

I suppose it was this failure which resulted in the story about a mutual friend, whom we called the Dauphin—a story circulated liberally among my friends. It was reported to me thus:

'The day I mailed your letter I ran into the Dauphin and we went up to his place to chat for a while. . . . Incidentally, he never believed that you were totally blind. We had a long argument about this, too. He felt that if you weren't, there would be something to be gained by keeping it a secret. I replied rather grossly to this, as I was a whit annoyed. I think the Dauphin keeps secrets just for the sake of keeping secrets.'

We had named our friend (now at Harvard) the Dauphin because of his unique personality, after the memorable character in *Huckleberry Finn*. The Dauphin's opinion itself would not have carried much weight if it did not reflect the gamut of notorious misconceptions about my having some sight or being blessed with some supernatural power or perception which persists among the people who should know better.

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In Search of Sight *vision*

small foreign bird.

Legend has it that there are certain birds which, if kept in a cage too long, lose their faculty to fly, although I never tested this myth by letting my canary or parrot out of the cage. In the same way, it is said of blind people that if they become too entrenched in one environment, they become lethargic, too careful. Instead of becoming more skilled, they lose their powers of travel. In short, these blind people are 'shelved,' or 'glued to a rocking chair.'

Having no love for either cupboards or rockers, during vacations I have traveled a good deal. I have not always traveled in style—it's impossible when you want to cover the distance from San Francisco to New York, from San Diego to Seattle, and from Miami to Cambridge. I have hitchhiked in 1928-model jalopies, *cars* ridden in fuming buses and rattling milk trains. Sometimes I have also had rides in *Cadillacs with buttons for rolling down the windows, smuggled myself into roomettes on Starlights, and flown in airplanes which had a bar and, because the plane was half empty, a window seat for every passenger. All in all, I have crossed the United States fourteen times and visited in or traveled through thirty-seven of the forty-eight states.*

Of course, when you are blind, you miss the scenic part—that is to say, you miss the view of a snow-clad peak, the impression of skyscrapers lined up shoulder to shoulder, a vast stretch of

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Merrill Colman

Face to Face

range, with cows milling about, or the way a city looks from a plane when draped in a thin veil of clouds. You become, however, more conscious of smells, the gamut of accents, or the unusual names streets have in some cities. But what you remember most of all, the thing which imprints itself permanently on your mind, are the people you encounter, even the ones you meet only for a moment on a street corner or sitting at a counter, or the kind driver whose motor you can hear coming faster and faster while you suspensefully wait to see whether he will pass you by like the one before him or stop. You remember vividly the moment when a car slows down, and a voice says, 'Hey, feller—want a ride?' or 'Where are you going?' or 'Can I give you a lift?' And when you come to the end of the journey, often the driver, who is now a friend, insists on getting out and helping you flag down the next relay.

Sometimes my hitchhiking has turned into a circus. I remember, for instance, a kind elderly lady who was genuinely distressed with my parents' not taking better care of me and letting me out on the streets like a 'vagabond.' In a wayside place in Texas, under the pretense of taking me to a gas station to catch the next ride, she turned me over to a police deputy with a blistering harangue that I was probably a runaway state ward, and if the Democrats had been in power I would have received better care. I was irritated until after she drove off, the deputy told me that she had left twenty dollars with him for a train ticket to take me back to Washington. We had a lively discussion about what to do with the money, and finally decided to send it to the Democratic campaign fund. The deputy then took me to a gas station, where I caught my next ride.

Somewhere I also have tucked away the card of a cutlery salesman who thought my blindness would be a 'terrific asset' in Southern accent, 'come to me.' I kept the card as a souvenir. After

all, he did take me two hundred miles. All these associations, sometimes embarrassing, sometimes touching, make the travelogue of those of us who are blind.

The summer after my freshman year at college I spent at the University of California, at Berkeley. It took me only two days to settle down in International House and to learn their campus. It was during that summer session that I met Simon. He was a South American, settled in the States, and I don't think he ever stood still. His body was always full of movement, as though he were doing a rumba, a samba, or even a Charleston. Even in the shower when he sang—that was by no means the only place where he sang—the songs were marked by jumping, gay motions.

Sam, who was bald, described him to me as having glossy hair and deep well-like eyes which were very effective when he sat on a sofa in the lounge—the International House abounded in lounges—and tried to catch or wink at the girls around him. Sam, who was an Iranian, nearing thirty, and wanted to marry an American girl very badly, used to call him the bouncing Romeo from South America.

It is not easy for me to meet bouncing Romeos or fanned athletes, but because I helped Simon in one of his economics assignments, he became a friend of mine. One day, early in the summer session, I said to him, 'Simon, you go out so much. Why don't you get me a date?' I said it sort of bashfully, and feeling the necessity to explain, I went on rapidly, 'You see, at college I have such a rigid readers' schedule that every hour from eight in the morning to ten at night is taken up, and that way I haven't had time to develop friendships, especially with girls.' I was flushing more and more hotly, but I couldn't stop. 'Understand, I don't live in a monastery. I have girl readers—brilliant and pretty, too—but I make a habit of not mixing business and pleasure. You know

Face to Face
talk with separated sounds

what I mean? I mean!—and I stuttered—when I go scouting for readers I don't want them to think there is anything else attached to it.' And then I tried to make a joke. 'I don't want them to think I am scouting for a wife. I have taken girls out, but it's been merely conversation, never anything more. I mean, that is, with the sighted girls.'

I would have gone on, but Simon was laughing, not unkindly, just gaily. 'Listen, listen, I pleaded, 'I want to have some fun this summer, and it's always awkward meeting people until they get used to me. Would you help me?'

'But your facial expression!' He kept on laughing.

I felt hurt, but I wasn't going to show it, because I knew that when you are blind, you have to make many compromises. Please, be serious,' I persisted, summoning all my wits.

'You mind if I tell you a joke?' he said.

I was disappointed, but what else was there to do? 'You see, there was a man, crippled—no, let's say lazy—and he was sitting with another man who was going to a job, and the lazy man told the other man to go for him, too. And being kindhearted, as he was, he consented. When he came out, the lazy man asked this man if he had done what he had told him. 'Well,' the man who had gone to the toilet said, 'you see, after I went, you didn't need to go any more.' He laughed at his own joke. I felt crushed.

'You see how it is in this game? Each man for himself,' he said. A wrong card, I thought to myself.

'You remind me of Sam,' he said, with an air of finality. But Sam, who had listened too, didn't say anything. I could not let it go at that. I had hid my innermost feelings many times before. 'Iranians and Indians,' I said, 'are friends from old historic times.'

'Thank you,' Sam said, and only then was I glad that I had coupled myself with him.

shown fully

'Simon, you're cruel,' Sam said reproachfully. 'I'll try,' Simon said, 'but one man's meat is another man's poison. Besides, the trouble with Ved is that he looks too much like a walking encyclopedia.'

I couldn't contain myself any more. 'Like hell I do,' I said. I couldn't contain myself where no one knew me at all, I found Being new in a university where no one knew me at all, I found it hard to get readers. I asked the professor if he would make an announcement in my class, which was four or five times the size of any at Pomona, that there was a blind student who would like his assignments read and who would be willing to pay seventy-five cents an hour. But he did it in such an incredibly garbled way that, although after each class I waited for someone to come up to me, no one volunteered.

I started getting panicky and thought seriously about trying some other course, but on the fourth day I happened to sit next to Syl and tried to talk with her. She spoke softly and almost timidly, and at first it was not easy to carry on a sustained conversation. I gathered she was a junior at the University of California, and a sociology major, but had a keen love for literature and music.

'Have you found any readers yet?' she asked shyly.

'No,' I said.

'I'd like to do it,' she went on hesitantly, 'except that the braces on my teeth don't come off for another week. I thought they would bother you.'

'Heavens, no,' I responded, and from that day she began reading to me.

Before the week was up, I learned that she came from an exceptionally large family for America. They were seven, and she was the only girl. The father had named all his children after the great universities in the country. In their family they had Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Stanford.

Syl told me, 'My father wanted to name me Wellesley, but my mother called a halt when it came to me.'

Although her father only owned a small grocery store, every one of his children had gone through the state university, and even law and graduate schools. 'He has a mania for education,' Syl told me.

Her mother had died when Syl was young, and Syl had had to perform all the domestic duties until her father remarried. 'I worked hard,' she said, 'because I not only had to take care of the house, but help manage the grocery store. When you have a small business like ours, the whole family has to work.' But she admitted that, being the only girl in the family, she had been spoiled, too.

Now and then she would stop reading and say, 'Oh, I sound horrible. Honestly, it's because of these braces.' I used to protest, and then she would say, 'Oh, you are very kind. You see,' she explained, 'I should have had these braces a long time ago. It's hard to wear them at college age.'

'You take it too much to heart,' I kept telling her. When she found out how far behind I was in my reading schedule in both my courses, she insisted on helping me catch up.

'I wouldn't think of it,' I told her. 'There are not many people who can read aloud more than two hours a day. And besides, you still have to put in your hours at the grocery store on Sundays.'

She would not hear of it, and once or twice, when she read to me late at night, I walked her to her dormitory. And this was the beginning of our warm relationship.

She had thick hair, a slight and slender body, a round mouth, and a mellow alto voice which always sounded fresh and alive and which reflected the modulation of her emotions amazingly accurately. Her laugh was subdued but full, and she walked as though she had no weight at all. Whether we were at concerts, the theater, movies, or restaurants, she always knew how to conduct me without an iota of embarrassment. There was, of course, nothing hard about directing a blind man, because it was

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I who escorted her, not vice versa. All she had to do was place her hand firmly in mine, and when walking through crowded aisles, not get nervous. She allowed me to order for her, open doors, help her off buses, and let me walk her home as anyone else would.

When we were on a day's outing together and went into a restaurant for lunch or dinner, she would say sweetly, 'Wash-up time,' and would explain to me from the table the twists and turns so well that I could walk directly toward the room without causing a scene.

'Isn't it strange and wonderful,' she exclaimed once, 'that I forget altogether that you can't see!'

When there were reminders, such as the girls at her dormitory marveling at the way I found her bell and rang for her, or overhearing ladies conversing at a restaurant about how nice it was that a pretty girl went out with a blind man, she used to joke about it, as Othello or Kenneth might have. If she had been self-conscious about the braces, she was proportionately relaxed when with me, and this gave our relationship an air of naturalness in which all the disagreeable reminders of awkwardness were effaced.

As at college, I still kept a rigorous reading schedule, but the difference was that every week night at ten I saw her, except for the days she read to me, when we studied scrupulously. I concentrated on my studies harder than ever, locked up in the library, always having the assurance that in the evening there would be the warm and fresh fragrance of Syl beside me, and her soft but firm hand in mine. The relationship was like discovering sight, getting in the bargain an unlimited open country to roam in, with all the problems of readers' schedules shoved into oblivion. *to George et*

Try as he might, Sam had very bad luck in getting girls to go out with. He, like Simon, used to sit in lounges. In the dining room he used to look for pretty girls to sit by, but as far as he was concerned, they were as cold as portraits. After a moment's

acquaintance, he would call them up, ask them for dates, but invariably they would turn him down.

'I can't understand these American girls,' he told me once. 'Here I am, working for a doctoral degree in electrical engineering, getting paid the salary of an instructor, have a car of my own and plenty of money to take these girls anywhere they want to go, and still . . . Is it because I am a foreigner?'

He paused for confirmation, but I just listened. 'I want madly,' he continued, 'to marry an American girl and live here. And what am I forced to do? Every Saturday night I stay home and listen to the radio, or go out and get drunk.'

'I wish I could do something for you, Sam,' I said. 'I'll ask Syl, but she is shy, and besides, she doesn't know many people at the summer session. Maybe she can do something about it, though.'

I asked Syl that night if she could do anything for Sam. 'Maybe,' she began, 'I can arrange it with my roommate.' (She had just moved in with a girl.) 'But she is very particular,' Syl went on, 'and I don't even know what Sam looks like.'

'Hang it,' I said. 'You don't have to know. Just get him a date.' Her roommate consented, and Sam insisted on Syl and me doubling with him. We would go to a play first, at the university, and then go for pizza in Sam's car.

All the remainder of the week, Sam kept accosting me and asking if he could at least have a glimpse of the girl he was taking out. He was terribly agitated, a state unsuited for a first meeting, although quite in order for a bridegroom. He stopped scouting around for girls in the dining room and sat next to me, as though to show his gratitude. I started wondering if I should have meddled in it at all, since Sam wouldn't give me any peace. Simon repeatedly insisted that he wanted to see Sam's date. 'Just to size her up,' he said, because Sam wasn't a connoisseur as he was. He decided he would take his girl to the play also, just to appraise the object of Sam's agitation.

When the night finally arrived, everything went off all right. Sam and I picked up the girls and it seemed to me that Sam liked his date, because they talked easily. After the play, however, when Simon came to 'size her up,' he whispered something, possibly his judgment, to Sam. After that, everything was miserable. There were awkward pauses and dead silences in the car. Syl and I could do nothing to make the wheels turn smoothly. I dreaded a moment alone with Sam, so when the evening was over, I stayed a while longer with Syl.

The next morning at breakfast, however, poor Sam was the butt of it all. 'She looks exactly like a sheep,' Simon said, and Simon's girl friend was laughing at his description of Syl's roommate.

'He doesn't look too much better than a goat himself, you know,' she whispered to me. 'You really marched them well.'

'One man's meat is another man's poison, Ved,' Simon said, and then to Sam, 'You should know better than to ask a blind man to get you a blind date.'

Although I think Sam really wanted to take Syl's roommate out again, because of Simon he did not. In those six weeks of summer school, however, I went to more concerts and more theaters than I had been to since my arrival in the States. Syl and I kept on going together, growing closer and closer to each other—that is, until the last night of the session, when Syl's friends arrived from Oregon.

There were two chattering girls and one boy just beginning college there. All of us started out toward the movies. Since the sidewalk was narrow, the girls were walking ahead, and John and I were following. It worried me that I could not get a conversation going with John. He still felt awkward about my blindness; I therefore felt nervous. I should have perhaps taken his arm, because that is what I usually do if I feel nervous. That way the other person feels easier, too. But I felt slightly proud, perhaps, or maybe I was just too lazy to ask.

We were late for the movies, and we were walking faster now. I was on the street side and was making careful effort to dodge the lampposts. It seemed to me that the small streets abounded in oddly placed, slim lampposts.

'Come, the girls are leaving us behind,' he said, and we walked with rapid steps. Just as we were approaching a cross street, I heard the roar of a truck motor which drowned out all other sounds and dulled my facial vision. I ran smack into a lamppost, and as my forehead hit it, it sent a vibration all the way down my spine.

I had run into iron posts many times before, but never with such gusto. I hoped hard that my forehead wasn't bleeding, but it was numb and I was too embarrassed to put my hand up. I didn't mind the internal pain, but an external blemish was another matter. I stood there stupefied, hating the truck, the driver, and the mechanics for making such a motor. I felt then in my side a nudge which sent me tottering half a step. The nudge wasn't severe, but it was like the push a mother might give, half mad, half embarrassed, to a child for breaking her favorite vase in front of a roomful of guests. I couldn't be sure that it had been Syl, because all of them were around me now, although I was standing upright.

'It's nothing. Let's go on,' I said.

But Syl had her hand up with a handkerchief, fragrant with the mild smell of her hand lotion. The motor of the truck was still rumbling. With a sort of quick, jerky motion, I pushed her hand away and started crossing the street, alone.

'It's really bad,' Syl said.

'I don't care. And with this pronouncement, all of us entered the theater, estranged.

In the dark I finally held my handkerchief up to my forehead and pressed it, but it ached. Syl was flanked by the girls, and I sat on the aisle seat. I did not follow the movie at all. When it was over, I tried to get beside Syl and have a word with her, but her friends were talking to her about the movie. Again with the girls

leading, we started walking back toward the dormitory. John was on the street side this time and held me fast.

'The reason no one has asked about my forehead, I thought, is because one of the girls put her finger to her lips. I felt as isolated from the group as though they were talking, not with words, but with gestures, and to divine their meaning, one had to see the movements of their hands. No matter how well trained one was in mobility, how well adjusted to a seeing society, there were always some lampposts left out of one's calculations.

I wished they would change the topic of conversation from the movie to something else, so that I might stop appearing like a chided, sulking child. But nevertheless, I yielded to a trance of reverie, the way a man in a trench, overpowered by odds, surrenders himself to private reflections.

When I pulled myself together and entered into the conversation, it seemed John had persuaded the girls to go on an all-night hike with him. They were to sign in at Syl's dormitory and then slip out the window. It was all so unlike Syl.

'While you girls are doing that,' John said, 'I'll walk Ved to the International House.'

'He'll come with us,' Syl said, but not a single one of her friends picked up the suggestion.

'I don't feel very well,' I said, my mouth completely dry.

'Don't force him to hike, Syl,' the girl on her right said, and then my presence was lost as the discussion shifted to the arrangements for getting out of the dormitory.

The girls went into the dormitory, and I left John impatiently pacing in front of the door. As soon as I was out of his sight, I walked slowly and deliberately toward Telegraph Avenue. Tomorrow Syl would be going home to the other side of San Francisco; I would stay on in Berkeley for another summer session, but compared to the first, it would be dull and dreary. Sure, I would see Syl again, but it could never be the same.

I thought about Sam and his bald head. He felt lonely because he was going on thirty and away from home there was no one to love him or for him to love. Simon was away from home, too, and like Sam he never wanted to return. But I was different from them both, because I wanted to go home. I wondered how many Sams there were—blundering Sams, who had bald heads, or looked like goats, or could not walk straight because they tried to forget their loneliness by drinking.

As I approached Telegraph Avenue, I heard the long drawn-out muffled notes of a violin. They were distant and hard to place, but they persisted, like the mellifluous melodies played on a flute late at night which I had heard so often at Murree Hills. Those musical flights of simple mountaineers seemed innocent compared to the subtle and rich notes of the violin.

phonetic
I was abreast of the café; a few people were gathered around its door. It was clear that the violinist was inside.

'What is it?' I asked, stirred by the music.
'A beautiful girl is playing a violin,' someone answered, after a pause.

Another commented, 'She practices every night, after the café closes.'

'No one can go in?' I asked.
'The door is shut,' I heard.

I stood apart from the group clustered around the door. By and by they left, but the violin was still being played. Maybe they'll let me in, I thought, since I am alone now, and I knocked at the pane, first gently and then hard and frantically, but it did no more than just disturb the music for my ears. At that moment, Syl seemed as unattainable as the violinist. I could come and listen to her play tomorrow and the day after, but the yesterday of Syl and me was gone. There was no reasonable explanation for it, but I knew her friends had brought with them an imperceptible change, a change as looming and solid as the lamp post.

I stood at the door for at least an hour longer, until the violin was put away. And then with my head hung low and the hands of my watch pointing to the early hours of the morning, I started walking toward International House, unconscious of all my surroundings.

'Hey, there,' I heard from behind me, but I kept on moving at the same pace.

'You, there, stop!' the man shouted again. I did not turn around, but simply waited for the intruder to come abreast.

'You are drunk,' the voice said militarily.
'What is it to you?' I said, starting to move away.

The intruder gripped my arm hard, and I felt too lowspirited to either struggle or be angry. In a moment the policeman was apologizing profusely. 'I thought, sir, you were drunk. I didn't know... We are not supposed to,' he continued, 'but I would like to give you a ride.'

I was too weak to decline. He drove me to International House in his secure police car.

3rd April M.A. Finkel

Blumen

Griva

Kapila

Monika

Pellegrini

Sam