

# MARY JUSTINE AND THE GENTLE ONE

*The Story of a Bright Unconscious Sinner*

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MARY JUSTINE woke abruptly and sat straight up. What was it filled her with such bright happiness? She rubbed her eyes. A light flickered over the room from the red lamp on the cupboard. How strange everything looked! The curtains at the window were different, puffing out a bit with the cold air coming in. At the bottom of the pane the frost was an inch thick, but higher up it turned to tall castles and knights in shining armor. The yellow spinning-wheel was different, and the mound of wool beside it; the high cupboard too by which Sister stood when she related the most exciting of her stories; all were different. They were alive. They were waiting, as Mary Justine herself was waiting.

Mary Justine remembered. It was Christmas eve. It was her eighth Christmas, and she, being so old, was going to church at midnight with Sister! To go anywhere at all with Sister was an enthralling adventure, like visiting a curious new world. But to go, hand in hand, out into the dark night to discover what Mary Justine knew they would discover, and to have this big surprise as a Christmas gift for Sister!

Mary Justine had a secret, born out of the glittering stories Sister had told. It was more, really, than a

secret. It had begun as a dream, had developed into a hope which had grown to a mysterious impassioned faith. All this had come about when Sister's stories began to change, as they had, a few weeks ago, from hobgoblins and fairy princesses, from the "fair pale one who had the power to love, to be loved, and to live," and from enchanting Wish Maidens—to the true, marvelous tales of the Son of Man, the Gentle One of Galilee.

The secret Mary Justine harbored in her heart which she could tell to no one for fear a word or look might dispel it, was that on this night, on this night hallowed by holy memories, she would see, she would find—the Christ Child!

Voices came from the other room where Father lay in the ornamented bed which was a relic of better days. Mary Justine did not understand about the "better days," nor about the "exile" which had brought them here, but she did understand why people came from far and near to talk to Father. It was because he knew everything and could tell them exactly what to do, no matter what the trouble.

His voice rang out now, cutting off Mary Justine's thoughts.

"You simply can't condemn Lydia for standing by her friend, my dear. We have our theories, and we've got to uphold them when it comes to a practical issue—"

"But Agnes is of a lower order, and not worth our daughter's sacrifice. Lydia will be sacrificed, along with her friend, to people's opinion. Just because we happen to be here, by an unjust trick of fate, is no reason she should get intimate with common people." Mother's tones were sharp.

"Simplicity, naturalness, are never low, darling."

"I'll not have Lydia sticking by her. I always suspected the worst of Agnes even before she did this thing. As untamable as a wild—"

"What chance has she had, with those cackling parents—?"

"That's not Lydia's lookout!"

Instantly Mary Justine's mind flew to Lydia's defense. She had to confess to herself, of course, that Sister would always need her. When she stood on the stool by the cupboard, and her eyes held that wide tranced look, she was not really there at all, but off on some miraculous journey, and Mary Justine felt at times that she too was being spun through skies, as with wings. It was dangerous; it was glorious. You might fall any minute, or you might spin on forever. What was it Sister saw when her eyes held that wide tranced look? The look went beyond Wisconsin, that green mitten on page twenty-seven of your Joggraphy book—it went, why, it went to undiscovered lands. Sister had a key to other worlds, and Mary Justine would hang on, that was all, to bring her beloved safely back home.

Her back ridged itself against the

words in the next room. But it was Father speaking, so she settled back comfortably.

"Personally," he said, "I'm pretty damn proud of being Lydia's father. After the disappointments life offers, to find you've created, by some queer alchemy, a poet—! And with a poet's vision, she stands for the truth as she sees it. She has some fine, clear-seeing integrity of her own, higher than the black and white morality preached. A blind loyalty is not so high, but to understand, at her age, with all her lovely innocence—"

"You're talking nonsense, my dear," said Mother, in a voice through which ran a quickening sense of tenderness.

"Nonsense," he answered, laughing impishly, "is all that makes life worth living—nonsense and love."

Mary Justine could feel, though she understood not a word of his talk, the peculiar warm emphasis he put on the word "love."

"I'm proud," he continued, "that my daughter Lydia can rise to that gorgeous moment when her friend Agnes gave herself so magnificently, so inevitably—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! That ridiculous story! A knight walks over the hills while she's picking flowers. He looks at her—speaks—they melt together—!"

"Even as Freya when she meets her Odin, and Spring reigns—"

"A myth you're speaking of, that has nothing to do with life—"

"On what, then, are myths based? At least Agnes confesses to a man. Another girl would have told of sleeping potions, or said that she was raped."

Mary Justine was glad that at this

moment Sister was coming down from the attic.

Anybody could see that Sister was beautiful.

She stood now in the flickering light which made little running paths of gold across the dark red of her hair. Her wide brow dreamed above tilted gray-green eyes, her straight defiant nose lifted above a sweet pure mouth forever betraying all she felt. It was tender, even when her brow was stern; it was forgiving, even while her eyes condemned. When she spoke a cadence of song fell from her lips, and even though at times the words were strange, unwonted, Mary Justine so passionately longed to understand, that in the end she did, strangely, in some deep essence of her spirit. Mary Justine herself never could have shaped them, those beautiful singing words, but she could think them and feel them, flowing like a river of burning jewels, through her.

Into the voices coming from the other room Sister stepped with clear uplifted look.

"So you're talking about it again?" she asked.

"Not again," Father responded. "We haven't stopped. Your mother's turning orthodox—think of that for an Ekengren! She's protecting you, darling!"

"You'll have to give her up," said Mother. "I can't hold any other view, in spite of your father's satire. Joe will be coming back now, any day. He's a fine lad. Think of his side of it—"

"Joe will understand," said Lydia quietly.

"Hah!" cried Mother. "Agnes pledges herself to him. He goes, in the manner of his brave kind, to seek

a home farther west for the two of them. He comes back to find this has happened—"

"He knows Agnes," said Lydia. "He knows how she's always been. Why, at parties it was never the kissing games for her. She wouldn't soil herself by something she didn't feel, even in the spirit of fun—"

"I understand," said Father, and at this moment Mary Justine knew that he looked exactly like Sister, impish, unbowed, lifting his beautiful tired head with a look that went through you like a golden arrow. "Agnes is a passionate saint, a bright, unconscious sinner."

"No sinner at all," said Lydia. "She is *herself*, therefore true, therefore sinless. As a flower is sinless in unfolding. As the soil is sinless when it lies sleeping to spring to more luxuriant growth, as the earth is sinless when it opens to bring forth the deeper blossoms born of fallow death."

"Stop it at once," said Mother. "The two of you are too much for me. Lydia, you'll do as I say in this. And you know how he feels, your Karl, too."

There was a pause, full of pain that was like a heavy blackness as Lydia finally responded, "It doesn't matter how Karl feels. He doesn't own my soul, nor does he have the right to tell me how, nor what, to think. And," she added, slowly, "I'm going over to Agnes's after church to-night."

"Lydia! What *will* people say? Already—"

"I can't be devoured by your protection, nor his." Mary Justine could feel the proud angle of Sister's head; she could feel the stern look on

her brow, the agonized trembling of her mouth. There was a stillness, followed by a quick rush as Lydia threw her arms about Mother and cried, "You precious old fraud! You'd be more ashamed than I if I were less than honest! And don't you suppose I know how you've sneaked over there to do nice things for Agnes?"

"The young are so independent these days," sighed Mother in a tone of ineffable pride. "Karl will be here now, any minute. Get yourself and the little one ready for church. Dress Mary Justine warmly, it must be forty below. Tell any one who asks that your father's condition kept us both at home."

"Do!" said Father, and Mary Justine got the impression of lifted, wicked eyebrows.

Now they were on the path, plowing through the heavy snow. Sister had dressed her in the new plaid linsey-woolsey dress and the knitted white stockings. During this, instead of the whispered confidences Mary Justine had certainly expected, Sister had remained aloof, in an impenetrable silence she could not enter. And here against the words, almost bitter, cold as the night itself, which came back at her from Lydia and Karl, her own imaginings stood rich.

She would not permit the dim sense of disappointment which had begun to creep into the adventure. Nothing could take from her the hope that had lain, white and pure and strong, in her heart these many weeks that to-night, to-night she would see the Holy Child—

This hill which she was now climbing was not the hill behind her home,

but a hill in far-away Judea, a frozen hill which led to a lowly stable. And there were three figures ahead of her instead of two, and there was a star leading. Oh, if she had but gifts to offer, frankincense and myrrh, to show him that next to Sister and next to Father she loved him best out of all the world! There was a special kinship between her and the Gentle One, for when he'd grown to manhood he had spoken truths for which he had suffered, even as had Father, in the land from whence they'd come, even as did Father, in the new land to which they'd flown.

Brave flowing words were suddenly called to her mind from Lydia as she stood by the high cupboard. "And God revealed to Joseph in a dream that each child born into the world is a child of God . . . a child of love."

The night wrapped itself about her in a cape of magic white.

The only trouble was that Sister and Karl had such long legs and hers were short and fat, and wouldn't go so far with each step. They seemed to have forgotten her altogether. She had almost to run, which wasn't nice at all, for it made it difficult for her to live the glowing scenes. And also this talk ahead was not in keeping with the night, and she had to turn her eyes to the lantern at Karl's side instead of watching the star overhead, pointing the way—

"Your mother's right, you know, sweet," Karl said over and over. "I realize how innocent it is of you to want to stand by Agnes—"

"It's not innocent of me," came Lydia's voice, changed from its muted music to stiff formal tones.

"I'm standing by Agnes first of all because I love her, and next because I believe her."

Karl's answer came clear and sharp. "I'd like to see her convince Joe or any one else of it!"

"The fact that others condemn doesn't matter to me," said Lydia, adding, in a softer tone, "Joe will understand. And you feel as you do because I'm to be your wife, and you want no shadow to fall on me, any more than does Mother—"

"Darling!" cried Karl. "You know me better than that. It's the ghastly trick played on Joe. He's so damned decent—"

"That's what I've been saying," answered Lydia. "That's just what I've been saying."

The words blurred for Mary Justine. Part of her exalted mood vanished. It was harder for her now to believe, harder to *know* that she was following the three pilgrims, to realize that this was the sacred far-away hill, and not the hill behind her home.

Why did they all keep talking and talking about Agnes? Mary Justine liked Agnes; she liked her in much the same way she had liked the wild deer they'd caught and tamed, and then let go. Of course once or twice, or maybe even more, she'd been jealous, when Sister had seemed to forget her with Agnes near. But she had always been sorry afterward, because each time she had discovered that Sister had been thinking of her all the time, and loving her more than even Mary Justine knew. It would be dreadful if Sister did not love Mary Justine as much as Mary Justine loved Sister.

She hadn't seen Agnes now for a

long time. The last time Agnes had looked queer—and misshapen. Mary Justine had asked Sister about it, and had got the answer, "Nature is re-shaping the clay, for her own uses," which had sounded so strange that Mary Justine had gasped, fearful that this time she would not understand. Then Lydia had taken her by the hand and led her to the shade under the cherry-tree draped in vines, and had said, "Now I will tell you a story, Little Goose."

And there upon Mary Justine had fallen a golden story about a lovely princess imprisoned in a hut in the forest with a squeaky old mother and a father whose voice was the squeal of a pig—a princess beautiful as morning, whose heart was open as the heart of a flower is open. A heart so pure that these two old ones could not teach her evil; she could not see it, nor could she learn the ways of the world. It chanced one day in spring that she had run out on a hillside to look for the first bud bursting through on the spot where the sun had warmed the snow away. As she looked up, with her hair tumbling and falling about her, as she looked up, there stood a prince, himself the color of evening, himself the color of dusk!

"You know, Little Goose," Sister had said, "how the sun storms over the hill in spring. You know how it comes, splitting the earth asunder, so that new life is brought forth. These two looked each upon the beauty of the other, and Nature had her way."

"But what happened?" gasped Mary Justine, quivering and breathless from her effort to understand.

"The prince walked back over the



hill, and the princess is held in the hut in the forest, waiting her day."

"What day?" asked Mary Justine.

"When she will be released. Do not look so sad, Little Pig, we will rescue her, you and I! And now I will race you to the river."

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Mary Justine remembered, clear as anything, the last time she had seen Agnes and Joe together. It had been a year ago, and they had come tearing down on skis, their cheeks red as sumach. Even while they laughed their faces held a sorrow too great for Mary Justine to look upon. Joe said he was leaving to go build a home for the two of them. He had had to force the words out. Agnes had cried quickly, "But think when you come back! Think of that, my Joe!" and Joe answered, "Well, don't I? How else d'you s'pose I could *live*? Take care of her for me, won't you, Lydia? Take care of her while I'm gone!"

Mary Justine did not like these memories crowding upon her right now, when her thoughts were fixed upon the night's unfolding, nor did she understand why they should all speak in such sharp tones about Agnes. She began to admit to herself that so far the night was a disappointment. Instead of walking hand in hand with Sister, she was separated from her as she had never been. There ahead of her was her beloved, quarreling with Karl, and being hurt, instead of being wildly happy, as Mary Justine knew Sister had expected to be; she had looked forward to Karl's arrival, even as Mary Justine had looked forward—was still looking forward, to this night.

Almost before she knew it, people

were all about her. Their lanterns glimmered from every side. Mary Justine was gathered into the church. She was seated beside Sister, and Karl, golden and tall like a figure out of a Norse fairy-tale, stood against the wall, looking as if he would hurl thunderbolts in every direction.

Mary Justine reached out to get hold of Sister's hand. For the first time Sister drew hers away. A pain, so great it frightened her, smote Mary Justine. She looked up, saw the dear face beside her was transfixed with sorrow. She was unable to speak one word of comfort; it would not be heard if she did. Sister was not looking at Karl, and Karl was not looking at Sister, which was in itself beyond belief.

The woman on the other side of Mary Justine snuffled with cold, and bent down to wring out the wet ends of her shawl. She heard, all round her, the murmured Christmas greetings. Nobody spoke to her; nobody greeted Sister. From behind, "My, everybody's here, even those proud Ekengren girls. They say she actually goes to see that fallen Agnes! Wouldn't you think her mother—?" The whisper died down. Sister had not moved a muscle, but she must have heard; her face had a fixed stare.

Mary Justine looked about. Perhaps, over there, in the dark corner under the tree, he would be lying—

The tree reached almost to the ceiling, and standing on top of it was a chocolate Santa Claus, brown like the chocolate pig Mary Justine had seen at the store and longed for. Festoons of paper flowers bloomed among the branches. Apples the

color of sunset dangled, and rows of pop-corn ran up and down. Mary Justine watched, entranced. She heard not a word of what the preacher said, caught up as she was in her dream. She could not keep her eyes off the tree. The bare room sprang to color and brightness as the candles were being lighted. Presently all stood to sing:

"Jesus, Tender Shepherd, lead us . . ."

Now, surely, surely in that dark corner under the shadowed branches, he would be revealed.

And never again in all the world, nor all the worlds to come, could any one be lonely who had looked upon his face. Mary Justine reached again for Sister's hand; not finding it, she clutched at Sister's dress. She wanted Sister to see at the same moment that she herself saw. For never again in all the world, nor all the worlds to come, after he had so been adored, would he lie lonely in a dark corner, his song of love and compassion and forgiveness forgotten—

Mary Justine's heart stood still, waiting to adore.

The song died down.

The preacher said the gifts would now be distributed. Some one dived down into the dark corner and brought out packages tied with gay ribbons.

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They were leaving the church, and clutched in her hands were presents Mary Justine had received. A strand of brightly colored beads, a bottle of scent, a chocolate pig. Sister had as always been thinking of her, because these were the things Mary Justine had lingered over in the store, with Sister watching her intently. She

knew that Sister must have gone down to purchase them for her, so that she would not be left out of the festivities in the church, so that she would not be hurt! Her heart pounded with happiness, and yet, and yet—she was curiously ashamed in her possession of these gifts, for she felt she had abandoned something more sacred and precious. The glory, deep down, had been washed away.

The going was harder now, for the snow had drifted more unevenly on the path. Again she got the impression that she had slipped from Sister's mind. She hurried behind them, stumbling, her eyes stinging and half-blinded with the cold. The voices ahead, still arguing, changed in tone, rather abruptly. Karl's voice took on a note of laughter.

"You'll not go there, d'you see? Here I've been thinking for weeks of nothing but that I'd see you during the holidays. Counting each day off! Marked on the calendar. All the fellows laughing at me, and me not caring. And now you go spoiling it all. I'll protect you from yourself, sweet! Here's how I'll do it!"

To Mary Justine's utter astonishment he picked Sister up, and strode with mighty steps forward. Why, he must be wearing seven league boots! Sister's laughter trailed back over his shoulder, a merry peal like the chime of bells.

Mary Justine rubbed her eyes, to see if she could have been mistaken. What she saw was only a lonely void of white white mounds gleaming. She could not see the winking lantern. Even their voices were lost. She glanced back, to see if any neighbors were in sight. But which way

would they be coming from? In a sudden panic she called aloud to Sister, and plunged desperately ahead. No, this could not be the path—which direction *was* ahead?

Perhaps she ought to sit down, and just be still, until Sister came for her. She would come very soon. Mary Justine sat down. The bottom of her woolen dress was frozen and stuck straight out in a brittle line from her knitted white stockings. Why, Sister had forgotten to put on her leggings or her overshoes! She mustn't tell Mother. She must be sure not to tell how cold her feet were, when she got home.

No one had noticed her new linsey-woolsey dress that she had been so proud of. It was such a pretty plaid. She wanted to cry, but her face felt too stiff. And anyway, Father had said to her once when she had screamed loudly, "We don't cry, people like you and me. We take our troubles with head up, standing square!" She had felt very proud and grown-up, for he had spoken as if she were his own age, and just as grand as he. The thought helped her, but nevertheless she was crying, inside, right now. Nobody had spoken to her all evening.

How silent the whole world was! How silent, and how stern, and how white! Even the sky was like a sheet of ice, bending down to cloak her.

A numbness stole over her, insinuating its sleepy way up and down her arms, and spreading pleasantly over her body. Her head sank forward. She fitted herself into the snow. She felt as if she could sleep forever, for now the world had become a world of shining white warmth. No, she wasn't at all cold any longer. It was

so nice to be warm again, as in her bed at home, only warmer, only sleepier.

Suddenly, way down, a message rang through her. There were no words, but the meaning was clear. It was a memory of something Father had said. She knew she had to obey that voice, not because of Father's command, but because it was a part of herself. She knew that she had to move. She got painfully to her feet, and stumbled on in the path which offered least resistance.

Here was a fence—she hadn't remembered a fence. But perhaps it would be their close neighbor's? Perhaps, all at once, she would be home! Father would pull her on to the ornamented bed, and his beautiful white head would be laid on hers, and he would call her "Little Goose" in a voice as tender as the fall of rain. There they'd all be, laughing together, as they always laughed together. She would show him her chocolate pig and her pretty beads—her hands closed convulsively; why, she couldn't feel them! She couldn't feel them at all, either hands or beads! This brought her to a sharp realization. The fence she had just climbed over could not be their neighbor's fence, for she had not yet crossed the big hill. She was nowhere near home!

She found herself no longer in the open space, but in a forest of bare trees. How indifferent the whole world looked! Anything might happen to her, and it would not reach out hands to help. The trees were bare black stone trees. On glancing up she saw that they were not so bare but that here and there were patches of snow upon them, and icicles hung down, formed by a warmer morning. Above



all this they stretched bare arms upward, surely in prayer—? Nothing but prayer could be so lonely. All the world held a longing, even though it looked frozen and white and cold, all the world a cry toward some deliverance, some hope, some love.

It was love.

It was Love the whole world hungered for, to wake and warm it into life.

She staggered and fell against a tree. Oh, Christ Child, dear Christ Child, where are you? Was the dream born of you too big for the world to clasp to its heart, too warm and friendly and glowing to become reality, so that now and forever and ever there must be terror and loneliness and death?

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"Here, youngster," said a man's deep voice. "You better come along with me." A strong hand grasped hers, pulling her forward. "Or I'll carry you if you like, poor kid?"

"No," her stiff lips said. "No. Why, I can walk, just fine. I—I guess I just felt—lost."

"I am lost, too," said the deep voice.

"Oh! Maybe—maybe we could find the way together?"

"Not much chance for me," said the man sadly. "But I'll find the way for you all right, kid. Don't you worry about that!"

Mary Justine liked him. She said, "No, we—we can find the way together."

They reached a plane of light which came from the window of a cottage.

The man looked down at her. "Why, bless my soul!" he cried.

"Bless my soul, if it isn't little Mary Justine! How on earth did you get lost, Little Pig?"

"It was my fault," she answered. "I couldn't keep up. My legs were too short. And I don't know you, I guess," she added, politely, "unless maybe you're some one who's come to Father for help?"

The voice that was really too sad to laugh did laugh suddenly, right on the door-step. "I s'pose it's my beard," he said, and rapped at the door.

Once inside, Mary Justine staggered over to the fireplace and sat down. Her hands and feet and face began stinging with many needles. She did not seem able to remember her manners. She should have shaken hands all round. She knew there were people in the room, and that she had been in this room before.

Then, sharper than the needles pricking her so cruelly, she was struck with the pain surrounding her. A woman over on the low bed was speaking haltingly to the man with the beard.

"You see how it was," the woman said. "It—it was the first day in spring. I had run out, up where we used to go, on the hill? To look for flowers. He—he came up—from the other side. He stood right there, before me."

"What happened?" asked the man.

"He laughed. He said, 'Are you a dryad, or a sleeping princess?' I laughed, too, and he came—closer. 'Yes, I might have known it, you are a sleeping princess!' He—he put his arms around me. He kissed me. I—I was no longer myself—"

"You hadn't seen him before?" asked the man's grave voice.

"No. He went back—over the

hill. I haven't seen him since. Oh, Joe, please, please believe me! Please forgive! It didn't have anything to do with you. Nor with my love for you. I couldn't ever love any one but you, Joe. Never, never—"

Mary Justine felt terrible, and wanted Sister. She wanted Sister because she knew that Sister out of all people could take these words spoken from the bed, and make them into an enchanting story, a story carved in words like bright jewels, a story that would fall over them, blinding them with its truth, bathing the room in a fierce and beautiful light.

"You mean," said the man, "you mean he had *your consent*?"

"It wasn't his fault, Joe, any more than mine. It happened—and he was not to blame—" The broken words, condemning her from whom they came, were spoken with horrifying difficulty.

"Good God!"

"She isn't even sorry," squealed a voice that should have been a man's, near the window.

"She's a fright," said another, cackling to a high pitch, "but she never lies. She's never lied, the poor fool!"

There was a long pause. The room was full of a whirling pain that settled like a black hand over Mary Justine's eyes, and over her heart, strangling her. She was unable to move, and sat there holding her gifts. She didn't care about her stinging hands and feet. She couldn't help it if Father had said never to cry, never, certainly, where others could see you. She wanted terribly to cry. She looked down.

The eyes of her chocolate pig were melting in agony, and rolled down in thick sad drops.

Mary Justine did not cry.

"Don't, Joe! God help me! Don't leave me—!" The cry from the bed shot through her like a stinging arrow, splitting her in two. She had the sensation of being spun through time and space back to the beginning of things, with memories of anguish and pain darkening her spirit.

She shook herself free, and forced herself to glance around. Father had said only cowards turn away. Her eyes saw hazily, though she blinked hard. But the room *was* familiar. There were the three crouching figures, emerging to her sight. Where before had she seen those three figures, bowed before a lowly bed—? The room changed again before the stinging of her eyes, turned into lights that sparkled like fireflies—she had been looking at the fireplace too long. She raised her head, seeking for the memory that was eluding her. Through the window shone one bright star, brave and steady. Mary Justine's heart gave a wild throb. Her eyes traveled down, followed the pointing star.

There, there on the floor, in swaddling, there he lay—the Christ Child!

She leaped up with a cry. She did not feel the needles pricking her, nor did she notice that her feet were only sticks on which she managed to move. She walked to where he lay.

She could not move nor speak. The light from the fireplace lay on his face, as he opened his eyes, first one, as if in experiment, and then the other, still hesitantly, and blinked sweetly at Mary Justine. She leaned nearer, and had the feeling that she

was drowning in those eyes, drowning and becoming a part of past worlds, of future eternities. She fell to her knees, fearful, in her adoration, of breathing lest it might disturb him. She took her gifts, still clutched, and laid them at his feet.

"I wish—I wish they were frankincense and myrrh," she whispered, "but anyhow they're precious, cause Sister gave them—"



The man had turned away from the bed, and was standing, coat and hat in hand, beside Mary Justine. He touched her gently. He said, "Here, I'll take you home."

She looked up.

"Why!" she burst out. "Why, I do know you! Of course I know you! You are Joseph! You are Joseph!"

Something shot through the room like a current of white lightning, making it violently alive. The woman on the bed raised herself, sobbing.

Mary Justine watched in amazement while the sadness on the face above her was wiped away as by a wand. A glory past believing crowned the brow and eyes. Then the man leaned over the two of them on the floor.

"My stars!" he cried, his voice going strangely up and down. "Look at him, would you! The homeless little beggar! Just look at him!" And as if he had already said more than he could say, he turned, so quickly that it startled Mary Justine, and swung back to the bed.



They were on their way home. Sister and Karl had come for her, and she was being carried up high, on Karl's shoulder. Sister had such

a tight hold of her hand that it hurt, and Sister's head was raised in the old happy way. Mary Justine sank comfortably down into the coat smelling like straw. And she had thought the night was a disappointment! She smiled to herself, in a secret, ineffable happiness.

"My brother," she whispered, sleepily.

"You see," Karl laughed, "you see, Lydia? She's already calling me brother!"

Sister's hand closed more tightly over hers. Her words came low and muted.

"Oh hush, Karl. I wonder, I wonder how the world would be if all of us saw each child as The Child?"

Mary Justine knew that Sister's eyes again held that wide tranced look, she knew that Sister was off, sailing beyond seas, beyond the tragic garden to the hill, her face lifted above the hill to some clear sky where the stars would surely descend to form a magic crown about her head. But Mary Justine was too sleepy now to go on any journey with Sister—she'd have to get on by herself, or Karl would have to bring her back.

In the drowsy world to which she was sinking a cadence of song arose, infolding her. It may have come from loiterers late from church; it may have been the wind singing to the trees, the bare and lonely praying trees; or it may have been Mary Justine's own heart shaping and flowing into song; or indeed, indeed it may have been Love abroad on this holy night, too burdened with ecstasy to be still:

"Jesus, Tender Shepherd, lead us . . ."

# TANK TOWN

*Do the Films Persistently Misinterpret Us*

PHILIP GUEDALLA

SOMEHOW the situation seemed familiar. As I alighted from the tall step of the Pullman, received the last refulgent smile of its attendant darky and looked along the train, there was a hint of something dimly remembered. Yet the scene was anything but memorable. A Père Marquette train stood at a station—stood, rather, to be more precise, where a station would have been, had any one thought fit to build one. For a single shed in the middle distance was the sole indication. The waiting train filled the entire perspective, as its tall, polished sides took the level light of a winter afternoon. It hooted huskily; the big cars slid by; and the train receded slowly into Michigan. No other passenger had got out, and I was left standing by the tracks, alone with my small belongings and a vague sense that I had seen it all somewhere else before. The train, a dwindling point now in the rough Canadian landscape, moved deliberately out of the picture; the tracks resumed their interrupted peace; the station-shed, wholly unmoved by the sight of a lonely figure standing forlornly by its baggage, still occupied the middle distance. No one seemed to care; the visible world was utterly indifferent; the— Then

I remembered. How many times had I seen movie heroines arrive precisely thus—the big locomotive, with impressive jets of steam; the long line of halted Pullmans; the deferential darky, as a trim figure comes tripping down the steps; then the train's departure, and the solitary arrival waiting, a little wistful, by its bag in an indifferent world. It was, of course it was, the recognized approach to life in a small town. In an ecstasy of recognition I almost shaded an eye to catch the last of the big, friendly train with its sympathetic brakeman and removed (close-up) one tear of glycerine.

Not more eagerly did Henry James acclaim, through slowly drifting clouds of circumlocution, some remembered aspect of Newport. For here it was, the indubitable small town of countless slightly sentimental dramas. Its stamp was on the chilly welcome; and, better still, its tank, the authentic tank, was on the sky-line. That ungainly symbol was my final confirmation. How soon, I wondered, would it be before I saw the comic help and her invariable swain—in a hat too small for him? My eyes would soon be gladdened by the kindly storekeeper gently rocking on his porch, by the world-famous profile worn (in this