

**EZRA CAINE**

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Ezra Caine by Joseph Sharts

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**JOSEPH SHARTS**

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BY

JOSEPH SHARTS

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### I

It does seem strange, even to me who am myself so strange, that I should feel such joy in calling it back to mind, in living my life all over; stranger yet, that I should crave to set it down in ink, for men who cannot see with my eyes to sneer at. But it was so glorious, the secret I kept hidden so long, half hidden even to myself! Then when at last my eyes were opened and I ceased to try to bind myself down to the sleepy ways of other men, what a wild, royal life I led! Now they have locked me up here in this miserable stifling,

R. Union  
17 May 1933

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choking house, where one can scarcely budge without two watchers at his elbows. They think—poor fools—that the staring of the bare white walls and my own despair will end me. Some day I shall—ah, but that is another secret! First, I must tell this one. Let me think how it all began.

Always, from the earliest day that I can recall, there was something odd about me—I was so different from the other people that I saw. Even my mother, with her snowy hair and fresh young face and scared, timid ways, was quite unlike other mothers. Then, again, there was something queer about the way we lived—we two, all alone in a big gloomy house guarded by tall whispering elms. The house was indeed so very large



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that we used only the ground-floor—at least my mother did; she dreaded even to open the door at the head of the stairs. As for me, the first that I remember is how I used to wander and rummage about the dim and dusty old rooms, crooning and whispering to myself, for I had no play-mates.

One afternoon I fell asleep up there. In a dark closet I had found a long, beautiful, polished cane, and then a tall silk hat, on an upper shelf. The hat was gray with dust, and cobwebbed, and when I put it on it came over my ears, and down to my shoulders—unless I slanted it back at just the proper angle. But there was great fun in wearing such a thing, and I wanted to see how I looked.

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Across one corner of the dim front room stood a bureau which had often before caught my fancy. It was a heavy black affair, quaintly carved, and with an oval mirror. The massive oaken legs were shaped into fierce griffins' paws; and the handles of the drawers, too, jutted out into little griffins' heads, which seemed to guard defiantly some mysterious treasure inside. I remember that I dragged one of the great hair-cushioned, straight-backed chairs across the yielding carpet, and climbed up in front of the mirror. Bars of light stole between the closed slats of the window-shutters, and the long lace curtains were draped back, so that I could see well enough. But a film of cobwebs had been drawn across

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the oval glass, and the dust obscured it, and I caught only a faint, shadowy image of a thin, solemn child in a man's tall silk hat, holding a man's cane in his unaccustomed fingers.

It was just a child's play, of course ; and I should have forgotten all about it years ago, only the look in my mother's eyes when she saw me there has fixed it in my mind.

I had opened the top bureau-drawer. It was full of trinkets and keepsakes which I was not old enough to know the meaning of. Later, when I was a man, on a certain wild day I opened that drawer again, and understood better. But this afternoon, being only a child playing in my own solitary way, I tumbled the trinkets heedlessly about. There