

LITERARY PAGE

Come Back a Better Woman

By MARY LOUISE VINCENT

JIM took me down to the Diamond Seven the night of the Hallman reception. He had never wanted me to go and I'd never pushed him very hard in the matter, although being young and quite in love made me jealous of anything that was part of his life before I'd known him. I wasn't even able to justify in my own mind why I thought that going to such places as the Diamond Seven could now make me as important in his past as I hoped to be in his future.

But tonight he gave in. I guess the reception must have kind of gotten us both. We'd been to lots of them—Jim covering them for the Daily and me going just to be with him and justifying my presence by picking up a few notes for the society section on the side. But this was worse than usual. Lloyd Hallman supposedly gave the affair so that the social set could meet and honor Madam Ronorat, the Opera Guild's new soprano, but everyone knew that it was the formal forcing of Regina Hallman down society's reluctant throats. Hallman had waited patiently, paying the penalty for having married beneath him, laying his plans for a long time. He knew that on Wall Street positions can change and often do. Society would come tonight, or at least as much of it as respected L. Hallman's wishes, and apparently the very small number that had declined his invitation weren't detracting from his pleasure, for Mr. Hallman could scarcely fail to show an unpleasant smile of triumph at such tribute as was being paid to him. You didn't notice Mrs. Hallman much, but you knew that there were few men like Lloyd Hallman who were so hard clear through that contact with them left bruises and their grasp crushed. People like that can make even seasoned reporters such as Jim long for a stiff drink, so after he'd gotten what he needed for his write-up we set out for the Diamond Seven.

* * *

IN the smoky light of the basement room it was hard to tell from where we sat just who leaned over the bar, and when one figure broke away he was almost unrecognizable until he had carefully made his way with that light-footed, off-center equilibrium of drunkenness, almost to our table. "It's Joe Larrow," Jim just had time to whisper before the man reached us and clung to a chair questioningly. Jim's "Do you want to sit down, Joe?" reassured him and he settled himself with some difficulty to the empty chair.

"Don't see you much any more,

Jim," Joe reproached. "You used to be here almost every night with me before you got to be somebody on the newspapers."

"And it would still be hard to beat the old cub days," Jim answered with a reminiscent laugh.

"My, it's a lovely night," Joe murmured thickly, complacently, satisfied that Jim hadn't really changed. "And you're a lovely fellow, Jim. And your friend's lovely, too. It's a night like those we had four years ago. Did I tell you about those nights, Jim?"

"Yeah, you told me, Joe," Jim answered in a tone so strange that I turned to look at him.

"Yeah, I told you," Joe assented sadly, then looked at me. "She was here four years ago on nights like these, and she'll come here again. That's why I come, Miss. I come every night. You ask Jim. Don't I come every night, Jim?" He hurried on. "She wasn't a beautiful woman, Miss. I never expected to get a beautiful woman but she wasn't beautiful. Only tall and quiet with eyes that spoke to me. I guess that's the kind of way we did most of our talking, she and I. Kind of from soul to soul, Miss, because she wasn't a beautiful woman and couldn't talk light and brittle like they do."

"Who was she, Joe?" I asked gently.

"Janie was her name. It kind of describes her, too. She didn't want much, only to have people like her, and to please me, I guess. She wasn't much of a fighter. Lots of times I'd never know I'd hurt her until I'd look down at her eyes. But that's the kind that every man wants, I guess, someone he can protect. But she'll come back, women like that don't change."

"You met her here, then?"

"She didn't have anything when she came in that first night, but even after she got a job in some kind of an office she still would come back every night. I work for the railroad and we had a line to put in out of Chicago. It would take three months and I told her I'd come

back fit for her at the end of that time. I said that because we always get some kind of a little bonus when a job's finished. She said she'd make a better woman of herself while I was gone too, and we both kind of understood that we'd get married when I came home."

Jim got unsteadily to his feet and started for the door. He turned back once to remark, "I guess if she's been making a better woman of herself for these four years, she'll be pretty good when I finally get her." His laugh rose from a whiskey-raw throat and I smiled in my throat. But seeing Jim's face suddenly quelled that rush of release within me for it was strangely drawn.

"You met her then?" I asked. He nodded.

"Doesn't anyone know where she is?" I demanded impatiently.

"We've all known," Jim answered. He stood up, shouldered heavily into his overcoat and picked up the reception notes from the table.

I grew angry at his complacency and almost shouted at him, "But what could you tell him that would be worse than this blind waiting and hoping that he's going through?" Then seeing Jim crush what he had written on the reception between his strong hands the words froze in my throat, and I remembered Regina Hallman who stood by her husband and greeted the best people of the city with brittle conversation and empty eyes.

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More than 100 faculty members and administrative officers have resigned their positions at Princeton university to enter war service.

An unprecedented number of undergraduates at Wellesley college are engaged this year in volunteer social service.

Midnight Return

My footsteps measure the silent streets,
Sweep echoes across the empty skies
I am a man of frightened eyes,
Flutter of moth wings under my heart.

A church full of swallows singing asleep,
Trees like pagodas under the lamps,
And under these trees and over those lamps
The web of yesterday's echoes hangs.

Sharp in my eardrum there steal thy tinkle
Of pianos arpegguing up the street.
Only a little soul, swept with defeat
Afraid of the dark and hurrying home.

Peggy Overland

Shadows

All across the campus when the purple shadows lie
Beneath the sable fir trees and along the fading sky
There is mystery and beauty in the slow advancing night,
The buildings black as ebony and starred with jewels of light.
There's a heavy scent of lilacs in the softly sleeping air,
And there's nothing left that's ugly and there's nothing left that's bare

While one by one the lights blink out, the shadows closer creep,
And night comes out of hiding as the people go to sleep.

By Betsy Wootton

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