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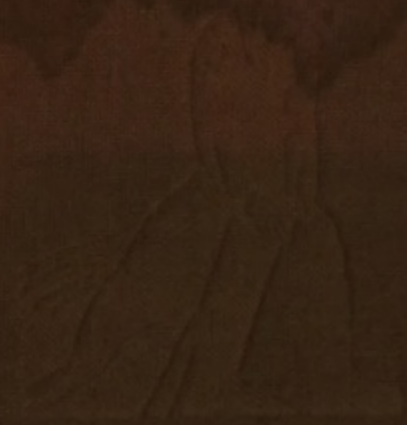

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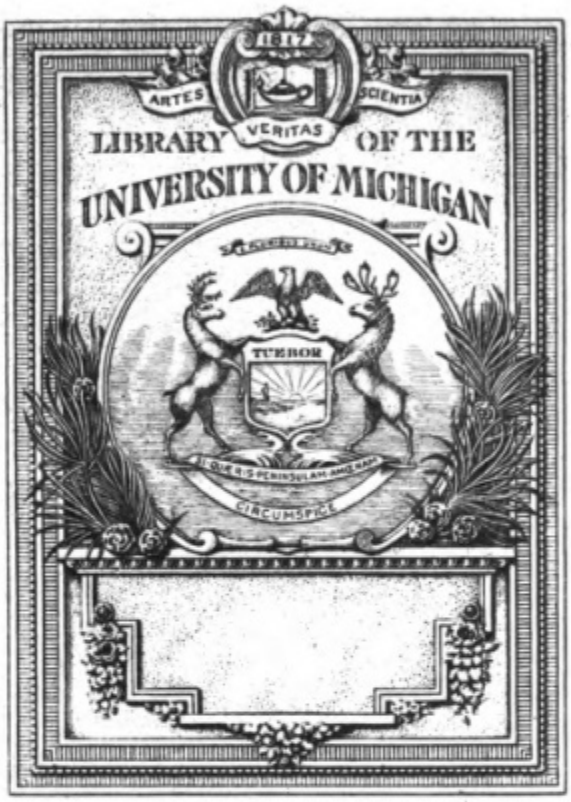

BOOKSHOP
50 E. 13th
New York

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WATERS E. TURPIN

O CANAAN!

A NOVEL

BOOKSHOP
50 E. 13th St.
New York, N. Y.

Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.
NEW YORK
1939

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FIRST EDITION

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on the dot . . . Blue Comet up from the delta. Joe locked the door and swung up the road at a gait which testified that, for all his size, he had no great amount of fatty growth beneath his patched blue overalls and sleeveless shirt. His was the peasant's trudge, one that for the majority of his forty years had followed unhurried mules in the bottom lands. As he walked his corded arms crooked slightly forward from their power-sloped shoulders, and his fingers curved in a habitual posture. His was a figure that somehow seemed to belong here on this flat, dusty land—as if he had sprung from the very soil upon which he trod.

"Hey, Joe! Whar you bound?"

A prodigious tuft of hair shooting perpendicularly from the left side of an unswerving part in his small head, a short, spare man grinned at Joe from the doorway of what once had been a one-room shanty resembling the others along the road. A scrawled sign leaning beneath its one paneless window proclaimed to all and sundry that within one could procure a shave and haircut for fifteen cents.

"Hullo, Sam," answered Joe. "On my way to the depot—ain't nothin' else to do."

Sam speedily locked his door and joined Joe.

"Ain't *gonna* be nothin' mo' to do in *this* man's town, buddy!" he rejoined.

"Yeah . . . that's what I bin thinkin' fo' the last two weeks since they lynched 'at boy," said Joe disconsolately. "Look-it them shacks!"

"You know whar they's went?" asked Sam. "I'll tell you: they's went up to Jackson, jes' sho's my name's Sam Cum-mins!"

"Yeah, I know," said Joe. "That labor agent, he come through right after they raised all that hell. Told ever'body they's jobs an' freedom aplenty up in Chicago. Said his company was runnin' special trains from Jackson fo' 'em ef they's there Sat'dy night. They bin leavin' same's skeeters

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"Now that's sho' nuf nice," said Joe. "We's goin' to Chicago. Where you bound?"

"Same place," answered Maggie, very pleased now that she was among "home folks." "My man he went out an' got hisself shot up by a woman 'bout a month ago—serve him right fo' his two-timin' ways—so I'm a-goin' North an' start all over agin. Sold out my eat shop an' ever'thing—figgers on startin' another one soon's I gits to Chicago. Folks got to eat, you know!"

"I'm gone do 'bout the same thing," said Joe, and expanded. "I figgers I kin git started up there in a sto'—ought to make *real* money wid prices like they is——"

"Now you's talkin'!" agreed Maggie. "Ef I'd-a had a man like you——"

"Who's that woman?" Christine had jerked up suddenly out of her sleep. "If you'd-a had a man like who?" she demanded, her nose rearing.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute, honey!" chuckled Joe. He hastened to introduce them.

"How's you?" Maggie smiled uncertainly. "My, but you gots nice chilluns! . . . Jes' like you, this gal o' yourn—an' that purty-haired boy there, too."

Christine's face lost its hostility, for it pleased her vanity to have the looks of her children praised.

As the two lapsed into feminine conversation Joe left his seat to wander through the littered aisles that smelled of stale food, sweating bodies and the fortifying liquors which some of the migrants had brought with them. He met similar sights in each of the fetid coaches: here a raucous huddle of drunken city loafers; there a loud-mouthed group of women whose rouge, perfume and postures manifested their means of livelihood; yonder a sober parson hemmed about by his flock. But dominating all, like symbols of the strata to which they belonged, were the easily identified farm laborers, brawny stevedores and dock hands, some

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Lusty, virile, and boisterous city . . . city of the high, the low, the merchant prince and the consuming pauper . . . of the polyglot racial spawns spewed from all the quarters of the globe . . . Great pioneer city, sprung from the hut of Du Sable: nor Northern rigors of climate, nor disaster of fire could defeat you! You bared your brawn to the elements and roared defiance! From ashes you reared yourself to splendor! You dispatched your lake tramps, laden with commerce . . . you gathered the hogs and beeves from the prairies and Western plains and cast them with sinews of steel into the world's hungry maw. . . . You mingled your leaping heartthrobs with the economic pulse international and established your own pumping stations. . . . You stretched forth your arms in welcome and embraced, with a huge belly laughter, the polyglot racial spawns spewed from all the globe's quarters. . . . You gave them each a portion of your broad bosom to suckle as you drew strength from your commerce, waxed gigantic, and sprawled around great Michigan, monarch of land-locked waters. . . . Great Canaan, ugliest where you are ugly . . . altogether beautiful among ten thousand, where you are beautiful . . . O Canaan . . . Titan of the prairies!

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warmly. "Come on, Sol—you an' Lem git the rest o' them bags. Connie, you take that bundle an' git hold o' Junior's hand. Hey there, Sam, you an' Maymie——"

The little barber was standing bewildered in the aisle. Behind him his wife seemed to cower like a fat child in fright. Her mulatto features of infantile snubness were flushed, while her double chin shook with excitement. At Joe's boom, however, the pair moved forward with their baggage expectantly.

"Whar you gwine?" whispered Sam.

"Come on wid me," said Joe.

Out on the platform some thirty men, women and children were huddled. When they saw Joe they bore down upon him in a body.

"What we gone do now, Mistah Joe?"

"Whar we gwine go?"

"I sho' is hongry——"

"Mammy here ain't feelin' a bit good——"

"Kinda wish I was back home——"

They swamped him, but Joe rose to the occasion.

"Come on, all o' you, follow me!"

And like the remnant of an army, with restored confidence in its leader, they fell in step behind him. That he didn't know where he was taking them didn't disturb Joe in the least. His head was up, a light was in his eyes, and his step seemed to lose some of its peasant's trudge. Maggie threw him more than one admiring smile as she moved along at his side.

2

"Whew! Man, I ain't never walk so much in my bo'n days!"

With his toes pointed ceilingward, Joe slumped on the worn cot. Night had come. The rumble of streetcars and the clatter of other vehicles in the street below assailed the

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Families bin up here a long time. Mostly Pullman po'ters an' folks wid hifalutin eddication. They don't mix wid us over here—don't even want set in same pew wid you——"

"Like some folks down home, eh?" growled Joe. "I'll show 'em!"

"What you aimin' to do?" asked Jethro.

Joe told him briefly, and added: "Puttin' that oldest boy an' gal to work, an' use Lem in the sto' 'cause he cripple."

"I kin git them young'uns jobs in the stockyards wid me —comp'ny needs plenty 'cause they shorthanded now."

"That's right nice o' you, now," said Joe, "an' I ain't fo'gittin' it!" He yawned. "Reckon I'll git to bed. Ef any mo' folks from home come round, jes' say I ain't here. Look like they takes me fo' they pappy! Ef some of 'em don't git mo' backbone, they ain't gonna make it!"

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part of the city for generations. The Carters' record was a chronicle of success. Great-grandfather Carter had been a "free" mulatto of old Charleston and during the Reconstruction had fled his headwaitership in a famous hostelry which he had made nationally famous because of his phenomenal memory for names and faces. He had settled in what had ultimately become the Loop, and lived to see his son take over a prosperous catering business which his own industry had built. The present head of the family, Dan senior, had taken advantage of his ability to be white or colored at will and turned barrister, in which role he had been no mean player. If his real-estate holdings were an indication of the man's astuteness, he most certainly had done well by himself. And now young Dan was following brilliantly in the trail blazed by his father. Ere long, the latter predicted, his boy, whose record at the university's law school was enviable, would be headed for the legislature. And the old man would finger the fine white mustache which he knew gave him the appearance of a Solon. And his plump, sealskin-brown partridge of a wife, too, would preen her yellowish-white hair with fat hands that long since had lost traces of the laundry she had done before snatching the prize marital "catch" of the nineties from under the very noses of her more socially fortunate rivals. Now her dinners, luncheons and suppers were always listed conspicuously in all the weeklies. Also she doted on their daughter, though teen-age Mae, carrying her social diadem with a grace in spite of her tartaric attitude, often stated her antipathy for the Carter tradition.

"Make yourselves right at home," she told Connie and Lem the Sunday during the Christmas holidays when they had finally accepted Dan's invitation to call.

Connie and Lem had stared at the display of well-being in the Carter living room. Everything exemplified a taste which had developed through years: the old furniture, the not too brilliantly bulbed tree with its heaps of presents

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fumbled without success through his pockets. "Say, Mick, you got any o' them tickets for the game Saturday?"

"Sure!" Mick eagerly produced a pack.

"Here." Milburn extended two to Joe. "They're a buck apiece—police and firemen's benefit. Now you get that woman out o' here before Judge Nicolli gets in here. If that little Italian sees her eye he'll give that guy plenty time! He's a tough Oscar on wife beaters. Maybe I can get Thomas a D.W.P."

Joe thanked him again and hurried Sallie out of the courtroom.

"He's a good egg," said Mick.

"Yeah, but I still says we gonna have trouble!"

"Aw, it 'll turn out all right. You gotta give these people time to get themselves together. Besides, Chicago's a great city, Jim. Nothing's ever gonna lick it!"

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