

“Ah,  
the square!”  
said Eugenides.

“All my life it has drawn me like magic. From our balcony where I lived, when I was a boy, I could just see a corner of it. On summer evenings, at dusk, I would lean over and wonder what was round that corner. I went to my piano – I tried to play – something calm and steady, but I could not. Or if I picked up an album of Chopin, he made it worse. Something seemed to be pulling me out of doors. Once or twice, when I had made such a firm resolution, Mother came in and said: ‘Would you mind not playing, darling? I have a headache.’ And I said it didn’t matter... I was just going out.”

That draughty square, so often crossed by Charles in heavy rain, in bitter winds, in glaring sun, and in such despairing misery.

“Caesarea changes, and gets spoilt like everywhere else, I suppose,” said Eugenides, who never went anywhere else, “but I think the square gets better and better. First the trams were invented – then I was no longer afraid of meeting my brother’s friends, I had always an explanation ready: ‘I am waiting for a tram.’ Or I could be waiting for someone who was coming in on a tram – ah, I often waited to see who would come!”

The dancing had begun again, and he had to speak louder.

“Then there were more shop signs and lights, and the square became brighter and gayer,” he continued.

“The black-out must have made you sad,” said Charles sympathetically.

“You don’t know anything about it!” said Eugenides, pouncing on him with eagerness, as if he had just made a false

move at backgammon. "It has made it better than ever! The mystery of dimly seen faces in the dark – lit for a moment perhaps, by a match, or by a flicker from a tram..."

"'To-fro tender tram-beams'," quoted Charles.

"Exactly!" cried Eugenides happily.

And the square was as full as he could have wished. Knots of people were gathered at the tram-stop. A long line of soldiers, joined at the waist or the shoulders as if they had been cardboard soldiers made for children to cut out with scissors, swayed across the centre of the square singing. Out of doors and passageways, and down dark stairs, more and more people poured into the square.

Eugenides was exhilarated. "We will go round first to the right," he said. He seemed to derive a strange pleasure from threading his way quickly in and out of this throng of people. He never paused, he hardly looked at anyone: no need to fear that he was up to mischief. In and out he went, untiringly. This must have been his own strange way of mixing and mingling with other people, of annihilating loneliness, and of casting off for a short time the burden of personality.

Charles had something to make up for, he had given Eugenides great pain, little as he had intended it. So he must do his duty, and follow his friend round and round the square, if that was what he wanted. Concentration was needed; without it they would be irretrievably separated in the crowd.

Then, suddenly, the crowd seemed to have melted away. Some of it, no doubt, had come out of the cinemas; and some of it, no doubt, had disappeared into trams. That could not account for half of it. It is always a mystery where a Caesarean crowd has come from, and where it has gone. In the wind that swept across the square, Eugenides and Charles felt like the last leaves upon a wintry bough. A few spots of rain fell.

---

*Robert Liddell (1908-1992), an Englishman, lived in Egypt and Greece for many years and produced a distinguished list of novels and critical works in his lifetime. This extract comes from Unreal City, first published in 1952 and republished by Peter Owen in 1992. The novel describes Eugenides, an elderly Greek poet, through the eyes of Charles, a withdrawn Englishman who is in Caesarea (Alexandria) at the end of the Second World War.*