

### MARIA

Maria is the name of a girl. She is an ordinary girl, yet a particular type of ordinary girl. You will find her type in any city. Maria is a settler in the city. She embraced the city with the intense excitement of first love. Why did she come to the city? Was it to escape the indignity of being observed by her neighbors? Perhaps. At least the city was her goal.

It was Friday evening and I was relaxing after a tedious day in the office. The phone was ringing. Somebody answered. "It's for you, Bill." I picked up the receiver. "Hello! Jack, how are you?"

We talked for a few minutes. Jack invited me down to his place for the evening. Jack was an old chum of mine dating back to our first schools days. We lived next door to each other then.

It was a two hour tram-ride to Jack's on a Friday evening. The streets would be packed with commuters leaving the city for their homes in the suburbs; and people going down to shop or seek entertainment would greatly swell the lists. So I decided to go prepared. I called in at the corner drugstore and purchased a pack of cigarettes and a pocket novel. The novel was **The Sun Also Rises** by Hemingway. I bought a pocket novel because I enjoy reading on a tram. It averts my attention from the hustle and bustle of passengers getting on and off, thereby assuring me of a more peaceful ride.

Two hours later I arrived at my stop. Now, let's see, the corner of St. Mark and Tupper. That's about five blocks away and no tram runs in that direction. I decided I would have my supper first and then go to Jack's.

Supper would be finished there and I was hungry. Across the street was the Diana Restaurant. I walked in and sat down at a table. A waitress in a white uniform with green trimmings came over to my table.

An order of Macaroni with cheese sauce, please," I said.

"Wine or liquor?"

Coffee please."

All this she carefully tabulated in a cashier book.

"The Royals won today," she said while thoughtfully regarding her cashier book.

"Oh!"

"Yes; three to nothing."

I looked up. She was standing there beside me still looking at her cashier book and with a smile on her pretty countenance.

"Why! Maria!"

"I thought for a minute you were not going to speak to me," she said coyly.

"I am sorry I failed to recognize you at first."

She took the order and went to get it filled. She came back a few minutes later and placed it on the table in front of me.

"Ever go to Western Hall?"

I admitted that I had not.

"I am going tonight."

"Good" I exclaimed, "I'll see you there."

I left and proceeded to Jack's. I rang the door bell and Jack answered.

"Good evening, Jack."

"Good evening; come in."

We talked for a while, Jack about his work and I about mine. About people we knew, their troubles and fortunes. Finally I asked.

"Jack do you know Maria is in town?"

"Yes," said Jack rather calmly.

"I met her this evening at the Diana, she's working there. Imagine Maria working as a waitress."

Maria used to live across the street from Jack and me. I could picture her as the neatly dressed little girl who wore pigtails. Or as the gay teenager who loved parties and dances and despised homework. She was full of activity then, a vivid personality, the idol of every young man's heart, and she handled them with finesse. She was a past master at the art of coquetry. To be admired she specifi- cally desired. To be envied by other members of the fairer sex thrilled her. She was haughty, but possessed an elegant haughtiness.

Jack had made an attempt to win her heart but had failed. The question I had asked hurt him. He still admired Maria, even though she had spurned him. The minute a young man showed interest in Maria, he was cut adrift. On the other hand, it troubled Maria that a young man should show indifference toward her charms, and she would then redouble her efforts to attract his attention.



"Jack, I promised Maria I would see her at the dance tonight."

Jack did not answer.

"Let's go to it for awhile."

Jack answered that he would rather not as he did not feel up to it tonight, but said he would drive me down to the hall.

Western Hall was one of the few places in the city where that hill-billy type of rustic culture was able to exhibit itself unmolested. Its patrons came principally from the rural districts of our great nation and shared in common a culture that bound them together with an undeniable relationship.

Sounds of hill-billy music and the shuffling of feet were heard as we approached the door.

Jack left for home and I went in.

The scene was exotic. A rural community hall uprooted from its natural environment and set down in the heart of a great city. But it was revolting against its new environment and unable to overcome its enemy; it was degenerating. Elements foreign to it had crept in. Its purity was lost, its former spirit partially lost. Its atmosphere was rather humid and sultry. The crowd possessed the element of peculiarity. There was evidence that most of the young men present were unduly under the influence of alcohol. They showed it in their every movement and by their general behaviour. To the unobservant, it was a merry company; to the observant a false mirth showed itself.

The scene in totality pictured a group of people uprooted from their native environment and trying desperately to regain it. They were either unwilling or unable to accept the new but at the same time not quite able to retain the old.

The orchestra began to play. The men went scurrying across the hall to grab their partners for the dance. A young man approached Maria. She refused, (offering some excuse, I presume) leaving the young man standing there in front of her in a state of bewilderment. I walked over to her.

"May I have the honor of this dance, please," emphasizing the words, "honor" and "please". The result was proportionate. She arose from her seat and smiled. I gave her a prospective glance. So this is the girl who used to be the bell of the ball; she looked a far cry from one tonight.

"How do you like the city?"

"Fair enough," she answered.



I asked her a few more questions but it was plain enough that she was not in a talking mood, so I turned my attention from conversation to dancing.

Maria was a good dancer.

After the orchestra finished the piece they were playing I took her over to her seat.

"Will you reserve the last waltz for me?" I asked inquiringly.

"Yes, Bill, I will."

In the interlude I bided my time in retrospection. Finally the orchestra leader announced, "The last waltz."

I made my way through the throng to Maria.

"Maria, may I - - ?"

We began waltzing. I made no effort to start a conversation. Finally she spoke.

"Why do I come here?" she exclaimed, "I never enjoy myself."

"Is there some other place you prefer?"

"Let's go to a club Bill."

I had talked myself into it. So, this was her angle, and I had fallen hook, line and sinker. We walked out into the night. The air felt so refreshing, so invigorating compared with the atmosphere of the dance hall.

"Do you go dancing often?" I inquired.

"No, not very often; I generally find it very boring."

We walked down the street with an air of ease and liberty, befriending no one, exalted by the feeling that all others were irrelevantly distant and quite unconcerned about our lives. Why! Had they not their own affairs to manage? It seemed so logical. Walk down any avenue in a city and see how wonderfully the city blends the gift of privacy with the excitement of participation.

"Did you ever go to the Copo Cobana?"

I admitted that I had been there a few times.

"Come on," she exclaimed rather nervously, "We can make it in time for the floor show."

It was evident that she was being besieged by that rascal named Desire. Desire for what? That's easy to answer—pleasure. It made her roam aimlessly from one place to another. I could see that she was searching, searching, —from one pleasure to another, but —

"I would rather not," I answered dryly.

She became very sullen and moody. What choice did she have? Go home? No, that would be no good. She had gone home a thousand times and each successive time it was as bare and as bleak as the time before. I experienced



a sudden change of heart. I was beginning to pity her. "All right I'll go."

Her spirits rose again, her vitality gushed forth anew, a sort of rejuvenance occurred within her.

Night clubs, cafes, Mexican sombreros, rhumbas, martinis and dancing girls to soothe the troubled souls of a degenerate people. Soothing? Perhaps, but, a true detersion — No.

A large neon sign which kept flickering on and off announcing in bright colors, Copo Cobana, showed us that we had arrived at our destination.

She stopped, hesitated for a moment and then said.

"Shall we go in?"

I hardly distrusted her intention.

An ever eminent doorman, in full regalia, stood guard beside the canopy which led to the entrance. He showed us the way in. Inside the door was a hallway which led up via a gentle ascending stairway to the interior of the clubroom. The floor and stairs were carpeted with velvet, and walls reflected images like a mirror. Impressive? Indeed. Such exclusiveness, such luxury, a passion seizes the mind, one more step to happiness, maybe it is just beyond that door.

How stately is the image! Look! The walls reflect the image of a goddess. Very intoxicating; commerce knows the answer - self-esteem. Inside the club, the interior was decorated in a luxurious fashion. Indirect lighting, coloring, uniqueness all contributed a peculiar something that added up to sensational.

We were obsequiously escorted to our table.

"What will it be, Sir?"

"Champagne, double order."

As soon as we entered the club, her demeanor altered. She now wore the mien of a debonnaire.

"Oh! Isn't this all so terribly exciting." Accentuating and gesticulating properly.

Exciting? Maybe she meant hopeful.

We drank and I reordered. The orchestra announced the commencement of the floor show. The curtains parted and a pretty girl came on the stage. She paused for a moment, flashed a coy smile at her audience, then, began her performance. She was an accomplished professional dancer. She held her audience spell-bound. I looked across the table at Maria. She seemed transfixed by the show on the stage. On her face was a smile of contentment. When the act was over the people applauded, Maria did too.

"Maria," I inquired, "do you always applaud performers?"



She was startled by this statement. The spell was broken and she was irritated. She could not control her emotions. "You - - you - - the trouble with you Bill is that you have no sense of values."

She was serious, dead serious.

"Most certainly I applaud actors, I like acting, I enjoy life. You take life for granted, but I don't," she exclaimed. "I know how to live and I intend to get as much out of life as I possibly can. Nothing is going to stop me. Take my sister, for example. She fell in love, got married and is now tied down with a child and husband to slave for. Do you think she is happy? I bet she wishes right now that she could be here enjoying herself. Don't you think I'm right?"

She looked at me with searching eyes. That finely featured face, an Aphrodite in pretty clothes, destined for a life of torture. We watched the remaining acts of the floor show. The magician, the singer and the rest of them.

She had partially regained her composure but something was annoying her. The final act was in progress. She sat there dreamingly watching the performance but was oblivious to what the act was about. She was thinking.

She reached across the table and held my hands in hers.

"Bill," she whispered.

I smiled.

Her hands began to tremble. She became pensive and her face flushed. "Maybe I was wrong," she murmured, "But, no, I can't be."

She began to cry but checked herself and forced a smile. She was brave. She stared away into the distance.

"Men are such pigs," she said calmly.

I was stunned at the statement. Moments later I regained my wits and answered.

"Yes," I said, "some are."

She was somewhat comforted by this answer. From this moment onward she began to place her confidence in my honesty. The innate need to confine one's secrets and desires to another person had been smothered in Maria's case. Her insincerity and vanity led her to believe that these, (insincerity and vanity), were common qualities of human nature. So she trusted nobody.

I looked at my watch. Two-thirty.

"We'd better go, Maria."

I hailed a taxi and we got in. She snuggled up close laying her head on my shoulder.

"I have been so very lonely."

But Maria, remember back home, you had so many friends, so many people who thought the world of you. You scorned them all. Yes, they were a common lot, stupid or old-fashioned. You did not care for their friendship, you merely tolerated them, exploited them. These things flashed through my mind as we rode home to her apartment. Yes, Maria the charming goddess with the world to gain. Now, Maria, a weak creature in an adverse world.

She had desired great things, but desire was sad to her. I took her to the door.

"Maria, let's go to a movie tomorrow night!"

"Hmm—no, I think I'll go to the Chez Paris tomorrow night?"

"But, Maria you - - -."

I knew it was no use to say anything more.

"Are you going to kiss me goodnight?" she asked teasingly. Afterwards, she said, "you'll come to see me some other time won't you?"

"Sure Maria I will."

Now I was being insincere.

She walked up to the door, turned around, smiled, waved and went in.

—RALPH GAUDET '55.

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"Nor does this work (of education) interfere in the least with the regulations of the State, because the Church in her motherly prudence is not unwilling that her schools and institutions for the education of the laity be in keeping with the legitimate requirements of civil authority."

—Pope Pius XI "Christian Education of Youth."