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SHORT STORY

(continued from previous page)

No, I said, so they tell me.

Silence for a space. Sam drummed with his fingers on the table and hitched his chair closer to mine. As I was saying, he said, about those stories I wrote. There was one . . .

No, I rudely interrupted, don't talk about that any more. Let's talk about something different. Tell me about your family way back in California. Your mother and father. Are they Armenians too?

Sure, he said, they're Armenians. Whad'ya think?

I wouldn't like to have told him what I thought, not at that precise moment.

Are there any more of you at home, I said, any brothers and sisters?

Sure, he said, four brothers, three sisters.

Eight, God help us.

What do they do? I said. What do they look like? Do they look like you?

I guess so, he said. I couldn't say. You sure ask plenty of questions, don't you? he said.

Yes, I said. I've an enquiring mind. It's a good thing to have. All writers ought to have one. Have you?

What? he said.

An enquiring mind.

"You're crazy," he said.

Maybe I am, I said. But it wasn't till you came along. I was a sane and rational being with a nicely enquiring mind and a nimble pair of feet and now . . .

You're crazy, he said.

Don't start that over again, I said.

All right, he said, let's dance.

No, I said, I couldn't. Let's sit.

* * *

WE sat. In silence. Sam drummed on the table and hitched closer to me every minute or so while I kept wriggling backwards out of reach. Silence still. Something wrong somewhere. Sam eyed me up and down. I felt I had failed him somehow. Obviously he was disappointed in me. I could bear it no longer.

Listen, Sam, I said. I'm going to talk to La. See, over there. Over at that table. I'm going to talk to La. Now.

But he didn't get it.

That's good, he said. So you're going to talk loud. It's about time you said something. You've been sitting here all evening not saying a thing.

No, Sam, I said. I'm going away. I'm going to leave you. I'm going to talk to La. Over at that table. See, the tall brown one, lighting a cigarette. That's La. I'm going to talk to him. Good-bye, Sam.

He looked at me. Those blank dark eyes in his wide face.

What do you want to talk to him for? I'm an Armenian. I want to be a writer, he said.

I know, I said gently. Yes, Sam, I know.

And I left him there, the empty words still framed upon his lips.