

STRAWS IN THE WIND

Significant notes in American life to-day

"In America one does not overhear the private conversation of strangers. One simply hears it."—W. L. GEORGE.

(Sam is a pleasant man of forty, recently sun-burnt and comfortably dressed in old clothes.

He stands in full morning light, caressing a band of chromium on his car, in front of a filling station. The Atlantic Ocean is visible, between two shingled cottages. Beyond a tall wire fence and a hedge some admirable tennis is going on. But Sam is not interested. His new car absorbs him, and you know at once that he is definitely proud of having a car with a catalogue price of \$4,750. He has just wiped dust from his Middle Western license plate and has just told the owner of the filling station what his time was from Buffalo to Boston. To him enters Gracie, his wife, clearly coming from one of the village's two hotels. She is not pretty, but she probably thinks of herself as "peppy," and last week in New York her new clothes cost Sam some money. A white coat is so folded over one arm as to show the familiar label of a famous shop on Fifth Avenue. She carries a whalebone cane bought yesterday in Nantucket, and, of course, wears a Basque cap. As she approaches she walks sharply between a dark and handsome young poet and Mr. Channing Pollock. Both men glance at her but continue their conversation.)

SAM: Where's Bud?

GRACIE: He's not coming, Sam.

SAM: Why not? He was crazy about comin' sailin'.

GRACIE: Well, he's not coming.

SAM: But why not?

GRACIE: I told him he couldn't. *(She climbs into the car.)* He had to get fresh. I told him, All right, then you can just stay right here. I don't know what

BUD ON NANTUCKET ISLAND

by Thomas Beer

I'm going to do with that kid! *(She looks at the poet and then almost whispers.)* That's Stuart Chase.

SAM: Who?

GRACIE: The fella that writes about Mexico.

(The poet either hears this wild statement or is attracted by Gracie's stare. He looks at her.) Look at him looking at me! Wouldn't you know he was one of these radicals?

SAM: What radicals?

GRACIE *(staring at the person who is not Mr. Stuart Chase)*: Oh, the whole place is chockfull of these radicals. Writers and soc'lists and things. I'm kind of sorry we came here. I bet Watch Hill'd been nicer. Edna says Watch Hill's dandy. Lots of prominent people go there. I was talking to a woman on the porch this morning. She says there isn't practically any prominent people here at all. Practically no money on the whole island.

SAM: Well, we wouldn't meet 'em if there was any prominent people, Gracie.

GRACIE: Why, Sam!

SAM *(as if he knew that tone)*: Oh, well! What about Bud?

GRACIE: He got fresh.

SAM *(frowning, but patient)*: How d'you mean fresh?

GRACIE: Well, he did. It's those boys.

SAM: What boys?

GRACIE: He was talking to them on the beach yesterday. He knows where one of them lives and wanted to go see if he could get in some tennis with him. I said to him, Now, Bud, you're only fifteen years old. You got to remember your father's the biggest man in the Legion, out home, and's got one of the biggest businesses in X—. You can't run around with every Tom, Dick and Harry in a place like this. I said, You don't know what kind of families those boys come from. I—

SAM *(not so patient)*: Aw! He's in same class, in high school, with three Jew kids and a nigger and

that Blank boy that's as good as a bastard, ain't he?

GRACIE: Why, Sam!

SAM: Oh, all right! But—

GRACIE: Look at that! (*A battered Ford coupé passes, driven by a notable Bostonian doctor and containing a daughter of the Vice-President of the United States. Sam chuckles, but Gracie directs an oddly ugly scowl after the old car.*) I should think a person'd be 'shamed to be seen dead in a thing like that!

SAM: Aw! Lots of people wouldn't bring their good car to a place like this. I wouldn't take this car up to the lake, fishin'. Let's go get Bud.

GRACIE: No. He was fresh.

SAM: Aw, mamma!

GRACIE: No. (*The syllable is hard and shrill. She is now staring at three lads down the lane.*) There's those boys, now! If you think they look all right!

(*It cannot be said that Nat, Bob and Pete are tidy, although Pete has on a clean shirt. But Gracie's dread of compromising Sam's position in the Legion is groundless. Pete is the son of a major and the grandson of a distinguished general. Bob's father served with credit in the campaign of 1898. Nat can at least claim a parent whose name is seen on covers of conservative magazines. The boys pass into the tennis courts.*)

SAM: Aw, they look all right, mamma.

GRACIE (*using her lipstick*): You say so! You've always got to be on Bud's side. If there was any prominent people here, I'd want Bud to meet their kids—of course.

SAM (*suddenly flushed under his sunburn*): I bet you would! (*He gets into the car.*) All right. I'm goin' for Bud!

GRACIE (*although twenty people can hear her*): Sam T—. I told that kid he could stay home and he's goin' to stay home!

SAM: You say so. I didn't say so. (*He drives off. An hour later his empty car is parked on a wharf in Nantucket. We may hope that Bud was taken sailing, in spite of his freshness, because the bay is brilliant under a fine wind and the sunshine sweeps among light clouds on the green-and-white slope of the town.*)

II

(*Another but older Midlander leans on a rail and smiles at the water. He has been exchanging*

small talk with a tall gentleman in gray flannels, not knowing that this stranger is a Jesuit priest. He breaks a remark to ask: Got any boys?)

THE JESUIT: No.

THE MIDLANDER: No? That's Bud, there. He's my oldest kid.

(*This Bud is one of a group in a small catboat putting out from the wharf. He lifts a brown arm toward his father, and the Midlander waves to him. As the catboat recedes, the priest speaks.*)

THE JESUIT: Big boy. Eighteen or nineteen?

THE MIDLANDER: Hell, no! Sixteen in May. But he is a big kid. His mamma's folks are all big. I'm the runt of my fam'ly. Only five foot ten. Bud's near six feet already. Kinda grew out of his stren'th, last winter. We was some worried about him. But he begun puttin' on weight this spring. (*Pauses.*) He's one Goddam fine kid. Best we've got.

THE JESUIT (*smiling*): One doesn't hear that said, these days, so very often.

THE MIDLANDER: I don't just get you.

THE JESUIT: The young generation isn't always so satisfact—

THE MIDLANDER: Oh! Well, yes. Been some trouble out home. Kids gettin' stewed and breakin' up cars. That kinda thing. Bud's fine. Lemme tell you. I had to be out in L. A. in June. My sister was sick out there and her husband's dead. So I was out there three weeks. I come home and Bud's mamma was all up in the air. High school was over, y'see? She says, He ain't asked for one cent sincet school stopped. He was out all day and got his own breakfast. Our girl don't come until eight o'clock. He was gettin' in for lunch and supper late, and then he'd go to bed right after supper. Acted dog tired at night.

THE JESUIT: He'd gone to work?

THE MIDLANDER: You said it. But his mamma didn't catch on. She says, I just know some nasty woman down town's got hold of him. We got a pretty tough red-light districk. Five factories in town. It's hell poppin' down there the night the men get paid. Prohibition's just a joke out our way. Well, this thing about women being more observin' than men kinda makes me laugh. If she'd ever looked at Bud's hands! Well, I says, I'll handle this, mamma. She took Sister and the kid—he's ten—out to Col'rado pretty soon. It begun gettin' hot.

Hell! Bud'd come in so wilted up, nights, it was a shame. One day Ed Schwartzmann 'phoned me at the store. He says, It might be all right with you Bud cleanin' cars for me, and I'm glad to have him. But, he says, it's goddam hot down here for a kid. I'd think you'd get him a job somewhere cooler. I says, You tell him to come here and see me. Bud come and I says, Now, son, what's this you're doin'? He says, Well, but you was sayin' the store ain't doin' so good. I don't want to be a burden. I says, Son, when you're a burden, I'll mention it to you. I says, You go home and get our car cleaned up. We're startin' East on Monday to look 'em over. *(Pauses.)* My partner says, You're crazy. He says, When you got a boy that will work for his keep, why in Christ's name don't you let him? I says to him, That's how my stinkin' old Dutch father back in Pennsylvania raised me. I says, I'd be so tired nights from shovellin' coal at the gas plant I couldn't get my lessons and was way down at the foot of the class and never got any good of what edjcatin I had. *(Pause.)* Well, we're havin' a swell time. He's enjoyin' every minute of it. You're only young once. He's picked up with some awful nice kids from Boston. They give him a grand time. You're only young once, h'm?

THE JESUIT *(staring at the water)*: Yes.

III

(On Main Street the sunshine seems green through the elms. There is a pretty confusion of cars, station wagons, people shopping and people idling. The cobbled roadway, the red brick shops, the darting aproned clerks and the parade of young people hunting each other may be seen comfortably from stools at the soda counter of an old drug-store facing the mouth of Orange Street. But the next Bud is not impressed. He sits spinning Nature and Reason between his palms, his long legs thrust out inconveniently. He is handsome, knows it and has costumed himself carefully. His white silk shirt is open to the belly. He wears sand shoes, an English cricket belt and, of course, a Basque cap. And yet people entering the shop look more often at Henry than at Bud. A scar, a wave of white hair across his head and an ironic smile may be combined with the Legion button in his coat to explain him. As their densely Southern voices lift, Henry's is the better voice.)

HENRY: No.

BUD: Oh, why not?

HENRY: Bud, you don't seem to know yet there's a panic goin' on.

BUD: But I can live in Paris 'bout twice as cheap as—

HENRY: You could, but you haven't yet, Bud. You can do your writin' down home just as well as in Paris.

(Bud breaks in with a short oration. But you have heard it all before.)

HENRY: I know, Bud. But you've been two years in Paris.

BUD *(going right on)*: 'Nother thing is, you can't get printed up North 'less you've got friends in the publishin' bunch. They're a lot of damn Yanks or they're lowdown Jews. A man from the South—

HENRY: Mr. Cabell gets printed and so does Faulkner and Miss Glasgow and this Wolfe boy. Mind your feet.

(Bud draws in his feet and lets Miss Ellen Glasgow pass.)

BUD: But that's different. An unknown writer—

HENRY: They were unknown writers 'fore they got known.

BUD: Yes, but there's this prejudice against a man from down South.

HENRY: Where?

BUD: Up here!

HENRY: You're crazy.

(Bud begins a second and much more interesting oration. He tells Henry that practically all editors are Jews and hate a Southerner. He instances many names and one suspects that his letters of rejection have been saved. How he knows that men named Costain, Rose, Briggs, Dashiell and Anthony are all "lowdown Jews" he does not state.)

BUD: —and if you want to get published you have to sit 'round in New York and buy drinks for that bunch!

HENRY *(smiling)*: You'll sit 'round in Paris and buy drinks for Yankees and Jew boys, if dad lets you go back.

BUD *(tacking briskly)*: 'N then dad had to carry us all up heah for the summer. Look at that bunch of morons out there!

HENRY: How d'you know they're all morons?

BUD: Dead on their feet! Look at 'em! *(He destroys the population of Main Street with a flourish)*

of Nature and Reason. Miss Glasgow, Miss Patricia Collinge, a kinswoman of Robert E. Lee descending in loveliness from a station wagon at the curb, a celebrated surgeon, a Member of Parliament, Mr. Austin Strong, Mr. Morris Ernst, Mr. Wilbur Daniel Steele, Mr. Ernest Boyd and a great-grandson of President Garfield perish together. Mr. Robert Benchley, arriving a moment later by motor, perhaps may be reckoned a survivor of the ruin.)

HENRY: All right, sonny. If it's so sour here, why don't you go home? Go back and work on your book. The place'll be plenty quiet.

BUD (*furious*): Yah! Live and die in Dixie! Agrarian civilization. Dixie!

HENRY: Behave yourself!

(*But a lady has recoiled from the shock of Bud's yell. He rises and stalks out of the shop. Henry sighs, gets up slowly and follows him.*)

IV

(*The passage of two hours is indicated by bells of the Unitarian tower in white Orange Street, where the town mounts high and you see the bay down sloped gardens, over roofs and trees. It is very still in a doctor's anteroom, and voices come easily through screens. The Gurls approach, examining houses, and laughing. They are trippers, brought to the island by the noon steamboat.*)

No. 1: —and I said, Well, madam, this is our section and I'll hafta trouble you to take your suitcase out of it. She— Look at that garden, gurls! Isn't that a scream?

No. 2: Kinda pretty, though.

No. 1: But 'magine having a garden run all down a hill! (*She laughs. This bray may be wholly defensive and involuntary.*) Isn't that a scream, though? Say, who's got the camera, gurls?

No. 3: Bud had it when we were at that Thimium place.

No. 2: Atheneum.

No. 3: Isn't that a scream? It was just a public libry. Yoohoo! Bud!

BUD (*remote*): I'm coming.

No. 1: He's the slowest kid in the state of Iowa. Slower'n his father.—Say, Bud, come along! Suze wants to snap this garden.

BUD'S FATHER (*wearily*): No more film, gurls.

No. 1: Well! Say, Bud, what was it you called that Atheneum place?

BUD: Classical.

No. 1: Why?

BUD (*savage*): Can't you see it was built like a Greek temple?

No. 1: Oh!— Look at that garden. Isn't it a scream?

BUD: No.

No. 3: Come on. (*They can be seen. The Gurls are all forty years old at least. No. 1 is probably Bud's mother, but they are the same woman. No. 3 flips a guidebook.*) The oldest house. Gee! Gurls, they got somethin' older than this bunch of stuff! . . . Historical association. Whalin' collections. Well, we saw the whalin' things at New Bedford. Say, I wonder what folks do here in winter?

BUD: Live, probably.

No. 1: Bud, you quit being sarcastic!

No. 3: Remind me to go back and look at that hooked rug in that store again. But there can't be any business here in winter. Oh, this here must be the tower you see from the boat—with gold on top of it.

No. 2: Isn't that a scream?

(*They move on. Bud and his father come in sight. Bud is a lank, tall schoolboy, angry at everything, lugging a camera, a luncheon basket now filled with cheap souvenirs from the gift shops and two female coats. On the trip East from Iowa he has found out that his clothes are badly made, and he scowls at two boys who laugh, riding past him on smart horses, although they are not looking at him. His father was just like Bud thirty years ago. But now he will do anything for peace and quiet.*)

No. 1: Bud, I'm ashamed of you. You've done just everything you can to spoil this trip, bein' sarcastic to the gurls.

BUD: All right.

No. 1: It is not all right!

BUD: All right.

(*She stares at him. Perhaps Bud will not be at all like his father thirty years from now.*)

No. 1: Well—

No. 3 (*screaming, ten yards away*): Say, come on! We're going to climb the tower!

No. 1: Well— (*She goes out. They will climb the tower. They will yell, "Isn't that a scream?" to names cut in the walls and to the old bells. They will look out from under the golden cupola at the green bay and blue moors and ocean. A wind will*

bring to them wild rose and the smell of heated sweet fern and baking shrubs. But they will bury feeling—if there is feeling—in this noise of their self-sufficiency. They cannot be still in the midst of novel beauty. They must make a noise.)

BUD'S FATHER: Goin' up, Bud?

BUD: No.

(They are silent. The tired man sits down on the curb and lights a cheap cigar.)

BUD'S FATHER: Some nice flowers in that yard, Bud.

BUD: Yeh. *(More silence.)* Say, Father!

BUD'S FATHER: Yes, Bud.

BUD: Say, what do people have to be—be so *God damn* common for?

BUD'S FATHER: Aw . . . Now, Bud! *(But then he says gently)* You're all tired out, Bud. Just keep still. . . .

LIVING ALONE

by *Dr. Frank Payne*
and *Florence Brobeck*

A FEW years ago we dismissed the people who live alone as old maids or bachelors, and without much further fuss let it go at that. To-day their numbers have increased so that statistics from city bureaus, employment agencies, census reports, and other sources reveal that over five million women between the ages of twenty-four and fifty live alone. There is an even greater number of men.

Jane, who lives in the walk-up one-room-and-bath; George, who has a ship-shape kitchenette apartment; Anne, who revels in a penthouse and terrace; Byron, who lives at his university club; and Joyce, the school teacher who lives in a mountain village, help create this group and make it a disturbing social problem. Their numbers are so great in the cities that they have revolutionized real-estate values and architectural projects, causing old family apartments to come down and towering structures of one-room homes to replace them. The cell-like buildings house men and women in the white-collar professions, teachers, lawyers, doc-

tors, illustrators, social workers. They are the dwellers in a post-War world in which society has made them accept responsibility, forced them into the economic struggle, and left them to shift for themselves.

Let us look at these social orphans. What are some of the reasons for their aloneness?



Aunt Ella was a bride at seventeen; Ella, her niece, is a successful art director in a small advertising agency. Ella didn't marry when she was seventeen because the young men she knew were still in college. They were supported there by their parents or relatives. Wage-earning must begin after their graduation and, with the changed standards of living which now prevail, a man just out of college can't earn enough to get married. Ella herself went to school, then college, and then on to a job because there "just didn't seem to be any point of sitting around with the girls every afternoon, and besides the family needed the money." By the time her young men were ready for marriage she was established in business and didn't care to give it up. She now has an apartment in New York and marriage no longer seems a feasible thing.

Young men are not as keen for marriage as their fathers were. Sam returned from France with definite ideas about the evils of marriage. He recalled the spectacle of his mother, a strong woman absorbing and dominating a good-tempered, easy-going man. In his cousin's home he saw a lovely girl who set out to snare a man. After getting him she immediately slumped into mental and physical softness. He had observed for years the tyranny of in-laws and the economic slavery of marriage. So after finishing a post-War year at college he left for New York. "Jobs are better and I'll be free."

He found, like thousands of others, that a single man did not need marriage to enjoy a full life. Athletic clubs, social engagements, and the freedom and slack morals of many women who live alone gave him a full life with no obligations, no strings attached. He has followed this pattern of existence for twelve years, only to find a growing discontent and loneliness. But his antipathy toward marriage has now become a fixation. He does not look toward marriage as a possible solution of his loneliness. Approaching forty, he is slightly morbid; gin