

JUPITER EIGHT

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Jupiter eight by Francis Pollock

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ALL the characters and events in this book are entirely fictitious. With the exception of a brief sketch of an art critic in the first chapter, great care has been taken to avoid anything that could suggest a resemblance to any real person. If any such resemblance should seem to exist, it is accidental and contrary to intention.

F. P.

CHAPTER I

EXPERTLY rolling cigarettes, and smoking them almost as fast as he rolled them, Edgar Lloyd continued to talk rapidly. At intervals he struck off the ashes upon Derrock's Chinese rug, unconscious of his surroundings, his face veiled in a fog of enthusiasm and thought. So talking, he was in a state of almost mystical rapture, and he was capable of continuing in it for hours, days, months, for eternities, and he was probably saying valuable things; but Ford Derrock was not listening to him.

For Derrock felt something new and strange, and perhaps mystical stirring within himself. He felt that there was a change coming to him. He nursed his bruised knee; he brushed the dust from his trousers. Indeed a change had very nearly come to him. It had been the narrowest shave he had ever had in his life, and he nursed his knee where the fender of the long grey car had grazed it.

He leaned his elbow on his mahogany writing-table, a copy of a piece in the National Museum. He glanced at the sheets of stationery on it, handsome, embossed in gold, 'Atelier Duroc. Interior Decoration'. The same legend was on his door; he could see it reversed through the frosted glass. In the outer office sat Florence the stenographer, purely

an interior decoration herself, since she seldom had anything to do, but an indispensable accessory now that his business was becoming important, just as indispensable as the rosewood piano with the works of Bach on it, which he couldn't play.

He had spent much time and thought in arranging this atelier. Everything in it was of supreme elegance, of the utmost good taste. Nobody could call it anything but arty; yet for the first time his heart rose violently against it. Or perhaps his stomach turned.

Edgar Lloyd did not see anything. Looking intensely well-dressed, smooth as if he had just been waxed and varnished, he shook another charge of fine-cut into a paper and rolled it, licking it feverishly.

'O Mrs. Porter and her daughter!
They wash their feet in soda-water . . .'

'What?' Derrock ejaculated.

'You see, you get the effect, Rock, but you haven't caught the principle of the thing. Now listen . . .

But still from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors that will bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O Mrs. Porter and her daughter . . .

'What do you make of that, Rock?'

'Bunk,' said Derrock, who had not listened.

'Oh no, Rock, you can't say "bunk". For he's really a very great poet, a great psychologist, the god of the younger intellectuals, of the new ironists. At least, he was until he turned religious. You can't say "bunk" to a god, Rock, even if it's only a sort of religious, intellectualist god. No, there's a great punch in it, only you don't get the shock where the punch lands. He says one thing and means quite another. It's a system of calculated mental reflex action . . . the anatomical school of poetry . . . a sort of spiritual ju-jitsu. Don't you really make anything of it, Rock?'

'No,' said Derrock, not listening. He could not take his mind from the shock of that long grey car. He was crossing a quiet spot on Bay Street when the car came down on him like a bullet, like a shell, like a bolt of death. It must have been going over sixty. He had barely time to jump. The fender grazed his knee and threw him down. The hot blast of the exhaust struck his face. The licence number flashed over his eyes — xz33 — so much of it stuck indelibly in his memory. Before he could get on his feet the car was almost out of sight down the street, with its driver either drunk or speed-crazed.

And when he got back to his office he found Edgar Lloyd waiting there, wanting to talk. Derrock looked about his large and expensive atelier with inexplicable misgiving. He still felt a sense of impending collision. Yet there was nothing here that was not reassuring. He had knocked two rooms