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EDITORIAL NOTE

To simplify publication procedures, this issue has combined the Winter 1965 and Spring 1966 numbers. Future issues will appear three times annually, and will be larger than in the past. The new price of individual copies is $1.25; subscription rates are unchanged.

THE CITY OF NANNIES

We begin a series of essays on great cities of the world with this translation by MARIA KUNCEWICZ, from her recent book of travel commentary, published in Poland. Mrs. Kuncewicz, the noted Polish essayist and novelist, presently holds the Chair of Polish Literature at the University of Chicago.

MARIA KUNCEWICZ

REALLY, at times Seville appears to be a city of nannies. At noon the parks and squares are populated with children accompanied by uniformed nurses, and one is struck immediately by the clash of interests between the governesses and their subjects. The babies almost pour out of the perambulators, so keen are they to get to know the world, such passion is aroused in their breasts by a running dog, a hopping sparow, another child's toy, a passerby's shoes, or a gleam of sun on the sidewalk. The nannies have hardly had time to spread out their bottoms and their food baskets on the benches, the feet of the pram passengers have hardly touched the ground, and the elder children have barely looked around them, before the conflict breaks out. The younsters squat down on the dirty ground, they busily collect stones and insects; the older years rush to conquer the steep slopes, the perpendicular poles and posts; they reach out for somebody else's things, but — especially, especially! — somebody else's secrets. In such activities clothing is bound to get dirty and torn, hands and legs are sure to be cut and bruised. Tradition imposes vigilance to ensure that the thoughts also are not sullied or the feelings bruised. The adult's care of the young is considered a task so simple that it is entrusted to anyone who has the time and a more or less sound mind. Hence the endemic drama: the guardians regard themselves as mediators between their charges and the world, setting, of course, their own interests above that of their wards. For their meritorious service will always consist in seeing that the children return home clean and unhurt. On the other hand, it will be counted against them if the child returns dirty, sad, or thoughtful because it has begun to know the world. How can that "square" on the chessboard in the sand be eliminated to which youth may not move, because death is there, or a pain too great for

an infant to bear? The pedagogues recommend organized games and occupations. But creative curiosity cannot be organized. And in the end it is the mediocrities and the cowards who more often than not remain on good terms with the nannies (in this category I include the grandmothers, grand-dads, the police, the politicians, and the majority of teachers). What of the parents? As the days pass they have less and less time for siestas in the parks. In any case, I have known only one mother, and she an Englishwoman, who, in fear and trembling, allowed her six-year-old daughter to stand for several minutes on the footboard of a speeding train.

I spent many lazy hours in the Square of San Fernando. It is bountifully provided with lamp-posts and statuary, and these were a constant temptation to children to climb, which in turn gave the nannies constant justification for smacks. I could not but notice with what self-indulgent relish, between two bouts of gossip, between two veiled glances, they distributed these smacks. The crime was committed in public, and easy to evaluate: it called for punishment. But how much cruelty and childish debauchery went unpunished in the bushes!

The little hypocrites, tenderly led by the hand, returned to their homes in glory; whereas the iconoclasts and explorers were pushed around, and bruised, and dragged sadly home to dinner without dessert. And so, whether it be in Suchedniów or Seville, at the beginning or in the second half of the century, for the nannies the problem of Don Quixote remains unchanged: they are against.

I realized all this as I sat one afternoon in the *Plaza de España,* while the nurses and soldiers carried on their romances against the background of history recorded in colorful ceramics on the walls of a palace.

Truth often thus makes a pattern beyond the consciousness of people who once illustrated it with their conduct. At first sight the confrontation of Don Quixote and the nannies sounds absurd. These two incompatible forces entered my own life quite automatically, before I was at all ready to appraise them. It was simply that in the Polish village of Suchedniów, where I spent a certain vacation away from my parents, the nannies functioned as a powerful clan, imposing on me and similarly situated children orders against which there was no appeal, our parents being as unreachable as God in heaven.

It also happened that a book which I was not old enough to read, but which I persisted in looking at in bed at night because of its pictures, fell victim to the nannies' repressive activities.

And it also happened that the causes of their irritation with children who didn't want to get off to sleep quickly were soldiers garrisoned in the town.

All this I realized only much later; but the moment I recognized the antinomy: Don Quixote and the nannies; and the symbiosis: the nannies and the soldiers, these conjunctions left their mark on my memory with a plus sign against Don Quixote and a minus sign against the nannies and soldiers. I came to dislike the nannies and the soldiers, and fell in love with Don Quixote. As I grew in experience, the concepts: Don Quixote, nannies, soldiers, began to have not only practical connotations but also metaphorical significance. And Spain — in that irrational, yet profoundly justified fashion in which "accidents" form a repeated pattern — became for me the land of Don Quixote, attacked as he was by nannies of every kind, beginning with the Holy Office and ending with the Franco regime: nannies, behind whom, and seduced by them, young, awkward soldiers lurk in darkness.

When I set out for Spain I had in mind a call on Don Quixote, who had visited me in Suchedniów. I went in the hope that in his own country it would be easier for me to understand him. And truly, the moment I crossed the Pyrenees I was absorbed in Don Quixotery. Not only because of the people, their mythological gravity, their fondness for gesture, their passion for dying beautifully and their archaic life, but also because of Nature. The Spanish scenery, whether mountain or seascape, pleasant or harsh, does not appear to provide suitable ground for so-called normal life. It is a back-cloth for superhumans. For Don Quixotes, who thirst to be "sons of their own deeds," never a function of society. Only in the light of the sunsets over Sierra Nevada and in the mythological mists of the river Guadalquivir was Cervantes' text transformed into truth, and only then did the paradoxical conflict which had arisen from the accidental juxtaposition of Don Quixote and the nannies begin to find justification. Here, indeed, the shade of Rosinante fell over everyday matters. Driven out from the Spanish dirt-roads the errant knight was now wandering in the clouds of various and opposing ideologies; foreswearing romanticism he was still tormenting the Spaniards with a yearning for ends bigger than nature. At the same time the powerful clan of nannies, those guardians of the immature "mass," stands up in arms, forbidding Don Quixotic flights and ordering off to bed. The official cult of Cervantes in Spain may be even greater than the religion of Mickiewicz in Poland. But the cult has been deprived of its "passport to life." Like so many

other archetypes of humanism, Don Quixote has been fettered in bronze and marble, imprisoned in monuments, condemned to be a classic. And with him, bewitched but not subdued by the chivalrous chimeras, the simple peasant, the wise Sancho Panza. Symbols have been rendered harmless. But will the element which gave them birth allow itself to be fobbed off with a museum fame? This element produced philanthropists, as well as inquisitors. Don Quixote set the malefactors free because he believed that God alone can mete out justice. The Holy Office, which burnt bodies at the stake in order to save souls from the fires of hell, also worked in the name of God. These two mystiques — the red and the black — did not die together with the symbols. They have survived right up to the present day, and they continue to haunt the guardians of the people, those powerful nannies who have such influence over soldiers.

Thus meditating, I turned out of the *Plaza de España* into the heart of the park, the Sevillian tropics created by Marie Louise, the dissolute Bourbon who so brilliantly rationalized her lust. Here the trees form a jungle; but the palms are not entangled with parasitic plants, only with jasmine and the roses known as Maiden's Veil, because they fall to the grass in white cascades.

REMEMBERING YOU

When you kissed you
kissed like a young man
filled with greeting and gaiety:

When you loved you
loved like an old man
filled with slowness and ceremony:

When you left you
left like a man of no age
filled with fear that ceremony

Had given me something
to keep more lasting than ritual
richer and brighter than darkness.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON

One of Canada's best-known poets, MIRIAM WADDINGTON considers herself "uncontroversial, non-violent, 'unexciting' (what a critical term!), passionate and contemplative; something out of the nineteenth century — or who knows — the twenty-first? . . . The truth about human relationships needs to be told from the way women see it as well as from the way men see or experience it. There is a subtle but pervasive irritation in the literary world with the way women see and know things — it isn't the way men would have them see or know; or maybe it is another way in which we can't stand non-conformity?" Mrs. Waddington lectures in English literature at York University.

Pages 10-24: A MISCELLANY OF VANCOUVER POETS

Four Poems by David Parkin

arrival of the tooth fairy

all set now.
nothing to do
but just lie back
and fall asleep
and await the visit
of the tooth fairy.

how much faith must one have?
does the fairy really
know what i believe?
couldn't i merely be receptive
and then believe
when i get the money?

i have always wondered
about the gender
of the fairy:
a dew-eyed nymph who leaves
my bedside with reluctance;
or,
and more likely,
a grinning old faggot
who doesn't want my teeth at all.

everybody loves satyrday night

on satyrday night,
the children's dragon is controlled.
he sleeps
in his dark corner of the room.
on satyrday night, the maiden views
the bloody, pregnant-rising moon
with delight and apprehension.
on satyrday night,
i saw a griffin in a hedge.

on the mountain, in the city's
shade of distant light,
the sound of pipes. the wind
in hollow trees, the hunter says.
he waits. he thought
there was an antelope.
the one-horned beast
that eats his lunch
does not believe in hunters.

was that his daughter's laughter
echo
in the carnal night?
(but she
lies safe in bed, he knows)

blossom-scent now drugs his mind;
his pillow-rock, in dreams,
an altar by which pass
strange animals untrappable.

awakened by the damp
and hesitant first light of day,
the hunter puzzles blood
and cloven hoof-prints,
that there was a struggle, but
he saw nobody on satyrday night.

karen found a satyr

karen found a satyr in her bed.
she blushed, and held
the shaggy creature to her breast,
unabashed by horn, hot breath.

the neighbours wondered
at such revel-sound;
her laughter; goat
man's, cry-
second/night/life (myth-
ology no time)

children and satyrs know her magic.
(enchanted time is never told on clocks;
a castle is a tenement in moonlight)

you must have forgotten the story

you must have forgotten the story.
you dance before you run
to the godmother's midnight curfew,
leaving a shoe — a sandal if you wish —
for me to trace. it won't be hard;
i'd know that ankle under any skirt.
perhaps it is another story.
i seem to be the only prince
who rides back to his castle
in a large, mouse-drawn pumpkin.

These are DAVID PARKIN's first publications.

Two Poems by Milton Acorn

whose poetry appears frequently as books and in journals.

THE KING RAINS

The king rains like a bloody waterspout
that gathers in the elements and spews them out
onto the noses pointing him, the upturned
pack of eyes, the brocade of the courtly city.

Truly he rains. Ask the sad hounds, worshippers
in the loaded wind, how all men rain, how every draught
bears fragments escaped from their urgencies.
Maybe this is why the dogs know better . . .

By no reflections, by no estranged energies
bouncing in their own crazy context, do they know
their gods, or for that matter their devils, but
by particles just shook loose . . . homunculli perhaps.

The kings eats, and the lowly vegetable, the stupid
moo-cow flesh becomes royalty — grand gestures, surges
of vision inpainted with power . . . And out
it goes! Ah manure! That once tottered so high!

Gurgled from the sewers of history, the rivers bear it
to plebian seas. The clerk, paid less than a laborer,
tidies his balls' threadbare covering and still votes
conservative. Does that dirty worn string, the continuum
of his consciousness, still wave in fantastic breezes?

The king points down his beard and listens. Oh grandly
does he permit the light whose flux is the blood of souls
to illuminate even his royal planet of a heart! "I am
your friend . . . oh let my worshipful word clothe itself

in your proud and glorious body!" And the king says,
"Friend? What does it mean? What interest of mine
can you fulfill? Which do we have in common?" "Inwardness,
outwardness . . . And the going to and fro between them,"
the councillor, if he were wise and brave, might answer

if the king were not a fool. Then he might look up
and see himself take shape in the king's eyes,
as if we all bore shields like mirrors, and the reflection
made the object, or else our meanings
dropped sizzling into the crucibles of one another's wills.

The king's a secret heretic. "Look at my hunting pack,"
he thinks, "How well they know what men are! And what makes
men?
My pleasure! How wrong
it is to say that I've got no dominion over souls!"

The king tells his confessor, is forgiven, feels a chilled moment
the winds of imagination blowing thru him; peasants
sowing his bones; armorers hammering out his shape.
Last night he dreamt he was a splattering pool

and his rain was a rain of bloody sweat. Splashes made rings
that ran out crisscrossing to his farthest edges. Then suddenly
some clouds — some men — would no longer rain, but stood over
him
: shadowing. He woke up crying, "Revolution!"

He slept again and dreamt he was a spark
hissing along the fuse of time.

MILTON ACORN says he is generally regarded "as a bit old-fashioned — a carry-over from the old 'proletarian' school; but the appearance of fine new poets (e.g., Joe Rosenblatt, Bill Bissett, Myra McFarlane) confirms my suspicion that I'm not a last survivor but a predecessor. I'm against the dogma that poetry and politics do not mix . . . history proves just the opposite."

THE CIGARETTE MACHINE

Always apart, with a row of figure-flecked
brands for eyes (How does one read surety
into a thing that never thinks : "No . . .
No cigars for sale here. Cigars don't matter!"
?) like someone who never feels lonesome
one stands, so designed that
it seems always at the moment before flight.

Only in part has thought touched; and feeling
's better described as 'sense', or some word
more partial. This
is what nobody ever wanted in the way the tongue tugs back
in the word 'want' : this flies so high
in the thin wind of abstraction that the eye glazes
and skids as if on its own shallow moisture
over the glitter — a dead glitter — of its surface.

At the centre of a thousand beings who think
it doesn't think, only controls
them . . . Think of the blanking of the cheeks
, sucking a cigarette, of the thousand ways
one expresses a dread detachment, a
detachment come from dread; or drooping from the lips,
a man-canceling toughness, or bewilderment
(I've seen that) ; or for a matter of fact the way
the match is shaken out, tossed with one jerk
, as if it were a life calling for love.

Time's an invention, not of men, but of matter
evolving thru life toward life, of amoeba
perhaps. Cancel out time and imagine the lines
going out from each trickley clutch of change
dropped in the box : of the web entangling brands
each tasting *"like any other brand . . . rotten"*
; of the smoke reaching and making felt
each tube and baglet of the lung; of the spots
of purposelessly multiplying cancer; of the knife
a corny older poet might call 'compassionate';
of all those rich men's sons, rich sons' fathers,
with their right hands elevated, abolishing the Hippocratic oath
as a hypocricy few people have the energy left
to give a damn about.

THE FOUNTAIN

The power
of the dream is
in Heaven
there is no difference
between ourselves
and the music of our intent.
But in the world, the mystery
of pain separates us
from God, ourselves
from ourselves. Listen
to the mountain.

The power of the dream
on this still abundantly green Earth, is we are
always living. We are alive to others, sure,
as we express interest in their *souls*, to
forget, time long enough for compassion,
that to which they merely subscribe.

What discretion can there be
except that of your heart beating.
Lips murmur song held in dream;
the singer and the song are one.

Irony is the firing squad, Peace
to the hired assassins. Are you ready
to stand, lambs to their promotion.

Some worms and some neon
show the picture; everyone is
in the fountain, to bear fruit,
bear witness, seed, to value
the flow we together ride.

If the analogy holds, we fall
to the ground to enter source,
so that we may again give.

We give from the centre we are

the fountain, circle, spirals
of magic water, ("the body is 90%
water") we need water to grow,
to sow our seed, generations

return again and again to the water-
hole, source we hold dear enough
to assure the music is our own, of
our own making we move among the oxen,
horses, and dogs, in the heat, to drink.

The girl in the forest
looks at the trees, at
the circles of growth
within them, hears
everything, the birds,
the flowers, growing,
herself a sound thru her,
and her lips let it out,
the sound, maybe love,
it is a baloon in the air,
and she is echo.

But she comes to the city
to learn of Hiroshima, Dresden,
how growth does run wild as men do
use that for control of other men, gain,
life is on sale as Mankind further divides,
is split, as the atom is, Dachau, the
wholly horrible leash of history
startles her genes; she becomes a pro,
dies in Skid Row; she is an Indian,
daughter of a Chief.

The general, he subscribes to death
for the many, a crystal living for few,
to succumb to an august mirage, himself,
at a later date. Says it is time America
stopped letting herself be bullied
by these emerging nations. Says he
doesn't know if there are more Vietnamese
being killed daily than in L.A. car accidents.
Perhaps he can forgive himself, but not
the others. Of an evening alone, he practices Zen.

The lover, subscribes touch of hand
and finger over and into each other, juice
of adoration, a forgetting smile, the simile
of desire. We eat each other at the end.

The teacher requires obedience.

The poet will sing if he has to.

A woman of the figure marvels
at the reflections, how we pose
for each other
to create different deaths.

And the green is locked out to us,
enclosed as it is by freeways, by
high-rise apartment blocks, we
have become tourists to Nature.

The images buried
within the marble
under the water's splat
down from the tower, the bright
babies sailing around it, on
their pipes, our faces buried
in the marble, rising again
to dust.

How he resents or regrets the burden
of pain drives Man to present the world
as unified, as whole, purposeful, (General
Motors, M.G.M., NATO, the corporate
Mystik Progression), tho he no longer accepts
the God who does support such notions. I say,
accept what pain there is for you as yours to live
as human in the world *with* other men
and women, as your own kind. There can be
much light in even the general's house, through
his courtyard. The boy who had to get off the bus
was not myself, not that time, the ads, the silence,
and the sanitation all around him so un-nerved him,
was my projection, I held on hard to the stanchion,
to look at him, sending what message of peace I could,
one elderly lady, cherry-brimmd hat looked
concerned as the bus lurchd, he got off, to find
what small plot of grass in a vacant lot
he could stumble down on to puke over.

What men and women do now, the measure
of the fountain is beyond anyone's single
comprehension, that we rise
now toward the music of suicide,
into the mushroom cloud rising
and falling, a long shot of the disaster,
tiny flotsam and jetsam, arbitrarily
at drift, no image, no focus, no significant
direction, all is one, good manners
proven beyond pain, what made God
impossible and Man a wreck to his own
way of thinking, Raphael buried in the moon,
arrows and daggers crossd; Satan
moves westward. Or was it our own will to
significance that led us all this far from the fountain.

BILL BISSETT

The author is the Vancouver poet, painter, and also publisher of *Blew Ointment*.

Two Poems by John Newlove

A FILM OF LHASA

In the film shot by one of their brethren the monks
move with ease across an overexposed landscape. Dalai Lama is
going to three monasteries to pass his exams. It is the first
time I have seen a man almost a god moving.

The scattered bushes are light green on white soil,
the garments of the lesser men have been washed many times.

All move slowly, chatting — no urgency when a man
becomes a god or part of a god. It is ordained, what will
happen; the perfect moments will be found. And exalted the
ordinances!

An emperor of Rome smiling on the deathbed sardonically
made a joke of his impending divinity. Dalai Lama does not die;
he smiles, moving back and forth, he questions the examiners and
claps his hands like a small delighted boy.

RIDE OFF ANY HORIZON

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may —

on the hot wheat,
on the dark yellow fields
of wild mustard, the fields

of bad farmers, on the river,
on the dirty river full
of boys and on the throbbing

powerhouse and the low dam
of cheap cement and rocks
boiling with white water,

and on the cows and their powerful
bulls, the heavy tracks
filling with liquid at the edge

of the narrow prairie
river running steadily away.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may —

among the piles of bones
that dot the prairie

in vision and history
(the buffalo and deer,

dead indians, dead settlers,
the frames of lost houses

left behind in the dust
of the depression,

dry and profound, that
will come again in the land

and in the spirit, the land
shifting and the minds

blow dry and empty —
I have not seen it! except

in pictures and talk —
but there is the fence

covered with dust, laden,
the wrecked house stupidly empty) —

here is a picture for your wallet,
of the beaten farmer and his wife
leaning toward each other —
sadly smiling, and emptied of desire.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may —

off the edge
of the black prairie

as you thought you could fall,
a boy at sunset

not watching the sun set
but watching the black earth,

neverending they said in school,
round: but you saw it ending,

finished, definite, precise —
visible only miles away.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may —

on a hot night the town
is in the streets —

the boys and girls
are practising against

each other, the men
talk and eye the girls —

the woman talk and
eye each other, the indians
play pool: eye on the ball.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall
where it may —

and damn the troops, the horsemen
are wheeling in the sunshine,
the cree, practising

for their deaths: mr poundmaker,
gentle sweet mr bigbear,
it is not unfortunately

quite enough to be innocent,
it is not enough merely
not to offend —

at times to be born
is enough, to be
in the way is too much —

some colonel otter, some
majorgeneral middleton will
get you, you —

indian. It is no good to say,
I would rather die
at once than be in that place —

though you love that land more,
you will go where they take you.

*

Ride off any horizon
and let the measure fall —

where it may;
it doesn't have to be

the prairie. It could be
the cold soul of the cities
blown empty by commerce

and desiring commerce
to fill up the emptiness.

The streets are full of people.

It is night, the lights
are on; the wind

blows as far as it may. The streets
are dark and full of people.

Their eyes are fixed as far as
they can see beyond each other —

to the concrete horizon, definite,
tall against the mountains,
stopping vision visibly.

JOHN NEWLOVE's most recent book of poems, *Moving in Alone*, was published in 1965 by Contact Press.

Two Poems by Nancy-Lou Patterson

SALISHAN BOYS ON SATURDAY NIGHT

The sheen-backed boys as brown as cedar
  Polish flesh between linked arms,
Drink blame against the dry outsiders,
  Burst at lip and knee with harm:
This lacking teeth, and that burnt-eyed
  As dying salmon — each one hides
His heart inside a burnished bole
  Axe-reft by common alcohol.

Embracing, shod for show in black,
  Among their shining nipples' eyes
They bear the wink of medals: crack
  Their sable knuckles, grin as shy
As baskets; heavy heads like trees
  Or bushes blown too dark for grease,
Too coarse for school, grown rank with heat
  As river sheds on fire with night.

They stumble, fallen mouths agape,
  And soil the beach with sorry wine.
Tomorrow, Sunday morning, strewn
  Like broken shells on sand, they'll sleep.

MOTORCYCLE HILL-CLIMBER

Let there be supine roads of long
hot asphalt cloven by the roar
of my machine's imprudent song;
that stiff hill there, erect before

the white sun's eye-defying gape
offends me. Nothing vertical
but my own shin-bones, greasy nape
and doubled skull should stand so tall.

Hide me in dust; obscure my sight
from urgent watchers. Let me rise
and drive my bones up that whole height,
a thunderbolt of need and noise.

The author has published in various Canadian journals.

THIBIDAULT ET FILS

CLARK BLAISE teaches at the University of Iowa. His fiction and poetry have appeared in various quarterlies including *Colorado Quarterly*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and *Shenandoah*. A personal comment by him follows this story.

CLARK BLAISE

I

I can see now why my parents divorced; why they tried so hard to reconcile, and why that failed too. But they are dead now, buried separately, and died before I learned not to fail them. Frank Thibidault, the man-sized boy of this story, has grown up and married. His wife would never guess that he was once so capable of indignation, of such exclusive loyalties, and was once so righteously indifferent to his father, a man he often talks about.

That summer my parents were divorced, I was living alone in Paris, studying for a Master's in French. News of the divorce trial came in weekly letters from my mother. There had been outbursts in court, all from my father: testimonies from unfamiliar doctors, hysterics, pleas for his freedom from my mother, from our furniture store, from everything, so he could rest. There was not another woman, as my mother maintained. But his show of shattered nerves was finally so convincing (and my mother's silence perhaps so corroborating), that the suspected woman, Sheila Diamond, was never called. He was awarded the store and inventory, the truck, his car, and a delivery wagon. For my mother there was the new house in a Milwaukee suburb and a recently-started mutual fund. After repaying the mortgage, she was left with twelve thousand dollars. She didn't appeal. Rather than return to her family in Toronto, she stayed in Milwaukee and found a job. Her wealthy sister Doris invested the settlement in Canadian stocks.

Then just two months after the divorce came the news that took everyone but my mother by surprise. Gene Thibidault, known in the trade and all over Milwaukee as "T. B. Dee", married the ex-decorator and took her to Mexico for a latin honeymoon.

It was February when I came back to Milwaukee after a year's

study in Paris. My mother met me at Mitchell Field and put me at ease with a light hug and a smile. She was a rangy woman with sharp features and gray eyes that looked perpetually startled, and though her hair had whitened in that year of dissolution, she still looked much better than I remembered. I had last seen her still living with my father, suffering indignities in silence, ashamed to admit that something irremediable was running its certain course.

She had found a room and shared kitchen in a dingy section of the southside, and a deadening job at fifty a week in a dying corner of downtown, selling fixtures. She had a television, stacks of paperbacks (legal guides, psychologies, the occasional classic), and faithfully she followed the divorcee's regimen: art shows, foreign films, a public speaking course at a local high school — interests suspended in twenty-five years of marriage to an uneducated man.

"Everything that's left is here," she said that first night, pointing to the suitcases under her bed, and the boxes of china piled in the kitchen. On the walls were the watercolors of European cathedrals she had painted in the thirties, while studying design in Prague, Leipzig, and London before she had returned to Canada, to Montreal, and marriage. Those had been the years of privacy in her life. "It's a horror, seeing everything shrunk to this." And then she sobbed, stretched on the bed, her legs taped and throbbing, her heart struggling for breath. "What have I done wrong?" she pleaded. "Was I a bad wife, Frankie, honestly?"

"Of course not — you were guiltless."

"I can't hate him. He had no more use for me, that was evident. Other women would hate him, believe me. It was just his lies . . . the way he forgot everything I'd done for him, the way we'd fought to get started here. And when we finally made something, *she* took it all away and he couldn't even be gracious. Nobody wants you when you're old, when you're tired out. That's a hard truth to discover when you're fifty-seven years old." She nodded her head, assuring herself, while I watched the floor, speechless. "The world doesn't let you make it up. One mistake and it's at your throat for life."

"Maybe you could go back to Toronto?" I suggested. "The world's still full of possibilities. You don't have to stay here if things are too bitter."

"There's nowhere else *except* Toronto. But I couldn't. Doris is so important — we'd never get along. I'd feel a nuisance and I

couldn't stand that. I always did everything on my own. Always. I married against their advice, and I came to the States against their advice. And don't misunderstand me, dear, I had some wonderful years with Gene. Some very happy memories I guarantee *she* won't have. But this is the only place left — I'll do what I can here, or die."

It was clear what my mother needed from me, in the answers I couldn't supply. She needed guilt: a just person, she felt, couldn't be punished as she had been. Just a shred of culpability to justify her fate. She brushed aside ennoblement, yet it was all I could give her.

"Then live for me," I said in desperation. "For my sake. I'll look after you, whenever you say. I'll never desert you."

"Please believe me, Frankie, you are all I've lived for, for many many years. But I'll die before I'm a burden." Death was the final topic each night; she spoke of it with familiarity, almost longing. And I knew, if she were to die, I'd be an orphan.

Yet there was no forgetting my father. Talking of him, remembering him, made me want to see him — maybe just to tell him that I, at least, could hate him. I carried two pictures of him, and in each shot he seemed a stranger. The first was a New England beach scene, taken shortly after we had come down from Montreal. I was a stocky seven, with the thick chafing thighs of my mother, and her narrow chest. My father was then forty-five yet looked in his thirties with a wide grin and wavy black hair, and the firm body of an athlete who still skiied, still skated. I had not been a satisfaction to my father, physically, professionally, but he couldn't be excused. He too had never tried. After we have moved into the States and English became the decisive language in our house, the early love began to die. In Montreal he took me to the Forum and taught me hockey; thereafter we'd never played catch. On the back of the photo he had penned, *Thibidault et fils, 5 d'août, 1946. Old Orchard Beach.* That afternoon in a stuffy Milwaukee kitchen, I stared into these pictures for hints of future chaos, but there were none. Thibidault and son gazed straight ahead, smiling at my mother who had taken the snap, while a barren beach curved in the distance out of sight.

The other was of my parents, taken by me, when we had given the South a try: Clearwater, Florida, 1949. Mother squinted against the sun — how dark her hair had been! — father was tanned, smiling, hair graying in a bar at his temples, in a Hawaiian shirt and Bermuda shorts. Both reclined on the porch furniture

he was selling so successfully, a banana shrub blooming just behind.

How he had changed in those three years! Not that he had aged, particularly, but how American he had become, despite his accent and citizenship. I remembered Montreal again, the War years, when we had driven around Westmount, admiring the houses. We would stop those Sundays at tiny restaurants where my mother ordered and my father and I spoke our Sunday English. Then we'd return to our flat on Rue Durocher and I'd watch soldiers drill and the occasional McGill student hurry to his classes. Years later, at the Furniture Mart in Chicago, I remembered my father leading songs —"Alouette", inevitably — then a medley of Crosby tunes in French so no one could follow. His voice had been so good no one minded. Even later, with secretaries or the girls I dated, he became a gay and mellow flirt, retrieving the accent he had come to lose. And much later, when our Milwaukee store was getting bigger, giant billboards had been erected . . . a garish triptych. Middle panel: a living room suite. Left-hand panel — DO YOU WANT LA VIE EN ROSE? And from the right, his face smiling from a massive fleur-de-lis: "Then See T. B. Dee!" At the bottom: THIBIDAULT FURNITURE, WAUKESHA.

But at home he had prowled in his shorts on Sundays, sleeping late, then napping before the TV all afternoon — no *boulevardier*, my father. I learned to detest Sundays during my high school years, the one day I saw my parents for more than an hour or two, the only day I didn't eat out. On that day, my mother did the week's wash and housework, and cooked the lone hot meal. There had been complaints, I recall, from my father and me, if the meal were not perfect.

I had only a week to spend with her before starting school again, this time at Cornell, where I held an assistantship in French. After that first night we avoided talking of my father. I met her at the trolley stop, drove her home, ate, and quietly watched television with her. We talked pleasurably of Europe, comparing continents of different dimensions; in her old Canadian passport were the claw-mark stamps of the third Reich — in my fresh American book, discreet little eagles marked "Bremen" and "Saarbrücken". I spoke of my eagerness to return some day to Europe.

"You must, dear — plan independently of me. You have to be a little selfish. If I had obeyed my father, I'd still be a schoolteacher somewhere in Ontario. But I went over and got my arts degree, then I got the job in Montreal. I'd never have met Gene, of course . . ."

"Don't worry about the past."

"I don't. It's the future. This business with him isn't over, believe me. I know your father too well for that."

"I think it is," I said. "He's made enemies and a huge mistake. He has some pride, after all."

"It's not a question of pride, dear. That just doesn't enter into it."

2

I came back from Ithaca for Easter vacation. My mother had moved from the stagnant company of spinsters to a small apartment in a near-by house, owned by a sprightly widow named Libby. The new apartment was attractive: low-ceilinged and freshly painted, and my mother had invested in drapes and a new chair. The boxes had been unpacked, and mementoes suddenly familiar now cluttered the dresser and mantle top.

That vacation I saw her as she might have been, had she never married. Energetic, alert, she substituted curiosity and adaptability for authentic brilliance. Her reading among the classics was slowing down, but her social life had begun again. There were divorcees, slightly younger, more conscious of careers, and old friends of the family now calling her for dinners or musicals at the Pabst. She had reopened old college friendships in Canada, by letter, and these women (some widowed, none divorced) had invited her up for her next vacation. She spent many hours watching television with Libby. I was disappointed that she had dropped her solitary interests (the art movies, the proper books, the lectures); but happily she spoke less often of my father and her imagined failings. While she was at work, I sat in her kitchen reading, and thinking back over the year in Paris that was gone and the summer that was coming — I had been given a scholarship at Laval in Québec. Another Paris, I hoped, only hospitable. It would be my first trip back to Québec in fifteen yeears.

Then, just before I left for Cornell, my mother received a postcard from my father, postmarked Los Angeles. *Situation hopeless. Coming back. All my love, Gene.*

"I knew this would happen," she cried. "Oh, the poor man."

"What will you say to him?"

"I'll have to see him, that's all. After all, I still love him."

Late in May he came back to Milwaukee. He didn't call her, but she often saw him, she wrote, pacing in front of the fixture

shop, never entering. He looked well enough from what she could see; he was thinner and tanned. When I came home in June for two weeks before leaving for Laval, he still had not called. She worried that something beyond her control was brewing; that perhaps he was trailing her, vengefully. Finally, a year and a half after I'd last seen him, a year after the divorce, he called from his hotel room to arrange for a dinner date. Very businesslike, my mother reported, just as he had often called from hotels on the road when he had been selling. We agreed to the next Sunday, which would give my mother time for a beauty appointment and the buying of a dress. He had chosen Milwaukee's finest hotel as a base of exile.

I called him from the lobby that hot Sunday, and after many rings he answered, saying he was just stepping into the shower but to come right up, the door would be open. We were already twenty minutes late; I had hoped he'd be ready.

We entered the room without knocking.

"Mildred," he called from the shower. "Is that you?" The voice was clear, the inflections intact. It frightened me; that voice, I felt, should be dead. The water shuddered off.

"Yes, dear. We'll just make ourselves at home?"

"Right at home — I'll be with you in a jiffy." We heard wet footsteps patter on the tile, then the whine of an electric razor. "Great room, eh?" he called.

"Very lovely, dear."

"Sy Lewis is letting me have it at ten a day till I get settled," he shouted back. "You remember Sy, Mildred? He asked about you."

The room was long and narrow: twin beds, television, a walnut dresser mellowed by a thick-pile gold rug. My Madras jacket was too light for the air-conditioning. Mother rubbed her bare arms, then opened the top drawer of the night stand to check its manufacturer.

"Drexel," she said, arching an eyebrow.

"Mom — what difference does it make now?"

"Mil*dred*," he called again, "did Frankie come along?"

"I'm here."

"Hey — that's terrific."

We took a bed and sat, facing the bathroom door. I kept thinking: no matter what happens today, you'll be in Québec next week. You'll survive.

"They didn't skimp on furnishings," my mother said quietly. She looked frightened — intimidated by my father's joviality. The razor stopped.

"Well-ll," came the sudden greeting. He stood before us.

"Gene!" She made no move, for like me, she was stunned. He was in his shorts, clutching the doorframe, with a towel draped over his shoulders. His skin was tanned but appeared now sallow, a texture worn and wrinkled, too perfectly observed. And his hair; the hair that had been long and graying now grew in snow-white patches, close-cropped but growing back.

"Mildred — thank God you've come."

She bowed her head.

"Hello, son. So good to see you." Then he coughed and doubled over with a series of retching coughs that echoed sharply off the bathroom tile. He had become fragile. Clean, rubbed dry, powdered — barely the shape of all we remembered. He shuffled to my mother and she stood to meet him, her arms outstretched. "Won't you come to me?" he cried.

"Oh, Gene, what's she done to you?" He kissed her loudly, wetly, like a very old man. They sat together on the bed, my father crying on her shoulder.

"You don't know what I've been through . . . it's been hell, Mildred, hell . . . " He pitched forward, knocking her on her back. I turned from the sight, but caught it again in the low mirror behind them; she was half-holding, half-pushing him away.

"Gene, please!"

He snapped up straight and slowly tucked his undershirt back inside his shorts. He blew his nose and smiled at me, extending his hands.

"Hello, son," he said, taking my hand in both of his, knotting his fingers in mine. His lips were thin and dark. Only his front teeth remained.

"Thank God you've come. Thank the Lord."

Mother too was crying.

"You look so good — both of you. You don't know how good you look. Thinking of you was the only thing that kept me going . . ." He stood, facing us, then backed towards the dresser, walking, smiling, like a children's photographer afraid he'd lose the pose. "Some scotch?" he asked.

"Sure, a little," I said.

"None for me, dear," said my mother.

He spilled a jiggerful over the ice, then plucked a half-pint of milk from the icebucket. "Ulcer," he explained as he handed me the drink, "can't keep anything down. Hour later, up it comes."

"Gene —" my mother cried, "you never *used* to —"

"It made her laugh. She used to cook things that would make me sick. Spicy Mexican stuff she learned specially for my ulcer, she said."

"Gene, *no,* the creature's insane."

He downed the milk. I sipped the scotch. Then he crushed the container and braced himself against the dresser. "You can't imagine what it's been like. No one can." He shook his lowered head. "It wasn't human, Mildred. *In*human, that's what it was. Everything started out so —"

He slapped the dresser. Mother nodded; her hand covered her mouth.

"Christ! Things ended up hell, Mildred." Then he walked slowly to the nightstand, and from a graveyard of green bottles and lurid cans, plucked out two gold bridges and slipped them in. "Well," he grinned, "I'll try not to complain. We have to make the best of it, don't we, Mildred?" He stepped off to the bathroom, stopping at the closet door to turn and say, "Drexel, Mildred, all of it. Did you notice?"

"Why — you're right, Gene."

"A thousand rooms — figure it out for yourself. Someone made a killing." He slid the closet door open, exposing a rack of suits and shirts. "I'll just take a suit and dress in the bathroom. What's it like outside?"

"Hot," she said, "stifling."

"You know, I haven't been outside in over a week? Just sitting in that chair there trying to figure out things."

"There's been a lot of time for that," my mother said.

"Well . . . it's a good thing I have these tropical weights then," he laughed. He left the bathroom door open as he dressed, and hummed, a new tune he didn't know the words to.

Minutes later he was singing loudly ("Are You Lonesome Tonight?") and my mother whispered to me, "I can't stand it." There were tears at the corners of her eyes, and moist fingers had smeared the rouge on her cheeks.

"He could have met us in the lobby, mom, fully dressed, if he wanted to be cordial about it. He wanted something else and this is the only way he could get it."

"But what could he want that I wouldn't give him? He got everything he wanted. *Everything,* he was very clear about that. It's not as if there's anything left, or that I have anything he wants. He was very clear about that at the trial, believe me, very

clear. *She* was everything he wanted. It was 'Mrs. Diamond this and Mrs. Diamond that —' the way she dressed, her opinions, her suggestions, till I wanted to scream. He couldn't ditch me fast enough for her . . ."

"He wants pity, that's all."

"But I *do* pity him. She never wanted him. Not for a minute and that was as plain as the nose on his face. I could have told him that if he hadn't tried to hide everything that was going on."

"He wouldn't have believed it, and you know it. He'd never believe anyone was using him or lying to him. *He* can lie all he wants and that's all right, but no one can lie to him — he falls for everything."

"And listen to what he's singing," she cried. "Oh . . ."

"I *have* been listening."

"Then how can you be so hard on him?"

He called, "I'll be right with you, dear."

"Mom," I whispered, "don't be taken in. This is a show — a very important one if he'll sacrifice his vanity to pull it off. Like his show at the divorce trial, right? The accusations, the hysterics?"

"Please, dear, I don't want all that dragged up. It was too dreadful. And he might hear you."

"Good God, mom — it's a cheap lousy script —"

"I must ask you to be quiet, Frank," she said. "It's obvious this isn't an act. Just look at the man." Then she leaned over to investigate his medicines. "You can't fake what we've *seen*," she added, then handed me the bottles: insomnia, headaches, stomach cramps, "attacks" . . . *Serutan and Fasteeth* stood out; these I believed, and even respected.

"How he must be suffering. Think what it must be like for him here." She hefted the *Serutan,* then smiled. "He always thought he'd die if he didn't have a movement a day. Old World nonsense. And he'd never go to the kind of doctor he needs."

How close this is to the way things have always been, I thought: the yellow laxative box, the singing from the bathroom. And perhaps it was always this close to horror too.

He emerged suddenly from the bathroom and asked, "How do I look?" Clothes had done more than I thought possible; the dark suit held his body firm, the white shirt set his face off as tanned. He looked like a vacationing executive who had left his wife at home. From his breast pocket peeked the monogrammed handkerchief: "TBD".

"Fine — just fine, dear."

"A little more to drink, son?" he asked. "I think I'll have a little drink just to celebrate, Mildred?"

"Just a wee bit, with soda."

He stirred our drinks with a hotel swizzle, humming over the tinkle of ice. He was smiling handsomely. "You know what I was thinking about in there?" he asked, looking at us both. "Remember one night — long ago — back in Montreal, I took you all out to the *Chez Son Frère?* I just suddenly remembered old Ouimet running over after he recognized me, and getting me to do a few songs . . . you remember that night, Mildred? I was thinking of that while I was getting dressed." He gave us the drinks and I drank immediately, to head off a toast.

"I vaguely remember that," I said. "I got embarrassed when you and mom started dancing in front of everyone."

"I remember perfectly," said my mother, "you sang *Je vous aime beaucoup.*" She continued hurriedly, "Frankie's going back next week, Gene. He'll be in Quebec City all summer." She pronounced it Kwee-bec. "Tell your father about it — he'll be very interested."

"I have a scholarship to Laval for the summer," I said, "that's all. I've promised not to speak English for the term."

His grin grew wider and his eyes didn't meet mine at all.

"Laval — that's some school," he exclaimed. "I was supposed to go there, you know."

"Gene —" warned my mother. "Please, nothing like that."

If he heard her, it didn't register on his face. "Well, then," he said, "you're doing so well, both of you." He held his glass high and smiled at it, a toaster's smile. We held our drinks out awkwardly, mine half-emptied, and he bent close to tap them. "To us," he whispered. "To a beginning." He set the drink down; his smile was broad.

"No, Gene. Let's be honest."

"Mildred, what?" He wheeled suddenly, facing the mirror, and pounding his fist on the dresser top. "Honest!" he cried. "I've been honest." My mother stared at the ceiling, shaking her head. "Gene, dear Gene," she moaned.

"Mildred," he cried, now falling on the bed. He reached around her hips, crying out. "She tried to kill me. She's choking the life out of me. You have to help me . . ." His voice rose until it cracked, then he started coughing. He blew his nose and dried his eyes. "You *have* to help me," he repeated, this time a com-

mand. When his face at last emerged from the TBD handkerchief, it was brick red and glistening with tears.

"I'm so lost, Mildred — it's awful. You can't imagine what I've been through. She's attacked me — here, see this dark line on my temple? Ten stitches to close it. When I was asleep, Mildred, *in my sleep* she attacked me with a nail file when I closed her charge accounts. Mildred, I don't have anything left. Sy Lewis thinks I can pay this hotel bill, but I can't. He's going to check up some day and he's going to find out I don't have a bank account even. She's choked me dry . . ."

"How much, Gene? How much did she take you for?"

"God, when I think of it, Mildred — the promises she broke on me. How good she was before, all changed the minute we got married. She's looking for a way to get me and she'll do it, I know. You can't imagine what I've been through. No one can. She took me for plenty. Plenty. Everything I ever had. Everything I built up — you remember how hard we worked, every night at the store, Frankie helping on the weekends?"

"You think I've forgotten?"

"And all those years getting started. The failures . . . Oh, God, Mildred, what I lost."

"And for what, Gene, tell me that. For what?" Her voice was so controlled, so reasonable, that my father couldn't even hear it over his coughing.

"And I gave her everything. A woman like that, Mildred — she has to have nice things, fashions and jewelery or she can't be happy. So I got it for her. She ordered everything direct from Nieman-Marcus. One thing I'm not is cheap — it's a fault and she played me for it."

"Where is she now, Gene? Did you leave her there?"

He gestured. "Yes," then buried his head in her skirt. "Out there in Waukesha in her old house. But I haven't seen her in a week, not since I moved in here."

Her arm still circled him; he was hunched over. Her eyes were dry, and riveted on something distant — it could have been Nieman-Marcus. I wondered how she could hold it in, the disgust she must have felt, learning what Sheila Diamond had taken him for, when she'd gotten nothing for all those years.

"It's hard to forget the trial, Gene," she said calmly. "You made a lot of charges I've been trying to live with. You made me want to end it all."

He scrambled to his feet and glared at her. "Mildred! Surely

you're not bringing that up again? All that unpleasantness? I made a terrible mistake and I've paid through the nose for it. She put me up to all that, Mildred. I didn't know what I was saying half the time. Then the lawyer coached me. But he took everything I got from the settlement, Mildred, believe me, and she took the rest. I've been sitting here with a pencil and paper just figuring it all out, everything she got from me, and now I have it in black and white, I know what it's cost me, and I know it's worth getting rid of her. Don't start telling me about wanting to end it all. No, no, I'm just beginning. I've been blind but I'm seeing clear now." He turned from us, paced to the dresser, muttering all the while, "Look, look. I'm fixing her wagon for her now. She thinks she has me over a barrel but I'm getting off. Yes, ma'm, I'm getting off and she's going to be one might-y sur-prised woman." He held up a set of manila folders. "It's all here. Everything I need is here, everything she did, sworn and notarized. I walked into the lawyer's last week with these papers and he said to me, 'Gene, they'd throw her out of any court in the country. Gene, don't you worry with proof like this.' That's what he told me. Believe me, it cost quite a few pesos getting it all down, getting statements from the bartenders — in Spanish even," he added, glancing at me, "all about how she carried on. She laid around the beach all day with her bathing suit straps down and made the beach boys guess her age. Then she told them I was just her boss who kept chasing her. She never told them I was her husband. Just someone to pay the bills. She made me look terrible and I couldn't even sleep —"

My mother traced the nubbing on the bedspread, and smiled embarrassedly.

"Well?" he demanded. "Nothing? Well listen to this: according to the lawyer I have grounds for divorce, cruelty and neglect. He told me, 'Gene, I don't see how you took it that long. She doesn't have a leg to stand on, legally speaking'."

"For Christ's sake — isn't that enough?" I cut in suddenly. "Hasn't this gone far enough? Do you think we give a damn if you have the goods on her or not? Did you bring us up here to be an audience for your performance?"

"She wants me dead . . ." he began.

"We *know* what she's like. Anyone but a damn fool knew all along. And you got what you deserved. Why are you making mom go through it all over again? How can you be so cruel?"

"I have the proof — documented. No one wanted to protect

her. Mildred," he begged, "you know what kind of person she is, don't you?"

"Oh, Gene . . ."

"Of course she knows. You called mom a liar when she said it all in court. Maybe we're not interested in your witnesses — get your divorce, or crawl back — we don't care. If you knew what mom has gone through these months you'd be ashamed to whine about your suffering down in Mexico —"

"Frankie!" she burst in. "I won't have you talking to your father like that. I just can't take it."

Then suddenly my father and I were grown men, staring over the width of a bed. In other years he would have struck me, but in other years I would not have struck back.

"Thank you, Mildred," he said. Then he turned to me, pointing with the folders. "*You* — you could try to be a little understanding, it seems to me. You're the one who lived through it all in Paris. That must have been very hard to take, eh? You're smart — you read French I don't understand, but you don't know *me* at all. You never cared how hard we worked so long as it sent you to college. My only dream was building a store you could take over, but your mother kept saying you were too smart to run a store. So everything we built goes nowhere, no Thibidault and Son, just a store for us to slave in and maybe sell when we get sick. You don't know what that means — you were too busy studying. No pride — that's what it means. After so many years, I got tired. Your mother got tired. Why were we going on? — I kept asking and all I got for an answer was, 'So Frankie can go to Paris.' Well, let me tell you this, boy: for someone so bright, you can be pretty goddam dumb."

Don't understand? I towered over him, a giant of indignation. Admit it, I tried to say, admit it was a little more than a mistake, something other than unpleasantness. The question of your guilt isn't yours to answer, T. B. Dee. He picked up the folders, then slammed them on the dresser top. They cracked like a whip.

"She's crying," he said. "Look — your mother's crying. She knows the truth. She remembers what it was like before all this came up."

He went to her, then sat beside her, dabbing her eyes with his handkerchief. She hugged him, crying on his shoulder, and I had given him that chance to make himself needed. And he was in possession, not about to cry. I touched my mother on the shoulder

and said I was going home. She bobbed her head, but her crying was hysterical. He patted her back.

"Good luck, son," he called as I shut the door.

I packed that evening, deciding to leave early. As I waited for her return, I concluded that perhaps it's good to have one person in my life to whom I owed nothing; a man I could face honestly. And perhaps too, to have another that summoned such clear loyalty. When she came back hours later, she said very little of that afternoon except that I had hurt him very badly. He had forgiven me. And she had forgiven him. Then she produced a list of restaurants, relatives, and old friends that might still remember him and help me get settled. He'd predicted I wouldn't like it.

3

I had sworn an oath: *pas un mot d'anglais.* I was to spend my summer immersed in French, living in approved monolingual housing, reading *Le Devoir* with breakfast, studying linguistics all morning and assisting in a seminar held twice a week. The only English I attempted was in letters home to my mother.

From her letters, I learned of a near-reconciliation. She cooked for him, sewed, and did his wash. She had kept her room with Libby, but he had a key, and while the women worked he would let himself in, sit in the kitchen and drink instant coffee, leaving sticky rings on the windowsill. Weather permitting, he'd sit on the porch and watch cars turn the corner, certain that Sheila Diamond was trailing him, meaning him injury. Or hoping perhaps — I interpreted — that she might be coming back, for he could not forget her. He could talk of nothing else, no one else, but their marriage and her behavior. How he had been deceived. How happy my mother and he had been, before the store, before the unpleasantness. "I tell him I can't bear to hear those things but he can't stop. It's compulsive — he can't control himself. He has no one but me. I think he's truly sorry for what he's done but he can't express it. I take him to movies and he sleeps through them, even the French ones. He can't watch television and he cries when he reads the newspapers . . ." Every two weeks I'd receive a card from him, telling me of his little room near the Marquette campus, in a house filled with med students. He got along fine with the boys and they gave him advice about clothes and invited him to their parties, which were too loud for him. They gave him pills

for his stomach, and for sleeping, and he was relieved to be living around doctors, in case anything happened.

But at certain moments I could see him from the students' angle, more clearly from Québec than I ever had at home. What of the times he must have left his teeth on the communal toilet ledge, and Serutan granules in the sink? He was no artist, I thought, but he was a liar; and that was his tragedy.

The classes at Laval went quickly. I loved the city, roaming the streets for hours, absorbing as best I could the origins I couldn't claim. But I made no real contact. I had a room on Avenue Ste-Geneviève, behind the Conservatoire, and all day the music students practicing the scales reminded me I had no real business in Québec. It seemed I was trading one shade of exile for another. Sharp memories of Paris were brought back, of those first few weeks, before contacting Boniface, when I had worked *Times* crosswords at student cafés. In the early evening I'd take a book and stand on the boardwalk behind the Château Frontenac and watch the mountains creep closer after sunset. The river would smooth itself after a day of heavy shipping. And the lovely girls paraded by, as they had in Paris, as they would — it seemed — all my life.

As the weeks wore on, it became clear to me, as a repatriate trying to return, that Québec lay far behind me. The old ways were foreign, and the new rebels were not fighting my battles. I began to realize what I would have been, had my father not taken us across in 1946. Half-French, half-Catholic, a lesser exile in Montreal, allied to a relic people speaking a relic tongue. He had been bold, and he had been right, fleeing from Québec. The demons that had driven him came from this province — and now that they were gone, who picks up the pieces? I felt ready to try. That summer splayed my affections; those simple, noble loyalties that my mother had so easily commanded, were no longer adequate. And the forgiveness my father had so painlessly assumed — that was the difficult sentiment I wanted now to summon up.

A warm evening in early August I walked down from my room to the benches by the Montcalm Monument, just above the boardwalk. At my side sat a bearded old man in a woollen suit and straw hat, studying his missal. Then down to the boardwalk, past the Americans out after a heavy dinner. I looked French to them. And to the kittenish girls, strolling by in threes and fours, in tight slacks and bouffants, transistors swinging around their

necks — I was also French, one of them. I understood their small talk, their foolish small talk.

But I am not French, I knew, walking further, beyond the *terrasse* and up the ramparts to the Citadel; past pensioners reading their evening *Le Soleil*. High above the city from the old fort, I sat till a cold night wind skimmed the Plains and the silent town below me turned on its lights. And running to the mountains was the river, calm in its channel, respecting the wakes of departed ships.

CLARK BLAISE's stories reflect the influences of his life in Canada and the rural American South." As the only American in my family, ever, Canada seems to me vital, a marvellous place for writers. I would choose Montreal over any city on the continent."

STATEMENTS ON POETS AND POETRY BY DIVERSE HANDS

SALTIMBANQUE

"The green lawn hangs heavy
over my head,
And I stand on blue sky,"
the poet said
Through somersaults
woven and turned
Around black clocks
he spurned.

FREDERICK CANDELARIA

FREDERICK CANDELARIA, who teaches English and edits *West Coast Review* at Simon Fraser University, writes: "The multiplication of verses dedicated to shocking middleclass sensibilities somehow surprises me. Even psychiatrists have given up shock treatment for better ways to get at reality. The raw rituals of the bedroom and the bathroom are obvious and easy truths and the verses that capitalize on them are also easy and obvious. These are verses that narrow our vision. The poems that truly electrify us, through their structures of sound, assimilate our basic and chaotic experiences and broaden our vision." Another poem by the author appears on page 71.

Two Poems by Peter Stevens

AN AXE JOB

Kafka once said
a book should serve
as an axe
for the frozen sea
within us.
Here we are
on the verge
of suicide
knowing somewhere
creeping up on us
is the sharp edge
to cleave our brains.

Bland Howells said
music and architecture
are the true creative arts
for they make
real form
they evolve a camel
out of
their inner consciousness.
So look
at a book of poems
with their built-in music
in another way —

locked in ice
Eskimos
hack to the peak
of an iceberg

gritty with sand
Arabs
gallop to the top
of a dune

and watch

the flash
of the axe
break into grains
the dense ice
gashing it open
in the glare
of an Arctic sun

the ludicrous dignity
of the camel
spurt into splashes
the loose sand
striding distance
in the chill
of a desert moon

until
they see
caravans of camels
stalking across the snow
and
an ice - axe
chopping the palms

So remember
when you see
a camel lurching up an iceberg
an Eskimo lunging at the skin
of an oasis with his axe
looking for fish
you may be looking at the image
of the real form of a poem.

PRAIRIE POETRY

around us
drifting
crusts the snow
but

later

creation alone

stalks
the land

the prairies
assert themselves
in awkward
stone

wheat
moulds
such blank buildings

in the hard glare

sometimes lies

with no pattern
swell

to full sound
made neat at ears
strangled
understanding
may yet discover by
questionings

knowing they are

ramshackle hovels

persistence
stamps
order

with the false fronts
of poetry

a rawness
fortuitously

greens into crops
which push
under care
wheat
shrivelled
by droughts
is not
steadfast
but somehow
must brace up
to be slashed
and stacked
in unknowing hands
hopefully
growth
sprouts from earth
with
desperate cities
with elevators
the prairie decays
into one-street towns
that slide away
to vacancy

PETER STEVENS, who lives in Saskatchewan, calls *Prairie Poetry* "mobile poetry. It can be read down in columns or straight across. The opening phrase invites the reader to step inside and 're-compose' it, for there are no punctuation limits set. The reader should be prepared to let the poem happen around him. The split-column is used at a much simpler level in *An Axe Job*." Another poem by the author appears on page 66.

THE PROPER EVALUATION OF POETS

A mirror is only breakable glass,
the experts said.
Let's shove some pieces up the poet's ass
& give his soul a look at itself.

The hammer they swung again and again
shattered as if on chrome, its quivering handle
shattered them, and only in quicksilver were they whole;
were they men.

RALPH J. SALISBURY

RALPH J. SALISBURY is editor of *Northwest Review*. His work has been published widely in Canada and the United States.

FESSION (PRO- and CON-)

The disgusting thing about writing, except for the dedicated souls
(and I think they are lovely people, the dedicated souls,
the eager beavers with their gleaming incisors,
their fat flat tails and their chisel-tipped incisors
— That dates a man, that zoological comparison,
so too, perhaps, the explicit working-out of the comparison)
Is finishing off after the first draft's done,
Putting in the superfluous details when the interesting work's all
done,
Checking the references, being consistent, going over the timing,
Changing the sequence — that's clearer, but what does it do to the
timing? —
Forestalling objections, planting anticipations, underlining the
obvious,
Amplifying, simplifying, clarifying, rejecting the obvious,
Checking again for the obvious flaws that got passed over,
— And what use can you make of all those bright ideas left over?
Pretty haggard by now, your fine fresh novel creation.
So are you, my boy. It has to be done, but it's damn dull work.

L. A. MACKAY

L. A. MACKAY teaches at Berkeley. His poetic satires have appeared variously, including our 5:2.

ELEGY FOR MISTER ELIOT

Please be seated, members; remove the crepe
While I light soft lamps which yellow,
When fans settle on the panels of the dark wall.
Silence breaks; the curtain strokes the cold floor;
The arms move upward: a penetrating click.

Now we will never know, never discover the rocks
Where the lighthouse sank in kelp, stirring
The fragments of cloud with the distinct bow;
Nor miss again the rising smoke behind
The philodendron in the white marble lobby.
Who let the whining of the shining cables
Enter through the doorway of the noisy room?
His face was unfamiliar, we thought.
Remember the wasted politeness of the figure,
The quiet stranger in the hall? And recall that hat,
The tactful reservation of a smile . . .

A sudden interruption. Twelve is struck,
Followed by a giant click.

DAVID M. SUMMERS

DAVID M. SUMMERS is a student at Victoria University. More of his poems appear on pages 72 and 73.

POETRY READINGS

Faithfully, I have put on my coat
and gone to witness the man
who rose like smoke,
opened his book and began to read.
Not once could I close my eyes
to let rivers flow by.

The people who came were
like myself, some
reflections of a fun house self
with the deserted longings sticking out:
the flaunting girls
trailing their long dark hair behind them,
the old ladies
ugly as dry flower beds,
the usual oddity, madman,
most recently the one without pants,
just a sheet furled between his thighs,
who came in late, determinedly Hindu,
but painfully swaddled and loose
in the noiseless room.

Noiseless, but at one reading
I thought we would rise like fire
to consume the thin, cold octogenarian bard;
and at another, somebody yelled,
"Emptiness, Sham!"
And once I left with the hecklers
who had the word.

It has never been right.
I've gone hoping to find
God burning the stage;
instead, some man
read a poem off a page.

RELLA LOSSY

RELLA LOSSY produces a literary magazine programme on KPFA-FM in Berkeley. Her poetic beliefs, she says, "echo those of Blake, Roethke and James Dickey, who is the best American poet we've got. I concur with him that poets must stop lying, must start saying something directly to the readers, something honest and necessary."

THE CRAFTSMAN

The Middle Ages as apprentice to the
Renaissance; a monastery, the fusty
Friar both scribe and craftsman. Of
Architectonic design, he steps from
The catacombs, rises to the heavens;
His horny hands span from the universe
Center, grasp caliphers and book,
Possibilities to learning. His face
Is a gargoyle; eyes rose windows;
Hair of gothic tracery; skin a mono-
Chromatic mosaic; the mouth a kiln.

Here craft is no æsthetic exercise.
Manuscripts are illuminated, stone
By stone cathedrals rise. If the
Guide be a heavenly blueprint, the
Product is pleasantly blunt, for the
Artisan works without mystery. It is
The material, not the immaterial, that
Matters. Elemental earth, air, fire, water.

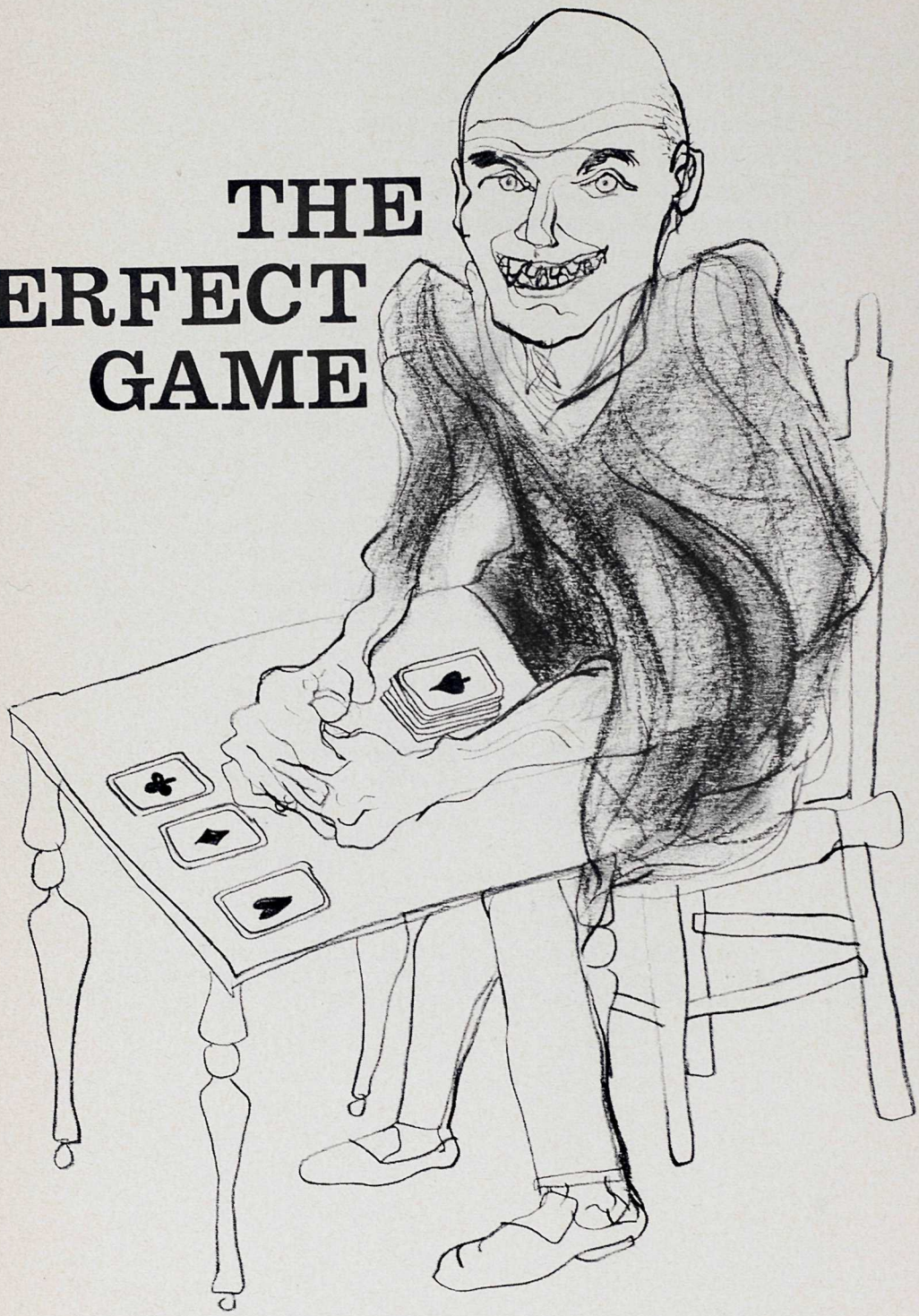
So too with my craft:
In the tradition of the craftsman,
Honest with myself, true to my tools.
The steel of sense is oil and fire
Tempered; my keys unlock images which
Spring to mind, transmute them to the
Blank luxury of rag paper. Words flow
Molten in flux, stand clean when set,
To weld sound and sense, without slag;
To build thin utilitarian forms, brittle
As gold leaf, yet strong and simple.
No alloy dilutes sounds of chime and
Gong: tinkle without tin. Or the fat
Sound of industry, where words mesh
Like cogs, spurring forward.

I have apprenticed: and now with every
Dictionary word ready, and my portmanteau
Packed, monuments may begin:
Words build to sentences to paragraphs
To pages, a strong but baffling gridwork
Construction, an eloquent pyramid, where
The plumbline of thought holds the margins
True, the only limits.

ALBERT DRAKE

ALBERT DRAKE is working for his M.F.A. degree in writing at the University of Oregon: "After writing steadily for eight years, I finally feel — as *The Craftsman* says — that I've completed my apprenticeship."

THE PERFECT GAME



PAT LOWTHER, who lives in Vancouver, has published verse in England and Canada. This is her first published story.

PAT LOWTHER

IT WAS A BREAKING DAY: Yesterday, on my last run, the five o'clock traffic had forced me too close to a high curb, and had broken the wheel of my motorcycle. So my delivery contract was also broken.

It gave me a laugh, thinking of all the fumble-fingered wet-mouthed popeyes arriving in all the little tobacco-and-bookie joints in the city for their daily confection of rape, ax-murder, and exotic, invented deviations. And finding the magazine racks empty. Or, if not empty, papered only with yesterday's scandals, last week's nudes. All because my motorcycle sat in the repair station, with the sidecar full of yellow dailies and picture magazines with fold-out wet-dream-of-the-week spreads. What a find for some mechanic.

I had broken my pattern, also, and sinned against order by arriving home on foot, too late for the landlady's Friday fish. Then broken it again this morning, by not going out at my usual time, revving the motor and roaring off in a cloud of smut.

On my way downstairs, after sleeping through breakfast, I broke the landlady's conversation with old Miss Striller. They were standing at the bottom of the stairs cutting up and serving somebody, probably me, and broke off in a sour confusion when I appeared. I went past them without speaking, deciding it was a breaking day.

And I decided to break old man Freeman's solitude. I could see him through the flawed parlor window, sitting in his year-long corner of the porch, with the little wicker table in front of him, playing solitaire.

I moved closer to study him, to find my point of entry. He was changeless, exactly the same each day — balding brown head, narrow shoulders, tough, sullen profile, deliberate motions of his hands with the cards. All through the heat of summer he'd sat in that corner, in the thick shade of the grape vine, playing solitaire. Now the vine was a tangle of brown and chartreuse vegetable wires, with the folded corpses of leaves hanging here and there, rocking in the wind. And now the old man wore, over the patched navy blue cardigan he'd worn all summer, a thin blanket tucked around his shoulders. It was the same kind of cheap, grey blanket that was on my bed — on all the beds, probably.

I went out and stood in front of him.

"That's my blanket," I said.

He raised his eyes and looked me over, then looked down thoughtfully and moved a card.

I rested my hip against the porch railing and folded my arms.

"That's my blanket you've got, old man."

He laughed, showing a mouthful of horribly rotten teeth.

"It is a dull day, isn't it?" he said. "What do you want?"

"What's that game you're playing?"

"Solitaire."

"It doesn't look like any solitaire I've seen."

"It doesn't? But how perceptive are you?"

He was looking down at the cards, laughing under his breath. I was growing impatient.

Then he said suddenly, "I invented it. It's the perfect game of solitaire. It always comes out right."

He swept the pattern of cards together and shuffled through them, selecting cards to show me.

"Look, the two kings. The king of hearts and the king of clubs. Look at their faces. The kindly judge and the hostile judge. And here is the — I don't call him victim or culprit; the one has a paranoid ring, the other suggests a rather overdone sense of guilt — no, I just call him the Jack.The Jack of diamonds. Look at his face. Ingenuous, passive. Utterly passive. There's the true criminal of our time."

The old man was growing excited now, producing cards like a conjurer, his brown speckled eyes glinting in the weak sunshine that came through the interstices of the vine. I could see the landlady standing in the parlor like a fish in a tank, watching us.

"Look," the old man said. "Each card represents a crime or a folly. The ace of hearts, the crime of love. Of diamonds, the crime of greed. Clubs, cruelty. And of course, the ace of spades, the conventional murder. There are cards for the penalties, too. Even one for acquittal. It never comes out that way, though. When I first started playing, sometimes it used to come out at the death penalty, and that satisfied me. I thought it was working out all right. But I have perfected it. Now it always comes out at solitary confinement."

He offered me a card, a deuce, and I saw the red marks in his palm.

"What's that on your hand?" I said.

He laughed, expelling the odor of his foul teeth. He spread both

his hands, palms up. There was a tiny deuce tattooed in the centre of each.

"That is my sign, my verdict. Solitary confinement. The eternal dialogue with oneself."

I felt the whole, huge day, like the old house, creaking with boredom.

"Ha!" he laughed at me. A leaf shadow lay momentarily like a pirate's patch over one of his eyes. "You think I've got a Messiah complex. Stigmata. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"I was the opposite of Lady MacBeth — 'Out, damned spot' — People came to me and paid for their damned spots. I did this myself, you know. This one," he pointed to his right palm, "I did left-handed.

"Oh, yes, I made a living tattooing. Giving courage to the uneasy, virility to the secretly doubtful, the seal of experience to wistful boys.

"Once I had a customer, a man in his fifties, said he must be reminded constantly of the depth of his corruption. Wanted swine eating out of his navel, and serpents twining among his genitals. I gave him what he wanted, his specifics against temptation."

"Don't you do it any more?" I asked.

I was thinking perhaps I should have some insignia of my own, and wondering what would be suitably original. A match and a tin of kerosene? A pictorial representation of a cerebral hemorrhage?

"I gave it up," the old man said. "It was all in vain, as vain as the painting. I used to paint, too, as a hobby. It was my way of coping with reality, turning the day's disasters into some semblance of order.

"Order, that's the thing! A kind of redemption. But I realized finally that the painting, and even the tattooing, though it made my living, were only steps in the evolution of this game of solitaire."

His small, coarse hands moved again among the cards, constructing a pattern. I didn't want him to escape. I put my weight on to a loose board of the porch. It creaked gratingly. He looked up, laughing again.

"Ah, but you should have seen the paintings I did. Demons and gorgons battling. Blood and bestialities from one end of the canvas to the other. But no one ever noticed the angels, or the little pure humans, away down in the corner, bringing bandages or planting flowers. Or maybe they did. Maybe they did see them, and that's why they called me mad."

"Ha!" I said. "So you have been called mad."

He opened his mouth wide in a soundless laugh.

"Twice! Twice before a magistrate, and twice sent up. The kindly judge and the hostile judge. The first time — No. I won't tell you what it was I did.

"I was in the merchant navy. You can see I'm not a large man. There was this fireman, Semlin was his name, one of those great, muscular turds who must always be proving the superiority of muscle over mind. He took a dislike to me. He made my life misery. As if I were a new first-former at a boarding school. The jeering, the debasement, the surreptitious kick or cuff or twist."

The old man's wrinkled eyelids dropped. His hands moved restlessly, then turned up a card.

"One night I got back at him. He came aboard drunk from an evening ashore, and passed out. I . . . will not tell you what I did. It was a petty thing. But I'll tell you this —"

His sullen old face tried to assume a mask of wisdom — the venerable llama, the sage elder, the eternal crap-shovelling ancient. I yawned.

He went on, "Let a strong man do a spiteful act, and he stands an even chance of being forgiven. Or at least understood. But do a weak and spiteful thing, and the whole world will rise to accuse you, having found, at last, a just object for its contempt.

"They locked me up — to protect me from his vengefulness, they said. Then, when we reached home port, he laid charges against me. The magistrate ordered me examined. He was a kind old chap, soft-spoken, chosen no doubt for his excellent projection of the father-image.

"Two doctors spoke to me, for perhaps forty minutes. I was younger then, I believed in the power of facts. I told them how I had been driven. I spread before them instance after instance of Semlin's cruelty.

"They said, 'Yes, yes, but you need a rest. There are so many Semlins. You have to rest and grow strong before you face them again.' So they signed me away. I would have appealed to my friends from the ship for help, but I'd seen the aversion on their faces when they glanced at me."

"You tattooed him!" I said. "You tattooed him while he was passed out."

I felt a surge of strength, of the power of action that was in me and not in the old man. I stood over him triumphantly.

His eyes flickered over me.

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe that was it. Maybe it was something else. What do you care?"

"You said twice." I bore down on him. I was beginning to enjoy myself now. "You said twice you were sent up. The kindly judge and the hostile judge."

The old man sighed and straightened a row of cards.

"Yes. After a while they let me out. They didn't tell me whether I had been cured, or even whether I'd been sick, for that matter. They said I could go, and I went home to my wife.

"Yes," he grimaced. "I had a wife. Of course, we hadn't lived together steadily for a couple of years, with me being at sea and then in the hospital. I don't think she knew quite what to do with a husband, especially a husband just delivered from the lunie bin.

"She screened off a corner of the front room for me to sleep in. I opened my tattooing shop. She worked in some office. She kept me while I was waiting for customers. She cooked my meals and looked after my clothes. Sometimes she'd go out with me for a drink, or to a movie. She was very polite and patient, even when I'd try to touch her. She would just break away gently, reproachfully, and tell me we must get to know one another again first.

"Four months we lived like that. At night I could hear her undressing in the bedroom where I'd used to sleep. I got so I would yell at her, curse her, accuse her of having lovers. The neighbours looked at her pityingly. She was polite and patient.

"Then one night I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to her and forced her. I forced myself on her.

"The next day I was again before a magistrate. A different one. This one was obviously practiced in dealing with the scum of the city. He had a look and tone he put on like a pair of reading glasses when he was addressing me. All of my wife's neighbours were there, to testify to my violent temper and jealousy. There was a statement from the hospital that I had been dismissed 'condition unchanged.'

"So they sent me back. And I stayed. I began to feel at peace there. Everything was so orderly, so routined." He laughed again, showing his brown, broken teeth. "One must go to a madhouse to find the truly stable society.

"There was a fairly good library there. I read and painted and began gradually to evolve this game of solitaire. I might have been there yet, but," and here he grew excited; his hands moved rapidly, "they wanted to take out all my teeth! 'Remove the organs of infection', one of them said."

And now, for the first time, I did see some hint of madness in

his face. His yellow-brown eyes glinted like coins. He leaned toward me.

"After all that — they wanted to *unpoison me*!"

He went into a spasm of coughing laughter, spraying his foul breath at me. I moved quickly back.

"I walked out," he said. "It was easy to do. They weren't expecting me to try it. I just walked down the road to a bus stop, and caught a bus. I had a little money that I'd been able to earn. Enough for a set of clothes and a room. I got along. I worked sometimes, sometimes just played solitaire. I don't know whether or not they ever tried to find me.

"Of course, they could find me now if they wanted to. The welfare department has me filed in quadriplicate, no doubt. But they know I'm harmless. They pay my pension and leave me alone. Except every so often some nervous social worker wants me to have my teeth out."

The old man reached into his pocket and brought out a packet of tobacco and papers.

When he had finished rolling his cigarette, I said, "I have no cigarettes."

He looked at me cautiously, under his lowered eyelids, then sighed and held out to me the one he'd just made. I took it.

The reaching forward motion of his arm dislodged the grey blanket he was wearing. As he put up his hand to tuck the corner around his shoulder, the sleeve of his cardigan slid back. I saw a steel-blue serial number tattooed on his arm, a mark he could have been given only in a Nazi concentration camp. A wave of horror and anger came redly up into my head. The old man was lying, or really mad, innocently mad.

"You've been lying to me!" I said. "It was all lies! You were *there*. It was *there* that everything happened to you."

He swung his hands up in a placating gesture, with the marked palms facing me.

"No," he said. "I know what you think. But I got that mark here, in this country."

"How?" I challenged him.

"I don't really know. I can only guess." He leaned across the table, his eyes dilating, pulling me in. He put a hand on my wrist. I was shocked by the touch, dry and smooth like a leather glove. His voice was low, portentous. "You've heard of the phenomenon of automatic handwriting? I woke one morning with this number on my arm, and my dyes and needles beside me."

I pulled my wrist away from him. My back slammed against the porch railing.

"You're putting me down!" I screamed at him. "All this time you've been hoaxing me, laughing at me!"

The enormity of it, absurdity piled on absurdity, and me fish-mouthed taking it all, swept over me. I felt I was shrinking, becoming a child or an old, dried husk like old man Freeman himself.

"You're a rotten liar!" I shouted.

The landlady and Miss Striller came to the door and stood muttering, watching me. And the old man sat there laughing at me, his eyes lost between their wrinkled lids and all his rotten teeth showing.

At last he stopped laughing and said, "Calm yourself. Light your cigarette."

I obeyed like a child. I picked up the cigarette that I'd dropped. My hands were shaking so that I had difficulty lighting the match.

"I don't remember your name?" the old man said.

"Brander," I told him, too angry and confused to refuse him.

That set him laughing again.

"Brander!" he wheezed. "An excellent name! Did you choose it?"

"Choose it?" I said. "No. I just accepted it."

"It's a name I might have chosen for myself when I was in the tattooing business," he said. "But I didn't choose my name until I had my number."

I dragged on the cigarette he'd rolled. It burned unevenly, the coal eating down one side. The landlady and Miss Striller decided there wasn't going to be any more excitement. They went back into the house, glaring over their shoulders.

"I'll tell you the truth about this number," old Freeman said softly. "I don't know how it came here. Only I know it freed me when it did.

"You know how the bodies of young boys, and young girls too probably, are often sprinkled with soft brown moles? Velvety, like mullein leaves. I had a big one here on my arm. As I grew older, it changed, became coarser, blue-black, ominous-looking. I used to worry about it. I thought it might be pre-carcinomous. One day I woke, and it was gone and this number was in its place. All the malignancy had concentrated into this number, this prison mark.

"It's strange, but the moment I saw it I felt a wonderful sense of relief, of freedom. It was the realization of what I had been trying to achieve with my tattooed deuces. I was marked, and the

mark was there to be seen. It coincided with the mark I wore inside me. Order, you see? Harmony.

"It was then I chose my name. Freeman. Freedom is the recognition of necessity. Jack Freeman."

He smiled at me, parternally, like a kindly judge. I knew he would stick to that story. I wouldn't be able to break it. I knew there was nothing I could do.

I threw away the ragged cigarette.

"You've got my blanket," I said. "I want it. Now."

He moved two cards on the table and bared his brown teeth at me in a grin of triumph.

"It worked out again," he said. "Take the blanket."

He unwrapped the thin blanket from around his back, and handed it to me. I held it over my arm, aware of it as an extension of him — the thin, gritty texture of it, and the smell of his tobacco. I moved a step away. He did nothing. I walked deliberately almost to the door before I turned around again. He was still grinning.

I went back to him as though I'd been jerked there, shoving the blanket on to the table, under his face, brushing his damned game all ways onto the floor.

"Don't you want it back?" I said, and I could hear the baffled anger in my own voice. "Aren't you cold, old man?"

He just laughed.

"Look at you, look at you," I shouted, "you're shivering! You *need* this blanket, old man. You need to get it back from me. Ask me for it, go on! See, it's right here, all you have to do is reach out, maybe I'll let you keep it. Go on, go on, try!"

He went on laughing and laughing.

"Why don't you at least curse me!" I yelled at him. "You fool! You stubborn old fool!"

I grabbed him and shoved the blanket into his face, screaming at him to take it, take it, take it!

"Mr. Brander!" Shouted, right in my ear. The landlady. She must have come up behind me. Kept saying, "Mr. *Bran*der, Mr. *Bran*der," even after I dropped the blanket and stepped back from the old man.

Miss Striller was standing in the doorway with her mouth open.

"I'll call the police," she said in a high, quavery voice.

Old man Freeman had his breath back.

"No, don't," he called. "It's quite all right, Miss Striller, Mrs. Bossom" — he nodded to the landlady — "Just a misunderstanding."

He stood up, a little guy about half my weight.

"Mr. Brander felt that I was in need of an extra blanket, and wanted to give me his. Young people often fail to understand that their charity, however kindly motivated, can be repugnant to an old man's pride. Nevertheless, he meant well."

A practiced liar. The two women softened, flattered by his dignified language, and their attitude toward me changed from fear and outrage to something less clear-cut.

"Well," the landlady said doubtfully, "well, all right. But I can't have such an *emo*tional person around. You never know what might happen. Mr. Brander, I'm giving you notice. You'll have to leave at the end of the week."

I just stood there, watching old man Freeman's hands gesturing as he talked soothingly. His hands were nimble and lively from years of dealing cards. It was almost impossible to glimpse the tattooes in the palms.

I was so fascinated by his hands that I wasn't listening to what he said until he had satisfied the landlady, and she humphed back into the house. Then his last sentence penetrated my mind.

"Mrs. Bossom, I'll personally take responsibility for Mr. Brander."

I stared at him, at his knowing, malicious eyes. He was *befriending* me! As if he knew how few people had ever offered to befriend me, and what kind they were, and the disgust I felt for them. It was all there in his eyes, without pity.

I got away from him, upstairs to my room, hardly able to breathe until the dark, varnished door was closed behind me. I was still clutching his blanket. I threw it into a corner, and opened the window to get the old-man smell of it out.

From the narrow window of the room, I could see, past the rows of close, old houses and the few skinny trees, a lighted hill of suburb, and sweeping past it, the road out.

I'll go, I decided. As soon as the motorcycle's fixed, I'll take off west, or south, or somewhere. But maybe I won't. All cities are much the same, and at least here I have a bed with an extra blanket.

I took off my shirt. I twisted myself before the cheap mirror on the highboy. That soft mole behind my shoulder — I had noticed lately that it was becoming coarser and darker. I wondered if it might become malignant.

EGG SONATA

by JOE ROSENBLATT, a young Toronto poet, whose *voyage of the mood* was published in 1965 by the Heinrich Heine Press.

I

"The Chick Peepeth From The Egg"
— Akhnaton

To an ounce and a half of energy strutting around in the palm of my hand
I say: congratulations . . . , you've made it;
don't blame you for being mad at me,
digging your beak into my finger,

don't blame you for looking up at me with defiance
like I was responsible for you being in the egg in the first place;
congratulations! you've made it, nosed your way out of the egg;
a poet would have died there, deciding he was mad, curled up and died there
in a perfect oval nightmare, but you my little refugee, are here in my palm
scratching for the answer, you have an Oedipus fixation, you think I'm responsible
for your situation, and bent on revenge, you follow the life line in my palm —

would I have made it in your place?
don't really know
it's tough on your nose
breaking the enamelware

then suppose, your nose is kind of soft
what then?
it makes me sweat!
O birdie! congratulations, a thousand times congratulations,
congratulations! congratulations! congratulations!

Yes! every morning at breakfast I get kind of religious

how fortunate I am
breaking the egg
from the outside
instead
of inside
out.

II

Let the egg live, let it be lowered, into a flower pot and buried in loam, and yes,
let the egg dream in technicolor, dream black loam and sunlight, egg-plants,
pear shaped purple enigmas, fruitation —
the last vegetable fantasy of the egg and not
Canadiana
— a dull maple leaf —

the egg should live forever, the yellow yolk endeared to the egg, loved
by the oval exterior
slick art form
erotic spheroid!

this morning I've cooked
— a wild enormous egg —
intact on a plate
I've scalped a hole
in the plaster

the spoon gouging out
the egg, gouging! gouging!
for dead
dinosaurs, crocodiles, lizards,
turtles, kingfishers, albatross, webbed toads, flying dragons, salamanders, golden
eagles, herring gulls, blue jays, great horned owls, peregrine hawks, Canadian
mallards, deadly hummingbirds, garden snakes, seedy romantic poets . . .

what evil lies in the egg?

III

"Mass production methods sweeping the egg industry
have given Canadians the lowest egg prices in more
than 20 years . . ." *Globe & Mail* — March 5, 1965.

EGG PRODUCTION CRACKS PRICES
or
Depression Time For Hens

the price of eggs are falling —
thirty-five cents a dozen
that's three cents an egg,
that's depression
for the farmer
the hen
and the egg, unwanted,
unloved;
— a sphere of melancholia —
on our breakfast table.

the egg
can't hide its curved feelings,
enamelled skies crack,
the egg, emotional. . . .
shell-shocked and broken . . .
spills its yolk heart
out on the breakfast plate.

It's a bad year
for the farmer, the egg, and the hen
that's depression
that's automation
that's exploitation

the perfect Canadian hen, reduced
to a second class bird, a bum,
a prairie chicken, a tramp,
pimped away on the market
for practically nothing . . .

soon the eggs will roll out of gum machines.

30 BELOW

In Alberta the antelope
are dying on the CPR tracks
at 30 below zero.
Their frozen bodies
lie beside the tracks,
feet pointing
at the passenger train going by.

This Fall
the hunters will walk
far north
looking for game.

Chief Walking Eagle says
Manitou brought the ice
to punish white hunters
who leave their dead ducks and rabbits
by the side of the road.

But the animals are frozen
carcasses now by every road,

the hunters are warm in lodges
waiting for the big thaw.

They know Manitou
doesn't hold his breath
all winter.

GEORGE BOWERING

GEORGE BOWERING, who teaches at the University of Alberta at Calgary, is a widely-published author and critic. *El Corno Emplumado* brought out his latest book of poems, *the man in the yellow boots*, in 1965.

A FEW MYTHS

When a short-panted boy
with a home-made bat clouted
with Graceless efficiency a six
into old man Shirt's
("Get off my garden!") garden,
we appealed to a god of cricket,
not a white-bearded W. G. Grace
but an Australian
with sloppy accent
"Who d'you think you are — Don Bradman?"
A god
with an Australian accent,
heard about,
never seen,
ruthless,
he slaughtered
the English consistently,
like that aboriginal savage Strang the Terrible
we all read about in *The Wizard* a primitive giant
untouched by colonialism,
for the colonials played cricket
on neat well-watered lawns and left evil
in the humid jungle outside.
Somehow Strang would take care of it
with his civilized weapon — Clicky Ba
an old cricket bat
(with a sloppy accent)
bequeathed by an old colonial.
And so Boy the Terrible
wielded his home-made Clicky Ba
with enormous swipe
(to the power of six) and
took care of old man Shirt.

Who d'you think you are — Don Bradman?
But any time you hit the ball
into his neat garden
(and it happened often)
you had to go and get it —
sneak into the flower beds of evil
where lilies festered and Old Man Shirt
might pounce and carry off
your balls.

When a short-panted boy
with a mouth organ plugged
with pocket fluff and spit managed
with wheezy suck and blow
to approach a tune we knew,
we appealed to a god of music,
not a motleyed pied-piper
but an American
"Who d'you think you are — Larry Adler?"
And we'd pelt
along the road spellbound
with the tune and
with the thought
of the matinee we were going to
at the local bug-hut.
Each week
some petrified man or
innocent girl
(but what did we know of innocence?)
gaped at the evil shadow
of an enormous hand — *The Clutching Hand*
coming to obliterate them
as the music swelled and
we saw
CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.
And so Boy Piper
blew loud and big his mouth organ
hoping to freeze that Hand.

But we daren't say it
out loud
in the presence of
beauty and love
afraid for our lives.
She might turn round and
despoil us.
Then that comic war came —
(we'd seen *The Great Dictator*
at a theatre called *The Gaiety*)
started by
a German Charlie Chaplin
an Italian Silenus
and later a midget Jap.
And it all happened
remotely as a comedy
although we saw an inferno
one Christmas.
Our school was bombed —
smashing! one week's holiday.
And some of our schoolmates were killed
when they decided to take apart
a bomb they'd found,
and
the funeral got us out of German homework. And
wrecked German planes were trundled into
the RAF post
in our school yard —
our contribution to the war effort,
but we used the Nissen hut
(we had a key —
one of the boys lit the fire
for our gallant RAF)
to play hookey and table tennis.

Who d'you think you are — Larry Adler?
But it was always
continued next week. The Hand
always came back ready to clutch
and rob you of
your organ.

When some mother we knew
as a loud-mouthed despoiler
of our
("Bill-eee! Your tea's ready!")
games dressed herself up
and
went out (consciously beautiful) to town,
we jeered at her secretly
(we always jeered at beauty and love —
conditioned at the local bug-hut
where beauty and love
had nothing to do
with what we knew)
we appealed to a goddess of beauty,
not a Hollywood Helen or Venus
but an American
"Who d'you think you are — Mrs. Simpson?"
When she stepped onto the bus
she rode into another world
shop windows
full of model finery
where she dazzled dukes and men
gave up kingdoms
for her.
And so
we jeered
at her secretly
Who d'you think you are — Mrs. Simpson?

And afterwards	our mysterious and alien		gods
			left us.
Don Bradman	became		Sir Donald
Mrs. Simpson	was		a Duchess
Larry Adler	played		his harmonica
	(not a mouth organ)	with	a symphony orchestra.
We had suddenly been			
	despoiled		
	spellbound		
	come to manhood	and	
	balls and organs taken		our world
	taken apart.		Petrified
we could no longer jeer at beauty		and	love,
	for there was		nothing left,
		only	the evil outside
(but what did we know about evil?)			
heard about,			
never seen,			
ruthless,			ready to clutch us
in a land without gods			
			afraid for our lives.

PETER STEVENS

A Few Myths, says PETER STEVENS, is about "extensions back into the past. Key words and images are isolated in the column to the right so that the poem extends back along the line. The poem should be read across in the normal manner before the right-hand column is seen in isolation."

OUR ZOO AT NIGHT

There are lions
in the park,
Dream-devouring
hungers,
Tigers in loins
in our dark.

FREDERICK CANDELARIA

Other work by FREDERICK CANDELARIA and ALBERT DRAKE appears on page 43 and page 50 respectively.

THE ARMS OF ST. PETER'S

Enclose the stuttering clouds
Of pigeons which spiral up
Under the wheels of tour buses,
Sweep over the black massed
Clouds of priests who, having
Traveled a world to get home,
Ignore the rough chalk wall sign
The thronged tourists disown:
Dirty scogg BOBS was here —
ANDOVER MASS
suppliziato brother
suppliziato

ALBERT DRAKE

Two Poems by David M. Summers

PROCESSION

So wave your piece of lace and let me guess
Lean and let the dark leather creak again
Together we shall wait, listen and gaze
To listen for the unexpected plops
Strike the hollow bridge on time and in time
Watch the blurred waves chop, the sails chop, in time

Slow, it is slow, each black leg lifts and falls
A regulated accent of a whip, cracks

They seem to move, do they, their twisted arms?
Their iron cold and melting into curls
Shaking the black faces, unrelenting
Bow in disrespect and say they said so
Passing across the gap between the cloth . . .
It is long and slow. It is long and slow.
Exhale and draw the heavy curtains black.

GOD, IT'S DECEMBER

Through twisting black bark, the branches
Shield the marchers from the sounds.

Heavy breathing on the marsh.

And, in the same land they arrange
The splinters of the mandolin
Between the flames of dying cinders;
There sever fir, the holly boughs;
Crack stems, rip the aging veins,
Plunge and burn the stolen seed.
Gather the fallen mother, heap
And kiss her broken stone-white face:
Sacrifice the virgin, melt her,
Stir the candle with an iron.
In, into the fire with all of them.

Those gold spires, those reaching points
Twist, torture their direction;
They do not touch the frozen heaven,
Caught between the snapping beams
Which glow and stain the tiles red;
Frail wrestlers settle and twist,
Finished, with dust to dust, forever.

Lay the black wreath on a snow drift.

Another poem by the author appears on page 48.

Two Poems by Barry Lord

poem on revolution by a Castro sympathizer
recently removed from Vancouver to Saint John

no
you have no
God in man
you go back
the beginning

Simon Bolivar
and Jesus Christ
after the revolution
crucifixion
God saw the Atlantic
ocean in wave
and wave on shore
as Castro
sees Havana harbour

God in
Jesus Christ
I have no meaning
but the word
revolution
and the waves
the crucifixion
now
in Havana
the harbour of Saint John

I have lived in Vancouver
I have the False Creek in my mouth
I have the inlet disease
Lowry in Dollarton
and Bolivar
we have the sickness of the great steep wave
we have
we have revolution

in Saint John harbour
we have blood
buried behind King Square
on a hill top
we have a tree
        crucify tree
the tree the word
        revolt

blowing

her anger always
            waiting
I declare an anniversary

            of my waste
I ask the dead man
found in bush
        who dies afraid
        remembering
        pretends himself
the power of the boots
from kicking

and she is the wind
I live at the edges of continents
        her anger a wind
                afraid
        and pretending
I am blown along the steep sides of highways
railway freight sheds
the road and the tracks are blown in the bush

snow
on the body of the dead man
him afraid
I ask

his boots
her anger

pretend to fear
my tracks my sides
myself

the shed
remember
the anniversary of winters
in bush on road

blowing

Curator of Art at the New Brunswick Museum in Saint John, BARRY LORD describes his style as "influenced generally by contemporary American poets, conversations with Roy Kiyooka, the curious examples of Bill Bissett and (very slightly) Lionel Kearns, but largely by my own need for greater honesty, clarity and strength of language." The poems published here will eventually be in *Poets '67*.

Three Poems by William Wantling

DON'T SHOOT

"Don't Shoot!" she
screamed, & as the dark
shadowed figure clicked
back the pistolhammer
twice I muttered Sheeeit . . .
I snapped off the set &
Ruthie hollered in from
the kitchen — Whatsamatter
Genius, too deep for you?
& I put Miles'
Sketches of
Spain on the stereo & we
had popcorn that night, 7-
up, & made love on the
livingroom rug
then when Ruthie was sleep-
ing, I read an old letter
from my first wife, wrote
a poem about her & the years
in L.A. & the narcotics, &
wondered about that old man
whose skull we'd had to
fracture to take his lousy
$83 that one bad sick
time, wondered if he'd
lived, if he'd ever just
loved & lived simply & with
total thanks as I had this
night . . .

HOPE

hope
is a lynching
framed over & over
on the blunt split
platform of
Life

IT'S COLD FOR AUGUST

it's cold for August
& it's been raining now
for 3 days & nights
a vague unease has
settled over many in
this place
unease
denied in the usual
manner, things going
on as usual

when I see
the people playing
golf in a Sunday rain
see them
flocking to a small
sad circus & being
gaily cheated, peeping
small sad peeps of
counterfeit joy, as if
the grand old days had
never ended

or I
notice the insects are
gone, the ladybugs
the lightning bugs
the grasshoppers &
the ants
& how few birds
returned this year

I remember the famed
mount of ancient days, how
the volcano came like the
Voice of God, burying the
town as it went about
its daily tasks
& then remember the
Hiroshima volcano, the
one erupting over
Nagasaki
& I walk alone through
a deserted park, wishing
I could leave with the
birds, or like the black
dog before me, pissing
on the nearest public
statue

WILLIAM WANTLING, an American whose poems have appeared frequently, including *Best Poems of 1962*, is presently at work on a novel. He considers Charles Bukowski "one of the Great Ones of our time, who will probably be the typical great poet unrecognized by the literary Mafia until many years after his death."

Two Poems by ROBERT KROETSCH, who teaches at Harpur College in New York. His novel, *But We Are Exiles*, was published in 1965 by Macmillan of Canada.

NATIVE

Laughing Crow was a Black-
foot brave who knew half
the women west of Winni
peg;
he had a Ph.
D. in anthropology from Yale,
an Oxford accent, a Mercedes-
Benz convertible
and a love
potion brewed from sun-

flower seeds: a sprig of water
hemlock: the claws of a female
wolf: his own semen:
and an
academic interest in Christian
mythology.

SYLLOGISMS OF DESIRE

A. All dogs have fleas.

My bed and blankets all are rank
with itching; back, belly, bum and
balls all burn.

Therefore my dog has fleas and keeps
me scratching.

B. *Whosoeuer desireth to liue vertuously,*
desireth to auoide fornication.

Whosoever desires the above
has never heard a Tristan grieve
for pale Iseult, has never wept
where sad Francesca and Paolo move:

nor dug an early grave,
nor drunk wine from a sieve.

C. Man is what he eats.

For breakfast, two raw eggs:
kidney for lunch, with turnip
and mushroom red in the peppered
juice of a crushed onion: fresh
nutmeg and gin at six, with pods
of vanilla oyster-crammed: neck
(after the ten o'clock news)
of mutton fried in deep hot
fat, two raw eggs, and one
small rhinoceros horn.

Ergo: come, sweet, I must
in thee abide.

D. All beauty lies in the beholder's eyes.

Radiant Apollo, god of sun
and wisdom, giver of song,
healer of mankind, teller
of past and future, right and wrong,
bringer of peace and harmony and good:
embraced the branches of a tree
and kissed the wood.

Therefore: you certainly shall want me yet
like Pasiphaë, hot for a big white bull,
trotting the pastures in a perfect sweat.

E. Socrates met Xantippe.

Did he ask: What
is justice? Did he
ask: Young lady, what
do you mean by love?
Did he undo her
brassiere?

All men are mortal.

F. All women praise this poem.
These lines have taught
them all the difference between
Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not.

Therefore: now try your dialetic skill,
and let us one on other work our will.

IF ONLY SOMEONE ELSE WOULD COME

(Translated by JUDITTE SARKANY-PERRET and EARLE BIRNEY from the Hungarian of ENDRE ADY.)

To show how I loved
I rushed you the wild hungry
troops of my desires, the proud hordes
of the blood

I envy, pity, detest you,
you lucky slut,
royal beggar
of Lust.

If only I could want somebody else
as I want you. O if someone
would come. A different woman. Somebody. Another.
Anybody.

CSAK JÖNNE MÁS

Hódolni kergettem elébed
a vágyak éhes csapatát,
nomád, vad, büszke csapatát
a vérnek.

Irigyellek, szánlak, utállak,
szerencsés koldusasszonya
Királyi koldusasszonya
a Vágynak.

Csak tudnék én nást úgy kivánni
Mint téged. Oh, csak jönne más.
Egy más asszony. Valaki. Más.
Akárki.

ENDRE ADY, who died in 1919, was a leading Hungarian poet of his generation. JUDITTE SARKANY-PERRET's translations of Attila were in 5:2. EARLE BIRNEY, one of Canada's best-known authors, is writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto.

Two Poems by D. M. Thomas

the English poet whose verse has appeared extensively. The following poems are in the "science-fiction" vein which he has been exploring.

CANCER

Robert Ettinger, in "The Prospect of Immortality", *suggests that disease can be overcome by deep-freezing our bodies until such time as medical-science has found a cure.*

'I who was "dead" and locked in ice
— ten years? — ten thousand years? — now feel
my venal, grey storm-troopers rise,
re-form their ranks, re-fired with zeal
to occupy this all but-vanquished land.

But wait! No sooner does my H.Q. hum,
than comes a greater Lord than I,
who massacres our strategy
and plunges us to second night.
I die; the City stands upright.'

So, when at last the sheeted host
shall spring untarnished from the ground
at Gabriel's trumpet-blast, the most
shall be chastised and re-engulfed;
while Christadelphians stand like flags around.

ANDROID ELEGY

At the last moment I
thought of the Neanderthals
pouring their flint arrows
into the rough grave
with its skins, haunch of meat, and
the wedding-ring I did
fling down onto your
casket was like a
lifebuoy, but where could I
possibly pretend that you were
going? I think that if I could
have paid more for you,
there would have been more persons
standing above that hole.

Bion and Theocritus
seeing your straight limbs,
classic grace of feature and gold
dazzling curls would have
unhitched their pipes but
chancing to see the
tiny emblem '*made in*
U.S.A.' in the whorl of your
navel would have
shuddered and walked
on. And yet I loved you, E-
vanasse, passing the love of
women.

LETTER TO MY MOTHER

I

I address you only,
my lonely mother.
Where seven islands
Squat in a filthy sea
You say your rosary.
The seven hills of Rome
Loom daily over the deaths
Of the weepers in the bazaar,
Equally without hope,
In the shape of your home
Which was also on a hill.
My small prosperous grandfather
Built a house there. He died,
Mourned by you, from me
Farther even than Rome.
Holy he rode to heaven.
He would be ashamed of me
Who attend to no virgins.
You are not ashamed.
In the corroding sun
You sit alone with your Church
And the memory of the son
You have scarcely ever seen.
You pray he may be spared
For the arms of the blue wife
God raped in an orchard.
You do not understand me.
I am tidying my life
In this cold, tidy country.
I am filling a small shelf
with my books. If you should find me crying
As often when I was a child
You will know I have reason to.
I am ashamed of myself
Since I was ashamed of you.

II

Your eyes are like mine.
When I last looked in them
I saw my whole country,
A defeated dream
Hiding itself in prayers,
A population of corpses,
Of burnt bodies that cluttered
The slow, deep rivers, of
Bodies stowed into earth
Quickly before they stank
Or cooked by the sun for vultures
On a marble tower.
You pray, you do not notice
The corpses around you.
Sorrow has stopped your eye.
Your dream is desolate.
It calls me every day
But I cannot enter it.
You know I will not return.
Forgive me my trespasses.

DOM MORAES

This poem was one of the eighteen commissioned from Commonwealth poets and presented at the 1965 Commonwealth Arts Festival in London. Born in Bombay, DOM MORAES is now a film script writer in London. The first of his three books of verse won the Hawthornden Prize; he is also known for his Indian journal, *Gone away*.

සීගිරිය

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බලාගෙන සිටිනවාවි. ———— සත්‍යපාලන

SIGIRIYA*

Under the weight of stupored heads
the palace stoops;
shall we in laughter
watch love's fortress fall?

Love overspreads the sky,
and the moat is filled with tears
that stay love's secret
from the ignorant eye.

The Rock of Love is mangled
by a thousand paths,
on every side
paths lighten through the sky;

yet, trapped in the earth
among roots blind feet have dragged,
we never could
love's pinnacle overtop.

Above this cragged hill
fashioned by broken lives,
lightly love dances,

music floats away
borne upon the drifting wind, music
forgets me.

From a rocky cave at the foot of this great rock
with a lone leopard to jaw my loneliness
shall I gaze on Sigiriya, the Lion Rock,
till from the swampy earth my feet are loosed.

SIRI GUNASINGHE

* A rock fortress of ancient Ceylon; the caved-in walls contain the now world-famous series of murals depicting ideally beautiful women as seen by an artist-king of ancient Ceylon (600 A.D.); the figures are symbols of love and, by extension, the rock *Sigiriya* itself stands as an undying monument to Love.

Translated from the Sinhala by GAMINI SENEVIRITNA.

SIRI GUNASINGHE is one of the New Poets of Ceylon writing in the island's major language — Sinhala. He is considered a revolutionary innovator trying to establish a new form devoid of the traditional trappings of "literary" poetry, and the rhetoric that has dominated the poetic scene for long centuries. Challenged and attacked by the older masters, he is at the same time accepted by many as a recognizably new voice worth listening to. Author of three anthologies of poetry and a revolutionary novel, Gunasinghe presently lectures in Sanskrit literature at the University of Ceylon. The poem printed here is one of several he read at the Commonwealth Poetry Conference held at Cardiff in 1965.

Two Poems

by A. E. DUDLEY, past editor of *Chase* and widely-published poet. He is deputy headmaster of a Catholic school in England.

SONG ON MY BRAIN

I have been carrying it around with me all day,
A familiar melody, once;
Singing it over silently,
Time and again.
It is you here in my mind,
The simple phrases, trite and well-remembered,
Popular once.
I have been repeating and repeating
(The monotonous fascination of it)
The hypnotic lines,
The inevitable sequence of chord changes.
It is you changed from the once familiar
Song on my brain,
Ineradicable pattern,
The sad corpse of a tune.

THE ESTUARY BIRDS

We have our longbilled songs of perception:
Sand and mud are a world,
Heaven is a smooth veined tidewash of perfection.
Strandwalking landwinged life is in a shield,
The vacant air of compass, round to migration,
Round with protection.
Life is a flat of two-dimension,
Death is a wingwide sky beyond concern.
Limitation is not forlorn.
Our types are lived in parallel conventions:
We have our personal longbilled songs of perception.

SONG OF A WALKING LAMPSHADE

To the God of Power

I am a walking lampshade
On this earth
Black parchment
On white skeletal frame
I am a walking lampshade
For your mind's delight
To shade my burning heart
The searchlight
The Death light
To shade my light from you

But do I dare
to open up
To flare up
To show you
Some corners of your room
The abstract shapes from Hiroshima
The blood on the Berlin wall?

Do I dare to show you
A looking-glass
An Asylum
Yourself
Crazy as craziest you
With your backside
On a heap of arms
And your glory at its height —
A bloody mess
A horrible decay?

Do I dare to show you
Your faces
Funny as funniest you
Like the nights when you
Kissed me with your lips

Or the days
When your bootsoles stamped my face?
Do I dare to tell you
That I have some feeling too
And that I am bloody sick of you
Your demented view
And your God of Power spew?

Do I dare to lighten up
The rotting rats
In Kaffirs' shanty towns
The lethal air you breathe
The graveyards of the wars
The sexuality of the night
Masturbating itself
Along a missile
Along a graveside
Along a corpse

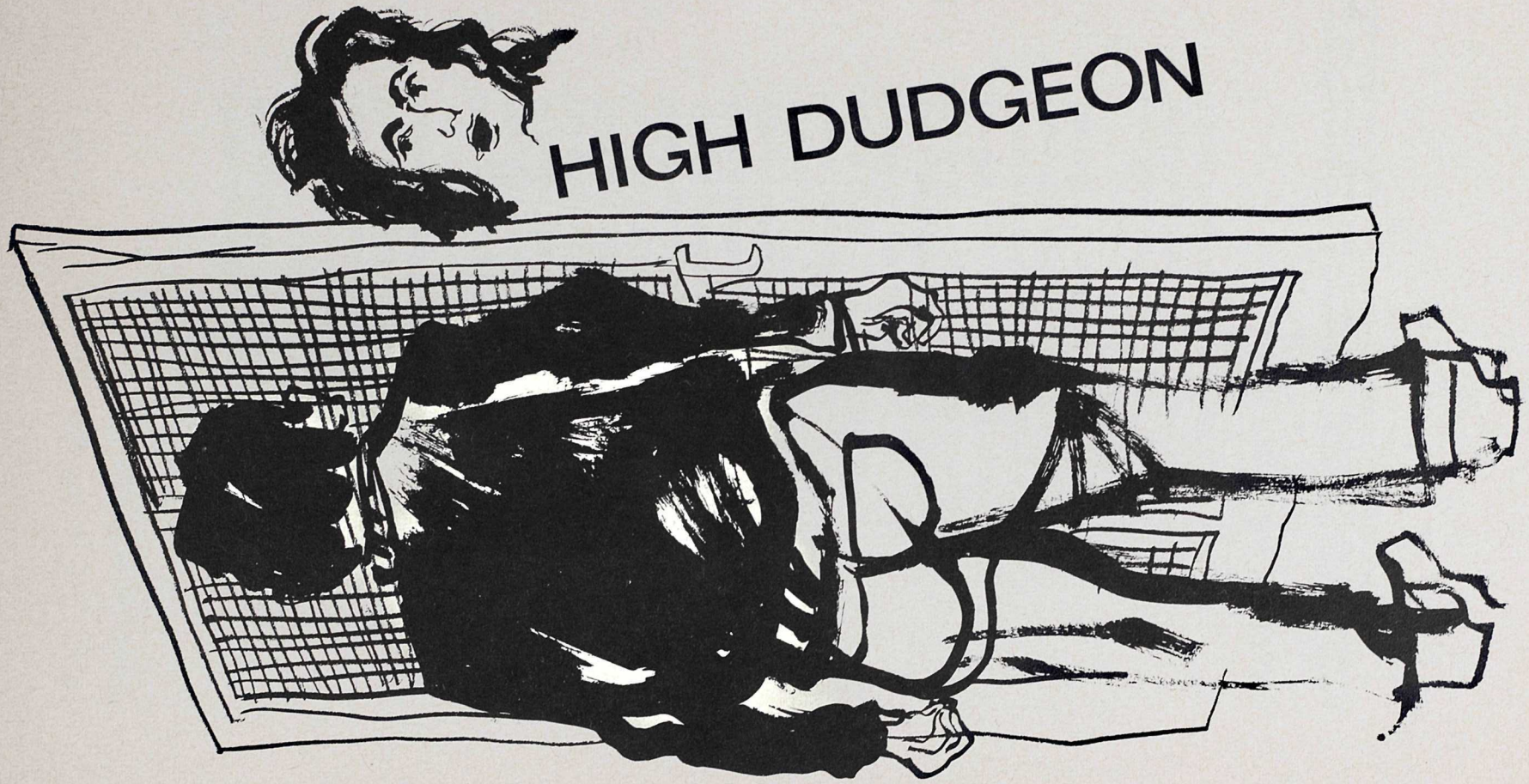
I am a lampshade
In this world
For the light in the slum
The shanty town
The wall
The cell
The graveyard
The pulpit
The ministry of death

I am black light
In blacker light
A light I dare not show to you

GASTON BART-WILLIAMS

GASTON BART-WILLIAMS, born in Sierra Leone in 1938, now lives in Germany. His stories and poems have won international awards, and he is well-known to European radio audiences as a reader of poetry with drum montage.

HIGH DUDGEON



RUTH JESPERSEN lives in New York City, where she is at work on a novel. Her stories have appeared in *Epoch*, *Points*, *Zero*, and elsewhere.

RUTH JESPERSEN

"SO, STEPHEN, YOU'VE COME HOME!"

She unhooked the screen door and swung it open with a fierce stare of fright.

"Only till Monday, Mother. Much as I'd like to stay longer."

My conventional remark calmed her anguish. Smiles of relief flowed over her face, and she kissed my cheek warmly.

* * *

Thick hangings of ivy hushed the porch and shut out the outside world. In the early evening light that percolated through the powdery leaves I saw my mother in her wicker chair, the carpet slippers on her bare blanched feet, her sweatblotted baggy grayflowered pinafore, her round white cat face with its flickering eyes, her night-black hair brushed back.

"These awful flies," she repined. "Aren't they awful? I had to spend sixty-five cents on flypaper. It's enough to try the patience of a Jeremiah." She looked at me bleakly. "Sit down, Son. Make yourself comfortable. It's real nice to see you again, Son."

My mother's face was feminine, but she thought it hard. Therefore she kept pouting, and grimacing, and swaying her neck, and lolling her head, and covering her cheeks with her hands, and restlessly disarranging her hair into draggletailed ringlets, and opening her mouth into an O when she smiled . . . all of which she thought softened her.

"So, Stephen, here we are." The wicker chair creaked with her deepseated sigh. " Getting along all right in the city, I spose? Tell me what you've been doing."

"Well," I said, "I have a new job now. I was fired from my last one, and . . . found this new one," I wound up, seeing her wavering eyes.

"Still write music, I suppose?" She smiled in her odd and careful fashion, and tugged at a strand of hair.

"Yes, Mother, I do."

"You must be hungry after your trip. I'm waiting supper cause your Uncle Hubert is coming."

"My Uncle Hubert? Oh . . . yes."

"Why, you remember him. My side of the family. He's the one that used to give you a dime at the family reunions when you were a teeny weeny boy."

She snickered, putting her hand across her mouth. It pleased her to recall the humble constraints of my childhood. I said nothing.

"Hubert is selling vacuum cleaners now," said she, expressing distaste.

She sighed and looked at me and looked away.

"He'll be here any minute now, I hope. I hope so. Well, Son! Well. What do you think of this heat?"

"It certainly is hot."

We spoke slowly and our speeches were separated by dreary silences. My mother was just beginning to tell me that "Whatsisname says everybody complains about the weather but nobody. . . ." when there rose from the front steps a stumbling sound and then a thump. "You've got to learn to mind what you're about, Hubert, and not take things for granted anymore," she sang out as I jumped to unhook the screen door.

"Are you all right?" I asked when I had set him on his feet.

"Hah? Oh . . . no. I mean, yes, thank you. Thank you very much."

He was a small neat man with black leather hair a little too long. His broad face and neck were boiled a deep freckled brown from walking around in the weather all day. Abstractedly he stood before me in a kind of prolonged bow, looking, but for his sharkskin clothes, his glasses framed in plastic, and the fresh carnation which bulged aggressively in his lapel, more like a figure out of a dream about the East than like a product of the Epworth League.

"You're on time for once," my mother congratulated him. She bounced up and replaced the hook on the screen door.

"Yes, I tried," he replied, listlessly massaging his right leg with his left shoe.

"Stop rubbing your ankle. If you twisted it, I'll get out the Epsom Salts and bathe it for you after supper. Not now, cause I've got things waiting on the stove."

"Okay."

"I'm Stephen. You remember me, don't you, Uncle Hubert?" I said, seeing he did not.

Behind the glasses his eyes blinked and blankly popped. His flabby jowls hung down so that they almost rested on the shoulders of his purple pinstriped suit. He, like my mother, had long tapering saffron eyes, a snub nose and a thin mouth — features which, expressive in her of anxiety, awareness and strength of will, in him bespoke a relaxed sort of shame. About his lips there sagged a weak little smile, like that of a person who has been insulted and is trying to pass it off as nothing. I had no trouble in forgiving him for the dimes my mother remembered.

"Oh sure, sure." He fumbled for my hand, and as we clasped he said something in a moan that kept sinking lower and lower until it went dead and the last word was only a light thud.

"Pardon me, Stephen. Fact of the matter is, I'm going blind."

"I don't think it's a bit necessary to tell everyone, Hubert, and feel sorry for yourself," my mother scolded.

Tears welled up in my uncle's eyes and trickled down his jowls. He staggered to the hammock and flopped, clutching his knees with his pudgy freckled hands and crying with small, soft, blubbering sounds.

My mother untucked a soggy handkerchief from between her breasts and went to him.

"All right, Hubert. If you want to be such a baby. I know you've had a hard day. They haven't fired you yet, have they? No? Well, that's good. But in a little while it won't matter anymore. Cause I've got things all worked out for you, Hubert. I've got a plan. You're going to be taken care of. I'm seeing to that. Yes sir. Are you listening to me, Hubert? I'm telling you I have good news for you. Want to hear it? Then come and have your supper. Now — shall I go on wiping your eyes for you or can you do it yourself?"

"Gee, I'm sorry, Effie."

My uncle got up from the hammock, and I could see he was feeling better as he looked forward to hearing the good news. We all went in to dinner.

Although the thermometer was at the hundredmark, my mother served us each a heaping platterful of roast pork, mashed potatoes, mushroom gravy, baked lima beans, steamed squash, fried eggplant, apple fritters and cornbread just out of the oven. As we were beginning to eat she said:

"Now, Hubert, I want you to turn up here again tomorrow night at six sharp, for supper, and I want you to wear your blue suit. Be sure and get it pressed. Don't forget to clean your nails good and take a fresh hankie and, let me see, for goodness sakes get a haircut.

Show me your shoes, All right, better have them shined."

"I will, Effie. It's nice of you. Why, though? I mean. . . ."

"How would you like to get married again, Hubert?" my mother asked, her eyes sparkling.

"What, tomorrow night?" he almost squealed.

"No, use some sense, Hubert. Tell you what, though. If you do as I say and are subtle and discreet I can have you married, I figure, within five weeks. Stephen, would you mind cutting that meat up small for your uncle?"

"Who would want to marry *me*!" the man snorted.

"Why, this woman that I have for you would. I know she would. Of course, she is a very refined woman but even so, at her age one has to make certain concessions. You'll see, Hubert. Everything will proceed smoothly if you'll just do as I tell you."

My uncle sat blinking at the scuffed and rusty oilcloth. He seemed as lonely as a child. I passed him his plate, having cut up the meat, for which he thanked me in a low, gentle voice.

"There's nothing to worry about, Hubert. Eat your supper and don't dawdle. If you can just hold on to your job for five or six more weeks, that's all that'll be necessary. If anyone discovers you're going blind, deny it and pretend to be indignant and that will put them off for awhile. I'll get you married as quick as I can, and after that you can relax for the rest of your life. You can do anything you want. I understand they're putting out the comic magazines in Braille now."

"What kind of a woman is she, Effie?" my uncle asked uneasily.

"She's a rich woman, Hubert, a rich woman."

"Oh."

My uncle gazed at his plate, chewing in silence. Suddenly a blush flowed over his tanned skin, transforming his face to a frightful purple which matched his suit.

My mother observed this blush and glanced at *me* with irritation. A hand rose to unravel the raven skein of her hair. Her face began to work wildly.

"If you mean what kind of a woman personally, she is a very nice churchlady, about your age, Hubert, or maybe just a teeny weeny bit older, serious and religious and a real lady in every sense of the word. She is very distinguished-looking and people will look up to you for having such a fine wife. Her hobbies are Bible study and crocheting little caps for the poor babies. She never married but spent her whole life taking care of her mother. Now, I call that devotion! Her care must of been excellent, cause the mother died

just recently at the age of one hundred and one. The only other thing to know about the mother is that she died very rich, Hubert, and the daughter was her only living relation," my mother went on slyly, unable to drop this fascinating subject. Her face had gradually subsided and she seemed quite happy now. "What else? Oh yes, her name is Miss Smythe, Huldah Smythe, spelled with a *y* and an *e*. Of course, you must not address her by her Christian name till I tell you it's all right. She lives over on Elm Street in a great big house full of expensive furniture. She wears made-to-order dresses that you can tell must of cost an arm and a leg and she is . . . well, as I said before, a very distinguished-looking lady."

My uncle shifted and squirmed in his chair and snorted once more and related in his slow, soft voice:

"Talking about the ladies, funny thing happened to me today. I was in this house demonstrating my vacuum cleaner to this lady — you know, fat, and she had on sort of a long loose light-color dress, a neggle-gee, I guess. Well sir, she was kidding me along and I was kidding her too although I was demonstrating my vacuum cleaner at the same time and giving her the little sales pitch. Well all of a sudden she says to me, 'You're likeable,' she says, just like that, 'You're likeable,' and when I straightened up she took my hand and put it on her stomach! What do you know about that!"

My mother frowned and laid down her fork.

"Hubert, I want you to promise me you won't tell any such stories before Miss Smythe tomorrow night. She is a very refined lady and she wouldn't like that kind of a story at all. Now promise me."

"Sure, Effie," he said, looking dashed. "Sure, anything you say. I didn't mean any harm." He sighed submissively.

Throughout all this I wore the mournfully decorous expression of the dinner guest who remains resolutely unaware of anything of which it might be impolite to be aware. This displeased my mother — in order to cope with people's reactions she needed to be able to identify them. However, she had decided to ignore me, at least for the present.

"I am going to serve the same supper tomorrow night as tonight. I was just trying it out. I want everything to go off real nice and I don't want you spoiling things, Hubert."

"Okay, Effie. Does that mean I shouldn't tell about any of the things that happen to me in my work every day? I just thought — for something to talk about?"

"If you have anything particularly interesting or amusing, I mean

on a high level of course, it would be all right to tell about it briefly. Don't be long-winded, Hubert! Have the point of your story clear in your mind before you start! Or no — better still, if you think of any anecdotes bring them to me first and I'll see if they're acceptable."

"But spose I don't get a chance? Sposing I think of some story to tell when she's right here with us. I couldn't whisper it to you without being noticed."

"Then don't tell it. Remember this one basic rule, Hubert: WHEN IN DOUBT, BE SILENT. Have you got that? Say it to yourself over and over. The silenter you are the more likely she is to think you intelligent, serious — she might even think you *mysterious*." My mother snickered. "Your tie is dragging in your mashed potatoes, Hubert."

"I really am awful grateful to you for helping me out like this," he told her sadly.

"Tell you what, Hubert. It would be smart not to mention anything about being a vacuum cleaner salesman."

"Why not? Is there something wrong with that?"

"I've already told her you're a salesman. Take my advice and leave it at that. Salesman is a nice-enough-sounding profession if you don't go into details. So remember now, Hubert, if she asks you any questions about your work — don't you dare mention anything about the house-to-house angle. Just give vague replies and give them in a casual manner. Don't brag, of course, but be calm and casual so as to suggest that you are well-satisfied with your own achievements. Understand what I mean, Hubert?"

"I think so, Effie," he glumly groaned.

"What I want you to do is act nice but a teeny weeny bit on the reserved side. Am I making myself clear? Extreme affability is a social handicap. So don't go breaking the ice with a crash. On the other hand, don't freeze her out. Remember the golden rule, no, I mean the golden *mean*. Warm up to her for awhile, and then cool off, and then warm up, and keep on like that, blowing hot and cold. That way she'll feel insecure and won't know what to think, and so she'll like you. Actually, I know she already likes you a lot, on account of your gender, but you never can tell about people, and I'm not taking any chances."

"Okay, Effie. Gee, I really will try to do everything you say."

"What *did* I say, Hubert? Go over it with me, from the beginning."

"Hah? Oh. Well, you said . . . get my suit pressed."

"Your blue suit. That's right. Go on."

"My blue suit. And next you said — or I think it was next —"

My mother took over at this point and briefed him carefully once more on his Rules of Behavior for the following evening.

* * *

At midnight, as I was reading in bed, she opened the door.

"You ought not to be burning the light this late, Stephen. That runs up the bill something terrible."

Instantly she was sorry she had said this. A strenuous smile distorted her face. A laugh of false sweetness broke from her throat.

"It does a mother's heart good to see you looking so well, Stephen, and so happy, and so prosperous. . . ."

Her voice faltered on the last word as her eyes fell on my threadbare jacket hanging over the chair.

"Can I get you something from the pantry? How about a nice piece of pie, a glass of milk. . . ."

"No thanks, Mother. It was such a big dinner."

"It's so nice to have you home again, and sleeping in your old room. I only wish you were going to be here longer than two days."

I answered: "Oh well, you know how it is. My work calls me back to the city."

This whole sequence sounded to me exactly as though it had been taken from a movie. My mother became sweeter and more motherly, like a mother in the movies. . . .

The twenty-watt lamp she provided for a reading light engulfed the monumental walnut chest, desk and wardrobe in a deep gloom which made them resemble the stalls and pulpit in a church.

Hovering over my bed, she had an unsubstantiality which partly compensated for the indecency of her attire. She wore a wrinkled voile nightgown, bedecked with bedraggled blue ribbons, through which I glimpsed her soft lumpy body white as lard. Her pathetic and distinctly feminine appearance gave her a new air of vulnerability which did not suit her, and yet I knew it was as true about her as about any other person. . . .

The least real thing was the long thick batch of hair which swathed her cheeks and swallowed her shoulders and arms. On many a night had I beheld, shocked, my mother thus, her harrowing black hair down. It lifted her from pathos to tragedy — she seemed a damned soul in search of an absolution that would never be granted her.

She swayed before me, laughing coquettishly, making faces.

"Oh Stephen, isn't it touching about your Uncle Hubert and

Miss Smythe? Two such dear lonely people, and looking forward so eagerly and hopefully to meeting each other. I've told both of them all about the other, of course, and they're *so* attracted. And why not? Two of the loveliest natures in the world. Talk about made for each other! And to think that it is I who am bringing them together. Oh, isn't it just too wonderful? I haven't felt so romantic since I was a schoolgirl!"

"Yes," I said.

"Oh, I know you think I'm silly to gush like this," she went on, throwing me a sharp look. "There you sit, so stiff and superior, and saying to yourself, 'Women'!"

"No, honestly I'm not, Mother."

"Yes, you are, Stephen. I can feel it. I can always feel things. All evening you've been looking at me with your eyes and thinking thoughts about me. Mean thoughts. Thoughts that aren't true."

To my surprise she burst into tears. She went on through sobs, "I can feel it! Yes! You don't like me, Stephen, my boy."

There was nothing blubbering about my mother's weeping. It had form, and a certain complexity of meaning was controlled by this form. It was, as a matter of fact, beautiful. I soon recognized the form as that of the passacaglia. Her weeping had surged into a series of strong cantabile sobs which rose and fell rhythmically in a changeless pattern on and on. The timbre was that of the lowest string of the violin. Full of noble anger and sorrow, this theme ceaselessly proclaimed, "I am innocent!" Around it she now began to weave an elaborate embroidery of smaller themes with her second voice — that voice which everyone has but which is heard only through tears, or rather, is also used at times in song to create something marvelous that is like a chord. The smaller themes, as she brought them forth, were in a minor key and seemed the deep issue of bassoon, piano and trombone. Among them were such statements as: "I am guilty and I despise myself," "I am neither innocent nor guilty but the helpless pawn of fate," "I have been a good Christian all my life," "I am not to blame, for my life has made me the way I am," "There is absolutely no alternative to what I am doing," "Your father was afraid of me but he loved me in his own way, while you detest me, and now I have no one," "You've got to admit I'm doing the smart, sensible thing," "I feel so sorry for myself" . . . And all these chimed with that heavy cry of innocence which suddenly was wrested from the strings and broke in a trombone shrill. Swooning about it were strings and keyboard and wind all weaving in distress. Lost she sounded, and mad as Lear. Soon again the

theme was seized, thrummed and clattered on a brilliant piano while the counterpoint kindled anew. Her "I am innocent!" quavered with thunders and the tears boiled down. Her sobs were bottomless and ranged the skies.

Without stopping her masterful weeping she cried out:

"All evening you've been sitting there criticizing me — for meddling, for being an old busybody."

"Oh no, Mother. I don't object to matchmaking in principle. Please calm yourself."

I drew her down to my arms and gently, with a thrill of horror, stroked her hair.

"Stephen, Stephen, I implore you. Tell me you condone the simple pleasure it affords me to engineer this little romance."

My mother's vocabulary improved according to the degree of her transport — I had often noticed that.

"You agree, don't you, that it will bring good to both of them, harm to neither? Whom am I hurting, Stephen? No one! Then you've no qualms, have you, my sweet, good, indulgent, understanding boy. Tell me you forgive me my insignificant senile joys!"

I stroked the hot swell of her hair that splashed in wisps, and I listened. Among the melodies that curled and climbed around her deathlessly throbbing proclamation "I am innocent!" was a muffled one which now, the organic perfection of her work having at length been destroyed through a couple of imprudent hiccups, reannounced itself more frequently than the rest, a heartbroken bassoon sound which sighed, "Why did you have to come home at this time!"

She insisted:

"Tell me you forgive me."

"I forgive you, Mother."

She swept up all the smaller themes into a grand suspiration, "I am innocent!" — sung now with certainty and triumph.

Radiant, she rose to leave, pausing at the door as a thought struck her.

"Stephen, I do wish you'd turn off the light now. You can read in the daylight, and it's better for your eyes anyhow."

* * *

My uncle acknowledged the introduction with a whispered confidence. All I heard was a sort of hiss and then a short humming sound.

"Didn't quite catch what you said." Miss Smythe bent down to him, engrossing him in her rose perfume, wagging the grizzled permanent under her pink velvet picture-hat, unfurling her pinch-lipped smile.

She was a scraggy six-footer in a baroque gown of pink organdy. Pink flurries of scarves swung silkenly from her, baring her spare and ashen arms. Lank strings of pearls festooned her chest. Bobbing pearl eardrops illumined her jaws. She had the shocking face of persons whose eyes burn with animation when all else around them has slumped into plummets of spongy flesh and craters of bone.

My uncle cleared his throat. "I said, I'm a salesman." He bashfully shuffled to his feet.

"Yes, so I understand," she breathed. "Now, that *is* nice. I am rather fond of salesmen. Many of my parishioners are salesmen."

My uncle didn't think of an answer to this.

She was one of those people who believe that you are as young as you feel. Her romantic getup, her rapturous mezzo-soprano, her relentlessly cheerful pale blue eyes proclaimed her eagerness even yet to help herself to what possibilities the unknown might have to offer, should fate be so kind as to present anything of an interesting nature.

My mother curtsied coyly at the porch door. "Dinner is served, Mamzell and Monsoors."

"You shouldn't of gone to all the trouble," Miss Smythe reproached her. "Uh — it's snowing down south," she added, delicately. My frazzled mother groped for a shoulderstrap, gave it a forceful yank which did not correct the disorder. We went in, Uncle Hubert following on my mother's heels. He pulled at her dress and I heard him whisper:

"You didn't say she was a minister!"

He was furtively reassured: "No, no, that's just her way of speaking."

Overnight he seemed to have won my mother's respect. She was most helpful and kind, coaxing him into his chair and drawing it up for him to the round table, meekly patting his shoulders. "There now, Hubert dear. Comftable?"

Miss Smythe was placed next to him, and I next to my mother.

"Everything looks so yummy!" said the guest of honor. She lowered her eyes and seemed to sulk for about twenty seconds during which I gathered she was mentally saying grace, instantly thereafter resuming her air of suspenseful cordiality. She stripped off her pink lace gauntlets and we started in on the roast pork, mashed potatoes, mushroom gravy, baked lima beans, steamed squash, fried eggplant, apple fritters and cornbread. My mother was very gay as she passed the dishes — her face glowed whitely with the heat and her anxiety.

The conversation was as follows.

My mother told about how some men were making an excavation in order to build an annex to the local jail, and how very interesting this was to watch. Had Hubert noticed it, and didn't he feel it was interesting? He whispered yes, he had, and yes, he did.

Miss Smythe explained how her garden was coming along better than ever this year, especially for the Showy Pricklepoppies, the Princesplume, the Houndstongue, the Cockscomb, the Purple Candytuft, the Farewell-to-Spring and the Love-in-a-Mist, and also for the Common Four O'Clocks, the Blistercress, the Honesty, the Mealycup Sage, the Job's Tears, the Helensflower and the Rose-mallow, but for some reason, in spite of all the tender vigilance of her morning efforts, she was not having much success with the Dusty Miller, the Tom Thumb, the Sweet William or the Herb Tree-mallow. She bowed down to my uncle and inquired if he knew what should be done in order to succeed with Dusty Miller, Tom Thumb, Sweet William and Herb Treemallow. He shook his freshly-shorn head in a shy disclaimer of knowledge upon this or, by inference, any other horticultural subject.

My mother recommended a fertilizer which she said she had found excellent for all her flowers. Her sharp eyes marched right, left, right, left, from Uncle Hubert to Miss Smythe and back.

Uncle Hubert was modestly atentive to his food. He did look up for a second when my mother gave him another helping of the meat. His lips moved.

"Hubert? What did you say, Hubert darling?"

"I said, thanks, don't mind if I do." And he ducked his head and ate. My mother pouted and pulled frantically at her hair. The Woolworth brooch at the throat of her black Sunday dress came unpinned but she took no note of it.

White lace curtains lay limp and hushed at the incandescent windows. The dying white of daylight glinted on our water glasses and on the glass door of the china closet whose blue and white Willoware contents now adorned our table. Beside us loomed the sideboard, a grand mahogany edifice, submerging faces in a sweltering gloom. Over our heads the flies buzzed thickly, colliding with discordant clicks.

"I saw Bet Davis in a wonderful picture, *How Green Is the Corn*," said Miss Smythe to my uncle, hopefully plying her pearls. "I surely enjoyed it. So picturesque, and . . . wonderfully enjoyable. I understand they're bringing a new Bet Davis picture to the Orpheum this week. ——————?"

He squinted at her with considerable curiosity, and went politely back to his dinner.

I felt my mother reach out to kick him under the table — but her little leg could not pass the colossal pair of lion's paws which formed its base, and she uttered a small sound of rage and helplessness.

Abandoning her efforts to tempt Uncle Hubert, Miss Smythe talked to my mother. Without removing her cautious gaze from my mother's eyes she lowered her hands and neatly, rapidly untied her pink velvet sash and retied it more slackly. By this time we had reached dessert, consisting of four kinds of pie.

The two women discussed last Sunday's sermon as given by the new young minister, a recent graduate of the Theological Seminary at Princeton University. The text, Miss Smythe well recalled, had been: "Man that is in honor, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." The sermon had been wonderfully inspirational, she believed, but perhaps . . . a teeny weeny bit on the highbrow side for the average layman to understand. My mother said Miss Smythe had said a mouthful, had really hit the nail on the head. Miss Smythe could say that again, my mother affirmed. Well, Miss Smythe thought, her new young minister soon would learn. Suddenly we all realized that the faint rumble in the room was issuing from my uncle. Miss Smythe and I leaned forward, while my mother sprang to, agog and atremble in her wary delight, and wearing her strange round smile.

Uncle Hubert was that sort of man — did not talk much, but sometimes he would decide to tell a story, and the story might turn out to be surprisingly lengthy. At first it was a little hard to hear what he was saying.

". . . Had a little wifie once," he hummed, and it was like the rumble of water over rocks. "She was just nineteen years old. Big blue eyes and the lightest hair you ever saw. And her figure? — saay! Just nineteen she was. Maybe you know how they are at that age. And then she was twenny-one when she died, and I was twenny-five."

He paused and my mother clattered some spoons as though rapping for attention, but he rambled on in his dreamy way:

"There was one thing about her. I never could understand it, but I got used to it. I often think about it still, not in bed at night cause then I'm too knocked out to think about anything, but in the daytime when I'm walking around and all of a sudden I'm in my old neighborhood. It's funny and I don't know how but it seems

like I'm always ending up in my old neighborhood. And then I get to thinking about her and this thing there was about her. It was this.

"Whenever she'd be mad at me she wouldn't be home when I got there at night, making my supper as usual. No, she'd be in a cafeteria right around the block, sitting at a table in the corner, drinking a cup of tea and looking sore. At first I didn't know that. So when I'd come home and not find her, I'd get panicky. The first time, I remember, I went out and took a cab and toured the whole neighborhood, looking for her and calling out the window. But I couldn't find her, so I went to the police station and spoke to a cop, but he wouldn't help me — just told me to come back later if she didn't show up. I didn't know what to do, what to do. I ran home and she still wasn't there, so I went out and walked around some more, thinking oh my God what's *happened*, oh my *God*.

"And then I found her in that cafeteria," he told us, his voice breaking with relief. "The next few times I was panicky too — it took me a little while, but I finally got it through my head that whenever she was mad at me she'd be in that cafeteria. So I got into the habit of when I got off the trolley at night asking myself, let's see, is she mad at me today or isn't she? — and if I had kind of a hunch that she was, I'd go straight to the cafeteria instead of home. That way I saved myself time and worry. And if I wasn't too sure if she was or not, I'd go and take a look in the window — it was only a half a block extra walk.

"Well sir, when I went in the cafeteria she'd pretend like she didn't know me, and when I sat down she'd act like it was too bad the place was so crowded people like me had to sit at the same table with her. But then I'd talk to her a bit, and say I was sorry . . . and I'd go up to the counter and buy us a dinner. I'd buy her everything she liked — no vegetables. And you know, in a little while everything would be swell, and we'd go out of there holding hands. That's the way it was.

"I've often thought about it," he marveled. "She was a fine girl and believe me, not hard to live with. She always kept things nice and neat for me and she liked to talk, but not too much, and she was always laughing, and . . . a real looker, my little wifie . . . and . . . how was I to know she had TB? You never could tell from seeing her. She coughed a bit, but I thought it was just the climate and all.

"Sometimes I go back there, and I think I'll go in and order a cup of tea and bring it to that corner table. I keep forgetting they tore down the building. There's a used-car lot there now — there where she used to wait for me when she was mad. And I walk

around and look for her in other places, but I know there's only one place she could be, the cafeteria — and the cafeteria is gone.

"That was a funny habit of hers, wasn't it?" he asked, slowly blinking his glass-shuttered eyes. "Some men's wives do awful things when they are mad at them. Mine just went to the cafeteria. . . ."

His words trailed off gravely and he rested, dazzled, wrapped in the vast silence of his dream. For a moment no one moved. Then:

"Why, I think she was a very naughty girl to do a thing like that to a nice man like you," said Miss Smythe, swatting her eyelids at him and tensely giggling.

A change smote my uncle's spellbound face. His fat jowls stabilized and seemed to vanish. His pug nose sharpened. Folded in dignity was his mouth. Alive and warmly ashine were his eyes. Now he closely resembled my mother, except that his expression was more loving. He reached across the damask cloth and took Miss Smythe's gaunt hand between his palms. She appeared startled, then gladdened. She flushed with pleasure beneath her rose-colored rouge, and wisely waggled her dust-colored curls, and allowed him to fondle her hand as he said:

"I think you're nice, too, Miss Smythe, honey. I think you're a very nice lady, and I have nothing against you, believe me. But there's something I got to tell you. I can't marry you. I can't marry you cause it would not be right. I'm fifty-nine years old and no angel, but I couldn't do a thing like that, cause it just would not be right. And that is why I can't marry you, Miss Smythe, honey."

My mother jumped up, shaking with rage, and slammed her hand against his cheek. He and his chair swayed from the blow. The glasses rattled on his nose. He swung to a stop like a rundown clock. It was a while before he spoke.

"Gee . . . I'm sorry, Effie. I don't know what came over me. . . ."

He sat goggling at the overturned gravy-boat which she in her violence had knocked to the floor. A purplish red badge of shame appeared on his swarthy cheek. Perhaps, though, he was not utterly miserable. My mother leaned over him glowering and going through her whole repertoire of mad grimaces.

"Never in my life have I heard of anything so presumptuous," declared Miss Smythe in the hollow and precise tones of the wounded. "Never, never in my entire life."

"But please, Miss Smythe," my mother cried, aghast, "he's not himself tonight, he has a little touch of sunstroke, hasn't been well today but usually he's very well and he's very good. I mean," she went on wildly, as a cold sweat blenched her face, "what it is is

that he's so smitten with you, Miss Smythe. You're making him run a temperature and he doesn't know what he's saying. Why, you should only of heard the nice things Hubert was whispering to me about you, Miss Smythe." She bared her teeth imploringly, in a smile that was all awry. "So distinguished-looking he said you were and so refined. A lady in every sense of the word. 'Why, I've completely lost my heart to her,' he told me. Didn't you, Hubert? Miss Smythe, won't you listen? Hubert thinks you're simply —"

"I would like all of you to know," enunciated Miss Smythe, discarding us all in a glance, "that I haven't the slightest interest whatsoever in entering into holy wedlock with that man. As Heaven is my witness I never had any matrimonial intentions whatsoever toward that man and I must say I was never so disgusted by anything so disgusting in all my life as when he said that disgusting thing. I must say I think that man is a pretty poor specimen of a man anyway and when he said that I felt so *amused* I had to laugh. Yes, I positively had to laugh."

"Oh Miss Smythe, I'm so glad you recognize he was only teasing you!" cried my mother, undoing her hair in her distress. "Hubert's a great kidder — the things he comes out with, honestly, he's a scream. Why, whenever I see him he just keeps me in stitches. Such a tease he is, but then of course it's all in fun. How silly to think that you'd mind, as if you were some ordinary, insignificant person, petty and shallow! Hubert was trying to test what a wonderful sense of humor you have, Miss Smythe. And I know you do have a wonderful sense of humor," she wheedled, looking dreadful. "Ha ha ha!" she laughed, encouragingly.

The other woman responded to this with some uncharitable remarks concerning Uncle Hubert's manner and appearance, concluding with: "And I don't like the shape of his head. You can tell a lot about a person from the shape of their head." She was intently stirring the contents of her pink-beaded brocade handbag, searching for something.

"He'll apologize to you for the rest of his life, Miss Smythe!" my mother panted. "Wait till you see how nice he apologizes." Sweat flowed down the throbbing fingers which clutched her face. She pitched profoundly from side to side like a ship in a storm, and her hair floated. "Have mercy upon him! He'll go down on his knees to you, he'll kiss your feet. Why, even I, I will kiss your feet, if you'll forgive. I'd do most anything. . . ."

And she rocked forward, ravenous with despair. She seemed about to fall upon Miss Smythe, strip her of her jewels, tear away

her finery, pillage her to the bone.

"I would like all of you to know," said Miss Smythe, banging a fist on the table for silence, and brandishing what seemed to be a letter, "that I couldn't of cared less when he said that to me and I must say it had no effect on me at all in the slightest whatsoever, *being that*," she stated, and here her voice soared a full fifth, "I am already engaged to be married to a man —"

My mother reared up like a cat.

"Yes, a very fine man, a very refined gentleman —"

Slinking slowly back, my mother narrowed her yellow eyes.

"Yes, a deacon in my church, who is boarding in my house at the present time. This letter is from him —"

My mother let off a long, low wail.

"And I shall read it to you." Miss Smythe unfolded the letter, her elongated chest heaving with the heartfelt satisfaction of revenge. In a rolling andante maestoso, she read:

"I think of nothing but you all the time sweetest Huldah, there is so much work piled up for me here at the office but dearest I can't seem to concentrate, your lovely beautiful face keeps coming up before me and I keep telling myself to be patient, only three more hours till evening when I can see you again, but precious it seems so long, oh my angel, my Huldah, this waiting is almost impossible to bear, every second that I spend away from you is like an eternity. . . ."

And so on, in the usual phrases expressing the sickness of love. Declaiming them, she swept us with her wicked glances, and held her head up proud.

But as she went on her voice began to sound decently embarrassed, and sank to a kind of croak. Fidgeting, she gaggled a phrase to the effect that the deacon was suffering from insomnia because of her. He thanked her, too, for remembering to wind his watch, as he could never remember that anymore, or anything else either, and all he could think of was his own little Huldah, his treasure, his perfect one, his little girl, his adorable and dear. Grimly she sermonized us and would not stop. The cords in her skinny neck stood forth and grappled with one another in the agony of her manful effort. The letter seemed quite long, and all the same.

My mother stood stockstill at last, locked up with her own unblessed thoughts, shrunk into whatever was her private world, and as those words of melancholy joy and desire floated to her across the room she seemed to grow smaller, older, her face paralyzed in sourness, a starved and wasted white.

From the depths of Uncle Hubert a huge yawn swelled, mightily convulsing his dull and gentle features, straining them urgently and long until finally his mouth fell open in a soundless yell and tears shot from his eyes and his body seesawed, shivering all over in a very passion of fatigue. Giddily he clapped himself together, and sat back stupefied, as deep and empty as the grave.

Miss Smythe's expression was compounded of arrogance and guilt, like that of a person who gets into a taxi in front of some people who are waiting at the bus stop. I had at first doubted the authenticity of her letter. I saw I had been wrong.

At last it did not seem so strange that such a woman would receive such a letter from a man. All around you, everywhere you go, the most unlikely-looking people are involved in something or other so complex, so intense, so extraordinary, that it would quite stagger you if you were to know of it.

Huldah Smythe had merely craved that which should have belonged to her youth, the felicity of having more than one suitor. She read on in her wretched voice, and her wrathful pain was awful to see. I decided to go for a walk.

Her harangue rang after me even as I reached the door. "How can you want to spend an evening without me, sweetheart?" she ranted. "You know I don't object to your seeing any of your girlfriends, not even that rattlebrained old bore that's always so lost in prayer when the collection plate is passed. It's just that I think you could have arranged to talk over your Ladies' Aid business during my working hours. Why do you have to go for dinner and leave me to eat all alone? Unless, my darling," he probed, showing the instinct of the betrayed, "you have not told me the whole truth? Maybe you are not going to be the only guest. Maybe somebody will be there that you want to meet. No, no," he lapsed, "forgive me, Lord, for thinking such a thought about my little duck. Who should know better than I that her heart is pure and true? My pet had to accept that dinner invitation because she is an angel and does not have it in her nature to hurt anyone. She will miss me terribly, terribly, just as I will . . . miss . . . *oh*!" she gasped, suddenly awake to what she was reading, and silence fell like a bomb.

"Now you see? You see now?" howled my mother. "Hubert, why didn't you mind me, you booby? It could of worked. Ah. Ah. It could of worked," she mourned.

* * *

Before the town bank stood a stately signboard of dark wood

carved in Gothic forms, a little text engraved upon its bronze plaque:

"It is better to have insurance and not need it, than not to have insurance and need it."

I searched, as I had always searched, to see if this behest were not followed by a Biblical reference.

A watercolor sunset hung over the square where the world and his wife sprawled on benches. In the shadow of elm trees their faces glimmered, hot, sad, profound. No one addressed me as I drifted by.

A car backfired, breaking the quiet, and birds, mindful as we all are of the imminence of death, swept up to the sky in a long breathtaking parabola.

People walking on the streets looked at me and I looked back at them and we did not know each other.

Porches were shrouded in green. A young girl spoke, her pretty voice from behind the vines rippling out on the flow of the summer night.

"And she's sloppy. Ooh, is she a sloppy girl. Why, I remember seeing her in a corduroy skirt. Can you imagine? And all rumpled in the back and everything. I and the girls were gonna take up a collection for her, to buy her a skirt. Yup. Honest to God, Virginia, I never yet saw her in one single thing that was decent. She has absolutely no clothes at all."

I fled down years of streets. Anger had not smashed the town, nor tears of loneliness washed it away. . . .

Darkness sank upon the shuddering heat. People went home and pulled down their shades. Streetlamps shone in meshes of branches that flickered with lime-colored leaves. My shadow leaped from the dark of elms.

I passed by beds that vibrated from headboard to footboard with human heat. I listened to the silence that lay in patches.

On my mother's street the lights were extinguished, for she had organized her neighbors to stop paying their taxes. Nor was there a moon aloft, which made me think the heavenly as well as the city fathers affronted by some mutiny. Around me as I moved through this deepest dark, vague darknesses broke like the shapes that swarm on the inside of an eyelid.

In the August night the houses droned the helplessness of dreams. So lay the town, slung in uneasy sleep.

This was the land of darkness and the shadow of death, the land dark as midnight, the land of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light was as midnight. I thought the souls of

the shutdown town were saying, We are but of yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow. Therefore, better thou shouldst have insurance and not need it, than shouldst not have insurance and need it. For what is thy life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. Gather insurance.

My mother and Uncle Hubert were still sitting at the littered table when I crept into the dark front hall.

Head propped in hands, my uncle seemed not to have turned his sheepish speculation from the gravy that was still seeping into the oriental carpet. A squalid light poured down from the chandelier and for the first time in years I was able to see the dank old wallpaper with its tan ghosts of roses. . . .

"Now listen, Hubert," my mother was saying, her voice sharply weary like the light that bleared upon her face, "I don't want to hear another word of your suggestions. What you could do around here in the way of gardening and so on just would not be worth the cost of your keep. As it is I never hire anyone to do anything anyhow. Last winter I even welded the furnace when it broke. And besides, I'd need no help from people even if it came free of charge. I enjoy being alone. No, you're no good to me, Hubert. There has to be some other way. So shut up now, and let me think."

My uncle kept his eyes on the floor.

"The thing is, I could of carried it off," my mother grumbled. "I know that deacon that she means and for goodness sakes, he's nothing I'd let stand in my way. He may be a little smarter than you, Hubert, but brains don't count for too much in matters of this sort, and in the looks department he's no Adonis anymore than you are. Besides, he lacks one important thing that you have, Hubert, and that is — *me*. Oh, I know I could of carried it off, I know it. If I had only of stopped her in time — but I let her blow off steam just a little too long. She gave herself away, Hubert, and she'd never, never be able to forgive you for that. She gave herself away, and that is the one thing nobody can stand." She sighed drearily, "Well, it's over now," and briskly rapped out: "There are other fish in the sea to fry. My head is dusty but unbowed. I'm thinking, Hubert. Oh sit up, don't slump like that! I wonder just how much time there is left — can you see me, Hubert?"

"A little. Yes. Not so good," came his morose murmur.

"All right. I'll hit on something. Shut up now, I may be getting an idea."

A short while later she sprang to her feet and began to stack the

dishes. "I'm going out to the kitchen and start clearing up. It's possible I'll have some good news for you by the time I'm done."

When she had gone I entered the dining room. Hearing footfalls, my uncle jerked up, eyes blackly dilating and exploding with alarms. I spoke his name and put my face up close, and laid my hand on his quivering shoulder.

* * *

At midnight, as I was lying in the dark, she opened the door.

"Asleep, Stephen?"

She waited, and softly said:

"No, you're not sleeping."

She waited, and I was silent.

"*I know what you did.*"

The sibilance of breathing, hers or mine, seemed to come to a dead stop. Presently she padded to my bed and switched on the lamp.

I had to open my eyes. She stood regarding me steadily, sad and bedraggled, luridly white, and her heavy hair hung down.

I said, "Oh, Mother — how are you?" — and realized the idiocy of this.

She observed me for a long time.

"How much do you make a week, Stephen?"

I said, "I . . . why do you ask?"

"Very well, I withdraw my question. Naturally your poverty is an unpleasant subject to you. My question was incidental. I can easily guess at the modest reward your labor reaps."

I tried to appear indifferent under her sombre stare.

"And out of that you purpose to support your uncle. You will send him weekly checks of sufficient amounts to sustain him for the rest of his life."

I was silent.

"What do you expect me to tell you, Son? That it was a very noble and generous gesture?"

"Anything you like, Mother."

"I should like to be able to tell you that, Stephen. I should like to be able to applaud you for the unselfish heroism of your act. But I can't, Stephen. Want to know why? Because what you did was not heroic. It was not unselfish. It was not generous. And it was not noble."

"I don't understand you, Mother."

"True, and amply demonstrated. What I mean, Stephen, is that

you were not moved by love or sense of responsibility when you arranged to support your uncle during his remaining years. What I mean is that you have no feeling for your uncle and that you simply do not care what becomes of him."

"That's not so, Mother."

"You are right and it is not so. Even I ought not to presume you totally without compassion. Very well, you met him and you responded to him. You told yourself how terrible it is, this thing that is happening to him. You even wished there were something you could do. Now, Stephen, let us unbeguile ourselves on how it will be when you go back to your city life. For possibly five moments in a year will you think of him and be sorry. But he, one of these mornings he will wake up and he will *no longer see*. And this he must live with every moment in the year. Can you commit a kindness capable of reckoning with that, Stephen? Can anyone? Yet it hasn't escaped my notice that there are people who try. Evidently some rich gift of the mind, or something, some greatness or freakishness, or something, some singular power of love, or something, impels them to such endeavors. You, with your gentle doctrines, your educated feelings, are you among them? Will you avow you have found yourself sincerely inclined to extend yourself in the service of others? No, my boy. Your heart, like mine, like the most part of hearts of the world, bleeds but briefly for this man or that man who is suffering and needs our help. So, Stephen, I tell you that your sacrifice had quite another motive."

She leaned liturgically over the bed, blinding me with the white flare of her face, drowning me in her hair.

"You wanted to make me feel cheap. You wanted to kill me with your contempt. For well do you know that I have ten times, a hundred times, it's nobody's business how many times, more money than you. What you have done I cannot countenance. I am an old woman and I have had much anguish in my life, far more than you can ever imagine. My money is all that I have left that is my own. Everyone has something he cares about more than anything else in the world. You have your music, I have my money. Tell me, is there any person, any person at all, for whom you would give up your music? No. Well, that is the way I feel about my money. And who are you to censure me? I am a human being, not a brute, and it may be that in the end I shall be judged to have atoned for my lack of tenderness by my excess of concern. It is true that I shall part with no part of my money in your Uncle Hubert's behalf. But have I not planned for him, acted for him, thought for him, have I not

overtasked myself till I am ready to drop, in trying to procure for him the calm and decent old age he deserves? This man for whom you care nothing is my brother, and never for an instant did I intend that he should die in a gutter with a tin cup in his hand. My son, you have insulted me most monstrously. Is that not what you came here to do? What other purpose might you have in honoring me with your visit? I ask you now to leave my house, my house over which the odium of your base disrespect to me will hover for the rest of my life. Do not return, I entreat you. And henceforth spare me your Christmas cards. I shall expect you to be gone before I am up in the morning. The first train leaves at five-fourteen. You will find a box of cornflakes on the pantry shelf, and the milk is in the icebox. Goodbye, Stephen."

She switched off the lamp and left and I lay in the dark that was dense and black and soft as a woman's hair flowing over and around and along me as I lay stilled and quelled and stunned as someone at the bottom of the sea.

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ROSENBLATT, JOSEPH, *voyage of the mood*, poems, Heinrich Heine Press, Don Mills, Ontario, 11 pp.

SIEBRASSE, GLEN, *the regeneration of an athlete*, poems, Delta, 3476 Vendome Ave., Montreal 28, Quebec, 58 pp., $2.00.

WEBB, PHYLLIS, *Naked Poems*, Periwinkle Press, Vancouver, 50 pp., $2.25.

The Beloit Poetry Journal, Vol. 6, No. 1, Quarterly, Box 2, Beloit, Wisconsin 53512, 50¢ each.

The Canadian Composer, No. 3, Quarterly bi-lingual magazine of music, 1263 Bay St., Toronto 5, Ont.

Canadian Poetry, XXVIII, No. 4, Quarterly magazine of poetry & reviews, Canadian Authors Association, 1339 Bathurst Street, Toronto 4, Ontario, $2.00 per annum.

Chelsea 17, No. 15, Quarterly of poetry, prose & plays, P.O. Box 242, Old Chelsea Station, New York 11, New York, $3.50 per annum.

ICA Bulletin, No. 151, magazine of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, poetry, prose & art, 17/18 Dover St., London W1, England, 1 shilling each.

Japanese Poetry in English, No. 4, Quarterly, c/o Syoin College, Nakazima-dori, 1-tyome, Hukiai-ku, Kobe, Japan, 75¢ each.

Kauri, No. 7, Quarterly magazine of poetry & prose, ed. Will Inman, 362 East 10th St., New York 10009, New York, $1.00 per annum for individuals, $3.00 per annum for institutions.

Open Letter, No. 1, magazine of poetry & debate, Canservcol, Royal Roads, Victoria, British Columbia.

Silo, No. 6, Bi-annual magazine of poetry & prose, Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, $1.00 each.

Views, No. 7, Quarterly review. This issue on "Britain in Labour", Marxist existentialist psychiatry, American Office, 100 Fifth Ave., New York 10011, New York, $1.00 each.

WRL news, July/August 1965, Newsletter from War Resisters League, a pacifist organization with affiliates in 53 countries, 5 Beekman Street, New York 38, New York.

Correction:

Our last issue had an incorrect listing of poetry books by Raymond Souster and R. G. Everson. The correct listing is as follows:

EVERSON, R. G., *Four Poems*, American Letters Press, Box 356, Norwich, Vermont, 4 pp., 25¢.

SOUSTER,RAYMOND, *At Split Rock Falls*, American Letters Press, Box 356, Norwich, Vermont, 1 p., 10¢.

The editors of PRISM *international* welcome the following new journals to the literary scene and wish them success:

WEST COAST REVIEW

a tri-quarterly, published at Simon Fraser University and edited by Frederick Candelaria. It will publish English and French poetry, fiction, drama, music, and art, as well as essays and reviews dealing with the arts and creativity. The first issue is scheduled for appearance in Spring of 1966. Contributions and subscriptions ($2.50 annually) are invited, c/o the editor, Department of English, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby 2, B.C.

THE OPEN LETTER

published at Canservcol, Royal Roads, Victoria, B.C. and edited by Frank Davey. "*The Open Letter* is an attempt to combine within the pages of a periodical the features of both a symposium and a debate. The subject will be poetry and its medium, language. The debaters will be the editors . . . and, of course, the readers." This journal is distributed to interested individuals on selection or application.

WASCANA REVIEW

published bi-annually at Wascana Parkway, Regina, Sask. It will contain poetry, fiction, and critical articles on literature and the other arts. "It will be neither regional nor specialist, its bias being to address itself to all readers who have passion and interest." Contributions and subscriptions ($2.50 annually) are invited.

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