Never Call Retreat

JOSEPH FREEMAN

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by

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He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat.

—BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC

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Never Call Retreat

This book is for
my mother.

All this is true in a way precisely because it is false in a way.

ST. AUGUSTINE

THIS STORY is sheer fantasy. The author has done his best to avoid realism in plot, detail and language. All characters, places, situations, institutions, movements, causes, countries, governments, creeds, ideas, conversations, books, writers and historical references are intended to be imaginary. Any resemblance these may have to anything in the real world, past, present or future, is an accident the author regrets. There ought to be algebraic symbols to designate lowest common denominators and highest common factors of human experience. In the absence of a literary mathematic, it has been necessary to employ invention, image and simile. This novel is consequently neither document, allegory, parable, sermon, nor political tract; it is meant to be, in the first place, "a tale that is told"; in the second, a kind of poem.

The Aim Is Victory

NAPOLEON was by no means an ideal human being, but he knew the business of war. "If it comes to battle," he said, "let it be victory, come what may: he who thinks of anything but this single aim is lost." Is it necessary to give the forces of evil a monopoly on this wisdom of the ages? No, we are fully awake at last. The American people are ready to defend their land, life and freedom. Our role among the nations liberating the world from the madmen who seek to devour it will not be small. Enormous resources are here, swift skilled labor, genius for organization, and the marvelous courage and fighting stamina of a fresh free people. Everything is here required for victory.

And victory is what we want above all things: the quickest possible victory; sure, remorseless, crushing; victory that will leave no trace of the sanguinary monsters who have befouled the earth; victory in which every American regardless of age, sex, creed, race or color does his just share of fighting, working, buying war bonds; victory that will reward in a thousand living ways our love of liberty, our unity as a free people, our determination to preserve and improve the good life.

Five thousand years of history have not seen an hour like this. The future of the world is literally in the hands of simple, decent men and women everywhere ready to give all that the world may be secure, just and free. In this immense hour deciding the destiny of man, every American home is a fortress; every factory, farm and office a battlefield; every branch of military and civilian service a sacred call, a glorious opportunity. Let us take our posts. Let us fight to win. The aim is victory.

JOSEPH FREEMAN

Never Call Retreat

True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

--Romeo and Juliet

86-B CENTRAL PARK WEST

July 21, 1942.

MR. RUSSELL HAGUE
President, Hague Publications
600A Fifth Avenue
New York City

My dear Hague:

I see by the papers that at last you've come in from Europe. You do get around, you lucky dog! And in times like these, too, when "on horror's head horrors accumulate," when the entire world is being reshaped in war, and America stands at Armageddon and battles for the right.

Your articles from London were splendid, by far the best you've ever written, I think. The heroic struggle of the British people seems to have evoked the finest things in you. You were lucky to get to Moscow, too. I'm glad you feel so enthusiastic about the Russians. What a people!

Things have been happening to me, too. The papers say you plan to remain in New York quite a while, so I'm looking forward to some good long talks soon. There's something I particularly want to discuss with you. Meantime, I'm mailing you what I wrote down during the seven months you were abroad. This will give you a chance to think about the matter before we talk it over. I confess it has occupied my own thoughts a great deal, and believe if you will read through the whole of the manuscript which accompanies this letter, you will want to reflect on it yourself.

In a way the thing began on New Year's Eve at the farewell party you gave before taking off for London. I have since wondered whether it was the wine or the war that prompted your flattering offer that night. You said to me:

"Why don't you write some stories for my magazine based on case histories in your practice?"

At first the idea fascinated me. There is something very tempting about the notion that one may be an artist after all. I have often thought about this curious temptation. One of Europe's mightiest dictators fancies himself a painter, another a musician. You might think that

type of man would be satisfied with controlling half the world. But no: he must insist also upon being gifted with some creative art.

This pose is based on a profound truth. Power forces people into submission; art wins their love.

For analogous reasons, I suppose, the scientist also toys with the idea of creative art. Science gives us knowledge; art, vision; and most of us want to apprehend the mysteries of life beyond their formulation in abstract or practical law.

A psychoanalyst like myself is especially susceptible to the lure of literature. Nowhere in the world, not even in the secret confessionals of the church, does a man strip his soul so naked as in the analyst's office. To us the patient's experience comes as nearly complete as it possibly can: or so we believe. We are in a position to know the whole of what a man feels, thinks and does; it is our job to bring into the light of day emotions which a man denies, thoughts he has long forgotten and actions he fiercely repudiates. And there, we sometimes imagine, is the richest material for stories about contemporary life.

You see how strongly your offer tempted me. Yet, the more I considered it, the more difficult the whole business appeared. There is a great difference between experience and art. Much of what a patient tells me cannot be printed in a popular magazine. Then, what is most likely to interest your readers may be of the least clinical value, while factors of clinical value may bore them.

A doctor finds the detailed report of a case history exciting, just as a mathematician finds a page of calculus exciting; the layman is neither predisposed nor trained to appreciate either. To convey the essential idea to him, to stir his imagination and feelings, you need a writer, a man endowed with the gift of transforming direct experience and abstract ideas into what we call art.

I am a scientist who can analyze experience without being able to re-create it. So my final decision about your generous offer had to be no.

I was on the point of writing you this when a curious case came into my office. I want to tell you about this case, provided you understand that I am not submitting this to you as an editor, but am simply telling you the facts as a friend.

The day after New Year's, at ten o'clock in the morning, just as my first patient had left, the telephone rang. I picked up the receiver and heard a man's voice:

"Dr. Foster?" The voice had a slight foreign accent. "My name is Schuman—Professor Paul Schuman. I met you at Mr. Hague's party New Year's Eve."

I did not remember him.

"I must see you, doctor," the voice said urgently. "I need your help."

"How about Tuesday next week?"

"O no! I can't wait that long."

He sounded frightened, so I told him to come to my office at three that afternoon.

At three sharp, the nurse ushered in a man of about forty, slim, well-built, with a sensitive, intelligent face. He stood quietly in the center of the room until the nurse went out.

"Dr. Foster?" he said timidly.

From behind my desk I shook hands with Professor Schuman and motioned him into the chair facing me.

"Tell me about it," I said.

"There's very little to tell," Schuman said with hesitation. I was silent, in the best traditions of the profession. "I am ill, doctor." The voice was now harsh with emotion.

"What seems to be wrong?"

"I can't work."

That is a very common complaint among neurotics when they first seek the psychoanalyst's help.

"How do you spend your time?" I asked.

"I spend . . . my time . . . in . . . the movies."

Obviously he did not know how commonplace that complaint also is among neurotic patients. The film is a wonderful thing, one of the very greatest inventions of our civilization; but, like almost everything else, the neurotic manages to use it for his own purposes. Movies can be a marvelous escape; they are less expensive than alcohol and the neurotic gets more out of them. He can take the ready-made dream on the screen and adapt it to the requirements of his illness. Every week he can live through different imaginary experiences and identify himself with any number of characters, for there is in every film at least one who satisfies his erotic fantasies or sense of guilt.

"There's nothing abnormal about going to the movies," I said.

"You don't understand, doctor. I don't simply *go* to the movies. I *live* there. On many days I start with an eleven-o'clock show in the morning, and wander from theater to theater until past midnight. Don't you think that's abnormal?"

"It *is* rather unusual," I granted tentatively. "When did you first become a film addict?"

"I always liked the movies, even in Vienna." The smile that lit his face at this moment rendered him very charming. I sensed that his reluctance to speak was about to break down in a deluge of words. "You wouldn't believe it, doctor, but in Vienna my two greatest passions were my work and the movies. I have always been especially

fond of American films." He leaned over my desk and dropped his voice to a confidential level, as if he were about to impart a secret or a discovery of some kind. "Do you know why we used to like American films in Europe, doctor? You see, the grandson is proud of his grandfather's great past, and the grandfather is proud of his grandson's first steps; you Americans used to flock to our art galleries, while we flocked to your movies."

I did not think his theory required my professional attention at the moment, so I said nothing. As is sometimes the case, my silence started him off on a tangent.

"I don't want to create any misconceptions in your mind," he said. "I don't mean to say that movies destroyed my love of painting."

He fell into a painful, stubborn silence which lasted a long time. I decided to break the resistance and direct his attention into some channel which might yield fruitful material.

"Professor Schuman," I said, "obviously it's not the movies that trouble you."

His pale face assumed a puzzled expression, and his eyes looked intently at the glass top of my desk.

"You're right," he said quietly. "It's something else."

"What is it?"

"I can't work. I'm wasting my life."

"What is your work?"

"In Vienna I used to be professor of Kulturgeschichte at the university. How shall I explain it? Let us say, the history of Western culture. But really, that's not a good translation of the term. You Americans use the word 'culture' in a narrower sense than we do. Let us say, then: the history of Western civilization. I gave general courses on that subject, but my specialties were the French Revolution and the transition from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages. That last we used to call the origins and foundations of Europe. I even wrote a book on that subject."

"What was it called?"

"From Augustus to Augustine."

"Is that your field in America, too?"

"Since I arrived in this country, I have received several teaching offers. But I have been unable to accept any of them. I don't seem to be able to settle down to work. I feel unfit to teach."

"Are you writing anything—a new book, magazine articles?"

"No, doctor, that's just the point. I fritter away my time in a dream world. I live in the movies. I go there day and night. To . . . to . . . escape, I suppose."

"From what?"

"I don't know, doctor. Perhaps . . . my fear."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know. I'm just afraid. In general."

I saw he was doing his best to avoid the thing that really worried him, so I tried another tack.

"When did you come to America, professor?" I said.

"Recently, though it feels like a century ago. I've lost the sense of time. I should say it was about three months ago."

"Did you experience anything painful or shocking?"

His charming smile came back, and I could see from the sparkle in his eyes that, under normal circumstances, he was capable of wit and humor.

"Nothing unusual, doctor," he said. "I spent three years in a concentration camp." His face became serious again. "There's not much I can tell you about that. These camps are more or less alike, though ours did have some special features. There are many books describing concentration camps. You must have read some of them."

"Yes," I admitted. "I have read about concentration camps."

"That's our Zeitgeist," he said, smiling. "Literature is the mirror of our souls. Twenty years ago we were reading about love; ten years ago, about economic distress. Five years ago there was an orgy of murder mysteries: we were coyly, obliquely approaching the violent spirit of the times. Now we take the bitter medicine directly: we read about concentration camps. And what could be more appropriate? Every age has its corresponding architecture. The tenth century had its castle; the thirteenth, its cathedral; the eighteenth, its laboratory; the nineteenth, its bank; and the twentieth—its concentration camp."

"What most shocked you during the three years of your imprisonment?" I said.

Schuman grinned. I knew at once I should not have put that question.

"Now, doctor," he said with mock gravity, "you don't think you can locate my trauma that simply, do you?"

"No," I said, "not if you came here to conceal it."

"What was your question, doctor?"

"I asked: what most shocked you during the three years of your imprisonment."

"Very well, doctor, I'll tell you. But I must warn you: it won't be what you expect."

I handed him a cigarette and lit one myself. We smoked in silence for a moment, then he said:

"The most terrible thing I encountered was not the clubbing or the whipping. It wasn't seeing men kicked senseless, or their faces smashed with rubber truncheons till they were a pulp of blood."

His face turned pale; he shuddered.

"I even saw two fellow prisoners executed," he said, "but that wasn't the worst either."

He inhaled his cigarette deeply, blew out the smoke and went on.

"Those things were terrible, doctor. The brutality of those people is inconceivable unless you have seen it with your own eyes and felt it on your own body. But that wasn't it. There was something far more terrible than that."

He looked straight ahead with a clear intense light in his eyes.

"That thing was hate," he said. "Yes, a monstrous hate poisoned that camp. At first I could not grasp its depth and scope. Then I refused to believe my senses. But there it was. And when I did realize it, I nearly went mad."

He covered his face with his hands. After a while I said in a calm, professional voice:

"Naturally the guards hated the prisoners. The tormentor is bound to hate his victim. It was also natural for the prisoners to hate the guards, don't you think?"

Professor Schuman looked up and said:

"I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear, doctor. Of course the tormentor and his victim hate each other. That hatred is horrible, but you expect it; you become accustomed to it. No, no, that isn't what shocked me. It was something else, something I did not expect at all."

He leaned forward across my desk, his face taut, and said in a low voice:

"That thing was *the hatred of the victims for each other.*"

His keen gray eyes searched mine eagerly, as if he wanted to make sure I understood what he was saying.

"Yes, yes!" he went on. "Facing their common foe, suffering in common the shattering cruelty from the identical source, the victims nevertheless hated each other! Not even the enormous calamity which had overpowered them all could obliterate the old rancors. These ought now to have appeared insignificant. Instead, they took on fantastic proportions."

He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again. They were shadowed with melancholy.

"Can't you see how awful that was, doctor? I think that's how my illness really started. It was in my prison cell that I first saw it."

He stopped abruptly. I waited in silence for him to go on, but he said nothing.

"You just said that you first saw it in the camp," I encouraged him. "Can you remember what it was?"

"Things," he said limply, in a barely audible voice.

"You mean hallucinations?"

"No, no, doctor! Not at all. It was something quite different."

"A fantasy?" I suggested.

"No, not a fantasy either. A fantasy is something that happens in your imagination. This was not a fantasy. But it wasn't a hallucination either. You have a hallucination when your imagination projects its fantasies into the external world. You see and hear your fantasies outside your body, so to speak, and you suffer from the illusion that they are real. In this case it happened quite differently. I saw and heard things outside of me, but had no illusion they were real. They seemed real, yes. But I was perfectly well aware that they *were* imaginary. That's no hallucination."

"What would you call it?" I asked.

"The name for that sort of thing," Schuman said, "is an old and honorable one. The ancient prophets saw it, medieval saints saw it, and even a modern poet like William Blake saw it. I should call it a vision."

This was a revelation of prime importance, and I made no comment. I did keep in mind, however, that visions and hallucinations may be the products of a neurotic state of mind, but they may also occur in normal, healthy people. Freud specifically says visions may appear "spontaneously in health" or "as symptoms in the psychoneuroses." He tells us that he himself as a young man used to hear his name suddenly pronounced by "an unmistakable dear voice." Yet Freud was one of the sanest men who ever lived.

"Have you had these visions often?" I asked.

"In a sense there was only one vision," Professor Schuman said. "I'm speaking now only of the vision, not of the long dream I had before that. Would it interest you to know that I dreamed for twelve hours continuously one night? That was just before they were going to execute me."

"Yes, that would interest me very much," I said as casually as I could. "But just now I think it would be better if you went on talking about your vision. There was only one, you say?"

"Basically it was only one, doctor. But I saw it in three installments. The first part I saw in my cell at the concentration camp; the second in a Swiss village while waiting to go to New York. And night before last when I got home from Mr. Hague's party, the third installment of the vision came to me. This time there was a greater dread than ever, but that dread was followed by the most extraordinary exaltation I have ever experienced."

He lit another cigarette, puffed at it thoughtfully and added:

"The other night I was told you are a leading psychoanalyst. So this morning, terrified by the recurrence of the vision, I decided to phone you. I really need your help, doctor."