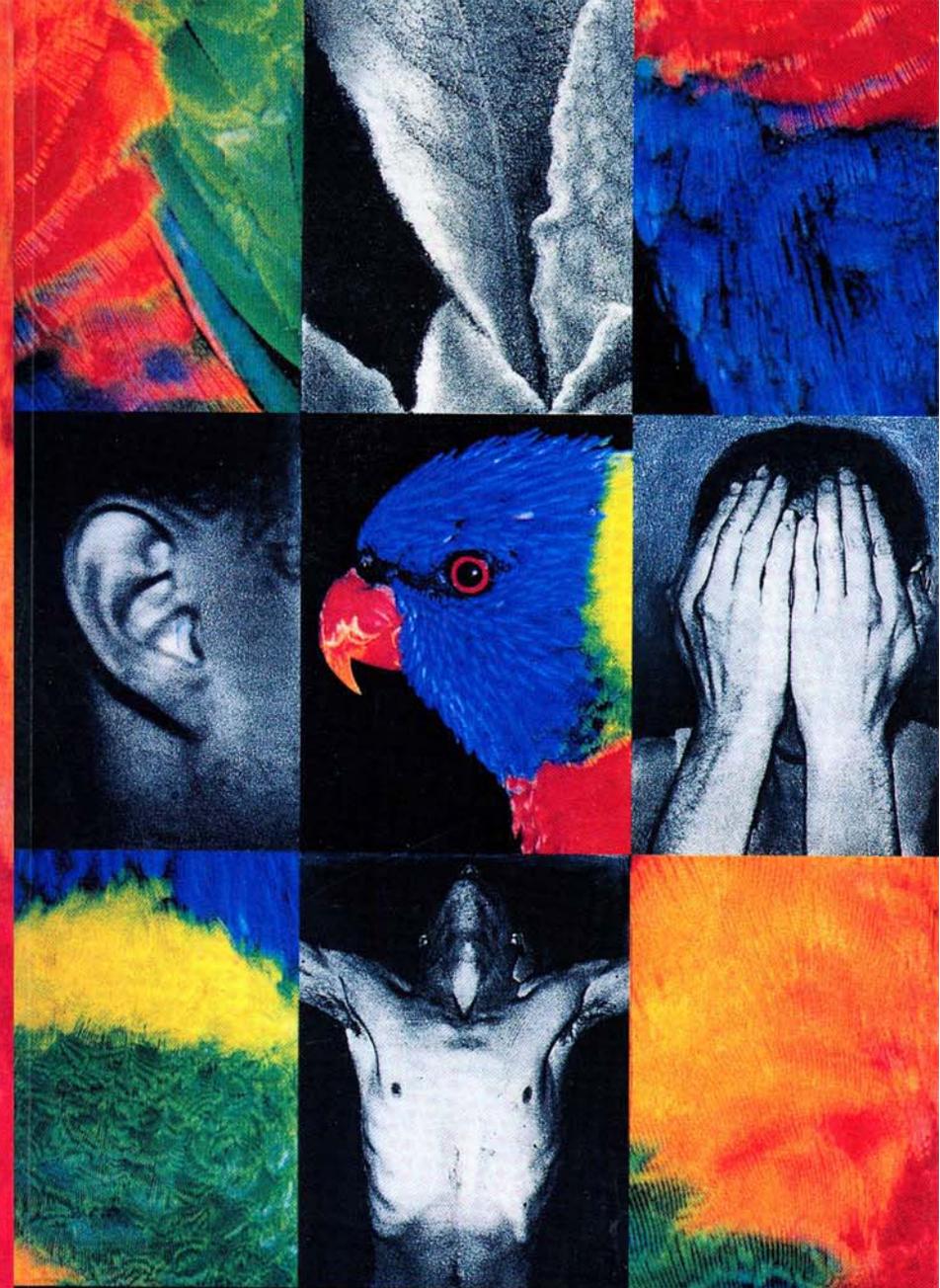


What would you think of a senior citizen who one day believes he is God and sets about ordering the Council to tidy up his suburb, or of an alcoholic who needs to be released from his family's insistence that he remain one? Or what of a boy who recalls a haunted house; a man whose life is made substantial by lorikeets who befriend him; a young woman who creates a phantom child following an abortion, and lives with it? What of a boy who delights in the past mystery of his Australian bush, or a man locked into himself who is suddenly released? There is also the man who is transported back two hundred years and discovers a history that transforms him. In every one of these stories is some element of delight, even of delicious mystery.

Troubadour Press Inc.



The Return of the Lorikeets
Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Geoffrey C. Bingham

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Foreword

The Return of the Lorikeets is the twelfth of my fiction books published in the last fifteen years, two of these being novels. That means the present volume is the tenth of a series of short stories. Of course some of these stories stretch back beyond the first publication in 1980 of *To Command the Cats*. All stories in the present volume are new, surfacing themselves in the past twelve months.

Richard Walsh, who published *To Command the Cats*, said he saw nothing different and better in the quality, style and content of my second book *The Translation of Mr Piffy* which he therefore declined to publish. For years I have had a problem; namely that I considered a yam to be a yam, that is, just a story to entertain. Of course a writer wants to get a point across, and in that sense has something prophetic to say. This, surely, is the way of all art.

Now-in the past few years-it has come clear to me that all living is a story, and each event of life is a part of that story. In this sense true biography is alive, adding to our knowledge of humanity and the world

in which it has lived, to say nothing of what I call 'mystery'-the secret and the sense of the heart of our history.

When one is dealing with these issues, fiction can be a rich genre for sharing our human insights. I think most folk welcome a little wisdom-those understandings gleaned from the doings and the thinkings of the human race. Most of us are fascinated by what flows down from the source of mystery, from the person-or persons-we call 'hierophants'. A hierophant is one who has gathered wisdom from the past and usefully passes it on in the present. Cultures have their hierophants in shamans, gurus, pundits, priests and the guardians of mythology, rites and ceremonies.

In this present set of stories I have tried to develop a few aspects of that mystery of wisdom. Stories which are only social documents smack of propaganda and moralism. Where, however, human beings share insights and realities, they come to a high level of genuine entertainment. The human spirit is fascinated, thrilled, delighted and, often, frightened and terrified.

I hope some of this may be taking my writing beyond its original 'quality, style and substance'. I hope it may unveil a little more of the mystery of human beings, their environment and their living. In doing so I trust it will genuinely entertain you.

Geoffrey Bingham

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Butterflies and Jewel Beetles

Grandpa Carn likes to sit in his backyard on what they call 'the patio'. He loves to sit in the sun. He has a shiny old Jason rocker, its brown leather well worn so well worn that the stuffing peeps out from its various corners. The Adelaide suburb in which he lives has a high social status and the family wishes to get him a new Jason, built for outdoors, but to be kept on the back verandah when the weather is too hot or too wet.

Grandpa Carn will have none of that.

'A new Jason?' he asks. 'A new Jason? Why this is as near new as anyone would want.'

When the various members of the family visit him, he always shows his affection from his kindly blue eyes; but when they try to manoeuvre or manipulate him into their ways of thinking, his gentle eyes become fierce, and he peers from beneath his beetling brows, ruffles his receding mop of white hair, and cuts off all that kind of communication.

Often he will just close his eyes, lean back on his extended rocker, and you will be thinking he is sleeping. Anytime his hands will be folded on his lap. His body will have sagged, finding its comfort in the mould it has fashioned for itself over the years. Even the wrinkles of his sun-tanned face will smooth themselves out as he relaxes. His slippered feet will flop slightly outwards. Grandpa Carn will be asleep. Now he is free from the family and their pressures to upgrade his respectability with a new Jason.

Tim was his devoted visitor. Tim could tell when the old man was genuine or when he was foxing. He, of all the grandsons, knew the stories that lay behind those closed eyes, and he was always after a yarn or two. He just liked things that belonged to a past age. His one worry was that Grandpa might die before he had divulged his whole treasure of tales. Being a computer boy he would record all details of the old man's stories in his own brain, save it, and then rush home and rattle them out on the keyboard.

At first it had been an idea of preserving the past of the family-the bit his grandfather knew-but after a time it became a hobby, and finally an obsession. He must miss nothing. It is true that he had a problem separating fact from fiction, but after a time he gave that up. Maybe, later, he could compare all his gathered materials and work out what was fact and what was fiction.

There was the day Grandpa had been given a cup of tea by Grandma, and with it some saffron cake. Tim had never seen saffron cake until Grandma brought it out one day, sweet and steaming.

Grandpa had said, 'Oh boy! Saffron cake!'. He had sat upright, taking his plate from the occasional table next to his chair. His powerful jaws had moved with delight.

'Tim', he said, 'don't miss out on your saffron cake. Take it lad. It will be the treat of your life'.

Tim found it enjoyable. He also chewed. Now, this day, Grandpa was washing it down with sweet white tea when all of a Sudden he cried, 'Oh, no! Not a Golden Wanderer! Not one of those!'.

'What a beauty!' said Grandpa, and Tim saw there was moistness in the gentle blue eyes.

'What's a Golden Wanderer?' asked Tim.

'Just that!' said Grandpa, stabbing a finger at the butterfly.

Tim had a way of nodding which meant that, as yet, he understood little but would patiently wait for explanation to follow.

Grandpa kept the wonder in his eyes. Then he looked at Tim quite earnestly and said, 'Tim, that butterfly is a citrus one. It lays its eggs on orange and mandarin trees, and the caterpillars hatch out, and they feed on the leaves, and one day they turn themselves into beautiful pupae, and they sleep all winter, wake up when the spring is warm and then they hatch out into those glorious creatures. Tim, no butterfly wanders just as that Wanderer does'.

'Yes, Grandpa', Tim said obediently, but his voice

had an invitation for extended conversation. He knew how to draw a memory from his forebear.

'Tim', said Grandpa, mouthing his last morsel of fresh sweet saffron cake, and tipping his cup to the last drop of white tea, 'Tim, I had the biggest collection of butterflies any boy ever had'.

'Is that so, Grandpa?' Tim said. 'That must have been quite a collection.'

'Was it ever', mused Grandpa. 'Boy were those fellows envious of it.'

He looked sharply at his grandson. 'Of course that was in New South Wales, not here in South Australia. In those days around Sydney there were thousands of butterflies. Quite swamped with them we would be in spring, summer and even autumn. They were always over those massed gardens of flowers. Nothing like them these days.'

He looked piercingly at his daughter's son, 'You believe me don't you?' Before even waiting for a answer he waved his hand in circular fashion, covering most of Adelaide.

'I ask you', he said, 'how often do you see butterflies around Adelaide?'

Tim, who loved Adelaide deeply, said in his somewhat thin voice, 'Often, Grandpa. Think of all those yellowish white ones you see in hundreds'.

Grandfather's eyes grew a trifle fierce with contempt. 'Those Cabbage Butterflies which people call Cabbage Moths? Those? Come on Tim, they are so plain and such a pest. Where is the grandeur of them?'

Do they fly like that lordly Golden Wanderer? Do they now?'

'Grandpa', said Tim with a snigger, 'it might be a lady and not a lord'.

The old man ignored that. His thoughts were elsewhere. 'Mind you', he said, 'one of my rarest butterflies came from South Australia-Ceduna, to be correct. My Aunt Florence was matron of the hospital there, and she used to get people to catch butterflies for her nephew'.

He paused thoughtfully. 'I think she might have got the Aborigines to go after them for me. Anyway, she sent me one in a package, through the post. Tim, believe it or not, no one was ever able to classify it. Not even the Sydney Museum could do that!'

'Not bad for good old South Australia eh?' said Timmy.

There was a faint snort from his older relative. He was away on a memory trip. With a jerk he brought the Jason to the upright position.

'Tim', he said, 'I had butterflies from New Guinea!'

Tim whistled dutifully. 'No!' he said in surprised disbelief.

'From New Guinea', said Grandpa. 'Oh, Tim, they were glorious. Great blue things nine inches across in wing span. I'd have given my heart to have seen them in action in the dark leafy jungles, flying above the flowers of the rainforests.'

Tim would likewise have given his heart. 'Wow, Grandpa!' he said. 'What butterflies they must have been.'

Grandpa had forgotten his dozing. The years were

slipping away. He was hauling out of his memory innumerable boxes-small cabinet-like containers which were fitted with protective glass on both sides so that you could slip them out and get to the beloved specimens. Now Grandpa was peering into them. He was, so to speak, delighting in every specimen, each mounted on a tall pin pricked into the cork layer beneath. Individually every specimen was special. Together they made a glittering glow of colour.

'Some of them were metallic in colour', Grandpa said wonderingly. Tim wished they were there. He would like to see metallic colours.

'Reds, yellows, blues and deep greens. Orange, white, pale pinks and misty pastels', said Grandpa who was something of a writer himself.

'What did you do with them?' Tim piped.

Grandpa ignored him. 'First of all I had the desire to collect 'em', he said, 'then I went to an agricultural school because I wanted to become a farmer. There we did entomology, and in doing that you collected Lepidoptera and Diptera; you know, butterflies and other flies. Then there were other orders-beetles, grasshoppers, things like praying mantises, and then locusts which were really cicadas. Even wasps of all sizes and stings. Boy, what a variety!'

Tim wasn't all that interested in insects, but he scented a story

'Did you ever get a prize for your collection?' he asked.

'That I did', said Grandpa, and his eyes gleamed. 'In fact that was the only prize I ever got!' He sensed

Tim's surprise, for the boy had thought, often, that the older man must have carried off every prize in every subject, so bright and brilliant he must have been.

'No, Tim', said the old man, shaking his head, 'I wasn't a good student. Spent too much time in the bush. I was all for insects and birds and animals, and special flowers. Only what I liked ever collected a prize. But, son, I had box after box, box after box, and when you laid them out they covered our long, wide dining table, and you had to put others on cabinets, and even on the lounge and chairs. And don't forget our dining table seated eleven people: we had that many in our family'

'So the family admired your collection', Tim said, 'when you put it out on the table and things'.

Grandpa snorted. 'They admired? Never! They thought I was a crazy boy. Just a bug hunter; but all the same they would catch a rare insect if ever they saw one, and then give it to me. Underneath I think that maybe they admired me.

'No, Tim, it was Wallace Smart who liked my collection beyond all others, and beyond everything. He would have given everything he had to get my collection.'

He gave Tim an intense look. 'Get me to tell you about Wallace Smart one of these days. Now what a boy he was!'

Tim was already preparing a document-opening a window-on his computer. 'I'll do that, Grandad', he said. 'I'll remind you one day.'

But Grandpa was racing ahead. 'You see Tim, we used to have swaps. You know what swaps are, don't

you? Of course you do. You do it with cards and comics and things, even today.'

Tim nodded dutifully.

'I had special cases in which I kept swaps-swaps from New Guinea, from North Queensland and even South Australia. Wally Smart was always after my swaps.

He fixed his eyes on his grandson. 'You know that guy never collected one specimen? He just used to buy those we collected-the extras I mean-or he swapped cards or toys or whatever. Never collected an insect in his life, but he loved them once they were in a case or a cabinet. You see, you had to put your insect in a gas bottle inside a special case, and wait until it expired. You must never let it harden, but get it at the right moment, spread it out until it looked lifelike, then pierce it with a special long pin and-hey presto!-you had the perfect Specimen.'

'Marvellous!' breathed Tim in imitation enthusiasm.

'Some', said the old man, 'were too large to put on pins. You used settings for those. Would you believe it, I had a large scarab from Egypt and I bet Antony and Cleopatra never saw a larger one. Kind of gods these were to the Egyptians. I think they worshipped them'.

This time Tim was really impressed. 'Really fantastic!' he said.

Grandpa nodded. 'Had this whopper in a special case all of his own. My Grandpa used to smoke Havana cigars, and I would get his redwood cigar boxes. The specials went in them. Had the

bottom of the boxes done in either velvet or shining silk.'

He pushed the Jason out to the recliner position, preparing to recline, relax and reminisce, but excitement gripped him and reversed his action.

'I wish I had those insects today. They would cause a sensation. Young fellow, we lived in those days. You didn't see us walking around with earphones on our heads, listening to that weird stuff you call "rock". I carried a net and a pack with a gas bottle, and with tweezers and that sort of thing, and I missed nothing. Here and there I would dart into a garden. In the bush I would run here and there with my heart in my mouth when I saw a rare butterfly. I had another net with a long pole and, at nights, I would go around the street lights. Boy! Did they ever gather on hot nights in hundreds, and sometimes you even got an Emperor Gum Moth.'

'An Emperor Gum Moth?' asked Timmy 'What exactly was that, Grandpa?'

Grandpa was incredulous. He looked at Tim with a bit of disgust mingled with unbelief.

'You have never seen an Emperor Gum Moth?' he asked, and there was pity in his eyes. 'Then you have seen nothing.'

Tim was humble. He knew the story was coming, perhaps even now.

'You see, Tim', Grandpa said, 'it takes a long time for this particular moth to develop. Ages in fact. One night you might just be walking along, anywhere. Then you might hear a flopping and flapping, and you would get excited for this would surely

be the greatest moth in the world coming into full life. Emerging from its great pupal case, it would be helpless, maybe with a few drops of moisture on it, but not yet fully fledged. You would shine your torch on it, and your heart would give a great beat, for there-flapping around in a circle as though ready to take off like an aeroplane, with antennae that looked almost like feathers, and with great eyes that glowed-would be our Emperor Gum Moth. In the centre of its wings would be great and beautiful circles that were for all the world like wonderful eyes, and they looked up and you almost wanted to do homage’.

He stared excitedly at his grandson. ‘Worship! Do you hear that, Tim? You almost bowed in wonder at the great creature and you wanted to be so careful. You didn’t want to disturb one particle of its wings. You could pick it up and feel its strong wings press against your hands, and you gently lowered it into a box. There would be holes for air and breathing, and you would keep it for days, peeping at it sometimes; and then gradually you would introduce some gas, and finally it would die, but all its glorious colours would be preserved.’

The old man seemed quite breathless after this long description. In fact he was slightly trembling. Then his face set in its determined wrinkles.

‘I could have got almost anything for one of those from Wally Smart, but I never sold him one. I honoured them too much to give them to that lazy fellow.’

‘So what happened in the end?’ asked Tim, who wanted to round off the story. It was hot out in the sun,

and he knew you risked skin cancer even if you wore the floppy kind of hat he was wearing.

‘In the end?’ echoed Grandpa. He looked at Tim suspiciously as though the boy was trying to cheat him out of his full story. ‘Oh, no, Tim, it wasn’t a short story like that.’

He fixed his gaze earnestly upon his younger listener. ‘I have yet to tell you about the jewel beetles’, he said, ‘because that was one of the greatest events of my life’.

Tim was polite. Tim was suitably attentive. Tim was meekly encouraging. ‘Jewel beetles?’ he asked. Grandpa on occasions was full of rich humour, so Tim said, ‘You don’t mean the Beatles-you know, those rock singers?’.

In Grandpa’s mind that kind of humour was pretty close to the wind.

‘Not those’, he said, with airy contempt. ‘No, I mean real beetles. I suppose you may never see one in South Australia. In New South Wales you find them in tea-trees or similar shrubs which have rich scented flowers, but they had their special varieties of bushes and you would find them on none other.’

His nose wrinkled. ‘Ah, Tim! I loved those beetles. They really had metallic colour. About an inch to an inch and a quarter long. They were kind of hunched up, solid little beggars with long waving antennae. They loved honey and would crawl over the flowers in search of it. Normally they would take no notice of you, but sometimes, if the notion came to them, they would suddenly rise in flight and circle around and you could hear the hum of their wings, and then, just

as suddenly, they would settle back on to the flowers and to their honey.'

Now Grandpa's hands were really trembling. Sometimes he would go into teaching mode and give out a bit of wisdom.

'Ah, Tim!' he said. 'What the young people miss today with all their telly and their fast foods and their racky music! They need to get out there!' He flung up an arm that pointed north to the plains, to the saltbush and the mysteries of the ancient land. He touched his head lightly, but meaningfully.

'I have treasures in there to burn', he said. 'I couldn't exhaust them if I tried.'

He came back to reality.

I just walked into a great opening in the bush. All around were the high gums, but this was just an open sunlit grove. Masses of bushes with creamy flowers, crammed tight in lovely clusters and they must have been dripping with bush honey. The smell was strong and rich in the air, and there were hundreds-if not thousands-of jewel beetles. Oh, Tim! There were brilliant reds and brilliant blues and brilliant greens, and some of them with those colours mixed. Black dots they had on the wings, and there was a kind of hum because they were so thick as they kept rising and alighting, hungry for the honey, and disturbing each other, and then not caring.

'I had heard about Paradise, and so I thought I must be in it. I filled bottle after bottle, selecting different colour after different colour, trembling all over lest I missed one colour, and then wanting to have a thousand swaps, and I just didn't have enough containers.

It didn't matter. I was no longer just being a collector. I was so excited with all the beauty-the smells, the moving mass of brilliant colour, the creamy clustered flowers, the warm day, the hum of the insects and the incredible miracle of it all. It is all still with me.'

He paused, stared into the air as though he were still in the magic grove and breathed a sigh of utter joy. Then he looked at the boy who was no longer a story recorder, or a grandson collecting data for some future biography. He, too, had been caught up into the beauty of that long-ago event, still so fresh in Grandpa's memory

The two sat immobile in the sun, and somewhere up in the peppercorn tree a blackbird trilled to its mate, and the echo came from the high almond tree almost a block away. The song poised, quivered, ceased, then started afresh.

'Grandpa,' Tim said, 'I have to go. I am on checkout today. I had better get some lunch and be away'.

Grandpa scarcely seemed to hear him. Then he started, as though the words had come to him.

'Tim,' he said, 'I really must tell you about those insects and Wally Smart. Would you have time to hear that one?'

'Of course', said Tim. Saying he was going had been a bit of a manoeuvre. Anyway he could get a pie on his way to the supermarket where he did checkout for expanding his bank account. 'I'd like that Grandpa', he said.

'Well', said Grandpa, 'the facts are that my prize

insect collection had to come to an end. You see our family were moving to the farm our father had bought. He had always wanted a farm and when he retired from his dental profession he was working things so that he could buy a farm’.

‘Lots of employees in a family of eleven’, joked Tim.

‘Oh, no’, said his forebear. ‘By this time only seven were left, but that is quite a number for farming. Well, you see, I knew the time was over for insects. New things were on the move, so I thought about my collection of jewel beetles and beautiful butterflies, and my giant scarab. I knew I had to sell them.’

‘To Wally Smart’, said Tim.

Grandfather scowled and nodded. ‘To Wally Smart’, he agreed, ‘but something within me rebelled against that. I never wanted Wally Smart to get my collection of hard-earned specimens so I had a dream against him’.

‘A dream against him?’

‘That’s right’, said Grandpa. ‘In life, when I cannot get something done that I want to do, or evade something I don’t want to do, I have my special dream.’

Timmy was mystified. He shook his head. Grandpa had always seemed so intelligent, so hard-headed, so rational. He waited for an explanation.

The old man was sitting up, but he mimed his boyhood dreaming. He lay back, folded his hands on his chest, closed his eyes, feigned sleep. Then he spoke out of the reclining state.

‘All people have day dreams. What they cannot accomplish they do in the dream. So I dreamed all my insects out of their boxes, cases, cabinets and covers.’

He sat up, a high delighted grin on his face, and stared at Timmy with immense glee.

‘I magicked them into life. I magicked them back to when they had no pins in them, to when they had not been in the gas bottle, to when they had been alive and alert. They all took off, the thousands of them!’

‘They did?’ said Timmy, his head almost rolling with wonder.

‘They did’, said Grandpa calmly. ‘Oh, Timmy, you should have seen them. What a whirring and a wheeling; what a fluttering and a dancing; what a whizzing and a shooting and a flying. Brilliant, glowing and glimmering jewel beetles to the right and to the left, to the fore and to the aft. Moths fluttering in the sun and a bit dazed in the light, but making for the shades of the bush and the forest, the woods and the glens.’

His face was suffused with delight as he went on. ‘Who led them all like the lord of the chase, the leader of the expedition, the king of the insect kingdom, but our Egyptian friend the monarch scarab of all creatures. Who followed in his wake, with the widespread and beautiful wings, but our butterflies lordly and queenly. My! What a sight they made! What a mingling of colours! What a great glory! Butterflies everywhere. On the right wing and the left wing the jewel beetles flashing out their beauty like a protective patrol to keep off enemies and predators: you know, predators who would snap up a butterfly in a flash and a flip. All those others-the droning cicadas, the leaping grasshoppers, the buzzing wasps, the armoured locusts-why, they were like one concentrated squadron.’

‘Tim it was glorious. Gloriously glorious. “Glory be, and glory be forever!” I shouted’.

Sure enough there was Grandpa, his straw hat wavering on his head, his body alert and quivering, his eyes flashing blue flames of fire and his fists and arms shaking in the air for the victory and the wonder of it all.

Then he subsided, tired, a trifle embarrassed, looking out at Tim from under his bushy eyebrows.

He grinned and said, ‘That was some dream, young Tim’.

Tim gave his obedient, assenting nod. ‘But it never really happened Grandpa, did it? After all that imagination the insects were still there.’

‘Ah’, said Grandpa, ‘yes, after all that they were still there’. He grinned hugely. ‘But I had had my time. It took the sting out of my having to sell them to Wally the Collector. It also gave me some backbone to argue with him. He knew others wanted to buy my specimens, but selectively of course. One wanted the high scarab, one this or that butterfly, and others those jewel beetles, or just some of them. He wanted the lot, did Wally! So he either paid me a high sum or I divided the collection. I knew he would be sick if he couldn’t get them all.’

‘So?’ said Tim, his mind on a pie and the supermarket, but his spirit unable to miss the last of the story.

‘Oh,’ said the old man shaking with joy, ‘I slugged him hard. I slugged him with the price until he had tears in his eyes. He almost blubbered. He told me, “My Mum and Dad would never give that amount of money”’.

‘Tim, I needed a riding outfit-you know jodhpurs and leggings, jacket and riding cap, to say nothing of riding boots. I needed a saddle and a bridle. I loved horses and I wanted to ride well. OK, later it became a joke. Nobody on the farms uses that gear except for show riding, but it was my dream, and I was going to get it.’

Tim was, if nothing, a commercial man. Night after night he dreamed about wealth. His bank account was already pretty plump. He could see, now, where he got it from: Grandpa!

‘So?’ he said again, urgently.

‘So’, said Grandpa, ‘I let him blubber until he ran to his mother, and she went to his father, and the three had a conference. They agreed to the price, provided I threw in the extras, like some empty cabinets, the gas bottles, the nets, the spare pins and all that stuff.’

‘Wow!’ said Tim. ‘How clever, Grandpa!’

Grandpa agreed, with becoming modesty. ‘Of course that wasn’t all’, he said. ‘There is another story that follows, but I’ll tell you that another day. It was the one when Wally Smart wanted to buy my war medals. He had none of his own and I had a special medal for bravery He would have given the world for that.’

‘You never sold it to him?’ Tim said, pushing back the scandal.

‘Now that, Timmy, is a story which has to be gone through slowly.’ He lifted up a hand of protest as Tim would have rushed an answer from him.

‘Off to your supermarket’, he said. ‘Off, and come back another day.’

Tim gathered himself as neatly as possible, and was about to strut off. Then he went back to the old man who was sitting almost wildly under his straw hat. They hugged each other, though a little awkwardly.

‘Love you, Grandpa’, said Tim.

‘Love you too, old chap’, Grandpa said, knowing that such a scene would have been impossible in his youth with his own grandfather. ‘Now off with you.’

Tim walked away from the patio with alacrity. He swung his bike into the lane and pedalled madly.

Grandpa still remained seated. The memory of the dream was strong upon him. After a time he lay back, his grin still huge and his delight unbounded. As it was, he could not sustain emotion for long, and so he felt all such feeling drain from him. He pulled the hat over his face to keep out the sun and any vagrant fly.

After a time his wife came to rescue the cup, saucer and plate from the flies.

She had heard most of the story from the back living room, through the open but gauzed doorway.

She shook her head at the old fellow, wondering where he still got it all from. Herself, she could never sort fact from fiction, so she took it all. Grandpa? Well, he wasn’t much better either, but at least his conscience never seemed to trouble him. Not now: he was snoring away like any old Trojan.

The Media Centre

The story I am about to tell you is a crazy one. It never happened. I only dreamed it. Some stories that come to me first arrive as intimations, then build up and become complete, but not this one. I just went to sleep, and as I was waking up it had come-spread itself and I suppose I woke with the shock of it. Of course it was real to me. Dreams are generally like that. Anyway, as I was saying, it is fanciful, far-fetched and beyond credibility. Only a dream, so if you want just don’t go ahead and read it. Drop reading right here, and I am not using a writer’s gimmick in saying this. All the story could do would be to unsettle you, if it is strong enough, and, if not, you would wonder why you had kept reading it.

The strange thing is that no-one can convince me it didn’t happen, and that maybe, some day, it might not happen. When I awoke with it throbbing in my mind, I knew it had actually happened. Out there the whole thing had blasted out. To tell the truth it was so vivid that I wanted to sit down and write it as a novel, but then I doubt I have the tenacity to develop a whole

novel from it. Perhaps someone will take it up and do that, and I say 'Good luck!' to anyone who will. It will need a lot of investigation; a lot of seeing how such things could happen which eventuated in this, my story. Even so, to sustain the plot line, to recreate the characters, the events, the suspension, the dread, the heart-sickening apprehension and the horror-that is at present beyond me. I dare not attempt it in this decade.

Maybe I am slowly recovering from the drama of the dream. Maybe I have a secret fear that it is happening, in slow motion of course, but actually happening, and throughout the world: I mean, developing imperceptibly. That form of destruction is perhaps spreading through everything like a virus, the sort of thing that makes a computer sick to its last megabyte. The whole thing is wonderfully but horribly apocalyptic. Behind all the scene that constitutes this peoplejammed, violence-crammed world are the dark riders, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and they are silent, doing their deadly work. Something like that must have been, and must be, happening. Nothing else can account for what I began to see that night at the Media Centre.

You may not know much about the Media Centre. I had not seen it before I came on it, as I emerged out of the vortex of that dream-a sort of wild swirling of body and brain as though I had been launched into it like a projectile. Yet in fact I came as someone unseen, someone anonymous, someone ambiguous. I was just set down in the lights and movements of that huge space complex.

One strange feature was that it was almost silent. I would reckon now that around the running wall of that circular studio there must have been a hundred television or video screens. They were up high, large, in full colour, flashing rapidly as the scenes changed and as the information came through. A hundred machines like them could have pounded your ears to death. It was enough having the eyes hammered to insensibility. Lower than the screens, at desk level, there were a hundred computers, each aligned to its screen. Half bent, concentrating over the keyboards, were a hundred scribes, each with earphones to keep the place silent and to make the visual and audio messages individually intelligible.

At first I thought I was in one of the local RSL clubs where the pokies have their own flashing lights, and where human corpses have their eyes glued to the pokey-faces. Same flashing lights and colours. Better still, the same club with a hundred silent players waiting for the Bingo calls. Tens of zombies motionless and silent as corpses until the number rings out, and then the resurrection for a few moments, slight animation, voiceless shouts until the following drop back into death. Well, it was a bit like that in the Media Centre. Each computer buff had his eyes to the screen, his fingers to the keyboard, and he was taking down the news. It was being fed from their machines to another room where the compilers were waiting to collate the streams of inflowing information, to send it off in a flash to the world's great megalopolises-to the papers and journals of their syndicates, which in turn fed it into countless lobby

centres, to waiting politicians, and to the whole gang of the world.

It just happened that the amazing event happened that night of all nights when I lobbed into the centre of the room. No one seemed to see me. The persons milling around did not even bump into me: I mean the messengers who came to extract the recorded news videos, and rush them off to some sending centre where they would flash around the world. I just watched bewildered. My trouble was that I was trying to watch a hundred screens all at once, and it was nerve-wracking because on every screen there was destruction of a kind I had never heard of in the wildest of prophecies or the grimmest of prognostications.

Take this one, for example. I am looking at the Taj Mahal in India. It is glowing with that inner light which has made it mystical and famous. Even as I am looking at it there are also innumerable tourists gazing up at it, or emerging from it. I can't hear the screams because only the man with the earphones can hear them. But what I am seeing is the steady disintegration of the famous world-wonder, this Taj Mahal. I can't believe what I am seeing. It is a media trick, I am thinking, but then it can't be. No one seems to be getting hurt-not physically, anyway. It is as though the famous monument to an Indian king's wife is just dissolving. Maybe into low heaps of fine sand or something. I do not know. People are fleeing. They are running in all directions. They are trying not to fall into the long square lake of water, but not all can avoid that. Panic

has set in. People are jamming up like logs in a river.

The man at the computer is remarkable. His shoulders do not shake. He is concentrated upon his wordprocessor as the Bingo players would be on their cards in the RSL club. This staggering bit of news is flowing from this world nerve centre into the collating room where the journalists are poised like vultures, waiting for the corpse; but this corpse-one of the many of these corpses-is very much alive. The press is tensed, waiting and willing to get this bit of news. It is historic. It is an epic. It is unbelievable. How can the Taj Mahal go just like that? I keep shuddering. First intimations of the loss of ancient culture are beginning to drum their way into my bewildered mind.

I can scarcely drag my eyes away to look at another screen. Here what I recognise to be St Peter's Cathedral in Rome is also disintegrating. Steadily, you may say. The same crowds of tourists, workers, loungers and commercial people are caught in the wave of shock that is reverberating in the Vatican City. I have been there. I have seen it. I remember the solid and ancient stability of the great monument. I cannot comprehend what I am seeing. I wonder that the earphoned scribe does not tear off his hearing piece and throw it away, and run in horror from his place. He has been well trained, conditioned for the awful, wanting to hear the worst. It is for the dreadful, the catastrophic, that such persons wait.

Then I get this brilliant idea: all of this is a hoax, just a weird concocted mad hoax. Some megalomaniacal film-magnate has dreamed it up or it has come to

him in a drug episode.. His brain has been hyped-up to accomplish this crazy farce. Things like this have happened before. A nation goes mad with fear. Hysteria builds up. Dreadful homicides result. Of course, it all has to be done by mirrors or multiple computers, or something. I am not much up in that sort of thing, but I have some idea of how they can do it.

When I realise that what I am seeing cannot be true-the Taj Mahal and St Peter's dissolving before my eyes-I want to cry havoc and tell the man at the Centre to hold off. Things like this have set off tidal waves of panic around the world. Maverick reporting can drive multitudes mad. Mass hysteria can rise like a king tide in minutes. I am hoping they are laughing in the news collating complex, and that the media barons are swigging their bourbons to the chant of great operatic laughter.

Then I become serious, really serious. I am aware of the deadly silence of the journalists. They have never seen anything like this. Each screen is crammed with reality which they cannot gainsay. Even a madman would not concoct what they are seeing: no one could concoct that! I mean here, on this screen is Arlington Cemetery, the famed resting place of America's great fighting heroes. The halls of warrior-fame are dissolving before my eyes. Headstones do not leave even a tiny pile of dust. I am guessing that the great lawns are just having a bit of supernatural topdressing; but then none of it looks like a graveyard, like a cemetery of fame. It has somehow vanished. What they call 'the White House' is receiving the same treatment.

Panic seizes me. Suddenly I am realising that

all the art treasures, all the glories of history-the archives of this White House-are receiving the disintegration treatment. I am remembering the Islamic invasion of Alexandria's library with its precious manuscripts and its documents of history being burned by the insensible invaders, and that same atrocity of art-fiendish iconoclasm-is now being multiplied beyond computing. No-one takes any notice of me as I dash from screen to screen. The Taj Mahal has gone, but in its place I am seeing the Great Pyramids. I am seeing them as they, too, begin to dissolve. I know that as they level with the sand about them the disintegration is like a deadly virus, going underground and destroying all the tombs beneath. The eyes of the slumbering Sphinxes are gone, their shaggy heads bowed into nothingness, the loins and the shanks and the great paws turned to a shadow of their former silent grandeur before they become nothingness.

I would laugh if it were funny, but it isn't. Locally, the Sydney Opera House is slipping into the dark waters of the Harbour. I look up to see whether the great Bridge is receiving the same treatment, but it is there in its silent reality, and traffic is crossing it, and on the Harbour ferries and other shipping are milling. Power craft are rushing towards where the Opera House had once been. I cannot see the great libraries of the city, in fact of all citiestheir archives of history, the art galleries, and the museums-but I know, with a sinking feeling, that they are also dissolving. One hundred screens, no matter how often they change their scenes,

cannot cover the universal destruction of humanity's past.

Now the scenes are beginning to take their toll on the receiving scribes at the computers. A few operators are rising. One man rushes out, having flung away his earphones. He seems to have gone mad. One woman topples back off her chair and collapses. A few hurry to help her, but the rest remain glued to their screens. They know this is the happening of a lifetime: this is a news bonanza, *the scoop* of all time. Their heads are buzzing with the commentaries that media people are making in faraway lands, or at Sydney Harbour. Even as they hear the descriptions they can sense the terror in the voices of the reporters. Current affairs crews are amassing data which will not be exhausted in a lifetime. To say that all are puzzled is a mild understatement. Shocked, stunned, horrified, terrified are some of the adjectives to use, but you need to go beyond them. You realise that it will need an army of counsellors to return people to tolerable normality following this monumental crisis in world history, but you also realise that probably few, if any of them, will survive the shock that is universal. Who will counsel the counsellors? Maybe we should ask the question, 'Who will survive the universal flood, the universal holocaust, the dissolving of humanity's history?'

Even now that I am awake I cannot stop trembling. I feel I shall shake to the end of my days. Didn't someone, somewhere, warn us of these things impending? All the block-buster, crime-bursting conspiracy accounts I have read just seem like pathetic

wraiths against the immensity and the enormity of what I watched on those screens. I would give all I have to show you just one recorded video cassette. What would you think if you saw St Paul's Cathedral slowly slip into dust? Or Westminster Abbey silently vanish into less than a tiny puff of the same dust? What of the great Buddhist temples, and the sanctuaries of Ram and Kali suddenly feathering into nothing-to say nothing of the black Kaaba of Mecca and the Mosque of the Golden Dome in Jerusalem.

What came through those screens was the dramatic story of every human effort-artistic, musical, literary, sculptural and architectural-vanishing for ever. The great libraries had died under the deadly virus; contents and indexes were gone. The late triumphs of microfiche, microfilms, and CD-ROMs were as though electronics and plastics could perpetuate nothing. Into the same thin air had vanished all the records that ever were, and nothing would be left for the archaeologists of the near and far future to disinter.

Of course, this was just beginning to dawn on the scribes and the news teams. They were surfeited with the tragedy. If they had not been conditioned for such a time as this they would never have survived. Of course, some did not survive. They just froze in their desk chairs, ossified into a numbness from which they would not recover. Cerebral palsy would have set in. Potential dementia would have been hastened into the actual. The demonic screens seemed determined to cover every bit of disintegration of the human Babel and of the magnificent towers to humanity's pride

which the human race had built. Of course, the thousand cultures were being melted into one-or none in the devastating dissolution of achievement. The screens began to portray kings and queens, presidents and prime ministers, as though it were their business and duty to appear and to attempt pacification of the traumatised, and to stay the mass madness which was beginning to grip the tribes and nations from the sophisticated cities of East and West, and from the plains, hills and jungles of the underdeveloped primitive peoples. These latter, too, had their sacred places, their sacrosanct objects, their amulets and talismans and now nothing remained of them. What is more, the priests, the shamans, the sorcerers, the witchdoctors, gurus and the pundits seemed to have lost their identity with the loss of temples, altars, sacred objects and fetishes. These hierophants had almost lost their minds. When they sought to mutter mantras, or recall sacred sayings, the words of wisdom teetered on the edge of their brains and fell like dead icons into the chasms and abysses below.

The President of the greatest nation was speaking on some of the screens. He could not altogether blot out the final extras of the news sleuths, though doubtless he had a hundred cameras on him to fill out those screens. That he was shaken was not in doubt. His lips trembled as he spoke, but he kept summoning up his fading resources. He fought desperately to fulfil his destiny as *the* man who spoke in civilisation's last hour. He promised to penetrate to the heart of this conspiracy, this devilish virus, the demonic destruction of the highest, purest, and noblest that

the human race had created and accomplished. Sometimes he used the name of the Deity, and sometimes he talked of the human race fighting back against this most deadly of all human enemies-the destroyers of culture, the eliminators of all that Man had accomplished. He promised that already his cabinet had met, and that it was in touch with the leaders and cabinets of other countries, and that every resource would be pooled and every power at human command would be brought to bear on a solution. Some presidents and prime ministers followed him, and it was rumoured that others had gone stark mad or had fled to places of refuge, whatever or wherever they may have been.

Royalty seemed to rise to the challenge, as though this was their finest hour. Democratised cultures seemed wistfully envious of the noble resources of the awakened sovereignty. Majesty seemed-if only for an hour-to have come into its aristocratic own, but even that was but a wisp of an accomplishment compared with the misery of the human race stripped bare of its greatest achievements and its most gorgeous garments. Not one stitch of famous tapestries remained; not one thread of artistic embroidery could be found. Only the dull and the useful remained.

Of course there were many rationalisations of the event. The religious said it was a recall to religion. The secular said it was a call to devise greater things than humanity had ever achieved. The artists and poets, writers and script-workers were already shaping up great scenarios and art works, and beginning

to build afresh as termites do after a nest is disturbed, or as builders set about when a house is burned to the ground. Their problem was that as soon as they began such work it would dissolve like the accomplishments of the past. It was wondered, fearfully and generally, whether the recorded videos would also self-destruct, but, whatever power had caused them to be shown to the human race, it had decided-if only for a time-to preserve them for many viewings, as though viewed repetitions would teach the lesson it had for the human race.

I suppose there is much more I could tell out of this strange dream of mine, but, as I said at the beginning, it would soon begin to pall on you. I mean pall in its enormity, its vastness, its implications and the morals it might be pointing out to any reader. At the last I can only record my impressions, and if my dream comes true, these, too, will not remain.

Yes, I saw that humanity is proud of its achievements, and I suppose rightfully so. Yet I saw, also, that as a human race it rests upon these much more than it ever dreams. I saw why tourism has such drive, why men and women travel thousands of miles to see something from the past which they call great, and no sooner is a modern marvel completed than they also will rush to see that. I pondered the thought that only rare souls ponder the thoughts: most are as busy about everything as they are about nothing. They like to be on the move. They are so gripped in a dependency upon works of art that they can never have enough. They feed on the accomplishments of others

as though they would be naked and impoverished without them.

It was this last thought which gripped me most. Not all human beings appreciate works of art, of literature, music and sculpture. Not all have a taste for the aesthetic and a longing for the rare and beautiful elements of culture; but without them the human race feels like a sheep shorn and thrust out into the frost, or one stripped naked in a dark and cold world. Misery is in our veins when beauty is dissolved. I suppose, too, that much of our accumulated wisdom lies in our monuments to greatness, and when the monuments disintegrate something precious to our spirits is lost. Indeed something of our spirits, themselves, is lost. I must admit I oscillate between horror for the loss of the great and beautiful things, and a genuine delight in being stripped back to what we are in our human weakness. Human creatureliness must be the thing we should prize most, though we be disinherited from our striving godness. By 'godness' I mean the kind of lordship over all things we have given to ourselves. I sometimes think we have barely begun to explore our human identity and to discover the rare and beautiful elements hidden there. We try to extraject or extrapolate the few rare things we find, and bring them into idolatries in a trice, so self-worshipful we are.

Now I am finding, to my amazement and chagrin, that I am beginning to preach, to point a moral, to urge on the human race to see what I see as its true destiny, unburdened by what it thinks it has accomplished, undistracted by its human undertakings. Perhaps my

dream will have to come true before we do that, and whilst I would not wish that upon anyone, I feel the richer for having dreamed, the quieter for having seen how distracted we become from what must be reality. I also remember that the great prophets were visited by dreams and visions. I have great hope that this sliver of a dream of mine may have something of the prophetic nature in it. Who knows? If some hear it, they may prevent the catastrophe which would be no catastrophe but, perhaps, the liberation of the human race. In that day our static icons may blaze into life and live in the pure air of human humility.

As it is I am off on a bit of a hunt to see whether some visible fragment of our culture remains. Who knows, I may find some scrap of music, some piece of sculpture, some portion of a painting, some shred of tapestry, a portion of a print, some unbroken shrine. I doubt it, after what I have seen at the Media Centre, but I will press on with my high endeavour. Should I fail, should others fail, then we are left lonely and bereft, doomed-as it were-to live in the creation itself, forever unable to articulate about it or to build upon cultural achievements.

Deep, Very Deep: Who Can Find It Out?

My problem with telling this story is that I am only a man. By this I mean I am not a woman. A woman should be telling this story, but it is difficult to transfer a plot which is known to you, and information which has come in an unusual way, so as a man I will have to try to tell it. Because it is really the experience of a young woman, the telling of the story will require some skill: skill which I doubt I have. I know this is not much of an introduction, but perhaps the story will carry its own interest and override my deficiencies. I might add my view that a woman is a person and so is a man. Gender certainly brings differences, but, at core, we are firstly persons, and then male and female.

I am aware that my story will prove quite emotive. Whilst it is not intended to be a social document, some will take it that way since it is linked with abortion. 'Right to life' and 'right to abortion' are two opposing principles, and supporters of either of them can come

into violent conflict. Killings have been carried out in the names of both.

The first part of the story is quite simple. A young unmarried woman, whom I will call 'jenny, wanted to bear the child of a man she loved. The man was married and did not wish to leave his wife. His wife had proved childless. Tests had shown him to be fertile, and he wanted children. Jenny, the idealistic young woman, wanted to bear a child and give it to the man and his wife to be their baby That is how she saw it in the beginning, and I was told she was determined to work it out that way. The husband said he would work on his wife to get her to agree.

There were two other problems linked with this. The first was that the young woman's parents were highly moral people and would be shocked to find their daughter was promiscuous, for that is how they would have seen it. They would not only have disagreed with the idea of her having sexual relationships with any man, much less a married man, but they would also have found it difficult to bear the stigma of their unmarried daughter being pregnant.

So far as I was informed there was yet another problem; namely that Jenny was something of the order of a nymphomaniac. She seemed to dream about men, even to fantasise. She constantly wanted intimate relationships. She kept the fact hidden from all but a few of her peers, and her parents thought of her as being a highly moral person. She had a narcissist drive that made her want to know men. She was a strange mixture of romance and idealism, and she genuinely thought pity for the childless couple

was ethically acceptable. Later she wondered how she could have failed to consider her parents' moral standards. Her father was a man of high standing in his business and his local community. Somewhere in the midst of it tragedy was about to take place.

At this point I would like to flesh out the characters in our story. Jenny Farnham, the young person mentioned, was a woman of extraordinary beauty; the kind you see depicted in *Vogue*, *Mode* and similar women's magazines. It was obvious she could earn millions if she were to be a model and then move on to films: one who could easily become an image for others in her age group-of intelligence and loveliness combined-but there was this streak of idealism which dogged her up to the time we meet her in this tale. She is what the generation before mine called 'an Australian beauty'; that is, her hair was peerlessly blonde-a silky white-to-gold blonde and her eyes a deep brown, an imperious brown. Her features were classical, almost Greek, with a finely curved chin, and lips which were broad but not too full. They needed no colouring. Her blood seemed alive under her skin, which was as smooth as it was soft. She must have been admired wherever she went, and this may have helped to develop the worship which she had of her body. Certainly she knew the power of it, but then so have others who have never felt the need to use the power, or to revel in what some today call 'skin living'. Her intellectual ability matched her beauty, but somewhere within her was a guilelessness which almost

made itself into a deceit. At least that is how I saw her.

The schoolteacher Max Andrews had no guile. He was a determined go-getter. He was out to use Jenny's guilelessness and he unashamedly played on her sympathy for his childlessness. His wife Marie was an attractive woman and a typical product of the laidback generation. Like Max she had first lived an alternative life-style role, but as they both moved into post-graduate studies, she planned and worked for what we now call 'high culture'. She hated her husband for his infidelity but was set to get the most she could from it. The crazy idea of Jenny providing them with a beautiful baby did not faze her, but she made capital out of her husband's wish, keeping him in her control with what some call 'emotional blackmail'.

Jenny's mother Prunella was a good product of a line of earnest but sensible Puritans. Her high morals did not close her off from a deep appreciation of the arts, of music and of literature. Her husband Arnold came from the same line of Puritans, and somewhere back of all their ancestors their family lines met. He towered over others when he met them. He was tall, handsome, strongly built, and a good sportsman whose Puritan blood did not close him off from fun and pleasure. Whilst he adored his three children, he taught them high moral standards without the preaching his own father had laid on him.

He was a man impatient of hippies, those careless young people who denied their natural gifts and who eked out their counter-culture rationalisations by courtesy of a welfare Government. He loathed

the rock music and mentality which he maintained had been spawned by the naive, yet calculating Beatles. He always maintained the public had been sold down the line by these clever young men, and he was a man who had enough intellectual brilliance to write for journals such as *Quadrant* and the *Financial Times*, whilst pursuing the building of his commercial corporations.

Jenny's older sister Teresa had some of the beauty of her younger sister, but with it had a strong moral sense: a sort of combination of her parents' way of life. There was no envy in her for Jenny's popularity. The Puritan tradition would always be safe with her. She tried to steer Jenny in a good path but was aware of the nymphomaniac streak in her sister, and sensed it would lead to tragedy. Later it was she who would give me the key to Jenny's passion for her lost child.

The only other person I would care to sketch was Tony Hillier who was the family doctor, besides being a popular Senior Surgeon at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and in the various clinics around Adelaide which he shared with other well-known specialists. The Farnhams and Hilliers moved in the same social circle and held similar, sane ideas on morality, society and culture. At least that is how they might have described their way of life.

What happened was that Jenny confided in Teresa that she was pregnant but she would not disclose who was the father. There were others who wasted no time in informing Teresa. The older sister was set to be Jenny's mediator between herself and her

parents. When the enormity of her predicament finally dawned on her, she thought of committing suicide rather than face her parents. Teresa talked her out of that. She faced the pain her parents would feel when the truth was broken open to them, but she had always been intimate with them and knew they would respond without senseless fury.

She was right: they reacted with horror but they quickly adapted—at least in that crisis. Jenny's father had no illusions about his daughter, but he had not thought she would come to what she had done whilst she was under age. Her mother Prunella was heartbroken by the news but did not react with anger or irrationality. She wanted to know how long Jenny had been pregnant, but she did not want to know who was the father of the foetus. Arnold Farnham insisted on knowing, and his daughter could see his mind forming its own plans.

They sat for hours discussing the whole matter, trying to get back to the beginning of Jenny's moral softness, her gullibility in the face of men like Max Andrews, and the actions they needed to plan. Arnold was a man who sought no counsel from other men. Suddenly confronted with a situation which had no obvious solution, he realised his own vulnerability. Of course the question was 'abortion or no abortion?'. The State laws were quite clear. Abortion for Jenny was out of the question. Liberalisation of abortion was probably somewhere down the track, but not at that point of their situation. The Farnhams despised and rejected the idea of backyard, illegal operations. Prunella wanted no abortion, but she felt for her

husband and the disgrace that would come to the family Teresa had the mind of her mother. Being a grandfather to an illicit child had no appeal to Farnham even though some of his colleagues at the club had had to accept similar situations. That was when Prunella and Arnold decided to consult Tony Hillier. The Farnhams thought of him with some sense of relief.

Jenny was silent in the face of her failure. The family and most of her friends—thought it to be a social failure. Some of them considered it to be a moral failure, but then the morality of the matter was scarcely raised. Like other parents her mother and father wondered where they had gone wrong. As with other parents it proved to be a useless piece of research. They were partly tender towards Jenny, partly angry. They recognised it was a time of crisis for her and so they gave her some kind of comfort whilst trying to understand her strange idealism. They also told her they were considering abortion, but did not wait to hear or understand her feelings. Inwardly she held firmly to her desire to bear the child and to break the barrenness the Andrews had known for some ten years.

Arnold Farnham wasted no time in getting to Jenny's suave English master. He had learned to be mercilessly cold when an opponent was getting the better of him. He hated the shallow meanness of the man whom he perceived to be a human rat. His anger grew—as did his coldness—when he realised the schoolteacher still believed Jenny would bear the

child, and that he and his wife would adopt it. Farnham could not believe the insolence and fatuity of this man who had established himself on his own deceit.

'The first thing I'll have you in court for', Jenny's father said, 'is having carnal knowledge of a girl under age'.

Andrews said triumphantly, 'She's not under age. That she told me'.

Farnham wanted to knock him down, but simply said coldly, 'A birth certificate will settle that matter!'.

The English master realised his primary mistake. He had no sympathy for the father. He still held to his hope for a child. The man opposite him was far too strong to hold. Andrews suddenly knew he was a sewer rat in the eyes of this man, and fear rose in him. He began to blabber, and Farnham relaxed inwardly. He knew he would have no trouble from this pawky bit of humanity.

He proceeded icily to lay down his criteria of behaviour for the schoolteacher. If he ever mentioned the matter to another, then he, Farnham, would pursue him to his, Andrews', last sewer refuge. If ever he wrote a letter or contacted Jenny through another person he would have Andrews up in court and into jail. There were many things he, Farnham, would do. He left the man cringing, trying to apologise and seeking to insure himself against some future disaster.

Tony Hillier was a man with a deep sense of morality. He told Arnold that he would frankly not know what to do if he were to be faced with the same situation. He knew of others who had let their daughters

fulfil the pregnancy and have the child adopted, but some refused to let the daughter see and hold her little one. Tony said he thought he would do this, but he recognised Arnold's and Prunella's case was a difficult one. Finally he offered to arrange for the abortion, but the Farnhams would have to make their own choice. The abortion would be quite legal-provision had been made for the case of minors-so they could have it 'above board'.

Arnold Farnham never hesitated. Jenny had not long conceived. Surgery should not harm her physically. Although her father sensed some reluctance in his wife, he arranged for the operation. Prunella and Teresa took over from there. Arnold did not need to come to the hospital. In fact it was better that he did not. The news was broken to Jenny who became unusually sullen, but she made no outward protest. Within a few days Jenny was back at school. By that time Max Andrews had been transferred to a country school, and the few students who knew subsided into an unbroken silence. The whole matter died down. A few days' absence from school was virtually unnoticed. Somehow the Farnham family settled back into their routine. The disturbance had come and gone: that is, on the surface it was the way it seemed to be, but the wounds were there. Only the young son Alexander knew nothing.

I had known nothing of these events. I knew Teresa and her family I had been doing social science at University but without much enthusiasm. Teresa was, however, an enthusiastic student. We were good

friends without having an emotional relationship. It was simply 'Teresa' and 'Arnie', and we left it at that. I married before she did, but because our interests were close, we kept up the friendship. She knew I had a deep interest in Australian literature, and might have preferred to have followed that line rather than social science. Together we talked over case histories which were set for us to study. Occasionally the matter of abortion came up, and I noticed she flinched when the subject was mentioned. Curious as I was, I never pursued the matter.

After a time Teresa married and settled down to be a wife and mother rather than continue on in her psycho-therapy practice. Jenny went on to be a model, and a quite famous one. She must have had many proposals of marriage but she remained single, and on the occasions I met Teresa she was quiet about her sister. She said Jenny was doing some studies in journalism and that she had shown a flair for fiction and poetry. Teresa thought her writing was unusually good. She was being accepted by the little journals: those who published modern creative writing, and, of course, some stuff that was *avant garde*. Not until she died did I read any of her fiction or poetry.

Jenny died in an accident. So did three others in the same vehicle. They were travelling back to Adelaide from Sydney and collided with a semitrailer on the Princes Highway, just past Gundagai. Jenny died instantly, the others lingered in unconsciousness for a few days before dying. Her body was brought to Adelaide, and her funeral service took place in a chapel at Centennial Park.

My wife Annette and I attended the funeral where some friends spoke highly of Jenny. She had become famous as a model, but recognition of her talents as a writer had lately been coming to the fore. I was intrigued by the mixture of mourners, as we used to call them in past days. Her funeral seemed more like a celebration than a mourning. Afterwards Annette and I were introduced to some of Jenny's literary friends. Funeral services seem to release folk into intimate discussion, and I think Teresa was quite surprised by the warm praise of Jenny by her journalist and editor friends. Some had come from interstate.

It was weeks later when Teresa called me. She was undoubtedly agitated. She asked if she could visit us, and we set the following night. Her husband Arthur promised to drive her up into the hills where we lived. Teresa was too disturbed to be able to drive. Annette and Arthur released us after dinner and we went to my study.

Teresa had two large files of Jenny's writing, and plastic bags filled with odd pieces of her scribbling—unfiled. Teresa let it fall on my desk, and then collapsed into a chair, weeping. I sat on the other side of the desk, curious about the papers, but wanting Teresa to have her full cry. If the files hadn't been there I would have put her weeping down to grief for the loss of her sister, but I caught a note in her sobbing which was almost terror.

'Oh, Arnie', she said, 'I just can't believe what I've read in these papers. Some of it is wonderful, but it all amounts to something terrible'.

I waited for her to finish a fresh burst of weeping.

‘Just read from the first file’, she said.

When I began reading I felt I was in another world, and frighteningly strange it was. Teresa kept pleading with me not to stop reading.

‘If you stop’, she said, ‘I will have to bear it all myself. I daren’t show it to anyone else. They wouldn’t know how to handle it. Someone unscrupulous might use it. Oh, Arnie, I know you will understand, somehow. Please, please read it’.

After an hour or so, Annette and Arthur asked whether we would like coffee or some other drink. We both nodded, and they brought us a tray. They didn’t even give a side glance at the papers that were scattered on the desk. Annette brought a side table and left us with the supper. She picked up my eye message and left us to work on into the night.

At midnight I asked Teresa to leave the papers with me. I also asked her to come back after I had gone through them minutely. I had no doubt that Jenny had been a fine writer, but like Teresa I had felt alarm for the content of much she had written. I wondered whether there wasn’t some insanity in it, but everything had been rationally written. One word was beginning to emerge-‘fantasy’-but it was neither neurotic nor psychotic. I said so to Teresa and she agreed with me. It seemed to give her some comfort.

Three nights later the four of us had dinner together again at our home. Annette and Arthur had not read the papers, nor did they wish to do so. Whilst

both had a deep appreciation of literature they were not psychotherapists or even psychologists. We had talked generally about them but without disclosing the elements which were disturbing us. They sensed there was a mystery in the papers Jenny had left but were content for us to evaluate them.

When we were left to work on the papers, Teresa’s first words were, ‘Arnie, we may have something very close to genius here and we have to make a decision as to what we will do about them. Perhaps we may decide to destroy them or somehow to use them’.

‘I agree’, I said, ‘but there may be other options. First of all let us share our evaluation. As you know, there are two obvious elements; one being her unusually powerful writing, her superb literature. I would never have thought it possible that Jenny could write in that way. The other element is what seems like fantasy; her remarkable, but unbelievable descriptions of her child-the one she calls her lost child-but which seems to me to be the steady building of a fantasy’.

Teresa agreed. ‘As to her poetry and her extraordinary prose, I would say we dare not destroy it. Even if we were to lock it away, sealing it and setting a date when it could be opened, then her writing would be preserved. Perhaps fifty years after her death it could be recovered and researched by those competent to assess it, but almost none of it does not, in some way or another, refer to the child she has called “my Beatrice”.’

All I could say was, ‘Exactly’. Then I added, ‘It might all be called a special social document.’

Somehow it embodies the thoughts of a subject whose links with her aborted foetus are unbreakable’.

For a time we sat silent, not knowing what to do. Then Teresa asked me, ‘Arnie, have you done much research on the reactions of women who have gone through the abortion of a child, or children?’.

‘That is what struck me’, I said. ‘The paucity of our research in this area is unaccountable. Each year some sixty million fetuses are aborted. The antiabortionists have asserted that abortion causes deep psychic disturbances in women who abort, whilst the lobbyists for abortion say it brings virtually no problems. The “Right to Life” people do have accounts of strong relational fractures and the difficulty of ever healing these. Perhaps there are more situations like Jenny’s.

‘The statistic of sixty million women being involved seems to call for more consideration and examination.’

We sat for some time, pondering this thought. We had studied both claims, but it seemed to us from reading Jenny’s writings that our analysis had been far too superficial. We both knew we lived in a world where the debate was raging as to the rights of the mother and the rights of the unborn child. Tackling the subject from the point of view of ‘rights’ certainly had its value, but we sensed Jenny had been fighting for something that transcended the idea of ‘rights’.

Teresa has a developed skill of reading aloud. She selected some of the poems and pieces of prose which could almost be categorised as poetry. She found it difficult to read without tears, and I found it hard

to listen without tears. Even now, these months later, fragments of Jenny’s passion and her love for her unborn child haunt me. I have always considered that the cadence of reading is like music, and in that sense every poem is a lyric, and every piece of beautiful prose likewise a song of sorts.

For a time we rested from such readings. Teresa was deeply moved by her sister’s thought and the power of her literary expression.

‘I guess great literature arises from the depths of genuine feeling about what grasps us most. The love of a woman for her child involves the depths of her femininity. Abortion is different- to a miscarriage. What we call “nature” seems to be helpful rather than harmful when a miscarriage happens. There has been no decision on the part of the mother to eject the foetus. Acts of will are linked with human accountability. Accountability seems to presuppose certain values and our responsibility to live by them. Jenny was never consulted as to whether she should have aborted or not. In addition she had the almost romantic idea of providing a baby for a childless couple. Maybe she felt guilty for not protesting, not fighting to retain her child!

I said, ‘Her guilt would have been mixed up with what has generally been seen as promiscuity or immorality. Maybe she felt helpless to argue the matter with her parents and you’.

Teresa had long thought about these things. ‘Perhaps guilt played a big part in her emotional disturbance, but over and above that she expresses indescribable love for her child. The schoolteacher and his

wife don't seem to figure much in her later thoughts. Her Beatrice takes the centre of her thinking, of her longings, of her fantasy imaginings. I am beginning to see that the relationship a mother has with her childborn or unborn-is perhaps the deepest and strongest of all human relationships.'

'You mean there is a kind of unbreakable bonding?'

Teresa shook her head. 'The relationship of a child and a mother is more than a bonding. Bonding can take place in adoption, but it seems to me that bloodrelationship is powerful beyond description. There is a union, almost a merging of the two, as each is in the other whilst still retaining the natural identity every person has. We talk about psychical unity, but I think we cannot evade the word "spiritual" and by that word I am not understanding "religion".'

'So how would you describe Jenny's experience; her creating of this fantasy child, this beautiful and mysterious Beatrice who never existed but who was as real to Jenny as our children are to us? So often she seems to be more real to Jenny than the other persons she knew, and with whom she had social interrelationships.'

'The way I read it', Teresa said slowly, 'is that a woman is so made, so structured, that her whole being is involved in the foetus she conceives. She never thinks of it as a "thing". She never calculates that it is not a personal being even before it starts to move in her body. Everything is oriented towards the day of its birth and its being released from her womb. Most of her thinking goes into developing the character and person of her unborn child. She

is moving towards what will be a remarkable, if painful, bringing forth of her baby. If this developing expectation is suddenly terminated, and the foetus is forcibly ejected, then there is a psychic or spiritual shock we cannot measure. Perhaps nothing so frightening can ever be experienced, and it defies description'.

We both thought of Jenny's sad but beautiful dreams, her sorrowful crying after her child, her fantasising it into being, her odes and lyrics as she described the phantom child who was no less beautiful than herself, and who was the sum of her dreams and imaginings.

'Maybe', Teresa said, 'these writings are deeper than others can be, by nature of the case. Maybe, also, they represent a social document which could be a key to understanding the depths of mother love and the coinherence of a child and its mother'. She sighed. 'I just don't know what to do with these papers. I would not dare to show them to my parents. They would never cope with what is written here.'

After a time I said, 'There is also the matter of the father. I am not speaking ideally here, but of what some theologians and philosophers have called "the ontological -the way things really are in the being and relationships of human creatures. The woman takes the seed of the man and together they conceive the child. Perhaps there is this psychic or spiritual relationship of the male person with his seed and so his offspring. Perhaps abortion affects him also, even if he is selfish and only wants the passing pleasure of sex. I guess what is called "sex" is not merely a

biological act. It is the most intimate union we know, and may carry a great weight of relational importance.

Annette and Arthur came bearing supper for four. We pushed aside the files and other papers, and enjoyed our coffee and tea, and some of Annette's special cooking. We gave a short review of what we had read and what we had talked about, and our inability to come to any conclusion.

Annette said, 'It is a kind of mystery. Maybe we are locked into accepting the mystery and living in it. Some mysteries are beyond the grasp of many of us. As you say, Jenny's father might never understand what his daughter has been about. I think Jenny's mother would fully understand, but then the pain of it might prove too much, so it would be best not to disclose what has happened'.

Teresa agreed with my wife, but added, 'Perhaps my Mum might in some way be relieved with what Jenny has written. Maybe my Dad needs to see the outcome of his decision to have the child aborted'.

Arthur said, 'I must confess it is all beyond me. Of course I haven't read anything Jenny has written. Maybe we all need to have more commonsense about the whole matter. After all, Jenny seems to have gotten into quite mystical states. If, as you say, there are sixty million abortions in the world, then human beings must have power to come to terms with the fact and matter of abortion'.

'Could well be so', I said, 'and perhaps even research may yield few tangible results. Even so, I feel

I would like to follow some of the leads which Jenny seems to have opened up'.

Annette nodded in agreement. 'You go ahead, Arnie. You don't have a great deal of interest in formal therapies. Maybe Jenny has left us a legacy, a key or something like that. At the same time I think we ought to consider the whole Farnham family, and honour Jenny's privacy. After all, she never made her writings public.'

There was a tinge of sadness in Teresa's voice. 'I am going to go back over all her published writings. Perhaps much of how she felt about her life can be detected in them. I would like to put that together.'

Annette said, 'What was this whole thing with Jenny? What do all those papers mean? What was her fantasy play? Can you somehow give us the story?'

Teresa nodded. 'It isn't difficult to work it through. Jenny never wanted the abortion, and yet she was never consulted. She had set her teenage heart on the child, and had rationalised it was for her childless teacher whom she adored. So much for her idealism. After the abortion she refused to accept the death of the foetus, and her motherliness kept building up the child as though it had never been aborted. She kept seeing the one she called Beatrice as a living person. She was mothering it through stage after stage. She seemed to have craved being the mother. By this time the teacher was gone from her thinking, and she was raising her daughter. She lived with the fantasy behind all her day-to-day living. It became her reality, but in none of this was she actually neurotic or psychotic. She will probably prove to be the classic for all

time of the mother who had her child aborted above her own will. She has immortalised Beatrice in some of the most beautiful poetry and prose that we have seen. The question is whether anyone beyond Arnie and myself ought to be allowed to read it. It is deeply affecting. In fact it haunts you, never letting you get away from the beautiful child she fostered in her heart and imagined with an art that is rarely seen. As we said, many human artists do not speak out of their deepest deeps. Koheleth, the Eastern preacher, once said, "That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep: who can find it out?". Arnie and I have, in a way, more or less grasped the outlines of her thinking, but that is about all.'

Annette and Arthur remained silent. They had been profoundly moved as Teresa, via Jenny, had opened up to them a world in which the depths of human emotion, devotion and love were shown to be beyond our general thinking. Perhaps they were reminded of the great operas. Certainly they were hearing of passion beyond the superficial soap operas of our day.

Even while Teresa was giving the picture of Jenny's experience of abortion-refusing the death of her Beatrice, and building out her phantom child—something had been forming in my mind. 'I reckon we can honour Jenny's privacy as we see it. We can lock away the papers from others, and maybe have them released some decades later; but there is nothing to stop us using the materials to research abortion, mother and child relationships and even father and child relationships, all of which would bring us into the wider realm of family relationships. Perhaps

Jenny has given us the most valuable key available to open this sort of research.'

We sat for a long time, pondering the matter. Teresa gave a deep sigh which seemed to be the signal for our night together to be concluded.

Annette said, 'I like Arnie's idea. I think he will need help from Teresa and even from me. Maybe Arthur can also assist. Whatever the case, I think we ought not let Jenny's experience be lost. No-one need know the source of it'.

'Out there', Teresa said with a tired voice, 'there must be a wealth of helpful material'.

'Agreed', said Arthur. Annette gathered the cups and saucers, and she and Teresa went to the kitchen. Arthur wandered around a bit looking at the books on my shelves. 'There seems to be no end to it all', Arthur said, indicating the many books which had been written about human relationships and behaviour.

'No end at all', I agreed. My mind was more in a ferment than I was prepared to let Arthur know. I wondered whether Jenny's story could ever be written satisfactorily, so deep was the matter. I thought of the world of millions whose minds and feelings must be as deep as Jenny's, even though they might never even suspect it. I had been a human being long enough to know something of our social complexity.

Most of all, I had entered into the mystery of the deepest of human relationships, and was not at all sure how I was going to cope with such a revelation or live in such a mystery.

I just did not know.

Alcoholics Anonymous Anonymous, or The Perpetual Alcoholic

I met Charles Means, or, perhaps, Meenz, Meanz, Mienz-I never did find out, having only met him but once-and I fastened on the spelling of his name in my mind as I have here typed it. I think he was also a bit of a mean man, no matter how pleasant he sounded. He was not tall, and he was thin. He was well dressed, yet a little unkempt, too. I can picture him quite clearly as I write. His Panama hat lay on the park bench beside him, his walking stick was in his hand, his half-eaten lunch was also on the bench. He was slightly bent over it, and when he looked up his eyes were quite keen: they were pale blue above the short, sharp nose. His sun-browned face was slightly lined, and his thin lips were puckered. He was ready to launch into conversation. His suit had seen better days but it was as clean as it was worn. The man in it seemed quite well preserved.

As for me, I was keen to unwrap my small lunch parcel and look, at the same time, at the violet larkspurs which were just beginning to bloom in that early spring. They lined the outside of the marvellous low hothouses which were colourful, even through the old glass, with their seasonal flowers. The Botanic Gardens in Adelaide are unusually beautiful, and at that moment my mind was on the column-like Queensland Kauri Pine, which I always observe as does a worshipper the primary object of the shrine he holds sacred. For these two reasons Charles Means had to catch my gaze and keep it by opening the conversation.

‘Beautiful larkspurs this year’, he commented, licking a buttered crumb from below his thin lips.

‘For the moment said, ‘I thought they were delphiniums’.

I then unwrapped my lunch.

‘Very much alike’, he agreed, his eyes vaguely on my sandwiches with their thick slices of cold sausage. I, too, have always had difficulty in remembering which is which.’ He barely hesitated as he switched the subject of conversation.

‘I’, he said, ‘am Charles Means and also am an alcoholic’.

I nodded and took my first bite of the sausage sandwich. At the same time I unrolled the slice of fruitcake from its gladwrap. I have met innumerable alcoholics in my lifetime and have known that they are all interesting people, even if incurably egocentric.

‘I have met many, many alcoholics’, I said by way of concession to him for having invited himself into my

grandchildren. Only on occasions like this would we permit its eating. I bit into its fruity sweetness, trying not to let its nutty bits get stuck under my dentures.

I was quite right in my intuition. He was interesting. He had made a collection of stories-tales of famous and infamous inebriates. Head of the list was Henry Lawson's famous story of the tram-riding, ferry-sailing, alcohol-swilling, city-dwelling perpetual drunk. Like others of Lawson's characters he seemed to have no future, but then the brilliant author seemed, generally, to get immense satisfaction from the way life was slanted against unfortunates who were born to be underdogs.

Right now my Mr Means was spelling out the doom of such drunks. He thought there was no story like that story, and I could not but agree with him. He wanted to tell me others, and in fact was well on the way to do so when I held up my hand.

'The day is deliciously pleasant', I said. 'The larkspurs are delightful and even gay in their own way. Let us be done with these stories of drunks. Let us get down to the matter which matters-the cure of the alcoholic.'

His eyes took on what might be called 'a sparkle'. 'I am with you', he said. 'It is the cure that matters. All the rest is but morbidity.'

It had been nicely said. I felt we were getting somewhere.

'We want to see causes rather than discuss symptoms', I said. 'We want cures rather than prognoses.'

they like to dish it out when given the opportunity. Even then they find it difficult to handle. Also, they are never wrong. They, in all the world, are right. You dare not contradict them. At the same time they all seem intelligent and even creative. In conversation they are no slouches. Quite interesting, in fact.'

His eyes held a pale blue wonderment. 'Where did you get all that stuff from?' he asked.

'I used to counsel alcoholics and the others', I said calmly

'Used to?' he quoted me.

I nodded. 'After some years I gave it up. They never really listened to me. They never heard what I said. I'm not too sure they even wanted to listen to anyone, but they demanded I listen to them.' I took another bite. 'Which, of course', I said, 'I always did, though the constant repetition of their way of life became quite monotonous'.

He was clearly impressed. 'You did all that, eh?' he said. 'So my talking to you now is much the same as you have always heard it?'

I told him, 'I have a feeling you are going to be one of the few exceptions to my previous experiences. You have something different to tell me'.

He stared at me with a kind of dazed delight. He picked up his walking stick-a pure Malacca cane, in fact-and tapped it on the asphalt path beneath us.

'You are remarkable!' he exclaimed. 'And you are exactly right.'

I had now reached the fruitcake: precious Christmas cake which my wife helped me to hoard away from the sight of my fruitcake-loving children and

‘Just a minute!’ he exploded. ‘You can’t leave me now! We haven’t discussed everything. I haven’t talked about my family. I haven’t told you my plan for alcoholics beyond even Alcoholics Anonymous!’

I could see he was most earnest. I also sensed that he thought me to be the one person that fate or fortune had led to him, who would understand, and indeed authenticate, his remarkable discovery. This discovery of his would be unique in the annals of ancient alcoholism, or, as they now say, alcohol dependency.

His blue eyes pleaded with me. Even so, I had a quick look inside and caught the brilliance of floral beauty, but I took pity and came back to our bench. He seemed immensely relieved when I sat beside him.

‘Thank you’, he said. ‘I’m not game to tell anyone what I am about to disclose to you. It is my system of Alcoholics Anonymous Anonymous. No-one has ever thought of this before.’

I was sure he was correct. I nodded respectfully. He seemed to take heart. He launched into his explanation.

‘Few people understand that sometimes an alcoholic is indispensable to his family. Generally the public look upon an alcoholic as a curse to his people. This may well be the case at the beginning, but after a time their alcoholic relative becomes quite a special creature, like a pet which is quaint and even unusual. Dogs with a certain kind of awkwardness and abnormal character are much noticed and even fussed over. Pets with physical or character handicaps get special attention. It is like that with alcoholics.’

He understood me perfectly. The language was not new to him. He was a decent, intelligent fellow.

He said, ‘What would you say is the primary cause, and what the primary cure?’

‘I would say offended egotism is the primary cause, along with the anger at not being loved, and the reaction to that injustice. The primary cure would be to have one’s anger dissolved, and one’s ego humbled and overwhelmed by pure love.’

He seemed astonished: stunned in fact. ‘Never saw it that way’, he said, shaking his head. ‘They don’t seem to say much about that in psychology.’

‘I wasn’t talking about psychology’, I told him. ‘You rarely find such words in psychological reasoning. With all your intelligence you won’t understand me unless you forget about human victimisation.’

This time I had lost him, and didn’t think I could make my way through the maze of his thinking. Even so he had an answer.

‘I have’, he said, with some kind of a triumphant finality, ‘been through Alcoholics Anonymous’.

‘Good for you’, I said. ‘They are a great help.’

‘Of course’, he said. ‘They are the answer, all right.’

‘Then that is just about it’, I said, picking the last minute crumbs of the fruitcake and popping them into my mouth. I was anxious to look at the anemones and ranunculi in the warm glasshouse. I also wanted to see the marvellous show of ferns. I rolled up my crinkled bits of gladwrap and put them into the brown paper bag.

I gave a kind of sigh as I rose, adjusted my hat and made towards the hothouse entrance.

and I know they need to need me, so we all play the game. They respond to my need, and I to theirs. Every so often they give me a bit of cash. Quite sacrificially of course, quite nobly I acknowledge the good act, but inwardly I am quite angry at their patronage. Every man has his dignity; of course, and no one appreciates handouts’.

Now his eyes were hard: quite icy in fact. ‘You see they talk about me to others. They gather sympathy. Each failure of mine is a kind of credit to them for their toleration, their suffering. You won’t believe it but *they don’t ever want me to be healed!*’

At this point I became alert. All he had told me I had known, but somehow he was shaping it up differently.

‘Suppose by a miracle I became dry forever, and not just a temporarily dried-out alky. Suppose I became whole and healthy again as I used to be, recovered my former skills, took up my place in the world and was provider-as I used to be-and so received great respect and became highly successful. Suppose that were to happen, eh, then where would they be?’

‘Some of the best artists, writers, musicians and geniuses have been alcoholics’, I said.

He nodded. ‘Exactly my point. Suppose I succeeded even beyond them. What then?’

I repeated his question: ‘Well, what then?’

He looked around as though someone was lurking in the bottlebrushes and banksias, intent on hearing him. ‘They would never allow it’, he said.

When I stared uncomprehendingly, he said, ‘They love Alcoholics Anonymous. They hope I will attend

He stared at me as though wondering whether I was following his argument. I was. He went on.

‘Of course, some alcoholics are not pets. They often get into great rages and can be dangerous, but on the whole families somehow cope with them. They adjust, so to speak. Likewise their drunken relative also copes with them. There is a lot of uneasiness, but where sobriety is not achieved the family has to live with the problem.’

He leaned forward, looked around somewhat furtively, and then said softly in a conspiratorial voice, ‘My particular problem is money. I have to do all sorts of things to get money so that I can have a sip here and there. I do not drink in bars. “Cupboard drinker they call me.

‘My family knows all this and they work hard to see I don’t steal much of their money. Of course it is all wrong, but I do it, but not like the druggies. No robberies, no hold-ups, no breaking and entering: I watch my moment to find their loose cash, wherever they hide it. I sometimes cheat on the cheque book. Even so, it is all part of the family needing their alcoholic. They know I do it. They even chide me for doing it.’

I had heard much in my time and read even more. I knew families learned to adapt to their poor addict but never because they would *need* him. This was wholly a new thought.

He saw my puzzled look, and a tiny gleam of triumph flared in his blue eyes. ‘You must have heard about “needing to be needed”. That is how some people live.’ His voice dropped, ‘I have a wife who is like that, and two daughters. They know I need them,

anyone can irreversibly be cured. Perpetual treatment for the perpetual addict is their idea, although they might never put it quite like that.

'I owe a lot to Alcoholics Anonymous, but Alcoholics Anonymous Anonymous is the only answer.'

I sat staring at him for some time. His former diffidence had gone. His eyes were not so much hard as they were firm. His face had gained character. He knew I had almost grasped his point, and some strong confidence was in his face.

'I really don't get it', I said. 'What do you mean by "Alcoholics Anonymous Anonymous"? Sounds weird to me.'

He was not dispirited. His gaze was steady now, his eyes a quiet blue.

'If we who are withheld from escape by those dependent upon alcoholics could really get together secretly then something might change. If we could work out how to be released from our imprisonment, then we might become whole humans again. That is why it would have to be wholly secret. No-one should ever be allowed to get to know. Those dependent upon alcoholics would be on us like a pack of wolves.'

I was beginning to understand his point. 'Would you try to get back to primary causes-back beyond the symptoms-and then try to come to primary healing?'

'I don't know', he said. 'Maybe people like you could help us, but we would need to be out of the reach and watching of those dependent upon us as alcoholics.'

it forever. It is part of the game: almost a hobby in fact-I attending, they talking about me as hopeless for life yet kept from total disaster by AA'.

I wanted to agree, but something was beginning to stir in me-in me who had worked with alcoholics for years! Not for nothing had I counselled them, year in and year out-that strange but attractive group of addicts.

'What are you at?' I demanded.

Now his blue eyes gleamed in triumph. 'I reckoned you would be intelligent', he said. 'I reckoned you would understand that some people become alcoholic dependent; that is, dependent upon people who are alcoholically dependent. They get to a stage when they can't cope if the person is cured. I have a son who has the utmost contempt for me and he helps me most by not helping me. It is he who keeps me alive. His contempt stings me like a vicious wasp. He reckons I ought to pull myself together, and that means he believes I can if I will. So he helps me. Unconsciously he has set a goal for me and will punish me until I reach it. The others who seem to need me to be alcoholic will never let me go. Sometimes when I seem to be succeeding they get angry and don't even know why. They don't know that they would be shattered if I were to recover.'

There was a hard line of bitterness in his voice. 'AA is a great institution but it is too public. It doesn't mean to do so, but it keeps our affliction before us and others. Sure, it is immensely helpful and supportive. I have no criticism for it. It assures the family it has got the matter in hand, even though it never claims

were out of my past situation, but I also knew he understood me. I could see by the soft blue light in his eyes and the gentle nodding of his head. He was also breathing rapidly.

'You are saying that if your family discovered you were making your way out of your addiction forever, then they would be shocked. They would be deprived of their addiction to being dependent on you to fulfil their need for being needed.'

The first grin I had seen in his face showed up. He nearly clapped. 'Right! he said, almost rhapsodically. 'They would scarcely know how to live. They would need to form their own Support Group to cope with their new situation. Maybe they would call it Alcoholic Dependants Anonymous.'

I grinned too. After all, the idea was pretty rich. I searched his eyes to see whether he was having me on. I don't think he was.

'What about having a look at these lovely flowers', I said, 'and then what about looking at the ferns. They are fabulous'.

'I know', he said. 'I often come here. I reckon they will look special today.'

He was quite right, of course. I think he knew the botanical names as well as I did, but we kept peering at them, sometimes commenting.

A thought struck me. 'Your son would understand', I said. 'He would be right behind you.'

He nodded. 'He's been my lifeline all the time, although he thinks he hates my guts.'

We shook hands as we parted. Some faint shadow of suspicion still lingered in my mind, but for the

For a moment I was tempted to tell him why I had gotten out of the social science business, and why I had viewed the burgeoning industry of social help and therapy with some kind of distaste. Most of us in it had known we had joined it to get help for ourselves. I suppose we all had the urge to help others, and perhaps gain some power through giving a lending hand to others. Conscience is sometimes a strange thing, especially when conditioned by the urge to help others.

The brilliance and beauty of the flowers I had been seeing through the hothouse glass whilst he talked suddenly ceased to hold me. This small, somewhat mean-looking man was no fool. Maybe he had somehow stumbled on a truth which could help to liberate him.

'See if I get you', I asked. 'Let me run before you what I think you mean.'

He nodded. He seemed a bit breathless; much as a person might be who has devised an important invention.

'You are saying that support groups for addicts or dependants help to keep their members from being enslaved and hurt by their addiction. You are saying that families adapt to the situation in order to help. Groups Anonymous can never finally heal or liberate the addict, and somehow close relatives view their weak one as an oddity and want to help; yet at the same time they need to be needed, and a conclusive liberation of the addict would do them out of a job. Is that what you're saying?'

I knew my words were a bit heavy, coming as they

were out of my past situation, but I also knew he understood me. I could see by the soft blue light in his eyes and the gentle nodding of his head. He was also breathing rapidly.

'You are saying that if your family discovered you were making your way out of your addiction forever, then they would be shocked. They would be deprived of their addiction to being dependent on you to fulfil their need for being needed.

'The first grin I had seen in his face showed up. He nearly clapped. 'Right!' he said, almost rhapsodically. 'They would scarcely know how to live. They would need to form their own Support Group to cope with their new situation. Maybe they would call it Alcoholic Dependants Anonymous.'

I grinned too. After all, the idea was pretty rich. I searched his eyes to see whether he was having me on. I don't think he was.

'What about having a look at these lovely flowers', I said, 'and then what about looking at the ferns. They are fabulous'.

'I know', he said. 'I often come here. I reckon they will look special today.'

He was quite right, of course. I think he knew the botanical names as well as I did, but we kept peering at them, sometimes commenting.

A thought struck me. 'Your son would understand', I said. 'He would be right behind you.'

He nodded. 'He's been my lifeline all the time, although he thinks he hates my guts.'

We shook hands as we parted. Some faint shadow of suspicion still lingered in my mind, but for the

most I was convinced. As I made my way back to the carpark I began to wonder whether I ought to re-enter the social industry. It was a temptation of a kind, but I rejected it. I thought I might share the idea of AAA with some of my friends, but to do that I might defeat the object the man had set before me.

It was then my suspicion sharpened. I looked back to see whether Charles Means was in sight, but he had vanished. I felt a flash of anger as though I had been hoaxed, but I knew I hadn't. He was right of course, but why had he picked on me to tell his theory?

I was still grinning when I reached the carpark. Driving home I knew I would tell no-one, not even my closest friends. I had my own reasons for keeping quiet of course, and that was my own personal business: and it will remain so.

Mystery Delicious

This morning I am on my own. I am making my way through the grounds of the haunted house. These grounds are old for a suburb which is supposed to be new. That is what my father told me.

‘Son’, he said, ‘you be sure of this one thing. This is a new suburb’.

Now I know it is a new suburb, but I am wondering why this house is so old in a suburb that is so new. I am very loyal to my father’s way of thinking. I know he is one of the wisest of men there is. I cannot even imagine him being wrong, and everywhere I see they are building new houses which proves him right. Even so, this haunted house is old: very old.

It must be that way out in the bush country, as this once was, someone must have ventured far from the city and built this house. As I make my way through some rough lantana, through which grow pittosporums and Queensland box trees, I am still asking myself, ‘How come this house is old? Australia is old, but not this suburb. It is on the fringe of the city. It is on the North Shore’.

The house faces the highway. This is a narrow highway. Because it is in the early 1920s of our land it has a thin flow of vehicles. Some of them are old. Some seem to stutter with noise as their engines urge them past the old pittosporums, which at the moment are disgorging sticky, thick fluid from their yellow seed balls. Red seeds are emerging. I am careful not to get their gum on my new jersey. There is not a thing that my father does not notice. He always notices the foolish things that I do.

What he does not know is that I have a love for something which I do not understand. I am always driven by curiosity, although I rarely ask questions. Once, years ago, I walked with my father who is always deep in thought and rarely answers questions. This seemed the time to ask a hundred questions which were lined up in a long queue waiting to be asked. They were mysteries to be solved.

I remember that night. It was dusk, just before the dark. There was a man going ahead of us, and he had a long stick which he kept poking up at the gas globes. He would hook onto something and suddenly there would be a blue flare, and another street light would break into the evening, making it to be a lovely haze. I kept hoping he would hurry ahead of us and make everything beautiful and dreamy whilst I talked to my father.

I knew he was not impatient with me. He was just lost in some special kind of thought. My father is always thinking. For that matter, so am I. That night he scarcely answered one of my questions, but I was happy, chattering on. It was good to chatter with my

father. I thought he had his own mystery and did not wish to enlighten me about mine. I suppose I was glad that he had his own world and did not mind me having mine.

Now I am through the tangle of lantana, the low shrubs, and past the tall blue gums which help to hide this house. It is not that I have not been here before, but my body seems to tingle with things like pins and needles. I find my breath is a little short. I am breathing hard. I am trembling a bit. I also shiver.

Six days ago Tiger and Trevor and I came to this haunted house. No one was around and we slipped low under the lantana and lay on our stomachs, making sure no ghosts were visible. It was in the late afternoon before the lamplighter came, and it was very quiet with the sun striking golden colour from the west and making pink fleece of the soft clouds above us. We could see through the pittosporums that sunlight was flooding the western side of the high water tank. That tank must have been there a long time. It was strange to think of those thousands of gallons being contained in that tank. That was one of the few things my father did explain. He said they pumped water high up into the tank and it then would flow through all the pipes to all houses and places. I wanted to ask him why the water had to be so high. I also had never seen or heard a pump. The silence of pumping is still a mystery to me.

Tiger hates the tall water tower. That Sunday afternoon we walked up the hundreds of steps to get to the

top, but he slouched around below, kicking at stones and sticks. After a time he took a thick stick and hit the iron stanchions trying to get us to come down. We liked looking over the country from north to south and east to west. When we came down he was looking miserable. I wonder why he does not climb with us. He says he has better things to do.

One of these better things is to dare about this haunted house. We dare to go into it. We dare to find ghosts. Tiger is always first to explore on the ground, though he does not explore up there in the sky on the walkway round the tank.

'I am not afraid of ghosts', he has told us once or twice. 'Ghosts don't frighten me.'

We admire him and forget that he seemed scared to climb the hundreds of tank steps. We let him go ahead. Three times in the six days we have visited the haunted house, and now I am making a fourth visit. Now I am on my own. I am trembling. I am fearful. I think of Tiger who never seemed to tremble, although he was very quiet and his face was quite white. He seemed to be fearless as he led us into the house.

When we got inside the house through a door that was not locked we found ourselves in a large room, but strangely enough it had a wooden floor which was thickly covered with straw. I thought I smelt horses. I love the smell of horses. One day I will ride horses, but I must ride them bareback, holding onto the mane as I have seen it in a painting in our drawing room. It is almost agony for me to have to wait until I can ride a horse this way-bareback. At least now I have the smell of horses.

'Horses have been here', I said softly.

'Of course, ninny', said Tiger, as though I had discovered nothing. 'Someone is using the haunted house for a stable.'

My mind was going wild. Who would be using the house for a stable? There have not been bushrangers for years; Ned Kelly and Captain Starlight are long since dead. Maybe they use this place as a stable for ghost horses. My mind gets these crazy ideas. I ventured the idea in a whisper, and Tiger scorned it. Trevor was not so scornful. He was trying not to tremble.

Then we heard a sound. It was a creaking sound. Trevor had found a rope which was like an endless chain. He was pulling on it, and the creaking sound had begun. We watched in delighted terror. Something was descending. It was descending from the ceiling. It was a large lift. It came with a slight thump onto the straw and the floor.

'A lift!' said Tiger, and we stared at it in awe.

I had never been in a lift.

Tiger was impatient. 'Get into it!', he said.

It was open on one side, and we got into it. Trevor started to pull at the rope. The lift gave a grunt and a bit of a groan, and we were going up into the darkness of what was above the ceiling. When we got aloft, the lift stopped. We looked around, wondering what might happen. We had been told that ghosts were angry people, generally spirits of those who had been done to death.

Again the shudder in my spirit, but I would not let Tiger think I was afraid.

All we found on the top floor was a swaggie's swag, a rolled blanket with things inside it, and a billy can tied to the tough cord.

My mind was away, thinking about the swaggie. I was happy with another mystery, but was also fearful. He may have turned up any minute. Like in the stories I read in Chums and *Sexton Blake* books, the mystery person is always murderous. I thought of our winter fire at our house and the rug in front of it on which I lie, looking into the red coals, seeing things no-one else sees, and I wished then I could have been in that different world. I would have been warm and glowing, imagining weird things, but safe.

Trevor looked at the swag. Then he looked at us. 'There was dust on that swag. Also cobwebs. That was an old swag. No-one was coming back for it.'

None of us dared voice his thoughts. It was a ghost's swag. Ghosts never boil billies. Ghosts live with old things.

Tiger is rarely imaginative, but this time he said quietly, 'He may be dead, down there under the lantana'.

We were horrified. The loft was getting dark. The light had gone, and we were in some kind of murk.

Tiger nodded, and Trevor pulled at the rope. At first nothing happened, and fear was shooting through our limbs. We were anxious. We saw ourselves caught up here. It was too far up to jump. It was about the time the lamplighter would be about his business. Then the lift began to descend. We were almost hysterical with joy. Trevor had been pulling the wrong

way with the rope. Now he was doing what was needed.

We were on the floor with its straw and smell of horse. We could not get out quickly enough. We broke through the lantana, dreading at any moment to crawl over a corpse, to scatter rotting clothes that held whitened bones. None of this took much imagination: it was all so real to us.

Out on the footpath of the highway, looking up at the dark water tower and seeing the last faint pink of the dying sunset, we were suddenly brave again. We laughed. We boasted. We were never scared, we told ourselves. We scurried home lest our parents rouse on us for being out after dark.

All of this was six days ago. Since then we have been back two more times. Most of the mystery has gone. We have unknotted the cords of the swag and found nothing but moth-eaten underwear, some eating utensils and tin plates and a small saucepan. We wonder where the swaggie has gone. We now give the lantana as wide a berth as possible, making our way through its natural breaks.

Now, today, I am on my own. I have a purpose on my own. I scarcely know what it is, but I guess it is because I want to live in mysteries. I have a family which is very much down-to-earth. They poohpooh ghosts and spirits. Everything has to be scientific for them. I am not against science, but I like things that are hidden. I like what I call 'hidey holes'-secret places where I bury things. Trevor is a bit like me. We make a game of finding each other's hidey holes.

We search for other children's hidey holes, and sometimes find them, and then our delight is great.

Once, unbelievably, I found ten shillings in a hidey hole and I felt I should show it to my parents. They made me take it to the police station, which I did, and the constables there smiled and said I had better take it home, as no-one would own up to hidden treasure. My parents made me halve it with Trevor, and then said I should make a treat for the family. My father changed his mind overnight and told me I must never tell the family about the money. One Saturday afternoon we invited Tiger and had a great party out in the bush.

So I am on my own. Now I am being careful as I make my way through the lantana, past the pittosporums and their special scent. I am approaching the haunted house on my own. I am opening the door. I had not noticed on the other days that the door creaks. Its creak gets louder. It seems to be protesting. I leave the door open so I can escape quickly if I need to. As I open it I hear a rustling inside. Terror paralyses me. I cannot move. Suddenly something shoots past me, almost knocking me over. I almost swoon with fear. Then I hear a snuffling snarl and realise it is a dog. I breathe again and lean against the wall.

After a time I pull at the rope and find it uncanny to watch the lift shake its way to the ground. I pull again at the rope and I am on my way upwards. The old swag is there as we left it, unrolled. I sit looking at it. I realise that I am aware of a presence, but the presence does not frighten me. I know it has come with me, and will go with me. I know I have never been on

my own. I do not understand this presence. I do not even wish to understand it. I realise I am never alone.

I know my mother has the same sense of a presence. She has told me so. Her parents came from Ireland, but I do not know whether that has anything to do with it.

I sit next to the swaggie's swag, imagining him as a man who was driven from his home and family by the Great Depression in which we are living. I have watched hundreds of swaggies trudging their way past our homes. Once they used to come in and ask for help. They were always quiet, and almost sad about what they were doing. My father would get my mother to prepare food for them. Sometimes he would give them work in the garden and some money for their work. That was when their looks brightened, but generally they had clouds in their eyes.

So I now thought about the swaggie who had left his swag and not returned. Somewhere he may have hanged himself: who knows? Maybe he would come back having been in prison: who knows? I kept on in this line of thinking. It was then it came to me that I would never be fully contented unless I had a mystery to live in. No mystery: no fun. I was sure there would always be mystery. Fear of the haunted house had gone from me, and my imagination seemed unable to invent new mystery from this place.

It was then I heard the noises from below. I heard the roar of a truck, and the clatter and clash of metal being thrown around. I rushed to the lift and tugged at the rope, and I shuddered my way to the straw below.

There was a man coming through the door, and he seemed surprised to see me. I knew he was no swaggie. He had the look of a man who was strong and tough. He had a red face, red hair, and arms with some tattoos on them. He folded his arms and looked at me.

'What do we have here?' he asked. 'I think we have a trespasser.'

I told him there were no notices about trespassing. He nodded at that. 'Just playing here, eh?' he asked.

I nodded. 'This is a haunted house', I told him. 'We come here looking for the ghosts.'

By this time some of his friends had made their way into the room.

Their foreman began to explain to me that they were from the Water Board, and they were going to cut down the trees, remove the scrub and shrubs, and then they would pull down the house.

For a moment my heart went cold with despair. They were about to destroy what mystery remained.

I said, 'But we already have a water tower'.

The man grinned. 'So we do', he said, 'but that tower is going to look like a midget against this great reservoir we will build. We will build it on the ground and it will have acres of water in it'.

My mind could not grasp that, but I knew we were about to lose our haunted house. I knew Tiger and Trevor would be sad. I stared up at the red-haired man.

'What will the ghosts do?' I asked.

One of the men laughed. 'They will have to learn to swim', he said, and the other men laughed with him.

I had a sad picture of ghosts burrowing down in the cold water to find their old home, but my imagination didn't convince me.

'Can Tiger and Trevor and I come when you are digging up the grounds and pulling down the house?' I asked.

The red-haired man was gentle. 'I am sure we can let you do that', he said. 'When you come just tell the others that Mike gave you permission.'

I made my way through them, and one or two ruffled my hair or patted me on the back. To them I was a little kid.

They didn't know that when dusk came, and the gas lights came on down along the highway, and the sun was almost departed, that I would run home to beat the dark to our place. They never knew that when my mother sent me to the shopping centre that I so hated the dark that I would dread the murk that lay midway between the lights. I would cover my face from the light I loved when I came to it so that the darkness would not seem so terrible when I ran on into it.

They never knew that I lived in a world where strange beings frequented the darkness-dangerous beings which would do harm to a little boy. These things lurked behind trees, even behind the latticework that ran round our lavatory out back of our house. They never knew I would leave the door of it open, so I would not discover the creature or malignant man who might be hiding behind the door. Later I wondered why burglars and that sort of person should hide behind lavatory doors.

Well, if those workmen never knew all that, and if they had never tasted terror like me, then they had missed out on the most delicious of all feelings: feelings that only a small boy or maybe a small girl can have when they know that no dark presence can defeat the other presence which stays with every human being---if, of course, human beings will have it that way.

I thought a lot about that when Tiger and Trevor and I were allowed each afternoon to see the great blue gums cut down and sawed into blocks by hand with the long, steel crosscut saws, whilst others slashed the lantanas into submission, and cleared the scrub away without finding one human bone, and dug into the soil with pick and shovel, and set the footings for the great reservoir where ghosts would have to swim if they wanted to haunt their old place; and I have never heard of ghosts swimming: have you?

The three of us were fascinated by the changes taking place, but there was a little sadness for the loss of the haunted house, and for the mystery of the vagrant swaggie. Perhaps his ghost was an able swimmer. One can only guess, and more than that I do not know. To tell the truth I have physically felt ghosts in my life, even if I have not seen them, but that is another story yet to be told.

For the moment, remembering all those years ago, I am a bit sad about losing our haunted house. Genuine haunted houses are quite hard to come by.

The Return of the Lorikeets

What would you say about a Sydney suburb-high density in population-having a handsome eucalypt which grew more solid than Jack's beanstalk, and harboured whistling lorikeets, honeyeaters, the transient currawongs; with their sweet rain cries, and chattering mynas galore, to say nothing of the occasional nocturnal possum? Balconies of an apartment block opened onto this arboreal treasure, and a poem or two were written to its beauty. Its trunk was as smooth as a firm thigh, and its red overflow of plastic gum was like an artery set free for a few moving moments.

John, my special friend, has lived in his third-floor flat for about thirty years. It is one of the twelve apartments of the building. All of the folk living in them are middle-aged or older. They like their comfortable quarters, each having its own balcony from which, on the southern side, a good view is given of the Harbour Bridge. On the northern side you look towards the aristocratic North Shore. Long ago the flat dwellers had become used to the noise of the busy

traffic, and these days they scarcely hear the rattling of the electric trains as they pass close by on their west.

On the northern side of the building there was, of course, this beautiful gum tree. It towered gracefully above the third floor, and brought welcome shade in the summer. Lorikeets loved its creamy clusters of honeyed flowers, and they were joined in their feasting by innumerable fluttering honeyeaters. On wet days the currawongs slipped silently onto the smooth branches to begin their plaintive rain songs. Other musical birds meditated their lyrics in soft sibilant melodies. The disgraceful Indian mynas chattered their disgusting gossip amid the fugal classics of the avian upper class.

John, my friend of many years, had greatly indeed enormously-loved the tree. He would sit on his balcony with a book and look up at the birds, who, for their part, eyed him also with friendly gaze. John would read, think, doze, and finally go off to cook his meal or answer an insistent phone call.

The beginning of the troubles was the purchase of some of the flats by European and Asian migrants. They were quiet enough as new citizens, but it soon became evident that they feared the tall eucalypt. Sydney is given to sudden electric storms when lightning sometimes strikes a tree, or cyclonic winds break branches and hurtle them onto tiled roofs. This they dreaded.

This fear the newcomers felt showed up when the flat-dwellers of the apartments met for their usual monthly pow-wow of matters domestic regarding

their corporately-owned building. In somewhat broken English, some pleaded for the removal of the tree. John, who was the sole survivor of the original owners, was firm about retaining the tree. He told stories about it, some real and some not, and he spoke movingly of the tradition that had been built up, and of the unusual beauty of this Aussie eucalypt. He pointed out in moving tones and terms that it was virtually a heritage matter. Sadly enough their fears were not diminished by this kind of talk, and each month they would press for the removal of the tree. Each apartment-owner had the power of veto when it came to any change, so the tree remained, and its birds and a family of possums were not ousted from their homes. John was not the only lover of the tree, and so it seemed safe.

That is, until John went on one of his many overseas trips. Ian, a friend of his, would call in weekly to check out the flat, and maybe to stay overnight before he returned to the country. This time when he arrived the chainsaws were buzzing and screaming when he jumped out of his car. It was too late. He made all kinds of noises and gestures and showed his horror and made his protest, but to no avail. John had made the mistake of being absent from the monthly tribal meeting. His veto had been vetoed. Disconsolately Ian rang Tokyo with the terrible news. John probably wept into the phone.

On return he noted the evident guilt on all faces, but the damage had been done. There was a great gap on the northern side and, although the scenic view had been enlarged, nothing could compensate John

for the loss of his beloved tree. Well, almost nothing.

That was until he rang me in Adelaide, South Australia. He had told me his story of woe, but this day he was excited. A crisis had arisen.

‘With what’, he asked, ‘do you feed lorikeets?’

As a vintage aviarist I was able to tell him. ‘Farex and honey’, I told him. ‘You mix it into a soft paste, a kind of gruel.’

‘What’s Farex?’ he asked. Being a person not yet married he had not come into contact with Farex.

‘Forget Farex’, I said. ‘It is pretty dear. Soft fresh bread will do. Honey and bread. Mix them well.’

He seemed undecided. ‘They are making a noise on the balcony’, he said.

I guessed what was happening. ‘Just some honey mixed with water and left in a bowl will do.’

‘I’m out of honey’, he said in dismay.

‘Sugar’s OK, I said. ‘Sprinkle it on the balcony floor.’

The brilliant parrots went for it without hesitation. John has a habit of clasping and unclasping his hands when he is excited. He also has a habit of twitching the end of his nose. I was betting he was clasping and twitching all together.

On my next visit to John we were having breakfast when the lorikeets arrived. All birds have a pecking order and a culture of decorum. Their system is hierarchical and very functional. I knew all about this. John was recognised as their patron. They let him

talk in what he thought was bird language. Also he had a mixture of warbling and whistling. They had accepted this.

I watched it all with delight. Nostalgia invaded me for past times when I had bred them, or, rather, they had bred themselves in my aviaries. Mine, also, had eaten out my hand. I had a slight envy of John, but the delight in his eyes dissolved that. I was glad for him. I had Laurel my wife: the best he had was lorikeets-but then he did have lorikeets, brilliant hued, metallic-coloured, gloriously social lorikeets. Happy is the man ...

He had developed tons of yarns about them. He loved a rather ragged-looking lorikeet couple who were timid about eating the sugar, whilst their more robust companions strutted with heads back, or beaks forward, all the time chattering and whistling and advertising their extrovert selves. John would make motions and the macho types would allow the humble and meek pair to have their fill.

The years passed of course. New generations were bred, but there was always a king of them all, as also a humble pair almost grovelling on the last rung of the ladder. I followed the changes with interest, noting that John would never have had this great joy but for the lopping of the eucalypt. I knew that to the end of his days John would draw comfort and companionship from his feathered friends.

That is, until the day of the departure of the lorikeets. True, the lady downstairs hated them, always trying to shoosh them away. She must have hated their chattering and unbridled joy. Sometimes John

would see a broom being elevated until it reached the rail of the balcony, and with a quick sweep she would scrape them off their iron perch, but they would quickly settle back again. John made a huge, angry protest one day, his voice rising higher than the top floor. This partly settled the matter, but when she knew John was away she doubtless sought to scare them away.

There was a kind of side plot to this story, but I will spend little time on it. It had to do with my original purchase of lorikeets, and a grizzled bird-seller who warned me I had better get in good with my new possession.

'They are clever', he said, 'and good judges of character. If they take a liking to you, you will always be safe and happy with them. If you dislike them they will dislike you. Watch them. They have a way of getting their revenge on a breeder they don't like. You won't even know they are doing anything, but they get onto a perch in a certain position, back and tail set in your direction and when you come within the right distance from them they squirt you'.

'Squirt you?' I asked, bewildered. 'What do they squirt you with?' I asked.

My grizzled friend slapped his sides with joy at my innocence. 'With their squirts!' he roared. 'What else would they do it with?'

Comprehension dawned. 'Really?' I whispered. 'They actually work that all out?'

'Never miss', he said - 'Just keep in good with them, that's all I can say.'

I am certain that the lorikeets had their revenge on

the lady with the broom, but I can't prove my claim. All I know is that the elevation of the broom had ceased forever.

It was John's grave illness which dispersed the lorikeet flock. He was in hospital having and recovering from a major operation. John's friends have always been many, and they ring each other and talk about their remarkable friend and companion. A sort of queue formed in the hospital ward where he was recovering. Later his brothers whipped him up north to recover in their luxurious week-ender. Weeks turned into months before he returned.

It was bad enough coming home to a flat which seemed empty and cold after such social fellowship in hospital and the comfortable week-ender. John did not sit down and weep, but he rang a number of us and chatted hungrily, so to speak. At first he did not realise that what he missed were his beloved parrots. The senseless chattering of the mynas below did not cheer him. A sort of gloom settled upon the place and him.

When I came to stay with him for a few days, I thought he was like an old man, even though he was only in his early fifties. His back was somewhat bent, his legs seemed almost bowed, and his eyes were perpetually tired. He seems, by nature, to have an inborn enmity with prescribed medication, and I think he was neglecting his doctor's orders.

I am not exactly proud of my peculiar sense of humour, but generally John loves it and responds. This time, no response. Even so I tried to cheer him

up. Ian, our mutual friend, arrived and we both conspired to revive our depressed friend. It was all to no avail.

That is until one morning when I emerged from the bathroom. John was waiting with a controlled grin. The twitching of his end nose muscles was not controlled. I was startled.

Ian was also startled. We sat down to breakfast. John's nose kept twitching.

'Look at the balcony rail', he said.

We looked at the balcony rail. On it were seated a bedraggled pair of parrots. You could not say they were brilliantly coloured. Their blues and crimsons and yellows were lost in their fluffed greenery of feathers. Bedraggled is the correct word. One of them had an injured claw and he waved it miserably towards John.

'They're back!' John breathed with delight. 'The old scungy couple has returned!'

He was trying to keep the delight out of his voice but he was not succeeding. He was emptying the sugar bowl into his hand and making trails of the white crystals across the balcony floor. The two birds had their heads turned sideways, looking down at the feast. The male bird flew down, and Injured Claw followed. I felt it was playing to the gallery a bit, but it seemed glad enough to get the sugar.

John was chuckling. Huge gulps of joy were claiming him. His bent back had straightened. His dull eyes had lightened. His voice had a sparkle in it. He had forgotten any surgical soreness that might have remained. He was talking to them in his

Dr Doolittle voice, and they were acknowledging it. They chirruped, whistled and chortled musically. Man and birds chatted away together.

Ian raised his eyebrows, tapped the side of his head meaningfully and then grinned. In fact he broke into laughter. So did I. John looked up, a trifle surprised, and then he laughed. The three of us laughed together. The two birds went on scoffing the sugar crystals. When they were satisfied they flew back on to the balcony railing. Then together they let out a whistling trill and from all corners of the globe lorikeets came.

The original two were hunched up as though being bedraggled was a sort of lorikeet alternate life-style. The brilliant yuppies of their bird-world came zooming in like jet fighters. Their timing was perfect. They put on their air brakes and alighted at the last second. They clung to the balcony rail, even rocking a little: teetering, so to speak. They announced their return with strident notes and much jostling of their positions, accompanied by throating, whistling, screeching and calling.

We realised, of course, that they had a song called 'The Return of the Lorikeets' and that they were announcing this splendid event with pomp and splendour. They took no notice of the hunched pair which had pioneered the way home. These two had little to contribute to the general celebration which was under way.

John shot out to the kitchen, pulled out drawers, opened cupboards, mixed something and came back with it all spread across a tin pan. I guessed it was

Farex and honey, and that John kept it for special celebratory occasions and this was one of them.

Ian and I kept exchanging looks and winks, but John was oblivious to us. Full health had come to him in one moment, as it were. On the balcony the birds were eating honey whilst the early morning sun shone. The mynas down below were complaining shrilly, but then what are mynas in a time such as this?

When John returned with tea and toast for us from the kitchen, he was a new and a whole man. His old moaning, complaining and depression had vanished. The tea tasted like good tea, and the toast went well with it.

Someone had to say something so I said it.

'I would just love to write a short story about this', I said.

John nodded his permission. 'What would we call it?' he asked.

Ian gave one of his characteristic contemptuous, dry snorts. 'You could only have one title', he said.

When we kept staring at him, he wriggled in slight unease.

'Only one title and that would be "The Return of the Lorikeets".'

'Of course', said John. 'What other title could you have?'

I nodded my agreement. I wished I had got to it before Ian, but of course he was right.

My computer fingers itched. There was not even a laptop in sight, but I accepted that.

Now that the fingers have finished itching and the story is told, I am not sure I have caught all the magic

of it, but maybe you are a better reader than I am a writer. Maybe you have been reading between the lines. The story may not be as good as its title, but the title carries it, anyway, and with that I am content. John is a rehabilitated man, full of his old elan, his loneliness ended, and his affection is once again in action.

Soon he began a host of yarns about what his lorikeets do: like getting into the house, noseying around the place, asking questions about this and that, and even getting into his bath-dry of course-but you won't want to hear about these. They are just the bubblings and boastings of a renewed man, and after all, it is this latter which counts.

The Man Who Never Saw

There was this close friend of mine, Arthur Rennick, whom I had not met in many years. What kept us close was our professional writing, and of course an occasional letter or phone call. He has always outclassed me in what he has written. Not that I have minded that much, because I've been able to make my way, so to speak. Abilities differ from person to person. Whatever resentment I may have had on the score of not being brilliant has been dissolved in the fact that I have always seemed to be able to have good acceptances of my articles and stories. Arthur could say the same, but journals I have never made it with seem quite eager to snap up what he writes.

That was why I was deeply interested when Arthur and I met at an Anzac march. It wasn't your march in one of the capital cities, but just a small country affair. Not that they are unimportant. As some of you will know, you find the same sense of solemnity, the same pleasure in meeting old mates, and then the satisfaction of that annual ritual-that annual worship ceremony, so to speak, of the march and the remembrance

ceremony. Over the years it has developed into a satisfying mystique, and goodness knows, life can be flat enough without something beyond the natural.

Enough of that, however. I want to tell you about Arthur Rennick. We were both in action together during the war; not only in the same platoon, but even in the same section. So we knew each other well. In those days we two talked incessantly about our favourite love: writing. We talked about it as bird fanciers talk pigeons or classic budgerigars, or as gardeners do about roses or camellias, or whatever is their passion.

After the war I was offered a job as a radio script writer, which is a sort of hack work. You have a limited number of plots with which to work, and your number of words is also limited. You have to write so that children can understand your adult scripts, so in a way it locks you into certain parameters. It can stultify your creative powers. You tend to get into a rut. Every so often I would go off to the country or fly overseas and hibernate in a cottage, or even a motel, and let my creative powers revive to some degree. In that sort of creative writing Arthur was far ahead of me. He has never worked in an office, at least other than his own study. He has deliberately taken all the time he desires to read around any subject, and travels in order to get colour and detail for his fiction or his non-fiction articles. His writing is always convincing. It is alive. It is close to perfect.

That is why I wondered when I heard him putting himself down.

'Arthur', I said, 'I can't understand you. You seem to be mad at yourself.'

'Mad at myself is a mild way of putting it. Gerry, I am the man who never saw!'

I shook my head, puzzled. He stared back at me in some temper. 'I tell you I am the man who never saw.'

'What a title for a story!' I said. 'I hope you will let me write it.'

'Small talk', he said disgustedly. 'Listen, Gerry, have you ever had the really big opportunity; the one you've waited to have come to you; and it has come and, without knowing, it has gone and you have missed it-but you never even knew it had come and gone and that you had missed it?'

I shook my head. 'Never, Arthur', I said. 'I think I have grasped every little straw that has floated my way; but then, as you say, all that could happen to you and you wouldn't know. I mean, if you never saw, then you would never know.'

He agreed with me, though impatiently. 'I suppose you are right, and if that happened then you wouldn't be chewing chips about it. But when suddenly it comes to you that you have been dumb where you believed you were thoughtful, and when you have let a glorious opportunity slip through your hands; then what?'

'Then what!' I echoed. 'Ah, Arthur, I would have loved that to have happened to me. It would have shown me that I had something of your brilliance, your creativity and your imagination. Mine has been mainly hack stuff, quite thin, in fact.'

He sighed, and I knew he thought I was still fairly dumb. He was a trifle sorrowful.

'You've done well, Gerry', he said. 'You are no

slouch. You turn out a lot of good stuff. Maybe it isn't quality writing if you have goals like mine, but you keep the interest of your hearers and readers. Me? I have done well, too, but then I had the good opportunity-the best opportunity-and I missed it.'

I appreciated his appreciation, but wondered why he persisted in knocking himself.

'Arthur', I said gently, 'just tell me what you mean. Maybe the telling will give you a trifle of relief. After all, this is strictly between you and me'.

He agreed to do that, and over some food and drink he began his story.

'You remember', he said, 'that after the war I wanted to get away from it all. I wanted to make sure I would not get tied like the other fellows, so that I could write in what you could call 'solitude'. That part of the plan-not getting married-didn't work out. As you know I fell for Sally, and we got married. With my accumulated Army money we bought a small farm on the North Coast of this State. It is an ideal place to live.

'Sally was marvellous. She married me, knowing what I was about. In those days few women were career persons. They just liked being wives and hoped to be mothers. They actually enjoyed that sort of existence. Much of it has changed, of course, but that is another story. We just kept enjoying each other. Children never came, and we never worried. Sally has always been a social type so she had plenty to do in being a member of the Country Women's Association, and being on the Parents and Citizens, though she wasn't a parent. Being a citizen also was satisfying.

She had plenty of friends. She loved her garden. We both worked the farm together. We have had fun mainly because she liked reading, and she liked being the wife of a writer. She helped me enormously. Still does, for that matter.

'Well we went to this place on the North Coast, and liked it and still like it. Love it in fact. All around us were dairy farms, banana plantations, and north of us more such farms, and then pineapple and mango plantations. Later farmers got into other nuts and fruit, like macadamias and pecans and pawpaws. We would travel and see the sugarcane farms. We immersed ourselves in farm life, came to know the lingo, could chat away with the locals, and get plots galore. We would meet eccentric people, and more stories and articles would come rolling in.

'Sally learned photography and that became a bit of a passion with her. She had her own dark room and developing gear. We made money in articles I would write and she would illustrate. In fact she was really an artist. Her photographs were taken from angles that made them talk, so to speak. She knew how to use light and shade, brilliant sunshine, frosts and winter mists, but she always insisted they were auxiliary to my writing. We have certainly worked well together.'

At this point I told him to eat whilst I talked, but I didn't have the same exciting sort of story to give. When he had eaten some and drunk some, he started off again. There was a bit of a misty look in his eyes.

'Gee, Gerry', he said, 'I've really had it good. Sally and I have had it good'.

He looked up. 'You and Pauline have had it good too, haven't you?'

'That we have', I agreed. 'Maybe we can talk about that later. Feel free to continue your saga.'

'Saga', he said thoughtfully. 'You're right. It has been a saga. If only I had never been so blind.'

He paused and was away, thinking.

'Come on man', I urged him. 'You have something to get off your chest. You remember, you were talking about the good life up the North Coast, and how you lived in the local colour and could write authentically from it all.'

'You know', he said brightly, 'there are not many places in the world which are so attractive. There are beaches, great sand dunes, good pastures, fine stock. There are cattle and horses, and you can be selective in your breeding, and you can grow fruit of all kinds. You have large forests and incredible scenery. If you want to go west or nor'-west you can cross the Dividing Range: one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world and where some of the finest rain forests, flora and fauna can be found. Then you are out into beautiful pasture lands, sheep and cattle and the cultivation of cereals and fruits. You might say we have lived at the hub of life and beauty.'

I envied him that good life. I'm not sure I could have made much of it in my more social, urban and suburban way of living. I have always catered for that kind of society. I'm not too sure what I could do with Arthur and Sally's world, but then their task was to bring their world to the same one I wrote for. Maybe they had their special message for it.

'What about the man who never saw?' I asked him.

He swallowed. 'That is the maddening thing. I have lived in that world for decades and have just about missed its history.'

'But you must have thought about its history', I said. 'You know, the pioneers and all that. Backbone of the community. Left us a heritage. We are the children of our forebears. All that kind of stuff.'

Arthur eyed me suspiciously. 'Of course I wrote about all that, but not in the way you suggest. I drew characters out from those pioneers, and used their families in my novels.'

He paused. 'Even so, when I think about it now, I only really them. In one sense they were a bit unreal. Sure, I tried to get into their minds and may somehow have succeeded, but I needed them. They helped to give substance to my plots. I could research their lives.'

He almost exploded. 'Only now do I realise what I missed so far as they were concerned.'

He looked up at me. 'I won't go into that now, but I'll try to explain later. Good Lord! What I never saw!'

I knew it was no use hurrying him. Others of the old Diggers passed us by, saluted, commented, joked, chucked and left us to our yarning. That is what they thought it was: yarning.

'I'll get to the point, Gerry', he said. 'I really lived in history and never saw it. Never saw it, man!'

'History is a big subject, a wide place', I said. 'I know little about history. I have always had to be a man of the present. People are interested in the things

in which they are involved. They want it direct from the factory, so to speak, hot off the stove.'

He nodded. 'Of course you're right, but they are wrong. What we need in our society is a history. We did our best to form one at our Australian bicentenary. We rustled up all we could. Maybe we did a good job, but we have to go further. How could I have missed history all these years of writing?'

He saw something of my impatience. 'Just give me a bit of time, Gerry. You are my father-confessor. I need to confess my stupidity and idiocy. You see, Gerry, I used our little farm, our district, our scenery, our social experiences to write my stories and novels. Sometimes I thought I had written of every blooming flower and every leaf, even their venations. I guess my characters lived, and the importance of their lives, and the things men and women and children do—all of those came through, I imagine, but I never saw history.'

'A moment ago you said you did', I said

'That wasn't really history', he said. 'If I treated it as history, then it was pretty superficial. Maybe no-one would have picked that up except the experts, but it is a fact. I never really saw the magnificence of history.'

'You've lost me', I said. 'You must be on some special matter that I can't see. History doesn't exactly bore me, but where we are is in the now. So what about that?'

He shrugged. 'I'm finding it hard to explain. Look Gerry, I came to know every nook and cranny of our district. Sally and I picnicked endlessly. We loved

what we saw. We knew the flora and the fauna, but we never saw a person of history.'

'Meaning?' I asked.

'Meaning', he said, 'I never saw a person from the days before the white man arrived'.

'Now come on', I said. 'Don't tell me you have never seen an aborigine!'

'Of course I have', he said. 'There are some on the North Coast. I've seen them in other places, too. They have a Reserve near us, and some quite decent folk live there. They are very intelligent, but I'm not talking about them.'

He leaned forward. 'Gerry, you are a writer, and a good one. Also you are a human being. Tell me, what if I could transport you back two or three hundred years? What if I could take you through some North Coast forest and you had no landmarks as we know them now, no industries, no knowledge of the land? Suppose all you can see is mountains, gullies, great undergrowth, vines, ferns, orchids and other plants and trees and shrubs which are all strange to you.

'You are on your own. You are overawed with your surroundings, your new environment, but you are alone: strangely alone and quite fearful. It is another world to the one you have known. You hear movements and rustlings and wonder what animal is around, or what beasts. Even the birds in the trees are different. There are brightly coloured parrots in flocks jostling and chattering as they eat the honeyed flowers high up. Some birds break out in laughter, and you have never heard that sort of thing before. You see a snake slide away before you. The trees themselves

go up for hundreds of feet. Even so, the place is not in darkness. Bright sun is filtering down through the leafy giants, but it is a world so different from the one you have come from that you are just about in terror. You are even ready to believe in the supernatural, it all seems so uncanny.

'You see something move. When you strain your eyes you see what you would call 'natives'. They are black; they are tall. The men have their hair piled up high so that they seem taller than any humans you have ever met. They are well made, quite regal in fact. They look like warriors, and you feel afraid; but they are as gentle as they are strong. They move with their women and children. They are laughing. Maybe they have been hunting for food, finding it behind bark, or have caught it high up in the trees. They chatter and they talk in a kind of liquid language. They are not in an aggressive mood. Food is plenty. They are not in competition.

'Then, before you know it, one is standing before you. You look at his eyes, into them. They are brown, deep, intelligent. His face is swarthy, but his features are strong. Your eyes look at him from tip to toe. You feel he is different. He has somehow brought wisdom as he stands before you naked. Maybe you think of him as guileless, and maybe he is, but he is not naive. The wisdom of millenniums is behind his eyes. He has been trained in wisdom and perhaps he doesn't even have a word for what he has accrued. His wisdom is practical. He has lived in this world for millenniums. That is how you sense it all.

'As I have said, he has sighted you, and you have

sighted him. Maybe he has some legend about folk with white skins. Maybe he thinks you are a creature out of his dreamtime. I don't know. But he is naturally thinking about you. He does not seem to feel threatened. He does not threaten. As for you, you have suddenly seen a man of history.'

I was moved by Arthur's presentation, and I saw something for the first time, as did he. Both of us were silent.

Finally I said, 'I get you, Arthur. I see what you are saying. I think I understand. You mean that you are not just seeing an Australian aborigine. You are seeing someone who had known his land from time immemorial, but even without reckoning about his knowing it. He had a mind for it that was, and he has moved in it, effortlessly, so to speak. As you said, he was regal, noble if you like. A natural aristocrat of his people. Maybe they were all aristocrats in that sense'.

He nodded, and there was a certain gratitude in his eyes. 'Now you can *see* why I am so mad with myself. I had missed all that.'

When I looked puzzled, he went on. 'Gerry, let me put it to you like this. When Sally and I went on to our farm we knew it was our farm. Torrens title and all that. We bought our stock and our implements. We gradually built up a comfortable home and a good way of living. We thought, "This is our home". Every Australian wants to own his own home. So we owned one. We had a fence around the property. It kept the cattle in and strangers out. I went about my profession, and Sally busied *herself in her* way about *her*

things. We worked up a reputation. We were secure. We loved each other. Life was reasonably full.

‘Sure, I took note of history. For me history began when we went onto our farm, and I built history by my writing. We built history together. I was interested, even fascinated, by the history we had built when and since our forebears had come from Great Britain. I often rummaged through old newspapers at the libraries. I read books. Why, we were even linked with North Coast history. Sally’s great grandfather had been mayor of one city and had owned land down the Coast even to our farm, though it had been sold long ago so that we had bought it from someone outside the family. Sally’s roots were in the North Coast, even though she had lived all her life in Sydney. So even then I didn’t see it.’

‘Nor do I, really’, I said. ‘The history of the aborigines is theirs, and ours is ours, so what is different except the fact of both? Aren’t they really the one history but in two sections?’

He shook his head vigorously. ‘No, Gerry, you haven’t seen. That’s what I didn’t see. Let me try to explain. When I looked out at the great mountain that lay behind us, I simply saw a geographical phenomenon. We folk who had come to the land simply inhabited that phenomenon. We taught ourselves to adjust to a different kind of scenery from the one we had known, to adopt the flora and fauna, and we called ourselves “Australians”. We adapted. We almost reculturised ourselves. I suppose we have built up our own kind of myths like this Anzac one. Perhaps we hoped to build a new history. 1

don’t know. What I know now is what hurts me most.

‘It goes something like this. When I went down to the creek that runs through our place, it was a creek I virtually owned. When I let my purebred milkers into a new paddock of mostly introduced grasses, I saw it as a farmer would see it in any land in which he lived. I never saw—as though out of the past, but yet belonging to the present—a black man, naked and tall and proud walk across my land. When I went into the great State forest and moved among the spotted gums, the bloodwoods, the tallowwoods, the blackbutts and the like, I never saw a man who carried millenniums of history in his bones. I did not see man who thought, “I own this land!”, for had there been a man from that past he would never have thought that way. His origins would have made him think differently from me. He would not have thought of *owning* land. He would have thought of it as part of himself, and he part of it.

‘My crime, if you can call it that, was that I have always thought history began with me: my life, my feelings, my ideas, my ideals—even my Sally—and so on. Even within my culture I was selective of what I thought was good, so far as I was concerned. As I said, if I thought about the history of my farm it went back to Sally’s ancestor who had once owned it, who had been given the selection by the government. I might have built up a story about the farm with some of my own atmosphere added to it, but then it came from my brain and my culture and my ideas.’

Arthur leaned forward and thumped the table

gently. ‘Gerry, even as an artist, as a literary man who loved words and ideas and wanted to shape something beautiful and good to be received by others, I should have thought of what was so all those millenniums before we came bringing with us the history we had built up, with all its own elements that maybe had not brought us into any particular wisdom. In the sense that I started history from the point of inhabiting my house and land, I was cutting off beauty and romance. I was missing out on wisdom.’

I said, a bit gloomily, ‘All sounds complicated and confusing to me, Arthur. I am vaguely getting something of what you are saying. Correct me if I am wrong. Are you saying you sold yourself short in thinking that the history of your land and your district began with yourself, or, at best, with Sally’s pioneer ancestors, and all the other forebears who carved out the farms and the industries?’

When he went to speak I cut him short. ‘Are you saying that you foreshortened history, and so you were not really authentic in your writing? Are you saying that only when you are a part of the full history of the human race, and in particular the history of this land, that you can write with integrity and Wisdom, and that only then are you true to your art?’

He nodded gratefully. ‘That’s right, Gerry. “Foreshortened” is a good word. Let me give you’ an example. We live back of a great mountain called Yarrahappini. If you are tourists you have much to see. A difficult climb, deep undergrowth, ferns over your head, rain forest, flora, a view from the top that is breathtaking. As a tourist you think you have seen

much: all in fact. If you have settled down as a local inhabitant you have all that and more. You see what you call the changing moods of the great mountain. You begin to build up your bit of folklore about it. Pretty soon you have a tradition, frail though it may be. Therein lies your bit of history.

‘Since I realised I was a person who has never seen, I have started to lay my hands on every thing I can read. Now I can see how for thousands of years the original inhabitants saw Yarrahappini. It figured in their dreamtime. Their heroes were linked with it. Every day they looked on it almost as a personal being. Their world of our farm and our district was as another world. How dumb we are coming with our fragmentary history and thinking that is all there is.’

‘Arthur, my boy,’ I said, ‘you have taken up a great load. Are you going to reverse things, so to speak? If you looked at the events of history, of nations that have been overcome by stronger nations, of the stratas that have been built, one conquering people upon another-why, if you tried to sort that all out you would have the devil of a job’.

‘Nothing is further from my mind’, he replied. ‘If the original inhabitants who have been foully treated are going to stand up and face the world they live in, and try to get some justice for the past and rehabilitate themselves, then I am all for it. Plenty of us have guilt for the past. Most of the efforts to do something about all of this are political anyway, and the politics are not all on one side. I am talking to you as a writer, and, I hope, as an artist. Maybe I’m selfish, also; out for my own rehabilitation. I want to know more of the world

that was their country for some 40,000 years. We are here, we have bulldozed our way into possessing the country. That was the mind of empire builders centuries before the British became the dominant power, and we had that mind in possessing this land.'

'Are you going to try to re-establish the old culture by your study of the past, and your use of your writing?'

Arthur shook his head. 'Maybe I don't quite know what I am going to do. I am so chewed up at having been the man who never saw, that I want to be the man who sees all things. I'll keep looking at the past, trying to understand the tribes and people who have lived here for so long. Sure, I'll try to learn all I can about their culture. I am finding already how fascinating that is. I have met aborigines and they have been friendly enough for the most part. Though many seem sullen and angry. Some, I realise, have never lost their old wisdom, and they are astute enough to see the flaws and shortcomings in ours. We can't turn history back, but we can go on with it.'

'You'd make a great preacher', I said admiringly. 'Maybe you could make a better Minister for Aboriginal Affairs than the present one.'

Arthur looked despairingly at me. 'Can't you get it, Gerry? I just want to be the man who sees, sees everything he should see. I'm not a reformer. I don't want to bring back the past. I love our farm near old Yarrahappini, and I love the old mountain. I don't even want to see it through the eyes of the people who lived so marvellously, in their own way, in their own days, by means of their culture, their laws and

their elders and their ancient wisdom. They have their wisdom and I need to understand it, even if I don't need to emulate it. All I want to do is to be a human who thinks that what he does is a contribution to the human race. I don't want to be empty through ignorance and think I'm doing quite well, thank you very much.'

I could hear Arthur well, but I still had a problem.

'Do you mean that we came bare of wisdom from our motherland? Do you mean that after being trained in our cultures, and after us having been through a war, that all our thinking lacks sense and deep insight? Do you mean we have to accept the ancient lore and religion of these people because they got here before others and developed their own way of thinking?'

He shook his head impatiently.

'Of course not. I don't even know how much of it is wisdom. It is certainly wisdom for them, and I don't say that patronisingly. I respect it. They had their problems and still have them, even within their own culture and system. What has made me despair of myself, my writing, my art and my way of life is that I have been so sure I knew all I needed to know, and so ignorant of the full history of this land, that I have missed out on history and all its wonders when I thought all along that I was a man of history. That is what is so incredible and so disappointing.'

I played my last card.

'Arthur, do you think they might find that in our history, in our religion, in our development over thousands of years, that we might have a wisdom from

which they could learn, so that we, too, might have a contribution to them?’

He had a tired smile. ‘Well, of course’, he said. ‘Surely in this age when we have such powerful media, such sharing of our cultures and our heritages, and when the world is shrinking into what they call “the global village”, yes, of course. I wasn’t saying it is a matter of them being right and us being wrong, or even the other way around. Maybe that isn’t the real point and certainly some of us got it wrong, really terribly, horribly wrong. No: it has something to do with us all being humans whatever different ways our cultures have led us in history.’

He looked up at me as though somehow I didn’t understand and he was miserable because he felt alone in his thinking. Somehow he had expected me to comprehend and to share with him in his new understanding, in his wider, richer view of life-all life-and the liberation it had brought him. I knew he had thought that I, of all people, would grasp what he was about and that would bring relief to him-a kind of fellowship of minds.

Both of us had used Army Signal equipment during our war. If a signal was weak and barely discernible we would report, ‘I hear you strength three’. The strongest one could expect was strength nine.

As we sat there, meditating on one of the most important things of our lives I said to my old Digger friend, ‘Arthur, I hear you strength nine’.

His expression gladdened. His eyes shone a bit and became moist. ‘It was horrifying, Gerry,’ he said, ‘to be “the man who never saw”’.

‘That’s what I’ve been, too, right up to this moment, mate’, I said. ‘What a lot of empty stuff I’ve turned out. Maybe it had its place, in a way. I reckon I’ll write better, but maybe that won’t be what the editor wants, but I’ll get some satisfaction at last.’

Arthur nodded and grunted. Then he looked at me. ‘Why don’t you bring Pauline up to our place. Get time off and come. I’ll show you how those dark aristocrats lived, where they got their food and water, and some of the customs they had. You’ll love it all. They are our forebears in a way, and we need to learn from them, too. The way things are at present shows we need wisdom. True artists love wisdom and try to bring it through. Maybe we’ll bring it through, and not just for our own people, but for the people we have to be one with.’

I knew Pauline would love that. She has always been a bit of a mystic; always glad at my success but at the same time somewhat disappointed with its shallowness. ‘What a world it is’, I thought, ‘everyone wanting something sensational, something different. You try to keep away from sleaze but many of them want it. Somehow they want to be titillated, but then there are those who don’t. You try to have a noble thought, and, whilst some think that is outdated, others don’t’.

I knew Pauline would love to have time with Sally Arthur had got me in, and I wasn’t going to fight him. He had battled his way and was just about out of his blindness. I had never thought of him as the man who had never seen: to the contrary, I had admired his writing and envied his art.

A thought-a great thought-was now cheering me. 'Maybe', I said to myself, 'I will now really see'. All sorts of thoughts and pictures began flashing in my mind. So much so that I became quite excited, which is a rare thing for a man of my age.

'I reckon Pauline would love that', I said. 'I also reckon I might love it even more. I just might see what I've never seen before, although, old buddy, you and I have seen things that others have never seen. Maybe some of our noble dark ancestors might not even have seen some of these things.'

My writer's pulse was racing. So was Arthur's. We both knew that instinctively.

We left the things on the table for the waitress and slipped rare, generous tips under our plates.

Arthur slipped his arm through mine, something unusual for us to do. We walked out, quite steadily for men of our age. We felt young. We felt exuberant. I think we thought we were pioneers or maybe artists and writers about to come of age. We were like men who were seeing.

Both of us knew we could hardly wait to get back to our writing.

The Way of the Monad

To look at Tom Strainey was to see a man whose beard had frosted with age and whose person was frozen from emotional coldness. Short in stature, he was physically strong, his shoulders thick, his chest barrelled and his arms well muscled. His eyes stared stonily at you from above the beard. His thatch of grey hair was like an unruly halo, but you wouldn't have thought of him as an angel. His eyes would have been piercing if their gaze had not been foreshortened. His stare somehow stopped short of reaching you, as though he refused to see you, to contact you with his gaze. He gave the impression of being embedded into himself, yet never looking into a person, and certainly not betraying himself to that other. It was a strange feeling, meeting Strainey yet not meeting him. I suppose you could have called him a 'non-contact person'.

I first met Thomas Mayhew Strainey when his daughter Verna invited me to link up with him. She was a social scientist and had worked it out that her dad had a problem-a social one of course. She had

told me he was a monad, but how much he was that I had not dreamed. I well knew the term 'monad'. The dictionary says bluntly, 'A single unit or entity', and that was how he saw himself, and kept himself to himself. For one who has dealt with humans and their relationships over a long period of time he was an enigma, even if you could give him a name, 'Monad'. I certainly agreed with her in my mind as we met in his living room. His wife looked tired and a trifle fearful, probably because Strainey's non-meeting of people worried her. She liked meeting people, although he never encouraged her in making friends or having social intercourse. I imagined Verna shrugged off his steady refusal to relate to other persons.

She introduced me to him. 'This is Dennis Marney', she told him. 'He is another social scientist like me. We both do research together.'

He had come from his dairy, having milked, separated some cream and washed up for the midday meal. He scarcely seemed able to shake hands. I thrust forward my hand, and he barely looked at it. He did not shake it. I was regretting having come, and would have excused myself, but Verna sent a quick message that I was to stay. Rhonda his wife gave a silent nod to the chair I was to use, and I sat when he sat.

It was not that he did not talk. He did, but then not to me. He obviously was proud of his daughter and her doctorate, and I could see that he had some kind of affection for his wife, but he was basically a monadone sufficient in himself, and not desiring social contact outside his family trinity of persons. Because I was a friend of his daughter he showed no emotional

hostility. He was just locked into himself. If he had thought of communicating with me, then it was by talking to Verna.

He was telling her about a cow that had calved two days ago. Her udder was so enlarged that he had a slight fear she might get milk fever, but as yet this was not the case. So the conversation went on. When Verna told him I had grown up on a farm, and helped my father with the milking, and that in fact we had never used milking machines, he seemed slightly impressed. His gaze dropped on to my hands, and he scanned them distantly. Then he addressed me without looking up.

'Do you still milk?' he asked.

'A little', I said. 'I keep a couple of house cows at my place in Aldinga. We separate a bit of cream, and feed a few poddies, but that is about the gist of it.' I found myself weighing my words carefully.

He waited some time before he spoke. He asked, indifferently, 'How do you separate?'

'The old way', I said. 'We scald the milk and set it out in pans.'

'What about butter?' he asked.

'We have an old churn', I said. 'We press the butter and take off the buttermilk.'

'If you do that these days, 'he said, 'you must be one of the few who do'.

I remarked how fresh the vegetables were. He nodded and told me he grew the lot of them. Nothing on the plate was from anywhere but the farm. Even then he did not melt. His look stopped short of me. Verna kept the conversation going, talking about her work

in the new therapy clinic. He would nod, but venture no opinion. He did not seem to care about things that were not on his farm.

We had preserved plums and junket for pudding. I hadn't seen junket in years and it brought back memories, but I guessed that memories would have been too personal for him, the mention of them too intimate, so I kept silent. I think that was probably the one thing that gave me some acceptance-my seeming reluctance to talk. It was for Verna's sake I remained quiet. I might yet be the first person who could make contact with him.

Verna flushed with colour when he invited me to go back to the dairy. Once there, he began washing down the bails, the cream room and the separator tank and machinery. He had disinfected the milking rubbers and cups. The place smelt fresh and the bailyards were spotlessly clean. Not once did he speak until something I did made him look curiously at me.

'You been in the Army?' he asked.

I nodded. I was going to let him make any conversation we might have.

After a time he said, 'What stoush was that?'

I told him it had been the Second World War, and I had been in the Pacific war zone.

He nodded. 'Had a bit there myself, but I was mainly in the Middle East.'

I said nothing, but stared across his lush paddocks. He followed my gaze and saw I was appreciating his farming.

'Key farming', he said abruptly. 'Uses the water. I have dams at different levels. Reticulation is the key.'

I knew about key farming. It was good to see it in operation.

We had tea in the mid-afternoon, after which he was going to round up the milkers for the second milking. He took the unusual step of taking me to see his vegetable garden. This was impressive. I noticed how black the soil was in contrast to his red volcanic loam.

'Just a strip of it', he said, 'but then I give it plenty of manure and humus. I keep that up, but I don't overload it with animal manure. Fresh organic manure takes a long time to break down'.

I kept short on praise, knowing he would stiffen at that sort of thing and my transient link with him would be lost. As it was he kept from looking at me directly. He was protecting his self: the wall was thick and high. He avoided intimacy and warmth.

I was surprised that he let me share in the milking. It was just a matter of encouraging milkers into the bails, but they did that anyway. One would be released and the next would move up. He gave them a good mixture of lucerne chaff and moistened cereals. Later Verna told me he had never let anyone get even that close to his precious animals.

'He shows them no affection', she said. 'Always curt with them, but they seem to like it. I think they take it for affection. He never lays a hand on any of them.'

I was more surprised when he asked me to milk the newly calved dam. Perhaps he wanted to see how I did it. Since I milked our house cows daily it was no problem. He watched the milk and the foam mount

up in the silver bucket and silently handed me a second one until I had stripped the last drops.

I had dropped into his near-silent mood. All I said was, 'Incredible', because of the number of litres. I had never milked more from any cow.

Obviously he was proud of her and led her into a small yard. Later he would let the calf have some of the new milk. The dam seemed glad to be relieved of the udder pressure and stood steadily chewing the cud.

I had to get back home to milk my own cows, but he walked with me to the car. I sat before the wheel and turned on the ignition. I had rolled down the window. He gave a brief glance at the interior and nodded. For once his gaze met mine.

'The war made the difference', he said, and nodded curtly. I watched him walk back towards the house before I drove off. I felt Verna would be pleased.

She was pleased. Next day at the College she told me I was the first man he had ever let into his dairy. She could not understand how he had let me milk his prize cow. She thought I might have established contact with him.

'The only one who ever has is Patsy our budgie', she said. 'He actually talks to the bird.'

Something quickened within me, but I said nothing, not wanting to raise her hopes. I thought the budgie was a good omen.

Nothing seemed to come of the omen. Verna went off to Europe for post-doctoral studies, and I lost contact with her. Then she wrote saying her sister Stella in

Zaire had died of some mysterious sickness, some virus, and that her father had written in a cold sort of anger about the event. His letter was one of the few times he had shown emotion. The burial had taken place in Zaire and she had been present at it, but her parents hadn't come. Even the idea of travelling to Zaire was beyond their grasp. Just prior to the death her mother had shown signs of Parkinson's Disease and her father had stiffly expressed some alarm at this next trouble. He wondered -if Verna shouldn't return from Europe and help her mother. Since the Parkinson's was at present mild, Verna thought she had better pursue her research. Maybe she would be locked into the farm if she returned, and this could be for the rest of her parents' life.

One day, on impulse, I drove south to the Strainey farm. Tom showed a flicker of gratitude at my coming. His wife was warmly grateful, but I could see she had deteriorated. Her hands were shaking and her walking wasn't steady, but she was able to prepare a meal for us. When Tom went out to feed the calves, she showed she was near to breaking point over Stella's death, and poured out her feelings.

'Tom doesn't seem to have any emotions', she said. 'He won't talk about Stella. He seems more frozen than ever. I think he's a bit angry at Verna staying overseas. He thinks her place is here, on the farm. He never liked her idea of educating herself.'

There was no anger in her voice, but just a sort of tired resignation to things.

'Verna keeps telling me he is a monad, a single self-contained individual. Of course she's right.'

It's always been that way. I imagined marriage was an intimate thing, but it hasn't turned out to be that.'

We both sat in silence, and I think she was grateful for the sympathy I was giving through this quiet empathy. She was quite gentle when she said, 'I just feel sorry for Tom. He wasn't like he is when we were young. He was full of fun and nonsense, and he was most romantic. I didn't marry him until after the war, because we weren't sweethearts before he enlisted. Sometimes he would write to me from the Middle East. He was a Tobruk Rat but I don't think that affected him. It was after he went to New Guinea that he changed'.

We both sat pondering. Suddenly the golden budgie spoke up from its cage over the blue kitchen cabinet. 'Hullo Tom, hullo Stella, hullo Rhonda! Hullo! Hullo! Hullo!' Its small chirrupy voice was like a rumination. He kept repeating the greeting like a mantra.

Rhonda seemed moved to tears, but she said nothing. Tom walked in to the repetitious greeting. It was the gentlest I had seen him. He poked his finger between the wire bars, and the budgie nibbled at it. I sensed that he was emotionally moved by the names the bird was uttering. Then the bird stopped its mantra. It went sleepy under Tom's faint caress. I saw tears in his wife's eyes. Tom came across to her, and his right hand rested lightly on her left shoulder. I think he was close to tears.

He addressed me. 'Dennis, I have to take Rhonda to Calvary Hospital in Adelaide. I was wondering

whether you could spare time to look after the milking for a day or so.'

Rhonda was concealing her astonishment well. Tom had never allowed another man near his dairy, let alone milk his precious cows.

When I nodded Tom went close to showing some emotion, but sat to drink coffee and tell me what was needed. If I could stay on for the afternoon's milking he would show me what was required for the milking schedule.

After coffee he went to bring in the herd, and I went with him. He still used a horse to round up the milkers and bring them to the bail yard. He saddled a fine gelding, something like a quarter horse, and another hack for me, and we rode in silence. We also milked in silence. After that there was the deeper quietness as he turned off the milking machine. Then there was the clatter of utensils as he scarified them, and the sweeping of the concrete as he washed down the bails. We walked behind the herd as it wended its slow way plodding into the night paddock. We both leaned against the three-railed, morticed red gum fence. In our nostrils was something of the sweet acrid smell of cow manure and urine. The sun was turning red behind a windbreak of wattles on the far hill. It seemed like a moment when Tom might cease to be a monad.

His voice was matter of fact, but I felt the worry behind it. 'Rhonda isn't well', he said, and he sighed. 'Her doctor says the Parkinson's is advancing rapidly.'

Now the sun had died, leaving the faintest of glow:

a sort of pale gold as the deeper blue of the night drew in.

‘It all seems to be coming at once’, he said.

We walked to my car, and he gripped my hand. ‘I’m grateful’, was all he could say.

There were plenty of us at Rhonda’s funeral in the Centennial Park chapel complex. The death-industry had corralled decease into a neutral event. At the beginning we were all silent, preparing to face the enemy; but the chapel was sympathetic, the recorded music was apt, and the two hymns-along with the minister’s words-seemed to draw something of the sting from the event. Tom and Verna and I sat in the front row for the service and stood together at the graveside. The worst of it all was to be greeted by the golden budgie when we returned for the milking. He kept up his old greeting whilst Verna made the coffee. We milked in silence, and I paddocked the herd whilst Tom washed down the baits.

I had tea with them both, and after the meal Tom ruminated aloud about the future.

‘I think I’d find it hard to stay here without Rhonda. Too many memories. Maybe we should have sold up before this. Mum should have had a time in a place like Aldinga, or maybe Adelaide. I don’t know.’

He was forlorn, bending over his coffee but unable to weep. Verna did a rare thing. She walked over to where he was and stood beside him, her arm around his shoulders. Days of death seem to permit intimacies, and this was certainly a rare intimacy for the two.

Before I left he held my hand firmly. I thought that maybe something of the monad was breaking. The two of us walked to the car. Verna stayed behind to clean up the kitchen. Her eyes were filled with tears, her cheeks wet with them. She nodded gratefully and then in a passion of feeling hugged me. Tom did not seem surprised.

Tom rang me from the farm. It was months after the funeral. His voice was still cold and emotionless. He had decided to sell up and go into the Returned Servicemen’s Village in Adelaide. Was there anything I would like from the farm for my ten-acre plot? The auction was next week before the buyer moved in. He was a Rundle Street farmer with horse-riding teenage daughters. The herd was to go. The new owner planned to run fat stock: Herefords in fact. I couldn’t think of anything I would like, but Jess my wife had seen Rhonda’s pot plants and hanging baskets and there were one or two she would love to have. In the end Tom insisted on my taking the rotary hoe and some trailer loads of his precious humus.

On the day we transported the gear, he seemed almost cheerful.

‘I met some of the folk at the Village’, he said, ‘and a few of my old mates are there. At least two of my own unit. They were both in Tobruk’. I sensed a faint change had taken place in him.

As we were leaving for Aldinga, he wondered whether I would care for his golden budgie. I sensed he wanted it cared for and so I nodded.

‘Jess loves budgies’, I said. ‘In fact she breeds them.’

I thought that maybe Tom didn't want a pet at his new home. It was then he told me they didn't have pets in the Village.

Tom was to drive himself to Adelaide, but I had promised to load my large trailer with the gear he had wanted to keep. Next day we were off to his new place. When we arrived, pulling up outside his single bedroom home unit, his two old Army friends-Brett and Robbie-were there to meet him. This seemed to affect Tom quite a bit. He introduced me to the two old and grizzled Diggers, telling them I had been in the Islands in the last two years of the War. They were impressed, and warm, very warm. Even so, I guess I must have seemed quite young to them.

We knew Verna was inside getting things tidy, so it was no surprise when she bustled out. There were hearty greetings all around, and a few others issued from their homes-here and there a man and wife; and a widow or two, as well as the widowers. We grew into quite a company and Tom was expected to be as hearty as the others; and it seemed he was, exchanging greeting for greeting, salutation for salutation and bits of humour for other bits of humour.

I watched Tom closely and could see his face was strained. I think it was the chiacking which hit him most. I knew he was straining, hoping to resume his silent privacy: the barrier to invasion, the fortress of his monadic living. Verna was observing this also, and yet the two old cobbers would not leave him. They insisted on having coffee and fruitcake with us. Verna bustled around getting out more cups and saucers.

Somehow Tom braved it out, but when the two

men were gone for lunch he almost wept. Even so, his criteria for being a single, private person would not allow him to show emotion. He busied himself storing things away, or returning objects to the trailer which he realised he could not retain in a single bedroom unit.

'Better take them to Goodwill or the Salvation Army', he told me.

I nodded at that. 'No problem. I'll do that this afternoon.'

By lunchtime all objects were in their places, and the new home was not only tidy but also we sensed it was alive. I ventured one of my rare remarks.

'The place is alive', I said. 'You will like it here, Tom.'

Surprisingly he nodded. I noticed a tear or two in his daughter's eyes, but she stared through the kitchen window at the small lawn and garden plot at the back.

'I reckon, Dad, that you could do with a few of those pot plants/ she said, 'and maybe a hanging basket or two. Maybe Dennis could collect a few for you'.

Finally it was time for me to leave, and Tom showed his appreciation by the strong grip of a milking hand and a slight crinkling of crow's feet around his eyes.

His last words were, 'I'll be right, Dennis'.

Verna stayed on to attend to the last details. I drove back thoughtfully to Aldinga.

A couple of weeks passed and I was searching around for an excuse to ring Tom and arrange for a visit. Maybe he might care to have a look at what his humus was doing for my vegetable garden. It was he who took the initiative. When I picked up the ringing phone he was almost booming.

‘That you Dennis? It is? Good to hear your voice. I wondered where you had got to. You really OK? Wife OK too? She is? That’s great. Me? I’m much better. Better than in a long time. Missing the farm? Yes, missing it a bit but not badly.’

He sounded almost garrulous. I had to pause and recall my old image of him. First impressions flitted back into my mind-‘a man whose beard had frosted with age and whose person was frozen from emotional coldness. Short in stature, he was physically strong, his shoulders thick, his chest barrelled and his arms well muscled. His eyes stared stonily at you from above the beard. His thatch of grey hair was like an unruly halo’. That was how I had seen him. It did not seem to be the same man at the other end of the line.

‘Look here, Dennis’, he said, ‘what about coming down to the Village, and maybe we could go off to the coast somewhere where it is quiet. I have things to tell you’.

Jess reckoned that it was the old Army friends who had done it. They had broken his barrier of silence. I was not so sure, but I certainly was looking forward to the time we were going to have together. Jess packed lunch for us and put in flasks of hot water and the makings for tea and coffee.

I could scarcely believe what I saw. Tom had had his wild hair cut-short back and sides. His beard was neatly trimmed. The fierce self-protective look was gone. It seemed easy for him to look you in the eye. I had never seen him grin, and wondered how he had come into such ease and delight. He was dressed in casual clothes, and when he saw my astonishment he laughed.

‘Verna got these for me’, he said. ‘She said they would be my celebration clothes.’ He paused a moment and I thought he was about to return to his old melancholy, but the sun shone again for him. ‘I’m sure Rhonda would be delighted to see me like this. I only wished it had happened back there.’

He gripped my hand firmly and drew me into his small but comfortable home. Verna’s prophecy had come true. The place was alive. There were framed photographs on the walls, mainly of Rhonda and the girls, but a special one of Tom and Rhonda’s wedding day. In it Tom was smiling, and his new wife was looking up adoringly. I guess my heart almost missed a beat. Meanwhile Tom was setting out cups, saucers and plates whilst the electric kettle was coming to the boil. He gave a bit of a wry smile at the carton of milk, saying it was not like the creamy fluid he had known on the farm.

Later in the morning we set out to go south and we decided on Moana Beach. We settled into a sandhill and let the sun soak into us. The blue water of the Gulf seemed smooth but moved enough to twinkle. A light breeze above scudded the soft fleeces of clouds. A few men were fishing from the beach, but they were half a

kilometre away. Everything was alive, and Tom most of all.

'It is a strange story', he said, 'and I'm not sure I can tell it well enough for you to understand, Dennis.'

'Sure enough it was meeting my old Army cobbers-Brett and Robbie-which seemed to change my thinking. I had stored things up over the years but they hadn't. As you know they are two outgoing people.'

I was thinking, *Monads never look out. They never regard others with interest. They live on their own, inwardly. Monads are self-centred. They have love, but it is turned in on themselves.*

'The two of them were in Tobruk, just the same as I was. I guess I was as outgoing as them, there. Tobruk wasn't all that bad.'

Brett and Robbie were outgoing. So was Tom. Quite remarkable.

'It was in New Guinea where it happened. The other mate we had was Harry Richmond. A better bloke you would never meet. Harry was my closest mate, being a dairy farmer and all that. Of course there was more to it even than that. Mateship is something you can never describe, but you would know.'

Mateship is something you can never describe, but you would know.

'We had all seen other men killed, even some in our own platoon, but then the four of us had never been touched. We had charmed lives. Even in the jungle where the Japs might suddenly surprise you, we had never come to harm.'

'This day we came to harm. Our section was moving silently through fairly open jungle and grass: *lalang* we called it. We were spaced out in line so that we covered a wide front, but close enough to keep each other in sight. I was on the right flank, and Harry was next to me. Between him and Brett was Robbie. We knew all the sounds, but snipers make no sounds. We heard the crack of the rifle and Harry pitched forwards. Without a second's pause our Tommy guns blazed and chattered where we had measured the sniper must be, and we were right. He tumbled down out of the tree.'

'We reckoned he would have been on his own, but we remained cautious. We circled around Harry. He wasn't dead, and we were grateful, but we couldn't cheer yet. He had been hit in the chest, and his blood was flowing: pumping out, really I plugged the hole with a brown field dressing, but the blood kept oozing.'

'Harry stared up at us like he was surprised. That's what I remember-the surprised look. It was as though he had been let down, deceived, taken in, and he was kind of protesting. Even then, none of us thought death was coming. Harry wouldn't die. He was not supposed to die. We were four together. We were one. We were mates.'

Harry wouldn't die. He was not supposed to die. We were four together. We were one. We were mates.

'Harry was looking at me, and I knew he knew he was a goner. Any moment he would slip away He knew that. He kept looking at me as though asking me to change fate, but knowing I couldn't.'

We never wanted to part. We were one, so to speak.'

Tom's voice had dropped. He was staring out to sea but it wasn't the Gulf waters he was seeing. It was Harry-Harry dying and not being able to recall life.

Tom said, 'Hundreds of us died, Dennis. You know that. You saw death, but when a mate dies it is different'.

'Of course it is different when a mate dies. No one would understand that who had never been there.'

When a mate dies it is different.

It was the look in his eyes which did it. I froze inside. I could do nothing for him. None of us was to blame, but then Harry was dying on us.

'Harry was looking at me, staring. He was dead, and I couldn't believe it. I threw myself on him and cried out for him to come back. It was crazy of course but *when a mate dies it is different*. I just froze inside, and after a time Brett and Robbie pulled me away.

"Come away, Tom", they said, but I wanted to stay. They were digging with their bayonets, scrabbling with their hands, pulling up the black mud and the rotting leaves. They were making a grave for Harry. I was like a dead man myself and could only watch what they were doing. All the time Harry seemed to be looking at me. I wanted to close his eyes, but I still wanted him to be looking, as though somehow he was alive. I never wanted that to end, even if he was dead.'

I wanted to close his eyes, but I still wanted him to be looking, as though somehow he was alive.

'The three of us buried him, saying a prayer over

him, heaping up the soil over him, and any bits of logs and branches. We kept looking back, but we had forgotten about the sniper. No one stays behind to bury snipers. The sniper was left alone. Harry was left alone, too, but a mate is inscribed on your heart.'

The tide was turning, and soon it would reach up on the beach, softly clawing the white sand. Tom was shivering a bit even though the sun was warm.

'You became a monad, Tom', I said. 'You froze into yourself. A psychologist would say you took the guilt of Harry's death into yourself, and you froze. You didn't dare let yourself feel anything. Memory was always going to be a painful thing to you.'

He nodded. 'Brett and Robbie brought it right out the other night. They were not troubled. They thought it was a grand affair, that it was something honourable to remember Harry and the way he died. I had always thought it dishonourable, but of course I knew it wasn't. I know now that I was angry. Harry of all people mustn't die. Harry was my close mate, closer even than Robbie and Brett.'

I had always thought it dishonourable, but of course I knew it wasn't.

I was thinking that long ago Tom should have sought out his old mates and shared his frozen mind with them, and of course his frozen heart, but I knew monads are made in a moment but remain that way for life. Monads number millions in the human race. No-one can change them. Monads hate emotions, despise relationships, fear love, shun intimacy. Tom's change was a miracle. Yet it was not only Brett and Robbie who had effected the miracle. All their lives

Rhonda, Stella and Verna had worked away at it, chipping, chipping.

I was setting out the vacuum flasks, and their tops as cups. Tom was rubbing his hands and still shivering. We drank the hot fluid gratefully, and then Tom stood up, raising his hands above his head. There was light in his eyes. I recognised that he must have been handsome in his youth. I mourned a little for the three women he had known: they would have been ecstatic over this new Tom.

‘Has Verna seen you since the change?’ I asked.

He nodded. ‘She is like another woman, just as I am like another man. I’m not afraid of affection or emotion any more.’

I thought about my own profession and how often we mistake the things of the mind for the things of the spirit. Spirit is deeper than psyche, no matter what its connection with it may be. Nothing of my psychology could have released this man from a mourning unto death.

‘Let’s drink to the death of a monad and the resurrection of a new human person.’

I knew he understood this, but because a faint shadow of puzzlement remained in his eyes, I thought I would quote John Donne to him, and I did; not only for Tom and his women, but also for me and, for that matter, for the whole of us-the human race.

No man is an *Island*, entire of itself.

Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in *Mankind*;

And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

The Secret, Secret Agent

My friend John Hartmann has allowed me to write this story. It is really his story but he is so much into his own way of life, study and teaching that he hasn’t much opportunity for writing yarns. He takes time off occasionally to read some of my stories, but on the whole he sees no great value in fiction. His particular thing is theology; but before you turn away from this story because you think theology is religion, and religion is for a special coterie of people in which you do not wish to be included, then let me tell you that theology, rightly understood, is a story all on its own. Even if you can’t swallow that, nevertheless set your prejudices aside and enjoy a thundering good yarn about my friend whose name, as I have said, is John Hartmann, and who is known as a scholar of high repute. As they say, ‘This man is no slouch’.

People have a sort of passion to know what others do, and when conversation develops-especially if it is interesting-folk almost always ask, ‘What do you do?’.

John's answer used to be simple and honest enough. 'Oh, I am a pastor. I preach and teach, so to speak.'

The convivial flow of conversation always seemed to dam up at this point. Something hung limp in the air. The questioner would try to hide his feelings. Generally he-or she-was aghast. He had thought himself to be talking with a sane and interesting and genuine person, but behind that disguise lay a preacher. Somehow the preacher was cheating. Maybe he should have been wearing clericals a black stock and a white reversed collar-his uniform, so to speak, but he was masquerading as a genuine human, and, in a sense, cheating the public. Uniforms are for warning off, for protecting the public against specialists of a trade or profession. It is well known that the public do not hobnob with parsons and priests, anymore than they strike up conversations with policemen or ticket inspectors. Every cartoonist worth his salt knows what treasures preachers are, and every humorist especially the bawdy ones-uses clergy in his or her stock of jokes.

So my friend John Hartmann, who is an intellectual heavyweight and a man of broad humour, one day hit upon the idea of disguising himself. Perhaps you might say, 'Protecting himself'. He resolved to keep contact with other humans by refusing to disclose his profession. At the same time he decided that he would not be ashamed of it. He would simply try to show it in a different light. In fact, he developed quite an interesting

philosophy of what it is to be a human being and remain a theologian at the one time. I am sure that as our story unfolds you will get his point and his method of getting it across.

John happens to be internationally known for his theological expertise. He easily relates to people at all levels of life, but at the same time he is highly esteemed for his theological know-how. In case you didn't know it, theology is not a static discipline. It involves much creative thinking, and its boundaries are as broad as the earth, if not the heavens also. For this reason John jets it across the nations, and in his travels meets many people. He is well versed on many subjects and loves the arts in all their forms. Of course it goes without saying that he is an astute thinker. When people get into conversation with him he values their insights, and incorporates them into his general knowledge as well as using them in his public speaking and lecturing.

He rarely initiates a conversation. In fact he simply loves to read when he is flying. He never takes advantage of the earphones the air company provides. He says he has enough TV watching at home when he is part of his family. Latest theological works fascinate him, and he enjoys, even covets, the time air flight gives him to catch up on this kind of reading. Because of this he has an aversion to the hearty fellow passenger who, as nature's major extrovert, loves to chat loudly all the precious hours of the flight. He-the noisy extrovert-imagines himself as

God's gift to anyone who happens to be seated beside him. What is more, he can often speak at the one time to those on both sides of him. That is why he likes the middle seat of a threesome. Of course, like John, he travels economy class. In this way he can spread his valuable conversation also to seats which are fore and aft of him. At the end of every journey he makes a hearty farewell to his suffering companions, on whom, so he thinks, he has showered the largesse of his own magnificent thinking. As I said, this was the one person John dreaded to have beside him.

In the interests of reading and writing economy I will devise a typical extrovert whom fate decrees should sit next to John and waste his precious reading hours. I should also tell you that whilst John suffers fools gladly, he also seeks to have some fun along the way. He not only wants to extract compensation for his loss of reading, but he wants to unseat his vociferous and crass companion. John knows that every human being-bar none-is, when all is said and done, a human being; that is, a human, *being*. He is not just a noisy extrovert. Deep down he is capable of better things than bragging and nagging and carrying on brashly. Unlocked, he can be quite a marvel. All of this comes from John's quite substantial theology, otherwise John would have been only your stereotyped parson, and he was far from that.

We will take the typical situation John faces from time to time and tell it as a story. You can be sure there is

much fact with this fiction. Today they call such writing 'faction'. So let us give ourselves to it.

The large man sat next to John. He had spent some time putting hand luggage into the locker, looking around, smiling at people and preparing them for receiving the great gift that he was, himself, by nature and self-cultivation. He still had a briefcase in his hand, but, by ousting John for a few minutes, he managed to slip his bulk into the centre seat. There was a bit of exertion, and some slight sideswiping whilst he extracted a book from the briefcase, closed the case and inserted it below the seat in front of him. He then settled into the seat, overflowing its two arm limits, fiddled with the seat belt until it clicked into place, looked up at the airconditioning knob, swivelled it both ways until the flow of air satisfied him, plugged his earphones into their socket, patted the blockbuster novel on his ample thighs, and gave a large sigh of contentment and graciously motioned John to resume his seat in anticipation of the treat he was about to receive.

Air hosts and hostesses have natural knowledge of such persons, and treat them accordingly, generally like large and somewhat unpredictable pets. They are specially wary when persons like our friend order immoderate quantities of alcohol, for it is then the pet can become dangerous. On this occasion our friend showed himself to be a teetotaller, and that would prove to be some relief.

Our large friend had the name 'Jamie'. He came from Sydney, but he was flying from Adelaide to

Cairns. John was flying to Brisbane. Perhaps at Sydney they would change planes and seat numbers, but perhaps not. John settled for reality and accepted the intrusive greeting of Jamie.

Jamie gave some of his life history, explaining that he did not hail from Adelaide but from Sydney, yet he was now flying from Adelaide to Cairns, and wasn't that a strange thing; but the reason for this was ...

John heard him out, casting furtive looks at his latest and most expensive theological text. Certain words caught his eye and excited him. His friend cast a cursory eye over John's book but did not see the title or the print. He thumped his own blockbuster and declared it a hot book, all right.

'A real sizzler', he told John. 'Make your hair curl, it would.'

John was not unaware that such books existed. He lived in the same world as Jamie, but was simply more selective in his reading. He realised Jamie was not going to read his sizzling novel. He was going to talk interminably to John, because already the man on the other side of Jamie had shown beyond any shred of doubt that he abhorred conversation. He was reading *The Financial Times*, after which he would read *The Bulletin* and, possibly, *Quadrant*. These exclusive journals he had determined to read until the time they reached Sydney, although that was only an hour and a half away. Jamie knew his fellow beings, and had already named his neighbour on the left as a sour-puss and a nonconversationalist. Equally he knew John to be the

man who would hear him out and enjoy conversation immensely.

John Hartmann was waiting for Jamie to ask him who he was, but this did not happen until they were well up in the 35,000 feet level of flying. Jamie still had a certain anxiety until the plane was flying smoothly. He worried about the few bumps the jet had in getting to the high zone, after which peace returned and he was ready for action.

An air hostess had brought them some orange juice, and Jamie finished it in a gulp. He chatted for a few moments about diverse subjects and finally came out with the direct question, 'And what do you do for a living?'. He obviously expected a smooth answer such as many would give. He suspected John was a doctor, and of course this was true, but he was a doctor of theology and not of medicine.

John savoured the moment for answering Jamie's question. He looked around in a sort of conspiratorial fashion as though expecting others to be listening. He gave the impression that he had to be very, very careful. Since most were absorbed within their earphones, listening to the news, they were scarcely likely to hear what John was saying. Even so, John wanted to make much of the build-up. He pressed close to the big man, reaching up to his ear. He whispered his answer, but the bulky fellow did not hear what John was saying. He bent down to give John better hearing.

John said, 'I am an agent'.

The other man nodded, waiting for further explanation. By 'agent' he understood 'agent for this firm or that, or for this product or that'.

‘Oh’, he grunted. John sensed his lack of comprehension.

‘Secret agent’, he said, but still the man did not understand. John’s eye fell on the novel which was titled *The Iranian Connection*, and he tapped. ‘An agent such as in this book.’

Jamie’s jaw fell, but his eyebrows went up. His eyes popped slightly. He shook his head in unbelief. Knowing secrecy to be important he bent more, and talked out of the right side of his mouth.

He said, ‘You mean *secret* agent?’.

John nodded. ‘Like I told you’, he said out of the left side of his mouth.

The large man sat bolt upright, hands on both thighs. Something was going on in his mind. He was thinking. He was wondering whether this quiet fellow passenger was really what he claimed to be, and whether, maybe, he had a weapon or two on him, and whether he-Jamie-might be in some kind of danger. He was not used to quick thinking, although he imagined he was no slouch when it came to the matter of puzzling out things.

Mercifully it was the time of eating. Trolleys moved from both ends towards the centre of the aisle, and, most efficiently, meals were being handed out. Jamie gratefully received his, and was thinking things through as he slipped off silver foil and bits of gladwrap and tucked his undersized paper napkin across his broad chest. He noticed that the secret agent was tackling the meal in the same way as fellow travellers were, and that he was not agitated by the thought of some other agent or counter-agent being hidden

behind the high backs of seats. Jamie thought he would limit his conversation whilst he was polishing off his meal.

This operation did not take long, and Jamie was soon asking for more coffee and maybe an extra bread roll, and perhaps a spare dessert that might be around the place. John was enjoying his meal and getting in a few paragraphs of reading into the bargain. It seemed he had silenced Jamie for a short period.

Short period was the case. Jamie had polished off his meal and the extras the hostess had provided with a smile. The company made provisions for such as Jamie, so there was no problem. The movie was flashing itself from a dozen screens but Jamie wasn’t interested. Nor was he interested in his sizzling novel. John had gripped his imagination and his attention. As he passed the disposable remains of his food tray to the hostess he asked John sotto voce what ‘crowd’ he was with.

‘The good crowd of course’, John said cheerfully, ‘but then we are the subversives’.

Jamie vaguely understood the term ‘subversive’. ‘You mean you are out to change the world?’

‘Absolutely’, John assured him, ‘because the world needs this change’.

All Jamie could say was, ‘Oh!’. He had slight mental pain in grasping John’s thesis.

‘The world is in a bad way’, John explained. ‘It always has been. Terrible things are happening.’ He looked up. ‘You would agree with that, of course.’

Jamie nodded as though he was agreeing.

‘Fifty thousand children on the streets in Australia’,

John said. 'Last year sixty thousand divorces in Australia. That's one hundred and twenty thousand people greatly disturbed, and many more children in pain. Sixty million abortions throughout the world. That's a lot of abortions and a lot of deeply disturbed women, let alone their men friends, relatives and others, so to speak.'

Jamie's rate of absorption was limited, but he kept nodding. 'Fancy all that!', he exclaimed.

'There's more', John said. 'There are problems galore to do with suicides, homicides and genocides. There are prejudices concerning genders, social classes, races and so on, which divide men and women, young and old, social groupings and the like.'

Jamie was listening. Occasionally his eye flickered up to the TV screens as though he might wish to escape there, but he pressed on. John sensed he was going to press through with the whole matter. It was like a tremendous adventure into which he was going, and which would provide reams of things to tell. I think his mind was fixated on being close to a secret agent and his own part in John's adventure, as such.

'As a special agent', he began, but corrected himself. 'As a secret agent what do you have to do? Are you allowed to tell?'

'I am not only allowed but I am committed to tell', John said. 'I have to bring the message of my people, and especially of my Leader, to the world. We are subversives. We oppose this world system about us. We are seeking to change it all, to convert it to our system, which is, of course, the only true system.'

Jamie was now serious. He was nodding, but he was also a bit anxious. 'I have heard that every group thinks it is right in what it is doing, and that it believes only it can save the world. Is this how your group is?'

John shook his head. 'It is not out to save the world', he said, 'but to change it. The present system is so rotten that other systems, were they to replace it, would inherit that rottenness and nothing would radically change'.

'You could be right', the big man agreed, 'though I have never given much thought to it. But you would need violence to change everything, and wouldn't that really continue the violence you are opposing?'

John looked at him with some admiration. 'You are spot on. We oppose violence in any and every form. We think love is the only way to accomplish our mission and we have secret agents all over the world. But then, the love we are talking about is not what most people call love. In fact it is a sort of mystery in which you live, because ordinary love is really quite self-centred. This love is concerned with others rather than itself. We talk about love being the kind that surrenders itself to others, and which dies to itself and for the others.'

Jamie held up a plump finger, acting, as it were, like a brake on the conversation.

'Not so fast', he said. 'This all sounds a bit too mysterious. That stuff about surrender to others, and kind of dying to oneself for them, sounds as though we are on the edge of religion. Religion really worries me. It brings a lot of harm to the world. You wouldn't just be religious, now, would you?'

‘Jamie’, John said earnestly, ‘we are not for religion. I just told you that. We are for love. We are out for love and not for religion. Religion is part of the world system which we are against. For example, football is religion. It has great congregations and priests and worshippers and mass meetings; and often it causes terrible riots, and people are killed. Also it fills up the minds of so many that they can’t think deeply about other things. If you add to the football some of the other sports, then you surely have a lot of other religions, and these are all the more dangerous because they are really tribal wars under other names’.

Jamie shook his head. His eyes furtively looked to the TV screen. He was realising he had been listening where he generally took the initiative in conversation. He noted that the stewardesses had tidied up, collecting the empty drinking glasses, and were giving hot towels to the first-class passengers. They were almost in Sydney. In fact the plane gave that sort of mild, forward lurch which heralded its descent. Less than thirty minutes remained. He thought he would get a few exciting bits of information to give to Mrs Mary Jamie and the kids. He could see them in his mind, and they were goggle-eyed, listening to what he had cleverly drawn out of the secret agent.

‘Are you allowed to tell the name of your Leader?’ he asked. ‘Do they let sympathetic people know where your HQ is, and is there some address we can contact, some phone or fax number we can use?’

‘Well, yes’, John said, and again he looked around as though expecting other agents or spies to be

listening on some kind of a device which brought his information to them. It was as though he even suspected some of those headphones were not really linked to the company’s TV program but were honing in on his secret message to Jamie.

‘Our Leader is quite special’, John said. ‘He has sent out messages from his HQ for many years, but not all want to hear what he says. He has a Son who is pretty high up in the business. He came with a great message about our revolutionary system, and even began subverting the world we all know. Actually his special agents run into millions, and they are about establishing his new reign. Of course the world has never taken kindly to what he teaches, especially his emphasis on love and love alone. They think his love is either too tough or too weak, according to the ways they look at it.’

Jamie had let John run on, and at that point the Captain’s voice broke through on the intercom. He was announcing, ‘We are sixty kilometres west of Sydney Airport and should be on the tarmac in about ten minutes. The ground temperature is twenty-two degrees and there is a light wind at twelve knots. We hope you have enjoyed your flight, and thank you for choosing us to fly with. Passengers flying onto Brisbane will have to change to another plane, and will be allotted different seat numbers. Do not leave hand luggage in this carrier. Please make your way to the transit lounge. Thank you again, and we hope to have you fly with us again’.

John sensed the battle going on in the mind of his fellow passenger. He had a bit of a battle going on in

his own mind. Part of him wanted to follow through with his secret service story, and the other part longed dearly to read his latest tome of theology.

Jamie was also becoming conspiratorial. He looked around to see whether anyone was listening, or even looking in their direction.

He whispered, 'You wouldn't carry a card with you, eh?' He gave a short laugh at his own ridiculous question, but John nodded.

'I do that', he said, and fished in his fob pocket. The card was attractive, in reds and blues. Jamie received it gratefully, and was about to slide it into a pocket, but curiosity overcame him. He glanced down. What he read was:

The Rev. John Hartmann, MA, DipEd, ThD

The Seminary

Jeffcott Street, North Adelaide

He looked across at John Hartmann and smiled. 'Very clever, Doc', he said. 'Great disguise if ever there was one, getting into seminary on behalf of the Movement. Got right into the heart of things there. Me? I'm a Baptist, but I believe in all religions, especially if they are Christian. Wait till the wife and the kids hear about this. Up there at Cairns we never get much to do with secret agents. They will love it all, and maybe I will be in touch with you. I've got your phone and fax numbers. Yes, I will be in touch. You just be sure of that!

The plane had reached the tarmac and was racing past the dry brown grass, and John's reply was lost

in the roar of the reversing engines. The chief hostess was talking to them about getting taxis or buses into the city, and what the transit passengers had to do. Jamie and John had mixed feelings as they collected their hand luggage. Jamie's mind was in a whirl, and he thought that maybe getting a seat next to someone else might be the best. He would then have time to think over the strange things he had heard. He must get the matter clear for Mary and the kids.

John Hartmann's mind was also a bit divided. One part of him wanted to have Jamie fully informed about the subversion in which he was involved, and the other part of him had a longing to get into the text of his subversive theology.

With these mental conflicts the two men made their way to the transit lounge.

As usual the hostesses smiled at their going, and kept their personal thoughts and impressions to themselves.

The Day Mr Gruntle Became God

The thing that happened that morning was almost imperceptible, and if anyone had told the old man what had happened he would have been acutely embarrassed. Not that it would have stopped him in his tracks, for he was a person like that. Once he got an idea into his mind it was virtually impossible to remove it, and certainly, this morning, he got the idea into his head.

He was a bit vague about what he was going to do. Sarah had always given him direction for his day's program, but then, of course, she was just not about the place. Every so often he would remember there had been a funeral and the idea would seem strange. Once he had been standing in the middle of the road-West Parade to be exact-and he had been reading a board about a house for sale. Dimly he noticed the rather up-market place, but it was the reader-friendly blurb concerning it which preoccupied him. He stood there in the centre of West Parade

digesting the facts about ducted air into every room. Fancy! Ducted music into every room! Fancy again! And so on.

It was fortunate that it was one of those streets which had humps across it every thirty yards, so that cars proceeded slowly. As the air-and-music-ducted-into-every-room house was on a corner he successfully held up vehicles coming from four directions, and they were all a bit puzzled as to what to do. The tiniest toot awakened Mr Gruntle. He raised his hat, bowed graciously and reached the kerb. The traffic jam sorted itself out silently and with much grinning, whilst Mr Gruntle went on his way wondering what Sarah would have thought of ducted air and music. He doubted that Sarah would have been impressed. He was just glad he had never bought the new-fangled house.

The morning of which we speak was like any other morning. It was one of those warm Adelaide autumn mornings and before he knew it, the old widower was on his way, though to where he would not have considered.

All he knew was that there was a strange thought running through his head.

It was this, 'We must get the world going again, today'.

Not for a moment did Mr Gruntle imagine he was God. Heaven forbid of course! Yet the notion was there, 'I, Henry Gruntle, have to get the world going'. So absorbed was he in that idea that he almost missed his favourite salmon hibiscus which was

flowering near the back gate. He would often spend half an hour contemplating the delicate shade of this bush's blooms, and even as he did so the honeyeaters would slip and flit and almost flirt with the laden blossoms.

He did notice it, but his mind was occupied. Always a man of imagination, he was now seeing the whole world waking under eastern, western, southern and northern skies. Dawn was skirting the world and advancing on the retreating darkness with vivid life. Mr Gruntle could see people awakening. Households were stirring. Children were rubbing their eyes. Parents were trying to sneak a few extra minutes' sleep. Cats and dogs were stretching. Perhaps even elephants were stretching: he did not know. All he knew was that it was a mammoth task to get it all into action. It just did not happen of itself. He remembered that not even a sparrow fell without its demise being recorded. As for lilies that grew in fields, they did not blossom of themselves. Some power was needed to get them going.

Mr Gruntle wondered how it could all be got going. He could see it all coming into action, and somehow he felt he had a responsibility for it. He stood for a moment, rubbed the golden haft of his walking stick until the sun touched it lightly, giving it a sort of burnished glory. The widower was facing West Parade at this time, and the sun had shot across the tops of the suburban trees. Again the disturbing thought of getting everything going was visiting him. He was slightly troubled, but he also felt the honour and dignity of his new office. He, Henry Gruntle,

was responsible for what was happening, or what was about to be happening.

Providentially he was not standing in the centre of the road. There were no notices of sale on the terrace houses. Even had there been Henry would not have regarded them: things of greater importance were in his mind. Falling sparrows were in his thinking, and lilies in fields; the cries of yowling, waking children; the movements of humans and animals. He was worried momentarily how it had been getting along without him until this morning when suddenly the responsibility of it all had passed to him. He had never before realised what an enormous thing it is for a world to awaken and get into action.

A few noises caused him to turn his head, and there were the garbage collectors trundling wheelie bins to their truck. To him the huge truck seemed like some hungry predator. It was yawping, hungrily devouring the offal from the bins. He hesitated, wondering whether he should give directions to these muscled men in singlets, shorts and sneakers; but he decided that somehow his energies were running through them, and he turned to other things he must figure out.

A cat was looking at him with sleepy morning eyes. It had managed the night without Mr Gruntle, and was yawning in his face. The old man wondered whether he should encourage it into active life, but it seemed to read his wishes, and took one leap over the closest fence and was gone. A minor sort of dog trotted by without looking at him. A car drew in at a garage, and the day began its activities there.

It was gradually dawning on Mr Gruntle that his great powers were indeed getting things and events into action. This particularly pleased him because in years past he had been sensitive about giving orders to anyone. In the early days he had tried being masculine to Sarah and giving her commands, but she had had a way of dealing with those odd notions of his, and soon they withered away. Now he had a resurgence of power after all those inert years, and he almost trembled with the delight of it.

The curious thing was he did not know he had become God. You might have said 'a god', but it was not like that. He was either God or he was nothing, but the thought of the Deity was not in his mind. It was simply in his veins, muscles and arteries. He had a universal sort of responsibility and he would fulfil it. It made him wander into the garage, or, as they now call it, 'the service station'.

Guiseppe Papino was there cheerfully at the counter giving change to drivers who had filled their tanks with petrol, self-service fashion. He nodded happily to old Gruntle.

'You wanting Safe Quality milk, Mr Gruntle?' he asked, but the old man just stared at him.

'Everything going OK, eh?' he asked. He felt rather wonderful knowing that this small business was operating successfully only because of his-Henry Gruntle's--emanating powers.

Guiseppe looked at him, puzzled. Then he thought he understood.

'Ha! Pension day today, isn't it?' he asked. He squeaked with joy. 'No Meals on Wheels today, eh?'

he chuckled. He winked. He gave change with a slight, oblique bow to the strangers who visited him only for his discount petrol. He was facing the widower politely.

For some reason Mr Gruntle felt offended. Did Papino not realise who he, Henry Gruntle, really was? It was no time to be talking about Meals on Wheels. He thought that if he left with dignity this would really change the proprietor's mind. He stalked out with all the emphasis his strength allowed him.

Mr Papino looked after him, mystified. He scratched his head and returned to his good humour when a driver bought six crates of Coke. For a moment he wondered whether Mr Gruntle had brought him good luck.

Mr Gruntle was thinking about Meals on Wheels. For some years he had received his midday meal from the visiting ladies and I had been grateful for their ministrations. Mr Papino had, however, put a thought into his mind. He handled the money in his righthand trouser pocket. It felt good. He would give the ladies a miss today. They would not understand, of course, but that did not matter. They would probably leave it outside on the back verandah and cover it with a towel when they found he was missing. He chuckled. If only they knew his special powers.

It was one of those powers which made him frown as he walked down West Parade. For the first time he noticed infringements of laws. Normally he would have passed by these, but today he felt responsible for the chiding of law-breakers. Take, for example, the bushes which grew through

garden fences and bulged out-or wandered out onto footpaths. One had to step out to the kerb to pass them. He turned into another of his favourite streets. On one corner there was a golden elm. Its branches were bowed down with the heavy foliage, and the old man had to bend his neck and then duck so that his Panama hat would not be dislodged. He almost slipped as his gold-hafted walking stick flew out of his grasp. He realised the local council had planted this elm in a public place. He would have it out with the council! A look of determination came into his eyes.

He noticed that folk passing by looked at him as though with new respect. He gave cursory nods to them, as though from some high and holy office. Some shook their heads. It seemed to him they were filled with wonder. His back straightened. His natural nobility asserted itself. Could Sarah see him now, she would be impressed.

His first sally, born of his new deity, was at the place where the lavender bush bellied out through and from the white picket fence. The plant was shaped like a huge globe. Half of it stretched across the footpath. Something had to be done about this. He opened the gate, strode up to the front door and rang the bell. It was a musical bell. Its tones echoed melodiously within the cavern of the house. The door opened. A young woman stared up at him. Awed, no doubt.

‘What can I do for you?’ she asked.

He was stern. He beckoned to her. She followed

meekly. He pointed to the lavender bush. She nodded. She loved that bush. Often folk commented on it, praising its rounded form and its beautiful head of fragrant flowers.

She looked up at him. ‘Well?’ she asked.

‘Madam’, said Mr Gruntle with dignity, ‘your bush is obtruding onto the footpath. People have to go around it. Their freedom is impeded. Gardens should stop at fences. This is the law of the land’. He stopped himself in time. He had almost said, ‘This is my law’. Of course it was his law because he was ... He paused, a trifle stunned at his authority.

It seemed to him that she was timid, meek, mild. He mistook her gentle smile. She was thinking, ‘What a dear old man. How dignified, but maybe he has lost some of his marbles’.

She said, ‘I will talk to my husband about this. He is the one who handles these things. I’m so glad you pointed out our mistake’.

She could not tell him she now had no husband. Her Alwyn had left her three years ago. The children loved the lavender bush. Every year they lovingly cut off the flowers and made sachets for Christmas presents. Her Cheryl would sew the sachets.

Mr Gruntle was satisfied. He was setting his world in order. He scarcely noticed how ‘the world’ had passed over to being his world, that is, ‘my world’. This, of course, was what happened to leaders of governments. They started off by saying ‘the government’, or ‘our government’, but graduated to saying ‘my government’. The old man missed the transition, but the

matter was firmly placed in his mind. One house had burgeoning oleander and grevillia, both forcing walkers into the gutter. Mr Gruntle felt this deeply. Unfortunately more people were away from their houses than were at home, but in some cases he had great satisfaction.

Just before noon he began to feel a bit tired. Maybe this was because he had got the world into action and felt it could be left to carry on, he being present behind the scenes as a watcher and keeper. Even so the golden elm worried him. He thought he had better see Toby Stevenson who was secretary of his RSL Club, but also the town clerk.

For the first time in his post-work years he was not awed by the marvellous Council Chambers. He crossed the miles of thick-pile carpet, went to Toby's room and knocked on the door, thereby breaking the rule of going through the receptionist.

Toby didn't seem to mind. He looked a trifle puzzled, a little askance at the intrusion, but, after all, old Henry was respected at the club and he had better humour him.

'Henry!' he exclaimed, as though this was the moment he had been waiting for. 'Great to see you! What can I do for you?'

Henry had seated himself on the bulbous leather lounge chair, had spread out his tired legs, and had laid the gold-hafted stick across his aging thighs.

'Toby', he said, fixing that man with his firm gaze, 'Toby, I have come about that golden elm on the corner of Rugby and Harrow Streets. You know, just off West Parade'.

'Our pride and joy that golden elm', Toby said. 'Glad you like it.'

He looked a trifle anxious. 'No disease has gotten in to it?' he asked. 'I hear some golden elms are being attacked these days. Sad it is, sad.'

Gruntle shook his head impatiently. 'Strong as an ox', he said without wondering about the curious figure of speech. 'No, Toby, that tree has taken over that corner. People have to go out on the road to avoid it. They could get run over by any car. Young people scream around that corner in their vehicles.'

He fixed the startled town clerk with his new gaze. 'I can't allow that Toby. I can't have people doing just what they want to do: not even town clerks and the like. I have been telling householders they must obey the law. Nothing must obtrude on to the public footpaths.'

Toby stared, amazed. 'Well,' he breathed, 'you can't have that, eh? And who are you, Henry, to set about putting things in order?'

Henry Gruntle looked at his friend. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell this ignorant fellow that he was ... but he stopped short of that. The man would not understand. He realised what he had been going to say and felt a trifle afraid. He was about to explain what had come to him in the early morning about getting the whole world into gear and moving off into its day, but Toby was, well, plain irreligious. He never went to church except on Anzac Day, and then it was probably to show off his medals. He had better be careful about what he said to Toby.

He gathered his stick with great dignity. Usually

he had to lever himself up but not today. He stood up steadily and looked at the town clerk with what seemed to him patient tolerance. He bowed slightly an uncharacteristic gesture-and backed towards the door.

‘Think over that golden elm, Toby’, he said. ‘If you don’t I may have to do something about it.’

‘Yes, Henry’, said Toby, and his meekness Henry knew to be a new thing for the man. He was rather pleased as he made his way across the deep brown pile of the carpet and reached the automatic doors. They opened and bowed him through. Toby watched him until he disappeared from sight.

‘Did you ever?’ Toby asked himself wonderingly. He found himself thinking in worried fashion about the golden elm on the corner of Rugby and Harrow Streets. He had better talk to the mayor about it.

Mr Gruntle was feeling the power and dignity of his office. He made his way across the street to the shopping centre. He had not come here much since Sarah’s departure from this world. Formerly of timid nature, he rarely ordered morning tea. Indeed he found himself unable to frequent coffee and snack shops as others did. Not this time, however. He found a place in the open cafe where he could survey the shoppers as they passed by. From his vantage point he could look over most of the shops in the branching arcade.

He nodded with his new-found dignity to the lively short-skirted waitress. He found himself saying, ‘Cappuccino and waffles with maple syrup and

ice-cream’. The waitress showed none of her surprise. It looked as if the old boy did this every day. She reckoned to herself that he must have been some kind of a lad in his day. She smiled with approval.

‘A little cream also, sir?’ she asked. Ah, he liked that ‘sir’ and the deep respect she showed. Well, after all he was ...

He stopped short. ‘Just a touch of it’, he agreed. ‘Must watch the old cholesterol, eh?’ He regretted having said that. He did not have to watch cholesterol. Not he, he being who he was. He smiled to himself and nodded. Toby had really been rattled hadn’t he!

She brought him the cappuccino and the waffles. The maple syrup was in a sort of cruet. There were two generous domes of ice-cream. He wondered whether he could eat the two waffles. They looked a bit much.

He found himself ravenous. His kind of work demanded generous replenishment. He amazed himself by ordering another coffee. There was still plenty to do in this day and he would have to get on with it.

He sat back, after a time, the waffles consumed, the cappuccino making warm feelings inside his system. His walking stick was hooped over a vacant chair and his white Panama with the blue band was on the seat of the spare chair.

He leaned back. Something proprietorial seeped into him. A chance look at his watch assured him that at this moment Mrs Crabtree and her fellow worker Mrs Alderdice would be rounding the back of his house, bringing their Meals on Wheels special for the

day Normally he would nod to them and say, 'Thank you, ladies. Just put it on the table there', and they would do that in a partially deferential and partially patronising way.

At this moment they would be surprised at his absence. They would not know of the high office and mandate which he had received early that morning. Were they somehow to know, they would be amazed, stunned, and probably would look wonderingly and humbly at him. Now he did not much care. He had higher things to think about.

He kept looking at the shoppers as they wandered along. Some looked vacant, others worried and others were just plain unthinking. The feeling within was becoming even more pleasant. His old fears and baseless premonitions were gone. He was a different person. He felt the glow grow. It was like the few occasions when he had had anaesthetic and then analgesics for pain. As the pain had faded the delight had grown. It was like that now.

He almost admitted that his new-found strength was also fading a bit. He would not worry about that now. He was sure he could stand up at once, as he had in the Council Chambers, surprising old Toby a lot. He wondered why he was giggling inside, thinking about the two Meals on Wheels ladies. He even caught himself wondering whether they would have left it all under a napkin or a towel, and if it would be there for the evening when he reached home, thus saving him the preparing of a meal.

He frowned slightly at the last thought. He had no need to worry about meals and that sort of thing.

Come to think about it he had no need to worry concerning *anything, he being who he was!* Somehow he dared not ask who he was: he knew who he was, and he knew what he had done this day.

He looked out again at the shoppers. He loved them all. He loved the pert waitress who had given him his bill. He loved the feel of the cash in his right-hand trouser pocket. He loved the things he was seeing in the shops. Everywhere there was colour and movement and light and action.

He thought he could go on like this forever, but something was nagging slightly at him. He shook it off impatiently This was his day of days and-who knew?-there might be many more such days. Of course there would.

Daringly he lifted his old legs, placing his feet beside his Panama hat with the blue band, and leaned back even further. He loved the glow within and the scene without. Perhaps he was imagining some draining away of his energy, and even his powers, but he did not even mind. He just kept staring at all there was, knowing this was a special hour. He just kept staring.

I Had Not Fully Thought

I am sitting here in the dining room of 'Sizzler'. It is quiet enough; a beautiful evening, and daylight saving will give us another hour or two before the evening falls.

I am together with my wife, and we are quietly working our way through a tasty meal. We are senior citizens, so the meal is not expensive. Occasionally we have this entertainment event, not that life is dull back at our modest duplex. For an hour or two I am away from my perpetual writing.

I am not away from my thinking. I can scarcely remember five minutes of my life when I have not pondered people, the environment, the circumstances, personal dreams and future hopes. I am doing this now.

I am looking across the carefully landscaped Sizzler park to the Flinders University. The South Road leading to Victor Harbor, and the northern direction of it to the great saltbush deserts, is at the moment thick with traffic moving in both directions. It does not

impede my view of the gracious and spacious University grounds. Gently undulating, green playing fields with attractive trees and shrubs are soft on my vision. Alongside the road, but inside the boundary fence, are tall eucalypts, quite towering, majestic and noble. I cannot hear the green and red Adelaide rosellas or see the brilliant, metallic colours of the beautiful lorikeets, but I happen to know that high up they are noisily eating the honeyed clusters of spring eucalypt flowers. So I am enjoying it.

I look to the right of me and there is Science Park, quite gay in its red and grey colouring, modern in its architecture and promising today much of what will be tomorrow. Sturt Road, which is to the left of me, leads down to the sea waters of the Gulf, and bright and sparkling they will be in the late sunlight of this refiring day. Plenty of entertainment will be a little further down the coast at Brighton and Gleneig.

In fact, as I contemplate it all, I am grateful for living in a land of prosperity, of peace and of plenty. In this restaurant there are people I know and understand. They are my country men and women, and so they pose no threat to me. I am content with my steak and French fries and the ice-cream which will come later. I sip at my cool drink. This is as close to a mild paradise as one could wish to live in. I am intrigued by the folk they call 'ethnic', for I perceive they are living in the same mode of Australian life as I am. So my thoughts are warm, and my spirit is mild. I am not so foolish that I do not know most of us have our problems, but here, this evening, it is festivity, and that is enough.

Why, then, does a verse of poetry come into mind,

especially when it is not at all connected with my present situation? The words come as clearly as when I first heard them and learned them in my primary school days:

He crouches and buries his face in his hands
And hides in the dark of his hair,
For he cannot look up at
the storm-smitten trees,
And think of the loneliness
there,
The loss and the loneliness there.

I remember that this poem was titled 'The Last of His Tribe', and that it is a sad one: a kind of a sorrowful lyric, a dirge of sorts. When, as a lad, I learned it in full, I know I was deeply moved. Now, almost seventy years further on, the melancholy of that day of hearing it comes back to me. My mind is muted: I have almost ceased to think.

I let the words repeat themselves to me. I want to know the other verses but I cannot recall them. When I get home I will try to find the whole poem. I will steep myself in my childish pensiveness. I sense a violet darkness. I see the wind whispering through the sheoaks as I heard it sing softly amongst shore-grown casuarinas in the north, or down on the south coast of eastern Australia. I have always been one for wistful lyrics. I have always listened to the voices in the trees, somehow sensing what they are saying.

Why, then, does it come to me at this moment: this subdued sense of sorrow? I realise, almost plaintively, that I cannot look on any part of the Australian landscape these days without thinking of this land's first inhabitants-the people now called by the curious

name of 'indigenes'. It is not politically correct to call them 'blacks' or 'dark people', as though the mention of these terms is demeaning to them. Why have we lately decided not to be demeaning?

At the moment I am actually seeing dark people making their way cheerfully and carelessly up along the undulating turf of the University; but then the turf is changing, giving way to dry soil with acacias and other scrub, and eucalypts do not just line the perimeter of the campus but they are everywhere, short and tall, wide and thin in a wild kind of asymmetry. I take pleasure in seeing this, and also in viewing the tall, naked men now coming into sight, some of them carrying their small children, whilst the rest of the children cluster about mothers who seem a trifle plumper than their spouses.

So the past comes to life to me. Only for a few brief moments, of course. It is difficult for me to sustain more than that in my imagination. I see a few children pull aside the bark of trees and cry with delight as they find insects: delicacies for immediate eating. Maybe one or other of the men is dragging behind him a stunned goanna. I do not know. My imagination has almost run its course.

Then I ask myself why we are here in such comfort, such prosperity, such ease. My reading has told me why, and this evening I do not want to go back through the two hundred years of failing to understand the various nations of these black people: nation differing from nation but yet, together making a network of tribes, with their fascinating history that precedes even that of the ancients of other continents. I

have read about them from archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists and religionists. It is not that I am ignorant.

It is, of course, that I am ashamed of what my forebears have done to these ancient peoples. Much of it was in the strange temper of the times: the arrogance of a western race coming to claim a continent for itself without due reference to the owners of the land. I know that these owners did not think of themselves as owning it. They were one with the land, and the land one with them. They believed they knew how all things had come into being; and how they did not just have a Dreamtime of the Past, but a Dreaming Time which preceded all things and will ever proceed from them, and whose procession depends upon their Songlines-their singing into being what was already in being, yet also waited upon their participation and creative rituals.

All this I know as I look out; and I mourn over the dreadful happenings that decimated tribe after tribe, and took honour and dignity from those who possessed it before the invaders came, and at, perhaps, an even higher level of perception and ritual than their violators. I am no idealist: I know this has been the terrible history of all human tribes, but I mourn it whilst I enjoy my ice-cream with caramel sauce.

The verse keeps repeating itself in my mind like a weary and hopeless dirge, but I let it do so: not that allowing it to do so is a palliative to my guilt-the guilt of my forebears. I neither bear this guilt nor deny it. I, too, have a wisdom from my forefathers-those of them who were wise. I understand the nature of

humanity inasmuch as I have seen its cruelty and selfishness as I have also seen its love and nobility I am not caught in the crossfire of such differences. I live within these contradictory elements every day, and am not immune to what is deeply entrenched in my own self.

I know we build our own legends of the people of the past, but some of them we build out of guilt and we idealise them out of reaction to the shame of our cruelty and selfishness. I know that they, too-these dark ancients-often fought one another, as do other former tribes and, no less, modern tribes throughout the world. I am not here to work out the guilt of any. My guilt is my own, and I must face that.

Even so, I am wishing the past had not happened in the way that it did. I have no care to rationalise it as merely unfortunate. I do not harden myself and say, 'Well what has happened has happened! It was wrong in the main, though some did not see it that way, but let us get on with the present'.

There is, of course, some truth in this, and I must let what is true just be. No one will blame me for wishing it had not happened; for wondering how we could ignore a way of life which, left to itself, would have continued in reasonable contentment and relative peace. Certainly there would have been little want for those ancient tribes in a land rich in flora and fauna.

Nor am I letting all this lapse, as I still see-and will see-the last of his tribe singing his swan song of mourning, and facing the future without fellowship, death without companionship.

I am truly sad, yet refuse the anger one indulges in at the foolishness and cruelty of others, that senseless anger that rages against injustice. This raging only increases pride in myself as the blameless one—a false perspective of myself as of a better ilk than others. So I desist, the verse still murmuring through my mind.

I hear voices behind me: soft sniggers, liquid laughter. Here, in Sizzler, I look around at a party which has lately joined us. They are ranged at a long table on the north side. Their bodies are plump. Their skin is brown, not shiny but almost of a matt texture. Their eyes are large and brown and beautiful. Their foreheads are prominent, their eyebrows thick and forward over the smiling eyes. They are fat-featured. One is so plump he seems to be bursting out of teenage clothes. His mother is attentive, but I see shadows behind her gaze. The children see me, but she does not.

They are the people of the land: the indigenes, the ethnics, the descendants of thousands of generations, and they are sitting in Sizzler. They are drinking their Cokes and their squashes. They are out to raid the pasta bar. They are dressed in the same manner as the hundreds of others here. They are liking their French fries and the salads, the fish and the meat, and the fruit and the ice-creams. Especially the ice-creams.

They are talking like others. They are laughing. They are having huge joy. I am not going to imagine what lies ahead any more than I am going to think of what has lain behind. I simply know their blood is similar to mine. It is one behind our varying

pigmentations, even if we have been acculturated differently over the innumerable generations.

It is not that my mind is relieved. I do not know their particular story. Obviously there are two families sharing the one party: one family warmly brown, and the other not so warmly white. It is enough.

My wife and I are replete. We rarely have this sort of a celebration, but tonight we have enjoyed it immensely. We think we have had enough. It is time to go. Tonight, in bed, we will murmur away about many things. If we could we would reverse the past and roll it out afresh in a more acceptable way, but we know that is not possible. We are small atoms, unable to inject our modicum of received wisdom back into the minds of our own forebears. Even so, let the politicians know we have wisdom. We have come to it through pain.

The giggling increases. We rise to go. I replace my wife's chair. We are going to the exit.

I look across at the children. My heart is warm. I would like to tell them what I think, but their minds are on Cokes and fruit and ice-cream, and anyway they would not hear.

I smile because they delight me. A few of them look at me. Maybe they sense me. I do not know. The mother's mind is not on us.

I smile genuinely, unable not to smile. In the smile is not patronage, no condescension, and perhaps no guilt. I smile as human beings often smile. For certain reasons I have a freedom difficult to explain.

They see an aged, white-headed man and an aged, white-headed woman. Perhaps they have respect for age. They may even think we have a certain wisdom. I do not know.

As I said, I smiled. One cute boy of about eight years of age looks back at me. He smiles. Then he winks.

He winks! That is the gift. Something passes between us. I think it is our humanity. I do not know. So many things I do not know, but I gather up this treasure.

I wink back. We both grin hugely. We make our way to the exit, my wife and I. The verse is still in my mind, and then, quite unreasonably, so, suddenly, is Beethoven's 'Song of Joy'. This is a strange mixture.

I keep back the tears as I open the car door for my wife, and then seat myself. We drive off.

The Legend of Lemery's Sword

Lemery's sword must have gone from his hand. That was the way it always was when he found himself in this frame of mind and body. Not that he immediately recognised the matter each time that it happened, since the sword was invisible. He would therefore not *see* that it was gone. It would take some time for him to realise that it was gone from his hand. 'From his hand' is the key thought: the sword did not go from him entirely but it went from his wielding it, often just in neglect of it. It was not in his hand.

How and when did this happen, and how did he realise it was gone? This question is not easy to answer. One can only describe what happened-what was known to have happened, perhaps some time after the event itself. There would come a time when Lemery would know he did not have the sword in his hand, and it was because something had changed for him. Sword in hand he was living, he was strong and he was authoritative. Often he was ebullient. Life around him was lively, sentient. In his mind and brain

were great ideas, and his heart found them satisfying.

Of course, if one asks, 'For what is a sword?', and tries to answer that question, then the meaning or use of the sword becomes apparent. A sword is for at least two things, the first being to defend oneself, and the second to go onto the offensive and strike down that which opposes a person. If there be no sword, then it means either there is no battle or that one is forced to succumb to the opposing force. Whilst one is battling rightly, it would appear that one is in the right, and when one succeeds, it would seem that what is right and good triumphs.

Of course, a sword can be wielded for self-defence when there is no righteous call for defence: one ought to fail in these cases. Lemery's sword refused to defend its holder when this was the case, and so the man was left in a quandary. He would wish to defend himself, but the sword would not defend him. This had gradually taught him that the sword was not his for spurious self-defence. Likewise, should he wish, impetuously or for self-victory, to seek to go on the offence, the sword would refuse to aid him. So he had been taught to use the sword rightly, and not for his self's wrong purposes.

If you were to ask how this sword came into his hand, Lemery could not fully answer you. He would be puzzled, himself, to know when it came to him, for he never knew an hour-not even in his infancy-when the sword was not present. In fact life as life would have had no meaning for him had it not been present.

So we would seem to be in a mystery, and perhaps that is the best term we can use. A mystery is a secret which cannot be disclosed to one who is not disposed to know it. Curiosity is not a good enough reason to explore a mystery. The secret is no secret to him who desires properly to know it. When a secret comes to a person, then he or she is at that stage in life when the unveiling of the mystery is needful, if not indispensable. This kind of reason assumes, of course, that we are not of ourselves wise enough to know those things that we need to know. We are wise enough, however, to know that we need to know the secret which has come to us.

The sword, then, is linked with wisdom, if indeed it is not wisdom itself. Perhaps we can go one step further and say the sword is the truth, or it is a weapon always present in the interest of truth. In one sense it is one with the truth. That is why it cannot be used wrongly. Some other kind of sword, one manufactured by anti-truth, may come into one's hand. Often one devises such a sword by one's own powers and imagination.

To go back to Lemery. On occasions he would know the sword was no longer in his hand. Some considerable time might have elapsed before he realised it was absent from his grip. He would know this by a kind of lethargy which would come to possess him, much as an old man or woman might discover that the energies they had known in their youth were now gone. Like all persons with a knowledge of vocation and a sense of destiny, Lemery would know a significant

loss of energy and driving force, although the sense of destiny and vocation was not diminished. It was a puzzle to him that he was virtually inert, and with an ache in his head that would seem to be a disease. He would wonder why he could not be effective in action.

The strange thing was that the sword would come back into his hand, almost without his feeling that this had happened. He would *know* it had returned because the lethargy, the unwanted passivity and the lack of drive would have disappeared, and his head would be clear. His sense of vocation and destiny would have been enhanced by the return of the sharp instrument in his hand. He would be eager to experience its powers of defence and attack. He would be alert again to the forces which opposed him and which-as required-he must overcome. Once again he knew he was living and, indeed, that all the gifts and talents of his life could now have both meaning and expression. They were not there just for him, but for others-firstly for the One who had given them to him, and then for the humanity of which he had been created to be part.

Lemery had come to understand that without the sword he was helpless and fruitless; that the sword was not of his own making, and that its use was not of his own desire. He had to be doing the will of Another before the sword could and would be effective. The powerful forces opposing him could never be defeated by other than the sword. Sometimes, tempted to devise his own sword, or to use the swords of others, he found this a futile endeavour.

The sword was the word he uttered, and that word did not originate from him but from that Other.

Naturally you are going to ask, 'Who is Lemery?' and the answer can only be 'The man with the sword'. When you ask, 'What is the sword?', then the answer has to be, 'The sword that Lemery has in his hand'. If you have a sense of despair over this short legend, then the kindest answer has to be, 'Lemery is Everyman, and also Everywoman. The sword is that which every man and every woman carries throughout their lifetime'.

This answer presupposes that human beings live in the midst of an endless life, and of course this is correct. How these things happen to be so is another story, outside of this legend, and cannot here be told. Even so, we all know what is so, and we take comfort in the fact that Lemery has his sword and that there are certain criteria for having it and wielding it. More than that we cannot say.

Blackbirds ‘n’ Things

I thought we were deeply blessed when I saw our first blackbird. It swooped, grabbed at the branch of shrub, and let go, to land cleverly on the soil. Its radar worked immediately, its beak thrashed away the surface mulch and in triumph it pulled out a long worm. In a flash that was devoured and it went on its hunting way. I wished fervently for its return.

What has fascinated me for years has been the blackbird. I have seen this feathered creature in more than one Australian city, though never in a rural scene. I have noted that the male is substantially larger, is glossy and has a beak that varies from bright yellow to red. His mate is duller in colour-more towards a brown-and her beak is less vivid. She is not less vital than her husband, and you can see them both as they cock their heads to one side, listening to what is under the soil, which they then attack furiously I imagine the worms, grubs and other under-the-soil creatures go still in terrified silence when the blackbirds are immediately above.

Now I had better start the story about blackbirds ‘n’ things.

To begin with I tell you one thing I never believed I would do; that is, live in a suburb, even an Adelaide suburb. I mean live in a street which was one of many, many streets, with houses more or less close together, and with a certain sameness about them. Also I would never conform to that kind of mind which is called ‘suburban’. When it came to the pinch, I didn’t exactly fight against such an idea, as I simply thought it would never happen.

Well, it has happened. Perforce, we came down from the Adelaide Hills where we had lived for eighteen years. These famous Hills are not so much wild as they are free, yet the weather and circumstances of health forced us-my wife and I-into a suburb. When I stood outside the duplex about to be shown to us, I said, ‘No! Never there!’. It seemed to be low, narrow and confined. The front garden behind its high tea-tree fence seemed a trifle small after our six-acre property.

When we went into the house I said immediately to myself, my wife and a couple of my daughters, ‘This is the place!’. Once inside I saw it was different. It was roomy for two, and we would be only two. The main bedroom was large, the second bedroom just the size for my study. Lounge, dining room, kitchen and living space were commodious. You might say the atrium, which brought light and a host of plants into the middle of the house, was what captured me. Yes, but it was also the modest front garden and the

capacious back one which finally decided me. I could work here, learn to grow small shrubs and beautiful flowers.

The memory of a man named Douglas Stewart finally swung my mind to accepting life in a suburb. Born in New Zealand, he had flourished as a poet, a short story writer and a journalist. In moving to Australia he became a famous editor, and later a publisher. He was a warm person and helped me get my foot on the literary ladder when I was quite young. I was mildly disappointed when I heard that in his retirement he had opted to live out his life in the suburb of St Ives in Sydney. Of course, with him were his attractive and personable artist-wife, Margaret ('Meg') Cohen, the famous painter, and their no less personable daughter Meg. I knew St Ives to be in the Ku-ring-ai Chase, so I expected his house would be more or less in the bush and that it would have a wildness beyond the more domesticated North Shore.

It turned out that his land was indeed the bush itself, somewhat landscaped. When I was given his book *Garden of Friends* and read it, I knew you could live in suburbia and have a whole world of beauty and fun. Douglas Stewart and his family certainly did. Maybe our setting in South Australia is a more domesticated one than the Stewarts', but it has a bit of fascinating history to its name, Kingswood. Our house, too, has its own special environment, and is ideal for a garden. Back of our backyard and to the right is the largest weeping myrtle I have laid eyes on, and next to it the tallest almond tree. Immediately behind our back fence is a delightful wilderness. To

our left is an old church hall, now a ballroom dancing studio. The quietness is charming: soothing, you might say.

Now, after that slight introduction, back to our blackbirds.

We have a terracotta bird feeder in the shape of a rooster with a bowl on his head. In our Hills garden it was useless to put out food for birds. The magpies would swoop in and devour it, or Soxy, the campus corgi, would lift his front paws, rest them on the bowl and stretch forward to have his extra meal. In our new garden there are no maggies and no canine creatures. The birds soon discovered the free feed, and from then on they looked forward to the daily meals-on-a-rooster. At first we were disappointed: only sparrows came. Then came the doves known as the spotted turtledove-a dozen, no less-and occasionally the alert and nervous woodpigeons whose proper name is crested pigeon. One day a yellow-crested cockatoo descended from the almond tree and made a meal of the seed, but he never returned. Even if this species does not visit our garden much, they are constantly next door in the almond tree. In the season of ripening almonds, they begin early in the morning, waddling up the branches with their harsh cockatoo cries of triumph, waking the neighbourhood with their screeching and the hollow plopping sound of discarded nuts falling on a tin-roofed shed below.

My wife and I have also had our good moments as we have watched the influx of bright coloured honeyeaters, of silver-eyes, of other occasional finches and

Adelaide rosellas who come in due season to quarrel over the red berries of a tree that hangs over our back fence. Possums once came to haunt the space above our ceilings but then they mysteriously disappeared. The one or two cats who prowled through our back garden rather self-consciously must have felt the cold looks of bird lovers upon them, for they have never returned.

I could make much of two sets of birds, namely the doves and the blackbirds. So many doves are here in the suburbs around us that I have felt like calling the district 'Doveland'. The doves breed throughout the year, and the couples seem devoted, calling to one another from morning to evening, and even throughout the night. They seem to be telling me something. At first I thought they were calling 'Be baptised! Be baptised!', and they repeated the command so often that my head was close to aching. I thought pagans in our district were being unduly bombarded, until it changed to 'You're all right! You're all right!'. So much, then, for their cooing communication.

Now it is about the blackbirds that I wish to write, for this is the heart of my story. The few times I had seen them in Sydney made me think they were elusive birds, slipping through the low foliage of shrubs and flowers, never still long enough to be fully seen and studied. How different they are now in our gardens, fore and aft of the duplex. Far from minding about being seen, they are regular visitors, working away at the mulch of pea straw, thrusting it aside or pulling it out onto the ornamental brick path, occasionally

tossing out beloved seedlings in order to better get at the worms and grubs. Every morning I have to tidy up after them, sweeping the straw from the path back onto the garden. Next day it is as untidy as ever. No matter: the rewards of these birds are compensation enough. We never have to use pesticides, for plant predators are almost nil.

So much for the usefulness of blackbirds. Now something about their singing and my dreadful faux pas in regard to that. We had not long been in our new home when I reverted to my life-long pattern of waking up during the night with an urge to write. In earlier years I would use a typewriter, but in the last decade I have recorded innumerable words on a computer. Rising, as I did, I would hear the sound of what I called 'plaintive singing'. The short, sweet song always received a reply from another bird, something like a softer echo. I would go to the back glass door and slide it open, and the lovely notes would fall about me like a gentle, musical cascade. Always there would be the song that sounded so wistful, and then the equally melancholy yearning of the reply. I would stand in the soft darkness of some nights and in the milky whiteness of others, and let the songs penetrate and shape my night mood. Grateful for it, I would sit at my desk, and the sound of sentimental yearning would stimulate me to write, no matter what the story or subject that had entered my head. It was in those first wonderful days that I made my terrible mistake.

So moved was I by the singing that I decided to discover what bird was singing so beautifully. At first I thought it was a thrush, and then I became convinced

it was a blackbird, but as I looked up one morning at a songster on our TV antenna, there against the sun was what I thought to be a starling. I had known starlings to be great mimics but I knew this was not a mimicked song. It was pure, liquid melody, native to the bird on the antenna. I was so moved by discovering what a common starling can accomplish that I went in and wrote a poem to apologise for my error.

Starling Song

This mom I heard a starling sing,
 Black-clothed and pensive;
 Not on the wing but earth bound —
 Seated on a TV pole His heart poured out his soul,
 As some sweet lyricist,
 And from the distant almond tree
 His sweetheart answered,
 Repeating as an echo-song
 His plaintive melody.
 Twice did I look to see a thrush
 Or skylark bound to earth;
 Not thinking that this lowly bird
 Could make a song as sweet,
 As filled with music as the thrush or lark,
 And I was wrong. His song
 Dropped and dripped from off the pole,
 And made my scattered fragments whole,
 Which were apart in me.

So much for avian snobbery,
 And myths of thrush and lark
 And nightingales that sing in dark.
 I heard the starling in the day
 And heard him too at night,

Though a blackbird on the wing
 Is sleek and lovely-a valued thing-
 I'll listen to the starling on the pole,
 Who takes my scattered parts
 And makes them whole.

I lived in this ignorance for some time, and one day saw a blackbird seated on our fence under the overhang of the large, glossy peppercorn tree of next door. This blackbird was singing his heart out, and it was the song I had heard day and night for some months. He finished his repertoire, then quite close, in fact from the peppercorn tree itself, came the lovely response. It was not that I burned with shame, but I was delighted to see the songster was our beloved blackbird. From boyhood I had never had a high opinion of starlings because of the damage they did to our family fruit. When I went to the bird books enquiring about blackbirds, they told me the species was of the thrush family. One book (*Birds of Australian Gardens*) described their voice in the following words: 'Well known is the powerful melodious song heard in later winter, spring and summer. Other calls include a high pitched "tsee-tsee" and staccato notes of alarm resembling "chip chip chip", accompanied by flick of wings and tail'. By contrast the common starling's voice is described as 'harsh, rasping, "tch-cheer"; clear whistles "fee-oooo"; clicking sounds' (*Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*).

I blush in the telling, and also for the poem. Bird lovers will certainly set me down at the bottom of the scale. It is the blackbird 'Who takes my scattered

parts and makes them whole'. Apart from skylarks and other thrushes I have rarely heard a song so plaintive, so filled with gentle warbling and strong 'notes of alarm' which then end with a trill. This is the song I hear in the night, as also in the early dawn, and sometimes in the day. When I hear it I remember my friend of St Ives, who in his last days had time to contemplate beauty in a way that was even beyond the poetic sympathy with nature which he had known in earlier days. Australian males are not given to outward tears, but let none be deceived: inwardly many of us do weep, and there are the times when I do so for example, when I remember the fey poet of *Ned Kelly, Fire on the Snow* and *The Birdsville Track*, whose heart and mind were ever in Australasian flora and fauna.

For years I have had an interest in hymns because they have a form and shape, and sometimes a power that unsung poems often lack, unless they are read by their authors or others who are born to read poetry. Hymns are often despised by people who think them 'religious' or 'unreal'. Not so: some of humanity's deepest and richest utterances are in hymns. No matter; I wish to refer only to one hymn-Eleanor Farjeon's 'Morning Has Broken'.

Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.
Praise for the singing,
praise for the morning,

praise for them,
springing fresh from the word.

If this were not enough then let me quote Joseph Addison of the 18th century, in *The Spectator*, 'I value my garden more for being full of blackbirds than of cherries, and very frankly give them fruit for their songs'. Thomas Edward Brown of the 19th century, who can be called 'the Garden Poet', wrote a poem called 'The Blackbird', and said, 'O blackbird, what a boy you are! How you do go it'. John Drinkwater of the 19th and 20th centuries wrote, 'He comes on chosen evenings, my blackbird bountiful'. Alfred Lord Tennyson-the 19th century poet-also had the blackbird in the front of his mind:

Once more the Heavenly Power
Makes all things new,
And domes the red-plow'd hills
With loving blue;
The blackbirds have their wills,
The throstles too.

The blackbird, then, has insisted on being in the front of the human mind. He 'has his will', he 'goes it' and 'what a boy he is!'. I discovered this when I realised recently that he had not sung his wistful song to no purpose. Not only did the beloved mate respond to him, but in the midst of the singing and the music they also built their cup-shaped nest and laid their five eggs. Their daily raids upon our garden store helped to feed the fledglings, whilst all through the night Father Blackbird sang his guard song to be answered sweetly by his mothering mate. Suddenly,

yesterday, there were, confronting me, seven blackbirds whose territorial rights contain our front and back gardens.

They were abruptly present to my astonished eyes. So full-bodied they were and all brown and rufous except Father Blackbird. His orange beak shone with parental pride, and the circle around his eyes seemed more radiant than ever. He hopped, he fluttered, his tail was spasmodic in its flickings. He hustled his five feathered siblings into the search for insects, and Mother Blackbird was doubtless teaching them by her actions. They spread out below the brilliant annuals, perennials and small shrubs. It was a worm *feste* and a *grub feste* and a caterpillar *feste*, and, in all of it, utter silence. No song, no chattering: just a busy silence.

I have surrendered our gardens to the bevy of birds which live in it daily. I rest back, recline and induct them officially into their kingdom. For my part I have joined Douglas Stewart and his family-avian lovers, as lovers, too, of all kinds of flora and fauna. For many decades I had not known that the 'blackbird had spoken' at creation's dawn, before the creation of man, and that he still speaks in most continents and countries, and, what is more, he sings the songs of peace and serenity. 'Go it', though he does with strong 'will', yet the passion of his love song arouses in us new songs of the night, and a sight of the creation which had its powerful dawn, and will yet, one day-we hope-have its powerful renewal in songs celestial and terrestrial. I guess in that delightful era it will be all music: just all music!

Shere Bubba, or The Night of the Lions

He had never thought to come back to the snow. It was one thing to return to a land he had come to love and from which he had been torn by nature of circumstances. It was another to be enclosed by the snow.

He had returned in the heart of summer to the high Murree Hills and lived with new friends. The old friends of the late 1950s and the following 1960s had, almost all of them, gone. Of course, he had remembered their children who now, in the 1990s, were grown men and women, some having their own children. Even so, they were not his peers and the sweet sadness which invests old age had come to him. Nostalgia was about him daily, and in a way it spurred him on to share the riches he had gathered as he had aged: riches which were like late summer and early autumn fruit. Some folk were most eager to listen to him. Some dreamed new dreams with the evocation he brought to them. Many simply stared in bewilderment, not catching on to the mystery.

Walking from Jhiga Gali to Murree each day, memories would arise of his wife and children. One sight of the old church of the Holy Trinity and the English architected vicarage beside it brought an intolerable ache. In the summer of 1957 they had passed happy days in that vicarage, excited in a new land, eager to see its fascinating culture, to taste its exotic foods and to see its beautiful fabrics and quaint toys. The six children had tumbled about the house, spread out into Murree Town or explored the beauty of the forest, taking in the fragrance of pines and junipers, rolling about on the soft floor of the place, or eating the wild strawberries which grew in abundance.

Those days were gone for ever. Ruth had died in an accident over two decades ago. Mary, the youngest, was in full maturity, a competent medic. Richard was a husband and the father of three; Carol the mother of two; Anne likewise, and Elizabeth the mother of four. There had been no divorces: the children were flourishing. Laurel, his wife, had this time declined to travel with him from Australia to Pakistan. She was unable to cope with long-distance travel. She was content to nestle amongst her children and grandchildren and to work out new and wonderful stitches for her famous embroidery. She called him an old fool for giving in to nostalgia and hunger to share his riches of wisdom afresh at this end-stage of his life. She knew it would be for only weeks, or maybe months. But he would be back: of that she had no doubt.

Even so, she had understood. She had clung to him, and her face had been wet with the tears. They

had waved him off as the large jet soared up from Adelaide. His heart gave a heavy thump, and he was glad it was sound enough to take that emotional knock.

He knew, now, what a fool he had been to stay so long in Murree. The promise to stay half through the winter had kept him in the cottages on the edge of the forest. In late summer and all autumn he had talked daily with folk who coveted what he had to impart. Some would gather in groups to hear him. On Sunday mornings they would hear him in the old church. Most listened with rapt attention. Others were uneasy with his ideas. These they had not met before, but even so, many of them came to accept his wisdom. He knew they talked among themselves. Some were wide-eyed in their delight. Pakistanis and expatriates alike—they appeared to love his wisdom.

His few old friends warned him against the folly of staying in the Hills in the winter when folk left for the warmer plains. In the cottages he was living at 7,000 feet above sea level on this last spur of the Himalayas. They reminded him that it would be impossible for him to move out of the cottages once the snow thickened. Even local inhabitants had been known to falter and die as they walked the few miles into Murree, their stiff corpses being covered by heavy falls of snow, and lying undiscovered until the time of the thaw.

He argued that he had electricity, oil enough for both cooking and the heaters, and enough food stored for months. The bread in the deep freeze could be thawed, and, most valuable of all, Lal Din the bearer

lived above him on the hill in the servants' quarters. That wily man would fetch his mail and milk. Something in him determined to repeat the winter of 1958-59. Besides, he could write as never before in the uninterrupted weeks. To maintain his resolve he had to fight the silent messages from his wife Laurel. If these came over waves of ether, they also sprang from the citadel of his own heart. He was aware of his own foolishness.

His old friend John Pittenger was with him when the snows came. John was to have a week with him before returning to Karachi. Both men had forgotten how the winter swept in on the Murree Hills. In later autumn the streets would be less packed with tourists and holiday-makers. Sam's famous restaurant would still beat out its jazz from another age, but there were fewer cars to thread their way through the halfcrowded mall. The oaks and elms and liquid ambers still rioted with their warm colours, but there was a sting in the air, and now the wind was bitter and beginning to howl.

The cottages were down in a valley, and in the late evening he and John would sit looking across to Jigha Gali where their children had once been in school. Denny and Laurel had stayed up one year so that he could get to learning his Urdu, and she mothered the little ones from the Missionary School. The cottages had become a hostel.

John said, 'Did you hear the jackals last night?'

He nodded. 'A strange noise, theirs. Hunt in packs don't they? I well remember them in 1958-59. That was the year of the lions.'

John did not take up the point. He looked at the white-haired man and knew he was a Celt, through and through, despite being born in Australia. His hair was a white shock, his face a rich pink which the sun could not wholly brown. Keen blue eyes looked from under ridges of brown eyebrows. The look was piercing, but the depths were thoughtful. John was from the U.S.A., an accomplished medico who had given years to the Pathans in Peshawar on the border of Afghanistan.

'They say this is going to be the year of the heavy snow', he said.

Denny nodded. 'I would like it that way', he said softly.

John said, 'Because of the nostalgia'. It was a half-question.

'Partly that', his friend admitted. 'But for other things, too. I guess I want to take something back for Laurel: something to tell her.'

They shivered with the cold. John lit the oil heater and they remained on the verandah while eating their evening meal. Pricks of golden light were in the valley and far away on the high hills.

'Strange how the Pakistanis have improved their hill-dwellings', John said. 'Working in the Middle East for the oil tycoons has raised their standard of living. Once they had only oil lamps, but we are looking at electric lighting and iron roofing. Every house has its transistor radio and cassette player.'

At midnight the heavy winds came. They thundered against the solid masonry of the cottages, but the effect was minimal. In the early dawn Denny saw

the tall pines tossed about, their intense green tops writhing in the tempest. He knew the poor folk would be about early picking up the broken branches as a godsend for winter fuel.

The bearers came for John's luggage. They wanted to squabble about the cost of carting the heavy burdens to the bus stop, but Lal Din rebuked them sharply. Denny's Urdu was good enough to pick up some of the words, but most of them were in the strange hill lingo. Even Lal knew the sahib would reward them with good tips.

He farewelled John at the top of the hill where the black bitumen road coiled downwards to Murree. The air was thick with dancing leaves, and further north was a black sky portending rain, but the softer clouds drifting towards him spoke of snow. He had not reached the cottages before the cold came, stinging him with sharp particles like miniature hail. It was too harsh to be sleet. It was not so much the pain that hurt him as the intense cold which hit his lungs. He hurried to the block of houses and let himself in, shivering.

He sat beside the heater and felt its hot fumes melt his cold misery. Fine sleet blew at an angle until the wind dropped, and there was a haunting silence. He went to the door, and when he opened it the lungcutting cold had gone. A benign warmth seemed to fill the air, and he knew the snow had almost come. He waited until the air was white, the dark pines and deodars gently obliterating in the soft white flakes that drifted down, as gentle lamb's wool floating. He went inside, sat by the heater and stared out, his thoughts

suspended, his mind tranquil. It was for this he had returned.

In the new morning the world had changed, transformed from hill grasses, stocky herbs and ancient, bulging basalt boulders under the new soft blanket of snow. The forest as yet was not wholly blotted out. Snow had partly covered the tall trees as custard does a Christmas pudding, but the weighted branches hung low. As yet the rest of the forest was dark, but the land was smooth and white under its fluffy blanket. He needed snow boots, snowshoes and skis, but none of these had he brought with him. His feet would freeze in his Wellingtons without double socks, and so he donned them, mid-morning, to make his way through the snow. The floor above him was well furnished but empty of human life, as was the other cottage, yet he did not feel lonely. He coveted the winter-silence of the scene about him, and he took a broom handle to make a staff for deeping the snow. With woollen slacks, thick long underwear, a flannel shirt, a sweater and a balaclava he could make his way around. Even as he picked his way a rush of memories came in such a torrent that he had to turn back to deal with them.

Lal Din found him on the glassed-in verandah, the heater beside him, and the typewriter spilling out the sahib's thoughts like a summer fountain. He opened the door and caught the man's attention.

'*Dak* for you, Sahib,' he said, thrusting a package of mail towards Denny. He paused for a moment. 'If Sahib would like curried ghosht and japattis tonight

my memsahiba would wish to cook them for you.' Curried meat with vegetables and hot, flat bread! His mouth watered.

'Thank you, Lal Din', he said with delight.

When the bearer withdrew he felt an urge to write. The small typewriter prattled to the touch of his fingers. Once he noticed his tea was cold, but he did not let it stem the flow of his words. Not even the coveted mail from home could break his attention.

He was living back in the winter of 1958-59. It was in the October of 1957 that Mary had been born, and that year they had been in the vicarage. Carol had come running to him with the news. She was scared he would be disappointed with a fifth baby girl.

She was crying, 'It's a girl! It's a girl!', and lest he should show even the slightest disappointment she shouted, 'And I'm glad! I'm glad!'.

He knew Richard would be disappointed, but he felt joy, seized by the delight a father has in another child. Later in the next year she had contracted a meningeal disease, and they thought that she might die, but she survived. Her Hindu ayah knew the ancient Eastern secrets of massage, and her long, sensitive fingers had brought life and movement to Mary's lower limbs which had been partially paralysed. When they had travelled to Rawalpindi from the southern plains later in 1958 Laurel had had to undergo major surgery.

His hand faltered on the keys. He took the almost cold tea and sipped it. He wondered whether he could tell the strange story ' but felt it to be too intimate to record. Perhaps another day he would recount that

personal tale. As a family they had been staying with missionary friends at the Rawalpindi Christian University when Laurel underwent her operation. The Holy Family doctor had told him it was touch-and-go. His wife was haernorrhaging badly, not retaining the blood. It was the healing of her which was a miracle. His love for her had revisited him with a sharp sweetness. In that same summer they had almost lost Ruth through dehydration following mumps: another miracle.

Whilst Laurel was in hospital Richard had a double fracture of his right leg, both breaks being below the knee. He had stood on the flat roof of the house where they were guests, and some boyfriends dared him to jump the twelve feet or so to the ground beneath. He had failed to reach the lawn, *landing on* the concrete path immediately below. His plaster cast was scribbled on by friends and sympathisers and, despite the pain, he was silently proud of his adventure.

What a summer that had been! Somewhere-back at home-there was a file of his letters with innumerable memories of their years in Pakistan. Even so, it was that special winter and its memories which now rushed in upon him. To let them settle he made a fresh pot of tea and sipped it as he looked out on the brilliant white scene. The sun had emerged, making the mantle of snow blaze brilliantly. Over to the east a lone eagle floated, its piercing eyes looking for a chance animal that might try to dart across the white landscape. He remembered how an eagle had suddenly flashed over the open pram in which their baby Mary had lain, and Laurel's wild rush to battle

the winged predator. Her indignation had brought a smile to all, but it had been a near go.

He was no longer writing: he was thinking, contemplating, and in the quietness ideas of a new kind were forming themselves. These he would want to write, but they gripped him, holding him fascinated. Memories, also, were crowding up like a bubbling fountain, seeking to be released from his mind and to flow into his consciousness, repeating the family life which had been so rich that winter. One memory released another. These recollections were about many things but did not form themselves into a pattern, and certainly not into a story.

After a time the sky gloomed, and more snow clouds formed. As the days went by he measured many feet of snowfall. It built up against the house so that he could not open the door on the ground floor. He had to climb down from the upper floor and shovel away the build-up. He watched the thick layer on the roof lest it should develop a weight that might slide off and bury him, but in fact that would not happen until the thaw. As yet it was too cold for that danger. Lal Din would sometimes cut a path to the front door. Denny was grateful for the occasional Pakistani meal, but he was adept enough to cook his own. After the evening meal he would wrap a blanket around himself and sit before the heater, first going through his mail and then reading a book until drowsy. Before retiring he would have a scalding hot shower, put on thick pyjamas and socks, and snuggle into his bed glowing from the shower, and with

the hot water bottle Laurel had insisted he bring with him. His mind, wearied with the day, left him free of dreams during the night.

Finally it was time to write, and he chose the true story of their special winter in the snow. At first his fingers faltered and his typing was dyslexic. Then his fingers found their old cunning, and he was away into a yam that unfolded fully from his memory. He was pleasurably surprised at the details which came to him.

‘That year we were our full family of eight, that is, the six children, Laurel and I. It had been a long time since we had been a family on our own-not having expatriate neighbours and indigenous friends, nor being part of a campus. In fact there was only Lal Din and his children, and we loved being on our own, together. From the birth of Richard we had versed ourselves in humour, and so repartee and interaction were our forte. Daily some of us walked the journey from our cottages to Murree. It was too far for Richard and his crutches, and Laurel had to rest back at the cottages, the walks being too long for her. The trees were bleak, denuded of their last leaves. Only the forest conifers retained their dark green.

‘Murree was a changed Hills station. Its streets were virtually deserted. It was a rare bus which would undertake the steep, upward climb from Rawalpindi. Sam’s restaurant was empty, its jazz band long gone to the plains. The vicarage was also locked against marauders. A few shops remained

open-those which sold groceries, and a rare hardware or clothing store. For the rest, the place was deserted. The children would forage out eastern toys and treats, and I would buy bread, tinned beverages and meat at the single butcher's shop.

'Back at home Laurel would try to shuffle about, sometimes making a meal, but always tired after the tussle for life she had been through. We were silently grateful she had won the battle and covered over our emotions with the family humour and laughter. We often teased Richard and the limitation of his crutches. Only later did I discover some of the children's fears of that winter.

'When the snow came, visits to Murree were ended. First the biting cold, the stinging grains of sleety ice blasting us from a fierce wind, to be followed by the unnatural silence that told the hour of snow, and then the snow itself, delighting the children as they raced around under its feathering falling. Balaclavas, woollen mittens, sweaters, slacks and fleecylined footwear kept them warm as they screamed their joy and tumbled about in the soft white stuff. At first Richard was a little awkward, and no-one joked about this. Soon he learned to move rapidly with his crutches and to stand on one leg whilst he made and pelted us all with snowballs.

'Sometimes I would sit with Laurel whilst she viewed the fun. As a girl her father had taken her to Kosciusko where she had become expert with skis. Now she would have loved to have had a toboggan for the children. I would hold her hand in sympathy and *we would chatter*, inanely about the children

and our present circumstances-anything to keep our minds off her helplessness.

'Within weeks the landscape changed. Over twenty feet of snowfall meant the ancient basalt rocks, the small shrubs and the fences were all surmounted by snow. As layer after layer compacted and froze so new soft layers would fall as white fairy feathers.

'One day the children clamoured for us to make an Eskimo igloo. Richard suggested we could shape up blocks and build it bit by bit. The children cried, "Yes! Yes!" and I was inclined to do it, but it seemed to require an awful lot of labour. Then the thought struck me that we could burrow into the frozen snow and carve out an igloo under it. Since we had kept clearing the way to the entrance door, and the snow on both sides of the track was over twelve feet we dug into the eastern side. With five children, one man, and Richard to direct, we soon had a playroom excavated. Day by day we worked at perfecting it. Then the time came when Mother Laurel inspected it, the children delighting to show her the bench they had carved from the ice which was shaped around the walls of the domed igloo. There was no way the new structure could collapse. Lal Din was delighted with it and certified its safety. Because he was a hills-man of a thousand generations we trusted him.

'Then began conversion of the cubby house into a domestic family unit for play. Utensils from the kitchen, some furniture, and games to play on the table were all brought into action. Laurel and I could sit and chat by our oil stove, whilst the children's

voices were drowned by the piled-up snow. We both knew they were building good memories for the future.

‘It was the jackals we heard first. For newcomers the cries are unnerving. Around evening these wolf-like creatures have their “sing”. Perhaps this canine choir music is to boost their spirits for the kills they will make during the night. Domestic poultry have to be well locked up against these predators. Throughout the summer we had heard them, and the children had shivered a bit in fear, but they had become so accustomed to them that they scarcely noticed their yelping and wailing cries unless they woke to them during the night. In winter, however, they sounded more fearsome. They hunted in packs and now made their way through to the snow-covered and unfenced tennis court.

‘Mary and Ruth insisted on snuggling into our bed-a protection from the near and fearsome beasts. When the howling ceased we would carry them back to their own beds. They worried during the early days of winter that the jackals might come to the house and break down the front door, but we allayed their fears. We did better than that. We invented our own kind of tobogganing.

‘We had large, round, shallow dishes for making the flat Pakistani bread. Manufactured from tough tin, they were quite sturdy. We would mix the unyeasted wholemeal flour with water and salt, and work it into a large lump, pounding it on all sides before extracting a sizeable ball of it to bake in the tandoori oven, or upon a hotplate. To make the toboggans we collected

all the large pans from the two cottages, and Carol and Anne tried them out. Richard stood, leaning forward on his crutches, watching enviously. Anne gave a shriek that sounded like a war cry and pushed herself forward. The result was startling. From the height above the tennis court she gained impetus, covered the length of the court and then disappeared over the end, and we saw her shooting on towards the snow-covered trees of the forest. She entered the forest and was lost to sight.

‘With a cry that was more like a whoop Carol followed. The smaller ones-Elizabeth, Ruth and Mary-clamoured for like fun. The older had to pair the younger who clung fiercely to the sides of their dishes as they, too, slid down the slope, slipped over the tennis court and shot in the direction of the forest. When I reached them there were tears of fun and fear in the little ones, but smiles and laughter from the older ones. They carried their pans back to the starting point, and so for hours we had great fun. Laurel and Richard helped the small ones to get seated, but Richard’s envy was growing with the minutes. There were tears of disappointment in his eyes until a certain thought came to him and he got his mother to tie his plastered leg to one pan, sat in another and off he sailed.

‘Laurel looked at me with similar longing. “Don’t you dare!” I said. “You are still a sick woman!” She nodded obediently but I knew what would happen. She selected an outsize dish, gave herself a thrust and the next moment she was on the tennis court, had passed it, but then landed with her legs up in the air,

and with a flurry of snow, shrieking with immense laughter.

‘How weary they were that night, and what fun, chacking and repartee we had at the evening meal. After it we sang and talked until the children fell into bed, bone weary. They did not hear “the sing” of the jackals: they were one with the snow-bound silence which followed. As usual Laurel and I talked about the day and the children’s antics. It was just as we were going off to sleep that we heard the lion. At first we thought it must have been the jackals, but the sound was different. It was a roaring of sorts that chilled us.

‘“Shere Bubba!” I said, sitting up.

‘My wife’s Urdu was not as clear as mine, but she knew what I meant. It was the term for the male lion: “King Lion” or “Mighty Lion” you might have translated it. Then we heard lesser sounds. On the clear air there was a coughing and a growling.

‘“Very close”, Laurel said fearfully. We had turned on the light, and I could see the same expression on her face as on the day the eagle swooped down over baby Mary. I went to the window and looked out on the snow. No animal was in sight. The children slept on. After a time we also slept.

‘Next morning Lal Din was on our doorstep. His eyes were filled with excitement.

‘“Shere Bubba there last night”, he said, motioning toward the forest.

‘We nodded agreement. “We heard him”, we said.

‘His face showed even more excitement. “Many

Shere Bubbas”, he said. “Tonight they will be here.” He pointed down at the doorstep.

‘“No!” we objected, “not up to the house. Shere Bubbas keep to the forest”.

‘He shook his head violently. “Many sals [years] ago Shere Bubba come here. Not in this house, but house near Hill Lodge. It kill and eat one fellow. Very dangerous. You must lock doors. Don’t be cooking meat or special curry. Be eating cold foods.” He gave a second look at the door which was made partly of panes of glass. “Best you put almari [wardrobe] behind this door, eh?”

‘We thought that best also. We had the whole day to somehow fortify the cottage. We thanked Lal Din very much. He bowed slightly. “Shere Bubba would like little children.”

‘Our blood ran cold. We knew he was not joking. He was warning us.

‘That day we relinquished tobogganing amidst the howls of the children. We explained why we were not sliding in the direction of the forest. They were awed. “Real lions!” they exclaimed. Ruth and Mary hugged themselves with an ecstasy of fear. The older girls looked horrified.

‘Richard said rather scornfully, “I heard them during the night. Coughs and growls and roaring. I’ve read all about lions. They will even come into a house if the door is left unlocked”.

‘The two littlies looked at each other in the delight of fear. Richard tried out his smattering of Urdu. “Shere Bubba they called the male lion with the big

mane. He leads the pride which is the group of lions.”

“Shere Bubba”, Mary repeated in her habitually shrill voice. “Oooh, I hope he won’t eat me./,

“We’ll lock the door,” I said, “and put heavy furniture behind it”.

“What about the verandah windows?” Richard asked.

“Everything is covered with snow up to the second floor”, I reminded him. “Only the door is exposed.”

“What about our igloo?” Anne asked.

During the day they played in the house. The most they would venture outside was to the igloo. There they held a conference and came back demanding a ring of fires in the snow at night to protect the cottage. I said that wouldn’t be practical. We just didn’t have the wood to make so many fires and keep them going. Besides it would mean we would have to go out to tend them. The family agreed it would be better to fortify the house.

Throughout the day we shifted needed goods into the upper storey. We placed a heavy wardrobe behind the entrance door. Having sent them above I climbed out of a window and hammered nails to fix it tightly. We wound barbed wire around the steps to prevent the animals climbing up to the entrance door of the second flat. We could do little about the verandah windows. The snow was below them. Lal Din had barricaded his poultry in a stout room of the servants’ quarters. His own section was built of concrete, and

we assumed he had almaris behind the entrance door. The windows were already barred.

‘Late in the evening the jackals began their “sing”. After that the snow-silence and then various cries coming from the forest below told us they were seeking out the pride of lions so that they could follow them and take part in the kill. We knew there were animals in the forest but also that such migrated south from the snow regions of the Himalayas into the Punjab. The lions would be ravenously hungry to have come from India, working their way northwards, killing as they went. We had heard nothing of them the previous winter so we knew they were desperate for food.

‘The children could not sleep. In fact, they would not. They wanted to hear the lions, and hear them they did. They shuddered at the first roaring of the king lion. Somehow it was a story plot prepared for them, and the delicious fear that spread through us all was not to be missed.

‘I think I could have missed it without regret. I had been in the Malayan jungle during the war and spent a night ringed with protective fires. Even with the fire, the danger had been close. Here I was thinking of Laurel and the children. Richard’s eyes were bright. He was storing up the event to tell to his classmates who were down on the plains. Maybe he would tell it to the end of his days. Maybe, like some of my stories, it would grow with the telling.

‘Then came the coughs and intermittent growls.

Ruth and Mary shrank at the sounds. The other girls put on a brave face.

'Ruth said, "God wouldn't let them eat us, would he?"

'I reckoned her theology was correct and told her so. She seemed relieved. Mary shook her head. "Lions would never eat little girls", she said bravely. It sounded more like a wish than an affirmation.

'Now we could hear them in the forest, though at some distance. How quickly they made it to the edge of it. I had read somewhere that lions roared only when they had eaten their fill, the roaring being to warn other animals away from the kill; but I have also been told it is when they begin their hunt in the evening and when lying down at dawn.

'At that point a lion roared. He roared from immediately outside the house, up into our upper floor. It was an imperious roar, a threatening, frightening detonation like loosed thunder. It reverberated throughout the house. We froze into silence, as though the lion would not know we were at home if we did not move. I was stunned that lions could invade human terrain as though they were above territorial rights.

'It was then I was surprised at myself. I found I was afraid. The certain roar of the lion had majesty beyond what I had known. Actual danger was near. The lions could break through into the flat below, but then there was no way they could break through into the upper flat. Although it was possible they could tear at the barbed wire with their teeth and weigh it

down and bound against the fortified door. My first fear was for Laurel and the children, but I realised, to my amazement and disgust, that I was actually afraid. I could not remember being afraid during war action. The coughs and the grunts and even a strange sound of purring were below us. I had thought they would have smelled out the poultry in one of Lal Din's concrete cells. Maybe the lions considered that to be jackals' food. We were not objects of contempt, but desirable.

'It seemed none of the children was afraid, nor did any appear to sense my fear. Perhaps that was because it was momentary: I had decided to tackle the fear. In the afternoon I had been browsing through our volume of Kipling and came to his *Jungle Stories*. There was old Shere Khan-'Lord Lion' in fact-and now I decided to chat to the children about that famous animal. For some Indians any large cat was a 'shere' and Shere Khan was no exception. I started to talk about him when Richard asked if there weren't lots of lions in the Bible. By his faint grin I realised he was on the same idea as my own: diverting the minds of the children. Down below there were further growls and coughs-intimations that the pride had not withdrawn.

'We exchanged bits of knowledge. There was the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Richard came out with that one. I talked about the lion on the road who had killed the disobedient prophet, but Richard insisted that some lions were good. They were there to protect us. Carol remembered that David had killed lions, and Samson also had had his share.

'Anne said suddenly, "Let us be Davids and Samsons".

'Laurel looked surprised. She was sitting on a rug and had her arms around Ruth and Mary.

'Ruth had a wide grin. "Daddy and Richard could easily kill lions if they wanted to", she said confidently. "Daddy's strong, and Richard would use both crutches." Richard and I exchanged knowing looks.

'Carol started to sing, "For the Lion of Judah shall break every chain; And give us the victory again and again".

'It was a chorus we had often sung together at family worship. We all took it up. The coughs and the growls ceased and again there was snow-silence.

'When we next heard a roar it must have been on the edge of the forest. There were later roarings from a distance, and once I heard the terrible bellowing of a cow which I knew had been attacked and was dying in fear. Carol asked what it was, and I said, "Let us sing that chorus again". So we sang it, and that was the last lion sound we heard that night. There were, however, yelps, barkings and wailings of the jackals.

'Next morning we slept in. I went to my typewriter to record the event, knowing I would soon forget some of the details. After a time I made breakfast and took it on trays to the children. They were delighted. Our large charpai [bed] could somehow contain the whole family when they snuggled in or lay at the bottom end.

'Richard was past such childish pleasures and sat on a chair, his crutches leaning on the wall beside him.

"Daddy", Ruth said in her persuasive way, "tell us about Shere Khan in that book you have".

'I was glad I knew my Kipling.

'After breakfast we ventured out. We removed the barbed wire. Lal Din came down to assure us the pride of beasts would move on, having fed themselves. The night of the lions was finished. They had prowled around in the igloo, doubtless wondering what it was. The light furniture had been upturned and some of it was broken. Games were scattered on the floor. We thought we could smell lion, but were not sure. Climbing to the top of the snow we looked towards Kashmir where the sun was shining on the higher mountains. Somehow everything was fresh and new. We were a quiet family, looking towards our future also.'

Denny had finished his story. His hands withdrew from the machine and lay on the table. He was staring across at the mountain forest. It had almost lost its identity, so one was it with the rest of the white landscape. He was remembering the summers they had wandered as a family amongst the giant trees, the lower branches having been cut for timber and to allow the light to break through for the mountain herbage to grow. The smells of pines and junipers came now to his nostrils. The names of the alpine flowers evaded him, but not their beauty. He remembered the eager strawberry gathering.

Why had he not written of many of these things all those years in his own land? Why were memories

now so sharp and vivid? He supposed they came from his being back in the environment, the mahoul as the Urdu word described it. If he was correct in his thinking then the earliest things of life had come back to him and he had written on them, drawing his stories out of those memories. Then came recollections of the war years and post-war times. In turn he had written of them. The events of the ten Pakistani years were only now coming to the forefront of his mind. Maybe that was why he had had to return. Maybe his thinking had to be rejuvenated by the lion motif. That theme and design had always been there.

That made him think of his cubs. With Laurel's nurturing and his own training they had grown into a pride-the old male and female and then one male cub and five females. Richard had changed beyond recognition. Red-bearded and long haired as any lion, he was living the alternative style of life in which he had raised his three children in a rural situation, aided by his wife Susan. Their children had shown clear character of a different sort to their father with his artwork, his writing and his desires for the soil and for world peace. Now they were poised for adventures in the jungle of the cities or the prairies of a land they had yet, fully, to see.

Carol, a trained nurse and wife to her doctor-husband, David, was consciously training a thoughtful young man, Tim, and his equally intelligent sister Kate. Anne had a husband who lived at the nerve centre of a computer world, having his own bulletin board-constantly fellowshipping with other buffs. Anne's son Dan and her daughter Bente both showed

her artistic gifts, and were now making their way to the forefront of life, not without having made their mistakes.

Elizabeth had married a man who had later become a minister and a fine theologian. Her four daughters, Danielle, Sarah, Jennifer and Karla were proving to be as beautiful as their mother, as alert, and as intelligent.

The thoughtfulness in his eyes deepened as he considered Ruth's grave in Victor Harbor. She had died in a senseless car accident brought on by a drugged driver of a heavy semi-trailer. She had been different from the others, the only one with brown eyes. He remembered those beautiful pools, and the other beauty of her thoughts, her intensity of life and her strange autonomy of thinking. Once she had cried she wanted to see God as clearly as she could see him, her father. Perhaps her death was no accident in the sense of that word, but a release into a wiser world, one that would satisfy her.

As yet Mary was about satisfying her thirst for knowledge, now working in a post-graduate area; but her understanding of human beings, and her desire to help them matched that of her mother and father.

His hands drummed on the table. Would his same thirst never be fully quenched, his own quest never end? He admired his wife who shared her wisdom with others, helping them out of difficult situations and yet able to sit quietly at her art of embroidery, listening to the music she loved, and doubtless dreaming about her children and grandchildren as much as did he.

Of course, his visit to this spur of the Himalayas

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was crazy when you thought about it. Even so, the past months had been rich, talking to old friends and making new ones. Whilst he lived he would always be searching for fresh wisdom and sharing that which had come to him through the years.

He smiled as he thought about it, that *leitmotif* of the lion which had pursued him through his life, but which had been cemented as such in what he had come to call 'The Night of the Lions'. Always he had kept in mind the name of Shere Bubba, the king of the beasts, Kipling's Shere Khan and the famous story of 'The Lion on the Road' in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. Chinese mythology had its Lion-Dragon, and British history had vaunted Britain as the Lion of the World. He knew that the spasm of fear that had come to him that night was not of servility but of awe, of recognition of true majesty.

Now he felt tired and went to lie down. His mind was still renewing the past to him and he was moved as an old memory broke through, a title given to him by the Pakistani students of his College. What was it? Of course. It was Shere-i-Saleeb-'Lion of the Cross'. As he drifted into sleep he knew it was a title he could never claim for himself. He knew it was uniquely the title of Another, one whom he had adored deeply, one filled with eternal wisdom and with everlasting love far far beyond his own.