Really, someone ought to put that child out of my misery. Just the other day Madge said — Oh oh, you'd better be quiet, Addison. They've spotted your flare and are coming over the top with all their thirst. Honestly, Addison, I simply can't understand why you fall over Harry Matheson every time . . . .

"Christine, dahhhllinng! Where did you find that handsome man? Here, sit next to me—have I got a piece of dirt for you! I happened to catch a glance of Madge Hollet downtown this morning, and whom do you think she was with dahling? . . . ."

Reunion
by George Fullen

Martin stood on the sidewalk outside Grand Central Station and embraced the overpowering size, the magnificence of New York City once again. It had been several years since he had stood, for the first time, on that same Forty-third Street pavement and felt the same awe before the spectacular accomplishments of modern civilization. Despite his great hurry, the man had had to pause, as before, to absorb the miracle of America as represented by its greatest city. But this time he was not so much impressed and did not stand so long. He picked up his bag, again, and got into the nearest taxi.

"The Peter Stuyvesant," he told the driver.

He could not escape the sentimental memories recalled by the New York scene. There, close to Grand Central, was the Child's restaurant where, so often, he had eaten dinner just after arriving in New York on a week-end pass. And then the cab was in Times Square which Martin remembered as being crowded for a New Year's Eve celebration every Saturday night during the war. Too late, he looked to see if the Stage Door Canteen were still functioning. Broadway was familiar names of theaters and bars flashing past. Once on Central Park West, he turned to see the line of plushy hotels along the South Drive which had always been one of his favorite views in New York. Then he settled back and counted the streets as the cab crossed them.

He was tense with the kind of controlled excitement that he had not known for several years. To see the Ziffers again—Martha and Ivan! Here! In the United States! In New York City! They had been so certain that all hopes of their ever meeting again were foolish when they had parted in Casablanca.
The taxi whipped around the corner at Eighty-sixth Street and nose-dived to a stop. Martin was out in a second, fumbling for his billfold. “Keep the change,” he said.

He picked up his bag and crossed the street, eagerly scanning the facade of the hotel. He had purposely been vague about the time of his arrival, for he did not wish to be met. He had had enough of strained public meetings and partings to last a lifetime.

The Ziffers had arrived in the United States six weeks before, but this had been his first opportunity to make the trip to see them. The Ziffers—Martha and Ivan—had become the symbol of spiritual security to him, the spiritual security which he had come to know in the army, but not of the army. The Ziffers were here, and he needed to feel secure again.

Martin had intended to go directly to the Ziffers’ room, but instead, after he had registered, he decided to put his things away in his own room and have a bath first. His room turned out to be too high up for his peace of mind, a circumstance which had bothered him on his earlier visits to the city, too. But after all, he reminded himself, it was foolish to feel that way when he had travelled so many weary air miles without turning a hair.

As he undressed for his bath, Martin realized that the agitation had left him. In its place was the rhythm of the line. It was a line of poetry—not actually a line yet; just the rhythm of the line. It was a rhythm which his mood had superimposed upon the rhythm of the train wheels during the larger part of his journey.

The rhythm became insistent when he turned on the shower. The beatings of these rhythms in his consciousness still had the power to terrify him a bit. He often feared that he might one day expire in insanity with the persistent and monotonous beat of Longfellow’s “The Psalm of Life” banging away at him . . .

Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream . . .
Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an . . .

. . . or worse yet, it might be Ravel’s “Bolero” with its rattling “Dum da-di-di-dum da-di-di-dum da-di-di-da-di-da-di-di-dum.” . . .Those were not the only two which pursued him; they were just the worst offenders.

But the rhythm that was plaguing him now had not taken on enough shape for him to know more than that it was words, not music. He also felt, vaguely, that it was not going to be a line of his own origination. It was an irregular rhythm which should have made him feel that it was his own, but it did not.

He finished his bath and dressed slowly. When he was fully
presentable, he sat down on the bed and picked up the receiver of the phone. He gave the operator the Ziffers' room number and waited until he heard Martha's familiar voice.

"Hello," she said.


"Wonderful!" she said. "I am a little bit in my bed—taking my afternoon rest—but come right up. We must see you!"

"I'll be up right away," he said and put the receiver back in its cradle. For a moment, he sat in a lethargic trance; then he went out into the hall and rang for the elevator. He stepped from the elevator onto a higher floor than his own. A quick glance at the progression of room numbers determined the direction of the Ziffers' room. He found it and knocked.

"Entrez! Come in!" Martha called from beyond the door.

And then he was in the room. Martha, her face and body revealing her surprise and pleasure, rushed to greet him. He felt like hugging her, but he gripped her hand instead in the proper European manner. Ivan was pounding him enthusiastically on the back, offering his hand next. The three of them babbled like little children—greetings, recriminations about tardy letters, inquiries about activities since their last meeting jumbling into incoherence—but gibberish would have expressed their emotions adequately. Martin found himself, finally, seated on the sofa with a Ziffer on either side of him.

Martha was saying: "You are fat! You are disgustingly fat! You have done nothing but eat! I see it now! You have composed no symphonies! You have written no novels! You have painted no pictures! You have been too busy eating!"

It was a typical speech, and in it, Martin found his reason for coming to New York. Martha took him back quickly to the days of enthusiasm. And she knew him well enough to jest about his enthusiasms—not that he aspired to all these things. God forbid, he thought, that I should ever be guilty of such pretense! But he was interested in the arts, and he still hoped to teach them some day.


"You look healthier, too," Martin said.

"Yes," Martha replied. "It's this wonderful country. You were right; it is a wonderful country. Such food! So good and so much of it! And such comfort!" She indicated the room which was, indeed, comfortable and furnished in a style which approached elegance. Martin saw, then, that he was in a suite of rooms.
“How is this?” he asked, lapsing into an English idiom which sounded as if translated from the German. It was an unconscious habit which he had acquired in the days when he first knew the Ziffers and they did not understand or speak English as well as they now did. “You are rich again?” he continued.

“We can use, now, our securities in the United States,” Ivan replied, and his fat, fine-featured face beamed because he had shown so much forethought when he had judiciously dispersed their wealth before they left Vienna. That was in 1938. Hitler had swallowed Czechoslovakia, and all Europe knew that he had his greedy eyes on Austria next. The Ziffers had known it, and they had also known that they could not live under Hitler. They had fled, in front of his armies, to Paris and, after a brief respite there, on to Africa.

In 1938, Martin had entered high school. He had spent the following four years in careless delights, unaware of the great conflicts abroad in the world until, in 1941, the reality of the situation was forced upon him as it was upon the rest of his countrymen. Six months after he was graduated from high school, the army had absorbed him and his careless generation, leaving a more careless generation behind to plan for tomorrow while Martins struggled for today. He had been rushed through the various phases of army training and, within a very short time, loaded on a ship. Eight days later, he was “abroad.” He had walked into the Red Cross club one morning, and met a woman working at the Information Desk named Martha Ziffer. She had asked: “Where is your home?”

“Indianapolis, Indiana,” he had answered.

And she had said, with a characteristic smile around her eyes: “Vienna is my home town.”

Martha recalled him abruptly: “I had a dream last night. You were in my dream. You came back to visit us in Africa. Ziffy and I were sitting on the terrace, and our landlady was sitting with us—it reminded me that I must write to her. She has gone back to Marseilles. I think maybe she has found another husband.”

“She was very beautiful for a woman of forty-five,” Martin observed. It was his inevitable comment on the woman who had owned the villa where the Ziffers had lived. The first time he had met her, he had judged her to be an extremely beautiful woman, probably in her late twenties. He had been very surprised when he had, subsequently, met her daughter who was obviously in her late teens.

“Madame Bronzini is very French, but very nice,” Martha remarked. Then she continued: “We were sitting on the terrace with Madame Bronzini—in my dream—when you came through the
gate and up through the garden, as you always did. Ellen was with you. I wonder where is Ellen now.”

The rhythm came back to Martin again, very well-defined: “Dum, dum, dum, da-dum, da, dum, da.”

He remembered Ellen, not exceptionally beautiful, but very lovely in her Red Cross uniform. She had been several years older than he, and they had been careful to form no serious attachment.

“It has been so long since I saw you that you spoke German in my dream,” Martha said, and added: “It was very convenient for you to speak German in my dream.”

“You have found a wife, maybe?” Ivan asked.

“No,” Martin replied, “No wife.” He redirected the conversation. “Is my United States really as good as I said?”

“Better!” Martha replied. “Much better! I have spent all our money in the shops.”

“She is so—,” Ivan had to grope for his word, “—so extravagant. Such an extravagant wife I got! I can do nothing with her. Buy, buy, buy! Everything she sees she must buy!” he said, grinning, for his wife was his only pet and could have taken him into bankruptcy without a complaint from him.

“Hot water,” Martha continued. “All the time we have hot water. And no food ration. Everything is clean—the people, the streets, everything. I like the United States. It is comfortable and I am old. I need a comfortable place to live.”

Martin had learned that when Martha said she was old, she meant that Ivan was old. She, herself, was just past forty, but Ivan was well past fifty. Martin remembered once—they had been sitting on the terrace of the villa with the warm afternoon sun on their backs—when Martha had told him, for the first time, about the flight from Vienna. Then, she had ended her story by speaking of her concern for her husband. “He should not have to work so hard,” she had said, “Because he is not so young. I like to work. I never did work before, and I enjoy knowing that I can care for myself, that I can care for myself anywhere.” She had said this as she told Martin of Ivan’s confinement in a concentration camp in Bordeaux. It had been, luckily, a French camp rather than a German one. And it had been the first time during their twenty years of marriage that they had been separated. When Martha had finally been allowed to visit Ivan, she had found him working in a vineyard. Having worked in the world of finance all of his life, he had never done anything physically strenuous, and when Martha had found him in the vineyard, he was unable to unbend from the position he had assumed to pick the grapes from the low vines. They had fallen into one
another's arms and wept. Martin was very moved by the story of the separation of these two people whose childlessness had made them so dependent upon one another.

As he thought of it, the rhythm pulsated more strongly: "Dum, dum, dum, da-dum, da, dum da."

"You are dreaming again!" Martha said accusingly. "What about this time?"

"Oh, nothing, Martha!" Martin replied. "I was just thinking about Casablanca—the Passage Sumica where I used to stop at the stalle to look over the latest shipments of music from France, the Petit Poulet (I have not had a good bowl of soup since the last time we ate there together), the sun's warmth and the sea air which kept it from being hot, the sidewalk cafes, the Oriental charm of the Riad tea garden by moonlight. I was just thinking of Africa."

"You have not been happy at home," Martha said, and her voice and face showed her concern and sympathy.

"Not unhappy, Martha," he replied. "Just disappointed."

The first word was "Gone—Gone is the da-dum, da, dum, da. Gone is the da-dum and the ... Gone is the—da-dum and the—dream! Gone is the—da-dum and the dream. What was the missing word?

"Disappointed?" Martha asked.

"Yes," he answered. "You know—the ideals we used to talk about."

The word might be "glory." Or maybe it was "vision. Gone is the glory and the dream. Gone is the vision and the dream." Either way it sounded Wordsworthian.

And then he had it; he could not understand why it had not come to him before. It was a corruption of Wordsworth. He could see the two lines underscored in his book:

"Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

"Things do not go well," Martha observed. "Ah, well, things do not often go well."

"And dinner is not more hot while we sit and talk," Ivan announced.

Martin glanced at his watch and saw that the dinner hour had, indeed, come upon them.

"Will you excuse us while we dress?" Martha asked.

"Of course," Martin replied.

The two fragile little people, comfortable but lost, left the room.