

FOR MIGUEL, it was a strange and different morning, and instinctively, he felt as if the whole world had been changed during the night and he was hollow from within. He was not drunk and his eyes were all right—he was sure of that, but the street and the dark electric wires and the apartment houses with grey galvanized iron roofs were altogether alien and meaningless to him now and he had an impulse to go away some place where he could recognize and name everything again.

He was in the room lying on the sprung bed, barechested,

for the heat of the morning sun was oppressive and it was likely going to be a hot day. He was looking at the weird green vines climbing wormily on the wrought-iron window grill and the fragments of blue sky. There was a lingering weariness in his heart, but he could not say why.

The door of the room opened and Myrna, his wife, came in. He looked at her and he saw her frown and he was confused because the face was also a strange and different thing and yet he knew it was Myrna. He stared at it till his wife trembled slightly and yelled:

"Now what is the matter with you? Aren't you coming?" Her lips were red with lipstick and he looked at them, all of a sudden remembering blood. And Myrna said, "By God, Miguel! Don't look at me like that! Are you coming with me?"

"Where?" he asked. Why was Miguel so different now?

"Where?" Myrna retorted, "To the church."

"Why?"

"It's Christmas! That's why! Is there anything wrong with your stomach?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Because you talk like a dope or something," said Myrna. "Why, you're making me nervous..."

"Come on, don't be angry," he said, "I'm just not myself today, you know."

No, Myrna did not know that—How could she? How could any one tell and share that lugubrious struggle of a man to find himself in the deepening shadows of awareness and to discover his affinity with this strange and different morning and with the world that seemed to have been changed during the night?

"Well, all right. Now, are you coming?" his wife asked.

"No, I don't think I will. You just go ahead," he answered, without looking at her.

"All right," Myrna said, stepped out of the room and closed the door and went away.

He moved to the other window that looked down the street and rested his elbows on the sill. He saw a scurvy dog looking for food in the garbage receptacle and he watched it. He felt sorry for the dog, for it stood for all animals in their determined efforts for survival in spite of misery and pain.

He went back to the bed and lay down, but he heard the faint sound of knocking from the main door of the house. He



*The world seemed to have
not...for red*

by

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got up and went to see who it was. He saw it was an old, ragged beggar, bent by age and poverty.

"Merry Christmas, Sir," the beggar said and stretched out his gnarled grimy hand.

He looked at the face of the beggar and was staggered by the brutality painted on it. Something in him shuddered. Without saying anything he gave twenty centavos to the beggar, and the old man walked away. He almost put his hand on the beggar's frail shoulder, and it was a good thing that the old man left on time.

Back in the room, he lay again on the bed and thought of himself. He was a welder in a machine shop. He had to melt steel and get burned each day for the sake of rice and fish, only to die like all the others... For how long he had to be a welder, he would not know, and just the thought of it tired him endlessly.

Afterwards he remembered the beggar. Why must a man be so brutalized? he asked. What's the difference between the beggar and the dog that was looking for food in the garbage receptacle? He could not find an answer and grew more tired.

Soon before lunch, Myrna was back and came into the room. He was still there lying on the bed. His wife smiled for she seemed to have realized that still her heart loved her husband. Once she kissed his lips and sat on the edge of the bed.

"I didn't mean to quarrel with you this morning," she said smilingly, looking into his eyes.

"Forget it," he said wearily. "Aren't we going to eat yet?" He asked, but he was not really hungry.

"Yes," Myrna said, "I'll just change my dress. We'll have a nice chow today. Was there anybody here while I was gone?" A beggar came. I gave him twenty centavos."

Myrna started to undress in the room. He was not looking at her. He was sullen now and rather tired for that.

"I bought some apples at the supermarket, red ones," Dolores said.

"How many?"

"Five. Would you like to eat them now?"

"No. Not now," he said, "This afternoon."

After lunch, they returned into the room. He had not eaten well and his wife was a little bit disappointed and suspicious, but she did not tell him. Together they lay on the

"Dewey Boulevard and ice cream," he said, "We're not children anymore."

Myrna became resentful. "I don't know what's the matter with you. Since this morning you've acted like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you're sore or something!"

"Look, Myrna," he said, "I'm not sore. I'm just tired, that's all. Don't you understand?"

"No," Myrna blurted out, "Who the hell can understand what you're doing. This morning I thought you'd come with me to the church and you didn't. I prepared a special dish this noon and you make me think I'm a school girl who doesn't know anything about the kitchen. I think it's because of that woman..."

Myrna stood up and went out of the room. Then she came back with a bulging paper bag. "Here are the apples I bought this morning."

"No, thanks," he said, "I'll just eat later," he rolled over to one side. He was tired and wanted to sleep. When he lifted his head and glanced at his wife the bulging paper bag was already gone. "Where are the apples?" he asked.

"I threw them away," Myrna answered, her voice hurt and hard.

"What did you do that for?" he asked. "I merely said I'll eat them later..."

Myrna was silent for a while, then broke into a verbal torrent, the voice mounting up in crescendo and her face furious.

He rose from the bed and went to the adjacent bathroom where he washed his face, and when he got back in the room Myrna was starting to cry, still ranting out everything her tongue could manage, but he did not bother to stop her, and without saying anything he put on his clothes and his shoes.

Miguel started to leave. He heard Myrna angrily shouting from behind: "Where are you going?" When he was about to put his hand on the door knob, he felt a violent pull on his arm and it was his wife with tearful eyes and her voice trembling and broken at the top: "You have no right to do this. Where are you going? You'll meet her some-

changed the night before, and he was walking away, hungry apples, but for white inner peace.

bed without saying anything to each other. Myrna was combing her dark hair, her body raised on the pile of pillows.

"Why don't we take a stroll this evening, Miguel?" Myrna suggested.

"Where?"

"Well, on Dewey Boulevard," she said, "We'll eat ice cream while we walk."

"That's silly," he said.

"What's silly?"

where?" He shrugged off his wife's hand and opened the door and went out hurriedly and in pain, closing the door strongly with a rocking sound.

He was not going to see anybody anywhere. For it was but a bodily means for a spiritual withdrawal from the strange and different morning; the scabby dog and brutalized old beggar; his angry wife, Myrna, and from the whole world that seemed to have been changed during the night that in the sun he was walking away from, hungry not for red apples but for white inner peace.