

“A Collage of Changes”

“OH, I see...”

There was an elegant greedy young woman, of good but ordinary tastes and a well-concealed ethnic background which enabled her to move in any environment she chose. Like everyone else, she'd been married and divorced. She wrote for the movies. One night at the usual party she met a man who saw her through and through and wanted her anyhow. She told him her apartment wasn't big enough for two and that she could never consider living in his place, as it was in a bad neighborhood. Instead, she went home to her pleasant place and wrote a filmscript of what it all might have been.

“Glad to meet you—”

Here we have the greedy young man from the Midwest. Son of a meat-dealer, he learned his father's trade, grew accustomed to the abattoir, the mallet, the shockwand, the cleaver. As would be expected. It did affect his relationships with women; he had the ill-fortune to be a romantic. But why waste all that good training. He joined an existential band of modern gypsies and became the Geek. He met many young women, though none of them would stay with him. When it was no longer exciting to the crowd to see him devouring live chickens &c., he reached into the crowd itself. They loved it.

“How about that!”

The young actress was the envy of her peer-group. She was truly golden: used her special gifts to godlike advantage. But she had a low self-image. She thought everyone around her would succeed her, and she feared each credit that the other actresses earned on the way up. Each credit earned by them was a credit less for her! She began to allow this paranoia to come forth in her roles, until it took over; instead of golden, she was mud and slinging mud. And, as she was a very good actress, after awhile instead of seeing her as golden, everyone saw her as mud. She had made a great deal of money in her early days, and people began to associate with her because they liked her money; then they began to identify with her anger and her self-put-down, so she continued to be rich. Two of her

colleague actresses committed suicide, and the by-then middle-aged actress thought correctly that she would gain the public that they had lost. A young, aspiring actor married her. In a while he became known as her consort, and gave up acting.

“Why don't you pay attention?”

There was a bright young man, plain, short and thin, who sought company by writing poems. He found love through the friends he met while reading his poems in public. Then he began publishing the poems of these friends, and some of his own. He became known in many cities. His friends loved him, his lady loved him, his colleagues respected him, but the city he was born in didn't reciprocate, because he wanted to change the city, and everyone knows it takes a long time to change a city. In despair, the young man shot himself. After his death, many of the friends wrote poems or articles or fables like this one about him. Not many of them had bothered to read the young man's poems. In which he wrote about futility and death as a religion.

“It occurred to me...”

An adventurous couple drove uptown to find a friend's house, to visit. It appeared that their hosts were out. No lights on, so they went on in, used the bathroom (including the shower) and decided to cook a dinner of the fish they caught at a nearby lake. Meanwhile the wife-friend was indeed in the house; a shy person, she was cringing in the basement, where she'd gone to fetch a bottle of preserved plums. Unable to appear or to object, as they talked about her or her husband in minute detail. They were discussing the idea of making a filmstrip of her awkwardness and then showing it to her husband. The wife considered for the first time how she might appear to others. To her husband, who did seem to love her. The adventurous couple were laughing, washing the dishes and putting them back. They then left.

“Sure, but—”

The older couple had it all figured out. Being Americans of European descent who travelled, they didn't want to retire to a Sun City; they were people of good taste and good sense, and sybarites. So they bought land in a grove of trees outside a colonial Mexican silvermining town which had been restored from ruins. The elder couple moved into one of the expertly restored houses, bringing with them their treasures, collected from all of the lands where they had travelled. The

month after they moved into the lovely house, they both contracted spinal meningitis and died within a day of each other.

“Hey — wait a minute!”

The wealthy young woman from the suburbs was skinny and slept a lot. At the finishing-school she attended, she had all she could do to stay awake more than a few hours at a time: sleep tasted so good. The sleep, thick and rich, was better than the life. Then the young woman left school and met a young man who'd always been an insomniac. The nightmares were more dangerous than the life he led. Tanned and sturdy, he spent a lot of time outdoors, playing tennis, jogging, playing four-wall handball, hoping to find a dreamless sleep at the end of each day. The insomniac and the sleep-addict married, in order to change secrets. They had a child and everything changed.

“Why not?”

The quiet suburban family. Before the war, he'd been a Park Ranger; he was stubborn. After he returned from the war, she said, “I think it's going to be a little stranger!” She'd met him many years before the war and would love him forever, no matter what. He was now badly damaged but he did return to her. She was staunch. Those parts of him were intact. She, by now, weighed 200 lbs. Now, with the difference in him, most of the work he could do was simple manual labor. He was treated deferentially by the townfolk: he'd grown up here. The daughter was born and fit right into their lifestyle. Each of them keeps busy, not finding much to complain about. As a family, they're close. The daughter is about ten now; she knits sweaters for them all and tends her father's wounds, and helps her mother around the house with things unreachable.

“As a matter of fact...”

There was a lovely but not beautiful woman who dabbled at analysis and was very avidly into poetry writing, trying to find herself. She decided that art and life required a serious approach and that she would participate to the fullest. She let her hair grow natural, sold her expensive clothes and furniture, and moved into a downtown artists' loft. She ate as much as she wanted and left off her bra, smoked a lot of grass. As she grew more creative and her poetry began to be published she grew ambitious, finding herself with many friends. One day the woman did more than the usual amount of acid and went walking down a stream in the country. She was never really seen again. Two months later, someone got a postcard from her, saying she felt marvelous and had discovered everything.

“If you'd only—”

Now we see the woman who was raised to marry for money. She was sent to a very expensive singles resort, and one day at lunch there was a telephone page for a doctor, so she watched who rose from the table, and she went for him. Though she soon discovered he was a dentist, she also discovered he had a fair amount of money back of him, so they might indeed marry. What she did not know is that he'd seen her driving a brand new red Cadillac convertible around the resort, and thus assumed she came from a lot of money. He'd had his mom page him on the telephone at lunchtime. Ah. The parents loved the marriage. The parents played bridge and golf together. The men went to Masonic meetings together. The women went to gardening club together. Meantime, back in the ranch-house, the young woman noticed she had married a man who was a lush, a rock-collector, skier, a sports-car racer, a hangnail biter and a snorer. And who would really rather do any of these things than make love, at which he did not excel. So the young woman planned her escape. She booked into the singles resort down the road from the one where she'd met the husband-dentist, and told everyone at home she was visiting a friend for the weekend. At the resort, she met the tennis pro. He seemed like a knockout and was also smitten. With money given to her as a consolation prize by her parents, she bought a divorce from the dentist to marry to tennis pro. Who would never be able to make a decent living, but who did like to make love. To just about anything around, as it turned out.

“It doesn't really matter.”

The man with a harelip met a girl with a harelip; they became lovers and, as lovers do, they kissed, often. They produced the sign of the double-cross, which is considered a most fortunate omen in some lands. They'd met at a bazaar for the handicapped but they didn't consider themselves anything but fortunate. They understood eating problems and each others' speech perfectly. It doesn't matter in which country this happened. It was their country.

“May I help You?”

A woman of about thirty married a much older man. She had respect for his grey hair and then she found that it had the weight and the sonority of metal. He brought many children to the marriage; some of them are older than she, in fact appear to be almost as old as he. They have all been raised as nudists and walk around the house with their genitals tightly moving to and fro like so many papery packets of seeds from a garden. No one is self-conscious. Her old man is strong and gives her a dry, kindly kiss, as he walks about tanned and naked like a

statue of life itself. With tree-shaped veins along his arms and the backs of his hands that match those beginning to show through the tender skin back of her knees. She thinks of him as a ventriloquist, of his iron-grey hair as antennae, of his ageless aged children as wooden dolls, carven, one dimension thick. She has known that he is a sculptor, and she is avoiding speculation on the project after the stone-grey statue on which he is now working. It resembles her. The model is of balsa-wood; she is fully clothed and there is a distressed expression in the set of the head, the arms tilted at an angle of defense. But the mouth is portrayed smiling. Green moss spreads from the pubic area of the wood model. The stone on which he has begun the sculpture has bits and flecks of metal ore in it. He's told her that this statue is of "how she will look," but he has not told her when.

"See you later..."

The ordinary woman lived alone in the tower of one of the buildings at the Catskill hotel. "Hey, sure, come in, I wasn't doing much anyway." She was cooking the parts of the animal which others discard. Once, she'd been making it with a college boy who lived in a cellar. He loved money more than romance, so he went to Hollywood, where he now writes screenplays; he writes to her occasionally, mostly about his life among the celebrities of Malibu Beach. She calls her tower "Malibu Beach". From a window, she counts all the other towers.

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