having thus taken leave of his balance, he started back to María Rosa, and found himself unaccountably in his own house, attempting to beat María Concepción by way of reëstablishing himself in his legal household.

María Concepción, knowing all the events of that unhappy day, was not in a yielding mood, and refused to be beaten. She did not scream nor implore; she stood her ground and resisted; she even struck at him. Juan, amazed, hardly knowing what he did, stepped back and gazed at her inquiringly through a leisurely whirling film which seemed to have lodged behind his eyes. Certainly he had not even thought of touching her. Oh, well, no harm done. He gave up, turned away, half-asleep on his feet. He dropped amiably in a shadowed corner and began to snore.

María Concepción, seeing that he was quiet, began to bind the legs of her fowls. It was market-day and she was late. She fumbled and tangled the bits of cord in her haste, and set off across the plowed fields instead of taking the accustomed road. She ran with a crazy panic in her head, her stumbling legs. Now and then she would stop and look about her, trying to place herself, then go on a few steps, until she realized that she was not going towards the market.

At once she came to her senses completely, recognized the thing that troubled her so terribly, was certain of what she wanted. She sat down quietly under a sheltering thorny bush and gave herself over to her long devour-

ing sorrow. The thing which had for so long squeezed her whole body into a tight dumb knot of suffering suddenly broke with shocking violence. She jerked with the involuntary recoil of one who receives a blow, and the sweat poured from her skin as if the wounds of her whole life were shedding their salt ichor. Drawing her rebozo over her head, she bowed her forehead on her updrawn knees, and sat there in deadly silence and immobility. From time to time she lifted her head where the sweat formed steadily and poured down her face, drenching the front of her chemise, and her mouth had the shape of crying, but there were no tears and no sound. All her being was a dark confused memory of grief burning in her at night, of deadly baffled anger eating at her by day, until her very tongue tasted bitter, and her feet were as heavy as if she were mired in the muddy roads during the time of rains.

After a great while she stood up and threw the rebozo off her face, and set out walking again.

Juan awakened slowly, with long yawns and grumblings, alternated with short relapses into sleep full of visions and clamors. A blur of orange light seared his eyeballs when he tried to unseal his lids. There came from somewhere a low voice weeping without tears, saying meaningless phrases over and over. He began to listen. He tugged at the leash of his stupor, he strained to grasp those words which terrified him even though he could not quite hear them. Then he came awake with frightening suddenness, sitting up and staring at the long sharpened streak of light piercing the corn-husk walls from the level disappearing sun.

María Concepción stood in the doorway, looming colossally tall to his betrayed eyes. She was talking quickly, and calling his name. Then he saw her clearly.

"God's name!" said Juan, frozen to the marrow, "here

I am facing my death!" for the long knife she wore habitually at her belt was in her hand. But instead, she threw it away, clear from her, and got down on her knees, crawling toward him as he had seen her crawl many times toward the shrine at Guadalupe Villa. He watched her approach with such horror that the hair of his head seemed to be lifting itself away from him. Falling forward upon her face, she huddled over him, lips moving in a ghostly whisper. Her words became clear, and Juan understood them all.

For a second he could not move nor speak. Then he took her head between both his hands, and supported her in this way, saying swiftly, anxiously reassuring, almost in a babble:

"Oh, thou poor creature! Oh, madwoman! Oh, my María Concepción, unfortunate! Listen. . . . Don't be afraid. Listen to me! I will hide thee away, I thy own man will protect thee! Quiet! Not a sound!"

Trying to collect himself, he held her and cursed under his breath for a few moments in the gathering darkness. María Concepción bent over, face almost on the ground, her feet folded under her, as if she would hide behind him. For the first time in his life Juan was aware of danger. This was danger. María Concepción would be dragged away between two gendarmes, with him following helpless and unarmed, to spend the rest of her days in Belén Prison, maybe. Danger! The night swarmed with threats. He stood up and dragged her up with him. She was silent and perfectly rigid, holding to him with resistless strength, her hands stiffened on his arms.

"Get me the knife," he told her in a whisper. She obeyed, her feet slipping along the hard earth floor, her shoulders straight, her arms close to her side. He lighted a candle. María Concepción held the knife out to him. It was stained and dark even to the handle with drying blood.

He frowned at her harshly, noting the same stains on her chemise and hands.

"Take off thy clothes and wash thy hands," he ordered. He washed the knife carefully, and threw the water wide of the doorway. She watched him and did likewise with the bowl in which she had bathed.

"Light the brasero and cook food for me," he told her in the same peremptory tone. He took her garments and went out. When he returned, she was wearing an old soiled dress, and was fanning the fire in the charcoal burner. Seating himself cross-legged near her, he stared at her as at a creature unknown to him, who bewildered him utterly, for whom there was no possible explanation. She did not turn her head, but kept silent and still, except for the movements of her strong hands fanning the blaze which cast sparks and small jets of white smoke, flaring and dying rhythmically with the motion of the fan, lighting her face and darkening it by turns.

Juan's voice barely disturbed the silence: "Listen to me carefully, and tell me the truth, and when the gendarmes come here for us, thou shalt have nothing to fear. But there will be something for us to settle between us afterward."

The light from the charcoal burner shone in her eyes; a yellow phosphorescence glimmered behind the dark iris.

"For me everything is settled now," she answered, in a tone so tender, so grave, so heavy with suffering, that Juan felt his vitals contract. He wished to repent openly, not as a man, but as a very small child. He could not fathom her, nor himself, nor the mysterious fortunes of life grown so instantly confused where all had seemed so gay and simple. He felt too that she had become invaluable, a woman without equal among a million women, and he could not tell why. He drew an enormous sigh that rattled in his chest.

"Yes, yes, it is all settled. I shall not go away again. We must stay here together."

Whispering, he questioned her and she answered whispering, and he instructed her over and over until she had her lesson by heart. The hostile darkness of the night encroached upon them, flowing over the narrow threshold, invading their hearts. It brought with it sighs and murmurs, the pad of secretive feet in the near-by road, the sharp staccato whimper of wind through the cactus leaves. All these familiar, once friendly cadences were now invested with sinister terrors; a dread, formless and uncontrollable, took hold of them both.

"Light another candle," said Juan, loudly, in too resolute, too sharp a tone. "Let us eat now."

They sat facing each other and ate from the same dish, after their old habit. Neither tasted what they ate. With food half-way to his mouth, Juan listened. The sound of voices rose, spread, widened at the turn of the road along the cactus wall. A spray of lantern light shot through the hedge, a single voice slashed the blackness, ripped the fragile layer of silence suspended above the hut.

"Juan Villegas!"

"Pass, friends!" Juan roared back cheerfully.

They stood in the doorway, simple cautious gendarmes from the village, mixed-bloods themselves with Indian sympathies, well known to all the community. They flashed their lanterns almost apologetically upon the pleasant, harmless scene of a man eating supper with his wife.

"Pardon, brother," said the leader. "Someone has killed the woman María Rosa, and we must question her neighbors and friends." He paused, and added with an attempt at severity, "Naturally!"

"Naturally," agreed Juan. "You know that I was a good friend of María Rosa. This is bad news."

They all went away together, the men walking in a group, María Concepción following a few steps in the rear, near Juan. No one spoke.

The two points of candlelight at María Rosa's head fluttered uneasily; the shadows shifted and dodged on the stained darkened walls. To María Concepción everything in the smothering enclosing room shared an evil restlessness. The watchful faces of those called as witnesses, the faces of old friends, were made alien by the look of speculation in their eyes. The ridges of the rose-colored rebozo thrown over the body varied continually, as though the thing it covered was not perfectly in repose. Her eyes swerved over the body in the open painted coffin, from the candle tips at the head to the feet, jutting up thinly, the small scarred soles protruding, freshly washed, a mass of crooked, half-healed wounds, thorn-pricks and cuts of sharp stones. Her gaze went back to the candle flame, to Juan's eyes warning her, to the gendarmes talking among themselves. Her eyes would not be controlled.

With a leap that shook her her gaze settled upon the face of María Rosa. Instantly her blood ran smoothly again: there was nothing to fear. Even the restless light could not give a look of life to that fixed countenance. She was dead. María Concepción felt her muscles give way softly; her heart began beating steadily without effort. She knew no more rancor against that pitiable thing lying indifferently in its blue coffin under the fine silk rebozo. The mouth drooped sharply at the corners in a grimace of weeping arrested half-way. The brows were distressed; the dead flesh could not cast off the shape of its last terror. It was all finished. María Rosa had eaten too much honey and had had too much love. Now she must sit in hell, crying over her sins and her hard death forever and ever.

Old Lupe's cackling voice arose. She had spent the

morning helping María Rosa, and it had been hard work. The child had spat blood the moment it was born, a bad sign. She thought then that bad luck would come to the house. Well, about sunset she was in the yard at the back of the house grinding tomatoes and peppers. She had left mother and babe asleep. She heard a strange noise in the house, a choking and smothered calling, like someone wailing in sleep. Well, such a thing is only natural. But there followed a light, quick, thudding sound—

"Like the blows of a fist?" interrupted an officer.

"No, not at all like such a thing."

"How do you know?"

"I am well acquainted with that sound, friends," retorted Lupe. "This was something else."

She was at a loss to describe it exactly. A moment later, there came the sound of pebbles rolling and slipping under feet; then she knew someone had been there and was running away.

"Why did you wait so long before going to see?"

"I am old and hard in the joints," said Lupe. "I cannot run after people. I walked as fast as I could to the cactus hedge, for it is only by this way that anyone can enter. There was no one in the road, sir, no one. Three cows, with a dog driving them; nothing else. When I got to María Rosa, she was lying all tangled up, and from her neck to her middle she was full of knife-holes. It was a sight to move the Blessed Image Himself! Her eyes were—"

"Never mind. Who came oftenest to her house before she went away? Did you know her enemies?"

Lupe's face congealed, closed. Her spongy skin drew into a network of secretive wrinkles. She turned withdrawn and expressionless eyes upon the gendarmes.

"I am an old woman. I do not see well. I cannot hurry on my feet. I know no enemy of María Rosa. I did not see anyone leave the clearing."

"You did not hear splashing in the spring near the bridge?"

"No, sir."

"Why, then, do our dogs follow a scent there and lose it?"

"God only knows, my friend. I am an old wo—"

"Yes. How did the footfalls sound?"

"Like the tread of an evil spirit!" Lupe broke forth in a swelling oracular tone that startled them. The Indians stirred uneasily, glanced at the dead, then at Lupe. They half expected her to produce the evil spirit among them at once.

The gendarme began to lose his temper.

"No, poor unfortunate; I mean, were they heavy or light? The footsteps of a man or of a woman? Was the person shod or barefoot?"

A glance at the listening circle assured Lupe of their thrilled attention. She enjoyed the dangerous importance of her situation. She could have ruined that María Concepción with a word, but it was even sweeter to make fools of these gendarmes who went about spying on honest people. She raised her voice again. What she had not seen she could not describe, thank God! No one could harm her because her knees were stiff and she could not run even to seize a murderer. As for knowing the difference between footfalls, shod or bare, man or woman, nay, between devil and human, who ever heard of such madness?

"My eyes are not ears, gentlemen," she ended grandly, "but upon my heart I swear those footsteps fell as the tread of the spirit of evil!"

"Imbecile!" yapped the leader in a shrill voice. "Take her away, one of you! Now, Juan Villegas, tell me—"

Juan told his story patiently, several times over. He had returned to his wife that day. She had gone to market as usual. He had helped her prepare her fowls. She

had returned about mid-afternoon, they had talked, she had cooked, they had eaten, nothing was amiss. Then the gendarmes came with the news about María Rosa. That was all. Yes, María Rosa had run away with him, but there had been no bad blood between him and his wife on this account, nor between his wife and María Rosa. Everybody knew that his wife was a quiet woman.

María Concepción heard her own voice answering without a break. It was true at first she was troubled when her husband went away, but after that she had not worried about him. It was the way of men, she believed. She was a church-married woman and knew her place. Well, he had come home at last. She had gone to market, but had come back early, because now she had her man to cook for. That was all.

Other voices broke in. A toothless old man said: "She is a woman of good reputation among us, and María Rosa was not." A smiling young mother, Anita, baby at breast, said: "If no one thinks so, how can you accuse her? It was the loss of her child and not of her husband that changed her so." Another: "María Rosa had a strange life, apart from us. How do we know who might have come from another place to do her evil?" And old Soledad spoke up boldly: "When I saw María Concepción in the market today, I said, 'Good luck to you, María Concepción, this is a happy day for you!'" and she gave María Concepción a long easy stare, and the smile of a born wise-woman.

María Concepción suddenly felt herself guarded, surrounded, upborne by her faithful friends. They were around her, speaking for her, defending her, the forces of life were ranged invincibly with her against the beaten dead. María Rosa had thrown away her share of strength in them, she lay forfeited among them. María Concepción looked from one to the other of the circling, intent

faces. Their eyes gave back reassurance, understanding, a secret and mighty sympathy.

The gendarmes were at a loss. They, too, felt that sheltering wall cast impenetrably around her. They were certain she had done it, and yet they could not accuse her. Nobody could be accused; there was not a shred of true evidence. They shrugged their shoulders and snapped their fingers and shuffled their feet. Well, then, good night to everybody. Many pardons for having intruded. Good health!

A small bundle lying against the wall at the head of the coffin squirmed like an eel. A wail, a mere sliver of sound, issued. María Concepción took the son of María Rosa in her arms.

"He is mine," she said clearly, "I will take him with me."

No one assented in words, but an approving nod, a bare breath of complete agreement, stirred among them as they made way for her.

María Concepción, carrying the child, followed Juan from the clearing. The hut was left with its lighted candles and a crowd of old women who would sit up all night, drinking coffee and smoking and telling ghost stories.

Juan's exaltation had burned out. There was not an ember of excitement left in him. He was tired. The perilous adventure was over. María Rosa had vanished, to come no more forever. Their days of marching, of eating, of quarreling and making love between battles, were all over. Tomorrow he would go back to dull and endless labor, he must descend into the trenches of the buried city as María Rosa must go into her grave. He felt his veins fill up with bitterness, with black unendurable melancholy. Oh, Jesus! what bad luck overtakes a man!

Well, there was no way out of it now. For the moment he craved only to sleep. He was so drowsy he could

scarcely guide his feet. The occasional light touch of the woman at his elbow was as unreal, as ghostly as the brushing of a leaf against his face. He did not know why he had fought to save her, and now he forgot her. There was nothing in him except a vast blind hurt like a covered wound.

He entered the jacal, and without waiting to light a candle, threw off his clothing, sitting just within the door. He moved with lagging, half-awake hands, to strip his body of its heavy finery. With a long groaning sigh of relief he fell straight back on the floor, almost instantly asleep, his arms flung up and outward.

María Concepción, a small clay jar in her hand, approached the gentle little mother goat tethered to a sapling, which gave and yielded as she pulled at the rope's end after the farthest reaches of grass about her. The kid, tied up a few feet away, rose bleating, its feathery fleece shivering in the fresh wind. Sitting on her heels, holding his tether, she allowed him to suckle a few moments. Afterward—all her movements were deliberate and even—she drew a supply of milk for the child.

She sat against the wall of her house, near the doorway. The child, fed and asleep, was cradled in the hollow of her crossed legs. The silence overfilled the world, the skies flowed down evenly to the rim of the valley, the stealthy moon crept slantwise to the shelter of the mountains. She felt soft and warm all over; she dreamed that the newly born child was her own, and she was resting deliciously.

María Concepción could hear Juan's breathing. The sound vapored from the low doorway, calmly; the house seemed to be resting after a burdensome day. She breathed, too, very slowly and quietly, each inspiration saturating her with repose. The child's light, faint breath was a mere shadowy moth of sound in the silver air. The night, the earth under her, seemed to swell and re-

cede together with a limitless, unhurried, benign breathing. She drooped and closed her eyes, feeling the slow rise and fall within her own body. She did not know what it was, but it eased her all through. Even as she was falling asleep, head bowed over the child, she was still aware of a strange, wakeful happiness.

THE APOSTATE

by

Lillian Barnard Gilkes

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THE APOSTATE

THE autobus was to start from the Piazza Venezia at two o'clock sharp. Thomas took out his watch.

"Seven minutes yet!"

The plain, practical face of Sarah sitting beside him in the bus bloomed out in a proud smile. "Danny got us here in plenty of time—he said we ought not to hurry——"

"Uh-huh."

But Thomas wished they hadn't been ahead of time. He reached for his handkerchief and mopped his bald forehead which still had a few briary gray hairs roosting there, and then he wiped round his collar which had wilted during luncheon. After that he flung on his hat—a gesture to let the world know it was time to be moving on. But the driver was nowhere in sight.

Two young ladies in the party wanted to know what the building was across the street, with all those naked figures leaning over the fountain and a thing like a summer-house perched at the top of the steps.

Danny could tell them, Sarah thought—if they really wanted to know. Danny knew everything about Rome. He was studious like that from a little chap—and every bit as good as an encyclopædia. My, but a delicate boy! She could smile now to think how scared she'd been about him, but she thought she would never raise him. Feeling so thankful he had been spared to them—she couldn't help it, whenever she thought of that time—she leaned toward the young ladies and said pleasantly, "It's dreadfully warm, isn't it!"

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"Something fierce!"

Thomas said "Whew!" and hit his knee with the brim of his straw hat.

"Are you staying long in Rome?"

The young ladies said they wanted to get out of that heat. And they didn't care for the Italian cooking.

Everything has its disadvantages, of course—even when dreams surprisingly turn into facts. Sarah and Thomas had saved to take this trip, to come over and see Danny. In anticipation they had dwelled on it as some astounding climax of their lives, a rich holiday conferred by the same goodness of fortune that gave them their splendid son. Now they actually were having the time of their lives. But travelling is not so easy —not what it seems when you are sitting on your own verandah. Sarah had never known how tired she could get, which proved she was getting old. Especially her feet—how they did ache, the whole time! And she had expected Rome, somehow, would be much bigger and grander than it was. But it was all so different from New England—the scenery, the lovely gardens—wasn't it just like a dream to be here with Danny? Thinking of this, she felt distressed to hear people complain about the food.

"We have been here three days and we've seen pretty nearly everything. It's wonderful how much you can do, when you've got some one to take you around! Our son knows all the places—he's at one of the seminaries. We came over to see him, but tomorrow we've got to take the train——"

She broke off. She would not think about taking the train tomorrow. She would have the courage to be happy for Danny's sake, every minute of the time now. Surely, yes—for they would have this wonderful time to look back on, she and Thomas——

A man shoved a tray of souvenirs in through the win-

dow of the bus, and stepping on the running-board he put his head inside after the tray.

"Post-card, souvenir—ten lire, signora. Real coral!" He held up a chain, and fondling the beads, let them drip through the fingers of his other hand. "Very cheap!"

Sarah hesitated. She had never seen so much to buy as there was in Rome—everything from beads to the bones of martyrs and the peace of heaven after you were dead. Sacrilegious, that was—but you couldn't tell about these foreigners. And she did love beads! At home, she wouldn't have dared spend money like this. She looked from the beads to the man, and saw Danny coming back with the tickets.

He waved the tickets in front of him and said very firmly, "Don't take any more of those things—you've got enough, I think——"

"No, thank you—" she told the man. "No, I don't want anything——"

Danny waved the man away, and climbed into the bus.

"Here—" said Thomas, moving over. "Sit between us, boy——"

"You have to be sharp with those fellows—they'll do you if they can!" Danny was smiling, but he sounded terribly serious. "The Italians have got a mean streak in them that way—hard after the dollar, you know. Well, we'll be off in a minute now——"

Sure enough, the driver strolled out of a tobacco shop and cranked up the bus. The conductor on the driver's seat turned round to count the heads. The bus rolled out of the Piazza.

"For Pete's sake!" One of the young ladies pointed out of the window. "Look at all those cats!"

Sarah looked. And Thomas stared as if he saw, that instant, the ghost of a Roman emperor, clad in the toga and waving the imperial sceptre, spring out of the stones

and order him to be flung to the lions. In a long rectangular space, fifteen or twenty feet below the street level—why, there must have been a hundred cats! Pink oleanders bloomed against the walls of the enclosure, and whole families of cats dozed in the shade of them. Some, going apart from the crowd, stalked with tremendous feline indifference across the sun-beaten area; others reclined in narrow strips of shade made by fallen capitals.

"Well, I never!" Sarah gasped.

As the bus curved past the place, she caught sight of a battle in progress over in one corner. A black midget advanced and bowed its back at an orange tiger, and lifting one paw, planted a swat on the jaw of its yellow enemy.

"How do they get out of there?" Thomas wanted to know. "Too high to jump, I should think——"

Danny was feeling self-conscious, very much annoyed because the young women were listening. "We've just left Trajan's Forum behind—" He leaned forward, raising his voice, and his manner instantly became a reproof to the two girls for their common behavior.

"The Romans, you know, put those forums—fora, rather—all over the city. The emperors did it to impress the people, and each emperor tried to do something more elaborate than the last man. The column in the centre used to have at the top a statue of the Emperor Trajan, but about twenty-five years ago, when they started to excavate Trajan's Forum, the Pope had a statue of Saint Paul put there. The cats occupy the forum now. They are protected there, people feed them—and they never go out. It's quite an accepted fact, the cats in Trajan's Forum—one of the landmarks of Rome. You find that kind of thing quite often in this country. Simple-hearted people, the Italians, you know—just like children!"

"Oh, yes—" said Thomas. "Oh, sure!"

Sarah nodded her head. But neither of them quite took it in. They listened attentively to all Danny told them about the customs of Italy, and while they hung on every word their minds were on something else. What did they know of the contents of books? They were old folks. But their son was a great student. Look where his application and learning had gotten him—and he'd go right on up to the top!

But if only he were somewhere nearer home—not with an ocean between. It took so long for letters to get to America. Sarah would feel better about it all if he were just where she could look after him, to see that he got enough good food and plenty of sleep. He neglected himself so. Why, when he got with a book he'd sit up till all hours—and many a time it was broad daylight when she found him, still reading. She thought he looked peaked, dreadfully thin, and so—so sort of hollow-eyed. He was so nervous—he seemed excited all of the time. It wasn't natural. While he was talking his eyes shone, a flush came on his face—and he had a feverish unnatural look, as though something were burning him up inside. When he thought he wasn't watched he would go quite limp, staring in front of him at nothing. She had seen that look—that queer strained look on his face—as they leaned out of the train window in the station and saw him coming along the platform. It had gone right to her heart. She turned round to find Thomas and gave a cry of fear. "Oh, he's sick! Thomas, look—oh, what's the matter with him?" "Looks a bit seedy—" Thomas agreed with her. But as soon as she had kissed him, when she felt his arms come around her in a loving embrace she forgot everything else in the one fact—the thrilling, comforting fact that she had him back again and he was her own boy. Then she stole a long look at him and tried to make her question sound matter-of-fact. "Are you all right, Danny? Do you feel well?" And right away

he was on edge, impatient of her worrying about him. "Why, of course, mother—you aren't going to be silly about my health!"

But his white face, his eyes like burnt shadows—they hurt her to see. She couldn't put that stretched look out of her mind.

The bus crept out of a winding black street where the houses almost met overhead, and the Colosseum stood up grandly before them. Danny told them about the great theatre that held eighty thousand people, pointing out the emperor's box, explaining how on the days of the great shows a canvas awning was stretched overhead to protect the spectators from the sun.

Thomas said, "Some size!"

"Right! When you think of such things——"

Danny paused, emotion stopping his thought. The pagan monuments exercised a fascination his vulnerable mind could not resist, though he knew them to have been reared in abomination. For the symbolism of the Christian victory was here—spirit over flesh, the Empire of Christ, the Holy Church triumphant in the seat of the heathen gods. His mind was tuned in symbols.

What was it? Seeing his abstraction, the question began to beat again in Sarah's mind. What was the matter with him? Why, when he spoke like that—in that tranced voice—did he seem so changed? Not her son any more, but some grave stranger whom she was in awe of.

"It's very chastening—" he went on. "There's a great lesson for us in modern times—not to let our corrupt pride carry us too far. The vanity of the Roman builders—ah, but think of the American skyscrapers!"

Beside the Arch of Constantine the bus stopped for two priests to get on. One was a young man, with a lean strong body and faded blue eyes that made his sallow face look tarnished. He was wearing a black gown and

a little hard flat hat, and his finger-nails were bitten off and dirty. The other, in plain black clothes, had a rosary hung round his neck. He bowed to the people in the bus. His appearance was quite ordinary, but as he seated himself every one turned to look at him—feeling, no doubt, that it would be a bad thing to come into conflict with a man whose eye emitted such a cool and cunning beam. His self-possession, that was almost insolence, would make people afraid of his will. He spoke in English to his companion; and as he talked, there came on his face a look of sarcastic but not unfriendly amusement.

Staring past the priests, Thomas sighed and forgot he was in Rome. A long aisle of backward-turning years unrolled before him—that aisle of time down which he and Sarah had walked hand in hand, starting from their courtship and taking them past the few scattered mile-stones that humped above the uneventful level of their mingled lives. The first mile-stone, quite near the starting-place, was a grave—the dim mound which held the sad little ghost that had flown away from them so soon after it put on mortal flesh. The next mile-stone was Danny's birth. Thomas stared out of the window at the smooth brown foreground of the Roman Campagna, from which a haze of dust rose up to the sky making the road and the distance one, and an old vexation troubled him again. Too bad the boy had mixed himself up with the Roman Catholics! None of that in his family, or Sarah's. Plain Protestant folks on both sides, right back to Plymouth Rock. Unaccountable where the boy got it from! But he was always deep. There was something dead earnest about him, some quality that seemed to lift him up and put him out of reach. He said it was his faith. Well——

Another mile-stone loomed on the smooth horizon of his past, and Thomas heard Sarah's voice calling him to come into the front parlor. Like the majority of village front parlors this was an ungracious room, frigid and

tidy, as becomes the apartment dedicated to unused and useless possessions. But somehow, the parlor had seemed the right place to discuss this thing. He walked in and found Sarah standing in the middle of the room. "Look here!" She spoke queerly. And then she showed him a crucifix and a rosary she had found in Danny's things when she was looking for his socks to mend. They looked at each other, voiceless. And Sarah said after a bit, "Well, what do you make of this?" But he could only gape at her, "What do you?" Then he burst out, "Good Lord! How long do you suppose—he's had those things in the house?" She answered, as full of incredulity, "I'm sure I don't know!" Again their looks met over the question neither spoke: what's come over him? If Danny had turned himself into a Chocktaw Indian, or a sun-worshipping heathen, it could not have been a harder thing to understand. When Thomas found his voice, light broke over the dark upheaval of his mind. "Sarah, this means—it means he's got another religion—he doesn't believe as we do!" The realization burnt like flame. "He's got hold of some nonsense—!" he shouted in his dismay. "Sh-sh!" Sarah shook him by the arm; her touch steadied him a little. "Let him alone, Thomas. You know you can't force him—you won't do any good—" Ah, he felt very baffled and miserable then. Not in the boy's confidence at all. But Sarah was right—you couldn't force him. He wouldn't give in.

There was a bump. Hey! Thomas was flung hard against the invisible angularities of the young woman next to him. The bus had stopped.

A gabbling confusion quickly arose, all on account of a goat in the road. The goat which was being driven by a peasant woman stood boldly in the way, its legs spread apart, immovable and baffling, while a bitter altercation in impassioned Italian raged between the driver and the peasant woman concerning the right to advance. When

at length the mischievous animal was induced to budge a trifle to one side, so the bus could pass, it appeared that defendant and plaintiff both were equally vindicated. Thomas grinned.

By Jake, that animal got the best of it—you couldn't turn a goat from his fixed intention! Why, that goat made him feel at home in Italy. Now who would have expected that? Here he was, and Sarah, in this foreign land—and Danny showing them the sights like the king's agent. No, it would be the Pope's. Well, he guessed it was all right. Danny was a good boy, and no notions about incense and the rest of it could unsettle that. Never had given them any trouble or anxiety about—about a young man's difficulties—oh, nothing like that! Thomas, smiling at such a thought, felt a glow like a warm perspiration coming out all over him. That boy would make good—and his dad would stand by him, sure!

"Say, what's that over there?" He asked the question without interest in knowing, but because—well, he was proud of the boy. Liked to hear him talk.

Danny said there were ruins like those everywhere in the teeming vicinity of Rome. You couldn't step but you came upon a bit of wall, or a piece of the aqueduct.

"The things tourists come to see—putting post-card atmosphere before the eternal spirit—the spirit of the Christian martyrs! Yes, people go abroad to look at architecture—but how little interest they take in the first monuments of our faith, which are as ancient—as ancient as the monuments of the Roman Forum!"

"Ah! But remember—" The dark-eyed priest had been listening. "The stone of our monuments came off the pagan temples—a most regrettable fact——"

"Oh, if you look at it that way—!" Danny was suddenly very angry. What right had this fellow to challenge him? He turned on the priest, hating him and feeling that the spirit of the martyrs had somehow been

impugned. "I should call that being disloyal to the Church!"

"Some of us think differently——"

"There can be no difference of opinion touching the Church's infallibility!"

Thomas looked at Sarah, and she looked at him. He said "Gosh!" under his breath. And she felt as if she were waiting for a fire-cracker to go off. She didn't know what they were arguing about, but for strangers to quarrel—churchmen too! Danny used not to be like that—so touchy and ready to fly off the handle. It was—it must be because he wasn't well.

"If you are discussing doctrine—" The priest spoke in a quiet, slow voice. "That's a different matter—quite. Church doctrine must be held infallible—only so can discipline be maintained within the ecclesiastical organization. But I'm not here as a churchman now—I'm on a holiday—you see, I'm not speaking from the ecclesiastical point of view. And—" he added with a queer smile—"as a spectator—a tourist—I probably have some feelings in common with the layman."

"Well—" said Danny, shocked quite beyond discretion—"If you mean that you hold private convictions contrary to the Church's teaching, that's very serious—that makes you a hypocrite!"

"Oh, not necessarily!" The priest laughed.

"But you believe in compromise——"

"Naturally. And don't you? Is not the Church's history a record of judicious and enlightened compromise? Indeed, how are you going to bring the masses of erring mankind to the faith and keep them there if you do not compromise with human weakness?"

Still smiling, he turned to Thomas and said very cordially, "If it's of interest to you—the ruin you were asking about is what's left of a house where Saint Gregory—that was Gregory the Great—lived as a monk. As a

pope, too, he taught there. They've got a table there now of the second century—just think of that!—from which Saint Gregory gave food to the poor."

"You don't say!" Thomas was astounded. But—if the table had hung on that long, the saint hadn't. He wondered if they had got any of his whiskers and fingernails around anywhere.

"It would be worth your while to make another trip out here and go into that house——"

"Oh, I'm sure!" Sarah was extremely relieved to find something she could agree with. If the argument were begun again it would become a quarrel and this time, surely, something terrible would happen. Obscurely, she felt that Danny was in the wrong and she wanted to protect him, to rescue his dignity for him, if he would not himself. Apologizing, she added, "But I'm afraid there isn't time——"

"Oh! Well, there never is—nobody ever has time enough in Rome."

Really he means well, she thought. But remembering that they were leaving tomorrow, suddenly home seemed terribly far away. Would they ever reach home again? She tried to picture home and, strangely, she could form no image of her accustomed life. It seemed incalculably remote—more distant, even, than that foreign destination they could not imagine, when she and Thomas boarded the giant ship that was to take them to the other side of the world. Nonsense! Home was right there where it had always been—it wouldn't have walked away in their absence! But she felt afraid—of what, she did not know. And now she did not want to visit the Catacombs or do any more of the fatiguing things people do in Rome. They had not come all that journey across the ocean to look at Roman relics or at churches the Christians had built. They had come to see their son. The

time was going—all but a few hours gone—and they had seen hardly anything of him. There was so much to do, and he wouldn't have them miss anything. But—why, they had not had a real good talk together yet! And tomorrow—tomorrow they must say good-by to Danny. Why, why was it so? Her health was good, but you never know—she might die without ever seeing her son again. And now that dry landscape out there—the Appian Way—though the sun was shining full on it, seemed to go under a shadow which made it monstrous and alien and ugly; and hot as the temperature was, she shivered looking at it.

Danny was staring angrily out of the window. The priest, with a peculiar crafty smile on his face, continued talking to Sarah.

"I walked out here the other day in the early morning—" he said with a wave of his hand toward the road. "The sun was just coming up and we walked along in the glow of the sky. Bare-footed, you know—I thought of the martyrs! We had an archbishop along with us—" He said that as you might have said, "We had Johnny along with us." . . . "You know, it's very pleasant at that hour. Several of us were going out to say a mass in the Catacombs and we all walked along singing hymns—bare-footed—" He laughed. "Just like the martyrs!"

The bus stopped in front of a plain little church with a dusty white plaster façade. Danny said they were to get out and go inside. Sarah was glad he gave her his arm to lean on, for she had not even yet got over the nervous feeling she had about going into Catholic churches. Not that she expected anything dreadful to happen—of course not! But she felt as though God were watching her.

Inside the church it smelled of wax and garlic. The white walls looked strange, though they were ordinary; but the candles burning in bright clusters warmed them

and hid their squalor. The uneasiness that troubled Sarah increased as she glanced about. The sight of a woman with a pinched sorrowful face, dressed in black and kneeling before one of the shrines, affected her with a kind of shock. She was used to making her supplications to God in the decent privacy of a church pew, and she thought she never could get used to the foreigner's ways of worshipping and love-making in public, not even if she lived over here. When she saw Danny go down on his knees and make the sign of the cross she began to tremble queerly. A nameless emotion burst from her heart and she wanted to cry out, "My son! O my son!"

Thomas came and stood close to her, and she put her hand in his. The bus conductor came in, followed by the rest of the party, and when he had got them all around him he began to speak an oration about the church. The priest who had talked to her in the bus was standing in the group, and she saw him turn away with a shrug, as much as to say, "That's all nonsense!"

"Come this way!" Danny called to them. He took hold of Sarah's arm and Thomas's other one, and walking between them guided them to a spot where there was a little iron cross standing up in the stone floor. "Look!" he said, pointing to the floor. They both looked, and saw the perfect imprint of a human foot graven in the stone.

"You know the story?" Danny asked, looking from one to the other. "This is where Our Lord met Peter as He was going out from Rome, and that is the spot where He stood. There you see His footprints—there are two of them, one a little fainter—left behind in the stone. Of course you can believe it or not—as you like. But there is the proof! Can you stand on a piece of granite in your bare feet and make an impression like that? Of course not! I say there's no question about it—it's a fact that can't be denied. Peter said to Our Lord,

'Quo vadis? Quo vadis—where are you going?' And Our Lord replied, 'I'm going forth to suffer again because thou art going away from Rome——'"

Sarah bent forward to see. Thomas exclaimed, "Humph! Well!" Hand in hand they stood together in wonder, gazing down at the divine mark.

"Quo vadis—where are you going?" Danny repeated it like a chant, like an invocation. It seemed to Sarah his voice sang with a passionate tenderness that smote her strangely; and Thomas stood ill at ease, fingering his hat.

"There it is, you see—you'd better kiss it before you go——"

"Yes—oh, yes!" she cried, too much moved to say more. Thomas murmured, "Oh, sure!"

Danny knelt down and touched his lips to the stone. Dismayed, she clung tighter to Thomas's hand—and while her son stood by, whipping her on with his unbending will, impeded by her stoutness she stooped and did as he commanded her. Thomas came down stiffly on one knee beside her.

Out-of-doors the sun was bright, too bright—it made black spots come before Sarah's eyes. Thomas blinked and rubbed his. The priest who had argued before got into the bus beside him, and remarked, "Of course, that's not an article of dogma—it's a tradition. But it could have been. He could have done it— He might even have done it deliberately. Over here I have seen many things I never expected to see. A piece of the true cross, a fragment of the cross of the good thief—three of the nails from the cross of Our Lord, and two thorns——"

It was all very marvellous. Thomas agreed with the priest. But you couldn't be sure it was true unless you had faith. His own faith didn't cover quite as much as that—not by a good deal! But what was that fellow

always putting in his oar for? He didn't exactly trust 'em, those priests.

A monk in a brown robe, sandals on his bare feet, led them through the Catacombs. He was an old man and he had a wan sad face, and a long gray beard which gave him an early Christian appearance. Now and then when he was speaking, his voice would die away and he seemed to forget what he was saying, but his dreaming eyes looked to be full of memories. He addressed everything he said to Danny. Sarah and Thomas didn't mind that—didn't mind not understanding. Danny translated everything promptly, and it made them feel pleased and proud to hear him reply to the monk in Italian.

It was chilly in the passages, and black dark. The brother handed them each a wax taper to light their way. When they came to the place where the infants had been entombed in the rock wall, Sarah was suddenly overcome with misery and panic at the thought of how little they were to suffer in that grim place. And she asked herself, how could people do the cruel, wicked things the Romans had done? Once they heard voices ahead of them and saw the tapers of another party moving up through the gloom, a poor little glow bobbing about precariously in the choking dark. Presently the corridor broadened out into a chamber where, in a recess behind a grill, several candles were burning on an altar that held some bits of vestments under glass. The candles shed their yellow light upon a woman's figure, on a bier in front of the altar. The face frozen in youthful innocence seemed moulded of moonlight, an expression rapt of the moon lying like frost upon the marbled features, the high arched nose thinned and sculptured by death.

"Oh!" Sarah drew back, uttering a soft scream.

"It's all right—nothing to be afraid of," said Danny, genuflecting and crossing himself. "That's only a plaster cast."

Thomas coughed in relieved embarrassment.

Fearfully they went up to the bier and looked into the face. It seemed impossible even yet that the likeness of martyred flesh was plaster, the cold moon-color of the features but the reflection of candle-light in a hollow cave. This was the tomb of Saint Cecelia.

Holding his taper high to throw the light farther, Danny told them the story of Saint Cecelia—how she was the daughter of a Roman noble family and was betrothed by her heathen parents to a Roman youth named Valerian, and how, filled with her influence, her parents became Christians and Valerian suffered martyrdom. Danny's eyes were lit with a strange dark fire, and as he related the frightful defamations to which the beautiful body of Saint Cecelia was subjected his voice rang with a fervor that seemed to lift him to some tremendous climax of transcendent feeling. One could believe that his own veins took fire with the agony and the rapture of the Roman girl's martyrdom.

"She was just a slip of a girl! Frail, and lovely, and afraid—afraid of the soldiers—" With a swift movement he raised his hands; the knuckles showed white. "They must have torn her white flesh—they probably violated her—" His body tense, he seemed about to throw himself forward upon some invisible form. His face was very pale. Then he took a step backward and dropped his hands. "Just a slip of a girl——"

"For a long time—a great many ages—" he went on with the story, "her body was lost. It disappeared and couldn't be found. But finally it was recovered, and then—" He lowered his voice significantly. "It was found to be absolutely uncorrupted—absolutely uncorrupted!" The word "uncorrupted" had a pulpy sound as he uttered it, as if it came from under his tongue. And he repeated it with a kind of joy, as though it signified for him a supreme and secret ecstasy.

His voice pealing forth in the weird dusk woke an old echo in Sarah's heart. Strange, how familiar! And then she remembered those tones—Thomas, in the days of their courtship, had used them speaking to her of love. Momentarily her youth returned upon her, and a warm flush streamed down her throat under the neck of her dress. Love had seemed such a horrifying thing. But there are things in life that don't seem real or right until you have accepted them, and then you wonder how they could have been anything but natural.

A wild excitement shone in Danny's eyes, and his face—so pale—made her again afraid for him. He lived too much on his nerves—ah, that was it!—and too much alone. Some way it injures folks to have too much of one thing, be it religion, getting rich, or love. As a boy he was restless, in the house and out—he couldn't settle to anything. And Thomas was strict with him—wouldn't have him dawdling about when there was work to do. Once she had found him out in the barn, sitting humped over on the stool beside the cow he had been milking—the cow switching her tail, disgruntled, and rumbling to herself; the milk pail standing only a quarter full. He'd been crying. . . . "What is it? What trouble have you got, my son?" She did not often show feeling. But the sight of his distress afflicted her keenly. She folded her arms around him, half lifting him from the stool; and for an instant he laid his face against her bosom. In silence they stayed so, his head pressed in to her shoulder; and it seemed her very self that she held there clasped in a tight embrace, her separate flesh united mysteriously with his, melted in compassionate love. The mare began munching straw in the next stall, and as though that external sound put an end to their communion, a single sob burst from him—an uncouth, terrifying sound. "Oh, mother—I want something—I don't know what!" And she never knew, either, what that desire was. But she

remembered she, too, once had felt a yearning after something, nameless and unattainable. The feeling was gone before she could identify it, displaced by other feelings; for then she met Thomas and married him.

She drew her breath in a deep, slow sigh. That instant she felt a touch of heart-burn. It must be the heat—and all this going—she wasn't used to it. She reached in her hand-bag for her little bottle of soda-mints, and poured a heap of the tablets into her palm. Swallowing one, she put the others back and corked up the bottle again.

Danny motioned to the brother, and led the way out of the dusk-filled chamber again into swallowing darkness. "Better go along now! You can spend all sorts of time in these places, but you've got to pack——"

They groped through black corridors, airless and dank, and inhospitable as a grave. Sarah was afraid of falling. Danny held her arm, but she stumbled several times before they got outside. They had a moment to wait for the bus. An ancient vehicle it was, and subject to spasms of exploding noise. They bumped forward, nearly thrown off the seats, a cloud of dust kicked up behind which whitened the grass along the edges of the road. Then the bus took a run of speed, like a young horse going to take a hurdle. But the leap didn't come, and presently they drew up outside a trattoria. The driver got down to get himself a drink.

Danny asked if they wouldn't like something. "Water—or lemonade?"

"Anything'll suit me, so it's wet—" Thomas declared. "I never was so plumb dry in my life."

"Lemonade's good to quench thirst," Sarah said. "That's what I'll have."

"Make it three, then. Hey! Wait a minute—" Thomas grabbed in his pocket for some coins.

"Oh, that's all right—" Danny started off. But Thomas wouldn't allow it.

"You're crazy, boy—keep your money!"

In a minute Danny came back and announced, "He wants a lira each—I think it's too much——"

But Thomas laughed. Out of a great guffaw he said, "Sure, go ahead—I guess a nickel won't break me up!" Still chuckling, when Danny had gone he turned to Sarah. "What do you think of that!"

She shook her head, smiling. But she knew. She knew it was because he didn't have the money to spend. Regretfully, she tried to remember whether they had let him pay any of the admissions to the places he had taken them. She hoped not, but she couldn't be sure. He was so quick at attending to things. She guessed Thomas could spare a bit of money to leave with him—five dollars or so would at least buy him some warm gloves for the winter. He used to suffer because his hands got so cold. And people said it was a disagreeable climate in Rome in the wintertime—the dampness was the thing.

"He's learned a thing or two. He's learned how to hold on to his money, all right! He'll get along——!"

They exchanged glances, their faces softly aglow with admiration of his shining qualities. Their splendid son! Then Thomas's countenance turned sober.

"Say—do you suppose they give 'em enough to eat in that place?"

"What place?"

"I'm talking about that seminary!" He didn't know why he was suddenly angry. But he thought she knew—well enough—what place he meant. "You know, these Catholics are great on fasting—I thought, maybe——"

She had the same thought. Maybe, in the interests of piety, his body was not being cared for.

Danny came out of the trattoria carrying the lemonades, straws sticking up in the glasses. But there were only two.

"Where's yours?" Thomas asked quickly.

"Thanks, I'm not going to take any—I had some water inside. Here's your change——"

"I don't want it."

"It's your change, Father——"

"I said I don't want it—" He was shouting now. "Don't give me any more of that tin money!"

In his impatience he struck Danny's hand that held the money, knocking a two-lira piece to the ground. It jingled on the pavement. "Lot of foolishness!" he muttered under his breath. Danny stooped and picked up the two-lira piece, and dropped it carefully into his pocket.

The Roman dusk was coming down—the rich, fanciful, gold-brown dusk that spreads over the darkening olive trees a mauve obscurity and blackens the pines, stooping gaunt on the yellow rim of eternity. Swallows were going to and fro overhead, dashing against the eaves and dropping their faint twitterings.

Danny leaned back, sucking air into his lungs. There was a pain in his chest. He drew his lips into a rigid, tight line to stop the pain. Words came into his mind—"the Power and the Glory"—and he felt them in his blood like a canticle. He looked away at the Sabine Hills, loping along with the motion of the bus like a procession of gray rabbits on the horizon, hopping one behind another endlessly; and he grew aware of an exultation in his soul, concocted of some subtle chemistry of atmosphere. Something acrid and sharp, yet sweetly disturbing. He often felt that at this hour, in Rome. He felt as if his naked body were enveloped in a burning, transfiguring light. To be near that light, seared and uplifted by it forever, was the utmost desire of his soul.

He remembered his childhood, that wintry time of toil spent in a harsh endeavor to make the earth give up its fruits. And he recoiled from the memory as he had done from the haunted emptiness of the life he had

had to lead. He saw himself a small boy in patched overalls, going unwillingly between the new furrows to drop in the seed. How bitterly then he had felt the binding village horizon shut down upon his straining spirit like some immense lid screwed down from the sky! Beyond that horizon he had thought there must be a place where it was possible to gain the things his mind visioned as so richly desirable—splendor and power and ceremony, and the purity of God. The books he read, though not many, were as wings that admitted him to the huge inviting realm encircling the mean restricted world he moved in. He read them lying up aloft in the hay, in moments filched from the chores—books about the missionaries of God who converted idolaters and kings. When no one was by he used to take them from the shelf in the kitchen that was between the brass clock and the heavy Bible which stood uptilted, clasped in a metal holder, feeling queerly ashamed to publish his preoccupation with the mysteries of the soul. His parents, in their simple devout minds, at first had seemed pleased with his interest in unworldly subjects; but soon they perceived in such things an encouragement to idleness, and commanded him to leave books alone except on Sundays. He felt the privacy of his soul ruthlessly invaded when his father ascended to the hay-loft and discovered him reading on a week-day. From negligence he had let the pigs get into the beans and banquet, to their agony and his humiliation, upon four superb rows of Kentucky Wonders. It was the one time in his life his father had laid a hand on him, but the memory of it still was obsessionally horrifying. He had but to turn and walk away and his father, a physically small man though wiry, would not have been able to use force on him. But some other subtler, inexplicable force rendered him powerless to defy his father; and so he stood up and let himself be whipped.

Mysterious power that the physical personality wields over minds in conflict! But he had broken out of that bondage. The day that Father Connolly came into his life he had ceased to feel himself in subjection to any authority outside himself, save only Divine Authority. A lad of seventeen he was then, and the priest came walking around a bend in the road. He marched up to Danny—on his way into town with the calf to be sold—and inquired how far it was to a place called Quimby. He had never heard of Quimby nor any such place, but he offered the priest a lift into town—and it was just like taking a ride with his destiny beside him! A magisterial, inspired man was Father Connolly, possessed of an eloquence that could conquer anything. A stranger apparition than a figure of a Roman priest was hardly to be found upon a New England highway. But out of oddities and strangeness have sprung many of God's most cunning miracles—what is incredible to heretics and blind men is to the man of faith the most immaculate, the only true reality. When the priest went away he left with him a crucifix and a breviary.

He saw ahead now the city coming into view, its domes phantasmagorial in the dusk. Watching the houses grow upon the skyline, he felt that the memory of his childhood stirred in him nothing but a sense of bitter alienation. He turned and looked at the old man sitting beside him, dressed in out-moded clothes of some thick material and having about him a scrubby, formal, old-fashioned gentility; and he felt strange to his own flesh and blood in his parents. What was it, he asked himself, that divided flesh from flesh? What made the difference? What had opened this immeasurable gulf between their lives and his, between their passions and his passions? He did not know. He only knew he would be glad to be alone again when his parents had gone from Rome—quite alone. It was distracting, the obligation to look after the old people

and find them entertainment. Their mute boundless affection, which he felt unable to reciprocate, was burdensome.

"Look here——!"

His father's voice dropped into his thought like a stone falling into a still pool; and with the sound in his ears his broken thought went rippling and curveting away to the covert quarters of his mind. He answered, "What?"

Thomas had been nerving himself to put a question; but now that he had it on the end of his tongue he didn't know what to do with it. He wished he might fling it away somewhere, where it wouldn't be found. All the same, he wanted to know for sure. Sarah and he had tackled it in secret. He cleared his throat and went for it now, adopting a voice that proclaimed him the head of the family.

"Er-ah—you've been three years over here. I suppose you'll be getting through soon and coming home?"

Danny turned, instantly resenting it that his father should use such a tone with him. As though he were a lad in college! Then it flashed through his mind that the old man probably meant this as a slight to his religion. They never would learn not to bring up that subject. He was sorry if it was painful to them, but he didn't see how he could help it. He was not going to discuss his faith with them. He thought what his faith was to him, and he wondered at other people's weak beliefs.

In that moment, he felt his isolation acutely. He could not live in his own country, and he was out of sympathy with his time. An exile, lost out of time, stranded among a race of aliens who were hostile to him—his soul was swept by nostalgic passions that resisted human ties. He felt as though a wintry blast, cold and lonely, had rushed at the windows of his spirit. He knew himself cut off. Then it struck him that such had always been

the lot of the Church's people, to be reviled and misunderstood. And all at once his feeling changed; he felt uplifted again, exhilarated by pride and resistance and a passionate self-assurance. His soul was as a mediæval garrison having contempt for the besieging enemy, exulting confidently in the power behind four walls to endure forever. He felt that he understood his destiny, that his personal relation to destiny was a secret matter between him and his Creator, and he was even glad that others understood it not—scornfully glad to be alone as he was, because it gave him a superior strength. His feeling cleaved to the teaching of religion that this strength comes from God, and it made him incapable of perceiving that God's strength is in the hearts of men. As he turned and faced his parents now, thinking of their wish to draw him and bind him to them, his heart was choked with ice.

"When are you coming home?"

"I'm not coming home," he replied coldly. "My work is over here. I have no other home but in that——"

"Eh?"

Thomas heard the words. But his mind cast them back in his ears where they simply rattled without sense. The blood rushed to his head and he was conscious only of an overwhelming fury that hummed about his ears, an enveloping rage against what he did not know.

"So, that's it! Oh—well——"

But he could not get command of his voice to speak because his thought was incoherent, pitching about in the darkness of his mind like a ship stricken in a tempest. He did not know what he thought. But more than anything else in life—the bit of life that remained to him—he wanted his son at home again. He was suddenly bitterly conscious of his age. That was true—he was an old man now, and he needed his son. Soon he would have to give up altogether. And when his time came, it would be hard to go out with his son not by. His only son was

stripped from him and given to God. What for, he thought, what for? His mind was full of blasphemy. For the first time in his life he doubted there was a God in heaven. He could not reconcile the two things—a Heavenly Father and the loss of his son. But he was a religious man instinctively, an old man besides, and used to believing. Whatever was done to him he could no more cease to have faith in the Might of God, whose benevolence it was not permitted men to question, than he could call back his youth and begin his life over. He sighed heavily; his head dropped forward. But his son thought he was only moving his position on the seat against the jolting of the bus.

Sarah started, hearing those blasting words spoken in her son's voice, "not coming home." How could he say such a thing to his father and mother, that he had no home! Had he no love, then, for the home of his people? Oh, why was it given to a woman to bear children and they to leave their parents comfortless in their old age? A sharp sound between a gasp and a moan came from her throat, and leaning forward, not to miss any word of what was so incredible and painful, her groping hand came against Thomas's knee. His hand closed over hers.

And Thomas remembered Job. He remembered it was the fate of old men, one way or another, to lose their sons. He pressed Sarah's hand, and in that moment something struck him, the first scourge of that pain they would endure the rest of their lives together in the loss of their living son.

"Why should I go back to America?" Danny, his voice tense with frigid passion, was speaking to them both. "What is America to me? The life there has become so utterly material—people cutting one another's throats for gain—I feel choked at the thought of it! I

can understand the bitterness in the Master's heart when he wept over Jerusalem. I—" He struck himself on the breast. "I—have felt that!"

Thomas raised his eyes and looked timidly into his son's face. His head felt heavy, and there was a queer trembling in his neck.

"All I want to know is—if you're happy over here—that's all I want to know——"

Danny's face which had been radiant clouded momentarily. He was gazing in front of him with a fixed, wild stare. Then a light blazed up in his eyes which became a look of reckless passion.

"Happy—yes, I'm happy——!"

The old people, still with hands clasped, looked again at their son. Their eyes strove to penetrate behind the impassive pale features to the inexplicable purpose nestled within his brain. But only the physical countenance they had created out of their bodies met their gaze—an aloof set of features that no longer confided the intimate processes of their son's life.

They turned away their eyes to the dusty, disordered plain spreading back from the road, with the dim gray ghosts of the Sabine Hills trailing behind in the distance. They heard the swallows speaking together from the house-tops.

THE ALTAR OF THE DEAD

by

Henry James

HENRY JAMES (*1843–1916*), *though his distinguished place in American letters has never been questioned was somewhat less highly regarded for some years after his death than he is now* (*1936*). *His reputation has revived surprisingly as a result of the interest displayed in his ideas and his technique by young writers whose sympathies are quite as likely to be radical as conservative. See for example Stephen Spender's* The Destructive Element (*1935*) *and the Henry James number of* Hound and Horn (*April–June 1934*).

THE ALTAR OF THE DEAD

I

HE had a mortal dislike, poor Stransom, to lean anniversaries, and loved them still less when they made a pretence of a figure. Celebrations and suppressions were equally painful to him, and but one of the former found a place in his life. He had kept each year in his own fashion the date of Mary Antrim's death. It would be more to the point perhaps to say that this occasion kept *him:* it kept him at least effectually from doing anything else. It took hold of him again and again with a hand of which time had softened but never loosened the touch. He waked to his feast of memory as consciously as he would have waked to his marriage-morn. Marriage had had of old but too little to say to the matter: for the girl who was to have been his bride there had been no bridal embrace. She had died of a malignant fever after the wedding-day had been fixed, and he had lost before fairly tasting it an affection that promised to fill his life to the brim.

Of that benediction, however, it would have been false to say this life could really be emptied: it was still ruled by a pale ghost, still ordered by a sovereign presence. He had not been a man of numerous passions, and even in all these years no sense had grown stronger with him than the sense of being bereft. He had needed no priest and no altar to make him for ever widowed. He had done many things in the world—he had done almost all but one: he had never, never forgotten. He had tried to put into his existence whatever else might take up room in it, but had

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failed to make it more than a house of which the mistress was eternally absent. She was most absent of all on the recurrent December day that his tenacity set apart. He had no arranged observance of it, but his nerves made it all their own. They drove him forth without mercy, and the goal of his pilgrimage was far. She had been buried in a London suburb, a part then of Nature's breast, but which he had seen lose one after another every feature of freshness. It was in truth during the moments he stood there that his eyes beheld the place least. They looked at another image, they opened to another light. Was it a credible future? Was it an incredible past? Whatever the answer it was an immense escape from the actual.

It's true that if there weren't other dates than this there were other memories; and by the time George Stransom was fifty-five such memories had greatly multiplied. There were other ghosts in his life than the ghost of Mary Antrim. He had perhaps not had more losses than most men, but he had counted his losses more; he hadn't seen death more closely, but had in a manner felt it more deeply. He had formed little by little the habit of numbering his Dead: it had come to him early in life that there was something one had to do for them. They were there in their simplified intensified essence, their conscious absence and expressive patience, as personally there as if they had only been stricken dumb. When all sense of them failed, all sound of them ceased, it was as if their purgatory were really still on earth: they asked so little that they got, poor things, even less, and died again, died every day, of the hard usage of life. They had no organised service, no reserved place, no honour, no shelter, no safety. Even ungenerous people provided for the living, but even those who were called most generous did nothing for the others. So on George Stransom's part had grown up with the years a resolve that he at least would do something, do it, that is, for his own—would perform the great charity without

reproach. Every man *had* his own, and every man had, to meet this charity, the ample resources of the soul.

It was doubtless the voice of Mary Antrim that spoke for them best; as the years at any rate went by he found himself in regular communion with these postponed pensioners, those whom indeed he always called in his thoughts the Others. He spared them the moments, he organised the charity. Quite how it had risen he probably never could have told you, but what came to pass was that an altar, such as was after all within everybody's compass, lighted with perpetual candles and dedicated to these secret rites, reared itself in his spiritual spaces. He had wondered of old, in some embarrassment, whether he had a religion; being very sure, and not a little content, that he hadn't at all events the religion some of the people he had known wanted him to have. Gradually this question was straightened out for him: it became clear to him that the religion instilled by his earliest consciousness had been simply the religion of the Dead. It suited his inclination, it satisfied his spirit, it gave employment to his piety. It answered his love of great offices, of a solemn and splendid ritual; for no shrine could be more bedecked and no ceremonial more stately than those to which his worship was attached. He had no imagination about these things but that they were accessible to any one who should feel the need of them. The poorest could build such temples of the spirit—could make them blaze with candles and smoke with incense, make them flush with pictures and flowers. The cost, in the common phrase, of keeping them up fell wholly on the generous heart.

II

He had this year, on the eve of his anniversary, as happened, an emotion not unconnected with that range of feeling. Walking home at the close of a busy day he was arrested in the London street by the particular effect of a shop-front that lighted the dull brown air with its mer-

cenary grin and before which several persons were gathered. It was the window of a jeweller whose diamonds and sapphires seemed to laugh, in flashes like high notes of sound, with the mere joy of knowing how much more they were "worth" than most of the dingy pedestrians staring at them from the other side of the pane. Stransom lingered long enough to suspend, in a vision, a string of pearls about the white neck of Mary Antrim, and then was kept an instant longer by the sound of a voice he knew. Next him was a mumbling old woman, and beyond the old woman a gentleman with a lady on his arm. It was from him, from Paul Creston, the voice had proceeded: he was talking with the lady of some precious object in the window. Stransom had no sooner recognised him than the old woman turned away; but just with this growth of opportunity came a felt strangeness that stayed him in the very act of laying his hand on his friend's arm. It lasted but the instant, only that space sufficed for the flash of a wild question. Was *not* Mrs. Creston dead?—the ambiguity met him there in the short drop of her husband's voice, the drop conjugal, if it ever was, and in the way the two figures leaned to each other. Creston, making a step to look at something else, came nearer, glanced at him, started and exclaimed—behaviour the effect of which was at first only to leave Stransom staring, staring back across the months at the different face, the wholly other face, the poor man had shown him last, the blurred ravaged mask bent over the open grave by which they had stood together. That son of affliction wasn't mourning now; he detached his arm from his companion's to grasp the hand of the older friend. He coloured as well as smiled in the strong light of the shop when Stransom raised a tentative hat to the lady. Stransom had just time to see she was pretty before he found himself gaping at a fact more portentous. "My dear fellow, let me make you acquainted with my wife."

Creston had blushed and stammered over it, but in half

a minute, at the rate we live in polite society, it had practically become, for our friend, the mere memory of a shock. They stood there and laughed and talked; Stransom had instantly whisked the shock out of the way, to keep it for private consumption. He felt himself grimace, he heard himself exaggerate the proper, but was conscious of turning not a little faint. That new woman, that hired performer, Mrs. Creston? Mrs. Creston had been more living for him than any woman but one. This lady had a face that shone as publicly as the jeweller's window, and in the happy candour with which she wore her monstrous character was an effect of gross immodesty. The character of Paul Creston's wife thus attributed to her was monstrous for reasons Stransom could judge his friend to know perfectly that he knew. The happy pair had just arrived from America, and Stransom hadn't needed to be told this to guess the nationality of the lady. Somehow it deepened the foolish air that her husband's confused cordiality was unable to conceal. Stransom recalled that he had heard of poor Creston's having, while his bereavement was still fresh, crossed the sea for what people in such predicaments call a little change. He had found the little change indeed, he had brought the little change back; it was the little change that stood there and that, do what he would, he couldn't, while he showed those high front teeth of his, look other than a conscious ass about. They were going into the shop, Mrs. Creston said, and she begged Mr. Stransom to come with them and help to decide. He thanked her, opening his watch and pleading an engagement for which he was already late, and they parted while she shrieked into the fog "Mind now you come to see me right away!" Creston had had the delicacy not to suggest that, and Stransom hoped it hurt him somewhere to hear her scream it to all the echoes.

He felt quite determined, as he walked away, never in his life to go near her. She was perhaps a human being,

but Creston oughtn't to have shown her without precautions, oughtn't indeed to have shown her at all. His precautions should have been those of a forger or a murderer, and the people at home would never have mentioned extradition. This was a wife for foreign service or purely external use; a decent consideration would have spared her the injury of comparisons. Such was the first flush of George Stransom's reaction; but as he sat alone that night —there were particular hours he always passed alone—the harshness dropped from it and left only the pity. *He* could spend an evening with Kate Creston, if the man to whom she had given everything couldn't. He had known her twenty years, and she was the only woman for whom he might perhaps have been unfaithful. She was all cleverness and sympathy and charm; her house had been the very easiest in all the world and her friendship the very firmest. Without accidents he had loved her, without accidents every one had loved her: she had made the passions about her as regular as the moon makes the tides. She had been also of course far too good for her husband, but he never suspected it, and in nothing had she been more admirable than in the exquisite art with which she tried to keep every one else (keeping Creston was no trouble) from finding it out. Here was a man to whom she had devoted her life and for whom she had given it up—dying to bring into the world a child of his bed; and she had had only to submit to her fate to have, ere the grass was green on her grave, no more existence for him than a domestic servant he had replaced. The frivolity, the indecency of it made Stransom's eyes fill; and he had that evening a sturdy sense that he alone, in a world without delicacy, had a right to hold up his head. While he smoked, after dinner, he had a book in his lap, but he had no eyes for his page: his eyes, in the swarming void of things, seemed to have caught Kate Creston's, and it was into their sad silences he looked. It was to him her sentient spirit had turned, knowing it to

be of her he would think. He thought for a long time of how the closed eyes of dead women could still live—how they could open again, in a quiet lamplit room, long after they had looked their last. They had looks that survived—had them as great poets had quoted lines.

The newspaper lay by his chair—the thing that came in the afternoon and the servants thought one wanted; without sense for what was in it he had mechanically unfolded and then dropped it. Before he went to bed he took it up, and this time, at the top of a paragraph, he was caught by five words that made him start. He stood staring, before the fire, at the "Death of Sir Acton Hague, K.C.B.," the man who ten years earlier had been the nearest of his friends and whose deposition from this eminence had practically left it without an occupant. He had seen him after their rupture, but hadn't now seen him for years. Standing there before the fire he turned cold as he read what had befallen him. Promoted a short time previous to the governorship of the Westward Islands, Acton Hague had died, in the bleak honour of this exile, of an illness consequent on the bite of a poisonous snake. His career was compressed by the newspaper into a dozen lines, the perusal of which excited on George Stransom's part no warmer feeling than one of relief at the absence of any mention of their quarrel, an incident accidentally tainted at the time, thanks to their joint immersion in large affairs, with a horrible publicity. Public indeed was the wrong Stransom had, to his own sense, suffered, the insult he had blankly taken from the only man with whom he had ever been intimate; the friend, almost adored, of his University years, the subject, later, of his passionate loyalty: so public that he had never spoken of it to a human creature, so public that he had completely overlooked it. It had made the difference for him that friendship too was all over, but it had only made just that one. The shock of interests had been private, intensely so; but the action

taken by Hague had been in the face of men. To-day it all seemed to have occurred merely to the end that George Stransom should think of him as "Hague" and measure exactly how much he himself could resemble a stone. He went cold, suddenly and horribly cold, to bed.

III

The next day, in the afternoon, in the great grey suburb, he knew his long walk had tired him. In the dreadful cemetery alone he had been on his feet an hour. Instinctively, coming back, they had taken him a devious course, and it was a desert in which no circling cabman hovered over possible prey. He paused on a corner and measured the dreariness; then he made out through the gathered dusk that he was in one of those tracts of London which are less gloomy by night than by day, because, in the former case, of the civil gift of light. By day there was nothing, but by night there were lamps, and George Stransom was in a mood that made lamps good in themselves. It wasn't that they could show him anything, it was only that they could burn clear. To his surprise, however, after a while, they did show him something: the arch of a high doorway approached by a low terrace of steps, in the depth of which—it formed a dim vestibule—the raising of a curtain at the moment he passed gave him a glimpse of an avenue of gloom with a glow of tapers at the end. He stopped and looked up, recognising the place as a church. The thought quickly came to him that since he was tired he might rest there; so that after a moment he had in turn pushed up the leathern curtain and gone in. It was a temple of the old persuasion, and there had evidently been a function—perhaps a service for the dead; the high altar was still a blaze of candles. This was an exhibition he always liked, and he dropped into a seat with relief. More than it had ever yet come home to him it struck him as good there should be churches.

This one was almost empty and the other altars were dim; a verger shuffled about, an old woman coughed, but it seemed to Stransom there was hospitality in the thick sweet air. Was it only the savour of the incense or was it something of larger intention? He had at any rate quitted the great grey suburb and come nearer to the warm centre. He presently ceased to feel intrusive, gaining at last even a sense of community with the only worshipper in his neighbourhood, the sombre presence of a woman, in mourning unrelieved, whose back was all he could see of her and who had sunk deep into prayer at no great distance from him. He wished he could sink, like her, to the very bottom, be as motionless, as rapt in prostration. After a few moments he shifted his seat; it was almost indelicate to be so aware of her. But Stransom subsequently quite lost himself, floating away on the sea of light. If occasions like this had been more frequent in his life he would have had more present the great original type, set up in a myriad temples, of the unapproachable shrine he had erected in his mind. That shrine had begun in vague likeness to church pomps, but the echo had ended by growing more distinct than the sound. The sound now rang out, the type blazed at him with all its fires and with a mystery of radiance in which endless meanings could glow. The thing became as he sat there his appropriate altar and each starry candle an appropriate vow. He numbered them, named them, grouped them—it was the silent roll-call of his Dead. They made together a brightness vast and intense, a brightness in which the mere chapel of his thoughts grew so dim that as it faded away he asked himself if he shouldn't find his real comfort in some material act, some outward worship.

This idea took possession of him while, at a distance, the black-robed lady continued prostrate; he was quietly thrilled with his conception, which at last brought him to his feet in the sudden excitement of a plan. He wandered

softly through the aisles, pausing in the different chapels, all save one applied to a special devotion. It was in this clear recess, lampless and unapplied, that he stood longest —the length of time it took him fully to grasp the conception of gilding it with his bounty. He should snatch it from no other rites and associate it with nothing profane; he would simply take it as it should be given up to him and make it a masterpiece of splendour and a mountain of fire. Tended sacredly all the year, with the sanctifying church round it, it would always be ready for his offices. There would be difficulties, but from the first they presented themselves only as difficulties surmounted. Even for a person so little affiliated the thing would be a matter of arrangement. He saw it all in advance, and how bright in especial the place would become to him in the intermissions of toil and the dusk of afternoons; how rich in assurance at all times, but especially in the indifferent world. Before withdrawing he drew nearer again to the spot where he had first sat down, and in the movement he met the lady whom he had seen praying and who was now on her way to the door. She passed him quickly, and he had only a glimpse of her pale face and her unconscious, almost sightless eyes. For that instant she looked faded and handsome.

This was the origin of the rites more public, yet certainly esoteric, that he at last found himself able to establish. It took a long time, it took a year, and both the process and the result would have been—for any who knew—a vivid picture of his good faith. No one did know, in fact—no one but the bland ecclesiastics whose acquaintance he had promptly sought, whose objections he had softly overridden, whose curiosity and sympathy he had artfully charmed, whose assent to his eccentric munificence he had eventually won, and who had asked for concessions in exchange for indulgences. Stransom had of course at an early stage of his enquiry been referred to the Bishop, and

the Bishop had been delightfully human, the Bishop had been almost amused. Success was within sight, at any rate, from the moment the attitude of those whom it concerned became liberal in response to liberality. The altar and the sacred shell that half encircled it, consecrated to an ostensible and customary worship, were to be splendidly maintained; all that Stransom reserved to himself was the number of his lights and the free enjoyment of his intention. When the intention had taken complete effect the enjoyment became even greater than he had ventured to hope. He liked to think of this effect when far from it, liked to convince himself of it yet again when near. He was not often indeed so near as that a visit to it hadn't perforce something of the patience of a pilgrimage; but the time he gave to his devotion came to seem to him more a contribution to his other interests than a betrayal of them. Even a loaded life might be easier when one had added a new necessity to it.

How much easier was probably never guessed by those who simply knew there were hours when he disappeared and for many of whom there was a vulgar reading of what they used to call his plunges. These plunges were into depths quieter than the deep sea-caves, and the habit had at the end of a year or two become the one it would have cost him most to relinquish. Now they had really, his Dead, something that was indefeasibly theirs; and he liked to think that they might in cases be the Dead of others, as well as that the Dead of others might be invoked there under the protection of what he had done. Whoever bent a knee on the carpet he had laid down appeared to him to act in the spirit of his intention. Each of his lights had a name for him, and from time to time a new light was kindled. This was what he had fundamentally agreed for, that there should always be room for them all. What those who passed or lingered saw was simply the most resplendent of the altars called suddenly into vivid usefulness,

with a quiet elderly man, for whom it evidently had a fascination, often seated there in a maze or a doze; but half the satisfaction of the spot for this mysterious and fitful worshipper was that he found the years of his life there, and the ties, the affections, the struggles, the submissions, the conquests, if there had been such, a record of that adventurous journey in which the beginnings and the endings of human relations are the lettered mile-stones. He had in general little taste for the past as a part of his own history; at other times and in other places it mostly seemed to him pitiful to consider and impossible to repair; but on these occasions he accepted it with something of that positive gladness with which one adjusts one's self to an ache that begins to succumb to treatment. To the treatment of time the malady of life begins at a given moment to succumb; and these were doubtless the hours at which that truth most came home to him. The day was written for him there on which he had first become acquainted with death, and the successive phases of the acquaintance were marked each with a flame.

The flames were gathering thick at present, for Stransom had entered that dark defile of our earthly descent in which some one dies every day. It was only yesterday that Kate Creston had flashed out her white fire; yet already there were younger stars ablaze on the tips of the tapers. Various persons in whom his interest had not been intense drew closer to him by entering this company. He went over it, head by head, till he felt like the shepherd of a huddled flock, with all a shepherd's vision of differences imperceptible. He knew his candles apart, up to the colour of the flame, and would still have known them had their positions all been changed. To other imaginations they might stand for other things—that they should stand for something to be hushed before was all he desired; but he was intensely conscious of the personal note of each and of the distinguishable way it contributed to the concert.

There were hours at which he almost caught himself wishing that certain of his friends would now die, that he might establish with them in this manner a connexion more charming than, as it happened, it was possible to enjoy with them in life. In regard to those from whom one was separated by the long curves of the globe such a connexion could only be an improvement: it brought them instantly within reach. Of course there were gaps in the constellation, for Stransom knew he could only pretend to act for his own, and it wasn't every figure passing before his eyes into the great obscure that was entitled to a memorial. There was a strange sanctification in death, but some characters were more sanctified by being forgotten than by being remembered. The greatest blank in the shining page was the memory of Acton Hague, of which he inveterately tried to rid himself. For Acton Hague no flame could ever rise on any altar of his.

IV

Every year, the day he walked back from the great graveyard, he went to church as he had done the day his idea was born. It was on this occasion, as it happened, after a year had passed, that he began to observe his altar to be haunted by a worshipper at least as frequent as himself. Others of the faithful, and in the rest of the church, came and went, appealing sometimes, when they disappeared, to a vague or to a particular recognition; but this unfailing presence was always to be observed when he arrived and still in possession when he departed. He was surprised, the first time, at the promptitude with which it assumed an identity for him—the identity of the lady whom two years before, on his anniversary, he had seen so intensely bowed, and of whose tragic face he had had so flitting a vision. Given the time that had passed, his recollection of her was fresh enough to make him wonder. Of himself she had of course no impression, or rather had

had none at first: the time came when her manner of transacting her business suggested her having gradually guessed his call to be of the same order. She used his altar for her own purpose—he could only hope that, sad and solitary as she always struck him, she used it for her own Dead. There were interruptions, infidelities, all on his part, calls to other associations and duties; but as the months went on he found her whenever he returned, and he ended by taking pleasure in the thought that he had given her almost the contentment he had given himself. They worshipped side by side so often that there were moments when he wished he might be sure, so straight did their prospect stretch away of growing old together in their rites. She was younger than he, but she looked as if her Dead were at least as numerous as his candles. She had no colour, no sound, no fault, and another of the things about which he had made up his mind was that she had no fortune. Always black-robed, she must have had a succession of sorrows. People weren't poor, after all, whom so many losses could overtake; they were positively rich when they had had so much to give up. But the air of this devoted and indifferent woman, who always made, in any attitude, a beautiful accidental line, conveyed somehow to Stransom that she had known more kinds of trouble than one.

He had a great love of music and little time for the joy of it; but occasionally, when workaday noises were muffled by Saturday afternoons, it used to come back to him that there were glories. There were moreover friends who reminded him of this and side by side with whom he found himself sitting out concerts. On one of these winter afternoons, in St. James's Hall, he became aware after he had seated himself that the lady he had so often seen at church was in the place next him and was evidently alone, as he also this time happened to be. She was at first too absorbed in the consideration of the programme to heed him, but when she at last glanced at him he took advantage of

the movement to speak to her, greeting her with the remark that he felt as if he already knew her. She smiled as she said "Oh yes, I recognise you"; yet in spite of this admission of long acquaintance it was the first he had seen of her smile. The effect of it was suddenly to contribute more to that acquaintance than all the previous meetings had done. He hadn't "taken in," he said to himself, that she was so pretty. Later, that evening—it was while he rolled along in a hansom on his way to dine out—he added that he hadn't taken in that she was so interesting. The next morning in the midst of his work he quite suddenly and irrelevantly reflected that his impression of her, beginning so far back, was like a winding river that had at last reached the sea.

His work in fact was blurred a little all that day by the sense of what had now passed between them. It wasn't much, but it had just made the difference. They had listened together to Beethoven and Schumann; they had talked in the pauses, and at the end, when at the door, to which they moved together, he had asked her if he could help her in the matter of getting away. She had thanked him and put up her umbrella, slipping into the crowd without an allusion to their meeting yet again and leaving him to remember at leisure that not a word had been exchanged about the usual scene of that coincidence. This omission struck him now as natural and then again as perverse. She mightn't in the least have allowed his warrant for speaking to her, and yet if she hadn't he would have judged her an underbred woman. It was odd that when nothing had really ever brought them together he should have been able successfully to assume they were in a manner old friends—that this negative quantity was somehow more than they could express. His success, it was true, had been qualified by her quick escape, so that there grew up in him an absurd desire to put it to some better test. Save in so far as some other poor chance might help

him, such a test could be only to meet her afresh at church. Left to himself he would have gone to church the very next afternoon, just for the curiosity of seeing if he should find her there. But he wasn't left to himself, a fact he discovered quite at the last, after he had virtually made up his mind to go. The influence that kept him away really revealed to him how little to himself his Dead *ever* left him. He went only for *them*—for nothing else in the world.

The force of this revulsion kept him away ten days: he hated to connect the place with anything but his offices or to give a glimpse of the curiosity that had been on the point of moving him. It was absurd to weave a tangle about a matter so simple as a custom of devotion that might with ease have been daily or hourly; yet the tangle got itself woven. He was sorry, he was disappointed: it was as if a long happy spell had been broken and he had lost a familiar security. At the last, however, he asked himself if he was to stay away for ever from the fear of this muddle about motives. After an interval neither longer nor shorter than usual he re-entered the church with a clear conviction that he should scarcely heed the presence or the absence of the lady of the concert. This indifference didn't prevent his at once noting that for the only time since he had first seen her she wasn't on the spot. He had now no scruple about giving her time to arrive, but she didn't arrive, and when he went away still missing her he was profanely and consentingly sorry. If her absence made the tangle more intricate, that was all her own doing. By the end of another year it was very intricate indeed; but by that time he didn't in the least care, and it was only his cultivated consciousness that had given him scruples. Three times in three months he had gone to church without finding her, and he felt he hadn't needed these occasions to show him his suspense had dropped. Yet it was, incongruously, not indifference, but a refinement of delicacy that had kept him from asking the sacristan, who

would of course immediately have recognised his description of her, whether she had been seen at other hours. His delicacy had kept him from asking any question about her at any time, and it was exactly the same virtue that had left him so free to be decently civil to her at the concert.

This happy advantage now served him anew, enabling him when she finally met his eyes—it was after a fourth trial—to predetermine quite fixedly his awaiting her retreat. He joined her in the street as soon as she had moved, asking her if he might accompany her a certain distance. With her placid permission he went as far as a house in the neighbourhood at which she had business: she let him know it was not where she lived. She lived, as she said, in a mere slum, with an old aunt, a person in connexion with whom she spoke of the engrossment of humdrum duties and regular occupations. She wasn't, the mourning niece, in her first youth, and her vanished freshness had left something behind that, for Stransom, represented the proof it had been tragically sacrificed. Whatever she gave him the assurance of she gave without references. She might have been a divorced duchess—she might have been an old maid who taught the harp.

V

They fell at last into the way of walking together almost every time they met, though for a long time still they never met but at church. He couldn't ask her to come and see him, and as if she hadn't a proper place to receive him she never invited her friend. As much as himself she knew the world of London, but from an undiscussed instinct of privacy they haunted the region not mapped on the social chart. On the return she always made him leave her at the same corner. She looked with him, as a pretext for a pause, at the depressed things in suburban shop-fronts; and there was never a word he had said to her that she hadn't beautifully understood. For long ages he never knew her

name, any more than she had ever pronounced his own; but it was not their names that mattered, it was only their perfect practice and their common need.

These things made their whole relation so impersonal that they hadn't the rules or reasons people found in ordinary friendships. They didn't care for the things it was supposed necessary to care for in the intercourse of the world. They ended one day—they never knew which of them expressed it first—by throwing out the idea that they didn't care for each other. Over this idea they grew quite intimate; they rallied to it in a way that marked a fresh start in their confidence. If to feel deeply together about certain things wholly distinct from themselves didn't constitute a safety, where was safety to be looked for? Not lightly nor often, not without occasion nor without emotion, any more than in any other reference by serious people to a mystery of their faith; but when something had happened to warm, as it were, the air for it, they came as near as they could come to calling their Dead by name. They felt it was coming very near to utter their thought at all. The word "they" expressed enough; it limited the mention, it had a dignity of its own, and if, in their talk, you had heard our friends use it, you might have taken them for a pair of pagans of old alluding decently to the domesticated gods. They never knew—at least Stransom never knew—how they had learned to be sure about each other. If it had been with each a question of what the other was there for, the certitude had come in some fine way of its own. Any faith, after all, has the instinct of propagation, and it was as natural as it was beautiful that they should have taken pleasure on the spot in the imagination of a following. If the following was for each but a following of one it had proved in the event sufficient. Her debt, however, of course was much greater than his, because while she had only given him a worshipper he had given her a splendid temple. Once she said she pitied him

for the length of his list—she had counted his candles almost as often as himself—and this made him wonder what could have been the length of hers. He had wondered before at the coincidence of their losses, especially as from time to time a new candle was set up. On some occasion some accident led him to express this curiosity, and she answered as if in surprise that he hadn't already understood. "Oh for me, you know, the more there are the better—there could never be too many. I should like hundreds and hundreds—I should like thousands; I should like a great mountain of light."

Then of course in a flash he understood. "Your Dead are only One?"

She hung back at this as never yet. "Only One," she answered, colouring as if now he knew her guarded secret. It really made him feel he knew less than before, so difficult was it for him to reconstitute a life in which a single experience had so belittled all others. His own life, round its central hollow, had been packed close enough. After this she appeared to have regretted her confession, though at the moment she spoke there had been pride in her very embarrassment. She declared to him that his own was the larger, the dearer possession—the portion one would have chosen if one had been able to choose; she assured him she could perfectly imagine some of the echoes with which his silences were peopled. He knew she couldn't: one's relation to what one had loved and hated had been a relation too distinct from the relations of others. But this didn't affect the fact that they were growing old together in their piety. She was a feature of that piety, but even at the ripe stage of acquaintance in which they occasionally arranged to meet at a concert or to go together to an exhibition she was not a feature of anything else. The most that happened was that his worship became paramount. Friend by friend dropped away till at last there were more emblems on his altar than houses left him to enter. She was more than any

other the friend who remained, but she was unknown to all the rest. Once when she had discovered, as they called it, a new star, she used the expression that the chapel at last was full.

"Oh no," Stransom replied, "there's a great thing wanting for that! The chapel will never be full till a candle is set up before which all the others will pale. It will be the tallest candle of all."

Her mild wonder rested on him. "What candle do you mean?"

"I mean, dear lady, my own."

He had learned after a long time that she earned money by her pen, writing under a pseudonym she never disclosed in magazines he never saw. She knew too well what he couldn't read and what she couldn't write, and she taught him to cultivate indifference with a success that did much for their good relations. Her invisible industry was a convenience to him; it helped his contented thought of her, the thought that rested in the dignity of her proud obscure life, her little remunerated art and her little impenetrable home. Lost, with her decayed relative, in her dim suburban world, she came to the surface for him in distant places. She was really the priestess of his altar, and whenever he quitted England he committed it to her keeping. She proved to him afresh that women have more of the spirit of religion than men; he felt his fidelity pale and faint in comparison with hers. He often said to her that since he had so little time to live he rejoiced in her having so much; so glad was he to think she would guard the temple when he should have been called. He had a great plan for that, which of course he told her too, a bequest of money to keep it up in undiminished state. Of the administration of this fund he would appoint her superintendent, and if the spirit should move her she might kindle a taper even for him.

"And who will kindle one even for me?" she then seriously asked.

VI

She was always in mourning, yet the day he came back from the longest absence he had yet made her appearance immediately told him she had lately had a bereavement. They met on this occasion as she was leaving the church, so that postponing his own entrance he instantly offered to turn round and walk away with her. She considered, then she said: "Go in now, but come and see me in an hour." He knew the small vista of her street, closed at the end and as dreary as an empty pocket, where the pairs of shabby little houses, semi-detached but indissolubly united, were like married couples on bad terms. Often, however, as he had gone to the beginning he had never gone beyond. Her aunt was dead—that he immediately guessed, as well as that it made a difference; but when she had for the first time mentioned her number he found himself, on her leaving him, not a little agitated by this sudden liberality. She wasn't a person with whom, after all, one got on so very fast: it had taken him months and months to learn her name, years and years to learn her address. If she had looked, on this reunion, so much older to him, how in the world did he look to her? She had reached the period of life he had long since reached, when, after separations, the marked clock-face of the friend we meet announces the hour we have tried to forget. He couldn't have said what he expected as, at the end of his waiting, he turned the corner where for years he had always paused; simply not to pause was a sufficient cause for emotion. It was an event, somehow; and in all their long acquaintance there had never been an event. This one grew larger when, five minutes later, in the faint elegance of her little drawing-room, she quavered out a greeting that showed the measure she took of it. He had a strange sense of having come for something in particular; strange because literally there was nothing particular between them, nothing save

that they were at one on their great point, which had long ago become a magnificent matter of course. It was true that after she had said "You can always come now, you know," the thing he was there for seemed already to have happened. He asked her if it was the death of her aunt that made the difference; to which she replied: "She never knew I knew you. I wished her not to." The beautiful clearness of her candour—her faded beauty was like a summer twilight—disconnected the words from any image of deceit. They might have struck him as the period of a deep dissimulation; but she had always given him a sense of noble reasons. The vanished aunt was present, as he looked about him, in the small complacencies of the room, the beaded velvet and the fluted moreen; and though, as we know, he had the worship of the Dead, he found himself not definitely regretting this lady. If she wasn't in his long list, however, she was in her niece's short one, and Stransom presently observed to the latter that now at least, in the place they haunted together, she would have another object of devotion.

"Yes, I shall have another. She was very kind to me. It's that that's the difference."

He judged, wondering a good deal before he made any motion to leave her, that the difference would somehow be very great and would consist of still other things than her having let him come in. It rather chilled him, for they had been happy together as they were. He extracted from her at any rate an intimation that she should now have means less limited, that her aunt's tiny fortune had come to her, so that there was henceforth only one to consume what had formerly been made to suffice for two. This was a joy to Stransom, because it had hitherto been equally impossible for him either to offer her presents or contentedly to stay his hand. It was too ugly to be at her side that way, abounding himself and yet not able to overflow—a demonstration that would have been signally a false note. Even

her better situation too seemed only to draw out in a sense the loneliness of her future. It would merely help her to live more and more for their small ceremonial, and this at a time when he himself had begun wearily to feel that, having set it in motion, he might depart. When they had sat a while in the pale parlour she got up—"This isn't *my* room: let us go into mine." They had only to cross the narrow hall, as he found, to pass quite into another air. When she had closed the door of the second room, as she called it, he felt at last in real possession of her. The place had the flush of life—it was expressive; its dark red walls were articulate with memories and relics. These were simple things—photographs and water-colours, scraps of writing framed and ghosts of flowers embalmed; but a moment sufficed to show him they had a common meaning. It was here she had lived and worked, and she had already told him she would make no change of scene. He read the reference in the objects about her—the general one to places and times; but after a minute he distinguished among them a small portrait of a gentleman. At a distance and without their glasses his eyes were only so caught by it as to feel a vague curiosity. Presently this impulse carried him nearer, and in another moment he was staring at the picture in stupefaction and with the sense that some sound had broken from him. He was further conscious that he showed his companion a white face when he turned round on her gasping: "Acton Hague!"

She matched his great wonder. "Did you know him?"

"He was the friend of all my youth—of my early manhood. And *you* knew him?"

She coloured at this and for a moment her answer failed; her eyes embraced everything in the place, and a strange irony reached her lips as she echoed: "Knew him?"

Then Stransom understood, while the room heaved like the cabin of a ship, that its whole contents cried out with him, that it was a museum in his honour, that all her later

years had been addressed to him and that the shrine he himself had reared had been passionately converted to this use. It was all for Acton Hague that she had kneeled every day at his altar. What need had there been for a consecrated candle when he was present in the whole array? The revelation so smote our friend in the face that he dropped into a seat and sat silent. He had quickly felt her shaken by the force of his shock, but as she sank on the sofa beside him and laid her hand on his arm he knew almost as soon that she mightn't resent it as much as she'd have liked.

VII

He learned in that instant two things: one being that even in so long a time she had gathered no knowledge of his great intimacy and his great quarrel; the other that in spite of this ignorance, strangely enough, she supplied on the spot a reason for his stupor. "How extraordinary," he presently exclaimed, "that we should never have known!"

She gave a wan smile which seemed to Stransom stranger even than the fact itself. "I never, never spoke of him."

He looked again about the room. "Why then, if your life had been so full of him?"

"Mayn't I put you that question as well? Hadn't your life also been full of him?"

"Any one's, every one's life who had the wonderful experience of knowing him. *I* never spoke of him," Stransom added in a moment, "because he did me—years ago—an unforgettable wrong." She was silent, and with the full effect of his presence all about them it almost startled her guest to hear no protest escape her. She accepted his words; he turned his eyes to her again to see in what manner she accepted them. It was with rising tears and a rare sweetness in the movement of putting out her hand to take his own. Nothing more wonderful had

ever appeared to him than, in that little chamber of remembrance and homage, to see her convey with such exquisite mildness that as from Acton Hague any injury was credible. The clock ticked in the stillness—Hague had probably given it to her—and while he let her hold his hand with a tenderness that was almost an assumption of responsibility for his old pain as well as his new, Stransom after a minute broke out: "Good God, how he must have used *you!*"

She dropped his hand at this, got up and, moving across the room, made straight a small picture to which, on examining it, he had given a slight push. Then turning round on him with her pale gaiety recovered, "I've forgiven him!" she declared.

"I know what you've done," said Stransom; "I know what you've done for years." For a moment they looked at each other through it all with their long community of service in their eyes. This short passage made, to his sense, for the woman before him, an immense, an absolutely naked confession; which was presently, suddenly blushing red and changing her place again, what she appeared to learn he perceived in it. He got up and "How you must have loved him!" he cried.

"Women aren't like men. They can love even where they've suffered."

"Women are wonderful," said Stransom. "But I assure you I've forgiven him too."

"If I had known of anything so strange I wouldn't have brought you here."

"So that we might have gone on in our ignorance to the last?"

"What do you call the last?" she asked, smiling still.

At this he could smile back at her. "You'll see—when it comes."

She thought of that. "This is better perhaps; but as we were—it was good."

He put her the question. "Did it never happen that he spoke of me?"

Considering more intently she made no answer, and he then knew he should have been adequately answered by her asking how often he himself had spoken of their terrible friend. Suddenly a brighter light broke in her face and an excited idea sprang to her lips in the appeal: "You *have* forgiven him?"

"How, if I hadn't, could I linger here?"

She visibly winced at the deep but unintended irony of this; but even while she did so she panted quickly: "Then in the lights on your altar——?"

"There's never a light for Acton Hague!"

She stared with a dreadful fall, "But if he's one of your Dead?"

"He's one of the world's, if you like—he's one of yours. But he's not one of mine. Mine are only the Dead who died possessed of me. They're mine in death because they were mine in life."

"*He* was yours in life then, even if for a while he ceased to be. If you forgave him you went back to him. Those whom we've once loved——"

"Are those who can hurt us most," Stransom broke in.

"Ah it's not true—you've *not* forgiven him!" she wailed with a passion that startled him.

He looked at her as never yet. "What was it he did to you?"

"Everything!" Then abruptly she put out her hand in farewell. "Good-bye."

He turned as cold as he had turned that night he read the man's death. "You mean that we meet no more?"

"Not as we've met—not *there!*"

He stood aghast at this snap of their great bond, at the renouncement that rang out in the word she so expressively sounded. "But what's changed—for you?"

She waited in all the sharpness of a trouble that for the

first time since he had known her made her splendidly stern. "How can you understand now when you didn't understand before?"

"I didn't understand before only because I didn't know. Now that I know, I see what I've been living with for years," Stransom went on very gently.

She looked at him with a larger allowance, doing this gentleness justice. "How can I then, on this new knowledge of my own, ask you to continue to live with it?"

"I set up my altar, with its multiplied meanings," Stransom began; but she quickly interrupted him.

"You set up your altar, and when I wanted one most I found it magnificently ready. I used it with the gratitude I've always shown you, for I knew it from of old to be dedicated to Death. I told you long ago that my Dead weren't many. Yours were, but all you had done for them was none too much for *my* worship! You had placed a great light for Each—I gathered them together for One!"

"We had simply different intentions," he returned. "That, as you say, I perfectly knew, and I don't see why your intention shouldn't still sustain you."

"That's because you're generous—you can imagine and think. But the spell's broken."

It seemed to poor Stransom, in spite of his resistance, that it really was, and the prospect stretched grey and void before him. All he could say, however, was: "I hope you'll try before you give up."

"If I had known you had ever known him I should have taken for granted he had his candle," she presently answered. "What's changed, as you say, is that on making the discovery I find he never has had it. That makes *my* attitude"—she paused as thinking how to express it, then said simply—"all wrong."

"Come once again," he pleaded.

"Will you give him his candle?" she asked.

He waited, but only because it would sound ungracious; not because of a doubt of his feeling. "I can't do that!" he declared at last.

"Then good-bye." And she gave him her hand again.

He had got his dismissal; besides which, in the agitation of everything that had opened out to him, he felt the need to recover himself as he could only do in solitude. Yet he lingered—lingered to see if she had no compromise to express, no attenuation to propose. But he only met her great lamenting eyes, in which indeed he read that she was as sorry for him as for any one else. This made him say: "At least, in any case, I may see you here."

"Oh yes, come if you like. But I don't think it will do."

He looked round the room once more, knowing how little he was sure it would do. He felt also stricken and more and more cold, and his chill was like an ague in which he had to make an effort not to shake. Then he made doleful reply: "I must try on my side—if you can't try on yours." She came out with him to the hall and into the doorway, and here he put her the question he held he could least answer from his own wit. "Why have you never let me come before?"

"Because my aunt would have seen you, and I should have had to tell her how I came to know you."

"And what would have been the objection to that?"

"It would have entailed other explanations; there would at any rate have been that danger."

"Surely she knew you went every day to church," Stransom objected.

"She didn't know what I went for."

"Of me then she never even heard?"

"You'll think I was deceitful. But I didn't need to be!"

He was now on the lower door-step, and his hostess held the door half-closed behind him. Through what remained of the opening he saw her framed face. He made a supreme appeal. "What *did* he do to you?"

"It would have come out—*she* would have told you. That fear at my heart—that was my reason!" And she closed the door, shutting him out.

VIII

He had ruthlessly abandoned her—that of course was what he had done. Stransom made it all out in solitude, at leisure, fitting the unmatched pieces gradually together and dealing one by one with a hundred obscure points. She had known Hague only after her present friend's relations with him had wholly terminated; obviously indeed a good while after; and it was natural enough that of his previous life she should have ascertained only what he had judged good to communicate. There were passages it was quite conceivable that even in moments of the tenderest expansion he should have withheld. Of many facts in the career of a man so in the eye of the world there was of course a common knowledge; but this lady lived apart from public affairs, and the only time perfectly clear to her would have been the time following the dawn of her own drama. A man in her place would have "looked up" the past—would even have consulted old newspapers. It remained remarkable indeed that in her long contact with the partner of her retrospect no accident had lighted a train; but there was no arguing about that; the accident had in fact come: it had simply been that security had prevailed. She had taken what Hague had given her, and her blankness in respect of his other connexions was only a touch in the picture of that plasticity Stransom had supreme reason to know so great a master could have been trusted to produce.

This picture was for a while all our friend saw: he caught his breath again and again as it came over him that the woman with whom he had had for years so fine a point of contact was a woman whom Acton Hague, of all men in the world, had more or less fashioned. Such as she sat

there to-day she was ineffaceably stamped with him. Beneficent, blameless as Stransom held her, he couldn't rid himself of the sense that he had been, as who should say, swindled. She had imposed upon him hugely, though she had known it as little as he. All this later past came back to him as a time grotesquely misspent. Such at least were his first reflexions; after a while he found himself more divided and only, as the end of it, more troubled. He imagined, recalled, reconstituted, figured out for himself the truth she had refused to give him; the effect of which was to make her seem to him only more saturated with her fate. He felt her spirit, through the whole strangeness, finer than his own to the very degree in which she might have been, in which she certainly had been, more wronged. A woman, when wronged, was always more wronged than a man, and there were conditions when the least she could have got off with was more than the most he could have to bear. He was sure this rare creature wouldn't have got off with the least. He was awestruck at the thought of such a surrender—such a prostration. Moulded indeed she had been by powerful hands, to have converted her injury into an exaltation so sublime. The fellow had only had to die for everything that was ugly in him to be washed out in a torrent. It was vain to try to guess what had taken place, but nothing could be clearer than that she had ended by accusing herself. She absolved him at every point, she adored her very wounds. The passion by which he had profited had rushed back after its ebb, and now the tide of tenderness, arrested for ever at flood, was too deep even to fathom. Stransom sincerely considered that he had forgiven him; but how little he had achieved the miracle that she had achieved! His forgiveness was silence, but hers was mere unuttered sound. The light she had demanded for his altar would have broken his silence with a blare; whereas all the lights in the church were for her too great a hush.

She had been right about the difference—she had spoken the truth about the change: Stransom was soon to know himself as perversely but sharply jealous. *His* tide had ebbed, not flowed; if he had "forgiven" Acton Hague, that forgiveness was a motive with a broken spring. The very fact of her appeal for a material sign, a sign that should make her dead lover equal there with the others, presented the concession to her friend as too handsome for the case. He had never thought of himself as hard, but an exorbitant article might easily render him so. He moved round and round this one, but only in widening circles—the more he looked at it the less acceptable it seemed. At the same time he had no illusion about the effect of his refusal; he perfectly saw how it would make for a rupture. He left her alone a week, but when at last he again called this conviction was cruelly confirmed. In the interval he had kept away from the church, and he needed no fresh assurance from her to know she hadn't entered it. The change was complete enough: it had broken up her life. Indeed it had broken up his, for all the fires of his shrine seemed to him suddenly to have been quenched. A great indifference fell upon him, the weight of which was in itself a pain; and he never knew what his devotion had been for him till in that shock it ceased like a dropped watch. Neither did he know with how large a confidence he had counted on the final service that had now failed: the mortal deception was that in this abandonment the whole future gave way.

These days of her absence proved to him of what she was capable; all the more that he never dreamed she was vindictive or even resentful. It was not in anger she had forsaken him; it was in simple submission to hard reality, to the stern logic of life. This came home to him when he sat with her again in the room in which her late aunt's conversation lingered like the tone of a cracked piano. She tried to make him forget how much they were estranged, but in the very presence of what they had given

up it was impossible not to be sorry for her. He had taken from her so much more than she had taken from him. He argued with her again, told her she could now have the altar to herself; but she only shook her head with pleading sadness, begging him not to waste his breath on the impossible, the extinct. Couldn't he see that in relation to her private need the rites he had established were practically an elaborate exclusion? She regretted nothing that had happened; it had all been right so long as she didn't know, and it was only that now she knew too much and that from the moment their eyes were open they would simply have to conform. It had doubtless been happiness enough for them to go on together so long. She was gentle, grateful, resigned; but this was only the form of a deep immoveability. He saw he should never more cross the threshold of the second room, and he felt how much this alone would make a stranger of him and give a conscious stiffness to his visits. He would have hated to plunge again into that well of reminders, but he enjoyed quite as little the vacant alternative.

After he had been with her three or four times it struck him that to have come at last into her house had had the horrid effect of diminishing their intimacy. He had known her better, had liked her in greater freedom, when they merely walked together or kneeled together. Now they only pretended; before they had been nobly sincere. They began to try their walks again, but it proved a lame imitation, for these things, from the first, beginning or ending, had been connected with their visits to the church. They had either strolled away as they came out or gone in to rest on the return. Stransom, besides, now faltered; he couldn't walk as of old. The omission made everything false; it was a dire mutilation of their lives. Our friend was frank and monotonous, making no mystery of his remonstrance and no secret of his predicament. Her response, whatever it was, always came to the same thing—an implied

invitation to him to judge, if he spoke of predicaments, of how much comfort she had in hers. For him indeed was no comfort even in complaint, since every allusion to what had befallen them but made the author of their trouble more present. Acton Hague was between them—that was the essence of the matter, and never so much between them as when they were face to face. Then Stransom, while still wanting to banish him, had the strangest sense of striving for an ease that would involve having accepted him. Deeply disconcerted by what he knew, he was still worse tormented by really not knowing. Perfectly aware that it would have been horribly vulgar to abuse his old friend or to tell his companion the story of their quarrel, it yet vexed him that her depth of reserve should give him no opening and should have the effect of a magnanimity greater even than his own.

He challenged himself, denounced himself, asked himself if he were in love with her that he should care so much what adventures she had had. He had never for a moment allowed he was in love with her; therefore nothing could have surprised him more than to discover he was jealous. What but jealousy could give a man that sore contentious wish for the detail of what would make him suffer? Well enough he knew indeed that he should never have it from the only person who to-day could give it to him. She let him press her with his sombre eyes, only smiling at him with an exquisite mercy and breathing equally little the word that would expose her secret and the word that would appear to deny his literal right to bitterness. She told nothing, she judged nothing; she accepted everything but the possibility of her return to the old symbols. Stransom divined that for her too they had been vividly individual, had stood for particular hours or particular attributes—particular links in her chain. He made it clear to himself, as he believed, that his difficulty lay in the fact that the very nature of the plea for his faithless friend constituted

a prohibition; that it happened to have come from *her* was precisely the vice that attached to it. To the voice of impersonal generosity he felt sure he would have listened; he would have deferred to an advocate who, speaking from abstract justice, knowing of his denial without having known Hague, should have had the imagination to say: "Ah, remember only the best of him; pity him; provide for him." To provide for him on the very ground of having discovered another of his turpitudes was not to pity but to glorify him. The more Stransom thought the more he made out that whatever this relation of Hague's it could only have been a deception more or less finely practised. Where had it come into the life that all men saw? Why had one never heard of it if it had had the frankness of honourable things? Stransom knew enough of his other ties, of his obligations and appearances, not to say enough of his general character, to be sure there had been some infamy. In one way or another this creature had been coldly sacrificed. That was why at the last as well as the first he must still leave him out and out.

IX

And yet this was no solution, especially after he had talked again to his friend of all it had been his plan she should finally do for him. He had talked in the other days, and she had responded with a frankness qualified only by a courteous reluctance, a reluctance that touched him, to linger on the question of his death. She had then practically accepted the charge, suffered him to feel he could depend upon her to be the eventual guardian of his shrine; and it was in the name of what had so passed between them that he appealed to her not to forsake him in his age. She listened at present with shining coldness and all her habitual forbearance to insist on her terms; her deprecation was even still tenderer, for it expressed the compassion of her own sense that he was abandoned. Her terms, however,

remained the same, and scarcely the less audible for not being uttered; though he was sure that secretly even more than he she felt bereft of the satisfaction his solemn trust was to have provided her. They both missed the rich future, but she missed it most, because after all it was to have been entirely hers; and it was her acceptance of the loss that gave him the full measure of her preference for the thought of Acton Hague over any other thought whatever. He had humour enough to laugh rather grimly when he said to himself: "Why the deuce does she like him so much more than she likes me?"—the reasons being really so conceivable. But even his faculty of analysis left the irritation standing, and this irritation proved perhaps the greatest misfortune that had ever overtaken him. There had been nothing yet that made him so much want to give up. He had of course by this time well reached the age of renouncement; but it had not hitherto been vivid to him that it was time to give up everything.

Practically, at the end of six months, he had renounced the friendship once so charming and comforting. His privation had two faces, and the face it had turned to him on the occasion of his last attempt to cultivate that friendship was the one he could look at least. This was the privation he inflicted; the other was the privation he bore. The conditions she never phrased he used to murmur to himself in solitude: "One more, one more—only just one." Certainly he was going down; he often felt it when he caught himself, over his work, staring at vacancy and giving voice to that inanity. There was proof enough besides in his being so weak and so ill. His irritation took the form of melancholy, and his melancholy that of the conviction that his health had quite failed. His altar moreover had ceased to exist; his chapel, in his dreams, was a great dark cavern. All the lights had gone out—all his Dead had died again. He couldn't exactly see at first how it had been in the power of his late companion to extinguish them, since it

was neither for her nor by her that they had been called into being. Then he understood that it was essentially in his own soul the revival had taken place, and that in the air of this soul they were now unable to breathe. The candles might mechanically burn, but each of them had lost its lustre. The church had become a void; it was his presence, her presence, their common presence, that had made the indispensable medium. If anything was wrong everything was—her silence spoiled the tune.

Then when three months were gone he felt so lonely that he went back; reflecting that as they had been his best society for years his Dead perhaps wouldn't let him forsake them without doing something more for him. They stood there, as he had left them, in their tall radiance, the bright cluster that had already made him, on occasions when he was willing to compare small things with great, liken them to a group of sea-lights on the edge of the ocean of life. It was a relief to him, after a while, as he sat there, to feel they had still a virtue. He was more and more easily tired, and he always drove now; the action of his heart was weak and gave him none of the reassurance conferred by the action of his fancy. None the less he returned yet again, returned several times, and finally, during six months, haunted the place with a renewal of frequency and a strain of impatience. In winter the church was unwarmed and exposure to cold forbidden him, but the glow of his shrine was an influence in which he could almost bask. He sat and wondered to what he had reduced his absent associate and what she now did with the hours of her absence. There were other churches, there were other altars, there were other candles; in one way or another her piety would still operate; he couldn't absolutely have deprived her of her rites. So he argued, but without contentment; for he well enough knew there was no other such rare semblance of the mountain of light she had once mentioned to him as the satisfaction of her need. As this semblance again

gradually grew great to him and his pious practice more regular, he found a sharper and sharper pang in the imagination of her darkness; for never so much as in these weeks had his rites been real, never had his gathered company seemed so to respond and even to invite. He lost himself in the large lustre, which was more and more what he had from the first wished it to be—as dazzling as the vision of heaven in the mind of a child. He wandered in the fields of light; he passed, among the tall tapers, from tier to tier, from fire to fire, from name to name, from the white intensity of one clear emblem, of one saved soul, to another. It was in the quiet sense of having saved his souls that his deep strange instinct rejoiced. This was no dim theological rescue, no boon of a contingent world; they were saved better than faith or works could save them, saved for the warm world they had shrunk from dying to, for actuality, for continuity, for the certainty of human remembrance.

By this time he had survived all his friends; the last straight flame was three years old, there was no one to add to the list. Over and over he called his roll, and it appeared to him compact and complete. Where should he put in another, where, if there were no other objection, would it stand in its place in the rank? He reflected, with a want of sincerity of which he was quite conscious, that it would be difficult to determine that place. More and more, besides, face to face with his little legion, reading over endless histories, handling the empty shells and playing with the silence—more and more he could see that he had never introduced an alien. He had had his great compassions, his indulgences—there were cases in which they had been immense; but what had his devotion after all been if it hadn't been at bottom a respect? He was, however, himself surprised at his stiffness; by the end of the winter the responsibility of it was what was uppermost in his thoughts. The refrain had grown old to them, that plea

for just one more. There came a day when, for simple exhaustion, if symmetry should demand just one he was ready so far to meet symmetry. Symmetry was harmony, and the idea of harmony began to haunt him; he said to himself that harmony was of course everything. He took, in fancy, his composition to pieces, redistributing it into other lines, making other juxtapositions and contrasts. He shifted this and that candle, he made the spaces different, he effaced the disfigurement of a possible gap. There were subtle and complex relations, a scheme of cross-reference, and moments in which he seemed to catch a glimpse of the void so sensible to the woman who wandered in exile or sat where he had seen her with the portrait of Acton Hague. Finally, in this way, he arrived at a conception of the total, the ideal, which left a clear opportunity for just another figure. "Just one more—to round it off; just one more, just one," continued to hum in his head. There was a strange confusion in the thought, for he felt the day to be near when he too should be one of the Others. What in this event would the Others matter to him, since they only mattered to the living? Even as one of the Dead what would his altar matter to him, since his particular dream of keeping it up had melted away? What had harmony to do with the case if his lights were all to be quenched? What he had hoped for was an instituted thing. He might perpetuate it on some other pretext, but his special meaning would have dropped. This meaning was to have lasted with the life of the one other person who understood it.

In March he had an illness during which he spent a fortnight in bed, and when he revived a little he was told of two things that had happened. One was that a lady whose name was not known to the servants (she left none) had been three times to ask about him; the other was that in his sleep and on an occasion when his mind evidently wandered he was heard to murmur again and again: "Just

one more—just one." As soon as he found himself able to go out, and before the doctor in attendance had pronounced him so, he drove to see the lady who had come to ask about him. She was not at home; but this gave him the opportunity, before his strength should fail again, to take his way to the church. He entered it alone; he had declined, in a happy manner he possessed of being able to decline effectively, the company of his servant or of a nurse. He knew now perfectly what these good people thought; they had discovered his clandestine connexion, the magnet that had drawn him for so many years, and doubtless attached a significance of their own to the odd words they had repeated to him. The nameless lady was the clandestine connexion—a fact nothing could have made clearer than his indecent haste to rejoin her. He sank on his knees before his altar while his head fell over on his hands. His weakness, his life's weariness overtook him. It seemed to him he had come for the great surrender. At first he asked himself how he should get away; then, with the failing belief in the power, the very desire to move gradually left him. He had come, as he always came, to lose himself; the fields of light were still there to stray in; only this time, in straying, he would never come back. He had given himself to his Dead, and it was good: this time his Dead would keep him. He couldn't rise from his knees; he believed he should never rise again; all he could do was to lift his face and fix his eyes on his lights. They looked unusually, strangely splendid, but the one that always drew him most had an unprecedented lustre. It was the central voice of the choir, the glowing heart of the brightness, and on this occasion it seemed to expand, to spread great wings of flame. The whole altar flared—dazzling and blinding; but the source of the vast radiance burned clearer than the rest, gathering itself into form, and the form was human beauty and human charity, was the far-off face of Mary Antrim. She smiled at him from the glory of heaven

—she brought the glory down with her to take him. He bowed his head in submission and at the same moment another wave rolled over him. Was it the quickening of joy to pain? In the midst of his joy at any rate he felt his buried face grow hot as with some communicated knowledge that had the force of a reproach. It suddenly made him contrast that very rapture with the bliss he had refused to another. This breath of the passion immortal was all that other had asked; the descent of Mary Antrim opened his spirit with a great compunctious throb for the descent of Acton Hague. It was as if Stransom had read what her eyes said to him.

After a moment he looked round in a despair that made him feel as if the source of life were ebbing. The church had been empty—he was alone; but he wanted to have something done, to make a last appeal. This idea gave him strength for an effort; he rose to his feet with a movement that made him turn, supporting himself by the back of a bench. Behind him was a prostrate figure, a figure he had seen before; a woman in deep mourning, bowed in grief or in prayer. He had seen her in other days—the first time of his entrance there, and he now slightly wavered, looking at her again till she seemed aware he had noticed her. She raised her head and met his eyes: the partner of his long worship had come back. She looked across at him an instant with a face wondering and scared; he saw he had made her afraid. Then quickly rising she came straight to him with both hands out.

"Then you *could* come? God sent you!" he murmured with a happy smile.

"You're very ill—you shouldn't be here," she urged in anxious reply.

"God sent me too, I think. I was ill when I came, but the sight of you does wonders." He held her hands, which steadied and quickened him. "I've something to tell you."

"Don't tell me!" she tenderly pleaded; "let me tell you.

This afternoon, by a miracle, the sweetest of miracles, the sense of our difference left me. I was out—I was near, thinking, wandering alone, when, on the spot, something changed in my heart. It's my confession—there it is. To come back, to come back on the instant—the idea gave me wings. It was as if I suddenly saw something—as if it all became possible. I could come for what you yourself came for: that was enough. So here I am. It's not for my own—that's over. But I'm here for *them.*" And breathless, infinitely relieved by her low precipitate explanation, she looked with eyes that reflected all its splendour at the magnificence of their altar.

"They're here for you," Stransom said, "they're present to-night as they've never been. They speak for you—don't you see?—in a passion of light; they sing out like a choir of angels. Don't you hear what they say?—they offer the very thing you asked of me."

"Don't talk of it—don't think of it; forget it!" She spoke in hushed supplication, and while the alarm deepened in her eyes she disengaged one of her hands and passed an arm round him to support him better, to help him to sink into a seat.

He let himself go, resting on her; he dropped upon the bench and she fell on her knees beside him, his own arm round her shoulder. So he remained an instant, staring up at his shrine. "They say there's a gap in the array—they say it's not full, complete. Just one more," he went on, softly—"isn't that what you wanted? Yes, one more, one more."

"Ah no more—no more!" she wailed, as with a quick new horror of it, under her breath.

"Yes, one more," he repeated, simply; "just one!" And with this his head dropped on her shoulder; she felt that in his weakness he had fainted. But alone with him in the dusky church a great dread was on her of what might still happen, for his face had the whiteness of death.

THE PRINCESS

by

Anton Chekhov

ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV (*1860–1904*) *was equally distinguished as playwright and writer of fiction. The best translation of his stories is that by Constance Garnett, in 13 volumes. His plays, like the First Moscow Art Theatre which produced them, have survived the Revolution; they have become classics of the Soviet theatre. His home at Yalta, in the Crimea, is maintained as a museum of his personal and literary life.*

THE PRINCESS

A CARRIAGE with four fine sleek horses drove in at the big so-called Red Gate of the N—— Monastery. While it was still at a distance, the priests and monks who were standing in a group round the part of the hostel allotted to the gentry, recognized by the coachman and horses that the lady in the carriage was Princess Vera Gavrilovna, whom they knew very well.

An old man in livery jumped off the box and helped the princess to get out of the carriage. She raised her dark veil and moved in a leisurely way up to the priests to receive their blessing; then she nodded pleasantly to the rest of the monks and went into the hostel.

"Well, have you missed your princess?" she said to the monk who brought in her things. "It's a whole month since I've been to see you. But here I am; behold your princess. And where is the Father Superior? My goodness, I am burning with impatience! Wonderful, wonderful old man! You must be proud of having such a Superior."

When the Father Superior came in, the princess uttered a shriek of delight, crossed her arms over her bosom, and went up to receive his blessing.

"No, no, let me kiss your hand," she said, snatching it and eagerly kissing it three times. "How glad I am to see you at last, holy Father! I'm sure you've forgotten your princess, but my thoughts have been in your dear monastery every moment. How delightful it is here! This living for God far from the busy, giddy world has a special

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charm of its own, holy Father, which I feel with my whole soul although I cannot express it!"

The princess's cheeks glowed and tears came into her eyes. She talked incessantly, fervently, while the Father Superior, a grave, plain, shy old man of seventy, remained mute or uttered abruptly, like a soldier on duty, phrases such as:

"Certainly, Your Excellency. . . . Quite so. I understand."

"Has Your Excellency come for a long stay?" he inquired.

"I shall stay the night here, and to-morrow I'm going on to Klavdia Nikolaevna's—it's a long time since I've seen her—and the day after to-morrow I'll come back to you and stay three or four days. I want to rest my soul here among you, holy Father. . . ."

The princess liked being at the monastery at N——. For the last two years it had been a favourite resort of hers; she used to go there almost every month in the summer and stay two or three days, even sometimes a week. The shy novices, the stillness, the low ceilings, the smell of cypress, the modest fare, the cheap curtains on the windows—all this touched her, softened her, and disposed her to contemplation and good thoughts. It was enough for her to be half an hour in the hostel for her to feel that she, too, was timid and modest, and that she, too, smelt of cypress-wood. The past retreated into the background, lost its significance, and the princess began to imagine that in spite of her twenty-nine years she was very much like the old Father Superior, and that, like him, she was created not for wealth, not for earthly grandeur and love, but for a peaceful life secluded from the world, a life in twilight like the hostel.

It happens that a ray of light gleams in the dark cell of the anchorite absorbed in prayer, or a bird alights on the window and sings its song; the stern anchorite will

smile in spite of himself, and a gentle, sinless joy will pierce through the load of grief over his sins, like water flowing from under a stone. The princess fancied she brought from the outside world just such comfort as the ray of light or the bird. Her gay, friendly smile, her gentle eyes, her voice, her jests, her whole personality in fact, her little graceful figure always dressed in simple black, must arouse in simple, austere people a feeling of tenderness and joy. Everyone, looking at her, must think: "God has sent us an angel. . . ." And feeling that no one could help thinking this, she smiled still more cordially, and tried to look like a bird.

After drinking tea and resting, she went for a walk. The sun was already setting. From the monastery garden came a moist fragrance of freshly watered mignonette, and from the church floated the soft singing of men's voices, which seemed very pleasant and mournful in the distance. It was the evening service. In the dark windows where the little lamps glowed gently, in the shadows, in the figure of the old monk sitting at the church door with a collecting-box, there was such unruffled peace that the princess felt moved to tears.

Outside the gate, in the walk between the wall and the birch-trees where there were benches, it was quite evening. The air grew rapidly darker and darker. The princess went along the walk, sat on a seat, and sank into thought.

She thought how good it would be to settle down for her whole life in this monastery where life was as still and unruffled as a summer evening; how good it would be to forget the ungrateful, dissipated prince; to forget her immense estates, the creditors who worried her every day, her misfortunes, her maid Dasha, who had looked at her impertinently that morning. It would be nice to sit here on the bench all her life and watch through the trunks of the birch-trees the evening mist gathering in

wreaths in the valley below; the rooks flying home in a black cloud like a veil far, far away above the forest; two novices, one astride a piebald horse, another on foot driving out the horses for the night and rejoicing in their freedom, playing pranks like little children; their youthful voices rang out musically in the still air, and she could distinguish every word. It is nice to sit and listen to the silence: at one moment the wind blows and stirs the tops of the birch-trees, then a frog rustles in last year's leaves, then the clock on the belfry strikes the quarter. . . . One might sit without moving, listen and think, and think. . . .

An old woman passed by with a wallet on her back. The princess thought that it would be nice to stop the old woman and to say something friendly and cordial to her, to help her. . . . But the old woman turned the corner without once looking round.

Not long afterwards a tall man with a grey beard and a straw hat came along the walk. When he came up to the princess, he took off his hat and bowed. From the bald patch on his head and his sharp, hooked nose the princess recognized him as the doctor, Mihail Ivanovitch, who had been in her service at Dubovki. She remembered that someone had told her that his wife had died the year before, and she wanted to sympathize with him, to console him.

"Doctor, I expect you don't recognize me?" she said with an affable smile.

"Yes, Princess, I recognized you," said the doctor, taking off his hat again.

"Oh, thank you; I was afraid that you, too, had forgotten your princess. People only remember their enemies, but they forget their friends. Have you, too, come to pray?"

"I am the doctor here, and I have to spend the night at the monastery every Saturday."

"Well, how are you?" said the princess, sighing. "I hear that you have lost your wife. What a calamity!"

"Yes, Princess, for me it is a great calamity."

"There's nothing for it! We must bear our troubles with resignation. Not one hair of a man's head is lost without the Divine Will."

"Yes, Princess."

To the princess's friendly, gentle smile and her sighs the doctor responded coldly and dryly: "Yes, Princess." And the expression of his face was cold and dry.

"What else can I say to him?" she wondered.

"How long it is since we met!" she said. "Five years! How much water has flowed under the bridge, how many changes in that time; it quite frightens one to think of it! You know, I am married. . . . I am not a countess now, but a princess. And by now I am separated from my husband too."

"Yes, I heard so."

"God has sent me many trials. No doubt you have heard, too, that I am almost ruined. My Dubovki, Sofyino, and Kiryakovo have all been sold for my unhappy husband's debts. And I have only Baranovo and Mihaltsevo left. It's terrible to look back: how many changes and misfortunes of all kinds, how many mistakes!"

"Yes, Princess, many mistakes."

The princess was a little disconcerted. She knew her mistakes; they were all of such a private character that no one but she could think or speak of them. She could not resist asking:

"What mistakes are you thinking about?"

"You referred to them, so you know them . . ." answered the doctor, and he smiled. "Why talk about them!"

"No; tell me, doctor. I shall be very grateful to you. And please don't stand on ceremony with me. I love to hear the truth."

"I am not your judge, Princess."

"Not my judge! What a tone you take! You must know something about me. Tell me!"

"If you really wish it, very well. Only I regret to say I'm not clever at talking, and people can't always understand me."

The doctor thought a moment and began:

"A lot of mistakes; but the most important of them, in my opinion, was the general spirit that prevailed on all your estates. You see, I don't know how to express myself. I mean chiefly the lack of love, the aversion for people that was felt in absolutely everything. Your whole system of life was built upon that aversion. Aversion for the human voice, for faces, for heads, steps . . . in fact, for everything that makes up a human being. At all the doors and on the stairs there stand sleek, rude, and lazy grooms in livery to prevent badly dressed persons from entering the house; in the hall there are chairs with high backs so that the footmen waiting there, during balls and receptions, may not soil the walls with their heads; in every room there are thick carpets that no human step may be heard; everyone who comes in is infallibly warned to speak as softly and as little as possible, and to say nothing that might have a disagreeable effect on the nerves or the imagination. And in your room you don't shake hands with anyone or ask him to sit down—just as you didn't shake hands with me or ask me to sit down. . . ."

"By all means, if you like," said the princess, smiling and holding out her hand. "Really, to be cross about such trifles . . ."

"But I am not cross," laughed the doctor, but at once he flushed, took off his hat, and waving it about, began hotly: "To be candid, I've long wanted an opportunity to tell you all I think. . . . That is, I want to tell you that you look upon the mass of mankind from the Napo-

leonic standpoint as food for the cannon. But Napoleon had at least some idea; you have nothing except aversion."

"I have an aversion for people?" smiled the princess, shrugging her shoulders in astonishment. "I have!"

"Yes, you! You want facts? By all means. In Mihaltsevo three former cooks of yours, who have gone blind in your kitchens from the heat of the stove, are living upon charity. All the health and strength and good looks that is found on your hundreds of thousands of acres is taken by you and your parasites for your grooms, your footmen, and your coachmen. All these two-legged cattle are trained to be flunkeys, overeat themselves, grow coarse, lose the 'image and likeness,' in fact. . . . Young doctors, agricultural experts, teachers, intellectual workers generally—think of it!—are torn away from their honest work and forced for a crust of bread to take part in all sorts of mummeries which make every decent man feel ashamed! Some young men cannot be in your service for three years without becoming hypocrites, toadies, sneaks. . . . Is that a good thing? Your Polish superintendents, those abject spies, all those Kazimers and Kaetans, go hunting about on your hundreds of thousands of acres from morning to night, and to please you try to get three skins off one ox. Excuse me, I speak disconnectedly, but that doesn't matter. You don't look upon the simple people as human beings. And even the princes, counts, and bishops who used to come and see you, you looked upon simply as decorative figures, not as living beings. But the worst of all, the thing that most revolts me, is having a fortune of over a million and doing nothing for other people, nothing!"

The princess sat amazed, aghast, offended, not knowing what to say or how to behave. She had never before been spoken to in such a tone. The doctor's unpleasant, angry voice and his clumsy, faltering phrases made a harsh

clattering noise in her ears and her head. Then she began to feel as though the gesticulating doctor was hitting her on the head with his hat.

"It's not true!" she articulated softly, in an imploring voice. "I've done a great deal of good for other people; you know it yourself!"

"Nonsense!" cried the doctor. "Can you possibly go on thinking of your philanthropic work as something genuine and useful, and not a mere mummery? It was a farce from beginning to end; it was playing at loving your neighbour, the most open farce which even children and stupid peasant women saw through! Take for instance your—what was it called?—house for homeless old women without relations, of which you made me something like a head doctor, and of which you were the patroness. Mercy on us! What a charming institution it was! A house was built with parquet floors and a weathercock on the roof; a dozen old women were collected from the villages and made to sleep under blankets and sheets of Dutch linen, and given toffee to eat."

The doctor gave a malignant chuckle into his hat, and went on speaking rapidly and stammering:

"It was a farce! The attendants kept the sheets and the blankets under lock and key, for fear the old women should soil them—'Let the old devil's pepper-pots sleep on the floor.' The old women did not dare to sit down on the beds, to put on their jackets, to walk over the polished floors. Everything was kept for show and hidden away from the old women as though they were thieves, and the old women were clothed and fed on the sly by other people's charity, and prayed to God night and day to be released from their prison and from the canting exhortations of the sleek rascals to whose care you committed them. And what did the managers do? It was simply charming! About twice a week there would be thirty-five thousand messengers to say that the princess—that is,

you—were coming to the home next day. That meant that next day I had to abandon my patients, dress up and be on parade. Very good; I arrive. The old women, in everything clean and new, are already drawn up in a row, waiting. Near them struts the old garrison rat—the superintendent with his mawkish, sneaking smile. The old women yawn and exchange glances, but are afraid to complain. We wait. The junior steward gallops up. Half an hour later the senior steward; then the superintendent of the accounts' office, then another, and then another of them . . . they keep arriving endlessly. They all have mysterious, solemn faces. We wait and wait, shift from one leg to another, look at the clock—all this in monumental silence because we all hate each other like poison. One hour passes, then a second, and then at last the carriage is seen in the distance, and . . . and . . ."

The doctor went off into a shrill laugh and brought out in a shrill voice:

"You get out of the carriage, and the old hags, at the word of command from the old garrison rat, begin chanting: 'The Glory of our Lord in Zion the tongue of man cannot express. . . .' A pretty scene, wasn't it?"

The doctor went off into a bass chuckle, and waved his hand as though to signify that he could not utter another word for laughing. He laughed heavily, harshly, with clenched teeth, as ill-natured people laugh; and from his voice, from his face, from his glittering, rather insolent eyes it could be seen that he had a profound contempt for the princess, for the home, and for the old women. There was nothing amusing or laughable in all that he described so clumsily and coarsely, but he laughed with satisfaction, even with delight.

"And the school?" he went on, panting from laughter. "Do you remember how you wanted to teach peasant children yourself? You must have taught them very well, for very soon the children all ran away, so that they had

to be thrashed and bribed to come and be taught. And you remember how you wanted to feed with your own hands the infants whose mothers were working in the fields. You went about the village crying because the infants were not at your disposal, as the mothers would take them to the fields with them. Then the village foreman ordered the mothers by turns to leave their infants behind for your entertainment. A strange thing! They all ran away from your benevolence like mice from a cat! And why was it? It's very simple. Not because our people are ignorant and ungrateful, as you always explained it to yourself, but because in all your fads, if you'll excuse the word, there wasn't a ha'p'orth of love and kindness! There was nothing but the desire to amuse yourself with living puppets, nothing else. . . . A person who does not feel the difference between a human being and a lap-dog ought not to go in for philanthropy. I assure you, there's a great difference between human beings and lap-dogs!"

The princess's heart was beating dreadfully; there was a thudding in her ears, and she still felt as though the doctor were beating her on the head with his hat. The doctor talked quickly, excitedly, and uncouthly, stammering and gesticulating unnecessarily. All she grasped was that she was spoken to by a coarse, ill-bred, spiteful, and ungrateful man; but what he wanted of her and what he was talking about, she could not understand.

"Go away!" she said in a tearful voice, putting up her hands to protect her head from the doctor's hat; "go away!"

"And how you treat your servants!" the doctor went on, indignantly. "You treat them as the lowest scoundrels, and don't look upon them as human beings. For example, allow me to ask, why did you dismiss me? For ten years I worked for your father and afterwards for you, honestly, without vacations or holidays. I gained the love of all for

more than seventy miles round, and suddenly one fine day I am informed that I am no longer wanted. What for? I've no idea to this day. I, a doctor of medicine, a gentleman by birth, a student of the Moscow University, father of a family—am such a petty, insignificant insect that you can kick me out without explaining the reason! Why stand on ceremony with me? I heard afterwards that my wife went without my knowledge three times to intercede with you for me—you wouldn't receive her. I am told she cried in your hall. And I shall never forgive her for it, never!"

The doctor paused and clenched his teeth, making an intense effort to think of something more to say, very unpleasant and vindictive. He thought of something, and his cold, frowning face suddenly brightened.

"Take your attitude to this monastery!" he said with avidity. "You've never spared anyone, and the holier the place, the more chance of its suffering from your loving-kindness and angelic sweetness. Why do you come here? What do you want with the monks here, allow me to ask you? What is Hecuba to you or you to Hecuba? It's another farce, another amusement for you, another sacrilege against human dignity, and nothing more. Why, you don't believe in the monks' God; you've a God of your own in your heart, whom you've evolved for yourself at spiritualist séances. You look with condescension upon the ritual of the Church; you don't go to mass or vespers; you sleep till midday. . . . Why do you come here? . . . You come with a God of your own into a monastery you have nothing to do with, and you imagine that the monks look upon it as a very great honour. To be sure they do! You'd better ask, by the way, what your visits cost the monastery. You were graciously pleased to arrive here this evening, and a messenger from your estate arrived on horseback the day before yesterday to warn them of your coming. They were the whole day yesterday getting

the rooms ready and expecting you. This morning your advance-guard arrived—an insolent maid, who keeps running across the courtyard, rustling her skirts, pestering them with questions, giving orders. . . . I can't endure it! The monks have been on the lookout all day, for if you were not met with due ceremony, there would be trouble! You'd complain to the bishop! 'The monks don't like me, your holiness; I don't know what I've done to displease them. It's true I'm a great sinner, but I'm so unhappy!' Already one monastery has been in hot water over you. The Father Superior is a busy, learned man; he hasn't a free moment, and you keep sending for him to come to your rooms. Not a trace of respect for age or for rank! If at least you were a bountiful giver to the monastery, one wouldn't resent it so much, but all this time the monks have not received a hundred roubles from you!"

Whenever people worried the princess, misunderstood her, or mortified her, and when she did not know what to say or to do, she usually began to cry. And on this occasion, too, she ended by hiding her face in her hands and crying aloud in a thin treble like a child. The doctor suddenly stopped and looked at her. His face darkened and grew stern.

"Forgive me, Princess," he said in a hollow voice. "I've given way to a malicious feeling and forgotten myself. It was not right."

And coughing in an embarrassed way, he walked away quickly, without remembering to put his hat on.

Stars were already twinkling in the sky. The moon must have been rising on the further side of the monastery, for the sky was clear, soft, and transparent. Bats were flitting noiselessly along the white monastery wall.

The clock slowly struck three quarters, probably a quarter to nine. The princess got up and walked slowly to the gate. She felt wounded and was crying, and she

felt that the trees and the stars and even the bats were pitying her, and that the clock struck musically only to express its sympathy with her. She cried and thought how nice it would be to go into a monastery for the rest of her life. On still summer evenings she would walk alone through the avenues, insulted, injured, misunderstood by people, and only God and the starry heavens would see the martyr's tears. The evening service was still going on in the church. The princess stopped and listened to the singing; how beautiful the singing sounded in the still darkness! How sweet to weep and suffer to the sound of that singing!

Going into her rooms, she looked at her tear-stained face in the glass and powdered it, then she sat down to supper. The monks knew that she liked pickled sturgeon, little mushrooms, Malaga and plain honey-cakes that left a taste of cypress in the mouth, and every time she came they gave her all these dishes. As she ate the mushrooms and drank the Malaga, the princess dreamed of how she would be finally ruined and deserted—how all her stewards, bailiffs, clerks, and maid-servants for whom she had done so much, would be false to her, and begin to say rude things; how people all the world over would set upon her, speak ill of her, jeer at her. She would renounce her title, would renounce society and luxury, and would go into a convent without one word of reproach to anyone; she would pray for her enemies—and then they would all understand her and come to beg her forgiveness, but by that time it would be too late. . . .

After supper she knelt down in the corner before the ikon and read two chapters of the Gospel. Then her maid made her bed and she got into it. Stretching herself under the white quilt, she heaved a sweet, deep sigh, as one sighs after crying, closed her eyes, and began to fall asleep.

In the morning she waked up and glanced at her watch. It was half-past nine. On the carpet near the bed was a

bright, narrow streak of sunlight from a ray which came in at the window and dimly lighted up the room. Flies were buzzing behind the black curtain at the window. "It's early," thought the princess, and she closed her eyes.

Stretching and lying snug in her bed, she recalled her meeting yesterday with the doctor and all the thoughts with which she had gone to sleep the night before: she remembered she was unhappy. Then she thought of her husband living in Petersburg, her stewards, doctors, neighbours, the officials of her acquaintance . . . a long procession of familiar masculine faces passed before her imagination. She smiled and thought, if only these people could see into her heart and understand her, they would all be at her feet.

At a quarter past eleven she called her maid.

"Help me to dress, Dasha," she said languidly. "But go first and tell them to get out the horses. I must set off for Klavdia Nikolaevna's."

Going out to get into the carriage, she blinked at the glaring daylight and laughed with pleasure: it was a wonderfully fine day! As she scanned from her half-closed eyes the monks who had gathered round the steps to see her off, she nodded graciously and said:

"Good-bye, my friends! Till the day after to-morrow."

It was an agreeable surprise to her that the doctor was with the monks by the steps. His face was pale and severe.

"Princess," he said with a guilty smile, taking off his hat, "I've been waiting here a long time to see you. Forgive me, for God's sake. . . . I was carried away yesterday by an evil, vindictive feeling, and I talked . . . nonsense. In short, I beg your pardon."

The princess smiled graciously, and held out her hand for him to kiss. He kissed it, turning red.

Trying to look like a bird, the princess fluttered into the carriage and nodded in all directions. There was a

gay, warm, serene feeling in her heart, and she felt herself that her smile was particularly soft and friendly. As the carriage rolled towards the gates, and afterwards along the dusty road past huts and gardens, past long trains of waggons and strings of pilgrims on their way to the monastery, she still screwed up her eyes and smiled softly. She was thinking there was no higher bliss than to bring warmth, light, and joy wherever one went, to forgive injuries, to smile graciously on one's enemies. The peasants she passed bowed to her, the carriage rustled softly, clouds of dust rose from under the wheels and floated over the golden rye, and it seemed to the princess that her body was swaying not on carriage cushions but on clouds, and that she herself was like a light, transparent little cloud. . . .

"How happy I am!" she murmured, shutting her eyes. "How happy I am!"

WINE

by

Sandor Gergel

SANDOR GERGEL *is a Hungarian novelist and short-story writer. He is the author of an anti-war novel relating his own experience of two years of complete blindness.*

WINE

A Short Story of Hungary

LITTLE Mary is ten years old. Hair and complexion, brown; eyes, blue. A city doctor would say: undernourished. Country folk only say: the thin thing. Little Mary has been head of the family now for two weeks. From five o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock at night. At five o'clock in the morning father and mother are already on their way to the rich farmer's. For the past two weeks they have been working there and the "home" is managed by little Mary.

Sleeping on two old straw mattresses are Hans, nine, Martin, seven, and Julie, four. The two straw mattresses are really only bags of straw-dust, but towards dawn, when the old folks have gotten up from them, it is lovely and comfortable there. Once in a while little Mary has to go away too. She puts on her rags, sticks her feet into the boots tied around with straps; picks up the lead ewer and goes. The ewer is very heavy and the place far, but by six o'clock she is at the railway station. At six o'clock the Pester passenger train comes. It stops there for ten minutes.

Mary is always on time. Even in winter she comes on time, if she is there at all. For it is not always there is something to bring. Last winter she went twice for two weeks. When the old folks went to work. . . . That means they had work twice during the winter, for two weeks at a time. They get paid not in money or even in lard, flour or meat—that comes only once in a long while—but in wine. Two liters of wine is a day's wages. Nowadays

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that's what they pay. . . . The two of them earn four liters of wine daily. A good part of it they drink themselves, particularly when there is nothing to eat in the house. But little Mary takes a four-liter ewer of wine every morning to meet the Pester passenger train. Her thin little voice chirps to meet the inrushing train:

"Wine, please. . . . Fresh, fine wine, please. . . ."

But she is not the only one that waits for the Pester passenger train, chilled to the bone. Big men in boots and with moustaches throw themselves upon the train, enter the cars, run up and down inside them while little Mary has to rely only on the few passengers that come out on the platform for fresh air. She shivers with the cold, her teeth chatter. Occasionally more than necessary when, with her uncanny knowledge of people, she is drawn to someone in particular.

"Uncle, buy some. It is the best wine. . . ."

"Auntie, I wash the ewer every morning with soda, it is clean, buy some. . . ."

"Only ten hellers a glass. . . ."

Sometimes she sells as many as five glasses.

Once, in winter, a man with a great big paunch drank right out of the ewer. He drank almost half the ewer and gave her a whole pengo. Mostly, however, Mary gets only forty or fifty hellers. For this she buys bread in the village, at thirty hellers the kilo.

"Well, little one," the baker said once, "do you take care of the family?"

"Sure. But not for long now."

"Is that so! Till when then?"

But to this Mary did not answer. She only thought of father's curses and the angry whispers of the poor folk: one of these days we'll take these lords by the scruff of the neck!

Only things like this one must not tell the baker or any of the others that have money.

And so she goes every morning and buys bread for the money she gets for wine, smiling confidently.

But the business gets harder and harder. The wine sellers go along with the train now from station to station. They buy themselves tickets, board the train, wake the sleeping ones and offer them drinks. Hardly anyone buys wine at the station. Little Mary stands between the tracks in the rain like a big wet bird. Despair sounds hoarsely in her "Uncle. . . ."

She thinks of the family entrusted to her. Hans, Martin, and Julie will go without bread today again. And, coughing, she lags behind the other wine sellers in her hour-long trot. All the others are grown up, only she is small. But Mary is glad of this. So long as she has to carry the wine to the railway station, it is good: if father or mother were to do it, that would mean they were unemployed and could only sell the remains of the wine. And they would also be coming back with full ewers, curse, and stop to take long draughts. Just as the others do.

Today she has not sold a single glassful. There is not a crumb of bread at home. Trouble presses on her brain, the heavy ewer presses on her shoulder, the deep mud pulls at her boots.

She collects the loose bricks lying about, makes a little pile near the door and gets upon it. That's how she reaches the window sill where the key is hidden. She unlocks the door and then scatters the bricks again. The children are up already. She drags them out of their rags. The older ones tend themselves. The little one she has to wash.

They sit down to the table.

Mary puts the ewer down in the center of the table. She puts a tin plate and spoon in front of each of the children. All fold their hands and repeat their morning prayer.

"There is no bread today," Mary says when the prayers are over.

She swallows a laugh as she had put one over again on Martin. That little godless fellow had announced yesterday:

"If there is no bread again tomorrow, I'm not going to say my prayers."

She pours the wine into the plates. The children fall to and drink hungrily. Julie doesn't feel like drinking the wine. Mary takes her on her lap and smiling slyly talks her into drinking her breakfast. After they are through they get up feeling dizzy, stagger and hiccup.

Rain is pouring. Hans and Martin go to school. Barefoot and hatless.

Mary washes the dishes. She herself had not used either plate or spoon. She drank out of the ewer in deep, heavy draughts. Then she also goes out, her sleeping little sister in her arms. She feels somewhat dizzy, staggers a little and has to lean against the door. She looks about the yard.

Standing in the doorway of their neighbor's house is another little Mary, also ten years old. To distinguish between them the neighbors call her Marilyn.

"I have shipped them off to school," says Mary.

"I too. All three," answers Marilyn and sticks her two little fists under her apron, just as the grown-ups do. She is silent a while, then she asks:

"Did they all have their breakfast?"

"All. But there was no bread again today."

"We had no bread either," Marilyn nods. "And I got no wine."

"I have no bread, darling," Mary says, "but I can give you some wine."

So Marilyn comes over to Mary. They go inside. The ewer of wine stands on the table. Marilyn falls upon it and drinks in deep, heavy draughts. After she is through she holds on to the table.

"I always get dizzy" she says in a murmur, "whenever I drink wine."

"I too. And she always goes to sleep from it," Mary points to the child in her arms.

So they stand there, feeling dizzy, their eyes sad with family troubles. They drowse off. Their heads hang down heavily. They lean over against the table. Then they slide down to the floor. The child in Mary's arms rolls out, almost stifled, on the floor beside them. Mary and Marilyn now let themselves go altogether and the little heads, so heavy with family cares, sink in sleep on the straw mattress.

THE PROTECTOR

by

Marcelo Salinas

MARCELO SALINAS *is a young Cuban writer, some of whose stories Langston Hughes has translated into English.*

THE PROTECTOR

THE man, bending over the long rows, worked rapidly as though in a great hurry to finish. His little boy, scarcely ten years old, went behind him picking up the sweet potatoes and putting them in piles. The Cuban earth was hard and very dry. In spite of the fact that the night was cool, the man was sweating.

"Enough yet?"

The child measured with a glance the piles and answered, "'Bout half a sack."

"Let's fill up then and get goin'. The moon'll be coming out."

While the boy held the sack open, the man threw in the sweet potatoes. From time to time, fearful of being taken by surprise, he looked around on both sides, across the big field, and down toward the road some two hundred meters away.

The sack was over half full. Then the man tied its mouth with a bit of palm fiber, put his knife in his belt, tightened his waist and started to raise the bag.

The little boy, frantic with hunger, gnawed on a root he had picked up.

"Throw that away. When we get to the village, we'll have bread."

The boy obeyed, sure that the promise would be kept. They would sell the sweet potatoes at Justo's store and then they would not only have bread but a piece of candy as well. That's what happened three days ago when they went to steal bananas. That's what had been happening ever since his father had been out of work, almost a month

Translated by Langston Hughes, and reprinted by his permission. From *New Masses*, February 25, 1936.

now. The rural guards hadn't caught them yet. And even if they should catch them he would not be afraid of anything beside his father, not even of the darkness which was the only thing that really frightened him now.

The man, having dragged his sack to a stone wall, put it up, turned and bent his back beneath the load. When he stood up tall with his burden, the heart of the child swelled with pride and admiration. How strong his father was! And how brave!

They took a short cut that the cattle followed and came out through a hole in the wall into the road which ran between two steep slopes like a dry river. They walked very fast, the father panting beneath his load, the little boy beside him, jumping over the bumps in the road.

A rooster crowed, then another and several more answered them. Soon the whole countryside vibrated with their awareness.

"Two o'clock! Soon the moon will be out," thought the thief. And he made up his mind not to rest until he was near the village. There he felt that he would be out of danger.

"Hurry up," he said to the child.

They came to a place where, in a violent curve, the road seemed to end. Above, like a mile-stone near the wall, a big tree spread its shadow.

Suddenly, a man jumped out and planted himself directly in front of them.

"Halt!" he said sternly.

The father and the son stopped. The man with the sack recognized him at once as a private watchman belonging to the plantation he had just robbed.

He stood there with his gun raised. "Ah, you robber! Now, I've got you!"

The prisoner threw his load down as if to run, but the guard said, "Don't move or I'll kill you!" And he cocked his gun.

They stood a moment in silence, face to face, the threatening watchman and the unhappy prisoner overcome by the shame of having been caught. The child clung to the legs of his father, but he was more filled with curiosity than with fear. He did not even suspect that they had been getting their bread and their candy in the wrong way.

"You dirty thief! I've been on your trail a long time!"

From these harsh insults the unfortunate creole felt a wave of blood sting his face. Half-blind, he began to look for the knife at his belt.

"Keep still! . . . Raise your hands!"

The fear of danger overcame him and giving way to discretion, he raised his arms. The guard approached and, as he took the knife away from him, he ordered, "Get ahead, and take care not to try to run away."

Filled with sorrow and despair, the hopeless man began to walk slowly, with the now frightened child beside him. Behind them, with military stride, they could hear the big boots of the guard on the road.

For seven or eight minutes they walked in horrible silence. In the distance the little yellow lights of the village could be seen.

The prisoner stopped suddenly as if rooted to the earth. "Watchman," he said, without turning his head, "I will not go into that village as a prisoner. If you want to, you can kill me, but I will not go in like this."

The guard had stopped, too, very near the prisoner. For a moment he was troubled by the latter's attitude. Then, thinking it was a trick to mislead him, he reasserted himself. "What do you mean, you won't go in? I bet you will!"

"No, I won't."

There was a terrific pause. One of those fleeting moments that concentrate a whole tragedy. The prisoner turned around and stood looking resolutely at his captor.

The little boy, with his eyes very wide open, did not fully understand what was happening.

The guard cursed and raised his gun, but he dropped it without firing. "Get away! Get away quick!" He yelled. "I don't want to commit murder!"

And as if he himself was escaping from the danger of his own wrath, the watchman gave a half turn and started off, almost running, in the direction from which they had come. Soon the sound of his footsteps was lost in the night.

Then the unfortunate stealer of sweet potatoes sat down on the grass at the edge of the road, sighed deeply and hid his face in his hands. Close behind him, seeking cover from the dampness of the night, the child snuggled.

They remained like that a long time: the man very still with his hands to his temples as if he were afraid they were going to burst, the child close to him seeking protection from the cold.

"Papa, let's go."

The man seemed to awaken.

"Yes, let's go."

But he made no move to get up, so the child took his chin gently in his hands.

"Papa!"

As the father turned his head, a ray of moonlight through the branches of the trees lit up his face, and you saw that his eyes were bathed in tears.

"Little boy! My little boy!" He embraced him tenderly, with all his soul, and a deep sob trembled in his throat.

The child threw his arms around the man's neck. He put his soft little cheek against the rough cheek of his father and quietly, very gently, he whispered in his ear, "Don't cry, papa! When I get big, I'll protect you. You'll see how *nobody'll* bother you then."

AWAKENING

by

Isaac Babel

ISAAC BABEL, *born 1894 in Odessa, of Jewish middle-class parentage, dates the beginning of his literary career to encouragement from Maxim Gorky, whom he met in 1916. He served in the army on the Rumanian front; later in the army in the north against Yudenich; then as a reporter on Petrograd and Tiflis papers, as a worker in a printing shop, etc. His best-known short stories, which began to appear in 1924, deal with the civil war in Russia, and particularly with Budenny's Red Cavalry.*

AWAKENING

ALL the people of our class: brokers, shopkeepers, and employees in banks and shipping-offices, had their children taught music. Our parents, who saw no bright prospects before them, devised a lottery, which they built up on the bones of little folk. This madness attacked Odessa much more violently than other towns. And sure enough, for years our town supplied the concert platforms of the world with infant prodigies. It was from Odessa that Mischa Elman, Zimbalist and Gabrilovich came, and Yasha Heifetz began with us, too.

As soon as a boy had reached four or five years of age, his mother took the puny little creature to Mr. Zagurski. Zagurski kept a factory of infant prodigies, a factory of Jewish dwarfs in lace collars and patent-leather slippers. He discovered them in the slums of the Moldavanka quarter, in the evil smelling yards of the Old Bazaar. Zagurski set them on the right track and then delivered them over to Professor Auer in St. Petersburg. A mighty harmony dwelt in the souls of these miserable mites with blue, swollen heads. They became famous musicians. One day my father decided to join in the race. Although somewhat over the infant prodigy age—I was almost fourteen—I was so small and puny that I could easily pass as an eight year old child. All our hopes hung on this.

I was taken to Zagurski. Out of respect for my grandfather he agreed to teach me for a ruble a lesson, an extremely low rate. My grandfather, Levy Idzhok, was at once the laughing stock and the pride of the town. He walked about in a top hat, with his feet bound in linen strips instead of socks, and dispersed people's doubts upon

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the most obscure points. He was applied to for information on Gobelin tapestries, on the reasons for the Jacobins' betrayal of Robespierre, on the production of artificial silk, and the exact method of making a Caesarean section. My grandfather could answer all these questions. Out of respect for his learning and madness Zagurski charged us no more than a ruble a lesson. And the trouble he took with me he took solely from fear of my grandfather, for it was clearly a waste of time. Sounds like iron filings crept out of my violin, sounds that cut me to the very heart, but my father would not give up. At home the talk was all of Mischa Elman, who had been exempted from military service by the Tsar himself. Zimbalist, according to my father's information, had been presented to the King of England, and had played in Buckingham Palace; Gabrilovich's parents had bought two houses in St. Petersburg. These infant prodigies had brought their parents wealth. My father would have borne poverty patiently, but glory was a necessity to him.

"It could not be," whispered the people who dined at his expense, "it could not be that the grandson of such a man. . . ."

I had something quite different in mind. While I played my exercises I placed some work of Turgenyev's or Dumas' on the music-stand before me and devoured page after page as I sawed away at the violin. In the day time I spun yarns to the neighbors' children, and spent the night committing them to paper.

Story-telling was an hereditary passion in our family. My grandfather, who became a little crazy in his old age, had been writing a story entitled *The Headless John* all his life. I took after him.

Three times a week I had to trail off, weighed down with my violin and music, to Zagurski's. Against the wall, awaiting their turn, sat a row of Jewesses in a state of almost hysterical animation. The violins they clutched

on their weak knees were much larger than those who were to perform on them in Buckingham Palace.

The door of the holy of holies would open and freckled children with large heads on thin necks like stalks of flowers and an epileptic flush on their cheeks would emerge. The door closed again after swallowing up the next dwarf. On the other side of the wall the teacher with the carrotty curls, the bow-tie, and the thin legs, chanted and conducted till he was ready to burst. The manager of this monstrous lottery, he populated the Moldavanka quarter and the black alleys of the Old Bazaar with the spectres of *pizzicato* and *cantilena.* Later this polish was to be heightened to an infernal brilliance by old Professor Auer.

I had nothing in common with this sect. Though I was a dwarf like them, I hearkened to a different inspiration in the voice of my ancestors.

The first stage was hard for me. One day I left the house loaded with my violin in its case, my music, and twelve rubles, the fee for the month's lessons. I went along Nejin Street, and should have turned into Dvorianskaya Street to get to Zagurski's, but instead, I went up Tirasspol Street, and found myself in the port. The hours appointed for my lesson flew by at the docks. That was the beginning of my liberation. Zagurski's waiting-room never saw me again. More important business occupied my mind now. Together with a playmate of mine named Nemanov, I visited an old sailor, Mr. Trottyburn, on the steamship *Kensington.* Nemanov was a year younger than I, but from the age of eight he had been engaged in the most complicated trading operations in the world. He had a genius for trade and fulfilled all that he promised. Now he is a New York millionaire, a director of the General Motors Company, a firm no less powerful than Ford's. Nemanov took me about with him everywhere simply because I obeyed him implicitly. He bought the tobacco

pipes smuggled in by Mr. Trottyburn. These pipes were made by the old sailor's brother in Lincoln.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Trottyburn to us, "mark my words, children should be made by hand. . . . To smoke a factory-made pipe is like sticking a syringe in your mouth. . . . Have you ever heard of Benvenuto Cellini? There was a real craftsman. My brother in Lincoln could tell you all about him. My brother doesn't believe in poking his nose into anyone's business. But he's a rooted conviction that children and pipes ought to be made by one's own hands and not by strangers. We can't but agree with him, gentlemen . . ."

Nemanov used to resell Trottyburn's pipes to bank-directors, foreign consuls and wealthy Greeks. He made a profit of a hundred per cent on them.

The pipes of the Lincoln craftsman breathed poetry. There was a thought in each of them, a drop of eternity. A yellow eye shone in every mouthpiece, every case was lined with satin. I tried to imagine how Matthew Trotty-burn, the last pipe-craftsman, the man who had withstood the march of things, lived away over in Old England.

"We cannot but agree with him, gentlemen, that children should be made by hand. . . ."

The heavy breakers at the jetty divided me more and more from a home that smelt of onions and of Jewish fate. From the docks I migrated to the breakwater. There was a little sandy patch inhabited by the boys from Primorskaya Street. There they could play from morning till night without putting on their trousers; they dived under the rafts, stole coconuts for their dinner, and waited till the string of barges laden with water-melons would arrive from Kherson and Kamenka and the melons could be split on the capstans.

To be able to swim became the dream of my life. I shrank from admitting to these bronzed lads that although I had been born in Odessa, I had never set eyes on the sea

until I was ten and at the age of fourteen was unable to swim.

How late I learnt the most essential things! In my early years I sat nailed to the Talmud, living the life of a sage, and I was almost grown-up when I began to climb trees.

Swimming proved beyond my powers. The phobia of my ancestors, Spanish rabbis and Frankfurt money-changers, drew me inexorably down to the bottom of the sea. The water would not support me. Soused with salt water, I returned to the shore, to my violin and music. I was attached to these witnesses of my crimes and dragged them everywhere with me. The struggle of the rabbis and the sea continued until the sea-god of those parts, one Ephim Nikitich Smolich, a proof-reader on the *Odessa News*, took pity on me. In that athletic bosom dwelt a great compassion for the small Jewish boy. He was the leader of a mob of rickety weaklings. Nikitich had gathered them from the bug-ridden tenements in the Moldavanka quarter, had led them to the sea, rolled them in the sand, drilled them, dived with them, taught them to sing songs, and, roasting alongside them in the direct rays of the sun, told them stories of fishermen and animals. To grown-ups Nikitich explained that he was a lover of philosophy and nature. Nikitich's tales made the Jewish children cry with laughter; they squealed and cuddled up to him like puppies. The sun bespattered them with freckles that melted into one another, freckles the color of a lizard.

The old man silently watched my single-handed fight with the breakers out of the corner of his eye. Seeing that there was no hope of my ever learning to swim, he included me in the circle of those to whom he had opened his heart. His whole heart was laid open to us and it was a merry heart, that knew neither pride nor greed nor worry. With copper-colored shoulders, the head of an aging gladiator, the bronzed legs—a little bowed, he lay

in our midst behind the breakwater—the sovereign of those melon-strewn, kerosene-tainted waters. I came to love this man as only a boy constantly suffering from hysteria and headaches can love an athlete. I would not leave him alone; I was always trying to do something for him. "Don't fuss about so much," he said to me. "Strengthen your nerves first. Then swimming will come naturally to you. . . . What do you mean by saying the water won't hold you up. . . . Why shouldn't it hold you up?"

When he saw how hard I tried, Nikitich singled me out of all his pupils and asked me to come and see him in his clean, spacious attic with its straw matting. There he showed me his dogs, hedgehog, tortoise and pigeons. By way of exchange for all these riches I brought him the tragedy I had written the day before.

"I knew it. I knew you wrote," said Nikitich. "You've got that sort of a glance. You never look anywhere. . . ."

He read my manuscript, gave a twitch of his shoulders, passed his hand over his stiff grey curls, and walked the length of the attic.

"One must come to the conclusion," he said very softly, pausing after every word, "that you have the divine spark in you. . . ."

We went out into the street. The man stood still, thumped his stick on the pavement and fixed his eyes on me.

"What is it you lack? . . . Youth is no hindrance, it'll pass with the years. . . . It's the feeling for nature that you haven't got."

He pointed with his stick to a low tree with a reddish trunk.

"What tree is that?"

I did not know.

"What grows on this bush?"

I did not know that either. We were passing through

the square in Alexander Avenue. The old man pointed out all the trees with his stick, caught me by the shoulder whenever a bird flew by, and made me listen to the different bird-notes.

"What bird is singing now?"

I could give no reply. The names of trees and birds, the division of them into species, where they were flying, where the sun rises, when the dew falls the heaviest, all these things were hidden from me.

"And yet you dare to write? . . . A man who doesn't live in nature like a stone or an animal lives in it, will never write two lines worth anything. . . . Your landscapes are like descriptions of stage scenery. Devil take me, but what were your parents thinking about for fourteen years?"

What were they thinking about? . . . About unpaid I. O. U.'s and the mansions bought by Mischa Elman. . . . I did not tell Nikitich this. I held my tongue.

At dinner-time, at home, I would not touch the food. It would not go down my throat.

"The feeling for nature," I thought. "My God, why did it never enter my head before? . . . Where can I find someone to interpret the different bird-notes for me and the names of trees? Let me see, what do I know about them? I might possibly recognize a lilac-bush and then only when it's in blossom. Lilac and acacia. Deribassovskaya and Greek Streets are lined with acacias. . . ."

At dinner-time father told us a new story about Yascha Heifetz. He had met Mendelsohn, Yascha's uncle. The boy, it seemed, was being paid eight hundred rubles for every appearance. How much does that work out at fifteen concerts a month?

I worked it out. It came to twelve thousand rubles a month. As I multiplied and carried four in my head, my glance wandered to the window. Across the cement yard my music teacher, Mr. Zagurski, was marching, leaning

on his stick. He came on with the breeze gently swelling his Inverness cape, his auburn ringlets escaping from under the brim of his soft hat. He was none too soon. Over three months had gone by since my violin first rested on the sand behind the breakwater. . . .

Zagurski was approaching the front door. I rushed for the back door, but it had been boarded up for fear of thieves only the day before. Then I locked myself in the lavatory. In half-an-hour's time the whole family had assembled outside my door. The women were crying. Aunt Bobka rubbed her greasy shoulders against the door wailing and sobbing. My father was silent. Then he spoke, more quietly and distinctly than I had ever heard him speak before:

"I'm an officer, am I?" said my father. "I have an estate. I hunt. The peasants pay me rent, don't they? I have sent my son to a military school. I do not need to worry about my son any more."

He ceased speaking. The women snuffled. Then the door of the lavatory was shaken by a terrific blow. My father threw himself upon it bodily. He ran back a few paces and rushed at it again.

"I'm an officer!" he shrieked. "I hunt, do I? I'll kill him. . . . It's the end. . . ."

The latch sprang off the door, but there still remained the bolt, which hung by one nail. The women rolled on the floor, trying to catch my father by the legs; he tore himself free; he was in a frenzy. An old woman came tottering out at last to the noisy scene. It was my father's mother.

"My child," she said to him in Yiddish, "our sorrow is great. It knows no bounds. There has been all but bloodshed in our house. I do not want to see blood in my house. . . ."

My father groaned. I heard his footsteps receding. The bolt was still hanging by the last nail.

I sat in my fortress till night-fall. When everyone had gone to bed, Aunt Bobka led me away to my grandmother's. We had a long way to go. The moonlight lay numb on unknown bushes, on nameless trees. . . . An invisible bird gave a whistle and faded into silence, perhaps into slumber. . . . What bird was it? What was it called? Did the dew fall of an evening? . . . Where did the constellation of the Great Bear lie? Where did the sun rise?

We went along Post Office Street. Aunt Bobka held me firmly by the hand so that I could not run away. She was quite right. I was thinking of escape.

CANDY-MAN BEECHUM

by

Erskine Caldwell

ERSKINE CALDWELL (*1903–*), *born in Georgia, the son of a Presbyterian pastor, is best known for his novel* Tobacco Road *and for the play based upon it. A somewhat irregular education, made necessary by the migratory life of his family, included three years at the University of Virginia and the University of Pennsylvania. Then he took up newspaper work. He resides in Maine, when not in California, Georgia, Virginia, or Florida. He writes chiefly of the poor whites in the Southern mountains, especially in Georgia. His stories have appeared in many magazines—among them* The American Mercury, Esquire, New Masses, Scribner's Magazine, Story, Vanity Fair; *efforts to suppress his second novel,* God's Little Acre (*1933*), *made him better known, but the quality of his work needed no such assistance.*

CANDY-MAN BEECHUM

OWLS in the trees began to take on life. Those whooing birds were glad to see the setting sun. The black boy in the mule yard scratched his head and watched the sun go down. If he didn't have all those mules to feed, and if he had had a two-bit piece in his pocket, he'd have liked to tag along with Candy-Man. It was Saturday night, and there'd be a barrelful of catfish frying in town that evening. He wished he had some of that good-smelling cat.

"Before the time aint long," Little Bo said, "I'm going to get me a gal."

"Just be sure she aint Candy-Man's, boy, and I'll give you a helping hand."

He flung the other leg over the split-rail fence and struck out for the high land. Ten miles from the swamps to the top of the ridge, and his trip would be done. The bushes whipped around his legs, where his legs had been. He couldn't be waiting for the back-strike of no swamp-country bushes. Up the log road, and across the bottom land, taking three corn rows at a stride, Candy-Man Beechum was on his way.

There were some colored boys taking their time in the big road. He was up on them before they had time to turn their heads around.

"Make way for these flapping feet, boys," he shouted. "Here I come!"

"Where you going, Candy-Man?"

They had to do a lot of running to keep up with him.

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They had to hustle to match those legs four feet long. He made their breath come short.

"Somebody asked me where I'm going," Candy-Man said. "I got a yellow gal, and I'm on my way to pay her some attention."

"You'd better toot your horn, Candy-Man, before you open her door. The yellow gals don't like to be taken by surprise."

"Boy, you're tooting the truth, except that you don't know the why-for of what you're saying. Candy-Man's gal always waits for him right at the door."

"Saturday-night bucks sure have to hustle along. They have to strike pay before the Monday-morning whistle starts whipping their ears."

The boys fell behind, stopping to blow and wheeze. There was no keeping up, on a Saturday night, with the seven-foot mule skinner on his way.

The big road was too crooked and curvy for Candy-Man. He struck out across the fields, headed like a plumb-line for a dishful of frying catfish. The lights of the town came up to meet him in the face like a swarm of lightning-bugs. Eight miles to town, and two more to go, and he'd be rapping on that yellow gal's door.

Back in the big road, when the big road straightened out, Candy-Man swung into town. The old folks riding, and the young ones walking, they all made way for those flapping feet. The mules to the buggies and the sports in the middle of the road all got aside to let him through.

"What's your big hurry, Candy-Man?"

"Take care my dust don't choke you blind, niggers. I'm on my way."

"Where to, Candy-Man?"

"I got a gal what's waiting on her toes. She don't like for to be kept waiting."

"Better slow down and cool those heels, Candy-Man,

because you're coming to the white-folks' town. They don't like niggers stepping on their toes."

"When the sun goes down, I'm on my own. I can't be stopping to see what color people be."

The old folks clucked, and the mules began to trot. They didn't like the way that big coon talked.

"How about taking me along, Candy-Man?" the young bucks begged. "I'd like to grab me a chicken off a henhouse roost."

"Where I'm going I'm the cock of the walk. I gouge my spurs in all strange feathers. Stay away, black boy, stay away."

Down the street he went, sticking to the middle of the road. The sidewalks couldn't hold him when he was in a hurry like that. A plateful of frying catfish, and he would be on his way. That yellow gal was waiting, and there was no time to lose. Eight miles covered, and two short ones to go. That saw-mill fireman would have to pull on that Monday-morning whistle like it was the rope to the promised land.

The smell of the fish took him straight to the fish-house door. Maybe they were mullets, but they smelled just as good. There wasn't enough time to order up a special dish of fins.

He had his hand on the restaurant door. When he had his supper, he would be on his way. He could see that yellow gal waiting for him only a couple of miles away.

All those boys were sitting at their meal. The room was full of hungry people just like him. The stove was full of frying fish, and the barrel was only half-way used. There was enough good eating for a hundred hungry men.

He still had his hand on the fish-house door, and his nose was soaking it in. If he could have his way about it, some of these days he was going to buy a barrel of catfish and eat them every one.

"What's your hurry, Candy-Man?"

"No time to waste, white-boss. Just let me be."

The night policeman snapped open the handcuffs, and reached for his arms. Candy-Man stepped away.

"I reckon I'd better lock you up. It'll save a lot of trouble. I'm getting tired of chasing fighting niggers all over town."

"I never hurt a body in all my life, white-boss. And I sure don't pick fights. You must have the wrong nigger, white-boss. You sure has got me wrong. I'm just passing through for to see my gal."

"I reckon I'll play safe and lock you up till Monday morning just the same. Reach out your hands for these cuffs, nigger."

Candy-Man stepped away. His yellow gal was on his mind. He didn't feel like passing her up for no iron-bar jail. He stepped away.

"I'll shoot you down, nigger. One more step, and I'll blast away."

"White-boss, please just let me be. I won't even stop to get my supper, and I'll shake my legs right out of town. Because I just got to see my gal before the Monday-morning sun comes up."

Candy-Man stepped away. The night policeman threw down the handcuffs and jerked out his gun. He pulled the trigger at Candy-Man, and Candy-Man fell down.

"There wasn't no cause for that, white-boss. I'm just a big black nigger with itching feet. I'd a heap rather be traveling than standing still."

The people came running, but some of them turned around and went the other way. Some stood and looked at Candy-Man while he felt his legs to see if they could hold him up. He still had two miles to go before he could reach the top of the ridge.

The people crowded around, and the night police-

man put away his gun. Candy-Man tried to get up so he could be getting on down the road. That yellow gal of his was waiting for him at her door, straining on the tips of her toes.

"White-boss, I sure am sorry you had to go and shoot me down. I never bothered white-folks, and they sure oughtn't bother me. But there aint much use in living if that's the way it's going to be. I reckon I'll just have to blow out the light and fade away. Just reach me a blanket so I can cover my skin and bones."

"Shut up, nigger," the white-boss said. "If you keep on talking, I'll just have to pull out my gun again and hurry you on."

The people drew back, so they would not stand too close. The night policeman put his hand on the butt of his gun, where it would be handy in case.

"If that's the way it's to be, then make way for Candy-Man Beechum, because here I come."

MRS. KENT

by

Robert Smith

ROBERT SMITH *was born in Boston in 1905 and studied at Brown University. His stories have appeared in* Hound and Horn, Esquire, Story, *etc., and in the 1933 anthology of the O. Henry Memorial Committee.*

MRS. KENT

MRS. KENT, bulging fatly from her corset and garters, stood before the long mirror in her own bedroom, and brushed with grim vigor at the sparse graying hank of her hair. The window near her was open and an infrequent breeze puffed the long curtain faintly. The window gave on an asphalt court with a picket fence beyond it and a vacant lot with a big For Sale sign in the center. In the noon sun, the sign cast a brief shadow where a fat tiger cat drowsed. Mrs. Kent could see him. Their apartment was on the third floor.

As she turned to put hairpins in her mouth, some movement outside caught her eye. She turned quickly in time to see a boy with a stick creeping on tiptoe toward Peter, the cat. For a moment she was too horrified to move. Then she spit all the hairpins into her hand and, clutching the kimono in front of her, she leaned to the window.

"Go away!" she screamed. "Go away!"

The boy, startled, turned a small narrow face toward her for a brief instant, looking directly into her eyes. His own eyes were little dead black holes. Then he was gone, scuttling away like a roach in the light.

Mrs. Kent, her exasperation not half spent, clung to the window frame and gazed down in horror.

"Oh, dear heaven," she gasped. "Dear!"

She slipped her arms into her kimono and then, bending close to the screen, she called:

"Kitty! Here kitty, kitty, kitty! Here kitty! Kitty, kitty, kitty!"

The cat came awake at once, uncoiling lazily, and then,

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recognizing the source of the call, trotted toward the backstairs, tail erect. Mrs. Kent went to open the back door for him; and when he slid in she picked him up and held him close for a moment, stroking and consoling him. He struggled out of her arms finally and she poured him some cream. Then she went to look out the window again, as if she might pick up some sign of the boy. She tried to remember which way he had gone.

"That awful, awful face," she whispered.

The gentle bong of the living-room clock came to her. She hurried into the bedroom to finish her hair, whispering frequently to herself. She put on a flowered gown that made her seem rather tall and a hat that was not new. She took her string gloves and a plain white purse and started out. As she opened the front door, Peter slid out ahead of her and scurried down the stairs.

"Peter!" she called. But he was gone toward the cellar; and when she reached the lobby there was no sign of him.

"Oh dear!" she whispered.

Then she lifted her chin slightly and strode out, down the three steps, with a brief survey of the street, and started toward the car tracks. The sun was hot, glinting from the cement and quivering up from the asphalt. Two men went by with their coats on their arms and sweat darkening their shirts. Mrs. Kent could feel the moisture beginning to gather on her face; and her gown stuck to her.

The car stop was a post with a white band on it. It was in the direct sun with no tree or building near enough to make a shadow. Mrs. Kent stopped, patting her chin with her handkerchief, breathless. She looked for a policeman, so she might report the boy who had stalked Peter. There was one far up the street, at the corner, waving autos on. It was uphill in the sun and Mrs. Kent did not feel equal to it. She gazed far up the tracks for the street car that did not come. She fluttered the handkerchief weakly to fan her face.

Finally the car came and Mrs. Kent climbed aboard with great effort, to sink puffing in her seat. She had only a few blocks to go, and most people would have walked; but it didn't seem right to Mrs. Kent to walk from her own nice apartment into the slums.

She got off at a dreary corner at the bottom of a long slope. There was a vacant store with grimy windows and in the doorway half a dozen little boys were playing a game with cards they dropped fluttering to the walk. They kept screaming at each other:

"Ya muzzler!"

"Ya dope ya! Gida-a-aht!"

Mrs. Kent, descending without grace from the street car, eyed them dubiously and kept clear of them as she went by. She made her way down the crowded hot street. These people all seemed to live on the sidewalk or on their stoops; and Mrs. Kent had to pick a path through little groups that fell silent as she passed. Boys were knocking rubber balls against the walls of houses and frequently Mrs. Kent paused to let a ball bounce in front of her. Girls of all ages chased in the middle of the street or lounged on the hot stairways, often showing their gray and tattered underclothes. A big girl in green jostled against Mrs. Kent as she struggled with a small boy for a stick.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Kent. But the children did not see her and she hurried on, shaking her head angrily.

Number 115 was a doorway about ten steps above the street. The door was wide open and the hallway was in darkness except that the beginning of a staircase was visible. There were three dirty little girls on the steps playing jacks. They took up most of the steps; and Mrs. Kent, after pausing for them to move, had to make her way around them. At the top of the steps a thin man in his undershirt was leaning against the doorjamb. Could that be he? thought Mrs. Kent. She glanced at him and he very carefully avoided meeting her gaze, his pale eyes

staring vacantly ahead. She hurried in quickly, excited and a little frightened. If that had been he . . . the agitator! And if he had known . . .!

The stairs inside were creaky and dim. On the walls and woodwork hung a smell of stale grease, a sweetish smell that had grown old and decayed. It was a familiar odor now to Mrs. Kent. She labored up the staircase. There were doors at each landing, all with round holes where the locks should have been and light shining through. On each floor the toilet door stood open, giving out a smell that made Mrs. Kent hold her breath. She was puffing and nearly blinded with sweat when she reached the top floor. It was darker up here and only light through a square of crinkled glass showed the Rolfe's door. Mrs. Kent paused outside for a long moment, getting her breath, tucking wet strands of hair beneath her hat. A growing sense of triumph gladdened her. Now! She rapped briefly on the glass. There was no movement inside, although she could hear a baby fretting. She rapped again; and finally someone stirred. The door, which had no latch or knob, swung back noiselessly. A little girl with solemn black eyes faced her. She stared, frightened, and gave Mrs. Kent no greeting. Then without turning her head or changing her expression she shouted:

"Ma!"

There was no answer; and the little girl did not move from the doorway. Mrs. Kent pushed the door back a little farther.

"All right, dear," she said, authoritatively. "Mother expects me."

The girl gave ground and Mrs. Kent came in. The girl still faced her, staring.

"Ma!" she yelled again. "It's the welfare lady!"

There was a sudden movement in the next room and the baby began to yell. Mrs. Rolfe appeared. She looked just like the girl, except that she was leaner and more

hollow-eyed. She wore a wrinkled flimsy Mother Hubbard and had no shoes on. She seemed to glide across the floor, the long garment almost hiding her feet, and when she stood still her stockings turned up. She smiled wanly, showing only three or four teeth.

"Hello, Mrs. Kent," she said in a flat voice.

"Tend to the little fellow first, Mrs. Rolfe," said Mrs. Kent. "I can wait."

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head.

"No," she breathed. "He's all right. He always yells."

Mrs. Kent smiled very determinedly.

"No, no," she snapped. "Don't let him cry so. See what he wants. I'll just wait."

She sat down on a chair without any back, setting her mouth. But Mrs. Rolfe sat down opposite her, folding her blue-white hands quietly in her lap.

"No," she said. "He cries all the time."

Mrs. Kent pressed her lips together in exasperation, then she sighed heavily, dabbing at her moist chin with her soggy handkerchief. Mrs. Rolfe waited for her to speak. The girl made off and there was scuffling and whispering in the kitchen where the other children were. The baby's cries subsided gradually.

"Now," said Mrs. Kent. "I've a number of questions I must ask."

Mrs. Rolfe lowered her eyes.

"First of all, about the money you're getting. You still feel it's not sufficient?"

Mrs. Kent's tone made the question rhetorical. Mrs. Rolfe barely nodded.

"Well," said Mrs. Kent. "I want you to understand this. The money you are getting is allowed on the basis of having one child. The others . . . we cannot . . . the State, that is, certainly cannot undertake to give its sanction to such things. I mean by that, the ones born before you and Mr. Rolfe. . . ."

Mrs. Rolfe lifted pained eyes.

"They have to eat," she murmured.

"They have to eat. Of course," said Mrs. Kent. "But that is something that should have been considered. You must see that the State, if it were to recognize, that is, seem to make it legal—such things—well, you can readily see. It would lead to all sorts of things. It's just impossible. There are homes of course. But . . . well, I'm sure you can see."

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head wearily but did not look up. She unfolded her hands and plucked at her faded apron. Mrs. Kent looked around the dingy room. There seemed to be new dark streaks on the walls as if water were seeping down inside the paper. There was no carpet but the bare floor was unpainted where a carpet had been. The light fixture was a green knotted cord with an unshaded bulb.

"And I'm wondering," Mrs. Kent went on," if we're being just as careful as we could be. So many simple meals may now be prepared. I mean, for very little. And just as good in every way—nourishing, that is. We mustn't pamper ourselves you know."

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head without looking up.

"And then," Mrs. Kent went on, "I understand you have been keeping a cat. Now I shouldn't need to tell you that the State is in no position to give relief to families that can afford cats—for certainly. . . . Well, such an unnecessary expense simply can't be permitted."

Mrs. Rolfe looked up quickly, and her eyes were moist.

"That cat just come," she said. "It eats only scraps. And mice. It ain't no expense. The kids would die without that cat."

Mrs. Kent's mouth made a firm straight line.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be quite definite," she said. "Keeping that cat would be sufficient grounds. We should be forced to discontinue relief. I'm very sorry."

Mrs. Rolfe's head drooped a trifle more.

"Is that clear?" said Mrs. Kent.

Mrs. Rolfe nodded slightly.

Mrs. Kent cleared her throat and the corners of her mouth twitched a little. Her eyes brightened.

"And now," she said, "About Mr. Rolfe. . . ."

Her tone made Mrs. Rolfe look up quickly.

"What about him?" she whispered.

"Why," said Mrs. Kent with studied innocence, "that's precisely what I wish to know. What about him? Do you hear from him?"

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head dully.

"And of course he's not in town? You don't know where he is?"

"I ain't heard."

"I see." Mrs. Kent paused again, a hint of triumph in her eyes. "Of course you understand why I'm interested?"

Mrs. Rolfe raised her eyes, but did not answer.

"Mr. Rolfe," said Mrs. Kent, "who can't seem to find work of any sort, has found time to go stirring up trouble. And I think he will find that he has stirred up a good deal. He has got himself mixed up with these anarchists and bolsheviks up at Haverhill. Perhaps you read about it. Two were killed."

Mrs. Kent was practically out of breath. Her nostrils were dilated. Mrs. Rolfe did not stir or make a sound.

"Well," said Mrs. Kent, "you have no idea where he can be? You're sure he hasn't been around here?"

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head again.

"The police would like to talk with him," said Mrs. Kent.

Still Mrs. Rolfe showed no emotion. Mrs. Kent took a deep breath and studied how best to reveal what she had to say.

There were sudden thumping footsteps on the stairs; and Mrs. Kent frowned in annoyance. The door banged open, admitting a boy about sixteen. He had on khaki

trousers and an undershirt. His face was white as pie-dough and his arms were lank and white as peeled sticks. He stopped short on seeing Mrs. Kent and then dropped his head sulkily and trudged toward the kitchen.

"Anything to eat, ma?" he asked.

"There may be some bread. If the kids haven't eat it."

The boy stopped and looked back, his brooding eyes resting for a moment on Mrs. Kent.

"I don't suppose there's any butter or anything?"

"No," said Mrs. Rolfe.

"My God!" said the boy. "I thought there'd be something to eat. I'll kill those damn kids. . . ."

"Billy!" Mrs. Rolfe gasped.

The boy pulled his mouth down at the corners and started back for the kitchen again. His shoulder blades were like wings on his back. He went through the door and they heard him banging around in the kitchen, opening drawers and shifting pans. The scuffling and whispering grew louder.

"You God damn chiselers!" the boy's voice said.

"Billy!" Mrs. Rolfe cried, half-turning.

Mrs. Kent shifted in her chair.

"Isn't that young fellow old enough to be working?" she demanded. "Something on part time?"

Mrs. Rolfe shook her head.

"He mustn't work," she said. "He ruptured himself."

"He what?"

"Ruptured," said Mrs. Rolfe. "Down here."

Mrs. Kent turned crimson, her face and neck and the V of her chest.

"Oh," she said.

She was annoyed and angry at the interruption. She had forgotten how she meant to start. She got up, slightly confused, and began to unstick her dress where she had been sitting on it. The kitchen door opened and Billy

stalked through and out, trotting down the stairs. Mrs. Kent waited; and Mrs. Rolfe studied her hands.

"Perhaps," Mrs. Kent began at last, "perhaps you may be surprised to know that Mr. Rolfe has been seen—that we have reason to believe. . . ."

The effect on Mrs. Rolfe was electric and Mrs. Kent felt a sort of grim pleasure. The little woman straightened and stared, wide-eyed.

"Who seen him?" she demanded.

Mrs. Kent tried to determine whether the woman was surprised or frightened.

"That doesn't matter," she said, biting her words off. "What I'm here to tell you is that unless you give us some definite help in locating this man your name must come off the relief rolls at once."

Patches of color showed on Mrs. Rolfe's wan face and tears stood in her eyes. Her lips trembled; and it was several seconds before she could talk.

"I don't know where he is," she muttered.

"Come now," said Mrs. Kent. "Certainly you must have some idea where he is. You can't expect us to believe. . . . I mean it simply isn't normal for a man with a family. The boy, perhaps. He must have seen him."

There was real terror in the woman's eyes now.

"He ain't seen him. There ain't none of us seen him. We don't know where he is."

"Well, I'm afraid you must make some effort to find him. The State is putting it right up to you, Mrs. Rolfe. If you are to continue to receive aid you must help us find this trouble-maker. We are determined to put a stop to his activities."

Mrs. Rolfe's face now was whiter than ever. Her bloodless lips were a thin line.

"I ain't going to see Frank in jail," she said, "no matter what."

"Very well," said Mrs. Kent. She turned briskly away,

then paused, expecting some word from Mrs. Rolfe. But the little woman got up silently and padded ahead of her toward the door. Mrs. Kent flushed angrily, then bustled out.

"Be careful of the stairs," Mrs. Rolfe murmured.

Mrs. Kent said nothing. She went down slowly, holding tight to the banister. These people! She thought. They needed a lesson!

She blinked in the bright light outside. The thin man had not moved from the door and she had to pick her way through the little girls again. She glanced back at the man. No. Surely not standing there so boldly. She hurried up the street, through and around the little gatherings, avoiding the scampering children. A big boy in his undershirt ran on to the sidewalk ahead of her, after a ball. It was Billy. He turned and threw the ball far down the street, yelling as he did so. Mrs. Kent had an inspiration. She hurried up to him.

"You're the Rolfe boy, aren't you?" she said.

He turned and glared at her suspiciously.

"Yeh," he said.

She made herself as pleasant as she could.

"I wonder if you kids wouldn't like some ice cream," she said. "It's so hot."

His face brightened at once.

"Sure," he said. "We never get none."

Mrs. Kent opened her purse and took some dimes from it. She dropped them into his grimy hand.

"There," she said. "Will that be enough?"

"Oh sure," he said. "Sure. That's swell."

"Be sure to get enough," she smiled. "And now, Billy. I'm going to see your dad. I think I have something for him. What's the easiest way to get there?"

Billy answered promptly, anxious to be away.

"We usually walk," he said. "It ain't so far. But you could take the street car. He's out to grandma's—out on Vinton Street."

Mrs. Kent beamed.

"That's fine!" she said. "Fine! What number was that?"

He wrinkled his brow at her. Then suddenly a little girl began to yell:

"Billee! Bill-eee!"

Mrs. Kent turned to see the Rolfe girl running toward them. She nodded quickly to Billy and started away. She would find it. Vinton Street. She heard the little girl:

"Ma says you ain't to tell her! Don't you tell her nothing!"

Mrs. Kent quickened her pace. It wouldn't do to run. Undignified. She heard the boy yell angrily:

"I told her already!"

There were confused shouts behind her. People standing on the sidewalk ahead of her looked back in surprise. Several men and women moved down from their steps. Fear clutched at Mrs. Kent's heart. She lowered her eyes and hurried grimly along. These people! If they should all. . . . If they should all be in it together. . . . She glanced wildly around for a policeman. They should have more in these terrible districts. Suddenly a hand clutched her sleeve and she screamed, without meaning to. A hundred faces turned toward her.

Bill's white face was near her.

"God damn you!" he yelled. "You made me tell!"

She tore herself out of his grasp, and her lovely sleeve ripped. She began to moan in terror and practically clawed her way through the crowd. She heard the swelling voices:

"What's the matter? What'd she do?"

Oh! Oh! If they should all be in on it together! If they should all decide. . . . They were all around her. She fought her way along, running now. Billy was beside her again and she beat at him madly. She could no longer make out what the voices said. She felt her hat slip and

heard her gown tear again. Something struck. They couldn't! The beasts! This couldn't happen to her! What had she ever. . .? She had always done good. . . . Blood pounded in her ears. Oh, I mustn't run. The doctor! Oh, mercy! Oh, don't kill me! She was aware of her own screams.

Then suddenly there was a policeman, and she clung to him. His buttons scratched her face. His voice rumbled. He should shoot, she thought madly. He should shoot the beasts. The beasts! Her heart seemed to fill her chest and her head spun in a purpling swirl. She felt herself slide . . . away . . . away . . . away.

PROFESSOR

by

Langston Hughes

For biographical note about Langston Hughes, see page 204.

PROFESSOR

PROMPTLY at seven a big car drew up in front of the Booker T. Washington Hotel, and a white chauffeur in uniform got out and went toward the door, intending to ask at the desk for a colored professor named T. Walton Brown. But the professor was already there, sitting in the lobby, a white scarf around his neck and his black overcoat ready to button over his dinner clothes.

As soon as the chauffeur entered, the professor approached. "Mr. Chandler's car?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes, sir," said the white chauffeur to the clean little Negro. "Are you Dr. Walton Brown?"

"I am," said the professor, smiling and bowing a little.

The chauffeur opened the street door for Dr. Brown, then ran to the car and held the door open there too. Inside the big car the lights came on, and on the long black running-board as well. The professor stepped in among the soft cushions, the deep rug and the cut glass vases holding flowers. With the greatest of deference the chauffeur quickly tucked a covering of fur about the professor's knees, closed the door, entered his own seat in front, beyond the glass partition, and the big car purred away. Within the lobby of the cheap hotel, a few ill-clad Negroes watched the whole procedure in amazement.

"A big shot!" somebody said.

At the corner as the car passed, two or three ash-colored children ran across the street in front of the wheels, their skinny legs and cheap clothes plain in the glare of the headlights as the chauffeur slowed down to let them pass.

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Then the car turned and ran the whole length of a Negro street that was lined with pawn shops, beer joints, pig's knuckle stands, ten cent movies, hair-dressing parlors and other ramshackle places of business patronized by the poor blacks of the district. Inside the big car the professor, Dr. Walton Brown, regretted that in all the large cities where he had lectured on his present tour in behalf of his college, the main Negro streets presented this same sleazy and disagreeable appearance: pig's knuckle joints, pawn shops, beer parlors—and houses of vice, no doubt—save that these latter, at least, did not hang out their signs.

The professor looked away from the unpleasant sight of this typical Negro street, poor and unkempt. He looked ahead through the glass at the dignified white neck of the uniformed chauffeur in front of him. The professor in his dinner clothes, his brown face even browner above the white silk scarf at his neck, felt warm and comfortable under the fur rug—but he felt, too, a little unsafe at being driven through the streets of this city on the edge of the South in an expensive car, by a white chauffeur.

"But then," he thought, "this is the wealthy Mr. Ralph P. Chandler's car, and surely no harm can come to me here. The Chandlers are a power in the Middle West, and in the South as well. Theirs is one of the great fortunes of America. In philanthropy, nobody exceeds them in well-planned generosity on a large and highly publicized scale. They are a power in Negro education, too, and that is why I am visiting them tonight, at their invitation."

Just now, the Chandlers were interested in the little Negro college at which the professor taught. They wanted to make it one of the major Negro colleges of America. And in particular the Chandlers were interested in his Department of Sociology. They were thinking of endowing a chair of research there, and employing a man of

ability for it. A Ph. D. and a scholar. A man of some prestige, too, like the professor. For his *The Sociology of Prejudice* (that restrained and conservative study of Dr. T. Walton Brown's) had recently come to the attention of the Chandler Committee, and a representative of their philanthropies, visiting the campus, had conversed with the professor at some length about his book and his views. This representative of the Committee found Dr. Brown highly gratifying, because in almost every case the professor's views agreed with the white man's own.

"A fine, sane, dependable young Negro," was the description that came to the Chandler Committee from their traveling representative.

So now the power himself, Mr. Ralph P. Chandler, and Mrs. Chandler, learning that he was lecturing at the colored churches of the town, had invited him to dinner at their mansion in this city on the edge of the South. Their car had come to call for him at the colored Booker T. Washington Hotel—where the hot water was always cold, the dresser drawers stuck and the professor shivered as he got into his dinner clothes; and the bellboys, anxious for a tip, had asked him twice if he needed a half pint or a woman.

But now he was in a big warm car and they were moving swiftly down a wide boulevard, the black slums far behind them. The professor was glad. He had been very much distressed at having the white chauffeur call for him at this cheap Negro hotel in what really amounted to the red light district of the town. But then none of the white hotels in this American city would keep Negroes, no matter how cultured they might be. Roland Hayes himself had been unable to find decent accommodations there, so the colored papers said, on the day of his concert.

Sighing, the professor looked out of the car at the wide lawns and fine homes that lined the beautiful and well-

lighted boulevard where white people lived. After a time the car turned into a fashionable suburban road, and one saw no more houses, but only ivy-hung walls and shrubs and box woods that indicated not merely homes beyond, but vast estates. Shortly the car whirled into a paved driveway, past a small lodge, through a park full of fountains and trees and up to a private house as large as a hotel. From a tall portico a great hanging lantern cast a soft glow on the black and nickel of the body of the big car. The white chauffeur jumped out and deferentially opened the door for the colored professor. An English butler welcomed him at the entrance, and took his coat and hat and scarf. Then he led the professor into a large drawing room where two men and a woman were standing chatting near the fireplace.

The professor hesitated, not knowing who was who; but Mr. and Mrs. Chandler came forward, introduced themselves, shook hands and in turn presented their other guest of the evening, Dr. Bulwick of the Municipal College—a college that Dr. Brown recalled did *not* admit Negroes.

"I am happy to know you," said Dr. Bulwick. "I am also a sociologist."

"I have heard of you," said Dr. Brown graciously.

The butler came with sherry in a silver pitcher. They sat down, and the whites began to talk politely, to ask Dr. Brown about his lecture tour, if his audiences were good, if they were mostly Negro or mixed, and if there was much interest in his college, much money being given.

Then Dr. Bulwick began to ask about his book, *The Sociology of Prejudice*, where he got his material, under whom he had studied, and if he thought the Negro Problem would ever be solved.

Dr. Brown said genially, "We are making progress," which was what he always said, though he often felt as if he were lying.

"Yes," said Dr. Bulwick, "that is very true. Why, at our city college here we have been conducting some fine inter-racial experiments. I have had several colored ministers and high school teachers visit my classes. We found them most intelligent people."

In spite of himself Dr. Brown had to say, "But you have no colored students at your college, have you?"

"No," said Dr. Bulwick, "and that is too bad! But that is one of our difficulties here. There is no Municipal College for Negroes—although nearly forty percent of our population is colored. Some of us have thought it might be wise to establish a separate junior college for our Negroes, but the politicians opposed it on the score of no funds. And we cannot take them as students on our campus. That, at present, is impossible. It's too bad."

"But do you not think, Dr. Brown," interposed Mrs. Chandler, who wore diamonds on her wrists and smiled every time she spoke, "do you not think *your* people are happier in schools of their own—that it is really better for both groups not to mix them?"

In spite of himself Dr. Brown replied, "That depends, Mrs. Chandler. I could not have gotten my degree in any schools of our own."

"True, true," said Mr. Chandler. "Advanced studies, of course, cannot be gotten. But when your colleges are developed—as we hope they will be, and as our Committee plans to aid in their development—when their departments are headed by men like yourself, for instance, then you can no longer say, 'That depends'."

"You are right," Dr. Brown agreed diplomatically, coming to himself and thinking of his mission in that house. "You are right," Dr. Brown said, thinking too of that endowed chair of sociology and himself in the chair, the six thousand dollars a year that he would probably be paid, the surveys he might make and the books he could publish. "You are right," said Dr. Brown diplo-

matically to Mr. Ralph P. Chandler—but in the back of his head was that ghetto street full of sleazy misery he had just driven through, and the segregated hotel where his hot water was always cold, and the colored churches where he lectured to masses of simple folks exploited by money-grabbing ministers he dared not warn them against, and the Jimcrow schools where Negroes always got the worst of it—less equipment and far less money than the white institutions; and that separate justice of the South where his people sat on trial but the whites were judge and jury forever—like Scottsboro; and all the segregated Jimcrow things that America gave Negroes and that were never better, or even equal to the things she gave the whites. But Dr. Brown said, "You are right, Mr. Chandler," for, after all, Mr. Chandler had the money!

So he began to talk earnestly to the Chandlers there in the warm drawing room about the need for bigger and better black colleges, for more and more surveys of *Negro* life, and a well-developed department of sociology at his own little institution.

"Dinner is served," said the butler.

They rose and went into a dining room where there were flowers on the table, and candles, and much white linen and silver, and where Dr. Brown was seated at the right of the hostess, and the talk was light over the soup, but serious and sociological again by the time the meat was served.

"The American Negro must not be taken in by Communism," Dr. Bulwick was saying with great positiveness as the butler passed the peas.

"He won't," agreed Dr. Brown. "I assure you, our leadership stands squarely against it." He looked at the Chandlers and bowed. "Dr. Kelly Miller stands against it, and Dr. Du Bois, Dr. Hope and Dr. Morton. All the best people stand against it."

"America has done too much for the Negro," said Mr. Chandler, "for him to seek to destroy it."

Dr. Brown bobbed and bowed.

"In your *Sociology of Prejudice*," said Dr. Bulwick, "I highly approve of the closing note, your magnificent appeal to the old standards of Christian morality and the simple concept of justice on which America was founded."

"Yes," said Dr. Brown, nodding his dark head and thinking suddenly how on six thousand dollars a year, he might take his family to Paris in the summer, where for three months they wouldn't feel like Negroes. "Yes, Dr. Bulwick," he nodded, "I firmly believe as you do that if the best elements of both races came together in Christian fellowship, we would solve this problem of ours."

"How beautiful," said Mrs. Chandler.

"And practical, too," said her husband. "But now to come back to your college—university, I believe you call it—to bring that institution up to really first class standards you would need . . . ?"

"We would need . . . ," said Dr. Brown, speaking as a mouthpiece of the administration, and speaking, too, as mouthpiece for the Negro students of his section of the South, and speaking for himself as a once ragged youth who had attended the college when its rating was lower than that of a Northern high school and when he had to study two years in Boston before he could enter a white college, when he had worked nights as red cap in the station and then as a waiter for seven years until he got his Ph. D. and couldn't get a job in the North but had to go back down South to the work he had now—but which might develop into a glorious opportunity at six thousand dollars a year to make surveys and put down figures that other scholars might study to get their Ph. D.'s, and that would bring him in enough to just once take his family to Europe where they

wouldn't feel that they were Negroes. "We would need, Mr. Chandler. . . ."

And the things Dr. Brown's little college needed were small enough in the eyes of the Chandlers. And the sane and conservative way in which Dr. Brown presented his case delighted the philanthropic heart of the Chandlers. And Mr. Chandler and Dr. Bulwick both felt that instead of building a junior college for Negroes in their own town they could rightfully advise colored students from now on to go down South to that fine little campus where they had a man of their own race like Dr. Brown.

Over the coffee, in the drawing room, they talked about the coming theatrical season and *Four Saints In Three Acts*. And Mrs. Chandler spoke of how she loved Negro singers, and smiled and smiled.

In due time, the professor rose to go. The car was called, and he shook hands with Dr. Bulwick and the Chandlers. The white people were delighted with Dr. Brown. He could see it in their faces, just as in the past he could always tell as a waiter when he had pleased a table full of whites by tender steaks and good service.

"Tell the president of your college he shall hear from us shortly," said the Chandlers. "We'll probably send a man down again soon to talk to him about his expansion program." And they bowed farewell.

A few moments later in the car as it sped him back toward town, Dr. Brown sat under the soft fur rug among the deep cushions and thought how with six thousand dollars a year earned by jigging properly to the tune of Jimcrow education, he could carry his whole family to Europe where just once for a summer they wouldn't need to feel like Negroes.

$595 F. O. B.

by

George H. Corey

GEORGE HARVE COREY, *American born and now in his early thirties, has had a career of what he calls "strange occupational patterns," of which the following may be mentioned: bell-hop, cabin boy, worker in a garage, seller of Fuller brushes and magazines, sailor, dock-hand, assembler in a Ford factory, handyman to a race track bookmaker. "Discouraged with these efforts," he writes in a biographical note in* Story, *which published his first short story,* $595 F. O. B., "*I entered dental school, graduated in the course of time and became licensed to practice. Unable to finance an office I accepted an appointment to teach and practice oral surgery at the Shantung Christian University, a missionary school in Tsinan, China. War, famine, alcohol and missionaries concluded this incident and I wandered about China supporting myself writing for news press services, newspapers, practising dentistry and for a while operating a motion picture show in an interior Chinese city." Continuing his career as reporter and press agent in China, Japan, and South America, he finally came back to the United States in 1932 and entered the advertising business, first in New York and then in Chicago.*

$595 F. O. B.

"KNOW what this is?" asked the Police Lieutenant.

"Sure, it's a metal rasp," replied Slim.

"Ever see one like it before?" queried the officer.

"Certainly, we use them all the time out at the auto plant," Slim answered.

"Ever see this particular file before?"

The Lieutenant pushed the rasp over the edge of the desk close to the faces of the two men standing before him. Slim, young and straight, turned to the bent figure of Monahan at his side. The old man's eyes were intent upon the file. The Lieutenant raised his voice and repeated:

"I asked you if you'd ever seen this particular file before?"

Light, ochreous and feeble, from a lamp on the police desk fell across the two men's puzzled faces. Their eyes were fixed upon the smooth, sweat-stained handle of the rasp held in the policeman's outstretched arm. On its blackened, circular end they read the letters, TINY, crudely scratched into the greasy wood. The old man twisted his head and stared at the bare, green wall behind the desk. Slim lifted his eyes to the level of the officer's tense face.

"Recognize it, now?" asked the Lieutenant.

"It's Tiny's, I guess," Slim said.

Monahan nodded his spotty, bald head slowly up and down. The policeman relaxed and leaned back into his chair. He dropped the heavy file onto the top of the desk and picked up two pieces of typewritten paper.

"I want you to sign these papers," he said. "All it

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says on them is that you have identified this file as one used by this fellow Tiny Cady at the auto plant."

He handed each of the men a paper and continued:

"Sign them and go home to bed. If you want to think it over, we've got a couple of cells downstairs for thinking."

Slim looked dumbly at Monahan as the old man shrugged his shoulders and said:

"There's no out on that. Give us a pen."

"Seems like a hell of a lot of rumpus over a guy stealin' a lousy fifty-cent file," murmured Slim.

The Lieutenant blotted the signatures and rose from his chair. He stepped down from the dais, walked around in front of the desk and stood beside the two men.

"You've got nothing to worry about, boys. Go on home now."

Obediently Slim and Monahan moved off toward the door to the street.

Monahan and Slim walked along in silence until they reached the corner of Canal and Royal Streets. The hands on a big clock in front of a jewelry store pointed to 6:30. It was light now and the street cars rattling down toward the river were crowded with factory workers. Monahan looked at the clock and said:

"Crise, Slim, we can just about make it to the factory."

Slim didn't answer him.

"C'mon, Slim, we got to step on it," repeated Monahan.

"I'm not going back to the factory, Monahan. If they ask you about me tell 'em I'm through. Tell 'em I've quit," replied Slim.

Slim turned quickly and crossed the street. He continued down Canal Street and turned off at Tehopatoulas. A few doors from the corner he entered a saloon crowded with longshoremen. They were gathered round a small bar and seated at tables drinking sugar mash whiskey. Slim slid into a chair at a table in a corner and ordered

a double shot. The first swallow tasted like all the evil-smelling sweet things his nose had ever encountered. The whiskey's sickening, sweet smell was dissipated by the knife-like burn it set up in his throat. The next drink went easier.

Quick warmth and a loosening of tension followed the next glass. The jumbled happenings of the past twelve hours became fused with the events of the last year.

Tiny's friendly, grinning face was a haven of refuge on that first day in the auto factory. Slim tagged along behind the big Texan as he showed the newcomer where to stow his clothes and where to get his tools. Clad in makeshift work clothes worn shabby by his bulging knees and elbows, Tiny pointed out Slim's locker and gave him the key. The Texan's head, which towered a foot above Slim's, was topped with the battered crown of a soft hat that had once been gray. The brim had been carefully cut away and its original color was lost under heavy smudges of grease and dirt. Other workmen passed through the locker room while Slim got into his overalls. Tiny's face, red and alive, seemed ever set to break into a great roar of laughter. Slim looked at the faces of other workmen. In the colorless light coming through the frosted glass windows they were grim, the color of green slate.

"Ever done this kind of work before?" asked Tiny.

"Never in my life," said Slim. "I was a sailor last thing I did."

"You're goin' to be a metal finisher now, kid," continued Tiny. "You've got to learn to sling a file, see? It's a hell of a job, but you'll get onto it."

"I hope so," Slim smiled.

"You'll get wise to everything in quick order," added Tiny.

"I'm kind of light to swing a file and do much good, ain't I?" added Slim.

"That's all right. There ain't room enough on that damned line for many guys as big as me."

"Okay, I'm all set. Where do we go?" said Slim, buttoning his pants.

"Wait a minute, kid, or what do they call you?"

"My name's Slim. Slim Ewell."

"Okay then, Slim, but wait a second. These here lockers, see them? Well, never put nothin' in them you don't want the superintendent to see. The bastards go through 'em every once in a while lookin' for Union Cards, Wobbley tickets, and booze. They'll fire you cold for findin' any of 'em. Watch your step on that stuff."

"Who's our boss?" asked Slim.

"I'm head of the crew you'll work in, but a big Polack named Krakowski's foreman of the whole line. He ain't a bad guy, but he's gettin' old and cranky. Raises hell sometimes, but don't pay no attention to him."

"I'm scared I'll bugger things up there at first," said Slim.

"Don't worry 'bout that. There's lots of new guys turnin' to on the line, these days."

"Who else's in your crew, Tiny?"

"I got four good guys that's been here quite a while. A young guy named Joey, an Irishman 'bout your size named Monahan, a German called Gus, and a big Greek. That makes six of us now. We get a dime apiece for every unit that comes over the line. Did they explain that part to you?"

"A dime apiece for each car?" asked Slim.

Tiny burst into a deep belly-laugh.

"Crise, no. Not a dime apiece. The six of us splits a dime."

"That don't seem like much money, does it?"

"It ain't, Slim, but we bats off a hell of a lot of dimes. Right now the line ain't goin' so fast on account they got a lot of green men startin' in. We're runnin' 'bout fifty

bodies an hour just now, but I hear they're goin' to step it up today yet."

"Step it up more than fifty?"

"Wait'll you see the line when that Polack turns that ol' switch so's she's rollin' seventy and eighty jobs an hour along her back. It's a bitch-kitty, then, I'll tell ya."

Tiny opened the door leading to the factory and a wave of sounds enveloped them. They walked through a maze of machinery clustered thick with men. Tiny raised an arm in a friendly salute as he passed each group. The workmen lifted their faces from their tasks to return the greeting. Slim followed carefully behind the big Texan until they drew up to a long steel track that ran from one end of the factory to the other. Tiny put his hands to his mouth and shouted into Slim's ear:

"That's the line, Kid. Half a mile long."

Slim stepped back a few feet to look at the other end. Directly in front of him he saw two steel tracks, several feet apart, across which were suspended steel rollers. In a narrow fissure down the center and parallel with the tracks an endless chain moved slowly forward. On both sides of the "line" as far as he could see hundreds of men were working on the gray metal shells which crudely resembled the bodies of automobiles.

"This is the sedan line," Tiny roared. "The bodies roll off the other end all finished, painted and everything."

Slim's eyes fell upon a thick white mark painted on the floor at right angles to the line. Twenty feet farther down he noticed a similar line. He nudged Tiny and pointed to the white marking nearest him. Tiny glanced at his pointing finger and yelled:

"Got to finish your job this side of that mark. Other side of it the bodies belong to the grinders. Let's go now! Watch me for a minute and then you can start."

Tiny picked up a huge file and walked to the end of the line where four other men, files in hand, stood waiting.

No one noticed Slim as he stepped back to watch Tiny. A body had just moved over the white marking leaving the line vacant directly in front of Tiny's men. The crew stood rigid looking upward toward the welding-room.

The deafening noise of thousands of men under a single roof, beating, scraping and grinding raw metal was suddenly augmented by the piercing screech of an overhead crane which slung the next body onto the line. The body was hardly free of the crane before the five men, led by Tiny, attacked it with their files. Slim watched the big Texan maneuver for a position behind the moving steel shell. This crew's job was to smooth the rough, welded seams on the rear panel of the bodies. Tiny was first to swing into action. Legs apart, the file held in his two massive hands, he lunged upon the narrow strip of crickly steel. A deep rasping sound rose over the factory's unending rumble as his file bit into the raw, blue metal. Tiny hurled himself against the welt of steel again and another sliver of metal peeled off. His face became tense; globules of sweat dropped from his forehead onto his dirt-caked arms. The lunging movement fell into a rhythm. One, two-lunge. Quickly the huge rasp under Tiny's mighty arms sliced the rough weld into a sleek glistening seam. As the body moved over the white marking on the floor, Tiny, followed by the other four men, withdrew from it and ran to cast themselves upon the next unit already in place behind them. As the crew backed away from the finished body another gang crowded in to take their places. This crew carried electric grinders that filled the air with showers of white sparks as their whirling emery stones slid across the metal.

Tiny shoved a file into Slim's hands and pushed him into position behind the waiting body. He shouted to him:

"You got the idea, now. Eat 'em up."

The big file mocked at Slim. It slipped over the brittle

surface of the metal, hardly making a scratch. The arms of the other men in the crew were in his way and the body moved out of reach before he could swing his file across the weld. Desperately he beat his file against the seam, but the metal remained rough and blue. Gently, Tiny swept him to one side just as the body approached the white marking and with quick, powerful strokes of his file ground the weld even and shiny.

Krakowski, the pig-eyed Polish foreman, stood alongside the line watching the new man. Now and then he barked a command that was drowned in the thunder of thousands of tools beating against metal.

Slim's confused nervousness became a paralyzing fright at the sight of the Polish foreman, Krakowski. The chunky figure of the boss of the line leaned heavily against a packing crate abreast the metal finisher's sector. In quick glances stolen between strokes of his file, Slim's eyes took in the Pole's bald, pumpkin-shaped head set upon a massive, beef-red neck. Two small, misshapen ears broke its symmetry. His eyes, shoe-button shaped and set wide apart, were fixed upon the moving forms of the metal finishers.

The fright that had seized Slim fled as he noted that the foreman's attention was directed toward Tiny and not upon himself. The Pole's squatty head and bulbous eyes followed the rhythmic motions of the giant metal finisher's body. His heavy lips rolled inward tight against his teeth.

The superintendent of the plant, a cat-faced man wearing thick, sweat-smeared glasses, tapped Krakowski's shoulder. The foreman turned quickly, bowed stiffly and smiled. The superintendent's attention was riveted upon the big metal finisher. The two men stood beside each other watching Tiny's arms move machine-like over a rough seam. They saw the crude blue weld become smooth and bright beneath the powerful strokes of his rasp. The

superintendent cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted in a voice loud enough for Slim, at the end of the line, to hear.

"Keep an eye on him, Krakowski. He's got the makings of a foreman."

Tiny, aware now that he was being watched, expanded his effort with savage attacks upon the brittle metal.

When Slim looked up from his task next, the two bosses had moved down the assembly line to the next operation.

The metal finishing crew sat eating their lunches in the material storage yard outside the plant. In grease-smudged work clothes they lolled over wooden packing cases, stuffing lumps of bread and meat into their mouths. Slim emptied his mouth enough to talk, and said to the group:

"Honest to Crise, Tiny, I heard him. The boss said it loud enough for me to hear, 'Keep an eye on him, Krakowski. He's got the makin's of a foreman.' I heard him say it to the foreman."

"Dot's no more tan right," said the diabetic German, Gus.

"Eferyone knows Tiny's the bes' goddamned man on the line."

A slice of bread crust between the big metal finisher's lips swerved upward as his mouth tightened into a grin. He made an awkward gesture with his free hand to protest his embarrassment. Steve, the taciturn Greek, another member of the crew, nodded his head in agreement. Joey, a youngster whose face was ancient with dissipation and hard work, emptied his mouth with a hurried swallow and said:

"I wouldn't want to be in your shoes, Tiny. Not with that bastard Krakowski for a foreman. He's goin' to ride your tail till you're plain nuts. You just watch."

Gus nodded his head up and down and added:

"The kid's right, Tiny. I'fe been in dis place a lonk time and I know dot Polack. I know how he figures tinks."

"He can't hurt me any," laughed Tiny.

"Don't kit yourself, poy," replied Gus. "I vas here ten years ago ven dot bastard started on de lines. Efery time I sees Krakowski lookin' at you I tinks of ven he vas a metal finisher. Dot ain't so long ago. He vas like a bull, so strong. Jost de same like dis boss looks at you vorkin' so fine now, da bosses used to look at Krakowski. In tree years dey made from him a foreman."

Tiny listened to Gus and answered slowly.

"He ain't got no reason to ride me. I ain't goin' to get his job. He's been here for years."

"Dot's chust de trouble, Tiny. Vot you tink dis damned Polack tink vhen de boss says you make a goot foreman?"

Tiny shrugged his shoulders and answered lazily.

"I don't know what the hell he's liable to think."

"Youse younk mans don't know vot old man tink. Krakowski's gettin' old. Maybe he's forty already. Dot's old for de line. How many foremans hass ve got? It's de same always. Seven foremans. For ten years ve haff always seven foremans. *Now* you know vot dot guy tinks?" asked Gus.

"Gus is right," interrupted Joey, "the Polack's figurin' you're after his job from now on. Who wouldn't? There ain't no signs of their needin' an extra foreman."

"Dot's right Choey," replied Gus. "Krakowski's old and soft now. Vot you tink happen to him if de boss say 'back on de line you go Krakowski?' Dot vould kill him. You know vhere is Svenson, now, vot vas foreman on number six? Ven dey put dat collich poy in Svenson's chob and pushed de Svede back on de line he chumped in de river. Vot else could he do?"

The crew sat silent over their crumpled sandwich wrappings. The German's words ended the conversation. The

five minute warning whistle sent them scurrying into the factory.

The feud between Krakowski and Tiny become a subject of guarded conversation among the men. Each day's gossip brought fresh evidence of bitter combat. Only yesterday Tiny had retaliated to the Pole's constant heckling with a barbed gesture. As the power was shut off for the noon hour and Krakowski walked away from the metal finishing sector, Tiny broke into a loud whistle to the tune of "The Old Gray Mare, She Ain't What She Used To Be." The workmen on the opposite side took up the tune. The infuriated Pole flushed crimson and shuffled his feet clumsily in an attempt to fall out of step with the beat of the refrain. The whistling pursued him along the assembly line for a hundred yards.

Krakowski stood beside Tiny's crew scrutinizing its work for flaws. The crew was working smoothly and he found nothing with which to torment Tiny. Slim watched the big Texan cast quick glances at the Pole. The boss metal finisher knew the foreman had his eyes on him and he swung into an exhibition demonstration. The back-breaking task of pulling a huge file across a rough seam kept the other five men in the crew tense and hurried. The giant Tiny made it seem like an effortless, almost playful task. His sinewy arms dragged the big rasp over the steel with uncanny ease, the sound of his file above the others, and beat a steady rhythm. One, two—one, two, the crisp metal seemed to turn soft under Tiny's great arms.

The serpentine procession of steel-gray hulls moved along the assembly line at a rate of fifty units an hour. At this speed the metal finishers were hard pressed for time to complete their tasks. Krakowski left their sector and moved to a place beneath the overhead crane. He shouted up to the man in the control box above him. As the man poked his head through a little window in the box, the

foreman raised two fingers on his right hand. The crane operator returned the signal and rolled the screeching hoist back to the welding-room. Slim saw the Pole give the signal. He nudged Tiny with his elbow and said:

"He's pushing her up to seventy an hour."

Tiny passed the word through the crew. They cursed the foreman with vicious grunts that were lost in the deafening noise. The raw steel shells moved faster, the noise grew louder.

Krakowski walked back along the line and surveyed the chaos in the metal finishing crew. Seventy units an hour called for an inhuman expenditure of effort. Slim, a competent workman now, wallowed in sweat and confusion. Furiously he swung his rasps over the seam as he battled to clip a few seconds from each unit of work. One, two—one, two—a stroke of the file every two seconds; twenty strokes for every unit, seventy bodies an hour; a cent and a half for Slim, a cent and a half for Tiny; one, two—one, two—thirty strokes every minute, one, two—one, two; fourteen hundred strokes every hour. Economical transportation at $595 F. O. B. the factory.

The noon whistle blew and the men dropped their tools before the machinery stopped. Exhausted from the murderous pace of the past hour they flopped onto the material cases flanking the line. Tiny and Slim, the last to leave the job, looked about the place to rest. Slim found a big, unopened box and raised himself wearily onto it. As the big metal finisher heaved his tired frame over the crate Krakowski appeared alongside of him.

"I'm goin' to have to put two more men in your crew, Cady," said the Pole.

"What's wrong with our gang?" asked Tiny.

"Can't keep up. You see for yourself," replied Krakowski.

"Give us a while to get used to the new speed," pleaded Tiny.

"Adding two men will cut hell out of our pay," added Slim.

"Not while we're running at seventy an hour it won't," said Krakowski.

"You know damned well we won't hold that rate long," argued Tiny. "We'll be back at fifty in no time. You know that."

"That's not my fault. Two new men will report to you after lunch. You break them in." Krakowski turned and walked away, leaving the two metal finishers sullen with futility and anger.

Warm weather came and the metal finishing crew sat about the material yard eating lunch. With the late spring came the end of the peak production period and work on the line lagged. There were still eight men in the crew, though the amount of work had dwindled. Slim lay on a bale of cushion padding and stuffed the remainder of a sandwich into his mouth. He mopped his moist head and body with a blackened towel wrapped around one hand. With eight men in the crew instead of six and production down the lunch hour had become a surly lull in the day's labor. The two new men tried vainly to overcome the unfriendliness with which the rest of the crew had accepted them. Tiny defended them but his arguments angered the rest of the crew. Two extra men cut the old crew's pay one quarter.

The two new men finished their lunches and invented an excuse to move off from the old-timers. As they passed out of sight Tiny spoke up:

"I feel sorry for those poor bastards. They can't help being shoved into our crew."

No one answered the crew boss. Slim and the others knew it was true but that didn't help their pay checks. Gus, the German, daubed his dirty towel over the endless stream of sweat pouring from his face and said:

"It's dot goddamned Krakowski's fault. Dis business can't go on, Tiny. Efery day it's gettin' worser. Last veek ve draw how much?"

"A lousy nineteen bucks, that's all," answered Slim.

The German continued: "Und for you, Tiny, it is vorser dan for us. How much did dey dock you for dose files vot vas missing?"

"Eight smackers!" said Tiny bitterly.

"Eight dollars! Crise, that's half your pay," exclaimed Joey.

Joey and the Greek rose and started off toward the tobacco shop across the street.

"Where you goin'?" asked Slim.

"Healey, that Union organizer's givin' a speech today across the street in the lunch room. We're goin' to listen to him," said Joey.

Tiny sat across from Gus and Slim and watched Joey and the Greek pass through the factory gate. When they had disappeared from sight Tiny leaned over close to the other two men and said:

"Gus, I'm worried about the crew. Krakowski keeps them so cussed mad all the time that they're gettin' sloppy."

"I've seen it comin'," said Gus.

"What in hell can I do? I can't fire these two extra men. And even with the line runnin' slow, I can't do everyone's work. It's gettin' so sloppy the inspectors had me on the carpet this mornin'."

"Dot's dangerous, Tiny," warned the German. "Ven de vork gets sloppy den Krakowski can do anythink to you and it's all right mit de boss. Vonce he shows de boss quality is missink in de vork den he can make from you a sveeper, a 'privy man'; or maybe shoff you into de paint boot."

"What would you do, Gus?" asked Slim.

"Dot I couldn't tell you. Dere is nottink to do mit a guy

like Krakowski. I'm old und I know sometink vot goes on in de Polack's head. Only an olt man can 'furshay' dis tink. De Polack is olt. He's got no money, vot mit eight kits to raise. All his life he vorked hard for de bosses. Vun day he hears de boss say you make a goot foreman. In dot tick head he tinks—'Vot becomes of Krakowski if dey makes dis Tiny a foreman?' Beck to de line, he tinks and den—out on de street—or de river, like Svenson.

"Maybe Choey and de Greek got de right idea," continued Gus rising from his box. "Maybe Healey and his Union beesiness is vot ve haf to get first. I don't know. Anyvay, vy don't you and Slim come to his meetink tonight? De rest of de crew iss goink."

Slim and Tiny sat without talking. The German walked away toward the assembly building.

"Maybe that's an idea," said Slim.

"Won't do no harm findin' out what it's all about," agreed Tiny.

"I'll find out from Joey where Healey's holdin' tonight's meetin'," said Slim as he rose to his feet. The warning whistle blew and the two men joined the stream of workers returning to the assembly lines.

Tiny and Slim took their seats in the dirty meeting hall and looked around for the familiar faces of their crew. About fifty men were gathered in the room when Healey rose to the platform and called for silence. He surveyed his audience for a moment and then began to talk. Piece by piece he built the background of labor's struggle against capital. Then he launched into his immediate cause.

"And how long are you sniveling idiots going to slave for the pittance your bloated bosses toss you each week? How much longer are you going to let them treat you like animals? No, not even animals suffer the abuses heaped upon you.

"What animal do you know of that must pull a 'privy

cord' so that some other slave will take his place on the line while he rushes to the toilet? Does any animal live by a system of work so inhuman that it allows not even time for a man to perform a fundamental act of nature? Name me any other animal than your poor selves who is so mistrusted, so driven and persecuted that his master must make him perform these acts of nature on a stage set in the center of the factory, on a stage so that his hirelings may count the seconds he is away from his work?"

Short, angry laughs told Healey he was on the right track. He continued:

"In the yard where you eat lunch are piles of raw material, men. Close your eyes and think of it for a moment. It's covered carefully with tarpaulins and guarded day and night. The wood stacked in the timber yard is covered and watched. Even the great piles of coal are protected from the wind and rain. These raw materials are valuable; the company paid out money for them and they're cared for.

"But you—you laborers, what care or protection do you get? When that pile of sheet metal can't be used it is soaked in grease and guarded. But, you, when the factory is through with you, at the end of the season, what happens? Out you go. Onto the street. Like a mangy dog, an unwanted whore. Out you go to starve, steal or die until you are wanted again.

"We don't ask for much, men. We're not asking for their riches. We ask for as much care as they give the raw materials; the sheet metal, the steel or the wood they use in the cars we build. Is that too much to ask for? To be treated as well as a piece of steel?"

A roar of approval went up from Healey's audience.

"What ill-begotten swine are you that your bosses must spy on you like thieves? That you should let them steal into your lockers and search your clothes? That you should squirm before them and pray not to be fired for

their findings on these marauding, illegal entries into your personal effects?

"You call yourselves men and yet you consent to these slave-driving bosses' denying you the rights your forefathers fought and died to get. The right to unite for protection from starvation and death. The right to work like human beings and not beasts."

The little Irishman darted back and forth across the platform. The dull, thirsty minds of his listeners soaked up his words. Tiny, seated next to Slim, shifted uneasily on his chair.

Indignation spread slowly through the crowd. Healey halted for an instant and drank a glass of water. While he paused, the smoke of discontentment burst into flames in scattered sections of the room.

"That means the foreman, too," one of the men yelled.

"That's right, Krakowski, and the others. They're worse than the bosses," yelled another workman.

Healey held his hands above his head, begging for silence. Desperately he pounded a table with a water glass and shouted for order. The men could not be silenced. The Union organizer let the outburst run its course.

In a few minutes it subsided. There was no one with whom to argue. Quiet established, Healey took a short cut to his goal. He stepped out to the edge of the platform and called out:

"Who's going to be the first to join, then? Who's going to get card number one and fire the first shot in the battle against the slave-drivers?"

This challenge threw the assemblage into an angry demonstration. The clumsy workmen pushed and shoved one another to reach the platform first. In the disorder of the movement, Tiny and Slim slipped out of the hall unnoticed.

They walked along the cool, dark street in silence for

more than a block. Under the flickering glare of a street lamp Slim looked up at the big metal finisher and said:

"Healey's right, Tiny. We're gettin' rooked."

"Sure we are, but we'd lose what little we're not gettin' rooked out of if we signed up with the Union."

"How do you figure that, Tiny?"

"Krakowski and the bosses knew about that meetin'."

"What can they do? Ain't no law against goin' to a meetin'," Slim argued.

"No, but there is against joinin' the Union. The company had half a dozen stools in that crowd. The poor saps who sign up will be out on their tails before the ink's dry on their Union Cards."

"What the hell's the difference, Tiny? We're not gettin' anywhere workin'."

"No, but we're eatin' and that's somethin'. No sir, they don't get my job, now! Not with a thousand guys waitin' at that factory gate every mornin'. Waitin' for someone to get fired."

"Healey told us yesterday not to be so scared of that gang waiting at the gate every morning. He says they ain't workmen at all. Just a bunch of bums hired by the company to keep us scared of our jobs," continued Slim.

"Maybe they are bums. What's the difference? It don't take a hell of a lot of brains to sling a file, does it? That's the trouble with the Union. I know we're gettin' a rooking, same as I know the Polack's trying to get my job, but what's the sense of fightin'?" added Tiny.

"But Healey says if we all get together we've got a chance."

"Healey's talkin' through his hat, Slim. What chance have we got? In any other business maybe he's right, but in the auto business we've got no chance. The company's got the jobs broken down so simple that they can take the dumbest cluck in the world, shove a tool in his hand,

throw him on the line and in two days they've got an auto worker."

"But if we all struck at the same time, we might tie them up."

"That's more of the Irishman's pipe dreams. The bosses ain't sleepin'. Look at the green men they're pourin' into the factory every day. Where are they comin' from? Down here in New Orleans? Not on your life! Georgia Crackers, Hill-billys from up North, poor bastards that never seen more'n a dollar in their lives. Think Healey can get those guys to strike?"

"Not right away, maybe," argued Slim.

"Damned right. And when they get wise to themselves there'll be more mountain boys to shove into their jobs."

"The way you see it then, there ain't nothin' we can do?"

"Not while the company's holdin' all the aces, Slim. Only thing to do is to play their game for all you can get out of it, then get out. I've missed more than one meal tryin' to beat the bosses. Twice I've been busted higher 'an a kite fightin' for Unions. Once in Galveston in the dock strike and once in the mine war in Georgia. Besides, Slim, maybe I'll get a break at the plant. Joinin' the Union won't help my chances of gettin' one."

The two men arrived in front of Tiny's tottering, two-storied shack and turned up the cinder path to the porch stairs. As Tiny slipped the key into the lock Slim lowered his voice to a whisper and said:

"I hope you get a break from the bastards, Tiny. You got it comin' to you."

The Union organizer's work took its toll along the line. In the weeks that followed Healey's first appearance outside the factory gates, dozens of men lost their jobs. Mysteriously, but quickly the names on the Union roster

had found their way into the company's office. Swiftly these names were sliced from the payroll.

The crew leaders and foremen sweated and raged to break in the army of green men hired to fill the vacant places. Most of them had never had tools in their hands before. Yesterday they were farmers, banjo players, race track touts, or vacuum cleaner salesmen. Tomorrow they would be skilled auto workers.

In crews such as Tiny's where some degree of skill was needed, the green men brought chaos and confusion. The experienced Greek and Gus had been fired. A flabby-armed piano tuner and a pot-bellied bartender struggled in their places. Tiny pleaded for replacements. Krakowski shook his head understandingly, shrugged his shoulders and did nothing.

The great snake of blue-gray steel slid stealthily onward. Tiny tore off his workshirt and pitched into the work with a fiendish burst of effort. Slim and Monahan, too, battled to cover the green men's work. It was futile. Farther and farther they lagged, holding the succeeding crews from their work. This kept up all day. Every half hour the metal finishers fell so far behind that the line had to be halted. During one of the long halts in the afternoon the superintendent stopped beside the metal finishers and surveyed the confusion. Krakowski close at his side, explained it to him.

Half an hour after the plant had closed down Tiny's crew was still hard at it. Groggy with fatigue, they completed the last unit of the schedule. Tiny and Slim dropped onto a bench to rest before washing up. They were alone but a few seconds before Krakowski appeared from the other side of the factory.

"Finally finished up, eh?" said the Pole.

"Yeh! Finally!" grunted Tiny.

"Bad business, this holding up the line, Cady," continued the foreman. "Costs the company a lot of money."

"Why the hell don't you give me some men who can work?" said Tiny.

"Those two birds will never make finishers," added Slim.

"Wot can I do, Cady? That's all they hire; green men. Other crews get along with green men," the Pole countered.

"You better get us better men tomorrow, Krakowski," threatened Tiny.

"That's what I came to tell you about," the foreman replied. "The superintendent gave me orders to transfer you and Slim to the paint booth tomorrow. Both of you start there in the morning."

Tiny jumped to his feet.

"The paint booth? Why you son — — ——." He was shouting.

"I've checked you off this operation. In the morning you'll get new cards from the boss of the paint booth."

The Pole wheeled about and walked away.

Muffled beneath grotesque equipment suggestive of deep sea divers, Slim and Tiny walked heavily toward the paint spraying booth. The thickly padded, paint-stiffened clothes made their movements robot-like. Slim followed Tiny into the long enclosure where the finished bodies received the widely advertised "*Gorgeous New Colors.*" They stopped before a huge, mirrored, incandescent bulb that flooded the line with hot, sharp light. Before them, on the inert line, stood a body heavily pregnated with a dull gray priming coat. The atmosphere was still and hot. A dozen men, clad in the same thick uniforms, passed silently along the line. Tiny and Slim greeted them with stiff, upward movements of their arms.

A warning bell rang and the two men set up their equipment ready for work. Slim flicked on three more powerful flood lamps and watched Tiny test his spray gun. The big

Texan wore a bulky pair of coveralls, the legs of which were tucked into the tops of heavy overshoes. Stout cords bound the open ends of his sleeves tight around his wrists. The coarse coveralls encircled his neck snugly, making the costume airtight. Over Tiny's forehead was drawn a piece of rough toweling that extended back over his head and neck in the manner of a hood. Its ends were tucked under his close-fitting collar. Only that part of his face between chin and eyes was exposed to the murderous irritation of the paint-laden atmosphere.

As the line began to move Tiny slipped a breathing-mask over his mouth, leaving only his eyes and patches of his face exposed. Over these areas he rubbed a thick layer of vaseline. Slim adjusted his breathing mask, signaling Tiny the equipment was ready and stepped back from the glare of the floodlamps.

The Texan grasped the spray gun in his gloved hands and pressed the control trigger.

A hissing explosion burst from the nozzle and a fine spray of paint rained upon the smooth body panels. Some of the paint hit its goal, covering the sleek, gray sheets of metal with a layer of bright green pigment. Much of it, however, missed its mark and shot out into the still air. This same operation was taking place at half a dozen places down the line. Across from Tiny, on the other side of the line another sprayer was covering the other half of the body. In a few minutes the booth was choked with a dense precipitation of multi-colored paint. Overhead a whining exhaust fan whisked bits of the contaminated air out of the shed. Most of the pigment that missed its goal settled upon the dust in the air and hung suspended in the atmosphere.

In the dazzling light the pupils of Tiny's eyes contracted into narrow slits and floating particles of pigment settled on his vaseline-coated face mottling it with the colors of the spectrum. Beneath the thickly padded worksuit his

body pumped a flood of hot sweat that sought escape from the airtight uniform in thick streams that ran down his back and legs. Slim saw brown circular stains appear at his crotch and knees.

Outside on the line Krakowski was having trouble. Tiny and Slim knew it was serious as they stood idly by the motionless conveyor waiting for the line to move. Delays grew more frequent. During the precious noon periods when, for an hour, they were free of the booth, workers on the line outside told them of Krakowski's problems. One day it was the metal finishing crew. Then it was the grinders, or the door hangers whose work lagged until the line had to be halted. The delays were costly and the management hounded the befuddled Pole. Hour after hour Krakowski rushed up and down the line shouting orders, goading the men to greater effort, wresting tools from their hands.

Frantically he struggled to instill order and speed. Tiny and Slim knew his effort was futile. The experienced men were disgruntled and shirked deliberately; the green men, confused and frightened, accomplished little. Patiently the two men waited for the superintendent to return them to the metal finishing section.

Tiny and Slim were back slinging their files again. For three weeks the big metal finisher had been laboring to keep his crew abreast the mounting work. Tiny's return to the line as boss metal finisher became a personal victory to each of the old-timers on the line—a victory of the men over the bosses. They speeded up their work and helped the green men. Delays became infrequent and the line approached its normal swift pace.

They were in production on a new model car. "*Amazingly New*," Slim read in the newspaper advertisements. "*The Car That Has Revolutionized Motoring*" at $595 F. O. B. the factory. The finishers' jobs hadn't changed,

though. The welded seams on the rear panels were a little wider and took longer to trim smooth.

Slim pulled the privy cord and waited for a relief man to take his place at the line. In a few minutes he appeared and Slim handed him his file. Then he started off in the direction of the toilet in the center of the plant. He wanted to smoke a cigarette and there was only one safe place to do it. Halfway to the overhead toilet Slim doubled back on his trail, cut across two assembly lines and headed toward the superintendent's office. When the superintendent's office had been built a narrow space had been left between it and the end of the factory. Slim looked carefully to see that no one was watching and slipped into the open end of the hiding place. Stealthily he opened a fresh pack and lit up. He inhaled a thick mouthful of smoke and felt it flood his lungs. As he exhaled he watched the blue spirals of smoke curl upward toward the roof. The place was doubly safe because the superintendent's office was roofless and he smoked continuously. Flat on his back, Slim lay on the concrete floor, cigarette in his hand. He listened to the noise of voices in the superintendent's office. From the other side of the open-topped office Slim heard a strange voice say:

"We can't have another series of delays again. Detroit's raising hell with me already."

Slim held his cigarette motionless as he listened to the voice of the superintendent reply:

"No need to worry, Chief. I think I've got it licked."

"What was it?" asked the Chief.

"One of my foremen fell down on the job. He's getting old and I guess I've got to ease him out," continued the superintendent.

Slim stabbed the lighted end of his butt onto the concrete and listened eagerly.

"I hope that solves it. Are you going to have to send to Detroit for a new foreman?"

"I don't think so, Chief. I've got a big metal finisher here who's a demon for work. I'm checking up on him now. If he's clear of the Union I'm going to give him a try at the job."

Swiftly and noiselessly Slim rose and slipped out of the fissure between the office and the factory wall. He sought the shortest route back to the line. He could still hear the bosses talking as he approached the open space in front of the offices. His eyes swept the clearing as he prepared to step out into the open space. Suddenly he stopped short and stepped back. Leaning against a pillar, a few feet in front of the boss' office Slim saw Krakowski. His thick neck was rigid and his hands shuffled a batch of time cards clumsily.

The conversation inside ended and the Pole walked hurriedly toward the opposite end of the factory. Slim waited until he was out of sight, then he started back to the crew.

For an hour the line had been moving at a stiff pace. The metal finishing crew was working feverishly. Tiny held his hot file between handfuls of cotton waste. A warning nudge in his ribs from a workman in the next crew told him the boss was coming. Silent elbows prodded into ribs telegraphed the news from one end of the plant to the other. Tiny nudged Slim and he in turn put the man next to him on guard.

Slim looked up and saw Krakowski's chunky form weaving through clumps of workmen a hundred feet ahead of him. Deftly the foreman slipped through the knots of men. A few feet ahead of the metal finishers he stopped and tapped a stubby finger on the shoulder of a man in the next crew. The lazy Georgian grinder looked up at the foreman and smiled. He was a well known character in the auto plant whose defiance of the company's stringent rules against loafing had won him a reputation for bravery. At least twice a day he was to be found seated on

the debris-littered floor of the half-exposed toilet, the sport sheet of the *Times-Picayune* on his knee and his back resting against the cool, circular tile of the water closet.

The big grinder looked up at Krakowski and raised his ear to the Pole's moving lips. The foreman turned away as the grinder dropped his rasp and reached for a piece of cotton waste.

Tiny had just completed the seam in front of him as Krakowski's hand touched his wrist. The big metal finisher looked up and the foreman leaned over and spoke to him. Slim's elbow, pressed quickly into the ribs of a man in the next crew, started the telegraphic nudge toward the other end of the line. Krakowski moved off in the direction of the superintendent's office. Tiny and the grinder followed close behind him. Two relief men answered the signal on the privy cord. They took the two vacated places.

It was almost time to knock off for the day and Tiny hadn't returned. Anxiously the metal finishers watched for him. Slim tried to dissipate his concern by thinking of a lot of good things that might have happened. Maybe they had made Tiny an inspector or a foreman. The peculiarly fixed squint in the Pole's eyes when he led Tiny away an hour before made these pleasantries hard to believe. A grinder in the crew ahead pressed his flexed arm into Slim's back. He raised his eyes, but could not see Tiny. Between strokes of his file he darted quick glances in the direction of the other end of the factory. At last the familiar hulk came into sight.

Tiny moved rapidly toward his crew. Abreast them he reached out, grabbed the relief man's arm and snatched the file from the surprised worker's hands. Tiny's eyes seemed to be focused on some far-off object. His smile was gone and the lean muscles of his face were drawn uncomfortably snug over their framework. Lips pressed

tight against teeth and strangely expressionless eyes forbade questioning. Slim tried to catch his eye. The crew went on with its work.

Tiny snatched up a piece of cord and broke it in two. He tied one piece around the wooden handle of his file, placed it on the edge of a bench at his side and then slipped out of his overalls. Slim looked at the clock on the wall, but it was still a half hour before quitting time. The big metal finisher picked up the file again, took a deep breath and dropped the rasp between his pants and his belly. Then he tied the loose end of string on the file handle to his pants belt. The heavy end of the rasp slid down his right trouser leg. With the other piece of string he fastened the dangling end of the file tight against his leg. The rest of the crew looked at one another with bewilderment. Tiny shook his leg, made certain the file was secure, and strode off toward the locker room.

A few minutes before quitting time the Georgian grinder from the next crew returned and took off his overalls. Slowly he rolled them into a bundle. The five o'clock whistle blew and Slim hastened over to him.

"What happened?"

"Got fired," drawled the grinder.

"Not Tiny, too?"

"Sure, canned both of us."

"I don't believe it. What happened?" continued Slim.

"Honest to Crise, Slim, we got fired."

"What for?"

"Union cards. Both of us."

"You're nuts. Tiny didn't belong to the Union."

"I know it. They framed the poor bastard."

"Who framed him?" asked Slim.

"Krakowski," replied the Grinder. "He knew they were goin' through the lockers this mornin' an' he planted a green card in Tiny's coat pocket. Tiny's name was signed

on it and it was stamped paid with the Union seal. I seen it up in front, just now."

"But Tiny could prove he didn't belong. We all know he didn't."

"Not a chance. Krakowski had Healey up there and he swore Tiny was a member."

"The dirty bastard," mumbled Slim. "What did Tiny say?"

"After Healey spoke up, he didn't say nothin'. He just stood there kind of dumb-like."

A sudden kick against the leg of Slim's chair bolted the parade of scenes from his mind. He looked up and saw a dirty apron drawn tight around a bartender's distended belly.

"Whatcha goin' to have, kid? Can't sit here all day on a coupl'a shots."

"Nothin' more, thanks," Slim answered. "I'm leaving now."

He rose and walked quietly over the sawdust-covered floor to the street. Aimlessly he drifted toward Canal Street. At the corner of Tehoupatoulas, a kid selling newspapers yelled and waved a bundle of papers. Absently, Slim fished a nickel out of his pants pocket and dropped it into the outstretched black hand.

Across the street the benches in front of the station were empty. Slim crossed the street, chose a dry seat and slid onto it. Listlessly he opened the damp newspaper on his lap, flipped it right-side-up and started to read. In huge letters sprawled across the sheet's eight columns he spelled out:

LABOR RED SLAYS AUTO FOREMAN

A three-column picture of Tiny filled the center of the page. Under the picture was a single word caption—

WANTED. A two-column bulletin at the right of the page was headed with:

DISGRUNTLED RED LABOR AGITATOR
SLAYS BOSS ON EVE OF DISMISSAL
POLICE COMB CITY FOR AUTO WORKER

Special—The body of Otto Krakowski, a foreman in the River Auto Plant, was found early this morning in a passageway at the side of his home at 2348 Ponce de Leon Avenue. Almost simultaneously a police net was thrown over New Orleans and surrounding parishes to apprehend the man believed to be his assailant, Tiny Cady, 30, discharged worker formerly employed in the River Auto Plant. Krakowski's body was discovered just before dawn this morning by Joseph Kline, a milkman. The victim's head had been brutally battered with a huge file which has already been identified by two of Cady's fellow employees as one used by the former worker at the auto plant. A careful check-up by the police of the Eighth Precinct Station revealed that Cady had stolen the file following his discharge late yesterday.

Factory officials name Cady as a dangerous Red labor agitator who has been responsible for much of the Union trouble experienced recently at the River plant. Police were told by factory officials of Cady's discharge yesterday, following their discovery of a quantity of Communistic literature in his possession. The missing labor Red was also prominent in the illicitly organized labor union discovered a short time ago at the auto plant. Chief of Police Davis is confident he will have the man suspected of Krakowski's murder in custody before nightfall. A police cordon has been thrown around all exits from the city and a careful guard is being kept at the suspected man's home at 212½ Bottom Street. Chief Davis believes

Cady's arrest will solve one of the most brutal murders this city has experienced in many years.

Factory officials are lending every aid to the police in their effort to locate Cady who is described as a powerful man, six feet, three inches in height. According to information furnished the police this morning, Cady harbored a grudge against his former foreman, Krakowski, for the latter's having brought to light the Communistic labor activities which resulted in his discharge from the factory.

RENDEZVOUS

by

Mary Heaton Vorse

MARY HEATON VORSE *has recently published in* A Footnote to Folly *her reminiscences of many years of activity in literary and radical circles, including experiences in Europe during and after the Great War and in the United States during certain famous strikes and labor trials. She calls the book "not a biography," but "a picture of the world as I saw it during an important moment of history; a record of what happened to the little people and their children in war time and peace." Much of her childhood was spent in the college town of Amherst, where, so far as labor unions and industrial struggles were concerned, "we might have been the original dwellers in the garden of Eden. . . . But if in Amherst we knew nothing about the conditions under which cloth was woven or coal mined or steel made, yet it was in the quiet of Amherst that my mind was prepared for thought. . . . My early training taught me not to fear the 'pain of a new idea.'" Mrs. Vorse's stories and articles have appeared in many magazines, such as* Harper's *and* Story *and* The Woman's Home Companion; *her novel,* Strike, *is based on the Gastonia textile strike.*

RENDEZVOUS

AS they drove along in the spring sunshine, Sidney Moore couldn't get out of his mind that because they had come, a young New York boy named Harry Grimm lay dying now in a hospital fifty miles away.

Harry Grimm had come across the mountain to meet the New York men who were bringing food to the miners. Deputies had shot him. He was a "foreigner." He was organizing the miners. The deputies shot him because of this. He was going over the mountain to meet the other "foreigners" bringing in the food truck. The miners had telephoned the news just before they started from Knoxville.

The road wound around the mountain. From where he was, Sidney could see all four cars of their little caravan, and, lagging behind, the food truck. It was a queer business, he thought, their being there at all. They'd come, a dozen of them, to bring food to striking miners; it was a sort of test.

Miners had been murdered by deputies in two counties in the past months. Miners had been taken from their homes and from jails, beaten, and sent naked across the mountains. Soup kitchens had been blown up, and the relief workers' car dynamited. The miners' food trucks had been blockaded. Relief workers had been arrested on the charge of criminal syndicalism. Reporters, even, had been shot at and wounded. . . .

Sidney could hear the two men in back—Quinn, an editor of a magazine, and a liberal writer named Sanderson—talking about holding meetings with the miners. They were driving directly toward the threat which the

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mayor of Mapleton had sent them. He had telegraphed them that neither "they nor their ilk were wanted around here."

In spite of this threat, these innocent men were babbling about holding meetings and visiting mining camps. Sidney felt as if he possessed some dark truth that he could not communicate to the others. They were innocent. They did not know the South. There would be no meetings. No need to test constitutional rights: there were none. . . . What was it the cashier in the coffee shop in Knoxville had asked him:

"What nationality are these people? I hear they're going up into the mountains in Kentucky, to set up some new kind of government." He looked at the other men. Quinn was sandy and compact, with an open clear-cut countenance and small, New England features. Sanderson had pronounced dark features; although young, he was inclined to be heavy. People often took Sidney for a square-head. He reflected that they all looked "foreign"—different from the natives of the South.

The road wound past blackened shacks without chimneys. Up a creek a cluster of these shacks was hanging on the cliff as by an eyelash. A mining camp. These mining camps, Sidney thought, were the most desolate habitations in the world.

"What do you think's going to happen, Moore?" Quinn asked, leaning forward.

"I think anything might," Sidney answered.

"They won't dare to do anything to us, though," said Quinn. Sidney knew that Quinn was thinking: "We're too distinguished a crowd, too well known; they wouldn't dare do anything to *us!*"

"I don't see why you think they'll feel any differently toward us than they did toward Harry Grimm," said Sidney. "He was coming to meet us—so in a roundabout way we're responsible for his getting shot. . . ."

The road made a swift turn. A new vista opened. They were going through a series of narrow valleys with swift, gay creeks running down them. High granite mountains rose abruptly from the creek bed. They were beautifully wooded, and already touched with spring in mid-February. The maples were in red bloom. The road did not run straight for twenty yards. Sidney had a feeling, as they drove swiftly through the brilliant spring morning, that they were making straight for the hate that had shot Harry Grimm at daybreak.

"What can we do? Why have we come? To bring food; to advertise what is happening in this remote place. Why have I come?" While he thought this, the white road slipped under their wheels. On one side of them the mountains rose steeply above; and below, on the other, were fields of yellow-ochre earth with bright green grass sprouting.

"We'll be passing into Kentucky in a minute," the taxi-driver remarked. "I wonder if they'll stop us at the border?" They all felt a little apprehensive. There was a mounting feeling of insecurity. No one felt quite smug. Each one felt uncertain and a little ridiculous.

Two cars were drawn up at the state line. It was an imaginary line, and yet, thought Sidney, dividing one state of mind from another state of mind. . . . The little procession of cars had been dispersed, and the food truck was now far behind. Two of their cars had stopped at the Kentucky line. Sidney felt a growing excitement.

"Likely deputies stopped them," said Sanderson. But there were no deputies, the way was open. Sidney felt a light sense of disappointment. The other cars were merely waiting for the rest to come up. Newman, their spokesman, called out from his roadster—

"We think four of us had better go ahead and see the mayor first and find out what he'll let us do."

"Find out what he won't let us do," thought Sidney. The band of crusaders seemed to him absurd. He reflected that they would be grotesque, but for the tragedy of Harry Grimm. Murder had been committed because of them. Death had made them authentic; it made their mission dangerous, gave them a burnish of heroism.

A platform from which one might see far distant views had been cut out in the mountain shelf. A large placard was placed there, which said that Daniel Boone had first passed through this place in search of freedom and liberty. The little procession stopped to look at the view. They read with cynicism the placard about Daniel Boone and liberty; then they went on their way unmolested.

At Centreville they stopped to wait for the food truck to catch up, so that they could convoy it into Mapleton. It was a thrifty little town with long, wide streets shaded with trees. A truck full of clothes was to have joined them there. It had been sent by the workers of a mid-Western city. Their taxicab driver, who had been a miner and who was in sympathy with them, reported:

"That truck's been taken down a side road somewhere and overturned. They say the truck driver is shot, but he ain't hurt bad."

The little crowd of Northerners looked at each other. The invisible menace was taking form. They had seen nothing, no one had stopped them or hindered them on their way—yet. Still Harry Grimm lay dying, shot as he was coming to meet them; and now here was an unknown man—a man whose name they didn't even know, a truck driver from a mid-Western city, probably paid to drive the truck—shot, possibly killed, by the invisible enemy.

Sidney looked at the others. "I wonder they don't see what we're up against. I wonder they don't know it's white terror." They were still innocent; they were indignant about the truck.

On the road ahead of them was a blot of blue. Hundreds of miners in trucks and on foot, waiting to greet them. Another group stood behind the miners—armed deputies and the chief of police. They stopped the trucks, they stopped the cars. Sidney had a sense of fatality, of something happening that he had been waiting for. But there was, as yet, no relief in its having happened.

They got out of their cars, the food truck between the deputies and the miners. The Miners' Union had a storehouse in Mapleton. Quinn talked to the chief of police.

"Why can't we store our food in the storehouse?" he asked, reasonably. The chief looked at him, a little puzzled. Quinn was a pleasant-spoken fellow.

"It's against orders," he said. "You drive right through the town. You can't stop in Mapleton. There ain't going to be no meetings." Deputies mounted the cars and deputies swarmed on the food trucks.

Mapleton was built around a courthouse and a square. It was the county seat. In the square were hundreds of miners. They made clots of blue as they drifted around the square, as they formed uneasy groups together. A great many deputies ostentatiously armed were strutting around. Up in the cupola of the courthouse there was a nest of machine-guns. The Northerners got out of their cars. Sanderson said to Sidney:

"I haven't seen so many guns since Château-Thierry! I didn't know this was a war that we were coming to! I thought we were coming just to hold a meeting with the miners, and bring them some food."

"Well, you're in a war all right," said Sidney. "This is the class war. We've walked right into it." That was what had happened. They had stumbled into the class war. That was why there were machine-guns in the courthouse and why deputies bristled with guns. "They've found out—partly," thought Sidney. He had seen a Southern mob in a killing mood. . . . Now everything

was quiet, waiting. He wondered if they didn't know yet that the hate which had killed Harry Grimm might attack them.

The little band divided. Part of them went down with the food trucks to the outskirts of the town. Sidney went over to the hotel, where the advance guard were meeting with the mayor. Around the room sat the principal men of the town and the mayor, who was a veterinary. They were big rangy men, men of consequence in their community, men proud of themselves and sure of themselves. They knew they were right. They were coal operators here, the attorney of the Rocky Creek Mining Company. A benevolent looking Baptist pastor sat to one side. The veterinary mayor was a small, unimpressive looking person.

Sidney looked around swiftly. A peculiar feeling—not of apprehension and not of fear, but rather like a knowledge of evil—came over him. There is a murderous quality about white terror. White terror was what emanated from these men who had assembled to meet them at the Mapleton Hotel.

The lounge was a comfortable room of good proportions, and it had an open fire. The four men comprising the committee were at one end. Twenty men faced them. Two civilizations aligned against each other. The Northerners looked small and young in the face of their opponents, who were keeping up a tone of insolent and polite ceremony. Like the ceremony of wolf dogs who walk around and around with their hackles up. The elaborate courtesy was just cracking.

The atmosphere grew dense with the hatred of these men. This was the sort of impersonal hate which was like the paralysis of snake bite. Some day, Sidney thought, they will measure a current like this.

The mayor, an insignificant man, felt himself warm and backed by the powerful bigger men around him.

"Watch your step," he said. "Don't have any meetings, or it will be my pleasure to have you all arrested, and to keep you in jail as long as I can!"

The meeting was breaking up. Everyone was standing. The mayor ran out into the hall, consulted someone, and ran back.

"Moreover, a group of you loitering on the street corner talking to miners, I'll call that a meeting!" Again he ran out. At someone's bidding he returned, with further orders:

"If you have any miners in your room, I'll call that a meeting too; and it will be my pleasure to arrest you."

"You mean that we can't entertain our friends in a private sitting-room which we've hired?" asked Newman.

"I mean just that," the mayor gave back with triumph.

"We are not here, I have told you," said Newman formally, "to go against your ordinances. But we shall broadcast your terrorism and your disregard for constitutional rights from one end of America to the other." A tall man towered over Newman.

"I admire your nerve, coming down here where you don't know any of the conditions," he said slowly. "You've talked and read a lot about terrorism down here, but you'll find that when we get ready to be ugly, we can be real ugly. And you can have your stenographer write that down. I'll sign to that."

"I'll sign to that!"

"I'll sign to that!" others echoed.

"That means they're ready to lynch us," Sidney told Newman.

"Not quite so bad as that," said Newman mildly. He was keeping himself in hand, keeping his rising excitement from brimming over. He was spokesman, and had done a good job. A reporter from Knoxville came over to Sidney.

"Say, don't they know, don't they see," he inquired

in a low tone, "that these men mean business? They'll do *anything!* You'd better get your food distributed and get out of town!"

The square was empty of miners, who had ebbed away toward the food trucks. But there were the deputies with their guns, and there were the machine-gun nests in the courthouse.

Newman asked Sidney, "Are you coming to the County Attorney's office?" The mayor had told them they would have to get permission to hold meetings even outside of town.

"No," said Sidney. "I'm going to see what's become of the trucks." All of a sudden the little studious band seemed to Sidney like a high comedy, as it wandered around from the mayor and operators to the County Attorney to get legal permission for a meeting. They would no more be given permission than the Germans would have given permission to cross No Man's Land with provisions for the French.

Sidney walked down a dirt road leading out of town. A bridge led over a creek. A granite mountain rose sheer above it. The mud was thick and gummy on the road, ochre-colored. The houses dwindled off as he walked along, and became less prosperous. Shacks of a mining community appeared on the mountain side. Down the road at last was a blue group of men again—the food truck.

They were, after all, holding a meeting of sorts. Food was being distributed. Someone was standing on the truck speaking, holding the crowd. Trouble makers and curious people were prowling on the edge of the crowd. Deputies with their guns were everywhere.

And punctuating it all, the fantastic sheriff, an embodiment of pure evil, so evil that he became theatrical and comic. Lean, long, with claw-like hands, and unclean as a hairy spider. How had the clean hills uttered such a one? Yellow eyes, with a malevolent, terrifying sideways glance.

A killer. The movies' unnatural exaggeration of evil. Yet there, horribly, he was, in the flesh, his venom directed against this innocent little company none of whom were agitators, none of them with experience even in the labor movement. This absurd little band of mercy which had come up into this war to quibble over constitutional rights and the right of relief trucks to bring food undisturbed.

Harry Grimm had been shot at dawn by a deputy, by a killer. . . .

A man named Nichols was talking. Nichols was talking like a fool, so Sidney thought from what words he could hear. "You'll get arrested," thought Sidney. A girl who belonged to the relief organization talked too. Now a miner was talking. Now someone shouted to the speaker from the crowd, something provocative—

"Your own brother is a deputy," cried the voice.

"Whoever says that about my brother is a god-damned liar!" This was fighting talk. The incredible sheriff whipped out two guns in his claws. The deputies stood there, evil, triumphant. The crowd began to run. People had drawn guns on both sides. For a moment every thing hung suspended—murder in the air, war in the air.

"I'm going to round up and arrest every goddam one of you!" the sheriff was shouting. The onlookers were flying.

"Let's get out of here," Quinn said, "no use of us all getting shot."

And now suddenly guns were put up. The menace had momentarily passed. They were arresting the girl, and Nichols.

"I'll go back and see that they don't take the food," Quinn said, "and see that it gets distributed. You go and find Newman and the others." They will have been arrested, thought Sidney. And I'll probably be arrested.

A woman drove up and spoke to Sidney.

"Are you one of the crowd that came up here?" she asked. "Did you hear what they were saying just now? Did you hear how they were stirring up the miners to riot? We got everything all quieted down—and they're stirring up the miners to riot, they're telling them they've got a right to organize, they've got a right to picket! I heard that girl myself, telling them to hang on and not give up. They don't know what they're doing, coming down here and stirring up those people. I'd like to take you and show you how these folks live. They live like animals, whole families in a room.—I'm a doctor's wife.—There is more incest and feeble-mindedness in this county than anywhere!" She was almost crying in her emotion, a big woman, kind-faced. Her words tumbled over each other.

"We're none of us rich people," she said. "These mines are locally owned, and the mines—you know what they are. They're ruined. We had a depression before anyone else did. We're doubly hit. A hundred and fifty dollars a month is a big income here. A hundred a month is good. And we give ten per cent to our community chest. I never turn away anyone from my door. Days I feed sometimes six—eight people. We all do. When they come down from the hills hungry, we feed them. And I work all day sewing—we've got the miners' wives and the women coming in sewing, to try and clothe them. And now you come disturbing us, stirring them up. You take my husband, you take me: We come from poor, mountain folks. But we got out and we got ourselves an education—" Her words flowed over Sidney, overwhelming him. He could see the little band as the community, as this undoubtedly kind woman, saw them, with her classic cry: "The workers like to live like pigs!"

She was the voice of the comfortable population. She was not one of the combatants. She was supporting her side behind the lines.

"I wonder if she thought Harry Grimm should be killed?" thought Sidney. He felt sure she would, because this was a war, and all people who stirred up the miners were evidently Bolshevists, and all Bolshevists should be shot as enemies of society.

Quinn came hurrying up to Sidney. "They've arrested fifty of the miners. They're holding them for criminal syndicalism. They've got Nichols, and Mary Ray."

"Is the food distributed?" asked Sidney.

"Deputies got about one hundred pounds, the miners got the rest," said Quinn. They had arrived at the square. The elegant county attorney was just saying goodbye to Newman and the other three. He had kept them there, purposely. He was beautifully dressed, the picture of a courteous Southern gentleman, and he grinned a sardonic goodbye.

Looking back on it afterwards, it seemed humorous that they sat that evening, all of them in the sitting room, discussing their plans for the next day—how they were going to take food into the next county, and how they were going to visit the mining camps there. While they were discussing their plans, a knock came at the door. Two miners came in.

"We come to tell you about Harry Grimm," one of them said. "Seems like he's dying. We thought maybe someone of you might like to come over to the hospital. Someone from his own home town, maybe."

Newman asked, "Do you know how it happened? All we heard was that he was wounded." One of the miners, a young fellow in his early twenties with a clear profile and bright hair answered—

"Harry was staying to my house last night, and he didn't know if he'd go over the mountain path or by the jitney railway. I said, 'I hate for you to go by the railway. You best keep to the mountain. For I fear they'll try and get you.'

"He said, 'I've got no time for the mountain. I've got to go by the shortest way if I'm to meet them.' He was coming, picking up miners along the way, to meet you."

Thoughts spun in Sidney's head. All his life, coming nearer and nearer to him, had been Harry Grimm. All their lives they had been approaching each other. They had walked around New York's streets at the same time. At the same time, seeing the same things, viewing the same spectacles, maybe, been together without knowing each other in the same places. All the time they had been walking along different roads which converged, closer and closer. Sidney felt he knew Harry Grimm very well, as though he had always known him.

"We jest thought, seeing how he was coming to meet you, you'd like maybe one of you to go over to the hospital," the boy repeated.

"How far is it?" asked Quinn.

"'T'ain't fur," said Jim. "Maybe twenty mile."

"How did it happen?" Newman asked again.

"He was a-walkin' down by the track with two other fellas. Two deputies come by on the hand car that runs the railways. The deputies backed up the car and stopped in front of the boys. Then Art Dillon shot Harry, and Ned Travers covered the other boys. They loaded Harry on the truck and arrested the others. They set Harry on a stone outside the hospital. He set there an hour, bleeding from the stomach. They wouldn't take him in unless someone went responsible for his doctor's bill. I heard he was shot, and I went to see him at the hospital.

"I said, 'Buddy, I'm shore sorry I wasn't with you.' He was awful sleepy. I touched his face with my hand and asked if he knew me. He said he did.

"'But I got a hurtin' pain in my side, and I feel awful sleepy,' he said.

"Then I said, 'I got word that my house is raided, and they're looking for me, so I'll have to clear out and go,

because they're after me.' They tole me when I come away that he was sinkin' fast, so I come here for you."

Newman asked, "What did they raid you for? Why do they want you?"

"I'd been speakin' to the miners—organizin'. Ef you're hongry, you're a Red, in Dell county. Ef you tell about it, you're a criminal syndicalist and a Bolshevik. I said, 'We miners are hongry'—so they raided my house and got a warrant out for me."

"You oughtn't be here now," said Quinn.

"I expect not; but they won't be watchin' for me yere. I had to come and git one of you."

"I'd like to go," said Sidney. He rose, and no one stopped him. This suddenly seemed to him the most important thing to do. He felt as though this were why he had come—that he had had an appointment all his life with Harry Grimm as they came together on their converging paths, as though Harry Grimm had something of deep importance to tell him. "He knows why he came; he'll tell me why I came," Sidney thought.

"All right," Newman said. "You go, Moore, if you want to." He seemed relieved. It wasn't important to anyone else, with all their concern.

"Lem Carter's got his Ford downstairs on the street," said Jim. The lobby was full of loafing men. Some of them Sidney recognized from the afternoon. They turned their heads to stare at Jim and the older miner, who hadn't talked at all, who had come to drive Jim. They could feel the hate of these men streaming out toward them. They got into the car; Jim and Sidney sat behind, and Lem Carter drove. Lem spoke for the first time.

"I don't like the looks o' them men," he said. "They's too many men for this time o' night. I heered talk of night riders."

A feeling of cold crawled up Sidney's back. Not apprehension, but as though he were steeling himself for an

attack. There was silence in the car, then Lem Carter turned his head slightly—

"I heered how they might kidnap the lot o' you and ride you out o' the State."

"I'll be glad when yore out," said Jim. "I'll certainly be more easy in my mind when yore over the line. I ben mighty worried about you sense they shot Harry. He was the nicest feller you ever knew. They wasn't anybody around here but whut liked Harry. We felt like he was kin. He talked awful nice and awful sensible. He was the only foreign organizer they was. That's why they shot him. It's an awful pity. My sister's goin' to feel awful bad. When she went North to collect money, she said to me—

"'Honey, look out for Harry. Don't let them git him. I kin feel he don't sense the danger yere.' That was it. We couldn't make him *see*. He wouldn't believe that they was out to git him. But they was, and they got him."

They were silent. The car bumped on through the darkness. Sidney felt as though he knew all about this boy he had never seen. He was a little younger than himself. He belonged to the youth movement, and he had come here to organize.

"I hope we git there in time," said Jim. "I hope he's conscious. It'll mean an awful lot to his folks if someone from his home was with him."

Lem Carter said, "Yeah, I'll sure be glad when you git over the line. That crowd in the hotel lobby warn't there for no good." A spreading sense of imminent evil flowed over Sidney. Life was becoming simplified, as it was to Jim, as it was to Lem. It was becoming black and white.

"Here we are," said Lem Carter. They were going through the streets of a tidy town. They drew up in front of a new brick building, and went in.

"How is he?" Jim asked the nurse.

"He's conscious just now. He's rallied." Jim stared at the nurse. A look of deep intelligence passed between the two. She shook her head gravely.

"Not for long," she said.

The boy Harry Grimm was lying with open eyes. All color had drained away under his tan, and his lips were pale. He had thick black hair. Jim and Sidney stood there, the nurse on one side. Harry Grimm looked at them with sightless eyes. Jim spoke gently.

"Buddy, do you know me?" he asked. The boy smiled very slightly, his lips outlined, "Yes, Jim."

"Buddy," said Jim, "I brought a friend from yore home town. Don't you want to send a message to yore folks? He's one o' the fellers you was goin' to meet today." The dying boy's face brightened. He spoke very low, so that Sidney had to bend close to him.

"Tell them," he said, "I'm some lucky they didn't kill me." The effort had been too great. He closed his eyes. A frightful pain gripped Sidney, a sense of anguish and loss and fury came over him. It was as if indeed this boy had been his childhood friend, from his home town. The nurse held the boy's pulse. She shook her head gently. She said in a low tone—

"You'd best go now."

They walked out quietly. Sidney's heart filling, overflowing with grief, with fury, grieving for a friend, a murdered friend.

"We kin 'venge him," Jim said gently.

Now Sidney knew what he had come for. He had come up to find that his world was divided into two camps. He was on the side of his murdered friend Harry Grimm, on the side of his friend Jim, the miner. Lem Carter came to meet them.

"Git in," he said. "I'm goin' to take you over the line. I ben phonin' to Mapleton. The night riders has rounded

up all yore friends and taken them away. I'll git you out of Kintucky over another road." Sidney got in without answering.

"They're right," he thought. "Why shouldn't they kidnap me? I am their enemy. I am in a war against them."

RED OVER EUROPE

by

George Weller

GEORGE WELLER, *well-known among foreign correspondents in Europe and at present (1936) in Greece, is the author of a brilliant Harvard novel,* Not to Eat, Not for Love *(1934).*

RED OVER EUROPE

FOR fifteen years, practically since the end of the war, during which he lost his little German weekly in a Wisconsin city, Eric Wolf had been correspondent in Vienna for the Traynor World Service. He used to stay on duty in the one room office in the Burggasse later than any other American newspaperman. In that way he sometimes picked up a revolution or a royal love affair that came in late from the southern Balkans. It might be too late for Morton Traynor's morning newspaper in New York, but it could always be used in the Traynor papers in Chicago, or Denver, or Los Angeles, on account of their later deadlines.

Sometimes Eric went to sleep on his desk. Then the bicycle boy from the radio office would let himself in with the key that hung outside the door behind the picture of Morton Traynor. He would read the despatch, and if it did not seem important he would not awaken Eric, but simply put an overcoat on the shoulders of the sleeping man and turn off the gas heater so that nothing could happen.

Eric was nearly twenty years older than any of the other Traynor men, but he was never fired because he knew how to write precisely what Morton Traynor wanted from the Balkans. Traynor wanted the Balkans always to be "the breeding place of wars." He wanted royal love affairs to have a revolution looming behind them, and at least a kiss in every revolution. After sending a story about the Roumanian wheat situation Eric would get a telegram from New York: "Traynor says always put

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Madame Lupescu in your Bucharest." Christmas afternoon he regularly heard from home: "Why you missed Christmas Eve boy princes throughout Balkans hanging up stockings awaiting Santa Claus?"

Traynor's newspapers sold love, politics and science, poisoned with unreality to make them more palatable to the ignorant and poor of America, for whose clogged perpetual fatigue the acids of Traynor were the cheapest antidote. What Traynor wanted from his foreign correspondents was not information about Europe but forgetfulness of America.

But he also wanted co-ordination. For example, when the Traynor newspapers were backing the bonus lobby of the veterans in Washington everyone in Europe, from Amsterdam to Warsaw, received orders to send New York three hundred words about how easily veterans in other countries obtained bonuses. None of the countries had a bonus resembling the American proposal, and many of them were repudiating their pensions. It was particularly difficult to write a bonus story from chronically neutral countries like Switzerland and Sweden, but the Traynor correspondents had their orders and they carried them out.

Another hard time came for the Traynor World Service when Morton Traynor got a frightened feeling that the government was going to nationalize the oil fields, just when he was doing rather well with some stuff he owned out Long Beach way. Thereupon the Traynor correspondent in Geneva missed several League of Nations tea parties while he hunted for something Swiss that was being nationalized just as pessimistically as oil threatened to be. He chose watches, and oiled them well before winding.

Eric Wolf knew he could never explain the Traynor investment scheme, of which he had a confidential copy, to his subcorrespondents in Belgrade, Budapest, Sofia, Bucharest and Athens, whose ordinary despatches were written in British English, broken German and bastard

French, varied with odd phrases in Serbo-Croat, Wallachian and the slang of Macedonian nationalism. So he wrote a sketch about the discovery of oil fields in Hungary, which emphatically would not be federalized, another short one from Belgrade about the Yugoslav bean oil industry, six hundred majestic words about Roumanian petroleum, two hundred witty ones about olive oil for Athens, and finally a long piece for himself from Austria about Vienna as a center of Balkan oil nationalism, which was breeding another war.

A week later he heard from New York: "Traynor says fire Sofia man for neglecting oil coverage." Eric telephoned Sofia and arranged with the man there to write his stories for the next three months under his cousin's name, though he had already been fired by Traynor so many times that he had few relatives left.

Eric Wolf, with the fifties of his years mounting upon him, sitting in his unpressed clothes in the office in the Burggasse, had too many capitals to handle, too many palace love affairs memorized, too many fallen cabinets incompletely forgotten. He was always overlooking either Sofia or Budapest.

The only job harder than Eric's was to be Traynor's correspondent in Moscow after he started his Americanist campaign against the Communists. If the correspondent's stories were not sufficiently anti-Communist he would be fired for disobeying orders, left in Moscow without a job. If they were anti-Communist the correspondent would be successively warned, then censored, then expelled from the country. But an expelled correspondent was no heroic martyr to Traynor; he was rather an awkward failure, deserving demotion or discharge. Traynor had the true sportsman's spirit of always wanting to be on friendly terms with the enemy: France, repudiator of her debts, and Morton Traynor; the red star of Moscow and Morton Traynor, demon publisher and bond-holding patriot;

the little people of the Land of the Rising Sun and Morton Traynor, the American yellow peril.

One night in May Eric Wolf was writing the regular Bulgarian revolution story. Sofia itself was deathly silent. For hours there had been no communication but breathless hints, bloody shrieks and hoarse whispers from the Yugoslav, Roumanian and Greek borders. What was happening in Bulgaria? Nothing was certain but the name of the leading actor, General Revodoff, but that was enough for Eric. He knew the General and he knew what he would say. He took a big drink of beer, stared across the street at a man and woman who had entered a room in the Ritterhof Hotel and immediately pulled down the curtain tight against the windowsill, and began to write:

"In an exclusive interview to the correspondent of the Traynor World Service in Sofia today General Revodoff, Bulgaria's new strong man, predicted that his regime would continue the friendly foreign policy of former governments and would stabilize the national currency, but would crush mercilessly any attempt by Marxists, Reds, or Communists to seize the reins of power."

I hope nothing bad has happened to the General, Eric thought, staring at the Ritterhof Hotel. He wrote on:

"When asked if hints that Olga Popoff, platinum blonde who has been named for a Hollywood contract, had put her vermilion tinted fingernail in the palace pie, were based on facts, General Revodoff said: 'Naturally not. The new government is in the hands of sober army officers, not blonde Hollywood aspirates.'"

Eric was erasing "aspirates" to put in "aspirants" when Byron Bean walked into the office.

Byron Bean was the greatest radical shooter on the Traynor staff. His start had been made four years earlier, covering the Los Angeles red squad, and his subsequent rise was speedy. He had been in Europe hardly six months

but he was a boulevardier already, carried a yellow cane, wore gloves all but the hottest days of summer, and turned on his hips whenever a beautiful woman passed, lacking only a spade-shaped beard to point at her. But he would never have that beard. His face was smooth and bald all over, and he looked more like a wornout chorus man than the alert discoverer of a dozen Communist plots.

"Don't let me interrupt your story, Mr. Wolf," he said familiarly. "Byron Bean of the Moscow office."

"Glad to see you," said Eric, ready to sympathize. "Sit down. I'm just doing a little piece for tomorrow."

Bean leaned over the typewriter, though uninvited, and said, "Oh, yes, Bulgaria." It was as though he said, oh, of course, that Sarajevo murder. He seated himself and held his cane between his knees, rotating it in his fingers with his egg-like chin close above.

"How do you like Vienna after Moscow?" asked Eric, putting the *Pester Lloyd* under his beer mug and unobtrusively wiping away the ring.

"I believe," said Byron Bean after consideration, "that I am going to like Vienna." He smiled with a kind of Tia Juana urbanity. "The beauty of the women of Vienna is famous the world over," he said without a blink.

That was destined to be the lead of Byron Bean's first story from the Balkans. The London office telephoned that night to say that Mr. Bean would replace Mr. Wolf as correspondent in Vienna, upon orders from Mr. Traynor in New York. Mr. Wolf was to complete the remaining nine days of the month, and would receive a fortnight's salary in advance.

Byron Bean said he thought he would take a week's rest in the Tyrol, and checked out of his hotel. Three days later Eric got a confidential letter from the correspondent in Belgrade saying that Mr. Bean had made

an unannounced visit at his home. Later there followed letters from the Traynor World Service correspondents in Sofia, Athens, Bucharest and Budapest, enabling Eric to trace the itinerary of Byron Bean's journey.

"How did you like the Tyrol, Mr. Bean?" he inquired, when the new correspondent came in and hung up his hat on the last night of the month.

"I had a short trip into Yugoslavia and a nice long rest, thank you," said Byron Bean.

"If you can," said Eric, "you ought to try to visit some of these Balkan capitals personally."

"I hope to have that opportunity," pronounced Byron Bean gravely, peeling off his tight gloves.

Some ceremony seemed to be called for, so they shook hands. Then Byron Bean quickly sat down at the typewriter. Eric wrapped up his beer mug in a copy of the *Abendblatt* and left the office for the last time.

Eric planned to go back to Milwaukee and look for a job and see if any of the girls and fellows of the old German-American crowd he used to know were still around. But it was not easy to leave Vienna, nor did it seem a trifle to say farewell to all those Balkan capitals over whose tumbling destinies he had watched for fifteen years. He decided to make a farewell tour and perhaps give his former assistants some pointers on how to get along with Byron Bean.

In Budapest the Hungarian correspondent made him stay at his home and wanted to try to get him a soft job on the publicity staff of the "Justice for Hungary" revisionist committee. In Belgrade the Serbian Racich, who had an apartment with one of the dancers at the Opera, made him stay with his mother's family. Eric soon found himself getting into a complicated way with Racich's sister Olga, who was about thirty years old, with eyebrows so black and mouth so red and expectant that he

did not stop worrying about himself until he was aboard the Simplon-Orient for Athens.

At Skolpje, in southern Serbia, he changed his plans and turned off for Bulgaria. That night he was unpacking his suitcases at the house of Igor Gradoff, correspondent of the Traynor World Service in Sofia.

Gradoff, a tall gentle man with an easily surprised face, had once been a distributor of American films in Sofia but was now wholly dependent on the Traynor job and his wife's small inheritance. What little confidence he had in himself had dissolved in the face of Byron Bean's searching questions, and Eric found him shaken.

Gradoff led Eric into a little parlor filled with pictures of his relations, many of whom had been nominally correspondents of the Traynor World Service and fired in his name. They drank a little wine and stared out the window, wondering what would become of them, whose knowledge and whose ignorance had always so perfectly dovetailed.

They had been sad together only a short time when Gradoff abruptly threw up his head, loosing a wild teardrop from his cheek, and crossed the room to the slender-legged desk. He handed Eric a letter. "This came by the plane today," he said bravely. "Mr. Bean's first orders. Perhaps you could explain to me. . . ."

The letter read:

"TO ALL SUBCORRESPONDENTS IN THE BALKANS:

"The New York office has sent orders to this office to get busy on some more red stories. Mr. Traynor is again taking up his fight against extremist agitation in the schools and universities of the United States, and all offices in the Balkans are asked to do their share by coming through with long fresh stories, to be sent by mail to Vienna.

"What is wanted are stories of how each country has fought the menace of the reds, with details of the methods

used in each country. This in order to explain what measures should be taken against them in the schools and universities of the United States."

Eric put the letter down and found Gradoff's face close to his own.

"I thought," said Gradoff, "that you knew already how to take care of the reds in the United States. I thought you either put them all together in one place, or you killed them."

"Killed them?" said Eric, who came from a fine old American brewery family. "Where did you get the idea we treat anyone like that?"

"Why, in the movies when I used to be in that business . . ." began Gradoff.

"Those were gangsters, not reds," said Eric. "Listen, this letter is dated Tuesday. That means Mr. Bean will need your story in Vienna by Thursday night so that it can get in next week's Sunday scandal sheet. You have to hurry."

"Of course I must hurry," said Gradoff, motionlessly. A troop of bicycle soldiers pedalled rapidly down the street. "Mr. Wolf, I naturally hesitate to think of asking your help. I am too indebted with you already. But I wonder what you would charge me to write that story? I must be very stupid. I cannot understand what Mr. Traynor—I mean Mr. Bean—really wants."

"When does your next air mail plane leave?" asked Eric. The idea of writing a final story for Gradoff, after his own discharge, went pleasantly as wine to the bottom of his stomach.

"Oh, we know all the fliers," said Gradoff quickly. "There is one leaving tomorrow. If we could arrange something tonight there would be plenty of time before they go out to the field at dawn—I often stay up all night—I love long walks at night—"

Mrs. Gradoff came in with her hair down her back and

made coffee for them. Then she kissed her husband good night like a plump and dutiful daughter and went to bed. Then they started on the story.

"First of all," said Eric, "how many reds are there in this whole country?"

Mr. Gradoff stared idiotically at him. "Why, none whatever," he said blankly.

"None?" said Eric. "What do you mean? What about the wild young people?"

"There are neither youngs nor olds," said Mr. Gradoff positively.

"But when they can't find any work worth doing, don't they get extreme ideas? Don't they begin talking around loose about revolution?"

"Oh, revolution!" said Gradoff, enlightened. His voice fell away. "I myself am working for a revolution here," he whispered, "but our revolution has nothing to do with any reds."

Eric sighed. "Look here, Mr. Gradoff," he said, "in all your experience as an inactive revolutionary, have you never come upon some radical, some foreigner, some agitator, some trouble maker, some red who tried to make trouble here in Sofia? Never? Never?"

Mr. Gradoff's pale brown eyes severely perused the past, with slow waggings of his head giving it a negative, negative, negative diagnosis.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, agape. His eyes were starting from his head. He could not speak. He rapped his forehead mercilessly with his knuckles and thus beat himself into articulacy. "Fool!" he said. "Fool, fool, fool!"

He sank heavily into his chair, took a quick sip of coffee, pushed the cup away, and spoke, repentantly confessing his sin. "Mr. Wolf, I have not told you the truth. Right here in Sofia is the man we need for our red story. Not only is he a red!" Eric tried to speak but Gradoff held

him off with both hands, crying, "Not only is he a red! Not only is he a red, but he is an American red!"

Eric smelt the news immediately.

"Let's get a taxi and find him, right now," he said.

But Gradoff caught his arm. "No, he'd be out of town. He was invited out to a party at a villa. He is an American red, very tough and experienced, but still he loves going on parties! Isn't that funny? But never mind! I know all about him. Sit down, Mr. Wolf."

Eric spoke gravely. "Gradoff, you have a better story here than any you ever sent me in Vienna. If we handle it right—you know what I mean, along the lines of American Extremist Sows Strife In Bulgaria—we ought to be able to make Mr. Traynor in New York very much pleased with your work." He ruffled through the soft sheets of paper and tried the pencils on his trembling thumb, selecting one. "Now, don't get excited, whatever you do. We'll simply handle it as though it was any other ordinary story, won't we?" He took a drink of water. "Now, first of all, what's his name? He has a name, hasn't he?" he scolded sharply, to curb the nervousness in both of them.

"His name." The directness of the assault caught Gradoff unawares. "His name is something like Patasee. Yes—Patasee. A name that is just like Patasee."

"You're sure it isn't Genesee?"

"No, Patasee." His doubt diminished as he repeated the word, and he continued the practice. "John Patasee. Mr.—John—Patasee." He beamed.

Eric remained stern. "Where does he come from?"

"Mr. John Patasee comes from Olakoma."

"You mean Oklahoma. Is it Oklahoma City?"

Mr. Gradoff enjoyed being pressed, grew brighter under it. "Certainly. His city is in the territory of Oklahoma."

"State of Oklahoma," Eric corrected.

"State of Oklahoma," Gradoff parroted. "Territory

of Oklahoma," he repeated in an indulgently gentle undertone.

"I have his address," said Eric tartly. "Now then, what are his chief activities?"

"Well," said Mr. Gradoff, leaning back and narrowing his eyes thoughtfully to show that he was an old Traynor correspondent and knew exactly when the acme of any narrative was reached, "I should say that Mr. Patasee's chief activity is drinking. Yes—yes. Mr. Patasee is very much of a drinker. When we take him into a bar and offer to him, he will drink and drink and drink. And yet," he shook his finger under Eric's nose, giving reproof for reproof, "Mr. Patasee is never drunk. He will drink all that is bought for him, and yet never be drunk," he concluded in a kind of tender reverence.

"When did he get here?" Eric shot out.

"Two months ago," pronounced Mr. Gradoff slowly and dreamily. Perceiving that more was expected of him he continued, "Drinking, drinking, drinking. . . . Oh, but Mr. Patasee can support it! He is a great dark man of at least a hundred kilos. I have seen him take four packs of playing cards at once—then rrrr-ii-ip—he tored them all to pieces!"

"But how does he work? That's the story."

"Mr. Patasee does not have to work. He just travels through Europe. He has many friends."

"I mean, how does he work the red propaganda?"

"Oh, that?" said Gradoff, with a look of deep conspiracy. "You mean how does he propagandize for the other reds?"

"Does he propagandize, as you call it, against the United States?"

"All the time! He says no red can live there and he much rather live in Europe."

"He sounds like a pretty clever man," said Eric.

"Clever? He is like a diplomat! All the time he talks

against the government of Washington, and immediately after he tells us how beautiful was his life in the territory of Oklahoma, where every man used to be equal, just like his neighbor, until the Washington government interfered."

"So Oklahoma was just like Russia, eh?" smiled Eric.

"A real soviet, it was," said Gradoff lyrically. "Everybody equal. Everybody going out hunting together."

"How do his ideas catch on?" asked Eric.

"Wonderful!" cried Mr. Gradoff. "Every one of the best people in Sofia all want to be red—the Moussorgoffs, the Probikoffs, the retired railroad director Diploff and his daughter—all want to go to Oklahoma."

Eric looked the Bulgarian straight in the eye. "Has it occurred to Director Diploff to wonder why the rest of the United States haven't gone red like the place where Mr. Patasee claims he comes from?"

"But they think it is very foolish!" exploded Gradoff, spreading his hands helplessly. "They would like to know why. . . ."

"Never mind," said Eric, patting his hand gently. "That's enough for our story. You sign yourself Igor Gradoff now, don't you?"

Gradoff unhooded his heavy old French typewriter, but at Eric's first experimental pickings his wife complained through the door that she couldn't sleep. So they went out and hired a hotel room and wrote the story there, Gradoff lying on the bed with a cigarette repeating musingly: "Mr. John—Patasee—state—Oklahoma—territory—Oklahoma—drinking—drinking. . . ."

Two nights later Gradoff got a telegram from Byron Bean: "Good story send another next week stop make it about woman communist stop if possible royal angle also."

"Mr. Wolf," said Gradoff, "what would you advise?"

"Is Mr. Patasee married?" asked Eric.

"No," Gradoff replied. "All the girls in Sofia are in

love with him, but he don't marry any. He just make love to those he can."

"Then you're out of luck," said Eric. "All you can do is to write about some lady no one ever heard of and call her the Lupescu of Bulgaria, or the Redheaded Red." For himself the fun was over; he had written his last story for Morton Traynor.

There was a hopeless look in Mr. Gradoff's face. He put his lank hand on the lever of the parlor door, uttered confusedly and irresponsibly the words, "Mr. Patasee has only black hairs," and went out.

Mr. Gradoff persuaded Eric to go away with him into the long fragrant valley below the Shipka Pass, the Valley of the Wild Rose. They stayed at a little tavern where mountains peered in at their window and they shouted from one room to the other when they were shaving in the morning. They loafed before luncheon, while fragrant rose oil from the pressing sheds made heavy all the sun drenched air. They ate, they took a nap, and in the afternoon they took a long walk. After dinner they would start to read, but soon Gradoff would say, "Come on, Mr. Wolf, let us go down the stairs and kid the peasants." Then there would be wine and constellations of jokes, and when they went up to bed the roosters would be summoning the dawn over the mountain.

When finally they returned to Sofia they were invited to a party in honor of Mr. Patasee, given by the son of the rose oil king, a young man who planned soon to visit the United States. Eric would have preferred to depart immediately for Greece, but he thought also that he might be able to get an idea for Gradoff's next story by talking cleverly to Mr. Patasee.

At the host's villa there were many people standing around holding cups in their hands, commencing the long adventure of eating and drinking that is a Balkan party.

"Mr. Patasee has already started," whispered Mrs. Gradoff. "They have telephoned his hotel and he is coming."

Soon there was heard, above, beyond and outside the whirlpool of conversation, a deep bass voice. It drew nearer and more portentous. Still indistinguishable, it already sounded foreign to the gathering, yet more American than Eric's. "Hello, hello," it proved to be saying, "hello, how's everybody, how are you all, my friends, how are you?"

There entered, on the arm of the hostess, a large and unquestionably genuine Osage Indian.

He was not wearing war paint; otherwise, however, his attire and appearance were as spectacular and complete as if his tepee were pitched on the sidewalk. His blanket was on his arm, his war bonnet with bright bold feathers on his head, and his somewhat plump face showed the confident appetite for greeting of a man long used to being the guest of honor.

"This is Mr. Patasee," whispered Gradoff.

It was Tuesday evening, and the article on Mr. Patasee had appeared in all the newspapers of the Traynor World Service on Sunday.

The guests pressed warmly around Mr. Patasee. He was induced to take his place in the largest upholstered chair in the room. A lady whispered a request, audible to all. Immediately the guests pressed closer than ever, the bare necks and arms of the women entreating him, the high foreheads of the men pleadingly in earnest while their voluble lips agitated their distinguished moustaches.

Mr. Patasee at first gave no favoring sign. At last, however, he yielded, and held up his hand for silence. He arose to his feet with a slight murmur of beads. Then he placed his feet wide apart, lifted high his dusky chin, and seared the creamy wainscoting with a war whoop.

The guests shrank back, their reason temporarily unseated, their veins delighting in this absolutely safe terror.

Mr. Patasee merely smiled, sat down, and allowing his hand to fall naturally to his host's cigar box, quickly demonstrated that he could smoke three large cigars simultaneously.

This lighter manner of his won their hearts totally. They were his slaves. Mrs. Gradoff whispered something for her husband to tell Eric. Gradoff passed it on: "Olga says, the most popular foreigner who ever came to Bulgaria."

Mr. Patasee suddenly swept all three cigars away from his mouth and held them, smoking formidably, in his open hand. "Listen, folks," he said pontifically. "I know all the educated ones among you speak English. I got something to tell you and I want you to tell it to your friends. I been entertained in Budapest, in Belgrade, and in Bucharest, but nowheres else in the Balkans have I been entertained like in Sofia. I could stay with you here in Sofia till the day I go to the happy hunting grounds."

There was applause, and a rapid susurration of footnotes to his last expression.

Mr. Patasee nodded matter-of-factly, drew deeply on all three cigars, and pushed back the warbonnet on his forehead before expelling the smoke over the heads of the guests, most of whom had settled themselves campfire style at the foot of his lounging chair.

"Now I want to tell you something," said Mr. Patasee severely. "And I want those of you who understand plain English to explain it to those who don't know anything but Hungarian—I should say Bulgarian." Several more persons squatted down, and there was a secretive and savage hunch to their shoulders as they leaned forward.

"I got a telegram from home today," said Mr. Patasee. "What do you suppose it said? It said some newspaperman here in Sofia has just sent a story to the Oklahoma Territory about my spreading trouble, trouble for you people here!"

There were cries of mystified indignation.

"Yes, it seems I been trying to agitate you, I been trying to overthrow the Bulgarian government, I been trying to make propaganda for the Communists here."

"For the Communists?" expostulated Mr. Diploff of the National Railways. "Why, you couldn't do that, my chief. That's against the law."

Mr. Patasee bountifully blew away another triple size, rolling cloud of smoke from his pursed mouth. Then, suddenly as Zeus the Thunderer, he leaped to his feet and smashed one fist in the palm of the other hand. His war whoop scourged the air, leaving two glass eardrops of the chandelier tinkling. Several guests lost their balance, falling on their elbows.

"I'm going to wire my lawyer tonight for the name of that reporter!" proclaimed Mr. Patasee in a terrible voice.

At carefully arranged intervals Mr. and Mrs. Gradoff and Eric Wolf left the party. Gradoff, though pale, insisted on being the last to leave, but he did not tell them he climbed out by a bathroom window.

"You cannot go away from Sofia now," said Gradoff, when the three were reunited in the parlor of his apartment. "You cannot go to Greece at this time."

"Why not?" demanded Eric.

"Because he would follow you, and you would be all alone against him. Two are better than one. You are an American, like Tom Mix, like Richard Dix, like George O'Brien. You know what to do with the reds. I know nothing. It is better we face him together."

"I can't stay more than three days," said Eric.

"Stay three days," said Gradoff. "Please stay only three days."

Nothing happened. Mrs. Gradoff kept the safety chain on the door and told the cook to watch the garden wall all the time. During the day it was not so bad, because

there were usually some soldiers going by in the streets who could be depended upon to protect the life of a Bulgarian against any foreigner, even an Osage. But at night the tension was great. Once Eric looked from the window of his bedroom into the garden and under the full moon saw Gradoff practising lasso throws with the clothesline.

Friday morning the telephone rang. It was their defensive plan that Mrs. Gradoff answer all messages, telephones, bells and letters.

She gasped. "It is a telephone call from—from London—for Mr. Wolf," she said with her hand over the mouthpiece.

"Not here—went away to Albania—not here now," prompted her husband.

"Let me answer it," said Eric, taking the instrument.

"Hello—hello—is this Eric Wolf?" said a reedy but distinct voice. "Hello—this is the London office calling—Mr. Traynor wants to know if you are prepared to take up your job in Vienna again. We've been trying every—hello?—we've been trying every country in southeastern Europe to get you. Hello? Hello? Did you get that? Traynor wants you back in Vienna. What do you want us to tell him?"

"What's the matter with Bean's work?" asked Eric. In the bottom of his stomach he was weighing the German-American crowd in Milwaukee against the smell of the new leaves on the Ring when it is raining in Vienna.

"Bean has resigned," said the London voice guardedly. "That's what we hear from the states and that's all we know. Do you want to take back your job in Vienna?"

"I'll go back tomorrow," said Eric. "How's that?"

"That's all right with us and I presume it's all right with Mr. Traynor," said the voice without enthusiasm. "Glad we could find you. . . . Oh, and say, in case Bean should be gone when you get there, remember this:

Mr. Traynor doesn't want any more red stories from Europe until further orders."

"Not even if there's a woman in them?" demurred Eric.

The man on the other end considered a moment, then he said: "If there's a woman in them I'd send them by mail." The operator interrupted and the man in London hung up without farewell.

There was an accumulation of mail waiting at the Vienna office. As Eric shovelled it up he picked out the Sunday newspaper, newest and fattest arrival from New York. Quickly he found the article: "JOHN PATASEE, THE OKLAHOMA RED WHO TRIED TO UPSET BULGARIA." There was a picture of a mean looking little man with his coat off, his fist raised in harangue above the heads of several composographed Tyrolese mountaineers. It was signed, "*by Byron Bean.*"

On the financial page of the *Paris Herald* he found a bulletin that Mr. Morton Traynor, the American publisher, had acquired the salient oil wells of the southern Osage district. "It is understood that he will soon open negotiations with Mr. John Patasee, one of the leading private owners of the district, who is now traveling abroad."

There was also a telegram, two days old. It came from New York. It read: "Beginning immediately stories favoring federalization oil resources will be favorably received. Traynor."

SIMPLICIO

by

Ignazio Silone

IGNAZIO SILONE, *a native of the Abruzzi mountain region of Italy, has been living in Zurich, Switzerland, where he has been active in anti-Fascist activities. His first published short story in the United States appeared in the April 1935 number of* Story; *it was* Journey to Paris, *reprinted in the volume* Mr. Aristotle. *He is the author of the peasant novel* Fontamara, *on which was based the play* Bitter Stream *produced by the Theatre Union in New York in 1935.*

SIMPLICIO

THE first alarm was given by a washerwoman. Through the open door of his carpenter's shop, Simplicio could hear her shouting:

"Quick! Run! Run! Hide! Quick!"

The washerwoman's words, which held no meaning for Simplicio, were accompanied by gesticulations implying that he should flee, hide himself, run for his life. Still shouting at him, the woman disappeared behind a building in course of construction.

"What's the matter with her?" said Simplicio to himself. "Is she crazy? Can it be the heat's gone to her head?"

Simplicio had been at work all day long in his carpenter's shop. He had not left the shop for a single moment; he had not quit his work for a single moment. He had seen no one, spoken to no one. He had attended strictly to his own business.

A goatherd appeared shortly after, making the same crazy gestures as the washerwoman and shouting the same meaningless words:

"Run! Run! What are you waiting for? For Christ's sake and the Madonna's, why don't you hide?"

The goatherd seemed very excited, and he too kept on shouting as he disappeared. It was as if a big storm were approaching. But the heavens were as bright and calm as they are at the end of May. Simplicio had worked all day long in his carpenter's shop. All day long he had attended to his own affairs. He had spent the entire day in finishing a kneading-trough which had been ordered by

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Rosa, the dye-woman, for her daughter who was about to be married.

"Can that goatherd be crazy, too?" Simplicio asked himself. "Can it be that, up there all alone with his flocks, he's lost his reason?"

He now noticed that the masons and laborers on the building that was under construction near by had left off work and were holding whispered consultations. It couldn't be more than four o'clock in the afternoon. It wasn't time to stop work. Yet the masons and the laborers had left off work, and stood there whispering. One of the workmen now came running over to Simplicio.

"Is that the signal?" he shouted as he came. "Is it starting now? Holy Mother of God, why don't you answer? Is that the signal? Is it starting?"

Simplicio made no response. He had worked all day in his shop. All day long he had worked on that kneading-trough for Rosa, the dye-woman. He had attended strictly to his own business.

"Are those masons out of their wits?" he wondered now. "Can it be the June sun has gone to their heads?"

He now saw the stone-diggers leaving the quarry and making for the village. It couldn't be more than four o'clock in the afternoon. It wasn't yet time to stop work. But there the quarrymen were, scampering down from the mountainside, talking and gesticulating with great animation. In the little provincial road which runs along the riverside at the foot of the hill, Simplicio could see groups of peasants on their way to the town. It certainly was not any later than four o'clock, and it was not time to stop work. Yet there were the peasants, hastening along, urging on with blows and kicks their donkeys, laden with bags.

It was then that Simplicio began to be scared. He had worked all day long in his carpenter's shop. He had minded his own affairs, being concerned with nothing

other than that kneading-trough for Rosa, the dye-woman. But in the meantime, something undreamed of must have happened. Something he had not seen. Something terrible—

It was then he began to be scared.

An elderly mason, surrounded by his fellow masons and the workmen, as they stood there among the building material for the dock that was going up near by, now called out to Simplicio.

"Is that the signal? Does that mean it's starting? Saints alive, man, why don't you answer!"

"Signal? What signal?" was the question Simplicio put to himself. He had not left his carpenter's shop for a moment. All day long, he had not given a thought to anything but that trough for Rosa, the dye-woman. Why couldn't they leave him in peace?

The men whom Simplicio had seen coming down from the stone-quarry a short while before now went past the shop. They appeared astonished at seeing him there, going quietly about his business.

"Is it starting?" they shouted at him. "Is it starting at last? It was about time for it to start!"

It was at this moment that Simplicio beheld, rising from the center of the town, an enormous column of smoke and flame. The town hall was on fire! The town hall was burning! It was then that Simplicio understood what it was all about. He could see a group of carabineers, with bayonets fixed, making for his carpenter's shop from the center of the village. It was then that Simplicio understood what it was all about.

"They are coming to get me!" he said.

He did not take time to close his shop door, nor even to snatch up his hat and coat. He did not lose an instant, but ran for the mountain for dear life.

The conflagration was in the middle of New Town, which was situated at the foot of the hill and inhabited

almost exclusively by merchants, land-owners and artisans. On the top of the hill was the Old Town, known as Purgatory. It was made up of a hundred or more hovels and stables where only peasants dwelt. About the flaming municipal building, the inhabitants of New Town were now swarming like ants, when an ant-hill has been kicked over. The peasants, on the other hand, were enjoying the spectacle from every point of vantage that Purgatory afforded. From down in New Town, those who were in charge of the work of putting out the fire, would from time to time shout up and gesticulate to the residents of the upper town, by way of signifying that they ought to lend a hand.

"Come down! Come on down!"

But the peasants pretended not to understand.

"What's the matter?" they shouted back. "Fire? What fire? Where's the fire?"

Now, the New Town residents were a little more thin-skinned than the Purgatory peasants, and those among the artisans, merchants, and land-owners who ventured to draw near the flames speedily drew back again, finding the atmosphere a little too hot for them. It was for this reason that the constables and carabineers were urging those up in Purgatory to come down, but the latter did not get their meaning. It could now be seen how fierce and relentless was that hatred which for years had been piling up between Purgatory and New Town. The former place was now transformed into a sort of grandstand. In those spots from which the view was best, the peasants could be seen squatting about on the ground, smoking their pipes and telling funny stories as they watched the fire. Round about, the young lads were cutting capers out of sheer exuberance.

The fire in the town hall had started on the top floor where the offices of the civilian authorities were.

"Just think," said Donato Frascone, in a half-jesting

tone, "of all the birth certificates, marriage certificates, and death certificates that are going up in smoke down there! It's terrible, I tell you! Why, it means that the dead are no longer dead, those that are born have not yet been born, and those that are married are unmarried—it's terrible! It means that we no longer exist!"

The fire by this time had got down to the second floor, where the office of the bureau of grazing rights was.

"That means," remarked the Ortonese, "that there's no grass left! There are no mountains any more. All the records are burned. What are the poor sheep going to do?"

But it was as the fire reached the first floor, where the tax offices were, that the peasants' mourning took on a lyric quality.

"What are we going to do if we can't pay taxes any more? How's a body to go on living if he doesn't get his little notice from the assessor at the end of the month?" And old lady Continenza sobbed and tore at her hair.

"And to think that this very evening I was going down to pay up my back taxes!" Old Geremia turned his empty pockets inside out. "Yes, sir, this very evening—and now, the office is burned! Oh, what have I done that the Lord should punish me like this?"

Each of them had his say, and their lamentations were accompanied by the chorus of lads: "Oh, what are we going to do! What are we going to do!"

The peasants stayed there until late at night, their eyes on the smoldering town hall. They stayed until the last rafter had dropped. And then, the show being over, the lanes of Purgatory were once more deserted.

"Good night! Pleasant dreams!" the peasants said to one another with an understanding smile on their lips. There was no need of saying anything more. But Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, had to have his say: "As a beginning, it wasn't bad." All were agreed on this but felt

there was no need of saying so. "As a beginning, it wasn't bad," Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, repeated. "No, of course not! Of course not!" the others replied, feeling that there was no need of all this talk.

"What I mean to say," Sabbatino insisted, "is that a beginning is one thing, and keeping it up is another."

"That's right! That's right!" the others replied. What was the use, anyway, of putting it into words?

"Do you think for a minute," the Ortonese asked Sabbatino, "that Simplicio needs any advice from you?"

Sabbatino dropped to his knees, bent his bearded face to the ground, and kissed the earth.

"May the Heavenly Father be his guide!" he said.

Simplicio eluded the search of carabineers and peasants alike. The former had received orders to fire on him, in case he should be found and should refuse to surrender or should attempt to escape. The peasants, on the contrary, were endeavoring to get into touch with him, in order to furnish him with food and ammunition.

"If he's started the thing, he'll certainly see it through," they assured one another. In many of the mountain villages of southern Italy the only history that the peasant knows is that having to do with bandits. That is the only political experience he has had. The ownership of a small piece of land or a vineyard commonly serves to sever any bond of solidarity. The wrongs and injustices inflicted by employers are almost always looked upon as individual calamities, calamities which the peasant, if he has a stout heart, must face as an individual. The bandit tales which each learns at his mother's knee invariably have to do with the fate of one of his kind who has been wrongfully persecuted, and who, by way of "taking justice into his own hands," has committed some crime or other. In order to flee arrest, the hero is thereupon constrained to take to the mountains. And in order to throw

the carabineers off the track, punish the defection of his false friends, and procure for himself something to eat, he is thereafter forced to certain other "acts of justice," until the total number of crimes chalked up against him mounts so high that there is no longer hope of a reconciliation between him and society. Every peasant is aware of all this, but the thing he never forgets is that initial cause which spurred the bandit on to "take justice into his own hands"; and inasmuch as "there was no other way," everything that the outlaw afterwards is led to do not only is not regarded as blameworthy but is even admired as heroism. And so, inspired by this tradition, the Purgatory peasants now began making preparations to aid and succor Simplicio.

"Before starting out," they said to one another, "Simplicio must have made his calculations. The first act of justice has been accomplished; the others will follow."

The peasants are acquainted with many stories of brigands, but what above all aroused their admiration in this case, was the calm manner in which Simplicio had kept his revolutionary plans concealed. It was for this reason that the carabineers had always been suspicious of him.

When he was a young man, Simplicio had been an anarchist; he had let his hair and beard grow, and had dreamed of the equality of all beings.

"Man is good," he would preach to the peasants; "man has no need of carabineers."

Simplicio was good, he had no need of carabineers; but the carabineers had need of him. Carabineers exist for the purpose of defending institutions, and against whom would they defend them, if not against the enemies of institutions? Simplicio accordingly had been placed upon the list of such enemies; and on the eve of every patriotic celebration, he was regularly put in jail by way of avoiding possible conspiracies and disorders. After the

celebration was over, he was given his freedom again. Free institutions had been saved.

"The business of carabineers is to prevent trouble, so that they won't have to put it down," the marshal in charge of the carabineers would always explain to Simplicio on the eve of patriotic events, when he repaired to the carpenter's shop with a warrant for arrest.

"Man is good," Simplicio would reply; but he did not venture to add that, in order to be good and remain good, man had no need of carabineers; for the marshal might have taken offense at this. In those days the peasants still could emigrate, still could go to try their luck in Argentine or Brazil; and for this reason they did not pay very much attention to Simplicio.

"If it wasn't for the carabineers," they would object to him, "where would we go for our passports when we want to leave the country?"

"Man is good," Simplicio still would say, "and has no need of a passport when he wants to travel."

"But without a passport, they'll put you in jail!" was the peasants' irrefutable logic.

Simplicio himself would very much have liked to go overseas, but he had given up this idea so that he would not be forced to ask the carabineers for a passport. What is more, he was the one anarchist of the region, the one avowed enemy of institutions; and the carabineers, whose business it is to defend institutions, would not have liked very well to see him go. He was good, he had no need of carabineers, but the carabineers had need of him. The result was, he had stayed on in his native village, always kind and gentle, always ready to do anyone a favor, always sympathetic, with advice for each of life's emergencies and with a good word for all who came his way. Many of the peasants had taken advantage of him, and had carpenter work done for which they had not paid. With the approach of age, however, Simplicio had become a little more prudent.

"Man is almost always good," was now as far as he would go. Or, "Man could be good." Or, more prudently still: "They say that man once upon a time was good."

Yes, with the approach of age, Simplicio had become a little more wary; he no longer talked anarchism, nor committed himself as to the innate goodness of mankind. He worked from morning to evening in his carpenter's shop and minded his own business. He had never married, but looked after his own household needs; and this had left a certain mild, timid, feminine imprint upon his character. Nevertheless, by reason of his youthful opinions, he remained a marked man; he was down in the police books as the dangerous element of the community. Just before each big patriotic festival the village carabineers would receive a telegram from Aquila, ordering Simplicio's arrest as a preventive measure. The marshal would personally attend to this little ceremony, and the courteousness he displayed in executing it appeared to grow with the years.

"It's a formality," he would say to Simplicio, "a mere formality."

"I understand, I understand," Simplicio would reply; "your duty is your duty."

He would then go to spend, without remonstrance, a few days behind bars. This happened three or four times a year, his detention lasting, according to circumstance, from three to five days. When the celebration was over, he was set at liberty, and free institutions once again were saved. Those institutions, in the course of time, came to be altered; but Simplicio's periodic arrest as a preventive measure continued. It even happened more frequently than ever now, since a new government naturally means new anniversaries to celebrate. The taking of Simplicio into temporary custody was, it might be said, the sole echo which reached the village of the patriotic celebrations in the metropolis.

"There must be big doings in the city," the peasants

would remark when word ran around that the marshal had come for Simplicio.

But Simplicio had no complaints to make. "Your duty is your duty," was all he would say, when shown the telegram from Aquila. In the jail he was treated with respect. The jailer's wife would sometimes slip a tomato into his soup, and he in turn would promise to mend her chairs for her.

"Man could be good," he would observe on such occasions.

"If I had a daughter, I'd give her to you for a wife," the jailer's spouse once said to him in a moment of compassion. As it happened, she had no daughter. Simplicio thought he would catch the ball on the bounce.

"Couldn't you," he ventured to ask, "give me another tomato?"

The good dame looked at him in amazement.

"Another tomato! Have you any idea what tomatoes are worth?"

The price of tomatoes had gone up. Everything had gone up. The peasants could no longer leave the country, and with the new government, poverty had increased to a point where it had become utterly unbearable. Wages were low, land rents were high. The famous Southland Law, absolving the poverty-stricken small-farmers from certain taxes, had been abolished.

It was at this time that something happened which was to have a great influence on Simplicio's life. At Sulmona there was an uprising of the peasants against the local authorities. It was put down by force in two or three days, but the feeling of excitement remained and spread round about Sulmona, all the way to the villages of Marsica. In the watercloset of the railway station of Simplicio's village, there was found a bundle of smuggled leaflets containing an appeal to the peasants. All efforts to find out where these leaflets came from were in vain, and it was likewise

impossible to determine the individual of the locality to whom they had been sent. The carabineers knew only one man who had ever taken a hand in politics, and that was Simplicio. They arrested him.

"Is it some new anniversary?" he asked the marshal. This time the marshal was not alone but had with him four carabineers. No, this was once when it wasn't a case of some new anniversary. Simplicio at the time was busy making a table for Crescenza Noce.

"I only have a few hours more work on this," he said to the armed men who stood in front of him. "Just wait till I finish this table, and I'll go wherever you like."

The marshal, however, was shortspoken on this occasion.

"Grab your coat and a pair of pocket-handkerchiefs and come along," he said. Simplicio was hand-cuffed and taken off to Aquila.

This occurrence made a new man of him in the eyes of all the peasants of Marsica; he became an exalted figure.

"He was just playing the goody-goody," they said when they spoke of him; "he was just playing possum, and all the while he was stirring up a revolution at Sulmona."

"But why did he have to begin at Sulmona?" was the question that Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, put to everyone he met. "Why couldn't he have started it here?"

"If he started it at Sulmona," the other peasants answered him, "he had his own reasons for it."

"The powder magazine is at Sulmona," was Raffaele Piunzo's afterthought one day; "every revolution begins with taking the munitions supply."

They did not keep Simplicio in prison but deported him to a small island near Tripoli. The poverty of the peasants, meanwhile, increased from day to day, now that the outlet provided by emigration had been cut off. The gentry were treating them worse and worse all the time, and there was no way of getting justice.

"If Simplicio were only here!"

"That fellow will be back one of these days," the peasants kept saying to themselves.

After a year spent in repairing the tables, windows, doors, and chairs on the little island to which he had been deported, Simplicio had been paroled "for good conduct," and was sent back to his native village. He got off at the station, crossed the village and went straight to his shop; and since it was still daylight, he took off his coat, just as if he had never been out of the shop, and at once fell to work finishing Crescenza Noce's table. He was rather pale and coughed a little but was as calm and gentle as ever in aspect.

"He hasn't a word to say, not a word," Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, informed his acquaintance from house to house. "It's no use to try to talk to him, it's no use to be getting him into trouble with foolish chatter."

"Did you have a good look at him?" Raffaele Piunzo went around saying. "Did you notice that way he has of smiling to himself? He's got something up his sleeve, you can bank on that!"

Simplicio went back to work. He worked in his shop from morning to night. He minded his business. He saw no one. He was sober, mild, and gentle. Under pretext of asking him for some sticks of wood for the fire, some of the women folk from time to time would go around to his shop, in order to tell him what was happening in the town and the neighboring locality; they told him of the widespread poverty and how insolent the gentry were. It was no use appealing to the authorities, since those who were guilty of these injustices had themselves become the ones in power. What were they to do, then? Simplicio let them tell him what was on their minds; he listened with a compassionate smile upon his lips but made no reply, although once or twice his eyes filled with tears; and after that he would accompany them to the door. It was not only the peasants without land, but sometimes the small land-

holders, or even occasionally a well-to-do farmer who would come like this, stealthily, to Simplicio.

"There's no use getting him into trouble with a lot of fool woman's talk!" Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, became angry on the subject. "He's only biding his time."

Simplicio's tranquillity and apparent indifference merely served to strengthen this supposition on the part of the peasants. He worked from morning to night and saw no one outside his shop. Why should anyone want to lead a life like that unless he had some hidden purpose? The carabineers for their part did not let him out of their sight and made it a point to pass his shop at frequent intervals, but they saw nothing which might arouse their suspicions. Several months went by, and when at last the fire broke out in the town hall, there was no longer any doubt.

"It's Simplicio beginning again!" was the thought that went through every peasant's mind. "That's his signal!"

The young fellows and the women marveled greatly at the fact that, a week after the firing of the town hall, Simplicio had as yet committed no further "act of justice"; but this was no cause for wonderment to the old men.

"It's a good method," they would say. "He's now getting ready his base of operations and his hiding places. That's the way real bandits always do. There's no need to be too hasty about it."

And indeed, after about a week, reports began to come that Simplicio had been seen in this place or that. Along the road from Luco to Trasacco, he had stopped to ask for a drink, and a woman had recognized him, despite the fact that he was disguised in a monk's hood. At Celano, he had been glimpsed at the entrance of the town dressed as a beggar. At Lecce, by way of contrast, he had been sighted in a soldier's uniform. The fact of the matter is, Simplicio was beginning to be seen just about everywhere at once.

"He's reconnoitering, that's what he's doing," the old peasants would shake their heads and say.

These appearances of Simplicio were not always peaceful ones; they sometimes left damage in their wake. In the neighborhood of Ortucchio, one night, he set fire to the wheat field of a landowner whom the peasants loathed. A couple of days later he made his way into the shrine of the Madonna of Venere and carried off all the treasury, including the ciborium from the tabernacle. The women folk were a little put out over this.

"If the Madonna lets herself be robbed, it means that she wants to be robbed," Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, took it on himself to explain. "Otherwise, she would have worked a miracle to protect her treasure."

Another night Simplicio poisoned four cows belonging to a doctor of Trasacco. The nerve that he displayed won the peasants' admiration.

"He was only playing the goody-goody; he was playing possum," they said. It got to the point where the gentry did not dare leave their houses any more of an evening. And every day brought them threatening letters of this sort: "You had better lower your rents, or you'll have Simplicio to deal with." "Fifty per cent interest is disgraceful. Is Simplicio going to have to take a hand?" "The time has come now for an accounting, you old skinflint."

A dozen carabineers were sent down from Sulmona as a reënforcement, but Simplicio remained uncaptured. Nor were the peasants any more successful in their attempt to establish relations with him. A number of young fellows would have liked to find him, in order to ask him if he would consent to take them as his armed followers; but they were unable to secure a bona fide contact. Among these were two or three who felt like taking to the mountains as a means of avoiding a deserved prison sentence for thefts which they had committed, but others were really spurred on by a hatred of their employers and the authorities.

Simplicio kept on making his appearance in regions far and wide, but all the efforts of his well-wishers to track him down proved unavailing.

"Why does he treat us that way?" the village lads demanded; "why doesn't he send for us?"

"You can never be too cautious in such matters," their elders reminded them. "Simplicio knows his history, and history is clear on the subject: bandits have always been betrayed by some one of their own followers."

"Does he think we're going to betray him?" asked the indignant youths. But their elders were firm: "History is clear on the subject."

The weapons on which the youths might count, in case Simplicio did send for them, were not many in number. Fernando Perzica had at his disposition the knives that he used in sticking pigs in winter time; Peppino Cicerchia could supply a pistol without any ammunition; Giacinto Barile and Antonio Lenticchia could each furnish a hunting rifle, with powder and shot, which they used in hunting wolves. That was about all.

"But once you take to the mountains, you can always disarm a constable or two," was Antonio Carrito's pat observation.

Taking to the mountains, however, without knowing where Simplicio was to be found, was out of the question. Mountain life is hard, and the brigand's trade is a difficult one and not to be thought of without a leader.

"Supposing Simplicio doesn't want us?" said Raffaele Piunzo.

"The thing to do is to ask him; we've simply got to get a message to him," Antonio Carrito insisted.

Simplicio's appearances kept up; he was seen by many here and there, especially at night, but not by any of those who wanted a word with him, that they might enroll as his followers.

"It would be better to think about getting some victuals

to him," said Sabbatino, the frog-catcher. "If he's out of victuals, he'll be obliged to come in too close, and the carabineers will get him."

"But how are we going to do it," said the youths, "if we don't know where he is?"

"What do you mean, where he is? Do you think a bandit has a house to live in?" replied Sabbatino. "A bandit never stays two hours in the same spot. He has certain places that he operates from and visits occasionally, but he keeps an eye out and changes them from week to week, depending on what the carabineers are up to. So there's no use asking 'where is he?' The thing to do is find out those places that he visits or might visit."

Tales of the past were then recalled, and the oldest inhabitants were consulted, those who knew the story of Viola, of Marco Sciarra, and of Sciabolone, the brigand of Santa Fede. The larger part of the guesses hit upon a certain grotto which was situated on the road from Pescina to Pescasseroli. Seeing that Simplicio had paid a visit one night to the shrine of Our Lady of Venere, it was more than likely that the famous grotto, which is on the same highway, was one of his bases of operation. In any event, all they could do was to try an experiment. Antonio Carrito volunteered to put it into execution. Leaving Purgatory one night with a basket of provisions, he set out along the road to Pescasseroli.

When he came to the place in question, he saw a large vertical cleft in the side of the mountain. He thereupon left the wagon-road and began clambering up a small rocky footpath, which led him to a point at about the center of the opening, where there was a large pile of flint-stone. This concealed from the sight of anyone passing along the road the entrance of a deep cave. It was the famous Brigands' Cave. There was no one inside, but the burnt branches lying about showed that someone had been there recently.

Antonio set his basket down at the entrance; it con-

tained some corn bread, a few onions, and a little honey, accompanied by a pencil-scrawled note which said, simply: "Do you need us?"

Two days later Antonio went back to the cave, to see what had happened. The bread, the onions, and the honey had disappeared! Weighted down by a stone was a piece of paper with these words: "Thanks, but I didn't care for the onions." This was the first time that Simplicio had communicated with the peasants of his village. Not a word as to whether he needed any help or not. The piece of paper with his message was handed about like a religious relic. Everyone felt a little hurt by that remark about the onions.

"Onions!" exclaimed the young fellows. "To think of our sending onions to a man like Simplicio! To a fellow who lives up on the mountain and sleeps on the bare ground—we send onions!"

"Simplicio knows very well that we are not rich," the women folk answered.

Nevertheless, sou by sou, a few lire were scraped together, and with them Antonio Carrito bought a salame. The following night the sausage, with a box of honey and a long loaf of corn bread, was deposited at the entrance of the cave, and beside it a note was left, saying: "Please excuse the onions. But do you need us?" The us was underlined three times.

Two days again went by, and Antonio returned to investigate. Once more, the food was gone, and under the usual stone was found a note: "Couldn't you send me wheat bread in place of corn bread?"

There was general mortification over this, as over the preceding communication.

"Corn bread!" said the village lads. "To think of our sending corn bread to a man like Simplicio!"

"Has Simplicio forgotten how poor we are?" the women wanted to know.

But for all of that, sou by sou, they got together the money to buy a little white bread and a fresh sausage, and to it they added another box of honey. Antonio took the packet to the entrance of the cave, and beside it left the penciled lines: "When are you coming back to town?" Upon his return visit, in two days, Antonio found the food gone, and the answer waiting for him under the stone: "On St. Louis' Day."

So that was that; on St. Louis' Day, Simplicio would be back.

This news produced the greatest excitement imaginable among the peasants.

"And now," remarked Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, "we've got to settle that business about the wages for the next harvest. The bosses had better come straight out and say what they mean to do, and not be waiting till the last day—"

Harvest-time was, indeed, drawing near, and it was not as yet known whether the peasants would receive the same wages as they had the year before, or whether those wages were to be increased or diminished. The excitement occasioned by the announcement that Simplicio was about to put in an appearance in the town, led to the feeling that this was a good time to bring up the question. And so, on the night of June 20th, on the eve of the feast of St. Louis, Sabbatino and the Ortonese and Donato Frascone and one or two others proceeded to call on a few of the landowners, with the object of finding out what the latter intended paying in the harvest field. They received the same answer all around.

"This year everything depends on the Corporation."

"We don't fix the wages any more; it's the Corporate Committee that does that."

"Better go make inquiries of the Corporation."

The peasants did not understand a word of all this.

"What is the Corporation?" they asked.

"Why," replied the owners, "there's been talk of it all these years, and you mean to say you haven't heard of it?"

This was not a very clear explanation; but the chief thing was, the peasants were glad to learn that it was not the bosses who were to fix the harvest scale.

"That's Simplicio's doings!" Sabbatino went about telling everybody.

This was around Hail Mary time. At one o'clock that night the word spread that the wages for the harvest had been posted up, and the peasants at once started making for the center of the town. On the door of the prefecture, opposite the carabineers' barracks, and on the door of the bureau of salt and tobacco, there was a small notice, put up by the Corporation, which stated that the wages for the coming harvest, "by common agreement between peasants, owners, and the authorities, and in the interest of the national economy," were to be reduced by three lire. Wherever one of these notices was posted, a group of peasants gathered, protesting loudly.

"So they are cutting us again, are they? What do they expect us to do, starve to death?"

"Better let the grain rot in the fields than take another cut in wages!" others said.

"Talk doesn't get you anywhere," Antonio Carrito reminded them. "Don't you think it might be better to wait and hear what Simplicio has to say about it?"

The very mention of Simplicio's name brought a feeling of calm and trust.

"But I'd like to know what that Corporation is, anyway," Sabbatino insisted. "And what's the national economy? What's it got to do with the harvest?"

Accompanied by Geremia, by the Ortonese, by Frascone, and some others, Sabbatino set out to look up one Peppino Cicerchia, who was known to have served several months in the Fascist militia, and who had been expelled for insubordination.

"Can you tell us what the Corporation or the national economy is?" was the question they put to him.

"Oh, that's only a new-fangled way of talking," was Cicerchia's reply.

"What do you mean, a new-fangled way of talking?" Sabbatino was bent on knowing.

"Why," Cicerchia tried to explain, "you know very well that there are new ways of saying things. Instead of saying 'Good-by,' for instance, you can say 'So long,' but it amounts to the same thing. It's just as if, instead of saying 'Tighten up your belt,' you was to say, 'Better take the horse in and give the grass a chance to grow.' The Corporation, you see, is a new word."

This explanation did not satisfy them.

"We know it's a new word," said Donato Frascone, "but what does it mean?"

"I tell you what," suggested Cicerchia, "let's go see Niccodemo. Niccodemo's been in the Fascist militia, too; he was discharged 'for absolute failure to grasp the new corporative spirit'; so he certainly ought to know what's what."

They accordingly hunted up Niccodemo.

"I wish," said Cicerchia, "that you would tell these fellows what the Corporation is."

"The Corporation is the bosses," Niccodemo answered.

"There have always been bosses," said the Ortonese, "but this Corporation is a new word."

"The Corporation is the bosses," was Niccodemo's curt rejoinder. "When there's any dirty work to be done, the bosses don't do it individually any more; individualism is a thing of the past; nowadays, when there's dirty work, it's like this: three of the bosses get together; one represents the peasants, another the Super-Class Authority, and a third boss represents the bosses, and the three of them are the Corporation—"

"Then," spoke up Geremia, "it's just like Holy Friday

in the Cathedral at Pescina when they're putting on the Passion Play; one priest is Pilate, another is Caiaphas, another is Barabbas, one is Christ, and one is the howling mob; yet they're all five of them priests, and everybody knows how the story's going to end."

"But isn't there at least one peasant in the Corporation —one from the militia, anyway?" Sabbatino asked.

"Well," said Niccodemo, "I'll tell you how it was. When the Corporation met last year, it was winter time, and so they sent for me. They sent for me to keep the stove going and to serve the wine while the gentlemen talked—"

"But what's the national economy?" Sabbatino broke in on him. Niccodemo racked his brain.

"If I'm not mistaken," he began, "the national economy must be the demijohn; because when the Corporation met, in a little room next to the one where the meeting was held, there was a demijohn of red wine, and on it were the words CORPORATIVE ECONOMY. Tending the stove the way I was, I naturally got thirsty oftener than the gentlemen did, and so I kept going back and forth to the demijohn, until the first thing I knew it was empty. When the three gentlemen on the Corporation found this out, there was one devil of a stink. The one who was hotter under the collar about it than anybody else was the Super-Class Authority. He gave me a kick in the belly that knocked the wind out of me and sent me over into one corner of the room.

" 'You wretch!' the Super-Class Authority shouted at me, 'you traitor! The only thing that keeps me from killing you outright is the fact you are too ignorant to know what you were doing! You worm of the earth! You miserable peasant! So you'd dare to drink up the CORPORATIVE ECONOMY, would you?'

"The result was, I was discharged from the militia 'for absolute failure to grasp the new corporative spirit.' "

"That's all the explanation we need!" Sabbatino decided.

Meanwhile, the news that harvest wages were to be cut was evoking loud protests, even from the ranks of the Fascist militia, which had been called out by the authorities to reënforce the carabineers, in case that Simplicio should come back to town the next day. No sooner was it mobilized than the squad was at once drawn up behind the carabineers' barracks with Loreto Ciccuzzo, a corporal, at the head. The marshal in charge of the carabineers then came out to read the men the orders of the day.

"For some weeks past," he began, "a bloodthirsty bandit has been terrorizing the entire population—"

"Nobody but the bosses!" one of the soldiers, Gaudenzio del Pinto, interrupted him. The marshal tried to go on.

"A dangerous criminal, a desperado—"

"Why not talk about the harvest wages?" It was Gaudenzio again.

"That's right! Let's talk about the harvest!" the other militiamen chimed in.

"If that's the way you feel about it," the marshal replied, "the mobilization orders for this squad are revoked. You may go home. I shall report to my superiors at once!"

Two hours later three truckloads of carabineers arrived from Avezzano, to take the place of the militia squad.

From Purgatory the peasants followed the movements of the carabineers in the new part of the town, about the barracks, the prefecture, and what once had been the town hall. They were too excited to go to bed, but stood about discussing the cut in harvest wages and speculating as to what would happen when Simplicio came and took a hand. Numerous clusters were to be seen here and there, wherever there was a good view of what was going on below. The largest group of all was seated on the ground about Sabbatino, the frog-catcher, at a point directly opposite Simplicio's closed shop. They were discussing

what was to be done the next day, a question as to which there was some disagreement. They fell silent when someone drew attention to a couple of carabineers who were making their way up to Purgatory.

"What are you doing here at this hour?" the carabineers asked as they came up.

"Tomorrow is a feast day," Rosa, the dye-woman, replied, "and we're just sitting around here telling stories."

There was a prolonged silence. The peasants were waiting for the carabineers to go away, but the latter showed no signs of doing so.

"Go ahead and tell that one about the Bandit and the King's Daughter," Giacinto Barile said to Rosa.

"No bandit stories allowed!" said one of the carabineers.

"Then I," said Geremia, "will tell the one that's called 'Troubles aren't always troubles.'" Inasmuch as the carabineers made no objection to this, the old fellow began, as all sat listening intently:

The postman came
and said to the folks:
"A terrible thing
has happened at Rome;
the post-office flag
they've put at half-mast!"

The poor peasant
was not excited,
but the hen in the belfry
rang the bells,
the mouse in the key-hole
whistled a tune,
the ass in the stable
strummed the guitar,
the ox in his stall
played the two-stringed lute,
and the sheep at the fountain
grew a star on their foreheads.

The postman came back
and said to the folks:
"What's the meaning of all
this jubilee?
A terrible thing
has happened at Rome;
the post-office flag
they've put at half-mast!"

But the poor peasant
was unexcited still,
to hear the same story again.
The she-goat on the mountain
played the trumpet,
as the pig kept time
with bagpipe and grunt;
the dogs in the kennel
beat on the drum;
and the porcupine
down in the wheat
laughed to himself:
"That's very neat."

The postman came back
and said to the folks:
"What's the meaning of all
this jubilee?"
And the animals answered
in a chorus:
"A terrible thing
has happened at Rome."

"That will be enough of that!" said one of the carabineers to old Geremia. "What's all this about a 'terrible thing'?"

"History is history," the old man answered him; "he who has understanding will understand."

"Tell the story about the true miracle that happened to St. Bernard," Peppino Cicerchia said to Geremia.

"No discussion of miracles allowed!" a carabineer warned them.

"Well, then," said Donato Frascone, "maybe you won't mind if I tell the story, 'One and one don't always make two'?"

"What's it about?" the carabineers asked; for they had not the faintest idea.

"Here's what it's about," said Frascone:

One, two and three,
the Pope's not a king,
the king's not a Pope,
the bee is not a wasp,
the wasp is not a bee,
the cat is not a rabbit,
the rabbit is not a cat,
the umbrella is not a cane,
the cane is not an umbrella,
the worker is not boss,
the boss is not a worker.
One, two and three,
the Pope's been made king,
but the king's not a pope,
the bee stings like the wasp,
but the wasp gives no honey like the bee,
the cat often plays the rabbit,
but the rabbit never plays the cat,
an umbrella may serve as a cane,
but a cane cannot serve as an umbrella,
the worker can be a boss,
but the boss cannot be a worker.
One and one do not always make two,
but one and two are always three.

"That will do!" shouted the carabineers. "What's the meaning of all this?"

"History is history," Frascone replied; "he who has understanding will understand."

"Do you mind if I tell the one about the Three Friars who went a-hunting?" asked old Sabina.

"What's it about?"

"Listen," said Sabina; and there was a hush:

There were three friars,
one naked and two stripped,
who went a-hunting without a gun
and knocked on a house without a door:
"We are three friars,
one naked and two stripped,
we are a-hunting without a gun,
and we have caught three rabbits;
two got away and the other escaped."
"Come in, come in,"
from behind the door
answered the one
who was not there,
"to cook your rabbits,
there's a burnt-out fire,
and here are three pots,
one broken and two of them smashed."

They all burst into a laugh, which tended to make the carabineers more suspicious than ever, since they had not been able to make head or tail of it all.

"Clear out of here! Get out!" they now began shouting. "You're making light of the law and of religion. If you don't go home at once, every last one of you, we'll send down below for help!"

"That's fair enough," said Sabbatino approvingly; "let's go to bed. The sweetest stories are those that are never told."

And they all got to their feet and went off home.

On the morning of St. Louis' Day all the Purgatory peasants were out in the street and on their way to church. It was the first time they had ever shown so heartfelt a devotion to this particular saint. For it should be stated that St. Louis Gonzaga is the patron saint of the young and, more especially, of the chaste; and the peasants accordingly have always been inclined to make light of him. This turnout on the part of the inhabitants of the upper town had been anticipated by the authorities, who had taken strict measures to prevent any trouble. On

every corner in New Town carabineers were standing sentry. The peasants, however, pretended not to notice this, but acted just as if it were a daily and normal occurrence. Liberato Boccella, the butcher, in front of his shop, was the only one to make a fool of himself, as if he did not know what it was all about.

"You old fox, you," he called to Sabbatino, as he caught sight of the frog-catcher among the other churchward-bound peasants, "you don't mean to tell me you've got religion on St. Louis' Day?"

Sabbatino, to tell the truth, did not look any too devout. He had on the rags that he wore to work, he had not shaved, and there were circles under his eyes, as if he had not slept all night, but he had an answer for the butcher:

"Better late than never, you old robber, you!"

With Sabbatino were Antonio Carrito, Niccodemo, Peppino Cicerchia, and some of the other lads. They were going quietly to church, as if they knew perfectly well what they were up to. The butcher turned to a group of carabineers and started orating:

"There ought to be a law against all these devotions to St. Louis, if the government is as interested as it pretends to be in having children—"

Some of the carabineers laughed at this; for St. Louis' name was often used as a popular synonym for that vice which is called after Onan, the second son of Judah, who, according to the Bible, refusing Tamar, his brother's widow, spilled his seed on the ground, which brought down on him Jehovah's wrath and led to his death. St. Louis Gonzaga, when he was alive, not only had nothing to do with his sisters-in-law, for he had none, but kept away from women in general and died a virgin; and for this, being more fortunate than Onan, he was made a saint, and is held up by the Church as a model for the young.

When the services began, the New Town church was unusually packed. Upon the great altar was St. Louis'

image, which appeared bent upon lending confirmation to what the people commonly said, the Saint being represented as a tall, skinny youth with deep eye-sockets and with his eyes constantly fixed on the ground. In the first rows, up against the railing of the great altar, were the so-called "Little Brothers of St. Louis," lads between the ages of eight and fourteen, who had recently made their first communion, or who were getting ready to make it. Next came a few rows of the Daughters of Mary, young girls of the same age as the boys, or a trifle older. In behind them was a throng of kneeling women, while at the back of the church, near the door, and about the Holy Water fonts, were the men folk, a few stone-masons, and the rest, peasants. Sabbatino with his following was standing near the baptismal fount. The sound of the bell which marked the beginning of the Mass was drowned out by the buzz of voices and almost unnoticed. In the churches of southern Italy, while services are going on, the faithful—and especially the women—are in the habit of chattering as if they were at market; and it would have been a strange thing indeed if, on this particular day, when so great an event was looked forward to, the women had seen fit to remain silent. None uttered *his* name, but all spoke of *him;* some told of having seen *him* in a dream, while others had seen *him* in real life the day before, not far from the town.

The only group to remain silent was the one about Sabbatino. He must have organized something in the nature of a liaison service; for every so often a young lad would come into the church and come running up to him, would whisper something in his ear, and then would leave. The messages could not have been very important, for Sabbatino stuck to his post, motionless and unperturbed. Once only was there an alarm. That was when Donato Frascone's son, who had been on guard up in the belfry, came bursting in.

"A man disguised as a monk has just come into town!"

The frog-catcher had Carrito and Niccodemo go out at once to make sure; and in the meantime, Peppino Cicerchia silently made the rounds of the church, going to all the corners where the men from Purgatory were stationed.

"Be ready!" was the whispered word he gave them.

The stir that followed Cicerchia's announcement served to make plain in what manner it was the residents of Purgatory meant to be ready; everything they had been able to find at home which had a sharp point or was capable of dealing a heavy blow—old knives, hedgebills, sickles, razors, hammers, mallets—they had brought with them to church, concealing these weapons under their clothes. Upon Cicerchia's announcement, each one now brought out whatever it was he had with him, or at least saw to it that he had it within arm's reach. The Mass went on, but no one, not even the lay-sisters, was any longer paying the least bit of attention, and the women's voices rose to a shrill pitch. Carrito and Niccodemo now came back into the church.

"He's a real monk; it's the preacher from Luco."

Cicerchia once more made the rounds of the church.

"It's a false alarm," he said.

It was, as a matter of fact, the preacher of the day, who at this moment came in and made straight for the sacristy. Inasmuch as the Mass had already got along as far as the Gospel, he reappeared at once in his surplice and went up into the pulpit for the sermon. He certainly did not look the least bit like Simplicio. He was a real Capuchin, and a tall, lean one with a white beard. Once in the pulpit, he did not at once begin preaching, but stood for a long while gazing about him from right to left, in astonishment at the unexpected size of the congregation. He was smiling and almost weeping. It was as if he could not believe his eyes. This pause on the part of the preacher impressed everybody. A woman who had been kneeling directly under the

pulpit now rose and was on the point of screaming: "That's who it is!" when the Capuchin suddenly began.

Addressing himself to the peasants, he started in by confessing that the sermon he had prepared was one for children, while on the other hand his heart was rejoiced at seeing that, though there were so few children present, there were so very many adults.

"This is a great day in Heaven," the preacher continued, raising his voice and his arms at one and the same time. "I can see from your eyes what it is that brings you to St. Louis and to purity; it is out of disgust for the sins of the flesh that you have come here. The flesh—that is the enemy that we have to fight!"

At this moment, Donato Frascone's son came back from the belfry.

"A man is coming to town from the direction of the cemetery!" he told Sabbatino. The latter at once dispatched Carrito and Niccodemo to find out if it was *the one;* and in the interim, Cicerchia slowly circled the church for a third time, by way of giving the signal to all those from Purgatory: "Be ready!"

"Heretofore," the Capuchin was droning on, "you have yielded to the Devil's temptings, you have yielded to all the temptations of the flesh, you have wallowed in the sin of gluttony, the sin of impurity and of lust; and now, listen to what St. Louis has to say to you—"

The peasants, following Cicerchia's warning signal, had again produced or placed within arm's reach, those weapons which they had concealed in coat or trousers. Carrito and Niccodemo were slow in returning, and Sabbatino grew impatient.

"The pleasures of the body are a deception and a snare. Stop and think, what have you left to show for all these pleasures in the past? What is left you of all the succulent meals and banquets at which you have sat, what of all those luxurious garments by which your hearts set so great a store?—"

Carrito and Niccodemo came in.

"It's a beggar from Celano," they announced; "he's come here to beg during the procession."

Cicerchia went around again saying: "It's a false alarm!"

"The flesh—the flesh is our enemy!" The Capuchin was concluding his sermon.

"Right you are," was Sabbatino's comment, "the butcher sure wants enough for his."

The sermon over, the Mass went on. When the Mass was finished, St. Louis' image was brought down from the altar, the main door of the church was opened, and the procession started. First of all came a young lad bearing the Cross; after him, by twos, came the "Little Brothers of St. Louis," then the Daughters of Mary, and after them the image of St. Louis, borne on the shoulders of four young fellows; behind the Saint came the priest with the sacristan, and a crowd of men and women brought up the rear. As the procession emerged into the square, it could be seen that the carabineers were there in force. The "Little Brothers," with their childish voices, were singing:

> Thy glance bend on me,
> Louis on high;
> One of the angel choir to be,
> Here at thy feet I lie.

And from the tail end of the procession, bellowing horribly, the peasants responded:

> Let thy soul's light, O Louis,
> Shine down on me.

The Daughters of Mary, in their turn, wailed:

> A fragrant wreath we bring thee,
> The Lily and the Rose,
> Whose beauty doth disclose
> Thy purity.

And once again from the end of the procession, came the bovine rumble:

Let thy contempt of the world,
O Louis, come to me.

The procession sprawled down the streets of New Town and struck off in the direction of Purgatory, without anything untoward happening. From the elevation afforded by Purgatory, squads of carabineers could be seen, scouring the countryside; they were obviously on the lookout for Simplicio before he could enter the town. But there were to be seen also a number of strapping lads, whose duty it probably was to pass the word along to Sabbatino. For it was to be expected that, even in case he should be arrested, Simplicio would put up a resistance while they were engaged in taking him down the street to the barracks, and this would give the peasants time to come in on it. The important thing was to be there at the right time.

The procession made its way through Purgatory and started back down to New Town. The priest was chanting the litany of the saints, and after the name of each saint, the women would respond with a "Pray for us." The men, restless and impatient, were scanning the landscape round about, but could see nothing which would indicate Simplicio's presence. Slowly, the procession came back to New Town and entered the square. At this moment Donato Frascone's son, who had remained on watch in the belfry, began gesticulating violently. At one end of the square was the church, and to the right of it was the carabineers' barracks. That was all the peasants, who were bringing up the end of the procession, were able to see. But Frascone's boy was still waving his arms like a crazy man.

"Where? Where is he? Which direction?" they all shouted at once.

The lad replied by pointing toward the square; but in

the square there was only the procession and a few carabineers. At the other end of the square was the church, its main door open to let the procession come in again, and to the right was the barracks. No sign of Simplicio. Yet Frascone's boy kept on waving his arms.

The cross-bearer, who led the procession, and the "Little Brothers" were already in the church, when out of the main street, which ran along directly beneath the belfry, there appeared a man riding a small ass and dressed like a beggar. Instantly the procession broke up.

"Simplicio! Simplicio! He's here! He's here!" cried the peasants from the far end of the square, bringing out their hidden weapons from their trousers and their coats, and brandishing them in the air. The Daughters of Mary ran into the church as fast as their legs would carry them, like hens in a hail storm. St. Louis' image, which had been abandoned by the four young fellows who had borne it on their shoulders, was now swaying perilously and ended by flopping over on one side, its plaster head striking against Liberato Boccella's butcher shop sign, as the priest and lay-sisters screamed: "Sacrilege! Sacrilege!"

The man on the ass had been by this time surrounded by carabineers, and he and his ass along with him were dragged into the barracks a few feet away. Instead of running at once to Simplicio's rescue, Sabbatino and his lads made a dive for St. Louis' image, which in falling had lost its head and the Saint's lily; they proceeded to strip off the robe and from the papier-maché body they extracted four large pistols and a hunting rifle. At sight of these weapons the priest and lay-sisters, frightened out of their wits, ran into the church and closed the door behind them. In the square there were now left only the men from Purgatory, who were clustered about Sabbatino; there were something like a hundred of them in all.

"If anyone is afraid, let him get out of here!" cried Sabbatino, turning to the other peasants; but no one

stirred. Then Sabbatino, hunting rifle in hand, made for the barracks, with his followers a few steps behind him. He went all the way up to the door and knocked the butt of his rifle against it.

"Bring that man out!" he called.

The door immediately opened and out came the man with the ass. It was not Simplicio. It was a blind man. It was the blind man of Trasacco. He had come to beg during the procession.

"Alms," he said, throwing back his tattered hood, "for the love of St. Louis, give me alms!"

"Back to Purgatory!" Sabbatino ordered his men. "Back to Purgatory, before the other carabineers get here!"

The peasants left New Town on the run and sought refuge in the cluster of huts and stables that went to make up Purgatory. They had abandoned all hope of Simplicio's coming for that day. While Simplicio had given them his word that he would come, he quite possibly had not foreseen such a show of force on the part of the authorities; and so, even supposing that he had approached the town, it was possible that he had gone away without trying to enter. It was not Simplicio's coming that the peasants were thinking of now, but of a possible attack on Purgatory by the carabineers.

"After that tom-foolishness that Sabbatino got us into down there in the square, with weapons and everything, they'll certainly be here!" said the Ortonese.

"If only Simplicio were here," said Fernando Perzica, "we would know how to set about defending ourselves; but without Simplicio, who is there who knows what's to be done?"

Without Simplicio, no one knew. The majority of the peasants were angry with Sabbatino.

"And Simplicio, when he hears of it," said Geremia, "will be angrier than anybody else. Bandits do everything

by acting quick and taking the other fellow by surprise; they've always done that."

"To go to jail just when the harvest's beginning wouldn't be so sweet," reflected Donato Frascone.

Niccodemo carried all this back to Sabbatino, and the latter was very downcast about it. The afternoon went by and evening came, and still the carabineers had launched no attack on Purgatory. Each one had quickly seen to hiding away his improvised weapons; and each kept telling himself that the carabineers would not come after all, while in case they did come, everyone must have a good story ready to prove he had not been in the square.

"To go to jail in winter, that's not so bad; but in the month of June, just as the harvest is about to begin, that's terrible!" the peasants kept saying to one another.

The next day was a work day; and with such thoughts as these, everybody went to bed early; but this was more of an excuse to get away from the others than anything else. It was by no means impossible that the carabineers would come during the night, and the mere thought of such a thing was sufficient to keep everyone awake. The roosters crowed three times, and the carabineers had not come. At daybreak, Purgatory was deserted within a shorter space of time than usual. One by one, and being careful not to go through New Town, the peasants went out into the country. For most of the men from Purgatory, this was one work day that was all too short. Sabbatino had gone to sprinkle disinfectant in a little vineyard which he had behind the cemetery. He had no sooner filled his pump, than four carabineers stood before him.

"Please come with us," they said; "the marshal wants to talk to you."

Sabbatino offered no resistance. In the street they were overtaken by a truck into which the Ortonese, Niccodemo, Donato Frascone and his son, Peppino Cicerchia and others already had been put. They had all been

picked up, one by one, on their way to work. Sabbatino had to climb up on the truck, and they were all driven away to the barracks. As soon as the door had closed on them, the truck was off again to pick up the rest.

The next day the carabineers succeeded in discovering Simplicio's hiding place. He was found dead near a shepherd's hut at a point near the Forca Caruso Pass in a valley between Mt. Treppa and Mt. Ventrino. He had died there on the night of St. Louis' Day in the company of only a few shepherds of the vicinity. As soon as he had breathed his last, a shepherd had gone down to Collarmele to notify the carabineers. The man told how Simplicio had arrived in the neighborhood of Forca Caruso at the end of May, on St. Augustine's Day, and had stayed on until the day of his death, on the evening of St. Louis' Day. He had a high fever at the time he arrived and was coughing much; and after two or three days he had begun to spit blood and was too weak to stand on his feet.

When the news of Simplicio's death spread abroad, a large number of carabineers came to Forca Caruso from Pescina, Collarmele and Castelvecchio Subequo, to take possession of the much feared bandit's remains and to verify the story of the shepherd who had notified the authorities, and who had immediately been placed under arrest.

Simplicio was lying on the ground with his arms and legs sprawled out, like one who has dropped exhausted after having made his way through a forest of bramble bushes. His shirt and trousers were in shreds; and through the tatters there could be seen, upon both arms and legs, the red and blue marks left by dogs' teeth. His head was as devoid of flesh as that of a skeleton and was a frightful object to behold. His beard had grown, and was matted with dirt and blood. His mouth was half open, as if he were suffering from a desperate thirst. The eyelids were not entirely closed over the huge, empty sockets; it was as

if he were still keeping an eye on what was going on about him and waiting, perhaps, for the moment to escape.

The authorities came and proceeded to divide up the work between them. Four carabineers with rifles on their shoulders were stationed about the corpse, as if to say, "If you try to get away, we'll shoot!" But Simplicio had no thought of trying to get away. In the presence of the body the officials opened an inquest concerned with Simplicio's residence at Forca Caruso. One by one, the shepherds, all of whom had been taken into custody, came up for questioning. Each of them told the same story. The principal witness was Carmine Massaro, the shepherd at whose place Simplicio had died.

"On the evening of St. Augustine's Day," his story ran, "I heard the loud barking of dogs down in the valley and a man's cries. When I got there, I found a man in his shirt sleeves, surrounded by large dogs that were leaping on him from all sides and which had bitten him on the legs and arms—"

"By the way, when is St. Augustine's Day?" inquired a sergeant of carabineers.

"The day after the Feast of the Holy Trinity," replied Carmine Massaro.

"And when is Trinity Day?"

"Trinity Day is Trinity Day," stoutly asserted Carmine, marveling that an educated person could ask such a question.

With the aid of a country constable who was present, it was possible to establish the fact that Simplicio had arrived at Forca Caruso some two days after the firing of the town hall.

"He asked me to let him sleep in my hut for the night," Carmine went on. "His teeth were chattering with fever, and so I let him come into my hut."

"He didn't tell you why it was he had taken to the mountains?"

"I asked him: 'What have you done that you're running away? Have you robbed somebody? Did you kill someone?' He answered: 'I was making a kneading-trough for Rosa, the dye-woman. Her daughter is going to be married, and how can she marry without that trough?' I didn't bother him any more about it, because I thought he would soon be gone. He didn't get a wink of sleep, but coughed all night long."

"And it was the day after that he left?" the officials asked.

"The next day his fever was higher still; he was like a bag of straw that someone had set fire to, and I did not know what to do with the man; so I called in some of the other shepherds near here. He understood that I didn't want to get into trouble on his account. 'Let me stay here until tomorrow,' he said, 'and I'll leave in the morning.' I gave him some bread to eat, and he started to cry; he took my hand and kissed it and said, 'Man is good after all!' I talked it over with the other shepherds. 'He's certainly not a thief,' one of them said, 'he doesn't look as if he had sense enough for that.'—'And he's not a murderer, either,' said another, 'he looks like a good-hearted fellow.' —'Maybe he's murdered his wife,' somebody said. That seemed the most likely of all; so I went up to him and said: 'Tell me the truth now; did you murder your wife?' He shook his head. 'I never had a wife,' he said."

"And the day after he left?" asked the sergeant of carabineers.

"The next day," continued Carmine, "he was worse than ever; but seeing that he had promised me he would leave, he got on his feet, thanked me, said good-by, and started to walk away. He hadn't gone more than ten feet when he sank down. I stood watching him for a minute or so, waiting to see if he would get up; but he kept on coughing and wasn't able to get on his feet. I went over to him, and I saw that he was spitting blood. 'Just let me

stay here alongside your hut,' he said to me; 'if I'm not inside your hut, you're not responsible, for the mountain doesn't belong to you, it belongs to everybody.' I helped him to get up and took him over into the shade beside my hut. 'Do whatever you like,' I told him; 'if you want to stay, all right; and if you want to leave, all right; the mountain belongs to everybody.' He then said to me: 'When I'm well again and back in my shop, the first thing I must do is finish that kneading-trough for Rosa, the dye-woman, because her daughter is going to be married, and she can't be married without it; but after that, I'll make you a table, or a couple of chairs, or a window-frame, or a chest, or anything you need.' With this understanding I kept on giving him a little bread every day, and every evening I would give him a glass of milk. But one day I happened to think of something; and I said to him, 'Supposing you don't get well?' He knew what I meant and thought it over for a minute. 'Haven't you a little something here that I could do? Not having any wife, I know how to cook, for one thing.' After that, I gave him some old clothes to mend; and when I saw that he did it very well, I told the other shepherds about it, and they began sending in their old clothes, and would pay him with bread or milk. All this time he had a high fever; but this didn't keep him from working, and he was in good spirits, you might say. Once in a while he would call me over, take my hand, and say, 'You know, man could be good!' It was at times like this that I tried to get the truth out of him. 'You don't need to be afraid to tell me,' I would say; 'did you kill your wife?' But he would shake his head."

"Well, then," the sergeant of carabineers interrupted him, "as I understand it, you are testifying that, from St. Augustine's Day on, this man never left the neighborhood of your hut?"

Carmine Massaro dropped to the ground, kissed the earth, then rose again.

"Not once!" he said.

"And how do you explain, then," the officer went on, "the fact that he was seen after that at Luco, at Trassacco, at Venere, and at Celano, and that yesterday, they were expecting him in his own village?"

"This man," the shepherd maintained, "never once left here after St. Augustine's Day."

"Why didn't you notify the authorities at once?" he was asked. "Didn't you realize the risk you were running by affording shelter to a dangerous anarchist?"

"I didn't shelter anybody," was Carmine's answer. "All the time he was here, he stayed right where you see him now, outside my hut like that. He's on a rock of the mountain, and the mountain belongs to everybody, carpenters as well as anybody else."

The other shepherds there present bore out Carmine Massaro's testimony. But for all of that, Carmine was placed under arrest and had to go to Pescina with the officers. Four carabineers were left on the spot, rifles on their shoulders, stationed about Simplicio's corpse. They seemed to be saying: "If you try to get away, we'll shoot!"

But Simplicio had made his get-away.

THE MOUNTAIN TAVERN

by

Liam O'Flaherty

LIAM O'FLAHERTY, *author of* The Mountain Tavern, Spring Sowing, The Tent, *and many other short stories, and of the novels* The Informer, The Assassin, *etc., was born in the Aran Islands in 1897. As a youth he was a volunteer in the Irish Republican Army; during the Great War he joined the British Army; in France a Scotsman converted him to Socialism. He attributes the awakening of his conscious mind to the experience during the War of contact with all sorts of workingmen, including German prisoners. After the War, becoming bored with Irish Republicanism, he spent several roving years at sea, in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere (recorded in the autobiographical* Two Years), *returning to Ireland about 1920 to fight the Black and Tans (British troops). By that time he was a Communist. He attributes much of the success of his subsequent literary career to timely encouragement and criticism from Edward Garnett.*

THE MOUNTAIN TAVERN

SNOW was falling. The bare, flat, fenceless road had long since disappeared. Now the white snow fell continuously on virgin land, all level, all white, all silent, between the surrounding dim peaks of the mountains. Through the falling snow, on every side, squat humps were visible. They were the mountain peaks. And between them, the moorland was as smooth as a ploughed field. And as silent, oh, as silent as an empty church. Here, the very particles of the air entered the lungs seemingly as big as pebbles and with the sweetness of ripe fruit. An outstretched hand could almost feel the air and the silence. There was absolutely nothing, nothing at all, but falling flakes of white snow, undeflected, falling silently on fallen snow.

Up above was the sky and God perhaps, though it was hard to believe it; hard to believe that there was anything in the whole universe but a flat white stretch of virgin land between squat mountain peaks and a ceaseless shower of falling snow-flakes.

There came the smell of human breathing from the east. Then three figures appeared suddenly, dark, although they were covered with snow. They appeared silently, one by one, stooping forward. The leading man carried his overcoat like a shawl about his head, with a rifle, butt upwards, slung on his right shoulder and two cloth ammunition belts slung across his body. He wore black top boots. His grim young eyes gazed wearily into the falling snow and his boots, scarcely lifted, raked the smooth earth, scattering the fallen snow-flakes.

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The second man wore a belted leather coat, of which one arm hung loose. With the other hand he gripped his chest and staggered forward, with sagging, doddering head. A pistol, pouched in a loose belt, swung back and forth with his gait. There was blood on his coat, on his hand and congealed on his black leggings, along which the melting snow ran in a muddy stream. There was a forlorn look in his eyes, but his teeth were set. Sometimes he bared them and drew in a deep breath with a hissing sound.

The third man walked erect. He wore no overcoat and his head was bare. His hair curled and among the curls the snow lay in little rows like some statue in winter. He had a proud, fearless face, bronzed, showing no emotion nor weariness. Now and again, he shook his great body and the snow fell with a rustling sound off his clothes and off the heavy pack he carried. He also had two rifles wrapped in a cape under his arm; and in his right hand he carried a small wooden box that hung from a leather strap.

They walked in each other's tracks slowly. Rapidly the falling snow filled up the imprints of their feet. And when they passed there was silence again.

The man in front halted and raised his eyes to look ahead. The second man staggered against him, groaned with pain and gripped the other about the body with his loose hand to steady himself. The third man put the wooden box on the ground and shifted his pack.

"Where are we now?" he said.

His voice rang out, hollow, in the stillness and several puffs of hot air, the words, jerked out, like steam from a starting engine.

"Can't say," muttered the man in front. "Steady, Commandant. We can't be far now. We're on the road anyway. It should be there in front. Can't see, though. It's in a hollow. That's why."

"What's in a hollow, Jack?" muttered the wounded man. "Let me lie down here. It's bleeding again."

"Hold on, Commandant," said the man in front. "We'll be at the Mountain Tavern in half a minute. Christ!"

"Put him on my back," said the big man. "You carry the stuff."

"Never mind. I'll walk," said the wounded man. "I'll get there all right. Any sign of them?"

They peered into the falling snow behind them. There was utter silence. The ghostly white shower made no sound. A falling curtain.

"Lead on then," said the big man. "Lean on me, Commandant."

They moved on. The wounded man was groaning now and his feet began to drag. Shortly he began to rave in a low voice. Then they halted again. Without speaking, the big man hoisted his comrade, crosswise, on his shoulders. The other man carried the kit. They moved on again.

The peak in front became larger. It was no longer a formless mass. Gradually, through the curtain of snow, it seemed to move towards them and upwards. The air became still more thin. As from the summit of a towering cliff, the atmosphere in front became hollow; and soon, through the haze of snow, they caught a glimpse of the distant plains, between two mountain peaks. There below it lay, like the bottom of a sea, in silence. The mountain sides sank down into it, becoming darker; for it did not snow down there. There was something, after all, other than the snow. But the snowless, downland earth looked dour and unapproachable.

"It must be here," the leading man said again. "Why can't we see it? It's just under the shelter of that mountain. There is a little clump of pine trees and a barn with a red roof. Sure I often had a drink in it. Where the name of God is it, anyway?"

"Go on. Stop talking," said the curly-headed man.

"Can't you be easy?" muttered the leading man, moving ahead and peering into the snow that made his eyelids blink and blink. "Supposing this is the wrong road, after all. They say people go round and round in the snow. Sure ye could see it from the other end, four miles away in clear weather, two storey high and a slate roof with the sun shining on it. It's facing this way too, right on the top of the hill, with a black board, 'Licensed to Sell.' Man called Galligan owns it. I'd swear by the Cross of Christ we must be up on it."

"Hurry on," snapped the curly man. "There's a gurgle in his throat. Jesus! His blood is going down my neck. Why can't you hurry on, blast it?"

"Hey, what place is that?" cried the leading man, in a frightened voice. "D'ye see a ruin?"

They halted. A moment ago there had been nothing in front but a curtain of falling snow, beyond which, as in a child's sick dream, the darkening emptiness of the snowless lowland approached, tumbling like a scudding black cloud. Now a crazy blue heap appeared quite close. Suddenly it heaved up out of the snow. It was a ruined house. There was a smell from it too. From its base irregular tufts of smoke curled up spasmodically; dying almost as soon as they appeared and then appearing again.

The two men watched it. There was no emotion in their faces. They just looked, as if without interest. It was too strange. The *Mountain Tavern* was a smoking ruin.

"It's gone west," murmured the leading man.

"Eh?" shouted the curly man. "Gone did ye say?"

"Aye. Burned to the ground. See?"

"Well?"

"God knows. We're up the pole."

Suddenly the curly man uttered a cry of rage and staggered forward under his load. The other man opened his mouth wide, drew in an enormous breath and dropped

his head wearily on his chest. Trailing his rifle in the snow behind him, he reeled forward, shaking his head from side to side, with his under lip trembling. Then he began to sing foolishly under his breath. There were people around the ruined house. And as the two men, with their dying comrade, came into view, quite close, these people stopped and gaped at them. There was a woman in front of the house, on the road, sitting on an upturned barrel. She was a thin woman with a long pointed nose and thin black hair that hung in disorder on her thin neck, with hairpins sticking in it. She had a long overcoat buttoned over her dress and a man's overcoat about her shoulders. She held a hat with red feathers on it in her right hand, by the rim. Two children, wrapped in queer clothes, stood beside her, clinging to her, a boy and a girl. They also were thin and they had pointed noses like their mother. One man was pulling something out of a window of the ruined house. Another man, within the window, had his head stuck out. He had been handing out something. Another man was in the act of putting a tin trunk on a cart, to which a horse was harnessed, to the right of the house. All looked, gaping, at the newcomers.

"God save all here," said the curly man, halting near the woman.

Nobody replied. The other man came up and staggered towards the woman, who was sitting on the upturned barrel. The two children, silent with fear, darted around their mother, away from the man. They clutched at her, muttering something inaudibly.

"Is that you, Mrs. Galligan?"

"It is then," said the woman in a stupid, cold voice. "And who might you be?"

"We're Republican soldiers," said the curly man. "I have a dying man here."

He lowered the wounded man gently to the ground. Nobody spoke or moved. The snow fell steadily.

"Mummy, mummy," cried one of the children, "there's blood on him. Oh! mummy."

The two children began to howl. The dying man began to throw his hands about and mutter something. A great rush of blood flowed from him.

"In the name of the Lord God of Heaven," yelled the curly man, "are ye savages not to move a foot? Eh? Can't ye go for a doctor? Is there nothing in the house?"

He stooped over the dying man and clutching him in his arms, he cried hoarsely:

"Easy now, Commandant. I'm beside ye. Give us a hand with him, Jack. We'll fix the bandage."

The two of them, almost in a state of delirium, began to fumble with the dying man. The children wept. The dying man suddenly cried out:

"Stand fast. Stand fast boys. Stand. . . ."

Then he made a violent effort to sit up. He opened his mouth and did not close it again.

The woman looked on dazed, with her forehead wrinkled and her lips set tight. The three men who had been doing something among the ruins began to come up slowly. They also appeared dazed, terrified.

"He's gone," murmured the curly man, sitting erect on his knees. "God have mercy on him."

He laid the corpse flat on the ground. The blood still flowed out. The other soldier took off his hat and then, just as he was going to cross himself, he burst into tears. The three men came close and looked on. Then they sheepishly took off their hats.

"Is he dead?" said one of them.

The curly man sat back on his heels.

"He's dead," he said. "The curse o' God on this country."

"And what did he say happened?"

"Ambush back there. Our column got wiped out. Haven't ye got anything in the house?"

The woman laughed shrilly. The children stopped crying.

"Is there nothing in the house, ye daylight robber?" she cried. "Look at it, curse ye. It's a black ruin. Go in. Take what ye can find, ye robber."

"Robbers!" cried the soldier who had been weeping. "Come on, Curly. Stand by me. I'm no robber. God! Give me a drink. Something to eat. Christ! I'm dyin'."

He got to his feet and took a pace forward like a drunken man. The curly-headed soldier caught him.

"Keep yer hair on, Jack," he said.

"Look at what ye've done," cried the woman. "Ye've blown up the house over me head. Ye've left me homeless and penniless with yer war. Oh! God, why don't ye drop down the dome of Heaven on me?"

"Sure we didn't blow up yer house," cried the curly soldier. "An' we lookin' for shelter after trampin' the mountains since morning. Woman, ye might respect the dead that died for ye."

The woman spat and hissed at him.

"Let them die. They didn't die for me," she said. "Amn't I ruined and wrecked for three long years with yer fightin', goin' back and forth, lootin' and turnin' the honest traveller from my door? For three long years have I kept open house for all of ye and now yer turnin' on one another like dogs after a bitch."

"None o' that now," cried the hysterical soldier, trying to raise his rifle.

"Hold on, man," cried one of the other men. "She has cause. She has cause."

He grew excited and waved his hands and addressed his own comrades instead of addressing the soldiers.

"The Republicans came to this house this morning," he cried. "So Mr. Galligan told me an' he goin' down the road for McGilligan's motor. The Republicans came, he said. And then . . . then the Free Staters came on top

of them and the firing began. Women and children out, they said, under a white flag. So Galligan told me. 'They damn near shot me,' says he to me, 'harbourin' Irregulars under the new act.' Shot at sight, or what's worse, they take ye away on the cars, God knows where. Found in a ditch. None of us, God blast my soul if there is a word of a lie in what I am sayin', none of us here have a hand or part in anything. Three miles I came up in the snow when Mr. Galligan told me. Says he to me, 'I'll take herself and the kids to aunt Julia's in McGilligan's motor.'"

"Where did they go?" said the curly soldier.

"I was comin' to that," said the man, spitting in the snow and turning towards the woman. "It's with a bomb they did it, Galligan said to me. Something must have fallen in the fire. They stuck it out, he said. There were six men inside. Not a man came out without a wound. So he said. There were two dead. On a door they took 'em away. They took 'em all off in the cars. And they were goin' to take Mr. Galligan too. There you are now. May the Blessed Virgin look down on here. An' many's a man 'll go thirsty from this day over the mountain road."

"Aye," said the woman. "For twenty years in that house, since my father moved from the village, after buyin' it from Johnny Reilly."

"Twenty years," she said again.

"Can't ye give us something to eat?" cried the hysterical man, trying to break loose from the curly soldier, who still held him.

"There's nothing here," muttered a man, "until Mr. Galligan comes in the motor. He should be well on the way now."

"They were all taken," said the curly soldier.

"All taken," said the three men, all together.

"Sit down, Jack," said the curly soldier.

He pulled his comrade down with him on to the snow.

He dropped his head on his chest. The others looked at the soldiers sitting in the snow. The others had a curious, malign look in their eyes. They looked at the dazed, exhausted soldiers and at the corpse with a curious apathy. They looked with hatred. There was no pity in their eyes. They looked steadily without speech or movement, with the serene cruelty of children watching an insect being tortured. They looked patiently, as if calmly watching a monster in its death agony.

The curly-headed soldier suddenly seemed to realize that they were watching him. For he raised his head and peered at them shrewdly through the falling snow. There was utter silence everywhere, except the munching sound made by the horse's jaws as he chewed hay. The snow fell, fell now, in the fading light, mournfully, blotting out the sins of the world.

The soldier's face, that had until then shown neither fear nor weariness, suddenly filled with despair. His lips bulged out. His eyes almost closed. His forehead gathered together and he opened his nostrils wide.

"I'm done," he said. "It's no use. Say, men. Send word that we're here. Let them take us. I'm tired fightin'. It's no use."

No one spoke or stirred. A sound approached. Strange to say, no one paid attention to the sound. And even when a military motor lorry appeared at the brow of the road, nobody moved or spoke. There were Free State soldiers on the lorry. They had their rifles pointed. They drew near slowly. Then, with a rush, they dismounted and came running up.

The two Republican soldiers put up their hands, but they did not rise to their feet.

"Robbers," screamed the woman. "I hate ye all. Robbers."

Her husband was there with them.

"Mary, we're to go in the lorry," he said to her. They're

goin' to look after us they said. Fr. Considine went to the barracks."

"The bloody robbers," she muttered, getting off the barrel.

"Who's this?" the officer said, roughly handling the corpse.

He raised the head of the corpse.

"Ha!" he said. "So we got him at last. Eh? Heave him into the lorry, boys. Hurry up. Chuck 'em all in."

They took away the corpse and the prisoners. There was a big dark spot where the corpse had lain. Snow began to fall on the dark spot.

They took away everybody, including the horse and cart. Everybody went away, down the steep mountain road, into the dark lowland country, where no snow was falling. All was silent again on the flat top of the mountain.

There was nothing in the whole universe again but the black ruin and the black spot where the corpse had lain. Night fell and snow fell, fell like soft soothing white flower petals on the black ruin and on the black spot where the corpse had lain.

NIGHTPIECE WITH FIGURES

by

Frank O'Connor

FRANK O'CONNOR, *author of* Guests of the Nation *and another volume of short stories*, Bones of Contention, *was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1903, and began his career with productions of Ibsen and Chekhov in his native city.*

NIGHTPIECE WITH FIGURES

PRELUDED by one short squeak of its hinges, a door opens slowly and quietly into a dark and empty barn.

Framed in the doorway is the glow of an autumn night, figured with a faint tracery of starlight. It is evident that the barn is pitched high above some valley because nothing obscures the lower portion of the doorway but the shadow of heaped straw. At last, and only after a whispered conversation outside, the upper portion too is filled, this time by a man's figure seen in dim silhouette. He stumbles headlong into the barn, his feet catching in and rustling the dry straw; and now the bright oblong becomes the setting for a shadow show in which a second, third, and fourth figure take part. Somewhere very near a cow moos, and hooves clatter with a light thud. The first man tripping in the darkness utters an oath, and flings himself wearily on to a heap of straw in one corner. The whispered conversation outside continues, but more animatedly; then a light flares up and the face of a young man, dark, sardonic, and reckless is seen, bent for a moment above the rosy vessel of his cupped hands. He smokes, shading the glow of the cigarette as he does so.

"What is it, Peter?" the first man whispers from his corner.

"Nothing, nothing. Do you want to smoke?"

"Not now—why?"

"We mustn't smoke inside because of the straw."

"Oh, is that all!"

A second man comes and sits beside the first, and they

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converse under their breath with subdued chuckles. Still another voice is heard outside, also in a whisper, but gradually rising as the speaker gives rein to his excitement.

"Believe you me, comrade, that man have us all taped. Twiced I seen him outside the gate here after dark and never was there rhyme nor raison for his presence. I said nothing but I thought the more. Then I got the first threatening letter I was telling you about signed 'Black Hand Gang' in red ink—pretending it was blood!—and three days later comes another signed 'I. R. A.' Mind you, I had no proof it was himself that wrote them, but I followed my natural reasonings and seduced the fact. 'So-ho! my esteemed friend,' says I, 'this is how *you* carry on. But I have no cause to be afraid of the Irish Republican Army. . . .' So I sent him a threatening letter signed 'O. C.' letting him know pretty plain that he was being watched too, and since that day he never darkened this gate of ours . . . never! Now that's strange, isn't it, comrade?"

"Yes," yawns the man who is smoking, "ye-e-e-s, that's strange. Good God, how tired I am!"

"Naturally, naturally. So what I say is: You send him a letter on printed paper, paper with I. R. A. printed on the top and see what effect that will have. Say 'You are being closely observed,' or words to that effect; 'a trusty friend of ours has constantly noted your movements and reported them to the proper quarter.' You see, I've thought it out, and if you leave me wan sheet of official paper I'll guarantee to give him many a sleepless night."

They are interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps. The young men sit up and listen tensely, but the one who has been speaking reassures them with a backward wave of his hand. Meanwhile, the slow footsteps come nearer; they are the noisy clatter of loose footwear. The young man Peter, who has been smoking, tops the cigarette between his fingers and stands inside the door. A faint

yellow light begins to stream around the doorway, and as it is swung backward and forward it projects a gradually widening circle of visibility over the loose cobbles among which the rain is still lodged from yesterday; while, with each jolt given to the lantern, the young men hear a loud, rhythmical sigh, a sigh that expresses habit rather than necessity. Then a figure stands framed in the doorway, carrying in one hand a lighted lantern and in the other a basket. The young man who is standing there, takes off his hat and says politely, "Good night, Sister," and the two men in the corner bend forward until their faces are revealed by the lantern, smiling and respectful, and do likewise.

The nun—for it is a nun—is dressed all in white. She is an old woman with bright, crustlike, apple-red cheeks, and her skirts are now drawn up about her knees. Everything she does is done slowly, with the pronounced emphasis of old age, as at this moment when she stands looking in, the lantern held a foot or less before her, her little blue eyes screwed up, each inside a score of wrinkles, and her breath coming in dry, wheezy, asthmatic pants.

"*Dia bhur mbeatha, a dhaoine maithe*," she says after a moment and the Gaelic salutation that means "God be your life" is followed by a quaint gust of antique mirth.

Still chuckling she lays down her basket inside the door, raises herself slowly with yet another sigh, and turns to the man who has been speaking.

"Two of the loveliest calves you ever seen, Dan," she says. "Two little jewels, praise be to you, God! So now that old caubogue, Jer Callaghan, won't be putting the milk of the cow we bought from him on the Department sheet."

"I was telling our young friends what a grand farm we had here, Sister," he says.

"Tch! Tch! Tch! . . . Nothing for fifty miles around to equal it. Nothing. . . ."

She looks at the young men, and in the half-light which the lantern casts up on her round, red, toothless, laughing face there is an extravagance of pride and joy. Her voice as she continues startles them by its masculine resonance.

"I don't know what they'll do without me at all at all when the Lord God calls me home! I don't indeed know what they'll do without me. I say to Reverend Mother when she comes round to Galilee—that's what we calls our end of the building, Galilee—I say to her, 'Ach, wait till I'm growing purty daisies in the ploteen beyond, and you'll see how fond of me ye were—then you'll see!'"

She is chuckling again, but continues in a lower tone and more tenderly.

"Ach, sure, I do be only taking a rise out of her, boys. They're all fond of me though I speaks saucy enough to them at times, the creatures—that's when things go agin me. But then we must be saying something, hey?"

"We're all fond of you, Sister," Dan the farm labourer says unctuously, and then dodges out of the way of her hand which she raises at him in mock indignation.

"Ach, go 'way, y'ould hypocrite and you're nothing else!" She turns on the young men once more, pointing a bony forefinger at the basket. "There's bread and mate for ye there, boys, and if ye want anything else ye've only to ask for it. And ye've my prayers as well, so that's mate for body and soul. . . . Ye night-walking blackguards!"

She is off again into her deep, merry, asthmatic chuckle. As it subsides into a prolonged fit of coughing she raises the lantern to the handsome reckless face of the young man standing beside the door. He is clearly the leader of the trio.

"What's your name?"

"Peter Mulcahy, Sister."

"There's none of ye there I know?"

"No, Sister."

"None of ye was here before?"

"No, Sister."

"I hope ye'll come again, God bless ye! I'm Sister Alophonsus, and though I likes me little joke I'm a good-natured old woman, so I am. And I've a great *gradh* for anyone that lifts his hand for Holy Ireland. My father was a friend of Bryan Dillon. Did you ever hear tell of Bryan Dillon, young man?"

"I did, Sister. He was the Fenian."

"So he was, the Fenian. Brienie Dill we called him. My father—the Heavens be his bed—was a great friend of his. Many's the night they talked powder and shot until the break of day. Brienie Dill was a little hunchback, but the neatest little hunchback you ever seen. I remember well the day he was left out of gaol, though I was only a slip of a girl then. There was stones flying that day in the Barrack Sthream I can tell you. . . . And my father was one of the men that buried the pikes in the Quakers' graveyard. Did you know there was pikes buried there, young man?"

"No, Sister."

"There was then. Pikes buried in the Quakers' graveyard. And 'God send,' says Brienie Dill, 'God in Heaven send they rise before the Quakers do!'"

They all laugh at this. She laughs with them, and shaken by her gusty mirth the lantern rocks to right and left in her hand. Suddenly the men start at the sound of light, quick footsteps, followed immediately by the rustling of a dress against the wall of the barn. In a moment a second woman's figure is upon them. The light just catches the dainty forehead and the rim of starched cloth beneath her veil. The old nun, who has heard nothing, has just raised her apron to her eyes to wipe away the slow tears of laughter that fill them when her arm is caught from behind by the newcomer.

"Don't be afraid, Sister!" a young voice whispers good-humouredly. "It's only me."

There is something grotesque about the way in which Sister Alphonsus proceeds to assure herself of the young nun's identity. She lifts the lantern until it is shining full into the other's face, and before the young nun in laughing protest has forced it aside, the men have received a picture of her that impresses itself forever on their memories. Unlike the farm sister she is dressed in black, and is obviously a choir nun. Her face is unusually broad at the jaw, but this instead of making her features appear harsh makes them appear curiously tender. Her face is almost colourless, her nose short; her eyes are jet black under long black lashes that give them a dreamy look; but over all her features is a strange expression which is not at all dreamy or tender, but anxious, abrupt and painfully, sensitively, wide awake. Yet she is very girlish, slim and sprightly; and her appearance as she stands in the doorway suggests to the three hunted men a visionary, enchanted youth, that wakes a sort of pang within them, a pang of desire and loss. She is carrying some rugs on her arm and hands them to the other nun; then with one hand on the jamb of the door in an attitude that more than suggests flight, she looks in.

"I must rush back, Sister," she whispers hastily. "Good night, boys, and God bless you!"

"Good night, Sister," they reply, and Dan, standing in the background hat in hand, chimes in with a respectful "Good night."

"Nobody there that I know?" she asks, delaying, her dark eyes puckered up in an attempt to pierce the shadows. "You are all from the city?"

"Yes, Sister."

"How have the city fellows gone? What about Dan Lahy? Jo Godwin?"

"Free State Army."

"And Denny, Michael Denny?"

"The same."

"God forgive them! Anyone else of that crowd gone over?"

"All but two."

"They used to stay out here in the old days—you knew that?"

"Have you heard about Sean Clery?"

A sudden bitterness has crept into the voice that speaks from the corner of the barn, a bitterness that communicates itself immediately to the other men, and dramatises the instant in their minds as well as in the mind of the young nun, so that her reply when it comes brims the cup of emotion for all.

"My sister told me. Poor Sean—God have mercy on him!"

"God save us from our own!" the bitter voice corrects her quietly. "Taken out the road and shot to pieces like a mad dog! Did you know him, Sister?"

"A little—oh, yes I did; of course I knew him when he was a boy. . . . They gave him a dreadful end. . . ."

"It's a cruel, cruel thing, this fighting!" the old nun puts in loudly and vehemently. "A cruel, silly thing! They must be wicked men to do a deed like that. Ah, if they were here now Sister Alophonsus would give them a bit of her mind, so she would!"

"Be quiet, Sister!" the other says fearfully. "You talk too loud you know."

Sister Alphonsus sighs.

"Ach, sure they don't mind how loud I talk. They hears me talking always to the cows."

"And do you talk to the cows, Sister?" the young man called Peter asks, as though to change the conversation.

"Of course I do, talk to them. Cows are foolish beasts—they're foolisher than pigs, cows are, and you'd get no good of them at all if you didn't talk sensibly to them and tell them what you want."

There is a heavy silence broken only by the stirring of

beasts in a nearby byre, and something in the silence suggests that the young nun is suffering deeply. After a little she breaks the stillness that has already grown too oppressive for all but the old woman immersed in her angry maternal dreams.

"And the people?"

"Indifferent," says Peter hardily.

"Against us," says the bitter voice from the darkness. "Just as it is with us here. In the old days we were all united—we knew that the boys were sleeping in the outhouses; we sent them out food and medals and scapulars; before we went to bed each night we said a prayer for them. Now there's no one left to pray for you but old Sister Alphonsus and myself."

"No one, no one!" chimes in Sister Alphonsus. "'Tis true for you, alanna, they all reneged. But Sister Alophonsus, the ould Fenian, didn't renege. She's as true to her counthry now as ever she was."

"If you were out with us for a day or two you'd see it all," the voice from the darkness continues. "Where is the sovereign Irish people we used to hear so much about a year or two ago? Sorry, Sister, we haven't any heroes left, but we can always find you a few informers." A revolver clacks open in the darkness and the voice continues half-humorously, "Holy Ireland! Holy Ireland, how are you?"

"Oh, chuck it! Chuck it for Heaven's sake!" the young man called Peter says irritably.

"*Och, a Dhe! Och, a Dhe!*" Sister Alphonsus sighs, turning away.

"Oh, informers, hadn't we always our share of them?" the young nun asks quickly. "But never mind what happens to us, never mind the people, never mind the informers! Ireland will outlive them all."

There is a sudden throb of male passion in the voice, a sudden bursting out of emotions that have been too long suppressed.

"Ireland?" the young man in the corner asks cynically.

"Yes. Ireland. We haven't been the first and we won't be the last."

Dan, the old farmhand, weary of the conversation that goes on so far above his head, moves away on tiptoe over the cobbles, downhill, and watching his retreating figure sink down against the autumnal sky she shivers slightly.

"What are your names?" she asks suddenly, and her voice has lost its overtone of passion. The three men tell her their names shyly, one after another.

"Michael . . . Peter . . . Liam," she repeats, letting each name sink into her memory. "I'll remember your names, and pray that you'll come safely out of it all—and be happy," she adds as an afterthought. "And you'll pray for me, won't you? Sister Josephine is my name."

"And Sister Alophonsus! Don't forget old Sister Alophonsus!" the old woman says warningly.

"Good night, boys."

"Good night, Sister."

"Good night, Peter," she says with a quick, dainty movement of her head to the young man standing by the door; a gesture that seems unerringly to separate him from the others and predict for him some experience richer than theirs—then, as silently and swiftly as she had come, the young nun goes.

Sister Alphonsus, sighing with the same antique vehemence, hangs the lantern on a hook from the low roof of the barn.

"The light of Heaven to our souls on the last day!" she mumbles earnestly. ". . . There's your rugs. . . . The child is supposed to be nursing old Mother Agatha. She must have slipped out when she was asleep and got the rugs on the sly. . . . Hot blood! Hot blood! . . . She's not happy. . . . She's too hasty. I tell her not to take things to heart so, but she do, she do! Hot blood! . . . Why should she mind what they say to her? I've put up

with them now these forty year. Forty years on the fifteenth of February, boys, if the good God lets me live to see the day."

Sighing still she bids them good night in her soft West Munster Gaelic and goes, latching the door noisily behind her. The lantern barely illumines the little barn and the three figures stretched upon the straw. They eat, exchanging an occasional word that does not express at all what is in their minds. Then Peter quenches the lamp and everything is dark and silent but for the stirring of beasts in a nearby byre. But neither the silence, nor the fragrance of the straw on which they lie, nor the food they have taken brings sleep to them—not for a long time.

They are all happy as though some wonderful thing had happened to them, but what the wonderful thing is they could not say, and with their happiness is mixed a melancholy as strange and perturbing, as though life itself and all the modes of life were inadequate. It is not a bitter melancholy like the melancholy of defeat, and in the morning, when they take to the country roads again, it will have passed.

But the memory of the young nun will not pass so lightly from their minds.

MAY-DAY CELEBRATION

by

T. O. Beachcroft

T. O. BEACHCROFT *has had stories in* The London Mercury, Criterion, The Adelphi, *and a number of other English magazines, and has also appeared in one or two newspapers.* A Young Man in a Hurry *and* You Must Break Out Sometimes *are the titles of two volumes of stories recently published by Boriswood. Mr. Beachcroft is (1936) thirty-three years old.*

MAY-DAY CELEBRATION

IT would be about now they would be coming, Mabel thought, and her heart beat somewhat faster. Thomas's face was all about her, wherever she turned; changing, changing from the boy with black hair and violent ways to the elderly man with the patient look; the waiting look; and the eyes deeper and deeper set with something in them of failure, and something in them of sticking to it.

Now she saw the red and white cheeks he used to have in his teens; now the grey face with heavy lines, and the stubble turning grey, and the shaggy eyebrows—and his eyes, which looked tired.

She heard the band now in the distance—the marchers were coming into the gardens. The crowd grew more dense every moment, and tremors of excitement shuddered through it, like gusts of wind in high corn. Mabel was carried sideways against her will over towards the platforms and the banners. A dense crowd was waiting there for the marchers and the speakers.

There were two platforms under the trees at the corner of the Gardens. Round them the red banners were stretched. Overhead clouds were racing in a stormy sky, and the branches threshing and weaving in the wind.

Mabel found herself carried in the crowd into the arms of an old friend. The two women greeted each other.

"It's a good muster," said Mabel. "The numbers are very good."

"Who's going to speak? Is your husband speaking?"

Mabel shook her head.

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"He's going to start it off," she said. "He's taking things a bit easy. This fellow Hardy's going to speak."

The crowd was massed solid round the platforms now, and policemen's helmets seemed to float everywhere among the heads. And beyond the crowd she could see the heads and shoulders of mounted policemen gliding about. Mabel knew there were almost as many policemen as there were demonstrators and marchers. There always were at a big meeting.

There came a wavering cheer, taken up uncertainly here and there: and the marchers began to file past the platforms. On each side of them marched a rank of policemen. Mabel saw first the bobbies' red faces, purple and red with the full blood of health—and their red fleshy necks and their upright carriage; each man of them carrying his twelve and fourteen stone like a boy athlete. She saw beef as they went by: and roasting fires. She saw steaks sizzling in grills and frying-pans. She saw gravy, and crusty chunks of bread and butter and foaming pints of beer and stout.

Then she saw the marchers; and she was watching pale, ill faces grey and yellowish: she saw the dragging feet and ragged clothes. Here and there a man squared his shoulders and stuck his jaw out. In every face she saw sadness and old despair: she saw the drawn lines that she had seen so often, and the patient, stern look of the men who were brave. She saw rain-soaked street corners, and men leaning motionless against street posts with the rain drifting over the cobblestones. The word *hunger* transfixed her like a spear, a pain that ached in her own body. Hunger marchers, she thought—men who marched under the banner of Hunger. They were hungry: and they marched, because there was nothing else for them to do.

Leading a section, her Thomas passed, looking steadfastly ahead. She pushed her way with purpose now towards the platforms. Thomas mounted the platform and held up his hand for silence. A hush fell.

For a moment or two he looked about him at the marchers. What were his feelings? Mabel knew he was not thinking of himself, nor of her, nor of anything but of them. As he waited and looked from one side to the other a low mutter of recognition began to arise; it was a rough growl of friendship that never rose to a cheer: something more friendly than a cheer. Thomas's grave deeply lined face looked round on the crowd, and he held up a strong square hand.

"Comrades," said Thomas, with slow Lancashire emphasis, "you know me well. You know something of what I have done for you in these thirty years. I wish it were more," he suddenly cried, "by God I wish it were more."

A sudden silence spread now.

"I'm not come here to speak for myself," Thomas went on more calmly. "I want to present to you Mark Hardy. He has been to Russia. Once he talked with Lenin himself. He is going to speak of our plans for the coming year."

Hardy stood up. He was a man of about thirty-five—over six feet. His face was thin and handsome, with deep set eyes. His hair was black and untidy. He wore a black coat and trousers and a red shirt open at the throat.

Before speaking he suddenly flung off his coat—and held his two arms towards the crowd. The murmur of talk round the platform died away. He began to speak at once swiftly and in loud, clear tones that carried far and compelled the attention.

"Friends," he said, "comrades—fellow workers. During the last five years we have passed through a century of experience in our long struggle: events have moved: and we have made a tremendous advance towards the inevitable downfall of capitalist misrule, and the building up of the workers' united and world-wide front.

"In this five years we have seen every capitalist country sucked far down in the economic maelstrom. We have seen their foundations splitting and cracking. We have

seen the feverish and insane efforts of Nazi and Fascist reactionaries in their despairing effort to shore them up."

Mabel's mind began to wander: now she had seen the marchers and heard Thomas speak, she began to edge away towards the back of the crowd.

Presently a burst of applause called her mind back to the speaker. Hardy was saying:

"We are asked this year to celebrate King George's Jubilee. You know as well as I do that all this Empire hullabaloo in the lickspittle press is propaganda: cold blooded propaganda, aimed to divert peoples' eyes from the sickening state of present affairs.

"What have we in truth to celebrate? First that after twenty-five years of the present reign we accept that millions of men in every capitalist country continue in permanent unemployment. A glorious achievement indeed! Millions of workers condemned to a standard of life that would be despised by primitive savages. Secondly, we celebrate that since 1926, Trade Unions have been placed in a weaker position than they have occupied since the days of Castlereagh and the Six Acts. Another great capitalist victory! Thirdly, that England continues to exploit by bloodshed, force and cruelty the Asiatic nations. Fourthly, that insane quarrels over the illgotten Imperialist gains among the nations lead us to the very brink of another horrible war, to which the workers will once again be driven: a war which brings to the workers nothing but torture, degradation, horror. And the next war will carry every fiendish device of slaying and torture into the workers' own homes among their women and children."

Hardy poured all this out in a torrent of clear and unhesitating speech. Suddenly he paused and looked round. Then he went on with slow measured emphasis:

"Stop it: stop it before it is too late. Remember Invergordon. Think of the power of the massed will of the

people, the same needs, the same enemies in every country. There is no hope for you in nationalism. . . ."

While he was speaking the sky darkened: clouds and gusty rain came spinning through the air. The trees swayed, and men tightened their collars round their throats.

"Let's go," said Mabel to Beth. "Let's get back. I'd like to have some tea ready when Thomas comes in. He'll need some warming up."

They slowly edged their way out of the crowd. When they reached its distant scattered fringe, they turned round and looked back. The outer groups of people were talking together: many were breaking off and going away as the rain came on. From here the voice of Hardy could still be faintly heard.

"This form of state will go: be assured of it: *war* will go. . . ."

Nearer in round the platform the crowd pressed silent, unmoving. Mabel looked back at the platform, and saw Hardy using his arms as he spoke, though his voice no longer reached her: and she saw Thomas sitting beside him: and the crowd packed round them.

The platform seemed like a heart or core of life, sending its own pulse through the silent, waiting crowd that pressed round to drain life from it. Her mind became filled with the image: she saw it as a brazier of coals in the dark, and men pressing round it, with the light gleaming on their hands and faces and clothes: she saw it as the pay office at the mills when she was a girl, with scores of men struggling round to draw their money. She saw it as a multitude of flowing, changing pictures, with light breaking through the clouds. She saw it as a stone sending silent ripples across the surface of a pond.

Both women were silent as the 'bus took them away from the parks and shopping streets to the grime-covered parts of the town beyond the two railway stations, where

there were factories and warehouses and poor men's homes.

Mabel led the way through the dark arches which carried one of the stations above the streets and houses. They came out into a street of small houses, which lay for ever under the shadow of the enormous viaduct. Their walls were crusted with sooty deposit, so thick that it fell away at the touch of a hand. The air was filled with smoke, white, grey and brown. And the little houses shook to the unending clamour of the trains overhead.

Mabel led the way up a bare boarded passage and uncarpeted stairs: the walls of the passage were thick with railway grime. She had two rooms. When they got inside, Beth looked round at the linoleum, worn and polished, and at the bareness of everything. She was used to rooms in which beds and tables and upholstered chairs jostled against each other.

"We've got another room here," said Mabel. "This is only the sitting-room."

She hung her mackintosh and hat on the door: she stooped down and put a penny in the gas meter and lit a small gas ring for the kettle. They settled themselves to talk. They sat with their knees apart and their hands resting in the outspread laps. Mabel and Beth had led hard lives; but time had brought their bodies a roundness which gave a placid dignity to all they said and did.

"It's a grubby place, this," Mabel said. She began to put out cups and plates. "I hope you'll overlook my not spreading a cloth: it'd only be black by the end of tea. The blacks get in even with the windows shut."

As she spoke a long goods train rumbled past, filling the room with clanking.

"I don't like living in Railway Street," she went on. "It ain't exactly my idea of a country cottage with nice roses to smell. But Thomas has got to find a place for his little printing press. It's what they call a platten. We can

put it down in the basement on a stone floor here. It's not every street they'd let you have a printing press."

"Does he print the *Worker's Clarion* on it?" said Beth.

"No; it wouldn't take that," said Mabel. "That's got much too big an affair—which is all to the good. But they want him to issue a lot of small pamphlets all the time."

She opened a cupboard door and showed, instead of cups and saucers, piles of papers and pamphlets. A cascade of papers came sliding out on the floor: they began to fall from the shelves, manuscripts, printed sheets, blank paper, all confused together.

"What do you think of that for a larder?" said Mabel.

Beth shook her head.

"Well," she said, after a long silence, "you would have him."

Mabel pushed the papers back into the cupboard, moved another pile from a wooden chair, and sat down.

"Don't think I meant that for a complaint against Thomas, or the way we live," she said. "You're right. I would have him—and perhaps my people were doing right in trying to stop me. I was only nineteen. But I've never lived to regret it. I was quite right, Beth, young as I was. There are some things the young ones know. He's a good husband and a good man: and I say that after forty years of married life. What more can a woman say than that? How many can say that much?"

Beth nodded.

"Forty years, is it? We're getting old. I can remember it all so clear, too: as if it was only last year. It seems funny."

They both fell to thinking of other days and times: far off scenes, when they were young slim girls in white muslin who ran with flying feet; who were caught by the waist on summer nights.

Mabel began to put out a loaf and butter on the bare table top.

"You'll stay and have a bite, won't you?" she said. "We don't live very high: but there's some bread and butter and jam: the butter's as cheap nowadays as the marge."

"Unless you have the fivepenny marge," said Beth.

Mabel went on talking as she set out the tea with slow, quiet movements.

"Mind you," she said, "my married life hasn't been all honey and jujubes. I'm not complaining. Why should I? But when a man lives for something beyond the ordinary things of life, home can't be his be-all and end-all."

Beth nodded.

"That's it," she said.

Mabel paused with a plate in her hand. "But take yourself too," she said. "It cuts all ways. Your Arthur's been a good steady worker always. But you haven't been too happy with him."

Beth nodded again.

"To all outward appearance," Beth said, slowly and decidedly, "Arthur looks like a 'usband to be proud of. But there it is. I got my crying over early in my married life. I did plenty of it then. He's a bully, that's the trouble: and he's never thought for anyone but himself. He's selfish to the bone. The first ten years of my marriage were all babies and black eyes."

"There have been times when I've felt it hard, too," said Mabel. "I've never had what I should call a home. Never in all these forty years. I've had to see my young ones go hungry and cold, when they were little. And I've never been able to give them a farthing to help them now they're older. We never know where we may be from one week to the next. Years ago I used to cry too, when Thomas's views and meetings kept getting him the sack from good jobs. Many's the time I've said to him, 'What's the use of going on?' Then every time he got a new job I used to think to myself, 'Now I'll have a proper home.'

But just as we was getting things together something always went bust. We've lived in fourteen different towns, let alone all the rooms: they're more than I can remember."

"But he's settled in a good job now, isn't he?" said Beth. "He's been there for a year or two."

"Yes, we're really better off now than we've ever been yet. I'm really beginning to hope now that I'm going to get a home together. We'll be out of this pigsty in a year. Thomas is beginning to take it easier now. He doesn't do so much—not all day and every day, like he used to."

"Well, he's getting on in years," said Beth.

"Yes, he says he feels he isn't in the forefront any more: he looks to leave things to the younger men. But he can still earn good money. He always could. He's a foreman compositor now on the *Morning News*—working on the advertisements. It's a good job. I'm beginning to think we'll settle down yet, Beth: I'll be asking you to see me in a nice little place one of these days, in a little peace and comfort."

Beth nodded.

"I'm sure I need it," said Mabel. "The kettle's on the boil now. I'll make tea. If he's late, I can make some fresh."

"Is that the fourpenny," said Beth, "from the Stores round the corner?"

"It's the threepence-halfpenny. Tell me what you think of it. The only thing I wonder is whether he'll ever be happy if he gives it up. His one grumble has always been 'e's never been able to do enough for the *cause*. He's said that every day for the last twenty years, I should think."

"What did you think of that fellow's speech this afternoon?" asked Beth.

Mabel sat silent for a little while.

"He seems a nice enough man," she said at length.

"Yes, but what about all that he was talking about?"

"I don't know quite what to make of it," said Mabel. "And I've heard enough speeches in my time. He always talks that sort of thing. He means it when he says it. But I don't quite trust it somehow. What's he got to do with it all? He's a chap with a lot of money behind him. In Thomas's young days it was a fight against the *owners:* men understood what they were making for—and knew who was against them. Thomas spoke to the men about their own towns and factories and homes, and what they'd better do next week: not about the whole of this world and kingdom come. I sometimes think speech-makers like him get so full of the new plans in front of them and all to that, they forget what these poor fellows want is just food and dry clothes."

"But he's an important man, isn't he?" said Beth. "He's been an M. P., hasn't he? He'll be somebody one of these days."

"Yes, I daresay he'll be someone," said Mabel, "on one side or the other. But it can't mean the same to him as it did to my Thomas when he was a young man. Yet he pushes forward and takes the limelight—and Thomas takes a back seat."

"Well," said Beth, "you oughtn't to mind that: only a moment ago you were saying you'd be thankful if only he would drop out of things a bit and keep a steady job for once."

"Yes," said Mabel, "but sometimes I feel—seeing all the work he's done—giving his whole life to it—he deserves something a bit more out of it."

"You persuade him to give it up," said Beth, "and have a little peace and quiet for once in your life. I saw a little house out our way in Welcome's Fields a week back. You could have got it on the money he's making now. Let him spend it on you and his home for once."

Mabel drew breath and compressed her lips: then she let it out as a slow, thoughtful sigh.

"We'll see," she said. "We'll see what happens."

"It's time you had your way for once," said Beth. "You take my advice."

"Here he is," Mabel said.

They heard his footsteps in the passage, then on the bare boards of the stairs.

Thomas came in and greeted his wife and Beth a little absently. He sat down on a chair with a grunt. He was dressed in a dark serge suit with a muffler at his neck. His grey hair was closely cut and his face once full of fire and expression, had grown dour and set and stubborn.

"I'm getting old," he said.

"That's just what we've been saying," said Beth. "We're all getting old."

"I'll just have time for some tea," said Thomas, "then I want to get down to the paper. I shan't be back till we've put her to bed. I'll be back about one. Then I shall have a full day on to-morrow, till late again. I had to work it that way so as to get off this afternoon."

"You'll be worn out," said Mabel.

"It won't be the first time," said Thomas.

Beth said: "You ought to think of your health a bit more at your age."

"I've got better things to think of," he said.

"Not for Mabel."

Thomas ignored her answer. Presently she said good-bye and went.

"I wanted to get downstairs to-night," Thomas said. "We want another thousand of those Invergordon pamphlets. That's been doing good work. But I can't manage it now—it's too late. Then they're asking me to do Hardy's speech later on. My Vanguard Press is getting well known."

"What did you think of that speech of Hardy's?" said Mabel. "I only heard the first part."

"It was good," said Thomas. "My job nowadays is to

go and print what better men say. I sometimes think I've never really done anything worth while for our cause."

"Don't be silly. Isn't it anything to have given your whole life to it?"

"I dunno . . ." Thomas began: but stopped.

Mabel started up.

There was a loud knock at the street door. They heard it pushed open, and the tread of two or three men in the passage.

"They're coming up here," said Thomas. "Hardy said he might come round."

There was a loud knock at the door.

"Come in," said Thomas. He went to the door and opened it.

When he did so a police constable stepped into the room: behind him a plain clothes detective.

They stared at Thomas for a moment, seeming to dwarf him by their height and heavy bulk.

"Well," said Thomas, after a bit, "any trouble?"

The detective stepped forward.

"There's no need for me to ask if you're Thomas Devlin," he said, "because I know you by sight."

"Yes, I'm Thomas Devlin."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Devlin, I've got a warrant here for your arrest—and a search warrant too."

"What for? I'm an honest man. There must be some mistake."

"No mistake," said the detective. "You work a small hand press down in the basement here. Whoever's at the back of you, the imprint's yours."

Thomas nodded.

"And you've been issuing a lot of very foolish pamphlets lately. There's one of my men downstairs just found a pile of these Invergordon leaflets—with your imprint on them. I've got to arrest you under the new Act. There's the warrant."

There was a pause.

"Well," said Thomas, "do you want me to come with you now?"

"Yes," said the detective.

"Can't you give me time to make a few arrangements first?"

"I must ask you to come at once, please. We don't want a crowd of people round here. And I must search this room before we go, too. I'm under orders to confiscate all the printed matter I find here."

Mabel opened the cupboard door and showed the stores of pamphlets. In a surprisingly short time they had searched the room and made a clean sweep.

Thomas began to make rapid arrangements with Mabel.

"We're going to the Central Police Station," he said. "Will you tell them what's happened at the paper at once? Go and see them yourself. Then come along and we'll see what we can arrange about bail."

"I wouldn't count on bail, Mr. Devlin," said the detective. "The authorities at headquarters aren't playing. I'm afraid this is a serious business for you."

"I'll come, anyhow," said Mabel.

Before going, Thomas kissed her and held her in his arms.

"It'll be all right," he said.

"Good-bye," said Mabel. "I'll be along directly."

The door closed: and she was alone.

She stood silent for a long time, thinking and seeing nothing.

Then she slowly walked to the window and pulled the curtains. How grimy they were. Then she sat down beside the table which still carried the remains of tea. Many pictures of her broken and tattered life passed before her. She saw her hopes of the future torn in ragged dirty pieces, fluttering away. She knew now that she would never have a home: that from now on she need never hope for a home.

The pictures of the little house she had begun to see changed to pictures of rooms in worse and worse streets: to fierce poverty, bare boards, and fireless grates, to comfortless old age.

Yet she felt calm and almost joyful. She had seen the look in Thomas's eyes. She knew he was living through the proudest and happiest moments of his whole life. She fell to thinking of the red and white cheeks, the wild black hair, he used to have. And gradually her heart grew light.

For a long time she sat silent and still until the penny in the gas was used up and the fire flickered out into cold, lifeless grey. Then she rose and put on her mackintosh to go out again. It was still wet from the afternoon's rain.

A WREATH FOR TONI

by

Dorothy Thompson

DOROTHY THOMPSON, *in private life Mrs. Sinclair Lewis, was foreign correspondent of the Philadelphia* Public Ledger *and the New York* Evening Post *from 1920 to 1928, and for half of this time (1920–1924) she was in Vienna where she became acquainted with the characters in* A Wreath for Toni. *She is a frequent contributor to American periodicals, and conducts (1936) the special column* On the Record *in the New York* Herald Tribune.

A WREATH FOR TONI

WE met first on the stairs, but we became friends because he had the kitchen and I had the bathroom. That was in 1920 when Vienna was very sad, and when domestic life was ruled by the *Wohnungsamt* (the dwellings bureau). Our house was in the Margareten district. A little lower down on the same street there were gray and yellow palaces in weedy gardens, and in some of them lived officers of the military missions, members of foreign embassies, and even Austrian princes; but most of the palaces were appropriated as offices. At our end of the street though the houses were very modest—tiny groceries or sausage shops in their ground floors, or butcher shops advertising horse meat. The stone stairs were worn and uncarpeted; the stencilled walls had not been painted for a long time; the paint was peeling from them and sometimes the plaster. In our house lived cabinet makers and other artisans and the family that kept the sausage shop. There was always a smell of mold and cabbage—the house porter's cabbage probably, because he and his wife lived in an airless niche off the dark stairs and usually cooked with the door open.

We met on the stairs because I had forgotten my key. On our floor there were just the two apartments, and I had often seen him coming out in the morning and going in at night, sometimes with a paper parcel that looked like a coffee cake from the confectioner's. He was not prepossessing, and I had not been interested in him. He wore neat but cheap-looking clothes, probably bought in the Mariahilfestrasse—the Rue de la Paix of the poor.

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Department-store clothes are very bad indeed in a town where all who can afford to do so have their boots made to order and buy even sheets and blankets in tiny shops which for generations have specialized in just those things. He was thin, and shy, with rough tow-colored hair and gray eyes behind very thick glasses. He was probably suspicious of me; for what in the world was an American girl doing, living alone in a proletarian house in Vienna of 1920?

But there I was, stuck without a key, just as he was putting his into the lock of the opposite door. It was a drizzly, typical Vienna autumn day, and I did not know the German word for locksmith nor where I should be likely to find one; my clothes were damp and I very much wanted a cup of tea.

"Do you think your key might fit my lock? I've lost mine," I ventured in what I hoped was correct German. Either the words or my obvious plight communicated the facts to him, and he came across and tried. When the key failed to turn, he invited me into his apartment, and I gladly went in.

It was, so far as space was concerned, an exact duplicate of mine. There was the same tiny hall, with a toilet at one end, and at the other, a small parlor. Off the parlor was a bedroom. Beyond that there was a tiny cubicle—not more than six by nine, with a window looking upon a dark narrow court, the kind of room called in Vienna a *cabinet.* The hall had a jog in it, and off the jog and, likewise on a court, was a kitchen. "I have a bathroom where you have a kitchen," I exclaimed; for all the doors were open and the whole tiny apartment was visible at a glance. "Yours *was* a kitchen first," my host replied, and explained the history of our floor.

It seemed that a minor ballet dancer from the opera and a minor clerk from a government office had once occupied the two apartments and, falling in love, had had a

door cut between them. Eventually the ballet dancer had been promoted and the pair had enjoyed relative prosperity, so they had married and converted the two apartments into one and changed one kitchen into a bathroom. "But after the War, when Vienna was crowded, what with all the missions, and people pouring in from the country, and no repairs having been made on any of the buildings for all the war years, there was a shortage of flats; and the dwelling commission ruled that two people could not have four rooms and two *cabinets*," explained the young man, gravely. "So they had to give up one of them, and I got it, together with my mother and father."

I glanced round the apartment, trying not to seem curious. There was little to see. In the parlor was a large ottoman, which probably turned into a bed at night, covered with a plush rug. There was a center table, with a green-shaded hanging lamp above it, which could be pulled down for reading, and about it stood several not very good Biedermeier chairs. In a corner there was an overstuffed easy chair. The room was used, it seemed, as a general living room, and there were dishes in a deal corner cabinet. The bedroom had two high black walnut beds covered with red counterpanes, with a night table between, and two large wardrobes, and a dressing bureau. What surprised me was the tiny *cabinet*, for it was lined with books in shabby bindings as though they had been bought from second-hand book stalls.

"You have lots of books," I remarked, wandering over to them, and was surprised to read the titles: Herbert Spencer, and Locke and Hume, the German classics, Engels and Lassalle, and what seemed pedagogical books. I noticed Pestalozzi. There was nothing else in the room except a shabby walnut writing desk strewn with papers, pushed up against the window to catch the murky light.

"I am a school-teacher," he explained, not without a

trace of pride. And suddenly he introduced himself stiffly with a little bend from the waist, "Anton Murbacher."

"I am a journalist—at least I hope I shall be one. Now I free-lance," I tried to explain, using the English word for my dubious profession.

"Ah, you study Vienna—Austria?" Herr Murbacher tried English, but with rather less success than I with German. I nodded. "I have not been here long. Now I study the German language. I hope later to go to Germany."

"If I could help you—you must get a true picture of our Austria. It is very sad, but not all sad."

This was all very interesting but not getting me into my flat, as he suddenly became aware. "If you will sit down I will get a locksmith, though there is none in our street, I think," he said, and then—"unless, of course, the door between the two apartments might be open or could be forced."

The door was behind the ottoman in the sitting room. A poor Balkan rug hung over it, and Herr Murbacher moved it aside. "It seems to have a common lock," he remarked, and took a key from the bedroom door. "Perhaps" . . . and sure enough it turned, opening into my apartment, pushing out a portière which on my side concealed the door from view. He gravely gave me the key. "You can lock it again from your side," he said.

So that was the end of our interview, but not the end of our acquaintance. Herr Anton Murbacher was the first authentic Viennese I had met. I had met, to be sure, a few eminent politicians, a few people with grand titles to whom I had letters and who had tentatively invited me to tea, where I had felt very provincial and out of it. Still, they belonged to the cosmopolitan world. Herr Anton Murbacher belonged exclusively, I was sure, to Vienna. I had wanted "to get about among the people," and I had found that for a stranger in any foreign country that is precisely the hardest thing to do.

After that when we passed each other on the stairs we bowed and exchanged remarks about the weather. Sometimes a little round woman emerged from the neighboring apartment, wearing a shawl thrown over her head and carrying a shopping bag, and sometimes a spare man, well past middle age, with a wise kind face and a workman's hands, and they nodded to me too. I took it that they were the parents of the school-teacher.

"Don't you know someone who would give me German lessons—cheap? I have very little money," I said one day to the young man, meeting him again on the stairs. His face beamed. "But, yes, indeed . . . I have a friend. She speaks English very well. Her father is a professor!"

That was splendid! Hugo's grammar and the daily newspapers with a dictionary were all very well in their way, but at this rate it would be years before I could conduct an interview in German. "I will ask her to come to you . . . or perhaps you will come to us one evening for supper?"

The question was put so shyly and tentatively that I replied robustly, "I should love to."

The friend was there a few days later, and Herr Anton knocked on the door. And across the narrow hall I went. The lamp was pulled down over the round table, which had a checked cloth on it and a platter of salami and cold veal. There was a potato salad and a big sugary *Gugelhupf*—I have never been sure how to spell that exclusively Viennese word for the most superior of all coffee cakes—and a large pitcher of milk. Father Murbacher was there, looking very scrubbed and clean, as workmen do who clean themselves up with brushes and coarse soap. Mother Murbacher hovered over us all, beaming upon us with her brown eyes, waiting on us with roughened hands protruding from a much washed flannelette shirtwaist. She had taken off her apron because there was company, but absent-mindedly she would wipe her hands on her serge

skirt. "The Friend" was a girl about my own age—twenty-one or two—dressed in a plaid skirt and a cheap woolen jumper, but obviously cultivated, with a pleasant voice and fluent English, which she explained she had learned in England, where she had gone to live for several winters with a colleague of her father's. Her name was Maria, but everyone called her "Maridl." She had short smooth hair, good straight features, and a body that looked as though she exercised it. She would give me three German lessons a week, for which I agreed to pay a dollar. She was pleased and I was delighted, I was sure I should learn German quickly with her and I hoped that she would be my friend.

Anton poured me out milk and then, suddenly abashed, "Perhaps you would like beer," he asked, "or a carafe of wine?"

"Toni!" exclaimed his mother, much perturbed, "we should have thought of it!"

"I would much rather have milk," I said. "Only I thought all Viennese drank beer or wine—what do you call it—*Heurige?*"

"Herr Murbacher is a socialist," explained Maridl. "He believes that drink is the curse of working people. All his family are teetotalers. More and more Viennese people, especially the workers, drink only milk. The Party encourages it."

Father Murbacher seemed to understand the tenor of the conversation. "Alcohol—it is all right for the rich, who have plenty of good food," he explained gently. "For us it is a great waste. Our children grow up pale and have rickets. It is better that we should spend our money for true food."

This was indeed a Vienna about which I knew nothing. I was curious about what bound these four people together. The father was a workman. The mother, unquestionably a peasant. The son had gone up a step. He

was a school-teacher, and belonged to the "intellectuals"; but it was clear that his rise into another social class had in no respect weakened the tie with his family. As for the girl, she was obviously different. In her looks, her bearing, her greater poise, and simple self-assurance there was no trace of a proletarian past. Yet all of them seemed to be on the same economic level. I guessed that the son earned no more, and possibly less than the father, and the girl's clothes gave no indication that she was better off than the others. Later I was to see that two things bound them together—love and The Party. Not only filial love, but love between these two young people; the professor's daughter, and the workman's son. Anton had spoken of Maria as his "*Freundin*" (his friend), and before the first evening was over, I believed that he had employed the word in the tenderer and more specifically German sense.

What with Maridl coming thrice a week for the German lessons and my proximity to the Murbacher family, we came eventually to have a sort of communal life. Frau Murbacher would often knock at my door at supper-time, carrying a plate under a clean checked napkin, which would reveal a cake or a little pudding. "Because you have no kitchen," she would explain. She knew how I struggled with two rings of gas upon which I made breakfast and sometimes supper in my bathroom. And if I was going out in the evening, I would stop at my neighbor's and leave the key. "In case anyone of the family would like a hot bath," I'd explain. This intimacy was never imposed on. They assured me with a smile that the bath was very often used, and I would sometimes suspect it from the exceptional whiteness of the tub and neatness of the bathroom.

Most of all, I liked to talk with the old man. He did not drink and was no frequenter of cafés, as most Viennese are, but he enjoyed a game of euchre; and sometimes of an

evening I would stop across to play with him on the round table, under the green-shaded lamp. There was a fine self-reliance and pride about him. I learned that he was a valve maker very skilled, and thus relatively well paid and fairly sure of work as long as the factories did not shut down altogether.

"You should be a socialist, young woman," he would say, mildly distressed at my insouciance about political affiliations. For him The Party was the center of life. Once a week he went to the party *Versammlung*, or meeting of the trade union, of which he was treasurer, and once a week he attended the committee meeting of the People's University. I learned that it was arranged and financed by the workers themselves, through their trade unions, and that it dated from long before the War. This organization gave lectures, and he would drive the whole family, even "Mutti," to them. "Education," he would say, "that is the hope of the working class, that is the hope of all the people. When a man can't learn any more then he may as well be dead."

Herr Murbacher was a freethinker, although he had been brought up a Catholic. His wife, who came from the Wachau, from a poor peasant family, remained faithful to the church, and was out for early mass every Sunday morning. Her husband had tried to read Renan to her, but she had only smiled. He was tolerant of her religious leanings. "Women are sometimes foolish that way," he would say, "and you can't change things all at once."

He worked in an engine works in the Favoriten district, which was not very far, and he walked there every day, carrying his lunch, of coffee, black bread, and a few pennies' worth of fat bacon, thickly encrusted with paprika. At night when he returned there would be a hot supper of thick soup and bread, and on Sundays, boiled brisket of beef or roast pork with potatoes or rice or dumplings. When they had *Marillenknoedel*, in summer—

light dumplings wrapped round apricots and steamed and sprinkled with ground nuts and sugar—that was a very great treat and I would be invited over. He went to work at seven-thirty in the morning and came home at five-thirty.

That he had been able to send Toni to the *Gymnasium* (the classical high school) and afterward to the university was his great pride. It was a tremendous sacrifice, for it meant feeding Toni until he was twenty-two. Toni told me that during all those years his father had had a single suppressed desire—for a cheap but complete edition of Darwin. But he could not afford it. Toni had bought it for him with the first money he had earned after graduation.

"Mutti" accepted her husband's socialism as he accepted her piety. After all, she had grown up under the shadows of the Melk monastery, where her father had worked in the vineyards belonging to the monks. What could you expect?

The coming of the Republic, after the War was over, Herr Murbacher had accepted as an inevitable step in human progress. Curiously, he cherished not the slightest animosity toward the monarchy and, indeed, spoke with tenderness and respect of the old Emperor, Franz Josef. "The Kaiser never wanted the War," he would say with conviction. "The military party forced it on him. 'God is my witness, I have not willed this,' he said when he signed the Declaration." He told me many stories of the old days. He had often seen the Emperor buttoned tight in his uniform, with his pink face and white whiskers, passing down the Mariahilfestrasse from Schoenbrunn, in an open landau with gilded spokes drawn by two white Lipiziner horses with a flunky sitting beside the driver. Once Herr Murbacher had gone as a delegate to a Party congress, and had met Victor Adler, the great leader of The Party, and Dr. Adler had borrowed a pencil from him and had never returned it. He spoke of this several times

with amusement and pride. He told me that Adler had worn eyeglasses and a mustache and had had kind eyes. "He looked like a college professor," Herr Murbacher would say, which was praise from him. The old Kaiser and Victor Adler were both wreathed with laurel and bay in his remembrance, and he seemed to find no paradox in the association.

For Herr Murbacher was a constitutionalist. He had never opposed the monarchy; in those days he had looked upon universal franchise as the liberator of the working class. He believed profoundly and without question in human progress, and he thought he saw evidence of it in his own times. After all, there was his son, Toni. Toni had moved upward; the state had given him a scholarship; Toni was educated and was still loyal to his own people. The working people needed more men like Toni. Herr Murbacher smoked his pipe, ruminated, and on the whole was satisfied with the world.

That his own life had been sadly limited—all day in the factory, the meager meals at night, the close quarters in a shabby house, and no amusements whatever except the Party meetings, the free lectures, the game of euchre, and the Sunday excursions—seemed of no consequence to him. There were the long, free Sundays, when he sat in his shirtsleeves after a breakfast with fresh rolls, and read the Sunday *Arbeiterzeitung*, the Social Democrat newspaper. He would spend hours over the cultural edition. After the midday meal he and the old woman would go by tram to the Wienerwald and lie under the trees, or walk in the Prater—right down the main thoroughfare to the Danube, and back again. Then they would sit on benches and watch the carriages pass. And finally they would have afternoon coffee with whipped cream on top and a roll with it. This was the treat of the week. Younger men, he confessed, sometimes went to cafés where green wine was served and where there were zither

players from the Tyrol; but in the stern puritanism of his socialism Herr Murbacher scorned such amusements. What impressed me was that his standards were all for himself and fellow-party members. He had no intolerance and no envy.

For Toni, to be sure, he had higher cultural ambitions. Once a week, even as a young boy, Toni was sent to the opera or the state theater, there to stand in the queue for two or three hours for a balcony seat to see "Wilhelm Tell," or "Don Carlos," "Lohengrin," or "Hamlet."

Of course there had been the War. Toni was too young for that, but his father was not too old. He was in the *Landsturm*, second reserve, and called to the colors only when Italy entered the War. He fought up in the Alps for the rest of the War and was returned home without wounds but with a bad cough which lasted always afterward. He hadn't minded that so much, but he had minded what the War had done to Toni. Toni was in school and throughout the four years he had been fed on corn mash, with pieces of straw in it, and turnips. On the wall of the Murbacher apartment there was a class picture in which Toni appeared, taken in 1915, showing him in shorts and very large hobnailed boots—bought so that he could grow into them—pale and thin, with the gray look of proletarian children, slightly overgrown, in a jacket of poor thin cloth and a cotton singlet, because it was cheaper than a shirt. Already he was wearing glasses.

"We never had any sports," Toni once confessed wistfully. "Two hours in the gymnasium doing exercises, that was all." Whenever they had it to give him he took a slice of bread to school to eat at ten o'clock, and at night he did his homework in the kitchen. Afterward he went to the library of the People's University, because the public library did not have the books he wanted and he felt out of place there. Of course he thought it his duty to study the socialist writers, and at eighteen knew all the

differences between Marx and Lassalle and Engels and Sorel, between the British guild socialists and the French syndicalists.

Oh, well, Toni had come through all right—"with honors." His father, to be sure, had wanted him to be a lawyer, perhaps a judge. But Toni shared his father's passion for education. He intended all along to be a schoolteacher.

Toni was twenty-one when the Republic was proclaimed. To Herr Murbacher the Republic was an inevitable development. All the socialist writers had predicted it. Everything was coming out as promised. Things did come out all right if you only had patience—and kept on educating. There were hard times right after the War, of course. Lots of days lost at the shop, and not much food, and Toni still a year to go at the university. But the Republic was generous to the workers. There were manifold signs of progress.

Frau Murbacher was also aware of progress. The death of the old Emperor had upset her much more than that of Victor Adler, though she shook her head from side to side in commiseration, out of respect for her husband. She was rather worried about Toni, who was a freethinker like his father, and, like his father, careful not to hurt his mother's feelings.

"I do not believe in the church," he said to me precisely. "It is a substitute for thinking. Still, it is not necessary yet to have a fight with God." His mother, I was sure, prayed for him. And once she confessed that she had saved a little money for her funeral. The socialists favored cremation, but she had a horror of it. To be buried in the good earth was right. Nevertheless, she was aware of changes under the Republic, and they were all to the good for Frau Murbacher.

First of all, the rents. It was very fine to live in two

rooms, a *cabinet*, and a kitchen, and the rooms looking upon the street, instead of the two narrow cubicles upon a courtyard which they had had before, with Toni sleeping in the same room as his parents. The Republic could be thanked for that, for it controlled the rents. And Toni? Toni had a library—seventy-five books perhaps—and taught in the secondary schools. Frau Murbacher shared his enthusiasm without quite understanding what it was all about. Vaguely perhaps she understood that class distinctions had been abolished in the schools. How very different they were than they had been under the monarchy she could not possibly understand, for she had never been to school at all after she was ten years old—and that had been in the country. Still Toni was happy, and when they could get an apartment Toni was going to marry Maria, who was a professor's daughter, and she was a fine girl too. Frau Murbacher, alone, felt strongly that Maria was above them.

Sometimes when I went into the city Toni would walk along at my side, full of enthusiasm for his work, his near-sighted eyes beaming behind his spectacles, his bony hands gesturing. "Your country is so poor," I would say. "The state is so poor. All the other people whom I know complain so bitterly."

"Patience," he would reply. "We must have patience." (The words might have been his father's.) "In many, many ways things are better than they ever were. We are bringing up a better generation. The children of the workers are better fed than I was, even under the rich monarchy. Sports! Don't you see the children going off with rücksacks or skis every Sunday? All we could do was to sit in the park and watch the carriages pass! There's medical inspection in the schools. This generation won't have bad teeth and poor eyesight—like mine." He smiled modestly, as pleased as though the teeth and sight of his

students were complete compensation for his own weakness. "After all, no country is better or stronger than its people," he would say.

"Your opponents say the taxes are too high. They say the peasants are resentful. They say all these reforms cost too much, at the expense of the business men and the landowners, Toni," I would warn.

"There's no other way," Toni would say. "You come and see our schools."

I did go to see them, and admired and wondered.

Then for some years I was not in Vienna. But I had letters. Toni was going to marry Maria "just as soon as we can get a flat to ourselves. We have been promised one in the new apartments which the municipality is building."

As a matter of fact they were married earlier, but they lived apart. There was not space enough in the two rooms and *cabinet* for four people. Toni went to his schoolroom each day, and Maria to the biological laboratory where she was a technician. Once when I was in Vienna for a few days she confided to me, "Soon we shall get the apartment. When we get the apartment we can have a baby."

II

I saw them last only a year ago. Again I climbed the stone stairs. There was the same smell of mold and cabbage and the same house porter, though he did not recognize me, but nodded affirmatively when I asked whether the Murbachers still lived on the third floor. But Frau Murbacher recognized me. She drew me into the living room, where the class picture, the green-shaded lamp, and the Biedermeier chairs still stood. She was not so round as she had been and her laugh of pleasure broke her face into many wrinkles as we embraced. "Toni? Maridl? They live now in their new apartment. They have a son.

He is a fine boy. Only five years, and he comes up to here." She measured his height proudly against her chest. "My husband?" Her mouth grew a little smaller. "Ach, Johann. He is not so well. He still goes to the works though, but he is failing. The cough is worse too."

Then I went to see Toni and Maridl, on a Sunday, when there was no school and no laboratory, and I was sure they would be at home. Why, it was a palace where they lived! One went through a great archway into a wide, grassy court, where there was an open splash pool, and children in sun-suits bathing and squealing. Up a clean, wide staircase, lighted by large windows. Maridl came to the apartment door, all excitement, all happiness.

So this was their new home, for which the baby had waited so long. It was hardly larger than the Murbacher apartment, but everywhere there was sunshine, and from every window one saw green trees. The kitchen was white and gleaming, and modern, and in an alcove stood a white table and chairs. There was a sunny bedroom with light walls and painted furniture, and a sitting room with a little day-bed in it, hidden by a screen. "For Victor, our son," said Maridl.

"Do you still go to work?" I asked. "But of course," she replied, "and I'm very lucky still to have a job. Now I only work half-time because of Victor. But I can leave him in the kindergarten. You must see the whole house! Think of it! We have our own public baths—they couldn't afford to give us each a bathroom, but we have our own lavatory, and there's a branch of the public kindergartens here, and of the public library, and lots of co-operative shops, and the most wonderful laundry. You must see what our Party has done!"

And down the stairs we went again, to look at the library where some children were reading, and the sunny kindergarten with its lovely murals, done by some children from one of the art schools, and the modern, well-lighted

and ventilated laundry. "I can do two weeks' washing and most of the ironing in half a day here," said Maridl, pointing out the electric washers and the gas "dryers," the large and small mangling machines, and the tall windows. And then we were out again in the courtyard, with its chestnut trees and loggias, and flowers and splash pool. And there was Toni, playing with his son. Same old Toni, with the beaming eyes and thick glasses and bony hands and cheap clothes. And playing with him, half naked, a tall, brown little boy, with hair as tow-colored and as stiff as Toni's, but with his mother's straight features and a proud, direct look. "Bow to your Auntie," said Toni. "She comes all the way from America." The boy stuck out his small hand and made a *diener*. "From America?" he asked, wonderingly, and went back to his sand-pile.

We had a long talk, Toni, Maridl, and I, mostly about politics, when congratulations about the flat and the child were over with. Hitler was in power in Germany, and the German republic was gone. "And your German Party colleagues?" I asked. "Where are they now?"

Worry creased a line in Toni's forehead. "It is a dreadful time," he said. "They say everywhere that democracy is finished in the world. They say no one believes in it any more. But our people all still believe. It is bad here, too. But the Austrians are not like the Germans. The people are different. They are more civilized. We have an old culture. It will never be here as it was in Germany!"

I wondered. In the town, among people not like Toni, I had heard other things. "They have taken away a lot of power from the municipal government where our Party has control," said Toni. (He referred to the Federal government as "they.") "We won't be building more houses like this one. But think of it! Tens of thousands of people now live the way we do! And look at the children!

If only this generation gets a chance to grow up! It's the healthiest generation that Austria has ever had, and the freest. And the best educated."

I had just come from Germany. "Don't be too optimistic, Toni," I said. "The middle classes are tired of all this and the peasants too. And the people who ruled before the War. You've never won them over. And you've been too tolerant to eliminate them. They believe the whole country is ruled in the interest of your class, and they are likely to turn against you as they did in Germany."

"I know how they talk," said Maria bitterly. "As though we were parasites! Don't we work? Whenever we can, and for very little. Toni and I together don't earn more than three hundred schillings a month. Not fifty dollars! Without all this"—her arm gestured to the balconied house, its courtyards and gardens—"for which we pay only the upkeep cost, which is almost nothing, we could barely survive. Just the same, we couldn't afford tomato juice for Victor or fresh vegetables even in summer if we didn't grow them."

"Grow them! Where?" I asked.

"Out in the suburbs, near the Danube, where we got a free allotment from the city. We have a fine garden there. Toni works there after school hours, and we all do on Sundays. Sometimes, in school vacation, we even live there in our 'country house.' We built it—out of tar paper mostly, and some old boards.

"Oh, we are in luck!" she added. "We have work. Lots of the people in this house haven't more than the roof over their heads and the merest pittance of an unemployment dole. And the peasants are poor too. It is marvelous how good-natured people are. When there is so little to go round, people usually get ugly. They begin to kill one another for what little there is. And our situation is so desperate—the situation of the country itself, I mean. All around us are bigger or richer countries who want to

absorb us or to keep control here for strategical reasons—France with money, keeping us just on a subsistence level. Why wouldn't she let us join Germany years ago, when the Republic was new, and when we might have helped to keep it? And Germany now, with the Nazis, no longer wanting union with us, wanting to gobble us up. And Italy too. Only here in Vienna, where our Party is in power, we have lived out of our own pockets, paid as we went; and now our opponents in the other parties say it is costing too much. I am afraid. I am afraid."

"If we can only get through these bad times," said Toni, "it must get better after a while!"

"I am afraid," Maridl repeated. "Sooner or later we shall have to fight for all this." Again her gaze swept the green court and the pleasant building.

"Not in Austria!" Toni averred stoutly. "Austrians aren't violent. We know how to get on with one another. Why, we've never even had any communist movement. The Party wouldn't allow it."

Maria veered to another angle of the subject.

"Toni doesn't know the old-fashioned people as well as I do," she said. "I was brought up among them. They don't see—the people who are fixed in their ways, who can't grasp how our circumstances have changed, our circumstances as a nation, I mean—they don't see that our only hope is to work out a new way of life. It isn't just what we believe or what party we say we belong to or what we call ourselves that really divides us from the old ones. It's a different form of life. My aunts still live in stuffy over-furnished flats and let out rooms to lodgers rather than lose a single room or a single silver teaspoon. They think it is dreadful that I do my own washing, even though I do it in a marvelous modern laundry. They wouldn't live in this house at any price, because working people live here, and yet they say that the city only lets the working people live here and is too favorable to our

Party members! They tell me I have married into the proletariat, and are still shocked. But what's the use of calling yourself middle class or proletarian when you belong to a proletarianized nation! Toni is like his father. He always says to have patience. But already they have dissolved parliament, and there are three private armies in Austria now. . . ."

"The Heimwehr," I said, "and the Storm Troops of the Nazis."

"And our own Defense Corps," said Maria gloomily.

"It's never been used for violence," said Toni. "It was started at the beginning, to defend the Republic and the Constitution. We all belong to it—to show how we stand."

"And all of them supported from the outside," said Maria. "Italy behind the Heimwehr, and Germany behind the Storm Troops."

"And the Little Entente behind you?" I asked.

"Half-heartedly," said Maria. "They would never help us in a show-down."

"One must have faith," said Toni.

"Some day we shall have to fight," said Maria. "You will see. I used to think, like Toni, that you can change the whole world by reason and good will. Now I wonder . . ."

Even when she went away and brought coffee, and we drank it on the benches in the sunshine, and talked of other things, with the handsome child playing about our feet, her words lingered like a chill.

III

When the government tried to oust the Mayor from the City Hall with the aid of the Heimwehr, the workers went on a general strike, and when their leaders were arrested the workers resisted with arms. Then the cannon came out and the Party Headquarters were bombarded and the

municipal houses too. I read about it on the front pages of the New York papers: Civil War in Vienna! they screamed. It was the unanimous opinion of the correspondents that the workers did not have a chance. Many of the reporters referred to them as the "rebels."

I saw a small item in a long account of the fighting:

> A leader of the resistance in one of the municipal apartment houses, Anton Murbacher, was sentenced to death for High Treason and hanged this afternoon. He walked coolly to the gallows, saying that he had always been willing to give his life for the Austrian Republic and the Social Democratic Party.

Yesterday I had a letter from Toni's mother. It was written in an uneducated hand, in the difficult German script, and it took me several hours to decipher it.

> Dear Gracious Lady:
>
> We want to thank our dear friend very much for the letter she wrote. We have had a real bad time. But it was a very nice letter. Our poor Toni would have been happy if he could have read the letter. It is now almost a month since then. He was in the apartment house where they lived the whole time. Maridl was there and Victor too, and for three days they didn't have any milk for him. Toni was commander of the defense department. On the day before they were at our house for supper and Toni ate a whole half of a *Gugelhupf*. When the troops marched in he had got the order to defend the house. Maridl says he was on the roof the whole time, but nothing happened to him, but many others were hit, also Franz, the Schroeders' boy that you know, but they think he will get well. Then when they began to shoot with cannon Toni wanted that Maridl and Frau Norbaschek should go in the cellar, but they did not go because they were helping with the guns. Frau Norbaschek got hit when she went to get water for one of the men. She is real bad. She was a good dressmaker and her boy goes to the *Gymnasium*. A shell hit Toni's flat and smashed all the things in it and his books too. Then they did not have any more cartridges and then Herr Stiegler put up a towel for a white flag. The police took them all away. They took him to a court, only it was a war court really. The Holy Father said Toni did not defend himself at

all. He said the others weren't to blame, only he, because he ordered them. He said he wasn't sorry because he had only defended his home and his rights.

Maridl took Victor to Toni so he could still see him. The officer allowed that and the good God will count it to his credit. Maridl said that Toni had broken his glasses so he did not know them when they first came in the waiting room. We couldn't go though because it was too late.

They did it right away like in war. Frau Ribanek, she who lives where you used to live, she was with me when they did it. I went to the Holy Father and paid for five masses for Toni. I had my funeral money, so Toni will have his masses. He did not go to church but he was a good boy. The Holy Father says God will remember that. Maridl sends love. She is living with us now because she had to go away from the new apartment. Other people are going to be put in when the building is fixed. We will be all right because we still have the two rooms and *cabinet*. Maridl says she will write you too, later. My husband would like to write but since it happened he does not go out any more. He doesn't talk any more nor read his books either. May the dear God protect the gracious lady.

Respectfully,
JOSEPHINE MURBACHER.

The stairs are dark, and smell of mold and cabbage, and the sun hardly ever comes in that street. They will make a bed for Victor, I suppose, in the *cabinet* where Toni's books used to be.

COCOONS

by

Fusao Hayashi

FUSAO HAYASHI *was born in 1903 and is the author of many short stories and novels, among them a recent work entitled* Seinen (Youth). *He has been arrested several times for his activities in the Left Wing movement in Japan.*

COCOONS

WHENEVER I see cocoons I am reminded of Yasuo Sakai. Of late I have become so completely a city-dweller that it is only by the patterns of autumn grasses on fabrics in the shop-windows that I know the autumn has come. No longer can I wander along country lanes where migrant crows drop seeds as they fly, the baskets of live cocoons swaying on the carts as if they would topple off at any minute.

Sakai and I were bosom pals in the middle school. We shared a room and with our two little desks, side by side, were as inseparable as Siamese twins.

At the back of the school rose hills covered with low pines; whenever summer drew near wild-flowers blossomed round the roots of these trees.

"Funny little guys; beauties, aren't they?" I remember him remarking solemnly one day as we watched a little snake, all its scales shining in the sunlight, disappear noiselessly under a bush.

There was a tinge of bitterness in his words. He himself was always called "the dirty guy" by the bullies of the class, as he was always in rags. Were he a spineless chap, that nickname alone would have been enough to humiliate him. Their scorn, however, probably contained a strain of jealousy since he was unusually intelligent, and was generally at the top of the class. He combined the extremes of cleverness and poverty. In this we were strongly contrasted, for I was remarkable neither for brains nor

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poverty. I was his only friend and whenever he got behind with his school fees I would offer part of my allowance as a matter of course.

Yes, in that class-room at the foot of those hills, with our desks side by side, we were as inseparable as twins.

From the hills you could see the sea. We two boys would often climb up and, lying down facing that blue paint-dish of sea under the sky, try vainly to throw stones into it, or hallo down at it the duet "River of Love" in voices strangely out of tune.

One day, under a wild briar bush, we found a snake eating a grass-green frog. Out of the open jaws of the snake only the little suckers on the end of the frog's hind legs stuck out, waving as if sending out S. O. S. signals. I noticed Sakai's eyebrows twitch, and then he let fly with his dusty boot and kicked the snake fiercely right in the belly. Then, squashing it with his heel, he watched it intently as a thin trickle of crimson blood came out of the yellow distended mouth.

"The devil," he snarled.

The frog had been rescued and it lay motionless on the grass with the snake's slimy saliva still clinging to it.

"The rotten devil," he repeated.

I remember another incident.

One of the abuses of middle school life was that the older boys invariably bullied the younger ones. One practice they delighted in was to get their miserable victim in some lonely field and, on some trumped-up charge, lay into him savagely with their fists. As we were wandering over the hills one day we had the bad luck to be caught by a gang of bullies.

One of them—his father owned a silk mill in our town—a rough, stupid fellow, called Okawa, came rushing at us.

"Look here, Sakai, you've been getting too cheeky lately."

Sakai gazed into his face for some time and then blurted out impulsively, "How do you make that out?"

The big boy suddenly gave him a punch in the chest.

"I'll teach you to answer back a senior. That's cheeky."

Sakai rolled over on the grass, but soon picked himself up and made a mad rush at his assailant's chest. But he was much smaller and, anyhow, it was three to one. The next minute he was on the ground again and was beaten like a dog. When he rose a second time I saw the glint of steel. It was his new penknife he held in his right hand.

The colour left Okawa's lips. Sakai's face, too, seemed to go a shade paler. Swiftly as a rat Okawa scurried, but Sakai ran him down near the place where he had once squashed the snake. The patch stopped there. Okawa stood waiting with the strength of one at bay.

"Stab me if you dare." Peeling off his coat, Okawa threw it on the grass and in the manner of all bluffers he bared his breast and extended both arms.

"You think I won't stab you?" Sakai's voice sounded strangely calm and collected. The gleam of cold steel rent the air.

"Oh!" All my blood went cold within me and this cry sprang from me as I saw how Okawa fell prone on the grass.

His fellow bullies ran to him to pick him up and carry him away. Sakai, limp and apathetic, followed them with his eyes, but once their figures had disappeared behind the bushes, he collapsed and lay motionless on the grass.

When I regained my presence of mind I hurried anxiously over to him. His face was buried in the summer grass and his shoulders were heaving.

Why?—I could not understand the reason.

Talking about not understanding reasons, there was another thing about Sakai that I could never fathom. In his desk he always kept a single white silkworm cocoon. Once I asked him why he kept it, but he refused to answer,

so out of spite I cut it up into little bits with my scissors. For a whole day after that he did not speak to me. A week later a similar cocoon was in his drawer again.

Later these two riddles were solved together.

I think it was on the second or third day after this incident. Sakai suddenly asked me to go with him to the town, and took me to a small silk mill that stood near the water-front. He seemed to be no stranger there, for with just a nod to the doorkeeper he hurried into the mill. I followed after him.

Inside the mill, murky with steam and dark like the inside of a kitchen on a rainy day, the old-fashioned spindles turned noisily. The foul smell of dead grubs and the heavy humid air almost suffocated you. Before each girl stood two pots full of boiling water, one big and one small; in the small pot white cocoons kept bobbing up and down. One or two boiled cocoons would be transferred by the girl's hand into the bigger pot and, as they danced round in the hot water, they gradually became thinner. At the same time an almost invisible thread passed from them, above the girls' heads, and was wound round the droning spindles behind. With the revolutions of the belt the reels of silk became fatter and the cocoons thinner. When one cocoon had been completely unwound, the little black grub would appear floating dead on the surface. I watched it all with unaccustomed eyes.

"Wait just a minute." Sakai hurriedly disappeared behind the machines, coming back after a time with an elderly woman wearing a mill-girl's uniform.

"This is my mother."

"Eh?" I was completely taken back and bowed my head in confusion.

"Now, mother, thank him."

Sakai's mother was about fifty and had smooth brows, unlike the woman of to-day. Bowing her head, in which

white hairs had begun to show, she kept thanking me for my kindnesses to Sakai, and implored me to remain his friend. This made me very bashful. I blushed scarlet, and could do nothing but keep bowing too, unable to look up into that face, so full of brooding and humility.

On the way home Sakai related his early history. Of how, during his fourth year at the primary school, his mother and he had been left alone through his father's death and reduced from comfortable circumstances to poverty; of how she had started working in this mill to help him enter the middle school. He had stuck out against going, but the teachers urged it on him, saying it was a pity to leave off at that point, and his mother, her eyes full of tears, tried to persuade him, saying there was no one but him to restore the fortunes of the Sakais, so he finally yielded; but when he saw his mother wearing out her aged body in that unhealthy mill in order to pay his school fees, he could not feel much like school; with her whole month's wages they just managed to pay the minimum fees; but if he left school it would only sadden his mother, who was straining herself to keep on working, and would shatter her last hopes; so partly as there seemed no way out of it, and partly out of gratitude to her, he kept on at school.

"I've never told anyone these things. I've never felt it necessary. But you—you've always been so decent to me. And then sometimes I've told my mother about you and she has said, with tears in her eyes, how much she wanted to meet you and thank you, and that's why I brought you to-day.

"And also," he soon continued, "there was another reason for bringing you to the mill. Perhaps you know that the owner of that mill is the father of that Okawa I knifed the other day?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"That's why I think I was in the wrong the other day.

Of course, it's mean to bully younger boys, but defiance, when a personal grievance enters into it, is worse, it seems to me. If Okawa had been alone that day—that Okawa who is always jeering at me just because my mother works in his mill—I don't think I would have gone so far as to use a knife. When I realized what I had done, I howled at my own meanness."

I watched the red evening sun between the roofs of the town as it sank into the sea.

Two or three years passed. We both became students of the same high school. Sakai received a scholarship from the prefecture, while I, somehow or other, succeeded in passing the entrance examination.

We were lying in the grass on a hill that overlooked the school building and talking idly as the summer sun shone down pleasantly on our faces and our new gold buttons.

"I still keep my cocoon," said Sakai, as if he had suddenly called it to mind.

"Do you? Is your mother still in that mill?"

"I can't get her to leave. She says she'll keep on, no matter what happens, until I graduate. Of course in a way she has reason on her side, for as long as I stay at school there is no other way for her to live except the mill."

Sakai bit his lips as he plucked stalks of grass, and his voice became thoughtful.

"Lately I've begun to have doubts about life," he said. "For instance, take that mill: now there are about 300 girls working there. They're mostly from fifteen to twenty-four years of age, all farmers' daughters from the neighbouring villages. When they come they're young, country girls with good strong bodies, but after a year or two they begin bandaging up their throats and coughing suspiciously; their eyes become red and swollen, and their fingers whitish and rotten, and then they return home. Some of them wither and die while in the mill, and you

hear sometimes of girls getting their hair caught in the machines.

"The humid air; the long hours from morning right on into the night; insufficient food—when I see those girls under such conditions, wearing out their young bodies before my very eyes, I think of the kettles and of the cocoons which the girls reel.

"Each one, boiled in the hot water, becoming thinner and thinner; its life drained from it by that single invisible thread, until finally the black grub—now a useless dead thing—is cast up on the surface of the water.

"But on the other hand—and this is what you've got to notice isn't there—exactly corresponding to the reels winding and winding above the girls' heads, a group of men who grow continually fatter and fatter!"

Sakai paused for a minute to wipe the sweat from his brow, and then in a voice deliberately lowered, went on.

"And you know, I have a feeling—it's horrible to think about it—but still I have the feeling that something will happen to mother in that mill before I get safely through the university. My mother holds to it almost like a religion that the ruin of the Sakai family is our fault and that we must somehow restore it. Not only that, but, as a mother, she naturally feels a deep joy and an object in life in giving a proper education to her only child. I can understand that feeling quite well.

"But so long as she's in that mill, isn't she, too, just one of those miserable silkworm cocoons? An invisible silken thread is drawing, drawing at her life, too. . . . "

Words seemed futile as an answer.

We were third-year high school students. It was a winter's day with graduation close at hand. Late at night, in spite of the snow, Sakai came to my lodgings.

"What's the matter?" Looking at his face, bloodless and like that of a man just come from a tomb, I felt intuitively that something serious was wrong.

"My mother is dead. . . . Too late, too late."

Almost snatching from him the telegram he had received, I recalled his prophetic words and a cold shiver ran down my spine.

My voice failed to utter a word. For a moment that face which I had seen in the silk mill, among all those droning spindles, with its smooth brows, so unlike the women of to-day, rose before me and then was gone.

"Too late. In the New Year vacation I begged her to let me leave school. I told her no son could bear to send his mother out into a mill like that, and that there was no rest for me while I knew she was surrounded by all sorts of dangers, and helpless against them. It was the first time I'd been back home for a long while and I realized with a shock the great change in her. She wept, but would not hear me."

His lips quivering, he brushed away the tears that welled up.

"But talking like this won't do any good now. I'm going home by the night train. Would you mind lending me the fare?"

I put together all the money I had and gave it to him, and walking through the snow saw him off at the station.

About a week later I got a letter from him.

"This morning we gathered up my mother's ashes. They all went nicely into an urn less than seven inches high. Sitting with it before me, I realize more deeply than ever the terrible blow I have suffered. More than ten girls from the mill came to the funeral. They were girls whom my mother had been kind to. More had asked to be allowed off just to attend the funeral, but, as you can imagine, permission was not granted. Those who came had managed to escape knowing they would be punished for it. I was deeply moved by this.

"When in the New Year vacation I was stopped by mother from leaving school, I thought out a plan of my

own. Were I to enter university, I would try to find work to do in my spare time. If I succeeded, even if I got mother to leave the mill, we would have enough for the two of us. But as things turned out, this too has ended in nothing.

"Sitting before this urn, my thoughts turn to the system which silently, with subtle force, destroyed my mother's life.

"The cocoons getting thinner, the reels fatter—the dead black body of the grub.

"My mother wanted me to get on in the world. That was her only wish. I, too, tried to comply with it and exerted all my energies towards that goal—and see what's happened.

"But I will not despair. In the crematorium in the hills, just as I was getting together her ashes by the light of a candle, suddenly an idea came to me. It seemed a new road opened up before me. There was not only one cocoon. My mother was not the only sufferer.

"In this land of ours alone, how many millions, no, tens of millions of human beings, like the cocoons in the boiling water, are having their life-blood sucked away from them?

"It may sound funny to you to say it abruptly like this. But I know the enemy I have to fight. I expect I shall have a chance of talking this out with you more in detail some time. I remember how once in our middle school days I used my knife against one fellow who bullied me. The road I am taking now is not a mean, cowardly one like that. This work is work fit for men which I must give up my whole life to. It would please mother, too, I think.

"I'm not coming back to school. It will be some time before I'm able to meet you again, probably. I hope you'll take care of yourself and study hard.

"One other thing—in the left-hand drawer of my desk you will find a white cocoon. It's a funny sort of keepsake, but I'd like you to keep it in memory of my mother."

Cocoons

That must have been ten years ago.

Whenever I see cocoons I am reminded of Yasuo Sakai. But there are few chances for me to see them, since I have become so completely a city-dweller, knowing that the autumn has come only by the patterns of grasses on fabrics in the shop-windows.

There is no need of cocoons to remind me of Sakai now. I, too, have joined the ranks of those he calls "Comrades."

OUTPOST

by

Denji Kuroshima

DENJI KUROSHIMA *was born in Japan in 1898. Drafted into the army, he was sent on the Siberian expedition during the civil war in the U. S. S. R. Since then he has become well known for stories about the life of soldiers.*

OUTPOST

I

Pigs

A DROVE of black pigs was snouting and digging the débris from the swamp. A company of the Japanese expeditionary army was stationed at a Chinese village a few miles away from the Taohon railway line. It was early in November. When this company departed from Mukden, the vast Manchurian plains were green, but now only gray, monotonous, endless fields stretched before them.

From beyond the hills an outpost of the Manchurian army strained their vigilant eyes over the plain. The Japanese side eagerly waited for the moment to open the attack. They had crossed the Eastern Siberian railway, occupied the Chahar fortress, and taken possession of the Taohon railway. It was preparation for an attack on the Soviet border. Well known is this story of Japanese aggression.

For two weeks this company of the Japanese army had been quartered in a Chinese village, waiting with the keen attention of a bird of prey for a chance to advance. But among the soldiers in these quarters, there was apparent an effort to forget the tense atmosphere of the war. They sought diversion, some amusement which would never be permitted under the strict army rule even in time of peace.

Pale yellow sunlight appeared in the far-away sky. On the roof of the billet where the Japanese army was quartered, a watch tower had been erected to observe the

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enemy. A Japanese soldier, Hamada, was on duty at the watch tower, but he too was restless.

"Look there!" he shouted to the idle soldiers on the ground. "Some surprises are coming over the swamp."

"What is it?" The soldiers down below lifted their heads and looked at Hamada. They saw in his face a mischievous joy. "Tell us! Are they women?" All the soldiers were thirsty for women.

"No, not women, pigs."

"What did you say? Pigs? Pigs? Well, that wouldn't be so bad. Come on, fellows."

The soldiers were not well fed. They received only the most monotonous food. The meat, which was served seldom, was canned and tasteless. The thought of fresh juicy meat stimulated their imaginations and their mouths watered. They hatched up a plan.

About five minutes later, several soldiers with rifles on their shoulders marched across the wild open fields towards the swamp. At about a hundred yards from the swamp, they fell on their knees on the dried grass and took aim. The black pigs were wandering in search of food, not sensing the soldiers. They missed their usual food from the farmers who had fled before the advance of the Japanese army. The soldiers aimed their rifles at the pigs. It was easy and safe to shoot, not a human being, but non-resisting and helpless animals. The pigs fell one by one. It was a pleasant game. But Goto, a new recruit, missed his aim and merely wounded the pig. It howled in sharp, piercing cries and leaped up, then rolled violently on the ground.

"Look, it is wounded." All the soldiers gazed upon the wounded pig, which was jumping and rolling with the blind power of madness.

Again Goto aimed his rifle and again he missed. The pig, in desperation, made another fierce turn. Goto aimed his rifle, but a third time missed.

"If that were a human being, we could not stand it," one of the soldiers murmured. "Even to do it to a pig is cruel enough."

"Do you know Ishizuka and Yamaguchi were murdered like that?" said Onishi.

"Were they really murdered by our officers?"

"Yes, sure, I know the fellow who was assigned to the duty of shooting them. He told me what he saw himself."

Presently the soldiers returned to their billet, carrying the pigs, still warm, tied to a pole by the hind legs. Blood running from the pigs' mouths drew a long red line on the gray field.

At the entrance of the billet the company sergeant-major stood with a stern and sulky look.

"Didn't you see a Chinese before you went out?" he asked.

"No, sir. Has something happened, Sergeant-Major?"

"Yes, but you fools don't know anything. All right." He cast a sidelong glance at the pigs, still dripping blood, but he said nothing. The soldiers filed past him and laid the pigs beside the mud wall of the billet.

"Hamada, what has happened?" Onishi asked Hamada, who had come down from the watch tower.

"A Chinese soldier has done a smart, quick job. He was here and has gone, leaving behind him leaflets. Nobody noticed him."

"Where are the leaflets?"

"All the leaflets have been taken away by the sergeant-major. We are not allowed to read them. Don't you know?"

But later Hamada brought out a sheet of folded paper from his rice-pot and showed it to the soldiers.

"Though Ishizuka and Yamaguchi were killed, we have our friends like them right here among the Chinese soldiers. Wasn't that Chinese soldier wonderful? He did not fear to come here to give us the leaflets and he left without a sound. How smart he was!"

II

Comfort-Bags

The Chinese house where the Japanese company was stationed had a thick wall and a low ceiling. It was steam-heated. At night the soldiers slept on the floor, rolled in a few blankets. A foul smell of body odor filled the air. The soldiers had not taken a bath in more than twenty days.

Hamada and several other soldiers were lying on a blanket after a day's duty. They were waiting for the mail. The officers were nervous about anti-war leaflets which were not only brought by the Chinese soldiers, but had often been found in the mail sent to the soldiers from their homes, and in the comfort-bags. The strictness of the censorship had been intensified.

The steam-heat warmed the soldiers; but the place was infested with fleas. It was five in the evening and already dark. In North Manchuria days were very short. A thick, grayish-white candle stood on the edge of a shelf without a candle-stick. The room itself expressed the desolate and dull life of soldiers at the front. The rifles leaning against the wall smelled of gun-powder. The muddy and torn shirts hung down like cerements. The gray wall, from which plaster was falling, was decorated with the pictures of two popular movie actresses. They were pasted up with rice. The officers were pleased to see that the soldiers were comforted in their lonely life by such things.

The rattle of wheels mingled with the neighing of horses approached. Clumping steps sounded on the stone road. The soldiers lying on the floor lifted their heads. Ten soldiers had returned, who had gone out to the railway line, two miles away, to receive food, mail, and comfort-bags.

The billet suddenly became lively. As soon as the

soldiers, warmly dressed, with deep-crowned hats and gloves, opened the door of the room, those who had been patiently waiting for their return asked, "Did you bring mail, too?"

"No."

"What was the matter?"

"The letters are held at Mukden."

"Why?"

"They were opened up and censored."

"God damn it! We are not even allowed to read the old man's letter without being censored!"

The comfort-bags were divided among them. They knew that these bags would be packed with the same old stuff: shorts, towels and soap. Yet they expected each time to find something different. It was a joy to guess the contents of the bag. They were as excited as if they were drawing for a prize. They had received many comfort-bags before and were able to judge the contents from the appearance of the white cotton bag. The bulgy ones were not exciting, for they always had the worst things.

This time, as always, a towel, a pair of shorts, and tooth powder were all there was in the bag. They took the articles out one by one, spreading out and shaking them in expectation of finding entirely different things between them. A folded paper dropped to the floor.

"Good Lord!" shouted one of the soldiers. He displayed his gift under the candle-light.

"What is it?" All the soldiers turned to see.

"Wait! Let me see." Quickly he picked up the paper and unfolded it under the dim light.

"Is it a leaflet?"

"No. What nonsense. This is only a letter from school children written by order of the teachers. . . . Damn it!"

At that moment the door creaked. Sword and spurs clinked. The conversation suddenly stopped. A newspaper reporter, dressed in a gown thickly stuffed with

cotton and with fur around his neck, entered with an officer.

"The soldiers here are treated well. Even in cold Manchuria they are housed in a warm room," the officer explained.

"How wonderful!" the reporter answered, despite the fact that he felt sick in the stinking room.

"I think this company holds the honor of leading our army across the Nomi River, doesn't it?" He looked around the room and observed the silent soldiers.

"Yes, it was this company," the officer replied.

"I suppose in that battle all of you had interesting experiences. Will you tell me about them?" He waited for an answer from the crowd.

But the soldiers kept their mouths closed. They looked at one another. The reporter inquired what they had found in the comfort-bags, and about the letter from the school children. Yet the soldiers only silently exchanged glances among themselves. The reporter took a picture of the soldiers and left the room with the officer.

"Damn it! He came to see us only because he wanted to collect special news for his paper. Instead, he should bring us news of Japan."

"That's right. I'm always worried about my parents. They may starve to death."

III

Outpost

The clinking shoes of marching soldiers could be heard across the frozen fields. Seven soldiers had gone out scouting under the leadership of Sergeant Fukayama. They had left the village behind and advanced towards an outpost three miles beyond the main army in the village. Onishi and Hamada were in the group.

Trees were rare. No hills, but swamps and kaoliang

fields. The vast plain sloped. The scouts marched forward. The village where the main army was stationed had dropped from sight behind the slope. In the deserted field they felt desolate. Yet pride forced them to deny their fear. It was shameful to show cowardice.

They knew that the Chinese soldiers were laborers and peasants like themselves and forced to take up arms against their will. The Chinese soldiers were paid little and did not want to fight. Yet the Japanese scouts, imbued with fear, imagined sudden attacks. Stories of the cruelties of Chinese bandits clung to their minds, though they did not believe them at all. The closer they advanced to the enemy's zone, the more their fear increased. Now the scouts were completely isolated from the main army.

North Manchuria was an endless field. Ahead an isolated house came into sight. The sergeant, who was tracing a road with the help of a map, understood that the scouts had reached the outpost. Trenches dug by the Manchurian army were frozen with mud. The deserted house was to be occupied by the scouts and they were glad to find shelter from the freezing, biting air.

The house was built of clay, the roof also covered with clay. The door was broken. Inside there was no bed, no chair, no shelf, no wood to burn. Only newly burned ashes. Perhaps it had been looted.

"There is another hut over there," Onishi shouted to the others when he came out after inspecting the house. The other hut, which was within fifty metres, stood low in the trench and was of a protective earth color.

"We must inspect that house, too." Hamada approached it carelessly. To his surprise a Chinese soldier appeared at the door.

The sight of a Chinese made his blood run cold. He instinctively clutched his rifle, but wondered whether he should shoot him at once or wait. Other Japanese soldiers also stood erect at a loss what to do, and gazed upon a

Chinese. It was easy to shoot him alone. But it would be dangerous if the Chinese battalion were hidden somewhere, or posted near. There was such a possibility. The Japanese main army would be useless in that case. All of them, from the sergeant to the new recruit, realized that they were powerless.

The Chinese soldier at the door smiled at them. Another Chinese appeared behind the first with the same friendly smile.

"Why! They are greeting us."

The tension on the part of the Japanese relaxed. They decided to take no action against the Chinese, though they were watchful.

That day passed without any trouble. Neither side sent any report to their main army. Yet fear was not extinguished in the minds of the Japanese soldiers. They could not sleep throughout the night. They were irritated and depressed.

The next morning, the Chinese were still there. They made their appearance at the window whenever the Japanese soldiers looked in, the good-natured smile always on their faces. The Japanese could not return a sulky look, and they, too, began to smile. During the whole morning both sides peered at each other through the windows and exchanged smiles.

After lunch, there still remained a piece of ham cooked by a former cook, Yoshida. Hamada wrapped it in a fresh towel and threw it towards the window of the Chinese hut.

"A nice present to you!" he shouted in Chinese.

"Thank you!" a voice answered.

The present was dropped on the ground near the Chinese house. Three Chinese soldiers rushed out and picked it up with a yell of delight.

In return for the present, the Chinese soldiers sent a bundle to the Japanese.

"Here is a bottle of rice wine for you!"

"What is it?" The Japanese did not understand the Chinese. They spoke too fast. But a package, shooting through the air like an arrow, dropped in front of Hamada. In the package was a bottle of Chinese rice wine.

The sergeant was opposed to accepting presents from the Chinese, and when Hamada opened the bottle, he uttered the suggestive word, "Poison!"

"No, Sergeant, I don't believe it. Give me the bottle. I will taste it first," said Onishi.

"No, the first is mine." Hamada insisted on drinking his first. The bottle was passed to Onishi, who licked his lips, pleased with the good taste. Then it was passed among the eight soldiers, one by one—to all except the sergeant. The sake made them happy. The sergeant could no longer refrain from drinking and finally joined the others. He got drunk and his eyes turned red.

The evening of that day was different from the preceding one. They were no longer conscious of fear. A fire was lighted from the wood collected during the daytime. They sat in a circle and talked. The centre of the talk was Onishi, who had worked in a foundry before he was drafted. He was bold and fearless. He told about the distress of his mother and sister.

"Even though I am serving my country in Manchuria, nobody takes care of or helps my family in their destitution. We are told that we fight for our country, but our country has been doing nothing for us or for the poor."

"You are right. War is no good for us."

"Manchurian railway stock went up higher because of the war. But who is getting the profit? It is not for us who have not a single share."

The sergeant attempted to change the subject. "Onishi, shut up. Talk about something else."

"No, Sergeant, I am not telling a lie. This is a fact." Onishi did not care what the sergeant said. The soldiers here were not afraid of him. They ignored army rule.

It was after nine o'clock and the wood had burned out. Hamada stood up, and asked the new recruit, Goto, to go with him around the house to get wood. "I will carry my rifle in case of emergency. You don't need yours. If both of us are armed, we cannot carry wood."

"Is it safe for two of you to go out?" Onishi asked worriedly.

"Sure. Nothing will happen."

But another soldier stood up, prepared to follow the two who had already left. He did not take his rifle. The three soldiers marched together. The moonlight was reflected on the white field covered with frost. The land was frozen as hard as a rock. The ice crunched under their steps.

Near a ditch beyond their hut, Hamada was picking and gathering wood. He stretched himself to try to get dried branches of trees. Beyond the ditch he saw a black crowd of animals moving across the slope. It looked like a herd of small cattle.

"Look!" called Hamada with a yell of horror to the other two. "Mongolian dogs!"

Goto, facing an army of dogs, dropped the bundle of wood. The Mongolian dogs made a sudden attack like an infantry attack. Hamada aimed his rifle at them. The others held their swords. The dogs, snarling, bore down upon them. They rushed at the soldiers, jumped on their backs, at their throats and chests. Hamada recalled the bodies of soldiers torn by the Mongolian dogs on the battle fields. He fired at them as fast as he could and tried to run. But the army of dogs blocked his retreat. At first sight through the dim moonlight, he saw only twenty or thirty of them. Now he found them increased to more than fifty. The other soldiers were helpless without rifles. They

tried to defend themselves with swords. But the dogs were stronger than the men. The three soldiers fought desperately.

Suddenly Hamada heard a sound of shooting. Behind the Chinese hut he saw black shadows aiming rifles at the dogs.

In the other hut, six Japanese soldiers looked out through the window. The army of fierce dogs was advancing towards their hut like rolling waves. Soon the hut was encircled with snarling dogs. Their eyes glistened in the moonlight. The Japanese soldiers seized their guns and ran out. The dogs were aggressive and did not retreat. When one was shot to death, another rushed to attack, jumping over the dead bodies of dogs. Sounds of firing echoed over the desolate fields.

Finally Hamada and the other two cut their way through the dogs and dashed to the rescuers.

"Thanks for your help! Now we are safe." Hamada thought they were the Japanese. But the answer was in a different tongue. He looked at them in the dim moonlight, and saw before him the Chinese who had sent the present of sake in the afternoon.

"Thank you! Thank you!" Hamada repeated.

The dogs gradually retreated, casting black shadows on the white field. The Chinese stood side by side with the Japanese and drove them back.

Three days later, the Japanese army made a sudden attack on all sections of the battle front. The company to which the scouts belonged also advanced.

The company commander was furious when he found that his soldiers had become friendly with the Chinese scouts. The Chinese and Japanese were eating together out of the same pot when the commander arrived.

"What are you doing here?" he shouted to his men. "Who do you think they are? Shoot them!"

But his order was not carried out. All stood still. An expression of hatred was on the faces of the soldiers.

"Shoot them!" the commander repeated.

There was a moment of tense silence, suddenly broken by the sound of shots. Onishi and Hamada had taken aim, not at the Chinese, but at the commander.

THE MARTYR'S WIDOW

by

Agnes Smedley

AGNES SMEDLEY *has had a career which embraces everything from school teaching among the Colorado miners to newspaper work in China. Shortly after she was born in Oklahoma, her family moved to Colorado, where her father was a piece-work laborer and carpenter in the mining camps. Her education was fragmentary, but since teaching standards were not high in those days, she got a job at the age of fourteen teaching school. A few years later she went to California, worked her way through the normal school, and made her first contacts with the "Freedom for India" movement, which, later, especially during the War, played an important part in her life. For several years she covered Chinese news in China for the Indian press and for German newspapers. Her two volumes on China*—Chinese Destinies *and* China's Red Army Marches—*contain incidents, sketches of people, and interpretations of events, that are journalism of a high quality and that in many instances pass over into the class of short stories. Her* Daughter of Earth *is autobiographical. At present (1936) she resides in Shanghai doing free lance writing.*

THE MARTYR'S WIDOW

AS Deng Yin-chu sat in prison in Nanking awaiting death, he reviewed the troubled, harassed years he had spent with his wife. Her one visit had revived memories. They were not pleasant ones. But now she had paid the prison director one hundred dollars for the privilege of talking with him for a few minutes, and she had told him that she had raised thirty thousand dollars to save him. With this money she had arranged with the prison director and judges to manage his escape. He had glowed with joy and sat waiting for the consummation of her promise.

Deng felt conscience-stricken when he recalled his treatment of Hwa-chuan in the past. Yet there had been reason enough for his actions. For years he had struggled with her. The revolution had pulled him in one direction, she in the other. A wife of his family's choice, he had still learned to love her. This love had remained unbroken until 1925, one year before his arrest. Their three children had bound her more closely to him. He had never understood her even though he had loved her. She spent most of her time gossiping at tea and mah-jong parties, decorating herself with new gowns, and caring for her complexion. But this was perhaps the way of women.

Also, she loved money, but perhaps this was not so bad, for he himself had no conception of its value, and during the ten years of his marriage he had turned his entire salary over to her. This money she had deposited in a Shanghai bank in her own name, and through an agent had loaned it out at such usurious rates of interest that she had nearly

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doubled it. With the eyes of a greedy gambler she had watched it grow. But Deng had excused her, saying this was only to guard the family from hardships. He felt certain now that it was this money she was using to save his life.

He recalled how he had tried to interest her in public affairs. First he had bought books and magazines for her to read and with enthusiasm had tried to impart some of his thoughts and knowledge to her. But his books and magazines she hid in a box in the store-room where they mildewed and rotted. And when he tried to impart his ideas to her, she turned to him a fretful and resentful face.

"What business is it of yours who rules China?" she complained. "You have a good position and you are earning a good salary. If you get mixed up in these dangerous plots, it will only endanger me and our children."

Of the men friends who came to see him she had first been suspicious, and when she heard them talking of the same things Deng had tried to impart to her, she became so hostile that gradually she drove them one by one from his home.

Deng sought in her a friend and comrade, as well as a wife. From his friends with their teeming thoughts and their secret plans he would repeatedly return to try to convince Hwa-chuan. His friends, wiser, repeatedly warned him to keep his affairs from her, but he loved her and it was not easy. As the revolutionary movement spread his conflicts with her grew, and only when the tears rolled down her face would he repent. With her in his arms he would finally sink into their bed, and, smothered by her caresses, he would promise to protect her, to sever himself from all friends or activities that endangered her. For a time she would rest content, their life would be peaceful, and then he would be drawn back to his own thoughts and plans. The conflict at home would be renewed; again it

would end by his wife's weeping in his arms in bed; and he, mastered by her body, would give her new promises.

Sometimes he had awakened at night to think of this harassing struggle. His friends were right, his wife wrong. Yet he did not have the strength to follow his convictions. Then his mind would travel back to the first woman who had mastered him. This woman had been his father's concubine and his father had paid many thousands of dollars for her. Nearly ten years his senior, it was this concubine who taught him the secrets of what is called love.

He had been a youth of seventeen at the time. For four years after that he had secretly waited to do her bidding, as a tailless dog awaits the command of its master. Watching her with jealous eyes, he had grown into a morose, silent young man laden with sickly passion and guilt. Then his father, as if sensing something at last, suddenly sent him abroad to continue his studies. Even when, a short time afterwards, he learned that the concubine had sickened and mysteriously died, her power over him was not broken. He sought her in every woman he met. And when he agreed to the wife his family chose for him, he dreamed of her only as the first woman in another form.

Deng recalled how he had often sat up in bed at night and gazed into the dim face of his sleeping wife, seeking in her some resemblance to the other woman. There was none. She was short of stature, fair of skin, and with small eyes. Hers was a dead, stupid beauty, like the face of a doll. She worked hard to preserve a certain prettiness. But the first woman had been tall and slender, with long black eyes that could burn with passion when he held her to him. Her body had been like a slender bamboo swaying in the breeze, responding to every breath of his desire. He could recall nothing she had ever said—but then women are supposed to have nothing to say. She was the begin-

ning and the end of his expectation from woman. Yet there was something in his wife that recalled this woman. When he held her in amorous embrace, his memory of the past revived and he lay again in the arms of the concubine. For these precious memories he had for years slighted his friends and the revolution.

Deng recalled the night he finally freed himself from his wife, the night a new passion took the place of his old memories. It was on the evening of May 30, 1925, when the news of the Shanghai massacre flashed through all China. All work had ceased and everywhere men stood talking of strikes, boycotts, fighting. That evening he had returned late, expecting to find his wife as excited and determined as was he. She met him, smiling prettily. She had heard nothing of the news. And when he told her of it, she looked vacantly into his face.

"These people are always doing something bad," she said fretfully. "They are always trying to stir up trouble!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, confused and astounded.

"Down there in Shanghai—the workingmen and students. They have no sense of responsibility. Your friends are the same—they are a bad influence upon you."

His arms hung lifelessly at his sides and he stood staring into her empty face.

"Now what have I done?" she began, her lips quivering, tears gathering in her eyes. She placed her hands on him, clung to him. But he continued staring at her as if she were a strange woman. Then he firmly and slowly released her arms, and without a word or a backward glance turned and left the house.

From this time he had worked in secret, always silent in her presence. Her fretfulness, her resentment, and her tears crystallized into a hard, mean hatred for his friends and the movement that was sweeping China. She peddled

her grief from one tea-table to the other in Nanking, and her gossip reached the ears of Deng's friends. Deng merely replied to them: "She knows nothing of our work. I never speak to her of it." But they worried, for her tongue wagged.

Finally an impetuous man by the name of Wu decided to act. One day he appeared in her home and spoke directly: "I hear what you are saying about Deng's political activities. I warn you—you are endangering his life. If your gossip reaches the ears of the militarists he will be arrested and killed."

She was white with fury. "You are all Reds! It is you who are endangering his life. What right have you to force him into these activities? He is *my* husband!"

"I have warned you, seriously. The militarists have ears at every keyhole. Nobody complains of him but you."

"You are a bad man—leave my house at once!" she screamed.

Hwa-chuan peddled her new injury over the city. Wu, the Red, had insulted her! When Wu heard her new attack, he quietly packed up and moved, fearing his own days would be few. And when Deng raised his firm voice in protest at her conduct, she had screamed in fury at him and run from the room.

Then had come Deng's arrest and within a few hours his sentence to death charged with high treason. Hwa-chuan was stricken not so much by grief as by resentment and anger. When his friends called and asked her, as his wife, to go to the prison and negotiate with the authorities about bribery, she had first accused them of every crime. They waited only for her to finish. Then, in straight, hard words, they asked her to recall that even were all she said true, still the problem now was to free her husband. This she could do, but none of his friends would dare risk their lives by negotiating for him.

"And who will pay this bribery?" she furiously asked.

"We will," they assured her.

Her fury slackened as they spoke of the money. And at last she agreed.

Hwa-chuan passed in and out of many doors in Nanking, and finally thirty thousand dollars was fixed upon as the sum that would make Deng's escape from prison possible. It was a huge figure, for Deng's friends were poor. Hwa-chuan had more than this in the Shanghai bank but not a breath of it passed her lips. It was Deng's friends who had got him into this trouble, it was *they* who should pay for it! Then the money began to pour into her lap. First Deng's old father wired fifteen thousand dollars from Szechuen and prepared to leave for Nanking to help his son. Deng's friends collected money in driblets—one thousand here, five thousand there.

Finally the entire sum lay in Hwa-chuan's hands. She gazed at it and thought what a shame it was to give so much money to the authorities. Hwa-chuan felt her power, and money also meant power. She began bargaining with the judges and jailers, just as she bargained with shop-keepers.

"Thirty thousand is too much—we are poor . . . we do not have so much money . . . I will give you five thousand . . . seven thousand then."

Then as the days and threats heaped themselves one on the other she offered ten thousand. The execution was twice announced and twice postponed as the authorities waited for the money. But they demanded the full thirty thousand. More, they were insulted that she tried to make them lose face by bargaining with them just as if they were common men of the street instead of high and powerful officials.

Friends, with perspiration standing out on their foreheads, haunted Hwa-chuan's house. Pay the full thirty thousand, they pleaded. Pay it! Hwa-chuan smiled when

she saw their dependence on her, these men who had treated her so badly but a week before!

"If I free Yin-chu," she said, "will you promise to leave him alone and not draw him into your traitorous activities in the future?" The men looked at her with black eyes filled with some emotion that might have been fear or hatred.

"Yes, we promise," they answered. "We promise you anything—only pay the money and free him."

"I will pay," she said, "but these authorities will take less if we hold out a little longer. I know how to deal with them."

The situation was altogether a most interesting and exciting one for Hwa-chuan—just like some of the novels she had read. She often pictured herself in the rôle of a heroine in a novel—one of the great beauties who held the destiny of empires in the palm of their fair hand. She recalled how by cunning and sex charm women of the past had raised their own families to eminent positions and destroyed their enemies. She recalled a more modern novel in which a traitor had been shot. The traitor's friends rescued his body and found it had only one bullet wound, and it not fatal. They had brought the man to consciousness and nursed him back to health. In fantasy Hwa-chuan saw herself doing the same thing. She would charm the authorities—thereby saving ten to fifteen thousand dollars—she would smash the friends of Deng who were responsible for his imprisonment, and if in the end her husband was shot, she would bring his body in a motor car to a hospital and nurse him back to life.

Hwa-chuan set about the realization of her dreams. Returning from the prison one day after fruitless bargaining and tea drinking, she felt she should adopt new tactics. She went to a silk shop and bought a number of new gowns, then drove by ricksha to her tailor's and gave instructions for their immediate preparation. She would appear in

ravishing new gowns before the authorities. But, emerging from the tailor shop, she could not endure the thought of returning home to face the perspiring men who haunted her house day and night, urging, pleading, promising. Her life was hard enough without hearing their voices each day! Upon her shoulders rested the whole burden of saving Deng's life and of saving half the money! Harassed by these difficulties, she drove to a fruit-store and selected a basket of choice mangoes. With these she went to the home of a friend, where she spent the weary hours of the afternoon eating mangoes and relating her sorrows and problems.

The next morning Hwa-chuan arose languidly to confront her difficulties again. But, outside, the city was astir with the report that on this day Deng Yin-chu was to be shot. Some one sent Hwa-chuan a note informing her of this, but she took it lightly, shrugging her shoulders and thinking, "This is the third threat. They are merely trying to squeeze the thirty thousand dollars out of me!"

Within an hour the streets of Nanking were lined with people. Others streamed from every direction. Foreigners mingled with the crowds of the curious. Down the streets came marching a long line of soldiers—and in their midst, his hands tied behind his back, the tall, slender figure of Deng Yin-chu. He was without a hat, and his thin, sensitive face was pale and desperate. To the gaping thousands that did not lift a finger to save him from the soldiers, he cried:

"I am being taken to execution! I am a member of the Kuomintang! I have worked for the revolution! Down with Sun Chuan-fang! Down with all the oppressors of the people!" Through one street after the other his hoarse voice shouted.

The crowds stared, now and then a man snorting a short laugh. Thousands fell in behind the procession, pressing close to the marching soldiers, struggling to see just how a

man acts on his way to death. At the place chosen for the execution, the dense mass of people formed a semi-circle. With the same expectant excitement that they would watch an old feudal play, they now watched the soldiers line up and await the moment of firing. Men fought to get in a front row that they might see better.

Deng Yin-chu was marched to a cleared space before the soldiers. Standing alone before the firing squad, but facing tens upon tens of thousands of men and women who stood and gaped, he raised his head and cried into the spiritual desert of China:

"Down with Sun Chuan-fang! Down with the oppressors of the people! Long live the rev . . . !"

A volley of shots cut his last word short. His body trembled, then crumpled together and sank to the earth, his face burrowing a small groove in the dust. Another volley of shots buried themselves in the prostrate form. Then an officer strode forward, kicked the body over until it lay face upward, lifted his pistol and buried a shot right through the mouth of the dead man.

In the crowd a man fell to the earth, unconscious. The crowd gave way to his falling body, then stood staring down at him stupidly, laughing a bit. Nobody bent even to touch him. Some one reached out and kicked him in the side with his foot to see if he was dead. The body did not move. A small circle stared down at him for a few seconds, then turned to the greater drama again. . . .

The soldiers were marching away, the body of Deng Yin-chu left to be devoured by dogs. It was forbidden to remove it, for Deng was a revolutionary. The crowd moved forward, stared its fill at the body, then began to seep away into the city to relate the drama to their friends and families.

Finally there remained but a small group of the insatiably curious, also one prostrate body of an unconscious man, and one man who stood as if petrified, staring into

the void. At last the man of stone came to life and began to walk away. His eyes fell upon the prostrate figure. With a gasp he knelt down, turned it over, and cried, "Wu . . . Wu!" The unconscious man returned to the earth again, the man of stone cried for rickshas, lifted the limp figure, and drove away with it.

Among those who turned and dashed from the crowd of gaping thousands was Hwa-chuan, Deng's wife. When the news had finally reached her that Deng was being marched through the streets to execution, she had telephoned a garage for a motor car. In her mind was the story in which a man was shot, rescued by his friends, and nursed back to health. She would rescue her husband in the same dramatic manner! But when she reached the execution grounds she could not break through the dense crowd. She had heard not one shot, but a whole volley. There had followed the second, as if a whole army was in action. Then a final pistol shot. A man, perched on the shoulders of another, said: "Well, there's not much left of *that* fellow!" Confused, astounded, Hwa-chuan had turned and rushed home in her motor car. When the chauffeur demanded a forty cent tip, she shouted at him, "You've got wind in the head!" and left him sitting with his hand outstretched.

That night through a rain storm that drenched Nanking a number of dark figures crept through the darkness over the place where Deng's body lay. They halted, whispered, heaved something up, and crept onward. Where Deng's body had lain outstretched was a long dry spot that soon blended with the surrounding mud. The next day the press reported that the body of the traitor had been stolen in the night. The dogs of Nanking had been robbed of a feast.

Deng's father arrived two days afterwards. He remained for a week. At the end of that time he returned to Hwa-chuan's house, packed up his bundle, and then, with a face

that looked like that of a corpse, said to her: "It is you who have killed my son!"

Hwa-chuan began to cry. "It is not my fault! It is Wu and Tsai and Wang and their crowd who have done this. They led Yin-chu astray. I tried to save him. . . . I worked like a slave! It is easy for them to accuse me now. I am only a woman and a widow. I am defenseless, with three little children! If Yin-chu were alive, they would not dare attack me like this!"

The old father waited for her to cease raving. Then once more he said: "You have killed my son! You would not even pay the fifteen thousand dollars I sent to save him!"

Her eyes red from weeping, the woman bitterly sobbed: "I suppose you even want that money back now. . . . You would even take it from Yin-chu's children!"

The old man turned and with slow, dragging steps left her house.

Hwa-chuan was left alone. Deng's friends who had formerly haunted her house seemed to have been swallowed up in a void. To the women friends who came to console her—and there were few—she wept out her grief. It was those Red friends of Deng who had killed her husband! She named them repeatedly. And when her accusations reached their ears, one by one they packed up their belongings and disappeared from Nanking.

In the great historical events of the period the details of Deng's killing were forgotten. His name, the name of a Kuomintang martyr, remained. And gradually Hwa-chuan became known as the widow of a martyr, the mother of a martyr's sons.

The revolution rolled and seethed, the southern army captured Nanking, the old militarist army fled. The year 1927 rolled on; the revolution broke on the cliffs of the class struggle; and in the place of the old, the new militarists established their own government in Nanking.

The Kuomintang was purified of everyone but the militarists, the landlords, and their intellectual apologists. Many of Deng's friends led the lives of hunted animals.

The new militarists claimed Deng as one of their martyrs, and upon his widow and children they settled life pensions. To his widow they gave large sums for his funeral and for a memorial. And when she murmured that the pensions were enough only for ordinary living, they gave her additional sums that his children might later be sent abroad for university education.

Hwa-chuan, the widow, became known as the true and faithful wife of a revolutionary, as a woman who had stood like a rock by the side of her husband aiding him in all his work. She herself often recalled the trials of secret revolutionary work of the past. Officials called upon her, she was showered with presents and attention. She was asked to honor the government with her presence—"to continue Deng's work where he had left it."

With her new official duties, it was impossible for the widow of a martyr to be burdened with Deng's children. She wrote Deng's old father in Szechuen and suggested that he take his grandchildren and rear them. For now she was only a widow, it was hard for her to support herself and her children on her meager salary. After all, she wrote, the children belonged to the Deng family. So one day a member of the family appeared in Nanking and took the three children back with him to Szechuen.

Hwa-chuan was now free to "continue Deng's work where he had left it." In preparation for this difficult task she went to Shanghai and bought a number of new gowns and a good store of foreign perfume, cold cream, powder and rouge. She had her hair permanently waved. With these aides she was able to remove all trace of her former sorrows and difficulties.

So completely did she succeed in her duties that the eyes of an old official fell admiringly upon her. He had

formerly been an official in Hunan and was an old Kuomintang member. He, by name Fu Kwang-chuang, was so rich that Hwa-chuan's heart almost ceased beating when she thought of him. A henchman of the new militarists, he had been one of those who had helped "purify" the province of Hunan when the counter-revolution began. The press reported at the time that "he had put his thumb down on the Reds in his own district—and it was a heavy thumb."

Hwa-chuan demurely returned Fu Kwang-chuang's admiring gaze. True, he was married to an old-fashioned woman whom he had left on his estate in Hunan; and true, he had ten children. But in these revolutionary days divorce is not difficult for an official.

A short time afterwards the chauffeur in the employ of Fu Kwang-chuang told the porter in Fu's department some news. The porter told another friend, and the friend told a lower official. Sometimes, he said, the old boss called on Hwa-chuan in the evening and left only the next morning! This news went the rounds and in time reached the ears of Hwa-chuan herself. One day she called to interview the powerful and honorable Fu, and as she passed down the corridor the brushes of many of the clerks came to a standstill. She turned resentfully as some one laughed. At the end of the month two men on whom her unfortunate eyes had fallen were informed by their chief that their work was so bad that they would have to find employment elsewhere. The guilty chauffeur lost his job and the porter found himself on the street.

Then came the incident at Shanghai. The head of one of the sub-bureaus in Fu Kwang-chuang's offices went to Shanghai over one week-end to take in the latest movies, dance halls, and visit the sing-song houses. One night when he returned to his hotel he came face to face with the old official and Hwa-chuan. They were just entering a room, and when they heard steps they had turned. He was so astonished that he had halted and stared. Returning to

Nanking on the following Monday, he was at once called to the office of his powerful chief. The old man made a little speech about the principles of their late master, Sun Yat-sen, and expressed his appreciation of the young man's devotion to duty. Such devotion should not go unrewarded under the new revolutionary régime. The young man was promoted to be head of one of the chief bureaus in the department. For continued devotion to duty further advance would be equally rewarded.

The young official expressed his deep gratitude and assured his chief that he was willing to give his life for the revolution and for the party to which they both belonged. His chief could depend upon him in all emergencies.

Next, the accountant for the department began to have considerable trouble. The expenses were mounting with each month. Shanghai firms from which the department bought supplies were sending blanket accounts, and sometimes false ones. Here were two of the latest bills he was asked to pay. One was itemized and included twelve ladies' handkerchiefs at three dollars each. The second included two tablecloths with napkins, a bolt of silk, and a box of silk stockings.

The old official looked in surprise at the accounts. There was some mistake! He would investigate. A few days later the accountant was called in and given two new bills. The one for the handkerchiefs was changed to a dozen hand-towels for the department, and the second one was a blanket account marked miscellaneous. At the same time Fu Kwang-chuang arose and delivered a little speech. He was delighted to have under him an accountant who kept his eyes open and looked after the expenditure of the department. This honesty was rare in officials these days, as Chiang Kai-shek had said in his recent speech. Henceforth the accountant's salary would be increased forty dollars a month, and further devotion to duty would meet with like reward!

The accountant expressed his appreciation for the raise and said that although he was not working for money and found it highly humiliating to have to accept any salary at all for his service to the party, still with famine, floods and Communist depredations in the interior, he was forced to depend upon money for his existence. In the future, as in the past, he would continue his unselfish labors!

Hwa-chuan, one of the choicest flowers of the Kuomintang, "continued the work that Deng had left unfinished" in many ways. There was the time she came face to face on a public street with Wu, the former friend of Deng who had warned her that her gossip would yet lead to his death, the same Wu who had fallen unconscious when Deng had been shot. He was now dressed in a disgraceful old foreign suit and hat, and across his upper lip was a scar as if some one had smashed him in the mouth. Elegantly gowned, a picture of Shanghai art, she had still halted and smiled charmingly at him. But instead of returning her smile, he greeted her ironically by her maiden name, saying:

"I hear you are a great revolutionary now, Sun Hwa-chuan!"

She looked at him suspiciously and then resentfully. "I am doing my duty!" she replied.

"As in the past!" he remarked.

Hwa-chuan's resentment turned into anger. "I have heard that you, as in the past, are still a Red! Still working against the government!"

Wu smiled. Furiously, to show her knowledge and power, Hwa-chuan continued: "In fact I have seen your name on the list of men the government intends to execute!"

"Perhaps you will help them, Sun Hwa-chuan—as in the past!" Wu replied. Then he scornfully walked past her and made his way down a narrow street.

That evening Hwa-chuan wept. Fu Kwang-chuang could not endure to see tears in the eyes of his little

treasure. It was all because of the insult of this man Wu whom she had met on the street, she told him. Wu Chung-hwa was a Red and was one of those who had caused Deng's arrest. Now he insulted her in the streets!

The old man became furious. Before another night had passed the man should be in the hands of the police! But his little treasure should not weep her eyes out because of such a bandit. She should have those jade earrings she had so much admired, and she should have anything else she wanted.

The tears continued rolling down her face: "It is only because I am a poor woman, and alone, that people can treat me like this," she gulped. "If Deng Yin-chu were alive, he would protect me. . . . But to you also I am only a widow to play with. Your old wife has the protection of your name and position—I have nothing!"

Fu Kwang-chuang protested. He loved her. But his wife was old, the mother of his ten children. It would look bad if he took a young wife.

"Yes," she wept, "I am but the widow of a martyr! I am good enough to give my life for the revolution but not good enough for you to marry!"

The old man sought to kiss her tears away. And at last he lay trembling in her arms, smothered by her caresses, promising to do anything she wished.

At another time Hwa-chuan complained to him: "Everybody is gossiping about us. But I know who is responsible. It is Professor Wen Fu-an. He tries to deny that he is a Red, but Deng Yin-chu told me in secret that he was. This is the reason he is creating a scandal against us!"

A few days later a friend called to warn Wen Fu-an that he should leave Nanking at once or face arrest as a Communist. Wen was astonished. He was not a Communist at all, he said. That did not matter, the friend declared, considering the source of the rumor. When Wen heard the

name of Fu Kwang-chuang, he recalled the death of Deng Yin-chu at the hands of the old militarists. The old militarists killed by the dozens, the new militarists by the thousands. That night he took the night train for Shanghai.

Finally the day came when Hwa-chuan's long years of suffering for the revolution came to an end. Fu Kwang-chuang divorced his old wife and settled a part of his fortune upon her and a part upon his children. Upon Hwa-chuan he settled a large sum of money and some of his Shanghai real estate. This he had done before he and she were married, for, weeping in his arms, she had expressed the fear that unless she had the property in her own name, his children might one day challenge her right to any of his fortune. She did not wish to suggest that he would die before she did—she would rather die than think of such a possibility! But in case he *did*, it was best to be prepared.

Following the divorce and the settlement Hwa-chuan walked to the table where a modern marriage ceremony was gone through, the old man proudly at her side, claiming as his own the revolutionary widow of a revolutionary martyr. There were many speeches about the benefits of modern marriage, marriage based upon love, and about the birth of a new society as expressed in such unions as this. "In this marriage," one speaker poetically cried, "we have love presiding over the revolution. Could anything be more hopeful for the future of China?"

One of the speakers was the young official from the old man's offices. This man had taken up a collection from all the employees of Fu Kwang-chuang and had bought a present of great value. Representing his colleagues, he delivered an oration on old Fu's self-abnegation in official life. As he spoke tears sprang to the eyes of many a guest and even the old man himself cried.

After the wedding Hwa-chuan spoke with deep feeling to friends who congratulated her: "Now I feel that I can be of more service than ever to the revolution!"

THE TIGER

by

V. Borokhvastov

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THE TIGER

A Soviet Short Story of the Far East

THE weather was on parade before Nature that day. The sun led the procession in all his dazzling glory with a golden march. After him came the heavy artillery of the thunder. Then the wind howled like the siren of an interceptor. Then the slow bombers, the clouds, rolled up, and after that a steady downpour of rain marched by the windows.

It lasted a long time, the drops keeping step evenly and regularly. It smoothed out the ruts and creases of the roads, picked out high lights on the trees. It tarried.

The parade concluded with the rain. Days like this are not uncommon in the Far East. Towards evening the sun shone out from behind the hills and splashed the tree-tops with light till the earth looked as though it had been plunged into the depths of the merciless blue.

Nature seemed to have been freshened with a spray. Everything gave off a sharp, unexpected odor. The scents were strong and sticky. Even the iron roof of the house where the frontier troops were quartered emitted its own peculiar smell.

The men were sitting peacefully cleaning their rifles and standing them, with a tug at the strap, like horses in their stalls for the night.

By the window, at a table as long as a file of soldiers, sat a seasoned fighter named Devitsin. He was holding part of the rifle-lock in his hand. It looked like the bolt of a casement window. Then he began to test the sear-spring.

Translated from the Russian by Anthony Wixley. Reprinted from *International Literature*, May 1935, with the permission of International Publishers Co., Inc.

Opposite to him sat the platoon commander Brikin, who had only lately arrived from distant Kazan. Another of the men was crawling about on the floor, looking for a swab he had dropped.

Outside the window the moon hung like a target. The men aimed their rifles at it and peered down the barrels. The screwthread wound like a corkscrew right up to the steady attentive eye. The barrels were clean.

The door opened, admitting the night scents, the commander of the frontier defence corps, and a woman. Devitsin gave the man who was kneeling on the floor a little nudge with his foot and said:

"Somebody's come to see you, Vanya."

"No, indeed I haven't," said the woman. "I've come to see the commander."

"That is, not to see me, but Comrade Devitsin," explained the corps commander.

Devitsin rose and laid his rifle aside.

"At your service," he said.

"Well, it's like this—there's a tiger annoying us again out at the collective farm," the woman began. "It stole a calf last night. It's got so that the cattle have no place left to breathe. Well, so at the general meeting they picked me to go and talk to your chief about it and he's sent me to you."

"Oh, all right, then," replied Devitsin, picking up his rifle once more. "It won't be the first time I've taken on a job like this. See those over there!"

He pointed in the direction of the Red Corner, where three tiger skins, his trophies, hung on the wall.

"Maybe, Comrade Devitsin, you wouldn't mind going tonight—it would save a head or so of cattle, eh?" said the chief.

"All right, Comrade Commander," replied Devitsin. "I'll start getting ready this minute."

He finished the cleaning of his rifle. Brikin unexpectedly

hurried over the cleaning of his, too. When Devitsin stood up and stretched himself, putting his great body to rights, the platoon commander was already fitting the lock in his rifle.

"Take me along with you, will you?" he asked.

"Right. Come on."

"On one condition, though: give me a chance to kill the beast. I want to send my wife the skin as a present."

"Right. I'll charge you a cigarette for that," Devitsin said. "If I should happen to kill it, it'll be yours all the same. I've got enough of them."

People said of him jokingly that he began to play with things like flatirons when he was ten months old. Nowadays, if the piano had to be moved from one place to another, Devitsin managed it alone, to the accompaniment of the men's jokes.

While they were completing the cleaning of their rifles, the conversation turned on tiger hunting.

"Where's Lavrukhin these days?" asked Brikin. "I've heard a lot about him."

Lavrukhin had been famed throughout all the army as the very best marksman. His eye was absolutely true; his hand as steady as a rock. It was said of him that while he cocked the trigger, he not only held his breath, but could even stop his heart beating.

With a shot-gun he could knock out a row of matches stuck in the ground at a distance of ten paces and not miss a single one, beginning from the right.

"Yes," replied Devitsin sadly, oiling the outside of the lock. "He was the best tiger hunter in these parts. He always shot his game in the eye, so as not to spoil the skin. I learnt the trick from him. You should always aim at the eye."

"And where is he now?" asked Brikin.

"Dead."

"What did he die of?"

"That's a long story."

"Tell me, though," Brikin persisted.

"You see, it was like this," Devitsin began, testing the lock once more. "If you come across a tiger and start to track it down, it'll start to track you down, watching for a convenient moment to attack you. It knows that it's easier to attack from the rear. Or for instance, if you kill either the male or the female, the remaining half of the family is certain to track you down and fall on you from the rear. That's what happened with Lavrukhin. He killed a tiger and as he was on his way back, the other got on his scent and killed him."

"Was it a male or a female that killed him?" asked Brikin.

"It was a—a male," replied Devitsin, stammering for some reason or other. The other men, who knew the story of Lavrukhin's end, sat with bowed heads cleaning their rifles.

No one spoke.

Nothing disturbed the silence but the sharp smells of the night and the energetic rubbing of the men at the rifles.

"Well, let's go, shall we?" said Devitsin, bestirring himself.

"Come on," said Brikin, giving a twitch to his Russian blouse.

They wandered about for a long time over bumpy, cut up ground. They endeavored, military fashion to keep out of the moon-light and in the shade of the trees. On his back Brikin carried a knapsack containing a small pig which was to serve as a decoy for the tiger. The darkness and the unevenness of the ground under the feet of the man carrying it terrified the pig and its squeals rent the silence of the woods.

"And what if the tiger should mistake me for the pig?" asked Brikin of Devitsin, who was just ahead of him.

"It might easily happen. Have a look round from time to time."

They both kept their rifles ready. The iron was pleasantly cool to the touch, the feel of a faithful rifle quieted all alarms and kept the pulse normal.

They moved noiselessly along like scouts. Only the pig betrayed their presence, he tossed about, gnawing the sack and squealing. The track they took was only for the experienced. No outsider could have found it for it was almost imperceptible. Brikin wondered about it as he tramped on silently. At first he thought Devitsin was going at random, but after a while he realized that they were making in a definite direction all the time. Devitsin would suddenly halt from time to time and give a rapid glance round. All was quiet. The forest was full of inexplicable night sounds: cries that resembled the voice of neither bird nor beast followed by a kind of variegated hissing and sucking and clicking and squeaking. And occasionally the almost inaudible sigh of the wind.

Brikin was only a step behind the other man, so that every time Devitsin halted unexpectedly, Brikin involuntarily bumped into him. Each time he gave vent to some exclamation, such as:

"Back hoss!" or "Hey up, a train smash!"

When they had ascertained that there was no sign of pursuit, they went on further. The track wound among the trees. Even a very experienced hunter could only guess at it. But Devitsin had been reared in the Volga forests and learned to hunt from childhood. The forest had no secrets for him. He might lose his way in a town, but in the woods—never.

"They make good violins out of this wood," he said, tapping the trunk of a tree as he passed.

Brikin glanced at the top of it, but could not say what kind it was.

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I'm a joiner by profession. And I do a bit of wood carving—just for love of the thing. I like to do small, delicate stuff in my spare time. Minute work. I read up about violins. Stradivarius—he was a good craftsman. He used to saw up the wood for his violins himself and only used the side of the trunk that caught the sun. He threw away the rest."

"Imagine that!" said Brikin, surprised. "I'm a blacksmith myself. There's nothing delicate about our work. Strength is mostly all that's wanted for it."

The night called for silence. The men obeyed. Only the little pig resisted the silence. He kept trying to jump off the divisional commander's back and thus at times was no weight at all. Whenever he jumped, he gave a squeal that pierced the stillness. Whenever he ceased, the stillness became almost tangible.

It was oppressive.

"Have we a long way to go yet?" asked Brikin.

"Well, about two kilometres. The woman said that it was mostly on the eastern side of the farm that the cattle were lost. I believe there's a path. We'll lie in wait on it. The tiger can't miss us."

The forest grew denser, more ancient. The almost invisible track they followed was strewn with dead trees that kept their shape like wooden mummies, as they rotted. Like human beings, they preserved their outer shell, while inwardly rotting.

The track of the hunter's prey lay through the hosts of the fallen. The mouldy wood gave off a rather pleasant smell that smothered all others. It was the smell of centuries. Ancient churches, towers and castles smell the same.

A snake rustled underfoot, unseen. Only the grass undulated where it passed. Devitsin gazed after it.

"Everything living is rounded," he was thinking. "There's no such thing as an angular creature."

Brikin could think of nothing but the tiger. He was

longing to kill the King of the Jungle of whom he had read so much. He called up a picture in his mind's eye. His wife would receive a huge parcel from him by post. She would open it and give a gasp of astonishment, and then rush off to her mother and then to the neighbors.

She would invite all her relatives, friends and acquaintances to see her. Then she would spend all day trying to hang it to the best advantage. And, having hung it at last, would step back to admire it, as if she was at a picture exhibition.

She would even run out into the yard, to observe the effect through the window.

Brikin glowed as he stared at the picture he had called up. He walked as if in a dream, clutching his rifle tightly.

Reality squealed again behind his back, Brikin came to himself and looked about him.

The stars glimmered like spikes in the sole of a boot. Falling stars went out like matches. Clouds screened the face of the moon. There was a mirage-like radiance but the source of the light was hidden. It lost its color as it filtered through the wooly clouds.

The forest was wrapped in twilight. The trees lost their contours.

"That's bad," said Devitsin. "You'll have to wait till you see the eyes flash before you take aim, otherwise you won't be able to distinguish a thing in this dusk. It's terrible."

"All right."

They moved on blindly. The shrubs looked like animals, the tree stumps, like people. Fancy supplied any trifling deficiency in the resemblance.

Devitsin came to a sudden standstill, glanced down between his feet and said:

"Here."

As Brikin took off the knapsack, the pig let out a blood curdling shriek. He knew what that word "here" meant;

he had heard it before. He was tired of being a decoy. He wanted to be a tiger for a change, this little pig was covered with as many scars as a warrior who had seen much service.

Devitsin always took great care of his decoy. He shot the tigers when they were about to spring, so that the pig got nothing more than a little mauling while the beasts were in their dying convulsions.

The decoy knew well how to squeal with terror, and tigers came at his call. With every beast that was killed the pig grew wiser. While he was being tied by the leg, he ceased squealing. He knew that the tiger might come any moment.

It was the same now. As soon as Brikin pulled him out of the knapsack by the leg, the pig grew dumb. He struggled and tried to escape on his three ridiculous legs, but all in a desperate silence.

Brikin tied him to a tree stump.

"Now let's climb a tree," said Devitsin.

They moved away to choose a convenient tree to climb, while waiting for the tiger.

"Let's try this one," said Devitsin.

They climbed it.

The pig had grown accustomed to his surroundings by now and wandered under the bushes.

"The scamp!" growled Devitsin.

"Who?"

"That pig. He's gone and hidden himself in the bushes."

Brikin looked in that direction. The pig was a vague spot of grey in the thick dusk. There was no moon. A dim, fitful light filtered through the clouds.

"Shoot when I give the word," Devitsin warned Brikin. "If possible, aim at the eyes. You'll save on cartridges and you won't spoil the skin."

"All right."

They perched like birds on the boughs. The alert barrels of the two rifles were directed to the grey patch that indicated the whereabouts of the pig.

Brikin was excited. He breathed heavily as he fidgeted about trying to find a more comfortable position. He kept shifting his rifle from one hand to the other.

"The dirty, little blackguard," said Devitsin. "He'll ruin the whole show for us that way."

"Who?" asked Brikin once more, absently.

"Why, the pig, of course. Look at him, he won't even open his mouth, the rogue!"

"I'll just go down and tease him a bit, shall I?" Brikin suggested, starting to climb down.

The pig unexpectedly uttered a squeal without waiting for Brikin. Terror had overcome fear. Devitsin clutched Brikin by the shoulder.

"Sh—sh!"

Brikin, who was half-way down already, stopped dead, and dropped his cheek to his rifle barrel, steadying it on a branch. The pig was twisting and turning; its tether had got entangled in the bushes. The forest was silent.

"Look out!" whispered Devitsin.

Out of the gloom of the bushes rushed a shadow that swallowed up the grey spot of the little pig. He uttered a piercing shriek that died out almost immediately.

A greenish phosphorescent eye gleamed in the darkness.

"Fire!" ordered Devitsin.

Brikin fired. Then both the men all but lost their balance out of sheer amazement. For the shot was followed by a tinkling of broken glass, and the eye disappeared.

"What the devil's this!" Devitsin cried in amazement. "It's the first time in my life I've ever met a tiger with a glass eye. Shoot again!"

Brikin fired, aiming this shot at a sound like a death rattle. The tinkling was not repeated, and neither was the hoarse gasp.

"Let's go down and have a look," suggested Brikin, unable to contain himself any longer. He jumped down.

"Where are you going? Are you mad, or tired of life, or what?"

The other man pulled up short.

"In their death agony tigers usually rip out the insides of hunters like you," Devitsin explained, pulling out his electric torch.

He flashed the light on the spot where the pig was, and gave a gasp of astonishment. Then he leaped down and rushed towards the bushes before Brikin had time to move.

A dead man lay there, flat on his back. Near him they saw a knife and the dead pig.

Devitsin flashed his lamp on the man's face.

"A real tiger, it seems," he remarked.

He turned the body over, searching for a clue to the riddle of the tinkling glass. It appeared that the first bullet had struck the camera straight in the lens, which had glittered like an eye in the moonlight, and passed through the man's chest. The second bullet had gone through his head.

In the barracks on the frontier, the film found in the camera was duly developed, and proved to be a photo of the railway bridges and fortification in our frontier zone.

After the corpse had been examined, it was discovered that the man had eaten nothing for five days. He had evidently lost his way in the Soviet forests. His stomach still contained undigested grass.

As they were burying the corpse, Devitsin said to Brikin:

"It was this kind of a tiger that killed Lavrukhin. He'd shot a female tiger and was on his way home when some blackguard tracked him down and finished him off in a secluded spot."

BLACK FRITTERS

by

Panteleimon Romanov

PANTELEIMON ROMANOV, *born in the government of Tula, Russia, in 1884, began to write long before the Revolution, and is regarded as a writer of the transition from the old to the new; Soviet critics have considered him not wholly emancipated from the outlook of "the typical bourgeois prerevolutionary intellectual." In English translation we have the novel,* Three Pairs of Silk Stockings *(1931), and the book of short stories,* Without Cherry Blossom *(1930).*

BLACK FRITTERS

WHEN the train was only thirty miles away from Moscow, Katerina could sit still no longer. It seemed to her that she would never reach the place. Her heart beat faster and faster with every mile.

Yesterday she had found out that Andrei, who had worked for the last five years in a Moscow factory, had begun to live with another woman.

He himself had written nothing to her and their relationship had not changed in the least; he still sent her money for the holidays, and now and then a letter. It was said that he was some sort of chairman now and lived well.

Maybe it meant nothing to him to give her the hundred rubles he was sending; he lived on the other four or five hundred with the other woman. The sum of one hundred rubles, which had seemed so large to her before, suddenly became insultingly small.

What should she do when she arrived in Moscow? Break into his place, unmask him on the spot, make a scandal?

Let people see that he was a scoundrel and a cad. . . . She would break the window panes—and with her bare hands, so that there might be blood. . . . And she would tear the other woman's hair out.

"Oh, Lord, Lord,—what has he done! And all on account of a bit of red ribbon. . . ." It was not so long ago, it seemed, that they had lived happily together, had gone for hay to the meadow by the river in the evenings; the sun would set, the corn crakes cry in the swamp beyond the river, blurred voices coming from the village through

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the evening air. She would stand on the wagon, and he, with his shirt collar unbuttoned, with dry, sunbaked hair, with small drops of sweat on his shaven upper lip, would lift the damp, fragrant hay with a pitchfork and throw it up into her hands as she stood on the wagon. Then he would lead the horse to the water, and she would lie on the hay in the wagon, chew a grass-blade, and know that after supper both of them, tired with their work, but happy and lively, would walk barefoot across the yard to the barn to sleep in the fresh hay. Storm would break from a sudden summer cloud, lightning would flare through the cracks in the gates, and the fresh air would smell even more of hay and the fustian of her sarafan.

And now it was all gone.

She felt she was capable of anything.

But when she walked out of the railroad station with a large crowd of people, she was overwhelmed, lost in the great city. What she had wanted to do was to sweep down on him like a tempest, tell him everything, but instead she had to ask how to reach the street where he lived. She was shown the tram, but when she bought her ticket she forgot to ask where she had to get off, and she sat in the tram until it reached a suburb of the city.

She had to ride back and then walk and ask for the number of the house, for she could not read. She would be told—and she would go, afraid to ask again, and when she did ask she would find that she had passed by the house and would have to retrace her steps.

She walked more and more quickly, thinking that while she was walking they would leave the house.

When she found the place, a house with enormous doors and windows, all the apartments were locked, and she had to knock and ring. And which bell was she to ring, how was she to guess which door was his?

"Auntie, what are you doing here?" a man in an apron, holding a chisel in his hand, asked her.

Katerina told him.

"He isn't here. He doesn't live here."

"What do you mean he doesn't live here? Good Lord, what am I to do now?"

She had only one ruble with her, tied in a corner of her kerchief. This was not enough for her fare home.

An old woman with a pail appeared from a door under the stairway, and on finding out what was wanted, said that Andrei Nikanorich had moved to the suburbs. Katerina had to take a train to get there.

Katerina was so happy that she had found a clue, that she almost ran out of the doorway. Because she was happy she had forgotten to ask exactly where he was, and so, when she came to the suburb, she knew the street, but not the number of the house.

Evening was approaching, and clouds. She ran from one end of the street to the other, asking and asking, but she could find out nothing. In her hands she had a kerchief with black fritters. She did not remember why she had taken them. She had come to make a scandal, but she had taken a present along, according to custom,—black rye fritters.

She had only eleven kopeks left now. The place was strange, night approached, a wind began to blow. Her face sweaty and bewildered, she ran along the grassy suburban street flanked by pine trees, and waved her hands in desperation, as she held on to the kerchief with the black fritters.

At the moment when she was most bewildered, when she was in the last throes of despair and fear, she turned into a little alley, and saw a familiar crown of dry hair beyond the railing of a fence.

It was he, Andrei. His tunic unbuttoned, he was squatting near a flower bed and digging the ground.

Katerina could only cry:

"Andriushechka, my dear!"

She ran through the garden gate, and when Andrei rose in surprise from the ground, she embraced him and pressed her head to his breast, powerless to hold back her tears.

"Look who's here! How did you come here? Did you fall from heaven?" Andrei asked in amazement and joy.

Katerina could not answer as she wanted to. She said:

"I was very frightened. I thought I would never find you. I looked for you all day. And I had nowhere to go."

And she wept again.

"Why are you crying?"

Conscience-stricken, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and smiled guiltily. Then she suddenly remembered why she had come. But after what had just occurred when she rushed to him as to her salvation and refuge and had wept with joy on his breast, it was impossible to start a scandal and pass from joyful tears to wild outcries.

And then, when she had seen his familiar crown of hair in the garden like a sudden, wonderful image, her heart was filled with a joy which she had never known, not even when they went haying together and slept in the barn.

He had not at all shown what she had expected from him, from a man to whom had come his deserted wife, a woman from the village, in a fustian sarafan, while he was dressed in city clothes and lived in a suburb.

She could not catch the slightest shade of dislike or perturbation in his face or voice. He was placid, the same slightly patronising caress was in his voice, especially when he said:

"Why are you crying? Come, I will tell them to put up the samovar."

He preceded her on the path that led to the new cottage painted a fresh yellow, which stood near the fence among tree stumps.

But on the way he stopped, and cried to a passerby in a civilian coat:

"Ivan Kuzmich, you must send to the city for the goods tomorrow. I will write you a note."

His manner of speaking to the man, the way in which the man said "all right" in reply, made Katerina feel that he was the old, clever, practical and kind Andrei, and yet at the same time another Andrei, on whom people depended, who arranged and gave orders in this strange, unknown place just as he had done at home. And he did it so simply and quietly, as if it could never be otherwise.

She approached the cottage with a failing heart. Suddenly she would meet the other woman, dressed like a lady, of course. Involuntarily, Katerina glanced at her own holiday sarafan, and felt a hot wave of shame flood her cheeks because of her village clothes.

When they entered a roomy chamber with new pine walls and partitions, the first things she saw were two beds. Her heart began to beat so that her legs grew weak and almost gave way under her, and her throat went dry.

Everything in the room was so unlike the house where she had lived with him. Near a window was a table covered with a newspaper tacked down at the corners, an inkwell, a pen, a row of books, some papers on a long nail in the wall. Clean city towels near the washstand in the corner.

"Are there no ikons here?" she asked, just to say something.

"No," Andrei answered simply.

He washed his hands, standing with his back to his wife, and wiped them unhurriedly on the clean white towel.

Katerina, sitting uncomfortably on the first chair she had found when she entered, which stood almost in the center of the room, with her bundle in her hands, looked around, and her eyes searched eagerly for signs of the other woman's presence.

Suddenly she saw an old straw hat on the top of a closet. She quickly lowered her eyes so Andrei might not notice that she had seen the hat.

"Well, we are going to drink tea right away," said Andrei, and began to gather up the newspapers and manuscripts from the dining table.

Katerina felt she did not know what to say in order to break the uncomfortable silence. And what was felt most terribly in this silence was that something of which neither of them had said a word still lay between them.

In the old home she would always talk of the same things—of the cow, of the children (there were three of them), of the bad weather.

Now she was trying hard to find something to say to him, but she could find nothing. Suddenly she remembered about their cow, and grew happy.

"Our Lyska calved the other day. It was a fine calf,—just like her."

At the words "our Lyska" she looked involuntarily at the straw hat. With beating heart, she waited for Andrei to speak.

"Just like her?" Andrei echoed mechanically. Still seeming to be engrossed in something, he slowly continued to remove the newspapers from the table and to put them on the bookshelf. Suddenly he looked at his wife with a new expression on his face, as if he had decided to tell her something important.

The terrible moment had arrived.

"Katiusha," said Andrei, looking not at his wife, but out of the window, "I did not write to you because that would not have meant anything. I do not live alone, but with a comrade. A fine, honest girl. She will come from work right away, so don't you hurt her. I never chased after women, the thing came about honestly. That is all. . . ."

Katerina looked at him in silence, without blinking,—

only her throat was convulsed as she swallowed hard occasionally.

This was the right moment to jump up, rip the shawl from her head, tear out a handful of her hair, shriek like a madwoman with insult and grief. And then smash the window panes.

Instead, she said quietly, she did not know why:

"And what about me now?"

"You will live as you have always lived," answered Andrei. "I shall send you money, and I shall come to help you with the harvest."

Katerina did not answer. Tears suddenly filled her eyes, fell on her hands. She did not dry her eyes; she wiped the tears from her hands with a sleeve.

"Why should you cry? It will be settled somehow," said Andrei, and glancing out of the window, added: "There she comes now. Her name is Katerina too—Katya. Wipe your eyes. I have told her about you."

Hurriedly, obediently, Katerina wiped her eyes.

She expected to see a large woman with plump elbows and big breast, with a white face, grown fat on the four or five hundred rubles while she, his lawful wife, was drying up, feeding and nursing his children, harvesting wheat in the fields where her arms had become rough and tanned, and her elbows, once round and white, had grown sharp.

And again a burning, jealous hatred surged darkly from her heart to her head. But her eyes suddenly rounded with surprise when a thin, emaciated girl in a white waist, a short blue skirt, and worn tan slippers entered the room. The girl's blond hair was bobbed like a boy's and held in place by a round horn comb.

The girl, a bundle of papers in her hands, stopped short in surprise.

"What did he find in her? She has a chest like a board," thought Katerina.

"Katya, we have a guest," said Andrei, noticing the girl's questioning glance. "Katerinushka is here."

Katya smiled, blushing confusedly, and offered the guest a thin, pale hand.

"I did not guess at once," she said, smiling again, guiltily and yet at the same time kindly. And recovering almost at once, she added: "I suppose you want to eat after your long journey."

"I told the landlady to put up the samovar," said Andrei.

"Good. . . . I just came from work," Katya turned to Katerina. Then for a fleeting moment she looked at herself in a hand mirror which hung on the wall near the towels, fixed her hair, and disappeared behind the partition.

Katerina still sat uncomfortably on the same chair in the middle of the room. She did not know what to say, and how to treat her husband when his wife was there, behind the partition. She spoke against her own will:

"She is small and thin."

"That is nothing. She is a fine, kind person," Andrei answered.

As if suddenly remembering something, Katerina hurriedly unwound her bundle, and took out the black fritters.

"Here, presents. . . ."

And when Katya, with an apron on, and with hands black from charcoal, entered the room, Katerina, still against her will, said to her too, as if ashamed of the black fritters:

"Here, a village present."

Katya blushed again and glanced at Andrei.

"Take them, take them," said the latter, busy with something in a corner. "She is a fine woman."

"Why did you bring them? It's too much, really." And Katya added at once: "But I love them terribly. Are they with buttermilk?"

"With buttermilk, with buttermilk," Katerina answered quickly, overjoyed that the girl knew what buttermilk was.

Later the three of them drank tea together.

"Ivanov was kicked out anyway," Katya said, turning to Andrei. "There was a general meeting, a lot of noise . . ."

"You don't say? It was time long ago," Andrei answered, livening up. He wanted to say something else, but Katya cut him short, and turned to Katerina.

"You have calluses on your palms. I have them on my fingers. I bang all day long on the typewriter."

Katerina also wanted to say something that would interest and enliven Andrei as much as Katya's words about Ivanov had done. She wanted to tell him about her railroad journey and what she had seen, but she did not know how to begin. All that she could say when she looked at Katya, was:

"Our Lyska calved,—our cow. I sat up with her all that night. The calf is just like her."

"I love calves," said Katya.

There was a silence.

"I've got warts on my hands," said Katya suddenly.

Katerina was glad that warts had been mentioned, for she knew of a remedy for them,—some acid. She began at once to tell how they were to be removed, and tried to keep on talking, for fear that she would soon end and have nothing else to speak about.

After supper, which tormented Katerina because she could not manage her knife and fork, dropping now one, now the other, Katya removed the dishes, and Katerina began guessing where they would put her to sleep. They would take her to the neighbor's, she thought, and would stay here by themselves.

This thought raised a dark wave of jealousy and resentment from the bottom of her soul. But Katya brought a

folding bed from somewhere and began to put it up in the room.

Katerina, approaching the table and looking at the papers lying on it, said:

"Lord, I can understand nothing. How do you make head or tail of it?"

Before bedtime, Katya sent Andrei out of the room. He put on his cap and went out.

"Now you can lie down," said Katya with the same confused smile, turning to Katerina, and pointed at her own bed in which she had just changed the linen.

Katerina, feeling that she was expected to say something polite, uttered:

"Why should you bother yourself? I can lie down on the floor."

"No, no, why?"

Katerina took off her boots, glad that she had not come in her best shoes. Then she pulled the sarafan off over her head, and ashamed of her coarse village shirt, covered herself hurriedly.

Katya got some acid from a closet, and sitting next to Katerina, applied it amateurishly to her warts with a feather. Katerina showed her how to do it and helped her.

Then Katya undressed. Katerina looked with involuntary, strange, painful curiosity at the bony legs and the thin abdomen. Her eyes grew dark again.

"What tempted him?" She, Katerina, could carry a full barrel of swill to the pigs with her own hands. This girl couldn't even lift a pail of milk.

"Well, are you settled yet?" they heard Andrei's voice outside the door.

"Come in, come in," cried Katya.

Andrei came in, hung his cap on a nail, and looking around the room, sat down on the folding bed. He asked:

"Shall I put out the light?"

"Put it out."

The room was dark. They could hear the bed creak under him when he lay down.

Katerina, blinking now and then, looked into the darkness to the side where Andrei's bed stood, and heavy thoughts crept into her mind about him, about Katya, about Lyska. . . .

Katerina was to go home in the morning. Andrei took her to the station. Katya overtook them when they were already out of the house, and gave a package to Katerina, saying:

"A present—for the children."

"Why should you bother?"

"But you must," insisted Katya. Then she added: "Maybe you will stay a little longer?"

"I must go home," answered Katerina. She wondered if it were possible that she should leave without speaking to Andrei. But what could she say to him, when Lyska always turned up on her tongue for some reason or other? She was also bothered by the fact that she had only eleven kopeks. Would he give her money himself, or would she have to ask for it?

Andrei, who was walking in silence, suddenly turned to Katya, and said:

"Ivan Kuzmich is going to the city. Go and write a note to the co-operative."

Katya understood that he wished to be alone with his wife, offered her thin hand to Katerina, and wishing her a pleasant journey, walked off. She waved her handkerchief to them from the distance.

Katerina walked at her husband's side on the soft, mossy path between the tall, scattered pine trees, and avoiding the stumps on her way, waited—perhaps he would begin to speak himself about the most important thing between them. They had lived together twelve years. Was it possible they would find nothing to say to each other at such a moment in their lives?

Andrei, on reaching the crossroads from which he would have to turn back, voiced nothing of what she had expected, but stopped, and said:

"Well. . . . If you need anything, write, and at harvest time I will come to help you."

He gave her two gold pieces, worn at the edges, and kissed her.

Katerina hugged his neck awkwardly with her left arm, holding the gold pieces in her right hand, and kissed him.

"Good-bye. Come and see Lyska."

"Good-bye. I shall come."

She walked away. But after she took several steps she looked around. Andrei still stood in the same place, and she could see that he had left something unsaid, that he was sorry to let her go without telling her something more.

She stopped, her heart sinking, and leaned forward.

Andrei stood for a few moments, as if looking for words, then, waving his hand, cried:

"Take care of Lyska!"

"I will take care of her," Katerina answered, sighing.

Andrei turned in his tracks, and made off.

"They fixed the old woman. They met her with kindly words and sealed her mouth so that she couldn't even move her tongue. In the village people will ask: 'Well, did you fix that good-for-nothing husband of yours? Did you tear the harlot's hair out? Did you smash the windows?' But she—not only had she not broken the window panes—she had made a present of the black fritters to the other woman. And they had given her two gold pieces and a package for the children. Never fear, the girl is laughing now over her black fritters—even white ones are not good enough for her with her four or five hundred rubles."

Katerina even stopped, as if ready to return. But she remembered the thin, weak hands of Katya and her confused, caressing smile. Waving her hand in final farewell, Katerina crossed herself, and went her way.

THE CHERRY STONE

by

Yuri Olesha

YURI OLESHA *is a prominent Soviet writer, author of many volumes of stories, sketches, and plays.*

THE CHERRY STONE

I WENT into the country on Sunday to see Natasha. There were three more guests besides myself: two girls and Boris Mikhailovich. Natasha's brother, Erastus, took the two girls for a sail on the river, while we others—Natasha, Boris Mikhailovich and I—went off into the woods. We sat down to rest in a sunlit clearing. Natasha raised her head and suddenly her face looked to me a shining porcelain saucer.

Natasha treated me as an equal, but with Boris Mikhailovich she behaved as if he was much older; she looked up to him in fact. She knew that I found this very disagreeable, and that I envied Boris Mikhailovich, so, from time to time, she would take me by the hand and, no matter what was said, ask me:

"That's true, Fedya, isn't it?"

As if she was asking my forgiveness in a roundabout way.

We started to talk about birds, because a funny bird-note had rung out just then from the thicket. I remarked that I had never seen a thrush in my life and asked what it looked like.

At that moment a bird flew out across the clearing and perched on a branch over our heads. It did not so much sit as stand, swinging, on the bough. It blinked and I decided that birds' eyes were not in the least pretty, because they had no brows, but the lids were strongly marked.

"What's that?" I asked in a whisper. "Is it a thrush?"

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There was no reply. I turned my back to them, so that my jealous glance removed, they might enjoy their tête-à-tête in peace. I watched the bird. Glancing round suddenly, I caught a glimpse of Boris Mikhailovich stroking Natasha's cheek. The hand seemed to say: let the poor slighted young fellow watch the birds, if he likes. But I no longer saw the bird. I was listening. I caught the sound of a kiss as their lips parted. I did not look around, but they knew they had been caught for they saw me start.

"Is that a thrush?" I asked again.

The bird took flight—up through the tree-tops. It was a difficult flight; the leaves rustled as she flew.

Natasha offered us cherries. Following a childish custom, I kept one cherry-stone in my mouth, rolling it about until I had sucked it clean. When I took it out it looked like wood.

I left the country cottage that day with the stone in my mouth.

I traveled through an invisible country.

I returned from the country to the town. The sun was setting. I went in an easterly direction. I was making a double journey but only one-half of it was visible. The passers-by could see a man crossing a deserted green common. But what was really happening to this person who walked along, to all appearances, so peacefully? He could see his shadow going before him, sprawling over the ground; the shadow had long, pale legs. I crossed the common and all of a sudden the shadow climbed a brick wall and lost its head. This the passer-by did not see, only I saw it. I entered as it were a corridor between two wings of a building. The corridor was infinitely lofty and shadowy. The ground here was rotten and gave like garden soil under foot. A wild, forlorn looking dog ran towards me, sidling against the wall. We passed each other. Then

I glanced round. Far behind me the threshold was bright. For a moment the dog formed a dark protuberance in the brightness. Then it ran off across the common, and only then I saw that it was a rusty-colored animal.

All this happened in an invisible country. What happened in the country visible to the ordinary eye was that a man and a dog passed each other, at sunset, on a green common. . . .

The Invisible Country was the country of attention and imagination. Two sisters walked beside our traveler and led him by the hand. The names of the sisters were Attention and Imagination.

Well, then, what about it? It appeared that, in direct opposition to society and the established order, I was creating a world of my own, subject to no laws but the shadowy laws of my own sensations. But what did that mean? There were two known worlds: the old and the new. But what sort of a world was this? A third world? There were two roads, but what sort of a road was this third one?

Natasha makes an appointment with me but does not keep it.

I am there half-an-hour before time. There is a train-clock at the crossing that reminds me of a barrel. They are really like barrels, aren't they, those street clocks? Two faces. Two ends. Oh, empty barrel of time, I might exclaim.

Natasha made the appointment for half-past three.

I wait. Oh, she isn't coming, of course. Ten minutes past three. . . .

I stand by the train stop. All around me people are bustling about. I tower above the crowd. Those who have lost their way espy me from afar. Now it is beginning. . . . An unknown woman approaches me.

"Would you be so kind," pleads the unknown one, "as

to tell me if Number 27 car will take me all the way to Kudrinsk Square?"

No one must know that I am keeping an appointment. Better to let them think: "That young man who is smiling broadly has come to this corner expressly for the convenience of other people. He'll tell you all you want to know, he'll direct you, he'll calm your fears. . . . Go to him."

"Yes," I reply, brimming over with civility. "The 27 will take you to Kudrinsk Square. . . ."

Then suddenly remembering the right number, I fling myself after the woman, calling out:

"No, no! You'll have to take a 16!"

Let us forget about the appointment. I am not a man in love at all. I am the good genius of the street. Come to me! This way, this way!

A quarter past three. The hands of the clock unite and lie horizontal. Looking at them, I think:

"Like a fly twiddling its legs. The restless fly of time."

How silly! As if there was such a thing! She will not come. She will not come. A Red Army soldier comes up to me.

"Can you tell me where the Darwin Museum is?" he asks me.

"I don't know. . . . Over there, I think . . . Wait a minute, though . . . Wait . . . a . . . min—No, I'm afraid I don't know."

Next. Who's the next? Don't be shy. A taxi describes a curve and glides up to me. You ought to see how that driver despises me. Not out of strength of mind. No, I should think not. As if he would condescend so far as to waste strength of mind on me. No, no. He shows it by his glove . . . the contempt is conveyed by his glove. Comrade driver, believe me, I'm only an amateur, I really don't know which way to direct your car. . . .

I am not standing here for the purpose of directing

people. I have my own business to attend to. . . . My loitering here is enforced, and rather pathetic. . . . I am not smiling out of sheer good nature. If you look closer you will see it is a forced, strained smile.

"Which way to Varsonofievski Lane?" the taxi-driver flings over his shoulder to me.

I hasten to explain: "This way and then that way and then—"

Oh, well, if it comes to that, why should I not stand in the middle of the road and take up in good earnest the work that is thrust upon me?

A blind man approaches.

He simply shouts at me. He pokes with his stick.

"Is that a Number 10 coming?" he demands. "Eh? Ten, is it?"

"No," I reply, almost stroking him. "It's not a 10. It's a two. But there's a 10 just coming behind."

Ten minutes over the appointed hour have passed. Why should I wait any longer? Perhaps she is hurrying to get here, though, flying as fast as she can?

"Oh, I'll be late—oh, I'll be late . . ."

The woman who wanted to get to Kudrinsk Square has caught the 16, the Red Army soldier is wandering through the cool galleries of the museum, the taxi-driver is trumpeting in Varsonofievski Lane, the blind man is climbing in his touchy, egoistic fashion, with his stick held out before him, up the front steps of the Number 10.

Everyone is satisfied. Everyone is happy. Only I remain there with a vacant smile on my face.

More people approach me with enquiries: an old woman, a drunken man, a group of children with a flag. I begin to slash the air with my arms, I no longer merely indicate the desired direction by a jerk of my chin as a passer-by casually inquired of might. No, no. I stretch out my hands, the edge of the palm cutting the air. . . . Another moment and a baton will appear in my fist.

"Back!" I shall shout. "Stop! That way to Varsonofievski Lane. Turn. To the right, old lady. Stop!"

Oh, look! here is a whistle clinging to my lips. I whistle . . . I have the right to whistle . . . Children, you may well envy me. Back! Oho . . . look here! I can stand between two trams going in opposite directions. I'm standing, you can see, at ease, with my arms crossed behind my back and the red baton touching my shoulder-blades.

Congratulate me, Natasha. I have turned into a militiaman.

Suddenly I catch sight of Avel standing some way off, watching me. (Avel is my neighbor.)

Natasha is obviously not coming. I beckon to Avel.

I: "Did you see that, Avel?"

Avel: "Yes, I did. You must be crazy."

I: "Oh, so you saw me, Avel? I've turned into a militiaman."

(A pause. I cast another glance at the clock. Ten to four.)

I: "Of course, you cannot understand. My transformation into a militiaman took place in an Invisible Country."

Avel: "Your Invisible Country is all a lot of idealistic nonsense."

I: "And do you know, the most surprising thing about it, Avel, is that I should figure as a militiaman in that enchanted country. . . . By right, I should be marching through it calmly and majestically, as its owner, with the flowering staff of the sage in my hand. . . . And instead of that, look here, this is the militiaman's baton I'm holding. What a curious mixture of two worlds, the everyday and the imaginary."

Avel: (says nothing).

I: "And what is still stranger is that the initial cause of my transformation into a militiaman, is—unrequited love."

Avel: "I can't understand a single thing. It's some sort of Bergsonism, I suppose."

I resolved to plant my cherry-stone in the ground.

I chose a suitable spot and planted it. "Upon this spot," I said to myself, "a cherry tree will grow up, planted by me in memory of my love for Natasha. Perhaps, some day —say five years hence—Natasha will meet me under this new tree in the springtime. We shall stand one on each side of it. Cherry trees never grow very tall; you can touch the topmost leaf if you raise yourself on your tiptoes. There will be bright sunshine and the spring will be a little bare still, for it will be just the time when the running gutters tempt children out to play and the tree is bursting into blossom."

I shall say:

"Natasha, the day is bright and joyous, the breeze blows and fans the light to a brighter radiance. The breeze sways my tree and makes its shining boughs creak. Each of its blossoms will lift and then droop, showing pink and then white. That is a kaleidoscope of spring, Natasha. Five years ago you gave me some cherries, do you remember? Unrequited love has made the memory humble and very clear. I remember even to this day how the palm of your hand was purple from cherry juice and how you made a funnel of it as you poured the cherries into my palm. I took away a cherry stone in my mouth, and I planted it in memory of my unrequited love. It is blossoming now. So you see: I was slighted then. Boris Mikhailovich was more manly than I was and he won you. I was dreamy and puerile. I sought for a thrush, while you two kissed. I was romantic. But you see—a fine, firm, mature tree has grown up from the romantic seed. You know that the Japanese think, a cherry blossom is the soul of man. See, this is a short, sturdy Japanese tree. Believe me, Natasha, romance can be manly, too, you should not laugh at it.

. . . The whole point is how to approach it. If Boris Mikhailovich caught me squatting on the common planting a puerile little cherry stone, he would feel his triumph once more over me, the triumph of the man over the dreamer. And it was just about that time I planted the kernel. It has burst and sprouted into a tree of dazzling beauty. I buried a seed in the soil. This tree is our child, Natasha. Bring me the son that Boris Mikhailovich gave you. Let me see whether he is as healthy, pure and aloof as the tree produced by an infantile person like myself."

As I returned home from the country, Avel appeared from the other side of the wall. He works in a Trade Union. He is small. He wears a Tolstoi blouse made of a cotton imitation of covert coating, sandals, and blue socks. He is clean-shaven but his cheeks look swarthy. He gives the impression of being overgrown with hair. One might almost think that he had not two skins but only one, a black one. He has a hooked nose and a black cheek.

Avel: "What's the matter with you lately? As I was passing in one of the suburban trains today, I caught sight of you squatting on your heels somewhere on the permanent way, scraping up the earth with your hands. What was up?"

I: (I make no reply).

Avel: (pacing up and down the room). "A man sits on his heels and digs the earth with his hands. What can he be doing? There's no knowing. Is he making an experiment? Or has he got the colic? There's absolutely no knowing. Are you subject to attacks of colic?"

I: (after a pause). "Do you know what I was thinking, Avel? I was thinking that a dreamer should never have children. What does the new world want with a dreamer's children? Better for the dreamers to produce trees for the new world."

Avel: "It's not in the Plan."

The world of attention begins at the head of your bed, with the chair which you draw up to it as you are undressing. To awake early in the morning, while the house is still. The room is flooded with sunshine. Silence reigns. You lie without stirring, for fear of disturbing the immobile light. A pair of socks lies on the chair. They are brown. But in the steady brilliance you suddenly detect among the brown threads tiny wisps of variegated hair —crimson, blue, and orange, stirred by the air.

It is a Rest Day morning. Once more I am taking the familiar route to Natasha's. I ought to write *Travels in an Invisible Country*. Here is a specimen chapter; it might be entitled:

"The Man Who Was in a Hurry to Throw a Stone."

Some shrubs grew under a brick wall. I passed them as I went along the path. I caught sight of a niche in the wall, and wanted to throw some pebbles at it. I stooped. A stone lay at my feet. . . . Then I saw an ant-hill.

The last time I saw an ant-hill was twenty years ago. Oh, of course, I had stepped over ant-hills many a time during those twenty years. And I suppose I had seen them, but had merely thought, "I am walking over ant-hills," and the word "ant-hills" was all that stood out clearly in my consciousness. All the living image was pushed into insignificance by the word that leapt so readily to my service.

Oh, I remembered now: ant-heaps can only be discovered by a casual glance. One . . . Then . . . here's another. Then—look here—there's another. That was how it happened now. Three ant-hills appeared one after the other.

My height hindered me from seeing the ants properly; all my eye could catch was a certain restlessness in a form that might easily have been taken for immobile. The eye was willing to be deceived. As I looked I was quite ready to think that it was not a multitude of ants swarming

round their ant-hills but the ant-hills themselves that were crumbling away like sand dunes.

I stood about four paces from the wall with the stone in my hand. The stone was intended to lodge in the niche. I flung it. The stone flew out and struck the bricks. A spiral of dust arose. I had missed the mark. The stone fell into the bushes at the foot of the wall. Only then did the exclamation uttered by the stone before I opened my palm reach my ears.

"Wait," cried the stone. "Look at me!"

I had been in too much of a hurry. I should have examined the stone first. There was no doubt about it, the stone was a remarkable thing. And now it had disappeared into the shrubs. And I, who had held the thing in my hand, could not even say what color it had been. Maybe it had been of a purplish tint. Possibly it had not been monolithic but made up of several different bodies. Maybe it had contained the fossilized skeleton of a flying beetle or a cherry stone; maybe—it had not been a stone at all, but a bit of mouldy bone.

I encountered an excursion on the way. Twenty persons were walking across the common where I had planted my cherry stone. They were led by Avel. I stepped aside. Avel did not see me, or rather, did not understand. He saw me without perceiving me; he gulped me down, so to speak, like any fanatic, without waiting for either my agreement or resistance.

Avel detached himself from his flock and turned to face it. His back was towards me. Flinging out an arm with a powerful gesture, he cried:

"Now here! Here you are! Here!"

A pause. Silence.

"Comrades from Kursk!" bawled Avel, "I hope you have some imagination. Imagine as much as you like, don't be afraid."

So Avel was trying to invade the Country of the Imagi-

nation? Would he even go as far as to show the excursionists the cherry tree planted in memory of unrequited love? Avel was seeking a way to the Invisible Country.

He strode along. Then he halted and shook his leg. Then he shook it again; he was evidently trying to free himself from some twining shrub which had wound itself around his foot as he was walking. He stamped his foot and the plant crackled and scattered in little balls of yellow. (How many plants and trees and shrubs there are in this story!)

"The huge concrete works I was telling you about will be set up here."

"Dear Natasha, I forgot the principal thing: the Plan. I acted without consulting the Plan. In five years' time a huge concrete works will have risen on this deserted spot where now you can see nothing but useless walls and ditches. My sister—Imagination—is an imprudent creature. They will begin to lay the foundations in the springtime and then—what will become of my poor silly little cherry stone? Yes—for a tree planted in your honor will blossom there in the Invisible Country some day. . . .

"And excursionists will come to see the concrete giant.

"They will not see your tree. Surely the Invisible Country could be rendered visible. . . . ?"

This letter is an imaginary one. I never wrote it. But I might have written it if Avel had not said what he did.

"The building will be laid out in a semi-circle," said Avel. "And the inner side of the semi-circle will be devoted to a garden. Have you any imagination?"

"Yes," I said, "I have. I can see it, Avel. I can see it all quite clearly. There will be a garden just here. And on the very spot where you are standing now, a cherry tree will grow up."

THE SUN AND THE MOON

by

Marjorie Fischer

MARJORIE FISCHER, *a New Yorker by birth and residence, is the author of* Street Fair, *stories for children published in 1934.* Palaces on Monday *(1936), from which* The Sun and the Moon *is reprinted, grew out of a trip to the U. S. S. R. taken by Miss Fischer in the summer of 1935.*

Of the selection included here, Miss Fischer says: "The Sun and the Moon *is a story from a book about the Soviet Union. The book is written for children, and perhaps also for grown-ups; that depends on what became of them as they grew up. It is certainly easier to write about the Soviet Union for children. Children know what makes sense, and what does not make sense. It never makes sense to a girl child to find that most of her abilities must be shelved because she is a girl. It never makes sense to a boy child to find that most of his abilities must be shelved because there are no jobs. But in the process of growing up, our children are taught that human nature can't be changed, that economic problems can't be solved, that it is good for human beings to suffer. These errors have been swept out in the Soviet Union, and any child can see that it makes sense to sweep them out.*"

This story is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Frankwood E. Williams, who fought for the future, and helped others to do so. Dr. Williams wrote about the Soviet child:— "*Life does not confuse and terrify him for the reason that the principles upon which his social system is based—no exploitation, mastery of the world through knowledge, united effort in the interests of all—are easily comprehensible to him, agreeable to him, in fact, seem eminently sensible to him.*"

THE SUN AND THE MOON

JUDY woke in her upper berth on the Soviet ship and saw the water reflected in ripples of light on the ceiling. It must be early, because the three ladies who shared the cabin were still asleep. Judy had not seen them yet; she and Peter had stayed up late, until they had left London and the Thames far behind. Judy had crept in, undressed in the dark, and struggled silently with the blanket and top sheet until she discovered they were folded into a sort of sleeping-bag.

Judy leaned out from her berth and looked down at the lady in the berth below. She had a round, pleasant face, which would look older when she woke, and she wore a netted cap tied under her chin to keep her wavy hair wavy. English, thought Judy. Just then the lady opened her eyes and saw Judy's face and shoulders hanging over her.

"Good morning," said the lady, and sure enough, she was English.

"Morning," said Judy, swinging up again. She dressed rapidly, getting to the washbasin ahead of the ladies, who watched her drowsily.

"Gracious heavens, child!" said one of them. "Surely you can't be traveling alone to Russia."

"Alone with my brother," said Judy. "We're going to meet our mother and father. Father's an engineer. He's working in some place called Erivan." He's working, thought Judy; oh, thank goodness, he's working after all this time.

Judy ran out into the sunshine flooding the ship and

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stood on tiptoe, throwing up her hands through the warm liquid air. A shiver of excitement rippled through her. Far away on every hand the fluted sea spread out, and light rose from the small waves like spray. The North Sea, the North Sea, thought Judy, marching across the deck in rhythm to the North Sea.

"What do you think you're doing, may I ask?" said Peter, leaning against the rail and watching two seamen swab down the deck. He gestured. "Did you ever!"

"What?" asked Judy.

"That one's a girl," said Peter.

One of the seamen was a girl; she had a beautiful girl's body, firm and strong, and yellow hair showed under her blue beret. She wore a yellow and black sleeveless jersey, black pants, and high rubber boots. Judy was astonished and delighted.

"Why not?" she said.

"It certainly seems crazy," said Peter, who was astonished and not delighted. "Come on, let's get some breakfast."

They were first in the dining-room, and the steward put out a cigarette when he saw them.

"Sit here, please," he said, and he gave them seats at the long center table. The room was full of sunlight, splashing over the white tablecloths and breaking against the shining glasses.

"What do you think we'll get?" said Judy. "I hope it's something new."

The steward brought grapefruit and omelet. Then he brought plates of yellow cheese, sausage like sliced red marble, smoked salmon, pale pink and finely grained, white and black bread, and tea in glasses with metal holders.

"I don't think I'll bother with omelet," said Judy, arranging cheese, sausage, and salmon around her plate.

"That's crazy to eat for breakfast," said Peter, sticking to omelet.

"It's just what mother wrote," said Judy. "Everything upside-down. For instance we'd eat this for supper."

"How will you like it if you get oatmeal for supper?" said Peter, but Judy paid no attention to him. He helped himself to salmon in an offhand way, and he liked it and took more. Judy was decent enough not to say anything about that, or maybe she hadn't noticed. She was watching the steward smoke a cigarette with a paper holder.

After breakfast they went out on deck and found that someone had strung up a rope and marked out a court for deck tennis. Four passengers were playing, and the others sat on the hatches and watched, or practised Russian out of books.

"Here comes the girl from Lancashire," said Judy. "The one we were talking to last night."

"First of all she's really Russian now," said Peter. "She's been living there six years. And second of all I don't like her. She thinks she knows everything."

"Hi, Susan!" called Judy, sticking her elbow into Peter.

"Morning," said Susan. She sat down beside Judy. "Let's bide here a while and have a game. Later I'll show you about ship."

"O. K.," said Judy.

Peter simply pretended he hadn't heard. If there was one thing he didn't want it was to have Susan show him anything.

Now and then the hoop of rope for deck tennis was tossed too far or too hard, and it went spinning out into the sea. The girl sailor came along with more hoops and set them down beside Susan.

"*Spasibo*," said Susan.

"*Spasibo*," called the studying passengers.

"That means thank you," said Susan. "If tha wishes I'll teach you some Russian. First I'll show you ship. I know Captain and everything."

Peter thought she was certainly stuck on herself, and he pulled his harmonica out of his pocket and began to play Yankee Doodle. Everyone turned to smile, and the game went on livelier than ever. Peter took the harmonica away from his mouth long enough to ask Susan if she could play. She shook her head no, and Peter played Yankee Doodle over again.

"*Spasibo*, thank you," said Judy. "How do you say I want?"

"*Ya khochu*," said Susan.

"*Ya khochu*," said Judy. "Sounds like a sneeze. How do you say please?"

"*Pozhaluista*," said Susan.

"What?" asked Judy. "Oh, Peter, you could shut up for a minute! Such a racket!"

Peter stood up and walked away, playing as long as he thought they could hear him; who did Judy think she was, he'd like to know. He climbed to the top deck and heard a wireless tapping; he looked through an open door and saw that the radiographer was a woman. If she's a radiographer she must be an officer, thought Peter, stricken, and he moved away fast.

He wandered forward and came to the bow of the ship, where he found mostly sailors. None of them were women. A boy stood in front of the deck-house cleaning chickens; he motioned to Peter to step inside.

Peter went past the sailors' galley to the crew dining-room; it was like the room in which they had eaten, except that it was smaller. Plants stood on the two long tables, and sunlight cast their shadows on the polished wood. A very large photograph of a man in a cap hung on one wall.

Another room opened off the dining-room, and Peter went inside. The room held a piano, a phonograph, a table with books and magazines, and a large chart of an airplane, with details of the engine along the sides. Peter leaned both elbows on the table and studied the chart.

He looked up when a young man in a blue suit came in; he smiled at Peter.

"You are American?" asked the young man. "I have heard you playing very good nice song."

"That's Yankee Doodle," said Peter.

"Yankee Doodle," said the young man, with some difficulty. "How do you like our Red Corner?"

"What's that?" asked Peter.

"This room," said the young man. "How do you like our ship? We have succeed to build many ships like this, but not yet enough. I am second mate; in few years will be captain. I see you are studying airplane engine. You are interested for engines?"

"You bet," said Peter. "I'm going to be an engineer. Listen, would you do me a big favor? Could you take me to see the engine-room sometime?"

"I take you all over," said the second mate. "At three o'clock I am free, and I meet you here. My name is Vladimir."

"Mine's Peter. Thanks a lot," said Peter, "*Spasibo.*"

Vladimir laughed and went away. Peter hurried back to Judy and Susan. They were playing deck tennis.

"Hi, Judy," he called. "Wait'll you hear!"

Susan was beating Judy all hollow, and Judy didn't mind interrupting the game.

"What?" she asked.

"I just fixed it up with the second mate to see the engine-room this afternoon. He's going to show me the whole boat."

"Oh, take me!" said Judy.

"He only said me," said Peter. "Maybe I could work it, though, but I can't promise. His name's Vladimir."

"Vladimir!" said Susan. "He's a champion lad. He'll take all of us. I know him very well."

"Then that's all right," said Judy, turning back to Susan.

Peter felt angry in a way he couldn't mention; the sun was too hot, the boat was too small, women were all over, and Susan knew everything.

"I'll play you both," he said. He did, and beat them, but it didn't make him feel much better.

After lunch they met Vladimir and started with the dining-room and Red Corner. Then they went below to see the crew's quarters. Judy stopped on the stairs.

"I don't know—" she said. "We saw them on the other boat coming over. They smell, and I had so much caviar and everything for lunch—"

"This is entirely different," said Peter.

Judy thrust out her head to sniff. It was true that nothing smelled bad so far, and she went on. Vladimir knocked on the door of a cabin, and when there was no answer he opened the door, and they peeped in.

"Why, it's just like ours!" said Judy. "Except it's really better because they have two in a cabin instead of four."

"Maybe this is for officers," said Peter.

"Nowt of the sort," said Susan. "This is for sailors."

"Is this for the crew?" Peter asked Vladimir, as if Susan hadn't spoken.

"That is correct," said Vladimir.

"It's just simply and solely for the sailors," said Judy, "and it certainly makes more sense."

"Yes," said Vladimir.

When they went upstairs again they heard music coming from an upper deck.

"Let's go up there next," said Judy. She was already half-way up the ladder. The others followed, and there they found an open deck with an awning over it. Four sailors sat about a table playing guitars and a banjo, and something larger than a guitar like a beautiful pear-shaped triangle.

"That is a balalaika," said Vladimir.

A yellow-haired sailor in blue denims came up the ladder; he began to dance at once, as though he was in such good spirits that he had to dance. He crossed his arms, and flung them wide apart, moving his feet in complicated and lively patterns.

"Oh, teach me!" cried Judy, and Vladimir translated. The sailor grinned and slowed up, and so did the music; Judy began to learn the steps.

The girl seaman arrived, wearing a white flounced dress and with her golden hair curling about her shoulders. She was very pretty, you could see now; her face was all sunburned except where her lids opened over her blue eyes. She joined Judy and the sailor, and gradually they speeded up, and Judy was dancing deftly and crying Hah! when the others did.

"We have show last night before Leningrad," said Vladimir. "Judy must dance then. She is very good nice dancer."

Judy pretended not to hear, but Peter saw how she bounced more lightly than ever, and he thought she was showing off.

"Now let's see the engines," he said. "Come on, Judy."

"I don't want to see any old engines," cried Judy. "I'm going to stay here."

They went off without her, and stood on the iron grill above the engines, and Vladimir talked about them proudly; they had been made in Leningrad. The engines were painted bright blue, and they shone smoothly and cleanly with oil where they were not painted. Here was the rhythm and rumble, strong and regular, that stood for planned power. Peter felt deeply excited, and he asked Vladimir question after question.

Susan interrupted, talking Russian, and it was like a door swung shut in Peter's face.

"Happen I'll be engineer on ship when I'm grown," said

Susan, "Or railroad engineer. I've not decided, except that I'll be engineer."

"Nonsense!" said Peter. "Girls aren't engineers."

"Why not?" said Susan. "I can be anything I want to be, and I want to be engineer."

"Can she?" Peter asked Vladimir, his voice almost cracking with annoyance.

"*Da, da, da!*" said Vladimir. "Yes, indeed. We have now woman engineer on board, and we have already two women sea captains."

Peter couldn't speak; he thought of mother writing how everything was upside-down in the Soviet Union, and it was no help at all.

They went back to the sun-deck, where Judy was still dancing, and everybody was singing.

"Susan," Judy cried, "Susan, they keep saying something like this—*Tovarishch* Judy, *Tovarishch* Judy. What does it mean?"

"It's rare and strange you don't even know that!" said Susan. "That means Comrade Judy."

"Then he's *Tovarishch* Vladimir, isn't he?" said Judy. "And they're *Tovarishch*—"

The sailors laughed and called:

"Dmitri."

"Alexei."

"Viktor."

"Anna."

"Wonderful!" cried Judy, dancing.

Susan began to speak Russian, and Peter felt perfectly alone and lost. It made him cross.

"Listen, Peter," said Judy, "will you do me a favor?"

"Maybe," said Peter.

"There's going to be a show," said Judy. "I want you to play Greensleeves on the harmonica for me to dance to."

"I'll think it over," said Peter.

"Well, for heavens sakes!" said Judy.

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," said Peter, feeling less cross every minute.

"Oh, never mind!" said Judy. "I'll get someone else."

The next few days they played deck tennis and danced: they put on bathing-suits and ran yelling in and out of the great spout of water that poured from a hose on deck. They ate caviar and smoked salmon, and drank tea with preserved cherries in it. They watched the days growing longer and the nights shorter as they voyaged through the Baltic Sea to the North, to Leningrad.

Judy never spoke about Greensleeves, which was the tune she needed for her dance, but Peter knew that she had gone all over the ship trying to find someone who knew it, and that there was no one. Peter felt mean and pleased about this; of course if Judy had asked him again—but she never mentioned it. Just stubborn, thought Peter.

The last afternoon he heard someone playing the piano, and he went into the salon. An English lady was playing, and a stewardess was dusting the chairs and tables. The English lady spoke to the stewardess, and she put her dust-rag under her arm and sang beautifully. Another stewardess came in and sat down to listen.

It sure is upside-down, thought Peter; but this time it was nice, he liked it. Susan came along and leaned over a table, resting.

"Judy's on deck singing tune to sailors," said Susan, "but they can't catch on to it. It's Greensleeves, isn't it? I learned it in England. Peter."

"What?" said Peter.

"Peter, England's rare and beautiful. I've not been there since six years ago, when we went to Soviet Union."

"You been visiting this time?" asked Peter.

"I've been visiting my grandmother," said Susan. "She's that poor!"

After a while everyone went away, and Peter and Susan were left alone. Susan sang:

For O Greensleeves was all my joy,
And O Greensleeves was my delight,
And O Greensleeves was my heart of gold,
And who but my Lady Greensleeves.

It was a gay song, but Susan looked sad.

"I love England," she said. "Happen someday I'll go back; it'll be all right there someday. But we were that poor. Father's a miner. Half the time there was no work, and father just sort of sat around."

"I know," said Peter. "But it's all right now, so let's forget it."

"Tha's right," said Susan. "It's all right now."

They sat up straight and sang:

Alas my love, you do me wrong
To cast me off discourteously,
And I have lovèd you so long,
Delighting in your company.

For O Greensleeves . . .

Judy came in.

"Oh, Peter, how can you be so mean," she said.

"I didn't say I wouldn't play," said Peter. "I said maybe I would and maybe I wouldn't."

"Peter! Will you?" said Judy.

"Naturally," said Peter. "And Susan knows Greensleeves so she can sing."

Judy burst out crying and stopped at once.

"We better practise right away," she said.

At nine o'clock red rays of sunlight were still slanting across the deck, and the crew and the passengers were sitting on the hatches and leaning along the rail to see the show. A stewardess sang, and a sailor recited, and four sailors danced a sword dance.

Then Judy danced and Peter played and Susan sang Greensleeves, dancing and singing and playing with all their hearts. Peter blew the lively tune out of his harmonica, as if his good spirits broke into song for everyone to share. It was wonderful! Everybody cried Encore! and clapped, and they had to repeat the whole performance twice over.

The moon rose in the sky which was still bright with day, taking on weight as it took on color and light, until at last it shone, round and full, like a luminous gold coin. Phosphorescence rose to the surface of the water, one light answering another, instead of reflecting.

When the show was over someone brought out a phonograph and started playing Hallelujah five times too fast, and sailors and stewardesses and officers and passengers trotted briskly around together.

Peter and Judy and Susan leaned against the rail. Suddenly they were all hungry. They went to the dining-room and ate sandwiches and cake and apples until they couldn't eat any more. They walked out on deck again, where everyone was still dancing. They watched Dmitri bow to one of Judy's English ladies and say "Bos-tone?", and then the pair went dancing around and around.

Judy leaned over the rail and looked at the water which was heavy and without color, now, like a liquefied metal.

"I bet you this is the latest I ever stayed up," she said.

"It's good and late, I bet you," said Peter, without wanting to know just what time it was. He hung over the rail thinking that this was a real ship, with the deck low and open, near the waves.

"Look," said Susan.

They looked up at the masts and spars against the sky half silver still with moonlight, and dimly colored with dawn before them. Overhead, from horizon to horizon, stretched a map of Time; the ship voyaged between the past and the future, with both of them plain in the sky.