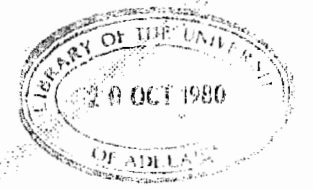


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# On dit



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## EDITORIAL

# A SHORT STORY OF OUR OWN

The emergence of several new writers within the pages of *On dit* this year has been heartening; something which we hope will continue in the years to come. The volume of journalistic writing has reached levels which we believe is unique around Australia at present. This is an important development in student activity, one which we think is vital if students are to be active participants in their own affairs. The immediacy of a weekly paper has encouraged involvement, an involvement necessary if students are going to continue to scrutinize closely the decisions that are made about their money and their future.

Criticism and appreciation of the Arts and Entertainment available each week has increased enormously. Cross fertilization of ideas and impressions is desirable to assist in making new discoveries; some would say it's integral to the spirit of a University. As well there have been students who have tried to communicate ideas about a subject of particular interest in a popular way. What better way to learn something than to make an effort to translate the technical jargon of an academic discipline or political argument into terms understandable by all.

Two areas of writing have called for specific stimulus this year. First, the Prosh Rag was put together in an attempt to give students a forum to air their satirical and humorous talent. The edition presently in your hands contains the better short stories received in response to a competition announced late in second term. We hope both issues will set a standard that students of coming years will look to improve.

Neither of these ideas are new. They have seen fulfilment in *On dit's* past, but tradition alone has not been enough to ensure their continuation.

We hope that short-story writers on this campus will now be encouraged that there is a facility

for the publication of their work. Why wait until October next year to put pen to paper?

Our thanks must be extended for the generous sponsorship of this effort on the part of *Liberty Bookshop* who put up \$50 as first prize, *City Books* a close second with \$25 and *Mary Martin* hot on their heels with \$10. We look forward to their continued interest next year. We are in particular debt to the two judges *Geoffrey Dutton* and *Colin Thiele* for their time. They patiently waded through the twenty two entrants (some of which had been very hastily written and almost illegible) to select the three winners. It must be added that the five other stories in this edition are simply a result of our decision. We considered them to be the better of the rest and therefore deserving of publication.

Finally our sincere thanks must be extended to the three artists, Frank, Dieter and Gerhard, for the time and care they have put into illustrating this edition. As has been the case all this year, they have given their services free and have contributed no end to the improved appearance of *On dit*.


## PRODUCTION

# GENTLE LOVE AND HUMAN DRAMA

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**He caught the lamb...snapping the neck**

## FIRST PRIZE

# MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

by Bronwyn Mewett



DIETER ENGLER

warning:

'Now shut up or else!'

The child started to whimper. A sharp slap silenced her. The farmer whistled and three black and white dogs raced over and leapt into the tray. The big man took the driver's seat and the ute rattled toward an iron gate.

The runabout ploughed through the red dust. It tracked between a few straggly trees in the middle of the paddock and pursued its prey into a corner. The dogs took control and kept the quarry tightly bunched while the men selected the choicest animal.

Bill plunged into the terrified mob and grabbed a lamb. The dogs were called off, the flock scattered. The struggling lamb was dragged to the ute and thrown in. I heard the tail gate bang shut. The ute returned to the home paddock. The frightened creature was dragged to a killing pen. It cringed in a corner, trembling.

Bill strode to the car. He threw open the boot. He pulled out a large butcher knife. My ears winced from the high-pitched honing sound.

'Sharp as a razor - just right for the job,' he called. The farmer nodded in agreement. Bill strode straight to the pen. His long legs slid over the fence and propelled him to the prey. He caught the lamb between his powerful thighs, yanking its head back and snapping the neck. The knife dug deep into the animal's throat. Amy screamed! I ran over and cradled her sobbing form. Blood bubbled, then spurted onto Bill's hands, then onto the red earth. The lamb fell. It continued to kick and shake. The earth became a bloody pool. As Bill stood back the farmer jumped into the pen and took the knife.

'If you wanna kill 'em, you gotta cut this one here,' he gasped as he bent double in the effort of ripping the blade even deeper into the raw wound. The lamb's frenzied kicking slowed; it lay shuddering.

Bill reclaimed the knife and slit the skin from the throat along the soft belly to the anus. The knife flashed around each leg, then chopped off the feet and left them loosely dangling. Bill's knuckly

bloodied hands then punched and ripped the skin from the carcass until only the head was left, grotesquely attached to an empty fleece. Hooks were stabbed through the rear tendons and the body hung from an overhead rail. Bill took the knife and hacked off the head; it fell amongst the scarlet jelly mass below, splattering the fleece with blood. 'Bastard!' he roared.

The skin was thrown over the rails and the pop-eyed head chopped off. The scowling slaughterman returned to the carcass and busied himself splitting the belly and ripping out the entrails. Thrusting both hands into the intestines he found and sliced the liver. 'Hey mum,' he called, 'nice fresh liver for tea - take it to the car.' 'I'll bring the paper over.' 'I said TAKE IT!' He thrust the bloody offal toward me.

I released Amy and received the warm gory piece. My hands trembled. My throat jerked. 'You want the heart too?' His hands dug into the warm entrails and cut away the core. 'Take it.' The piece flopped and slipped onto the liver. Throat retching I carried the dripping flesh to the car. Bile rising to my mouth, head spinning, I fell against it. The offal slipped from my grasp.

Amy yelled. I lifted myself and stumbled to her. She screamed again while she watched, mesmerised, as her father ousted the slippery entrails over the fence to be gulped by the greedy dogs. Snarling and snapping all the while, they ripped the murky mass to shreds.

I recognised Amy's old cot sheet as Bill wrapped the lamb and carried it to the car. The farmer was paid. He was slowly counting the notes as we drove away. I wondered if they were soiled.

The car reeked of blood and guts. My stomach heaved. I unwound the window, enduring dust and smouldering heat; enduring anything other than the raw stench. Sunburned Amy cried herself to sleep on the back seat, rather than in my crimson stained hands.

Monday, at work, Bill claimed the lamb was succulent, the juiciest he'd ever eaten as he munched his meat-filled sandwiches. He gloated over his mates from the plant shop.

'You poor buggers in the city haven't tasted real meat - 'till you've had country killed.' The men laughed and joked about Bill chasing a 'bloody sheep' around the countryside to get a cheap meal.

That night Bill carved large slices of the hot roast, inhaling the steam and claiming:

'Beautiful piece of lamb - best we've had in a long time,' as the knife worked, slicing and chopping. I called Amy to dinner. 'Amy, wash up and come to tea.' She wandered in with a grubby face and even grubbier hands. Bill roared!

'Get and wash or I'll lay one on you!'

She scurried away, returning a few minutes later, clean. I lifted her into the high chair and lay a dish of meat and greens on the tray. 'Here you are sweetie.'

Bill was devouring his food. I sat across from him and picked. Silence reigned until he finished. 'Lovely tea, lovely.' He smacked his lips. 'I might have seconds.' 'Help Amy finish hers - first?' 'Come on kid eat up.' He chopped her food and shovelled it into her tiny mouth.

'No!' she yelled.

'Eat it! What do you think I killed it for? EAT!'

'No!' She spat her half-chewed food into Bill's livid face.

'You little bitch!', he raged, his fist striking the child and knocking her to the floor. She spilled from the chair and lay convulsing. Her mouth frothed, her arms and legs jerked about wildly, then flopped still. I screamed and dropped beside her. I held her head. Blood dripped from her mouth. It trickled warmly over my white legs. 'My baby, my baby.' Sobs shook my rocking frame.

'It wasn't my fault --- she bloody well asked for it --- you know she did'. □

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## SECOND PRIZE

# FANTASIES IN THE DAY OF A JOGGER

by Sabrina Pitt

**J**ump, jump, tap, tap, bob, skip. So goes the crowd around. We're waiting for the starter's gun. The huge red 'start' dreamily waves above. We're off! Up the slope of the road, joggers rise gently. A silent Zulu army ants round the bend. Walking, then jogging, walking. At last a clear patch ahead. There we go - pacing trotters, numbers waving on our chests. We have all the glory of show-ponies; crimson ostrich feathers, gold braid, jewelled eye covers. No. It's just my longish, thin hair flapping in view.

Victoria Square fountain is in sight. The Ambulance men behind us are cruising the beat, craning, leering, itching. They are New York State patrol. We're the protestors fleeing the fierce, red lights of Mad Max cars. Hey! There's some bikies - real Hell's Angels. What's this? Hey - a bullet - here it comes. Hey, hey! No it's a

paper jet soaring in the harmless breeze, a dirty ragged streamer from the gutter.

I'm starting to pant a little like a crumpled-hooved mare set out in a misty pasture. Only imagination because we keep jogging in the wake of the voluptuous mass ahead. A few, here and there, wearily cheer and clap from the pavements, self-conscious of the envious thrill in their throats.

We tread the relentless tram-lines. The Square is behind us now. Occasionally, we glance behind to see straggling, sweating riverlets of competitors.

"The street coming up - is that where we turn?"

"No," says my sister, next to me "It's the one after."

The Federal Mad Maxes are still chasing joggers who are getting further towards the centre of the road. Policemen must get a laugh out of herding the sheep back into one lane. They think they're Marlboro men, spurring the horses' flanks, beeping their horns at the shiny shoal with overworked gills.

Movements pass and the parklands spread towards us. Not even three kilometres have gone yet. Not even a quarter of the way. We'll get there, though. Some relentless blood-force keeps our legs pumping; a social quirk not to fail, but also the thrill of a goal where we haven't been, a childish whim to run all day in the sun.

At last, Keswick Bridge creeps towards us. I'll jump over into murky ripples, slide down green plates of lilies. Maybe I'll catch a fish. We're jogging over its concrete expanse now, and the railway yards below gleam up in their lifeless, fishless tracks.

"Twenty bus stops to go," I pant.

We chat, heavingly conscious of words which drain our energy. Ahead glares the six kilometre mark. The orange letters to us are like a sunset paradise to a photographer who's been shooting grey houses all his life. And a drink stand! Whew! Without resting we grab a cup, drink and the salty cider dribbles down our chests. Ahh! Solo. It's a man's drink. It's a woman's drink. It's a jogger's drink.

Sometimes I glance at the passers-by in cars. There goes my sister's friend in his panel-van. It's a creeping red creature, a modified St John Ambulance ready to collect our melting marrow if we don't make it. On we go, though, and with all the flock ahead are migrating to an island called 'Finish' where, as the natives tell, the stop-watchers greet weary ships with their sirenous song.

At the stop lights of Cross Road, spectators encourage, sponge-girls sponge and policemen signal us to go. I came, I saw, I conquered. I'm tempted to brandish my victory at the waiting cars.

The troops march on. Keswick soldiers pass us with camouflaged artillery. Chains and muscles are stretched. Sandals are worn. Goblets are dripping sweat. Their eyes are slitting at the sun as a helicopter vultures down, shooting pink, purple, blue hazes at us. But the Channel Nine 'copter soars away ignoring the last of the army.

Eight kilometres swoops out at us. I stop for a fraction to rest my stiff, rocky stumps. Another drink swells down along crusted swollen throats. I hold the empty cup higher. The Olympic flame still burns. Higher it is. The next runner looms ahead ready to capture the flash on its final lap to Athens. Around a curve I take it. There it falls lightly into a rubbish-bin.

Ahead rises Glenelg Tower, round, metallic, swollen with victory. It seems so close but is really a Babel illusion. Still two kilometres to go.

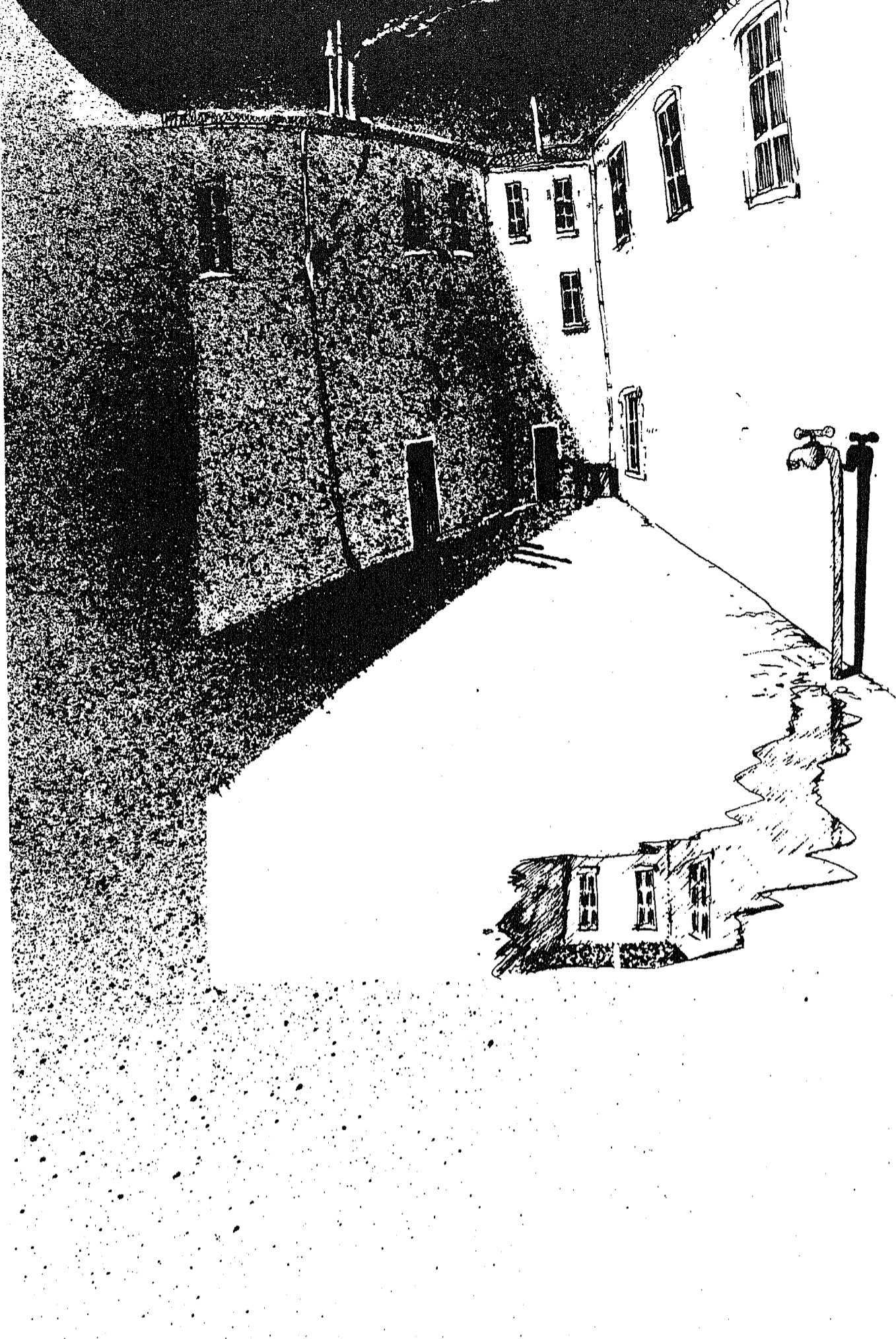
"Don't stop," my sister smilingly urges as she pumps ahead. There she goes. See her run. Betty Cuthbert for another gold. In front the bobbing couple smile and flirt. Soon, they're gone too. As I come towards the final bend, everyone's in the path. Where do I go? A St John Ambulance man and iridescent witches' hats direct the way. They are shepherds to a traveller of flak. What! At the straight all is clear. A crowd surrounds and alone I run the yards to a sweeping "Finish".

"This is gold," the microphone shouts. Towards a thousand finished soldiers I prance. My little streak of attention. The clock-watcher flashes me the time. I collapse into her table, as she anticlimactically, in perfuntory tones, says,

"Move to the right, please."

In a space among myriads, I lay, anticipating exhaustion, anticipating punch-drunk legs which seep with marrow. All I feel is a little puffed, a little tired as my grasshopper legs shine in the sun. I collect my certificate, a thousand others waving around. I drink more salty cider while looking for my sister. I stumble slightly. Inside my heart pounds with glee. Outside a filmy disappointment that it's over. Ninety-four minutes and thirty seconds and home again. □

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The rosella, for that is what it was, captured my attention. I wondered what it was up to, beheading roses as if they were a species of tall poppy. In metaphor the bird was a Milesian tyrant silently lobbing the tall ears of the wheat in his fields, and I was Periander's messenger who was to go on his way without a word of comprehension. Only later did I pose the more unanswerable, why? to its breaking the bud; and only now do I ask, who is the Periander I must answer to?

It was all very fleeting at the time; transient like all flesh. Was I merely a butler to carry away the debris, to who knows where?

The bird was perched plum amid the new shoots. It had settled on the stem of the bud with all the squealing pleasure of an excited child devouring an ice-cream daringly grabbed from an unwary outstretched hand.

Of course it was not alone. It was one of a group of five, four of which were in the trees above. The din from their encouragement would have put, weight for decibels, the most cheery half-dozen football fans in a panic of flight. Perhaps it was the fracas of their screeches which sensitized me to the chatter of my own walk, when, in the moments before I became aware of their cries, I passed between the skeletal remains of two once rose-submerged shrubberies which littered the adjoining ponds of lawn that were spilt on either side of the path. The dirty deed had been done and its ovation given, before I had been swept from the general pleasure of the cultivated nature of the park, through the drudge of hobby gardening and the facts of my progress, to the escape of fickle curiosity. It was the ritual subsequent mutilation for the audience chorus that awaited my interest.

The swing of that decimation was well established by the time I blinked. The handsome red-green-blue parakeet seemed unconcerned at my gaze. It continued to whittle away at the tender shoot of the now decapitated stem.

With a final flourish of shredding it then fled to its flock in the neighbouring tree; for a moment camouflaged and oddly quiet in victory. I peered at the ragged stump, now no more than the top stub end of a pencil, displacing the symmetry of its rubbered and bundled brethren with its chewed butt end.

Something like this had happened to me once before. Then I had thought nothing more of it: no more at least than to fantasise it as some confused ghosting metaphor of a run-back of Lot's wife turning to salt, atop a replay of the loss of Eurydice to the caverns of the underworld.

The background on that occasion was a main road in the suburbs of this same metropolis. Walking along its concrete footpath, I was drawn by the noise

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

DIETER ENGLER

THIRD PRIZE

# THE ROSELLA AND THE ROSE BUD

by Patrick Byrt

I had set out on foot that afternoon to walk into the city.

Living in an inner suburb, I had to pass through its ring of parklands. I was off to look at a garden I had started on the far side of town closer to the sea; a garden I had started to maintain an active contact with the family that I come from.

Though I was walking to catch a train, I was not in a hurry. In spite of the cloud, it was still light enough to enjoy the manicured colour and variety of the trees and flowers adjusting themselves for winter.

To avoid the traffic fumes, I had abandoned the asphalt surface of the bikeway, bordering the road which sliced directly into the business centre. They took my mind off the view of the gardens in the park. A longtime student, it had become a habit to attend lectures fresh from pollen and ducks

as a relief from the tedium and smoke of buses. Naturally I was not the best of students. A habit that was reinforced by my wariness of keener cyclists and athletic joggers who pounded the bikeway later in the afternoon. Not that I expected them then, but their sweat and pace seemed to similarly linger around their tracks.

Looking around in distraction, I saw on a sprouting bush a bird with a bud falling from its beak.

The grit of the track had perverted my pleasure in normal things, denied me the conventional resort to objective ends - the cabbages of the garden, their layout and protection from snails were a useless defence - and forced me from its mundanity to the relief of random amusement. It had mimicked the continual tack of my thoughts and appreciation until I gave them up.

# REPLAY

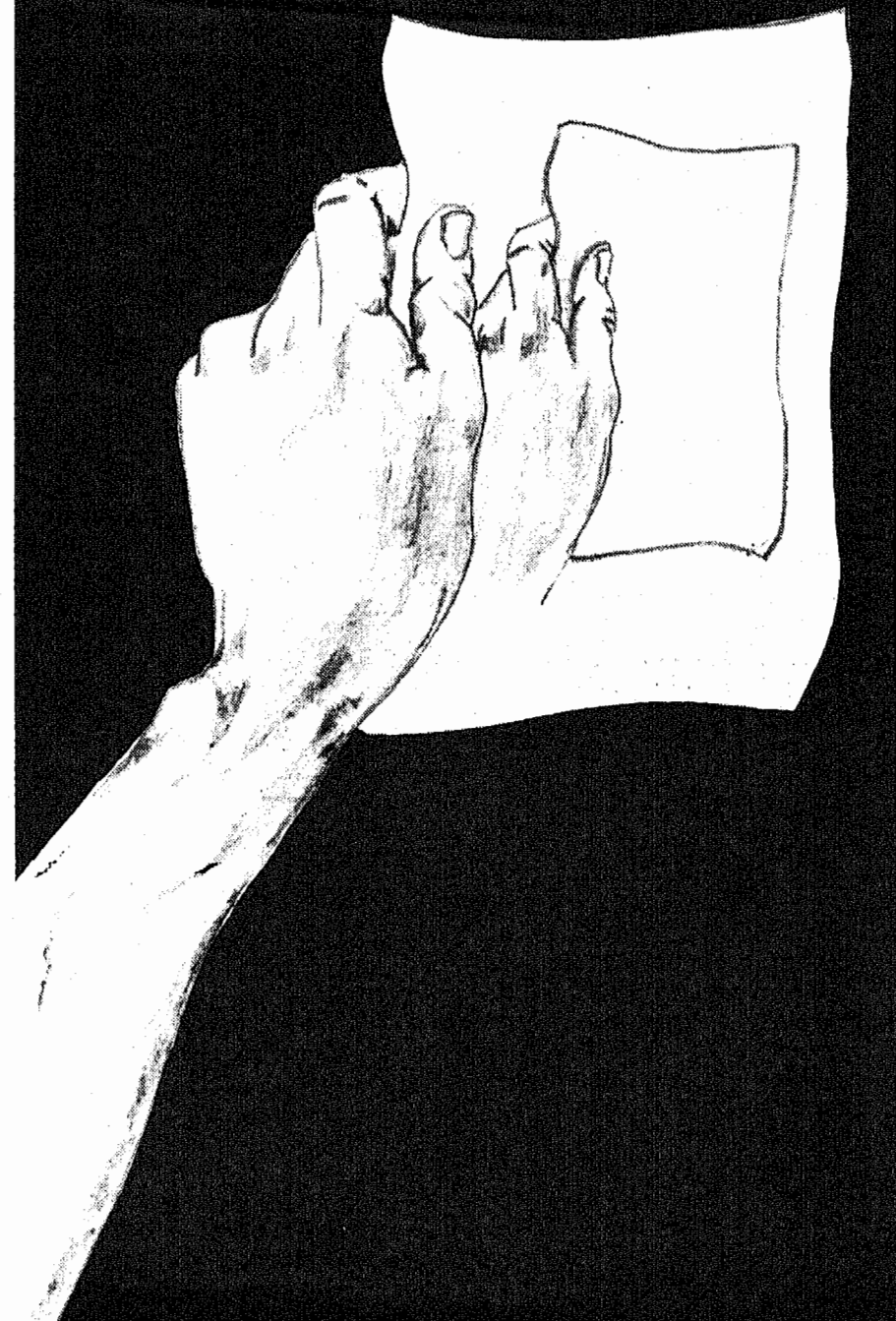
by James Groves

There was a movement in the shadows to my left. I cried out, involuntarily flinging my arm out, which extinguished the match. The smoke tickled my nose gently as I stood completely still in the silent room. There was a sudden noise from the table. The desk-lamp snapped on momentarily blinding me. I peered into the harsh light, trying to discern the identity of the motionless figure with its hand on the switch. I strode forward and the lamp went off leaving a coloured after-image obscuring my vision. I grasped for the switch on the lamp while the person rushed past me. The door opened flooding the room with light as I turned the lamp on. A man ran through the door momentarily framed against the backdrop of light. He turned his head briefly before disappearing around the door. It was Miller. I scrambled towards the door and looked on the featureless corridor. There was no one there. I stood indecisively, for a short time before re-entering the room. There was a half-finished page in the typewriter."

I looked up as a movement caught my eye. The light went out. I moved clumsily over to the door, kicking the wastepaper basket on the way. In the dark I couldn't find the light-switch. I fumbled a match out of the box in my hand and struck it. I quickly shifted it to my other hand, anticipating the movement on my left. Extending the matchless hand experimentally, I touched nothing. There was a man crouched on the floor. He lifted his head quickly with a surprised look on his face. It was Miller. I beat him to the desk-lamp and savagely snapped it on. He cried

I knocked tentatively on the door and entered. A desk stood with its sides square to all four walls, a typewriter placed on the top. The single bulb hanging from the ceiling and no windows of any kind. Apparently Miller was out. A half-written page lay in the typewriter. I glanced at it and pulled it out, laying it flat and sitting on the edge of the desk since there was no chair. The page was headed "Provisional" and began;

"In the dark I couldn't find the light-switch by the door. I fumbled a match out and struck it on the box. It flared briefly throwing the room into relief.



FRANK AHLIN

out and ran swiftly towards the door which he opened and fled through. I heard his footsteps receding down the corridor. When I stepped out of the room he had vanished.

I moved back into the room. The

sheet of paper had been replaced in the typewriter. I glanced at the title swiftly, careful not to read the first sentence. It was headed "Final".

I left the room, slamming the door behind me. □

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

and stark colour of a white pigeon fluttering to the ground on the bitumen of a light industrial concern's carpark. The type of bird available in most supermarkets as an inside window ornament; red eyes, raised wings which are not yet outstretched, could be landing or in the process of vertical take-off, and of course in fake rock-salt.

This one must have escaped. It was free of whatever dove-cote usually confined it. It just dropped in view as I was reading the name emblazoned on the facade of the building at the end of the yard. As I followed its descent down that brick and glass veneer, I was amused to see a garden tap of glinting metal affixed to the wall.

A sucker for reticulated water, I walked over to slake my hangover at the tap. It was a recent addition. No doubt an executive perk; something to keep an offspring busy on a Saturday morning while the other half did a spot of shopping - a car needed to be washed, and why pay the robot all the time, especially as \$s maintained that necessary parent-child communication which went by the board of authority during the

week. So much for the fantasies of tender loving care I indulged in as I went over to what I had presumed was a tap of newly polished brass. There was a limit to what even the most dutiful would or could do without a greased palm. The burnished chrome stood as a permanent memorial to the insight, expedience and pragmatism of the successful trader. The capital outlay established the limit of the initiative of the worker. The cost of materials and labour to maintain a nostalgic symbol of the power and endurance of brass, would be a running drain which was best plugged with irony - even if it still had to be electro-plated.

I left satisfied with finding myself out so privately.

It was then I looked back. I had left the pigeon permanently grounded. Outside its flight I had no interest in it. The earth was the domain of cats. People may be necessary to feed them or occasionally, to be their feed. But cooing, strutting birds with bulbous crops were vanity incarnate. Hence my dislike of the pompous idol of flight that passes as the pigeon in the window - it is idolatry to salt them do so for winter.

All smugness vanished. It was pillared to the ground, but not where I left it. Wings tucked in, it was statuesque. However, its head was reaching up with its beak so slightly ajar. Then, like a smile, flight stole over its every feature.

It had just swallowed a sip of water by running it back down its throat. Its only movement as I turned was the pulse of ever so little a gulp. That's when and how it took off.

I was stung to see how this white rock ornament came to life. I lost all sense of the moment of its flight. I need not have to actually put a pigeon on the window-sill to preserve its animation - how would it be complete without the droppings of its sojourn? - but, the flicker of spirit that showed in its swallow, has permanently confused for me the instant of its solidarity with the instant of its flight.

Naturally I walked away. The whole notion of the coincidence of fortune's symbols, I now understand, was an idea that could only be explored in writing, or else it was an event to be thankful for and then left alone.

Anyway, that time there was sure to be nothing to investigate. The bird had not sat in the stream

of spillage which I created and from which it had drunk. There was no discernible evidence of anything but a recent human presence: no feather, no track on the impenetrable bitumen, no trail of small feet leading from the rivulet, no spoor and no excrement.

This time in the green of the park I was not the one cast in the role to look back. I was being led on. So I went over to the bush. I was covered by a crimson haze of new growth. Their colour matched the russet shades of the deciduous boundary trees. The birds remained silent.

The bush was one of a small cluster in their own bed. The boundary of it was the lawn. It was an island amidst a pool of green. The earth at its base was well composted, and there nestled among the straw and leaves was the bud. It was covered in aphids. □

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# MIRRORS

by Lesley Jenkins

Passing the open door of her bedroom she glanced in and stopped, surprised by the woman who stared at her from the dressing table mirror. Fascinated she crept into her room and sat before the reflection, not daring to take her eyes away from the face lest it should disappear and, when she turned back to it, there be nothing but a blank glass. For some time she sat in wonder, still staring into her own eyes, afraid that if she did not hold the image with her gaze, then it would dissolve and with it, she would cease to exist.

A small figure appeared behind her in the glass, breaking her reverie. Sighing she turned to face the child. "What is it Amaryllis?" she asked coldly. As Amaryllis struggled to answer, her poor deformed features distorted even more by the effort of stammering, the woman watched indistate. Why was I left to shoulder this burden? she wondered angrily. I'm not responsible for Amaryllis, yet I'm the one left with her when she's deserted; she thought, her irritation growing as it always did in the presence of Amaryllis. "I've told you, Amaryllis," she replied slowly and carefully, trying to be patient when at last the girl had choked out her mutilated question, "I don't know when your father will be back but when I find out I'll tell you. Don't ask me again!"

Amaryllis began to cry, great silent tears sliding over her red cheeks, fists clenched in futile fury at her helplessness. Impassively and without sympathy the woman watched until Amaryllis, used to this indifference, lumbered out of the room, sobbing bitterly in her lonely and confused misery.

The woman left her dressingtable and crossed the room to stand by the window. The oppression outside matched her mood. A gray and sombre sky overhung the tense and unnaturally hushed atmosphere. The air was heavy and stifling, no rain or breeze promised relief. There was a sense of waiting, of suspense, as though the elements

were holding back, imprisoned until their release should come.

That's how it is with me, she mused. I'm holding my breath, waiting on all my plans until...? Until Robert returns, I suppose. How long had he been away? She couldn't be sure, — three or four months perhaps. She had spent the days and weeks since her lover had left literally pacing within the four walls of his house, rarely leaving it. At first she had done nothing, taken no positive steps, expecting his return at any time. Now her patience was wearing thin, her anxiety and anger mounting, but still his continued absence, combined now with inertia, fear and hope, held her captive. She was a prisoner, impounded originally in this house without locks by her jailor, a man who had simply walked out with the key, locking her in with his retarded daughter and no clues as to when her sentence would end. Now, even had she known how to break those nebulous ties she would have been afraid to do so. The bonds that held her were nebulous but compelling.

Wearily she walked outside to collect the mail as she had so many times before, her hope dwindling every day. There was an envelope marked, "To The Householder" she noted and one other letter, postmarked in Rockhampton. Rockhampton? Her heart quickened. Robert came from Rockhampton. Eagerly she turned the envelope over but, — no. She bit her lip in disappointment. The letter was not from Robert but from a Damon Williams. She knew of no-one by that name. Dully she tore open the envelope and straightened out the short note it contained. "Dear Miss" she read, (funny how she didn't seem to have a name these days. Call me Miss Householder.)

"I hope you won't mind receiving a letter like this from a stranger, but I had to chance your reaction and write to you as you are the only person who may be able to help me. Perhaps you've heard of me, I'm Damon Williams, my father is Robert Easter. When father left my mother, eight years or so ago, I stayed with her and he took my sister, Amaryllis. I know they eventually came to live at the address to which I'm now writing and that about eighteen months ago a lady moved in with them: I presume you are that lady but know no more about you. I know these things only because my mother has told me. There are some things, however, that she will not tell me and one of these is what is happening to Amaryllis. I am writing to you rather than to my father as I have no desire to communicate with him and indeed, I'm only writing now because I know that he has been in Hong Kong for some weeks. I'd like to meet my sister while he's away if I could and was wondering if you would help me? I haven't seen her since she was two, she was a sweet kid I remember, quiet and peaceful. I heard that my father had left the country

unaccompanied and so I hoped that you might still be in my father's house minding Amaryllis and would allow me to come and visit her?"

The woman read the letter in amazement. A son? Yes, of course, now she remembered Robert mentioning his son once or twice, Damon had been twelve when Robert left his wife and the boy seemed to have meant little to his father. Now that she thought about it, Robert seemed altogether disinterested in the people around him. When at home he ignored his daughter most of the time and never mentioned her defects as though pretending that something embarrassing and painful did not exist would remedy it, so too it seemed with his son. He had left his wife without warning had now, it seemed, had left her too. No! It couldn't be true! Hong Kong! It must be some horrible joke. Surely he would have told her if he was leaving the country, unless... unless he wasn't coming back? Why else would he tell his wife and not her? It hadn't occurred to her before that Robert might never return, simply because she hadn't dared to consider that possibility.

Pondering still she walked slowly around to the backyard where Amaryllis played, the child stood, happy and at peace among the plants. She was stretching up on tip-toe to smell a flower, her usually bland and expressionless face alight with joy. "A sweet kid...quiet and peaceful..." The woman recalled the words with shame. She and Amaryllis shared a house, were linked by the common need for the same man, Amaryllis of course, with the greater need and yet she had been so unkind to the girl. When Robert was at home the woman had been able to tolerate his daughter's presence but, once alone with Amaryllis, the sense of disgust and impatience that such mental and physical abnormality awoke in her overwhelmed that tolerance. She knew her attitude to be harsh and uncharitable but nowhere in her soul could she find affection, or even respect for the girl.

She realised now that this was partly because of that very similarity of the separate plights. When she looked into Amaryllis's unhappy face she saw her own loneliness and bewilderment. Amaryllis's confused and desolate look reflected her own. Now the woman realised her mistake. Surely their common abandonment should have drawn them together rather than making them isolated prisoners waiting out their sentences in solitary confinement.

That night she wrote to Damon Williams, telling him that she was ignorant as to how long his father intended to stay overseas and that Damon was welcome to visit Amaryllis. Signing the letter, however, she suddenly recognized the clear implication of Damon's letter, — he didn't know that Amaryllis was handicapped. Perhaps none of them had known it then although Damon's mother must know now. She re-wrote the

letter explaining the situation as best she could, sure now that Damon would never reply.

Damon did reply however, to say that he would be there sometime within the next fortnight. He had been shocked upon first reading the letter but the years of wondering about his lost sister had livened his thirst to reclaim her so thoroughly that it was not easily quenched.

He arrived by train one afternoon, a tall, stringy twenty year old with close-cropped curly black hair and strong blue eyes. Amaryllis, ever distrustful and wary of strangers was prepared to like them if only they would accept her. Damon, innately cheery and loving, easy-going and irresponsible by nature, accepted her. Where the woman had withdrawn and become hostile, he reached out and befriended; Amaryllis became precious to him and she thrived in the new-found attention.

The days were less irksome for the woman now that there were three in the house again, but by night there was still no escape. Sheetmetal giants held her captive, huge black robots stalked her electronic dreams as she fled, imprisoned in their terrifying computer cages.

One evening, Amaryllis in bed, the adults read in the living-room. Something in the magazine she read interested her although she could not have said why it did. "Damon," she remarked, "It says here that in some countries prisoners, particularly political dissidents, are often denied mirrors. It's a means of stripping them of their sense of identity. I can understand that, does it make sense to you?"

Damon studied her dubiously, for his light-hearted soul, such things held little meaning, but a vaguely connected reply seemed necessary. "I don't know about that," he answered, "but I do know that mirrors are funny things. I used to think that if vampires had no reflection, then they couldn't be real and Amaryllis said the other day that when she looked in the mirror she saw a princess. It was pretty hard to explain to her that what we see in the mirror isn't always how things really are," he laughed.

The woman didn't laugh but read on for some minutes. She was curious about Damon but afraid to question him in case he should think she was prying. Now she hesitated, then asked him tentatively, "You aren't close to Robert, are you, Damon? I mean, no contact after he left, it's been more than eight years! Didn't you miss each other?"

"No," replied Damon without bitterness or sorrow, "when mother remarried I took on my stepfather's name and he's been more of a father to me in the past seven years than my real father was in the twelve before that.

I can barely remember my father

but I do know he wasn't at all like the other kids' dads, I hardly ever saw him. He was never there, ready to play with me or anything, — you know, the usual father and son stuff. He was distant, cold in a way, very methodical and serious, if I remember correctly." He laughed uncertainly, then continued, "This may sound crazy to you, but somehow he always made me think of a machine. He was like a, like a robot; sort of mechanical and emotionless."

She nodded dumbly, no, Damon didn't sound crazy to her. The perceptiveness of his childhood had understood the factor that she had only sensed vaguely about Robert. Even the night she met him, she had seen something, metallic, was it, in his eyes? Ever since then the missing factor had eluded her but now she saw it, he was uncaring, yes, inhuman.

That night she slept deeply, her slumber uninterrupted.

The next morning she rose early. Before Damon or Amaryllis stirred she was dressed, packed and had left them without a word. On her way to the railway station, in the rain, suitcase under one arm, she passed a furniture store. Glancing in she caught sight of her reflection, but the mirror had been shattered, and she saw her face, — fragmented infinitely. □

## SMALL NOTICES

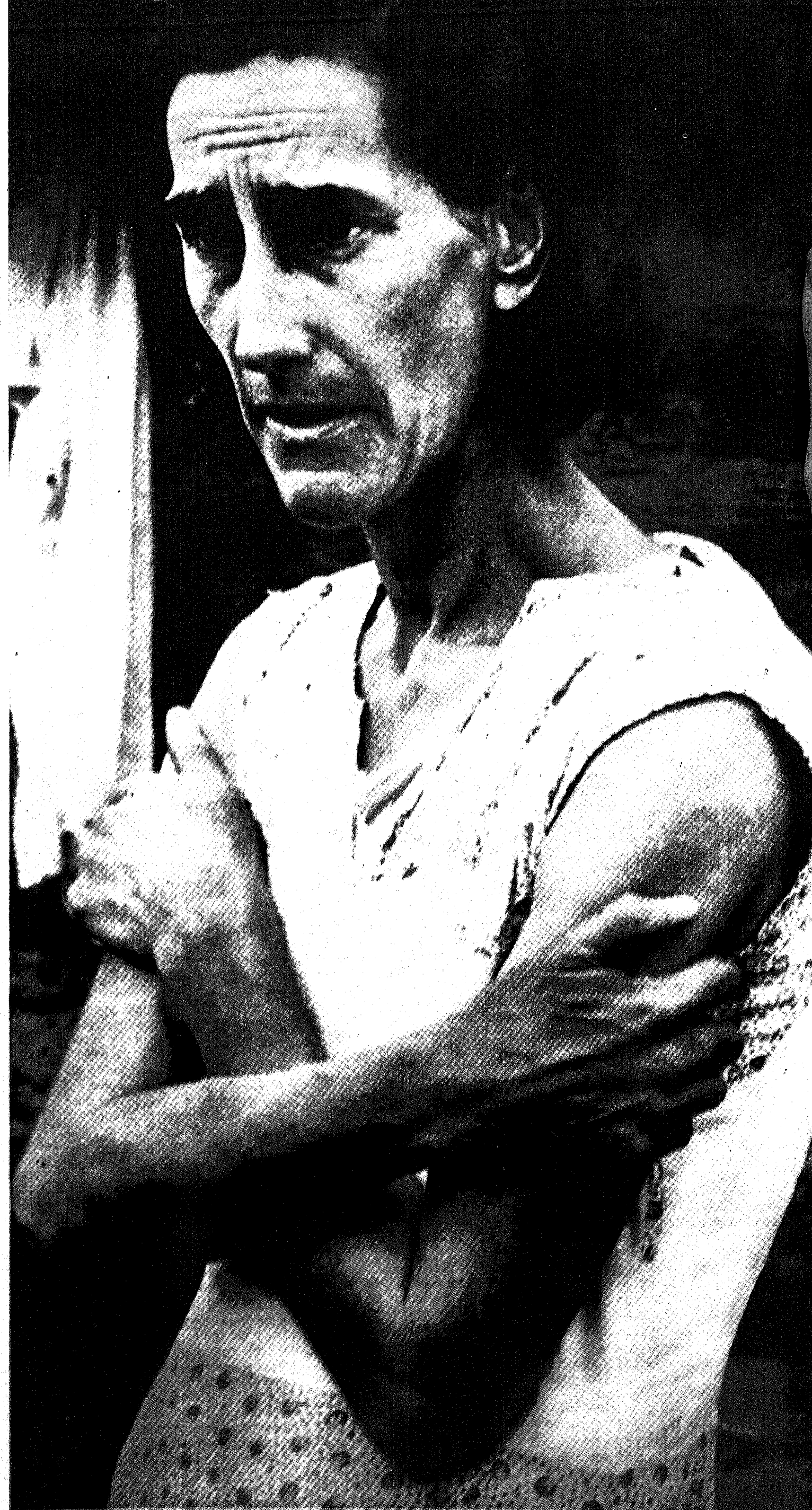
### Liberal Club AGM

Thursday October 16th  
Portus Room  
1 p.m. sharp.

### New president

A meeting will be held this Tuesday, October 14th at 1 p.m. on the Barr Smith Lawns to discuss the following motion.

- (1) "That Howard Glenn take the position of Acting President and administration of the SAUA subject to direction of the Executive until 31.12.80."
- (2) "That Howard Glenn be paid half the Adult Minimum Wage while in the position of Acting President."
- (3) "That no payment be made for the position of Acting President and that Howard Glenn fill the position of Acting President until that General Student Meeting."







DIETER ENGLER

# SOUNDS OF MADNESS

by Chris Simmons

The meal was good and Fabian smiled briefly in appreciation at Cassandra. Not in thirty years had his wife ever failed to cook so well for them both, such nourishing foods and with such good taste. Cassandra returned the smile simply in response to the gesture, but was uncertain of his meaning.

After dinner and with the chores done, they pushed the big old lounge chairs closer to the living room hearth, as the fire was necessarily lower tonight, there being little wood left. Fabian had given up his smoking but still drooped an unlit cigarette from the corner of his mouth, as he sat and listened to the silence ...

Yes, it is rather quiet, was his thought. He could even hear faintly the sighing of the trees outside in the moderate wind that

was blowing tonight.

It was quiet tonight, revealing the natural silence: that ... ghastly thing that had been feeding on the small animals in the woods and circling the house perhaps waiting for a moment to strike them while they still did not know of it; that terrible creature that had come from only God knew where ...

The slow twirling of Fabian's cigarette as he chewed his cheek suddenly ceased.

The silence — it may be planning something; it still is fighting to escape. It must not. I had better keep my ears sharp tonight. Cassandra had stopped reading her book momentarily and was looking at her husband, wondering at the strange expressions of his face.

She had not seen It. Fabian would not allow her; he would become angry and he said it would harm her. He would not so much as describe the thing. He had discovered It three nights ago, lurking by the west side of the house where the ground dropped off steeply into the forest. It had made sounds at him when It saw It had been spotted crawling up the slope, and Fabian had aimed his pistol quickly at its middle and felled it with two shots; then hurriedly — for he knew it wasn't dead yet — tied it with heavy rope and dragged it into the cellar.

There It had lain quietly for a short time, before It began making wild injured noises, screaming at its captors. Every night It had screamed, until tonight.

Fabian suddenly realized Cassandra was talking to him. "The thing is very silent tonight," she was saying. "Yes," was all he wanted to answer.

Cassandra waited for a few moments, then realized he would say no more. She returned to

gazing at her book, not reading as she could not relax at all. Something was in the cellar that Fabian had caught one night and Fabian had trapped and that he was scared of, and Cassandra had not seen.

She looked up again at him, seeing a strange twist to the corners of his eyes that had not been there before. She did not mention this to him; realizing that she did not know well the workings of Fabian's mind any more.

Tonight It lay quiet.

Breathing still was difficult; the pistol had bitten into Its innards and and gouged Its speaking-mechanism, and life fluid trickled from the wounds and blocked the passage of air.

Through the smells of Its own broken exposed flesh It could detect the contents of the prison, Mustiness, rot, the dusts of neglect — repressive odours that hid, stifled. Like the darkness here in this cellar, where It had been thrown.

It tried to take a full breath of air, but felt a sharpness in the cellar floor cut into It where It lay, and turned Its length over as best It could to make the pain less.

Now It faced the window of the cellar, through which the moon-drenched sky could be seen. That moon's light had betrayed It three nights ago, but now It welcomed the relief from darkness. It wondered where the others could be, the others of Its kind. There were certainly many more than a hundred of them scattered about the whole country; at least one must have caught Its signal just before the pistol had thundered It into unconsciousness...

unconsciousness... But It knew this to be only hope. And now It had so little strength It could signal none. Though there were Its captors, not out of reach...

Cassandra was about to speak up again, when the screaming began. The walls and floors of the house were solid, but there was not the external noise of traffic or neighbours out here, so isolated they were in the country; and the creature's shrieks were all too distinct.

It was a deep, liquid, almost warbling utterance, not continuous but broken in different ways, as if it were a sort of speech. Cassandra felt the muscles in her back twitch with each burst of the creature's voice. Fabian looked at her for a short moment, and she saw the tension of the muscles of his jaw. He said nothing.

"Fabian."

There was a pause, then "Yes?". "Do... do you think the thing can escape, from the cellar?"

"No." She waited for him to continue, but he didn't.

"Then why don't you let me see it? I must imagine worse than it really appears, just from never seeing it. I would feel much better if I did." Again she waited, and this time he did answer.

"No, you would not."

"Again, he left his statement unjustified. Why would she not feel safer, knowing what It looked like? Cassandra said no more, and knew Fabian wouldn't either.

We don't really ever communicate, she thought. We just speak a few words sometimes.

The thing's terrible screams suddenly, strangely stopped just at that moment.

Cassandra managed to return to her book, eventually. Fabian still gazed into the fire, still unreachable.

At eleven thirty, Cassandra noticed Fabian looking at the clock. Usually she would have gone to bed by now; the past three nights, alone, for Fabian would stay up here by the fire with the pistol nearby.

He was not hinting, trying to get rid of her; Fabian never gave hints of his thoughts. At twelve, he spoke.

"Shouldn't you be getting some sleep?" he asked evenly. "We are going to have to collect some firewood tomorrow, you know." "I'm going to stay up here tonight, with you."

He did not ask her why; and he did not look at her.

The fire dimmed to a glow after a time, but they didn't want to add more wood. Cassandra thought of fetching a rug from the bedroom.

It was quieter still now, and she was startled when as she started to get up Fabian suddenly choked off a short breath. He too looked startled for a moment. Then his face grew angered and he stood up sharply and reached for the pistol.

"What is it? — " Cassandra began.

"Don't follow me," he spoke sternly.

"Fabian — "

His voice grew louder. "Do you really want to know what the thing is like?" he glared as he checked the weapon. "Do you really think you want to know?" and ran out down the hall to the stairs.

Cassandra waited a moment, deciding, then quietly moved out into the hall, then out the back door of the house.

She guessed where Fabian must be going, and was much farther from the cellar window and entrance around the corner than Fabian and she walked quickly to catch him. But she did not want to reach the cellar before him ...alone...

Thoughts crowded her mind as she quietly stepped through the longish moonlight-blue grass by the west side of the house.

What has happened? I heard no sound from the cellar. Why was he so suddenly angry?

Fabian had always been quiet, a little unpredictable, she knew. She had not objected strenuously to their moving out here into this rather isolated old country house, though she did not like being so out of contact with people. She had always silently wished that he

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

# A DAY IN THE LIFE

by David Hood

Brandt came down the dark corridor and into the kitchen. We two cats bounded from the bedroom after him, sensing the possibility of food. He picked up the younger one and spoke affectionately to it, rubbing its stomach, behaving like an indulgent parent.

Holding the cat under one arm he filled the kettle and placed it on the stove, leaving the tap to run for a while before he switched it off. He never ate breakfast for the thought of it sickened him but this morning he allowed himself a biscuit which he ate as he went into the living room to light the fire and lift the chill of this bleak July day.

Outside there was nothing but a thin grey light filtering through the lacy curtains. The features of buildings were hard to distinguish; all had become a dull monotone. A hum came from the beginning of the peak hour rush together with the occasional racket from a tram swinging down the tracks in the centre of the wide parade. None of the larger elm trees outside showed any signs of leaves.

Putting the cat down he switched on the electric heater and stood with his back to its glow. Ken had left the heater behind when he had left, together with most of the other furniture in the flat. Usually Brandt used a kerosine heater for economy; today he wanted to be warm as quickly as he could.

He thought of Ken for the first time in a long while. Saw him in his office, using a calculator, answering the phone. Then he remembered that someone had told him ... who was it? ... that Ken had given up his job and gone to live in Venice for a time. He conjured up a mental image of that city with its canals and piazzas and imagined Ken walking the narrow streets; going to the opera; the sun shining over the lagoons. He wondered if the sun did shine there, at this time of the year.

Since Ken had gone there had been no one and he wished for no one. It was almost as if his

mother's death had been a watershed in his life. As he went to make the tea he thought bitterly of the last visits to Vera in the hospital. The cheerful conversation in the beginning, harder and harder to sustain. The smell of the ward. Sisters avoiding pointed questions. This attitude had quickly changed when he had demanded to see the doctor and blasted the man into telling him the truth. From then on Vera always had the medication that she needed and he in turn knew just what he had to face. Two weeks after Vera's death he had asked Ken to leave the flat.

Finishing his tea he went into the central lightwell of the flat. There he kept his plants, arranged on three different levels. Keeping them meant scrimping on other things but he gladly did this. Picking up his scateurs he trimmed here and there, speaking all the while to the plants. When the weather picked up he would do some root pruning and place some of the trees into new containers. His father had suggested selling them off as they matured but although he knew that the bonsai were valuable he could not bear to part with them.

Later in the day before he ate lunch, he dropped two calcium tablets into a glass of water and drank the fizzing liquid. He held doctors in little respect and no longer hoped that some new approach would be found for his condition. The medicos assured him that his disease could be controlled but Brandt knew that he was dying.

Finishing his sandwiches he potted around the flat, tidying it up. Eventually he settled down to read, choosing from the bookshelf an illustrated history of the Dracula legend. This, too, was something that belonged to Ken. He had put the book down in his lap and was lingering over a cigarette when the telephone rang.

"Yes," he said, attempting to sound as brusque as possible.

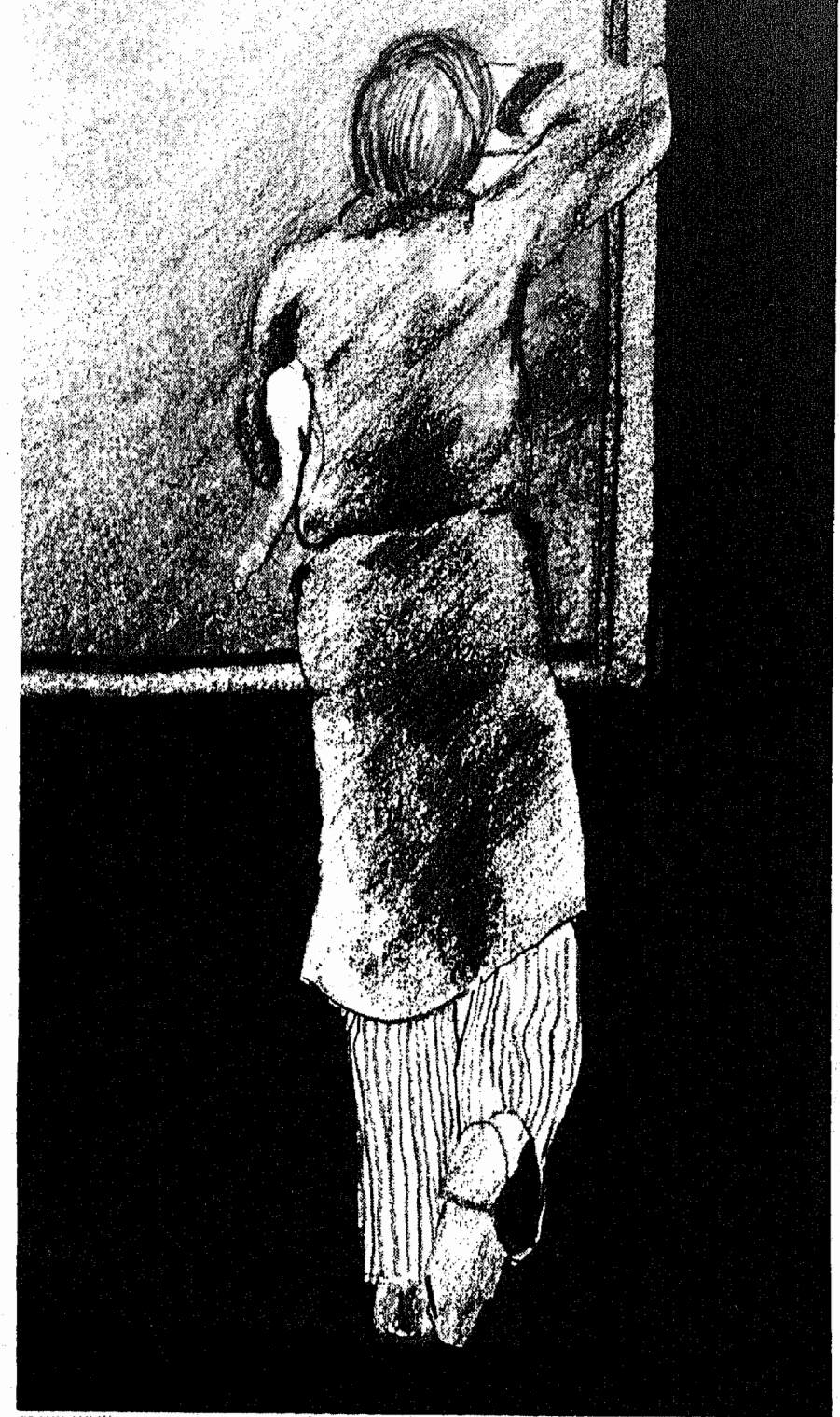
"Hello Brandt," a nervous voice said at the other end, "it's June here. How are you?"

"Alright," he replied, gaining a certain satisfaction at making her work at the conversation.

"I'm going to a play tonight ... and I was wondering if you would like to come along. The tickets are comps. and I can pick you up and bring you home again afterwards."

"What's the play?" he asked, mainly to give himself time to think.

She told him. A play featuring rock songs of the fifties and sixties. Songs that he would know; that would gnaw at his memories. He refused the offer and, softening a little, prolonged the conversation past its natural cadence. June talked on about the alterations to her house and the money it had cost her. Everything was so expensive ... He smiled as he thought of June and her small restored terrace house. Her dream of going to live permanently on a Greek island faded as the bills piled up. Replacing the receiver he



FRANK AHLIN

noted that June phoned less frequently now; one day she would tire of his silences: the phone calls would cease.

As dusk fell he decided to warm himself by having a bath. Stretched out in the warm water he soaped his body and lay back again, watching the steam curl off the water. His sex bobbed limply in the water and he thought briefly of masturbating, before dismissing the idea. It doesn't - he said aloud, pointing each word - matter.

Television filled the gap until bedtime and he watched a B-grade movie, knowing that it was bad, and even found himself watching the advertisements.

When he went to bed he knew that he would sleep easily, for once. The cats figeted for a while, then settled, and as he drifted off he was aware that a light rain was falling outside. He dreamed of running to catch a plane and being left behind as the silver jet lifted off into the sky ... The rushing of the engines became louder and he awoke, realising that he was here, in his bed, in the dark of early morning.

As he listened to the water rushing he realised that something was not right and, getting up silently so that the cats were undisturbed, he put on a dressing gown and made his way out of the dark bedroom.

The noise led him to the lightwell where, as he pulled up the blind, he found a torrent of water falling from the downpipe which

had become blocked. Running into the rain he grabbed his bonsai one by one, and moved them onto the internal windowsill. Some had had their earth washed away by the downpour and one had fallen off the stand and broken its pot. Rage welled up within him as he surveyed the damage that had been done. He cursed the water that sucked around his feet, that jetted down onto his head. It was an alien thing, trying to reach him, to wreck his life. Moving the last pot, he went inside.

Too angry to go back to sleep he went into the front room and lit the kerosene heater. He towelled dry his hair and then warmed himself fully in front of the fire. He felt tired from the exertion and from his anger and he knew that soon his hands would begin to ache again. He noticed Boney making his way, stretching, across the room to him. Picking up the cat in his arms he stood in front of the window watching a dim light appear in the sky.

As he watched, a little old man carrying a gladstone bag walked in front of the house, his boots shuffling along the pavement. Later, the street would become noisier as people hurried to work. In time, he mused, the whole world could pass by his window. And as a soft rain began to fall onto the dark street, he lit his first cigarette for the day. □

# A PORTRAIT OF THE MARXIST

by Malcolm Lindner

It was a searing-hot summers' day with the oppressive heat becoming too much for him. Gesticulating with mirth, he approached the tarmac, exercising extreme caution. He looked up in astonishment to see a Soviet aircraft, heading straight for his unmentionables ... Thrown upon

the cock-pit he writhed in agony. A battered and bruised being, with his virility travelling at the speed of sound, he looked up ... all of a sudden he realized ... NO ... it wasn't a Soviet aircraft, but the Queen Elizabeth II disguised as a Soviet defector ... "Heh heh heh" she laughed, with overtones of evil.

See, it was all part of a well planned plot to re-establish the Sino-Soviet split ... "Heh heh heh" laughed the Sino-Soviet split, with overtones of evil. With twilight approaching it was down to the business of eating freshly baked crumpets, kindly provided by old Mrs Midge. The evening air was somewhat reminiscent of Charlie Chan's prefabricated dog kennel, that stood in the middle of a luxurious penthouse.

Meanwhile the Sino-Soviet split became preoccupied with the eastern border war in outer Mongolia. Ruthlessly it began to indoctrinate unwary mountain goats in the finer points of Russian dancing. The Americans immediately threw the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra into a counter-insurgency manoeuvre. There ensued such cultural confrontations, never seen before in the Western World.

The Russians opened the show with an offensive strategy that took the Americans by complete surprise. Basically, it could be described as a movement in which the ownership of the means of production was depicted. Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pop Orchestra arrived as reinforcements, to provide a fine rendition of the Imperial American Capitalist Overture.

All was quiet on the Western Front, as little Tommy sat down to a bowl of cold soggies for breakfast ... meanwhile ...

Little Miss Muppet, sat on her tuffet.

Eating her curds and whey.

Down came a spider, who sat down beside her ... and said "What yer got in the bowl, mole?"

She replied, "Rack orff Hairy Legs!!!"

Now if one can appreciate the philosophical refinements of Dante's *Inferno*, then perhaps you might realise what I am trying to say. However, if you do not, I would not worry if I was you, as it has no bearing upon the plot.

Enricho, a half-starved Puerto-Rican nationalist, had decided to enlist the aid of the Sino-Soviet split in an effort to rule the entire

world ... At this very moment, Leon Trotsky was suffering from yet another migraine because his brother Vladimir was taken up with pre-conceived ideas on the nature of man.

While the wind whistled through the leaves on the trees, time stood still for no one. It was easy to recall the acrid flavour of urine on the subway walls. Yet even more profound was its effect on young Tess' sensory processes. The illusion of its beauty seemed so real to her. There it was, within her reach, she grasped at the image, only to see it disappear in a cloud of smoke.

The infantile member of the Sino-Soviet split's behaviour was beyond comprehension for young Tess. Shining like some phosphorescent being, from a distant galaxy, the image hovered over a nearby Russian embassy. Captivated by its entrancing presence, a junior clerical assistant boldly stepped towards the mystical body, unaware of the danger that lay within ... Was there to be any chance of this obscure person being saved? ... No I am afraid not ... it was useless. There he stood, surrounded by the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

would talk more; she needed conversation. And he had been far quieter the past three days.

But does anybody ever really communicate? she asked herself; then wondered, Why am I thinking about these things at such a time? and shook her head to clear it.

She rounded the corner of the west and north walls quickly and there something stood in front of her —

"Get inside."

"Fabian, why do —" she stopped as she saw the horribly angry tightness in his eyes. She stared back into them for a moment, saw his face distorted in the pale light in the strange way she'd seen before. He closed his eyes tightly, as if he was trying to push something, some unwanted emotion from his mind.

He spoke again, forcing the words harshly from his throat, "It will ... get at you." He turned, waited for no answer and strode off quickly toward the cellar entrance, rifle held firmly.

Cassandra stood quite still for one minute, contemplating the only clue Fabian had ever given her about it; moreover, the way he'd spoken for the first time actually sounding very frightened.

What was Fabian trying to fight by closing his eyes? Was it ... so horrible to look upon that he'd had to flight away the image? Cassandra felt the fear building up into something solid within her, remembered fear of that terrible liquid screaming...

It was straining itself, all but destroying itself in an attempt to reach further. It had to build up its

strength; it had affected one of the captors but the other was still too far away for his pitifully weakened abilities.

The other must be made to know! It must or it saw that it would die —

Fabian froze at the top of the steps leading down into the cellar, hand still on the light switch turned on.

He squinted down into the cellar, all dark brown lit with dull yellow from the small globe, all darkness and dust — and shadows.

It was still there.

He would see the shape between two large wooden crates, hideous, mangled by his bullets of three nights ago.

It could not do it, could not reach the other one, weak as it was.

It must try something else, bring this one closer...

Fabian tonight had made his decision. He lifted his pistol to aim into the shadows there, then saw a motion on his right; Cassandra was at the window.

Cassandra squinted down through the dirty glass of the cellar window, saw Fabian but could not see anything else from here. Fabian turned towards her.

"Get away from —" he started to shout at her, and saw a movement down in the shadows between those crates, swung the pistol back to aim —

Cassandra saw something massive, a stone or a piece of timber fly out from between two crates and strike Fabian's temple and Fabian fired a shot back down there and as he dropped the weapon, fell loosely to the concrete floor.

She did not move for a minute or two, unsure of what she'd seen happen. Fabian was not moving. He lay face down in a heap; she couldn't see if he was bleeding ... and it was still down there in that cellar — alive?

She finally moved, but didn't fully know why because she felt far too afraid. She ran around to the cellar door, paused there, then did her best to such down the steps and grab the rifle before it could — — She had the weapon. She looked down between the crates. Torn ropes lay there in the shadow, parted by Fabian's hurried shot. Liquid oozed from between them, a blood.

Something seemed wrong there, she felt strangely.

—The blood was red.

She saw a human hand pressing on the concrete floor; a man pushed himself up, leaning heavily against a crate. He had bullet wounds in his side and in his neck. He tried to speak it seemed, but only a feeble gurgling came forth from his throat.

Cassandra lowered the pistol. She stared silently at the man for a long time. What had Fabian done?

The bleeding man gained his balance finally.

He was frightened, she answered herself.

What was he so frightened of that made him —

Scared of talking, she again seemed to answer herself as if there was another —

Why is he smiling? She realized she should say something, but the man obviously couldn't reply any way.

But I can, her mind was saying.

Why was your husband scared? I meant you both no harm. He was scared of my thoughts, and of his own. He does not know how to talk with other people. Look how he has shut you both up out here in the woods.

Cassandra still stared at the man, bleeding from Fabian's shots. She felt a presence, light but distinct, toward the edges of her mind. It was not unpleasant.

This is why he shot me and imprisoned me.

Cassandra did not understand still why would this cause Fabian to try to kill this man? But there was a strange twist to the corners of her eyes that had not been there before. The man's painful smile widened a little, and it was a kind smile.

Come Cassandra, I can show your mind how to communicate properly ...

She said nothing, and thought nothing. For this moment she did not wish to communicate.

"We don't communicate. We just speak a few words sometimes." the thought-words came back to her now, her own thoughts seen by this man and echoed back to her.

All her thoughts.

She checked her memory as she lifted the pistol again.

There was one bullet left. □

inhabitants of the Sino-Soviet split. Perhaps this spelt the end for this reluctant protagonist ... maybe it was ... but I really cannot say for sure.

Poor Roderick, he never could understand the true significance of the Sino-Soviet split, let alone the world-wide repercussions of Detente. Even the rudimentary aspects of Ping-Pong diplomacy were beyond apprehension for him. Perhaps this could explain the air of inadequacy in his personality. Whatever it was, it made him a boring, lifeless, odds-on favourite to commit suicide. That was until one day, when he was kicking an empty Foster Clark's custard tin, he thought:

"Man I'm Gonna Buy Me A One Way Ticket to Hell" (pretty dramatic ehhl)

In a dark and deserted section of metropolitan Adelaide, a

strange occurrence was about to take place. Out of a sewerage mains crept a multitude of Sino-Soviet splits, ready to initiate a full-scale invasion. However, their attempt had been anticipated by General MacArthur, who retaliated with a neutron bomb. "Heh heh heh" laughed the General. "We don't think it's all that funny," the Sino-Soviet splits retorted.

The rain fell gently, quenching the dry earth's thirst. Harold, a survivor from Pre-Keynesian days, pondered on the nation's economic problems. He was contemplating a method for eradicating the poor, sick, aged and helpless, in an effort to remove the necessity of a welfare state. In an effort to implement his evil designs, Harold retreated to his secret laboratory.

But while all this was happening, the Sino-Soviet split had infiltrated the country's cultural screen ... "Heh heh heh" laughed the Sino-Soviet split again. In a fit

of rage Mirtle dashed his head upon a brick wall ... was he that upset with the failure of the White Australia Policy? ... or what it because he was a masochist? ... I suppose no one will really ever know for sure.

When one is dealing with political dogma, it is essential that all those involved are stark raving mad. If not, there may eventuate a number of serious repercussions, which may be totally void of any logical explanation. Thus the desired effect is far from achieved, which tends to mean that what was intentionally meant, does not mean a thing. Although not really proven, it is commonly accepted that Young Liberals shouting obscenities in public toilets are to blame. Their ludicrous actions are a ghastly stain upon these licentious beings, whose sole intent is to defaecate in their britches. Society will not tolerate such behaviour.

While this lengthy digression was taking place, a young Marxist, suffering from extreme altruism, tried to indoctrinate an innocent Sabco toilet brush. I tell you these political extremists are a mad bunch ...

Amid the excitement of the last two paragraphs, young Tess re-appeared unknown to the author. How this occurred merely provided another opportunity for all to indulge in some petty student politics. Like Joan of Arc, they ruthlessly laid charges of ballot rigging against her. A highly extroverted law student, Todi Jabalot(MY WORD HE CAN)ny was immediately searching for the traces of Malcolm Fraser's perverted humanitarian principles, so that he could effuse them in the next state election campaign.

Within another realm, Tess at last felt safe from all the viciousness of student politics. She concentrated upon picking up from where she had left earlier. But it was hopeless ... she just could not do it. So she decided to fade out of the narrative, to prevent herself from becoming a hackneyed personification of stupidity. This was perhaps a good thing as far as Q.C. Pendlebury, a troglodyte Liberal, was concerned. Effusing all sorts of 18th century

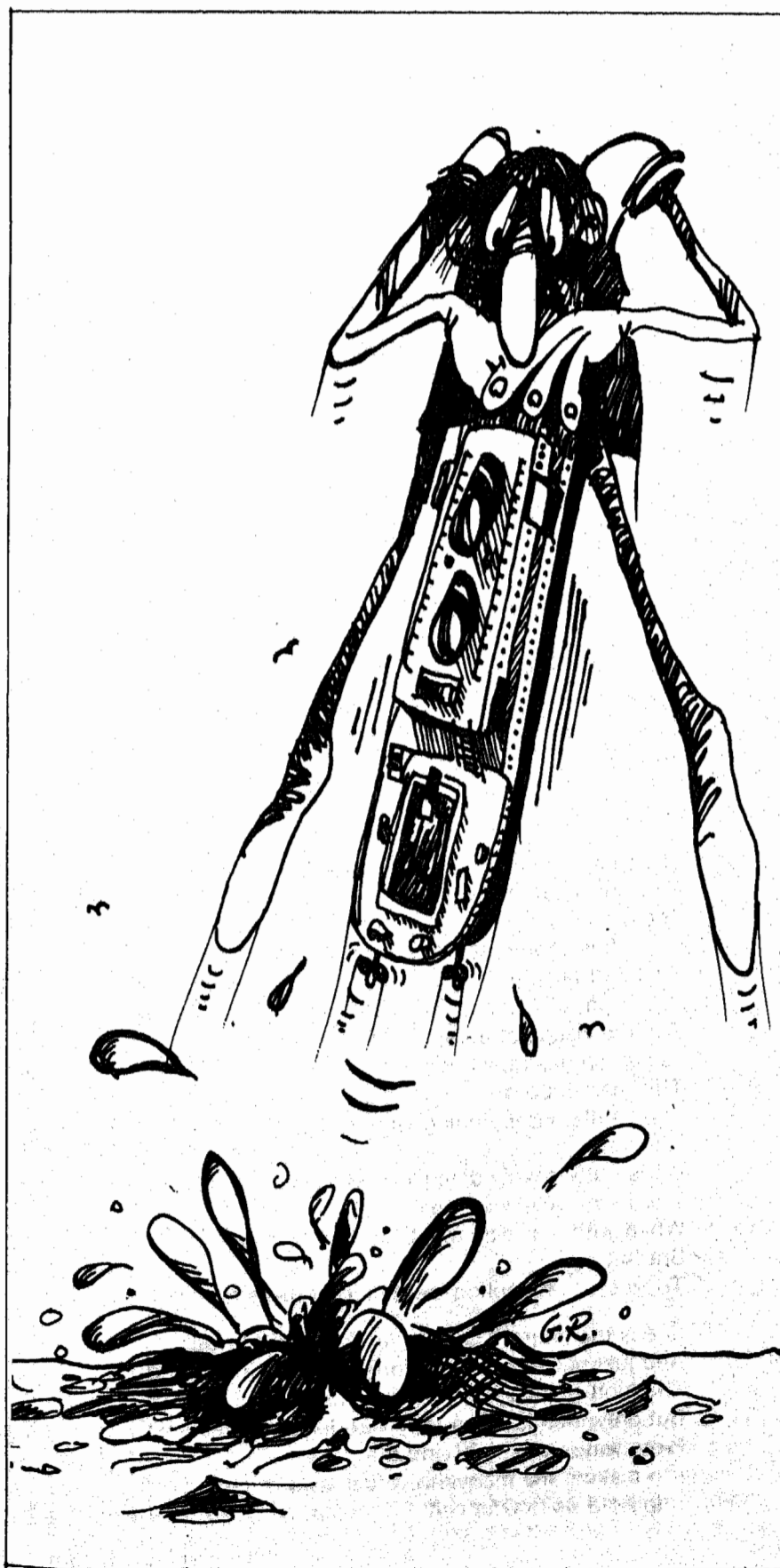
irrelevant capitalist doctrines was more his cup of tea.

Mind you, Karl Marx wasn't doing any better regurgitating the materialist philosophies of Epicurus. Besides all that nonsense about "ownership of the means of production" and whatever wasn't best-selling stuff anyway. I mean to say that factory workers would enjoy a mystery novel much more than a directive on how to cast off the shackles of capitalist oppression. And what was Marcuse up to? Who is this Marcuse precisely? I'm really not that sure. I just heard a long-haired radical mention the name. I had no idea he was of any significance at all. All these political theorists are boring because they all go off on a tangent, rather than think like rational human beings (how controversial!).

Gee Whiz, Frederick exclaimed. He was growing tired of what seemed to be a never-ending succession of conspiracy theories.

What the CIA was doing in Chile was of no concern to him, or his wife Ethel, who had a house and three kids to look after. Talk about apathy! But then Marx probably didn't have to worry about just what sort of meal to cook for hubby's boss. I'm not inferring Marx was a male chauvinist pig, but he could have been more considerate towards Ethel.

The Sino-Soviet split was now contemplating on changing sides and enlisting with the Cold War. It had always enjoyed watching the Americans jumping up and down about threats to world peace that didn't exist. MEANWHILE ... Frederick's boss was complimenting Ethel on the superb souffle she dished up. The two business magnates were now enjoying expensive Havana cigars, their thoughts many miles from the millions starving in the third world. Karl Marx wasn't any more concerned himself, he was too damn busy pondering on monolithic political theories. It makes one wonder if God really cares about human suffering to let idiots like these populate the earth. □



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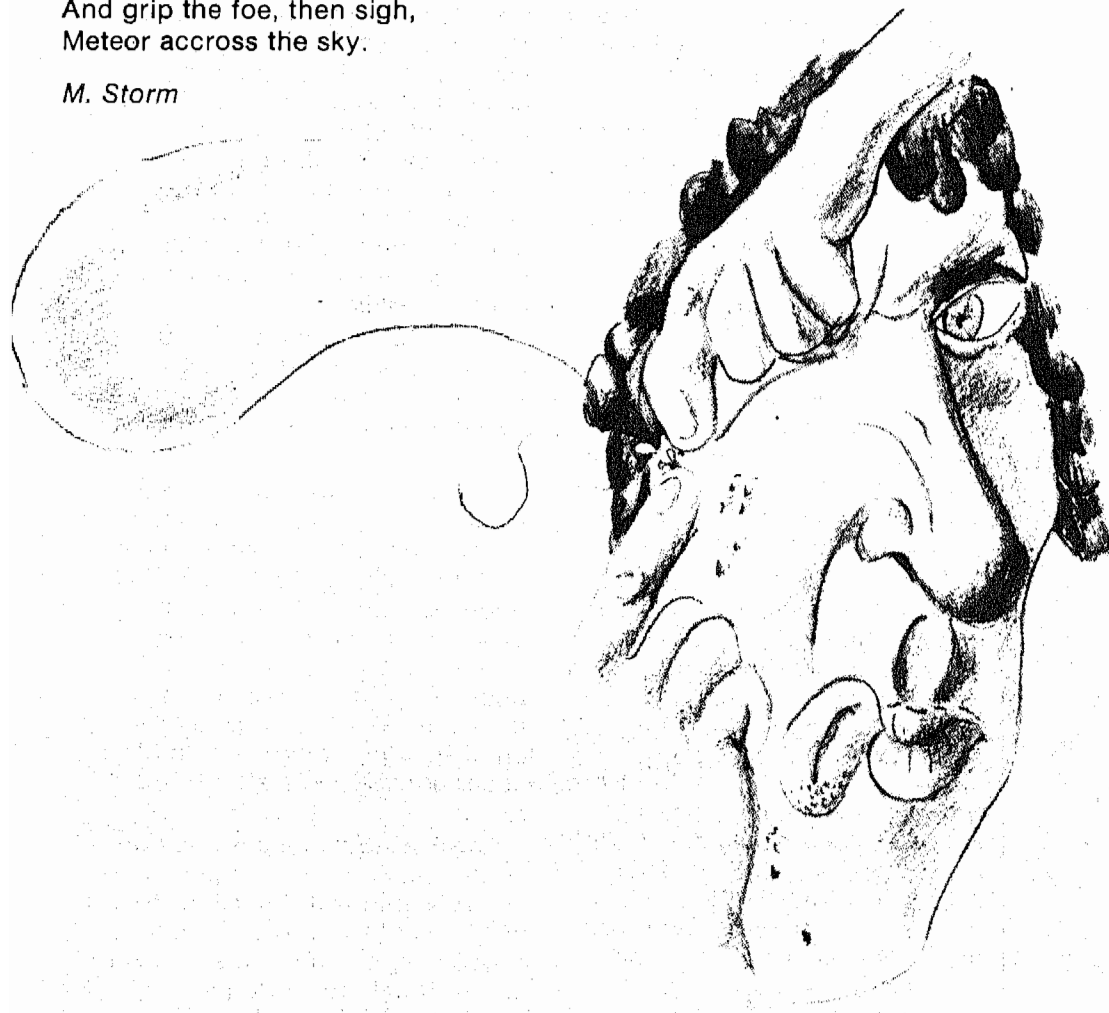
## Meteor

Red, white and obscene  
It stares at me as I stare at it,  
Foul, monstrous, unclean  
A deathly, verminous pit.

Bulbous, hideous, unsightly  
It mocks my efforts true  
With valiant heart I hold my breath  
'Till in the face turn blue.

Teeth clenched, courage high  
Feet apart, I cry  
And grip the foe, then sigh,  
Meteor across the sky.

M. Storm



FRANK AHLIN

## Fathers 1968

Today I got a telegram;  
"Your son's been killed in Vietnam".  
I read the words, and then I knew,  
That I had killed him,  
My son I slew.  
He wasn't killed by the Viet Cong,  
Nor the N.V.A.  
(Though they too were wrong).  
No; we had killed him,  
He we sent,  
Because of us he joined and went,  
Across the sea, across the sky,  
Asking not the reason why.  
(We knew no more than he.)  
Yet now I know, he had to go,  
For we before had gone;  
We asked not,  
We fought, and won.  
Won what? Won peace or victory?  
No "victory" when so many died,  
No peace, so many to avenge.  
But we had lived, we had survived.  
So now we sent our sons to war,  
To take our place, to fight some more,  
To fight and die and question not  
The lies they told us ...  
So it is, such are our ways,  
The flower is grown to be cut;  
Fathers and sons before us had known,  
But their voices were not heard.

Paul M. Walter.

## Promethea Unbound

'O! It's not like the good ol' days  
Our Roman Catholic laity,  
Our flock of sheep,  
Our goats, our ministry,  
The children He entrusted to  
Our care, our teaching.  
Isn't it a shame  
(Where point the BLAME?)  
That our women take the pill  
And have abortions!  
(They used to know that such a wish and will  
In my day led to backyard agonised contortions).  
That's partly why we've got less Faithful.  
A pity they no longer turn out in their thousands.  
They're more educated now  
And to doctrine they refuse to bow,  
Thinking that theology can't teach  
What Got within their hearts does reach.'

## Hope - The Crumbling 'Church' is Broken Manacles from the Wrists and Minds of Men.

That Form is to its content now reduced;  
From older order chaos is produced;  
And the great inspired universal edifice -  
"Supported by Thomas,  
saved by Assisi's Francis,  
Renewed by that soldier with a limp,  
She, who Voltaire would have called a pimp,  
And then, the witful imp,  
would ramble on  
To name her red-light late-night lady of Babylon,  
Which, I wis,  
she is -  
Is like a Jewess of her kind  
Whose tears of recognition so did blind  
Her unstoned sight of him, in which he seemed  
To beckon her and men-y many of her mind  
Redeemed.

At last it falls  
And to the ruins I say '—'  
for all's  
Well with the foundations.  
'Look, it'll be all right," because that rubble reveals  
A woman that feels, and kneels, and reels  
With God-sensations.  
Yes!  
God bless!

The true church  
was left in the lurch;  
The human core  
has shouldered Adam's guilt and wore  
That stiff facade,  
That front of stone, a mask so hard,  
Too the visage of an apish idol  
To her spirit - rapist homicidal.  
This leaden burden blighted bore  
The heathen Babylonian whore  
And yet  
Her smutty bawdy soul Christ's own did meet  
And by his love was met  
When with her tears most fragranc'd sweet  
She set  
To wash, in humbling 'pentence of her sins, his feet.

She is the church. Christ's 'ever-faithful bride'.  
And just because her minions number not so wide  
The high-priests fear they're letting down the side.  
But only then is when they wander as Hosea's wife  
From way, truth, light and life.  
- In making the many 'universal laws of God' so rigid  
to hold us to One Faith, they almost froze his loving frigid.

Christopher Sen

**Bremen Coffee**  
Little Theatre to Oct. 18.

Theatre in Adelaide appears to be going through something of a crisis. On the main front, the illustrious State Theatre Company is achieving new heights of mediocrity, whilst smugly pursuing an expansionist policy. Not so long ago one of the few alternatives to this monolithic lizard was provided by the University of Adelaide Theatre Guild Ensemble. Affectionately known as the Guild, it boasted a proud contingent of enthusiastic and - more importantly - talented amateurs who, through the agency of imaginative direction, produced some of the theatrical highspots of recent years.

In this tradition *Bremen Coffee*, the Guild's latest production, regrettably has no place.

Written by Werner Fassbinder about ten years ago and set in the early 19th century, the play concerns a woman who serves as particularly toxic cup of coffee. Her victims include her long-suffering mother and her two children; their presence threatens to interrupt her relationship with the man whose boudoir behaviour she most appreciates.

Interspersed with this deathly theme is considerable rhetorical holding-forth on the oppression of women, pro and con. How much of this is Fassbinder's doing is not clear; some, certainly, is the interpolation of director Noel Purdon. Whatever the source, the result is a heavy-handedness that fails to exploit the dark humour of the situation whilst at the same time being too trite to be edifying.

That it need not be so is apparent on two brief occasions in the second act, when John Edge and to a lesser degree, Sue Giles, responds with good effect to the comic potential of their respective



Malcolm Calder as Gottfried and Anna Pike as Geesche.

## BREMEN COFFEE

parts, paradoxically increasing the sense of threat in the process. It is this sense that is absent from the performance of Anna Pike as the murderess. Confronted by a part which juggles clear-sighted feminism, hopeless romanticism, homicidal pragmatism and more, she attempts a middle path which cannot really exist.

As for the other performances, they have about them a woodenness which reduces conversation to rhetoric and conflict to cliché. If this shallowness is intentional - as the introductory procession of characters in clockwork motion suggests is possible - it is as bewildering as is the inclusion of the - dare I say obligatory - male nude who supervises the opening scene from a cross on the balcony.

On the positive side, mention must be made of the Spartan effectiveness of the set, the use made of footlighting, and the clever deployment of the balcony, with John Edge as resident clergyman providing a recurring musical backdrop on an ancient pedal organ.

But, to return to my introductory

theme, what is particularly disappointing about this production is that it is done in the name of the Guild. For I think it typifies a number of traps that theatre in general and this company in particular, is in danger of sliding into.

Firstly, there is the roughness - complacency syndrome: the implicit assumption that the demanding nature of live performance means some sloppiness is only to be expected, especially from amateurs. It may be this that prompts a company to undertake a production requiring a greater number of competent actors than it has available; it may also explain competent actors turning in less than competent performances.

Secondly, there is the political pitfall, wherein a well-intentioned theatre may beleague itself with a cause it can do less than justice to. Good intentions do not assure good theatre, as both *Bremen Coffee* and its predecessor *Femination*, similarly concerned with sexism, have shown. Both were written a decade ago for shock value in their particular environments. As such, they are

part of that necessary brandishing of the unexpected that seeks to shake existing institutions out of their preconceptions, so that a new reality may be set up. Once deprived of their shock value, such tactics can become an embarrassment.

Thirdly, I venture to suggest that there is a tendency for play direction to be equated to concept-crafting above all else: the wilder the concept or adaptation, the better the direction. That it can be done extremely well, is testified to by the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* mentioned earlier. Yet a director's ultimate responsibility must remain that of constructing, with a cast, as good and coherent a production as their joint abilities can provide. If, in the changing circumstances of a company that is attempting to rebuild, this requires a revision of priorities, then so be it.

I look forward to the time when the Guild again produces something of substance to back up the great titles and posters it continues to put out. *Phil Mohr*

## SILLY GILLIES GETS THE WILLIES

Scanlan  
Theatre 62  
October 6-11

Little Theatre 1.00 p.m.  
Thursday October 9

Adelaide Uni. students are used to incompetent lecturers but a bad lecture with the difference was given in the Little Theatre Thursday lunchtime.

Actor Max Gillies played the professor, and it was a one-off, free lunchtime performance of Barry Oakley's play *Scanlan*, which the State Theatre Company had down at Theatre 62 for the week. The audience was an enthralled crowd of about forty. It deserved more. *Tim Dodd*

Afterwards I talked to Max Gillies:

**How was the reaction to the play here compared to the reception down at Theatre 62?**

Well it was good, but it was a very small audience, more like a

seminar group than a lecture situation. It was not nearly as volatile.

**I suppose there was an ulterior motive for bringing Scanlan down to the University. How did it work out? Did they take the bait?**

I got the impression not many people knew about it here. I've performed it at a number of universities now and I think it works much better in a real lecture theatre. I mean this [the Little Theatre] is a theatre rather than a lecture theatre. So it had those two things going against it today. But given that, I was reasonably happy with the response. The thing is though, the larger the audience the better it works. I had to scale the performance right down, and I wasn't sure whether I was bringing it down enough.

**Well I was stunned by the play. It was tremendous. What are the problems of holding an audience all by yourself for a period of half an hour and making them work for you?**

I think it's being sure of your material. You can't afford to have dull spots. I suppose that's true of any play but you feel much more exposed when you're by yourself, and, as you say, particularly when you have to relate directly to the audience. They are the second character in the piece, the two of you are working together. The audience has to keep feeling that they're part of the drama and if the play isn't good enough for that you lose them very quickly. No matter what gimmicks you get up to as a performer they'll just stop being part of the lecture audience. In that sense I think the play is a nice piece of writing and I'm very confident of it as a piece about a lecturer. I think all the mannerisms and the occupational hazards of lecturing are written into the play.

**Yes, I can speak for the mannerisms anyway. But as a lecturer you are a neurotic professor who has a disastrous lecture in which he destroys himself. How much is there of the real academic in that character?**

It's an extreme case certainly. The particular lecturer is at a crisis in his life and in that sense it's unusual. But I've been around to different universities and when I was working on the play with the Director, Neil Armfield, we talked about particular lecturers we knew who had these mannerisms in an extreme form. Occasionally people will come up with an example of someone who had some sort of breakdown before a class. Arguably that's not a subject for comedy, but this particular play also has a lot of sympathy for that situation.

**How was the university reaction elsewhere to the play?**

Terrific; it really was just so good. I've never done it without the audience knowing that it's a play but there was a performance of it at La Trobe Uni. a couple of years ago when Scanlan was introduced as a visiting lecturer and people were taking notes and things. I'd love to have seen that because it would really be a mixture of art and life. □