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Classic Adulterous Love

Every individual existence revolves around mystery, and perhaps that is the chief reason that all cultivated individuals insisted so strongly on the respect due to personal secrets.

People were telling one another that a good-looking newcomer had been seen on the boardwalk--a lady with a dog. Already a fortnight in Atlantic City, Bill Smith was accustomed to its ways, and he too had begun to take an interest in fresh arrivals. From his seat in Pete's outdoor café, he caught sight of a dark and tall young woman passing along the boardwalk in a brimless hat that fit tightly on her head. Behind her trotted a white Pomeranian.

Later he encountered her in the municipal park and in the square several times a day. Always alone, she wore the same brimless hat that fitted tightly on her head, the Pomeranian always trotting at her side. Nobody knew who she was, and people referred to her simply as "the lady with the dog."

"If she's here without her husband, and without any friends," thought Smith to himself, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to make her acquaintance."

Not yet forty, he had a twelve-year-old daughter and two sons in high school. He had been talked into marrying in his third year at college, and his wife now looked nearly twice as old as he did. She was a short woman with dark eyebrows, erect, dignified, imposing, and, as she said of herself, a "thinker." She was a great reader and called her husband "Willie" instead of Bill, as if he was to her just another child. Though he secretly considered her shallow, narrow-minded, and dowdy, he stood in awe of her and so disliked spending time at home. He had first begun deceiving her long ago and was now constantly unfaithful to her. This was no doubt why he spoke slightingly of women, whom he regarded as an inferior race.

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He considered that the ample lessons he had received from bitter experience entitled him to call them whatever he liked, but without this "lower race" he could not have existed a single day. Bored and ill-at-ease in the company of men, with whom he was always cold and reserved, he felt quite at home among women, and knew exactly what to say to them, and how to behave; he could even be silent in their company without feeling the slightest awkwardness. There was an elusive charm in his appearance and disposition that attracted women and caught their sympathies. Aware of this charisma, he was attracted to them by some invisible force.

Repeated and bitter experience had taught him that every fresh intimacy, while at first introducing such pleasant variety into every-day life, and offering itself as a charming, light adventure, inevitably developed, among decent people (especially in New York City, where they were so slow to move), into a problem of excessive complication leading to an intolerably irksome situation. But every time he encountered an attractive woman not met before, he forgot all about this experience, the desire for some mysteriously heightened life surged up in him, and everything suddenly seemed enhanced.

One evening, then, while he was dining at the restaurant on the boardwalk, the lady in the brimless hat came strolling up and took a seat at a neighboring table. Her expression, gait, dress, coiffure, all told him that she was from the upper classes, that she was married, that she was in Atlantic City for the first time, apparently alone and visibly bored.

Knowing that accounts of the laxity of morals among visitors to Atlantic City are greatly exaggerated, he paid no heed to them, suspecting that for the most part they were invented by people who would gladly have transgressed themselves, had they known how to set about it. But when the lady with the Pomeranian sat down at a neighboring table a few yards away from him, these stories of easy conquests came back to him, and

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the seductive idea of a brisk transitory liaison, an affair with a woman whose very name he did not know, suddenly took possession of his mind.

He snapped his fingers at the Pomeranian and, when it trotted up to him, shook his forefinger at it. When the Pomeranian growled, Smith shook his finger again. That made the lady glance at him. Once he caught her glance, she instantly lowered her eyes.

"He doesn't bite," she said as she blushed.

"May I give him a bone?" he asked. Upon her nod of consent he added in friendly tones: "Have you been long in Atlantic City?"

"About five days."

"And I am dragging out my second week here."

Paralyzed in each other's presence, neither spoke for a few minutes.

"The days pass quickly, and yet one is so bored here," she said, self-consciously not looking at him.

"It's the thing to say it's boring here. People never complain of boredom in godforsaken holes like Coney Island or Asbury Park, but when they get here it's: 'Oh, the dullness! Oh, the dust!' You'd think they'd come from Philadelphia to say the least."

She laughed before they both went on eating in silence, like complete strangers. But after dinner they left the restaurant together, and embarked upon the light, jesting talk of people free and contented, for whom it is all the same where they go, or what they talk about. They strolled along, remarking on the strange light over the sea. The water was a warm, tender purple; the moonlight lay on its surface in a golden strip. They remarked how cool it had become, after the hot day. Smith told her he was

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from New York, had a degree in literature but worked in a bank; that he had at one time trained himself to sing in a private opera company, but had given up the idea; that he owned two houses in New York.

From her he learned that she had grown up in Boston, but had gotten married in New Haven, where she had been living two years, that she would stay another month in Atlantic City, and that perhaps her husband, who also needed a rest, would join her. She was quite unable to explain whether her husband was a member of the town council, or on the board of the country club, and was greatly amused at herself about this failure. Further, Smith learned that her name was Anna Rossi.

Back in his own room he thought about her, and felt sure he would meet her the next day. It was inevitable. As he went to bed he reminded himself that only a very short time ago she had been a schoolgirl, much like his own daughter, learning her lessons. He remembered how much there was of shyness and constraint in her laughter, in her way of conversing with a stranger. It was probably the first time in her life that she found herself alone, in a situation in which strange men could follow her and watch her, and speak to her, all the time with a secret aim she could not fail to divine. He recalled her slender, delicate neck, her fine gray eyes. "And yet there's something pathetic about her," he thought to himself as he fell asleep.

II

A week had passed since the beginning of their acquaintance. As both were on holiday, they met again. Indoors it was stuffy, but the dust rose in clouds out of doors, and the breezes blew people's hats off. It was a parching day and Smith kept going to the outdoor café for fruit drinks and ices to offer Anna Rossi. The heat had become overwhelming.

In the evening, when the wind had dropped, they walked to the pier to see the steamer come in. There were a great many people strolling about the landing-place; some with bunches of flowers in their hands were meeting friends. Two peculiarities of the smarter Atlantic City crowd stood out distinctly--the elderly ladies all tried to dress very youthfully, and there seemed to be an inordinate number of moguls both real and fake.

Owing to the roughness of the sea the steamer from Philadelphia had arrived late, after the sun had gone down, and in darkness it had to maneuver for some time before it could get alongside the pier. Anna Rossi scanned the steamer and passengers through her opera glasses, as if looking for someone she knew. Together again, she talked a great deal, firing off abrupt questions and forgetting immediately what it was she had wanted to know. Then she lost her opera glasses in the crush.

The smart crowd began dispersing, the wind had quite dropped, and Smith and Anna stood there as if waiting for someone else to come off the steamer. Anna Rossi had fallen silent, every now and then smelling her flowers, but not looking at Smith.

"It's turned out a fine evening," he said. "What shall we do? We might go for a drive."

She made no reply.

Looking steadily at her, he suddenly took her in his arms and

kissed her lips, as the fragrance and dampness of the flowers closed round him; but by the next moment he looked behind him in alarm--had anyone seen them? "Let's go to your room," he murmured. And they walked off together, very quickly.

Her room was stuffy and smelt of some scent she had bought in the Japanese shop. Smith looked at her, thinking to himself: "How full of strange encounters life is!" He could remember carefree, good-natured women who were exhilarated by love-making and grateful to him for the happiness he gave them, however short-lived. There had been others--his wife among them--whose caresses were insincere, affected, hysterical, mixed up with a great deal of quite unnecessary talk. Then there had been two or three beautiful, cold women, over whose features revealed a predatory expression, betraying a determination to wring from life more than it could give, women no longer in their first youth, capricious, irrational, despotic, brainless. When Smith had cooled to these, their beauty aroused in him nothing but repulsion, and the lace trimming on their underclothes reminded him of fish-scales.

But with Anna the timidity and awkwardness of youth and inexperience were still apparent. There was a feeling of embarrassment in the atmosphere, as if someone had just knocked at the door. She seemed to regard the affair as something very special, very serious, as if she had become a fallen woman, an attitude he found odd and disconcerting. Her features lengthened and drooped, and her long hair hung mournfully on either side of her face. She assumed a pose of dismal meditation, like a repentant sinner in some classical painting.

"It isn't right," she said. "You will never respect me anymore."

On the table was an apple. Smith cut himself a slice from it and began slowly eating it. At least half an hour passed in silence.

Anna was very touching, revealing the purity of a decent, naïve

woman who had seen very little of life. Though the solitary candle burning on the table scarcely lit up her face, it was obvious that her young heart had become heavy.

"Why should I stop respecting you?" asked Smith. "You don't know what you're saying."

"May God forgive me!" she exclaimed, and her eyes filled with tears. "It's terrible."

"You have no need to seek to justify yourself."

"How can I justify myself? I'm a wicked, fallen woman, I despise myself and have not the least thought of self-justification. It isn't my husband I have deceived; it's myself. And not only now, as I have been deceiving myself forever so long. My husband is no doubt an honest, worthy man, but he's a flunky. I don't know what it is he does at his office, but I know he's a flunky. Devoured by curiosity, I was only twenty when I married him, and I wanted something higher.

"Recently I told myself that there must be a different kind of life I wanted to live, to live. I was burning with curiosity. You'll never understand that, but I swear to God I could no longer control myself, nothing could hold me back, I told my husband I was ill, and I came here at Atlantic City. And I started going about like one possessed, like a madwoman and now I have become an ordinary, worthless woman, and everyone has the right to despise me."

Smith listened to her, bored to death. The naïve accents, the remorse, all was so unexpected, so out of place. He thought that, but for the tears in her eyes, she might have been jesting or play-acting.

"I don't understand," he said gently. "What is it you want?"

She hid her face against his breast and pressed closer to him.

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"Do believe me, I implore you to believe me when I say that I love all that is honest and pure in life, vice is revolting to me, I don't know what I'm doing. The common people say they are snared by the Devil. And now I can say that I have been snared by the Devil, too."

"Come, come," he murmured. He gazed into her fixed, terrified eyes, kissed her, and soothed her with gentle affectionate words, and gradually she calmed down and regained her cheerfulness. Soon they were laughing together again.

When, a little later, they went out, there was not a soul on the boardwalk, the town and its cypresses looked dead, but the sea was still roaring as it dashed against the beach. A solitary fishing-boat tossed on the waves, its lamp blinking sleepily. Renting a car, they drove to Long Beach Island.

"I discovered your name in the hall, just now," said Smith, "written up on the board. Rossi."

When they got out of the car at Long Beach Island, not on the ocean but the bay, they sat down on a bench and looked down at the sea, without talking. The mainland could be dimly discerned through the morning mist, and white clouds rested motionless. Not a leaf stirred, the grasshoppers chirruped. The monotonous hollow roar of the sea came up to them, speaking of the eternal peaceful sleep lying in wait for us all. The sea had roared like this long before there was any Atlantic City or Long Beach Island, it was roaring now, and it would go on roaring, just as indifferently and hollowly when we had passed away. It may be that in this continuity, this utter indifference to the life and death of each of us lies hidden the pledge of our eternal salvation, of the continuous movement of life on earth, of the continuous movement toward perfection.

Side by side with a young woman, who looked so exquisite in the early light, soothed and enchanted by the sight of all this magical beauty--sea, mountains, clouds and the vast expanse of

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the sky--Smith told himself that, when you came to think of it, everything in the world is beautiful really, everything but our own thoughts and actions, when we lose sight of the higher aims of life, and of our dignity as human beings.

Someone approached them--a watchman, probably--looked at them and went away. And there was something mysterious and beautiful even in this. The steamer from Philadelphia could be seen coming towards the pier, lit up by the dawn, its lamps out.

"There's dew on the grass," said Anna, breaking the silence.

"Yes. Time to go home."

They drove back to the town, each returning to their own rooms.

After this they met every day at noon on the boardwalk, lunching and dining together, going for walks, and admiring the sea. She complained of sleeplessness, of palpitations, asked the same questions over and over again, alternately surrendering to jealousy and the fear that he did not really respect her. And often, when there was nobody in sight in the square or the park, he would draw her to him and kiss her passionately. The utter idleness, these kisses in broad daylight, accompanied by furtive glances and the fear of discovery, the heat, the smell of the sea, and the idle, smart, well-fed people continually crossing their field of vision, seemed to have given him a new lease of life. He told Anna she was beautiful and seductive, made love to her with impetuous passion, and never left her side, while she was always pensive, always trying to force from him the admission that he did not respect her, that he did not love her a bit, and considered her just an ordinary woman. Almost every night they drove out of Atlantic City, to Long Beach Island, the waterfall, or some other beauty-spot. And these excursions were invariably a success, each contributing fresh impressions of majestic beauty.

All this time they kept expecting her husband to arrive. But a letter came in which he told his wife that he was having trouble

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with his eyes, and implored her to come home as soon as possible. Anna made hasty preparations for leaving Bill.

"It's a good thing I'm going," she said to Smith. "It's the intervention of fate."

When she left Atlantic City, he went with her as far as the railway station. The drive from Long Beach Island took nearly a whole day, so easily interrupted was their trip by distractions along the way. When she got into the train, after a second warning bell had been rung, she said: "Let me have one more look at you, one last look. That's right."

She did not weep, but was mournful and seemed ill, the muscles of her cheeks twitching.

"I shall think of you, I shall think of you all the time," she said. "God bless you! Think kindly of me. We are parting forever, it must be so, because we ought never to have met. Good-bye-- God bless you."

The train chugged rapidly out of the station, its lights soon disappearing, and a minute later even the sound it made was silenced, as if everything were conspiring to bring this sweet oblivion, this heightened madness, to an end as quickly as possible. And Smith, standing alone on the platform and gazing into the dark distance, listened to the shrilling of the grasshoppers and the humming of the telephone wires, with a feeling that he had only just awakened. And he told himself that this had been just one more of the many sexual adventures in his life, and that it, too, was over, leaving nothing but a memory, much as the others had. Moved and sad, he felt a slight remorse. After all, this young woman whom he would never again see had not been really happy with him. He had been friendly and affectionate with her, but in his whole behavior, in the tones of his voice, in his very caresses, there had been a shade of irony, the insulting indulgence of the fortunate male, who was, moreover, almost twice her age. She had insisted in calling him

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good, remarkable, high-minded. Evidently he had appeared to her to be different from his real self--succinctly he had involuntarily deceived her.

There was an autumnal feeling in the air, and the evening was chilly. "It's time for me to be going north, too," thought Smith, as he walked away from the platform. "High time!"

III

When he got back to New York it was beginning to look like winter. The heat was turned on every day, and it was still dark when the children got up to go to school and ate their breakfast. Frost had set in. When the first snow falls, and one goes for one's first sleigh ride, it is pleasant to see the white ground, the white roofs; one breathes freely and lightly and remembers the days of one's youth. The ancient lime-trees and birches, white with hoarfrost, have a good-natured look, they are closer to the heart than cypresses and palms, and beneath their branches one is no longer haunted by the memory of boardwalks and the sea.

Having always lived in New York, he returned home on a fine frosty day. When he put on his fur-lined overcoat and thick gloves, and sauntered down Fifth Avenue, and when, on Saturday evening, he heard the church bells ringing, his recent journey and the places he had visited lost their charm for him. He became gradually immersed in New York life, avidly reading three newspapers a day, while declaring that on principle he never read New York newspapers. Once more he was caught up in a whirl of restaurants, clubs, banquets, and celebrations, once more glowed with the flattering consciousness that well-known lawyers and actors came to his house, that he played cards in the Medical Club opposite a professor. He could once again eat a whole serving of New York Clam Chowder served in a tureen.

He had truly believed that in a month's time Anna Rossi would be nothing but a vague memory, and that hereafter, with her wistful smile, she would only occasionally appear to him in his dreams, much like others before her. But the month was now well over and winter was in full swing, and all was as clear in his memory as if he had parted with Anna only the day before. And his recollections grew ever more insistent. When the voices of his children at their lessons reached him in his study through the evening stillness, when he heard a song, or the sounds of a music-box in a restaurant, when the wind howled in the

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chimney, it all came back to him: early morning on the pier, the misty mountains, the steamer from Philadelphia, the kisses. He would pace up and down in his room for a long time, smiling at his memories. As memory turned into dreaming, what had happened mingled in his imagination with what could happen. Anna did not just come to him in his dreams, he felt that she accompanied him everywhere, like his shadow, following him everywhere he went. When he closed his eyes, she seemed to stand before him in the flesh, still lovelier, younger, more tender than she had really been, and looking back, he saw himself, too, as better than he had been in Atlantic City. In the evenings she looked out at him from the bookshelves, the fireplace, the corner, he could hear her breathing, the sweet rustle of her skirts. In the streets he followed women with his eyes, not to appreciate them for themselves, but to see if there were any like her.

He began to feel an overwhelming desire to share his memories with someone. But he could not speak of his love at home. Outside his home who was there for him to confide in? Not the tenants living in his house, and certainly not his colleagues at the bank. And what was there to tell? Was it love that he had felt? Had there been anything exquisite, poetic, anything instructive or even profound about his relations with Anna? He had to content himself with uttering vague generalizations about love and women, and nobody guessed what he meant, though his wife's dark eyebrows twitched as she said: "The role of a coxcomb doesn't suit you a bit, Bill."

One evening, leaving the Medical Club with one of his card-partners, a government official, he could not refrain from remarking: "If you only knew what a charming woman I met in Atlantic City!" Nonetheless, the official got into his sleigh, and just before driving off, turned and called out: "Bill!"

"Yes?"

"You were quite right, you know--the sturgeon was just a little off."

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These words, in themselves so commonplace, for some reason infuriated Smith, seemed to him humiliating and gross. What savage manners, what people! What wasted evenings, he spent, what tedious and empty days! Frantic card-playing, gluttony, drunkenness, perpetual talk always about the same things. The greater part of one's time and energy went on business that was no use to anyone, and on discussing the same things over and over again. There was nothing to show for it all but a stunted wingless existence and a round of trivialities, and there was nowhere to escape to, you might as well be in a madhouse or a convict settlement.

Smith lay awake all night, raging, and went about the whole of the next day with a headache. He slept badly on the succeeding nights, too, sitting up in bed, thinking, or pacing the floor of his room. Sick of the bank and sick of his children, he felt not the slightest desire to go anywhere or talk about anything.

When the Christmas holidays came, he packed his things, telling his wife he had to go to Boston in the interests of his bank, and set off for the town of New Haven. To what end? He hardly knew himself. He only knew that he must see Anna, must speak to her, arrange a meeting, if possible.

Arriving at New Haven in the morning, he engaged the best suite in the hotel, which had a carpet of gray military frieze, and a dusty ink-pot on the table, surmounted by a headless rider, holding his hat in his raised hand. The hall porter told him what he wanted to know: Rossi had a house of his own on Hillhouse Street. Not far from the hotel, he lived on a grand scale, luxuriously, kept carriage-horses; and the whole town knew him. The hall porter pronounced the name "Ross-see" with an accent on the second syllable.

Smith strolled over to Hillhouse and discovered the manse. In front of it was a long gray fence with inverted nails hammered into the tops of the palings. Living behind a wall like that is

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enough to make anyone want to run away, thought Smith, looking at the windows of the house and the fence.

He reasoned that, since it was a holiday, Anna's husband would probably be at home. In any case it would be tactless to embarrass her by calling at the house. And a note might fall into the hands of the husband, and bring about catastrophe. The best thing would be to wait about on the chance of seeing her. And he walked up and down the street, hovering in the vicinity of the fence, watching for his chance. A beggar entered the gate, only to be attacked by dogs, then, an hour later, the faint, vague sounds of a piano reached his ears. That, he assumed, would be Anna playing. Suddenly the front door opened and an old woman came out, followed by a familiar white Pomeranian. Smith tried to call to it, but his heart beat violently, and in his agitation he could not remember its name.

He walked on, hating the gray fence more and more, and now ready to tell himself irately that Anna Rossi had not only forgotten him but also had, already perhaps, found distraction in another. What could be more natural in a young woman who had to look at this accursed fence from morning to night? He went back to his hotel and sat on the sofa in his suite for some time, not knowing what to do, then he ordered dinner, and after dinner, had a long sleep.

"What a foolish, restless business," he thought, waking up and looking towards the dark windowpanes. It was evening by now. "Well, I've had my sleep out. And what am I to do in the night?"

He sat up in bed, covered by the cheap gray quilt, which reminded him of a hospital blanket, and in his vexation he fell to taunting himself. "You and your lady with a dog--there's adventure for you! See what you get for your pains."

On his arrival at the station that morning he had noticed a poster announcing in enormous letters the first performance at the local theater of a play he already knew. Remembering this, he got up

and made for the theater. "It's highly probable that the wife of someone like her husband goes to first nights," he told himself.

The theater was full. It was a typical provincial theater, with a mist collecting over the chandeliers and the crowd in the gallery fidgeting noisily. In the first row of the stalls the local dandies stood waiting for the curtain to go up, their hands clasped behind them. There, in the front seat of the mayor's box, sat the mayor's daughter, wearing a boa, and the mayor himself hiding modestly behind the drapes, so that only his hands were visible. The curtain stirred, the orchestra took a long time tuning up their instruments. Smith's eyes roamed eagerly over the audience as they filed in and occupied their seats.

As he hoped, Anna came in too. She seated herself in the third row of the stalls, and when Smith's glance fell on her, his heart seemed to stop, and he knew in a flash that the whole world contained no one nearer or dearer to him, no one more important to his happiness. This little woman, lost in the provincial crowd, in no way remarkable, holding another pair of opera glasses in her hand, now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, all that he desired. Lulled by the sounds coming from the wretched orchestra, with its feeble, amateurish violinists, he thought how beautiful she was, he thought and dreamed.

Anna was accompanied by a tall, round-shouldered young man with small whiskers, who nodded at every step before taking the seat beside her and seemed to be continually bowing to someone. This must be her husband, whom, in a fit of bitterness back in Atlantic City, she had called a "flunky." And there really was something of a lackey's servility in his lanky figure, his side-whiskers, and the little bald spot on the top of his head. As he smiled sweetly, the badge of some scientific society gleaming in his buttonhole resembled the number on a footman's livery.

As her husband went out to smoke in the first interval, Anna was left alone in her seat. Smith, who had been in the stalls, went up to her and said in a trembling voice, with a forced smile:

"How d'you do?"

She glanced up at him and turned pale, then looked at him again in alarm, unable to believe her eyes, squeezing her fan and opera glasses in one hand, evidently struggling to overcome a feeling of faintness. Neither of them said a word. She sat there, and he stood beside her, disconcerted by her embarrassment, and not daring to sit down. The violins and flutes sang out as they were tuned. There was a tense sensation in the atmosphere, as if they were being watched from all the boxes. At last she got up and moved rapidly towards one of the exits. He followed her and they wandered aimlessly along corridors, up and down stairs. Figures flashed by in the uniforms of legal officials and civil servants, all wearing insignia; ladies, coats hanging from pegs flashed by. A sharp draft brought with it an odor of cigarette butts. And Smith, whose heart was beating violently, thought: "What on earth are all these people, this orchestra, for?"

The next minute he suddenly remembered how, after seeing Anna off that evening at the station, he had told himself that all was over, and they would never meet again. And how far away that earlier end seemed to be now!

She stopped on a dark narrow staircase over which was a notice bearing the inscription "To the upper circle."

"How you frightened me!" she said, breathing heavily, still pale and half-stunned. "Oh, how you frightened me! I'm almost dead! Why did you come? Oh, why?"

"But, Anna," he said, in low, hasty tones. "But, Anna. Try to understand, do try."

She cast him a glance of fear, entreaty, love, and then gazed at him steadily, as if to fix his features firmly in her memory.

"I've been so unhappy," she continued, taking no notice of his words. "I could think of nothing but you the whole time, I lived

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on the thoughts of you. I tried to forget. Why, oh why, did you come?"

On the landing above them were two schoolboys, smoking and looking down, but Smith did not care, and, drawing Anna Rossi towards him, began kissing her face, her lips, her hands.

"What are you doing, oh, what are you doing?" she said in horror, drawing back. "We have both gone mad. Go away this very night, this moment. By all that is sacred, I implore you. Somebody is coming." Someone was indeed ascending the stairs.

"You must go away," went on Anna Rossi in a whisper. "D'you hear me, Bill? I'll come to you in New York. I have never been happy, I am unhappy now, and I shall never be happy--never! Do not make me suffer still more! I will come to you in New York, I swear it! And now we must part! My dear one, my kind one, my darling, we must part."

She pressed his hand and hurried down the stairs, looking back at him continually, and her eyes showed that she was in truth unhappy. Smith stood where he was for a short time, listening, and when all was quiet, went to look for his coat before leaving the theater.

IV

And Anna Rossi began going to New York to see him. Every two or three months she left the town of New Haven, telling her husband that she was going to consult a specialist on female diseases, and her husband believed her and did not believe her. In New York she always stayed at the Plaza, telephoning Smith at his office the moment she arrived. Then he went to her, and no one in New York knew anything about it.

One winter morning he went to the Plaza see her as usual. His daughter was with him, for her school was on the way and he thought he might as well see her to it.

"It is forty degrees," said Smith to his daughter, "and yet it is snowing. You see it is only above freezing close to the ground, the temperature in the upper layers of the atmosphere is quite different."

"Why doesn't it ever thunder in winter, Papa?"

He explained this, too. As he was speaking, he kept reminding himself that he was going to a rendezvous and that not a living soul knew about it, or, probably, ever would. He led a double life--one in public, in the sight of all whom it concerned, full of conventional truth and conventional deception, exactly like the lives of his friends and acquaintances, and another which flowed in secret. And, owing to some strange, possibly quite accidental chain of circumstances, everything that was important, interesting, essential, everything about which he was sincere and never deceived himself, everything that composed the kernel of his life, went on in secret, while everything that was false in him, everything that composed the husk in which he hid himself and the truth which was in him--his work at the bank, discussions at the club, his attendance at anniversary celebrations with his wife. All this was on the surface. He began to compare others to himself, no longer believing what he observed in them, and

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always assuming that the real, the only interesting life of every individual goes on secretly, as under cover of night. Every individual existence revolves around mystery, and perhaps that is the chief reason that all cultivated individuals insisted so strongly on the respect due to personal secrets.

After leaving his daughter at the door of her school Smith set off for the Plaza. Taking off his overcoat in the lobby, he went upstairs and knocked softly on the door. Anna, wearing the gray dress he liked most, exhausted by her journey and by suspense, had been expecting him since the evening before. She was pale and looked at him without smiling, but was in his arms almost before he was fairly in the room. Their kiss was lingering, prolonged, as if they had not met for years.

"Well, how are you?" he asked. "Anything new?"

"Wait, I'll tell you in a minute I can't . . ." She could not speak, because she was crying. Turning away, she held her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I'll wait till she's had her cry out," he thought, and sank into a chair.

He rang for tea, and a little later, while he was drinking it, she was still standing there, her face to the window. She wept from emotion, from her bitter consciousness of the sadness of their life; they could only see one another in secret, hiding from people, as if they were thieves. Was not their life a broken one?

"Don't cry," he said.

It became quite obvious to him that this love of theirs would not soon come to an end, and that no one could predict when any end would be. Anna loved him ever more fondly, worshipped him, and there would have been no point in telling her that one day it must end. Indeed, she would not have believed him.

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He moved over and took her by the shoulders, intending to caress her, to make a joke, but suddenly he caught sight of himself in the looking-glass.

His hair was already beginning to turn gray. It struck him as strange that he should have aged so much in the last few years, have lost so much of his looks. The shoulders on which his hands lay were warm and quivering. He felt a pity for this life, still so warm and exquisite, but probably soon to fade and droop like his own. Why did she love him so? Women had always believed him different from what he really was, had loved in him not himself but the man as their imaginations pictured him, a man they had sought for eagerly all their lives. And afterwards when they discovered their mistake, they went on loving him just the same. Yet not one of them had ever been happy with him. Time had passed, he had met one woman after another, become intimate with each, parted with each, but had never loved. There had been all sorts of things between them, but never love.

Only now, when he was gray-haired, had he fallen in love properly, thoroughly, for the first time in his life. He and Anna loved one another as people who are very close and intimate, as husband and wife, as dear friends love one another. It seemed to them that fate had intended them for one another, and they could not understand why she should have a husband, and he a wife. They were like two migrating birds, the male and the female, who had been caught and put into separate cages. They forgave one another all that they were ashamed of in the past and in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both.

Formerly, in moments of melancholy, he had consoled himself by the first argument that came into his head, but now arguments were nothing to him, he felt profound pity, desired to be sincere, tender. "Stop crying, my dearest," he said. "You've had your cry, now stop. Now let us have a talk, let us try and think what we are to do."

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Then they discussed their situation for a long time, trying to think how they could get rid of the necessity for hiding, deception, living in different cities, being so long without meeting. How were they to shake off these intolerable fetters? "How? How?" he repeated, clutching his head. "How?"

It seemed to them that they were within an inch of arriving at a decision, and that then a new, beautiful life would begin. And they both realized that the end was still far, far away, and that the hardest, the most complicated part of their furtive relationship was only just beginning.

Ricardo Castellanos spends much of his winters in Puerto Rico.
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