

THE JUGGLERS

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The Jugglers by Ezra Brudno

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EZRA BRUDNO

THE JUGGLERS

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FUGITIVE

THE LITTLE CONSCRIPT

THE TETHER

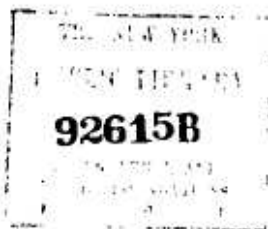
ONE OF US

THE JUGGLERS

BY
EZRA BRUDNO



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To

THE MOST PERFECT HELPMATE

MY WIFE

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED

BJJ 200

THE JUGGLERS

THE JUGGLERS

I

I SEE it clearly now — now when the errors of a decade, like the memory of a crime unatoned, persist in haunting me. Yes, it is ever thus with Nature. First she tempts one in a thousand different ways, and after she has trapped her victim resorts to rebuke. Why does she not sound a note of warning when there is still a chance of escape? Why does she not — but why ask questions? Why philosophize? I wish to tell my story without homilies, without preachments. Truth needs no parables.

II

ONE humid summer day I arrived in a mid-western city well fortified for conquest; world conquest, I then thought. My armor consisted of a college degree and a certificate attesting my right to practice law. I had chosen this city partly because a boyhood friend of my father's lived here and partly because I had been impressed by the aphorism of a successful American — spoken of as a merchant prince — that success thrives on smoke, dirt and noise. The city of my choice embodied these three graces to a marked degree. Its inhabitants boasted of its smoke, of its dirt, of its noise. The local orators eloquently, if not elegantly, spoke of its vomiting

chimneys, of its fire-spitting furnaces, of its sizzling thrift. The most widely circulated local newspaper, The City Daily, proclaimed with pride that a city with so much smoke and dirt and noise was bound to forge ahead of all its rivals.

This was one of those fast growing cities that seem neither city nor village, with the unmistakable features of both. It had the appearance of a boy who has outgrown his breeches. Dilapidated two-story shacks were wedged in between towering skyscrapers; beautifully laid avenues intersected uneven country roads; colossal billboards spanned vacant lots within a stone's throw from the business centre; hoosiers, who could have stepped upon the stage of a burlesque theater without the slightest make-up, elbowed dandies, whose dress was patterned after Broadway models; saloons, with large foaming "schooners" painted in yellow on their windows, vied with the gaudy magnificence of cafes built after the style of the castle at Nürnberg. The Square was the heart of the city. Into it all the city's blood vessels flowed. In the center of the Square, as an eloquent specimen of the city's artistic aspect, stood a monument, which was a cross between a lighthouse and the Statue of Liberty — a monstrosity dedicated to the memory of the brave soldiers who had laid their lives down in the cause of liberty.

Upon my arrival I set out at once in search of my father's boyhood friend. My father had told me that although he had not seen, or heard of, his friend for more than thirty years he was sure that a man as brilliant as Mike Toner could not help but be one of the leading legal lights in the city. How else could it be? Mike Toner was a wonder in his boyhood; a real prodigy. Mike, my father had spoken enthusiastically, could recite Pope's Essay on Man backwards when he was fif-

