

Sketch

Volume 32, Number 3

1966

Article 5

The Cock of the Golden Morning

Del Nett*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1966 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

flowers against the peeling boards of the porch.

“Fine, then I’ll get back in the house. I don’t like to leave the kids alone with all that broken glass. Timmy’s so curious about everything.” She turned and went inside, the screen door banging behind her.

Ted scarcely noticed she was gone. The flowers were stiff and erect, and in the brilliant light their color was garish and unreal. Slowly, deliberately, he drew his mud-caked shoe through the middle of the row and crushed them.

The Cock of the Golden Morning

by *Del Nett*

Education, Grad.

RAFANEL, his black chauffeur’s cap tucked under his arm, stood at a respectable distance, saying: “Are you ready yet, Miss Tracy?” He whispered it so gently that the slender young blonde wondered how many times he said it before she turned. She pulled her veil down and, putting her gloves in her purse, walked down to the black limousine waiting in the street.

Rafael opened the door and Tracy slid onto the cold leather seat, where, leaning her blonde head back, she closed her eyes against the vacant afternoon. For a few moments an unordered dark hovered behind her lids, and the weight of her emptiness seemed beyond the darkness. Rafael’s door slamming interrupted her senses and Tracy opened her eyes again. The car was moving now through the curving streets.

Rafael studied her through the mirror, his young face a mask behind his dark glasses; then whispering through the speaker system, he asked: “Where shall I take you?”

“The beach,” Tracy answered, staring at the impassive face in the mirror until it turned away. The beach would be empty and blue by late afternoon and she would frolic

in the windy surf and feel herself again. For a long time there would be no need to wonder about the direction of her life or Rafael's prying eyes in the rocks overhead. Instead, there would only be Tracy and a lonely stretch of sand and the cawing birds.

The car swung under a grove of trees and up a short hill past a stone chapel. The hum of the tires came like music through the open windows and Tracy could almost believe she heard Buddy's voice behind the tall, stained-glass windows. She remembered how innocent and strong Buddy had looked singing before JL's glorious funeral flowers. Seated among the celebrity audience, Tracy didn't find it easy to listen to Buddy's fine, young voice. Her thoughts recounted again and again the many battles she had with JL's nearly divorced wife over the funeral arrangements. Because of the producer's wants, Tracy stubbornly insisted on Buddy and white-headed Wesley Auerbach, JL's favorite actor, who read the eulogy with his deep and moving voice. In spite of her preoccupation, Tracy did find Buddy's haunting rendition of the Lord's Prayer inspirational. When the crowd dispersed and she and Buddy stood alone by the fresh grave, she told him how pleased she had been with it. Buddy smiled and thanked her with a quick nod. To Tracy's surprise, her next remark had made the youth laugh. She had said the whole ceremony reminded her so much of other JL productions that she expected the old man to throw open his coffin and, in his booming voice, thank the director and his crew. Tracy smiled now, remembering how Buddy's infectious laughter had made her laugh, too.

The cemetery trees had changed to city buildings now and the long black car rolled along with the traffic. Tracy had hardly begun to watch the whirling activity when she felt the muscles tighten across her back. The hard, glaring light made the nervous buzz of cars past her windows seem like a limbo she would never cross. Weary of the sight, she shut her eyes. For a moment the traffic roar in her ears seemed like the pleasing roar of the surf; she watched the breakers rear and plunge along a stretch of beach. Slowly, the hard fist on her breast relaxed and her hand slipped to her lap.

When Tracy finally opened her eyes, the car was swinging onto a well-travelled boulevard that eventually ran down to the ocean. The first segment of buildings seemed unfamiliar to her, even though she had passed them many times. At the second light, however, as the car waited before the signal, Tracy's hands turned to clenched fists again. Through the front windows, past Rafael's shoulder, loomed the grim facade of a theater building. The gloomy overhang of the marquee stretched its dark shadow into the street and Tracy wanted to tell Rafael to avoid it when he passed; instead, she sat dumbly confused as the car edged through the shadowy light. Her slender face was white with rage and fear when the car finally emerged into the harsh sunlight.

Tracy leaned her blonde head against the black leather, her mind tortured with an evening a month old. Buddy had just finished his concert an hour before and she and a policeman stood at the fringe of the milling crowd by the black limousine. When a group of teenagers pressed around them, muttering obscene names and giving them menacing glances, Tracy locked herself in the car. The policeman continued to stand nearby, but when he turned his back, a teenage girl scrawled "Kiss off, Old Hag!" with lipstick on a window. Tracy wanted to roll the window down and argue with the young crowd that her engagement had not corrupted Buddy, even though she was ten years older than the youth. Only the hostile faces behind the glass told Tracy she could not hope to be understood.

One of the faces in the nervous crowd seemed so like her own that Tracy remembered that she, too, had once stood and waited for the movie stars. She and another Midwest beauty queen had waited outside the Academy Award Show, clapping and cheering with other teenagers when one of Hollywood's royalty appeared. That evening might have seemed impossible now—except for the young faces that surrounded her.

The crowd began to cheer and, knowing Buddy had left the theater, she asked Rafael to pull up to the alley. The limousine hadn't gone a few feet when spit began to hit the windows. Buddy—who had decided to come out the front

entrance—moved through the pressing crowd with the help of policemen, one riding a horse. The car had stopped now and Tracy tried to shout through the noise to keep it rolling. The people were packed against the car so tightly it rattled and shook and Tracy couldn't see the mounted policeman any more. She clutched her throat, trying not to cry out; Rafael, in front, hammered wildly on the horn. When Tracy turned and saw a screaming face mashed against the glass, she found herself screaming for the first time. She held both hands over her mouth, trying to control herself, when suddenly the back door jerked open and a wide-eyed policeman started shouting at her. She could only stare back, both hands against her mouth. The policeman climbed in and shoved her over, while another officer pushed Buddy through the door. Buddy, dripping blood, slumped against one of the men who leaned the boy's head against the seat. His nose, eyes and mouth streamed blood that ran down over his chin to his white coat. Tracy stared at the policemen dabbing fruitlessly at Buddy's bleeding face until she found herself crying helplessly into her own handkerchief.

The car picked up speed as it neared the ocean and the bracing air through the open windows drew Tracy's thoughts away from the martyred singer. One more dingy business district and a series of small hills would put her where she could see the long horizon of water and sky. She began to count the three hills as the car rose and descended, then curved onto a winding road that ran above the ocean.

When the limousine finally bumped to a stop, Tracy, bag in hand, hurried from the car only to be reminded by her slamming door that she had forgotten to leave Rafael any instructions. She came around the front of the car and paused at his door. "I'll be awhile, Rafael," she said, studying his impassive face.

Rafael wiped the beads of sweat from his short upper lip. "Will that be long?" he asked. He turned his gaze toward the ocean.

"No . . . I shouldn't be long."

Tracy didn't know why, but now the conversation had started, she was reluctant to conclude it. She placed her hand tentatively on the door.

“It’s three now and I have a dinner engagement with the Auerbach’s at seven. I shouldn’t be on the beach any more than an hour.” She paused with a brief smile to add: “I think you’d better stay in the car.”

Rafael turned and stared at her through his dark glasses. “Well, whatever you say.”

There was still a faint smile on her lips when she removed her hand from the door. “I say stay in the car.”

It bothered Tracy all the way down the cliff why she had smiled the way she did. Usually the young man’s sullenness irritated her and she sometimes handled it with a curtness of her own. She had often thought of replacing him, but his care of the machinery and his attractiveness as a driver seemed more important than his temperament.

Tracy forgot these problems, however, as soon as her long legs began to cut through the surf and she threw herself beneath a towering breaker. The water was right for that time of afternoon and Tracy danced nimbly between the waves before she swam out past the pounding surf. With a spring chill still in the water, Tracy didn’t swim long behind the breakers; instead she followed the waves in and raced, cold and wet, through the shallow water to her handbag, where she discovered she had forgotten to bring her towel down from the car. For this inefficiency, she cursed herself aloud—only to look up and see Rafael a few yards away, towel in hand. He offered it to her as he explained: “You left this thing in the car”

Her teeth chattering, Tracy stared dumbly at the white towel. She crossed her arms over her breasts—whether from a sudden chill or a sense of nakedness she couldn’t tell—and began her complaint; with her teeth chattering so, she only stammered unintelligibly. Tracy turned her back and waited for him to go. It was only a moment before she felt the warm towel begin to dry her shoulders, enveloping her chilled skin as it moved down her back. The sudden warmth and tenderness seemed to hypnotize her senses and she found herself wanting to close her eyes. She let her body shrink into the soft, warm towel until the gentle rubbing

stopped and Rafael's lips touched the base of her neck. Her muscles froze again—this time with horror and disgust. The towel continued to caress her back before Tracy angrily darted from beneath the towel. She raced across the sand to the gleaming water where the first wave knocked her down; then struggling to her feet, she tried to fight down the panic inside and the watery disorder of the waves. After she fought past the last breaker, Tracy turned to find that a wall of water still blocked her view of the beach and she continued to swim until her arms grew tired. The beach was vacant when she turned again, even the car on the cliff was gone. Tracy paused to rest in the choppy water and plan ahead. First, there was the need to get ashore and find a phone; then the long cab ride back to Beverly Hills. Everything seemed to have logic again until she started to swim. Her arms, tired as they were, made little progress against the cold, outgoing tide. She rested again to find strength for another try; but to her surprise, she found her arms were so leaden they could hardly keep her afloat. In her growing panic, she began to cry for help and thrash in confused fury against the waves that pulled her toward the depths. She could only think of tomorrow's headlines as she struggled to keep light in her eyes.

"DEAD SINGER'S GIRL IS SUICIDE"

The Family Man

by Paul Kratoska

English, Sr.

IT WAS twilight, in the season when darkness daily intrudes itself earlier on light. The world has tired of the false exuberance of Indian summer, and cold lurks in the falling shadows. It is easy to be weary at such times, and Richard Carr was gladly approaching the refuge of his home.

Richard Carr was of the genus "medical student, married" to which one automatically adds "struggling." The