

## **“One Morning”**

**by Elliot Manches**

Night had begun to evaporate into morning.

Twilight filters through a thin pair of pale blue curtains into a small room. The space and its few contents are now clearly visible and in possession of an ethereal quality.

The room, nearly square at about eight foot by ten, has a high ceiling from which hangs a single naked light-bulb. The walls are dirty off-white, and the thinly carpeted floor is worn and stained.

By the window are a wooden desk and a round wooden stool of slighter darker colouring. The surface of the desk has been picked at, and the edges sawn into. On it are piled several tatty books, stacked in no discernible order, a large notepad, closed with crumpled sheets of scribble and sketches protruding, and a couple of lidless pens. On the black metal seat of the four-legged stool is a heap of laundry.

Against the wall on the left is an oak cupboard. One door is open, revealing a long mirror on its reverse, and two hanging shirts and an overcoat inside.

In the corner between the cupboard and the desk is an inexpensive ‘easy chair’ on which rests a classical guitar. The strings are long and unclipped.

Against the opposite wall is a low single bed. Above there is a shelf, almost bare but for a small battery-operated radio and a couple of notebooks. Beside the bed is a small square collapsible table with an extendable lamp and a dog-eared novel.

There are two people in the room. The sound of their breathing is quiet but regular, as if waves rolling ashore in the distance. They are squeezed up beside each other on a narrow mattress that sags in the middle.

The young woman is curled up and facing the wall. She murmurs in her sleep, at times seeming to sing softly. The young man lies on his back on the edge of the bed. His hands are behind his head. He is staring at the pockmarked ceiling, awake for maybe hours.

The young woman has stolen his blanket and most of his bed. The young man is unbothered. He is not tired, and her warm presence is comforting. He has watched the black dissolve away. But the Sun is still to show its weary face. The young man has resolved to venture outside to greet the dawn.

He turns to his companion, inhaling her familiar scent. Stroking away her hair, he kisses her once on the back of her neck. She sings for a moment. He steps gently out of the bed and reaches into the heap of clothes on the stool.

He gets dressed and leaves.

Dawn can be disorientating. Sound vanishes down empty streets – countless ears deaf in slumber. Sleeping bodies hidden – we sense their dreams drift outside and onwards. The cold is weak. It bites the skin but spares the bones. Adam's lungs are open.

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