

COMMA



I TOLD the invisible fellow to cease following me, he didn't, now I let my hair down. He would be an idiot if he'd permit me to touch him. I'd choke him to death. No, he couldn't be shapeless or bodiless; he couldn't be a mere sound. The earth's full of secrets and mysteries; he must be one of the hidden and enigmatic ones. He stopped at the door and when I turned around, I still saw nothing except the moving shadow or the pendulum of the big clock encased in glass and plastic.

His *Find me Find me Find me* were pistons painfully punching my consciousness. It seemed that I couldn't concentrate my mind anymore on my work. Yesterday, I signed a piece of paper and the next thing I knew, I had let go ₱500 for a simple thank you. I scolded my secretary and spat invectives to the winds. Through the window, I watch angrily the two women in black clothes and white wide caps walk along the pavement slowly but lightly as if they had won something or cheated somebody.

Darling, you're late, I heard someone say when I entered the office. I thought it was the invisible fellow again, but when I sat down I detected that it was a feminine voice; and I saw her on the lounge scanning an art magazine.

You're early, I said.

Darling...

Switch on the air-conditioner.

Darling...

What's the matter with you?

Kiss me.

No moon above us. This is my office. Don't forget that. Switch on the air-conditioner.

In my hands I held success and even some men's future. I had only to press a button and I could have whatever I desired: a drink, record books and reports, or the presence of someone whom I could talk to or shout at. And even this girl who called me Darling, because we were sweethearts and were supposed to be married soon, I knew, was in my power. I could brush her aside anytime I liked to and forget her

altogether. There were many others who wanted very much to take her place.

I made a god of myself, and I was glad to discover that some people were crawling on the ground, I stood for mercy. I lifted my face and said, Can't you stop pestering me, wise men? I've given you enough, and you cry for more. You talk of profit and labor as if you knew more than I know. Return to your business, and keep quiet and wait for what you deserve: it shall be given you. I didn't even glance at them when they went out of my office. Let them strike and starve.

She lighted a cigarette and handed it to me. I received it, and she lighted another one for herself.

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by Junne Cañizares

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She said, I've finished reading *Home & The Family* by Rev.

Very good, very good, I interrupted her. I'm busy.

You're sulky, darling.

You can describe me as a monster.

Darling, I've been observing you all these days. You're putting a fence between us. If you don't love me anymore, for goodness' sake, tell me. Darling.

Your imagination is wild; be a short story writer. If you really love me—

You doubt it, darling...

Then you sit there till I'm through with all these papers.

Okay, though it's aching not to be spoken to.

Not to be spoken to Not to be spoken to I was impoverished totally crushed and myself was naked to the gnawing teeth of hunger *Not to be spoken to* I knocked at doors of houses where I opined I would be welcome and came out of doors in search for people who could give me a piece of mind people that suddenly would not be there or a while ago had gone to some places no one could surely tell me where In those nights I lay on bed with hunger and strong aversion and loathing and despair Then I stood up and started my fight And now that I emerged with pearls in my hands many ran to my sides Ha I had been hungry for years Try to be hungry too Try I'm looking I hadn't the time to look carefully at myself before Recommendations Applications I'd make public through the Ads if there's a vacancy Where's that waste-basket.

Where's the waste-basket? I said.

There, she said, and crossed her beautiful legs.

The secretary opened the door and walked in (her shoes barely created any noise on the floor) and softly informed me that the Chief Hired-Hand wanted to see me. I rubbed the back of my palm against my nose and commanded her to send him away, but she said that he had pleaded. I sighed heavily and gestured to let him in. The telephone rang when he showed himself; I picked up the receiver and had a conversation with the woman on the telephone. Afterwards, I banged it down and faced him with impatience. His hands were trembling. He was tongue-tied. This was what I hated most; I valued my seconds.

They made you come here? I asked.

Yes, sir, he said. We believe you'll give it further consideration if you know all the facts, sir.

What do you mean know all the facts?

Our financial condition, sir.

You live near the slum, don't you?

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In those nights I lay on bed with hunger and strong aversion and loathing and despair.

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Yes, sir. I live there, sir.

Do all your neighbors have jobs? Do they always eat the usual meals? regularly? Do they earn as much as you do? Don't I pay you the minimum wage? Don't I give you privileges? Think it over! Now, don't waste my time.

He was silent for a long moment; his eyes were watery and blinking rapidly. Then, he apologized.

Bravo! You broke him to pieces, she uttered and stood up. Darling, I feel very ugly inside. I fell very ugly inside. You make me sick.

What happened to you? I said.

If you can't grant them their wish; if you can't raise their salary—give them understanding. Darling, come down from your ivory tower.

I warn you. Don't interfere—.

All right. I'm not needed here. I'll never see you again. Never. I'll never come back to you, you hear? I feel very ugly inside. You make me sick.

She went away hurriedly, crying. She really loved me, that girl. She was only foreswearing, I know. But.

Something like smoke of dearest cigars enwrapped me, and I was little by little weakened. The minutes were marching soldiers passing through the room. I was the last one to leave the big, tall building that was my empire.

The invisible fellow hailed me, and I offered him the same hostility. I got in my car and gunned the motor. Somehow, I could sense his presence; probably, he sat beside me—exactly where, I didn't know, for he was smart; he could throw his voice here and there. I drove straight, and I wondered why I did so. I

wanted to go home; I would have split-aced to the right. Was I perhaps under hypnotic spell? Where was this stranger taking me? I was terrified.

Take it easy, partner, the invisible fellow said. We might hit some electric post.

Appear, appear, I said.

Find me. Find me.

You're crazy. Bother me no more.

You require me.

What? How could it be? I don't know who you are; I haven't seen you either!

We are familiar with each other. Isn't it possible for one to require something he doesn't see perfectly?

I've no taste for arguments. Say, why should I require you?

You miss me.

Funny. Very funny. Ring-around-a-rosey! Ring-around-a-rosey!

We were now in the country. There were many children on the street and I had to slacken speed. I parked the car beside a bantam restaurant, and got out.

Your car, partner, the invisible fellow said.

I studied my car, and I saw what he was pointing out. It was very dusty. Hell, I didn't mind it. I eased into the restaurant and ordered one whole fried chicken and beer. As usual, the invisible fellow remained outside.

There was a wealthy-looking man inside; he was wearing a light green Hawaiian shirt. He talked lively with the bartender; he was always smiling.

The trip back was leisurely, and somehow I didn't feel disturbed or offended by the invisible fellow. He was more talkative and I listened to him as attentively as a curious child. He spoke of the pursuit of richness, and automobiles and dust, of hard thick glass walls, of the urgency for destruction and nostalgia for smiles. I kept silent; my hands were glowing red.

It was already 9:00 P.M. when we arrived in the city. The gate was locked, and my building loomed in the dark. I picked up a stone and hurled it at the glass wall. There was a violent clatter.

What about that? I said.

Excellent, excellent, the invisible fellow said. At last, you've found me. <>

— The End —