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Lights and Shadows

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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

I STOOD in the midst of chaos. Shadows and figures of all sizes and shapes swirled by me. I was pushed and shoved in every direction by a seething mass, and, though in the middle of all this, I felt alone. Unfamiliar odors assailed me—perfumes, paints, and body odors. Lights of varied hues were scattered about, winking on and off.

The somewhat muffled sounds of the pit orchestra, mingled with the laughter and applause of the audience, beat out a tempo which seemed to have instilled itself in the blood of the actors and actresses. Tension prevailed. And everybody seemed to give his utmost to his part, from the star to the assistant call-boy. The scene-shifters worked at top speed, the property man fumbled industriously among his charges, the promoters nervously flicked through the pages of the book—efficiency was the watchword.

I peered through the wings. A garish scene met my eyes. The unfamiliar view of the stage, from that angle, robbed me of some of the illusions I had treasured until then. The flimsy back-drops and flats emphasized the falsity of it all.

The chorus was going through one of its many routines. A bizarre effect was created by the waving and kicking of bare arms and legs. The jagged flashes of light bathed the scene in a multicolor of beauty. Fixed smiles, sinewy arms and legs, weaving bodies—all formed a background for the vocal attempt of the beautiful star.

The finale with its gorgeous scenery and lighting effects—the entire company assembled—and then it is all over. The flats are struck and the stage is stripped bare. A harsh white light is turned on the floor from above. A sense of barrenness prevails. The curtain is rung up. The darkened, empty house creates a weird impression. It seems hard to believe that, a few hours before, this dim theatre

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contained several hundred people, laughing and applauding the efforts of performers and that this bare stage was the scene of gorgeous settings and vibrant life. The flats are piled up in order and the stage is swept clean. The workers file out quickly. A scattered laugh and word—then all is quiet. As I realized the enormity of the pageant I had witnessed, I thrilled—thrilled to think that at last I had seen something I had long desired, backstage of a Broadway musical show.

—Walter E. Magid.