

“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

The Pilgrim

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Lullaby, 1968

September, 1968

It happened twice in the last six months... I retire at a reasonable hour, look out of my window and see that everything is normal... Beyond the shadowed oak tree the moon stands white above the National Guard Armory across the road... Everything seems to be still and only a single light burns in the building... I go to bed cherishing the balm and healing of this quietness... this daily return of God’s silence...

Six or seven hours pass and while the morning coffee begins to boil I look out the window again... The oak is still there, its leaves wet with the coming of rain, and the road to the West, and the fields beyond it... But the Armory!... Where late last night there was only a single light, the silence and a brooding moon there is now a startling gathering of tanks, trucks and armored cars... They stand row on row, perhaps fifty of them, so arranged that they can move quickly and purposefully to the West... a far cry from the still shadows and the quietness of the night.

My sons, more tolerant of history and life and more cynical, tell me that these trucks and tanks, reflecting man at work in God’s universe, are there because there is something called a “race riot” over in Gary and the Governor has called out the militia to stop it... In Gary men are talking desperately — but if no agreement is reached and the talks fail the argument will be moved into a totally different context — not American, not Christian, not even human... The brown monsters across the road will begin to move fifteen miles west to stop the argument in the one way in which it will not be stopped permanently — by force by guns, by naked power... This is clearly the way to achieve peace... by firing a few shots up in the air — surely they would not aim at the little black boy who is grabbing a pair of shoes from a broken window — just into the air confident that whoever is up there will not care very much... since He will never be hit...

As I have noted, this has happened twice in the last few months... It is becoming a part of our life and we rush to the window each morning to

THE CRESSET

take the temperature of our black friends in Gary... Are the armored trucks still here?... If they are, it means that nothing much happened in Gary last night... a few black men were shot, a few stores were looted — and the same black cloud over everything... of hate and desperation... of hate and anger... of hate and no hope... but always hate... The quiet of the night, ordained from the third day of creation, becomes a mockery and a lie...

Many of my friends feel that this is really the shape of things to come... This is the way we are and shall be... This is not 1776, they say, and tanks and guns will be an essential part of a working democracy... This is an age which worships only stark power... The quietness of our long comfortable night has been broken by our new realism... our new cynicism in human affairs... our corporate death-wish... Let us live now by bringing death, either over Hiroshima or the streets of Gary... This summer night in the year of our Lord 1968 is the winter of our faith and our optimistic prophesies v>f the future — the old worn prophetic lion and lamb stuff... These are only our vague hopes finding last stammering words... seeing their final contradiction in the silent serried ranks of armored monsters across the road...

And so I stand at my window and look out at the night now almost at noon... The monsters are still there but their shape and size have been softened by the gracious night... This is the very edge of darkness and standing on the brink I feel — more than I think — that there are still lost causes which are finally never lost... I remember a strange lullaby of many years ago:

Night comes on,
Night, and the peace you have desired —
Earth is calling, you are tired;
Earth draws you down.
The hope, the fear
The labor vain — your heart grows cold.
Time's secret is untold
The light fails that led you here.
Sleep then; sleep is best
The roads are many where we go astray
But all, all by the one way
Come home, at the one heart have rest.

THE CRESSET

That will not stop the monsters across the road but it will rob them of all final meaning... and that makes my pilgrimage a little easier...

