



DUST OF NEW YORK

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TO JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE



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DUST OF NEW YORK

THERESA THE VAMP

New York is an orchestra playing a symphony. If you hear the part of only one instrument—first violin or oboe, 'cello or French horn—it is incongruous. To understand the symphony you must hear all the instruments playing together, each its own part, to the invisible baton of that great conductor, Father Time.

But the symphony is heard only very rarely. Most of the time New York is tuning up. Each voice is practising its part of the score—the little solos for the violins to please the superficial sentimentalists, and the twenty bars for the horn to satisfy the martial spirit in men.

But don't, oh sightseers, don't think you know New York because you have sauntered through a few streets and eaten hot tamales in a Mexican restaurant, or burnt your tongue with goulash in some "celebrated Hungarian palace." Only to very few privileged ones is it given to hear the symphony—and they have to pay dearly for it. But it is worth the price.

They called her the Vampire, or Vamp for short. Her name was Theresa, and she was born somewhere on Hungarian soil in Tokai, where flows the dark blue water of the Tisza, not far from the Herpad Mountains on which grows the grape for the luxurious Tokai wine.

Now, when and why Theresa came to New York nobody knew. But all were glad she was here ... here, at a little table in a corner of the "Imperial" on Second Avenue. When one met a friend on the street and asked: "Anybody at the 'Imperial?'" and the answer was "Nobody there to-night," it simply meant that the Vamp was not there. The other two hundred or more guests did not count.

She spoke very little. She smoked all the time, and her fiery dark eyes hid behind the thin smoke curtain from her cigarette. Young men had no chance at her table. They seldom came near her at all. They were afraid of her. Only married men dared approach her, relying on their experience to extricate themselves when in danger.

And yet there was no danger! At some hour after midnight Theresa brushed the ashes off her waist from the "last" cigarette, arranged her hair a bit, and announced to the company "I am going."

It always was irrevocable. A newcomer was known by the fact that he offered to see her home. The habitués would then answer in chorus, "I can find my way alone," and laugh and tease the unfortunate who did not know that Theresa went home alone.

After Theresa's departure her friends would scatter to different tables and take up cudgels for this or that or the other, always with the conscience that on the street the question would be: "Anybody there?" and the answer would be the inevitable "Nobody there." So most of them would leave the place soon after Theresa—dispersing over the city, each to his home, bringing there the secret emptiness

that was in him.

"Ferenczy is here," a friend greeted me one day.

"Ferenczy who?" I asked.

"Ferenczy, the great painter, man!"

I did not know much about the great Hungarian artist, but my friend knew, and urged me to come and see him. I found him at the "Imperial."

Tall, thin, dark, passionate, the picture of the painter as portrayed in novels. He spoke about art like a true artist. Some of the ladies, usually placidly sipping their coffee, became very self-conscious as he declaimed a bit too loudly about beauty of line and harmony of color. Even the two fighting musical critics, old Newman and Dr. Feldys, forgot the nightly squabble over the merits of modern music, when Ferenczy talked.

In the midst of all appeared Theresa. She went straight to her table. From different sections of the café men rose, and after making their apologies to the other guests, walked up to where the Vamp was waiting for some one to help her take off her coat.

Ferenczy turned about to see who caused such a stir. A few minutes later he was sitting opposite her, the two oblivious of everybody else. He was her fellow countryman, was born at the foot of the same mountains, the Herpads.

And we were all surprised when she did not say "I can find my way alone," two hours after midnight, and allowed Ferenczy to see her home.

When Ferenczy entered the café the next evening there were two

different camps. One hated him because he took the Vamp home, and one admired him because he had succeeded where everybody else had failed.



When Ferenczy entered the café there were two different camps.

He went straight to Theresa's table, which was usually vacant until she came, and ordered something from the astonished waiter. They had not realized before how boisterous a mustache can be, and not one guest felt comfortable in his workaday garb facing the immaculately black and white Ferenczy.

The other guests broke precedent that evening and came to sit at the Vamp's table before she had arrived. Every time the door opened all the heads turned in its direction, still maintaining or arguing about something. And thus guests, perfect strangers, felt the weight of words hurled at them as from a cannon's mouth.

And the door was never still. The Imperial was the home of all the disappointed, disabused men of the East Side; men and women from the four corners of the earth. Former poets who studied dentistry to earn a living, and who are now completely swallowed up by their profession, came nightly, to hear themselves mock the former music composer who is now a physician, and over the ears in real estate transactions. This physician once gave to a patient a prescription as follows: "60 pounds of nails, fourteen window

panes, 3×4, 12 pounds of putty and 80 pounds of lime."

Former sculptors, former painters, former dancers, former men, former women, all gather in the café of the might-have-beens, and all invite every newcomer to witness in them his own doom. Some go to concerts to hear music which they might have composed, others read poetry which they might have written, criticise a play the thought of which had lingered in their own minds for years without coming to utterance. Disabused socialists now owning factories, and great, great chemists now clerking in some drug store of the vicinity, assemble there.

Theresa came that night. Ferenczy helped her with the coat, and lit her cigarette and ordered her coffee, and they talked earnestly in their mother tongue the rest of the evening. One by one the other guests left the table until the two were alone. It was after 2 A. M. when they left the place. They were almost the last guests. He saw her home.

The following evening Theresa's former friends discussed Ferenczy. His work, while having a certain charm which appealed to the uninitiated, was worthless as art, they decreed.

He never did anything worth while. He was just good enough for America; to make magazine covers. And Andrasky, the journalist, remembered that an art critic in the Budapest Hirlap called Ferenczy "Muncaczy's Monkey."

A few days later one of the Magyar papers had a derogatory article about Ferenczy, in which the "Budapester" critic was cited.

The painter himself was not seen at the Imperial for a few evenings, neither was Theresa. Scouts went out to find them. It was inconceivable that the Vamp should not be out every evening!

At the café they began to accuse one another with writing the article, which was anonymous. That vacant table near the wall stood like the altar of a deserted shrine.

One day Fuller, the musician, met Andrasky around Tenth Street, going in the opposite direction from the Imperial.

"Whereto, Andrasky?"

"Just for a walk."

And because he did not ask "Anybody there?" Fuller suspected that he knew. He followed the journalist at a distance and discovered them, the three of them, in a little Russian restaurant on Tenth Street.

In a week all the Imperial guests had gone over to the Tenth Street café. Neither service nor food was as good as in the old place, but they all professed to like the new one. They did not know whether it was because of Ferenczy or because of Theresa. She paid no attention at all to them.

In the following few months some of the might-have-beens tried to resurrect themselves. One of the former poets wrote a long poem. Another had a play accepted. The composer tried his fingers again on the keyboard.

The tables at the Imperial were vacant. The waiters were asleep on

their feet. It lasted throughout the winter. In the spring the proprietor went into bankruptcy.

"Anybody there?" is still a question on Second Avenue after midnight. Only the "there" is somewhere else, and nobody knows who the "Anybody" is—not even Theresa, because in the new place her former admirers read their poetry and plays, try their songs and hang their pictures on the walls. Even her table is not exclusively HER table any longer.

THE TROUBLES OF A PERFECT TYPE

Walk through Grand Street from Third Avenue to Clinton Street, which is not a long distance, and you have the types of the whole world before you. They are not in concentrated form; they are diluted. But if you analyze, even hurriedly, you will soon be able to know the components of each one of them.

A remote Tartar ancestor of one of the pushcart peddlers is plainly seen in the small sunken black eyes. In another the straight line of the back of the head tells you that his mother, or his grandmother, had lived once in Hungary. In another one the Slav type, the flat fleshy nose, is mixed with the Wallachian strong chin. Some Teuton blood calls out through the heavy cast of an otherwise typical Austrian Jew. A Spanish grandee, as if come out from a page of Cervantes, is selling shoe laces and cuff buttons. And a Moroccan prince, ill at ease in his European garb, is offering to the passer-by some new Burbankian fig-plum-orange combination.

The vendors call out their wares in what seems at first a tongue all their own. But a trained ear soon discovers that it is English, or rather that English is the essential component of the chemistry of their language; the rest being words of their own creation, or scraps from a dozen other languages which stuck to the people of woe in their two thousand years peregrination from land to land.

They needed a Jewish type in producing a screen drama. Not one of the actors, semi-actors or hanger-ons of the company fitted the demands of the omniscient director; so he set out to find the type himself. Seated in a large touring car, he traversed every street of lower Manhattan, carefully scanning the faces of men. For a full week he thus busied himself without much success, unable to discover what he wanted.

The beginning of the second week found the director roaming through the east side on foot. He stocked up more cigarettes than his pockets could hold, visiting the innumerable little shops on every street, and drank tea in a dozen obscure cafés without locating his man, the counterpart of his imagination. But on the fourth day of the second week his patience and perseverance were rewarded.

As he was sipping a glass of tea in a little coffee house the door opened and a tall, lanky fellow appeared as if drawn by the magic power of the director's desire.

He sat down at the first table and ordered something to eat. The director could not take his eyes off him. That spare, long, black beard, undulating to midway between chin and belt, those side locks, the drooping mustache that hardly covered the long thin upper lip, that misty something over the whole countenance, and the garb in which the man was wrapped up! It was as he wanted,

and better. It was the ideal type for which he had searched the whole city in vain, and now, suddenly, when least expected, the man had come by himself.

Mr. Cord was too anxious to realize his plans to be bold and direct. After deliberating with himself as to the best method, he did what he had seen done in the movies years ago. He called the waiter, tipped him liberally and asked information about the man sitting at the corner table.

"That fellow there? It's Samuelson, from the candy store on the corner."

"Is he making much money?"

"Him?" the waiter sighed. "Selling four sticks of gum and three packages of cigarettes a day."

Mr. Cord began to see his line of action.

"Is he a clever fellow?"

"He plays chess with the boss and beats him every time."

Meanwhile the bearded fellow got through with what was before him, wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve, and was ready to go, when the director called out:

"I say, Mr. Samuelson, can I see you for a few minutes?"

"What do you want to see me for?" the man asked, hesitatingly approaching Mr. Cord's table.

"Would you not sit down and have a glass of tea with me? Waiter! two more teas and some cake, please."

A few minutes later the two men were engaged in earnest conversation. The director wanted to draw him out and did not know how to do it, while Samuelson scented that the other one needed him, and decided to be on his guard until he should know more definitely what it all was about.

Has he ever gone to the theatre? Sure enough. He has seen every play in the Jewish theatres, and Libin the playwright, bought his cigarettes from him every day.

Has he seen the movies? Sure enough. When it was very cold in the store, and on Saturdays. What warmer place was there than the movie theatre on the street! And cheap too, five cents, including war tax.

Does he like them? Of course! What a question!

How would he like to be seen in the movies? Well, that was a different question. He could not do any of the stunts the movie actors do. Leaping from a galloping horse, falling down a precipice, or walking over from one side of the street to the other on a telephone wire a hundred feet from the ground, was not exactly his profession or to his liking. But what a director wants cannot be denied. This one talked long and convincingly, ordered tea after tea and cigar after cigar, and got Samuelson so excited that at the end of their conversation the candy store keeper was convinced a greater actor than himself had never yet trod the earth. To clinch the bargain the director gave Samuelson twenty dollars on account of a promised fifty dollars a week contract, and it was agreed that the store keeper was to present himself ready for duty a week later.

And now, to preserve the flavor of what happened, I will tell the story in Samuelson's own words—or rather, I will use as many of

Samuelson's own words as possible.

"And when that feller Cord, or what's his name, when he walked away and I remain alone with twenty dollars in my fist—like that—what do I do but sit and think what a great country this is.

"In Russia I have been a tailor twenty years, and nobody saw that I was a great actor, not even myself. I met thousands of people. They saw me at work and at prayer. They saw me every week day and every Sabbath. My own wife in Russia has never seen that I was a great actor. And here comes a man I have never seen and who never saw me before and offers me tea and cake and gives me twenty dollars and a contract for fifty dollars a week, and who tells me I am a great actor! So of course I am a great actor.

"So this is a great country, I said to myself! And now that I am such a great actor, why should I have such a little store that don't even pay for coals in the winter? Why should I? Why? So I goes out to Mendel the waiter and he calls by the telephone a jobber and I sell him the whole store, and the shelves, and the show case, and the sign over the door, and even sell him the big lamp I bought on payments. He gives me two hundred dollars for everything. I know he cheats me, but what do I care! Am I not a great actor?

"And I go out and watch the great actor, Adler, come out of the theatre, and I see how he goes dressed up and with a high hat. So I say to myself, this is how you have to be dressed up. And I go in a store and buy a what you call, a full dress suit and a high hat and white shirts and collars and neckties and patent leather shoes. And I go to a barber and tell him: This is a great country and I am a great actor. And when I got up from his chair I looked almost like Adler. The hairs cut nicely and no beard, no moustache, no sidelocks.

"When I am through I go to the office of the movie company.

"When Mr. Cord sees me all dressed up and with no beard he gets terribly excited and throws me out of the office.

"What have you done with your beard and side locks?" he yelled, and he nearly wanted to murder me.

"And now I have to sit and wait until my beard and mustache will grow back. I am ashamed to go to the café house. The boss will laugh, the waiter and everybody will laugh, and with a high hat how can I go to look for work at my trade? And my hairs grow so slowly!

"What kind of a country is this?"

HOW THE IBANEZES LOVE

If you ever find yourself on Thirty-fourth Street near Seventh Avenue, don't fail to hunt up a certain Spanish table d'hote restaurant. This section of New York is like a border town on the lower Pyrenees in France. People speak French with the Spanish accent and Spanish with the singsong of Southern France.

Sitting on the broad steps of the fine old massive brown stone houses of the district, children of old Catalonia, Dons and Donas from Madrid and Barcelona, using a latinized English all their own, exchange stories and opinions with their French neighbors.

Chords struck on a guitar, to accompany a subdued voice, high colors on the window curtains, a mixed odor of garlic, incense and heavy-scented perfumes, suggest something indefinably Moorish, Alhambresque; slow yet passionate, like cold fire.

And lo! the mirage vanishes! You are out of the district. The modest warm curve of the Orient has disappeared, the arrogant cold straight line of the Occident stares at you. You are in the heart of busy old New York.

But if you are hungry, hungry for good, hunt up the Ibanez place. Four two-seat tables, two three-seat ones, and two big tables of elastic capacity in the centre. The wall paper is red, the shade on the lamps brown, the ceiling is golden, the lady is fair, the food is good, and the wine....

The Ibanezes have a daughter, Juanita. She was twenty when I last saw her. Her hair fell over the forehead like foam from an overful glass of liquid amber. Altogether she reminded one of molten gold and fire and honey.

Pablo Cortez, the Cuban poet, was in love with Juanita at that time. She was not indifferent to his attentions; yet like a real Spanish dona she allowed him to woo her in his own fashion.

The last clients had departed. Cortez, myself and Madame Ibanez were drinking coffee. Juanita was not well. Pablo had brought some of his latest poems which he wanted to read to all of us. Madame Ibanez thought them beautiful, but she became very serious when the poet told her they were dedicated to her daughter.

Her smile vanished, the face and body became taut, and her eyes, like two big search-lights, seared through to the man's heart. After a while she relaxed, lit a cigarette, brought some more coffee and seating herself between us two she said:

"You two have been talking the whole evening. I too, want to tell a story.

"There was a young couple I knew twenty-five years ago. They were both artists. She was a pianist and he was a singer. He had the most beautiful voice I ever heard—and I have heard a lot of good voices. Her father was a rich merchant and had planned differently for his daughter, but she fell in love with Pedro and eloped with him.

"At Boulogne they took a steamer for Havana and landed there penniless, absolutely penniless. Another piece of sugar, Don Pablo? non? Well, they landed penniless. But he had some friends there who bestirred themselves, and in ten days they had arranged the first concert in the largest hall of Havana. It was more than a success, it was a triumph. She acted as his accompanist.

"That night they vowed one to another that he would never sing with another accompanist, and she would never play the accompaniments to another singer.

"His voice and her playing pleased the Cubans so much the couple had to appear in concert several times a week. Money flowed in from all sides. The young wife sometimes longed for home and hers, she loved her people very much. But Pedro kissed away her worries—sang away her longings. They were very happy.

"A manager got hold of them and pretty soon they had engagements from San Francisco all the way to New York.

"When they arrived in San Francisco it was spring. Pedro had a slight cold, and went to see the doctor his manager recommended to him. It was the first time he had ever been out alone since they eloped from Madrid. She was too tired to accompany him. He had

to return the next day, and the next, for treatment.

"On the fourth day was the concert. A phenomenal success. Pedro sang better than ever. His wife sitting at the piano felt the envy of a thousand women. And she was proud of her Pedro. His voice rose and fell and rippled, and between the folds of sound were jewels of all colors.

"Still, on the next day he went to see the doctor. When he returned he was irritable, quarrelsome, and refused to even go out with her.

"She cried. What else can a woman do? He quieted her soon, and made her beg forgiveness. The reason for his irritability was, he said, the condition of his throat, as the doctor had explained it to him. It made her sit up the whole night. What if her Pedro should lose his golden voice?

"The next morning she made herself ready to go with him to the doctor. It was an Italian who knew French well. She would try to get him to tell her the truth about her husband's voice. But Pedro insisted that she must remain home. She did not have proper street wear to conceal her state. He talked and talked until she gave in and remained home.

"No sooner was he gone and she regretted to have let him go alone. Why! in a taxi she could be there without being much seen by any one!

"She dressed hurriedly and was soon at the medical man's door. She heard Pedro's voice. He sang to a piano's accompaniment. The voice was as clear as a bell, the 'tessatura' as firm as rich velvet.

"She rang the bell. A servant came out. 'No, the doctor was not in town.'

"'He has not been in town the last two days. He was always away on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of every week.'

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