

Where the World Begins, Truman Capote

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Miss Carter had been explaining the eccentricities of Algebra for almost twenty minutes now. Sally looked disgustedly up at the snail-like hands of the schoolroom clock, only twenty-five more minutes and then freedom—sweet, precious freedom.

She looked at the piece of yellow paper in front of her for the hundredth time. Empty. Ah, well! Sally glanced around her, staring with contempt at the hard working mathematical students. "Humph," she thought, "as if they're goin' to make a success in life just by addin' up a lot of figures, an' X's that don't make any sense anyway. Humph, wait'll they get out in the world."

Exactly what getting out in the world or life was, she wasn't sure; however, her elders had led her to believe it was some horrible ordeal that she was going to have to undergo at some definite, future date.

"Uh, oh," she moaned, "here comes Robot." She called Miss Carter "Robot," because that was what Miss Carter reminded her of, a perfect machine, accurate, well oiled and as cold and shiny as steel. Hurriedly she scribbled a mass of illegible numbers over the yellow paper. "At least," Sally thought, "that'll make her think I'm working." Miss Carter sailed past her without even a look. Sally breathed a deep sigh of relief. Robot!

Her seat was right next to the window. The room was on the third floor of the High School and from where she sat she could see a beautiful view. She turned to gaze outside. Her eyes became dilated, and glassy and unseeing—

"This year it makes us very happy to present the Academy Award for the finest portrayal of the year to Miss Sally Lamb for her unparalleled performance in Desire. Miss Lamb, you will please accept Oscar on behalf of myself and my associates."

A beautiful, striking woman reaches out and gathers the gold statuette in her arms.

"Thank you," she says in a deep, rich voice. "I suppose when something wonderful like this happens to anyone they're supposed to make a speech, but I'm just too grateful to say anything."

And then she sits down with the applause ringing in her ears. Bravo for Miss Lamb. Hurray. Clap, clap, clap, clap. Champagne. Did you really like me? Autograph? But certainly— What did you say your first name was, dear boy—John? Oh, French, Jean— All right— "To Jean, a dear friend, Sally Lamb." Autograph, please, Miss Lamb, autograph, autograph—Star, money, fame, beautiful, glamorous—Clark Gable—

"Are you listening, Sally?" Miss Carter sounded very angry. Sally jumped around, startled. "Yes, ma'am."

"Well, then, if you're paying such undivided attention perhaps you can explain this last problem I put on the board." Miss Carter's gaze swept the class superciliously.

Sally stared helplessly at the board. She could feel Robot's cold eyes on her and the giggling brats. She could have choked them all until their

tongues hung out. Damn them. Oh, well, she was licked, the numbers, the squares, the crazy X's, Greek!

"Just as I thought," the Robot announced triumphantly. "Yes, just as I thought! You've been off in space again. I would like to know what goes on in that head of yours—certainly it has nothing to do with your school work. For a girl who's so—so, stupid, it looks like you could at least favor us with your attention. It's not just you, Sally, but you disrupt the whole class."

Sally hung her head and drew crazy little designs all over the paper. She knew her face was cerise, but she wasn't going to be like these other stupid morons who giggled and carried on every time the teacher bawled them out—even old Robot.

GOSSIP COLUMN:

What number one debutante of the season whose initials are Sally Lamb was seen romancing at the Stork Club with millionaire playboy Stevie Swift? "Oh, Marie, Marie," called the beautiful young girl lying on the huge silken bed. "Bring me the new Life magazine."

"Yes, Miss Lamb," answered the prim French maid.

"Hurry, please," called the impatient heiress. "I want to see if that photographer did me justice; my picture's on the cover this week, you know. Oh, and while you're about it bring me an Alka-Seltzer—dastardly head-ache, too much champagne I guess."

RADIO:

Rich girl makes Debut Tonight. The long awaited Social Event of the Season brings forth Sally Lamb to Society in a brilliant Ten thousand dollar Ball. Nice work if you can get it! Flash, flash—

"Will you please pass your papers to the front of the room, hurry it up, please!" Miss Carter rapped her fingers impatiently against her desk.

Sally shoved her illegible paper over the shoulder of the pink faced boy that sat in front of her. Children. Humnph. She pulled her big Scottish plaid handbook over to her, delved around inside, and came up with a compact, lipstick, comb, and Kleenex.

She gazed at herself in the powder-dusty mirror as she smeared the lipstick on her pretty shaped lips. Raspberry.

The tall, slinky woman stood admiring her image in front of a huge gilt mirror at one of the more spectacular residences in Germany. She patted a stray hair back into her elaborate silver coiffure.

A dark, handsome gentleman bent over and kissed her bare shoulder. She smiled faintly.

"Ah, Lupé, how lovely you look tonight. You are so beautiful, Lupé. Your skin, so white, your eyes—Ach...you can't imagine what they make me feel."

"Umm," purred the Lady, "that, General, is where you are mistaken." She reached over to a marble table and picked up two wine glasses, slipped three pills into one, and handed it to the General.

"Lupé, I must see you more often. We will dine together every night when I return from the front."

"Ohhh, does my little baby have to go up there where all the fighting is?" Her raspberry lips were close to his. How clever you are, Sally, she thought.

"Lupé knows I have to carry the army maneuver plans up to the front, doesn't Lupé?"

"Do you have the plans with you?" queried the charming fifth columnist.

"Why, yes, but of course." She could see that he was passing out, his eyes were getting glassy and he looked very drunk. By the time the Mata Hari had finished her 1928 vintage, the General was stretched out at her feet.

She stooped down and began searching his coat. Suddenly she heard boot steps outside—her heart jumped—

The bell went off with a loud clang. The students rushed helter-skelter for the door way. Sally put her make-up articles back in her handbag, gathered up her books, and prepared to depart.

"Just a minute, Sally Lamb," Miss Carter called her back. Robot again. "Come back here a minute—I want to talk to you."

By the time she reached the desk Miss Carter had finished filling out a form and handed it to her.

"That is a detention hall slip, you will go to detention hall this afternoon until it is over. I have told you numerously that I do not want you primping yourself in class. Do you want us to all get your germs?"

Sally blushed. She resented any reference to her anatomy or pertaining there of.

"And another thing, young lady, you didn't hand in your homework...Well, as I've told you, it's up to you whether you want to do your work or not...It's certainly not any skin off my back—"

Sally wondered vaguely whether she had any skin on her back—or was it tin?

"—you know, of course, that you're failing this subject. It's a mystery to me how anyone could so completely waste their time—I do not understand it—not at all. I think it would be better if you dropped this course, because, to be quite candid, I don't believe that you are mentally capable of doing the work. I—I—wait a minute—where do you think—"

Sally had thrown her books down on the desk and run out of the room. She knew she was going to cry and she didn't want to—not in front of Robot. Damn her anyhow! What does she know about life. She doesn't know anything but a lot of numbers—Damn her anyway!
She worked her way on down the crowded halls.

The torpedo had hit about a half an hour ago and the ship was sinking fast. This was a chance! Sally Lamb, America's foremost newspaper woman, right here on the spot. She had gotten her camera out of her water logged cabin. And here she was, snapping pictures of the refugees climbing into the lifeboats and of her fellow sufferers struggling in the raging sea. "Hey, Miss," called one of the sailors. "Yuh, better take this lifeboat, I think it's the last one."

"No thanks," she called over the howling wind and the roaring water. "I'm gonna stay right here until I get the whole story."

Suddenly Sally laughed. Miss Carter and the X's and the numbers seemed far, far away. She was very happy here, with the wind blowing in her hair and Death around the corner.

The End