

EACH MAN'S . . .

(Continued from Page Two)

"Place? Place? This is but the gateway to the stars, where men's greatest moments are arrested to live forever, where what we found the happiest in life lives on and on in death. This is the highway between heaven and hell, where we all wait patiently for a final Judgment Day, when we will be finally disposed of. All mankind is here—all of history is around us. For those who were good it is blissful, for those who were evil, it is barren. I trust you don't cross the Line of Segregation by mistake."

"I won't" Spud said, "but I must find Kate."

"Kate? But you are too soon. You're not dead. You're time is not now."

"I'm here on special permission. The Goddess of Time—"

"The G. of T.! What was that old shrew doing here where Time stands still and youth never passes away? So. You're a tourist! Very well, your Kate's name is now Fantazia. She lives in the Garden of Eros—that way. Stick to the road and don't cross the Line."

"Thanks", said Spud and turned away.

"She won't know you, William called after him, "you're too early."

But Spud paid no heed and William shrugged and thought of a new phrase: "Whereby his fire the hermit sits alone", he muttered carressing every word.

When Spud got on the road again he saw where the Line of Segregation was, for on the right the fields were green and filled with flowers, while on the left all growth was stunted and everything looked in a state of disrepair. So Spud walked along the Line being careful to stay on the right side, until he came to a man dressed in velvet and lace who was watering his horse. Spud noted that he was on the left side of the Line. But being tactful, he resolved not to draw attention to this and noting that the horse was branded 'Desire', greeted him.

"My name is Spud and I'm—". But he stopped as the gentleman looked up, for here was a face gutted by premature age, unbearable fatigue and unforgettable shame, and yet its desecration held the traces of what was once great beauty.

He smiled sadly, comprehending Spud's embarrassment and said: "Like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart, isn't it? Ah, well, nowadays, when we know the prices of everything and the value of nothing, we can't expect to reap anything but what we sow. The name's Oscar. Oscar Wilde. And at your service."

"Oscar Wilde! Say, Oscar, old boy, is it true what they say about you and the Marquis—"

"Don't mention that name! I'm cursed enough with all the evil memories of my life without having you remind me. You know, a man in my position doesn't take lightly to scandal and that period in Reading Goal was no picnic."

"Sorry", said Spud. "But I thought here men existed forever in their happiest moments and were always young."

"Only on the other side of the Line. Here it is the reverse. Here our sins and shame, and the consequences thereof, are our constant burdens. Our crown of thorns; our cross."

"Well, anyway," said Spud consolingly, "at least you wrote some wonderful stuff."

"The best. That's my one hope to get over there". He nodded toward Spud's side of the Line. "I mean that at least I created beauty. Does that end justify the means? Well, I must get back. Farewell."

With this he mounted 'Desire' and rode off through the desolate fields like the fleeting recollection of some half-forgotten sin.

Went this way. Came to a small house marked 'Desk Clerk—check your reservations promptly!' On the wall there was a chart of the Valley divided by the all important Line. On the left he read the list of reservations. "Luciano, 19—", "Joseph Stalin, —". Then to his dismay directly beneath Stalin's name: "Spud Stanley, 19—", and greatly perplexed and feeling like he'd like to die, that is, when his time came, he saw it was extremely close to the Line, but at least on the right side of it. Hurriedly he left the place resolving to go to Church more often in the future.

Through the land of dreams and dewey memory, Spud went his solitary way and felt the unknown breezes on his brow and saw a sky no man had seen before. Passed through the ageless masquerade of History's pageantry, read the prevalent air of expectancy on a face of prehistoric man or the teen-aged boy from Calgary who died in a car in 1936. Came to the river Styx, along whose cheerless waters Hitler walks with Herod and Nero plays at dice with Al Capone. Lingered near a tavern where William Pitt spills rhetoric to Julius Caesar, while Cromwell sits with Washington talking war.

A place of dreams, a wonderland of myths. And across the Fence of No Repentance voluptuous Amber leaned and gazed at the forbidden fields with languorous eyes. And on a hill, to soundless violins, Beethoven worked his magic on an unfinished symphony. Whispered low desire in a glen as Henry lay with Anne while nearby stood their unborn child, Queen Bess, conqueror of Spain, regretting her illicit heritage. In Aztec splendour Montezuma stood, as Cortez on him

looked with scornful eyes. Came to the Nile where Cleopatra walked with Antony and with her eyes sung soft to him of love. Came and stopped beneath a swaying palm, and spoke:

"My name is Spud. I'm looking for—"

And Antony made reply. "Eros. In the Garden of the moon. Name's Fantazia now". And turned back to his Queen to drown his brand of shame with lips of love.

The alchemy of moonlight lit the sky with dulcet radiance and rode on steeds of shadow down the fragrant hills to the hollows where mystic Eros lay; laughing Eros, the Garden of the Moon. And with the echoes of all bygone days singing in his ears Spud walked through the byways of his dreams to where a girl in white played with red roses, and but for a white swan in a stream below, sat alone. The magic of her beauty filled the night; the magic of the night, the timeless stars, the ageless splendour of living memory, filled his soul as there, as in remembrance, sat his love humming a song she always used to sing before death came with soundless feet seducing her with promises of sleep.

"Darling!" he cried, exulting in his joy and bounding to her side.

"Darling, it's been so long."

A frightened girl jumped up and looked askance with eyes as wide as some young, startled deer, and haughtily replied. "Who are you, sir, and why do you address me with such familiarity? What right have you to suddenly interrupt my dreams."

"But Kate", faltered Spud. "I'm—you—. Oh, don't you recognize—"

"You call me, sir, and with a familiar voice, by names my old lover used to use. My name was Kate then and his was Spud—(and here her eyes filled with the tears of love and glistened like diamonds in her eyes)—and we loved like no one dared to love before that day I had to go away."

"I am Spud and you still are Kate and I've come back—"

"My name is Fantazia," the maiden said indignantly, "and I'll thank you not to assume his sacred name." She suddenly quieted down and with a wistful look added: "His time is not yet. But I will wait. He'll be but a moment."

"A moment!", Spud almost screamed, thinking of imminent death. "You mean a lifetime."

"There is no time here", she quickly said. She went on distractedly "You know, Sir, you remind me of him. But he was different in those days. He was kind and gentle and you seem bitter and hard. Oh, no offense. It's just that I love him so. I wish he'd hurry back."

"Back?" Confusion settled on a bewildered mind. "You were the one who left."

"I didn't leave him, I only died. Our deaths are really our births, our births but death. I wish he would die so we could live again our love." She stopped a moment, and troubled waves, like April's breath on water, crossed her brow. "But he must be good. I watch him all the time, you know. His reservation now is too close to the Line."

"You watch him?"

"Oh, yes. He worries me quite a bit some times. For instance there was that little hussy Jean—"

"Ah—er—ah", Spud cleared his throat and blushed. He made a brave attempt to change the subject. "Tell me, can you see him now?"

Chapel bells were sounding in her laugh. "Of course. He's sleeping by a lake beneath the pines. And, why yes, he has a smile on his lips and his dreams are all of me."

Spud was quite disturbed. Perplexed to find there was a smile upon his lips; that he was thinking of her—or rather, of Kate in days gone by. He quickly erased the smile and scowled.

She sighed. "He smiles no more. In fact he's frowning. I wonder what he worries about now?"

To Spud this was the last straw. Here was Kate who didn't even know him telling him he was sleeping by a lake in some unknown grove of pines. And he was right here! Well, he was, wasn't he? He made a final plea.

"Honey". His tones were measured and deliberate. "I'm a very fortunate fellow. I've been allowed to revisit my past, here—a chance to relive my happiest moments. Don't disappoint me."

"But I don't understand", she said. "There is no past here. I don't even know you, but I must say there's something about you I like."

"It used to be more than that". "Pardon me?"

"Nothing."

Fell the darkness and the moonlight began to fade. The lovely garden appeared to dissolve and the trees assumed shapeless masses against the blending hills. A whirlpool of flowers and perfume, a dizzy descent for a tired brain. He saw her features still lovely in distortion; he heard her say, "Here sir, you look pale. Take—this—rose—a fond remembrance—". Then it was cool and he dozed, awoke and dozed again. Awoke once more beneath the pine trees by the lake and saw the silvery frolic of the moonlit waves. And heard the night cries in the forest and the distant wail of a train beyond the hills. Remembered Eros and the girl Fantazia, shrugged and arose to leave for home.

O.K., he thought, so it was a dream. But then he did feel tired as if he'd walked a long, long

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way. Why, he said suddenly to himself, it's only nine p.m. That was the time I sat down here by the lake. And my watch hasn't stopped!

And as he slowly walked toward his home he realized that he carried in his hand a rose and with a start remembered Fantazia's gift in Eros, the night his dream-world crumbled. So long ago it seemed and yet, no time at all had passed. Where now was the land to men unknown, where things happen that do not happen here, down in the well of all the centuries and where pale stars look down? Where now, he wondered sadly, shrugged, and pondering the rose, rewalked the shattered drawbridge of his dreams.

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