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The Double Life of Hans van Meegeren

by Klaus Mann



"De Emmausgangers" is van Meegeren's most famous "Vermeer"

AFTER a delay of more than two years, Hans van Meegeren, the Dutch artist who made millions by painting magnificent pictures and palming them off as Vermeers, was brought to trial last fall and sent to jail. Almost immediately a movement was afoot to have him pardoned. Almost immediately, too, his genuinely own mediocre paintings, which previously had been admired most by Nazi chieftains, began to command high prices. The principal mystery was not the delay, the light punishment, or the sudden popularity of van Meegeren's "own" work; it was the fact that the man who could paint those "Vermeers" could also paint those van Meegerens. The mystery remained when he died in December.

It was in the summer of 1945, soon after the liberation of the Netherlands, that van Meegeren volunteered his sensational confession, claiming the authorship of certain paintings which had been attributed to old Dutch masters—notably the great Jan Vermeer of Delft (1632-1675)—and sold, as outstanding samples of seventeenth-century artistry, to leading museums and collectors.

Clearly, Dutch authorities were in no particular hurry to have "*l'affaire van Meegeren*" discussed in public—a reluctance which could not but cause suspicious rumors. Were there any prominent figures involved in the fraudulent

plot, men of such wealth and influence that the police would prefer to spare them? What about the political implications of van Meegeren's case? Had he not been in contact, during the war, with high-up Germans as well as with Dutch businessmen and officials of pro-German, or rather, pro-Nazi, leanings? Maybe authorities did not like the idea of reviving the ticklish, embarrassing question of "collaborationism."

The attitude of the court on the occasion of the trial was hardly apt to refute or silence such rumors. If Dutch officials had been surprisingly slow in conducting the preparatory examination, they seemed all the more eager to do a speedy job once the trial proper had started. The whole affair was rushed through in a few hours. Even conservative Dutch papers, like the *Haagsche Post*—usually rather inclined to be lenient with "collaborators"—appeared to be mildly shocked by the at once perfunctory and diplomatic way in which the matter was handled. Would it not have been interesting to go into certain questions of political significance? Did the public not have a right to be fully informed about van Meegeren's dealings with German occupation czars and Dutch quislings? But, for one reason or other, the police chose to drop the charge of collaboration on which the painter had originally been arrested. Now he found himself prose-

cuted for "deception" only—an offense for which the Dutch law reserves a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment. The sentence was one year.

BUT if the trial failed to shed new light on the political aspects of van Meegeren's case, the story of the counterfeit masterpieces remains amazing enough—psychologically as well as from a purely criminologic point of view. Here are the basic facts:

Back in 1937, a lawyer from Amsterdam discovered a dusty canvas, stored away in the Paris apartment of a Dutch businessman who had recently died. The heirs did not think much of the painting—a fairly large composition showing Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus. But the lawyer rather liked it: in fact, liked it so much that he took the next train to Monte Carlo to have the picture examined by the noted art expert and collector, Abraham Bredius. Dr. Bredius (who, incidentally, died in 1946, at the venerable age of 91) looked at the painting, was struck by the superb quality of the workmanship; had another look, and recognized—one can imagine with what delight!—the familiar monogram, "*I.V.M.*," standing for I. V. Meer.

A few weeks later, the discovery of "a new Vermeer" was enthusiastically announced by Bredius in the columns of the highly respected English art review,

Even a personal interview
with the late forger
failed to reveal
by what mystic dispensation
he could paint the sublime
"Vermeer" at the left
and still take pride
in his own silly
"genuine van Meegerens,"
such as the uninspired
musical confection
reproduced on the right



Genuine van Meegeren: Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, Brahms, Schumann, and Chopin, and van der Pas

Burlington Magazine. "It is a wonderful moment in the life of a lover of art," he wrote, "when he finds himself suddenly confronted with a hitherto unknown painting by a great master, untouched, on the original canvas and without any restoration, just as it left the painter's studio! Neither the beautiful signature . . . nor the *pointillé* on the bread which Christ is blessing, is necessary to convince us that we have here a—I am inclined to say—the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft, and, moreover, one of his largest works (1.20 by 1.17 m.), quite different from all his other paintings and yet *every inch a Vermeer*. . . . In no other picture by the great master of Delft do we find such sentiment, such a profound understanding of the Bible story—a sentiment so nobly human expressed through the medium of the highest art. . . ." And so forth, in the same rhapsodical vein.

In the meantime, other connoisseurs had rushed to Paris to admire the new-found treasure. It is true that some of them—notably the director of Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, Dr. Schmidt-Degener, and the distinguished historian and philosopher, Jan Huizinga of Leyden University—voiced certain doubts as to the authenticity of the chef-d'oeuvre; the majority, however, agreed with Bredius' verdict (every inch a Vermeer!), and shared his enthusiasm.

Director Hannema of Boymans Museum in Rotterdam was pleased to buy the masterwork for the trifle of 540,000 Dutch guilders, or about \$270,000.

"*DE EMMAUSGANGERS*," as the picture is called in Dutch, was the main attraction of an art show, "Masterpieces of Four Centuries," presented at Boymans Museum in 1938. Although works by Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Matthias Gruenewald, and other giants of art were displayed at the same exhibition, the "new Vermeer" stole the show and aroused more curiosity, more enthusiasm than all the genuine masterpieces together. The art critics—not only in the Netherlands but also in France, Belgium, Germany, and other countries—raved about the magnificent, incomparable, typically seventeenth-century, unmistakably Vermeerish painting which, as one of the experts put it, "came to light recently, as if to show that we have until now underrated Vermeer most of all as a religious painter." The lay public seemed at least as deeply impressed as the high priesthood of art criticism. A few weeks after the opening of the Boymans show, "De Emmausgangers," reproduced in millions of copies, had found their way to churches, hospitals, school buildings, farmhouses, patrician mansions, and proletarian tenements all over the country. Never before in the history of Dutch art

had a painting enjoyed such an immediate and sweeping popular success.

In the course of the following years, some more unknown Vermeers and two pictures by another master of that period, Pieter de Hooch, were discovered—allegedly in the possession of a noble but impoverished family. While the De Hoochs seemed pleasantly typical samples of genre painting, a gaily realistic style in which that artist had successfully specialized, the Vermeers appeared less characteristic. The Master of Delft—hitherto famed for the serene lucidity of his portraits, landscapes, and domestic scenes—now showed himself as an accomplished mystic, concentrating exclusively on Biblical subjects. But however strange and puzzling this unexpected predilection in Vermeer may have been, the more recently found paintings, in contrast to the Emmaus composition, failed to cause much of a hullabaloo. There was little publicity. The new discoveries were handled, quietly and competently, by two of Holland's major art dealers, P. de Boer and D. A. Hoogendijk, who offered the masterpieces to their choice clientele. A "Last Supper" went to a private collector for 1,600,000 guilders (about \$800,000, at that time); another well-to-do art lover paid 1,275,000 guilders for "The Blessing of Isaac." In 1943, the Netherlands Government bought one of (Continued on page 111)

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the finest "new Vermeers," "Christ's Ablution," for the exclusive Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

All those transactions took place while the country was occupied by the German army. Nazi chieftains bought (or stole) Dutch masterpieces on the largest possible scale. One of their main agents and purchasers was a German banker by the name of Miedl, who had taken over the well-known Goudstikker gallery in Amsterdam. (Mr. Goudstikker, racially objectionable from the Nazi viewpoint, had managed to escape from his invaded homeland—only to die as the victim of a freak accident aboard the ship taking him to England.) It was Herr Miedl to whom an impoverished, anonymous family entrusted one of their precious Vermeers, "Christ and the Adulteress." The picture was bought, for the rather impressive price of 1,650,000 guilders, by a collector of almost unlimited means and insatiable appetite—that famous patron of art and lover of all things beautiful, Hermann Goering.

The van Meegeren scandal might never have exploded if it had not been for this particular deal of the jolly Reich Marshal's. For no sooner had the Netherlands been liberated than Dutch authorities detected the illegal, immoral transaction. A national treasure, one of Vermeer's splendid works, had been sold to a foreigner, an enemy, a notorious ringleader of the Nazi gang! The man responsible for the crime, Banker Miedl, was not available for punishment; he had already left the country, taking along a fortune in jewelry on which he would be able to live in style as an honored guest in the Spain of Generalissimo Franco. But what about Herr Miedl's agents and associates? If the main culprit was gone, where were his contact men and advisors?

In the course of investigations, a certain name came up repeatedly—Hans van Meegeren. No doubt there had been a connection of some sort between the fugitive German financier and that Dutch artist—rather a mediocre artist, by the way, not very highly thought of by local critics, but comparatively successful under the Nazi regime. Van Meegeren had been in touch with Miedl, had received payments from him. As police went on investigating, it became more and more obvious that van Meegeren was somehow involved in the Goering deal. There was enough evidence for the painter's complicity to justify his arrest.

HE DID not take to jail very well. A nervous, delicate man in his late fifties—chain smoker, used to sleeping tablets and considerable quantities of strong liquor—he felt incapable of facing the hardships of life in a prison cell. After a fortnight or so he seemed about to collapse. It was at that point that he announced his willingness to make "a complete confession." What he had to disclose was enough to leave prison authorities dumbfounded, flabbergasted.

Those much-vaunted Vermeers Mynheer van Meegeren claimed, were his own work. He whom ignorant critics had brushed off as a second-rater, had produced—not just copied, mind you, but actually

produced!—all those glorious paintings, including "Christ and the Disciples of Emmaus."

The "Emmausgangers" a forgery? It sounded like a blasphemous joke and the officials refused to believe it. Obviously that queer little van Meegeren was a neurotic, a pathological liar trying to pull a trick. Some madmen take themselves for Christ or Napoleon; this one pretended, in good faith or out of some absurd calculation, to be the author of a world-famous work of art. A case for the psychiatrist, rather than the police.

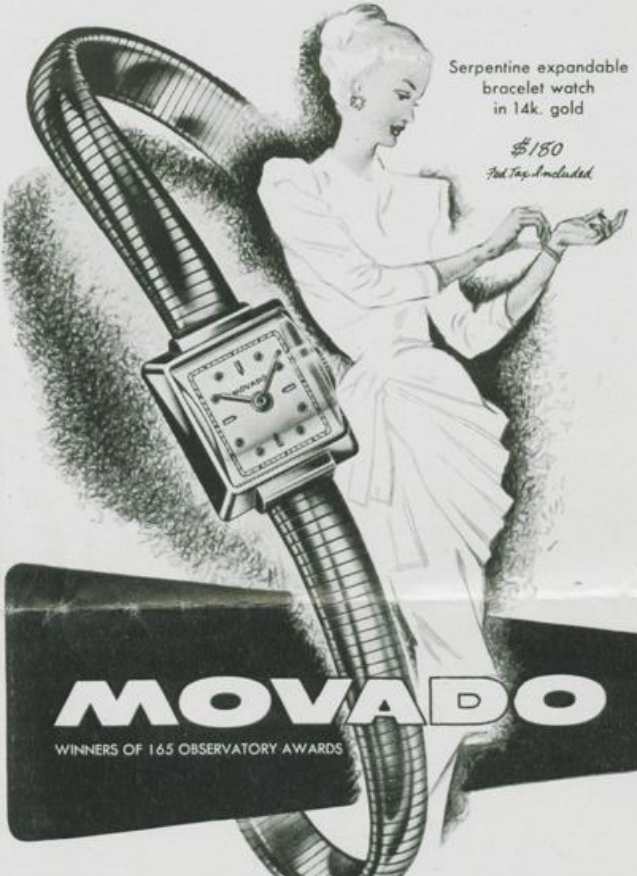
But, amazingly, the queer little man was able to prove his assertion. First of all, he proposed to paint another "Vermeer" in the presence and under the strict control of police officers. So he did, having been released from jail and allowed to return to his studio. The subject authorities had picked for him was "Young Jesus Teaching in the Temple." Mynheer van Meegeren sat down and, under the unbelieving eyes of professors and commissaries, completed another masterly composition *à la* Jan Vermeer—an exquisite piece of work (technically at least) which would have delighted Dr. Bredius and other infallible experts.

Was that sufficient proof? The master forger had more to offer. He produced some of the rare and precious colors he had used, in strict accordance with seventeenth-century methods—a mellow ultramarine made of genuine lapis lazuli, a radiant crimson consisting of the dried bodies of a scale insect (cochineal) native to Mexico, white lead to form a basic ingredient of the bright hues, dark pigments containing earth. Moreover, he presented various objects—dishes, weapons, articles of clothing, pieces of furniture—which had served him as models for certain details in the Emmaus tableau and other "classical" paintings. Investigators were shown the places where he had hidden while doing his stealthy job—Rocquebrune, in the South of France, and the village of Laren near Amsterdam.

For those who still remained unconvinced, van Meegeren had additional evidence that verified his claim beyond any question. The seventeenth-century canvas on which "Christ at Emmaus" was painted showed originally a "Resurrection of Lazarus," the work of a minor artist of that period. The forger, while removing most of that original composition, left certain parts of it intact, using them as a base for his own effects. Experts, having examined the picture by means of X-rays and various chemical tests, were familiar with the contours of the half-vanished Lazarus group. Was Mynheer van Meegeren able, by any chance, to oblige the investigating commission with some information about that invisible painting?

He was indeed. Not only did he know, and disclose, the general subject of the original, but he also recalled the position of the major figures, the distribution of colors, and other particulars. To the astonishment of all, the artist jotted down a few lines indicating with remarkable accuracy the composition of the Resurrection scene—quite a stunt, considering the fact that almost ten years had elapsed since he had seen the picture.

(Continued on following page)



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VAN MEEGEREN

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Now even the skeptics were compelled to admit that van Meegeren had proved his authorship of the "Emmausgangers" and the other discoveries. Where was the money museums and collectors had paid for six phony Vermeers and two equally spurious De Hoochs? Van Meegeren was asked to refund something like eight million guilders to the outraged buyers, including the Netherlands Government. It turned out, however, that there were only about three million left of the four-and-a-half he had received from art dealers Hoogendijk, De Boer, and Miedl in the course of the last nine years. (Out of the 1,650,000 guilders Goering had paid for "The Adulteress," Van Meegeren got a round million; in the case of "The Last Supper" his personal share was as high as 1,350,000 guilders. All those transactions—except the more elaborately staged "Emmaus" deal—were handled by the plagiarist or one of his trusted friends, supposedly on behalf of that nameless aristocratic family who had to part with their inherited treasures.)

Being unable to satisfy his creditors, van Meegeren was judicially declared a bankrupt. Authorities permitted him, however, to stay in his beautiful home, a large eighteenth-century mansion in the center of Amsterdam, where he enjoyed complete freedom while preparations for his trial were dragging on.

IT WAS there, in his private residence, that I called on Mynheer van Meegeren a few weeks before his trial. As he was not supposed to give any interviews, my visit had to have a purely social character. Mutual friends introduced me to the man whom some people considered a genius, and others a clever, unscrupulous crook.

He seemed delighted to see us, almost pathetically eager to talk, to make an impression, to explain his case. "Why did I do it?" he cried, pacing the room with frantic restlessness, his face twisted to a wry grimace. "The critics, my dear sir! Don't you see? The critics made me do it! 'No talent,' that's what they said about me! 'No imagination!' 'No personality!'" He shook his fists furiously, then rattled on: "I had to teach them a lesson; had to prove, once and for all, their utter incompetence, their shocking lack of knowledge and understanding. Well, I've done it, haven't I?"

He chuckled. Suddenly in high spirits, he offered us cigarettes and drinks—real American cigarettes and large glasses of the best Dutch *Genever*—rarities in Holland, these days!

Drinking and smoking, he continued his breathless talk. "Besides, is there anything immoral about producing a work of art in the style of a great master?" he demanded, somewhat aggressively. "If the so-called experts are not smart enough to see the difference—that's too bad! I am not the first one to fool them. Others did it before. The great Michelangelo sold some of his works as newly excavated antique sculptures, just to get better prices. And then, in the nineteenth century, that incredible fellow, Bastianini—

you surely remember him, Giovanni Bastianini of Florence?—his statues and busts were admired all over the world as the most wonderful artistic monuments of the Renaissance period. And even though Bastianini's success should have made the critics a little cautious, they allowed themselves to be duped again, just a few years later, by another Italian of stupendous versatility, Alceo Dossena. What a craftsman! He mastered all the different styles of the past three thousand years—Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque. But all the great exploits of forgery were accomplished in the field of sculpture. It was my ambition to prove that the same thing could be done through the medium of painting."

Of course, in reality plagiarism has by no means been limited to the particular sphere of sculpture; the *chronique scandaleuse* of art records numerous cases of forgers successfully imitating the mannerisms and signatures of illustrious painters. One of the more recent and most sensational scandals of that kind took place in 1932 when several pictures attributed to Vincent van Gogh turned out to be counterfeit, to the embarrassment of such distinguished van Gogh specialists as Julius Meier-Graefe who had taken them for the real thing. But it would have been tactless, indeed cruel, to remind van Meegeren of those facts, since it obviously flattered his ego to think of himself as the first and only large-scale plagiarist in the history of painting.

Clearly, he was a man of unusually strong emotions—tormented by ambition, haunted by doubts and fears. What bitterness, what fierce resentment in his voice whenever he referred to his archenemies, those despicable scoundrels, the critics! And what profound joy, what passion, as he described those wonderful, exciting weeks he spent in the solitude of his Rocquebrune studio, working on "Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus!"

"It was the most thrilling, the most inspiring experience of my whole life!" he said, his eyes alight with real enthusiasm. "There were so many things to consider, so many traps to avoid. It took me about seven months—seven months of constant solitude, of frantic labor, of unending delight! I was



President Truman confers with three "cold war" strategists of the State Department, Undersecretary Robert A. Lovett, George F. Kennan, director of the Policy Planning Board and author of the article on the USSR which appeared in "Foreign Affairs," and Charles E. Bohlen, counselor. (Page 100 has our Washington Letter)

happy because I felt, yes, I was positive, that good old Vermeer would be satisfied with my job. He was keeping me company, you know. He was always with me, during that whole period. I sensed his presence; he encouraged me. He liked what I was doing. Yes, he really did."

It was strange to watch this little wizard—his shifty eyes, the expressive play of his dexterous, fidgety hands. There was something queer, something disquieting about his smile as he paused from time to time, absorbed in memories. If you were a believer in occultism, you might suspect some kind of mysterious contact to have existed between the immortal Vermeer and this frustrated, harrassed mortal. But why should the dematerialized genius have employed such a rickety material tool? Why should the great Vermeer have had his otherworldly visions painted through the medium of little van Meegeren?

The room where we were sitting, a large, paneled hall on the ground floor of the fine old mansion, was lavishly decorated with "real van Meegerens": huge black-and-white compositions showing lasciviously ecstatic nudes, torture scenes, skeletons, angry-looking soldiers, musicians with sheepishly transfigured faces over stiff white collars and neatly tied white ties. Of course, all these drawings and paintings are the work of an experienced craftsman; they testify to an accomplished technique, even to a certain virtuosity. Some of them are not without charm, especially a few likenesses of wide-eyed and graceful deer. But on the whole, what an array of macabre grimaces! What poor taste! What gruesome imagination!

IT IS no wonder that the Nazis had a penchant for Mynheer van Meegeren's products. Naturally, the sham supermen of Berlin and Berchtesgaden would fall for his pretentious, sinister *Kitsch*—to use an untranslatable German term, most appropriate in this particular context. How Hitler must have loved this conspicuously Germanic-looking pianist surrounded by the ghosts of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms! How this cheap and showy mysticism must have appealed to the Fuehrer's poetic

heart! Don't I recall having heard rather unpleasant stories about the pianist, one Theo van der Pas, portrayed here in such illustrious company? The Dutch virtuoso on whose shoulder van Meegeren placed Chopin's spookily hand was in fact such an ardent "collaborationist" that his compatriots, after the liberation, banned him for two years from the concert halls. Van Meegeren, however, did not deem it necessary to remove his friend Theo from the wall of his drawing room. It was not without pride that he showed us a large, pompously presented book containing, among scores of other "real van Meegerens," a full-page reproduction of the Pas portrait. The book, which offers also some rhapsodical articles on van Meegeren's art and personality, was printed in the Netherlands at the time of the German occupation. A copy of it was found in Hitler's personal library, adorned with the artist's autographed dedication to the Fuehrer.

THE longer I look at van Meegeren's graphic nightmares, the more I am perplexed. Where is the affinity between these grotesque, sultry hallucinations and the sublime discretion of Vermeer's mastership? If the profound persuasion of Vermeer's art lies mostly in its natural and effortless nobility, it is the complete absence of anything noble or harmonious which makes van Meegeren's work so repulsive. How could an artist, a man so utterly devoid of greatness, produce a great picture like "Emmaus?"

There is something fascinating and disturbing about this strange contradiction, as there is something fascinating and disturbing about the phenomenon of split personality in general. No doubt van Meegeren ceased to be himself while composing his masterpieces *à la* Vermeer or in the style of any other master. (For, almost certainly, this matchless plagiarist could ape the characteristics of Rembrandt or Poussin just as accurately as those of Pieter de Hooch and his illustrious friend.) This was more than just a case of extreme adaptability; rather, it had to do with metamorphosis in the old, mythological sense—meaning a permanent or temporary change of substance and structure, presumably by witchcraft.

But Black Magic and Art are irreconcilable contrasts. By stooping to the dubious tricks of scorchery, the artist betrayed his real mission and polluted the pure sphere of the creative genius. The Dutch prosecutor, H. A. Wassenbergh, was right, in a sense, in telling the Court that Hans van Meegeren had "insulted the great masters of our nation" whose style and spirit he copied with such terrifying skill.

Some of the celebrated forgeries were displayed in the courtroom where the trial took place. (The most famous one, "De Emmausgangers," was missing, though. More than ten years have passed since that picture was painted, which means that the offense comes under the statute of limitations, according to Dutch law.) The art dealers and experts, looking now at those synthetic chef-d'oeuvres again, appeared rather embarrassed.

"It's curious," Art Dealer Hoogendijk observed, contemplating a portrait of Christ for which he had

once paid 400,000 guilders; "The picture has lost its glamour. I'm afraid it's not really a very good picture. . . . How could I ever take it for a genuine Vermeer? I must have been blind or hypnotized or something."

The defendant grinned, shrugged his shoulders—self-conscious, nervous, arrogant. I could not help remembering what he had told me, a few weeks before, in his studio: "They don't appreciate talent here, they don't understand the exceptional. No, I shan't stay in the Netherlands. If they ever allow me to move about again, I'll go to the United States. I have many friends there, many admirers. They want me to come, they keep sending me invitations. In America I wouldn't be treated as a criminal but as a creative artist. I'd make plenty of money in America. I'd be happy there."

The witness continued: "Anyway, something was wrong with me." "Otherwise I wouldn't have fallen for such an obvious swindle. Maybe it had to do with the occupation? Some kind of wartime psychosis? Who knows?"

It sounded convincing enough. Some listeners nodded; laughter could be heard from the crowded gallery. People looked at van Meegeren, who tried to keep a detached and haughty expression. But, clearly, his self-assurance was as phony as his art. Nothing about him was real. A shrewd and reckless pretender, he seemed just the kind of man that would prosper in times of treachery and confusion. What with an ersatz superman duping and ruling the Continent, why should not an ersatz genius get away with his comparatively innocuous hoax?

TROPIC LANDFALL

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as the Pennsylvania Station in New York or the Public Service Building in Newark, New Jersey. No, that wouldn't do. I was aware that something of the strain of Sir John Mandeville infests all travelers, in spite of themselves, and I was prepared to be let down.

But, at that instant on the staircase, I think I felt what all the others had—awe that this vast ruin, ravaged by storms, shocked by earthquakes, and gutted by fires, actually stood. And it took no special keenness of imagination to see it as it had been in its shining newness in 1812. Then, it lifted four stories above its terrace, was almost all brick, with delicate cornices, and was covered with stucco of pale yellow, so that from a little distance, in sunlight, it seemed of gold. Its chambers were stuffed with tapestries and silk, the records say; ornaments were silver or gold or mahogany; there were paintings from Europe (I wish someone had told us what paintings).

Today, Sans Souci is only a shell; but *shell* is misleading, for it will endure. Its walls are thick and strongly made; its foundation is rock. Hollow, roofless, grass-grown, with little trees rising from drifted soil in rooms that cannot remember the pageant of the court, this place is a lasting monument to the man who dreamed it, to all the men who bruised their hands in the labor of building it.

We mounted the rest of the stairs. Our horses, Léon said, were on the wide terrace to the left of the palace, the terrace where, under an old caimite tree, Christophe held informal receptions for his aristocracy. But the horses were not ready; one was still stabled below in the village and would be brought promptly. For ten minutes we walked through the silent rooms of the palace, treading on grass. Léon led us to the chamber where, behind a narrow window that looks out over Milot and across the lovely plain to Cap-Haïtien and the sea, Christophe killed himself with a pistol ball. (There are so many legends: some say the bullet was of gold, others of silver. Probably the unromantic truth is that Christophe, stricken by paralysis and unable to control a revolt among his people, shot himself with a common plug of lead, like any other man.) The death room is small; its walls are still sound. The grass is like a green carpet in its muffling any footfalls.

Under the caimite tree we eventually did find our horses. With Léon mounted to bring up the rear, we left the terrace of Sans Souci in the full heat of day and started up the trail to the Citadel.

The clouds were heavy above us. Only rarely, now, did the sun break through. "Léon," I shouted, "is it going to rain?" He struck himself sharply on the forehead with the flat of his hand. "Never!" he cried.

Milot is not much above sea level, and the Citadel's altitude is better than 2,500 feet. We had expected a steep climb, and found it. There is no gracious introductory path of gentle rises to adjust your nerves; rather, your horse rears back, digs in his hoofs, and starts to climb. You are off. This, you know, will go on for two hours—zigzagging, twisting, climbing, always climbing. So you take a firm grip with your knees, clutch your horse's mane with one hand, and (if you are devout) trace the cross upon your breast, quickly.

My mount and my small black attendant—the horseboy who came with him—were at war all the way up the trail. The beast would move along rapidly, at a pace between walking and running, for a few minutes and then would dawdle, making a great show of stepping carefully on the jagged rocks of the path, rather like a delicate old lady out for a stroll on cobblestones. But this super-caution was a sham and the horseboy knew it. With a great shout, part meaningless ejaculation and part Creole, he would periodically beat the horse unmercifully fore and aft with a stick the size of a walking cane. And the horse, unprotesting, would shuffle off again, almost running up a grade that offered no obvious safe footholds. But after a few minutes he would take to mincing again, hopefully, and again the boy would scream what sounded like a Pennsylvania plowman's curse, and another beating would follow. This went on and on—until finally I lost all awareness of the game between horse and boy, and no longer noticed the blows that rained about my saddle and often narrowly missed me.

My boy—who was no boy at all, really, but an allantoidal little Negro perhaps forty years old—spoke

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