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Mister Intellectual

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Mister Intellectual . . .

. . . John T. Burns

"Three sailors, three drinks, three inevitable more. Three sailors, their treasure, their last night ashore."

The bar-keep thought and spoke in rhymes: a whim of his. It helped business; he was individualized by his poetry. The seamen who frequented his place called him "the intellectual." Though they said it in a joking way, he began to believe them. He felt that he was above his position; he deserved more. He read poetry, spoke poetry, thought poetry; no man so cultured as himself should waste his life in a water-front dive.

The sailors shouted for rum. The sailors drank too much rum. So did he. But he could hold his rum.

"Three sailors, three drinks, three inevitable more. Two bottles were empty, then three, now four." His thoughts continued as he brought them the liquor, slowly, suddenly.

"Come, Mr. Intellectual," said one, "How shall we divide our bounty? Devise us a plan."

A proposition was forming in the poet's mind. Why should ignorant sailors have such wealth, when he, an intellectual, must be left in want? Why not devise a plan for them, a gamble that he alone could win? "Your treasure has value; it's easy to see, but not quite enough to satisfy three. Drink hardy, my lads, and before night is through, I'll have worked out a scheme that will surely suit you." Saying this, he walked away.

His mind filled with cunning, the bar-keep returned to his station. When the place was closed, when the sailors were drunk, then he would make his proposition.

"All sailors are gamblers; so they must be too. I've one sure-fire way; I know what I'll do." His logic was good, but he noticed his poetry wasn't up to par. "Confound the poetry," he thought. But he found himself drifting back to it from habit. "An adventurous gamble will tempt them I'll bet. They can all be eliminated by Russian Roulette."

Some customers came in, breaking his train of thought. He served them and returned to his stool behind the bar.

Russian Roulette: that was it. There was no other way. He would

load the gun, load it so none could win and then, the treasure would be his.

As fortune would have it, there were few patrons that night. Everything was going smoothly. He locked the door and pulled down the shade at two o'clock, just as the constable passed by. The officer waved and he returned the gesture. The sailors were still drinking and by this time were very drunk. He inserted four cartridges in his revolver. "The sailors drink to find their pleasure; I get them drunk and take their treasure." He smiled at this thought.

"What's your plan now, Mr. Intellectual?" shouted the oldest of the three.

Their eyes were blurry and one of them was slumped over the table, half asleep. The others were weaving considerably, and their speech was slurred.

"Perfect!" thought the host. Then he began to form his plans. "Gentlemen, I have formed a plan that might shake the nerve of a lesser man. Tell me yourselves; I wonder yet; would you indulge in a game of Russian Roulette?"

Two men sat straight, though their eyes were still blurred. The third remained asleep. For a moment there was silence, then the older man said, "You dare challenge our nerve, you old hoot? By all that's holy, we will." The expression of the second man remained blank. The third still slept.

"To eliminate two, I believe was my task. Two shells in the cylinder, then I must mask."

He broke the revolver so that none could see; then he extracted two shells from his pocket and slipped them in place, closed the piece and spun the cylinder. The third man still slept.

"He will go first," said one of the two, motioning to the sleeping man. "You, poet, will pull the trigger and help our incapacitated friend." The second sailor nodded his approval.

The bar-keep had not thought of this, but what must be done, must be done. "To the man with the break goes—" He could think of no rhyme and this somehow rattled him, but to blot out the error, he quickly pulled the trigger. The explosion was deafening. The hole seemed gigantic and ugly. The older man sat motionless; then bade the other to try his luck.

"Too late to back out now," thought the host as he saw the second man raise the gun. "He looks as if he were hypnotized," he said half aloud, but no one seemed to notice. But he noticed the poetry was gone. Again he said, "Confound the poetry!" But his words were covered by the explosion.

The older man was still expressionless. He said, "I suppose I must live up to my part in the bargain, even though they are dead and the shells are used up."

The bar-keep was suddenly taken by fright. "Enough of the whole business," he said, "Give me the gun."

But the third man would have none of it. "I made a bargain," he said, "and, by God, I'll keep it." A third explosion and he died with this oath on his lips, but the expression on his face was peaceful.

"Death won the game on an evening so still—" he started, but again he was at a loss for the rhyme. "How can a poet live without poetry? I'll never have peace without poetry. And they look so peaceful."

He raised the gun and firmly pressed it to his temple.

Night City . . .

. . . Margaret Perry

Her eyes are never closed;
They look down aimless alleys
Where darkness is not always shaded,
But dark with crass desires.
Staggering bodies with leadened feet
Try running from their own existence,
And cry at life's huge darkened mirror.

This is My city—My own,
Of glittering lights—blinking, glaring,
And of soundless sounds and
Sounding sounds. Where whorish
Screams pierce through the night
And flesh filled matter—happily—
Jockey to an unset rhythm,
Reeling, rolling—subdued, still.