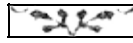


Augustus (1913)



A young woman named Elizabeth, who lived on Mostack Street, had lost her husband due to an accident shortly after their marriage, and now she sat poor and desolate in her little room, about to give birth to a child who would have no father. Because she was so utterly alone, she kept thinking about the child she was expecting, and her thoughts turned into wishes and dreams about all the beautiful, splendid, and desirable things she wanted for the child. A stone house with plate-glass windows and a fountain in the garden seemed barely good enough for the young one, and as far as his future was concerned, he had to become at least a professor or a king.

Next to Elizabeth's house lived an old man who was seldom seen. He was a little fellow who wore a tasseled cap on his gray head and carried a green umbrella with whalebone ribs, as in the old days.

The children were afraid of him, and the grown-ups believed he probably had his reasons for living as secluded as he did. No one saw him very much for long periods of time, but sometimes in the evening strange music could be heard coming from his small dilapidated house, as though tiny, delicate instruments were being played. Then as the children walked by the house, they would ask their mothers whether angels or perhaps nixies were singing inside. Their mothers, however, knew nothing about it and would respond, "No, no, that must be a music box."

This little man, who was called Mr. Binsswanger by his neighbors, had a strange kind of friendship with Elizabeth. They never spoke to one another, and yet the little old man would greet her in the friendliest manner each time he passed her window, and she would nod gratefully to him in return, for she liked him very much. And each of them thought: If ever I am really desperate and need help, I'll certainly go to my neighbor for advice. When the days began to turn dark, Elizabeth sat at her window all by herself. She would mourn her dead husband, think about her small child, or slip into a reverie. Then Mr. Binsswanger would quietly open his casement window, and tranquil music would flow from his dark room, softly and silvery like moonlight through a crack in the clouds. In return, Elizabeth made a point of looking after Mr. Binsswanger's geranium plants at his back window, which he always forgot to water. They were always green and in full bloom and never wilted because Elizabeth carefully tended them early each morning.

Now one raw windy evening, when autumn was making its presence felt and no one could be seen on Mostack Street, the poor young woman realized that her time had come, and she was afraid because she was completely alone. At nightfall, however, an old woman, carrying a lantern in her hand, arrived at her door, entered the house, boiled water, and laid out the linens in the proper manner. She did everything that has to be done when a child is about to be born, and Elizabeth let her do it all without saying a word. Only when the baby was there and was enjoying its first slumber on earth, wrapped in new diapers, did she ask the old woman where she had come from.

"Mr. Binsswanger sent me," the old woman said, and then the tired Elizabeth fell asleep. The next morning when she awoke, she found that the milk had been boiled and was ready for her. Everything in the room had been cleaned and put away, and next to her lay her tiny son, who cried because he was hungry. But the old woman was gone. So now the mother drew her baby to her breast and was happy that he was so good looking and strong. She thought of his father, who had not lived long enough to see his son, and tears rose up in her eyes. Then she hugged the little child and was

forced to smile as she and her son fell asleep once more. When she woke up, there was more milk. Some soup had been cooked, and the baby was wrapped in clean diapers.

Soon the mother was again healthy and strong enough to take care of herself and little Augustus. Gradually, it occurred to her that her son had to be baptized and that she had no godfather for him. So toward evening, when darkness was about to cover the streets and the sweet music sounded once again from the little house next door, she went to see Mr. Binsswanger and knocked timidly on the dark door.

“Come in,” he called out in a friendly voice, and as he went toward her, the music suddenly stopped. Inside there was a small old table with a lamp and book on it, and everything was just as it was in other people’s homes.

“I’ve come to thank you,” Elizabeth said, “because you sent that good woman to me. I’d also like to pay her as soon as I begin working again and can earn some money. But right now I have something else on my mind. The boy must be baptized, and I want him to be named Augustus after his father. But I don’t know anyone around here and don’t have a godfather for him.”

“Yes, I know, and I’ve also been thinking about this,” the neighbor said, stroking his gray beard. “It would be good if he had a kind and rich godfather who could take care of him if ever things were not to go too well for you. But I am only a lonely old man, and I, too, have few friends in the neighborhood. Therefore, I can’t recommend anyone to you, unless you want to accept me as the godfather.”

The poor mother was relieved to hear this and thanked the little man, whom she did indeed choose as the godfather. On the following Sunday they carried the baby to the church and had him baptized. The old woman, too, appeared once more and gave the infant a taler as a present. When Elizabeth refused to accept it, the old woman said, “Please, take it. I’m old and have everything that I need. Perhaps the taler will bring him luck. It was a pleasure for me to do a favor for Mr. Binsswanger this time. We’re old friends.”

Then they went home together, and Elizabeth made coffee for her guests. Mr. Binsswanger had brought a cake, so they enjoyed a real baptismal feast. When they had finished eating and drinking everything and the baby had long since fallen asleep, Mr. Binsswanger said modestly, “Now that I’m little Augustus’s godfather, I’d like to give him a present and provide him with a royal castle or a sackful of gold coins, but I don’t have these things. I can only give him a taler, just as my good friend has already done. Meanwhile, I’ll do whatever I can for him. Elizabeth, you’ve probably wished many beautiful and good things for your boy. Now, think about what you feel would be the very best thing for him, and I’ll make sure that your wish comes true. You have one free wish for your child, whatever you want — but only one. Think about it carefully, and when you hear my music box playing tonight, you must whisper your wish into the left ear of your little one, and it will be fulfilled.”

Thereupon, Mr. Binsswanger quickly left the room, and the old woman departed with him. Elizabeth remained alone, totally bewildered. If the two talers had not been lying in the cradle and the cake had not been on the table, she would have thought it all a dream. Then she sat down next to the cradle and rocked her child, while she meditated and thought up many beautiful wishes. At first she wanted Augustus to become rich or handsome or tremendously strong. Then she thought it might be best if he were clever and intelligent, but she constantly had misgivings. Finally she thought: “Oh, the little old man was only joking with me.”

It had already become dark, and she would have fallen asleep in her chair beside the cradle, worn out from entertaining her guests and from her worries and thinking of so many wishes, if it had

not been for the sounds of the fine soft music that drifted over from the house next door. The music was so delicate and exquisite that no other music box could have ever produced the same sounds. Upon hearing them, Elizabeth came quickly to her senses and remembered everything that had happened. Now she believed in her neighbor Binsswanger once more and in his godfather's gift. Yet the more she reflected and the more she wanted to make a wish for something, the more confused her thoughts became. As a result, she could not decide upon anything and became so distressed that she had tears in her eyes. Then the music sounded more softly and faintly, and she thought that if she did not make a wish right at that moment, it would all be too late and everything would be lost.

So she sighed, leaned over her boy, and whispered in his left ear, "My little son, I wish — I wish," and just as the beautiful music was about to fade completely away, she became frightened and said quickly, "I wish that everyone will have to love you."

Now the sounds of the music had entirely vanished, and it was deathly quiet in the dark room. However, she flung herself over the cradle and cried and was filled with fear and anxiety. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Now that I've wished the best thing that I know for you, I feel that it was perhaps not the right thing. Even if everybody loves you, every single person, nobody can love you as much as your mother."

In the following years Augustus grew up like all other children do. He was a cute blond-haired boy with bright fiery eyes, and he was spoiled by his mother and well liked by everyone. Elizabeth soon realized that her baptismal wish for her son was being fulfilled. Indeed, no sooner was the little boy able to walk through the streets than everybody he encountered found him good looking, pert, and smart, an unusual child, and everybody shook his hand, peered into his eyes, and wanted to do him a favor. Young mothers smiled at him, and old women gave him apples, and if he did anything naughty, nobody believed that it had been he, or if it was obvious that he was the guilty one, people shrugged and said, "You really can't blame that nice little boy."

People who had been drawn to the handsome boy also started coming to see his mother. Up until this time, nobody had taken the time to get to know her, and she had received only a few sewing jobs.

Now, however, she was well known as the mother of Augustus and had more customers than she could have ever wished. Everything went well for her and for the young boy, too, and whenever they went out together, the neighbors were delighted and greeted them and followed the happy pair with their eyes.

Augustus himself had his best times next door with his godfather, who sometimes called him over to his house in the evening when it was dark. The only light in the room would be produced by small red flames burning in the black opening of the fireplace. The little old man would draw the child to him on a fur rug on the floor and look into the flames and tell him stories. But sometimes when a story had come to an end and the little one was very sleepy and looked over at the fire with drooping eyelids in the dark silence, a sweet polyphonic music would ring out of the darkness, and when the two of them listened to it for a long time, it often happened that the entire room would suddenly be filled with tiny glittering children, who flew back and forth in circles with bright golden wings, dancing gracefully around each other in pairs. They also sang, and it sounded as though a hundred voices were rejoicing with exuberance and serenity. It was the most beautiful thing that Augustus had ever heard or seen, and when he later thought about his childhood, it was the dark, comfortable room of his godfather and the red flames in the fireplace with the music and the festive golden magic flight of the angelic creatures that rose in his memory and made him homesick.

In the meantime the boy grew bigger, and now there were times when his mother was sad and

compelled to think back to that baptismal night with regret. Augustus ran around carefree in the neighborhood and was welcome everywhere. People gave him nuts and pears, cookies and toys as gifts. They let him have things to eat and drink, play on their knees, and pick flowers in their gardens. He often came home late in the evening and shoved his mother's soup aside, unwilling to eat. If she became upset and wept, he would find the entire scene boring and go to bed in a bad mood. And if she scolded and punished him, he would scream with all his might and complain that everyone was nice and kind to him except his mother. So she often had distressing times and would become seriously angry with her son. But afterward, when he lay sleeping with his head on his pillow and her candle would cast a ray of light on his innocent childish face, all the bitterness in her heart would vanish, and she would kiss him, taking care that he did not wake up. It was her own fault that everyone liked Augustus, and sometimes she thought with sorrow and also some dread that it might have been better if she had never made her wish.



One time she happened to be standing right by Mr. Binsswanger's window of geraniums, cutting the wilted flowers from their stems with some shears, when suddenly she heard her son's voice in the courtyard behind the two houses, and she looked over to see what was happening. He was leaning against the wall with his handsome and arrogant face, and in front of him stood a girl who was bigger than he was. She looked at him imploringly and said, "Come now. Be nice and give me a kiss."

"I don't want to," Augustus said, and stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Please," she said again. "I'll give you something wonderful if you do."

"What?" asked the boy.

"I have two apples," she said shyly.

But he turned around and made a face.

“I don’t like apples,” he remarked with disdain, and was about to run away.

But the girl grabbed hold of his arm tightly and cajoled him further: “I also have a beautiful ring.”

“Show me!” said Augustus.

She showed him the ring, and he examined it carefully. Then he took it off her finger, put it on his own, held it up to the light, and decided that he liked it.

“Well, you can have your kiss now,” he said abruptly, and gave her a quick peck on her mouth.

“How about playing with me now?” she asked in a trusting way, and she put her arm through his.

But he pushed her away and shouted viciously, “Stop pestering me! Just leave me alone! I want to play with some other friends.”

The girl began to cry and left the courtyard with slumped shoulders, while Augustus looked after her with a bored and irritated expression on his face. Then he turned the ring on his finger and studied it. Soon he began to whistle and slowly walked away from the place.

However, his mother, standing there with the shears in her hand, was horrified by the harshness and contempt with which her son had treated the girl’s love. She left the flowers where they were, and as she shook her head, she kept repeating, “He’s really evil. He has no heart at all!”

Later, when Augustus came home, she took him to task, but he merely laughed and looked at her with his blue eyes, showing no sign of guilt. Then he began to sing and flatter her, and he was so funny and nice and tender with her that she had to laugh and realized that you could not take everything so seriously with children.

Meanwhile the boy did not entirely escape punishment for his misconduct. His godfather Binsswanger was the only one whom Augustus respected, and when he went to the old man’s room in the evening, the godfather said, “There’s no fire burning tonight, and there is no music. The little angelic children are sad because you were so bad.” Then Augustus went home without saying a word and flung himself on his bed and cried. Afterward, he tried hard for many days to be good and kind.

Nevertheless, the flames in the fireplace burned less and less, and the godfather could not be bribed with tears and hugs. By the time Augustus turned twelve years old, the magic angelic flight in his godfather’s room had become more a distant dream than anything else. Once when he had a dream in his own room during the night, he was twice as wild and boisterous the next day, and like a military general he ordered his numerous playmates to do reckless things.

His mother had long since grown tired of hearing everyone praise her son and tell her how fine and charming he was. In fact, all she did was worry about him. One day, when his teacher came to her and told her that he knew someone who had offered to send her son to a boarding school for his education, she consulted with Mr. Binsswanger. Shortly thereafter, on a spring morning, a carriage drove up to the house, and Augustus, dressed in a fine new suit, climbed into it and said farewell to his mother, godfather, and neighbors because he was going to the capital to live and study. His mother had parted his blond hair neatly for the last time and gave him her blessing. Now the horses tugged, and Augustus was off on his journey into a new and unknown world.

After many years had passed and Augustus had become a college student and wore a red cap and moustache, he returned home because his godfather had written to him that his mother would not live much longer because of an illness. The young man arrived in the evening, and the neighbors watched with astonishment as he stepped out of the carriage, followed by the coachman, who carried a large leather suitcase into the house, where his mother lay dying in the old room with the low ceiling. When the handsome student saw her pale withered face on the white pillows and that she was barely able to greet him with silent eyes, he sank to the floor next to her bed and began to weep. He

kissed his mother's limp hands and knelt by her side the entire night until her hands had become cold and her eyes, extinguished.

After his mother was buried, his godfather Binsswanger took him by the arm and went with him into his house, which seemed to the young man to have become even smaller and darker. When they had sat together for a long time and the small windows were glimmering dimly in the darkness, the little old man stroked his gray beard with his lean fingers and said to Augustus, "I want to make a fire in the fireplace. Then we won't need the lamp. I know that you must leave tomorrow, and now that your mother is dead, you won't be back again very soon."

As he said this, he lit a small fire in the fireplace and moved his easy chair closer to it. Augustus did the same. Once again, they sat for a long time and watched the glowing logs until the flames died down. Then the old man said softly, "Farewell, Augustus, I wish you well. You had a fine mother, who did more for you than you know. I would have liked to make music for you one more time and show you the small blessed creatures, but you know it won't work anymore. Nevertheless, you mustn't forget them, and you must remember that they are still singing and that you may even be able to hear them one more time if you ever feel a deep craving for them with a lonely and longing heart. Give me your hand, my boy. I'm old, and I must go to sleep."

Augustus shook hands with him and could not utter a word. He went sadly across the way into the desolate little house and lay down to sleep for the last time in his old home. But before he fell asleep, he thought he heard the sweet soft music of his childhood once again from far away. The next morning he departed, and nothing was heard about him for a long time.

Soon Augustus forgot even godfather Binsswanger and his angels. Swept away by a life of luxury, he rode its waves. No one could equal the manner in which he went through bustling streets, greeting the attentive girls with a contemptuous look. No one could dance as gracefully and charmingly as he did, drive in a coach as smoothly and elegantly, or carouse as loudly and boastfully in a garden during a summer night. In addition, Augustus became the lover of a rich widow who gave him money, clothes, horses, and everything he needed or wanted. He traveled with her to Paris and Rome and slept under her silken sheets. His true love, however, was the soft blond daughter of an upright citizen, and he risked his life by visiting her at night in her father's garden. Whenever he took a trip, she kept contact with him by writing long passionate letters.

But one time he did not return. He had found friends in Paris, and since he had tired of the rich widow and long since treated his studies as a nuisance, he remained far away in France and enjoyed the life of high society. He kept horses, dogs, and women. He won and lost money in large sums, and people everywhere pursued him, fit their lives to his needs, and were at his service. And he smiled and accepted it all, just as he had long ago accepted the girl's ring when he was a boy. The magic of the wish lay in his eyes and on his lips.

Women overwhelmed him with tenderness, and his friends raved about him, and nobody saw — he himself hardly noticed it — how empty and greedy his heart had become and how his soul was sick and languishing in pain. Sometimes he became tired of being loved by everyone and went by himself in disguise to foreign cities. Yet everywhere he went he found that the people were foolish and very easy to conquer. In fact, he found that love had become ridiculous as it continued to pursue him so zealously and yet was content with so little. He was often repulsed by women and men because they did not show more pride, and he spent whole days with his dogs hunting in beautiful regions of the mountains. If he stalked and shot a stag, it made him happier than courting a beautiful and spoiled woman.

One time, however, while he was on a sea voyage, he noticed the young wife of an ambassador,

an austere, slender lady of Nordic nobility, standing amidst many other distinguished ladies and cosmopolitan men. She was clearly the most striking person among them, proud and quiet, without peer. While he was observing her, he noticed that her glance seemed to touch him too, fleetingly and indifferently. It was as though he now felt for the first time what love was, and he became determined to win her love. From then on, he was always near her and within sight of her, and because he himself was constantly surrounded by women and men who admired him and sought his company, he and the beautiful austere lady were always kept apart, at the center of attention of the other travelers, like a prince and princess. Even the husband of the blond lady treated him with deference and endeavored to please him.

It was practically impossible for Augustus to be alone with this remarkable woman until the ship sailed into the port of a southern city, and all the voyagers disembarked for a few hours to walk around the foreign city and feel some earth under their feet once again. Augustus did not budge from the side of his beloved and eventually succeeded in drawing her into a conversation amid the hustle and bustle of a lively marketplace. There were numerous small, dark alleys connected to the marketplace, and it was into one of these alleys that he led her, for she had no reason not to trust him. Yet when she suddenly found herself alone with him, without her companions, she became timid, while Augustus fervently took her reluctant hands into his and implored her to remain on land and to flee somewhere with him.

The young lady turned pale and kept her eyes fixed on the ground. "Oh, this is not very gentlemanlike," she said softly. "Allow me to forget what you've just said!"

"I'm not a gentleman!" exclaimed Augustus. "I'm a lover, and a lover knows nothing but his beloved and has no other thought than to be with her. You're such a beautiful woman! Come with me, and I'll make you happy."

She looked at him earnestly and reproachfully with her bright blue eyes. "How could you know that I love you?" she whispered dolefully. "I can't lie — I do love you and have often wished that you were my husband, for you are the first man whom I've loved with my heart. Oh, how can love go so far astray! I had never thought it possible for me to love a man who's not pure and good. But I prefer a thousand times to remain with my husband than to go off with you, even though I do not love him very much. You see, he is a gentleman and full of honor and chivalry, qualities that you lack. And now don't say one more word to me, but bring me back to the ship. Otherwise, I'll call some people to protect me from your intrusive behavior."

No matter how much Augustus begged and protested, she turned away from him, and she would have walked off alone if he had not run after her and accompanied her silently to the ship. Once he was there, he had his suitcases brought ashore and did not say goodbye to anyone.

From then on the fortunes of this well-beloved man declined. He came to hate virtue and honor and trampled them underfoot. He took pleasure in seducing virtuous women with all the magic wiles at his disposal, and he exploited unsuspecting men whom he quickly won as friends, only to discard them with contempt. He reduced women and girls to poverty, then denied having anything to do with their downfall, and he sought out young men from noble families, whom he led astray and corrupted. He tried out every sort of pleasure to the point of exhaustion, and there was no vice that he did not learn and then abandon. But there was no longer any joy in his heart, and nothing in his soul responded to the love that he attracted everywhere he went.

Cynical and morose, he lived in a beautiful country mansion by the sea, and he tormented the women and friends who visited him there with wild whims and malicious acts. He took pleasure in humiliating people and showing them how much he despised them. Satiated, he felt sick and tired of

being sought, demanded, and given love, which did not interest him. He sensed the worthlessness of his dissipated and decadent life and of the way that he had always taken and never given anything. Sometimes he fasted for a while, just to be able to feel a voracious desire again and to satisfy his appetite.

News spread among his friends that he was sick and needed peace and quiet. Letters came, but he never read them, and people who were worried about him asked his servants how his health was. He sat alone, however, deeply troubled, in his mansion overlooking the sea. His life lay ravaged and empty behind him; it was barren and without a trace of love, like the gray, undulating water of the sea. He looked hideous as he sat hunched over in his easy chair at the high window and held himself to account. White gulls drifted in the wind on the beach. He followed the course of their flight with a vacuous look, devoid of joy and interest. Only his lips smiled harshly and maliciously as he finished his thoughts and rang for his servant, whom he ordered to send invitations to his friends to attend a party on a particular day. His intention was to horrify and mock them by confronting them on arrival with an empty house and his own corpse. Indeed, he had decided to end his life with poison before they came.

On the evening when the party was to take place, he sent all the servants from the house, so it became completely quiet in the large rooms. Then he went into his bedroom, mixed strong poison into a glass of Cyprus wine, and raised it to his lips. Just as he was about to drink it, there was a knock at the door. When he did not answer, the door opened, and a little old man entered. He went straight to Augustus, carefully took the glass out of his hands, and said with a very familiar voice, "Good evening, Augustus. How are you?"

Surprised, annoyed, and somewhat ashamed, Augustus smiled mockingly and said, "Why, Mr. Binsswanger, are you still alive? It's been a long time, and you truly do not seem to have grown any older. But you're disturbing me at this moment, my dear man. I'm tired, and I was just about to take a sleeping potion."

"So I see," his godfather responded calmly. "You want to take a sleeping potion, and you're right. It's the last sort of wine that can still help you. But before you drink it, let's have a little chat, my boy. And since I've traveled so far, you won't be angry at me if I refresh myself with a small drink."

Upon saying this, he took the glass and raised it to his lips, and before Augustus could prevent him, he lifted it high and drank it all in one quick gulp.

Augustus turned deathly pale. He rushed over to his godfather, shook him by the shoulders, and cried out in a shrill voice, "Old man, do you know what you have just drunk?"

Mr. Binsswanger nodded his wise gray head and smiled. "It's Cyprus wine, I see, and it's not bad. You don't seem to be suffering from a lack of good wine. But I have little time, and I don't want to keep you unnecessarily long if you'll just listen to me."

Confused, Augustus kept looking at his godfather with horror in his bright eyes, expecting him to collapse at any moment. Meanwhile, his godfather sat down comfortably in a chair and nodded kindly to his young friend.

"Are you worried that the drink of wine will harm me? Just relax! It's nice of you to worry about me — I would never have expected it. But now let's talk as we used to in the old days! It seems to me that you've had your fill of the easy life. I can understand that, and when I leave, you can refill your glass and drink it down. But before that, I must tell you something."

Augustus leaned against the wall and listened to the kind, pleasant voice of the ancient little man. The familiar voice from his childhood brought back to life shadows of the past that he could

picture in his mind. Profound shame and sorrow gripped him, as if he were actually viewing his innocent childhood.

“I drank your poison,” the old man continued, “because I’m the one responsible for your misery. You see, when you were baptized, your mother made a wish, and I fulfilled it even though it was a foolish wish. You don’t need to know what it was. It has become a curse, as you yourself have realized. I’m sorry that it turned out this way, and it would make me happy if I could live to see you sitting with me at home by the fireplace once more and listening to the angels sing. It will not be easy, and at the moment it may seem impossible to you that your heart could ever become healthy and pure and cheerful again. But it is possible, and I want to ask you to try it. Your poor mother’s wish cost you dearly, Augustus. How would it be now if I granted you another wish, any one you want? I don’t think that you’ll want money and possessions, nor power or the love of women. You’ve had enough of all this. Think about it carefully, and when you believe you know the right magic that will make your ruined life better and beautiful and that could also make you happy once more, then wish it for yourself.”

Now Augustus sat deep in thought and did not respond. He was too tired and too much in despair, but after a while he said, “Thank you, godfather Binsswanger. However, I believe that my life is so tangled that there’s no comb in the world that could ever smooth it out. Its better for me if I do what I intended to do when you came in. But I want to thank you nevertheless for coming.”

“Yes,” said the old man discreetly. “I can understand that it’s not easy for you, Augustus. But perhaps you can still reconsider. Perhaps you can recall what you were missing most of all. Or perhaps you can remember the early days, when your mother was still alive and you occasionally came to me in the evening. Weren’t you sometimes happy then?”

“Yes, but that was long ago.” Augustus nodded, and the picture of his radiant youth came back to him from afar, a faint reflection, as though from an antique mirror. “But that can’t return. I cannot wish to be a child again. Why, then everything would start all over again!”

“You’re perfectly right. That would make no sense. But think once more about the time when we were all together at home and about the poor girl whom you used to visit as a student at night in her father’s garden, and think about the beautiful blond lady with whom you once traveled on a ship, and think about all those moments when you’ve ever been happy, when life seemed to be good and precious. Perhaps you can recognize what made you happy during those times and can wish for it. Do it, my boy. Do it for me!”

Augustus closed his eyes and recalled his life as one looks back from a dark corridor to a distant point of light from where one has come, and he saw once again how everything had once been bright and beautiful around him and had gradually become darker and darker until he stood in pitch-blackness and could no longer be happy about anything. And the more he contemplated and remembered, the more beautiful and lovable and desirable the distant small spot of life seemed to glisten at him, and finally he recognized it, and tears burst from his eyes.

“I’ll try it,” he said to his godfather. “Take away the old magic. It hasn’t helped me at all. In its place, give me the power to love people!”

Weeping, he knelt before his old friend, and as he sank to the ground, he could feel love for this old man burning within him, and he struggled to express it in forgotten words and gestures. But his godfather, that tiny man, took him gently into his arms and carried him to his bed. There he laid him down and stroked his hair from his feverish brow.

“Everything’s all right,” he whispered softly to Augustus. “Everything’s all right, my child. Everything will turn out well.”

Augustus felt totally worn out by fatigue, as if he had aged many years in one instant. He fell into a deep sleep, and the old man silently left the forsaken house.

The next day, Augustus was awakened by a wild tumult that resounded throughout the house, and when he got up and opened the bedroom door, he found the hall and all the rooms filled with his former friends, who had come to the party and found the house abandoned. They were angry and disappointed, and when he went toward them to cajole them as usual with a smile or a joke, he suddenly felt that he had lost the power to do so. No sooner did they see him than they all began simultaneously to yell at him, and when he smiled helplessly and stretched out his hands in self-defense, they fell upon him in rage.

“You crook!” one person cried. “Where’s the money you owe me?” And another: “And the horse that I loaned you?” And a furious pretty woman: “The entire world knows my secrets now that you’ve blabbed about them. Oh, how I hate you, you monster!” And a hollow-eyed young man screamed with a distorted face: “Do you know what you’ve made of me? You’re Satan, the corrupter of youth!”

And so it continued, each person heaping insults and curses on him, and each one was justified, and many hit him, and they left broken mirrors behind when they departed and took many precious articles. Augustus got up from the floor, beaten and dishonored. Then he went into his bedroom and looked into the mirror in order to wash himself, and he regarded his wrinkled and ugly face, the red eyes oozing with tears, and blood dripping from his forehead.

“I deserved it,” he said to himself and washed the blood from his face. No sooner had he cleared his mind a bit than the tumult began once more in the house, and people came storming up the stairs: the moneylenders who held the mortgage on the house; a husband whose wife he had seduced; fathers whose sons he had enticed into a life of vice and misery; servants and maids whom he had dismissed; and policemen and lawyers. One hour later, he sat handcuffed in a patrol car and was being taken to jail. Behind the car people yelled and sang songs mocking him. Through the window of his cell, a guttersnipe threw a handful of dirt that landed on his face.

The city was full of reports of disgraceful crimes committed by this man, whom so many people had known and loved. He was accused of every possible sin, and he did not deny a single one. People whom he had long ago forgotten stood before the judges and made accusations about things that he had done many years ago. Servants, to whom he had given presents and who had stolen from him, revealed his secret vices. Every face was full of disgust and hate. Nobody came to speak in his behalf, praise him, or exonerate him. In fact, nobody recalled anything good about him.

He let everything happen, let himself be led into and out of the cell before the judges and witnesses. Confused and sad, he gazed with sick eyes into the many angry, disturbed, and spiteful faces, and in each one of them, he saw a hidden charm and a spark of affection that glimmered from beneath the hate and distortion. All these people had loved him at one time, and he had not loved any of them. Now he begged their forgiveness and sought to remember something good about each one of them.

In the end he was imprisoned, and nobody was allowed to visit him. So he talked in feverish dreams to his mother, his first lover, godfather Binsswanger, and the Nordic lady from the ship. And when he awoke and sat alone and lost during those terrible days, he suffered all the pains of yearning and abandonment, and he longed for the sight of people as he had never longed for any kind of pleasure in his life.

And when he was released from prison, he was sick and old, and nobody recognized him anymore. The world was still going its way. People drove and rode and walked in the streets. Fruit and flowers, toys and newspapers were sold all over. But nobody turned to speak to Augustus.

Beautiful women whom he had once held in his arms while enjoying champagne and music drove by him in their carriages and left him behind in their dust.

Still, he no longer felt the terrible emptiness and loneliness that had stifled him when he had led a life of luxury. When he stopped for a moment at the gateway of a house in order to find some protection from the heat of the sun, or when he asked for a drink of water in the courtyard of some building, he was surprised to see how irritated and inhospitable the people were who had formerly responded to his proud and harsh words with gratitude and sparkling eyes. Nevertheless, the sight of each and every person delighted and touched him. He loved the children whom he saw playing and going to school, and he loved the old people sitting on benches in front of their little homes and warming their wrinkled hands in the sun. If he saw a young boy follow a girl with longing looks, or a worker taking his children in his arms when he returned home at the end of the day, or a fine smart doctor driving silently and quickly in his car and thinking about his sick patients, or a poor, simply dressed prostitute waiting by a lamppost in the evening at the edge of the city and even offering him, the outcast, her love — then all these people were his brothers and sisters. Each one of them carried the memory of a beloved mother and a better past, or a secret sign of a more beautiful and more noble destiny, and each person was dear to him and remarkable and gave him something to think about. Indeed, he felt that nobody was worse than he was himself.

Augustus decided to wander through the world and to search for a place where it would be possible for him to be useful to people in some way and to show them his love. He had become accustomed to the fact that his appearance no longer made people happy. His cheeks were caved in; his clothes and shoes were like those of a beggar. Even his voice and gait had lost the charm that used to delight people. Children were afraid of him because of the long scraggly beard that hung down from his chin. Well-dressed people kept their distance from him because they would feel anxious and dirty if he were to come too close. Poor people were distrustful because they regarded him as an intruder who might snap up some bits of their food. Consequently, he found it difficult to be of service to anyone, but he learned how to help and was not discouraged. One time he saw a child stretching out his hand in vain to reach the doorknob of a bakery, and he gave him a boost. Sometimes there were people who were worse off than he, blind people or invalids, and he would help them on their way and do some good deed for them. And when he could not assist them, he cheerfully gave them what little he had — a bright kind look and brotherly greeting, a gesture of understanding and sympathy. Along the way he learned to tell from people's expressions what they expected of him and what would make them happy. Some needed a loud spontaneous salutation, some a silent look, while others wanted to be left alone, undisturbed. He was amazed each day to see how much misery there was in the world and yet how content people could be, and he found it splendid and inspiring to experience over and over again how sorrow could soon be followed by joyous laughter; a death knell, by the song of children; every predicament and mean act, by simple kindness, a joke, a comforting word, or a smile.

People seemed to arrange their lives in remarkable ways. If he turned a corner and a group of schoolboys came rushing toward him, he marveled at their courage and zest for life and at the beauty of youth that glistened in all their eyes. If they teased and annoyed him a little, it was not so bad — he could even understand it. When he saw his reflection in a store window or the water of a fountain, he found that he looked shabby and wrinkled. No, for him it was no longer a question of pleasing people or wielding power. He had experienced enough of that. For him, it was now wonderful and edifying to see how other people struggled and groped their way along those paths that he had once taken in his life, and how everyone pursued goals with zeal, vigor, pride, and joy. For him, this was a

wonderful drama.

In the meantime winter came and went, and now it was summer. Augustus lay ill for a long time in a charity hospital, and there he silently and gratefully enjoyed the pleasure of seeing poor downtrodden people clinging to life with all their might and passion and overcoming death. It was marvelous to see the patience of those who were terribly sick. Then there was the vigorous passion for life and brightness in the eyes of those people who were convalescing. And it was also beautiful to see the silent, dignified faces of the dead. Most of all, he admired the love and patience of the pretty, well-kempt nurses. But this period also came to an end. The autumn wind blew, and Augustus set about wandering again as winter approached. Now a strange impatience gripped him as he saw how endlessly slowly he proceeded. He still wanted to travel all over and meet many more people face to face. His hair had turned gray, and his eyes smiled shyly behind infected red lids, and gradually he began to lose his memory so that it seemed to him that he had never seen the world other than it was on that particular day. But he was satisfied and found the world most glorious and deserving of love.

At the onset of winter he arrived in a city, and the snow drifted through the dark streets. Though it was late, a few boys were still walking around, and they threw some snowballs at the wanderer. Otherwise, a veil of silence covered the city. Augustus was very tired. He came to a narrow street, which seemed very familiar to him, and then to another. Suddenly he was standing in front of his mother's house, and right next door was his godfather's dwelling. Both were small and old, covered by the cold snow. A light was burning in one of the windows of his godfather's house. It glimmered red and seemed peaceful in the winter night.

Augustus entered and knocked at the living-room door. The little man came toward him and led him into the room without saying a word. It was warm and quiet there, and a small bright fire burned in the fireplace.

"Are you hungry?" asked his godfather. But Augustus was not hungry. He only smiled and shook his head.

"But you're certainly tired." His godfather spoke again, and he spread his old fur rug on the floor. The two old men squatted next to one another and looked into the fire.

"You've come a long way," said his godfather.

"Oh, it was very beautiful, but I've become a little tired. May I sleep here? I'll move on tomorrow."

"Yes, you may. But how would you like to see the angels dance again?"

"The angels? Oh yes, I certainly would, if I become a child once more."

"We haven't seen each other for a long time," his godfather continued. "You're so handsome. Your eyes are kind and gentle again, as they were in the old days, when your mother was still alive. It's nice of you to visit me."

The wanderer, clad in torn clothes, was slouched over as he sat quietly next to his friend. He had never been so exhausted, and the pleasant warmth and glow of the fire made him so confused that he could no longer clearly distinguish between today and yesterday.

"Godfather Binsswanger," he said, "I've been naughty again, and Mother cried at home. You must talk to her and tell her that I'm going to be good again. Will you do that?"

"I will," responded his godfather. "Don't get upset. She loves you very much."

Now the fire dwindled, and Augustus stared into the dim glow with large sleepy eyes, just as he had done a long time ago in his childhood. His godfather placed Augustus's head on his lap, and some soft and blissful music sounded through the room. Then a thousand beaming spirits came

floating through the air and circled gracefully around each other in pairs. And Augustus watched and listened with the keen sensitivity and openness of a child to the paradise regained.

It seemed to him at one point that he heard his mother calling him, but he was too tired to answer and his godfather had promised to talk to her. And when he fell asleep, his godfather folded his hands and listened to his heart until it stopped beating and the room was completely enveloped by the night.