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May 1923

The first time I saw Jimmy, he was playing the piano.

Even before I laid eyes on him, I could hear him playing. Jimmy's music mingled with the buzz of voices from the Iverson wedding reception as I walked along the Chandler Hotel's wood-paneled mezzanine toward the Grand Ballroom.

From his precise phrasing the rippling passages of a Mozart piano invention flowed, clear and fresh. The spontaneous enthusiasm of a trout darting along a rivulet ran through the light, lyrical performance, yet something lingered that I couldn't quite put into words.

When I entered, I saw Jimmy sitting at a grand piano next to a polished wooden column and a potted palm. He was engrossed in his playing, bathed in light from a stained-glass skylight.

Everything about him looked crisp and clean, from his sandy hair parted neatly down the middle and slicked back movie-star fashion, to the white tie, the starched dress shirt, the fit of the tail coat hugging his trim body. His right foot worked the piano pedals while his left was planted firmly beneath the bench as his torso swayed with the rhythm.

I'm not a musician and I have none of Jimmy's technical background or understanding. But I love music. And I know when music moves my emotions. Jimmy's music stirred my heart. Maybe it was only my imagination, but I now found words for the quality I couldn't at first express. My ear caught the song of a distant satyr's pan pipe twined up inside Jimmy's playing. His intensity drew me in. I moved through the crowd to position myself closer to the piano.

I watched for a time, pretending to be more seduced by the music than the maker, then at last turned away before I appeared to show too much interest in him.

The music continued to fill the room as I made my way through the men in morning dress and the women in fashionable spring frocks. The crowd was still sparse since most of the wedding guests had not yet arrived from the church across the river. A few sat at tables, but most stood talking in small, scattered groups. As I passed by, I recognized a gaunt man with sharp features, a fellow surgeon with a less-than-praiseworthy reputation who owned a small private hospital.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Adrian," I said as I caught his eye. I may have misread him, but I thought he gave me a cold look before making a slight nod and turning back toward the Police Commissioner who stood beside him saying, "…and then Ruth belted one right out of the ballpark. I couldn't believe my eyes."

A large party of guests entered the ballroom, talking excitedly, and I wandered across the room toward the tables. A roving white-coated waiter carrying a silver tray offered me a glass of prohibition punch. The scent of lemon rose as I took a sip, but the taste was overpoweringly sweet. I scanned the faces in the crowd. My colleagues, Gowan and Bleeker, stood with their wives toward the side of the room, talking with a tall gentleman I didn't recognize. Dr. Gowan

was an imposing figure, tall and bulky, his gold spectacles and bald head glinting in the sunlight from a nearby window. His charming smile and jovial manner dominated the group, but he looked uncomfortable in his wedding garb. Dr. Bleeker, grey-haired and slight, appeared, as usual, the very picture of East Coast propriety, his wife a perfect match in her stiff little dress. Gowan spotted me and made a small upward gesture inviting me over. I went to meet them.

The group exchanged greetings with me, and the man I didn't know eyed me with curiosity. As I took Mrs. Gowan's gloved hand, I caught the scent of her perfume. Her smile and demeanor were civil, but she seemed decidedly cool toward me, as was often the case. Maybe it was something to do with my relationship to her husband. Or could it be some quality she sensed about me that she disliked?

"I'm glad you were able to get away from the hospital," Gowan said. "I thought it was important for you to join us today. I don't believe you've met Jack Iverson, father of the bride." He presented the tall gentleman. "Jack, Dr. Carl Holman." So that was it. The new hospital.

"It's a pleasure, Mr. Iverson," I said as I shook his hand.

In the last few months, there had been considerable discussion, planning, and newspaper ink devoted to the building of a new hospital. Iverson was donating the land for the project and the Gowans were instrumental in promoting it along with the Masonic Lodge and a Lutheran church group.

"Hello, Dr. Holman. Happy to meet you at last." Iverson placed his hand on my shoulder and the aroma of cigar wafted up. "Younger fellow than I expected, Bob," he said turning to Gowan, "to have such a fine reputation as a surgeon." He laughed and turned back to me.

"I'm flattered," I said, "but I think you exaggerate."

"Now don't be so modest, Dr. Holman. I've heard all about your medals and awards. I expect your experience during the War was a good education."

"A lot of cases I would never have seen in medical school," I said.

"Well, son, a brand new modern hospital would provide you with a real opportunity to demonstrate your skills, wouldn't it? That's what I hope to provide for this great community."

"You're right, Jack," Gowan said. "A modern facility would be a boon to any community,"

"All of the latest techniques and equipment," Iverson said. "Science is our future, eh, Dr. Holman?"

"Yes, basing our medical practice on sound science is essential," I said, "but there is still an element of art to it." I had been reading Shakespeare the day before and Hamlet's admonition to Horatio came to mind. *There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy*. But this was not the place or time to be spouting Shakespeare, and I kept my thoughts to myself.

"Take the radio, for instance. Or the automobile industry," Iverson said. "New scientific innovations every year."

"There's no doubt about it," Gowan said.

I suppose it is necessary, but I'd never liked this kind of boosterism. I was unsure what role Gowan and Iverson expected me to play in their venture, and I felt uncomfortable being the center of attention. I took advantage of a remark I'd heard from Irene Iverson, one of my patients, to divert the conversation.

"Mr. Iverson, I hear from your sister that you're interested in thoroughbred horses."

"Why, yes. It's a hobby of mine. Magnificent animals, aren't they?

"The most beautiful creatures in the world," Mrs. Gowan said. "You were so smart to include equestrian facilities at Greenwood Estates."

"Jack, that reminds me," Gowan said, "I've been meaning to ask if that boundary dispute has been settled out there?"

"The attorneys tell me that the real estate boundaries are clearly spelled out in the original papers," Iverson said. "There is nothing to dispute. I don't care if that old farmer has been there for fifty years. He simply doesn't want to admit that he's wrong." Then he changed the subject. "You know, this city could use a first-class race track."

"I'm afraid you'd have to build it indoors, Jack," Bleeker said, "if you wanted to attract a crowd during the winters here."

"Now, Harold, there's an enterprise worth considering," Iverson replied, laughing.

The murmur of voices rose as another wave of guests arrived. Underneath it all was the music. I restrained my desire to glance over at the piano player.

A lady approached with a middle-aged couple in tow.

"Jack," she called out. "You must meet some friends of mine. They're just up from California. This gentleman is in banking and wants to talk to you about opportunities in Portland."

After introductions, the Californian mentioned that he was an old friend of a wealthy Portland lumberman, and Iverson seemed favorably impressed.

"My, but you've arrived for some lovely weather," Mrs. Gowan said.

"Yes," Mrs. Bleeker chimed in. "The rest of the country thinks it rains all the time in Oregon, but we have one of the best climates you could ask for here in Portland."

As I watched the women talk, I wondered if, now that they had the vote nationwide, they would vote according to their own thinking, or if they would simply followed their husbands' preferences.

The three women began discussing the food and the caterers and went off to examine the fare. Bleeker followed his wife, while Gowan patted his paunch and said he was dieting and didn't want to be tempted. His self-control often impressed me. The Californian insisted that Iverson come talk with his old friend the lumberman, and they disappeared into the growing crowd.

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When Gowan and I were alone, he turned to me. "You remember me telling you about Greenwood Estates—Jack's development out on Wilcox Road?"

I sensed what was coming.

"You seriously ought to consider investing some money out there."

"I just bought my bungalow in Sunny Grove a while back. I believe I should stay put for a while."

"Yes, but this is going to be first class all the way. It even includes tennis courts and, as my wife mentioned, stables for horses with bridle trails through the forest. Luxury living in a country setting—within easy reach of downtown, just like the advertising says."

"But I'm only now settling in."

"At least drive out there with me sometime. You'll need a bigger place once you have a wife and family."

"I'm afraid you're talking to a confirmed bachelor."

"Oh, give it time, Carl. Give it time. Anyway, it won't do any harm to let me show you around out there."

"I'll give it some thought."

"Remember, it's not just a good investment. It will be a quality residential neighborhood with quality people. Marge and I plan to build out there. I've already got my eye on a couple of prime lots right near the country club. Bleeker is thinking about it. And I know Dr. Adrian has already bought one of the lots."

"You don't say. You know, I said hello to Dr. Adrian earlier, just after I got here. He didn't seem too pleased to see me."

"He's worried about possible competition from this new venture of ours. But this city needs a new hospital. Portland is growing."

"It certainly is. But I guess I can understand his concern."

"Besides, you know he's not too happy about the work you're doing with the American College of Surgeons—and with that Catholic hospital organization to boot."

"But surely he recognizes the value of modern standards and patient histories for proper medical care." I wanted to avoid the subject of Catholicism and St. Mary's Hospital.

"Look, Carl, I know you served in the War, and you're used to following orders. And I know that a lot of those East Coast medical school doctors who were in the service want to shake things up a bit now. But you've got to understand that after a man's been practicing medicine for

more than thirty years in his own private hospital like Dr. Adrian has, he knows what he's doing and he doesn't like to change his ways."

"But, Dr. Gowan, we all have to work together to bring medicine into the 20th century."

"By golly, Carl, when your father told me he had a son who was a doctor and served in the War, we were excited to bring a veteran into our business—because we're proud Americans. But I should have known that you would bring a head full of new ideas with you. Just like all these low-class immigrants crowding into our city with their foreign ways." His voice had taken on considerable emotional energy. He took a deep breath and I could see his face soften as he regained control of his emotions. He continued in a measured tone. "There are some things that have stood the test of time, and they shouldn't be changed. Let me give you a piece of advice, Carl. Don't push things. Take it slow."

We fell into an awkward silence and turned to watch as more reception guests entered. "My, but the place is certainly filling up," Gowan said, taking on his jovial manner again.

A loud crash drew our attention to the buffet tables where a gentleman had just dropped a plateful of food. One of the white-coated serving staff hurried to clean it up. Bleeker and his wife were squeezing through to the buffet line as a robust blonde with a majestic gait sauntered away from the food tables. Before her generous bosom, she carried a plate filled with an abundant portion. Her formidable hips accentuated her stately progress past the end of the punch bowl table. She crossed to the side of the room not far from us and took up a position next to a portly silver-haired fellow, giving him an affable greeting. He returned the greeting in a way that indicated they were more than casual friends and he smiled as he eyed her plentiful form. I never truly understood the appeal of such voluptuous fleshiness, the current fashion toward boyish

figures being more to my taste. *De gustibus non est disputandum.* There's no accounting for taste —that old saw from college Latin.

"A real armful, isn't she?" Gowan said, following my gaze.

Chewing leisurely, the woman appeared to savor the tastes, her moon-shaped face radiating pleasure. At last, she swallowed with satisfaction and turned to her companion, gesturing toward the plate with her fork. Eating is definitely the fashionable real estate at the front end of the alimentary canal, I thought. I always carried in my mind a map of the human body, and after operating on an incarcerated bowel at the hospital early that morning, I couldn't help thinking of the gut course as I watched her ingesting.

"I hear she and her husband have what is now being called an open marriage," Gowan said.

"Is that so?" I took a sip from my punch cup.

"She's said to be inclined toward illicit affairs. A couple of years back it was rumored that she had a torrid affair with a local attorney."

In my mind's eye, I saw the medical illustrations of the microvilli that multiply the surface area of the small bowel like millions of tiny fingers.

"I guess she and the attorney carried on like that for about six months. Hotter than a bitch in heat. When he divorced his wife to marry her, she dropped him like an old rag."

Beyond the small intestine, only useless waste is left, sapped of vitality, budged along the colon as the last of its fluids are absorbed. But in spite of the fact that its workings are one of the first signs of a healthy body, that dark lower end of the intestinal tract is deemed unmentionable in polite society. The site of shame.

"Being a bachelor, Carl, you wouldn't be one to take up with married women."

I wondered if this lady and her various paramours ever engaged in anal intercourse, as I had.

"Not a chance," I said.

"It never looks good, should word leak out."

I smelled an unpleasant odor. Had Gowan passed flatus? A lapse of self-control? Or was it that because there were no ladies present in our immediate company he had relaxed his guard?

The blonde's companion leaned in close to say something and she let out a small giggle.

"She seems to have a penchant for older men," Gowan said.

She speared a sardine with the tines of her fork and consumed it. I had to smile remembering Hamlet's speech: "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat the fish that hath fed of that worm….to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar." *The eviscerated guts. That young soldier. The German artillery barrage at Meuse-Argonne.* I took a deep breath, and I put the memory out of my thoughts. I focused on the lady eating. Another smile of enjoyment came over her face.

"She seems to have a penchant for good food, too," I said. I was reminded of Freud's pleasure principle. He was all the rage now.

A Mozart minuet came to a close. The tumult of voices and laughter seemed to surge up to fill the void left by the music. My attention unconsciously drifted toward the musician. I never felt that the popular press did justice to Freud's distinction between sexual aim and sexual object choice.

Iverson's sister Irene crossed in front of the pianist, as she moved nervously from one group of guests to another, enforcing conviviality.

"Oh, there's Miss Iverson," I said to divert attention in case Gowan had seen me eyeing the pianist.

"Tedious hypochondriac," Gowan said. "No wonder she's never married."

"She's one of my many patients whose gastrointestinal problems seemed to be caused by nervous conditions." Where can one draw the line between the mind and the body? As a physician, it was a question that was always with me.

"I've noticed that same thing in many of my patients over the years," he said.

"She sometimes comes to me complaining of abdominal distention, but on physical exam there is never anything to it. I suspect her mind simply exaggerates some minor physical discomfort."

"My guess is she's just interested in getting a physical exam—and some attention. I appreciate you taking her on as your patient. Relieves me of having to deal with her."

"I've read about East Indian yogis," I said, "who could mentally control their digestion, even their breathing and heart rate. We in the West don't seem to have the knack for that kind of mental control."

Gowan gave me a skeptical glance.

"I'm sorry. This morning I had an incarcerated bowel surgery," I explained, "so the digestive tract has been on my mind. Certainly the case today was one where no amount of psychological control would have helped."

Surgery. Hard steel and soft flesh. Our highly controlled violation of the boundary between the interior and the exterior of the body.

A new piece of music rippled into the air over the increasing babble, and the room seemed to change. My eyes were drawn back to the piano player. Then I recognized Agnes Washburn from the public library, standing near the piano watching him play. His body swayed rhythmically, his face rapt with concentration. I took stock of his profile, the straight nose, the strong jaw line.

"Are you a music fancier?" Gowan asked.

"Oh, as much as the next fellow, I guess." I felt as if I'd been caught. "I just recognized Miss Washburn over there by the piano."

"Oh, yes. Isn't she the girl who's been finding those medical articles for you? A nice-looking young lady."

There's no accounting for taste. I'd always thought of her as rather mousey. And now viewing her standing next to the piano player… "That's right, the librarian. She's quite sharp," I said.

Agnes Washburn's brother had been killed on the battlefield in France, and when she learned that I had served at a dressing station near his regiment, we formed a bond. "You know that her mother has colorectal cancer," I said.

"That's too bad. A lamentable affliction. Cancer's one of our greatest challenges in medicine."

"Yes, isn't it strange how the malignant cells seem to lose all regard for cell boundaries? The sense of the self and the other within the organism seems to break down and the cancer grows out of control."

Gowan gave me a curious look. Then as if not knowing how to respond, he said, "I recall that Dr. Adrian had Mrs. Washburn as a patient at his hospital."

"He apparently misdiagnosed her case. Now the tumor is inoperable."

"Don't judge too harshly, Carl. No doctor is infallible. Once you've lost a few patients, you'll be more forgiving."

"I lost plenty of patients during the War, Dr. Gowan." I glanced at him, remembering the soldier from the Meuse-Argonne.

Gowan turned back toward the reception crowd.

I continued, "According to the pathology report, the resection appeared to have missed part of the tumor. She needed another operation. If that information had been requested at his hospital, Dr. Adrian could have gone after the tumor instead of just sending her home."

"And where did you hear that?"

"From the inspection at St. Mary's. Where they did the first operation." I became aware how much emotion had crept into my voice. I realized I had stepped over a boundary and I immediately regretted it.

"Of course." Gowan's voice was firm and pointed.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Gowan. I've spoken out of turn. Besides this isn't the proper place for me to be discussing such matters. Forgive me. At any rate, I hear they've started Mrs. Washburn on morphine now. She shouldn't be in any pain."

"Yes, Dr. Adrian put her in touch with a young pharmacist we've been working with, Lloyd Haskell. A bright young fellow we know from some of our fraternal associations. His pharmacy is near her home. You mustn't fret about Mrs. Washburn. I'm sure Haskell will take good care of her."

I had suspected that Adrian—and Gowan as well—worked with some local pharmacist to concoct proprietary medicines they could sell to their patients in order to pad their incomes. Now I knew the name.

"That's good to know," I said, trying to keep my tone flat and my eyes diverted in Miss Washburn's direction.

Agnes took a couple of steps closer to the piano, as if to read the title of the piece on the sheet music.

"You know, I ought to go say hello to Miss Washburn. If you'll excuse me, Dr. Gowan."

He turned to me with a sly smile as if encouraging me to pursue her and said, "Certainly."

I headed through the crowd, relieved to be away from him.

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I recognized a Bach partita I'd heard at a concert in Berlin the year after the armistice. It was around the time Gerald took me to a lecture by a German physics professor named Albert Einstein, who was then teaching at the University of Berlin. I was fascinated by his theories about electromagnetism and ether.

I met Miss Washburn at the public library when I was searching for articles about Einstein's work. She found one about the 1919 British expeditions to Africa and Brazil to observe a solar eclipse, which helped prove Einstein's theory of general relativity. He became

famous almost overnight, and the scientific cooperation between England and Germany was hailed as a step toward healing the great animosities of the War.

As I moved through the crowded ballroom in the direction of the piano, I wondered about the relationship between music and electromagnetic waves.

"Hello, Miss Washburn. How good to see you."

"Oh, Dr. Holman."

"I missed you at the wedding."

"Yes, I was delayed. Caring for Mother. So I just came for the reception."

"How is your mother doing?"

"As well as can be expected. And how are you, Doctor?"

After her brother's death, some of Agnes's brotherly affection transferred to me and probably went beyond the platonic. I was not interested beyond a simple friendship.

As we talked, my eyes kept wandering toward the piano player behind her. That certain grace in the way he moved as he played created an electromagnetic field of its own that kept pulling me in.

"I'm doing fine," I said, bringing my attention back to her face. "Just extremely busy."

"I don't mean to add more to your heavy schedule, but I saw a notice for a lecture that you may be interested in."

Closer up, I reexamined the features of the piano player's face, just beyond Miss Washburn's shoulder.

"What's the subject?" I kept glancing back to her face, calculating that I was covering up the distraction.

"Eugenics. I remembered that was the subject of some of the articles you asked me to find."

Facing the pianist in such close proximity while trying to talk with Miss Washburn became unbearable. I moved slightly so that the pianist was hidden behind her.

"It's on Friday evening if you're free."

"Let me check my calendar at the office, and I'll let you know." It was becoming too difficult for me to focus on our conversation, and I wanted to avoid committing myself to a date with her. "Please give your mother my regards." I excused myself to get more punch.

Making my way toward the punchbowl, my path was impeded by the dense crowd and I had to slow directly behind the pianist. I caught the scent of his hair oil, just as his fingers bounded into a lively scherzo. Pretending to be drawn by the music, I seized the chance to turn and look. His hairline in back formed a perfect symmetry at the base of his head, coming to a straight line in the middle and feathering out on each side over the muscles at the back of his neck. His long slender fingers, strong and precise, scampered over the keys with deft confidence. The blue-green veins stood out on the backs of his hands as the fine bones beneath rippled with his playing. The crowd in front of me thinned and I tore myself away.

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Near the punchbowl I came across my neighbor, Tom Harris. His wiry hair never quite took to combing, and it stood out here and there in an amusing way. Since I arrived at the reception, his was the first familiar face that I felt genuinely glad to see.

He gave me his friendly, off-handed greeting—the same casual quality that had drawn me to him when we first met.

"I didn't know you covered weddings," I said.

"I don't. I'm in the unfortunate position of being the groom's cousin." His round horn-rimmed glasses caught the reflection from a window, and I took a step sideways to see his eyes behind the thick lenses. "I'd prefer to be out covering murder and mayhem and political corruption."

Tom first introduced himself to me shortly after I moved to town three years before. I had just done surgery for a gunshot wound at St. Mary's Hospital, and Tom was covering the story for one of the local papers.

"I believe I know how you feel," I said. "I'd prefer to be elsewhere myself. But you may find some corrupt politicians at this gathering. I saw the Police Commissioner here earlier."

He laughed. "I'll keep an eye out for him—and give him a wide berth."

Tom and his wife had lived in the Sunny Grove neighborhood for two years when we met. I was renting an apartment then and when the house across the street from them came on the market at a good price, Tom encouraged me to buy it.

"Tell me what's new in the world."

"The Ku Klux Klan. Big recruiting push. Generating a lot of political interest. They aren't too keen on the Catholics. Especially Catholic schools."

"I've heard something about that," I said. "Although, I admit, I don't follow politics as closely as I should."

"I know. That's why I'm telling you. I think this is a story you'll want to keep your eye on. Especially since you've been working with St. Mary's."

"Hmm. I've got so much other reading to keep up with—it's hard to stay abreast."

"You're probably up on the eugenics issue. The legislature will be voting on it soon. Surely you know about the lecture on Friday."

"I just now heard mention of it."

"That woman doctor—what's her name? Higgle…? Higgenbotham. Dr. Higgenbotham is lecturing at Fitzsimmons Hall. Friday at 8. You ought to take it in. You'll get the whole political scoop."

"It sounds interesting. I'll try to catch it. How're Polly and the kids?" I had delivered their second child, Rachel. Their son William was now 5. Even though they lived right across the street, I was so busy that we seldom got a chance to talk.

"They're all fine. We just got a kitten for the kids—you've probably seen it in the yard. They're driving the poor devil crazy. Rachel has discovered her mother's make-up and we keep finding rouge and powder on her dolls. So now Polly has to keep the dressing table locked. And William has recently taken an interest in pirates. He keeps threatening to make me walk the plank."

"Oh, Mr. Harris." A young woman walked briskly to his side. "How are you?" She extended her hand. "We were so glad that you could come to our fundraiser for the new hospital last week. I'm sure it was your coverage in the *Oregon Register* that made the event so successful. We raised over $5,000 for the Shriners."

"Nice to see you," Tom said addressing her by name. "Have you met Dr. Holman? He's an associate of Dr. Gowan's."

"Oh, my. No, we haven't met. I've heard so much about you. So happy to make your acquaintance, Doctor."

"How do you do," I said.

"I was just telling the mayor's wife about my husband's work drawing up papers for Mr. Iverson's generous donation of property for the new hospital. Dr. Gowan and his wife have played a key role in getting this project off the ground."

"Yes, they are certainly active in the community," I said.

"Do you plan to buy out at Greenwood Estates, Dr. Holman? I know the Gowans are. My husband and I are so excited about the prospects there."

"I've got a small bungalow over in Sunny Grove."

"How nice for you. Sonny Grove is such a charming little neighborhood."

"Nice enough for your mother," Tom Harris said, turning to me. "Maude Williams." The lady gave Tom a haughty side-long glance.

"What a small world," I said. "I live right next door to her. She's such a pleasant person. And what a gardener. She gave me fresh vegetables from her garden several times last year."

"Talents she learned on the farm down near Bayfield, no doubt, wouldn't you say?" Tom said, turning toward her.

"Oh, that was all so long ago, Mr. Harris." She turned from him back to me, and Tom gave me a wink and smiled. "I expect, Dr. Holman, you'll be associating yourself with the new Lutheran Hospital, along with Drs. Gowan and Bleeker?"

"Once there is a building available with modern operating rooms, I would welcome the opportunity to do surgeries there."

A wave from Irene Iverson caught my eye. She stood nearby chatting with a gray-haired couple. "Dr. Holman," she called.

"My goodness, there's Miss Iverson. I must go say hello to her. Excuse me, won't you? Good to meet you. I'll tell your mother we met. See you later, Tom." He gave me a knowing smile.

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"There's my handsome young physician" Miss Iverson said, taking my arm. "I do believe you are the most eligible bachelor here today. Watch out when the bride tosses her bouquet."

"Miss Iverson, I just met your brother Jack. We'd never been introduced. My, but there is a family resemblance. And aren't you looking lovely today."

"Why, thank you, Doctor. Now, I want you to meet these people." She introduced me to the couple at her side. "Their daughter is one of the bridesmaids. She's just home from university back East. Have you met her?"

"I don't believe so."

"You must let me introduce you when she gets here with the wedding party." Miss Iverson told me that the older couple were both professors of literature at one of the local colleges in Portland. "He specializes in Shakespeare," she said.

"How interesting," I said. "Something that someone said just reminded me of *Hamlet*."

"I'm not surprised," he said. "So many common expressions come from Shakespeare. For example, 'There's the rub,' and 'Something's rotten in the state of Denmark.'"

"And isn't it interesting," the wife added, "that Hamlet is such a modern character, with all his doubts and ruminations."

"Why, I'd never thought of it that way," I said. "A German friend in Berlin recently wrote to me, raving about *Hamlet*. I was ashamed that I'd never read it, so I went out and bought a set of Shakespeare."

Miss Iverson was making nervous little movements from which I inferred that she wanted more attention. I turned to her. "I take it the blushing bride and groom haven't arrived yet?"

"A lady from my church told me there was an accident right at the east end of the Burton Street Bridge," Miss Iverson said. "A farmer in a model T crashed into a street car and knocked it right off the tracks. The traffic is all in a snarl now and that has delayed the whole wedding party. I don't know why they insisted on having the wedding at that brand new church on the east side —when there are so many lovely old churches on this side of the river."

"It was a beautiful wedding though. And this is a fine place for the reception," I said. Then, before thinking, I found myself asking, "Where did you find the piano player?"

"He's from our church. He plays the organ there. Quite good, isn't he?"

"Yes. He's an excellent musician. I wonder if he plays anywhere else."

"I've been told he plays in a dance band at different venues around town. Why, he's just finished the piece. Let's go ask him." She excused us from the professors and led me across the room.

I couldn't believe my good fortune, yet I wasn't sure I was ready to meet him. My attraction exacerbated my nervousness. And besides, I asked myself, what does one say to a musician?

Miss Iverson wound her way through the clots of reception guests to the piano. The pianist was sorting through sheet music.

"Mr. Harper, hello. Do you remember me? Irene Iverson from St. Michael's Episcopal Church. Your playing is just splendid." She patted the piano with her white-gloved hand. "I was just telling Dr. Holman here I've heard that you play in a dance band. Let me introduce you. Dr. Carl Holman, James Harper."

I extended my hand. His handshake was strong and firm. His grey eyes glittered and he gave me a slightly crooked smile.

"James…Harker?" I said. It was sheer nervousness that made my tongue stumble over the name.

"Harper," he replied. "Jimmy Harper."

"So you play popular music too?"

"Some other fellows and I are just starting up a small jazz combo. We call it the Diggs Monroe Jazz Orchestra."

Miss Iverson gave a little gasp and glanced away. Jimmy caught her reaction and smiled.

"Where do you perform? I'd enjoy hearing you play—your new sound." I caught myself before using the offensive term "jazz" again.

Jimmy laughed as he placed some of the sheet music on the stand. "It's a bit out of the way, but next Saturday night we'll be playing for a dance near Bisby—east of town—at the Bisby Grange Hall. We're just getting started, as I said, so we've got to take whatever work we can get. We're hoping to line up more dates here in town as we get to be better known."

"I'll try to catch it. That's a week from today?"

He nodded.

A new buzz of excitement arose near the entrance to the ballroom. On tiptoes Miss Iverson craned her neck peering through the crowd.

"Mr. Harper, we'd better let you get back to entertaining the guests," she said. Placing her hand on my arm, she said, "Dr. Holman, some very important guests have just arrived. I must introduce you."

"Good to meet you," I said to Jimmy as Miss Iverson tugged on my arm. Casting an amused glance at her, Jimmy chuckled and winked at me before he turned back to the keyboard. I wondered how much significance I should attach to his wink as I allowed myself to be led away.

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An extremely old couple was being escorted with much deference to one of the tables. Miss Iverson pulled me along toward the group that was forming around them.

"They met coming out in a wagon train," I overheard someone say, "just after her brother was killed by Indians." Miss Iverson excused our way through the group which recognized her as part of the family and made an opening.

The ancient woman slowly lowered her spindly frame into a chair with the help of a young army captain in formal dress uniform. I couldn't take my eyes off him.

"That's one of her great-grandsons," a woman's voice whispered behind me. "Isn't he handsome?"

My attention was riveted on the officer. He appeared to be in his early 30s, about my age, and his medals indicated that like me, he had served in the occupation of Germany after the War.

For a moment the wedding reception faded into the background, and I was at that 1919 diplomatic ball in Berlin watching Gerald in his captain's dress uniform, waltzing with a *fraulein*. He moved with such grace and physicality as he danced to the small chamber orchestra that I wanted to be that *fraulein*—not because I felt feminine in any way but because I wanted to be held in Gerald's arms and feel the movement of his body as he waltzed me around that ballroom, gazing into my eyes and laughing.

The officer leaned in and asked the old lady if she was comfortable and then positioned himself behind her chair. To avoid staring at him, I refocused my attention on her. Her strong, angular features bordered on the masculine, accentuated by gauntness. Her white hair was so thin that the scalp showed through. The old gent beside her was plump with round, clean-shaven features and a full head of white hair that had not seen a barber in some time. Steadying himself with his cane, he carefully settled onto the seat next to her.

"Don't make such a fuss over me," the old woman said in a rich, husky voice. She raised a hand, blotched by age spots, and with a bony finger, bent by arthritis, scratched her upper lip, which was scattered with wisps of white hair.

"Where is Matilda?" the old man said. His voice was high and thin.

Except for their clothing, I'm not sure I would have known which was the husband and which the wife.

"Grandmother," Miss Iverson said. "Grandfather. I want you to meet Dr. Carl Holman."

The old woman looked up. "I'm pleased to meet you, Dr. Holman."

"The pleasure is mine." I gave a little bow of my head.

"He is an excellent physician," Miss Iverson said, "next time you need one."

"We already have a family physician, Irene, as you know. But I will keep your name in mind, Dr. Holman."

The old man had turned to watch a group of young ladies walk by. Then he cocked his head, stuck his little finger in his ear, and twisted it back and forth vigorously.

"Grandfather, can you say hello to Dr. Holman?"

"Who?"

"I want to introduce you to Dr. Holman. He's my doctor."

He turned to me and opened his mouth. "Aaah," he said loudly.

"I don't need to examine you, sir," I said. "I'm just here to meet you. I'm Dr. Holman." I extended my hand.

"Oh," he said. "Hello." He turned back to looking at the young ladies.

The army captain laughed. I glanced up at him and then quickly turned my gaze back to the old woman.

"Grandma," a young man in a morning coat said, stepping up to the old woman. A young lady beside him held a chubby baby dressed in pink.

"You remember Jack Junior," Miss Iverson said.

"Of course, I do," the old woman turned to the young man without looking at Irene. "How are you, Junior?"

"Fine. Just fine. We want you to meet the baby."

"Oh, yes, dear. I heard you had a new little one. Remind me, my memory isn't as good as it used to be, is it a boy or a girl?" Always the first question, I thought, having delivered numerous newborns.

"He's a boy. We named him after Great-Grandpa." At that the old man turned back to our group. The young woman holding the baby moved in closer and bent down to show off the infant. The round pink cheeks of the baby contrasted sharply with the sunken and wrinkled cheeks of the old woman.

"Aren't you a sweet little fella," the old woman said, reaching up to take his tiny hand.

How significant, I thought, that in the extremely young and the extremely old the differences between the sexes are so much less pronounced, and yet people have no trouble accepting that fact.

"Imagine," Miss Iverson said, "your great-great-grandson." She turned to the old man and said in a louder tone, "What do you think of that, Grandfather?"

"Another little pooper, eh?"

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Later on, after I had disentangled myself from a conversation with the daughter of the college professors, I withdrew from the crowd and stood apart where I could see the piano. I recognized another Bach variation, which Gerald had remarked about at an open-air concert in Berlin. When the piece came to a close, I caught Jimmy's glance. He looked me straight in the eyes for a moment longer than I would have expected from another man. Then we both became aware that the gaze had lasted too long, and I hurriedly cracked a smile to signal that it was all right. Jimmy's expression did not change, and his eyes went back to the piano. I sensed a momentary uneasiness in him as he fidgeted with the sheet music, but then he began to play again and the moment passed and the room changed.

"Carl," I heard a woman's voice behind me. I turned to see Charlene Devereaux strolling gracefully toward me in a stylish sapphire-colored party dress.

"Charlie," I responded. "What a nice surprise to see you here."

"Aunt Inez asked me to drive her. She's such a dear that I couldn't refuse."

"You look beautiful, as always," I said. She was tall and slender—some would say willowy—with a porcelain complexion and naturally blonde hair worn in a fashionable bob, which now showed only in curls at the rim of her cloche hat. She could easily have been a movie star or a fashion model. Charlie moved with a poise and a fluid elegance that mesmerized on-lookers. I suspect she knew the effect her appearance had on people, especially men, but she gave no sign, which only intensified her charm. Fortunately, I was immune to her allure and we could maintain a casual friendship.

"Gwen isn't with you?" I said. Gwen Cook, one of my oldest and dearest friends, shared an apartment with Charlie.

"She wasn't invited." Charlie gave me a knowing look. "Besides she's working today."

"I expected she would be at the hospital."

"Of course." Charlie sighed. "As you know, St. Mary's only gives nurses one day off a week."

"She's well?" I asked.

"As always. She visited her parents during her day off last week."

I heard a hint of pique. "I guess it was good for her to get away and see family," I said. On a number of occasions, Gwen and I had driven out to her family farm near the mouth of the Columbia River. I was fond of her parents.

Charlie smiled and examined my face. “What brings you here?”

“I wouldn’t have come except for Dr. Gowan’s insistence. The Iversons, you know.”

“The new hospital.”

“Precisely. And then I had a chilly run in with Dr. Adrian.”

“Oh, yes. Aunt Inez introduced me to him. He seems to have a soul made of ice.”

“I wish I knew what he and Gowan said about me behind my back.”

Charlie glanced around to make sure no one was within earshot. “I don’t know about Dr. Gowan, but I really ought to tell you about a conversation I overheard earlier between Dr. Adrian and that police commissioner.”

I was all ears.

“They were talking sports when they spotted Dr. Gowan across the room and the commissioner asked about that new young doctor working with Gowan, obviously referring to you. Adrian said that you fancied yourself the Big Bill Tilden of the operating theater and that you went mincing around the hospital making trouble about modern surgical standards and medical records.”

“Mincing?” I said.

“Yes, I was startled to hear him use that expression, too. But it got worse. They were speaking very negatively about Catholic hospitals and suggesting that the Klan should get involved. He said Gowan should pitch in, which made it sound to me like Dr. Gowan is associated with the Klan. But then he went on to imply that there is no love lost between Gowan and himself.”

“No, I understand Dr. Adrian is not thrilled about the new hospital. More competition.”

"But Carl, what most concerned me was that they were wondering if you were a drinking man, and then they speculated that you might have known some Bolsheviks when you were in Germany. It was as if they were thinking about making some sort of trouble for you."

"Dear God, that's disturbing."

"It is. I didn't want to trouble you, but I felt you should know."

We were silent for a time. I happened to glance over at the piano player. My dark thoughts contrasted with the light-hearted music he was playing.

"Handsome young piano player." Charlie looked at me.

I wondered if Charlie had seen me watching him earlier.

I smiled back. "And an excellent musician, isn't he?"

Charlie nodded. "You wouldn't guess that I play the piano too."

"Why no, Charlie. You never told me." She smiled at me and turned back to watch. In the back of my mind I had an inkling that she might be feeling possessive of our friendship. Maybe she had indeed observed me paying too much attention to Jimmy Harper. "You must play for me sometime."

We listened to the music for a bit.

"Hasn't it been lovely weather recently?" Charlie said. "I'd much rather be home. Or outdoors somewhere." She glanced toward the window. "May is such a beautiful time of year here. When I left our apartment today, the rhododendrons were in full bloom."

"They are at my house, too."

Just then a considerable hubbub arose as the bride and groom arrived. Charlie said she should go find her aunt. She gave me a peck on the cheek and disappeared into the crowd.

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During the cutting of the wedding cake, Jimmy took a break from the piano and went to an hors d'oeuvres table. With some trepidation, I made my way there, too. When I approached and he saw me, he again seemed to be overcome with an uneasiness that he struggled to conceal. He quickly looked away, studying the different canapés.

"They've provided quite a spread, haven't they?" I said with a smile, hoping to put him at ease.

"They sure have," he replied. "These little pastries seem to be filled with some kind of salmon concoction. Salmon is one of the foods of the gods." He glanced at me briefly and then popped a puff pastry into his mouth and returned to his perusal of the other delicacies on the table.

I picked up one of the pastries and took a bite. It was filled with a creamy salmon mousse. "Ambrosia," I said.

Jimmy glanced up, gave a little chuckle, and turned back to the food. Once again I was mesmerized by the color of his eyes. I could not stop admiring the shape of his face and the grace of movement of his slender body. Although a working-class he-man with hair on his chest might have had second thoughts about a certain refinement in Jimmy Harper's demeanor, nothing about him could be characterized as effeminate.

The silence between us grew too long, and desperate not to squander the occasion, I blurted out, "The feel of a room certainly changes without music."

Jimmy turned to me with an eagerness in his expression, and his face opened like a book. "Yes, exactly," he said. "Music can change the shape of a room." Our eyes met for a moment.

"Not physically," he continued, as he looked away, "I mean, not carpentry. But emotionally. Spiritually. Music affects the soul. But there's a spatial dimension, too." He glanced at me to see if he was making sense.

Obviously, I did not need to remind Jimmy about the "more things in heaven and earth." Here was a fellow with whom I felt I could develop a rapport. I looked into his clear, grey eyes. "I believe what you are saying."

"Now if I were playing jazz here, this room would have a considerably different shape."

"I have no doubt about that." We both laughed. "Where did you pick up jazz?"

"I first started dabbling with it in college. It's been my dream to go to Chicago to take in the Negro jazz scene there."

I was about to ask where he went to college, when Miss Iverson bustled up to Jimmy, burbling about a waltz for the bride and groom, and the two of them disappeared into the crowd.

Before long Jimmy began playing the waltz and again the room changed. The bride and groom began to dance and after a while other couples joined in. Again, I remembered Gerald waltzing at the diplomats ball in Berlin, but now I found my attention focused on Jimmy, his body moving with the sensuous rhythm of the music as he played. My frame of reference had changed.

I thought over what Jimmy had said about the room changing and remembered that Einstein lecture in Berlin. I had trouble completely grasping all of the professor's ideas, but I was impressed by the way he demolished the theory of ether as the medium that carried light rays. By looking from different frames of reference, he demonstrated that our traditional ideas of time and space are not absolute.

After I returned to Portland from Germany, Einstein was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics and completed a triumphal tour of the United States in 1921, appearing on the front pages of newspapers across the country. In one article, I read that Einstein played the violin, and now as I listened to Jimmy's music, it did seem to change the nature of time itself in the ballroom. If time and space truly were interrelated, maybe Jimmy could change the shape of a room.

I listened and watched as he played a few more pieces, but I did not catch his eye again. After a while I checked my pocket watch and saw that it was time to get back to the hospital. As I made my way out of the ballroom, I paused and glanced toward the piano one last time. Jimmy was bent over the keyboard, absorbed in his music. For my part, I knew I'd been hooked.

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