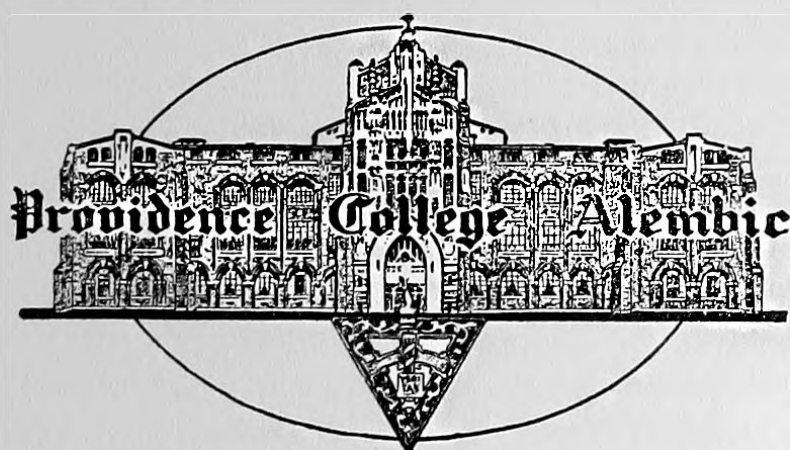


THE ALEMBIC



MARCH, 1950

THE ALEMBIC



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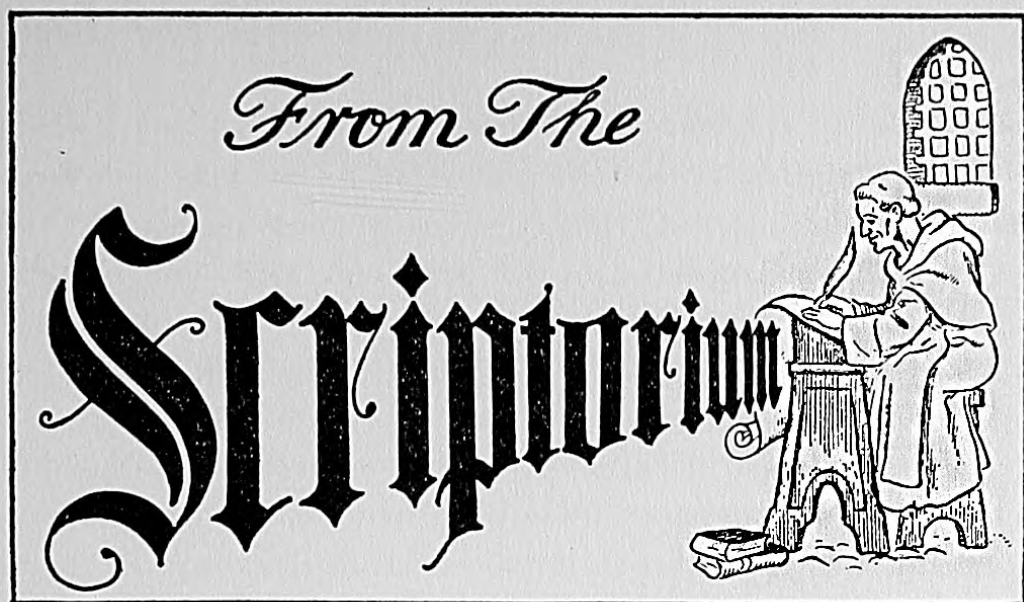
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THE Providence College ALEMBIC, founded in 1920, was the first organ of literary and journalistic expression to exist on the campus. Besides embodying the creative thoughts of the students, it served as the medium through which the religious, athletic, social, academic, and cultural activities were announced. For the following fifteen years it stood alone in the field of Catholic collegiate publications in the state of Rhode Island, with the notable exception of the annual *Veritas*. In November of 1935, the ALEMBIC was relieved of its journalistic duties when the *Cowl* became the official College newspaper. Since that time, the endeavors of the ALEMBIC staff and contributors have been devoted exclusively to matters of creative literary thought.

The ALEMBIC has ever aimed at one ultimate goal: true literary perfection. In striving for this goal, no one pretends to believe that it will be attained during college years. Nevertheless, since these years are often critical in the formation of the character and mind of the full man, the thinking man, a literary quarterly is indispensable in enabling him to express himself articulately both for his own edification and for that of his fellow students. The ALEMBIC, then, is first and foremost a workshop in which ideas and their expression are primary. Following close upon this is the form which this expression takes, depending on the preference of the author and the requirements of the thoughts themselves. The form may be fiction, as a short story,

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a sketch, or an episode. It may be non-fiction: an essay, whether familiar, descriptive, critical, or philosophic; or it may embrace the most exacting means of all, poetry. Finally comes the actual writing of the piece in a manner which will be at once easily understandable and conducive to the maintenance of the reader's sustained interest. Thus the importance of style is immediately apparent.

Style is the participation of the personality of an author in his work. A thought is no more interesting than the man who propounds it, for after all, human beings do not dwell in the abstract. They are interested primarily in other human beings. Since it would be impossible for every reader to meet every author face to face, the reader can know an author only through the medium of the printed page. To the writer, therefore, falls the task of making his work truly a reflection of himself. Indeed, the acquisition of a pleasing style is a definite necessity in any field of artistic endeavor; but this is especially so in the field of literary creation. Assuming that a person who feels compelled to set down his thoughts on paper really believes that he has something to say, the development of a style is his most difficult problem. It is the solution of this problem that constitutes the proximate goal of the ALEMBIC.

In considering material submitted for inclusion in the ALEMBIC, the staff is guided by generally acknowledged principles of literary criticism. Offerings are carefully considered and either accepted for publication or returned to the authors. Each rejected manuscript is accompanied by a written critique which explains in detail the reasons for its rejection and at the same time offers constructive suggestions for rewriting or the improvement of future contributions. It is to be carefully noted, however, that the Editors of the ALEMBIC are not so interested in returning material as they are in seeing it in print.

H. E. V.

From the Scriptorium

To Wales Henry, who precededd me as Editor, I wish to express my sincere and humble gratitude for the aid and counsel he has so graciously given me. His example of efficiency and leadership will serve as a rich source of inspiration to all of us during the year to come.

Of my contemporaries on the staff, I earnestly beg that same spirit of generous and wholehearted co-operation which has characterized them in the past. Although the Torch has changed hands, the goal remains the same: far distant, yet not impossible to reach. The road is long and dark, but the *lux veritatis* will make it bright.

H. E. V.

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A Way of Understanding

By GEORGE L. EAGLE, '50

THE train, a suburban local, stopped with a steel clangor. Outside, the underground blackness silvered the window and gave Drake his image, rather sallow perhaps, the cheeks a bit hollow, but reasonably alert. He stood up and joined the line already waiting in the aisle for the doors of the coach to open. The passengers, Drake knew, were Long Island matrons in town for shopping, elderly men with prosaic purposes, and university students enroute to afternoon classes. The door opened with a pneumatic gasp, the line moved, and he was about to step from the train when he saw, coming from the coach ahead and facing him, Chuck Ellis.

It was strange how you could recognize in an instant someone you had not seen, and hardly thought of, in seven years. Something of the schoolboy in Chuck must have lingered, some contact with the past, some basis for recognition, but it was hard to tell what, because everything about him seemed different. Instead of the baggy slacks and the gray sweater with the reindeer design (Drake remembered the sweater from a civics class with Chuck at the desk ahead sketching naked girls), Chuck was dressed now in a tan gabardine suit and a blue silk tie. Instead of the adolescent pompadour, his hair was brushed close to his head and it might have been already a trifle sparser. His familiar brows were black and heavy and perhaps it was his brows and his dark eyes which had brought Drake to a quick recognition here in the train. After seven years there was no reason to say hello to Chuck

Ellis, but Chuck was already smiling and now there was no way to dodge it.

"Well, Chuck Ellis, what do you know!"

"You late too?" The way Chuck said it, it was a greeting, a good way to say hello, even after seven years. The passengers were pushing their way out, and Chuck and Drake stepped onto the platform, where they could talk. After seven years you had to say more than hello.

"It's my second time this week," Chuck was saying. "I can't seem to make my train. Where you headed?"

"I don't work in town, Chuck, I took the day off to come in."

Chuck grinned. "A little outside interest. Well, you have to have some fun now and then."

Drake chuckled falsely. "I guess so." He wished he were clever at badinage, but it was like that civics class, it was the same thing again, not knowing what to say when Chuck had shown the sketches of the girls. But now they were on the escalator and Chuck was saying something.

"I'll get hell if I keep being late, but I can't seem to make that train.—Gee, Drake, I don't think I've seen you since school."

"I was just thinking the same thing. It doesn't seem possible."

"Seven years. It's funny we never ran into each other. Course there was the war—did they get you?"

"The army for three years, and then I went away to college for a while." Drake wished already he had not mentioned school; he was afraid it would give Chuck an exaggerated estimate of his scholarship, and he could still hear Chuck during a civics test, asking him questions in a whisper. He was

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sorry he had mentioned college, but perhaps Chuck had not noticed, because he was talking of something else.

"I sweated it out in the navy myself, the Pacific, three years of that lousy stuff." He smiled reflectively. "But I'll never forget high school, what a riot. I never laughed so much in my life, it was sure a load of laughs."

Drake could not remember that it had been a load of laughs. He could remember the crowded cafeteria, the girls with acne, and the smell of wet wool on rainy days, but he could not remember laughing all the time. He could remember feeling sleepy after lunch, blushing for a clumsy recitation, and guessing at unknown obscenities, but it had not seemed very gay at the time. He could remember the Senior Ball with Lorraine Schmidt in a pale yellow gown, how dry his throat had got and how clammy his palms. He wondered if Chuck was investing high school with a gaiety it never had, but then he realized that perhaps it was true; perhaps it had really been for Chuck a load of laughs.

They reached the top of the escalator and stepped into the row of underground shops in the station. When they stopped before the window of the bakery, Chuck turned and gave Drake his bland, white smile. It was the smile too that had remained the same, that had made it easy to recognize Chuck Ellis even after seven years. He had sweated out a war in the Pacific, and this morning he had missed his train, but the smile was the same, the smile Drake knew from high school, when everything had been a load of laughs.

"I'd better beat it, Drake, or I'll catch hell. Wish I had it lucky like you, taking off in the middle of the week. I bet it's a dame, I bet you're in for a cozy afternoon."

There must have been a clever parry, but Drake could

not think of it now. He wondered if Chuck would tell his friends that he had run into Drake on the train and, boys, it was really a laugh.

"I wish it were," he heard himself saying, "but it's only a friend from upstate"—he wondered why he tried to minimize it—"in town for a few days. I knew him in the army, and I see him when he comes to New York." It seemed improbable, talking to Chuck about Cyril Keller, here in front of the bakery. They belonged to different parts of his life, and it amused him to find them juxtaposed now in his mind. As he spoke to Chuck, the thought of Cyril consoled him, as if Cyril represented a growth, a development, a maturation which he could never share with Chuck. Very soon he would be talking to Cyril, and then the civics class, the sketches, the reindeer sweater—none of it would matter anymore.

"A friend from upstate," said Chuck, laughing, and then, more seriously: "Hell, I've got to run. Maybe I'll see you next time I miss my train. I can't seem to make that damn train." He laughed again, passed into the crowds, and disappeared.

For a moment Drake stood before the window of the bakery. He felt an unexpected malaise. He wondered why, for five minutes, he had felt bested, in some subtle way, by Chuck Ellis; and then he realized that it had always been the same in school. Chuck represented a group with which he had never been able to cope, and Drake sensed an inadequacy of his own. He reproached himself: there was no reason to render to Chuck an ascendancy to which he had no claim. Chuck was puerile, illiterate, and even loutish, and it was foolish to pay him such deference; but then Drake remembered from some college textbook that you could never efface

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the marks of adolescence, and he knew he would always remember how stiffly he had smiled when Chuck had shown the sketches of the girls.

Someone brushed by, clipping his knee with a bag, and Drake felt a flush of pique. It seemed that the noises were getting louder, the scuffing of feet, the voices, the departure announcements, the clangor of the trains below. It was hot and he could smell the pastry in the shop, the hamburgers frying at a nearby counter, and from the pharmacy the mixed odors of perfume. He read his watch. He did not want to stand in Pennsylvania Station for half an hour waiting for Cyril Keller, yet there seemed to be nothing to do. Then he remembered a bookshop in the concourse where he could browse, and he stepped into the crowd with decision. But his attention was caught by the voice of a girl, loud, thick, uncontrolled. It took him a moment to see her in the throng. She could not have been thirty, and you could see at once that her clothes were fine, but they were disarranged and askew, the hem of her dress torn, her stockings limp at her ankles, her pumps scuffed and one heel partly torn away. It was noon, but she was still quite drunk.

She was railing at the man with her. "You lousy rotter, who the hell you think I am?"

He clutched her arm and she reeled back uncertainly. People stopped, standing at a distance to watch, and some of them laughed. The man still held her arm and in a fury she kicked him. He slapped her soundly and her feathered hat fell across her eyes. But so many people had gathered, encircling the pair in an arena, that Drake could no longer see them.

He went up to the concourse, to the shop, and stood

for a time at the window. He tried to fix his attention upon the display, the new novels, the vocabulary builders, the books about Russia and canasta. He tried to find an interest in them, but presently he stepped inside and approached a shelf of fiction to read the titles.

"May I help you?"

"Oh. No thanks, I'm just—"

"Browsing. Certainly. Just let me know if there's anything you'd like."

Drake lifted a volume down to read the jacket. Mr. Eldred Maynard had wrought a fine and sensitive novel of two lovers caught in a strange passion, living in a world of secrecy and lies. In a prose of remarkable brilliance and texture, Mr. Maynard carried his lovers to heights of courage which alone could give the happiness they sought. Readers of Mr. Maynard's *Life Is for the Valiant* would find the same dramatic scope, the same depth of perception, in this, his finest book.

"I find his work quite stunning, don't you?"

It was a high and studied voice, and Drake turned to face the youth beside him. The face was round and babyish, extraordinarily pallid, and his brows were plucked to thin arched lines. But the first thing you noticed was his hair, long and bleached, waving over the tops of his ears. He wore a yellow silk shirt, open at the neck, with a light blue jacket, and though his smile made Drake squeamish, he wanted to be polite.

"I've never read any of his stuff."

"Oh but you must. He has ever so much to say, and his style's lovely. I read this at a sitting, I simply couldn't leave it."

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"Perhaps I can get at it sometime," said Drake.

"I think they're doing some awfully good things in the novel right now, don't you?"

Drake wished he knew what they were doing in the novel right now. He wished he had something to say. "I'm afraid I don't read as much as I should."

"I should die if I didn't read, but then one does feel sluggish in the summer. I simply live at the beach, but I never tan and I do feel so self-conscious about it."

Drake wished he had something to say, but he turned slightly and started to move away. "Well," he said, because he did not want to be curt, "it's almost October and soon it'll be getting cooler and we'll all feel better." But he had not intended such a flatulent verbosity.

"Oh you're right, and I do love town in October, don't you?"

Drake was edging away now, thankful that the youth remained at the shelves, where the clerk had found him; and as Drake walked toward the door, he could still hear the voice: "Oh you're the one I spoke to. Well, I simply haven't found my Bowen anywhere . . ."

But Drake was in the concourse. He passed between the columns at Savarin's and took the escalator down to the information desk. The floor teemed with people with suitcases and some with light coats on their arms, most of their faces harried and uneasy. He glanced quickly about, but it was still too early for Cyril Keller.

"You're not going to the gate with me?" It was a sailor nearby talking to a girl, both of them young. The girl, with her short hair, cotton dress, and scuffed loafers, was like a child, and though she smiled, her eyes were glazed.

"Go on—you'll miss your train."

He lifted a small bag from the floor. "But gee—"

"Hurry up, you'll miss it." Her voice was faint and hoarse, and Drake could hardly hear it. He felt ashamed for listening. The sailor kissed her briefly and self-consciously and strode away across the floor. He was almost lost in the crowd when the girl gave a little sharp call and ran after him. He turned and waited, smiling diffidently. They linked their arms and vanished.

"Been waiting long?"

Drake smiled and shook hands with Cyril Keller. Cyril was Drake's age, but taller and heavier, in every way, thought Drake, more imposing. He was as impeccable this morning as ever, his hair fastidiously brushed, his face smooth—you could still smell the Yardley's—his suit fresh even in the heat. His clothes, Drake knew, were neither cheap nor custom, and since they were faultlessly tailored and he wore them with dash, they became him. He looked like someone who gave every attention to appearance, and of course he did, and now he was shaking hands with Drake.

"Drake, you never change."

When Drake met people after a separation, he did not like them to assure him that he had not changed. It made him feel unprogressive and static. He could never be sure what such people thought of him, whether they considered him changeless and dependable, or merely torpid. He was suddenly grateful to Chuck Ellis for not remarking that he had not, in seven years, changed.

"I guess you haven't either, you look the same."

"New suit?" asked Cyril. "Looks like sharkskin. I like the nailhead myself, but a stripe looks good on you. Yes—

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terday I was looking at a flannel, but I've got a flannel already, and there's no point in having more than one."

"I guess not. Where's your hotel, Cyril?"

"Midtown, but I came down for shopping and that's why I met you here. I couldn't get a damned thing, but I've enjoyed knocking about."

They were walking now, up the stairs to the street. "You enjoy just being in New York, don't you, Cyril?"

"I love it. I couldn't stand Elmira without a week now and then in New York."

"What've you been doing since you came?" asked Drake. He was already becoming accustomed to Cyril: it was as if the year since his last visit had not elapsed; the first faint strangeness at the information desk was gone, and now he was ready to hear what Cyril had done since his arrival.

"First of all, I saw *South Pacific*. Drake, it's terrific. Have you seen it?"

"I haven't seen anything in months."

"I can't understand you. If I lived in New York—"

"But I don't, Cyril."

"All right, if I lived *near* New York, I'd be here all the time."

"I wonder what you see in New York."

"You'd know soon enough if you lived in Elmira. My job's all that keeps me there, I know when I've got a good thing. But New York has life, for one thing, and I know you don't like the word, but it has glamor. You feel in the center of things, you see everything."

They were in the street now, with the noon crowds pushing by.

"You say that," said Drake, "because you're here so seldom. What are we going to do?"

"First I think we should eat. All I had for breakfast was coffee and I'm starved."

The day was warm, and as they walked through the crowds past the windows of the shops, Drake found it unnecessary to listen too closely to Cyril. It was the way it always was when they met: Cyril was telling him what he had done since his arrival; he was talking about dinner at Longchamps and about a broadcast at Rockefeller Center; he was talking about a film at the Roxy and about the shoes he had bought at John David; he was saying he was pretty sure he had seen Eleanor Roosevelt in a Cadillac. It was always like this when you met Cyril, and you never had to listen too closely.

"Well answer me."

"I'm sorry, Cyril."

"I said where shall we eat?"

They stopped on a corner to consider. Drake tried to think of a place that Cyril would remember in Elmira. "I think I know a place you'll like. Come on."

They went down into the subway and joined the line at the change booth. At its head a colored woman turned sharply from the window and knocked a parcel from the arms of the woman behind her.

"Ah why the hell don't ya watch where you're goin'?"

"Don't you cuss me, you—"

But a train roared by and deadened the rest of the words. An uptown local stopped and when the doors snapped open, Drake and Cyril stepped in and seated themselves on a dirty cane seat that ran along the side of the car. The train

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started and the slight swaying of it induced in Drake an insouciance. He was looking at the posters above the windows, the brassiere and the whiskey advertisements, the expectoration warning, the slogans for macaroni and deodorants. There was a picture of a lemon and a man drinking something hot, and there was a picture of a girl in the bath, and one of the posters, showing three men smiling, declared that it did not matter what you believed or what color you were, if you were American. You might be a Jew or Chinese, but no one cared, if you were American. There were millions of Americans, all different, but they could all pull together. Drake smelled a stench at his left.

"I suppose you think I been like this all my life."

An unshaven old man in a dirty blue suit and a black shirt had sat down beside him. Liquor was heavy on his breath and his gray hair was long and ragged. When he spoke the saliva washed around his black broken teeth.

"I'm a God-fearin' Irishman and let me tell you young fellas—" He broke off and regarded Drake dolefully. Drake was afraid the man was going to cry. He wished it were time to get off. He did not want to rebuff the old man, but he was looking straight ahead, afraid that people were watching.

"Can you give me a dime, boy? Can you give me a nickel or a dime?"

Drake had nearly a dollar in coins but he could not bring himself, in front of everyone, to reach into his pocket and hand money to this man. "Sorry," he mumbled, "I can't." He had hardly heard his own voice and wondered if the man had, and it seemed to him that he should say something more. He felt ashamed, and he wondered what the old man was thinking, this man who had not always been like this. Drake

wanted to say something more, but the train was slowing for his stop, and he turned to Cyril.

"Here we are."

Cyril was grinning. "Who's your friend?"

The train stopped and the doors opened and in a moment Drake and Cyril were in the street. Drake inhaled as much air as he could, he felt his lungs grow taut, then consciously, deliberately expelled it. Cyril was saying he wanted cigarettes and they stopped at one of those snack counters open to the street. Behind it stood a woman reading a magazine and chewing gum and as Cyril asked her for the cigarettes, Drake noticed the boy. He was eating a frankfurter in a roll, holding in his other hand a bottle of pale green soda. His brown hair was uncombed, his eyes in the thin, white face stared blankly into the street, and the soiled shirt spilled over his belt; his trousers were frayed at the cuffs, the loafers on his feet stretched and misshapen. It was noon, the boy was having his lunch, and Drake thought of the place to which he was taking Cyril; and there was something in the ashen thinness of this boy, drinking his green soda, that filled Drake with a pity he felt almost physically. In a moment Cyril would have his cigarettes, and he and Drake would pass on, leaving this boy in some awful isolation.

"Aren't they cheaper in New Jersey?"

"What?"

"Cigarettes."

"Oh, I guess they are. At least they used to be."

But when they reached Park Avenue, he was still thinking of the drunken man in the subway, and the boy in the street.

From the canopied sidewalk they stepped through grilled doors into a foyer with black walls. The floor was car-

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peted in deep red, and great ivory sconces shed a faint light in the room. Here and there people sat about lacquered cocktail tables. Drake gave his name to the headwaiter, who listed it, and then he turned to Cyril.

"While we wait for a table, we can have a drink here, if you like."

They sat down at one of the little tables. Cyril smiled mischievously. "Am I supposed to be awed?"

Drake felt a faint resentment. "You like crabmeat and they have it here thermidor."

"Been here often?"

"Only once, with Lorraine."

"By the way, how is Lorraine?"

"I don't see her much. She keeps taking courses in psychology."

A waiter came and they ordered cocktails. Neither spoke until the drinks came. "What are you thinking of?" asked Cyril.

Drake hesitated; he wondered if he should broach it to Cyril. "It's strange. Today I thought of someone I haven't seen in years." He paused. He did not know whether Cyril would understand; he was not sure he understood himself.

"Well go ahead. What were you going to say?"

"It's not important, and it doesn't mean anything, but it was strange thinking of him there in the bookshop—I dropped into a bookshop just before I met you. I saw someone there who reminded me of a boy I knew as a child. He had a pretty face and his mother made him a long blonde wig by sewing gold fringe to one of her hats. Sometimes he put on lipstick and he swished his hips when he walked. I don't know why I'm telling you this, but I thought of him this morning in the shop, and for a minute I worried about him."

Cyril was looking at him evenly, with a smile. "Why?"

"I don't know exactly, except that everyone keeps saying that childhood sets the pattern of your life."

"When I was a kid," said Cyril, "I set a kitten on a hot stove, but that doesn't mean I'm still doing it."

"I wish you wouldn't always be so flippant."

"You're a funny kid, you know that, Drake?"

"I suppose I am." He tasted the cocktail. "Other people have said it."

"It doesn't bother you?"

"It used to."

Cyril signaled the waiter and ordered again. "When did you last see your friend?"

Drake knew Cyril was asking the question to show an interest he did not really feel. "He moved away, to Chicago, I think, when he was ten. I didn't think of him much after that, but I don't think I ever forgot how the other kids laughed at him, especially the girls. There's nothing more hellish than shrieky little girls."

Cyril allowed an interval and then said: "What do you feel like doing this afternoon? How about a play? I'd sort of like to see *Burned Bridges*."

It had not interested Cyril, and perhaps there was no reason why it should have, and Drake was sorry now that he had broached it. It was only a mood, after all, and not something you could articulate, not something you could propound in a conversation with any sort of meaning at all.

"They say it's pretty funny," Cyril was saying. "Wasn't it written up in *Life*?"

"I don't know, but I suppose we might see it. You know, Cyril, I haven't seen a play in months."

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And then the waiter was there, to say that their table was ready.

Drake stood up and so did Cyril. Drake said, "We'll have plenty of time before the play, and you can tell me what you've been doing since you got here. I think I'll take the thermidor myself."

They were walking now toward an arch outlined with baroque scrollwork, ivory like the sconces, and through it they could see the diners. Cyril was saying something.

"You know, Drake, you're a funny kid. If I lived in New York, I'd always be going to a play."

II

Drake wondered why, before so many plays, there were string quartets playing unfamiliar melodies in the pit. It never seemed to fit with anything, with the smell of fresh paper from the *Playbill*, with the dusty gilt of the proscenium, with the worn drapes in the boxes, with the matrons on their French heels. The scratching of violins continued over the chatter and only the dimming of the lights brought silence. It was an obscure niche in the world, for men like the clerk in the bookshop, whose voice you heard once and never remembered again.

"Rather good seats," Cyril was saying, "I'm surprised we could get them. Maybe the play's no good."

"If you can't get tickets you're disappointed, and if you can the play's no good. I think Fox did the sets." He was beginning already to feel hot. He never went to the theatre before October, except when Cyril was in town.

The chandeliers went dim and a battery of lights in the balcony flooded the curtain. The violins were gone and

a wave of silence passed over the audience. He was aware of Cyril settling his position and placing the *Playbill* on his lap. The curtain was rising.

He had forgotten to read the synopsis of scenes, but with the light from the stage he could still make it out. It was midnight in Sybil Chandler's apartment in New York. The room you saw had high French windows on the left, with diaphanous drapes; on the right an ebony fireplace flush with the cream wall, a still life hung above it; and to the rear an alcove where Sybil was now seeing guests to the door. The women wore fur wraps over their gowns and the men wore black coats and white silk scarves. Drake supposed the *Playbill* announced the gowns by Sophie, the shoes by I. Miller, and the beverages by Park and Tilford.

Sybil Chandler was smiling, everyone was saying good night, they had all had a heavenly time. Sybil Chandler was saying, in a throaty theatrical voice, that they had been absolute darlings to come. In a moment she was alone, having closed the door behind them, and she came downstage with a sigh. Glancing to the door at the right, she took from the coffee table a cigarette and lighted it listlessly. A tall man came in from the right, pulling on his gloves.

"Oh," said Sybil.

"It's me."

"I rather suppose it is. I thought you'd left."

"I couldn't find my gloves. I can't imagine how they got to your room."

"How strange. Could she—?"

"She?"

"Agatha . . ."

"Hardly. You see—"

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Sybil flung her cigarette into the fireplace. "Then you did ditch her?"

"I shouldn't put it that way. You didn't see her leave, about ten?"

Sybil smiled and sank onto the ottoman. "I'm awfully afraid I did."

"You're—sorry?"

"Dreadfully." She walked quite slowly upstage and threw a switch. The stage now darkened, they were standing together in a shaft of bluish light from the window. "I'm afraid I'm utterly degraded."

He bent her suddenly in an impassioned theatrical kiss. Drake did not know why it reminded him of the sailor and the girl in the station. The circumstances were dissimilar, there was nothing but the kiss to suggest it, yet he was thinking of the girl who was afraid she would cry if she went to the gate with the sailor. The stage was relighted and the actors were talking again, but he was not giving them his attention, and it struck him curiously that here in the theatre he was thinking of the sailor and the girl. The sailor might still be on the train, enroute to Norfolk perhaps and reading a detective novelette, or playing cards with some others. Drake wondered about the girl: perhaps she was home now, in some apartment in New York, but not like Sybil Chandler's. The sailor and the girl were apart, they were in love, but they could not be very clever about it.

"But if she comes back—"

"Who?"

"Agatha."

"Oh. I rather think she won't."

He wondered how long his mind had been off the play.

He glanced at Cyril's face, attentive, absorbed. Someone must have said something funny, because now the audience was laughing. Cyril nudged him.

"That's the slickest one yet."

Everyone laughed again, and Drake wished he could give his mind to the play.

"You forget, my dear, I'm an utterly wicked man."

The actress chuckled; then sighed deeply and rose from the divan to face him on the hearth. "What a hellish bore it was, waiting for now."

"You were good."

"Good?"

"Efficient. Not a soul suspected."

"Not even Agatha?"

"Not even Agatha. Agatha least of all, I should say."

She laughed a hoarse, artistic laugh. "You fool. You don't know women."

Drake wished the scene would end. He wanted a cigarette, but perhaps that was not the reason, and perhaps it was an undivided act, it seemed to be lasting so long. He glanced again at Cyril, still entranced.

"Perhaps you don't know men."

She turned from him and walked across the stage to the window. For a moment she stood there in silence, and when she spoke she managed somehow to get a catch into her voice. "I've known too many, I thought it was finished, but now I should love to know you."

"I don't know in which sense to take that."

She swung about and faced him levelly. "How the hell can I make it any clearer? You *are* a child."

He strode across the stage and embraced her. "You

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know what this means. I'm not like the others. This time you're burning your bridges."

The door in the alcove opened, and in staggered an actress in a sequined gown, her face half concealed by long hair. In a thick contralto she said, "Sybil, I've just come back to tell you what you are."

Sybil met her in the center of the stage. "My dear, it's public knowledge. Agatha, where's your coat?"

"Downstairs, at Mildred's."

"But Mildred's in Paris."

Agatha gave a short hysterical laugh. "She was, until yesterday."

Sybil stared at her. "Agatha—"

"You certainly don't believe, Sybil, that I'm going to fight you alone."

The two women glowered at each other while the curtain fell.

Everyone was applauding now, and Drake joined briefly. Cyril was smiling and saying something about the actress, but Drake could not understand him. People were already leaving for the lounges and the lobby, and Drake suggested a cigarette.

The lobby was small and hung with the portraits of actors. It was already dense with smoke and loud with conversation. A woman near Drake was saying that it was really an awfully smart play, and a young man, he must have been a student, was talking in a brisk tone.

"Of course the lines are all juxtaposition, and you don't realize till it's over how false they really are. It's an extremely clever deception."

Drake was not sure that it was really a deception at all,

but someone was asking the young man what he meant by juxtaposition. A girl in a gray suit was telling someone she had lunched on stuffed figs and an orange salad, and Cyril was talking about plays.

"In Chicago I saw Bankhead. The girl's a riot, Drake, I've never laughed so much in my life."

Drake felt himself squint; he looked at Cyril closely. "Cyril, did you laugh much in high school?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean—was it all a load of laughs?"

Cyril gave a short laugh. "You get like this every time I see you. I don't know what you mean."

"It's a simple enough question. I'm only asking if you laughed a lot in school."

"Of course I did, doesn't everyone? I was young, there was nothing to worry about."

He was trying to make Cyril understand, he was trying to find the words for what he meant. "Nothing to worry about?"

"You know what I mean. It was all silly stuff, little things that didn't matter. What got us started on this?"

"I was just thinking of something."

"Well, you've got to get the kicks while you're young, and, believe me, Drake, I did."

Someone with a high voice was saying that the second act was about to begin, and would everyone return to his seat.

Cyril dropped his cigarette into an urn. "That girl's perfect as Sybil. I'm sure I've seen her before."

"You can find it all in the *Playbill*," said Drake, "and you can have your *Playbills* bound."

III

The curtain was down and already, amid the applause, people were leaving their seats. You could see their silhouettes coming up the aisle while behind them the rising curtain revealed the cast lined across the stage. The actress who had played Sybil held the actor's hand, and they both bowed graciously, and Cyril was folding his *Playbill*.

"Let's wait for the crowd to get out," said Drake.

The stage lights in the balcony went out and the chandeliers came on. The usherettes were turning up seats and gathering scattered programs, and Cyril was saying something.

"Mind if we go to the hotel before dinner? I'd like to wash up and anyway there's plenty of time. Enjoy the play?"

"Utterly."

"Oh shut up."

The theatre was nearly empty, and as they rose, the curtain went up and a man in overalls carried to the center of the stage a naked light, nothing but a bulb on a stanchion. It filled the set with a harsh brightness, transforming Sybil Chandler's apartment into a structure of canvas flats, painted a dull and vacant hue. The colored lights in the balcony had given them a richness which was purely illusory and a texture wholly false. But the thing that startled Drake was the shallowness of the set, and he wondered what had given it the spaciousness in which the actors had moved. The sofa downstage was but a few feet from the back and the alcove was only a recess. Sybil Chandler's apartment, a moment ago so large and elegant, was small now, cramped and shallow. The play was over.

"See the stage?" said Drake when they stepped into the aisle.

Cyril turned and gave it a glance. "What about it?"

"Looks different, doesn't it?"

Cyril regarded him curiously. "Of course it does. What'd you expect?"

Through the doors of the lobby they could see the street, the people passing by, the playgoers in little knots of conversation, the cabs and the trucks and the cars. They could hear the sounds of traffic, the horns, the slamming of cab doors, the occasional shouts of the drivers. They could smell the odors, the fumes that mixed already with the smoke and the perfume that lingered still in the lobby, and the plush stuffiness of the theatre. They stepped into the street and into a cab and Cyril gave the name of his hotel.

Drake sank back in the seat and lighted a cigarette. "You know, Cyril, I'm a bit tired."

"It must have been the heat in the theatre, or perhaps you're hungry. You'll feel better when we've eaten, and you'll feel better when you've washed up. Maybe a drink would fix us."

He was not hungry and he did not want a drink, but Cyril was being constructive and Drake did not want to be curt. In a jam of traffic the cab stopped, long enough for Drake to see an old woman leaning against a wall. The people were brushing by her on the sidewalk, but she seemed insensitive to them, as she stood there in a black coat and blue corduroy slippers. In her bony hands she clutched a little black purse. At first Drake suspected she was faint, but he could not tell, and he could not read her face; there was in it at once too much and too little, sadness, bewilderment, and even, though he tried not to dramatize, a sort of valor: all muted by time and poverty. Lined and indistinct, it seemed without

faced east and outside the sunset gilded Manhattan with a rose splendor. Drake crossed the room and stood at the window, for a moment silent. He heard Cyril rummaging in the suitcase for something, probably for a fresh shirt, and he heard him switch on the light in the bath, but he remained at the window, watching all those other windows afire with the sun.

"Remember this morning, Cyril, you said New York had glamor?"

Cyril came over to the window. He had taken off his shirt, and he stood for a time with a towel about his neck. "It's really magnificent, isn't it? Now I guess you see what I mean." His voice was good-humored, and he smiled gently, with benevolence and a sort of amusement. "You know, Drake, you pretend not to like New York, but maybe you're too close to it—I mean, maybe you can never really find a way of understanding it."

He went into the bath, and Drake could hear the water running in the basin, and in a moment he caught the fragrance of soap. Cyril was asking him to look for a brush on the bureau, but Drake remained at the window. It seemed to him that the sun was like the stage lights in the theatre, lending the scene a glory it did not possess. When night extinguished the sun, everything would turn to canvas again, with no magic of its own. He wanted to tell Cyril that it was all the setting for a play, but Cyril would tell him that he would never say that, if only he lived in Elmira. Cyril would tell him he needed a drink.

He heard Cyril come in from the bath. "Thanks for the brush, kiddo."

"Cyril," said Drake, still without turning from the view, "you said this morning that in New York you see every-

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thing, but you don't. No one ever sees everything, and even when we see the same thing, the angle's always different. It's like those people in the theatre—everyone saw the same play, but from a different vantage. Chuck Ellis and I went to the same school, and Chuck thought it was a hell of a lot of fun, but it didn't seem like much fun to me. Chuck Ellis thought it was just loads of laughs."

He could hear Cyril brushing his hair. "What's eating you, Drake? You've been moping since we left the theatre. Go in and wash your face, and I'll have some drinks sent up. A drink will do us both a lot of good."

He heard Cyril sink onto the bed and lift the receiver of the phone. "Room Service, please.—It's only a mood, Drake, you'll get over it."

"That's what I'm afraid of, Cyril, I'm afraid I'll get over it."

"No, no, I'm trying to get Room Service."

Drake turned about and seated himself on the sill. He was looking at Cyril, sitting there on the bed, wrapped in a silk robe, his fresh crisp collar open, the receiver in one hand, a cigarette in the other. "You take bourbon, don't you? Or maybe you'd like a cocktail. We'll take our time and then go out to dinner. What'll it be?"

"Anything, Cyril, I don't care."

There was benignity in the smile Cyril gave him. With his face washed and his hair freshly brushed, Cyril looked, sitting there on the bed, composed and assured.

"By the way, who the hell's Chuck Ellis?—Hello, Room Service? Just a minute—" He covered the mouthpiece and looked again at Drake. "I'll have them send up martinis. A drink will do us both a lot of good."

Rest Stop

By WALES B. HENRY, '50

At a fire-swept bar
Neath a blood-red star,
Resting a bit from their Hell-bound ride,

Sit a blonde and a brute
And the devil's recruit,
Who sailed on the ebb and not on the tide.

They shed no tear
In their red-hot beer;
They of the damned who have died.

They join the elite
On a red-hot seat
And get their posteriors fried.

They toast to their sin
With a lava-like gin
And a chaser of brimstone beside;

It's mighty hot fun
For the things that they've done
In sinfulness, hatred and pride.

And now, at long last
Their respite is far past
And the devil soon herds them outside

To the molten-red cart
Of the sin-stained heart,
On a highway that's broad and wide.

And with little of cheer
And a great deal of fear
They start in again on their ride,

And the coachmaster's whip
Recommences their trip
To the fiery-red land where the evil reside.

Hurricane Within

By MIKE HARTUNG, '51

I WAS awake, and lying face-down on the hard, cold floor of my cabin. My head hurt where it had struck the deck, and part of my body lay sprawled over an upturned typewriter. The wet floor was cluttered with papers, and the room was tilted at an angle.

I struggled to my feet. The angle suddenly changed, and I was thrown against the forward bulkhead. The cabin shook with a creaking, splitting sound, and I could hear pots and pans falling in the galley below. I went to an open port-hole, and dogged it shut against the wind and spray. I looked out at No. 2 boat, whose canvas cover was flapping wildly at a loose end, where it had torn loose. The angle shifted again, in a deep roll from starboard, and I was pressed hard against the wall. Through the mist, I saw a mountain of foam and spray towering above the boat-deck. The black lifeboat cover was suddenly obscured in white, and the sea smashed against the glass.

I groped about, picking things up off the deck and securing everything that was loose, and thinking how strange it was that a short while ago this cabin had been crowded with men and pretty French women. That was when we were tied up at Brest, an hour before we got underway. We had called it our "bon voyage" party, but I guess the occasion was merely an excuse for a mixed drinking bout. I had been elected host, since my cabin was nearest the gangway. All the ship's officers were there, even the captain, and the two

agents, and of course our girls. We christened five bottles of champagne, applauding each time a cork would hit the ceiling. We were all happy, even though we were leaving, and there was much laughter and silly feminine chatter. Sunshine flooded in through the open ports, and sparkled on wine glasses and green bottles and silver hairclaspers.

A while later somebody had knocked on the door, shouting that our tug was laying off, and the party broke up quickly. After saying *au revoir* at the gangway, I returned to clean up the mess in my cabin. My head was dizzy from the champagne; but I felt warm and good all over, and very drowsy. Presently I was sprawled out on my bunk and hearing footsteps overhead, and stevedores yelling on the dock, and lines splashing in the water. The sounds had become vaguer, and vaguer, and all blended together.

It seemed almost no time at all since those things had happened. And now I had all I could do to stay on my feet, as I clutched my way toward the door of the cabin. So this was the hurricane they had checked ashore. Sparks had been to the port weather station that morning, and he'd said something about it at the party; but we had all laughed, because you can't rely on the frogs for a weather report.

Grabbing a coat, I wrenched open the door and stepped out. The door slammed quickly behind me, and I was thrown flat against the opposite side of the companionway. This time it was worse than usual, she just kept on going—over, and over, and over—and I wished to hell she'd come back. Then everything slanted lengthwise, shaking violently, and most of the overhead lights went out. There was a loud, hollow pounding up forward, and I knew our bow was completely under.

Hurricane Within

At last she steadied again, and I went slowly along the dim passageway, my feet wide apart and my hands brushing the walls. I stumbled over something, and bumped into someone who was edging around a corner. It was the 3rd mate, coming off watch. His tired face was wet, and a dripping sou'wester sat clumsily on his head. He wore a soaked life-preserver over his foul-weather gear, making his bulky frame appear even bulkier. He steadied himself against the wall.

"Beautiful weather!" I laughed.

"Yeah. I bin sunbathin' all afternoon."

I punched the cork of his life-jacket. "Whatsa matter, Bill, can't you swim?"

"Cap's orders," he mumbled. "Better climb in yourself, Mike."

He went on, edging along the bulkhead toward his cabin. I picked up a fallen life-preserver and put it on, and then groped across to the companion ladder. Placing my feet on the second step and hanging out from the handrail, I waited for the ladder to come back to normal position. I could hear the whir and thump . . . thump . . . thump of the engines below. And from the bridge above came a piercing r-r-r-rring, as the engine order telegraph slowed us down to "all-ahead 1/3". The props came up aft on a forward pitch, she shook all over, and I almost lost my grip on the railing. Then I was being pressed down toward the ladder, and I stumbled across it to the upper deck.

The passageway was dimly visible in a red, flickering light. I smelled liquor, and from the 1st engineer's cabin came a drawling, singing voice. Somewhere, something slid

back and forth in a wash-cabinet, banging the sides. I heard a whining staccato noise, and made my way to the radio shack.

Sparks had his earphones on, and was slouched forward in a chair which kept tilting back and forth. He hugged the table with his left arm and jotted figures down rapidly on a scratch pad. His head was cocked to one side, the brows upraised in that cynical way of his, and a cigarette with a long ash stuck to his lower lip. The monotonous whine suddenly stopped, and he looked up and smiled.

"Who's in trouble?" I asked.

"Oh, some poor character 12° North. Just get up?"

"Yeah."

"Some party. Champagne knock y'a out?"

"Guess so."

"S'matter, kid, don't they teach ya to drink at college?"

"Look who's talkin'!"

Sparks laughed, snuffed out the cigarette with his fingers, and leaned back in his chair. Then suddenly the chair lurched forward, he caught at the table for support, and his head struck the instrument panel. He braced himself and looked over at me, craning his neck sideways. The slanted cabin shook hard, and again I heard that deep, hollow pounding noise. This time it was louder, and it scared me a little. I knew it was up forward, but it seemed to come from everywhere. Then we stopped shaking, and I couldn't hear the sound any more, and Sparks settled back in his chair. He lit another cigarette and looked vaguely at the overhead.

"Hope she holds," he sighed.

"What holds?"

Hurricane Within

"The bow."

"Why?"

"She split this afternoon."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, in two places. Old Man's pretty worried."

"That's nice," I said.

I left the shack, and walked unsteadily through the companionway. The lights blinked on and off now, showing quick glimpses of a hazy red gloom between short intervals of darkness. I passed the chartroom and heard the tic . . . tic . . . tic of the trace indicator. I reached the door to the bridge-house, opened it, and stepped in.

It was very dark, except for a small patch of light on the compass scale. Heavy spray thudded against glass, and I could hear the sea flooding in on our wings outside. Someone was whistling softly, and somewhere the mate mumbled to the wheelman in his strong Norwegian accent. The deck slanted hard against my feet, and there was a commotion at the wheel, and the sound of hands slapping against wooden spokes. And always the tink . . . tink . . . tink of the compass. I squinted and saw the captain, his face flat against the window, staring hard through the darkness at the bow.

DEBUT . . .

MIKE HARTUNG, '51, the newest ALEMBIC author, is a native Rhode Islander who came to us via Phillips Andover, a war-time Navy stint, and Dartmouth. The salt flavor of his writing is come by honestly; he divides his summers between sailing on Narragansett Bay, and shipping out as a seaman aboard Merchant Marine vessels.

Wanderlust

By CLIFFORD J. BROTT, '50

What sadness do I realize
To think the world before me lies
All too immense for human eyes
To view in its totality.

For often does my fancy wander
Past the hills and valleys yonder
To distant lands of which I'm fonder
Than of my locality.

My fancied trips encompass climes
Of all the world, and all the times
That ever were—These are but rhymes
Which share my dull reality.

Strange Ship

By MIKE HARTUNG, '51

DURING the meal a silence had come over the saloon mess, it seemed to have seeped in through the open portholes from the close-enveloping fog outside, and even the colored messboy was careful as he stacked plates in the pantry. At the table there was hardly a sound, and the only voice was the captain's. While talking he sipped his coffee nervously and kept glancing up at the portholes, which showed nothing but fog and some vague outlines of rigging. His voice was low and he was trying to sound casual; but none of us were listening to him.

He stopped talking abruptly, I looked up at the clock on the bulkhead and saw it was time, and suddenly again came the deafening noise of our fog horn. I counted the long and short blasts, it was the same warning signal as before——
HOLDING — COURSE — ON —206 — PLEASE — REPLY —— ; and then it ceased, trailing off over the still ocean, and we waited.

This time the Old Man didn't resume talking, but just stared reflectively at the ports. There was no more tinkling of silverware, everyone was listening, and the messboy stood motionless and wide-eyed with his hand on an empty coffee cup. And it seemed as if the whole ship waited. Footsteps overhead had ceased, and a guitar back aft wasn't playing any more, and all we could hear was the sizzling of calm sea past the waterline outside.

Then came the whistle of the other ship, this time much louder and close at hand, and some of the men jumped to their feet. It was still a long routine blast, no reply signal at all, and she was unmistakably dead ahead.

"Why doesn't the damn fool answer?" growled the 2nd officer; and we all looked at the captain, who had partly raised himself from the seat and was craning his neck toward the portholes. Outside there was a commotion up forward, and we could hear men shouting and running along the deck toward the midshiphouse.

Our whistle sounded off again, it was the emergency warning now, and the plates on the table rattled at every short screeching blast. The captain had stood up and was trying to make himself heard between the blasts, but they were too loud and rapid and I could only see his lips moving. And then suddenly he was running toward the door, and the rest of us got up and followed him out.

Some men stood waiting in the companionway, more men were coming out of their fo'c's'les, and they all watched us as we hurried past. A few of them were rubbing sleep from their eyes and cursing and wondering what the racket was about.

The deafening blasts continued, and I couldn't even hear our footsteps as we bounded up the companion ladder. I watched the heels of the man in front of me and thought about the other whistle, and about our cargo of high explosives and the three boats that had been carried away off the capes and where I'd put my life-preserver. And then we reached the 3rd deck, and ran down the passageway, and clattered into the bridgehouse.

Strange Ship

The mate was at the bridge window, his feet wide apart and his face pressed against the glass. He was yanking the whistle's cord overhead, and his other hand was held up in readiness. The quartermaster stood braced at the wheel, gripping the spokes hard and staring doggedly at the upraised hand, and his face was pale as he waited for the signal.

The Old Man ran across to the mate and yelled something in his ear. The mate nodded and let go of the cord; and suddenly the whistle had stopped blowing, echoing sharply against steel decks and bulkheads outside. And then it was quiet, as we stood waiting and peering through the glass at the grey invisibility beyond, and I could hear the tinkling of the compass scale above the steady murmur of smooth sea.

The fog was so thick we could hardly see the foremast and the bow was completely hidden; so all we could do was stare into nothingness, and listen. And I suddenly knew, by the quick breathing of the men beside me, that I wasn't the only one whose heart was beating fast.

I glanced around for the captain and saw him alone out on the port wing, and I went outside and joined him. He was clutched over the slippery rail, his eyes closed and his face tense and rugged against the grey mist, and he seemed to be searching the fog with a sixth sense.

"Where do you think she is, Cap'n?" I asked quietly.

He didn't answer. I could hear the sea up ahead being knifed by the bow and slapping our hull on the way back and shying off in a cloud of spray, and I knew he was listening for something above these sounds. The fog was very near and I almost thought I could touch it, and I felt hemmed in and helpless and unable to escape.

All of a sudden the captain swung around and cupped his hands to his mouth.

“Hard right rudder!” he roared. “Full speed! Sound off!”

I heard the men inside echoing the orders and the piercing r-r-r-ring of the engine telegraph and a slapping of hands against wooden spokes, and suddenly these sounds were deadened by the screeching blasts of our whistle. I instinctively braced myself on the deck and held on tight to the railing, and squinted hard into the fog.

And then I saw it. Just off our port bow there was a darkening shadow in the grey curtain of fog. It got bigger, and darker, and then it started to grow long; and suddenly I heard another ship's whistle between our own short blasts. The shadow kept getting longer, and longer, and soon it was coming abeam of us.

The two whistles stopped blowing, and the other men came out of the bridgehouse and joined us on the wing. No one spoke or moved, we just stood there gazing at the long dark shadow in the fog, and we could hear the sizzling of sea past two waterlines. Presently there was the slow, monotonous grinding of screws and the sound of props kicking up water in a fury, and we heard the water spraying all around below. And then the shadow passed and there was nothing but the grey fog before us, and the foam of a widening wake below.

An editor with space to spare
(We'd like you all to know it)
Must be, of course, an editor,
And also be a poet.

The Idol of Beauty

By RAYMOND D'AMBROSIO '51

THE ad read: Woman wanted to do housework five hours daily. Apply 1228 Kingston Road.

Diane folded the paper, got into a worn brown coat, placed an old straw hat on her head, and started quickly for 1228 Kingston Road.

Diane wasn't a pretty girl; in fact, one could not truthfully call her homely; she was ugly. She had long, straight, straw-like hair, which, no matter how often she tried, would not curl, and which she wore in an upsweep, that was the style in 1910. Her face was gaunt and angular, and her slightly aquiline nose heightened her plainness; her lips were two thin lines, having no fullness or curve. There was no sparkle in her narrow brown eyes, whose disquieting dullness left one cold. Her figure held no grace, and her every gesture was devoid of any suppleness. A stinging consciousness of her own ugliness made her diffident, so that she was singularly shy whenever anyone spoke to her, stammering and faltering a reply. She had no friends, and she had convinced herself that she didn't mind this lack of friendship. Long ago she had become glumly resigned to the fact that she was to go through life alone; and she was satisfied with her lot.

Twelve twenty-eight Kingston Road was a gaunt three-storied house. There was a cupola in the center of the flat roof, and from the third floor three dormer windows gazed contemptuously down on the beings who passed by. Hesitantly, Diane pulled the door bell knob, shivering slightly and

wondering whether there could be any happiness in such a cheerless-looking place.

The door opened slowly, and a tall, slender old woman who was about seventy and whose ash-colored hair was off her neck and rolled tightly on top of her head, stared at Diane with lustreless, introspective eyes. For a moment, neither spoke; then, Diane, discomfited by the woman's unwavering gaze, said timidly, "You advertised for a house-cleaner?"

"Yes," the woman said abstractedly. "Come in, my dear."

Haltingly, Diane entered the house, and the woman closed the door after her. Diane found herself in a large, gloomy hallway. It was so quiet, so peculiarly quiet, that the soft beating of her heart seemed to resound throughout the spacious room. Glancing about, Diane observed the wide stairway, with its intricately carved balustrade, tapering off into black nothingness; and the huge crystal chandelier that swayed high above her, its precisely cut prisms tingling a sad melody as they touched each other. And she noticed the old woman's high cheekbones showing through her fragile, sallow skin, and her eyes, sunken into their oval sockets, watching her closely.

"You've come in answer to my advertisement in the paper?"

"Yes," Diane replied, the woman's hard gaze causing her to stutter.

"I see."

The interview was short. The old woman, who introduced herself as Miss Wyndham, asked for references and seemed satisfied with those that Diane gave her. After studying Diane's fresh, impeccably clean appearance, she informed

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the girl of her duties. She was to come every morning at ten, dust and sweep, and keep the house in order. She did not have to prepare meals, for Miss Wyndham had a cook. And the pay was liberal: six dollars a week.

"Is everything satisfactory to you?"

Amazed at the rapidity with which she was accepted, Diane murmured a weak, "Yes."

"It is not necessary for you to start your duties today. If you will be here tomorrow at ten o'clock, you may begin then."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I hope you will be happy in this house, my dear. At first, the rooms will seem cold and dark; but, I'm sure, in time you will become inured to the gloom. And," she added, in a whisper, "you'll be thankful for it. Good day."

The next morning at ten, Diane rang the rear door bell of 1228 Kingston Road, and was let into a large kitchen by Mrs. McCarthy, the cook. Mrs. McCarthy, a short, rotund woman, with a fat, florid face, explained to Diane that Miss Wyndham wasn't able to see her this morning, for the old woman wasn't feeling good. So, Mrs. McCarthy gave Diane a somber grey uniform to put on, placed a duster in the girl's hand, then walked down a narrow passageway to the parlor, Diane following.

"You begin in here, dearie. And be careful. Don't break nothin'," she enjoined Diane, waddling back to the kitchen.

For a moment, Diane remained in the doorway, glancing about the parlor. Here, too, was the ubiquitous gloom. Covering the floor was a thick carpet, which was worn in spots;

directly before Diane across the room was a high marble fireplace. An overstuffed settee of green velvet and two smaller chairs of similar hue and material were placed a good distance from the fireplace so that their occupants might not be deprived of the comforting heat of the fire. There were carved tables upon which stood various pieces of bric-a-brac. Heavy satin curtains kept out the brightness of the day. And over everything lay a patina of dust.

Diane found it increasingly difficult to restrain her impulse to throw open the windows and let welcome fresh air into the musty parlor. But, she intuitively felt that Miss Wyndham would not condone such an action. So, sighing deeply over the job she had taken upon herself, Diane entered the parlor, duster in hand.

As she worked, Diane could not help but wonder how anyone could live in such a depressing house. Did Miss Wyndham not see the darkness, feel the chill dankness? Or had she, as she had assured Diane the day before she would grow, become accustomed to the stillness and gloom. Miss Wyndham was a puzzle, thought Diane, who was so deeply engrossed in her thoughts that only by her quick movements did she save, in the shortness of a breath, a figurine from toppling to the floor.

Never before in her life had Diane had the sensations of unbearable yet pleasing warmth run through her, of unsustainable joy overcome her, of bursting exuberance surge through her. Yet, at this moment, she experienced all three sensations. And when these alien feelings had passed and the transient minute during which she believed herself beautiful had fled, a singular coldness numbed her body. Trembling slightly, she gazed down at her white, shaky hand, and the

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sight of the figurine that she had rescued from destruction brought her back to the murky parlor.

For a long time she stared at the figurine, which was about seven inches high. The substance of which the figure had been carved was doubtful. It was a brilliant white, and looked as smooth as marble; however, the stone—or whatever the material—lacked the dead coldness of marble. Instead, it was warm, like human flesh. The figure itself appeared life-like. For the figure was that of a woman, an inexpressibly, incomparably beautiful woman, who was naked from the waist up. She was smiling, and there was loveliness in the sensual curve of her lips. At any moment, it seemed as if she would laugh aloud, making the room brighter with her happy, musical laughter. The contour of her breast, of her narrow waist, of the folds of the loose tunic that covered her legs was the work of either a master or a man silently in love with his model, and instead of bespeaking his love to her, expressed his worship of her in his work. And, truly, no words of love could have expressed more sweetly, more tenderly the creator's feelings than the quiet beauty of the figure. Diane, passing her thumb over the slender, graceful arms that were raised behind the figure's head, so that the figure's fingers were lost in the human softness of her hair, was startled by the fleshy smoothness of the arms. It was as if through this figure of a smiling woman flowed hot human blood.

Why, she never knew, but suddenly Diane turned around, and she gasped with surprise as she saw the thin figure of Miss Wyndham standing in the doorway, watching her.

"She's beautiful, isn't she, Diane?" Miss Wyndham said in a weak voice.

It took a second for Diane to agree, "Yes, very beautiful, ma'am."

"She seems to fascinate you."

"She—she does. It's as if—as if the figure were flesh and blood."

"You feel that, Diane? That she—this figurine—is alive?" Miss Wyndham asked, her brow wrinkled.

"Yes," Diane admitted, flushing at her own silly words. "I know it's foolish."

"Yes," Miss Wyndham repeated after her, with slight movement of her dry lips, so that her words came out like a sigh, "foolish."

Slowly, she walked over to Diane. Stopping a few inches in front of the girl, Miss Wyndham looked down at the figurine which Diane still held in her hands.

"It is a very old figurine. Centuries old. It's been in my family a good many years, so I wouldn't want anything to happen to so precious an object. You must handle it with great care," Miss Wyndham instructed her, taking the figurine from Diane.

"Yes, ma'am. I will."

For a minute, Miss Wyndham held the figurine tightly in her wizened hand, so that her knuckles became white. Then, she placed the smiling figure on the table.

"A man, a Mr. Collins, will be here shortly, Diane. When he arrives, have him come into the living room."

"Yes, ma'am."

Sinking into the comforting softness of a chair, Miss Wyndham said, "You needn't dust in here any longer. Leave everything as it is. Go out."

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"Yes, ma'am." And obediently she left Miss Wyndham alone in the room.

Diane was in the dining room when the shrill ring of the front door bell sounded through the house. Putting down her duster, she hastily moved toward the front door. A tall, handsome man, briefcase under his arm, smiled at the timid maid and announced himself, "I'm Mr. Collins. Miss Wyndham is expecting me."

"Oh, yes, sir. Miss Wyndham is in the living room."

"You're new here, aren't you?" he said, handing Diane his coat and hat.

"Yes, sir. I was hired yesterday."

"Oh." And he walked toward the living room.

When she was in the kitchen later in the day, Diane asked Mrs. McCarthy who Mr. Collins was. The cook told her that he was Miss Wyndham's lawyer—or something. He was the only person who ever came to visit the old woman. And she remarked, archly, he was very handsome, wasn't he? Yes, he was.

PART II

After the newness of coming each morning at ten to Kingston Road had worn off, the house lost its air of formidability and the rooms no longer sent shivers through Diane, who, as Miss Wyndham had prophesied, had become accustomed to the gloom. In time, the house offered her a place of sanctuary to which she could come everyday and forget that beyond the cold walls was a world ready to mock her ugliness. As days progressed, the quiet, the peculiar, penetrating quiet, ceased to frighten Diane; instead, it soothed her, made her calm, so that when the hour to depart arrived, she found her-

self reluctant to leave the unusual tranquility of the house and return to the outside world of jibing people.

One Friday, (she didn't work Saturdays) when she had been working in the house for three weeks, Diane was surprised to receive an invitation to tea for the following Sunday from Miss Wyndham. Diane accepted timidly, remembering the hard and fast rule that no employee should ever dine with his employer. However, at three o'clock Sunday afternoon, Diane, balancing a cup of tea in her hand, was sitting in the living room opposite Miss Wyndham. Neither spoke much. But, after awhile, Miss Wyndham asked, "Have you a mother and father?"

"No, ma'am. They died when I was young."

"Have you any friends?"

"None."

"Do you miss friendship?"

"No," Diane replied, sipping her tea.

An understanding smile parted Miss Wyndham's lips. "I see," she murmured, causing Diane to look at her quickly. Did this old woman really know how greatly she missed the love of a friend.

They were silent for a moment; then, "I like you, Diane," Miss Wyndham told her.

"Thank you. You're very kind."

"You remind me of myself when I was a girl. The same plain features. The same sadness in the eyes. You see, my dear, I, too, was ugly." She said the last sentence with her narrow eyes staring at Diane, waiting to discern the girl's reaction to her cruel bluntness.

Diane smarted. As long as she would live, she would never become accustomed to a person's openly speaking of her

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ugliness. And Miss Wyndham's mentioning it now pricked her bubble of happiness.

"I did not mean to hurt you, Diane," Miss Wyndham assured her, hurrying to repair any injury she may have inflicted.

"It's all right," Diane said. "You are not the first to comment on my—my plainness. And you're not likely to be the last."

"I know how you feel," Miss Wyndham sympathized. "They did the same to me until—" But, she stopped abruptly and finished her sentence with a bitter chuckle.

"Is ugliness so evil and beauty so virtuous that those who are ugly must suffer for the evil that they themselves have had no hand in and must cry for the beauty which they can never possess?"

"Ah," sighed Miss Wyndham, "Beauty." Her eyes expanded and her eyebrows arched, and she did not look at Diane, but beyond her to the dark corners of the unfriendly room, as she continued, in a thin voice, "Beauty, Diane, beauty is everything. Yet, there are many kinds of beauty in addition to facial and bodily beauty: beauty in loving, beauty of the heart, beauty of good intention." Leaning toward Diane, who suddenly felt cold, she murmured, "And there is beauty in what I am going to do for you."

The woman's unearthly gaze mesmerized Diane for a minute so that she was unable to move, to think, to breathe. The room seemed to grow darker and colder; and the day and the world outside were still—frighteningly still.

Slowly, Miss Wyndham sank back into her chair; and, for a moment, she hesitated, to steady her uneven breathing. Then, she turned to the table beside her and stared at the

figurine of the woman who wore a wry smile on her face. Diane was not mistaken when she read hatred in Miss Wyndham's flinty gaze; however, the figurine appeared indifferent to the old woman's living despisation. With shaking hands, Mrs. Wyndham grasped the figurine, caressing it close to her breast, as if this figurine represented all her worldly wealth.

"This is my secret," she said calmly. And her shrivelled features seemed to change, to twist, to become softly radiant; and her eyes were no longer dulled by oldness; and her pale lips grew red with youth; and her weak voice sang with youthful richness. "I give you this figurine—this idol of beauty." With seeming reluctance, she handed the figurine to Diane, who automatically took it from her. "This figurine, this woman, has a name. Aspasia. A very odd name. A name seldom, if ever, heard today. There is a story, too, connected with this figurine. How much of the story is true, how much false, I don't know. If you wish to believe that it is a true story, it is perfectly all right. If you wish to consider it fiction, just a fanciful tale, then you may do so. However, I shall relate this story, or tale, or fantasy, if you like, to you." Miss Wyndham paused, as if to find the right words to begin her story. "Aspasia lived nearly two thousand years ago. It is right that the story takes place in antiquity, for, today, in the modern world, where realism is striven for and honored and fantasy laughed at and abused, Aspasia's story could easily be true, because the events took place in a century so distant that all things that occurred then which we know to be true have the semblance of fantasy. So, remember, Diane, that no matter how fantastic my words may sound, there is always the possibility that what I say might well have happened centuries ago.

"If you had searched the ancient world for the most beautiful living woman, your search would have ended in

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Athens, at the home of Aspasia. For, truly, she was and *is* a beautiful woman. She was a courtesan. And she had many lovers, who curried to her, indulged her slightest whim, and who, by their words and deeds, reminded her of her great and unusual beauty. So that every day, Aspasia grew more vain. Not satisfied with the worship of men, she longed to be admired and worshipped by women also. And, the women did worship her, for not one of them could equal her beauty. Their worship of her was the food which kept her living, which made her beautiful.

“One man, above all others, loved her sincerely; this term connotes that his love for her would have been just as great even if she had suddenly been divested of all her beauty. His name was Lazarus. So deep was his love for her that he employed a sculptor to carve a figurine of Aspasia, a figurine small enough for him to hold in the warmth of his hand, and to remind him of her when he was in some far-off land. The sculptor was so taken with Aspasia’s extraordinary loveliness that he excelled himself, stating that if he were to live a thousand years, he would never be able to carve such an exquisite object again.

“Now, Lazarus was not a jealous man. He did not mind Aspasia’s flirting with other men, as long as she always returned to him. However, when he realized that Aspasia was going away from him, his jealousy blinded him, drove him mad for one regretful moment, so that he choked the life out of her. At having seen what he had done, a wave of remorse coming over him, he killed himself. He took his life because he could not bear to live in a world where there was no beauty.

“Although all her lovers and worshippers had known Aspasia to be a woman of inflated conceit, all mourned her

death—or rather, all mourned the beauty that had left the earth. Some asserted that she was human after all, and no goddess, as many had believed her to be. Others avowed that she had not died, that her spirit lived on in the figurine in Lazarus' home.

“Hundreds of people came from all parts to gaze on the idol of the most beautiful woman who had ever lived. One Macedonian prince fell madly in love with the figurine, and, after all attempts to purchase the figurine legally had failed, he stole it from the house and brought it to his home in the North.

“Nothing was heard of the figurine again until the time of the Romans. It was stated that a certain Roman senator had an ugly daughter at whom everyone laughed. Her life was miserable, and three times her attempts to kill herself had been defeated. Somehow, the figure of Aspasia came into her possession, and she was fascinated by its beauty and humanness, just as you were, Diane. This Roman's daughter learned the history of the figurine; and, she, too, believed that the spirit of Aspasia lived in the figurine. And, the girl reasoned, if Aspasia was truly a goddess then she could make her beautiful, so that men would want her. So, she worshipped the figure and had a private altar built for it in her father's house. In time, so the story goes, that ugly girl, this girl who had been laughed at and ridiculed, grew beautiful. *Beautiful, Diane. Beautiful.* Aspasia made her beautiful. And this Roman girl gave the figurine to another woman, and she to another. And Aspasia made them all beautiful, as she has made ugly women throughout the centuries beautiful. Women who worshipped her.

“I received this idol of beauty from a woman I met in Paris when I was an ugly young girl. She told me this strange story. And I believed her; and I worshipped Aspasia, Diane. *And I became beautiful.* It is your turn to worship her, Diane.

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Your turn to become beautiful. Worship her. Worship Aspasia, Diane. At this moment, you are incredulous, skeptical, frightened, and you think I am mad. But, what I have told you is true. *True!*"

"What do you say, Miss Wyndham?" Diane cried, shocked into disbelief. "What do you say?"

"I am not mad. You must believe me. Worship her, Diane! Worship Aspasia, and she will give you beauty. Great, unbelievable beauty."

"No," Diane shook her head, as if trying not to listen to Miss Wyndham's words. "You don't know what you say. I must go."

"No, Diane!" Miss Wyndham's raised tone restrained her. "I have something more to tell you. Not only does Aspasia give beauty, but also love and happiness. If you will worship her, you will receive beauty and love and happiness. Believe me. She will give you all these things. Believe me!" she begged, her voice erratic. "Worship her!" As if the strain of talking had been too much, Miss Wyndham fell back into her chair.

The stunned Diane rose from her chair and leaned over Miss Wyndham. "Miss Wyndham," she screamed, tears stinging her eyes. But the woman did not answer her. "Miss Wyndham, are you all right? Are you all right?" For one horrifying moment, Diane thought that the woman was dead, and she moved from her. However, the almost imperceptible rise and fall of Miss Wyndham's breast told her that the woman had only fainted. Never thinking of reviving her employer, only desiring to leave this hateful room, she hastily ran out of the house and toward her home. Feeling an extraordinary coldness in her hand, she looked down and for the

first time she noticed that she still held the figurine of Aspasia, the smiling idol of beauty.

That Miss Wyndham was insane Diane believed without a whit of doubt. And the thought that she had worked for a mad woman made her shiver. She resolved never to walk to Kingston Road again. But, Diane, lying on her bed, deep in thought, noticed the figurine of Aspasia, which stood on a bureau across the room, the dullness of the waning day, coming through the window, falling blandly on the figurine. Well, she would go back to the house just once more, to return the figurine to its rightful owner. For, she wanted nothing to remind her of her association with Miss Wyndham.

For a long time, she gazed at the figurine. Many times she tried to bring her eyes away from its striking beauty; but it was futile. With slow movements, she sat up on her bed, never turning her head from the fascinating loveliness before her. Miss Wyndham was right, she thought; the figurine was really beautiful, beautiful enough to make her grotesque story plausible. At this moment, in the dim light of her room, the sounds of the earth, of reality far-off, Diane did not think it impossible that ugly women had worshipped Aspasia and had been made beautiful by her. Perhaps—and this was the first time she had allowed herself such a senseless thought—Miss Wyndham had spoken the truth. No! No! Miss Wyndham was mad. Mad! Only a mad woman would attribute supernatural powers to a figure carved out of cold, lifeless stone. Her words had been devoid of all truth, all logic. False! Yet, suppose—oh, suppose—Miss Wyndham was not insane. Suppose—and Diane sat stiff and unrelaxed—suppose Miss Wyndham's crazy words were not crazy words, but sensible words, their truth hidden behind a wild tale. No! No! She mustn't think that. Miss Wyndham was mad. What had

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she said to Diane? *Worship her. It is your turn to be beautiful. Worship Aspasia.* Beauty. Oh, to be beautiful! Not to fear anyone. Not to have to seek a hiding place where her ugliness would not be seen. Not to cry because of people's taunts and mockery. To be beautiful! Beautiful! She would have reached her heaven on earth. Trembling from the unbearable feeling of happiness that her thoughts gave her, she stared at the figure on the table. If this woman—Aspasia—could give her beauty, what joy she would know. But, could she? Did this figurine hold some strange and magical power to make a woman beautiful? Diane shook her head. She must stop thinking of Miss Wyndham, of this figurine, or she'd go mad. However, Aspasia's beauty seemed to come alive in the room, to draw Diane to the figurine. *Worship her, Diane. Worship her. It's your turn to be beautiful.* Miss Wyndham's words ran unbidden through her confused mind. No! I don't want to. I won't worship her! But, she was moving across the room toward the smiling woman. No! Now she was standing before Aspasia. She wouldn't! She mustn't! Her lips parted and in a low voice that belonged to another person, not to her, she uttered, "Make me beautiful, Aspasia. Make me beautiful. Goddess of beauty, make me beautiful."

After repeating this prayer, Diane collapsed to the floor, her whole body shaking violently with tears of fear and fatigue. And the stark blackness outside the window lightened to a dusty greyness, then to a chill whiteness, which finally brightened to a hot gold.

Diane rose from the floor and stood in the center of the room, her hair falling carelessly over her shoulders, her best blue dress, which she had not removed, wrinkled, and her whole appearance that of one who hadn't slept for days. From

its place on the bureau, the figure of Aspasia smiled enticingly at Diane. Like a somnambulist, she went over to the bureau. Gazing at the carved figure of the woman with round eyes that gleamed incredulity, she grasped it quickly, before fear possessed her, and frantically turned the figurine about in her hands.

"It's stone!" she said to herself. "Stone! Cold stone!"

She placed the figurine on the bureau, and when she looked up, she saw her reflection in the mirror that hung over the bureau. The face that gazed back at her was the face of an ugly girl. That she had worshipped Aspasia and hadn't become beautiful overnight proved to Diane the absurdity of and insanity in Miss Wyndham's story. The figurine held no magical powers. How could anything carved out of hard earth influence the lives of humans of flesh and blood. She called herself a fool for ever having, even for a second, believed in the figurine's spurious powers and for having worshipped it like an idolatress.

Diane was about to walk from the mirror when something in her eyes arrested her, causing her to lean over the bureau and examine her features closely. Was there not a faint sparkle in her eyes where there had never been a sparkle before? Yes! And, she observed happily, the sickly white pallor of her skin was tinted pink. Unbelievably, she noticed that the contour of her nose had changed slightly, so that her nose appeared straighter than it had looked, and that her lips had an almost indiscernible crimson curve and fullness to them. These changes were slight, of course; however, she recognized them, for she was searching for beauty on a countenance that had always been ugly.

What she saw in the mirror first surprised her, then thrilled her, then frightened her. That she had suddenly, al-

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though almost indistinguishably, grown beautiful made her painfully joyful. But how she obtained this little beauty, who or what had given it to her, made her fearful. Although it was beyond all comprehension, all belief, all reason, she knew that Aspasia, who didn't exist, who was only a name given to a stone figurine, had made her beautiful. Until last night, she had been an ugly girl; now, suddenly, after she had beseeched this figurine to make her beautiful, her plain features had changed. It was incredible! But true.

Her belief in the occult powers of the figurine refuted her thoughts of Miss Wyndham's being insane. And, Diane realized that if she were to tell anyone this outlandish story he would think Diane mad. So, she would keep the figurine, worship it, and tell no one the secret of Aspasia.

As soon as Mrs. McCarthy would see her, Diane was sure that the cook would be startled by her sudden acquisition of beauty. However, Mrs. McCarthy, if she was aware of the change in Diane, did not, by her words, give evidence that she recognized any striking difference in Diane's appearance. Diane got into her uniform and went to the living-room where she knew Miss Wyndham was.

Miss Wyndham sat straight and stiff, like an arrogant queen on her throne, in the same chair in which she had been sitting the previous afternoon. Her burning red eyes looked intently ahead at some non-existent object across the room; her head was held high, so that her sallow skin was taut over the bony outline of her face; and her lips were cracked and dry, like those of a person dying of thirst.

"Come in, my dear," Miss Wyndham said, as if it required all her strength to speak.

Slowly, noticing the fragile tea cups still filled with cold tea placed on the coffee table before Miss Wyndham, Diane

took a few timid steps toward her, surmising that Miss Wyndham had spent the night in this room. A soft mantle of dimness covered everything, and the properties of the scene and the characters were the same as they had been in the far-away yesterday.

"Come closer, Diane. Come closer," Miss Wyndham commanded. Diane moved toward her until she was only a few feet away from the old woman.

For a long minute, Miss Wyndham scrutinized Diane's face; then, she smiled, "The room is dark and my eyes are old, Diane, but I can see beauty on your face."

Automatically, Diane raised her hand to her face, passing her sensitive fingers over her hot flesh. "You see it?"

"Yes, my dear. To be sure, your beauty cannot be admired by other eyes, for others do not look at you as I do."

"What do you mean?"

"The reason that I can discern on your face the beginning of what is to be true beauty is that I have seen the same beauty before change my features. I knew immediately what to look for: the lustre in the eyes, the curve of the lips, the line of the nose, and the color of the complexion. No one will recognize your beauty now, Diane. But, as the days progress, your voice, your gestures, everything about you will be beautiful, so that everyone with whom you come in contact will not be able to keep himself from admiring you, wanting you, loving you. Soon you will learn the great power of beauty. And soon you will have the other two gifts of Aspasia: love and happiness."

"Oh, Miss Wyndham," sang Diane, "thank you for giving me this opportunity to be beautiful."

"Do not thank me!" Miss Wyndham said swiftly, pounding her fists on the arms of the chair, as if she had sud-

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denly become angry. "Do not thank me!" she repeated, and her tone was low and shaky, and the tight cords of her neck showed above her high collar. "I do not want your thanks. Give it to Aspasia. She wants it. She craves it. But I do not want it. For you do not know, you can never know, what I have done."

Taking a fearful step back, Diane said, "I'll go, Miss Wyndham."

"Yes, yes, go, Diane," Miss Wyndham told her, having calmed her wayward spirits.

Quickly, Diane crossed the room, opened the door, and, before she could pass over the threshold, she heard Miss Wyndham's stammering voice, "Forgive me, Diane. Forgive my rudeness. My unreasonable anger."

"Of course," Diane said gently. And her heart went out to her pentinent employer.

PART III

And so the weeks went on. And every morning Diane walked to Kingston Road, did her work, and returned home in the late afternoon. And every night she worshipped Aspasia, uttering her orisons fervently and rendering to the smiling idol a sort of latria. And every day Aspasia granted her more and more beauty.

As her eyes became gently radiant, as the texture of her skin became warmly soft, as her color grew delicately white, as her cheeks were painted light rose, and as her voice came out sweet and soothing and resonant, and her movements exhibited grace, Diane was unable to hide her beauty any longer, for it lived in her body.

What was really a gradual transition from an ugly girl to a beautiful woman was to the shocked and amazed Mrs.

McCarthy a sudden metamorphosis. Mrs. McCarthy knew that there was something mysterious about Diane's beauty. In fact, she told herself, when an ugly person becomes beautiful right before your eyes, then it smacks of witchery. Slowly, the cook's liking of the girl turned to distrust. And soon, her unfriendliness became conspicuous by her studied silence whenever Diane was in the kitchen. Diane surmised the reason for the usually talkative Mrs. McCarthy's silence; but she could not tell her the truth for Diane was sure the woman would consider her mad. And she could not think of a lie that would give a logical false explanation of her beauty. So, it was best not to speak and have Mrs. McCarthy think what she would. For, this was a time when the truth appeared to be a lie, and the lie could never be so fantastic as the truth.

Yes, Diane was happy. To be beautiful after so many long years of ugliness was ecstasy. Diane could feel the beauty in her, could feel it spread through her, driving out the dead ugliness, replacing it with ebullient loveliness. But, now that she had beauty and happiness, to be completely contented, she longed for love. And Aspasia did not have her wait long for love. For one morning, Diane, answering the ring of some caller at the front door, let in Mr. Collins.

Mr. Collins was about to place his hat in Diane's waiting hands, when he stopped abruptly in his action and gazed at her, as if it were the first time he had ever seen her.

"What is wrong, sir?" she asked.

"What happened to the other girl?" he questioned.

"What other girl, sir?"

"The one who was here last time. The other girl. You know."

"I'm the girl," she told him, taking his hat.

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"You can't be," he said. "Why she was—was—" he would not utter the word ugly, just in case, "looked different. You don't look like her at all."

"Nevertheless, sir," Diane assured him, enjoying his bewilderment, "I am Diane. And Miss Wyndham is waiting for you in the living-room, sir."

"Yes," he murmured absently. He moved toward the living-room door, muttering to himself about something being incredible. And, as Diane watched him cross the hallway, she laughed gaily to herself.

For a half hour, Miss Wyndham tried to talk to Mr. Collins about financial matters. But, she observed that he was thinking hard on another subject, and paying scant attention to her words. When she inquired what had carried his mind far from the room, he asked her, "Your house-cleaner—or maid—Diane, is she the same girl who was here a few weeks ago?"

Miss Wyndham suppressed a smile. "The same girl. A priceless maid. Why do you ask?" she said, perfectly aware of his reason.

"It's uncanny. I could have sworn that the last time I was here she was ugly as sin."

"That is idiotic. Diane was always beautiful," she lied.

"I suppose you're right. But, still, it did seem that if she was beautiful I would have remembered her."

"You're quite taken with her beauty, Ralph."

"A beauty like hers is rare, Miss Wyndham. Very rare."

They resumed their talk about the state of Miss Wyndham's finances, and then he left. And Miss Wyndham could hear Ralph's muffled voice as he lingered to speak to Diane,

who answered him in musical tones. And then she heard Diane laugh, and she could tell that what the two were saying was light and humorous and inconsequential.

In the weeks that followed, Mr. Collins became a frequent visitor to Kingston Road. Although he entered the house on the pretext of concern over Miss Wyndham's health and finances, it became increasingly obvious from the way he spoke to Diane every time he entered and departed that there was something else, a more powerful force, drawing him to Kingston Road.

Diane realized, a bit complacently, that it was she whom Mr. Collins really came to see and not her employer. Mr. Collins was the answer to her prayers to Aspasia, whom she thanked profusely nightly for sending her a lover so quickly. Not for a minute did she even let the thought lay on her mind that perhaps fate, or its twin, destiny, or even her own beauty (which Aspasia had given her) or something in the man himself, some tormenting emptiness, had anything to do with his coming to see her. No, it was Aspasia's doings; she had sent him to her. And he would never go.

Every day she was with Ralph. Every day they talked together, laughed together, loved together. So deeply did the two love that the other people about them were unable to obtrude upon their happiness. Diane did her work at Miss Wyndham's methodically, with a dreamy expression on her face. And Ralph forgot his law and remembered only Diane. And like most lovers they committed one grave sin in their neglect of the world. Perhaps, in this instant, the sin was more Diane's than Ralph's. And what was this unforgivable, and later regrettable, transgression? Diane, in her paroxysm of love, forgot Aspasia. And, if love had not so completely bemused her, she would have taken note of the figure on her bureau. And she would have, perplexed, recognized the

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change in the figurine. For the smile—the lovely, the mellow, the voluptuous smile—no longer crossed Aspasia's face.

Whenever Ralph spoke to Diane of love, it was her beauty he continuously mentioned, with a sort of reverence. Diane began to believe—and fear—that it was her beauty that Ralph really loved and not her. When she told him this, he answered, "Of course it's your beauty I love, for you are your beauty." This rather enigmatic remark did not allay the few pangs of doubt that attacked her. If she were ugly, he would never love her, of this she was sure. Also, if he were to learn that her beauty was only a gift given to her by a lifeless stone figurine, he might, after he'd cease to laugh, stop loving her—if he believed her.

Above all else, Diane wanted to be honest with Ralph. She didn't want any lie—for her beauty was a sort of visible lie—to mar their love. Many times she started to tell him of the fantastic way she had obtained her beauty; however, looking into his eyes that were filled with adulation, she would never speak. If she couldn't be honest with him, she would be honest with herself. So, one morning, she walked to Kingston Road with the figurine of Aspasia in her hand.

"Ah, Diane. Good morning," Miss Wyndham said, as the girl entered the living-room.

"Good morning, ma'am." Diane knew that the object of Miss Wyndham's steady gaze was the figurine that Diane held in her hand. "I wish to return the figurine," Diane told her.

"Why?" Miss Wyndham asked in sepulchral tone.

"Because I love Ralph, and he doesn't love me." She went on to explain her words. "Oh, he does love me, I guess. But, what he doesn't realize is that he loves my beauty. And by loving my beauty, he loves Aspasia. And, anyway, I want to be honest with him. I couldn't tell him that Aspasia gave me

beauty, for he would laugh at me. I couldn't tell him that the thing he loves most in me is just some artificial gift given to me by a figurine. He'd think I was mad. So, I'm returning Aspasia to forget her. To love only Ralph, who will love me, not my beauty. For when Aspasia leaves my possession she will have no power over me any longer."

Miss Wyndham listened to her, her body tense. "Whatever Aspasia gives, she demands something in return. She gave you beauty and love and happiness, and in return for these gifts, she wants all your love; she wants to be worshipped. However, when you fell in love with Ralph, you deprived her of love that really belonged to her."

"If," Diane asked, barely moving her lips, "Aspasia desires all my love, then why did she send me a lover?"

"Ha," chortled Miss Wyndham, "it was a test. With vulpine cunning, Aspasia sent you a lover to see whether his words, his actions of love would make you forget her. And Ralph has done just that: taken you away from Aspasia."

"This is foolish," Diane cried. "Here we are two grown and intelligent women talking about a piece of stone as if that stone had life, as if that stone, shaped into a beautiful woman, could affect our lives."

"It is too late," Miss Windham told her, emphasizing each word with unusual harshness, "to begin to doubt Aspasia's existence. You know, no matter how you may try to convince yourself of the contrary, that Aspasia does live. And now, you must, without hesitation, do as she commands. There is no way of vanquishing Aspasia. What she gives, she takes. And she will divest you of your beauty if you continue to love Ralph."

Diane turned a pain-riven face to Miss Wyndham. "What do you mean?"

"Either you love Aspasia and worship her and retain your beauty or you love Ralph and grow ugly."

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Miss Wyndham was leaning forward in her chair, her head drooped and tilted slightly, her eyes focused on Diana, who had suddenly turned to stone.

Opening her mouth to speak, Diane could not; she swallowed once, then tried again, her voice a hoarse whisper, like the voice of a person gasping for his last breath before death overshadowed him. "You mean—that—that my love for—for Ralph would make me ugly?"

"Yes." Miss Wyndham's voice, too, was lifeless.

"But, I love him! I love him!" Diane protested against this injustice.

"You cannot love him. It is Aspasia you must love. You must choose, now, today, between them. Aspasia and beauty. Or Ralph and ugliness."

"Why didn't you tell me all this before, that Sunday afternoon when you gave me this figurine, this thing of the devil?" she screamed, outstretching the hand in which she held the smiling idol.

"Would it have made any difference, Diane? Would you have refused the figurine? I think not. And even after the first night, you could have returned the figurine. And now you can leave it with me, if you really love Ralph, and if he really loves you."

For a second, Diane stared at the figurine; and then she looked up. A chink of faint sunlight slipped through the closed drapes at the windows, painting the rug with a long, pencil line of yellow that ended at the foot of Miss Wyndham's chair. Odd, thought Diane, this was the first time she had ever seen light in this room. And instead of the scant amount of daylight making the room cheerful by its soft brilliance, it seemed to deepen the gloom.

"I must think. I must think." She laughed, and her laughter trailed off into sobs.

"Go home, Diane," Miss Wyndham said gently.

"Yes, yes." Dazedly, still holding the figurine of Aspasia, she walked out of the room, hot tears blinding her.

It was a difficult problem which Diane had to settle. Perhaps if she could have shared this problem with another, receiving the assistance of some other person in aiding her to come to the correct solution, her dilemma would not have appeared so formidable. But, this was something that she alone could solve by her own reasoning. Should she choose Aspasia and remain beautiful, or should she accept Ralph and have only his love?

Some might say that there was no problem at all. How could there be when there was only one indisputable choice: Ralph. Ralph was real; he wanted her; he loved her; and she loved him. That he would make her days happy was unequivocally clear. His fathomless love for her would endure a hundred times an eternity.

Yet, Diane's awareness of all this still did not evanesce the mist of doubt and worry that befogged her mind. Ralph loved her. But did he? Did he love Diane, the woman, the way she laughed and spoke, the things she said, the way she dressed? Or did he love only one thing in her: her beauty? Yes, it was her beauty he adored. And, if this was true, would he continue to love her when Aspasia jealously stripped her of her beauty? No. For the person and the beauty he loved would not exist any longer. And his love would congeal into a cold, hard despisation.

This was one argument for not choosing Ralph. There was another: Diane's searing fear of becoming ugly again. To Diane, ugliness meant depression and sadness and loneliness. An uprising of the feeling that beauty's self-confidence had subjugated in her. No, no, *she could never be ugly again.*

She wanted beauty above all else. She was ready to

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forfeit all her possessions, to forsake the love of a man to remain beautiful. As long as she was beautiful, nothing mattered; nothing or no one could hurt her, as they had wounded her sensitivity when she was ugly. As long as she was beautiful, all men and women were her supplicating lackeys, to command, to belittle, to deride, as they had done her. She did not need love, for in the eyes of everyone who would gaze at her there would gleam adulation, on the lips of those who would speak to her would be an unspoken word of love. And this mute worship would be just recompense for the love of a man forbidden her. And for a short minute, she was no longer Diane, but Aspasia, demanding the worship of men and women.

That night, when Ralph came to call, Diane had to perform one of the most difficult and most unpleasant tasks of her life: tell Ralph that she did not love him, that he must go away and never see her again. What made her telling him these things a task, and an arduous one at that, was that her denial of loving him was a naked lie.

"I've brought my carriage," Ralph said. "I thought you might like to take a ride out to Benson's Falls."

"No, I don't feel like it."

"Perhaps you'd like to go for a walk," he suggested. "The evening's cool."

"No, not tonight, Ralph." She stood half-turned from him, a few feet from him, afraid of what his closeness would do to her intentions.

"Say it, Diane. You won't be at your ease until it's said."

"Say—say what?" She hadn't looked at him since he had entered, and even now she did not raise her lowered eyes.

"Whatever is troubling you. You're not going to deny that there is something bothering you?"

"No," she murmured. "I'm not."

"Then tell me. What is it?" He waited for her to speak.

"How can I tell you? What words can I use? The one thing I don't want to do is hurt you, and I'm afraid I'm going to." She took a deep breath to give her courage, then she told him quickly, with a forced evenness in her tone, "Ralph, I can't pretend any more. I—I don't love you."

She could not discern how her cruel words affected him for his placid expression did not show any change. "From the beginning I never loved you. What I thought was love, wasn't."

"I don't believe it! I won't believe what you say!"

"Please, Ralph, please. Let's not talk about it. Let everything end now," she implored him.

As if not hearing her, he went on, hoping that she was joking with him, that this was her way of teasing him (a pretty poor way indeed). "*You do love me. And I love you.*" He was beside her. And when he attempted to embrace her, she pushed him away, moving to the window. He did not follow her, but stood gazing at her. "You told me that you always loved me; that you would always love me. How can I believe what you say now?"

Facing him for the first time, she said, "All right, suppose I do love you. We would marry someday. Be honest, Ralph, would I fit into your way of life? Would I, a mere maid, be the wife that you deserve? You're going to be an important man someday. You should have an intelligent woman, from some well-known family, who would do you proud. Around your friends, in your house, I would be just a seedy little maid, who doesn't belong in your world."

"That's silly, Diane. Your beauty would hold my friends in bondage."

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"My beauty!" she echoed, throwing her head back with seeming impatience. "Always my beauty. Whether you are aware of it or not, Ralph, you have never loved me. It's been my beauty that you loved."

"Perhaps I loved your beauty, but I worshipped you. Oh, Diane, Diane, what has happened to us? Only a day ago, we were in love. And, now, in a short twenty-four hours, something has come between us. What is it, Diane? Tell me why you say these lies?"

She longed to go to him, to fling her arms about him, to whisper, "Oh, Ralph, Ralph, I do love you. I do. My darling, forget all I have said. I love you! I love you!" But, on the bureau there stood a figurine of a beautiful woman, smiling triumphantly. If she told him the truth, he would probably still disbelieve her, thinking that she had made up some fantastic lie. It was best to try to have him believe her lies.

"I've told you the truth. Whether you choose to believe me or not, does not matter to me any longer."

Many minutes passed before Ralph said, softly, "I don't understand you. You're a complete puzzle to me. One moment you claim you love me, and the next, you deny that you do. Well, even though you don't love me, I love you with my whole heart. But, since you don't want my love, I won't try to force it on you. You, and you alone, have I loved. I can never give my love to another, for it is yours." Taking a slow step toward her, he said, "Because you want me to, I'll go. But, if you didn't mean all that you said, before I close the door, call to me, and I'll come back to you. But, once the door is closed, I'll never return."

He started for the door, expecting any moment to hear her voice calling his name. But, only quiet sounded in the room. He opened the door, and even hesitated to give her

another half second in which to cry out her love. Yet, when he closed the door after him, he could not hear her.

Diane stood as if stupified. She tried to raise her fingers to her cheeks to wipe away her tears; but her arm was made of lead. She tried to move to a chair to rest; but her legs were stone. Suddenly, the haziness before her eyes cleared, and she found that she was alone. Ralph had gone. He would never come back.

"Ralph! Ralph!" her voice rang through the room. "Ralph! Ralph!" she screeched, running to the door. Opening it, she rushed to the stairway and, leaning over the banister, she looked down the dark empty stairwell. "Ralph! Come back!" she cried. "Come back!" But he had gone. "Ralph! Ralph!" she called, falling to a step weeping and peering through the rails of the balustrade. "Ralph, my beloved!" Slowly, wearily she rose and returned to her room.

What had she done? *What had she done?* Ralph. Ralph. She wanted Ralph's love, Ralph's arms, Ralph's kiss. She wanted him, not Aspasia. Aspasia would keep her beautiful. But, she no longer cared for beauty. Ralph would love her, ugly or beautiful. Yet, he would never come back. He had told her so. She would never be able to win back his love. And all this unhappiness was begotten through her own craving for beauty, her own sinful worship of Aspasia. Well, she would prostrate herself no longer at Aspasia's feet; she would beg her for beauty no longer. She would return the figurine to Miss Wyndham this night, this minute, and prove by her action that Aspasia could not dominate her as she had ruled other feckless, vain women.

Grabbing the figurine, which was light in her hand, she raced with a sort of madness through the night to the house on Kingston Road. She pulled the door bell violently, her great anxiety adding many minutes to the time that it took

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Miss Wyndham to answer her ring. The door opened slowly, and Diane could barely make out Miss Wyndham, who was a phantom with glistening eyes, waiting for her in the chill blackness of the hallway.

"I must see you, Miss Wyndham. I must!"

Miss Wyndham detected a note of urgency in Diane's wavering tone. "Come in."

Diane entered. There was no light in the hallway. Just blackness, and the neck-prickling feeling of evil. For the first time in months, fear of this house filled Diane, so that she wished to run away.

"Come into the living-room." There was in Miss Wyndham's voice the same dead calmness that crawled into every corner of this house.

Purely by instinct did Diane cross the hallway to the living-room, the whispering of Miss Wyndham's long skirt, as it felt the stiff rug, echoing through the hallway like a soft voice in a black cavern, startling Diane so that she stopped, glancing about her to see who had spoken.

Only the sickly red embers of a once gaudily-burning fire afforded light in the parlor. Miss Wyndham sat in a chair silhouetted against the red glow in the hearth. Pale and tired, looking like a wraith, Diane stood before her.

"What is it that has brought you to my home so late at night, Diane?" Miss Wyndham queried.

Without a second's hesitancy, Diane explained, "I've come to return the figurine."

"Ah," sighed Miss Wyndham, straining forward in her chair, "then you've made your choice. You've chosen Ralph."

"Yes. I've chosen Ralph. And God grant that I win him back."

Miss Wyndham's eyebrows met in a frown above her nose. "Win him back?" she echoed questioningly.

"Yes. You see, first I chose Aspasia. And I told Ralph to leave me, never to see me again. And he did leave." She said this as if it were beyond her comprehension that he should do such a thing. "He had no sooner gone, than I saw the daylight of reason. I loved him. I wanted him, and not Aspasia. And I called to him; but he did not come back. And it is Aspasia who would not let him come back. So, I'm returning Aspasia and going to Ralph."

From deep in her throat the raucous screech pushed its way up, banging against the walls of the room, running with spiny fingers over Diane's body. "You are like the rest!" screamed Miss Wyndham. "You chose Aspasia."

"First I did. But now I've had a change of heart. I want Ralph."

"No matter! No matter! It was Aspasia and beauty you chose first. That is what counts! You refused Ralph's love for beauty. And now, you repine at your foolish first choice, and want Ralph. He is not for you! Aspasia is your master."

"No!" she breathed heavily. "I don't want Aspasia. Here," she placed the smiling figurine on a table, "take her back. I don't want her."

"It is too late to give her back. You must hand the figurine on to another ugly girl. She is yours! You chose her!"

"I don't want her!" she cried, her voice falling like a discordant scale on a piano. "I won't have her."

"Silence, foolish girl!" Miss Wyndham's body shook with tension. "If you had not wanted her, why did you choose her? I shall tell you, for I know the reason, for it is the identical reason that I chose her. You could not bear the cross of ugliness; beauty was too precious a jewel for you to lose. Why, why," she hurled her strong voice to the heavens, "why are women cursed with vanity? Vanity ruined my life; it was my

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undoing. I could have been happy with Ralph's grandfather, but, I chose Aspasia and beauty. And in time, the beauty within me rotted me, so that I'm old and alone and afraid of the world outside, the world in which I found little happiness, the world which I renounced. And for that reason I hate myself. And, for that reason, I despise Aspasia." Her teeth were clenched tightly and her words spilt out with venom. "If you had accepted Ralph, first, and not Aspasia, you would have broken her power."

"Broken her power? How? How?" demanded Diane.

"The only way for Aspasia to be stripped of her power is for a woman to accept the man, and not Aspasia. Astoundingly true as it may seem, no woman through the centuries has ever chosen the man. All craved beauty, and the thought of becoming ugly again made them willing to do anything to retain their beauty. Even suffer hell, if necessary. What they did not learn until it was too late was that if they had chosen the man they would have remained beautiful."

The room was whirling about; and three Miss Wyndhams sat in front of Diane, who felt for a chair and fell into it. "Why did you keep this from me? Why?"

"Because keeping back this information is part of the whole confused story of Aspasia. If I had told you this in the beginning, you would have gone to Ralph immediately. And I wanted you to break Aspasia's power. If you had known all this from the beginning, you would not have broken her power, for you would have gone to Ralph knowing that you would still be beautiful. I wanted you to repudiate Aspasia; I wanted you to sacrifice your beauty and go to Ralph, not caring whether you were ugly or beautiful, and thus you would have really defeated Aspasia. I wanted you to destroy her, as she had destroyed me. But, she has won. *She has won.* It is a joke to her to see us powerless mortals become entangled

in her web of power. She mocks us and laughs at us, fools that we are." Miss Wyndham cocked her ears, her eyes expanding and gleaming with the hard brilliance of cold sapphire. Raising her gnarled hand, she hissed. "Listen, listen, Diane. Do you not hear Aspasia laughing at us? We, who had worshipped her! Laughing at us, poor, insignificant humans that she rules! I hate her! I hate her!" Insane with hate, she grasped the figurine of Aspasia and threw it against the fireplace, where it crashed into many pieces. "I hate her! I'll destroy her!" Miss Wyndham laughed maniacally. Abruptly she stopped and began to weep, her head on the arm of the chair.

The room was oppressively hot. But outside a brisk wind drove black clouds, burdened with rain, over the city. In a few minutes, the rain fell furiously, sounding like the footsteps of an echelon of soldiers. Lightning lit the streets; then thunder growled across the sky like a savage beast.

Diane spoke softly. "I'm ugly. I have no mirror in which to gaze at myself, but I know that I'm ugly. I can feel the dampness of the ugliness in me. All warmth has left me. I'm cold. My beauty has been destroyed." And she passed her sore fingers through the straw-like stiffness of her hair. "I'm ugly. I'm ugly," she repeated flatly, Miss Wyndham's steady weeping joining her in her quiet lamentation.

And on the floor lay the remains of the shattered idol of beauty. However, the head had not been smashed. It was as if it had been severed with an ax from the rest of the body. And on the face of Aspasia, the idol of beauty, there was a smile of victory.

THE END

Variations On a Theme

By HAROLD E. VAYO, JR., '51

IT is a source of constant amazement to us to hear what are being performed today under the imposing titles of serious musical compositions. Everything that has ever been sacred to the fine art of music has been mercilessly abused and beaten and then abandoned on the rocky slopes of Parnassus without the least tinge of regret. The mass assassination and subsequent cremation of the beloved rules of harmony will forever remain high on the list of the most infamous deeds of all history. Out of the ashes of these martyrs has arisen a monster which seems dedicated to the task of reducing music to a senseless garble of roars and squeaks which sound like nothing on earth or above it. This evil genius has invaded even the sedate and hallowed symphonic auditoriums of New York, London, Paris, and Berlin.

As things now stand, it is all but impossible to tell when the orchestra has stopped tuning up and started to play. For years, since the inception of the modern idiom, this problem has perplexed even the veterans. About the easiest way out of this dilemma so far devised seems to be: Listen, and when you're sure the orchestra is tuning up, it's playing. It has come to such a point now that to attend a concert is most disconcerting.

Modern composers love to hear their stuff played loud. This is simply an example of the sadistic streak that runs through their very natures. Not content merely to shock their audience mildly: *piano*, they proceed to scare them out of their

wits: *fortissimo*. We wonder if the thunderous applause which apparently greets the close of these works is not a grateful prayer of thanksgiving that the damn thing is over. Never since the days of the rack and the iron maiden have such fiendish instruments of torture been devised. For a person to sit in the loges or in the orchestra seats used to be a mark of distinction. It still is. But today it is not so much an indication of social standing and prestige as of courage, stamina, strength, and sheer intestinal fortitude. The human body was built to take tremendous punishment. By far the greatest proof of this is the fact that most concert-goers are able to leave at its conclusion in a vertical position. They may stagger a bit, and their eyes may have a wild and frenzied look, but they are heroes; they have proven themselves.

It would appear that many of our contemporary composers are a group of thoroughly frustrated radio sound-effects men. Perhaps they are misanthropes. Perhaps even anarchists. Whatever the case, no modern symphonic orchestra can afford to be without an assortment of buggy-whips, sirens, cocoanut-husks, loaded pistols, police whistles, and the like. The tympani have changed from the staid few drums of seventy-five years ago to a monstrous collection of junk and noise-makers which by comparison would make the wildest New Year's Eve party seem wakish.

The critics are the greatest objects of our sympathy. They have been characterized, and not without reason, as a race apart. They are fast becoming a race extinct. Their Olympian fortitude has enabled them in the past to withstand the fierce onslaughts of their arch-enemies, the composers; but after all, they're only human. We often hear of the savage struggle that is waged between composers and critics. At present, the composers seem to be having the better of it. A glance

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at the obituaries on the morning after a first performance attests to this. Permanent battle fatigue is another chief cause of the rapidly thinning ranks of the critics. One sometimes wonders whether those pistols were loaded with blanks.

At least one favorable thing must, in all fairness, be said about this group of conspirators against the æsthetic serenity of mankind. Deep down inside they have a love and appreciation of the individual orchestral instruments. They want everyone to share this love, and so the score for each instrument is written in a different key. The effect is breathtaking. Of course the point beyond which there is no other occurs at the finale, when the men behind the brasses and reeds take a full load of air into their lungs and blow for all they are worth, each striking a different note. During the next ghastly moment all hell breaks loose.

They say that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. If this stuff can do it, more power; but perhaps for "soothe" the more apt phrase "beat into submission" should be substituted. We've heard some talk in the last few months about a new secret weapon, a machine which emits sounds whose intensity will drive the people within its range either to complete insanity or mass suicide. Evidently, and maybe fortunately, our top military strategists are blissfully unaware that enormous stockpiles of this lethal weapon have been amassed since the turn of the century. Uranium is on the way out. Within a few years, Oak Ridge and Hanford will become composers' colonies and Schirmer's will be guarded like Fort Knox. In the event of war, the logical choice for Chief of Staff will be Deems Taylor. Gas masks will give way to ear plugs, the M-1 will pass into oblivion. Its successor will be a conductor's baton.

Distinction

By PAUL FLANIGAN, '53

Sparrow in an alder
Indicating grief
Near it on the twig-tip
Irritated leaf
Rattling in the alder
Obvious as May
Seasonable sorrows
Have potency to clay
But yonder is a heart
Whose harvest streams are narrow
Whose two eyes could not part
A dead leaf from a sparrow.

Hypermetricity

By PAUL FLANIGAN, '53

Meek warrior day, so fallen to warm rain,
Straying from battle with no Hector slain,
Ground-clothe thy heart from seepage of despair
And rest beneath the vollied spears of air.

Now all the tented winter songs may never bring
The tenuous ascension of another spring:
But life is never long enough to value quite
The blossoming diminuendos of a night.

When Adam Saw the Sun Decline

By PAUL FRANCIS FLETCHER, '51

Have you ever thought of Adam on the very first day
When he first marked the burning sun
And revelled in its ray?
How he must have watched with wonder its purple decline
And drank in its splendor like Burgundy wine?
But in his inexperience, what a sense forlorn
When the sky loomed dark and empty
And he knew not of the morn.

DEBUT . . .

Paul Francis Fletcher, whose Nantucket impressions are herewith recorded for ALEMBIC readers on page 97, is an old hand at campus literary magazines. He edited one in a preparatory seminary, and gives promise of being a steady contributor to the ALEMBIC.

Departure

By MIKE HARTUNG, '51

I WENT outside and walked to the edge of the deck, and leaned against the stern of a lifeboat. The morning sun was bright through scattered clouds, and here and there the white midship-house of a freighter glared above the black filth of the docks. In the distance church spires and gay-colored houses glistened and shadowed, and beyond the town a paradise of greenery rolled upward into a dark overcast sky.

I lit my pipe and glanced down at the slowly widening gap of water between the ship and the dock pilings. Below on the maindeck, men were leaning out over the rail and shouting farewells and throwing things to the French girls on the wharf.

Up on the bridge the captain was running back and forth and waving his arms and yelling orders through a megaphone.

"Mr. Jennings! Cast off your spring! ——— Mr. Willis! Let go-o-o-o-o-o!"

The springlines slapped into the water, and there was a commotion on deck as they were heaved up through the oily surface.

Sooty-faced stevedores ran along the edge of the crowded dock, grappling with hawser lines and cursing at each other in guttural French. Men, women and children scrambled in the coal dust for American cigarettes and candy that the men were tossing over the side. And a little way

back neatly-dressed company officials were clustered around their cars, waving their berets to get the captain's attention and shouting last-minute instructions.

They were slacking off fore and aft now, and up on the bridge the pilot was shrieking orders to a tug which lay off the port quarter. Then the tug was plowing through the water toward our stern, and two of the boys stood by to catch her line as she came up. On her bow a lazy-looking Frenchman got up slowly from the deck and lit his pipe, and then picked up a coil of dirty heaving-line and swung the end of it in a circle above his head.

"Viola, M'sieur!"

The line came flying over our sternrail and its monkey-fist thudded on the deck. The two seamen grabbed it and started heaving up on the hawser.

There wasn't much noise now. The Old Man was leaning against the bridge-wing rail, talking to the 2nd mate and waiting patiently for the tug's tow-line to be secured. The crowd on the pier just milled about, jabbering in undertones and looking up wistfully for more cigarettes. And the stevedores were sprawled on the edge of the dock, with their eyes on the two remaining lines.

Suddenly I heard someone screaming. I scanned the people on the dock below, but it wasn't coming from there. Most of them had turned around and were staring at something down the pier; and looking up, I saw a young woman running along the car tracks toward the crowd. She clutched at a long black dress that kept falling down over her knees as she ran, and she stumbled as her high heels caught in the grooves of the track. She was screaming and choking with sobs, and her shrill cries echoed between the hulls of ships on either side.

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She reached the crowd and pushed her way frantically through the bewildered people, her head tilted back and her eager eyes on the ship, and ran toward the edge of the dock. She sprawled against a rusty iron cleat, looking up anxiously and ignoring the catcalls from the crew. She was breathing hard, and her pretty head swayed back and forth as she scanned the row of faces on the maindeck. Her pale face was wet with tears, and some long strands of jet-black hair hung down over her eyes and stuck to her moist cheeks.

Then her head stopped turning, she craned her neck eagerly and cried out: "Henri! Henri!"

I glanced up quickly at the bridge. The captain had walked abeam and the 2nd mate was alone out on the wing, clutched over the rail and staring intently at the girl below. His square jaw was set hard, and his face was rugged and impassive against the overcast sky. The girl was sobbing and talking to him in French, and her voice was clear and pleading above the low murmur of the crowd. She cried "Henri!" again and again, and each time someone on the maindeck yelled it back in mockery.

Suddenly the 2nd mate turned from the rail and walked away, disappearing behind the wheelhouse. The girl sprang forward to the edge of the dock, screaming his name and weeping hysterically.

From the port side came the order "Let go fore and aft!", and all at once the pier was alive with commotion and the girl was jostled by running stevedores.

The sun had disappeared and the sky was black with low trailing clouds. There was a loud clap of thunder, followed by a long drawn-out roll, and scattered little rings widened in the water below.

I heard a sharp splash as they let go aft, and then

the bos'n cursing as his men heaved up on the cast-off stern-line. The signal was given up forward and the bow-line followed, cracking like a whip across the smooth pattern of liquid rings. The pilot yelled something in French, and a stevedore ran down the pier and relayed the order to the tug captain; and soon, objects on the wharf were moving slowly past.

The girl was edging along the dock now, tripping over lines and keeping abreast of the bridge, and suddenly I realized she was trying to get my attention.

"M'sieur! M'sieur! —————"

There was a burst of thunder overhead, and then the long screeching blast of the ship's whistle, and I saw her lips moving and her eyes pleading with me and tears streaming down her face. I looked away and stared hard at the lifeboat cover—at the raindrops splashing on the black, canvas lifeboat cover—and all at once I felt sick and helpless, and ashamed. The deafening noise of the whistle suddenly ceased, echoing mournfully across the harbor, and she was still calling to me. I didn't understand what she was saying, but I knew she was begging me to go get the 2nd mate, and I just kept staring at the lifeboat cover.

After a while I didn't hear her anymore and I looked up, and through the rain I saw the dock receding slowly past our bow. On the end of the pier the girl was slumped over against an iron post, her face in her hands and her long black hair reaching to the wet ground. The ship began to swing slowly around, and presently she was hidden from view by the bow.

Soon the tug cast off, and there was a r-r-r-ring up on the bridge, and then the engines began their steady ceaseless

Departure

throb. We eased out through the harbor, moving cautiously down the lane of buoys and past the drab silent hulks of ships at anchor. Our decks were cleared and sea watches were set; and soon there was a sort of lazy quiet on board, broken only by the pattering of rain on steel decks and the sizzling of calm sea past the waterline.

I went across the deck and stepped inside. I felt like hell, my mind was depressed and confused, and all I wanted was to be alone. I walked through the companionway toward my cabin, and as I passed the 2nd mate's door I caught a strong odor of whiskey.

C'EST FINI

Moon of Hope

By MIKE HARTUNG, '51

When I am sick and weary with despair,
With ceaseless sights and sounds, with lethargy,
With ever-present saltiness in the air
And ever rolling hills of endless sea—
I sometimes wait in darkness by the bow
For a moon whose beams are smothered in the sky,
And gaze into the blackness, wondering how
In this abyss a dream of hope could lie.
Then suddenly I see through thinning shrouds
A faintly glowing haze of yellow light;
A glimmering mist, then racing out from clouds
The moon in all its splendor takes to flight!
Lighting a thousand islands in the sky,
Showering rays of hope for which I cry.

Stop This Murder

By CHARLES F. WOOLEY, '50

THE hero of this story is probably as responsible for your being alive today as is the mother who bore you in her womb. For you see, in the middle of the nineteenth century, mothers were being murdered under the cloak of childbed fever; and while medical science fiddled, the bodies of a million mothers burned with the dreaded, incurable puerperal fever. To quench the fire there came from the prison that was Hungary at this time an uninhibited doctor who savagely ripped the roots of mysticism from the field of obstetrics: Ignatius Semmelweis, by name.

The world of 1840, as viewed from a medical standpoint, presented this scene—the average human lived less than thirty-three years, and one man in a hundred lived to be sixty-five. Twenty-five percent died before the age of six years, and fifty percent died before the age of sixteen. Those were the good old days! This was the world that Semmelweis left Hungary to face; but as a student of law. The study of law was a millstone around his neck, and he soon abandoned it for medicine in one of the unexpected, brash moves that characterized so many of his actions. His insatiable curiosity, unorthodox questioning, and country-boy manners set him apart from his companions; and later his great promise as an undergraduate attracted the attention of two of the leading men of the so-called New Vienna School, Josef Skoda and Carl Rokitansky.

At this time, Vienna was one of the medical centers of

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Europe, and the New Vienna School, with its doctrine of therapeutic nihilism, composed one of the more prominent medical groups of the time. Skoda, the leading clinician of the school, along with Rokitansky, described as the ablest pathologist of his time, formed the brilliant nucleus of this group. It was in this atmosphere that Semmelweis studied; and the friendships he made at the Vienna General Hospital were to last the rest of his life. In 1846 the young Hungarian became an assistant professor in the First obstetrical ward under Professor Klein; this ward had such a high mortality rate that women begged in tears not to be admitted. Curiously enough Semmelweis soon found out that the nearby Second Division had only one-third the fatalities of the infamous First, and in contrast, used midwives to examine and deliver, while the doctors and students acted in this capacity in the First. This knowledge, plus the terrible pity he felt for the dying mothers, ignited the fire in his brain that sought the "why" and "how" of puerperal fever; the deaths became an obsession with him, and Klein, who wanted no part of the Hungarian's curiosity, resented the intrusion.

Oddly enough, Klein's resentment can be partially understood, on the basis of the pattern of thought followed by the orthodox medical minds of the day. The patients could be cared for, treated, diagnosed—but to hope to cure something like puerperal fever was sheer nonsense; even the Hippocratic treatise on female maladies noted the disease to be contagious and fatal. Of course there were various theories held at the time: ranging from injured modesty, emotional conditions, and errors in diet to the presence of a miasma, that is, a noxious atmosphere from which the disease originated or spread. These were the almost overwhelming conditions that Semmelweis faced, but always there were the faces of the

dying mothers—tell them they were doing fine in the afternoon, even though the pulse beneath your fingers branded the encouraging words lies; and that night the chaplain's death bell tolled for another death.

The figures told no lies though; at this time the death rate became prodigious, usually fluctuating in the vicinity of 5 percent, sometimes exceeding 7.45 percent; during one period, of 5,139 child-bearing women, 829 died, a mortality rate of 16 percent. The question might also arise, what became of the babies these mothers bore before their deaths? In Vienna, the Foundling Home records show that over a period of time when 183,955 babies were admitted, 146,920 died, which balanced the deficit of mothers that died bringing them into the world. Those good old days!

Despite Klein's opposition, Semmelweis drove on with his careful study of the disease—one by one he discovered the prevalent theories to be useless, and they were discounted; always there was the puzzle concerning the differences in mortality between the First and Second Divisions. Having found no answer in these theories, he began a careful study of autopsies in fatal puerperal cases, often working with Jakob Kolletschka, Rokitansky's assistant, who became one of the friends he was to need so desperately. He noticed too, that often the doctors and students would leave the dissection room after working with cadavers, their hands still dripping putrescent fluid, coats still carrying the traces of numerous encounters with pus, blood and cadaveric material.

It was this study of autopsies in fatal puerperal cases that gave Semmelweis his background knowledge of the pathological appearances the disease manifested. In time he ran out of the knowledge that others had accumulated on the topic, and still there was no answer. Then in 1847, his friend

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Kolletschka received a scalpel wound while aiding a student in dissecting a cadaver, and died shortly after of cadaveric poisoning. Though grieved by the loss of his friend, Semmelweis noticed that the pathological appearances were the same as in the unfortunate puerperal cases of the First Division; and there it was—the answer to all the deaths. Puerperal fever was blood poisoning, the whole uterus was the wound, and his hands and the hands of others carried the poisonous material. There was the answer to the differences in death rates between the First and Second Divisions; the midwives used in the Second Division didn't do autopsies, hence there were only one-third the fatalities. He and his colleagues were the murderers. How to stop it? Why the answer was unbelievably simple—wash the hands! Wash the hands, and stop this murder. Here was the pioneer of antisepsis in obstetrics, twenty-one years before Lister.

If this were fiction, the story would end happily here—but this is factual, and often facts appear as huge blots on the pages of history. In May of 1847, he prescribed washing with chlorinated limewater for all those having contact with the mothers, and the mortality rate of 12.24 for that month fell to 3.04 by the end of the year, and at the end of the second year, to an unbelievable 1.27. Always there was Semmelweis: impatient, tactless, tender-hearted, exhorting the rite of washing, pleading for the murder to be ceased. Then came the additional discovery that puerperal fever came not only from the bodies of the dead, but from any purulent sickness of the living. In 1846, 459 mothers had died of the fever in the First Division; by the end of 1848, 3,356 mothers had babies, and only 45 died.

Yet the portion of the medical world that heard his claims scoffed at his theory, and his figures were drowned out

by the laughter at the "fool from Budapest". Wherever he turned, he was met with fierce opposition; only Skoda, Rokitsansky, Hebra, and a few others stood by him; the orthodox obstetricians of the day persecuted the doctrine vehemently. Strangely enough, Semmelweis aided his enemies by his slowness and reluctance as an author; so hypnotized was he by the answer to the deaths that writing seemed to be so much wasted labor. Why couldn't they see? Here was the answer, the mothers needn't die! It was murder, but how to stop it?

Then Klein, always a thorn in his side, moved in; apparently blinded by jealousy and vanity, supported by other teachers, and aided by political repercussions concerning the Hungarian nation, he managed to get rid of Semmelweis. The Hungarian, disgusted and tired of the friction he was generating, left for Budapest. Here he became Professor of Obstetrics at the university in 1855, and after introducing his antiseptic methods at the small hospital, reduced the mortality rate to the unheard of figure, 0.85—a medical triumph, especially when the fact is realized that until 1932, almost 7,000 women a year died of the same disease in the United States. In 1856 he made the last of his chain of discoveries, when an epidemic in the wards was traced to infections resulting from previous patient's sheets. With two possible exceptions, he had tracked down every source of blood poisoning that kills mothers.

The years at Budapest brought no glory or triumph, only more denouncements, more abuse; still worse, being completely ignored in many quarters. Reluctant as ever, he began to write, and finally in 1861 published his masterpiece, *Aetiology, Concept and Prophylaxis of Puerperal Fever*. By now some of his pupils had carried the doctrine to other lands, and the publishing of his thesis brought a few new converts; but

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the opposition increased in intensity—the French Academy pronounced against his opinions, so did the highest pathological authority in Germany. The neglect hurt Semmelweis almost as much as did the oppressing burden that the unnecessary deaths had added on his shoulders; the violent controversy placed a tremendous strain on his sensitive nature. So much so that in July of 1865, at his wife's suggestion, they returned to Vienna without any of the plaudits or fanfare he so deserved on his return. He was a broken man, and on the twentieth of July was admitted to the asylum; however, he brought with him into the asylum a dissection wound of the right hand, and on the seventeenth of August died of the disease for which he had sacrificed so much: first fame and success, then health, finally life itself.

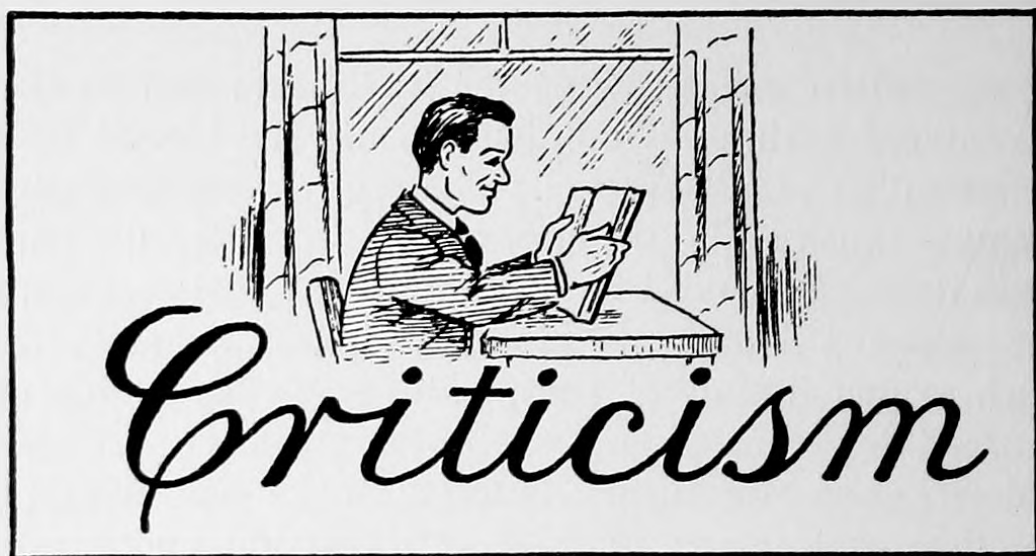
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I HAVE little doubt in my mind that if that new novel of Russian life, *Seduction in Siberia*, were to go on sale tomorrow, within two or three weeks it would be at the top of most best-seller lists. For such is the sad commentary on American literary taste, as is reflected weekly in those journals whose objective it is to keep a constant record of the ever-fluctuating book-selling pulse. In the realm of fiction, publishers maintain a surprisingly high standard of context by demanding only a few basic adherences to the party line; first, that the historical background be accurate within a certain degree—thus, an Egyptian physician in the court of King Tut cannot perform a prefontal lobotomy, nor can General Sherman be seen riding in one of his tanks. Secondly, the characters as such must be so anatomically constructed as to allow for at least one bosomy creature to decorate both the book jacket and the accompanying conservative advertising, both of which carry impressive reviews from the *Shanghai Sun*, *Timbuctu Times*, and Dennis Doorknob, ace Broadway columnist; and make use of expressive adjectives (scandalous, shocking, sensational, passionate) and phrases (women blush when her name is mentioned, strong men break down and

Criticism

weep). Also there should be a plot whenever possible, without diverting the reader's attention from his enjoyment.

These books and their prototypes form the propaganda machine that supports the Cult of Perversity which so dominates the American scene today; nothing is sacred and everyone must worship at the altar of sensuality. Every day is open season, and fair game includes everyone and everything that is connected with decency or respectability—tear apart chaste love, marriage, the home, honesty—and your commercial success is assured. The best seller lists, week after week, are the damnable evidence of these conclusions; the American reading public's fictional tastes are one step above the gutter level, and still on the way down.

Heading fiction lists we have *The Parasites* (du Maurier), a conglomeration of implicit amorality; *The Egyptian* (Waltari), whose only claim to fame is its Egyptology and immoral incidents; *Mary* (Asch), a negative answer to the axiom it is better to be than not to be; *Woman of Rome* (Moravia), the title tells the story; *Home Town* (Amory), where God is mentioned frequently, "but only as a conversational cog and aid to mild social blasphemy";¹ and *One on the House* (Lasswell), plain drivel. These books make it clear that to adequately express the confusion that exists in the world today, writers have resorted to the injection of confused thought, ideals and morality into their works. It amounts economically to settling for tripe when the price of steak is the same. There is, however, a pseudo balance existing in current fiction, what with such recent, readable, and commercially successful entries as *The Wall* (Hersey), which is both important and morally sound; *Gentian Hill* (Goudge),

¹Best Sellers, University of Scranton.

with its skillful simplicity; *The Way West* (Guthrie), a most unorthodox presentation of a fine theme; *The Cry and the Covenant* (Thompson), a readable revelation in historical, humane science; and a few other sound offerings.

Yet on the whole, our fiction leaves a magnitude of improvement to be desired; the war novels to date have illustrated this, *The Young Lions* (Shaw) and *The Naked and the Dead* (Mailer) being prime examples. It has reached the stage where no story is complete unless there is a trip to a brothel, a seduction scene, or a theme of degeneracy involving one central character; always there is a steady diet of mush and more mush as dispensed painlessly and C.O.D. by the almost infinite number of book clubs, few of which rise above the Erskine Caldwell level. This same cycle is responsible in a large part for the vast ignorance that the American reader holds concerning his literary culture—names like Hawthorne, Howells, Harte, Twain, Longfellow, Crane, Whittier, Melville, and the rest fit into the same category with forgotten dates and names in history.

Catholic readers must develop into a reactionary element against such concentrated forces, make the choice between a Christian or a pagan literature, and make it before sensual erosion reduces our fiction to the sterility of desert sand. Take the whip of boycottism in hand, drive the money changers from the Temple of American fiction, and enjoy a healthy, Christian heritage.

C. F. W.

The Moors of Nantucket

By PAUL FRANCIS FLETCHER, '51

A June sun mounting the blinding sky,
I pedal the road 'crust with sand.
The white hot heat of the earth and sky,
Makes me sway like a quivering wand.

The salt sea breeze blasts heat at me,
And billows the back of my shirt,
I pedal along like a galleon of old,
And my sea is the sweat and the dirt.

The dew-starved moors lie on either side,
And sputter and gasp with the heat.
I pedal my bike o'er the sun-browned road,
And the moors make my mis'ry complete.

A killdeer rises up at my feet,
And throws itself into the air;
But the grip of the breeze holds it up for a while
Then flings it a few feet there.

With a valiant surge—one last hope of life,
The moor crawls the windmill hill,
Imploring a drop of the water laid there,
But the windmill is shuttered and still.

The Alembic

I pedal the hill by the windmill gaunt,
And fling myself in its shade;
But the stench of its oldness is worse than the sun,
And my thirst wields a merciless blade.

I munch on a sandwich gritty with sand,
And frenziedly smother my flask
With kisses that draw a cooling warmth
More ardent than lovers ask.

We lie there panting, the moor and I,
And wait for the afternoon
And the cool sea-mists that slake the thirst . . .
For we know they are coming soon.



Frustration

By WALES B. HENRY, '50

Hear the mighty ocean roar
And waste itself upon the sands.
Been doing it for years or more,
In this, and many other lands.

You'd think the ocean would get sick
Of playing at this silly trick.

See the poor lad standing there,
Pale and wan and all alone;
Wond'ring why his queen so fair
Has left him for a better throne?

You'd think the lad would have the sense
To find, in love, a recompense.

While writing this I often find,
That like a string of cultured pearls,
The thoughts I think within my mind
Are often best when they're on girls.

Instead of sitting, writing verse,
I ought to go and date that nurse.

