
Saul Bellow

Dangling Man

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There was a time when people were in the habit of addressing themselves frequently and felt no shame at making a record of their inward transactions. But to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, a weakness, and in poor taste. For this is an era of hardboiled-dom. Today, the code of the athlete, of the tough boy--an American inheritance, I believe, from the English gentleman--that curious mixture of striving, asceticism, and rigor, the origins of which some trace back to Alexander the Great--is stronger than ever. Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them. To a degree, everyone obeys this code. And it does admit of a limited kind of candor, a closemouthed straightforwardness. But on the truest candor, it has an inhibitory effect. Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpracticed in introspection, and therefore badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring.

If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments. To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice. In my present state of demoralization, it has become necessary for me to keep a journal-- that is, to talk to myself and I do not feel guilty of self-indulgence in the least. The hard-boiled are compensated for their silence; they fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room.

In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet, in a very real sense, I am just that. I am alone ten hours a day in a single room. As such places go, it is not bad, though there are the standard rooming-house annoyances: cooking odors, roaches, and peculiar neighbors. But over the years I have become accustomed to all three.

I am well supplied with books. My wife is always bringing new ones in the hope that I will use them. I only wish I could. In the old days, when we had a flat of our own, I read constantly. I was forever buying new books, faster, admittedly, than I could read them. But as long as they surrounded me they stood as guarantors of an extended life, far more precious and necessary than the one I was forced to lead daily. If it was impossible to sustain this superior life at all times, I could at least keep its signs within reach. When it became tenuous I could see them and touch them. Now, however, now that I have leisure and should be able to devote myself to the studies I once began, I find myself unable to read. Books do not hold me. After two or three pages or, as it sometimes happens, paragraphs, I simply cannot go on.

Nearly seven months have gone by since I resigned my job at the Inter-American Travel Bureau to answer the Army's call for induction. I am still waiting. It is a trivial - seeming thing, a sort of bureaucratic comedy trimmed out in red tape. At first, I took that attitude toward it myself. It began as a holiday, a short reprieve, last May, when I was sent home because my papers were not in order. I have lived here eighteen years, but I am still Canadian, a British subject, and although a friendly alien I could not be drafted without an investigation. I waited five weeks and then I asked Mr. Mallender at Inter-American to take me back temporarily, but business had so fallen off, he told me, that he had been obliged to lay off R.M. Trager and Mr. Bishop, in spite of their long years of service, and could not possibly help me. At the end of September I was informed by letter that I had been investigated and approved and again, in accordance with the regulations, I was instructed to present myself for a second blood test.

A month later I was notified that I was in 1a and was told to hold myself ready. Again I waited.

Finally, when November came, I began to inquire and found that through a new clause affecting married men my induction had been postponed. I asked for reclassification, pleading that I had been prevented from working. After three weeks of explaining, I was transferred to 3a. But before I could act (in a week, to be accurate), I was summoned for a new blood test (each holds good for only sixty days). And so I was shifted back. This tedious business has not ended yet, I am sure. It will drag on for another two, three, four months.

Meanwhile, Iva, my wife, has been supporting me. She claims that it is no burden and that she wants me to enjoy this liberty, to read and to do all the delightful things I will be unable to do in the Army. About a year ago, I ambitiously began several essays, mainly biographical, on the philosophers of the Enlightenment. I was in the midst of one on Diderot when I stopped. But it was vaguely understood, when I began to dangle, that I was to continue with them. Iva did not want me to get a job. As a 1a I could not get a suitable one anyhow.

Iva is a quiet girl. She has a way about her that discourages talk. We no longer confide in each other; in fact, there are many things I could not mention to her. We have friends, but we no longer see them. A few live in distant parts of the city. Some are in Washington, and some in the Army; one is abroad. My Chicago friends and I have been growing steadily apart. I have not been too eager to meet them. Possibly some of our differences could be mended.

But, as I see it, the main bolt that held us together has given way, and so far I have had no incentive to replace it. And so I am very much alone. I sit idle in my room, anticipating the minor crises of the day, the maid's knock, the appearance of the postman, programs on the radio, and the sure, cyclical distress of certain thoughts.

I have thought of going to work, but I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to use my freedom and have to embrace the flunkydome of a job because I have no resources - in a word, no character. I made an attempt to enlist in the Navy last time I was reclassified, but induction, it seems, is the only channel for aliens. There is nothing to do but wait, or dangle, and grow more and more dispirited. It is perfectly clear to me that I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will. But the seven months delay is only one of the sources of my harassment.

Again, I sometimes think of it as the backdrop against which I can be seen swinging. It is still more. Before I can properly estimate the damage it has done me I shall have to be cut down.

I have begun to notice that the more active the rest of the world becomes, the more slowly I move, and that my solitude increases in the same proportion as its racket and frenzy. This morning Tad's wife in Washington writes that he has flown to North Africa. In all my life I have never felt so stock-still. I can't even bring myself to go to the store for tobacco, though I would enjoy a smoke. I will wait. And simply because Tad is now landing in Algiers or Oran or already taking his first walk in the Casbah - we saw Pepe le Moko together last year. I am honestly pleased for his sake, not envious. But the feeling persists that while he rockets to Africa and our friend Stillman travels in Brazil, I grow rooted to my chair. It is a real, a bodily feeling. I will not even try to rise. It may be that I could get up and walk around the room or even go to the store, but to make the effort would put me in a disagreeable state. This will pass if I ignore it. I have always been subject to such hallucinations. In the middle of winter, isolating a wall with sunlight on it, I have been able to persuade myself, despite the surrounding ice, that the month was July, not February.

Similarly, I have reversed the summer and made myself shiver in the heat. And so, also, with the time of the day.

It is a common trick, I suppose. It can be carried too far, perhaps, and damage the sense of reality. When Marie comes to make the bed, I shall get to my feet, button on my coat, and go to the store, and that will be the end of this feeling.

As a rule I am only too anxious to find a reason to leave my room. No sooner am I in it than I begin to cast around for one. When I do go, I do not go far. My average radius is three blocks. I am always afraid of running into an acquaintance who will express surprise at seeing me and ask questions. I avoid going downtown and, when I must go, I carefully stay away from certain streets. And I think I have carried over from my schooldays the feeling that there is something unlawful in being abroad, idle, in the middle of the day.

However, I am poor at finding reasons. I seldom go out more than four times a day, three times for meals and the fourth on a contrived errand or on some aimless impulse. I rarely take long walks.

For lack of exercise, I am growing heavy. When Iva objects, I point out that I shall lose weight quickly enough in the Army. The streets at this time of year are forbidding, and then, too, I have no overshoes. Occasionally I do take a longer excursion, to the laundry or to the barber shop, to Woolworth's for envelopes, or even farther, at Iva's request, to pay a bill; or, without her knowledge, to see Kitty Daumler. And then there are obligatory visits to the family.

I have fallen into the habit of changing restaurants regularly. I do not want to become too familiar a sight in any of them, friendly with sandwich men, waitresses, and cashiers, and compelled to invent lies for their benefit.

At half-past eight I eat breakfast. Afterward I walk home and settle down to read the paper in the rocker by the window. I cover it from end to end, ritualistically, missing not a word. First come the comic strips (I follow them because I have done so since childhood, and I compel myself to read even the newest, most unpalatable ones), then I read the serious news and the columnists, and, finally, the gossip, the family page, the recipes, the obituaries, the society news, the ads, the children's puzzles, everything. Reluctant to put it aside, I even reread the comics to see if I have missed anything. Re-entering waking life after the regeneration (when it is that) of sleep, I go in the body from nakedness to clothing and in the mind from relative purity to pollution. Raising the window, I test the weather; opening the paper I admit the world. I am now full of the world, and wide awake. It is nearly noon, time for lunch. Since eleven I have been growing restless, imagining that I am hungry again.

Into the silence of the house there fall accentuating sounds, the closing of a door in another room, the ticking of drops from a faucet, the rustling of the steam in the radiator, the thrum of a sewing machine upstairs.

The unmade bed, the walls are brightly striped. The maid knocks and pushes open the door. She has a cigarette in her mouth. I think I am the only one before whom she dares smoke because she recognizes that I am of no importance. At the restaurant I discover that I am not hungry at all but now I have no alternative and so I eat. The stairs are a little more difficult this time. I come into the room breathing hard, and turn on the radio. I smoke. I listen to half an hour of symphonic music, disturbed when I fail to catch the announcer before he begins to advertise someone's credit - clothing. By one o'clock the day has changed, has taken on a new kind of restlessness. I make my effort to read but cannot key my mind to the sentences on the page or the references in the words. My mind redoubles its efforts, but thoughts of doubtful relevance are straggling in and out of it, the trivial and the major together. And suddenly I shut

it off. It is as vacant as the street. I get up and turn on the radio again. Three o'clock and nothing has happened to me; three o'clock, and the dark is already getting in; three o'clock and the postman has bobbed by for the last time and left nothing in my box. I have read the paper and looked into a book, I have had a few random thoughts.

"Mr. Five-by-five. He's five feet high and he's five feet wide..." and now, like any housewife, I am listening to the radio.

The landlady's daughter has cautioned us not to play it too loudly; her mother has been bedridden for more than three months. The old woman is not expected to live long. She is blind and very nearly bald; she must be close to ninety. I see her at times, between the curtains, as I go upstairs. The daughter has been managing the house since September. She and her husband, Captain Briggs, live in the third-floor apartment. He is in the Quartermaster Division. A man of about fifty (much older than his wife), he is solid, neat, gray, and quiet-spoken. We often see him walking outside the fence, smoking a last cigarette before retiring.

At four-thirty I hear Mr. Vanaker next door, coughing and growling. Iva, for some reason of her own, has named him the "werewolf." He is a queer, annoying creature. His coughing, I am convinced, is partly alcoholic and partly nervous.

And it is also a sort of social activity. Iva does not agree. But I know that he coughs to draw attention to himself. I have lived in rooming houses so long that I have acquired an eye for the type. Years ago, on Dorchester Avenue, there was an old man who refused to shut his door but sat or lay facing the hall and watched everyone, day and night. And there was another on Schiller Street in whose washbasin you could always hear the water running. That was his manner of making himself known to us. Mr. Vanaker coughs got only that, but when he goes to the toilet he leaves the door ajar. He tramps down the hall, and a moment later you hear him splashing. Iva lately complained about this to Mrs. Briggs, who thereupon tacked a notice on the wall: Occupant please close door when using and wear bathrobes to and fro. So far it hasn't helped.

Through Mrs. Briggs we have learned a number of interesting facts about Vanaker. Before the old woman took to bed he was continually urging her to go to the movies with him. "When it should be plain to anybody Mamma can't see a thing." He was formerly in the habit of running down to answer the phone in his pajama trousers only - the reason for the bathrobe warning. The Captain had to step in and put an end to that. Marie has found half-smoked cigars ground out on the floors of unoccupied rooms. She suspects Vanaker of snooping through the house. He is no gentleman. She cleans his room, and she knows. Marie has high standards for white conduct, and her nostrils grow wider when she speaks of him. The old woman, Mrs. Kiefer, once threatened to put him out, she claims.

Vanaker is energetic. Hatless, he hurries in his black moleskin jacket up the street and between the snowy bushes. He slams the street door and kicks the snow from his boots on the first step. Then, coughing wildly, he runs up.

At six, I meet Iva at Fallon's for supper. We eat there quite regularly. Sometimes we go to the "Merit" or to a cafeteria on Fifty-Third Street. Our evenings are generally short. We turn in before midnight.

December 17

It is a narcotic dullness. There are times when I am not even aware that there is anything wrong with this existence. But on the other hand, there are times when I rouse myself in bewilderment and vexation, and then I think of myself as a moral casualty of the war. I have changed. Two incidents in the past week have shown me how greatly. The first can hardly be called an incident. I was leafing through Goethe's Poetry and I came upon the following phrase: "This loathing of life has both physical and moral causes .. 'Radix malorum est' ... weariness of life." Then came the statement: "Nothing occasions this "weariness more than the recurrence of the passion of love." Deeply disappointed, I put the book down. Nevertheless, I could not help seeing how differently this would have affected me a year ago, and how much I had altered. Then, I might have found it true but not especially noteworthy. I might have been amused by that Englishman but not moved. But his boredom threw "passion of love" in the shadow and he instantly took his place for me beside that murderer Barnardine whose contempt for life equaled his contempt for death, so that he would not come out of his cell to be executed. To be so drawn to those two was proof that I had indeed changed. And now the second incident. My father-in-law, old Almstadt, came down with a bad cold, and Iva, knowing how inept her mother is, asked me to go there and help out. The Almstadts live on the Northwest Side, a dreary, hour's ride on the El. I found the house in great disorder.

Mrs. Almstadt was trying to make the beds, cook, attend her husband, and answer the telephone all at the same time. The telephone was never idle for more than five minutes. Her friends kept calling, and to each she repeated the full story of her troubles. I have always disliked my mother-in-law. She is a short, fair, rather maidenish woman. Her natural color, when visible, is healthy. Her eyes are large, and they wear a knowing look, but since there is nothing to be knowing about they only convey her foolishness. She powders herself thickly, and her lips are painted in the shape that has become the universal device of sensuality for all women, from the barely mature to the very old.

Mrs. Almstadt, nearing fifty, is already quite wrinkled, much to her concern, and she is forever on the watch for new packs and face lotions.

When I came in, she was busy talking over the telephone to someone, and I went to my father-in-law's room. He was lying with his knees drawn up and his shoulders raised, so that his head seemed joined without a neck directly to his body. Through an opening in his pajamas his flesh showed white and fatty under graying hair. He looked unfamiliar in the high-buttoned tunic with the crest on the pocket, and a little ludicrous. This was Mrs. Almstadt's doing. She bought his clothes, and she had dressed him for bed like a mandarin or a Romanoff prince. His broad knuckles were joined on the silken quilt.

He greeted me with a not wholly ungrudged smile, and also as though it might be considered unmanly or unfatherly to fall sick. At the same time, however, he tried to make it plain that he could afford to spend a few days in bed; he was far enough ahead of the game; the business was in good hands. The telephone rang again, and Mrs. Almstadt once more told her story to one of her innumerable connections. What I now became curious to know was whether he was unaffected or whether she was a nuisance to him. In the five years that I had been his son-in-law I had heard neither criticism nor defense of her from him, save on two occasions when he said, "Katy's still a child; she never grew up."

Before I was aware of it I was saying, "How did you ever manage to stick it out so long, Mr. Almstadt?"

"Stick out? What?" he said.

"With her," I plunged on. "It would get me, I know it would."

"What are you talking about?" the old man asked, perplexed and angry. I suppose he thought it dishonorable to allow anyone to say such things to his face. But I could not help myself. It seemed, at the moment, not an error but a very natural inquiry.

I was suddenly in a state of mind that required directness for its satisfaction. Nothing else would do. "I don't know what you mean; what are you talking about?" he said again.

"Well, listen to her."

"Oh," he said, "you mean the telephone."

"Yes, the telephone."

He appeared somewhat relieved. "I don't pay any attention to it. All women are talkers. Maybe Katy talks more than most, but you got to allow for that. She..."

"Never grew up?" I said.

I doubt that this was what he intended to say, but since the phrase was his he could not dissent. With lips tightly drawn together, he nodded. "Yes, that's right. Some people just turn out different than others.

Everybody isn't alike." He spoke stiffly; he was still angry. He had to make allowances for me, too, once in a while. My behavior was not always what it should be, he thus, indirectly, gave me to understand. His color had thickened furiously; it was slow to recede. Harsh and red his face shone under the branched brass fixture whose light had a singular hue, like tea. Was he deliberately covering up an opinion which, it must be conceded, he had every right to hold privately, or did he believe what he said? The latter was the more likely explanation. Babble, tedium, and all the rest were to be expected; they came with every marriage.

There was still another possibility to consider, and that was that he was not resigned and that he did not ignore her as he pretended but - and there was every likelihood that he was unaware of this - heard and delighted in her, wanted her slovenly, garrulous, foolish, and coy, took pleasure in enduring her. His face, as we looked at each other, took on a doglike aspect. I was perturbed, and rebuked my imagination.

The doctor had left a prescription which the old man asked me to take to the drugstore. As I went out I heard Mrs. Almstadt saying, "My Iva's husband Joseph is here to lend a hand. He isn't working now, he's waiting for the Army, so he has all the time in the world."

I started and turned, full of indignation, but she, pressing the black, kidney-shaped instrument to her cheek, smiled at me all oblivious. I wondered whether it was possible that she should not have said it intentionally, that she should be blameless; whether her thoughts were as smooth and contentless as counters or blank dominoes; whether she was half guile and half innocence; or whether there worked through her a malice she herself knew nothing about.

There was a sharp wind outside; the sun, low and raw in a field of coarse clouds, ruddied the bricks and windows. The street had been blown dry (it had rained the day before), and it presented itself in one of its winter aspects, creased and with thin sidelocks of snow, all but deserted. A block-long gap lay between me and the nearest walker - come out on some unfathomable business - a man in a long, soldierly coat which the sun had converted to its own color. And then the pharmacy where I waited, sipping a cup of coffee under the crepe-paper lattice till my parcel, wrapped in green Christmas paper, was handed to me.

As I was going back, an exhibit in a barbershop attracted me: "Fancy articles from kitchen odds and ends by Mrs. I. Kowalski, 3538 Pierce Avenue." And there were laid out mosaic pictures, bits of matchstick on mats of leaf from old cigar butts, ash trays cut from tin cans and shellacked grapefruit rind, a braided cellophane belt, a letter opener inlaid with bits of

glass, and two hand-painted religious pictures. In its glass case the striped pole turned smoothly, the Lucky Tiger watched from a thicket of bottles, the barber read a magazine.

Armed with my parcel, I went on and, through the gray pillars and the ungainly door which clanked on the mailboxes, entered the sad cavern of the hall.

Upstairs, I worked energetically on the old man. I had Mrs. Almstadt make a pitcher of orange juice, dosed him with the medicine, and rubbed him down with alcohol. He grunted with pleasure during the massage and said that I was stronger than I looked. We were on better terms by this time. But I would not be drawn into a conversation. If I kept silent, I could not make another mistake. If I began to talk I would soon find myself explaining my position and defending my idleness. Old Almstadt did not bring up the subject. My own father, I must say, treats me less considerately in that respect. He would have asked me, but Almstadt said nothing about it.

I rolled down my sleeves and was preparing to go when my mother-in-law reminded me that she had poured a glass of orange juice for me in the kitchen. That was not lunch, but it was better than nothing. I went to get it and found on the kitchen sink a half-cleaned chicken, its yellow claws rigid, its head bent as though to examine its entrails which raveled over the sopping draining board and splattered the enamel with blood. Beside it stood the orange juice, a brown feather floating in it. I poured it down the drain.

Wearing my hat and scarf, I wandered to the living room where I had left my coat. Mr. and Mrs. Almstadt were conversing in the bedroom. I looked out of the window.

The sun had been covered up; snow was beginning to fall. It was sprinkled over the black pores of the gravel and was lying in thin slips on the slanting roofs. I could see a long way from this third-floor height. Not far off there were chimneys, their smoke a lighter gray than the gray of the sky; and, straight before me, ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars, and the occasional bare plan of a tree. These I surveyed, pressing my forehead on the glass. It was my painful obligation to look and to submit to myself the invariable question: Where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, or in the past, had spoken in man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life. And yet, I told myself, there had to be a doubt. There were human lives organized around these ways and houses, and that they, the houses, say, were the analogue, that what men created they also were, through some transcendent means, I could not bring myself to concede. There must be a difference, a quality that eluded me, somehow, a difference between things and persons and even between acts and persons.

Otherwise the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among. I had always striven to avoid blaming them. Was that not in effect behind my daily reading of the paper? In their businesses and politics, their taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders, I tried continually to find clear signs of their common humanity.

It was undeniably to, my interest to do this. Because I was involved with them; because, whether I liked it or not, they were my generation, my society, my world. We were figures in the same plot, eternally fixed together. I was aware, also, that their existence, just as it was, made mine possible. And if, as was often said, this part of the century was approaching the nether curve in a cycle, then I, too, would remain on the bottom and there, extinct, merely add my body, my life, to the base of a coming time. This would probably be a condemned age. But... it might be a mistake to think of it in that way. Mists faded and spread and faded on the

pane as I breathed. Perhaps a mistake. And when I thought of the condemned ages and those unnamed, lying in their obscurity, I wondered.

How did we know how it was? In all principal ways the human spirit must have been the same. Good apparently left fewer traces. And we were coming to know that we had misjudged whole epochs.

Besides, the giants of the last century had their Liverpools and Londons, their Lilles and Hamburgs to contend against, as we have our Chicagos and Detroits. And there might be a chance that I was misled, even with these ruins before my eyes, sodden, themselves the color of the fateful paper that I read daily.

I have spoken of an "invariable question." But the fact is that it had for many months been not in the least invariable. These were things I would have thought last winter, and now, in their troubled density, they served only to remind me of the sort of person I had been. For a long time "common humanity" and "bring myself to concede" had been completely absent from my mind. And all at once I saw how I had lapsed from that older self to whom they had been so natural.

December 18

For all purposes, I am that older self, and if a question of my identity were to arise I could do nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday. I have not tried to bring myself up to date, either from indifference or from fear. Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings.

Joseph, aged twenty-seven, an employee of the Inter-American Travel Bureau, a tall, already slightly flabby but, nevertheless, handsome young man, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin - major, History - married five years, amiable, generally takes himself to be well-liked. But on close examination he proves to be somewhat peculiar.

Peculiar? In what way? Well, to begin with, there is something about his appearance, something wrong. His is a long, straight-nosed, firm face. He wears a little mustache, which makes him look older than he really is. His eyes are dark and full, rather too full, a little prominent, in fact. His hair is black. He does not have what people call an "open" look, but is restrained - at times, despite his amiability, forbidding. He is a person greatly concerned with keeping intact and free from encumbrance a sense of his own being, its importance. Yet he is not abnormally cold, nor is he egotistic. He keeps a tight hold because, as he himself explains, he is keenly intent on knowing what is happening to him. He wants to miss nothing.

his wife does not remember him without a mustache, and he had just turned seventeen when they met. On his first visit to the Almstadt's, he had smoked a cigar and talked loudly and fairly expertly (he was then a Communist against the German Social Democracy and the slogan United Front from Below." Her father had taken him for twenty-five and had angrily ordered her not to invite grown men to the house. It amuses Mr. Almstadt to tell this story, now a family joke.

He says: "I thought he was going to carry her away to Russia."

To turn now to Joseph's dress (I am wearing his castoff clothes), it adds to his appearance of maturity. His suits are dark and conservative. His shoes, it is true, are pointed and rather dandyish, but that is possibly intended as a counterbalance. A broader toe would give

you a man in his middle thirties. As he is in most things, Joseph is conscious of a motive in his choice of clothes. It is his answer to those whose defiant principle it is to dress badly, to whom a crumpled suit is a badge of freedom. He wants to avoid the small conflicts of nonconformity so that he can give all his attention to defending his inner differences, the ones that really matter. Furthermore, he takes a sad or negative satisfaction in wearing what he calls "the uniform of the times." In short, the less noteworthy the better, for his purposes. All the same, he manages to stand out.

In things of this sort his friends sometimes find him ridiculous. And, yes, he says, he admits he is on "the funny side" in many ways. But that can't be helped. The appearance and behavior of reflective men is seldom comparable to that of the less reflective, who unhesitatingly entrust all they stand for to their looks and gestures. What he is trying to do is not easy, and it is not unlikely that the more he succeeds, the more odd he may seem. Besides, he says, there is an element of the comic or fantastic in everyone. You can never bring that altogether under control.

"An element of the comic or fantastic..." such phrases have a queer ring; and people who have begun by taking him for a clerk at Inter-American, a fairly nice chap, begin to look at him with changed eyes.

But even his oldest friends, those who like John Pearl and Morris Abt have been close to him since boyhood, often find it hard to make him out. And, despite his anxiety to be understood, he cannot always help them.

Joseph, since leaving school, has not stopped thinking of himself as a scholar, and he surrounds himself with books. Before he interested himself in the Enlightenment he made a study of the early ascetics and, earlier, of Romanticism and the child prodigy. Of course, he has to earn his living, but he tries to strike a balance between what he wants and what he is compelled to do, between the necessity and the wish. A compromise exists, but then men's lives abound in such compromises. He is proud of the skill with which he manages both sides and - albeit somewhat mistakenly - likes to refer to himself as a Machiavellian. He keeps his roles successfully distinct and even goes out of his way to be an excellent employee, simply to prove that "visionaries" can be hardheaded.

Everyone admits, however, that Joseph has a close grasp on himself, that he knows what he wants and how to go about getting it. In the last seven or eight years he has worked everything out in accordance with a general plan. Into this plan have gone his friends, his family, and his wife. He has taken a great deal of trouble with his wife, urging her to read books of his choosing, teaching her to admire what he believes admirable. To what degree he has succeeded he does not know.

It should not be thought that Joseph, when he speaks of the "less reflective" or of his "element of the comic," is being harsh. He is not severe toward the world. He calls himself a sworn upholder of *tout comprendre cest tout pardonner*. Theories of a wholly good or a wholly malevolent world strike him as foolish. Of those who believe in a wholly good world he says that they do not understand depravity. As for pessimists, the question he asks of them is, "Is that all they see, such people?" For him, the world is both, and therefore it is neither. Merely to make a judgment of that kind is, to representatives of either position, a satisfaction. Whereas, to him, judgment is second to wonder, to speculation on men, drugged and dear, jealous, ambitious, good, tempted, curious, each in his own time and with his customs and motives, and bearing the imprint of strangeness in the world. In a sense, everything is good because it exists. Or, good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and, for that reason, marvelous.

But for all that, Joseph suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it. Now, he says, all human beings share this to some extent. The child feels that his parents are pretenders; his real father is elsewhere and will some day come to claim him. And for others the real world is not here at all and what is at hand is spurious and copied. Joseph's feeling of strangeness sometimes takes the form almost of a conspiracy: not a conspiracy of evil, but one which contains the diversified splendors, the shifts, excitements, and also the common, neutral matter of an existence. Living from day to day under the shadow of such a conspiracy is trying. If it makes for wonder, it makes even more for uneasiness, and one dings to the nearest passersby, to brothers, parents, friends, and wives.

December 20

Preparations for the holiday. I went out yesterday to do some shopping for Iva. Downtown there were bell ringers on every corner, in beards of soiled cotton and red Santa Claus costumes. For love of the poor, for dear charity, clang-clang away in the din. Immense wreaths were mounted on buildings in the green, menacing air; the thousands upon thousands of shoppers ground through the stores and the streets under the smoky red facades and in the amplified roar of carols. The holly berries flashed on the tarred poles in thick drops. The jukeboxes in the taverns were playing "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." Everyone prays for snow, and the thought of rain or sleet brings panic. Vanaker is restless these days. He keeps moving the furniture around his room. Marie complains more than ever. By changing the position of the bed he makes it hard for her to clean the room. The door is blocked. She doesn't like to go in anyway. He doesn't keep himself clean, she claims.

Instead of sending his linen to the laundry, he airs it at the window. He hangs up his underwear at night and forgets to take it down in the morning. Mrs. Briggs tells me that he is engaged to marry a lady of sixty who insists that he be converted to the Catholic faith and that he goes every evening to the church of St.

Thomas the Apostle for indoctrination. At the same time, I notice that he receives large quantities of mail from the Masonic Scottish Rite. It may be this conflict of principle that drives him to get up at two in the morning to change the position of his bed. We have two invitations to Christmas dinner, one from the Almstadts and another from my brother Amos. I am for refusing both.

December 22

A strange explosion of temper this afternoon, when I was with Myron Adler. I behaved unaccountably, greatly surprising myself and, of course, bewildering Myron. He had phoned me about a temporary job which would consist of asking people questions for a poll he is conducting. I hurried down to meet him at the Arrow for lunch. I arrived first, took a table toward the back, and immediately fell victim to depression. I had not visited the Arrow for a number of years. It was at one time a hangout for earnest eccentrics where, at almost any hour

of the afternoon or evening, you could hear discussions of socialism, psychopathology, or the fate of European Man. It was I who had suggested that we eat there; for some reason it had been the first place that came to my mind. Now it depressed me. Then, as I looked around at the steam tables and the posters of foundering ships and faces of Japanese, I suddenly saw Jimmy Burns sitting at a table with a man I did not know. Since the days when we had been Comrade Joe and Comrade Jim, we had seen each other no more than two, perhaps three, times. He looked changed; his forehead had grown higher and his expression more severe. I nodded to him, but got no recognition for my pains; he looked through me in the way which is, I suppose, officially prescribed for "renegades."

When Myron came in a few minutes later and started at once to talk about the job, I said impatiently, "Wait a second, now. Just hold on."

"What's the matter?"

"Something very special," I said. "Wait till I tell you. You see that man in the brown suit over there? That's Jimmy Burns. Ten years ago I was privileged to call him Comrade Jimmy."

"Well?" said Myron.

"I said hello to him, and he acted as if I simply wasn't there."

"What of it?" said Myron.

"Does that seem natural? I was once a close friend."

"Well?" said Myron.

"Stop saying that, will you!" I said in exasperation.

"I mean, do you want him to throw his arms around you?" asked Myron.

"You don't get the point. I despise him."

"Then I don't get the point. I confess I don't get it."

"No. Listen. He has no business ignoring me. This is always happening to me. You don't understand it because you're a person of no political experience. But I know what this means, and I'm going to go up to him and say hello whether he likes it or not."

"Don't be a fool. What do you want to make trouble for?" said Myron.

"Because I feel like making trouble. Does he know me or doesn't he? He knows me perfectly well." I was growing angrier by the minute. "I'm surprised that you shouldn't be able to see it."

"I came here to talk to you about a job, not to see you throw a fit," he said.

"Oh, a fit. So you think I care about him? It's the principle of the thing. It seems to escape you. Simply because I am no longer a member of their party they have instructed him and boobs like him not to talk to me. Don't you see what's involved?"

"No," Myron said carelessly.

"I'll tell you what's involved. I have a right to be spoken to. It's the most elementary thing in the world. Simply that. I insist on it."

"Oh, Joseph," said Myron.

"No, really, listen to me. Forbid one man to talk to another. Forbid him to communicate with someone else, and you've forbidden him to think, because, as a great many writers will tell you, thought is a kind of communication. And his party doesn't want him to think, but to follow its discipline. So there you are. Because it's supposed to be a revolutionary party. That's what's offending me. When a man obeys an order like that he's helping to abolish freedom and begin tyranny."

"Come, come," said Myron. "You're making too much fuss over it."

"I should be making twice as much fuss," I said. "It's very important."

"But you've been through with them for years, haven't you?" Myron asked. "Do you mean to say you've just discovered this now?"

"I haven't forgotten, that's all. You see, I thought those people were different. I haven't forgotten that I believed they were devoted to the service of some grand flapdoodle, the Race, le genre humain. Oh, yes, they were! By the time I got out, I realized that any hospital nurse did more with one bedpan for le genre humain than they did with their entire organization. It's odd to think that there was a time when to hear that would have filled me with horror. What? Reformism?"

"I've heard of that," said Myron.

"I should think so. Reformism! A terrible thing.

About a month after we parted company, I sat down and wrote Jane Addams a letter of apology. She was still alive."

"Did you?" he said, looking at me curiously.

"I never mailed it," I said. "Maybe I should have.

Don't you believe me?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"I changed my mind about redoing the world from top to bottom ala Karl Marx and decided in favor of bandaging a few sores at a time. Of course, that was temporary, too."

"Was it?" he said.

"Oh, for heaven's sake! You know that, Mike,"

I said loudly.

The man who was sitting with Burns turned around, but the latter still pretended not to see me. "That's right," I said. "Look the other way. Go on. That boy is mad, Myron. He's never been sane. Everything has changed, he's been left far behind, but he thinks it's as it used to be. He still wears that proletarian bang on his earnest forehead and dreams of becoming an American Robespierre. The rest have compromised themselves to the ears, but he still believes in the revolution. Blood will run, the power will change hands, and then the state will wither away according to the in-ex-or-able logic of history. I'd gamble my shirt on it. I know his mind. Let me tell you something about him. Do you know what he used to have in his room? I went up with him one day, and there was a large scale map of the city, with pins in it. So I said, "What's this for, Jim?" And then - I swear this is true - he started to explain that he was preparing a guide for street-fighting, the day of the insurrection. He had all the critical streets marked in code for cellars and roofs, the paving material, the number of newsstands at each corner that could be thrown into barricades (the Parisian kiosks, you member). Even abandoned sewers for hiding arms. He traced them through City Hall records. At that time didn't know how crazy it was. The things we used to accept as natural why, it's unbelievable! And he's still in that. I'll bet he still has the map. He's an addict. They're all addicted people, Mike. Hey, Burns! Hey!" I called out.

"Shut up, Joseph! For God's sake. What are you doing? Everybody's looking at you."

Burns glanced briefly in my direction and then resumed his conversation with the other man, who, however, turned again to examine me.

"What do you know about that! Burns won't give me a tumble. I can't arouse him. I'm just gone. Like that." I snapped my fingers. "I'm a contemptible petty-bourgeois renegade; could anything be worse? That idiot! Hey, addict!" I shouted.

"Have you gone mad? Come on." Myron pushed back the table. "I'm going to get you out of here before you start a fight. I think you would start a fight. Where's your coat, which is

it? Why, you're a madman! Come back here!" But I was already out of his reach. I halted squarely before Burns.

"I said hello to you before, didn't you notice?"

He made no reply.

"Don't you know me? It seems to me that I know you very well. Answer me, don't you know who I am?"

"Yes, I know you," Burns said in a low voice.

"That's what I wanted to hear," I said. "I just wanted to be sure. I'm coming, Myron." I pulled my arm away from him, and we strode out.

I was aware that this had made a bad impression on Myron, but cared to do little to rectify it beyond explaining in a few short words that I had not been myself lately. But I did not say this until we had come to our second course in another restaurant. I became very quiet. I did not, and still do not, know where this outbreak came from, I suspect that it originated in sheer dishevelment of mind. But how could I explain this to Myron without becoming entangled in a long description of the state I was in and its causes? I would make him squirm and I myself would squander my feelings in self-pity.

We talked about the job, and he promised to recommend me to his superiors. He hoped, he said (he had sounded more positive on the phone), that I would get it. Myron likes me, I know he does. But he has worked hard to reach his present position and, realist that he is, it cannot have taken him long to decide that he could not afford to be responsible for me. I might prove unreliable, raise a cry about "the principle of the thing," and with one quirk or impulse, undo him. I could not blame him after what had just happened.

But still, I could not condemn myself altogether for it. It was wrong to make a scene but, after all, it was not so wrong to be indignant at Burns. To have invented a letter to Jane Addams was, however, clearly wrong.

Why on earth had I done that? I had a point to make, yes; but I should have thought of a better way.

For a moment, in the interest of elementary honesty, I thought of confessing. But if I told him that and no more (and I did not want to say more), he would become even more confused and distrustful. And why bother?

And so I said, as we were about to separate, "Mike, if you have anyone else in mind for that job, feel free to suggest him. I can't tell how long I'll be around. They may notify me any day, and then I'd be forced to walk out in the middle of things. That wouldn't do. But thanks for thinking of me."

"Oh, now, Joseph, look ... "

"Never mind, Mike. And I really do mean that."

"I'll put your name up. And, Joseph, we ought to get together. I want to talk to you. One of these days."

"Well, all right. But the fact is, I'm not fit company. I'm all up in the air. And forget about the job." And I walked away quickly, certain that I had lifted a burden from him and, by so doing, had acquitted myself decently.

Later, thinking these incidents over, I felt less inclined to shoulder all the blame. It seemed to me that Myron might have been somewhat less worried about the spectacle I had made of myself and the attention I had drawn to him and more concerned about the cause of my outburst. If he had thought about it, he would have seen that there were reasons for my behavior, reasons that might well prove disquieting to a friend.

And, moreover, he might have found that what I was driving at was not without importance. For the insolence of Burns figured the whole betrayal of an undertaking to which I had once devoted myself and my chagrin - though it seemed to find its object in Burns - was actually aimed at those who had perverted it.

But then, I may be expecting too much from Myron. He has the pride of what he has become: a successful young man, comfortable, respected, safe for the present from those craters of the spirit which I have lately looked into. Worst of all, Myron has learned, like so many others, to prize convenience. He has learned to be accommodating. That is not a private vice; it has ramified consequences - terrible ones.

For months I have been angry with my friends. I have thought of them as "failing" me. Since the Servatius party, last March, I have been brooding over this failure. I have made it look like a major catastrophe, whereas it was nothing of the sort, and have made an obsessional grievance of betrayal where, in fact, only my shortsightedness was at fault - that and the inflationary, grandiose, tasteless attitudes I dissociate myself from by pinning them on Joseph. In reality, the Servatius party merely forced on my attention certain defects in the people around me which, if I had been as astute as I should have been, I would have recognized long before, and of which I think I must have been partly aware all the time.

Partly, I say. And here I feel it necessary to revive Joseph, that creature of plans. He had asked himself a question I still would like answered, namely, "How should a good man live; what ought he to do?"

Hence the plans. Unfortunately, most of them were foolish. Also, they led him to be untrue to himself. He made mistakes of the sort people make who see things as they wish to see them or, for the sake of their plans, must see them.

There might be some justice in the view that man was born the slayer of his father and of his brother, full of instinctive bloody rages, licentious and unruly from his earliest days, an animal who had to be tamed. But, he protested, he could find in himself no such history of hate to overcome. He could not.

He believed in his own mildness, believed in it piously. He allowed this belief to interfere with his natural shrewdness and did both himself and his friends a disservice. They could not give him what he wanted.

What he wanted was a "colony of the spirit," or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness, and cruelty. To hack, to tear, to murder was for those in whom the sense of the temporariness of life had shrunk. The world was crude and it was dangerous and, if no measures were taken, existence could indeed become in Hobbes' phrase, which had long ago lodged in Joseph's mind--"nasty, brutish, short." It need not become so if a number of others would combine to defend themselves against danger and crudity.

He thought he had found those others, but even before the Servatius party he (or rather I) had begun to have misgivings about the progress that was being made. I was beginning to see that a difficult plan or program like mine had to take into account all that was natural, including corruptness. I had to be faithful to the facts, and corruptness was one of them.

But the party shocked me.

I did not want to go. It was Iva who insisted, out of loyalty to Minna Servatius and because she knew what it was to be a disappointed hostess. It was a long time since a party, any party, had given me pleasure. I liked nothing better than to see my friends singly or in pairs, but when they came together in a large group they disheartened me. You knew what to expect beforehand. If there were jokes, you knew how they would be told; if there were exhibitions,

you knew who would make them and who would be hurt or shamed or gratified by them. You knew what Stillman would do, you knew what George Hayza would do, you knew that Abt would make fun of everyone and that Minna would have difficulties with her husband. You knew there was bound to be mischief, distortion, and strain, and yet you went. And why? Because Minna had prepared a party; because your friends were going to be there. And they were coming because you were going to be there, and on no account must anyone be let down.

When the heat and stridency of the party burst upon us through the open door, I began to regret that I had not been more firm in refusing, this once. Minna met us in the entry hall. She was wearing a black dress with a high, silver-trimmed collar; her legs were bare, and she had on high-heeled, red sandals. It was not immediately apparent how drunk she was. She appeared, at first, self-possessed and grave; her face was white, her forehead full of creases. Then we noticed how she was perspiring and how unsteady her eyes were. She looked first at Iva and then at me, saying nothing. We did not know what to expect.

Then, with alarming suddenness, she cried, "Sound the gong; they're here."

"Who?" said Jack Brill, putting his head out of the door.

"Joseph and Iva. Always last to show up. They come when everybody's high so they can stand around and watch us make fools of ourselves."

"It's my fault," Iva murmured. We were both taken aback by Minna's outcry. "I have such a cold, and..."

"Darling," said Minna. "I was only joking. Come in." She led us into the living room. There, both doors of the phonograph were open, but the guests talked; no one seemed to listen to the music. And here was the scene, predictable to the last detail, hours, days, weeks before the light furniture in the popular Swedish style, the brown carpet, the Chagall and Gris prints, the vines trailing from the mantelpiece, the bowl of Cohasset punch. Minna had invited a number of "stranger" acquaintances, that is, who did not belong to the inner circle. There was a young woman to whom I had once been introduced. I remembered her because of her downy, slightly protuberant lip.

She was quite pretty, however. Her name escaped me. Did she work in Minna's office? Was she married to the fat man in the steel-rimmed glasses?

Had I also met him? I would never know. And in this noise I could not help being indifferent about it. So it was with these strangers. Some, like Jack Brill, you came to know well, in time. The others remained grouped together indistinctly and were recalled, if the need arose, as "that fellow with the glasses" or "that pasty-looking couple."

One by one, the friends came forward - Abt, George Hayza, Myron, Robbie Stillman.

They were the center of the party; they performed. The others looked on, and who could tell whether they were amused or resentful at their exclusion, or even if they were aware of being excluded? The party went on around them.

If they were aware of what was happening, they made the best of it.

And so did you. Your first tour of the room done, you moved aside with a glass and a cigarette. You sat - if you could find a place - and watched the performers and the dancers. You heard Robbie Stillman tell a story he had told any number of times about the mishaps of a stuttering girl, or about a hobo with a new portable radio he had met one day on the steps of the Aquarium. You did not like him less for telling it. You felt, somehow, that he, too, was forced to endure it, that he began unwillingly and was under a compulsion to finish what no one wanted to hear finished. You could not blame him.

Minna went around the living room from group to group, unsteadily, as if in danger of falling from her high heels.

Finally she stopped before George Hayza. We heard them arguing. It turned out that she wanted him to record on the machine a poem he had made popular years ago when he had played at being a surrealist. To his credit, he refused. That is, he tried to refuse, reddening and smiling anxiously.

He wanted to live it down. Everybody was tired of it, he most of all. Others came to his support. Abt said with an edge of impatience in his voice, that George ought to be allowed to judge whether or not he should recite it since everyone had heard it a dozen times.

"Everyone has not heard it," said Minna. "Besides, I want to make a record of it. It's clever."

"It used to be considered clever."

"It still is. It's very clever. Abt gave up the argument, for a sense of a special situation was arising. Abt had once been engaged to Minna, but for reasons none of us knew, she had suddenly decided to marry Harry Servatius. There was, therefore, a complex history of injured feelings between Abt and Minna, and in a gathering atmosphere of embarrassment, Abt withdrew, and Minna had her way. The poem was recorded. George's voice came out strangely high and unsteady. "I am alone and eat my hair as a calendar of regrets" George, with a grimace of apology, backed away from the phonograph. Only Minna was satisfied; she played the record again.

"What's wrong tonight?" I asked Myron.

"Oh - it's Harry, I guess. He's in the study with Gilda Hillman. They've been there all evening. Talking."

"Joseph," said Iva from her chair near by, "will you get me some more?" She held out her glass.

"Iva," said Jack Brill, with a warning laugh. "Go slow."

"With what? The punch?"

"It tastes mild, but it isn't mild at all."

"Maybe you shouldn't drink any more of it," I said, since you're not feeling well."

"I don't know why I'm so thirsty. I haven't eaten anything salty."

"I'll bring you some water if you like."

"Water." She drew back the glass contemptuously.

"I wish you wouldn't drink tonight. It's a strong punch," I said. My tone was unmistakable. I did not mean to be disobeyed. Yet a little later I saw her at the bowl and frowned at the quick motion with which she raised her arm and drank. I was irritated enough to consider, for a moment, striding up and snatching the glass away.

Instead I started a conversation with Abt on the first subject that came to hand, the war in Libya. We wandered into the kitchen, talking.

Abt is one of my oldest and best friends. I have always been much attached to him and have valued him perhaps more than he has valued me. That does not make much difference; he certainly has great affection for me, and some respect. At college we roomed together for a while. We were temporarily estranged because of a political matter. When we returned to Chicago we resumed our friendship, and while he worked for his doctorate - until last June he was an instructor in political science - he practically lived with us.

"We owe a lot to the Italians," Abt was saying. "They have a sensible attitude toward the war. They want to go home. And that isn't our only indebtedness. Capitalism never made

them the victims of addition and subtraction. They remained a thoughtful people." (he spoke slowly, so that I knew he was improvising, an old habit of his.) "And they never became swashbucklers. They have better taste and less false pride than the heirs of Arminius. Of course, that was an Italian mistake. Tacitus inflated the Germans."

My irritation with Iva faded. I found myself listening amused, to his praise of the Italians.

"So that's our debt" I said, smiling. "Do you think they're going to save us?"

"They won't do us any harm. It begins to look as though civilization may start its comeback from the Mediterranean, where it was born."

"Have you tried that on Dr. Rood?"

"He'd take me seriously and try to steal the idea."

Dr. Arnold Rood, or Mary Baker Rood, as Abt liked to call him, was the head of his department and a dean of the college.

"How is the old man?"

"Still oily, still the highest-paid Reader in the city, and just as ignorant as ever. I have become his favorite problem in conversion and I have to see him twice a week to discuss Science and Health. Some fine afternoon I'll stick a knife into him and say, "Pray yourself out of that, you bastard." That's a vulgar refutation, like Johnson's kicking the stone to triumph over Berkeley. But I can't think of another way to deal with him."

I laughed, and at the same moment another, shriller laugh, almost an outcry, came from the front of the house. I stared down the hall.

"Minna," Abt said.

"I wish something could be done."

It appalled to hear that cry and to recall the look on her face when she had greeted us in the entry hall. The party blared on in. side, and I began to think what a gathering of this sort meant. And it came to me all at once that the human purpose of these occasions had always been to free the charge of feeling in the pent heart; and that, as animals instinctively sought salt or lime, we, too, flew together at this need as we had at Eleusis, with rites and dances, and at other high festivals and corroborees to witness pains and tortures, to give our scorn, hatred, and desire temporary liberty and play. Only we did these things without grace or mystery, lacking the forms for them and, relying on drunkenness, assassinated the Gods in one another and shrieked in vengefulness and hurt. I frowned at this dreadful picture.

"Oh, yes," said Abt, "she's having a bad time."

It reassured me to hear him say this; he felt as I did about it.

"But she shouldn't allow herself." Rapid footsteps came toward the kitchen. "There's such a thing as ..."

"What's such a thing?" Minna said.

"Was that you yelling?" said Abt.

"I wasn't yelling. Stand aside from the refrigerator. George and I have come for ice cubes. Say, what are you hiding in the kitchen for, anyway? There's a party on. These two," she said to George, "are always in a corner together. Him in his undertaker's suit, and this one... with rings under his eyes. Like a couple of plotters." She walked out unsteadily. George, with a set and disapproving face, carried the ice-filled bowl.

"Having a wonderful night, isn't she?" said Abt.

"Is Harry drunk, too? What's the matter with them?"

"He may be a little soused. I think he knows what he's doing," said Abt. "But it's really not our business."

"I thought they were getting along."

"There's trouble of some sort. But, ah!" he made a grimace. "It's very unlovely."

"It certainly is," I said.

"I've had my share, too, tonight. That business of George's damned poem."

"Oh, I know."

"I'm going to keep my nose clean."

I felt increasingly disturbed. Abt looked and sounded exceptionally unhappy. Not that it was unusual for him to be unhappy; he was seldom otherwise.

But tonight there was a much larger degree of harshness in his customary mixture of levity and harshness. I had noticed that and, though I had laughed, I had also winced a little when he spoke of stabbing Dr. Rood.

I sighed. Of course he was still in love with Minna.

Or would it be better to say that he had never recovered from his disappointment in her? But there was more to it than that, I knew - a fundamental discontent which would not yield its meaning to such easy formulations as "love" and "disappointment." Still more, I was disturbed at myself because I knew that at heart I was tired of Abt's unhappiness and of seeing him rise to it like a jaded but skillful boxer. I did not want to admit that. I urged my sympathies to work for him. He was unhappy, after all, wasn't he?

We came back to the living room. Iva was sitting beside Stillman on the piano bench. Servatius and Gilda Hillman had appeared at last; they were dancing. Her face was lowered against his chest; they hung together, moving slowly.

"Nice-looking couple, aren't they?" Minna said. She was standing behind us. We turned uneasily.

"Well, they are," she said. "Harry dances well. She's not bad, either." We did not reply.

"Oh, you're a couple of fish." She started to walk away but thought better of it. "You needn't have such high opinions of yourselves.

You're not the man Harry is, and you're not, either."

"Minna," I said. "Minna yourself!"

We turned from her. "She's getting worse and worse," I said awkwardly. "We ought to leave."

Abt answered nothing.

I told Iva that I was going to get her coat.

"What for?" she said. "I don't want to go yet." She regarded the matter as settled. She looked around calmly; she was mildly drunk.

I persisted. "It's getting late."

"Oh, don't break up the party," said Stillman. "Stay a while."

Red-faced and smiling broadly, Jack Brill came up to us a few minutes later, saying, "Minna's looking for you, Morris."

"For me? What does she want?" said Abt.

"Search me. But I'm pretty sure she'll get it."

"Morris!"

"Morris!"

"I told you. Here she comes," said Brill.

"Morris," said Minna, putting her hand on his shoulder, "I want you to do something for the party. It's got to be livened up, it's going dead."

"I'm afraid I can't help you," said Abt.

"Yes you can. I have a marvelous idea."

No one asked what this idea was. Jack Brill, after smiling at everyone's discomfiture, said, "What's your idea, Minna?"

"Morris is going to hypnotize somebody."

"You're mistaken," said Abt. "I've given up amateur hypnotism. You'll have to ask someone else to liven up your party." He spoke coldly and without looking at her.

"It's not a good idea, Minna," I put it.

"You're wrong; it's a wonderful idea. Keep out of this."

"Oh, drop it, Minna," said George Hayza. "Nobody wants to see it done."

"You shut up, too, George. Morris," she said beseechingly, "I know you're mad at me. But, please, this once. The party'll break up if something doesn't happen soon."

"I've forgotten how. I can't hypnotize anyone any longer. I haven't done it for years."

"Ah, you haven't forgotten. You can do it. You have a strong mind."

"Go away, Minna," I said.

"She'll get her way," Jack Brill chuckled. "Wait and see."

"You encourage her," I said severely.

"She does everything without encouragement. Don't blame me." He still smiled, but hack of his smile there was a resentful and inimical coldness. "I just like to see how she goes about getting her way."

"Morris, please do it."

"Get someone else to do tricks. Get Myron, here."

"He's too stiff for tricks.

He doesn't know any."

"Thank God for that,"

Myron said.

"Now, to get you a subject," said Minna.

"I don't want a subject."

She rapped for attention on the piano.

"Announcement," she called out. Servatius and Gilda did not interrupt their dancing. "We need someone for Morris, here, to hypnotize. Judy, how about you?" Judy was the girl with the man in the steel-rimmed glasses. "No? Afraid you'll give yourself away? This takes a little courage. Stillman? These people are against it. Does anybody want to volunteer?" There were no volunteers.

"Oh, what a lot of wet blankets."

"There," I said, "nobody's really interested. So you see."

"Then I'll be your subject myself." Minna said, turning to Abt.

"That's the silliest proposal yet," said George.

"Why shouldn't I be his subject?"

We waited to hear what Abt would say. He had so far given no indication of what he thought of her proposal. He regarded her with raised brows like a doctor who is considering how fully to answer a layman's question while, with quizzical, concealing eyes, he keeps him waiting. The indirect ceiling light gave the side of his face the look of a sheet of thick paper, artfully folded at the eye and pierced, high on the forehead, by straight, black hairs.

"I'll be damned," Jack Brill said softly to me. "He'll take her up on it, too."

"Oh, impossible," I said. Abt hesitated.

"Well?" Minna said.

"All right," he said. "Why not?"

He disregarded me. And the others also protested.

"She's drunk," said Stillman. And George said, "Are you sure you know what you're up to?" But he disregarded them, too, and made no attempt to explain or justify himself. He and Minna started off toward the study.

"We'll call you. I mean, Morris will call you," Minna said. "Then you can all come in."

When they left, the rest of us fell silent. The dancing had stopped. Jack Brill, leaning one shoulder against the wall, smoked his pipe and seemed to relish watching us. Harry Servatius and Gilda were together on a narrow seat in the corner. They were the only ones talking; no words, however, were audible, only his heavy burring voice and her occasional choppy laughter. What on earth could he be saying that she found so funny? He was making an idiot of himself, and if Abt were correct in saying that he was not too drunk, then he was doubly idiotic. Iva still kept her glass on the piano ledge and took a small sip every so often. I did not like the aimless absorption with which she smoothed out the paper napkin on her knee, nor the rapid yet vague way her eyes moved around the room.

She remained behind with Harry and Gilda when Abt called us. The rest of us crowded into the study and, in embarrassed silence, stood looking down at Minna on the couch. I could not believe at first that she was not pretending; the change seemed too great. I was soon convinced that this was real enough. She lay loosely outstretched, a strong light behind her turned against the wall. One of her sandals had come unfastened and swung away from her heel. Her hands lay open at her sides. One noticed how narrow and bony her wrists were and the mole between two branches of a vein on her forearm. But, for all the width of her hips, and the feminine prominences, her knees under the dress, her bosom, the meeting of her throat and collarbones, she looked less specifically like a woman than a more generalized human being - and a sad one, at that. This view of her affected me greatly. I was even more prejudiced against Abt's performance.

He sat beside her and talked to her soothingly. Her breathing was regular, but touched with hoarseness; her upper lip was drawn way slightly from her teeth.

He began by making her feel cold. "Someone must have turned off the heat. I'm chilled, don't you feel cold, too? You look cold. It is cold here; it's almost freezing." And she gasped a little and drew up her legs. He went on to tell her that when he pinched her hand she would feel no pain, and so she felt none, though the skin, where he had twisted it, remained white long afterwards. He deprived her of the power to move her arm and then ordered her to raise it. She struggled until he released her. The rest of us, half-tranced ourselves, eager to see and yet afraid of what we were seeing, concentrated on her face with its lifted lip and creased eyes. He let her rest, but only for a moment. Then he asked her to recall how many glasses of punch she had drunk. He would give a series of numbers and she was to make a sign at the right one. At this, her eyes moved or flinched under her lids, as though in protest. He began counting.

I was standing at a corner of the couch in such a position that her bare heel, the one from which the sandal hung, grazed my trouser-leg. I had an impulse to touch the mole on her arm with my finger.

All at once, looking at her face and her closed lids, my impatience with Abt turned into anger. Yes, I thought, he likes this. I tried to think what I could do to stop it. Meanwhile he was

counting. "Six? Seven?" She tried, but was unable to answer. Perhaps she was aware of the insult.

"So you can't remember?" said Abt. "No?" She rolled her head. "Maybe you've forgotten how to count? Let's see if you have. I'm going to tap your cheek a few times. You count and tell me how many. Ready?"

"Bring her out of it, Morris, we've all had enough," I said.

He did not seem to hear me. "Now I'm beginning," he said. He struck her lightly four times. Minna's lips began to form the first "f" but dropped away, and the next instant she was sitting up, open-eyed, exclaiming, "Harry! Oh Harry!" Then she began to cry, her face fixed and bewildered.

"I told you you were going too far," I said.

Abt reached his hand out to her in surprise.

"Let her alone!" someone said.

"Oh Harry, Harry, Harry!"

"Do something, Morris!" Robbie Stillman shouted. "Slap her, she's having a fit!"

"Don't touch her. I'll get Servatius," said Jack Brill. He ran, but her husband was already at the door, staring in. "Harry, Harry, Harry!"

"Get out of the way, she doesn't see him,"

George said. "Let's clear the room." Jack Brill began herding us out. "Go on, don't stand there." Abt pushed Brill's hand away and muttered something to me which I did not hear.

Iva was no longer in the living room. I went looking for her and found her on the porch off the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" I said roughly.

"Why, it was warm. I wanted to cool off."

I pulled her inside. "What's the matter with you tonight" I said. "What's got into you?"

I left her in the kitchen and strode back to the study. I found Brill guarding the door.

"How is she now?" I asked.

"She'll come out of it," said Brill "George and Harry are in there with her. What a wow of a finish."

"My wife's gone and made herself drunk, too."

"Your wife. You mean Iva."

"Yes, Iva." He was right. I was still treating him like a semi-stranger and he resented it. He had irritated me before when I had thought that he was goading Minna on; but I saw now that, after all, he was no worse than any of the others.

"Well, the party turned into a terrible mess, didn't it?"

"Yes," I agreed.

"Do you ever wonder what's the matter with these people?"

"I've been wondering," I said. "What do you think?"

"So you want my opinion," Brill said, smiling. "You want to see this as an outsider sees it?"

"You're not exactly an outsider, Jack."

"I've only been around five or six years. Well, if you want to know how I feel about it."

"You're being a little hard on me," I murmured.

"That's right. I am. This is a tight little bunch. I like some of the people in it. I like Minna a lot.

Others lean to the snob side. They're not very agreeable. They're cold. Even you, if you don't mind my saying so."

"I don't."

"You're all fenced around. It took me some time to find out you weren't such a bad guy. At first I thought you wanted people to come up and sniff you, as if you were a tree. You're a little better than that. Not Abt, though, he's a bad case."

"Maybe he needs more study."

"I wish I could give him what he needs more of. No, there's something wrong. And then you people all seem satisfied to settle down to a long life of taking in each other's laundry. Everybody else is shut out. It's offensive to people like me."

"What makes you come around then?" I said.

"I don't know," said Brill. "I guess it interests me to watch you carry on."

"Oh, I see."

"You asked."

"It's perfectly all right. So long, Jack."

I offered him my hand; after a moment of surprise (perhaps it was an ironic surprise), he took it.

"So long, Joseph."

Iva was in no condition to walk. I got a cab, helped her in, and held her head on my shoulder all the way home. When we stopped at an intersection I looked down at her shadowed face.

The yellow traffic light fell on her temple, where I saw a single vein near the surface of the skin, crooking with the slight groove of the bone. I responded to this almost as I had to Minna on the couch.

The cab continued down the black street, which was streaked with the remnants of that afternoon's snowfall waning under the changed warm wind.

What could I say to all this? I asked myself fitfully and as though I, too, were a little drunk.

I thought that with one leap "nasty, brutish, and short" had landed in our midst. All my feelings, what I had felt in looking at Minna, what I had felt at Jack Brill's words and at Iva's disobedience, now attacked me together. What could I say? I repeated, but in the midst of the question perceived my purpose in asking it. I was looking for a way to clear Abt or protect him, and, through him, what was left of the "colony of the spirit." But then, how much was he to be blamed?

For let us admit the truth. One was constantly threatened, shouldered, and, sometimes invaded by "nasty, brutish, and short," lost fights to it in unexpected corners. In the colony? Even in oneself. Was anyone immune altogether? In times like these?

There were so many treasons; they were a medium, like air, like water; they passed in and out of you, they made themselves your accomplices; nothing was impenetrable to them.

The cab stopped. I helped Iva into the house, undressed her and put her to bed. She lay on the blankets, naked, shielding her eyes from the light with her wrist. I turned off the switch and in the dark took off my own clothes.

What sort of barrier could one put up against them, these treasons? If, in Abt, cruelty and the desire for revenge were reduced to pinching a woman's hand, what would my own mind give up if one examined its tiniest gaps and runnels? And what about Iva? And the others, what about the others? But suddenly I felt that none of this excused Abt and that I had only

cunningly maneuvered to achieve the very end I had begun by rejecting. No, I could not justify him. I had been revolted by the way he had pinched her. I could find no excuse for him, none whatsoever. I was beginning to understand what it was that I felt toward him. Yes, I had been revolted by the rage and spite which emerged in the "game"; it had been so savage because its object could not resist. It was some time before I could bring myself to fall asleep. I would think of this more sanely tomorrow, I promised myself, wiping my forehead on the edge of the sheet. But I already knew that I had hit upon the truth and that I could not easily dispel it tomorrow or any other day. I had an uneasy, dream-ridden night.

This was only the beginning. In the months that followed I began to discover one weakness after another in all I had built up around me. I saw what Jack Brill had seen, but, knowing it better, saw it more keenly and severely. It would be difficult for anyone else to know how this affected me, since no one could understand as well as I the nature of my plan, its rigidity, the extent to which I depended on it. Foolish or not, it had answered my need.

The plan could be despised; my need could not be.

I have not visited Minna or Harry since the party. I do not know what sort of aftermath there was; I suppose their troubles were eventually ironed out.

Abt has gone to Washington. He writes occasionally, usually to ask why he so seldom hears from me. He is doing well as an administrator, one of the "bright young men," though I understand he is not satisfied. I don't think he ever will be satisfied. I should perhaps write oftener; he is, after all, an old friend. It isn't his fault that I am disappointed in him.

December 23

Slept until eleven o'clock; sat around all afternoon and thought of nothing in particular. We are going to have Christmas dinner with Amos. Iva accepted his invitation.

December 24

Myron Adler phoned to say that his agency had decided to hire women to make the survey; there is less possibility of their being taken away, leaving things in mid-air. But he did try to get me in, Myron says. He has kept a copy of the memorandum he sent recommending me and he is sending it on as proof that he kept his word. I told him it wasn't necessary to send it; I believed him.

He is sending it anyway. He wants to have a talk with me in the near future. We have agreed tentatively to meet during the holiday. He feels, I daresay, that I need to be taken in hand by someone and straightened out. It's good of him, but I don't think I could allow him to do much for me.

We got "Season's Greetings" cards from John Pearl and from Abt. One of these days I'll have to get around to the dime store to buy envelopes. Iva put in a supply of cards a week ago but she forgot to buy envelopes. Can't convince myself that it's worth the bother. But I suppose we ought to keep up our end of the amenities.

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