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The Blue Belch

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The Blue Belch . . .

. . . Earl Farrington Bmocloh

In any consideration of the contemporary short story, or in any mention of such greats as Steinbeck, Hemingway, and Faulkner, the name of Oscar Farrington Bmocloh must not be omitted. Through his stories are relatively scarce (he wrote only two in his life) they glow with the vitality and terse symbolism of the new Naturealistiromantic school of which he is the founder and only member (with the possible inclusion of Carl Bandooni who has contributed many fine works to the illustrated monthly "True Tales Of Teenage Cowgirl Romances". Eminent for his beauty of style, subtle irony, and immediate presence of scene, Mr. Bmocloh's greatest contribution to modern literature is his handling of point of view. The finest of all his stories is re-printed below.

Dave Holcomb

I didn't recognize him at first. He was standing at my elbow buying a pack of cigarettes, and I looked up casually and then returned to perusing my favorite volume of Freudian psychology. Suddenly, a sharp, sonorous chord sounded in my sensitive sub-conscious—and then it was all too clear, and the memories of this man fought their way tumultuously into my mind, one after another like luminous locomotives pulling coal cars; and the memories came piling, flying, bubbling into my conscious mind. I turned timidly back to the man. I said, "Say."

"Huh?"

"Excuse me . . ."

"Yeah?"

"But, isn't your name Id?" I asked him.

"Ed," he corrected. And his blue, too-blue eyes, like the plastic dome of the sky, burned defiantly into my own eyes—brown eyes like the brown, brown clods of wet clay at Frayway bay. I could tell he didn't recognize me. But why should he? . . .

* * * * *

It was a December; a black wet, dark, stormy, calm, miserable, sunny, cold, and snowy December, and the bums along the street spit into the gutters, and the spit went "splat" and spread into greenish

and yellowish rivers, tributaries, and streams on which I perceived phlegm barges floating, and brownish-blue tobacco schooners. It was then I saw Ed for the first and, until now, the only time. In a cocktail lounge. He, the center of attention . . . like a king . . . majestic purple . . . champagne-glass sceptre . . . young women sat around . . . listening, listening. They were smiling demurely like the sweet, pink, drunk young things they really were. And laughing. Laughter like the sound of bells. Ding Dong he he Ha Ha Boinng Dingle doining. And I could only look on—drunk. Drunk not with the cheap bock beer with the mauve mold islanding in it—the beer my environment forced me to drink, but drunk with abject envy. The great, gaunt Envy Bird buried its beak into my bosom. Peck, peck, peckpeck, peck. Spinning, scarlet, screaming jealousy shook my frame. (It was ten o'clock.)

No, Clarence, I told myself; no! No jealousy—ah, naughty lā. Control yourself! Is it your fault you're poor, destitute, and not wealthy? No. It's society. The variety of impiety in society has driven you here. Damn, damn, hell, oh blast it all to heck! You're as good as the next man. But—oh Lord—those happy, flashing, too-blue eyes, like the plastic dome of the sky, with crinkles of lightning-mirth at the corners. It was the eyes that affected me most. They flashed confidence. They showed me my littleness, my miniaturesqueness. Oh, damn my miniaturesqueness and my obscurity. Like a universal telegraph to all the world, Ed's eyes coruscated the overpowering symphony of his confidence and my own un-confidence: "I'm better than you. I'm happy, have money, am popular with the debutantes, my wife, and the prostitutes on Fifth avenue. I stand here sipping scintillating champagne—the proud paragon of man. Kneel down, you bastard; my name is Ed!"

And I felt baser and bluer and duskier and moodier than ever I had before—and my thoughts were dark, dirty, dank, dread and cobwebbed corners and the yellow-gray bloated bellies of dead fish, and I thought of that long sleep and of peace in the next land, and should it be hell, why, let it be so, and I thought of the laden longings of the man contemplating his self-styled journey to the land beyond this present life—beyond that chintz curtain of little life he had always lived. And, when my desire to live was at its lowest ebb, and when the corks of bottles were popping all about and calling me "Sop," and the head on my beer nodded in agreement, there suddenly happened something strange. At that table of gaiety and mirth, presided over by Ed, something happened which changed the entire course of my life. Precisely in the middle of an inspired discourse, with three pairs of dancing eyes focused lovingly upon him, at the height of the even-

ing's merrymaking, the light in his blue, blue eyes went dull, his huge frame quivered majestically—Profoundly, with solemn dignity, he belched. Ed belched! "Burrroomph," he belched; it was exactly ten-fifteen o'clock, a misty Decembr night. And then . . . liberation! For somehow I sensed that beneath that excellent epidermis of Ed's lay the COMMON physical desires and motives of all base mortals. Behind the eyes that burned blue, like the sky's plastic dome, lay a brain preyed on by the dictates of the human drives; and as I considered more and more that blue belch, my mind was washed wonderfully clean by a giant wave of sunshine, spray, and phosphorescent foam. Then, feeling as new and bright as a raindrop from a gilded sky, I squared my shoulders and strode out of the saloon and surged forward into the world to carve my niche in society's wall of employment. I became a psycholanalyst and have subsequently had the satisfaction of helping other morally depressed and mentally mortified fellow creatures.

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As Ed gazed at me there in the snack bar, while waiting for his pack of cigarettes, an inferior brand, with his blue eyes burning, I felt sorry for some strange, odd, unusual, queer, unique, inexplicable reason. He seemed to sense this, for slowly and silently he turned away, and the light in his blue, blue eyes went dim, and in ineffable agony he crept away, and as he went out through the panelled door, creeping away, an all but inaudible sound wafted back on wavering wings. It was a sorrowful, plaintive belch.