CLASSICS TO GO

TWELVE MEN

THEODORE DREISER

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Peter

In any group of men I have ever known, speaking from the point of view of character and not that of physical appearance, Peter would stand out as deliciously and irrefutably different. In the great waste of American intellectual dreariness he was an oasis, a veritable spring in the desert. He understood life. He knew men. He was free—spiritually, morally, in a thousand ways, it seemed to me.

As one drags along through this inexplicable existence one realizes how such qualities stand out; not the pseudo freedom of strong men, financially or physically, but the real, internal, spiritual freedom, where the mind, as it were, stands up and looks at itself, faces Nature unafraid, is aware of its own weaknesses, its strengths; examines its own and the creative impulses of the universe and of men with a kindly and non-dogmatic eye, in fact kicks dogma out of doors, and yet deliberately and of choice holds fast to many, many simple and human things, and rounds out life, or would, in a natural, normal, courageous, healthy way.

The first time I ever saw Peter was in St. Louis in 1892; I had come down from Chicago to work on the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, and he was a part of the art department force of that paper. At that time—and he never seemed to change later even so much as a hair's worth until he died in 1908—he was short, stocky and yet quick and even jerky in his manner, with a bushy, tramp-like "get-up" of hair and beard, most swiftly and astonishingly disposed of at times only to be regrown at others, and always, and intentionally, I am sure, most amusing to contemplate. In addition to all this he had an air of well-being, force and alertness which belied

the other surface characteristics as anything more than a genial pose or bit of idle gayety.

Plainly he took himself seriously and yet lightly, usually with an air of suppressed gayety, as though saying, "This whole business of living is a great joke." He always wore good and yet exceedingly mussy clothes, at times bespattered with ink or, worse yet, even soup—an amazing grotesquery that was the dismay of all who knew him, friends and relatives especially. In addition he was nearly always liberally besprinkled with tobacco dust, the source of which he used in all forms: in pipe, cigar and plug, even cigarettes when he could obtain nothing more substantial. One of the things about him which most impressed me at that time and later was this love of the ridiculous or the grotesque, in himself or others, which would not let him take anything in a dull or conventional mood, would not even permit him to appear normal at times but urged him on to all sorts of nonsense, in an effort, I suppose, to entertain himself and make life seem less commonplace.

And yet he loved life, in all its multiform and multiplex aspects and with no desire or tendency to sniff, reform or improve anything. It was good just as he found it, excellent. Life to Peter was indeed so splendid that he was always very much wrought up about it, eager to live, to study, to do a thousand things. For him it was a workshop for the artist, the thinker, as well as the mere grubber, and without really criticizing any one he was "for" the individual who is able to understand, to portray or to create life, either feelingly and artistically or with accuracy and discrimination. To him, as I saw then and see even more clearly now, there was no high and no low. All things were only relatively so. A thief was a thief, but he had his place. Ditto the murderer. Ditto the saint. Not man but Nature was planning, or at least doing, something which man could not understand, of which very

likely he was a mere tool. Peter was as much thrilled and entendered by the brawling strumpet in the street or the bagnio as by the virgin with her starry crown. The rich were rich and the poor poor, but all were in the grip of imperial forces whose ruthless purposes or lack of them made all men ridiculous, pathetic or magnificent, as you choose. He pitied ignorance and necessity, and despised vanity and cruelty for cruelty's sake, and the miserly hoarding of anything. He was liberal, material, sensual and yet spiritual; and although he never had more than a little money, out of the richness and fullness of his own temperament he seemed able to generate a kind of atmosphere and texture in his daily life which was rich and warm, splendid really in thought (the true reality) if not in fact, and most grateful to all. Yet also, as I have said, always he wished to *seem* the clown, the scapegrace, the wanton and the loon even, mouthing idle impossibilities at times and declaring his profoundest faith in the most fantastic things.

Do I seem to rave? I am dealing with a most significant person.

In so far as I knew he was born into a mid-Western family of Irish extraction whose habitat was southwest Missouri. In the town in which he was reared there was not even a railroad until he was fairly well grown—a fact which amused but never impressed him very much. Apropos of this he once told me of a yokel who, never having seen a railroad, entered the station with his wife and children long before train time, bought his ticket and waited a while, looking out of the various windows, then finally returned to the ticket-seller and asked, "When does this thing start?" He meant the station building itself. At the time Peter had entered upon art work he had scarcely prosecuted his studies beyond, if so far as, the conventional high or grammar school, and yet he was most amazingly informed and but

little interested in what any school or college had to offer. His father, curiously enough, was an educated Irish-American, a lawyer by profession, and a Catholic. His mother was an American Catholic, rather strict and narrow. His brothers and sisters, of whom there were four, were, as I learned later, astonishingly virile and interesting Americans of a rather wild, unsettled type. They were all, in so far as I could judge from chance meetings, agnostic, tense, quick-moving—so vital that they weighed on one a little, as very intense temperaments are apt to do. One of the brothers, K——, who seemed to seek me out ever so often for Peter's sake, was so intense, nervous, rapid-talking, rapid-living, that he frightened me a little. He loved noisy, garish places. He liked to play the piano, stay up very late; he was a high liver, a "good dresser," as the denizens of the Tenderloin would say, an excellent example of the flashy, clever promoter. He was always representing a new company, introducing something—a table or laxative water, a shaving soap, a chewing gum, a safety razor, a bicycle, an automobile tire or the machine itself. He was here, there, everywhere—in Waukesha, Wisconsin; San Francisco; New York; New Orleans. "My, my! This is certainly interesting!" he would exclaim, with an air which would have done credit to a comedian and extending both hands. "Peter's pet friend, Dreiser! Well, well, well! Let's have a drink. Let's have something to eat. I'm only in town for a day. Maybe you'd like to go to a show—or hit the high places? Would you? Well, well, well! Let's make a night of it! What do you say?" and he would fix me with a glistening, nervous and what was intended no doubt to be a reassuring eye, but which unsettled me as thoroughly as the imminence of an earthquake. But I was talking of Peter.

The day I first saw him he was bent over a drawing-board illustrating a snake story for one of the Sunday issues of the *Globe-Democrat*, which apparently delighted in regaling its

readers with most astounding concoctions of this kind, and the snake he was drawing was most disturbingly vital and reptilian, beady-eyed, with distended jaws, extended tongue, most fatefully coiled.

"My," I commented in passing, for I was in to see him about another matter, "what a glorious snake!"

"Yes, you can't make 'em too snaky for the snake-editor up front," he returned, rising and dusting tobacco from his lap and shirtfront, for he was in his shirt-sleeves. Then he expectorated not in but to one side of a handsome polished brass cuspidor which contained not the least evidence of use, the rubber mat upon which it stood being instead most disturbingly "decorated." I was most impressed by this latter fact although at the time I said nothing, being too new. Later, I may as well say here, I discovered why. This was a bit of his clowning humor, a purely manufactured and as it were mechanical joke or ebullience of soul. If any one inadvertently or through unfamiliarity attempted to expectorate in his "golden cuspidor," as he described it, he was always quick to rise and interpose in the most solemn, almost sepulchral manner, at the same time raising a hand. "Hold! Out—not in—to one side, on the mat! That cost me seven dollars!" Then he would solemnly seat himself and begin to draw again. I saw him do this to all but the chiefest of the authorities of the paper. And all, even the dullest, seemed to be amused, quite fascinated by the utter trumpery folly of it.

But I am getting ahead of my tale. In so far as the snake was concerned, he was referring to the assistant who had these snake stories in charge. "The fatter and more venomous and more scaly they are," he went on, "the better. I'd like it if we could use a little color in this paper—red for eyes and tongue, and blue and green for scales. The farmers upstate would love that. They like good but

poisonous snakes." Then he grinned, stood back and, cocking his head to one side in a most examining and yet approving manner, ran his hand through his hair and beard and added, "A snake can't be too vital, you know, for this paper. We have to draw 'em strong, plenty of vitality, plenty of go." He grinned most engagingly.

I could not help laughing, of course. The impertinent air! The grand, almost condescending manner!

We soon became fast friends.

In the same office in close contact with him was another person, one D—— W——, also a newspaper artist, who, while being exceedingly interesting and special in himself, still as a character never seems to have served any greater purpose in my own mind than to have illustrated how emphatic and important Peter was. He had a thin, pale, Dantesque face, coal black, almost Indian-like hair most carefully parted in the middle and oiled and slicked down at the sides and back until it looked as though it had been glued. His eyes were small and black and querulous but not mean—petted eyes they were—and the mouth had little lines at each corner which seemed to say he had endured much, much pain, which of course he had not, but which nevertheless seemed to ask for, and I suppose earned him some, sympathy. Dick in his way was an actor, a tragedian of sorts, but with an element of humor, cynicism and insight which saved him from being utterly ridiculous. Like most actors, he was a great poseur. He invariably affected the long, loose flowing tie with a soft white or blue or green or brown linen shirt (would any American imitation of the "Quartier Latin" denizen have been without one at that date?), yellow or black gloves, a round, soft crush hat, very soft and limp and very *different*, patent leather pumps, betimes a capecoat, a slender cane, a boutonnière—all this

in hard, smoky, noisy, commercial St. Louis, full of middle-West business men and farmers!

I would not mention this particular person save that for a time he, Peter and myself were most intimately associated. We temporarily constituted in our way a "soldiers three" of the newspaper world. For some years after we were more or less definitely in touch as a group, although later Peter and myself having drifted Eastward and hob-nobbing as a pair had been finding more and more in common and had more and more come to view Dick for what he was: a character of Dickensian, or perhaps still better, Cruikshankian, proportions and qualities. But in those days the three of us were all but inseparable; eating, working, playing, all but sleeping together. I had a studio of sorts in a more or less dilapidated factory section of St. Louis (Tenth near Market; now I suppose briskly commercial), Dick had one at Broadway and Locust, directly opposite the then famous Southern Hotel. Peter lived with his family on the South Side, a most respectable and homey-home neighborhood.

It has been one of my commonest experiences, and one of the most interesting to me, to note that nearly all of my keenest experiences intellectually, my most gorgeous *rapprochements* and swiftest developments mentally, have been by, to, and through men, not women, although there have been several exceptions to this. Nearly every turning point in my career has been signalized by my meeting some man of great force, to whom I owe some of the most ecstatic intellectual hours of my life, hours in which life seemed to bloom forth into new aspects, glowed as with the radiance of a gorgeous tropic day.

Peter was one such. About my own age at this time, he was blessed with a natural understanding which was simply Godlike. Although, like myself, he was raised a Catholic and still pretending in a boisterous, Rabelaisian way to have

some reverence for that faith, he was amusingly sympathetic to everything good, bad, indifferent—"in case there might be something in it; you never can tell." Still he hadn't the least interest in conforming to the tenets of the church and laughed at its pretensions, preferring his own theories to any other. Apparently nothing amused him so much as the thought of confession and communion, of being shrived by some stout, healthy priest as worldly as himself, and preferably Irish, like himself. At the same time he had a hearty admiration for the Germans, all their ways, conservatisms, their breweries, food and such things, and finally wound up by marrying a German girl.

As far as I could make out, Peter had no faith in anything except Nature itself, and very little in that except in those aspects of beauty and accident and reward and terrors with which it is filled and for which he had an awe if not a reverence and in every manifestation of which he took the greatest delight. Life was a delicious, brilliant mystery to him, horrible in some respects, beautiful in others; a great adventure. Unlike myself at the time, he had not the slightest trace of any lingering Puritanism, and wished to live in a lush, vigorous, healthy, free, at times almost barbaric, way. The negroes, the ancient Romans, the Egyptians, tales of the Orient and the grotesque Dark Ages, our own vile slums and evil quarters—how he reveled in these! He was for nights of wandering, endless investigation, reading, singing, dancing, playing!

Apropos of this I should like to relate here that one of his seemingly gross but really innocent diversions was occasionally visiting a certain black house of prostitution, of which there were many in St. Louis. Here while he played a flute and some one else a tambourine or small drum, he would have two or three of the inmates dance in some weird savage way that took one instanter to the wilds of Central

Africa. There was, so far as I know, no payment of any kind made in connection with this. He was a friend, in some crude, artistic or barbaric way. He satisfied, I am positive, some love of color, sound and the dance in these queer revels.

Nor do I know how he achieved these friendships, such as they were. I was never with him when he did. But aside from the satiation they afforded his taste for the strange and picturesque, I am sure they reflected no gross or sensual appetite. But I wish to attest in passing that the mere witnessing of these free scenes had a tonic as well as toxic effect on me. As I view myself now, I was a poor, spindling, prying fish, anxious to know life, and yet because of my very narrow training very fearsome of it, of what it might do to me, what dreadful contagion of thought or deed it might open me to! Peter was not so. To him all, positively *all*, life was good. It was a fascinating spectacle, to be studied or observed and rejoiced in as a spectacle. When I look back now on the shabby, poorly-lighted, low-ceiled room to which he led me "for fun," the absolutely black or brown girls with their white teeth and shiny eyes, the unexplainable, unintelligible love of rhythm and the dance displayed, the beating of a drum, the sinuous, winding motions of the body, I am grateful to him. He released my mind, broadened my view, lengthened my perspective. For as I sat with him, watching him beat his drum or play his flute, noted the gayety, his love of color and effect, and feeling myself *low*, a criminal, disgraced, the while I was staring with all my sight and enjoying it intensely, I realized that I was dealing with a man who was "bigger" than I was in many respects, saner, really more wholesome. I was a moral coward, and he was not losing his life and desires through fear—which the majority of us do. He was strong, vital, unafraid, and he made me so.

But, lest I seem to make him low or impossible to those who instinctively cannot accept life beyond the range of their own little routine world, let me hasten to his other aspects. He was not low but simple, brilliant and varied in his tastes. America and its point of view, religious and otherwise, was simply amusing to him, not to be taken seriously. He loved to contemplate man at his mysteries, rituals, secret schools. He loved better yet ancient history, medieval inanities and atrocities—a most singular, curious and wonderful mind. Already at this age he knew many historians and scientists (their work), a most astonishing and illuminating list to me—Maspero, Froude, Huxley, Darwin, Wallace, Rawlinson, Froissart, Hallam, Taine, Avebury! The list of painters, sculptors and architects with whose work he was familiar and books about whom or illustrated by whom he knew, is too long to be given here. His chief interest, in so far as I could make out, in these opening days, was Egyptology and the study of things natural and primeval—all the wonders of a natural, groping, savage world.

"Dreiser," he exclaimed once with gusto, his bright beady eyes gleaming with an immense human warmth, "you haven't the slightest idea of the fascination of some of the old beliefs. Do you know the significance of a scarab in Egyptian religious worship, for instance?"

"A scarab? What's a scarab? I never heard of one," I answered.

"A beetle, of course. An Egyptian beetle. You know what a beetle is, don't you? Well, those things burrowed in the earth, the mud of the Nile, at a certain period of their season to lay their eggs, and the next spring, or whenever it was, the eggs would hatch and the beetles would come up. Then the Egyptians imagined that the beetle hadn't died at all, or if it had that it also had the power of restoring itself to life, possessed immortality. So they thought it must be a god

and began to worship it," and he would pause and survey me with those amazing eyes, bright as glass beads, to see if I were properly impressed.

"You don't say!"

"Sure. That's where the worship came from," and then he might go on and add a bit about monkey-worship, the Zoroastrians and the Parsees, the sacred bull of Egypt, its sex power as a reason for its religious elevation, and of sex worship in general; the fantastic orgies at Sidon and Tyre, where enormous images of the male and female sex organs were carried aloft before the multitude.

Being totally ignorant of these matters at the time, not a rumor of them having reached me as yet in my meagre reading, I knew that it must be so. It fired me with a keen desire to read—not the old orthodox emasculated histories of the schools but those other books and pamphlets to which I fancied he must have access. Eagerly I inquired of him where, how. He told me that in some cases they were outlawed, banned or not translated wholly or fully, owing to the puritanism and religiosity of the day, but he gave me titles and authors to whom I might have access, and the address of an old book-dealer or two who could get them for me.

In addition he was interested in ethnology and geology, as well as astronomy (the outstanding phases at least), and many, many phases of applied art: pottery, rugs, pictures, engraving, wood-carving, jewel-cutting and designing, and I know not what else, yet there was always room even in his most serious studies for humor of the bizarre and eccentric type, amounting to all but an obsession. He wanted to laugh, and he found occasion for doing so under the most serious, or at least semi-serious, circumstances. Thus I recall that one of the butts of his extreme humor was this same

Dick, whom he studied with the greatest care for points worthy his humorous appreciation. Dick, in addition to his genuinely lively mental interests, was a most romantic person on one side, a most puling and complaining soul on the other. As a newspaper artist I believe he was only a fairly respectable craftsman, if so much, whereas Peter was much better, although he deferred to Dick in the most persuasive manner and seemed to believe at times, though I knew he did not, that Dick represented all there was to know in matters artistic.

Among other things at this time, the latter was, or pretended to be, immensely interested in all things pertaining to the Chinese and to know not only something of their language, which he had studied a little somewhere, but also their history—a vague matter, as we all know—and the spirit and significance of their art and customs. He sometimes condescended to take us about with him to one or two Chinese restaurants of the most beggarly description, and—as he wished to believe, because of the romantic titillation involved—the hang-outs of crooks and thieves and disreputable Tenderloin characters generally. (Of such was the beginning of the Chinese restaurant in America.) He would introduce us to a few of his Celestial friends, whose acquaintance apparently he had been most assiduously cultivating for some time past and with whom he was now on the best of terms. He had, as Peter pointed out to me, the happy knack of persuading himself that there was something vastly mysterious and superior about the whole Chinese race, that there was some Chinese organization known as the Six Companions, which, so far as I could make out from him, was ruling very nearly (and secretly, of course) the entire habitable globe. For one thing it had some governing connection with great constructive ventures of one kind and another in all parts of the world, supplying, as he said, thousands of Chinese laborers to any one who

desired them, anywhere, and although they were employed by others, ruling them with a rod of iron, cutting their throats when they failed to perform their bounden duties and burying them head down in a basket of rice, then transferring their remains quietly to China in coffins made in China and brought for that purpose to the country in which they were. The Chinese who had worked for the builders of the Union Pacific had been supplied by this company, as I understood from Dick. In regard to all this Peter used to analyze and dispose of Dick's self-generated romance with the greatest gusto, laughing the while and yet pretending to accept it all.

But there was one phase of all this which interested Peter immensely. Were there on sale in St. Louis any bits of jade, silks, needlework, porcelains, basketry or figurines of true Chinese origin? He was far more interested in this than in the social and economic sides of the lives of the Chinese, and was constantly urging Dick to take him here, there and everywhere in order that he might see for himself what of these amazing wonders were locally extant, leading Dick in the process a merry chase and a dog's life. Dick was compelled to persuade nearly all of his boasted friends to produce all they had to show. Once, I recall, a collection of rare Chinese porcelains being shown at the local museum of art, there was nothing for it but that Dick must get one or more of his Oriental friends to interpret this, that and the other symbol in connection with this, that and the other vase—things which put him to no end of trouble and which led to nothing, for among all the local Chinese there was not one who knew anything about it, although they, Dick included, were not honest enough to admit it.

"You know, Dreiser," Peter said to me one day with the most delicious gleam of semi-malicious, semi-tender humor, "I am really doing all this just to torture Dick. He doesn't know a

damned thing about it and neither do these Chinese, but it's fun to haul 'em out there and make 'em sweat. The museum sells an illustrated monograph covering all this, you know, with pictures of the genuinely historic pieces and explanations of the various symbols in so far as they are known, but Dick doesn't know that, and he's lying awake nights trying to find out what they're all about. I like to see his expression and that of those chinks when they examine those things." He subsided with a low chuckle all the more disturbing because it was so obviously the product of well-grounded knowledge.

Another phase of this same humor related to the grand artistic, social and other forms of life to which Dick was hoping to ascend via marriage and which led him, because of a kind of anticipatory eagerness, into all sorts of exaggerations of dress, manners, speech, style in writing or drawing, and I know not what else. He had, as I have said, a "studio" in Broadway, an ordinary large, square upper chamber of an old residence turned commercial but which Dick had decorated in the most, to him, recherché or *different* manner possible. In Dick's gilding imagination it was packed with the rarest and most carefully selected things, odd bits of furniture, objects of art, pictures, books—things which the ordinary antique shop provides in plenty but which to Dick, having been reared in Bloomington, Illinois, were of the utmost artistic import. He had vaulting ambitions and pretensions, literary and otherwise, having by now composed various rondeaus, triolets, quatrains, sonnets, in addition to a number of short stories over which he had literally slaved and which, being rejected by many editors, were kept lying idly and inconsequentially and seemingly inconspicuously about his place—the more to astonish the poor unsophisticated "outsider." Besides it gave him the opportunity of posing as misunderstood, neglected, depressed, as becomes all great artists, poets, and thinkers.

His great scheme or dream, however, was that of marriage to an heiress, one of those very material and bovine daughters of the new rich in the West end, and to this end he was bending all his artistic thought, writing, dressing, dreaming the thing he wished. I myself had a marked tendency in this direction, although from another point of view, and speaking from mine purely, there was this difference between us: Dick being an artist, rather remote and disdainful in manner and decidedly handsome as well as poetic and better positioned than I, as I fancied, was certain to achieve this gilded and crystal state, whereas I, not being handsome nor an artist nor sufficiently poetic perhaps, could scarcely aspire to so gorgeous a goal. Often, as around dinnertime he ambled from the office arrayed in the latest mode—dark blue suit, patent leather boots, a dark, round soft felt hat, loose tie blowing idly about his neck, a thin cane in his hand—I was already almost convinced that the anticipated end was at hand, this very evening perhaps, and that I should never see him more except as the husband of a very rich girl, never be permitted even to speak to him save as an almost forgotten friend, and in passing! Even now perhaps he was on his way to her, whereas I, poor oaf that I was, was moiling here over some trucky work. Would my ship never come in? my great day never arrive? my turn? Unkind heaven!

As for Peter he was the sort of person who could swiftly detect, understand and even sympathize with a point of view of this kind the while he must laugh at it and his mind be busy with some plan of making a fol-de-rol use of it. One day he came into the city-room where I was working and bending over my desk fairly bursting with suppressed humor announced, "Gee, Dreiser, I've just thought of a delicious trick to play on Dick! Oh, Lord!" and he stopped and surveyed me with beady eyes the while his round little body seemed to fairly swell with pent-up laughter. "It's too rich!

Oh, if it just works out Dick'll be sore! Wait'll I tell you," he went on. "You know how crazy he is about rich young heiresses? You know how he's always 'dressing up' and talking and writing about marrying one of those girls in the West end?" (Dick was forever composing a short story in which some lorn but perfect and great artist was thus being received via love, the story being read to us nights in his studio.) "That's all bluff, that talk of his of visiting in those big houses out there. All he does is to dress up every night as though he were going to a ball, and walk out that way and moon around. Well, listen. Here's the idea. We'll go over to Mermod & Jaccards to-morrow and get a few sheets of their best monogrammed paper, sample sheets. Then we'll get up a letter and sign it with the most romantic name we can think of—Juanita or Cyrene or Doris—and explain who she is, the daughter of a millionaire living out there, and that she's been strictly brought up but that in spite of all that she's seen his name in the paper at the bottom of his pictures and wants to meet him, see? Then we'll have her suggest that he come out to the west gate of, say, Portland Place at seven o'clock and meet her. We'll have her describe herself, see, young and beautiful, and some attractive costume she's to wear, and we'll kill him. He'll fall hard. Then we'll happen by there at the exact time when he's waiting, and detain him, urge him to come into the park with us or to dinner. We'll look our worst so he'll be ashamed of us. He'll squirm and get wild, but we'll hang on and spoil the date for him, see? We'll insist in the letter that he must be alone, see, because she's timid and afraid of being recognized. My God, he'll be crazy! He'll think we've ruined his life—oh, ho, ho!" and he fairly writhed with inward joy.

The thing worked. It was cruel in its way, but when has man ever grieved over the humorous ills of others? The paper was secured, the letter written by a friend of Peter's in a nearby real estate office, after the most careful deliberation

as to wording on our part. Extreme youth, beauty and a great mansion were all hinted at. The fascination of Dick as a romantic figure was touched upon. He would know her by a green silk scarf about her waist, for it was spring, the ideal season. Seven o'clock was the hour. She could give him only a moment or two then—but later—and she gave no address!

The letter was mailed in the West end, as was meet and proper, and in due season arrived at the office. Peter, working at the next easel, observed him, as he told me, out of the corner of his eye.

"You should have seen him, Dreiser," he exclaimed, hunting me up about an hour after the letter arrived. "Oh, ho! Say, you know I believe he thinks it's the real thing. It seemed to make him a little sick. He tried to appear nonchalant, but a little later he got his hat and went out, over to Deck's," a nearby saloon, "for a drink, for I followed him. He's all fussed up. Wait'll we heave into view that night! I'm going to get myself up like a joke, a hobo. I'll disgrace him. Oh, Lord, he'll be crazy! He'll think we've ruined his life, scared her off. There's no address. He can't do a thing. Oh, ho, ho, ho!"

On the appointed day—and it was a delicious afternoon and evening, aflame with sun and in May—Dick left off his work at three p.m., as Peter came and told me, and departed, and then we went to make our toilets. At six we met, took a car and stepped down not more than a short block from the point of meeting. I shall never forget the sweetness of the air, the something of sadness in the thought of love, even in this form. The sun was singing its evensong, as were the birds. But Peter—blessings or curses upon him!—was arrayed as only he could array himself when he wished to look absolutely disconcerting—more like an unwashed, uncombed tramp who had been sleeping out for weeks, than anything else. His hair was over his eyes and ears, his face and hands dirty, his shoes ditto. He had even

blackened one tooth slightly. He had on a collarless shirt, and yet he was jaunty withal and carried a cane, if you please, assuming, as he always could and in the most aggravating way, to be totally unconscious of the figure he cut. At one angle of his multiplex character the man must have been a born actor.

We waited a block away, concealed by a few trees, and at the exact hour Dick appeared, hopeful and eager no doubt, and walking and looking almost all that he hoped—delicate, pale, artistic. The new straw hat! The pale green "artists'" shirt! His black, wide-buckled belt! The cane! The dark-brown low shoes! The boutonnière! He was plainly ready for any fate, his great moment.

And then, before he could get the feeling that his admirer might not be coming, we descended upon him in all our wretched nonchalance and unworthiness—out of hell, as it were. We were most brisk, familiar, affectionate. It was so fortunate to meet him so, so accidentally and peradventure. The night was so fine. We were out for a stroll in the park, to eat afterward. He must come along.

I saw him look at Peter in that hat and no collar, and wilt. It was too much. Such a friend—such friends (for on Peter's advice I was looking as ill as I might, an easy matter)! No, he couldn't come. He was waiting for some friends. We must excuse him.

But Peter was not to be so easily shaken off. He launched into the most brisk and serious conversation. He began his badger game by asking about some work upon which Dick had been engaged before he left the office, some order, how he was getting along with it, when it would be done; and, when Dick evaded and then attempted to dismiss the subject, took up another and began to expatiate on it, some work he himself was doing, something that had developed

in connection with it. He asked inane questions, complimented Dick on his looks, began to tease him about some girl. And poor Dick—his nervousness, his despair almost, the sense of the waning of his opportunity! It was cruel. He was becoming more and more restless, looking about more and more wearily and anxiously and wishing to go or for us to go. He was horribly unhappy. Finally, after ten or fifteen minutes had gone and various girls had crossed the plaza in various directions, as well as carriages and saddle-horses—each one carrying his heiress, no doubt!—he seemed to summon all his courage and did his best to dispose of us. "You two'll have to excuse me," he exclaimed almost wildly. "I can't wait." Those golden moments! She could not approach! "My people aren't coming, I guess. I'll have to be going on."

He smiled weakly and made off, Peter half following and urging him to come back. Then, since he would not, we stood there on the exact spot of the rendezvous gazing smirkily after him. Then we went into the park a few paces and sat on a bench in full view, talking—or Peter was—most volubly. He was really choking with laughter. A little later, at seven-thirty, we went cackling into the park, only to return in five minutes as though we had changed our minds and were coming out—and saw Dick bustling off at our approach. It was sad really. There was an element of the tragic in it. But not to Peter. He was all laughter, all but apoplectic gayety. "Oh, by George!" he choked. "This is too much! Oh, ho! This is great! his poor heiress! And he came back! Har! Har! Har!"

"Peter, you dog," I said, "aren't you ashamed of yourself, to rub it in this way?"

"Not a bit, not a bit!" he insisted most enthusiastically. "Do him good. Why shouldn't he suffer? He'll get over it. He's always bluffing about his heiresses. Now he's lost a real one.

Har! Har! Har!" and he fairly choked, and for days and weeks and months he laughed, but he never told. He merely chortled at his desk, and if any one asked him what he was laughing about, even Dick, he would reply, "Oh, something—a joke I played on a fellow once."

If Dick ever guessed he never indicated as much. But that lost romance! That faded dream!

Not so long after this, the following winter, I left St. Louis and did not see Peter for several years, during which time I drifted through various cities to New York. We kept up a more or less desultory correspondence which resulted eventually in his contributing to a paper of which I had charge in New York, and later, in part at least I am sure, in his coming there. I noticed one thing, that although Peter had no fixed idea as to what he wished to be—being able to draw, write, engrave, carve and what not—he was in no way troubled about it. "I don't see just what it is that I am to do best," he said to me once. "It may be that I will wind up as a painter or writer or collector—I can't tell yet. I want to study, and meantime I'm making a living—that's all I want now. I want to live, and I am living, in my way."

Some men are masters of cities, or perhaps better, of all the elements which enter into the making of them, and Peter was one. I think sometimes that he was born a writer of great force and charm, only as yet he had not found himself. I have known many writers, many geniuses even, but not one his superior in intellect and romantic response to life. He was a poet, thinker, artist, philosopher and master of prose, as a posthumous volume ("Wolf, the Autobiography of a Cave Dweller") amply proves, but he was not ready then to fully express himself, and it troubled him not at all. He loved life's every facet, was gay and helpful to himself and others, and yet always with an eye for the undercurrent of human misery, error and tragedy as well as comedy.

Immediately upon coming to New York he began to examine and grasp it in a large way, its museums, public buildings, geography, politics, but after a very little while decided suddenly that he did not belong there and without a by-your-leave, although once more we had fallen into each other's ways, he departed without a word, and I did not hear from him for months. Temporarily at least he felt that he had to obtain more experience in a lesser field, and lost no time in so doing. The next I knew he was connected, at a comfortable salary, with the then dominant paper of Philadelphia.

It was after he had established himself very firmly in Philadelphia that we two finally began to understand each other fully, to sympathize really with each other's point of view as opposed to the more or less gay and casual nature of our earlier friendship. Also here perhaps, more than before, we felt the binding influence of having worked together in the West. It was here that I first noticed the ease with which he took hold of a city, the many-sidedness of his peculiar character which led him to reflect so many angles of it, which a less varied temperament would never have touched upon. For, first of all, wherever he happened to be, he was intensely interested in the age and history of his city, its buildings and graveyards and tombstones which pointed to its past life, then its present physical appearance, the chief characteristics of the region in which it lay, its rivers, lakes, parks and adjacent places and spots of interest (what rambles we took!), as well as its newest and finest things architecturally. Nor did any one ever take a keener interest in the current intellectual resources of a city—any city in which he happened to be—its museums, libraries, old bookstores, newspapers, magazines, and I know not what else. It was he who first took me into Leary's bookstore in Philadelphia, descanting with his usual gusto on its merits. Then and lastly he was keenly and wisely interested in

various currents of local politics, society and finance, although he always considered the first a low mess, an arrangement or adjustment of many necessary things among the lower orders. He seemed to know or sense in some occult way everything that was going on in those various realms. His mind was so full and rich that merely to be with him was a delight. He gushed like a fountain, and yet not polemically, of all he knew, heard, felt, suspected. His thoughts were so rich at times that to me they were more like a mosaic of variegated and richly colored stones and jewels. I felt always as though I were in the presence of a great personage, not one who was reserved or pompous but a loose bubbling temperament, wise beyond his years or day, and so truly great that perhaps because of the intensity and immense variety of his interests he would never shine in a world in which the most intensive specialization, and that of a purely commercial character, was the grand rôle.

And yet I always felt that perhaps he might. He attracted people of all grades so easily and warmly. His mind leaped from one interest to another almost too swiftly, and yet the average man understood and liked him. While in a way he contemned their mental states as limited or bigoted, he enjoyed the conditions under which they lived, seemed to wish to immerse himself in them. And yet nearly all his thoughts were, from their point of view perhaps, dangerous. Among his friends he was always talking freely, honestly, of things which the average man could not or would not discuss, dismissing as trash illusion, lies or the cunning work of self-seeking propagandists, most of the things currently accepted as true.

He was constantly commenting on the amazing dullness of man, his prejudices, the astonishing manner in which he seized upon and clung savagely or pathetically to the most ridiculous interpretations of life. He was also forever noting

that crass chance which wrecks so many of our dreams and lives,—its fierce brutalities, its seemingly inane indifference to wondrous things,—but never in a depressed or morbid spirit; merely as a matter of the curious, as it were. But if any one chanced to contradict him he was likely to prove liquid fire. At the same time he was forever reading, reading, reading—history, archæology, ethnology, geology, travel, medicine, biography, and descanting on the wonders and idiosyncrasies of man and nature which they revealed. He was never tired of talking of the intellectual and social conditions that ruled in Greece and Rome from 600 B.C. on, the philosophies, the travels, the art, the simple, natural pagan view of things, and regretting that they were no more. He grieved at times, I think, that he had not been of that world, might not have seen it, or, failing that, might not see all the shards of those extinct civilizations. There was something loving and sad in the manner in which at times, in one museum and another, he would examine ancient art designs, those of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, their public and private house plans, their statues, book rolls, inscriptions, flambeaux, boats, swords, chariots. Carthage, Rome, Greece, Phoenicia—their colonies, art and trade stuffs, their foods, pleasures and worships—how he raved! A book like Thaïs, Salammbo, Sonica, Quo Vadis, touched him to the quick.

At the same time, and odd as it may seem, he was seemingly in intimate contact with a circle of friends that rather astonished me by its catholicity. It included, for instance, and quite naïvely, real estate dealers, clerks, a bank cashier or two, some man who had a leather shop or cigar factory in the downtown section, a drummer, a printer, two or three newspaper artists and reporters—a list too long to catalogue here and seemingly not interesting, at least not inspiring to look at or live in contact with. Yet his relations with all of these were of a warm, genial, helpful, homely

character, quite intimate. He used them as one might a mulch in which to grow things, or in other words he took them on their own ground; a thing which I could never quite understand, being more or less aloof myself and yet wishing always to be able so to do, to take life, as he did.

For he desired, and secured, their good will and drew them to him. He took a simple, natural pleasure in the kinds of things they were able to do, as well as the kinds of things he could do. With these, then, and a type of girl who might not be classed above the clerk or manicure class, he and they managed to eke out a social life, the outstanding phases of which were dances, "parties," dinners at one simple home and another, flirting, boating, and fishing expeditions in season, evenings out at restaurants or the theater, and I know not what else. He could sing (a very fair baritone), play the piano, cornet, flute, banjo, mandolin and guitar, but always insisted that his favorite instruments were the jews'-harp, the French harp (mouth organ) and a comb with a piece of paper over it, against which he would blow with fierce energy, making the most outrageous sounds, until stopped. At any "party" he was always talking, jumping about, dancing, cooking something—fudge, taffy, a rarebit, and insisting in the most mock-serious manner that all the details be left strictly to him. "Now just cut out of this, all of you, and leave this to your Uncle Dudley. Who's doing this? All I want is sugar, chocolate, a pot, a big spoon, and I'll show you the best fudge you ever ate." Then he would don an apron or towel and go to work in a manner which would rob any gathering of a sense of stiffness and induce a naturalness most intriguing, calculated to enhance the general pleasure an hundredfold.

Yes, Peter woke people up. He could convey or spread a sense of ease and good nature and give and take among all. Wise as he was and not so good-looking, he was still

attractive to girls, very much so, and by no means unconscious of their beauty. He could always, and easily, break down their reserve, and was soon apparently on terms of absolute friendship, exchanging all sorts of small gossip and news with them about this, that and the other person about whom they knew. Indeed he was such a general favorite and so seemingly impartial that it was hard to say how he came close to any, and yet he did. At odd tête-à-tête moments he was always making confessions as to "nights" or "afternoons." "My God, Dreiser, I've found a peach! I can't tell you—but oh, wonderful! Just what I need. This world's a healthy old place, eh? Let's have another drink, what?" and he would order a stein or a half-schoppen of light German beer and pour it down, grinning like a gargoyle.

It was while he was in Philadelphia that he told me the beginnings of the love affair which eventually ended in his marrying and settling down into the homiest of home men I have ever seen and which for sheer naïveté and charm is one of the best love stories I know anything about. It appears that he was walking in some out-of-the-way factory realm of North Philadelphia one Saturday afternoon about the first or second year of his stay there, when, playing in the street with some other children, he saw a girl of not more than thirteen or fourteen who, as he expressed it to me, "came damned near being the prettiest thing I ever saw. She had yellow hair and a short blue dress and pink bows in her hair—and say, Dreiser, when I saw her I stopped flat and said 'me for that' if I have to wait fifteen years! Dutchy—you never saw the beat! And poor! Her shoes were clogs. She couldn't even talk English yet. Neither could the other kids. They were all sausage—a regular German neighborhood.

"But, say, I watched her a while and then I went over and said, 'Come here, kid. Where do you live?' She didn't understand, and one of the other kids translated for her, and then she said, 'Ich sprech nicht English,'" and he mocked her. "That fixed her for me. One of the others finally told me who she was and where she lived—and, say, I went right home and began studying German. In three months I could make myself understood, but before that, in two weeks, I hunted up her old man and made him understand that I wanted to be friends with the family, to learn German. I went out Sundays when they were all at home. There are six children and I made friends with 'em all. For a long time I couldn't make Madchen (that's what they call her) understand what it was all about, but finally I did, and she knows now all right. And I'm crazy about her and I'm going to marry her as soon as she's old enough."

"How do you know that she'll have you?" I inquired.

"Oh, she'll have me. I always tell her I'm going to marry her when she's eighteen, and she says all right. And I really believe she does like me. I'm crazy about her."

Five years later, if I may anticipate a bit, after he had moved to Newark and placed himself rather well in the journalistic field and was able to carry out his plans in regard to himself, he suddenly returned to Philadelphia and married, preparing beforehand an apartment which he fancied would please her. It was a fortunate marriage in so far as love and home pleasures were concerned. I never encountered a more delightful atmosphere.

All along in writing this I feel as though I were giving but the thinnest portrait of Peter; he was so full and varied in his moods and interests. To me he illustrated the joy that exists, on the one hand, in the common, the so-called homely and what some might think ugly side of life, certainly the very

simple and ordinarily human aspect of things; on the other, in the sheer comfort and satisfaction that might be taken in things truly intellectual and artistic, but to which no great expense attached—old books, prints, things connected with history and science in their various forms, skill in matters relating to the applied arts and what not, such as the coloring and firing of pottery and glass, the making of baskets, hammocks and rugs, the carving of wood, the collection and imitation of Japanese and Chinese prints, the art of embalming as applied by the Egyptians (which, in connection with an undertaker to whom he had attached himself, he attempted to revive or at least play with, testing his skill for instance by embalming a dead cat or two after the Egyptian manner). In all of these lines he trained himself after a fashion and worked with skill, although invariably he insisted that he was little more than a bungler, a poor follower after the art of some one else. But most of all, at this time and later, he was interested in collecting things Japanese and Chinese: netsukes, inros, censors, images of jade and porcelain, teajars, vases, prints; and it was while he was in Philadelphia and seemingly trifling about with the group I have mentioned and making love to his little German girl that he was running here and there to this museum and that and laying the foundations of some of those interesting collections which later he was fond of showing his friends or interested collectors. By the time he had reached Newark, as chief cartoonist of the leading paper there, he was in possession of a complete Tokaido (the forty views on the road between Tokio and Kyoto), various prints by Hokusai, Sesshiu, Sojo; a collection of one hundred inros, all of fifty netsukes, all of thirty censers, lacquered boxes and teajars, and various other exceedingly beautiful and valuable things—Mandarin skirts and coats, among other things—which subsequently he sold or traded around among one collector friend and another for things which they had. I recall his selling his completed Tokaido, a