

The sandpit

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walk back to the docks. I told ye I was sorry and I meant it.»

«You're an ignorant monster, and I never want to see you again.» Richard turned round and flounced back into the house, leaving Jamie alone with Arthur. Jamie turned as though to follow Richard, but thought better of it and walked slowly down the drive. Arthur followed him.

«But Jamie, you were so right in what you said to Bernard. He really is a broken down old bag but won't admit it, and Richard uses him just for what he can get out of him. Of course, you were a teeny bit rude to me too, but I forgive you for that.» He linked his arm through Jamie's. «You can't walk back to the docks; it's all of ten miles. Why don't you come to my place and go back in the morning?»

Jamie disengaged his arm. «It's very kind of ye, and I don't want to be rude to anyone. But I'll not come back with ye. I can walk to the docks in less than three hours. I like to walk. Please forgive me for what I've done and ask Richard to forgive me too, for he's a nice lad in his own house and I could be verra fond of him.»

Arthur tried again. «It's so nice to meet a real man like you, Jamie, and so rare, with all these beastly queers and their silly parties and their nasty backbiting gossip. Why, I could tell you things about Richard and Bernard and all of them that you just would not believe. Please come back with me.»

Arthur turned on what he believed to be his most winning smile.

But Jamie was already striding down the road.

Stornoway.

The Sandpit

My work took me, in the summer of 1926, to a beautiful small city in Western New England. There I took a room at a small hotel, the owner, Jacob Lane, being an old friend of one of my friends and a prominent business man in the city. The hotel was managed by Paul Ray, a dark, curly-headed young man of quiet demeanor, distant manner, and large, but in outline babylike, figure. In three months of residence there, during which time my own friendly manner scarcely succeeded in establishing even acquaintance with Ray, I learned that he was supporting an invalid mother and a crippled sister, as well as himself, on a meagre salary for which he worked seven days a week and often twenty hours a day. Lane, who came to the place only to sleep, to collect his profits, and to play with his pet ferrets, was in manner always somewhat contemptuous of Ray and often cruelly impatient about Ray's work. He was about forty-eight years old, a hook-nosed man with calculating eyes and a trick of pulling his mouth sideways derisively when he talked or laughed. His speech was often vulgar and mean.

Yet he had a wry sense of humor and, accepting me because of our mutual friend, he often made himself very agreeable to me. Having no car at the time, I was glad to join him on Sunday trips or on jaunts to roadhouses at night. He was well-informed, he conversed well, and he

was an amusing companion whose importance in the town often impressed me. I was twenty-four then but still boyishly inclined to accept people as they seemed, or as they wished to be taken. I still had the home-instilled habit of respecting older people, even excessively, and I was flattered by Lane's patronage. Except that I sometimes wished he were less unkind to Ray, I had no fault to find with his character.

When I left the town, Lane invited me to return for a visit during the Christmas holidays. In all likelihood I should never have done so, had not an unlikely accident taken me to the neighboring town of Read just before the holidays began. Thus, providing myself with presents for Lane and Ray, I arrived at the hotel a day or two before Christmas.

It was no longer clean and attractive. A slatternly woman assigned me to a room and seemed to resent my arrival. I asked for Ray. «Don't know nuthin' about him,» she said; «I run this joint now.» I felt uneasy until I telephoned Lane; but he welcomed me, invited me to dinner at his club, and in spite of the deep snow took me to a nightclub far out on the highway afterwards. It was there that I asked about Ray. I'd hesitated to do so before because I had not wanted to seem aware of the unpleasant changes at the hotel.

Lane, toying with his empty glass and looking about impatiently for the waiter, said, «Oh, that fairy! I turned him in to the police, and he had to leave town.» I was shocked, more by his manner than by the news, for I scarcely comprehended what was meant at first. «Did you — catch him in something — with the guests?» I asked. «Naw», Lane replied with a sneer, «but anybody could see what he was, and I got sick of having him around.» I paused while he snapped his fingers and shouted profanely at the waiter. Then I asked quietly, «Where is Ray now?» «Dunno,» Lane said; «last I heard he was down at Read, working in the sandpit. He don't dare come back here or the police'll nab him, but I understand he sneaks back once in a while to see his old-maid sister. The old woman died just after the police ran him out.» Stunned by the news and even more by his callousness, I had to ask, «Were you the only one who complained on him?» He gave me a surprised, challenging look and exclaimed. «Hell, does it need anyone else? Guess you don't know how I *rate* in this town!»

I didn't say any more. Christmas was spoiled, I felt, and I began to make plans to spend the remaining holidays in New York City. Thus, after the floor-show was over, I hinted that I'd had a letter which changed my plans and that I'd have to leave the next night on the midnight train. «Hell, don't do that,» Lane urged; «why sit up when you can sleep? New York'll keep. Take the ten o'clock next morning.» Inept at lying, I hesitated and had to yield. Then Lane was all amiability. At the hotel he stayed in my room a long while, talking. When he left he said something about a lot of extra guests coming to the hotel the next day, which was Christmas.

I saw few people about the place next day, however. It was as gloomy and cold as the weather. I had Christmas dinner with Lane at his club in the late afternoon, and I expected to go out for the evening; but Lane

said that he had a cold and was tired and, therefore, wanted to get to bed early. Thus, we went back to the hotel; and while he made himself generally unpleasant with the manageress, I wrote letters in my room. About nine-thirty he came to me and said he had more guests than he could handle. «As long as you're pulling out in the morning,» he suggested, «you can bunk with me and I can rent out this room.» Feeling unable to refuse, I packed my things, so as to be ready to leave in the morning, and went to his room.

He was very amiable again, and we lay for some time talking. It was about eleven o'clock and I was half-asleep when he moved to my side of the bed and pressed against me. I drowsily reflected that he was going to be a difficult bed-partner, and then I realized that his heavy breathing was not that of sleep. Suddenly he seized me, and there was no question as to what he was about.

For a moment I was stupefied; but muttering something about the bathroom, I got up, managed in the darkness to get my clothes without his seeing me, and dressed in the bathroom. My suitcase and outer things were still in his room, however; and when I returned to get them, he snapped on the light and saw that I was dressed. «Where the hell you going?» he asked. «Midnight train,» I said. «What the hell *for*?» he demanded; «thought you were going on the morning train.» I was embarrassed enough then to be angry, and I replied, picking up my things, «It just occurred to me that my waiting so long might be a little inconvenient for you.» «What d'you mean?» he asked, his expression becoming dangerous. «Well,» I said at the door, «the morning train doesn't leave until ten: and if you have nerve enough to face yourself squarely, you'll be off to the Read sandpit much earlier than that.» «You son of a bitch!» he yelled, getting out of bed; «wait —!»

But I caught the midnight train. I never saw him again.

Admetus.

Letters to the Editor

«. . . Did you hear the one about the person who thought a homosexual was a person who had sex at home? A person actually did say that recently.»

A Subscriber from the States.

«. . . and telling you that I'm more than happy with the many answers I've had with my ad in *La Petite Feuille*, those letters I'm receiving almost daily fill the emptiness of my life, and things are a lot easier now.»

A Subscriber from Panama.

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