

Being and Nothing

by Mark Mathew Braunstein



Once upon a time Mom and Pop had two sons. "My younger son is good for a nickel," Pop said, "but my older son is good for nothing." So he named the older son Nothing, and the other Being.

Prepared always for the worst, they repeatedly instructed their two children where to find the family's fortune in the event Mom and Pop "got lost."

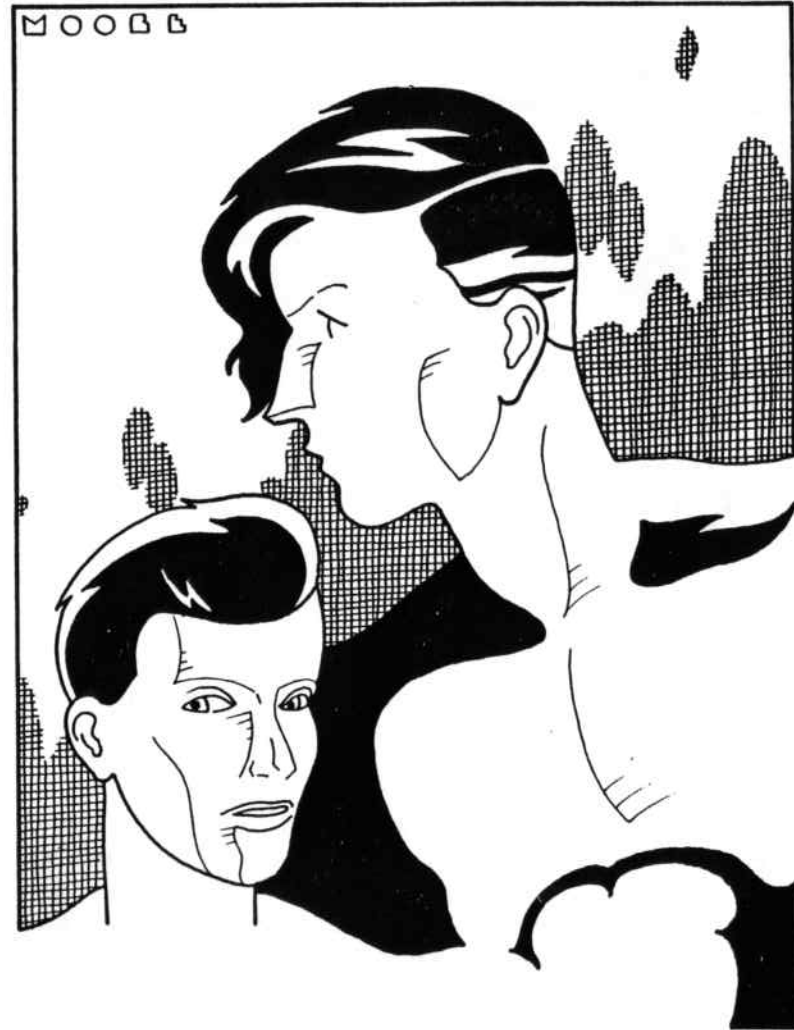
"Your two Grandpops' gold watches," said Pop, "which never yet have agreed upon the time, are stuffed inside my green pillow."

"Our money is stashed inside the cookie jar," Mom and Pop both advised in unison, "the deeds to our cemetery plots are filed in the grey cabinet, and the two sets of house keys are buried under the brown stone."

When Being was thirty and Nothing thirty-three, Mom and Pop made a trip across the sea to visit the old countries of their own moms and pops. They vowed they would go before they died. On the return flight, they died. The plane crashed, and Mom and Pop were lost at sea.

Upon being informed of his parents' deaths, Being wept and wept. Eventually he gathered himself and gathered his share of the inheritance. He sold his gold watch and red ruby to the highest bidder and combined those earnings with his share of the money from the cookie jar. He then embarked upon a journey in search of a new life.

Hearing of his parents' deaths, Nothing rejoiced over their having lived so long and



healthfully and over their having died so quickly and painlessly. Previously when his parents asked him how he was, Nothing answered, "Not good, not bad, not being." Their hopes of his becoming a "somebody" had until now inhibited his aspirations of becoming a nobody. "How unbecoming!" they lamented. Now, however, he was free.

Nothing stuffed his watch and ruby into the

cookie jar with his half of the money, and he buried the jar in his Pop's vacant grave. He unearthed his set of house keys, entered the home in which he had been raised, and locked himself inside.

A year and a day later, gaining admittance with his second set of unearthed keys, Being intruded upon Nothing's hermitage. Being rejoiced at their reunion, whereas Nothing simply offered his brother some cold tea. Nothing requested that Being recount his travels of the past year.



For the first nine months Being had roamed the country. First he hitchhiked, but soon tired of the lonely drivers who sought his company to burden him with their life stories all of which sounded the same. So he bought a motorbike, but soon grew lonely himself. So he bought a car and gave rides to hitchhikers, but soon tired of the silent riders who all eventually fell asleep in the back seat. So he resolved to postpone further travels until he found a companion who could keep awake during the day and with whom he could fall asleep during the night.

For the next three months he settled in a large city. First he sought romance in singles' bars, but the women who so easily slipped into his arms one night just as quickly slipped out of his arms the next morning and into another's the next night. So he sought romance among married women, but they maintained reputations of fidelity to one man only by betraying all the others. So he sought romance among divorcees, but they already were accustomed to and would settle only in luxurious homes in prestigious neighborhoods. So he resolved to postpone further romances until he found a home.



is story told, Being asked what Nothing had done while staying home during the same twelve months. "I helped our father," Nothing explained. "And what was Pop doing?" asked Being. "Nothing. Pop is dead," Nothing answered and laughed. Seeing that Being did not get the joke, Nothing explained further.

During the year that Being searched for something to search for, Nothing waited for something to wait for. He sat quietly, and stared into the mirror to unveil his future through his face. But from one day to the next, he never saw the same face twice. With each progressive gaze, that face grew nearer to death. Eventually he ceased seeing his face and saw only the death lurking within.

He observed fleshy lines burrow semi-circles beneath his eyes. He watched his forehead fill out his face while his hair filled up the sink. He noticed the growth rate of his hair slow down and their ends split sooner. He felt new blemishes where once there were none and larger ones where once they were small. He experienced his hearing weaken and his vision blur.

Not for one moment did Nothing's descent into death cause depression or despair. Quite the contrary, he was delighted by it all. Never did he imagine he would live long enough to witness it. Of course he understood he would die, but now he also understood he would live until he died.

"How might I live a full life?" Being asked. Nothing answered, "By preparing for death."

"How might I prepare for death?" Nothing asked.

Being answered, "By living a full life." 3

The Mystic Muse
Tales for the New Age
Autumn 1987 Vol. 1 No. 3