

# Ashes of Desire

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cheeks drawing together, as if I were dying.

"And yet, I did not move from the spot. I don't know that you were aware of my profound agitation. I was trembling, and my eyes, upon you, were blind as if looking at the sun. Why, Ruth, did I remain thus, immobile and gray? And with an effort like an agony, prison within the silent tomb of my soul the command and the clamor? As far as I can read now, there were three reasons. They are small, and do me no credit; I give them to you out of sincerity.

"First of all was my ignorance. I ignored at that time the importance of the moment, the importance of the impulse. Two dead black worlds, cruising aimlessly the void, veer abruptly to the tug of huge desire. They meet, they burst into flame, a new and glorious sun, fecundator of immensities. Upon earth, two beings, aimless and vaguely sad, are suddenly whirled toward each other. It is the same phenomenon, Ruth, as breathlessly big, as profoundly important: a cosmic eddy has them. I did not know this. For, as we all are, as we all shall be long, I was still a slave; a slave of that philosophy which to two stars delirious for each other says "Stop!"

"My second reason is a personal perversity, consisting in this: an invincible attachment to the gray half-lights of Promise has in me, as corollary, an acute distrust of Fulfillments. Already, before dawn, I fear the truth of the sun.

"My third reason was my pride. A monstrous pride. For even as the impulse to seize you possessed my being, already, simultaneously, I was suffocating with the thought that I might be repulsed, that in my arms you might be rigid and cold. Right away, and very clearly, I saw that I could never bear this.

"THESE are my three reasons which do me no credit, except in the frankness with which I offer them to you and lay them pitilessly before my own eyes. The three are one, you can see. They are a shrinking from Life. They are a written name all I have of you, heavy, soddened man, I have of living only the outward and mechanical semblance, and of what might have been a stupendous spiritual adventure, only a tantalizing and obsessive questioning which at the present moment, with your name before me, and the vision of the Past before me, is akin to torture.

"And so, I would ask you the question: If I had yielded to my impulse; if, acting to the imperious and clam-

orous command of all that is deep and vibrant within me, I had that evening taken you in my arms, and placed my lips upon your merry lips, upon your sad eyes, and crushed, crushed you into my being, Ruth Anderson, what then would you have done? What would you have done? Would you have lain there in my arms pale, inert and sick till slowly, to the sense of hideous mistake, they parted and let you free? Or, holding you thus close, would I have felt—ah, far, sweet, muted note, herald of galloping yellow clarionings of joy—would I have felt, fluttering and hesitant, within my arms, against my flesh, the first, faint, exquisite stir of your answering passion?

"I implore your reply. For it is my suffering and my fate that I must see, that I must know. And from you alone can I obtain this knowledge and this vision."

HIS pen, as he ended, had become convulsive. It cried out with a microscopic and sputtering cry. It was still now, and he also was very still, his head low on the desk, pillowed in his hands.

When he stood up after a long immobility, his features had regained their calm. He re-read the letter carefully.

He read it once, and shook his head from side to side in a panic of doubt.

He read it again; a slight embarrassment seemed to possess him, face to face thus with what he had written. He read it a third time. When he was through, a rueful smile was upon his lips. Twice, hesitatingly, his right hand rose and touched lightly the bare spot set like a chip in the centre of his head.

He came to a decision now. His right hand, with a large and firm movement, came toward his breast; his left hand, with the same decisive precision, moved away; the written sheet, between, in the divergent grasp tore smoothly in two. He repeated the gesture. The two pieces became four, the four became eight. His fingers opened, and the white fragments, eddying from side to side as with a last reluctance, fluttered slowly into the basket at his feet. He looked down upon them there, and seemed to feel the need of further resolution. He opened a door, and into a long corridor called "Martha!"

There was a shuffling approach; in the frame of the door stood the fat, red-faced cook.

"Martha," he said, "in my basket there is some waste paper. Fling it into the furnace!"

## Why Women Do Not Sleep in Church

IT IS doubtful if one woman to a thousand men go to sleep in church, and people have long held an entirely wrong impression of this. It has been said that the men are a bit more stupid, that they do not pay enough attention to the sermon, or do not comprehend it sufficiently to retain their interest, and hence get sleepy. It has also been said that women are brighter, quicker to understand and have more self-control, and so do not lose interest and close their eyes in slumber while the minister is preaching.

But all this is quite wrong. A German professor has been making a study of the problem and he declares that men fall asleep in church because they do pay more attention to the sermon than do the women. Further, he declares the average woman does not begin to grasp the purport of the sermon, that she is far slower of understanding than man.

The man will watch the minister

every minute, he will concentrate all his mind upon the preacher and what he is saying, he will watch his every gesture and every motion of his lips and listen to every word until finally he drops off to sleep simply because he has watched so steadily, gazed so intently that he hypnotized himself.

If the woman does not grasp the meaning of the sermon so readily, if her mentality is not quite so keen and quick, one would think she would fall asleep. But the fact remains that she has plenty to interest her. A man cannot look about the church and be interested in John Jones' cravat or William Smith's vest, or Sam White's cuff buttons. He doesn't care anything about them, but a woman will sit quietly in church, she will hear what the minister is saying without giving much thought to it, but she will be interested in everything every other woman is wearing, and there is enough to keep her just moderately entertained and wide awake.

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