

# A Very Short Story, or The Amazing Case of Mr. Ex

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For the most part it was a lazy day. The drowsiness of afternoon was thick as honey over Central Park. Warm sunlight splashed the world like white wine, and the sky was an uninterrupted blue, except for powdery whiffs of clouds which were urged along by the wind. Men, having finished their noon meals, stretched out on benches and slept or endeavored to. Women strolled down the paths, miraculously unmindful of gossip. Only a group of children frisking among the trees and their frantic attendants who pursued them were untouched by the midday lethargy.

Apparently the boy and girl were in love. They passed his bench, unaware that they were followed by eyes which for a moment seemed puzzled. As the couple rounded a clump of bushes, they disappeared, and his eyes turned to the trees heavy with summer, to the grass shining with pools of sunbeams, and finally to the sky, a pure bright sapphire. In that instant perhaps the spell was caught. Perhaps a door was opened. His lips formed the words, I wonder if . . . . But it was a lazy day for the most part, so the spell was broken and the door closed. Besides he was not profound . . . . Presently he slept.

Augustus Leonardo Ex was a small round man who wore spectacles and was bald. There are men who excite interest under even these conditions, but Mr. Ex had only his name to offer in respect to the unusual. However, that had been in the family for three generations, and the singular spark of genius which conceived that appellation had long ago flickered and died.

Augustus (His close friends, had he enjoyed any, would have doubtlessly de-

rived something shorter.) was a clerk in a law firm, as had been his father. Although he did his work consistently and adequately, neither the clerk nor the firm would ever know fame. He was a bachelor, having been embittered toward women during childhood. When he was eight years of age, his great aunt Bertha came upon him one day as Augustus was devouring the better half of a chocolate pie. Unfortunately, the pie was intended for dinner, and as guests were expected that night as well as pie, Aunt Bertha's rage was excited. Deeply vexed, she struck Augustus soundly. As a result he had never married.

On the particular day of which I write, Mr. Ex, having grown, in his case dwindled, to manhood, fared forth from his office at twelve-fifteen. For nine years he had lunched at twelve-fifteen, except for Sundays when he dined with his two sisters, Stella and Doris. (They too were unmarried, although for reasons slightly different from their brother's.) He always spent Sundays with Stella and Doris, as he felt that he owed it to them. Returning however, to this summer day, we find him headed toward Central Park. With him was his lunch which he prepared at home, for he considered dining at a restaurant an unnecessary extravagance. His repast had been highly standardized. In fact his lunches were as limited as the other habits of life common to Mr. Ex. The meal consisted of a pear, a bottle of milk, and two doughnuts. Today, unhappily, he had been forced to substitute an apple for the customary pear. This event had disturbed him.

In Central Park he established himself

at his usual bench and began to eat. As he was preparing to bite into the apple that had caused him so much anxiety, a boy and girl arrested his attention. Love occupied a very insignificant place in the heart of Mr. Ex, and he was not given to day-dreaming. Nevertheless, his interest was held by the couple. Perhaps some stifled chord of sensitivity in his soul responded to the combination of young love and the beauty of the afternoon. He was wondering about it when the drowsiness of the stillness and the sun overtook him.

The couple passed from sight, and Mr. Ex closed his eyes. New York and Central Park became forgotten things. A robin sang from the shaded branches of a maple. Down the path danced the children's laughter as they played tag among the tall trees. Far to the left the traffic of Manhattan groaned under the load of lunch

hour, its baritone rumble scarcely audible to one in Central Park. But these sounds escaped Augustus Ex. He was remembering a summer when as a child he was taken to the seashore. He was thinking of how he had gone off by himself to watch the restless water and of how the moonlight looked as it spun across the tiny waves on the night he had left. He remembered that he wept for days after he returned to the city. He had missed the ocean . . . . . Suddenly there seemed to be a link between the feeling for the ocean and the twinge of loneliness at seeing the couple. Somehow the beauty of the day was related too. He couldn't understand. "I wonder if . . . .," he thought, but before he could answer the unasked question something had destroyed his consciousness . . . . .

Mr. Ex was asleep.

## Definitions of Liberty and Freedom

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Almost any discussion of the present war will involve the use of the terms "liberty" and "freedom". They are used interchangeably so often that it is difficult to make a distinction between them. Both "liberty" and "freedom" in their primary significance refer to the state of being free or the absence of restraint, compulsion, or subjection of the individual and his actions. The idea of liberty often contains the added implication that such restraint or subjection had existed previously.

"Liberty" is commonly used in a political or legal sense. There are three common types of liberty included under the manifestations of this meaning — civil

liberty, political liberty, and individual or personal liberty. Civil liberty refers specifically to the rights and immunities of citizens in an organized society with a guarantee for the protection of such rights. The right to share in the forming and in the conduction of the government under which one lives is called political liberty. Individual or personal liberty, according to modern political usage, involves such privileges as freedom of movement from place to place and equality before the courts. Thus, "liberty", in this sense, refers to a body of rights which the individual in a modern constitutional government possesses.

While the term "freedom" may be and