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- 10-9/82
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AFTERMATH

by

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The leaden skies writhed and twisted in the agonies of trying to rid themselves of their heavy burden of snow. Finally, with a tremendous announcing blast of the cold wind which made everyone snuggle further down in their coats, a few flakes, and in a few seconds, a few more began to fall. The streets were cold, and the snow didn't melt as it sometimes does in a big city, and soon the sidewalks, parked cars, and scurrying pedestrians were covered with a thin layer of the white stuff. In the street, thousands of snaky black paths were being traced out as the hurrying, honking, murmuring, thundering cars sped up and down.

There was a comfortable feeling in the air, one that was hard to decipher, but as he walked along, he wondered about it. It wasn't the first time he had felt like this during a winter's storm. Breathing deeply, and

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then exhaling with a mighty sighing sound as though trying to rid himself of many unpleasant thoughts, he turned his face upwards, squinting his eyes against the thousands of powdery, cold flakes ~~that tried to squeeze under~~ his coat collar.

The sounds of the city made him feel at home. In the distance, above the moan of the wind, the occasional screeching of car brakes as the tires skidded and found a clear expanse of street to cling to and the clang of changing traffic signals, he could hear the thunder of the elevated trains as they raced, stopped and then raced on again. He could see the crowds at each station as they waited for the train doors to open, the people inside pushing to get out, the people outside just as eager to get in. The low hum of voices, the sharp cold sting of the wind and the snow when first stepping into the air, the pleasant feeling of warmth when first stepping in the car, the murmured excuse me's, the occasional curses, the operator stepping in from his position between the cars to announce each coming station - North Station, Scolley Square, Park St. Terminal, Harvard Square - students with their books giving every good-looking girl they see that a knowing look that reeks of first-hand knowledge of Kinsey and biology, the workmen in their faded worn clothes each carrying a black lunch pail under his arm and trying to get a look at the sports page or the racing sheet - they all put dollar bets on the horses with the bookie who came around to the plant once a week -, the housewives trying to get home after a day's walk through the city streets trying to find a bargain, anything for a bargain - would you like to buy this miss'es dress, madame, on special today and we don't know when we'll be able to offer anything like it again - , so she buys it because it is a bargain, dollar day at White's, Jordan's, Filene's basement, the thousands of talking, looking, singing in a low voice, whistling tunelessly, reading, waiting, thinking people, the masses of humanity on the move, constantly waiting for something to happen, thinking the life

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they lead is drab, each looking at the other and thinking that there is someone who probably leads an interesting life, this subway train rattles and slams down into the depths of the earth, but another will soon follow.

On the corner, the ringing of a bell, the flash of a red suit, a white beard turned whiter from the flakes of snow, a great steel pot swinging from a tripod, and the top covered with a wire mesh. Santa looked jovial and happy, as he swung his wild clarion noise out into the other myriad noises of the city where it was absorbed and lost somewhere in the upper atmospheres where all noises collect and record themselves on the air. Good old Santa, he thought, with his big fat belly and his red nose and his shining face. A symbol of a thousand things, 'Twas the night before Christmas, and the children were never able to get to sleep, hanging around the tree downstairs until the last moment, hoping that Mom and Dad wouldn't notice that it was way past your bed time, but then one of your brothers or sisters would say something that would make you laugh too loudly, and Mom would look up and ask why you hadn't gone to bed hours ago, and what did you think Santa would leave for naughty little children who stayed up past bed time. And all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse, but it was hard to get to sleep and you kept waiting for Santa's reindeer to gallop over the roof, Mama in her kerchief and I in my cap had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap, but finally, morning came and you had been sleeping, downstairs you run only to find that your younger brother had beat you down and was already opening his presents, the dull glow of the Christmas tree lights in the dim morning light, the happy tired look on Mom and Dad's faces as they watched, the little screams of astonishment and pleasure as brightly colored paper gets thrown everywhere, and then Dave had to go out to deliver his newspapers and he asks you to go, and you do but it was so cold that you both had to come back, when up on the roof there arose such a clatter, that we sprang from our beds to

keep things straight unless you have a definite reason to shift them

see what was the matter.

He stopped at an intersection, a red light, and a crowd of shoppers and walkers and listeners and talkers gathered waiting for the clang that announced the change to walking for pedestrains , did you hear what happened when the boss walked in and found us all, God, Mart, what can I get for Tom, I just know he's going to get me something, a tie, I'll get him a tie, and then he told me that if I didn't like what he said, I could go to, clang, and the crowd heistated for a mánute , and then swirled away through the snow, still talking, or listening, or thinking, and he was swirled away with them.

Oh come let us adore him, oh come let us adore him, oh come let us adore him, Christ the Lord, a loudspeaker blasted out carols into the milling thousands of ears, some of which heard and some of which didn't, in a manger, without ~~any~~ heat or morderen conveinances, or even ~~any~~ decent clothes to keep him warm, the savior of the world, the man who said again what millions had been waiting to hear, who re-echoed thoughts that had been thought centuries before him, Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the new born king, who would be sickened if he knew then what he was going to be responsible for, what crimes were going to be committed in his name and for him, whose only hope was that people could live with love in their hearts instead of hate and distrust, fat jolly priests in long black robes, who can interpret everything that anyone wants to know, who sit in the confessional and listen to the sins of their flock - the faithful confessing millions who say, bless me father for I have sinned in the name of the father the son and the holy ghost amen - come unto me ye sinners, ye defilers of the earth, and I shall see that you are made holy and pure once more, how many times can this be done, but they do it, and they are clensed once more and welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, from thence they shall come to judge the living and the dead, the sinners judge the sinners, the dead judge the living dead, and who comes out on the

top of the heap, Oh little town of Bethlehem, the town which is the living mother of all towns, had every town's sins, had its big men and its little men, had its bad sinners and its good sinners, Venite Adoremus, Christ the Lord, will save us all from the fear of sins, who would hate the wars that have wracked the earth time and time again, his glorious death on the cross, it is glorious to die for your fellow man, they said, and so thousands of young men marched off to war, to die for their fellow man, to die for the butcher the baker and the candlestick maker, the wall street man, the insurance broker, the munitions maker, oh glorious is death for your fellow man, ~~There~~ There can be no death as full of rich virtue as that suffered on the field of battle to protect your country, your family, and your God, for all of these are on your side and will see that ultimate victory is won for us! Away in a manger no crib for his bed, the little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.

The snow fell harder, the wind blew stronger, and the Old North Church burying grounds were to his right. Across the street, the stores were lit ^{shone} up early. The blue and yellow and red and green lights ^{shone} hazily through the driven curtains of snow, and here were buried many of the patriots of the first ^{Revolution}. There were thousands of the small white crosses, spreading as far as the eye could see, each cross directly before, behind, and beside another, each with its nervously fluttering red white and blue falg fluttering before it. No mistakes in the ^{laying out} of dead bodies for burial here. Each human has a place in life, a special niche which is prepared for him, and here are some of them. That these dead shall not have died in vain, here they are laid out, geometrically perfect, officers to the front as in life, but what happens in the Valhalla, or the Blighty, or the happy hunting grounds, or to wait to come back to life in another form, is anyone in front there, or are they all in the same hole, the snow can't cover things up here. "No man is wise enough, no nation is important enough, ~~no human interest pre~~

no human interest precious enough, to justify the wholesale destruction and murder which constitutes war." In the center stands a tall pole, with old glory waving from its top so that each dead man can see it equally as well, the symbol of why he died, and at midnight, the thousands of murmuring restless souls come back to life and walk around the grounds looking, wondering, saying much that none can hear, and thinking, and listening, and all sitting at the right hand of God from whence they shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The door of the restaurant closed heavily behind him as he entered, and it took his eyes a few seconds to become accustomed to the glare of the lights, and for just a moment, pairs of eyes lifted from their plates of food, their newspapers, their thoughts of what each was going to do tonight or had done last night, and looked to see who had come in. The clink of knife and fork on each other, the occasional bell-like sound of a spoon as it dropped to the designed floor and the ^{culprit} dropper looked around for a moment to see if he could find another, and then leaned over and picked up the dropped spoon carefully wiping it off with his napkin and then dropping it back into the coffee cup, and stirred it while reading about the Berlin situation. Damned Reds, who wanted to conquer the world, who give arms and comfort to the rebels and bastards in Greece and China, and all they wanted to do was toist their police system off onto the rest of the world who didn't want it, but why the hell couldn't Chiang Kai-Shek get enough men to fight for him against their own countrymen, isn't it glorious to die for your country by killing your neighbors and committing all kinds of rape and slaughter, and seeing little kids so hungry that their stomachs are bloated a little, and they sit there looking at you with that vacant stare in their eyes as you eat your rations, and they would like to have some, but damn it all you barely have enough for yourself, but what the hell can you do, if you give it to one of them, soon there will be a whole

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circle of kids squatting around you, not noisy kids, but strangely quiet, who just look and you can't escape their eyes, the hungry eyes of children, small wasted bodies and old hopeless eyes, but you can't see them sitting there without doing something, what thehell would you feel like if this was happening to your kids, so you get up and distribute your rations as equally as you can, and they don't thank you with words, they just take the food and look at it and you with a strange look, and then they eat, not savagely as you would expect a hungry kid to do, but slowly, their jaws moving up and down, and their eyes still on you, dumb, mute eyes, and you suddenly feel terrifically old and cynical, and you curse whatever God there is above you or below you for allowing anything like this to happen, and the tears refuse to flow, even though you turn away from the silent, eating, looking, kids and go back to your room and throw yourself down on your bed and try to cry, try to bawl your eyes out, with a terrific sorrow for the stupidity of mankind, but the tears won't come so you finally get up and wash your face.

Coffee and a roll, and make the coffee black. The girl sitting on the stool next to you gives you a quick look, why does everyone think you've been drinking when you order black coffee, but she smiles a little, and you can see that she's pretty, so you smile back at her and wonder what thehell she is smiling at you for, and then you remember that it's almost Christmas and it is the custom to smile and be friendly with everyone for the few days before the celebration of the birth of the holy savior of mankind. Cold outside, isn't it? Yes, of course it is, what a hell of a way to start a conversation, but it is a lonely feeling at times to be in the hustling, bustling, disinterested-in-you city, particularly at this time of year. She smiles again, and you notice that she is even prettier than you thought, and has bedroom eyes, so you make a better attempt to talk to her. What do you do, and she is going to school at Radcliffe, good old Radcliffe, and the Harvard boys work for months trying to acquire that little affectation that

says to all the world, I am a ^Harvard man and a spawn of Lowell and Longfellow and Wolfe, and ^I have read more books than ~~you~~ and are undoubtedly much more intelligent, so it is only right and natural than in the due course of events, you should feel just a trifle inferior to me, oh, we don't talk about sex as such at Harvard, it is a biological experiance which should prove interesting to experiment with, but it is all rather boring in the long run, don'T you think, [?] so much trouble, and when it's all over, what do you have, oh hyman [?] oh hymanee why do you tantalize me, but she is still smiling and says that she is studying social welfare work.

Do you expect to go to work in the field, but of course not, an insurance company made a good offer as office manager, and after all, the lower classes, the rising lower classes, have so much more now than they ever have, and a degree is a degree. Marriage will probably follow anyhow, so what's the sense, [?] oh, ^I feel sorry for all those ~~poor~~, depressed people who have to live in those dirty slums, but why don't they get out and ~~do~~ something for themselves, instead of voting for Curley all the time, that crook Curley, why everyone knows that he cheats the state of all kinds of money and makes taxes so high for our families, the good ^Radcliffe families, and Harvard families, whose fathers register them at birth for the right clubs, who made the first move in the country to get rid of the undemocratic fraternity system, and so the clubs were founded, the great clubs, where most anyone can join, oh, of course, we can't take in just anyone, but how much money does his family have, and the tree, Bradford, the tree, what is it, of course it's perfectly ridiculous to think of taking anyone like him into the club. But why are you studying social work if you expect to work in an insurance office, don'T you realize that we all have a moral obligation to the world to do something for someone while we are here without thought of monetary recompense, and you apparently don't think that you have to abide by this, you certainly arn't a humanitarian, but what differahce does that

make when you're a Radcliffe girl. Don't get angry, I'm probably only kidding with you. How about a quick cocktail or two before you have to leave, oh you're staying in town all night, all right, let's do the town up good for a pre-Christmas celebration, what do I do, what difference does that make, you're a Radcliffe girl and I'm a man, and let's get out of here and try the Statler lounge, it has what you would probably refer to as a sexy atmosphere.

A heavy fur coat over round, soft shoulders, a fleeting hint of perfume, aphrodisia it smells like, and then the open door, the heavy freezing blast of the wind, the snow, and the noise of the city. Arm in arm, free hand holding hat, overcoat billowing out into the wind, head down, a quick look at each other once in a while, too cold to talk, and then the Statler looms up ahead of you, and the warm comfortable appearing lobby swallows you up, and you help her off with the heavy fur coat, and you catch that whif of perfume again, aphrodisia, she says, and smiles at you in a shy way which shrieks to high heaven that I'm a Radcliffe girl and I know that you think I'm shy, but I'm probably the biggest sex-pot you've ever met, and won't you be surprised, but ~~I~~ you won't be.

Downstairs, she leaning a little heavily on your arm, and you realizing that she must have had a couple drinks before she met you, but her eyes are clear, and give a hint of what she wants tonight. The cocktail lounge exudes a comfortable atmosphere of well-fed patrons, leather seats, perfumed women, and whiskey, bourbon of course, and brandy and wine. She just loves it here, it is so cosy, and it seems so good to get away from Radcliffe for a few days and just relax and act like a human being for a change, and didn't you think the Harvard-Yale game was a big upset. What game was that, oh, yes, small talk, it takes years to develop a capacity for small talk, it isn't fashionable to talk about anything that smacks the least little bit of book or knowledge of world affairs, because if you do you're a party

pooper, and what thehell do you worry about things like that for, haven't you ever read Omar Khayyam, or the prophet, drink, drink, man, lift the cup that clears today of past regrets and future fears, when love beckens to you follow him, though his ways are steep, and when his wings enfold you, yield to him, though the sward hidden among his pinions may wound you, come on, boy, relax and enjoy the party, make with the small talk.

And you drink slowly, for pleasure you say, and you look across the table at her, and soon you start thinking of other things you would like to do, slowly, for pleasure, and she returns your look with a twist of her head, and you can see she's laughing at you, so you make a quick laugh back at her and a few wise cracks which she doesn't expect, what was that about treating all the bitches like queens and all the queens like bitches and you'll keep them all happy. She laughs gayly and orders another drink, and then another and another, and you can see that she can hold her liquor and give no outward sign of the inner emotion she must be feeling. These are all the same, some get drunk fast, and others slow, but it's the same old circle, isn't there one woman in the world who doesn't think that it's Thrilling to go out and get picked up by a stranger and sleep with him, but I guess men are the same way though, and pretty soon, you move over beside her, and she moves up close to you, and rubs her silken knee against yours, and a warm soft shoulder leans against yours, and her eyes ^{are more} arn't as clear as they were, but she is still drinking, and it won't be long now before she asks you where you are staying, and you're going to have to lie and tell her that you just got in town a few hours ago, and you have intended to get a room right here at the Statler, and why don't you go up and get it, and you'll buy a bottle and drink it in the room where it will probably be ^{more} much comfortableer. And when you get there, she excuses herself for a moment and goes into the john and when she comes out you get a whif of that perfume again, and it makes you think of other things than opening the fifth, but you do anyway, because you know it is just a matter of time, and soon the drinks are mixed, and drunk, and you ^{forgot}

are in bed, and the lights are out, and just as you are ready, the store across the street starts playing carols on a loud speaker system, God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay, remember Christ the savior was born on Christmas day, better to cast your seed into the belly of a whore than to allow it ---

After a while, the carols stopped, and you stop, and she murmurs sleepily that she's hungry, and you see the silent, ~~staring~~ ^{staring} eyes once more, and her long soft warm body doesn't feel so satisfying as before, and you get up to go to the john, and when you come back, she has passed out in bed, and her eyes are closed, and she is breathing like a baby, away in a manger, no crib for his bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head, and her perfume catches in your throat a little, so you take a shower and feel a little better, and when you come out she is still sleeping, so you dress and leave a note for her saying that you have gone out for a bite to eat and will be back in a little while.

The snow is deep outside now, a regular New England blizzard you hear the cop on the corner say as you walk by, and the carols are blasting out stronger than ever again, except with the wind, the sound is twisted a little, and the huge Christmas tree on the Common glows through the thickly whitened air, and you can see a group of stocking-capped young boys standing around it singing, happy kids, with dancing, clear eyes, and you go over closer to hear what they are singing, and to listen, and to think.

Joy to the world, man comes into the world blind lives a life of blindness and then dies never having seen, The Lord has come, once in a great while a man is born who is permitted to see who has the privilege of having his eyes opened and because of this attempts to inform his unseeing fellows of what he has seen, let earth receive its king, but most of the blind are content in their darkness afraid to see lest what might be shown them might prove unpleasant, let every heart rejoice him good, and feeling thus secure in the

darkness of their lives will condemn the seeing man as a liar a distorter
of the truth and a dangerous member of the community, and heaven and nature
sing and heaven and nature sing and heaven and nature sing, and the seer
being rebuked refused and condemned on all sides acquires the disease of
cynicism, the disease which is the life and the death of the thinker.....

***** THE END *****