

Prism

a magazine of contemporary writing

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a sample
of what the critics are saying
about
Charles Bruce's new novel

THE TOWNSHIP OF TIME

"a poignantly beautiful X-ray study of the unending drama of man's personal relations with his fellow man and with himself."

I. Norman Smith, Ottawa Journal

"an enjoyable and absorbing work . . . a celebration of the interdependence of man."

Robert Fulford, Toronto Daily Star

THE TOWNSHIP OF TIME

A Chronicle

Charles Bruce

\$3.75

Macmillan of Canada

70 Bond Street, Toronto

MAIL

You've started quite an ambitious mag. so I'm going to take you seriously — re your editorial about welcoming criticism.

Your cover looks a bit like a photo mag.; but that's not serious. We do not here think much of the verse. I think there's a widening gap between East and West here, weighted, I'm afraid, on our side. The exceptions to my mind, were Nowlan and Ray Souster. Ray's was lightweight, of course. But Watson's thing was really very poor, when compared with similar ones by Dudek (see *Laughing Stalks*) and so many others written here. The whole thing's palling now. But Watson's — poorly executed, and years out. Other stuff unexciting Birney, I'm sorry. He's now teaching, not writing Some of us are going down to the YMHA Poetry Center, New York for a reading and general get together soon. Point is, that we are establishing many links with American poets—especially those in NY and New England, and this is for us (apart from the contemp. French, of course) more important than the fizzling out strands of things that pass for tradition here

When I say 'we', I mean Toronto-Montreal; for we're very much in touch, solving the same problems, to a certain extent, though they in Montreal don't go quite as far as looking to the U.S. as Ray Souster and myself. I think they're wrong. Point is, I think there is this East-West split All the best.

Kenneth McRobbie, Toronto

(continued on page 69)



**CRAFT
WORKSHOP**

CANADIAN AND IMPORTED ARTS AND CRAFTS

4325 WEST 10TH

VANCOUVER 8, B.C.



Get water. No, not water. Yes, water . . . and a towel. No, no, not water as such . . . but water soaked in a towel. No, no, a towel soaked in water.

THE SNAKE

Ernest Langford

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY:

PETER *a bank teller*

SUSAN *his wife*

MISS WHYE *an elderly spinster*

MR. DRUMDERRY *the bank manager*

FELICITY *his wife*

MISS PENTUP *bank clerk*

MISS FISHSTOCK *bank clerk*

THE DOCTOR

TWO POLICEMEN

TWO WARDERS

TWO LAWYERS

A JUDGE

WARDEN

WARDERS IN THE PRISON

TWO EXECUTIONERS

PEOPLE AND

WORKERS IN THE BANK

SCENE: A CANADIAN TOWN

The music used throughout the play is Handel's Trumpet and Organ Voluntary, played by a piccolo and a harmonium.

SCENE I: *A road that is neither town nor country, but an unsatisfactory combination of both. Along this road wanders a young man. Lean of body, dark of hair and skin, and with a face that is pleasing, and by its sharp moulding suggestive of intelligence and a ranging imagination; but when his eyes are examined closely they are seen as a barrier, beyond which none may walk, but behind which he moves freely, peeping out at and summing up the outer world, and in general, mistrusting what he sees. He wears an old suede windbreaker and a pair of corduroy pants. No hat. He wanders along, peering into every bush, up every tree, at every cloud and every bird that calls or flies across the road before him. Suddenly he runs forward and picks something off the road which he cups in his hands, while smiling and whispering to it.*

PETER: Hello, hello. You shouldn't cross roads like that, or you're likely to be killed by brutal cars and heavy feet. Where have you been . . . where have you wandered? Tell me, tell me. My name is Peter . . . married to a desperate girl named Susan. Oh, she is very lovely and charming, but she

hates being a bank teller's wife. She wants to be something in the world. She hates being a speck amongst other specks. She wants to be a lump of something that is seen and admired. Oh, she is desperate, and I am becoming desperate too. Each time I enter my teller box it is as though I am going into my . . . (*A look of complete astonishment covers his face as he stares at what he holds in his hands.*) Did you speak to me? (*He listens.*) You will! You will! All that for me! For me! Tell me your name. Do tell me. (*He listens.*) Thank you, thank you. You understand, it's not for me, it's for my Susan. She is so desperate. Oh, so desperate

SCENE II: *The home of Peter and Susan. The living room, dining area and kitchen are a large space divided by bits of glass or wood. Of the three areas, the kitchen is the smallest. The furniture is bright, new, modern, and repellent. The total effect is of a doll's house. Susan is setting the colonial dining table for dinner. Her plump shapeliness and pretty face hide a vast determination. She does her best to be and look the modern wife, as suggested and reported by the best magazines on the subject. Just now she is having a fight with a long candle which refuses to stand up in an Italian wine bottle, preferring to lie in the salad bowl.*

SUSAN: Damn you, stand up! (*She tries again.*) Listen to me, listen to me. If you don't stand up, I'll I'll I don't know what I'll do to you. Stand up! Stand up! (*She now holds the candle with both hands and gives a tremendous jab at the bottle, like a man jabbing at an obstinate piece of concrete with a crowbar. The terrified candle stands.*) Now, why didn't you do that in the first place? Why are you so unco-operative? (*Peter comes in from the outside. She turns and smiles at him as the modern wife should, possessively and questioning.*) Hello, my handsomer-than-all-the-film-stars-put-together-husband! Where did you get to this Saturday afternoon?

PETER: Get to? I went for a little walk.

SUSAN: Why didn't you tell me you were going? I thought you'd eloped with our beautiful neighbor.

PETER: Neighbor? Oh no, I haven't seen her today.

SUSAN: She's so good-looking, isn't she?

PETER: Oh, is she? Yes, I suppose she is, I suppose she is.

SUSAN: Am I nice looking? (*After a pause*) Sometimes I wonder how you noticed me long enough to propose and marry me. (*She goes on with her dinner preparations.*) Where did you go walking?

PETER: (*He remains in the same position.*) Oh, around some roads.

SUSAN: Which roads? Describe them.

PETER: They were like all roads in this country . . . perfectly straight.

SUSAN: I can see you'd never make an author or a political commentator. They have to observe life . . . and things.

PETER: I do observe.

SUSAN: But you can't tell me what the roads you walked along were like.

PETER: I could if I wanted to. Listen, Susie . . .

SUSAN: Don't call me Susie; it makes me sound like a . . . a servant girl.

PETER: Guess what I've found. It's something of vast importance.

SUSAN: A diamond worth a million dollars? A gold nugget bigger than this room? A uranium mine?

PETER: None of those, Susie. Something much better.

SUSAN: Hm! Those are the only things I'm interested in finding. Give me a match, Peter.

PETER: (*He absent-mindedly hands her a match box.*) So if you went for a walk, those are all you'd look for?

SUSAN: I'd keep my eyes open. Shall we have a million dollars one day, Peter? There's no matches in this . . . as usual!

PETER: (*Handing her another box.*) I suppose. (*He looks around the room.*) I suppose . . .

SUSAN: Why didn't you give me this in the first place! Listen, Peter. You mustn't suppose. Your certainty must be absolute. All millionaires know what their fate is.

PETER: Do you mean their deaths?

SUSAN: (*Lighting the candle.*) Silly, no. I mean their accumulation of wealth. And that, Peter dear, is what you have to know. Now, do you? Why won't this candle stay lit?

PETER: I feel wealth slipping through my fingers.

SUSAN: Don't annoy me. Do you? Stay lit!

PETER: (*Taking the box from her.*) Let me do that, Susie. (*He lights the candle and it remains alight.*) It's a sad fact, Susie. Money slides through a bank teller's fingers.

SUSAN: Don't joke about it. You must do as I . . .

PETER: . . . but it's no joke. With these candles you have to get the wax well heated, then they'll go.

SUSAN: That's just like you, to know something that's perfectly useless. Now listen. Soon you must stop being a bank teller, Peter.

PETER: What being shall I be then?

SUSAN: How am I to know! But something that will result in a million dollars.

PETER: All I can think of is being a bank robber.

SUSAN: You would. (*She goes into the kitchen. He straggles behind her.*) I hope you're not too hungry, because we don't have much to eat. (*She comes back into the dining area.*) The fact that you can only think of being a bank robber implies a lack of imagination.

PETER: You've always said I had tons of it . . . it was my greatest asset . . . especially when I make love to you.

SUSAN: I've changed my mind. You do have some, but it's the wrong kind.
It's un . . .

PETER: Non-financial?

SUSAN: Given the right twist all imagination can be made financial.

PETER: I agree with that.

SUSAN: It's a matter of application.

PETER: I agree with that.

SUSAN: Your imagination is negative. What you lack is an imaginative imagination.

PETER: I agree with that.

SUSAN: Imagination is nothing in itself. Everybody has it . . . (*Peter opens his mouth to speak.*) . . . Don't interrupt me. Just as everybody has arms and legs . . . and other things

PETER: What other things?

SUSAN: That being so, why is it everybody can't do marvellous things? Why is it all the people aren't millionaires?

PETER: There's not enough money to go round. To supply every person in this country with a million dollars would require seventeen million million, and where's it to come from?

SUSAN: I don't know. Where does the other come from? The government makes it. Well then, they can make more. There's nothing to stop them. There's no shortage of paper.

PETER: I agree with that.

SUSAN: Anyhow, that has nothing to do with you. What I've said is a generalization. But it doesn't alter my point.

PETER: Nothing could.

SUSAN: (*Suspiciously*) And just what does that quip mean?

PETER: I mean that your point is as much a point as anybody else's point. I agree, it's a valid point. A point is valid when it can be identified with an individual. And without a doubt you and your point are absolutely inseparable.

SUSAN: (*Dubiously eyeing him.*) Hm! Hm . . . well . . . I'm glad you realize something. Do you agree with me that imagination is nothing?

PETER: I do.

SUSAN: And that what is needed is imaginative . . .

PETER: . . . I do.

SUSAN: Will you let me finish?

PETER: I do.

SUSAN: What is needed is imaginative imagination . . . which is, imagination brought up to comply with the necessities of modern living. Do you agree with that?

PETER: I do.

SUSAN: And that this is what you lack?

PETER: I do.

SUSAN: Well . . . now you can tell me what you are going to do about it.

PETER: I do. (*She angrily turns away to the kitchen.*) Do you want to see what I've found, Susie? (*She shrugs and goes into the dining area. He follows.*) It's very beautiful.

SUSAN: Everything you find is beautiful and useless.

PETER: I found you.

SUSAN: You did not.

PETER: Women are always fascinated by what I have found.

SUSAN: Your kind of women may be. And you didn't find me, I found you.

PETER: Don't you want to see it?

SUSAN: No.

PETER: Is there a spare box around?

SUSAN: There're more empty boxes in this house than anything else.

PETER: Oh, good.

SUSAN: Where are you going now?

PETER: I need a box to put my prize in.

SUSAN: Prize!

PETER: Hmhm.

SUSAN: I don't believe you'll ever get any prize. Not like me, I won lots at school.

PETER: Shall I show mine to you?

SUSAN: I may as well see it.

PETER: (*Taking something from his pocket and holding it in his cupped hands.*) See? Isn't it beautiful?

SUSAN: (*Backing away.*) Take it outside.

PETER: (*He holds a snake up by its tail. It is a nut brown color flecked with red, and is about seven inches long.*) He likes me. I saw him wriggling across the road in front of me . . . quite alone. So I picked him up, and he curled up in my hands and went to sleep. He likes me, Susie.

SUSAN: Take it out. Take it out at once.

PETER: Just think, Susie. He's been alone all the winter, and last fall. No affection or paternal advice to help him along. Nothing but himself. Don't you think that's amazing?

SUSAN: No no no, I think it's horrible.

PETER: But just think of what you need, what I need. You know, Susie, I believe I see why the serpent persuaded Eve to eat the fruit. It's nothing to do with good or evil, but simply that he wanted her to understand the difference between her complacent dependence and his self-sufficiency. But he failed . . . the complacence is as final and total as the dependence, and always will be. Can I have the box, please?

SUSAN: I won't have that thing in my rooms.

PETER: (*Hopefully*) I'll keep him in the other room with my Geiger Counter and geologist's outfit.

SUSAN: Nor anywhere in my house. And why don't you get rid of that other useless stuff?

PETER: But you made me buy them, Susie. (*Slyly*) Suppose my friend showed me how to be rich. Would you welcome him then, Susie?

SUSAN: It can't. And you never used the Geiger Counter in the right places. That's your trouble.

PETER: You remember how you talked of having an absolute and irrevocable certainty? Well, I have it.

SUSAN: Determination has nothing to do with mangey snakes.

PETER: You can't be mangey unless you have hair, Susie. As I picked him up I heard a voice saying "I'll help you. Give me food and warmth, and I'll help you. Good for good." So, I must help him, mustn't I? Besides, the good is mainly for you. I feel my bank clerk position more every day because of you. The pain is keen when I stand at the counter passing out thousands to people who lack imaginative imagination . . . like me. Then how did they come by so much money? They couldn't have made it of their own volition since this is impossible in the modern world without imaginative imagination.

SUSAN: There're more ways than one.

PETER: That's just what I've concluded. And that's why I made a pact with Snake.

SUSAN: (*Hesitantly*) I think you're teasing me.

PETER: Teasing! Are you teasing me when you judge my horrible failings and decide on my fate? (*She shakes her head.*) Then why should I tease you over so desperate a happening as my benefactor's arrival?

SUSAN: Don't shout at me, Peter.

PETER: I'm not.

SUSAN: You are. At the top of your voice. No reptile can make a fortune.

PETER: How do you know that?

SUSAN: Because Because nobody but a fool would ever dream a snake could talk.

PETER: Have I said he does?

SUSAN: You told me you heard it speak.

PETER: I said I felt a voice speaking which is not quite the same thing.

SUSAN: I don't see any difference.

PETER: Don't you really? That's strange, coming from one who is always talking of the psyche. One who maintains her marriage was a psychic arrangement, and who tells people she has telepathic chats with her husband while he's at work passing out uneasy money.

SUSAN: Just tell me how it will supply you with wealth.

PETER: I don't know. Time will show. Besides, he won't supply me, but you. You are the one who wants it so badly. I just want to be left alone.

SUSAN: How kind of it. I suppose such a marvelous creature has a name?

PETER: Just "Snake". Why should he want to be called anything else? He's proud of his snakiness.

SUSAN: It must be, if it can string you along.

PETER: You must cosset him, like the Golden Egg Goose. Feed him cream and snails.

SUSAN: Hm! I've no objection to the milk part.

PETER: Cream . . . cream.

SUSAN: All right . . . cream. But I won't play with snails.

PETER: You merely put them in with Snake, and he'll do the rest. Perhaps a mouse or two now and then. Or a frog. He enjoys them, and they are easily procurable. I could do all this, but I think you should help because he is going to supply you with riches . . . and I know he'd appreciate a showing of humility by you. But he doesn't want the exotic meats of Eastern lands, do you? Just good, plain Canadian sustenance and adequate warmth. That's not much asked in return for wealth, is it? Just think what has been surrendered in the past and what is given in the present for a mere pittance.

SUSAN: If it gave us what I want, I'd . . . I'd feed it fresh chicks every day.

PETER: Extremes offend him. Just do as I've suggested. You'll find he'll eat every two or three days. Do you want to hold him?

SUSAN: Not yet. (*She backs away as Peter holds out the snake.*) Later on I will. Later on. . . .

PETER: He's so smooth, so soft. Now, find a box and a soft bed for him. Are you hungry, Snake? Tell me. You are? You'd like some cream. He asks for a little cream.

SUSAN: Did . . . did it speak to you?

PETER: I felt I heard him speak.

SUSAN: Why didn't I hear it then?

PETER: Because you don't believe in him. Now, get the box and the cream. (*Susan goes into the kitchen. Peter whispers passionately, urgently.*) Give it to her, Snake. Please, please She wants so badly . . . like a little girl wanting a fine doll. Do you know how desperately I've looked for you since I married Susie?

SUSAN: (*Coming in with a cardboard carton. Jeering.*) Will this satisfy his Lordship?

PETER: (*Examining it.*) Will this do, Snake? Say if it offends you. Once it carried tins of soup, but I'm sure there's no offensive smell left.

SUSAN: (*Impatiently as Peter holds the snake above the box.*) Of course it's good enough. Please don't play the fool, Peter.

PETER: (*Holding Snake up to his face. Listening.*) Ah ha! Yes. He says you must wipe it out and disinfect it with Lavender Water, then place a soft pillow in the bottom, and he will accept it as a residence . . . for the moment.

SUSAN: And what does it want in the future?

PETER: He's not said.

SUSAN: I hate showing myself up for a fool.

PETER: You will be a fool if you don't. Now, do as he asks.

SUSAN: Why don't you help?

PETER: If you'll hold him, I'll make his bed.

SUSAN: No, I'll do it. (*She carries the box back into the kitchen.*) I don't have any Lavender Water . . . so I can't obey that order.

PETER: Oh! Oh! What do you have?

SUSAN: Eau de Cologne.

PETER: She has only Eau de Cologne, Snake. (*He listens, then calls.*) He says Cologne will do for now, but tomorrow you must get Lavender Water. He prefers the natural flowery scent that reminds him of warm flower beds where sweet beetles, grubs, and caterpillars multiply and fatten for his delight. So do as he commands.

SUSAN: (*irritably*) I will, don't you worry. I'll pour a whole bottle over the pillow and prove myself a bigger fool than you.

PETER: Please treat your benefactor with due politeness and consideration. He is here for your benefit, not his own. His assistance is quite disinterested. He is not motivated by greed or any human vice. And you will do well to remember this. (*Susan returns with the box.*) Place it on the couch, and I will offer him his chamber. Please accept our humble hospitality, Snake. And forgive us if we, in our ignorance, transgress or fail in those duties proper to a host and hostess.

SUSAN: I'm not ignorant. I've read all the right books on etiquette and entertainment.

PETER: (*He places the snake in the box.*) Now, let us go and prepare the cream . . . if you please!

(*Susan goes into the kitchen, followed by Peter, processionally carrying the box and trumpeting Handel's Trumpet and Organ Voluntary. He marches round the rooms. An instrumental performance takes over as the scene ends.*)

SCENE III: *A bank. At one end, close to the street entrance, the manager's area; at the other end, a vault door. Between them, the public area and the tellers' boxes. Customers are being served, and all suspiciously count their money before putting it into wallets and purses. Peter is in a teller's box, examining and writing in a bank book. On the public side is an elderly and unusually ugly lady, who is also eccentrically dressed. The manager, who is plump and bald, trots from his office, looks around, sees the lady, trots up to her, deeply bows, is ignored by her, then trots back into his office.*

PETER: I'm sure the summer sun would help you, Miss Whye. Oh, undoubtedly it would.

MISS WHYE: You are a healthy young man, but I'm an elderly, ugly, and achey woman, long past the sun's beneficence.

PETER: No one is ever past the sun, Miss Whye.

MISS WHYE: You say that because you are young and love to run about in it.

PETER: Not I, Miss Whye, not I.

MISS WHYE: Oh, I'm sure you and that little wife must lie around in the sun, don't you?

PETER: The young sport in the sun, Miss Whye, because they wish to be seen and envied. They want to pain the old and the sick who see their beautiful limbs and bodies. And I refuse to do that. They don't want the sun, nor does the sun want them. Why should they hunt for reservoirs of strength when they spend most of their time trying to rid themselves of an over-abundance. Oh, Miss Whye, it is when strength fails that we must go to the fountain-head.

MISS WHYE: You are a very sensible young man. Perhaps I'll buy myself a swimming suit and try your remedy in my garden. Tell me, how is that little wife of yours?

PETER: Desperately she needs a million dollars.

MISS WHYE: All young wives do. (*Peter hands her the book.*) Does she have a baby yet?

PETER: It takes time to satisfy her every need. A baby isn't the most important of her requirements.

MISS WHYE: (*Smiling at him.*) Well, perhaps you'll eventually give her all she asks for . . . perhaps you will. You have the look of a young man who could easily end up with a fortune.

PETER: Miss Whye, since two days ago, I am absolutely and irrevocably sure than I will succeed.

MISS WHYE: (*Patting his hand, which lies on the counter.*) And that is a very good way to feel.

PETER: Do you have an imaginative imagination, Miss Whye?

MISS WHYE: I think I do have some imagination.

PETER: Oh, everybody has that. But is yours imaginative?

MISS WHYE: It seems to me you are begging the question.

PETER: No, no. There's nothing of the beggar in me, Miss Whye, not even of questions. I have felt my position keenly on account of Susan's need for a million dollars.

MISS WHYE: Hm. You mustn't let what she says bother you. I know how these girls carry on. They want the world, without caring a hoot for what is lost in the getting of it. Don't you pamper her.

PETER: Miss Whye, for a long time I hesitated and dithered, until I had come to the point of desperately acquiescing to Susan's judgment . . . which was that I lacked the necessary imaginative imagination to make a success of modern living. Then I found my talisman . . . or rather, he came to me. Now he's directing my life, and I'm sure that in the near future Susan's legitimate needs will be satisfied.

MISS WHYE: What an unusual young man you are! Tell me, what is this miracle-working object. A magic horse shoe?

PETER: (*Conspiratorially glancing around the bank.*) Would you like to see him?

MISS WHYE: A magic horse shoe! Of course I do. Don't you know I'm a believer in magic. (*She leans over the counter, while Peter takes Snake from his pocket and holds him in cupped hands for her to see.*)

PETER: Look, Miss Whye, isn't he majestic? (*She bends over and looks, then staggers back, while giving a loud frightened scream, and falls to the floor. There is an uproar in the bank. Peter quickly returns Snake to his pocket and jumps over the counter. The manager and several girls dash up.*) She fainted

MANAGER: (*Very excited.*) Get water. No, not water. Yes, water . . . and a towel. No, no, not water as such . . . but water soaked in a towel. No, no, a towel soaked in water.

MISS PENTUPP: Cold water, Mr. Drumderry?

MANAGER: Not too cold, Miss Penttup, but cold enough to provide a stimulant. Get a coat. Feel her heart. Lift her up. No, don't lift her up. Get a doctor. Telephone. No, don't telephone. Run and fetch him. Unfasten her dress, her corset. No, no, that can't be done in public with elderly ladies.

PETER: (*Feeling her pulse and then the rest of her, even her feet.*) She doesn't seem to have a heart anywhere.

MANAGER: How strange.

MISS FISHSTOCK: Perhaps it's stopped.

MANAGER: (*Tapping her head.*) Silly girl. The hearts of important ladies don't stop. It is probably in some safe, inaccessible spot . . . like gold reserves in the vaults of a bank.

MISS PENTUPP: (*Coming with a towel that drips water.*) Here's the towel, Mr. Drumderry.

MANAGER: Apply it to her forehead and gently wipe her face. Miss Penttup, run for the Doctor. (*Miss Penttup runs out.*) We mustn't lose her deposits. She is very influential. One word from her and deposits could fall by the hundreds. Miss Fishstock!

MISS FISHSTOCK: Yes, Mr. Drumderry.

MANAGER: See if she has a corset. And should she have one, try to unfasten it without attracting undue publicity .

MISS FISHSTOCK: (*Touching Miss Whye.*) Yes, Mr. Drumderry, she has a full length one.

MANAGER: We will look the other way while you relieve the tension. Peter, turn away. Modesty of deportment is necessary in the face of such a deposit. (*They turn away. Miss Penttup runs back in.*)

MISS PENTUPP: Here's the Doctor, Mr. Drumderry.

DOCTOR: (*He is of middle height and thick-set. He marches instead of walks. He treats the living, the dying, and the dead with humourous, inhuman indifference. He has a short, barking laugh, which he scatters between his abrupt sentences.*) Where is she? Get away, the lot of you. (*Casually examining her.*) She's dead.

MANAGER: No. No. She can't be. It's impossible.

DOCTOR: Don't be a silly fellow. This is the one possibility that never fails us.

MANAGER: I feel so unhappy.

DOCTOR: What happened? Who saw it?

PETER: She was talking to me.

MISS PENTTUP: She screamed.

MISS FISHSTOCK: It sounded . . . like terror.

DOCTOR: Why shouldn't she! Are screams, or is terror rationed? What were you talking of. Love?

PETER: Sunbathing . . . and how it cures aches.

DOCTOR: She's found the cure-all for every ache and pain.

MANAGER: She was my chief depositor. Gone. Gone! Oh dear! Oh dear!

DOCTOR: Cheer up. Why not put her in with the deposits! Ha ha ha! I'll call the ambulance and undertakers. (*He marches into the manager's office.*)

MANAGER: Now her deposits, like veins of gold, will be ripped from my safe keeping. Ah! Now I can envisage how the raped earth must feel.

GIRLS: Oh yes, Mr. Drumderry, so can we too.

MANAGER: You are generous, appreciative girls. So understanding. Oh, Peter, what a calamity. Death in our bank. I hope this won't affect your advancement. Has it ever happened before?

PETER: Not that I know of.

MANAGER: A teller who causes heart cessations simply will not do. Rather he must inspire a resurrection of that delicate organ. He must gladden it, causing it to sing and dance for joy. And should there, by chance, be unfavorable news to impart, he must tell of it heroically, and in such a way as to implant in the depositor a belief that the situation is not beyond recovery. The contrary . . . he must imply that by one epic effort all can be rectified, thus allowing the victorious depositor to march towards a golden future, confident in the knowledge that behind him stand the regiments of savings deposits ready to march out should that need ever arise. Oh, what glorious, wonderful things are deposits. "A mighty fortress is my deposit . . ."

PETER: Yes, sir.

MANAGER: "A never failing strength . . ."

PETER: Yes, sir.

MANAGER: "It helps me over awkward moments . . . and makes other men say . . . (*Peter desperately joins in.*) . . . he must have wealth." Never forget this, my boy. In time, if you should ever attain a deposit such as Miss Whye possesses, people would honor you as they honor her. Wouldn't you like that?

PETER: Yes, sir.

MANAGER: (*Sighing*) But of course, it's not possible. Some are destined to have large deposits, some small ones, and some, nothing at all.

PETER: I agree with that. (*The Doctor marches from the office.*)

DOCTOR: (*Smacking the manager's back and laughing when he jumps.*)

See what money brings! The moral is, if you have money you die, if you don't have it you die. So, what're you going to do, young man?

PETER: (*Piously.*) Since one dies in either case, it seems to me one may as well have it.

DOCTOR: I've never met a man yet who didn't say exactly what was expected of him.

MANAGER: Pardon me, Doctor. Where's the ambulance? Why hasn't it come?

DOCTOR: All things are coming. Time kindly allows them to. But don't worry, she'll be all right for a few days. Just sweep the dust under her. (*He marches out.*)

MANAGER: (*Watching him go.*) He is quite influential, though not so much as Miss Whye. Still, he's renowned for his intelligence and his amazing diagnostic ability. Hm! He seemed to take to you, Peter. You'd be surprised how a word here and a word there helps. Oh, it helps. I wonder where her money will go, Peter? She has neither cats nor dogs, nor starving relatives. Perhaps I, as the immediate protector of her wealth, may receive a small legacy. We have the Will here. (*Pause*) In a safe deposit box. (*Pause*) I would not dream of looking at it. It has been known, but I'd never dream of doing such a terrible thing.

PETER: I could. In fact I frequently dream of such things. Wills and bills of all denominations shower on me.

MANAGER: (*Deeply moved.*) My boy, my dear Peter. I have never had a teller in my bank whom I have thought so much of as you. I may say my feelings are almost paternal. So, I feel what you have just said, deeply, deeply. (*Wiping his eyes.*) I urge you, banish such erotic dreams. Fight them. Cast them out. They are most dangerous. To dream of touching what does not, cannot, belong to you! Oh, what could be worse? Anarchistic, Peter, anarchistic!

PETER: I touch what I dream of all day, every day, without once possessing.

MANAGER: That is different. Here, you are closely supervised for eight hours. But a rampant dream! . . . where may it not end? It horrifies me. (*The ambulance men enter, dump Miss Whye onto their stretcher and depart. The Trumpet Voluntary is heard in the distance, gradually increasing in volume.*) Ah, I would have kept her immortal. Wealthy people should not be allowed to die. It is not fair to those they support. Now Peter, let us, with humility and modesty of deportment, carry her safe deposit box to my office, there to prepare for its opening by those privileged to do so. (*They go to the vault door, which the manager opens. Peter fetches out a box, then the pair slowly and solemnly march the length of the bank to the manager's office, while the rest of the staff and any customers, stand, their heads bent, reverencing that majesty that is now passing before them.*)

SCENE IV: *Peter's home. The table laid, food on it, the candle leaning and dripping wax onto the salad. Susan sitting in the living room, sullenly staring at a magazine page. Peter enters, blithely singing "The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo". Susan ignores him.*

PETER: (*Shouting.*) Here I am, Susie, here I am. (*She holds the magazine up, hiding her face.*) I am here, Susie . . . and something else besides me. Don't you want to know what Snake and I've brought home?

SUSAN: (*Throwing the magazine across the room.*) Do you know what I've done! I cooked a beautiful dinner of hamburger and frozen vegetables, and now it's all wasted, wasted Why should I care about what you and that loathesome snake bring home! (*She bursts into tears.*)

PETER: You'd be pretty pleased if you knew. You'd neither cry, nor care about wasting a bit of food.

SUSAN: (*In a fury.*) Do you imagine I care for the food. It's the slaving I put into it that I care about. That's what I am — a slave . . . to a bank teller's wage. And that's what I'll always be while I'm married to you. (*She returns to crying.*)

PETER: You'll forget all your suffering when you know what I've brought for you. You'll forget I'm three hours late. You'll want to go out and buy Snake a diamond encrusted home. Ask me what it is I have for you. (*Shouting.*) Ask me, or I'll, I'll

SUSAN: (*Sneering.*) Why have you and that snake been detained, dear? Did you misplace two cents?

PETER: (*Shouting.*) I have inherited two dollars . . .

SUSAN: Give them to me, I need some new stockings.

PETER: . . . multiplied by one million. (*Susan stares at him, her mouth slowly opening.*) All . . . all Snake's doing. He gave it to me. (*He takes the snake from his pocket.*) You are my brother, my friend, my king, my emperor, my divinity.

SUSAN: I don't think that kind of teasing is funny.

PETER: (*The impression he gives is of being in a state of drunken ecstasy.*) Who will dare tell me now that I lack imaginative imagination! Come, strip off your clothes and bathe yourself. Pat sweet scented powder on the hills and in the valleys of your body. Dress yourself in fresh and fragrant silk. Then come with me, me, me, me, and parade. Parade with the wealthiest man in this town, this province, this country, this world. (*He waves the snake above his head and dances like a dervish around her.*) Who will tell me now I am nothing. Who will tell me now I have nothing! Who will dare tell me anything, except that I am a King!

SUSAN: Peter, you're drunk.

PETER: Two million, two million. (*Holding out Snake.*) Thank him. Kiss

him. Worship him as your lord, your divinity.

SUSAN: I won't be teased, Peter, you hear. (*Angrily.*) I won't kiss a snake or play the fool for nothing.

PETER: Nothing! Listen to this. Behold, said I, I have found a talisman, a bringer of fortune and prosperity. Show me, she said, show me this curiosity. I did. I took him from my pocket, and as she bent to look, he turned his golden head, and she died. Died at the showing of his great and majestic ordination! Then came the Will-Makers to announce that I, I, I, was the chosen. Me, me. Picked, so they said, because I had talked to her and made her feel I had no objection to sharing the earth with her. But I know better. It was his doing. His ordination!

SUSAN: Two millions . . . two millions . . .

PETER: Kiss him, kiss him. Worship the god who brought you good fortune. (*Shouting, as he thrusts the snake at her.*) Go on, go on. Or I'll . . . I'll burn it all. I swear I will.

SUSAN: (*She takes the snake and forces herself to bring it to her lips.*) Thank you, Snake.

PETER: Acknowledge him as your Divinity.

SUSAN: You are my Divinity. I will feed you on . . . on . . .

PETER: Tender young lives.

SUSAN: Tender young things.

PETER: (*Shouting.*) Lives! Lives! Divinity doesn't exist without the taking of lives.

SUSAN: If it's really true, then I can have the things I've always wanted. Peter, it is true? You make up so much that I still don't know whether to believe you. Peter, I'm asking you? I'll never forgive you if . . . (*A knock on the door.*)

PETER: Go and see . . . (*He seems suddenly deflated and tired.*) There's someone at the door. (*Before Susan can reach the door, it opens, and in bounces the manager, followed by his wife, an elongated, dyspeptic looking woman, and the Misses Fishstock and Penttup. The manager chases Peter around the room trying to embrace him, while Peter tries to avoid him by getting behind the furniture.*)

MANAGER: My dear Peter, my dear boy, my almost-a-son-in-my-mind. I simply had to come and congratulate you.

PETER: (*Dashing for a chair.*) Get away, get away.

WIFE: (*Generally.*) Yes, we felt we had to come.

THE GIRLS: Yes, we felt we had to.

SUSAN: (*Giving an hysterical laugh.*) I can't quite believe it yet. It's so incredible.

PETER: (*Hissing at her from behind the couch.*) Then wait until you believe before you speak of sacred matters.

MANAGER: (*Edging behind the couch.*) Fortune has favored you, Peter. In one stroke you are set apart from the common lot of mankind. Now, you

may go anywhere, at any time, and with whom you please.

(*Peter dashes from the couch to a chair, the manager hard on his heels.*)

WIFE: (*To girls.*) Years ago Mr. Drumderry was a passionate relay runner.

MANAGER: I know you won't object to my little homilies. I've prepared them entirely for your edification.

PETER: (*Warding off the manager with a potted tuberous begonia.*) That's where you're wrong. I do object to them. I don't want to be edified.

SUSAN: Peter, please don't be rude. (*To wife.*) Aren't tuberous begonias lovely? Peter, show that begonia to Mrs. Drumderry. The pot is an antique.

PETER: I object to everything you say. (*Peter lets the manager have the begonia and runs.*)

SUSAN: Peter. Peter, please . . .

MANAGER: (*To Peter, behind a chair.*) The young princes of old expected elevating homilies from their advisers.

PETER: If their advisers were anything like you, it's no wonder history's such a mess.

SUSAN: (*To wife.*) I'm sorry he's behaving like this. He's excited.

PETER: (*Desperately holding off the manager with a collapsible table.*) I am not excited. You . . . you . . . While I live in this town I shall continue to have some small deposits with you, but be warned. Even having those depends on your behavior. (*The table collapses. Peter is left without any defense.*) Leave me alone.

MANAGER: (*Stopping in his tracks and becoming very humble.*) Please forgive me, sir. I will try to do as you wish, sir. Always.

PETER: (*Gaping at the manager. Then becoming remote and dignified.*) I should hope you would. Think. If you lost *my* deposits, you might also lose *your* position; which is, to say the least, most precarious at the best of times. So, be warned.

SUSAN: Peter, you've no right to behave like this to people who've been kind to you.

PETER: A kindness that listed his perfection and my hopelessness at least ten times a day. You . . . you . . . (*Forgetting to be remote. Shouting.*) Never call me "your boy" again. Never speak to me, unless I first grant you permission. Now, you may go. Go on. Shoo! Shoo!

SUSAN: Peter. I am publicly ashamed of you.

PETER: Then I'll settle ten thousand a year on you, provided I never see your face again.

SUSAN: Never see me again! Me!

PETER: Public shame and ideal matrimony don't mix well. (*Shouting at the Misses Penttup and Fishstock.*) You two! Will you surrender your virginities to me, without feeling shame, for a hundred thousand a piece? Eh? Come on, come on, answer me. What are you waiting for?

SUSAN: (*Her arms about Peter.*) Silly. I didn't mean it. I just meant that . . .

PETER: . . . I don't care what you meant. Didn't you say you were publicly ashamed of me?

SUSAN: What I meant was . . .

PETER: Answer me.

SUSAN: . . . that you oughtn't to speak . . .

PETER: Answer me, or I'm finished with you.

SUSAN: (*Kissing, caressing him.*) No, I'm not ashamed of you, darling. Why should I be?

PETER: Then what are you?

SUSAN: I . . . I'm proud of you. (*Wheedling.*) But promise me you won't speak so detestably to him. Please darling. It makes you seem less than you are.

PETER: He is detestable. Aren't you?

MANAGER: If you say so, sir, then I certainly am.

PETER: Don't be so damned cheerful about it. I am a great man, aren't I?

MANAGER: One of the world's greatest.

PETER: (*To Susan.*) See. I am only telling the truth. (*To manager.*) You . . . listen. I have been cut to the quick by your efforts at corrective surgery. Now I must slash to ease my pain. I have decided to withdraw all my deposits from your bank.

MANAGER: (*After a stricken pause.*) No, no. Please . . . Please . . . A few hundred thousand dollars, what do they mean to you? Nothing, nothing. But they are my life's blood. (*To his wife.*) Plead, plead, my dear. Throw yourself on him.

WIFE: They are his life's blood.

MANAGER: (*He falls to his knees and wriggling up to Peter, grasps his legs.*) Do what you please with me. Kick me, beat me, anything . . . (*He squeezes Peter's legs, and Peter falls over. The manager leans over him, his nose about half an inch from Peter's, where he proceeds to leer at him.*) Do what you please with my wife. (*Calling to his wife.*) On your knees, my dear. (*The wife falls to her knees.*) But don't withdraw your deposits. (*Wife joins in.*) Don't withdraw your deposits.

PETER: (*He has managed to get clear of the manager and scrambles to his feet. He points with horror at Mrs. Drumderry.*) Just what do you mean when you suggest I may do "anything" with that collection of skin and bone? (*He backs off to avoid the manager's grasping arms.*) Get up. Get away!

MANAGER: Oh, sir. Such offers are but a matter of form. But if you . . . Ah ha! Got you! (*He grabs at Peter's legs. Peter skips clear.*)

PETER: Get up, damn you! (*Shouting.*) Get up, or I'll . . . I'll . . .

MANAGER: (*Eagerly.*) What? Leave your deposits? (*The snake, aroused by the noise and warmth, has poked his head out of Peter's pocket. Now he proceeds to wriggle out, and falls to the floor close to the wife.*)

WIFE: Albert! Albert! Save me, save me! (*Albert jumps up, sees the snake, and in a moment has crushed its head with his foot.*)

MANAGER: There, there, my dear. Don't be afraid. I've killed it. Be calm. (*On hearing the words, "I've killed it", Peter slowly turns. The manager points to the snake and gabbles merrily on.*) Now isn't that peculiar. How could a snake suddenly appear in here? Oh, don't be afraid, sir. It's dead. Fortunately they aren't dangerous, just repulsive. My dear wife has a horror of them . . . a definite phobia. That apparently is why she is so thin . . . the doctor says phobias are fat-devouring. (*Peter bends over and picks up Snake. He turns him over and caresses him as though to re-instill life.*) The doctor's quite sure that if she could accommodate her phobia, why she'd swell and become a positive balloon. (*He gives a giggle.*) What a delightful nocturnal change that would be for me.

PETER: He's dead.

MANAGER: I'm a very efficient executioner. One stamp of my heel and they're dead. I may say without exaggeration that I've executed thousands of the things. (*Standing by Peter and patting his back.*) Now . . . you won't withdraw your deposits, will you?

PETER: But . . . he's dead, he's dead (*His voice is full of disbelief and shock.*)

MANAGER: (*Trying to take Snake from Peter.*) Allow me to throw it out for you. You ought not to touch such repulsive creatures. Allow me, sir.

PETER: Snake is dead, Snake is dead.

MANAGER: I've never understood why so much of the life on earth is useless and horrible to behold. (*Trying to relieve Peter of the snake.*) Let me show you how well I handle matters, sir. And you won't withdraw your deposits, will you? Hm?

PETER: Do you know what you have done?

MANAGER: (*Laughing.*) Of all men, a Bank Manager must know what he's doing. No chance thrust and cut for him. (*Coyly.*) Now, you will let your deposits remain, won't you?

PETER: (*His voice rising.*) My friend, my companion, my benefactor . . . murdered . . . by you! You, of all things!

MANAGER: Oh, hardly murderer! Say executioner. You know, pointless things and men have to be kept down. Now, promise me you'll leave . . .

PETER: . . . I'll promise to kill you! (*He advances on the manager. Susan grabs his arm.*)

SUSAN: Peter, dear (*He throws her off.*)

PETER: Give back his life to me. Do you know you have destroyed a divinity! Ah . . . but how could *you* destroy him? You, a safe deposit box! It's all wrong!

MANAGER: (*Backing away.*) If I'd known the creature was yours, and that you thought so much of it, naturally I'd have let it live. However, there are thousands, millions, billions more like it. Rest assured, sir, that I will bring you one.

PETER: You've brought too much to me already. (*He grabs a futuristic*

ironwork lamp stand and swings at the manager, who nimbly skips out of the way while Peter, yelling from frustration, charges after him. They gallop round the room watched by the women and cheered by the Misses Penttup and Fishstock.)

WIFE: In his young days Albert always ran twice round the block before coming to bed. (*The manager flies by.*) And you used to practice your style before the mirror on wet nights, didn't you, dear?

SUSAN: Peter's not an enthusiastic runner, he lacks wind. But he loves to walk. (*Peter flies by.*) Don't you, dear!

MISS PENTTUP: Oh, hasn't Mr. Drumderry got a beautiful motion. This is just like the Olympic games. (*The manager gallops up with Peter hard behind him swinging the lamp. He dodges behind his wife, and the iron base of the lamp lands on her head. She grunts her surprise and sinks to the floor. The manager now runs for the door, while Peter skips over the wife and goes after him. The Misses Fishstock and Penttup, hysterically cheering, follow them. Susan kneels by the wife.*)

SUSAN: Mrs. Drumderry! (*Feeling her.*) Oh dear, I think you are dead, Mrs. Drumderry. Though I really don't think you ought to die here, Mrs. Drumderry. (*Peter returns, wild-eyed and raging.*)

PETER: I lost him in the dark, but I'll find him eventually. And I'll still withdraw my deposits. He'll find I'm a man of my word . . . two million words. (*He takes Snake from his pocket.*) Snake moulded chance for me, and it can't be taken away. Can it, Snake?

SUSAN: Peter, you've killed her. (*Her voice rising. He ignores her.*) Peter, you must realize. (*Very faintly the sound of a siren.*) Peter, what will you say?

PETER: . . . But he is dead. So perhaps this gift will melt away like snow under the spring sun.

SUSAN: (*Shouting.*) Peter, listen to me. You must think of something to say.

PETER: Divinity isn't stamped off the Earth's face by a pair of nine-dollar boots.

SUSAN: (*Beating at him with her fists.*) Think of something, think, think, think of something.

PETER: . . . But supposing it is so, then what does it mean to me . . . and to those who wait for chance to become divine? (*The sound of the siren is overwhelming. Susan's mouth opens and closes, and she waves her arms in his face, but nothing of what she says is heard. Then the siren stops and there is complete silence.*)

PETER: No . . . I can't think of such a horror. I refuse to think of it. (*The door is thrown open. Peter, very erect and square shouldered, faces the open door.*)

POLICEMEN: (*Outside.*) We're coming in to get you.

MANAGER: (*Outside.*) Be careful, Officer. He's a dangerous killer. (*Two*

husky policemen rush into the room, waving revolvers. Susan yells. The manager follows the policemen in, hides behind one of them and peeps out at Peter. They stand on either side of Peter, pointing their guns at him.)

POLICEMAN: (*A Corporal. The second one does not speak.*) Young man, did you do that?

PETER: (*Very haughty.*) I did.

SUSAN: Please, Officer, the Manager said Peter could do as he pleased with Mrs. Drumderry.

POLICEMAN: Did you?

MANAGER: Of course. But everyone knows such a gesture has nothing beyond its face value.

SUSAN: (*Obsequiously.*) But sir, Peter doesn't understand face values. He thinks all things said and done go deeper and deeper. Peter, tell them . . . explain to them.

PETER: (*Holding Snake across both hands.*) He destroyed Snake. (*Shouting at the manager.*) I still withdraw my deposits.

POLICEMAN: (*Touching Peter's arm.*) Come with me.

PETER: Don't touch me. I have two million words I can fire off. (*Police-man grabs Peter's arm and nods to his companion. Peter yelling.*) Touch me not. I am on Snake's business.

POLICEMAN: And I'm on Justice's. (*Peter swings at him but the other policeman catches his arm, rips the snake from his hand, and throws it away. Together they frog march him to the door.*)

PETER: (*Shouting and struggling.*) Let me have him. Let me have him. Please, please . . . Don't take Snake from me. Don't take Snake from me. Please, please, sir . . . sir . . . (*They thrust him through the door. Susan runs towards it, but the manager gets there first and closes it.*)

MANAGER: (*Bowing, smiling.*) How strange. At one moment there is a vast concourse of people and at the next all are gone. You find it confusing, and so do I. (*He sidles towards her, smiling and moving his hands to emphasize what he is saying.*) Now, contrast this uneasy state of affairs with deposits.

SUSAN: Mr. Drumderry . . . your wife . . .

MANAGER: There stability reigns.

SUSAN: (*She is backed against a wall and there she stays.*) Mr. Drumderry . . . oughtn't you to cover her?

MANAGER: Deposits never fail; so unlike men who accumulate failure from the moment of birth.

SUSAN: Mr. Drumderry . . . your wife will get dusty.

MANAGER: Promise you'll leave your deposits, eh? Promise. (*He is very close to her. Quite terrified, she tries to push her way through the wall.*) Promise . . . just a promise . . .

SUSAN: Yes, I promise. Don't touch me, I promise, don't . . . don't touch . . . (*He kneels in homage before her. The music is heard. He bends over, kisses her feet, then allows his hands to touch, first her ankles, then her legs.*)

MANAGER: This is the peak of my life. I am handling beauty and deposits. I am one of the blessed. (*Susan remains transfixed as the scene darkens, with the manager's hand never going above her knees.*)

SCENE V: *A cell. Peter, fully dressed, lies on a narrow cot. His eyes are open. In his hands he holds and caresses a bit of cloth, as he formerly caressed Snake. Outside the cell door Warder 1 patrols. Occasionally he stops to look in at Peter. While doing this, he accidentally pushes his hand between the bars, then finds he cannot withdraw it. An expression of comical anguish spreads over his heavy, middle-aged face.*

WARDER 1: Oh Jesus! (*Peter looks round.*)

PETER: Hello! Still night-time? (*He wanders over to the door.*) What's the matter?

WARDER 1: My hand's stuck. I've always had trouble with my hands. They're extra big. But if I say anything to the authorities, they just tell me my hands ought to be smaller.

PETER: You'll have to take the door off . . . or your hand. Which do you think the authorities will recommend?

WARDER 1: They ain't interested in solving problems. I can't get gloves to fit. I rip all my shirt sleeves. Oh, Jesus! Kerm out, damn you. (*He gives a violent jerk. His hand flies through, and he sprawls away. He can be heard groaning and feebly cursing his affliction.*)

PETER: (*Solicitiously*) Hurt yourself?

WARDER 1: (*Returning to the door.*) Y'see what I mean! I tell you, when a man's outsize, he suffers for it.

PETER: (*Apprehensively*) Outsize neck?

WARDER 1: Don't let that worry you. Size makes no difference there.

PETER: Oh, thanks for telling me.

WARDER 1: Me and my mate do what we can to help.

PETER: That's generous of you.

WARDER 1: A man has to do something if he believes in humanity. Now, you go and get a bit of sleep.

PETER: (*Right against the bars.*) But aren't you at the tail end of humanity?

WARDER 1: Where a man is shouldn't influence his concept of duty. (*He starts to move on.*)

PETER: If I try to sleep, people come from the walls and shout at me, until I forget everything, except that I'm to die in the morning.

WARDER 1: Those people are in your mind. Refuse to think them. Thoughts can't control unless you allow them to. I took a course in mind control, and you'd be surprised what it does for a man.

PETER: I can see it blanketed quite a lot in you. (*He returns to the bed. Lies on it, and closes his eyes.*)

WARDER I: (*Calling.*) Concentrate, then refuse to think. (*He continues his patrol; shadowy figures emerge from the wall. Their voices are clamorous, their shoutings overlap, and their gestures are exaggerated. Two shadows vaguely resemble lawyers in their court gowns, one a judge on his bench, another the manager, and another Susan.*)

PETER: (*Whispering.*) Oh, Snake, I beg you, raise me up from this misery. Grant me peace.

LAWYER I: This man is insane. Of that there is . . .

LAWYER II: . . . doubt . . .

LAWYER I: . . . no doubt. A man does not blossom from a pallid teller into a raving killer.

LAWYER II: This one has set a precedent. I shall now prove the

SUSAN: . . . money is mine . . . ours, I mean. The Will . . .

LAWYER II: . . . to kill is always there. I shall prove . . .

MANAGER: (*Suddenly appearing.*) . . . he had erotic dreams every day. He would not listen . . . (*He disappears.*)

SUSAN: . . . to me, Peter. Haven't I cooked, cleaned, dressed, and wriggled in bed as recommended by the best books? Very well then, you have no right to condemn me just because I put that snake in the garbage can. Garbage and snakes are perfectly suited to each other, and the sooner you realize that . . .

JUDGE: . . . each man shall contribute to the common cause and gain of the society into which he is born. In return he will receive recompense in proportion to his effort, and be given a justification of his existence. Above all, in order to insure an orderly purging of those impulses that everyday affairs do not appease, he will be licensed to commit violences, though their nature and time of performance must be determined by society. Thus, such acts as yours, committed without sanction . . .

PETER: (*Shouting.*) I had Snake's sanction!

JUDGE: . . . sets you beyond the pale. Therefore, you will be taken . . .

PETER: Snake, I beg you . . . answer me. Has faith no recompense? (*Warder I peers in, nods with satisfaction to see Peter's eyes are closed and goes on.*)

JUDGE: . . . where you shall be . . .

PETER: (*Opening his eyes, screaming.*) I beg you, I beg you, Snake!

JUDGE: . . . until you are . . .

PETER: Give me some reason for this!

JUDGE: . . . have mercy on your soul . . .

PETER: (*Whispering.*) There is no soul or mercy to haven it. There is only a little faith, that vanishes with the shadow it has embraced when night falls. (*The cell door opens. The figures back into the wall and disappear. Warders I and II enter, with Warder II carrying a tray. Peter, on hearing*

them enter, stiffens and then forces himself to look round. They proffer encouraging but insipid smiles.)

WARDER II: (*The same age as Warder I.*) Breakfast, sir? (*Peter shakes his head.*) Nothing? Not even coffee? (*His disappointment is apparent.*)

PETER: Oh, all right, I'll have coffee.

WARDER II: Your usual sugar and milk?

PETER: Yes. (*He sits up.*) What's the time?

WARDER I: (*He takes out his watch, stares at it, shakes it, and seems surprised and indignant.*) It's stopped! Fifteen years I've had this watch and it's never let me down before.

PETER: (*Warder II hands him a mug of coffee.*) Never? You're lucky. I've had my life twenty-three years and it's never shown any consideration for my pride. (*To Warder II.*) Does your watch let you down?

WARDER II: Never. (*He takes it out.*) The time is . . . Well . . . I'm jiggered! It's stopped. (*Peter laughs, becoming quite hysterical, and spilling coffee from the mug.*) More coffee?

PETER: What's behind all this coffee? Who profits from my last cup? (*He empties the coffee onto the floor.*) Which share receives its dividend from this? (*He throws the mug, knocking over the coffee pot. Then he lies face down on the bed. The warders look at each other, and nod. Warder II straightens the pot.*) I wish I'd asked Snake to abolish time. I would've lived in a world where everything remained in bud. (*The warders solemnly wink at each other.*)

WARDER II: I guess a man can't go through life without having an occasional wish.

WARDER I: I wish I had education, then I wouldn't be sitting here. I wish all men had education, then the world'd change.

WARDER II: Oh sure! The time'll come when workers fart culture and doss-houses have poetry circles. But what'll it signify? Today, every dumb Joe has what only the rich had fifty years ago. But who's still cleaning up the world's crap? In fifty years time every dumb Sam'll have what only the rich have today. But who'll still be cleaning up the world's crap?

WARDER I: (*Very argumentative.*) I say that when men get education then the world'll have to change.

WARDER II: (*To Peter.*) Do you think the world'll change, sir?

PETER: (*Sitting up.*) Which world do you mean? (*He laughs at their surprised faces.*) Because it wouldn't surprise me if there weren't lots. You might even say I inhabit one, and you, another.

WARDER I: (*Sentimentally*) Sure, every man has his own little world . . . His home . . . his wife . . . his family.

WARDER II: He doesn't mean that kind of world, do you, sir?

PETER: No. I was thinking of worlds of knowing and awareness. Worlds where coincidence becomes so mixed up with longing that a man comes to believe some divinity is directing his affairs . . . and acts accordingly.

WARDER II: Now that's most interesting. (*Peter laughs.*)

WARDER I: Well, I still say a man's world's his home.

WARDER II: Supposing he ain't got these valuable things?

WARDER I: (*Sullenly*) He drifts round til he finds 'em.

WARDER II: You mean, drifts like a dandelion seed on the wind?

WARDER I: (*Angrily*) No, I don't mean no blasted dandelion seed.

WARDER II: (*Genially patting his back.*) Well, just explain what you do mean, my friend.

WARDER I: (*Waving a fist under Warder II's nose.*) If you don't stop insulting me . . . I'll . . . I'll . . .

PETER: (*Hopefully*) Murder him? (*The warders look at each other, then laugh.*)

WARDER II: Don't let our tiffs bother you. We do it to pass the time. It doesn't mean a thing.

PETER: Do you mean that all that passionate belief, all that strident faith, is nothing . . . means nothing!

WARDER I: (*Genially slapping Warder II's back.*) The trouble is, my friend here won't stick to facts. I tell him facts get you to important places fast. Like main highways

WARDER II: And I tell you, they're too easy. You glide from one fact to another, but nothing ever happens. No; to live, you must pick your objective, then fight your way to it through virgin forests and over mountain ranges.

PETER: You are both wrong. To find out what you are and which world you inhabit, all you have to do is to get lost for a few moments.

WARDER II: (*Politely*) You don't say! Well, I guess that's easy enough.

PETER: The trouble is, we are never lost when we desire it, but always at the moment when we believe we have triumphed. (*They are silent. Peter stares down at the rag in his hands. Warder II clears his throat.*)

WARDER II: Ah . . . would you care to brush up, sir?

PETER: What . . . my French? (*He looks up. Both warders make brushing motions on their sleeves and shaving motions on their faces.*) Oh . . . No thanks.

WARDER I: (*Clearing his throat.*) Personal neatness raises the level of all a man does and causes others to value him more.

WARDER II: Untidiness seems to be the primary cause of indignity and humiliation.

PETER: Your eyes are at the wrong end of the glass . . . (*As Peter says this, the cell door opens and a number of men enter, the principals being the warden and two nondescript men dressed in blue suits. They look like unemployed men who have gotten into their best suits to apply for a job. These three advance on Peter who gives his hysterical laugh and springs up to meet them.*)

WARDEN: (*The only movement on his face is a continuous blinking.*) Will you . . .

PETER: (*Confidentially*) Ah, Warden . . . so glad you called. Ah . . . I've been meaning to ask whether you could see your way to letting me stay on here for a while. I've nothing better to do at the moment.

WARDEN: Will you come, please?

PETER: (*Laughing even more. He stares at the group around him and especially at the blue-suited men.*) I wouldn't ask to keep this room . . . any old cubby hole 'ud suit me. I'd be . . .

WARDEN: Will you come, please?

PETER: Yes, yes . . . of course. I'd be willing to pay a large bonus on top of the rent. I'm quite wealthy.

WARDEN: Will you . . .

PETER: (*Gabbling and laughing.*) I appreciate that the expanding population overcrowds every building as soon as it is built. (*The Warden looks at the two men, who in turn, look at each other. Peter gabbles on.*) Any old apple or orange box would do me. I know how to rough it. I took a course in camping and forestry. I wasn't actually a scout . . . but the next best thing, so you see . . . (*The two men move so that they are closer to him. His eyes flicker from face to face.*) So you see, Warden, until a room becomes vacant . . . any old box . . . any old box . . . any old box . . .

WARDEN: (*Pause*) Actually . . . we do have a box . . . of sorts . . . for you.

PETER: (*After a pause and by now quite demented.*) Oh ah . . . oh ah . . . of course . . . I'd forgotten You are going to present me with a little room. (*He appears to calm down and to be quite sane and serious.*) Tell me, has it a name like Mon Repose or Cosy Nook painted on the door? (*He laughs, bows, shakes the warden's hand and behaves like a public servant responding to the presentation of an official retirement clock.*) Thank you, thank you, gentlemen. I wonder whether you can appreciate how inspiring it is to receive a gift that will remain with you for as long as you need it. (*Laughing.*) A gift that you know can never be stolen away. And this presentation is especially touching when you have reached the point . . . as I had . . . of believing that you had lost everything. Once again, I thank you. Now, shall we go? I am anxious to enter and spend a night in my new quarters. (*He takes the warden's arm and urges him from the cell. They leave at a trot and the others are compelled to run in order to keep up with them. The music quickens in tempo and becomes quite erratic. Warders I and II are left in the cell. They wander around as if filling in time. Warder II picks Peter's bit of rag from the floor. Warder I examines and winds his watch.*)

WARDER II: (*Shaking the rag.*) Funny how he held onto this for so long.

WARDER I: (*Preoccupied with his watch.*) Something for his hands to do.

WARDER II: (*Yawning.*) This is exhausting work. We expend a lot of energy just to make the last hours pass quickly.

WARDER I: (*Solemnly*) Men who believe in humanity will always behave with humanity, even if it exhausts them.

WARDER II: (*Tearing up the rag and absent-mindedly allowing the bits to fall to the floor.*) If men were motivated by the principle of humanity, the world 'ud be a better place.

WARDER I: (*Skeptically*) Just give me the number of men who believe in a principle and actually act on it . . .

WARDER II: (*Sorrowfully wagging his head.*) There, when you come down to it, is the root of all man's troubles. He lacks the strength to believe and the faith to act. (*The music now goes completely crazy. The piccolo rushes through a series of ascending arpeggios to vanish in some unattainable heights. The harmonium attempts to transform itself into a cathedral organ and bursts its bellows during the process. Warder II, after a pause, takes out his watch. Warder I makes a falling gesture with his hand, and the other nods.*)

WARDER I: I guess it's seven o'clock?

WARDER II: (*Nodding.*) It's over. Another dream has been sprung by a loose board (*He pockets his watch, picks up the tray, and together they leave the cell.*)

BATHTUB BOTTICELLI

Curled in the tub she wonders at the red
so nicely placed, the smooth, the textured patch,
the bubbling in the ancient maidenhead —
unaware there new ages wait to hatch;

then standing from the soap white suds that lave
her she is borne to waters through whose thighs
in every age, with every kind of wave
the shallow shell shall from the seafoam rise.

So hail the virgin goddess of the sea
of life! Hail Mazie! — Venus here once more;
through her the world will always be with thee;
but pity her, for when she steps to shore
she'll hear, down through the vortex of the tub,
the leering gurgle of Beelzebub.

Mike Conway

Abhisarika

*Dragon crested tombs stand silent in their poplar gardens
Doves jostle among the Shrines of Heaven.
The earth is brooding
The wind comes not
The lovers of men look in the dusty air
While that shadow
Of the other garden
Vanishes
Moving in and about the silent trees.*

Tüt Kodar

Soliloquy on the Rocks

*The black shell harvest
of low tide
clusters in a dry afternoon death.*

*Streaks of green and white
and harbour smell
that fondle with the waves
the shell-sprouting rocks,
groan at last in retreat to the sea,
and we are left,
crackling, crunching guilt with every step.*

*Can it be, as the dipping
and soaring gulls shriek,
that these clinging disbelievers,
these empty, blackened and sun-sick
reminders of wafting livelihood,
are seaweed-shawled in effigy
of our own waterfowl existence?*

George Bowering

Mammorial
Stunzas
For
Aimee
Simple
Macfarcon

Earle Birney

Ah but I saw her ascend up in the assendupping breeze

There was a cloudfall of Kewpids
their glostening buttums twankling
in the gaggle-eyed and deleted air

We had snuk away from the Stemple
the whoopaluyah mongrelation
pigging their dolourbills to the kliegbright wires

We wondered at dawn into the cocacold desert
where bitchy torsouls of cacteyes prinked at us

Then soddenly she was gone with cupidities
vamoostered
with pink angelinoes

O mamomma we never forguess you
and your bag blue sheikel-getting ayes
loused, lost from all hallow Hollowood O

Aimee Aimee Tekel Upharison

PROFILE:



Maria
Madame des Salles
Myself

Alice McConnell



SHE CAME into the ward just before lunchtime but for the first few days she was indistinguishable to me from the countless other sounds and movements that occurred. One morning I noticed that she wasn't dressed like the aides or nurses, in blue or white, but that she wore a drab grey uniform and that she was washing the floor with a long-handled mop which she sloshed carelessly into a bucket of suds. It was some time later that I noticed she was young and slender and extremely pretty and how she would look up at us suddenly with a sullen, baleful glance. Her short black hair clung to her head like a dark cloud that shadowed her brow and her eyes. Her lips were vividly painted and petulant. She looked so much like one of Vasco Pratolini's heroines that my eyes began to follow her as she moved through the room slopping the wet mop and pushing the pail with her foot. She never said 'Good morning', and one felt instinctively that she wanted no part of the cheerful nonsense that went on around her. Her silence gave her a kind of dignity and her task, though menial, did not seem demeaning. All she must do, it seemed, was wash the floors, without even having to put her hands into the dirty water because the bucket was so ingeniously designed that the mop could be squeezed dry without handling.

One day her humour changed. The indifference, the aloofness and the silence exploded in our midst like a packet of firecrackers. She flung herself into our room, whacked the pail on the floor, and set to work with such vigorous anger that we almost shuddered under our sheets. "Bygosh, I'm fed up!" she exclaimed.

None of us said a word. We could hear the water running in fretful rivers under our beds.

"Bygosh, am I ever fed up! My husband he make me go to work. I leave my boy with his grandmother. She spoil him awful. Oh, how she spoil that little boy! He so sheeky, I spank his bottom. His grandmother say I am cruel to him. My husband say I am cruel to him."

Her fiery glance leapt around the room and for several moments we were stunned into a silence broken only by the pounding of the girl's mop. Finally the elderly English woman across from me ventured to ask, "Are you French?"

"No, I am Italian. In our family we are all Italian. My husband, he make me go to work. He like the money. I tell him, other things, they are more important, but he don't listen. Oh, I should whack that little boy, he is so sheeky. My husband say I don't love my son but I think I love him more than anybody. I want my son to be a good boy."

The outburst was so unexpected and violent that there didn't seem to be anything important enough that any one of the four of us could say in reply. Finally it was the timid English woman who again spoke. "What is your name, dear?" she asked.

"Maria," the girl replied.

"Well, Maria dear," the English woman continued, and her voice, though dreary, had a studied gentility, "you have too much lipstick on. I don't like to see a girl wearing too much lipstick, do you?" and she looked to the rest of us for confirmation.

The girl dropped her mop and went to a mirror. "You are right. I forget to blot it. I am so busy all the time, sometimes I forget to blot it."

"You really should, dear. It looks a bit common if you don't, I think."

The scene didn't seem to have any real meaning. I picked up a book and began to read.

While I was in hospital I drugged myself with reading. My bed was always untidy with books. I liked to have all of them within reach so there wouldn't be the slightest risk of becoming aware of the aseptic world around me. When I moved, quite often some of the books would fall to the floor and that is why I kept a particularly large and valuable volume, *Venice Observed*, on the chair by my bed where it was safe from falling but where I could, with some effort reach it.

It was several days before I had a conversation with the Italian girl. She was working near my bed one morning when I spoke to her. I said, "Well, how do you feel today?" as if she were the patient.

"Lousy," she replied, and slurped the floor.

"What's the trouble now?" I asked, inserting a thumb between the pages of my book to mark the place until she had gone.

Her expression brightened when I showed interest. "It's this lousy working," she said. "I don't like it here."

"I had to go out to work until I was much older than you are," I said.

This information seemed to give her some secret pleasure because her face suddenly became radiant with a smile.

I continued our conversation. "Why, even last year I had to work," I said, "in my husband's office."

"And did you like it there?" she asked.

"Not very much," I replied, "but I was paid for it. I insisted upon being paid like anybody else."

"Ah, that's good," she said. "And did you tremble when your husband come near you?"

I laughed. "No, I certainly didn't tremble."

She saw no humour in this. Her expression was very serious. "Oh, I tremble when I work for my father one time. At home we get on fine but when I work for him I tremble every time he come near. So I give it up. You can't work for your own family, I think."

During our talk the girl had, of course, been working her way around my bed and towards the door. She was still talking when she moved through the doorway and down the hall to the next ward. Our conversation didn't seem to add any dimension to her character, except that she had smiled and her glee had been like that of a crafty child. I opened my book and began to read.

I remember her again shortly before noon of my last day in hospital. By this time she had become a familiar figure and so had receded into the background of my interests. She was working efficiently but I interrupted her when she came near my bed and said in a tone of passing the time of day, "It will be good to get out of here."

She stopped and glared at me. "I'll say it will!"

I turned her remark into a poor joke. "Do you mean you will be pleased when I leave? I haven't caused you any trouble, have I?"

"Not you. I don't mean you. I mean *it will be the day* when I get out of here!" and she went back to her work with the same seething spirit that had been so eloquent when I first noticed her.

I didn't say any more while she grimly mopped under and around the bed. I didn't even look at her again until I heard from the corner near the head of my bed a sudden intake of breath. "Ah, Venice! Venice!" she exclaimed.

She leaned her mop against the wall, glanced towards the door to see if anyone was coming, then picked up the heavy book and brought it to the bed. When she was near me, slowly and thoughtfully turning the pages, I fully realized for the first time her youth, her sensuality, her vulnerability. I noticed that her fingernails were carefully manicured and coated with silver lacquer.

She came to the picture of 'The Nicopeian Madonna'. "These jewels, they are very valuable," she said, and she looked up at me to see if I doubted it.

"Do you come from Venice?" I asked.

"No, but we go there for a trip. It is nice. Rome is nice, too. You know, the Vatican; it is very nice Ah, here is Jesus! and Saint Mark! Is this your book?"

"No, it belongs to a friend. It is written by an American."

"An American! What would he know about Venice?"

The question was rhetorical so I said, "It was a woman who wrote it."

She went on, indifferent to the American woman author. "Bellini, he is a good painter. They do not have good painters today, like then. Bellini, he is very good."

"What about Picasso?" I asked.

Obviously she hadn't heard about Picasso. "If the head nurse come in here and see me looking at this book, she will bawl me out. But I don't care. I am used to that. It's too bad this isn't your own book, eh?"

She had been taking her time and had examined at least half of the prints very thoroughly when, as if suddenly she did care about being caught by the head nurse, she quickly put the book aside and picked up her mop. Just before she reached the door I asked, "How's the boy?"

Her face clouded. "Oh, just the same. No good."

* * * *

"I wish I could be godmother to your boy, Bob, but I'm too old. When you reach my age you become so hopelessly conscious of the element of time."

Madame Des Salles paused and looked out the window at the greying city hills. "I'm irrational enough to want to live to see the next generation of artists. I've devoted a lifetime to them and I don't see why I should be willing to accept an end."

"I know what you mean," Bob said. "I felt very old this morning when I saw my son and realized that now he was going to take over, and that, in a sense, I was finished. That's what I thought when I saw him. I wasn't living for my work now, not primarily, I was living for him."

Madame Des Salles glanced at the young face. "I think you need a drink, Bob," she replied.

She had taken Bob to the kitchen to tell her about his new baby because she expected the out-of-town visitors to come at any moment and she liked to keep the gallery as free as possible of personal relationships. The kitchen was cheerful in the October light, another, more private gallery, with some of her best paintings covering its walls. She preferred to entertain her friends, the young artists, here, where she could make a cup of coffee or pour them a drink.

She went to the cupboard where she kept a bottle of whiskey for such occasions as this and brought the remaining small portion to the table. Bob had sat down and was fingering his latest piece of sculpture which, despite the excitement of the birth of his son, he had remembered to bring to show her.

"You've been like a fairy godmother to me," he said warmly, as she passed him the drink. "Who else in this town would take a chance on an unknown like me?"

"I didn't take a chance," Madame Des Salles said sharply, "I'm sure about you."

This pleased him. He sipped his drink and grinned.

Madame Des Salles wondered if he looked so happy wholly because of her remark or if he was thinking about the baby again. She sat down at the table opposite him and for lack of anything else to do with her restless fingers flicked one by one the few scattered crumbs left from her lunch. For some unaccountable reason she was suddenly reminded of Pablo, when she hadn't thought of him for years. Was it because of the crumbs that this ominous little creature was recalled — because he hadn't liked crumbs? She used to have to cut raw meat into tiny pieces for him to eat and he enjoyed flies which she would catch and feed him. She thought of telling Bob about Pablo and then realized how incongruous it would be to disturb his dreams of his child with her reminiscences of a pet insect. Her friends expected occasional eccentricities from her but little did they know her struggles to maintain as well as she did a sense of form in her relationships. Hazarding a glance now at her Paul Klee, hanging behind Bob's head, she was sure it winked at her. Squinting her eyes she looked more closely. No, it was the same Klee.

"How's Jerry's show going?" Bob asked, nodding his head towards the outer gallery.

Madame Des Salles clenched her hands to force herself to stop flicking the negligible crumbs. "Not too well," she said. "The work is too experimental to sell. But it's good. That's the trouble, it's too good."

Bob smiled. "You wouldn't have it the other way?"

"Of course I wouldn't," she retorted, "but this way I'll die in the poor house! I haven't recovered yet from having to sell my Kandinsky."

"And I haven't recovered from missing it," Bob said. "Still I do think we're becoming a bit more sophisticated in this town."

"Nonsense!" Madame Des Salles snapped. "Not as far as appreciating new work is concerned. Sophistication isn't the answer; that just means that a few people are beginning to buy work that has been established, that has been accepted or shown in New York. Not that this sort of thing doesn't help a great deal but it's so easy to be a connoisseur when the standards have already been established."

"You aren't bitter, Madame Des Salles?"

"No, Bob, I'm not bitter. If I were I wouldn't keep on. But one has to be realistic and sometimes it's discouraging. For instance, a couple phoned an hour or so ago. They'd heard about Jerry's show here and wanted to see it this afternoon. There's a possibility that they may be interested in the paintings but there isn't a chance in a thousand that they'll buy one. How-

ever, I like people. I enjoy their reactions.”

“You have sold two or three, though?”

“Yes, two. The gallery bought one. They usually do when I stand behind a painter, and . . .” Madame Des Salles smiled sardonically, “I bought one myself!”

“You did!” Bob exclaimed, “after selling the Kandinsky!”

“Of course. Jerry has a great deal of talent and, after all, Kandinsky is established.”

“You’re even more marvellous than I realized.” Bob had finished his drink and was rising to leave.

“Well, I bought one of your pieces, didn’t I?” she queried sharply.

“Yes, you did. That’s what I mean, that I’ve realized you do it for others, too.”

“Only if they’re fine artists. I’m not the Community Chest!” She stopped him with her hand. “Don’t go, Bob. Wait for a few moments and meet these people. We’ll see if I’m right.”

Bob sank back in his chair, abashed by the slight tone of command in Madame Des Salles’ voice. “I should go,” he said, “Kit is expecting me at the hospital this afternoon.”

“They should be here any moment now.” Madame Des Salles’ finger flew to her throat where she deftly adjusted the magenta silk scarf. For the first time Bob noticed with a shock of pleasure how sculptured and youthful her hands were. How unusual in an elderly woman! He must do them sometime.

They heard the car as it came into the driveway, then the knock, and Bob stayed in the kitchen while Madame Des Salles went to the outer gallery to meet the strangers.

She greeted them with a languid flutter of her jewelled hand. The man and his wife noticed how coloured ribbons seemed to stream from her tapered fingertips. “Won’t you come in?” she asked, and they moved across the threshold softly, like kittens.

She had often noticed how her gallery had this effect upon new visitors. The thick grey carpeting and the muted walls, contrasted with the vibrant paintings and the vast valley of the city from the picture windows, created in them a feeling of awe which gentled the encounter.

As the couple moved into the centre of the room, looking not at her or at each other, but out through the window at the serrated hills, they seemed to Madame Des Salles oddly forlorn, despite their fine clothes. It was not until they turned to her with murmured praise of the view that she motioned them to sit down.

They sat stiffly on the edge of her comfortable chairs. Madame Des Salles realized she hadn’t said anything to put them at their ease. Perhaps that would come later, through a natural and truer way; she was too old to make all the effort.

“Are you painters?” she asked casually, because if they were it was very

unlikely that they would buy anything. Painters expected to exchange pictures with each other, or in some way acquire them as a gift.

The young woman was staring at Madame Des Salles' purple dress with the magenta scarf. The hues merged and swam before her eyes in a violent light. At the question she tore her eyes from the vision and turned to her husband. The man clasped his thin hands, which could be those of an artist, and said no, they weren't painters, but they had friends who were, and that they were interested in painting.

"It seems that everyone paints these days," Madame Des Salles said. "They take painting-for-pleasure classes and they think they have discovered its mysteries. But they haven't!" and she tossed her head in disdain. "There are no more good painters today than there ever were."

"Do you paint yourself?" the woman asked.

"I wouldn't dare!" Madame Des Salles retorted, then turned her head abruptly and called into the next room, "Bob, come on in!"

As Bob entered, huge and gauche, holding his piece of sculpture in his great hands, Madame Des Salles thought, 'He looks like a stevedore, that great red face of his and those awkward limbs,' and suddenly her pride in him was so profound that it was only with extraordinary effort she kept it from showing in her expression. She turned to her visitors. "Bob's a sculptor," she told them. "For the past two years he has been studying with Henry Moore."

The faces of the two lighted at the mention of Moore. The man rose to shake hands with Bob and then realized, when his hand was extended, that they couldn't because of the piece of sculpture. "Put it down, Bob! Put it down," Madame Des Salles said, "it's not going to run away."

Bob blushed, placed the figure on a table, and shook hands. "Well, I guess I should be going," he said, and picked it up again.

Madame Des Salles walked with him to the door. "Give my love to Kit," she said as he left.

She came back to the couple and passed cigarettes.

"A woman at the art gallery told us about your current show," the man said, vaguely waving his arm to include all of Jerry's paintings.

"She told us you seldom make a mistake," the woman said.

"I never make a mistake," Madame Des Salles replied, "but sometimes the public does." Then she laughed wryly. "Oh, of course, we all make mistakes, but I've never been able to admit mine. I still believe they're good paintings, even if they were a poor investment."

"Perhaps we should have a look at these," the man suggested.

"Yes, please do," Madame Des Salles replied. She didn't rise when they did but sat quietly, smoking her cigarette, watching them as they softly moved from one painting to the next, occasionally exchanging remarks in undertones, standing back for perspective, most of the time not saying anything, but looking. Yes, they were really looking. She decided she liked these

people, liked their gentle manner and their unobtrusive appreciation. It didn't seem important now whether or not they bought a painting. And their absorption loosened their reserve so that when they came back to her they were easier in manner. They told her in what way they found the work interesting. Their enthusiasm was a credit to Jerry and to themselves.

"What a splendid way this is to live!" the young woman exclaimed.

"Yes, it is," Madame Des Salles replied, "but it took me a long time to realize what I wanted. I spent the first half of my life squinting in the light of a West Indian summer, believing that nothing could surpass the beauties of nature."

The two smiled compassionately. "And that was somehow changed?" the man asked.

"Yes, completely changed. I saw an exhibition of paintings by Picasso."

"It happened suddenly, without any other influence?" he questioned.

"Perhaps there were other things but I can't remember them. I can only remember the exhibition. It wasn't until several years later that I discovered he was the greatest living painter. I wanted to meet him."

"And did you?" The young woman's voice was encouragingly eager.

"Yes, I know Picasso."

Madame Des Salles paused, the glance of her black eyes darting from one to the other in awareness of their interest. "If you will come to the kitchen I'll show you my Klee and Mondrian and there's a Matisse in the bathroom. I had a Kandinsky but sold it to the Metropolitan to keep this gallery going."

They followed her into the other rooms. The young woman seemed to be extraordinarily impressed with the Matisse. Of course this was a particularly good one, Madame Des Salles reflected, although she had bought it for a song thirty-five years ago.

"Wouldn't the steam hurt the painting?" they asked.

"I always take a tepid bath," she replied and they nodded their heads solemnly, as if it were a logical practice under the circumstances. She didn't tell them her doctor had warned her about hot baths, or any sort of shock for that matter.

When she thought of death it was more in dismay than fear. Because she knew the immortality of men like Picasso she couldn't believe in her own mortality. She felt in herself an extension of these people. No, she wasn't afraid, though sometimes lonely. Bob had left early today and soon this couple would be gone. For the rest of the afternoon and perhaps the evening, and certainly the night, she would be alone.

When they were reseated in the main room she said, "Once I had a praying mantis for a companion. He was a great pal. I called him Pablo." She was serving the couple coffee and they stared into their steaming cups, bewildered by her remark. "Yes," she went on, graciously passing cream and sugar which she never used herself, "he came in a basket of bananas. Such

a solemn fellow he was. He would sit motionless for the longest time, only his funny eyes turning as I moved about the room. Other times he would be most pugnacious, fencing an imaginary enemy with his swordlike limbs. I used to catch flies and grasshoppers and caterpillars for him and he would devour them with the most terrible ferocity."

"Was he harmless?" the young woman asked.

"Oh yes, quite. I became very fond of him. I would waken in the morning and find him perched on my forehead, staring into my eyes. There are many legends and superstitions about the praying mantis, you know. The Greeks believed he had supernatural powers. The Turks and Arabs claimed that he always prayed with his face towards Mecca. Pablo was a beautiful creature, coloured like an exotic jungle blossom."

"I suppose he didn't live long — in this climate, I mean," the man remarked.

"I don't know what happened to him. After about two weeks with me he suddenly disappeared. I looked everywhere but I couldn't find him."

"What a strange experience!" The young woman was placing her cup on the table and rising to leave. The man was rising, too. He was holding out his hand to bid her goodbye and so was his wife. Madame Des Salles realized too late that they hadn't told her anything about themselves and that she had revealed too much of herself to them. At the door, in a last frantic effort to revive conversation she asked, "Do you believe in reincarnation? Some of my friends do and I've often wondered about it."

The young woman said, "You had your praying mantis, isn't that enough?" and gravely turned to join her husband, who was already half way along the path.

* * * *

The field that bordered the beach was nettled with coarse sand-grass. Scattered half around it were the summer cottages, unpainted and weather-crippled, brightened only by a display of colored bathing suits. As I walked across the field to the far gate the sun blazed on my hair and the burnt grass rasped my sandals. Not even a breeze from the sea cooled this open space, for the shore edge was hedged high with arbutus trees which the permanent residents (of which there were only two) said were a great bulwark against the storms of winter.

Just as I reached the gate and was about to unhook the chain fastening it, across the field running, his legs pumping a rhythm to his shouts, came my little boy. "Mummy, Mummy, where are you going?"

I dropped my arm and turned from the gate to wait. His eagerness was more than I would trade for an hour by myself in the woods. With a final spring of running he threw himself upon me and clasped my hand. "Mummy, where are you going?"

"Come with me," I said, "I'm going to the blackberry patch. To pick a pailful of blackberries for supper." I showed him the large pail which I was carrying.

"Where's Daddy? Is he coming, too?"

"No. He's at the beach."

He was puzzled, undecided. What should he do when one parent was bathing and the other blackberrying? I watched the flickers of indecision in his small face, the half-light of disappointment. "Well, what are you going to do?" I asked lightly.

"I guess I'll go with Daddy to the beach," he said and then, thinking that I might be unhappy by his choice, he kissed my dress at the hip which was as far as his mouth reached.

I unhooked the gate and stepped from the blaze of the field to the cool, almost damp-cool, woodland path. What relief and contrast there was between the hot arid field and the tree-shadowed path! It seemed unbelievable that two worlds should be so close together.

It was a half-mile along this path to the berry patch, a half-mile so often walked that the journey along it had become a part of something unforgettable, not only for me but for the other vacationers, too, I think, because there was never any argument about who should go for the milk every day, or for the mail twice a week, or whether or not we should have our swim at the second beach, or our boat ride from the government wharf. Most of our pleasures seemed to be along, or at the other end of this path.

The trail, bounded at first only by dense woods of fir and cedar, soon dropped to the sea's edge where it was at its loveliest. At one side, making arches of light, grew the flaming arbutus and through them one could see the water glistening, yachts and sailing vessels slipping across the bay. Shafts of sunlight made columns of gold across the pathway. Gently, lavishly, spirea showered its petals on sun-patch and shadow alike.

About half the distance to the berry patch was a tiny cemetery. Seven souls were buried there in a plot no bigger than a room. At least half the number of times that we drew near the place we would go in, pulling the clumsy wooden prop from the gate and dragging it open over the sod. There were two graves without names but the other five we knew well: George Alexander Beekin 1884-1946, 'Beloved husband of Martha Mary', Martha Mary Beekin, his wife, 1890-1947, 'Her memory will be green', John Forsythe 1900-1926, 'Loyal in faith and goodness', Major Samuel James Snider 1892-1930, 'From wounds sustained while fighting for God and his country in France', and Cherry Ann Townsend 1942-1947, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me'.

It was the last, Cherry Ann Townsend, which held the fascination and the weird charm of death. The others were dead, so irrevocably dead, their graves untended, overgrown with the wild weeds of the forest. Cherry Ann was still a child; over her grew a dozen cultivated pansy plants. Surely she could not bear it — the crushing earth, the darkness!

As I neared the cemetery I half expected to see her little ghost flitting between the trees, high above the ground. So I leaned over the gate and looked for her. Yes, sure enough, there she was bright and swift, swifter than flashes of sunshine. She was like a song that could be seen — no sound, but laughter in her eyes and the suggestion of music in the rhythm of her flight.

It was natural that a child should be out in the air on such a day. Absorbed in her play she did not beckon to me or even seem to know that I was there, so I turned away from the gate and walked farther along, to the berry patch.

The bushes were loaded with berries, hidden amongst bracken, dry tree stumps and the tangled, vivid vetch flowers. I scrambled into the middle of it, feeling the sharp scratch of the brambles on my legs, the greater warmth of the sun in the clearing. I trod carefully; the ripe fruit was crushing under my feet. The richest growth was at the centre of the patch so I made my way there and bent over and began to pick. Thorns tore and juice stained but the berries were dead ripe and luscious to eat. I filled my mouth before filling my pail. I bent down, down, so often that the pins fell from my hair and it tumbled, long and warm and heavy with the salt-kelp scent of sea-bathing. I listened to the calling and the quarreling of crows, the chattering of a thousand other birds and the buzzing of wasps close by my fingers. It must have been an hour that I felt the warmth, listened to the sounds, and filled the pail with blackberries. During that hour I loved blackberry picking better than anything else in life.

The pail was full. There was the sound of running feet. I looked up. Weaving, rushing, stumbling through the bracken and brambles came my son, calling louder than the crows, sweeter than the other birds, "Mummy, Mummy, I'm coming to help you pick the blackberries!" When he saw the full pail he reached both hands into it again and again until his mouth was stained dark with the purple juice.

"And now no more," I said. "The rest are for supper."

"I don't think I want any blackberries for dessert," he said and clutched at my dress with his sticky fingers as we pushed back through the underbrush to the path.

He was quieter than usual as we walked back towards our cottage. Occasionally he darted off the path into the woods for another blackberry, or a huckleberry, or asked if the blue fuzzy ones that grew close to the ground on the shiny-leafed plants were good to eat or poisonous. As we drew near the cemetery he whispered excitedly, "Shall we go inside again? I don't like to walk right on top of the graves, do you? Was the little girl

younger than me or older? She must have been younger, because I'm nearly six. You know, Mummy, even if you don't believe in God, I do."

What could I say? I felt for his warm hand.

We did not go in. We walked past. He was still talking. He told me that he had been in the water with his Daddy, on top of a log and on top of his Daddy. He had been in the boat, too. All these things he had been doing while I was away. Suddenly he stopped, poised on tiptoes. "Look!" he shouted, "Be quiet, Mummy. Look up there in that tree!"

As I stopped walking my feet rustled a few leaves, a twig snapped.

"Now see what you've done! There was a beautiful nuthatch up there in that tree and you've frightened him away."

"Why, you're the one making all the noise," I said. "You're shouting."

MY HEAD A HIVE

Lionel Kearns

my head a hive
for buzzing memories
I smear my dripping combs
of sticky sweet imagination
on your face and limbs
obtaining once again
my soul's obsession
at least until the rain

JUST BEYOND

Jolted
by an imagined glimpse
of long black hair
or a tingling
on my neck like breath.

You
lurking always
in the murky nowhere
just beyond
my ragged rim of light.

Lionel Kearns

CAFÉ, MEXICO CITY

A long spoon
leans in my glass of thick black coffee.
Legs
 shuffling down the narrow street
throw shadows on the dusty window pane.
Behind the curtain
 clacking mahjongs
and a fugue played on old Chinese throats.

The grey-haired *patrón* at the counter
squints through his wrinkles
at the weary stairs
three empty tables
and his one *cliente*.

Charlie
 what are you thinking about —
the price of *frijoles*
or the mists that drift in
 off the Yangtze?

Lionel Kearns

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED

have you ever noticed
how a dead man's personal articles
take on a certain contentious air
as if they're offended for being left
and are making things difficult just out of spite?

what to do with them?

I don't mean money
but sad little bits of uselessness
like a piece of shabby lace
a worn old photo of God knows who
with something scribbled on the back
or this unfinished manuscript
an inch in dust and dedicated to
his son? imagine that
and him with no family at all

Lionel Kearns

AT THE BOOMING-GROUND

The west wind swings to the south-east,
brightness becomes rain; flatness and furrows
fade in the waters of the Strait.

Honey and petals turn to salt and weed;
things that were full of growth are now in chill,
tense in the early parts of a new becoming:

Things that have moved or flown: rocks and flies,
are now caught rigid; flying turns retreat;
Things that have thirsted: roots and honey bees,
disown all liquids, patterning in soil
on solidness.

Earth's mad heap itself
is ready now with round receptive wounds
to re-possess, re-furbish out a nest
for all who need: And need is all in fall.

Earle Dawe

THE INTERRUPTION

Wilfred Watson

I saw a funeral creep down to the grave;
A file of corpses, one was in a coffin;
All of us sad, but only one was brave —
The one of us who wore a wooden skin,

He seemed not to know death. The rest of us
Put by our knowledge singing psalm and hymn;
Forgot our homage to the mortal Zeus,
And praised obsequious the living Lamb

O vanquished death, we asked, where is thy sting?
But soon put on our knowledge once again;
And made our faces presentable for the feast,
The dead cold mutton and the funeral ham

We corpses filed up to the world again;
Death blew his bagpipes and we followed him;
Our bladders full of tears of grief's salt rain;
Our bowels full of wind, anxious and grim

Like to a nurse-maid who has given suck
And tucks her breasts back into her blouse,
We hide our pathos and our charity;
And set the safety catch upon our claws

The mortal bailiff who is our destroyer
Nods to each corpse of us, as we file past;
We nod to him, benevolent employer
And take our places at the waiting post

MUKILTEO BEACH

Here, in a strong wind
on a narrow strand
where the pulling August clouds uproot
the last of summer, I, encompassed by
felicities, remember you, an inland
man. Here, where the bay

imitates the sea
in its spin and ply,
on this rocky beach not meant for running on,
I reach out for the hand I have not held
since I was six, and lean against your knee,
old man, now you are dead.

I have inherited
more than your blood
your twiggy bones, your eyes made visionary
by cataracts. Those gnarled tailor's knuckles
taught my hand to finger for a word.
You wrapped your cloudy gaze

about my fatuities,
your gentle gaze
that never shut in lazy pleasure at the sun,

that opened ever on the humdrum hour
relieved by little money or love. These seas
of freedom that are my air

you watched from the shore.

Grandfather,

your frigate will could ride all disciplines.

Write me that clause, bequeath me your fortune: leave
me the strength that made you rise at four
until your ninetieth year, to move

pen across paper. Prove
me relative,

heir to kingdoms of patience. And all your books
so passionately constructed, that no one wanted,
will reassemble themselves on your grave,
not dusty things nor dead,

but like this grey driftwood
that warms my blood,
these grainy shells that shock my fingertips
and move my mind to metaphor, the salty
wind that I can taste, the gritty sand,
the cold, bright, living sea.

Beth Bentley

AUGUST NOT OVER

Claire Sanford

THE SILENCE hung around them like a shroud and they lay back to back. She pulled her foot in under the sheet. The nights so cold already, the bed like ice. And clear to the edge sliding silently away, David. Damn him. How dare he — without one sound? “David.” “David, tomorrow I am going out to the Nursery,” she called to the other side. “I will buy a huge load of chicken — chicken shit — and spread it ALL over the garden. Wait until you get the bill. Then will you so — casually — toss it out?” He lay still as a corpse. Throwing out a year’s labor just like that. Without a word. As if — as if — she shivered. “That damned husband of mine!” she’d said to Fran this afternoon. And earlier that morning.

"That damned father of yours!" Eve yelled at her daughter. Clang! She threw her garden shears across the kitchen table. In the hall Hilda turned round, stared a full minute and flicked off the vacuum cleaner. "What, Mother?" she said. The roar slid into a sigh and suddenly with Hilda waiting there serene her own voice sounded peevish and loud: an old fishwife. But she *was* cross. "I have never been so — furious — with your father," she insisted. Not that she wanted to frighten Hilda. Hilda had scared so easily as a little girl. She would never forget the day — sixteen . . . seventeen years ago (that far back? farther?) — the day Hildie had climbed up on their bed with wide grey eyes and said, "Mummy are you and Daddy getting a divorcement?" And they quarreled so seldom after all. How *could* you quarrel with a perfect man?

But Hilda wouldn't scare now. That wasn't the danger. The danger was, she might not see how serious this was, that it mattered. Hilda had a way of looking at her sometimes now that made her feel ridiculous. Yesterday when she'd come home near six from Bridge and said, "We had a darn *good* game, but Betty — (you know *Betty*, she said and winked, but Hilda wouldn't wink back at her) Betty only served *one* drink," right away she'd felt silly. She didn't have to account for the number of drinks she took any time of the day, not to her own daughter. Hilda just said, "Is that so?" And then smiling as if it were nothing, told her, "I've had a nice day too. Since you were late I made dinner myself. Would you believe it, Mother? I *like* doing it when I'm here alone . . ." She could smell the onions in the meatloaf and there, when she went out into the kitchen, was (she couldn't believe it) a raisin pie, still steaming. She'd looked at it the longest time, because she hadn't made a raisin pie in, oh — "Hilda," she said slowly, "isn't that nice? David loves a raisin pie." Her daughter had grown up. Why, when she used to come home there would be nothing done yet, everything waiting for her. She'd start dinner and it was pulling teeth just to get Hildie to set the table. She would only follow her around the kitchen, hanging on until she got a kiss. But last night the table was set. Hilda wouldn't even let them stop for a cocktail.

So she should have known Hilda wouldn't flinch when she said she really could kill David. Nevertheless when Hilda laughed, when Hilda had laughed she'd nearly died. She drew her knees up against her stomach, thinking of it. "That father of yours threw away my tub of compost!" she'd cried into the sudden quiet. "That tub of chicken — manure — and leaves and rainwater I've been collecting behind the lilac for a whole year, Hildie. I could kill that man this minute," she said, Hilda wouldn't dare, she wouldn't dare — but her eyes watered at the corners and her lip shook against a smile. She could see her fight it, her hands clench the vacuum cleaner handle, her grey eyes fasten to the floor. But the rug looked back spotless, not a crumb, not a thread to pick up, to concentrate on. And she sputtered out, trying to hide the ghastly ridiculing giggle, "Oh Mother I'm

sorry but it does — really, Mother — it seems so f-funny to get all upset over — over a p-pile of chicken — ma-nure!” Of course Hilda was right. She always was. So it required about all the strength she had to hang onto her fury past her daughter and up to the bedroom. If she could keep it — if she could store it all until tonight, until the moment when she would fling it at him, all at once. She did not think about him laughing. She kicked off her cracked loafers, stepped out of the ancient yellow silk she wore to garden in, and went into the john to run a bath. It was barely eleven now and Florence had said one-ish. But it took longer now to get dressed up than it used to. It was just that much more difficult to get into a girdle than it had been five, two — even a year ago. She looked at herself in the wide mirror over the sink. Her weight had stayed the same, but shifted around so she hardly knew her own body. Now she had to mascara the hair at her temples as well as her eyebrows. And today she would soak in the tub and do her nails. They were in hideous condition from gardening. And dirt in her ring. But partly, she was proud of their condition. She would look at that beautiful garden and think, it’s well worth a few calluses and broken nails. Somehow it pleased her to think that. She had tried rubber gloves but you couldn’t do a thing in them . . . not a thing.

How could he do that, without asking her?

“You look beautiful, Mother,” Hilda said too gently. “I love you in greys now.” She stood awfully slim in the kitchen door (Hilda could be pretty if she would only fuss a little and —) smiling down at Eve blowing on her fingernails. And Eve couldn’t help but remember when that child would climb up on the bed to watch her dress, to exclaim “Oh Mummy you’re beautiful in black velvet!” (Or lemon chiffon, raspberry wool.) How she would bend down to let her smell the gardenias . . . “Careful darling, you’ll crush Daddy’s flowers.” “Let me go with you, PLEASE?” “No Hildie. These are grown-up parties,” David would say, holding out her cape. He would hold the cape ready for her, looking at her with his incredulous grey eyes, looking himself like the Duke of Windsor and totally unaware.

“When I grow up I *will* go *with* you, everywhere!”

Under Hilda’s generous smile she pushed down one by one the fingers of her white kid glove. Struggling over the diamond she said, “Please put in the lamb at five, Hildie — and — when you’re through studying you might set the table. Dear.” She sank her white kid finger into a wave at her forehead, glanced up at Hilda’s flaming face and almost lost the nerve to say, “Florence serves cocktails at five so I’ll be a bit late . . .” She pronounced her tees with especial care but couldn’t quite smile back at Hilda (at that strange young woman) smiling gently again and saying with just a shade

of sarcasm, "Yes, Mother." She slammed the screen door behind her. To remind Hilda that after all she was cross. Furious, enraged — with David. And she had got mascara on her glove.

They were having highballs in the living room already. She didn't go in. She had seen them through the lighted living room window—David's handsome white head turned toward Hilda, his eyebrows drawn in, listening. Hilda curled up on the couch in the corner nearest his big chair, talking intently she could tell by the back of her head turning slowly left and right. What they were saying she didn't know because Hilda had stopped when the front door opened and called, "Hi there, late one." Pulling off her gloves in the bedroom upstairs she could just hear snatches. She pulled out the pin of her mustard felt hat, ran her finger along the satin band and set it down on her dressing table. Unthinking she dabbed more chanel behind her ears. Christmas four good months away and she was almost out. It sounded like politics. Why did Hilda bother him with politics? He hadn't come home from a day of teaching engineers how to — to — mechanical draw — to argue about Communists and Jews and the Republican Party. That's what they always seemed to talk about. David had said in bed last week he was almost afraid Hildie would turn democrat, or communist.

Well — let her if she felt that way, only — only — it was hard enough on him teaching summer school. And sometimes she wondered — they were so lucky to have her home awhile — but sometimes she wondered if Hilda would ever really *write* that thesis, and teach history, somewhere.

But she would. Hilda worked hard. She was made like her father.

And after all was it so much better hearing about the second rubber and how Fran and she had made a slam?

She turned off the bedroom lights and walked to the window. Dark so early and August not over. Squares of light gleamed onto the flagstones from the dining room below. Her single wrought-iron loveseat loomed chalkily against the black hedge, one slender curving leg caught by the light. Under Hilda's window, in the green tub David had built her, bright red blooms flamed out, threw changing shadows on the stones. Her geraniums had never looked better. She would have to open the doors during dinner, she decided on the way downstairs.

The plates were hot on the stove and the table was set. Dinner was ready, Hilda called. "Let's eat!" She mixed herself a short bourbon anyway. And pushing with her thumb a wave at the back of her neck, she walked into the living room — walked into the living room and they said Well how was *your* day and she said, Oh, *Fran* and I . . . and they had dinner. ("VERY tasty, hon." "Hilda did it tonight." "I know, I meant —" "OH!") She first and then all of them laughed. "Hilda, honey, I don't have to do a thing these days . . ." She seldom drank after dinner but tonight the

Darlings dropped in and you had to offer them a drink. They stayed and stayed and stayed. Hilda looked bored very early and went to bed. Once when Hal started to get up she cried, "Amy, you haven't seen my garden . ." and David went out to pour more drinks. "Eve —" Amy called, "your GERANIUMS!" Out of the green wooden tub the flowers blazed red in the electric light. "I plucked out the dead ones this morning," she said. David came to the door. "It's a real outdoor living room," he said as he'd said a hundred times, always with a touch, just a touch, of awe. "Eve's done a swell job." "Can't we sit out here a while, dear?" said Amy. But they couldn't David pointed out in a whisper, because right there was Hilda's bedroom window, open and dark, with the shades pulled down. Standing on the top step he held the door open for everyone. "Amy," she said going back in, "Amy, do you know what that husband of mine did today?"

On she babbled, faster, faster, her voice rising until David put down his drink and stared across at her. "My —" she looked at the shining mahogany toe of his shoe — "compost!" she said. "That he knew I'd been — cultivating — for over a year. Without SAYING ONE WORD he threw it out because — Amy! — because it didn't SMELL nice!!" She laughed so hard that Amy stood up and said how sorry she was they had to leave, but the kids were coming tomorrow from Rochester, bringing the baby, and they had to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed didn't they Hal, didn't they Hal, until he at last got up and they were alone.

She had emptied all the ashtrays and had three glasses in her hand heading toward the kitchen when David said, "If you wanted to start something why in hell did you have to do it in front of them?" Turning around, she looked at him. Why, he was furious. She could have cried from relief. If he had looked bored or raised an eyebrow and let it go at that, what would she possibly have done? How could she live?

She looked at him standing with the fourth empty glass in his hand, standing tall and snow white, so distinguished, before the fireplace holding back the glass after all, stooping, putting it deliberately back onto the table for her to get later. As if he were rolling up his sleeves. Before he could straighten up again —

"That was the best CHICKENSHIT I've ever had," she hurled. He flinched. It was a disgusting word.

Her feet were freezing cold. "Well," she told Fran when she made a crack about the double bed, "my feet get cold." But it was really stupid, now, to put off buying twins. Especially since her back — he'd done his civic duty throwing out the foul stuff he'd said. "It permeates the whole damn neighborhood." It permeated Hilda's room and Hilda couldn't read, couldn't breathe the afternoon last week when she had spread it around.

Well couldn't Hilda go swimming one afternoon and be gay like other young girls? Beautiful and gay.

The moon was coming up slowly. She couldn't see it yet but a little light crept in across the mound of her feet and on the other side, across his, she saw, turning her head. The garden would be so lovely. It would — would it glow, a warm gold under the August moon, her geraniums on fire? She thought of him stamping into the bedroom muttering Oh for god's sake, for god's sake, and his incredulous grey eyes turned on and then away from her. Turned out. He lay there like a statue now and she wondered if his eyes were closed, or wide open. If he could sleep . . . she didn't dare touch him. He might think — and be disgusted with her, at her age — and — be right. He *was* always right.

But not here. Not now. She sat up and glared at the mound on his side. "HOW," she said out loud, "How can I make you an outdoor living room without — compost?" For after all it didn't matter that it was only a little manure and that he was perhaps right, and Hilda. "You are so unreasonable," they would say. She sat straight up glaring at his feet. In this, damnit, she had to be the one. The one to forgive. "My feet are frozen," she said. "But I forgive you." And if he wouldn't let her — if he wouldn't let her be — well then well then well —

But she — when his stupid, stiff apology forced its way out, into the freezing air — absolutely melted, collapsed in laughter across the bed. "That," she cried, finding his feet, "that is a classic apology . . . 'I didn't — didn't—'" she would break in two, dying, as the salty water trickled down her cheeks, sliding over the cold cream and into her mouth — " 'didn't know the — chickenshit — meant so much to you — HON!' " She could just make out his pale grey eyes in the warm orange light and suddenly she thought of Hilda, of the red moon outside, and in a little hot flood she *did* feel sorry about her, so sorry for Hilda asleep in her dark room, with the shades pulled down.

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OUR CONTRIBUTORS

The Editors of *Prism* are pleased to present as a feature of this second issue, four student writers and two student artists.

ERNEST LANGFORD

- . . . came to Canada from England via the United States in 1950
- . . . devotes himself almost exclusively to writing plays
- . . . has had several television plays produced by C.B.C.
- . . . "Main occupation in life; looking at people"
- . . . resides at White Rock, B.C.

GEORGE BOWERING

- . . . born in Penticton, B.C.
- . . . spent three years as a photographer in the R.C.A.F.
- . . . said, "To heck with thinking about it; I'll write," after reading *The Old Man and the Sea*
- . . . is at present majoring in English at U.B.C. "Soliloquy on the Rocks" which previously appeared in U.B.C.'s student magazine, *Raven*, in 1958, is his first professional publication

EARLE BIRNEY

- . . . one of Canada's foremost poets, has recently returned to his teaching post at U.B.C. after a year in England
- . . . both this poem and "Bangkok Boy" which appeared in Issue One will be included in the forthcoming *Selected Poems* (McClelland & Stewart)

ALICE McCONNELL

- . . . Alberta-born; now living in Vancouver with husband and son
- . . . assists her husband in the administration of Klanak Press
- . . . has been writing since the Second World War years
- . . . publication: in *Queen's Quarterly*, *Klanak Islands*; on several occasions her work has been read on C.B.C.'s Anthology.

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MIKE CONWAY

- . . . has deserted the business world to devote himself to writing poetry
- . . . enjoys a considerable reputation for his work in ceramics
- . . . supports himself by teaching and resides in San Francisco

LIONEL KEARNS

- . . . is a heavy-equipment operator from Nelson, B.C.
- . . . at present is a Third Year Arts student at U.B.C.
- . . . the five poems in this issue are his first published work

WILFRED WATSON

- . . . well-known author of *Friday's Child* teaches English at the University of Alberta
- . . . gave readers of *Prism's* first issue "Laurentian Man," which one reader suggested was "by a gent who has laughed in the face of pedantry and survived EDUCATION."

TIIT KODAR

- . . . comes from Estonia. Fleeing the Russian advance, he roamed about in Central Europe, rested in England, and eventually settled in Canada
- . . . chief interests are "a lust for knowledge, and a search for loveliness"
- . . . is an English major at the University of Alberta

EARLE DAWE

- . . . ex-machinist; graduate in Arts and Law from U.B.C.
- . . . "disliked everything about U.B.C. except Dr. Sedgewick"
- . . . is now disentangling real estate legalities in Vancouver
- . . . has appeared previously in the *B.C. Centennial Anthology*

BETH BENTLEY

- . . . associated with the lively group of poets in Seattle producing *Poetry Northwest* and regular poetry readings
- . . . has appeared in several magazines, including *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*

CLAIRE SANFORD

- . . . was born in Seattle; graduated from Cornell University
- . . . is now engaged in graduate work in English at U.B.C.
- . . . "August Not Over" appeared in 1958 in U.B.C.'s student literary magazine, *Raven*, and is her first professional publication

ANNE LONG

- . . . is a second year Education student at U.B.C.
- . . . has studied art under Herbert Siebner in Victoria and at the Vancouver Art School
- . . . has exhibited with the Siebner Studio Group

IMKE STOERMER

- . . . born in Germany; educated there, in Denmark and in Canada where she arrived in 1951
- . . . attended Vancouver Art School
- . . . now studying at U.B.C.

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MAIL (continued from page 3)

I am so happy to tell you at once how many things I like about this first number of your quarterly.

The previous reiteration of "no concessions to Mrs. Grundy" dismayed me because surely we take that for granted, especially as the lady has been dead for some years (taste and vigorous opinion are fortunately not dead). I cheered up a lot when I saw the good cover, also that you do not propose to go in for a regular Editorial Pronouncement which is a superfluous voice in a publication of this kind, I think; and particularly when I read the two excellent stories by Henry Kreisel and Margaret Laurence. I seldom enjoy short stories — neither my own nor anyone else's — and do not read them for choice, but liked these two immensely. Mr. Kreisel has a light-hearted and light-handed easy presentation of the ludicrous which is needed in our rather earnest and pedestrian output. It delights me. "The Merchant of Heaven" is a good story told well and developed in depth with natural unobtrusive skill. Both of these 'first person' stories show this unobtrusive skill and are deceptively simple. There are no literary attitudes. In my opinion, they will rank high among Canadian short stories. They have the essential merit of being interesting in addition to being well written.

This morning's radio referred to one of our public men who spoke seriously of "a milestone in the crucible of Canadian history." A nice phrase, and some crucible! I think these two stories are "a milestone in the crucible" of Canadian short stories — and a relief from "love". . . . I see that the authors are deprived of the customary capital letters, beheaded so to speak. That seems a rather self-conscious trick which I thought was obsolete. It gives the page a dated appearance. . . . With compliments and interest, hopes and very best wishes . . .

Ethel Wilson, Vancouver

I think your first issue of *Prism* is superb! Congratulations. You will be hard put to it to maintain that standard — but here's wishing you well.

Walter Herbert, Director, Canada Foundation, Ottawa

(The editors invite all writers to respond to the challenge in Mr. Herbert's letter.)

"The Travelling Nude" has called forth a greater response than any other piece of fiction I've published. I've had twelve letters about her, ranging from people like Earle Birney (by the way "Bangkok Boy" is very fine) to what I judge to be an elderly lady who wrote a puzzled letter, and asked pathetically if I thought any government, however liberal, would ever allow people to travel in the nude . . . Of course, the Nude isn't a story everybody likes. But no one is really neutral. And that's the good thing. I think the response is the same to the magazine. And hence I think you've all done a brilliant job.

Henry Kreisel, Edmonton

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and PAPERBACK CELLAR

Looks like it's time I took you out to the woodshed. Good Loks, Man! They didn't even let us out of high school until we had got firm hold of the following fundamentals:

The use of lower case letters for proper names has no aesthetic significance. It is merely some kind of measure of the courage with which university professors defy tradition.

Agglomerations of words, however beautiful, do not become literature until they are endowed with content. Now as to content, we do find

A travelling nude, p.7 *et seq.*

Seven [instances of sexual intercourse] on p. 19

An unspecified number [of the same] on p. 21

A girl's bottom on p. 18

A seduction on p. 39

Copulation on p. 48

A delightful fraud, p. 52 *et seq.*

Take away the sexual intercourse, and what do we have? A delightful fraud.

I must not forget Laurentian Man. Especially Laurentian Man. Because this is Prism: i.e. it is Wilfred Watson talking to Louis Dudek about Irving Layton. Draw a circle around those three names and you have circumscribed *Prism* — its voice and its audience. Only the circle is a noose. The same noose that has strangled every Canadian cultural effort except only New Frontiers and the Calgary Eye Opener.

Why waste your time? One of these days, in pure frustration, you may forget yourself and insert a piece of literature into the magazine. . . . Love and kisses.

Emil Bjarnason, Vancouver

Just a note to tell you how much I've enjoyed your first issue. Naturally, not all the contents are first-rate, but the quality generally gives you a high standard to maintain. I particularly liked Margaret Laurence's story. If she can maintain a style like this in other stories she's going to go far. Like many others I've talked to, I am bothered by the rapid changes in typeface, though the make-up as a whole is excellent. The most important thing I can say is "Thank God there's a magazine at last which publishes writing instead of comment on writing!"

William C. McConnell, Vancouver

I think the issue is all-in-all handsome — cover design, format, print-styles, even the pagination . . . The editorial is wonderful in concept. Keep criticism the hell out . . . I think your danger may lie in sacrificing royalty to democracy; and this, in the arts, is worse than death. In other words, I feel that you must seek out some dozen or so real talents and give them repeat performances enough so that these individuals will have followings. It's only thus, I think, that you'll have 1. quality and 2. a dependable buying public.

Andrew Susac, San Francisco

I responded delightedly to the appeal of the cigarette girl's bottom, and . . . I think "The Merchant of Heaven" the best piece in the book. It looks like an honest effort on the part of a keen and sympathetic observer to set down the age-old problems of man's incomprehension of man. The author has well conveyed the essentially pitiable Brother Lemon, with the medieval spiritual outlook of a Jogues or Lalemant, rendered still more incapable of understanding by the dehumanizing insulating effect of modern wealth and all-enveloping comfort and convenience, so serenely oblivious of shortcoming, so unfitted for martyrdom. Obviously he should have set up his mission in Los Angeles. Danso is not so well done. I don't know any modern West Africans, but I don't think an Oxford trained Negro would talk so much like Satchmo Armstrong The blind men's pidgin interpretation of the verse from Revelation tickled me.

Frank Roy, Winnipeg

The first issue of *Prism* arrived here a day or two ago and I should like you to know that I read through it with a great deal of pleasure. I thought the Margaret Laurence story a particularly fine piece of work. Finished, sensitive, vivid and full of meaning. Every point is made with a subtlety and naturalness that make the whole a very powerful and moving piece. I enjoyed too the very ingenious *Traveling Nude*, and Wilfred Watson's *Laurentian Man*, as well as all the other verse — perhaps especially Nowlan's *Three Poems*.

Anyway, *Prism* will be something to look forward to from now on and I hope it will keep going in good and lively shape for a long while.

Roderick Haig-Brown, Campbell River, B.C.

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Some Offerings in

PRISM'S

Spring Issue:

Moses' glasses were blurred by rain, so the carved door and the blown moonflowers and the crouched villagers all looked to him as though they existed in some deep pool, and he, peering and straining, could see them only vaguely through the shifting waters. He took off his glasses and put his face close to the blank window. And saw, looking out at him, not two eyes, but one. One gleaming amber eye.

from *Godman's Master*, another African story by Margaret Laurence.

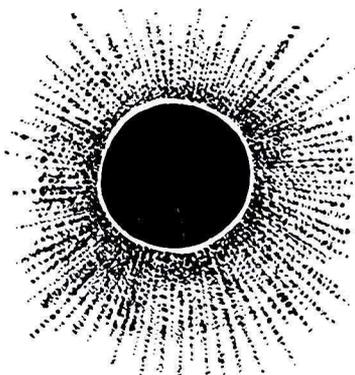
It is only the ebb and flow,
Where vies the vervain
And viburnum,
Violaceous, riverrained
With sapiglossi
Coral corollaed riparian.

from A. C. Annan's tour de force, *Faux Pas de Deux*.

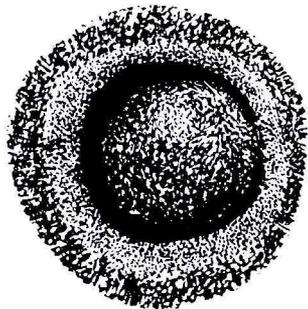
Just as the knife slipped in my pounding heart,
Tearing the echo from each muscled chamber
And patches of rose and ochre closed my eyes,
I heard it.

from *Letter I*, by Melvin Walker La Follette.

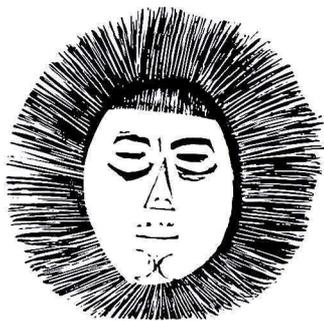
and additional distinctive writing
by Alden A. Nowlan, David Wevill,
Anne Marriott McLellan and others.



the sun



and the moon



and fear of
loneliness

SONGS

OF THE ESKIMO (1)

*There is fear in
Turning the mind away,
Longing for loneliness,
Amid the joyous
People's throng.*

lyaiya — ya — ya.

*There is joy in
Feeling the warmth
Come to the great world
And seeing the sun
Follow its old footprints
In the summer night.*

lyaiya — ya — ya.

*There is fear in
Feeling the cold
Come to the great world
And seeing the moon
—Now new moon, now full moon—
Follow its old footprints
In the winter night.*

lyaiya — ya — ya.

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