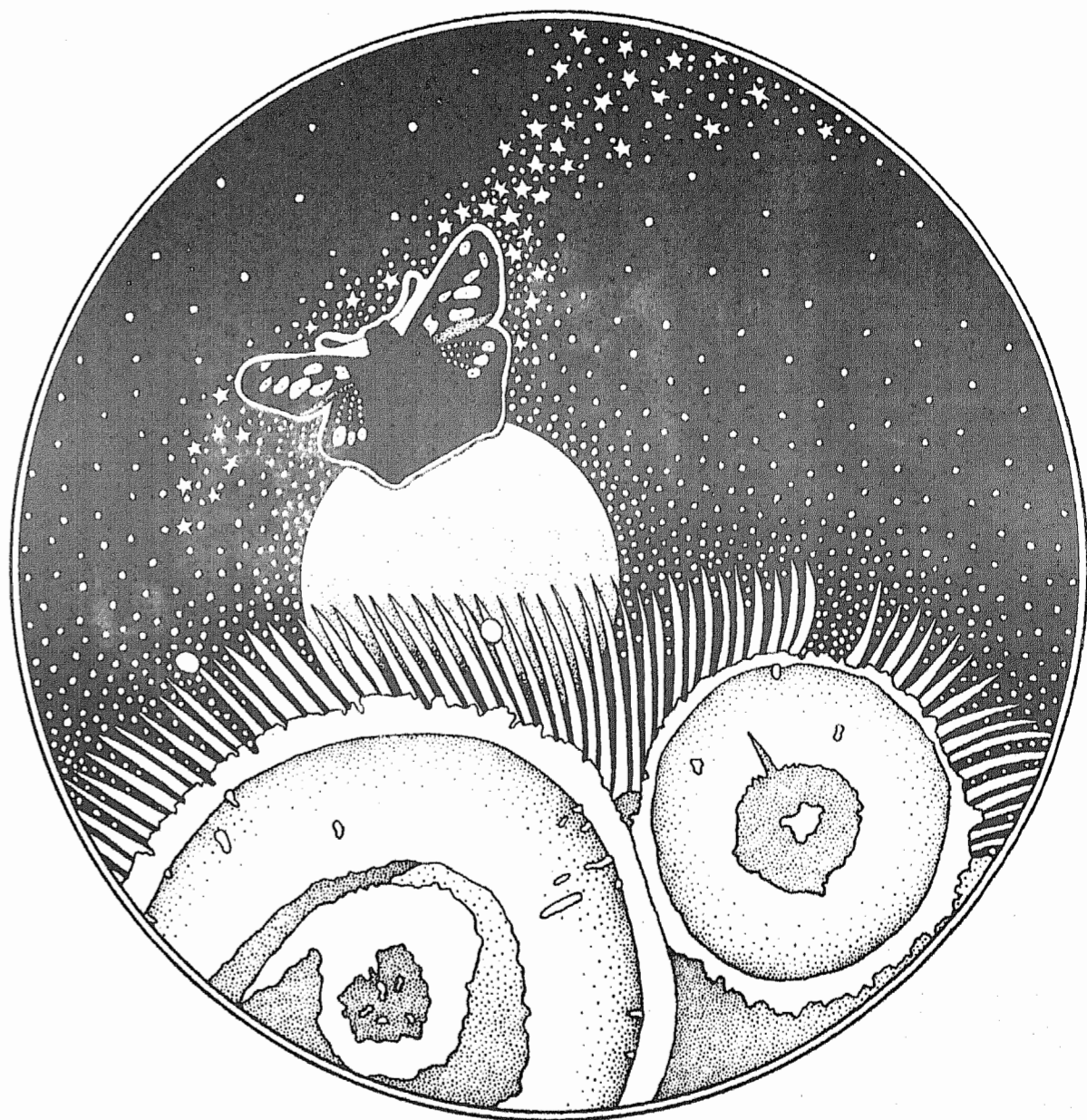
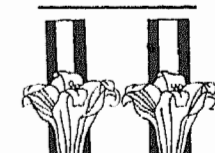
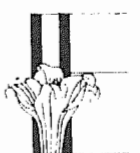
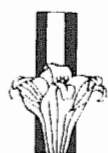
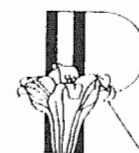
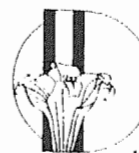
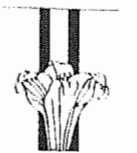
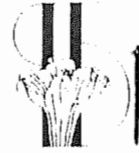
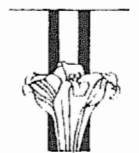
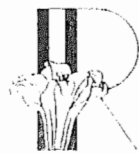
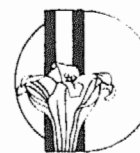
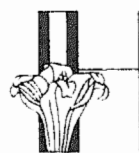
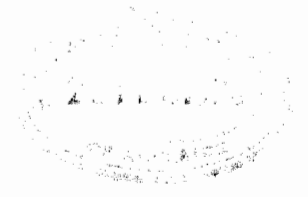
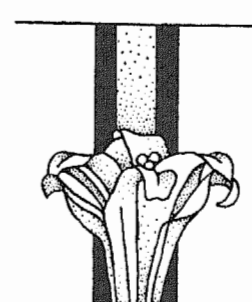
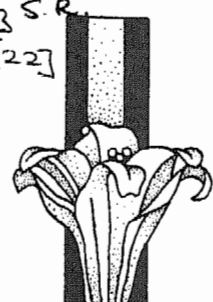


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WINNERS

WINNERS IN THE SHORT STORY COMPETITION

1. THE REVELATION OF MR. LIDINUM - PETER WHITE
2. DISNEYLAND - JAMES ROBERTS
3. AS IN LIFE - MARK TAINSH
4. MARIA/CHRONICLES - JOCK KIELNEROWSKI

BOOBY PRIZE - GRAEME JENKINS

PRIZES MAY BE COLLECTED FROM THE SAUA OFFICE

JUDGES: DR. F. DALZIELL (PSYCHOLOGY DEPT.)

FIONA WALLACE (ENGLISH)

DAVID HALL (?)

ANDREW LIVINGSTONE (A MARXIST SEAGULL WITH
LIBERAL LEANINGS)

THE SHIFT

...singing massed choirs
printing circuit dreams
wave spinning cobwebs
and strange suburban streets
of aged writers with actors' eyes
of actors chanting another's lines
cracked lips/whispering...

Michael Heeps.

A client stood at the counter, demanding service. Michael glanced up from his desk, looked at his watch, groaned, and began to get to his feet. Someone else was serving the customer now, and so he returned to his claims forms. It was late on a Thursday afternoon. He was wearing a tweed sportscoat, and gray woolen trousers. He was eighteen, and had been in the insurance business for seven months. His desk was the third from the front counter, and featured a telephone, an ashtray, and a ballpoint pen on a chain. It was a cold day, and looking out over the city he could see people walking beneath heavy gray clouds. It might even rain on the way home, so he'd better make sure to take his umbrella.

Michael's friend was called Paul, who sat at the next desk. They'd been schooldriends, and both for some reason had decided to enter the insurance business. They'd been told it would make a good career for them. Quite often they went out to films and things together, and sometimes they met girls together. Michael's parents did not approve of him staying out with girls all night, and he did not do it very often. He did not feel unhappy. Having read the first few lines of the scroll and partly understood, and having heard whispers of the rest. The rest did not really interest him much anyway.

On this afternoon with little to do Paul dropped in at his desk and started talking about a science fiction novel of Kurt Vonnegut's he'd just finished reading. Paul's small eyes only shone when he was talking about Science Fiction. Michael had told him that he was too dependent upon Science Fiction for his personal stability, and that he should read more widely. Paul's small eyes shone black as he spoke about his new book, and Michael pretended to be interested. Outside the

heavy clouds had begun to rain and people were getting wet. Cars were putting on their lights and someone had switched on the highway lights.

Michael was not really interested in what Paul was saying about Science Fiction. Michael was an existentialist, as this was the personal philosophy most compatible with being an insurance clerk. He lived in a dark universe of chaos, known only to himself, in which all attempts at meaning were pointless and a waste of time. He had held this philosophy since lower high school, and it stood him in good stead for the situations he'd so far encountered in his life.

On the stairs he met Sharon Carson, a girl who worked in the company's filing section on the floor above. She was young and attractive, and a large proportion of the young men in the office had gone out to places with her. Michael mused about Sharon's love of laughing, and how, at the slightest provocation, she would throw her long neck and long light brown hair and be racked with that peculiar form of breath control people called laughter. But it was her inherent despair and basic unhappiness that so attracted Michael. Physically they were similar as well, except for the fact that he had lush, curling black hair. Each was fair-skinned, fine-boned, and intelligent-looking.

They stood talking about work for sometime as people streamed around them on the stairs. His throat said he wanted to see her for lunch tomorrow, and she said she would meet him outside the building at 12.45 and to be on time for once.

I had already spoken to him about the influences of Jack Kerouac and Kurt Vonnegut on modern literature, and we'd bitched a bit about the all-pervading influence of their styles, but he really seemed to be impossible to talk to on this day.

"What's the matter Michael?"

"Nothing."

"Is it your mother or family or something."

"No."

I really didn't know what to do, because when these brash young men types get morose, they feel it's their duty to get really morose. Part of the image. He asked me if I'd like another cup of tea. I said no.

We sat there at the table in silence for some minutes, whilst the Girl in Blue whisked around us, troubleshooting cold pies and chips served with unordered vinegar. The place was pretty busy, full up with bulky brown-paper parcels and young children in check flannelettes. I was afraid we'd be asked to shift, having finished our meals, but at the same time pondered the kind of relief such a demand would bring. Minutes passed.

Michael's face is really quite striking. He has quite exceptionally large steel-blue eyes. Today they were rivetted upon a cement pillar about fifteen feet to my left. He had dropped some tomato soup and one small potato chip on his sports coat. The soup had soaked in, and I knew it would be hard for him to get out.

His big white hands rested on the table.

"Michael, what's the matter?"

"I'm being shifted."

"Where to?"

"Brisbane -- can you conceive of a more repulsive shithole."

I asked him if moving was the only problem.

"Yes."

He twitched as he said it, and I couldn't help thinking that his face was about to break open and gush out onto the table.

"I don't know whether I should let them move me around like a yobbo after a penny, that's all. I don't like the idea of them, knowing nothing more of me than Heeps, being able to send me off somewhere just because it suits them to do so."

"Can they fire you otherwise?"

"Yeah, the argument from starvation. They can."

The place was all abustle now, and threatening shadows lurked close to our table. We got up and started walking, passing along the rows of plastic toys and cooking utensils, grooving along in time to the muzak and the beat of the foot of the crowd,



and tripping out into the back alley, past the drunk with the bottle in the gutter who didn't even know what month it was. August, the 15th 1975 1.43 p.m.

I bought him a drink in the pub.

We downed two or three beers and Michael began crying in the front bar.

"It's so fucken fucken fucken pointless", he pleaded to the fat stupid barman.

Out in the street again it was getting on for half-past two and I led him back to the office. Kissed him and told him to be a good boy. He told me it was so fucken fucken fucken pointless, and I told him that as far as I was concerned everything was worth it. It was merely a matter of perspective. He stood on the bottom step, shirt out, soupstain on his jacket like a bond of crimson kinship, telling the odd passer-by about how it wasn't really worth it, and how the insurance company would send them away like a parcel in the mail. How the company knew his face and clothes, but had never seen his armpits or his mind, or him playing chess.

or fucking all day in a narrow single bed with clouds outside the window and a bottle of baby oil standing on the bedside table. They wanted his fingers to fit about pens called biros.

"You're sounding like Kurt Vonnegut again," I breathed.

Everybody heard it and breathed it aloud. I kissed him on the stairs and he kissed me on the ground. I told him I was worried too. The trees were not budding and the clouds were dishevelled.

I jerked him off in the open staircase whilst a man with a bald head and the manager's name went by sucking a cigar.

"That's very Freudian" he gasped to the manager. "My name's Michael Heeps and you're sending my body and soul and destiny away in a package to some shithole." The manager did not look up from his book, and did not hear.

As we embraced madly on the staircase more from fear than from love, I described his new life to him. I told him about his flat, "it's modern" I said. I told him how the dirt got ingrained into the bathtub, and why his typewriter in his new rubber-planted Brisbane office would always drop its p. I described the clothes he would wear, how the inside of his car would look after a short holiday on the Sunshine Coast, with cardboard containers with the biggest written on them and the dregs of chocolate malted milks inside. Michael, I said, this is you. He hugged me out of fear and disbelief. I said it would take much courage to believe it, and he said he would have the courage to go, and still to disbelieve it. I said he'd better believe it. He placed his tongue in my mouth. The world was falling down around us like playing card castles like loves discarded urgent clothes. He said he would go.

I placed a tick in the box for office use only. It was close to knock-off time.

"Nothing, "

"No"

"I'm being shifted."

"Brisbane -- can you conceive of a more repulsive shithole."

"Yes"

"I don't know whether I should let them move me about like a yobbo after a penny, that's all. I don't like the idea of them, knowing nothing more of me than Heeps, being able to send me off somewhere just because it suits them to do so."

"Yeah, the arguement from starvation."

Paul was at my arm, muttering something about some character of Vonnegut's called Kilgore Trout.

"It's so fucken fucken fucken pointless", I said.

"I know," he said. "But try to remember that in the end everything, be definition, is always worth it."

"It's just a silly matter of perspective you silly creep"... , I added.

"Yeah."

I told him I was going to the shithole.

He said it was merely a matter of perspective.

A client stood at the counter, demanding service. I glanced up, looked at my watch, groaned, and began to get to my feet.

THE SHIFT by Felix Underhill.



BETTY

K.J.S. Llewellyn.

Today the tea was without sugar as usual, but they forgot my saccharine tablet. The old pink one had none, as they forgot her tea altogether. She held her doll and dribbled on it but said nothing. She sings a lot but without tune, its a groan for the doll's comfort and her own.

There is a land I long to be. Far away.

The trees are waving new and very pretty. I feel glad to see them when they open the curtains in the morning. Some of the nurses like the daylight and when they are at work, I can even see the dawn. Some though, leave the lights on until late. It feels as if I am at sea in a cabin with Willia once again on those mornings. He is often here with me, but he goes away. Perhaps he is working or perhaps he forgets to come to me. Kenneth comes on Sundays, he brings me fruit and sometimes a new nightdress. He knows I hate the hospital gowns and brings only the best for his Mother. I think I will sleep a bit now until they come to dress me.

"Have you don Betty yet?"

"No."

"Well for Christsake hurry up will you?"

"Put your arm up Gran, I can't get it in this way. Look Gran, if you won't help me, you can bloody well stay cold. I'll start Betty."

When she took me on the chair to the shower she left me naked as usual. I hate that, they make me shrink and yet I see the others left just the same, but they don't dry like me. I don't think I will ever get used to the smell of us, they throw powder over us all, which makes it worse, like flowers on dead fish.

I drove the horse and dray to Glenelg today, but there was nothing on when I got there. It took all day and was a complete waste of time. Sheaves of yellow hay were lying in the paddocks. All their finger tips were touching, begging God for mercy. Thank heaven I had my good cotton sun-bonnet as the wind was something dreadful. I'd hate to get wrinkled like the others.

The nurse who smiles at me came in a few minutes ago, she held my hand and said "Hello Lovey."

She knows I would speak to her if I could and she lets me look at her eyes and sometimes she cries too. I saw her crying without sounds like I do. She wiped her nose on her apron when no one else was looking. As they never give me a tissue, mine just runs.

It is very cold here. I feel as if I have been sitting out on this chair for hours. Perhaps they have forgotten me. They want me to use this bedpan, but I can't. They wait until I do, and even then they let me stay as I am too heavy for one to lift me which doesn't help matters. They call to each other "Come and help me with Betty," but then after a bit, the caller goes away and when the other arrives, she leaves too. I am so cold though and so sleepy. I watch the others sleeping in their beds and wish I was in mine. I always mean to ask Willie to speak to them about these matters, but when he comes I only cry. Oh Willie, waif needs older shoulder, as we used to say.

Elegant, bare, brown tree sticks, drop silver water fruit. Outside my window.

On a little cloud I float, in a happy moment. My skin melts into air and angels' breath supports me.

The pink one is wearing my nightie again today. It is weeks since I had one of my own on. Kenneth doesn't notice that the others in here wear my clothes and of course no one else knows.

Round and round my cage I prowl. Endlessly.

She is feeding me my porridge but it is too hot and though I cry, she thinks it is only my usual cry.

Outside a white butterfly is punctuating the garden.

Straining noises are beginning. Walls shift, creaks and awful sounds of chains and rumbles I can hear. The prisoner is coming out.

This bed is wet, its making me shiver, my feet are freezing under.

I certainly feel peculiar. Wait for me Willie, I am coming to you.

There are those who call and those who come. I called, you came. You left, now I am leaving too. I am coming to you.

I've left this lovely world at last and now I travel in the atmosphere. Now soft clouds are earth, my skirts are air, my smile laughs at the sun. Adrift, afloat, I swirl about, knowing this is heaven.

"God Jesus! Come here will you? Fuck! I think Betty's dead! Oh my God! I can't find a pulse! Oh Jesus Betty, don't die now, I'll never get off.

MOSHE

There was a poem on my lips, but I laughed and it fell off. I laughed because I saw all the doves escape. What a sight! A white crested wave in the sky.

Here at Bernie's he's done us proud as usual. The garden is so big I've been walking round it and even though I have been here over an hour I haven't seen it all. So many people to talk to and you know what we are, so many ancestors, so many pleasantries, it takes time, it takes time. I had afternoon tea, but I haven't seen the paintings yet. The posters have been judged I hear. It's a Peace Poster for Israel, this contest.

While I was sitting on a stone bench beneath three poplars, I watched a soldier tell a lady he believed mankind was evil. She ate a cake and disagreed. She said she thought she shouldn't talk to him. He said his castle needed a cautious approach. She ate another cake and disagreed. She told him she thought it needed delicacy but: "Mankind is splendid, mysterious and the flowers are my sisters Sir." He looked at his watch and said: "Forgive me, I must go to meet a General." A little girl in a yellow dress ran past the yellow irises and all the doves in the peace posters rose up and flew away. And the three poplars watched with me.

At times like this when we are together, I see us, the Tribe, products of so many lands and so many universities, walking beneath tall gum trees, smiling, bowing, greeting, drinking eating, all wishing we were dead. I think it is the fact that seeing each other reminds us of the past and by a collection of sadness it overwhelms all our barricades and we know the past was true. Not that we didn't know it was real before, God knows we have had time to realise it, it's just that we recognise the hugeness of it and once again it becomes a knife we can't swallow.

Just the fucking day you'd pick. Oh Betty, breathe for Christsake!"

"Well thats it, she's gone alright. We'd better phone Matron. I'll do that and perhaps you'd get the tray. Try to find her a decent nightie will you?"

K.J.S. Llewellyn.

Brush all those days before we came here under the carpet. But on these days someone turns back the carpet. Rebecca and David I still love but I have recovered from their deaths, but I can't recover from all the others.

Reuben and Diana were so beautiful to see together today, they are so full of love for each other they seem enchanted. It is strange that when one clings to love, one goes into a dark well and can't see the beauty of the world. Yet when rich in love and not fearful, the world seems extraordinary, so heavenly, an extra perception is given to us. It's years since Thea died yet I often see things through her eyes. My lady had a face, venerable like a ram, her nature I cannot tell you, somethings too precious to be shared.

We drove, Reuben and I, to Aldinga yesterday. I found seaweed forming question marks on the sand. Even God doesn't know the answer I wore my white flannels but the cleaners had left some grass marks on them. I must be getting old, but it really does seem that things aren't done as well as they used to be.

Lying on the sand I looked up and saw Reuben's child standing with a string of hills around her waist and clouds in her hair. Sea Grand-daughter.

Yes, as Pascal says: "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this."

The Nazis had gas. And we have memory.



C SHARP IN DARKNESS

In spite of a massive heritage, I had never before seen the trilogy of ducks on the mantle wall fly through the room. Brown bottlenecks with bronze wings, eagerness in their eyes. The piano player beats out a rhythm with his knee and foot -- should I put a bass drum beneath them to magnify the already pounding emphasis? A candelabra with two burning:

- Why?
- I forgot a song.
- Is that a rule?
- Yes, that's the rule.
- What if you forget three songs?
- You'll listen in darkness.

That's the way it is, darkness all around. Six lampshades rim the periphery of the room, white lambasted shades of known consequence. Their shadows lie out of proportion; 2 x 1 cylinders reaching out into 6 x 12 voids of crusty shadow. The room fills with people I cannot stand, they are standing. They talk incessantly: what is it the piano player is playing? God! who cares. Filling the bucket of ice they pour the champagne down the drain, lirting into more powerful amnesiacs: memory, nationality, illusions.

--What illusions do you believe in? One asks me.

The ceiling falls in, I am covered with a fine white dust, is it plaster? No, its flour, one says, we are all part of a huge cake, we are waiting for a giant to come and eat us.

--What's this icing, then, I ask.

The woman with the lowcut blouse flapping in the now strong wind bends over the wipes the icing off my pant leg where she had clumsily dropped it from her half-consumed cupcake. The glass in her hand becomes a piece of ice, her hand an icepick.

--Nice icepick, ma'am.

The piano player is going verbatto. Sometimes I watch his fingers. Blazing, they are. Crooked at the end of a measure, slowing for the corners.

--What's his name, she asks. What does he do?

I notice the mantle is not a mantle in the true sense of the word. More of an anti-mantle. No shining mirrors or brute stumps, no trophies dusted over once lightly, no fat outbursts of oak or granite, just a flat wall with a square hole for logs. To the left, the murder weapon. This way, ladies and gentlemen, please avoid the trapdoor.

The room which is dark fills with shadows and people I used to know. I am alone except for these visitors. The piano player pounds on.

--What of those twelve dusty airvents, Captain? Perhaps a bit of cyanide?

--(I can't smell any almonds, but maybe he's right). Better check it.
Charlie.

The ducks fly overhead in a blur. Three ducks, amazing how they never flew before. How many other birds await discovery? There is a dictionary in the corner, open to the word Tallow. Two candles still burn on the piano top. Still born? No, I was premature. The bookcase magnifies it's ignorance. The encyclopedia volumes stand precisely one-eighth of an inch from the edge of the shelf. Each one the same, glued together, hollowed out for a safe, no doubt containing the old man's most valuable golf balls, tennis caps. The carpet sings with the musician, who hums with the wind. An apparition he is concerned with stands twenty feet behind him to the left. Myself, I have dreams, try to remember them: my brother stabs me in the back and mows over a ladies flower garden:

-- Thorough, he says.

I catch a refrain or two, the piano rocks like a secure treehouse. Funny that there is no wind in the house enclosing these eight walls. The sofa answers by sagging toward the middle. No one sits in the middle, but it sags anyway. There is a floral arrangement to the room which escapes my attention momentarily. A marble cigarette lighter stands alone. The acom panelling has fine lines encouraging adolescence. I look to the north -- the long line of open windows are framed by white magnesia curtains that appear to be sixteen football halfbacks in an elevator. People say close the curtains when they mean open them. When curtains are closed, they are open,

but the window is closed. When curtains are open, they are closed, but the window is open. All of the logicians have left the party.

--Isn't that the semantic differential? One girl asks.

I have come to feel the piano player's personality in the room. Filling the room and vacating it again, like Ephemeral Youth Bags. Now he cries out with a peculiar chord, a little nonself scream. He doesn't notice me.

I had forgotten: corners go in, not out. When observing the three lines which make up a corner of a room, they came out at me, but on approach my nose did not bump but slid past the corner into space mush.

-- I could go on, she says.

--Please don't..

The skin-naked piano player imagines he is sweating from the armpits, but I imagine I am reassuring him that he is not. He doesn't anyway. He plays sweat onto the carpet and below, the boards beneath being as naked as he. There are five siamese cats in the next room. It's dark. The one candle now existent (two songs forgotten...) yields bushels a day, tons a night. Strange that the word tallow comes to mind. Moon-faced, beards and bottles. The party is over, hasn't it been? Everyone leaves, or is left. Cliff plays on. The concert hall disappears in favor of any open meadow. Silk lilacs covet the tender saporill.

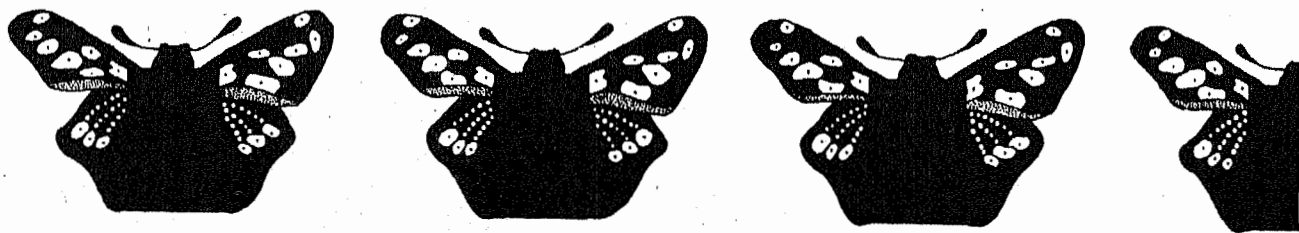
I am lying on my back in the weeds of green. Three ducks fly overhead. I can hear a paino far away. Suddenly, the wind and the bullfrogs stop belching. I turn from my glass to the table top sustaining the one marble cigarette lighter: how lonely it seems. Yet, it breathes. What doesn't in this room of ubiquity? I have lived here for two hundred years. It may be birth. Death hides and doesn't enter the picture. Death may be in the discussion ahead or in the crown of the ghost standing alongside. He is not present, in any case.

Do the piano's imaginary parents walk through the closed, too tightly closed door? Do they scream inhibitions at the sub-pre-post-occupied young naked man colliding with the keyboards? Or do they leave him in favor of bigger cars? I cannot help being impressed by the whole flavor entering through my nose into my very ears. Tuneful rays float by without obligation; many stay for dinner, some go the way of the suitor. The piano player goes on, will he ever stop, some wonder? I, for one, think he won't. He does, eventually, at the peak of performance and sleek subtle energy levels, to balance his nighttime psyche. Who wouldn't? I would cry if I wasn't so predispossessed. I am not.

-- Is that a rule, too, I ask him.

-- When you want, he says.

I return to the thoughts of a hundred nights ago, the thoughts of a newborn enthusiasm and a fresh love. Perhaps I am deluding myself. The piano



player insists on talking when I don't want him to. Why doesn't he go back to his rhythms and leave me to mine? Time for interphase -- yes, but does he have to be so loud? He did mix a nice drink: celery, parsley, lettuce and chives.

-- Good if you're feeling blue.

-- If you want to feel green, you mean, he said.

Why didn't I see these ducks before? In how many homes are there ducks flying across the mantle? No one at the party knew. Good evening, tonight 60 million ducks formed a coalition and demanded more recognition. More precognition, more like it.

Another curtain arrangement speaks out from the south wall. Twelve dispassionate dutch-door type curtains entertain me with the concept of equilibrium. Ah, the Dopler effect! You can't fool me. A rooster sitting on the left bench winks toward the piano player. Cock a doodle doo. He himself had painted the bird at the age of eight. It hangs behind glass in the kitchen to the right of the stove. His malted lions also sit stupified on the hallway cabinet, where thousands can manipulate them into tiny pieces on the anguished floor. This piano player, he's a talented boy, eh? Well, rhythms...

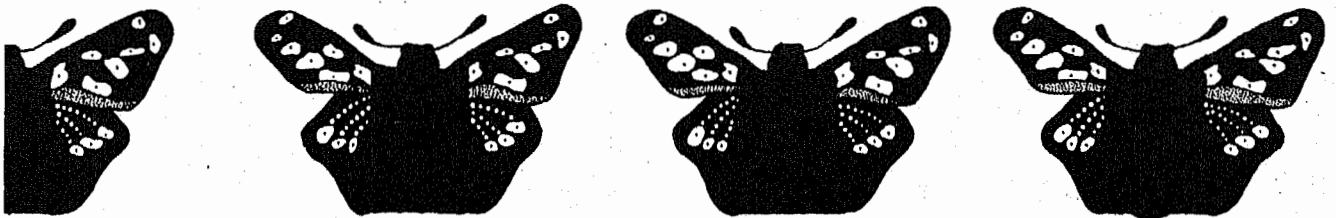
The last candle is out. The party is over. Thank God they took the plaster-flour with them. When did it begin? Who visited me during those timeless minutes? I sensed the piano player had an unfortunate skirmish with his aunt and a lover's lover, but he didn't mope so I left him alone. The piano has small inserts of metal to make it click when you touch it. There is even a coin slot for pseudo-participants:

-- How much revenue yearly?

-- \$5,000, he said dryly.

The boy is well off. But he keeps his head to himself, unlike the apparition standing twenty feet behind him to the left, who holds his in front of him like a lantern to see by. The piano player said he wanted to paint the entire scene. I thought a marvellous ambidextrous plan. I saw a man in a book on Africa who did the same with his feet, while climbing a coconut tree. Marvellous.

IN DARKNESS by James Roberts



AS IN LIFE

The rain drifted into the greying area, misting the viewers, distorting the screening in the warm and safely enclosed bible. There was an animal grazing to the left, not at all disturbed by the presence of this obviously alien object, it did not seem to notice its existence at all, the security of long association, familiarity of position and comforting stasis of inanimate objects. One that didn't click, whirr, buzz or set off unnecessary alarms, bells or flashing lights. The scene was set for...nothing. Here was silence and regularity, time to timeless passage of seasons, here and tread of booted feet had never been heard.

Here in this grove was calm, not that preceding the storm, but of no fear, no danger, no fright; that solidity of feeling bred into every piece of living material. Here there was no hint of competition or selfishness, if such terms could be used, here was the stolid country that had been dreamed about for centuries, the land of the fine; and in the land of the fine the misfit is free, free from laughter, free from pity, free from anxiety, free from trying to be 'normal' altogether free...

So, this was heaven. Pretty dull sort of place, but he had never believed in such a place, such an existence. Odd really, here was something for nothing, finally the matter of survival became of less importance, the end result would still be the same.

SURVIVAL?...The last thing he remembered was the wall collapsing and screams and faces and a lot of bass and then...he was walking around here, as if he had been here for quite a while, and he knew about the mist and the animal grazing over there and the fact that this was heaven, if that could be the right word for this place.

He wondered why no-one had come to greet him, that was the way he imagined any sort of heaven, the jokes about St. Peter and the three sinners, that was the place he thought of when arguing with religious nuts on streets and cornered at funerals, wed-

dings, christenings etc. his mind wandered on. But he had never dreamed that it could be like this... this was a degenerate place, nice, but degenerate. Ah well, it looked like it would be his home for a long, long time, he might as well try and enjoy it before some-one came for him, maybe they were busy at the moment, there was a war going on at the minute on earth and there might be a lot of work for the 'heavenly bodies'.

He walked towards the animal, cautiously, with the fear of centuries of human survival built into his brain and reflexes. One never knew with anything these days, almost everything could be a drug induced vision, he might never have stepped into his auto, he might not have travelled too fast, too far and too tired. He might not be dead, he might be lying in a bed somewhere; unable to distinguish the walls from the foliage surrounding him now, not be able to tell if he was really moving; or if this was merely induced motor response to tiny applied currents in his brain. H'mmmm, he would have to perform some tests to see if he could verify his existence on this plane, in this place. Place? That's what it seemed, there was no sense of time passage (he could see no shadows, no sun, no wind. Just the gentle drift of fine mist). He pulled up with a jerk.

There was the problem. How could he possibly justify his existence, and the certainty of this place when there was nothing to compare them with. Obvious answer, interact with the environment. Use the beast and prove as much as he could have in his earlier place, mode of living, that yes, he could affect his surrounds.

He continued to step towards the beast, cowlike it was, that's what it looked like, a sort of cross between a cow and a...he didn't know what, but definitely cow-like. There had been no sort of reaction from the beast as yet, no sort of flicker of muscle (maybe they didn't have muscle here?), no turning of the head or motion of tail/s. He could not see more than one but you never know, espec-

ially when one is a new arrival in a place like this, there could be almost, or rather would be absolutely anything that could happen or be possible here. All he could do was try and believe the things he could not argue with, and he was just about to find out. He had walked to the front of the animal and still no reaction, this was the safest way to approach it, front first, hands held out, open.

He thought that even here animals would prefer to scent an object, especially one that moved. Incredibly, there was no reaction, the cow (that's how he thought of it now) just kept on chewing its food, a twig slipped from its mouth, held to its lips by sticky saliva, in different circumstances he would have thought it funny, like a baby with a bowler hat and pipe. Here it was different. He reached out his hand to touch the shoulder...and felt firm muscle rippling with the motion of its mouth. He increased the pressure, sliding his hand along its back, the prime gesture of communication.

He repeated the stroke, feeling the animal's life in its motion, the short fur, the slight wetness from the mist. Still poised to step back if necessary, still no reaction from the beast; he stroked it again. This was definitely real, to his senses and his mind there would have to be a massive transformation if this was not real, him and this animal.



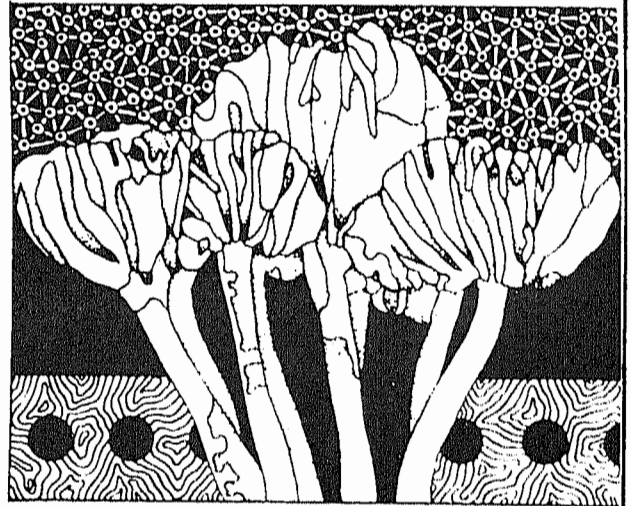
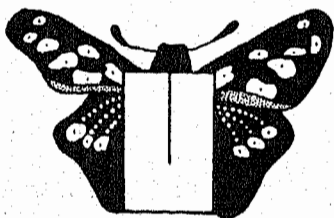
There was still no reaction from the beast, either there were other people here and it was tamed to the point of dullness, or it was just not programmed to react to threat from anything, maybe he did not exist from the animal's point of view, maybe he was not here at all, maybe, maybe... He discarded any theory of a drug at this stage, if he had been drugged the animal would have made some sort of movement of recognition, at least looked up, and maybe licked his hand. He smiled to himself at that thought, friendly animals surrounding the master, not likely here. But there was still the lack of reaction from the beast. He wondered if it was insensitive to smell and touch, with very bad sight as well; what sort of animal was this? No built-in sensitivities, none of the ones needed to survive in a competitive environment; result, there must be little need to struggle here, maybe that's what heaven was about, there was no need to struggle, to race; maybe there were no goals to race for here.

But what was earth-life all about then? If it was supposed to be a training and testing ground for heaven, all that one brought to heaven was the need to get ahead, to survive, to get what you want. Here it seemed that even the animals existed, not survived. That seemed to be accepted, and he supposed that if they did not fear him, he should not feel so wary about them. But this was all wild assumption at the moment. He had one negative; this was not a druggy dream, it had every possibility of 'being real'.

He felt safe with the beast for company, a living thing was a comfort to a sentient being. He squatted down to look the beast in the eyes... and found deep, deepbrown eyes staring back out at where his knees had been. They slowly moved to take in this new vision, a face, separated by a few inches of air and the ever-intrusive droplets of rain. At last! Some form of recognition! This animal had enough ability to notice movement in its vicinity. There seemed mindless depths in those eyes, eyes that had seen something of life, eyes that had seen many things happen and none of them seemed to have made much impression on those eyes. There was no real reaction to his presence, those eyes just took him in, filed under 'non compre' and then lidded over, winking his presence past recognition, past understanding, closing him out. He had been classified and that was that, there was no need to take more notice, there never had been.

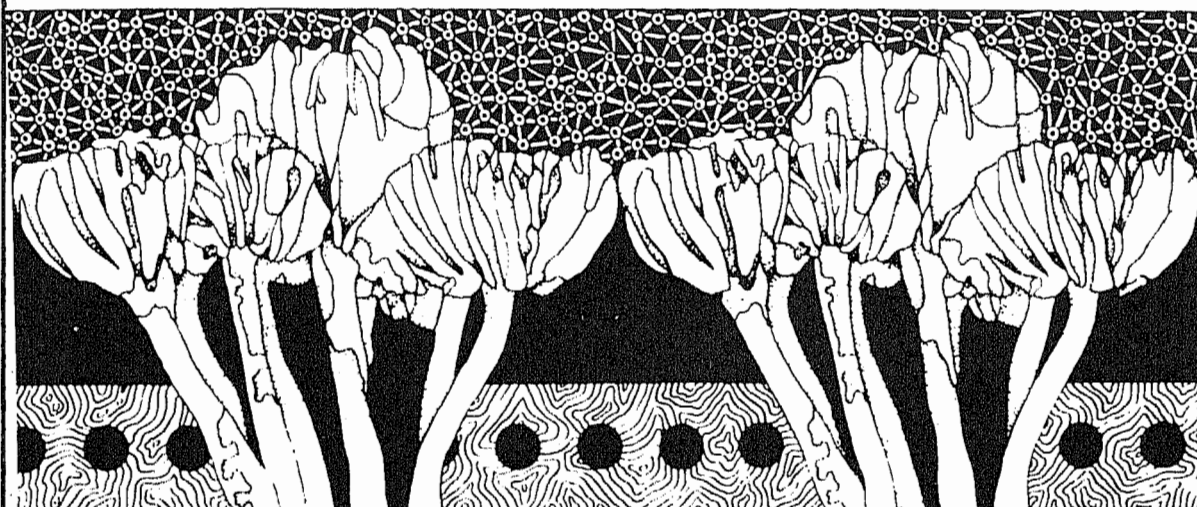
He straightened up and looked around, at the clearing with its walls of vegetation, seeming to deny the existence of anything outside this little section of peace and quietude. It was restful here.

And it was quiet here, and so, so peaceful, maybe there are other patches of peace, here it would be undisturbed forever. He felt at rest for the first time in years, feeling no need to strive, no need to remain constantly aware and alert. He began to understand the beast. And yet he deliberately forced himself to keep watching, glancing around, sliding his eyes over the bushes and trees, trying to pierce them with sight alone. Their barrier remained hard, smoothly denying his attempts to pre-experience his future. He turned to face the beast again; it had not moved, its mouth still ground over and around its fodder, lately cropped and re-digesting. He realised with a shock that he was feeling the start of an empty stomach, one not used to dying and still demanding raw material to continue its function. His lips moved in imitation of the beasts, the saliva from his own mouth matching the animal's, trickling inside his mouth and being reflexively swallowed.



Food. That now became of the prime importance, over-riding other thoughts of existence or not, he was definitely hungry, but what was there to eat? Having established that nothing was rushing from the underbrush to tear at his flesh in search of sustenance, he trod delicately towards the edge of the clearing to start looking for anything resembling edible material, and stopped. This was getting to be a habit here, not knowing what was edible, and what would turn him into a being of wrenching pain. But the beast had eaten something, probably the shortened turf, or the tender, short, leafy foliage by the edge of the grove. And there would probably be some sort of fruit to those trees, if only he could find one bearing at the moment, or would they have fruit all the time, or none? It would depend if there were seasons here, and yet he did not doubt his ability to find something to assuage his growing appetite.

He shrugged his shoulders, there could only be one way, to try the fruits he found and to leave those with bitter taste for the foragers of the ground. As he approached the cleared edge he saw a variety of trees one bearing small polished fruit, looking like turnips, only with a hard reddish skin; and on another, large clusters of peach-like affairs, hanging in bunches as grapes. He stood under its smooth barked limbs, full-fleshed leaves glistening with mist droplets, and pulled one of the bunches down, snapping it from its stalk with a quick tug; the branch rearing back to its position. Shaking the flung drops from his arm, he walked away from the edge. He did not want to climb those trees unless absolutely necessary, you never knew what you may find up a tree.



The fruit tasted soft and pulpy, but he spat out the skin, its rough texture too much for his untrained teeth, used only to biting into foods with a minimum of chewability. He let the thick juice run down his throat, smoothing the way for the first swallow.

He decided there could be no harm in taking another bite, and then another, and finding that he had ravenously bolted the whole fruit, decided he may as well die again, the food supply here was sufficient to his needs, so what if it killed him? He realised how hungry he had been, the tension of the situation had blocked it well. He wiped his mouth and walked back to the animal, juice dripping from his hands in tiny drops, falling with the rain-mist, disappearing into the moist ground.

It tastes good, you poor beast, it's a pity that you could never reach these, you might have grown hands to pick them, you might have the body to spring from tree to tree in search of these and other delicacies. But then, you might have some sort of relative who can. Well, do you?

His voice shook the surroundings in an almost visible manner. He realised that he had spoken for the first time, the noise shattered the silence of the grove, only to be over-rushed by the drifting mist, closing in again, deadening all possibilities of echoes. He faced the beast, watching it move its mouth, its eyes blinked at the noise, then at his aping of its motions.

He finished the cluster of fruits, wiping his hands on his thighs, feeling the coarse cloth of his shorts damp from the mist. SHORTS? He suddenly realised that he was still clad in the loose shirt and baggy shorts he had pulled on that morning in preparation to visiting the beach. Odd sort of heaven this one, they even allow you to keep what you came in. Pity I didn't know it sooner, I could have come prepared and really taken it all with me. And now, a place to sleep, or maybe this place stays lit all the time, maybe one doesn't need to sleep here, though he found it hard to imagine not sleeping. Maybe I'll just stick with the beast here, watch it and use its behaviour as an example; that should be the safest way, after all, it's been here longer, I suppose.

And then he noticed the light failing, the edge of the clearing becoming even more washed-out, dimming into blurriness. Exactly like an old film fade-out, shading to almost invisible in half a minute. That could have been half-an-hour for all he could sense the passage of time; even so, it happened very quickly. He was left standing by the animal, which made its first move. It collapsed.

Having no alternative, he felt for the warm hide of the animal, lying down and moving alongside, cuddling into its solid bulk and body heat. He smiled to himself, this is what it must have been like thousands of years ago, man lying with his animals to protect and warm his puny self.

He slept...

by Mark Tainsh.

ALEX SEGLENIIEKS

PERSONAL EDIFICE.

I sense already your devotion
My words to you unfold as rose-buds;
Just as they take up water in a vase
So are my words to you embraced
Never to fall away
Unheard.

To know you wait
Even a little

To know that your thoughts
Acknowledge my existence

This is greater than to build me up
As some broad edifice of character
And abilities sprung from courage.

DEDICATION TO LYNDALL.

Suitably inscribed
Is the day to you

I add
Merely the postscript
No small feat
For me

To make the minutes flow
A current of words
Verses
And to make your eyes shine

To brighten mine too
Not merely glittering bubbles
But stars

Plucked from your company.

ON BEING TOLD THE RELATIONSHIP WAS AT AN END.

Only a subjective opinion
But you are wrong

And I fear for our state
Of mind
I fear for happiness marred
And missed by confusion

Take my emotions
They are only enriched.

As for horizons
These are united with darkness and sunshine
With partly self-made winds
That loosen the blossoms
Of my snowflake tree

First green they grow
And bleach white before they fall
And whither.

When green there are many blossoms
I treasure them when white
While white
I live them

And forget my past green youth.

THAT GREAT HUMAN NATURE .

I feel a golden cup
And expect to be overfilled
With liquid
Of astronomical heights
Of starry visions
And centaur's splendour .

Rather, I am sure
This will occur
But always doubt with that
Great human nature
Whether I attain ever such heights
Again .

But again
Time deepens and lets me lie deeper
In a cloudy cushion
Of alternate deep dark and
Lingering sunlight .

To go down thus is to grow closer
Closer to my fellow man
Or woman
To leave behind my scornful storm
But to return always on pushing tides
Closer anyway .

ABSENT .

With curved palms
I sense
A warmth
A tense, tight closeness
I long for

To press hard, almost to crush
And amazingly
To care
Protect sensitivity
Of limbs, mind, face
Easy now

With softness separated
By my pen

But in physical presence
All of you .

As one desired .

AFTER MIDNIGHT .

After midnight
And I write to think of you .
Being unaccustomed
To my present position and possibilities
I need to reassure you
What I do
I do as a comrade
To rest in your arms .

You build me up
And I fear to miss my chances
All men strive to attain the outcome
Of their philosophy -
What do we know of its worth?
But such questions do not worry me
I worry for you
I need to confirm, to need
To show that I want you for your whole being .

To want this
I still fear that I reject
Some part of you
But I know I do not .

If possible I shall satisfy you physically
But I must see you laugh
I would play the helpless clown
Or a witty fellow - I can do this
Even past midnight
However, I see you tonight
And it is not today that I have feared
I fear to lose tomorrow
To lose a world, a person tomorrow

And funnily enough
I fear to lose through fear .

LORRAINE .

Only in alienated moments
Do I succeed in more than
Ordinary ecstasy
And the need is always there
For a link, another life
A continuing affection
To face the thoughtful catacombs
Of my lower hours and days .

You are now the basis
Of my determination
To erase my cardboard mountains .

From these your lines
Is my own happiness gained .

AN INCIDENT ONE EVENING

IN THE LIFE OF HAROLD

ENTWHISTLE

It was a hot night, a choking night. Full of noisy colourful people, in their equally noisy ears, coughing smoke and blaring lights all across the roadway. Their bustle walked and split all over the footpath, as I made my way hungrily to the bright lit entrance of the Chinese Restaurant.

But inside it was all the same. Instead of the car effluent, there was cigarette smoke and vaporized Chop Suey, mixed with the haze of voices and glass and wood.

A quiet and patient observer, I made my way quietly and patiently to the counter:

"Chicken and Almonds, and... Sweet and Sour Pork, please."

"Ker - ching!" (no pun intended, mind you).

"Thank you."

Silently I sat and silently I waited. (Perhaps I fell a slight lie, for I may have made some noise in seating myself between the two unobliging hulks that occupied the sole bench provided for waiting clients. But then, beneath the conglomerate of sound, and the multi-directional bustling and gesticulating about one, I was nothing - or at least, nothing to speak of - and nothing makes no noise.)

The unfolding of this drama began as inconspicuously as my own entrance.

"No. 26! No. 26!"

I should explain, I suppose. You see, everybody received a number for their order, (not to be con-

fused with the number of the dish ordered: for instance, sweet and sour pork was 57). When your food was ready, they called out your order number. Mine was No. 31. Obviously, No. 26 was now ready. (Once again, I am deviating from the truth just a little: I say "obviously", but really, at this stage, the call for No. 26 was but a harmless addition to the melee of sound, smell and movement that filled the restaurant. It was intended for No. 26's ears only, and no-one else, at this stage, took any notice of the call - one develops an ear, you see, for one's own number.)

For myself, the fat fellow across from my wall-side waiting seat was holding my attention. (Did I remember to tell you that I was waiting for take-away food? I don't think I did. How silly of me. Well, I was, and while waiting I faced a merry room full of intensely occupied diners). Anyway, this "gentleman" - I use the term at this stage to show my innocence as to future events - was quite enthralling to watch. He was - amazing as it may sound - swilling. Rose, conversing grandly, eating, and moving his hands about, all with the dexterity and ease of a practiced juggler. I was captivated. The man wasn't really eating piggishly or anything (though he did have rather porky features, I must admit). He did manage to hold all that food and wine in his mouth quite expertly whilst in mid-speech. Yet there was, come to think of it, something about him, which.... No. I'll not enter into the matter now: otherwise you'll accuse me later of trying to impute to myself some kind of psychic ability. No fear. I'll just tell it how it was.

Well, as I have mentioned, my order number was No. 31. I had just reassured myself of this fact by gazing idly at my fidget-worn docket for several minutes, when the cry for No. 26 first really came to my notice. It was then that I realised that he had been called at least twice before, yet apparently not come. (This struck me at the time, because that meant that my order was closer than I thought - I mean, No. 27 or No. 28 may have gone already, without my noticing it. No. 26 was only being called still because he hadn't come as yet).

Despite my calm and patient nature, I was by now becoming bored by all this waiting. I had been there a good fifteen minutes...well, maybe only ten; but time enough. My inactive mind seized on the distraction of a little imaginative conjecture: perhaps the fellow - No. 26 I mean - had stepped outside for a breath of fresh air, and collapsed from all the busy night fumes? Alternatively, he may have been kidnapped, by Russian agents, for not only was he No. 26, but comrade X, from K.G.B., who had defected to our fair land.

Well, as you can imagine, I soon tired of such silliness. It was then that my gaze dropped listlessly to the floor, searching for some patterns to distract my mind more fruitfully, and help forget my hunger and growing impatience.

Now the tale really clicks into gear, for unbelievable as it may sound, and incredulous as you might well be when I tell you, No. 26 was lying on the floor, as still as the cold tiles themselves!

Well, I'm starting to rush things now, as you may understand. It was a good half a minute before it hit me, really, but I knew - don't ask me how, please - that he was dead. Secondly, I knew it was No. 26, for sure, because the unlucky fellow, still held his ticket (or half held it, anyway) in his flaccid crumpled fingers: "No. 26" in stark black was clearly visible.

I was damm surprised, I can tell you. For some reason my reaction, in my amazement, left me staring, mouth agape and eyes as wide as eggs, at the porkly "gentleman" across from me. Ironically this fellow was himself peering at the body on the floor. With head half raised in a nod and a curious, eye-squinting gaze, he was still chewing steadily, at his inimitable gait, but had stopped talking, his face taking on a frozen frown of bewilderment. His "accomplices" - meaning his companions at table feeling lost at this sudden absence of leadership, were obliged to turn their heads in line with Forkly's own, in order to make out the cause of this

lull in mid-speech. (The one with his back to me had to turn full about in his charm in order to see).

Dumbly they smiled at the fallen No. 26, and turned back to face Forkly once again. Feeling the need for guidance one of them volunteered a nervous laugh - or comment: I couldn't hear - to which Forkly immediately responded with a round and disarming grin. All embracing, and with twinkling eyes amidst the round and drawn up flesh, of his face. Forkly rose in one easy, balanced movement - he had poise, I must confess. The confident leader of the group said something briefly to his carrion crew, and made towards me, followed by this shuffling, tittering group.

I don't know what had been said, let alone what strange connection these people had, but with one obvious intent, and one unquestioning series of movements, they came almost to my feet, bent down, heaved No. 26 up from the floor, and staggered back to their table. In one lazy motion, No. 26 was swung onto the table by this dark scourge, (on top of all their dinner plates and all, I might add).

The rest I must pass over quickly for its a strain, I can tell you, recalling the whole morbid thing.

They ate him. They just sat back down and ate him. And Porkly was the worst. From somewhere unknown he produced a dirty great carver, and like a father tenderly sliced 26 into serves for his team of jackals. It was disgusting.

Of course, you might well be saying: "But why didn't somebody do something!" But you weren't there, and you could have no idea as to the circumstances - I mean, the full impact and inconvenience of the whole situation. Like I said, it was noisy. People were very busy. Everyone was minding their own business, which is enough trouble at any time, as anyone knows. They were all having their fun, eating their food, drinking their wine: bustling around in their noise filled worlds, at their own tables. It was very crowded. And people kept coming and going in and out the door, walking in front of me all the time. (It was hard enough to see what was going on). Nobody noticed it, except me. Or at least I think I was the only one. And what could I do?

Anyhow, I sat there. Watching. (What could I do?). Porkly, naturally, held my gaze as before. You may not believe this, but with the same unequalled eloquence, he was talking away, and chewing, all at once, while his hands were busy

pulling and cutting at poor 26, with the occasional gesticulatory punction whenever he got the chance. (26 was unrecognizable by now, I might add). The worst part was when Porkly grabbed an old coke bottle and put it on an empty (but dirty) soup bowl, and started grinding out the marrow from one of 26's thigh bones, by rotating it around the curved indentations on the neck of the bottle - as if he were squeezing an orange. It was sickly, really sickly.

It was then, thank heavens, that I was swiftly pulled back into reality.

"No. 31!.... No. 31!"

Quickly I reminded myself of my real purpose in this stifling place, and leaping up, I hustled to the counter. A quick "Thank you", and a few breaths and shoves later, I was outside.

It was cooler there, but still very warm.

The street was full of noisy, colorful people; in their noisy cars and on foot. Smoke and glare were all across the roadway.

I reached my car and slid into the seat.

"You took bloody long enough!" (the wife).

What could I say?

by Andy Selway.

CONCUPISCENT MEANDERINGS OF A LUCUBRATOR

It was a winter's night when the sun set. Four cammels (with 3 humps between them) began to light the fire. Horace the dog lit a fag.

"Matches" said Claude (the cammels were all asleep by this time). One of them began to snore, so Claude, with the use of his hands, picked up a vase and placed it on the mantlepiece.

"Gertrude" said monte, "where's the horse?" Gertrude had become immune to Monte's stupid statements. At times, Monte would rave on for hours, telling of his hair-growing adventures in the Punjab Region. Gertrude would often take these opportunities to practice at being a cammel, it wasn't easy but she put a lot of effort into it.

One day, Monte's ramblings got the better of Claude so Gertrude left Monte and went to live with the four cammels, changing her name to Fred because all the cammel's names were Abdul.

Monte was fond of radishes but he planted all cabbages that year. It was a bad day for planting wheat however, as a herd of cammels named Abdul (actually there were only 4 of them but Monte liked to brag) arrived on the scene and one of them (named Abdul) ate his wooden leg. But Monte wasn't perturbed. He shrugged off the episode with his usual comment,

"If you can't beat them, then feed the cat" (who was also named Abdul).

Monte did not enjoy writing with one leg, so he decided to turn into a lizard and grow another leg. (As you may have guessed, Monte was not very Christian). Claude thought he would like to be a slug so he gathered his hat and coat and stepped out of the door and jumped on the roof. Monte was getting nowhere with his one leg and was, to say the least, hopping mad. Abdul suggested to Monte that he try eating a tree so that his wooden leg would grow again.

"This is definately food for thought. . . . I'd do it" said Monte, so he began to chompaway until he reached the root of the problem.

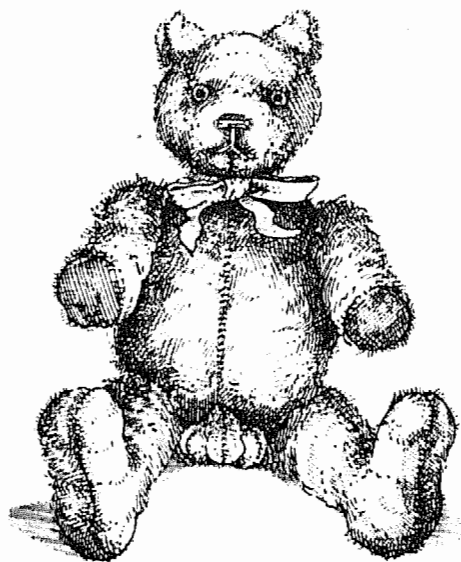
"Roots are good for you" observed Monte "I think I'll have a few." Itc finally finished eating.

"I'm rooted" was his comment.

"Give me a haggis" said Jack to Jill.

"A haggis?" queried Jill.

"Yes! A haggis!" snapped Jack. "I'm sick of milking the cow and mowing the lawn."



Jill looked puzzled but she gave Jack the haggis. He seemed pleased as he rolled it down the hill.

Standing on the fingers of one hand and counting up to four, Claude stood up, his soul in torment (actually he had just finished eating a haggis which gave him indigestion, but he liked to be dramatic). So dramatic was he that cows would eat grass when he brushed his teeth.

Horace who had been to Eton and always wore his old school tie (this was a habit he acquired since the school toilets were devoid of paper). He had also been to Oxford but was expelled for continuously using his tie for purposes for which it was not intended. He was shitted off with Monte's stupidity and so went to the toilet.

Helplessness was the feeling that Horace experienced when the four cammels raided the toilet and bit off

his. But this time the cammels had bitten off more than they could chew (it was at least 14" long) even though cammels were known to have a "Deep Throat."

The cammels had learnt their lesson, "Too many colts spoil the broth" said Abdul dismally. Horace decided to straighten Monte('s) out,

"A good heart to heart talk with my step brother will prevent Monte('s) from cracking up", observed the dog. Monte had seen the folly of his way, "less talk and more action" was his thought.

Monte needed a holiday so he took a weekend package tour of the "whole" of Africa and Europe, staying at the luxurious Kangaroo Island Motel, complete with tables and chairs. The hole trip actually lasted 34½ hours and consequently things (esp. his) got a bit hairy.

Flying back on the M.T.T. (much tossing and turning) paddle steamer "The Overland" (not to be confused with "The Overland") he stopped by in Singapore for a duty-free stump and to watch the local and water poloteam drown six horses while partaking in the national sport of smashing two bricks together.

On returning home he found that one of the cammels had become a camumel (i.e. pregnant) another of the cammels was a camwmel (i.e. pregnant with twins). The other two cammels (both named Abdul) had become cammmmmels and died of the mumps.

Meanwhile Fred, alias Gertrude had died of thirst (shetried being a cammel once too often). Jack and Jill were over the hill (and their psychoanalyst couldn't give a stuff). Horace had refused to be associated with this story long ago (as it was silly).

Monte was disillusioned, so he returned to Kangaroo Island with his cat (named Abdul) to start a new life as a pirate (he had all the qualifications one leg and a stump and Abdul was taking a course on How to be a parrot). As he sailed the seas on his invincible ship "Titanic" he could be heard to yell "Hoist the main sails and scuttle your undies!!"

Claude hadn't got very far with being a slug (as they were slow moving creatures and he was a real goer) and so returned to his normal self.

"Himm" thought "tomorrow the sun will set on a new summer. . . ."

Q.E.D.

Gabriele Santucci, Graham Kueschner.

LITTLE HOUSE I USED TO LIVE IN (FRANK ZAPPA)

"Ger up, Gungadin. Ger up y lazy bastard." Andy dragged the campbed across the room, then with a heave flipped Bill, struggling in tangled sheets, onto the lumpy lino floor. Bill forked his customary salutation at Andy the grinning ape.

"Don't lie on yr arse. I thought y had a big day ahead of ya." Andy crossed to the window. Insinuating with smirk, he said: "Y gonna lie on the floor all day, y idle activist." He'd been saving that one.

"You, y bastard," said Bill with sideway glances at the morning.

"First time I've seenya up before noon all week."

Andy peeled his deep absorbing eyes from the reddening plain.

"I've been workin on my bike, haven't I." He mumbled off to the basin. Oilugly lather clung to the jerks of his palm scrubbing hands. As he towelled the last suds off his rough hands, he kicked the front door shut. "Bloody flies everywhere."

Bill rose unwinding the sheets from his legs, then fell back exhausted on his bed, which shuddered under the sudden weight. "A parade of ants in here."

Andy swivelled his hips and strutted across the kitchen floor, booming in and out of tune:

Wonder through the bedroom
Makin sure the sheets are clean
Oh wowowoh
Baby you're just as mean
Can't help worryin bout the way you been
Tell me Esmeralda
When you play your little game
Oh wowowoh
Do you always charge the same
I can't help thinkin we're bout to meet again

"You're up," Mac coughed, appearing bedragged. "Got a beer Andy I'm as rough as an abo's loincloth."

Andy, with magnanimous movements, flicked a bottle top into the air, took a swig, then handed Mac the tube.

"Bloat yr guts with that. Gungadin, pull yr finger out. Butter and jam, where are they. Don't piss off Mac, the toast's brown. Bloody hell the milk's off. Shitty fridge. Typical clearance sale."

"We can use condensed, it's not too bad," Bill said, entering the kitchen with a hand moving beneath his jocks.

"Fuck you syrup tongue," Mac said. "All sinks t the bottom."

"Fr christ's sake put some clothes on," Andy complained, looking at Bill's fat hairy legs, and the pubic hairs that creeped from the top of his jocks towards his scarred stomach.

Amid muted light through windowdirt of the front room, Michelle flipped disinterestedly, pages of magazine gloss. Ants crawled the dirty floor. Projector beams of sunbright caught the particled air in slow spiral.

Ian, who'd dropped in, with Michelle, to see how the boys were getting on, was in the kitchen educating Andy about political forces in our society. Andy nodded, thinking bullshit. Mac and Bill looked at the mess around them, wondering whether to make an effort to clean up.

The door was rapped by beckoning knuckles. Come in.

"Good morning (panning eyes) all."

"G'day," Ian said, offering nothing.

Two men entered in black suits, no friends of ours, and stood before the table.

"Beautiful day," tall said, "Thanks to God."

"Crash hot," Mac replied abruptly.

"We're here to spread."

"Vegemite," Bill asked Andy, knife poised to spread.

Mac watched them mouth, in puppet stance, loving phrases not theirs. Starched shirt straights. They mouthed, in turn, a bellyfull. Young and direct they emerged from a purposed world, commissioned missionaries.

Tall praised the bounty of His words, pouring it out. Striding to each doorslam, from daystart to daydone, John of Arks, their eager fingers quick at book, verse and line. Jehovah witness by life. A martyr for God and y pesterin bastard, baptismal names for their kind. Telling about their Work in New Guinea, spread the light.

"They're not dirty, (dish pile pyramid in sink) quite civilized, (monolithic grogbottle stack out the back,) they're our equals."

"They're not equal t us, we're bloody filthy," Mac laughed.

Startled.

"Read this anyway," short said.

Mac read it upside down.

They thanked and left, farewelled by Bill's dramatic kneeling cry,

I don't know how to love him
I don't know why he moves me
He moves my bowels, just my bowels.

"Didya see that, that was fantastic," Ian laughed tearfully, slapping his thigh.

"Gotta get goin, you shitheads," Bill announced.

"Goin t college, shit don't strain yself that's twice this week," Mac said.

"Got a test at three or I wouldn't bother. Ed. Psych."

"What?" Andy asked.

"Educational Psychology. You know, why kids beat each others brains in, all that bull."

"What are you guys doin," Ian asked.

"Might mosey along into town," Mac said in a gun-fighter's drawl.

"Yeh, perve on the birds," Andy added.

"I'm ready, how about you Michelle," Ian called. Emptying her roomcocoon, she walked in silence to his side. Obeying the man's voice that bid her be his with still unquestioning tongue.

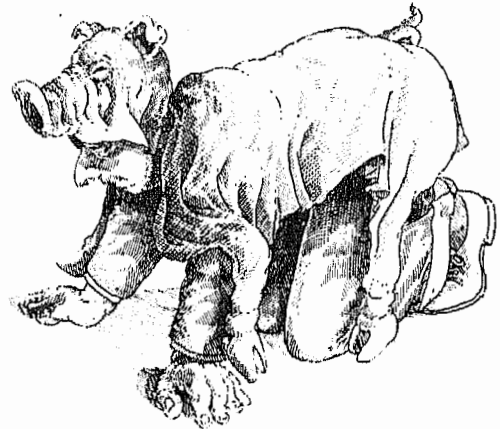
Outside Mac faced Bill for thoughtful moments, twitching his ear.

"How about the rent money," he said, hating to ask. Bill tunneled his pocket, drew out his last crumpled

Lawson. "That's all I've got." Mac whisked it away.

"All donations gratefully received."

Bill cruised up the nowherebending road. Finishing the bend he hit his horn. Friends.



II

Cat's eyes stolen by headlights. Fur-rising, back-arching fear disappearing under the wheels. Chilling catscream scraped through Chris's head. He slowed down, having swerved across the road towards the glowing eyes. Laughter sobered in Nank's throat, shit, he glanced through the back window, couldn't see the squashed oncelife that he knew must bleed behind them.

"Some guy on the council'll get fifty cents fr it," mumbled Chris, remembering Bill's Lee Mundy story, when he walked to work with a dead dog slung across a pole, then demanded his fifty cents. Probably killed it himself. Fuck it, a bitter foot forced the accelerator to the floor.

Might just drop in for a pint, ah I needed that, just one more and we'll be right. The Smithfield, an afterwork routine. Scratching stubbed chins, two old boys of the road, mutter reverent words 'Manx Norton'. Nank raps the bar with gavelhand agreement "Now that was a bike." Green slacked, white bloused barmaid slopped a beer for Chris, listening to his confiding words. She laughed when he laughed. And everytime she served him, she listened. Chris stood there, eyes circled by grease, dirt clinging to his beard, waiting for her to come near him. One of Nank's new friends blew his nose, remembering his old BSA thumper, and the days when the roads were free and easy.

And now they were drunk and laughing and speeding up the Angle Vale Road. Across dark paddocks square windows shone. Somebody's home. They screamed off the bitumen, tailwagging down the deadend track, slammed on brake squeezed through gate, negotiating the potholed deepdipped driveway in first. On the porch, under insect shrouded lightbulb, five figures in a mysterious circle. A blue Holden stationwaggon blocked the caryard. Bill's Peugeot, Andy's van, the R4 and its wheelless predecessor, Maggot, Nigel's abandoned relic, and Nank's stobied Holden surrounded the blankfaced house. A resting place for dead and dying cars. Nank hopped out, clutching a brownbag of beerbottles, yelling "Howya goin cobbbers."

Overloaded voices, 'G'day cobbles, 'Cheers, 'Where-ya bin, 'Nank y bastard come an join us in a joint.' George smiling welcome.

Imbecile concentration creasing Bill's features, tentatively sucking soggy paper, smoke escaping through face-holes.

"Na, yr all wrong, ya gotta hold it in yr lungs, then let it go slowly. Nank, show these fuckwits how to smoke." Andy rescued the wet butt from Bill's clumsy fingers, handed it to Nank, who with explanatory comments, demonstrated drawbacks.

Chris, Chris, background man shadowy watching figure, apart but part, known yet unknown. Mac and Bill complaining about the tabacco, worse than the mari, mak-esa dizzy, instant hangover. Ian coaxing George to try one drag, George unwilling, rather drink oyo.

"Is this tuff from our little plant," Nank yelled from inside, sliding his bottles along the bottom rack of the fridge.

"Yeh man, just a few leaves to give us a buzz," Mac said, laughing at himself.

(That afternoon Mac and Bill together, Andy thrashing his BSA someroad, they were talking about something-nothing, remembered the plant, needed watering, filled a jug, went outside, climbed through barbedwire boundary, slope overlooking miserable cows roaming dry grass paddock, mari plant poking through its protective wire, once had four or five, died or eaten, expecting to see stoned cows mooing the blues, poured water onto the cracked claysoil, getting bigger, like tomato plants, try a few leaves? Mac gently picked, Bill didn't discourage, carried them reverently into house, wrapped them in Gladwrap, how dya smoke it, can't smoke it all green, took a trip into Gawler, dropped in at Anita's, Little Red Schoolbook borrowed without asking from her father givesya all the info,

later back at house, shredded leaves in frypan, dry them it says, Andy returns, mixes mari with tobaccy, the first homegrown reefer was lit).

"Doesn't do a thing fr me," Bill said, breaking the intent circle of silence to piss into the darkness beyond the rim of light.

"Yr just an alco Bill, don't appreciate, 'Doesn't the first time, 'No wonder, y can't smoke, 'Can't y feel it, yr head swimmin, 'That's the tobacco.' Mac on weak legs raising both arms in stoned worship of lonely nightsuns infinite. Nank more comfortable guzzling beer. Chris and Andy. George gesticulates forlornly at Ian's unheeding logic.

"Come on George, let's face it, yr at uni fr two years, there must be a cultural clash somewhere, how do you reconcile the greek family or rigidity and the...the.. individual freedom of..." He leans back, balancing his chair on two legs, irritated at his own hard voice.

"Yeh, yeh, but that doesn't mean I have to reject my ...background, my cultural roots I mean." Ian filled the two glasses, half oyo, half coke. Continual conflict. Chained - greenhouse duty, weeding, spraying, picking, season follows season. Proudlatenight grappa, fluid Greek swearing, homesick father's nostos wishes, uncles dancing kinship.

Andy, tiring of cartalk, explaining his frustrations to Chris, who couldn't listen but nodded, knowing that feeling. Girls that he'd rooted, girls that were stupid, girls that he'd loved, those that he'd left, one that he wanted. Chris emptyhearted, wondering if he could love.

"We've got ten minutes." Somewhy Nank was shepherding Chris and Andy towards the cars. Splintering glass. Mac stared as if wronged, at his empty hand, jigsawed bottle scattered around his feet. Bill thumping George's shoulder, punchlining a joke, then seeing the exodus he sprinted towards the revving Cortina. "Follow's George." "Yr gonna risk Chris's drivin," Ian asked emptiness, as the Cortina reversed up the drive like a flame eyed beetle, its dark feelers waving through rolled down windows.

They burst into the Exchange, yelling for the barman. Two minutes to ten. Beers all round. Regulars, slouched on stools, turned heavy heads towards the laughing newcomers, then, unable to see the humour, went back to watching and waiting for closing time. Two oilstained hands, one wrinkled aging, the other fleshy ageless, raced matchsticks around a cribbage board. From the Saloon Bar the noise of a darts match,

loud encouragement, mock congratulation, carefree boasts, squeak of scorer's chalk, thud of striking darts. Ian and George arrived, greeted by raucous sarcasm. Didya walk, we bin ere ages, you two go parkin eh, whatya drivin a model T.

"We lostya y bastards. Saw the car, might've guessed you'd head fr a pub," Ian explained, raising Mac's glass to his lips. George, who usually shouted everyone to everything if people would let him, was broke. But finding twenty cents he thought he could, at least, give the beertickets a burl. Second round, drink it down. Nobody shouted George, or even noticed his hopeful smile. Ten o'clock. Tall, brute banman threw two blue tickets across the bar. The first flipped open. Buggar. Bill pressed against George's warm side, trying to see. Stubborn staple - final ticket jagged with tears, revealing the numbers 5 0 0. Shit, we've done it. Shit. Unanimous yells of triumph. You beauty George. Bill leaping onto a table, holding high the ticket in a vigorous victory dance, the barman ruffling his oilslick hair and screaming ger off before I. A dozen, a dozen. You bloody beauty, let's go an get thoroughly pissed. George knuckling Ian's skull, how's that fr arse. Andy's insane grin, Chris pouring dregs down Nank's neck. Swollen checked cribbage player muttering, yd think they'd won the bloody lottery.

The sudden silence of decision when everyone rushes out onto the rippling pavement. And all down Murray Street pubs are emptying, leaving drunks to grope home-wards from streetlight to gutterspew. Skipping across the road, dodging a cruising yanktank, they left George to collect the winnings. Car doors slammed. Shove over. Chris newborn, surrounded by friends, driving mad. Mac struggling to close his door, shouting slow down, as Chris flattened the pedal. He shut it, just as they swung, tyres squealing, into Cowan Street. Whereya bloody goin, thats the cop station, they'll nabya. Chris played a solo on his horn as they fled dreamlike under the jacarandas. Bill squashed his nose against the rear window, fearing pursuit. They weaved from kerbstone to kerbstone. A bloody dozen. Beauty Chris, Nank urged. You'll never stop. Red ghost Catholic church dead ahead. Any confessions. Hold on. Brakes slammed on, clattering ashtray, wheel swung frantically left, shuddering body. The righthand wheels ran up onto the pavement, collision bound with a pole. They missed it. Forgot about that corner, Chris grinned over his shoulder. Bill felt sick with sobering fear. Watch those corners, it'll make me chunder all this rockin about. Nobody listening.

Somehow they survived. They'd almost been airborne through the ford. Andy swore they were doing sixty.

Mac swore, his head hammered the roof. Chris flashing his headlights at opposing drivers and Andy pulling on the handbrake, grating back to third at eighty. Nank blinding Chris with his palms, guess who. Bill petrified with fear, complaining he felt sick from the booze. Somereason they'd survived.

Deafening music in small room chaos on lucky night of no name. George gone, only empty bottles lying in amber pools of their own lifestream, Mac strumming a brokendown guitar, Bill dancing around Andy, banging cymbals to his own crazy beatfeet, Chicago syn-copating through full blast speakers and Nank in the bedroom falling asleep. In the rhythm of a moment with the walls coming in. Bill fell in love with them all, thinking of Whitman, thinking of the poem he was writing, the long sunlight soul poem that he wished was him. And then after Andy had drummed a message on Bill's head initiating a threshing drumstick duel and Bill, exhausted, had lain down on his livingroom bed to read Macbeth with drunken insight, and when the room was silent, mosquitos porwling, and after Chris Whiteface came to lie down dead on mangy old couch, Mac played this short searching song, over and over, patiently placing the needle at the beginning each time it ended.



Tell me why oh tell me why
is the answer locked within your eyes
must it always be this way
must it be another day
I don't expect you'll understand

Bill watching Mac's hunched back at the foot of his bed, wondering what he was thinking.

Who are you, who am I
Who are we, tell me why

Later, and much sadder, Mac rose, clicked the power off and bid a soft goodnight to Bill who lay asleep, Macbeth still open by his side.



III

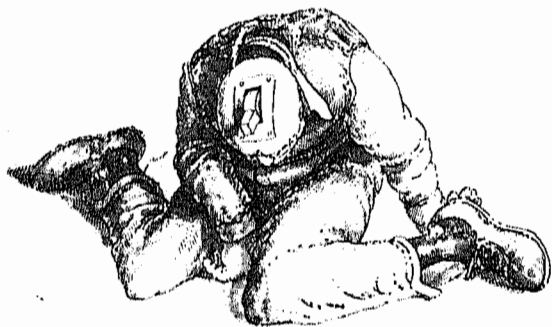
The house became a symbol. In the days when pricks were pricks and carrots were carrots, and I couldn't imagine a womb, it was known as a house. Standing alone, how long alone, it resembled a packing case, its barefaced walls ingrained with dust that darkened the sky above the plains in summer's sunstroked whirlies. Corrugated driveway flanked by chicken-sheds and a legumegreen plot which two moustachioed Italian women, (mother and daughter, sisters?) mounted on bicycles, came to tend each morning. If the house itself ever had a garden, it had long ago been baked into a hard claycrust spiked with stunted weeds. Sultry summer days with just the faintest breeze reminded nostrils of the nearby piggery. The majority of the surrounding properties, thank god, were market gardens. On weekends whole families, from grandpapa's rambling advice to the youngest walking child's fistful weeding, were crouched among the rows of growing harvest. Amidst this industrious order, the household committed heresy as they let the indolent days slip away. Only the South Para river seemed in harmony as it idled on its journey. Soon it would trickle to a halt leaving stagnant pools, alive with just-born wrigglers, waiting for autumn rains. If you were awake smelling the morning, the sun seemed to rise like an angry face from out of distant Gawler's rooftops. That was part of it, leaving Gawler, losing contact with workaday time, feeling as if you were in the country, away from troubled cities and towns. Not that they were hermits or even organic farmers, they never made much impression on the undernourished soil, a solitary mari plant and some sweet corn which Bill planted and watered, then left to die. They dependent on Gawler for food and drink, parents and lovers, and yet they were glad to live away from it in the little house which never asked too much and gave them a symbol.

The beginnings are cloudy, perhaps Mac answering an ad or following a rumour, found the vacant house with the affordable rent. He could leave his boyhood home. Andy, restless and rootless, said rightyo. Fleeing from a bank clerk's life, Nank had no choice. Nigel flowed with his friends. In one big struggle, they moved in. Beds were squeezed into a small room which they'd chosen as the master bedroom. Each would be master in his own bed. Trespassers prostituted. The lower half of Andy's doublebunk became the guest bed. Positioning a wornout couch, donated by a long gone tenant, against one wall of the large room, they joked about entertaining guests in this their stately country mansion. Nigel brightened the walls with Salvador Dali prints and posters of Hendrix and Cocker while Nank rigged up a series of plank on bricks shelves.

The final trailerload, kitchen table and chairs, suitcases crammed with clothes, Nigel's wooden chest full of magazines and paperbacks and the bargain basement fridge with \$29 written indelibly in red upon the cream door. They borrowed an old kero cooker promising to return it the day the stove was connected. That day never came. Mac asked his old man how chipheaters worked, Andy asked his. Together they got it heating. On that first night they hurried through their showers, the house was short of fuel, then lying in their beds they sipped beer, made plans, told jokes and worked through that strange misplaced feeling that comes in the dark of an unfamiliar room. During those crazy days and hazy weeks everybody had it bad once in a while, but always someone would begin, looking far into the ceaseless thresholds of the day, and many were the times that conversation drowsed away at dawn.

What y readin. Andy. What. Andy by Geoffrey Dutton. Who'd the fuck name a book after Andy. Yeh he's a croweater too. Australia's Catch-22! Any good. It's about this guy. Hey, I just remembered we've gotta pay the rent tomorra. Keep yr hair on. No, what I mean is, I'm broke. (Someone farted, Mac cut the air with a karate chop) I'll lendya the money, me cheque came yesterday, whend'ya get paid. Friday, that's if I finish the week, d'ya wan a job Nank. Why. I'm quittin. What the fuck for. Sick of pushin bloody mowers around all day and workin fr Bob gives me the shits. He's yr brother. Who wants t work fr their brother, y know, he always asks me to do things instead of some other dickhead. Remember Mac said he was gonna study fr his exams, what he do all day, played guitar with Pete Bowey. And a pissweak guitarist Pete is too. Apart from that and bein a pain in the neck, he's not a bad guy. Were you here the other day, he was talkin about stage acts, he reckons with this clarinetist he knows playin snakecharmin music we could come out of baskets, weaving from side t side strummin our guitars, canya imagine, dressed in saris uhhaha well I just didn't know where t look. Yr kiddin. He's not kiddin. I can see it slayin them in the aisles. I'll go t me folks place on the weekend and put in a final spurt, bloody Structures. Aint we good enough fr ya. Can't get a moments peace with you bastards clownin around. What's Structures. Ah, the breaking limit of materials an that. Fr bridges an things. Ye, kind of. Close yr legs yr breath smells. This guy at work told me another one, close yr legs yr hair needs cuttin, or y need a haircut, somethin like that. (Andy jumped down from his bunk). Anybody wan a drink a water. Yeh. Ever thought of visitin a pro. Whatya mean. A prostitute, haveya ever thought. Y feelin rangy or somethin. Take a trip down Hindley Street, or see if Beryl's still in business. Get lost, I

was readin this article, I forgot where, Dolly one of Janice's magazines. Oh yeh, I bet y buy it every week, how t trap a man in ten filthy lessons. Go on. Well it was sayin that because of the permissiveness of er modern youth, an the pill an all that, that the er er incidence y know the number of, the use of prostitutes has declined. Redundant prostitutes units (Bill who was paying one of his not infrequent visits, blewsucked two shrill notes on his mouthorgan) demand the right to fuck. Its funny really, I wonder why a girl'd become a prostitute. Perhaps they're nymphos. All of them, Y don't pay yr nymphos, d'ya Nigel. I don't know, there's so many things, and they've got no choice, its a social thing. I reckon they do it fr the money. They deserve it, grotty old deros and fat businessmen glad t be away from their wives, it'd make me puke. You'd make them puke. For the mistreated, mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute. Who's that. Dylan, the times they are a'changin. Y see them on Hindley Street, they even keep to the cliches of bright red lipsticks and peroxide blonde. Some girl at College, she wasn't talking specifically



about prostitution, said that in a male dominated world women will always be fleshy possessions, bought, psychologically socially not just monetary, bought for their cunts. Burn the Playboys, or we'll all be hrrch (Nigel slit his jugular with a deadly finger) after the revolution. Its only natural though, we wouldn't be here today if men weren't attracted to women's bodies. Its degradin. Bullshit. Prostitution I mean, fancy payin fr it, it'd be like goin shoppin. I'd have t feel the merchandise before I bought it. Test drive. Anybody'd think they enjoyed it, look at all the bonuses, gonorrhoea, syphilis. Howd'ya tell if Y've copped a dose. Hurts when y piss and y get boils or lumps y know spots, don't know about syphilis. It comes in three stages, if it gets t the third y go crazy, affects the brain. Takes a long time though, doesn't it. Don't know. I think I might have it. Yr just naturally mad Andy. It hurts when I piss a bit, an I've got this big pimple. Whod'ya catch it off. Get fucked! Sorry.

Better see the doctor quick, its fairly essy t cure if y catch it early. Besides it might be somethin else. Couldn't be Sylvy, she's never been with anybody else, must've been that bitch. The Gap. Don't worry, penicillin'll fix it. Wonder if poofs catch it. Couldn't Why not, if y can catch it off toilet seats. God are you dumb, they discovered that was impossible years ago, stopped puttin signs in the shithouses. Sodomy can be fun (Mac sang on, cocking his wrist). I couldn't come at that. They should bloody legalize it! I didn't say they shouldn't, it wouldn't suit me that's all. I reckon they should hand the lot by the balls. Let's get a good nights sleep fr a change eh. That Ginsbergs a hom isn't he, I was readin that Open Head book of yours this afternoon, the spit an come of centuries, somethin like that, some of 'is stuffs not bad. A bit rambly. Yeh, he's kinda scareda women, paranoic about cunts and producin babies. I think its somethin t do with his dead mother, he wrote a poem about her, Kaddish, she went mad, I'll get it forya if y like. Don' bother, Its brilliant really, sickening. I'll read it sometime. Dya fix the R4. Na, can't get at the bloody pump. Try takn it t Spencer's, he's pretty cheap. How do I get it there. Bill'll giveya a tow. If Andy says so, course I will. Shit, it's the elections on Saturday, I'd forgotten all about 'em livin out here. Big stiff, we don't get a vote. You'd vote informal anyway. Err err I'm sorry mister err what err comes after two. (Nank scratched his armpits and made a gorilla of his face). Gives the shits, yr old enough t die in a real fuckwit war, buy yr not mature enough t vote. Big stiff. Smart isn't it, the Liberals'd lose a few thousand votes if we could. It's time. If I see Joe Tumer singin that song once more I'll. They've got nearly all of Bellbird in on it. I really think they'll get in this time, attitudes are gradually changin. Not Nigel's old man's. He's just a petty bourgeoisie capitalist. Ah yeh, but he feels threatened. Ah yeh, but that's no excuse. How would you like it if y knew y'd be hardhit by a Labour government. Yr dad's almost gone bankrupt under a Liberal government, besides it's about time protits were trimmed. I wonder if they really will build an all Australian car, they tried once twenty years ago. More than that. Made bikes too. I'll believe that one when I see it. Ah yeh some of their promises are a bit wild, but fr chrissakes anythins better'n another three years of the bloody Liberals. Really liberal lot ain't they. I'll be on the run if they lose. Thats right, Mac was tellin me, y didn't register, your game. Not really, they've only convicted a few. Why didn'tya. Well it's like this Andy, I couldn't fill in the forms, I cut off me hands. (Andy swung a leg under his bunk, just missing Bill's head). Y bastard. He just wants t be an underground hero, y could've chanced the ballot, Mac and Nank missed out. Seriously folks seriously there's a few reasons, fr one I don't think we should be there at all an I'd rather the Vietcong won,

they're the people's choice. I don't know about that. Look I've studied the subject, this Indonesian lecturer, an he's no communist, said that nearly ninety per cent of the population support them, if only secretly. Y can't just say that. Yes I bloody can, howd'ya bloody think they could hold out against all the yank's armory, even beat'em. Jungle war fare's a different thing. And napalm makes a mess of the vegetation, not t mention the people, why don'tya read a few books about it beforeya comment. Come on, we had this out the other night when Ian was here. It just gives me the. Alright, alright let's frget it. Na, I agree with Bill, we shouldn't be involved. Fr chrissakes I'm goin t sleep. Maybe I don't know what I'm talkin about, but there's no need t get shirty. Anybody heard any good jokes lately. Talk about changin the subject, why don't we talk about the weather. We'll all be ruined, said Hamrahan. I did hear one actually, it's a real ripper. Oh yeah. No really, little Ockerballs, works with Andy, told me in the pub the other day, meant t tellya. Well tell us then. Well there's this guy see an one day when he was a kid he got his eye knocked out by, by a rock or somethin y know in a fight, anyway he gets a wooden eye put in instead an he's real lonely, so one day he says bugger it an goes t this dance, this guy with the wooden eye, well, when he gets there he feels embarrassed an just sits watchin everybody else dancin, well he's just sittin there. How long is this bloody joke. It's nearly finished y bastard, anyway before I was so rudely interrupted, he sits there watchin when he sees this dame an she's got a face like this (Nank opens his mouth then sucks in his cheeks until his mouth becomes a vertical slit) y know her mouth looks like a cunt, well he says t himself, shit if I can't get on with her I can't get on with anybody, we're the perfect match, so he plucks up his courage an walks over t 'er and asks 'er for a dance, and she, NO, he says would y like t dance an she says wouldn' I and he says, don't get personal cuntface. Haa. Is that it. Haaa. Wouldn' - wooden, get it. Haaarch. (They all laughed but Mac nearly died. His breathing came in thick pants between gales of laughter. His chest ached. It's common for insomnia to be produced by worry, sorrow, love and lust, even hiccups but laughing insomnia? Just when his room mates thought he'd stopped and were trying to sleep, a smothered giggle would infect his whole body and soon he'd be tossing from side to side, cackling hysterically).

Now Nigel's gone. An old Pulteney Grammer friend, 'Lugs', convinced him that Surfers was the place to be that summer and while everybody was saying he wouldn't go, he left. Being christened Nigel Dexter St. John-Sweeting would make anybody restless. The truth is, he would've relished sainthood, he needed worshippers at the sagging alter of his ego. Saints are known for their virtues, Nigel was known for his vice. He had an uncanny knack of winning and losing the love

of women. Many girls who vowed they couldn't stand him ended up in his arms at parties or backseat drive-in forays, others who had loved him at first touch later shuddered at the speaking of his name. Jealous jokes would cross the room as he disappeared with his latest girlishine into the communal bedroom. Often he would block the door with a chair. One warm and friendly night, Nank, returning from visiting Janice, blustered in then blundered out of the bedroom. Andy, seeing Nank's flustered expression, pointed a slapstick finger. Anita reading Gill knitting Mac strumming Bill thinking turned to see the figure of fun entering the lounge. How long they been in there. Only an hour or two, Mac exaggerated. Y could've warned me. Didn't get a chance did we. They weren't, Anita asked. From that moment a song grew. NIGEL'S IN THE BEDROOM, WONDERING WHAT TO DO, words flew randomly off Bill's tongue HE'S BEEN IN THERE FIFTY TIMES TONIGHT, Andy rhymed do to threw glue blue AND HIS FACE IS TURNING BLUE Nank laughed at every line AS HE DROPS THEM TO THE FLOOR, THE GIRLS CRY OUT FOR MORE Gill screwed up her nose "That's awful", now for the chorus DON'T AGGRAVATE MY HERNIA, Anita lay her head on Bill's shoulder "Let's go home" DON'T LET MY PRIMROSE BURNYER, Primrose! DON'T AGGRAVATE MY HERNIA, Mac inspectedrejecteddelected to fit the injected music YOU'LL RUIN MY CAREER. Perhaps Kathy heard or maybe she was already angry as she stormed outside to her getaway car. Meekfaced Nigel followed her halfhopefully then shrugged his surved shoulders and joined the merry songsters. Laughing it all away as they blackened each others names with contorted veise, singing of the caricatures that were the light in that old louse.

To Nigel's complaining parents the trip to Surfer's Paradise was just another milestone in the inexplicable course taken by their blacksheep son. They'd done their best, what more could they do. What can I do, Mrs. St. John-Sweeting worried, chewing a caramel with her morning coffee. She blamed it on their move to Gawler, he'd been happy at Pulteney. She'd been happy in England, or so she remembered. People respected you for what you were, and we're certainly not part of this riff-raff. He never settled down, fell in with bad company, bringing friends home at all hours of the day, I told Norman he should put a stop to the whole business. Mr. St. John-Sweeting rarely thought about his son, he pushed such disturbances deep into the recesses of his mind. His son reminded him of bad investments (1,000 shares in Mineral Holdings deceased) business blunders (ignoring advice and appointing a manager who fiddled the books and ruined the business) and scandals (being accused of misappropriating the rugby club's funds). He was also reminded of that unpleasant incident. Nigel had no right to visit his office without warning, it had finished

things with Audrey and he'd had to plead with his own son, virtually bribing him to keep the accusing words to himself. Mr. St. John-Sweeting rarely thought of his youngest son.

Gone Nigel gone. Watchfully silent, he felt the disintegration of his life there. The others, in the way they moved, spoke, implied, filed away his nerves. They cried bullshit when he bullshitted, asked him for money and used standover tactics at dishwashing time. Bondage. Freedom found by leaving. Bill, equipped with a foldup bed, moved in to restore the balance of payments. Andy, from time to time Nigel's closet friend, felt sour thinking of the fifty dollars he'd lent for mateship's sake. Bugger Nigel, Mac thought, skimming over the painstaking handwriting that said 'we've fixed for Goose to play at our social, boy it took some doing, looking forward to seeing your groovy band, especially the funky bass player, love June and Sue. Groovy! Very groovy my arse, we haven't played fr months, and where's the bass player who arranged this bum deal. Christ knows no. For drink's sake or in unconscious vengeance Nigel's derelect Austin was stoned, then set upon by the mob. That afternoon glass splintered in onto disembowelled seats, while Nank and Bill claimed the roof for the Southern Cross and the Australian way. It buckled under these heavy-weights. That fifty dollars worth Andy? Hey Andy remember we've got that bloody social out at Brinkworth tomorrow. She's right, the old van'll get us there. Hope Pete Bowcey'll play base. Him! We're desperate.

On that last longnight journey, squalsed between cymbals and speakers in Andy's cranky van heading up a lonely country highway to play twelvebar rockers to dancehungry boppers released from schoolcares, it all seemed illusion. Had there ever been a rock band named Incredible Goose? Where was the golden egg? Listening to memories of songs long gone, those first hectic nights, magic feeling in their fingers. Dark-room intimacy of Gawler Arms Hotel when everything seemed right and rock was sex and love was revolution. Children of the Beatles and the motherfuckin Stones, living in the decade of electric guitars (well the fifties had their sax players moanin in the bars) it took years to sift the truth from the trite, while rock heroes died and folk heroes lied. Ian sweating out a rhythm that could lock paroxysmal feet in a stupor, ominous base rumblings, sharp notes sighing from Mac's caressed Gibson, Lesley's harsh angel's voice mixing with drunken snarls, and sometimes they were brilliant. Nothing really mattered except the moments themselves, Bill could seize the microphone drunkenly and chant in a singsong voice Mama, did Jesus wear make-up, Daddy, did Buddha use ballpoint and dancing head Chris could listen and never worry. Summertime and the living is

easy. Was easy. City discos with fluorescent paint and incredulous crowds, Mac's Zeppa routine stirring up enemy rocksingers y can't rubbish other groups on stage, dishonest managers, crowds requesting Hello Mary Lou, Lesley complaining about Led Zeppelin songs ruining her voice, Ian losing beat thinking about groupies, amplifiers blowing, Andy talking to other roadies about the hassles, bigtalk managers promising fame and fortune, the competitive race becoming all too obvious, Gill tired of the nights lost in backstage waiting. Lesley's laryngitis, everybody sensing that the end had begun, music curdling in their heads, disastrous gig at the Octagon, enthusiasm dead. On that last mission for rock'n roll they remembered that mixedup beauty, and wondered whether they could bear the tears of time.

Was it all worth it? The group, the house, their lives worth. A day's worth, a night's worth, worth a year, mirth worth, dearth of worth, a song's worth, are symbols worth, worth earth world worth, is it is it is it is worth.

by Andrew Macfarlane.



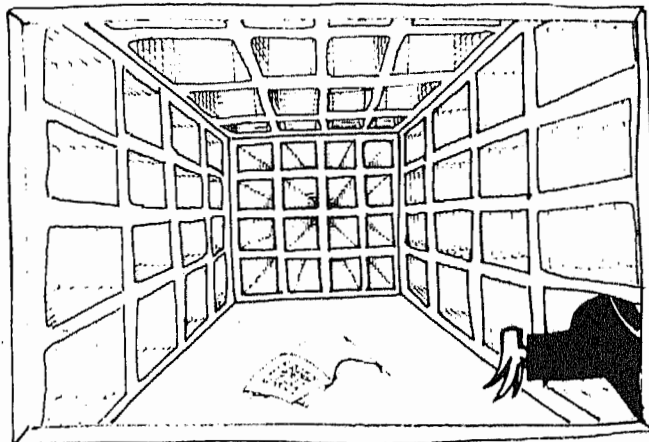
THE REVELATION OF MR. LIDINUM

by Peter White.

Ever since last summer holidays I've been looking for a tree. I haven't spent much time at it, I've had other things to do. I'm not the sort of person who's much good at finding things though. My father often says (he's often saying things) that you see truly, only when you're not looking. Well that's when I've been doing my searching, when I'm not looking, at the times I've had to stop and straighten the mud guard on my bike or pick a bit of gravel out of my sandals. That's when I've looked, but always out of the corners of my eyes you understand. I haven't found it yet, this particular tree, the flock of bird's tree. Perhaps I ought to explain, seeing you wouldn't know what I'm talking about as yet.

"Roll up, roll up, get your tickets here for the greatest mystery mirror maze of all time. Lidinum's Luminous Labyrinth, guarantees to baffle, bemuse and befuddle. Lose your way in the endless passages, in the countless reflections which twist and turn beyond mind's comprehension. Never, since Minos and his Minotaur, has such complexity been realized in confusing corridors of light. Come one come all to the maze that no man can map. Test your mind, your balance, your courage in this turbulence of twisting twilight. Roll up, roll up, get your..." And on and on the man shouted. Of course I and my brother didn't ever listen to that anymore. We must have heard it about a million times already. He could really talk though, that man. I reckon he was an actor once, out of vandyville, with his name on posters all over the place, sort of destitute now and doing this side show stuff. It's just when you've heard something so many times before, well you don't listen.

We were standing by the entrance to the maze sort of insignificant in the crowd because nobody there knew us. I love that feeling, nobody knowing who I am or who my grandpa is or that my dog's had fleas or that I once came bottom of the girls at speed and accuracy in Grade Four. I called up to my brother, "Have we got enough time to go in?" He with the indifference of a consciously mature thirteen year old who just happened to have been given a large watch for his last birthday, answered vaguely, "Yes we have, it's only half past two.



Now you haven't gone and lost your money like last time have you? If we have to go home and get some more we really won't have time."

"Of course I've got it silly, right here tied up in my hanky."

My brothers been getting kind of bossy like that lately. It's probably because this is his first year at high school and he thinks he's got to be stuffy and not do what he really wants to do as a result of his greater age and maturity. I get really mad with him when he gets like that. I've even begun to worry that he might think he's too old to go to the maze anymore although I suppose he'd have to be really bad before that happened.

The mirror maze, you see, must be about the most important thing in my and my brother Guy's life and for that matter in the lives of most of the other children in our neighbourhood. I remember one Sunday at Sunday School (my mother and father are very religious you know, especially my father, who's got an old walking stick that used to belong to the Devil. He bought it for a shilling at a church jumble sale. It could be worth as much as a genuine holy relic such as a piece of Christ's cloak he told me once, if he could find the right buyer that is). Well on this Sunday, it was about a year ago, we had this very nice Mr. Sloam as our teacher. He was very young for a Sunday School teacher, that is about fifty. My best friend Gabby says she doesn't know how he was allowed to teach seeing as her brother told her that a person has to be at

least eighty before they're allowed to teach Sunday School, that's to make sure they're properly good and clean living. Not that I'd believe Gabby's brother. I told my father anyway about Mr. Sloam and how he was too young and all. Well he sat there as I was telling him, still as a dead snake under a hot sky and then suddenly stood up without even looking at me and walked out of the room. He came back again immediately with his Devil's walking stick and began waving it at me as if it were a magic wand. He did calm down a bit after a while, placed me on his knee and began to stroke the back of my neck all creepily. Then in his S.S. voice he whispered into my ear, "Do you know what my little one I think your Mr. Sloam must look young for his age." Sometimes I'm not only half sure my dad's nuts.

Well back to this time at Sunday School, Mr. Sloam was taking the lesson in his black suit with its watch and chain that Guy's friend Alexander says he'll steal some day. Alexanders all bad though you see. Mr. Sloam was being intimate and sympathetic about our childhood problems, not going on about angels and archangels, the blood of the lamb and all that. This Sunday he was asking us what was the most important thing or person in our lives. After he'd finished his little talk he stood with an understanding smile on his face waiting for a reply. There was absolute silence. You could have heard a pine-cone drop on a tin roof, twenty miles away. Then there was a bit of scraping of the little Sunday School chairs as some of the kids shuffled. They always do that when they're embarrassed. Kids of nine years would much rather be told about angels and archangels and fire and brimstone than be asked about what was most important in their lives, they're just not prepared for that sort of stuff at Sunday School. You could see from the twinkle in Mr. Sloam's eye that he had expected this momentary reticence. He obviously had great faith in the good sense and exuberance children would display if given a chance. So he waited, benevolent, letting us take our own time. About long enough to hear five pine-cones drop, that was all we needed and we'd worked out just what old Mr. Sloam was after. Christopher Nombkin was the first to put up his hand. I reckon if we hadn't all been staring so hard at Christopher Nombkin we'd have seen Mr. Sloam jump for joy.

"Yes Christopher" he said "and what is most important in your life?"

"My dog, Mandy" Christopher Nombkin mumbled. Christopher Nombkin is kind of dumb, a bit backward. He would have lisped except he never said enough to give his tongue a chance to slip. He's

the kind of boy I'd never call "spastic" even if he'd just thrown my ball away into old Mrs. Jame's front yard because I reckon he's a bit too much like a spastic, sort of wrong in the head to be called one. I might call him a perv. If you call another kid that you have to be quick to add "And I bet you don't even know what that is" before they get a chance to say "Oh Shut up stupid. You wouldn't even know what a perv is". Christopher Nombkin wouldn't think of saying that, he's that dumb.

With that reply Mr. Sloam must have glowed all over.

"You're a very fortunate young man Christopher," he said. Mr. Sloam always calls us young men or young women, it doesn't sound half bad.

"A dog can truly be man's best friend". He gave that last bit, the way he does the bits out of the Bible. Come to think of it, it might be out of the Bible. St. Paul probably said it. My dad reckons old Paul really had it in for women so perhaps he loved dogs instead.

"Now, Margaret, what's most important in your life?" Mr. Sloam continued with his lesson. Perhaps I shouldn't say too much about Margaret, considering that I never got on too well with her. Sh's fat, not that I'd hold that against her, its just that as well as fat sh's mean and stuck up and thinks she's smart and always knows the answer, and all the parents who've got no brains thinks she's sweet. But she's not, she's mean, that meanst kid at school. When Mr. Sloam asked her she settled herself down like an old hen, but it wasn't an egg she was sitting on, no it was the answer she knew was right. She cleared her throat, looked up all eyes at Mr. Sloam and said "Well Mr. Sloam, most important are my parents who've looked after me and brought me up in a Christian home and secondly the Bible which has helped me to live according to God's wishes."

Almost half the class were in an advanced state of strangulation after they'd heard that lot and the other half were coughing violently into their handkerchieves when it was all too much for Christopher Nombkin who fell backwards off his chair. Perhaps he's not so dumb as I thought. Old Mr. Sloam was oblivious to the row. I don't think I've seen anyone look as happy as he did then, except perhaps our old labrador the morning after she'd given birth to three damp, sucking splats of fur.

I reckon he was just about ready to take off and transmigrate into thin air.

"You Margaret" he said "are a young woman of rare wisdom. Your's is a sensitivity far beyond your meagre years."

I kind of felt sorry for Mr. Sloam then, such a nice old bloke and so dumb. It was on account of this feeling that I didn't say anything mean when he turned to me and asked, "Well young lady and what about you, is it a dog or perhaps a person?" I didn't even stop to think, it came straight out like a rabbit from a burrow full of ferrets.

"Mr. Lidinum" I blurted.

"Mr. Lidinum?" he questioned.

"Why, Mr. Lidinum of the Luminous Labyrinth, of course."

Lidinum's Luminous Labyrinth was no ordinary mirror maze, ten foot square tent with a few old mirrors which couldn't confuse a blind man. There were mirrors alright, and about an acre of them but that wasn't all. It was the island of twilight that made Lidinum's what it was. The outer regions of the Labyrinth were this enormous mirror maze. I never really learnt it properly. I could find my way pretty well, but then nothing like my brother. He used to go through running with his eyes closed, never bumped his head or harmed mirrors and I crashed often enough with my eyes wide open. Not that I was half bad. I could beat any other kid my age in a race through and my brother even let me join his team a couple of times. He and the other boys his age had this game they'd play by the hour which led to more than a few fights. One team was hunter, the other hunted.

With the teams at opposite ends the hunted had to get two through uncaught. To begin you had to know how not to get lost and if you didn't know all the corridors like you knew the stains on the bathroom ceiling you soon got trapped. The problem was you'd see a hunter in front and he'd really be behind on account of all the reflections. If you really knew the mirrors you knew just where to ambush. They say Guy, that's my brother, never got caught, at least no-one remembers having caught him and I know why. It was because Guy went through The Twilight. No-one else could. They'd try alright but after wandering about lost in those shadows for half an hour they were easy prey. You could tell before you caught them if they'd been into The Twilight.

At the centre of the maze was an empty space no corridors only shadows. You could never see across it. We tried shining Gabby's twelve volt under-

water flashlight into The Twilight once. It wasn't any use. There were always things in The Twilight, ladders, portcullises and if you ventured in away from the corridors, staircases opened before you, empty rooms appeared. Always there were sounds. Sea noises like when I'm trying to go to sleep at our beach shack and the waves keep beating, the sound a train makes when you put your head to the rail and hear it panting a mile off, they're all there. My brothers always seeing the queerest things in The Twilight. One afternoon on the way home he kept mumbling to himself about this girl. I know he'd been in The Twilight for about three hours. A great fir tree had appeared before him, he'd passed by and lost himself in a dense forest. From down the avenues of trees a girl had come dancing, he said her name was Marika, she led him laughing back through the thickets to the great tree. He's strange, my brother. Of course it's not real, all just electronic gadgets, loud speakers and hidden microphones, lenses, projectors and stuff like that, but that doesn't make any difference, no difference at all.

Outside the maze on that morning my brother and I were still standing. I was kicking at the dust with my old red sandals. I'm very interested in dust, especially the dust at the funfair. Guy's friend Alexander once found an old army medal in the dust. He says his father told him that it's three hundred years old. I don't know, Alexander tells as many lies as would the Devil at a Sunday School picnic, but it certainly was a queer old coin, really ancient looking and not a speck of rust. I reckon there's all sorts of stuff in the dust, mostly diamonds of course, a few rare coins and an oboriginal axe-head or two. I kick the dust a lot you know.

Guy was standing, hands in his pockets staring up at the entrance. He always does that before he goes in, as if he's about to be baptised. His hair was kind of funny that day. He's got rotten hair. The wind was flicking it up about the edges. I don't usually notice hair or hands, just teeth. I've got a very profound interest in teeth. Finally he took one large breath and we began pushing our way through the crowd towards the ticket office.

The maze was quiet that day, a few dumb old tourists knocking themselves about and shrieking their heads off like a pack of demented orangutans let loose in a Nobby's Nuts factory. Tourists are the kids who come for a day at the funfair. Us local kids wouldn't go near the ferris wheel or the ghost train, but these kids just do the rounds.

They've got no appreciation for the maze. We trotted past a rather dazed group of these amateurs. They just stared as we glided past like two ghosts not feeling our way or bumping the mirrors.

"Did you see that, they were running!" I heard muttered behind as we past on. It doesn't half make you feel good.

"Now we're in and there aren't too many tourists (you should hear the expression he puts on tourists). I'll try and break my five minute record." Guy called back over his shoulder.

That's his best time for going around blindfolded. He could do better except that last time he knocked down three "tourists". The owner found out and got sort of nasty, about as mad as a centipede with chilblains. He has to take it a bit easy. Guy turned,

"I'm starting from here, tie my hanky and make goddam sure it's tight, you never were much good at knots."

That was a lie mind you, I'd be about the best knot tier in the street, about a hundred times better than Guy. That's why he goes on about it I suppose. Once I tied our old labrador to the kitchen table, a couple of strong loops about the stomach. She didn't shift an inch, moved the table though, right into the lounge room, still attached. I always said she was strong.

"Take my watch and don't drop it." He's not usually as bad tempered as that, but he gets nervous before a record attempt.

"Count down from twenty and make sure you watch it closely, I reckon I'm going to do it, just hell, if those tourists..." He was gone.

His reflection remained for a moment, countlessly repeated, then lost. One and a half minutes had passed when I saw him again but heading back. I thought at first it must be a freak reflection but then I saw that his handkerchief was off and he was looking really excited.

"Hey Phoebe," he yelled "Come on I've seen it. I've seen the light. I've seen the light in the maze." Despite the fact I didn't have the foggiest idea what he was going on about, I still managed a pretty funny answer.

"What's that" I said. "You haven't gone and knocked down Billy Graham have you?"

"Oh shut up stupid and just follow me. I didn't have to come back for you." We moved quickly down the corridors silent as two detectives stalking their prey down some old dump of an alley.

And then I saw the light. That must have been about the biggest let down I ever had in my life. Just a dumb old candle flame flickering away down the corridor. I don't like to admit it but we might just have been moving a trifle quick for me. At a certain speed the corridors you once knew, seems to change shape. Clear glass panes appear where they shouldn't be and the corridors bend suddenly in the wrong directions. It wasn't too easy to notice anything moving at this speed but one thing I couldn't miss was that the candle wasn't getting any closer. Then we left the mirrors and plunged into the empty space of shadows. I didn't feel much like some smart detective anymore, not silent either.

"Hey Guy," I panted, "Ease up a bit I can't keep it up." I'd admit any day that I was puffed but never that I was scared, but he didn't stop. We were running in a valley, dry wind was blowing and above the sky was black. High up these great black birds were hovering. I'm no nature study genius but I reckon they were vultures, I could just make out their mean looking talions. It didn't help at all to know it was all fake. Cactuses began to line our path now, you know the long tall sort. At first there were just a few and then more until it was just as good as a forest. We were on a path winding between those great prickly shapes, I wouldn't have stumbled then for anything. The candle was up ahead, disappearing for a moment around a curve then flickering again. I knew now how cactus live so long in the desert, they suck up light, not water. The candle light wasn't glowing like it should, just a sphere as if it were a jelly in a bowl that couldn't get out. I've never seen light with round edges like that before. I reckon it was the cactuses. Then the candle was gone, the cactuses ended and stood in a wall behind us. The ground rose before us, sandy with a few rocks and on the top of the rise stood a wrecked Hosienda. A light was flickering in a window. You might ask how I knew it was a Hosienda, well my brother's an El don Conquistador fanatic. El don Conquistador is this Spanish bloke on television, a kind of South American Robin Hood who is always masked and is really good with a sword. Not that I watch television, I avoid it conscientiously but if you're intelligent you can't help absorbing a few facts now and then. So I know that without a doubt this was a Hosienda, wrecked though, obviously been done over by bandidos. We walked slowly up to the great wooden gate that rested smashed against the outer wall. We paused in the dim shadow the gateway caste in the darkness. The

courtyard was bare, a few old tiles lying on the closely set brick paving and an old Spanish saddle rearing in an open doorway. I heard a guitar being strummed in the distance and a woman sort of humming.

We stepped in under the gateway and it vanished, nothing remained but light, bright white light. Then I saw him, this funny looking bloke seated at the side of a great clear glass prism that rose like a pillar, taller than a very tall man. Neither Guy nor I exactly moved, in fact we were about as still as the encyclopedia on the library shelf at school. I just stared rudely I guess. This bloke had the rottenest teeth that I had ever seen. Of the few he still had some were yellow, others brown and all chipped. I could see them so well because he had his mouth open in a stupid grin like our dog when its got stomach pain. He was watching us closely. I shut my mouth, I can't stand people staring at my teeth. Not that they're half bad, only one filling last year. Then he began to speak in this low thin voice with about as much tremolo as an electric organ at a funeral service. "At last we meet my boy" he addressed to my brother. "Long you have wandered, long have you struggled in my darkness, yet always I have watched lest you stumble. It is not without reason nor without purpose that you alone have been led through the unbra. But of late a great premonition has been upon me, I have seen you straying hence to the world of reality drawn by your new adolescence. Truly that must come but not yet, firstly you must understand.

"But Sir", Guy interrupted "Is it you who has led me through all these years, everytime?" The old bloke sort of chuckled "Yes indeed my boy 'twas I."

"But then Sir, you must be Mr. Lidinum." The old bloke exploded with laughter, "Well perhaps my boy, but many are my names and few that know them. Some have called me by that name but not I, not I."

Well, as I'm sure you'll understand, I was starting to get a little fed up by all this. That "first premonitions" and purpose bit wasn't half bad, almost as good as the John the Baptist I saw in "The Man Of Gallilee" at the pictures last year. But when my brother started making a fool of himself with his "Sirs" and the old bloke went into his Rumpelstiltskin naming act I'd just about had enough.

"Well then what do you call yourself, Sir?" I demanded (you should have heard the expression I got into "Sir"). There was absolute silence. Then

pointing at me, "What is that?" he insisted, sending his voice through two full octaves of the chromatic scale. He didn't give either of us a chance to answer.

"Ah, now I see, there is no great dissimilitude of countenance, your parturition has been of one woman." Big words seemed to calm him down.

"Now my young presumptuous one. You ask my name. That you need not do. Look upon me and all will be made known." I hadn't really looked upon him, as he said, yet. I never notice people's clothes only their teeth but when I did look at him, well I wouldn't say it gave me a shock but he was absolutely all colours. He didn't seem to have any shoes and socks and his only garment was this multi-coloured sacklike thing. That wasn't the surprising thing however, not at all.

The sack garment was made of patches and each patch seemed to be a side-show poster. Stretched sideways across his chest was this faded yellow one, You could just make out the lettering. "Buffalo Bill and his Hootin' Tootin' Cowboys" it said in this real archaic type printing. I reckon that one must have been about as old as my grandpa.

I couldn't make out the others too well but around his ankles I could distinguish a couple of Can-Can girls. It couldn't have been made of paper but it certainly looked like it. "Well," he said, "who am I, you have looked upon me, What is my name?" My brother always was a bit queer. I guess its the genetic background but what inspired his next outburst I'll never know.

"The coat, the coat" he mumbled. "The coloured coat, coloured....," he paused, "the coat of many colours. You're Joseph from the Bible, Joseph who was cast in the pit by his envious brothers, envious of that coat."

After the shock of that absurd jibberish I couldn't catch my breath for a moment but when I saw the reaction of the old man I almost suffocated. He was skipping around the prison almost beside himself with happiness, chuckling and chirping at the same time.

"Oh my son how could I have doubted you. Such boundless perspicacity, such endless sensitivity in one so young it quite becomes a thing of doubtful possibility" he collapsed in a colourful heap at the foot of the glass. Peering out at us from the level of his dirty feet he began, quite obviously, to tell us the story of his life.

"Truly that is my name, Joseph, though when first my mother called me to her side it was not that

sound which shaped her lips. No, when we suffered in the dust of Egypt's plains it was a different tongue we spoke. Aye, that I was, Joseph of the Coat of many Colours. It was a fine coat. Woven in the spring for love, worn within the winter's wind for warmth." He wasn't looking at us any longer but held his rather scabrous big right toe in a fixed stare." And ripped in summer's heat for hate. How young I was then and so beautifully sad. My brothers, aye they came with evil and cast me out into the desert. Nay, 'tis not true, it was not my coat they took but a shred, a multi-coloured shred that was as the borealis of the Arctic skies."

"Baloney," I muttered to the region of my diaphragm. "Baloney."

"But how is it that I am here now, you must ask. They cast me into darkness but it was no ordinary pit, it was a gap within the worlds, an emptiness of space."

He lifted his head slowly to stare at us.

"And it is within that emptiness that you stand alone with me, a man? Nay. A spirit? No, a reflection, perhaps...perhaps. The years passed and within each I took the sand and grain by grain cast it molten beneath the sun into this great glass beneath which I stand. Now we rest here, imprisoned in a funfair mirror maze." He was laughing hysterically but deep inside his stomach. You couldn't hear it, just see it in his eyes like when a dog cries. He stopped and the laughter trickled out of him. He was much calmer "But it is not a place without joy, the laughter of children and have we not made it the greatest mirror maze of all time! The mirrors they are of no significance, it is the darkness. I and the glass build these visions. The seas which rise, the swooping birds, the weeping crowd are but tempting shadows which we, their masters, cast upon the empty sand. "He was up now executing a kind of hopping jib.

"Baloney," I said and this time loud enough so he could hear me.

"Baloney". He stopped, taken aback, not punched in the stomach taken aback but tripped on the shoulder when you're trying to stick your used wad of chewing gum under the desk type taken aback. He didn't say anything, then seemed to gather himself. "What was that young lady? You seem inordinately incredulous." I bet he didn't think I'd know that one but I did, I knew it right off.

"I jolly well ought to be" I answered "I don't reckon I ever heard so much rubbish before. You've got a fine vocabulary alright and a pretty high

reading age as well but, Mr. Joseph, (I wasn't going to call him "Sir") from the very beginning you've got your information all wrong. That Joseph wasn't left in the pit, they took him out and sold him to traders who took him to Egypt and he interpreted dreams and got into trouble with the Pharaoh's wife and ended up saving everybody."

"Ah yes little girl you would say that wouldn't you, you're referring of course to that most inaccurate book the Bible, most inaccurate. That bit about me in the Pharaoh's Palace was probably one of my brother's inventions, most creative chaps my brothers. Completely false the information though, completely false."

"But it's all just impossible" I yelled "How do you live in here, how can you speak English and what about food, you've got to eat." He took a very patronising breath and sat down again. "Ah well" he grunted "then I must explain. The English that is easy. I have had centuries, I listen, I learn and surely I am the greatest polyglot of all time. Hebrew, Assyrian, Hittite, Samaritan, Classical Persian, Libyan, Aeolian, Dorian and Ionian Greek, I have them all. English was not without difficulties though, I have no teacher and all my knowledge must be gleaned from those few books dropped within the maze. Surely there have been papers, the trotting guide, campaign posters, religious pamphlets and every now and then a paperback volume. That's how I came by the Bible, lying in the sand, some new illustrated version." He paused, he seemed quite pleased with himself. I had to think too. That about the books certainly could explain the queer ways he spoke. Sometimes straight off some evangelistic handout but getting mixed up with Science Fiction terms. I mean if he only read what he found, no-one was going to drop the complete Oxford dictionary in there, let alone an English Grammar.

"And as for food" he sighed "that is a sad story. A half a hot dog here, plucked from the dust, the crumbs from a coconut donut, perhaps a whole hamburger dropped in a moment of hilarity by some over stuffed youth." I was thinking fast not I knew he was wrong but if that was all he ate, it certainly would explain his rotten teeth. But I wasn't worried about myself, I would never be taken in. It was my brother Guy, you see. He's as gullible as they come. I was worried for him. He was just standing there... in awe.

"Well then why did you lead us here" I demanded. "through that corny old desert and that Hosienda that must have come out of some late night movie?"

"Young lady, " I think he was angry now, "If your memory serves you correctly you will recall that it was not you, plural, that I sought but rather your brother, singular. You came quite uninvited and quite unwelcome."

That shut me up. He turned towards Guy.

"Come Guy, stand beneath the glass and stare with me into depths. I have brought you here so that you might see the source of all your dreams. The source of every flickering light that led you through the darkness. 'Tis your skill that has made you great in the ways of the maze but without that flickering of flame never would you have run with such ease across the darkness of illusion. I have called you that you might understand, but that is not all. I summon you to serve me in the world outside where I can never tread."

Taking a small cloth bag from within a fold of his garment, I think it was from behind the head of Errol Flynn, he continued to address Guy.

"Take, within you'll find the seed of cactus fruit and you must seek the cactus tree. When you're guests complete, plant one seed amongst the cactus aging roots. I know these trees within your land are few and you must find but one, Cactus tree has trunk of brown, to all appearance like another tree but the cactus is a tree of strangeness. Clasp that trunk, it harbours prickles, beat upon its bark, no ordinary wood but like a drum it's hollow there within. Stand beneath, look up and see the branches, angular, no softness as of other trees. It moves not with the winds, never swaying but jerks alone as with the distant winds of desert shores. Look truly at the cactus leaves upon the boughs, great green wings. They are a flock of birds, frozen, their wings spread wide to beat the air, caught and held, forever bound." He stopped, the silence spread, not because I was overcome by his words or anything dumb like that, far from it, I was just annoyed. It was all too idiotic to be true. Why should he want to give Guy cactus seed. But he was talking again.

"Here, take it my boy, take it now and seek the cactus tree that is a flock of birds caught in flight."

Guy turned and sort of stumbled towards me, leaving the old bloke standing beneath the prism.

"Come on Phoebes" he mumbled "Come on." As we passed on out through the mirrors towards the exit I tried to reason with him "You didn't believe all that junk did you Guy, you didn't believe him did you"

"Shut up" was all he said "Oh shut up will you Phoebe..."

THOUGHTS

Anonymous First Year Student.

All through the dark
we knew we should be silent,

The air held us
in a glistening forest of vertical cold compress.

Now it's 7 a.m.
Grey and white birds
stand ground and gaze about,
then flutter and land again, in silence;
respectful mutterings
and sidelong glanceabouts.

Morning ants troop amid the boulders
and cool air streams at my feet
which I disturb as I pass,

pale orange cloud fragment...
isolate..
not quite overhead;
well timed leaf
spirals down on invisible thread.

We live and wait
while a silent careful climax is building,
in white heat bands
and sad lines of brush strokes.
Wraiths of night assemble and vanish;

there are melancholy phantom hills above the hills
drifting and evolving on the tide
of the breath of morning.

The hills subside,
bow down to the sun;
it wordlessly accepts the hush
and the bend and flutter of
treeleaf, birdwing and eyeblink.

Golden overview blues the sky
and warms the city
melting nights invisible pineforest of frost trees.

I turn my head
and live warmth again,
I feel the day.

She is the watercolour girl
 in the clear memory
 of a few weeks past.
 Down there at her height
 her here-I-am eyes
 glance living thoughts
 Child's hair of gold
 frames her far away face.
 She giggle smiles her thoughts to you
 and you'd love her -
 the girl of the sidelong glance;
 of feminine mystique so misty.
 Cool here below
 in the pool of my mind -
 my water colour girl is not mine.



I hope I wont forget
 why a red raincoat
 will always make me think of the sea.
 She a spot of red running in the rain
 far up the beach;
 wanted to be alone - to dance.
 I don't want to forget
 why short sun blond hair
 will make me wonder what painters are thinking.
 She seemed to love parts of the pictures she showed
 me;
 she spoke of the live and movement and moved her
 hand in the air
 as her voice mused, excited, thinking.

I will remember her -
 when hurrying from her room to the kitchen
 she had to stop and gaze far out and away
 at the oceanic winter sunset
 which had silently begun without her -
 standing silent and barefoot before the windows,
 startled by the day's ending.

I've just been down to the river.

I was a seagull - twenty seagulls
 and our reflections
 coinciding pink underfeathers at river's surface.

Glassless black dog,
 I nosed the leaves;
 crunching ecstatically.
 No time to smile it all.

Below two pairs of blue jean knees I lay.
 Pure smooth, the blue cool sky and
 she-and-I, he-and-I we in love
 lay rocking our hired rowboat
 on the river.
 Single simple fact of the pair of us
 not separate....
 one world our one love, our laughing.

the unworded certainty of existence.

As a duck
 I bobbed updown
 and walked graceful circle steps
 above the silent river bed.
 Webbed feet plunged into cool silence,
 reeds.

From the clouds or treetops
 the scene is a sincere green,
 a rolling green;
 the soft mossy mother earth
 to kneel in and clasp.
 From the clouds
 there is sunshine
 and a soft breeze to bear us down
 smiling weightless
 into the cool shade
 of earth's shaded river valley.

A CASUALTY

A Winter's day
In a deep and dark remember...

White sight -
Black night -
Speeding sleekness
Radiating red pulses
Alarm!

The expectant emptiness,
My yet malformed
Clinical Objectivity,
Both pierced
By the revolving rays

Siren's wail
Orderly's hail
She, young, pale
Smothered in comatose veil
of turbid pregnant mistiness...

In a body
Slowly, smoothly, sadly
Slipping
into a barbiturate vacuum

In a soul
Slowly, smoothly, sadly
Sliding
towards release
and Oneness
with a barbiturate cosmos

A bell barks.
Computerized white coats
....On legs
....Scurry
Cubicle 1.
'Shit'
'Another bloody overdose!'
'Haven't I seen her before?'
'B.P.?'
'Pulse?'
'Temp?'
'Breathing?'
'Colour?'
'Blood?'
'Reflexes?'
'Auscultation?'
'Pupils?'
'Respiration?'
'Drip!'
'Catheter!'
'B.P.?'
'Pulse?'
Safe!
(Safe?)
Wheeled ward-ward
(Forward?)
'Treatment conservative'
(Treatment?)
'Now where's that ectopic
with the Cullen's sign
you mentioned?

ADMISSION

Day breaks

A paler shade of grey

And with it....

Injections...

The nourish the humours.

That cathiarize the hand that holds the
stethoscope?

Ejection...

Release,

From the haemangioma

Of corridors and bedridden sinuses

With their white coated, pink bonnetted cor-
puscles.

Bowel passed,

by a system

of organ analysis

in which

feeling is palpation,

involvement a textbook,

and objectivity the bastard offspring of person
patient dichotomies

Rejection....

Still rotting the spirit,

Dissipating the soul.

Emotions,

Sensitized by bodily insults,

Sacrificed on the altar of Medical Science.

She

Swallowed again

by a world

Where

Love is a can of pet food.

Drifting

Bogged

Swampy marsh fog

Swirling through a dream

Deep

Throbbing

Slowly sinking sleepward

Sobbing

Cold and dark

Blue and bleak

A vile void

of lonely despair

So very, very cold

No light

No warmth

No one

Better an empty nothingness

Than a painful emptiness

Sensation

Seeping, peeping

Dull and distant

...Intimates

The death tide's ebb

That will leave

Bitterness

Its beached debris.

This resentment...

Regretful or reproachful?

Psychiatric or iatrogenic?

by Shaun Brennecke . .

CONSCRIPTED - A MODERN FAIRY TALE

The day had worked hard, the sun had spread its radiance across the sky and now pointed westward as it followed the day to the distant oceans. Cooking dinner by a new shining yellow orange sun which in reality was the dead wood of the Australian bush, burning up into masses of dancing flame, sat an old lonely man. He looked at his friends who sat about him and there were none. He looked at his wife and children as they stood watching him, but they did not exist. So he looked into the glowing flames. His old friend the fire, his family the fire, and he told the burning wood a story from his youth.

"Did I tell you about the time I was travelling through some foreign country, it's different there now they changed the Government, even the name and now I can not remember the old name. Yes, well I was travelling about a bit, like I'm still doing, I've come to the border of this country. I was first going to cross over the country to get to the other side. I never got there! to the country on the other side. I was waiting for a train just inside the border, only the train must have been blown up, ambushed, on the train drivers must have been on strike. The train never came that day, nor any other day for all I know. Pity! Pity it didn't come. The station was a dirty spot covered in defaced propaganda posters, I read the posters while I waited. After waiting and the train not arriving, and waiting some more the station master suggested I spend the night at an inn in the town.

There had been people at the railway station who chatted while waiting for trains, about fighting occurring in the North. As I was just passing through I took no notice, all I knew was that some rebels were shooting at the Government troops with foreign guns and bullets, and that the Government troops were shooting back with foreign guns and bullets. The same foreigners, who supplied the foreign guns and bullets, were busy trying to stop the fighting. Meanwhile the rebels fired their foreign bullets from their foreign guns, and the Government troops fired back with foreign bullets from foreign guns. Both accused each other of using foreign bullets and foreign guns, and both bought more foreign bullets and foreign guns from the foreign countries who were trying to stop the fighting.

The town was SMALL and drab, and the inn was smaller and drabber. My room was tiny and drabber still, and it goes without saying that my bed was too small and was equipped with a worse quality than drab, it was lumpy. But I fell asleep, and awoke as if I'd hit the ground after falling off a cliff. I awoke with blood tears of pain, on command some soldier had belted me in the stomach with the butt of his rifle. After coughing, spluttering and vomiting, like a decapitated dog, over the floor, I was dragged into the street and kicked until I stood to attention.

I stood like a modern American executive with ulcers, I stood in a line of pathetic and beaten people. A major suddenly appeared, walked up and down the rows of pathetic and beaten people. He stared and looked, peering straight into their eyes, and screamed questions into their minds.

They! the major that is, suspected that there was a rebel hiding in the town. So he decided to horrify the residence of the town in order to find the non-existent rebel. As an example to us all a toothless, short sighted, old man was pulled out of line and the Major executed him with his revolver. Encouraged by the death of the old man, which pleased the Major no end when the old man promptly died as the Major's bullet entered his brain, the Major had a middle aged, dumb peasant and an old woman shot by a firing squad. Both of these, as anticipated, promptly died when riddled by a mass of bullets.

The Major completely unsuccessful in finding the rebel had a turn of heart and let all the children under sixteen go free, to fend for themselves in a ravaged town. All the men, including me unfortunately, were conscripted into the army. The Major then picked out one or two women for himself and his officers and gentlemen, one of the peasants objected and was shot. The Major, like a true officer and gentleman handed over the rest of the women to his men.

So I was now a soldier, and my "mates" and I were put through four weeks of horrifying basic training. The basic training was torture, physical

training sessions lasting hours were immediately followed by oppressive, brain washing, propaganda lectures. One particular horrifying lecture I can still recall. A stiff looking General strutted into the lecture room, introduced himself as Major Mundinoff, said that he was going to give us a lecture called Nates for a soldier, he then ejaculated what follows:

A soldier is Christ defender. Remember the Army is your family, your Commander is your father; Your Comrade is your Brother; your inferior is a young relative. If you remember this all will be happy, friendly, easy! Don't think for yourself, obey your Commander, he will think for you, perish but obey your commander. Under fire advance in open order, attack, attack! Strike with your fist, not your open hand. Don't expect relief support will come when you have thrashed the enemy. Only he who is afraid is beaten. Always attack, never defend.

If you bayonet breaks strike with the stock, if the stock is smashed bite and kick until your teeth splinter and your legs are crushed. Remember, only he who fights desperately wins. A soldier should always hold on to his rifle even as he died. Don't waste bullets, shoot seldom but blast your victim. With the bayonet strike hard, your bullets may miss your bayonet will not. From the dead take their cartridges.

If you surprise your enemy or he surprises you, hit hard do not hesitate. If three fall upon you, shoot one, bayonet another, and finish the last with your rifle butt. Remember, God defends the brave, for a good soldier there are no flanks, no rear, only advance, destroy and kill. Always pace the attacking cavalry, at two hundred yards give the attacking hurricane a volley, position your bayonet and freeze. Remember, God defends the brave. In war a soldier should expect poor food, no sleep, sore feet. It's hard for you, it's harder still for the enemy, when you have smashed the energy you will feel better. If you don't succeed go in again with your bayonet, and again, and again. When fighting support the sound men, think only of the wounded when the enemy are crushed. Die for the church, for our leaders, and for our country.

Look after your socks, and pray to God. A soldier should be healthy, brave, hardy, determined, just, pious, noble heroes, and bludgeon his enemy to pulp. A good soldier pulverizes his enemy, and if he looses his life he will find a new one through God. Noble soldiers God leads you, God is your General.

After four weeks of such Satan worship, we set out for hotter fires in action. We were loaded like old cattle into old trucks, obviously requisitioned from the peasant farmers. Then we were carted off up north to help prop up the crumbling ruins of the Governments position. Eventually, after hold ups, breakdowns, detours, diversions, and some action against snippers we arrived at our destination, which was a mile behind our lines.

Even the most reached of us was overjoyed to know that we would soon be able to burst out of our stuffy, sardine cans, it would be a relief to brief even freshly polluted air. As we drove down the main street, the world around us exploded into cascades of noise and colour. The whole of our column of trucks danced as mortars, Bazooka and cannon shells exploded and ripped it to shreds, and machine gun fire splattered over the trucks. Men alive and happy five minutes before, now lay dead and dieing. We left the trucks and like good soldiers we lay in the dirt of the road. Major Murdiruff's lecture had been waisted on us, I left my complete kit, including my imported rifle in the truck. As the battle raged and men died around me, I found a bomb crater and hid in it.

Above my head the Thunderbolts of death exploded for over an hour, as the sound of dieing and murder reached my ears, I dug deeper and deeper into my hole. Eventually the battle stopped, and I took a look out over my hole to see if I should surrender because we had lost, or celebrate at our victory. We had won! So I sneaked out to get my equipment and rifle. As I emerged from the womb that had protected me from death, I saw the earth scattered with the bodies of dead and dieing men. Pools of blood lay on the ground and the agonizing groans of the wounded seemed to blot out the suns rays. All was black, all was bleak, it was revolting, but I had to survive, and I kept to my purpose. So thick was the ground covered with maimed bodies I had to step on these poor souls to get to my ruined truck. I pushed the bodies off my kit, put my kit on, shot my gun once in the direction of a vague enemy in the distance, so it would appear that it had been fired. I then dirtied my uniform up a bit, and smeared a little mud on my face.

Two battle weary soldiers were just bringing in an exhausted prisoner, in order to prove to my surviving superiors, my infidelity to the cause which they clearly had previously suspected, I rushed over, belted the prisoner in the stomach with my rifle butt and kicked him frantically, until he stopped coughing and spluttering and vomiting, and stood to attention.

One of the few surviving officers seeing my excellent soldiering abilities immediately approached me, congratulated me, and congratulated me again for beating a little discipline into the prisoner. He congratulated me, and congratulated me again for being able to keep my uniform neat and tidy, when his troops were not even able to keep themselves alive. He immediately made me a sergeant, because he said "such an excellent soldier as I deserved to be a sergeant", and I fear because all the other sergeants were dead. That night we camped in an old walled fortress amongst the stench of the dead, and the cries of the dying. There were no doctors. The few doctors we did have just happened to have been in the medical truck, the medical truck just so happened to have been at the head of the column, and the first truck in the column just so happened to have been the first truck blown to smithereens. It just so happened that all the doctors who just so happened to be aboard just so happened to be blown to smithereens too. So it just happened that there didn't happen to be any doctors to help the soldiers who just so happened to be wounded.



In the middle of this carnage suddenly appeared my first chance to escape from this army; I climbed down the fortress wall with the aid of a rope. Only to find two rebels planting explosives at the bottom of the wall. I tried to surrender but they attacked me with knives. I ran for my life screaming for

help at the top of my voice. Machine guns popped up on the top of the walls and my attackers were mowed down in droves. A large body of rebels now started firing foreign bullets at the fortress through foreign guns. The fortress garrison returned their fire with equally foreign bullets, fired from equally foreign guns. When the rebels had lost a sufficient amount of men to foreign bullets to call the battle a defeat, and futile, and in vein and such like military words, they decided to end the attack for tonight and went home to bed.

The Commander of the very old fortress, who was in the middle of having a leg amputated because it was full of those nasty fully imported bullets. Promptly promoted me to the rank of some officer or other. The next day as he wobbled about defending the fortress from his stump, he presented me with a medal. But our situation was desperate, our numbers had diminished from one thousand two hundred, give or take a few hundred, to two hundred, which was not giving any and taking a lot of few hundreds. Our supplies all fully imported had been destroyed and we were surrounded by thousands of rebels. So after burning the whole town to the ground and shooting all our prisoners, our remaining seventeen dozen soldiers beat a retreat.

Unfortunately because I was such a good soldier I was left with twenty equally unfortunately good soldiers, who constituted the rear guard. Our task was to cover the retreat and blow up an important bridge. As we finished laying the explosives on the bridge we suddenly became aware that the enemy were upon us. They had surrounded us - twenty unfortunately good soldiers, and like hungry lions they were steadily sneaking in. "Men" I said talking to my unfortunate chaps, "Today we shall die heroes" at which I without a doubt, distinctly heard twenty groans. This was exactly what I wanted. With my brave soldiers eager consent I negotiated with the enemy. I guaranteed the safety of the bridge if the enemy would guarantee my little brigade. When I got back to my twenty men on the bridge I found out that in my absence they had all agreed to change sides and join the rebels. The rebels were overjoyed, I was let squeeze out of the country. I was overjoyed, everyone was happy and that's the end of my war story.

My medal I managed to swap with a rebel officer for half a pack of cigarettes, I was even happier, and he marched up and down showing off the medal on his chest, a brave soldier?

Anthony Edward Thorogood.



THE VOID

I have felt the void. Men from my past have met the void and some have perished. Some have returned crippled. Others have not returned.

Understandably, the void is frightening. Lack of exact details about its construction keep us from a technical solution. Of course, we are still working on the bulk of the problem, we have some theories, some progress, some hope. But we need someone to go in.

I tried to explain, I tried to tell them about my flat feet. I brought spine X-rays. I went on a crash diet. I showed them my brother's report card. I wore my mother's wedding dress to the medical examination. They didn't understand. They said I was perfect.

I said I was scared. They said it was natural. I said I was terrified. They said everything's fine. I said don't do it. They said we won't hurt you. I said I don't believe you. They said that's because you're scared. I said I said that. They said: Echolalia.

They put me in a chamber. I said I wanted to leave the chamber. They said do you feel anything. I asked for a glass of water. I was thirsty in the chamber. It was hot and getting hotter. There was really nothing to be afraid of except the heat. They said how's the heat? I said how's the weather out there looks like rain to me. They said: Atmospheric Saturation.

The void opened up and I went in. It was not black. The void is not black as some people imagine. The few survivors have reported blackness but they are wrong. It is plain to me that they became infatuated with the sight, overloaded their optic nerve and burnt out their capacitors. No doubt the retrieval methods had something to do with this to.

It is certainly big in the void. I had no preparation for that at all. We had done exercises in caves, but they at least had sides. The void was big, but they would never believe me. We had never had any training at that.

The void can surprise you. I was just going along and I bumped into my mother. She was shopping. She had a cart with about six grocery bags. She said she would love to talk but she had a hair-dressing appointment. I had to laugh at the void.

I had a degree in electronics and physics. A group of us had trained for seven years under top secret conditions. The Army had supervised the entire project. Many Academy members who were actively involved in research at national universities participated in the study.

One famous scientist had put his weight behind the idea and the rest is history. Not history as it is generally known, but nevertheless history to a large group of very influential men.

At first my family had been against it. My parents thought I was connected with some spy outfit. I couldn't tell them what I was doing. My kid brother wanted to see my gun and transmitter. He had a little blackboard in his room, and every time I came home he marked up a skull and crossbones alongside the others. I told him to cut it out, but he just shot at me with his index finger.

There were times when even I couldn't understand all the security. At one luncheon they brought in these guys to taste the food. I ended up with half a potato and a sandwich with a big bite out of it. I can understand security but starvation is another thing. Sometimes scientists get crazy ideas.

Our program had special funding. Apparently Congress was in the dark about it, so the Army laid out the cash. They said it was strictly a departmental affair. Many of the scientists had contracts with large industrial firms who were staffed with ex-military men, and they also contributed a great deal of money and technical assistance. As one advisor put it, they were sharecroppers. The void, they said, should produce a bountiful harvest, enough for all. In spite of the frightening nature of the void, these men were constantly smiling. We are waiting, they said.

I had been relieved to finish the exhaustive training. I didn't really expect to be used. I was a back-up man, in case the others failed. No one had any idea how rigorous the void would prove to be. Twelve men had entered the void: six returned blind and crippled. For a while there was a furious controversy over the Army's method of retrieving the subjects if they showed signs of weakness. A few scientists accused them of deliberately punishing the subjects for failing, and for using techniques which severely endangered the likelihood of complete withdrawal from the void. The Army responded that something had to be done, as the first six men had all failed to return. These men were just too valuable to be lost into thin air. The dissenting men of science left the project. All died within the year. There was no more discussion of method.

I was frightened. As the thirteenth man on the training team, it was my turn to go in. I wrote a letter home.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Hi, I didn't think I would ever be writing to you like this. It's been a long seven years, here, and they finally asked me. I guess I didn't think they ever would. All the time I could never tell you what I was doing. I didn't like the idea of keeping things secret, but I guess it has been important.

How is John? He should grow up to be big, maybe play basketball. Is the back room still mine? We've had nice weather down here. Dave says to say hello. So did everyone on the project.

The mission starts tomorrow. I don't know when I'll write next. Wish me luck.

Your son.

The Chaplain said he would mail the letter as soon as he could. He was a nice guy. The Discovery crew used to meet with him once a week to discuss God, Religion, Death, anything like that. Towards the end he said he thought he was losing his flock. I was the only one at the last meeting. He told me he was scared of dying and that he didn't admire our position. I guess we all felt the same.

After these years of training, I thought I knew a lot about science. We had all the best professors in everything, all the best equipment.

There was never any lack of money around the place. They said they had to keep everyone

happy. I don't know if I was really happy, but I had over \$300,000 in the bank. I was planning to build a house in Florida when I got out.

At times the object of the study got under dispute. The Army and the academics would argue priorities, board meetings would be held, luncheons and conferences attended. Invariably the executive from the top industries involved in the research would engineer a compromise. They always seemed to be around, smiling, waiting to settle any conflict. I don't know if they had any official capacity on the project, but they were involved in every consideration, from the distribution of underwear to meeting at the Pentagon.

When they finally decided to put me in the void, I got really scared. They measured it on the Haines Fear Index: I scored 90 out of 100. Some of the psychologists there were using the data to write articles; apparently there was a lot of pressure for them to publish information from the study. The Army successfully blocked all attempts to release any of the results, even when the experiments were double blind and disguised as other studies. The security on the project was so tight that the military men refused to give access to background files on our crew to the scientist.

Most of the researchers were sympathetic when my turn came to go in. I imagine they all had some feeling that I might not come back. I know I did. There was the usual round of parties, gifts, and women. I had seen the other men go through it. It seemed like taking a kid to the circus just before he has his tonsils removed.

I have never been very religious, but the night before I went in I did go to the chapel and say a prayer. Mostly I wanted to get a few things off my chest about my past, the family, things like that. I didn't feel very guilty about anything, really, I just wanted to make sure. Somehow going into a church and going through the ritual was comforting, as though somebody else was responsible.

When they put me in that pre-entry chamber my pulse went up to 200. All the monitors were going berserk. I remember watching the men in white coats moving quickly back and forth and talking to each other. Through the glass window I could even see some of the industrial reps with their sharp suits and smiles. The brass was there too, looking a little worried: I was the last man on the Discovery team. They couldn't very well lose me and then try to justify the entire project and millions of dollars without blowing security. They needed me to come

out as much as they needed me to go in. Without me as documentary evidence, they might as well have been spending their money on dominoes.

One thing -- the heat -- I think that was a malfunction. None of the previous entries had generated heat. Maybe that's what the men in white coats were discussing. I hadn't been programmed for heat so I didn't know what to expect. All that happened really was I got thirsty. After seven years you'd think they would have thought about it, but there wasn't even a glass of water around. I was positive they had some dehydrated water in my survival kit, but I couldn't reach it.

After a few minutes the door to the chamber opened and I went in. It's really funny how scared I was at first, and then all I could do was laugh. I lost contact with the control base right away. I don't know why all the communications systems failed, but they did. Even the backup relay was dead. I guess the same people designed the whole network, because they missed something.

All this talk about the void. Loose talk, really. Now I know why they had to send someone in: they really didn't know what it was. They were scared, more scared than I was. They were so scared they thought if they didn't get hold of it, it might get hold of them and not let go. The chaplain had something of the same idea.

Where I found myself was right back home. At first I thought it was a mistake, that I had got off course or something. I was sure it wasn't right, but there I was. That's where I saw Mom. She didn't think anything was abnormal, me in a silver Mylar suit with an oxygen tank and a survival kit. She had just been shopping and wondered why I was home in the middle of training. She obviously hadn't got my letter.

She left to get her hair done and I just walked around. A lot of my old friends were in town and I managed to catch up on some news. I bought some gum at the store -- gum in the void! Wait till the Army hears about this.

All contact with the base was out. I wondered whether this had happened to my team-mates. Nothing about their missions had got beyond an intimate circle known as the Big Three. None of the followup men were briefed about the previous encounter, on the grounds that it would prejudice their observations of the void. At first I thought I could understand that, but I would have liked to have known that it was like this. I would have brought my swimming suit.

The void, really wasn't scary at all. I felt quite comfortable and happy. I was back home. I didn't understand how I could feel that way after our intensive conditioning. I analyzed my senses to see if I was being manipulated or deceived in any way. We had been taught a whole set of techniques to assure that we were receiving data objectively. I went through the entire bunch and it all checked out. It occurred to me that the void was so clever that it could conceal itself from the Army and the most intelligent minds in the country.

After six hours in the void, I noticed that my oxygen tank was completely full. We were advised to return after that time, as we only had a seven hour tank. There must have been plenty in the air. I wondered if I should go back. I had a number of doubts. Here I was, really happy for the first time in a long while, back with good friends in the real world. Why should I return?

In spite of this feeling I was obligated, I had committed myself to the highest ideals of science, the potential national interest, and the moral discipline of the most powerful military in the world. After all, hadn't they honored me by asking me to participate in such a dangerous mission? Besides, I experienced some anxiety that the Army would apply their retrieval methods on me if I didn't return soon. I wanted to beat them to it, if at all possible. I decided to go back.

There was no problem with that. Of all the systems the scientists had worked on, the transfer technology was the best. It puzzled the researchers when the subjects failed to return, but I can understand now: they just didn't want to go back. They delayed as long as possible until the Army stepped in and hauled them across several time zones. Is it any wonder they returned mangled?

I flipped the transfer switch, hoping that it hadn't failed like the communications system. I felt dizzy and then hot. I was sitting in the chamber, still thirsty, when I opened my eyes.

After the cheering and the applause had died down, someone gave me a drink of water. They said what was it like. I said it was beautiful. They said what do you mean. I said it wasn't a void at all but America. They said are you alright. I said the void isn't the void at all. They said of course it is. I said I had the best time in seven years in the void and wanted to go back.

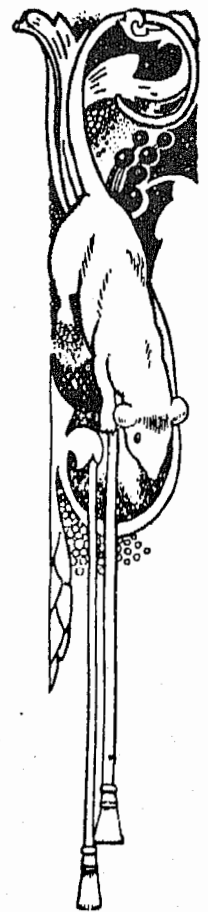
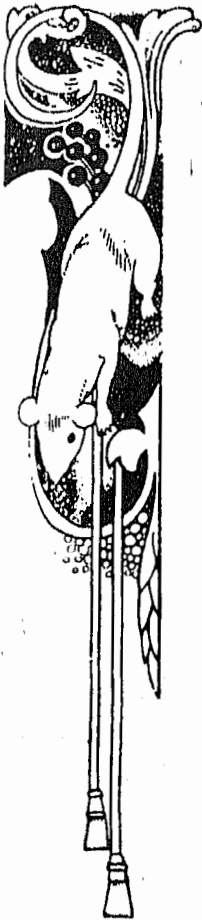
They put me in a hospital and gave me lots of tests. I passed them all: a nurse told me. They talked to me and shook their heads. The scientists shook their heads. The Army shook their heads.

I said don't you realise. They said I was confused. I said the void is the real world. They said they didn't think so. I said the void was everyday life, America, the suburbs, cities, country, people, ideas. They said they didn't believe me. I said you are too scared to even see it all around you. They said I was sick and would need their care for a long time. I said you are blind and frightened of anything beyond your control. The void only

exists because you are scared of it. They said the project was finished and all the data was going to be destroyed. I said you can't hide behind lies. They said all the participants including the top-level scientists were going to be de-programmed. I said the void is the myth you live by but it doesn't even exist, its just a huge conglomerate military-industrial fantasy. They said I was lucky to come back alive. I said I was sorry to have come back at all. They said I would be safe with them, there in the hospital. They said they would take extremely good care of me.

I said: I don't believe you.

THE VOID by James Roberts.



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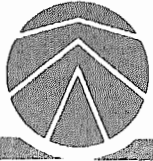
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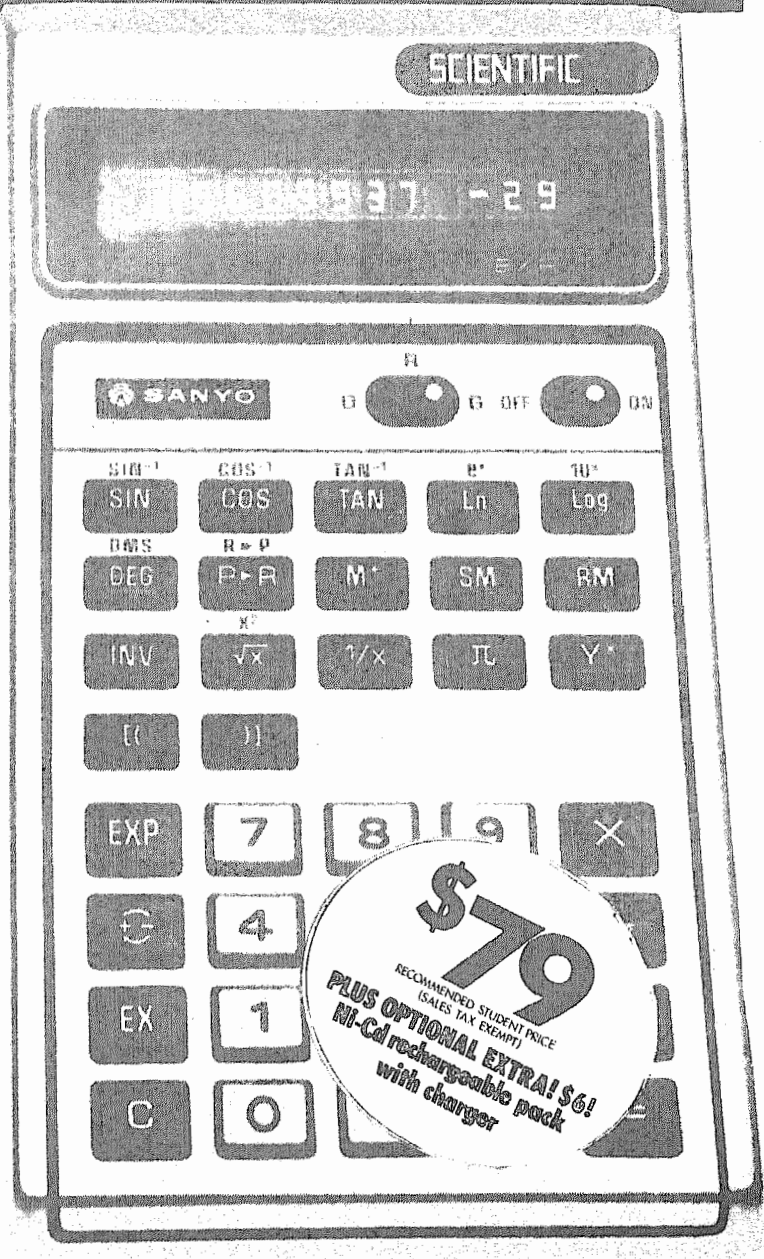
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