DICTATOR

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We stood between the giant columns of the mighty triumphal arch high above the riotous crowd of rejoicing people. Three of us, the spokesman, Comrade Jones, and I, stood on the decorated platform waiting for the cheering to cease, for the bands to stop playing, for some semblance of order so that the ceremony might begin.

Yes, the world had been saved. Peace had been restored, and civilization was to carry its glorious banner on to even greater heights than it had thus far reached. The world's economic system had been revolutionized. The common standard of living now surpassed even the wildest dreams of the staunchest socialist. Capital and labor worked shoulder to shoulder and saw eye to eye. Currency had been stabilized. Science was making strides unheard of even five years ago. Expanded educational opportunities revealed all potential geniuses, and individual accomplishments in all fields had reached astounding peaks.

All these miracles had been wrought by the formation of a United States of the World. We were all one glorious unit, and now on this memorable Fourth of July, nineteen hundred forty-six they were offering to one man, who was accredited with accomplishing the Herculean task of righting the world, the sole leadership of the great commonwealth, just as centuries ago Julius Caesar had been offered the title of Emperor of Rome. One of the three of us was to be presented with the opportunity of being the dictator of the United States of the World, and his acceptance—or refusal—was to be witnessed by the vast, clamoring mass on the street below and transmitted by television all over the world.

A hush had fallen over the crowd as the spokesman slowly made his way to the front of the platform. By the time he had reached the speaker's stand an overwhelming silence had descended upon the people. They seemed suddenly awed by the terrible significance of the moment.

With the spokesman's first words, "Dictator of the World," I seemed to become oblivious to the whole setting. There was a strange questioning in my mind. Thoughts kept going back to the days before. What did all this really stand for? The sea of upturned faces below were dissolving in a mist. "Dictator of the World"—What would one do? I found myself in a sort of aery twilight, and something—was it thought or was it really a voice?—seemed to be speaking in a mocking tone—answering my question . . .

Dictator of the world? There are things to do, many things. Fathom the silence of falling snow in November twilight, the burn of a lone tear as it rolls down the cheek, the pain of a broken heart. Demand orchestral scores for the music of the wind moaning through pine woods, of rain on the roof in September, of waves lapping gently against the rotting pier while breezes play in the reeds and frogs sing bass accompaniment to the night bird's call. Harness lightning's knife of fury, the sun's beams shining through the crack in the door, or the wind whistling under the eaves in December. See always the kitten curled upon a cushion, a child's face light with a smile, the glow of fireplaces on winter evenings, and erase memories of suffering, hate, and cruelty. Wear the rainbow as a silken scarf. Rest upon a pillow of fleecy cloud. Hang the suns of all the universes on your Christmas tree. Climb the silvery path of the moon on the lake and gaze through the millions of sparkling
windows at the mysteries beyond the sky. Imprison in perfume vials the mists of late autumn afternoons, the prim lavender and old lace atmosphere of a New England country town . . . .

Dictator of the world? There are other things also . . . . Be big, vast as the silent night. Be infinitesimal beyond the probing scientist's view. Be heart and soul of each man in the world. Know how each thinks and feels. Be darkness and light. Be everything and be nothing . . . . The voice was laughing . . . .

A wild burst of applause shattered my reverie. The great man had been named. The spokesman beckoned. I hesitated a moment and then walked toward the man. He was holding out the robe destined for the dictator of the world, but I shook my head. They wouldn't understand, but it didn't matter because I knew. I couldn't be dictator. I turned and started down the long stairway from the triumphal arch.

EXCERPTS

I. Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings were so realistic, that the image he painted almost protruded from the canvas. Realistic Painting by June Holtman.

II. He was a saint the first day of the week and a business devil the other six.

The soft, red light cast by the colors in the rose window threw a flase look of kindness on her harsh features. Sunday Morning by Harold Kellermeyer.

III. A tantalizing fly hummed its farewell to life about the room. Its abrupt silence I heard as a distinct sentence to die, for this sentence was immediately followed by the guillotine—like crack of a newspaper. "Got him," was its unmistakable pronouncement of death. Musings by Thomas Broden.

IV. Down the street came a muffled figure, black against the snow-covered earth. Out of the stillness came the measured tread of his heavy boots as they snapped the thin ice that crusted the snow. The sound grew louder and more distinct as he came nearer. Each step breaking the night's silence like the crack of a dead twig. Footfalls in the Snow by Barbara Jane Peacock.

V. Nocturne's sheath of magic has erased the distorted lines of broken fence; tortuously gnarled trees become graceful.

Nearer is the cat, sleeping contentedly beside them. Cool, sweet fragrance of fresh, living plants is more refreshing than sleep itself. Eyes lifted to the sky show the heights of beauty, the base of thought. Yet the ideas formulated this night belong to this time only. A separate world has been created by man, using God's own for a setting. To make use of those ideas they must be confined to the world of make-believe. Transformation by Mary Shockency.