

samuel
beckett

WATT



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Watt

Mr. Hackett turned the corner and saw, in the failing light, at some little distance, his seat. It seemed to be occupied. This seat, the property very likely of the municipality, or of the public, was of course not his, but he thought of it as his. This was Mr. Hackett's attitude towards things that pleased him. He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. He knew they were not his, because they pleased him.

Halting, he looked at the seat with greater care. Yes, it was not vacant. Mr. Hackett saw things a little more clearly when he was still. His walk was a very agitated walk.

Mr. Hackett did not know whether he should go on, or whether he should turn back. Space was open on his right hand, and on his left hand, but he knew that he would never take advantage of this. He knew also that he would not long remain motionless, for the state of his health rendered this unfortunately impossible. The dilemma was thus of extreme simplicity: to go on, or to turn, and return, round the corner, the way he had come. Was he, in other words, to go home at once, or was he to remain out a little longer?

Stretching out his left hand, he fastened it round a rail. This permitted him to strike his stick against the pavement. The feel, in his palm, of the thudding rubber appealed him, slightly.

But he had not reached the corner when he turned again and hastened toward the seat, as fast as his legs could carry him. When he was so near the seat, that he could have touched it with his stick, if he had wished, he again halted and examined its occupants. He had the right, he supposed, to stand and wait for the tram. They too were perhaps waiting for the tram, for a tram, for many trams stopped here, when requested, from without or within, to do so.

Mr. Hackett decided, after some moments, that if they were waiting for a tram they had been doing so for some time. For the lady held the gentleman by the ears, and the gentleman's hand was on the lady's thigh, and the lady's tongue was in the gentleman's mouth. Tired of waiting for the tram, said¹ Mr. Hackett, the strike up an acquaintance. The lady now removing her tongue from the gentleman's mouth, he put his into hers. Fair do, said Mr. Hackett. Taking a pace forward, to satisfy himself that the gentleman's other hand was not going to waste, Mr. Hackett was shocked to find it limply dangling over the back of the seat, with between its fingers the spent three-quarters of a cigarette.

I see no indecency, said the policeman.

We arrive too late, said Mr. Hackett. What a shame.

Do you take me for a fool? said the policeman.

Mr. Hackett recoiled a step, forced back his head until he thought his throatskin would burst, and saw at last, afar, bent angrily upon him, the red violent face.

Officer, he cried, as God is my witness, he had his hand upon it.

God is a witness that cannot be sworn.

If I interrupted your beat, said Mr. Hackett, a thousand pardons. I did so with the best intentions, for you, for me, for the community at large.

The policeman replied briefly to this.

If you imagine that I have not your number, said Mr. Hackett, you are mistaken. I may be infirm, but my sight is excellent. Mr. Hackett sat down on the seat, still warm, from the loving. Good evening, and thank you, said Mr. Hackett.

It was an old seat, low and worn. Mr. Hackett's nape rested against the solitary backboard, beneath it unimpeded his hunch protruded, his feet just touched the ground. At the ends of the long outspread arms the hands held the armrests, the stick hooked round his neck hung between his knees.

So from the shadows he watched the last trams pass, oh not the last, but almost, and in the sky, and in the still canal, the long greens and yellows of the summer evening.

But now a gentleman passing, with a lady on his arm, espied him.

Oh, my dear, he said, there is Hackett.

Hackett, said the lady. What Hackett? Where?

You know Hackett, said the gentleman. You must have often heard me speak of Hackett. Hunchy Hackett. On the seat.

The lady looked attentively at Mr. Hackett.

So that is Hackett, she said.

Yes, said the gentleman.

Poor fellow, she said.

Oh, said the gentleman, let us now stop, do you mind, and wish him the time of evening. He advanced, exclaiming, My dear fellow, my dear fellow, how are you?

Mr. Hackett raised his eyes, from the dying day.

My wife, cried the gentleman. Meet my wife. My wife. Mr. Hackett.

I have heard so much about you, said the lady, and now I meet you, at last. Mr. Hackett!

I do not rise, not having the force, said Mr. Hackett.

Why I should think not indeed, said the lady. She stooped towards him quivering with solicitude. I should hope not indeed, she said.

Mr. Hackett thought she was going to pat him on the head, or at least stroke his hunch. He called in his arms and they sat down beside him, the lady on the one side, and the gentleman on the other. As a result of this, Mr. Hackett found himself between them. His head reached to the armpits. Their hands met above the hunch, on the backboard. They drooped with tenderness towards him.

You remember Grehan? said Mr. Hackett.

The poisoner, said the gentleman.

The solicitor, said Mr. Hackett.

I knew him slightly, said the gentleman. Six years, was it not.

Seven, said Mr. Hackett. Six are rarely given.

He deserved ten, in my opinion, said the gentleman.

Or twelve, said Mr. Hackett.

What did he do? said the lady.

Slightly overstepped his prerogatives, said the gentleman.

I received a letter from him this morning, said Mr. Hackett.

Oh, said the gentleman, I did not know they might communicate with the outer world.

He is a solicitor, said Mr. Hackett. He added, I am scarcely the outer world.

What rubbish, said the gentleman.

What nonsense, said the lady.

The letter contained an enclosure, said Mr. Hackett, of which, knowing your love of literature, I would favour you with the primeur, if it were not too dark to see.

The primeur, said the lady.

That is what I said, said Mr. Hackett.

I have a petrol-lighter, said the gentleman.

Mr. Hackett drew a paper from his pocket and the gentleman lit his petrol lighter.

Mr. Hackett read:

TO NELLY

To Nelly, said the lady.

To Nelly, said Mr. Hackett.

There was a silence.

Shall I continue? said Mr. Hackett.

My mother's name was Nelly, said the lady.

The name is not uncommon, said Mr. Hackett, even I have known several Nellys.

Read on, my dear fellow, said the gentleman.

Mr. Hackett read:

TO NELLY

To thee, sweet Nell, when shadows fall

Jug-jug! Jug-jug!

I here in thrall

My wanton thoughts do turn.

Walks she out yet with Byrne?

Moves Hyde his hand amid her skirts

As erst? I ask, and Echo answers: Certes.

Tis well! Tis well! Far, far be it

Pu-we! Pu-we!

From me, my tit,

Such innocent joys to chide.

Burn, burn with Byrne, from Hyde

Hide naught—hide naught save what

Is Greh'n's. IT hide from Hyde, with Byrne burn not.

It! Peerless gage of maidenhood!
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!
Would that I could
Be certain in my mind
Upon discharge to find
Neath Cupid's flow'r, hey nonny O!
Diana's blushing bud in statu quo.

Then darkly kindle durst my soul
Tuwhit! Tuwhoo!
As on it stole
The murmur to become
Epithalamium,
And Hymen o'er my senses shed
The dewy forejoys of the marriage-bed.

Enough—

Ample, said the lady.

A woman in a shawl passed before them. Her belly could dimly be seen, sticking out, like a balloon.

I was never like that, my dear, said the lady, was I?

Not to my knowledge, my love, said the gentleman.

You remember the night that Larry was born, said the lady.

I do, said the gentleman.

How old is Larry now? said Mr. Hackett.

How old is Larry, my dear? said the gentleman.

How old is Larry, said the lady. Larry will be forty years old next March, D.V.

That is the kind of thing Dee always vees, said Mr. Hackett.

I wouldn't go as far as that, said the gentleman.

Would you care to hear, Mr. Hackett, said the lady, about the night that Larry was born?

Oh do tell him, my dear, said the gentleman.

Well, said the lady, that morning at breakfast Goff turns to me and he says Tetty, he says, Tetty, my pet, I should very much like to invite Thompson, Cream and Colquhoun to help us eat the duck, if I felt sure you felt up to it. Why, my dear, says I, I never felt fitter in my life. Those were my words, were they not?

I believe they were, said Goff.

Well, said Tetty, when Thompson comes into the dining-room, followed by Cream and Berry (Coulquhoun I remember had a previous engagement), I was already seated at the table. There was nothing strange in that, seeing I was the only lady present. You did not find that strange, did you, my love?

Certainly not, said Goff, most natural.

The first mouthful of duck had barely passed my lips, said Tetty, when Larry

leaped in my wom.

Your what? said Mr. Hackett.

My wom, said Tetty.

You know, said Goff, her woom.

How embarrassing for you, said Mr. Hackett.

I continued to eat, drink and make light conversation, said Tetty, and Larry t
leap, like a salmon.

What an experience for you, said Mr. Hackett.

There were moments, I assure you, when I thought he would tumble out on th
floor, at my feet.

Merciful heavens, you felt him slipping, said Mr. Hackett.

No trace of this dollar appeared on my face, said Tetty. Did it, my dear?

Not a trace, said Goff.

Nor did my sense of humour desert me. What rolypoly, said Mr. Berry,
remember, turning to me with a smile, what delicious rolypoly, it melts in th
mouth. Not only in the mouth, sir, I replied, without an instant's hesitation, no
only in the mouth, my dear sir. Not too osy with the sweet, I thought.

Not too what? said Mr. Hackett.

Osy, said Goff. You know, not too osy.

With the coffee and liquors, labour was in full swing, Mr. Hackett, I give you m
solemn word, under the groaning board.

Swing is the word, said Goff.

You knew she was pregnant, said Mr. Hackett.

Why er, said Goff, you see er, I er, we er—

Tetty's hand fell heartily on Mr. Hackett's thigh.

He thought I was coy, she cried. Hahahaha. Haha. Ha.

Haha, said Mr. Hackett.

I was greatly worried I admit, said Goff.

Finally they retired, did you not? said Tetty.

We did indeed, said Goff, we retired to the billiard-room, for a game of slosh.

I went up those stairs, Mr. Hackett, said Tetty, on my hands and knees, wringin
the carpetrods as though they were made of raffia.

You were in such anguish, said Mr. Hackett.

Three minutes later I was a mother.

Unassisted, said Goff.

I did everything with my own hands, said Tetty, everything.

She severed the cord with her teeth, said Goff, not having a scissors to he
hand. What do you think of that?

I would have snapped it across my knee, if necessary, said Tetty.

That is a thing I often wondered, said Mr. Hackett, what it feels like to have th
string cut.

For the mother or the child? said Goff.

For the mother, said Mr. Hackett. I was not found under a cabbage, I believe.

For the mother, said Tetty, the feeling is one of relief, of great relief, as when
the guests depart. All my subsequent strings were severed by Professor Coope

but the feeling was always the same, one of riddance.

~~Then you dressed and came downstairs, said Mr. Hackett, leading the infant by~~
the hand.

We heard the cries, said Goff.

Judge of their surprise, said Tetty.

Cream's potting had been extraordinary, extraordinary, I remember, said Goff.
never saw anything like it. We were watching breathless, as he set himself for
long thin jenny, with the black of all balls.

What temerity, said Mr. Hackett.

A quite impossible stroke, in my opinion, said Goff. He drew back his queue to
strike, when the wail was heard. He permitted himself an expression that I shall
not repeat.

Poor little Larry, said Tetty, as though it were his fault.

Tell me no more, said Mr. Hackett, it is useless.

These northwestern skies are really extraordinary, said Goff, are they not.

So voluptuous, said Tetty. You think it is all over and then pop! up they flare
with augmented radiance.

Yes, said Mr. Hackett, there are protuberances and protuberances.

Poor Mr. Hackett, said Tetty, poor dear Mr. Hackett.

Yes, said Mr. Hackett.

Nothing to the Glencullen Hacketts, I suppose, said Tetty.

It was there I fell off the ladder, said Mr. Hackett.

What age were you then? said Tetty.

One, said Mr. Hackett.

And where was your dear mother? said Tetty.

She was out somewhere, said Mr. Hackett.

And your papa? said Tetty.

Papa was out breaking stones on Prince William's Seat, said Mr. Hackett.

You were all alone, said Tetty.

There was the goat, I am told, said Mr. Hackett.

He turned away from the ladder fallen in the dark yard and his gaze moved
down over the fields and the low tottering walls, across the stream and up the
further slope to the bluff already in shadow, and the summer sky. He slipped
down with the little sunlit fields, he toiled up with the foothills to the dark bluff
and he heard the distant clink of the hammers.

She left you all alone in the yard, said Tetty, with the goat.

It was a beautiful summer's day, said Mr. Hackett.

And what possessed her to slip off like that? said Goff.

I never asked her, said Mr. Hackett. The pub, or the chapel, or both.

Poor woman, God forgive her, said Tetty.

Faith I wouldn't put it past him, said Mr. Hackett.

Night is now falling fast, said Goff, soon it will be quite dark.

Then we shall all go home, said Mr. Hackett.

On the far side of the street, opposite to where they sat, a tram stopped.
remained stationary for some little time, and they heard the voice of the

conductor, raised in anger. Then it moved on, disclosing, on the pavement motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it. Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr. Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord. Goff rose, without a word, and rapidly crossed the street. Tetty and Mr. Hackett could see his eager gestures, for his coat was light in colour, and hear his voice, raised in remonstrance. But Watt moved no more, as far as they could see, than if he had been of stone, and if he spoke he spoke so low that they did not hear him.

Mr. Hackett did not know when he had been more intrigued, nay, he did not know when he had been so intrigued. He did not know either what it was that so intrigued him. What is it that so intrigues me, he said, whom even the extraordinary, even the supernatural, intrigue so seldom, and so little. Here there is nothing in the least unusual, that I can see, and yet I burn with curiosity, and with wonder. The sensation is not disagreeable, I must say, and yet I do not think I could bear it for more than twenty minutes, or half an hour.

The lady also was an interested spectator.

Goff rejoined them, very cross. I recognized him at once, he said. He made use of reference to Watt, of an expression that we shall not record.

For the past seven years, he said, he owes me five shillings, that is to say, six and ninepence.

He does not move, said Tetty.

He refuses to pay, said Mr. Hackett.

He does not refuse to pay, said Goff. He offers me four shillings and fourpence. It is all the money he has in the world.

Then he would owe you only two and threepence, said Mr. Hackett.

I cannot leave him without a penny in his pocket, said Goff.

Why not? said Mr. Hackett.

He is setting out on a journey, said Goff. If I accepted his offer he would be obliged to turn back.

That might be the best thing for him, said Mr. Hackett. Perhaps some day, when we are all dead, looking back he will say, If only Mr. Nesbit had accepted—

Nixon, my name is, said Goff. Nixon.

If only Mr. Nixon had accepted my four and fourpence that night, and I had turned back, instead of going on.

All lies, I suppose, in any case, said Mrs. Nixon.

No no, said Mr. Nixon, he is a most truthful man, really incapable, I believe, of telling an untruth.

You might at least have accepted a shilling, said Mr. Hackett, or one and six.

There he is now, on the bridge, said Mrs. Nixon.

He stood with his back towards them, from the waist up faintly outlined against the last wisps of day.

You haven't told us his name, said Mr. Hackett.

Watt, said Mr. Nixon.

I never heard you mention him, said Mrs. Nixon.

Strange, said Mr. Nixon.

Known him long? said Mr. Hackett.

I cannot really say I know him, said Mr. Nixon.

Like a sewer-pipe, said Mrs. Nixon. Where are his arms?

Since when can't you really say you know him? said Mr. Hackett.

My dear fellow, said Mr. Nixon, why this sudden interest?

Do not answer if you prefer not to, said Mr. Hackett.

It is difficult to answer, said Mr. Nixon. I seem to have known him all my life, but there must have been a period when I did not.

How is that, said Mr. Hackett.

He is considerably younger than I, said Mr. Nixon.

And you never mention him, said Mr. Hackett.

Why, said Mr. Nixon, I may very well have mentioned him, there is really no reason why I should not. It is true—. He paused. He does not invite mention, he said, there are people like that.

Not like me, said Mr. Hackett.

He is gone, said Mrs. Nixon.

Is that so, said Mr. Nixon. The curious thing is, my dear fellow, I tell you quite frankly, that when I see him, or think of him, I think of you, and that when I see you, or think of you, I think of him. I have no idea why this is so.

Well well, said Mr. Hackett.

He is on his way now to the station, said Mr. Nixon. Why I wonder did he get down here.

It is the end of the penny fare, said Mrs. Nixon.

That depends where he got on, said Mr. Nixon.

He can scarcely have got on at a point remoter than the terminus, said Mr. Hackett.

But does the penny fare end here, said Mr. Nixon, at a merely facultative stop? Surely it ends rather at the station.

I think you are right, said Mr. Hackett.

Then why did he get off here? said Mr. Nixon.

Perhaps he felt like a little fresh air, said Mr. Hackett, before being pent up in the train.

Weighed down as he is, said Mr. Nixon. Come come.

Perhaps he mistook the stop, said Mrs. Nixon.

But this is not a stop, said Mr. Nixon, in the ordinary sense of the word. Here the tram stops only by request. And since nobody else got off, and since nobody got on, the request must have come from Watt.

A silence followed these words. Then Mrs. Nixon said:

I do not follow you, Goff. Why should he not have requested the tram to stop, if he wished to do so?

There is no reason, my dear, said Mr. Nixon, no earthly reason, why he should not have requested the tram to stop, as he undoubtedly did. But the fact of his having requested the tram to stop proves that he did not mistake the stop, as you

suggest. For if he had mistaken the stop, and thought himself already at the railway station, he would not have requested the tram to stop. For the tram always stops at the station.

Perhaps he is off his head, said Mr. Hackett.

He is a little strange at times, said Mr. Nixon, but he is an experienced traveller.

Perhaps, said Mr. Hackett, finding that he had a little time on his hands, he decided to while it away through the sweet cool evening air, rather than in the nasty railway station.

But he will miss his train, said Mr. Nixon, he will miss the last train out, if he does not run.

Perhaps he wished to annoy the conductor, said Mrs. Nixon, or the driver.

But a milder, more inoffensive creature does not exist, said Mr. Nixon. He would literally turn the other cheek, I honestly believe, if he had the energy.

Perhaps, said Mr. Hackett, he suddenly made up his mind not to leave town after all. Between the terminus and here he had time to reconsider the matter. Then, having made up his mind that it is better after all not to leave town just now, he stops the tram and gets down, for it is useless to go on.

But he went on, said Mr. Nixon, he did not go back the way he came, but went on, towards the station.

Perhaps he is going home by a roundabout way, said Mrs. Nixon.

Where does he live? said Mr. Hackett.

He has no fixed address that I know of, said Mr. Nixon.

Then his going on towards the station proves nothing, said Mrs. Nixon. He may be fast asleep in Quin's hotel at the present moment.

With four and four in his pocket, said Mr. Hackett.

Or on a bench somewhere, said Mrs. Nixon. Or in the park. Or on the football field. Or on the cricket field. Or on the bowling green.

Or on the tennis courts, said Mr. Nixon.

I think not, said Mr. Hackett. He gets off the train, determined not to leave town after all. But a little further reflexion shows him the folly of such a course. That would explain his attitude after the tram had moved on, and left him.

The folly of what course? said Mr. Nixon.

Of turning back so soon, said Mr. Hackett, before he was well started on his way.

Did you see the accoutrement? said Mrs. Nixon. What had he on his head?

His hat, said Mr. Nixon.

The thought of leaving town was most painful to him, said Mr. Hackett, but the thought of not doing so no less so. So he sets off for the station, half hoping he may miss his train.

You may be right, said Mr. Nixon.

Too fearful to assume himself the onus of a decision, said Mr. Hackett, he referred it to the frigid machinery of a time-space relation.

Very ingenious, said Mr. Nixon.

And what do you suppose frightens him all of a sudden? said Mrs. Nixon.

It can hardly be the journey itself, said Mr. Hackett, since you tell me he is a

experienced traveller.

A silence followed these words.

Now that I have made that clear, said Mr. Hackett, you might describe your friend a little more fully.

I really know nothing, said Mr. Nixon.

But you must know something, said Mr. Hackett. One does not part with five shillings to a shadow. Nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means of existence, distinctive signs, you cannot be in ignorance of all this.

Utter ignorance, said Mr. Nixon.

He is not a native of the rocks, said Mr. Hackett.

I tell you nothing is known, cried Mr. Nixon. Nothing.

A silence followed these angry words, by Mr. Hackett resented, by Mr. Nixon repented.

He has a huge big red nose, said Mr. Nixon grudgingly.

Mr. Hackett pondered this.

You are not asleep, my dear, said Mr. Nixon.

I grow drowsy, said Mrs. Nixon.

Here is a man you seem to have known all your life, said Mr. Hackett, who owes you five shillings for the past seven years, and all you can tell me is that he has a huge big red nose and no fixed address. He paused. He added, And that he is an experienced traveller. He paused. He added, And that he is considerably younger than you, a common condition I must say. He paused. He added, And that he is truthful, gentle and sometimes a little strange. He glared up angrily at Mr. Nixon's face. But Mr. Nixon did not see this angry glare, for he was looking at something quite different.

I think it is time for us to be getting along, he said, is it not, my dear.

In an instant the last flowers will be engulfed, said Mrs. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon rose.

Here is a man you have known as long as you can remember, said Mr. Hackett to whom you lent five shillings seven years ago, whom you immediately recognized at a considerable distance, in the dark. You say you know nothing of his antecedents. I am obliged to believe you.

Nothing obliges you, said Mr. Nixon.

I choose to believe you, said Mr. Hackett. And that you are unable to tell what you do not know I am willing to believe also. It is a common failing.

Tetty, said Mr. Nixon.

But certain things you must know, said Mr. Hackett.

For example, said Mr. Nixon.

How you met him, said Mr. Hackett. In what circumstances he touched you. Where he is to be seen.

What does it matter who he is? said Mrs. Nixon. She rose.

Take my arm, my dear, said Mr. Nixon.

Or what he does, said Mrs. Nixon. Or how he lives. Or where he comes from. Or where he is going to. Or what he looks like. What can it possibly matter, to us?

I ask myself the same question, said Mr. Hackett.

How I met him, said Mr. Nixon. I really do not remember, any more than remember meeting my father.

Good God, said Mr. Hackett.

In what circumstances he touched me, said Mr. Nixon. I met him one day in the street. One of his feet was bare. I forget which. He drew me to one side and said he was in need of five shillings to buy himself a boot. I could not refuse him.

But one does not buy a boot, exclaimed Mr. Hackett.

Perhaps he knew where he could have it made to measure, said Mrs. Nixon.

I know nothing of that, said Mr. Nixon. As to where he is to be seen, he is to be seen in the streets, walking about. But one does not see him often.

He is a university man, of course, said Mrs. Nixon.

I should think it highly probable, said Mr. Nixon.

Mr. and Mrs. Nixon moved off, arm in arm. But they had not gone far when they returned. Mr. Nixon stooped and murmured in Mr. Hackett's ear, Mr. Nixon who did not like the sun to go down on the least hint of an estrangement.

Drink, said Mr. Hackett.

Oh my goodness no, said Mr. Nixon, he drinks nothing but milk.

Milk, exclaimed Mr. Hackett.

Even water he will not touch, said Mr. Nixon.

Well, said Mr. Hackett wearily, I am obliged to you, I suppose.

Mr. and Mrs. Nixon moved off, arm in arm. But they had not gone far when they heard a cry. They stopped, and listened. It was Mr. Hackett, crying, in the night. Pleased to have met you, Mrs. Nisbet. Mrs. Nixon, tightening her hold on Mr. Nixon's arm, cried back, The pleasure is mine, Mr. Hackett.

What? cried Mr. Hackett.

She says the pleasure is hers, cried Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Hackett resumed his holds on the armrests. Pulling himself forward, and letting himself fall back, several times in rapid succession, he scratched the creases of his hunch against the backboard. He looked towards the horizon that he had come out to see, of which he had seen so little. Now it was quite dark. Yes, now the western sky was as the eastern, which was as the southern, which was as the northern.

Watt bumped into a porter wheeling a milkcan. Watt fell and his hat and bag were scattered. The porter did not fall, but he let go his can, which fell back with a thump on its tilted rim, rocked rattling on its base and finally came to a stand. That was a happy chance, for had it fallen on its side, full as it perhaps was of milk, the porter who knows the milk might have run out, all over the platform, and even on the rails, beneath the train, and been lost.

Watt picked himself up, little the worse for his fall, as usual.

The devil raise a hump on you, said the porter.

He was a handsome if dirty fellow. It is so difficult for railway porters to keep their sweaters sweet and clean, with the work they have to do.

Can't you look where you're going? he said.

Watt did not cry out on this extravagant suggestion, let fall, it is only fair to say in the heat of anger. He stooped to pick up his hat and bags, but straightened himself up without having done so. He did not feel at liberty to see to this matter until the porter had finished abusing him.

Mute on top of blind, said the porter.

Watt smiled and clasping his hands raised them to his breastbone and held them there.

Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done. And it was true that Watt's smile, when he smiled, resembled more a smile than a sneer, for example, or a yawn. But there was something wanting to Watt's smile, some little thing was lacking, and people who saw it for the first time, and most people who saw it saw it for the first time, were sometimes in doubt as to what expression exactly was intended. To many it seemed a simple sucking of the teeth.

Watt used this smile sparingly.

Its effect on the porter was to suggest to him words infinitely more disobligating than any he had already employed. But they were never spoken, by him, to Watt. For suddenly the porter seized his can and wheeled it rapidly away. The stationmaster, a Mr. Lowry, was approaching.

This incident was of too common a kind to excite any great interest among those present. But there were connoisseurs on whom the exceptional quality of Watt was not lost, of his entry, his fall, his rise and subsequent attitudes. These were content.

Among these was the newsagent. He had seen all from his warm nest of books and periodicals. But now that the best was past he came out on the platform, with the intention of closing his stall, for the night. He therefore lowered and locked the corrugated apron. He seemed a man of more than usual acerbity, and to suffer from unremitting mental, moral and perhaps even physical pain. One noticed his cap, perhaps because of the snowwhite forehead and damp black curls of hair on which it sat. The eye came always in the end to the scowling mouth and from there on up to the rest. His moustache, handsome in itself, was for obscure reasons unimportant. But one thought of him as the man who, among other things, never left off his cap, a plain blue cloth cap, with a peak and knob. For he never left off his bicycle-clips either. These were of a kind that caused his trouser-ends to stick out wide, on either side. He was short and limped dreadfully. When he got started he moved rapidly, in a series of aborted genuflexions.

He picked up Watt's hat and brought it to him, saying, Your hat, sir, I think.

Watt looked at the hat. Was it possible that this was his hat?

He put it on his head.

Now at the end of the platform the newsagent came out of a door, wheeling his bicycle. He would carry it down the winding stone stairs and then ride home. There he would play a game of chess, between masters, out of Mr. Staunton's handbook. The next morning he would carry his bicycle up the stairs again. It was heavy, being a very good bicycle. It would have been simpler to leave it below, but he preferred to have it near him. This man's name was Evans.

Watt picked up his bags and got into the train. He did not choose

compartment. It happened to be empty.

On the platform the porter continued to wheel cans, up and down. At one end of the platform there was one group of cans, and at the other end there was another. The porter chose with care a can in one group and wheeled it to the other. Then he chose with care a can in the other and wheeled it to the one. He was sorting the cans, said Watt. Or perhaps it is a punishment for disobedience, or some neglect of duty.

Watt sat with his back to the engine, which now, having got up steam, drew the long line of carriages out of the station. Already Watt preferred to have his back to his destination.

But he had not gone far when, conscious of eyes upon him, he looked up and saw a large gentleman sitting in the corner diagonally opposed to his. The gentleman's feet rested on the wooden seat before him, and his hands were in the pockets of his coat. The compartment then was not so empty as Watt had at first supposed.

My name is Spiro, said the gentleman.

Here then was a sensible man at last. He began with the essential and then working on, would deal with the less important matters, one after the other, in an orderly way.

Watt smiled.

No offence meant, said Mr. Spiro.

Watt's smile was further peculiar in this, that it seldom came singly, but was followed after a short time by another, less pronounced it is true. In this it resembled the fart. And it even sometimes happened that a third, very weak and fleeting, was found necessary, before the face could be at rest again. But this was rare. And it will be a long time now before Watt smiles again, unless something very unexpected turns up, to upset him.

My friends call me Dum, said Mr. Spiro, I am so bright and cheerful. D-U-M. Anagram of mud.

Mr. Spiro had been drinking, but not more than was good for him.

I edit Crux, said Mr. Spiro, the popular catholic monthly. We do not pay our contributors, but they benefit in other ways. Our advertisements are extraordinary. We keep our tinsure above water. Our prize competitions are very nice. Times are hard, water in every wine. Of a devout twist, they do more good than harm. For example: Rearrange the fifteen letters of the Holy Family to form a question and answer. Winning entry: Has J. Jurms a po? Yes. Or: What do you know of the adjuration, excommunication, malediction and fulminating anathematisation of the eels of Como, the hurebers of Beaune, the rats of Lyon, the slugs of Mâcon, the worms of Como, the leeches of Lausanne and the caterpillars of Valence?

Now the fields flew by, the hedges and the ditches, ghastly in the train's light, appeared to do so, for in reality it was the train that moved, across a land for ever still.

Though we know what we know, said Mr. Spiro, we are not partisan. I personally am a neo-John-Thomist, I make no bones about that. But I do not allow

it to stand in the way of my promiscuities. Podex non destra sed sinistra—what a pettiness. Our columns are open to suckers of every persuasion and freethinker figure in our roll of honour. My own contribution to the supplementary redemption, *A Spiritual Syringe for the Costive in Devotion*, is so elastic, and unrigid, that a Presbyterian could profit by it, without discomfort. But why do you trouble you with this, you, a perfect stranger. It is because tonight I must speak to a fellow wanderer. Where do you get down, sir?

Watt named the place.

I beg your pardon? said Mr. Spiro.

Watt named the place again.

Then there is not a moment to lose, said Mr. Spiro.

He drew a paper from his pocket and read:

Lourdes
Basses-Pyrénées
France

Sir

A rat, or other small animal, eats of a consecrated wafer.

1. Does he ingest the Real Body, or does he not?
2. If he does not, what has become of it?
3. If he does, what is to be done with him?

Yours faithfully

Martin Ignatius MacKenzie

(Author of *The Chartered Accountant's Saturday Night*)

Mr. Spiro now replied to these questions, that is to say he replied to question one and he replied to question three. He did so at length, quoting from Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Sanchez, Suarez, Henno, Soto, Diana, Concina and Dens, for he was a man of leisure. But Watt heard nothing of this, because of other voices, singing, crying, stating, murmuring, things unintelligible, in his ear. With these, if he was not familiar, he was not unfamiliar either. So he was not alarmed, unduly. Now these voices, sometimes they sang only, and sometimes they cried only, and sometimes they stated only, and sometimes they murmured only, and sometimes they sang and cried, and sometimes they sang and stated, and sometimes they sang and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated, and sometimes they cried and murmured, and sometimes they stated and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated, and sometimes they sang and cried and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated and murmured, all together, at the same time, as now, to mention only these four kinds of voices, for there were others. And sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now.

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