

**MEMOIRS OF
MONTPARNASSE**

JOHN GLASSCO

INTRODUCTION BY
LOUIS BEGLEY



JOHN GLASSCO (1909–1981), born in Montreal, attended McGill University without graduating, visited Paris as a sixteen-year-old and two years later, in 1928, accompanied by his friend Graeme Taylor. It was on this more lengthy and eventful stay, in the city he loved, that he based his *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970), which was published, and presented by Glassco, as an authentic memoir though it was later discovered to be in many respects a work of fiction. Before publication he had confided to his friend Kay Boyle: “It has the form of fiction—i.e. with lots of dialogue, speed, rearranged and telescoped action; never a dull moment—and is more a montage of those days than literal truth.” It is, however, firmly based in reality and felt experience, and probably contains as much fact as fiction.

Glassco once remarked that he was “as much a novelist, anthologist, translator and pornographer” as he was a poet or a memoirist. His *Selected Poems* (1971) won a Governor General’s Award, then Canada’s leading literary honor.

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Introduction

It's early February 1928 in Montreal. Two young men, John Glassco (1909–1981) and Graeme Taylor (1907–1957), set out for Paris, crossing the Atlantic on a government cargo bound from Saint John, New Brunswick, for Antwerp. The passage was arranged through a family connection of Taylor's. For him, it was free; Glassco, known to his friends as Buffy, paid a nominal fare of fifty dollars. The scene of their departure from their Montreal apartment sets the mood of high spirits and high comedy that pervades much of Buffy's memoir. Here they are, escaping the ire of the landlady infuriated by their practice of renting the apartment out to men who need a place to take a girl to at night, in the three taxis required to transport their trunks:

[The landlady] appeared when everything was loaded, and came out on the icy steps, dancing up and down with rage and trying to shout above the roar of the taxis; ... I gave the signal to move off. As there was no room inside the taxis, Graeme and I had to stand on the running-boards of the leading one and so had a fine view of St Catherine Street, all lit up, as our little fleet of cars bumped and skidded over the streetcar tracks on the way to Bonaventure Station.

Buffy was born into a family that was part of the affluent Anglo ascendancy in Montreal at a time when that city was the financial center of Canada. His father had wanted him to become a lawyer; he saw Buffy in the robes of a judge. His mother would have liked him to enter the church. She saw him as a bishop. Buffy would have none of it. He admitted to his father that he was set on a literary career whereupon the father offered him an allowance of a hundred dollars a month, if he would live more discreetly instead of "running something very close to a house of ill-fame" at his apartment. That was a better deal than Buffy had expected. "The way to Paris was now open." But he was all of eighteen, and it was not easy for someone that age to toil away in Paris at his writing while the great Jazz Age party was in full swing. Expatriate Americans congregated in the cafés, bars, and brasseries of Montparnasse, and talked about art while champagne flowed. If work was done by serious writers, it was done out of sight, between binges. After Buffy had taken stock of his new surroundings—an atelier in the rue Broca (since renamed rue Léon-Maurice-Nordmann) that he shared with Taylor, the Dôme, the Sélect, and the Dingo (an American restaurant that by the 1950s had disappeared), and inhaled the intoxicating air of the *quartier*—he asked himself what he would do with his youth, his life. The answer was: "Why, I'm going to enjoy myself." That was a resolution taken in private. To give himself countenance he let it be known that he was busy writing his memoirs, and did in fact publish an autobiographical sketch, entitled "Excerpt from an Autobiography," in the Spring 1929 issue of *This Quarter*, a short-lived literary magazine. But if he had a genuine occupation, it wasn't writing. It was meeting celebrities, some whose stars still burn bright.

How seriously anyone took his literary pursuits is uncertain, but surely no other eighteen-year-old in modern times has dropped so many names, or managed to enter into conversation with so many famous men and women, sometimes using the journal as a wedge.

The celebrity cruise begins in London, the two friends having debarked from the government cargo in Southampton, with a visit to the eighty-seven-year-old George Moore, whose sloping shoulders, beautiful drooping moustache, and exquisite chinless face Buffy duly admires and notes. Moore's parting present is an inscribed first edition of one of his works, which Buffy will later sell to Galgani's, at a time of seemingly hopeless penury. Soon he will meet in astonishing succession: Leo Stein ("a tall, thin, slow-moving man dressed in black") and Gertrude Stein ("a rhomboidal woman dressed in a floor-length gown apparently made of some kind of burlap, she gave the impression of

absolute irrefragability ... it was impossible to conceive of her lying down”); Alice Toklas (“a deciduous female”); Ernest Hemingway (“a burly, moonfaced man dressed in baggy tweeds and with his necktie clewed by a gold pin”); Frank Harris (“a little grey-faced, grey-haired man ... he didn’t look like Frank Harris at all”); Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas (“much smaller than I had thought, and the delicate curved nose of the early portraits had developed into a monstrous beak”); James Joyce (Buffy charms Joyce until Joyce realizes that Buffy has confused *Ulysses* with *Finnegans Wake*); and Ford Maddox Ford (“towering like an elephant, talking almost inaudibly about Thomas Hardy”). These are the figures whose identity Buffy did not think he needed to conceal. Others, whose *noms de guerre* are identified in the notes to this new edition of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*: Man Ray (thinly disguised as Narwhal); Peggy Guggenheim and her first husband, Laurence Vail (they are Sally and Terence Marr in *Memoirs*, and her car is “a stunning open Hispano-Suiza, with a body of natural wood, like a yacht”); and Harry Crosby (disguised as Jimmy Carter), who gives Buffy ether to sniff to help him recover from a hangover. This is just a sampling. Many other notable figures, some less and some better known, stroll through the pages of *Memoirs*.

Taylor is Buffy’s constant companion in Paris, until his father’s illness forces Taylor to return to Canada. At times we can infer that he and Buffy are lovers. Taylor has left few traces of his passage through life, except in Buffy’s book, but an American expatriate, with whom Buffy and Taylor go to Luxembourg and later the Côte d’Azur, Robert McAlmon (1896–1956), referred to in *Memoirs* invariably as Bob, is a well-known quantity. Living off a generous divorce settlement, and very much part of the Montparnasse fauna, he was a serious writer who published regularly and yet found time to serve as Buffy and Taylor’s mentor in debauchery. He too had a homosexual relation with Buffy. The trio’s homoerotic proclivities did not stand in the way of a procession of women who passed through Buffy’s, Taylor’s, and Bob’s beds; sometimes the women are shared. Occasionally, Buffy visits a brothel. He describes an ineffably touching and somehow innocent episode involving Buffy, Taylor, and an expatriate American, Sidney Schooner (in reality Hilaire Hiler, a painter and musician who managed the American restaurant called The Jockey), at a Montmartre establishment in rue St. Apolline, and three of the establishment’s inmates. The communicating doors leading in their three rooms have been left unlocked so that they may pass easily from one to another:

After a short rest Graeme switched to Arlette and Schooner to the brunette, while I took the mulattress. When it came to my turn with Arlette, however, I was in no condition to continue, and while Graeme and Schooner were running their third course she perched on the bidet and entertained me with the story of her life on the farm in Normandy, “where I hope to retire some day,” she said, “and raise a big family and look after some nice geese. But for all this I need money, you know, so won’t you give me a little tip? Then I won’t tell your friends how *tired* you were.”

Having paid this piece of blackmail to the extent of five francs, for which she kissed me affectionately, I then brushed my hair and got dressed just as there was a loud rap on the hall door accompanied by the chambermaid’s voice hissing through her hare-lip: “*C’est l’heure, messieurs. S’il vous plaît!*”

Among the most memorable of Buffy’s flings are those with Daphne Berners (possibly the painter and sculptor Gwen Le Gallienne); the girl called Stanley whom he shares with Taylor until Stanley leaves them for Daphne; and Diana Tree (in real life Kay Boyle), the affair with whom does not last long, since they can agree on nothing. Mrs. Quail (apparently modeled on more than one woman, including probably Margaret Whitney) is the *femme fatale* Buffy falls in love with. She opens for Buffy a window on stronger sexuality and greater opulence than he had tasted and gives him a dose of

clap, for which they are treated by the same doctor. Then she drops him for a grown man and breaks his heart.

Much of the time Buffy lives off his allowance, at first ample and then, after his father reduces it not quite sufficient to support Taylor as well as himself. One more reduction in the amount of the monthly remittance, prompted by the father's mounting dissatisfaction with the literary results of his son's Paris existence, and Buffy is broke. As an emergency measure he sells the few first editions he owns. Then he decides he must work and gets jobs, some of which are piquant. He types manuscripts for a boozy and decrepit Richard Le Gallienne; poses for dirty pictures; serves as a boy-for-hire at a specialized brothel for older women (he finds them more rapacious and more maniacal about sex than men); writes a pornographic novel. His last job is as secretary to Gladys Brooke, also known as the Dayang Muda (Princess) of Sarawak, a gloriously fat spendthrift and publicity hound. He has been recommended by Kay Boyle, who had been ghostwriting the Dayang Muda's memoirs. The scene Buffy paints of the Princess's reception into the Catholic Church—with Madame Alphonse Daudet, who had greeted the formal invitation to the ceremony “with a freezing smile,” as the godmother—is unbeatable:

The Princess's conversion was quiet and almost perfunctory. The cathedral was nearly empty. Madame Daudet occupied the place of honour and gave her responses in French. The ceremony itself took less than five minutes, and Monsignor's final allocution was a model of brevity and restraint. He touched on the beauty of conversion, and neatly separated converts into two classes with respect to their support of the church, describing them as either pillars or buttresses: the Princess, he said, was a buttress. Mrs Haggren [the housekeeper] wept silently, as if it were a wedding, and clung to my arm. For reasons of economy there was no music.

And throughout it all, Buffy eats, drinks, and observes. His vignettes of Luxembourg should be the centerpiece of that country's tourist campaigns. Here he describes the city's principal square:

There were small string orchestras playing softly everywhere. Gorgeously uniformed officers were sitting before coloured ices. Solid men in black, with great beards or moustaches, were drinking swollen mugs of brown beer. Around the square little flocks of pretty girls were walking hand in hand, swishing their long home-made skirts and talking to each other with self-conscious animation, while in the opposite direction marched young men in black velveteen trousers cut very wide at the cuff, large floppy black hats, and short jackets covered with silver chains, pins, and emblems.

After almost twenty-four hours in a third-class railroad compartment he writes with equal enthusiasm about Nice:

When I woke it was to a vision of paradise: through the window was the Mediterranean, even bluer than in the postcards. And there were the square sun-baked houses, the red earth, the grey-green vegetation, the palm trees. My throat was dry as ashes, I was coated with a mixture of soot and sweat and aching all over; but the sight of that tideless inland ocean, mother of gods and men, nurse of poetry, changeless grandiose fact of the ancient world, made me dizzy with joy.

Nice is the setting of one of his many fabulous lunches, as a guest of Sally Marr and her husband. Terence Marr orders “an enormous meal of oysters, langoustines with mayonnaise, sweetbreads and green peas, a pineapple tart, and a magnum of champagne.” He tags along with McAlmon to a dinner

at a restaurant in Villefranche where their host is Ethel Moorhead, the editor of *This Quarter*. They sit down to a meal of “oysters, bouillabaisse with rice and three bottles of chilled Moselle.... The oysters were so fresh they quivered when touched with the fork, the rolled and buttered wafers of brown bread were light and nutty, the bouillabaisse was like a glowing eclogue.” But nothing can top eating in Luxembourg. At his onedollar-a-night hotel, Buffy enjoys lunch, included in the price of the room, consisting of “soup, trout, veal cutlets, fried potatoes, creamed cauliflower, pancakes, and a large pitcher of dry white wine.” Unless we give the laurel wreath to the Dayang Muda and her chef:

It was wonderful to ... enjoy the taste of early morning tea served in bed and the sheer volume of an English breakfast of grapefruit, scrambled eggs, grilled sheep’s kidneys, milky coffee and pre-buttered toast and marmalade. I soon got used to eating luncheons as big as dinners, and dinners of lobster New-burgh and roast beef and saddle of mutton and creamed vegetables and savouries on toast and desserts like blancmange and open tarts and apple puddings and trifle.

Over these gargantuan, lovingly recreated meals, at the endless parties in bars and *tabacs*, in fact at the drop of a name or an allusion, Buffy talks about books. He has read and absorbed—and has exposed to his sharp and mature critical judgment—a prodigious range of literature, nineteenth-century and contemporary, and has strongly held views on Dostoevsky, Flaubert, T.S. Eliot, and practically everybody else; he knows *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* “almost by heart”; he admires the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Berkeley. The catalogue of his literary disagreements with Diana Tree is exhilarating:

She admired Tolstoy, Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Cocteau, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Mauriac, W. C. Williams and Ezra Pound, none of whom I could stand. I admired Turgenev, Forster, Firbank, Breton, Dreiser, Proust, Eliot, Ransom and Robert Frost, all of whom she despised. Both of us liked Joyce and disliked D.H. Lawrence, but for altogether different reasons.

Then comes the fall of 1929 and the lights begin to dim over the Parisian stage. Buffy’s friend Schooner, his guide to the brothel on rue St. Apolline, clues him in. “You may not have heard of it,” he tells Buffy,

but there has been a resounding stock-market crash in New York, London, Paris and Tokyo, and it really looks as if the party is over; anyway, everyone is going home.... The twilight of the gods is drawing in; the international bankers are pulling the portières over the sky, or rather they are rolling down their iron shutters. No more credit, the game is over, the world must go back to work.

Buffy resists for a while, until abandoned by Mrs. Quail, at death’s door with tuberculosis, he is repatriated, after a sojourn in the American Hospital in Neuilly, to Montreal to face radical and dangerous operations on his ribcage and lungs. It is as a patient at the Royal Victoria Hospital of Montreal, he tells us, “in an advanced state of tuberculosis, waiting for the final operation that will mean either life or death,” that he takes up the first three chapters of *Memoirs* written during his eighteen months in Paris, and decides that he would “continue my record of those years—the years in which I really lived...”

There is a story behind this enchanting story. Despite the claim that frames his narrative, in reality Buffy did not write *Memoirs* in the winter of 1932–1933, while undergoing treatment at the Royal

Victoria Hospital in Montreal. The first chapter does appear to have been based on the piece published in *This Quarter* in the spring of 1929, but he wrote the rest of *Memoirs* in the mid-1960s, after two prolonged visits to Paris, in 1958 and 1960, during which he reacquainted himself with the city he would describe. No part of the book was written in the hospital. Until the appearance of *Memoirs*, Glassco had been known principally as the author of labored, formal, and derivative verse, and his American agent responded unenthusiastically to the book. *Memoirs* was first published by Oxford University Press (Canadian Branch) only in 1970. The circumstances of the composition and publication of this extraordinary book are set out in detail by Professor Michael Gnarowski, in his introduction to the second edition of *Memoirs* published in 1995 by Oxford.

I was taken in by Glassco's fib when I first read *Memoirs*. Now that I know better I am comforted by the fact that so was Henry James's great biographer, Leon Edel, who had known Buffy in Paris and on the Côte d'Azur, and before that in Montreal, and provided the introduction to the first edition. Indeed, Edel found that Glassco's book was "more human and 'actual' than Hemingway's *The Moveable Feast*," and went on to say that

If his book is more modest than most of the Montparnasse memoirs, it is more immediate—possessing almost the effect of "instant" memory, total recall. The other memoirs (I have read I believe most of them) look back from middle life. Buffy couldn't wait that long. He wasn't sure, when he wrote them, that he would have his middle age.

Does knowledge of Glassco's mystification detract from the enjoyment of *Memoirs*, a text which to quote Edel once again, is "lively and libidinous, surfacing like some shining tropical fish out of the depths, and with all the elegance of their author's youth"? It has not done so in my case; I agree with Edel's assessment, and have been amused by the sly but harmless prank, so like the sort of thing one might expect Buffy to think up. Why I wasn't tipped off by the improbable extent of the erudition and culture he had accumulated by the age of nineteen? That is a question to which I have no answer.

Does the fib impair the literary value of *Memoirs*? I am convinced that it doesn't. Accounts of an author's youthful years are usually, like Glassco's book, written long after that past has become a shimmering but distant memory. Invariably, liberties are taken with historical truth. We accept that as a given, as we must. Otherwise, what would we make of such admirable works as Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*, George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, which Buffy admired and set out to emulate, or, for that matter, Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, which may well be one of the few great books in Western literature that Buffy had not read? Notwithstanding their authors' protestations, none of those great works is a model of veracity. Glassco wished to paint a portrait of Buffy "in all his flippancy, hedonism and conceit." He succeeded brilliantly, even if he fibbed and, looking back on his work in 1969, thirty years after the story ended he was obliged to admit that Buffy "is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel."

—LOUIS BEGLE

Prefatory Note

I wrote the first three chapters of this book in Paris in 1928 when I was eighteen, and soon after the events recorded; at that time I wanted to compose my own *Confessions of a Young Man à la George Moore*, and felt I simply could not wait, as Moore did, for the onset of middle age. The rest of the book was written in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal during three months of the winter of 1932-3, when I was awaiting a crucial operation, and I used such notes, taken on the spot, as were spared from the holocaust mentioned in the final chapter; by then my intention was altered, and all I desired was to record, and in a sense relive, a period of great happiness. After barely surviving the operation I turned away from my youth altogether. I did not look at the manuscript again for thirty-five years.

I have changed very little of the original. The revision amounts to the occasional improvement of phrase and, in the case of the first chapter, the excision of some particularly fatuous paragraphs; also for reasons of discretion I have given several characters fictitious names. Nothing else has been altered or omitted—in spite of a temptation to suppress or at least soften many passages that expose the youthful memoirist in all his flippancy, hedonism and conceit. And after all, why change any of this? This young man is no longer myself: I hardly recognize him, even from his photographs and handwriting, and in my memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read.

J.
Foster, Quebec
October 1963

Winter in Montreal in 1927. Student life at McGill University had depressed me to a point where I could not go on. I was learning nothing; the curriculum was designed at best to equip me as a professor destined to lead others in due course on the same round of lifeless facts. I was only seventeen and had the sense of throwing my time and my youth into a void.

When I told my father I refused to attend college any longer (I was then in my third year) and had decided to write poetry, he said I was a great disappointment to him and my mother, I was ungrateful and lacking in manliness and could go to work; he would allow me to keep on living at home. After a few minutes' thought I decided to leave both home and college at the same time and live with my friend Graeme Taylor.

My real problem was a combination of precocity, impatience, and inability to take in anything more from books. I already existed in a climate of restlessness, scorn, frequent ecstasy and occasional despair. Graeme had however combined a taste for literature with an ambition to make money out of it. For the rest, we were united by comradeship, a despisal of everything represented by the business world, the city of Montreal and the Canadian scene, and a desire to get away. God knows what would have happened to us if we had relaxed our hold on these simple principles.

We took a run-down apartment on Metcalfe Street and found work in the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada. In our spare time I threw myself into composing surrealist poetry, and he continued planning the great Canadian novel. But it was on a dream of Paris that our ideas were vaguely but powerfully concentrated. This kept us going; without it we could not have faced the daily routine of rising at eight o'clock every morning, bathing in a small gritty bathtub, dressing without any attention to the niceties and stumbling down the icy street to an honest day's work.

Our office pay was barely enough to live on. But the situation was soon improved by two of our college friends, Pratt and Petersham. Hearing we had taken an apartment downtown, one evening they put on their dark tubular overcoats and bowler hats and visited us with a proposal to pay ten dollars a month each for the privilege of taking women there one night a week, from nine o'clock till one in the morning.

The extra twenty dollars was a help, and it was no hardship keeping away from the apartment until late on Wednesday and Saturday nights; moreover, it soon turned out that Petersham was not using the place (his night was Wednesday), though he continued to pay. But a few more friends heard of the arrangement and applied for the same facilities. The apartment was warm, quiet, safe, fairly clean and had a private street-entrance. We were soon taking in seventy dollars a month, which covered the rent.

The difficulty was that I now had to compose my poetry in the early hours of the morning, and arrived at the Sun Life only half awake. By ten o'clock I would finish my morning work of posting up the five-and ten-cent weekly premiums for burial insurance paid by Chinese labourers in Hong Kong and then go and bed down in one of the toilets in the basement, where I made myself a little nest in my ankle-length raccoon coat. After two months I was summoned to the departmental head's office and told to ask for more work as soon as I had finished my allotment, and, if there was none, at least to keep sitting decently at my desk. The prospect was so depressing that I gave my two weeks' notice to the personnel department the same day.

We were thus once more in financial straits, and to make peace with my father I called on him at the family mansion a week later. He suggested I return home, go back to McGill, and by hard work make up the few months I had lost.

Once again I had to refuse. I had had enough of university life. I was more than ever determined to be a poet.

I had known for a long time what a disappointment I was to my parents. My father had always wanted me to take up law: he pictured me in the robes of a judge. My mother, for her part, would have liked me to enter the church: she saw me as a bishop. These images, and all that went with them, now struck me with such renewed horror that I was able to stand my ground, which I began to realize was stronger than I had thought.

‘I hear you and your friend Taylor are running something very close to a house of ill-fame on Metcalfe Street,’ said my father. ‘Colonel Bird-lime, of McGill’s Department of Extramural Affairs, tells me it’s common knowledge. I hear the same thing at the club.’

‘Well, we take in a little rent.’

He was silent for a minute, stroking his great cleft chin. ‘You’re still set on a literary career?’

When I said I was, he offered me an allowance of a hundred dollars a month if I would live more discreetly.

It was more than I had expected. The way to Paris was now open. But it was a harder matter to persuade Graeme to come along. He said he didn’t want to sponge on me.

‘No, but I’ve been thinking of your cousin Jane’s husband in the Canadian National Railways. He might get us a free ride to Europe on a Merchant Marine freighter. That’s as good as three hundred dollars.’

‘True.’

For the next two weeks we waited, sitting quietly in grimy downtown offices while the strings were being pulled—slinking from one government building to another, adroitly passed from one civil service hand to another. At last Graeme received a note: we were to sail in three days’ time on the *Canadian Traveller*, a government cargo-boat of 950 tons leaving Saint John, New Brunswick, on the 4th of February and taking us to Antwerp. Graeme was given a free passage and I was to pay a nominal fare of fifty dollars.

Graeme had a supplemental examination for his Bachelor of Arts degree to take at McGill the next day. But our news was so apocalyptic that he went into Scott’s on St Catherine Street and bought himself a wide-brimmed black Bohemian hat.

Paris! We made it after all. This is where I’m writing now, only three months after leaving Montreal. It’s a spring night in the rue Broca, and there’s moonlight on the unfinished abandoned statues in the yard outside this big studio we moved into last week. The smell of some flowering shrub is coming in through the long window, and there’s a bird singing somewhere in the walled garden of the Ursuline Convent at the corner of the rue de la Santé. Down here in the Glacière quarter we’re not so close to Montparnasse as we were, but it’s better than that hot little room in the Hôtel Jules-César around the corner from the Dôme and the Dingo. And so quiet. For the first time I can feel the movement of my thoughts, the pulse of my youth—as you’re supposed to at eighteen. I’m lucky to be here, in this city that I love more and more every day. What do I mean to do with my youth, my life? Why, I’m going to enjoy myself.

Here, as Eliot’s girl says, you feel free. This is something Paris does to one, God knows how. I mean to write, of course—but not too much. Literature isn’t so important as life, and I’ve made my choice. I’ve already abandoned surrealism and decided to write my memoirs—not a journal but a record of my life written in chapters, like one of George Moore’s books—to impose a narrative form on everything that has happened since we left Montreal last February ...

It’s getting late now, the bird in the convent has stopped singing, and there is a faint rosy-grey tinge in the sky. Soon

Graeme, in his sky-blue pyjamas, lies humped up in bed, his face stares at me, crushed sideways against the pillow. He is sleepy, and has been waiting for me to turn off the gas and go to bed. As I begin writing again, his voice startles me in the silence.

‘I just saw you in a dream—as an old man with whiskers, writing...’

We spent our last night in Montreal going from one bar to another and ended up in a night-club called The Venetian Gardens, where I saw Pratt and Petersham. While Graeme was dancing unsteadily with one of the bar-girls they came up and sat with me.

‘I hear you’re both pushing off for the Continent tomorrow,’ said Pratt. ‘How does that affect our little agreement?’

‘The rent’s paid for two weeks. You can have the place all the time now if you like.’

They exchanged a look.

‘White of you, old man,’ said Pratt.

‘We don’t wish to take advantage,’ said Petersham. ‘What’s it worth?’

‘Say thirty dollars.’

With an almost co-ordinated movement they reached for their wallets.

‘As of tomorrow night,’ said Petersham.

‘White of you, old man,’ said Pratt.

For the rest of the night I drank a great deal too much champagne.

Later, in the fusty over-heated apartment, I lay in bed not daring to close my eyes lest things should start whirling around. Graeme was snoring, apparently with no thought for his examination a few hours away, as I left the room and went down the hall to the W.C., where I vomited. Staggering back to the bedroom I heard a violent knocking and kicking on the street door and my name being hallooed nervously from outside.

I opened the door and Bertie Ballard, a fat little lecher who was one of our sub-lessors, rushed in with a woman in a red hat at his heels, bringing a cold blast of wind with him. He was buttoned up in his enormous silver raccoon coat, and his serious circular face, above the upstanding fur collar, resembled a hen sitting on its nest. He began explaining in a whisper why he had called at five o’clock in the morning.

‘But it’s not even your night.’

‘I know. But don’t turn me down for God’s sake, everywhere else is closed. I’ve been working on this all last week. We won’t be long.’

I opened the door of the bedroom and he bundled the woman in ahead of him. She was hiding her face, but I thought I recognized the cashier from an all-night restaurant.

Waking late the next morning I found the apartment beautifully empty. I shaved and dressed with care, hardly able to believe it was my last day in Montreal. Then the landlady arrived.

‘I was thinking,’ she said in her polite but barbed manner, her eyes shooting around the room, ‘I should have something extra for the filthy state you’ve got this place into. I never had a tenant who did like you and all the other gentlemen does.’

‘Yes, yes, Mrs Casey,’ I said, wanting to get her out of the room on such a beautiful morning. ‘I’ll settle everything in full when the time comes.’

I went out. The loveliness of the late morning was dazzling. The snow, the blue air, the creaking

underfoot of the hard-packed sidewalk—everything is so hard and gem-like at eleven o'clock in Canada! Three blocks away, I thought, the day was curling its edges around the granite walls of the Sun Life Assurance Company, while inside the men and women were all busy denying their dark god. It was a solemn thought to consider that only sheer luck had snatched me from among them.

I walked along St Catherine Street on the way to the McGill Union, with groups of shop-girls passing on the early lunch-hour in their little cloche hats, closely wrapped coats and flapping overshoes, and the young men in form-fitting overcoats and bell-bottomed trousers. I waited for Graeme on the steps of the Union, not wanting to see any of my former classmates and answer questions. Soon I saw him trudging down the campus, and in front, almost hiding him, the immense figure of Sir Arthur Currie, principal of the university, holder of a dozen honorary degrees and ex-warlord of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. What a poor figure Graeme, in his long green frieze overcoat and black hat, cut behind this white-spatted symbol of the army, attired like the editor of *Vanity Fair*!

Graeme didn't yet know whether he had passed his examination. 'It's a toss-up,' he said. 'I'll get the news in Paris. Now we've just got time for a good lunch and to pack and catch the train.'

We had gathered more possessions than we thought. When everything was stowed we found we would need three taxis to take us to the station. Soon the room was filled with taxi-drivers who fought among themselves over who should take the lighter trunks. To the smallest, who was left with my wardrobe trunk to carry out, I gave my new snow-boots which I would need no longer.

I was surprised that Mrs Casey had not darted up from her cellar as soon as the trunks started moving out. For once she was caught napping. She only appeared when everything was loaded, and came out on the icy steps, dancing up and down with rage and trying to shout above the roar of the taxis; silently consigning her to Pratt and Petersham I gave the signal to move off. As there was no room inside the taxis, Graeme and I had to stand on the running-boards of the leading one and so had a fine view of St Catherine Street, all lit up, as our little fleet of cars bumped and skidded over the streetcar tracks on the way to Bonaventure Station.

Almost until the very moment of boarding the train I was sick with a reasonless anxiety. I could still hardly believe in our luck, and all the time the baggage was being checked and our tickets visaed I kept imagining some disaster would still keep us in Canada. Only when we were marching along the echoing wooden station-platform behind the porters, our arms full of canes, rugs and overcoats, under the great wooden roof that covered the lines of tracks and with the engines shooting off soot and steam all around, did I relax and embrace my first clear moment of exaltation as we walked alongside the train bound for the Port of Saint John.

Our seats were in the last car of the train, and every now and then we went out to stand on the rear platform and watch the rails running away behind us.

‘It’s a single track we’re on, you’ll notice,’ said Graeme.

‘A good omen.’

We then went back inside and continued drinking brandy. By the time we reached Saint John the bottle was almost empty.

On the docks we found the *Canadian Traveller*, slightly larger than a tugboat and entirely sheathed in grey tallowy ice.

‘I wonder how we get in,’ said Graeme, banging on an iron door that was at last opened by a dwarf.

‘Are you two gentlemen the supercargo?’ he said. ‘The captain told me of you. Do you know him?’

‘Not yet. When do we sail?’

‘When the agent says, and that’s likely tomorrow. So you don’t know Captain Pethick? He’ll be in a hoorhouse at the moment, I’ll warrant. But he’s a fine seaman, none better. I have been all around the coast of South America with him when we were peddling betel. Come in, gentlemen, and take a look at your quarters.’

The informality of everything, compared with the venal fuss and courtesy of an ocean liner, was refreshing. ‘Are you a friend of his?’ I asked.

‘I’m naught but a f—ing employee. I’m the steward. Shall I get you a cup of tea?’

The tea came in thick ironstone mugs, with separate portions of Eagle Brand condensed milk and lead spoons to stir it with. But we were delighted with our quarters—a fine half-round livingroom with windows on both sides, a large double bedroom and a private bathroom and toilet; there was even a bookshelf in the livingroom, filled with the works of George Henty, Bulwer-Lytton, and Ouida.

Captain Pethick arrived, small, sandy-haired and lipless.

‘As ye go through life,’ he said, sitting down in the best seat and taking out his pipe, ‘ye’ll understand the beauty of tobacco.’

I instantly divined him as the worst kind of bore.

The trip across was unspeakably tedious. Within three days I had become completely constipated, the food was terrible, and there was not a drop of liquor on the boat. Every evening Captain Pethick would descend from his bridge and bore us. From him I learned two things, that sailors call themselves ‘seamen’ and the standard procedure to ward off venereal disease. ‘Smear the knob well,’ he said, smacking his palm over his fist and massaging it, ‘before and after.’

Halfway across the ocean we ran into a hurricane. The livingroom stood on its end, the water in the toilet pitched out on the floor, and the chairs were all roped to the walls. Captain Pethick was divided between disgust that neither Graeme nor I was seasick and an increasing alarm over the seaworthiness of his ship. One night when the waves had risen and kept crashing over the bridge, on three occasions putting out some kind of light on the mast, we noticed a gradual cessation of the pitching, succeeded by a sense of being lifted up from behind and rolled forward. When Captain Pethick came down for his evening’s refreshment of conversation he was smiling grimly.

‘Ye’ll notice a change in our way of going, eh?’

‘Much smoother,’ said Graeme. ‘Has the wind turned round?’

‘No, it’s we have done that. Just now we are heading for the coast of Brazeel.’

For three days we steamed away from Europe. Captain Pethick was in a mellower mood now, and not quite so tiresome. He spoke often of Joseph Conrad, under whom he had served at one time. ‘A dour man he was, and awful high and mighty. I’ve heard it said he was a queen, but I do not believe it.’

And say what they will, he was a real seaman. He was no donkey-master, was Captain Kornowski. His best book is that *Nostramo*. He had the right view of the buggery natives in Costa Rica.'———

By the time we had turned back towards Europe I had almost finished my first good surrealist poem, 'Conan's Fig', which records the impressions gained from sitting in a disused attic in spring. Now, less than six months later, when I have definitely abandoned surrealism, I still think it has a certain idiotic grace.

Long before we reached England we had had enough of the *Canadian Traveller*, and though we were booked to Antwerp we decided to get off at Cardiff. After sixteen miserable days at sea we did so, taking an occasion when Captain Pethick was busy in the agent's office to avoid the nuisance of saying goodbye to him.

We spent that night in London. I disliked the city at once. The streets were too crowded, and the people were presumptuous, brutal, ugly and unintelligible.

'We'll see Westminster Abbey and Rotten Row anyway,' Graeme said.

Both were disappointing. Then it began to rain. There seemed nowhere you could get a drink. At Cook's we found we had missed the Dover-Calais boat and decided we might as well spend another night in England rather than cross the channel in the dark. It was then I had the idea of visiting George Moore.

Moore was at this time still my literary god. The sweep of his memories, the magic of his style, the bland persistent assertion of himself, the dazzling effect by which in a single phrase he gives an almost physical impression of a landscape, an emotion, or a woman—these made him for me the first writer of the age.

'He must be almost ninety,' said Graeme doubtfully.

I looked up his address in the directory. There was no telephone, and we decided to call unannounced in Ebury Street that afternoon.

'Maybe he'll ask us in,' said Graeme. 'After all, we are going to Paris, just as he did when he was a young man.'

The sign 'Ebury Street' on the corner of Buckingham Palace Road gave me a thrill of joy and awe. It was like seeing the awning of the Café de la Nouvelle-Athènes. 'We mustn't forget to say we're from Canada right away,' I said. 'Perhaps the remoteness, the idea of disciples coming from the wilderness, will appeal to him.'

But when we arrived at the black brass-knocked door tucked under its little Grecian white-pillared portico, I lost my nerve and hurried Graeme past it. Fifty yards further on we took heart, turned back and rang the bell. A fat, very old rosy-cheeked parlourmaid answered and dropped a curtsy.

'We have come across the ocean to pay our respects to Mr Moore,' said Graeme, 'if he is at home and can spare us a few minutes. Say we are admirers of his, from Canada...'

'Please to step in, gentlemen.'

We stood in a miniature vestibule, sweating, for at least five minutes. I was already thinking that I did not see this man it would spoil my whole life.

'Mr Moore will be 'appy to see you for five minutes, gentlemen,' said the parlourmaid. 'But no more, please. He is just out of the nursing 'ome. This way.'

He was much frailer than I had ever imagined, but there before me were the sloping shoulders, the beautiful drooping moustache, the exquisite chinless face, the heavy-lidded eyes, the tiny feet. He rose, his hands fluttering slightly.

'From Canada,' he said. 'Dear me.'

His hand felt like paper. The bright eyes looked straight into mine, then dropped to my feet.

'Do sit down,' he said, taking Graeme's hand for the same fraction of a second. 'I am not very

well, I'm afraid. Did you have a pleasant voyage?'

'No, sir,' I managed to say, trying to smile.

'Ah, *mal de mer*, I suppose. I am subject to it myself.'

His charm was enveloping. All my nervousness disappeared and I told him how I had admired his work so long and of my happiness in being able to speak to the greatest living English writer.

'Greatest? Oh, indeed no. No, no. But thank you. May I ask you on which of my performances you found your most flattering opinion?'

'*The Brook Kerith*,' I said, 'to begin with—and then the autobiographical books, the *Confessions*, *Hail and Farewell*...'

A faint tinge of pink showed in his cheeks. 'Yes, *Kerith* is my best book, I think. But—the *Young Man*? He looked at us. 'Really, doesn't everyone look on that as dated, *vieux jeu*, nowadays?'

'No, sir,' said Graeme. 'It is a book that will never date, it's a kind of statement of youth for all time, a youth in which we all partake somehow. Only people who are never young could find it dated.'

'Really. You're very kind. And perhaps you're right, too. Yes, you may be right.'

Then he asked us to stay to tea.

During tea he talked of James Joyce. 'An astonishing performer,' he said. 'That's a most interesting book of his.'

After a minute it turned out he was talking not of *Ulysses* but *The Portrait*.

'Oh yes, *Ulysses*,' he said. 'No, I couldn't quite get through it. Rather dull in the middle, I thought. And a little too earnest and iconoclastic for my taste. Too satirical.' His nose wrinkled slightly. 'All that Irish wit and humour—no. But I should have liked to meet Mr Joyce all the same. When I was last in Paris I went to that little shop in the rue Dupuytren and inquired for him, but a very draconian woman there told he never saw anyone. I left a note for him. I don't imagine he got it.'

Before we left he gave us a thin pamphlet in grey wrappers, *Recollections of the Impressionist Painters*, and wrote in it simply, *Yours truly, George Moore*. 'It's all I have to hand at the moment. Thank you so much for coming, and I hope you enjoy your stay in Paris.'

In the vestibule the parlourmaid asked us to sign a visitors' book.

As we went out I said, 'What luck. We'll remember this all our lives.'

'Yes, and he didn't even ask us our names.'

'By the time you're eighty-seven I suppose you don't bother about names. We signed the book anyway.'

'And we've got this little pamphlet too.'

We were almost dancing as we went down Ebury Street. For us he was more than ever the greatest living English writer, greater even than Thomas Hardy.

The next day we crossed the channel and arrived in Paris around six o'clock in the evening. It was dark, damp, and snowing slightly, and I suppose the city did not look its best from the train windows, but I had only to think I was now in the city of Baudelaire, Utrillo and Apollinaire to be swept by a joy so strong it verged on nausea. Coming out of the Gare du Nord, however, and standing on the wet dark street with a little wall of trunks around me and a vision of half-a-dozen brightly lit cafés opposite, I had a much different impression—the warm, prosy, comfortable feeling of having somehow come home.

On the train from Calais we had seen in a newspaper the advertisement of a hotel 'near the Gare du Montparnasse'. We thought this must be in the Montparnasse quarter itself, and the name, the Hôtel de l'Abbé-Grégoire, sounded amusing. But it was off the rue de Rennes and not at all amusing, and we moved next day to the Hôtel Jules-César on the rue du Montparnasse, mainly because it was around the corner from the famous Café du Dôme.

The Jules-César was a charming hotel: it was neither comfortable nor clean nor warm, but you never saw the proprietor, there was always plenty of hot water, and moreover our room, though without windows, had a skylight over the washstand and by standing on the bidet you could look into medieval courtyard where they made sections for corrugated tin roofs, apparently by hand. The room cost twenty dollars a month and you could have breakfast in bed for fifteen cents.

The first thing we found was that with the franc at four cents we were much richer than in Montreal. Here I must say that I don't think the rate of exchange is always given its proper importance as an element in the charm of Paris: to be able to live well on very little money is the best basis for an appreciation of beauty anywhere, and I think we admired the city all the more because we could now eat and drink almost as much as we liked.

Another cause for congratulation was the telegram Graeme found waiting for him from his brother, with the news that he had passed his examination and was thus a graduate of an institution of learning.

During our first week in Paris we never left Montparnasse at all, simply moving from one café and restaurant to another. It was then early March and the enclosed stove-heated *terrasses* were the best places to sit and pretend to work, for work at this time was for us more a pretence than anything else. I managed however to finish 'Conan's Fig'—the title is of course not only meaningless but has no connection with the poem itself—and also to write the first lines of over a dozen other surrealist poems; while Graeme resumed work on the plan of his novel, which was to be called *The Flying Carpet*. But it was more fun to play at being a writer. Later I found that a great many other young writers felt and behaved the same way. Indeed Paris is a very difficult place for anyone to work unless he is dull and serious.

After a week we began to find it rather tiresome not knowing anyone. Therefore one evening when we were sitting in the Café Select and I heard a large, benevolent-looking grey-haired man at the next table being introduced to a number of people as Adolf Dehn, I decided to speak to him. I had already seen a book of his lithographs and admired them, especially one entitled *Nine Whores* in which the faces and figures were full of the most ecstatic greed, cruelty and joy. By this time I had had enough to drink to make me capable of such boldness, and as he was leaving I ran after him and said, 'Mr Dehn, my friend and I have just arrived in Paris, and we know no one but yourself by sight. We are going to the Dôme, and won't you have a drink with us there?'

He smiled and said he would be delighted, but he thought we should go to the little *tabac* nearby where it was not so crowded. Dear Adolf, I am still grateful for your kindness that night; but for you we might have continued friendless for a long time.

The *tabac's* terrasse held only six or eight tables, but one of them, right at the front, was vacant, and we all ordered brandy and soda. Soon we were approached by a tall, thin, slow-moving man dressed in black—I learned later it was Leo Stein—who presented Adolf with a photograph of a long eared spaniel.

'I thought you would be interested in having this, Adolf,' he said, 'because it struck me as being so like your wife.'

'Thank you, Leo. You haven't one of a bulldog resembling your sister, have you?'

'Gertrude and I are not on speaking terms, Adolf.'

'So much the better for both of you.'

The exchange was carried on with the greatest good humour. Leo Stein then raised his hat and passed on. A few minutes later we were joined by a smiling, short, curly-haired man whom Adolf introduced as Hugo Quattrone, a romantic painter and a Christian Socialist from California.

'He is a very fair painter,' said Adolf as Hugo sat down, 'only he lets his emotions run away with him and he is too fond of suffering.'

‘Yes, but not my own, gentlemen,’ said Quattrone. ‘It’s the suffering of the other guy that breaks my heart. Look at all those faces,’ he said, pointing at the crowd passing slowly in front of us, ‘they are tragic masks of pain. The system that produces them’s got to be painlessly replaced.’

‘How would you go about it?’ said Graeme.

‘By exerting the power of good will. The English poet Shelley understood this—I mean that all men are brothers and must not think of themselves. In the first place everyone should stop working.’

His ideas were the index to a character that was very pure but a little boring; however, he did not obtrude them.

‘And how is your little girl Irma?’ asked Adolf. ‘Does she like her job in the creamery?’

‘She is happier, I guess. Prostitution, gentlemen, is not only immoral, it’s a mug’s game. You see I don’t idealize it like Dostoevsky did. But the creamery woman doesn’t pay very much and Irma gets pretty hungry. And think of all the food in the shop, all the food in Paris, in the whole world!’

‘I feel like having a sandwich,’ said Adolf as Quattrone left. ‘Shall we go to the Dôme counter?’

At the Dôme we all kept on drinking. Adolf was in his most expansive mood and everyone seemed to know him; in half an hour we had met a dozen of the habitués of the quarter—among them an attractive big-nosed Spanish girl with violently hennaed hair and the beautiful name of Caridad de Plumas, who became interested in Graeme.

‘You have a corrupted mouth and kind eyes,’ she told him, ‘and such awkward hands, and you are thin like a pussycat. You and your friend must come to a party with me tomorrow. How old is your friend?’

‘Nineteen,’ I said, adding an extra year. I had had six or seven brandies and was feeling a little dizzy from the heat and noise of the comptoir.

‘Dolfen says you are poet,’ she said. ‘How many poems have you written?’

‘Only one.’

‘Good. I don’t like artistes of any genre who produce too much. Now speak your poem to me. I am a very good critic, I will tell you truly if it is good or awful.’

I recited the forty lines of ‘Conan’s Fig’ slowly and with great expression.

‘It’s awful,’ she said. ‘But it’s very beautiful too.’

‘Excuse me,’ said a grating, boozy voice at my elbow. ‘It’s good and it’s not beautiful at all. Send it to *The Dial*. No, send it to *transition*. Jolas is taking anything these days.’

‘You mustn’t pay any attention to this man,’ said Adolf. ‘He is Harold Stearns, and he knows less about poetry than any living man.’

‘I am not a living man,’ said Stearns.

At that time his name meant nothing to me. His period as editor of *The Dial* had been years before this, and I did not even know he had come to Paris to play the races and apparently drink himself quietly to death on champagne—though he is still alive, and when I saw him last month, was still wearing the same incredibly dirty white shirt and black business suit.

After a while we went across the street to the Sélect. The hundred yards in the cold night air freshened me up. I decided to switch to champagne, as being milder than brandy.

This was the first time I had met Monsieur and Madame Select. Madame had a high colour, shrewd eyes, and a bosom like a shelf; she wore little black fingerless mittens that kept her hands warm without preventing her from counting the francs and centimes. Monsieur Select, who made the Welsh rarebits on a little stove behind the bar, had long melancholy moustaches like Flaubert’s. It was a good night in the Select. The company in bars is, I have noticed, either very good or very bad; there seems to be some force of a minor destiny that draws good company to the same place at the same time. Adolf, Caridad, Graeme, and I ended up by listening to Emma Goldman, who had just left Russia in disgust: the government had cynically betrayed all anarchist principles and she was going back to

Chicago. She was short, squat, with feet turned outwards like a webfooted bird, and the famous red hair was now streaked with grey, but her eyes were sparkling with shrewdness, pugnacity and fun. I had never met a woman so free from artifice, so intellectually alive. Her appetite for argument was insatiable, and it was hard to conceive of anyone getting the better of her. 'Stratification!' she was crying. 'It's the same old story in Russia, the same thing all over again. Well, they may come to me on their bended knees to go back, but I won't. Ah, when I think of Rosa Luxemburg.'

'A great woman,' said Adolf. 'But a poor speaker. Her attitudes and gestures always reminded me too much of Danton.'

'Impossible,' said Emma Goldman. 'You never met Danton.'

'I'm referring to his statue on the boulevard Saint-Germain.'

'You don't admire it?'

'I do not.'

'Why not?'

'My dear Emma, the thing is just as absurd as Rosa was.'

'In what way, please?'

'Well, it's the study of an angry child. If Danton were dressed as a boy of five it would be a very fine domestic study—a picture of outraged appeal, say to his mother over some injustice, like the theft of a toy by his elder sister. He's even pointing at her in the distance.'

'Exactly. Outraged appeal. Well put. You prove my point.'

Adolf blinked. 'What is your point?'

'That Rosa and Danton—or at any rate the man who did the statue—reached the emotions of the people in the best and most direct way.'

'By assuming the attitudes of angry children?'

'Certainly. This is good oratory. What better?'

I began to understand something of Emma Goldman's skill in impromptu debate. It was like watching a clever tennis-player drawing his opponent out of position.

'But it's still absurd,' said Adolf.

'What's absurd about hitting your audience in the breadbasket?'

'Rabble rousing, you mean.'

'You don't think the rabble should be roused?'

'Not to Danton's kind of violence.'

'You don't believe in the people, eh?'

'Well, not to that extent.'

'I do.'

By this time Graeme and Caridad had come to an understanding. He whispered his good fortune to me and the next minute he was squiring her across the street towards the rue Delambre, his black hat over one ear.

Adolf lived quite far away, in the rue Vercingetorix, but when I insisted on taking him home in a taxi he demurred. 'Are you rich?' he inquired anxiously.

On my assuring him I was quite rich we took a taxi to his place and I returned home in the early light of dawn.

O Paris dawns, you are always beautiful, I think, no matter what the weather, but there was never one more beautiful than on that bitter morning in early March in 1928, with a sky of ashes and the tall houses grey and cold, the streets wet and only a few lights showing in the little cafés where the chauffeurs take their breakfasts and brandy. It was all too soon when I arrived at the Jules-César and staggered up the stairs to our windowless little room, where I vomited in the bidet and fell into bed with a sensation of pure happiness.

When Graeme turned up at noon the next day his face had a happy, pale and pummelled look: his night had obviously been a success. But the morning was bitterly cold, and we took turns thawing ourselves out in the hotel bath, which cost five francs for a single filling, and I wore my raccoon coat and fur cap to breakfast at the Dôme.

‘When will spring come?’ I asked Monsieur Cambon the proprietor.

‘Soon now. Your costume will shame it into appearing.’

In the afternoon we went to the party at the house of Caridad’s friend Rupert Castle, a rich English expatriate and dilettante who had a big ground-floor studio looking on a garden in the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. The windows were rimed and opaque with frost, but there was a stove as well as a fireplace, and mugs of hot whisky-and-water with lemon. There I met the great surrealist poet Robert Desnos, looking barely older than myself and wearing a thin shapeless suit and a long grey tasselled muffler wound many times around his neck; he was much uglier than his portraits and, shivering with cold, he looked as if he had been set upon and dragged through the gutter. His mouth was wide and humorous as a frog’s, and his large protruding oyster-coloured eyes, behind thick glasses, were full of wit and intelligence. Caridad introduced me to him in French, adding, ‘Here is a young Canadian poet who calls himself surrealist and who has written some touching lines about the effect that bats have on him.’

‘Ah, monsieur, vous vous occupez donc de la poésie?’ said Desnos quizzically. He spoke no English, and the fact of my being one of the few people there who spoke French was probably the only reason he bothered with me at all.

I told him that after reading André Breton’s collection *Les Champs Magnétiques* when I was sixteen I had become converted to surrealism, and his own *La liberté ou l’amour* had confirmed me in the faith.

‘You like Breton?’ he said. ‘I will introduce you to him. But first you must read his *Nadja*, which has just come out and which is the finest novel of the century. And you must also read Péret, Eluard, Fargue, Vitrac, Soupault, Schwitters, Sternheim, Marcel Noll, and myself, although I am presently being prosecuted for obscenity. And read Tristan Tzara too, for though he is not much good you can learn from his absurd errors and want of taste, and moreover he is hand in glove with the police.’ I learned later this last remark was an allusion to a difference he and Breton had had with Tzara, when the latter was supposed to have advised the Paris prefecture that his two fellow-surrealists should be put in jail.

He then spoke of his horror of public buildings. ‘You must know of the anger I silently hurl against every church, hospital, court-house, prison—simply for their damnable impersonality! It is a rebellion against the whole apparatus of medicine, religion and law. These things, and the buildings which embody them, are unnecessary, they disfigure not only the face of the earth but the spirit of man; they are acknowledgements of failure, insults to humanity. My friend, what do these buildings symbolize but the impersonal care of the sick and suffering, the salvation of souls by a system, the maintenance of order for a lot of cowards? They are all signposts on a road leading downwards, monuments to the abrogation of all personal responsibility, wretched plasters on the running sores of suffering and loneliness and fear, Stations of a secular Cross built along the shameful retreat of the self into a collective ant-like consciousness. The duties of man in these three specifically human areas are: one, to tend and sympathize with and assume the sufferings of others,’ here he spread out his hands as in the gesture of benediction, ‘two, to wrestle in solitude with one’s own damnation,’ he wrung his hands together, ‘and three, to redress all wrongs done to one by acts of instant and personal

violence,' and he struck his fist softly into his palm. 'These duties alone possess and assert human dignity.'

The celebrated Kiki was also a guest. At that time, as a newcomer to Montparnasse, I was unaware of her status as acknowledged queen of the quarter; but there was no mistaking the magnetism of her personality, the charm of her voice, or the eccentric beauty of her face. Her *maquillage* was a work of art in itself: her eyebrows were completely shaved and replaced by delicate curling lines shaped like the accent on a Spanish 'n', her eyelashes were tipped with at least a teaspoonful of mascara, and her mouth, painted a deep scarlet that emphasized the sly erotic humour of its contours, blazed against the plaster-white of her cheeks on which a single beauty spot was placed, with consummate art, just under one eye. Her face was beautiful from every angle, but I liked it best in full profile, when it had the lineal purity of a stuffed salmon. Her quiet husky voice was dripping harmless obscenities; her gestures were few but expressive. As a fitting penalty for a journalist recently convicted of blackmail she was suggesting that it would be enough to drop him in a public toilet. '*Et puis—la corde,*' she murmured, bending her knees slightly and pulling downward on an imaginary chain.

There was also a little knot of handsome girls dressed in dark tailored suits and neckties; they wore low-heeled shoes, spoke in deep voices, and shook hands with crushing force. The most beautiful was Daphne Berners, an English girl with enormous grey eyes, a low thrilling voice and a schoolgirlish sense of humour that was quite at variance with her avowed status of *femme damnée*. Her friend Angela Martin was extremely pretty, with stiff frizzy hair and an air of charming and invincible stupidity that was quite genuine; she had been in the chorus of one of Florenz Ziegfeld's revues but something wayward and unpredictable in her nature had saved her from the fate of so many of these girls, and instead of being kept by some serious stockbroker she had become the *chuchotte* of a succession of avid elderly women and was now living with Daphne in what appeared to be a state of perfect bliss. 'I got tired of all those old biddies,' she told me. 'They call you their dream-daughter and want to keep you away from men. They are bitches in the manger. You have to play the little girl with them all the time too—in muslin, curls and a lisp—and they don't even like you to drink. Now Daphne, she is a real pal.'

In her mannish suit and four-in-hand tie, with her candid greyblue eyes, ragged eyebrows and wide mouth free of lipstick, she was fascinating. I was also astonished by her capacity for drink. The only sign of intoxication was the way her lisp became more marked.

Daphne strode over. 'Angela, it's time you had something to eat. Bring your young man along and we'll have a tuck-in at Rosalie's.'

I found Rupert Castle and thanked him for his hospitality. He stared. 'This is very original,' he said. 'No one has ever thanked me for a party before. Of course I appreciate it, but you must not be too bourgeois, you know.'

Rosalie's restaurant was not far away, in the rue Campagne-Première, and was already filling up for dinner. The food was very good and incredibly cheap, and I was surprised by the amount the two girls put away: they worked their way enthusiastically through the entire menu of the *prix fixe* and I found their healthy girlish appetites stimulated my own. We finished off with chocolate mousse served in little earthenware pots covered by a circle of silver paper.

'You get a good feed here,' said Daphne, sitting back and lighting up one of her rank Gauloise cigarettes. 'Let's have coffee at the Dingo, it's too cold to sit outside anywhere.'

This was the first time I had been to the Dingo. We sat at one of the six little tables and had strong black *filtre* in thick sherbet glasses. Angela drank brandy while Daphne talked about sculpture. 'You mean you don't know Zadkine or Brancusi? You must see Brancusi's "Young Girl". It's the most beautiful female bottom in the world. It positively sings.'

All the time she was looking at me with her lovely myopic grey eyes. Suddenly she said, 'Let's g

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