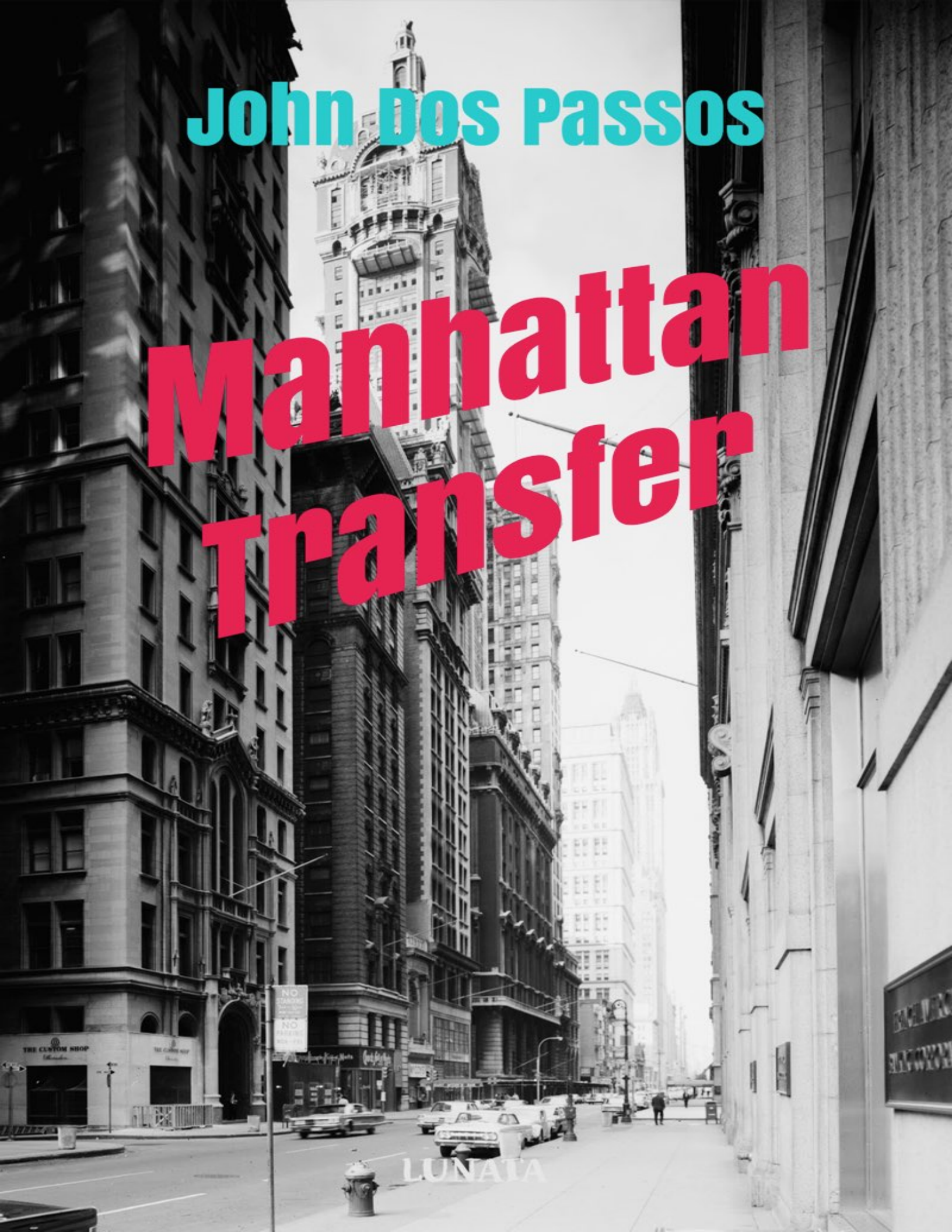
John Dos Passos

Manhattan Transfer



LUNATA

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MANHATTAN TRANSFER

JOHN DOS PASSOS

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First Published in 1922
ISBN 9783753497792
Herstellung und Verlag: BoD - Books on Demand, Norderstedt

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FIRST SECTION

FERRYSLIP

Three gulls wheel above the broken orange-rinds, spoiled cabbage heads that heave between the splintered plank walls, the green waves spume under the round bow as the ferry, skidding on the tide, crashes, gulps the broken water, slides, settles slowly into the slip. Hand-winches whirl with jingle of chains. Gates fold upwards, feet step out across the crack, men and women press through the manure-smelling wooden tunnel of the ferry house, crushed and jostling like apples fed down a chute into a press.

The nurse, holding the basket at arm's length as if it were a bedpan, opened the door to a big dry hot room with greenish distempered walls where in the air tinctured with smells of alcohol and iodoform hung writhing a faint sourish squalling from other baskets along the wall. As she set her basket down she glanced into it with pursed-up lips. The newborn baby squirmed in the cotton-wool feebly like a knot of earthworms.

On the ferry there was an old man playing the violin.

He had a monkey's face puckered up in one corner and kept time with the toe of a cracked patent-leather shoe. Bud Korpenning sat on the rail watching him, his back to the river. The breeze made the hair stir round the tight line of his cap and dried the sweat on his temples. His feet were blistered, he was leaden-tired, but when the ferry moved out of the slip, bucking the little slapping scalloped waves of the river he felt something warm and tingling shoot suddenly through all his veins. "Say, friend, how fur is it into the city from where this ferry lands?" he asked a young man in a straw hat wearing a blue and white striped necktie who stood beside him.

The young man's glance moved up from Bud's road-swelled shoes to the red wrist that stuck out from the frayed sleeves of his coat, past the skinny turkey's throat and slid up cockily into the intent eyes under the broken-visored cap.

"That depends where you want to get to."

"How do I get to Broadway? … I want to get to the center of things."

"Walk east a block and turn down Broadway and you'll find the center of things if you walk far enough."

"Thank you sir. I'll do that."

The violinist was going through the crowd with his hat held out, the wind ruffling the wisps of gray hair on his shabby bald head. Bud found the face tilted up at him, the crushed eyes like two black pins looking into his. "Nothin," he said gruffly and turned away to look at the expanse of river bright as knife-blades. The plank walls of the slip closed in, cracked as the ferry lurched against them; there

was rattling of chains, and Bud was pushed forward among the crowd through the ferry-house. He walked between two coal wagons and out over a dusty expanse of street towards yellow streetcars. A trembling took hold of his knees. He thrust his hands deep in his pockets.

EAT on a lunch-wagon halfway down the block. He slid stiffly onto a revolving stool and looked for a long while at the price-list.

“Fried eggs and a cup o coffee.”

“Want ’em turned over?” asked the red-haired man behind the counter who was wiping off his beefy freckled forearms with his apron. Bud Korpenning sat up with a start.

“What?”

“The eggs? Want em turned over or sunny side up?”

“Oh sure, turn ’em over.” Bud slouched over the counter again with his head between his hands.

“You look all in, feller,” the man said as he broke the eggs into the sizzling grease of the frying pan.

“Came down from upstate. I walked fifteen miles this mornin.”

The man made a whistling sound through his eyeteeth. “Comin to the big city to look for a job, eh?”

Bud nodded. The man flopped the eggs sizzling and netted with brown out onto the plate and pushed it towards Bud with some bread and butter on the edge of it. “I’m goin to slip you a bit of advice, feller, and it won’t cost you nutten. You go an git a shave and a haircut and brush the hayseeds out o yer suit a bit before you start lookin. You’ll

be more likely to git somethin. It's looks that count in this city."

"I kin work all right. I'm a good worker," growled Bud with his mouth full.

"I'm tellin yez, that's all," said the red-haired man and turned back to his stove.

When Ed Thatcher climbed the marble steps of the wide hospital entry he was trembling. The smell of drugs caught at his throat. A woman with a starched face was looking at him over the top of a desk. He tried to steady his voice.

"Can you tell me how Mrs. Thatcher is?"

"Yes, you can go up."

"But please, miss, is everything all right?"

"The nurse on the floor will know anything about the case. Stairs to the left, third floor, maternity ward."

Ed Thatcher held a bunch of flowers wrapped in green waxed paper. The broad stairs swayed as he stumbled up, his toes kicking against the brass rods that held the fiber matting down. The closing of a door cut off a strangled shriek. He stopped a nurse.

"I want to see Mrs. Thatcher, please."

"Go right ahead if you know where she is."

"But they've moved her."

"You'll have to ask at the desk at the end of the hall."

He gnawed his cold lips. At the end of the hall a red-faced woman looked at him, smiling.

"Everything's fine. You're the happy father of a bouncing baby girl."

“You see it’s our first and Susie’s so delicate,” he stammered with blinking eyes.

“Oh yes, I understand, naturally you worried.... You can go in and talk to her when she wakes up. The baby was born two hours ago. Be sure not to tire her.”

Ed Thatcher was a little man with two blond wisps of mustache and washed-out gray eyes. He seized the nurse’s hand and shook it showing all his uneven yellow teeth in a smile.

“You see it’s our first.”

“Congratulations,” said the nurse.

Rows of beds under bilious gaslight, a sick smell of restlessly stirring bedclothes, faces fat, lean, yellow, white; that’s her. Susie’s yellow hair lay in a loose coil round her little white face that looked shriveled and twisted. He unwrapped the roses and put them on the night table. Looking out the window was like looking down into water. The trees in the square were tangled in blue cobwebs. Down the avenue lamps were coming on marking off with green shimmer brick-purple blocks of houses; chimney pots and water tanks cut sharp into a sky flushed like flesh. The blue lids slipped back off her eyes.

“That you Ed? .... Why Ed they are Jacks. How extravagant of you.”

“I couldn’t help it dearest. I knew you liked them.”

A nurse was hovering near the end of the bed.

“Couldn’t you let us see the baby, miss?”

The nurse nodded. She was a lantern jawed gray-faced woman with tight lips.

“I hate her,” whispered Susie. “She gives me the fidgets that woman does; she’s nothing but a mean old maid.”

“Never mind dear, it’s just for a day or two.” Susie closed her eyes.

“Do you still want to call her Ellen?”

The nurse brought back a basket and set it on the bed beside Susie.

“Oh isn’t she wonderful!” said Ed. “Look she’s breathing.... And they’ve oiled her.” He helped his wife to raise herself on her elbow; the yellow coil of her hair unrolled, fell over his hand and arm. “How can you tell them apart nurse?”

“Sometimes we cant,” said the nurse, stretching her mouth in a smile. Susie was looking querulously into the minute purple face. “You’re sure this is mine.”

“Of course.”

“But it hasn’t any label on it.”

“I’ll label it right away.”

“But mine was dark.” Susie lay back on the pillow, gasping for breath.

“She has lovely little light fuzz just the color of your hair.”

Susie stretched her arms out above her head and shrieked: “It’s not mine. It’s not mine. Take it away.... That woman’s stolen my baby.”

“Dear, for Heaven’s sake! Dear, for Heaven’s sake!” He tried to tuck the covers about her.

“Too bad,” said the nurse, calmly, picking up the basket. “I’ll have to give her a sedative.”

Susie sat up stiff in bed. “Take it away,” she yelled and fell back in hysterics, letting out continuous frail moaning shrieks.

“O my God!” cried Ed Thatcher, clasping his hands.

“You’d better go away for this evening, Mr. Thatcher.... She’ll quiet down, once you’ve gone.... I’ll put the roses in water.”

On the last flight he caught up with a chubby man who was strolling down slowly, rubbing his hands as he went. Their eyes met.

“Everything all right, sir?” asked the chubby man.

“Oh yes, I guess so,” said Thatcher faintly.

The chubby man turned on him, delight bubbling through his thick voice. “Congradulade me, congradulade me; mein vife has giben birth to a poy.”

Thatcher shook a fat little hand. “Mine’s a girl,” he admitted, sheepishly.

“It is fif years yet and every year a girl, and now dink of it, a poy.”

“Yes,” said Ed Thatcher as they stepped out on the pavement, “it’s a great moment.”

“Vill yous allow me sir to invite you to drink a congradulation drink mit me?”

“Why with pleasure.”

The latticed half-doors were swinging in the saloon at the corner of Third Avenue. Shuffling their feet politely they went through into the back room.

“Ach,” said the German as they sat down at a scarred brown table, “family life is full of vorries.”

“That it is sir; this is my first.”

“Vill you haf beer?”

“All right anything suits me.”

“Two pottles Culmbacher imported to drink to our little folk.” The bottles popped and the sepiatinged foam rose in the glasses. “Here’s success.... Prosit,” said the German, and raised his glass. He rubbed the foam out of his mustache and pounded on the table with a pink fist. “Vould it be indiscreet meester ...?”

“Thatcher’s my name.”

“Vould it be indiscreet, Mr. Thatcher, to inquvire vat might your profession be?”

“Accountant. I hope before long to be a certified accountant.”

“I am a printer and my name is Zucher—Marcus Antonius Zucher.”

“Pleased to meet you Mr. Zucher.”

They shook hands across the table between the bottles.

“A certified accountant makes big money,” said Mr. Zucher.

“Big money’s what I’ll have to have, for my little girl.”

“Kids, they eat money,” continued Mr. Zucher, in a deep voice.

“Won’t you let me set you up to a bottle?” said Thatcher, figuring up how much he had in his pocket. Poor Susie wouldn’t like me to be drinking in a saloon like this. But just this once, and Pm learning, learning about fatherhood.

“The more the merrier,” said Mr. Zucher. “... But kids, they eat money.... Don’t do nutten but eat and vear out clothes. Vonce I get my business on its feet.... Ach! Now vot mit hypothecations and the difficult borrowing of money

and vot mit vages going up und these here crazy trade-union socialists and bomsters …”

“Well here’s how, Mr. Zucher.” Mr. Zucher squeezed the foam out of his mustache with the thumb and forefinger of each hand. “It ain’t every day ve pring into the voirld a papy poy, Mr. Thatcher.”

“Or a baby girl, Mr. Zucher.”

The barkeep wiped the spillings off the table when he brought the new bottles, and stood near listening, the rag dangling from his red hands.

“And I have the hope in mein heart that ven my poy drinks to his poy, it vill be in champagne vine. Ach, that is how things go in this great city.”

“I’d like my girl to be a quiet homey girl, not like these young women nowadays, all frills and furbelows and tight lacings. And I’ll have retired by that time and have a little place up the Hudson, work in the garden evenings…. I know fellers downtown who have retired with three thousand a year. It’s saving that does it.”

“Ain’t no good in savin,” said the barkeep. “I saved for ten years and the savings bank went broke and left me nutten but a bankbook for my trouble. Get a close tip and take a chance, that’s the only system.”

“That’s nothing but gambling,” snapped Thatcher.

“Well sir it’s a gamblin game,” said the barkeep as he walked back to the bar swinging the two empty bottles.

“A gamblin game. He ain’t so far out,” said Mr.

Zucher, looking down into his beer with a glassy meditative eye. “A man vat is ambeetious must take chances. Ambeetions is vat I came here from Frankfort mit

at the age of tvelf years, und now that I haf a son to vork for … Ach, his name shall be Vilhelm after the mighty Kaiser.”

“My little girl’s name will be Ellen after my mother.” Ed Thatcher’s eyes filled with tears.

Mr. Zucher got to his feet. “Veil goodby Mr. Thatcher. Happy to have met you. I must go home to my little girls.”

Thatcher shook the chubby hand again, and thinking warm soft thoughts of motherhood and fatherhood and birthday cakes and Christmas watched through a sepiatinged foamy haze Mr. Zucher waddle out through the swinging doors. After a while he stretched out his arms. Well poor little Susie wouldn’t like me to be here…. Everything for her and the bonny wee bairn.

“Hey there yous how about settlin?” bawled the barkeep after him when he reached the door.

“Didn’t the other feller pay?”

“Like hell he did.”

“But he was t-t-treating me….”

The barkeep laughed as he covered the money with a red lipper. “I guess that bloat believes in savin.”

A small bearded bandy-legged man in a derby walked up Allen Street, up the sun-striped tunnel hung with sky-blue and smoked-salmon and mustard-yellow quilts, littered with second hand gingerbread-colored furniture. He walked with his cold hands clasped over the tails of his frock-coat, picking his way among packing boxes and scuttling children. He kept gnawing his lips and clasping and

unclasping his hands. He walked without hearing the yells of the children or the annihilating clatter of the L trains overhead or smelling the rancid sweet huddled smell of packed tenements.

At a yellow-painted drugstore at the corner of Canal, he stopped and stared abstractedly at a face on a green advertising card. It was a highbrowed clean-shaven distinguished face with arched eyebrows and a bushy neatly trimmed mustache, the face of a man who had money in the bank, poised prosperously above a crisp wing collar and an ample dark cravat. Under it in copybook writing was the signature King C. Gillette. Above his head hovered the motto no stropping no honing. The little bearded man pushed his derby back off his sweating brow and looked for a long time into the dollar-proud eyes of King C. Gillette. Then he clenched his fists, threw back his shoulders and walked into the drugstore.

His wife and daughters were out. He heated up a pitcher of water on the gas-burner. Then with the scissors he found on the mantel he clipped the long brown locks of his beard. Then he started shaving very carefully with the new nickel-bright safety razor. He stood trembling running his fingers down his smooth white cheeks in front of the stained mirror. He was trimming his mustache when he heard a noise behind him. He turned towards them a face smooth as the face of King C. Gillette, a face with a dollar-bland smile. The two little girls' eyes were popping out of their heads. "Mommer … it's popper," the biggest one yelled. His wife dropped like a laundry-bag into the rocker and threw the apron over her head.

“Oyoy! Oyoy!” she moaned rocking back and forth.

“Vat’s a matter? Don’t ye like it?” He walked back and forth with the safety razor shining in his hand now and then gently fingering his smooth chin.

METROPOLIS

There were Babylon and Nineveh: they were built of brick. Athens was gold marble columns. Rome was held up on broad arches of rubble. In Constantinople the minarets flame like great candles round the Golden Horn … Steel, glass, tile, concrete will be the materials of the skyscrapers. Crammed on the narrow island the million windowed buildings will jut glittering, pyramid on pyramid like the white cloud-head above a thunderstorm.

When the door of the room closed behind him, Ed Thatcher felt very lonely, full of prickly restlessness. If Susie were only here he'd tell her about the big money he was going to make and how he'd deposit ten dollars a week in the savings bank just for little Ellen; that would make five hundred and twenty dollars a year.... Why in ten years without the interest that'd come to more than five thousand dollars. I must compute the compound interest on five hundred and twenty dollars at four per cent. He walked excitedly about the narrow room. The gas jet purred comfortably like a cat. His eyes fell on the

headline on a Journal that lay on the floor by the coal-scuttle where he had dropped it to run for the hack to take Susie to the hospital.

MORTON SIGNS THE GREATER NEW YORK BILL
Complete the Act Making New Your World's Second Metropolis

Breathing deep he folded the paper and laid it on the table.

The world's second metropolis.... And dad wanted me to stay in his ole fool store in Onteora. Might have if it hadn't been for Susie.... Gentlemen tonight that you do me the signal honor of offering me the junior partnership in your firm I want to present to you my little girl, my wife. I owe everything to her.

In the bow he made towards the grate his coat-tails flicked a piece of china off the console beside the bookcase. He made a little clicking noise with his tongue against his teeth as he stooped to pick it up. The head of the blue porcelain Dutch girl had broken off from her body. "And poor Susie's so fond of her knickknacks. I'd better go to bed."

He pushed up the window and leaned out. An L train was rumbling past the end of the street. A whiff of coal smoke stung his nostrils. He hung out of the window a long while looking up and down the street. The world's second metropolis. In the brick houses and the dingy lamplight and the voices of a group of boys kidding and quarreling on the steps of a house opposite, in the regular firm tread of a

policeman, he felt a marching like soldiers, like a sidewheeler going up the Hudson under the Palisades, like an election parade, through long streets towards something tall white full of colonnades and stately. Metropolis.

The street was suddenly full of running. Somebody out of breath let out the word Fire.

“Where at?”

The group of boys melted off the stoop across the way. Thatcher turned back into the room. It was stifling hot. He was all tingling to be out. I ought to go to bed. Down the street he heard the splattering hoof beats and the frenzied bell of a fire engine. Just take a look. He ran down the stairs with his hat in his hand.

“Which way is it?”

“Down on the next block.”

“It’s a tenement house.”

It was a narrow-windowed six-story tenement. The hook-and-ladder had just drawn up. Brown smoke, with here and there a little trail of sparks was pouring fast out of the lower windows. Three policemen were swinging their clubs as they packed the crowd back against the steps and railings of the houses opposite. In the empty space in the middle of the street the fire engine and the red hose-wagon shone with bright brass. People watched silent staring at the upper windows where shadows moved and occasional light flickered. A thin pillar of flame began to flare above the house like a roman-candle.

“The air-shaft,” whispered a man in Thatcher’s ear. A gust of wind filled the street with smoke and a smell of burning rags. Thatcher felt suddenly sick. When the smoke

cleared he saw people hanging in a kicking cluster, hanging by their hands from a window-ledge. The other side firemen were helping women down a ladder. The flame in the center of the house flared brighter. Something black had dropped from a window and lay on the pavement shrieking. The policemen were shoving the crowd back to the ends of the block. New fire engines were arriving.

“They’ve got five alarms in,” a man said. “What do you think of that? Everyone of ’em on the two top floors was trapped. It’s an incendiary done it. Some goddam firebug.”

A young man sat huddled on the curb beside the gas lamp. Thatcher found himself standing over him pushed by the crowd from behind.

“He’s an Italian.”

“His wife’s in that buildin’.”

“Cops won’t let him get by.” “His wife’s in a family way. He cant talk English to ask the cops.”

The man wore blue suspenders tied up with a piece of string in back. His back was heaving and now and then he left out a string of groaning words nobody understood.

Thatcher was working his way out of the crowd. At the corner a man was looking into the fire alarm box. As Thatcher brushed past him he caught a smell of coal-oil from the man’s clothes. The man looked up into his face with a smile. He had tallowy sagging cheeks and bright pop-eyes. Thatcher’s hands and feet went suddenly cold. The firebug. The papers say they hang round like that to watch it. He walked home fast, ran up the stairs, and locked the room door behind him. The room was quiet and empty. He’d forgotten that Susie wouldn’t be there waiting

for him. He began to undress. He couldn't forget the smell of coal-oil on the man's clothes.

Mr. Perry flicked at the burdock leaves with his cane. The real-estate agent was pleading in a singsong voice:

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Perry, it's an opportunity not to be missed. You know the old saying sir … opportunity knocks but once on a young man's door. In six months I can virtually guarantee that these lots will have doubled in value. Now that we are a part of New York, the second city in the world, sir, don't forget that.... Why the time will come, and I firmly believe that you and I will see it, when bridge after bridge spanning the East River have made Long Island and Manhattan one, when the Borough of Queens will be as much the heart and throbbing center of the great metropolis as is Astor Place today."

"I know, I know, but I'm looking for something dead safe. And besides I want to build. My wife hasn't been very well these last few years...."

"But what could be safer than my proposition? Do you realize Mr. Perry, that at considerable personal loss I'm letting you in on the ground floor of one of the greatest real-estate certainties of modern times. I'm putting at your disposal not only security, but ease, comfort, luxury. We are caught up Mr. Perry on a great wave whether we will or no, a great wave of expansion and progress. A great deal is going to happen in the next few years. All these mechanical inventions—telephones, electricity, steel bridges, horseless vehicles—they are all leading somewhere. It's up to us to

be on the inside, in the forefront of progress.... My God! I cant begin to tell you what it will mean....” Poking amid the dry grass and the burdock leaves Mr. Perry had moved something with his stick. He stooped and picked up a triangular skull with a pair of spiral-fluted horns. “By gad 1” he said. “That must have been a fine ram.”

Drowsy from the smell of lather and bay-rum and singed hair that weighed down the close air of the barbershop, Bud sat nodding, his hands dangling big and red between his knees. In his eardrums he could still feel through the snipping of scissors the pounding of his feet on the hungry road down from Nyack.

“Next!”

“Whassat? … All right I just want a shave an a haircut.”

The barber’s pudgy hands moved through his hair, the scissors whirred like a hornet behind his ears. His eyes kept closing; he jerked them open fighting sleep. He could see beyond the striped sheet littered with sandy hair the bobbing hammerhead of the colored boy shining his shoes.

“Yes sir” a deep-voiced man droned from the next chair, “it’s time the Democratic party nominated a strong....”

“Want a neck-shave as well?” The barber’s greasy-skinned moon-face poked into his.

He nodded.

“Shampoo?”

“No.”

When the barber threw back the chair to shave him he wanted to crane his neck like a mud-turtle turned over on its back. The lather spread drowsily on his face, prickling his nose, filling up his ears. Drowning in featherbeds of

lather, blue lather, black, slit by the faraway glint of the razor, glint of the grubbing hoe through blue-black lather clouds. The old man on his back in the potato-field, his beard sticking up lathery white full of blood. Full of blood his socks from those blisters on his heels. His hands gripped each other cold and horny like a dead man's hands under the sheet. Lemme git up.... He opened his eyes. Padded fingertips were stroking his chin. He stared up at the ceiling where four flies made figure eights round a red crepe-paper bell. His tongue was dry leather in his mouth. The barber righted the chair again. Bud looked about blinking. "Four bits, and a nickel for the shine."

ADMITS KILLING CRIPPLED MOTHER ...

"D'yous mind if I set here a minute an read that paper?" he hears his voice drawling in his pounding ears.

"Go right ahead."

PARKER'S FRIENDS PROTECT ...

The black print squirms before his eyes. Russians ... MOB STONES ... (Special Dispatch to the Herald) Trenton, N. J.

Nathan Sibbetts, fourteen years old, broke down today after two weeks of steady denial of guilt and confessed to the police that he was responsible for the death of his aged and crippled mother, Hannah Sibbetts, after a quarrel in their home at Jacob's Creek, six miles above this city. Tonight he was committed to await the action of the Grand Jury.

RELIEVE PORT ARTHUR IN FACE OF ENEMY ... Mrs. Rix Loses Husband's Ashes.

On Tuesday May 24 at about half past eight o’clock I came home after sleeping on the steam roller all night, he said, and went upstairs to sleep some more. I had only gotten to sleep when my mother came upstairs and told me to get up and if I didn’t get up she would throw me downstairs. My mother grabbed hold of me to throw me downstairs. I threw her first and she fell to the bottom. I went downstairs and found that her head was twisted to one side. I then saw that she was dead and then I straightened her neck and covered her up with the cover from my bed.

Bud folds the paper carefully, lays it on the chair and leaves the barbershop. Outside the air smells of crowds, is full of noise and sunlight. No more’n a needle in a haystack … “An I’m twenty-five years old,” he muttered aloud. Think of a kid fourteen…. He walks faster along roaring pavements where the sun shines through the Elevated striping the blue street with warm seething yellow stripes. No more’n a needle in a haystack.

Ed Thatcher sat hunched over the piano-keys picking out the Mosquito Parade. Sunday afternoon sunlight streamed dustily through the heavy lace curtains of the window, squirmed in the red roses of the carpet, filled the cluttered parlor with specks and splinters of light. Susie Thatcher sat limp by the window watching him out of eyes too blue for her sallow face. Between them, stepping carefully among the roses on the sunny field of the carpet, little Ellen danced. Two small hands held up the pink-frilled dress and now and then an emphatic little voice said, “Mummy watch my expression.”

“Just look at the child,” said Thatcher, still playing. “She’s a regular little ballet-dancer.”

Sheets of the Sunday paper lay where they had fallen from the table; Ellen started dancing on them, tearing the sheets under her nimble tiny feet.

“Don’t do that Ellen dear,” whined Susie from the pink plush chair.

“But mummy I can do it while I dance.”

“Don’t do that mother said.” Ed Thatcher had slid into the Barcarole. Ellen was dancing to it, her arms swaying to it, her feet nimbly tearing the paper.

“Ed for Heaven’s sake pick the child up; she’s tearing the paper.”

He brought his fingers down in a lingering chord. “Deary you mustn’t do that. Daddy’s not finished reading it.”

Ellen went right on. Thatcher swooped down on her from the piano-stool and set her squirming and laughing on his knee. “Ellen you should always mind when mummy speaks to you, and dear you shouldn’t be destructive. It costs money to make that paper and people worked on it and daddy went out to buy it and he hasn’t finished reading it yet. Ellie’ understands don’t she now? We need con-struction and not de-struction in this world.” Then he went on with the Barcarole and Ellen went on dancing, stepping carefully among the roses on the sunny field of the carpet.

There were six men at the table in the lunch room eating fast with their hats on the backs of their heads.

“Jiminy crickets!” cried the young man at the end of the table who was holding a newspaper in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. “Kin you beat it?”

“Beat what?” growled a long-faced man with a toothpick in the corner of his mouth.

“Big snake appears on Fifth Avenue.... Ladies screamed and ran in all directions this morning at eleven thirty when a big snake crawled out of a crack in the masonry of the retaining wall of the reservoir at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street and started to cross the sidewalk....”

“Some fish story....”

“That ain’t nothin,” said an old man. “When I was a boy we used to go snipe-shootin on Brooklyn Flats....”

“Holy Moses! it’s quarter of nine,” muttered the young man folding his paper and hurrying out into Hudson Street that was full of men and girls walking briskly through the ruddy morning. The scrape of the shoes of hairy-hoofed drayhorses and the grind of the wheels of produce-wagons made a deafening clatter and filled the air with sharp dust. A girl in a flowered bonnet with a big lavender bow under her pert tilted chin was waiting for him in the door of M. Sullivan & Co., Storage and Warehousing. The young man felt all fizzy inside, like a freshly uncorked bottle of pop.

“Hello Emily! ... Say Emily I’ve got a raise.”

“You’re pretty near late, d’you know that?”

“But honest injun I’ve got a two-dollar raise.”

She tilted her chin first to one-side and then to the other.

“I don’t give a rap.”

“You know what you said if I got a raise.” She looked in his eyes giggling.

“An this is just the beginnin …”

“But what good’s fifteen dollars a week?”

‘Why it’s sixty dollars a month, an I’m learning the import business.”

“Silly boy you’ll be late.” She suddenly turned and ran up the littered stairs, her pleated ball-shaped skirt swishing from side to side.

“God! I hate her. I hate her.” Sniffing up the tears that were hot in his eyes, he walked fast down Hudson Street to the office of Winkle & Gulick, West India Importers.

The deck beside the forward winch was warm and briny damp. They were sprawled side by side in greasy denims talking drowsily in whispers, their ears full of the seethe of broken water as the bow shoved bluntly through the long grass-gray swells of the Gulf Stream.

“*J’te dis mon vieux, moi j’fou l’camp* a New York.… The minute we tie up I go ashore and I stay ashore. I’m through with this dog’s life.” The cabin-boy had fair hair and an oval pink-and-cream face; a dead cigarette butt fell from between his lips as he spoke. “Merde!” He reached for it as it rolled down the deck. It escaped his hand and bounced into the scuppers.

“Let it go. I’ve got plenty,” said the other boy who lay on his belly kicking a pair of dirty feet up into the hazy sunlight. “The consul will just have you shipped back.”

“He won’t catch me.”

“And your military service?”

“To hell with it. And with France too for that matter.”

“You want to make yourself an American citizen?”

“Why not? A man has a right to choose his country.”

The other rubbed his nose meditatively with his fist and then let his breath out in a long whistle. “Emile you’re a wise guy,” he said.

“But Congo, why don’t you come too? You don’t want to shovel crap in a stinking ship’s galley all your life.”

Congo rolled himself round and sat up cross-legged, scratching his head that was thick with kinky black hair.

“Say how much does a woman cost in New York?”

“I dunno, expensive I guess.... I’m not going ashore to raise hell; I’m going to get a good job and work. Cant you think of nothing but women?”

“What’s the use? Why not?” said Congo and settled himself flat on the deck again, burying his dark soot-smudged face in his crossed arms.

“I want to get somewhere in the world, that’s what I mean. Europe’s rotten and stinking. In America a fellow can get ahead. Birth don’t matter, education don’t matter. It’s all getting ahead.”

“And if there was a nice passionate little woman right here now where the deck’s warm, you wouldn’t like to love her up?”

“After we’re rich, we’ll have plenty, plenty of everything.”

“And they don’t have any military service?”

“Why should they? It’s the coin they’re after. They don’t want to fight people; they want to do business with them.”

Congo did not answer.