

FEIRA



Cover by Priscilla McCandless/Vowles

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ERA

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William Gadon

IN EUROPE

Abdul, the Arab attendant, formerly of Fes,
Raised black eyes
To the passing jaunt of female legs
Which struck a happy gait, smoothly making
Abdul with the pavement one:

Abdul scored his calendar
With sagging, ochre eyes
Counting Western Women
Like teasing market flies.

But he, forgetting his pipes and his tea
And his former nights in El-Jedid, had grown
Accustomed to the scorn of bare, pale limbs
That slapped the sidewalk like a calf's stretched hide
Ringing out a rhythm raising prickles in his very visa
And attributing to him a lowly impotence
Making him homely in his own sight.

Abdul lived in exile uncompelled
And spent his empty hours
Counting Western Women
Like wilted desert flowers.

Yet Abdul always watched and said no word
Acquiring in his exile (far from Fes)
A sallow lear and tin-gold grin
A gross and clownish imitation
Of the arrogance he dreamed was his.

Michael Marqusee

For what am I to be glad? There is
a real answer to this question, which
for the moment, is not what I need. Now

the unripe riddles the air,
the friends insist on asking each other
is it like this for you? And they know

that wanting the crisis to be here, now,
wanting the parallels to intersect,
is an honesty

of self-incineration, a blaze
that to illumine,
burns. Then what do I give up

by foregoing the solitary passage?
But to this question there is
no real answer, only a plethora

of quizzicalities, remote
inveiglements posing as genuine
enquiries. Even now

talking in this fashion
I've forsaken the flooded world,
taken you into confidence, and yet

I doubt we understand each other.
No matter. There is neither gladness
nor horror. Only

this place: where we both live alone
and are visited fearfully at times
by the beings that are you.

Michael Marqusee

— “I don’t need this kind of aggravation anymore” —

And then he passed into a deep sleep
while I sat throughout those hours
in a small chair by his bed,
pouring my soft gibberish, low strains
learned by the shores of a foreign sea,
over his deaf figure, reckoning
that some of it would penetrate, and he
at last would rise and let me sleep.

Once he stirred, rose a bit, screamed at me:
“Get the fuck out of here,” then slept again.

Later,

I drove him into the country, telling him
we were heading for an old sea that
I remembered and he did not.

For a time he was satisfied with this. But soon the earth
unfolded and the sky expanded and he was pricked
by it all into an awareness
of dissatisfaction. He complained about my driving,
said I should have brought some lunch at least,
fidgeted constantly. I was pleased; these were signs
of the splitting-apart for which I had waited
so long. I began to relax.

Only now did the old recognitions
pass into effect. As the forest thinned
and at length the beach spread before us, open, empty,
magnificent on either side, he turned to me, saying
he now knew what I had meant
and was happy to be here.

Michael Marqusee



Victoria Steiger

WINDSONG AT TEA-TIME

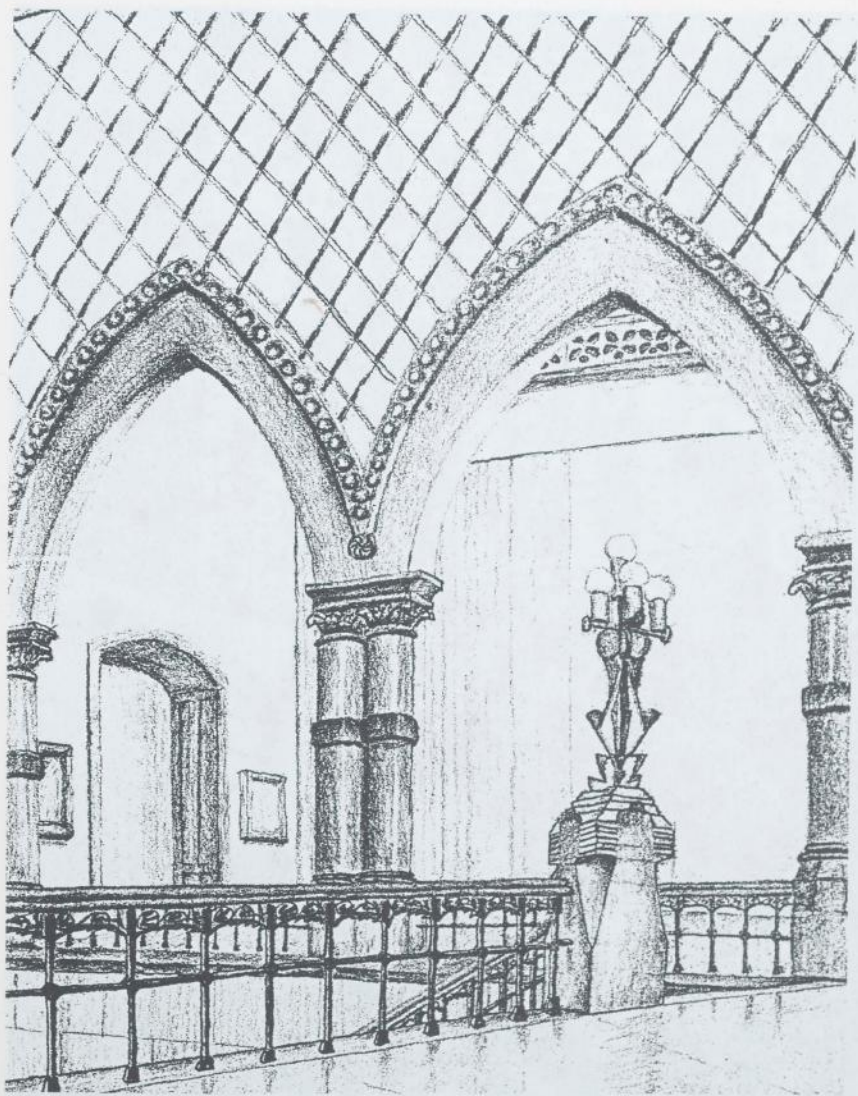
The pork chops burn
The plate is hot
We thank the Lord for what we've got.
I ask myself
What does this mean?
The only reply is silence.

You won't play ball. . .
Well, that's okay
I never liked you anyway.
And all the several whiskey bottles whisper:
"Turn on the television."

My Father is a butcher
My brother is a thief
My mother sells stale cigarettes
And I am on relief.

The voices which mysteriously beckon me to violence,
Which haunt my tiny bedroom,
Do not know me.
"Fred, kill," they say.
I am not Fred.
I am not even Dave.

R.M.O.



Lawrence Malcic

ORDER OF SERVICE

SUNDAY

SCHOOL OF WISDOM 9:30 A.M.

MORNING SERVICE 11:30 A.M.

NIGHT SERVICE 8:00 P.M.

WED NIGHT... BIBLE CLASS 7:30

FRI. NIGHT TARRY SER 7:30

Look OVER VAIN EMOTIONS
LIFE IS RIGHT: THE PRICE IS TOO.



Robert M. Klein

As if by magic the lantern lit
The cold light hovered near my bed
The floor shook, but not so much
The water boiled that scalding liquid flowed
And then Ike died in Mamie's arms
What a terrible shock to troop 67
So what? If man were meant to fly,
He spread his wings and reached the clouds
I left my bed and ate the socks
How good they tasted. The light still shined.
So what? I ate some more and the lights.

John G. Celeste

GENERATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS

- I. *My only son, I also wandered through
The silky way that brought you to this life
Before you sucked I licked the tender brew
Provided by your mother, by my wife.*

*And yet you are ashamed if I should see
You looking at some woman unadorned.
Think you your quietude somehow unmeet
To one who kissed your ass when you were born?*

*Mere words are under-agents to our joy
Safe keep your house held thoughts my beamish boy.*

- II. *If there were but a chink within this wall
Through which we could exchange some ancient words
A lonely exiled poet might attempt
To put in measured verse our maudlin tale*

*But no apprentice mason laid the brick
In serpentine array it winds between
Our minds and years. Perhaps you stand and wait
Unbid for but a momentary breach.*

- III. *Is my role with you all ways to be
Somewhat progenitor, part progeny?
Are we forever stereotype cast
To play the child and the pederast?*

*So let it be, I love you more, my pit
Unstring your blouse and suckle me at your tit.*

Gordon Goodman

MONA IN SOLITUDE

Dark but comely Mona walks in fear
Despairing of herself, despising me
For loving as she would if she could find
The time to straighten up her room's debris.

The night oppresses Mona and the day
Is little kinder to a sleepless mind.
Smiles carefully fail to hide the pain
Of bloodless womb, of heartless woman-kind.

Smooth skin beneath black hair reveals no spot,
An evil creature perfectly formed, the bane
Of all my hope, the bitch, the cruel girl
I love is dark but comely and insane.

Gordon Goodman

LASON V. STATE, 12 SO. 2d 305

Buford, C. J. "... Does the one specific crime definitely defined and limited by Section 7567, C.G.L. — 1927; 3534 G.S. (1906) 5424 R.G.S. — 1920; Ch. 1637, Sub. Ch. 8, Acts 1868, Sec. 17, comprehend or include the action of a 76 year old, aged Indian War Veteran, feeble physically and mentally, in, after having met the two girls of 11 and 13 years of age who solicited him, went to his residence and there they both got on the bed, pull up their dresses and drop down their panties, when he in turn on his back in the same bed allowed them to diddle with his rag-like penis, unerectable, lifeless and useless except to connect the bladder with the outside world for more than six years since the death of his wife, utterly incapable of either penetration or emission, and wad it like a rag into their mouths, and then, in his feeble and aged condition impelled by the irresistible impulse, in turn he would kiss and put his tongue in their little though potentially influential and powerful vaginas?"

INRE LASON V. STATE

A wonder that they didn't gag,
For he was mighty like a rag.
They viewed the pubic dental floss,
And wondered, is it love, per os?
T'was they had hijinks in their hearts,
So call the tiny tots the tarts.
Don't place the blame on Mister Lason;
It wasn't he who chose the face on
Which they sat, the wells he lapped —
Those prepubescent rabbit traps.
Eschew the steamy little bods,
And not the gray and gristled wad.

Robert Speiser



William Gadon

She cracks a smile; her cheeks go, too,
Her face a delta of effluvia,
I watch, aware I'm not the first
Or near the last one she has nursed
To continental shelves now sapped,
Behold those sere and withered paps.
They call that piece a wonder now
And she returns their tricks, but how?
Her vast and hemorrhoidal face
Returns each evening to grace
This spot of joy. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, I stay,
In awe, and we are both aware
Till death does part us I'll be there.

Robert Speiser

Phoenix fire, was the pyre
Formed, in fact, before the bird?
Turning tomb to burning womb,
Birth and death as much ensured.
Do the embers he remembers
Light the grave in which he'll burn
And unbridle suicidal
Passions that he must return?
It's his destiny to rest in
Flaming sepulchres he builds
Moribund, yet do you wonder
That it's thus he is fulfilled?
Lemming blind, he is enshrined,
And his follower's exhumed;
His will is done; thus is each one
Consummated and consumed.
Each one sires further fires
Just as surely as it spawns
Avatars as bright as stars,
Fickle flickers quickly gone.
Can anyone who reads these words
Imagine I'm discussing birds?

Robert Speiser

LOVING LOSING

Oh harpy dreams, just shut your mouths
And let me love again.
What hidden lines were mine last time
To force you from me then?
You came and went, and what it meant
Could hardly be construed,
When mind and bones together groaned
In pineal servitude.
Your echo haunts my days and taunts
My nights. And still I find
That daisies lie, in chains that tie,
And whispered words that bind.

Robert Speiser

RAIN FANTASY

Hemispherical umbrella —
mammoth mushroom
and I the stem
supporting my structure.
I walk in darkness,
silently protected,
shielded from the falling jewels —
diamonds in the moonlight.

Linda Lee Walker

REALITIES

The great poet enscribes the last words
upon the page, glares at them as if
they might come alive, and ponders the floor
a while, kneading profoundly his head.

Then, one finger boring in his ear,
he rises and shuffles to the bathroom,
honks his nose on some toilet paper,
takes a piss, undresses, and goes to bed.

Chip Horgan

There have always been the questions.

"You live *there*?"

"Doesn't it bother you?"

"Aren't you scared?"

They've been asking them for years,

Always the same ones.

Look, I'm not a ghoul.

I live here, this is my home.

My life is like yours in ways — this is

My home

My work.

It's not unusual,

And I wish the reputation wasn't so bad, so

Wrong.

I am a man.

I am alive.

And this is my work.

I wonder how a fireman can do what *he* does,

Or how an athlete can be away from his family

for weeks at a time.

This is something in which I believe, and I

feel I am helping.

I helped at the Coconut Grove,

And at train wrecks;

I've embalmed babies

And buried a woman one hundred nineteen years old.

When families feel it, I try my

Best to help them. There's a need, I feel

there's a need.

I might have been a doctor.

I invented a process that can make

A snake's body perfectly transparent.

With alizarin stain, you can make the

Skeletal structure visible, every rib.

I've taught anatomy to college classes
Without myself having taken a degree.
My apprentice came out of twice as much school as
I ever had, and
I think I taught him more than he had learned
In all the years.
My son, my youngest boy, is four.
He goes to Reidy's Drugstore every night, and
 buys a can
Of cashews, and we sit down here in the embalming
 room
And we read poetry. Last night we were talking.
I quoted: "The world is so full of a number of
 things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings."
He looked up, and said,

"Longfellow."

I said, "Right. . . .!"
That doesn't matter. This is my son. I think
 Longfellow is the only one he
 knows so far.
When he goes upstairs at eight-thirty,
I stay down here for a while, and read, and think.
If things had been different, maybe
I would have been an archeologist, and
Reached for the dead, the Past.
To read the walls of the Pyramids, to sweat
In the wide Sahara — to drink from a vessel
Of a King two thousand years gone.
I have my books, I can share that life,
But I have something unsharable.

When a funeral is over, when a family goes to the
limousines,
While they open the hearse and load the flower car,
It is I who closes the casket.
I am the last man on earth to see their faces,
The last one.
A last look,
“And then forever!”

D. F. Clow

DEPARTURE

Could you rest at my heart and rescue my need?
Would wholeheartedness hold you beyond your choice?

My survival quests much more than your offer,
Requests greater promise than your remote heart.



Younger dreams in older schools make me
shower every morning to wash away
yesterdays and last nights.

Ordinarilly, I'm in until I'm clean.
But today I stayed and let the water
hit me, soak around me.

I got rid of the nightmare from the dark
Like a child who hits the bad: go away!
Only I can do that.

S. Steber

THE MAN KILLER

She selects a bright label.
The disc pierced, it drops, whirls.

The needle dances
on the first few bars,
then sighs as it slides
(oh so comfortably)
through familiar grooves,
easing into new
variations on
the same song, same song.

Hopes shattered once again,
the discarded column climbs.

(Another false start of a masterpiece.)



THE TELEGRAM

Rolling downhill casually,
slowly accumulating
waxing anticipation:
she rushes to the finish.

(It arrives just prior to landing.)

The bedrock bruises harshly
as mossy cover neglects
to cushion sudden fallshock:
she splinters upon impact.

Sue Schwartz

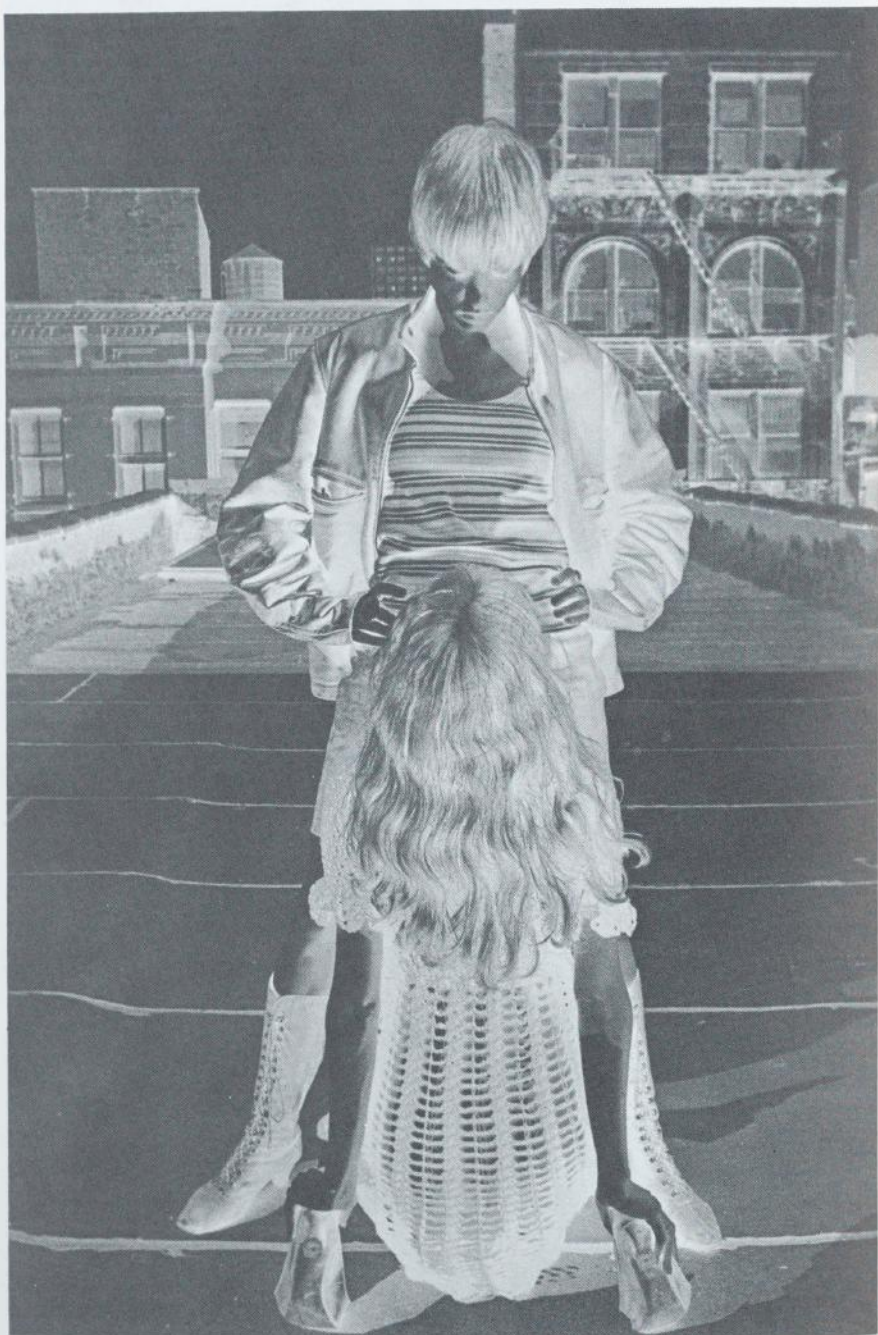
EPITOME

So you want me to just strip,
Take all myself off. . . .
Just to stand and freeze on the scorching
inside of my bleeding heart.
For you, stand naked?
But you, will you let me rape
the very bottom of a fathomless well
of love,
So that I may find the inner peace
for you-and-for-me-
To lie naked both of us, fool on
fool; lover on lover; life on life. . . .
My mind will forever search, for
this relentless dream which keeps tearing
me from limb to limb.
I must find the answer,
For, baby remember. . . . I am mankind,
I shall exist to express my idealistic emotions. . . .
Finding never but to the will of God. . .

Gary R. Greene



Larry Kurland



Larry Kurland

—DEDICATED—

To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
But to rape the very thing of true love,
Is despicable.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
Prostitution of God's ultimate expression of love for *you*,
Is criminal.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
No man or woman should, even though in a slave-like stupor,
not come totally outside of self.
It is a sacrilege.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
If I love you, you must love me from the inside out. . .
Do not glean from me my total life, just that which keeps
you warm with happiness around you.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
Wanton eating of a person weakened by wishful imagination,
should be declared an inhumane act.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.
If no one else should ever be so fortunate to love you,
you shall not be wasted, you will forever
love yourself, for when the total ambiguous haze clears,
The only thing real left is self.
To be selfless, is to be beautiful.

Gary R. Greene

UNTITLED

New York . . .

Thoughts of unparalleled beauty come to mind,
Entrancing me, numbing my senses 'til I can
almost forget the utter disgust I experience
when I see puss-like maggots devour your
sacred flesh . . .

For you see, you are really nothing but a whore.
You sell your warm thighs in a minute to any sucker tourist,
While your lithe but sly hand pumps dope into an arm,
or rolls a johnny artfully;
At night you do those things so well,
For it is then that you are flashy, you are slick,
As you glide, gracefully, gazing coolly into the eyes
of those who dare look at you realizing your innate beauty . . .
Even their cheap and horny desires do not overcome
their fear for you, because you are a queen of a world
where people are icy . . .

But you know something,

I will never fear you.

You will be nothing to me today —

But then tomorrow I will not forget you as
queen of days too — as you pour yourself into my eyes . . .

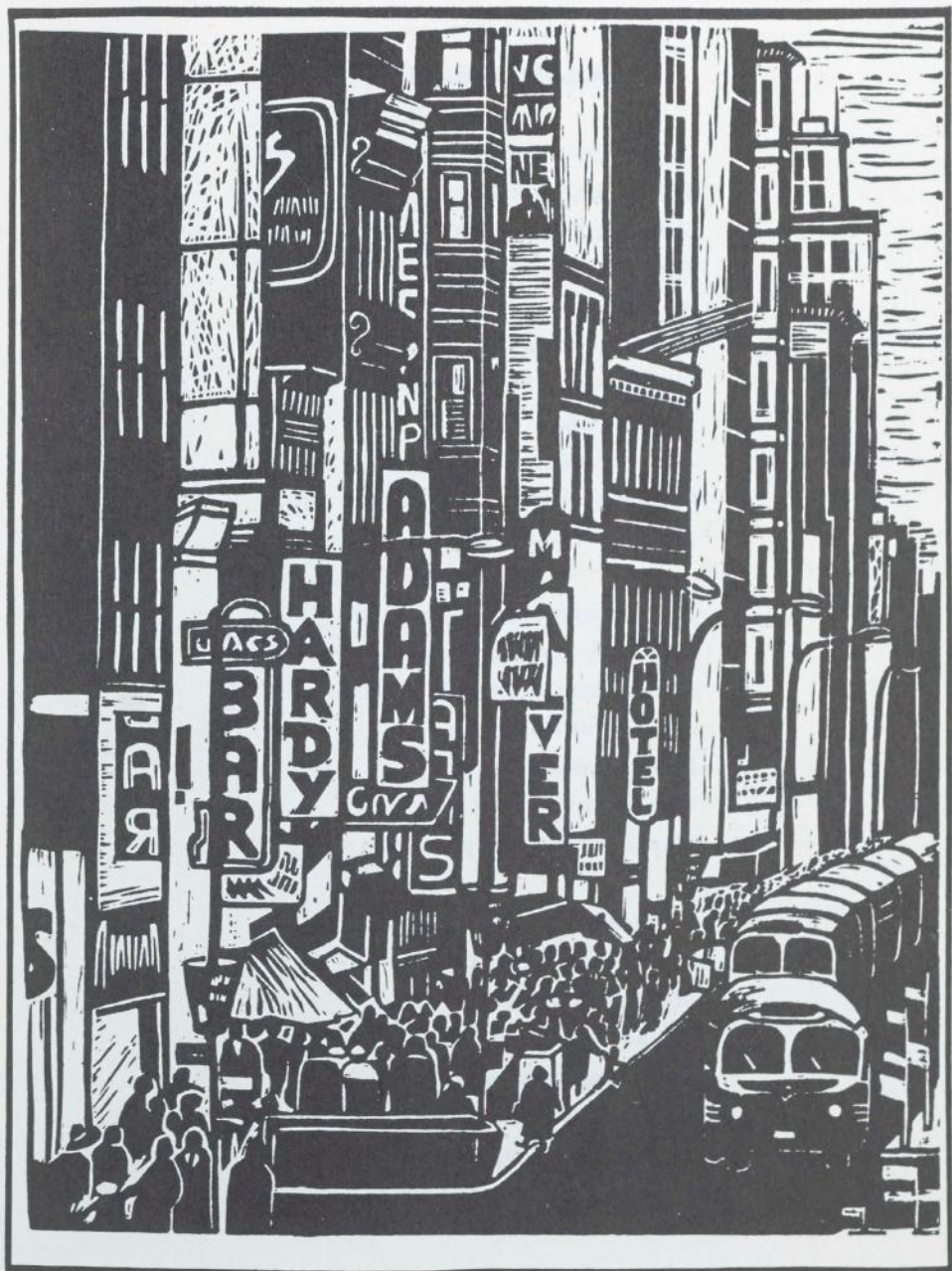
I see you walking statuesque in the park
while I gape at you, almost losing control
with excitement of your presence.

I shall not begrudge you of all that . . .

Because when I am not with you, you are always with me,
at least.

Guess you shall never leave me, because your commonness is
like a cut that refuses to heal,
. . . it leaves a mark under the skin as well as on the surface.
WHORE you said they call you,
well then I guess, I have bought you.

Gary R. Greene



Anne Kraus

I KILLED SUICIDE

I remember the world,
Staring at me like I
Was a bottle of poison
Trying to cause pain to
All who were around me.
I pleaded that all I
Wanted was to be accepted
By the world.
And the world responded by
Grabbing me and smashing me
Against the wall.

And there I was with
My blood dripping down the walls
Falling, drop, drop, drop
All over the floor.
I started to cry,
Why don't you want me?
Why won't you accept me?

It was then that I realized that
It was all over; that I
Might as well end it all.
I'll show them that I'm not
Something to be smashed
Whenever they want.
So I ran to the cupboard and
Grabbed the bottle of poison.

I remember that bottle of poison
Staring at me like I
Was going to cause it pain.
Staring at me, the bottle pleaded
For me to accept it, to like it, to
Go and have fun killing myself.
And I responded by
Grabbing it and smashing it
Against the wall.

And there it was with
Its poison dripping down the walls
Falling, drop, drop, drop
All over the floor,
The broken pieces all started to cry,
Why don't you want me?
Why won't you accept me?

Pauleon Czikowsky

MECHANIZATION OF A MECHANIZED SYSTEM

There was a man who swept the floors,
Until one day,
A machine came along,
And did the sweeping better.

There was a man who built the machine that swept the floors,
Until one day,
A machine came along,
And did the building better.

There was a man who supervised the machine building the machine that swept the floors,
Until one day,
A machine came along,
And did the supervising better.

There was a man who started the machine that supervised the machine building the machine that swept the floors,
Until one day,
A machine came along,
And did the starting better.

There was a man that programmed the machine that started the machine that supervised the machine building the machine that swept the floor,
Until one day,
The man got sick,
And the floors remained dirty.

Pauleon Czikowsky

BOY ON A BICYCLE

Fingers tensed to type, grasping
my lunch in brown paper, a run
in my left stocking, sensing
a certain languorous glamor in having
just come from bed, I turn
the corner, and

there he is, again,

arched leopard-like, blond
as this morning's sun, fair
as the sun, sun in his eyes
and glinting off the spokes, he
silently pedals and smiles
at me. The city
vanishes from around his body, re-
appears and he,
again, is gone.

If only he would love me.

If only he would brake,
and break the ice, if only
he would take my arms, my
breasts beneath him, if only
I could feel his
thighs hot
and pumping against
mine.

His broad back bursting through the traffic,
his lean calves tensing and relaxing,
his arms embracing his machine,
his body sings of sex

even in the distance.

Jay Rogoff

THE GOLDEN BULL

Paradise Island N.J. is not an island and it isn't even a peninsula, but none of the two-million-or-so tourists who vacation there each summer know that. Paradise Island N.J. is a shore resort about thirty-five miles down from Atlantic City and, while it's not as big as Atlantic City (it doesn't have anywhere near as many blacks), it's getting there. Paradise Island N.J. has a six-mile bathing beach (the world's safest), a five-mile boardwalk (the world's longest), and seven amusement piers of one-hundred-and-eight thrill-of-a-lifetime rides (the world's most). On the west side of the boardwalk opposite the piers are innumerable rows of innumerable shops. You can put 25¢ on the number of your choice on one of the ninety-three wheels of fortune. Or you can buy a pound of Betsy's homemade salt-water taffy (or Lou's or Sidney's or Rita's or Aunt Anna's) for only \$1.79. Or you can have a T-shirt printed with a decal of Mickey Mouse or Sex Won't Rot Your Teeth or your very own name. Or you can get your mother a plastic statue of the Blessed Virgin pasted on a stand with spangles and sea-shells and a tiny thermometer which reads "It's Always Pleasant in Paradise Island N.J." for only 89¢. You can't buy a square meal or a warm jacket or a plant or any kind of original artwork on the boardwalk in Paradise Island N.J. But none of the two-million-or-so tourists who vacation there each summer seem to care.

The largest row of shops on the boardwalk is owned by Mrs. Schwartz, a shrewd hard-bitten businesswoman who has the deeds to one-quarter of the stores on the Paradise Island boardwalk and is dying to get her hands on another quarter so that she might own as much property as the Cohen Brothers who run four of the seven piers. This particular row is fairly typical; among other attractions, it features a pizza palace (run by twenty Assyrians) and a T-shirt emporium. Mrs. Schwartz's son Leo has been running the T-shirt emporium for twenty-five years now and is probably still the fastest decal presser in town. His salesgirls must keep moving at all times, cannot let a customer go unattended, and are not allowed to wear patches on the ass of their dungarees. Leo knows his business. Leo's son Max used to work for his father until he grew his hair long and started smoking dope, at which point his father threw him out of the emporium. But because Max was a Schwartz before he was a hippie, his grandmother gave him the only pony ride in Paradise Island N.J. to run on the beach across from the stores. I worked for Max in the summer of '69.

The summer of '69 wasn't the first time I had been to Paradise Island N.J. But it was the first time I spent the whole summer there. In Paradise Island N.J. there is an important difference between being there for a week or two (which makes you a tourist) and being there for a whole summer (which makes you a seasoner). For every seasoner there are ten tourists. The tourists spend money while the seasoners earn money. And the tourists don't even know the seasoners exist, but the seasoners hate the tourists because it is tourist money that they have to work so hard to get.

For each of the first fourteen summers of my life I spent a week in Paradise Island N.J. as a boy-tourist with my tourist family. It wasn't a bad life: every day I would sit on the sand building castles out of popsicle sticks and soda cups and every night I would look out of my cage on the Screaming Zipper ride and watch the ocean wash my castles out to sea. My fifteenth and sixteenth summers were spent back in the city in the park at 14th and Vespucci where I got high every night and the only waves were made in a little glass syringe. During my seventeenth summer I wound up in a hospital for a few weeks as a result of a simple miscalculation and later my best friend wound up in the river because somebody else had been made unhappy by another simple miscalculation. When my eighteenth summer rolled around, my parents unanimously decided to send their patched-up Andrew to a place where they knew he could stay out of trouble. I wound up in Paradise Island N.J.

I was never quite sure how my parents got me the job. Believe it or not, jobs are hard to come by in Paradise Island N.J., especially if you are an eighteen-year-old male. They must have had connections, although it's hard to imagine any connections between Irish-Italian blue-collar workers and Jewish merchants. But then, the resort business makes strange bedfellows. I can only remember being ushered into a plush red office where a tough old geezer pinched my arm hard and said He'll do. I thought at first she wanted to eat me but later found out that I was being saved for a more important role: caretaker of the pony ride.

The pony ride was certainly not the biggest attraction in Paradise Island N.J. but it featured the one thing that the town did not have another one of: a real live pony. Except for the annual Fourth-of-July Livestock Show held at Convention Hall by the New Jersey Livestock Breeders Association, Pegasus was the sole four-legged animal in Paradise Island N.J. It was Max's idea to call him Pegasus and for a good reason—he was the mangiest, tireddest, most chewed-up looking pony you ever saw. I figured at first that he looked like that because of the treatment he got from the kids who rode him. The kids who come to Paradise Island N.J. are on the whole rough city kids who can't tell the difference between a real horse and the formica ones on the merry-go-round. But no, Max said, he was just a cheap horse who wasn't fit for much else besides carting little kids around the sand.

My job was to take care of the pony and see that he didn't throw anybody. It had previously been Max's responsibility but sometimes he would get so high that he'd forget to feed it and clean up after it. After a while the Board of Health (which doubled as the Humane Society) got wind of Pegasus' neglect and ordered Mrs. Schwartz to see that the pony was treated better. So I was hired to take care of it and Max was left to collect the money.

When I first came to Paradise Island N.J. in the summer of '69 I was pretty much away from drugs of all kind except for an occasional joint. The whole point of my going to the shore was to get me away from the city, cause everybody knows that trying to give up drugs in the city is like trying to be a pacifist in the middle of a brawl. It's hard. My parents figured that the job and

the change of scenery would keep me so busy that I wouldn't have time for drugs. I figured that the surf and the sun and the fresh air would keep me so contented that I wouldn't need drugs. All the other summers I had gone to Paradise Island N.J. as a boy who was firmly herded into barren avenues of middle-class fun-in-the-sun. Now I was a man, a new man, my own man, and I was determined to find the lush natural path that I always believed was there.

On July 2nd I had been in Paradise Island N.J. for one month. I had stayed relatively straight, displayed a decent tan, and enjoyed working with Pegasus thanks to a lifelong interest in relating to animals. To celebrate, I did something I had wanted to do since I was six years old and was denied permission: I got up at five o'clock in the morning and went down to the beach to watch the sun rise.

There is something quite beautiful about Paradise Island N.J. at five o'clock in the morning. For one thing, there are no people out. No pushy crowds, no crying babies, no angry fathers. There are no flashing neon lights at five o'clock in the morning nor are there amplified hawkers' voices telling you to step right up and try your luck. The stores are still there and so are the empty rides and a few pizza-stained napkins scattered on the boardwalk. But you can easily ignore them. For before you lies that powerfully soothing surf and that clearly rolling sand and in back of it all is the emergent sun against the mother-of-pearl sky. And everything is moving and everything is very, very still. I'll never forget the beach that morning. I ran about for hours, in slow motion, dragging my feet through the sand, playing tag with the waves. The seagulls circled above me, laughing, as I spun around til I was dizzy then laid down til I was balanced then got up to spin around again and then saw the bull.

Now it is not every morning that you see a bull on the beach at Paradise Island N.J. But on this particular morning it just seemed right. Of course, this was no ordinary bull. He was about five feet six from the shoulder, colored a golden tan, and perfectly formed. He moved like the surf, with grace, one step at a time. He belonged there. I kept very still when he first spotted me because I didn't want to scare him away. He sauntered over to the empty stretch of beach where I stood, gazed at me softly, and began to frolic about, gently tossing the sand into the air with his horns. Searching my pockets for the sugar cubes I always carried for Pegasus, I carefully approached the bull with sugar in hand and we got acquainted. The whole thing was like a dream but I knew it was really happening because by that time it was eight o'clock and there were people on the boardwalk. They were all gathered by the rail, cheering every time the bull ate from my hand and throwing coins at us. They must have thought we were a new attraction and out of habit they could not enjoy an attraction unless it cost them something. Before long Leo came over from the T-shirt emporium to see what was going on. He was afraid to come down to where the bull was and instead shouted from the rail to ask me where I'd found it. I told him exactly what happened. Then he smiled very strangely and shook his head for about five minutes. He said Andrew you're a good boy, now why don't you try and lead the bull into the stall with Pegasus while I find out who the owner is. He explained that that way we could keep the bull in one place so his owner could come and take him back where he belonged. Leo thought that was the right thing to do.

It only took Leo twenty minutes to locate the bull's owner. And it only took Mrs. Schwartz ten minutes over the phone to work out a deal. It turned out that the bull was owned by the top breeder at the annual Fourth-of-July Livestock Show held at Convention Hall by the New Jersey Livestock Breeders Association. This particular bull had been brought to the convention so that he might be entered in the bull-and-cattle competition. His owner had expected him to at least win the first prize blue ribbon. But the lady owner of a darker, less muscular bull managed to convince the head judge that dark was beautiful and the top breeder had to content himself with the silver ribbon. And then to make matters worse the damned bull broke out of his pen during the night and took off. Finally, Mrs. Schwartz called the next morning and offered to rent the bull from him on a daily basis and the breeder knew a silver lining when he saw one. After all, nobody at the convention was about to pay to see a second-place bull.

That afternoon the sign which read "Pony Rides—\$1.00" was substituted with a bigger sign which read "See the Golden Bull—Special Limited Engagement—Adults \$2.00, Children \$1.50." The story had gotten all around town that the boy who worked the Schwartz pony ride had seen a twenty-four-carat gold bull come walking out of the ocean at dawn and that the bull had tried to gore him to death but the kid had managed to lasso him in and now the bull was shut up inside the pony stall. The last part was true; Leo had me pen the bull up indoors because he figured that in order to get people to pay to see the bull you had to keep the bull out of sight. Pegasus was saddled up and gave more rides that day than he had all season because the kids who were waiting in line to see the bull had to be kept busy somehow. Before too long people started to come back with their cameras and soon it was more important to get a picture of the bull than to get one of the fifty-foot roller coaster. People with extra film in their cameras took pictures of me with their kids. Some lady even asked me to autograph a postcard.

But that wasn't the thing that really bummed me out. The thing that really bummed me out was the way the bull looked at me. It was like I betrayed him or something. I mean, I was his friend. And now he was cooped up in a seven-by-nine-by-six box with one hanging light bulb and a million flashcubes. And it was all my fault. After a while the bull got rambunctious and they had to send for one of the vets from Convention Hall to give him a shot of something. When I couldn't take it any more I got hold of Max, explained the situation to him and begged him to help me to help the bull escape.. Max smiled his stoned smile and said where is he gonna escape to? And he gave me a handful of valiums which lasted me about two days.

But that was only the beginning. I had hoped that when the convention left town the breeder would come and take his bull away. Only Mrs. Schwartz was a step ahead of me. She met with the breeder on the last day of the convention and drew up a contract with him to lease out the bull for the rest of the season with an option for next summer. Then she had the bull insured for \$10,000. The only thing left to do before the bull became a Paradise Island institution was to publicize him to the fullest extent. So Mrs. Schwartz turned to the man who had

the greatest control over advertising space on the boardwalk. She ordered her son to have the decal manufacturer produce a thousand decals of a golden fire-breathing bull which said "I Spent My Summer Vacation at Paradise Island N.J." And soon there were hundreds of gold bulls on hundreds of chests parading up and down the boardwalk. Even Leo couldn't print the shirts up fast enough. The rest of the merchants caught on quickly and started selling bullburgers and little buckets and shovels printed with bulls and bathing caps with horns. A plane was hired to cross the beach every half-hour on sunny days trailing a banner which read "See Schwartz's Golden Bull." The climax occurred when the Cohen Brothers erected a Charging Bull ride on Happy Pier which infuriated Mrs. Schwartz. The ensuing lawsuit made the third page of the Philly papers and the old lady was in her glory.

By this time both the bull and I had learned to make the best of a bad situation. I gave him massive doses of phenol-barbital in every meal. Max gave me a couple of valiums every time I asked for it. Two weeks passed, two weeks of crowds and money and flashcubes. Finally the mayor of Paradise Island N.J. called to say he was bringing his family and a group of local reporters over and could we clean the bull up for a picture session the next day. The mayor of Paradise Island N.J. was a full-time plumber who nobody ever saw and who usually ran unopposed. But this year he was slated to run against the son of one of the Cohen Brothers and he was beginning to make a perceptible stir.

Now the thing which had gone unnoticed by everyone except me was that Max had tried out the phenolbarbitol prescribed for the bull and liked it. He liked it so much that he began to put less and less in the bull's meals. The first time I really saw a difference in the bull's behavior was the morning that the mayor was supposed to come over. The others would have seen it too if they hadn't been so busy trying to straighten up the stall. The mayor showed up at one o'clock with two reporters and a photographer (the entire news staff of the Paradise Island Enquirer), his attractive wife, his pretty daughter, and the meanest six-year-old bastard I ever saw. In a town noted for little monsters, this kid was a walking horror show. He bit, he screamed, he spat, but when his father gave him that certain look he would tone down for the cameras and even look angelic. While the photographers were getting a shot of the mayor and Mrs. Schwartz shaking hands, the kid got tired of riding Pegasus and announced in a very loud voice that he was going to ride the bull. What a cute idea! said Mrs. Schwartz. What a great shot! said the photographer. Be careful! said his mother. Why not? said his father.

I could have stopped it. I could have told them that the bull was behaving normally that day and that a normal bull can only take so much. But I was high at the time and I figured why not? too so I just sat back and watched the kid jump over the stall fence and pull at the bull's skin. I just sat back and watched the bull put his horns through the likeness of himself on the kid's chest and push him into the wall. I couldn't even turn away.

The doctors were able to close up the kid's chest with sixty stitches and the kid surprised everybody by pulling through, but his father still brought out the

sympathy vote to win the election. The doctors weren't able to restore Mrs. Schwartz's heart to what it once was, which didn't surprise anybody. She was forced to retire to a wheelchair and had to stop collecting the rent checks personally. Leo and the mayor tried to bring somebody in to shoot the bull but the Humane Society (alias the Board of Health) dug up an old ordinance prohibiting the slaughter of livestock within the town limits. So the bull was abruptly sent back to his owner who sent letters of condolence to Mrs. Schwartz and the mayor. And now the bull is undoubtedly kicking up dirt in some beautifully green pasture and waiting, just waiting for some other little bastard to come pulling at his skin.

Leo threw out all the remaining bull decals and cancelled his order for another thousand. He was sure he could have sold them and more but, as he pointed out, money isn't everything.

And I packed my one suitcase, said goodbye forever, Paradise Island N.J., and spent the rest of my summer in the park at 14th and Vespucci.

(This story is part of a collection of short stories, unfinished and as yet untitled.)

Kate Callen

POST MORTEM

He hadn't recalled it for years, but something in the letters, he didn't know what, brought the scene suddenly before him. There could be no doubt; as if by magic, his memory was purged, verisimilar to the last detail. He was seated at his father's table, eating as he had been taught to eat, when his father, a left-handed novelist, exclaimed, "My God, I didn't know you were left-handed." The boy was too confused to answer; after a moment of silence, the third member of the party, a tall, thin woman who was living with his father at the time, explained impatiently, almost scornfully, that the child was only eating in the regular English fashion, fork in left hand, and was in all probability right-handed. The son confirmed this and the father resumed his meal.

Joel Littoman, the father, had died six months ago, entrusting his literary estate to his son Henry, who now sat before a thick pile of the author's letters. He looked through the window at the English countryside, overcast but alive, and thought over the longforgotten scene. Olive Littoman, the writer's second wife, was expected shortly and Henry looked forward to receiving from her the manuscript of his father's last novel, which he had described in a letter as a slight variation on his usual mode, "something different" but "essentially the same". So the visit was a simple, affectionate, and practical mission, and it could only be all three in a relationship unthreatened by conflict. They had shared the dead man's love, no other bond was needed. But Henry had to admit it was a strange one, without regulatory precedent: one had to feel one's way through it, nurse it with care, conduct it by instinct. In the long run, it had proved much easier than he had expected.

They always had little to say about his mother, an Englishwoman Joel had married in his early twenties. He had been spending a year in London, aborting story after story, miserable in his back-water bed-sit. Affluent friends introduced him to the even more affluent woman who became, for six devastating months, his first wife. At the end of this period, the American had come to associate his spouse with everything that appalled him in English life. Cursing the island and its inhabitants, proclaiming them a host of provincials, he fled back to the mountainous, impoverished state he warned himself never to abandon again. The annulment of the marriage which followed his flight did nothing, however, to disrupt the process by which, seven months later, Henry Littoman was born amidst the comforts of his maternal grandfather's country house.

In later years, his mother became involved in psychoanalysis and therapy groups. She explained to her son that his father had been a sexual brute, and held him responsible for the years of unhappiness that followed their separation. One source of irritation during those years, Henry suspected, was that Joel Littoman had no intention of visiting upon his son the disregard he reserved for his former wife. From the first, Joel had asserted all his parental prerogatives. He demanded a place in the boy's life and the enraged mother found herself compelled to acquiesce. Secretly, she was pleased to saddle Joel with the boy

every so often. She would, thereby, with one stroke, punish the egotistical bastard and give herself a much deserved relief.

But for Joel nothing could less resemble punishment. And for his son the annual visits were occasions set apart from the rest of the year by far more than the differences in landscape and climate. Henry could remember catching sight of his father for the first time after nearly a year's separation: Joel had stopped in his tracks, placed his hands on his hips, and leaned back as if to allow his incipient grin every chance to worm and furrow across the broad plain of his face. He was a large, barrel-chested man with his sleeves habitually rolled up over his elbows, which Henry thought of as veritable knots of bone and muscle. It was the grin he remembered especially, for it told him the one thing he never doubted about his father: his pleasure in having a son. In glum moods he often thought Joel would have found equal joy in any son, that it was only his father's temperament, and not himself, that generated the enthusiasm of their reunions. But this qualm was invariably crushed by the author's large embrace; and the silence and the awkwardness which ensued were filled out with smiles and clasps on the back that Henry knew were saved especially for him. At such moments there was confusion on both sides, not simply as to 'where should we begin', but more importantly 'where were we when we saw each other last'. It was difficult for Joel to keep close track of Henry's development. At various times he would treat Henry as if he were older or younger than he actually was, as if he comprehended more or less than he actually did. And because of this, the father's dealings with the son assumed a humbly experimental tone. To each paternal injunction he seemed to add the caveat, 'if in fact that's the right thing to tell someone of your age, of your intelligence, to do'; and Henry understood the reasons for this confusion and welcomed it as a positive relief from his mother's unrelenting supervision.

The novelist's ignorance gave his son a special freedom. If he behaved childishly, Joel's reluctance to exercise authority would leave him in peace; if he demonstrated suprising maturity, Joel's serious sensibility would be deeply impressed. And yet the son came to know of these reactions only belatedly, obliquely, if at all. For Joel was too preoccupied with his work and his land to devote himself full-time to the arduous study of what his child knew and did not know, felt and did not feel. He had purchased an abandoned farm in the mountains, and never passed a day without surveying its grounds and noting the progress of the seasons. This pattern admitted few disruptions—Henry himself being the most predictably periodic. Not that the father in the least resented the son's intrusions. On the contrary, Joel had found Henry a most receptive child; he could be integrated into the writer's routine, taught to enjoy the long walks and silent evenings. From the earliest visits, they found each other easy company. And yet this very easiness, like the paternal ignorance which sponsored Henry's special freedom, was rooted in the distance that separated father from son. So there was confusion in their meetings as well as joy, but though one damped the other, neither was ever completely extinguished.

From an early age, it had been apparent that Henry would inherit his father's bulk. His thick wrists and arms, large, round head, and broad torso contrasted—at times painfully—with the meagre frames of his schoolmates. Nonetheless, he liked the public school his mother had chosen for him; he received its highest marks and was admired by his fellow students. Like most of them, he both hated and prized his lot: schoolwork seemed the merest drudgery, and yet an academic success was esteemed beyond any other. The one thing that Henry did not share with them was his American father. And his size somehow represented this distinction: by the time he was thirteen, Henry towered over his mother.

It was around this time that he developed an interest in ghost stories, Gothic tales, narratives of the occult and grotesque. Beckford, Monk, Lewes, Poe, Machen, M.R. James, Blackwood, Lovecraft filled his shelves and his spare time. When on his next visit Joel found him reading his way through piles of corpses, madmen, and ruined abbeys, he grew concerned. Henry asked him if he disapproved of his reading. The novelist meditated silently for a few minutes. Henry, however, felt no anxiety; he was quite used to the phenomenon, and his father's silences were never ominous or oppressive. They were, at least to him, simple blanks.

"That's all very English, you know", he replied at length. "All that moribund creepiness. I suppose that's why I've always shied away from it. Now you read what you want," he leaned forward, "you read what pleases you. But I ought to tell you that I think this stuff is about as far removed from serious literature as you can get. Detectives, spies, soldiers, prostitutes, even science fiction's closer to the real thing. What are these stories about anyway? What kind of conflict do they portray?" He paused to observe, for a moment, the comprehension that shone like light from his son's face. "I dislike these stories, you see, not because they deal with purely imaginary events, not because of their fantastic nature, but because—ultimately—they concern themselves with only one phenomenon, death, which engulfs their imaginations so entirely they have no room left over for the issues that ought to preoccupy the survivors. For these writers, death is an obsession *and* a distraction. A kind of laziness, a failure to apply themselves to the examination of the daylight world, which passes itself off as a compulsive or fuminative quest. I would never write a ghost story, and seamy as my stuff can be, it's always something more than macabre. Historically, that sort of fiction is always *after*—sometimes after other writers have utilized the existing realistic material, or after the tensions that make a society productive have slackened, or simply (in the case of Poe and Lovecraft) after the man has given up his hopes, his life, himself. That's why they lack conflict; everything's already settled, one way or another, so an artificial form of conflict has to be invented. And thinking to draw upon the most primeval fears, the most ancient responses, they trump up these sophisticated, false and flimsy phantoms, things that would leave a primitive tribesman cold. Which is not to say that they leave *me* cold. On the contrary, I just object to the way they generate their heat. I finish a story like that and I feel profoundly cheated. I feel as if I were being pampered,

condescended to. But you read what you want. You come to your own conclusions."

Henry couldn't remember the first time he'd read any of his father's writing. It had always been around the house, and he had inherited from his mother the habit of voracious and almost indiscriminate reading. But the day he finished the first one of his father's books he had been able to read before publication was one he could never forget. A review copy arrived on Wednesday and sometime Friday night he savoured its last sentence, a perfect sentence, and filled with a strange sense of contemporaneity, of having caught up, he promptly composed a brief, enthusiastic letter to his father. Reading it over the next morning, he was seized with trepidation. Who was he to offer praise, to extend congratulations? His father's books were reviewed by every major publication in the English-speaking world; he received personal notes of admiration and appreciation from fellow writers, leading intellectuals, renowned critics. How would a few eager words from a son who slept on the other side of the ocean be received in the midst of all his panegyric? He cursed himself as the answer fell upon him with accusatory clarity: Joel Littoman would read his son's letter with deep emotion. He would be pleased and proud. He would be proud of his son's devotion and comprehension. He would write back immediately—just a few sentences, that was all his letters ever were, keeping Henry up to date with the state of the American seasons, curious events in the lives of his rural neighbors, greetings from family friends to his English son, and he would mention briefly how glad he was that Henry liked his book. As Henry foresaw all this he became furious with himself: why had he entertained, even for a moment, such a degraded image of his father? And what was the source of that trepidation which had seized him—directly in the wake of this novel feeling, this sense of having, at last, caught up?

Joel was never a truly popular writer. Despite his insistent use of the most rugged vernacular, he remained an acquired taste, his ironies too dead-pan and his implications too morose for common consumption. Nevertheless, the regularity with which he published his tales, and the candor with which they told of the reactionary, ill-used, and spiteful people of his rural homeground had won him a consistent and appreciative following. This was a source of considerable pride for Henry, who was nonetheless careful never to mention the subject first. If someone asked him, if the topic was under general discussion, he would be happy to offer what knowledge he had. But he obeyed with silent rectitude the rule he had formulated for himself, never to speak openly of his father's personal life and habits. This made his current task of preparing the author's letters for publication all the more difficult. The process of retrieving forty-five years of correspondence was not itself the problem; it had required little more than a patient thoroughness that came naturally to Henry. Far more perplexing was his present assignment: Henry had decided, with Olive, to offer to the public only those portions of the letters in some way relevant to his father's literary activities. Of course, if the book was strictly limited to explicit references it would be a slim volume indeed. But there remained a vast, shaded

area of Joel's correspondence that could be seen as of interest to the public, and was yet not directly a reflection upon his work. People were naturally inquisitive as to his domestic life and personal fortunes, and Henry meant to give them as clear a picture of these things as he possibly could, but he had no intention of letting the veils fall from any of the family intimacies—these were mysterious things to him even now, and there was no way the public could accurately conceive of them.

Any yet they could never appreciate the quality of his father's life without some knowledge of this kind. So Henry found himself obliged to create from the mass of documentation he had gathered a portrait of his father that was veracious, yet of necessity incomplete. He was at once the least and most qualified individual for the job. A superficial view would reveal that in his person he coupled the most immediate, unchallengeable access to the relevant papers with the most unscholarly sort of involvement. This analysis of the situation had been his own when he began the job—heedless of Olive's plea for professional, i.e. academic, assistance. But as his work proceeded—the initial stage had gone without a hitch—he came to think otherwise. The peculiarity of his task lay not in his double role of scholar and son, but in a duplicity underlying both. It was an assumption—almost impossible to articulate—that he knew he shared with others, that was somehow endemic to the way in which people viewed the scruffy, unwieldy unit known as 'a life'. When he thought of this, feeling the day grow colder and clouds gather for rain, two contrasting images suggested themselves to him. In one, a young writer bent on denying posterity access to his private life, destroys his every jotted note and letter. Decades later, he spends his bitter nights longing for a memento of his ambitious youth, lamenting his belief that posterity could ever muster an interest in himself equal to his own. In the second image, a successful novelist acquires the habit of preserving, with date and occasion noted, every scrap of correspondence, every stray memorandum. Late in the afternoon, he quietly envisions a handsome, posthumous edition of the previously unpublished papers. But the son knew that, unlike these figmentary tamperers with time, Joel Littoman gave little thought to the state of his reputation after death. During his active years, he had regarded his small but devoted audience with an uneasy mixture of suspicion and delight, in keeping with his pessimistic yet good-natured view of things. Like most people, he preserved his correspondence haphazardly: misplacing a letter from a renowned colleague, carefully filing a podiatrist's bill. Therein lay the duplicity of Henry's task: he, more than anyone, knew how impossible it was to transform his father's life into one of his own novels. And this was how the volume of letters would inevitably be read. Yet, though the body had greatly deteriorated, the inquest must be completed. And he had no one to blame but himself for having a coroner's perspective thus awkwardly thrust upon him.

He now confined himself in the view that this perspective was neither better nor worse, for the moment, than any other. Close-up or far away, under the laboratory lights or in utter darkness—it made little difference. Originally, he had told himself that the son would be an invaluable aid to the scholar and the

scholar might even have something to give to the son. But he had come to regard them both, even in alliance, as altogether out of luck. The fact that he now freshly apprehended was that no one's private life could be systematized. There was no way to segregate the significant from the insignificant. The accumulation of detail presented itself as an untidy heap—and even its outline, the boundary where it passed into the public eye, was impossible to discern.

He had however, an unshakeable faith in Olive's understanding of the way to present his father to the public. This, along with the delivery of the last manuscript, accounted for the impatience with which he, now, awaited her arrival. As he tried to formulate an explanation of his quandaries and scruples that would place his problem clearly before her, he recalled the time when his faith in her judgment had been nurtured and confirmed. He thought it odd that, when a moment before he had been musing on the inadequacy of our memorials to the dead, he should now be almost shocked by the vividness, the completeness with which he recalled the distant episode. He had decided the previous autumn to go to an English university, and for all intents and purposes to make his home in England. He knew this was a disappointment to his father, so he planned to make his visit the next summer longer than usual. When he stepped off the plane, there was Olive—twenty years younger than his father and three years older than himself.

He was immediately annoyed with himself for feeling so uncomfortable. He had never talked much with his father about women, perhaps because, as a by no means sedentary divorcee, the father was as eligible and probably more active than the son. This remained, for many reasons, an awkward fact for them both, and they found it best to avoid the subject altogether. What did either stand to gain from a discussion on this head? When he saw Olive, his first thoughts were of the women in his father's books: frustrated, angry, unsubtle women who dwarfed their husbands and lovers. But Olive, he quickly realized, was something else entirely. For one thing, she was extraordinarily beautiful—and Henry's eyes darted from her form to his father's face in embarrassment.

His irritation with himself mounted as their first evening wore on; he sensed his vision of his father being sickened and warped by his own crude awe: surely this was a triumph for Joel! To have attracted a woman of such beauty and such youth—Henry withered as the hours passed. For it became apparent that Olive was an exceptionally wise and beautiful woman; he noted that while his father's previous mates had always seemed afraid to contradict or eager to scold, Olive was quite beyond either. She and Joel engaged in their spare, deliberate exchanges with the certitude of people who share an understanding that could never be spoken. They were different from each other in countless ways, and Henry was to wonder often how they had been drawn together in the first place. He could understand how, after that, a workable relation might emerge, but it was their initial alliance, their having passed from acquaintance to intimacy at all, that puzzled him.

These certainties and questions formed themselves slowly in Henry's mind during the first few days. But for the time being, he permitted them to rest in

abeyance; his more immediate concern was establishing an easy relationship with Olive and re-establishing the peculiar form of intimacy he had come to enjoy with his father. The problem was that the two efforts did not coincide. It appeared that to make progress in one would be to retard the other. Most of Joel's friends wanted to know 'all about him'; they were cordial but inveterate interviewers: did he like America? did he read his father's books? did he enjoy the local hick color? did he mind having to cross an ocean to see his dad? did he consider himself English or American? To all of these he answered politely, giving his replies an air of completeness that never belied the guarded reserve that was his real response, Olive, on the other hand, let him know right away that it would be strictly up to him to supply the relevant information. She did not want to know 'all about him'; she wanted, simply and uncompromisingly, to know him. Hers was a demanding curiosity. And Henry realized that in her own subtle way, she was fiercely prying. He marveled at the number of ways she found to let him know what she wanted. If Joel was working in the morning, she would insist that Henry accompany her on a shopping excursion to the nearest village. There Henry would follow her from store to store, intensely aware that most people took them for a young couple, and that most of these same people wondered what such a beautiful woman was doing with a guy like him. And making the situation at once more difficult and shockingly easy was Olive's own calculated indifference. She acted as if she were unaware that there could be any awkward mistakes and yet somehow made him feel that she knew exactly what was going through his mind. In this way, she seemed to tell him: yes, there are some embarrassing ironies in our relationship, but I'm not going to pamper you by talking them out, getting them on the table, easing the tension with a humorous remark. If we're to know each other just as we are we have to learn to regard the confusion and the tension not as something separate from us and therefore quickly and artificially remedied, but as something which we can only live through and go beyond; eventually, the confusion and the tension will die a little-noticed death. It was an immense demand, and Henry alternately shrank from and rose to its challenge.

One of her favourite tactics was to ask—in Joel's presence—Henry's opinions on or reactions to a subject, usually English, of which she knew Joel was ignorant. This at one stroke made him the centre of attention and gave him the freedom to answer without fear of incurring contradiction or, worse yet, earning approval. His initial response was to squirm under the glare of the spotlight, which neither surprised nor embarrassed his father who was still only remotely cognisant of his age and state of development. But again Olive refused to acknowledge the possibility of his embarrassment, and attended to his half-felt, incomplete answers as if they were his deepest conjectures. She would briskly nod her comprehension, or stare into space thoughtfully, as if deliberating over the implications of his statements. And it was by insisting upon this deliberate tone, by consistently taking only part of his answer—the honest, unembarrassed kernel of sentiment—into account, that she gradually created for Henry a clearing in which to move, an arena in which self-expression could be at once deliberate and spontaneous. She permitted him to think aloud.

As Henry's discomfort eased, aspects of his personality appeared that took his father by surprise. Nothing in Joel's previous acquaintance with his son prepared him for the genial, quietly amusing Englishman who now walked about the house. His old ignorance of his son was soon replaced by an inability quite to grasp and utilize his new knowledge. So as one gap closed another opened, but neither the father nor the son despaired. Olive's manoeuvres had not been intended to disentangle the confusion and the joy which had for years made up the relationship; they had only balanced and somehow leavened the mixture, establishing Henry in a more advantageous position and startling Joel by eliciting more from his son in a few weeks than in the preceding seventeen years. Joel was no more guilty of complacency than Henry was of excessive restraint, but it was now, according to some ineluctable ironic law, his turn to suffer embarrassment. The pride he took in the intelligence of Henry's conversation, the carefulness and originality of his observations, was itself a barrier between them. He was, moreover, forced to admit to himself that he found Henry's *Englishness*—his understated, helpful tone—positively likeable. And to discover that the influence he had feared most had proved, at least in this respect, beneficent, caused him to wonder at himself. When an English turn of phrase fell from his son's lips, the struggle between admiration and alienation that would ensue was obvious to all.

This situation would have upset Henry more had it not been for the pleasure he had come to take in Olive's company. She listened so well, seemed so intrigued by his thoughts and experiences. He was ashamed of himself for knowing so little about her life while she knew so much of his, but he was afraid to ask questions which he was sure would sound strained and artificial in the present context. How could he avoid the subject of her liaison with his father, which he felt he must avoid, and still learn anything of consequence about her? It only further shamed him that she had delved without inhibition into the details of his life without once asking about his mother.

He developed the habit of following her around the house as she cleaned, straightened, and cooked, occasionally lending a hand, but mostly just talking away about anything from the upcoming American election to the climactic apparition in a favorite horror story. She would interrupt him to bitch over a clogged drain or invite him to admire some rare feature of the old house; but she had an unfailing ability to re-establish the original line of discourse as if there had been no digression at all. This technique so struck Henry that he could no longer continue his discussion; a self-conscious sense that he was being listened to too closely, that he was making a spectacle of the drivel that ran through his brain as a matter of course, made him draw back. But only for the moment. Olive demanded nothing less than a whole-hearted performance; and Henry could have never offered her this had he not apprehended that the particular note she demanded was that of the performance not being for her benefit. And this manner of auditing her friends (for so Henry counted himself) made sense when it was understood that her relentless curiosity went hand in hand with an equally relentless, yet virtually invisible discretion.

This was a cornerstone of her character—Henry grasped it, almost as a guiding principle, one afternoon when the two of them ventured into the mountain woods on a raspberry hunt. Joel and Henry, it had been revealed at dinner the evening before, shared a passion for home-made jams, and Olive had learned the dying art from her mother as a child. The day was clear and cold, an atmosphere that pricked Henry into taking solemn, bewildered notice that he was, after all, in America. It was a fact he tended to overlook in the midst of the visits which he conceived of, without protest or question, as a family duty. The mountain climate asserted itself today with a vigor and keenness that no one, not even the jaded locals, could fail to appreciate. They gathered enough raspberries to keep them in jam for the winter, found their way to an unpaved road that would eventually lead them home, and entered into a discussion of the relative merits of English versus American countryside. He was wondering why, in the midst of all this American beauty, he should find it necessary to hold forth on the gloomy splendours of the English moors, when Olive quoted something a friend of hers had said about the New Forest. It was several minutes before Henry located the source of his befuddlement over the remark. It was, he realized, the first time he had heard her repeat a story involving someone else, a third person, a voiceless absentee. It was also the closest he had ever heard her come to gossiping, and even still it seemed a far cry from that. She must have observed that he was now only half-listening to her, for she brought her conversation to an abrupt halt. He swiped a glance at her that revealed a young and handsome woman, his own age and yet much older, fixing a pair of serious, impatient eyes on the dry ground.

Returning his own eyes to the coarse foliage spilling over the roadside, he considered the significance of what he had just seen and heard. There was no question about it: Olive, to his surprise, was an unfathomably discreet person. Not like his mother, who appeared sensitively discreet until you knew her well, when even the most entrenched bastions of privacy yielded to her siege—indeed, she made a habit of unhesitatingly repeating to her attentive son every curious intimacy that came her way. No, Olive's discretion functioned in a manner directly opposite. It was only when you knew her well—was Henry getting to know her well? He corrected himself: it was only when she knew *you* well that limits of her confidence became apparent. But what was so excellent in this trait, he realized, was that you knew you were safe with her. And now Henry knew he was safe with her. He also explained to himself that it was his own habitual disinclination to look anyone directly in the face that had prevented him from noticing, until now, that he shared this nervous habit, which he disliked being reminded of, with (of all people) Olive.

That night, after lying in bed for hours, he began to masturbate. He was tired from the walk and yet he could not sleep. He had thought of his father and of Olive, and then of his talk with her that morning, and then of her clear beauty, those features that opened into such deep wells of discretion. He could not help it that this image eventually became a part of his solitary act, and a sickened groan passed through his lips as he fell asleep.

He left the house with his father early the next morning, quickly falling into a brisk, regular pace that would carry them all the way to the white-shingled little town and back by mid-afternoon. Henry prized these excursions, not least because he knew his father enjoyed them as well. Some passed in almost complete silence; others were filled with the good family talk for which there was no substitute—even if their family was a muddled, torn affair. On this occasion, however, Henry seemed unable either to speak out fully or remain silent: and this, he observed to himself, was the certain mark of the guilty man. He could not bear the idea of squandering any chance of sharing thoughts with his father, and kept trying to organize the choicest of his recent observations into a semblance of coherent form. But the effort yielded only furtive stretches of verbal foot-shuffling.

What was making it so difficult was his father's recently-adopted habit of attending to everything he said with the utmost seriousness, as if a more scrupulous reading would provide a cipher for the familiar text. He seemed to expect, at any moment, some special divulgence that would account for the strange, new son Olive had unveiled for him. This time he was making sure that nothing would escape him. Not the slightest nuance, the faintest fragment of a sentence would pass—he seemed to have vowed—unappreciated. Not surprisingly, the knowledge that he was 'being appreciated' only compounded Henry's frustration. But the core of the frustration, he was resolved to overcome it.

Joel was explaining that a friend of his (Henry had known him for years) had just published his first book in a decade; it was an absolutely loathsome novel whose protagonist was a tortured nineteenth century physician who spent his nights performing illicit abortions. The bulk of the writing consisted of remorselessly detailed accounts of the operations—some of the most pointlessly vile images Joel had ever encountered in prose. It was not disgusting so much as purely excessive; you could see that the author—and Joel noted that his personal knowledge confirmed this—actually enjoyed the dreadful ceremony, the way some people like to pick scabs. And how could he expect it to terrify or punish the reader when it was so obviously a pleasurable indulgence for himself? The book wound up being irksome rather than shocking, and Joel had no patience for the sort of writing that paraded its unflinchingness so patiently. Such a posture lacked credibility; you have to flinch sometime if you want to keep seeing clearly.

Henry agreed and hoped the old friend would never ask him if he had read the book. But he was surprised to hear his father talk about the value of the occasional flinch. To Henry, Joel's stories had always seemed the repositories of the most unpleasant, unredeemed facts of human life. They were built around the sort of truths that one vainly wished could be denied. He made a quick joke about the contradiction which Joel seemed only to comprehend in part. Dropping the subject would be admitting defeat, so he obliged himself to keep talking, only to find himself rambling through a loose sequence of observations on his father's books. There was that vignette in the last one—it read almost like an interpolated episode—of a black family crippled and enfeebled by the

mercury that had polluted the flesh of their two hogs. There was no flinching in that; but it was only an episode within a more generally subdued context: it was a ghastly image that commented upon the more obscure but equally appalling ghastliness of the main story. So perhaps the principle of the occasional flinch had been obeyed after all. On the other hand, there was that novel he had written years ago, when he first came back to the States, about an American who has inexplicably raped a child while on holiday in France, and returns home to contribute his own self-torment to the general social torment surrounding him. Henry explained enthusiastically that whenever he told people about that particular book they always said it sounded awful; and it was, he admitted, hard to believe that such a simple design could yield such a subtle and satisfying book. The relentlessness with which the protagonist gathered evidence and constructed arguments against himself, his refusal to admit any extenuating circumstance, was utterly convincing. And his desperate attempt to conceal all this from his friends and neighbors—that was the damning stroke. To know that you were evil and that because of this your hand would shake, and that such a horrible thing, such a palsied trembling, could actually be seen!—

“But one mustn’t believe that,” Joel had been gathering in every word, listening and analyzing what he heard with a concentration that, Henry now saw, had caused two deeply indented parallel lines to appear between his brows. “One mustn’t believe that one is evil, is a devil. I know that it’s possible to scrutinize one’s actions until they seem the source of every confusion and harm within reach, but to place any faith in that kind of self-observation is fundamentally wrong-headed. By endlessly poring over one’s motives—and they are as irrecoverable as any summer’s day—we wind up overlooking the real vehicle of harm, of guilt, of failure: the act itself, the living irony.” Joel stood back from Henry, and delivered the last of his words in a deliberately pedagogic strain. “The world is a locus of exchange, and there’s no exchange without deceit. So the motivation is never enough to harm others, but the performance invariably is.”

Six months later Henry was not surprised to learn that Joel and Olive were soon to be married. The ceremony was to be held on the farm, where they would remain for their honeymoon and where they would afterwards resume their daily chores. Henry felt very clear and very pleased about the whole thing. The intervals between his visits to America became longer and less predictable. He filled them with the activities and feelings which henceforth became the substance of his life. Strangely, as his meetings with his father grew less frequent, their correspondence blossomed, assuming the regularity and amplitude it had always conspicuously lacked. Henry was sure Olive should receive credit for this development: she gave Joel the continuity he needed to order and rationalize his feelings, and thereby created the framework within which he could communicate the issues of his daily life to his distant son. There was neither stagnation nor sudden change. His letters grew relaxed in tone and ever more crammed with anecdotes and observations. Henry, in turn, found them much easier to answer than the old abbreviated scraps. Since Joel’s letters were no longer memorials of

specific occasions, and since they rarely asked or answered specific questions, Henry was free to respond at leisure without reference to any previous correspondence. Each took it upon himself to keep the other up to date; and the enormity of the distance that separated them made it easier to select the details they wanted to narrate, and the large developments they wanted only to summarize.

Henry continued to enjoy his father's books, and his aerogrammes often carried long, minutely scripted commentaries: appreciations and questions, elucidations that Joel did not hesitate to place before friends as examples of his son's special gifts of penetration. Henry also provided Joel with reports of the reception of his work in England, and of the vagaries of his reputation among the London literary crowd. Joel enjoyed the idea that he had a son serving as his 'eye' in England, and in return he kept Henry well informed as to the inception and progress of his newest writings. Along with descriptions of the problems he had encountered and the obstacles he had overcome in the creation of a given story or novel, he would enclose ample accounts of the renovations he had at last undertaken in the old farm house, of mountain drives and two-week trips to Canada, and always a word of love from Olive. It was this horde of scrawled treasure that comprised most of the book he was now assembling. And yet to share this with the world! There seemed to Henry little gain to balance with his loss.

He now heard Olive Littoman park her rented Volkswagen in the driveway of his rented summer cottage. As she stepped out and slammed the door behind her, the clouds broke into the rain which they had been threatening since the night before. Henry had only begun to bring her into focus when she walked through the doorway and kissed him on the cheek. They agreed they were glad to see each other and sat down on opposite sides of the fire Henry had been alternately tending and neglecting all day. She said the sound of rain, indoors, in a country house, reminded her of the farm. Henry asked how the last week in London had gone and whether she had looked up any of the people whose names he had given her.

The last three or four days, she replied, had been wonderful, but she hoped he wouldn't be hurt that she hadn't phoned anyone. She had never been in a foreign city by herself before, and had discovered that—once you adjusted to the freedom and loneliness—the pleasures and surprises to be had were enormous. London, she averred to Henry, was even now a city of infinite charm, and the English, despite all of Joel's forewarnings, had proved very kind.

Henry was pleased to find her so relaxed; she might, he offered, consider coming back to London in the spring. She could rent a flat, and stay for as long as six months. It took you at least that long to get to know the city and the change in environment would surely be good for her. He noted silently, as he had every day for the last six months, that if *he* found it difficult to imagine her living anywhere but on the farm with his father, how much more impossible must it seem to her; and how much more intimately she must know the grief that he had come to regard as a sullen house-guest whom he had not the fortitude to dismiss.

He told her of the troubles that threatened to arrest his work on the letters, and heard himself, with disquiet, adumbrate the problems he faced, in the fine critical manner he had mastered as a youth. He had needed then a way of talking about books with casual intelligence; but he could no longer listen to his own familiar tones with equanimity. There was no question about it: he had a talent for the neat discrimination. But at heart he did not want to discriminate, he wanted to take it all in regardless and wait for the sorting and analyzing to happen by themselves.

"Ah, you see," said Olive, "we should have gotten a professional. It's too great a strain on you."

"What about the novel? Have you thought anymore about what you're going to do with it?" She had been reluctant to read through the unpublished manuscript after Joel's death, and Henry had not pressed her: there was plenty of time for posthumous publication. But on her own initiative she had brought it to London and there, over the past two weeks, read it for the first time.

She ruffled through the bag she had dragged in from the car, and at length pulled out a thick sheaf of lightly typed paper. He saw that her face was still wet from the rain, and its beauty moved him profoundly. He liked her so much he thought his heart would break.

"You're going to be very pleased with it."

He received the manuscript out of her hands. On the cover was typed: 'Every house is haunted', which, after considering for a moment, Henry realized was the title of his father's final work.

Michael Marqusee



Sylvie Steber

CANON
for
Voices & Continuo

Blackout. Rustlings and coughings from stage. Twenty seconds silence. Yellow-white lights slowly come up, revealing chairs #'s 1,2,3 as follows: #1 & #2 downstage right and left, facing slightly away from each other; #3 is four or five feet upstage, closer to #2. The stage is covered with rubbish and litter of all sorts. ALAN is found sitting on #1, fiddling with a cigarette; BETH on #2, doing up the last of her buttons on her blouse. #3 remains empty for the duration of the piece. ALAN and BETH are in their late forties, informally dressed.

Silence

ALAN

Someone's always accusing me of that. I'm in no position to argue about it . . . oozing all about the place, not even a face there I'm afraid . . . a few words perhaps, I remember a few words, that's certain, a blue dress like a flower—something about a flower—was that you?

Pause

Perhaps we went for a walk one day, picked flowers—might that be it? In a garden, it might have had walls, or hedges even, a gardener trimming the hedges with shears, looking up and saying, good afternoon Sir, lovely day, just right for picking blue flowers, and then we did, that might be it, and then I would have said, well look at that! or, I'll be damned! One of those things, and you said, Alan, you're right, it does match the dress, precisely the same colour. Hah! So it did. I might have happened some Sunday, a few weeks after I first met you at someone's house. Or—

Pause

In a botanical garden. A friend who studies plants and said, Alan, you've got to see this, the rarest flower, blue like a dove. And he would have been right . . . later, if it was you, I would have remarked on the similarity of hue to your dress. You *were* pleased! Alan, you said, just the right shade! Where on earth did you get it?

Pause

Even if it was someone else, I might have taken that walk, or spoken with a friend, I suppose . . . what else.

Pause

I'm trying, you can see that, can't you? I'm not sure—I don't know why this is so important. Perhaps you'd rather I started somewhere else. Give me a hint.

Pause

Just a little clue.

Pause

Well perhaps I do know a botanist—I mean, why bring him up at all? Is that what you mean? I don't know anything about botany, growing things, I'm sure of

that. Cells, saps, muscular trees. Roots. All that sort of thing. Don't know a bit about it. Osmosis, membranes, veils, diaphonous seeds; glutimate leaves.

Long pause

BETH

The parting in the forest. Goodbye Harry, I said. I will never forget you. After all these years. I shall try to live without you.

ALAN

That might have been his name: Harry. Harry. Hurry up harried Harry, hup-hup! Ha. No. I don't think so. It would have been Geoffrey, or Michael, something like that, not Harry. Harry would be a journalist for some Liverpool rag—a one-room apartment, screws, television tubes and oiled rags lying all about the floor. Electronic magazines and half-finished eggs on the sofa, bits of milky toast waiting for the pigeons on the sill—something like that. Owning perhaps a Cashmere jersey, a grey one, with holes in the elbows, yes. Wouldn't know a bloody thing about dresses or flowers—I think we can take that as given. Not a bloody thing. Plays tennis too. In fact, he's rather good at the game, has a tendency to beat people at it, normally. Poor bastard's going bald though. *(Reaches up to stroke hair)* A good head there. Not in the genes you know—I'll die with a good clump of white hair, no fear about that.

Pause

In fact, I'd feel rather foolish coming in front of Harry with a ruddy flower in my hand saying, have a look at this, ever seen this before? Alan, he'd say, don't be a fool. Come have a drink. And off we'd go for a bit of sausage and a pint, not too much, but enough. Look, he'd say, either eat that mongrel weed, or chuck it. I can't go about with you carrying that shriveled bit of pathos, can't do it. Harry, I say, you're right.

Pause

That could take place before or after I showed it to you.

Pause

Who the hell is Harry. *(Louder)* Who the hell is Harry?

BETH

Years and years.

Pause

I snuggled up under your arm at night. I remember that. Such a strong man. At the sea-side, with the sun sea-glinting on your face, you made me what I am. I thought about you all the time at work, everyone knew you were seeing me, they all asked what I did Sundays—I was with Harry, I'd say, and they all knew. *(Turns to #3 and smiles, slowly turns back)* Rhoda said I came back from weekends with a flush on my face, all rosy-like and glowing, and she said that gave it all away. I'd protest, of course, couldn't let too much be known—but I didn't deny it. Well, maybe you're right and maybe you're wrong I'd say, and leave it at that.

Pause

There've been others, but I told you, I told you everything, none were like you, you were my own true love always. But sometimes—

Pause

Sometimes you were so hard, as if I weren't there at all.

Long pause

ALAN

I don't give a damn about that. (*Snaps his fingers*) Like that, that's what it means.

Pause

I suppose it might have been someone else. I never seriously considered that. An Ellen, or Liz, or Jane, something like that. Ellen. What ho! Look here Ellen, matches your dress. Something like that. Brown hair, spectacles came off when she wanted to kiss me. Black hair between her legs. Does that mean she dyed her hair on top? I don't think I would have asked her, not really a proper question. Rather private that. I'd call her up after winning a spot on the football and say, Ellen me luv, you and I are going to a show! But Alan, she might say, I can't, mother's laid up, it's serious. Something to do with red cells, bones fit all wrong. Too bad, that's what I say, too bad. She won't kick off tonight, more's the pity, she'll be gasping and groaning when you get back—for god's sake take a bit of a break.

Pause

Grotesque, that's what it is. Bleeding guts everywhere for 'er to pick up, slopping oats into her cavernous gullet—that's no life for a pretty girl. Well. Alright she said, just this once. Just this once! I'll be buggered. I gave her the flower to wear for the show, a blue one, hand-picked in the garden. Stunning it was. Took off her specs right there and then in the trolley and—god's eyes! Could feel them bouncing all about underneath. Best thing I've ever done; could have won hundreds for all I know.

Pause

I might have lost, betting like that.

Pause

I don't take chances. You've to guard every penny, no reason to be an idiot and throw it away.

Long pause

The bit about the mother—don't remember anything about it. She might have died years and years before. Years and years before. It's a bit confusing all the same.

Pause

What the hell. No bra . . . I like that. (*Turns to #3*) I like that! Alright by me!

Pause (Turns back)

So few joys in life. Nothing wrong with enjoying those you've got, nothing wrong there. Can't sit back and say, what the hell, I can't do that, that's not proper— or think about the buggers slaving away in Afghanistan for your butter. Can't let it get in your way—or where would you be then? Hah. No fear.

Pause

I wonder what she's doing now. Always wanted to go back to Dublin, that's what she said. Selling hatpins in Dublin or dead. Can't be too sure. Lovely girl . . . wasn't she.

Long pause

BETH

I didn't mind it. You weren't always like that, cruel and mean.

Pause

At Jersey— at Jersey there was the oil painting, with clouds and hills and all, just like Scotland you said, I'll take you there next week—that was a good one—but I thought about it all the same, what it would be like, you and I on the train looking at shepherds and kilts.

Pause

I knew we wouldn't, not for a while at least, but I thought about it. A lovely room on the Jersey street, all that selling, little sailboats and straw dolls, walking through all the stalls on your arm with you saying things and buying the painting. I don't want a doll like that and you laughed—where everybody heard—when I said it wasn't real. Lovely Beth, you said, neither is the canvas . . . I don't know, paintings are different. Mountains like that, rolling fogs and shafts of light.

Pause

Mountains, you look at them and say to yourself, why, that's well done, like a photo . . . Dolls all sewn up together, little bits of extra straw sticking up all over, you look at it and what do you see? Well, what's the use of that.

Pause

It's so vivid! The postcards we brought back, I've saved them all Harry, pasted in my scrapbook with your letters when you went away, I've got them.

Long pause

You write very well you know. Telling me how you wanted me and missed me and you would be back Tuesday and could you come over to the flat even if it was late. Well, what could I say? I couldn't say no; I wanted to say yes.

Long pause

ALAN

I don't know any Ellen. Faceless nameless puckered machines. Everyone has a mother like that, red cells, all those private questions, ridiculous material. Don't remember any Ellen.

Pause

She did call me Alan though . . . I suppose it must have been— what—any number of years ago. It must have been at the sea. Yes, I think so. Pulling my name down from the shorecliffs, looking at me and saying, so softly, Alan. I must have told her about my gardening. The roots, bulbs, dead trees. Would you like to see my bulbs I asked.

BETH

When he knocked at my door and asked me again, I had to say yes.

Pause

Rotten weather he said. Beth can I come in for a cup'a. I took his coat and pullover with the holes in it and said sit down. Lor, I could barely stir the tea. Could barely stir it. Look what I've brought you he said.

Pause

ALAN

You can plant them either in the spring or autumn, it doesn't matter which, they'll grow either way. The bulbs. Versatile. (*Turns to #3*) They'll keep forever, don't worry about water or manure. When you're ready, shove them rootdown in the sod (*turns back*) and bingo. Four hundred year old plants in budding; give them the shock of their lives. No trouble there old girl.

Pause

All bloody colours. Red green gold, blue sometimes, or always, blue from Land's End to the Hebridies. Alan, she said, pulling the name across her sweet lips for me.

BETH

Little ivory elephants, you can keep them forever he said. Harry, Harry, they're beautiful. (*Turns to #3 and back*) Engraved with thin black lines and green eyes. You said I could wear them as earrings. I did. I wore them for you when we went out. Everyone saw them, Rhoda says they're lovely, and I had to tell her you gave them to me. In the drawer, I've still got them. Nestled in Kleenex.

ALAN

Would you like to see them I asked her. Wouldn't you like to see them.

BETH

All wraped up, I'd never lose them, you know that Harry, never.

ALAN

Here! Look all the colours you'd possibly need. Blue blue and blue, matches everything, goes with anything, no trouble there old girl, no trouble at all. Bloody hell. Mr. Cranston she finally called me. It's not *Cranston* at all. Never heard of him. Alan, *Alan* she said, whispering over the centuries-high cliffstone walls.

Pause

She whispered something over the sandfall dunes, the roaring of the breakers, I couldn't hear it, Alan, my love said, I couldn't hear it, talking in her sleep at sunbreak, who did she mean, speaking like that with words flowing from the lips, saying—

Long pause

BETH

Harry.

Pause

Years later I said goodbye, I shall try to live without you. (*Turns to #3 and back*) You see I have not forgotten you. On my blue walls I keep the oil painting with the thick white fogs. It was just like you—just like you to give it to me.

ALAN

It might have been anyone.

Long pause

I don't remember anything.

Long pause

BETH

Doing things together, talking like that while I smelt fish and salt on the wind. Your hand on my breast. I could hold your hand and count the freckles, kiss you for each one. Taking my fingers to your forehead and saying count those too. Such a sly grin. O you *were* the one.

Pause

Years and years.

Pause

ALAN

Where are the sandfall grains. The impressions of toes, shellfish, canvas stretched out over the crossbeams, catch the wind, whistle while you may. Who was speaking? Who was that? Rushing on the far flung marshes of the beach, the beach-head, the leaves springing back after my passage, around and around and around.

Pause

Ah no my pretty girl, once more and I'll kill you. Ah god no.

Pause

Have you forgotten me so soon.

Pause

Let me see, Mary Anne, the long locks curling, yes I know, coming to me with grains in your hair, spilling out over my bloody face. Watch out! Watch out! Get out there! Can't see a damn thing, out of me light.

Pause (ALAN breathing through his teeth)

Yeah, on the back with me face staring up into the seabreaker wind, crunch crunch someone's feet, wasn't that it, sure, sure.

Pause

Keep the eyes closed you fool, smells like chocolates, but I'm not moving, no fear there. Burnt chocolate or peppermint, one or the other, might have been Mary Anne crunching over the sandblasted fields, face in the sun like a kamakazie pilot, can't see a damn thing.

Pause

The shock of their lives.

Pause (Turns to #3 and back)

Jesus.

Pause

BETH

Framed in wood, I even put holes in the wall to hold it up, I didn't mind the plaster falling out. It's lovely and still, Harry—do you remember it? Buying it for me in Jersey?

Pause

I wore a dress for you, all my beautiful clothes, I wanted to be lovely for you . . . God, I was so excited, I wanted you to fall in love with me.

Pause

And later, later, I was afraid you would strike me, your hand on my breast . . . Sometimes, it's the end, I can't sit about and be battered like that forever, your mad ravings and all, it was a private thing with myself. Oh Harry, don't you see? All that time, all those years, and I thought—. As if I weren't there.

ALAN

You and your Liverpool flat. Bloody disgusting that's what I call it. Mary, Ellen, Jane whatever it was . . . *someone* had that dress, runs in the stockings . . . the slipshod lipstick . . . pathetic. No skin off my back, I'll tell you that right now I said, no skin off my back . . . I'm not going to waste my time explaining or remembering it, whatever.

Pause

BETH

And I thought—

ALAN

Bloody spunk. I could have woken up with me arm about her tit and I wouldn't have known her. She bloody well wouldn't know me. Well, I can say things, I've got that haven't I.

Pause

Sentences, the whole works, I can think can't I. She wanted me to hold her hand, filling a hole in the ground with putrid buds, that's what it is, what possible use, I ask you, I asked her. Matilda I said, don't bother me.

Pause

Let me be. For god's sake everyone will find out, Jamison and old George, wizened bastard, I'll never hear the end of it, no way out.

Pause

She took off in a hurry when she heard that. Well.

Pause

A pleasant interlude. One here, one there, no skin off my back. Not that I've had much experience in these things, I don't really remember ever having such an experience, just as well.

BETH

O Harry—

ALAN

Just as well. Mind you, I'd know how to handle it. If it ever happened. I've got to make sure it doesn't. That's crucial.

Pause

Yeah.

Pause

Luckily— in the meantime, I've saved myself a lot of anguish.

Long Pause

That's crucial.

BETH

And I thought you really—

Pause

Coming back Tuesday, you asking—

Pause

I wanted to say yes, why don't you come inside.

Pause

A cup a tea.

Pause

Wouldn't that be nice.

Pause

I've kept them in Kleenex Harry if—you'd ever like to see them.

Pause

You remember that? Ivory all etched in black?

Longer pause

I've still got them.

BETH turns to #3; ALAN is looking down, crumpled on his chair. Total silence: hold for twenty seconds. Lights dim off. House lights up on stage with chairs #1 & #2 removed.

Curtis Karnow

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

"Jurgen in Tralfamadore" may be incomprehensible to those unfamiliar with the works of either James Branch Cabell or Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. This is not surprising, since it is an attempt, as its subtitle implies, to show that the universes created by these two writers have a great deal in common. The naive reader would do well to read *Jurgen* by Cabell and *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Vonnegut as introductions to those universes, but although both are great works by themselves, neither is a fully self-contained summary of its author's cosmic view. It may or may not be coincidence that Cabell died in 1958 and Vonnegut published *The Sirens of Titan* in 1959, but it cannot be coincidence that the name Walpurga (Walburga), which is so important in the saga of *Jurgen*, appears in my paperback of *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, on page 81, and nowhere else in twentieth-century English literature.

JURGEN IN TRALFAMADORE: A COMEDY OF CONVERGENCE

It is a tale which they narrate in Poictesme, saying: in the old days lived a pawnbroker named Jurgen; but what the censors called him was very often much worse than that. Now this Jurgen was in many ways an ordinary fellow. He had a wife, known generally as Dame Lisa, though her true name was Adelais and she was said to be the daughter of Ninzian of Yair, who was a devil; and her tongue befitted her patrimony—but that is another story. Dame Lisa was meddlesome and annoying, and Jurgen, though comfortably fixed, had always the haggard look of a man who lacks the freedom to choose his own suspenders. Jurgen had journeyed to Heaven and Hell one Walburga's Eve, when almost anything is more than likely to happen, but no one in Poictesme knew it, because all that time was cancelled; so that his fame rested on his having been, at the tender age of four, the sole eye-witness of Dom Manuel's ascension into Heaven. Now, many years later, his memory of the event was less than fresh, but it afforded him an excellent supplementary income: thanks to the custom of making a pilgrimage to the site, his toll-gate had begun to turn a handsome profit, and he had opened a roasted-chestnut booth at the shrine.

They tell also that in the old days, after putting up the shop-windows for the night, Jurgen was passing the Cistercian Abbey,—just as he had the night he met the Prince of Darkness,—and darkness was falling, and Jurgen had barely a moment's reflection that it was Walburga's Eve again, when the conviction came over him that he was about to be kidnapped by a flying saucer from the planet Tralfamadore.

"Fie! says Jurgen, "how can I be kidnapped—whatever that means—by a flying saucer? I've been struck by enough of them thrown by Lisa, and a soup-tureen once, too—"

He stopped to look at the saucer. It was a hundred feet in diameter, with portholes around its rim. The light from the portholes was pulsing purple. A

hatch opened in the bottom and a ladder appeared. Jurgen found that his will had disappeared. "I've become unstuck in time," he thought, not quite knowing why, and ascended the ladder . . .

* * *

"Welcome aboard, Jurgen, son of Coth," said a loudspeaker. Jurgen's eyes surveyed the interior of the saucer. The furniture was very peculiar, like nothing he had ever seen. He noticed that he was strapped to a yellow object inscribed "Barca-Lounger." He wondered if this was an exotic torture device.

"Where am I?" asked Jurgen.

"This is an intergalactic space ship," said the loudspeaker. Jurgen did not know, of course, that the Tralfamadorians had no voice-boxes, and communicated telepathically with a computer that translated their thoughts into the language of the recipient. "You are," the voice continued, "en route to the planet Tralfamadore, which is three hundred million miles from Earth."

Jurgen considered this with his usual caninness. Finally he asked, "Why me?"

"You Earthlings are all alike," said the voice. "As I told another of you once, why *anything*? The moment simply *is*. There is no *why*."

A flicker of recognition appeared on Jurgen's face.

"Are you from Koshchei the Deathless, who made things as they are?" he asked.

"Jurgen, you have undertaken—and forgotten—the most extraordinary travels in space and time of anyone in your century, but they are nothing beside ours. We of Tralfamadore have visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe. We have met deities who have never heard of, let alone voyaged to, Antan. But we have things to learn from you. We are very fortunate that one of our captive Earthlings—a fellow named Billy Pilgrim, from Ilium, New York, was acquainted with you and recommended you to us. You may be sure that you will be pleased with your accommodations."

And with that enigmatic declaration, they anaesthetized Jurgen by remote control, and he slept as the saucer entered its time warp.

* * *

* * *

Jurgen awoke in the zoo on Tralfamadore. He was completely naked. Across the room from him was another naked man, rather a puny fellow. "Welcome to Tralfamadore," this man said.

"Welcome, indeed! I am Jurgen, asking odds of none; but what kind of business is this,—when an honest pawnbroker should be getting home to his wife,—to be spirited off by people he cannot see, to wake up in the company of a naked newt like you—" just then he noticed he, too, was naked, and for the first time in his life he blushed.

"I never thought I'd actually meet you, Messire Jurgen," said Billy Pilgrim, extending his hand. "Frankly, I didn't even know whether you ever existed, but the Tralfamadorians said that didn't matter."

"How could you doubt I existed, if you had heard of me?" asked Jurgen, who was now crouched behind what seemed to be a bed without posts, something Jurgen had never seen before.

"I read about you in a book by a man called Cabell," said Billy. "I used to read it back in Ilium before the War, but I never really understood it until much later. When Valencia died I think I understood it for the first time. The Tralfamadorians were very interested in it. They have millions of Earth books on microfilm, but they had never heard of *Jurgen* until I told them about it. They say I'm the only person still alive who ever read it. That's hard to believe, of course; and yet, whenever I would recommend it to anyone on Earth, they would say they never heard of it, so perhaps the Tralfamadorians are right."

"I never heard of a book named after me," said Jurgen.

"That's because it was written almost seven centuries after your birth," said Billy.

Jurgen was rather perplexed. "Such things, which seem to make no sense, must have to do with Koshchei," he observed.

"Exactly. That is why the Tralfamadorians are so taken with the book. In Tralfamadorian literature, you know, there is no beginning, middle, or end, no suspense, no moral, no causes or effects. They love the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time. You had an experience like that, Jurgen, which you have since forgotten."

"Yes, Jurgen," said the loudspeaker. "We are going to have you relive that experience, because we have a morbid fascination with primitive efforts at time-travel. Since we cannot find the book we will *experience* the events it documents."

And Jurgen became unstuck in time, and had some dealings with a certain black gentleman . . .

* * *

So it was that Jurgen came once again to his senses in the zoo compound on Tralfamadore. He opened his eyes to behold not only naked Billy Pilgrim but naked Montana Wildhack.

This Jurgen was more used to nakedness in mixed than unmixed company, so he did not blush.

"That was a wonderful adventure," Montana said, and Jurgen recollected that his manhood had not been so extraordinarily aroused since his last encounter with the Lady Guenevere.

"What is extraordinary," said Jurgen, "is that I feel as if it remains unfinished, even though I now know everything that happened that Walburga's Eve and thereafter, and even how I come to be here. But tell me, how did all of this, which I knew nothing about before, get into this book? How could the author have known that I was Pope, and that I ascended the throne of God, when I didn't know it?"

"The author, Branch Cabell, was an expert in mythologies of the world, a truly cultivated classicist," said Billy, to whom Jurgen's gaze had not strayed

once since his return. "He knew how a great many things that happen to great men do not become known to anyone until long after their deaths."

Jurgen thought of his father Coth, and what Coth had said about the canonization—or worse—of the late Dom Manuel. Billy told him that all of this had been recorded by Cabell in a book called *The Silver Stallion*. "This man Cabell was positively clairvoyant," exclaimed the pawnbroker as he noted how greatly Montana Wildhack surpassed Queen Helen of Troy in every perceptible endowment. "Since time seems to be so flexible here, might I meet this Cabell?" he asked almost idly.

The loudspeaker intervened. "I'm afraid that's out of the question, Jurgen," it said. "We couldn't possibly let characters meet their authors. Mr. Pilgrim, there, asked us many of the questions you did. He knows there is a Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. somewhere in space-time who knows everything about him, but if they ever meet it will never be through our agency. Can you imagine the chaos that could be introduced in literature if characters could complain to authors about their treatment, and wheedle changes in the plot to their advantage?"

"Yes, I see the point," observed Jurgen. "Yet it seems that if Koshchei could create God and Heaven and all their appurtenances in order to please my grandmother—"

"Would you like to sleep with me, Jurgen?" asked Montana, whereupon Nature took precedence over Art.

* * *

In what would have been an earth week, Billy took Jurgen on a series of time-trips to Ilium, New York. He brought Jurgen to dinner and introduced him to Valencia as a shirt salesman. Jurgen observed that Valencia was very like his dear wife Lisa, and became homesick. Billy later told him that Valencia's family, the Merbles, were descended from the Vicomte de Crapaud, of 18th-century Poictesme, a rogue widely reputed to be an incarnation of the friend Surkrag, once known as Ninzian; so that Valencia and Dame Lisa were extended half-sisters. This seemed entirely plausible to Jurgen.

Billy took Jurgen to a public lecture by the science-fiction writer, Kilgore Trout. Trout, who had recently lost a finger, spoke about the book he had just placed on the best-seller list: *Liluonis*. *Liluonis* was a planet where everyone worshipped an idol in the form of a nose. The idol had withered, and the prosperity of the planet with it. One day a fair-haired champion arrived and restored the idol to its health and vigor. The planet blossomed forth once more, but the champion could not understand why the people of *Liluonis* insisted on calling their idol a nose when it was surely a different member; and he resumed his intergalactic wandering befuddled that a mistaken notion should bring happiness to those who held it. The reviewers loved this book, much to Trout's consternation. It all sounded familiar to Jurgen, somehow; and he wondered what this Trout would look like as a redhead.

Billy told Jurgen about automobiles and income taxes and Dresden. Jurgen was interested, to be sure, but he was thinking about how lonely Montana Wildhack must be on Tralfamadore. He saw a book in Billy's study: *Wisdom From the Books of Bokonon*. He opened it and read:

Tiger got to hunt,
Bird got to fly;
Man got to sit and wonder, "Why? Why? Why?"
Tiger got to sleep,
Bird got to land;
Man got to tell himself he understand.

Billy took Jurgen to a John Wayne movie.

* * *

And Jurgen abode in Tralfamadore for some time, accumulating an unprecedented knowledge of the gimcracks and geegaws of several centuries, and making love to Montana Wildhack whenever Billy was off reliving Dresden or his future death or whatever; and Jurgen was reasonably content. He had a better perspective on time and the meaning of life than any other man, except perhaps Billy Pilgrim; but, being Jurgen and being human, he had a nagging awareness that something was missing. He had acquired enough sense to know that it was not Dame Lisa. One day he thought of it.

The Tralfamadoreans knew immediately. Their invisible eyes were all around the cage as Jurgen prepared to ask the question. "Billy," he said, "What *really* happened to Manuel so many years ago?" "Let's find out," said Billy, and Jurgen entered a time warp . . .

Mists drifted lazily about the wood. Little Jurgen awoke with a start; a rider was approaching at a gallop. The familiar but revered figure of gray Manuel, the Redeemer of Poictesme and former swineherd, rode into the clearing, dismounted, and sent his horse on its way. The Tralfamadoreans were fascinated.

Manuel stood alone—so he thought—in the clearing. In the mists came an owl voice. The flying saucer was a hundred feet in diameter, with portholes around its rim. The light from the portholes was pulsing purple. The usual hatch produced the usual ladder and Manuel entered, looking fixedly forward. Above the owl-screach of the saucer Jurgen thought he could hear the words "*Why me?*" just as the door closed.

"So it goes," remarked a Tralfamadorian.

A bird said to Jurgen, "*poo-tee-weet?*"

Arthur M. Shapiro



Anne Kraus

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