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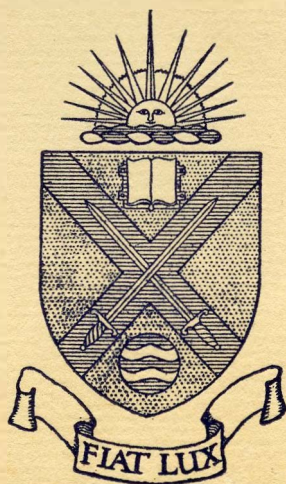


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# THE FLAMINGO

APRIL, 1942



ROLLINS COLLEGE  
Winter Park, Florida

# THE FLAMINGO

ROLLINS COLLEGE

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VOL. 17

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

No. X I

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## AND A BLACKBIRD SANG

DOUGLAS BILLS

**C**ORKY Taft Johnson, was small for his age. That was why he was allowed to finish school through the twelfth grade.

"Too li'l fer nothin' mo'en totin' wood fer his mammy, come wash-day," his father would growl. Sam Johnson had no patience with a weakling. His was the credo that the weak should just naturally die out; that the Kingdom of Man was for the strong. Squat of stature and broad of ham, his was the only back in the section capable of lifting the hind end of an unruly horse while it was being shod. But Sam was getting old now, respectably so. At the ripe age of forty-eight, he, like most other negroes of that venerability, was entitled to sit back and watch his strapping sons work.

Milltown had been a cow town before the cypress mill came. That was when Sam achieved distinction. In the old days before "They was so many snortin' gas-mules," as Sam called them, mules and horses had been the only means of snaking the great cypress logs through the swamp, down the log roads to the mill. Sam was the only man who could drag any team of horses out of any muck hole. Deep in the echoing swamp could be heard his great voice:

"Come 'roun' heah! Git up theah!" and all at once he would break into song. Minutes later, mules and Sam would come ploughing through the waist-deep water, Sam behind lifting the huge log over cypress knees and around entangling vines.

That was how Sam worked—hard. And when dark came and his mighty back ached, Sam still grinned and sang. And because Sam worked hard and long, he was now forty-eight, an old man. He still grinned and sang, but his rheumatic legs, bowed by labor, no longer carried him to the inaccessible reaches of Big Swamp. He, who often said as a young man: "Nothin' like hearin' the patter of li'l feet 'roun' th' house," now watched the little feet grow large and flat under huge bodies. Sons, some short like their father, some unbelievably tall, but all seven strong; that is, all but "Li'l" Corky.

Sam said; "Every time me an' Sissie has a fight, we decides t' have a li'l 'un."

Obviously, the fights had been more or less annual affairs.



But one cold night when the chickens huddled under the slab-sided shack close to the warmth of the floor where the cinder bucket lay, Sissie, who had never before needed any doctor save waddling Aunt Helena, moaned between grey lips:

"Sam, honey, git a doctor."

And Sam had ridden his spare-ribbed mule to Suttin's Landing for young Doctor Moore.

"Hit's awful early fer this'n, Ah thinks," fretted Sam.

"He'll come around all right, and Sissie, too, but Sam, there just mustn't be any more."

The baby came as the doctor predicted. Sissie whispered with tears in her eyes:

"Ah knows hit's kinda punny, Sam, but hit'll grow."

And Corky did grow, but slowly. His knobby little limbs would not carry him where the other pickaninnies scampered, so he spent the days straining his thin legs to reach the pedals of the old pump-organ that sat in the parlor. Sam purchased it after one glorious night when the whole town paid tribute to his crap-playing luck. Sissie, who treated all the other boys with shrill screams and pats on their britches as soon as they were weaned, never stopped loving her youngest. Her voice, when she spoke to Corky, was high but not shrill. It was more the suppressed cry of the mother who craves the love of the baby who needs her and knows there will be no more. When her birth-wracked torso ached, she found comfort in clasping the ever-young body to her breast, much as she had that terrible morning some years before when all the suffering and joy of her world were embodied in the tiny, wet figure miraculously alive beside her. She would pump the pedals of the organ while he drew his weird harmonies from the keys; Sissie, smiling with delight as he tonelessly hummed to the accompaniment.

"Too li'l fer nothin' an' she spiles 'im," Sam would growl.

At eighteen, Corky still wore the faded overalls which his twelve year-old predecessors had discarded. His piping voice seemed out of place as he delivered the class-day oration in the Milltown school where thirty-four students attended twelve grades. They stood, step-ladder fashion, upon the frame platform and sang the graduation day songs. Immediately after the exercises, Corky's two graduating class-mates went out to get drunk and Corky home to pack his belongings.

Mrs. Carol, wife of the mill-owner, had obtained a scholar-

ship for the little negro through her father who was an instructor of music in a conservatory in New York. Years before, she had heard Corky play the piano at the negro church on Sundays and secretively on weekdays. It was on one of these week days that she had been most impressed. Huddled over the cracked keys, and with much lip movement, Corky would figure out different chord arrangements for hymns.

Mrs. Carol, who held her master's degree in music, had been forced to abandon her own career when she married. She became deeply interested in Corky. The hopes she had held for herself, and later for her son, had been destroyed by circumstances. The son had grown from an obstreperous young baseball fan into a shiftless maturity. The greying gentleness of the woman was warmed by the desire for knowledge in Corky. Sewing and social circles were abandoned for the grooming of her black protege.

"No, Corky, that section is played more sprightly and please, don't say 'yaas'm."

Thus continued his education. The woman watched him speed through exercises and in spare moments, crammed him with grammar and proper pronunciation. She taught him not only the goal which he must achieve, but the essentials by which he might attain it, even to the standards of society and its customs. They made a strange couple, a shiny-eyed little negro boy in patch-work overalls and bare feet, discussing the merits of a contemporary composer in stilted English and a dignified, middle-aged lady smiling gently at his enthusiasm.

Early in his teens, Corky acquired another interest. He had an intense craving for companionship at times and found not only that but the rapt attention of his race through his music. It was a natural thing for Corky to lapse into swing. Mrs. Carol didn't know but Corky seldom missed a Saturday night at Smiley Aimes' juke joint. There he played no eighteenth-century classics but he held the love and admiration of the colored population of Milltown with his torrid interpretations of the music they all felt in their hearts. This had begun when Corky was twelve. Since then, he had sweated many nights over the scarred piano at Smiley's. But that was all. Weekdays were for Mrs. Carol, his dreams and his studies.

The muddy streets of the colored section of a Florida mill town is no place for Bach or Beethoven, but there it was—



rolling out of the closed windows of the church and soaring up into the steeple to tremble the cobwebs and peeling paint.

Mrs. Carol was seated in the front-row pew.

"That's fine, Corky. Don't practice too long: You leave at ten tomorrow. I'm expecting big things of you in New York."

Corky smiled his thanks and resumed his practice. Mrs. Carol left. Practice was no ordeal for Corky; it was a time of discovery. He would play by the hour, a beatific smile on his wizened little face, or an expression of anxious concentration, striving to draw every shade of grandeur or pathos from the black notes before him.

Tonight, however, Corky grew restless early. It was pay night in Milltown and he felt he must bid his old friends farewell. When he reached Smiley's place, the juke was blaring and every buck in town was drooling over the liquor counter or engrossed in losing his week's earnings to the beaming proprietor at his "flinch" table.

"Come on in?" It was Jeanelle. She was high "yaller" and every ebony son of the town, including Corky, worshipped the violent perfume she wore on her vibrant young body. Tonight was the first time she had ever noticed him and Corky was enthralled.

"Play somethin' hot, Corky."

Jeanelle brought him a nickel water-glass of 'shine and someone else handed him a lighted cigar. The smoke swirled about Corky's closed eyes. For a moment, he dreamed of mahogany grand pianos and spacious studios overlooking Manhattan but the noise about brought him back. Jeanelle hung over his shoulder, either oblivious to or confidently conscious of the effect her nearness had upon him. Rivulets of sweat ran down his shining, gnome-like face, big flat-footed mill hands and clinging, eager-eyed nigger wenches stomped and shouted to the jungle rythm of the piano. Corky's face was creased in smiles; he didn't think of tomorrow or New York any more. His shriveled little body bobbed in time with his music. Time ceased to matter. The fire of the 'shine in his veins and of the shoulder touching his were in his head—tomorrow—a new life—a shining grand piano. What a glorious send-off!

At three, Jeanelle cooed drunkenly in his ear:

"Comin' home with me, honey-boy?"

Staggering home together in the cool moonlight, Corky asked:

"Whatever happened to Big Sam, Jeanny?"

"Oh, I done tol' him whar he was'n goin' to be sleepin' no mo' this mawning. Me 'n him ain' livin' together no longah. 'Sides, he ain' got no right takin' vantage of a young gal like me. You is kinda small but I loves y'."

When they entered the unlighted closeness of the shack, Corky was conscious of being dimly afraid but this feeling dwindled when Jeanelle brought in a lighted lamp and led the way to her room. Then, just as she crossed the threshold, there was a resounding slap, and Big Sam emerged with the guttering lamp in his hand. The unconscious form of Jeanelle slipped from his grasp as he staggered towards Corky. His bristly black chin glistened, his eyes were drunkenly red, and his muscles were blue-black in the light. Corky saw the hand holding the lamp shoot forward, felt a flashing pain in his eyes, and slipped into unconsciousness.

Three months had passed since that night-marish night before Corky's planned departure. When he didn't show up for his train the next morning, Mrs. Carol went to his home. Sissie's tearful reply to her queries was:

"He ain' been home all night."

When Sissie did hear from Corky in the hospital, he directed her to tell his benefactress he had left town. He himself had the nurse type a note explaining that a traveling dance band had offered him a job. The nurse guided his hand as he signed his name.

He never knew the sorrow he caused his teacher. The love and hopes she had for the little darky transcended all racial barriers. This, she thought, was the third and last disillusionment. Never again could her soul warm itself with a new hope, only to be frozen in the blasts of cricumstance. She threw herself frantically into the petty personal and denominational conflicts of the town. The sisterhood of gossips rejoiced in her vehement trading of scandal and her husband was worried at the breakfast table because of the change that had come over her. It was the first time his Lillian had been a cause of worry since their marriage and it perturbed him. He abandoned his nightly poker-liquor party at the company's house-boat for an entire week. When this wrought no improvement in her, he gave it up as a bad job. He joined the group of husband



sympathizers whose wives made life unbearable for them with their breakfast hour of tale-telling.

Corky resumed his old life as soon as he left the hospital. Only, now, Mrs. Carol never saw him and Smiley's was his only haven. He never practiced in the church. Mrs. Carol might hear him. Every evening, he would tap his way down the board walk to Smiley's juke. There was always someone there to buy him a drink of the local 'shine and Smiley himself was glad for the trade attraction.

Several times he sensed or heard Jeanelle in the crowded room and had ventured to speak. But each time she hadn't answered and Corky felt a terrible urge to reach out in the blackness that engulfed him and clutch her to him—perhaps to find resurrection in violent embrace. Once, he had reached out and touched her as she walked past. She had shrunk back in revulsion, whispering fiercely:

"Don't you tech me!"

Several days later, Corky heard:

"I done tol' thet li'l niggah I ain' got no use fer 'im. What good is a blin' niggah?"

Jeanelle said this so Corky could hear her as she danced by with grinning Sam. But as Corky's sightless eyes brimmed tears, he heard above the stamp of dancing feet and the monotonous blare of the piano, thunderous applause in spacious auditoriums and crashing symphonies in the now-inaccessible lyric world of music. He rose from the piano stool and stumbled out into the night. His feet were soaked from staggering off the walk into the wet weeds or into the puddled ruts of the road. He sobbed as he ran. Suddenly he halted, turned and retraced his steps, past the juke, and on toward the white-washed church. Many times before Corky had attempted to express with his own music the things he felt within but he had always been unsure and halting. Tonight there was no hesitation. Tears streaming down his face, he poured the torture of his soul into the keys.

But Corky wasn't the only one crying that night. As he had feared, Mrs. Carol heard him. She and her husband had been preparing for bed.

"And that disgusting Lollie Spencer chasing after that young clerk of yours like a silly girl! I actually expect her to . . ."

"Lillian, please. If you have no respect for those whom you

gossip about, at least have some consideration for me. I'm tired and I—Good Lord, what's wrong now?"

Mrs. Carol stood transfixed in the midst of vigorously combing her hair. Two blocks away, the negro church piano was rocking under the hands of a master.

"It can't be—but it is!" she whispered. "Corky!" she cried, and fled from the room, her loosened hair a silver cascade over her dressing-gown.

Her felt slippers were soaked when she reached the church. Her breath came in choking sobs

"Dear God!" she cried in a low voice when she opened the door. There, in the moonlight streaming from the window behind the altar was Corky's familiar little humped back. She walked silently to his side and started to lay her hand on his shoulder when suddenly his face was lifted to the light. She smiled timidly as his eyes came to rest upon her—but they didn't come to rest and in the fleeting look, Mrs. Carol saw the filmed eyes and the emaciated lids of the blind negro. Horrified, she sank back into the first available chair. She stared unbelievably as the little negro's hands flew unhesitatingly over the keyboard. She realized that he could not be conscious of her presence, for this was nothing she had ever taught him—this was a wounded heart nakedly beating its song of frustration, terror and unrequited love, and painfully weaving itself into an unforgettable theme. This was Corky's opus. Before her eyes, a master creator was being born from a half-literate mind that had found expression in music.

Hours, later, as the sun tinted the sleeping quarters and in the distance was heard the clang of men's shovels firing the mill furnaces, Corky fell in exhaustion over the piano. For long minutes, Mrs. Carol sat dreaming. New dreams, grander dreams, dreams of a blind negro thrilling the world with his work. In the early hours of dawn, Corky had stopped crying. The bedlam of pain had melted into a plaintive tinkle that soothed the delirious effect of the pain.

She spoke softly to herself:

"That's how Corky will thrill the world—paint the chaos of times so that people, hearing, can weep. And he'll end by soothing them into sanity." She rose from her seat and touched him gently. "Corky. Corky, I've got a new dream for us." And then she told him. "It means study and work, hard work, but you'll be great, Corky, and I'll be so very proud."



## SEARCH FOR A SONG

Suspended in twilight.  
 The blinking of an occasional idea  
 Through the night of somnolence.  
 Along, along, along  
 The ringing corridor of memory,  
 A song is somewhere floating.

Strong it is and biting as the last  
 Few drags from an aged pipe.

Some clan-call broad enough  
 For the whole of man,  
 Hymning the love of Pan,  
 Bridging the span of hate and dread,  
 And calling to the dead ages  
 For a sacristan.

A long numb horror  
 Fills the fields with fury,  
 O Lord Equivocation, in thy might,  
 Fling down the instable walls  
 Of hollow Right. There flaunts  
 The flag of Convention amid  
 A host of rushing doubts.

Some paeon, marching song.  
 But where is it to be found?  
 Look inward—turn the mirror so.  
 Do you catch the glint of  
 Emptiness?

A weary, weary way and we are lost!

The spindle jumps; the thread is snarled.  
 A silence falls where we have quarreled.  
 The battle's on; no trumpet calls.  
 A leaden hate in our heart thumps  
 The jiggling strain of our vain world.

WALLACE SCHULTZ

## BOREDOM IN EDEN

E. BROWN

I REMEMBER the garden perfectly. It wasn't too hot and it wasn't too cold. It was just right. It was pretty, too, with a stream running right through the middle and laughing to itself. There were trees and lots of animals. The trees were all green in the shade and golden in the sun. The animals wore scales or fur. Some of them had the damndest voices you ever heard. The lion roared at you and the skunk kind of spat at you, but as for the snake, he would only whisper, in a sleek, insidious way.

I remember God, too, though to tell you the truth he only comes to my mind nowadays as a sort of shadow. Of course Adam knew Him much better than I did. They were always talking, those two, and always leaving me out of it. Sometimes they went off together for days and when they came back their heads would be all cloudy and God would have cobwebs caught in his beard so I'd have to sweep it out for Him. He just took that as a matter of course. You know how men are.

At first I didn't mind being left alone so much. I liked to cuddle the young creatures, all curled up in sleepy balls. I liked to throw oranges for the panther cubs and duck the baby beavers in the stream. But I got tired of that after awhile. I got tired of Adam and God never talking to me, and I got tired of the creatures all so indifferent and preoccupied with their own affairs, except the snake, to be sure.

The snake was polite as bananas, and most affectionate. He liked milk and music, and he had an intriguing sort of syncopation when he walked around on his numerous and delightful feet. Anyone could tell he'd been decently reared, if you know what I mean. I got so I really looked up to him and valued his opinion. When Adam and God went walking the snake stayed home with me.

One day, when they were away as usual, he crawled up my arm and said: "Look, Eve. Most of the trees in this garden are golden, but this here one is red."

"Oh that," I said. "That's apples. Adam and I aren't allowed to eat them."

"My dear Eve!" he exclaimed and horror sat up in his tail.



"You can't mean it. The rest of this stuff is all stale. Why on earth can't you eat apples?"

To be sure it *did* have a sort of moldy look about it.

"It's the law," I said, but inside I was thinking, well, why on earth not?

I mentioned the matter to Adam. He really is a most impractical man, even now. He said God was creating and apples were part of the plan. And what do you think? The knowledge of good and evil was hidden, in *apples*. Well, I tried to persuade him to take just a bite but he was stubborn about it. You know how men are. So I just said: "That's a fine place to hide it. Still you can't prove it by me." And of course that's where I was wrong. Adam went off in a huff the next day and you can imagine I felt pretty depressed. I got to thinking about apples, and then about climbing trees. And then about picking apples. I thought about it for the longest time. Then pretty soon I was doing it. I was climbing the tree and picking apples. I threw away the first ones but then I went and got some more. If the snake hadn't crawled up just then I probably would have thrown them away too. But he was so snooty about it.

"You'll never get Adam to eat one of them things," he said, wagging his head to and fro.

"You think not?" I asked haughtily.

"Why I know you can't," said the snake, "Him and God being such pals and all."

Now that made me mad. If there's one thing I dislike more than another it's being told I can't do something.

"If you think I can't get round Adam, you're completely mistaken," I said. "Adam's going to eat *more* than one. He's going to eat several, see? Only I don't know whether to fry 'em or bake 'em or stew 'em."

"Eve darling," the snake said. It's the first time anyone ever called me that and I really think it's a lovely word. "Eve, darling, why don't you make him some cider? That always appeals to men. I like it myself."

So when Adam came home all musty from talking so long to God I said: "Hello darling. Have a nip before supper. I made it myself, and it's strong."

"What's it made of?" he asked.

"Fruit juice," I said. "What else?"

Well Adam took a swig, and then he took another and an-

other. To tell the truth I never knew him so nice. I offered the snake some too but he said he was on the wagon on account of being so low to the ground drinks sometimes upset his liver.

"That's too bad," Adam said. "You don't know what you're missing!"

Adam kept getting nicer and nicer. As the drink didn't make him sleepy or spotty or anything queer I decided I might try one myself.

The snake said: "You'll like it, my dear."

He was all smiling and glib and Adam was all smiling and fuzzy and I felt pretty good about the whole thing. I took a couple of sips. I took several sips. It was awful. All of a sudden I saw myself and I was nothing but a measly old rib, one of Adam's ribs at that! As for Adam, well, the first thing I did was to run and get a couple of the biggest fig leaves I could find for the pair of us.

God *would* choose that moment to pop in to call. It got kind of dark and there He was.

"What have you done?" He asked. "What have you gone and done?"

"It's bad enough that You made us at all," I sobbed, "without adding insult to injury. Look at me! A rib! A horrid, old rib!"

"That's just the trouble," Adam said. "We didn't want you to find out about it."

"I'll take care of this," God said crossly.

And then the snake had to pop his head out from under a leaf and giggle.

"Stop ribbing her," he giggled.

"That's a lousy pun," I screamed, "and in very bad taste."

"I think you two better get out of the garden," God said.

"All for a harmless whim?" I asked. "How was I to know?"

"Look here, Eve," Adam interrupted. "It's all your fault. I think you'd better explain exactly what happened and apologize to God. You know I didn't have anything to do with it."

"You drank it," I said. "Anyhow why make such a fuss?"

"I think you two better get out of the garden," God said again.

"I'm sorry, God," I said politely. "It was just a sort of joke. I didn't mean anything by it."

Then the snake had to poke his head up again.

"Dames," he said. "They never do."



"You keep out of this," I said.

"I tell you what," God said. "If you get out of the garden you'll be so busy with dishes and diapers you won't have time to play any tricks."

"Well," I said, "if you two hadn't gone off and left me alone so much it wouldn't have happened at all, so there!"

Then I began to sob.

"I want Adam," I sobbed.

"All right." God said mildly. "You can have your Adam, but you can't stay in the garden if you take him."

He turned to Adam. "You want to go with her?" He asked, and all of a sudden His voice got sort of sad and tender. It made me more scared than when He was cross. And I was scared about what Adam would say. I don't know why but it came to me right then that dumb as he was I loved him. He kind of hung his head and looked ashamed and my heart got to flopping round like a broken wing, but I didn't want him to know so I just tossed my head.

"Don't come on *my* account," I said. "I can take care of myself."

Well, the snake started laughing, and Adam started laughing and God started laughing too. You know how men are—unpredictable.

"Goodbye Adam," God said. "Take care of each other."

"Goodbye God," Adam said, sort of choky.

And there we were, only Adam and me in a cold world, but we were close and peaceful.

"Adam," I said. "Let's have another apple."

## FREE TICKET

JEAN HAMAKER

Paul Nelson folded the letter and inserted it and a worn looking five dollar bill into an envelope just as he had done every Saturday night since he had gone to California five weeks ago to find work. At first, he had sent Margo part of the money he had saved for emergency, so she wouldn't know what a struggle he was having finding a job.

Paul glanced around his room in the run-down boarding house. What he saw was distasteful to him, but on sixteen fifty a week it was all he could ask for. He sighed and took the letter out of the envelope. Better reread it to be sure it doesn't sound discouraged, he thought.

"Darling Margo,

Another week away from you and Bobby has gone by and I miss you both more each day. Things are picking up though, and I think I'm in line for a better job. This is hard on all of us, yet you and I know that we couldn't live together in Chicago without money. That's why we agreed that the best thing I could do was to come out here where I might find work, and live in the hope that we'll be together soon. So hope and pray with me, and everything will be all right.

Hope you are taking care of Bobby's sniffles and that you're keeping well yourself.

I want to get this in the nine thirty mail, so must close, with all my love,

PAUL."

Margo's clear, wide eyes met him from her picture on his dresser. It was her college year book picture, taken three years ago.

"Ah, honey," he thought, "I shouldn't have let you go in for this kind of a life. Out of college two weeks and we were married, with no prospect of an income."

He sighed and reached for his suitcoat. Absentmindedly, he tucked the sleeve lining back up and went out to mail his letter.

It was four blocks to the mailbox and Paul hurried. The clock on the bank said nine fifteen. He passed a bunch of screaming little boys who were playing in the doorway of a meat market. Their shrill laughter suddenly rose as a baby



kitten darted in front of Paul, then stopped and tried to shake all four legs at once. He scooped the little thing up and saw that the kids had put patches of adhesive tape on each of the kitten's paws. He thought of how Bobby loved kittens, and how he barely touched them as he petted them, murmuring "Pitty, soft, lil kitty." With care, he removed the offending tape and delivered the kitty to the shopkeeper, who grinned his thanks and handed it over to a boy dressed in a Western Union uniform, evidently his son, though he looked like a rather weak carbon copy.

Business was dull and the store owner wanted to strike up a conversation to while away the time.

"Yer new around here, ain't yuh?" he asked. "Working over at the new pipe line? Watcher name?"

Paul nodded his head and murmured his name in answer to these questions. Remembering the letter, he started to leave, when the boy, who had looked up at the mention of Paul's name, ran to him and asked excitedly, "Are you P. A. Nelson? You are? Well, I just left a telegram at 5023 Hickory for you."

A dozen thoughts, all bad, flashed before Paul's eyes before he realized he was walking toward his boarding house. He never should have left Margo. Anything might have happened. The wire read, "BOBBY DEVELOPED PNEUMONIA. GRAVELY ILL IN MERCY HOSPITAL. PLEASE COME. MARGO."

Two thousand miles—two thirds of the continent. A sense of aloneness and helplessness settled heavily over him. The fates were certainly down on him.

He straightened up, squared his shoulders. "I'll get there," Paul wired back grimly, and briefly, for he lacked even enough money to finance the bus trip. He collected his few belongings, and was silently thankful for once that he had no more.

After scribbling a short note to Mrs. Callahan, his landlady, and leaving the telegram as confirmation of his plight, he set out—for Chicago. Never had the distance seemed so great.

For two hours Paul waited on the highway just outside the city limits. He hadn't counted on this. There was no point in walking on. The spot where he was standing offered the best opportunity for picking up a ride. He cursed Saturday nights and their gay, carefree crowds of pleasure-seekers. He had just confined his last cigarette to the scattered pile of stubs

on the road before him when a fruit truck slowed to a stop next to him. The driver leaned down.

"I can take you about thirty miles up the road, bud. Okay?"

Thirty miles was a drop in the bucket, but nonetheless, a drop that hadn't been there before.

At the end of two days, Paul was over seven hundred miles from Chicago and Bobby. He had found that the letter to his wife which he was never to mail was in his pocket. Now the five dollars were spent. Nothing was left for him but hope and faith in the kindness of travelers towards hitchhikers, and both were waning fast. He was tortured by not knowing, not being able to find out how his baby was. A race against—he shuddered and turned his thoughts to one thing, getting to Chicago.

That night the police of San Francisco and every point between there and Chicago were hunting Paul Nelson to give him a teletype message his wife had given to Chicago officers.

The message, "Paul Nelson: Your wife needs you badly. Get to the nearest American Airlines office immediately, where a ticket to Chicago awaits you. The funeral for your son will be held tomorrow. He died Sunday."



## THE FLAMINGO

## SMALL SNARE

I have been with you too long  
In a closed room,  
Accustomed my feet to walking  
In the gloom

Of unfamiliar corners; breathed  
The soft air,  
Warm and dark, in a small room,  
In a small snare

Of my own making. I love you well,  
Know your face,  
Recall the shadow of your eyes  
In that space

Of night when some few words  
Unspoken yet  
Are surface-close. So well I know,  
That when I get

My face against the window glass,  
Quick-breathing, free,  
And rub the darkness from the pane,  
I will not see.

There is not light enough, no brightness  
To consume  
This dark. I have been with you too long  
In a closed room.

PEGGY HUDGINGS

## DECEMBER REVOLUTION

*A Play in One Act*

TAD CIST

**T**HE time is Monday, December 30, 1940, which is the day on which the history books tell us that twelve men were executed in Guatemala City for leading a rebellion against the government of General Jorge Ubico.

The scene is the office of General Ubico. It is severely decorated and well lit by broad windows, center. There is a huge desk at right behind which the General is seated, and the door left, is the only entrance to the room. There is a large wall calendar in full view of the audience, it is of the type having a sheet for each day.

The General is a weather-beaten hard-bitten individual of late middle age. He is busy at his desk when the curtain rises. His aide, Francisco, who enters directly is lean and perhaps forty-five. His face is hard and his eyes have a cynic's twinkle.

Aide enters and with a wry smile tears off calendar day Sunday, December 29th.

**AIDE:** (With mock obsequiousness) May your Grace find continued health and happiness in the coming year.

**UBICO:** Your own thick hide is hardly bullet-proof you know.

**AIDE:** Yes I have had evidence to suggest that you're right. but these would-be liberators are so poor they can hardly do a thorough job on your own great carcass. Perhaps if you paid your University professors a little better they could afford a more lavish and inclusive revolution.

**UBICO:** They could always find some worthy benefactor to finance your extermination. Unless of course, they decided to use you in their own beneficent government.

**AIDE:** Minister of the Interior to Donandes and his gang.

**UBICO:** I'm sure you wouldn't let a small change of government interfere with your breakfast. —I take it the curfew and the blue uniforms gave our high minded friends something to think about during the long night.

**AIDE:** If they didn't think, they were asleep; they had no alternatives. Are you having them brought here?

**UBICO:** I want a few words with them. You can learn by listening to your enemies, you know. And this professor: he's a strange conspirator after the petty grafters and



disgruntled half-breeds that we've had to deal with. A professor of ancient history and a handful of students. The only politician in the bunch is Miguele.

AIDE: Yes, I was surprised to find your son-in-law among them. One would scarcely expect such a — ah "practical" man to be wearing the robes of the prophet.

UBICO: He was getting a very good salary.

AIDE: Perhaps the opportunities for graft seemed better under a less efficient regime.

UBICO: Perhaps. (Pause) Tell me, Francisco, why are there always these flaming prophets who destroy with words the best that man has built? They become the pawns of evil. You remember how the parliament was, graft and incompetence, but now that that is seven years behind and well forgotten, these professors begin to dream of liberty and rule by the people, and the worms crawl back out of the sewers and strike up the National Anthem and dangle freedom and political offices in front of these stupid, staring half-breeds.

AIDE: A semblance of democracy is sometimes a useful thing. The United States diplomats don't like the smell of corpses when they pay their respects to their liberty-loving brothers.

UBICO: Democracy. God, even the United States is rotting in its lovely democracy, and they send us diplomats with a brief-case and a line about freedom, and ask us to follow them in the paths of righteousness for their dollars sake. I'd like to see their faces when I tell them I've put twelve men in front of a firing squad for making too much noise about liberty and freedom.

AIDE: You're going to shoot Miguele, your son-in-law, with the rest?

UBICO: Yes. I only wish I could let the rest go. I was an idealist once myself, you know.

(Telephones)

The chief of police. Yes. (waits) This is Ubico. I want you to round up those twelve men you've been watching. Yes, immediately. They did? You have a great aptitude for just that sort of thing. Find them, or you may have to take their place. (to aide) He says they rounded them up but Miguele and Donandes were missing. The leaders

go free and I have to shoot ten students whose only fault is they've read too much Plato.

AIDE: Why don't you let them go? Their teeth are pulled.

UBICO: I owe my generalship and my relatively unpunctured carcass to my reputation as a son-of-a-bitch. I can't afford to let them forget it, or instead of a handful to kill, I'd have a dozen bloody revolts on my hands.

(There is a knock)

Yes, come in.

(Donandes enters. He too is tall with a thoughtful, sensitive face.)

DONANDES: Your excellency, and my good friend, the minister of internal affairs.

AIDE: Donandes!

UBICO: You're just in time to save the taxpayers a few quetzales. Your idealism is really above the ordinary.

DONANDES: I didn't come here for the sole purpose of being shot; I want a few words with you. — If we may be trusted alone?

(exit Aide on nod from Ubico)

UBICO: Nothing you say will save you, my friend.

DONANDES: I know that well. Your reputation is hardly based on clemency. Still I may have arguments that will reach you.

UBICO: I always listen to my enemies.

DONANDES: These boys whom I have led. You know them all. They are students at the University, and their age is one for dreams. I had them in my classes, and we read Plato together and dreamed the dreams that man is heir to, (along with filth, and tyranny — and death) until it seemed possible to build the structure of these dreams here in Guatemala.

UBICO: So you turned plotters, eh?

DONANDES: Yes. And since we required the services of one who knew his way around we gathered Miguele, your son-in-law, into our fold. He took advantage of our faith and used us, as we feared, he would, and failed us at the last, and left us to pay the price alone. Must clean ideals always be prostituted by expediency?

UBICO: You seem disillusioned, my friend.

DONANDES: What I have come to beg is freedom for my students. You will no doubt find it necessary to make



them aliens, but can't you see that nothing will be served by killing them. Their lives are scarcely run; and I have been their leader.

UBICO: Though you may doubt it, I was once as much an idealist as you, though what you call expediency has forced me into other paths of thought. When you have been a general and sacrificed a thousand or ten thousand men for some cold piece of ground, you get a perspective that's different from the Nazarine's.

DONANDES: (dryly) No doubt.

UBICO: (angry) You've never had to compromise. You live in your quiet back-water where you can enshrine your fragile ideals and are spared the hard decisions that would break them, — or you. You'll never know how hard it is to condemn a man. I've had to. (Pause) Now as to these boys you speak of, — I can see no alternative but to kill them.

DONANDES: I am sorry to have made the mistake of addressing you as a man. I will speak to you as a general.

UBICO: If you aren't careful, it will be your soul and not your mouth that does the talking.

DONANDES: These words suggest the text that I wish to commend to the attention of the general. To this date your murders have lain quite still underground. Orontes, the politician, Jose, the half-breed, and the rest you trod across on the way to this lonely sinecure you hold.

UBICO: (Speaking into the inter-office telephone which is on his desk) Send over a man from the guard-house right away.

DONANDES: These men were quite forgotten by your loyal subjects. They were unromantic and callous and bad and their souls were easily stilled by your lead. But these boys you plan to kill, their souls are not so tired of living that they will be muted by your fire. (Guard enters) They will speak on, and in the language of the generals, they will give rise to a wave of popular resentment. You will be able to maintain yourself only at the cost of increasing vigilance and the execution of more boys from the University, and so on, until you are too old, and your aides too corrupt, to deal with them, and then the whole structure will fall. You, a general in your prime, should see this and not be too old to change your mind.

UBICO: Speaking as a general, of course, I'll think over what you've said. As for you, you shall be shot. (To guard) Take this man and lock him up and have the firing squad ready tomorrow for a public execution.

(Exit guard and Donandes)

(There is a short pause, then door bursts open and Miguele enters, winded)

UBICO: So you are come, Miguele? I hardly expected to see you unaccompanied.

MIGUELE: If you don't mind, general, I have something very important to tell you.

UBICO: (With a trace of sarcasm) Sit down, my friend.

MIGUELE: It's this. There's been a plot against the government. A bunch of wild-eyed kids led by a professor at the University were going to kill you and overthrow the government. — I know you don't take such things seriously, but this is no idle rumor.

UBICO: Who are these conspirators and what are their names?

MIGUELE: There are ten students led by Donandes the professor. I have their names here.

UBICO: How do you come by this information?

MIGUELE: I keep my ears open. I know their plans too. They plan to get into this office at night and meet you here when you come in in the morning, knowing you always get here before any of your staff. They were going to shoot you and overthrow the government.

UBICO: How do you know these plans, friend?

MIGUELE: Because two days ago Donandes asked me to come in with them.

UBICO: And why should Donandes, a professor of ancient history, want to "overthrow" the government as you call it?

MIGUELE: Listen: He puts up a front like he's a sap, and wants to reform the world, but he's just as anxious to get his hand on the grab bag as anybody else.

UBICO: (He buzzes, and a guard enters) Send to the guard-house for Donandes.

MIGUELE: Donandes? Have you got him here? (Tries to get his bearings and then takes a breath in feigned relief.) Then everything's all right; if you got him there's nothing to worry about except a lot of kids without a leader.



(Pause) He may try to tell you I was in on it, to save his skin. (laughs) But you could always tell when a man was lying. (Pause) Why would I have come here to tell you about it before the thing had come off?

UBICO: As to your motives for coming here, they don't seem hard to explain. Your filial devotion brought you here. Your love for your wife and her father, no doubt. Also perhaps you wanted to live.

MIGUELE: I'm afraid I don't get your drift.

UBICO: I'm sure you aren't so simple as that, friend.

(Guard brings in Donandes and remains for scene)

Donandes, tell me, you who know the ways of God, what shall I do with this man?

DONANDES: How is he come here?

UBICO: He has come here like a frightened half-breed to tell me of your plot and claim everlasting devotion for saving "the government."

DONANDES: He doesn't surprise me. I suppose he goes free, so as not to injure your reputation for having taken such a thing into your family.

UBICO: It was my daughter who took him in, not I. (Pause)

DONANDES: If you have had your pleasure I will leave. I prefer my cell to such company. (Phone rings)

UBICO: Wait. (Takes up phone and speaks into it) Yes. Good. Bring them right along. (Turns to Donandes again) I asked you here for my education. I want you to judge this man.

DONANDES: I leave him to your most tender consideration. Nothing I say can make any difference.

UBICO: On the contrary, you are the sole custodian of his future. I want to see how you men of scruples handle such matters.

DONANDES: Haven't you been reading comic operas? Judgments aren't in my line, General, but unless I'm mistaken you're not so squeamish. Go ahead and have him shot and don't try to make your dead men do your onerous business.

UBICO: The shoe seems to be on the other foot, doesn't it?

DONANDES: The Mikado will have his little pleasantries.

UBICO: And as you would have it. who *would* judge this man?

DONANDES: (Indignantly) Laws. The impartial machin-

ery of justice. The right of human beings to live must be beyond the caprice of one man.

UBICO: The impartial machinery of justice? Do you remember the courts under the parliament? — But you wouldn't remember — that was seven years ago. It's either the consistent caprice of one man or the degrading venality of the courts. (With an appraising look) You won't find any caprice in your sentence.

(There is a knock on the door)

Come in.

(A guard brings in ten youths about twenty-two years old. Ubico to guard,) Here, take this man out with you and lock him up.

(exit guard and Miguele)

Well, we come face to face. You gentlemen are no doubt acquainted with my quaint custom, a trifle barbarous perhaps, but full of local color. I execute all conspirators against my government. Do any of you suggest any reason why you shouldn't be shot?

(One man, gathering consensus of group)

PRISONER: According to your laws, we must be shot.

UBICO: Well, Ernando, and what of your codes? Have you no precepts advising leniency to traitors?

PRISONER: (hesitantly at first) I can't speak for the others, but when I got in this thing, I expected that if we failed it would be your justice and not ours that would prevail, and since it undoubtedly will, I prefer not to throw my ideals at your feet.

UBICO: (disgusted) Ideals. What good are your hot-house ideals that can't stand the light of day?

Very well, since you refuse to speak, I'll have to follow my own crude formula.

DONANDES: Wait a minute. These boys can't speak They're bewildered by your attitude and the heart is out of them. They've lost their way; their books never taught them how to bandy words with comic opera Mikados and go off stage smiling. They're too young and too much living should be ahead of them for them to take much pleasure in your little games. They're frightened and bewildered, and you have the cruelty to poke your lewd fingers through the tinsel of their faith. Let them go and they will trouble you no more.



UBICO: You forget; I must be beyond caprice. When I sit in judgment I am no longer a man but the state. General Ubico, the Mikado, as you have it. How can I send these boys away? You know the stand the state takes in such matters.

DONANDES: You will weaken the government by executing these boys.

UBICO: But how can I abrogate my codes? Surely that would be caprice?

DONANDES: Your codes exist only to serve the state. You can't follow them against the interests of the state.

UBICO: Your arguments begin to sound very much like my own. The state is all; the individual has no rights that conflict with the state. Isn't that what you are saying.

DONANDES: One has to — (Realizing that he cannot risk saying this) (tight lipped) Will you release these boys for reasons of expediency?

UBICO: We'll see. (turning to prisoner) You heard your leader? Will you deny what he says?

PRISONER: Yes. I will.

UBICO: Do you realize what you're doing?

PRISONER: Yes.

UBICO: (laughing softly) Well, well, I should say you have a lot to learn, though you will no doubt, tell me that it is I who have learned too much. At least, you'll have time to find out which of us is right. You're free. Go now, and learn your lessons. Remind me to your father, Ernando. (partly to himself) I knew him well.

PRISONER: (flustered) Yes, sir, I will.

(Exeunt)

UBICO: Thank you for your lesson in government, Donandes. I'm glad we understand each other so well.

DONANDES: I think we do although we disagree.

UBICO: Yes, we still disagree, don't we. (Pause) Well, I'm sorry our ways part. You will be missed by your students.

DONANDES: (dryly) Not to mention my wife and two boys.

UBICO: I'll see that your wife is looked after and that your boys go to the University. That's a fine lad, Juan, your oldest.

DONANDES: (sadly) Yes. He enters the University next

year. I'd hoped to have him in my classes.

(There is a pause, awkward)

UBICO: Well, I don't think there's anything more to say — (nods to guard)

DONANDES: Wait, I want to ask one favor. It's a bit romantic I'll admit to object to the way you die, still its the last act by which we express our highly valued uniqueness, and people have a way of regarding it as significant. If I am able to choose, I will kill myself before I allow you to execute me hand in hand, so to speak, with Miguele.

UBICO: (suddenly) I believe we can grant your wish and at the same time improve the morals of the people of Guatemala.

(to guard) You'll have Donandes face the firing squad in the usual manner. Miguele, however, you will shoot in the back. (to Donandes) I think the public will understand that.

*Curtain.*

DAMOCLES, XENOPHON, AND THREE OTHERS

Five parasangs from nowhere  
I remained an infinite time  
And stroked the edge of a knife  
With my bare hand.  
The blood fled from my body  
And I was uplifted.

The plains are broad  
And as I crawl  
Back over the  
Slippery track  
Of ancient days  
I realize how like all  
Men are.

The tenuous thread of Damocles' life  
Was the tender skein that held the knife.

We are three runners  
Bringing fantastic garlands.  
We are couriers of madness  
Winging out of far lands.  
Hear the salpinx-sound  
Of glorious war!  
We are the tailors, decking  
The new-made graves.

How flighty are the angels  
When they roam  
The bright skies over Abydos.

WALLACE SHULTZ

FROM DARK STREETS  
DADE THORNTON

I WENT into the "city" again, this time I was absolutely intent upon doing it. I had a full weekend with no contaminating engagements except a meeting of the New York Herpatological Society. I killed time during the day by riding the Seventh Avenue down to Fulton Street. Then walking over to Wall Street and thus up and down, stopping in all the remnant leather companies observing the little Greek proprietors with their leathery faces, chalk white in the dim light of their stockrooms and their hands worn smooth by rubbing them together. Their only intentions are a servile state of abject slavishness as they try to divert your attention from a \$.50 cut of tooling calf to a more expensive hide of Russian fine grain. The street lights came on and the delicatessens and saloons begin to fill, the first with those who are in the habit of eating and drinking to live, the second with those who live to drink and perhaps eat an occasional crust. By various means I got to the only spot in the world where a fast moving shadow cuts across some bum's face as a dirty elevated rumbles overhead, casting more dirt upon the teaming path. Raucous shouts can be heard from every other door, punctuated sharply by the slam of those same doors. The evening was still young! I went up to the third floor of Louey Roo's World Wide Reptile Supply House and borrowed Louey Junior's working clothes, leaving my own carefully placed in a far removed closet. When I again emerged upon the street, I looked a good deal more natural and at home. The populace ceased to stare at me and I wandered down the block and out of sight. A sign, Supper \$.05, attracted my attention so I forced my way through the entrance and took my place at the long well littered table.

"What'll you have, Bud?"

"What ever you got for a nickel!"

Before me was placed a slice of bread and a large cup of black coffee. a tremendous bowl of soup, a dirty looking pot of rice and a spoon.

"You get a mug of beer with that, Kid—want it now?"

With that he put a stein filled with a brown appearing beverage, devoid of foam, and distinctly showing traces of grease on the surface before me. It tasted like Hell. That's the way



they eat when they live in the Bowery, or am I being too all encompassing?

Noises rumbled up and down the street even at this hour. I languished in a secluded spot between two pillars and watched the people come by. A drunken sailor with a girl nearly as far gone as he was, swinging from his arm, went loudly by. Two old men stopped and sat down on the curb in front of me to argue about the economic situation. Their haranguing could be heard for blocks. Even the sidewalk shivered at their choice of language. There are two kinds of swearing—one is forming the words, the other forming opinions. The former is ugly while the latter is beautiful. Nevertheless, the beauty in their opinions did naught but evoke a prayer for their souls. A box fell off the back of a truck as it slammed along under the El. It broke open and a couple of dozen cans slid to the curb. They were gone before the truck was out of sight. One little kid was leaning against a lamppost, the torn can against his lips as he drank the tomatoes. In his blouse were bulges where he had secreted a couple more cans. A taxi rushed past and in the distance I heard the clang of an ambulance as it pursued its sombre and incessant course throughout the maze of New York City.

I stared for awhile then turned and walked farther down the street. My courage was leaving me and a nauseating feeling had settled in my stomach. The sign I was looking for appeared, suspended in the reflected night heat. I turned slowly, gancing at a clock before I went through the door and up the rickety stairs. Ten minutes to twelve was the time. A bent old man answered the door at my knock.

"I got only nine cents," I told him.

"What do you want here then kid, my sign says ten cents—at that it's the lowest priced in the city."

"Well, I don't take up much room and I won't cause no trouble!"

"Come on in then but don't come running to me if someone boots you out a their way."

He pointed down the hall and said, "That room there is the only room that ain't filled."

I heard low mumbles on every side as I walked down the hall. Someone screamed in the dark and my blood turned to water. I yanked open the door and nearly vomited at the sight that greeted my eyes. Spread out on the floor of a room about 30x20 were about forty dirty mats and on almost everyone a hulking

derelict of a man was either snoring drunkenly, or was restlessly rolling over and over or staring vacantly into space. Right before me a man with a dirty blue shirt tucked into a soiled and rumpled black coat was sitting, his arms hung limply at his side and his blood-shot eyes stared moodily at me, as though I were responsible for his plight. Suddenly, he laughed piercingly and said, "Fools, a newcomer—welcome, oh Lamb of God." I shambled around him and made my way to a mat in a far corner. As I started to sit down a muffled voice right beside me said, "A man died in that pile of straw last week. better sleep on the one on the other side of me, Kid." I shivered and sat gone as he was, swinging from his arm, went loudly by. Two old down. Light from one of the Elevateds sent a beam through the tiny window near the top diagonally down until it bathed the ghastly face of a drunk and weak-mouthed man slumped against a wall in the ugly yellow glow. Every few minutes he would moan and his facial muscles twitched spasmodically. Lying next to him was a little man with beady eyes who watched him intently. As I watched I saw him try three times to extract something from the drunkard's coat pocket, each time the bum's hand brushed him off. From out of the darkness someone said sharply, "Why don't you nail him one then get it, Bill."

"Oh, the Hell with him," said Bill.

The man next to me said, "Nice, Kid, isn't it?"

There was a long silence broken only by the groans of the poor souls whose only comfort night after night was a drunken sleep on the thin mat spread out on the hard floor. I wondered what they did for covering in the winter but I was afraid to ask.

Suddenly, the silence was broken by a strangled cry. My heart jumped to my throat as my eyes focused in the gloom just in time to see a man drop a hypodermic needle on the floor. Tears were streaming from his eyes and his shoulders shook convulsively. From another part of the room came the sound of uncontrolled laughter.

It rose and fell in the dark room for perhaps five minutes although time passed slowly in there.

The voice by my side said, "Dope!"

A reflex made my face contort.

An undertone of mumbling in an even key had been coming from the center of the room. At first I didn't notice it, then I just paid no attention to it. When finally the incessant buzz



attracted my sensuous attention I was astounded to see a man kneeling and apparently reading in the dark from a little Bible. Then his words took form and I found he was quoting from the Scriptures.

More time elapsed and I asked the individual by my side if he had been coming here long. He told me that he was once a dock foreman but that he was framed out of his job and as long as everyone was against him he wasn't going to get kicked out of any more jobs. He said he lived by stealing parts off cars. In case I needed money and a friend he offered me the job of general assistant.

The door was thrown open and in stumbled another disreputable derelict. He staggered over toward a straw heap near the dope fiend and told the inhabitant to get the Hell out because that was his personal place of rest. The fellow got slowly to his feet and suddenly laid him cold with a beautiful right hook. He then went back to sleep, the only peaceful person in the entire place.

In the morning, I was awakened by the various shufflings and putterings as the wretches arose and gathered their belongings preparatory to going out for another day of panhandling or petty philandering.

And that's why I always say, "It's a great life if you don't weaken, and why those that add "and more fun if you do" don't know what they're talking about.

## GOD'S BABY

CECIL BUTT

**S**PRING brings more than the warmth of sunshine to the tenements. For in spring the windows long shut against the winter are thrown open and the women lean from them to bask in a warmth of communal tolerance and understanding. The children are lost for a time without the snow to fight with, or the icy sidewalks to slip and slide over. But soon they form gangs which roam the city to find adventure in construction crews, in junk piles, in the darkness under the wharfs. On Sunday afternoons the men sit beside their wives at the windows and plan for the summer excursions. When summer itself is come they will gather on the steps below, but in early spring the pallid sun doesn't push much warmth down between the tall buildings and the stone steps are too cold for sitting.

Mrs. Magruder was the sole adult in the tenement whom spring did not bring to the windows. "I much prefer," she would state in her firm way, "To climb a few steps and have what I say understood than to crane my neck out of joint and shout to the wind."

Once that the women could remember she had called to the windows. That was the time she noticed, as she noticed everything about the tenement, that Mr. Carson on the first floor had not gone to work for several days. Fearing he might be sick Mrs. Magruder took Em'ly, the janitoress, and went to his room. They found Carson slumped across the bed, his shirt pulled open at the front, a half full whisky bottle on the floor beside him. He was dead.

Mrs. Magruder had shouted up the towering side of the tenement then, and the reedy shrillness of her voice made uneasy those who heard it. For the women were accustomed to think of Mrs. Magruder as a reflection of human order and stability. But by the time they arrived Mrs. Magruder, her grey hair bunned smoothly on the back of her head, was busy straightening the room, calmly, precisely. And soon their vague fears were forgotten completely as it was Mrs. Magruder who arranged for the funeral, who had Mr. Hiebitz, the barber, come shave him: it was she who persuaded five or six of the women to go with her to the undertaking parlor while the minister read the service. They hadn't wanted to go because they thought



Carson deserved little from decent people, being nothing but a drunkard. But as Mamie Scowitz told her husband, "There's no argument with Mrs. Magruder when she makes her mind up."

The women suspected that although she would not answer from the window Mrs. Magruder did not object to overhearing the conversations of others. Certain it was that they could seldom bring her fresh gossip. Ellie Costello was always telling of the time her husband had returned with news of a better job. Ellie had run upstairs to tell Mrs. Magruder first of all. But before she said a word Mrs. Magruder asked her how Joe liked his new job.

Perhaps the children told Mrs. Magruder. Her room was their favorite rendezvous. Once a week she fried doughnuts for them, and she often brought home games for them to play in her living room. But the children said they liked her room because it was so cool. It was peculiar, that coolness. It may have been the slack, easy furniture, or the fresh tints on the walls, or it may have been the unhurried, unruffled attitude of the room. There was never the sense of frantic, sweaty preparation for supper, never the fierce clash of dishes being washed in time for a movie. The women came as often as the children. Yet the room was never crowded. For when too many came, some would leave, as if by tacit agreement.

It couldn't have happened, the women agreed later, save in the early spring. For then each one was so occupied with apartment cleaning, with packing winter things, with attending schoolday exercises that she didn't have time to think of anything else. Always Mrs. Magruder had helped with the work, here or there, always willing though never obtrusive. But when she didn't come out of her room no one worried, for each figured she was with another. The children too were busy because the time they weren't in school or helping in the apartment they wanted to spend in the crisp yet balmy air, which made their spines tingle with remembrance of summers past.

It was Johnny Sarigs who found out. But Johnny was a brownfaced Armenian scamp to whom the fantasies he created were often more real than the things others believed. His mother and Mrs. Entzminger who were washing clothes together laughed at his tear-drenched earnestness.

"Ahh, so it is she is sick," his mother mocked, curling a long

woolen stocking wetly around his neck. "Here, cool her head with this."

But when he continued to cry she shewed him away and promised him a spanking if he came back before the washing was out. Mrs. Entzminger who had no children said that if he had been her child she would have taught him to behave right then and there.

Johnny, however, persuaded some of the other children to go with him. And this time his mother listened for it was Nitro Sargis and the older ones who were talking.

"But she wanted us to tell you," concluded Nito, "that she wasn't sick, just resting."

"Guess she has a right to rest," Mrs. Entzminger commented, "what with all the chasing about she does."

Mrs. Sargis, though, was worried, for it was not like Mrs. Magruder to stay in bed, particularly not in the spring. So Mrs. Sargis dried her hands and hurried to Mrs. Magruder's room. Fearing lest she miss something, Mrs. Entzminger followed.

The children had left the door ajar so they entered without knocking. For a moment they hesitated in the front room. For all they knew she might have been sick for days, really sick. But when they peered into the snug little bedroom a sigh of relief came to their lips. Mrs. Magruder was lying peacefully inert in her three-quarter bed. The flush of fever was not in her cheeks, nor was her breathing harsh and forced.

Hearing them on the threshold she bade them come in. Her voice, though faint, was as crisp and as purposeful as ever. But when they came nearer they noticed that her face was pale and that her eyelids were slow and heavy to raise.

"I told the children not to bother you," Mrs. Magruder said. "Go finish your washing."

"We'll not leave you sick and all alone," said Mrs. Entzminger.

"I am not sick," Mrs. Magruder snapped. "I was tired out and now I'm resting."

"A sin and abomination it is to rest in the spring," cried Mrs. Stargis.

"Laziness is the prime luxury of age," answered Mrs. Magruder.

"An insult to God it is, but," Mrs. Sargis continued, softening, "Now maybe we can fix for you like always for us you have."



And fix for her they did. A steady stream of delicacies began to pour in. There were sweet little Jewish rolls with brown sugar, butter, and walnuts melted together and poured over the top. There were thick yellow low pastries with creamy white filling, and paper thin slices of spiced meat whose composition Mrs. Arkhah insisted was an Assyrian state secret. But soon it was evident that Mrs. Magruder was not getting well. Her face became more grey than pale and the bones stood forth in sharp angularity. Twice she had fallen while out of bed. The women arranged for someone to be with her all the time. Overriding her objections, they called in old Dr. Malbert, who punched her, and probed her, and looked at her tongue.

"No hope," he told them, pocketing his five dollars and preparing to leave." She's like an old piece of machinery whose parts have worn down too fine to hit together.

They refused to believe this for Mrs. Magruder was only fifty-nine, the doctor himself was probably as old. So they decided, each paying a part, to send her to one of the uptown doctors. For her share Mrs. Entzminger provided her husband's grocery truck in whose front seat Mrs. Magruder rode to Dr Grayson's office.

Dr. Grayson took blood tests, had samples analyzed, checked her metabolism.

"Pernicious anemia," he told Mrs. Entzminger and Mrs. Sargis who had come for the final report. He gave them several bottles of food concentrates and told them to make sure Mrs. Magruder followed the directions on the labels.

"But the most important thing," he admonished them, "is to keep her mind free from worry. Such a condition as this is often caused by prolonged emotional strain."

They saw to it that Mrs. Magruder took the food capsules according to schedule. And they helped Mrs. Sargis with her own housework so that she might sit beside Mrs. Magruder in the afternoon. For nothing seemed to cheer the old lady as much as the presence of her stocky Armenian friend.

They talked incessantly, those two. And they laughed a lot for the dry, penetrating humor of Mrs. Magruder found a ready foil in the rich earthy wisdom of the younger woman. They remembered that the spring Mrs. Magruder had come to the tenament. She had been more erect then, and her lips had been stiff and uncompromising. Mrs. Magruder smiled; that was because everything had been so strange.

There were the long summer evenings at twilight; the entire tenement gathered on the steps. The women sat in one group with their babies in their laps or on the steps beside them. The children played hopping games on the sidewalk, or tried to catch ball in the gathering dusk. The men, drawn by their common interests, sat apart, but sometimes their harsh appreciation of a joke would break through and shatter the restless whimpering of the babies and the low cooing of the pigeons from the facade of the building across the street. In the far corner of the steps colored Jim and Em'ly huddled together in a world of their own. And occasionally the mellow peal of their laughter would cause everyone to smile softly in unreasoning concord.

These things the women remembered: these and the smell of meals long since eaten, of bananas ripening in a nearby room; there was the sweetish breath of the babies mingled with the tang of asphalt from the streets, and permeating it all through and through was the lush fecundity of summer itself.

The only reason she liked the winter, Mrs. Magruder admitted, was that it was the time the babies came. For Mrs. Magruder was the tenement's unofficial midwife. No one, not even Em'ly, could have a baby without her. It was always she who gave the first washing, she who handed the new baby to the mother. And as they talked Mrs. Magruder's thin, ascetic face wrinkled in sly reverence of the secrets women share with nature.

They talked of many things, but mostly it was of the tenement, that was the home of both. Once in awhile Mrs. Sargis would tell of some prank of her girlhood, or she would sing queer rollicking Armenian songs which made Mrs. Magruder think of brown elves dancing on a green lawn. But Mrs. Magruder seldom mentioned her life before she had come to the tenement. Most of the women knew that she had taken the title "Mrs." for convenience, and that she'd never married because she had had to care for an invalid sister. But she had never told them why she had decided to come to the city alone. Nor did Mrs. Sargis care to know. It was enough for her lovable peasant heart that the pale trace of color had come to the cheeks of her friend, and that she could stay out of bed more and more without feeling faint.

When the tenement learned that Mrs. Magruder would soon be well they planned a celebration. They would all meet on the steps early Sunday afternoon before the warmth left the streets.



The children would put on some skits they had learned at school. Signor Pasco, who sang in the chorus at the Metropolitan, promised to sing. Mrs. Etzminger was to recite "Boots" in her strong almost masculine voice. But the crowning touch was the invitation which Emil Swanset, the poet of the tenement, sent to Dr. Malbert, asking him to come to a party given in honor of the "worn out piece of machinery."

The women came to tell Mrs. Magruder about the joke. They laughed until they choked, then they sat silently staring at each other until the subtlety of it made them laugh again. But when the women had gone and Mrs. Sargis and Mrs. Magruder were alone, Mrs. Sargis was startled by the sadness which crept into the face of her friend, pulling down the corners of her mouth, making her eyes tired and strained.

"What is the matter?"

"There is nothing the matter," Mrs. Margruder replied firmly.

"Perhaps it is you are tired."

"No."

"Perhaps you should go to bed early to rest up for tomorrow."

"I am not sleepy."

"You must be worrying then."

Mrs. Magruder laughed rather bitterly, "What could I possibly have to worry about?"

Mrs. Sargis rose and took Mrs. Magruder's arm.

"Here, you are much too tired. It's bed for you."

"No, I start thinking when I go to bed?"

"Thinking?"

"Just thinking," said Mrs. Magruder slowly, "that none of this is right. I ought to have died. What right have I to hang on so tight to life?"

"What right? I don't understand."

"Listen," Mrs. Bagruder gestured toward the window into which was pouring a babbel of women's voices. "Listen to them. They sound happy, don't they. And it's because they earn the right to live. They raise children, they take care of their husbands. Even if some of them don't do a good job at least they do something. Their lives have purposes, have reason. They deserve life, they deserve happiness. But as for me I deserve what I get . . . emptiness. I create nothing, I help with nothing."

"You silly one. It is you who make them happy."

"I used to tell myself that."

"When they need food you feed them, you give them clothes, you go out to find jobs for them. You give courage and ambition to the young ones, you give strength to the old. Your life you spend making happiness."

"I've never tried to make anyone happy, except myself."

"It's crazy you are tonight."

"No, once I felt that I was helping, that I was teaching others to enjoy the fullness of life. But now I see how foolish I was. I can see clearly, too clearly, that all along I've fooled myself into thinking I was helping others. I've never in my life tried to help anyone else, just myself."

"You never think of yourself at all."

"No? Think, dear friend, think. What do I know of life? What have I learned for myself? I know nothing except what I've learned from them. I've pried on their secrets, I've stolen into their feelings, thoughts, emotions. What I know of love, of joy, of hate I've tasted with their lips, felt with their bodies. I am not a woman. I'm not real, I'm a shadow."

"Hush! It's not true. You must rest."

"I've thought it over and over, I tell you. I live their lives, not mine. I've fooled myself and now I . . . I . . . can't."

Then, abruptly as it had come, the tension drained from her wasted body and she lay exhausted against the back of the chair.

"I'm sorry," she said finally.

Mrs. Sargis didn't answer, but she stretched forth her firm thick hand and gently clasped the thin shoulder of her friend. They sat for a long time in silent communion as the night lights began to shine up from the street below. Clear and distinct they could hear the rap of the policeman's billy as he went by on his rounds. At last the freshening breeze brought dampness from the river and Mrs. Sargis bundled Mrs. Magruder off to bed.

"Rest well," she admonished, "you'll need your strength for the party."

But next morning the party had to be postponed for over-night the faint dawn of color in Mrs. Magruder's cheeks had deepened into the burnished red of fever. Her voice was strained and hoarse but she told them to go on with the party.

"I can enjoy it from here," she said.



Before noon, however, the fever had goaded her frail body into delirium. It was all they could do to hold her under the bed clothes. Dr. Malbert came and administered a sedative.

"Keep her warm and quiet," he said. "She'll be all right when she wakes up. Unless, of course, she has pneumonia."

All afternoon she lay in an insensate coma. There was life only in the sluggish beat of the blue vein in her neck and in the shallow rasp of her breathing. Mrs. Sargis and Mrs. Entzminger shewed the others away for Dr. Malbert had said there had best not be many in the room. The living room, however, was constantly jammed with those coming for news. Two minutes after Mrs. Entzminger announced that Mrs. Magruder had awakened almost the whole tenement was gathered in the room and the corridor outside the door.

"She's very weak," Mrs. Entzminger reassured them, "but she's going to be all right. She wants just one thing. Guess what."

"What?" asked Ellie Costello.

"A baby. She wants to hold a baby. One of 'her babies' she calls them. You know, one of the ones she helped with. Now, Ellie, you could . . ."

"Ralph is asleep," Ellie interposed quickly.

"But the baby would sooth her and Dr. Malbert said she absolutely had to rest. Your baby won't lose enough sleep to hurt him."

But Ellie and the other women remembered that Dr. Malbert had said Mrs. Magruder might have pneumonia. They couldn't take chances with their babies.

"Rest, just rest," Mrs. Sargis crooned to the old lady. "When you're strong enough we'll bring you one of your babies."

"One of mine?" Mrs. Magruder whispered smilingly. "That will be nice."

She lay so still that they thought she had gone to sleep, but, "Could you bring him now?" She asked.

"Better wait 'till you're stronger." Mrs. Sargis answered gently.

"I'm strong enough."

"A little later, perhaps."

"Oh," Mrs. Magruder was silent again, but this time she did not lay still. Her fingers picked at the pillow case and occasionally all of her body twitched with sudden spasms.

"Don't you think we'd better call Dr. Malbert?" Mrs. Entzminger whispered as the spasms increased in intensity.

"It is not her stomach, it is her heart that's sick."

"That's foolishness."

"A little love is what she needs."

"I'm going to get Dr. Malbert," snapped Mrs. Entzminger and headed for the door. But before she reached it there was a quick shuffling outside and suddenly the large body of Em'ly, the janitoress, came in.

"Shshs, Get out!" ordered Mrs. Entzminger.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Sargis.

"I heard Mrs. Magruder wanted a baby to hug," Em'ly said timidly. "Here I brought mine 'cause I know how good it feels to hold your baby when you're feeling bad."

"But Mrs. Magruder might have pneumonia."

Em'ly grinned, "I've lost one out of thirteen, and he was runned over. They is all pretty tough."

Mrs. Magruder did not see him at first, when she did she touched him gingerly as though she dared not believe. Then, believing, she cradled him gently in her arms and pressed his black kinky head tight against her dried up breast.

"Is he one of mine? Yes . . . Yes, I know he is. I can feel it." And she began to rock the baby in her arms. "Mine, mine," she whispered. And her lips moved in time to a soundless lullaby which only she could hear, or perhaps the little black child held close in her bosom heard it too. At any rate he was content to rest there for he did not cry out or become restive, not, that is, until the warmth of life had departed from the arms which cuddled him.

Mrs. Sargis wished she could cry. She had tried hard, but it was useless because she felt too warm and happy inside. She envied Mrs. Entzminger who was crying easily and fluently. From the corner of her eye she observed interestedly the combined effect of tears and perspiration on the broad face of her companion. Of course she ought not to notice such things: she should pay attention to the preacher who, even now, was explaining the infinite mystery and poignant beauty through sadness of death. But in thinking of death Mrs. Sargis could not go beyond the joyous reflection of supreme faith and understanding which she had seen in the face of her friend.

The preacher was almost to "Dust to dust, returneth" when Mrs. Entzminger leaned over and tugged at Mrs. Sargis' arm.



"You know," she whispered aspirately, "It was almost sacrilege the way she died with that child in her arms. You'd think she believed it was her own baby."

"I am sure she did." replied Mrs. Sargis quite firmly.

"Well! And who was the father of a child that black."

"I think, perhaps, it was God."

And the name was echoed and reechoed by the hollow sound of the turf falling on the casket, until sound, echo, casket, and all were gathered in by the richness of the earth.

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### CHRISTMAS 1941

Madonna,  
Tears of Blood  
Cannot erase  
The damage done  
To earth  
This Christmas dawn.  
So hear me now  
And cease your tears  
They do no good  
Today.

Madonna in a shelter dark  
Forgive my foolish word.  
It was so dark I could not see  
Your eyes were shot away.

PEGGY HULT

## THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH

JACK RUTH

**A** light snow brushed against the window pane, a fire blazed in the hearth, and the decorations of holly about the room all combined to make the atmosphere of this New Year's Day a pleasant one. But all was not serene within. Sheila flung a cigarette butt into the fire and immediately took another and put it to her lips. As she struck a match her face showed all the more that tense and worried expression it had held since the wee morning hours. Mitch was unmistakably in a rage; his voice resounded about the room.

"It's a fine son I've got. Doesn't even know when he's had enough. I let him drink—moderately, I said—but no, he can't do anything moderately; he's got to go to extremes in everything he does."

"Well, you certainly don't set any fine example. I wasn't exactly proud of you last night."

"My god, you're not sticking up for him are you—at a time like this?"

Sheila turned her face away. She couldn't bear to look into his eyes, for she did want to stick up for Clayton. She always had in the past when she possibly could. And here she was about to do it again, although she knew well enough that what Clayton had done was not to be forgiven in a hurry. But his father had such a fierce temper, he might be too rash with the boy. "No, of course I'm not sticking up for him; it's just that I want him to have a square deal, and he won't, I'm afraid, unless you calm down a little before serving sentence on him."

"Square deal, you say! Good Lord, woman, you don't seem to realize what this son of yours has done. I'm absolutely disgusted with him myself."

"Yes, Mitch, I'm thoroughly ashamed of him—you know that. It's just upset me so that I don't know what the best solution can be."

With this said Mitch began what was to be a lengthy explanation of what should be done to the boy and why, but Sheila interrupted him, for she heard Clayton's step on the stairs. "Please, Mitch, let me speak to him first. Go on in and eat your breakfast and I'll send him in there in a few minutes."



None too willingly Mitch retreated to the dining room, just as Clayton entered the room. He greeted his mother with a cheery good morning and immediately asked her if she might know where he had put his overcoat.

"Overcoat? Where do you think you're going- You haven't had any breakfast yet."

"Oh, I'm due at Johnny's for egg nogs at eleven; I'm late already." With that he started for the drawing room in search of his coat. Sheila stood dumbfounded—too weak to speak. Was this her Clayton—her own son, being gay and heartless at a time like this. He had done things in the past that she had disapproved of highly, but she had always managed to forgive him. By the time he reappeared, donned in camel's hair, Sheila had experienced a sudden realization that she held little pity for him because of his being utterly void of feeling for his own parents. A lump began to form in her throat as she spoke to him.

"Clayton, I've been feeling sorry for you and worrying about you since four this morning when I found out about your little performance of last night."

"But, Mother, it can be explained—"

"Please listen. I'll only take a few seconds of your valuable time. I had meant to take time to talk to you and try to straighten things out before you spoke to your father; you see, I've been standing your ground again for at least an hour. Rather foolish of me, wasn't it?"

"Don't feel that way about it, Mother. Dad will take care of everything and it will all be straightened out in a day or so."

"Maybe so. Perhaps you'd better ask him about that. I doubt whether he's turned sympathetic to your cause in the last five minutes. As for me, I'm ashamed to call you my son. You'll find your father in the dining room." With this said, Sheila left the room abruptly, not anxious that her son see the tears in her eyes.

Clayton stood as though chained to the floor. His mother had never spoken to him in that way before; he couldn't quite make it out. He dreaded his father's temper, but—oh, well, it would all be forgotten in a few days. He turned the knob of the dining room door—God, how he hated scenes—he wished it was over.

Once on the other side his feet seemed glued to the floor. His father merely looked up from his paper and asked Clayton

if he wouldn't take his coat off and have some breakfast. Clayton followed out his father's instructions in rather a dazed fashion, completely forgetting the egg nog party—completely forgetting everything but the situation at hand. His father's attitude amazed him—so calm—so different. He wasn't quite sure of what he was in for. Was it his place to speak first? If so, what should he say? A few silent seconds went by, and then his father spoke. "Did you have a nice time last night?"

"Dad, please don't act this way! Let's straighten this matter out and forget about it. I can't stand this terribly tense feeling about the house; I'd rather you get angry and throw a fit. I admit I shouldn't have gotten myself mixed up in such a mess, but we were both drunk and didn't know what we were doing."

"I know all that, but what is it you propose I do about it?"

"Well, Kay's of age so her folks can't annul it, but I'm not of age so you can annul it. I'm sure there won't be any hard feelings."

"But, you see, I feel differently about it. Kay has gotten you into a lot of scrapes, and I've fixed it up for you, but this time you're going to have to straighten it out between the two of you. I'm through. I'm not going to annul the marriage."

Mitch got up and walked out of the room, leaving Clayton more amazed than he had ever been in his life. He finished his breakfast in silence.

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## REMINDER

Never hear a wind brush against the night,  
Never hear the rush of wild wings on the air,  
Do not look straight upward at the stars . . .  
Never strain your eyes to stare  
Backward . . . Backward. Never dare  
Stand alone, your hands against that wall  
And feel old sadness with its brushing touch,  
Without knowing . . . without knowing that the call  
Of wind against the night, wings on air,  
Means this hour I have thought of you  
And wished you with me . . . known you dear.

PEGGY HUDGINGS



## SONNET

It is not that this cup of wine I hold  
Is different or darker than the rest,  
Nor that this love, a tale already told,  
Can lure me to a more mysterious quest;

But with the drink the old fires burn anew  
In wasted veins, while perilously sound  
The golden notes long silent trumpets blew  
Before the holy grail was ever found.

There is a change of tide and time but truth  
Remains forever secret and the same.  
Ours is the heritage of Cain, of Ruth.  
Our faith and fear, our wonder and our shame,  
No less disastrous and no less supreme  
Trace yet the pattern of an ancient dream.

E. BROWN

