

CALL IT SLEEP

HENRY ROTH

With an introduction by

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FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

NEW YORK

PROLOGUE

*(I pray thee ask no questions
this is that Golden Land)*

THE small white steamer, *Peter Stuyvesant*, that delivered the immigrants from the stench and throb of the steerage to the stench and the throb of New York tenements, rolled slightly on the water beside the stone quay in the lee of the weathered barracks and new brick buildings of Ellis Island. Her skipper was waiting for the last of the officials, laborers and guards to embark upon her before he cast off and started for Manhattan. Since this was Saturday afternoon and this the last trip she would make for the week-end, those left behind might have to stay over till Monday. Her whistle bellowed its hoarse warning. A few figures in overalls sauntered from the high doors of the immigration quarters and down the grey pavement that led to the dock.

It was May of the year 1907, the year that was destined to bring the greatest number of immigrants to the shores of the United States. All that day, as on all the days since spring began, her decks had been thronged by hundreds upon hundreds of foreigners, natives from almost every land in the world, the jowled close-cropped Teuton, the full-bearded Russian, the scraggly-whiskered Jew, and among them Slovak peasants with docile faces, smooth-cheeked and swarthy Armenians, pimply Greeks, Danes with wrinkled eyelids. All day her decks had been colorful, a matrix of the vivid costumes of other lands, the speckled green-and-yellow aprons, the flowered kerchief, embroidered homespun, the silver-braided sheepskin vest, the gaudy scarfs, yellow boots, fur caps, caftans, dull gabardines. All day the guttural, the high-pitched voices, the astonished cries, the gasps of wonder, reitera-

tions of gladness had risen from her decks in a motley billow of sound. But now her decks were empty, quiet, spreading out under the sunlight almost as if the warm boards were relaxing from the strain and the pressure of the myriads of feet. All those steerage passengers of the ships that had docked that day who were permitted to enter had already entered—except two, a woman and a young child she carried in her arms. They had just come aboard escorted by a man.

About the appearance of these late comers there was very little that was unusual. The man had evidently spent some time in America and was now bringing his wife and child over from the other side. It might have been thought that he had spent most of his time in lower New York, for he paid only the scantest attention to the Statue of Liberty or to the city rising from the water or to the bridges spanning the East River—or perhaps he was merely too agitated to waste much time on these wonders. His clothes were the ordinary clothes the ordinary New Yorker wore in that period—sober and dull. A black derby accentuated the sharpness and sedentary pallor of his face; a jacket, loose on his tall spare frame, buttoned up in a V close to the throat; and above the V a tightly-knotted black tie was mounted in the groove of a high starched collar. As for his wife, one guessed that she was a European more by the timid wondering look in her eyes as she gazed from her husband to the harbor, than by her clothes. For her clothes were American—a black skirt, a white shirt-waist and a black jacket. Obviously her husband had either taken the precaution of sending them to her while she was still in Europe or had brought them with him to Ellis Island where she had slipped them on before she left.

Only the small child in her arms wore a distinctly foreign costume, an impression one got chiefly from the odd, outlandish, blue straw hat on his head with its polka-dot ribbons of the same color dangling over each shoulder.

Except for this hat, had the three newcomers been in a crowd, no one probably, could have singled out the woman and child as newly arrived immigrants. They carried no sheets tied up in huge bundles, no bulky wicker baskets, no prized feather beds, no boxes of delicacies, sausages, virgin-olive oils, rare cheeses; the large black

satchel beside them was their only luggage. But despite this, despite their even less than commonplace appearance, the two overalled men, sprawled out and smoking cigarettes in the stern, eyed them curiously. And the old peddler woman, sitting with basket of oranges on knee, continually squinted her weak eyes in their direction.

The truth was there was something quite untypical about their behavior. The old peddler woman on the bench and the overalled men in the stern had seen enough husbands meeting their wives and children after a long absence to know how such people ought to behave. The most volatile races, such as the Italians, often danced for joy, whirled each other around, pirouetted in an ecstasy; Swedes sometimes just looked at each other, breathing through open mouths like a panting dog; Jews wept, jabbered, almost put each other's eyes out with the recklessness of their darting gestures; Poles roared and gripped each other at arm's length as though they meant to tear a handful of flesh; and after one pecking kiss, the English might be seen gravitating toward, but never achieving an embrace. But these two stood silent, apart; the man staring with aloof, offended eyes grimly down at the water—or if he turned his face toward his wife at all, it was only to glare in harsh contempt at the blue straw hat worn by the child in her arms, and then his hostile eyes would sweep about the deck to see if anyone else were observing them. And his wife beside him regarding him uneasily, appealingly. And the child against her breast looking from one to the other with watchful, frightened eyes. Altogether it was a very curious meeting.

They had been standing in this strange and silent manner for several minutes, when the woman, as if driven by the strain into action, tried to smile, and touching her husband's arm said timidly, "And this is the Golden Land." She spoke in Yiddish.

The man grunted, but made no answer.

She took a breath as if taking courage, and tremulously, "I'm sorry, Albert, I was so stupid." She paused waiting for some flicker of unbending, some word, which never came. "But you look so lean, Albert, so haggard. And your mustache—you've shaved."

His brusque glance stabbed and withdrew. "Even so."

"You must have suffered in this land." She continued

gentle despite his rebuke. "You never wrote me. You're thin. Ach! Then here in the new land is the same old poverty. You've gone without food. I can see it. You've changed."

"Well that don't matter," he snapped, ignoring her sympathy. "It's no excuse for your not recognizing me. Who else would call for you? Do you know anyone else in this land?"

"No," placatingly. "But I was so frightened, Albert. Listen to me. I was so bewildered, and that long waiting there in that vast room since morning. Oh, that horrible waiting! I saw them all go, one after the other. The shoemaker and his wife. The coppersmith and his children from Strij. All those on the Kaiserin Viktoria. But I—I remained. To-morrow will be Sunday. They told me no one could come to fetch me. What if they sent me back? I was frantic!"

"Are you blaming me?" His voice was dangerous.

"No! No! Of course not Albert! I was just explaining."

"Well then let me explain," he said curtly. "I did what I could. I took the day off from the shop. I called that cursed Hamburg-American Line four times. And each time they told me you weren't on board."

"They didn't have any more third-class passage, so I had to take the steerage—"

"Yes, now I know. That's all very well. That couldn't be helped. I came here anyway. The last boat. And what do you do? You refused to recognize me. You don't know me." He dropped his elbows down on the rail, averted his angry face. "That's the greeting I get."

"I'm sorry, Albert," she stroked his arm humbly. "I'm sorry."

"And as if those blue-coated mongrels in there weren't mocking me enough, you give them that brat's right age. Didn't I write you to say seventeen months because it would save the half fare! Didn't you hear me inside when I told them?"

"How could I, Albert?" she protested. "How could I? You were on the other side of that—that cage."

"Well why didn't you say seventeen months anyway? Look!" he pointed to several blue-coated officials who came hurrying out of a doorway out of the immigration quarters. "There they are." An ominous pride dragged at

his voice. "If he's among them, that one who questioned me so much, I could speak to him if he came up here."

"Don't bother with him, Albert," she exclaimed un-easily. "Please, Albert! What have you against him? He couldn't help it. It's his work."

"Is it?" His eyes followed with unswerving deliberation the blue-coats as they neared the boat. "Well he didn't have to do it so well."

"And after all, I did lie to him, Albert," she said hurriedly trying to distract him.

"The truth is you didn't," he snapped, turning his anger against her. "You made your first lie plain by telling the truth afterward. And made a laughing-stock of me!"

"I didn't know what to do." She picked despairingly at the wire grill beneath the rail. "In Hamburg the doctor laughed at me when I said seventeen months. He's so big. He was big when he was born." She smiled, the worried look on her face vanishing momentarily as she stroked her son's cheek. "Won't you speak to your father, David, beloved?"

The child merely ducked his head behind his mother.

His father stared at him, shifted his gaze and glared down at the officials, and then, as though perplexity had crossed his mind he frowned absently. "How old did he say he was?"

"The doctor? Over two years—and as I say he laughed."

"Well what did he enter?"

"Seventeen months—I told you."

"Then why didn't you tell them seventeen—" He broke off, shrugged violently. "Baah! You need more strength in this land." He paused, eyed her intently and then frowned suddenly. "Did you bring his birth certificate?"

"Why—" She seemed confused. "It may be in the trunk—there on the ship. I don't know. Perhaps I left it behind." Her hand wandered uncertainly to her lips. "I don't know. Is it important? I never thought of it. But surely father could send it. We need only write."

"Hmm! Well, put him down." His head jerked brusquely toward the child. "You don't need to carry him all the way. He's big enough to stand on his own feet."

She hesitated, and then reluctantly set the child down

on the deck. Scared, unsteady, the little one edged over to the side opposite his father, and hidden by his mother, clung to her skirt.

"Well, it's all over now." She attempted to be cheerful. "It's all behind us now, isn't it, Albert? Whatever mistakes I made don't really matter any more. Do they?"

"A fine taste of what lies before me!" He turned his back on her and leaned morosely against the rail. "A fine taste!"

They were silent. On the dock below, the brown hawsers had been slipped over the mooring posts, and the men on the lower deck now dragged them dripping from the water. Bells clanged. The ship throbbed. Startled by the hoarse bellow of her whistle, the gulls wheeling before her prow rose with slight creaking cry from the green water, and as she churned away from the stone quay skimmed across her path on indolent, scimitar wing. Behind the ship the white wake that stretched to Ellis Island grew longer, raveling wanly into melon-green. On one side curved the low drab Jersey coast-line, the spars and masts on the waterfront fringing the sky; on the other side was Brooklyn, flat, water-towered; the horns of the harbor. And before them, rising on her high pedestal from the scaling swamy brilliance of sunlit water to the west, Liberty. The spinning disk of the late afternoon sun slanted behind her, and to those on board who gazed, her features were charred with shadow, her depths exhausted, her masses ironed to one single plane. Against the luminous sky the rays of her halo were spikes of darkness roweling the air; shadow flattened the torch she bore to a black cross against flawless light—the blackened hilt of a broken sword. Liberty. The child and his mother stared again at the massive figure in wonder.

The ship curved around in a long arc toward Manhattan, her bow sweeping past Brooklyn and the bridges whose cables and pillars superimposed by distance, spanned the East River in diaphanous and rigid waves. The western wind that raked the harbor into brilliant clods blew fresh and clear—a salt tang in the lull of its veerings. It whipped the polka-dot ribbons on the child's hat straight out behind him. They caught his father's eye.

"Where did you find that crown?"

Startled by his sudden question his wife looked down.

"That? That was Maria's parting gift. The old nurse. She bought it herself and then sewed the ribbons on. You don't think it's pretty?"

"Pretty? Do you still ask?" His lean jaws hardly moved as he spoke. "Can't you see that those idiots lying back there are watching us already? They're mocking us! What will the others do on the train? He looks like a clown in it. He's the cause of all this trouble anyway!"

The harsh voice, the wrathful glare, the hand flung toward the child frightened him. Without knowing the cause, he knew that the stranger's anger was directed at himself. He burst into tears and pressed closer to his mother.

"Quiet!" the voice above him snapped.

Cowering, the child wept all the louder.

"Hush, darling!" His mother's protecting hands settled on his shoulders.

"Just when we're about to land!" her husband said furiously. "He begins this! This howling! And now we'll have it all the way home, I suppose! Quiet! You hear?"

"It's you who are frightening him, Albert!" she protested.

"Am I? Well, let him be quiet. And take that straw gear off his head."

"But Albert, it's cool here."

"Will you take that off when I—" A snarl choked whatever else he would have uttered. While his wife looked on aghast, his long fingers scooped the hat from the child's head. The next instant it was sailing over the ship's side to the green waters below. The overalled men in the stern grinned at each other. The old orange-peddler shook her head and clucked.

"Albert!" his wife caught her breath. "How could you?"

"I could!" he rapped out. "You should have left it behind!" His teeth clicked, and he glared about the deck.

She lifted the sobbing child to her breast, pressed him against her. With a vacant stunned expression, her gaze wandered from the grim smouldering face of her husband to the stern of the ship. In the silvery-green wake that curved trumpet-wise through the water, the blue hat still bobbed and rolled, ribbon stretched out on the waves. Tears sprang to her eyes. She brushed them away quickly, shook her head as if shaking off the memory, and looked

toward the bow. Before her the grimy cupolas and towering square walls of the city loomed up. Above the jagged roof tops, the white smoke, whitened and suffused by the slanting sun, faded into the slots and wedges of the sky. She pressed her brow against her child's, hushed him with whispers. This was that vast incredible land, the land of freedom, of immense opportunity, that Golden Land. Again she tried to smile.

"Albert," she said timidly, "Albert."

"Hm?"

"Gehen vir voinen du? In Nev York?"

"Nein. Bronzeville. Ich hud dir schoin geschriben."

She nodded uncertainly, sighed . . .

Screws threshing, backing water, the *Peter Stuyvesant* neared her dock—drifting slowly and with canceled momentum as if reluctant.

BOOK I

The Cellar

I

STANDING before the kitchen sink and regarding the bright brass faucets that gleamed so far away, each with a bead of water at its nose, slowly swelling, falling, David again became aware that this world had been created without thought of him. He was thirsty, but the iron hip of the sink rested on legs tall almost as his own body, and by no stretch of arm, no leap, could he ever reach the distant tap. Where did the water come from that lurked so secretly in the curve of the brass? Where did it go, gurgling in the drain? What a strange world must be hidden behind the walls of a house! But he was thirsty.

"Mama!" he called, his voice rising above the hiss of sweeping in the frontroom. "Mama, I want a drink."

The unseen broom stopped to listen. "I'll be there in a moment," his mother answered. A chair squealed on its castors; a window chuckled down; his mother's approaching tread.

Standing in the doorway on the top step (two steps led up into the frontroom) his mother smilingly surveyed him. She looked as tall as a tower. The old grey dress she wore rose straight from strong bare ankle to waist, curved round the deep bosom and over the wide shoulders, and set her full throat in a frame of frayed lace. Her smooth, sloping face was flushed now with her work, but faintly so, diffused, the color of a hand beneath wax. She had mild, full lips, brown hair. A vague, fugitive darkness blurred the hollow above her cheekbone, giving to her

face and to her large brown eyes, set in their white ovals, a reserved and almost mournful air.

"I want a drink, mama," he repeated.

"I know," she answered, coming down the stairs. "I heard you." And casting a quick, sidelong glance at him, she went over to the sink and turned the tap. The water spouted noisily down. She stood there a moment, smiling obscurely, one finger parting the turbulent jet, waiting for the water to cool. Then filling a glass, she handed it down to him.

"When am I going to be big enough?" he asked resentfully as he took the glass in both hands.

"There will come a time," she answered, smiling. She rarely smiled broadly; instead the thin furrow along her upper lip would deepen. "Have little fear."

With eyes still fixed on his mother, he drank the water in breathless, uneven gulps, then returned the glass to her, surprised to see its contents scarcely diminished.

"Why can't I talk with my mouth in the water?"

"No one would hear you. Have you had your fill?"

He nodded, murmuring contentedly.

"And is that all?" she asked. Her voice held a faint challenge.

"Yes," he said hesitantly, meanwhile scanning her face for some clue.

"I thought so," she drew her head back in dröhl disappointment.

"What?"

"It is summer," she pointed to the window, "the weather grows warm. Whom will you refresh with the icy lips the water lent you?"

"Oh!" he lifted his smiling face.

"You remember nothing," she reproached him, and with a throaty chuckle, lifted him in her arms.

Sinking his fingers in her hair, David kissed her brow. The faint familiar warmth and odor of her skin and hair.

"There!" she laughed, nuzzling his cheek, "but you've waited too long; the sweet chill has dulled. Lips for me," she reminded him, "must always be cool as the water that wet them." She put him down.

"Sometime I'm going to eat some ice," he said warningly, "then you'll like it."

She laughed. And then soberly, "Aren't you ever going down into the street? The morning grows old."

"Aaa!"

"You'd better go. Just for a little while. I'm going to sweep here, you know."

"I want my calendar first," he pouted, invoking his privilege against the evil hour.

"Get it then. But you've got to go down afterwards."

He dragged a chair over beneath the calendar on the wall, clambered up, plucked off the outworn leaf, and fingered the remaining ones to see how far off the next red day was. Red days were Sundays, days his father was home. It always gave David a little qualm of dread to watch them draw near.

"Now you have your leaf," his mother reminded him. "Come." She stretched out her arms.

He held back. "Show me where my birthday is."

"Woe is me!" She exclaimed with an impatient chuckle. "I've shown it to you every day for weeks now."

"Show me again."

She rumbled the pad, lifted a thin plaque of leaves. "July—" she murmured, "July 12th . . . There!" She found it. "July 12th, 1911. You'll be six then."

David regarded the strange figures gravely. "Lots of pages still," he informed her.

"Yes."

"And a black day too."

"On the calendar," she laughed, "only on the calendar. Now do come down!"

Grasping her arm, he jumped down from the chair. "I must hide it now." He explained.

"So you must. I see I'll never finish my work today."

Too absorbed in his own affairs to pay much heed to hers, he went over to the pantry beneath the cupboard, opened the door and drew out a shoe-box, his treasure chest.

"See how many I've got already?" he pointed proudly to the fat sheaf of crumpled leaves inside the box.

"Wonderful!" She glanced at the box in perfunctory admiration. "You peel off the year as one might a cabbage. Are you ready for your journey?"

"Yes." He put away the box without a trace of alacrity.

"Where is your sailor blouse?" she murmured looking

about. "With the white strings in it? What have I—?" She found it. "There is still a little wind."

David held up his arms for her to slip the blouse over his head.

"Now, my own," she said, kissing his reemerging face. "Go down and play." She led him toward the door and opened it. "Not too far. And remember if I don't call you, wait until the whistle blows."

He went out into the hallway. Behind him, like an eyelid shutting, the soft closing of the door winked out the light. He assayed the stairs, lapsing below him into darkness, and grasping one by one each slender upright to the banister, went down. David never found himself alone on these stairs, but he wished there were no carpet covering them. How could you hear the sound of your own feet in the dark if a carpet muffled every step you took? And if you couldn't hear the sound of your own feet and couldn't see anything either, how could you be sure you were actually there and not dreaming? A few steps from the bottom landing, he paused and stared rigidly at the cellar door. It bulged with darkness. Would it hold? . . . It held! He jumped from the last steps and raced through the narrow hallway to the light of the street. Flying through the doorway was like butting a wave. A dazzling breaker of sunlight burst over his head, swamped him in reeling blur of brilliance, and then receded . . . A row of frame houses half in thin shade, a pitted gutter, a yawning ashcan, flotsam on the shore, his street.

Blinking and almost shaken, he waited on the low stoop a moment, until his whirling vision steadied. Then for the first time, he noticed that seated on the curbstone near the house was a boy, whom an instant later, he recognized. It was Yussie who had just moved into David's house and who lived on the floor above. Yussie had a very red, fat face. His big sister walked with a limp and wore strange iron slats on one of her legs. What was he doing, David wondered, what did he have in his hands? Stepping down from the stoop, he drew near, and totally disregarded, stood beside him.

Yussie had stripped off the outer shell of an alarm-clock. Exposed, the brassy, geometric vitals ticked when prodded, whirled and jingled falteringly.

"It still c'n go," Yussie gravely enlightened him. David

sat down. Fascinated, he stared at the shining cogs that moved without moving their hearts of light. "So wot makes id?" he asked. In the street David spoke English.

"Kentcha see? Id's coz id's a machine."

"Oh!"

"It wakes op mine fodder in de mawning."

"It wakes op mine fodder too."

"It tells yuh w'en yuh sh'd eat an' w'en yuh have tuh go tuh sleep. It shows yuh w'en, but I tooked it off."

"I god a calenduh opsta's." David informed him.

"Puh! Who ain' god a calenduh?"

"I save mine. I godda big book outa dem, wit num-buhs on id."

"Who can't do dat?"

"But mine fodder made it," David drove home the one unique point about it all.

"Wot's your fodder?"

"Mine fodder is a printer."

"Mine fodder woiks inna joolery shop. In Brooklyn. Didja ever live in Brooklyn?"

"No." David shook his head.

"We usetuh—right near my fodder's joolery shop on Rainey Avenyuh. W'ea does your fodder woik?"

David tried to think. "I don't know." He finally confessed, hoping that Yussie would not pursue the subject further.

He didn't. Instead "I don' like Brownsville," he said. "I like Brooklyn bedder."

David felt relieved.

"We usetuh find cigahs innuh gudduh," Yussie continued. "An we usetuh t'row 'em on de ladies, and we usetuh run. Who you like bedder, ladies or gents?"

"Ladies."

"I like mine fodder bedder," said Yussie. "My mudder always holluhs on me." He pried a nail between two wheels. A bright yellow gear suddenly snapped off and fell to the gutter at his feet. He picked it up, blew the dust off, and rose. "Yuh want?"

"Yea," David reached for it.

Yussie was about to drop it into his outstretched palm, but on second thought, drew back. "No. Id's liddle like a penny. Maybe I c'n pud id inna slod machine 'n' gid gum. Hea, yuh c'n take dis one." He fished a larger gear out of

his pocket, gave it to David. "Id's a quarter. Yuh wanna come?"

David hesitated. "I godduh waid hea till duh wissle blows."

"W'a wissle?"

"By de fectory. All togedder."

"So?"

"So den I c'n go opstai's."

"So w'y?"

"Cuz dey blow on twelve a'clock an' den dey blow on five a'clock. Den I c'n go op."

Yussie eyed him curiously. "I'm gonna gid gum," he said, shrugging off his perplexity. "In duh slod machine." And he ambled off in the direction of the candy store on the corner.

Holding the little wheel in his hand, David wondered again why it was that every boy on the street knew where his father worked except himself. His father had so many jobs. No sooner did you learn where he was working than he was working somewhere else. And why was he always saying, "They look at me crookedly, with mockery in their eyes! How much can a man endure? May the fire of God consume them!" A terrifying picture rose in David's mind—the memory of how once at the supper table his mother had dared to say that perhaps the men weren't really looking at him crookedly, perhaps he was only imagining it. His father had snarled then. And with one sudden sweep of his arm had sent food and dishes crashing to the floor. And other pictures came in its train, pictures of the door being kicked open and his father coming in looking pale and savage and sitting down like old men sit down, one trembling hand behind him groping for the chair. He wouldn't speak. His jaws, and even his joints, seemed to have become fused together by a withering rage. David often dreamed of his father's footsteps booming on the stairs, of the glistening door-knob turning, and of himself clutching at knives he couldn't lift from the table.

Brooding, engrossed in his thoughts, engrossed in the rhythmic, accurate teeth of the yellow cog in his hand, the thin bright circles whirling restlessly without motion, David was unaware that a little group of girls had gathered in the gutter some distance away. But when they began

to sing, he started and looked up. Their faces were sober, their hands locked in one another; circling slowly in a ring they chanted in a plaintive nasal chorus:

"Waltuh, Waltuh, Wiuhlflowuh,
Growin' up so high;
So we are all young ladies,
An' we are ready to die."

Again and again, they repeated their burden. Their words obscure at first, emerged at last, gathered meaning. The song troubled David strangely. Walter Wildflower was a little boy. David knew him. He lived in Europe, far away, where David's mother said he was born. He had seen him standing on a hill, far away. Filled with a warm, nostalgic mournfulness, he shut his eyes. Fragments of forgotten rivers floated under the lids, dusty roads, fathomless curve of trees, a branch in a window under flawless light. A world somewhere, somewhere else.

"Waltuh, Waltuh, Wiuhlflowuh,
Growin' up so high,"

His body relaxed, yielding to the rhythm of the song and to the golden June sunlight. He seemed to rise and fall on waves somewhere without him. Within him a voice spoke with no words but with the shift of slow flame. . . .

"So we are all young ladies,
An' we are ready to die."

From the limp, uncurling fingers, the cog rolled to the ground, rang like a coin, fell over on its side. The sudden sound moored him again, fixed him to the quiet, suburban street, the curbstone. The inarticulate flame that had pulsed within him, wavered and went out. He sighed, bent over and picked up the wheel.

When would the whistle blow he wondered. It took long to-day. . . .

At last, he had been won over and finally growled his consent. "Talking won't help me," he said bitterly, "But don't blame me if anything goes wrong. Remember!"

It was some time in May that Aunt Bertha arrived, and the first thing that David thought when he saw her was that his father's sarcastic description had not been exaggerated. Aunt Bertha was distressingly homely. She had a mass of rebellious, coarse red hair, that was darker than a carrot and lighter than a violin. And the color of her teeth, if one had to decide upon it, was green. She used salt, she said—when she remembered. The first thing David's mother did was to buy her a tooth brush.

She had no figure and no vanity about her appearance. "Alas!" she said. "I look like one butter firkin on another."

A single crease divided fat fore-arm from pudgy hand. Her legs landed into her shoes without benefit of ankles. No matter what she wore, no matter how new or clean, she always managed to look untidy. "Pearl and cloth of gold would stink on me," she confessed.

Her ruddy skin always looked as if it were about to flake with sunburn. She perspired more than any woman David had ever seen. Compared to his mother, whose pale skin always had a glossy look that no heat seemed able to flush, his aunt's red face was like a steaming cauldron. As the weather grew warmer, she began using the largest men's handkerchiefs, and at home she always tied a napkin around her short throat. "The sweat tickles me at the bend," she explained.

On those infrequent occasions when his mother bought herself a dress, she sometimes frankly preferred to stand rather than sit down and wrinkle it. His aunt, on the contrary, made hers look like a limp rag so quickly that she would take her Sunday afternoon nap in a new dress to get over the feeling that she had to be solicitous about it.

Apart from their complete difference in appearance, David soon observed that his mother and Aunt were worlds apart in temperament. His mother was grave, attentive, mild in her speech: his aunt was merry, tart and ready-tongued. His mother was infinitely patient, careful about everything she did; his aunt was rebellious and scatter-brained.

"Sister," she would tease, "do you remember that Salt Sea that grandfather used to speak of—by Judah or by

Jordan, where-ever it was—no storms and it bore everything? That's how you are. You use all your salt for tears. Now a wise woman uses some of it for sharpness." Aunt Bertha used all of it.

III

ON a clear Sunday afternoon in July, David and his aunt set out together toward the Third Avenue Elevated. They were going to the Metropolitan Museum. Sweat runneled his aunt's cheeks, hung down from her chin, fell sometimes, spotting the bosom of her green dress. With her handkerchief, she slapped at the beads viciously as though they were flies and cursed the heat. When they reached the elevated, David was compelled to ask innumerable people what the right train was, and during the whole trip, she sent him forward to plague the conductor.

At 86th Street, they got off and after further inquiry walked west toward Fifth Avenue. The further they got from Third Avenue, the more aloof grew the houses, the more silent the streets. David began to feel uneasy at his aunt's loud voice and Yiddish speech both of which seemed out of place here.

"Hmml!" she marveled in resounding accents. "Not a single child on the street. Children, I see, are not in style in this portion of America." And after gaping about her. "Bah! It is quiet as a forest here. Who would want to live in these houses? You see that house?" She pointed at a red brick structure. "Just such a house did Baron Kobelien have, with just such shades. He was an old monster, the Baron, may he rot away! His eyes were rheumy, and his lips munched as though he were chewing a cud. He had a back as crooked as his soul." And in the role of the Baron, she tottered onto Fifth Avenue.

Before them, stood a stately white-stone edifice set in the midst of the green park.

"That must be it," she said. "So they described it to me at the shop."

But before they crossed the street, she decided to take her bearings and cautioned David to remember a certain brown-stone house with gabled roofs and iron railings before it. Thus assured of a certain return, they hurried across the avenue and stopped again at the foot of a flight of broad stairs that led up to a door. A number of people were going in.

"Whom shall we ask to make sure we are right?"

A short distance from the building stood a peanut-vender with his cart and whistling box. They walked over to him. He was a lean, swarthy fellow with black mustaches and bright eyes.

"Ask him!" she ordered.

"Is dat a museum?"

"Dotsa duh musee," he flickered his eyebrows at her while he spoke. "You go inna straight," he pushed out his chest and hips, "you come out all tire."

David felt his arm clutched; his aunt hurried him away.

"Kiss my arse," she flung over her shoulder in Yiddish; "What did that black worm say?"

"He said it was a museum."

"Then let's go in. The worst we can get is a kick in the rear."

His aunt's audacity scared him quite a bit, but there was nothing to do except follow her up the stairs. Ahead of them, a man and woman were on the point of entering the door. His aunt pressed his arm and whispered hastily.

"Those two people! They seem knowing. We'll follow them till they come out again, else we'll surely be lost in this stupendous castle!"

The couple before them passed through a turn-stile. David and his aunt did likewise. The others turned to the right and entered a room full of grotesque granite figures seated bolt upright upon granite thrones. They followed in their wake.

"We must look at things with only one eye," she cautioned him, "the other must always be on them."

And keeping to this plan, wherever their two unwitting guides strolled, his aunt and he tagged along behind. Now and then, however, when she was particularly struck by some piece of sculpture, they allowed their leaders to draw so far ahead that they almost lost them. This hap-

pened once when she stood gawking at the spectacle of a stone wolf suckling two infants.

"Woe is me!" Her tone was loud enough for the guard to knit his brows at her. "Who would believe it—a dog with babies! No! It could not have been!"

David had to pluck her dress several times and remind her that their companions had disappeared before she could tear herself away.

Again, when they arrived before an enormous marble figure seated on an equally huge horse, his aunt was so overcome that her tongue hung out in awe. "This is how they looked in the old days," she breathed reverently. "Gigantic they were, Moses and Abraham and Jacob, and the others in the earth's youth. Ai!" Her eyes bulged.

"They're going, Aunt Bertha," he warned. "Hurry, They're going away!"

"Who? Oh, may they burst! Won't they ever stop a moment! But come! We must cleave to them like mire on a pig!"

In this fashion, hours seemed to go by. David was growing weary. Their quarry had led them past miles and miles of armor, tapestries, coins, furniture and mummies under glass, and still they showed no sign of flagging. His aunt's interest in the passing splendors had long since worn off and she was beginning to curse her guides heartily.

"A plague on you," she muttered every time those walking ahead stopped to glance into a show case. "Haven't you crammed your eyes full yet! Enough!" She waved her sopping handkerchief. "May your heart burn the way my feet are burning!"

At last the man ahead of them stopped to tell one of the uniformed guards something. Aunt Bertha halted abruptly. "Hoorrah! He's complaining about our following him! God be praised! Let them kick us out now. That's all I ask!"

But alas, such was not the case; the guards paid no attention to them, but seemed instead to be giving the others directions of some kind.

"They're leaving now," she said with a great sigh of relief. "I'm sure he's telling them how to get out. What a fool I was not to have had you ask him myself. But

who would have known! Come, we may as well follow them out, since we've followed them in."

Instead of leaving, however, the man and woman, after walking a short distance, separated, one going into one door and one into another.

"Bahl!" Her rage knew no bounds. "Why they're only going to pee. Ach! I follow no longer. Ask that block-head in uniform, how one escapes this jungle of stone and fabric."

The guard directed them, but his directions were so involved that in a short space they were lost again. They had to ask another and still another. It was only by a long series of inquiries that they finally managed to get out at all.

"Phehl!" she spat on the stairs as they went down. "May a bolt shatter you to bits! If I ever walk up these stairs again, I hope I give birth to a pair of pewter twins!" And she yanked David toward their landmark.

His mother and father were home when they entered. His aunt sprawled into a chair with a moan of fatigue.

"You look as though you've stumbled into every corner of the world!" His mother seated him on her knee. "Where have you led the poor child, Bertha?"

"Led?" she groaned. "Where was I led you mean? We were fastened to a he and a she-devil with a black power in their legs. And they dragged us through a wilderness of man's work. A wilderness I tell you! And now I'm so weary, my breast seems empty of its heart!"

"Why didn't you leave when you had seen enough?"

She laughed weakly. "That place wasn't made for leaving. Ach, green rump that I am, the dirt of Austria is still under my toe-nails and I plunge into museums." She buried her nose under her arm-pit. "Phew, I reek!"

As always, when she indulged herself in some coarse expression or gesture, his father grimaced and tapped his foot.

"It serves you right," he said abruptly.

"Humph!" she tossed her head sarcastically.

"Yes!"

"And why?" Irritation and weariness were getting the better of her.

"A raw jade like yourself ought learn a little more before she butts into America."

"My cultivated American!" she drawled, drawing down the corners of her under lip in imitation of the grim curve on the face of her brother-in-law. "How long is it since you shit on the ocean?"

"Chops like those," he glowered warningly, "deserve to drop off."

"That's what I say, but they're not mine."

The ominous purple vein began to throb on his temple. "To me you can't talk that way," his eyelids grew heavy.

"Save that fishwives' lip for your father, the old glutton!"

"And you, what have you—"

"Bertha!" his mother broke in warningly. "Don't!"

Aunt Bertha's lips quivered rebelliously a moment and she reddened as though she had throttled a powerful impulse to blurt out something.

"Come, you're all worn out," continued his mother gently. "Why don't you lie down for a little space while I make you some dinner."

"Very well," she answered and flounced out of the room.

IV

"HERE is a man," Aunt Bertha said vehemently to her sister, "who drives a milk wagon and mingles with pedlars and truckmen, who sits at a horse's tail all morning long, and yet when I say—what! When I say nothing! Nothing at all!—he begins to tap his feet or rustle his newspaper as though an ague were upon him! Did anyone ever hear of the like? He's as squeamish as a newly-minted nun. One is not even permitted to fart when he's around!"

"You're making the most of Albert's absence, aren't you?" his mother asked.

"And why not? I don't have much opportunity to speak my mind when he's around. And what's more, it won't

knew. It took a great deal of patience. He had tried that method of collecting lollipop sticks himself, but it had proved too tedious. Anyway he didn't really have to do it. He happened to be bright enough to avoid punishment, and could read Hebrew as fast as anyone, although he still didn't know what he read. Translation, which was called Chumish, would come later.

"Yowooee!" The cry came from overhead this time. They looked up. Shai'h and Toik, the two brothers who lived on the third floor back had climbed out on their fire-escapes. They were the only ones in the cheder privileged to enter the yard via the fire-escape ladders—and they made the most of it. The rest watched enviously. But they had climbed down only a few steps, when again the cry, and now from a great height—

"Yowooee!"

Everyone gasped. It was Wildy and he was on the roof!

"I tol' yuh I wuz gonna comm down higher den dem!" With a triumphant shout he mounted the ladder and with many a flourish climbed down.

"Gee, Wildy!" they breathed reverently—all except the two brothers and they eyed him sullenly.

"We'll tell de janitor on you."

"I'll smack yuh one," he answered easily, and turning to the rest. "Yuh know wad I c'n do if one o' youz is game. I betcha I c'n go up on de fawt' flaw an' I betcha I c'n grab hol' from dat wash-line an' I betcha I c'n hol' id till sommbody pulls me across t' de wash-pole an I betcha I c'n comm down!"

"Gee, Wildy!"

"An' somm day I'm gonna stott way over on Avenyuh C an' jump all de fences in de whole two blocks!"

"Geel!"

"Hey, guys, I'm goin' in." Izzy had won the last of the pointers. "C'mon, I'm gonna give 'im."

"How many yuh god?" They trooped after him.

"Look!" There was a fat sheaf of them in his hand. They approached the reading table. The rabbi looked up.

"I've got pointers for you, rabbi," said Izzy in Yiddish.

"Let me see them," was the suspicious answer. "Quite a contribution you're making."

Izzy was silent.

"Do you know my pointers were stolen yesterday?"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, where did you get these?"

"I won them."

"From whom?"

"From everybody."

"Thieves!" he shook his hand at them ominously.

"Fortunately for you I don't recognize any of them."

IV

TWO months had passed since David entered the cheder. Spring had come and with the milder weather, a sense of wary contentment, a curious pause in himself as though he were waiting for some sign, some seal that would forever relieve him of watchfulness and forever insure his well-being. Sometimes he thought he had already beheld the sign—he went to cheder; he often went to the synagogue on Saturdays; he could utter God's syllables glibly. But he wasn't quite sure. Perhaps the sign would be revealed when he finally learned to translate Hebrew. At any rate, ever since he had begun attending cheder, life had leveled out miraculously, and this he attributed to his increasing nearness to God. He never thought about his father's job any longer. There was no more of that old dread of waiting for the cycle to fulfill itself. There no longer seemed to be any cycle. Nor did his mother ever appear to worry about his father's job; she too seemed reassured and at peace. And those curious secrets he had gleaned long ago from his mother's story seemed submerged within him and were met only at reminiscent street-corners among houses or in the brain. Everything unpleasant and past was like that, David decided, lost within one. All one had to do was to imagine that it wasn't there, just as the cellar in one's house could be conjured away if there were a bright yard between the hallway and the cellar-stairs. One needed only a bright yard. At times David almost believed he had found that brightness.

It was a few days before Passover. The morning had been so gay, warmer and brighter than any in the sheaf of Easter just past. Noon had been so full of promise—a leaf of Summer in the book of Spring. And all that afternoon he had waited, restless and inattentive, for the three o'clock gong to release him from school. Instead of blackboards, he had studied the sharp grids of sunlight that brindled the red wall under the fire-escapes; and behind his tall geography book, had built a sail of a blotter and pencil to catch the mild breeze that curled in through the open window. Miss Steigman had caught him, had tightly puckered her lips (the heavy fuzz about them always darkened when she did that) and screamed:

"Get out of that seat, you little loafer! This minute! This very minute! And take that seat near the door and stay there! The audacity!" She always used that word, and David always wondered what it meant. Then she had begun to belch, which was what she always did after she had been made angry.

And even in his new seat, David had been unable to sit still, had fidgeted and waited, fingered the grain of his desk, stealthily rolled the sole of his shoe over a round lead pencil, attempted to tie a hair that had fallen on his book into little knots. He had waited and waited, but now that he was free, what good was it? The air was darkening, the naked wind was spinning itself a grey conch of the dust and rubbish scooped from the gutter. The street-cleaner was pulling on his black rain-coat. The weather had cheated him, that's all! He couldn't go anywhere now. He'd get wet. He might as well be the first one in the cheder. Disconsolately, he crossed the street.

But how did his mother know this morning it was going to rain? She had gone to the window and looked out, and then she said, the sun is up too early. Well what if it—Wheel!

Before his feet a flat sheet of newspaper, driven by a gust of damp wind, whipped into the air and dipped and fluttered languidly, melting into sky. He watched it a moment and then quickened his step. Above store windows, awnings were heaving and bellying upward, rattling. Yelling, a boy raced across the gutter, his cap flying before him.

"Wow! Look!" The shout made him turn around.

"Shame! Shame! Everybody knows your name." A chorus of boys and girls chanted emphatically. "Shame! Shame! Everybody knows your name."

Red and giggling a big girl was thrusting down the billow of her dress. Above plump, knock-kneed legs, a glimpse of scalloped, white drawers. The wind relenting, the dress finally sank. David turned round again, feeling a faint disgust, a wisp of the old horror. With what prompt spasms the mummified images in the brain started from their niches, aped former antics and lapsed. It recalled that time, way long ago. Knish and closet. Puh! And that time when two dogs were stuck together. Puh! Threw water that man. Shame! Shame!

"Sophe-el!" Above him the cry. "Sophe-el!"

"Ye-es mama-a!" from a girl across the street.

"Comm opsteht! Balt!"

"Awaal!"

"Balt or I'll give you! Nooo!"

With a rebellious shudder, the girl began crossing the street. The window slammed down.

Pushing a milk-stained, rancid baby carriage before them, squat buttocks waddled past, one arm from somewhere dragging two reeling children, each hooked by its hand to the other, each bouncing against the other and against their mother like tops, flagging and whipped. A boy ran in front of the carriage. It rammed him.

"Ow! Kencha see wea yuh goin?" He rubbed his ankle.

"Snott nuzz! Oll—balt a frosk, Oll—givel!"

"Aaa! Buzjwa!"

A drop of rain spattered on his chin.

—It's gonna—

He flung his strap of books over his shoulder and broke into a quick trot.

—Before I get all wet.

Ahead of him, flying toward the shore beyond the East River, shaggy clouds trooped after their van. And across the river the white smoke of nearer stacks was flattened out and stormy as though the stacks were the funnels of a flying ship. In the gutter, wagon wheels trailed black ribbons. Curtains overhead paddled out of open windows. The air had shivered into a thousand

shrill, splintered cries, wedged here and there by the sudden whoop of a boy or the impatient squawk of a mother. At the doorway to the cheder corridor, he stopped and cast one lingering glance up and down the street. The black sidewalks had cleared. Rain shook out wan tresses in the gathering dark. Against the piebald press of cloud in the craggy furrow of the west, a lone flag on top of a school-steeple blew out stiff as a key. In the shelter of a doorway, across the gutter, a cluster of children shouted in monotone up at the sky:

"Rain, rain, go away, come again some oddeh day. Rain, rain, go away, come again some oddeh day. Rain, rain—"

He'd better go in before the rest of the rabbi's pupils came. They'd get ahead of him otherwise. He turned and trudged through the dim battered corridor. The yard was gloomy. Wash-poles creaked and swayed, pulleys jangled. In a window overhead, a bulky, bare-armed woman shrilled curses at someone behind her and hastily hauled in the bedding that straddled the sills like bulging sacks.

"And your guts be plucked!" her words rang out over the yard. "Couldn't you tell me it was raining?"

He dove through the rain, skidded over the broken flagstones and fell against the cheder door. As he stumbled in, the rabbi, who was lighting the gas-jet, looked around.

"A black year befall you!" he growled. "Why don't you come in like a man?"

Without answering, he sidled meekly over to the bench beside the wall and sat down. What did he yell at him for? He hadn't meant to burst in that way. Gee! The growing gas-light revealed another pupil in the room whom he hadn't noticed before. It was Mendel. His neck swathed in white bandages, sickly white under the bleary yellow flicker of gas, he sat before the reading table, head propped by elbows. Mendel was nearing his bar-mitzvah but had never learned to read chumish because he had entered the cheder at a rather late age. He was lucky, so every one said, because he had a carbuncle on the back of his neck which prevented him from attending school. And so all week long, he had arrived first at the cheder. David wondered if he dared sit down beside him. The rabbi looked angry. However, he decided to venture it and crawled

quietly over the bench beside Mendel. The pungent reek of medicine pried his nostrils.

—Peeuh! It stinks!

He edged away. Dull-eyed, droopy-lipped, Mendel glanced down at him and then turned to watch the rabbi. The latter drew a large blue book from a heap on the shelf and then settled himself on his pillowed chair.

"Strange darkness," he said, squinting at the rain-chipped window. "A stormy Friday."

David shivered. Beguiled by the mildness of noon, he had left the house wearing only his thin blue jersey. Now, without a fire in the round-bellied stove and without other bodies to lend their warmth to the damp room, he felt cold.

"Now," said the rabbi stroking his beard, "this is the 'Haftorah' to Jethro—something you will read at your bar mitzvah, if you live that long." He wet his thumb and forefinger and began pinching the top of each page in such a way that the whole leaf seemed to wince from his hand and flip over as if fleeing of its own accord. David noted with surprise that unlike the rabbi's other books this one had as yet none of its corners lopped off. "It's the 'Sedrah' for that week," he continued, "and since you don't know any chumish, I'll tell you what it means after you've read it." He picked up the pointer, but instead of pointing to the page suddenly lifted his hand.

In spite of himself, Mendel contracted.

"Ach!" came the rabbi's impatient grunt. "Why do you spring like a goat? Can I hit you?" And with the blunt end of the pointer, he probed his ear, his swarthy face painfully rippling about his bulbous nose into the margins of his beard and skull-cap. He scraped the brown clot of wax against the table leg and pointed to the page. "Begin, Beshnos mos."

"Beshnos mos hamelech Uziyahu vaereh es adonoi," Mendel swung into the drone.

For want of anything better to do, David looked on, vying silently with Mendel. But the pace soon proved too fast for him—Mendel's swift sputter of gibberish tripped his own laggard liping. He gave up the chase and gazed vacantly at the rain-chipped window. In a house across the darkened yard, lights had been lit and blurry figures moved before them. Rain strummed on the roof, and once

or twice through the steady patter, a muffled rumble filtered down, as if a heavy object were being dragged across the floor above.

—Bed on wheels. Upstairs. (His thoughts rambled absently between the confines of the drone of the voice and the drone of the rain.) Gee how it's raining. It won't stop. Even if he finishes, I can't go. If he read chumish, could race him, could beat him I bet. But that's because he has to stop . . . Why do you have to read chumish? No fun . . . First you read, Adonoi elahenoo abababa, and then you say, And Moses said you mustn't, and then you read some more abababa and then you say, mustn't eat in the traife butcher store. Don't like it any way. Big brown bags hang down from the hooks. Ham. And all kinds of grey wurst with like marbles in 'em. Peeuh! And chickens without feathers in boxes, and little bunnies in that store on First Avenue by the elevated. In a wooden cage with lettuce, and rocks, they eat too, on those stands. Rocks all colors. They bust 'em open with a knife and shake out ketchup on the snot inside. Yich! and long, black, skinny snakes. Peeuh! Goyim eat everything . . .

"Veeshma es kol adonoi omair es mi eshlach." Mendel was reading swiftly this afternoon. The rabbi turned the page. Overhead that distant rumbling sound.

—Bed on wheels again . . . But how did Moses know? Who told him? God told him. Only eat kosher meat, that's how. Mustn't eat meat and then drink milk. Mama don't care except when Bertha was looking! How she used to holler on her because she mixed up the meat-knives with the milk-knives. It's a sin. . . . So God told him eat in your own meat markets . . . That time with mama in the chicken market when we went. Where all the chickens ran around—cuckacucka—when did I say? Cucka. Gee! Funny. Some place I said. And then the man with a knife went zing! Eee! Blood and wings. And threw him down. Even kosher meat when you see, you don't want to eat—

"Enough!" The rabbi tapped his pointer on the table.

Mendel stopped reading and slumped back with a puff of relief.

"Now I'll tell you a little of what you read, then what it means. Listen to me well that you may remember it. Beshnas mos hamelech." The two nails of his thumb and forefinger met. "In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah

saw God. And God was sitting on his throne, high in heaven and in his temple—Understand?" He pointed upward.

Mendel nodded, grimacing as he eased the bandage round his neck.

—Gee! And he saw Him. Wonder where? (David, his interest aroused, was listening intently. This was something new.)

"Now!" resumed the rabbi. "Around Him stood the angels, God's blessed angels. How beautiful they were you yourself may imagine. And they cried: Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh—Holy! Holy! Holy! And the temple rang and quivered with the sound of their voices. Sol!" He paused, peering into Mendel's face. "Understand?"

"Yeh," said Mendel understandingly.

—And angels there were and he saw 'em. Wonder if—

"But when Isaiah saw the Almighty in His majesty and His terrible light—Woe me! he cried, What shall I do! I am lost!" The rabbi seized his skull-cap and crumpled it. "I, common man, have seen the Almighty, I, unclean one have seen him! Behold, my lips are unclean and I live in a land unclean—for the Jews at that time were sinful—"

—Clean? Light? Wonder if—? Wish I could ask him why the Jews were dirty. What did they do? Better not! Get mad. Where? (Furtively, while the rabbi still spoke David leaned over and stole a glance at the number of the page.) On sixty-eight. After, maybe, can ask. On page sixty-eight. That blue book—Gee! it's God.

"But just when Isaiah let out this cry—I am unclean—one of the angels flew to the altar and with tongs drew out a fiery coal. Understand? With tongs. And with that coal, down he flew to Isaiah and with that coal touched his lips—Here!" The rabbi's fingers stabbed the air. "You are clean! And the instant that coal touched Isaiah's lips, then he heard God's own voice say, Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? And Isaiah spoke and—"

But a sudden blast of voices out doors interrupted him. Running feet stamped across the yard. The door burst open. A squabbling tussling band stormed the doorway, jamming it. Scuffling, laughing boisterously, they shoved each other in, yanked each other out—

"Leggo!"

"Leggo me!"

budged, sounded hollow. Again he braced himself, thrust—
Clank!

Wedged between the shoulder of the can and the cellar grill, the long, grey, milk-dipper clattered to the ground. He stooped to pick it up—

"Tadam, padam, pam! Thew! Thew! He had to get under, get out and get under—" With a jaunty, swaggering stride and nasal hum and toothy whistle, a tall, square-shouldered man drew abreast. "To fix up his little machine!" Between cap and black shirt, frosty green-blue eyes winked down at David, turned away, and passing, left their chill fire lingering in the air. "Pam! Pam! Prra! To fix up his little machine!"

The coast was clear now. Across the street, the children were shrieking with excitement. David picked up the dipper, crept out of the store entrance, and with the scoop of the dipper under his armpit, long, flat handle in his hand, he slunk quickly toward Tenth Street—

"Wolf are yuh ready!" their voices pursued him.

"I'm co-o-o-o-omin'—down—duh—st-o-o-op!"

—Goin'! I'm goin', winder! Winder! Winder! I'm goin'!

Uphill, the faint slope, steep to aching legs, he ran, avoiding the careless glance of the few who noticed. Tenth Street. A street car crossed the Avenue, going west. The river wind blew straight and salt between a flume of houses. He swung sharply into it, entered the river-block, dimlit, vacant. Ahead of him, like a barrier, the one beer-saloon, swinging door clamped in a vise of light, the mottled stained-glass window bulging with a shoddy glow.

—Somebody'll see.

He skulked in the shadows against the rough wall of the iron-works, crept forward. In the ebb of river-wind, the faint bitter flat beer spread round him. Gone in the quick neaping of wind—A man knuckles to mustache, flung back the swing-door—whirred reiteration of bar and mirror, bottles, figures, aprons—David slunk past him into deeper shadow.

And now the old wagon-yard, the lifted thicket of tongues; the empty stables, splintered runways, chalked doors, the broken windows holding still their glass like fangs in the sash, exhaling manure-damp, rank. The last street lamp droning in a cyst of light. The gloomy, massive

warehouse, and beyond it, the strewn chaos of the dump heap stretching to the river. He stopped. And where a shadowy cove sank between warehouse wall and dump heap, retreated.

—Yuh dared me . . . Yuh double-dared me . . . Now I gotta.

The tracks lay before him—not in double rows now but in a single yoke. For where he stood was just beyond the fork of the switch, and the last glitter on the tines lapsed into rust and rust into cobbles and cobbles merged with the shadowy dock and the river.

—Scared! Scared! Scared! Don't look!

He plucked his gaze away, tossed frenzied eyes about him. To the left, the chipped brick wall of the warehouse shut off the west and humanity, to the right and behind him, the ledge of the dump heap rose; before him land's end and the glitter on the rails.

—Yuh dared me . . . Yuh double-dared me . . . Now I gotta. I gotta make it come out.

The small sputter of words in his brain seemed no longer his own, no longer cramped by skull, but detached from him, the core of his surroundings. And he heard them again as though all space had compelled them and were shattered in the framing, and they boomed in his ears, vast, delayed and alien.

—Double-dared me! Now I gotta! Double-dared me! Now I gotta make it come out.

XXI

INSIDE the Royal Warehouse, located on the East River and Tenth Street, Bill Whitney, an old man with a massive body, short-wind and stiff, rheumatic legs, toiled up the stairway to the first floor. In his left hand, he held a lantern, which in his absent-mindedness, he jogged from time to time to hear the gurgle of its fuel. In his right hand, clacking on the bannister at each upward reach of his arm, he held a key—the key he turned the clocks

with on every floor of the building—the proof of his watch and wakefulness. As he climbed the swart stairs, stained with every upward step by shallow, rocking lantern-light, he muttered, and this he did not so much to populate the silence with ephemeral, figment selves, but to follow the links of his own slow thinking, which when he failed to hear, he lost:

"And wut? Haw! Ye looked down—and—sssl! By Gawd if there weren't the dirt-rud under ye. And. Ha! Ha! Haw! No wheels. Them pedals were there—now weren't they? Saw 'em as clear—as clear—but the wheels gone—no—where. By Gawd, thinks I— Now by Gawst, ain't it queer? Old Ruf Gilman a'standin' there, a'standin' and a'gappin'. Jest a'standin' and a'gappin' as plain— And the whiskers he grewed afore the winter . . . By the well with the white housing. A'savin' his terbaccer juice till he had nigh a cupful . . . Whawmmmm! Went plumb through the snaw in the winter . . ."

*Resounded, surged and resounded, like
ever swelling breakers:*

*—Double! Double! Double dared mel
Where there's light in the crack,
yuh dared me. Now I gotta.*

In the blue, smoky light of Callahan's beer-saloon, Callahan, the pale fattish bar-keep jammed the dripping beer-tap closed and leaned over the bar and snickered. Husky O'Toole—he, the broad-shouldered one with the sky-blue eyes—dominated those before the bar (among them, a hunchback on crutches with a surly crimp to his mouth, and a weazened coal-heaver with a sooty face and bright eye-balls) and dwarfed them. While he spoke they had listened, grinning avidly. Now he threw down the last finger of whiskey, nodded to the bar-tender, thinned his thin lips and looked about.

"Priddy wise mug!" Callahan prompted filling his glass.

"Well." O'Toole puffed out his chest. "He comes up fer air, see? He's troo. Now, I says, now I'll tell yuh sompt'n about cunt— He's still stannin' be de fawge, see, wit' his wrench in his han'. An I says, yuh like udder t'ings, dontcha? Waddayuh mean, he says. Well, I says, yuh got religion, aintcha? Yea, he says. An' I says, yuh play de ponies, dontcha? Yea, he says. An' yuh like yer booze, dontcha? Sure, he says. Well I says, none o'

dem fer me! Waddayuh mean, he says. Well, I says, yuh c'n keep yer religion, I says. Shit on de pope, I says— I wuz jis' makin' it hot—an' t'hell witcher ponies I says— I bets on a good one sometimes, but I wuzn' tellin' him—an' w'en it comès t' booze I says, shove it up yer ass! Cunt fer me, ev'ytime I says. See, ev'ytime!"

They guffawed. "Yer a card!" said the coal heaver. "Yer a good lad!"

*As though he had struck the enormous bell
of the very heart of silence, he
stared round in horror.*

"Gaw blimy, mate!" Jim Haig, oiler on the British tramp Eastern Greyhound, (now opposite the Cherry Street pier) leaned over the port rail to spit. "I ain't 'ed any fish 'n' chips since the day I left 'ome. W'y ain't a critter thought of openin' a 'omely place in New York—Coney Island fer instance. Loads o' prawfit. Taik a big cod now—"

*Now! Now I gotta. In the crack,
remember. In the crack be born.*

"Harrh! There's nights I'd take my bible-oath, these stairs uz higher." On the first floor, Bill Whitney stopped, gazed out of the window that faced the East River. "Stinkin' heap out there!" And lifting eyes above the stove-in enameled pots, cracked washtubs, urinals that glimmered in the black snarl, stared at the dark river striped by the gliding lights of a boat, shifted his gaze to the farther shore where scattered, lighted windows in factories, mills were caught like sparks in blocks of soot, and moved his eyes again to the south-east, to the beaded bridge. Over momentary, purple blossoms, down the soft incline, the far train slid like a trickle of gold. Behind and before, sparse auto headlights, belated or heralding dew on the bough of the night. "And George a'gappin' and me a'hollerin' and a'techin the ground with the toe of my boot and no wheels under me. Ha! Ha! Mmm! Wut cain't a man dream of in his sleep . . . A wheel . . . A bike . . ." He turned away seeking the clock. "And I ain't been on one . . . not sence . . . more'n thirty-five . . . forty years. Not since I uz a little shaver . . ."

*Clammy fingers traced the sharp edge of
the dipper's scoop. Before his eyes
the glitter on the car tracks whisked . . .
reversed . . . whisked . . .*

"Say, listen O'Toole dere's a couple o' coozies in de back." The bar-keep pointed with the beer knife. "Jist yer speed!"

"Balls!" Terse O'Toole retorted. "Wudjah tink I jist took de bull-durham sack off me pecker fer—nuttin'? I twisted all de pipes I wanna w'en I'm pissin'!"

"No splinters in dese boxes, dough. Honest, O'Toole! Real clean—"

"Let 'im finish, will ye!" the hunchback interrupted sourly. "O'Toole don' have to buy his gash."

"Well, he says, yea. An' I says yea. An' all de time dere wuz Steve an' Kelly unner de goiders belly-achin'—Hey trow us a rivet. An' I sez—"

—*Nobody's commin'!*

Klang! Klang! Klang! Klang! Klang!

The flat buniony foot of Dan MacIntyre the motorman pounded the bell. Directly in front of the clamorous car and in the tracks, the vendor of halvah, candied-peanuts, leechee nuts, jellied fruits, dawdled, pushing his push-cart leisurely. Dan MacIntyre was enraged. Wasn't he blocks and blocks behind his leader? Hadn't his conductor been slow as shit on the bell? Wouldn't he get a hell of a bawling out from Jerry, the starter on Avenue A? And here was this lousy dago blocking traffic. He'd like to smack the piss out of him, he would. He pounded the bell instead.

Leisurely, leisurely, the Armenian pedlar steered his cart out of the way. But before he cleared the tracks, he lifted up his clenched fist, high and pleasantly. In the tight crotch of his forefingers, a dirty thumb peeped out. A fig for you, O MacIntyre.

"God damn yuh!" He roared as he passed. "God blast yuh!"

—*So go! So go! So go!*

But he stood as still and rigid as

if frozen to the wall, frozen fingers

clutching the dipper.

"An' hawnest t'Gawd, Mimi, darlin'." The Family Entrance to Callahan's lay through a wide alley way lit by a red lamp in the rear. Within, under the branching, ten-drilled chandelier of alum-bronze, alone before a table beside a pink wall with roach-brown mouldings, Mary, the crockery-cheeked, humid-eyed swayed and spoke, her

voice being maudlin, soused and reedy. Mimi, the crockery-cheeked, crockery-eyed, a smudged blonde with straw-colored hair like a subway seat, slumped and listened. "I was that young an' innercent, an' hawnest t' Gawd, that straight, I brought it t' the cashier, I did. And, Eeee! she screams and ducks under the register, Eeee! Throw it away, yuh boob! But what wuz I t'know—I wuz on'y fifteen w'en I wuz a bus-goil. They left it on a plate—waa, the mugs there is in de woild—an' I thought it wuz one o' them things yuh put on yer finger w'en ye git a cut—"

"A cut, didja say, Mary, dea'?" The crockery cheeks cracked into lines.

"Yea a cut— a cu— Wee! Hee! Hee! Hee! Hee! Mimi, darlin' you're comical! Wee! Hee! Hee! Hee! But I wuz that young an' innercent till he come along. Wee! Hee! Hee! Hawnes' t' Gawd I wuz. I could piss troo a beer-bottle then—"

Out of the shadows now, out on the dimlit, vacant street, he stepped down from the broken curb-stone to the cobbles. For all his peering, listening, starting, he was blind as a sleep-walker, he was deaf. Only the steely glitter on the tracks was in his eyes, fixed there like a brand, drawing him with cables as tough as steel. A few steps more and he was there, standing between the tracks, straddling the sunken rail. He braced his legs to spring, held his breath. And now the wavering point of the dipper's handle found the long, dark, grinning lips, scraped, and like a sword in a scabbard—

"Oy, Schmaihe, goy! Vot luck! Vot luck! You should only croak!"

"Cha! Cha! Cha! Dot's how I play mit cods!"

"Bitt him vit a flush! Ai, yi, yi!"

"I bet he vuz mit a niggerteh last night!"

"He rode a dock t' luzno maw jock—jeck I shidda said. Cha! Cha!"

"He's a poet, dis guy!"

"A putz!"

"Vus dere a hura mezda, Morr's?"

"Sharrop, bummer! Mine Clara is insite!"

Plunged! And he was running! Running!

"Nutt'n'? No, I says, nutt'n'. But every time I sees a pretty cunt come walkin' up de street, I says, wit' a mean shaft an' a sweet pair o' knockers, Jesus, O'Toole, I says, dere's a mare I'd radder lay den lay on. See wot I mean? Git a bed under den a bet on. Git me?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw! Bejeeziz!"

"Ya! Ha! He tella him, you know? He lika de fica stretta!"

They looked down at the lime-streaked, overalled wop condescendingly, and—

"Aw, bulloney," he says, "Yeah, I says. An' booze, I says, my booze is wut I c'n suck out of a nice tit, I says. Lallal'mmm, I says. An' w'en it comes t' prayin', I says, c'n yuh tell me anyt'ing bedder t' pray over den over dat one!" O'Toole hastily topped the laugh with a wave of his hand. "Yer an at'eist, yuh fuck, he hollers. A fuckin' at'eist I says— An' all de time dere wuz Steve and Kelly unner de goiders hollerin', hey trow us a riv—"

*Running! But no light overtook him,
no blaze of intolerable flame. Only
in his ears, the hollow click of iron
lingered. Hollow, vain. Almost within
the saloon-light, he slowed down, sobbed
aloud, looked behind him—*

"But who'd a thunk it?" Bill Whitney mounted the stairs again. "By Gawd, who'd a thunk it? The weeks I'd held that spike for 'im . . . Weeks . . . And he druv and never a miss . . . Drunk? Naw, he warn't drunk that mornin'. Sober as a parson. Sober. A'swingin' of the twelve pound like a clock. Mebbe it was me that nudged it, mebbe it war me . . . By Gawd, I knowed it. A feelin' I had seein' that black sledge in the air. Afore it come down, I knowed it. A hull damned country-side it might of slid into. And it had to be me . . . Wut? It wuz to be? That cast around my leg? A pig's tit! It wuz to—"

Like a dipped metal flag or a grotesque armored head scrutinizing the cobbles, the dull-gleaming dipper's scoop stuck out from between the rail, leaning sideways.

—Didn't. Didn't go in. Ain't lit. Go back.

He turned—slowly.

—No—body's—look—

"Bawl? Say, did I bawl? Wot else'd a kid've done w'en her mont'ly don' show up—Say! But I'll get even with you, I said, I'll make a prick out of you too, like you done t' me. You wait! You can't get away with that. G'wan, he said, ye little free-hole, he called me. Wott're ye after? Some dough? Well, I ain't got it. That's all! Now quit hangin' aroun' me or I'll s-smack ye one! He said."

"Where d'ja get it?"

"I borreed it—it wuzn't much. She called herself a m-mid-wife. I went by m-meself. My old-huhu—my old l-lady n-never—O Jesus!" Tears rilled the glaze.

"Say—toin off de tap, Mary, f'Gawd's sake!"

"Aw! Sh-hu-hu-shut up! Can't I b-bawl if I—I—uh-hu-hu—G-go p-peddle yer h-hump, h-he says—"

"But not hea', Mary, fr the lova Pete. We all gets knocked up sometimes—"

—Horry op! Horry op back!

"They'll betray us!" Into the Tenth Street Crosstown car, slowing down at Avenue A, the voice of the pale, gilt-spectacled, fanatic face rang out above all other sounds: above the oozy and yearning "Open the door to Jesus" of the Salvation Army singing in the park; above the words of the fat woman swaying in the car as she said, "So the doctor said cut out all meat if you don't want gall-stones. So I cut out all meat, but once in a while I fried a little boloney with eggs—how I love it!" Above the muttering of the old grey-bearded Jewish pedlar (he rocked his baby carriage on which pretzels lay stacked like quoits on the upright sticks) "Founder of the universe, why have you tethered me to this machine? Founder of the universe, will I ever earn more than water for my buckwheat? Founder of the universe!" Above the even enthusiasm of the kindly faced American woman: "And do you know, you can go all the way up inside her for twenty-five cents. For only twenty-five cents, mind you! Every American man, woman and child ought to go up inside her, it's a thrilling experience. The Statue of Liberty is—"

*—He stole up to the dipper warily,
on tip—*

"Shet up, down 'ere, yuh bull-faced harps, I says, wait'll I'm troo! Cunt, I says, hot er snotty 'zuh same t' me. Dis gets 'em' hot. Dis gets em hot I sez. One look at me, I says, an yuh c'n put dat rivet in yer ice-box—t'ings 'll keep! Yuh reams 'em out with dat he says—kinda snotty like. Shit no, I says I boins 'em out. W'y dontcha trow it t'dem, he ays, dey're yellin' fer a rivet. Aaa, I don' wanna bust de fuckin' goider I says. Yer pretty good, he says. Good, I says, didja ever see dat new tawch boinin' troo a goider er a flange er any fuck'n' hunka iron—de spa'ks wot goes shootin' down—? Didja? Well dat's de way 'I comes. Dey tol' me so. An' all de time dere wuz Steve and Kelly unner de goiders havin' a shit-hemorrhage an' yellin' hey, t'row—"

*toe, warily, glancing over his
shoulders, on tip-toe, over serried
cobbles, cautious—*

"Wuz t' be. And by Gawd it might hev gone out when I went to bed a' suckin' of it. By Gawd it hed no call t' be burnin'. . . . Wuz to be—Meerscham, genuwine. Thankee I said. Thankee Miz Taylor. And I stood on the backstairs with the ice-tongs. Thankee and thank the Doctor . . . Boston, the year I—Haw, by Gawd. And the hull damn sheet afire. And Kate ascreamin' beside me . . . Gawd damn it! It hadn't ought to 'a' done it . . . A'lookin' at me still now . . . A'stetchin' of her neck in the white room . . . in the hospital—"

*As though his own tread might shake the
slanting handle loose from its perch
beneath the ground. And now, and—*

"Why not? She asks me. Pullin' loaded dice on Lefty. The rat! He can't get away with that y'know. I know, Mag, I said. It'd do my heart good to see a knife in his lousy guts—only I gotta better idee. What? She asks me. Spill it. Spill it is right, I says t' her. I know a druggist-felleh, I said, good friend o' mine. O yea, she looks at me kinda funny. Croak him with a dose o'—No! I said. No poison. Listen Mag. Throw a racket up at your joint, will ye? Give him an invite. He'll come. And then let me fix him a drink. And I winks at her. Dintcha ever hear o' the Spanish Fly—"

*over it now, he crouched,
stretched out a hand to*

"They'll betray us!" Above all these voices, the speaker's voice rose. "In 1789, in 1848, in 1871, in 1905, he who has anything to save will enslave us anew! Or if not enslave will desert us when the red cock crows! Only the laboring poor, only the masses embittered, bewildered, betrayed, in the day when the red cock crows, can free us!"

*lift the dipper free. A sense almost
palpable, as of a leashed and imminent
and awful force.*

"You're de woist fuckin' liar I ever seen he sez an' ducks over de goiders."

*focused on his hand across the hair-
breadth*

"Yuh god mor'n a pair o' sem'ns?"

*gap between his fingers and the
scoop. He drew*

"It's the snug ones who'll preach it wuz to be."

back, straightened. Carefully bal—

"So I dropped it in when he was dancin'—O heel! Heel! Mimi! A healthy dose I—"

anced on his left, advance—

"Yeah. I sez, take your pants off."

ed his right foot—

Crritlkt!

—What?

*He stared at the river, sprang away
from the rail and dove into the shadows.*

"Didja hear 'im, Mack? De goggle-eyed yid an' his red cock?"

*The river? That sound! That sound
had come from there. All his senses
stretched toward the dock, grappled with
the hush and the shadow. Empty . . . ?*

"Swell it out well with batter. Mate, it's a bloomin' goldmine! It's a cert! Christ knows how many chaps can be fed off of one bloody cod—"

*Yes . . . empty. Only his hollow nos-
trils sifted out the stir in the
quiet; The wandering river-wind seamed
with thin scent of salt*

"An' he near went crazy! Mimi I tell ye, we near bust, watchin—"

*decay, flecked with clinging coal-tar—
Crrritlkt!*

"Can't, he sez, I got a tin-belly."

*—It's— Oh— It's—it's! Papa. Nearly
like. It's—nearly like his teeth.*

*Nothing . . . A barge on a slack hawser or
a gunwale against the dock chirping
because a*

"I'll raise it."

boat was passing.

—Papa like nearly.

Or a door tittering to and fro in the wind.

"Heaz a can-opener fer ye I sez."

Nothing. He crept back.

"Hemm. These last durn stairs."

*And was there, over the rail. The
splendor shrouded in the earth, the
titan, dormant in his lair, disdain-
ful. And his eyes*

"Runnin' heel heel heel Across the lots heel heel
jerkin' off."

lifted

"An' I picks up a rivet in de tongs an' I sez—"

*and there was the last crossing of
Tenth Street, the last cross—*

"Heazuh flowuh fer yea, yellor-belly, shove it up yer
ass!"

ing, and beyond, beyond the elevateds,

"How many times'll your red cock crow, Pete, befaw
y' gives up? T'ree?"

as in the pit of the west, the last

"Yee! heel! Mary, joikin'—"

smudge of rose, staining the stem of

"Nawthin' t' do but climb—"

the trembling, jagged

"Show culluh if yuh god beddeh!"

chalice of the night-taut stone with

"An' I t'rows de fuck'n' rivet."

the lees of day. And his toe crooked into

the dipper as into a stirrup. It

grated, stirred, slid, and—

"Dere's a star fer yeh! Watch it! T'ree Kings I god. Dey
came on huzzbeck! Yee! Hee Hee! Mary! Nawthin' to do

but wait fer day light and go home. To a red cock
crowin'. Over a statue of. A jerkin'. Cod. Clang! Clang!
Oyl Machine! Liberty! Revolt! Redeem!"

Power

*Power! Power like a paw, titanic power,
ripped through the earth and slammed
against his body and shackled him
where he stood. Power! Incredible,
barbaric power! A blast, a siren of light
within him, rending, quaking, fusing his
brain and blood to a fountain of flame,
vast rockets in a searing spray! Power!
The hawk of radiance raking him with
talons of fire, battering his skull with
a beak of fire, braying his body with
pinions of intolerable light. And he
writhed without motion in the clutch of
a fatal glory, and his brain swelled
and dilated till it dwarfed the galaxies
in a bubble of refulgence—Recoiled, the
last screaming nerve clawing for survival.
He kicked—once. Terrific rams of dark-
ness collided; out of their shock space
toppled into havoc. A thin scream wobbled
through the spirals of oblivion, fell like
a brand on water, his-s-s-s-ed—*

"W'at?"

"W'ut?"

"Va-at?"

"Gaw blimey!"

"W'atsa da ma'?"

The street paused. Eyes, a myriad of eyes, gay or
sunken, rheumy, yellow or clear, slant, blood-shot, hard,
boozy or bright swerved from their tasks, their play, from
faces, newspapers, dishes, cards, seidels, valves, sewing
machines, swerved and converged. While at the foot of
Tenth Street, a quaking splendor dissolved the cobbles, the
grimy structures, bleary stables, the dump-heap, river and
sky into a single cymbal-clash of light. Between the livid
jaws of the rail, the dipper twisted and bounced, con-
sumed in roaring radiance, candescent—

"Hey!"

"Jesus!"

"Give a look! Id's rain—"

"Shawt soicit, Mack—"

"Mary, w'at's goin'—"

"Schloimec, a blitz like—"

"Hey mate!"

On Avenue D, a long burst of flame spurted from underground, growled as if the veil of earth were splitting. People were hurrying now, children scooting past them, screeching. On Avenue C, the lights of the trolley-car waned and wavered. The motorman cursed, feeling the power drain. In the Royal Warehouse, the blinking watchman tugged at the jammed and stubborn window. The shriveled coal-heaver leaned unsteadily from between the swinging door—blinked, squinted in pain, and—

"Holy Mother O' God! Look! Will yiz!"

"Wot?"

"There's a guy layin' there! Burrhnin'!"

"Naw! Where!"

"Gawd damn the winder!"

"It's on Tent' Street! Look!"

"O'Toole!"

The street was filled with running men, faces carved and ghostly in the fierce light. They shouted hoarsely. The trolley-car crawled forward. Up above a window slammed open.

"Christ, it's a kid!"

"Yea!"

"Don't touch 'im!"

"Who's got a stick!"

"A stick!"

"A stick, fer Jesus sake!"

"Mikel! The shovel! Where's yer fuck'n' shov—"

"Back in Call—"

"Oy sis a kind—"

"Get Pete's crutch! Hey Petel!"

"Aaal Who touched yer hump, yuh gimpty fu—"

"Do sompt'n! Meester! Meester!"

"Yuh crummy bastard, I saw yuh sneakin'—" The hunchback whirled, swung away on his crutches. "Fuck yiz!"

"Oy! Oy vail! Oy vail! Oy vail!"

"Git a cop!"

"An embittance—go cull-oy!"

"Don't touch 'im!"

"Bambino! Madre mia!"

"Mary. It's jus' a kid!"

"Helftz! Helftz! Helftz Yeedin! Rotivit!"

A throng ever thickening had gathered, confused, paralyzed, babbling. They squinted at the light, at the outstretched figure in the heart of the light, tossed their arms, pointed, clawed at their cheeks, shoved, shouted, moaned—

"Hi! Hi down there! Hi!" A voice bawled down from the height. "Look out below! Look out!"

The crowd shrank back from the warehouse.

W-w-whack!

"It's a—"

"You take it!"

Grab it!"

"Gimme dat fuck'n' broom!"

"Watch yerself, O'Toole!"

"Oy, a good men! Got should—"

"Oooo! De pore little kid, Mimi!"

"He's gonna do it!"

"Look oud!"

"Dunt touch!"

The man in the black shirt, tip-toed guardedly to the rails. His eyes, screwed tight against the awful glare, he squinted over his raised shoulder.

"Shove 'im away!"

"Go easy!"

"Look oddal!"

"Atta boy!"

"Oy Gottinyool!"

The worn, blackened broom straws wedged between the child's shoulder and the cobbles. A twist of the handle. The child rolled over on his face.

"Give 'im anudder shove!"

"At's it! Git 'im away!"

"Quick! Quick!"

Once more the broom straws rammed the outstretched figure. He slid along the cobbles, cleared the tracks. Someone on the other side grabbed his arm, lifted him, carried him to the curb. The crowd swirled about in a dense, tight eddy.

"Oy! Givalt!"

"Gib'm air!"

"Is 'e boined?"

"Bennee stay by me!"

"Is 'e boined! Look at his shoe!"

"Oy, de pooh mama! De pooh mama!"

"Who's kid?"

"Don' know, Mack!"

"Huz pushin'?"

"Jesus! Take 'im to a drug-store."

"Naa, woik on 'im right here. I woiked in a power house!"

"Do sompt'n! Do sompt'n!"

The writhing dipper was now almost consumed. Before the flaring light, the weird white-lipped, staring faces of the milling throng wheeled from chalk to soot and soot to chalk again—like masks of flame that charred and were rekindled; and all their frantic, gnarling bodies cut a darting splay of huge, impinging shadow, on dump-heap, warehouse, river and street—

Klang! The trolley drew up.

"Oyee! Ers to! Ers to-i-t! Oye-e-e-el" A woman screamed, gagged, fainted.

"Hey! Ketch 'er!"

"Schleps aveck!"

"Wat d' hell'd she do dat fer—"

"Vawdehl!"

They dragged her away on scuffing heels to one side.

"Shit!" The motorman had jumped down from the car and seized the broom—

"Fan 'er vid de het!"

"Git off me feet, you!"

"At's it! Lean on 'im O'Toole! Push 'im down! At's it! At's it! I woiked in a power house—"

And with the broom straws the motorman flipped the mangled metal from the rail. A quake! As if leviathan leaped for the hook and fell back threshing. And darkness.

Darkness!

They grunted, the masses, stood suddenly mute a moment, for a moment silent, stricken, huddled, crushed by the pounce of ten-fold night. And a voice spoke, strained, shrunken, groping—

"Ey, paizon! She 'sa whita yet—lika you looka da slacka lime alla time! You know?"

Someone shrieked. The fainting woman moaned. The crowd muttered, whispered, seething uneasily in the dark, welcomed the loud newcomers who pierced the dense periphery—

"One side! One side!" Croaking with authority, the stone-grim uniformed one shouldered his way through. "One side!"

"De cops!"

"Dun't step on 'im!"

"Back up youz! Back up! Didja hea' me, Moses? Back up! Beat it! G'wan!" They fell back before the perilous arc of the club. "G'wan before I fan yiz! Back up! Let's see sompt'n' in hea'! Move! Move, I say!" Artificial ire flung the spittle on his lips. "Hey Georgel!" He flung at a burly one. "Give us a hand hea, will yiz!"

"Sure! Git back you! Pete! Git that other side!"

The policeman wheeled round, squatted down beside the black-shirted one. "Don' look boined."

"Jist his shoe."

"How long wuz he on?"

"Christ! I don't know. I came ouda Callahan's an' de foist t'ing I know somebody lams a broom out of a winder, an' I grabs it an' shoves 'im off de fuck'n t'ing—"

"Sh! Must a done it himself— Naa! Dat ain't de way! Lemme have 'im." He pushed the other aside, turned the child over on his face. "Foist aid yuh gits 'em hea." His bulky hands all but encompassed the narrow waist. "Like drownin', see?" He squeezed,

Khrr-r-r-r-fl S-s-s-s.

"I hoid 'im!"

"Yeah!"

"He's meckin' him t' breed!"

"See? Gits de air in 'im."

Khrr-r-r-r-fl S-s-s-s.

"Looks like he's gone, do. W'ere de hell's dat am-billance?"

"Vee culled id a'reddy, Ufficehl!"

"Arhl!"

"Rap 'im on de feet arficer, I woiked in a power—"

Khrr-r-r-r-fl S-s-s-s

"Anybody know 'im? Any o' youz know dis kid?"
The inner and the craning semi-circle muttered blankly.
The policeman rested his ear against the child's back.
"Looks like he's done fer, butchuh can't tell—"

Khír-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

"He sez he's dead, Mary."

"Dead!"

"Oy! Toit!"

"Gott sei donk, id's nod mine Elix—"

Khír-r-r-f. S-s-s-s.

"Sit im helfin vie a toitin bankis." The squat shirt-sleeved Jew whose tight belt cut his round belly into the letter B turned to the lime-streaked wop—squinted, saw that communication had failed. "It'll help him like cups on a cawps," he translated—and tapped his chest with an ace of spades.

Khír-r-r-f. S-s-s-s.

(E-e-e-e. E-e-e-e.)

One ember fanned . . . dulling . . . uncertain

"Here's the damned thing he threw in, Cap." The motorman shook off the crowd, held up the thinned and twisted metal.

"Yea! Wot is it?"

"Be damned if I know. Hot! Jesus!"

Khír-r-r-f. S-s-s.

(E-e-e-e.)

Like the red pupil of the eye of darkness, the ember dilated, spun like a pinwheel, expanding, expanding, till at the very core, a white flaw rent the scarlet tissue and spread, engulfed the margin like a stain—

"Five hundred an' fifty volts. What a wallop!"

"He's cooked, yuh t'ink?"

"Yea. Jesus! What else!"

"Unh!" The policeman was grunting now with his efforts.

Kh-í-r-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

"Hey, Meester, maybe he fell on id—
De iron—"

"Sure, dot's righd!"

"Id's f'om de compeny de fault!"

"Ass, how could he fall on it, fer the love O Jesus!"
The motor-man turned on them savagely.

"He could! Id's easy!"

"Id vuz stink—stick—sticken oud!"

"He'll sue, dun' vorry!"

"Back up, youz!"

Khír-r-r-f! S-s-s.

(Eee-e-e-e)

*And in the white, frosty light within
the red iris, a small figure slanted
through a desolate street, crack-paved,
rut-guttered, slanted and passed, and
overhead the taut, wintry wires whined
on their crosses—*

E-e-e-e-e.

They whined, spanning the earth and sky.

—Go-d-d-b! Go-o-o-ob! G-o-o-b! G'bye! . . .

"Makin' a case fer a shyster. C'n yuh beat it!"

"Ha-a-ha! Hunh!"

"I'm late. Dere it is." The motorman dropped the
gnarled and blackened dipper beside the curb.

"An Irisher chuchim!"

"Ain't it a dirty shame—"

"Noo vud den!"

"Wat's happened, chief?"

"Dere give a look!"

"Let's git troo derel!"

"Unh!"

Kh-í-r-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

(—G'by-e-e. Mis-s-s-l-e. M-s-ter. Hi-i-i-i.)

Wo-o-o-d.

*And a man in a tugboat, hair under
arm-pits, hung from a pole among the
wires, his white undershirt glittering.
He grinned and whistled and with every
note yellow birds flew to the roof.)*

"T'ink a shot o' sompt'n' 'll do 'im any good?"

"Nuh! Choke 'im if he's alive."

"Yeh! If hiz alifel!"

"W'ea's 'e boined?"

"Dey say id's de feet wid de hen's wid eveytingk."

"Unh!"

Khír-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

(We-e-e-e)

*The man in the wires stirred. The
Wires twanged brightly. The blithe*

and golden cloud of birds filled the sky.)

"Unh!"

(Klang!

The milk tray jangled. Leaping he neared. From roof-top to roof-top, over streets, over alley ways, over areas and lots, his father soared with a feathery ease. He set the trays down, stooped as if searching, paused—)

"Unh!"

(A hammer! A hammer! He snarled, brandished it, it snapped like a whip. The birds vanished. Horror thickened the air.)

"Unh!"

"He's woikin' hard!"

"Oy! Soll im Gott helfin!"

"He no waka."

(Around him now, the cobbles stretched away. Stretched away in the swirling dark like the faces of a multitude aghast and frozen)

"Unh!"

(W-e-e-e-e-pl Weep! Overhead the brandished hammer whirled and whistled. The doors of a hallway slowly opened. Buoyed up by the dark, a coffin drifted out, floated down the stoop, and while confetti rained upon it, bulged and billowed—)

"Unh!"

Khi-r-r-r-rf! S-s-s-s-

(—Zwank! Zwank! Zwank!

The man in the wires writhed and groaned, his slimy, purple chicken-guts slipped through his fingers. David touched his lips. The soot came off on his hand. Unclean. Screaming, he turned to flee, seized a wagon wheel to climb upon it. There were no spokes—only cogs like a clock-wheel. He screamed again, beat

the yellow disk with his fists.)

"Unh!"

Kh-i-r-r-rf! S-s-s-s.

"Didja see it?"

"See it? Way up on twelft'!"

"I could ivin see id in de houze—on de cods."

"Me? I vas stand in basement—fok t'ing mack blind!"

"Five hundred an' fifty volts."

(As if on hinges, blank, enormous mirrors arose, swung slowly upward face to face. Within the facing glass, vast panels deployed, lifted a steady wink of opaque pages until an endless corridor dwindled into night.)

"Unh! Looks Jewish t' me."

"Yeah, map o' Jerusalem, all right."

"Poor bastard! Unh!"

"Couldn't see him at foist!"

"Unh!"

Kh-i-r-r-rf! S-s-s-s.

("You!" Above the whine of the whirling hammer, his father's voice thundered. "You!"

David wept, approached the glass, peered in. Not himself was there, not even in the last and least of the infinite mirrors, but the cheder wall, the cheder)

"Junheezis!"

Kh-i-r-r-rf! S-s-s-s.

(Wall sunlit, white-washed. "Chadgodya!" moaned the man in the wires. "One kid one only kid." And the wall dwindled and was a square of pavement with a footprint in it—half green, half black, "I too have trodden there." And shrank within the mirror, and the cake of ice melted in the panel beyond. "Eternal years," the voice wailed, "Not even he.")

"Unh!"

"Gittin' winded? Want me to try it?"

"Nunh!"

"Look at 'im sweat!"

"Vy not? Soch a coat he's god on!"

"Wot happened, brother?"

"Cheh! He esks yet!"

"Back up, you!"

"Unh!"

Kh-i-r-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

(And faded, revealing a shoe box full of calendar leaves, "the red day must come.")

"Unh! Did he move or sumpt'n?"

"Couldn't see."

(which lapsed into a wooden box with a sliding cover like the chalk-boxes in school, whereon a fiery figure sat astride a fish. "G-e-e-e o-o-o d-e-e-e-l" The voice spelled out. And shrank and was a cube of sugar gripped be-)

"Unh!"

Kh-i-r-r-r-f! S-s-s-s.

"Shah! Y'hea id?"

"W'a?"

"Yea! It's commin'!"

"Id's commin'!"

"I sees it!"

"Meester Politsman de—"

"Back up, youz!"

A faint jangle seeped through the roar of the crowd.

"Unh!"

(tween the softly glowing tongs. "So wide we stretch no further—" But when he sought to peer beyond, suddenly the mirrors shifted, and—

"Go down!" his father's voice thundered, "Go down!" The mirrors lay beneath him now; what were the groins now jutted out in stairs, concentric ogives, bottomless steps. "Go down! Go down!" The inexorable voice beat like a hand upon his back. He screamed, de—)

Jangle! Angle! Angle! Angle!

"Dere! It's comin'!"

"Look! Look hod dere!"

"Orficer!"

Angle! Jangl

"Christ's about time!"

The crowd split like water before a prow, reformed in the wake, surged round the ambulance, babbling, squall—

(scended. Down! Down into darkness, darkness that tunneled the heart of darkness, darkness fathomless. Each step he took, he shrank, grew smaller with the unseen panels, the graduate vise descending, passed from stage to dwindling stage, dwindling. At each step shed the husks of being, and himself tapering always downward in the funnel of the night. And now a chip—a step—a flake—a step—a shred. A mote. A pinpoint. And now the seed of nothing, and nebulous nothing, and nothing, And he was not. . . .)

ing, stabbing the dark with hands. "Ppprrr!" Lips flickered audibly as the blue-coat rose. With one motion, palm wiped brow, dug under sweat-stained collar. Softly bald, the bareheaded, white garbed interne hopped spryly from the ambulance step, black bag swinging in hand, wedged whitely through the milling crowd. Conch-like the mob surrounded, contracted, trailed him within the circle, umbiliform—

"Lectric shot; Doc!"

"De hospitall!"

"Knocked him cold!"

"Shock?"

"Zee dead?"

"Yea, foolin' aroun' wid de—"

"Shawt soicited it, Doc!"

"Yea, boined!"

"Vee sin id Docteh!"

"Git back, youz!" The officer crouched, snarled, but never sprang. "I'll spit right in yer puss!"

"Mmm!" The interne pinched the crease of his trousers, pulled them up, and kneel—

"Guess yuh better take 'im witchuh, Doc. Couldn't do a goddam t'ing wit—"

"He's gonna hea' de heart! See?"

(But—)

ing beside the beveled curbstone, applied his ear to the narrow breast.

"Shoe's boined. See it, Doc?"

(the voice still lashed the nothingness that was, denying it oblivion. "Now find! Now find! Now find!" And nothingness whimpered being dislodged from night, and would have hidden again. But out of the darkness, one ember)

"Take it off, will you, let's have a look at it."

(flowered, one ember in a mirr—)

"Sure!" Blunt, willing fingers ripped the *(or, swimming without motion in the motion of its light.)*

buttons open,

"Hiz gonna look."

(In a cellar is)

dragged the shoes off,

(Coal! In a cellar is)

tore the stocking down, re—

(Coal! And it was brighter than the pith of lightning and milder than pearl,)

vealing a white puffy ring about the ankle, at *(And made the darkness dark because the dark had culled its radiance for that jewel. Zwank!)*

"Is it boined?"

"Can't see, c'n you?"

which the interne glanced while he drew

"Waddayuh say, Doc?"

a squat blue vial from his bag, grimaced, un-

(Zwank! Zwank! Nothingness beatified reached out its hands. Not cold the ember was. Not scorching. But as if all eternity's caress were fused and granted in one instant. Silence)

corked it, expertly tilted it before

(struck that terrible voice upon the height, stilled the whirling hammer. Horror and the night fell away. Exalted, he lifted his head and screamed to him among the wires— "Whistle, mister! Whistle!)

the quiet nostrils. The crowd fell silent, tensely watching.

"Amonya."

"Smells strong!"

"Stinks like in de shool on Yom Kippur."

(Mister! Whistle! Whistle! Whistle!

Whistle, Mister! Yellow birds!)

On the dark and broken sidewalk, the limp body gasped, quivered. The interne lifted him, said sharply to the officer. "Hold his arms! He'll fight!"

"Hey look! Hey look!"

"He's kickin'!"

(Whistle, mister! WHISTLE!)

"W'at's he sayin'?"

"There! Hold him now!"

(A spiked star of pain of consciousness burst within him)

"Mimil! He's awright! He's awright!"

"Yeh?"

"Yea!"

"No kiddin'! No kiddin'!"

"Yeh!"

"Yuh!"

"Yeh!"

"Oi, Gott sei dank!"

XXII

"THERE you are, sonny! There you are!" The interne's reassuring drawl, reached him through a swirl of broken images. "You're not hurt. There's nothing to be scared about."

"Sure!" the policeman was saying beside him.