

SPLURGE

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It was a cold morning, bitter cold, a cold made even harsher by its just being Monday. Even so, Yonge Street was crowded with suited businessmen, walking to and fro, preoccupied with the events of the coming day. Women, wrapped in protective coats, adorned with multicolored scarves and gloves, hurried to awaiting desks in sheltered offices.

I heard his voice a block before I reached the corner, ringing clear in the chill air. I smiled inwardly, nothing seemed to deter this man, he was like the street lights, always there, ready to shine when darkness approached. This morning he was dressed in his black attire, white cuffs just visible above fur lined gloves. His clerical collar was hidden by a handmade scarf, probably donated by a loyal follower. I always accepted a leaflet, deposited a dime, and turned towards work. Today, I was early, so I stopped to listen. Nobody ever seemed to listen, in fact nobody seemed to stop. I wondered why he bothered. Those blank expressions which scamp-ered past considered him irrelevant, yet something drew him there every morning. I stood motionless staring at construction workers laughing as they put the pieces of a new edifice together. People brushed past me, reminding me I too must be on my way. I deposited my dime and continued on with, "And Jesus said, 'Let the children come unto me,'" echoing faintly in my mind.

The Savarin always reminded me of my apartment this early in the day: dark and deserted, it did not start to liven up until noon when the businessmen came in for their twelve o'clock cocktails.

I began arranging the tables, folding napkins, trying to be certain everything was in its proper place. The rest of the girls lingered, smoking cigarettes and chatting idly over instant coffee. My request to leave for an hour seemed to startle them. I never went anywhere. I assured them I would be back before the lunch hour crowd, so they consented.

I wasn't sure where the office was, so I splurged and took a taxi. I walked back though; it really wasn't that far, and this time I needed the pick-me-up fresh air always seemed to give. Approaching the Savarin, I halted, it seemed as if I couldn't face it today--the smiles of the businessmen, polite, irrelevant gestures made to make you feel important. Oh, yes, they deserved the title of professionals! They knew their business.

I made it through the day, routine grows into one's system and after awhile can be performed mechanically. That's all I was on this bitter Monday--a machine performing a function. My mind was miles away, resting on the front doorstep of a white bungalow somewhere down east that had once been home.

At closing time, I lingered, drawing on a cigarette and drinking warmed over coffee. I had never smoked until I came to Toronto. I'd never needed a crutch before, now it seemed as if I had too many.

It was a mile from the Savarin to my apartment, but the walk seemed short this time. I dreaded the emptiness, the stale air that prevailed throughout the four rooms. At one time I had hurried home, anxious to prepare a home cooked meal for a hungry man. Now I couldn't even eat. Everywhere I looked I saw bits and pieces of a life too short--cigar stubs, wilting roses, after shave.

Tuesday morning I phoned in sick, I was sick, but not from some local virus. I made my second telephone call of the day around two-thirty. The report was positive. I don't remember how I passed the rest of the day.

Wednesday morning was a descendant of Monday. Black clouds hovered menacingly above the heads of the scurriers, anxious to find warmth. The preacher stood erect, in his usual spot, speaking into the microphone to anyone who wanted to hear. I opened my purse. I had \$85, on impulse I put \$30 into the silk hat held by his assistant. The man of the cloth turned slowly to me, pressed something hard into my hand and whispered, "Have faith, my child."

I laughed outright at his concerned expression. The look in his eyes reminded me of one I'd seen many times before, but would never face again.

The clientele at the Savarin had an old customer return for the first time in four months. Today, though, the gold glistened brilliantly on his left hand and his laughter was the loudest of all. He was the greatest businessman; he really knew his work. Odd though, for a man of such merit, he could never look you straight in the eye.

After the rush was over, I told the boss I was through, slowly picked up my coat, wrapping its soft folds around my body, and descended the carpeted staircase. I felt no remorse, only a pity for those up there waiting and working patiently in the oppressive fog of cigarette and cigar smoke. Nobody said good-bye or wished me luck. I really don't believe they realized I was leaving.

Passing May and Co. on the way home, I sauntered in and decided on a lovely lounging outfit for the evening. I also bought myself two large lobsters and champagne. It took me two hours to prepare my dinner, but the results were excellent. I put on some soft music by some obscure band who really should have made it, lit the candles decorating my usually bare table, and sat down and enjoyed my meal. Afterwards, I ran my

bath and lay soaking in suds for what seemed an eternity. Then meticulously drying myself, I splashed on the remainder of a bottle of cologne, and laid myself down on the cold linen sheets of my bed. The lounging gown fit perfectly, and as I lay swathed in satin I held delicately the last thing he had left in my home. Glancing skyward for a moment, I envisioned once

more Yonge Street early in the morning. I reached for the gift from the preacher and saw only an address label and a phone number. With one last drink of champagne, I toasted him. Yes, I thought, today these children will come unto Him. With hands widespread, I watched as the red of humans dripped onto a waxed floor. I hoped there wouldn't be too much mess for the landlord.

