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Women without Qualities: Chapter IV

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mouth was full she began to talk rapidly in a different manner than she had previously. I thought her accent might disappear but it became thicker, heavier, until I couldn't even understand her.

It was a Swedish girl I was listening to. She was just entering her teens, about to become a woman, a dreamy, unhappy, brooding girl who sat by the fire and listened to the adult talk around her and made up impossible fantasies about her future life as a great movie star, greater than Greta Garbo, greater than Ingrid Bergman!

I couldn't interrupt to tell her to talk English and so I missed most of what she said. But I got the tone of it, the passion, the human quality.

It was dark when she let me out with a weary smile, kissed me affectionately and closed the door on me. I stood in the hall and was free.

It was really the desire to prolong the aura of her presence, I suppose, that led me to the press room of the hotel where I wrote out all I could remember. I marked my copy for the Sunday Section and took a taxi to the newspaper and dropped it off.

The paper sent a Kodak boy to get close-ups. They gave the story a big play. Anita has just called and told me she wants to see me so she can thank me.

Women Without Qualities: Chapter IV

We came to Naples as we come to life.

"Some men build boats," my sister said one day. **How like her.**

"Some women go to Naples," I said.

"Why do they, Bunny?"

"They think it's the thing to do."

"Is that so?"

"They don't argue."

"Why don't they argue?"

"They see that argument is useless."

"I wonder."

We left the chateau on a drizzly November day. Naples was sunny. You might expect it.

"The world is our oyster," I said. "I needn't tell you that." She gave me a pretty smile then.

It began to snow in the mountains around us. We woke up in the morning and looked out on a beautiful bay and we were lonely. We were not often lonely. We had tired of looking for husbands.

The chef who was breaking eggs greeted me as I walked into his kitchen. His name was Alphonse.

"We'll have cold duck for lunch," I told Alphonse.

My secretary, Lionella, entered with word from McIntosh. He was on Capri and would be up to see us soon. Lionella was nineteen and just as cute as she could be. She could take shorthand with both hands in five languages. She read us the headlines and we showered and ate breakfast. The poem for catching queens has entered the snowy wonder. A hare run of days. Lionella often embroidered on the news.

A little after five Lionella returned on a motorcycle with an American girl on a tour of Italy. She was a blonde with tiny tits. We called her Tiny Tits. Her name was Marybelle Dictu. She taught us to ride a motorcycle. We hardly had time for McIntosh when he called a few days later. He fell hard for Tiny Tits. That was obvious to everybody. But she would have nothing to do with him and after a few days he left to look after his interests in Pretoria. We toured Southern Italy with Tiny Tits and Lionella.

We went to the opera with her. She said she was from Mankato, Kansas.

"Mankato must be a big place," I said. She shrugged.

"Did you ever know a writer from Wichita? A Mr. Mechem, I believe."

"Not to speak to," she said. We listened to the opera.

Renata had made a movie in Rome. We thought we would make a movie in Napoli. Tiny Tits said she would pose in the nude. McIntosh said he would pay for it. We borrowed Bodenheim's plot for *Naked on Roller Skates* and put Tiny Tits on her motorcycle. McIntosh sold it before the script was shot. It was destined to play in all the best houses.

In Rome, we shot Tiny Tits on her bike through the Baths of Caracalla. This required that we pull some pretty high strings but we were pretty high strung ourselves. The same for the Pompeian baths. Some nice shots of the walls to titillate the ladies in the audience. Tiny Tits sailed daredevil at high speeds across the yawning and vaporous mouth of Vesuvius. Tiny Tits had pluck if nothing else. We were all crazy about her. Alphonse baked apple pie when she was home. She smoked the cigars we had laid up for McIntosh.

"We can't get Havana in Mankato," she said with the air of a woman who knows what she's talking about.

"Why did you come to Italy, Tiny Tits?"

"I wanted to see something pretty, something besides sedge and broom corn," she said.

"Isn't it pretty there?"

"Buffalo grass and fescue aren't so pretty," she said in her Midwestern American idiom.

"The Duke was from Mankato," Sunny said.

Tiny Tits looked peeved. "I don't know him, I'm sure."

She was hostile to some men but some she liked immediately. We liked her because she was stubborn and determined and tough and altogether feminine, older than Lionella but without intellectual attainment, unlearned in everything but physical skills and a few social graces. She went to work when she finished high school and saved her money and that was all she had ever done. But she was intelligent and had no trouble picking up what there was to be learned around her—which was the history of civilization from the age of fable on. We tried to talk her into seeing the good side of McIntosh, his wealth for one thing, and his good health and virility for another, but she wouldn't hear of it. He was fifteen years older. If she didn't like McIntosh we would find someone else for her, I said, and we lay in the sand of Capri while Tiny Tits rode her bike barebreasted. For diversion we shot another film of her. *Pancho Villa on Capri* it was called. Pancho, a Neapolitan extra, talked in nonstop monosyllables when he talked or else he grunted. He drank from the time he got up until the time he went to bed and his grunting never slurred. His hairy chest was enormous and he wore his shirt open. He didn't do anything but sit but the way he moved and the way he broke things in his hands made him look strong.

Pancho Villa was never on Capri so Pancho was the real *Pancho Villa on Capri* and the film turned into an exploitation of his talents and an exhibition of Tiny Tits' breasts pushed into his broad back furthering her career and catapulting him to stardom in the first hundred frames. Our films were less literary and more artistic and made more money. The sun went down on Capri and we set sail for Napoli.

Our nipples rose and withered inside our gowns outside Pompeii.

Deep bosomed brainy twins I say but Sunny never does.

She isn't like me in all respects. We were young women in Libya and Lebanon and India and Tokyo. We didn't feel like young women now. We were children in Paris. Mother was worried about her flowers. Father told her there were more important things to worry about, like the twins. We were surrounded with her flowers and big hats. Mother had a stamp collection that she sold for a fortune to Afshar before we knew him. She was lovely, he said, wearing a cotton dress while she showed him the garden and talked of her flowers.

In our white silk nightgowns we look through our telescope at Capri and the islands in the bay while we talk on the phone to Zulikya in Bombay and Lionella reads us the headlines and McIntosh joshes us from the Dark Continent.