

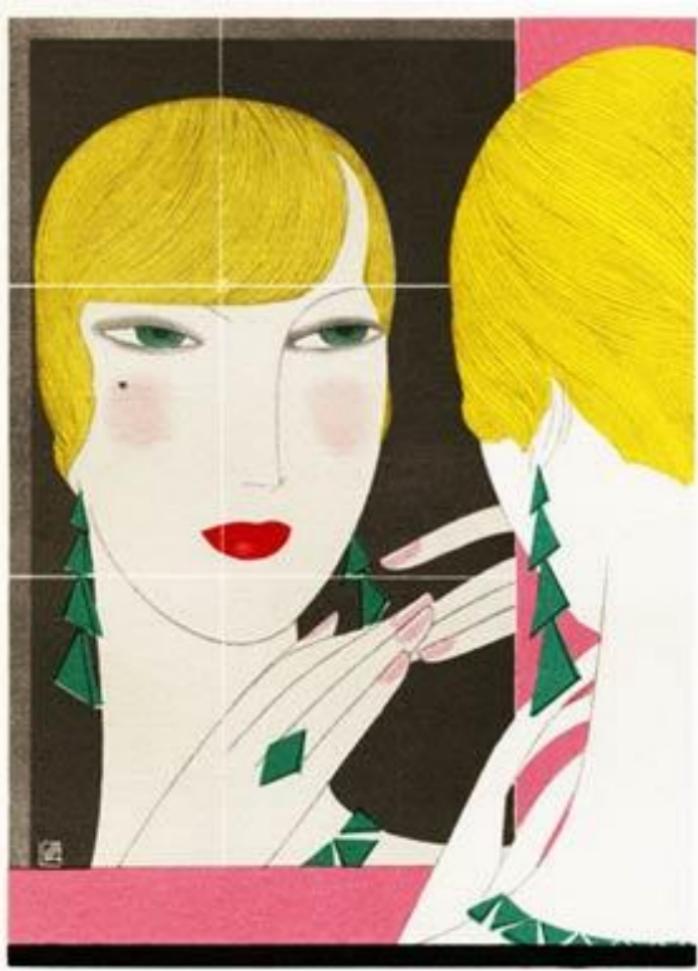
Constant Love

Contents

The Way I speak 1

Mrs. Whitaker 33

Constant Love 67



Mrs. Whitaker

Mrs. Whitaker walks around her block several times each day at noon. Sometimes when she's feeling well enough, she walks around both her block and the one adjacent to it, directly to the south. Sometimes, when she's feeling especially well, as she was that spring, she'll head west toward Alta Plaza Park. On all her walks she's always careful to keep to the paths. This is especially important in the park, in order not get her feet wet. She's always careful there to keep to the outer edges, the peripheral paths that afford her the most spectacular views. For the park occupies the heights of her neighborhood and from it one can see in every direction a view that encompasses at least a third of the very lovely city in which she lives.

Mrs. Whitaker walks with a cane in her right hand and a long silver cigarette holder in her left. The cigarette is usually lit, seldom smoked. She walks tremulously, her cane and holder weaving before her as though

Mrs. Whitaker

warding off the landing that might be forced upon her at any moment by some unexpected obstacle. Her hair, once long and red, is now long and graying. She wraps it around her crown whenever she goes out. Her clothing is never wrapped. Her skirts flare at mid-calf; her coats, colorful and somewhat bohemian, blaze at elbows, buttocks and wrists. Thus arrayed, Mrs. Whitaker resembles a sparrow in flight, her progress the very image of pure impulse, her twittering imbalances, dips and swoops rendered poignant by the fact that she is someone you fear will never land at all.

That spring Tate watched her from his bench at the crest of the park and planned how he would snare her. One day he flicked out his cane to bar her way and just as rapidly raised it so she could pass. She seemed not to notice his antics, which worried him, not only on his own account but on account of what it suggested about her state of mind.

Controlling a childish impulse to stick out both feet, he said "nice day" the next time she came 'round. Nodding— or was it simply a Parkinsonian tremor? — she swept by him once again. As he watched her tilt away he

Mrs. Whitaker

realized that if he were to get anywhere with this woman he would have to get up and move.

So move he did.

. . .



Alta Plaza Park, San Francisco, California

A young woman meeting her birth mother
for the first time, an elderly woman
attending her dying husband, a boy dealing
with his father's shame; these three stories
about love examine in exquisite detail what
it costs and how we pay.
—from *The Bindery at the Well*

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