"A FABLE OF THE BUYERS"

A man walked out on the street with three dreams for sale. Of course he would not tell anyone what they were. He even said that he couldn't, because the dreams wouldn't be the same for them. He couldn't tell them anything about the dreams at all. They were there like straws to be drawn. Everyone hopes for better dreams than his own, and people bought them. The dreams were to be opened in private, the buyers were told. They were printed on exactly the same paper, which was made to dissolve as it was read, or to dissolve anyway if someone tried to keep it without reading it, like a talisman, so that it might produce its dream that way as everything can do if the right spirit approaches it. A little later they would return to sight in the man's hand.

People who bought the dreams sometimes met each other later and tried to compare which dreams they had bought. Very suspiciously at first. Very cautiously, with hints back and forth. Everyone found out after a while that the other person seemed to have bought a different dream. But then it turned out finally that there were too many of them in the same room for them all to have had different dreams, and they started arguing with each other. For they had all seen that there were only three dreams in the man's hand.

But with each person each dream clearly had been different. And still the buyers wanted to know which of the three dreams they had had. They tried everything. They classified by means of every triad they could think of. They divided each other into three factions, which never seemed accurate enough. They kept changing sides and never forgiving each other. Eventually, in order to check, two of them tried to read the same dream at the same time, and it disappeared at once, entirely, and never reappeared in the man's hand. That happened again and the man was left with only one.

"Now won't the others come back at all?" he was asked.

"No," he said. "But it doesn't matter. They were all copies of the same dream."

"Will you sell us that one?" they asked.

"No," he said. "I'm going to give it back."

"Which one is it?" they asked, almost in unison. For none of them had learned anything at all. What can you learn from a bought dream?