Concerning Mr. Mundy

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Mr. Mundy lived on Seventh street. Seventh street lay between Sixth street and Eighth street which was the only way Mr. Mundy could tell that it was his street. Otherwise the three streets were exactly alike; they had the same houses and the same trees and the same square green lawns. There was no way you could tell them apart except that Seventh street lay between Sixth and Eighth.

One afternoon Mr. Mundy had nothing to do. He had a job. That is, he went to a large square building at the same time every morning and left the same large square building at the same time every evening. What he did between these times was his job. My Mundy had never figured out to what purpose this was, but it seemed expected of him and Mr. Mundy always did what was expected — except this particular afternoon.

On this afternoon Mr. Mundy had simply stopped in the inbetween time that was his job and walked out of the large square building at a different time. He had nothing to do and no place to go because he was not expected to have anything to do when the time of his job was. Since there was no place to go he stood for a long time against the green lamp post that stood across the street from the large square building. Mr. Mundy was watching. He didn’t know exactly what he was watching, but he remembered that other people did this when there was nothing to do. He watched the building until he became embarrassed because it watched him too. It had a hundred blank eyes in its gray front and they were all watching him. It embarrassed him because the large gray building was probably thinking more than he was, which is always embarrassing.

So Mr. Mundy decided to watch the people. After watching intently for a long time, he found out that there was nothing to watch. They all did the same thing — not at the same time, of course, but eventually it always amounted to the same thing. They all had the same heads that were always hurrying ahead of their bodies as if they cared little for the close association. They all carried an assortment of bundles and satchels. These didn’t matter, since they all became the same thing sooner or later. It took Mr. Mundy a long time to find all this out, but when he did he stopped watching the people.

Then there was nothing to watch except the taxicabs and the birds. He didn’t like watching the taxicabs because they always went by before you had had time to watch them properly. He didn’t like to watch the birds either because they reminded him too much of the people he had watched. So Mr. Mundy stopped leaning against the tall green lamp post that stood across from the large square building and began to walk.

Since he nearly always did the same thing he began to walk toward Seventh street. He got as far as Sixth street and stopped. He thought at first that he would watch Sixth street, but then he remembered that he had just decided that he didn’t like to watch. So instead he turned down Sixth street until he was in front of the house that was exactly like his — except that his house was on Seventh street.

Because the house was so much like his on the outside, he decided to go in and see what it was like inside. He knew that
this wasn't expected of him, but then this was an unexpected afternoon; so he went up the walk and opened the door that was exactly like his door. There was no one in the living room, but he saw the chair that was like his only his paper was on the footstool and his pipe and slippers close at hand. Mr. Mundy didn't like this. They never were this way on Seventh street. He always hunted for them there. That was part of the adventure at home after the job. He didn't like this; it was too easy.

Then he went through the dining room and saw that the table was set and there were flowers in the middle. He didn't like this either so he went on to the kitchen. There was a woman. She was mixing something in a bowl. She looked a little like his mother and more like a girl he had almost known once and she smiled and asked him why he was home early. Mr. Mundy couldn't answer this because at the same moment he saw a child in the yard that was beyond the windows. He almost watched the child, but it reminded him of the birds that reminded him of the people and he didn't. Instead he looked again at the woman and at the stuff she was mixing in the bowl. He didn't like her and he didn't like the stuff in the bowl and he hadn't liked the flowers on the table and his paper and pipe close by his chair; so he left. That probably wasn't expected of him either, but it was the only thing he could do under the circumstances.

Then Mr. Mundy decided that since this truly was an unexpected afternoon he might as well go to the house on Eighth street that was exactly like his. He almost stopped at Seventh street to turn down to his own house, but he didn't. He was not usually a curious man but this afternoon he was very curious. This was quite unusual because most curious people didn't have a job. He had a job, therefore he could not be a curious person.

When he did get to the house on Eighth street he didn't hesitate; he walked right in the door. There was no one in the living room and no one in the dining room, so he went out to the kitchen. There was a man sitting at the table. He looked a great deal like Mr. Mundy. Only Mr. Mundy always shaved at 7:15 in the morning and this man hadn't and Mr. Mundy's ties were always straight and this man's wasn't. Then Mr. Mundy who ordinarily wasn't a close observer of such things saw that the man was drunk — not only drunk but rapidly getting drunker. Not having had experience in the matter he wondered how long it had taken the man to reach this stage and how much longer he could still be able to lift the bottle.

After a few minutes in which Mr. Mundy forgot his resolution not to watch, the man saw him and motioned for him to sit down. He started to decline the invitation, but when he saw that the man was becoming very insistent he sat down on the edge of the chair across the table from the man. While the man was drinking he looked around for a woman like the one on Sixth street or even another bird-child, but they were not there. There was nothing there except the man and his bottle.

Suddenly the man pushed the half empty bottle toward Mr. Mundy. Mr. Mundy jumped because he hadn't expected that. The man's eyes were on him so he reached out a cautious hand and lifted the bottle. He smelled it and as he was smelling it he looked at the man and then down at the table. For the first time he saw the gun. It lay by the man's right hand and the man's fingers kept reaching out to stroke it. Mr. Mundy didn't like this any better than he had liked the house on Sixth street. Because he was a careful
man he set the bottle down gently and
then ran from the house as fast as he could
before the man could call after him.
He kept running until he got to
Seventh street. Then he made himself
stop and look behind him. There was no
one there so he walked slowly to the
house that was really his. He walked in
the door and through the living room and
dining room and into the kitchen.
Then Mr. Mundy sat down and smiled
slowly because he was alone.

Yearning

IONE COLLIGAN

They fell upon the polished desk—
Gold bits of pollen from the cosmos.
Last flowers of the year these were,
Rescued from bleak November death
To live a weary moment more.

The pollen fell, and fell in silence
Tears in a mutely speaking fragrance,
As the cosmos mourned for the buffeting wind,
For rain to mingle with falling tear,
For the sob and sough of the dying year.

And the pollen fell on the polished desk.