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The Eternal Quadrilateral

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feasible economic system not because it furthers the equality of all men, but only because it increases our chances of rising in the social strata. Man's abilities are misdirected, says Shaw. Instead of striving for instruments of peace, we concentrate all our efforts and money into the production of potent weapons of death.

Again quoting from Man and Superman: “The sympathies of the world are all with misery, with poverty, with starvation of the body and heart. I call on it to sympathize with joy, with love, with happiness, with beauty.” These are the words of the devil who, after all, speaks from a point of authority. And why should our sympathies lie in the first direction? Why should we not look to joy, happiness, love and beauty? Are not these the things which make life worth living?

THE ETERNAL QUADRILATERAL

U. Harold Males

I hadn't wanted to come. I had made up my mind that this was one weekend that I wasn't going to spend in an alcoholic stupor. These drunken weekend parties were getting to be a habit.

I was settled down with a good book when the phone rang. Immediately I regretted not having taken the receiver off the hook.

“Hello darling. What are you doing?” Marge Outerbridge. It was impossible not to recognize that squeaky voice.

“Reading.”

“What?”

“A book.”

“Oh, you're so clever, darling. What's the title?”

“War and Peace.”

“My God. Are you going highbrow on me?”

“What did you call up for, Marge?” As if I didn’t know.

“We're having a little party.” My guess was right.

“How little is little?”

“Just a few friends, darling. Get dressed and come on over. What the hell you wanna waste your time reading for?”

“Forget it Marge. I feel like staying sober this weekend. It'll be a novelty.”

“Don't try to high-hat me you crum,” she screeched. “You lush it up as much as any of us. Now, get the hell out here or I'll see to it that you never get another contract.”

“Since you put it that way, I'll be right out.”

“That's better. Be seeing you darling.”

That's the trouble with earning an honest living; people who don't have to earn one can foul you up with hardly any effort at all.

I designed and built expensive sailing craft in a small boat yard.
People like Marge Outerbridge furnished most of my business. I went where the business was and since I knew which side my bread was buttered on, I did as I was told.

I dressed and drove out to the Outerbridge estate. The place was only slightly smaller than Yellowstone National Park. Margie’s dear hubby probably had callouses from clipping coupons to support this layout. My Chevy looked out of place among all the foreign cars. A few friends... she had half the damned summer colony at the party.

I went inside and found Marge. She only vaguely remembered calling me, “But as long as you’re here, you might as well get drunk like the rest of us. And if you’re a good boy, I might introduce you to some people who are thinking of buying a boat.” She smiled sweetly and turned away.

I was boiling. I moved over to the bar and had a couple of quick ones. These were folowed by a couple more, and then a couple more. After that, the party wasn’t so hard to take. I realized, between drinks, that I was getting drunk. My head ached and the perfume-filled room shimmered before my eyes. I put down my drink and went out onto the terrace, closing the door behind me.

I breathed heavily, grateful for the cool air that held back my dizziness. Lord, I hadn’t intended to drink that much. I’d better pace myself if I expected to finish this party on my feet.

The french doors behind me opened. A laughing couple came out, followed by a wave of noise. They embraced then noticing me watching them, went back inside. Privacy seemed like a fine idea to me. I lifted myself over the terrace rail and dropped to the lawn. I waited until my head had cleared again, then groped my way to the rear of the house. I stumbled down a slight slope until I was out of sight of the house and sat down with my back against a tree.

My hand shook as I extracted a cigarette from my case. There was no doubt about it. I was drunk as a coot. Before I could light it, a woman spoke behind me.

“Ah, there you are Mr. Bernhardt.”

I looked around as fast as my head would permit. There stood a woman in a white evening gown. I strained my eyes to identify her, but between my drunken state and the moonless night, her face remained a blur.

“Do you mind if I keep you company?”

“Not at all.” Dammit her voice was familiar.

“Thank you.” She sat down about ten feet from me. She was quiet for a few seconds. Then, in a quiet voice she spoke.

“I’m going to tell you a story, Mr. Bernhardt. It’s a short one. I’m a married woman. Until tonight, I was also a happily married woman. Tonight, I overheard a drunken girl tell her friend that my husband has been having an affair with your wife for over a year. I thought it was ridiculous, but I looked for him to ask him about it. I found him, Mr. Bernhardt. I found him with your wife. They seemed to be enjoying themselves.” Her voice became strained. “I
am going to pay him back.”

She stood up and fiddled with the fastenings of her gown. It slid to the ground. The rest soon followed.

When we had finished and were dressed again, I realized that I still didn’t know who she was. Then she began to cry softly.

“This is the first time I have committed adultery, Mr. Bernhardt. May I please have a cigarette?”

“Of course.” At last I’d find out who she was. I lit her cigarette. Well I’ll be damned, Mary Conant.

She inhaled deeply and between sobs asked, “Now what have you to say for yourself, Mr. Bernhardt?”

I lit my own cigarette. As the lighter illuminated my face, her features registered shock.

“All I’ve got to say for myself is that my name is Swenson, not Bernhardt and what’s more I’m a bachelor. But please don’t think that I don’t appreciate what you’ve done for me.”

I left her there crying bitterly and went back into the party. I had to find Lillie Bernhardt. I’d been having an affair with her myself for almost a year and just now I find out about Bill Conant. What timing on Lillie’s part! He must have been going just as I was coming. I don’t mind being one side of a triangle, but being the fourth side of a square makes things a little too complicated for my taste.

CONTRAST

The whitecap crests spit bubbling foam.
Squalls thrust the sloop. The air is full
Of wind-whipped, prickly, salty spray.
The ocean swells to meet the hull,

And gulls swoop, screeching, as the flaws
Impel them sideways, off their course.
And lashing rope, and thrashing sail
Reveal the violence of its force.

Wind turns to breeze; then breeze is stilled.
The orange sunset falls below
A smooth horizon. Mirrored, are
Dusk-softened clouds and liquid glow.

And silent sails lie slack, and there
Is not a fall and not a rise
Of quiet sea. The boat submits
Its static sculpture to the skies.

Joan S. Popke