

A Child  
is Born

Charles Yale Harrison  
1931

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BOOKS BY CHARLES YALE HARRISON

*GENERALS DIE IN BED*  
*A CHILD IS BORN*

JONATHAN CAPE AND HARRISON SMITH, INCORPORATED,  
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# A CHILD IS BORN

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CHARLES YALE HARRISON

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JONATHAN CAPE & HARRISON SMITH

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CHARLES YALE HARRISON*

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*TO MY SON YALE*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*All the characters and institutions described in this book are fictitious although their prototypes actually exist. Some of the italicized passages are authentic quotations from newspapers, magazines, reports of speeches and excerpts from standard works, the sources of which the reader will readily recognize.*

*The author acknowledges with gratitude the editorial assistance of Emily Courtier.*

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MENS SANA

MEDITATION

SLEEP

ALL THE NEWS

ESCAPE

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*Gentlemen in velvet breeches who knew how to take a pinch of snuff with infinite grace. Children of mechanics in Boston standing shivering in narrow streets outside of gabled houses singing Christmas carols.*

*New England merchants aghast at British cheap tea, Colonial workingmen and farmers toiling twelve hours through the day; giving their blood at Lexington, at Brandywine, at Bunker Hill, dreaming of a day when men would be free; facing British and Hessian bayonets.*

*Hoofs of horses clattering through black-shadowed villages. Massachusetts farmers scrambling out of bed, reaching for flintlocks. . . .*

*Philadelphia businessmen selling food and supplies to General Howe's redcoat army. The first Congress haggling bitterly over grants and provisions for the Revolutionary Army. Tom Paine writing to hearten a war-weary people.*

*The rich domains of the New Land. Indentured white servants from England, Ireland and Wales. Black slaves brought shackled in the holds of slaveships from the brilliant African coast. . . .*

*Lanky Abe Lincoln splitting rails, reading the law, becoming president, freeing the slaves. New Englanders buying blockade cotton, laying foundations for proud families.*

*Mississippi paddle-boats and gentlemen with curled, perfumed mustachios; dandies wearing long pantaloons strapped under boots.*

*Revolution in technology comes. The giant steam is set to work. Factories rear smokestacks where once peaceful towns slept by quiet rivers. A few handlooms become a textile-mill town. Steel mills rise on the ruins of village foundries.*

*Sprawling, sleepy towns send sons forth to conquer the West. Millions of immigrants are imported to labor in the building of the new empire. They pour through the gateways of the Western World looking with wet eyes at the uplifted arm of the Statue of Liberty in the harbor. . . .*

*Slums spread. The East Side. The Bowery. In Boston near the wharves. In Philadelphia, in narrow crooked streets. In Brooklyn, too, slums on the bay front—near the oil-covered Gowanus Canal—Red Hook.*

# I

## RED HOOK

Red Hook. Saturday night. The slums are celebrating. Fumes of cheap Geneva gin deadening the slow-eating worm of poverty. Brawls. Drunken laughter of slum women.

A bedroom in a tenement house on Walker Street.

A woman lies awake beside her sleeping husband. It is a warm night and he sprawls diagonally across the bed crowding her close to the wall. He sleeps in his underwear which wrinkles at the elbows and knees so that he appears to be grotesquely formed.

The soiled bedclothes are pushed back.

A coarse nightdress covers the woman's body which is big with child in the seventh month. She lies with her face to the white wall thinking.

She thinks of the man beside her, of the nearly-formed child within her, of the street noises which pour in through the open window, of her other children, two girls, who sleep together in the next room.

She lies thinking poverty-thoughts.

She passes her hand over her tightly-rounded body. Under her lower ribs she feels a slight stirring.

Another little one kicking its way into the world. Well, she would have no illusions about this one as when the other two were born.

Now she remembers the first time she felt that strange kicking within her. What thoughts! What plans! In this very room, too. What had become of the thoughts, the plans?

Under her left ribs the little embryonic foot shoots out and gives her body a tiny jerk. A little sickening the first time you felt it and yet a little pleasant.

Here she is, Margaret Smith—she smiles at her error. Of course, she was Mrs. Roberts now. Funny how at times she kept thinking of herself by her maiden name. . . .

Up against her ribs—kick, kick. . . .

She is a woman of about thirty years, with gray, sallow skin and iron-gray hair over her temples as though a little of the metallic quality of life had entered into her and had colored her face and hair.

Before she had met the man who now sleeps by her side she had worked in a bag factory and somehow or other after the manner in which these things happen she met him at a ball given by his union. He was a little drunk at the time and his black

serious eyes sparkled as he whirled his partner around the room, or stood near the refreshment bar. When the dance was over they walked by the side of the smelly Gowanus Canal and he asked her to marry him. She thought he was joking.

But he wasn't. The next night he called at her boarding house. She was nervous as she met him in the hallway and tremblingly led him into the parlor where the boarders took their "men friends."

Although his back was turned to her now, as she lies thinking these thoughts she can see his face as it appeared to her that night in the boarding house—a hard face, long, with creases in it, unsmiling.

After the first baby, Miriam, came he stopped drinking because they couldn't afford it and this sacrifice he charged to his wife.

"See," he seemed to say, "see, I do not drink liquor although I like it, but I give it up because I have a child to support. I am that kind of a man. . . ."

Kick, kick, go the feet up against her ribs, impatient feet kicking a way into Red Hook, feet which will swim in the Canal nearby. In the street outside the tawdry revelers seem to be celebrating the youngster's impatience.

"Come on into the world, young mister Roberts," their drunken shouts seem to say, "come on, there's plenty of room for another in Red Hook."

She knows it will be a boy for the young doctor at the clinic told her so. He said he could tell by the way it lay, and the size of the head. Kick, kick. Another mouth to feed, a red-ugly-little-thing that will need stockings and diapers.

The bed jerks with the movements of the unborn child. The figure in gray underwear stirs by the woman's side. The long, wooden face grimaces in waking. Edward Roberts opens his eyes and looks in a startled manner at his wife:

"What's that—what's that . . . ?"

A drunken pair sing in the street, under the window.

"It's him," she replies. She places her hand over her stomach. "Him!"

"Oh—him!" the husband says. "He shook the bed. He kicks like a pony, don't he? The little son-of-a-gun . . . ain't he, now?" He smiles in his drowsiness.

He closes his eyes and rolls over.

Margaret Roberts turns and faces the white wall.

## II CHARACTERS

Samuel Blumgarten, agent and collector for the Gibraltar Life Insurance Company, industrial department, was making his weekly rounds in Red Hook. He climbed two flights of stairs in a Walker Street tenement and knocked sharply at a door. He waited for a moment. The hallway was filled with the soapy odor of Monday morning washing, stale food and tenement hallway odors. He felt slightly ill and knocked again impatiently. Margaret Roberts heard it above the sizzling boiler of clothes on the stove and shouted, "Come in." The agent walked through the parlor and into the kitchen.

"'mornin' Mis' Roberts. No rest for the vicked, huh?" He opened his long collection book and thumbed the pages.

"'M'm, you're two veeks in arrears, Mis' Roberts."

He spoke with a sing-song Jewish accent.

Margaret Roberts got her premium book down from a shelf over the gas range and gave the collector some money.

He looked at it.

"This is only vun veek. Dun't let your insurance fall too far beck."

He had suspected that Mrs. Roberts was pregnant for some time but this morning there was no mistaking it and this reminded him of something he must say to her.

"I—I would like to talk to you for a liddle vile, Mis' Roberts. You see, de cahmpuny is making a special drive and in order to make it wery attractive for our policyhulders . . ."

"Mr. Blumgarten—I've got all the insurance I can pay for now. . . ."

"Yes, but hev you got all you nid, ha, Mis' Roberts?"

The agent sat on a kitchen chair and turned the pages of his collection book.

"Now I dun't vunt to be poisonal, but, you see—I—I—you vill soon hev anodder beby—anodder liddle moud to fid, und in dis void—"

Margaret Roberts went on poking the boilerful of steaming soiled clothes with a long wooden stick. The words of the eager little agent streamed through her ears and were lost somewhere.

This was Monday and all morning there would be an endless parade of agents and collectors coming into the hot kitchen, and each would bully for more money or wheedle her into buying another piece of furniture, pay off arrears on the milk bill, buy a gramophone . . .

In a daze she heard the rapid, cunning little words . . . “protection . . . in your hour of need . . . believe me Miss Roberts a dollar is your best friend. . . .”

Meaningless words, part of the ceaseless, irritating, depressing reality which is poverty.

The sing-song voice of the agent was relentless.

Little by little some words began to affect her.

“ . . . in a few months . . . and when he grows up won't it be fine to have him a chack . . . ‘when you have a baby,’ you will say to him . . . education . . . dot is, I hope” (and here with a flattering smile) “dot it's a boy. Eef his mudder want provide for him, who will?”

She leaned up against the wall near the gas range and wiped a wisp of hair from her smarting eyes.

She was listening to the agent now. Aware of the interest he had aroused, Blumgarten continued:

“ . . . und den dot will it cost? Twenty-five cents a week! Dot is dot? Three cents a day. Dot is three cents a day?”

“Nothing!” he answered himself triumphantly.

There was no resistance in Margaret Roberts now; she looked with a far-away look at the ceiling.

Mr. Samuel Blumgarten took some application blanks from his coat pockets and began to look for a clean one.

Yes . . . she would do everything for that little tumbling one within her. Her boy would escape this squalor. She thought of her husband's sagging worn face when he returned from work, the noise of Walker Street, of the fighting drunks on Saturday night, of the discomfort of the soapy-smelling kitchen on Monday morning, vague, indeterminate plans . . .

Maybe, maybe—perhaps salvation lies in the words of the excited little man who fumbles in his pockets for a piece of paper—maybe her boy will be a fine big important man with a bronzed, strong face and will wear smart clothes when he grows up and people will say Sir to him and he will do things that will be reported in the newspapers. . . .

Blumgarten wrote on a piece of paper which he rested on the kitchen table.

He asked a few questions.

“ . . . how old are you, Miss Roberts?”

She did not answer at first. He repeated the question. She smiled and said:

“I am thirty-two next September.”

“Mm-m. Believe me, you don't look it, Miss Roberts. You look so-o young. Sign

here, plis.”

The pen scratched laboriously across the bottom of the paper. Blumgarten folded the application and put it into his pocket. He beamed on the woman.

“Und ven in twenty years from now de cahmpuny brings you a check for de muny, Mis’ Roberts, you’ll denk me—you’ll see.”

Mr. Blumgarten skipped his plump five foot three body down the malodorous steps of the hallway out into the cleaner-smelling air of the street, where he took a deep breath of relief. He passed a white hand across his brow and made a rapid mental calculation. “T’ree dollars commission,” he said to himself. “Not so bed—not so bed.”

2

Michael Doyle, business agent of Local 34 of the International Longshoreman’s Union, sat at his oak roll-top desk in the union’s headquarters in Red Hook.

He was a short, powerfully built man with shrewd, dark eyes which peered out from sockets surrounded by little rolls of red and white flesh. On his paunch there rested an ornate watch charm with the insignia of his fraternal lodge, an elk’s head with bloodshot, ruby eyes. He was dictating a letter to his stenographer. . . .

Michael Doyle was a power in Red Hook. He controlled the stevedore’s union. He saw to it that the poor in his district got a hamper of food each Christmas. He was a political district leader; he hobnobbed with the great of the land and had quite forgotten that he came to New York as a frightened Irish immigrant boy thirty years before with the pinch of an Old World famine on his white little face. Now all that was gone.

In his union, a little group of malcontents called him “Umbrella Mike.” But this was jealousy he told the reporters when one of the trouble-makers was found in the hallway of his tenement with a cracked skull.

The insurgents in his union said that he was called “Umbrella Mike” because of the way he accepted graft from the shipping companies in his headquarters in MacDougall’s saloon. There, while receiving his friends among the shippers, he used to hang his umbrella on the bar-edge and they would drop their contributions into the folds. And in this manner, his enemies said, he was able to say he had never taken graft from any man.

His power in the union was unchallenged. Members paid their dues, once in a while there was an increase in wages.

Once a year Mr. Doyle chartered a river steamer and the whole union together with their families sailed up the Hudson, drank Mr. Doyle’s beer, listened to Mr. Doyle’s speeches on unionism and came back the next day and voted for Mr. Doyle

as head of the union.

But there was a time when Mr. Doyle did not have everything his own way. The soreheads, as he called them, said that Doyle accepted graft from the shipping men. This was called "strike insurance," they said.

His enemies got hold of cancelled checks and had photostatic copies made of them.

Some newspapers made a hullabaloo of the matter; a few of the shipping companies thought that they could get along much better without the help of Doyle and decided to get rid of the union altogether.

Headlines flared. Editorials were written.

The anti-union shippers remembered that they had had strikes when other companies had none. Doyle was arrested on a charge of conspiracy to restrain trade.

Doyle was sentenced, after a sensational trial, to a year's imprisonment and a fine of five thousand dollars.

In jail, the insurgents charged, Doyle was treated royally. He had, so it was reported, a private office, a secretary, and business visitors. Often he was allowed to slip out at night and visit his home or friends. While in jail he remained the business agent of the union.

Upon his release from jail he was presented with a grand piano from his brothers in the union, who met him on the steps of the jail and made speeches denouncing the enemies of labor.

A few nights after his release from jail his home was robbed and the following day the papers reported his losses. One paper wrote:

*"Two robbers entered the home of Michael 'Umbrella' Doyle late yesterday. After tying the colored maid, they ransacked the house and took silverware, jewelry and furs valued between eight and ten thousand dollars.*

*"Included in the loot was a sable coat belonging to Mrs. Doyle, valued at three thousand, seven hundred dollars, a diamond pin set with five stones valued at two thousand, five hundred dollars, a string of beads worth two hundred dollars, three silver cigarette cases, pearl earrings, and a number of smaller articles of jewelry, in addition to five hundred dollars' worth of silverware taken from the dining-room.*

*"When Mr. Frank Logan, president of the Independent Shippers Association was notified of the losses of the business agent of Local 34, he remarked that this was evidence of the wealth which Mr. Doyle must have gained through the ignorance of Brooklyn's dock workers. He advocated the open shop as the*

*solution of the labor troubles which have beset the shipping business during the last three years.*

*“When interviewed at his offices in the Red Hook section, Mr. Doyle replied as follows:*

*“Sure I own jewelry and live in a swell house. What of it? Don’t the dock union know it? They think a lot more of me because I dress like a gentleman. They say, “Well, there’s some class to our boss, ain’t they?” I spend money, sure I do. But most of it is for the good of the service, as the police department calls it. Nobody can tell me about the way to put up a front to the whole class of workingmen. The more front you expose the more they will think of you. During my term of office, I increased wages for my men over twenty per cent—ain’t that worth a few luxuries? You bet it is!”*

All that was three years ago and peace reigned in the union now. Doyle’s grip over Red Hook was secure.

3

Margaret Roberts’ two daughters were playing in the street in front of the Walker Street tenement. Miriam was seven years old and Gladys not quite six.

Bright cunning faces. They sat on the stoop of the house and rolled a little rubber ball to each other across the stone step. They sat with grave faces utterly absorbed in the meaningless game.

Near by two little Italian boys, sons of the corner grocer, stood watching them. The girls sat on the top steps with their bony little knees spread apart. Tony, older of the lads, walked up to Miriam. The ball stopped rolling.

The girl looked into the black shining eyes of the lad.

“C’mon, let’s play doctor. I’ll be the doctor and you be sick and me brudder’ll be a doctor, too. . . .”

Miriam shook her head.

“No, we don’t wanna.”

The boy was insistent:

“Aw, c’mon.”

Margaret Roberts put her head out of the window up above and called out into the street:

“Mir-i-am.”

The little girls jumped up and ran into the hallway. . . .

---

*“Mrs. Henrietta Smithers, national secretary of the American Children’s Rescue Society yesterday spoke on ‘Happiness in the Home’ at the Astor. She*

*declared that the aim of her organization was to spread sunshine in the homes of the needy.*

*“‘We make it our business,’ Mrs. Smithers said, ‘to popularize the idea of a happy home, a home where the child is not looked upon as unwanted, a care or trouble, an economic burden, but a blessing and a joy, the rearing of whom is a sacred privilege.’”*

### III BIOGRAPHY

In St. Louis, a sharp-faced young man tacked a sign over a doorway.

He had been an orphan farm boy—a starved chore boy who cleaned out cuspidors in a small-town hotel; an itinerant shifting from town to town.

The money-making fever had just struck the Middle West, business men swaggered down the main streets smoking fat cigars and the young man looked at his sign over the door with pride. It read: Bernard Powers, Kinisitherapist, Teacher of Higher Physical Culture.

In 1868, a few months after a snarling Senate had decided by one favorable vote to keep the impeached President, Andrew Johnson, in office, the infant Powers was born to a young farmer's sickly wife in a backwoods county in Missouri.

His father, son of a dilapidated country gentleman, felt that even in his poverty it was incumbent upon him to indulge himself in whisky and to follow the horse races at the visiting county fairs.

In an atmosphere of dismal domestic strife and in the misery of a two-room cabin fouled with the odor of the near-by pigsty, the puny Powers struggled through his first infant days.

Drunken sprees of his father . . . memories of bitter quarrels . . . the baffled bewilderment of children in the face of the hate between adults . . . a warped background to carry through life . . . a life that will later influence millions of Americans in a subtle, banal manner.

Like the badly drawn illustrations used on prohibition tracts of the period, the father comes to his drunken end . . . “wild drunken sprees, terminating not long afterwards, in a death in the throes of delirium tremens.”

A childhood flush with strange impressions . . . the Negro neighbors; the Baptist immersions in the river close at hand. The rich melancholy spirituals:

*Jawdon water*

*Chilly col':*

*Chill-a de body,*

*But not de soul!*

The hysterical shrieks of the Negro women as they felt the cold water against blazing bodies . . . the little Powers standing on the bank of a Missouri river receiving impressions—life-molding impressions.

In Chicago a doctor scrapes the skin of his arm and vaccinates the boy . . . the

frail lad cannot endure the strength of the serum . . . he grows ill, his body becomes hot and sticky, his eyes luminous with fever.

“Add a new foe,” his biographer, a poet after a sort, wrote long years afterwards, “add a new foe for him to fight, along with drunkenness and fear. . . .”

And then there was the poverty-driven mother with the worry of keeping her child moving from town to town planning to leave the little boy at a boys’ orphanage.

The scene on the Mississippi pier. A boat was drawn alongside waiting for the passengers to come aboard . . . a big dark man comes and tears him away from his mother . . . the mother’s frightened face . . . the beating of a frightened heart . . . “sobs racking the little body,” the hack biographer wrote, . . . the smoke of the river-boat disappearing around the bend in the river. . . .

The institution, the beatings, the huddled children at night in the dark dormitory . . . impressions that will form a life which later will talk to scores of millions of Americans from newspapers, magazines, radio. Frightened, childhood days filled with fears.

At night when the new boy arrived, a little voice whispered to him from an adjacent bed, “They never feed us *nuthin*’. No boy ever grew any bigger while they kept him in *this* place.” . . . Primitive emotions; the longing for food, for the quiet of a home, for ease from the pains of a fevered body.

The kind-hearted relatives who took him in to work in the small-town hotel near Chicago . . . the cuspidor slops to be emptied . . . the boots to be blackened . . . the worn-out body at night . . . the fat, grotesque wife of the hotel-owner, who frightened the lad as he sat and watched the Chicago train pull out of the country-town station, and then the words from her mouth later, “Yer ma’s dead. . . .”

Then long afterwards as Powers sits in his large, sunny office on Broadway in New York he tells his interviewer: “Memories of her would come back, and I would continue cheerlessly at my work in the hotel, sobbing, sobbing. . . .”

The writer repeats a verse and the publisher nods his head in approval as his long, bunched-up hair bobs up and down giving his smallish body a ludicrous appearance:

*“Mother, come back from your echoless shore,  
Take me again to your heart as of yore . . .  
Clasped to your heart in a loving embrace,  
With your light lashes just sweeping my face.  
Never hereafter to wake or to sleep.  
Rock me to sleep mother, rock me to sleep.”*

In the crowded streets below newsboys sold a lurid pink newspaper which showed pictures of legs of publicity-avid chorus girls, which lonely men living in gray rooming-houses took home with them at night.

In the meantime, however, in St. Louis the eager young man, ex-laundry worker, hung out the kinisitherapist sign over the door.

The effects of the strangled childhood weigh on his brain . . . money . . . money . . . money . . . health . . . strength . . . half-formed ideas raced through his head . . .

Words picked up out of books eagerly read in libraries.

Half-baked ideas being fashioned by the hysteria of an enormous frustration.

“The human body is the temple of God . . . Bernard Powers kinisitherapist teacher of higher physical culture. . . . I am the rebuilder, I am the guardian of the temple of the living God . . . I will be the apostle of physical culture in America . . . I will be like the thundering bearded prophet of the Old Testament who will hurl bolts of denunciation at the erring, wine-bibbing, Baal-worshiping Americans and bring them back to a sane, healthy life. . . .”

New York.

Obscure business ventures.

The thirty-year-old Powers dreamed at night of a magazine that would carry his message to millions of people.

Borrowing money, reading proofs . . . and at last the publication saw the light of day.

The factories in the land were turning out pale-faced laborers, slums were spreading, the East Side in New York, the Red Hook section in Brooklyn; in Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, down by the waterfronts. New cities were springing up and with the factories came sickness, headaches, patent medicines and now the kinisitherapist's magazine.

It gave a message to the twelve-hour-a-day factory workers.

It said: “*Weakness is crime . . . vigorous, pulsating health is within reach of all . . . the human body is the temple of God . . .*”

Farmers' wives buy the magazine in Iowa, Nebraska, Vermont.

“*The body beautiful . . . the temple of God . . .*”

Pictures of posing athletes, male and female. The stacks of blue magazines mount higher on the news-stands in the land.

Later cheap sex stories, confession stories, sensational divorce cases are featured in the millions of magazines and newspapers which pour off his presses but now the bushy-haired kinisitherapist is engrossed in the temple of God. . . .

---

The child within Margaret is nearing its hour of delivery. Life in Red Hook goes its sweltering way. Edward Roberts toils on the South Brooklyn docks. In his union Michael Doyle, the labor leader, reigns supreme. The little Roberts girls, Miriam and Gladys, play in the Red Hook streets, hide in cellars with the little street urchins, learn strange things, half-understanding.

## IV A CHILD IS BORN

The Island stands below Bronx Kills just off the shores of Harlem in Manhattan. It is an almost square piece of land washed by the slate-gray waters of the East River, which a few miles below empties into the Bay of New York.

Passengers on ships going up to Boston, Fall River and New Bedford sometimes look to the east as they pass the Island and see gray figures in uniforms drilling on a parade square. At one end of the Island there are long, dark buildings with an occasional tower here and there—and the passengers speculate idly what the name of the fort might be—but the buildings do not look formidable enough for modern warfare.

At the other end of the Island, and this, too, a passenger might know if the wind was blowing the right way, is a garbage dump fed by wagons which are carried across the river on ferries. Little by little the dump has crept closer and closer to the group of dark, long buildings at the northerly tip of the Island.

The city on the other side of the river sends its garbage and sordes here. Old clothes, no longer tempting even to the ragpicker, millions of broken bottles, refuse, the leavings of a million tables, rich and poor, ashes . . .

Once a rich lady lost a diamond ring and it was suspected that the ring had found its way into the garbage. The can was traced and the exact spot where it was dumped was discovered; the lady's servants poked around in the offal while newspaper reporters and photographers looked on. That was one day when everybody in the city across the river took notice of the dump—Little by little the dump grew and grew.

One day as the hot rays of the sun shot down on the glittering expanse of garbage, wisps of smoke began to appear on the surface of the refuse. Gradually a tongue of flame appeared here and there. Soon firemen from the city across the river came and put the fire out. The next day the fire broke out in another part of the Island.

For years, it seemed, a certain type of refuse had been deprived of air and slowly oxidation had taken place. The decaying matter formed methane gas. Finally it burst into flame. This sort of thing, the head of the fire department explained to the authorities, sometimes happened in coal mines; marsh gas it was called, he said.

A week or perhaps a month went by without a sign of the fire being visible and then suddenly the gases below exploded and sheets of flame leaped into the air and once more the fire force would be summoned.

Later four high-pressure pumps were installed, two at each end of the Island: these machines poured hundreds of gallons of water into the dump every minute but the intense heat of the underground fire consumed the water and turned it into a yellowish steam which clouded the air above.

The fire had been going on now for five years. . . .

---

At noon Margaret Roberts was taken with labor pains.

When Miriam came home from school at lunch time a neighbor sent her down to the docks to fetch her father. For the first time in a long while Edward Roberts smiled when he saw his pigtailed daughter run toward him after he was pointed out to her. She saw him walk up to the foreman, say a few words to him, then the foreman smiled and then her father smiled too and then he walked toward her. He looked down into her shiny face and rested his heavy hand on her shoulder.

“So, ma’s sick?”

“Yeah, she’s sick, pa.”

“What’s wrong?”

“She’s gonna have a baby, I guess.”

The man smiled and walked with his girl out of the dock-gates into the cobblestoned street beyond, his hard, stiff boots heavily striking the stones as he walked.

“How do you know she’s gonna have a baby?” He smiled.

“I heard Mrs. Slovack say.”

“How’s your ma doin’?”

“When I lef’ they wuz bendin’ over her and wuz sayin’ they hoped it came soon an’ I said what and Mrs. Perkins said the baby.”

The man walked on looking straight ahead of him. He saw the whole scene as clearly as though it were happening before him—this was the third time he was to witness a child coming into the world and he thought of many things as he walked. Speaking a thought aloud he said:

“Well, I hope this one is a boy.”

“Why, pa?” the little girl walking at his side asked.

The man looked down at her with a start—he had nearly forgotten she was with him.

“Oh, I dunno,” he said after a while.

When Miriam and her father turned into Walker Street and the women looking out of the windows saw Roberts hurrying to his home with little Miriam running breathlessly at his heels they knew that the hour of the baby’s delivery had come.

Men came home from work in the middle of the day in Red Hook only for birth and death.

---

When Roberts climbed the three flights to his tenement and entered he saw several of the wives of his neighbors in possession of the house.

One woman, Mrs. Slovack, the wife of a Russian longshoreman brought some linen from her supply and was busy changing the bed; another, Mrs. Perkins, the wife of the foreman in the bag factory near by, the factory where Margaret worked before she married, was heating some water on the stove in the kitchen.

Two middle-aged women, Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Williams, had Margaret between them and were pacing her up and down the floor of the "parlor."

"We're walkin' her up an' down," Mrs. Todd explained, "to keep the pains up. By the way they're comin' it won't be long now."

Margaret, her face drawn with pain and her body contracting with each spasm, walked up and down between the two women, groaning at each step.

Mrs. Todd had brought some preserves from her larder and told Edward to get himself into the kitchen and cut himself a slice of bread and try some of her crab-apple preserves and not stand there like a bull in a china shop or something. Mrs. Williams kept saying encouraging things to Margaret; stupid but well-meant words of courage.

"Never you mind, my dear," she was saying, "you think this is hard. Well, when you've had thirteen as I have done—it'll be as easy as taking sweet medicine."

She laughed a well-meaning raucous laugh and Margaret twisted her face into a sympathetic smile.

As soon as Roberts came home, the little Roberts girls ran out into the street to play where they became the center of an admiring group of street children; but they drew away and walked to the corner with haughty disdain. After a while they tired of this aloofness and joined the children talking outside of the tenement house:

". . . sure, I know how they come. The doctor feels . . ."

"Teacher says a bird brings 'em."

Titters greeted this remark.

Tony, the son of the Italian grocer, volunteered gratuitous information:

"I'll tell yuh how it happens. I know, see." His eyes twinkled. "I know 'cos one night I seen me mudder and fodder . . ."

---

At five o'clock the women left Margaret to go home to prepare food for their men.

Up and down the room Margaret went leaning heavily on her husband's arm, he with one arm encircling her waist. The husband said very little, only walking the length of the room to the table with the cheap knickknacks at one end and back to the black imitation leather sofa.

After a while Margaret began to grow tired, her knees sagged and Edward made tea. They sat in the kitchen drinking and talking quietly.

Before going home one of the women had run to Dr. Rosenbloom, a young Jewish doctor who had set up practice in Red Hook, to tell him of the impending event. The doctor came into the kitchen just as the couple were finishing tea.

"Hello everybody," he said. "And how is my patient?"

He took a stethoscope from his breast-pocket and applied it to Margaret's chest, then he felt her pulse and solemnly announced that she was in great shape. He inquired how often the pains recurred, when they had started, gave instructions about hot water, and the things he would need later: disinfectant, plenty of clean bedclothes, a basin, a douche bag—and in a whisper to Edward—"not quite so many women as we usually have."

He promised to be back later.

Mrs. Williams came in and took a turn with Margaret pacing the floor. Every fifteen minutes or so a dragging feeling would seize Margaret.

First, an insignificant pain, then drag, drag, drag until it was almost unbearable—then it died down until she was free of it. They walked up and down to bring the pain on again.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Schmerer came in. She was a fat, tubby little woman, wore a gray shawl and was reputed to be the wise woman of the neighborhood.

She had come to America with her husband from a little German village in Transylvania some twenty years ago because of Magyar racial persecutions. Back home they were tenant truck farmers and the lure of free land and racial freedom brought them across Europe and the broad Atlantic until they landed at Ellis Island.

Somehow or other they never got beyond New York and never realized their dream of broad acres and their own home. Schmerer was now a dock worker with Roberts.

Mrs. Schmerer bustled into the room and immediately took charge of things.

"Ach, mein Gott," she wheezed. "Vot foolishness." She shook her finger at Margaret.

She began to open the doors and windows and to unscrew the locks from the doors.

"Und yo expect to haf ein easy time, foolish voman—mid vindows clost und

locks on de doors—dis vill make for you de delifery hard—open de doors und take off de locks und you make de outgoing easy.”

But her activities were not confined to complying with Transylvanian peasant superstitions; from the depths of her bosom she pulled out a square bottle of lavender-scented smelling salts and gave Margaret a whiff when the laboring woman blanched with pain.

Near midnight the spells became sharper and sharper and increased in tempo. Margaret’s hour of delivery had arrived.

---

All day long Roberts dodged swinging blocks and tackle, slipped from under monster bales of goods which swung up and out from the holds of ships at the docks, but now that Margaret was in labor and her eyes stared from her head, he began to grow sick at the pit of the stomach. The nervous movements of the women who had come in to aid her added to his nervousness—that incessant walking up and down and the increasing frequency of the groaning made him feel shaky.

The tenement was filled with neighboring men and women.

Miriam and Gladys stood in the hallway outside surrounded by two or three admiring girls of their own age.

Just before midnight Dr. Rosenbloom came into the tenement, he ordered the women out and had the girls put to bed. There was no door from the bedroom to the room in which they slept, only tawdry curtains separated the rooms, and the girls heard all the sounds of preparation.

“Out—all of you,” the doctor ordered.

Looking around he saw Mrs. Schmerer.

“You may stay,” he said.

“C’mon, Roberts,” the doctor said, “clear ’em out. What do you think this is, a circus?”

Slowly and with reluctance the women shuffled out of the bedroom into the hall where they stood for a while discussing the merits of delivery by midwife.

The intense dragging ache that presages the coming of the child had Margaret in its grip. Waves of pain swept over her leaving her bathed in sweat. The rooms grew quiet save for her dull moaning. In the street outside children played and the sound of their shouting floated in through the open windows.

Mrs. Schmerer helped Margaret lie down in the bed. She set the basin and antiseptics on a table. The doctor took two sheets and knotted them to the posts at the foot of the bed for Margaret to strain upon.

Mrs. Schmerer looked with wide-open eyes at the doctor.

“No, no, doctor—do not tie de sheets op. Back home we say ‘tie knots; tie de vomb.’”

She untied the sheets and twisted them instead.

“Here,” she said to Margaret, “take dese und pull on dem ven you feel de young vun coming.”

Roberts poked his head through the curtains and saw the doctor roll his shirtsleeves up and sit down by the side of the bed. Margaret tossed from side to side; her nightgown had crept up so that her thighs showed.

The calm look of the young doctor reassured the husband.

He walked into the room where the girls lay. They were wide awake and looked at their father with large questioning eyes.

Outside in the hallway he heard the buzz of excited voices.

At once, from the bedroom came a long, drawn-out shriek. “Ah-h-h-h.” Slowly with a musical quality it died away to a soft moan.

The buzzing stopped in the hallway.

Roberts stood still; his heart hammering against his ribs.

Again the scream cut through the stillness of the rooms.

From the bed where the children lay he heard one of the girls whimper.

He heard the guttural accents of Mrs. Schmerer soothing the laboring woman. Once he heard the voice of the doctor but could not make out what he was saying. He walked back and stood near the doorway of the room whence his wife’s voice came. The cheap cotton curtain partly hid the scene from him.

Like the death-sighing of a man whom he once saw dying after he was crushed by a falling bale, the moaning in the room rose and fell.

Suddenly the doctor came through the parting of the curtain. He seemed surprised to see the husband. His hands were covered with blood.

“Water. I want some water.”

Roberts stood motionless.

“Where’s the water?”

“In there.” The husband pointed towards the kitchen.

The doctor walked away. From the kitchen came the shriek of the tap being turned on.

Roberts walked through the curtains and into the bedroom where his wife lay.

---

When the doctor returned from the kitchen he went back to work on Margaret. Roberts turned away.

What the doctor was doing seemed wrong to him somehow. The husband

looked out of the window and saw boys and girls sitting on the stoops opposite. Those kids, he thought, will grow up and have children and have to feed 'em and the girls will lie on beds and toss around with blood-streaked thighs. . . . He groped around in his mind for some sort of answer to an unformed question which troubled him. But no answer came.

The doctor was speaking to him:

"I'm afraid we're going to have a hard time with this one. It's a dry birth. The water broke this afternoon. I guess I'll be here all night. You look tired, you'd better go out and get yourself a drink. You're no use here."

The husband turned and walked out of the room glad to get away. He put his hat on and walked out into the street.

---

When he pushed his way past the swinging doors of the corner saloon the distracted husband saw Schmerer, Williams and Doyle standing up against the bar drinking.

"Here he iss," Schmerer shouted. He was a tall, fair man with a ruddy face and watery blue eyes. "Here is de new fodder."

Doyle held out his hand to Roberts.

"Put it there, me lad."

Roberts held out his hand. He recognized the labor leader.

"Well, what is it, a boy or a girl?"

"It didn't come yet."

"How long?"

"About six hours already. Doctor says it's a dry birth."

"Well, I guess it's going to be a dock worker. They're stubborn as hell."

"If he is I'll make him a union man."

"You're damned right. Let's have a drink."

The bartender stood smiling behind the bar.

"If it's all the same to you, sir, this one's on the house," the bartender said.

"What? Wid one of me men gonna be a poppa. No sir. It's on me. C'mon—er—er—"

"Roberts—"

"C'mon, Roberts, order up."

The bartender put a bottle of rye on the bar and elaborately polished each glass before he set it down. The men drank. The smooth whisky slid down Roberts' dry throat and burned pleasantly in his stomach.

"How's that?"

“Hit’s the spot.”

“Yes, sir. Have another.”

“This one’s on me now,” Leo, the bartender, intervened.

The men opened their throats and poured the drinks down. Roberts felt that sick feeling at the pit of the stomach gradually leave him. His insides glowed. He walked to the free lunch counter and cut himself a piece of Dutch cheese and ate a salted biscuit with it.

“It’s five years since I’ve had a drink,” he shouted to the men at the bar. “Five years, by God, but I’m gonna have my fill tonight. C’mon. Leo, fill ’em up again. This is on me.”

“Not on your life,” Doyle shouted. His face was red and a little wet. “When one of my men is havin’ a kid, by Christ, I’m gonna pay fer his licker until it oozes out of his eyes.”

---

Two hours later when Roberts stumbled up the stairs and walked into his kitchen he found the doctor washing his hands at the sink.

“It’s a boy,” Dr. Rosenbloom said.

Roberts smiled.

Mrs. Schmerer, hearing his voice, bustled out of the bedroom. Her face beamed.

“It iss ein boy.”

The husband grinned drunkenly.

“Then, by Jeez, he’s gonna be a dock worker—like his old man.”

“Sh-h,” Mrs. Schmerer said, “Margaret iss sleeping.”

## V BEGINNINGS

For some reason unknown to her husband Margaret Roberts insisted on calling her newborn son Arthur. There was no one in her family who had ever been known by that name, but she insisted. Her memory did not carry her beyond her mother about whom she had vague childhood memories. When Edward pressed her for a reason she could give none; but in some indefinable manner the name Arthur seemed to her to be associated with strength and size—and so the infant was called Arthur.

That was two years ago. Her dreams spent themselves in the caring for her three children, in staving off creditors when Edward was out of work, in protecting her brood when he came home tipsy.

Since the birth of Arthur they had moved half a dozen times from tenement to tenement, but always remained in the same neighborhood.

Before Arthur was born she had always taken good care of the two girls, but now there were months when the youngster was continually ailing and the girls played unnoticed in the streets. Once in a while as she went about her household duties she put her head out of the window and called warningly to them—but now even that ineffectual precaution was forgotten.

The house was a bedlam, the infant Arthur howled, the air reeked of boiling diapers and Margaret's room smelled like the fetid Red Hook hallways.

All her life, it seemed, she had fought to keep that odor out of her house—but now she was beaten.

Miriam, the older girl, matured before her time. Although she was nearly twelve her features were clearly defined, her hair was a blazing red and her gray eyes had already frightened children of the neighborhood into submissive silence when they fought. Gladys, although a year younger, was a subdued little thing who tried her best to blend with the neutral colors of Red Hook.

The children fought for food at the table; listened with frightened faces when Margaret and Roberts quarreled with adult bitterness on pay night.

Since the day that Blumgarten had sold her an endowment policy on her life for Arthur, Margaret had taken out other policies.

In time of unemployment the policies lapsed after four weeks for nonpayment of premiums. Sometimes the arrears were so great that the insurance was forfeited altogether; when Roberts got work again Margaret would reinsure her whole brood.

Blumgarten followed the family from house to house as they moved, scenting them out like a bloodhound; begging and pleading with Margaret, sometimes paying

a week's premiums out of his own pocket. Roberts fought over the insurance man. . . .

“Hangin’ aroun’ here when I’m at work—you an’ him prayin’ fer me t’ die.”

Desperate pleading—rent, furniture, the doctor, the grocer—and Edward banged out of the house, raving. . . . At other times he was silent and taciturn as he was before Arthur was born.

---

Lytton F. Coleman, Ph.D., D.Litt., passed a nervous tapering hand over the dome of his head before proceeding. He cleared his throat:

*“Time,” he said, “time, as we have seen, may be distinguished: first as real, absolute or mathematical; second, as subjective or empirical. Both of these conceptions view time as a relation of change to continuity. Newton conceived constant time as flowing at a constant rate, unaffected by the speed or slowness of the motion of material things.*

*“The modern view of time is mainly a development of Kant’s doctrine that it is an a priori mental form which experience necessarily assumes. Time—”*

---

Time with Margaret was constant. It was stationary. Every Monday was like every other Monday—Blumgarten, the collectors, the steaming wash, hurrying the kids off to school.

Time hung stagnant over Red Hook, down at the docks, in the schools, in the streets, in the stench-laden hallways, in the dark cellars where the children played.

Children were born, grew up, died . . . pay night followed pay night, endlessly.

---

Four years is a short time in a slum.

First Arthur learned to walk, bumping his forehead and chubby little behind in the process. His mother cleaned him up in the afternoons when the girls came home from school and they took him, with unwilling hearts and scowling faces, for a walk near the canal. He romped in the muddy streets, eating dirt and smearing his face with the filth of a thousand passing wagons.

His sisters played with the boys of the neighborhood—those dangerous, groping, childhood games of the streets. Once in a while they looked in Arthur’s direction to see that he hadn’t fallen into the canal. When they played too far away from him he came running to them wobbling on his little bandy legs. . . .

Margaret was frightened of Miriam’s living shock of red hair and her bitter, steady eyes. Already the points of her rapidly developing breasts pressed timidly against her thin, print dresses. The girl walked with a looseness that disturbed her

mother. Even the heavy hand of her father could not subdue her flaming rebelliousness. . . .

---

On a corner near the school which Miriam attended was a candy store.

It was owned by a man in his late fifties who the year before had lost his childless wife. He was gray and bald and one expected his brown wrapping-paper skin to crack when he smiled.

The children called him Pops.

On the way to school they hovered over his fly-specked show cases under which lay rows of black, yellow and pink candies. The store was pervaded by a musty, sweet odor.

Some mornings the Roberts girls had a penny between them and they trooped in with the other children, laughing and talking:

“Hey, Pops, how much a’ these ones?”

“Gimme six a’ dese.”

The children pointed grubby fingers and Pops ambled back and forth behind his show cases serving them.

One day as the electric gong in the school yard clanged and the children ran out of the store to fall in line before marching into class, Miriam lingered in the store with an instinctive indifference to the iron-voiced clangor of authority.

“Better hurry up,” the old man said. “Teacher’ll be mad.”

Miriam eyed him coldly and said:

“That’s all right—she can wait. How much a’ these?”

“Two fer a cent.”

“An’ these?”

She pointed her finger to the rear of the show case.

Pops reached his hand over and touched the back of the girl’s hand.

“Four fer a cent,” he said after a pause.

Pointing to the two-for-a-cent chocolates Miriam said:

“Gimme four of these for a cent.”

She smiled into the old man’s eyes. The man sucked in his lower lip for a moment.

“You got nice red hair,” he said finally.

“Will yuh gimme four of these for a cent?” the girl said again.

“If you come in here,” the man said, pointing to his solitary room in the rear of the store, “I’ll give ’em t’ yuh.”

He put four pieces of chocolate into a bag and dangled it over the show case.

Miriam walked behind the counter, past the cotton curtain which separated the room from the store.

The man followed.

“Gimme the candy,” she said.

“First yuh gotta gimme a kiss.”

“Yuh didn’t say that.”

“Gimme a kiss, redhead, and I’ll give yuh the candy.”

She walked over to him and held her face up. Pops spread his thin blue lips over hers.

“Gimme the candy,” Miriam said and she ran out of the store.

---

As Miriam hurried out of the store she ran past the policeman on the beat.

“Hurry up, red,” the cop said. “You’re late.”

The girl ran breathlessly into the girls’ entrance.

Patrolman James Parsons twirled his club adeptly at the end of the leather thong which bound it to his wrist and sauntered down the street.

He smiled in contemplation to himself; he glowed with a warm feeling of self-satisfaction.

What luck! To pick up Michael Doyle outside of Leo’s saloon dead stinking drunk! Well, he knew who Mickey Doyle was. Umbrella Doyle! Did he take him home? Not on your life. No, sir. Took him straight to his own flat . . . the expression on Florence’s face when he dragged him into the parlor . . . “here take this . . . lemon juice . . . contains the necessary acids to counteract the effects of the alcohol” . . . and this morning Doyle said, yes, Mickey Doyle himself . . . “drop around . . . boy, you sure was a life-saver” . . . “lemon juice, sir, that’s what did it . . . God’s own remedy . . . Mr. Doyle, if we all lived clean lives like our Maker intended us to . . . oh, no I’m not preachin’ . . . now look at this magazine . . . yeah, some shape . . . but don’t forget that the human body is the temple of God . . . yes, sir . . . well, let me tell you, Mr. Doyle, this man Powers knows what he’s talking about . . . yes, sir. . . .”

## VI WORDS AND PHRASES

Powers struggled with his magazine. With the first evidences of success came problems, attacks. Late at night he sat in his room writing feverishly. He answered a critic who called him a body-lover.

*"I accept the criticism, if it might so be termed, as a distinct compliment!"*

*"I admit I love my body.*

*"I respect and reverence it."*

The piles of blue health magazines mounted higher and higher on the news-stands.

Pallid stenographers, pimply boys, tired wives read it, looked at the pictures. Anthony Comstock attacked the magazine. Powers wrote on and on:

*"Beauty is supposed to be inherited.*

*"But few people realize that it can be cultivated. . . .*

*"A plain face can be made alive with an expressive personality."*

America was becoming a nation of delicatessen eaters. Food came in packages, underweight. The frontier spirit was gone. Heterogeneous nations swarmed in the big cities, were crowded into slums, worked in factories. Girls went to work in offices, in mills; the soot of factory smoke hung over the land. The health editor wrote for his growing tens of thousands of readers:

*"Glorify God in your body. . . . Know ye that ye are the temple of God. . . . If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy."*

Out of the Middle West he had come, kinsman to William Jennings Bryan and other long-haired ya-hoomen. Like his brethren, the Indian medicine men of his boyhood, Powers peddled his half-baked cure-alls to the credulous of the nation. In place of snake-oil he offered gaudier remedies:

Fasting, whole-wheat bread, vegetarianism, kinisotherapy, special Powers muscle-developers, sets of books, charts, the devil White Bread, the ogre meat. Mountains of books poured from his presses with chapters on asthma and hay fever; colds and catarrh; constipation; diabetes; digestive troubles; foot troubles; the truth about tobacco; tuberculosis; vitality supreme—step up, ladies and gentlemen, come closer—

More books: *The Athlete Quest* (a novel), *Virile Powers of Superb Manhood*, *Marriage a Lifelong Honeymoon*, *Hydrotherapy*—

Patrolman James Parsons believed in Bernard Powers, believed in whole-wheat bread—hated meat, didn't smoke, drink or fornicate too often—and luck of a dead

Chinaman—he had picked up Michael Doyle dead drunk outside of Leo’s saloon and Doyle had asked him to come around to see him. The future looked bright for Officer Parsons.

---

Miriam visited the old man’s store often. One day she came home from school late. She was pale and her eyes were frightened. Margaret’s heart froze when she saw her.

“What is it?—what’s the matter?”

“Nothin’.”

The girl walked into the bedroom. She limped a little.

“What’s the matter?” Margaret screamed at the girl.

Miriam threw herself on the unmade bed and buried her face in the gray pillow.

Margaret shook the girl by the shoulders, Miriam’s voice was hysterical as she talked.

“Lemme alone—will yuh—lemme alone—” the girl said, shaking herself free.

“Oh, my God,” Margaret wailed. “Tell me, Mirrie, what’s happened to you—”

The girl began to whimper. She pressed her hand to her groin. . . .

“Who was it—tell me—who was it—” Margaret wailed.

Her shrieks and cries attracted the neighbors who crowded into the rooms to see what was happening.

---

Roberts was sullen when he came home that night. Miriam tossed on the bed in pain.

In a frightened voice Margaret told her husband what had happened.

“Who was it?” he bellowed.

His chair fell backwards as he got up.

From the girls’ room he heard Miriam cry for the first time since she was a baby. His boots struck the floor heavily as he walked into her room. He stood over her bed.

“I’ll murder you if you don’t tell me who it was, you—you—”

The girl looked up at him, holding her hand to her side, but said nothing.

“Tell me who it was, you little whore.”

In the kitchen the other children and Margaret sat staring at each other silently.

The girl on the bed cowered toward the white wall. Her father began to unbuckle the belt of his trousers. . . .

---

*“The soft, easy environment in which we live is the only process known to*

science which will organically weaken the human being,' Edward Wiggam, biologist and writer said yesterday at the annual luncheon meeting of the committee on coöperation with clergymen of the American Eugenics Society at the Town Hall Club.

"He asserted that heredity was the chief single factor which made one man different from another. Charity and philanthropy as now carried on are leading to the deterioration of mankind; medicine and hygiene are tending to weaken man's organic powers and morals and education is not directly remedying the situation, he declared. He urged sterilization of 'the absolutely unfit.'"

---

. . . Margaret froze when she heard the word whore. To her the word was only an epithet snarled at street-women. She started from her chair. . . .

---

Over in Manhattan a student in English literature pored over the pages of *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*. He turned to his favorite section 962 and read:

"Libertine.—N. libertine; voluptuary, &c., 945a; rake, debauchee, loose fish, rip, rakehell, fast man; intrigant, gallant, seducer, fornicator, lecher, satyr, goat, whoremonger, *paillard*, adulterer, gay deceiver, Lothario, Don Juan, Bluebeard; chartered libertine.

"adulteress, adventuress, courtesan, prostitute, strumpet, harlot, whore. . . ."

---

. . . as Margaret ran towards the room where Miriam lay she heard her husband shout:

"You won't tell me, eh, you little whore . . ."

---

The student of English literature read on:

". . . whore, punk, *fille de joie*; woman-of-the-town, streetwalker, Cyprian, miss, piece, frail sisterhood; demirep, wench, trollop, trull, baggage, hussy, drab, bitch, jade, skit, rig, quean, mopsy, slut, minx, harridan; unfortunate, -female, -woman, woman-of-easy-virtue &c. (*unchaste*) 961; wanton, fornicatress; Jezebel, Messalina, Delilah, Thais, Phyrne, Aspasia, Lais, *lorette*, *cocotte*, *petite dame*, *grisette*; demimonde; chippy (U. S.); Sapphist; spiritual wife; white slave.

"concubine, mistress, doxy, *chère amie*, *bona roba*.

"pimp; pander, -ar; bawd, *conciliatrix*, procuress, mackerel, wittol.

"'Take the Cash and let the Credit go.' *Omar Khayyam*."

---

. . . she heard the swish of his leather belt as he raised his hand over his head. The belt came down whistling through the air. She heard the sharp thwack as it landed on Miriam's body. The girl screamed. Margaret stood still.

In that moment she looked through the window which faced Walker Street. A couple were standing across the street under a street lamp. They were looking up at the window and the woman was pointing her finger.

The strap whistled through the air again. This time Margaret was able to move. She leaped at her husband and caught his arm as it swung downward.

"Edward," she screamed, "Edward—don't—"

Her husband turned to her for a moment. In the light which shone in from the arc light outside, she saw his pale face gray with anger. He snarled at her:

"Get out—you—lemme alone—"

His breath smelled of whisky. He straightened his arm and sent Margaret flying into a corner of the room. She said nothing.

From the kitchen she heard the children crying. . . .

---

*"Arthur P. Schnitzler, chairman of the New York Council for the Curbing of Juvenile Delinquency, yesterday declared in an address before the New York Associated Clubs that he had suggested a plan to the Mayor which will cut down considerably the present delinquency rate of the city.*

*"I maintain," Schnitzler said, 'that one of the best ways of controlling juvenile delinquency is by increasing park facilities. If children are kept off the streets and are restricted to salubrious surroundings the problem of juvenile delinquency will eventually disappear. I also maintain—'"*

---

The young student of English literature put *Roget's Thesaurus* down on the table and looked out of his window. It was an early spring evening and coatless couples strolled in the shade of the trees on the other side of the street.

"Just imagine," he said to himself, "there are fifty-seven synonyms for the word whore."

Some of the words seemed so attractive—"Jezebel—what images—Jehu calling outside of Jezebel's window—and she painted her face and tied her head and looked out of her window—what a picture, what Oriental lasciviousness—Messalina, the lustful wife of that Roman emperor—"

Far away to the west an elevated train rumbled—"Thais dead in the convent and Paphnutius falling in love with the corpse anew—" voices of women laughing in the street lent force to his imagination—"women, European, Asiatic, tall Italian women in

black lace garments with the whites of their bodies showing through; an aristocratic Chinese woman with crippled feet and an enticing hobble draped in Messaline—just imagine, fifty-seven synonyms for whore—”

---

. . . from the corner in which she lay Margaret saw Miriam leap at her father with the desperation of a heroic rat. She clawed at his face, tore at his hair and screamed incoherencies into his face.

Roberts pushed her down on the bed and lashed at her with the belt. His arm was bleeding. In a frenzy he tore away his daughter's clothes revealing her young naked body.

After a while he wiped away the blood which streamed from his arm.

## VII RISE AND FALL

It seemed to Margaret that life for her and her brood had reached its lowest ebb. All her efforts were futile and ended in defeat.

Edward worked from time to time, slumped into fits of despair and moodiness and drank when he was laid off.

The gramophone was taken to the pawnshop.

Blumgarten was called in and one of the children's insurance policies was surrendered for its cash value—a third of what she had paid in for ten years.

Margaret ran from neighbor to neighbor and borrowed a dollar here and there. Edward came home drunk in the afternoons after futile mornings of hunting for work on the docks. Even jobs unloading banana boats at two dollars a day were hard to find.

Life swirled and twisted for the Roberts in their narrow Red Hook whirlpool.

Once in a while a newspaper found its way into the house. But mostly it was read by Miriam and the youngsters who stared seriously at the comic pictures. On the day that a great world event happened Edward and Margaret were unaware of its occurrence.

In Sarajevo, at the foot of the high Bosnian hills, an Austrian archduke arrived with a party of officers from Ilidze. The archduke was in full military uniform, wearing all his decorations. His wife, dressed in a white summery dress, sat beside him. On the seat facing them sat a general, the military governor of Bosnia.

As the royal party approached the Cumurja Bridge and the general called the archduke's attention to some newly constructed barracks, the conspirator Chabrinovitch knocked off the cap of his bomb, stepped forward from the cheering mob, and hurled it at the regal car.

The chauffeur put on speed and the bomb fell on the folded hood of the car. Franz Ferdinand seized the explosive and threw it back into the road. It exploded and injured members of the military party in the following motor.

At the Town Hall the mayor of the city welcomed the heir to the throne. The archduke was ill at ease. He shifted from foot to foot as the paunchy aldermen stood around while His Honor laboriously read the speech of welcome. The mayor sweated and told of the loyalty of the Bosnian people and the overwhelming joy with which they welcomed the eldest son of the Emperor.

The strain of the attempted assassination had shattered the archduke's regal composure. His mouth twitched. Suddenly he seized the frightened, provincial mayor

by the arm and said:

“Enough of that. What! I make you a visit and you receive me with bombs.”

His Honor finished the speech with stammerings and explanations.

After the Town Hall ceremonies, it was decided that His Royal Highness should visit the hospital where one of his staff lay wounded as a result of the bombing.

Again the entourage started through the narrow streets of the town. A halt was necessary at a corner. At this moment the assassin Princip stepped forward and took careful aim at the archduke.

He fired twice. One bullet struck the regal neck of the archduke so that royal blood spurted from the mouth. The other bullet entered the stomach of Sophie Chotek, his wife.

She crumpled to the floor of the automobile. The white summery dress was stained with blood. Her large cool-looking hat flopped ridiculously as she collapsed at the feet of her husband.

The street was in an uproar. The car turned and sped over a bridge.

The archduke leaned down over his dying wife, his mouth sputtering blood as he spoke and said:

“Sophie, Sophie, do not die. Live for our children.”

But she died.

Terror overtook the town.

Telegraph wires became hysterical.

Editors worked late into the night on this fatal St. Vitus’s Day, Sunday, June 28, 1914.

In Europe workers in grim-faced factories and peasants in rolling fields knew the significance of the news—mothers became frightened as the ugly word war swelled in the mouths of men until it became a howl.

Chancelleries issued *communiqués*.

Peace became a word to be croaked by senile diplomats who anxiously maintained close communication with their War Offices.

In barracks in all parts of Europe troops were routed out of bunks in the night and moved from station to station.

Armies prepared for mobilization.

Navies steamed out to the open sea.

On July 28 Count Berchtold sent a telegram to the Servian Foreign Office:

*“The Royal Servian Government having failed to give a satisfactory reply to the note which was handed to it by the Austro-*

*Hungarian Minister in Belgrade on July 23, 1914, the Imperial and Royal Government is compelled to protect its own rights and interests, by a recourse to armed force.*

*“Austria-Hungary, therefore, considers herself from now on to be in a state of war with Servia.”*

This was the news that sprawled on the front page of the newspaper which Edward Roberts listlessly brought home to his tenement one day in July, 1914:

As Edward came through the doorway Margaret said what’s new? and Edward said nothing, meaning that he had not found work.

Odd jobs here and there and a few dollars for Margaret and the children.

July passed into August.

At night the voices of the Red Hook children sounded shrill and happy in the shabby streets.

In Europe armies marched and counter-marched. Belgians, Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Englishmen started the long campaign of homicide.

Along the edge of a Belgian stream German boys writhed and died with Belgian bullets and shrapnel in their intestines.

A haggard, torn British army fled from Mons.

In Galicia, France and Russia men marched through the hot days and nights.

War smeared a crimson streak across the face of Europe.

In the street outside the Roberts tenement one night there was a sudden shout:

Under a street-lamp two men were beating, kicking each other. A little cockney and a German were fighting. They repeated jingo phrases in their hatred. “Bloody bosche.” “*Verdammt Englischer.*” A policeman broke up the brawl.

On the seas ships laden with food, supplies, munitions were sunk. From the American Middle West endless trains of food began to roll toward the Atlantic ports; food for the embattled armies in Europe.

Ships waited at docks in New York, Hoboken, Jersey City, Philadelphia, Red Hook in Brooklyn. Work.

Edward Roberts toiled from early morning till late at night.

From Pennsylvania and New Jersey freight cars rumbled up to the wharves laden with copper-banded ammunition for heavy artillery.

A Scottish lad in kilts at the foot of a Belgian ridge whimpered at the sight of his shell-amputated leg, but Margaret was getting a fat pay envelope every Saturday night.

The children had shoes. Bills were paid. Blumgarten beamed now that the

insurance was no longer in arrears.

A little manila yellow envelope made Margaret happy, made her children well-fed, gave Edward a sense of importance.

In Europe manila envelopes made mothers and wives stare in horror: "*His Majesty regrets to inform you . . .*"

Arthur's little form filled out, the transformed contents of the pay envelope fattened his wasted body. He was sent to school, face licked clean and tow hair plastered down and parted on the side.

He bloomed with the sudden prosperity of Red Hook. He stood in line in the courtyard in the morning with his little stomach poked out as the teacher called the line to attention. He wriggled on his arched, hard schoolroom seat. His eyes bulged as the class at assembly saluted and recited the oath of allegiance:

*"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the republic for which it stands; one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all."*

At night at home when his father and mother and Miriam and Gladys sat around the supper table school-thoughts tumbled through his head:

"One apple from three leaves two with liberty and justice for all and when Goldilocks woke up the three bears number eight looked like the daddy bear."

His father's voice broke into his thoughts.

"Well, what did y' learn today, boy?"

"Numbers." Margaret beamed.

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

A deliberating pause.

"Four!"

There was a shout of laughter from the girls. Margaret blushed for the boy.

"Leave him alone, Edward. Miriam and Gladys keep quiet."

But Arthur went on eating his meat and potatoes, unperturbed. He looked at Mirrie and his father and remembered a night long ago when his sister lay sobbing in a corner of a dark room and his father came into the light of the kitchen and put his bleeding arm under the tap.

His brow wrinkled a little. He couldn't understand why the grown-ups changed so.

Why did his father laugh now, and Miriam, too; then she was sobbing and his face was horrible-looking. They were friends now—his brow wrinkled into deeper little folds.

His father spoke at the forehead which bent over the plate:

"Don't worry, kid, it's all right. This many fingers is five. See, five."

Arthur shook his head with childish profundity.

---

Good times came to Red Hook; that is, comparative good times.

Life eased up for Edward Roberts. Margaret's face was not haggard and accusing as he came through the door of the kitchen; that was a great deal.

On pay nights he stopped at a store where toys were sold and bought playthings for the children; mechanical contraptions for Arthur to pull to pieces, roller skates and cheap trinkets for the girls.

The general living conditions of Red Hook, however, remained the same. Somehow or other the inhabitants along the waterfront seemed hemmed in. On three sides of the district there were natural water barriers. Across the river lay Manhattan, forbidden territory.

The children still played in the streets, in empty lots or in the oily water of the canal in the summertime.

More work meant better food, warmer clothes, a less insistent insurance agent.

But Red Hook itself remained the same. Its streets were just as dirty as ever, the dilapidated houses as dismal as before; there were just as few bathtubs in the houses and just as many toilets in the back yards. The streets were filthy with refuse and litter and more drunks staggered into dingy hallways than ever before.

But work was plentiful. Jobs galore. Work from morning until night; every day and Sunday, too. That was something.

Nobody thought very much about the war except as it affected Red Hook. Liners crawled to the dirty docks, cargoes were loaded into their bellies and life was easier.

Where were the silent, gray guns going? For whom were the mountains of artillery shells destined? Who was paying or would pay for all this?

No one asked. No one cared.

Women smiled now, children laughed. That, Red Hook said, was a pretty good answer.

Two years went by.

On a dozen fronts in Europe and Asia Minor armies lay intrenched month after month. Bloody battles were fought. The ring tightened on the Central Powers.

News accounts of slaughter no longer interested the newspaper readers in Red Hook.

"Twenty thousand men have died in the attempt to take Loos." Words. "Six divisions are reported drowned in the swamps." What is six divisions? Two words in a pink newspaper.

In school children of the belligerent immigrants fought in the playground.

Sometimes a Russian and a German would come to blows in a saloon brawl. The war was far away.

But gradually the war came closer. Propagandists from the Old World countries flocked to America. German apologists wrote in the newspapers of British perfidy and the English replied with lurid stories of German atrocities.

The former British Ambassador, James Bryce, signed a report on the frightfulness of the German armies in Belgium: this was welcome news to the pro-ally newspapers.

German submarines sank merchant vessels plunging cargoes destined for the Allied armies to the bottom of the seas.

In April, 1917, America declared war on Germany.

In school, Arthur and his class sang *The Star Spangled Banner* in high-pitched, squeaking voices.

Recruiting sergeants appeared in Red Hook, near the saloons, at the factory gates. Soldiers in ill-fitting uniforms and sloppy, slouch hats swaggered down the streets.

Color had come into the life of Red Hook; color, glamour and romance. The younger men saw a way clear of the humdrum life in the factories or on the docks. Flags appeared everywhere.

Miriam was attracted by the bravado of the lads in uniform. Her vivid red hair caught the eyes of the boys as they came home for a few days leave before sailing for France. Thoughtless care-free days before marching away to the trenches. The street-corner became her rendezvous.

Sonorous words rang in the newspapers—country, honor, battlefield, to die for one's country—words to quicken the pace of slum-sluggish blood, words to color a drab life filled with petty cares and ills.

Miriam was fourteen—a tall, matured girl of fourteen with hard, round breasts and flaming hair which tossed in the spring evening breezes, breezes which pressed her skirt against her womanly thighs shaping her clearly before the eyes of the soldier boys who stood on street-corners and whistled as she ran by.

Even colorless Gladys was infected with the mad, wild spirit. She watched her sister with envious eyes, deterred by her natural timidity. But she admired Miriam as she swaggered up to a street-corner, past laughing groups of boys in khaki and said, "Hello, doughboys," and shook her mop of hair behind her with a tantalizing, rebellious motion of her head.

Gladys, somehow or other just couldn't bring herself to be quite so bold. But

she played her rôle in the game and kept quiet when Miriam went for long, silent walks with a young man down the darker side of the canal.

In the movie houses well-dressed men appeared on the dingy stages and pleaded for subscriptions to the Liberty Loans. In the schools teachers pleaded with pupils to save their pennies for thrift stamps. At work Edward had some of his wages deducted to pay for his quota of the war.

*Over the top—over the top; our boys are dying; do your share; subscribe, subscribe, subscribe.*

Classrooms were festooned with flags; mornings were given over to the reading of dispatches from the front.

“Our troops advanced yesterday under a veritable hail of enemy fire. A preliminary bombardment of the enemy trenches had crushed all resistance so that when our troops captured them not a German was alive. Crushed and torn bodies littered the trenches rendering consolidation difficult. . . .”

In the streets on the billboards immense posters stirred the basic emotions:

A bloody hand. “The Hun, his Mark. Blot it out with Liberty Bonds.”

A gray-haired, battle-bereaved Whistler mother. “Ask *His* Mother How Many Bonds You Should Buy.”

Workers in factories, clerks, housewives, laborers, artisans, artists, teachers were badgered, coerced; slick, well-tailored men went through the land telling of the suffering of the soldier boys over there, pleading to “give until it hurts.”

At Edward’s union, Doyle boasted of the good he had done for his men. He patted Edward on the back, reminded him of the night that Arthur was born:

“remember the night that freckled kid of yours was born, eh? Those was hard times. But all that’s over now, eh? Lotsa work. Good pay, eh? Well, raise ’im up to be a longshoreman. Yeah. Ain’t he got freckles? Save your money.”

Labor organizers from Washington lectured to the tired men at open meetings on the loyalty of work:

“Load the ships, that’s our job. Think of the men that are dying in the trenches. God damn it, the least we can do is load the ships. That’s our job. This is our country, I don’t give a whoop in hell where you came from, this is our country. We got contracts with the companies and they’ll pay the wages if we load the ships. Guns, planes, food, get ’em into the holds, that’s our job. This is labor’s war.”

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At night in the street before the Roberts tenement the Red Hook children played at soldiers. Proud parents sat on the stoops or hung out of windows watching their youngsters at play.

Companies were formed. Broom handles were guns with bayonets, boiler-lids were used as shields, lids of pots were steel helmets. Arthur was there, his chest stuck out, his feet following the rhythm of the drummer who beat a tattoo on an empty, discarded garbage pail. Tum-tum-tiddy-tum-tum-tum.

Suddenly there was a whoop of alarm and the children dashed into hallways and cellar openings. Shrieks of simulated terror were uttered as the mock bayonets were thrust home.

“We got the Kaiser; we got the Kaiser,” the children chanted as they led one of their number off. A rope was tossed over the arm of a lamp-post.

“Hang the Kaiser; hang the Kaiser.”

Under the yellow light of the street-lamp the children chanted war songs and tormented the youngster who was unfortunate enough to be the German Emperor.

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The summer of 1918 turned to autumn.

Along the western front the Allied troops pressed forward against the crumbling German armies. German trenches manned, so to speak, by boys of sixteen and seventeen, surrendered as the reënforced French, British and American armies continued their onward march.

One day in November the news of the signing of the armistice appeared in the newspapers.

Across the river in Manhattan crowds filled the streets cheering, drinking, weeping, laughing. Confetti filled the air. Restaurants, saloons, theaters were crowded with people half drunk with nervous excitement and joy. Soldiers were fêted, dined, wined, seized by women, kissed and fondled.

Red Hook had its celebration that night, too. Flags, made of cheap, stiff cloth were hung out of windows. The streets were full of milling people. The corner saloons were wide open; shouting men passed in and out. From the bar came snatches of songs.

*“. . . and they won't come back till it's over over there.”*

Women walked the streets laughing and calling to one another. Firecrackers were set off. No one seemed to want to sleep.

Miriam met some soldiers from Governor's Island and went over to Manhattan with them. Her father had come into the house for some money before returning to the saloon.

“Doyle is there and some of the boys. The war's over, God damn it, the war's over. Christ, can't a man take a drink t' celebrate? The war's over.”

His eyes were watery and wishy-washy as he looked at Miriam.

“Hello, red. The war’s over. Where yuh goin’? Soldiers, eh? Well, ’ats all right. They won the war, didn’t they? Sure yuh can go. Nuthin’s too good fer the doughboys—sure yuh can go.”

When Edward came home early the next morning at dawn Margaret and Gladys took his boots off and rolled him into bed where he grunted:

“S’ all right, war’s over, no more war. Boys’ll come home now. Was labor’s war, tha’s what it was—an’ we won, din’ we?”

Miriam came home when her family was asleep. She crept into Gladys’ bed. Her sister looked startled when she saw Miriam’s flushed face.

The older girl put her finger to her lips warningly.

“Are they asleep? Don’t tell ma when I came in.”

She undressed in the dark and snuggled close to her sister. She smelled pungent and hot.

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The war was over.

Troops came home.

Work became scarce again. Wages dropped. Strikes broke out in factories, in mines. Steel mills in many states shut down. Blood stained the streets leading to mills and factories.

Troops patrolled strike areas.

A wave of radicalism swept from New York to California. Aliens were thrown into prison, deported, persecuted. Union meetings were raided and dispersed. The hatred of the war was finding a new outlet.

“Lynch the radicals. String ’em up. . . .”

In Washington twelve prominent lawyers issued an appeal: *“To the American people. For more than six months we, the undersigned lawyers, whose sworn duty it is to uphold the Constitution and Laws of the United States, have seen with growing apprehension the continued violation of that Constitution and breaking of those laws by the Department of Justice of the United States Government.*

*“Under the guise of a campaign for the suppression of radical activities, the office of the Attorney General, acting by its local agents throughout the country, and giving express instructions from Washington, has committed continual illegal acts. Wholesale arrests both of aliens and citizens have been made without warrant or any process of law; men and women have been jailed and held incommunicado without access of friends or counsel; homes have been entered without search-warrants and property seized and removed; other*

*property has been wantonly destroyed; workingmen and working-women suspected of radical views have been shamefully abused and maltreated. Agents of the Department of Justice have been introduced into radical organizations for the purpose of informing upon their members or inciting them to illegal activities; these agents have even been instructed from Washington to arrange meetings upon certain dates for the express object of facilitating wholesale raids and arrests. In support of these illegal acts, and to create sentiment in its favor, the Department of Justice has also constituted itself a propaganda bureau, and has sent to newspapers and magazines of this country quantities of material designed to excite public opinion against radicals, all at the expense of the government and outside the scope of the Attorney General's duties.*

*“We make no argument in favor of any radical doctrine as such, whether Socialist, Communist or Anarchist. No one of us belongs to any of these schools of thought. Nor do we now raise any question as to the Constitutional protection of free speech and a free press. We are concerned solely with bringing to the attention of the American people the utterly illegal acts which have been committed by those charged with the highest duty of enforcing the laws—acts which have caused widespread suffering and unrest, have struck at the foundation of American free institutions, and have brought the name of our country into disrepute. . . .*

*“It has always been the proud boast of America that this is government of laws and not of men. Our Constitution and laws have been based on the simple elements of human nature. Free men cannot be driven and repressed; they must be led. Free men respect justice and follow truth, but arbitrary power they will oppose until the end of time. There is no danger of revolution so great as that created by suppression, by ruthlessness, and by deliberate violation of the simple rules of American law and American decency.*

*“It is a fallacy to suppose that, any more than in the past, any servant of the people can safely arrogate to himself unlimited authority. To proceed upon such a supposition is to deny the fundamental American theory of the consent of the governed. Here is no question of a vague and threatened menace, but a present assault upon the most sacred principles of our Constitutional liberty. . . .”*

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*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of*

*the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”*

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During the war Miriam had helped Margaret with the household duties, but now that work was scarce again and Edward’s savings were speedily vanishing, it was decided that Miriam should go to work. Gladys too, now that she had finished public school, was to go to work.

Arthur went to school and since Margaret was once more concerned with the problem of food, rent and clothing, it was easy for him to play truant once in a while. When the monthly report card was ready for signature he waited for a family quarrel and put the card and a pencil into Margaret’s hand. She signed in a distracted sort of way, looking at the markings—“School work C, Conduct B, absent 5 days”—but not seeing.

One night Miriam failed to come home. In the morning Margaret sent Arthur to school and went over to the department store in Manhattan where Miriam said she was working.

A young woman in charge of the employment department told her that the girl had been discharged the week before. She did not know where the girl might be working.

A week later when the family was at supper, Miriam came home, voluble and defiant. Edward listened to her story with lowering eyes. Margaret bit her upper lip in agitation.

“So I was afraid t’ come home. I stayed with a friend, an’ the next day I went and got a job with Harkell’s. Yuh can get clothes there and they charge it against your pay—that’s how I got the clothes. If yuh don’t believe me—”

Miriam looked about the tawdry kitchen, at her father’s tired wooden face, at her mother’s frightened eyes, at Arthur, who sat poring over a schoolbook in the corner, at Gladys wiping the dishes with a dirty dishcloth near the sink. She hated the place.

“You’re lyin’.” It was her father.

“I ain’t.”

“Don’t answer me back—you little chippie. Don’t lie t’ me.”

“I ain’t lyin’.”

The muscles in Edward’s jaws began working spasmodically, as when he was faced with something he could not answer. Arthur looked at his father’s face and closed his book and sneaked through the kitchen door and ran down the stairs into the street.

Miriam opened her purse and took some money out and laid it on the table.

“Look, here’s my pay, if yuh don’t believe me.”

It was twelve dollars. Edward looked at her black silk dress, unbelieving.

Three bank notes looked up at him from the table. He hadn’t worked for two weeks now, and Margaret was nagging at him.

“Chase National Bank,” one bank note said, “will pay to the bearer on demand, ten dollars in gold.”

He picked up the money and gave it to Margaret. Miriam sat down at the table and took her hat off with a sweeping womanly gesture. An odor of perfume, sharp and pleasant, filled the room.

Margaret looked at her daughter and felt more at ease.

There was something in the gesture with which Miriam took off her hat that made Margaret feel more secure about her daughter.

The girl looked at her father with an arrogant glance and said:

“I ain’t gonna live in Red Hook any more. I can live with a friend over in N’York. I’ll bring five dollars over every Sunday. The floorwalker said I can get a raise soon . . .”

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At night, when Margaret got into bed she found it hard to sleep. She tossed from side to side. Figures danced before her eyes. Blumgarten stood over her bed, “You’re in arrears Mis’ Roberts, yuh never can tell.” Tony, the groceryman: “How about a leedle somet’in’ of de bill, Mees’ Roberts.” She saw Miriam lift her hands to her hat like a woman; where did she learn to do that? why was she so sure of herself? where did she learn to do that?

Long before Edward came home she had fallen into a broken sleep in which she dreamed that Blumgarten and Tony were sitting in her kitchen and looking at her with lecherous eyes. She was wearing a fine, new hat which she lifted from her head with a gesture of assurance. Suddenly in her dream she became Miriam but all the time she knew it couldn’t be so because she felt tired in her arms and back.

She was sound asleep with a troubled look on her face when Edward got into bed and said, “Come on, move over.”

## VIII DEATH

That summer the prices of food went higher and higher. Demands for more wages were denied by employers. Groups of angry men gathered at the gates after work; talked in low resentful tones of the low wages, of hard times, of what their women would say.

Meetings were called. Speeches were made. Committees were appointed. Votes were taken.

Red Hook was in a flurry of excitement. Strike talk was in the air. Little boys, sons of the dock workers, Arthur among them, chalked insulting slogans on the gates leading to the docks:

“To hell with the —— Company.”

At the union headquarters, Doyle perspired and explained to his men that no strike vote could be taken without the consent of the international executive committee. Work was not as plentiful as it was during the fat war days.

There were days when there was no work at all. Sixty-five cents an hour came to very little what with days of idleness. Bread, butter, milk, meat prices moved higher and higher. On Friday, in some strange manner, the week’s wages were gone.

At union headquarters newspaper reporters appeared:

“What’s new?” “Will your union go on strike, Mr. Doyle?”

Doyle passed an agitated hand over his forehead, licked his dry lips and spoke for publication.

“Now yuh can say dat Michael Doyle, business manager of de International Longshoreman’s Union, local 34, last night said dat he is willin’ to do business wit’ de employers. He is against rough stuff of any sort. My men knows I’m O. K. I wanna avoid trouble along de docks. If de bosses’ll meet us halfway—we’ll do de rest. . . .”

*“The olive branch of industrial peace was extended last night in the longshoremen’s impending strike, when Michael Doyle, business manager of the International Longshoreman’s Union, local 34, offered to negotiate an agreement with ship owners without resorting to a stoppage of work.*

*“Mr. Doyle told reporters that he would do everything in his power to avert a strike. He said:*

*“ I am perfectly willing to negotiate with the employers. I am*

*unalterably opposed to violence of any sort. The sane thing to do at this time is for all interested parties to sit down calmly at a round table and discuss the questions which agitate not only the employers and longshoremen but the public at large. . . .”*

The president of the International Longshoreman’s Union was a member of the wartime National Adjustment Commission. When the commission rejected the workers’ demands of one dollar an hour and offered seventy cents as a compromise, the president decided to abide by the decision, not without an effort however, he said, to present the plight of his men. He stood up at the committee meeting and said:

“Gentlemen—”

It pleased him to be able to stand here in this well-appointed room and look down at the morose faces of the committee—a banker, a millionaire manufacturer and a nationally known dollar-a-year man—and say to them, as an equal might say, “Gentlemen—”

“Gentlemen, I shall, of course, abide by the decision of the commission, of which I am proud and honored to be a member. I feel, as I have said before—” he looked at the solemn upturned faces of his fellow-members, he watched with pleasure the pencils of the reporters jotting down notes “—that seventy cents an hour is somewhat insufficient—”

Notes jotted down again and then a pause of pencils, a pause for the president of the International Union—

“But I assure you that I shall do all in my power to induce my men to accept the award of this commission. I shall ask my men to remain at work.”

Pencils raced across copy-paper.

“Industrial peace, as I have stated on previous occasions, can only be maintained . . .”

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When Doyle’s local met to hear the report of the president, the men were restless. Strange faces appeared among the rank and file; sinister, gangster faces.

Doyle sat, red and excited, on the platform. On his right was the president, wing collar and bushy hair, his hands folded in his lap.

It was with deep regret that the president had to announce that the award of the commission was not up to the expectation of the membership but in these days half a loaf was better than none. It would be extremely unwise to listen to the advice of hot-heads to go on strike. It is an easy matter to go on strike. All you had to do was to stop work and you were on strike. But it takes leadership to obtain some measure

of success and keep men on the job. That was the trick. Five cents an hour was an increase of two dollars and forty cents a week. That means more than a hundred dollars a year extra. . . .

Other speakers arose. Labor leaders. "Look at our union, peaceful negotiations done the trick."

Speech after speech. The men listened silently, their bronzed faces immobile under the torrent of words. A young longshoreman got to his feet after the speeches:

"Brother president and Brother Doyle, I wanna say that for me and some of the brothers that we can't accept the terms that the commission lays down for us. If you took a vote—"

Some of the strangers in the hall moved towards the speaker.

"Throw 'im out!" they shouted.

Instantly the room was in an uproar. Men leaped to their feet.

One man stood on his chair and shook his fist in the face of the president and shouted:

"Get yer God-damned stool-pigeons outta here."

Shouts calling for a vote on the report were heard.

The president walked to the edge of the platform and held up his hand for silence. He spoke of radicals and warned of ill-considered action. One of the strangers shouted "adjourn."

Doyle smashed his gavel on the table, and shouted:

"Brothers th' meetin' is adjointed."

When the men crowded out of the hall into the street a brawl had started. One of the longshoremen, a giant Swede, had called Doyle and the president bastards; one of the Doyle adherents had reached into his hip-pocket and swung a leather-encased blackjack at the head of the Swede.

Knees collapsed and the bulky body slid along the wall against which it was leaning and fell to the pavement. The face, red and tanned a moment ago, was now green under the yellow street-lamp.

Hoarse voices called to one another. The sound of heavy boots striking the pavements sounded and mingled with the shouts. The awkward figure of the Swede lying limp near the wall of the meeting-hall had crystallized the loose feeling of injustice and betrayal.

Sides were quickly drawn. The Doyle men and the strangers in the black derby-hats edged along the wall leading to the corner. A ring of hulking longshoremen circled the retreating men.

Lonely, mournful police whistles called and were answered. Angry hands

reached for the throats, shoulders of the union gangsters. Boots lashed out at shrinking loins.

A woman shrieked across the street. The attackers withdrew. The police whistles sounded nearer. The shadowy group of longshoremen dispersed, vanished around corners, up alleys.

When the police arrived the Swede was still lying near the entrance of the hall; near him one of the men in the derby-hats was bent over hugging his groin.

The next day the insurgents in Doyle's union rented a room over a saloon as headquarters. New committees were formed. Edward joined the new union.

Leaflets were printed. The next night a mass meeting was held.

Red Hook came to life after the idle listlessness of the summer. Women in the hallways talked of the new union. Stories of the impending strike filled the newspapers. Doyle issued statements to the press deploring the strike talk. Squads of police appeared at the dock-gates in the morning as the men went to work. Mounted police clattered on the cobble stones along the streets leading to the waterfront.

A young Irishman appeared out of nowhere to lead the strike. He sat with the committees and drew up a list of demands, he organized picketing groups, issued statements to the press.

Doyle warned through the papers that the new union was outlawed by the International, that its leaders were radicals, that the young Irishman had been a pacifist during the war, that the International Union would abide by the award of the adjustment commission, that half a loaf was better than none.

The morning that the longshoremen went on strike it rained. At dawn gray figures of pickets appeared near the dock-gates. Men going to work were stopped; groups argued with the strikebreakers.

Simple arguments. The price of food. "Takin' the bread outta the mouths of our wives and kids." "Join with us, brother, and it'll all be over in a week."

Sometimes the answer was a sheepish grin, sometimes an incoherent answer: "I got a wife and kids too." An angry movement of the shoulders and the strikebreakers strode towards the gates.

Wives of the strikers appeared on following mornings. They wore shawls over their heads to protect them from the drizzling October rains.

For the first time in his life Edward found an interest apart from Margaret, the children and the corner saloon. He was a member of the picketing committee. Early in the morning he took his group of men down to the docks. He was animated now. It was not important now, it seemed to him, where money came from.

Miriam came over every Sunday and left a few dollars, but since the strike she brought packages of food, also. She was smartly dressed in a cheap way.

Margaret got some supplies from the strikers' relief station. The landlord was put off from week to week. The corner grocery-man was wheedled into giving a few dollars' worth of credit.

Blumgarten called on the Roberts at night after his regular daily collections. His debit-route included nearly all the longshoremen's families in the district. Bit by bit his collection fell off. Each policy which lapsed meant loss of earnings and the strike was as real to him as it was to the most haggard housewife.

The night that the strike vote was taken he called on Margaret to warn her of the danger of letting her insurance payments fall too far in arrears. His face was pasty and his simulated forceful eloquence sounded hollow.

"Mis' Roberts, now, ve been doin' business for more'n ten years, hev'n't ve? Lemme varn you dot now it would be de voist t'ing for you leipse de insurance."

"I know Mr. Blumgarten," Margaret said, "but what can I do? The strike—"

"Yes, it's just in a time like dis ven you nid it."

Margaret was silent.

The agent was tired, all day long he had been saying the same things, giving the same warnings, talking of protection and the hour of need and the inevitable certainty of death—words meaning basic, fundamental things—the bitter reality of life, death, children—but now the words were things to be spat out in stuffy kitchens.

Somewhere in Manhattan, in mahogany offices, glib executives had coined these phrases for him; they had written speeches for him, speeches containing vital words—children, life, death, happiness—but now as he sat in Margaret's kitchen a listlessness overcame him and the words seemed as though they were dropping without motive or force from the corner of his mouth.

"God forbid, Mis' Roberts, it shouldn't heppen to my voist frendt, but supposin'—de strike, gengsters—und God forbid, your hosbend got killed—so vat?"

Margaret looked at him with silent, frightened eyes. Arthur stood by his mother and listened to the strange words—life, death, happiness, children—but not understanding. Men came into this kitchen and spoke important words to his mother, important words which made her look sad.

Blumgarten sighed.

"Vell, vot more cen I say? I'm tired too, Mis' Roberts, all day on my feet. Vun more veek und your insurance is gone, efter all dese years. . . ."

A misty October morning.

It is a little past dawn. The yellow mist smears the Red Hook waterfront blurring dock-gates, scurrying figures and the looming outlines of ships, all distorted in the gray morning light.

Out of the side streets leading to the docks, figures emerge, one by one. Groups form. More picketers arrive and shuffle off into the mist. Soon the mist is studded with loosely outlined figures.

Last night in the insurgents' hall a mass picketing demonstration was decided upon. Wives of the strikers pledged to take part. Exultant voices offered services, faces were red and flushed with excitement, but now there were no shouts and no excitement—only scurrying figures in the mist.

The empty clatter of hoof-beats sound along the street. Mounted police canter out of side streets, take up positions near the dock-gates.

More figures emerge from the side streets. Policemen on foot in twos and threes saunter up to their positions and station themselves near the gates.

The sun struggles hopelessly to break through the gloom and mist.

Imperceptibly the street running parallel to the docks takes on the appearance of a battlefield before dawn.

Silent group facing silent group.

From the window of a house looking down on the waiting figures the wailing cry of a child is heard.

A lonely man here and there hurries into the open gates. Here and there a picket disengages himself from his group and accosts the strikebreaker. The police stand at the gates and watch silently.

Seven o'clock.

Suddenly groups of strikebreakers come out of the side streets. They are indistinguishable from the picketers. The same uncouth work-clothes. The same splodgy walk. They are escorted by private detectives.

Edward Roberts stands in a doorway with a group of five pickets. He and his men eye the strikebreakers resentfully. They talk:

“Look at those bastards—takin' the bread outta our mouths—”

“Scabs—” The word is spat out with hatred.

“Yuh know de story of de scab wot walked up to a snake one morning and de snake said, ‘Hello, shorty’—”

“Christ, if they'se anythin' worse than a scab—I dunno—”

“Boy, it'll be different after the strike—”

“Yeah, th' stew'll be thicker. My woman can use that extra dough—”

“Sure, it'll be fine after the strike—”

“Lookit ’em, lookit ’em—”

“C’mon, Roberts, let’s go out an’ talk to ’em—”

“Wait a minute, there goes another bunch now—”

They watch another group of pickets approach the strikebreakers.

The strikebreakers hesitate, halt awkwardly. Other pickets approach. A few policemen start toward the group which is now halted in the center of the street.

Suddenly from the side streets, strikers, women and children run toward the haggling group of pickets and strikebreakers. Men in blue overalls, women in shawls, little boys in torn trousers, girls in faded gingham dresses. It is raining hard now and the clothes of the runners stick to their bodies outlining arms, legs, breasts.

A police club is raised. A clenched fist is seen for a second above the heads of the milling crowd.

Soprano police whistles call and are answered.

The battling group breaks up. The strikers, disorganized, withdraw to the side of the street facing the docks. A brick is thrown. Then more. The area between the police and the strikers is not cleared yet. Stragglers run for cover. Groups of police are merged, waiting for the signal for action. A few women and children run for safety into the side streets.

A volley of stones lands near the police.

Suddenly shots are fired. The crowd facing the police is silent for a moment. No one is hurt.

A group of strikebreakers, late arrivals, are hustled by detectives through one of the gates leading to the docks.

The strikers yell resentful epithets at them.

“Yah, scabs.”

“Come back, you yellow bastards.”

There is sudden threatening movement from a group of pickets and sympathizers. The crowd moves toward the pickets. It runs, gains momentum.

A little woman with bedraggled skirts and her shawl glistening with rain leads the crowd. She is well to the fore. She waves her arms. She is shouting something. What she says cannot be heard for the shouts of her followers.

She reaches the center of the street. There is an encouraging cry from the strikers. She is making for a group of strikebreakers being escorted to the dock-gate.

At once a few shots are fired from where the police stand. The little woman falls.

She rolls on the cobblestones and clasps her hands to the base of her skull. Her legs kick high in the air, revealing thin, straight shanks in banded, colored stockings

and a red petticoat; the sort of underthings which bring roars of laughter from burlesque-theater audiences.

Edward Roberts stood in the doorway and watched the woman rolling in the street. When she fell he said to himself, half aloud:

“Christ—there goes Mrs. Schmerer.”

He remembered the night that Arthur was born and how he came home feeling good and how she had said, “Sh, Margaret iss sleeping,” and now she was rolling on the hard stones out there with her hands to the base of her skull like something hurt her.

The scene suddenly became immobile for him. Everything stood still, frozen.

The street with men and women running—motionless like in the pictures in the newspapers. The police in their blue uniforms, brass buttons and silver shields. The horses, one of them rearing up on his hind legs, his flanks shining in the morning rain. And Mrs. Schmerer lying there. Everything was still.

Suddenly Mrs. Schmerer moved. She moved and rolled over on her side still holding the base of her skull.

There were no shots now; only Mrs. Schmerer lying there.

Edward Roberts moved out of the protection of the doorway.

He walked slowly to where the woman was lying; she was quite still now. He walked slowly with his eyes fixed on the gray huddled-up woman lying on the cobblestones.

He kept thinking that he would have to get her, pick her up and get her out of the way. Pretty soon, he thought, the mounted cops would be coming his way and he would have to pick her up and get her out of the way of the horses’ hoofs.

He heard voices calling to him from the crowds of strikers which hesitated in the openings of the side streets. He did not heed.

Edward walked steadily on.

He saw the mounted police at the other side of the wide street.

Suddenly he looked down and there was Mrs. Schmerer.

Her face was bloodless, green. It was turned in the direction of the docks and it had no expression. Her shawl was pushed back and her long strands of colorless hair blended with the gray of the cobblestones. A thread-like blue vein at her temple throbbed a little, he could see that. He must get her away from here.

He walked around the unconscious woman so that he could pick her up in his arms and carry her away, back to where she lived.

Edward wondered in that moment where her husband might be. Maybe over there with those people. Maybe Schmerer had seen her fall. Maybe he didn’t know

it was his wife that fell.

Anyway, he would have to pick her up and carry her back to where she lived. He bent over to pick her up. . . .

In that second he felt a heavy blow in his groin. A sickening sharp pain followed. He staggered.

I mustn't fall on her, he said to himself. I'm heavy, I'll hurt her if I fall on her. God help me, I'm shot. He knew he was bleeding.

The police, the horses, the outlines of the smokestacks of the ships became indistinct, blurred. He felt nauseated.

I mustn't fall on her, he said to himself.

Those who stood in the side streets saw Edward keel over and fall doubled-up near the prostrate woman.

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Little Arthur had just been packed off to school. When he had gone there was a knock on the door and Blumgarten entered. The agent sighed when he saw Margaret.

"Ah, Mis' Roberts, I see by your eyes dot you vunt pay enyt'ing today. All right. Dat's your business but dunt say I deedn't varn you. Already de insurance is lepsed. . . ."

Margaret stood before him shamefacedly, not looking at him.

Blumgarten thumbed the pages of his collection book. He shook his head from side to side.

"Look," he showed her the page. "Seex veeks in arrears. It costs me money. You dunt hev insurance. Cen't you pay at list two veeks? Den your insurance will be beck in force."

"I—I can't."

"Vun veek, den. You pay vun veek und I'll pay vun und vill kip op de insurance."

Margaret wrung her hands and looked with imploring eyes at the little collector.

"I tell you—I can't. My man ain't been working now for nearly two months. I tell you—"

"God forbid, but suppose'n dat your hosbend should die, God forbid—get killed, wot den, ha? De insurance is lepsed, wot good'll it do you?"

"I've paid for so many years, you'd think that now that my man is strikin'—they'd carry me for a few more weeks. . . ."

"Do I make de rules of de cahmpuny, Mis' Roberts? Believe me, I vould halp you if I could. . . ."

At that moment a shout was heard in the street. The woman and the agent

stopped talking and listened. Heavy footsteps were heard in the hallway, then on the stairs. Heavy, awkward footsteps.

There was a knock on the door. Margaret answered. A policeman stood in the doorway.

“Mrs. Roberts?”

“Yes, what’s the—”

“Your husband.”

He pointed to two men in his rear in the narrow hall; they held a stretcher between them. The stretcher was tilted sideways and the end carrier stood a few steps up the next flight, so that Margaret looked almost full into Edward’s face.

“Your husband is hurt. Now, don’t do that, Mrs. Roberts. You can’t do anything about it.”

“What was the matter. What did—”

“Got hurt down near the docks . . . picketin’ . . .”

“What’s the matter? . . . what’s the matter. . . .”

“Well, he’s dead. Better let’s bring him in.”

The stairs in the hallway were crowded with neighbors and strikers. They were quiet as the stretcher was carried in through the open door. A few neighbors forced their way in after the body.

Margaret looked at the greenish face of her husband. She was bewildered. What would the children say when they came home? She imagined she saw the frightened expression in Arthur’s blue eyes.

Neighbors, men and women, said consoling things to her. Quiet, meaningless things whose power lay in the pitying subdued intonations of the speakers. She began to weep.

“What’ll I do now? O God, I haven’t a penny in the house. How’ll I bury him?”

One of the women put a caressing arm about Margaret’s shoulders.

“Don’t worry, now, darling. Everything’ll be all right. Now, don’t worry.”

A man took a dish from the cupboard and placed it in the center of the table. He searched in his pockets and placed a few coins in the dish.

One by one the neighbors did likewise until the bottom was covered with silver and copper coins.

Blumgarten put his hand in his pocket and spilled a handful of change into the dish. Margaret turned to the agent.

“My man’s dead. Do you hear? I’ve got to bury him—give him a decent Christian burial. How much will I get on my policies—Oh, I know I shouldn’t be talkin’ this way with him layin’ in there with the blood not cold in him—but what can

I do—how much will I get? tell me. . . .”

Blumgarten was frightened. This was the first time in his life that he had witnessed naked death. The words death—in your hour of need—protection—God forbid, but we all have to die—these were words until now. Here was Roberts lying in there dead. Here was a distracted woman with the whites of her eyes distended in fear and anger, asking for money on policies which weren’t worth the paper they were written on.

He searched his mind for words to tell her—that he wasn’t the president of the company, that he, too, worked for a living, that he was hounded for new business, that he had to lapse the policies when the premiums were unpaid for four weeks. . . . He was frightened by the expression in Margaret’s eyes.

He stammered:

“You see, Mis’ Roberts . . . I know how you fill. Here ve vas stending talking and soddenly he is cerried in. But de policies—de policies are lepsed—no good—de cahmpuny von’t pay—I know about all dese years—but dey vere lepsed before—und den you took new vuns—dey deedn’t even hev cash value. . . .”

Margaret’s face was blank.

“Maybe you can go to the company and tell them that I’ve been payin’ all these years—that my man got killed—oh, what’ll I do with my little boy. . . .”

“I’ll try, Mis’ Roberts. But you dunt know de cahmpuny. See, I gave you all de munej I hed. If I had de munej I would give you everyt’ing. . . .”

Suddenly Margaret felt very much alone. These people in here would soon go home. She would be left alone with the corpse on the bed in there with little Arthur, Gladys and Miriam. She remembered all the years that Blumgarten had come into her kitchens and sold her new policies for herself, for the children, for Edward—and now he was dead and she couldn’t get a cent. He shouldn’t have sold her the damned things if they were no good when your man is out of work or on strike.

The fat little Jew, she thought, coming into my house and talking and talking and getting us to pay out our good money and now—

She stared into Blumgarten’s frightened face.

“I want money to bury my man.”

“If I hed it, believe me, I would give it to—”

“Yes, and you used to say that when we needed it most—I need it now, damn you—”

“Dunt look at me like dis—am I the cahmpuny? I esk you—?”

Margaret shrieked into his face:

“I want money to bury my man. Do you hear? I want money. You come into my

kitchen and get money from me and now my man is dead. Money. You—you damned Jew thief. . . .”

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In the city of St. Petersburg, in the state of Florida, a convention of life-insurance officials was in progress. The windows of the convention hall were wide open. Outside brilliant foliage greeted the eye; warm, pleasant breezes came in through the windows, filling the room with fragrance.

A former president of the United States, dressed in the prescribed black coat and striped trousers, got to his feet to read his speech. There is a burst of applause as he steps to the rostrum. Press correspondents prepare to take notes and follow the prepared written speech which lies before them.

The former president reads:

*“It is easy to become so entirely engrossed in carrying on the administration of a great institution like life insurance that there is a danger of failing to appreciate the far-reaching economic and social principles and the important public service that it includes. The immediate business of life insurance is to sell policies, collect premiums, invest income and pay the proceeds to beneficiaries. . . .*

*“We have staked our institutions on the ability of the individual. We have recognized that he is endowed with every power and he must therefore assume every responsibility. That is the essence of our popular government. The people are privileged to follow their own conscience, make their own mistakes, and reap their own rewards.*

. . .

*“Under this system not only has our wealth increased, but under our system of public schools and careful provision for higher education, the general intelligence has been raised, so that the people at large have had ample ability to take advantage of the freedom and equality of opportunity. As a result we have secured a broader distribution of wealth, a more equitable division of the rewards of industry in accordance with service rendered than has been possible in any other country. . . .*

*“This reward of industry comes from our political and economic institutions, which all rest on the recognition that the individual is entitled to the largest freedom and through its enjoyment can work out his own salvation. . . .*

*“Civilization always has its camp followers and we are not without a fringe of idle, vicious, boisterous wastrels, but in the main our workmen are skilful, our management is able. In applied science, in inventive genius we are not surpassed. No one would be bold enough to set any limits to the spiritual powers of the people of the United States. . . .*

*“The most significant evidence of the soundness of the economic thought of the nation is the present yearly purchase of billions of dollars of life insurance . . . A country which is pursuing this course may have periods of hesitation and recession in which many individuals may suffer reverses, but the country is not dissipating its resources; it has a large reserve and its ultimate progress is secure. It cannot fail.”*

“You damned Jew thief,” Margaret shouted, “get out of here. Don’t stand there looking at me. Get the hell out. Thief!”

“Mis’ Roberts, plis lissen to me—”

“Don’t Missus Roberts me, get out of here . . .”

“Oi, she calls me a t’if . . .”

The neighbors stood back and listened. Margaret advanced closer to Blumgarten.

Blumgarten wrung his hands, looked at the silent, unsympathetic faces of those who stood in the kitchen with Margaret.

My God, he thought, she calls me a thief. I work for my wife and family. Many times I paid her insurance so it shouldn’t lapse, my God . . .

The sight of the agent’s face infuriated Margaret. Her face was close to Blumgarten’s.

Suddenly she reached up and clawed him. Red streaks showed on his face, spurted blood. He screamed in terror. Margaret clenched her fists, beat the cowering agent, tore at his hair.

“Get out—get out.”

A neighbor stepped forward to intervene. Margaret’s nostrils were distended, her face was white, her hair disheveled. She breathed hard.

Then she wept, sat down near the table, covered her face with her hands and wept. Blumgarten gathered his things together, his bag and collection book, and left.

Margaret sat for a long time with her face in her hands. Neighbors came and went. Strikers called, strangers, and put coins and bills into the dish in the center of

the table. She sat there a long time.

When she looked up Arthur was standing by her side. He looked at her with frightened, wide-open eyes. His mother looked at him unseeing for a few moments. Then she wept again.

Neighbors had gone to the union and some money was raised for the funeral expenses.

Potter, the undertaker, came and conversed with Margaret in a respectful, subdued voice.

“I seen him only the other day. A fine, big, upstanding man he was.”

Margaret sniffled.

“Oh, I know it’s a heavy burden, Mrs. Roberts. But we all have to bear it some day.”

Margaret wept silently.

“It’s an hour that comes to all of us. I always say that when it does come for one of our beloved, the least we can do is to give them a decent Christian burial. God knows we have little enough here below. At least in death we ought to give our departed ones some of the finer things—don’t you think so, Mrs. Roberts?”

Margaret nodded her head.

“To begin with, how much did you get from the union?”

“I’ve got four hundred dollars altogether.”

Potter pursed his lips in thought, took out a slip of paper from his breast pocket, carefully smoothed it out on the table and calculated silently for a while. Finally, pleased with his efforts he looked up and smiled a sad, respectful smile.

“You’re very lucky, Mrs. Roberts,” the undertaker said, “you can give your departed husband the Christian funeral he deserves. A crêpe on the door with lilies, a black, satin-lined coffin—the latest thing, I’ll show it to you in the catalogue when we go down to my office—folding chairs for neighbors. Twenty’ll be enough, won’t it? Uh-uh, I thought so. Flowers in the room. A nice black suit with satin lapels, a white flower in his button-hole. I’m sure some of the neighbors have told you how nice I can make a deceased look in death.”

Margaret nodded her head.

“Now, if you can give me something on account, I’ll get started.”

Margaret took a roll of bills from her bosom and looked questioningly at the undertaker.

“How much do I have to give you?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Mrs. Roberts, as much as you like—it’s just to get things started. Come to think of it, though, now that we’re at it, suppose you pay the whole

thing—and save yourself a lot of trouble; after the funeral you won't want to be bothered with business. I find the bereaved like to be alone with thoughts of the dear departed one.”

Margaret nodded her head slowly.

“That'll be three hundred and seventy-five dollars, then, Mrs. Roberts.”

Margaret counted out the money and handed it to the undertaker.

“You won't be sorry, Mrs. Roberts. I make them look so they're a pleasure to the sorrowing ones.”

Potter got up and looked into the room where Edward's body was lying. The undertaker rubbed his hands and turned to the woman.

“I'll have my man up here in a little while. We'll put the crêpe up downstairs. Where do you want him laid out?”

“Here—in the parlor,” Margaret answered.

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The first day was the hardest for Margaret. Neighbors crowded into the small tenement. Miriam came running over from Manhattan in the evening; she had read something about her father's shooting in the afternoon papers. Gladys came home from work at night and wept for a little while in the kitchen and started to help her mother, cleaning up, helping Mr. Potter's assistant in setting out the folding chairs.

Only Arthur felt out of place, he had nothing to do. Later in the evening he went out into the street and played.

In the street he felt a strange sympathy. People stopped him, strange people, and asked him how his mother was. Women looked into his face, patted his hair, said things he did not understand.

His street companions looked at him in awe. He was given choice positions in the street games. Sometimes he paused in the midst of some piece of street horseplay and looked at passers-by with an abstracted air.

“What's a matter, Art?” a friend asked him.

“I don't know. My pa's dead.”

“Gee!”

At night reporters and photographers pushed their way into the Roberts tenement; interviewed Margaret, spoke to the girls, asked questions . . .

“Was he always a union man, Mrs. Roberts?”

“Do you think it was the union's fault in ordering the picketing demonstration?”

“What will you do after this?”

“I don't know.”

“Did he say anything before he died, Mrs. Roberts?”

“No, nothing. He was dead when they brought him in. The policeman said . . .”

Reporters spoke to Miriam, took down her name, where she worked, what she thought of her father’s death. One young reporter edged away from the crowd looking for a picture of Edward. Before leaving the city room his editor had told him to get a picture of the dead man even if he had to steal it from the wall in the parlor. Get us a picture, the editor had said, it’s pictures we want.

A photographer from Bernard Powers’ pink evening newspaper posed Arthur kneeling at the foot of a bed with his hands clasped in mock prayer.

“Look sad, remember your father’s dead,” the photographer said. “Now just a minute.”

He poured magnesium into the pan of his flashlight apparatus.

“That’s right,” the photographer said, as Arthur looked with a frightened expression at the gray counterpane. “Hold it.”

There was a blinding flash, the room was filled with smoke.

The next day the photograph appeared in the paper and underneath the caption read: Boy prays for father killed in strike riot on Brooklyn waterfront.

Later that night Mr. Potter and his assistant came and prepared Edward’s corpse. Potter was popular in the Red Hook section. The secret of his success lay in the fact he could make the deceased smile in death. A simple trick: the jaw-bones broken in the proper place, the labial muscles pushed up a little, cotton in the mouth to fill out the hollows, the flesh wrinkled and massaged and held in position with some wax and the trick was done. A cheap tuxedo coat and a pair of black trousers, a carnation in the button-hole and black bow-tie—and there was the deceased smiling in death! Sometimes the distortion was too much, the smile a little too broad, so that the corpse looked like someone else—but it was a smile and it justified the most effective part of his sales talk: “I make them look so they’re a pleasure to their sorrowing ones.”

In the morning when Margaret awoke, the transformation was complete. She looked into the coffin and marveled at Potter’s art. Edward’s black hair was neatly combed back. There was no trace of his few gray hairs. He had color in his cheeks. His trousers were neatly pressed and his yellow hands rested serenely across his chest on an immaculate white, stiff shirt-front. His eyes were closed and he smiled as though he were slightly amused. Margaret had never seen Edward like this before.

Potter observed the look of amazement on Margaret’s face and said:

“You see, Mrs. Roberts, as good a job as you could get done at some of these highfalutin’ places—at half the price.”

The children sat around, went in and out of the house. The girls wept a little in

the morning. In the afternoon some of the members of the union visited Margaret and presented her with a typewritten and signed copy of a resolution which had been adopted the night before at a protest meeting. She read the flowery phrases but they meant nothing to her.

She walked about that day bewildered by all the fuss. But sometimes when people were not coming and going she kept asking herself: "After this—what'll I do? What will become of Arthur and me?"

Now and then she walked into the parlor when no one was present and she looked at Edward's body. It looked so different from what she had known. Where were those heavy creases in his face? Gone. He looked so different and yet she remembered a time when he looked something like this:

"Yes, the night I met him at the ball. That was a union affair, too. Only his eyes sparkled then and I can't see his eyes now. They're closed, but he smiled that night—laughed and he took me along by the canal and he put his arm around me and he said he loved me and now he's lying there smiling. It's a good thing that Potter could make him smile. It's a good thing. His hands are not red any longer—yellow—and his nails are clean, well, he won't have to haul crates and bales around on the docks any more, and even his sleeves are pressed and his shoes are shiny, his hair is combed slick, just like he was going to a ball. He looks swell. Clean—all set out just like he was somebody important. Rosy cheeks and smiling as though they didn't bring him home on a stretcher with a bullet in him. It's a good thing you can't see the bullet. That don't show. You just see his smile. But you can't fool me, Edward, I know you ain't smiling. It's a shame I couldn't have had you smiling like that when you were alive. It's a shame. Yes, I remember one night when we were living on Walker Street and I was carrying Arthur, it was in the ninth month, no, it was in the seventh month. He used to keep me awake at night kicking. I thought he would be so strong by the way he used to kick. One night he kicked so hard and shook the bed that he woke you up and you asked what was the matter and I said it was the boy and you smiled something like now and you were glad and you said something about him kicking like a pony. . . ."

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The next day the coffin was carried down the narrow stairs and out into the street. A crowd watched the scene. A few reporters and photographers hung around. The strike was still on. Photographers jumped before the coffin and clicked the shutters of the cameras. Margaret lowered her head and one man pushed his camera close up to her face. The strike was still news, but for Margaret it was all over.

The coffin was rolled into the hearse. Margaret and her children got into a carriage; a few friends and some of Edward's relatives who had come over from Manhattan got into another. Two of the insurgent strike leaders got into a third carriage and the entourage moved off.

Margaret looked out at the dingy houses as the carriage moved along the street. She loved them. She had spent the best part of her life here. Now she did not know what she would do. Go to work, she supposed. She tried to brush the thought from her mind, but it persisted. She would think of it tomorrow. Go to work and leave Arthur with one of the neighbors. Back to the bag factory. She looked at Gladys. Perhaps she could talk to her forelady and get a job. Miriam sat opposite her mother, her face was streaked with tears and rouge; perhaps Miriam would come home to live; no, she wasn't like Gladys. What about the boy?

The hearse turned a corner and Margaret saw the black coffin. The coffin reminded her of many things. Thoughts crowded through her brain:

"It was the first time in my life I ever saw him looking so nice. I never knew his face was so strong. He was really good looking like actors in the movies. Smiling. All the times he would come home smelling sweaty not like a woman would like, not like he's in that coffin, clean with red cheeks and his hair smoothed back and a clean black suit on. I would like to hold him in my arms now and kiss him, yes, kiss him, and why not, it's the first time I've ever seen him look so nice. Smiling just like he was thinking of something nice. But he's lying in that box, nailed down and I won't ever be able to hold him again, feel his strong arms again. It's a shame to take him away. The first time I ever saw him looking so. . . ."

The carriages rolled across the street to the cemetery. Soon they stood before an open grave. The cemetery attendants were in a hurry and the coffin was lowered quickly into the grave. One of the union leaders started to say something.

"Friends—" he said.

The weeping of Margaret and the girls caused him to look up in distress and he stopped talking, regretting that he had started.

The grave-digger threw the first shovelful of earth on the coffin. Arthur burst into tears. Margaret and the girls clung to each other and wept aloud. Through his tears Arthur saw a hazy severed earthworm wriggling out of the side of the grave. This attracted his attention and he stopped crying.

Later Margaret and the children got on a street car and rode home. On the way home Arthur pressed his face close to the window and watched the automobiles in the street. When the family got to Red Hook, there were no crowds on the street in which they lived. A few neighbors looked respectfully at the woman and her

children. There were no reporters or photographers. The crêpe was taken down; Potter had seen to that. The folding-chairs were gone. Only a faint odor of flowers remained.

After Miriam had gone back to Manhattan and Gladys and Arthur had gone to bed, Margaret sat down in the kitchen and wept quietly.

## IX UNSUPPORTED BY GRACE

That winter was a hard one for Margaret. She sold her few sticks of furniture and rented a room to which she, Gladys and Arthur moved.

At night she came home from work, got Arthur who played in the streets, and prepared supper.

Gladys helped quietly. Once in a while a young longshoreman called for the girl and took her to a dance or the theater.

Sometimes Margaret went to the street in which she and Edward had lived. Another family had moved into the tenement. She stood in the hallway and heard the voices of husband and wife raised in dispute and envied the woman. Soon she stopped going there.

Miriam came to visit her mother once in a long while. When the girl arrived it was difficult for Margaret to talk to her in privacy. The door of the room was usually open and the loud voices of the family with whom she lived drowned out the whispered conversation.

Arthur played on the streets. Since his father's death he was difficult to handle. He stayed away from school for it had become irksome to him. He had hated his teacher ever since the day after the funeral when she had spoken so sharply to him.

He was thinking of how his mother had cried at the grave, and looked with a far-away look out of the window.

"Roberts," the teacher snapped, "stop staring."

Arthur did not hear. He continued looking out of the window.

"Roberts," the teacher shouted, "will you *please* stop staring."

Arthur came to with a start.

"What were you doing?"

"Nothing," Arthur replied.

"Nothing, eh? Stand up when you're spoken to."

The boy stood up.

"I—I was thinking."

"What were you thinking about? You weren't thinking about your lessons, were you?"

"No."

"Well what were you thinking about?"

"Nothing."

"Well, stay in after school this afternoon and I'll give you something to think

about.”

Miriam struggled along at Harkell’s department store. She fitted into the scheme of things and took the attentions of the floorwalker for granted. It was part of the business. Once every week with almost monotonous regularity she submitted to the advances of Mullins, her department head. She did not question the propriety of her actions.

Mullins was also one of the officials of the employees’ association. He was a thin little man with fast-falling hair, whose unpleasant breath made it hard for the girls to hold their jobs.

Coming home from the movies he sometimes took a cab and put his arms around Miriam, stroking the curves of her young firm body with his lean fingers.

He grew excited easily and his breath came rapidly in short wheezy gusts.

“You are so young—you young dear thing.”

“Oh, Mr. Mullins,” Miriam said and moved away.

Miriam thought of the nattily dressed young men who danced with her in the Fourteenth Street dance halls and looked apprehensively at Mullins as he edged along the seat.

He put his arm about her waist and toyed with the girl’s hair.

“Red hair,” he said. “Don’t you want to be my little redhead? I’ve heard red-headed girls are so passionate. . . .”

“Mr. Mullins, you mustn’t say that.” Passionate was a nasty word to Miriam.

“Why not?”

On the way over to Miriam’s rooming-house the cab rolled past a long line of silent waiting men before a Salvation Army shelter. A bread-line. She felt like clawing at Mullins’ yellow face.

The floorwalker drew the girl close to him and laughed nervously:

“You wouldn’t refuse to be nice to your boss, would you, you lovely young thing?”

Miriam said nothing.

Mullins leaned forward and gave the driver a new address. The cab swung around the next corner.

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Joshua Harkell, philanthropist and department store owner, resented the question to begin with. Button-holing him like that and saying in that insulting, excited voice:

“Mr. Harkell, how do you expect your sales girls to live on twelve dollars a week?”

The philanthropist looked coldly at his questioner and said: "I employ them during the day only."

---

Margaret went to work at seven. The woman from whom Margaret rented the room looked after Arthur, got him up at eight, saw that he licked his face in some cold water and hurriedly packed him off with her three children to school.

After three o'clock in the afternoon Arthur got a slice of bread and butter and played in the streets until Margaret or Gladys picked him up and took him home, usually to the tune of his protestations.

"Aw, ma, let's stay out a little bit more."

It was fine to stay out in the streets, to hang around the corner near the saloon and watch the drunks being thrown out.

There were bright lights on the corner and big boys in long trousers who swaggered and boasted of many strange things of which he had but a faint suspicion.

There was the head of a large ram on the side of the building which housed the saloon; it was fine to pat its hard, wooden nose and swing on to its curled wooden horns.

At home it was different, Margaret nagged about lessons and complained about money and such things.

Sometimes when Margaret went out and Gladys's young man called, the boy was given a quarter and told to run out and play.

It was great to go to a movie show and see Texas Rangers and Indians and cowboys in chaps and spurs riding over mountains and down valleys and then to come out into the garish street and see the girls and young men walk by.

But it was different at home with only one dim, yellow electric light and the room filled with his mother and Gladys. It was different at home.

One night when Margaret was out and Gladys and her young man were sitting on the bed, Arthur went with Slim Smith down along the side of the canal.

Slim was a youth about sixteen who knew all the secrets of Red Hook. He knew where a factory door was open and how to steal fruit from a fruit stand. He was wise in the ways of Red Hook, learned in the ways of poverty.

The boys sat on the side of the canal and pitched flat pieces of stone across the water. They watched the stones ricochet across the black, oily surface of the water and strike the other side. Slim was a good companion. He knew how to justify himself.

"Sure it's all right. Didn't I catch Tony puttin' his hand on the scale when he was weighin' tomatoes for my mother? Hey, take your mitt off the scales, I said to him.

You should 'a seen 'im.”

He slithered a stone across the surface of the canal, and spat with philosophic calm into the water.

“They can’t fool me,” he added after a pause.

Arthur looked admiringly at the older boy.

“What did he do?”

“Do?” Slim laughed. “Why he took his mitt off the scale, that’s what he did.”

The boys rose after a while and walked down the dark side of the canal. They walked toward the yellow lighted streets.

Slim put his arm around Arthur’s shoulders. This was Slim’s mark of acceptance; a high honor. He gave Arthur a point of advice:

“When yuh got the apples in yer blouse, don’t run, just walk away like nothin’ was the matter. If yuh run it looks bad.”

---

The editorial writer sat in his office and looked out of the window. He lit cigarette after cigarette. Somehow things weren’t coming so fast today.

There was a note on his desk from the editor: “Please let us have something on the necessity for more playgrounds today. I have just heard from Walker of the Playground and Recreation Society. You might ring him on the telephone.”

He had called Walker on the telephone but it hadn’t done much good. Walker had a way of going off on a long-winded harangue about the cost of maintaining children in reformatories and ending with “it’s crime insurance, you know, it’s crime insurance . . .”

The editorial writer lit another cigarette and unsuccessfully tried to puff rings of smoke toward the ceiling and let his mind wander aimlessly:

“Children—character—religion—degradation to sainthood—heritage of a godly home—sweet home—prison house closing in upon the boy—where does that occur—let’s see, oh yes—Wordsworth—must look it up in the dictionary of quotations—what a damned bore—dry idiot—God help us from the Lake poets—play pushes back the shadows of prison—how can one push back the shadow of anything—costs so many hundreds of dollars to maintain a juvenile delinquent—must look that up too—accuracy accuracy and still more accuracy—end up with a mushy note on playgrounds—oh, God damn that fool Walker . . .

The editorial writer put a sheet of paper into the typewriter and rapidly began to click out the editorial:

*“What we call character is so difficult of definition, and is the result of so many factors”*—the old man’ll like that, it shows a conservative attitude, never be

rash, my boy—*“that one must be guarded in assigning chief value to any one of them. Religion has worked its miracles in lifting men from degradation”*—that means the Salvation Army—*“to sainthood.”*—who can that be?

There aren't any more saints in these days; Saint Gary, Saint Bishop Manning, Saint Charley Schwab, Saint Woodrow Wilson, Saint Warren Gamaliel Harding. What a way to earn a living. *“Loyalty to a person of noble qualities has bred nobility”*—God, what a word—*“in many a youth. The heritage of a godly home”*—that'll please the old man—I hear his home isn't so godly, though—*“but with all these, play must be included as one at least of the important elements in the development of character. When Wordsworth, in his”*—wait a minute, let's see that quotation—*“in his ‘Ode to Immortality’ spoke of the shades of the prison house closing in upon the boy, after the period of infancy when heaven lay about him, he was thinking not literally of prisons but of the influences which narrow and darken the growing life.”*—That'll please the out-of-town readers—always remember the rural readers, my boy—*“Play pushes back the prison doors”*—back, Satan! thou destroyer of youth's souls—*“both real and figurative. And it is an economic factor as well as a moral one”*—never forget the economic factors, but when you can blend them with the moral ones, you are a first class editorial writer, my boy, a man to be desired—*“The cost of maintaining a juvenile delinquent upon whom the prison ‘shades’ of a reformatory have closed is \$439, whereas that amount provides a year's municipal recreation, play under leadership, for scores of children. Both religious leaders”*—remember the Sunday pages—*“and criminologists agree”*—thank God someone agrees—*“that the break-up or impairment of the home is one of the primary sources of criminal careers”*—now how the hell am I going to get out of this stupid mess? Delinquent children come from broken homes, let's give 'em playgrounds—but it's too late then. Q. E. D. What a mess!

The writer sat looking at his typewriter for a long time; then he continued:

*“Playgrounds are places where”*—where what?—*“moral victories of maturity are won, and they drive back effectually the shades of the prison house.”*—Thank Christ, that's done. Boy! Copy!

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Miriam quit Harkell's because she couldn't live on twelve dollars a week. Besides it wasn't worth while to submit to Mullins' surreptitious attempts to touch her breasts in the stock room. And then his breath was so bad.

“If I got to have a guy breathin' his damned breath in my face I'm gonna get paid decent for it,” she said to herself. “I can get a job in Rhythmland like Florence

Thurman has. Gets tips and dancin' and makes more'n thirty dollars a week."

It wasn't as delightful as she thought it would be, Miriam discovered after two weeks at Rhythmland.

The men liked to "taxi"; to get into a corner of the dance hall with a hostess and stand and rub bodies to the rhythm of the music with just the slightest pretense of dancing. There were many disadvantages, obvious ones. But the men paid ten cents a dance and five cents of it was hers and then there were tips, especially from the drunks.

The music, it was true, became monotonous after twelve o'clock and every man that "taxied" with a girl thought he could go home and spend the night with her; but still it was better than Harkell's, she decided. Thirty dollars a week was thirty dollars a week.

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*Vito Fasola, 21, 302 E. 105th St., and Tony Pecora, 24, 2037 First Ave., were held in \$1,500 bail each for further hearing when they were arraigned before Magistrate Dodge in Harlem Court yesterday on a serious charge made by Miriam Roberts, 18, a dance hall hostess.*

*According to Miss Roberts, she met the two men in a dance hall near 23rd St. and Seventh Ave., where she is employed. Accompanied by another hostess, the girl said, she went with Pecora to an apartment on East 105th St. where she was overpowered and attacked. Miss Roberts was then taken to a garage on E. 104th St., where, she alleges several other men abused her against her will. Her companion escaped.*

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*"Funeral services for Louis G. Harkell, president of the Harkell department store, who died on Thursday, were held yesterday morning before a large assemblage of friends in the Beth-El Chapel of Temple Emanu-El at Fifth Avenue and Sixty-fifth Street. The Rev. Dr. Paul Levine officiated and eulogized Mr. Harkell in recalling his career.*

*"The services opened with Handel's Largo played on the organ, and closed with Chopin's Funeral March as the flower-draped coffin was borne from the edifice. The pallbearers included men prominent in civic affairs.*

*"Dr. Levine praised Mr. Harkell for his character and spiritual strength. He spoke feelingly of his acquaintance with him when he had charge of the Harkell store in Philadelphia and reminiscently traced his career in New York.*

*"I remember him when he was very small," Dr. Levine said feelingly. "And because the memories of childhood are the strongest of all, the death of our*

*friend is a personal loss to me.*

*“ I remember him when he came to this metropolis, where he saw his daughters grow to womanhood, and he was always the same old friend, generous, sweet and loyal. Even as he was loyal to his friends, he was tender in his devotions.’*

*“In speaking of the philanthropist’s generosity Dr. Levine said that Mr. Harkell had won the love and admiration of all who knew him and had come in contact with his great institutions.*

*“He believed in justice and righteousness,’ Dr. Levine said, ‘and his closest friends will always remember him as a devoted lover of humanity. . . .”*

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*“Physicians at several hospitals report the prevalence of a new occupational disease. It is acute peritonitis and is caused by ‘taxiing’ by dance hall hostesses.*

*“Acute peritonitis, a prominent physician said yesterday, usually begins with a shivering fit, vomiting and pain in the abdomen with extreme tenderness, so that pressure even of the bedclothes cannot be borne.*

*“The patient lies on the back with her knees drawn up to relax the abdominal muscles; the breathing becomes rapid and shallow, and is performed by movements of the chest only, the abdominal muscles remaining quiescent—which is not, this physician explained, the case in normal respiration.*

*“The abdomen becomes swollen by flatulent distention of the intestines, which increases the distress. The skin is hot; the pulse is small; the face is pinched and anxious. . . . These conditions and fatal collapse may all take place in from twelve to twenty-four hours.*

*“Officials of several women’s societies yesterday threatened to call for an investigation of dance halls in the city. The Mayor, it is said, will be called upon to curb the ‘taxi’ evil.”*

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*“In an encyclical filling two and a half pages of the Osservatore Romano, the Vatican newspaper, the Pope today reverts to his favorite subject of the education of youth.*

*“In the encyclical, which is very general in scope, and is addressed to the episcopacy of the world, the Pontiff again asserts that the education of youth belongs primarily to the Church.*

*“In discussing the rôle of the Church in education, His Holiness said:*

“ It is evident that both by right and in fact the educative mission belongs pre-eminently to the Church. It is also evident that no intellect not clouded by prejudice can conceive of any reason to oppose or supplant the Church in this mission, of which the world is now reaping the benefits.’

“It must not be forgotten, the Pope continues, that education must be imparted to men fallen from the original state but redeemed by Jesus Christ. There remains in man’s nature the effects of original sin, particularly a weakened will and disordered tendencies, the encyclical says. All those systems are therefore false which are based on pedagogic naturalism, which includes all those systems which give to a child unbounded liberty by diminishing or suppressing the authority of education and attributing to a child exclusive primacy of initiative independent of all super-natural laws.

“‘An extremely dangerous thing,’ the Pontiff holds, ‘is that naturalism which invades the field of education in such delicate subjects as moral purity. Very widespread is the error of those who with dangerous presumptuousness and with ugly words promote so-called sexual education, falsely believing that they can forearm youths against the dangers of the senses with purely natural means, such as foolhardy inaction and preventive instruction or, worse still, by exposing them early in life to temptations in order to accustom them as they say, to harden their hearts against those dangers.

““ They err gravely in not recognizing the innate frailty of human nature and also in neglecting the experience which warns us that sins against morality are not so much the result of intellectual unpreparedness as of a weak will exposed to temptation and unsupported by grace.””

# X

## CASE HISTORY

### CASE HISTORY OF ARTHUR ROBERTS

Arthur Roberts is thirteen years and seven months old. He was born in Red Hook, the notorious Brooklyn Slum. His ideal is the rough and ready type of slum youth. He is skeptical of the claim that 'you can't win' and points out with some logic that he has been getting away with a good deal himself without being punished.

"As he told his grammar school teacher recently when warned of the awful consequences of a life of crime and assured that he would eventually be caught, 'No I won't. My friend, Slim Smith, only got caught once. We stole lots of times.'

"The boy appears to be timid although he sometimes walks with a swagger. His father was killed during a strike riot on the Red Hook waterfront last year. Neighbors report that the father was a taciturn, law-abiding longshoreman. The name of the family appears on the police records in connection with the death of the boy's father.

"The first observation of any conduct difficulty was made shortly after the death of the father. Mrs. Roberts is employed as a stitcher by the American Bag Company where she is held by those in authority to be a hard-working woman. She noticed that her son together with other boys in the neighborhood was stealing fruit and candy from merchants in the district. Mrs. Roberts is a dull sort of woman who apparently does not realize the seriousness of her son's conduct. When her son's thieving was pointed out to her she went to one of the grocers from whom her son had stolen and asked that he beat her son if he caught him taking things.

"On the suggestion of a social worker the mother had her son enrolled in the Red Hook neighborhood settlement house. This apparently did not help, as in a few weeks the lad was caught stealing a bottle of perfume from a ten-cent store. When questioned he said he wanted the perfume for a girl in the neighborhood.

"Sexual irregularity runs through the family. The boy's sister recently figured in a rape case in Manhattan. She is a dance hall hostess in a notorious place which has been investigated and raided on several occasions.

"The family's neighborhood is the hang-out of a group of waterfront gangsters who operate with the dock workers' union and who are also engaged in liquor running. The frequent murders in the vicinity have had a very deleterious effect on its boys. They find the supposed romance of the gangsters' life more romantic than the drabness of their home life.

"After a recent gang killing Arthur was arrested, having been caught with three

other boys attempting to pick the lock of a store. Intensive case supervision was undertaken that summer. Arthur was taken to a summer camp where the counsellor reported that at first the boy cried at night and asked for his mother.

“Under the influence of the outdoor life the boy’s attitude changed and during the few weeks he was in camp he made more progress than any other boy in the cottage.

“On his return to his old surroundings he reverted to his old habits and companions. He became a deliberate violator of school rules and discipline and lied when confronted with evidence of his wrongdoing. On one occasion he and several other schoolboys entered a candy store and while the other boys diverted the attention of the store-keeper, one of the group stole a box of lollipops which they later divided among themselves.

“Arthur at thirteen and a half years is in the 6-B grade of his school.

“The I. Q. is 96. His educational quotient is the score suitable for his school grade. The mechanical ability score is satisfactory. The psycho-neurotic inventory gave nine unfavorable responses, which is average for his age and sex.

“Arthur is rather tall for his age, has thick black hair, his eyes are brown and sensitive, with a frightened expression at times.

“He recoils while being questioned but is self-assertive with children of his own age and social status. He is quite thin. He was a full term infant when born and weighed about seven and a half pounds. He was a healthy child and suffered no serious illnesses. When last medically examined he was in comparative good health, appetite and elimination were good; he had no headaches; his teeth were beginning dental caries and he had a slight adenoid congestion; his height was 53 inches and his weight 76 pounds; he was underweight according to the Smedley chart.

“The boy has been described at various times and by various people as being impulsive, easily influenced, careless, and unstable emotionally. His teachers say that he is changeable, being bright and attentive one day and moody and abstracted the next. This moodiness dates, his teacher says, from the date of the death of his father. Since then, it is said, he weeps easily and exercises very little restraint. He comes easily under the influence of older and more adventurous companions. His test behavior showed that he is not lacking in energy. His teacher reports that he has often given evidence of temper outbursts during the last six months. He has been known to strike teachers who have chastised him. Reprimands appear to have a beneficial effect upon him but actually they do not deter him from wrong-doing. His home discipline is very lax, due, no doubt, to the fact that he has very little parental supervision after school hours.

“Arthur is a potential gang member. His interests are gregarious. He likes and must have the companionship of other boys. He appears to choose as his associates the most adventuresome boys about him. His status among his friends is not definitely known. In school it was said that he gave suggestions as well as took them. There is evidence, however, that he is well liked by some of his friends. The mother has not responded to the suggestion that she move to another neighborhood.

“In the choice of amusements Arthur seems to lean towards the boisterous and adventuresome in type. He did not take kindly to institutional club programs. He did join a settlement through the influence of a social worker but from his own statements, was interested only in the athletic programs offered. He appears to have some normal interests, being fond of playing ball. He is fond of the movies. Adventurous military life appeals to him. He recently joined the Sea Scouts, a group of several hundred boys who drill on Friday nights in a church, wear sailor uniforms, drill with real guns and will go on a cruise during the summer. Asked how he came to join the organization he stated that one day when he was going by their headquarters, he noticed their advertisement asking boys to join, so he went in and joined.

“His conduct in the early grades at school indicates that . . .”

## XI SEPARATION

Margaret looked at Justice Carter and marveled at his serenity. It would be fine, she thought, to be so unruffled and calm. The judge looked at Margaret and thought it would be fine if all the cases went smoothly today. He was tired.

Margaret was tired, too. She had lain awake all night wondering how Arthur was and whether they had been treating him badly. And here he was sitting over there with that frightened expression on his face. When she came into court she tried to speak to him, but the probation officer said that it wasn't allowed. They were going to try him for stealing something, he said.

An officer of the Children's Court came to her the night before and told her that Arthur had been arrested and locked up in the Children's Society Shelter. The probation officer said something about his being tried as an incorrigible minor. But she didn't know what that meant. It was all mixed up.

Margaret looked at the judge again. He was busy with a stack of papers: something about Arthur. The judge kept looking at the papers and looking up at Margaret now and then until she felt uncomfortable and looked down at the floor in embarrassment.

Nothing seemed to happen in the courtroom; there was talk between the man who sat at a desk and another man who had a batch of papers in his hand but they didn't seem to be getting anywhere. It was nearly eleven o'clock and she had been in the room since half past nine. Here it was with nearly half a day gone. It was too late anyhow, she would lose a whole day's pay even if she went back so she might as well stop worrying about the money.

Justice Carter was new to the Children's Court. This was his first day. He had hoped that he would get the nomination to the Supreme Court, but at the last minute they appointed someone else and as a compromise he was offered this thing. He looked through the papers and fumed inwardly.

A few nights before he had had a dinner given in his honor. "A bunch of damned welfare women," he said to himself when he saw them, "with busts like battleships and faces like meataxes," sat at the tables and listened to the Mayor's speech:

"This position carries with it a greater honor and responsibility than any you have held before. Here you will handle the sapling, the bud of that beautiful flower, youth."

"Youth be damned," the judge thought. "A bunch of dirty looking kids with sniffing noses and a gang of weeping women, scrubwomen. Where the hell was the money in a job like this, handling a bunch of paupers? Beautiful flower, youth—huh."

Margaret sat and wondered whether she ought to have gotten a lawyer after all, but the social worker last night had told her that the judges in the children's courts were sympathetic men who knew all about children and that Arthur would be taken care of well.

Justice Carter looked across the room at a group of newspapermen who were to report his first day as judge of the Children's Court. Usually they were not allowed in, but this day was an exception and he would have to say something about children being the hope of the country. Stuff like that.

After a long wait someone called out Margaret's name.

"Mrs. Roberts!"

Margaret looked up and the attendant motioned to her to stand before the judge's desk. She obeyed.

"Arthur Roberts!"

Arthur stood beside his mother and looked with downcast eyes at a jade paperweight on the judge's desk.

Another name was called. A thin man holding a derby hat in his hands took his place near Arthur.

The judge looked at some papers and then looked up at Margaret and frowned.

"Are you the mother of this boy?"

"Yes—sir."

The attendant behind her edged close to Margaret and whispered:

"Say, 'yes, your honor.'"

Margaret stammered:

"Yes, your honor."

The judge waved a white hand at Margaret and smiled:

"Never mind that, Mrs. -er-er—Roberts, never mind that. We don't stand on ceremony here. We are all one big family here and we try to do the best we can for the children of this city."

In the corner of the room, near the judge's desk, the reporters made notes of this remark.

"Yes—sir."

"Now then, Mr. er-er-Keller here, says that your boy stole a large box of candy valued at two dollars from his store. Special officer Duffy says that he found the candy in the possession of your son. The report of the probation officer here states that your son has been guilty of similar offenses before this, and that he exercises a harmful influence in the neighborhood. Why don't you look after your son?"

Margaret was frightened by the judge's rapid flow of words. People with pencils

and paper in their hands making notes of her words—

She felt that she would like to tell the judge that Edward was killed last year, but maybe he wouldn't like that; maybe he would ask her how he was killed and she would have to say by a policeman in the strike. The judge didn't look like a man who would be very sympathetic to a woman whose man was killed in a strike. So instead she said:

"I look after him the best I can."

"The best you can? Do you call having your son going to Mr. Keller's business establishment and stealing two dollars' worth of merchandise—do you call that looking after your son?"

Margaret felt beaten.

"No, sir," she said in a subdued voice.

"I should say not," the judge said. "I should imagine that you have been remiss in your duties as a good mother. What does the boy's father do?"

"He's dead."

The judge looked through the papers and read the statement of the probation officer: "His father was killed during a strike riot on the Red Hook waterfront last year."

There was considerable talk and much of it Margaret did not understand. She kept looking at Arthur and heard the sharp voice of the judge and the polite tones of Keller, who stood respectfully before the judge and answered the many questions which were asked of him.

With a sinking heart the mother realized that Arthur would be taken from her. She had heard this kind of talk before; efficient, low-toned, merciless speech—the speech of the upper classes when they spoke of one of her kind. The owner of the bag factory spoke that way when he brought visitors through the plant and pointed to the workers and the machines. It was impersonal—it left one out of consideration. It was hard. Margaret had heard it before. She knew what it meant. She looked sidelong at Arthur with an apprehensive glance.

The judge heard the evidence and the report of the probation officer with obvious restlessness. Finally he addressed Margaret:

"Your son is a very bad boy, Mrs. Roberts."

Margaret said nothing.

"I suppose you know that?"

Margaret wet her lips and started to speak. The judge interrupted.

"You don't answer, because you realize that you have not brought him up properly. You have not taught him to respect the belongings of others. How would

you like people to come into your home and take from you what did not rightfully belong to them? You wouldn't like it, would you? Of course not! Then, perhaps, you can understand how Mr. Keller here feels about the matter. It will do you very little good to stand there and glare at Mr. Keller who is an honest merchant in this city. It is not his fault. You have yourself to blame."

Margaret felt oppressed under this harangue. She began to weep.

"You should have thought of your tears when you were neglecting this boy. He is not at fault. He is the victim—if I may use the expression—of your carelessness. In this connection I will tell you the story of a young man who was standing in the prisoners' dock after being sentenced to death for murder. His father went close to his son to kiss him good-bye and as he did so, the son bit his ear off. And rightly so, for the father was responsible for the young man's plight, just as you are guilty of your son's predicament."

Arthur seeing his mother weeping, also began to cry.

"Do not cry, young man. I assure you, you will be taken care of well."

Margaret stepped closer to the judge's desk. She put her hands on it, leaned forward and pleaded with Justice Carter:

"Let him come home with me just this once. I will take better care of him."

"It is too late, Mrs. Roberts. You have had your chance and you have failed. I think it is time that we took our turn with the boy. Perhaps we can do something for him."

"Please, sir—your honor—don't send him away."

"He will be in excellent hands, Mrs. Roberts. He will be carefully supervised by trained people who will instill in him respect for authority. He will partake in healthy sports, he will be well fed, and when he comes home to you as a normal, upright young man you will be thankful for what is happening now."

"Your honor—please. . . ."

"Now don't go on like that."

The judge made a notation on a sheet of paper before him. Margaret wept bitterly. The room was quiet and the sound of the woman's weeping irritated the judge, besides her eyes and nose were red and she made unpleasant noises as she gulped and attempted to restrain herself.

"Stop that," the judge said. "You think we are taking something from you—well, let me tell you that you are taking much more from the city."

Margaret suddenly felt a hatred for all these people who seemed to her like stealthy enemies with their quiet talk and their devious reasoning.

She looked at Arthur's lowered head, saw the scar showing through his hair,

where he fell when he was going to school one day. How she ran with him to the clinic, his blood staining her dress! She thought of the years she had cared for him when Edward was not working, pinching pennies to keep him well fed. But now she was working in the bag factory and how could she care for the boy? She took a deep breath and started to tell the judge of these things but he met her look of resentment with a cool gaze and Margaret said nothing. Justice Carter went on:

“Perhaps if you knew, my dear woman, that your son will cost the city the sum of \$439 every year, it would make you feel easier. Yes, four hundred and thirty-nine dollars—and some odd change.”

Suddenly Margaret’s silence ended:

“You don’t know how I have looked after him—but I work in a bag factory. Ask the foreman there and he will tell you that I am an honest woman. All my life I have been honest. I have done the best I could for my boy. But, you see, since his father got killed—died—I have had to work. He is really a good boy, judge. Please give him another chance, I will promise . . .”

The judge held up a white hand to silence the woman; but Margaret went on undeterred:

“You say it will cost four hundred dollars to keep him in the reform. . . .”

“Four hundred and thirty-nine dollars and some odd change,” the judge interposed.

“Well, if the city gave me that money you wouldn’t have to send him away. I’d be able to have someone look after him. What do you expect with me working all day? Maybe you don’t know what work is, well . . .”

The judge motioned angrily to an attendant, who took Margaret by the arm and led her away from the desk. Another attendant took Arthur by the arm and he was led through a door. Margaret looked after him until he disappeared somewhere inside the building.

On the way home in the street-car Margaret thought of how futile the day had been. Arthur sent away—and a day’s pay lost!

She sat looking at the street-car advertisements; pictures of well-dressed men in top hats and women in evening wraps, rosy-cheeked mothers putting pancakes before laughing youngsters.

After a while she sighed again when she remembered that she had lost a day’s pay.

## XII

### MENS SANA

The special officer who took Arthur over to the Island was a thin, spindly little man with sandy hair who chewed tobacco. As he left the Children's Society shelter he took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and showed them to the boy.

"Do yuh want me to put them on you?"

Arthur looked at the man in terror and shook his head.

"Well, den, do yuh promise? You'll come quietly?"

The man and boy rode uptown in the subway. The officer read a paper and sat engrossed in a murder story all the way up. Now and then he looked out of the corners of his eyes at the subdued boy who sat beside him.

As they crossed over the East River on the ferry the man took out the lad's commitment papers and looked them over.

The ferry backed water and finally touched the Island. Arthur stood near the railing and watched the boathands throw a rope over the side and make the boat fast. It was great fun and he thought how fine it would be to be a sailor when he grew up. There were so many boats on the water and the men called and laughed to each other. He was the only passenger and this made him feel important. On the way over one of the men had given him a quarter.

"Keep this," the man had said, "maybe you'll be able to use it later."

Arthur slid the coin into his shoe. The man who gave Arthur the coin engaged the officer in conversation.

"Kinda youngish to be coming over here," the boat hand said, pointing to the lad.

"Yeah, they all look God forsaken—but don't let that fool yuh, this one's a bad egg. Look at this."

He offered the commitment papers in evidence.

"See this? It says 'incorrigible minor.' You know what that means—just no God-damned good. He'll end up in the pen—they all do."

The boat hand was impressed.

The man and boy walked up the gravel path leading to the reformatory school walls. The officer rang the bell and in a little while the iron gates were opened and they passed through into a gray stone building. They walked into the office where an elderly, gray-haired man received them.

"Hello, Mellish," the special officer said.

The man grunted a reply:

“What’s this one?”

The special officer handed the commitment papers over. The old man signed a receipt and looked at Arthur.

The special officer performed the amenities:

“This man is the assistant superintendent, boy; he’ll be looking after you. His name is Mellish.”

“Where’s Parsons?” the special officer asked.

“In there,” Mellish said, pointing in the direction of a closed door.

“I’ll be dropping in to see him before I go,” the special officer said.

The assistant superintendent looked at Arthur scrutinizingly.

“What’s your name?” he asked at length.

“Arthur Roberts.”

Arthur smiled in an effort to be friendly.

“Whadda ya grinnin’ at?”

“Nuthin’.”

“Well, stop grinnin’—there’s nothin to laugh at here, my boy.” The man’s voice was hard but his lined face held a faint, kindly sad expression.

“Where are yuh from?”

“Brooklyn.”

“Whereabouts in Brooklyn?”

“Red Hook.”

“A tough one, I suppose.”

“No, mister, I ain’t tough. I got sent—”

“Take off your belt.” The boy did so. “Now take your laces out of your shoes.” The lad obeyed.

Mellish motioned to Arthur:

“C’mon, follow me, I’ll take yuh in to see the superintendent.”

The boy followed. Suddenly he found himself standing before a desk at which a red-faced, middle-aged man was sitting. The man seemed enormous to Arthur. His partly exposed pate shone through strands of graying hair.

“This is Mr. Parsons,” the assistant said, “he’s the superintendent of the school.”

Parsons nodded to Arthur.

“Sit down.”

“All right,” Parsons said to his assistant, “you may go now.”

The superintendent busied himself with some papers on his desk. The room was very quiet, so quiet that Arthur heard the clock ticking quite distinctly in the far corner of the office. The man went on reading letters and looking through papers.

The boy sat on the edge of the chair waiting expectantly.

It was a long time since Parsons had picked up Michael Doyle outside of Leo's saloon in Red Hook. One thing led to another—and here he was superintendent of the Island. Not a job full of glory but a comfortable job as city jobs go and one where a pretty penny could be saved if a man was wise and knew what he was about. Hundreds of kids to look after, plenty of help and swell residence—kinda comfortable.

Parsons thought these thoughts every time a new boy was brought in. The commitment papers made him realize his importance. They were addressed to Mr. James Parsons, superintendent of the Island. Official looking papers, they were, and full of important, high-sounding language. Sitting there silently with a frown on your face kinda put the fear of God into the kids. Nothing like starting them off right.

Arthur saw the expression on Parsons' face turn to a scowl. He waited for the man to say something. Everything was quiet.

Suddenly Arthur felt very much alone. He wished that his mother was here, not that she could do very much, he realized, but it would be good to have her here, even like the day in court—just to have her standing here.

At once Parsons looked up sternly from his desk and shot a question at the boy:

“What are you doing here?”

“They sent me here.”

“They—who?” the man demanded sternly.

“The judge—Judge Carter,” Arthur faltered.

“Well, why didn't you say so?”

Arthur was silent.

“What were you sent here for?”

“I dunno.”

“You don't know? Well, let's see what these papers say—”

“I stole something,” the boy volunteered.

“Oh, you stole something, well, that's different.”

“Don't you know it's wrong to steal?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

The man lifted his hand and brought it across Arthur's face. The boy tumbled from the chair on to the floor. He put his hands to his face to ward off another blow and fled to the corner of the office crying.

“Come here,” Parsons shouted.

The boy stood in the corner terrified.

“Don’t hit me, please,” Arthur whimpered.

“Come here.”

The boy came closer slowly until he stood before the desk.

“Don’t you know enough to say sir when you speak to a grown up person?”

“Yes—sir.”

“Now, that’s right. If you’ll remember that, we’ll get along fine.”

The boy looked fearfully at the man. Parsons went on:

“You’re going to be here a long time, my lad, and the sooner you make up your mind to obey rules and do as you’re told the better it’ll be for all of us. Understand? Now this isn’t the worst place in the world. If you don’t like this place you can go to jail—the penitentiary—do you understand? You’re a thief and you belong in jail, but for a while we’ll see what we can do for you here. You’re not going to like it here, see? and if you run away, you’ve got the river to swim—there’s been five boys drowned trying to do it—so don’t you try it, see!”

Parsons got up and rang a bell. He turned to the boy who was still whimpering:

“Cut that out,” he said, “that stuff won’t get you anywhere here.”

Arthur ran his wrist across his nose and tried to straighten his face.

“And we’ll also teach you habits of cleanliness while you’re here. You’ll be getting some khaki handkerchiefs in a few minutes. See that you use them.”

An overgrown red-headed youth of about seventeen came into the office and saluted stiffly. He was dressed in blue overalls, a khaki shirt, and his hair was cropped short. He stared straight ahead as Parsons spoke to him.

“Here’s a new boy.”

The youth nodded sharply. Parsons turned to Arthur.

“This is the head of the monitors. His name is Lynch. He’ll take you to the main building where you’ll get a haircut and a bath and get your issue of clothes, then he’ll take you to the dining-rooms to get some food.”

“Yes, sir,” Arthur said.

Parsons signaled Lynch who walked over to Arthur and took him by the arm. They walked toward the door of Parsons’ office, the tops of Arthur’s unlaced shoes flapping noisily against his ankles.

As Lynch and Arthur reached the door Parsons halted them with an abrupt command:

“Hey.”

The pair stood still. Lynch turned around stiffly and faced the superintendent.

“Yes, sir.”

“Bring him back to me after he’s eaten.”

“Yes, sir.”

Lynch marched out of the room, his narrow eyes fixed on a point straight ahead of him. Arthur shuffled behind.

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Parsons sat at his desk after the boys left and leaned back in his swivel-chair. He put his hands behind his head in a posture of relaxation and closed his eyes.

Another boy! That made seven during the last two weeks. More expenses.

“Four hundred and thirty-nine dollars a boy. Well—there were the fixed expenses, salaries and that sort of thing. Nothing to be done there, no matter how hard a guy tried.

“Now with food, that was different. People had the idea that food was everything. Stuffing their damned brats with white bread and meat so that when they got on a real sensible diet, they went to pieces at first. . . .”

Parsons was a devout follower of Bernard Powers; he read his health magazine every month and every day the ferry-boat brought him over a copy of Powers’ pink evening newspaper. He had read of Powers’ experimenting in fasting and applied it to the boys in his charge. He had read that tea and coffee were stimulants, so tea and coffee were cut from the lads’ diet. White bread—softens the bones, contains no nourishment—so white bread came off the list.

“A dollar here and there. ‘Fat men die prematurely . . . the more weight you carry in proportion to your height, the less chance you have of a long life.’

“Lean, wiry boys, that’s what I’ll make of them.”

There was no doubt that the boys were lean.

Powers’ philosophy together with a daily scrutinizing of the accounts saved Parsons thirty dollars a year on each boy.

“Now with three hundred boys. . . .”

The superintendent picked up the pink newspaper and looked over the day’s editorial. He liked to read Powers’ signed daily editorials. There was something inspiring in them:

*“Many a happy marriage has gone smash on the rocks of obesity”—there you are—obesity, fat—“Too fat to love’ has been prolific of a countless string of separations and has brought misery into thousands of families”—that’s right. Christ, how that man Powers can write! All them mealy-mouthed reformers talking of poverty. Fat, that’s what causes misery. “Sparkle, vitality and feminine allurements are smothered in fat. One more case for the divorce court.”*

Alongside the editorial was a picture: an enormous woman on a divan with rolls of fat and baby-doll eyes, a roly-poly arm reached for a box of candy, near her a fat

little dog begged for a sweet. At the same time her husband, a trim, lean and wiry disciple of physical culture, stood near the door about to leave his wife.

Parsons admired the editorial and the picture for some time.

“Can’t beat that guy Powers—a real social philosopher, that’s what he is—a social philosopher. Too much food, that’s the trouble with mankind. I think I’ll cut out the molasses on the boys’ diet. Fat slows down the thinking apparatus.”

The superintendent turned the pages of the newspaper and skimmed through the headlines and articles. He looked over the pictures; at photographs of dancers and actresses arriving from Europe snapped in the staterooms of the incoming liners. They sat with their knees drawn up showing flashes of white thighs which showed pink on the pages of *The Evening Tabloid*. His eyes wandered through the paper reading a little here and there:

“Oh, what a gay señorita! Yes, she’s Señorita Dolores, Spanish *danseuse*. She’s here to shake her—castinets, and also her—tambourine. And all New York will see her—dances during the next six months. . . .”

Parsons’ eyes reluctantly left the pictures and skipped lightly through the reading matter:

“A plain face can be made beautiful . . . the love-thief could not be located at a late hour last night . . . if any man defiles the temple of God . . . boy bootleg king held in death probe . . . him shall God destroy . . . Does virtue pay, a Powers true story . . . orgy halted in magnate’s love-nest . . . Like a broken butterfly on the rack of a rich man’s lust . . . Powers scores serving of white bread to hungry men in breadlines . . . She’s here to shake her—abode of shame . . . a dapper insouciant youth dressed in the height of fashion and contemptuous of the girl’s serious charge . . . her own story . . . temple of God. . . .”

Parsons folded the paper up and carefully put it in the drawer of his desk. Later when he had more time he would read it carefully. He turned to his monthly report and started to check the statement of accounts.

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Red Lynch and Arthur left the administration building and walked across the hard gravel path leading to the main building. At the far end of the Island a yellowish smoke oozed from the garbage dump and was visible over the gray walls. It was beneath Red’s dignity to open the conversation. Arthur looked sidelong at the monitor and the youth’s narrow, dark eyes chilled all desire for conversation. After a few paces, however, Arthur spoke:

“What’s that smoke down there?”

“Dump,” Lynch answered curtly.

“What’s the smoke from?”

Lynch was offended by Arthur’s ignorance, everybody knew of the fifteen-year-old dump fire; for a while he did not answer.

“It’s been boinin’ for years. Sometimes de flames jumps right up in de sky.”

The monitor’s face spread itself into a leering smile as he went into details of the origin and effects of the dump fire. Arthur paused for a moment to watch the heavy smoke lifting from the dump. Lynch snapped at the boy:

“Hey, you—don’t stand dere, de top screw’s watchin’ us.”

Arthur started and continued walking.

“Who’s watchin’ us?”

“De top screw—Parsons, de sooprintendent. Always walk straight like a soldier, dats what he likes, see.”

Arthur straightened his narrow shoulders and marched along a little to the rear of Lynch. After a moment’s silence the monitor asked:

“Wot’d dey send yuh here fer?”

“Stealin’.”

Lynch looked contemptuously at the lad.

“What are you here for?” Arthur asked.

“You wouldn’t know if I told yuh. Dey said I got fresh wid a liddle dame wot lived in our block. Ever hear de woid rape?”

Arthur shook his head.

“I t’ought so.” He swaggered a little. “Wot did yuh steal?”

“Box o’ chawclits.”

Lynch looked at his charge with a sneer and continued walking in silence.

The monitor took Arthur down into the cement basement of the main building and told him to strip. While the boy was undressing Red returned in a few moments with the school uniform, blue overalls, khaki shirts, heavy boots, and thick woolen underwear. The basement reeked with the odor of creosote.

The monitor pointed to a shallow concrete tank filled with water:

“Get in dere,” he commanded. Arthur obeyed.

The water was cold. The lad stood shivering while Lynch looked on with evident satisfaction. He threw a hunk of yellow common soap at the boy.

“Wash yerself good.”

Arthur stood in the water, his teeth chattering, not knowing what to do. He looked at Lynch inquiringly.

“What are yuh waitin’ fer?” Lynch demanded.

Arthur bent over and reached for the soap at the bottom of the rough tank. At

that moment the monitor walked close to the edge of the tank and shoved the boy so that he fell full length into the water. His head went under and he came up in a second, terrified and sputtering.

Lynch grabbed hold of the lad and with savage vigor started to scrub his body with the piece of soap. Arthur started to cry and made weak attempts at washing himself. He watched Lynch out of the corners of his eyes. Finally, blue and shivering, he climbed out of the tank.

Sobbing and with chattering teeth Arthur got into the rough clothes and followed Lynch upstairs through narrow, dark hallways into the dining-hall.

As they entered about three hundred boys were sitting with bowed heads over their enameled tin plates and mugs. Grace was about to begin.

Lynch halted Arthur at the threshold of the door. He grabbed him by the arm, squeezed it and whispered darkly:

“Bow yer head.”

Arthur lowered his head.

The monitor in charge of the dining-room, a swarthy youth with a close-cropped head, looked arrogantly at the rows of bowed heads. He shouted the grace:

“Fer wot we are about t’receive may de Lawd make us trooly t’ankful. Amen.”

He surveyed the bowed heads.

“Heads up,” he ordered and three hundred odd faces flashed into view. The boys ravenously fell to their food.

Arthur was given a place at one of the bare wooden tables. He was hungry and eagerly ate his food: two pieces of gray bread, a plate of soggy sago pudding smeared with molasses and a tin mug of bitter, greasy cocoa.

The boys ate silently with eyes intent on their food. They saved pieces of the bread and wiped the bottoms of their plates for fugitive drops of the mahogany-colored molasses.

Arthur finished his food with a sigh and looked toward Lynch who was waiting in the doorway of the dining-hall. At Arthur’s table twenty boys of his age sat with their hands folded across their chests waiting for the signal to get up and march out of the hall. The lads’ faces were sullen and they looked out of the corners of their eyes towards the newcomer. Here and there a face smiled slightly in greeting.

---

When Lynch brought Arthur back to Parsons the superintendent had just finished leisurely reading *The Evening Tabloid*. He had even read the for men only medical advertisements, the notices which were captioned: “Are you troubled with unsightly pimples?”

“Sit down,” Parsons said when Lynch marched out of the office.

The day’s events had terrified Arthur so that he looked with wide open eyes at the man, expecting anything.

The superintendent cleared his throat and started to talk. His face was flushed and his eyes were bright.

“Now you think I’m pretty tough, don’t you?” he asked.

Arthur looked at him with frightened eyes, but did not answer. The superintendent smiled:

“Go ahead, answer any way you like. This is going to be a heart-to-heart talk. Go ahead, answer.”

He smiled again and reached across the intervening space and put his hand on Arthur’s knee. The man looked straight into the boy’s eyes. His heavy lips spread into a smile.

“Go ahead, answer!”

Still frightened and not assured by Parsons’ smile Arthur said:

“No—no, sir.”

“You don’t think I’m tough, do you?”

“No, sir, I don’t think you’re tough.”

“What does your father do?”

“He’s dead, sir.”

“What does your mother do?”

“She works, sir.”

“Where?”

“In a bag factory, sir.”

“Any sisters?”

“Yes, sir, two.”

“What do they do?”

“One works in the bag factory with my mother, sir.”

“And the other?”

“She dances, sir.”

“Oh, a dancer—on the stage?”

“She works in Rhythmland.”

“That’s very fine. Dancing is a marvelous form of exercise, it develops the body, makes one graceful. I hope she’ll visit you soon. We have exercises here, military drill. That’ll straighten you out and build up your body. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. Have you ever heard of Bernard Powers?”

“No, sir.”

“Never heard of Bernard Powers?”

Arthur hesitated, fearful of having made a mistake.

“No—no, sir.”

“Well, Bernard Powers started like you in life, a poor boy in an orphans’ home and today he’s a millionaire. He’s a great philosopher and a publisher of great fame. He overcame many obstacles just the same as you must do if you want to get on in the world.”

“Yes, sir,” Arthur said. He was interested in this story.

“One of the things which Bernard Powers has taught us is to take a pride in our bodies. Are you proud of your body, boy?”

Arthur was at a loss for an answer and lowered his head in confusion.

“Are you ashamed of your body?”

“No—no, sir, I ain’t ashamed.”

Parsons looked at the ill-fitting clothes which the boy wore; he looked at his startled brown eyes and then said:

“Take your clothes off, I—I want to examine you.”

Arthur bent over and started to undo his shoes. The man went on talking:

“The wise men tell us that you can only be happy if you have a healthy body and that’s what we believe here.”

The lad was nearly undressed. Parsons continued talking:

“I agree with Bernard Powers that we should be proud of the beauty of our bodies—exult in the pagan symmetry of our”—he realized that the boy would not understand—“in the strength of our bodies—”

The boy was naked.

Parsons walked closer to the lad and looked at his white, thin body. The superintendent placed his hands on Arthur’s back and ran his palms tightly over the boy’s ribs. Arthur drew back instinctively. He looked up at Parsons with a drawn face and retreated a little. Parsons’ face hardened.

“Put your clothes on,” he said sharply.

Arthur started to dress.

“I guess you’ll need a lot of breaking in,” the superintendent said.

### XIII MEDITATION

The first weeks were the hardest. New faces, a new environment, a new mode of life. It was only at night that Arthur found relief from the day's cold fright. It was under the stiff blankets which smelled of creosote that he was able to shut his eyes and strike out the day's evil memories—Red Lynch, the “screws” and the hard, new acquaintances. The heat of his own breath and the warmth of his body brought drowsiness, released him from the rigid hatred which permeated the Island.

He arose at five in the morning, stumbled out on to the hard, cold concrete floor and marched down the stairs in his coarse nightgown. He remembered with an overwhelming regret the days in Red Hook, even after his father was dead: his mother standing over his bed shaking him by the shoulder, “Arthur, Arthur, get up, get up, it's time for school.”

Now as he awoke he looked into the malignant face of Lynch who stood over his bed jerking his shoulder, shouting in a cracked voice: “C'mon, you, get out.”

Down the concrete stairs he marched bare-footed with the other lads and everywhere there was the sharp, sickening odor of the disinfectant. Down into the cold basement and under the shower with the head monitor standing by, giving orders.

“In. Out.”

Sometimes when he disliked a boy, as he did Arthur, Lynch waited ten, fifteen, twenty seconds while the boy stood huddled under the icy stream, blue and shivering.

In those first few weeks something hardened in Arthur. Something in his lanky inside froze and stiffened. Perhaps it was the spirit which enabled Margaret to go on during all those years in Red Hook. Perhaps it was that something which impelled his father to walk out into the street after Mrs. Schmerer was shot; perhaps it was this that made his face harden when the officers or monitors shouted rankling words into his young ears.

*“My dear son, You will be glad to hear that I will be up to see you this Sunday. How are you dear son. We are all in good health thank God. Gladys is well and when we are eating she says how much we miss you dear son Arthur. Miriam was here last night and she left two dollars for me to bring you a parcel. What do you want the most dear Arthur. Ask your teachers to let you write me a letter and say what*

*you want me to bring you the most. I went to see the judge that send you up and he told me that you will be treated good I pray to God that he is right. Write and tell me what you want the most. Ask your teachers if I can bring you some good things and if yes I will bring you some. Remember Arthur my dear son try and do what your teachers tell you. Remember be good and do what they tell you. We are all in good health thank God and we pray you are the same. In closing your loving mother: Margaret Roberts. P.S. Don't forget to be good and do what they tell you."*

But Arthur could not wait for his mother to come. Sunday—it was five long days away. Five days of Red Lynch, five days of Parsons and the “screws,” many of whom were so far nameless to him. They scowled at him, spoke with abrupt sharpness when he stood in line, smacked his head when he was slow to understand in the tinsmith’s shop where he was assigned for work.

Early in the morning the boys marched into the shop, took up their places before the machines and silently waited for the signal to start work.

Talking was forbidden, but Arthur soon learned that by compressing his lips and speaking out of the corner of his mouth he could carry on a careful conversation.

The boy who worked next to him looked likeable enough and they talked when the tinsmith “screw,” Mr. Fink, was not looking.

Fink was an undersized little man with a large round head, the sort of head commonly supposed to be only on the shoulders of philosophers. He had a bulging, protruding forehead and a lump in the back of his head. To the boys he was surreptitiously known as “Knuckles.” This was because he punished petty offenses by running his knuckles sharply up the back of a lad’s head. This method of mild torture was called “getting a knuckles’ haircut.”

When a new boy was assigned to him, Fink called the lad into a partitioned office in the corner of the shop and addressed him:

“My boy, if you were any good you wouldn’t be here, so I’m not asking you to be good, see, only do as you’re told and maybe you’ll be a good tinsmith some day and good tinsmiths make lots of money. Do you know what tin is? No? Well, I’ll tell you. It’s a metallic chemical element. You don’t know what that means, do you? Well, never mind, all you have to do is cut strips of it and don’t let me catch you talking, see.”

Like most of the “screws” on the Island he had his favorite boys and these he appointed as shop monitors. The boy on Arthur’s right was not a monitor, but two

years in the institution had taught him the advisability of becoming one as soon as possible.

From where Arthur stood facing his cutting machine he could see the streets of Manhattan facing the Island. The scene, it is true, was obscured somewhat by the mesh of thick steel wire which covered every window, but nevertheless it was pleasant to look out and see the people, trucks and automobiles, which looked like toys from the Island, moving up and down the streets.

One morning Arthur pressed his lips tightly together and speaking out of an opening in the corner of his mouth, whispered to the boy beside him:

“Hey.”

The boy apparently did not hear.

Arthur repeated the signal. The boy turned his eyes without moving his head, and made a warning grimace.

“How long you been here,” Arthur whispered.

His neighbor held up two fingers.

“Two years?”

The boy nodded slightly. He went on feeding his machine sheets of tin and cutting each sheet into smaller squares. He looked across the river at the city and its tall buildings and church spires and finally said to his neighbor:

“Can yuh ever escape from this place?”

The boy opened his lips and then closed them—and jerked his thumb warningly in the direction of Fink.

At dinner Arthur dawdled over his food. He could not stir up sufficient enthusiasm to eat his gray stew; there was an odor about it that nauseated him. His stomach, too, was weak from the sudden change of diet and the odor of the disinfectant was constantly in his nostrils.

His hatred for the Island increased until it shut out all other ideas. Mad thoughts raced through his brain: suppose he were to set the place on fire, he could escape in the confusion; he was a good swimmer, he could swim twenty city blocks—he remembered the oily Gowanus Canal and lowered his eyes into the gray stew. He looked up and saw Red Lynch glaring at him.

After dinner the boys played in a metal-screened concrete playground. Their games were rough and boisterous and they sought an outlet for their pent-up silence and the rigid discipline of the shops in cruelty and snarling fighting.

Before the boys fell in for afternoon parade Red Lynch crooked his finger at Arthur and told him that the top screw wanted to see him.

When Arthur, accompanied by a monitor, arrived in the hall leading to Parsons’

office he saw his neighbor of the tinsmith shop waiting also. The boy avoided Arthur's glance. Fink was there, too, his hands clasped behind his back and looking very important as he surveyed the behavior chart which hung immediately outside of Parsons' office.

Inside, Parsons sat at his desk; Fink and the two boys faced the superintendent.

"What's this I hear about you?" Parsons said addressing Arthur.

Arthur's tongue and palate dried up instantaneously. He licked his lips and looked at the floor.

"Answer me," Parsons shouted.

"I dunno, sir," the boy replied.

"You don't know sir, do you?"

Arthur said nothing. The superintendent went on:

"Did you or did you not broach to this boy the proposition of escaping from this institution?"

Before his wife had died Parsons used to say to her that if only he had the opportunity he would have made a good lawyer. He had once found a technical flaw in the commitment papers of a boy and had written a lengthy letter to the committing judge and had received a courteous answer in reply which was one of his treasured prizes.

"Your very silence is an admission of your wrong-doing. It is—if you can understand what I am saying—an evidence of consciousness of guilt."

Arthur was frightened.

Fink smiled an ingratiating smile. Parsons went on:

"You stand there guilty of the most serious offense which a boy in this institution can commit. However, I will hear what Mr. Fink and this boy, Grunchik, have to say. Proceed, Mr. Fink. You see, Roberts, you are being given every opportunity of what on the outside and in legal circles we call a fair trial."

Fink sucked his mouth dry of saliva and cleared his throat. He spoke rapidly:

"At ten-fifteen or thereabouts this morning sir the boy Grunchik here asked me if he could go to the toilet and as all the monitors in my shop were busy at the time sir I gave Grunchik permission to go down without escort he reported back promptly but before going back to his machine sir he reported to me that the boy Roberts had suggested to him the possibility of escaping from this institution. I immediately communicated with you sir."

"Is that so?" Parsons asked Grunchik.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you hear this evidence?" Parsons asked Arthur.

“Yes, sir,” Arthur said.

The superintendent got to his feet and leaned over the table so that his face was close to the boy’s.

“At great expense,” he said, “we maintain this institution for boys like you. We feed you and clothe you, you play games in the playground, discipline is instilled into you, you are being taught to lead a clean, healthy life and here you are plotting and scheming to escape and when people hear of it they’ll think that we run God knows what sort of a place here. You little rat!”

He closed his impassioned speech by bringing his heavy hand across Arthur’s face. The boy lost his balance and put his hand to his face.

“Take your hand away from your face,” Parsons shouted. “Take it away. Stand at attention.” Arthur started to cry. Tears streamed down his face, his nose watered.

Fink and the boy Grunchik stood to one side and looked with expressionless eyes at the scene. Parsons looked at the boy for a moment and then rendered his decision:

“All right, my boy, I’ll deal with you at assembly tonight. Take him back to the shop, Mr. Fink, and keep a close watch on him. He’s a dangerous character.”

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Assembly at the Island occurred on Sunday when a visiting clergyman led the boys in divine service, when celebrities from over the river inspected the place or when Parsons had something of great importance to impart to his charges. The meetings were held in the chapel of the institution. Parsons stood at the pulpit with Mellish, his gray-haired assistant, standing respectfully a few feet to his rear and to the side. Assembly always opened with a short prayer service. Mellish, who played the organ, started each service with Parsons’ favorite hymn, *Abide with Me*.

Mellish had been at the Island for the past twenty years. He was a crude, simple man and had hoped before Parsons came to the place, to become superintendent, but he lacked the necessary political influence. His rôle in the institution was a colorless one and during the last few years he was content merely to do minor administrative jobs and play hymns at assembly.

The old man ran his fingers over the keyboard and pumped at the bellows with his feet and swayed his shoulders at the organ as though he were going somewhere.

When Parsons entered the assembly hall the boys were seated with their arms folded across their chests, and staring straight ahead of them. They jumped to attention as the superintendent came into the hall and the monitors and officers saluted. He returned the salute and the boys sat down as he busied himself with some papers.

Mellish sat at the organ and resumed playing the hymn with improvised runs and many evident errors. Finally he came to the end:

*In life and death, oh, Lord,  
Abide with me.*

The hall was silent. Parsons' face was hard. He looked through some papers for a few moments: he liked the tense, apprehensive silence as the boys, monitors and officers waited for him to speak. Finally he began:

"Roberts, come up here!"

Arthur stood up, walked to the front of the large hall and faced the superintendent.

"Turn around!"

The boy turned and faced his companions. His face was pale and frightened, his eyes stared from his head like the eyes of a slaughtered cow in a butcher's shop. Parsons spoke:

"This boy has been guilty of the greatest crime in my eyes. He has wilfully plotted to escape from this institution. Not only did he scheme in an underhanded way but he approached another boy and asked that he be joined in his criminal plan. . . ."

Parsons looked down on the rows of boys with obvious satisfaction. I should have gone into politics in a big way, he thought. I sure got the gift of the tongue. . . .

". . . we try to make this institution as near like a school as possible. You boys play games, drill, have sports, are taught how to build your bodies in the manner laid down by that great social philosopher, Bernard Powers, who, I am happy to say, once honored us with his presence here. You, Roberts, have been guilty of ingratitude. That is the greatest crime I know of. Stealing is bad, murder is bad, but he who is guilty of ingratitude is the thief of another's faith . . . the next step from this institution is the penitentiary, the big house. If you want to go there, it's all right with me. If some of you bigger boys want to go, go ahead, but you, Roberts, are too young yet, but you'll get there. In the meantime you have to stay here and you're going to obey the rules of this school. I'm going to make a public example of you."

The superintendent motioned to Mellish and the old assistant came forward and stood near Arthur.

Parsons turned to the boy and said:

"I'm going to give you a good thrashing, see! Then I'll give you twelve hours strung up in solitary to give you time to think whether it pays to be ungrateful. A little meditation won't do you any harm. Get ready."

Mellish stepped closer to the boy and whispered to him:

“Take your shirt off.” Arthur obeyed.

“Now take your underwear off.” Arthur obeyed.

“Your shoes and stockings.”

Finally the boy stood before the assembly in nothing but his khaki overalls.

Parsons drew a rubber hose out of his hip pocket. It was split into several tongues at the end. He stepped closer to the boy.

“Bend over,” he ordered. “Touch your toes with your fingers. If you scream or holler I’ll add one stroke every time you yell. I’m going to give you fifteen.”

Arthur bent over, his knees trembled, his mind became wild with fright. The hall was utterly silent. He felt Parsons’ hand on his buttocks straightening out a fold in the seat of his overalls.

Suddenly he heard the swish of the hose and a sharp, vicious blow on his body. A scream started out of his mouth; he bit his lower lip and stifled it until the teeth nearly cut into his skin.

Another. And still another. Each blow sounded sharp and clear like a miniature revolver shot. The lad’s head was covered in sweat. He closed his eyes and red lights danced before his eyes with each stroke.

Eight. Nine. Ten. The pain was unendurable. In desperation he decided to get up at the next stroke—it was too much . . . too much. . . . Eleven. Twelve. Too much, too much. He straightened up for a moment and the hose landed across the small of his back. He sickened with pain and screamed. . . .

“Please, Mr. Parsons, I’ll be good . . . please, sir . . .”

Parsons sternly motioned to the floor. His face was livid and his eyes shone with an aroused brilliance.

“Bend over, sir,” he ordered.

“Please, please, sir . . .”

Somewhere in the rear of the hall one of the boys laughed nervously. Parsons did not hear.

Arthur bent over and again the hose descended with renewed force. Thirteen. Fourteen. Arthur had lost count. His sweaty hands contracted and opened slowly. He waited. There were no more strokes.

Parsons put the rubber hose into his hip pocket and gave the order for the boys to rise. He ordered Arthur into a corner and motioned to Mellish to play the school march. The old man played a wheezy military air and the boys marched out of the room. Arthur waited . . .

---

“Stringing up” at the Island was a form of punishment which Parsons found

particularly effective.

In the cellar of the main building there were stone cells with iron doors opening into an unused passage. The cells were airless and dark. Twelve hours in one of these cells with the hands of the culprit handcuffed to the bars of the door usually had a tempering effect on the conduct of the hard cases. Sometimes twenty-four hours were required.

Parsons, Mellish and Arthur walked down the cellar passage until they came to the solitary cells. Mellish unlocked a door, and took the boy in with him. He took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and looped them through the bars of the door which were about as high as Arthur could reach with ease. The circlets were snapped on to the boy's wrists so that when Mellish opened the door to come out Arthur moved with it. The door closed with a metallic bang and the boy heard the keys scrape in the lock. He heard Parsons' voice outside:

"You'll be different in the morning."

He heard retreating footsteps.

It was pitch black inside. The handcuffs didn't bother him very much at first and it was good to get away from Parsons. His body ached all over and he leaned against the cold metal of the door and felt its welcome coolness against his hot, fevered head.

It was quiet, so quiet that he heard that sort of buzzing silence which one hears after much excitement and noise.

Gradually his fever abated and soon he felt quite cool again.

The cell was damp, it was below the waterline of the Island. He began to tremble and shake. He grew tired. It seemed that an hour had passed. His legs weakened and his knees sagged. He became more tired.

Little by little he began to hang against the wrist-pieces of his handcuffs. The metal pressed into his skin.

He remembered Margaret suddenly with a burst of childish regret. He began to weep. The dark frightened him.

He heard strange noises out of the boom of the silence. He called out, screamed  
...

Before his eyes in the dark he saw hallucinations of light; red and white streamers moving slowly before his eyes. Then he became still and tried to see if he could measure the passing of time.

He tried to figure out how long he had been in the cell. An hour, perhaps, maybe longer. . . .

The wrist circlets cut into his wrists. His arms ached dreadfully; the sockets felt

as though his arms would be dragged out. . . .

Surely, he was here nearly three hours, maybe longer. . . .

“It must be midnight. . . .”

He was sleepy but the pain kept him awake.

“If Parsons would come into the cell now, I would fall down and kiss his shoes if only he would let me out . . . those handcuffs . . . past twelve, sure . . . it must have been one hour when I first felt the handcuffs hurting my wrists . . . I’ll go crazy if they keep me here. . . .”

The boy’s throat became parched with fright. He wondered if there were any rat-holes in the cell.

At dinner he had heard the boys talking of the water-rats. One boy said they were as large as tomcats with lots of fight in them. Cats made him think of Red Hook and Margaret and Miriam and Gladys and of his father. Yes, he would do that. He would think of home, that would make the time go faster. He would forget . . .

“First thing I remember . . . a big man with black hair—that was father . . . then the night on the stairs and a man reaching out for me and me running upstairs and mother’s voice calling me. I’m going too fast. No, I must think slow. I’ll think of every day, day by day. . . .”

Out of the stillness he heard a clock strike somewhere across the river in Manhattan. He heard it very faintly and did not know, because he could not distinguish the strokes, that it was only ten o’clock. He had been in the solitary cell for only one hour. . . .

*Professor Lytton F. Coleman was lecturing to a private night class.*

*“We have seen that if it were possible for one to be suspended in space removed from the influences of the earth, moon and sun, Time, in its subjective sense, would be non-existent. We can go a step further in this conception.*

*“We have seen that in studying the motion of a particle in space, four sets of quantities must be taken into consideration and obviously their results cannot be graphed on an ordinary piece of paper. What is required is four-dimensional space with x, y, z and time as co-ordinates.*

*“With the acceptance of a four-dimensional graph or continuum, which we must accept as something real and objective, it becomes possible for us to conceive of two events as represented by a finite*

line.

*“Thus, the instant of time and point in space can be fixed by a given point in our continuum. The interval between any two events, such as the great fire of London and the outburst on the star Nova Persei, may be measured by one group of observers as so many years and millions of miles, while other astronomers may conceive of the interval between the two events quite differently.*

*“For instance, it may be reckoned with equal truth, depending of course upon the position of the observer, that the great fire of London occurred a century before the outburst of Nova Persei, or the outburst occurred a century before the fire. Time, as we see, then becomes . . .”*

. . . little by little Arthur weakened. He hung limply on the wrist-pieces of the handcuffs. Terror flooded his mind. He began to whimper.

He imagined he heard sounds in the cell—the sound of teeth on stone, gnawing. When his hands touched the metal door, it felt cold and dripping. It seemed to him that he had been in the cells for days.

The minutes ticked away steadily, sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour, but his thoughts raced through his mind with the speed of a dream. Mother—father—Red Hook—the strike—funeral—Mr. Potter, the undertaker—the ride to the cemetery in the automobile—the judge—his teacher at school—the days he swam in Gowanus Canal—Parsons—Mellish. The pictures in his mind were distorted and fled and re-appeared as they do in nightmares. Sixty seconds to the minute, sixty seconds. . . .

*Professor Coleman cleared his throat and continued:*

*“. . . or let us take another example. Light travels at the rate of approximately three hundred thousand kilometres a second. If one were able to construct a machine which could travel, let us say, at the rate of six hundred thousand kilometres a second, we would be able to reach stars before their moment of extinction millions of light years ago. In the same manner it would be possible somewhere along the path of light to look back, if one can use the term in this connection, and witness, if one could see that far, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on earth two thousand years ago.*

*“Time, we see, then becomes something altogether different from*

*what we have previously imagined it. . . .”*

It was midnight when Mellish turned the key in Arthur’s cell. The boy awoke at the grating sound.

“It’s me,” Mellish said. “It’s only me.”

He unlocked the handcuffs and let the boy down.

Twenty years in the institution had not hardened him sufficiently to be able to endure the thought of a boy spending the night in solitary “strung up.”

In his youth he had vague notions about boys and their treatment and he was quite excited when he got a position on the Island. He had ideas, during those first few years, about reforms and new systems of administration, but nothing ever came of them; he merely turned out to be Parsons’ assistant who spent his time picking out tunes on the organ. . . .

“Rub your wrists hard,” Mellish said to the boy. From his pocket he drew a flask of hot tea and gave some to Arthur to drink.

The old man whispered as he spoke, although no one was within hearing distance. It pleased him to think that he was frustrating Parsons’ plans.

“I can’t stay very long,” the old man said. “Just sit here and try and get some sleep. I’ll be back about half past five and put your handcuffs on again so when Mr. Parsons comes to let you down, nobody’ll know. Now, remember, you mustn’t tell anyone, or we’ll both get into trouble.”

The boy nodded his head and lay down in the corner of the cell to sleep. The old man shuffled down the passage and reported to the night watchman that the kid in solitary must have fallen asleep on the bracelets.

Arthur was only wearing his overalls and shoes and stockings and the cell seemed to become colder and colder. Finally, however, the boy fell asleep. . . .

## XIV SLEEP

Strong as Parsons was, once every day he lost control of his charges. Once every twenty-four hours, at night, when the agony of the day was over the boys all escaped from the Island.

In sleep there was no captivity. No longer were they at the mercy of the screws, of Red Lynch, of the solitary cell, of the handcuffs.

Across the river, a few hundred yards away, Manhattan flashed and roared. In the screened dormitory it was utterly quiet by ten o'clock. Each boy covered his head with his blanket and at twelve o'clock the night watchman heard only the sound of regular sleeping when he made his hourly rounds.

Once every night the bars and walls of the Island came down. . . .

The glutton went abroad and ate his fill, stuffing rich, sweet greasy food into his mouth, grinning in his sleep as he did so. No gray punk here, no Parsons and his philosophy of physical culture. Rich food, lots of it; roast meat running with fat gravy, rings of sausages; hot, roasted potatoes; stews, roast chickens done to a rich golden brown with stuffing made of thyme, onions and breadcrumbs. Pies, deep and filled with apples, peaches, cherries. Mouths watering in sleep. No carefully arranged budget could stop the hungry from eating their fill. Eight short hours of sleep and food.

The daytime might be cold and hard for the lecher—but sleep released him. . . .

He walked through the bars, across the dark waters to Manhattan. Now there was no need to think black thoughts and leer at the little boys when they came to the Island. No need carefully to time the rounds of the watchman, to wheedle and threaten. Once every twenty-four hours one could walk down the streets of Manhattan.

Girls everywhere. Tall ones with slinky hips that would drive one mad during the day. Heavy, mascaraed eyes. The music of dance halls, the warmth of feminine bodies, movement. No need now to look at female visitors, even at the ugliest reformers, when they visited the Island, no need to look at them with clenched teeth.

Once every night the lecher was freed. He tossed in his sleep, groaned so that the watchman would pause, listening, as he made his rounds in his rubber-shod shoes. Lights, music, warm twisting bodies. Sleep.

Once every day the timid, the weak, the frightened became strong, bold, unafraid. The bars came down. The walls melted away. They walked in the world outside, upright and swaggering. No longer at the mercy of the cruel, the brutal, the

merciless.

The dope addict slunk up alleys and bought his share from the dope peddler. Night. Sleep. Morphine. Heroin. Cocaine. It was no longer necessary to wheedle money from visitors, bribe the monitors. Here was pleasure without stint. Exhilaration. Relief. Sleep. At night.

The idiot, the deformed, the cripple, the stammerer. No cold laughter from the boys now. Once every day they became bright, upright, nimble, smooth-tongued. Once every day. At night in sleep.

Under the stiff blankets smelling of creosote sleep came. Release. For the dull-witted. For the meek. For the frightened. The walls came down. Melted away. They strutted and walked upright, erect, like men.

All these years on the Island were endurable for Arthur because at night he, too, could escape, could walk through the thick stone walls—straight through the walls across the river, down into the subway, out to Brooklyn, to Red Hook, to Margaret and Miriam and Gladys.

Sometimes when he came home his father was there and he was taller than ever, his hair was black like shiny coal, he would laugh and talk and tell how he caught hold of the tackle and went down into the hold of the ship with a ton piece of cargo.

Sometimes it was visiting day, he was back at the Island, but Parsons was laughing and mixing freely with the boys, the parcels were not searched and Margaret stayed long, until long after dark; then he would go to bed, but it was home in Red Hook, and he would hear the street noises, the sounds of children playing in the streets and suddenly he would be in the street playing . . .

Days came and went. Sixty seconds a minute. Sixty minutes an hour. Twenty-four hours a day, and once every day he could look forward to sleep. Never mind the heavy, smelly blanket. Head under, eyes closed, and soon sleep and relief! Walls down. Bars down. No heavy wire screens to block out the sight of tugs on the river and the lights across on Manhattan.

There was no standing in line, erect and stiff until one's back ached. Miriam looked just as she did before she left home. At night in his sleep he forgot that Margaret had told him that Miriam had had a baby and that the baby died. In his sleep he did not worry about who the father was. He did not hear Margaret's voice as she told him that Mirrie got into trouble, that she got sick and had to go to the hospital every week and get medicine that they put in under her skin, that hurt her so she cried and came home shaking like she had St. Vitus' dance. Five years on the Island was nothing—forgotten.

Sometimes he was a little boy again. Sometimes he was a man, walking down

the streets across the river with good clothes on, walking into theatres, ordering meals in restaurants. . . .

Sometimes he walked down dark, deserted streets with a blue light at the far end. Sometimes there was a woman on the street walking ahead of him. The swaying of her body disturbed him; it was then that he remembered in his sleep that he was no longer a boy. . . .

There were no tinsmith shop, no kitchen duty, no smoking in the basement blowing the smoke up the flue of the basement furnace so that the screws couldn't smell the odor of the cigarette smoke. He walked down the street blowing rings of smoke into the air, taking deep inhalations, flicking the ash from the tip of the butt with a careless gesture. . . .

Once every day, at night, when nothing stirred on the Island except the night-watchman in his rubber-soled shoes and the rats out on the dump, Arthur and his companions walked out of the dormitory, walked past the walls, through the bars and screens, out over the river—free.

But in the morning the walls became solid and gray, the bars became fast and firmly set in their concrete bases. Gray figures stirred under the blankets. Red Lynch, or his successor, shouted harsh orders in the early pale morning.

The figures of the sleeping boys stirred, heads came up from under the gray, heavy blankets. Heads shook and startled eyes looked at a new day.

They were back at the Island.

## XV ALL THE NEWS

Crime. Executions. Crooked police. Stool-pigeons. Judgeships bought and sold. Communists beaten in the streets. Bootlegging, hijacking, graft, crime, corruption. New York. . . .

A fifty-two-year-old woman was accused of killing a man in her boarding house in Arizona. She was found guilty. Special correspondents were sent to the state prison at Florence. Special wires were run into the death house. Special stories poured into editorial offices. A woman was to be hanged! Something to talk about! A woman! A mother! Feature stuff. Sob stuff. The perfect newspaper story—sin, sex, sensation.

The story trickled over the wires early one morning: “Ma Dugan was hanged today. Her body, draped only in a cheap wrapper—for she decided at the last moment the silk shroud she had made ‘might get mussed’—went through the trap at 4:11 A.M., Pacific standard time (7:11 New York time).

“She fell through a hole in the floor in the execution chamber to a room below. Death was instantaneous, for the rope when it snapped at the end of the drop severed her head from her body. . . .

“On the walls of the execution chamber were the pictures of sixteen persons, all men, who had been hanged on the same gallows. Around each picture was the noose which caused death, and tomorrow Ma Dugan’s picture and her noose will be placed in the collection. . . .”

*“Frances Kane, secretary of the Women’s Freedom League, yesterday said at the Savoy Hotel that her organization was opposed to the exemption of women from the death penalty because of their sex.*

*“ There should be no sex discrimination between the punishment meted out to men and women found guilty of murder,” the noted feminist told her listeners. “ The question of capital punishment does not enter into my argument, I am against women being exempt from the death penalty while men are not exempt. . . .”*

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. . . Mr. Cromwell’s address follows in part:

*“In England during the Eighteenth Century there was capital*

*punishment for more than one hundred criminal acts, including shop-lifting, pocket-picking, cutting down a hop vine or a shrub in a private park; damaging a rabbit warren; frequenting the company of gypsies and the illegal killing of a deer. When the English abolished the debtor's prison and the removal of the penalty for debt, it caused no increase in the number of debtors. . . .*

*"Buckle shows quite clearly by means of his collected facts and statistics that the number of criminals increases just as the price of food soars. Ferri proves that crimes against property show sudden increases in years of severe winter and corresponding decreases when the temperature is milder. . . .*

*"The remedy, then, is not to be found in reprehensive measures of punishment, but in changes of economic environment. . . .*

*"The belief that a man, despite poverty and evil social surroundings, is free to choose his own destiny, and is, therefore, capable of rising to the highest positions in the community, is obviously a misleading and false one. . . ."*

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For several years the ex-professor had been writing letters to the newspapers. During the war he had been expelled from one of the leading universities for harboring dangerous ideas. His descent in the social scale merely accelerated his activities, which, year after year produced nothing but a little collection of clippings from the "letters to the editor" columns.

His wife had deserted him and he now lived in a skylight furnished-room for which he paid three dollars a week; his clothes were greasy and his linen was perpetually gray. Despite the fact that his letters were often ignored or edited beyond recognition he persisted nevertheless.

He carried himself with a professorial dignity that was reminiscent of his glorious days, which impressed no one but his landlady, who was proud to have a man in her house who had once been among the great and who was quiet, orderly and whose only drawback was the fact that the clicking noise of his typewriter at night sometimes disturbed some of the roomers; but this, too, in a way, was something of a distinction.

He lived by book reviews for obscure publications and was at work on a book which would make his fortune, he felt. It dealt with the abolition of the slum areas in New York City and he knew that if he could interest the Mayor and the Board of

Estimate he would go down into history as the man who had devised the scheme which had done away with slum dwellings. He had approached many minor politicians and had taken seriously their evasive promises.

The ex-professor sat in his room and composed another letter to the editor of a morning newspaper.

“Sir,” he wrote, “In New York a survey made by disinterested observers shows that fully one-third of the population live in tenements on expensive land, pay exorbitant rentals for the miserable accommodations provided and these hundreds of thousands of slum-dwellers constitute a menace to the security of our state.”

It gave him great pleasure to write and he sat back and surveyed the few lines of typewriting with evident enjoyment.

He continued: “Because of overcrowding, dilapidation, dirt, dark rooms and other evils, it would seem that some modern and energetic measures should be taken to make halls and stairways safe for exit and to provide sufficient rooms for common decency and thus do away with conditions that are the cause of prostitution, disease, drunkenness, crime, incest and other social evils. . . .”

A few days later the letter appeared badly mutilated. The editor had cut out the word incest; it was a word he hated—then he pencilled through prostitution and so on until only a few lines remained. Then he wrote across the edited copy the words: “Urges Housing Reform.”

Margaret, however, continued to live in Red Hook. She worried about Gladys who was “keeping company,” was sick with fear about Miriam, thought always about Arthur. . . .

## XVI ESCAPE

It was August. Five years had passed. Five long years. Five reformatory years. Hopeless years. Years of fear. Years of hopeless hope. Minute followed minute, slowly, minute after minute; hour followed hour slowly, became a day, a long day of senseless, mechanical work, aimless drill, and cruel play. A day of harsh orders, bellowsings, beatings, a cold, loveless day. Days became weeks, slowly, but they became weeks; weeks became months, more slowly. Months trickled into the years. Endless, endless years . . . five years.

Arthur's voice broke. He was troubled by vague stirrings within him. Silently he groped for love, wanted sunlight, wanted to play and swim in the water which washed the shores of the Island. But during these so dangerous years Parsons was his guide, he only saw the water through the crossed iron screens which held every window. Slowly the boy was becoming a young man, a young man with something vital crushed out of him, a joyless man, a loveless young man, a warped young man. . . .

Five years. Five years of a slowly mounting fear and hatred of all authority. Five years during which he had seen more of life's bitterness than most men see in a lifetime. He had seen ignorance beaten into submission, scalded, gouged, struck, bullied into submission. Convict submission. Reformatory submission.

Every movement watched. Watched when one awoke, watched when one slept. The most intimate functions of a human being—watched, too. Watched like an animal until one became an animal—a hunted, frightened animal. Watched by the officers, watched by the monitors, watched by one's cringing companions. Watched . . .

Margaret came seldom now. The trip tired her out. Sometimes she could not afford to bring him food and delicacies. But once every two months she came, nevertheless and brought her little package of sugar, butter, candies and cigarettes.

Mother and son sat and talked in the public reception room which also had steel wire mesh over each window.

"Two more years, son, it won't be long now, Arthur."

Arthur answered in a subdued, hoarse voice:

"Yes, ma, two years. It's a long time.

"Be a good boy, Arthur dear, don't do anything . . ."

The youth nodded his head and eagerly ate some candy.

At five o'clock the visitors were herded out of the room and the boys went to

the large, bare dining-hall.

As the boys left the visitors' room Margaret surreptitiously gave the officer on duty a dollar bill.

"I am Arthur Roberts' mother," she whispered, "be good to him please."

Arthur marched back with the other boys and youths who had had visitors. They marched sullenly with lowered heads. It was worse, somehow, on visiting day.

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Friday was a bad day. It was fish day. For lunch a stew was served made of frozen cod fish and some potatoes and a thin watery gravy. Friday was the day that the boys came down from the dining-hall and searched through their lockers for stray morsels of candy, bread and cake left from visiting day.

One day the stew was particularly bad. Bits of fish skin floated, gray and sinister, in the gravy. The potatoes in the stew were underdone, hard. The stew had an odor. . . .

As the boys marched into the mess-room their faces hardened when they looked at the plates. Grace was said, but no one ate. The rule against talking at meal time was suddenly broken. The boys talked spontaneously in resentful voices.

"Shut up, dere," the monitor on duty shouted.

"Go to hell," one of the boys shouted.

Others took up the cry. They stuffed the bread into their shirts and sloshed the fish stew over the tables, on the floor, at the walls. The dining-room stank. The monitor sent a boy for an officer. The lads began to stamp their feet and chant in unison:

"We want food . . . we want food . . . we want food . . ."

The officer came running into the hall and sent for Parsons. The boys kept on chanting:

"We want food . . . we want food . . . we want food . . ."

The superintendent rushed into the room, red-faced and furious.

"Silence!" he shouted.

The noise stopped.

"Attention!"

The boys folded their arms across their chests and stared straight ahead of them.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded.

No one answered.

The boys knew that whoever spoke up would be regarded as the ringleader and ultimately would find himself in solitary. No one spoke.

"Who started this?"

The boys looked straight ahead of them, looked blankly at the walls, stiff and erect.

Two years before there had been a table riot and three of the boys were beaten and kept in solitary for two weeks. One of the lads had gone insane, there was an investigation but nothing happened. The food was as bad as ever.

The boys sat erect and said nothing.

“Yuh don’t like the food, eh?” Parsons said, cold with anger. “Cook!”

The cook, a frightened little Greek, came running out of the adjoining kitchen. His apron was greasy and his dark eyes looked knowingly at the superintendent.

“Bring me a dish of your stew.”

The cook disappeared and returned with a bowl. Parsons tasted a spoonful of the stew.

“Why, this is good wholesome food,” he said. “Now, come on, all of you, I want to see this stew eaten.”

The empty plates were filled again.

“Come on, eat it. I want to see every bit of it eaten.”

The boys did not move. They sat motionless before their plates. At the far end of the hall some of the smaller boys began to eat. The superintendent walked over to the nearest boy.

“Eat!” he commanded.

“I’m not hungry,” the boy replied.

Parsons’ fist crashed into the lad’s face.

The boy toppled off the bench on to the floor; his face bled. Parsons towered over him.

“Get up,” he shouted. “Get up, you damned swine.”

The boy got to his feet.

The superintendent signalled to one of his officers:

“Take this sulking thief to solitary. We’ll see if that’ll give him an appetite.”

Parsons glared at the boys at the tables.

“You won’t eat, eh? All right. I give you three or four hours on the parade ground on the double. I guess that’ll make you hungry.”

“Up!”

The boys rose to their feet, stiffly, with military precision.

“Quick march.”

The officers took turns in marching the boys up and down the concrete parade ground. They ran, did setting up exercises over and over again. They were trotted around and around panting and sweating in the hot August sun.

At five o'clock they were brought back into the dining-hall. Parsons was there, waiting. The fish stew was still on the plates, cold and greasy. The boys sat down at his command and the superintendent said grace:

"Oh, Lord, for what we are about to receive may we be truly thankful. Amen."

Some of the boys hesitated for a moment. The superintendent was calm and firm and said:

"If you don't eat it now, you'll eat it in the morning. Now take your choice."

The boys ate the stew. There was a sullen silence in the dining-room. Parsons walked up and down between the tables, exulting.

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A stroke of bad luck dampened Parsons' victory over the boys. The boy whom he had struck and sent to solitary became ill and had to be taken to the Island infirmary. His nose was broken and two nights in solitary, in the damp and cold of the cellar, brought on pneumonia. The lad died.

The school report showed he developed pneumonia after a strenuous drill hour.

The parents were not satisfied with the official report; they demanded a post mortem, wrote letters to the papers, took the matter up with lawyers.

A newspaper sent a reporter over to the Island to apply for a job as a keeper. After two weeks on the Island a series of articles appeared. The boys had confided to the disguised newspaperman. For days following the story appeared on the front pages of the papers.

*"Secret and sensational charges of cruelty to boys, confined to the Island Reformatory in the East River, were filed with the board of trustees of the institution, it became known today. The investigation came as the result of the death of one of the boy inmates recently, who died, it is charged, as a result of an inhuman beating administered by one of the institution's officers.*

*"A thorough investigation of similar institutions is being urged by persons familiar with the treatment of juvenile delinquents at what one authority called 'so-called reformatories.'*

*"The lads were flogged with split rubber hose, felled by blows of their adult guards and supervisors and beaten into unconsciousness with clubs, the secret report shows. In addition to corporal punishment the officials of the Island still practice the method of 'stringing up,' it was learned yesterday.*

*"This form of punishment consists of isolating an offender in a*

*solitary confinement cell and handcuffing him to the bars in the door of the cell for periods ranging from twelve hours to one week. During the period of solitary confinement the boy is taken down for one hour at meal times when he is given bread and water:*

*“The report included testimony of mothers that their sons committed to the Island in good health emerged sick and broken as a result of mistreatment.*

*“One boy died of tuberculosis soon after leaving the Island, and his mother, an independent investigation by the Evening Mail disclosed, believes weakness caused by cruel treatment at the reformatory contributed to his death. . . .*

*“Constant harsh treatment and punishment of a sadistic nature have wrecked the morale of the boys committed to the institution, and fights among the youngsters and attacks on them by guards are reported to be frequent. The use of the straitjacket for disciplinary measures is known to be a constant practice at the school. . . .*

*“Corporal punishment in the institution is approved by law. . . .*

*“Reports of cruelty were borne out by at least one member of the staff of the institution. Edgar Mellish, assistant superintendent, said he expected to lose his job as a result of talking, but felt it would be worth while if the school could be cleaned up and the cruelty stopped. . . .*

*“‘This cruelty to the boys has almost driven me crazy,’ he said. ‘In my capacity of assistant superintendent I have witnessed boys beaten into insensibility with clubs and lengths of rubber hose. I have seen their bruised bodies and black eyes. I do not care if I am discharged. I have been a silent party to this too long.’”*

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*Editorial:*

*“The public’s neglect of institutions charged with the care of convicted juvenile delinquents is due to the fact that the inmates, for the most part, are mere children and this is a hard world for children at best. The adult offender against society is sent to prison, but he has friends outside, in some cases he has political pull, he has future earning power; but the inmates at the Island, it appears, were sent there by a thoughtless city which promptly forgot. How they have been treated has been dramatically brought to light as a result of*

*recent investigation which proves . . .”*

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*A columnist:*

*“A wit with a black eye yesterday offered this novel excuse: ‘I’ve been reformed.’”*

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*News item:*

*“. . . the following reports of brutal treatment on the part of officers at the reform institution are among those made public yesterday by the investigating body:*

*“A boy was thrown downstairs by a school officer during an angry brawl; an infuriated instructor kicked a boy and struck him with his fist; sufficient steps have not been taken to curb immoral practices among the boys; a boy was gouged with a sharp instrument by a school official in one of the work shops when he was slow in obeying an order; boys are confined to solitary cells and in some cases have been handcuffed to the bars of the metal door of the cell; that the straitjacket is employed for minor offenses; boys have been discharged from the institution in worse physical condition than they were in when they were admitted.*

*“A drastic shake-up is expected in the personnel of the institution, it was learned yesterday. . . .”*

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*A letter to the editor:*

*“Sir: The recent investigation of the Island Reformatory prompts me to write. I am a ‘graduate’ of this reformatory. That I am a law-abiding citizen is no fault of this institution. I was strong enough to resist the four years of inhuman treatment to which I was subjected. There is one feature of reformatory life which the investigating committee has overlooked and that is that the boys and youths at this and similar institutions are under constant surveillance; the boy has no privacy; acts of nature must be carried out under guard which brings about a perversion of his natural sense of decency. . . .*

*“It is difficult for one who has not been under the suspicious watchful eyes of a keeper to understand the psychological breakdown and the agony caused by being constantly watched. . . .*

*“This breeds in boys a hatred of all authority. It awakens in the*

*heart of the boy a fear and a distrust of everything. When I left the Island I carried with me the memory of a hard, cold pair of unsympathetic eyes following me wherever I went. It took a long time for me to forget.*

*“The bitterness caused by treatment of this nature explains to some extent why the ‘reformed’ boy is uncomfortable when he is released to a hard, unsympathetic outside world. It may also explain why so many lads revert to criminal associates. Perhaps it is because these former inmates can understand the necessity for human warmth, which God knows, they did not receive while they were being reformed. . . .”*

One day the members of the board of trustees visited the institution and conferred with Parsons.

The boys were drawn up on the drill grounds awaiting inspection by the distinguished guests. There was an undercurrent of suppressed excitement in the ranks as the boys waited for the meeting to end. They kept their eyes on the gray administration building as though they expected to see Parsons booted down the steps by the righteous looking gentlemen who had come over from Manhattan.

Officers, monitors and boys stood at attention and waited. Suddenly the door opened and Parsons accompanied by a group of smiling men descended the stone steps.

The chairman of the board, a paunchy little alderman, was introduced to the waiting ranks. He announced changes in the staff of the institution:

“. . . in a way this has been a good thing; we are going to get rid of the trouble-makers. Mr. Fink, head of the tinsmith shop will no longer be with you. Your assistant superintendent, Mr. Mellish, has also been relieved of his post. . . . I hope that you will now all stand behind your superintendent and show the sensational newspapers that this school has *esprit de corps*, a feeling of school loyalty. As I look into your happy faces I am convinced . . .”

One of the senior monitors stepped forward from the ranks, took his cap off and shouted:

“Three cheers for our board and for our superintendent!”

Cheering for distinguished guests was compulsory at the Island. The boys cheered.

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The last few days of August settled upon the Island leaving its inmates breathless

and scorched. The boys marched listlessly to the workshops, drilled under the white sun, tossed about on their beds. Night brought little relief. Sometimes a faint puff of hot wind came from the river.

The investigation was all over, the boys no longer talked about it. Discipline was tightened. Visiting days were temporarily suspended. Across the river the city forgot the Island scandal and turned its attention to other and new sensations.

During the past two years the dump had been creeping closer and closer. From time to time its smoking, smouldering surface burst into flame but these outbursts were subdued by the two high pressure hydraulic pumps at either end of the Island. The reek of the burning refuse permeated the institution, but when the flames were temporarily under control only the odor of creosote remained.

The visiting day before the investigation Margaret had come over to see Arthur. She now appeared to be old and shrunken, looking seventy despite her fifty years. Her hair had turned completely gray. Arthur felt that this was really not his mother; that when he was released he would go back to Red Hook and find his mother young, tall, upright with black shiny hair as he remembered her in the days before his father had died. Two years more. They would never pass, he thought, it was too long—two whole years. . . .

Arthur was now a member of the older boys' clique. There were the monitors, but he had refused to go through the period of toadying required for the job which carried with it a few privileges—smoking, staying up after the boys had gone to bed, the right to inflict summary corporal punishment on petty violators of school rules.

There were cliques on the Island which were formed with the basis of membership being the nature of the crime for which the offenders were committed; those sentenced for rape, burglary, Sullivan law violation and other adult crimes moved in a circle far superior to the common run of boys who had been committed for mere childish thieving, truancy, incorrigible behavior and juvenile delinquency.

The endless hours in the play-yard and in the dormitories were spent in discussing the technique of crime; how to pick a pocket, how to cut a purse and among the aristocracy how to make nitroglycerine "soup." In the face of this rigid suppression the lads sought escape in imaginary, romantic crimes. Sometimes at night two members of the supreme clique sleeping in adjacent beds talked in low tones:

"Aw, all dem guys is yellow."

"Yeah."

"Yuh stick a rod 'tween dere ribs an' dat takes all de fight outta dem . . ."

"De best way is t' woik fast . . . it takes dem 'bout fi' minutes to get dere guts back. . . ."

“Yeah, an’ always be on de up and up wid yer loiyer, den he knows wot t’ do. . . .”

“De best kind is Jew loiyers, dere de best. . . .”

“Whatyya mean—all loiyers is Jews. . . .”

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It was a hot night, the boys lay sleepless, irritated, waiting for the dawn, tossing from side to side.

The dump had lain silent for the past few weeks, a haze of steam hung over it as the hydraulic pumps poured thousands of gallons of water into its caverns of vegetable putrescence.

Midnight found some of the boys tossing in restless sleep, others spoke in undertones—waiting.

Suddenly a sustained volcanic roar shook the walls of the main building. Sheets of burning gas and liquid shot high into the air, came down upon the tar-covered roof. Other detonations followed. Geysers of flame shot up at various parts of the dump.

The boys leaped out of bed, ran to iron-screened windows and watched the spectacle with delight. Here was a break in monotony. Tongues of flame ran along the surface of the dump with incredible rapidity. The inside of the dormitory was smudged a deep red. The river a few hundred yards away reflected the gigantic fire, its black waters suddenly turned a dark red as though it were a running stream of molten metal.

The roof over the dormitory grew hotter and hotter. The tar roof had caught fire. One boy looked up and saw wisps of smoke curling from the ceiling.

“Fire!” the boy shrieked. “Fire!” His voice was insane with fright.

A group of boys ran to the heavy oak door which led out of the dormitory and down to the basement. They pounded vainly, shook the heavy iron knob. The smoke from the crevices in the ceiling curled downwards in thickening clouds.

Outside explosions shook the dump, threw blazing offal high into the air.

Across the grounds the administration building remained dark and silent.

At one corner of the dormitory the ceiling cracked open revealing a mass of flame.

Arthur and a group of older boys looked out of the barred windows in the direction of the administration building.

“Where the hell is that God-damned watchman . . . ?”

“Where’s the God-damned screws . . . ?”

“My God, we’ll be burned alive here. . . .”

The speaker's voice tapered off into a terrified whisper.

The shouting of the boys drowned out the thunder of the roaring fire outside. It was impossible to see the other side of the river—a heavy pall of smoke hung over the Island.

Arthur leaped on top of a bed, held his hands high and shouted for silence.

The monitor in charge was cringing near the door and crying: "My God, we'll all die here like rats. . . ."

"Listen," Arthur shouted at the top of his voice. "Hey, all you fellers—line up over here, come away from that corner where the roof's blazin'."

The boys obeyed.

The walls at the far end of the dormitory were smoking. Arthur started to take one of the metal beds apart. Others, sensing his motive, helped him. Soon the boys had several pieces of iron tied together with strips of blanket.

"All together now," Arthur shouted, "let's smash this door down. C'mon, you, take hold of this. Now, all together, up against the door."

The improvised battering ram smashed into the door. The door shook and splintered a little. The boys drew away and rammed the door again and again. It splintered here and there but refused to open.

Sounds were heard in the hallway on the other side of the door. In a moment a key scraped in the lock and the door swung open.

The night watchman stood facing the boys, behind him was Parsons with an automatic pistol in his hands. The boys faced him terrified and coughing, blinded with smoke. . . .

Arthur and three or four older boys faced the men. Parsons stepped forward, shouting orders:

"Get in line—here, you line up. Where the hell is the monitor in charge?"

The man entered the room to look for the monitor. He turned to the night watchman:

"How many boys are there supposed to be in this dormitory? C'mon, don't stand there like that—number them off."

In that moment Arthur stepped forward and swung his clenched fist between the superintendent's eyes. Parsons staggered, his automatic slipped from his hand. As the boys saw the superintendent fall they piled through the doorway and ran down the stairs towards the basement where their clothes were kept.

In the basement the boys hustled into their clothes and waited for orders. None of the officers were in sight. One of the junior monitors tried to give orders but his voice was lost in the shouting and scuffling. . . .

The boys were leaving the building and running towards the drill ground far from the blazing buildings. Arthur got into his khaki shirt and blue overalls and hurried out of the building. Most of the lads were huddled together near their various buildings waiting for orders. He ran past the administration building and through the gate leading down to the jetty where the ferry-boats landed. No one was in sight. Through the haze of smoke he saw the lights of Manhattan towering across the river. At his feet the water lapped enticingly.

“Two more years,” he said to himself. “God, I’ll never live through it—I can’t stand it.”

He thought of his mother, of his childhood days, of Parsons lying crumpled up at the head of the stairs leading to the dormitory. . . .

He stepped into the water and struck out towards Manhattan. He swam steadily for a few minutes. A little further upstream he saw a river fire-boat heading for the Island; behind it he saw a police boat loaded with men who looked into the water. Mounted on the bow of the boat was a machine-gun.

“Comin’ over,” Arthur thought, “t’ see that nobody escapes. . . .”

He dived under the water and swam towards some shadows. When he came up the boats were behind him, closer to the Island. After a few minutes he changed his stride, settling down to an easy-going breast stroke.

The water was cold and his teeth began to chatter. Manhattan still looked far away; he was half way across. Suddenly the mid-stream current caught him; he felt it pulling him downstream. For a moment his arms and legs weakened. He became giddy; in his desperation bright spots spattered before his eyes.

A sudden fear and fury seized him. After all those years on the Island, after all those years to be cheated here in the water—so close to freedom? He bit his lips. He treaded water and lifted his head as high as he could. On the other side the tall, illuminated buildings seemed to call to him. They seemed so serene; so sure of themselves. His face hardened. He clenched his teeth. To drown here like a river rat?

He looked behind him towards the Island; the buildings were ablaze and against the flames he saw white powerful streams of water pouring high into the air.

He hated the Island; he was glad it was burning down. With a sudden renewal of strength he plunged through the water. He hated the Island, and in a vague, hazy way he hated the city. He thought of the policemen, the probation officers, the judge who had sentenced him; Parsons, Fink, the solitary cell, the straitjackets—he hated them all.

It was this hatred which gave him strength to fight desperately against the

tugging, swirling waters. It was this hatred that carried him on and on.



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *A Child is Born* by Charles Yale Harrison]