

Owen never came back again.

The first day or two, Lloyd thought nothing of it. The raw weather continued, and the boy had obviously taken cold. But the days stretched into a week, and the shadowy little figure was ever beside him, haunting his thoughts, more with him than he had been when he had come every day. At night, Lloyd stood sometimes for minutes staring out from the kitchen at the lighted window Owen had told him was his, and one night an impulse struck him. Swiftly, he moved up the back stairs, unlocked the locked door, and looking, straight ahead, out the uncurtained window, clicked the light on and off three times. Nothing happened; the light across stared blankly at him. He waited; and suddenly the light in Owen's window went out—on again—and out—and then on. It stayed on, and he wondered.

But Owen did not come back.

Had the seething bitterness of the town robbed him of even this innocent companionship, Lloyd wondered, as he went about his chores, his ears waiting for the echo of footsteps, his eyes fixed on the opposite hill, watching for that little shadowy

figure. But he did not see him. And nights, when he was unable to sleep, prowling around the kitchen, thumbing through the old Town Reports, counting the votes that he had won and the votes he had finally lost, his eyes were drawn, as if by a magnet, to that light in the window.

For it never went out. Sometimes strong, sometimes shaded, it was burning. It was burning at eleven or twelve at night, when Lloyd went to bed, and sometimes even at one or two in the morning. Lloyd began to suspect now, and asked his brother, Tom to make some inquiries in town. Yes, Withers' boy was ill, rheumatic fever, so they said, a fearfully hard attack, and he hadn't the strength to stand it, poor little chap!

And Lloyd hadn't the strength to go and see him.

To enter that house . . . to face those faces . . . those unspoken accusations . . . challenges . . . hatreds . . . he could not do it. He would not. Yet the thought of the boy haunted him by day and by night; the lighted square of that window was burned on his consciousness. One morning, past two, he turned on his own light, and once again crossed the hall and unlocked that

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## *He Was Old*

He had eyes like red-husked onions  
drying,

Strong and concealing a white sheen  
Like the heat of summer layering,  
Slipping down the shine of leeks  
And onions and the smells of green.

He had sunburned eyes. He had eyes  
Like white doorknobs on old corner  
doors

Where winter tightens the splintered floors  
And suddenly summer cracks the winter  
cold,

Netting the knobs with cracks. He was old.

CAROLINE MADDOX TONSOR

cold chamber, so empty now of all human warmth and life. This time he looked about him; he searched until he found what he was looking for. It was a small, green doll's chest, with scarred brass edges, and inside, under a matted heap of worn-out doll clothes, he found the box, red-striped and dog-eared at the corners, with a dingy button on the side. Lloyd pressed the button — and up he sprang — the grinning Jack-in-the-Box, the big mouth hanging loosely open, his stocking cap dragging from the top of his head.

Perhaps it was too childish a present for a big boy—Lloyd hesitated, yet he felt Owen would like it. He stood, still hesitant, then dashed to the kitchen for a paper bag to tear and wrap around it—and hesitated again. The house-cat purred around his ankles, and suddenly he remembered. He turned to the summer kitchen, pulled on overalls and woolen shirt, stiff with cold, lit a lantern, and went out to the barn. The cows stirred sleepily as he walked between them; their great eyes looked out in wistful wonder. The grey cat was asleep, under the mow. Gently, so she would not awake, slowly, inch by inch, Lloyd disengaged one from the heap of kittens, scooped up some hay and carried the little grey, blue-eyed thing into the house under his shirt. Then he sat down to fashion a suitable traveling box for a kitten, complete with a bed of hay and air-holes, and spent some time soothing the kitten to sleep there behind the stove, before it started its journey in the morning with the rural mail-carrier. In the corner of the box he placed the toy from upstairs, then addressed the torn paper bag. He did not write his own name.

He had over-tired himself, for he did not go back to bed that night, and by noon as he dragged about his chores, he found that he had taken cold. His head ached dully; his cheeks were hot and so flushed that when he came in at night his father stared at him. He was coughing constantly, a dry, short, hacking cough that tore at his chest, and under the ribs of his back; and by

supper-time, he felt too tired and sick to eat. "You're ailing. You'd better get to bed early," his father snapped. Lloyd arose; every move was an effort now. But before he had started, his brother, Tom, and sister-in-law, Bettina, had come in from the other side of the house. Bettina took one look at him. "We're going to get Dr. Haley," she said. And by that time Lloyd felt too sick to protest or care.

He waited in the kitchen for Dr. Haley's arrival—no use exposing him to an unheated room. But he was unprepared for the doctor's verdict — or Bettina's decision. "Yes, of course, he must be kept warm," she was saying. "We'll move him into Jimmy's room; there's a fireplace there."

"No," Lloyd said. Startled, their faces swung towards him.

He was still protesting futilely as Bettina shepherded him up the stairs, as Tom almost forcibly relieved him of his key-ring. He stood by helplessly as Bettina and the doctor dragged the bed out of his room, and Tom shouldered his way upstairs with logs, then knelt to build the fire. Bettina, Lloyd believed, would have undressed him personally, if given the chance; and in his embarrassment and the confusion, he was suddenly in bed in his boy's room, limp, swathed in flannel and hot-water bags, his head swimming pleasantly, and the unaccustomed fire leaping brightly against the cracked bricks of the hearth.

"A light case, but pneumonia, nevertheless," the doctor was saying. "He must be kept in bed and he must be kept warm." Lloyd grinned internally at these impossibilities, but was suddenly too weak to dispute them. The doctor was still muttering warnings about the weakness of his chest, and the absolute necessity of keeping him under cover; and Lloyd, his fever rising higher and higher, suddenly surrendered his whole weary frame to the unaccustomed, almost unbelievable luxury of being taken care of.

He was alone, the lights out, the frame of the discarded crib, the old chest of drawers, outlined dimly in the firelight.

But he was too tired to think, too tired even to feel. He was sinking into a heavy sleep, when suddenly he noticed the Withers house on the hill. From every window, the lights blazed as if on fire. Far away although they were, they glared into Lloyd's eyes and held sleep off. He tossed and he twisted, trying to shut himself away from them. Then he saw—and knew.

The light in Owen's window was out.

He was wide awake now, although his head was swimming and his body on fire. He called to Bettina, and in she came—with a sharp clicking of her heels—her usually soft face sharp with anxiety.

"Lloyd, you must keep covered, or you'll never get well. What a nuisance you are!"

"The light," he said, hoarsely, "the light."

She looked at him as if he were delirious. Perhaps he was. His head spun. Feverishly, he gestured his hands towards the window. "The light," he repeated, insistently, "the light in Owen Withers' window."

"Yes, of course," she said, "the poor little kid! Didn't you know? He died this morning."

Lloyd leaned back quietly against the pillows and let her pull the quilt about him. She turned off the light and left him to stare out the window into the whirling, flying snow, to stare into his own fever dreams and delirium and loneliness, the blazing windows and the shape of darkness. The wind shrieked and screamed; the snow fell faster and havier; it blotted out the house and the hill, the lights and the shadow-shape of the unlit window. It blotted out Owen, the boy who was dead, and pressed Lloyd back, alone, into the room of the boy he had lost. Lloyd shifted and turned in his bed and found tears wet on his pillow; he listened to the wild wind and the slow piling of the snow, and towards morning was conscious that the lights had gone out in the house on the hill, which stood shadow-like in the pale on-coming of dawn.

White light engulfed the room in the morning, and the chatter of voices. Dr. Haley was murmuring to Bettina that there was no involvement yet; but the crisis was still to be passed. He was a good, tough boy, and they had only to keep him warm and make him eat and sleep.

Lloyd lay half conscious, listening to the onrush of voices—"the snow so deep they won't get the plow up here for two days, if it keeps up like this . . . the funeral tomorrow, but how can folks ever get out to a funeral . . . they're going to have him laid out for visiting hours tonight up at the house . . . but who will ever go out tonight?"

At last, the voices quieted. Lloyd lay in a cocoon of quiet, the snow deepening, deepening, the hush over the land as if like a held breath, the silence and the peace of death. There was no wind now. He lay quietly all day, dozing off now and then, breathing in shallow gasps, obediently taking the medicine that Bettina brought and submitting to her scoldings at his failure either to eat or to sleep. Night came, and it was still snowing. The doctor did not return. Bettina's hand lingered cool on his forehead, but she did not look displeased when she removed it. "You're better than last night—don't care what the doc says," she commented. "Less fever." He felt better. He ate some stew, drank some milk. "You can have all you want of that," Bettina commented. "With this snow, don't know when we're ever going to get it off to market."

After a while her chatter ceased, and Lloyd was left again in the great cocoon of silence, emphasized by the little wind that was whining now. The great tree outside the window was bowed and sagged, as if with age; the whole world was wrapped in a winding sheet and the stillness of death. Bettina had retreated to her own quarters. The old man had gone to bed; half an hour earlier, Lloyd had heard the sag of the springs under his massive body. A log broke in the fireplace; a few charred sparks soared upward. Lloyd's breath came

easier; there were less stabs of pain.

The Withers house was dark against the storm. All the windows were dark but one. It was the window in the big library, the room below "his" room, the room all filled with books and ship models and prints and snow-storms under glass. It was the room where Owen Withers now lay.

No-one could come to see him. No-one could get out because of the storm.

Lloyd lay a few minutes, considering this thought. He turned easily in his bed. He felt light and free and unfettered, not in the least tired. He felt well. He felt energy charging through his veins. Suddenly, in one impulsive gesture, he swept the covers off and stood up, his head swaying strangely, but his thoughts focussed and clear.

He knew what he was going to do.

He did not put on the light. He moved stealthily, as he had when slipping out on a summer night, when he was a boy. Tentatively, he lifted the latch of his door, tensed himself against the creak. He waited, breathless, but no-one stirred. Across the hall he slipped into his old room. On a chair he found the iron-cold underwear and pulled it on. He was surprised that the effort left him breathless. Now his mackinaw—the good one—the red and black checked one; he knew where it hung in the closet—and he was so hot he would not need another one; and his best pants. On the floor, where the bed had been, he found some wool stockings and pulled them on. Pain stabbed in his chest as he sat up, but he held still, and it eased away. Now, in his stocking feet, he crept down the corridor and step-by-step down the stairs; he made it, past the stove, out into the summer kitchen and the entry, gasping for the clean, cold air. He found his boots and slipped them on.

There was no chance of the truck; he saw that right away. He saw the line of the snow, drifted up beyond the window pane. He must walk it, down the hill and up the hill—and how deep was the snow? Two feet—three feet—it was up over his

boots; he could feel the wetness settling down between his toes. The cold drops felt good on his hot face; he lifted his bare head to receive them, and to breathe—if he could only breathe! Every breath stabbed at him; the snow was choking him; there was a weakness in his legs and the drifts sucked and pulled. Every step was an effort, every breath an agony. He kept his eyes fixed on the lighted window. He was alone in this wilderness of silence and pain and cold; no car had broken the virgin whiteness of this snow. Down the hill he moved, down, down; and then the slow climb up the road that Owen had climbed—it was so long; God, it was so long!

He was breathing snow; he was a part of the snow and the storm. He was dragging his weight through the dead weight of the snow, he staggered; once, he fell, but he had no temptation to lie there. He struggled up and on. The lighted window was beckoning him, and his shadow fell darkly ahead of him . . . it was only a little way now. If he could just hold on . . . he was so tired . . . he must signal good-night to Owen, but the window upstairs was dark . . . on, on; oh, God, not down again; he clung frantically to the bush, and in one final spurt of energy saw a house-step not yet buried in snow and made for it, stumbled across the porch and pounded his wet fists against the door.

The door was opening. He pulled away, drew his tall frame erect, threw back his head. The door had opened, and he looked down into the tear-marked face of Violet Withers, her mouth a small "o," as she screamed; and then, out of the shadows loomed the face of the father, the man who had ordered him out of his house, but had lent him his son—a dark, shriveled, incredulous face. For a moment, they stared at each other, and summoning his last strength, Lloyd spoke.

"I've come to see Owen," he said.

They stepped aside for him. Alone, he walked into that room, dark with the great,

climbing towers of book-cases, but with light falling from a central chandelier, falling brightly upon the grey coffin where the dead boy lay.

Lloyd moved towards him. From far away, he was conscious of voices, rising and falling, as if in wind; the coffin looked near and now far. There were no shadows here. The boy, lying stark beneath the light, with the wafer-like white hands crossed over one another like the hands of a praying angel, was not the flitting, little, shadow-like figure he had caught and held and watched slip away. This was not Owen. He had lost him, as he had lost Jimmy . . . The light glared into his eyes; beyond, the shadows were clutching, reaching out towards him, and he plunged towards them, reaching, seeking, welcoming the all-encompassing darkness . . .

Days later, when he was up and around for the first time, still in Jimmy's room, where a dying fire ebbed on the hearth, he was drawn again, as if by a magnet, to the window from where he could look out on that window beyond.

The snow had receded from the earth. Down the hill and beyond the waste of dead grass stretched—a vaporous mist was rising from the fields, and up on Break-Neck Hill the Withers house hung as if suspended in space. It vanished, then advanced; the empty window of Owen's room suddenly sprang forth, sharp and clear. Lloyd leaned from his own window. Not a sound broke the stillness. The swaying mist was like snow and the silence of that snow-filled night. Lloyd moved his head sharply, and a vine scratched his cheek. He reached up and broke it off—its tip was melting into green.

He turned back into the room and suddenly all that was in it rose around him and possessed him again. Again, he saw the baseball mitt and the crib and the mat-

tress where the dent that had held Jimmy's young body had flattened out. It no longer looked like a grave now. The boy's pajamas were hanging on a nail overhead; the legs, the arms still held the rounded shape of Jimmy's live body. Lloyd stood a moment, his legs shaking from weakness, but his mind racing. Owen was dead. But Jimmy was alive.

He stumbled and dropped to his knees. There was the bulging pillowcase of his wife's belongings that he had hurled across the floor that September day. Suddenly Lloyd found himself standing on his feet, throttling the case, beating at it, shouting: "Damn you, you're not going to get him—you're not going to keep him. You're not Death." Strength surged through him. He knew what he was going to do. Again, he hurled the case from him; it broke and the contents poured loose across the floor. Lloyd plunged for the stairs.

Dimly, he heard the old man shouting after him. In the summer kitchen he ran straight into his brother Tom, who was just coming in from the barn with a bucket of milk. "Hey, you, what are you after? You can't work yet. You'll kill yourself." Lloyd's pace did not slacken. He pushed past his brother outside, heading straight for the shed and the truck, Tom's voice trailing on after him: "You're just like what Ed Withers told Charlie Pollack about you up at the Four Corners the day I got you home—"

Lloyd heard no more, because he was in the shed and cranking the truck and then backing it out to where his brother was still standing, talking: "You running off in the snow to see that dead kid."

Lloyd threw the truck into gear. He thrust his head out of the window. "What did Ed say?" he shouted back.

"Just the kind of damn-fool thing you'd expect Lloyd Parker to do," Tom answered.

## A SYMPOSIUM

### OTTO VON HABSBURG

From time to time, MODERN AGE will print articles by, and about, some of the principal social thinkers of our time. In early numbers, we shall include autobiographical essays by Wilhelm Roepke and Richard Weaver.

We commence with the Archduke Otto, head of the ancient house of Habsburg. Still young, and possessed of remarkable intelligence and courage, Otto von Habsburg, the Archduke of Austria, is a champion of international order, and of the rights of minorities. Forbidden to enter his own country, he lives in Bavaria. Recently he published an important book, which is discussed in this number of MODERN AGE by Dr. Frederick Wilhelmsen. Professor Wilhelmsen visited the Archduke before writing this article. The Archduke's own essay summarizes his social principles.

Otto von Habsburg knows Europe and the United States thoroughly. Since the Hungarian rising, he has been active on behalf of the refugees from ruined Hungary.

### *Otto von Habsburg And The Future of Europe*

FREDERICK D. WILHELMSSEN

THE WESTERN ARMIES marched into the chaos of Central Europe in 1945 and brought in their wake thousands of expatriates, men outlawed for years by the fiat of Nazi tyranny, men seeking once again a hearth and the promise of a fatherland. They were denied one young man because his birth was illustrious and his name feared in the counsels of barbarism

in all the East. Archduke Otto von Habsburg, son and heir of the last Austrian Emperor and Apostolic King of Hungary, was forced to leave the land of his birth.

Exiled from Austria, he has become the first citizen of Europe. The irony is one with the supra-national destiny of his house. To carry an inheritance often sanctified by the holy crown of Otto I; to re-