

E HEARD the jingling as he pressed the doorbell.

"Arturo, you're an hour late! I was about to ring you up." Edoardo took hold of his shoulder abruptly. He was short and heavy—and a little bow-legged. If he were sensitive enough he would have cultivated a complex: people had that queer habit of staring at the way he walked.

"I was tied up," Arturo exclaimed. Long ago he had ceased to believe in other people's sense of punctuality.

Idly his eyes strayed irresolutely over the enormous room filled with a sea of nameless faces bathed in red and yellow and green lights. In the center of the room a six-foot Christmas tree, a pine whose branches were ornamented with pear-shaped, colored bulbs, stood stalwart in a wooden box of stone and earth. Here and there a boy was asking a girl to dance. In a far-flung corner a group of youngsters were making gestures and downing their drinks. The clink of glasses, the sound of gurgling water: all were smothered under the piercing music. And it was always the same piece of music: like clanking and sawing, like the thudding of hammers against a feverish brain. It tore at his nerves, this paroxysm of pain. Ununderstandable.

Minutes later. . .

Edoardo hobbled across the room. "You look like someone who had just fallen down the stairs. Don't spoil the party. Come, I want you to meet a friend! Now. . . now don't say No!"

She was a figure of graceful quietude sitting there on the sofa, seemingly out of reach, her mind shuttered in thought. He had never seen anyone like her before. The irregular lights had framed the shadow of her cameo-like profile against the pale-grey wall. And peeping out under the tip of her dress of floriform designs, her well-trimmed ankle revealed a small strawberry mark. She had lowered her eyelids, looking on the floor, as if searching for dropped coins. For an instant he was looking down at the pure oval of her face.

"Naty, this is Arturo! Art, Naty," Edoardo said with a clear voice.

A flask of apprehension became her. She looked up with that proud, distant and cold look of a handsome girl of eighteen who knew her

Live To See The Dawn

place. Suddenly, her face creased in a smile, she said "hello!" above the sound of music, above the turbulent and disquieting gaiety.

"Hi!" he returned the remark.

She drained her glass of soft drink and laid it on the small round table, and reposed her hands on her lap. "Care for a drink?" she asked as he pulled back a chair.

"Thanks. But I'm full."

"Do you dance?" she asked again. One could see that she was trying to hide her wild shyness behind a few casual remarks.

"Sometimes only," he declared with bitter simplicity. At times he did not feel like dancing at all; and a wave of disgust, transcending all feelings, would overwhelm him. This disgust over life.

Now and then the music stopped only to begin anew. He blinked his eyes in the dim light, closed them for a moment. And when he opened them again he seemed surprised that she was still there, looking at him profoundly, and then abashed, she looked on the floor. He felt a great chasm of silence yawning in his face.

"You bored with the party?" he asked.

She had raised her face before he could speak again. "How do you know?" she queried.

"I felt it the first time I looked at you."

She did not answer him with many words. She just smiled.

II

They made their way across the cleared ground to the street. The pale moon was shining over the begrimed city's chimneys and rooftops. But the city was alive that December night, unlike the city slumbering in the torpor of the Summer heat.

"Shall we ride or walk?" he asked. "Let's walk," she reflected and countered. "Walking will do us

good. It induces sleep. Besides, this is a beautiful evening—"

The sound of her words more than their meaning, the timbre of her voice—it impressed him deeply.

And occasional streetcars sporting headlights scurried by.

"Why do you go home this early?" he inquired. The party was by no means over. She had insist-

SHORT STORY

by Roy Yap

ed, however, rather persistently; in the end Edoardo gave way—she was the first to leave.

"I don't know. . . Maybe it was as you said, I was bored—" she gave him a negative response; and tilting her head a little she looked up at him with her coffee-brown eyes, and pursued:

"Art, why do you want to take me home?"

Her words came to him across the haze of his own thoughts. They had a very complicated meaning. Words demanding and searching



and refusing to be unanswered. He could lie to her, tell her anything except the truth. But he did not feel like it. He held his breath.

"Maybe someday I will be able to explain it to you," he uttered.

And silence came between them. Deep. Forceful. Overwhelming. Like the glaring silence of her eyes.

At the foot of the stairs her face was suffused in the glow of the light shining through the glass of the door. Her eyes once coffee-brown were now transformed into two pools of darkness.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "It is late!" He gave a faint smile. "Good-bye—" she whispered.

He did not move. He stood there among the still shadows. "Not Good-

bye, just Good-night..." his voice faltered.

She clung to the rail of the stairs, and in a moment she turned her face toward him. She paused and said audibly, "Good-night—"

Now the city was as silent as a tomb, shrouded in it memory of generations of struggles and heartaches. It was a city clothed in the garment of monstrous concrete and colored with darkness and incandescent lamps.

This was Christmas! Time of pronounced laughter of innocent children gazing at the mechanized toys in the display windows.

Yet he felt very old, very tired! Very old—barely twenty! This

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Christmas the World...

(Continued from page 3)

the household sit together to eat their breakfast. Bursting of firecrackers is not allowed; no noise devices either, except the singing of Christmas carols.

The Catholics in Holland have the Crib as a feature in their homes while the Protestants have the Christmas Tree. Because of their belief that the X'mas Tree has a great pagan significance, the Catholic Dutch do not hang their gifts at the holiday tree. They utilize it instead as backdrop of the Crib where the Image of the Infant Jesus is laid upon.

Special dish and special bread are liberally served on Christmas Day. Special bread, which they call X'mas Bread, includes raisins, currents, sucade, etc.; for dinner, they have the rabbit or hare as the special dish.

December 6th is the favorite Day of the Dutch children. It is the Feast Day of Saint Nicholas and is devoted chiefly to family reunions, surprises and giftgiving. They do not give gifts to each other except on this day.

The Midnight Mass is the most important part of the Christmas Day in Central India. Practically, almost everybody goes to the church to hear Mass and take Communion. After the Mass, the Statue of Jesus is taken by a priest and after it has been laid upon the manger, the Indians begin to flock around the Crib and one by one, kiss the feet of the Statue. After the church ceremony, all sorts of noisy devices, bursting of firecrackers and whistling dominate the day.

During the Christmas Day, they bring all kinds of presents and food-stuffs to the priests and give gifts to each other. They also offer money to the dignitaries of the Popes.

Christmas songs are chanted till sunrise.

We've heard a lot about America — of its many wonderful things, of its skyscrapers that stand majestically against the blue sky — but we know little of its Christmas. In the following lines, our Moderator compares Christmas in the tropics with Christmas in America. "In America," he writes in one of his articles, "we like to have a 'White' Christmas. In the tropics the weather is very warm; here it is usually cold. There, the people dress in gala costumes, white, red and yellow." (Continued on page 29)