



## A Great Man

I had known Eugen Cucoanes since the first year in high school but we never became friends. At the University I lost sight of him; I only knew that he had enrolled at the Polytechnic. I met him once by chance in a tobacconist shop some years later, and he told me that he had got his degree and obtained a position—better-paid than he had hoped for—in a Transylvanian town. After that I never saw him again. You can imagine my surprise when, one indescribably sad July evening in 1933, he burst suddenly into my study. I recognized him at once but he seemed to be changed; five or six years had passed, besides, since our last meeting.

"You know that I've started to grow," he declared abruptly before I had time to ask him what was going on. "At first I wouldn't believe it but I measured myself and became convinced of the truth; in about a week I've grown enormously, perhaps two or three inches . . . I was with Lenora in the street and suddenly we both noticed it. And this morning it shows even more."

There was uneasiness in his voice. He wouldn't sit down, but perched on the arm of a chair, then walked up and down, nervously, his hands clasped behind his back. I noticed that he didn't know how to hide his hands and I understood: the cuffs of his shirt stuck out in spite of all the trouble he gave himself trying to cover them with the sleeves of his jacket.

"I've got to send all these togs to the tailor—to let them out," he told me when he caught my look.

I tried to calm him down; I reminded him that at school he was always worried about remaining of small stature. He interrupted me:

"If I had grown like everybody, in one or two years . . . But this . . . *in a few days!* . . . What shall I tell you? I've started to be afraid. My greatest worry is that it may be some bone disease . . ."

And because he saw that I didn't know what to say, he changed the subject:

"I dropped in, just on the spur of the moment; I wanted to find out whether you had left for your holidays . . . You see, I've got my transfer to Bucharest and we're almost neighbours. I found a small apartment in the Strada Lucaci."

He gave me the address and told me when I could find him at home. Then he pressed my hand and left.

I was quite perplexed during all that week. There wasn't a doctor among my friends whom I did not seek out to tell him the case of Cucoanes. As it was to be expected, he himself went next day to a specialist in the tuberculosis of the bones and asked to be examined. All he learned was that for the moment there was no question of such a

malady but of a phenomenon which the doctor described as 'macanthropy'. It was well-known in the annals of medicine but in this case it showed a most unusual tempo. Truly unusual; for when I went to see Cucoanes two days later, before dinner, at an hour when he told me I was certain to find him at home, I was really frightened when I entered the place; my friend now topped me by at least six inches. He had grown proportionately, not just in height; he had become a big and well-made man. His clothes were so ill-fitting that Cucoanes had discarded his jacket in his shame and was wearing a bathrobe the sleeves of which he had had let out. It was in vain that he had tried to get his trousers adjusted; at the best they reached half-way to his ankles and when my friend sat down in a chair, the trousers became hitched up so badly that he looked like a poor man who was wearing somebody else's cast-offs.

"Well, what's new?" I asked softly to break the silence which became endlessly prolonged. "What did the doctor say?"

"Macanthropy!" he replied with a strange tranquillity.

"Splendid!" I exclaimed. "That means you'll grow into a great man. That's not so bad, after all . . ."

"You've certainly chosen the time badly if you want to joke," interrupted Cucoanes. He got up from the chair and started to pace the room. When he saw me light a cigarette, he came closer and asked for one.

"When did you start to smoke?" I asked, only to say something.

"This moment. Perhaps it does me good."

That particular cigarette certainly did not do him any good and he threw it away after a few puffs; when he tried to inhale, he almost choked. But a few minutes later he asked for another and this time he smoked it to the end—clumsily but stubbornly.

"I measured myself before you arrived," he began suddenly. "Look here, at the door. Well, since nine o'clock this morning I've grown more than one third of an inch. Do you understand what it means? I am growing rapidly!"

"Perhaps you're eating too much," I said, trying a timid consolation. "Perhaps you should watch your diet. Probably you should avoid every form of calcium . . ."

"Calcium, iron, vitamin B and all other vitamins, everything's forbidden," burst out Cucoanes. "I haven't eaten anything since last night except a piece of dry bread and a cup of tea with a little sugar. I didn't want to worry about the details of my diet, so I simply cut out all food."

"And now?" I demanded.

"I'm dying of hunger! I am dizzy with it. But as for growing, I continue to grow, I am always growing . . . I wish I would grow right into hell and I wish no one would talk about it any more!"

I began to feel that I was unwanted.

"I'll be back to see you again," I said, offering him my hand.

From that time onwards I went to visit him every evening. Outside the house from the third day onwards curious people began to gather for they had heard about his strange malady. As my friend no longer left his home, the curious had to be content with news whispered by the neighbours. Their only information could come from the cook but everyone amplified it according to his own imagination.