

SKETCH FOR A CURTAINRAISER
By Robert Walser

A Stage

The curtain rises, we are looking into an open mouth, down a brightly-lit reddish throat, out of which a big, broad tongue is dangling. The teeth, framing the stage mouth, are sharp and blinding white, the whole thing looks like the maw of some monster, the lips are like mammoth human lips, the tongue is reaching out over the footlights and is almost licking the heads of the audience with its fiery tip; then it withdraws, and now comes out again, bearing on its broad, soft surface the sleeping figure of a beautifully-clad maiden. The maiden's bright golden locks are flowing in a long flood from her head and around her gown, she is holding in her hand a glittering star, that looks like a big, soft, sunny snowflake. Set firmly on her hair is a pretty green coronal, her mouth is smiling in sleep as she reclines upon the tongue, leaning upon her elbows, as if upon pillows. All of a sudden she opens her eyes, and those are eyes such as one often sees in dreams, when, irradiated with some supernatural light, they bend themselves upon ours. These eyes have a wonderfully refreshing brilliance, and now they are gazing all around, like children's eyes looking upon the world in their questioning, searching, innocent way. Now up out of the fiery blackness of the throat a man climbs forth, clad in fluttering fabrics, apparently thrown together by a half-demented tailor, and that hang like rags around his massive limbs; he strides out along the tongue that keeps twitching under his steps, reaches the maiden, leans over and kisses her. Thereupon flames and fiery sparks come gushing out of the throat, and rain down upon the pair, without causing them the slightest alarm. The well-knit youth lifts the young lady in his arms and carries her back, the huge tongue rears up, casts itself over the couple and swallows them up in its maw with a rumbling crash. The maiden's white star flashes out against the teeth, then all at once blue, green, yellow, crimson, indigo and shimmering-white stars are shooting in a flame-colored rainbow parabola out of the dark throat, music starts playing, and the stars keep exploding into nothing in the air; finally the great maw's lips move and utter the quiet, but raw, clearly audible words:

The play is beginning

Curtain

TWO LITTLE FAIRYTALES

I

In the street it was snowing. The cabs and the cars came driving up, set down their passengers and departed therefrom. The ladies were all swathed in furs. People were swarming round the cloak counter. In the foyers there were greetings, exchanges of smiles and handshakes. The candles were shimmering, the gowns were rustling, the overshoes shished

and squeaked. The floor had been waxed like glass, and attendants were standing here and there making hand movements, now this way, now that. The gentlemen were harnessed into their swallow-tail coats, that is how a swallow-tail is worn. People were bowing. Pleasantries were flying like doves from mouth to mouth, the ladies were glowing, even some old ones too. They kept standing up at their seats, in order to see their acquaintances, only a few were sitting down. Their faces were so close to each other, the breath of one played on the nostrils of the one standing next to him. The ladies' gowns gave off scent, the gentlemen's bald heads were glossy, eyes sparkled, hands said: What, you back again? Where've you been all this time? In the first row sat the critics like the faithful in some high church, so quiet, so devout. The curtain stirred a little, then the bell for the start of the performance rang out; anyone wanting to clear his throat made haste to do it now, and then they were all sitting there like children in a schoolroom, looking straight ahead, quiet as mice, as something went up and something was performed.

II

The curtain went up, and there was a tense interest in what was to happen next; then a boy walked on, and he began to dance. In a box in the front sat the Queen, surrounded by her court ladies. She enjoyed the dance so much, she decided to go down on the stage in order to address some pleasant words to the youth. She very soon appeared on the stage, the boy gazed upon her with his youthful, beautiful eyes. He smiled a secret smile. Then the Queen was struck as if by lightning, she recognized her own son through the smile, she collapsed on the ground. What's the matter, the boy asked. At that she recognized him ever more certainly, by his voice now. Then she cast all her queenly dignity to the winds. She cast aside her regal demeanor and did not hesitate to press the youth close to her heart. Her breast rose and fell, she was weeping with joy: you are my son, she said. The audience clapped applause, but what was the point of the applause? This woman's happiness was certainly something far above all applause, it could have surmounted a storm of hissing: the boy's head was seized again and again and pressed to the heaving bosom. She kissed him, and then her court ladies came and pointed out to their royal companion the unseemliness of the scene. That made the audience laugh, but the court ladies cast withering looks upon the many-headed rabble. They twitched their mouths, and then the curtain twitched and fell.

