

livion and nihility, or physical nothingness? Or will it be death in limbo, awaiting<sup>g</sup> resurrection in another world, to be called into being in another future? For there is no absolute Nothing. There always is 'Something in Nothing' .... The Eternal, the Infinite: the Origin, the Kernel!"

There was a conscious momentary silence in the room, as if by common consent. Something fleeting and brooding which they couldn't comprehend. A ghostly echo of a Voice they couldn't hear but listened to from within.

An enchantment. A power!

The vehemence of passion was within Cynthia, as with deliberate action she took George's hand and squeezed hard. This thing within her was overwhelming and disturbing, upsetting the delicate balance of timid reserve in her young and inexperienced body.

George felt a quaking, as of a chill, at the touch of her hand. It evoked a fear in him as of an overhanging doom, a clairvoyance, which he condemned as a madness.

Had he spoken the words which brought him a kinship with his father's spirit? Had his father spoken through him?

## CHAPTER II

Miss Macdowel

Miss Martha Macdowel was nibbling daintily on a chocolate mint pattie George had offered her from not so dainty @ small brown paper bag. George had received a summons from Miss Macdowel to see her after

classes, and had bought the tidbits to assuage his hunger until he got home.

The patties were fresh and the mint had a delicate flavor, just enough to <sup>slake</sup> ~~take away~~ the cloying sweetness of the chocolate. Miss Macdowel seemed to like the chocolates; for she munched on them with more relish after the first two bites. Still she nibbled, and though George could have wolfed the whole bagful with a few mighty swallows he had to act the gentleman and follow pace. He was relieved when she started on the second pattie. By the end of the second his stomach wasn't in such an uproar and he was able to think. And the first thing that came to his mind was the reason for his being here. But Miss Macdowel wasn't talking while she was chewing. Her mouth was sealed by her lips like a tomb, while the grinding inside went on as in a vacuum. George's sharp ears detected an echo-like sound, which had a booming hollow quality; muffled, like one coming over the surface of water while one is swimming underneath. He looked more sharply at Miss Macdowel's face but detected no awareness of any sound reaching her auditory nerve from her mouth. She continued complacently and pleasureably to chew on, the jaws working in unison, not unlike a cow chewing her cud. The likeness brought a smile to his face, which might have broken into laughter hadn't he quickly turned away, pretending to clear his throat.

Miss Macdowel, at this, broke a long standing tradition. She opened her mouth, warning George with a finger to be careful. Then she clapped her lips shut, opened them again, as if she had thought better of it. "Bad things have happened with a piece of chocolate in one's throat, she said, "one might even choke to death."

"To think that an innocent piece of sweetmeat could cause death!" George smiled broadly, displaying a white line of well matched teeth.

He caught himself staring at her, watching the process of deglutition. He observed first the easy movement of the throat muscles as the Adam's apple moved upward, and then for a split second, as if teetering

on a delicate balance, starting to move down again. She didn't take another pattie but sat still, as if ruminating, staring ahead of her. George noted that her throat from the larynx upward to her chin was quite smooth, but that immediately under the larynx the skin settled into a crease, a circling fold, resting on the tips of her collar bones, which gave way her years above middle age.

There was a paleness to the skin, as of parchment-like quality, observing her now more closely. It was a blow to his vanity. He remembered the fall of his freshman year when he had caught a glimpse of her walking with another teacher in the evening twilight. In that moment she had faced him his nostrils caught the tantalizing fragrance of her perfume, and he worshipped her as the Goddess of wisdom, as the symbol of winsome ageless womanhood. She had recognized ~~recognized~~ the adoration in him with a wise look in her smiling eyes, and had forgotten it completely when next morning he attended her class in English Lit.

Miss Macdowel's voice brought him back. "You must be wondering what I called you in for?"

"I hope it isn't that class in the morning," George said haltingly, his face flushing, "I made a fool of myself. I shouldn't have..."

"On the contrary, it was quite a revelation." She looked into his eyes with that smile of long ago. The delicate fragrance came back to his nostrils. She was young again. She dropped her eyes and continued. "It helped me make a decision. Though I was never much in doubt as to who would be the one. But let it be sufficient." There goes that word again, George thought. "Sufficient." Was wondering when it would come. On her lips it has special significance, a smooth roundness. "Sufficient," It never <sup>has</sup> failed to alert his nerves as if to something mysterious and transcendent. "Mr. Barton," she went on, "Wallace Barton, editor of the Eventide, my next-door neighbor, spoke to me of an addition to the staff, in the City Room. Specifically, he mentioned your name and asked about

you. It seems you had brought in short pieces which had come to his personal attention."

"Surely, you couldn't mean that I'd fill a regular place on the paper?"

"That is exactly what I mean," Miss Macdowel said in the teacher's firm tone. "Many a reporter had gone from my classroom to the paper."

"I wrote a few items as my fancy dictated, but regular assignments!"

"Your items seemed to please the Chief. At anyrate he wants a young inexperienced one, not a hard-bitten newshound. One to train to his own ideas."

"With one high school year left it would hardly be worth his time."

He put out his brown little bag. She glanced at it, and shook her head in the negative. "Have had enough." Then after a short pause, "The crux of the matter to Mr. Barton is how to handle the problem of Mr. Foster Forrest Senior versus Solomon Dreen and his girl show at Damon Hall!" Her uttered words had the wont clipped preciseness so familiar to George when she expostulated in class on the wrong or right thesis, or phrasing, or the right words, in a composition. To carry him away from his classroom iniquities he turned to the window looking out on the daily offerings of the old landmarks, and the usual human traffic. He was assured. He said, "But I am hardly the man for such an assignment. Mr. Forrest already is objecting to me even before I joined the Eventide."

"That's because he blames you for his troubles with his grandson, especially visiting his Jewish mother in defiance of him."

"Why?"

"Because of your friendship and influence over Foster. He never forgave his son, even after his death, for giving the name of 'hallowed' Forrest to a Lena Thalberg. Especially now that she had married this fellow Dreen..."

"Mr. Solomon Dreen is not a 'this-fellow-Dreen'", George inter-

rupted with some vehemence.

"My apologies," she smiled, "it wasn't meant quite as it sounded. But, of course, I hadn't the chance of Mr. Dreen's acquaintance. The problem that sticks in Mr. Barton's throat is the same Mr. Dreen and his girl show, and the fact that he married Mr. Forrest's daughter-in-law."

"Yes, I know. Double restrictions now on young Foster to keep him ~~from~~ from his mother."

"According to Mr. Barton old Forrest is out to ruin Mr. Dreen, and thereby strike directly at Lena for having married his son."

"That was so long ago. About twenty years?"

"Yes, a Forrest never forgets - unto his dying day."

"Not even to the death of his son - and his wife, his son's mother!"

"I well remember that tragic union," Miss Macdowel reminisced sadly, "a Forrest and a Thalberg, a scion of tradition and wealth and a daughter of a poor immigrant! The old story, the iron-bound standard of Down-East-Yankeeism. Rigid and moribund as death itself!" Her eyes lighted up, as a slightly discernable blush touched her cheekbones.

"You see I had them both in my classes, he senior and she junior. A more admirable pair I never saw. She lovely and tender, and he handsome - a manly handsomeness. The looks of his beautiful mother, poor Flora." She looked up into the air as if to recollect more of her memories.

"When the news was sprung upon the girls that the handsome football captain and the star pitcher <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>the</sup> Foster Forrest Second, ~~base-ball nine~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ to escort meek little Lena to her first Prom, it erupted like an explosion. There was a chattering and chittering in classes that would not be stilled. Poor Mr. Bibbly, his first year as a teacher, was quite upset and came to my room to find the reason for all this unruliness. But he profited later, driving the girls mad by his pointed remarks about their jealousies. When Foster graduated the rumpus <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ stilled <sup>down</sup> for a year until Lena's

graduation when Foster married her. The old man turned into an avenging Angel, forbidding his son his house. Foster was forced to leave college. After a while, with the help of his mother, he bought a little hotel on Pacific Street trying to make good for himself and his young son. They were selling that one per-cent brew there, and serving lunches...."

"I know the rest," George remarked. "It turned out to be a house of ill repute. They had a small flat upstairs, with separate entrance, and neither of them knew what was going on in the lower regions, at least not Lena, until one day when she <sup>had</sup> left little Foster alone for a short while. He toddled downstairs. When Lena returned she found him in the arms of one of those women, with a drunken burly fellow jeering at both of them. Lena snatched the child from the woman at the same time her husband came upon the scene. He slapped the drunk down who had tried to make advances to his wife, took his family upstairs, and...."

"Well, it caused the death of his only son," said Miss Macdowel. "Foster sold the place, gave it all to Lena, and left. He would return if he made good. He never did. Presumably he died, for nothing was ever heard of him. Not long after his mother followed him."

"The steel merchant, after all these years, is still harping on the same theme. He never forgets. It seems that I handed in a short story, on the 'Letters to the Editor' Miss Macdowel."

"So you did, George. Mr. Barton agrees with you that the letters condemning the show are mostly inspired by Forrest. He <sup>well considered</sup> thinks a report by you - the name Sheraton attached to it - will cool off a lot of hot heads. Even ten years after your father's death."

George stood in embarrassed silence.

"The appointment is for ten tomorrow," she spoke again.

"Thank you, Miss <sup>a</sup> Macdowel...."