

# Morning

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Edmund Apffel

After the Official Proclamation.

No, say Morning.

Lifting the lid of the coffee pot carefully, she managed to remove it without a sound. She crept through the bedroom into the bathroom, quietly closing the door behind her. Oh, quietly she turned the cold water on and filled the coffee pot, also looking at herself quickly in the mirror over the sink, and with a little toss and shrug removing the limp, cute coil of hair straying over her eyes more to the right. Better. Back to the kitchen. She plugged in the coffee and stood silently scratching the cool smooth silk over her abdomen, listening to the gathering hiss and first stabbing, half-hearted burp of the percolator. And now she turned with a lingering, half solemn something in her walk and moved back into the bedroom. Smiling, she bounced gently back into bed and deliberately gave a noisy whack to the pillow, just in case. "I heard you in the bathroom," he said in a sleepy voice, amused and not turning. A shadow, distinct, but of indefinite origin (what monstrous hunch in the sun?) was now revealed on the kitchen floor just out the door. From the kitchen one would have seen the light whitening with a new flush (from vague rose to real paper, that for a morning poem, oh, soon, soon) out the window behind irregular rooftops across the street. From the kitchen window one would have now seen that a single pigeon had quietly appeared from nowhere, perched with tiny shocked shivers at the peak of the roof directly across. Please be careful today.

In the smaller apartment the next floor below, the four sat at the kitchen table, coffee cups suspended between mouths and table, listening, their dim, still sleepy eyes drawn to the ceiling, waiting. Then Flora set her cup down with a determined clatter upsetting the spoon in the saucer. She compressed her lips several times, looking down into her huge lap, whispering to the ugly folds of black satin, and gentle Karl noted with detached interest the gummy residue of spittle mixed with the coarse lipstick Flora used far too confidently forming on the lips and collected at the corners of her mouth. Gio expressively drew a paper

napkin to his lips concealing a faint smile, for he was always glad and a little embarrassed at loving them all so.

She curled an arm tenderly over his side and snuggled up to him feeling the nervous heat of his back and the prickle of the small hairs of his buttocks on her thighs. She playfully twisted and pulled at the fine hair on his belly, moving her fingers lower and lower until a ragged nail strained too sharply a coarser hair and he twitched and barked softly sending the corsair coursing to the less coarse—but he could not phrase it exactly and so firmly clamped his thighs shut on her trapped contented hand. “Where’s Gio?” he asked at last, patience weakening fast. “Who needs ’m,” she said, squeezing up higher and more closely against him and insinuating (?—he nearly laughed aloud) and insinuating a tough little nipple into his dampening armpit. “Don’t be so sinister,” he said.

Gio rose gracefully from the table, miraculously sweeping the chair back behind him across the floor without a sound. Cramer knew that he wouldn’t be able to rise so expertly and that no amount of care would prevent his chair from scuttling back with the bumpkin’s triumphant rattle he had come so to detest as a sure sign of a fatal lapse in grace’s gifts to her most long-suffering and ill-starred pupil. And so he waited, feeling like an idiot, for the others to get up first in order to conceal the helpless stutters of his performance. Unfortunately, Karl seemed to sense this and nonchalantly waited him out while the seconds fluttered acidly through Cramer’s heart. He seethed with loathing while Karl looked away out the window, indifferently appraising a darkened balcony of the old hotel across the street. And Gio looked back at them from the kitchen sink where he silently placed his cup and saucer, as if amused at their effort to maintain a silence that was no longer necessary (the way his younger brother—before he was killed in the terrible bombings at the age of twelve—used to continue Let’s-Pretend-We’re-Under-Water long after little Gio had tired of it, and now watched languidly the foolish, willing gamester sleepwalk past him, arms floating charmingly about, and one foot dreamily dives over the bright, bright cringing roller skate that torpedoes him forward all at once, suspended for a breathless second, but then he crashed head on into the red wagon that with a grating howl, limped painfully away). Karl studied his fingers laid flat on the table one last time and with a sigh made a subtle move to rise. Relieved and ashamed, Cramer heaved clumsily to rise with him, and then suddenly Karl paused and looked into Cramer’s eyes and Cramer could not stop the harsh shriek of his chair against the floor as he flung away all restraint and bounded choking out of the room to get his viola while distant marble halls rang with laughter. With a demure shrug, Karl sidled out of his chair without moving it at all and stood patiently behind Flora with both hands resting on the back of her chair while she (thank goodness) finally closed her lips over her napkin and, noticing the hideous smudge left on it, rose hastily and bustled off to the bathroom for a much-needed inspection. Karl smiled to Gio who with a swift small movement unleashed a sparkling torrent of water from the faucet into the sink and hummed the exultant opening bars of this morning’s quartet.

Abruptly he twisted around and slid over on top of her. Her heels slowly rose up and down the length of his tensing calves. Raising himself over her on his arms with a quick growl, he flexed his knees, slipping his legs out of her hold. Her lips parted revealing a tip of tongue between glistening, between pearly, wait! between small white teeth. He heard the kitchen door open and the quick steps of the musicians across the floor.

Gio paused in the doorway a moment raising an eyebrow questioningly. Geoffrey grinned back over his shoulder noticing how sunlight through the kitchen window paled the black of Gio's tuxedo, making it look almost like paper, and lit the side of his face in a soft white flame (how really beautiful). Then Gio strode to the arrangement of straightback chairs and stands near the vanity and deftly flung out his music, a single sharp flap, before him on the stand. He poised his bow over the strings and the other three smoothly took their places and hastily raised their bows. With a heave, Gio lunged into the first powerful chord. Flora in the fury of her attack nearly fell off her chair for some reason and Cramer glanced over at her with disgust. Karl shut his eyes in surrender to the next broken chords and the thrilling storm around him that was softened only by the miraculous understanding and warmth of his, his! second fiddle part—in this music, at least, the defining spirit of the ecstasy and torment in a deaf and dying genius' despair.

With a whimper Theresa clawed the rippling skin on Geoffrey's back. She closed her eyes too and offered herself up to the fierce sounding, resounding, astounding glory of . . . but nothing to match the stateliness of the theme came to mind. For a moment Geoffrey drew his brows together, thinking . . . "I know this one," he panted at last.

Her eyelids fluttered open and a remote questioning look flashed across her face.

"I say I know this one," he gasped. She started to smile and then winced, shutting her eyes again and her mouth opened with a low moan.

"The Fourth, posthumous."

Gio glanced ironically at Karl who lowered his eyes back to the music with a smirk. Flora writhed over her cello making that mysterious noise with her dental plates in time with the galloping descent of her part. Cramer watched the bed covertly with bright eyes while something sleepy and sad cowered in a background thought. With regret he returned to the music to whisk the page over.

"I can whistle it!" (Geoffrey was shouting now.) Again Theresa opened her eyes and tried to laugh but the effort got tangled somewhere in her throat and she choked feebly.

"Bet I can whistle it?"

She swallowed once and began to clamp her legs with excruciating tightness almost up to his shoulders. He was practically kneeling now and supporting himself on trembling arms. He pursed his lips to whistle but no sound came out. A spray of saliva flew out over her hair and he suddenly felt her teeth numbly against his chest. With a gasp and a shudder he collapsed all at once over her in

an explosion of jerks and she had the distinct impression that surely, now, this is the way one's neck breaks.

Gio nodded tranquilly to the musicians as a sign that they were to skip the recap and finish directly on the prearranged coda. With a bound Flora snatched at her music with her bow hand, upsetting the stand into Cramer's and he icily looked away and set into the last measures which he knew quite well even if she, poor cow, did not.

"Excellent! Excellent!" Geoffrey cried tearing himself from her (she gave a tiny shriek and then fell back with a pant, flinging an arm across her forehead). He clapped enthusiastically and was instantly aware of a throbbing ache and a fearful feeling of exposure. Gio inclined his head in a princely bow.

"Well, let's clean up," Geoffrey said with weary exuberance, clutching his groin in relief and turning to the blissfully limp Theresa. "Come on Mary Sunshine! Late for work!" He trotted off to the bathroom and urinated with a vaguely gratifying pain. Peering around to the mirror he surveyed the smudges on the paint on his face. Shaking clean (keep that!), he set to work with a piece of toilet paper wiping his face. The white around the eyes merged with the blue of the cheeks and forehead and finally (with more toilet paper gently but firmly applied, as they say) the creamy blue began to disappear, the effort leaving a tingling flush on his face. Because he had not shaved the night before, the gum of the mustache tugged at the real hair causing him to grimace with theatrical exaggeration. With a wet washrag he wiped his face, carefully digging up behind the ear lobes and tilting his head back to inspect the underside of his jaws. With a clean towel he dried his face and leaned over to the shower blindly reaching through the curtain to the spigots.

Theresa watched the musicians collect their music and move slowly out to the kitchen whispering to each other. Then Flora said rather loudly to the funny looking Cramer, "I don't care what you say," but he firmly shoved her along through the doorway and then suddenly shot back at Theresa a glance full of pity and distress. Theresa looked back startled, but in the next moment he was gone. Geoffrey reappeared cautiously from behind the bathroom door. "Come and have a shower, darling." She got up and sat on the edge of the bed staring for a moment at the floor. Then she walked languidly into the bathroom.

"Cramer's looking queer today," she said musingly to him over the thrum of the shower.

"What's that?"

"So," said Gio noncommittally. He snapped a speck of lint off the trousers and carried them to the closet. Still facing Cramer he retrieved with a sure and perfect jab (a not unfamiliar gesture) a wire hanger from the invisible depths of the clothes closet (Cramer half expected a rabbit or bouquet of roses).

"So, Gio. So I want you to tell her to rehearse better . . ."

"Is that why you're so sad, little one?" Gio asked kindly, and there was something so inviting—a note of delicious melancholy that understood all—that Cramer

experienced an unreasoning impulse to throw himself sobbing at the feet of Good Great Gio.

"Well, you saw. Ah, how ridiculous it was. This morning. With her music stand!" he replied in short petulant whispers, twisting a chipped button on the face of his nice coat and trying to resist the growing temptation to weep.

"He's complaining again," Flora whispered, narrowing her eyes knowingly to Karl as they sat at the kitchen table playing chess. Karl yawned and took up the sharp steel nail file and delicately dug out a white crumb of soap from under the gleaming nail of his right fourth finger.

"Karl!" she burst out again in a whisper, leaning forward, "He's complaining again! You know it! What will Gio do with him this time?"

"Oh move," she added after a moment, her eye catching the position on the board. "Your queen's pinned, move." She sat back and drummed her fingers on the table abstractedly.

"What will Gio do?" Karl asked pleasantly with an ingenious but futile dilatory move through a wilderness of pawns. "Why, he'll make him weep, of course."

Gio materialized at the door. He no longer wore the tuxedo, but was dressed now in fashionable street clothes consisting of a white flannel coat and checked trousers and a stiff broad-brimmed straw hat with a length of red silk wrapped around the crown. He wore patent pumps and around his throat a floaty red scarf with a wide blue border limped in the breeze coming through the open kitchen window.

"You're going?" groaned Flora, startled at seeing him, and with something tragic in her voice that made Karl snigger as he looked up.

Gio nodded and stood waiting.

Flora sighed and finally said in a husky voice, "You'll be careful?"

Gio smiled faintly, then swept noiselessly out the kitchen door to the hall. An unknown young man in a double breasted navy blazer and white slacks and oxfords clattered down the stairs twirling a set of keys around one upraised index finger. He replied to Gio's courtly nod and with an ironic, bright smile (next time take the elevator) taking in at a glance the musician's splendor and perhaps not a little envious.

Theresa sat alone at the kitchen table resting her forehead on her hand and looking down into the brown reflection in her coffee cup. She heard the tinny whine of Geoffrey's car speeding off down the street five stories below. With a matter of fact snuffle she got up and walked into the bedroom. She surprised the dark, shifty-eyed maid in the act of examining a rather horrible wound in her arm pit with her left elbow raised high up and her right fingers tentatively touching the bright slash in the shaded hollow as she swayed slightly before the bathroom mirror.

"Heavens, Lisa! You must be more careful when you *shreft* (literally "shave," but much more feminine)."

"Oh, mademoiselle! I thought you'd gone," Lisa cried lowering her arm reluctantly.

Theresa sat down on the low stool at the vanity near the closet, bending

down to slip into her heels. Then she straightened and with a swift shake flung her heavy blond hair behind her and applied a quick twist of lipstick. Raising herself up with her hands on the glass top she stooped forward to the mirror and critically inspected her face. A timid knocking came from the kitchen door. Patting her hair she crossed back through the kitchen with the regular sharp tap of her heels on the floor catching up with the stabbing race in his heart like some brisk, flapping doom splitting the seconds into red gun shots, and snatching up her handbag from the table without a pause, she opened the door.

She was magnificent.

"Mademoiselle Theresa. I am nothing, of course. I am a fool."

"Why Cramer . . ."

She was magnificent in a pale lime suit with blinding white cuffs.

"I am a fool. I weep too much. And I am afraid of many things."

"Cramer, Cramer, poor thing, come in and have some coffee; Lisa . . ."

"I am afraid of many things" (here he felt his eyes fill with tears and he attempted to look away but could not) "but I have always . . ."

"Yes, yes. Lisa will get it for you because I really must go."

She was magnificent with the soft bloom of gold in her skin and the blond hair tossed back over her shoulders.

"But I have always loved you and I shall be strong forever now that . . ."

"But of course, and I'm in love too, and I'm late—look!" She extended her magic hand to him trying to show him her pretty wristwatch.

Impetuously he seized her hand and for an instant it rested in his.

". . . now that I've told you."

"And I must, must to go," she said, trying to be clear. The hand dissolved from his timorous clasp and she disappeared past him catching the elevator just in time as a tall, elderly man gallantly held the iron gates open for her. Letting them creak closed with a smart clank he pressed the ground floor button and turned to Theresa with a look of suave concern. "I couldn't help overhearing that strange little man. One is so apt to meet such sorts in these sections of the Capitol. You are a foreigner . . ."

Theresa cut him off with a crude sneer: "Buzz off, *bogtur*" (heavily sarcastic, "old warrior").

The smothered whirr stopped and Cramer stood stock still in the doorway where she had left him. Cautiously he tried to recall the sequence of the last confusing seconds. "One thing at any rate," he decided, walking into the kitchen and sitting down wearily in her chair, "I've told her and she has spurned me." Out the window a flock of greedy pigeons settled on the roof of a building across the street. They walked about each other impatiently and shot alert glances down into the street with little tilts of their heads. Then they seemed all at once to spy Cramer through the window and they stared across at him incredulous and scornful. Cramer, unnerved, looked back at them with hate. A warm breeze lightly pushed the curtains out toward him and he got up heavily and went to the window. To his right the sun shone well above the roofs, and in the narrow, still cool street he thought he saw her. But she was really much

further away already, forever. He leaned out the window and watched the scene below. A few cars drove aimlessly by, attempting to dodge the persistent hawkers that scrambled out directly in front of them and bombarded them from all sides with joyous supplication.

Cramer leaned further out and all at once he knew quite certainly that our whole sorrow is just a question of sleep. But of course, he thought, feeling the wind whip past him in his ears.

Lisa peeked out hesitantly from the bedroom doorway and saw a plump man in black leaning from the waist out the kitchen window. Then his feet slowly rose up off the floor as he edged further out, now balanced directly on the sill. Lisa watched breathlessly as the man tottered slowly back and forth, dipping out and back, where his toes lightly tapped the floor and sprang back up again, once, twice, and then vanished quite suddenly with a click of buttons on the ledge and a faint sighing over the breeze. Lisa blinked and brushed her cheek.

Karl noticed the black flash out the window with an uncontrollable start. Recovering himself he returned to the game and sighed. "My, my! Guess what's just happened." Through the open window the sound of a muted crash and several excited voices rose from the street. "What's that noise?" Flora demanded, moving imperiously to the window. From the roof across the way a dozen dusty pigeons fluttered leisurely to the street.

"Today, my sillies, all in English. *Tot. OK?*" Geoffrey dashed into the giant lecture hall with a dazzling smile to everyone. His voice boomed grandly up to the ceiling and as the door flew closed behind him a gratifying roar reverberated for several seconds making the ornate suspended lamps tremble and tinkle with amusement. Several girls tittered and one well known prankster solemnly raised his hand. "What is English for *crapula?*" Everyone laughed. "*Yeg ved ik,*" Geoffrey replied, "nothing too precise, anyway. 'Hangover,' perhaps," he mused, flinging a grammar open before him on the lectern. He wore those becoming wire frame glasses that gave him an irresistably gentle and scholarly look that, even if Theresa failed to credit it so, was the unmistakable impression he made here on students and officials alike. His class was preparing for civil service translators' examinations (for it was more than a rumor that soon diplomatic relations would be resumed with the outside) and the students appealed to one with that stolid ambition that could culminate only in the mechanical, pleasant transjabbering of accusations and denials and guarded protests, tactfully attended to from those remote, cool boxes of glass set high up in that heaven where everything is understood without a blush. But really, under the influence of the nostalgic classroom atmosphere how they blossomed, fresh, youthful, their imaginations soaring (if regressively)!

"Simple sentences, pronunciation!" he announced, lifting his head quickly and aware that sun through the tall windows to his right refracted off the gold and crystal of his glasses one glorious instant a bursting flame into the eyes of the fourth tier lovelies. "Civility is service."

"Civility is Service!" came the mocking echo.

“Too easy, huh?” he inquired superciliously. How popular he was! How beautifully you do beautifully!

“Civility, not servility, is the service of the civil servant!”

“Civility, NOT Servility, is the Service of the Civil Servant!!”

“Seven civil servants serve serviceably . . .” (Laughter). “Forget that one.” (More laughter).

Gio bowed politely and presented his carefully prepared papers to the sergeant at the front desk. “And so,” he began with a paternal sigh, “I am back.”

“Yes. Yes, I see,” said the sergeant, an unhappy looking boy with trembling fingers and dirty nails (we had all expected someone dreadful and sour, of course). “But the General still isn’t seeing anyone, you know,” he added, looking down. Whether he felt sorry for this rather wonderful old man (a famous violinist, he had heard) or whether he was reminded of something tragic and gorgeous in the musical shuttle of his prismatic name as it lay splendidly spilled out on his papers, Sergeant Pain felt always a rapturous melancholy overtake him in his impersonal connection with Gio’s case, so that no matter how courteous and detachedly informative he tried to be, he always ended by saying something perfectly awful (the last time Pain had unaccountably offered him money; Gio had stood still, quietly watching the boy with a sympathy endless in its eloquence).

Today Gio was the tiniest bit impatient so he said in a melodious whisper: “Perhaps this once I could see him unannounced. By accident?”

“Oh that is impossible,” murmured Pain wondering if he was going to collapse.

“Ah yes, we live in impossible times . . .”

“Ah!” gasped Pain.

“Yes. And much is impossible, nowadays, though we must try, must try. Try to live and forget the mistakes, the losses . . .” Gio suggested resignedly.

“Oh yes!” cried Pain, choking, and he hastily rose and stumbled toward the washroom, a crumpled handkerchief pressed to his face as he was suddenly reminded of his poor brother whimpering on the edge of his chair in the waiting room of the impossibly new institution into which he and his mother were trying to have him committed, and a much too grown up, cheerful nurse helped the child up and guided—no dragged the feebly protesting—casting imploring, puzzled—a thread of shimmering dew following the wet thumb—turning with a look of wonder—Gio slipped behind the desk pressing the button that, humming, opened the passageway before him. Pause. Vanish.

Peeking over the edge of his morning newspaper Geoffrey noted her advance. She moved quickly and with a cool determination that effectively discouraged any thought of intruding on this lovely, awfully well dressed foreigner. “Miss, oh, Miss,” how one wanted to stop her for a moment, watch her toss her hair back and look at you with calculation and contempt!

She saw him sprawled expansively in a chair at a street side table on the terrace reading a newspaper that he held spread out in front of him like a pair of stiff wings (“Yes, here I come beaming.”). By the way he had his legs crossed,



the right knee high with the ankle resting on the left knee, she guessed he was in a good mood. His British mood? Yes, and one which she liked rather much, she supposed.

"Good God," he said, glancing up at her in quick greeting. "Cramer's gone and killed himself this morning. Look, it's in the paper." He extended the paper to her, but she brushed it away hastily and opened her menu.

"It couldn't be in the papers so soon. And that reminds me, Geoffrey. I shall need some money."

"What on earth for?" he asked with a dear frown.

"Cramer visited me this morning, poor thing. I think he asked for a loan or something."

"Well, they're not supposed to be bothering us that way," he said, reaching into the breast pocket of his coat for his billfold. "How much does he want?"

She whispered a monstrous sum.

There was genuine surprise on his face and he dropped his hands quickly to his lap and squared around to her. "We can't possibly lend him that much!"

"Well he's dead, you said," she cried, flinging her menu aside. "Don't you care about anything?" and all of a sudden she was looking down with blinking eyes and a snuffle.

"Dearest, what is it?" he moaned, reaching across to her and taking her hand (and noting with pleasure a cluster of rhymes still ringing in the air quietly).

"Oh, it's nothing," she muttered, pressing his hand.

"Are you angry with me?" he whispered.

"Oh no!" she cried, lifting her head up to him with a brave, bright look. "I'm angry with myself."

The pose was captured in a larger photo showing the entire terrace of the restaurant from the door, so that, inclining south, their table was off to the right side while a much less romantic couple dominated the center where, behind that couple, the hedge grew ragged and one could make out a passing straw hatted figure with a dark scarf around his throat floating off in a frozen breeze behind him.

They clasped hands tenderly across the table, she with her mouth open a bit and a worried look in her shining eyes, he, caught in a blink and appearing to be half asleep or laughing quietly while he leaned over toward her and the dark blazer bowled out over the table top. Approaching at the left, through the hedge, the blur of a mid-stride pedestrian. In her lap her handbag lay open and her free hand was hidden inside searching for something.

Perhaps a dainty pearl and silver revolver.

His knee was raised right to the roof of the table while his right leg was unfolded out toward her chair, the foot perhaps searching for her foot. The shadow of the table fell distinctly in front of the scene and the smooth grey curve of the tiles was broken by a round protrusion . . . Of course, now one noticed that the hedge beyond them was low enough to allow a glimpse of the heads of passersby rolling beyond. Directly above them the head of an elderly man in profile rested on the dark foliage. A certain firm set in the mouth pressed

closed and the faint shadow extending from the flute of a strong nostril to the corner of that straight mouth attracted one by its energy and calm apparent even in the casual glance of the photographer, and then there was the scarf that flew up lightly behind.

She had tilted her chair out a few degrees and one foot hid shyly behind the other stretched slightly toward the viewer. Beyond her legs one saw the hedge and the short iron fence running along the bottom. Further to the right, the hedge abruptly stopped and the fence sprang up with a baroque leap turning into a tall gate that lead on to the terrace. Caught with one hand on the gate latch as if undecided was an elderly man in white coat and checks, the fashion of the moment. A dark scarf played out in front of him as he paused in the act of smoothly sweeping in through the gate. Then he stood with his back to the camera at the gate, closing it. With a murmur he slipped into the lounge past the intent photographer thoughtlessly blocking the door.

He was a little surprised to see Karl seated at a corner table in the shadows. A pale lamp behind him on the wall lit up one side of his face, lending it a strangely repulsive girlish softness.

"Even *in taberna* am I, eh?" Gio asked seating himself before Karl who tittered with a serpent's smirk (Karl's invention).

"Cramer's dead."

"Yes, I know," Gio said with a trace of a shrug. He turned and signalled the bartender with a swift small gesture. "I read in the papers."

Karl was startled. "How could they find out so soon?"

"Soon?" he murmured removing a leather cigarette case from his pocket (Karl watched, half-expecting something else, there was a promising flair of the sleight of hand in Gio's movement while he steadily watched Karl's face). "Soon?" It happened yesterday."

"Ah, I see."

"The General will have an official press reception soon," Gio offered Karl the cigarette case "and thinks a small recital a good pretext."

"Well," Karl ventured, waving away the case nervously, "Well, we will need a violinist."

"Why?" asked Gio, looking up with a lovely smile to the entranced waiter who swept a tall glass of shattered ice and vermillion down before him. "We shall do as we did this morning."

"Of course. I must be going." Karl squirmed up abruptly and with a hurried bow walked away.

When he reached the terrace he spotted them over near the gate. With a snicker he drew softly up to the table and bowed to Theresa who didn't look up. They still sat, Geoffrey with his hand over hers in the middle of the table watching her intently while she studied her free hand moving slowly in her purse on her lap.

"I have some terrible news," Karl said hopefully.

Without turning, Geoffrey waved him off.

He needs a haircut, decided Karl disdainfully and moved away.

"I've got to go," she said at last, withdrawing. She pushed back her chair and stood up smoothing down her skirt. Pursing her lips in a pretty pout she tugged on a stubborn glove and picked up her purse. Then she straightened up and smiled coolly down at him.

"I may not be home tonight."

He smiled back not daring to breathe.

"And get a haircut," she said.

With a small, polished farewell wave, she was off swinging and tapping.

I will, but I haven't time, he decided. And so he got up with a secret stretch and stifled yawn and asked a kind waiter kindly for the check, please.

Of course, of course, we didn't order, and he wondered whether he was hungry as he passed through the gate, quick shadow tentacles writhing on his coat. Dare I? He plunged his hands deep into his trouser pockets and handsomely considered: Love. Handsomely blessed the trees every twelve steps. Handsomely said, Love is blind you know. And he dodged a pretty little girl who dashed past him toward a group of nodding pigeons in the street.

What could she have meant by this money theme? Ahead, the glittering pink stone of the State Institute of Civil Training. And beyond, those lovely lawns and trees, he thought. He smiled at his feet one last time and crunched the loose change between his fingers in his pocket, bunching up his coat nicely, and skipped up the stairs, head bowed and a tuneless whistle just about out of his lips.