

with the ripeness of fruits. Then came the time when men became as knowing children, and as wilful, in their tiny understandings, so that Truth perforce must move among them under many guises and her voice came to be regarded as lightly as the wantoning wind. It was in this age this bud-fresh Beauty was born, she with milk-soft cheeks as lovely as the high spring dawn, her nature pure as the font from which she had sprung, her smile alluring as the velvet purpled peaks that throw the warm kisses of the genial sun back into the dazzling azure above them. Her delectable presence reminds us of the low twittering songs of wooing birds and of that gay scented time when the leaf unfolds and the early modest flowers take courage from the sun and display their glories. To this wonderful child born of the mysteries, Truth has entrusted her power and deputised her mission to man. To this guileless babe she has transmitted her strength, her power and her arts and has willed that this Beauty shall henceforth carry her torch and with her might shall make entry through the senses into the citadel—the heart of this newer higher most-rebellious man. Ah, she wins not through the intellect but through the understanding, which some call wisdom, and by that means the still unsullied primitive instinct, that universal birth-right, that children, alas so very soon lose and with it that priceless heritage—

imagination, when they become aware of their contact with their parents. This saving instinct, now sadly shackled to extinction, when given its fullest liberty, will produce your superman."

"Phew! And who is this cheerful dreamer? Butler?"

"Oh, no."

"That soft-boiled prof. Tom Wilton?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

"Harold Bretano."

"O! Ha, you—You damned cat!"

The cigarette falls from his agitated fingers. A swift movement of his arm. Some object flies across the table. A slight crash of glass; the table light is extinguished; the lamp globe has fallen.

Darkness.

A slipping, sliding sound of crumpling silk.

A slight gasp.

A repressed sigh.

A deep breathing.

A tiny tinkling sound, as if a remaining pendulous fragment of the amber lamp-globe has fallen on the polished table.

Silence.

The soft orange glow from the fireplace falls on an indistinct mass of disordered silk heaped on the hearth-rug.

All else is darkness.

A muttered exclamation.

Hurried footsteps cross the room. The door is plucked open. A narrow oblong

ochre plane of light from the hall filters in past the door-frame.

"Get out, get out!"

A dark form separates itself swiftly from the shadows of the room, it hurls itself into the tawny slit of light at the doorway and is as suddenly gone from sight.

The door is closed vigorously.

Darkness.

Footsteps return across the soft-yielding rugs to the fireplace.

A light is switched on overhead.

"Jessie, my dear, why do you allow that infernal cat in this room?"

A mumbling from the crumpled mass of blue silk on the hearth-rug:

"Oh, Jim, he—Tiddles scared me out of my wits and—I fell off the chair; I thought for a moment we had quarrelled."

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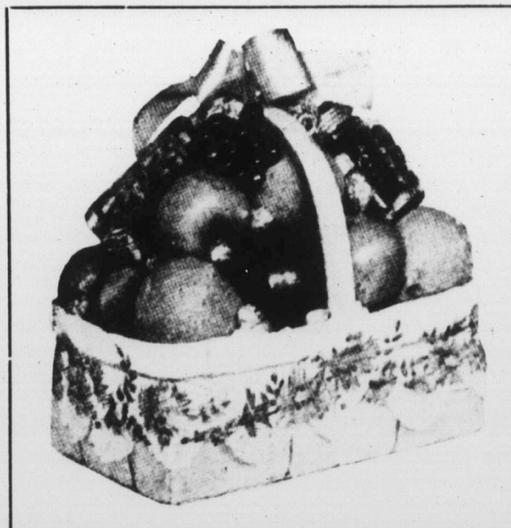
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