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GESTURES

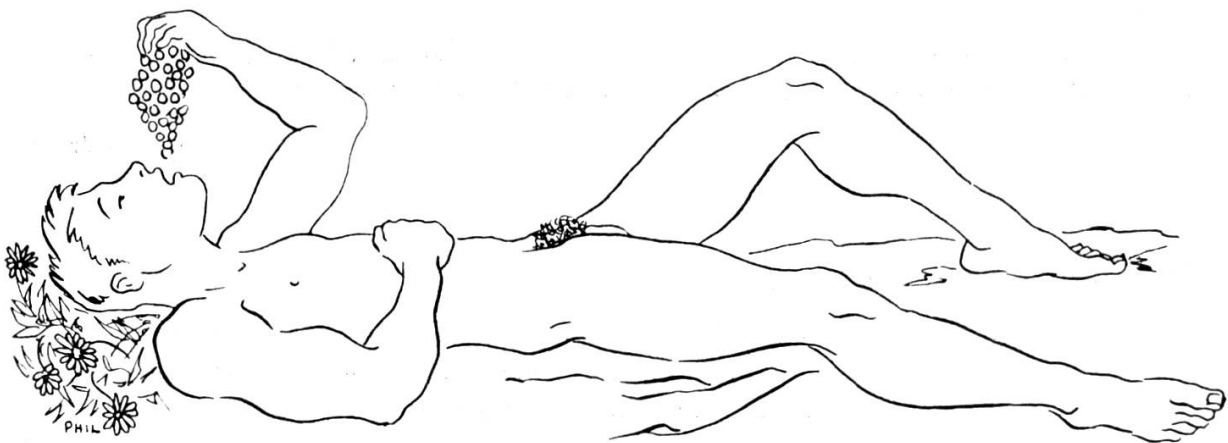
— Steward

To some extent all men are victims of »gestures«. But especially so are we whose lives are built on the filmy foundation of our impossible dreams. We like to interpret every gesture sentimentally; we like to collect them, we are great collectors. For if our lives are broken time after time in the matter of human relationships, we find that the tangible memories of those relationships do not disappear — and we collect a handkerchief, a little hair, a love-note, the label of a bottle of wine, a water-glass (because *his* lips touched it once), a broken shoelace, a corporal's stripes (he ripped them off and sewed the sergeant's on).

But mostly we collect gestures to lay away lovingly in our hope-chest — gestures that we dream over and re-interpret a thousand times, seeing in them a hint of the loveliness for which we seek. We like to think that if only this word, this clasp around the shoulders, this half-smile flickering beneath half-closed sleepy eyes had been carried through to its conclusion, that therein we would have found unending happiness. In my hope-chest are hundreds. One, a postcard written at four in the morning, saying simply: «I could not sleep. And I got to think of you and what your friendship means to me and how much you have influenced my life. If you know other persons better or think of them as better friends of yours, please do not tell me; I would not want to know it.» It was from a great hulking handsome twenty-two year old, six feet and four inches tall, with a crew-cut so short that it seemed a kind of silky brown cap on his well-shaped head, and clear blue eyes, and great hands in which my own felt lost — an athlete, moreover, a giant of a young man, quick with a woman, but slow enough with me to be love's heretic.

But the gesture, once tucked safely away in the cedared layers of our hope-chests, should be left there undisturbed. I made an error once. I found the card, I looked in the telephone book, I called, he came to visit — as charming as ever, and as handsome . . . and long since married, with two charming daughters, and three sons. We looked at each other without gladness — politely, but lost. And when he left, I tore the card slowly, and threw the pieces away.

And all the other gestures lie undisturbed within my heart.



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