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MASKERMAN

A Play in Verse for Radio by GEORGE WOODCOCK

CHARACTERS

ALFRED MASKERMAN, a film cameraman.

THE LORELEI, a spirit.

THE JUDGE.

THE CLERK OF THE COURT.

THE LAWYER.

MARIA MASKERMAN, an erring housewife.

JACQUETTA DELANEY, a scriptgirl.

LORE, a hostess on a transcontinental bus (to be played by the same actress as *The Lorelei.*)

Produced on CBC Stage, 28th August, 1960.
Directed by GERALD NEWMAN, with IAN THORNE in the title role.

SCENE I

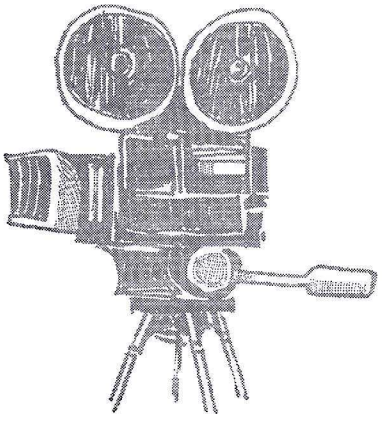
MASKERMAN

For those who sleep in snow,
White, uncorrupted,
And mammoth-like retain
All lineaments of life
And eyes still glaucous under
Time's sheltering lids,
Who smile, and even whisper
Like flakes upon a window,
And dead, will never know it,
So slight the sliding over,
We neither speak nor play.
Let them sleep on. We speak
To those whose devious hearts
Know all the traps of love,
Expect the tricks of fate,
Sing in the grip of anguish.
In all delivered to your ears
I am the hero and the victim too—
My name, Alfred Maskerman, slave of love.
So let the spirit of these acts
Step from the shadow,
Open up the play.

LORELEI

Nameless, men give me name,
Formless, men give me shape,
Preferring the describable enemy
To the amorphous terror.
And so they say that once I was a maiden,
Deathless, yet lovely in fair flesh,
Gold hair, and glint of eye.
I lived, men say, upon a towering rock,
Dry stone and shale, the haunt of snakes
And mice and hawks that preyed upon them.
Below the valley lay, narrow and green,
Dappled with vineyards, spiked with forts,
Cleft by the rolling crystal of the Rhine.
My stone yearned to its green,
My drought called to its crystal,
And like the snakes and falcons
My predatory heart
Longed for the warm and human flesh.

But that is all over now.
The river is safe for traffic,
And the men in the valley die of cancer and wine,
And the tourist looks at my rock with disappointment.
But do not assume that the Lorelei is dead.
I am dematerialised, that is evident,
But wherever the dry rock of negation
Yearns over the vale of life I comb my hair
And sing my song alluring,
And some with inner ears still hear me,
Out of the channel on the sharp rocks foundering.
So let us take up our twentieth century story
In which I am certainly goldenly singing,
Though in what heart I have placed my rock
I leave you, for the present, to consider.
Unwind, unwind the thread of fate.
The year is nineteen fifty eight.
The city unnamed, the land uncharted,
And the scene a court for the fickle-hearted.



SCENE II

JUDGE

To part whom lust united
  In error and brief bliss,
To purge the morning after
  Of the lightly given kiss,
To weigh and carefully assay
  The gold within a marriage,

This is the business of our court—
  Fate grant it no miscarriage.
What time has tarnished we cast out;
We judge as men, fogged in by doubt.
Our test is faithfulness, not faith,
And love, that strange and birdlike wraith,
Whose nature tests the poet's art,
We leave to judgments of the heart.
Ours is the judgment of the state,
And states have hearts no more than fate.
What is the case we try today?

CLERK

My lord, it is Maskerman,
Versus Maskerman and numerous co-respondents.

JUDGE

And *numerous* co-respondents!
How many does that mean precisely?

CLERK

Seventeen are named, my lord.

JUDGE

An unusual number, even for this court!

CLERK

The plaintiff is a gentleman of unusual precision.
He acted as his own detective, my lord,
With cameras concealed in bedboards
And microphones in the connubial mattress . . .

JUDGE

No more! This must be heard as evidence.
So it is Mrs. Maskerman who is the defendant?

CLERK

Mrs. Maria Maskerman, my lord.

JUDGE

And are both parties present?

CLERK

Both, my lord—but none of the seventeen gentlemen.

JUDGE

We shall not need them. Let the case begin.
A brief pause.

JUDGE

You are Alfred Maskerman?

MASKERMAN

I am, my lord.

JUDGE
And your profession?

MASKERMAN
Film cameraman.

JUDGE
You wish, I understand, to conduct your own case.

MASKERMAN
I do, indeed, sir.

JUDGE
It is your ambiguous privilege. You may begin.
Tell the whole truth and do not spare the sin.

MASKERMAN
My lord, I tell of love betrayed by lust,
    Of the apple consumed by the worm,
Of the passion fruit rotted to dust,
    Of the delicate feminine form
Whose beauty denies its heart
    And ramps like the weed in the summer
Submerging the wife in the tart . . .

LAWYER
My lord, I object for my client.
Such statements are prejudicial.
They reflect the plaintiff's emotions
And bear no relation to fact.

JUDGE
Objection sustained. Mr. Maskerman,
This is no place for lyricism or the more
Delicious flights of fancy. In private
I am a connoisseur of verse and would gladly
Bandy images with you, but in this court
Facts are what speak. Let them be hard as bullets.
If your wife was unfaithful, tell us how,
But do not search the heart to tell us why.

MASKERMAN
Must I speak in numbers then, and metal statements,
Describing human acts like an IBM?

JUDGE
I am told, Mr. Maskerman, that you have already
Used certain machines to gain your evidence.
Need you turn fastidious at this point?

MASKERMAN
No, it is too late for that. At every step
The machine tempts us with easy formulae.

We feed our lives into it, accept the pattern
It imposes upon them. And we were its victims,
My wife and I, like the rest.
The sports car, speeding from responsibility,
The television's daily tour to nowhere,
The automat dispensing contraceptives . . .

JUDGE

The facts, Mr. Maskerman, the pitiless facts
Without the sugar of philosophy . . .

MASKERMAN

The facts, the pitiless facts
Of breaking hearts and loves.
My lord, I present them to you.
Eleven years ago you would have seen me
As a young man returning from the wars
With great ambition, minuscule gratuity,
And a girl waiting, rosy-cheeked, unblemished,
A berry, it seemed, the wisest man would pick.
I picked her like an eager bear, or rather,
Since you prefer the literal, I married her
In the local registry—paying five shillings extra
For flowers on the desk—and two days later,
To please her family, at Holy Trinity.
At Trinity Church, you might say, I met my doom.
The first years, I admit, were quite idyllic.
No cash to worry us—we lived like mayflies
In the eternal single day of love,
Too much absorbed that ever eyes should rove
From that bright vortex where our senses swirled
Down to the magic centre . . .

JUDGE

Mr. Maskerman, let me remind you . . .

MASKERMAN

Quite so, my lord. I will be literal,
Mechanical and mathematical.
Seven years of poverty the idyll lasted.
Then came success. One morning we were rich,
Cash flowed in floods, and in the meretricious
Heaven of the studios, that gaudy chaos,
All our domestic joys and private passions
Grew small and rustic. Our delights were blunted,
Differences hardened, hearts released each other
By imperceptible inches, till our single child

Remained the one frail link. Often I worked away,
Yet never heard the cuckoo's mocking call
Until one day a friend's malicious frankness
Stirred my suspicion. The tactless telephone—
One day my wife was out—revealed the rest.
I will not spell the agonies that followed,
The two years of appalling confirmation
As every careful trap closed on its quarry.
To my sad knowledge, in the marriage bed
My wife received no less than thirty lovers . . .
In an astonished crescendo the word "thirty" is repeated around the courtroom.

MASKERMAN
I used the methods of my trade to trap them . . .

JUDGE
Aha—those cameras and microphones!

MASKERMAN
Quite so, my lord. But no machine is perfect . . .

JUDGE
Our age's solitary consolation . . .

MASKERMAN
I beg your pardon, sir?

JUDGE
Nothing. Nothing at all. You may proceed.

MASKERMAN
Blurred films, flawed tapes, let thirteen men escape
Into the luck of anonymity. Seventeen remain,
Their actions photographed, their sighs—and more—recorded,
And in all bouts so scissored out of time
Each lover plays to the same leading lady,
My wife, that fruit so long ago unblemished.
(He catches on a hysterical sob and then continues.)
Here is the evidence I will present,
The *how* the court requires . . .

JUDGE
Quite so. The *why* must be explored elsewhere.
It is not in our jurisdiction.
Mr. Maskerman, present your evidence.

LAWYER
I object, my lord. The open showing of such matter
Is prejudicial to my charming client
And deeply hostile to the public morals.
Think, my lord, if you had a daughter of fourteen . . .

JUDGE
As a bachelor I prefer to think of no such thing.
Nevertheless, your objection is sustained.
Let the court be cleared.
The scene fades out in conversation, and then fades in again.
CLERK
Silence in the court!
JUDGE
The court has looked—and listened—with attention.
Cameras and tapes may lie, but not so boldly.
What we have seen in private minds might raise
Concupiscence, astonishment or laughter,
Or pity at man's doomed desire for pleasure.
Let me be frank—I felt them all in turn,
Yet as a judge I purge them from my mind.
On facts alone this court's decree is based,
And one fact here has clearly been established—
That in these seventeen most scandalous episodes
Mrs. Maskerman has been the single actress,
Wanton—delicious—and deplorable!
MARIA *(shouting in a voice of agony)*
My lord!
Murmur of scandalised voices.
JUDGE
Who was the cause of this interruption?
LAWYER
It was my client. On her behalf, my lord,
I apologise. The strain—you understand . . .
JUDGE
More than I dare say, sir. Let me assure your client
She shall have every chance to state her case.
LAWYER
My lord, she has no case within this court.
The evidence is plain, and the defence
Rests on the court's indulgence.
JUDGE
And you—Mr. Maskerman—have you more to say?
MASKERMAN
Only, my lord, that one slight slip of mine,
One frail response to understanding eyes
In all these years of anguish be forgiven . . .
JUDGE
Men's courts do not forgive. That lies elsewhere.

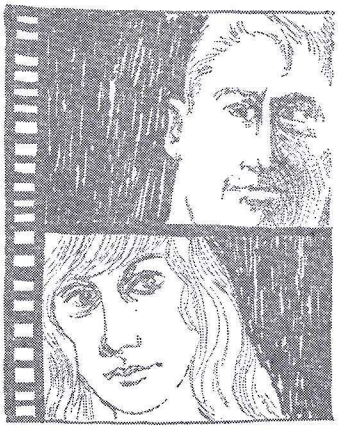
We balance out the faults on either side.
You grant, I take it, one adultery
Committed under some provocation.

MASKERMAN

I do, my lord.

JUDGE

One against seventeen. The count is clear.
Therefore the court decrees that this sad marriage
Here be dissolved. And let all men take warning
What deeds the dark-room may reveal next morning.



SCENE III

MARIA

I know it is finished. In my heart The End
Sprawls like the letters flashed across the screen
In all the films that drained away your love.

MASKERMAN

If you know that, why did you want to see me?
To shift the blame for all your hot betrayals?
To change my mind? You heard the court's decree.
All is too late. Now we are free—to build
What best we can out of our shares of rubble—
And you, my dear, will have no lack of helpers . . .

MARIA

I only came to ask for your forgiveness
And a last touch of your hand.

MASKERMAN
So you're humble now! You ask forgiveness!
Now, at the end, with every feeling sapped!
And a last touch of my hand! Did you ask
A last touch of every hand that touched you?

MARIA
Must you be cruel?

MASKERMAN
Have you not been cruel?
Once I despised a jealous man. You made me jealous,
The laughing boy of all who knew me,
The cuckold with the nymphomaniac wife,
The comic spy with lens and microphone,
Despairing, self-despising, filled with hate
More of myself than you! Today, as the foul facts spilled out
I loathed myself. I knew that I prepared
With my revenge my own humiliation.
You are too late, Maria. There was a time
I'd have forgiven only for the asking.
You never asked. You never told with frankness
What I must find by cold and devious shifts.
And yet—today—when you cried out, my heart
Failed, and my rage went grey, and for a moment
I could have stood before the court and shouted:
Enough! Let us forget! Let us begin again!
It was too late. That horror lay between us—
The half-tone record of your long betrayal
Left with the world for laughter and for gloating.

MARIA
Why did you give it? There were other ways.

MASKERMAN
Shame piles on shame, like stones down mountains falling,
Until you cannot stop the avalanche. There was no other way.

MARIA
How did we reach this one-way road to sorrow?

MASKERMAN
You gave the cause, and you should know the reason.

MARIA
The guilt was mine. And yet I got no joy.

MASKERMAN
No joy? Then why did you go on?

MARIA
I too was caught within the avalanche,

Pushed on by impulses I could not master,
As if some cliff yearned down to the abyss
And took me with it.

MASKERMAN

Yet it began. There must have been a cause—
Some first loose stone falling towards the valley.
Why did you change from those first years, Maria?
I saw you then, rosy and innocent,
And never felt the knife of jealousy
Turn in my side. Was I a fool then also?

MARIA

You were no fool! And I was happy then,
Knowing and wanting nothing but your love.

MASKERMAN

And yet you changed . . .

MARIA

Not I, but our love changed.
You told the story in the court today,
Success, and money, and the great career!
Each day I felt you drawing far away,
And like an icy rain the loneliness
Fell in my mind. You went away on projects,
And then returned, and still you were away,
And in my heart you were away for ever,
Like a bright migrant that has stayed a season
And nevermore returns.

MASKERMAN

And so—you sought your love elsewhere.

MARIA

I sought your love elsewhere.

MASKERMAN

My love? What reasoning is this, Maria?
To make unfaithfulness a test of faith!

MARIA

You do not understand. You never tried.
You saw the facts just as the court has seen them,
The voices crying out of tape recorders,
The shadow figures in the camera's eye.
You never saw beyond.

MASKERMAN

What was beyond but lust—
The hot late flowering of a hidden evil.

MARIA
So they'll think, now you have left me branded—
A nymphomaniac wife—you spoke the words
That all the rest will whisper.
It is not true. It is not all the truth.
What I became I was not to begin . . .

MASKERMAN
But how did you begin?

MARIA
Anger and emptiness
A lonely woman, and the level sun
Golden upon the lakeshore and the woods.
Add the parked Jaguar, the soothing hand,
The inner whisper crying out, "Why not?
Why not your share of love?" And there you have it.

MASKERMAN
Which one was this?

MARIA
The one you did not know. The one who came
Nearest to bringing back my love with you.

MASKERMAN
Your love with me! That pitiful excuse!

MARIA
Yes, pitiful! I felt the need for pity!
And yet it is the truth. In every man
You were the man I sought, and each embrace
Became an act of magic, to restore
What I had lost in you.

MASKERMAN
Strange avatars I had!
The small part actors and the crass reporters,
The lank professor moaning out in Latin,
The butcher flaunting in his new Mercedes,
And the scoutmaster, guiltily bisexual!
Like the Greek Gods, I came in odd disguises!

MARIA
You came in none, but like a barren woman
Who seeks in witch's charms the quickened womb,
I sought you in them all. The magic failed.
We think too much for magic.

MASKERMAN
And why not seek me here, within myself?
I would have listened then.

MARIA
At first I longed to speak,
Pour out my sorrow and my guilt before you,
And then it was too late.

MASKERMAN
Too late? But when?

MARIA
How lightly in the court you cast it off!
That one affair—such understanding eyes!
Those eyes! The topaz eyes of falcons
Stooping upon their prey!

MASKERMAN
You mean Jacquetta?

MARIA
Jackie you called her! Understanding Jackie!
That nasal Lorelei with lilac locks
Combing them out before the script-room mirror . . .

MASKERMAN
In your glass house, with thirty lovers odd,
You call another woman Lorelei . . .

MARIA
I never played the siren with my lovers
Or tried to keep them in my claws for ever.

MASKERMAN
Because all lovers were the same to you—
Plain Man without the person . . .

MARIA
All but you . . .

MASKERMAN
You're jealous, then! I didn't think of that.

MARIA
You thought of nothing till it was too late.
That is our tragedy. Yes, I was jealous.
One day I'd bent my heart to fall before you,
Confess, beg your forgiveness, coax your love
Out of its hibernation. That day I heard—
You and sweet Jackie! Like some rotting token
Thrown at my feet upon the tide of gossip
The knowledge lay before me. I knew—
I knew you knew of me,
And that instead of turning back to me,
Accusing, raging at me, bitter,
You took the coward's way, the offered hand

Enticing you with neatly silvered talons
To consolation on the shared divan.
And how did you enjoy it? Rather cramped, I'd think.

MASKERMAN

You have no right to ask, Maria.
I looked for love where I could hope to find it,
Just as you did.

MARIA

With better luck, I hope.

MASKERMAN

If you found nothing, why did you go on?

MARIA

Like desert travellers following mirages.
Hope was my mirage—there was always hope,
And then, after Jacquetta, pride that needed healing,
And then revenge. O, you must understand . . .
You wove your iron net with hating patience
Till you could hold me like a beast within it
And let the world batter me with its scorn.
Alfred, I am beaten . . . and sad . . . and happy!
Yes, I am happy!

MASKERMAN

Happy! What freak is this, Maria?
You need a rest. A month in Porto Fino.
I'll pay the fare. And that young Welsh psychiatrist—
He's just worked wonders with old Prothero . . . .
Peeping Tom Prothero—you remember him . . .

MARIA

Keep your money, and your advice, and Peeping Tom!
I *am* happy . . . you must listen to me, Alfred!
I'm happy for what you did today—the court,
The insult, the humiliation, all of it!
You cared, and turned upon the thing you cared for.
You cared—and I had thought you ceased to care.

MASKERMAN

And so we walk like blind men through the world
On parallel roads and never meet again.
You sought me in your lust, I you in hatred,
Each thought the other lost, and now, too late,
We see the ties that bound us all along
And kept us numbly walking near each other.
And now these ties are broken, all is ended,
And all revealed, by hurt too deep for healing.

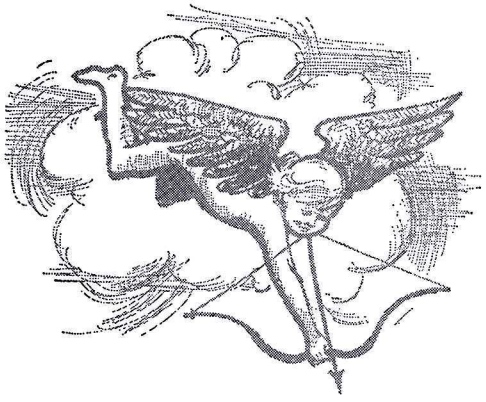
Our past remains, but like a fossil bone,
The living tissues all replaced by stone.

MARIA

Tears can wear a stone, and pity bring
The heart's dry desert into flowering.

MASKERMAN *(in abrupt anger)*

It is too late, Maria! Let me go!
Go to your street and get another man!



SCENE IV

MASKERMAN

On the barren shore of Labrador
The icebergs freeze the sky,
The wind blows chill on Primrose Hill,
But none so warm as I.
A tropic flood is in my blood,
My heart is an equator.
My love's a fish in a golden dish
And I am an alligator.

JACQUETTA

A baby alligator,
Crying snap-snap-snap
To be kept in the bath
In a cellophane wrap.
But Alfred, you look so much more like a Christmas tree.

MASKERMAN

Today is the Christmas day of love, my love.
O, Jackie, Jackie, comb your auburn hair,

Here are orchids and cumquats and sugar plums rare,
Chanel Number Five and ladderproof silk,
And the hundred-year vintage of Liebfrauenmilch.
You don't mean to say you've forgotten the day?

JACQUETTA
O, darling, it isn't . . .

MASKERMAN
It is. The very day.

JACQUETTA
But I thought it was at least a week ahead.

MASKERMAN
Nothing of the sort, my dear. Look at your calendar.
The day of the hearing was October the 15th.
Today is April the 15th. The decree is absolute.
I went to the court and picked up a copy.
The Magna Carta of Alfred Maskerman! Read it!

JACQUETTA
I don't want to, darling. Put it away,
And hand me my girdle and my negligée.

MASKERMAN
But don't you want to rejoice in my freedom?

JACQUETTA
Of course. I'm absolutely wild about it. Absolutely wild.
But you know I can't bear those terrible documents.
They make me feel so completely illiterate.

MASKERMAN
Why, you've got more brains than all those lawyer fellows.

JACQUETTA
I may have, but I'm still illiterate.
Abysmally illiterate. I read nothing but your letters.

MASKERMAN
And the fashion magazines . . . and the social columns . . .

JACQUETTA
Which only the illiterate read. Put that thing away!
Put it away at once!

MASKERMAN *(in comic consternation)*
My charter of independence?

JACQUETTA
Don't be tedious, darling. And pedantic as well!
All I want to know is that you're free—
Free of that dreadful creature. Open the wine.
Let us drink to your freedom, not read it in decree.

MASKERMAN
Let us drink! Where's the corkscrew?

JACQUETTA
There—behind the glasses.

MASKERMAN
This is a tight one! *(He groans clownishly)* Here it comes!
One for you and one for me and none for Little Moses!

JACQUETTA
To your freedom, Alfredo!

MASKERMAN
And may I lose it quickly!

JACQUETTA
Delicious!

MASKERMAN
Could be a little dryer!

JACQUETTA
Don't play the connoisseur, my dear. When I first knew you
You couldn't tell champagne from Whiteway's Cider.

MASKERMAN
We change our palates with our lovers
And choose fine wine for finer company.

JACQUETTA
Fill high the bowl with Samian gush!
Alfred, I shall insist in our marriage contract
On fifteen minutes flattery night and morning,
Gross flattery, shovelled on with gusto,
Like an abstract painter wielding a palette knife.

MASKERMAN
Impossible! Flattery would defeat its purpose
By turning into truth.

JACQUETTA
A good beginning!
Keep it up, my dear! We'll have a happy marriage!

MASKERMAN
But when does that begin?

JACQUETTA
Whenever you will.

MASKERMAN
Shall I go tomorrow and buy the license?
Let's fix it for—a week today?

JACQUETTA
So soon?

MASKERMAN
Sooner the sweeter, you always said.

JACQUETTA
Wouldn't you like a little spell of freedom
Before you put the shackles on again?
A bachelor ten days at Porto Fino—

MASKERMAN
Porto Fino!

JACQUETTA
What's wrong with Porto Fino?

MASKERMAN
Nothing at all.
It called up something, but I can't quite place it.

JACQUETTA
It's empty now. April. You'll meet the swallows,
And in the surf wash out the creature's presence.
Why the great frown? Did I speak out of turn?

MASKERMAN
Of course not. But I'll meet the swallows here.
Next week they'll come. The plane trees veil themselves
In green of breaking buds. The windflowers nod
Their blooms along the park. A new life starts
For all the earth and us.

JACQUETTA
O most poetic Alfred!

MASKERMAN
Let's go to the country for our honeymoon
And roll in bluebells in the beechwoods.

JACQUETTA
And clothe ourselves in earwigs and dead leaves!
Alfred, how dare you! Paris at least I ask—
The very least! Paris, to roll in silks
And sniff the springtime scents—Mon Rêve,
Scandale, Nuit de Péché . . .

MASKERMAN
Paris it is! I'll get the tickets now.

JACQUETTA
But still the frown! Alfred, do you regret . . .

MASKERMAN
The lost years I regret. Failures are always sad.

JACQUETTA
Escapes are not. Such partings should be glad.
You came here full of joy, and now the veil

Settles upon you, and that evil woman
Casts shadows on our future.

MASKERMAN
Shades cast no shadows.
Like a poor ghost she lingers in the past,
Never forgotten, never to live again.
Do not hate her. Hatred can keep a ghost alive.

JACQUETTA
I hate her. I can't help it. She is evil.

MASKERMAN
Other things she is. But evil—never!

JACQUETTA
I know the tale. She's weak, unfortunate,
Unhappy, off the beam. She needs
A good psychiatrist, and all is well.
She looks so mild—those rosy cheeks of virtue,
Those gentle lips, those softly falling eyelids—
But then the look that flashes out between them,
Just like a falcon—or, wait, who was it
That sat upon a rock and combed her hair?

MASKERMAN
The Lorelei?

JACQUETTA
The Lorelei! There you have Maria,
Singing upon a pile of plundered sexes . . .

MASKERMAN
That's enough, Jackie! Odd you said it, though.
Falcon and Lorelei! She said the same, of you.

JACQUETTA
She said? When did she say? When did you see her?

MASKERMAN
So long ago, my dear—outside the court . . .

JACQUETTA
How dared she talk of me! But you agreed—
I know you did.

MASKERMAN
Neither with her, nor you.
Loreleis don't exist, and women are not birds.
Still, it was strange you both should say the same.

JACQUETTA
You mean something more, don't you, Alfred?

MASKERMAN
Perhaps I mean you're nearer than you think.

The same images come to your lips, your eyes
Have both the golden sharpness of a bird's,
And now your hair is dark, I see it grows
In the same pattern, low upon the brow,
Over the cheekbones glowing darkly
Where hot blood rises under veils . . .

JACQUETTA
Most fascinating and poetic. Tell me more!

MASKERMAN
There's nothing more to tell. In character
You're quite apart, of course. She lived in secret,
Hid her motives . . .

JACQUETTA
While I speak out where angels hold their tongues.
Thanks for the praise! But now, let us discuss
How *you* appear in this. Alfred Maskerman,
Man of emotional habit. Likes to think his women
Are all the same with just a dash of difference
To make the meal exciting. What if I jib?

MASKERMAN
Jib?

JACQUETTA
Jib at it all. At marrying, you oaf!

MASKERMAN
But, Jackie, what in heaven . . .

JACQUETTA
Not Heaven, but you.
Your mind's full of Maria. You look at me
And think you see her features in my face,
And then, in boundless tact, you tell me so.
I see it all now. Right from the beginning
I was your consolation, the puppet around whom
You build your longing for a first love lost.
Always to see you searching in my face
For that detestable face! No, not for me!
I'll be myself. Let's call it off, my poppet,
Before time strips the gilding from the locket.

MASKERMAN
Let me explain—just one moment—let me explain.

JACQUETTA
Do as you like. It's all the same to me.

MASKERMAN
It's very simple, Jackie. All men think in patterns,

And certain qualities and images
Appeal to each man. These he recognises
And makes the keypoints of relationships.
Yet every pattern is itself. All that unites them
Is their creator's personal inclinations.
And so, they say, each has his type of woman,
Finds certain qualities always inviting,
But invitation leads to exploration,
And types dissolve in individuals.
You see the point?

JACQUETTA
Most glibly made, my dear.
I'm like Maria, but I am myself,
And for myself you love me. I'll accept
The second, but the first I hand you back.

MASKERMAN
Pax, is it, then?

JACQUETTA
Pax! My type are talkers, weak and noisy men.
Fill up my glass, please.

MASKERMAN
Over the brim! Quick! Before it spills!

JACQUETTA
To Gullible Jackie and Plausible Alf!

MASKERMAN
To Oafish Alf and Adorable Jackie!
They laugh.

MASKERMAN
Just a mouthful left in the bottom.

JACQUETTA
Pour it in my glass. We'll drink it together.

MASKERMAN
First sip to you.

JACQUETTA
Still think it's too sweet?

MASKERMAN
Sweet as a mood and sweet as a nut.

JACQUETTA
And who is the nut, may one ask?

MASKERMAN
It's Alfred Maskerman, fool of love,
Who soars like an eagle and clings like a glove.

JACQUETTA
It's goggled-eyed, glutinous, Jackie Delaney,
Who lives like a Turk and loves like a zany.

MASKERMAN
And now let me fly like a homecoming plane
To put up the banns and book the boat train.

JACQUETTA
A moment, my poppet. There's one clause unsettled.

MASKERMAN
One clause?

JACQUETTA
One clause in our contract of understanding.

MASKERMAN
Can't it wait till tomorrow?

JACQUETTA
It can't.

MASKERMAN
What is it, then?

JACQUETTA
You know. The child!

MASKERMAN
Daisy?

JACQUETTA
Sweet little Daisy, the divorce court orphan.

MASKERMAN
For Christ's sake, Jackie! Don't keep on like that!

JACQUETTA
I only want to know what's to become of her.

MASKERMAN
Well—you remember—the court left her to me.
I thought, as soon as we were married . . .

JACQUETTA
You and the court have done all the thinking.
It's my turn now.

MASKERMAN
You don't mean, Jackie . . .

JACQUETTA
Precisely that, Alfredo.
She is Maria's child as well as yours.
Maria's image, by Maria shaped, perhaps
Inheriting Maria's tastes. Who knows? Who cares?
A clean slate, my dear—that's all I ask. No leftovers,
Nothing to remind us of the past, no tiny images

Of lost loves growing up in flesh and blood
To stand like reminiscent angels there
Or reminiscent demons. That child shall never
Cross my door or nestle at my hearth.

MASKERMAN
And what do you think will become of her then?

JACQUETTA
The court doesn't force you to take her. Where is she now?

MASKERMAN
With Maria's mother. There was nowhere else.

JACQUETTA
Let her stay then, or go back to Maria.
Let the past keep the past. I'm for the future.

MASKERMAN
The future! Ah, you're right! Then let time gone by
Pass into darkness. Our love cannot die.

SCENE V

JUDGE
What is the case we try today?

CLERK
My lord, it is Maskerman
Versus Maskerman and Maskerman.

JUDGE
One of those curious reverse triangles, eh?
Old customers, I assume.

CLERK
Quite so, my lord.
You remember the gentleman with the photographs
And the microphone in the mattress . . .

JUDGE
That was Maskerman! Remarkable evidence!

CLERK
It appears, my lord . . .

JUDGE
No more. That must be heard in court.
Are all the parties present?

CLERK
The case is undefended, my lord.
Mrs. Jacquetta Maskerman, the plaintiff, is here.

JUDGE
That is enough. So let the case begin.
Pause.

JUDGE
Sir Henry, I believe that on a previous occasion
You appeared on behalf of Mrs. Maria Maskerman.
Now, it seems, you take the other side.

LAWYER
Quite so, my lord.

JUDGE
Well, I stood on your side of the bench once.
Ours is a liberal profession. One accepts one's fees
Without discrimination. You may continue, Sir Henry.
Examine your witness.

LAWYER
Thank you, my lord.
You, madam, are Mrs. Jacquetta Maskerman?

JACQUETTA
I am.

LAWYER
And you are the wife of Alfred Maskerman?

JACQUETTA
Unfortunately, yes.

LAWYER
And when were you married?

JACQUETTA
On the 23rd of April, 1959.

LAWYER
That is almost exactly fifteen months ago, is it not?

JACQUETTA
I leave the arithmetic to you.

LAWYER
Fifteen months is a short term for a marriage.
The bird loves for a season, but man for longer.

JUDGE
Sir Henry, your ornithology is wanting.
Some birds love lifelong, and some men
Change like the sparrow. Draw out the facts, sir.
I will philosophise upon them.

LAWYER
I stand corrected, my lord.
Mrs. Maskerman, would you have the kindness
To tell the court why in so short a period
Your marriage should be . . .

JACQUETTA
On the rocks, you mean?
Let's call a rock a rock, a wreck a wreck.
Our love wrecked on the rocks of time, the past.
A siren sang it out of the quiet waters
Into the boiling rapids where the reefs
Stand up like piercing linghams in the flood.

LAWYER
A siren, madam?

JACQUETTA
A Lorelei, if you prefer it.

JUDGE
This court, Mrs. Maskerman, invents its own myths.
It accepts no others. Sirens and Loreleis
May have reality elsewhere, but here
We recognize only the human and the specific.
Out of them we make our new constructions.

JACQUETTA
Then, sir, my claim is that my propitious marriage
With Mr. Alfred Maskerman was hot-bloodedly ruined
By Mrs. Maria Maskerman.

JUDGE
Your husband's former wife, I believe?

JACQUETTA
Yes, my lord.

JUDGE
Most interesting! You may proceed, Sir Henry.

LAWYER
Mrs. Maskerman, would you care to tell the court
In concrete details how it all took place.

JACQUETTA
Just like a tiger hunt.

LAWYER
A tiger hunt?

JACQUETTA
You tie a kid up in the jungle,
Then climb a tree and wait.

LAWYER
Madam, I don't quite understand you.

JUDGE
I do, Sir Henry. You never served in India, of course.
So much went out of life with the old Raj.
You sat on a platform, eaten by mosquitoes,
The kids cried out, the tiger came, and then
You potted the tiger, from the tree of course,
And next week you went down with fever.
But how did you know about this, Mrs. Maskerman?

JACQUETTA
I work for the films, my lord.

JUDGE
Of course, of course.
Well, how are we to interpret your little parable?
The tiger, presumably, represents your husband,
And the huntress in the tree his former wife,
That charming but untypical Artemis?

JACQUETTA
Right the first time, my lord.

JUDGE
But now—the kid?
Who stands behind that image?

JACQUETTA
You may take it as a pun, my lord.

JUDGE
A kid? Ah, a child!

JACQUETTA
The child of the first marriage.

Mrs. Maskerman—the other Mrs. Maskerman—
Used it as bait to draw my husband back.

JUDGE
It?

LAWYER
My client means her, my lord. The child
Is a girl—Daisy Maskerman.

JUDGE
But I was under the impression that this court
Awarded custody to Mr. Maskerman.
How could his former wife use her for bait
If he already had her with him?

JACQUETTA
I was the victim of my own devices, sir.
I would not take the other woman's child.
At first my husband seemed to understand;
Then he longed for the child, began to see her,
Took her to tea, the circus, pantomimes—
And then Mama came too! The longing spread
Up from the smaller to the larger image.
Perhaps he'd never ceased to long for her.
He talked a lot about his type of woman.

JUDGE
But you will have to prove, my dear young lady,
That something more than circuses and longings
Went on between those former lovers.

LAWYER
We have the proofs, my lord.

JUDGE
You have? I seem to remember, in a former case . . .

LAWYER
If your lordship is thinking of photographs
And tape recordings, that will not be repeated.
Our evidence is orthodox.

JUDGE
Orthodox!

LAWYER
I wish to call as my first witness Thomas Prothero
Of the Argus Eye Investigation Agency.

JUDGE
Ah, Mr. Prothero!
Our Mr. Prothero one might almost call him.

A tried and old acquaintance of the court.
So there will be no photographs, Sir Henry?

LAWYER

Not this time, my lord.

JUDGE

One always hopes. A change in the routine . . .
Well, call your witness. Let the human acts
Be beaten down to figures and to facts,
And in the cold detective's gloating eye
Let love's complexities grow pale and die.

CLERK

Call Thomas Prothero! Thomas Prothero!

VOICES FADING

DOWN CORRIDORS

Peeping Tom Prothero! Peeping Tom Prothero!

SCENE VI

MASKERMAN

So, that's the end. Poor Peeping Tom
Has done his social duty well. Now it's goodbye.

JACQUETTA

Goodbye. There's nothing else to say.

MASKERMAN

There might have been.

JACQUETTA

If you had chosen. You never made a choice.

MASKERMAN

One never does, you know.
You see the world always in light and shadow,
In clean-cut ends and days marked off from night.
Life isn't that. Its days are full of twilight.

JACQUETTA

I don't like twilight.

MASKERMAN

You could have tried to understand it more.

JACQUETTA

I didn't want to. I am not a sharer.
Rather than that I'd end it. And I did.

MASKERMAN

Jacquetta, you're a hard and selfish woman.

JACQUETTA
I am myself. I know the life I want.
You did not give it to me, so we part.

MASKERMAN
And no regrets?

JACQUETTA
Only for wasted time.

MASKERMAN
Well, then, good-bye!

JACQUETTA
Goodbye. *(slightly softening her voice)* What will you do, Alfred?

MASKERMAN
What does one do with freedom?

JACQUETTA
Most men try to lose it. Go back to your Maria.

MASKERMAN
That would be easy now.

JACQUETTA
And logical.

MASKERMAN
My life is never logical.
Something within me beats against the circle.

JACQUETTA
Think it over then. Go away. You have the money.

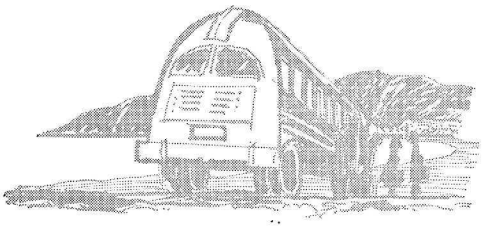
MASKERMAN
You said that once before.

JACQUETTA
If you'd gone then, things might be different now.

MASKERMAN
Well, perhaps I will go. Perhaps I'll see more clearly
Somewhere along the singing one-way highway.

JACQUETTA
Good-bye, Alfred.

MASKERMAN
Good-bye, Jacquetta.



SCENE VII

A bus is drawing into a town.

LORE *(speaking through a microphone)*

Ladies and gentlemen, we are arriving now at Porto Fino.
The sun shines, the coloured houses welcome you,
The dark sea is calling and the rocks beckon.
Your journey is ended. You have reached your South.
And now, on behalf of Pan-Continent Buses,
I wish you a happy holiday, and a calm returning
For those who do return.

The bus draws to a halt. The door opens.

LORE

Please look on the racks. Have your baggage checks ready.
Good-bye, Madam. It was pleasant to see you again.
Good-bye, sir. Good-bye, madam. Good-bye, sir.

MASKERMAN

Good-bye, miss. Will you be staying in Porto Fino?

LORE

Yes—till the bus returns.

MASKERMAN

And when will that be?

LORE

Tomorrow afternoon. Good-bye, Madam.

MASKERMAN

Oh, pardon me, ma'am! Perhaps I shall see you, miss.

LORE

It's a small town.

MASKERMAN

Where do I find the Hotel Firenze?

LORE

Straight down to the quay and round to the right.
Good-bye, sir.

MASKERMAN

Won't you say, "A rivederci"?

LORE *(laughing)*
A rivederci! But now please excuse me!
Good-bye, madam. Good-bye, sir.

SCENE VIII

MASKERMAN
Why, hullo!

LORE
Good evening.

MASKERMAN
So it *is* a small town.

LORE
As small as you make it, like everywhere else.

MASKERMAN
Do you mind if I join you?

LORE
You may if you wish.

MASKERMAN
At my own risk. Is that the idea?

LORE *(laughing)*
Perhaps it is.

MASKERMAN
I'll take it. Now, where do we start?
I don't even know what to call you.

LORE
I am Lore.

MASKERMAN
Lore! That's a pretty beginning. How does it go on?

LORE
Lore is enough. It identifies me.

MASKERMAN
My name is Alfred Maskerman. You see, I'm more trusting.

LORE
Perhaps you can afford to be, Mr. Maskerman.

MASKERMAN
Afford to be trusting! If only you knew!
Ah, well! Lore! It is a nice name. I'd say it suits you.

LORE
You think so? Why?

MASKERMAN
Your voice and your looks,
Golden eyes and blonde hair turning to copper,
And—O, all the rest . . .

LORE
All the rest?

MASKERMAN
Don't take offense, please. I mean . . .
Well, it all adds together and echoes your name.
Where do you come from?

LORE
I hardly know now. I've lived in so many places.
Once I lived in the Rhineland, a place in the country.
On a sunny day I would sit on the clifftop
And watch the boats come sailing upriver,
And the sailors pulling the oars . . .

MASKERMAN
Do they still use oars?

LORE
No—I daydreamed all that.
In a strange kind of way I seemed to remember,
Sitting there, thinking about the past . . .

MASKERMAN
You must love the place.

LORE
I did.

MASKERMAN
Don't you live there now?

LORE
I live nowhere now. I'm a wandering girl.
Sometimes my bus goes to Venice, sometimes to Nice,
But I always end at rocks and at water.
But, Alfred Maskerman, what are you?

MASKERMAN
Me? I'm a runaway!

LORE
What are you running from? Yourself?

MASKERMAN
No—no, not from myself!

LORE
It would be more flattering if I said—from a woman.

MASKERMAN
From two women. My two wives.

LORE
So that's what you're running from! You're a bigamist!
MASKERMAN *(laughing)*
No, you're quite mistaken.
LORE
I won't tell. It's no business of mine.
MASKERMAN
I'm no bigamist, though I might as well be one.
I'm divorced from them both, and yet I can never . . .
Oh, it's a long, long story, and boring for strangers—
If you are a stranger.
LORE
Don't you think me a stranger?
MASKERMAN
No. I don't. I can't, in fact. From that first moment
When I stepped on the bus I felt that I'd seen you.
One of those odd things—a sense of knowing . . .
LORE
Perhaps you did know me.
MASKERMAN
How could I? But now I must.
Are you quite sure you'll go tomorrow?
LORE
Does it matter to you if I go tomorrow?
MASKERMAN
Of course.
LORE
Why?
MASKERMAN
Stay here, and I'll tell you why.
LORE
I'll be back in a week.
MASKERMAN
And all that week will be wasted in waiting.
Can't you stay now?
LORE
By what right do you ask me?
MASKERMAN
I don't know!
I don't know myself, and yet I can feel it,
A curious knowledge that drives me towards you.
If you stay I know it will all become clear
And stream between us like rays in the evening

Shining level through windows and lighting up secrets.

LORE

I cannot stay. Yet there's plenty of time.
Let's meet tomorrow, in the morning.

MASKERMAN

Only the morning? Those few fast hours?

LORE

O, the right morning need never have ending
Or ever begin as you know a beginning,
But swing in its lovely and fearful suspension . . .

MASKERMAN

What on earth are you saying?

LORE *(laughing)*

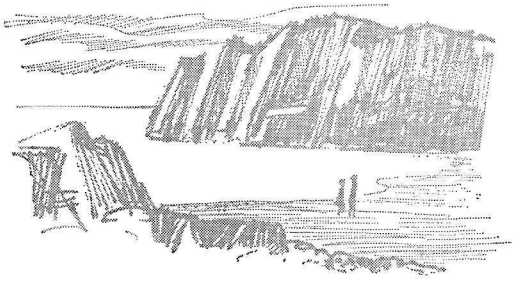
I don't know myself. It came to the surface.
I have an idea. I know a small bay,
Not far from here, deep under the shadow
Of the tallest cliffs, yet completely secret.
Let's go in the morning, and sunbathe, and linger,
And say what you must say, familiar stranger.

MASKERMAN

Good! What time shall I meet you?

LORE

At eight on this terrace. Good night, Alfred Maskerman!
Her laughter fades out.



SCENE IX

The surf fades in.

LORE

It's just round this rock. There you are!
There's my bay. Don't you think it's a jewel?

MASKERMAN

It's perfect! It has no right in this world!

LORE
It has in mine. Such places *are* my world.
Look at the rock roses, and the broom falling,
Purple and gold on the cliff and the berries
Red on arbutus down to the sand.

MASKERMAN
And the sea pure violet—could you believe
A sea could be that colour?

LORE
It is, though. Let's sit on this rock.
We'll swim in a moment. But now, Alfred Maskerman,
Your morning begins. Say what you must say.

MASKERMAN
All I can say is a gloss on one word.
That word is *love*.

LORE
Is this a declaration?

MASKERMAN
All my life is a declaration of love,
And a journey of love, as I see it now,
Passing through Way to Destination,
Until the way is the destination
And the road disperses within the city.
I think I have reached my destination.

LORE
Are you sure you have read the signposts truly?

MASKERMAN
My eyes tell me so, and my heart is an echo.
With you I have reached the end of my journey.

LORE
With me? Why do you say that?

MASKERMAN
I will tell you the reason behind the journey.
Each man in love has a certain ideal,
A woman who holds all his thoughts of beauty.
Most men cease to search, accept the next best,
And turn the ideal into a goddess,
A theory, a painting, a sublimation.
But I have sought her through many women,
Pursuing the type that nears the ideal.
This is the cause of each failing marriage,
The gnawing distaste for the flaw and the folly,
The blistering wound of imperfection.

LORE
So you are a seeker after perfection.
Some say the only perfection is death.

MASKERMAN
You are alive, and so I refute them.
The incarnation of all my longing,
Held transfigured in flesh and in motion . . .

LORE
So you see me, Alfred Maskerman,
A thing that emerges out of your mind,
But I am myself, a thing within
That you do not know, that no-one can know.

MASKERMAN
The outside mirrors the world within.
What you are I accept as my destiny
And my destination.

LORE
You accept? You accept the thorn within the rose?

MASKERMAN
The thorn completes the rose's beauty.

LORE
And the fang of the snake? And the beak of the falcon?

MASKERMAN
I accept them all in their own perfection.

LORE
You accept them all? Then I will accept you.

MASKERMAN
Lore!

LORE
Not so hastily, Alfred Maskerman!
You still don't know my way of accepting.
Let us swim first. Look, the water calls you!
It laughs in ripples along the boulders.

MASKERMAN
Why, yes, if you . . .

LORE
You must humour my whim.
You go first. I'll be there in a moment.

MASKERMAN
I'll go then. But don't be too long.

LORE
Just long enough to comb out my hair.
She begins to hum, and the humming continues as background.

MASKERMAN
Lore!
Lore! Come in there! It's superb!
Come on, Lore! I'm swimming back to your rock!
Lore! Lore!
The humming continues briefly.
LORE
Good night, Alfred Maskerman, good night.
The surf, fading out.

EPILOGUE

LORELEI
This was the end of Alfred Maskerman,
Drowned in the whirlpool, dragged on the sand.
Water killed him. But who led him there
To the fear and the terrible gasping for air?
Where was the Lorelei? Where was I?
Was I Jacquetta? Maria? Was I Lore?
All were like sailors steering a ship
Whose course is set. None set the course,
For Maskerman's compass was pointed already,
Within the heart, directed at the whirlpool.
He did not choose. The whirlpool chose him,
And I was in the whirlpool.
I was the whirlpool, the vortex of negation
That waits for men and sings within their hearts,
And spins them onward to that dancing point
Where death immortal meets immortal life
And for an instant triumphs.

BOOM MAN

THELMA REID LOWER

I stand at your funeral, two hearts in me,
My own and unborn child's; not yours
But his whom I married after that day.

The grey grouse furrowed the ground of leaves,
As we kissed on the corduroy, kissed on the corduroy,
Kissed on the corduroy down to the Fraser's flat.
I was new at this game and the gun was heavy,
But I cocked it as you showed me and O
Pain on shoulder as I writhed on blueberry peat!
But not you! Swift with mallard wings
You flew the bank to boom, and balanced
With skill of twirling feet, you fired!
Fire on fire! How many pellets
From a red plaid pocket? "Come back!"

There was no grouse and no kissing on the climbing corduroy.
The old orchard had hung its oldest apples
To wait the late-coming stars.
"Apples," I cried, for his hands to have something to do.
"Apples," I cried, "I cannot marry you."
"Apples," I cried, "on the tree, not on me."
Shake my apple head, yes, shake my apple head;
It cannot loosen from its shoulder tree.
I left you crying on the rotting apple turf.
I left you crying but I kicked rocks
Clear to the frigid moon.

I stand at your funeral, two hearts in me,
Both beating; but yours is dead.
Boom man slips. Drowns in Fraser.

Now the moon of my body can swim its warm waters.
It is the end of the frigid moon.

THE PIECE OF GREEN

BY MARGARET SALTERN

She was going up the little road again that led to the ruined cottages on the north bench. Nobody knew why she climbed the toilsome road nor why she followed the tiny, hesitant paths from one sagging doorpost to the next. It was hard to imagine why this desolate neighbourhood attracted her; no one lived there any more; it was the dark side of the canyon on which the sun shone rarely and then only in midsummer; it was Limbo's ghost town.

A congregation of abandoned wooden houses stood along crazy boardwalks and at crazy angles like crapulent wraithes lurching together, waiting for winter's snow to crush them one by one, for the rain to leach and the wind-driven sand to etch their ligneous substances away, waiting to sink back by imperceptible stages into non-existence. Nothing of any conceivable value remained there; everything of practical use had been carried off long ago and the dwellings left for the desecrations of bush rats and of smutty-minded boys.

Yet the woman came and came there again, climbed the little road, trod the precarious boardwalk, crossed the thistled yards and disappeared into the brown cavity of a gaping cottage door, always with avidity in her movements like thirst to water. Once inside a dim interior, with her eyes adjusted to the gloom and her nostrils accustomed to the bitter tang of rat dung and decay, once inside the Kingdom of the Discarded, she was at peace. Remote from the faces and the laughter—the laughter that made her spirit wince, that made her frail nature cringe like meat thrown on a hot pan. Remote from the faces of the past with laughter that pierced her trembling self-image like spicules of glass.

Here in this brown solitude she swam into silence as into a midnight sea, and like a seashore animal when the tide returns, her spirit put out tendrils and her bruised courage revived. Perhaps today. Perhaps if she searched diligently, if she studied every object closely, if she photographed every part of every room with the retina of her mind, reading every inch of wall and floor with little rhythmic sweeps of the eyeball, perhaps she might find the thing which must be found.

And thus seeking, she returned repeatedly to the cottages of the ghost town. From each house to its neighbour she followed her stealthy search, from one room to the next, peering into mildewed clothesclosets, forking over musty piles of paper, prodding the dust, hoping to discover among the scattered plaster and broken glass, old rubber boots and moldy oilcloth, the precious thing discarded by mistake, the object which would change her life and set her free.

But until the day she found this thing she must remain as anybody else in Limbo, any of the other faceless people who came there beneath the majestic peaks, walked the few, short, ore-paved streets of the town, worked in the restaurants and laundries, in the mines which produced metaliferous ore, and in the mill which pounded the ore into mud; like all the others in

Limbo, waiting. Waiting for an opportunity to meet the assayer, who, sitting in his shop high under the millhouse eaves, tested samples of the mud in a diminutive furnace and cast little ingots. And occasionally, in the evening, when the moon would be pouring a golden clabber of curdled milk down the narrow sky, and the nightshift would be clocking in, he would heat his furnace to incandescent fury and assay a human soul.

She had gone up to the north bench again and was working her way laboriously around the outside of the old, grey house, trying one by one all the boarded windows and doors. The vast, grey, tired, old house occupied the hillside like a ship that had run aground and lay festooned in tattered wooden lace and galleries all awash with fallen shingles. An old eroded house, blind, bereft of paint and furred all over its epidermis with gleaming lignin fibres which came off, like the silvery plush of a moth's wing, on the woman's hands. She knew that what she sought lay inside this house and she wrenched at each plank furiously to find a loose one through which she could enter; but there were none.

Winter came early in the lee of the dinosaur-backed mountains. Snow did not fall from the skies upon Limbo; it was born there upon the ground and grew upward, up and over the straws of grass, up the stalks of the great mullein plant, over the picket fences and up the front steps and telephone poles, combining shapes and cancelling angularities. It crept up the walls and grew on the roof of the old, grey house on the bench, investing it wonderfully with pagoda crests, ram's horn cornices and woolly brocade; it threw bridges from the upper hillside to the roof. Intense cold fell on Limbo and changed the snow from moist sponge to hard, dry bread.

The woman climbed the road to the bench again, walking lightly on the strong snow crust. The winter sun spilled into the canyon beneath her and rebounded from the white surface with brilliance which bruised the eyes. Like black ants suddenly freed in a world of sugar, children ran about on the crisp field of snow; chains of miniature figures swarmed up tree branched now magically within reach and wordless sound rose up to her, clear and sharp, like the outcries of happy birds.

In the shadows of ghost town, the snow which lay about the old, grey house was copper-sulphate blue and acid-cold to the touch. The woman footed her way along a snow bridge from the upper hillside to the roof. On a balcony, she opened a weather-stained door with a white porcelain knob. She crossed a room as dark as a pocket to a long, grey hall flanked with a procession of doors.

Carefully and deliberately she opened all the doors and photographed with her eyes the contents of each room. She found the waist of the house where the great cavity of the stairwell plunged three dim storeys to the ground floor. She crept down one flight of stairs and discovered another long, grey hall extending in both directions into the dusk. One by one she

opened the doors and explored the rooms. She completed the tour of the middle floor and as she again approached the stairwell, her heart began to jump at her throat like a bottled frog. The ground floor, dark and portentous, gaped below. She brought her foot to the top of the staircase and drew herself down it, step by step, like the hand of a blind organist groping over a wheezing keyboard.

She was standing in the wolf-light of the entrance hall inside the high front doors. Suddenly the space became flushed with solemn, copper-coloured rays reflected from some burnished surface across the canyon. In this brief moment of illumination she saw that she stood in a broad, wainscotted corridor cutting the building transversely, at the other end of which a wide staircase ascended to a mezzanine floor and a pair of sombre-looking double doors. She approached and began to mount the staircase, which at the touch of her foot, sighed in all its joints as at the memory of an ancient wrong. She gained the landing and was lifting her hand to the ornate latch of the double door, when the keyhole spouted a dark, furry body which plopped to the floor and scuttled off in disgusting agitation. Snatching back her hand as though she had touched filth, she stumbled down the stairs and found her way outside.

She came again over the snow to the old, grey house by snow bridge and white-knobbed door and was now exploring the maze of rooms which lay to right and left of the ground-floor hall. She searched through them all, devotedly, meticulously, examining every niche and cavity; through vast chambers with jungles of drooping wallpaper and curtains of spider cloth, through snowstorms of discarded letters, through cubbyholes dark as swamps and reeking of urine, through a room containing nothing but broken toys and a cabinet bright with glass tubes of every description, from huge hypodermics to the finest ampoules and pipettes, and glass doors locked and no key nor keyhole. But in none of these rooms did she find what she sought.

What *was* the thing she sought, the treasure that her spirit coveted? Had it texture and weight like a lump of peacock ore? Or was it something delicate and frail like the eyelash of a goddess drifted down from an unimaginable realm of upper air? She could not tell. Her fumbling brain held no picture of it nor could her tongue define it. And yet, only a few rooms remained unsearched—

She searched the rooms and searched the days and on the following Sunday, there it was. She recognized it instantly and gathered it up tenderly and stared at it fixedly until her eyeballs stung. It was nothing more than a china plate, a chaste little plate no larger than her hand, with a circle incised in the middle and four lines drawn from it outward to the rim. Yet she held it reverently and regarded it with awe.

The consummate miracle, she decided, was in its colour which was divine, vibrant, liquifying green. It was the green of a hummingbird's neck, of a

jewel beetle's back, of melted emeralds; it was the distillation of every green in which she had ever soothed her sight: green of algae flowing in beards from stones in quick-running streams; green of duck weed floating on yeasty ponds where primordial life teems infinitesimal under the fructifying sun; green too, of summer mountains climbing tree upon tree to the sky; green bright as fields seen through tears; green of creation, of growth. For this plate no ordinary hand had kneaded the clay, no ordinary foot had spun the wheel that shaped it. But to her unspeakable grief, the little disk was smashed into several pieces and one small triangle was missing.

It was on that Sunday too that she found the murderess. A picture in an old newspaper of a woman who, thirty years before, had slain her mother. The discovery of the murderess subtracted from the wonder of the discovery of the plate.

She came to the old house again and yet again seeking the missing portion of the plate. Her desire to find it possessed her in a single, corruscating thought; she divided into a dozen persons, all like herself searching. Searching in cracks and under linoleum, beneath baseboards and down kitchen drains for a fragment of green no larger than a pumpkin seed.

Time was growing short; looters who had followed her trail into the building were everywhere at work; they came at night and took away the windows. Lumber was scarce and expensive in Limbo, so they came at night and took the doorframes and the doors. Litte Oedipus-minded boys smashed the glass of the cabinet and made off with the ampoules and pipettes. And sometimes now, she heard in the winter dusk, footsteps following her from room to room, moving when she moved, stopping when she stopped. And in the ensuing days a great burden like hidden chains enveloped her. When she slept she dropped to the bottom of a deep well where she lay all night embalmed, and on awakening, struggled with bursting lungs to the surface.

Dreamfooted, she went up the little road. The old house lay bone-pale and skull-eyed against fuliginous mist. She went inside and stood in the main floor hallway while silence flowed around her like a rising tide hissing and lipping at her feet. She moved dreamfooted to the mezzanine stairs. Now they were giant stairs with enormous treads and risers as when she was a little child. The twin doors above stood open and from the room behind them issued faint crepitations like stirrings on a horse hair mattress. Like a little child, she began to ascend the gargantuan stairs and beheld without looking a silent partner ascending beside her; she heard without listening a sound as the throbbing of a dreadful heart and the frog within her chest turned over on its back with fear. She reached the head of the stairs and the open doors and beheld dim shapes striving and convulsed bedclothes writhing and an enormous bed butting itself with systaltic rhythm against a wall. Anguish and jealousy poured over her like scalding rain and she turned to run headlong from the odious bed and the terrible heartbeat.

But in so turning, she ran with all her body into the shadowy companion who had been following her. At the collision, the nebulous face began to clarify, the blurry features to coalesce. It was the murderess. The chlorotic face contorted with rage and the pale lips writhed abuse, jetting insults like corrosive drops.

"Stop", cried the woman, and drawing back her arm she struck the murderess hard across the face. Then there was the sound of a great rending of cloth and the faint odour of hot metal and smuts of carbon floating in the air and a scattering of fine, luminous, viridescent sand upon the floor. But of the murderess, there was no trace, anywhere.

The south wind began to blow through Limbo. Spring had now come and the snow had evaporated. Looters came at night and were stripping the boards from the walls of the old house. Soon there would be no walls and the roof would collapse. The woman sat long in the wolf light on a pile of mildewed mattresses, listening to the drip of rain through the leaking roof and the distant crash of falling plaster, thinking of the tiny piece of china she could never use to make her green plate whole.

Stiff and cold, she finally rose up and left the old, grey house. Not troubling to return by the precarious boardwalk and the little, slanting road, she plunged through rainsoaked overgrowth straight down the hill; chancing to glance down between queencup leaves and huckleberry bells, there on a flat stone she saw the plate. It was no larger than her hand and of divine, vibrating, liquifying green, a fellow to the shattered plate. Cleanly split in pure and perfect halves, it lay where the snow one day had pillowed it and in melting, gently deposited it. The woman quickly brought the green plate home where she glued the parts together, invisibly and indivisibly. That night the rooftree of the old, grey house collapsed in convulsions of dust.

The woman packed her things, and while she wrapped the green plate in silk and stowed it safely in the centre of her square cowhide bag, she observed high under the millhouse eaves the assayer's furnace flaring incandescently against the dark as he opened the door and with his tongs brought out a whitehot crucible to recast a human soul. She left Limbo by the first bus in the morning.

THE HAWK

WILFRED WATSON

The trees were cocks of flame
Of such a colour
You would have thought it was
Hen-treading weather

But along came a foul white hawk
A two-bit fellow
Who struck its beak at their throat
And stripped them of their feather

I wish some smart farmer
Would put a shot
Clean through the heart
Of that foul white hawk

If he split open its crop
He would find there
Balled up in its stomach
Many a human hair

I had my bride in bed
And she was warm and sweet
But along came that foul white hawk
And snatched both bride and sheet

I have seen many a
God-fearing preacher
Slit by that foul white hawk
From his God-praiser to his lecher

And I wish our field-proud farmers
When they meddle with harmless crows
Would poke at that foul white hawk's nest
Under our very house

I'd not mind the wet-mouthed wolf
Or grass-hopper loving coyote
Could I sit under some tree, safe
From that foul white hawk

I turned to kiss my love
I was looking for her mouth
But there stood that foul white hawk
Who changed my spit to drouth

The famous Eastern Shepherd
Crucified a lion
And nailed it dead to a rock
With a she-ass's jawbone

But what good neighbour will nail
To the door of his barn
With a firm certain staple
Through each foot and outstretched wing-bone

The foul white hawk
Who steps out of the wind
Round his house, to molest
His cattle, wife and kind

THE NECKLACE

WILFRED WATSON

There's the baker with a sieve for a head
There's the butcher with a skewered tongue
And Herb the milkman, with a leaking cart
And the policeman, with the policeman's art
To loop a right into a wrong—
There's the parson, with a hole for his brains—
One way or another the wind blows through us—
There's the lawyer with loopholes drilled into
his eyes—
And Joan with the simple hole in her legs—
Christ, with the terrible nail in your hands
Threading harlot and pope upon your needle,
I am your mankind with a hole in my heart

SERMON ON BEARS

WILFRED WATSON

1.

I would have you think on the mystery of bears,
And how they feed in the wild mountains, poets of our wilderness.
You will see the bushes with the hearts scooped out of them—
Salmon-berry, wild raspberry, kinnikinic
Miserably violated. I had not expected to find
That when an infinitesimal stalk of moss is broken,
The mountain suffered

2.

We set aside sanctuaries for these animals,
For every nation has its own sense of the sacred.
We cherish these brutes, not from impure appetite,
As English lords kept poets instead of whores,
But from our tameness, because, being utterly unwild,
We honour the strangeness of this brutal fur,
The beast we never are

3.

It is a truth that with stupidity—only the young
In it are lovable; and this truth repeats with bears.
The adult is mother-irritable, jealous-irascible.
I have seen a bear with a cloud of mosquitoes
Covering its head—but the pathos of bears
Is comfortless. You cannot wipe away the look
Of treason from their eyes, but must leave them
To their blindness, and to their flies
And to the kindness of winter

4.

I fear our parks of mercy compromise this fur—
The pity of pity is its conscienceless cruelty—
There is a tendency in all natural creatures
To become monstrous, as if monstrosity
Were the ultimate goal of unchecked nature;
And here among the bears this tendency is left free
To burst their forms in a grief for which there

Is no natural relief. Would it not be better
To let our hunters decorate this fur with the death
Which never brought any creature real loss,
  Despite the will which deals it?

5.

These animals become our paupers—and of all creatures
Only man can support indigence with nobleness,
Recognizing, as Yeats said, that shabbiness is the patina
                of the poor.
We have ecumenically decided that their poetry
Is not ours, who cannot support the stiff elbow
Of our civilization, as rats can, crows and other
                vermin.
Let us therefore abandon to this decision
Those whom we cannot save—without a revision
Of heart we obviously have no mind for;
Knowing at the bottom of our hearts, that with progress
  All poetry ends

6.

Then, Mary, mother of Jesus, pray to your son
To intercede with the father of all life
To accept back again into his incomprehensible
                bosom
The majesty, the mystery of his creature the bear;
Who cannot support upon so simple a bone
The turning of the machine we mismultiply on earth,
  Its ultimate monster

THE BLACKBERRY PICKERS OF CHEMAINUS, VANCOUVER ISLAND

WILFRED WATSON

Picking warm
Blackberries, blackberries
Cropping ripe, blackberries
Which grow and spread like fire

In earth boiled black by flame:
Three or four Siwashes
Upon their knees,
Their hands among the ants and bees . . .

Their faces moist in the
Bonfire glare of the smoking sun;
A hint of China in the high cheekbone;
But an Italian drop of blood, to make
The girl's face with its olive shape
Look like a virgin's, if she were not one . . .

Plenty of berry here, we laugh and say . . .
Plenty of berry now,
Plenty of berry everywhere, the man laughs sly—
For woman who *want,* for woman who *know*
To set out a little little wine
To comfort the tubercular bone
And breed the second joy of man

The woman silences; fitting
Her eyes into a face or mask of wood;
The woman womans at her brat
Crawling beneath the cedar root—
But the girl (her hand streaked
With the berries' blood)
Raises her clamshell full of fruit
And smiles, parting her lips stained
With the berries' breath
And tonguing the red juice blackening her
teeth

O love the sour smell of burnt wood
The red blear glory of the smoking sun
The hill of stumps where she began,
The mountains of slash where she was born:
Let's drink her health in a *little little* wine
For she is simple and she is young
And does not think that the bear
With glossy summer-shining coat
Must sleep all winter in its dung

THE BUTTON

WILFRED WATSON

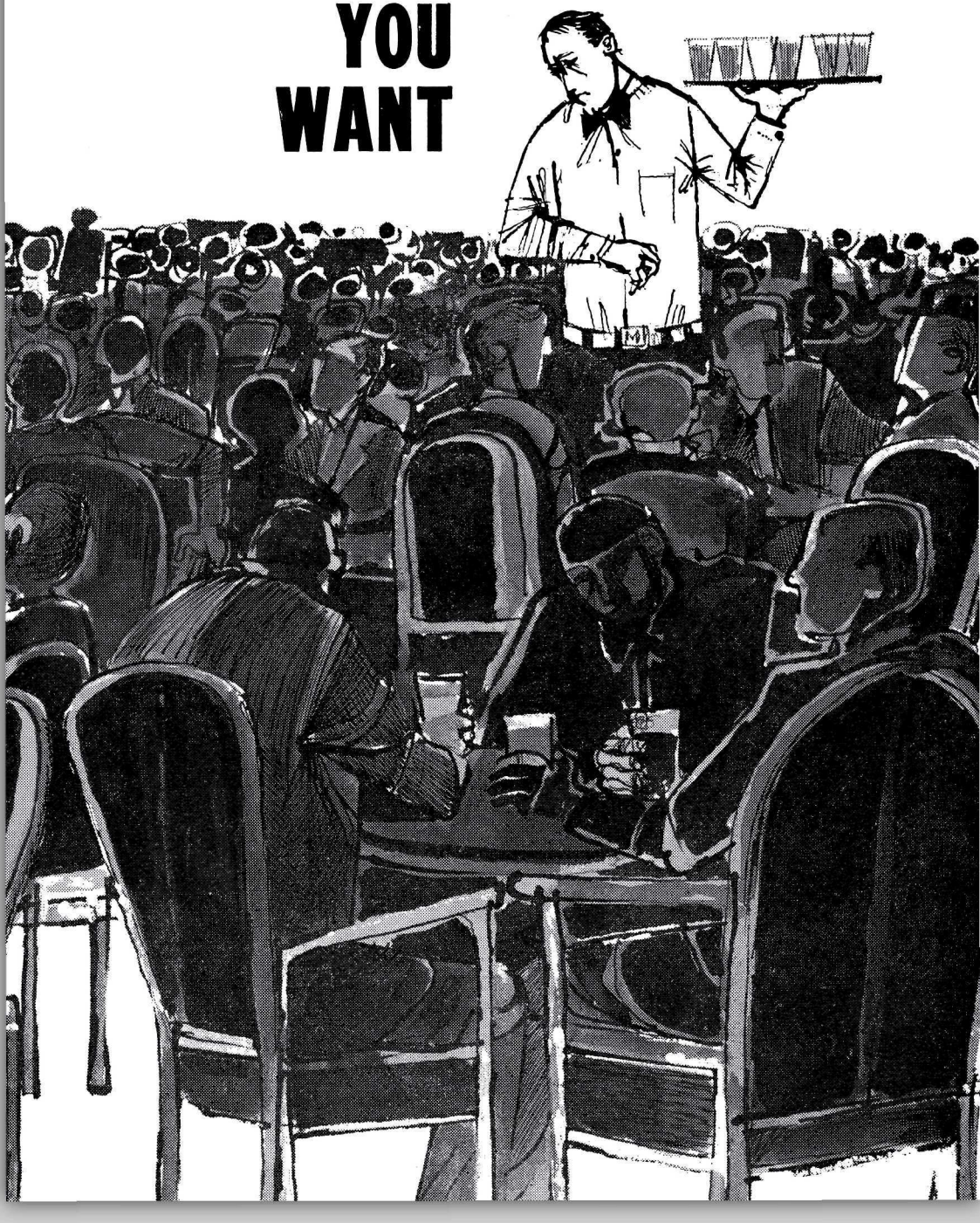
Thus with a mere trifle, with a mere nothing
Is saved the long majesty and delay of the law:
For when the enormous ballooning
Vague of the ocean, with all its sinking and drowned
ships,
Rafts of sailors, incestuous beds of ooze,
Flukes, kelps, jellies, corals and all the swimming-
for, swimming-from things,
Is narrowed down to a particular coast of loss,
To the wave and three pebbles
That grind the sea-hand's button—

(The sea-hand gone to save his laundry, washed over-
board;
Poked in the kisser by the accompliced wind, pushed under,
Scooped dumb into salt darkness
When his tug stumbled among the seagulls;
Never seen sight of again,
Though the papers have his name,
The owners, and the next of kin)—

Isn't this a most sweet fact
To catch a sea of evasions, the sliding ocean,
The whole slippery water? To accuse
A shifty and smiling bitch with,
Hang all her fornications without number
Into a single bill—though she dance
Her white heels up to the stair of judgment
With a starfish for a garter
And God's bright moon in her hair?

ANY GAME YOU WANT

VINCENT SHARMAN



Philip Warton tried to force his mind to understand the words that his eyes looked at, but it was useless. Saturday. He put down the book and leaned over to the telephone on the endtable. His hand paused in mid-air and he sat back. Lucille: she would accept his invitation to the movie—she always did—and then coffee at some fluorescent-lit restaurant and a couple of hours of talk about *her* and *her* job and *her* family. He tried to read again, but his eyes stopped on the first words. Who instead of Lucille? After years in the city there was no one instead of Lucille. She was taller than he; tall and thin and empty. Drink beer instead. He looked at his watch. Two o'clock. Too early to go into the beer parlour and drink beer. Not many people would be there at two o'clock.

He got up from the chesterfield and wandered through the three rooms of his apartment. He went into the kitchen. The window looked down into the alleyway and he stood watching the people going about in the June heat. A man in a blue uniform, with Belton's Flowers written in orange across the back, carried armloads of flowers from a florist's. Philip wondered about sending a dozen flowers to someone. Roses: too expensive, too rich. Daffodils: yes, a dozen daffodils; bright, happy daffodils. A dozen daffodils . . . for whom, sir? Yes, sir; and the address? No, Lucille wasn't really worth a dozen daffodils. Tall and empty on Saturday nights with nothing to give except her woes.

Too early to start drinking beer. He thought about his apartment. He always thought of it as being green. It wasn't. Only three walls of the living room were green. To Philip the green was quiet and cool and seemed to pervade all three rooms. When he came into the apartment, he felt as if he were entering a forest glade, safe and protective. Daffodils would go nicely in the apartment. His footsteps echoed on the hardwood floors as he walked through the rooms admiring his furniture, his collection of records, his shelves of books. He had once thought of painting all the rooms green.

Saturday afternoons! On Saturdays the city was bright and exciting if you had someone to explore it with; someone to share it with. How did you do exciting things alone? You didn't. You drank beer instead. He would go to the beer parlour at four o'clock. It would be crowded then.

Philip went to the florists and bought the daffodils for his apartment. A dozen large daffodils, with full and deep mouths that poured out the delicate scent. He put them in a vase on the mantel and stood back admiring them; then he re-arranged them and smelled each one separately. There was such a delicate scent! He looked back at them from the doorway and smiled.

He put in the remaining time walking the streets, pretending to be shopping, feeling the material of clothes that he had no intention of buying, looking at magazines, thumbing through them, not reading anything, scarcely seeing the pictures. He glanced often at his watch. He went to the park

and tried to take an interest in the fountain and the flower arrangement, but he saw only the lovers who walked hand in hand along the paths, or sat together in the sunshine; and the parents with their children on the bright green grass, the fathers wrestling with their sons. He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock now. He decided to discipline himself: he would walk around the park once more. That would take fifteen minutes; fifteen minutes more before he went into the beer parlour. There was strength in deferring pleasures. It was a small victory, but it was a victory.

As he walked, Philip veered away in disgust from the old man that he saw begging money from the people in the park. He hated the meek uselessness of these old men who found the park a good hunting ground. He looked back over his shoulder at the old man, shivered at the thought of the dirty clothes and body, and hurried on.

He felt the smoke and din and stench of the men's beer parlour caress him like a warm hand and smiled contented when the doors closed behind him. The beer parlour was a large rectangular room filled with a cloud of smoke. It was crowded with men at small round tables. The noise of laughter, talk, swearing and shouting was thunderous—like the sound of a waterfall it rumbled up from nowhere in particular, and yet from everywhere. On the walls were grimy murals of moose at sunset standing in muskeg to their bellies, vacantly munching waterlilies; there were mountain sheep peering moronically down from impossibly precarious grey rocks, into deep black-green valleys. The men sat around the small tables in large close circles, their arms reaching out to the glass-filled table-hubs like the spokes of a wheel. They were loud and rough and strong young men who drank too much beer toward six o'clock and fought, and the blood flowed from mouths and noses, and tables upset. Philip had once seen two men beat another's head against the wall until the skin was torn from the face and the blood streamed like water from a squeezed sponge.

The men wore their work clothes, sweat-stained, streaked with grease; their shirt-sleeves rolled up; stubbled faces; grimy broken fingernails; laughing and swearing. Philip paused inside the doorway, his jacket and tie and neatly pressed trousers incongruous. He did not want to sit with the crowds of men. He wanted to watch them from another table, or to talk to someone alone, while around him, enveloping him, the noise grew louder and the smoke thicker. He walked through the beer parlour as if looking for a friend. There was one empty table but he did not sit at it. He saw a young man by himself in a corner, sat down with him and looked at his watch, frowning. He looked around the room exaggeratedly, pretending to be looking for someone, some friend.

He began, hopeful, "I was supposed to meet a friend here at four o'clock," and added, "Looks like he isn't going to show up."

The young man did not hear.

Philip sat back in his chair, chagrined. He hated to raise his voice in a public place. He put up two fingers to the waiter, who brought him two glasses of beer, the foam running down the sides of the glasses and forming a pool on the table.

He leaned forward over the table, closer to the young man. "Noisy in here today!"

The man heard. He answered loudly above the roar, "Yeah. Usually is on Saturdays," and smiled. Philip pulled his chair up to the table, leaned forward, trying not to appear eager, and prepared for an afternoon of talk.

But the public address system blared out above the noise: George McIvor. Telephone. George McIvor.

"That's for me," the young man said to Philip. "I'll be back in a minute." Philip watched him walk to the bar and traced patterns with the spilled beer on the table. His hand slipped to his protruding stomach; he tried to push in the soft roundness. 'Hey, Philip,' the men at the office, the married and happy, golf-at-six-thirty salesmen said to him, 'your chest is slipping.' They laughed and slapped him on the back and said not to take it seriously; they were only kidding. He was thirty-seven. His hands were white and small and faintly freckled; even the hairs were not black or brown or golden—they were just pale, like the freckles, faintly red.

Another Saturday in the beer parlour and what would it yield? Other times at concerts, at theatres, at clubs he had tried; and in the better beer parlours where the customers dressed in suits and white shirts and never got drunk or fought. Those were long deadening times. Long afternoons and evenings waiting for them to ask him about the play, next week's concert, about politics or his favourite drink. Waiting; trying not to look too long at the groups of friends who did not want an outsider. Days and nights of longing, they became—not for intimacy, finally, but only for a word: a word of respect. Words that were on their lips, but never addressed to him. Words for Philip Warton because he was a man. Words that didn't come.

Times on the streets when he became dizzy looking at the faces whirring by; looking for someone, anyone. Alone. So many faces. So many faces on the streets. And in his bed at night he heard their words from the street below. Voices. Voices. Voices. Just a word.

He sometimes found it here. In this hotel beer parlour with its smoke and din and smell. He was sometimes able to favor these men into giving. They gave because Philip appealed to them by giving what they, as he, wanted—themselves. He listened to them, asked them questions about themselves, even flattered them, and he became something necessary. Here in his suit or sport jacket he commanded attention, and out of the seed of attention could grow respect, and perhaps, one day, somehow, there might come love.

And George? George McIvor, it is, Philip thought. He knows his way

around, I'll bet. Sexy looking. About twenty-three . . . twenty-four . . . Please don't let him go away . . . he said barely aloud, trying not to move his lips; not to look like he was talking to himself.

George came back to the table. He started to talk before he was seated. "Goddam. I was supposed to go to work tomorrow. Now it's all off."

"That's too bad, George. Aren't you working now?"

"I've been out of work for three months."

"You look young. You shouldn't have trouble getting work. How long have you been earning a living in the cold, cruel world?"

"About ten years. Worked on the last job for two years—until the boss caught me with his wife! That was something, that was!" he laughed.

Philip looked interested and surprised, but did not press the topic—yet.

"You must have started young."

"Which? Working or the other?"

They both laughed loudly. "Working," Philip said.

"Started both when I was sixteen."

So he was about twenty-six. Strong and virile looking.

"I suppose you live in the west end of town, eh?" Philip went on. "Probably in a big apartment, eh?"

"Not me. I live in a rooming house just off skid road. One room, one bed, one window, one chair, one dresser, one woman!"

Philip thought of his lonely rooms, saw them filled with George's warmth and vitality. He took a drink of his beer, deep and burning cold in his throat. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand and lit a cigarette.

"What about you and the boss's wife, George?" he said sitting back in the chair.

Philip scarcely listened to the trite old tale; did not try to separate the truth from the embellishment. He sat back and let the words flow to him.

His eyes slipped over George's brown hair and his tanned face, his blue-grey eyes and the top lip that bent downward, almost in a pout. Philip laughed and ohed and nodded when he thought that the expression on George's face required a response, and ran his fingers through his own thinning sandy hair, fingered his glasses and rubbed his hand over his fattening, smoothly-shaved jowl.

". . . and then one night she called and said that the old man would be out of town and for me to come over . . ."

George was relaxed in the chair, his broad shoulders against the back. His plaid sport shirt was open at the neck and golden hairs curled up from his tanned chest. Philip compared his hand holding the glass to George's broad muscular brown hand with the long, strong fingers that lay relaxed on the table. The nails were large and round, faintly lip-red hard and shiny, with large white moons. Especially the large thumbnail fascinated Philip. He found himself staring at each of the fingers individually and with a start

forced his eyes to George's face.

". . . at one o'clock in the morning we heard someone at the door . . ."

Philip listened now to the ending of the story, keeping his eyes away from the fingers across from him. He saw George and the woman, naked and tanned, confronting the furious husband. The two men fought. George won and calmly dressed while the woman fretted in the corner and didn't know what to do. The middle-aged husband, white and soft, lay on the floor, bleeding at the nose and mouth; the woman cried, afraid and naked. George had no use for weakness and walked out without a word to her. Philip's hand slipped up and down the moist glass as the picture grew in his mind; he teetered with excitement on the edge of his chair and George held up four fingers to order more beer.

Philip insisted on paying for all the beer that they drank. George talked and asked Philip about the insurance office he worked in. Philip offered to get him a job there.

"In an office?" George asked amazed. "I'd go crazy cooped up in an office."

"But there's a good salary. It's steady. And there's a good pension plan and everything . . ."

"What the hell do I want a pension plan for? I want to live now, not when I'm so old that I can't even get a hard-on!"

"But you've got to have something . . ." Philip stopped. George was suddenly withdrawn, examining his fingers, frowning, his top lip curving down abruptly in annoyance. Philip felt the dissipation of the richness that had been growing between them. Maybe George didn't need a pension plan now, but later . . . He sat unspeaking, afraid that George would leave. George would not comprehend the green apartment, the daffodils, the need to have something, anything. They finished their beer quickly, nervously. Frantically Philip ordered more. George looked across the room, away from Philip, who put admiration into his voice when he spoke: "You must be well over six feet tall, George." And George came back to him. They talked about George and then about women—the women that George had had—and Philip registered his astonishment and they told jokes and laughed and forgot that they were different men. When they walked out of the beer parlour for late supper, Philip put his hand on George's shoulder and told him the joke about the middle-aged man in the brothel; he staggered as he laughed, lunging into George. "Easy, mate," George said and Philip hung to his arm for a moment feeling the strength of the body like a rock. They laughed into the dark hot night and walked on to the restaurant, Philip walking with quick, short strides to keep up with George. He came up only to George's shoulder.

Philip felt as he had never felt before. He sat in the booth of the restaurant with George and winked at the women coming in and made jokes with

the waitresses. The more the women were embarrassed and the louder the waitresses laughed, the better Philip felt. He sat straight in the booth and sucked in his stomach. He noticed that like this, he was nearly as tall as George. As a waitress went by, he reached into the aisle and patted her buttocks and felt himself growing, expanding like a great, powerful sensual machine that could do anything to anyone. Do anything to anyone! Sweep these girls off their feet and carry them laughing and faintly struggling to a downy bed; repulse any interference from boyfriends or family with few words and a grand gesture, a long hard stare, an iron fist. George laughed at Philip and encouraged him. Cocksure, now, Philip talked loudly of going to bed with the waitresses and described their bodies, with lewd gestures, under their uniforms.

This was the Philip Warton he knew he deserved to be. Sharing himself with someone, bringing laughter. Philip Warton, individual, becoming large and strong, causing women to blush, drawing George's praise and laughter. Laughter and praise for him, Philip Warton. His eyes shone and his face glowed in the happiness he felt. George *would* learn to understand the apartment, the flowers, the books, and records.

He sat up straight and revelled in his new strength and virility. He lit a cigarette after his meal and inhaled deeply and richly, as he had seen the hard and affluent heroes do in movies. He let the smoke come out of his mouth thickly on his words as he spoke.

"How about coming up to my place after supper, George."

"Any women?"

"Oh, we can get some," he said nonchalantly.

"I usually go down to a place on 98 St. when I haven't anything to do on Saturdays."

"On 98 St.? What kind of a place is it, down *there?*"

"What do you mean 'down there'? There's lots of good people live in that part of town."

"Oh, yeah, I know, George. Sure there are. But aren't there some pretty rough spots?"

"I suppose. For guys that go looking for trouble. There's nothing wrong with this place, though."

There was silence. Philip finally spoke:

"What do you do there?"

George shrugged his shoulders. "Dance, drink, play cards. There are women around."

"Is . . .is it a . . . a . . . a house?" He hated to stumble over the words.

"A whore house? No. Gambling mostly. But there are women there."

"Why don't we just go up to my place, George? I've got a nice place. Maybe we can meet some of these waitresses after work. That's what we can do." He spoke quickly. "We'll get them to come up. Let's ask them. You

ask them, George."

"I usually go down there on Saturday nights. I've got a kind of a girl friend there. While I'm out of work she's handy to have around. No expenses involved. Might even marry her some day. And I gamble there. I make enough to live on."

Philip slouched in his chair. His stomach began to ache. He loosened his belt. "I don't know how to play cards—except blackjack." The green apartment, a party with the girls and George; he as host, impressing them with his manners and books and records and expensive furniture; the girls with daffodils in their hair, laughing, dancing, loving; his flowers, his apartment, his desire . . .

"But, George, if you get raided, the police . . ."

"The cops never go near the place. You can play blackjack. You can play any game you want. You don't have to play any game if you don't want to." There was annoyance in his voice, as in the voice of a teacher explaining the rules of a new game to a stupid child. "I'll introduce you to them, and to the guy that runs the place. Then you can go down there whenever you want."

"Ask them up to my place, George. It's a nice place."

"Oh, for christsake, Philip, I've got to gamble to make some money. I haven't worked for three months."

"I know, George, but if anything did happen . . . my job . . . well, the Company's pretty strict about the employees. They sent out a memo last . . ."

But George wasn't listening any more. His eyes wandered up and down the opposite row of booths; his gaze touched the hair and eyes and breasts of the girls he saw.

"I'm going, Philip. Coming?"

"Well, if you're sure . . . Here. Let me pay the bill."

To Philip's surprise, George had a car—a new one, shiny and sleek. Philip whistled in admiration and stroked the shining chrome. "A beauty, eh?" said George. "I've only had her for six months but haven't made a payment for so long that they'll come along and take her away one of these days. But what the hell . . ." Inside the car were foam rubber dice, postcards of women and a blue pennant from a small nearby resort.

They pulled away from the curb with a squeal of rubber on pavement and roared down the street, to the admiration of teen-agers standing on the corner. They wheeled screeching around the corners of the long sweeping road up the river hill. George sang along with the rock and roll music that blared at full volume from the radio. Philip relaxed, lit a cigarette and looked out of the window at the bright Saturday lights around them. They roared up to a red light.

Philip saw the blinking sign of a cocktail lounge and suggested that they go in and have a drink. "Naw, save your money for later tonight," George said.

He pulled up to a shabby hotel farther down the street. "We'll go in here for some beer, but when I get some money!" He slapped Philip on the shoulder. "Well, let's go in."

They sat in the gloomy depressing hotel with worn brown linoleum on the floor and drunks at every table. Philip looked with disgust at the old men around him, most of whom would sooner or later sidle up to the table and try to bum drinks. At the other hotel—the one in which he met George that afternoon—the men were young and full of vitality; these were old and worn and brown like the place they drank in. Philip thought of the old man he had seen in the park that afternoon: he's probably in here now, spending all he collected. Horrible dirty man, he thought.

"Why do you keep staring at those guys, Phil?" George asked.

"I didn't know I was."

"You been looking at them since we came in."

"Oh, they bother me, George. They're so damned . . . well . . . They give me the creeps!"

"Then don't look at them. I kinda get a kick out of them. They're all right. They don't do any harm."

Philip's face flushed. "They sure as hell don't do any good! They're dirty and useless. They never had anything and never will. They're weak, or they wouldn't be like they are. They're just parasites."

"What's that?"

"Oh, never mind. It's nothing. Just my imagination, I guess."

He changed the subject then, and George told of some of his exploits. Philip nearly forgot the sad old men around, as he listened to George, enjoying with relief the stories and jokes that he told. They sat for nearly two hours in the dingy hotel beer parlour, and as he became drunk, Philip thought that George's fingers performed just for him. He deserted his embarrassment and watched the fingers as they lay muscle-relaxed, long and thick, or rose tensed and strong in the excitement of some story. God, how I wish I was like him, he thought.

When they left the beer parlour Philip was quite drunk. They drove recklessly up to the old house that stood behind a high caragana hedge, a darker shape in the dark night.

It was in the large, yellow-enamelled basement room of the house that they drank straight gin from thick cups at 60 cents an ounce. They bought it from Gus whose hand was like a dead fish when Philip shook it, and who smoked a cigar and coughed and wheezed and sat on a white kitchen chair behind a card table that served as a bar. It was here in the garish, deadening glare

of fluorescent lights that Gus tried to smile from sick sleepy eyes and white lips and told Philip that he was welcome, and told George to take care of Philip and to show him around. And Philip felt like a small proud child as he strode across the blue floor beside George. They drank their gin and people came to the table and spoke to George and were introduced to Philip. The smoke swirled happily through the room for Philip, and the people came and went and he was caught up in the waves of laughter and music. Bobby, Gus's wife, came to the table to talk to George. Her mouth full of blackened teeth seemed to dance for Philip as he watched her laughing to George; and her sagging breasts swayed over the table as she chided her 'boys' and poured maternity on them. There was love and music and gin and brightness.

And it was here that Philip met Rose and Billie. As if it had been timed they came into the room on the first few bars of a fast rock and roll selection on the juke box. Billie waved and burst hellos over the room like fireworks; Rose followed a step behind, fluttering her hand in greeting or smiling tiredly to those she knew. They came immediately to George and he introduced them to Philip. Billie was Gus and Bobby's daughter. Her eye-brows were thin-pencilled lines above her thick, heavily rimmed glasses that emphasized the slight bulge of her eyes. Her teeth were a little too prominent, but they gave her mouth a curious fullness that Philip liked. She spoke warmly to Philip and took George's arm and ran her fingers up and down the fine tanned skin, following the thick muscles. Rose sat beside Philip. Her eyes roamed across the room after the introductions. Her long blond hair and slim rounded figure in a tight blue dress did not compensate for the tired eyes, the thin lips that were scarlet against the white of the powder that covered not just lines, but peeling red spots and the pits of squeezed blackheads. Occasionally she smiled a tired flat smile at Philip. She soon put one hand on his thigh and tapped on the tabletop with the long red fingernails of her other hand, the rhythm of the jukebox music.

Philip bought several rounds of drinks from Gus and they all laughed more loudly. But the talk was a three-way communication. Rose said little and Philip turned magnetically to George and Billie—Billie who exuded warmth and love; who gave. Rose was a presence whose only comments were to Billie about couples in the room, or about dresses that the other women wore. But her hand was on Philip's thigh, and although he wanted her to go away, to leave just the three of them to talk and drink and laugh, he was polite to her, because she was the girl that George had introduced him to. She had lovely breasts and a flat stomach that Philip could see small, firm and circular sheathed in the blue of her dress. He liked Billie; but he was with Rose. George was with Billie. With George's eyes on him, he tried to take an interest in Rose. He acted for George's benefit. He put his arm around Rose; he whispered in her ear; played with her hair. She took it

all calmly, with no return except a new pressure with her hand on his thigh. This was the girl that George had said he would meet. When he came down here again he would know Rose. He would know Billie and Gus. He would know Bobby. They would be his friends; and it was all because of George. Rose was beside him, to hold when he wanted to; she had a nice figure and a flat stomach. He would not let George down: he accepted Rose; tried to warm her, to make her as Billie was; but she only pressed his thigh. He knew these people now, and he had somewhere to go. Because of George. After all the years he had lived in the city . . . He laughed and talked and joked. He felt across the table that Billie liked him. He tried to want Rose. He got drunk.

He danced with Rose on the space of linoleum at the other end of the room. He felt that George and Billie were watching them and he pulled Rose tightly to him and kissed her. He did not dance in rhythm with the music but merely shuffled his feet, hanging over Rose. She looked away, over his shoulder, around the room, dancing more with herself than with Philip, moving her whole body, her small feet doing intricate steps, her mouth chewing gum rhythmically.

They sat down and had more to drink. And then Philip asked Billie to dance. She went out on the dance floor with him and the music started at a furious pace. He whirled her drunkenly in circles, and the room spun gloriously around him. Billie's head was thrown back and she laughed and screamed and cried out. "Oh, Philip, Philip, OOOHHHHH!" And away they went on a mad whirl again. George watched and urged them on and beat out the rhythm of the music on the table top. And next Philip took the pose of what he thought was a ballroom dancer. He held Billie at arm's length, and with long strides, of no pattern other than walking, pushed her backwards, his head high in the air, his back ramrod straight; then he marched backward himself again to their starting point. Billie understood and played the game, setting her mouth in a straight line, unsmiling, pointing her nose upward to the ceiling. Back and forth they strode across the floor, and the music blared out, and around everyone stopped to watch and roared with laughter at the ballroom dancers. Near their table, Philip suddenly broke away from Billie and started an Indian pow-wow dance, hooting and pow-wowing, and Billie joined with him and at the music's end they collapsed in exhaustion into their chairs. The room roared with applause and laughter.

The four of them sat oohing and awing and laughing delayed laughs. Gus sent over a round of drinks, and they fanned themselves and took deep drinks of the gin. Then Billie disappeared. It happened so quickly that Philip scarcely noticed that she was gone. A man in a dark suit spoke to Billie; she got up and went to talk to him a few feet away from the table. She came back to George and whispered; he nodded, and she went out with

the man. She was gone. Quickly she had disappeared, just when he was getting to know her, to enjoy,—really enjoy—the evening.

"Who was he?" Philip asked George. George looked up, smiled, winked and said, "Just a guy. She'll be back . . . Say, Philip, can you lend me ten bucks? I'll pay you back with what I win at poker."

"Yes, yes. But how long will she be?"

"Not long. Not long." And he got up and went to another table. But Billie was gone—just walked out with another man. And George went to play cards; only wanted to know if he could borrow ten dollars. Things were happening too quickly. The laughter, the applause, Billie, drinking; and George went to play cards. He sat hunched over the table, his mouth a few inches above his cup of gin. Rose linked her arm in his.

"You want to dance?"

"No, no. Where'd she go? Where'd Billie go?"

"Just out. She'll be ok. She'll be back soon. Why do you care anyway?" They sat silent. It was empty and blackening; he was alone again and Rose was nothing.

"Why don't you try a little gambling, Philip. You might make a few dollars," Rose mumbled and unfeelingly sat close to him. She moved closer. "But then you're a nice guy. George says you've got a real good job. George likes you."

"George is a good guy." He was quiet and pecked at his gin. "But why does he let her just go out like that? He should stay with her."

"It's ok, Philip. It's ok. You're just getting a little drunk. It'll be ok. George don't worry, so why should you?" She caressed his arm.

He could not tell her to go, but he wanted to throw her away with his arm. To get away from her, even for a short while.

"You were sure funny tonight, Philip. Billie was funny, too. God, I sure laughed."

Philip could not tolerate the flat expressionless voice at his side. The arm linked in his was a chain that rankled his flesh. He turned to look at her, his face devoid of expression. Her white-powdered face with the bright lipstick scar of her mouth and her blond hair seemed to waver before him, to disintegrate like a reflection in disturbed water; then away, away from her he seemed to move until she was minute; he towered over her as if he were looking down from a high castle wall. He pulled his arm abruptly away from her.

"Philip . . ." she began querulously.

"So you think I can't gamble like these other guys. You think I can't do the things that they can do, eh?"

"Philip, I never said you couldn't gamble . . . I just said . . ." To Philip her voice was far away, small and unimportant.

"Well, I can. Hey, you guys," he yelled to two men smirking at the next

table, "do you want to lose some money? Want to gamble?"

Philip didn't see the men wink at each other. They came to Philip's table and began to play blackjack. Philip dealt, sitting erect in his chair, concentrating on dealing correctly, with precision, trying to overcome his inebriation. He won the first two hands, and he felt himself growing again, becoming expansive as he had with Rose a few moments ago and as he had in the restaurant. The cards in his hands became living things; he flicked them out with a competence that he did not know he possessed. He scraped in his money and felt a warmth inside him that dispelled the black discomfort of Billie who had left him, the inanity of Rose by his side, and the lingering shadows of the shabby men in the beer parlour where they had drunk beer. The cards in his hands were tools to success and respect. He glowed with satisfaction. These men would fall before him, he believed; he would crush them into the ground; these fools. He flicked out the next hand. He was strong again, winning at cards, as he was when he had won the waitresses in the restaurant, and Billie in the dance; as he was when he had towered over Rose. He let a cigarette droop from the corner of his mouth and tossed a bill at Rose, "Bring us a round of drinks!" he barked at her. "Didn't I tell you I could gamble? Didn't I?"

The other men had not drunk their drinks. "Drink up you guys!" Philip ordered, and laughed deep in his throat, as they complied. They took small sips, looked at each other and quickly back at their cards before they smiled. Philip tossed down his drink and sent Rose to get more, taking the money from his winnings. His muscles tingled and his head was light in victory and drink. "Ready, you guys?" he said out of the corner of his mouth, and began to play again. Then he lost his first hand and the deal. He bet a ten dollar bill on a ten. The next card was a deuce, and the next another ten. He lost more and reduced his bets. He lost not in regular succession, but when his bets were high, when the feeling seemed ready to grow up in him—his power and greatness. But more often his twelves became twenty-twos; sixteens twenty-threes. His pile of money dwindled and Rose lost interest in the game, wandered away to the jukebox and stood jiggling one leg in rhythm to the music; she strolled to George's table. Philip found that he could not keep count of the cards. Everything moved too quickly; the red and black markings became blurred, and seemed constantly to be moving, shifting on the table: he counted sixes as nines; nines as sixes; he couldn't remember if he wanted to count one or eleven. He tried to force himself to concentrate; the perspiration ran from his flushed face. He took more money from his wallet, but lost it. Superstitiously, he tried to hold his cigarette the way he had when he was winning; he crossed his legs under the table, for luck.

He looked up and saw Billie come in, walk over to George, give him some money and stand beside him and kiss his hair. Philip turned quickly back

to his cards and to his losing and to the sickness that he felt rising in his stomach. He had already lost fifty-five dollars of his own money, and his winnings. Billie was back; but she watched George. Philip held his head in his hands. He felt the vomit rising and constricted the muscles in his throat. He shut his mouth tight for a moment, until the nausea subsided.

"I . . . I think I'll quit," he said, and lied, "I'm broke." He was afraid to accuse them of cheating. "You've cleaned me!" He tried to laugh but only made a drunken gurgling sound in his throat. "I'm going over to watch George . . ." To see George again; to talk to Billie, even Rose. Someone.

The men looked at each other; half-smiling, smirking, one said, "But, man, you asked us to come and play cards, and here we are. We want to play more cards. You ain't broke."

"I can't anymore. I *am* broke!" he shouted. He was flooded with flaming heat. His boiling stomach burned. The men stared at him, no longer smiling. "You can borrow from Gus. What'll it be? Stud? . . ."

"I don't want to. I'm sick. I've got to go . . . ."

One of the men rose and moved around the table toward him. He loomed above Philip, a huge form. Philip tried to stand up but fell drunkenly against the wall, upsetting the chair. The other man calmly dealt the cards.

Philip didn't see what happened: the fury with which George leaped and drove his fists like hammers into the man's face. Gus's rushing in and holding the man's partner, with the help of other customers. It ended quickly and simply. The two men were thrown out, the one smashed and bleeding.

Philip washed with George in the washroom, and tried to thank him. He could have kissed George's hand, but only mumbled thanks, embarrassed, defeated, filled with gratitude. George only laughed and said, "That's the only way to treat those punks. They don't understand nothing else." He wiped some blood from his shirt, "Come on, we'll go up to Rose's for a few drinks. You'll feel better up there."

The apartment block where Rose lived was saturated with the smells of ten thousand suppers of boiled cabbage and liver and onions. The ceilings of the hall were lit by small bulbs that cast only gloom. Rose's room was too large for the little bit of furniture in it. The chesterfield was red and stained. The floor was spotted with dirt that had been cemented into patches by spilled liquor. The bed in the corner was unmade. An old wooden clothes screen, with a nude woman crudely painted on it stood near the bed. The battered shade of the old trilite lamp hung drunkenly, bent out of shape by the many blows its fragile frame had suffered.

Philip drank beer that Rose brought from under the bed, and the others drank rye with water from the taps of the brown-stained sink. They sat relaxed: Rose and Philip on the chesterfield, and George and Billie together in the huge over-stuffed red chair. They sprawled their legs before them,

sunk down into the lumpy softness of the furniture. Gradually the new liquors diluted the intensity of feeling that had lingered in their minds and bodies since the fight. They talked quietly of the affair, everyone applauding George, and Rose said that the man was ready to pull a knife on Philip, just as George . . .

The alcohol flowed through their bodies, softening them. Rose dimmed the lights and Philip tried to respond to the pressure of her body on his, to her breasts pushed against him when she kissed him and left a musty richness of lipstick on his mouth. The smells around him crowded in—the whiskey, the cabbage and onion smells, the girls' cheap perfume, the dead stale smell of a bedroom never aired . . .

"Let's go up to my place for a party," Philip said. No one replied for several seconds.

"What can we do up there that we can't do anywhere else?" It was George, his voice muffled by Billie's body.

"I've got records we can listen to. I've got lots of booze," he said, emphasizing the last word, luring them.

"What George means is, how many bedrooms you got," giggled Rose.

"I've just got one. But it's a nice place. I'll cook you bacon and eggs. D'you want to? We'll have a real party. There's lots of space."

"What kind of records, Philip?" Billie gently wanted to know.

"There are some Broadway shows, and there's some classical music." "Oh, Christ!" George and Rose burst out together, and Rose began to screech in a ghastly imitation of an operatic soprano.

"Not on your life, Philip. Billie and I are going home. We've got things to do." Philip could see George caressing Billie and kissing her passionately. Rose leaned on Philip, and he clutched her to him and put his wet mouth on hers in a long, cold passionless kiss.

"You and Rose can go, Philip, but Billie and me are leaving." They got up.

"But we don't have to listen to . . ." Philip tried to finish, but they were going out the door.

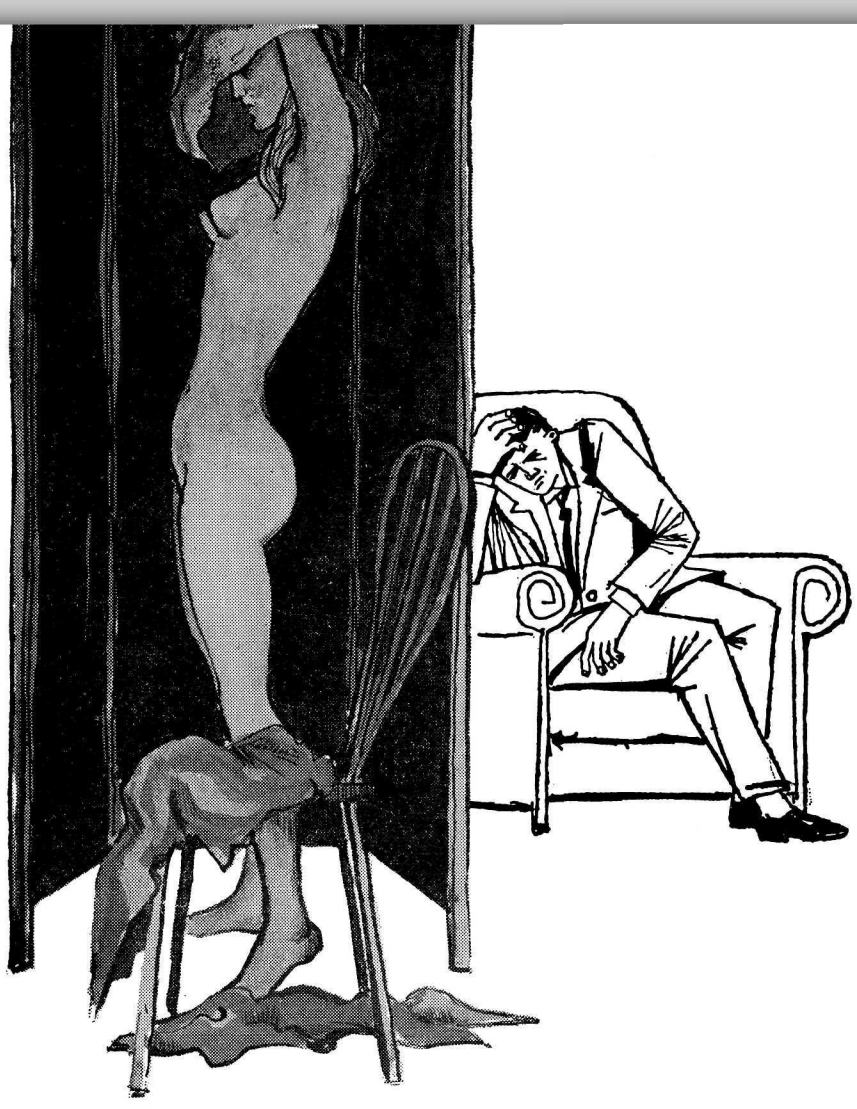
"You stay here with Rose, Philip," interrupted George. "Do as uncle George tells you and you'll be all right, eh Rose?" He closed the door and Philip was alone with Rose.

"Do you want to come to my place, Rose?" It sounded ridiculous; hopeless.

"Naw, let's stay here."

"But we don't have to listen to music."

"Naw, let's stay here." They did not speak. Philip waited, he knew not for what. He wanted to leave. But Rose would see George again and she would tell him that he had gone, and George would know that he had been afraid of Rose; that he had run away.



Rose leaned over and put her tongue in his ear and kissed him: "Take off your clothes," she said brazenly and got up and went behind the clothes screen. He was shocked at the abruptness of her action, and at the tone of authority rather than suggestion in her voice. This was to be all he was left with. A vapid, empty, grown-up child. He sighed deeply. He could hear her undressing but did not move. But he would not go now. He could not run away from Rose. Not after the shame of the card game and of his weakness in the fight. Not after the power he had felt in the restaurant, and over her at Gus's. Not after his bragging to George about the waitresses. George.

She put her head around the screen. "Take off your clothes," she ordered. He got up and began to undress.

"Are you ready?" she asked, loudly, like someone about to start the con-

testants of a race. She came out naked when he was in his shorts. She stood with her hands on her hips, looking at him as he took them off.

"Come on," she said and led the way to the bed.

He lay beside her on the cotton sheets, telling himself to relax.

"What's George going to do for a job?" he said.

"I don't know. How should I know?"

"But he's got to do something. He's young now, but later on he'll need something steady."

"Ah, you smart guys worry too much about things like that. A guy like George, he don't never have to worry about living."

"Yes, but if he marries Billie, then . . ."

"Marry Billie? He'll never marry Billie and she knows it. She don't even want to."

"But George told me he might marry Billie."

"Just something to talk about. She's along for the ride. Why the hell should she give up all her fun to *marry* him."

"But if she gets into trouble, then . . ."

"Then she'll marry some fat, hard-up slob about forty years old."

Philip winced.

"A girl like Billie?"

"Billiie's no angel, mister. She'll live with George until he beats her up like he did Sandra, and then she'll take off and find somebody else."

"Hit a woman? Beat up on Billie. That's hard to believe. He should learn to control his fighting, if that's the case."

"What do you mean? What the hell are you going to do? You gotta do something for christsake!"

They were silent while footsteps went by the door and down the hallway. Rose spoke loudly, rousing him from his thoughts, "I got to go to work tomorrow at eight. Are you just gonna lay there and talk all night?"

"What?" he said softly.

"Hurry up, eh?"

He knew vaguely what he was supposed to do. He took her in his arms and lay holding her tensely. He pressed his face into her breasts, and tried to kiss her, but the smell of her unwashed body repulsed him and he could not bring himself to put his mouth on her again. He was paralysed with a terrible fear as she lay waiting inertly beside him. If only she would move; if only she could be anything except the passionless limp clod by his side, he could love and be happy, and climb to mountain tops and scoop the stars by the handfuls to sprinkle over the joyous earth. He lay still.

"Have you got any money?" she said.

Only then did he realize why she had bothered with him.

"How much?" His voice was dry and he was not quite sure that he had spoken audibly. "How much?" he repeated.

"As much as you think I'm worth. I know you're a real gentleman," she said in an impossible attempt to be sweet.

He climbed out of bed with relief, took a ten dollar bill from his wallet and laid it on the table beside the bed.

"Is ten . . . is ten enough?"

"From a guy with a good job like you got?"

He took another ten and put it with the other and stood, not wanting to go back to her, afraid to leave . . . afraid of being weak.

"I'm waiting. Come on," she said flatly into the heat of the room.

He lay beside her again, his heart beating wildly. He put his hand on her body and realized with horror that his hand was cold and damp with sweat.

The hot night buzzed in his ears. He shut his eyes and waited for desire to seize him, but a great incomprehensible wave engulfed him. His brain whirled in distaste and disgust of the whore by his side, and in enfeebling loneliness and fear. He wanted to cry out to George to help him; George would not have failed.

Hours seemed to pass. Rose sighed impatiently. "Can't you do nothing?" she sighed coldly. He could not answer. "Something wrong with you?" She was silent a moment. "You haven't caught something, have you?" She threw back the covers, switched on the bed-lamp and examined him. He put his arm over his eyes and did not speak. He was not quite certain that he would not cry if he tried to speak. He lay on the sheets that were now sticky with sweat and knew that her eyes were inspecting his body, paunched, white, flabby. He did not want to see her looking at him.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked in angry disgust.

He swallowed loudly and tried to answer. There was no sound from his mouth. He cleared his throat and the sound seemed thunderous.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Quickly Rose snapped off the lamp and pulled the covers over her with abrupt movements. She sighed loudly and into the emptiness of the room, her voice reverberating from the bare plaster walls: "All right. If you don't want to do nothing, it's all right with me. If you want to just lay there . . ."

Philip tried to sleep. At least sleep might come, if death would not. But there was no sleep. There were only phantom faces rising before him, and quickly disappearing, unspeaking. Always unspeaking. Lucille, his mother, and his office staff appeared, stared with hard eyes in accusing disgust of weakness. They came and went, one by one, and then Billie and George stood before a door, grinning over their shoulders with wide, red mouths, winking at him. Philip opened his eyes and through lashes thick with tears looked into the fevered greyness of the hot room that seemed to be filled with movement, with particles of greyness that swam in the sea of buzzing stillness. He covered his eyes frantically with his hands, but the phantoms

came again, moving quickly like the single frames of a silent motion picture. George and Billie at last melted into one—George—as if in some game, gleefully, again and again, the two of them becoming one grinning George who licked his lips and rubbed his stomach. They all accused, all of them, except George, who only grinned, took Billie into his body and melted away, grinning and rubbing his stomach. George was at last replaced by a wrinkled and dirty old man with cold-bright eyes, steel-hard above a pencil-line mouth. He stared and did not move. Dirty and old, his skin wrinkled, crawling with lice. The mute disgust and horror of the face threw Philip into a panic. As if his eyes were rivetted to Philip's mind, the old man would not move on.

Filled with horror, drenched in perspiration, Philip quickly put the covers from his body and got out of bed. He swayed, standing in the dead-dry swirling greyness, his head spinning, and looked for his clothes in the unreal dark. He dressed in imagined silence, as if in silence he would cease to exist.

He stood at the door with one hand on the knob. A sound from the bed made him turn and he saw Rose sitting up. He turned away and heard her little girl's voice, "You going home to mamma, you poor sick bastard?" And then began the little giggle that bellied into a full, blaring red-mouth laugh. It followed him as he ran down the squealing stairs and out into the night. Compulsively, he turned to look at the grey bulk of the apartment building behind him, and suddenly, as if it had developed great, clawed wings that swept out for him on the insane laughter, he turned and ran, the laughter ringing in his mind until he reached the empty main streets with their street lamps and few remaining neon signs in the late night.

He wrapped his arms around a lamp post like a homeless drunk and a hot fever ran through him. The red, yellow, blue of the signs stared down on him, and the night sat around him like a shroud. In monumental disgust of himself he beat his fist against the iron standard. The whole night was black bile in his throat; his whole life, a vague current tumbling and turning in the depths of his mind, rising in swelling floods of self-loathing. The mælstrom swirled tortuous disgust and loathing like bloated animal corpses onto the shores of his realization; putrid fumes of hatred, dark, nauseous clouds, erupted from the dungeons of his memory. They infused his whole body as unassociated feelings, and he retched against the post, wanting to vomit out his life, to tear out with his fingers his whole insides, to claw out the innards of his mind. "Oh, jesuschristgod! Oh, jesus, jesus, jesus!" Sobbing, he clutched the pole with both of his hands and shook against it, "Useless, useless . . . oh jesus, god, god, god!"

He stood for many minutes, limp and exhausted. His face was pressed against the pole and his hands were clasped around it. They moved slowly up and down the iron pole as if in a caress that would drain off all the storms of confusion, doubt, hatred, and fear, and leave peace and surety.

He was soaked with perspiration and a chill suddenly roused him. He looked around slowly as if regaining consciousness, wondering.

"Sir, could you help an old man?"

He turned to the small, cracked voice. There was an old man in a long brown coat. But Philip did not recoil; he looked strangely at the old man, emotionlessly, as if he were dreaming; the lids of his eyes hung heavily. He took a step toward the old man, and stood, his legs wide apart, his head to one side, and stared at him, unafraid, undisgusted.

"I'm old. I haven't eaten . . ."

Philip saw the toothless face, black with stubble; the sunken cheeks. The coat hung nearly to the ankles. The pockets were torn and hung down. He was one of those who inhabit the streets of night like old papers blown in the gusts of night-wind, sheltered only momentarily by some building, and tossed from street to street until one time, in some dark alleyway, they are covered by the sifting dust of the city.

As the old man mumbled his sad tale, Philip watched him, as if from afar. The toothless mouth worked in fruitless explanation. Philip did not hear the words; he saw the mouth, working like a fish's gasping for air. And as he watched, Philip felt an intense desire to feel in his hands this man's body, the flesh, the bones, beneath the ragged brown overcoat. Then through his body surged a fantastically strong power, a power greater than he had felt in the restaurant, or over Rose, or at the card game. Lightness swam in his brain. He saw the little man as from a great height; up and up above him Philip seemed to rise until, looking down, he saw the man as something to be picked up and examined and crushed underfoot. Rivers of chills ran in Philip's spine; his breath came short; his heart leaped at his ribs. Strength throbbed in his arms, urged at his fingers, licked his buttocks and thighs. He glanced up and down the street. Footsteps sounded.

Quickly he said to the man, in a hollow, unreal voice, "Would you like a drink?" The old blackened face brightened and the toothless mouth grinned. Idiotically the head bobbed. He motioned the old man down a side street, "Come on!" He walked impatiently ahead. He stopped and waited, but could not stand still. He felt strong enough to have carried the man in two fingers, like something dirty. "Hurry up!" he ordered. The old man tried to hurry, but the bent knees had not hurried for many years. The street grew dark from old trees in full leaf that hung their branches over the sidewalk. The smells of the trees thrilled Philip: a long, dark, journey. He was dizzy from darkness and the warmth and the thrills that surged impatiently through his body, strong, now, vital.

"We'll go down here, where we won't be seen," Philip said in a loud whisper, hiding the urgency in his voice; the excitement he felt. He walked ahead of the old man and then turned and waited. He pulled at the old coat, felt it rip in his hands. A flame of elation leaped up in him. He strode

on ahead, but turned and patted his coat pocket to indicate where the imaginary bottle lay. A dark alleyway lay ahead. "Just a bit further; just up here. No one will see us," he spoke back to the old man.

The old man lagged, and Philip called out, "Come on. There's not far now." In the dark, the old face tried to smile.

Philip turned into the alley. He stood beside a telephone pole and a brick wall, waiting. The old man came on. Philip saw the shape coming and waited, his breath coming so quickly that he panted. His fingers clutched at his sides. Brightness flashed in his mind.

"In here, by this post." The old man came up and leaned against the wall, breathless, trying to smile, his head bobbing with the deep breaths. A gigantic surge filled Philip. His chest swelled on a forceful breath. He faced the old man, and put his hand on the other's arms, and squeezed. The old man began to slide away along the brick wall. Philip would not let go; his grip tightened feeling the bone-thin arms; his body tingled with the promise of the thing before him.

"Please mister, I didn't . . . I'm seventy years . . ."

Philip pushed him against the wall and felt how easily the body gave way under his hands. He pushed him harder against the wall. He felt that he could kill him with his hands. "You're a filthy, crawling thing, aren't you? Aren't you? Filthy and crawling! So filthy that I can hardly see you in the dark. Filthy. Don't you know that you shouldn't be filthy? Don't you? Don't you?" His voice rose in a tight screech. "Don't you know you can't have women when you stink like you do? Don't you? Don't you?" He raced madly on. The old man struggled but Philip held him. "Don't you know you've got to be clean like me to have women? Like me? Like me?" He screamed, tearing the membranes of his throat. The old man wrenched to free himself. "No, no! Don't run away!" Philip screamed, raised his hand and crashed it into the stubble-black face.

"Let me go! Let me go. I'm . . ."

He had no time to finish. Philip threw himself at the body, grabbed the throat in his hands and squeezed and shook the neck with all his strength, screaming through his rage-constricted throat, as he smashed the head against the wall, "Filthy! . . . filthy! . . . useless filthy! . . . crawling! . . . filthy! . . . bastard! . . . bastard . . . useless . . . useless . . . useless bastard . . ." He hit the face with his fists; drove his knees into the body. He held the body up by the throat, grunting in the exertion he did not feel. The head tossed loosely back and forth. He let the body slip from his hands to the ground and kicked it, again and again. The blood poured over the black stubble and onto the gravel of the road. The body had long been still when he stopped.

Philip ran from the form that lay open-mouthed and bleeding. He ran down the empty streets, fleeing, his feet echoing from the warehouse around.

He ran frantically, his heart pounding, his breath tearing at his lungs. He stumbled, and, as if in one great final thrust threw himself to the pavement, tearing his hands and knees and lay feeling, as his gasping softened into quiet breaths, a vast relief suffuse his whole body. He felt with thankfulness the hard concrete beneath him and the ripped flesh of his hands and knees, like fiery purgation. The cool pavement at his face, he lay exhausted, without movement, and a great drowsiness flowed through him. The pavement cool, strong, and the searing pain of the torn and bleeding flesh.

He lay until he became aware of the first sparrows' chirps. Slowly he got up. The night was fading. Some sparrows fluttered down from the buildings to look for food in the streets and alleyways. He looked at his hands. They were covered with blood. He shoved his hands into his pockets and walked towards his apartment in the growing light.

PRAYER FOR A PERVERT IN HIDING

DAVID WEVILL

I do not say this to God, who may be
A pair of eyes hungering through the garden
But to that kernel of my being
Which is placeless and invisible. This man

Having no fewer hours than a sparrow
Breathing less easily, lungs winded by flight
Drilled a darker, more lonely hole than a worm
Because he was too sensitive to light

And kept the hole within him, burying
Nitrogenous wastes deep, at its deepest point
So his blue eyes, naked, could invade
A summer sky and appear as innocent.

But the tired secretions of his skin
Must some time irrupt in a slippery sheath
That baffles our fingers, burns
And shocks the whistling holes of our breath

Until we become killers, and rouse
The panther-hackles that defend our night
And snarl until our human shame draws ink
From human blood, and cruelty becomes our right.

He will survive though torn
Though shredded like a catted sparrow
He will become the unspeakable curse of daughters
A breathing in the garden, the tree's shadow

And the timid eyes of sons who cross
Their legs in public buses, playing
Sparrows to his cat we thought wore feathers
Whose beak lies bloody by the garden swing.

I do not say this to God, who may be
A pair of eyes hungering through the garden
I say it to the part of me that bled
Like claws, and forgave, but could not pardon.

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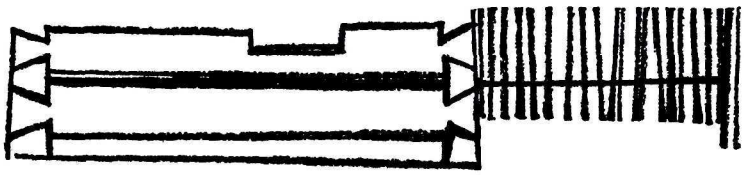

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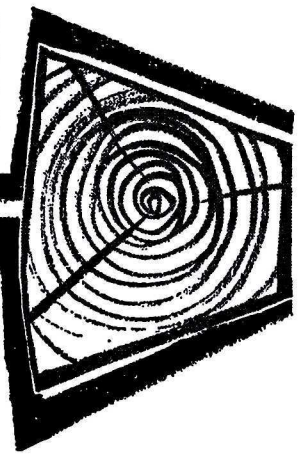

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