

CHAPTER V

.....They had the likeness of man. And every one had Four Faces, and every one of them had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the glitter of burnished copper.....

How salacious was the Dreen show at Damon Hall?

There was a challenge in it to George from every angle. There was Solomon Dreen himself, a man of many facets, shades of outlook and attitudes. The challenge of his identity. And Foster Forrest Sr., the vortex in this whirlpool of emotions. His grandson Foster, who is his friend. And Cynthia, who is Foster's friend.

Is Cynthia important to him? Would she be critical of him if his report is adverse to Foster's grandfather?

The show that Mr. Dreen put on did not adhere to any particular form of entertainment. There were skits, one-act plays, a bit of vaudeville, and singing and dancing. The performances lacked the glitter of Keith's, two blocks away, and were as bare as the boards on the stage; yet, it seemed to George, they had more human quality and appeal in them in spite of it. Or maybe because of it. It all appeared as a preparation for something greater, as if Mr. Dreen were experimenting. But when George broached the question, no more than a broad smile would break on Solomon's face, a twinkle would come to his eyes, but no other response than a meaningful silence.

Maybe Solomon didn't know the answer. Maybe to him it was a way of living, a way he loved. To depend and be depended on. To watch the smiles on the faces of the three girls at the morning rehearsals, at the appreciative and respectful look in his direction from his lone male actor.

It was an intimate little group, a cheerful area in the dark facade of his lonely life. It remained so after Lena had come to him. Life was wonderful with Lena, but it needed a setting in the outer world - outside the world he and Lena lived in - to make it true, to make it full.

George's mind went back to the nostalgic days of his early youth when the magic influence of Keith theatre had been upon him. The gilded touch of wealth and magnificence as compared to the bleakness of this poverty-stricken place! He remembered the long mirrored-tunnel, brilliantly lighted and delicately scented, that led from the street to the mouth of the of the great auditorium. The journey through that long passage was an experience in itself, part of the ritual of going to B. F. Keith's. As you entered you were cast into a different world, the world of dream and fantasy. A suitable and very soothing preparation, a heightening of anticipation of what was to follow.

The main theme might have been a disappointment after the excitement and thrill of the prelude, but there was enough illusion in it to overcome in great part the disillusionment. The enticing illusion of the silver-bell like voices of the young and glittering actresses, bedaubed and be-rouged angels of the stock-companies; and the equally fascinating silver-templed actors! They were the heroes in the shining armour of glamour, as with Herculean steps in their Roman boots they strode forward on the creaking softly creaking carpeted boards; and tripping along, the coy, cuddling, dainty female heroines- with their moistening eyes - on their brave arms.

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Four Faces.
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copper.....

But now, as he sees them again, they appear to him as fallen gods and goddesses in disrepute. Atrophies, ugly puppets, with clay bodies, and dead hands. Nothing deader than a dead hand. Fallen idols, with wall-plaster, and ceiling-calcimine exterior - a wash and sludge interior.

Voices whining and whinnying, and as presumptive as a skeleton grin; and the striding step but an empty boast of a propped up cadaver! The mincing steps of the old goddesses but the restless hovering of an old hen, with the travail and unfulfilled desire of ^{an} unlaidd egg within her. Theirs, the frustrated twitterings and mutterings of the hoarse caw of a ruffled crow.

Mr. Dreen's was an enterprising little troupe. A happy little group. The three females danced, and showed their fancy-panties, lace edged. The sole male entertainer, long and gangling, sang ditties, and threw about his legs with such musterings that the tightly wrapped trousers showed bagginess at the knees. The girls loved to dance and display their feminine charms, but in no sense was there any hint of lewdness. It was their very life, like the gentle breezes and soft rains of spring to the tender growing things. Never was there the slightest attempt at lurid display. Just prankish young girls at play, liking their act and their boss. They couldn't imagine themselves without their dancing, or without Mr. Dreen managing them and advising on the ways and manners of this strange world.

Mr. Harrington, the male member, had never failed to sing at the end of every performance that famous Lincoln ditty that ends with, "a government by the people, for the people and of the people shall not perish from the earth."

A dramatic finish it was, and had never failed to evoke a storm of applause. Harrington knew how to take advantage of the great epic of that era, and how best to pull at the heart strings of his audience. Surely, the great beacon of light which the Emancipator had kindled still shone brightly across the days and years of the half-century and more; and in the year of Nineteen Hundred and Eleven the echoes of the deeds of those elegiac and noble days and the sounds of the turbulent words of that heroic figure still rang provokingly in the ears of those who knew of the great saga. There was a great flourish as he reached those last words;

and a sudden pause, as if to gather an inward power. The voice would rise tremulously at first; the legs bowing outward and forward, the chest thrust out. Then it would come with all the explosive force of the compressed air in his lungs. The word "perish" would be drawn out so long it seemed it would never perish, or only with the collapse of his lungs. The people took to their eyes from the lustre in the singer's eyes, and the drops of tears that welled up from within; for they were dramatically moved. And they were abashed, and fluttered those white things in front of their faces, at the same time dabbing an eye and blowing softly in their noses in the stealth of semi-darkness, and in the dream of that other epoch of another world. And they were happy in the coziness of their wet eyes and in the dreaminess that was the other world.

CHAPTER VI

Kinships

There is a kinship between George and Solomon which lies in the past, which is fate. Fate that caused George's father to be a witness to the tragic death of Solomon's mother. Solomon wants to forget the past and live in the future. But Fate is not finite, it has no future and no past, no beginning and no end. The earth and man on the earth came after millions of years, and it'll be more untold millions before Man has changed his earthly form - in earthly death! It is the before-life, the after-life - the soul - which is Eternity. Fate! There are moments in our conscious existence which are purely of the physical world, and are finite; but even these ^{brief} moments add up to infinity. A house, a cat, a dog, are in themselves finite possessions, but taken in the aggregate they are infinite: from the smallest unit of existence - offshoot of the atom; to the biggest - the star!