



DAPHNE  
DU MAURIER

*I'll Never  
Be Young Again*

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# **I'LL NEVER BE YOUNG AGAIN**

**Daphne du Maurier**

**Foreword by Elaine Dundy**



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## Foreword

Devotees of Daphne du Maurier will find in *I'll Never Be Young Again* a rich source of self-revelatory material. This second novel with its world-weary title was completed in 1930, when the author was a year of twenty-three years old. Young as she was, however, it is all there, yet at the same time none of it is wasted. She is a beginner. Nevertheless, it contains the strengths that will make her one of the great novelists and monologists in twentieth-century fiction, most endearing are the twists, turns and shocks of her plot which are done in such a way that the reader grows to accept them as reasonable. It also reminds us once again what a strong influence James Joyce had on our writers in the 1920s and '30s, with his stream of consciousness, a technique du Maurier uses to her great advantage.

Two decades later, about her novel in progress, *The Scapegoat*, she will write to her publisher Victor Gollancz describing her task as "simply to take a fantastically impossible situation and make it read with utter conviction," a target which she hits bull's-eye in most of her novels, including this second one.

In form the novel is episodic; if a film, it would be called a "road movie," with the self-described male narrator, Dick, driven from crisis to crisis. Starting as a would-be suicide on a London bridge, he moves to a posh cruise of Scandinavia. From there, as a deckhand, we find him on a rundown tugboat about to sink. Having survived, he goes on to Paris. Settling into café life, he enters into a yearlong love affair with an American girl, simultaneously embarking on becoming a writer, buoying himself up on hot dreams of fame and fortune. His bubble bursts when a noted publisher tells him he has no talent. Then, when he returns to Paris, his girlfriend walks out on him. In a surprise ending, Dick becomes happier than he has ever been in his life as a bank clerk in London, listening to a bird which seems to be singing over and over, "I'll never be young again."

True, Dick is rather unsympathetic. Du Maurier will rarely make that mistake again. At the same time she will magically retain the weaknesses, dishonesties and peccadilloes in her characters that are so unsympathetic, as she does with Dick. Fifty-seven years later, in her novel *The House on the Strand* there is also a narrator called Dick who is similarly unsympathetic. Coincidence? Subconscious? Provocative?

This early novel is a forerunner of the later ones in that, as with all prolific writers, du Maurier employs favorite words in it which she will use throughout her work. It's fun to see which words here will become staples of her style. "Fool," "child" and "brandy" are three. Her characters feel like fools as often as they call other people the same. The word "child" denotes everything from innocence to tantrums while brandy is, universally, the only drink characters swallow to pull themselves together. It is fascinating to see some phrases evolve: "I'll never be young again" progresses to the second Mrs. de Winter's "I'll never be a child again." Biting one's nails under stress, which appears as early as her first second novel, turns up again full force in the second Mrs. de Winter, who says, "I didn't like it."

began biting my nails. No, I did not like it.” Nail-biting will apply throughout her oeuvre. In *The King’s General*, one person even gets around to biting his hands. Daphne herself bit her nails when growing up. A touch of reality.

Another reality in du Maurier’s books is that people die in them, sometimes in profusion! She kills them off with the brio of Dickens and Shakespeare. Babies, mothers and grandfathers fall dead just when we are becoming fond of them. Only two people die in *I’ll Never Be Young Again*, but they are the two most important to Dick. Reading her novels, we become alerted to the real and present dangers that threaten her characters every time they mount a horse, climb a hill, step into a car or carriage, scramble up a balcony—or even walk out of a front or back door.

Important also are du Maurier’s unhappy endings (which her husband teased her about). They leave us to ponder how invariably fate pays us back for our transgressions. Though her books were advertised as “romances,” boy rarely gets girl; in fact it is rare that two main characters go off together into the sunset. We realize she feels it would be *morally wrong* if they did. Du Maurier, schooled in the ways of the world, makes this sound sense, leaving a reverberation that haunts us, whereas a happy ending would merely signal closure.

After reading Margaret Forster’s biography documenting du Maurier’s hitherto unknown bisexuality, I confess that it sent me straight back to her novels sleuthing for clues of this interesting facet of her personality. And there are plenty. Nowhere is it more blatant and confusing than in *I’ll Never Be Young Again*, when narrator Dick explodes about how he wished his father had treated him like a boy: “I wanted to use my fists against the faces of boys,” he says, “to fight with them, laughing sprawling on the ground, and then run with them, catching at my breath, flinging a stone to the top of a tree.” The confusion here is that the author has mixed up her real-life plight with that of Dick’s, and writes like a woman yearning to be a man. This kind of thing runs through her work. Often her heroines will declare they wished they were a man.

Looking for a context in which to place du Maurier in a literary and historic time frame, I suddenly came across a phenomenon I might otherwise have missed. Until recently, it seemed to me that all the full-drawn female characters such as Becky Sharp, Hedda Gabler and Scarlett O’Hara disappeared after the nineteenth century. I see now that the twentieth century, specifically the 1920s and 1930s, produced two other star woman writers, who created wonderful female characters as did du Maurier: I am talking about Virginia Woolf and the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, both of whom were also Sapphically inclined. In order of their appearance, Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), in whose *Orlando* the protagonist begins a three-hundred-year journey as a man, but metamorphoses into a woman and who, in another work, gives us the arresting psychological insight that “Women have served all the centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” (*A Room of One’s Own*)

As for Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950), whose wit, candor and genius made her the hottest ticket in the poets’ lecture circuit, unseating Robert Frost; when a college girl, she asked herself the question: What will a scholarship student several years older than the other girls at a top women’s college, Vassar, do to get noticed? The answer: use her attraction to and by women and fix on the same-sex spell they were all under. Her poem, “A Few Figs from Thistles,” containing the stanza

*My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But, ah, my foes, and, oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light.*

endeared her to females around the world and possibly gave rise to Dorothy Parker's comment: "If the prettiest girls at Vassar were laid end to end, I shouldn't be surprised."

Bisexuality surely added to their originality, idiosyncrasies, imagination and talent. Yet of equal significance was their strong sense of reality which is manifest to anyone who begins to study their careers. There was nothing fey about them. In fact, they were noticeably grounded. All needed a special place to lay their heads and all got it: du Maurier at Menabilly, a mansion in Cornwall, Millay at Steepletop, a farmhouse in upstate New York—two houses set in impressive surroundings. Both women renovated them to suit their own will. With Woolf, it was simply *A Room of One's Own*, yet speculate it stirred up more emotion in women than the two other grander houses.

Another similarity: all three did a lot of suffering in their childhood, which seems to have stiffened their resolve to make up for it by working towards a kingdom, a power and a glory in their art.

As for husbands, each chose hers with a sense of practicality. We have all heard of Trophy Wives but not enough of Trophy Husbands. These three realists chose husbands that they loved and were proud of. Virginia married a publisher, Edna a Dutch businessman, Daphne a much-decorated war hero who masterminded an important wing of World War II Air Force and became a valued member of Queen Elizabeth's and Prince Philip's staff, for which he was knighted.

All three women on their own were powerful and entitled, yet desirous of what they saw families could not purchase: respectability and acceptability. They married what seemed to them stable, non-participants in the arts, although appreciators of them. The men seemed the embodiment of what the women wanted—someone to lean upon, someone to guide them. Ironically, all three of the ladies became the breadwinners of the family.

And yet... suppose I ask us to forget, erase, wipe out all I've been writing before. Lest all self-revelations, the deconstructions and any other clues lead us astray from the only thing close to our heart: what's on the page? When we open books, we don't care about the mood of the authors, the events surrounding their creations or the people they loved and hated at the time. Who cares if they were unhappy, if they give us the finished masterpiece? For this special event, the trio not only achieved Trophy Husbands, they achieved Trophy Editors. They put themselves not in harm's but in help's way. Once writers have given themselves to the right person's eyes, something else happens. It also happened that these editors—Victor Gollancz, Daphne's publisher and editor; Edna's high-ranking editor at Harper's, and Leonard Woolf, Virginia's husband—became fathers, mother bankers, messengers and advisors. Cases in point: Virginia's homage to Leonard Woolf, ticking off in her acknowledgments all the ways in which he was vital to her novel *Orlando*; Edna's editor, always at hand to come to her financial aid when needed.

But best for me were Daphne and Victor Gollancz's flirty, sunkissed, delirious exchange concerning a short-story collection. One story, "The Birds," he called a masterpiece, but he didn't like it and wanted her to drop two further stories, one of which jarred on him while he thought the other poor. She was "one of the few authors... with whom I can be frank." Daphne accepted his judgment and dropped them, adding that he was "dynamic, exuberant, tender, intolerant and the only publisher for me." To which Victor returned that she was "beautiful, adorable, gracious, charming and good."

Most of all, these Trophy Editors gave Virginia, Edna and Daphne the respect, adoration and veneration due to them.

*Elaine Dundy*

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“If it must be so, let’s not weep nor complain  
If I have failed, or you, or life turned sullen.  
We have had these things, they do not come again,  
But the flag still flies and the city has not fallen.”

Humbert Wolfe

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# **Part One**

**Jake**



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# 1

When the sun had gone, I saw that the water was streaked with great patches of crimson and gold. They formed a ripple under the bridge that was part of the wake belonging to the barge. She was perhaps two cables' length from me now, low in the water, deeply loaded with timber, the brown sails flapping uselessly against the mast. There was scarcely a suggestion of a breeze, and it was the ebb tide that carried her downstream. I could see one man aboard her, his arm flung carelessly over the tiller, his legs crossed, and a cap on the back of his head.

His pipe must have gone out, for I saw him bend swiftly and fumble in his pocket, steadying the tiller with his knee, then he cupped the pipe in his hands, and threw away the match. I imagined myself in his place, glancing half-curiously in the wake of the barge, where the little match drifted with the tide.

The air to this man would be strong with the harsh smell of tobacco, and the peculiar sweet flavor of well-seasoned timber that clings to a barge. His hands and his clothes would be of it too, the sticky mixture of tar and cutch, and a burned rope's end dangling near an empty barrel.

While beyond all these things, so intimate a part of his life, there would come floating up to him from nowhere in particular, the old unchanging smell of the river, borne from the mud flats beneath the wharves and the dingy warehouses; a smell of refuse left on these beaches to be carried away by the tide, a hint on those mysterious houses where no faces are ever seen and whose dark windows look out upon the Lower Pool, a whiff of oil upon the surface of the water cast by some passing tugboat.

And strange and unbelievable, mingled with the smoke of London rising into the hazy orange sky of the spent day, a suggestion of some world farther than the tired City and the river, a world where there would be no stretch of buildings flattened in a half-light with the spire of St. Paul's companioned to a warehouse chimney, but a gray sea not encompassed by the smallest ridge of land, cold and white-crested, under a gray sky.

Now the barge was no more than a black smudge among the traffic in the Pool, a tugboat with frothing in her wake, smoke screaming from her stout funnel, her propeller churning the water as she went astern.

The iron of the bridge felt hot under my hand. The sun had been upon it all the day.

Gripping hard with my hands I lifted myself onto the bar and gazed down steadily on the water passing under the bridge.

The flaming colors had gone with the sun, the little ripples still formed and bubbled, but they were brown now, dull, and shadowed by the archways of the bridge.

The sight of the barge had taken me away from myself, and because she had left me I fell back again into my first despondency, seeing nothing but my own black mood of bitterness, caring for nothing but that the night should come quickly and allow me to slip away unseen. I waited then, for time was something with which I had no more concern, except for the furthering of my purpose, and as I leaned against the stanchion of the bridge I closed my eyes so that I need not look upon the face

of the men and women who passed me by.

~~In this way I could cling to some sort of security, and my plans would not be hindered by momentary weakness thrusting itself into my view, a weakness coming to me from the strength and solidity of people.~~

My ears would not be deafened, though, and in spite of myself I listened to the safe and steady rumble of traffic over the bridge, the hard, grating wheels of lorries, the painful grind of a tram homeward bound, the jolt of a bus, the smooth wheels of cars, and the silly rattle of a stray taxi. I pretended that these things were meaningless in themselves, and could not drag me away from the river to be part of them, but even as I argued thus I heard the voices of women as they trudged along the pavement, brushing against me as they went, the shoulder of one just touching the back of my coat. And these women, whom I had never seen, seemed by this simple action to enter my life, becoming definite personalities of reality.

Coward-like, I would have turned to them and stretched out my hands, saying as I did so: "Perhaps you would stand here a little longer so that I may listen to your voices; nothing more than this. Maybe they would have understood. Stupidly, with the dumb knowledge that such a moment was impossible, I longed for them to linger awhile, and consider the matter, and then accepting me as one of themselves suggest that I return with them. Gravely, kindly, they would watch my face, and with a quick, shy gesture, as though ashamed of their charity, they would say to me: "You can come back with us, you know, it isn't much of a place...."

I would walk then with them, somewhat apart, conscious of their superiority, and we would arrive at some drab tenement building, where iron-railed balconies stretched from window to window. There would be a canary swinging in a high cage, and a faded odd-patterned screen. These women would busy themselves, familiar with their surroundings, and the drip of a tap or the moving of cups and saucers would seem blessed tokens of friendship to me, humble in a quiet corner, blinking my eyes because of the sudden flare of a gas jet. I would enter the moods of these people, share their troubles, love their friends, act in some way as a faithful servant if only they should not cast me away from them, leaving me to wander back to the bridge once more.

I opened my eyes, and the women had passed from me along the pavement; I could scarcely distinguish their backs among the crowd pushing each other where the tram stopped.

They were away and out of my remnant of existence, like the low hull of the barge and the man with his arm flung over the tiller.

I took a folded newspaper from my pocket, smoothing the creases carefully and read with interest some advertisement for furs.

The print mocked me, knowing that the words they spelled could have no meaning to me, for soon it would be a bent, contorted thing of ugliness, sucked and drawn by the swirling eddies of the Pool, and the paper and its advertisement floating placidly to some unknown destination upon the surface of the water.

It seemed strange that things could still be done to me after I was dead, that my body would perhaps be found and handled by people I should never know, that really a little life would go on about me which I should never feel.

The tiresome business of burial, and decay. These sordid actualities of death would be spared me at least.

For me, the present agony of departure, the silent terror of leaving a place known to me if hated, the well-nigh impossible task of conquering the fear that possessed me. Not the fear of that hasty look round, the sudden plunge headlong and the giddy shock of hard, cold water, the river itself entering

my lungs, rising in my throat, tossing me upon my back with my arms outflung—I could hear the sea  
~~strangled in my chest and the blood leave me—but fear of the certain knowledge that there was no~~  
returning, no possible means of escape, and no other thing beyond.

It would not matter to the world that I was gone, odd doubtful thought, entering my mind at such  
moment. I felt the flesh that was mine and the body that belonged to me; queer to think it was in my  
power to destroy them so swiftly.

During these last moments I stood apart then from the world I had not left. No longer of it, and yet  
not broken away.

That man on the top of a bus, brushing his hair away from his face, a cigarette hanging from his  
mouth, he belonged—he would know many days and many nights. That lorry driver, his face white  
with cement from a load of bricks, shouting to his companion; and a hurrying girl, parcels in her  
hands, glancing to right and left. One after another they flashed before me, imprinting themselves  
forever on my mind, living, breathing figures I had no right to touch. I envied them their food, their  
sleep, their snatches of conversation, the smell even of their clothes, dusty after a long day. I thought  
of places I should never see, and women I should never love. A white sea breaking upon a beach, the  
slow rustle of a shivering tree, the hot scent of grass. A crowded café, and the laughter of some man,  
a car passing over cobbled stones. A dark close room and a girl still against the shadowed pillow, her  
hands across my back.

I remembered as a child standing in a field where a stream crossed my path, and a yellow iris grew  
next a background of green rushes. The stream sang as it tumbled over the flat stones. And as a child  
thought how strange it was that such things should continue after I had left them, as though when  
turning a corner with the stream hidden from view, a mist must fall about them, shrouding them  
carefully, until I should pass again.

It was like this now, with the traffic and the moving people. Impossible that they should live while  
I was no more a part of existence.

Once more I looked down upon the swirling water beneath the bridge. I threw away my paper and  
watched it twirl slowly, caught in a sudden eddy, and then, limp and tragic, float from me, borne by  
the current. A crinkled edge stared up at me, as yet unsodden, like a faint protest.

I resolved that I would not wait anymore. The dust and the noise of humanity, the nearness of men  
and women, were urging some claim upon me that was robbing me of my strength and will.

They were united in a conspiracy to keep me from the peace I had promised myself.

It was not thus I had imagined it would be.

I wanted it to be made easier for me. In my preparations for this moment I had been overcome by  
great weariness, my eyes had seen nothing but the wide placid sheet of water ready to receive me, my  
ears had heard nothing but the soft, steady ripple of the wash against the archway of the bridge.

There was no throb of traffic then, no hum of city, no smell of dust, and body, and life, no shouts of  
men, nor the clear whistle of a boy with his hands in his pockets.

I wanted to be tired, I wanted to be old, I wanted to lose myself and not be reminded of things I had  
never done.

I looked up at the sky and saw a great dark-edged cloud hover over the distant spire of St. Paul's.  
Where the west had been golden was a shadowed blanket, a grim reflection of the murky buildings by  
the water's edge. Soon the million lights that belonged to London would cast a halo of light into the  
sky, and one faint star would flicker against the purple.

There seemed no reason for staying any longer. I would not even be dramatic and make a gesture  
farewell. There should be no sentimentality where I was concerned. It was not worth the trouble

tears, not my life, anyway. I would make a ripple upon the water for a moment, not much more than a stone thrown by a child from a bank. Nothing mattered very much. I wondered why my heart felt so heavy and afraid, why the sweat clung to my hands and could not be wiped away.

I swung my legs over, holding onto the bridge with desperate fingers. An odd snatch of breeze blew across my hair. I supposed that this was the very last thing of the world to come to me.

I breathed deeply, and I felt as though the waiting water rose up in front of me and would not let me go.

This was my final impression of horror, when fear and fascination took hold upon me, and I knew that I should have no other moment but this before the river itself closed in upon me. My fingers slackened, and I lowered myself for the fall.

It was then that someone laid his hands upon my shoulder, and turning to clutch him instinctively as a means of safety, I saw Jake for the first time, his head thrown back, a smile on his lips.

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## 2

“You don’t want to do that,” he said; “it doesn’t do any good really, you know. Because nobody has ever proved that there isn’t something beyond. The chances are you might find yourself up against something terrific, something too big for you, and you wouldn’t know how to get out of it. Besides—wait until you’re sixty-five if you must finish that way.”

I was ready to break down like a boy and cry. I kept my hand on his arm as though it afforded me some measure of protection. Yet somewhere inside me there was a feeling of revolt, a stupid sense of frustration. This fellow had not any right to stop me from making a fool of myself. And, anyway, I did not care a damn for his opinion. Mechanically I heard myself speaking in a small tired voice I scarcely recognized as my own.

“You don’t understand,” I kept saying, “you don’t understand—I’m not going to explain to you or to anybody. This is my affair, you don’t understand.”

He swung himself up on the bridge beside me. He pulled a packet of cigarettes from his pocket.

I took one, and this very action of turning it in my fingers and lighting it, in the familiar drawing-out of my breath, gave me such a sense of life newfound with the blessed relief that I had so far escaped the horror of death, that I smiled and was no longer fearful or ashamed to meet his eyes.

He smiled too, and then stayed silent for some minutes, allowing me time to recover my mental balance, while his shoulder just touched my shoulder, and his knee just touched my knee, so that I was aware of the immense security of his presence.

He must have been following some train of thought in his mind, for when he spoke again it was like the continuation of things unsaid.

“There’s always been a whole lot talked about responsibilities,” he went on, “and citizenship, and duty, which is a funny word. None of these matters to you or to me, I guess. Maybe we’re built on a lower level. We’re not belonging to the crowd of real people. They exist apart, in their true, even way of living. But there’s something in me and in you that can’t be cheated for all that, it’s like a spark of light that burns in spite of ourselves, we can’t throw it away, we can’t destroy the only chance we’ve got to live for our own purpose. We wouldn’t have been born otherwise.”

He broke off abruptly and looked at me sideways, not to watch the effect of his words, but to see how I was taking my new lease of life.

“What were you thinking about?” he asked. I saw that he meant by this what was I thinking before I tried to throw myself down from the bridge.

“I don’t know,” I said; “pictures came into my mind that I couldn’t stop. The smell of grass in early summer, a gull dipping its wing into the sea, a plowman on a hill resting, his hand on his horse’s back, and the touch of earth. No, now I come to remember, these faded before things I had never known. Impossible dusty cities and men swearing and fighting; then I getting terribly drunk, getting terribly tired sleeping with women who laughed against my shoulder, not caring about me at all. The eating and riding, and a long rest and a dream.”

Somehow we found ourselves smiling at the pictures my imagination had so swiftly conjured.

~~“That’s the sort of mood you’ve got to cling to,” he said, “don’t get away from it. I want you to feel like that.”~~

Once more I was a boy again, shy, sullen, resentful of the attitude he had adopted. I didn’t know him. It wasn’t his business.

I leaned forward on the bridge, biting my nails.

“I don’t see,” I said, “what all this has got to do with you. You might as well have left me to clean out. I’m no use, I don’t want to live.”

He did not bother about me, he made no attempt to ask questions, and I felt like some silly girl snubbed by a man older than herself, failing to win her impression, and sitting back confused and immature.

“Oh! hell,” I said, and to my shame and misery I heard my voice break off in the middle, and I felt the tears come in my eyes.

I was not even a boy, but a little sniffing child wiping his nose against the shoulder of his companion.

“I’ve been such a fool,” I said, “such a bloody fool.”

Then he laid his hand on my arm, and I knew he was not looking at my face, but that he meant to show he was with me and that my boy’s tears could not spoil anything.

“We’ll pull along together,” he said, and that was all.

I knew then that I did not have to worry about things again, that I could lean upon him, weak though it might seem, and that he would not leave me to the horror of being alone. I began to notice his face, his curious gray eyes and the scar that ran the length of his left cheek. His hair was black, and he wore no hat. His clothes were shabby too, as though he did not care. I did not mind who he was or where he came from, all I knew was that there was something of splendor about him that had lifted me away from myself, making the coward in me sorry and lamentable beside his grandeur. He must have been some six or seven years older than me, but I felt there was no necessity to ask these sorts of questions.

We accepted each other and that was all.

“My name’s Jake,” he said, throwing away his cigarette, “what do you call yourself?”

I hesitated like a poor fool, and then stumbled over my words, realizing that my father’s name could not matter to such as he, fame would be one of those things that would leave him untouched save for a smile and a shrug of his shoulder.

“Oh! call me Dick,” I said, “that’s good enough for me,” but even as I muttered this stupidly I hated to feel he had been aware of my hesitation. It was as though some remnant of family pride still clung about me, reminding me that the shackles of relationship could never be shaken off.

At that moment I loathed the memory of my home more than ever; I could not bear to think instinctively it should step between me and my freedom.

He asked me suddenly how old I was, and I told him I was twenty-one.

“You mustn’t throw it away,” he said.

“No,” I said.

I don’t think I really knew what he meant.

“Life,” he said, “isn’t just whining about things. There’s something tremendous in it. We don’t want to go messing up our chances. There’s so much to know, so much to do. No reason for us to crumple.”

I wondered why he included himself in my inferiority, and I thought that this was his way of

showing sympathy. He was pulling himself down to my level. I didn't want him to do that, it was humiliation to both of us, but especially to him. I knew that however desperate his life might have been, however lonely and bitter and distressed, he would not have done what I had tried to do.

He would have been sufficient to himself and never lonely.

"Oh! you," I said, "you're different—"

I felt hot and ashamed, but he did not notice this, unless he kept his thoughts to himself.

The darkness had come while we had been talking, and there were no wide streaks left in the sky and no dark patches.

There was a star above the black smudge of St. Paul's.

I was grateful to the darkness and grateful to the vast sound of London in the distance. I loved the warm air and the spent dust, the lights of the world that still accepted me, the listless scent of a summer evening, the movement of people, and the blessed certitude of the small star. And above all the voice and nearness of my companion.

The river beneath the bridge was remote now and beyond me, the very water running so swift and silently held no suggestion of horror. It had even lost its power of fascination. I was superior on my firm bridge and it could not reach me. I would not be afraid of it again.

Perhaps in a way I was dazzled at the thrill of escape, I was oddly excited at the possibility of an adventure, I wanted to show off. I swung my legs carelessly over the parapet, whistling to myself, knowing I should not fall.

Jake laughed, and steadied my arm as though I were a child.

"You're safe now, aren't you?" he said.

I felt small and ridiculous, and was not sure how much of a fool he thought me. I wished I were different, I wished I were stronger than he.

It would be good to win his approval over anything.

"What are we going to do?" I asked, and I wondered whether he realized how I hung upon his words. He did not answer me directly, his face was in shadow and I could not learn the expression on his eyes. Once more he continued in a channel of his own thoughts.

"Being young," he said, "is something you won't understand until it's gone from you, and then it will come in a flash, leaving you a little wiser than before. You won't be lonely, you won't be unhappy, possibly there will be a great peace and security. You'll go on, you see, as others have gone on, just that and no more. You'll love and live, and the rest of it. But because of stupidity, or carelessness, or a belief in the lasting glamour of things, you'll throw away what you wanted to throw away tonight. I guess you won't notice any difference. You won't know what you're losing, and you won't care."

He laughed softly, and laying his hand on my shoulder I knew that he understood me better than I did myself. And there was a shadow across his eyes which made me feel as if he were sorry about something.

"You'll be all right," he said, "you'll be fine, and stronger than before. But if you listen you'll hear the echo of a lost thing away in the air, like a bird with a song you can't name, high up above you where you can't reach.

" 'I'll never be young again,' it says, 'I'll never be young again' "

Still he had not answered my question. And I did not want to be treated as a child. Nor did I understand. I spoke roughly, not choosing my words.

"Oh! damn your sermons, let's clear out of this place, it doesn't matter where."

Away down the Pool I heard the siren of a ship, and the echoing siren of a tug.

Lights winked in the darkness, and the still rotten smell of the river floated up to me, bringing memory of the barge that had gone with the tide and the setting of the sun.

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Jake lifted his head, and he seemed to be listening to the siren and the hundred-odd sounds of the Pool. It may be there was a distant whistle and the scraping of feet on a deck, the rattle of a chain, the hoarse shout of a pilot. None of this could we see, only the flashes of light and the dim outline of moving things upon the water. I fell to wondering about the sea that lay beyond this river, and how the sight of it would meet our eyes at dawn like a strange shock of beauty after the mud reaches and the green plains. Somewhere there would be tall cliffs, white against the morning, and loose chalk and stone crumbling to a beach. I fancied there would be breakers upon the shore, a thin line of foam and soft wind coming from the land. Little houses would stand on these cliffs, snugly asleep, the windows closed to the air. They would not matter to us as we passed, for we would have done with them. We would be away, and long after men would come from those houses and make for the fields, staring at the warm sky, calling to a dog over their shoulder, while the women bent low over their tubs, wringing their hands in the blue soapy water, harkening to the kitchen clock and aware of the good dinner smell. Staring towards the sea, shielding their eyes from the sun with their hand upraised, perhaps they would see a gray whisper of spent smoke upon the horizon to tell them we had passed. Or the square corner of a sail dipping below the line, the tip of a masthead smudged against the sky.

Then I sighed, for these things had become real to me in a moment, and here we were only upon the bridge, and we must turn to the streets, and the noise of the traffic, and think of the necessity of eating stand shoulder to shoulder with people on pleasure bent, mounting like beetles from the hazy Underground, our eyes blinking at the glaring lights of a crowded cinema, and so to a drab lodging house with the narrow beds and the gray cotton sheets.

So once more I turned to Jake and repeated: "What shall we do?" scarce caring for his reply, aware that despondency would come to me in any case. And his answer was one that showed me he had an intuition of my every mood, that he joined in with them as though he were part of myself, that even my thoughts were not hidden from him, that we were bound henceforth as comrades and I loved him and he understood.

"We'll get away in a ship together, you and I," he said.



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### 3

After I had eaten I felt strong, with no shade of weariness clinging to me. We sat at a little table in a dark corner, and the shabby waiter had flicked the last crumb off the greasy cloth. We had told him to go away and not to worry us. The air about us was thick with the smoke from our cigarettes. This and the swinging light from the opposite wall worried my eyes, but Jake's face was in shadow and he sat motionless, though I knew he was watching me. The ash fell from my cigarette onto the plate beneath me, and I kept picking at the crumbs on the cloth, and drawing imaginary figures. Jake had suggested a brandy and soda to pull me together, and perhaps this and the food had gone to my head, for I moved about in my chair excitedly, and my face was burning, and I wanted to go on talking and talking, and explaining to Jake the reason for things. With the outpouring of my words I seemed to get right clear of the atmosphere of the place, and to find myself once more standing on the lawns below the windows at home. Smooth even lawns stretching away to the sunk garden and the lily pond.

I could hear the distant whirr of the mowing machine, and one of the gardeners snipping at the laurel bushes leading to the drive. A dog barked away by the stables. And I would look into the cool long room that was the drawing room, with its shiny chintz covers, the air filled with the scent of flowers so fresh compared to the solidity and stale mustiness of furniture never moved, while my mother's voice, cold and impersonal, continued in a strange monotony to my father their endless discussion of things that did not matter to me.

Then he would push back his chair and wander towards the door, returning to the library, where he would continue his work, and on his way pausing, his hand on the handle of the door: "Have you spoken to Richard?"

My mother answered something I could not hear, but I could see him shrug his shoulders as though to dismiss such a trivial thing as me from his mind, and then he would add contemptuously with a half-laugh: "He'll never make anything of himself."

She probably nodded her head as she always did, in complete agreement to any of his words, and when he was gone she would forget me as he had done and give herself up to that self-effacing work which was her life's pleasure, the copying of his spidery manuscripts in her own neat handwriting.

And I, standing without on the smooth lawn, would glance towards the large bay window of the library, and would see the figure of this man that was my father standing an instant, his hands clasped behind his back, gazing at the son of whom he had so piteous an opinion; then turning to the heavy desk, the curtain blowing and fanning the litter of his papers, he would seat himself, his head lower than his hunched shoulders, and in the room there would be no sound but the steady scratching of his pen and the tassel of the blind tap-tapping against the windowpane.

Every word he wrote would be strong with that sweet purity and simplicity that was his gift alone, placing him higher than any living poet, secure on his pedestal apart from the world, like a great silent god above the little dwarfs of men tossed hither and thither in the stream of life. From the crystal clearness of his brain the images became words, and the words became magic, and the whole world

transcendent of beauty, one thread touching another, alike in their perfection and their certitude of immortality.

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Thus it seemed to me he was not a living figure of flesh and blood, but a monument to the nation's pride of his country, his England, and now and then he would bow gravely from his pedestal and scatter to the people a small quantity of his thought, which they would grub for on their poor rough ground, then clasp to their hungry hearts as treasure.

My father was a legend, and he had created his legend, his life, his atmosphere, he continued something changeless and immortal like some saga whispered from generation to generation. His home was no more than a reflection of himself where his wife and his servants moved like dull things, stray patterns on a screen of his own weaving, and he a giant in the huge musty library, his somber eyes set deep in his carven face, untouched by the world, as the frozen snow of a far mountain splendid on his pinnacle, alone with his thoughts.

Like a medieval king he accepted the homage due to him, and I could remember the line of people waiting in the stone hall until he should come to them, my mother moving among them as gracious as the queen she felt herself to be.

The little crowd of worshippers would fade away when the audience was finished, and, dazzled and awestruck, find themselves out on the great paved terrace with the magnificent image of their god printed forever on their minds.

This was as it should be; this was what they had imagined, the poet secure in a background tradition, while England and themselves bowed low in recognition of his supremacy.

And so away down the long chestnut drive and through the park where the deer grazed, and the deep woods beyond, and out past the lodge and the high iron gates onto the main road that led to Lessington.

They would sigh, shaking their heads at the loveliness of what they had seen, the peace of the house, the marvel of my father's presence, but even as they envied him, deep in their hearts they would smile at the memory of the homes awaiting them, and their own little joys and their own little worries.

These were some of the things I told Jake that night in the corner of the dirty smoke-filled eating house. Nor did he interrupt me to put some question, for I spoke as though talking to myself and he a silent witness.

Even as the words came from my mouth my eyes fell upon the torn half of a newspaper left on another table, and this was the same edition I had read myself that evening on the bridge. And here was a column of a speech, and here was my father's face staring up at me from the print to torture me once more. I struck at it with my fist and threw it over to Jake in his shadowed corner.

"There," I said to him, "there is my father," with triumph and defiance in my voice as though I expected his surprise and disapproval, and I didn't care at all, not I.

He looked at the photograph and the name beneath, then handed it back to me without a word. Then I continued speaking my thoughts aloud. Once again I was back at home, and wandering lost along the narrow dusty corridors of the silent house, passing the doors of the bedrooms never used, peering into the great empty wing that was shut away from the part in which we lived.

The furniture, draped in white sheets, stared strangely through the gloom. If I opened a window the hinges creaked, the pane shook, and the stream of day filtering through into the room seemed like sacrilege and the intrusion of shame. A blind moth fluttered its way to the light. Then I shut the window again and drew close the shutters and crept from this atmosphere of decay and silent antagonism, and away down the murky passages and down the stone stairway of the servants' quarters.

out into the bright sunlight of the gardens even as the moth with its fluttering wings had done. Yet the moth was free and I was still in prison.

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And I wanted to shout and I wanted to sing, and I wanted to throw a ball into the air.

For I wished to be a boy with other boys, wandering in early morning in wet fields, astir with the lark, the dew soaking my shoes and the mud from the valley stream clinging to my clothes.

I wanted to rob a nest, careless of the disconsolate bird; I wanted to dive into the stagnant lake from the low branches of a crouching willow. I wanted to feel a cricket bat in my hands, bending the spring handle, and hear the sharp crack of the leather against the wood.

I wanted to use my fists against the faces of boys, to fight with them, laughing, sprawling on the ground, and then run with them, catching at my breath, flinging a stone to the top of a tree.

I wanted to smell the hot, damp flesh of horses, they snuggling their warm noses in my hand, and then up, and a kick, and a jerk at the rein and off towards the low meadows and the rough hussocks turf.

I wanted to have a father who cared for the glory of these things, who gave me a gun, who roared with me calling to his dogs, who laughed loudly and long, whose breath smelt of whiskey and tobacco and then after dinner would lean back in his chair and smile at me across the candles on the dining room table, and bid me tell him what was passing in my mind.

I would have a mother whose beauty made me ashamed of my own clumsiness, whose voice was low, whose smile was a caress; who knew my thoughts without my telling her, who loved me to be silent in her room when I wished to be alone thinking of nothing, whose scent would always be the same behind her ears and in the hollow of her hands, and who would come to me at night and let me be a child.

And none of this belonged to me, but existed only in my imagination, for I had a poet for a father and my mother was his slave, while I sat stiffly in the schoolroom with my tutor, his weak eyes blinking behind his spectacles, his scholarly voice accentuating with punctilious correction the steady meter of Greek verse. So I learned that I must follow meekly like a humble shadow in the footsteps of my father, train my mind gradually and patiently to the polished beauty of words, fold my hands reverently on the covers of books, care for no smell save that of ancient manuscript, the faded ink, the yellow parchment.

To be able to write then was the only object in my life; without this achievement there was no purpose in my being born at all. My tutor was like the thin echo of my father's voice, repeating his phrases as a disciple murmurs the teachings of his master. And I grew to loathe my father, loathe his genius that made such a mockery of his son; and my spirit rebelled against all the things he stood for. It struggled to resist his power, it fought to escape from the net that bound me imprisoned in his atmosphere. I hated him, alone in his library, distant and intangible, his cold brain wandering among the heights which I could never attain, worshipped by the world and remaining aloof, untouched and unharmed by his own fame. How could I interest him, with my boy's body and my restlessness, and what were my dreams to him? We sat round the table in the dining room, my mother shadowy and ineffectual, keeping up a little patter of words to the tutor, who turned his own face towards her with pretended interest; and my father silent in his oak chair chewing his food slowly, his eyes fixed on the tablecloth like a dumb idiot.

Sometimes my mother would glance in my direction, and I would guess at the puzzled thought behind her brow.

"Richard," she said, "looks pale today. I think he might take his bicycle into Lessington."

And my tutor would fall in with her agreement, and immediately they would make a business

this going into Lessington, the time of starting and the time of returning, and what I should do there and what I should see. So much so that instinctively I resented their idea, and scowling over my meal would mutter that I did not care to go.

Then my mother appealed to my father at his end of the table, with a glance of reproach in my direction for being the cause of disturbance to his great thoughts, and putting on the special voice she used for him would say: "My dear, we think Richard should bicycle into Lessington."

My father would turn his eyes upon me, as a scientist looks at an unimportant insect whose name he does not even bother to remember, and then pausing to consider the matter, for his manners were excellent, he nodded his head gravely as though he had turned the subject over in his mind.

"Yes," he said, "Richard must certainly bicycle into Lessington."

Thus the subject was closed forever, and early in the afternoon I would be dragging my machine from the empty stable, and pedaling along the silent drive out onto the hard high road bounded on either side by the ugly telegraph poles.

In the evening my father would still be working in the library, and we would sit in the drawing room, the tutor with his spectacles balanced on his nose reading aloud to my mother, who lay back in her chair, her eyes shut, sleeping, her work on her knee.

And I would run upstairs to the empty schoolroom, my mind afire with a poem I should write, but once I took the pencil in my hand the ideas floated away from me, mocking me, and the words would not come. I would scribble something in a last desperate effort to be unbeaten, but the lines stared up at me pathetic in their immaturity, and in a wave of misery I tore the paper, aware of my failure. There was silence in the house and the garden was hushed. There was no movement even in the branches of the trees.

"You talked to me of being young," I said to Jake, "you talked this evening on the bridge of losing something I would never understand. Don't you see what all that has meant to me? I was a boy without the life of a boy. Being young means bondage to me, it means a gaping sepulcher of a house smelling of dust and decay, it means people I have never loved living apart from me in a world of their own where there's no time, it means the stifling personality of my father crushing the spirit of his son, it means the agony of restlessness, the torture of longings which nobody would explain, and always with me the certainty I was a failure, unable to write, unable to live—don't you see, don't you see?"

I did not really care whether Jake followed my words or not, I was speaking to persuade myself.

I went on to tell him of this business of growing up in my father's shadow, of no longer being a boy and my tutor leaving, my supposed education being finished, while my mother still looked upon me as a child of ten and my father never looked on me at all, unless it was to ask me courteously if I had finished the play I had begun.

For I had started a drama in blank verse, one scene of which had been written and re-written, and because of this I shut myself up in a room all day pretending to be working, while most of the time I bit the end of my penholder and gazed out of the window over the trees in the park to the hills beyond.

I hated blank verse, and I hated the Greek form which was nothing but a wretched, slavish imitation of my father's meter, and forgetting the pompous mouthings of my hero I dreamed idly as the long hours passed.

I would be a man with other men, I would lose myself in a conversation of trivial things where poetry was scorned; I would go where there were no trees and no placid grazing deer but the hot dust of a city and the scream of moving things, where life was a jest and a laugh, where life was an oath and a tear, where people hated and people loved, and beauty meant no empty word in the cold impersonality of a poem but the body of a woman. And so on, and so on, I dreamed with the pen still

clutched between my fingers and the poor hidden life in me yearning to be free.

As I explained these things to Jake it seemed as though the old hatred of my home rose strong in me as ever, and I was still passionately bound to it for all my breaking away, for all my thankful realization of the hot drab restaurant and my hands on the greasy cloth and Jake's face secure in the dark corner before me. My father still wrote unmoved in the library, and whatever I did could not change him, for he would always know me as unworthy, a wretched abortion of himself, and therefore something to be cast aside from his thoughts lest I should disturb their crystal clarity.

So all I had been saying was no more than an attempt to show this man my father and the atmosphere grown up about him, and once more Jake must bring his mind back to the picture I had drawn for him, of the open windows of the drawing room and I standing on the lawn with the echo of my father's voice ringing in my ears: "He'll never make anything of himself."

Even the first sentence: "Have you spoken to Richard?" proved in a few words his contempt for his son, so much that it was not worth the trouble of taking him to task, but such a matter was best left to the handling of my mother. For why should he worry, and why should he care?

Then in a blind frenzy of rage I must run upstairs to the poor forsaken schoolroom and rummage in a dusty drawer, and from beneath the scarce-started manuscript of my Greek play, which rapidly I tore across, flinging it in pieces about the floor, I drew page after page of my own poetry hidden in a thick black exercise book, poetry that I had not dared read over even to myself, for here were lines of hatred and revolt, bitterness and despair; here were my dreams of women, lust-ridden and obscene, images conjured by the loathing of my father's simplicity and purity. Pitiful and stark, they expressed more than a defiance of his beauty. And seizing these I went down to the library, and flung open the door, looking upon him where he sat before his desk, his heavy brown face resting in his hands, and I went to him and threw my poems in front of him, stammering over my words as I spoke. "Read them, read them, I wrote them because of you," and then called out of the window to my mother bending over her flowers: "You come too, and listen to my poems." Then the horror grew upon me as she came through the long windows, a dawn of a smile on her face, and leaned over my father's shoulder, who slowly drawing his spectacles from his case, fumbled with my litter of paper.

So he began to read aloud in his resonant voice, unaware at first of the sense, the pornographic outpourings of his son. This scene I had staged seemed to me so untrue that I was afraid, and even as I shuddered a wave of disgust came upon me for the diabolical cruelty of my action, and in something more than shame and despair I saw the papers fall from my father's hand and his great eyes turn upon me, while my mother, understanding less than he, would have put some question, for I noticed her puzzled frown and the beginning of a sentence: "Why, Richard—" she said. "Why, Richard...?" But my father never moved, he only kept his eyes upon my face. So then there was no more than my cursing and my stumble from the room, and running away down the drive with the memory of his eyes, and past the deer in the park, and the crying rooks hovering above the woods, and out of the iron gates for the last time, never once looking back over my shoulder. After this, three days and three nights which passed as a dream swiftly forgotten, leaving nothing but a sensation of despair, and then the sight of London friendless, and cold, and feeling hungry and feeling tired and thinking about things, and still thinking, and so standing on the bridge above the river.

Now I was tired and I leaned on the table with my head pillowed on my arms, and waited for Jake to speak to me.

"You're blaming me, of course," I said; "I don't care."

I took his silence for a confirmation of my words.

"Even now you don't understand what I've been through," I told him; "you can't know what tho

years have meant to me. Lost and wasted. A misery and a denial of everything that was living. The  
you talk of the glory of being young.”

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Jake’s voice sounded gentle coming from out of the shadows.

“I believe you’ve felt all you’ve told me,” he said; “I can understand everything and a little more.  
But against all this you had things you could have loved.”

“Had things? What do you mean?” I asked.

“There was a garden,” he said, “and woods and rocks, and the smell of flowers, and the voices  
people.”

I thought he must be mad. I stared at him in amazement.

“A garden? What was that to me? I tell you I was buried; you can’t have any conception of  
suffering when you say that.”

He was silent again.

“It’s all very well for you to talk,” I said; “all the years I’ve wasted you must have spent loving and  
living, and not caring a damn. You’re crazy to talk about woods, and flowers in a garden—you haven’t  
understood, then, after all? Where have you been these last five years, anyway?”

I was superior to him in my knowledge of suffering. He did not know what it was to be sensitive.

Jake waited a moment, and when he spoke it was as though he were sorry for me, and the fool I had  
made of myself, but for himself he did not care.

“I’ve been in prison,” he said.

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## 4

When Jake told me this I got up blindly from the table and went out, through the swing doors into the street, and began to walk like a drunkard along the pavement brushing against people I did not see, never caring how I went or where I should end. I did not realize that he had followed me, but looking over my shoulder I found that he was walking by my side, and turning my head so he should not see my face, I told him roughly to go, and leave me by myself.

“Don’t be a fool,” said Jake, and he caught at my wrist before I could strike him. “Don’t be a fool,” he said.

I wanted to knock him down, for every word of his was like a sting and a reproach to me, who by my ignorance had accused him of a lack of sympathy and an ignorance of sorrow. He had listened without speaking to my interminable rambling story of repression and introspection, with no hint of comparison of what his own life must have been, and he had let me run on, the silly boyish words pouring from my mouth, I who for all my discontent had lived in comfort and security. And in his understanding of my feelings all he had suggested for the difference between us was my possession of woods and rooks, the smell of flowers and the voices of people.

It seemed to me that I could see him in his cell watching for a glint of light through the grate window, and there would be a smile on his face for the blessed comfort this light would bring to him, while I, my hands and my lips buried in the scarlet and golden petals fallen from the azalea and the rhododendron bushes on the lawn at home, the sun on my back, and in my ears the song of a thrush or the sweeping branches of the chestnut tree, would groan and struggle against the impossibility of escape.

“You’d better go away,” I said to Jake; “you can’t hang around with me after what I’ve said. I’m not worth a curse; I’ll clear out, I’ll go with people who don’t matter.”

“Don’t be a fool,” he said again. We were standing now by a lamppost at the corner of a street. “You don’t have to mind what you say to me,” he went on, “and you don’t need to worry over many years in prison. That’s all gone, and locked away in myself, minding, I mean. You can talk about it whenever you like if it helps you.”

“I feel a swine,” I said, “the way I’ve been throwing about my own story like some fake martyr and you going through hell....”

“Oh! that’s all right,” he said, and he laughed to show me I need not be shy of him over this.

“What did you do?” I asked stupidly, and then felt myself go scarlet, for what business was it of mine, anyway?

“I killed a man,” said Jake.

I did not know what to say, I wanted to show him that it did not matter to me what he had done, that he would be justified in anything.

“Oh! well,” I said lamely, “I dare say...” but I did not know how to go on with my sentence.

“I expect the other chap deserved all he got....” I ended, feeling a fool.

“No,” said Jake, “whatever anybody does it can’t give you the excuse to take their lives. I reason that out in prison. You get a whole lot of time for thinking there.”

His words were simple enough, but it hurt me to think of him alone with his thoughts, fighting out the reason for life and death.

“I don’t know,” I said, wishing to argue on his side, “if your chap had done something you couldn’t forgive?”

“Oh! forgiveness,” smiled Jake, “that’s nothing. You soon get over that. I was your age when that thing came along, and I guess I thought very much like you then. I wanted to hurt, and only succeeded in hurting myself. The man I killed wasn’t any the wiser. In prison I soon forgot about him, and what he’d done; all I remembered were the years he might have had, and mine too, gone because I hadn’t stopped to think.”

“What happened quite?” I said.

He did not answer me directly.

“When you’re young,” he said, “you make the mistake of plunging too deeply into things. That’s what I did, anyway. I reckoned myself capable of judging men by standards I’d built up for myself. I resented illusions crashing about the place.”

“Yes,” I said.

“I didn’t see that my concern was with myself, and that however much I fought I couldn’t change things, and the way people went. I believed a great deal in that fellow, and I killed him because he had spoiled the life of some woman I had never even met.”

As he spoke I could see the Jake of seven years back, and the hatred in his eyes not for the man whom he had destroyed, but for the loss of an ideal. He would crucify himself for no reason. Beneath all this I saw his superiority to myself, for I would have no principles and no standards; I would accept such a thing as natural, making excuses for the conduct of a friend, laughing perhaps, wondering idly as to the attraction of the woman, and wanting to know her.

“Oh! well, if he was like that...” I began, but I was aware my voice did not ring true with sincerity. “Anyway, what had he done?”

Now I was curious, and at the same time I despised my curiosity. Jake looked at me and the expression in his eyes made me uncomfortable, as though I were a little schoolboy grubbing over a coarse passage in the Bible.

“Just been selfish,” he said, “and thinking about his body.”

He did not say anymore than this.

“She died of consumption out in Switzerland. She went to pieces after he left her. He was the first you see, and he hadn’t bothered to think.”

I nodded, biting my nails; I wanted to get away from the subject of the woman. I felt I wasn’t qualified to judge.

“How did you kill him?” I asked.

“Fighting in the ring,” he said, “just a cheap prizefight, one of those affairs in a tent at a circus where you pay half a crown to watch. I broke his neck. Nobody but myself knew how much it was on purpose. At the trial the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter. I knew I was guilty and I didn’t tell. That’s being a coward. Now you know why I’m here. I’ve served my little sentence.”

He laughed, and I thought how bitter I would be, how resentful of the world, how bent and broken by the punishment brought on myself. And he was laughing, standing under the lamppost, lighting another cigarette.

“Maybe I’ve been boring you,” he said; “let’s forget about all that. I’ve told you this just to show



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