

What Made Thee

A Novel by
Willard Thurston

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PRÉCIS: A story about: a reclusive Canadian prairie Boy (early 50's, Saskatchewan), an enigmatic Drifter who sees in the boy a poignant likeness of himself at that age, and a retarded Girl in the Boy's class who alters their lives in unexpected and piquant ways. ((The character of the Drifter derives from the ominous and little known GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence) operation in Canada in the early Fifties code named 'Cedar', as described in the Mitrokhin Archive, Allan Lane, The Penguin Press 1999, a few details of which are seamlessly incorporated into the story.)) At the outset the Girl has an ugly time in her tense home and strict school, including a gang of teasers the Boy is both envious and wary of — due in part to the Boy's discovery of his own ungainliness and his flight into a wonder world of his own devising.

Sample Pages follow. Download options at end of Sample Pages.

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PART ONE: SAVANT

The comedian known as The Gryphon was ending his show in Vancouver's Nefer Lounge in the aging Alexandria hotel which,

in the musings of local chroniclers, had seen better days. The faux Egyptian wall murals now had the look of a ransacked tomb, not the vivid celebratory murals patterned after the historic talatat blocks that featured family portraits of the eccentric Akhenaten, his enigmatic ‘best wife’ Nefertiti, and their children. The Gryphon himself was showing signs of wear, of time travail, which his partly inebriated state did little to mask. The small audience, once highly expectant, itching to be amused, slowly began to lose its resilience, its predilection for levity. Precious wordy insinuations can become gawky, labored. When the laughter languishes, you tend to see and hear only what miffs you.

“Has anyone in the audience thought much about -- What made thee? *What Made Thee?* Not who you slept with last or why you put that chalk dust up your nose but -- What made thee? Where in the ‘background noise’ did you, babe, dude or specialist come from? Why and how? Stuff like that. What made thee?...” (A few cursory nods.)

“You probably think...like most of the mummies here tonight...that environment is omnipotent. Right? Context and nurture are everything, the whole enchilada. Feed everybody Big Macs and out pop jelly-bellies. Bear with me. What made thee?

“We got this science today called genetics. Chirpy stuff that’s up there in your face. Your airedale nose, cabbage patch dollies, your puny dangling participle. Maybe even the fact you can’t carry a tune without the Vienna Philharmonic backing you

up. Genes. What your father and mother imagined you wouldn't hold against them. Man were they slow. What made thee?

He looks at an overweight lad in the front row.

"Got a great bod, kid. A fact you've known for some time, right? (The lad wanly smiles.) Always pray before you smile. It helps. What made thee? What made thee?... Genes prescribe a certain inalienable and ineluctable look, from the stipulations of bone articulation to special vulnerabilities to disease. No reprieve here. Genes. No innocent bystanders. They're wasp accomplices to an arbitrary arrest!"

The lame audience response seemed to animate the Gryphon's urgency.

"Let's face it -- genes are ancient copecks more often than Swiss dollars. Something people can get decidedly wistful about. The hoary cartoon you cannot rub out.

"Not being career stoics, folks get cheesed off! Then spooked. Then wacko: for crissake, something oughta be done about a Creator who may be both Miser and Thug...something, surely bloody something before the Second Bloody Coming. Before the Great Futures' Peddler comes back to judge his Mays' and Macs' fannies! Fannies being the main act for some folks. (A groggy someone shouts 'boring' followed by some table thumping. The Gryphon looks dryly amused for a moment, then:

"Hear you man -- it is a mego scandal, right? Think about it. You look and sound better than your neighbor, you're just a

high-toned smeg head, right? Everybody knows that. And the smegs get away with it, right? Having two good kidneys, say, or 20/20 vision, or a memory that can recall Paradise Lost verbatim -- that's hardly legit but rather something you didn't really deserve, hadn't earned, and maybe should be taxed for having. A lucky sonofabitch oughta pay through the nose, right? You got capital that's earning interest and holy hannah you get to keep it!"

"Right on!" one gummy copper nose calls out, freshly awake, glancing about, prompting bearish applause from some nearby tables.

" -- Nice to have the board of directors here. (A few sniggers.) What a bloody mess. Think about it. To be heathy and pretty, let alone wealthy or smart, is cause for reprisal, right? Only the poorest, ugliest, dumbest, most disease ridden should be allowed to reproduce without apology. They don't know any better and they've been doing it for years, right? Yeah. Yeah. (More applause from the same tables.)

"I mean, life presupposes a lot of crap, and I mean a lot, right, not just some Wall Street 'jawsmith' spicing it up. Think about it. All that life crap. Mountains of it. Ugly sickening polluting crap. Chin deep in the stuff...and jees we're living longer! Silly old farts spreading all over like dust mites. While research labs make drugs to keep 'em living longer! Can you imagine? Naturally the do-gooders among us have a solution -- death with dignity! Don't embarrass yourself. Get out now before you really mess up. Yes. Death with dignity. Which

means not being there when it happens, right? Woody Allen's plea bargain. Euthanasia will soon be a political reality. so the social advisement can't be far off."

He looks about the somnambulant crowd with blood shot eyes, shaky aspen limbs, his nose nearly a roadway marker, to stare at a couple of old boozers in the second tier of seats. One of these offers a quizzical toast. The other gives him the finger.