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Forest Hill (1911)

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There's an omnibus to the bank every 2 minutes for one penny. The trip from the bank to the Victoria Station by subway costs two pennies. From there, there are trams to Forest Hill.

The tram is wide, the benches comfortable, windows big, clean, transparent. Poor Berlin; it has got so little glass. Paris has got more of it, and London has got flexible glass – must be most expensive.

The houses are monotonous, dull, one- or two-storey – they fade away as we go.

The tram is going fast, no turbulences.

The journey takes 5 minutes and, in front of the houses, there appears shy greenness. The ivy is creeping, a small flower bed, a tuft of grass.

We slide from a hill – the tram driver moved the arrow by just one – with no effort.

More greenness comes up. There are bushes in front of each house. Then there is a park, then again houses – with bigger gardens. Here and there, brick walls are hidden behind trees.

Another park. We're ascending. The driver moved the arrow by one again – no effort this time as well.

The sun is shining.

The road is even, leveled – we meet two enormous, heavy machines – they roll slowly – ahead of them some uneven, sharp rocks – behind them an even road. Some automobiles – a bicycle – then one, two, ten trams – all passing us by.

There are lanterns on both sides of the streets, so there must be thick, iron pipes in the ground. Each house has water flowing to and from it, so there are two more rows of thick, iron pipes in the ground. People try to fool us with the mirage of Gardentowns. The people who can see just what's on the surface, not what's underground.

Forest Hill.

A park – lawns, a lawn – a hill – a big park – a gazebo built atop seems to be very small and, on Sundays, it's a place where forty musicians play.

On a green hill, some children play football.

Beneath it a pool – there the children put paper ships. Beyond the hedge there comes a muffled clatter – a train passing by. The smoke from the steam engine is visible in the air.

Silence all around; just the children's scream fades away into a murmur, and from the sky the sun is smiling, golden and happy.

The gardener is preoccupied with trimming the bushes and mowing the lawn. He doesn't bend down; the shears are on a long stick and the shovel cuts the grass by itself, he just moves it with his foot. A couple of iron teeth in the comb, some kind of circle – I don't know what it is.

The clock strikes a full hour.

One, two, three gazebos – for the children when it rains.

A small part of the land is fenced – a small botanic garden – just the right area for school projects.

The school – the benches on the lawn, the walls made of hedges. The children have got their little fields, an aquarium, a vivarium – a workshop underneath the sky. The roof made out of a thick sail, so the sun doesn't interfere. A small castle for the rabbits; doves, guinea pigs – like a little petting zoo.

Next to the school there is a tiny museum. Just a two-story building. One thing from each section – just one mummy, just a couple items from the Stone Age – just enough for school.

The street among the trees – greenness – just one market has got large but not diversified shops. The citizens can find anything they need there.

The building itself is bigger and more impressive – public bath, two pennies for the bathtub, one penny for the pool, separate for children and for adults.

How much did the bath cost? How much does the usage cost? Nobody knows. The town pays for it, some lord also chipped in. The tiles expensive – for sure they are – but it's better and cleaner that way.

A shelter for orphans. Strange; Forest Hill has got orphans. What do the people here die of and why?

Two identical one-storey houses. Thirty children in each of them. The girls there have got a laundry room, a sewing room, an embroidering room; the boys have got a workshop. Besides that, they attend school.

There is a report, of course. They would give one with pleasure. It's a ledger in which they put the names of visitors.

– Warsaw? Yes, they've heard of it. – Warsaw? – Yes, it's far from here.

– Very far.

They're all polite – the teacher, the female manager, as well as the museum staff. They are all calm – they stand up straight; their eyes bright, their foreheads smooth. They show no trace of neither German arrogance nor French stiffness.

– Warsaw? A guy from a faraway land, strange man. Why is he looking with such curiosity? What's so exceptional about it? A school? – There are children, so there must be a school. A shelter? After all, these are orphans – they have to live somewhere. The bath? The park – It's all necessary.

– Indeed it is all necessary.

I'm coming back to London. On a busy Strand, a hobo in tattered clothes stops me – he sells postcards and town maps. I feel a strong need of revenge. I give him alms – a shilling – the cost of a dinner.

I slap away the memory of the trip to Forest Hill.