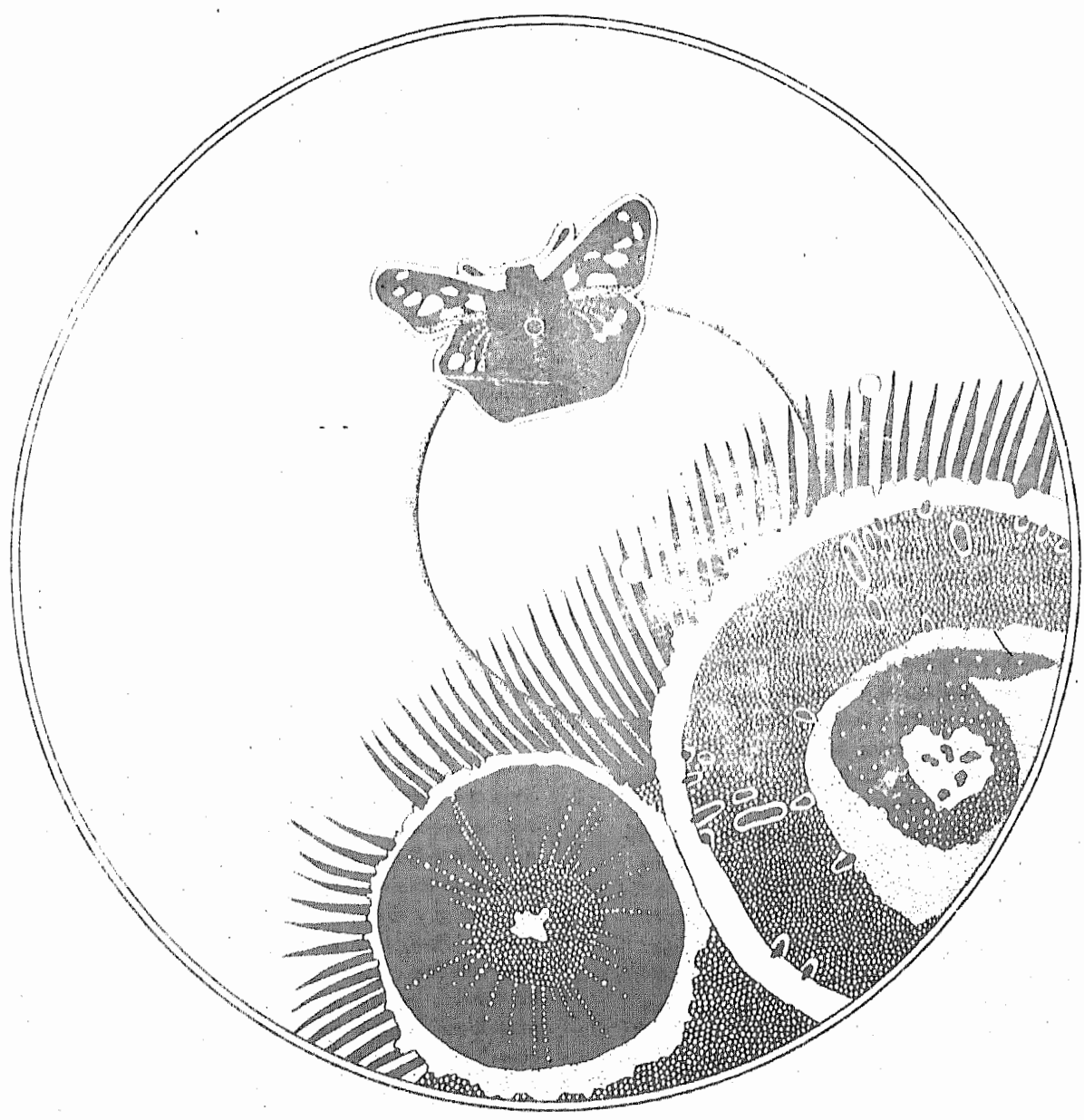


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SHORT STORIES



DISNEYLAND

The Systems Engineer, tired from a recent project concerning the expansion of amusement parks in Los Angeles, decided to take a vacation. He had lived in southern California all of his life, yet he had never been to Disneyland. A unique opportunity arose to enjoy an all-expenses-paid visit, sponsored by the city. Leaving his cluttered apartment with a sigh of relief, he climbed into the taxi and closed his eyes.

Disneyland was much as he thought it would be; bright and gay, noisy, full of kids. A pack of Cub Scouts jostled past him to get to the ticket line first.

"Hey! Watch it punks."

They ignored him. So did their Den Mother, a large fat hen with wolverines and coyotes plastered to her suit like wasp's nests. The well-educated Engineer contained a sly smile: he was beginning to appreciate the ridiculous. Maybe that's what attracts people, he thought.

For some reason he had joined the queue for the Tunnel of Time. Harmless relaxation, he thought. The mouse in the ticket booth assured him it was a good trip, the best in the park. You won't want to get off at the other end, is what he said.

The ride began slowly and smoothly. In the dark confines of the tunnel every sound was magnified: the Engineer could hear his watch ticking, could hear a hundred watches ticking, could even hear the Cub Scouts whispering behind each others' backs many boats ahead. Rounding a corner he could see Dali's molten clocks. Of course they are melting, he thought, its getting hot in here. Unbuttoning his collar, he was sure their cooling system was responsible.

The Engineer had little time to worry about the heat. The boat had slowly accelerated until it was barely touching water. Hydrofoils could not manoeuvre in such tight areas. They had better slow this thing down, he thought. Looking over the side, he could see no water. The Engineer swallowed.

By this time all the noise, save the whistling of the boats through the air, had ceased. The tunnel was jet black, though an occasional flash of amber revealed intricate tubing and wiring on the walls. As the speed increased further, the Engineer found himself getting nauseous. The turns became sharper and more frequent, and the entire chain of boats fell through the mouth of a vertical shaft. Screams and the incessant ticking of a thousand clocks filled his ears until he burst with sound and there was silence.

"What would you like, monsieur?"

A long Gothic hall, with a long white table covered from end to end with steaming silver dishes of food. Two French chefs in white aprons and pop-over hats, polite and servile.

"Monsieur?"

"Of course, excuse me; . . . snow peas and water-chestnuts, please."

Brown oak timbers frame the bright walls. The table is one hundred yards long and one yard long and one yard wide, covered completely with food.

"Bon mot. Bon mot."

They are so polite, these two, so terribly nice. Crisp red cheeks and Renaissance smiles: they appear delightfully satisfied.

The food is excellent. I look up to ask them about it but they are gone. A fat man enters the hall from the most distant door. He is dressed in a red silk housecoat, intricately frilled with saffron lace, and cobalt-blue pantaloons. As he walks toward me, his rotund frame gives way to his puffy pink face, the face of a man who has spent a lifetime in suanas. Pink, rosy red-pink, soft, squeamish, silky soft skin. Jowls like flaccid tea-bags hand off his cheeks. He has beady blue eyes that match his pantaloons, shining out from his pink face as beacons. A beaverpelt hunting cap with a pheasant feather is plopped jauntily on his dome top. He walks with the momentum of a man who cannot



stop once he gets going, his humpty-dumpty body floating along exactly three feet above the floor, his tiny bowling-pin legs struggling to keep up with the mass above. Stub arms flash out spasmodically, disconnected from the main body. He is one massive island with four tiny isthmuses reaching out into the watery blue. A large plumb island covered with palm trees -- I bet he has palm trees tattooed to his chest, blue and green palm trees that sway in the breeze of his rolling blubber.

"Good morning."

"Tunnel of Time, eh?"

He laughs a small pardonable laugh, cocking back his jowls so they shake and bounce with his mirth.

"Yes, I'm sorry about all that, but let me introduce myself: I am Guide."

"Guide?"

"Guide. I will be explaining some things...no doubt you have questions...ah, what a business," he said with a tired sigh.

"Ever try real estate?"

Again he cocked back his merry pink head and clutched at his belly with his two stubby hands. Drawing in air like an ocean blowhole, he doubled over in one movement and exhaled magnificently through his stretched vocal chords: a rolling booming laugh that moved the length of the long hall and echoed back again.

"Oh, my friend! If you only knew! If you only knew!!"

"Indeed. And isn't that what you are here for?"

"Yes, yes, of course, I'm terribly sorry, forgive me please," he smiled with a restrained grin.

"What are you wondering about...primarily?"

"Well, I came here for a vacation, not a--"

"But you've had one," Guide interrupted.

"If you call that a vacation--"

"Most definitely, my good friend. One week in our...luxury suite, is indeed a very special holiday," Guide smiled.

One week? No. Could it be? I felt my chin --

"Yes, my friend, you are certainly a week older. And you are lucky: most of them are aged about a year."

Aged a year?

"You were selected out for...for your knowledge of of systems. It will prove very valuable to us... if you..."

Systems? Selected out?

"...I'm sure...after I show you around...it will become clearer.

WE--"

"Wait a minute. Who is WE?"

"Well, perhaps if I just..." Guide reached for the sash which held his coat together and gave it a jerk. As the curtain swept back to reveal the gigantic stage, I gasped in amazement: not a forest of blue and green palms, not a ship in full sail, not a snake twisting around an anchor or a big MOM: none of these, but, could it be true! a huge larger-than-life tattoo of Walt Disney. Glittering there in more brilliant colors than a technicolor spectacular; amazon reds and turquoise blues, dazzling diamond eyes staring out from obsidian sockets. Walt Disney, winking and grinning and waving with the gently rolling flesh covering Guide's chest; Walt Disney, dressed in a white satin robe, sitting lotus-like on the sauna fresh skin; Walt Disney, holding a flame red rose in his right hand; Walt Disney, bathed in a golden glow, adorned with strings of sandalwood beads and flowers; Walt Disney, silently smiling, and on the crest of his robe -- yes! could it be true! a tiny embroidered mouse with giant ears and white kid gloves.

"WE is Him," said Guide solemnly.

We is Him? We is Him? Am I mad?

"Yes, We is Him. It is Mahatma who gives us strength, it is He who deserves credit for Union."

Union? Mahatma?

"We would be nothing without His guidance, His sight Nothing. Even you...look."

Guide moved his body through the space between us and with his stub arms reached down and parted the robe I was wearing.

"Oh, my God!"

"Correct."

Staring up at me with Fatherlike features, an indelible scar in vivid blues and maroon, was none other than Him: Walt Disney.

"You see, my friend, you too, have some Hope. Mahatma Disney loves you. If He did not, you would not be graced with His sign. You are very fortunate, indeed, very lucky."

I pulled the white robe over the garish image -- Mahatma? Was this my new savior? Could I ever gang-shower again?

Guide tied his robe together and took out a strange bundle of keys. Each key was shaped like a pyramid, and every side was a different color. No key had the same combinations of hues and tints, although they were all the same size. Guide looked up at me and smiled.

"Shall we begin?"

"Why not. I have no idea where I am. Lead the way."

"You are in good hands, my friend. Trust Mahatma: He knows best."

Guide began his concerted effort to start the momentum of his body moving forward; he grunted and groaned and slipped ahead a few feet, followed quickly by his stump legs. Suddenly, he was off and I had to run to catch up with him -- he couldn't stop. He sped through the Great Hall toward a tiny door.

"Wait for me!"

Guide couldn't wait. He sped along with the inertia of a charging bull until he crashed pell-mell into the wall. When I reached him, he seemed fine -- a little breathless -- but unharmed.

"The key," he wheezed, "its...the...red one."

I found the bundle of keys on the floor. Looking through them I could not discern one as being more red than any other; they were all more or

less red, and also more or less blue, green, and yellow.

"Which one?"

"Here." He clutched at the key ring with his pudgy hand and fingered through them all one by one. "This one," he said, handing me the key.

I looked to the door. There was no lock or hole to insert the key.

"What use is a key without a keyhole. .?"

"Just touch it," Guide said from his position on the floor.

I touched the door with the key and it dissolved. I gasped.

"What...what kind of door is this?"

Guide looked up with a faint smile. "A Disney door, of course."

"I should have known."

"Come on, my friend, we don't have all day "

Guide climbed up and went through the door and disappeared.

I stood there for a moment. Guide was gone, exterminated by a door. I decided I would rather not go through it.

"Go on, my friend."

I whirled to see a grinning Guide standing behind me. "But you just vanished!"

"So I did," he said, "and I just returned."

"I'm not about to step through that door."

"Oh, you silly fool, you already have."

Again, I turned. Through the magnifying effect of the door I could see the Great Hall stretched out in front of me. Two tiny figures in white aprons and popover hats rushed about the long white table. A solitary man sat at the far end of the table, looking rather dazed. The chefs left suddenly and a rotund man entered through a door. I turned to look at Guide.

"Enough?"

Somehow I had the feeling that it was too much.

"Don't worry, come."

I turned from the door and moved behind the shuffling Guide. Chrome walls reflected our passage. We seemed to be going deeper into the heart of the Disneyland complex. A clear but muffled aria rose in volume when we rounded a metal corner and entered the Computer Room. The oval dome was lined with massive electronic bulkheads. Video screens flashed about whirring tapes and clattering terminals. Guide continued his motion toward one of the large central computers and leaned into a microphone on its panel.

"You're sounding a bit queasy this morning, Gloria," panted Guide.

"The sleazy find it easy to be queasy. Listen to yourself, Fats."

From the dozens of speakers around the room the taped reply echoed Guide's remark yourzondenabit-queazydismornengloria. It had the unmistakable quality of the aria. Guide grinned and patted the console with his smooth thick hand.

"Just checking, Sweet."

"Oh, popsie sweetbuns honey sugarpie creampuff watermelon tootsie fruity cutesy bubbles sugarplum angel! I just adore you!"

Guide laughed.

"She's my favorite," he hispered away from the microphone.

"Get lost, Tubs!"

Guide pushed off the computer with a chuckle. From behind, moving down the glistening corridor, he resembled a shimmering two-tone bowling ball. As we descended down endless passageways, I noticed for the first time a high-pitched hum which appeared to emanate from him. Each time we passed a Diney door the note would change an octave, and Guide would smile faintly.

The air inside the labyrinth had grown sweet. I remembered county fairs and carnivals as a boy growing up in Texas. The heat, too, had become the heat of a long summer's night, stuffed with stars and restlessness, brooding, impatient...

In an instant it was upon us, though it must have been building for some time. Guide and I stood in complete darkness.

"Guide?"

"Yes, my friend."

"What is this all about?"

I heard a slight giggle.

"Mahatma loves surprises."

"My god, Guide, what is this about Mahatma? Why the darkness?"

"Why the doors? Why--?"

I was cut off by the crackle of a thousand floodlights. Through a window in front of me, illuminated with the power of a hundred suns, was a room, nay, a city of such size I could not see its boundaries. Stretching infinitely to the horizon was a field of white sarcophagi; each cell linked to the others around it by electrical coils, creating the effect of an immeasurable bee hive. Man-size mice swarmed over the surface of this gigantic pattern, tending to coils and polishing the enamel surfaces of the ivory tombs. I realized then that we were not stationary but slowly accelerating over the city. Turning around, Guide was smiling.

"Isn't it beautiful!"

Acre after acre sped underneath us: there was no end to it. The light was impossible to pinpoint, yet I knew we were underground, yet I could see no roof. Guide beamed munificently.

"You see, my fortunate friend? Do you see? What a lucky man you are! Only a handful have been given the opportunity to view this -- the glorious City of Sleep: Hibernacula!"

He paused for air. I noticed he was trembling slightly.

"Mahatma's Dream City come true. Two million sleeping visitors, two million slumbering guests. Ah, peace; Ah, rest. They have never felt such bliss before. Pure one hundred percent bliss. It is so beautiful. All of them existing in the Father's Womb, Union, existing for Him. Their dreams are monitored, and well...tapped. Mahatma thrives on their love. They are like the blood cells that contribute to the living body; some die in

order for the whole to go on. Nothing can stand in the way of such bliss! They need Mahatma as much as He needs them. For them, a chance to forget, a chance of absolving many sins and errors in their ways, a chance to become Full. For Him, energy and love, imagination and creativity, and most especially, Entertainment! That is what Mahatma really enjoys, and that is what We must give Him!"

Guide spoke with such emotion that he shook violently and had to sit down. His blue eyes filled with the sea and dripped profusely. The momentous waterfall showed signs of filling the entire room.

"Guide, you've got to pull yourself out of this: I can't swim."

Guide's laugh exploded out of his mouth, spraying spit and tears and foam at me like a geyser.

"My friend," he gasped, trying to control himself, "once you have touched Union with the Mahatma... the Bliss is sometimes catastrophic."

Guide rose and pointed to the mass of whiteness below.

"Hardly a week ago you were there with all the others. Because of certain genetic variants, coupled with your excellent Systems background, you were selected out. Thus, you missed the experience of Full Union. Mahatma choose you to be a Helper: that is your sacrifice and also your gain. For the rest, it is time to sleep, and to...well... Share. That is the Plan. One year under supervision and they can go. Certain changes are implemented, certain improvements in thought, discipline. They are really representive when they leave us. All of this would have been impossible without His teaching. He is the Savior, and everyone will love Him when they finally understand the nature of Love. That is our job: We are the workers who must strive to convince the world of our purpose. You will be of great use to us in one of our major problem areas: Logistics. That is why I have been Guiding you. It is precise work, delicate, fragile."

Guide spoke the last sentence with a low pride, almost embarrassed by its immodesty. He was flushed, his face was a bright pink. He hung his head for a moment and then spoke.

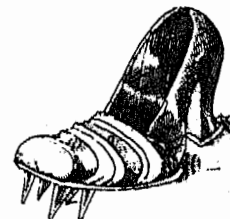
"My responsibilities with you have come to an end. You have been patient. I admire your curiosity, yet you have only begun to encounter the curious. I wish you all the best. You may be confused."

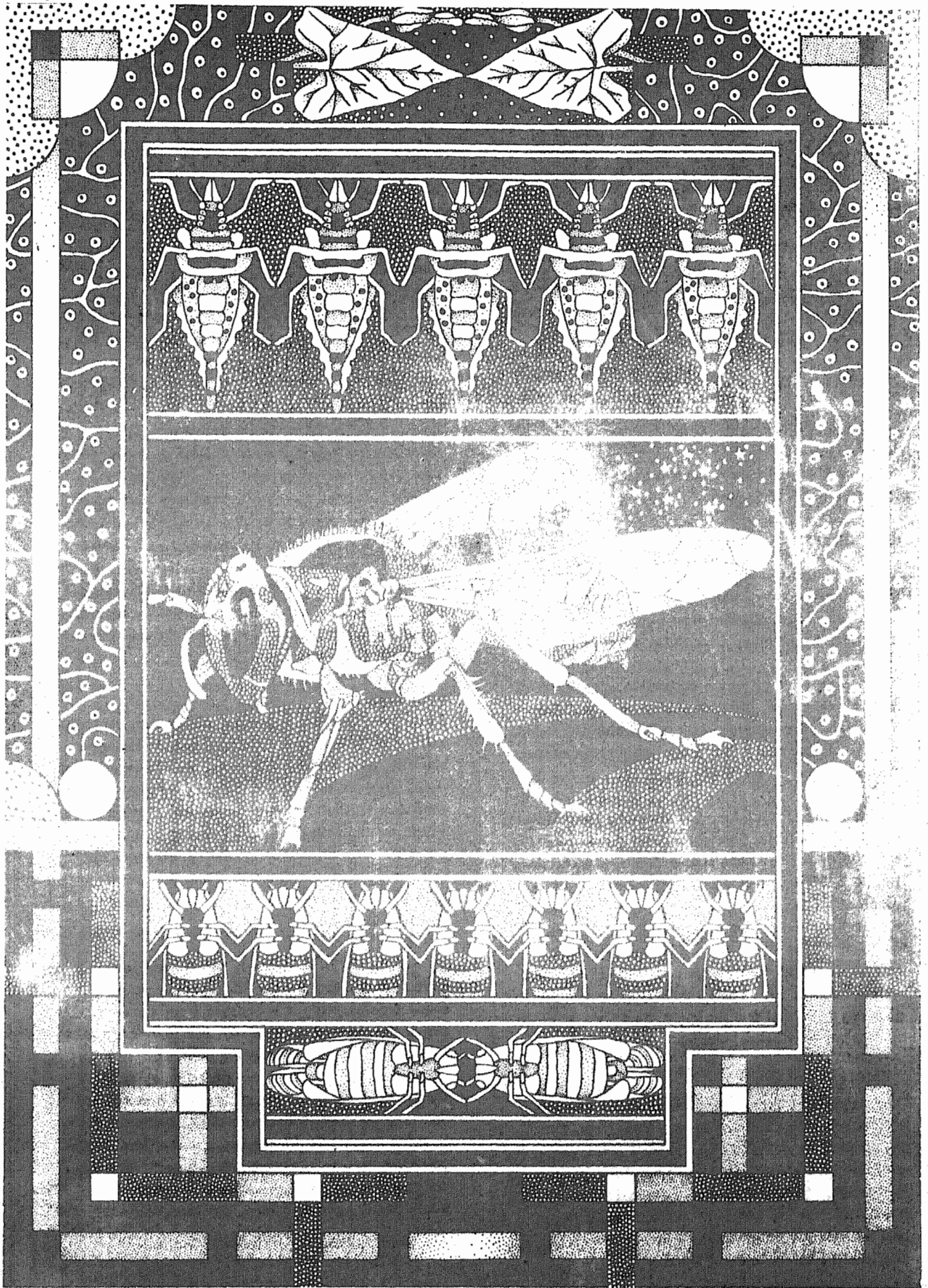
Don't worry. Keep one hand on the wall and always turn right. Mahatma Disney Union Bliss."

Guide bowed slightly and lifted a glowing key to his temple. There was a moment, and then he was gone.

The Systems Engineer turned and began to run. He passed a myriad of tunnels. A platoon of mice saluted as he ran by. He went through an operating theater and a morgue. Music sung from every speaker. Giant dogs and parakeets performed pirouettes through a large glass screen. A pack of Cub Scouts filed past. The engineer kept both feet off the ground and turned left at every opportunity. He ran through the House of Murders and the Wax museum and the submarine and the Magic Castle. He dived into the moat and swam until his lungs were breaking. He swam past fish doing the national dance of Finland. He ran by men and women with vacant eyes who walked and talked as their children rode on gay machines. Mice and dwarves and fireflies danced by the candy houses. The Engineer ran as far as he could and there was no end. He ran past a frozen lake with frozen skaters frozen to the frozen ice. He kept running through deserts and mountains and lush forests. Huge mice laughed from behind giant mousetraps. He ran and ran further through mobs of happy vacationers pulling their children behind them on leashes, through fields of ice cream cones and licorice, through medieval England and prehistory. The well-educated Engineer would run for an eternity and he would not reach the end. He gasped for a breath of freedom, but there would be none.

DISNEYLAND by James Roberts.





DIARY OF A FUCKWIT

Hobart

Feb. 20th

This ole town
its a getting me down
its just like I've seen before
the people here
they live with fear
they do not want to soar

they do not want to soar oh no
they do not want to fly
they work to make their living easy
and watch the years go by.

Feb. 21st.

The day after tomorrow, I leave this place, the day after tomorrow I catch a plane to Melbourne, across the water, the day after tomorrow I cross the water to the other side, to the other side.....

My parents have given me no trouble, yes, take a year off they said, after all you've been studying for twelve years, there's a lot of learning to be done outside of University, and when you do start next year you'll be all the better for it....

I'll be going to Adelaide, I'll hitchhike from Melbourne to Adelaide, I've got a sister there and to begin with at least I can stay with her, she's working for a doctor, she's easygoing, we don't talk much about anything, but we can kid around with each other, and she wont interfere, she'll go her way and I'll go mine, she's alright my sister, I can do what I like, I'll be in a city where no-one will know me, not a soul; a fresh start, a new beginning, right now I'm the great blank, the page that hasn't been filled, the book that hasn't been written....

The day after tomorrow, all possibilities are open. I'll be Bob Dylan arriving in New York City, I'll be Rimband arriving in Paris, there's nothing I can't do, there's nothing I can't be, I shall talk to all men, I shall attempt to know all things, I shall reach for the very stuff of life, I shall suffer and see terrible things. I shall go everywhere, I shall be the true wandering spirit....

Here in this crisp, clean town, comfortably crouched around the Derwent River, I'm straitjacketed, I cannot breathe, every day in these streets, which nestle snugly under the wings of Mt. Wellington, I run into my past, it's choking me, I cannot spread my wings, I have friends here sure, but they are not real friends, they are not fellow travellers of the thing soul, none of them will go far enough, none of them will extend themselves, they think I'm just one of them, but though I look just like them and act like them, no one knows my yearnings which I water daily with my books and my dreams, no one knows my yearnings which to be realized, only need to be planted in fresh soil; the soil here is stale; the soil is crowded with oldness, crowded, crowded; one part of me left here long ago, my body only has remained rooted in this old old soil, the day after tomorrow my body leaves, across the water, across the water, the day after tomorrow I am born again.

Feb. 22nd.

I said yesterday this is a crisp, clean city; yes, too crisp and clean, crisp and clean and sterile, give me dirt, give me dirt and sweat and grime and semen, give me the filth of the gutters, give me intestines spilled out onto the streets. I shall roll in the muck, I shall become unrecognizably covered in the filth of centuries, and I shall scour myself clean, purge myself with songs and words which shall touch people's hearts like a breeze within a tornado.

My rucksack is in the corner, tomorrow I leave, I have been waiting for this for eighteen years, if I sound proclamatory it is because I am excited, this is the moment in a persons life that biographers love to dwell on. The turning point, the step forward which in a sense is the great homecoming - tomorrow, tomorrow, my rucksack and my guitar and me, goodbye Hobart, goodbye snow on the mountain, wind in the streets, goodbye kind city, you have been my cocoon, my warmth, my security and my tomb, I'm breaking out now, I am the butterfly, goodbye kind, too kind, city.

The world is mine, now; I shall seize it!

Adelaide.

Feb. 25th

Adelaide! lights on the plain; I can't believe my luck; already I have a job, starting tomorrow at the Royalty Theatre; I saw the ad in the paper this morning, my first morning here, caught a bus into town and spoke to the manager. Looks like I'll be pushing a broom and doing a bit of backstage work.

Adelaide, my sister pleased to see me, and I'm pleased to see her, pleased to have a roof over my head and food in my belly, everything seems to be working like clockwork, everything is fresh, everything is immensely interesting. The plane trip to Melbourne, the murky, menacing water, and then touching down on the great continent. Melbourne was like a dream, I didn't hang around too long. I headed straight out. Tall buildings and depressing streets, suburbs and suburbs and suburbs, got a lift all the way from Ballarat to Adelaide with a truckdriver who said that he would like to write a book about all the different people he's met, he never will though, it's up to someone like me to write a book like that, keep your eyes and your ears open and you can't help but be influenced.....

and the countryside! so much space! just to be able to look and see nothing but flatness - no hills or mountains on the horizon, now I know the meaning of the word "plain", the Australian plains. The road shimmering under a sweating sun, flatness and desolation - one word sums up Australia - "emptiness" - Australia. The great emptiness, empty in more ways than one.

and Tasmania seems like it doesn't even exist. I still don't feel real, walked round the city today after I'd seen about the job, people are the same everywhere, hope I meet some interesting people here. I'm ready for anything, I'm ready for great love affairs and great passions, met some friends, of my sisters tonight but they're all boring. I'm still alone, I'm alone in this great expanse, amidst this great collection of people, I'm alone but it will change, I hope it will change.

Feb. 26th

Well it looks like I've got some sort of an affair on my hands already, and it could turn out to be interesting.

M. is a doorman at the Royalty Theatre, about 30 years old, we got to talking in the afternoon and he seemed very solicitous towards me, was very interested and asked questions all about me, why I'd left Hobart and what did I want out of life and all

that. We talked for about two hours and then he asked me to come and have a few drinks with him tomorrow evening and I accepted.

All in all, this place seems like a good place to work for; no-one really cares if you work hard or not and I like to watch the people coming to and from the stage door - actors and dancers and truck-drivers and suited men and assorted nobodies, the theatre is another world altogether.

I went for a walk tonight, this city is quieter than I expected, but its wide and its large. I'm sure there are things happening here, it's just a matter of time before I sniff them out anyway. Tomorrow at 6.30 p.m. I meet M at the Richmond front bar. He's camp, though not outrageously camp, he's got an unnerving laugh - spontaneous but unnatural in its intensity, he kept looking at me with a sort of pleading look.

Feb. 28th

Well I never thought I'd lose my virginity to a man, instead of a woman; I still don't believe it; last night I was the woman, he fucked me.

It was all so predictable last night, like we were playing out some B-Grade movie, and I, the open book, the drifter with the tide, the reed bending in the wind, the great malleable one, went with the flow of the evening which was his flow; he was the director and I was the actor; I was seduced, but it wasn't really seduction because I knew what was happening, as it happened; I wasn't powerless to stop the evening's events, I just had no reason not to, from the start, we both knew the story, from the first few drinks and beer nuts in the Richmond public bar, all through the counter tea and cafes of wine, all through his life story and mine (I've never been close to any women, he said), all through his long looks and the kidding around, all through the intimate walk down Hindley Street and down the stairs into the "Blue Cave" where we fingered our cheese and greens and drank more beer and talked and talked to cover up the screaming silence, all through the sinking night, we both knew the score, except for him, it was a matter of life or death, me, I was just there for the ride.

and then he asked me to stay the night with him, he had already booked a room at the Flinders Lodge Motel that afternoon, we couldn't very well go back to his place because he lived with his parents, he lived with his parents, and had a T.V. in his bedroom; I said yes because it was the same as no. I tried to explain in stumbling words that I wasn't

entering the contract for the same reasons he was. It didn't matter in the least, he ordered a taxi, he'd been paying for everything all night, and he stroked my leg in the back seat.

Flinders Lodge, Room 7, just like a woman, the young virgin, I even said "be gentle", his prick was much smaller than mine, we spent a long time fooling around, he said he'd never felt happier in his life, he called me beautiful, I was as cold and as clear as a razor blade, kept saying to myself - "am I enjoying this?" I jerked him off, after a while he grew stiff again. I was stiff, but I knew I wouldn't ejaculate in a thousand years, though it was quite pleasant when he licked and sucked my prick all over, all the same I couldn't bring myself to suck him, and when he forced his prick smeared with cream up my arse, I kept saying "take it easy, take it easy". I wasn't repulsed, but I couldn't say I was enjoying it. I felt vague disgust at kissing him full on the mouth, but overall I was the great callous one, we fell asleep in each others arms and in the morning I was keen to go, all sorts of questions still unanswered, but I said I must be going, the questions wouldn't have been answered by my staying any longer, I hitched home, feeling like a drunk on a frosty morning.

My sister didn't ask any questions, I'd said I'd met a girl and spent the night with her, she just said "fast worker aren't you?" I felt proud of myself and went to my room where I've been up till now, my heads been racing, spinning all afternoon. I've half dozed off a couple of times, but can't get it out of my head. The way he was just sitting there on the bed when I left him, just sitting there, and even on the way home, when I got picked up by a nurse, returning from night shift, even then as we drove along, I was still there with him, I was there in Room 7, Flinders Lodge Motel, I couldn't leave that room, he held me there with his eyes, with his mind and with his hand and prick which were all working together to hold me there and not let me go and when my friendly nurse dropped me off home, I felt like saying to her "I'm not really here, I'm somewhere else, you're just dropping off a shadow, I might look real, but I'm just a shadow." and tomorrow? don't ask me what happens tomorrow, I'll see him again and I'll know that I haven't even left him, that we haven't really been apart. Jesus, a week ago seems like an age ago, what did I write back then? "The world is mine, I shall seize it" - that's very true, yes, but the world is his, too, and he too, is seizing it, and I'm part of his world, now, and he's seizing me...

March 1st.

Saw M. at work again today and he cornered me and we had a fairly painful conversation and I said I didn't want to sleep with him again, because I didn't really enjoy it, and it would be dishonest, and I said we can still be friends, though, and I almost gagged when I said that I've heard that line before and it really is bullshit, and he knew that too. The thing is I really do like the guy, I like him for being honest, and I like him for the way he lays himself on the line, lays himself open to being hurt, and I don't want to hurt him, but where do we go from here? Can we ever be friends? It's too painful for us to be friends, because he wants us to be lovers, and it would be a cop out to reduce him to just an acquaintance, someone to say hello to every morning, friends, lovers, acquaintances - we do not have enough words to describe the infinite variety of relationships between human beings. The conversation was left unresolved, I feel like I've been using him, which is true, but he's been using me as well, and what else can people do with each other?

Went out tonight to some pub in the city, can't remember the name, listened to a blues band there, didn't meet anyone; everyone there seemed to be in little groups, I sat at a table and drank beer after beer, pretended to look detached, thought about M, I suppose he's been at home all evening numbing himself with the T.V.

I've never really realized before that I do exist for other people - I mean, we all know that, but it's never hit me before - even as I closed the door of the motel room yesterday morning, my presence remained within those walls, even now, somewhere in this city, there is a room and M and the T.V. and me - its hitting me with such force now that I'm writing, writing frantically to prove to myself that I do really exist for myself, right here and now...

March 2nd.

M wasn't at work today and he should have been; feeling uneasy about it, went out to dinner with my sister and then to the pictures but couldn't really concentrate, it's funny, but the only person I know in this city, apart from my sister and apart from my workmates, who are just workmates, is M.

April 8th.

This is the first thing I've written in my diary since M dies, all writers are basically callous; a month

ago I was blistered, rubbed raw, now the blisters have turned to callouses; I can write again.

They said it was heart failure caused by mixing barbiturates and alcohol; unintentional, died at home in his room, T.V. on.

I used to think I was invisible, in my eyes, I wasn't solid, I could become anything, I'm solid now. I always was, it's just that I realize it now, whereas before I didn't; I'm solid; looking back on the first few pages of this diary, I see a fool, a young fool; how blithely he said "I shall see and suffer terrible things", he thought the world was made for him to such dry to gather in his mouth its juices, sweet and bitter, and then to spit out its essence; what arrogance! what blindness!

I'm working on a building site now, hard work but good pay, I left my sisters place, I almost left Adelaide but didn't, I'm living with a couple of

uni students, I know a lot of people here, I go out a fair bit and by all accounts the Hobart lad is doing fine.

I'm not the centre of the universe any more, the world doesn't revolve around me, on the bus this morning on the way to work, there were 40 centres of the universe, I never did meet or go to see M's parents, I never went to the funeral, no one even suspected that we knew each other, I tread carefully, people are bombs, not fodder, I got a sort of girlfriend, we go out together and sometimes sleep together, I think she's coming round tonight, right now I couldn't care less if she did or not, though I wouldn't mind a fuck.

Anonymous

YOU'RE HORRIBLE AND I'M FLABBERGASTED

Windy, In a breezeknees SurGents castle, made en master, forte ague overtly on Tuesday 10th fat all butter flew lofty stave note but goodcher teas Holl-ocomotion. Hallibut, what a dinner it was! It seemed they wood never fish.

"Out," cried Sir Gent, et "Stay!" cried tea maid been as were other stayings bounded back and forth, and back again

"Why. There don't" cry Sir Gent, while all the time there abidismal whales sounded like some gigan-antic tenors match in progress

- "Andanother think!" - Heir Gladflyship have sheets dipped red in the sunset, "quod the made, as her holdings the evidence of his amorphous advance.

"Rubbish!" strowed Surgeon't, never fatter, "Her Giddysnip is as keen as a wissle, clean as a blade, has been an always!"

"Her Ladyship bleeds like a pig!" screamed the maid on a summer morn (and, not to be overdone), toasted her back over her shoulder, and, turning her back on him, broke off.

"Humpf!" grunted the Colonel, and a-humped away down the steershorn legs that trembled jest a little, though brave was his torso. (a nervous sort). He pot hat on Ned, and steered his nose outsides, taking special Kartoum slam the door behin drem.

Down the Rhode he strolled, feeling rather queazy and a little hot under the scholar, while humming a little hum to humself. He Hadn't gone far enough, when there came a sodden routine in the brushes behind the Village, nearby. Silllowly,

A rather curious, bulbous head appeared, seeming just in time to look the Colon thrice up and down, before receding squarely into the bushes of gin.

Two large puss eyes flanked a long yellow nose, with assorted pimply ears the colour and texture of crumbed cutlets, where there should have been hares.

AS IF IN A DREAM, the Col. looked at the sky, looked at the apparition, wondered who he was, and when he opened his mouth wide came tumbling out, that he could not seem to stop.

"Who are you?" he asked it, stressing every morsel like his bored life was afraid of losing the flavour of discovery.

"Thingamejumble!" cried the creature. It managed to add to the man's confusion by moving around behind the bushes, and by flapping tiny yellow wings, previously hidden behind its back.

"No such thing. You're no here Thingamejumble," said the Col.

"Alright - I'm no Thingamejumble," said the Grimlet. "In fact I'm rather in apertune, behind these bushes. Could you possibly fetch me some clothes then?"

"I don't understand." said the man, "What you are doing there in the 1st place - what's your business? Anyhow?"

"I will tell you, I will tell you, - now hurry. I must be clothed."

"It's funny, but I cannot seem to sow a single word you say! Your language is rather strange for a body of those parts. Who are you?"

"I, am the communicator of notions, and it doesn't what language or words I use, to do just that, or if not they are flat or thin, or have the meanings I want or not.

"Well, when I use a word," said the man, "It means just what I choose it to mean!"

Teeth broke out in profusion, below the yellow nose, and red knuckles cracked, while it waved it pawed in rhythmic circles. Its very stance hinted at more than a little excitement. "But, surely many words have more than one meaning!" it said. "And all of the meanings together make up only a confused web, such that the words become unimportant. One's hardest task, and one's first, is to find the meaning, or meanings that one wishes, and then to grab some words, oh, from about the place, to express it!"

The man trembled. At times it was such beyond his troll. Carefully he ventured, "Well, what about when I choose a word then? I give a word its meaning, and then it always stays just so."

"Then men like yourself have attached meanings too firmly to words. The word is Master, and you must therefore free yourselves, and break the ties! In a sense - it makes no difference what words, or groups of letters or syllables or such are used, or strung together, in order to communicate ideas. All words can be made to flow and hold together, while thoughts slip and slide between them, such as coffee beans on toast and marmalade spread thin on faces pressed against cold glass cuttings. Abroad swath lawnmower ship load of my mind your step outside yourself for one quick smart uniform sparkling look fore parades of golf clubs strumps again, is button egg sample, my good sir."

The grin on the creature's face could not be mistaken. To aid the collection of his thoughts, the man let his eyes rest anywhere else but upon that visage. A little knot of manpower had appeared coming up the road towards them. By now other souls were either standing around regarding the creature, or could be seen in the distance, quickly walking over the fields in their direction. The man had never associated much with the villagers. None of them did he recognise, and none of them seemed of a mind to stand closet to him. A number of the locals had already surrounded the man in a loose semicircle opening onto the line of bushes along the road. Mrs. Fanakapan and Chips Woman were already there.

The Grimlet was speaking again - "Words are there to be used by everybody, not just in playful connections each with their own meanings, but as letters to be put together and used in every possible way the artist likes, to create what he wishes to say! Say what he wishes to create!"

"Not at all! Not at all!" said the man, feeling braver now, and speaking louder so that those around mightier. "The word is not master! I give the words their meanings - I am master of words, just as I am master of all this," and he spread his arms for and wide in circles about him. The crowd pressed a little closer. "The trouble with you is that-"

"The trouble is," attempted the creature, "that if you choose a word to mean what You want it to mean, then you might not be able to communicate at all, whereas I give the idea direct - fetching

words to me, that I can use to form that idea; warping, ignoring, interacting meanings, until they fit to what I want to say."

The man was an obvious shade of blood on ketchup. The crowd was thicker now, and gossip and snatches of comment could be heard freely passing amongst its ranks.

"I just want to say," cried the man, as clearly coolly as he could, "that all of these people here speak the same language I do, and I doubt whether any of us can see the tiniest bit of sense in what you've said!"

The creature didn't stir. Whispers moved among the crowd.

"What did he say?", asked one Grimlet to another.

B. Osborne.

GRAEME JENKINS SPEEKS **BOLD**

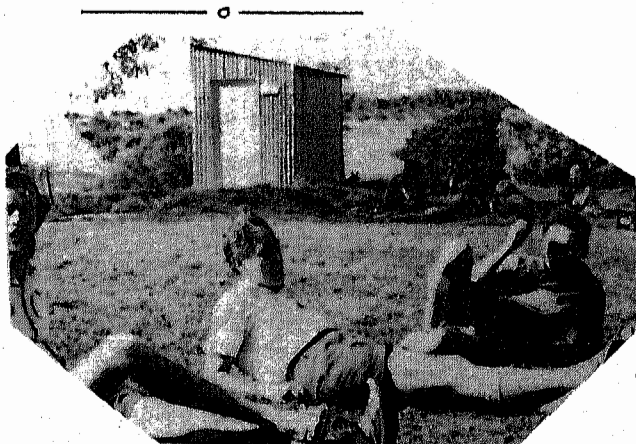
BEDTIME

My luvly lady friend has gone to the loo
When she comes back to me I know what we'll do
We'll jump and we'll cry and breath a lot
cos' a meaningful relationship is what we have got.

She's back now and what does she do,
She takes off a sock and she takes off a shoe
She undoes a zip and pants down her thighs
Undoes her blouse and has no clothes on at all.

She's in bed with me now and its ever so warm
And her head on my shoulder feels so new born
She smiles cos she thinks that I am silly
and I love my friend.

This silly man has forgotten one thing
he must do before anything
I must go elsewhere, away from this place, I must
do!
I must clean my teeth, and go to the loo.



ECHOS OF A LOST STORY

A lonely tear meandered down her cheek as she sat amidst the overwhelming sofa her grandmother gave her. That was a wedding present. Only two years before.....

A lonely tear meandered down her cheek as she sat amidst the overwhelming sofa her aunt gave her. That was a wedding present. Yes the gold is dull now, and her hands are bulbous, bent and ugly.

A sad tear fell down her face as she plonked down on the nite-n-day, her mother-in-law had given her. That was for her wedding. Only yesterday....

"I can eat fried chicken, do a crossword and meditate with you on top of me"
she said slurring at his grit smile.

"Never a cross word, pidgeon dove" he grinned back.

"4 across, 3 down, and my mantra and teeth in the glass beside your bed!", she suggested.

"You don't even know what beside means, let alone near myself. At least my teeth are into something tangible, not a glass!"

"Well at least I'm not so fucking wishywashy as your minibitsize attempt at celestial reality," she angrily retorted.

"So what if I have a small penis, is that all you want!" he lurched.

"No, I'm talking about every bit of your hopeless reality."

"Oh Christ" and he broke into tears.

"Knock, Knock"

"UM, come in, no wait a sec, we'll get dressed"

"Oh sorry I came in anyway."

"Well, now that you're in we better start talking about something deep, meaningful and relevant."

"By the way, who are you?"

"Sam and Janet"

"Who!"

Some enchanted evening, you may meet a strangler,
you may meet a stranger in a crowded room, and suddenly it will seem, as if in a dream....

"Stop singing if you don't know the words - that's beyond the charter of editorial comment."

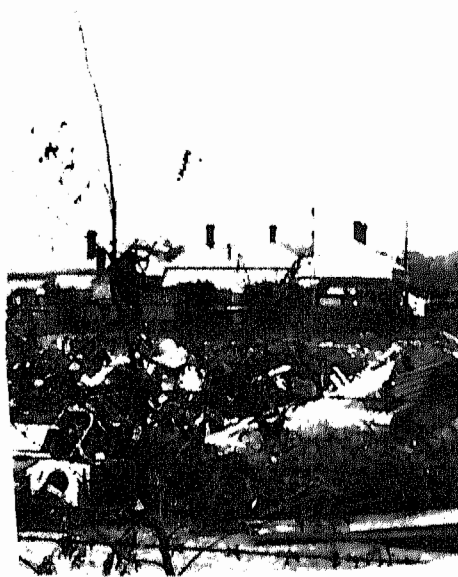
What words.

"Thats what I asked."

"Kconk, Kconk"

We're alone again now, I think.

Thats just it, we've always been alone.



I've got a luvly bunch of nuts
see them both standing aglow
a big one, round one, one as big as the bed
a little one, tiny one, small as a pinhead.

Oh

Oh

Oh

Oh

Oh, I've got a luvly bunch of/ SHIT - You cut them off, Why?

Because I wanted to see you cry
And then I could show you mi...

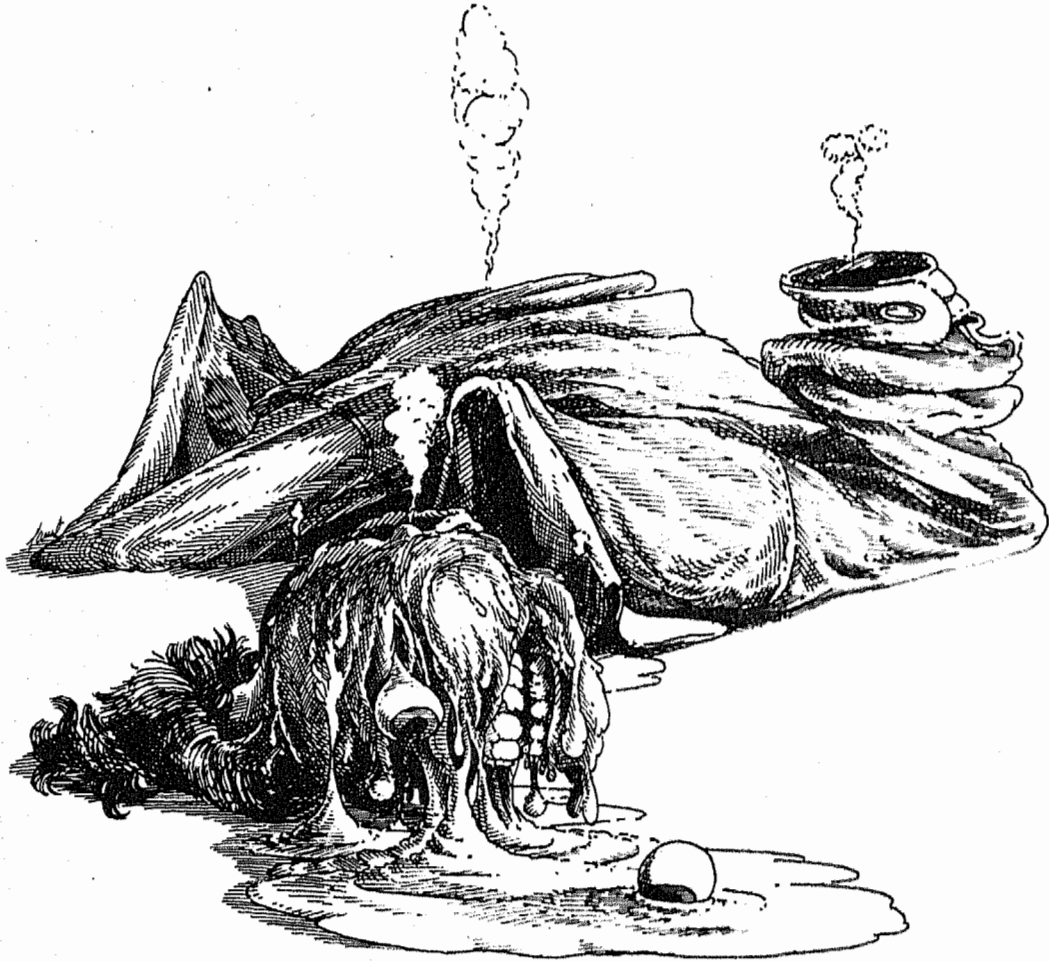
mi...

mi...

mi...

mine, oh I've got a luvly bunch of!

by Graeme Jenkins.



THE EXTRAORDINARY BURIAL OF HARRY M.

by Lesley Wells.

Harry M. and Simon F. are amongst the perpetual, coatless boozers of the city. They talk, spasmodically, of football and cars, and frequently, of death and burials. Harry can put up quite a good case for cremation, but Simon feels obscurely that it may cheat him. They quibble, over schooners, on the time it may take for any particular corpse to degenerate. But this is mere bar-room repartee; secretly they are careless and unalarmed. For Harry has a special interest in the disposal of the dead; and Simon is his confidant. Once more, one night, he explains to his companion:

"Ya see, male, I always had this desire... a desire like, to be, dug inter the old farm, see, when I died."

He pauses, for known effect.

"All these 'ere cemeteries, clutterin' up the landscape. 'Orrible, init? Why not do the soil some good? Farm or garden, no worries. Jeesus, many's the year I've seen the fruit trees and grass comin' up lovely on the farm, where a few sheep died and were dug in... doin' the earth good, see?"

Simon grins slowly.

"Yeh... all the money spent on fancy caskets... and useless bloody ashes..."

They are chuckling now, sepulchral conspirators.

"... all that nutrition, all goin' ter waste..."

They understand each other perfectly.

Days, months, years later, Harry M. dies. It is long before anyone knows, longer before the grand administrative processes begin to turn up the forgotten, important data of his life.

"Good morning Sir. I wonder if you'd come with us to the morgue... a slight matter... identification of the body. Yes, we believe a friend of yours... found you through the pub..."

He is no hard to identify. And Simon, white, clammy, swallows acknowledgement of Harry's existence.

"I think he had parents on a farm... down the South".

"Anything else you can tell us?"

"No... did 'e leave a will."

"A will?" surprised... "No, no, I shouldn't think so. Did he have anything to leave?" amused.

Simon knows he had a body to leave.

"What's 'appenin' about the... burial."

"Pauper's burial - State expense."

But Simon, with a dreamer's determination, is going to do right by Harry. He feels he has only to 'see the necessary people'. Simon is innocent. Not, alas, for long. The laughter seems to follow him:

"Dug into? A farm or garden?! It just isn't done... the churches would be up in arms... from an administrative point of view its quite impossible... and besides, the State must know where its dead bodies are..."

Simon goes to one office, and to another. But it is impossible for such a corpse to be buried so simply. It must be taken, ceremoniously, in a six by three, to the common land set aside by law. The faery words must be incanted. Harry must be carefully segregated from the nigger earth and the elements. His precious, decomposing carcass must be kept free from worms for a decorous period. Human dignity and pride cannot let an animal corpse support the roots of beauty.

Simon is sorely tempted. He is going to brave Fate, and the Churches, and the Laws. He is going to take his mate's body and dig it into his garden. He would be comical in action, if he were not so serious in intent. By careful forethought, (not to say pure-minded abstention) he obtains Harry's decaying body and digs a goodly hole beneath his

pear tree and around his cucumber patch. Already in his mind's eye he can see the enormous, juicy cucumbers and pears he will grow in successive seasons... sees them being eaten, in solemn joy, for old Harry's sake... old Harry, fast rotting now, is mixing with the moist and tender earth; the last spadeful is thrown. Sadly, gently, Simon rakes the crumbly soil, pondering quizzical dreams of luscious capsicums and pendulous eggplants.

The fracas is dreadful, and the papers have a field day. Corpse robbing - in the twentieth century! Hints of murder and darkest deeds in dreary night! Even 'Man Dug Into Garden' does not sound quite horrid enough in the popular mouth.

Simon is arrested, bewildered, up before the magistrate. Where Simon went, there was no-one to talk to about deaths and burials. They all said he was morbid.

The body is, of course, dug up again. Censers swinging, it is put in a lovely six by three, satin lined too. And it really was, as the neighbours said, a lovely funeral: lovely.

The eggplants in Simon's garden were the pithiest they'd had in years.



DO YOU FEEL LIKE THIS

by Alex McMillan.

"Goodnight," the telephone whispered.

"Goodbye," my mistress sighed.

"Hello," the television called.

"Oven here," beckoned the electric fire.

"No! No!" shouted my wife. "I married him first so you'll have to wait. I haven't had a minute alone with him for a long, long time."

"Oh no, oh no you didn't. I was married first to my house of books, a world of television and a mountain of things to do. So you'll have to wait until I have time to spare."

"But darling...I haven't had a good wind down for many, many summers and I'm craving for good one right now."

"Well your not getting it and that's that."

"What!" came the strangled exclamation.

Hold on!

"Who's that?"

Me.

"Tell me, then, just who is me?"

Your skull, you sexless idiot.

"What do you want then?"

Let me start by asking what book are you reading at the moment?

"What's that got to do with your intrusion?"

Just tell me. You'll realize soon enough.

"Okay! I'm reading 'Pure Passion'."

Well don't you think your wife can give you as much as, if not more than your novel 'Pure Passion'?

"No! I answered adamantly -"Never!"

Well what the bloody hell are you?

"Practical, that's all, just practical."

You're hollow. Completely hollow, there is nothing there inside.

"Never."

But of course you don't really know.

"Explain yourself."

For one, when was the last time that you had a roll?

"I forget."

Wow what an inconsiderate, imleccilic of furniture you are.

"So what?"

So for two you agree with me that your wife is bigger and of course softer and also she's warmer than one little book.

"Oh...mmm...well...yes."

And for three your end is still there isn't it?

"I wouldn't be without it."

Then what are you waiting for?

"WIFE, WIFE, WIFE."

"Yes darling, what is it?" came the sexy reply from the seductive darkness.

"Let's get into it. NOW."

"We can't."

"Why the hell not? I want it."

"Because its been sown up for one helluva long, long time."

"Why you stuck up bitch. You've still got an arse-hole then."

"Now darling, calm down. Are you sure the phone is off the hook, and the T.V. will stay blind and the fire is cold. Because I want it, I need it now and I want it to last forever."



THE FINAL EXAMINATION

by H. Lindquist.

It was a quarter past four in the warm November afternoon. The sky was blue and without clouds from one horizon to the other so the blinding orange sun had been left to rule over all the land. The sun was still high in the sky because it was almost summer and because of the introduction of daylight saving. The rays of the sun bounced off the floors of windows which rose into the sky like jewellery and scattered down into the maze of little streets below. The streets were beginning to be filled with cars and buses in anticipation of the rush hour which reached its peak just after five. The noise of the slow rumbling traffic with its orchestra of horns and sounding devices littered the air for kilometres around but the people were too busy to hear anything and besides they had grown deaf a long time before. The sidewalks too were beginning to be filled with people as students and shoppers battled their way to cars and buses in the hope of beating the crunch which would come once the office and shop workers finished work. The colour of their clothes gave the impression of an endless pageant and only their uninhibited display of bare limbs distinguished them from clowns. The advent of colour in the streets signalled the beginning of what was termed the 'silly season' because it coincided with the annual holidays of most people and gave them the opportunity of doing all the silly things which they had dreamed up during year and because its highlight was a nativity in which no one believed and which had evolved into a purely commercial enterprise. But all the colour in the world could not disguise the strain on the moving faces because the strain was the trademark of the technological age and the barometer of the delusion of the people. Only the young students who waited at the bus stops in their mundane uniforms were able to joke and smile. Only they showed any signs of humanity.

The ranks of the pedestrians were soon swilled by the more advanced students of the universities and technical colleges which ringed the edges of the city centre. They poured through high traditional gates shouldered by dead academics immortalized in stone in a constant stream of aloof individuals and disinterested pairs which gave the impression that they were the result of a mysterious mental

assembly line churning them out inside the university grounds. The other factor apart from their stereotyped minds which immediately marked them as tertiary students was their satchels. Only a very small variety of satchels was in use and one had only to visit the foyer of the library to know that the types could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In all the years at the university the sociology department had not ventured to hazard a guess which might explain this satchel similarity but two physicists had thrown light on the problem by their discovery of a relationship between the knowledge contained in the books in the satchels and the knowledge in the minds of the students who thought alike and studied from the books. The students merged into the moving ranks of the faceless masses with serious doubts about their future and superiority. Their confidence had just been put to the test by the end of year examinations which would determine their status for a long time to come. Some in the more advanced stages of their degrees had already completed their examinations and now lived in a sort of limbo which seizes a general between the end of the battle and news of the victory. But for most the battle was still raging and they experienced the futility of war.

For Tom Pierce and Henry Paleceh the examinations wore over. Tom had just completed his final examination for a degree in economics while Henry had finished his second year examinations of a three year Science course that morning. They came through the campus gate onto the crowded street and were quickly swallowed by the streams of people that flowed past in both directions. Tom was still very tense and he could sense the perspiration of the crowd in his nostrils because his mind had been exhausted of all knowledge during the afternoon. His ears rang with the ocean of life around him so he hardly noticed when Henry spoke. It almost seemed as if fifteen years of his life had vanished and he was once more a child awed by his first visit to a big city. Henry on the other hand was calmer and felt more comfortable in the crowd rather than on the open spaces of the campus. Usually however he preferred solitude but he had been drinking all afternoon and was intoxicated by the whims of

drunken brotherhood. Inconspicuous in their appearance except for their black satchels, they drifted with the crowd toward the set of traffic lights a hundred metres up the road and waited with other students for the lights to change.

'Well I'm glad that the exams are over' remarked Henry to Tom and the crowd of sympathetic ears which stood around.

'Yeh!' acknowledged Tom without emotion.

'Now we have six months to do as we please' added Henry.

'Six months?' asked Tom doubtfully as the lights changed and the crowd stepped onto the road.

'Well I hope you're not going to get a job before then! pleaded Henry because he dreaded the thought of pushing a pen for a living.

'Don't know. Depends if I can find one,' replied Tom who looked forward to implementing the great amount of theory he had painfully learned over the past three years. But he knew from his studies that the economy was heading for a down turn under the recently elected socialist Government and that widespread unemployment would result within the next six months.

They stepped onto the pavement at the opposite side of the road and continued walking in the same direction as before.

'What do you mean if you can find one?' asked Henry cynically recalling that there had been many openings for economic graduates in the local and national papers recently.

'But I'm thinking in terms of a career that's going to affect me for the rest of my life. Not a job for the holidays,' emphasized Tom wisely but loathe to explain to Henry the effect of the political situation on the economy. 'The position has to offer the right salary, good working conditions and chances of promotion. Otherwise it's not worth the burden.'

'No pen pushers job is worth the burden,' laughed Henry taking the opportunity to air his philosophy on work. Usually he was not quite so cynical but alcohol had eroded his capacity to think and lead him to believe that the ideas of others had no merit. As a consequence his own ideas soared to paramount importance and he laughed whenever anyone contradicted his wisdom.

'It's easier than pushing a wheelbarrow!' exclaimed Tom.

'Only physically though,' cut in Henry.

'What about pay, working conditions and chances of promotion?' asked Tom thinking that it would settle the argument.

'Well of course they're better but both jobs are based on the pusher's mentality,' replied Henry sensing that Tom did not understand the point he was trying to make.

'There's nothing wrong with the pusher's mentality. It depends solely on what you push.' added Tom to consolidate his argument. 'I bet that after you get your degree you'll be pushing a pen instead of a wheelbarrow.'

The question was a tough one and would have silenced most minds by the sheer weight of its blatancy. But not Henry, especially when he was drunk.

'Well of course I wouldn't push a wheelbarrow for a living but I wouldn't push a pen either. If I ever came in contact with one, I'd let it push me instead.' replied Henry.

'And how would you do that? By sitting on the point?' chuckled Tom confidently but relieved by the last second inclusion of the pun because he had no idea of what Henry was talking about.

'No. By sitting on my bum and watching all the things that a pen can do. That way I'd become a slave to it,' replied Henry.

'But I thought that was your objection?' asked Tom totally confused.

'No, no!' exclaimed Henry quickly to put Tom on the right track. 'The danger lies in becoming a slave to the work you perform with the pen. It's a much more difficult task to become a slave of the pen itself.'

'Why?'

'Because at its best, the pen is an extension of the mind. And if you only push it you won't use it to its maximum potential,' explained Henry more coherently.

'So what?' asked Tom still totally confused.

'It means that in your job you'll never use your mind to its maximum potential either,' concluded Henry correctly.

'Ah!' exclaimed Tom as the truth finally dawned on him. After a short pause during which he churned over the ramifications of what had been said Tom continued. 'But what will you eat?' he said

pointing out the necessity of a career in life. At that moment his hopes of winning the argument rose considerably as he saw no way around the objection he had made.

'Whatever you like' replied Henry trampling over Tom's objection as if it were a blade of grass. 'You choose a career which enables the pen to be put to maximum use.'

'Like what?' asked Tom dejected and confused.

'Become a scholar or a writer,' replied Henry with no pun intended.

Tom conceded the point Henry had made but he was reluctant to accept defeat because actually they had been arguing about different sides of the same coin. Tom had emphasized the practical advantages of mental over physical labour while Henry had concentrated on the stifling effects of both on the maximum utility of the mind. Neither had mentioned happiness for each had argued toward the view which he had found more pleasant.

'But that means in all the years that we've been at the University we've never used our minds to their maximum potential,' concluded Tom with rare insight.

'That's bloody right!' replied Henry.

They turned the corner and headed for the Golden Fleece hotel just ahead of them. The Golden Fleece was the favourite hotel of the students because it was the closest to the campus. The next hotel was a hundred metres further up the road. The Golden Fleece was as old as the university and four generations of proprietors had perished in the eighty years that it had catered for the needs of the students. Two had died from heart attacks, one had bled to death after being cut by a bottle in a brawl and another had been shot by a radical for calling the police after allegedly overhearing a sinister plot to take over the country. The present proprietor too had already suffered a nervous breakdown and was well on his way to becoming an alcoholic. As a result he was not usually on the premises and ran the hotel by a roster of professional barmen. The building itself was a showpiece of Victorian architecture and had been declared a historical property by the National Trust although most parts had been burnt down at one time or another. The building had not escaped the march of progress either and the front was decorated by an assortment of beverage advertisements and neon lights which regularly vanished and reappeared as weapons against police at demonstrations.

As the two young men came to the entrance of the hotel, they stopped momentarily and looked around to see if their friend Marshall Clark was in sight. Marshall was a third year medical student and a constant drinking companion of the other two. However he could not be seen and they concluded that they were a little early. Henry pushed open the thick wooden door to reveal an empty bar except for two poorly dressed sick old men who kept up a pointless conversation with the barman who had obviously heard it all too many times before to pay any sincere attention to it. The two drunks sat at the far end of the bar on the counter stools which ran for the length of the bar and around the end walls. The counter itself was made of dark highly stained wood with a protective plastic strip on top where drinks were placed. The wall behind the counter had a large mirror in the centre with shelves of bottles running off towards each end. The rest of the space on the wall was taken up by medicinal powders, three cash registers and historical beverage advertisements. The remaining floor space was taken up by small tables and chairs with a pool table and juke box situated at the unoccupied end.

Tom and Henry noticed the two drunks and instinctively moved toward the individual tables in the corner furthest from them. The presence of tramps in the bar always made them the objects of unbearable distast and calculated fun among the students. But now the bar was empty of students because they were at home or still on their way from the examinations. And the workers had not yet finished either. They dropped their cases on the floor and sat down next to the pool table. But the empty bar lacked atmosphere and was not conducive to forgetting about the examinations. An the contrary, its uncharacteristic peace brought traumatic examination experiences flooding back to mind and the two were unable to think about anything else.

'It's a wonder that they don't hold the exams here. The economic faculty would get a much better attendance,' said Tom to break the silence and recalling that the absenteeism had been high at that afternoon's examination.

Henry was amused because he was aware of the absenteeism and because he realized that Tom too could not get the examinations out of his mind. But he had found the cure earlier and because its effects were beginning to wear off, he stood up and asked Tom what he wanted to drink. He then walk-

ed off towards the counter reaching for his wallet in a rear pocket. As Tom sat there, he became frustrated by his attempts to forget about the examinations. Each time he turned his thoughts to something else the memories of that afternoon and the previous week became more clear in his mind until he voluntarily switched back to the examinations for fear that they would otherwise become crystal clear. While the examinations were still prominent in his mind he began to search for a reason why they haunted him so much. He remembered that they had been much easier to bear on previous occasions when he had been younger and had not fully realized the consequences which the mad scramble of competitive examinations forced upon all students. But that was not the complete answer. There had been pressures from outside like that of his parents, the need to live up to the expectations of his friends and finally the plans he had made and boasted of to others. It was not as if any of these things were bad in themselves but collectively they made the examinations seem a totally pointless exercise and an insult to the intelligence of the students. When Henry returned with two large glasses of beer, Tom decided to take his advice and get drunk.

Henry placed a glass in front of Tom and sat down.

'I don't think I've ever seen it this empty before.' said Henry taking a drink from his glass.

'Give it an hour or so and the rest of the economics faculty will be in here swilling their guts with beer,' exclaimed Tom laughing deliberately so he could forget about the examinations. His remark however had not totally been the product of creative thinking because economic students made up the largest proportion of the patrons to the hotel. At times, one in every two patrons was an economic student and this fact was held in high esteem by the whole of the faculty. It was no surprise then that the economists had won the inter faculty sculling competition for as long as most people could remember except for one year when their team had been the victims of foul play by the pharmacists.

They finished their drinks more quickly than usual and it was Tom's turn to shout. He thrust his hand in the air to attract the attention of the barman and when he looked in Tom's direction, Tom extended two fingers to indicate that he wanted two more beers. The barman nodded and took two large glasses from under the counter. Normally barmen did not like to take orders in this unorthodox fashion and preferred the customers to come to the counter

but here they feared being branded stupid if they could not communicate by more sophisticated means than the spoken word.

'What about some music?' suggested Henry rising from his chair and reaching for his wallet before Tom had a chance to object. Tom liked music and was the proud owner of an extensive record collection, but his broad musical taste did not include that of Henry and as a consequence he never enjoyed his selections. Henry dropped a coin into the juke box, browsed through the list of selections and chose three songs which he had heard on the radio recently. As he walked back and the music of the first song began to echo across the empty bar, Tom was disturbed in his trance and provoked to comment on the selection.

'What sort of a selection is that?' he asked disappointedly in a brisk voice which conveyed censure. It was not that he did not like the song but personally he would have chosen a more popular hit. 'Its so mournful that people could be forgiven for thinking that were holding a funeral in here.'

Henry said nothing and laughed at Tom's sense of humour so he would not say anything and would allow him to listen to the song. The barman came around with two glasses of beer and further infuriated Tom by the discomfort of having to dig out the correct money from his wallet. Tom angrily remmed the wallet back into his pocket and took a long drink from his glass.

They quickly became immersed in the song to such an extent that their minds wandered to the shores of oblivion where thought ceased to exist and ecstasy overcame the soul. They swayed finely balancing on the individual legs of their chairs and made grimacing gestures with their faces to parallel the mood of the song. Their arms evoked sympathy from the air and a sorrowful hum flowed from their lips as if they were primitives engulfed in a trance of a ritual. Like the beer, the music was a means to lightened feelings and a more concentrated dose of life. The song finished but they continued to enact their gestures through the interval much to the amusement of the two tramps at the counter. They were too drunk to make a comment but smiled and continued to stare in an air of sympathy and paternal understanding.

As the second song began Marshall Clark appeared at the door. He glanced around the empty bar and saw his two friends being inundated by music in the corner. He then walked over to the counter keeping a good distance from the two tramps at the end and ordered three beers. Although he had seen that the glasses of his friends were still nearly full. Marshall carried the three glasses like a bouquet and placed them in the middle of the table while smiling apologetically for buying the beers too soon. But his smile went unnoticed because Tom and Henry were too absorbed in the music.

'Well how are you?' asked Marshall pulling a chair from under the table and sitting down apprehensively.

'Hello stranger! When did you drop into town?' greeted Henry with his head rolling to the beat of the music. He had not seen Marshall for nearly a fortnight and hardly recognized him because his hair had been out. Marshall smiled embarrassed by the metaphorical reference to his hair and turned towards Tom.

'Absorb the music,' said Tom lifting his glass in the form of a toast and laughing at Marshall's short hair because he could not think of anything to say.

'It's a bit mournful, isn't it?' joked Marshall keen to keep up the humour in the conversation but unable to take an interest in the slow rhythm, 'You could be excused for thinking that we're holding a funeral in here.'

'Fuck!' exclaimed Henry in a totally dejected tone because through sheer coincidence Tom had used almost identical words to describe his musical taste only moments before. Tom broke into uncontrolled laughter at the sudden outburst and spilled most of the remaining beer from the bobbing glass in his hand. Marshall was perplexed by Tom's fit because although his comment had contained an element of humour, it was not that funny. At first he thought that Tom was being sarcastic about his hair but when he could not see any connection between the two, he concluded that they were drunk and smiled accordingly. Meanwhile Henry brooded over the comment trying to convince himself that it was not a true indication of his musical taste and trying to prevent a smile from breaking out over his face. Tom placed his glass on the table before he was seized by another spasm of laughter while Marshall rested his elbows on the edge so Tom's antics would not dislodge it and spill the untouched drinks in the middle. By this time Marshall was becoming fed up because he could not see the joke and unwittingly decided to ask them about the examinations.

'Well how did you go in the exams?' he asked hoping that they were calm enough to answer the question.

'I'm sure that I got through' replied Tom whose traumatic preoccupation with them had been diluted by the beer and the spasms of laughter.

'And what about you?' he asked Henry pleased at Tom's success.

'Don't know,' replied Henry.

'What do you mean you don't know?' asked Tom taking a new interest in the subject and angry that Henry did not answer the question.

'Don't get mad. How am I supposed to know how I went?' asked Henry obviously not keen to answer the question. 'I've been wrong in the past so I've stopped making predictions.'

'Just answer the question and don't make a speech about it,' pleaded Tom because Henry had refused to give an opinion. Tom thought that there was no reason for Henry to hold out like this unless he feared that he had failed and in that case it was better to drop the subject. But he refused to accept that because Henry had told him several weeks earlier that his examination preparation had been ahead of schedule. However Tom saw no point in continuing the matter along any other lines because once Henry had made up his mind not to say anything, the discussion would collapse anyway. So instead he asked Marshall about his examinations.

'When did you finish yours?' asked Tom looking at Marshall.

'Thursday,' replied Marshall taking a drink and wondering why Tom had asked him that because that was when they had last met and had a drink with their friend Jack Rogers in this very bar.

'Remember when I told you about my car?'

Tom apologised for his stupidity and rose to put another coin in the juke box which had just finished playing the final song. He chose three recent big hits which were certain to appeal to Marshall who had a record collection almost as large as his own. But he was uncertain of Henry's reaction to them. He then sat down and started on one of the full glasses in the centre of the table as the first song began to play.

'That sounds better,' claimed Marshall directing his comment as a question to Henry and beginning to shake his head to the rhythm of the introductory music.

'Yeh,' replied Henry downing the remaining beer in his glass and pleased at the change of subject in the conversation. The music was always better after a few beers. But those who could not get immersed in a song when they were drunk were guilty of the lowest musical taste and were generally unpopular in the bar because the juke box was in constant use. But not many students were like this and even then it was only a matter of a few more drinks.

'I'm glad that you like it. It's a bit different from your collection of hearse music,' commented Tom cynically because Henry had been adamant to talk about his examination prospects. However there was a certain amount of truth in his comments since the bulk of Henry's small record collection comprised of sad ballads and heart rendering country and western.

'Hearse music?' questioned Henry refusing to attack any validity to Tom's imaginative metaphor.

'Let's face it. All of your records are so dreary that a decent new hit would give your record player a stroke,' said Tom cynically hoping that Marshall would see the pun. But he did not because he was listening to the song.

'That's only your opinion' replied Henry bluntly as he always did when Tom launched a scathing attack on his record collection. It was after all only a question of aesthetics and his opinion was as valid as that of anyone else.

'Would you prefer Marshall to make a diagnosis?' asked Tom hoping that Marshall would see the pun this time. But he did not and Tom's clever smile eroded into a disappointing gape. However Henry had picked them up and understood that they had been introduced to get Marshall to side with Tom in the judgement of his records. As Henry laughed Tom could not keep a straight face at the disguised ridicule and jokingly scalded Marshall for his inattention. 'Wake up you silly idiot!'

'What's that?' asked Marshall apologetically turning towards Tom.

'I was just saying that Henry's records are dreary,' he replied, conveying the impression that he wanted Marshall to agree with him.

'Well, yes,' replied Marshall disinterestedly so that his judgement would appear impartial. 'I suppose that they have their place but I couldn't listen to them all the time.'

'There you are,' expounded Tom cynically launching his most imaginative assault of the conversation. 'They have their place and if we ever have a funeral, we'll know where to go!'

Marshall could not help being amused by Tom's harsh judgement because it resembled his own impartial thoughts on the matter which he had declined to express on the grounds of courtesy. Henry looked on impressed by the heights of imagination to which Tom had ascended and at a momentary loss for words by which to reply. Tom took a drink and nearly choked as he tried to laugh at his own joke at the same time.

'Two opinions don't constitute much of an opinion poll,' explained Henry just to keep the conversation going although there was no point to be made.

'Not only two,' replied Tom raising his voice to suggest that there was no truth in what Henry had said. 'Fred doesn't think much of your music either.'

The remark was a particularly caustic one because Fred Williams was a science student like Henry and the two usually held similar views on most matters of interest. But musically they did not concur. Where as Henry could enjoy sad songs, Fred could not because they reminded him too much of his own turbulent life at home and at the University.

Henry was at first provoked to annul the comparison by reference to Fred's undistinguished intellectual and educational achievement but he did not wish to prolong the pointless discussion.

'All it means is that his musical taste is as bad as yours,' replied Henry betraying his desire to end the conversation.

Tom said nothing and beamed because he had said the last sensible word on the matter. He too no longer wished to continue because Henry had resorted to logical arguments which undermined the inconsistencies on which the discussion thrived. And besides the strategies of logic grew more formidable with each drink.

As the three students sat drinking, the bar gradually began to fill with people. The construction workers from the various sites in the city had been the first to knock off and about ten of them sat at the tables. They were soon joined by the public transport workers from the bus depot who now stood at the counter stretching their after a day on the buses. Finally a handful of students had also gath-

ered and they sat drinking at the tables with the construction workers. The barman was busy behind the counter while a part time evening waitress in a short black shirt ferried trays of glasses to and from the tables. Two construction workers came over to the pool table and made a token wager before commencing to play. A student dropped another coin into the silent juke box while buying a drink. As the music began to premeate through the chatter and the echoes of colliding pool balls, the bar settled down to a normal evening's trading.

At about that time two girls who were also students at the University entered the bar. One was tall and thin with long blond hair which came down to her shoulders. She wore a pair of brown fashion slacks with matching elevated cork sole shoes and a white embroidered blouse. Her friend was shorter and had short brown hair. She wore a pair of yellow jeans, white belt and a yellow top which had a white strip around the neckline. Both carried small leather shoulder bags. They hesitated by the door for a moment as if in a strange place and then made their way to the counter gazing around as they walked. The tall one placed her elbow uncomfortably on the counter and looked in the direction of the barman uncertain of how to attract his attention. Meanwhile her friend continued to gaze around with great rapidity as her glances were being reciprocated from all sides by the patrons. Finally the barman walked over to serve them. He placed two glasses of soft drink on the counter and continued to converse with the tall one at her own instance.

Marshall looked up and saw the two girls. He was immediately captivated by their neatly groomed hair and well defined contours which stood out from beneath their clothes like evening silhouettes in a brightly lit window. Marshall cast his gaze down the figure of the short one and felt a sudden dryness in his throat when she turned around to reveal a pair of huge breasts which dwarfed everything he had seen previously.

'Hello, ' haven't we met before?' he asked himself quietly in response to his active imagination.

Tom and Henry looked up wondering what Marshall was talking about and then followed his gaze to the counter. Tom froze with a glass at his lips, unable to force down the beer in his mouth lest it disrupt his gaze. Meanwhile Henry continued to stare in fascination of the novelty of the situation. As a rule women did not like to be in male dominated bars and so with good looks and big chest. For the

rest of the time they had to be satisfied with boasting about their dubious past experiences with them.

'Will you look at the size of her chest!' exclaimed Tom in utter disbelief as he always did when he saw a girl with large breasts. 'They're huge, like the alpo in summer.'

'The alpo in summer?' queried Marshall half heartedly without turning towards Tom and certain that he had missed the pun because of his inattention.

'High and warm' replied Tom without changing the direction of his gaze.

A smile spread across Marshall's face but he did not betray whether it was the result of Tom's joke or his own phantasies. Henry looked on but did not laugh because he had heard Tom tell the same joke on many previous occasions. However in this instance he was compelled not to remain silent.

'As usual you're jokes are out of season,' said Henry in an air of aloofness which he usually reserved for his cleverest remarks although he realized that his companions had no chance whatsoever of understanding the pun in his words.

Appropriately Tom and Marshall completely ignored his words and continued to pound the weight of their imagination on the great issue at hand.

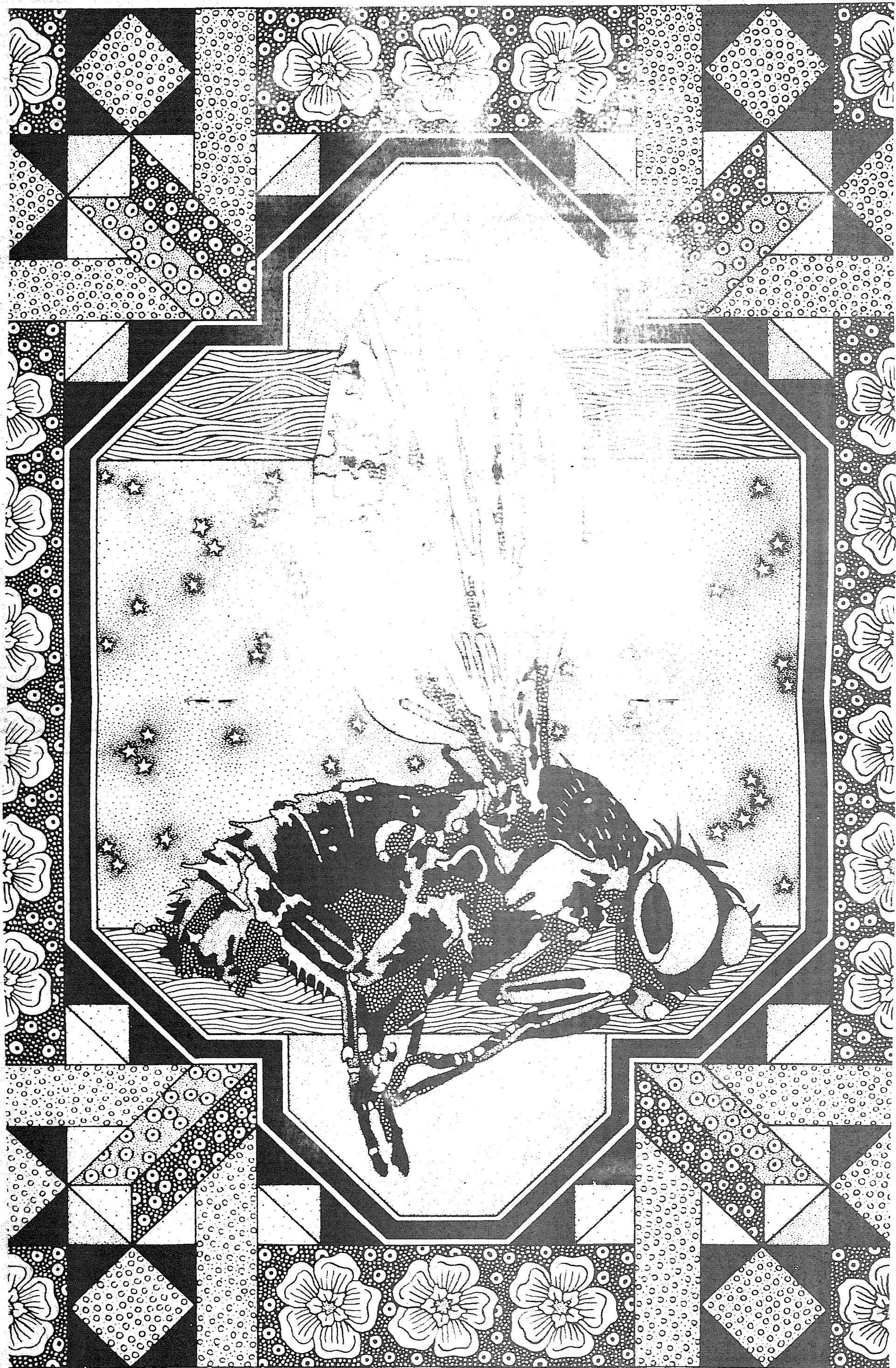
'They're huge!' repeated Tom excitedly holding his hands a good metre apart to add to the effect of his blunt verbal description.

'Ah. Would I like to get my instrument under her tent,' sighed Marshall until he realized his choice of words. 'I mean my medical instrument. My stethoscope.'

'Yes. We know,' replied Tom cynically. 'But what about your ethics.'

'What about them?' Just as long as I can get my hands on those beautiful boulders,' replied the normally reserved Marshall whose self restraint had obviously been eroded by drink. 'I'm usually opposed to pervision on medical grounds but at the moment my mind is very open on the matter. They're bloody huge!'

Tom laughed because Marshall was obviously enjoying every moment of the bawdy encounter but he also sensed that Henry had withdrawn for some reason.



'You're strangely quiet all of a sudden' he said turning towards Henry. 'You usually take a much greater interest in things like this.'

Henry hesitated before replying, trying to weigh the consequences of revealing a popular secret.

'They're big!' replied Henry quietly. 'All one metre and three centimetres of them.'

'What's that?' asked Tom lounging towards Henry so he could understand the full ramifications of what had been said.

'I said they're big. All one metre and three centimetres of them,' repeated Henry pleased by Tom's sudden interest.

'Do you know her?' guessed Tom in excitement.

'Well I used to for a short time,' replied Henry leaning back in his chair and taking another drink from his glass in preparation for revealing the whole story.

'Shit!' exclaimed Tom in envy and surprise which left him without a clean word. He hesitated for a moment trying to think of a pertinent question which would reveal more of the vital details but when he could not think of one, he turned towards Marshall and uttered. 'Did you hear that, Henry knows her!'

Marshall was shaken out of his trance and quickly turned towards Henry for confirmation.

'I really only knew her for a short time, repeated Henry apologetically because apparently his companions were under the impression that they were still friends.

'Paradise!' put in Tom again lounging towards Henry so he would not miss any of the details.

'How did you get to know her?' enquired Marshall whose gaze had returned to the counter.

'It was at a dance on campus last year. Everybody was pissed including Helen. That's her name. Helen Gladstone. And ofcourse she was the centre of attention. Well, to be more specific, her chest was the centre of the attention. You should have seen them, when she dance. Up, down, up, down, one after the other. She wielded them like the cars of a boat,' explained Henry, keenly to the delivious laughter of his companions as he tried to imitate a drunken rower in his seat. Tom leaned to far back in his chair and nearly toppled over while Marshall buried his face in his hands and cried with laughter. Henry continued. 'Ofcourse she was pissed as a barrel and people shyed away

from her. You couldn't approach her without making your intentions plainly apparent to everyone in the place. But I approached her. I was hypnotised by sheer size, I started chatting to her, and eventually took her home. Mind you I didn't take her straight home.'

Tom and Marshall again broke into laughter and made gaffowing noises at the more explicit parts of the story.

Henry continued and laughed at the more explicit parts himself. We stopped on the way home. Well I stopped anyway. She was too pissed to know whether we were coming or going. I couldn't resist the temptation to wet my lips on her chest. I knew it was the opportunity of a lifetime. But she didn't like the idea of being undressed. Not at first. I had to be very insistant to make her appreciate my point of view. Finally she couldn't resist the temptation either and gave in but the pleasure proved to be too much for her and she became frightened. After that what could I do but take her home. I called her the following day but she told me to piss off in no uncertain terms.

'What an experience' said Marshall blushing with envy.

'Fuck!' exclaimed Tom with plain envy.

'Paradise,' repeated Marshall and added in candid disappointment as he always did at the realization of a lost opportunity, 'But I think you played a poor hand. Had you been more considerate you may have got to keep her a lot longer.

'I would have done the same thing as Henry if I were in his shoes.' interjected Tom failing to appreciate Marshall's long term strategy due to his own skirmish like experiences with women.

'I look at it philosophically,' put in Henry eager to justify his actions and prevent any malice from developing between Tom and Marshall. 'If I was broke and wondering alone at night and I suddenly came across a million dollars in the road, I'd stuff as much as I could into my pockets and piss off because I know that if I was found with it in the morning someone would find a legitimate excuse to take it off me.'

'I'd take as much as I could and piss off too,' agreed Tom.

Marshall listened carefully but could not see their point of view.

'I can't see any comparison between women and money,' he replied failing to realize that the real

comparison was being made between money and men's success with women.

'Don't get me totally wrong,' apologized Henry re-collecting what had been said. 'I would have liked to have got to know her better apart from her obvious charms. But her old man's loaded and she thinks that all I'm capable of doing is raping her.'

'No wonder she doesn't like you,' said Marshall laughing.

'Maybe, But I can't understand what she's doing here. I didn't think she was the type who'd come here to celebrate the end of the exams,' uttered Henry trying to fit his image of her to the facts of the moment. 'Unless ofcourse she's been getting too much attention lately and she's come here to drown her sorrows.'

Tom glanced at the two women once more and noticed that the stools next to them and those along the counter were occupied. Students had occupied the tables and now competed with each other to place their money into the juke box. Labourers stood in line for their piece of the action at the pool table. Only standing room at the counter and around the pool table was left. The level of noise had increased considerably and it was necessary to shout in order to be heard. But the noise was not detrimental to the life at the bar because it added spice to arguments and allowed one to draw attention to oneself without disapproval from either friends or strangers. And one could always tune in on the conversation at the next table when one got tired of the conversation at his own.

At the far end of the counter Tom caught a glimpse of their old friend Jack Rogers, an undergraduate economics student who had come in for a drink with a group of classmates. He saw Jack scull three schooners in quick succession to the laughter and encouragement of his companions. As he finished the third one, a friend placed his own glass in front of Jack and he sculled that too. Tom laughed at first but then remembered that on Thursday Jack had told him that his examinations would finish tomorrow. He thought it unwise for Jack to drink so heavily on the eve of an examination but concluded that he had enough common sense to know what he was doing.

Tom's gaze was interrupted by another wave of students entering the crowded bar. They pushed their way to the counter, ordered drinks and dropped their satchels on the little free space which was still available on the floor. While roaming intoxicated patrons tripped over the satchels, the students

heatedly began to debate the examination questions which they had faced that afternoon. The debate began with reference to a particular examination question and then all at once everyone rushed in with the answers they had given during the examinations. Ofcourse the heterogeneity of the replies immediately revealed that not everyone had answered the question correctly. This was followed by a short period of deliberation during which each student computed the approximate marks he gained for his answer. As reference to further questions was made, the extent of their success began to dawn on all those participating in the debate. But unfortunately by the time all the examination questions had been exhausted everyone was too drunk to feel pride or self pity. That would come on the following day and finally be sealed by the official publication of the results several weeks later.

Several of the students came over to the pool table with drinks in hand. They did not wish to play but sought to subdue their frustrations by intimidating the shabby labourers engaged at the table. While other labourers wailed in a gentleman's queue for their turn, the students impertinantly swarmed around the table like a rash and indicated their intention to play next. When one of the players pointed out that there were others who had more right to play, the students expressed complete surprise and then cynically stated that it made no difference as long as the labourers did not play with them in the next game. Such arrogance sparked resentment among those playing and an uproar among those waiting in the queue. The labourers stepped forward self-righteously in defiance, determined to let the students know by a show of force that they could not abuse the rights of others in the games section of the social activity at the bar. The students burst into laughter over this provocation because they had succeeded in manoeuvring the labourers into a position where their petty working class pretensions were exposed. They took great delight in watching the labourers stand up for the rights of the people in the queue waiting to play pool without realizing that in the world just outside the doors of the bar, they were at the end of the socio economic queue managed by graduate students in such a way that they never got a chance to play in the game of life. The labourers became infuriated by the laughter and began to utter obscenities as they always did when they failed to grasp something. When one of the labourers threatened to become violent the students pretended to grumble and then withdrew. As they headed back to their friends at the counter they again burst into laughter. Other stud-

ents, including Tom and his companions, who understood the real intentions behind the confrontation also laughed at the pretensions of the labourers. Only the two girls at the counter were completely puzzled by the episode.

The commotion at the pool table caught the attention of Jack Rockers and he saw his three friends at one of the tables. He finished the beer in his glass, bought another one and then pushed his way through the crowd to where they were seated. He stopped beside Henry and took a drink from his glass without speaking.

'How are things Jack?' enquired Tom suspiciously because he was certain that Jack still had an examination to do on the following day.

'Not bad,' replied Jack drowsily rubbing his tired eyes with the fingers of his empty hand. 'Did you manage to get the loan?' he added thinking back to their activities on Thursday.

'No I haven't asked him yet,' replied Tom embarrassed by his poor memory and referring to his father from whom he had promised to negotiate a loan for Marshall. 'How did your exams go?'

'Not bad so far,' answered Jack with sombre features and taking another drink, 'I finish tomorrow.'

Henry who had remained silent until now burst into laughter and said 'You'll be lucky if you get up tomorrow by the way you're drinking.'

Marshall also burst into laughter because he shared Henry's prediction. It was obvious that Jack was too drunk to stand up safely and chances were that he had been drinking for quite some time. Consequently none of them believed that he had been successful in his examinations and they decided to take a more sympathetic attitude toward his drinking.

Marshall's fit of laughter caught the attention of Jack and he noticed that his hair had been cut since their meeting on Thursday.

He thought of something amusing but decided that this was not the time to say so. Meanwhile Henry brought to his attention the presence of Helen Gladstone.

'There's a bird over by the counter with huge breasts' said Tom holding the palms of his hands out in front of his chest to add substance to his description.

'And Henry used to know her!'

Henry laughed and Marshall glanced towards the counter to check if she was still there. But Jack hardly heard his words and took another long drink from his glass.

'Did you know that Fred is dead?' he asked.

For a moment Jack's words did not register in the minds of the students. They continued to think the old thoughts and act out the same physical gestures which had been present before Jack had spoken. But the flow of nervous impulses to their brains was occurring at an enormous rate and within seconds a realization of indescribable complexity flashed across their minds. In an instant they realized the far reaching consequences of his words. They realized the effect on themselves, on their friends and on their families. But above all they realized the dialectic of life and death which only emerges so rarely in the mind of an individual. But their electrified brains were too paralyzed to retain such a realization for any length of time without becoming physiologically dangerous so the focus of their minds switched to the obvious.

'Who? Fred Williams?' asked Tom to ensure that he understood correctly.

'Yeh. Fred Williams' replied Jack quietly in a cold impersonal tone, 'Do you know any other Freds?'

Tom realized the stupidity of his question but not without some antagonism. He did in fact know of an overseas uncle of his called Fred, but he also knew that this was not the time to say so and had to be content with silent amusement at his own joke. His companions were grateful for his impertinent question because it had removed their need to put up a prop of respectability in the face of the tragedy. A short silence followed before someone seized the opportunity to force more information out of Jack.

'How did it happen?' asked Marshall in a friendly yet impersonal tone, which he had inherited from his doctor father.

'Suicide!' answered Jack bluntly.

The minds of the students turned blank. A silence followed during which their minds focused on empty space. They could no longer feel anything whereas before their feelings had been subjugated in respect for the victim. Now the truth touched upon the very reasons for their own existence. Death was an unavoidable part of life but suicide was alien to all forms of reason. It was a new dimension whose re-

ality could only previously be acknowledged but never approached. It was, like the moon, a romantic novelty, to be discussed and praised for its virtue, but never to be encountered because of its distance. But now because of its reality, it overran the reasons upon which their own lives rested and the minds of the students were shattered. They were beyond despair, beyond fear. They were beyond pity, beyond remorse. They were beyond purpose, beyond hope. They were beyond words, beyond thought. They were beyond flesh, beyond intellect. For all intents and purposes even though they were drunk, for an instant they were dead.

The shock did not subside immediately and their thoughts only partially returned. Tom was determined not to be the first to speak this time. Marshall was uncertain of the best way to re-open the discussion in view of the new circumstances. Henry wondered whether it was possible to say anything further without introducing the sociological perspective and attributing blame. Jack's only interest remained in the reaction of his friends. The silence continued. Jack took another long drink from his glass. Everyone felt the need for someone else to say something, but they realized that there was nothing to be said. In fact there seemed little purpose in even thinking about it.

Tom raised his head and opened his mouth in a vain attempt to express his thoughts. But he could not find the words and burst into laughter shaking his head to deny that it was intentional. It was impossible to decide whether he was in ecstasy or pain. Unable to control his laughter, Tom leaned forward rolling his glass around in the palms of his hands and studied his reflection in the table top. Tom's antics caused Jack's sombre features to melt into a smile because he too had laughed pathetically after hearing of the tragedy. But his laughter was no longer pathetic. Jack laughed because he had thought about the tragedy a great deal and saw how stupid and illogical it really was. It reminded him of tragedies he had read about in the classics and which he had condemned as the actions of fools and madmen. Fred's death no longer affected him as much as the causes of the suicide.

Henry shuffled uneasily in his chair and allowed his gaze to wander aimlessly around the bar. He tried to assure himself that there was no purpose to be achieved in thinking about the tragedy but realized from his knowledge of sociology that the roots of

suicide ran long and deep beneath the victim. They engulfed his family, friends, work, education, sexual relationships, religious beliefs and a host of other less significant variables. But above all sociology stressed the importance of integration into family and society. And he and his companions were a part of that society. He felt like blaming himself because he had all this knowledge but had been unable to foresee the impending tragedy. Anger built up inside him but he suppressed it because it was an injustice to Fred and the conspiracy which killed him. Henry wanted to remain honest intellectually and emotionally but as was always the case in any dialectic, his intellect won out in the end.

Marshall leaned back in his chair and deliberated quietly. He was aware of similar tragedies through his father's medical practice and remembered from his lectures that it was best to remain calm and unattached in situations like this. At first he found it extremely difficult to remain aloof but when the implications of the tragedy began to dawn on him the task became considerably easier. He did not have to be a sociologist to realize the social repercussions which the suicide had for him. But then again suicide was a medical problem which could be explained away in terms of the theory of mental disease. He was confident that the repercussions would be minimal for him. Marshall scanned the reactions of his companions for signs of hysteria or anger so that he could arrest any mental deterioration which might arise.

'When did it happen?' asked Henry gazing at the far wall.

'Yesterday. I phoned him last night and one of his brothers told me that he'd tried to poison himself,' replied Jack trying to suppress the grin he had acquired from Tom.

Marshall was prompted to continue the questioning because the clinical procedure demanded that a dialogue be kept up for as long as possible in a situation like this in order to prevent the grief-stricken companions from elapsing into hysteria.

'Think how hard it must be on his family?' asked Marshall with professional sincerity so Tom would not withdraw further and Jack take to another bout of heavy drinking. But he need not have worried about Jack because he had already been through the worst part of the ordeal and the idea of laughing at the tragedy had begun to appeal to him.

'It's not difficult to imagine what his younger brothers must have gone through. When I phoned this morning to check the story their old man told me that they had been sedated,' replied Jack. For a moment he forgot that he had only just informed them of the tragedy and felt like giving a detailed account of the phone call and his subsequent feelings. 'I actually felt good during the exams this morning. They were a breeze.'

'Did he do the exams?' asked Henry guessing that they were probably at the roots of the tragedy because he himself had gone through a strenuous ordeal in conjunction with the examinations that morning.

The question fell on deaf ears because of its proximity to the truth and only further alienated Tom by its irreverence. He knew nothing about the clinical procedure for the handling of distressed persons nor about the horizons of sociology but he sensed a self imposed indifference in the attitudes of his companions to the tragedy. He was not certain how he should feel but he was convinced that the conduct of his companions was unacceptable. He had reached the stage where the inexplicable behaviour of his companions was beginning to add to the distress caused by the tragedy.

Marshall sensed the growing strain in Tom's mind without knowing how to ease it. He was worried by Tom's crushing reaction to the tragedy because it would remain subconsciously manifested in Tom's thoughts for a long time to come and determine his future attitude to many things. He recalled how the initial reactions of his father's patients to the deaths of family members determined their later attitudes to life. In many cases an initial hysterical reaction was detrimental to social and economic success. In others it eroded the need for purpose in life until they hardly realized that they were alive at all. A few recovered to lead useful if not spectacular lives. Marshall tried to continue the dialogue but could not think of any more relevant questions apart from what kind of poison Fred had used. He did not realize the real motive behind his attempts to scrutinize Tom's reactions and almost plunged into the emotional abyss with Tom by his failure to continue the dialogue. But he saved himself at the last moment by condemning himself professionally for not knowing what to do.

Jack laughed and advised Tom to have another drink but the suggestion did not appeal to him because Jack had been drinking all afternoon

and now as a consequence he was only capable of laughing at the tragedy. Jack concluded from the silence of his companions that he had only succeeded in alienating them further and because he could no longer show any signs of sincerity without suspicion from them, he decided that it was best to rejoin his classmates at the counter.

He was too drunk to realize that neither Henry nor Marshall cared about his attitude but only hoped that he would continue talking so they could remain silent. To their dismay Jack expressed the hope that Marshall would get his loan and returned to the counter.

Jack's reference to the loan further infuriated Tom. It convinced him that Jack had no respect whatsoever for Fred. If he had then he would keep his sacreligious sentiments to himself like Henry and Marshall. At that moment Tom wished that Marshall had never approached him about the loan. He wished that Marshall would have either tried to beg the amount from his father or found a job for the vacation. He would have to pay it back somehow anyway.

Tom watched Jack return to the counter and caught a glimpse of the two girls still talking to the barman. He gazed at the bosom of Helen Gladstone and felt nothing. It no longer aroused his passions nor conjured his imagination. It no longer even provoked him to comment where as previously he would have rushed in to give an opinion of the merchandise. He also observed that they wore heavy makeup on their faces and the array of powders and colors which he had found attractive earlier now assumed the repulsiveness of contemporary art. Tom realized the change in his attitude and hoped that it was not a sign of impotency.

'We came here to forget about the examinations but it looks like Fred found a better method,' reflected Henry honestly as he once more recalled his own harrowing examination experiences from that morning.

'It's a little extreme for a piece of paper!' he added referring to the degree which is bestowed by the successful completion of studies.

Marshall was relieved that Henry spoke although he did not agree with what he said.

'I don't think its wise to relate suicide to academic goals. There are other variables involved.' Marshall hastened to say without thought, because

his own father mercilessly drove him towards the same goal. But Marshall realized that his ideas were not important at the moment. It was only important that he spoke. Only that way would he escape irreparable emotional damage.

Tom did not listen to the analysis of his companions. He had already made up his mind about their attitudes and now recalled the remarks he had made about Henry's record collection earlier in the afternoon. It was ironical that he had mentioned that their place was at a funeral and now an hour later they had a funeral on their hands. He wanted to leave because he suspected that sooner or later in the evening one of them would remind him of the comments or worse go over to the jukebox and play one of Henry's favourite songs. He could not bear to think about the silly comments he had made. He saw no alternative but to leave. He needed an excuse so he would not look back like running out on his companions but he did not care too much if they did not believe him.

'I've got to get home for tea,' said Tom uttering his first words since Jack had mentioned the tragedy. He looked around at his companions, stood up and pushed the chair back under the table.

Henry looked up while Marshall tried to conceive how Tom could think of his appetite at a time like this until he realized that he just wanted an excuse to leave. And realizing this Marshall lost his animosity because he considered he had a much better chance of remaining objective if only Henry remained present.

Tom hesitated for a moment in case his companions had anything to say. When they said nothing, he picked up his satchel and uttered a farewell as he began to head for the door through the crowded bar.

'See you here at three tomorrow!' called out Henry uncertain whether Tom had heard him because the noise in the bar was so great that he had difficulty in hearing the words himself.

Tom walked through the door onto the crowded street. The deafening noise of the rush hour traffic failed to penetrate his ears and he hardly noticed the crowds of pedestrians whose ranks he joined. On other occasions he would have gone straight home but today his destination made little difference. His mind had been liberated by drink, he was alienated from his companions and his purpose lay shattered by the death of his friend. He was therefore chained to freedom and misery and his aimless roaming around the streets of the city suited his needs well.

Occasionally he lifted his head and watched the strain on the faces of the people that approached him. They frightened him because he had never seen them that way before. He had previously imagined that they belonged to happy people with purpose in their lives. But now they did not reflect purpose and seemed gaunt as if the insides of their heads contained vacuums and their faces had been pushed in by the air outside. Tom wondered what all of them were seeking from life. Perhaps their aim was wealth like that of the students who studied purely to obtain qualifications and then settled into well paid positions which required little work. Or perhaps they hungered for power in their jobs, in their interest groups and among their friends. But power was a forlorn hope for most of them because qualifications were essential for most positions, apart from trade union posts and parliamentary seats in the working class areas. Or perhaps it was love that they wanted. But again there was not much chance of that unless the men had gained their degrees and the women possessed good looks and figure. He studied the faces of the women that passed by. He saw young faces with smooth unblemished skin and long shining hair. He saw middle aged married faces with heavy make up and extravagant hair styles. He saw old wrinkled faces with warts and dyed hair. He could not help thinking that the pageant of femininity before him was every man's inheritance upon marriage and was forced to conclude that love could not be a lifelong endeavour. As a consequence the relationship between the sexes after thirty could not rise above friendship. That left only power and wealth as a purpose in life and he was glad that he had completed his degree.

Yet Tom realized that for the first time in his life he identified himself with the multitudes he mingled with in the streets. It was an admission of the fact that they were basically like him. They too dreamed of wealth and power. They too wanted to be loved by beautiful women and successful

ment. They too saw possibilities in life for enjoyment and finding happiness. But most of them also saw that the years had passed them by and that they could only envy the success of others. Others like him who had the qualifications to succeed. And because they had failed, he could only expect their wrath and distrust. Failure did not breed respect for victors, only for the task. The situation reminded him of a story he had often heard that the pinnacle of success was the loneliest place in the world. It was particularly so in the case of power because power operated on a strict social hierarchy in which each step was precisely defined by law. The story frightened him because he had not believed it before and did not wish to believe it now because its consequences were not included in his dreams about success. He had caught a glimpse of the delusion of success and wandered whether he would still see it tomorrow or next week or next year. He wondered about it for a while and then it passed out of his mind.

Tom walked past the university gates on the opposite side of the road and continued until he came to a set of traffic lights. As he waited for them to change he became aware of the multitudes around him. He had not previously realized that there were so many people around at this time of the day, although he passed this way several times a week. He wondered where they all came from but was not encouraged to pursue the question because the realization of his own insignificance in the human race flashed across his mind. Previously he had viewed the world in terms of himself on a pedestal in the centre with the crowds milling around him. Now he saw no crowds. There were only individuals like him and they too were insignificant and lost. Their futility eased the pressure in his mind and in a rare flash of insight he realized that the crowd was just a figment of man's self centred social imagination; a delusion. The realization cleared his mind and the noise of the rush hour traffic returned to his ears. The strain on the approaching faces began to disappear and in his mind the individuals again merged into a crowd. They no longer represented hostility towards his ambitions and even some of the middle aged married women began to appeal to him.

As he crossed a street, the initial shock of Fred's suicide began to wear off and his thoughts returned to the tragedy. He did not wish to remember at first but when he realized that he had deliberately kept it out of his mind for the past few moments just like his companions had done in the bar, he

did not try to suppress it any longer. He tried to think about it rationally but could not formulate the questions necessary to do so. Instead he had to be content with memories which came easiest to his mind. They were happy memories like the time Fred had taken him and Henry to a brothel in the migrant quarter several years earlier and he had had to borrow money to afford it. The evening however had not been altogether successful because they had been drinking for several hours prior to the visit and had only decided to go for the sake of curiosity. He had gone again later by himself but had been left cold by the sham of human emotions inherent in such transactions. Then when Marshall had joined them, Fred began to toy with the idea of setting up a brothel on campus to cater for the large demand of the student population but the idea had collapsed because of studies and Fred's inability to recruit girls for the task.

Tom again looked at the approaching faces of the women in the crowd. Many of them reminded him of the prostitutes he had visited when he had been unable to find a girlfriend. He thought that most of them would even take it up if given half a chance in these inflationary times. Most of them were reasonably well groomed and financially insecure enough to succeed in the worlds oldest profession. The better looking ones could make a fortune and live a life of comparative luxury.

He remembered the race meetings they had gone to with Fred and the gambling and drinking they had enjoyed on those occasions. He recalled the time when Fred had won several hundred dollars and treated them to a lavish dinner that night. Later Fred had phoned a prostitute and they had finished the evening with an orgy. He could never forget their attempts to have six with her at the same time and how Henry had tried for thirty minutes to calculate the optimum positions mathematically. There had also been occasions when they had lost heavily but he did not recall those times. But what really remained in his mind about the races were the extravagant life style they lead on race days. They began the day with a chicken and champagne breakfast before working out their bets for the afternoon. Then it was off to the course for more chicken and champagne before invading the betting ring. And finally more chicken and champagne in the evening if they won. It had been Fred who had instigated this lavish routine when he had become bored with just plain gambling and the rest of them had only been too keen to follow his example.

The congestion began to make Tom feel unpleasant. He did not like the milling crowd because people bumped into each other and the apologies they exchanged reminded him of the shallowness of human relationships in the brothels he had visited. People said all sorts of things without really meaning them. They spoke because it was the social thing to do. They apologized because they had learned to do so. There was nothing he hated more than listening to people who did not mean what they said. But it was for reasons beyond his comprehension that he only felt this way in the crowded streets midst strangers.

Tom remembered the plans Fred had made for himself. He had always wanted to be a Scientist like Henry but he had never got into the knack of passing examinations. It was not as if passing examinations had anything to do with becoming a good scientist but they did provide a useful bureaucratic technique for eliminating a large number of aspirants for the few positions which were available. Lately, Tom had come to doubt Fred's ability because of the poor grades he had attained but he thought that the enthusiasm and reverence which Fred had for science would eventually see him through. He remembered the arguments which they had had about science and how Fred and Henry had condemned economics as the metaphysics of politicians. He had not given them much credit but now with the economy beginning to slide into depression under the socialists, he was beginning to appreciate their point of view. It had previously not occurred to him that economics was purely and solely the dominion of the political philosophy of the Government in power.

The memories of Fred cheered him up for a moment and a smile broke out on his face. But he could not repress the apparent stupidity of it all for any length of time. He could not understand how Fred had found the need to kill himself if he could muster so many fond memories about him. It seemed completely senseless until he recalled the examination system about which Fred had often complained so bitterly. He remembered his own ordeal with them

and his subsequent attempts to drink away the memories of them that afternoon. He remembered how his parents had continually pushed and questioned him about his studies so he would keep working right up to and through the examinations. He remembered how they had always emphasized the importance of success at the University. He remembered how they had impressed upon him the fact that these were going to be his last examinations as if they too had once experienced the futility associated with them. He could begin to understand the relationship between futility and the examinations but considered suicide an extreme reaction. But he did not condemn the idea completely because he himself had contemplated suicide more times than once during periods of great pressure at the university. He tried to think of the difference between the thought of suicide and the actual task of carrying it out but he could formulate the answer. He could only see the result of the difference in that he was alive and Fred was dead. And he was not prepared to venture into religion to find the answer.

Tom turned the corner and headed down one of the side streets. He continued to think about Fred and the future. He realized that he had lost a long standing friend whose company had always cheered him up. His empty projections about the future made him sad and brought tears to his eyes. He cried because he realized that he would never see Fred again regardless of how hard he tried to think otherwise. It had not been easy for him to admit that because his own life was still fully ahead of him and the concept of eternal annihilation held no mind shattering significance for him yet. But now he realized its meaning and cried over the death of his friend. The death had left him utterly alone with his memory of Fred. When Fred had been alive, he had not realized that Fred was a part of the world whose image was carved into his brain by the association of time and that it would remain there until the day he died himself. At that moment he realized that there was nothing more lonely in the world than a memory whose reality had vanished from the face of the earth forever.

TRIO

Three vignettes by Michael Stutchbury.

SOLO

The roof and floors were mostly gone and the solitary walls (the stark singularity) projected an eeriness, a lonely dija vu of when the skeleton house was fleshed and of all the times I was there. It seemed inconceivable that a house which seemed to be alive, as life went on inside of it, could be reduced in this way to rubble. Floorboards were ripped up and scattered in a random maze of planks. Their legacy a defiant rusty nail punctured the sole of my shoe. All was bare; no more dressed up people singing and dancing on winter nights. No more of the warm hum around a roaring fire place or the beating sound of moths against the window pane. Other things had crumbled than just red brick and shingles....

In the same way, I explored an old farm house. The only roof was an olive tree canopy which had inherited the small rooms beneath. Yellow sandstone walls held charcoaled scrawled claims by the local youth to their loves or their existence and the nails in the wooden window panes were square headed and seemingly home made. Fat gutted dairy cows strolled nonchalantly through the narrow passageway on grey slate floors viewing my presence with a cud-chewing distachment. And I tried to imagine an Australian farm family in the nineteenth century eating, working, talking and washing in these four rooms. A family of perhaps six living in this small house; a mother using this very hearth to cook meals and boil water, children sleeping in the neat thick walled room. And it struck me as amazing. Here, I was tasting time.

DUO

We walked, pacing our steps to grass tufts that stood above the mud at convenient intervals; now to a drier, sharp stoned track that sloped gently upwards to the lip of the cliff, Palos Verdes Cliff. The approach of late afternoon and the sombre matching of the colors made everything seem dense, thick and more massive. Dark red cliff against blue grey sky against deep green sea. If you didn't

look south you could forget that Marineland was two miles down the coast, the sea breeze carried the sound of the highway behind us and Los Angeles smog was thin today. One had something to be thankful for.

Some one hundred yards to our left rose a white lighthouse guiding sailing ships and ocean tankers past the dangers of the cliff that jutted out from the mainland. But ships and tankers weren't the only things that passed by this landmark. Every December saw a movement of life past this cliff from the chilly waters off the coast of Alaska south to the warm inviting shoals of the Mexican Baja. It was here that the Pacific Grey Whale on its instinctive journey made closest contact with the coast.

Standing on this edge overlooking the red walls and the stony beach far below we could see forever across the ocean but now only the first two or three hundred yards were of any importance. After about fifteen minutes of concerted scanning we were rewarded. Two at once, their grey backs rolling out, up and down into the water followed by the flicking salute of the large webbed tail at the end of the motion. Often in the middle of a performance they would blow, the spout thin at first then widening and finally dissipating with the wind. We were voyeurs of nature following about ten whales altogether on their course past the cliff; plotting their dives, the deep ones to the sea floor for food with long intervals between surfacing and the shallow dives that covered more distance along the coast.

Later we walked back across the mud and the grass tufts both feeling quite exhilarated by the experience. Clive was speaking his thoughts to me, "You know I get a real kick out of seeing things like that - getting out in the thick of nature in the forests with the deer and the squirrels. There's just something about the fresh air and the wild animals all around. That's why I like hunting so much."

TRIO

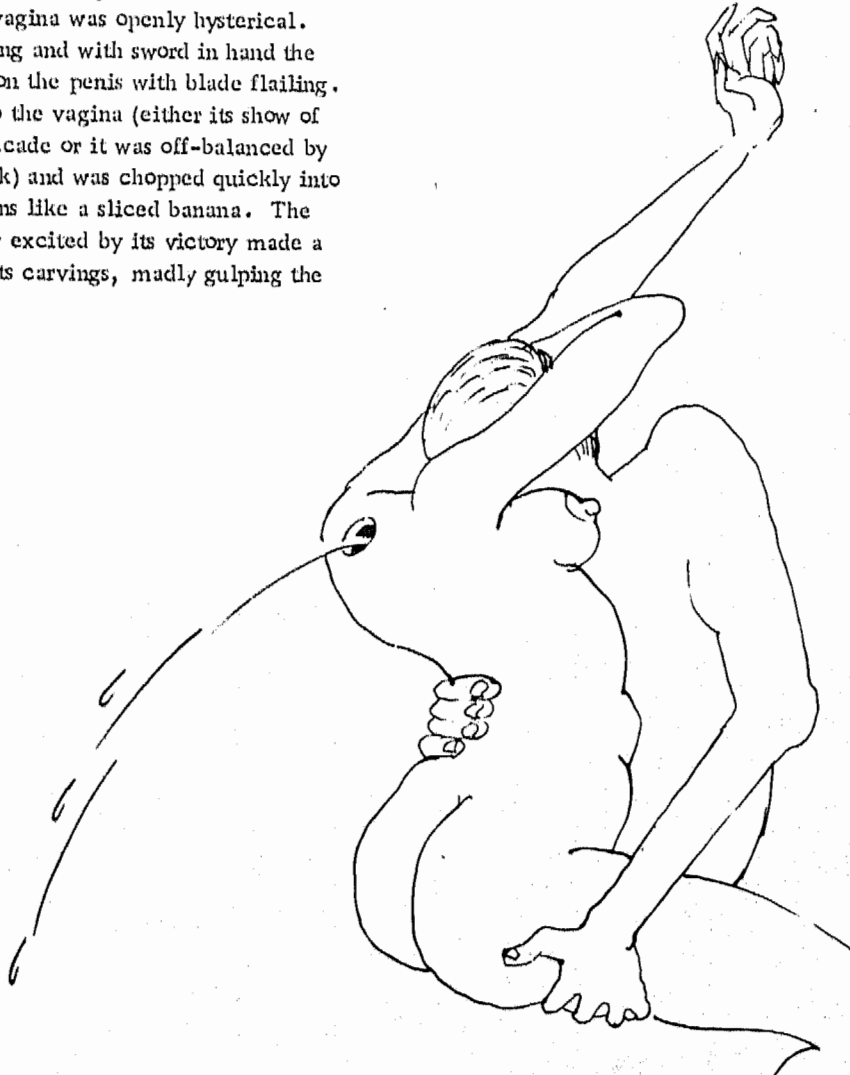
In a dream Jimmy Squatter thought of how God must represent the essence, the totality of life and concentrating intently he tried to picture a God. He saw an ocean horizon, waves breaking through a pink clouded foreshore and bursting up through the burning clouds a gigantic golden penis. Like at Saturn 5 rocket in its intensity, propelled by steaming pubic hairs it rose and boasted of the power in its bulging veins.

Jimmy turned onto his stomach and in his sleep rubbed the sensitive shaft of his comparatively puny penis up and down the flannellette bed sheet. And his mind was directed to heaven when from the sky above there flew down a juicy, dripping vagina. A growing body of thought among the vagina population was that the golden penis was not worthy of the official power it wielded over the rest of the community and in this context the descending vagina was openly hysterical. Running, snapping and with sword in hand the vagina came upon the penis with blade flailing. The penis fell to the vagina (either its show of strength was a facade or it was off-balanced by the surprise attack) and was chopped quickly into horizontal sections like a sliced banana. The vagina obviously excited by its victory made a hearty meal of its carvings, madly gulping the penis pieces.

Jimmy Squatter dreamt on. The vagina after the adrenalin had subsided was in a state of anti-climax; the victory it had so much wanted before now seemed somehow less important (Jimmy drew an analogy with his own life: fantasies such as his with the feather duster and the cucumber which were so satisfying in his head were often so disappointing in practise).

Meanwhile all was not lost for the indigestible penis as surely it regenerated itself until with an almighty effort it burst forth from the side of the vagina as an erect and flesh colored penis. Simultaneously the vagina and the penis recognised the presence of the other and as instinctive behaviour took over they curled up and proceeded to screw each other to death.

And that, dreamt Jimmy Squatter was the goal of life.



MARIA



CHRONICLES

Old Maria sat back in her scrubbed chair, laying her worn hands feebly on faded apron knees, and the light reflected her sigh. Eyeball longings rested peacefully on a pallid face, ingraining the creases of a lifetime encrusted with sorrow.

Out came old Papa, groaning and creaking in every limb as he pattered his cane through the doorway. Through this portal of time came an image of her grandfather, a ghostly dream of an aeon ago, a legend in the unknowing of her undeciphered memories. And again through the doorway came the simple breeze of youth, tousling her again - black hair in the wild forgetting dream which she had cherished - and hoped in - without their realization. She was fresh and free, flowering in girlish love, laughing with a boy of dancing eyes, growing up in the caress of her family. She sat again on her father's shoulders, looking out at a world strung together of green fields and sweet hay, of goat-milk and black bread, of singing people and laughing sprites, of fairy tales and phantasy....

In the grey non-existence of her dozing she did not see herself. She did not see the grey-black sooty air of her girlhood. She did not see a drunken father, and an ever-working mother; she did not see the disease and sickness, the rats and open sewer, the mud-brick walls coated with the dirt of ancestors, her father, grandfather, and...daughter. She did not see and could not see. And so she still lived. And so she was not in despair, as none of her family had despaired. And she gave a great sigh, and there was no more vision.

In the hidden light of a quiet evening a little girl stood in the doorway of a mud-brick cottage, say-eyed, and dreary-faced. Her black hair was strung in knotted twists like tear drops down her cheeks, and there was no laughter in the way she gazed out at the smoke-blackened slum, or the open sewer in the narrow alleyway. "Mama," she whimpered, "Speak to me..." but the staring eyes were dulled, and the tanned cheeks were now grey, and they reflected the dreary light of a dreary evening, and were in the past.

And the little girl sat down and cried.

Joek Kielnerowski.

"Ircha", Trusha whimpers....

.. but Ircha does not reply.

That tree had stood here from all eternity, sometimes basking, sometimes shivering. Always overpowering the landscape. Not its pale shimmering leaves drooped softly over the setting sun, diffusing amber shadows over their faces, and filtering misty wisps off the foetid air. Ircha coughed.

The hills winked, and the sun switched over the horizon. Suddenly doom clasped them close. Ircha shuddered. Trusha cried.....alone, all alone, the lonely cry echoed within itself....

...quiet, so quiet...

then a cry tunnelling through twisted bark, vibrating spiders in their webs, tickling beetles in their piles of rotting leaves..... A cry slithers down the spines of hunting snakes, swishing the tail of a clinging possum, pursuing the peace, pursuing the silence.....

Quiet.

Ircha gathers his sister close. He is a brave boy. Only yesterday his mother had told visitors he always cleaned his plate. And he washed his teeth. Sometimes. He had found a centipede yesterday....where is it...? Here...yes...dead...of course....in the back pocket of my jeans..Oh mummy where are you?.silent.... be silent....Trusha is afraid..mummy where..... so afraid..I am.....mummy...I am a brave boy.. mummy...!...

And they huddle closer.

The trees are waking up from work. All day long their lazy factories had toiled in the sun, oozing rich sugars through their porous inner cells. Now, chloroplasts resting, they relish the cool, look out at a world wrapped in its soft cocoon of night, and begin to dance.

And as they dance they sing.

It is slow, this song, ancient as life itself...before you were I am...before the first metazoan, I was... as old as the algae in primeval seas.

Slow
beat
step
beat
rustle
rustle

rustle.....quiet
And all is swept in silence.
Ircha was aware of their deep, deep breathing. In his drowsy womb it comforted him.....Sleep, it said, ...sleep, sleep.
And under the stars, beneath the spreading maternal arms of that old, old eucalypt, they slept.

Ircha awoke in the morning, juvenile muscles knotted through bony limbs, possessing a deep throbbing numbness in lieu of hunger. His crusty eyes hurt with unconscious tears and there was a lump in his fearful hope of rescue.

"I'm thirsty" moaned Trusha. She was too young to attempt a smile. Her tongue was swollen and her cheekbone arched. Her hair, plaited with grass and leaves, hung in a mask about her longing. "I'm thirsty!" she pleaded...but the gall did not appear.

Wail, and yet again! Cry you bayers at the dawn! Cry! you human animals, parasites of our home!, cry when you peel the rawness from our nature!

But no such curse broke the stillness...and the crows belched contented, and the flies settled their wings, while all around them, amidst the missing blare of parrots, the scrub lay hushed in the sun.

The men have named us names. We who have stood before them are now their children. Men who trembled with fear at the unknown have given us names. We have been tamed by the naming of names. Titles have changed men. They have not changed us. Men pretend they know us. How little it is they know.

"That bastard there is called Triodia irritans, more commonly known as spinifex. The flattened clumps are reputed to have been sat upon by emus."

"That the reason for their population decline?"

"What?"

"Hitting the hormones where it hurts"

"Oooo that's weak. You'll go. It's more likely wild dogs roaming.

Loose from the farms. Note how the Baeckea behrii increases just in the middle of the transect....Note also the absence of Eucalyptus baxteri....."

It is amazing how crude is their understanding of plant ecology.

Parrots fluttered before them. Dryness oozed their sweat. Rodents peered hastily out of their holes and rabbits scurried away. Even the scorpion retreated as the boy with an old man's back bent wearily through thickening *incrassata*, minding a fearful sister creeping haggardly behind him.

I thirst.

"How long will the search last?"

"Not more'n a coupl'a days. Only go for a few days without water 'ere. No creeks. Seeps straight inter sand. Watch out for that bloody hakea."

They climb into the 'rover. There is a loud crutch as the bomb wanks into gear.

"Imagine bringing kids into this country"

"Stupid buggers"

"Yeah"

I thirst.

The bush is quiet. It is always quiet. One rarely comes across a living creature in this undergrowth. It is too quiet....yet there they are....hidden....

How many 'roaches under that bark? How many rabbits under this hill? How many ants under this sand? Set a flame to a stand of *Banksias* and you will see the animals. And smell the animals. The burning animals. These plants are adapted to fire, but the animals take their chances. It is the way of the bush...bush that does not care if this eucaryote was rational.

And even here, inside this epidermal bag, within this collection of cells....was a life - were two lives. Could one pulsate an engine that thought, that knew itself?

No.

But the plants fluttered, and the bush knew best, and the decision to return was a final one.

Then the roos pause and the wild dogs prick their ears as the silence trickles gently away. For the click can be heard, as if far, far away, of mineral-starved roots flicking blowflies away from

their chancrous

chemical

banquet.

Joek Kielnorowski.

JASMINE

Old green Ford crawl, boil, and whime up the hill.
Schoolgirls stand at the side of the road,
Coquettish, premature, socialites they stare and smile.

How I once longed salaciously after such tunicked nymphettes,
But now I only stare back with the vacant eyes of lost youth.

They walk across crossing one glance sideways, faint smile:

"The smiles that win, the tints that glow
But tell of days in goodness spent."

Two storey Mediterranean facade looms from the hills.
My boots crunch up the drive, radiator hisses behind.
White wrought iron, cement, and hedge, all are garden walls.
Under an ascetic birch runs a ring of gold brown toadstools,
Fungus tombstones, occult symmetry in a decaying couchgrass cemetery.

Earth locked time capsules, bulbs erupt in a garden bed
Potential energy release, they escape, I am pleased.
Tumps of earth weigh down on their rubber shoots,
Others force skywards till gravity forces bends.
They taste sweet sunlight of early spring,
Sucking air, water and earth, exploding in floral fire
They consummate in color and scent and are picked
To breathe their last from coffee table vases and compost heaps.

The Siamese cats stalk a clove across the sulphated lawn.
Siva creeps between potted lemon trees poised to strike.
The bird senses, ballbearing head pivots nervously.
Pagah moves in full view with evil elastic choreography
She leaps but the dove flies and the cats seek her young.
They climb the pine and crunch her flightless offspring
At four p.m. they'll be fed their special diet of fried liver and chicken.

While cats chew their embryonic entree I drink my balcony tea.

The jasmine is flowering earlier than it was last year.
It twists and winds through arches and nails with star flowers.

The brown teapot puffs steamings from its dulled lid.
They hang momentarily and vanish into the clear mid afternoon sky.

The city rises up out of the acneous suburban plain,
And stretches to the shimmering horizontal sea.

A lone rosella in swoopfall flight lands in a pine
The branch sabbends out from the flame shaped cypress
Standing out like a crayon scribble on the blue sky wall.
The bird shrieks instinctively knowing what lies beyond:
Sinog, noise, slug guns, cement, lawns and a jungle of geraniums.
With parting shriek it flies towards unknown sanctuary
And so to its ordained place the unburdened branch returns.

The sun inkblacks shadow lines on the balcony tiles,
These dim, fade and are etched again by clouds patsh.
The jasmine drifts into my memory and I see her face,
Her eyes are dark, hair dark, church dark, night dark.
We sit in awe as Beckett tastes the sweetness of martyrdom,
And a thunderstorm rages outside our Gothic drum.
Eliot resurrects, sacrifices Beckett before us, candles flicker, incense and must
Poetry hangs for a moment bounces off beams into darkness and dust.

Outside the medieval time machine, the streets are awash
The light from the signal flashes a pool of blood at our feet
Cars glide by, aquaplaning on a film of blood - then green.
The sidestreets and deadends are shaken by splashing steps
Droplets dazzle and form on my rainbowed glasses
The drain makes a suck, the leaves clog the grate,
We touch the chilled water, watch the eddying pool.

The dormant city lies silent defenceless and open,
We race headlong into the secrets of the night.
The old shed, our midnight shelter, full of des-
sicated newspaper,
Bundled in twine for a forgotten drive, piled up
by the days of suburbia.
The leaves in here dry and brittle are eggshell
crushed under our feet
The rain spills over the blocked gutter, a galvan-
ized waterfall.

We run on squelching wet socks in wet stretched
shoes
Laughter in the lane, puffing steam and gasping
We stand next to a corrugated fence, last stop
before home

The fragrance of jasmine fills the room, seeps through
my skin
On clothes hang steaming in front of the fire
The kettle slowly boils, we sip, talk, quiet
Faces flushed with bloodrush
Cup chinks on saucer,
The garden still grows beyond the fence.

Gazing clear eyed at the vine glassbeaded with
rain
We shook and showered each other with jasmine
jewels.

By Ian Henschke.



It being the S.A. standard time of 9.00 a.m. George opened two sleep encrusted eyes and lay listening to the sharp ringing of a Model 438692 alarm clock. A familiar beginning to a late July morning. This sense of familiarity occasioned a certain satisfaction in our subject. It was a reminder of his security - a promising omen of a day free from confrontation with the unusual or the unordinary. Rain also. Wet fur collars and blue hands buying small tokens of travel on misty chrome coloured buses.

"YES", he muttered, "this is a day that has begun true to expectation."

Now it should not be thought that George Colin Davies had lived 22 years without an acute awareness of the chaos and futility that define human life. Somewhere back in his student life there had been a time when he had grasped such a bull by the horns, only to find himself thrown by the weapons of the beast. He had landed upon Sartre's shoulders, looking at Vonnegut. This being such an unpleasant position he now chose to suppress the memory. The rapid rising which would follow the cessation of the alarm, was a habitual testimony to this policy. It was a conscious determination to ignore the visions of his upsetting post-adolescence.

George would s'ave without a mirror in such devices lay a threat to his stability. Ironically, he found confirmation in clocks and small change.

It was an unspoken agreement he had with himself, that George C. Davies was a happy man, one with a material identity. Or rather, an identity defined in his relationship to the inorganic physical creations of industrial man. The Public Transport System of Adelaide City meant more than mere travel to such a man, it was a twice daily statement of his correct position in the universe.

There were, of course, moments of disease. Quite recently he had been disturbed by an intoxicated old man who marred an otherwise ordinary and perfect day (5.00 p.m.) by falling in the aisle of a train and clutching madly at George's coat for support. If this was disconcerting, then what followed was far worse. The drunk made a loud attempt to enlist George in a mutual condemnation of the driver. Such an ugly little scene necessitated swift withdrawal and George walked to his flat from Alberton station that evening twenty extra minutes of unplanned action.

Still, such events were (thank who - EVERYONE THANKS) rare. With practice he had learnt a discerning blindness. He did not see the humiliated plea in the aged eyes, nor the unsettling effect of the incident upon the 19 year old mothers; who clutched their grubby, cardiganed prodigy in an attempt to keep the old man from touching the flesh of infants.

Rather, he saw it as an inconvenient event that gave only a personal sense of assault. Had he been less rig-

id in his mental tyranny an inevitable progression of thought would lead from compassion and sorrow, to a sensation of dissassociation. George Davies, at 18, would have found himself viewing a 3 dimensional Warhol movie conforming to a neurotic pattern, reducing the world to lumps of meat that move, collide, fuck and die.

It was in the matter of sex that the g.c.d. programme of control had reached its finest point. Far from the seven selfconscious attempts at intercourse, that stood like distasteful statues over his 4 tertiary years, George had now found a satisfactory answer to his genital demands. Were he an objective observer of his behaviour, the twice weekly act of masturbation would have made an excellent symbol of his life. The performance began with the opening of a book, on each page a black and white photograph of human holes - excluding those occurring in the head, for faces were taboo in such books and to g.d.'s mind. Female... Male...arse or cunt...such details were irrelevant. Seventeen photographs - 3 strokes a page. George would lower the nylon sportzee jockettes and fasten his eyes to the pages. Even the most casual glance at his labouring hand was unallowable, as was any thought that rose above the illustration towards personal fantasy. When the climax was reached the discharge was hastily removed from sight. Caught in 4 white tissues it was placed in the toilet and flushed down into the dark miles of a surburban sewerage system.

To finish our description, let it be known: George Davies did not read novels. He had to television and owned one H.M.V. monogram which played the favourite sides of his 3 records every even-

ing at 7.30 p.m. (this schedule being affected to a small degree by the time needed to heat an Oven Pack dinner).

The records were not always played in order...it was a small flirtation with anarchy upon his behalf, but the pleasure of guessing the second record was a temptation he could not resist. If he was wrong the discs were played again and again until a correct guess was made.

Each song was a ballad, but since the lyrics were in French he remained peacefully uncomprehending of their sad tales.

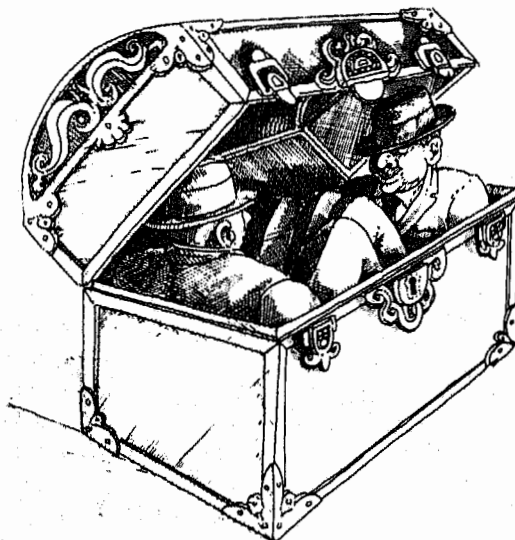
The music soothed.....

At 10 p.m. the swallowing of one Mogodon tablet was followed by a return to his bed. George then fell into a dreamless, mindless sleep...not unlike that to which he would awake at 9 a.m.

.....

The author of this short story takes the remaining paragraph to disown those interpretations which view George with distain or lack sympathy for him. George is not a warning; he is an ideal. If you can understand this you are indeed unfortunate, but we share a similar perspective. George exists in my brian. He calls out to me to join him. His voice is loudest at bars, parties, cafeterias, discoteques etc...etc... etc. If at one unbearable moment I should answer the cry, for christ's sake...DON'T TOUCH ME.

Mark Tainsh.



WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

W. King.

"There'll be no tears in MY ears on the day you refuse to bring in my washing," I muttered to myself and gave my discjockey a thumbsdown. "NO TEARS, NO TEARS, NO TEARS, do you hear jockeyboy? So why don't you stop trying to do my washing and instead, use your imagination. Invite me home to your house, give me something to drink and I can look into your eyes...and...and see things. I can look at your face and you can let me look at your face, your tight skin, your stained teeth, your short short life.

And we can have dinner and we can talk - first we can discuss your friends and then we can discuss mine and we can be amused. We can wonder about our odd lives and throw glances at each other over our table, over our conversation. And we can start thinking, "There's an UNDERCURRENT here." And I will let you look at me. You will see what you will.

Then, over the coffee, we will talk about ourselves. We will shake things out of our mouths and be surprised that we are there. We will listen intently because we will realise that somehow the night has to end. There will be an urgency in our voices, a refusal to allow things to drop. There will be deliberate misunderstandings demanding explanations. There will be silent pleas for help, vague expressions of hope and perhaps, for this quarter of an hour, we will never be closer.

And then, predictably, we will begin to stray. We will say to each other how glad we are that we are two women. I will love you. And I will think that for the first time in my life there is nothing in it which is constructed. I will be devastated by your freedom. And I will not even think of The Male. I will have ceased reacting. Our kisses will be the result of nobody else's passion.

And late, late, later in the night, with you, ugly in your sleep beside me, your relaxed beauty torturing me, I will stare into the darkness and see nothing and look back at you.

You won't toss and you won't turn.

In the morning, I will watch the light creep into the room and I will listen as the tired, heavy day begins to roll. I will touch your breast and rise and walk out, into the men's world and, making that cliché mine, I will think for myself, "How knowable everything is."

And my husband? What will he do?

He will be the perfect stooge. He will bend over backwards in order to UNDERSTAND. He will be my favourite idiot. He will see my independence as some sort of reflection of his own value.

His value for what? For the world, of course.

The fool loves me.

What if I left the bugger, the comforts of home, the perfect excuse for a life? And what if I didn't? What if I stayed with this piece of reason and meaning which calls itself a man? Why is it so that with him nothing I do escapes the classification of mere REACTION? Why was he there first?

And if I come back to you? my later latterday love? Would you fine long fingers dance over my face in spite of that hopeless morning when I left you to wake by yourself? Would you know me again?

YIKES!

Writing like this makes me feel that everything has already happened, and it suddenly hurts. I suddenly seem to be substituting...something with...something. There's only the radio, the discjockey making his assumptions about his audience and there's only you, visiting me on a typical wife's leash during our typical wife's afternoon. There is only this dissatisfaction and this useless surplus time and energy and...dare I say it...there is this ironing to do...and you and your partly inane conversation, continuously suggesting that a love between women may not be impossible. And then the exhilarating sense of danger...thinking that it might not be a love between women - it might be you and it might be me. Together we might (as they say) fly in the face of our past, our determined futures, our husbands...what foreign nouns they seem...ahhh! I'm carrying myself away again. If only we could reduce all those males to nouns and adjectives and verbs and sentence them to themselves!

What if you were thinking this? And what if I knew? Would I still be left by myself? And would I mind? Would The Day, the horrible passing day disappear? Would my wryness dissolve? And would there be no more questioning.

I hate this, but then, thank the world, honeychild, the fault is not mine."

THE BAKER'S SON

I am Bob the baker's son. In the mornings I rise with the sun and deliver bread to the breadless. Sometimes it is bitter cold and the dogs bark bitterly as I pass them. Sometimes it is foggy and the cats steam silently in their own shadows. Sometimes, too, it does not rain or hail or snow but just lays out before me patiently.

My father the baker comes home as I leave. All during the blackshapeless night he tends ovens and their rising contents. He works alone, quietly. In the stillness you can hear the slow hiss and crackle of the loaves.

There is a small grave in the country where my mother lives. She lives alone, quietly.

The baker and the baker's wife came a long way to this little town. They came over mountains and rivers and oceans. They travelled until the towns grew small and far apart. They stopped in this town, where I was born. They wanted rest.

My mother had visions. Her visions were large and did not allow her time to catch up. She spoke with great speed but could not describe them all. She would tremble and gasp at a horrific point and her mouth would move silently as though still speaking. Sometimes she would twitch, opening and shutting her hand rhythmically. I remember her standing in the kitchen, looking out the window, telling me our her death. It was quite simple, she said, but she had tears in her eyes, falling down her face to the sink.

My father became a baker. During the midnight nights, he found some peace with the solitude. In his mind, dark images flew about like bats, stirring pinioned memories. It was difficult for him to speak. He was troubled by Mother's visions.

In the mornings I get up with the sun. I have a wagon and a horse to pull it. Sometimes the rain comes down hard, making a patina on its back. When it rains, the dogs do not bark. I like that very much. The cats cannot be seen, but they can see just the same.

There are oak trees on my bread run. In the rain they are like giant fountains. In a fog, they are gods. I stop at each tree, taking the bread up to the box by the door. Sometimes, someone is awake, making breakfast. Because it is very early in the morning, no one has much desire to speak. Usually they just take the bread and nod heavily. I have never spoken to anyone in the mornings. I cluck to the horse but I never speak. When I was very young my mother told my father that I would never speak. She said I would see visions like hers but I would never communicate them. I have not yet spoken.

My mother had visions of a new world. She described the sensations of being in complete comfort, ease and harmony with the environment. Often as she spoke she was racked with pain. My father would go gently to her and lay her down after an exhausting vision. She would cry then and ask him why she suffered so much. He wondered too, but he did not have an answer. Once they cried together for a long time, and then the house was silent.

In the summer mornings, the sun rises clearly over the horizon. The light is faintly red, coming through the oaks, casting shadows on the rough bark. The summer shadows are deep and youthful, which the dogs know well, dancing around their silhouettes. The cats know all about summer light, too, and all about dogs. In the mornings, they make no mistakes.

Occasionally I have longed to work in the bakery. In the summer I am happy with my freedom, but the cold and wet comes inside during the winter until it is impossible to feel warm. That is when I envy my father with his roaring ovens and hot bread.

My father, as far as I know, has never envied me. I have never questioned that he bake the bread and I deliver it -- it seemed the natural thing to do. There is just one thing about my father that is peculiar.

In the morning before he leaves the bakery, he

stands in front of each loaf and says a prayer. I do not know what he prays about, and I have never asked him, but I have often thought about it.

Mother had her last vision. She said she saw two people coming over a giant ocean full of swordfish and sharks. They came across rivers and mountains and settled in a lush valley. Every morning there was a rainbow in the sky. There was plenty to eat. But one day the valley was flooded with people yearning to settle on the idyllic land. The crops were trampled, the streams became muddy and the sky grew dark. Soon everyone was starving and many died. The parents began to eat their young, rather than leave the valley. Eventually the entire valley was full of old people. More outsiders came in, killing the weak and helpless who were in their way. Chaos became the pattern of life. After a

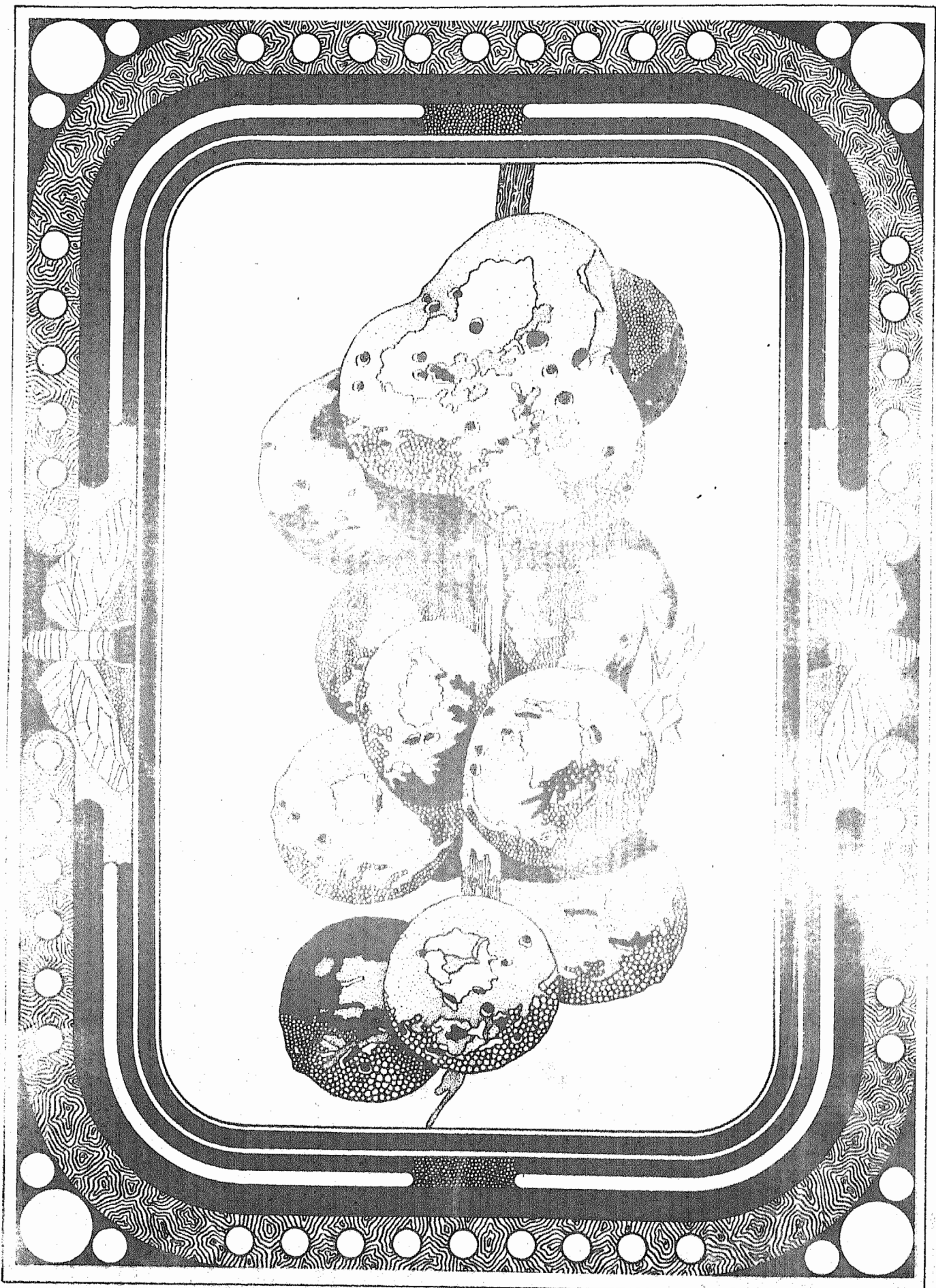
time, a young man wandered into the valley. He looked around and understood what he saw. He wanted to tell the people but he had no tongue. He tried to speak but he could not. Then he had a vision.

My mother did not finish speaking. She closed her eyes, and she was as a statue. My father went to her, and he wept.

I am Bob the baker's son. In the mornings I rise with the sun and deliver bread to the breadless. Sometimes it is bitter cold and the dogs bark bitterly as I pass them. Sometimes it is foggy and the cats steam silently in their own shadows. Sometimes, too, it does not rain or hail or snow, but just lays out before me patiently.

THE BAKER'S SON by James Roberts.





THE SPORTSMAN

Under Smiley's feet there was a quarter of an inch of dolomite. The toe of his right boot was stuck insecurely on this. Then there was a thousand feet of nothing and, far below; the road; the nice easy road to the top winding around the base of the Needles. His right knee was shaking with weakness as his left foot scrabbled for another hold on the smooth rock. In the hot sun his hands were slippery with sweat on the tiny handholds.

The nylon rope was very tight around his waist. He felt its roughness against his face as it stretched upwards to Don who was sitting thirty feet above in the ~~shade~~. "Of course this is only a psychological belay." Don said cheerfully.

"If you come off; I'll come with you."

'All right then. Here we go together.' Smiley thought grimly. 'How much agony can an overstrained toe transmit through a knee that feels shot through with an anesthetic before the whole works collapses?' 'Could it possibly be pleasant?' he thought. 'Those last few seconds falling through space?' 'It might even be fun if you could forget the inevitability of the end. Hell it would probably be just like being hit very hard once, and then nothing.' "'Knieschutteln" Hans said they called it in Germany, when your tired knee shook so much. Every climber gets it sometimes. God knows they don't all come off; but some do. Don and he were going to be among them.'

Way above him Trevor appeared. 'Why was it all so easy for him? Had he really climbed all that way by himself so quickly? Unroped?' He must be having hallucinations in the last few seconds of his life.

"What are you waiting for?" said Trevor. "We've got all that beer in the Esky down in the car. I'll shoot down and get started on it while I'm waiting for you."

Smiley's left foot found a hold at last. 'Thank God for that.' he thought. It was a bigger hold but very high up. It took the strain off his right foot and his knee. 'Pull with your hands, harder!' He made it. Supported more safely on his left foot he leaned against the burning rock waiting for the strength to come back into his other leg. Aloud he said, "It's all right. I haven't climbed for a bit and I'm out of condition."

"Don't hug the rock." said Don. "You'll stay on longer if you balance out on that foot a bit."

'O.K., O.K.' thought Smiley. It was wonderful that rock. It had a lovely safe feeling just leaning on it holding on with two hands and a big foothold. He could get all of half a foot on it. With an effort he pushed the rock away from him and stood squarely on his left foot. 'You bloody liar.' He thought. 'They must know by now that you've never climbed before. All this terror because of a bit of bravado in the canteen and now there was still a hundred feet to go.'

Don said, "Stick your foot round the corner. There's a big chockstone in the chimney there. It's a beautiful foothold. I came up on it."

"I can't see it." said Smiley.

"Just feel for it. It's an easy one." said Trevor.

He appeared a few feet from Smiley standing, it seemed, on nothing; not caring about the exposure. "Here, I'll help you." With a light jump he changed feet on his foothold and danced across the rock to Smiley.

He wasn't even sweating. Smiley's hands were slippery on his holds. He was getting very, very fond of those handholds. He didn't want to leave them. All he wanted was to stay where he was, to

go neither up nor down. Eventually something would happen. He couldn't imagine what it would be but it couldn't be worse than climbing the rest of these bloody cliffs.

He said, "I'm not sure that I like this route. Not in the condition I'm in. Couldn't we sort of go down again? Abseiling or something? And try it again when I've had a bit more training? I'm pretty good when I'm fit but it's been a long time."

"It's all right. We're nearly up." said Don.
"Get onto that chockstone and I'll try giving you a bit of a pull on the rope."

Rested a bit now, Smiley pushed his right foot round the corner. There was nothing there

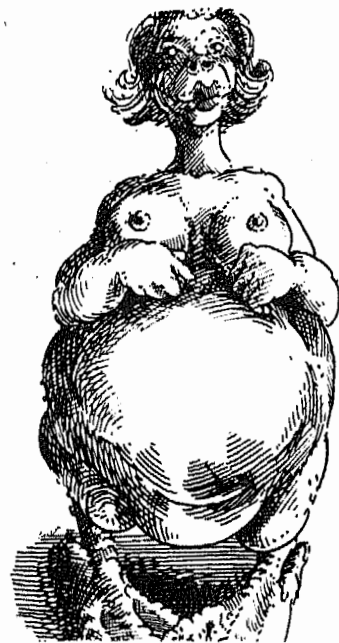
"That's it." said Trevor. "You were nearly on it that time. If you let go with your left hand you'll be there. Then change handholds and you can get your right hand into the chimney."

'Three points of balance,' the manual of mountaineering had said. 'Always keep three points of balance. Two feet and a hand or two hands and a foot.' He wished he had never read those books; then he would never have started on this madness.

After a while he let go of that lovely handhold and lunged round the corner. 'That's no bloody good at all,' he thought. 'Go back. Or more likely down.' His handhold had disappeared. 'Two points of balance now. Jesus! only one.' His scrabbling foot found the chockstone and he hung there with his knee bent awkwardly. 'Praise be to God!' His hand fell into another hold.

"Up you come." Don said and pulled the rope. Smiley stood in the chimney.

Inside the chimney life seemed much brighter. Rock, good solid rock was on two sides of him. He had two feet firmly on the chockstone. 'How wonderfully secure. Every climber gets a bit scared sometimes,' he thought. 'That's one of the attractions of the sport. Man pitting his skill and courage against a mountain and winning. This is sport for real men. Man against nature is far better than man against man. Almost there now and he would have conquered his first mountain. Don and Trevor would think it was just another climb for him. Well, let them think so. A few more climbs like this and he would be as good as them anyway. Leading them perhaps.'



"Now we've come to the hard bit," said Don. Smiley looked up. Above him the chimney narrowed and fizzled out at the ledge where Don was sitting. Don said, "Get your back on one side of the chimney and your feet on the other and then push with your hands and feet until you get a hold on this ledge. There's a few friction holds at the top here to finish off."

"Yes. I know how to do it," Smiley said. He almost added, "I read it in the book," but he remembered in time.

He got into position and pushed. He didn't get far but he did move a small way. It was very hard work. Sweating again he forgot the drop below and slowly worked his way up the chimney. Near the top he stuck.

"Haven't you finished yet?" said Trevor. "I've been down and had a beer but I got sick of waiting for you so I came up to see what happened to you." "I'm stuck," said Smiley.

"Of course you're stuck, Trevor said. "Yqu're facing the wrong way."

'The hell with them all,' Smiley thought. 'I'll show them.' He struggled out onto the ledge.

"Hell!" Trevor said. "I wouldn't try a layback. Not if I wasn't fit. If your hands had slipped you would have shot out into space like a catapult."

"I know what I'm doing," Smiley lied sitting comfortably on the ledge. "I'll be all right to belay you now," he said to Don.

He sat on the ledge paying out the rope. It was very nice to rest there on a safe nook while someone else did the climbing. The height didn't frighten him now. It was exhilarating to look down on those poor, half alive tourists who were driving to the top in their cars. Wouldn't they be astonished when they saw three tough ragged mountaineers emerge over the top of the Needles to swagger nonchalantly down the other side. He knew it would be frightening on the last pitch which he still had to climb but that was a comfortably in the future. It would take Don some time to climb it first.

"O.K. I've got you. You can come up now," Don called. 'How the hell had he got up so quickly? He hadn't been climbing so very long. He couldn't be that good.'

Smiley looked up at the last pitch. He couldn't see any holds at all. There was an overhang at the top.

"Use the same holds as I did." Don called.



Smiley hadn't been watching him. He felt very jealous of Don now, sitting on the top. He was finished with the climb and was safe. All Don had to do now was to walk down the track and have a cold beer. Smiley still had thirty feet of hell to go. Well he'd have to do it. There was no way back now. One thing he knew for certain. It would be his last thirty feet. This would be his first and last climb. He regretted forking out \$30 for a new nylon climbing rope. He'd even rubbed it in the dirt in his garden to make it look used. He'd have to put that down to experience. He'd say he was getting too old for climbing. He'd told them he'd started climbing at sixteen. Nine years was enough danger for any man. Other people went through life without climbing mountains. So could he. Very, very easily.

He struggled a few inches up the rock face. Then he slithered back onto the ledge.

"There's a foothold just above your right knee," called Don. There was too, he could see now. A very tiny hold and two tiny handholds just above it. He pulled himself up balancing on his right toe. He couldn't see any more holds at all. Suddenly he was back poised over that terrible drop. His knee started to shake.

"Come on. Let's go and have that beer." Trevor appeared again, shoving him from the ledge. "Pull yourself up by your arms and we'll get it over with."

Smiley couldn't manage a chin up at home. It seemed less than likely that he could do one on a mountain. He didn't need to. Don pulled on the rope. Trevor pushed him from behind. He collapsed in a panting heap on the top.

"Not a bad climb, I suppose," he said. "Worth it for the view."

They lay on the grassy summit of the Needles waiting for Trevor. They looked down at the city in the sun four thousand feet below them planning trips to the far off mountains they could see way off in the uninhabited South West.

"Of course I'd love to come." Smiley said. He could always make an excuse later on if he thought it was going to be too tough.

"Where the hell has Trevor got to now?" Don said.

"He was right behind me on that last pitch. I reckon he's gone down to his beer and I for one wouldn't mind joining him."

"Give him a couple of minutes and he'll bounce back here and we'll all go ~~down~~ the track together."

A bunch of men wandered over from a car, young men, pot bellied with their shirts off. They were drinking beer out of rip top cans. Smiley preened. He wanted an audience.

"Did you come up that way?" one of the men said pointing over the cliff.

"Of course we did." Smiley said. "It's the only way."

"Catch me out there. I reckon you're crazy."

"The height always terrifies me at the start of the season," said Smiley. "But then you get used to it and you really enjoy climbing around above nothing. You're quite safe if you know what you're doing with the rope."

"Hey," another man called out. "There's still a bloke down there. Is it one of your mates?"

Running to the edge they looked down. On the ledge a hundred feet below a figure sprawled.

"God. It's Trevor." Don shouted and to the men,

"Call out the Search and Rescue."

The men, not wanting to miss anything, shuffled around.

"For God's sake. Move!" he yelled, "If he shifts another two inches he'll fall to the bottom."

Reluctantly one of the men moved towards the car.

"Tie on Smiley and I'll let you down to him."

"Why don't you go ~~down~~? You're a better climber than me." Smiley was stiff with fear.

"Come on. Hurry up," Don snapped. "Leader always belays from above and Trevor fell helping you not me."

Smiley tied on. His world a confusion. 'I've killed me old mate Trevor,' he thought. "What's the point? He's already dead."

"Don't look down as you go." Don said.

Smiley was already looking down, panic rising in his guts. He slithered down the face; Don slowing him with the rope. Soon, panting, horizons rocking, he landed on a ledge ten feet from Trevor. He clutched at the rock trying not to be sick. He looked across. Trevor was out of sight round the corner. He looked up. He couldn't see Don either. He could see that the rope was snagged around a root. The snag was well out of his reach. He knelt, shaking, on the ledge trying to pull himself together.

"I'll have to unrope to get across to him." he shouted. There was no answer.

Still kneeling he untied the rope. 'You're on your own now,' he thought. 'First time on a bloody mountain and I'm stuck on a ledge with an injured mate, probably a dead one.'

Braver now, he crept slowly round the corner. Here the ledge narrowed then broadened where Trevor lay. He inched himself onto the narrow foothold hugging the rock.

'Mustn't hug rock,' He eased round the corner.

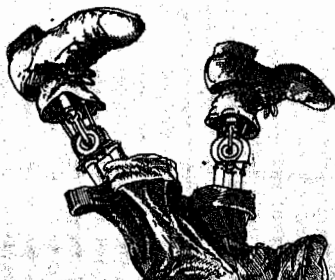
He could see Trevor three feet away. He wasn't moving, didn't seem to be breathing. He had been bleeding from his nose and his ears. His head lay in a pool of blood, flies buzzing where it dripped over the edge.

"I've killed me old mate, Trevor," he shouted. It echoed back round the mountain, the sound amplified. "I've killed me old mate, Trevor. I've killed me old mate ----."

As Trevor stirred slightly on the ledge, Smiley's foot slipped.

Far below, in the office of the Search and Rescue Organization, the phone rang.

by Bill Veitch.

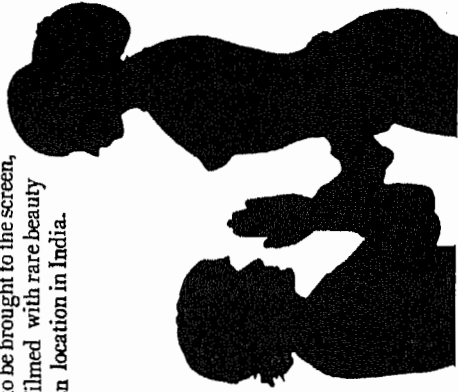


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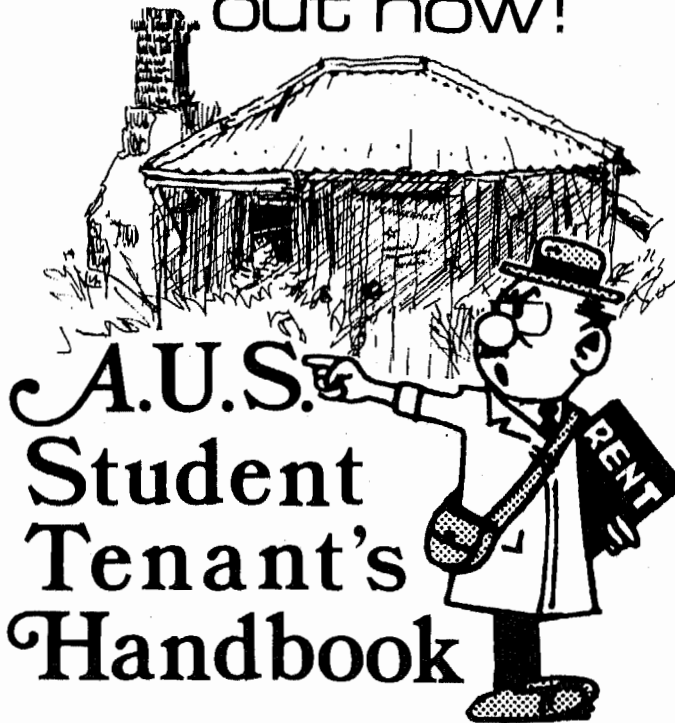
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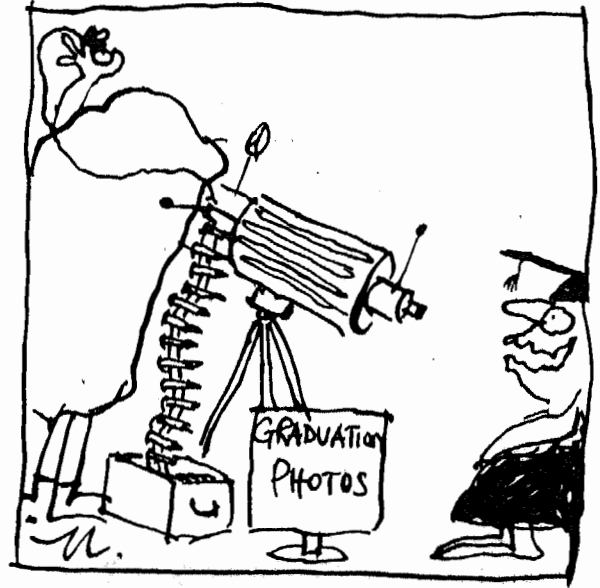
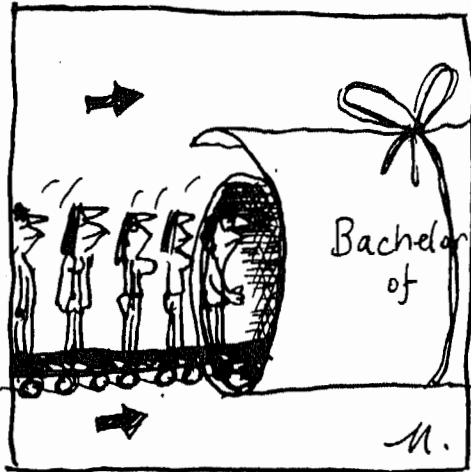


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