

## The Responsible Romance

I stood there on the bridge and watched the moonbeams varnish the smirking crocodiles. Now and again one of them slid from the mud and ghoulishly passed beneath me like an iceberg on the prowl. I was a feverish swindler in edible birds' nests with a muted interest in guano. With my clawed valise and rugged charm I traveled the islands, stopping in dumpy hotels in search of fortune, frowning my way through monsoon or lurking in muffled teak forests. Some day I'd end up on a slab of marble in Auckland, a mustard seed clutched in my fist, foiled at last in my own perishable rhapsody. The damage done but no one to call it folly.

Far off now I hear drumming, then a wail, twangings of an extinct instrument. Footfalls. That face, I know it: it is the class president from my high school. What does he want of me now, in this infernal jungle, nine thousand miles and twenty-five years from that poisonous fenced-in playground for imbeciles.

He was puffing and frothing in his lawyer's garb: "You must come, we need you . . ." I flung my cigarette into the river, a crimson knot of hope against such stammering accidents as this. And yet, what good is it. Already rasping machines are turning my life into a twenty-five word account. *It's none of your beeswax*, I wanted to say. Instead, slipping into something comfortable, I made haste, stumbled and bluntly accepted the call, the signal from the pit, to return to my nook in the deaf opulence of fossils mending their clocks.

## Goodtime Jesus

Jesus got up one day a little later than usual. He had been dreaming so deep there was nothing left in his head. What was it? A nightmare, dead bodies walking all around him, eyes rolled back, skin falling off. But he wasn't afraid of that. It was a beautiful day. How 'bout some coffee? Don't mind if I do. Take a little ride on my donkey, I love that donkey. Hell, I love everybody.