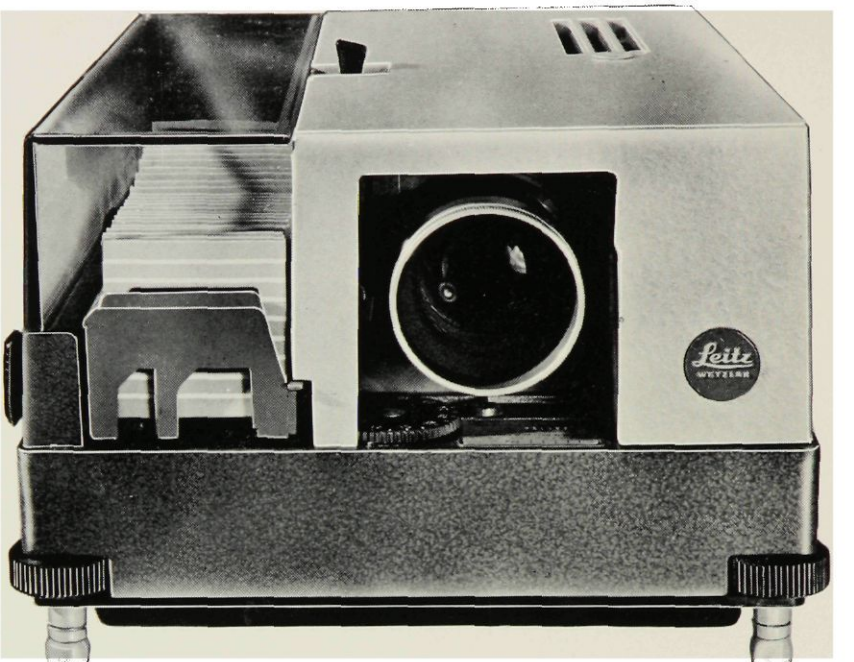

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No. 2, July, 1969

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THE BIRTH OF PEGGY GREY

1. ROBIN GREEN

Yesterday on the bus a girl who was talking to someone else (or so I thought) suddenly touched my arm and said: "Why don't you answer me?" I'd never seen her before and meant to say so, but what with everybody staring (not at her, but at me!) words failed me and I walked away. Fortunately the bus had stopped and I got off. But afterwards it seemed unreal like a dream.

Meanwhile, nocturnally, the dreams continue to flourish. Last night I stood in a room with barred windows, when suddenly on the table beside me a giant lizard or miniature dinosaur appeared. This pleased me enormously, more so when he moved past me, rapidly, and splintered the door. I clapped my hands to show my appreciation and admiration, then started to follow him, but now the shattered door with the broken lock had been replaced by a solid sheet of glass.

"Not yet," said the lizard/dinosaur. "You'll have to wait." He said it politely with a hint of regret, as if he was sorry to leave me behind, and I woke up weeping.

Another dream: Was in a room with many people who were busy pinning medals on each other. Apparently I was not having any, which embarrassed me, so I pretended not to notice what they were doing. "Because of the angle of the moon," I said, "we've become temporarily separated from the rest of mankind." At this they all began to cheer, and I understood, after a while, that we had landed on the moon. Or someone had.

I trace this back to the tremendous interest I am taking in the news—all tales of violence, it seems. Planes explode and cars collide and ships go down. People die in wars and fires, are shot, stabbed, kidnapped or raped, are attacked by sharks from the sea, floods and drought from heaven and earthquakes from within. All is disaster. Yet the population is increasing at disturbing speed, and some people starve, while others have oysters for breakfast, delivered by air mail to ensure their freshness. While waiting for the tragedies to happen the announcers play music that has no tune and tell you what to buy and where to get it.

At the office today I asked old Leonard, the bookkeeper if he believed in Flying Saucers. I never know quite what to say to him, and thought we might have an interesting discussion. He said that no, he didn't and wondered if I'd seen his umbrella. He thought he might have left it in the bus, in which case, no doubt, it had been stolen. I do hope he doesn't think that I've taken it.

Such notions, of course, are silly. I know I haven't taken his umbrella, just as I know the girl on the bus couldn't possibly have known me. And yet, in such moments of sudden doubt and insecurity I find great comfort in simple facts, such as knowing who I am, where I come from and what I do, etc. I am able to prove, so to speak, my own existence. These facts cannot be refuted or interpreted as dreams. My name is Robin Green. My father is a retired chemist, my mother was killed in a plane crash, when I was twenty-five. I am an only child, unmarried, past thirty and live in a furnished flat in Sydney with a view of the harbour. I've been with Hartman & Grimwood (Import & Export) for the past ten years, advancing from a typist in the pool to private secretary. I smoke excessively and drink with moderation, lost my virginity when mother died and don't believe in God.

All of this is truly very reassuring. Sometimes I go further and examine these facts from which dreams are made: My father had beautiful hands and smelled of medicine and leather. (His briefcase probably.) I loved him painfully, in silence. At night sometimes I heard him plead for his marital rights, which made me sad and angry. Later we drifted apart, through mutual disappointment, though what we expected from each other I do not know. My mother was a gregarious, headstrong woman, impossible to defeat. Her death embarrassed me. I could not cry and spent the night with a stranger in a shabby hotel that we left at dawn. Had breakfast at Central Railway in awkward silence ("Sugar . . . yes, please!") and afterwards parted in the subway with a casual wave and a hurried smile. Thus I wept for the death of my childhood at mother's funeral, and people respected my grief. Nothing else of importance has ever happened to me. I have no friends and don't know many people. But read a lot. And dream.

The lady next door has accused me of leaving an empty milk bottle on her doorstep. I told her politely it wasn't I who had left it there. "But I saw you do it," she cried, which is surely a preposterous untruth. But why should she lie? We do not know each other and I never did her any harm.

Last night in my dream I was having a party and mother came in, carrying a milk bottle. "Your time will come," she said. It sounded like a threat, not a promise. And then the milk bottle exploded.

In the morning I slipped on a banana peel left in the hallway and told the janitor about it. He went to have a look and came back, gloating. I was mistaken, he said. There wasn't any banana peel. Spent the weekend in bed resting my ankle which I twisted when I slipped. It is all red and swollen. Most painful, in fact.

It was erroneous to say I don't believe in God. I merely meant that he doesn't care or interfere, but simply is and watches. A disinterested observer. Mother used to say I had a guardian angel. Such a cheap way out, I thought. Passing the buck. So typical of mother.

Last Friday old Leonard went home early and left his wallet on his desk. Since he had locked the safe I put the wallet in my purse intending to return it this morning. But because of the swollen ankle I took a sleeping pill last night and overslept. On arriving was immediately informed about "the theft". Leonard already was closeted with Hartman who called me in, just as Leonard came out. Hartman, visibly distressed, told me about the wallet, so I hurriedly explained the situation. I thought he would be pleased, but much to my surprise he scowled at me and nervously chewed his lips. After pacing the floor and worrying his hair for some length of time he finally suggested that to avoid "unpleasant complications", it might be wiser if he pretended to "find" the wallet and return it to Leonard. "You know what people are like," he said, averting his eyes. "No smoke without a fire and all that." It hadn't occurred to me, of course, that anyone would suspect me of theft, but the minute he said so, I was instantly assailed by guilt and mis-

givings, and thanked him profusely. And some people claim that he doesn't care about his staff! I dare say they're quite mistaken.

At lunch time today old Leonard publicly accused the cleaner (who wasn't present) of stealing his wallet. I pulled at his sleeve and dragged him with me to a corner to explain what had happened. He looked at me in a most peculiar manner and snapped: "Why didn't you just tell me?"

I said that Hartman knew and would explain everything. At this he turned quite pale and said: "I see." Then gave me a tight, determined smile and said no more all day.

The janitor complained about me leaving empty milk bottles (in plural!) outside Mrs Denver's door. "And who's Mrs Denver?" I asked facetiously, and received from him a mildly reproachful glance before he walked away, shaking his head. When mother said things like that people thought she was frightfully charming and amusing.

Hartman called me in this morning and gently rebuked me for telling Leonard the truth. I should have let him handle it, he said. Unhappily now Leonard suspects him of shielding me from justice. I thought that was very funny, but as the conversation progressed I began to feel worried and guilty, although most certainly I'd had no intention of stealing Leonard's wallet, and Hartman knew it, or so he said. Still, it would have been wiser, he implied, if I hadn't returned the wallet and above all hadn't worried about the cleaner. This was my biggest mistake, not taking the wallet but telling Leonard about it. He actually began to speak as if I'd stolen it, which compelled me at last to protest, and he, impatiently, said: "Yes, of course, but the point is that Leonard has a family to support, and you're single. You'll manage somehow." I had a faint notion then that he was asking me to leave, but this was so incredible to me that I refused to pursue it. I thought I must have misunderstood him somewhere along the line, that he was thinking perhaps of giving Leonard a raise because of his family, which seemed quite sensible to me.

"Surely you can see," he kept saying, fingering his limp moustache as if he feared it might fall off, ". . . that I can't give you Leonard's head." I assured him most ardently that I wouldn't want him to, though really I couldn't see how Leonard's head had entered the discussion. I certainly didn't introduce it, but he was so insistent about it, so intense that I felt obliged to reassure him. He brightened at once and said: "Good. That's settled then. I knew you'd understand." At this point he had lost me completely. I didn't know what was settled or what I'd understood but hesitated to say so. He guided me to the door. "You might as well leave at once," he said. "Just post your resignation, and I'll post you a reference."

It was all most confusing and unprecedented. But by then he had opened the door and I didn't care to argue in front of all the others, so I went home, feeling dizzy and slightly feverish. My ankle was throbbing and causing me immeasurable pain.

This morning on opening my door to take in the milk I was confronted with the woman next door.

"*I* am Mrs Denver," she announced in a loud, belligerent voice as if suspecting I might dispute it. I started to smile and was about to introduce myself, although we have been neighbours for many years, when she continud: "And *I* am the one who complained to the janitor about your milk bottles which you keep leaving outside my door."

This was a bit much, I thought, so I said: "There must be some mistake . . ." but she didn't even pause to listen and carried on at great length about the bottles

leaving rings on her doorstep and damaging the wax and wood and spreading diseases because they weren't washed. In the middle of all this a fly settled on my nose, and I lifted my hand to chase it away. Just then without the slightest warning the woman hit me squarely on the jaw and slammed the door in my face. Later this afternoon the janitor told me that seeing me lifting my hand Mrs Denver concluded that I was going to hit her and therefore raised her hand to ward off my blow. "That sounds a bit far-fetched," I said and showed him the bruise on my chin which he regarded with a curious lack of sympathy. Evidently he was convinced that I had initiated the attack and/or provoked it, so I quickly explained about the fly and added that my father was a chemist and had always been pathologically hygienic, for which reason I'd always been most particular about washing my empty milk bottles, a fact that I felt certain the milk man would be able to substantiate. I urged him to relay these vital details with all due speed to Mrs Denver. The janitor nodded, dubiously, and left without a smile.

It is obvious by now that Hartman has no intention of asking me to come back, nor does it appear that any member of his staff has threatened to strike or resign on my behalf, not even the cleaner. Books and magazines devote considerable space to people who dash to the defence of those unjustly persecuted, but I don't really think they do so in real life. Solidarity among the workers is clearly but a myth. I can't help feeling just a little hurt. Certainly the cleaner might have interfered, though possibly she doesn't know. Perhaps I should write and tell her. Hartman's attitude bewilders me no end. He might have found the courage to explain the situation to Leonard. If he believed in my innocence surely he ought to back up his faith with action. Ten years of my life I've given to his firm and for all he cares I might as well be dead. If I'd known this I certainly would not have stayed that long. But father, in particular, was anxious for me to have financial security. He stayed where he was for forty-five years and nearly had a heart attack when once I spoke of leaving. So I stayed with Hartman, and now at my age where am I going to find another job? It is easy for him to say I'll manage—just another version of mother's guardian angel.

Meanwhile all my efforts to clear up the misunderstanding with Mrs Denver are being misinterpreted as threats. Incredibly she seems to think I am persecuting her, when all I want is to explain about the fly. The janitor promised to do so but hasn't, and now refuses to get involved. I suppose he is mad about the banana peel.

Two days ago I purchased a secondhand portable typewriter for the purpose of maintaining my typing speed and also to write some applications. It is so much easier, I think, to talk to people on paper rather than in person. But already today on behalf of several tenants the janitor complained about the noise I made, and the landlord rang up to remind me that according to the lease I signed years ago the premises are under no circumstances to be used for business purposes. "That's all I've to say," he said severely and hung up.

This morning a uniformed policeman arrived to caution me that any further attempts on my part to contact Mrs Denver could have the most serious consequences. I thought at first he had come to arrest me about the wallet, and could scarcely speak. When he had delivered his warning I did my utmost to explain the situation, but even while talking began to feel slightly doubtful about the fly and so perhaps failed to convince him. Also I couldn't help worrying about the wallet and feeling guilty about it and was tempted to enquire if maybe Leonard had submitted an official complaint. It is curious, I think, that Hartman hasn't sent my reference, but I simply dare not remind him. Perhaps I should consult

a lawyer. Father would know, but I hesitate to approach him as legal and financial matters tend to upset him no end. And if he knew I was unemployed he might not be able to sleep for weeks. To him depression and unemployment are inseparable. You can't have one without the other. He is apt to withdraw his money from the bank and sell all his securities in a fit of panic. Anyway it is probably too late to see a lawyer now.

Have had several responses to my applications, which is most encouraging. Unfortunately I can't do anything about it until Hartman sends my reference. Also am reluctant to leave the flat for fear of encountering Mrs Denver and maybe getting accused of accosting her. It is all quite ridiculous, but I'm practically immobilized being now at war as it would seem with both society and the police —all due to actions of mine which have been completely misconstrued. It terrifies me to think how many possibly innocent people have been convicted of murder purely on circumstantial evidence and maybe even have been executed. I left not a single mark on Mrs Denver but have a bruise to prove that she hit me, and yet, incredibly, *she* has been wronged—not I! The injustice of all this appals me no end.

To make things worse it now appears that several tenants have petitioned the landlord to get rid of me. "You must be joking," I told him on the 'phone— which was a mistake. He frostily replied that this most certainly was not a joking matter, and then while I was trying to explain and apologize, he simply hung up on me. Very ill-mannered I thought, but what with my attack on Mrs Denver that only the fly can refute, the nuisance of my typewriter and the theft of Leonard's wallet, I simply cannot risk a legal battle over the lease. If only for my father's sake—the scandal would most certainly kill him—it might be wiser and more dignified to leave at once. Consequently I've had to abandon my quest for work in order to look for a room. One cannot, of course, rent a respectable flat without having stable and permanent employment. Perhaps I should have demanded to see the petition, but then they might have asked to see the fly. I find it safer not to ask too many questions. Clearly, a certain amount of faith must be invested in the act of living in order to maintain some semblance of sanity.

Found a room through an ad in the Sydney Morning Herald. A most exceptional experience, enchanting like a fairy tale.

The house is a large rambling affair on top of a hill—a little like something from "Wuthering Heights". It was raining when I got there in a taxi, and the wind was howling in the trees and running rampant through the long narrow hallways, slamming doors and windows as though an army of ghosts were at large. I said so to the landlord whose name is Thomas Sharp. He is rather short with too much belly and behind, narrow shoulders and a thin, pallid face that moves from side to side with the abrupt motions of a bird. His eyes are blue, quite attractive in fact, but there's something about his mouth that I don't like, but can't define. His voice, though, is most pleasant.

"Mr Sharp?" I said, when he opened the door, and he sniggered at me and said: "Mr Sharp, indeed, Miss Brown, why don't you call me Tom?" Which seemed a bit odd, since I had not as yet introduced myself, and he could not therefore have confused the colour—Green and Brown, I mean. But before I could say a word he had seized both of my hands and pulled me in. "Let's have a look at you," he cried. "Lost a bit of weight, haven't you, love? And your hair longer. It suits you. And how's your writing coming along? Any success yet?"

I thought for a moment, confused, he was referring to my applications, but then he demanded to know when I had come back to Sydney, and gradually, as he talked and kept on talking, it dawned on me he thought I was someone else who

had apparently lived with him before. As a tenant I presume. I certainly did not deliberately mislead or delude him, for *he* did all the talking and gave me no chance to answer of explain.

"I suppose you wonder why I'm not married yet," he said, showing me into a large, brown-papered room that smelled of man, bacon and cabbage. Whoever lived there clearly had no intention of moving out in the immediate future. "I'll tell you what happened," continued Tom and picked up a pack of cigarettes. "The girl I was going to marry, the one I wrote you about that I met on the cruise—she married somebody else. How about that? She didn't even tell me. Some friends of mine wrote me two days before the wedding. They thought I ought to know. Well, what do you think?"

I thought he meant about the room. Obviously by now it would be awkward to explain I wasn't whom he thought I was, and as I didn't want the room it would be simpler to say so and leave. I took a quick look around and expressed my disappointment that it wasn't vacant. "I was hoping to move in right away," I explained and started for the door.

"Emma, you kill me," he said. "This is *my* room, you silly girl. Don't you remember?" And then laughing like a maniac he suddenly recalled that I'd never seen his room before. "God knows I tried to get you in, but you always refused. Quite an occasion, this eh?" he said, giving me a sultry look, and opened two cans of beer. "But seriously what do you think? Wasn't that a dirty trick to play on me? It's a wonder Penny didn't kill herself."

"Penny?" I echoed, sipping beer, reluctantly from the can, since he didn't offer me a glass. Father would have frowned on that.

"You remember Penny, don't you? The girl I was going to marry before I went on the cruise. I had to tell her, of course, about Beatrice. Poor girl. It almost broke her heart. I introduced you to her once, to Penny, didn't I? I'm sure I did. She read one of your stories in a magazine the other day." He glanced at his watch, anxiously, picked up his beer and said: "Let's go. I'll show you the room and then I've to dash."

I followed him through a maze of pale-green corridors to a small, white-washed room with yellow curtains and a huge, hospitable double bed.

"Peter is getting married," he said. "Did you know? To a deaf girl. Divorced with a boy of six. She's pregnant. That's why. And oh yes, old Mrs Jones finally died. In her bed. That's nice, isn't it? She always wanted to die in her bed."

The room smelled of sleep and flannel pyjamas. He opened a window and yawned, showing small, back-slanting teeth. Just like a rat, I thought. "Are you going to marry Penny?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Who knows? What do you think?"

"I don't know."

He sighed. "Well, what's wrong? The bed? I'll give you a single bed, if you like. Fair enough." He handed me the key. "See you later then." And was off.

Two hours later I moved in.

* * *

2. EMMA BROWN

My room looks out on a walled-in garden with potted plants tended by Daisy who cleans Tom's house. Very devoted she is and watches him like a mother. White hair, pink cheeks, blue eyes and she always wears starched white aprons and pink or pale blue frocks. The room is very cold, but I cannot tax my savings with unnecessary expenses such as a heater. Sometimes to get warm I go to bed or spend long hours at the library.

Have answered a great many ads and rented a post office box, since people here believe that I am Emma Brown, without me ever having said so. That would be lying. Made three appointments which I failed to keep, because the reference has not arrived. I eat once a day in a different cafe, and speak only to strangers who think they know me—as Emma Brown.

Yesterday in the city I was stopped on the street by a stranger, a tall bearded man with fierce blue eyes.

"Emma," he cried. "Darling, how are you?" He gave me an affectionate bear hug, then pushed me away and gazed at me fondly. No man has ever looked at me like that. "I like your long hair," he declared, "but you're thin. So thin. Haven't you been eating? Oh dear, it's going to rain again. Where shall we go?"

It was too late by then to tell him that I wasn't Emma. In fact, I didn't want to. and merely stood there looking at him.

"What's the matter?" he asked, ever so gently. "Say something."

"What?" I asked helplessly. "What do you want me to say?"

"Hello Dick, how are you," he suggested, smiling.

"Hello Dick, how are you," I repeated like an idiot.

He laughed and squeezed my arm. I gained the impression we had been lovers. Emma and he, I mean.

"We're getting wet," he observed, frowning at the sky. "And where am I going to take you? Let me see now . . . a cup of coffee first of all."

We darted across the street and sat at a table by the window and watched umbrellas bloom in the mirror-black street. Just like in a dream.

His wife had left him with a child, he confided, and June had committed suicide. He had met her in the street, not long ago, and she had wanted them to have a cup of coffee.

"But I was in a hurry," he said. "My mother had just died, and I was still in a state of shock, stupefied, unable to accept the finality of death. The stillness, Emma, the cold withdrawal. Whatever you say can no longer be heard. Too late for words—too late for everything. I was never aware while she lived what she thought or felt, I didn't know her, Emma, until she died. That's why I didn't notice how sad June looked. I was thinking of my mother, but remembered when I read about June's death in the papers. Brian was the one to find her. Must have been dreadful for him and his wife. I suppose she knew about them. They had been carrying on for years. He just wouldn't let her go. Perhaps if I'd talked to her that day, but no . . . I won't feel guilty. I've found the answer, you see, and I don't feel guilty even about my mother, or about my wife. We weren't compatible, you see, she and I."

As he was talking, I, unfortunately, began to feel acutely guilty thinking of my father who would not approve of Dick in his tight-fitting jeans, netted T-shirt and bare feet. I hadn't noticed them before and might not have, if the waitress hadn't stared. Imagine walking in the city without any shoes on! Father once said he felt naked without his gloves.

"The answer to what?" I asked, just to say something and get my mind off his feet.

"Reality," he replied, and I felt certain that now, any minute now, something wonderful was going to happen and gazed at him expectantly. "It's all a question of perception," he went on, "of seeing things as they really are."

"Yes, oh yes," I said, holding my breath and almost drinking the words from his lips.

"Of smelling, hearing, tasting, seeing and touching," Dick continued. "Take a tree . . . ah, the experiences I've had with trees, you can't imagine. The leaves, the veins in the leaves, the intricate patterns they make, and the lines . . . the millions of lines in the trunk."

I withdrew, deflated, and stared gloomily into the coffee. He must be mad, I thought and wanted to go home. He leaned across and held my hand in his. "You must try it, Emma," he beseeched me.

"Try what?"

"Once you've tried it, you'll know, you'll see as you've never seen before. All sorts of things. Yes, we must go." He rose abruptly and pulled me to my feet. "Immediately. Right now. At once. We must fly." And he laughed a little madly, but he wasn't drunk. Not a trace of liquor on his breath. "Like the deer," he said. "Remember the deer that we used to feed."

"Aren't you going to pay?" I asked.

"Pay?" He looked at me blankly like a child confronted with an adult joke beyond his comprehension. "But Emma," he said, crestfallen, "I don't have any money."

"Oh," I said flustered and paid for us both.

Outside the rain had turned into a drizzle. He lifted his face and said: "Ah!" then smiled at me and hailed a taxi.

I don't know why I went with him, except I'd nothing else to do. It didn't matter that I wasn't Emma. What he needed was someone to talk to—not with. He was an actor in search of an audience. My raison d'etre was to watch, listen and applaud. If I escaped or disappeared he would cease to be, die like an actor when the curtain falls and his part is played out. That made me feel frightfully important and I smiled.

"Poor Emma," he said and patted my cheek. "I shall teach you the art of seeing. I shall lead you out of this dream, this madhouse of mirrors and show you reality."

And I said: "Yes please," quite certain that he would.

We went to a flat at the cross where he was living with some friends. One room with kitchen and bath. The room was squallid and untidy with bedclothes everywhere. The curtains were drawn and a pink rag tied around the light bulb created an illusion of eternal sunset. The television was on but not properly focussed and the sound was turned off. A radio blared from a corner where a young man sat, crosslegged, on the floor, his eyes half closed and his long lean face filmed with perspiration. Next to him on a couch lay a fair-headed boy of twenty with a cigarette dangling between his lips. Reclining at his feet on a thread-bare carpet lay a teenage girl in hipsters and a semi-transparent blouse. Her hair was the colour of honey and clung damply to her cheeks and forehead in strands that made her face seem prematurely lined.

"Did you get it?" she asked, eagerly.

Dick nodded. The youth in the corner opened his eyes and peered at me. "Who's she?"

"This is Emma," said Dick. "I promised she could try."

"You what?" The boy on the couch swung his legs onto the floor. 'Suppose she talks?"

Dick looked ashamed and anxious like a dog that has been kicked and begs to be forgiven. His obsequious smile embarrassed me, and tarnished his glory. "She won't," he said, pleading.

The dark-headed boy in the corner came suddenly to life. His eyes glinted darkly in the pallor of his face. "It was the weirdest thing," he cried excitedly. "I was talking to you. You weren't here, but I could see you. And the colours—man, oh man, the colours. Van Gogh intensified a hundred times."

"I know." Dick smiled, a sage, wistful slightly envious smile. The girl on the floor arched her neck and began to giggle. The others, following her glance, gazed intensely at the television screen. All I could see was wavy lines, the same as before, but the four of them roared with laughter, pointed fingers at each other

and shouted incoherently. They were having such fun that my eyes were stinging, as tears began to gather in their corners. I blinked and turned to the door.

The fair-headed boy, still smiling, looked at me and said: "Are you leaving?" It was an order, not a question. I nodded and opened the door. Dick came after me.

"Emma," he said. "I'm sorry. So sorry." He made a gesture with his hands, then looked at them intrigued and smiled. "My hands . . . just like a painting. Look, Emma. Look."

Whatever he saw was beyond my vision, and once again I felt cruelly deprived like a child on the fringe who isn't allowed to play. Shunned. Ostracized. Not wanted. It wasn't fair that I, wanting so much to see, should remain in the dark. I moved away. Dick followed. "But Emma," he cried. "Where are you staying? Shall we meet again? Will you write to me?"

I shook my head. He said reproachfully, sadly: "You've changed." Which made me laugh. "Or is it I who has changed?" he wondered aloud. And now he too was laughing. Perhaps we laughed, because we couldn't cry. Mirrors reflecting grief But I was angry too, for he had promised me reality. He was going to teach me to see. So much might have happened, but nothing did, and in the light of morning, it all seemed like a dream.

Tom dropped in to brood about the girl who married someone else. He put his arms around me and might have kissed me, if I hadn't moved.

"Don't you like me any more?" he asked.

"You're drunk," said I, and he laughed, ruefully, like Dick, and left. Perhaps he was going to marry Emma also, at one stage or another. He keeps telling me what a fool he was, that he missed the boat. I asked him where he was going, which gave birth to a great deal of hilarity but he never answered. I gather from his reaction that Emma must be very witty, so no matter what I say he is ready to laugh, assuming beforehand it is going to be funny.

It has occurred to me that father might notice my absence eventually, so I've written to explain (vaguely) that I'm travelling and not to worry if he doesn't hear from me. Daisy commented today that I don't get any mail the way I used to. Nor any 'phone calls. Wrote a couple of letters to Emma Brown and posted them from various suburbs, some of which I've never visited before. I had no idea that Sydney was so big.

In my dream last night I had bushy eyebrows and thought of shaving them to thin, enigmatic lines. This, someone whispered, would make me different. Different from what? In the moment of examining a dream it disintegrates, as in the moment of seeing the vision dissolve. Rang up Emma when Emma wasn't home and left a message that Robin would ring back. Daisy delivered this message to me in a state of feverish excitement. Wrote Hartman for my reference.

All these people I am supposed to know intrigue me no end: June who killed herself and Brian who found her, and why I wonder should Dick feel guilty about June? Would it not be funny if he should meet the real Emma Brown and talk to her about the flat at the Cross and their meeting in the city? Each would think the other had gone mad.

Tom came in this evening, relatively sober, to tell me about his quarrel with Penny, which I followed with close attention. He had invited her for dinner after work. "Anywhere you like," he had said, "how about the club?"

It had been only a suggestion, he explained to me, but afterwards Penny said that he hadn't given her any choice. Then she ordered lobster and claimed it hadn't been properly cooked. She left most of it on her plate, and so not to waste his money he had asked if he could eat it. She didn't object, but when he had

finished she grew furious and said she had left it on her plate to complain about the quality of the food.

Here Tom paused to say he hoped he wasn't boring me, but all these details would give me an idea what Penny was like. He seemed so anxious for me to understand what Penny was like that I urged him to continue, which he did. When the claret she had ordered—although she knew quite well that he preferred white wine—did not arrive, he went to get it and consequently didn't tip the waiter by way of expressing his dissatisfaction with the service. This so infuriated Penny that she got up and stalked off without waiting for him. They had a rip-roaring fight in the lobby where she accused him of humiliating her beyond endurance, after which she drove home in a taxi. And didn't I think she was most unfair?

Without waiting for an answer, driven perhaps by desperation, he suddenly began to stroke my thigh and fondle my breast. The left one only. This obvious preference for one and neglect of the other puzzled me very much, and I was dying to ask him why, but thought it wiser not to do so. Meanwhile I was wondering how to put an end to all this without hurting his feelings, which might result in an eviction. Fortunately some days ago he had told me about the girl across the hall who had one night slept with the boy upstairs and pestered him ever since. The mere mention of her name had an immediate, sobering effect. Soon afterwards he left. In the doorway he paused and said sheepishly: "You won't mention this to Daisy, will you?"

I promised that I wouldn't, and he blew me a kiss.

Next morning on opening my door I was approached by Daisy and instantly blushed.

"Do you know what time Tom came home last night?" she enquired sternly.

"No," I replied and tried to get past her.

"I didn't hear him come in," she said, agitated. "I always hear him come in."

Unable to pass her I decided to withdraw and close the door.

"Just a minute," she cried, and I waited, nervously.

"Did he call on you last night?"

"Call on me?" I repeated, thinking that surely she had no right to ask these questions and I didn't have to answer them.

"In your room. Was he in your room?" She made it sound as if, having been in my room, Tom would be doomed.

"In my room?" I echoed, remembering that I'd promised not to tell. "Last night?" I simulated bewilderment, as though she had said the moon was green and attempted a slow puzzled smile. "You really must excuse me," I went on, squeezing past her. "But I must . . . I really must . . ." Surprisingly she didn't try to stop me, and when I came back from the bathroom, she had gone.

Later had a note from Tom begging me to meet him on the corner at five o'clock. It didn't say what corner, but when I got off the train at six o'clock he was waiting for me in his car outside the station.

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "I didn't know what corner." I started to open the door and get in.

"What are you doing?" he cried. "Get away from here. I'm waiting for Penny."

Flustered I stepped back and collided with Daisy.

"Good evening," she said, smirking.

Tom groaned and covered his face behind one hand. "Did she see me?" he asked, when she had passed.

"Of course she saw you," I said annoyed. "This is absolutely silly. She works for you, doesn't she? Or do you work for her?"

"Sometimes I wonder." He sighed. "I hope you didn't tell her anything."

I assured him that I hadn't, and he told me to go home straight away, which

would, he felt, allay her suspicions. The problem was I hadn't eaten yet, but if I told him he might insist I should go home without eating, and I would not have the courage to argue. For some obscure reason, perhaps because he exuded a kind of worldless disapproval that reminded me of my father, I knew that if he told me not to eat I would have to go home without eating. On the other hand what he didn't know couldn't hurt him, so I walked off without explaining and had a big dinner. Unfortunately, upon returning I met Tom at the gate just as Daisy came sauntering towards us across the lawn en route to the incinerator with a bag of rubbish in her hand.

"Back so soon," she minced.

"Yes," said Tom briskly and paused, while after a brief hesitation I hurried on.

It is certainly not that I want these things to happen. All I ask is peace. I do nothing, absolutely nothing to provoke these incidents, but it would seem the less I do, the less I say, the more complicated my life becomes.

Hartman wrote to enquire how many references I wanted. He had already posted me two and suggested I had them photostated as he could not continue sending me any more. They must have been posted to the old address and I'm definitely not going out there, nor do I propose to write the janitor and ask him to forward my mail. In view of these developments I have answered an ad for the position of housekeeper for a single man with a child. It seems to me that Emma is more of a hindrance than a help. And my room is growing colder day by day.

Had a letter from a man, named Milton, who wanted me to ring him for an interview. Rang at the appointed hour and asked for Mr Milton. The girl at the switchboard said: "Who?" then burst out laughing and said: "Just a minute, love." Arranged to met Mr Milton Sunday in a garage(?). Spent all day in the library to escape the cold and on returning met Tom in the hall. He hissed at me as we passed and turned to blow me a kiss, which seemed so peculiar to me that after thinking it over I decided that possibly he said: "hush" and put a finger to his lips by way of telling me to be quiet. This reminded me, painfully of the fly. One must think a little before interpreting gestures.

Milton who doesn't want me to call him mister lives in a flat on top of a garage. He is 28 (he says) with auburn hair, narrow cheeks and a short, tight-lipped mouth. Has the build of a football player and told me, when I asked, that he used to play. His hands are broad and very white with freckles. Nervous hands, but well kept. He looked at them now and then, oddly pleased or amazed, a little like Dick, almost as if they didn't belong to him. I had the impression that he lies, also I think he drinks.

A woman has been living in the flat quite recently. There were flowers, already wilted, but not yet drying, in a vase on the table. On a shelf in the bathroom stood several empty containers that had once held assorted cosmetics. And on the floor in one room I found two hairpins. I picked them up and put them on the table. Milton blushed and gave me a long, searching glance. "A friend of mine . . ." he muttered, ". . . helped me out for a while."

I got it from him in bits and pieces, her name: Christine, her age: twenty-two and so on. She came from Perth, where she had left a husband and a child. He didn't say why. Apparently his brother had met her at a party and brought her to Milton's flat. Having nowhere to live she suggested staying to help him with the boy—who now incidentally lives in the country.

Later she found a job at a pottery and subsequently left taking with her, he claimed, some tea and sugar, but leaving behind a vast array of ashtrays and

vases. I had the peculiar sensation that he was making it up as he went along, pausing after each bit of information as if to gauge my reaction and sometimes going back, fretfully, to dot an i or cross a t like someone writing a letter and wanting to make sure he hadn't left out some vital detail.

Having finished with Christine he talked at some length about his wife in the same halting, tentative manner, almost like a writer creating a character, picking and choosing with infinite care what to include and what to leave out. She too was young and had plunged him hopelessly in debt. Father once boasted of owning a doorknob in a bank. In much the same manner Milton appeared to own various minor parts of a washing machine, a fridge and a stove, the greater parts of a vacuum cleaner and a car and almost every part of the furniture. This, though new and very modern, imitation teak and purple covers, bore evidence of wear and tear and very little care.

Milton spoke with great enthusiasm about his future. He was going to manage a branch of the firm he worked for. Then ten minutes later he had evidently changed his mind and decided to be on the board of directors. By the end of the evening he seemed to think he actually owned the firm and had been dethroned by a legal hoax but would eventually through hard work and sheer determination regain his rightful heritage. I needn't worry about that, he assured me earnestly. At one point he suddenly became acutely distressed. A man named Walter at the office didn't like him. He was absolutely certain of this and wondered if I could tell him why. Which of course I couldn't. Didn't I think it was strange, he asked. I said I thought it seemed a little odd. He nodded glumly. But it was true. There was no doubt about it. No doubt at all. Only the night before he had offered to stay a little longer and give Walter a hand.

"They like you to work overtime," Milton explained to me with the air of an undertaker discussing the details of a funeral. "Show a bit of initiative, you know. Not that I mind," he added quickly. "But in my position you don't get paid for overtime, which is a bit unfair, because I need the money badly. But I don't suppose they know that. Perhaps I should tell them?" He looked at me, hopefully, and I agreed that perhaps he should. But no, he decided after some consideration, he wouldn't. It was unwise to seem too greedy.

"Anyway . . ." he resumed his story. "I told the bloke that I would count the money in the till which seemed to please him. So I suggested perhaps I better separate the twenty cents from the fifty cents."

Here Milton paused to study his hands as if they had only just been given to him. "What do you think?" he asked. "Is that a sensible suggestion, or is it not?"

"Quite sensible," I said.

"Yes," he said slowly, pausing again, and then blurted out, now visibly agitated, that Walter, inexplicably, had laughed at his suggestion. "Why separate them?" he had asked.

"They're so much alike," Milton had said, bewildered by Walter's reaction and embarrassed to admit that he himself occasionally had trouble distinguishing between the coins and even, in fact, once or twice had made a mistake.

"I wouldn't worry about it," Walter had said, smirking. Definitely smirking.

"It made me mad," said Milton and darted me a sudden, suspicious glance. "As if he knew something about me. I lost my temper. I've a bit of a temper. So I slammed down the till on his desk and said he could bloody well do it himself. And went home. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe he doesn't know anything. I don't see how he could."

For a second, while he was speaking I grew panicky and terrified like sometimes at night when I cannot sleep and worry about how I'm going to survive. A kind of vertigo feeling that makes me dizzy. I rose and said that it was late. I had to go. But Milton said the last train had left. The gas fire was lit, and I

thought of the long way home and the cold in my room and agreed to stay. At breakfast we talked about his wife again. He did, that is. She had wanted to deprive him of her money.

"Your money, you mean," I said. "Don't you?"

He looked at me startled. "Yes, of course. What did I say?"

"Her money."

He made a deprecatory gesture. "Her money, ha! She ruined me, that girl. I didn't even like her. I told her so. 'I don't want to marry you,' I said. But I did. Now why do you suppose I married her?"

I told him that I didn't know which semed to disappoint him. Later, when he briefly left the room, I saw a letter addressed to Mrs Christine Castle lying on the table and read it inadvertently. Apparently her back had been injured in a car accident, and the letter was from a lawyer who advised her to settle out of court for $3,455. If she would sign the statement enclosed a cheque for $2,500 would be forwarded to her immediately. The difference, I gathered, would go to pay for legal cost and hospital expenses. I thought it strange that Milton had opened her letter and wondered why. He caught me reading it and said, casually: "She rang me at the office yesterday and told me to open it." He paused, looked at me strangely and said: "I could sign that statement, you know. Just copy her signature and they'd send the money. And I could pay all my bills. Only, of course I wouldn't be able to cash it, only a woman could. Worse luck." He laughed and put the letter in a drawer of his desk.

Later when we walked to the station he handed me the key and told me to move in any time. I had changed my mind by then, but didn't like to tell him and decided to return the key by mail. After all I had made him think I wanted the job and wasted a good deal of his time. It was impossible right then and there to say no without hurting his feelings.

* * *

3. CHRISTINE CASTLE

On returning this morning I encountered Daisy at the gate. She glanced at her watch and frowned.

"I went for a walk," I said, guiltily.

"Did you?" With a dubious smile. "No letters for you today," she added. "The postman has been here, and I looked, but there wasn't anything for you." If I had expected any, I'd instantly have suspected her of tampering with my mail. She carried that pugnacious look on her face which tends to accompany a guilty conscience.

Slept all day and woke with symptoms of a cold. Went out at dusk for a meal and had a strong yearning for fish, but I seemed to have lost my sense of direction, or else perhaps the cafe has moved. Was thinking a great deal about my mother and my childhood for no apparent reason. My mother was extremely anxious for me to be popular and in my teens, just to please her I often pretended to be invited to parties, when I wasn't. She would make me a new dress, very stylish or what she called 'sophisticated'. Her taste was immaculate and she did right not to yield to my childish desire for frilly desires. I know that now, but at the time I didn't. On the nights of these parties I walked the streets and made up stories about the food we ate, what we did and what the house looked like. My mother insisted on details and when, at the appointed hour, I returned to account for the evening she listened, wide-eyed and not without envy to my stories. "How lucky you are," she sighed, and always at that moment the lie became a truth.

Meanwhile, because I could not find the restaurant I wanted, the others closed, and I went home without eating.

Woke in the middle of the night thinking that my heart had stopped and suffered a prolonged attack of vertigo, which always gives rise to the most peculiar ideas. It occurred to me that if Milton was murdered that night, the police would be bound to suspect me. And how could I hope to explain the key to his flat and where I'd spent the evening? Who would believe that I didn't know him, when I'd spent a night in his flat, and he had given me his key? Would anyone accept that while looking for a restaurant I got lost in memories? And why this particular cafe? Because I wanted to eat fish—which sounded perfectly absurd.

I visualized how the police would uncover my attack on Mrs Denver and the theft of Leonard's wallet. Undoubtedly I should be tried and found guilty of murder. Then with a surge of relief I remembered they had no way of tracing Robin Green to Emma Brown, and it was as Robin that Milton knew me. So that was all right then, I thought with a glow of satisfaction. It was only when the girl across the hall got up and turned on her wireless that I saw how silly I had been to worry about something that hadn't even happened yet.

Above the din of the wireless I heard the girl cry out: "Roy . . . just a minute Roy." The music ceased abruptly, and a deep, unhappy voice said: "No, I can't. I'm in a hurry."

"Aw please Roy. . . . It won't take a minute. Come and get it, darling."

"No, damn it. No. Let me go." There was the sound of a slap, followed by a scuffle. I got out of bed and, shivering with cold, ran to the door and peered through the keyhole.

The girl was on the floor, her face knotted up like a monkey's, and a tall, black-headed chap was trying to drag her towards the fridge.

I opened the door and asked what he was doing. He turned and said: "Mind your own business."

"Yeah," said the girl. "Go away."

He started dragging her again and then with a passionate ardour that frankly shocked me threw himself on top of her. I quickly closed the door and hurried back to bed. I burrowed myself deep under the covers and presently dozed off. Slept till noon, then rang up Milton and said I couldn't come until next week. He was evidently alive and sounded disappointed.

This decision of mine, not to return the key, puzzled me greatly at first, but now upon reflection it seems quite logical. Obviously something has happened to Christine, and Milton wants her money. For this he needs a woman, any woman and therefore advertised for a housekeeper. If I returned the key he would find someone else to do his dirty work, so clearly I am morally obliged to keep it and find some way of stopping this hideous scheme of his.

I took a long walk to think this over and on returning found a pink slip of paper on my door mat. "Penny rang," it read. Signed Daisy. But why on earth should Penny ring me? Since it seemed quite likely that Penny might ring again, and I wanted some time to think about it, I took another walk, and came back determined to disengage myself from all these dreadful complications. I simply have to find a job, as my money is running short.

Tom, seeing me in the hall, came sprinting up and wanted to know why I hadn't given him Penny's message.

"I thought it was for me," I explained and felt tremendously relieved to know it wasn't.

"How could you possibly think it was for you?" he said on a note of exasperation.

"It was under *my* door."

"That's because you were supposed to tell me on the 'phone, when I rang up."

"But you didn't ring," I pointed out, triumphantly.

"Yes, I did, but you weren't here, when I rang. And you hadn't left the message

in my room, so I didn't hear about it until Daisy came home, and now Penny is furious."

By then I was quite exhausted by all these tedious trivialities and told him acidly I didn't give a damn, that all he ever thought about was himself, and other people had troubles too, in case he didn't know. I was quite astonished at the way I spoke. It didn't sound like me at all, and I thought, a little frightened, that perhaps I had better apologize. But just then Tom began to yell that since I had moved in, his troubles had multiplied like rabbits. This was so grossly unfair that my anger immediately boiled up again, and I said with considerable heat that it wasn't nice to be roused in the morning by murderous activities and sexual orgies right outside one's door. Tom's eyes began to sparkle, gleefully. What did I mean by that? he asked, and I related how Roy had knocked down the girl across the hall and tried to put her in the fridge, and then when I'd interfered the two had ended up copulating on the floor right there in the hall outside my door. Tom looked at me, speechless, then recovering announced he didn't believe me. This so infuriated me that I went out and rented a room in a boarding-house. I was upset and so emotionally confused that I gave my name as Christine Castle, which on second thought seemed quite a brilliant idea of mine.

I waited till Tom had left for lunch, and then I called a taxi. Just as we drove off Daisy came running out, just back from her shopping, a bit earlier than usual.

"You're shifting, are you?" she asked. "Does Tom know?"

"Central Railway," I told the driver and left her standing there, gaping. From Central I took another taxi to the boarding-house and felt deliciously like a criminal.

I now believe that Milton killed Christine and dumped her things in the harbour. It's no good telling the police, of course, they wouldn't believe me. But obviously my position is most precarious. I am the only one who knows what he has done and what he is doing. Thus if someone should steal the letter he has, he would instantly suspect me, since I have his key. It would be quite simple then to accuse me of theft, not the letter of course, he wouldn't want them to know about that, but something else. I rang him in the afternoon and said I would arrive on Monday, which evidently pleased him. Went to his flat after the garage had closed, but before he was due to be home, and found the letter, untouched in his drawer.

It came to me then that if I were to remove the temptation I would be doing him a favour. So I took it with me, also two other letters with her signature.

I rang Tom again this morning and asked if it would be all right to come at noon.

"Any time," he said. So then he hasn't missed the letters then. But the longer I wait the greater the risk. Meanwhile I have signed the statement and posted it to my lawyer. It will be interesting to see if my theory works out. I do believe that Milton is a very dangerous man, a criminal, a menace to society.

At the library this afternoon an older grey-haired woman came up to me and said: "Emma dear, what on earth are you doing in Sydney?"

I naturally was quite upset as I'd hoped to leave Emma far behind me, and couldn't think of anything to say.

"Didn't it work out?" she asked gently and patted my hand.

A younger girl came up to join us. "You remember Emma . . . Emma Brown," said the grey-haired woman.

The younger girl shook her head. "I don't think we've met, but I've heard of you, of course. I'm Sally."

It was on my lips to ask her what she had heard, but I didn't quite have the courage.

"Sally . . ." said the other woman with a significant look at me, ". . . is living in Bobby's house."

"Oh, are you?" I said.

"You didn't know that, did you?" she continued with evident relish. "But Sally only uses it on weekends, isn't that so?"

"Yes Alice," said Sally, looking bored and ill at ease as if she'd rather be somewhere else.

"Isn't it odd how things work out," Alice went on with the look of a horse heading back to the stable. "Six months ago Bobby was begging Emma to stay in his house, while he was away, but Emma couldn't manage to arrange it, and here she is now without a roof over her head."

Before I could protest she raised her hand. "I know you'd didn't say so, dear, but from the look of you things must be pretty bad."

It has been obvious to me from the beginning that I must look like a faded, thinner and possibly older copy of Emma, so I wasn't in the least insulted. It's no good arguing with people who think you look awful. It merely reinforces the notion that you're very brave and trying to make light of your trials. This in turn kindles their admiration and thus their determination to help you. Therefore prudently I said nothing and looked with compassion at Sally.

All exits barred she managed a smile. "But of course. Your need is greater than mine, and if it's any help to you, I'm sure Bobby would want you to have the house."

"Oh no," I protested. "I wouldn't dream of it."

I didn't in particular want the house, though if it was offered to me I wouldn't reject it either. Alice was whispering to Sally, while I frantically began to wonder what address to give. I knew they would pop the question and when they did, I still hadn't found an answer. It was too late admitting I wasn't Emma, equally unwise to give them Tom's address, and a false one might give rise to a thorough investigation, so in the end I blurted out: "The truth is, you see, I just arrived this morning and haven't got an address yet."

All of us now were deeply embarrassed by Emma's desperate position and wanted only to part.

"I'll drop you a note at the G.P.O." said Sally smoothly, "as soon as I can tell you anything definite."

I thanked her and left in a state of growing excitement. There was something I had to do, something terribly important and urgent which kept leaping into my mind like a searing flame and then abruptly fell back and temporarily disappeared.

On my way home I passed a man who had evidently been stabbed and was lying on the pavement with blood gushing from a wound in the stomach. Some sort of morbid curiosity compelled me to stop and watch. It didn't seem real at first, rather like watching a show on television. The people around me had a look of dark pleasure in their eyes as if they were watching a strip tease or a lynching. In the moment of thinking this I suddenly felt faint. The street began to turn dizzily and all sounds receded. I had a most peculiar sensation that I was going to fall or be violently ill. This is a feeling I have experienced a thousand times in my dreams—a sense of absolute impotence and isolation—a kind of living death, as if all means of communication had suddenly broken down.

The man on the pavement was trying to get up. Two men restrained him. His eyes met mine and I knew we were dying together, that he too was falling, whirling through empty space in an alien universe. He closed his eyes and fell back, while I, sighting a chair in the distance, began to walk towards it. I sat down, and the sweat came pouring off my face and my body. It was a bank I had entered, which seemed significant somehow. Later when I looked at myself in a mirror I was white, and my eyes were very bright and feverish like the boy in that flat

on the cross. I felt that was very significant too, as if I had been granted a vision at last.

That night I had a dream that the man on the pavement was Milton. And the pavement suddenly became a bed. I felt terribly sick and there was no one to turn to, for Milton had closed his eyes and refused to see me. I rattled off facts as irrefutable proofs of my existence. I begged him to speak to me, to look at me and finally stabbed him gently with my finger. My hands, I saw, were covered with blood, but this did not deter me. I stroked his hair, and still he didn't stir. "It's only a dream," I said out loudly and covered him with sheets.

Everything went smoothly as expected. The cheque arrived and I deposited it at once, then left the boardinghouse and rented a room in Glebe. There was a telegram from Sally. The house is ready and she is sending me the key. It has occurred to me that God might care. Perhaps he doesn't merely watch. I walk the streets and feel as if I own the world. With God on our side, what a difference it makes!

After a decent interval I withdrew half of the money and opened a bank account somewhere else for Emma Brown. Cabled Sally and told her I was coming the following week. "Everything comes to he who waits," mother used to say. But she was wrong, so wrong. One must participate.

I can see now very clearly that I've wasted my life, waiting for Santa Claus, waiting for Lancelot, waiting for buses and trains, people and birthdays, waiting for God, who was waiting for me. Waiting for love and life like the river waiting for the moon, the tide. Like the water waiting for a stone to ripple the surface. Like a cow waiting for a bull—any bull, instead of chosing her own.

A few days later I cashed the rest of the cheque and closed the account for Christine Castle. It was then that they found poor Milton's body in his bedroom. His last name was Castle, which is something that never occurred to me. So then Christine was his wife. Oddly he was stabbed in the stomach like the man on the pavement and covered with sheets like the man in my dream.

Needless to say I was shocked and almost panicked. I realized at once they would think that Christine killed him, and the people in the bank and the boarding-house would be describing me, not her. Then Robin Green or Emma Brown would be accused of murder, and all my plans had gone astray. Consequently I withdrew my money from Emma's account, packed all my things and left them at the station and thought it over, carefully.

But after all it was quite silly of me to panic. Robin Green had disappeared, and no one will ever think to look for her. The problem was then how to dis-engage myself from Emma Brown, who after all was not me, but someone else. I went to have my hair cut, and later somewhere else had it dyed. And then, being now neither Brown nor Green. I opened a bank account for Peggy Grey.

Meanwhile poor Emma was arrested and charged with the murder of Milton and the disappearance of Christine. Emma, unfortunately, had no alibi. She has been living for the past six weeks in a North Sydney flat all by herself and has never, she claims, seen Milton nor his wife. She doesn't even know them and never has. On the night of the murder she went for a solitary walk to think about a novel she is writing. She intended to stop and eat but was so engrossed in her thoughts that she forgot. All of which sounds pathetically familiar. She denies having met any of her friends while in Sydney, or having cabled Sally or cashing any cheques.

I know just how she feels. Poor kid.

Grace Perry

PASSING THROUGH

One of those cold wideopen western mornings. No cloud anywhere and the sky stretched thin, pale as Chinese parchment, the brush strokes too bright, too sharp-edged to be real.

Like a straggle of sheep the grey buildings of the town hunch along the river bank. After the long dry the water is little more than a trickle around sandy islands and exposed roots of old trees.

Bridge planks rattle under the wheels. Main street. Too early for anyone to be about. A few fists of paper bowl over one another by the School of Arts, shoebox shape dunked in milk chocolate. No welcome on scabby notice boards sloughing off past happenings.

Furniture and farm equipment conspire in shop windows secreted under iron awnings.

And at the end of the block, crossroads. Seem to remember stories of suicide burials. No graves here. If you ask me the whole place is dead. Four separate signposts offer contradictory invitations to the traveller not to stop but dash off somewhere else.

There slap in the middle of the intersection, the memorial. Dangerous, I call it, though not much traffic comes through this way, I bet.

The birdsoiled figure on top looks shabby and sad, rifle across thighs, feet astride embracing columns of names—victims a few wars back.

The face is shadowed by the broad-brimmed hat. I wonder if he was meant to resemble anyone in particular. More likely he's another conglomerate monstrosity, quotient of multiple small deaths. A hunk of granite. Somehow appropriate.

At his right hand the corrugated pubroof mushrooms over lace petticoats protecting crude paintings of women on mirror and panels of green tiles stinking of stale beer.

Left hand, red brick and glass, the bank. The one structure that could possibly be accused of attempting to be modern and not quite making it. Empty and shining the counters remind me of long coffins. Leathery plants in troughs twist their necks towards the patch of sky beyond the glass.

Once round the square.

Behind the monument the picture show and next door the cafe. Pyramids of fruit shrivelled young. Funny how sitting in the dark, or not in the dark a man gets hungry. A confetti of wrappers and cartons.

The blownup comeons always get to me. Not that there's anything appetising about large mouths scribbled over with moustaches and whiskers, or the exaggerated shapes. Some sadist tried to rip them upwards from the corners. Most of

the bodies below the waist are gone. Jagged edges of breasts clap softly in the wind.

Cold, all right.

In the petrol station four white-faced yellow bowsers rooted in bitumen. I give a toot and wait for someone to appear.

I get out, stretch myself, huff on cramped fingers, stamp numb feet. They hurt. Circulation slowing up. Doesn't bear thinking. I push the door marked "Office" and go in.

A brown bench thick with dust. There's a bell, one of the round kind with a knob on top. May have been silver. Banged with the butt of my hand it manages a feeble "ping".

No one comes.

Maybe the place is deserted for years. Cobwebs cover piles of tyres. On shelves tools and tins rust undisturbed. The red Coca-Cola dispenser seems an anachronism.

Through a far door, the workroom. High up one side a row of louvres admits bars of light. Chains dangle from girders. A damaged mudguard and great splotches of oil on the concrete floor are the only evidence of cars.

The cough startles me.

"Yesss . . .?" The question becomes a wheeze, then erupts into a prolonged convulsion of coughing.

"Fill 'er up."

He considers me, spits disapproval. We trudge outside. The sun is unkind to the rabbit skin cap, shirt of grey flannel. Beneath dungarees, the frayed toes of slippers.

The nozzle gurgles in the orifice.

He clears his scrawny throat. Watery eyes scan the sky. The face, red-brown as a withered apple. An exuberant cauliflower growth ulcerates the rim of an ear.

"Fine day."

"Weather's not what she used to be." The battle for breath goes on between statements. "Not by a long chalk . . . Never known it so cold . . . One time a man knew where he was . . . Summer or winter . . . Now, what is it, Mister? . . . You tell me . . . Hot one day . . . Perishing next . . . Snow last week . . . Tough I call it." Petrol splashes the slippers. "That all?"

"How's she for water and oil?"

The grey eyes pity me. The bonnet squeaks. The cap hisses steam. He smears the oil gauge down the shirt. "Could take a pint?"

"O.K."

"Never known it so cold." The tips of his fingers are blue protrusions from woollen socks with the toes out. He shivers as he upends the oil.

The ear fascinates me.

"That don't bother me much . . . Get fixed up right as rain . . . Soon as me vet mate gets back . . . Got some stuff takes things off sheep like a shot . . . Fair eats them . . . No trouble . . . Nothing to it." The offending outcrop is tucked out of sight. "Two dollars eighty."

I give him three singles. "Any maps of the district?"

"New here, eh?" The tone suspicious. "Figuring to stay?"

"Just passing through."

"Maps'll set you back ten cents apiece?"

"But you get them free."

He recoils from me, lips parted in a snarl. "Just like the bleedin' public . . . All the same . . . Always after everything for nothing . . . Takes a man's time . . . Figure time's worth something . . ." The wheeze gains on him.

"Don't bother."

"No profit in petrol these days . . . Main business here's engineering . . . You know, smash repairs . . . "There's a trace of pride. The dollars flap in his hand. The milky eyes no longer look at me. "Fifty years . . . fifty . . . I been here come October . . . Hell of a hole . . . Never known it so cold . . . Goes right through you . . ."

I get back in the car and turn the key. The engine picks up and purrs. I let out the handbrake. She begins to roll.

"Hey. Just a minute, mister . . ." He flags the money.

I stamp on the pedal. The car skids round the stone soldier and away.

Peter Loftus

JAGO AND THE DEEP NIGHT

I am an old man, thought Jago. And I will die soon. Probably. He felt heavy and sour as the moment lapped at him and passed. In his throat he tasted something like bile, or flat wine. He took up his handkerchief and spat gently into it. Outside, across the street, the men from the railway gang were hunched up under the lee of the new concrete platform. The rain flipped over the street and skittered along the bitumen, and now and then a broken sheet of it, buckled and flayed by the cutting breeze, rose like a waving film, lunged across the top of the platform, and vanished down the street.

Jago belched softly. His mouth was stained somewhere in its channels. He put his book down on the small table beside him, and called feebly: "Madge." More like a murmur, a shambling sound, a sick man muttering to himself in the cave of his own hollowness. His wife came slyly across the lounge-room carpet and up to the window. She looked out at the gusty raw day flapping its watery wind into the suburban afternoon. She did not look at him, as he sat silently in the glittering chrome chair, under the dark green rug.

"What would you like, Arthur?"

Her voice was soft and resigned. Tired of me—buggered with me—but she loves it. And Jago tried not to whine.

"It's alright, dear—I just wondered if I could have some raspberry or something—my throat's queer again."

She continued staring out at the day. The three men huddled by their rail-trolley were smoking under a ragged bit of tarpaulin. One of them, who looked foreign, Italian, was pushing his ams about in animated conversation. The other two squatted stolidly and looked at the rain.

"I wonder why those men don't have a cover on that trolley. They must have seen today that it would rain." She let the curtain slide back a little closer to the end of the window. She sighed: "Yes, Arthur—I'll get you some juice. Or would you rather have some of that chicken soup I made for tea? It's strong."

Jago shifted his right leg so that it slid against his left, which was now almost totally useless. He turned painfully to her as she stood in the middle of the carpet. Sometimes he thought she waited until she got there before asking him a question just so he would have to turn round from his position at the window to answer.

"Whatever you like, dear."

She stood still and said softly, looking at him this time: "Well, what would you like?"

There was just enough emphasis on the "what" to make him squirm—he felt his bowels roll in him. Jesus, did it matter what he had? She knew he only wanted something to take the sourness from his throat. But he couldn't afford to lose his patience—to show the slightest sign of irritation. He was her victim if she chose. In all the countless little things that really mattered, that made up the invalid's halter, his chain of petty pains. And he knew that she loved it. Her power. He tried to sound meek—and grateful.

"I think I would like some soup."

She slid out of the room. Jago turned to the window and forced back the slime in his throat.

He didn't know why he asked Madge about the railway line. It had been, of course, quite an event in his life. Nothing ever happened in the house except for the odd visit from George Gammon or Ralph Smith, who had been in the air force too. And occasionally the sub-accountant from the firm came, a man who was lonely and talked with the polite urgency of loneliness. And when Madge went out in the car he would sometimes listen to the radio which was by him, or turn on the automatic record player. He had had a liking for jazz when he was young—but all he could get on the radio was the monotonous thunder of guitars doing something he hated, because he knew that even those responsible should know that it was bad—and the desperate disc jockeys, the furniture ads, and somewhere else the dark drone of Brahms or somebody. Once he said to himself —I'll get Madge to draw something out and I'll get a real two-wave job. Then I'll get the Yank stations. There'll be jazz on them. Probably.

Madge's friends, of course, called as usual. They were very nice to him. He was a precious commodity—a real invalid, helpless in his chair—and always there, and always forced to listen. His arms were getting weaker, and often he didn't even bother to try and wheel himself off to his room. He liked Bev Andrews, a big rolling woman, who was gay and a bit bawdy. But she didn't come very often, because Madge was always aloof with her. Madge knew about a man in Sydney.

One day he asked Madge if she knew when the line and the station would be finished. Madge didn't know—that meant nobody in the street knew. So he sat and watched, as the weeks went past, the men and the trucks and the cranes out over the street. And the days passed without quite so much of the old dragging ache in them.

Dr Abrams came to see him with new pills for his back, which was getting very weak.

"Don't you get tired of looking out that window, Mr Jago? I think I've seen you there every visit for the last—oh—six weeks or so?"

Madge was standing by to receive instructions.

"He's here all day, doctor. From the moment the workmen come." And she had moved the curtain. "I think he regrets the weekends. There's nothing to watch, is there, Arthur?"

And she looked down at him with a cold smile which chilled Jago's marrow. He wondered then what he had ever done to her. He felt he had fallen from the hoist and crippled his body so that she could wrap herself in the coils of power, and drop them over him, one by one, year by year, for compensation.

"I seem to find that watching the work—takes me a little—a little—" Madge's cold eye on him "out of myself."

And he had coughed, with that apologetic sound which he had cultivated out of some need born of his weakness, but which he recognized and hated all the

same. Dr Abrams, a bland little Jew, thought he understood.

"I read when I can. But there's quite a lot goes on over there—and I think . . ." But he was too tired to continue. And anyway, he didn't care what he thought, he didn't care what reasons he could dredge up for staring out the window all day at a mess of machinery and men making a railway terminus in the deadest heart of a chill suburban graveyard—he just liked looking.

"He seems to enjoy it, doctor. It passes the time."

And Madge had broken out into her crusty smile, which seemed to Jago to resemble the rust flaking off in a broken curve from a piece of plumbing.

The day the terminus was opened Madge had visitors. Jago had feigned headache and was wheeled into the spare room where he slept. Madge said he moved too much at night. He could hear cars driving up, the loudspeakers being tested, and people filling the street.

One of the women in the lounge said loudly, "Look, there's a train coming."

"What a difference to the street all this noise is going to make," another mild voice offered.

And Madge must have known what he was thinking, as he sat and cursed and shifted in the spare room.

"What a pity Arthur isn't here to see."

And he heard the discreet chink of a teacup.

The icy bitch, the bloody crow—hate and the venom of a thousand helpless days crackled in him as he sat in the twilight of the windowless room. He felt his pulse rising and battering in his throat—he took a sip of the stuff Abrams had given him for his nerves, and leaned back in the chair and forced his feelings down. He knew Madge was bitter because he had had a bad night, and kept her awake most of it as one of his awful dreams boiled around his room. They had been a part of his life for years after the accident, and they had something to do with the war, but they were vague, and he didn't know in the morning what they had been doing to him. Nothing about them was ever clear.

Madge suffered them in a sort of cold charity, ministering to him through the long hours, and she would tell anyone who happened to call the next day that she wasn't too well—Arthur had one of his bad nights. They are trying, you know. And the strange, grim thing about it all was that she would never hear of him being sent to a home. Their only son Roy, who never came to see them now, and spent most of his life at racetracks, had once suggested it. Madge had recoiled. When Jago himself had put it to her, once, in a mild, hopeful way, she had said that she wouldn't hear of it. She wanted him for this reason. So that she could hate him without interference, Jago cursed in the room, under his sick breath. And he had given up his requests—he hated his weakness, but he couldn't drive himself against her will. And there was always the built-in dread of any sort of hospital, lurking there, to fortify his evasion.

He could hear people milling about, and music, from a small band, and then he heard the train. I'll be damned, he thought, it's a steam engine. They must have got it out for the occasion. He sat and swore in his chill room. But he couldn't keep it up.

"Madge!"

The sound of his own voice almost terrified him. It was keen, urgent. He could tell it had produced a result—the silence in the room outside was stiff with surprise. Madge came into him with a new look on her face.

"Take me out to the lounge—I'll have a cup of tea with you."

And he started to wheel the chair towards the door with a firmness that made her stand back in quiet astonishment. But she snatched at her composure, quickly.

"Yes, Arthur, of course."

There was a speech in progress, the loudspeakers were braying with important statistics and prophesies of economic grandeur. There were children, cars, a pavilion, and right in front of the window, directly opposite the house, a huge old grey engine stood steaming and sighing on the rail. Jago ignored the women, who settled down to talk about other things once the novelty had paled. He watched the engine. His hand shook, and the cup which Madge had handed him with the gravity of an exiled aristocrat clattered in his fist.

He didn't care very much about all the bustle of people around the pavilion, the stalls, the band. The tin signs with the station's name on them were bright and new—the tired title which seemed to promise some sort of suburban Arcady looked gaudier and more vulgar than it sounded. What impressed Jago was the engine. How long was it since he had seen a steam engine? He remembered, with sudden clarity, the long bleak platform at Albury in the foggy damp of a morning in 1942, when he had stood there for hours waiting with others to be taken north and fly aeroplanes against the Japanese. He remembered how on that morning the steam from the engine had dropped from the pipes with a heavy, shooting sound, water dripped from a tap somewhere on the station, and it became confused with the sound of water falling in glittering runnels from the cab of the engine. Outside the darkness of the long, icy platform, where dozens of men in their uniform drabness stood and yawned, a farmer had let two muddy sheep across the lines further up. A bell rang. The frosty lines were spangled with light when the sun seeped through the fog.

Children clambered in and out of the two carriages hitched up behind the engine, the pavilion was busy with drinks and official compliments, and the driver in the cab got out and took a beer someone offered him. It was all done with a sort of nervous gaiety. Jago drank his tea when he remembered it was still in his hand, and answered polite questions about his health in a flat monotone. Madge was unhappy, and that pleased him. So he sat and ignored the women, and stared at the train. Madge sat uncomfortably and acted the mid-afternoon hostess without her usual queenliness. Jago was an unexpected presence. And he knew it.

One of the women was talking. She knew something about the line. It was going to run freight from a factory a mile away, and use the station terminal as a switching point for the main line to Melbourne. And it would be used at night as well. The women expressed loud disapproval of expected noise. But Jago received the news with a sort of glee. He didn't know why, but he felt better. And he knew that the trains at night wouldn't be steam engines. There would be noise alright. To the complete amazement of Madge, he leaned forward in his chair, fixed his eyes on Mrs Hallam, a tiny dry woman with a languid nose and a social list, and said to her: "things will happen in this street at night from now —you take my word for it." And with great effort he wheeled himself off. Madge stared at him over her cup. She was fixed to her chair by something—was he really grinning?

Back in his room, Jago read the last pages of his borrowed Life of Rommel, and fell asleep over his rug, as the engine outside sighed and gushed with steam.

Ralph Smith called the next evening, to find Jago sitting by the radiogram and his wife sewing in a corner, in a sulky sort of way. He was very surprised when Jago suggested a bottle of beer from the kitchen, and some cold ham. They sat and talked about the air force days, and old comrades, and a little bit of business. They hadn't been in the same squadron, but they knew of a few things in common. Dim faces and dead names. When he got up to go, Smith realized with a shock, a tangible effect that troubled him, that there were three empty beer bottles on the coffee table, Madge had gone to bed, and Jago had talked for nearly two hours. He got outside to his car, and sat in the darkness for a few moments. Poor bastard—look what happens when someone bothers to come and see him. He hasn't been like that for years. Should call more often—if only she wasn't such a pain. Can't follow all this excitement about trains. Suppose the poor bugger is starting to go. And he drove off. But he resolved to come again. He thought he could tolerate Madge for Jago's sake.

The night the first freight broke into the street's silent curtained hours Jago woke from the beginnings of a vague dream of noise, snapped from his sleep straight into the thunder of the train. He heard nothing but a ragged rolling sound for the first few seconds of his conscious moments, and lay stiffly with his head up from the pillow. Outside in the street, in the stale suburban shallows of the night, under the poles and wires and all the fashioned ribs, scoured skeletons the city props above the dark, the heavy diesel slid down the polished lines. The engine was idling as it came rumbling down towards the house, but suddenly the huge motor spat and broke into the darkness with a lash of compressed air going free, and a cough so deep and sudden that Jago's skin bristled under the sheets. The pistons rose and thundered as a brief acceleration kicked the great flywheel around in a blur somewhere inside the portholes, there was a hidden hum under the snarl of hot, exploding oil, the noise of the ponderous pins and gudgeons answering to the flow of fuel swelled across the neat street, the window pane chinked and Jago felt the road and the hidden bottoms of the house pulsate under his bed. The engine barked, a sharp snap of compressed air slapped in the pipes, shut off, and the pistons dropped back into a measured thrust, a steady, thumping underbeat, like the nervous quavering of drums in a hushed orchestra.

Jago sat rigid in the bed. He felt as if he had been made hollow somewhere in his consciousness, and for the few seconds of the engine's rage he felt that he was simply pure response, and his soul seemed to pulse without direction. But there was also a sort of panic that accompanied the brief exultation. As his consciousness slipped into the dark and left his nerve-ends to bounce with the ragged cacophony of the great motor, he knew that there was a fear, a cold compression in his soul. The shackled power sitting on the line on the other side of the street, snarling at the prim houses and the barbered lawns, reminded him of something. Something vague and dark, that he could not fix.

He was still tense in the bed, elbows supporting his neck and head, when he heard the motor drop to a sigh, a soft chuffing sound, and heavy iron brakes moaned on the rail. The light in the hall went on. He knew Madge would be up. She came in, huddled in her dressing gown, to find him lying contentedly back in his bed with his head on his arms. He was looking straight up at the ceiling. She shuffled over to the foot of the bed. The light from the hall broke into the room behind her.

"Arthur—what on earth is it? It's terrible."

He smiled at the ceiling.

"That," he said softly, "is a train."

She stared at him. "Of course it must be. But why is it so loud?"

"They're all loud. Don't you listen when you have to stop for them at crossings?"

"Why should I? The thing goes past—that's all I notice."

She was getting peevish. Any minute now and she would remind him of himself, and command—he knew. All she had to do was to make him conscious of Jago the invalid, and she had him under the greed of her grip—her suffocating tolerance, her perverted maternal smothering, or whatever it was that she was. He waited for it, his arms behind his head, as the engine rolled its rods outside.

"Arthur—you must have been upset by the noise. I know I was. Can I get you something to help you sleep? And your throat is nearly always bad at night. When you have your bad nights. I'll get us both something."

"I'm alright. Thank you. I rather like it."

She turned from the door and looked back at him. Her long hair hung in grey lines over her shoulders. The light seemed to crackle in her hair. She looks worse without a bun, he thought.

"Like what?"

"The noise, dear."

She made a strange squeak in her throat. "But it's horrible. What if it happens every night?"

"You can complain. To somebody."

"But it's like having a factory next door. The steam engine didn't seem to make anything like this row." She was losing composure.

"That is because it is a diesel. A huge diesel engine. About two thousand horsepower. It is unlike a steam engine—it works on the principle of concussion. Like getting knocked on the head." He chuckled softly. He could almost hear her bones lock.

"Arthur—I—I will get you a sleeping tablet. You aren't at all well."

"I'm enjoying it. I do not want anything." He made his words sound as deliberate as possible, slow and soft.

At that moment the engine threw out a hiss from its pipes, and the exhaust belched like a huge animal. The lines squealed as the train moved off up the track in a steady rising howl as turbines spun. Jago could feel the cold fear of Madge's response. She stood and shook herself as if a leech had slid over her spine.

"Goodnight, dear," he said as she shuffled in a nervous sort of way out to the kitchen. Some time later the hall light went off. He lay and savoured his conquest for a while, as he had on the day of the ceremony, after the women had gone and Madge had tried to resume her imperiousness—without much effect. But the noise at close quarters had moved something in him. He was uneasy, as if he was closeted with a sick stranger.

Madge went to work on this new and terrible problem. She started next morning. There were urgent consultations with neighbours, and complaints over the phone. The lounge-room crackled with indignation. Her friends in the street called and there was consternation in the kitchen. The whole street had been tipped into a mutual nightmare on the first visit of the intruder. Jago sat reading, and looked out of the window now and then with untroubled eyes.

Two nights later, Friday, the engine returned. It was earlier—nine-thirty, and Jago was sitting by the radiogram. Madge was out. He wheeled himself quickly up to the window as soon as he heard the thin rumble start further down the street. The great box of steel and glass rolled past the house in its intransigent cocoon of noise, the muscular solitude of an invasion of the quiet lawns, the

pebbled gutters and the red walls by the fence. It rolled by in the flares of its rising lights, slid up to the single concrete wall by the signal lamp, and waited. The engine dropped to a slow, soft thudding, and when Jago pulled back the curtain from the window he saw the phosphorus green glare of ghost lights through the portholes on the side of the engine, in amongst the great cylinders the small globes of green flickered, like a brace of aquamarine eyes.

It reminded him of something burning in a water tank, in an aquarium where, in the clear depths, green things quiver and stare in a remote separateness. There was a languid man idly inspecting a cigarette as he leaned from the window of the cab. In there, with the drivers, lights of pink and green and smarting yellow were brilliant and static, set in glass upon a control panel. Jago sat and stared at the huge red machine, dull in the dusky glare from the neon light prodded on its pylon by the platform.

The train rumbled off up the line, and came back some time later. There was more noise of wheels, a heavier rolling murmur, and Jago could see dozens of waggons following the engine. As they passed him, he could see that they were loaded with motor parts, and steel tubes, and barrels of glittering tin. The train clanked to a standstill and a man got down with a lantern onto the line. Something chinked against metal, a solitary light note in the dark air. Points were changed, and the whole long line of engine and waggons rolled up past the window. The engine hissed, a rising pitch of turbines was flung up into the night as the lights dipped past the house, the huge pistons thrummed into the dark, and the train went off up the line to new cities. He sat by the window in the dark trying to bring up, to a point where he could see it and recognize it, the strange murmurings of disorder and memory and noise that flickered with the engine's pulse. Somewhere he thought he could pick up, amongst the hot mists rising from burnt oil, a faint, vague smell, which swelled and sharpened until it was keen as tannin in a tin cup. It was like the odour of fear.

When Madge came back Jago was in bed. He heard her come through the lounge, cross the hall and listen outside his door. Sometimes he was not able to make it into bed himself, and Madge would always come in and see if he was sleeping, in the bed or crouched in the chair. Jago listened too. And he felt full with secret knowledge. The train had come. But it would be back on other nights. She couldn't stop it. She and all her committees and representations.

One afternoon he was sitting by the window reading. The street was dead outside. Madge had gone out on missions of official moment. From far up the line the single faint blast of a freight train's horns flickered into the room. Jago's empty tea-cup rattled in his hand. He suddenly felt sweat rising on his neck, nibbling at the skin. The engine came nearer, and the window chinked softly as the thud of the pistons' concussion got into the walls. The big motor barked and the exhaust chuffed viciously as the engine rolled up to the switchpoint. The thunder of the acceleration swelled in the room. Jago could feel his pulse tighten, his veins fill with some cold fluid, and then his heart gave way to a hot panic. The book and the tea-cup went to the floor at the same moment. He pushed fiercely at the wheels of the chair.

When Madge came home late in the afternoon, stung by the knowledge that there was nothing she could do about the cacophony that surrounded her two or three times a week for ten minutes at a time, she found Jago asleep, in a troubled dream, in his room. If she had returned half an hour earlier, she would have found

him sobbing, his face to the wall, under the big photograph of the Beaufighter he had flown in the Pacific, his body, even his useless leg, rattling like a column of bones, and the train rolling past the house in its ponderous thunder.

The dreams came back, and very quickly established themselves. They were still vague, and full of noise, and the rushing of wind, and most nights he woke from them into the roll and thudding of the engine. They seemed to be coming to him on the same nights as those of the engines. Something was happening to him that he couldn't understand or control. He did not know how to talk about it. But Madge guessed—and she nursed a savage revenge for a few days. She noticed one night, when the engine paused directly outside the house, that Jago turned from the window and hustled himself over to the radio, and turned it up defiantly. And sat there until she had gone to bed, the music blazing in the room.

When Ralph Smith called the next Saturday night neither Jago nor his wife could really believe it. Nobody, not even his few friends who came once or twice a month, ever called on Saturday night. Jago always presumed that other people were far too busy with the pleasant things of their own lives to bother with him on a Saturday. And Ralph had even brought three bottles with him. Jago was jolted out of his depression. After polite exchanges, Madge left and drove off to see a friend, leaving the two men together.

Ralph took a long drink. "Do you remember Archie Coombs? He was a navigator, I think. Worked with the Yanks on some of their stuff. Knew him in Brisbane. I saw him in Lae, once."

Jago was not helpful. "No, I don't remember him. There are so many I don't remember. Would I have ever met him?"

"That's a point. He was attached to our unit once, not yours. Anyway, he's up here in the Repat. Robbie Barnes told me when I dropped in to see him a few days ago on the way back from a business call. He reckons he's in the nut ward."

"Oh."

"Something that happened to him once." Ralph filled glasses. "Imagine all those poor bastards who got buggered in Changi and on the Burma Road. Imagine what they're like sometimes. All those sick old diggers moaning about their rotten bones, and farting all night."

A cloudy silence crept up on them both. Ralph, however, found further cause. "I spent three weeks in a big Repat. in Melbourne once when I had my back bad. One bloke near me was brought in—very quiet—had to have an operation. But in the middle of the night he starts yelling out down the room that the ward is full of trees and leaves with Japs in amongst them. Kept saying they were mucking around with some natives. On the ground. They quietened him down quick. But he had to be transferred to the nut wing for a few days' observation. Told me before he left, in one of his calm spells, that he'd seen it all happen. He was on the Kokoda. Said they came across this bunch of Japs while on patrol. They dropped them all with Tommy guns—and then found that the fuzzies were all dead too. Had been all the time. Said he'd never forgotten it." Ralph opened the third bottle, with an angry hand.

Jago put down his glass and gripped the side of his chair. He ran his fingers along the icy chrome. Slowly. "I saw a queer thing once. Brisbane. Must have been '43. We were in a navigation class, I think. I was bored as hell and spent half the time thinking about other things." His fingers stopped as he realized that he had probably been thinking about Madge. That's where he met her, in Brisbane. Seemed strange now—not only strange, but—repulsive. Ralph was watching him

closely. "I'll never forget what sort of a day it was. A crazy day. Gales howling outside one minute, and the next minute the whole place quiet. No rain—just hot wind. We had this class on the third floor, I think, of the Met. building at Archer field. There were these terrific winds belting down the tarmac and hammering at the buildings. Then it would be quiet. I looked up from my desk, turned around and looked out the window." He pulled both hands from the rails of the chair and held his fingers wide. "There was a DC3 sitting there, in the air, right outside the window. I could see right into the cockpit, and there wasn't anybody in her. She was just sort of hovering there, for a couple of seconds—then she dropped back onto the tarmac, the wheels folded up, and she crumpled in like an old lady giving in under her shopping. They'd parked her by the building, braked her and chocked the wheels, but they hadn't pegged her down. Along comes a decent gust, and it must've been about take-off speed, and up she went." Jago sipped at his glass. Ralph was still, surprised. "She only dropped from about three stories, but she was a complete write-off. That was queer, though—to see this bloody thing hovering outside the window. I reckon I could have reached out and touched it."

They were well into the third bottle. Jago thought there might even be some in the fridge. Ralph leaned forward, puffing vigorously. "I might have told you before about one of the tightest things I ever saw on an airfield. Anyway, you'll know if you've heard it. Happened in Melbourne. In a way, that's why it happened. A squadron of Yanks were there—I reckon it must have been '44, because I came down from the islands for a while then. They were Thunderbolts—big as barns—and they were on a long range exercise with bombs. Going out to western New South Wales or somewhere and back. Anyway, they'd been in the air about three minutes when this frantic voice hit the wires in the radio room, where I was having a cup of tea with an operator I knew. This pilot was the last off the ground, apparently, and he was in formation behind the others when his power shorted. We could hear him yelling at the squadron leader—everything dancing around on the panels—didn't know where he was going or how fast he was getting there—and he was ordered to get back to the drome. He kept saying that he had two bombs slung under, but that was just too bad, because they were still over suburbs and had a lot of suburbs to go." Ralph pulled at his glass and noticed at the same time the intense audience Jago seemed to be giving him. It pushed him on. "I reckon half the drome staff turned out to watch the poor bugger come in. Fire trucks belting along the tarmac, and all the rest of it. We saw him come, way off, wobbling a bit, and he passed over once before he made up his mind. You could see the bloody bombs hanging like leeches under the fuselage. I was positive he'd give up and ditch the plane and hit God knows what, but he came in. He hit the ground, and the aircraft went up again—six times—I counted it—and every time he bounced onto the strip you could tell everyone was waiting for the things to go off. He taxied up to the control tower, climbed out, and fainted. He was about nineteen."

Ralph looked unhappily at the empty bottle. "Unusual decision for a Yank."

Jago laughed feebly. He seemed to relax suddenly. "Thank God it wasn't me. Nothing like that ever happened to me."

At that moment they were both caught by the arrival of the freight. Its motor throbbed suddenly into the room. Ralph stood up. "Jesus! Those bloody things come at this hour? It's half past eleven." The engine belted the air with its bass percussions. Jago felt dark and suddenly helpless. Ralph was peering out the window. He snorted. "That'd be enough to drive me mad if I had any sort of nerves at all." He turned round to see Jago struggling in the chair. He saw Jago's white face banded with deep lines, and his mouth was a tight scar somewhere in

the middle of it. Ralph was stunned by the fear and fury on Jago's face. He stood with his empty glass in his hand, in a stupid sort of way.

A car's headlight flickered through the curtains, and Ralph felt the room vibrate as the train roared off again up the line. Jago sat very still, rigid, in the chair. He seemed to be staring sullenly at the floor. They heard the garage door slam on its steel hinges, and moments later Madge was in the lounge room, putting down keys. She was surprised, very surprised, to see the two still there. She was about to mouth a special form of thanks designed to discourage the few who occasionally tried to amuse her husband, when she noticed him staring at the floor.

She looked at Ralph, who was standing stiffly by the sofa. Behind her bland forehead words were forming—printed slots were clicking into place. Getting him drunk and silly. I'll have to put him to bed.

"Is Arthur alright?"

The question reminded Ralph, an unimaginative man, of grey icicles.

"He had a bit of a turn when the train came. Otherwise, he's been fine."

They both looked at Jago, who was still sitting with arms clenched to the side of the chair, fixed by the rattling of wheels and the heavy coughing of the engine outside, as it fussed on the line. Ralph tried to give to words the intention of ointment.

"That racket would be hard to get used to. Even if you weren't a sick man."

By this time Jago had become an uncomfortable presence. He still seemed unaware of Madge. Ralph knew that his words were lame. And Madge had everything tight under her grip. He wanted very badly to go.

Madge indicated that she would have to attend to her husband. "The noise is terrible. But there's nothing we can do about it—except move."

They were at the front door. "The strange thing is that Arthur seemed to like it—at first." Ralph felt some gesture might be due.

"Will you be able to handle him on your own?"

Madge took it, as she would take it, as a signal for release. "Oh, I'm quite used to it."

And Ralph went out to his car. He turned the ignition on, and sat with his eye on the plum red of the warning light. For a long moment.

Madge returned to the lounge. Her husband was not there. She was checked by surprise for a moment, hesitated, and then strode into his room. At first she saw nothing but the thick darkness within the door, and it was a matter of some seconds before she thought to turn on the light. Outside, across the street, the muffled pulse of the engine went on. Jago was sitting in his chair by the bed, his face huddled on his chest, his arms relaxed now, folded in front of him. But his eyes were raised, and they were fixed, resolute, on the big photo of the Beaufighter neatly pinned to the wall.

Madge's ideas of remonstrance were demolished—she stood rigidly by the door, puzzled. He made no attempt whatever to recognize her presence. He was locked in his intense, framed isolation. It was as if she did not exist any longer for him, but had been swiftly and completely exorcised, swept away utterly from the bare grounds of his world. She sensed this, and her bones went cold. A feeling of desperate emptiness took hold in her, and for the first time in years she caught hold of a sense of sudden and undeniable pity, pity for him, sorrow for his squeezed, hunched figure by now almost moulded into the cold, efficient steel bracket of the chair.

But she was sorry for herself too. All the years of her wasted life with a

flabby invalid whose manhood had long since been denied her. Madge went weak by the door, and it shocked her. Her weakness. She had intended to bark at him, wrap him up into the efficient parcel she made of him when she had to dispatch him to bed, and go off herself to enjoy her drowsy moments of reflective self-righteousness. That was the usual pattern. But instead his crushed figure sitting in the folded dark had suddenly, like a blade drawn with a single sweep into the flesh, drained her of her power. She was drifting without the anchor of her righteousness. It was strange and it made her afraid. Instinctively, although she was aware that she couldn't win, couldn't bring back her mastery over the domestic battleground, she reached out quickly, blindly, in an attempt to save herself, to assert the old majesty, to reshuffle her conflicts into the tower of confidence they had formed only a few moments ago. She struggled with her drooping bones.

"Arthur—I will help you if you like—it's very late, and you don't look well." But it had trailed off in the last seconds to a flat and sick tone. Almost an entreaty. Jago kept his eyes on the photo. He did not flick a line of flesh. His soft voice came to her from an infinite distance, out of the quiet darkness where he now sheltered from her. Out of the other world into which he had wheeled himself.

"Go to bed, Madge—I don't need you now."

His eyes, all the time, on the wall, where the photo loomed. She looked at it herself, as if she might see something she had not seen before. But there was nothing—she had no key for the door through which he had gone, the new place of being which had given back to his face since she saw him in the lounge-room some of its old strength, some of its former dignity. She felt alone and cold. Although he was still a bent invalid in a chair, he no longer looked as if his soul was stooped. She stood in awe of this stranger. The words bit at her, scrabbled at her self-control across the room, where she stood confused and silent. She would have made another attempt, another commanding phrase which might reduce him to his correct dependence on her whim, had not the train shifted the pitch of its low rumble into a savage bark, and turbines whined on the leash of rods. Jago could almost see the hand shift the throttle. Madge slipped blindly out into the corridor.

Jago sat with his burning eyes fixed on the photo, his limbs tense again as the engine outside rolled and spat into the darkness. He could feel the blaze behind his eyes.

It was the only time he had ever flown without an observer. That was one of the first things that had helped him, after the shock of strangeness on the first night of the train, to focus his fear onto something concrete in his own past. He could not remember why he had been alone, but he saw distinctly that he was. That was enough. He could not fix in his mind, in the glare of the inner cone of light which now seemed to be scattering beams along all the channels of his nerves, the take-off or the familiar thunder of the two big engines pulling the aircraft off the island strip. But the sea was there, the pale milky green far beneath, flat and wide to the horizon where the earth dipped like a rimmed disc, and the sun was an indistinct blur of white light crackling in the upper blue, dipping slightly into the far corner of the afternoon waters. He was out off the coast, flying high over the deserted sea—the brown blur of land far away to his left as he peered out from the large cockpit, squat between the two ugly lumps of the Hercules engines. The sun was sharp through the perspex.

He must have been an hour or so out when the chirping of static and the electronic burping in his headphones was cut clear by a crisp, searching voice calling for him. It assigned him the personality of numbers, and he called back,

acknowledged identity, and listened urgently to commands. An American reconnaisance plane had sighted small ships, a string of them, entering the Sula Sea, but now becalmed in a stretch of dead water. They were large native craft, apparently. Jago was given position and swung the heavy Beaufighter in the thin air for the search. He went down and kept the aircraft just high enough to span a wide bowl of sea. The sun was now a long way away, arched above the sudden stop of the hot horizon. But it was still bright and incandescent with white fire.

By the time he had found the convoy, the sky was spattered with the first streaks of muddy orange, the sea was still as a board. On the dead green top where waves should have been furling foam the ships were smudges of sharp brown. They were so still they looked as though they were melting into the pale green, or rising in a pure vertical line from the bottom in individual places. The engines were fanning the air in that dead drone, the purring heavy whisper that made the Japanese fear the Beaufighter as they feared no other stranger in the air. To the right of his tense stare Jago could see islands dabbed into the sea, close to the coast of Negros. He spoke quickly into the radio, checked the fuel meters, and kept his eyes on the brown dots. He would have to do his work quickly, before fighters met him from the coast.

He had instructions, along with all other armed reconnaisance pilots, to deal with anything he saw that might mean help to the enemy. He did not think about the purpose of all these boats—it was assumed. There were too many of them. He dipped the wings sharply, drove the throttles forward in their slim grooves, and the plane dropped dead to the greasy waters. He flew flat over the sea, the plane buzzing slightly. He stared nervously at the line of muddy, ramshackle sails which glowed with spots of white and red as the sun sprayed them with dabs of colour before it made its quick drop to the line. The wooden craft raced towards him as the engines skimmed the plane over the water. He was flying fast at a hundred feet. He held on to the controls with a grim concentration, pushing his mind and his body to the centre of watchfulness, steely and tense, always to the centre of his will.

He pulled up sharply as he raced over the packed line of boats, went up high and fast, and floated back over them for a full minute. They were poor, drab things, patched with bark and bamboo, their greasy sails of coloured slats flat and thin in the dying air, where the winds of the South China Sea had left them. They were very close together. Over his shoulder as he turned back he saw men waving bits of rag from the littered scows—it seemed to him that they were full of men, all in shabby strips of greyish-white. There were eleven boats. They were heavy and fat in the water, and they were now packed into a thick, curved line as they had drifted together.

He came down in a slow swing which dragged his stomach into the floor and up again, and he turned to the boats. He switched on the guns, checked the power flow, pulled the aircraft almost to the level of the sea, squared his face into the centre of the gunsight, and leaned his left hand carefully into the throttles.

The plane lunged forward with a sort of clumsy eagerness which surprised him for a moment. The engines now answered with a dark sound, a heavy boom like a last wave breaking, and they pulsed through the thin fabric. The airframe stuttered with a steady, intense vibration, as fixed and resolute as the boring of his will on all the live tissues of the machine. The boats careered towards him.

The Beaufighter was an improvised weapon of destruction. It was elaborate with power—and one man could turn this power to the aim of his will by the soft pressure of switches. When the boats loomed at him, perking from side to side in the fine hairs of the gunsight as the plane swung onto them, Jago pulled firmly on the heavy plastic control, and closed his eyes, as if the diseased sunlight stung him.

The fuselage shuddered and the whole aircraft seemed to check itself as the guns raged. The four cannon in the nose rattled like heavy drums being pounded in an empty lane, the six machine-guns crackled into a long, tearing sound which seemed to go on for ever. He kept his hand firmly on the trigger, until his arm locked with the pressure of his cold tendons. He sat forward in the strapped seat as if his body was being slowly coerced to bend, as if a steady force was ushering him from behind. The guns roared in his ears, and their wild vibrations flooded his wits.

Ahead of him the sea broke apart into columns of bright foam, slim pillars of water jutted into the air, crumbled at the top into dots of bubbles and lumps of green, and slipped back into the green slate of the sea. The sea spat and boiled in front of the aircraft, always just ahead of its squat grey nose, as it swept onto the miserable boats like an armoured wing. Jago had never held the guns for so long—they drowned the heavy burring sound of the engines. Their savage clatter went deep to his bones, he was absorbed into the sound with a sort of helpless glee, he felt crowned with power. In his eye he could see the white rags.

When he pulled back at the end of the run, with a planeful of hot, dead guns, he turned into a long, slow roll, eased the engines back, and let the plane drift into the sun. The noise had snapped off like a switch, leaving him blurred and dumb. There was nothing on the hazy green slab of the sea where the boats had been. Then he picked out a large blotch of splinters, of torn wooden pieces, large segments of board, and slats of bamboo. The cannon had taken the fragile craft apart, as if all the seams had melted into the sea. Jago looked down carefully, as he prepared to call back. The sun was still hanging on the world's rim, and bristling with muddy red fire, and on the flat patch of sea underneath him he saw now the wide, translucent stain of delicate crimson, like a fine film that wavered on the sea.

He swung back onto his course, with the echo of the guns still somewhere in the bottom of his head, and the plane laboured on. In two days he would be twenty-three years old.

Jago sat sweating in the dark room—he felt he wanted to sob, or break out with a sign, or wheel himself madly into the street. The house was dead. The engine clanked a long way down on the line. If it came back now he would meet it with a cold heart, for his soul had been dredged out of him, he was left only with the sediment of himself. He would not fear it any more, its pulse of power could not crack his fibres with the lash of the unknown, the stream of darkness that had made him panic in the night. He put his hand up to his cold face and gently stroked away the crease of sweat from his eye. He folded the wet drop in his hand. He looked at the floor. They would have to move. He had found his fear in the dark, but he knew he could not have the image of the fishermen thrust at him, on any night, he could not live with that sound of power on the line.

In No 1 of 1969

LANTANA was attributed to Daphne Hillman and RETURN to Natalie Scott. We regret the authors' names were transposed—the titles and authors should read

LANTANA — Natalie Scott

RETURN — Daphne Hillman

Judging by the comments we have received, our Young Writers' Issue has been popular with our readers and has been a welcome stimulus to young writers themselves. *Westerly* invites contributions from writers of all ages, but is especially interested in the work of younger and more experimental writers. Most of the contributors to our Young Writers' Issue were poets; we hope to see more of the work of young prose writers in the future.

Apart from creative work, *Westerly* carries articles and reviews. While these are usually commissioned, we are always happy to consider non-specialist articles (not more than 3000 words) on literature, art, history and sociology, and other topics of general interest.

THE COPY-WRITER'S DREAM

Hoardings screened the landscape from his sight,
He drove for power-thrust miles, his head thrown back,
Down of breasts and teeth whose white
Everlastingness oppressed him. A neat flak
Of jingles burst above him. A coupe
Howled up alongside: at the wheel a German
Who flailed him with a baton until they
Crashed in a ditch. He was listening to a sermon
And waiting for the punch-line, someone came
(Her hair brushed over him: it smelt of flowers).
He was being carried, strapped into his name,
And then into his car. He drove for hours,
Always ending in the ditch, with the slow wheels turning,
The sermon, the scent of flowers, the smell of burning.

BRUCE DAWE

SONNET

Beside your gate columns of broken stone
rest on the path, material for your
haute couture gardening. We knew the door
they framed as if it were our own:
we'd meet by the old portico, and stand
embracing by those columns, lingering
till nightfall, never guessing time would bring
such fine proportion to the wrecker's hand.

I knew my body as a column graced
with classic wreaths of hope, being young and sure
such love would last forever. Stone by stone
it fell under your blows until the last
lintel was down. Now vanity alone
preserves the noble fragments that endure.

T. F. KLINE

YOU AIN'T EXACTLY TRUE

You ain't exactly new,
You ain't exactly true;
But you take my fancy dear you do,
You ain't exactly new.

You ain't exactly good,
You take more than you should,
But that's the way it's gotta be,
And that's the way it is for me;
You ain't exactly good.

But be my pal, and you really shall
Have all of my fancies free;
I will sit and smile for you all the while;
You ain't exactly new;
You ain't exactly true!

MARGUERITE JEAN GORDON

THE DOLL'S HOUSE

You're a doll he said,
A long-legged yellow-haired honey, sweet
With gingham in lollipop pink, a-dangle dangle down;
Eyes like grapes and lips as bright as candy.
Oh yes you're a doll he said
And sugar, you make me sick.

SHIRLEY KNOWLES

THERE IS ONE ME AMONG YOU

I betrayed you
today.
toyjudas dorgan.

I didn't mean to—
I drove past the off ramp
unnoticing

just following the stream
of chromium conversation.
suddenly
I heard!
like exploding coke bubbles
in my mouth,
my words fizzed and burned
inside my head.
I want to swallow

the 30 pieces.

TOY DORGAN

STORM

Rain fell

like apples

from trees.

Very hard

they broke

as they hit

The ground

and gushed

juice that spread

Everywhere,

then ran

bubbling

Into the big,

red jar

of the earth.

JOAN MAS

COSMOS

In astonishment
she bent
over them. No scent.

But—"Oh! darling,
look, *look*
at the cosmos," she said.

"So—so," she sighed,
"The glow—
such a rich purple bed.

"*Royal*, of course.
Some are
its canopy. And red."

JOAN MAS

TRIPARTITE POLITICAL POEM

I. MEMORIES

Filthy filthy filthy

swines homosexuals fascists
capitalists warmongers traitors
communists and subversives

filthy fascist capitalist warmonger swines
traitorous subversive communist homosexuals

filthy fascist capitalist warmonger homosexuals
traitorous subversive communist swines

filthy subversive homosexual swines
traitorous fascist capitalist warmongers

filthy traitorous communist
fascist subversive capitalist
homosexual warmonger swines.

II. ALLEGIANCES

Imperialism imperialism imperialism
fascism fascism fascism
capitalism capitalism capitalism
communism communism communism
blacks whites
black-whites white-blacks
black imperialists white imperialists
imperialistic blacks imperialistic whites
black-white imperialism white-black imperialism
imperialistic black-whites imperialistic white-blacks
black fascists white fascists
fascistic blacks fascistic whites
black-white fascists etc.
black capitalists white capitalists
yellow capitalists red capitalists pink capitalists
capitalistic blacks whites yellows reds pinks
black communists white communists
red yellow pink communists
black-white white-black red yellow pink communists
communistic blacks communistic whites
communistic black-whites communistic white-blacks
communistic pinks communistic yellows etc.
imperialistic fascists imperialistic capitalists
imperialistic communistic black white yellow pink etc.
fascistic imperialists etc.
fascistic capitalists etc.

fascistic capitalistic blackistic whitistic yellowistic
redistic pinkistic etc.
red yellow pink black white imperialistic
fascistic capitalistic communistic
fellow-travellers—
istic istic istic
ism ism ism
ist ist ist
etc.
istic-ism ist-ism istic-ist
istic-istic etc.

III. POLICIES

ul al ent ic ion etc.

Respectful mutual national political independent
territorial peaceful economic social cultural
integral international regional collaboration

Collaborative regional international integral
cultural social economic peaceful independent
territorial political national mutual respect

Respectful mutual national political independent
integral international regional peaceful
territorial economic social cultural collaboration

Collaborative regional economic peaceful
independent etc.

ive al ic ul ent etc.

NOEL MACAINSH

COMMODITIES

Some of my friends have new shoes,
new underclothes they shyly confide;
some of them have new false teeth,
new spectacles with the latest rims.

Some of them buy paper-backs—
by means of which one friend found God—
How good! New underclothes, new teeth,
new zest for life from a book on God!

One friend of mine has a yacht—
but this of course is harder to do.
He saved for months. He did without.
Now over the waves we bravely pursue.

New things have made our life worthwhile.
Acrylon, Orlon—plump sails to the fore!
Even my love, so coolly she flows,
keens to the wind, will use me no more.

NOEL MACAINSH

MY LOVE AND MOLLY

Things are not so jolly Between my love and Molly,
Between my love and Molly and me.
I should be frantic, If there was no possibility
Of a reconciliation Between my love and Molly and me.
No, it is not so jolly, The skies are grey, I'm blue today
'Cos things are not so jolly—Things are not so jolly—
Things are not so jolly 'twixt Molly and Me!

MARGUERITE JEAN GORDON

EPISTLE FROM TOM COLLINS HOUSE

There are three old men on my mind—
My father, my wife's grandfather (Pop),
And Tom Collins, in whose house I write;
With other, minor characters.

1.

The fire is burning well,
contesting the New Winter.
A timeless situation.
A supper of coffee and cake.
You pour it from the cup into the saucer,
then slurp it up. Crumbs fly.
Just as you did before, crouched
by the hissing train in the night,
the billy over the glowing coals.
You always know
when the trains
is coming
by the light in his eyes,
in his eyes the Past—
just as the train calls
close to us now.
The pulse of night
is in the strong
rhythm of trains.

2.

As I pull a weed, hungover,
the effort great, I think of him
that fell the trees,
that built the house,
that built on either side a house for each son,
that heard Pop's train slow for the corner,
the Fireman that held back the coal . . . .
You always know when
the trains is coming
by the lights on the track
as you walk at night.

Out on the desert/the train goes fast
Clickety clack, clickety clack.

As my baby now
listens in on
his mother's heart,
so I as baby heard

clickity clack
clickity clack
Pop's train maybe.

3.

Tom, Tom, I hope
my father didn't own yr land
you hewd with yr own hand.
Tom, I sit here knotted,
my best work lies in my wife's womb.
Do I trespass at yr table, typing in yr room?

4.

The fire is going down.
The wind has dropt.
The record stopt.
And I am more within myself.

I try to stop myself

listening to my own

breathing.

The singular breath, if counted,
is horrific.

My Father took so long with his last,
unfinished breath.
My Mother lies in the night,
counting beads.

Everything has to be in Numbers;
to be in Rhythms.

My friend, a musician,
hears everything in Notes
and in certain Keys.
He says it hurts,
acute awareness.

Myself, I co-relate everything
to my own intricate pattern,
to Times unresolved,
to evershifting Rhythms.
O for simple clickity clack,

Pop's train or my own Hornby;
chop-chop of treefelling;
or to be in the Womb, swelling.

To be at a Beginning.

Or simply not

to have Happened

at all

ANDREW BURKE

AN UNSIGNED SLADE ORIGINAL

I feel like an obscure egyptologist
scouring these covers for treasure
or a body. But the body has gone,
the pages are all cut; I close the
sarcophagus and look elsewhere
for bandages and ointment.

Mother told me, cleanliness
is next to godliness; always a zealous
man, I worship best when in the bath.
This is my body and let the water out.
Standing in my adamness, I take
my unsigned Duchamp original from the rack
and scrub the taste out of my mouth.

This is the letter that I always
meant to write you. I won't say
anything because you've had it
all before. And besides, I've already
given the game away. Dear me,
I remain.

LEON SLADE

HOMAGE TO A HOMOSEXUAL

> *". . . . . rebellion against the subjugation under the order of procreation, and against the institutions which guarantee this order."*
> *—Marcuse.*

He was the artist who drew in chalk
on the pavement just before it rained. He wrote
his poems in water-colour paint on ice
and left them to dry in the sun.

Today, I saw him lurking in the shadows
of Bank Place, sockless, his face shaded
by a growth of beard and the dust of
a city. He stepped out into the road
not wanting or not wanting to see
the ponderous semi-trailer, stacked
with virgin Valiants. I ran to his side;
and on a bed of smashed spectacles,
Superman, in his death throes, whispered,
"Kryptonite, bloody kryptonite".

Tonight, I have chalked a memorial
to him at the corner of Collins and Queen. I've painted
a water-colour epitaph for him on a block of ice
which I've placed on the memorial

to wait for the morning sun.

LEON SLADE

THREE DAY GUEST

Charismatic as always
he made an unexpected guest appearance;
a good Iago
with all his magic working.
And I loved him
even as he destroyed me.
Now I am become
a poor leaden-tongued Othello
struggling to recapture
the magic of a first night.
The audience, distracted,
is nonetheless sympathetic,
even loving. She applauds understandingly.
But, from the darkness of the wings
where he watches
I am upstaged, forever.

BILL WARNOCK

IT'S A FREE COUNTRY!

So the weeds are at it again,
campaigning all over the garden,
waving their green flags
and their banners of blossom,
until pageants and processions
seem drab by comparison.

I seize the spade from the shed,
and advance upon them.
Then I think:
a weed is a weed,
just as a man is a man,
and if a man has rights
what about weeds?

Then I laugh and laugh,
because I remember:
man is the boss-cocky,
he holds the money-bags,
he has the big battalions
of motor-mowers and mattocks,
he controls the stock market,
he sounds the starting siren
and the knock-off whistle,
he sits in the union secretary's chair,
and the chair of the managing director too,
he holds the monopoly of weed poison,
he wears the policeman's helmet,
and he and the garden tools
have a mutual defence treaty.

How then could have a weed have rights!
Hand me the file
that I may sharpen the shovel.

IAN MUDIE

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Wannan, Bill. *My kind of Country*. Adelaide, Rigby, 1967. 199p. $3.75

Linklater, William and Tapp, Lynda. *Gather No Moss*. Melbourne, Macmillan, 1968. 222p. $3.50

What kind of response to their environment do Australians have? I never cease to be puzzled by this question, and although I haven't come up with the answer I'm pretty sure that the Australian's response to his country is totally different from that of the Englishman, or at any rate of the English woman. This image of one's country has absolutely nothing to do with patriotism or my country right or wrong and nothing much to do with loyalty in any public sense. It is a relationship between a person and a place which has about it the same quality as a relationship between two people. For the English exile at least it has some of the attributes of a love affair, the loved one is not perfect, but is known, real and beautiful.

If you are an Australian who has read as far as this you may wonder what I'm talking about, which will only go to prove my point. That Australians get homesick I know, there is a plaintive queue of them in the Botanical Gardens at Oxford waiting to smell the eucalypts, but their longing is for a generalised concept: gum trees, beaches, wide open spaces, above all sunshine, and bright hot sunshine is a great destroyer of personality in places. The very words used to describe the non-urban environment in Australia are vast, impersonal and harsh; the bush, the outback, in the sticks, the mulga, back o' Bourke. How they contrast with the loving rather secret words of the English countryside, hedgerow, woodland, lane, footpath. These words suggest intimate knowledge and closeness. It is my contention that despite the large population and the diminishing countryside the English have a more immediate and responsive relationship with their environment than the Australians. Partly of course this is a matter of changing seasons, Spring and Fall are so obvious that even in London or Liverpool you can't miss the fall of old leaves or the budding of the new. In most cities public transport brings the countryside within the reach of all but the most deprived child; Epping Forest is only a bus ride from Bethnall Green and excursions for things like blackberrying or (alas) bluebell picking bring a consiousness of country things to many town children. Thus even in urban England a child can grow up with the consciousness of particular idiosyncratic landscapes both urban and rural to which he has a personal sense of belonging The great diversity of English landscape plays a part in this, Bournemouth is not like Bath, London is quite different from Lincoln or Jarrow on Tyne. Each new era offers a new personality to be explored and cherished. Most of the English, when they are homesick are nostalgic for one or two specific places, not for England as a whole.

This intense devotion to place can be demonstrated over and over again in English literature; as Professor Helen Gardiner has recently pointed out poets as diverse as Tennyson, Eliot, the Beowulf poet and the writer of *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight* all use specific places, recognisable landscapes, as part of the emotional furniture of their poems. Such use of a specific place seems to me much rarer in Australian literature. There are outstanding exceptions, Judith Wright's poetry and *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* for instance. But then Henry Handel Richardson was an expatriate Australian and Judith Wright was brought up in the country. It is my experience that urban Australians do not usually feel strong ties with this natural environment rather than that. If you grew up in the Kimberley, or the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales, or the Western District of Victoria then you might make strong ties with your rural environment but if you grew up in one of the cities then you would be less likely to become passionately involved with a place. Most of the cities, after all, are more alike than they are different, especially in the suburbs where most of us live, and the very rivalry between cities is the product of their sameness. Gum trees, sunlight and his own quarter acre will do the average Australian.

Nevertheless there are some Australians who are linked to a particular area by very strong emotional ties. In *Winbaraku and the myth of Jarapiri*, Charles Mountford says "The philosophies of the aborigines are linked (intim-

ately) with the topographical features of a particular locality". Just how strongly and intimately linked some of us are now beginning to learn, and the Weebo affair has shown how little we are prepared to accept and understand the emotional life of other people. Charles Mountford's book was something of a revelation to me because of what it has to say about the attitude of a group of desert aborigines to their environment and also because their attitudes enable one to see that environment through new eyes—their eyes perhaps.

The book is about the travels of a group of totemic beings. These creatures of the dream-time, giant and semi-human have an important place in myth, best described in Mountford's own words:

> The men and women of the Ngalia and Walbiri tribes believe that before the time of creation, the surface of the earth (which had always existed) was one vast plain, unbroken by hill, water course, or any other natural feature. Nor was it inhabited by any form of life.
>
> Then at some ill-defined time in that long distant past —totemic creatures emerged from the surface of the level plain, and started to wander aimlessly over the face of the earth. As they did so, they carried out the same tasks as the aborigines of today—they camped, made fire, dug for water, performed ceremonies and other relevant activities.
>
> Then, for some reason which the aborigines cannot explain, the Dream-time came to an end, and now wherever the Totemic people had performed any task, the place is marked by a rock, hill, watercourse, or some other natural feature.

Mountford has chosen to write about just one such group, in which Jarapiri the snake man is the most prominent character. Apparently there are many such groups and journeys and knowledge of most is in danger of being lost along with the way of life of which they are part. Jarapiri is connected with an area in the McDonnell Ranges, the start of his journey was at Winbaraku "A spectacular double peaked hill about one and a half miles long and a thousand feet high." In this area live the Ngalia and Walbiri tribes and it is their stories which Mountford has recorded. The myths, he says, provide them with an explanation and philosophy of life and they define relationships and laws. The stories, which are thus very important to them are kept alive in a number of ways. They are passed on by oral tradition which explains the geography of the land and they are remembered in totemic ceremonies with songs and colourful body decorations. There are also cave paintings and engravings on sacred objects.

In this book Mountford recounts how he followed the path taken by the mythical creatures from Winbaraku where they started their journey, to an area many miles to the north where Jarapiri and his party finally passed beyond the knowledge of the Ngalia and Walbiri people. He did the journey in a land rover with aboriginal guides who were able to recount to him the various exploits of the mythical party along the way. "The long journey with my aboriginal companions over this totemic route allowed me to see, first-hand, the strong emotional links that bound them so closely to their land. Everything they saw about them were to the aborigines, continuous reminders of the truth of the mythical stories that explained their origin," His companions were able to arrange for performances of secret totemic ceremonies which both explain elements of the totemic journey and keep its memory alive, and they were able to show him and explain to him various paintings, some of them quite spectacular.

All these things are told in an unadorned style whose plainness is extremely effective in reflecting the country and harsh conditions. Mountford is concerned primarily to record and when necessary to explain, comment occurs fairly rarely, most of it in the introduction and first chapter. Thus the account of Jarapiri's journey is allowed to make its own forceful impact. Every natural feature of the landscape has been explained by the aborigines who live in their area in terms of what was done there by the totemic creatures in the dreaming. So for them, wherever they go, there are constant reminders of the myths which form the basis of their way of life. Such unity between the present and the past, between life as it is lived and its sources is remarkable and surely enviable. We should certainly be doing everything we can to preserve and to learn from such imaginative unity with an environment.

This book helps one to appreciate what is the birthright of still tribalised aboriginal people. It also helps one to understand a little more

about the country in which both they and we now live. There are still parts of it so remote and unchanging that a dead tree will lie for long enough in one place to become incorporated into the myth. This has happened for instance in the case of one dead tree which represents the body of Jarapiri who rested on the spot where the tree now lies. Such distance from the world in which we live, where the tree would have been taken for firewood or defaced by vandals long since, lends us a valuable perspective. It offers an insight into a way of life which values imagination, and a relationship between man and his environment which has nothing to do with material wealth.

The book is beautifully presented with excellent photographs and diagrams. Some of the excitement which must be generated by the rock paintings is captured in the illustrations and the photographs are well related to the text. Anyone who lives in Australia and wants to understand the country must surely read it.

The same cannot unfortunately be said of either *My Kind of Country* by Bill Wannan or *Gather No Moss* by William Linklater and Lynda Tapp. The first is a collection of "yarns, ballads, legends and traditions" many of which strike me as trite and rather depressing—a typical example is the definition given by David Healey "I look upon him as a genuine Australian . . . A man saturated with dry humour as it were" Although this is the level of much of the humour in the book there are some good things—the ode to Westralia which I'd be lynched if I quoted and of course the well known but utterly delightful

Kangaroo Kangaroo
Thou spirit of Australia
That redeems from utter failure,
From perfect desolation,
And warrants the creation
Of this fifth part of the earth.

Nevertheless while such a collection may amuse the Australian, it hardly presents a real picture of the country.

It is odd that this is often the case with books about Australian life by people whose own response to it has obviously been whole hearted. *Gather No Moss* is the autobiography of William Linklater who has wandered all over Northern Australia, who knows it well and loves it. But he fails to communicate any real excitement or understanding of the country to his reader for whom the thing is a string of anecdotes. To have experienced the unusual is not enough, one has to understand it and to communicate it. Linklater's Australia seems trite compared with Mountford's.

CAROL BOLTON

Pearson, W. H. *Henry Lawson among Maoris.* Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1968. xvi, 224p. $5.00.

In recent years renewed attention has been given to both the publication and assessment of the works of past Australian writers, and every bookshop worthy of that name, has a special section devoted to what it terms "Australiana". In the field of Australian writing a much honoured place is given to Henry Lawson and Cecil Mann has attributed to him the unconscious role of the founder of a Lawsonian school of prose writing. Of late, much of the adulation given to Lawson as the writer *par excellence* of the nationalist tradition in Australian literature and the exponent of a nationalist code of values, especially that of mateship, has given way to a more critical assessment of both Lawson's writings and Lawson himself. This tendency towards discretion and selective evaluation in the treatment of Lawson and his literature was evident in the publications made available to commemorate the centenary of Henry Lawson's birth in 1867 and is the keynote of W. H. Pearson's recently published wrok, *Henry Lawson Among Maoris* (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1968).

One of the lesser known aspects of Lawson's life, and probably because of this, an aspect considered to be relatively unimportant by Lawson's critics, is Lawson's third visit to New Zealand in 1897, during which time he was employed as a teacher at the Mangamaunu native school in the Kaikoura district of the South Island. Ostensibly, Lawson's reason, or at least his wife's reason, for taking this position was to provide Lawson with a steady income while, at the same time, giving him the necessary leisure to pursue his literary career. An additional reason given by his wife, Bertha, who seems to have taken the initiative in procuring the teaching position, was to isolate Henry from his Sydney drinking companions and, if possible, the temptations of alcohol generally. One is tempted to question the successful fulfilment of any of the reasons given as the Lawsons stayed at Mangamaunu for only five months from 5th May to early October, 1897, during which time Henry found himself increasingly out of sympathy with the Maori people in the area and unable to cope successfully with the demands placed upon him as the teacher of their children. His literary output during his stay would seem to have been small and little of it was published. Neither Lawson's sojourn in Mangamaunu nor the writing accomplished there have been seen by his critics to be integral to the general development of his thought and the expression of that thought in his other, and more major contribution to Australian literature. Indeed, the creative efforts inspired by Mangamaunu, notably "A Daughter of Maoriland", have been viewed as being directly contrary to Lawson's views on "universal brotherhood and mateship".

Dr Pearson has given quite a different interpretation to this period at Mangamaunu; an interpretation which sees the effects of Lawson's stay there as marking a crucial point in the development of his thought—"an aesthetic crisis". To quote Dr Pearson, "the artistic crisis that came out of Lawson's experience at Mangamaunu was a withdrawal. He had taken up the challenge of interpreting a different culture, but he retreated into bitterness when the values of his own culture were offended. But the crisis was also a reassertion of the values from which he had hitherto drawn artistic strength; a recognition of the limitations in time and place in which his talents could operate. It preceded a deeper exploration of the area of experience he knew. Within four years three volumes containing some of his most memorable prose had been published, mostly set in Australia: *On the Track*, *Over the Sliprails*, and *Joe Wilson and his Mates*". (p. 154 of *Henry Lawson Among Maoris.*) If this interpretation is correct, and certainly it is convincingly and painstakingly put forward, together with abundant evidence to support it, then the later period of Lawson's life and his disillusioned retreat from the realities of the newly developing urbanisation of Australia have been in part conditioned by this New Zealand experience of 1897. Moreover, the apparent inconsistency between Lawson's doctrine of universal brotherhood and mateship and his limited application of this doctrine in his writing is lent added explanation and weight.

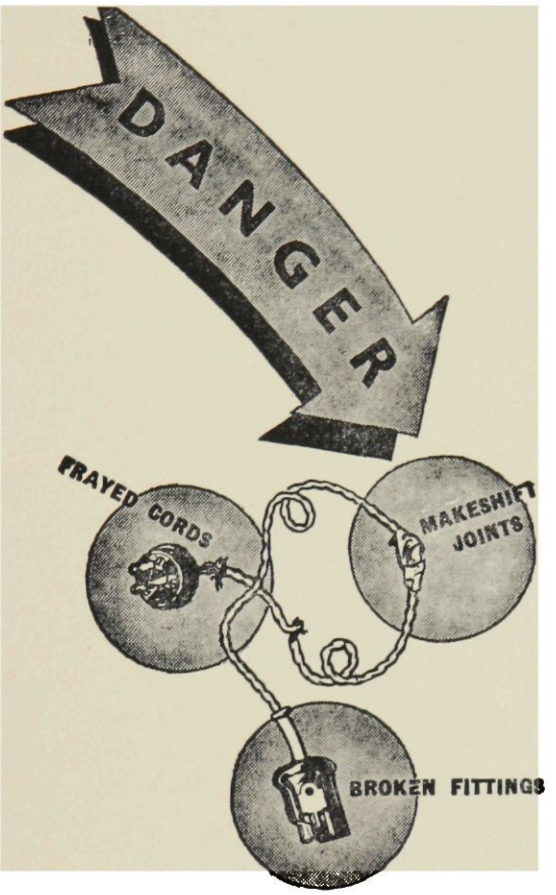
Dr Pearson himself does not seem to have realised the full extent of his study of Lawson's

experience among the Maoris—he says in his introduction that his purpose is to explain why a man who advocated the idea of human brotherhood should have failed in his relations with the Maoris and, in particular, should write such a story as "A Daughter of Maoriland" with its bitter message of the futility of extending overtures of universal brotherhood to an inferior people. However, it would seem that Dr Pearson has attempted more than this—he has tried to link Lawson's experiences among the Maori people of Mangamaunu with the rest of Lawson's life and work, and, in so doing, has dealt yet another mortal blow to the over-stressed evaluation of Lawson as the uncritical proponent of universal mateship and brotherhood. He has achieved much success in both his avowed and seemingly unconscious endeavours, yet for all this "Henry Lawson Among Maoris" is not an easy book to read. Some of the content of its earlier chapters seem unnecessarily over-detailed until they are viewed in the light of the final chapter, "Lawson's Aesthetic Crisis", where Dr Pearson at last justified their pedantry by his conclusions which far exceeded his acknowledged purpose.

Superficially, the book appears to lack continuity and perhaps the main reason for this is its loose construction—in the first two chapters the popular conceptions of Lawson as the propagator of universal brotherhood and again as the eulogiser of the Australian bushman are critically evaluated in the light of Lawson the individual and Lawson in society. In the following two chapters Lawson disappears while the author develops the background to Lawson's teaching position at Mangamaunu by outlining the origin of the Mangamaunu Maoris and the nature of the native teaching policy adopted by New Zealand educational authorities in the late nineteenth century. Dr Pearson does not only confine himself to simply a brief outline of the native teaching policy but critically examines it in the light of its avowed aim of using teachers as "missionaries of civilization". The remainder of the book is again devoted to Henry Lawson, first as a teacher at Mangamaunu, then as a writer crucially affected by his contact with Maori culture. An epilogue gives evidence of Lawson's continuing preoccupation with the Maoris of Mangamaunu and two appendices, one reproducing Lawson's letters from Mangamaunu and the other providing extra information of Lawson's three visits to New Zealand, further consolidate and elucidate the content of the book itself.

Dr Pearson shows himself to be a scholar of much versatility and his book is the product of much painstaking research. Frequent reference to and quotation of contemporary letters, figures and Lawson's own manuscripts are used to substantiate Dr Pearson's contentions, while the use of maps and photographs provide the reader with a clearer picture of the locality in which the Lawsons were placed during their stay at Mangamaunu. Dr Pearson's book, combining as it does valuable information on the New Zealand native education system in the late nineteenth century and critical estimations of both Lawson and his work in both the Australian and New Zealand contexts, will be of much interest and use to scholars in both areas. Perhaps its dual nature explains the curious exclusion of the obvious article in the title.

J. M. WOODWARD



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