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The Voices

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The Voices . . .

. . . Mary Jean Lentsch

He went down, down—deep into the chasm. The shadows and memories followed him, tumbling over each other, falling down, down. He put out his hands, clutching at the mists which disappeared under his fingers. Sprawled deep in the chasm, he seemed to feel the bottom rise around and over him like a huge feather tick that got bigger and bigger until he couldn't breathe, couldn't see, couldn't hear. There was no light, no direction. He finally struggled and stumbled to his feet, tottering unsteadily. Think! where was he? He wasn't home. No, he couldn't be home. There was no feather tick like this to smother and confuse him at home. Home? He didn't have a home—did he? Think. He had to remember. No, Ira was dead now. He didn't have a home anymore. He couldn't live there anymore now that Ira was dead. Dead? How did Ira die? Water. It had something to do with water.

The feather tick was now wet—wet like water. Yes, it must have had something to do with water. Why couldn't he remember? The water was rising. It was up to his ankles, his knees, his thighs, his waist . . . his chin. He couldn't move. The water was like molasses, holding him back, but always rising higher until it was over his nose, his eyes. He held his eyes open if he couldn't see anyway. Was he blind? Maybe that was the reason that he couldn't see, but he didn't remember anything having happened to his eyes. He put his hands to them. They felt the same, except for the water or molasses or whatever it was. He wasn't breathing. He had to breathe. Had to get air. The well rope! Of course, there had to be a rope. All wells had to have ropes. He had to grasp the rope and lift himself out of the well. People drown in wells. He had to get out. Air at last! He wanted to cry out, but his tongue was thick and heavy, and he couldn't make a sound. It was a long way up. He would never get out. Was this the way Ira felt? Ira couldn't have known because he was dead. No, Ira couldn't have known. He was sure that Ira was dead before he ever got into the well.

It wasn't so dark anymore. He was right. He wasn't blind—not really blind. He could see. It was that there wasn't anything to see in a well. Here out in the street he could see. There were people. He must know some of them, but he couldn't make out their faces.

Why couldn't he see their faces? There was someone whom he knew. The newsboy. He was selling papers. Silly, what else would a newsboy be doing standing on the corner? He was holding something in his hand and saying something. A newspaper. Yes, a paper. He couldn't hear what he was saying. Why couldn't he hear what he was saying? He wasn't deaf—at least he didn't think that he was. He couldn't get close enough to see what the paper said. The sidewalk became soft and sticky and his feet were sinking into it. It was hard to move. One step, two steps. Only one step more. Then he could see the big black letters that he knew had to be on the top of the paper. He couldn't move anymore. Lean forward. Then he could see—read the letters, the words. The letters blurred and weaved on the paper, getting smaller and farther away from his eyes. He had to see. Ah, now he could just see the words. "DEED." Deed? No, "DEAD." ". . . DEAD . . . WELL." Yes, that was it. He could see the words clearly for an instant: "DEAD IN WELL." But who was dead? The old man, of course. He had forgotten for a moment again.

Everyone said that Ira was a nice old man, but they really didn't know. He knew. Ira had never liked him. Ira had made him pitch hay and haul up the water from the well. And besides Ira didn't need money. What would an old man do with all that money. It was so hard walking through all the bills on the ground. Much worse than the leaves piled deep in the park in the fall. They were fluttering down all around him. He was so exhausted. The money was heavy, and each bill hit him as it fell from the nowhere. He didn't know that there was this much money. No, Ira didn't have that much. It must be someone else's money, too.

Voices again. He had heard them before. Where were they coming from? He couldn't understand what they were saying. He just heard the voices. Did they know he was here? They must not find him. He had to hide. His ears hurt from straining so hard to hear. It was almost the same as trying to read those letters. He could see and yet he couldn't. He could hear, but he couldn't understand. They were talking about him. Why would they be here where he was hiding if they didn't know? Had they been in the room? At the well?

The voices. They were beating, pounding now. They were hitting Ira. Now he was hitting, too. He couldn't stop. He had to go on pounding and beating. He wanted to stop himself from swinging the ax handle which he held in his hands high over his head, and which he brought down heavily again and again upon the squirming mass at his feet that was screaming—drowning out the voices for a few seconds. Then the screaming stopped and he heard the voices—louder

and clearer now. Suddenly he bolted up and sat in the cheap bed with the perspiration running down his face and chest. He knew. The voices were pounding on the door. They were coming for him.

R. John Mc Keough

Spring

Comes tripping triumphant over the fallen snow
God knows what all;
Little elves with pails to spoon the golden sand,
And girls, breasts kissing the flying wind,
Astride the plunging satyr's dancing stirrups;
From the moon, lad, from the moon.
And the sun's bursting in easy fragments
Over a garden as wild as a world,
With flowers to be as anxious as unwritten poems;
And Pan's lute piping over the pregnant hills;
To a tune, lad, to a tune.
And Death catching in his scythe, the piped phrase
For a moment with capered legs, stands, sighs,
And moves on.

Ativismus

The delicate sound of falling paint
From ancient icons
Tinkles slowly through the drifting void,
Echoes sharply into the wish-world
Refracting thought, destroying Time:
Feeds Phoenix on Phoenix;
And the brain-womb gives birth
To idiot children, half-man, half-child.