

volunteers in the big book which I used to read beside the workbench; I thought of the battleship "Maine" that floated over my bed in the little room with the iron-barred window, and of Admiral Dewey and of Schley and Sampson; I thought of the trip to the Navy Yard which I never made because on the way my father suddenly remembered that we had to call on the doctor that afternoon and when I left the doctor's office I didn't have any more tonsils nor any more faith in human beings. . . . We had hardly finished when the bell rang and it was my wife coming home from the slaughterhouse. I was still buttoning my fly as I went through the hall to open the gate. She was as white as flour. She looked as though she'd never be able to go through another one. We put her to bed and then we gathered up the dominoes and put the tablecloth back on the table. Just the other night in a *bistro*, as I was going to the toilet, I happened to pass two old fellows playing dominoes. I had to stop a moment and pick up a domino. The feeling of it immediately brought back the battleships, the clatter they made when they fell on the floor. And with the battleships my lost tonsils and my faith in human beings gone. So that every time I walked over the Brooklyn Bridge and looked down toward the Navy Yard I felt as though my guts were dropping out. Way up there, suspended between the two shores, I felt always as though I were hanging over a void; up there everything that had ever happened to me seemed unreal, and worse than unreal—*unnecessary*. Instead of joining me to life, to men, to the activity of men, the bridge seemed to break all connections. If I walked toward the one shore or the other it made no difference: either way was hell. Somchow I had managed to sever my connection with the world that human hands and human minds were creating. Perhaps my grandfather was right, perhaps I was spoiled in the bud by the books I read. But it is ages since books have claimed me. For a long time now I have practically ceased to read. But the taint is still there. Now people are books to me.

I read them from cover to cover and toss them aside. I devour them, one after the other. And the more I read, the more insatiable I become. There is no limit to it. There could be no end, and there was none, until inside me a bridge began to form which united me again with the current of life from which as a child I had been separated.

A terrible sense of desolation. It hung over me for years. If I were to believe in the stars I should have to believe that I was completely under the reign of Saturn. Everything that happened to me happened too late to mean much to me. It was even so with my birth. Slated for Christmas I was born a half hour too late. It always seemed to me that I was meant to be the sort of individual that one is destined to be by virtue of being born on the 25th day of December. Admiral Dewey was born on that day and so was Jesus Christ . . . perhaps Krishnamurti too, for all I know. Anyway that's the sort of guy I was intended to be. But due to the fact that my mother had a clutching womb, that she held me in her grip like an octopus, I came out under another configuration—with a bad setup in other words. They say—the astrologers, I mean—that it will get better and better for me as I go on; the future, in fact, is supposed to be quite glorious. But what do I care about the future? It would have been better if my mother had tripped on the stairs the morning of the 25th of December and broken her neck: that would have given me a fair start! When I try to think, therefore, of where the break occurred I keep putting it back further and further, until there is no other way of accounting for it than by the retarded hour of birth. Even my mother, with her caustic tongue, seemed to understand it somewhat. "Always dragging behind, like a cow's tail"—that's how she characterized me. But is it my fault that she held me locked inside her until the hour had passed? Destiny had prepared me to be such and such a person; the stars were in the right conjunction and I was right with the stars and kicking

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love nor hate, but to enjoy. And this joy of living, because it is unnaturally acquired, is a poison which eventually vitiates the whole world. Whatever is created beyond the normal limits of human suffering, acts as a boomerang and brings about destruction. At night the streets of New York reflect the crucifixion and death of Christ. When the snow is on the ground and there is the utmost silence there comes out of the hideous buildings of New York a music of such sullen despair and bankruptcy as to make the flesh shrivel. No stone was laid upon another with love or reverence; no street was laid for dance or joy. One thing has been added to another in a mad scramble to fill the belly, and the streets smell of empty bellies and full bellies and bellies half full. The streets smell of a hunger which has nothing to do with love; they smell of the belly which is insatiable and of the creations of the empty belly which are null and void.

In this null and void, in this zero whiteness, I learned to enjoy a sandwich, or a collar button. I could study a cornice or a coping with the greatest curiosity while pretending to listen to a tale of human woe. I can remember the dates on certain buildings and the names of the architects who designed them. I can remember the temperature and the velocity of the wind, standing at a certain corner; the tale that accompanied it is gone. I can remember that I was even then remembering something else, and I can tell you what it was that I was then remembering, but of what use? There was one man in me which had died and all that was left were his remembrances; there was another man who was alive, and that man was supposed to be me, myself, but he was alive only as a tree is alive, or a rock, or a beast of the field. Just as the city itself had become a huge tomb in which men struggled to earn a decent death so my own life came to resemble a tomb which I was constructing out of my own death. I was walking around in a stone forest the center of which was chaos; sometimes in the dead center, in the very heart of chaos, I danced or drank myself silly, or I made love, or

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I befriended some one, or I planned a new life, but it was all chaos, all stone, and all hopeless and bewildering. Until the time when I would encounter a force strong enough to whirl me out of this mad stone forest no life would be possible for me nor could one page be written which would have meaning. Perhaps in reading this, one has still the impression of chaos but this is written from a live center and what is chaotic is merely peripheral, the tangential shreds, as it were, of a world which no longer concerns me. Only a few months ago I was standing in the streets of New York looking about me as years ago I had looked about me; again I found myself studying the architecture, studying the minute details which only the dislocated eye takes in. But this time it was like coming down from Mars. What race of men is this, I asked myself. What does it mean? And there was no remembrance of suffering or of the life that was snuffed out in the gutter, only that I was looking upon a strange and incomprehensible world, a world so removed from me that I had the sensation of belonging to another planet. From the top of the Empire State Building I looked down one night upon the city which I knew from below: there they were, in true perspective, the human ants with whom I had crawled, the human lice with whom I had struggled. They were moving along at a snail's pace, each one doubtless fulfilling his microcosmic destiny. In their fruitless desperation they had reared this colossal edifice which was their pride and boast. And from the topmost ceiling of this colossal edifice they had suspended a string of cages in which the imprisoned canaries warbled their senseless warble. At the very summit of their ambition there were these little spots of beings warbling away for dear life. In a hundred years, I thought to myself, perhaps they would be caging live human beings, gay, demented ones, who would sing about the world to come. Perhaps they would breed a race of warblers who would warble while the others worked. Perhaps in every cage there would be a poet or a musician so that life below might

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I suddenly decide to climb a tall building, like a fly, and once having reached the roof I do fly with real wings and I fly and fly and fly, covering towns like Weehawken, Hoboken, Hackensack, Canarsie, Bergen Beach in the twinkling of an eye. Once you become a real schizerino flying is the easiest thing in the world; the trick is to fly with the etheric body, to leave behind in Bloomingdale's your sack of bones, guts, blood and cartilage; to fly only with your immutable self which, if you stop a moment to reflect, is always equipped with wings. Flying this way, in full daylight, has advantages over the ordinary night-flying which everybody indulges in. You can leave off from moment to moment, as quick and decisive as stepping on a brake; there is no difficulty in finding your other self, because the moment you leave off you *are* your other self, which is to say, the so-called whole self. Only, as the Bloomingdale experience goes to prove, this whole self, about which so much boasting has been done, falls apart very easily. The smell of linoleum, for some strange reason, will always make me fall apart and collapse on the floor. It is the smell of all the unnatural things which were glued together in me, which were assembled, so to say, by negative consent.

It is only after the third meal that the morning gifts, bequeathed by the phony alliance of the ancestors, begin to drop away and the true rock of the self, the happy rock sheers up out of the muck of the soul. With nightfall the pinhead universe begins to expand. It expands organically, from an infinitesimal nuclear speck, in the way that minerals or star clusters form. It eats into the surrounding chaos like a rat boring through store cheese. All chaos could be gathered together on a pinhead, but the self, microscopical at the start, works up to a universe from any point in space. This is not the self about which books are written, but the ageless self which has been farmed out through millenary ages to men with names and dates, the self which begins and ends as a worm, which *is* the worm in the cheese called the world. Just as the slightest

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breeze can set a vast forest in motion so, by some unfathomable impulse from within, the rocklike self can begin to grow, and in this growth nothing can prevail against it. It's like Jack Frost at work, and the whole world a windowpane. No hint of labor, no sound, no struggle, no rest; relentless, remorseless, unremitting, the growth of the self goes on. Only two items on the bill of fare: the self and the not-self. And an eternity in which to work it out. In this eternity, which has nothing to do with time or space, there are interludes in which something like a thaw sets in. The form of the self breaks down, but the self, like climate, remains. In the night the amorphous matter of the self assumes the most fugitive forms; error seeps in through the portholes and the wanderer is unlatched from his door. This door which the body wears, if opened out onto the world, leads to annihilation. It is the door in every fable out of which the magician steps; nobody has ever read of him returning home through the selfsame door. If opened inward there are infinite doors, all resembling trapdoors: no horizons are visible, no airlines, no rivers, no maps, no tickets. Each *couche* is a halt for the night only, be it five minutes or ten thousand years. The doors have no handles and they never wear out. Most important to note—there is no end in sight. All these halts for the night, so to speak, are like abortive explorations of a myth. One can feel his way about, take bearings, observe passing phenomena; one can even feel at home. But there is no taking root. Just at the moment when one begins to feel "established" the whole terrain founders, the soil underfoot is afloat, the constellations are shaken loose from their moorings, the whole known universe, including the imperishable self, starts moving silently, ominously, shudderingly serene and unconcerned, toward an unknown, unseen destination. All the doors seem to be opening at once; the pressure is so great that an implosion occurs and in the swift plunge the skeleton bursts asunder. It was some such gigantic collapse which Dante must have experienced when he situated himself in