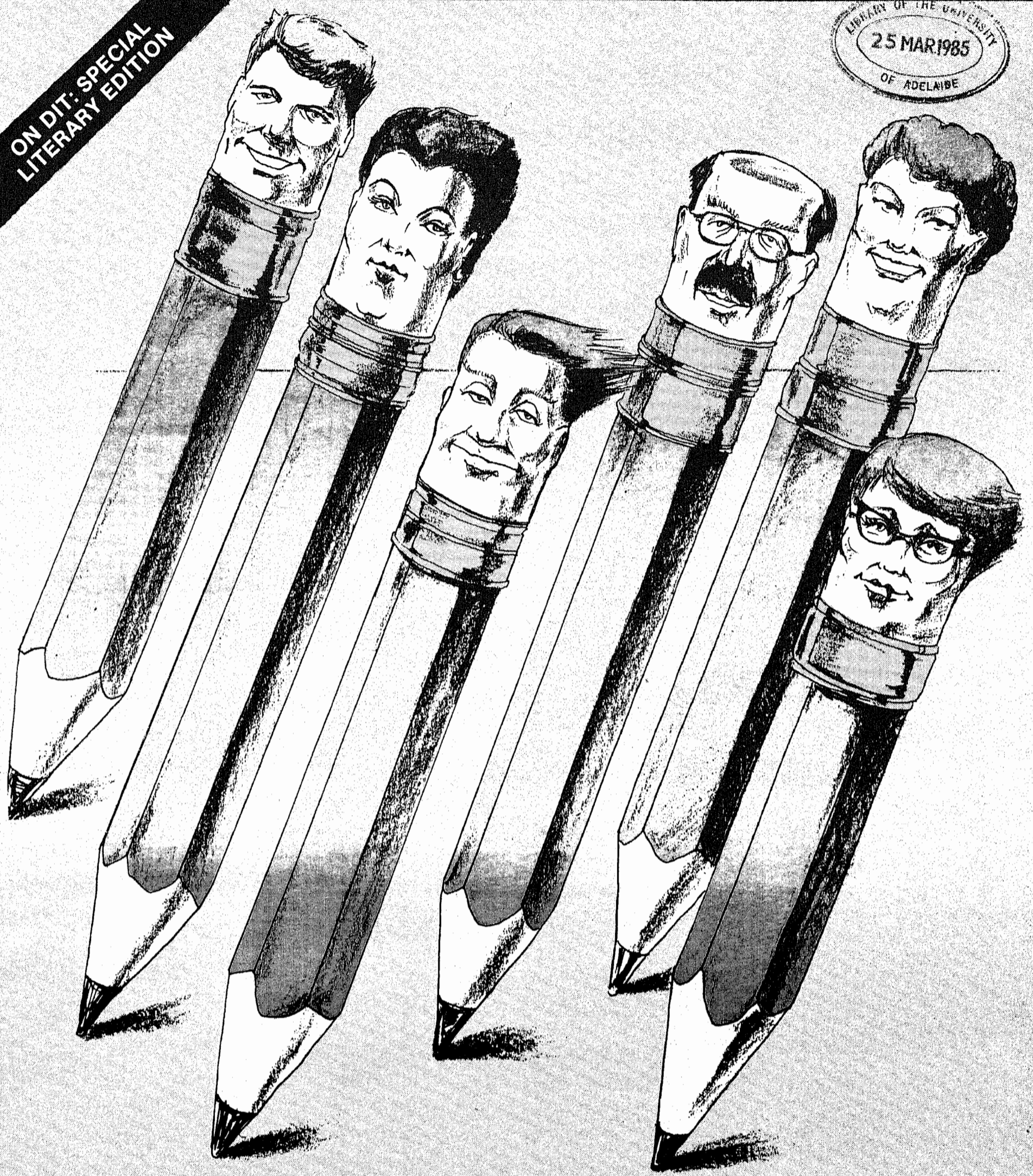


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ON DIT: SPECIAL
LITERARY EDITION



EIGHT SHORT STORIES

In this special literary edition *On dit* — the newspaper of the University of Adelaide Students' Association — publishes eight short stories by new Australian writers.

The stories are the winners and meritorious entries from *On dit's* short story competition, conducted in 1984. The winning stories have been awarded prizes as follows: \$300 first prize, \$150 second prize, and \$50 third prize.

Members of the judging panel were Dr. Robert Sellick, Mr. Andrew Taylor,

Dr. Peter Goldsworthy and the Hon. J.J. Bray.

The competition and this special literary edition were made possible through the kind assistance of the University of Adelaide Foundation, a body dedicated to supporting activities which enrich the intellectual and cultural life of the University.

This special edition of *On dit* was edited by Mark Davis and Andrew Gleeson with help from Jaci Wiley, John Tanner, Richard Dall, Ron Tomlian and Rob Tomlian.

MEMORIES OF MARLENE DIETRICH

BY DAVID RAIN

REDMOND REMEMBERED HER in London after the war. Her arrival occasioned scenes of public emotion unprecedented even in those emotional years. Noel Coward escorted her from the plane. Marlene in dark glasses, gold hair cascading, they fought through fans to a waiting limousine. She would sing bathed in pink light, her gown glittering with every move she made: she appeared to be clothed in jewels. She sang the most evocative songs of her generation. Each night she was introduced by a different celebrity: she was feted by the most influential men of our time. Her dressing room was filled with champagne and flowers. They called her: The German Who Conquered England.

MARLENE DIETRICH was travelling by rail. They had put on a special carriage. Soldiers swarmed the platform: the air was electric. Immaculate in black, her face veiled, Dietrich wound slowly through the sea of men, signing autographs, smiling sometimes. A tall man, unsmiling, moved behind her, guarding her safety: everyone wanted just to see her. Cameras were flashing. In the carriage door, Dietrich turned and waved. She lifted her veil. The frail petals of her smile fluttered softly over the crowded platform, tinting pink the yellow, electric air. Signs above displayed the names of distant cities. It was 1943.

In 1929, Marlene Dietrich starred in *Der Blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*). Directed by Josef von Sternberg, it is the most important film in the history of German cinema. Dietrich played Lola-Lola, a dissolute cabaret artiste: the legend was born. Contracts came from across the Atlantic. Maria Magdalene Dietrich would never return to the backstreets of Berlin. Gloved hand clutching a rail, she stood on the deck of a large white liner. It was a cold morning in 1930: fog was swirling and her breath came out in clouds. She clutched briefly at her throat. The shores of the fatherland were fading. Somewhere, ahead, lay Hollywood.

SHE STANDS BY THE WINDOW, suddenly alone in the dim-lit crowded room. She turns, plucking a fluted glass from a tray with long gloved fingers. She raises it briefly to her lips; then, fondling the stem, holds the glass for a moment like a rose against her breasts. Her hair shimmers softly as she stands, pensive, by the richly flowing curtains. The clinking glasses, the music and conversation seem like silence to her now.

She paces across the room, the glass discarded, her trailing gown glittering like stars in the mellow party light. She pauses, producing suddenly a cigarette; notes coolly the lingering glance of an acquaintance on the other side of the room; then, tossing back her shining hair, quickly ascends the stairs, smoke clouding the air behind her. She pauses again, momentarily, at the top of the stairs. Below, another form approaches, moving rapidly out of the darkness towards her. A voice calls above the clamour: Fraulein Dietrich!

She turns. Aloof, she hovers for several seconds, a slender silhouette framed against a lighted doorway. Slowly, one hand stroking her shining hair, famous thighs rippling beneath the lavish gown, she glides delicately down the stairs. The langorous, impossibly deep eyes survey, sardonically perhaps, the small, rather angular man who has called her name. She extends with infinite grace, a perfect, white-gloved hand. She says softly: "Why Mr. Redmond."

ONE COLD AFTERNOON Redmond took me to his room. He invited me to lie on his crumpled bed. He played me his gramophone records: then he showed me his photographs.

Marlene with Erich Maria Remarque: Hollywood, 1948. With Cary Grant: Blonde Venus, 1932. The thirties: an outrageous costume from The Devil is a Woman: in each succeeding picture, Dietrich was more extravagantly gowned and coiffured. With



James Stewart in Desire. 1954: the Cafe de Paris. An unforgettable performance: 'They call me naughty Lola': 1930. The Blue Angel. Surprised by a kiss! Marlene shows her admiration for the aging Freud.

Often she was photographed with Josef von Sternberg, the director who had discovered her. In Hollywood, they were rumoured to be lovers. Years after they had ceased working together, still von Sternberg would speak of her with the air of a man obsessed. In his declining years he would corner strangers in Los Angeles supermarkets, housewives with valium eyes or young men and women in strange modern clothes, and insist on showing them stills from his tattered celluloid visions. By Warholesque banks of Campbell's soup-cans or Kellogg's boxes he would urge with gesticulating hands: Ze merest look, ze fleeting expression, It iz — it is a vorld!

Redmond, at least, was somewhat more subdued. He appears himself in one famous photograph, one of many from the war years: a young man at the back of a crowd, almost indistinguishable, his battered slouch hat disguising his eyes. Like Dietrich, he was always mysteriously alone.

For ten years we were lovers.

IN THE LATE THIRTIES, Dietrich ignored Hitler's demands that she return to Germany. When war was declared, she disguised herself and travelled alone up the California coast, retiring for several days to a cheap hotel: she needed this loneliness. Months later, in a somewhat more illustrious locale, she stirred suddenly from hours of contemplation and drafted a letter to the U.S. Army. Unconcerned, it seemed, for her own safety, she entertained the allied troops in many parts of the world throughout those dark, anguished years that followed.

T.S. Eliot was an air-raid warden.

Even in khaki, Dietrich was still, unmistakably, Dietrich. She would sing her famous war song: *Outside the barracks, by the corner light / I'll always stand and wait for you at night ...* The British soldiers picked it up first in North Africa, and they made it their own.

After a performance in England, early in the war, Marlene experienced her first air-raid. Leaving her darkened room, as if the melancholy howl of the siren seemed to her a signal, calling her into the night, she stood watching on the hotel balcony as anti-aircraft shells exploded over the sea. A German plane dropped, flaming, from the sky.

In 1947, in Los Angeles, Marlene was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour of the U.S. War Department. Thirteen years later, she performed again in her homeland. She was attacked on stage by a woman in West Berlin. The woman screamed: "I hate you! You betrayed our country in the war!"

REDMOND COULD DISCOURSE for hours, it seemed, on the aesthetics of each photograph. *Marlene on the telephone; Marlene with cigarette holder; Marlene in top hat and suspenders.* How to describe her? A

studied unreality, said one critic. Aloof, langorous: cruel almost, sometimes.

On the wall was a shot from *Knight Without Armour* (1937). She appears stern, military even, a taunting male-female figure in dramatic black with hard unsmiling lips and hooded, magnetic eyes. This photograph was Redmond's favourite.

Poor Redmond. He was gone a few months later. His pictures, messages from another life with jagged scissored edges, were left heaped on the window-sill. On the floor were found the following materials: Michael M. Dreiser's *Marlene* (1950), the inaccurate but useful biography; *A Room of Marlene's Own*, Virginia Wolf's classic early study (1935); a Trinity College scarf and several socks; clippings from *Time* and *American Music*; six paper-clips; and drafts of a fiction, *Recollections of Dietrich*.

MARLENE DIETRICH MOVES against indistinct forms. Marlene Dietrich flickers and pulses in the vast darkened room. Marlene Dietrich moves to the centre of the screen. Marlene Dietrich moves out to meet the darkness, a yearning romanticism echoing from the hollows of her barely fleshed face.

Marlene Dietrich turns. Marlene Dietrich shines.

Marlene draws rapidly back, spinning in the arms of a cynical man; then, detaching him deftly, careers across the cabaret floor to a sweep of sweet violins, and jutting out her hands behind leans back upon a barrel, kicking out her legs to reveal, once again, the fabulous, flawless thighs.

The film flickers. Jump!

Marlene multiplies, image on image in endless array. Marlene glances: Marlene advances.

The film flickers, Jump! and her face is melting into waxen drops as her soul spreads wide across the skies into the memories and dreams of a million masturbating soldiers; into the misty eyes of Irish funeral-goers and the mysterious predictions of a lean gypsy; into whores parading in the streets of Belgrade, thick paint and boredom covering their cracking faces; into a countess with severe lips, donning dark glasses as she orders her chauffeur on a reckless course; into sailors, gathered at the sides of creaking ships as an undiscovered country fills the horizon; into the bespectacled earnest eyes of a college student drafting a surrealist story; into a scrawny child of the slums scratching squares and numbers on the pavement with a stub of broken chalk and jumping, Jump! under flapping laundry and a smoke-filled sky.

There is a flickering. Jump! The film flickers. The film flutters. The film snaps in a blaze of white.

SOME YEARS AGO Marlene Dietrich performed in Sydney, Australia. Her gown glittered with every move she made. Her face was taut and ageless. They called her: The German Who Conquered Australia. One night she collapsed on stage, long nails clawing suddenly at the curtain, hair tumbling wild. An ambulance rushed

through the streets. She was carried from the theatre, her face concealed from cameras and the searching eyes of onlookers who milled around the stage door. Several cynical women applauded as the star was sped away.

She was seventy-three years old.

REDMOND'S DISAPPEARANCE was an unexpected, unexplained affair. But I realized later I should not have been surprised.

He had to escape. It was not from me, not from the life around him he was escaping, but from some dark oppressive force that welled, deep and secret, in his own being. I found the room suddenly barren that day, dust thick on the floor where the furniture had been; a few forlorn books, a few papers the only testimonies to his presence. The bleak light of late afternoon seeped through the dirt and scraping branches that obscured the window. Marlene, from a yellowing poster, eyed me ironically from the wall. I remember that poster: her face a blur of white and black, slashing shadows.

Redmond remembered her. In London after the war.

I still think of Redmond. We were not lovers, despite what was sometimes said.

THE DARKNESS IS ALIVE with applause. Stars trailing in the air behind her, Marlene turns and blows a kiss as she vanishes from the stage. As she lingers, tired but still splendid, in the wings, Noel Coward presses her hands warmly between his. He said once: She is and will remain one of the great cultural figures of our time. Returning the pressure of his clasp, Marlene kisses him quickly on the cheek before gliding back to the waiting spotlight, and eager gaze of enamoured eyes. Still there is a thunder of applause. Among the audience are: Princess Margaret; the Oliviers; T.S. Eliot, a long-time admirer; even the aging Dr. Carl Jung, now lecturing in London.

The conductor raises his baton. The orchestra sit poised for the famous refrain. Moving to the microphone, Marlene Dietrich thinks: It is a quarter of a century since first I sang this song. Her gaze travelling among a thousand faces in the darkness, a community of love, her eyes sparkle with a warm mist and she feels a sudden elation.

Smiling, Marlene Dietrich announces: The last one. And the inevitable.

Music wells around her as she stands, glittering, in the warm pool of pink. When she leaves the stage again, for the last time, there flutters down behind her in the fading circle a single, perfect rose.

David Rain was born in Adelaide in 1961, and has been planning Great Works from an early age. Few are completed, but one previous story, "The Driver", appeared in "Ash" No. 8. David Rain studies English at the University of Adelaide, and is currently engaged in postgraduate rummaging through the works of Samuel Richardson.

THE CAR

BY STEVE DUNNE

For John A. Scott

Next morning Marcia expected her husband to be in the house at least, even if he wasn't in bed. But, not finding him, she wondered if he was still in the car. He was.

White knew this was a situation demanding bluff — probably all that he'd managed to acquire over the years. So as Marcia walked into the garage he offered her a cup of coffee; cooked on the primus stove he'd set up level with the back of their station wagon. Marcia took the cup, almost by reflex.

"What's all this?" she said, probably expecting a simple, partly humorous answer. White frowned. He looked at the coffee Marcia held, noticing the steam that rose from it.

"James?" she was a little more insistent, perhaps realising that something was not quite right. She looked down at her coffee, reassured by its normality.

"I suppose you should know straight off," White began carefully, "I've been thinking a bit, and've decided to stay here in the car... for a little while," he added, as a concession to her confusion.

Marcia stared at him, then looked into the car and saw the blankets, books and food White had arranged there — wincing at what was apparently his self-made plumbing system.

"But what ... what's it for?"

White shrugged: "I just want to stay here, that's all."

Marcia looked into the car again, then out the garage door.

The conversation had ended, it seemed. She put the cup of coffee she hadn't touched down on the tailgate of the car.

"Well, I'm going to go up and make some breakfast ... Do you want some?"

White lay back against his pillows: "No, I've already eaten. Bacon and eggs." He smiled.

Marcia nodded and walked back up into the house, only once looking back.

That Saturday passed uneventfully. White was a little surprised at the calm with which Marcia had taken his decision, but was aware that this would probably change. He spent most of the day reading poetry, which was

something he'd never really had a leaning for. Yet he quickly found himself enjoying the turns different authors took and where they led him. Glad for the space the station wagon allowed him he would sometimes lie on his back, staring at the ceiling, thinking about how he could look at his life differently. Or he would turn over onto his stomach and look at the backyard, like a scientist staring at a photograph of another world.

Several times through the day Marcia looked out the back window, trying to make up her mind what he was doing; deciding that it was best to leave him alone for a while. White noticed her there a few times and resisted the impulse to wave.

Just after sunset Marcia came down from the house and asked White if he was comfortable or if he wanted anything — more because she wanted a reason for entering the garage again. Such things seemed fairly safe subjects to her. White thanked her and said he was very comfortable and had everything he wanted. Marcia paused for a moment, deciding whether to say anything.

"James, are you alright?"

"Yes, perfectly good," he replied calmly. She smiled uncertainly.

"You still want to stay in the car?"

"Yes."

They stared at each other for a moment. Then Marcia, feeling somehow defeated, said goodnight and went back into the house. She was sure that her husband would be back to normal by morning — having a middle class faith in the forces of 'equilibrium' as far as seemingly meaningless aberrations of behaviour are concerned.

Friday, the night before, and the car had rolled down the driveway with Marcia at the wheel. White sat in the passenger seat; told he'd had a 'sufficient amount' to drink. He'd had more than anyone thought. Because when the others had gone into the back garden he'd excused himself, saying he wanted to look about the library. The books, wood panelling, or degrees perched on the wall had not interested him. Instead he'd sat drinking whisky while staring out at the neat, plainly rich street.

The car rolled into the garage, its door opened by remote control. Marcia switched off the ignition and sat back, sighing. White remembered that she'd said something then, her voice sounding like a thick and distant dog's bark in the heavy summer's night: "Isn't it funny. Sometimes when you come to the end of a journey you just want to sit for a while..." White's head lay back on top of the seat, giving in, and for a moment his eyes blinked at the roof; as if trying to recognize something there. His mouth flapped open, about to speak, but he remained silent. Marcia climbed out of the car;

"I'll put a cup of tea on," she said "James? Are you coming?"

White raised his head — staring at one of the few marks on the windscreen:

"Just sit here for a while."

Marcia went up into the house wondering if he was going to be sick. The car wasn't the best place for him, but what could she do?

Forty minutes later White's tea was still on the kitchen table — cold, with the milk forming a film on the top. Going down to the garage Marcia found him asleep on the front seat. She left him there, knowing what he was like when woken from a drunken slumber, and went back into the house to watch television — a repeat of *Doctor Zhivago*.

When White woke he wasn't sure what time it was or how long he'd been lying there. Sitting up he felt none of the after effects

alcohol usually had on him; rather a very clear view of the day just gone. He remembered the visit to his boss' house. The guy had only been at the shipping firm for three years, but it was always the case of 'isn't it better to do it this way, Jim?'; 'Oh yes, I remember this concept'. Concept-model - theory. God. The attitude fitted in with the champagne-before-and-cognac-after image. Marcia loved it, but twenty five years seemed too long for anything.

White shifted to the driver's side of the car. From there he could look out the garage windows and see the suburb; the lights; the top of an 'Amoco Petrol' sign on the main road a few streets away; their next door neighbour's caravan, which had lately been occupied by their second daughter and her husband — saving their money for a trip to Europe or somewhere. The sounds that reached White were heavy with the veneer of the night's heat; carrying a sense of absence.

It was dark; the garage door and windows forming a screen to the outside world. White felt as if he were sitting in a theatre: unseeing and unfeeling in the moments between the lights dimming and screen lighting up. He wished he could talk now, could tell Marcia of his feelings; of the isolation he sensed. But all there'd be, all there'd ever be, was her little chuckle and the words 'Oh dear, you shouldn't worry about things like that'.

White stared out across the car bonnet, thinking of the firm he had spent twenty five years working for; the realisation long ago that he'd never be a rising star there; forgetting his hopes of making it to the top. Finding that his thinking was pedestrian and methodical rather than incisive; that he never would be rich — never would make the 'big score' he had so often talked and thought of. All there'd ever be was an acknowledgement of competence. Year by year. Layer by layer. Wondering where he had actually been heading; then not wondering. He could now look forward to the slow decline into retirement and all the clichés of departure from work — too many to mention. Then a pension; the years of old age.

It must have been midnight, and White slowly eased the release catch on the front seat and laid it flat, then did the same for the back. He sat with his legs spread wide, thinking. It was then he remembered what Marcia had said: 'Halfway between where you've come from and where you're going to.' This was a good thought. A relaxing thought. For White it was a safe thought.

At one o'clock Marcia came down from the house. She had been reading and realised that White was still in the car rather than in bed. She saw him asleep and, shaking her head, pulled the light car blanket over him. When she had gone White sat up, having watched through slit eyes her reaction: the resigned disapproval; the resigned indulgence. He didn't want to go up into the house just yet, especially not now when he'd be cast under her suspicions of 'were you awake?'. He felt comfortable in the car, being able to sit there without the pressures of Marcia or work or his normal, habitual life. The funny thing for him was that he'd ridden in that car so many times and hadn't felt anything even vaguely like this. It was one of those variables some people call 'life' — branding it as typical: the same as the fact that soon White would read and understand translated French poetry for the first time in his life.

What waited for him? In the house was a Saturday with a leaky tap in the laundry which he would try again to fix and would fail. A Sunday where he would read the

papers a.m. and watch television — thinking vaguely of attending church, which was an idea he'd been toying with lately. Then turning up to work on Monday and answering his boss' questions, playing that role with the correct degree of service. Was that where it had all been heading? His youth was gone — he knew that much — but what did he have now? White switched on the car's interior light and pulled at the rear vision mirror, pulling it off the windscreen. He stared at his face. Saw everything thrown there. He was an old man, he saw. He was an ageing man. He was the kind of person he'd once laughed at on buses and trains. And now he'd arrived, or was on his way there with little chance of escape. He looked about the car. Perhaps this was his only respite from this unnoticed decline; a last chance to see anything with clarity. But surely he could do something — surely to realise what was happening would allow him to change it. But when he looked down the mirror was still in his hand; his face unchanged by all these revelations.

"You're ugly..." he said quietly. And the secretary he'd thought of trying to have an affair with sprung into his mind; and the cute filing clerk before that; that woman at the bus stop; the shop assistant. He now knew he'd never really had any chance with them — even if he had tried. But he never did, always hiding behind the idea of being a responsible family man. And even that now seemed a lie. Now there was only the one or two visits a month, if that; the calls on birthdays and anniversaries; possibly getting a middle name if your son or daughter had a boy.

Listening to the distant sounds of traffic he heard the revved engines and the occasional skidding tyres; imagined the occasional crashes gone and to come. He looked around the interior of the car, at its sense of containment and remoteness. White closed his eyes:

"Yes," he whispered, "Yes."

Outside the garage White felt a strange sense of space which was uncomfortable. He wanted to get this over with. Creeping up the back steps he slipped in through the door, leaving behind the crisp, oppressive air of the early morning. Inside he felt like a rodent — rustling through the storeroom grabbing blankets and pillows, finding some books; to the kitchen getting food and drink. Once he thought he heard Marcia stirring in the bedroom, but went on with the task. After tying together his bundles in the blankets White searched through Marcia's bag and found her keys to the car. There was a spare key to the garage somewhere but it had been put in a 'handy place' he'd forgotten — or Marcia hadn't told him. With his bundles placed against the back door White stood for a moment indecisive, then walked back into the bedroom.

Marcia was spread out on the bed. If he'd been there he would be lying awake wishing she would move. He'd done that kind of thing for twenty five years all for the right to make love to his wife. He stared at her, as if this would make a difference, and opened his mouth to speak, to wake her, but turned and walked out of the room.

In several hours Marcia would wake and look for her husband in the house, only to find him still in the garage, still in the car.

On Sunday morning Marcia found the garage door closed, but was relieved to find it unlocked. White, having already eaten breakfast, was propped up beside the car's open back reading some poems by a Frenchman called Baudelaire. One of the books that had been in the pile he'd picked up.

"How are you this morning, James?"

White hardly stopped reading: "Good, thank you."

Marcia slowly put her hands on her hips, watching him.

"James, can I ask what you're really doing?"

White was a little alarmed at Marcia's directness, and knew that the calm with which she'd accepted his decision yesterday had faded. He pretended vagueness:

"Reading. These French poets are rather good — there's a few of them here. Must belong to one of the kids."

White held up the book and Marcia could not help looking at it,

"I think it must be Jennifer's..."

White stared up at the roof of the car,

"Jennifer? Oh yes. But listen to this: 'The clock, a sinister, terrifying, inscrutable God, whose finger threatens us, crying Remember'. It's good, isn't it."

Marcia only narrowed her eyes a little, taking a few seconds to frame her next question.

"Can I ask if you're ready to come out yet?"

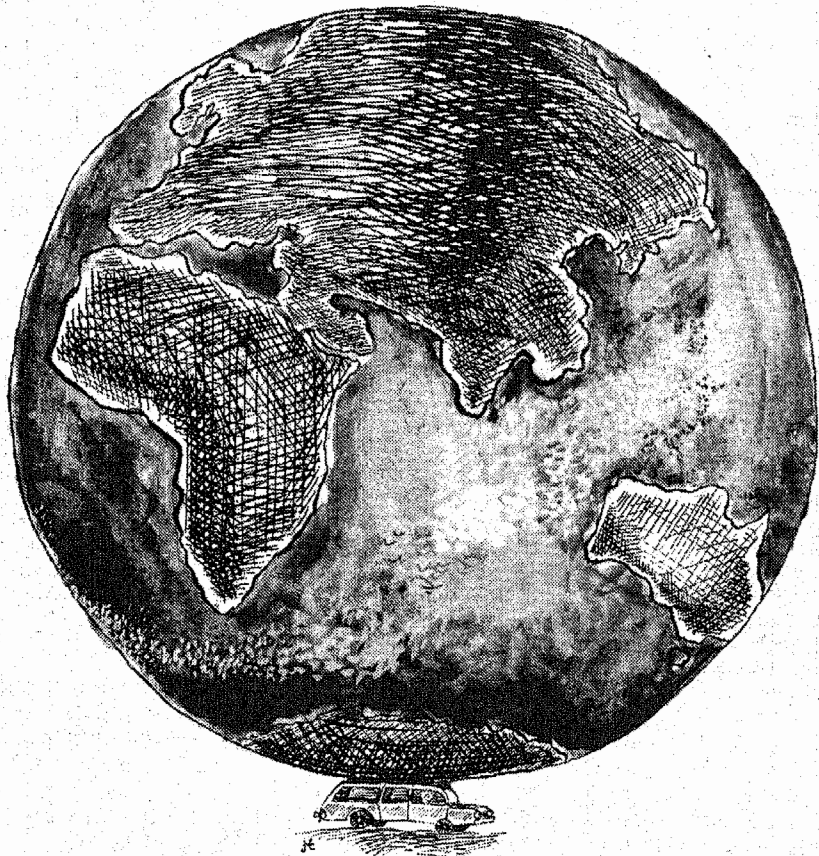
"You can ask," White replied. He knew that onwards his wife would be a formidable opposition.

"James, is this some kind of joke," she said, her tone patronising, "Please tell me."

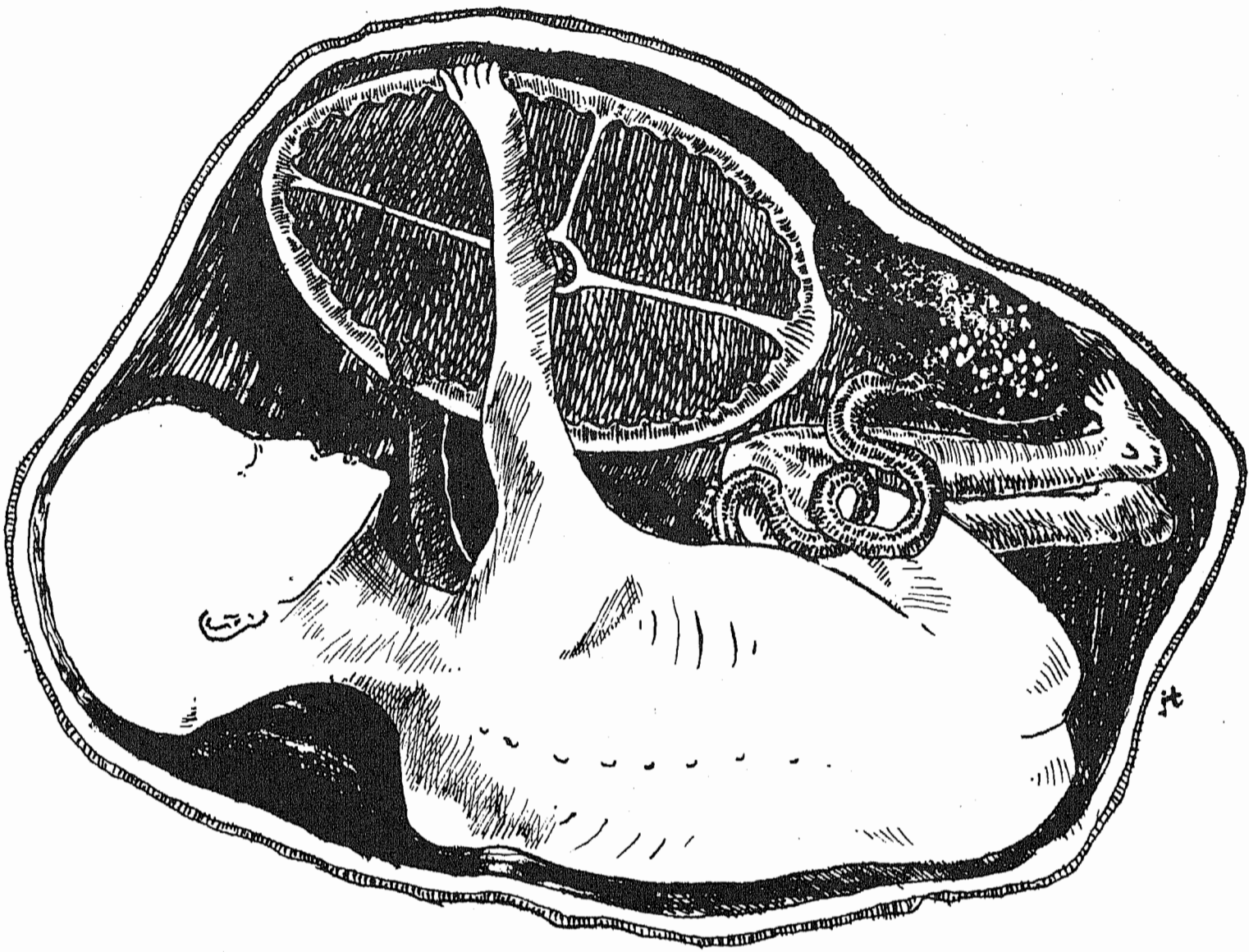
White shook his head: "It's no joke. I just want to stay here for a little while."

Marcia paced from one side of the car to the other. She stopped and stared at White.

"Look, I don't know why you want to stay in



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the car, but it *can't* be indefinite; you've got to come out sometimes, haven't you?" White only looked at her. Marcia smiled at him: "And anyway you'll have to get out of there soon — or have you forgotten that the Company Lunch is on today?"

White sat up, putting down his book. He'd forgotten about the Company Lunch — the annual showing off of expensive dresses and such. He wasn't overly concerned, but thought it an unwanted complication.

Marcia, the Company Lunch is really the last thing on my mind right now..."

"Oh for God's sake!" Marcia cut in. White closed his eyes for a second, then continued, "Can't you understand that all I want to do is stay here for a while. Can't you leave me alone?"

"Can't I understand? To tell you the truth, — no. I can't understand anything about all this." She shrugged "Look, I'm going up to get ready for the luncheon, because we have to leave in two hours. I hope you'll follow me up so we can forget this little joke of yours and have a fairly pleasant afternoon."

White watched her stride across the lawn, up the stairs, and in through the back door. He shifted forward, but only to recover his book. Turning its pages White thought of his decision to stay in the car.

"No joke," he said quietly.

It would be wrong at this point to think White lacking in resourcefulness. When his wife came down to the garage an hour later, angry, intent on getting him out of the car, he was ready for her.

"Marcia, I'm going to ask you not to enter the garage," he called, his wife stopped: "For hygiene reasons I've set up a plumbing system in here. I won't bore you with the details, but part of it involves having the garden hose on with the spray gun fixture attached. Apart from dripping a bit it's an effective weapon which I won't hesitate to use."

Marcia surveyed the situation from a distance of ten meters. She had a look on her face that White had rarely, if ever, seen. She spoke with authority:

"I'll only say this once. You can see I'm wearing the dress you gave me two hundred dollars to buy, and that I've done my hair for this afternoon. I'm also very tired of this whole act. So I'm sure that considering all this you won't use that hose because I'm coming into that garage right now."

Marcia was wrong. White was long past caring about two hundred dollar dresses, hair dos, or what his wife thought. He watched her run into the house, crying, and knew that this was only the beginning.

The door of the garage was closed. Its lock and mechanism had been jammed with a few handfuls of nails — a hammer had

finished off the job. White lay back on the pillows and turned his head to the side. He felt now that he had some control of things — even if it was only within the car. It was part of a calm his wife had failed to disturb; a calm he didn't want to lose. He knew the boundaries of his life then, felt suspended there. Again White remembered what his wife had said: 'Halfway between where you've come from and where you're going to'. White smiled.

And then there was a banging. A knocking on the garage door. White half decided to ignore it, but whoever it was wouldn't go away.

"James?" he heard his wife call, "Our friend Mr. Hall's here!"

That boring mechanical engineer from next door, White thought. There were a few seconds of silence. The garage door rattled.

"James," his wife repeated, "James, there appears to be something wrong with the door."

White thought about this for a moment. He wondered what was going on out there between his wife and his neighbour, though he was indifferent to it. Hall was there for moral support, perhaps for physical support, certainly for use as a weapon of embarrassment. White cleared his throat:

"As both of you probably already realise, there is nothing wrong with the door: I've jammed it so no one can get in. I want to retain my privacy, and this seems to be the only way I can do so."

It only took a few seconds for the thick, brooding face of White's neighbour to appear at the garage window.

"James. What is it? A problem? Surely it's better to talk."

White had taken up his book again: Baudelaire was telling him of the Voyage.

"Look, things like this aren't that uncommon for men of your age," Hall continued, "It's nothing that can't be helped, or cured — at least — I mean..."

White turned a calm eye on him, "Tom, please ask my wife to show you out. You're not welcome here."

Hall's face disappeared from the window. A minute later Marcia looked in, her expression angry and tired — a variation on an already established theme.

"I hope you're having fun, because I certainly am not," she shook her head, "Well you may have your day today, but come tomorrow it'll all be over. And when tomorrow comes you'll regret you started this and that you put me through this. Just think about that."

She left White in his car, and he felt no regret at her departure. At least he wouldn't be bothered for the rest of the day. He'd be alone and would enjoy it.

Dinner for White on that Sunday night was a quiet event. He cooked defrosting steak on

his primus, burnt it a little, and ate it with a piece of lettuce and carrot. It was the best meal he'd had for years, he thought. When he'd been younger, he now remembered, this calm was the kind of thing he'd wanted to share with the woman he'd been in love with — whoever it was. But this had all been torn from him, that kind of thinking. Every excursion into 'mature life' had killed another belief he'd held close: first religion (when he was young); then sex (one of the worst to go); then romantic love (a long process); then marriage. It had all come down to worrying about small things — investments for old age, his golf game. Then even these had gone.

But it didn't seem to White that any of these things were as important now. All he regretted at that moment was that he couldn't open the garage door and hear the sunset. Out there was the last whistles of a paper boy in the street; the slow rhythm of summertime insects starting up; the final calls of children moving indoors, leaving the sun outside. The lamplight of a fading sun being replaced by the lamplight of streets; houselights flicking on; meals being cooked; the communal meals with the young. These were his dreams — the future he once thought he could possess. Marriage, fatherhood and, soon, old age. Happiness, or so he had thought. But for now there was only the car; not part of the things that had built up around him, not part of the death he'd put up with.

But where could he go from here? The following morning Marcia would turn up and break into the garage, and knowing her it would be with some plainly public help — the fire department or something. And he would have to leave behind his car; his peace; the poetry he'd only just started reading, which only in these past few days he'd been able to appreciate. He would be born again, painfully. Pushed out, analysed, claimed to be fit, would go back to work, die a few weeks or months or years before or after retirement. Was that the way? To be continually crying out for a place of safety which he could never again find? And always watched. Always laughed at. Forever having to put up with car jokes. White grabbed at the steering wheel; stared out the garage window at the evening star. When he was young he'd done astronomy — telling people that he'd journeyed millions of light years through space; that he could imagine what it was like out there. But it had never really been like that. His lack of imagination had always proved too much of a barrier to the concept of losing himself in any experience. And now he'd finally come face to face with himself or, at least, with what his life had made him. He compared this to what he really felt; what he really wanted to be; to his options. White looked down at the ignition switch; at its key. It seemed an even easier decision.

one of the pipes from the plumbing system White had set up. Then he taped this to the exhaust pipe and ran it through the back window. All the windows were secured, and it only remained for the back swinging door to be closed. White stopped for a few seconds. There was still time to step free, he knew. But what could be given to him now? He couldn't run anywhere; and he felt he'd seen too much to go back. All there'd be was the laughing secretary. And, he thought, his wife, as he shut the back swinging door. His neighbours and their sympathy as he crawled to the front seat. A rebirth into a world he didn't want as he put his hand on the key and turned on the ignition.

He sat without thinking for many minutes as if he had all the time in the world. Godlike, he thought. Imperturbable. He was in control. So his head was starting to spin, but that was alright. Perhaps the whisky — probably cheap — the expensive manicured street. It looked so rich you might be able to find dollar or twenty dollar bills on the lawns. He couldn't remember drinking that much but of course he must have. He was in the car now, though it wasn't moving. His wife wouldn't hear him leaving either, because the car was well tuned. He wondered what time it was. It was all like something you watch on a video: when someone does something — makes some kind of decision or ends a story or resigns. Even though the secretary would laugh and say that you couldn't write poetry for a living. But Jennifer had never been his secretary — she was his daughter, he was sure. Perhaps when he died — if he died, because he had lately become something like a God — she would look on him as something of a Jesus figure. His balding head — and only his head — staring down from her mother's bedroom wall. He was coughing too much to be drunk. He thought something about ... wondered if he should turn the engine off now. Whether he'd had enough. But he couldn't move. Couldn't even kick out at Hall who was in bed with his wife now, and they'd somehow got into the car, though miles... kilometers away. And Baudelaire was there telling him that he should remember. Remember. What? White was slurring his words like he shouldn't have — like he'd been told he shouldn't have when he was little. Remember? Millions of light years away an insect voice said 'I am already you past'. But no, that wasn't it. 'Stay if you can stay.' Yes. 'Go if you must.' Yes. He remembered. He was millions of light years away now. He'd stayed and he'd arrived, he knew. And he closed his eyes.

Steve Dunne was born in 1961 in Sydney. After attending school and working he went to the Canberra College of Advanced Education in 1982 to study professional writing and media. He is currently a TV scriptwriter in Sydney.

It took only a few minutes to disconnect

WING WALKING

BY BARRY WESTBURG

Let me be frank. I don't want to tell this story. I'm afraid it doesn't reflect very well on me and on...certain relatives. It concerns the time my father tried to establish my brother and me in a useful trade. It does not reflect very well on my father's judgement — I say this in retrospect, for at the time all the failures I thought to be my own — that the occupation he chose to initiate his two sons into was wingwalking.

"Wingwalking?"

Correct.

"You mean, like, uh...walking on the wings of an airplane?"

Uh-huh, particularly when it's in flight, at around five thousand feet or so. But — not to worry — it was a slow old biplane, with lots of struts and things to hang onto.

You've got to understand the context. The Midwest of the United States was full of fanatics just after World War Two. Most folks were fanatics about something that was just coming on, they were crazy about FLIGHT. In the late thirties the craze was airplane racing. Then, come the late forties, it was stunt flying, and gee-whiz type airshows. We had one in Des Moines about every weekend or so.

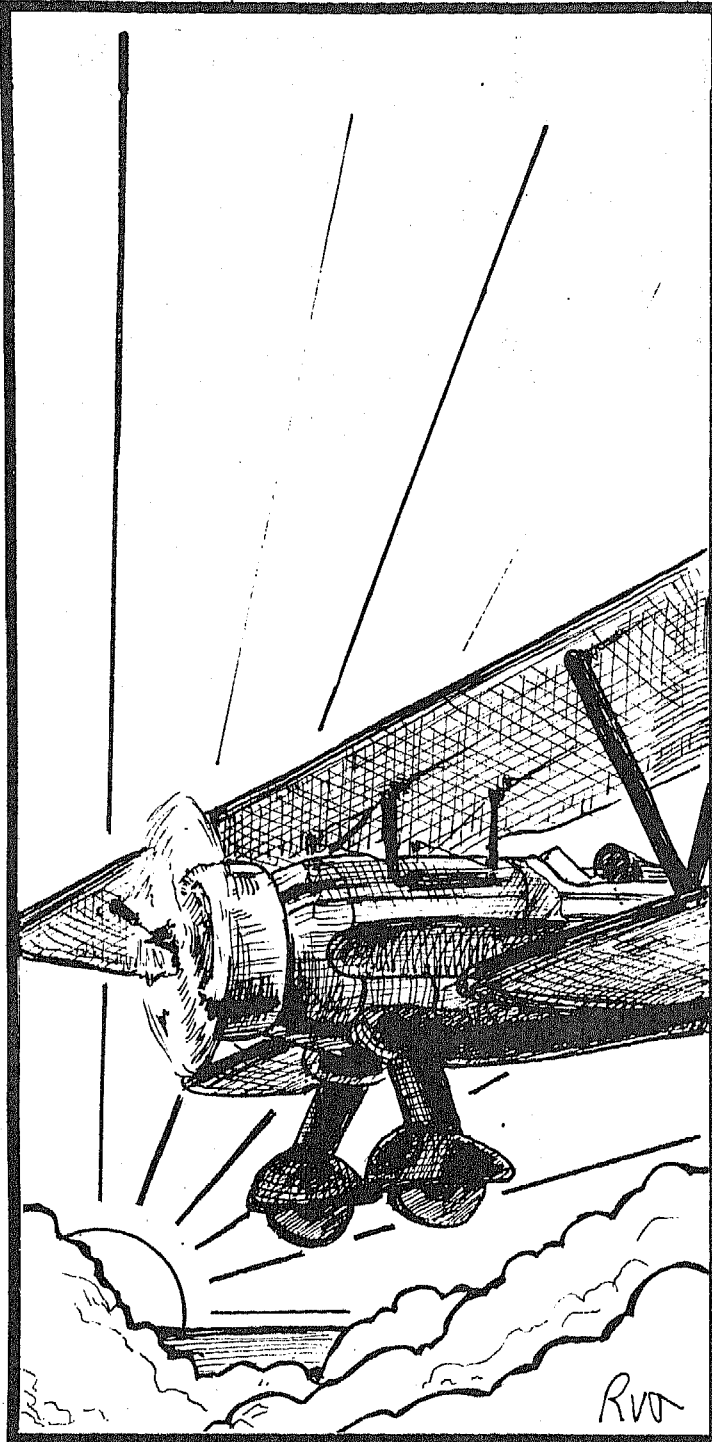
Maybe your family goes to the beach for the weekend, or...maybe you play a little football. Well, our families would be out at the local "field" by dawn, and we'd all be tinkering with aircraft and taking them up for a spin.

You should have seen some of the bizarre shapes and sizes those planes came in. Most of them were homemade, or partly so. Cessnas ... Piper Cubs — those were for the impossibly wealthy, the aristocrats.

Which all goes to remind me that another symptom of the flight fever of the times was the springing-up, all over the Midwest, of colleges of "aeronautical engineering." These were about as common then as Kentucky fried chicken franchises are now. "Pratt/Whitney Institute of Aeronautical Engineering," "Curtis Wright Institute," "McGeorge Institute," and so on. Most of them were shopfronts with a patch of landing strip behind. Usually a couple of planes partly assembled would be out there in the "hangar." These were being built as student projects. It was like doing a thesis, except that you had to FLY the completed project before you were awarded your B.A. in aeronautical engineering.

My father's buddy, "Buzz" Curtis, who had gone through most of the war with him, took his GI Loan and founded the North American Aeronautical Institute, which was a couple of sheds behind the main runway of the Des Moines airport. That's where we picked up our first biplane. The price tag was a steep 500 bucks, but the idea was that we could paint it ourselves...and of course do the first "air-testing" — the "North American Chickenhawk" had never been taken up. The student who designed it had dropped out of college shortly before completing the project and a few first-year students were trying to finish it for him. The dropout had run off to Paris, Ohio, to join the flocks of poets and writers who were presumed to be languishing in exile there.

We took delivery of the North American Chickenhawk as soon as it was finished (or very nearly so). Buzz Curtis towed it over to my father's hangar with an International Harvester. My father paid him 300 on the spot and gave him a post-dated check for another seventy-five. If Buzz could wait a few days for the rest of the money my father would throw in a side of beef just to sweeten the deal. We would be flying up to my grandfather's farm on our first trip and we could bring the beef back in the plane — somehow. Grandpa had promised us a side or two from his next killing. Grandpa always kept his feet on the ground.



In those days, the magic of flight had contaminated even our names. Everybody had a nickname like "Buzz" or "Speed" and the common form of greeting was "Hey-y-y, Ace!" Even though I didn't learn to fly until I was eight or nine or so, I affected many of the mannerisms of airshow fliers, who, in those times of peace, were the true knights of the air. You had to wear your hair long, to create a "mane" effect, which could then be "windblown." I wanted to change my name to Buzz, or at least to "Chazz," but this met with resistance from my mother, who evidently had taken some pains in choosing my original name. My own name (Percy) seemed unheroic; I coveted my brother's: "Ron" seemed to have a good flier's ring to it.

My father's hangar, truth to tell, was in fact the property of the Army Air Corps. Because he was the leader of the local Air National Guard Squadron he felt entitled to park the North American Chickenhawk alongside the Douglas Dauntlesses, the Voight Corsairs, the Mustangs, the Thunderbolts — all the obsolescent fighter planes we spent our waking hours tuning up and flying. In the days B.C. (before Chickenhawk) we logged a lot of air time flying those riddled survivors of a war we never knew except through our fathers. After loading the wing guns with tracers and blanks we'd fly around the countryside zapping dogs cows and people. The gas was free: compliments of the Army Air Corps. My father was no casuist and so could not be expected to ponder the fine line between his personal hobbies and the perhaps wider mission of the postwar air arm of the United States.

The Chickenhawk arrives and we finish her up, painting her a nice pumpkin color. That afternoon the old man takes her up and tries every stunt in the book with her, just testing her out. She does most things a plane can do in the air but not without protest: she creaks, hisses, grumbles and heaves eldritch sighs. Then the old man takes me and Ron up in her and we fly over the farmlands, upside down, for half an hour or so, to see if anything will shake loose, as all the groaning struts portend. We fly over my great-grandfather's old homestead, a haunted, scenic place now known as Devil's Backbone State Park. My Great Aunt Kate Newberry's old house is down there, three stories high, Victorian style, where she still keeps three or four "girls," including — of most interest to us boys — a cook.

We fly over at about 100 feet altitude, still upside down, and spot the cook herself, a black woman who looks like the original Aunt Jemima. She's on her way to the

chickenhouse or the "outhouse" we can't make out which. We whiz past, eight miles an hour, upside down, fanning our ears and thumbing our noses. She emits a throaty squawk (rolling her eyes, so help me) followed by a drawn-out squeal as she runs for her mistress. Our first mission accomplished.

And now, below us, the fabled troutstreams of the Devil's Backbone wink — as if inviting us to return to an era that would never return for us: camping in the bayou, diving off the roof of the houseboat, racing swampbuggies, dipping for crawdaddies and all that midwestern boyhood stuff.

Flight was our thing. And now, perhaps BEYOND flight, was — wingwalking. "You boys will have to do something to DISTINGUISH yourselves," the old man said. "The best thing I can think of is to do something at the airshows that nobody else has the nerve to do. Something that takes skill, because any jerk can risk his life; it's how you risk it that makes folks take notice of you."

My brother and I — or at least I — pondered this advice (redolent of the sententiousness in which all parental utterances in America are couched), though we knew that once dad had made up his mind there was no arguing possible: Like the time somebody paid off an old debt to him by giving him a truckful of canteloupes. He decided he would develop our sales abilities. We had to sell them door to door for the next week. It would be salubrious for us to conquer the fear of rejection by facing it for ten hours a day seven days a week. We had to pretend to be supersalesmen to neighbours who were heartily sick of us from the Christmas card and magazine sales campaigns we had mounted earlier.

Nothing could save you from one of my father's schemes, especially if he thought it was educational.

And... was it good to have folks "take notice" of you? Why should you WANT folks to "take notice" of you? My father assumed that life was all display and competition. It was not until we listened to the wingwalking proposal that we (or I) began to question certain of the old man's values.

Making people take notice of you... That might explain why my father got shot down THREE TIMES while flying daytime missions over Germany. The Luftwaffe noticed him. And so did the townsfolk of Eselsdorf when they paraded him through the streets as a captive airman. He regarded that near-lynching, actually, as a kind of highwater mark of public attention. For him, being

noticed was all-important, a kind of signature of divine election. He came from true Calvinist stock.

Ron and I were either elect or reprobate, he didn't as yet know. That he was elect was by now fairly certain to him. To be the only survivor of three military (and one civilian) plane crashes was his (partial) proof. But election could be taken away somehow, or could be mistaken: I forget how this all worked, if I ever did understand it. I used to know a girl, when I was in my twenties, who had also survived three plane crashes and they were all commercial airline flights and she thought so little of her chances at election that she decided to give up flying, even though this would surely mar her career as an archaeologist. She decided to confine herself for the rest of her life to digging up the La Brea tarpits outside LA.

All this brings us back to my brother Ron and me and the awful burden that was being strapped on us by a father who had spent an entire life of hair-raising adventure in a state of perpetual and maniacal cheerfulness.

Ron was always his willing slave: as a nine-year-old who has formed few lasting opinions can be; but I was a year older and beginning to ... question the old man. This caused acute embarrassment to Ron who was beginning to look upon me as a monster of filial impropriety.

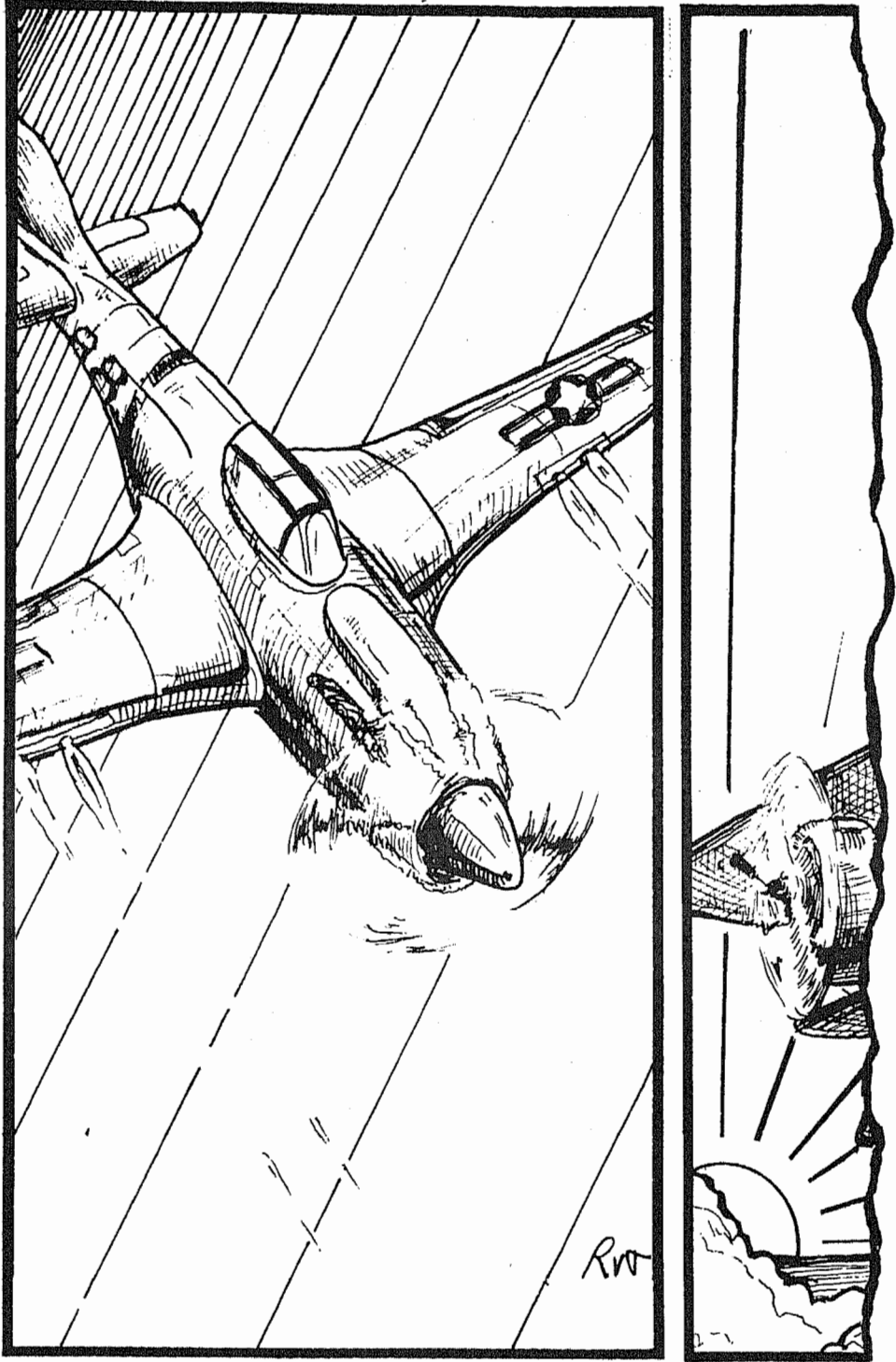
The day we were to begin wingwalking was in August. The seasonal hurricanes were not expected to give us any trouble. There was just the oppressive humidity to deal with, and once we got up aloft in the North American Chickenhawk this would not bother us quite so much. I have a tendency to perspire easily even in the mildest of circumstances but I was soaked with sweat when we took off. The cockpits were open of course and this exposed us to a comfortable airflow, but the sweat was still whipping off my flyer's mane into my brother's face.

Each of us had been tossed a little chute pack by the old man — but contemptuously. A chute was a useless prophylactic. What danger was there? What danger, for chrissake, could there be?

Thus he scorned showing us how to use it. Come the crunch, any good intuitive boy would be able to figure out which cord to pull. And any boy of his...well it was evident, wasn't it?

And so he tossed us the chute packs — which he had picked up from an army

CONT. PAGE 7



FROM PAGE 6

surplus sale. He had never tested them anyway.

Lighting one of his beloved Churchillian stogies he mumbled something to the effect that all the army had to do was to find one moth in an entire warehouse and they would condemn the contents. That's how come the chutes were sold so cheaply (to be used for making curtains and pinafores and the like) and that is why they had stamped on them, CONDEMNED.

With that word on our backs Ron and I took off, with Dad up forward doing the flying. It was heartening to recall that Dad had never had to bail out in any of his mishaps. He had always gone down with the ship and walked away with hardly a scratch.

Dad would turn around every few minutes and shout instructions to us, but he might as well have been in a silent movie. His hand gestures were easier to read but still ambiguous, perhaps because he was also waving his cigar. The blowing ashes (as usual) were scorching our eyes but we got used to that when we travelled with him, be it in car, train, speedboat or plane.

He had as yet no finalized plan as to how we would stage the actual definitive wingwalking. He would work it out during the climb to five thousand feet and announce the details once we made our . . . uh . . . rendezvous.

"Rendezvous?"
Well, yes. . . Buzz Curtis was going to take up his cropduster, (a plane of similar pedigree to the North American Chickenhawk) and "rendezvous" with us directly over Des Moines. My father was no conscious symbolist but the exact point of rendezvous was to be over the Equitable Life Assurance Society offices, the highest building in Iowa (ten stories). We would then fly in a triangular path using the Swedish Cemetery and Mercy Hospital as our points of reference.

What we were supposed to do, as I say, was not worked out in detail, since we were doing something relatively novel. . . for which the book had not been written — yet.

Now we see a biplane with a redheaded, woody woodpeckerish man flying it. My father waves his cigar showering his sons with hot ashes. Buzz waves back and clasps his hands vigorously over his head, the old salute. Dad starts giving us orders then. He turns and points at one of us, but I think he

means Ron, not me. He shakes his head and points again. Age before beauty? Perhaps he means me, but I play dumbkopf for a few seconds. He shakes his head disgustedly and points and shouts again. This time Ron stands up. OK OK the Old Man seems to be saying. Ron points his finger at his chest: "Me, dad, is it me you want, huh?" Moving like an octogenarian my kid brother stands up on his seat. We take a few spars-shuddering turns over Mercy Hospital with Ron still standing, trying to balance himself. Then, at a further shouted (but still ambiguous) command Ron gingerly puts his leg out of the cockpit. Buzz and my father grin tolerantly at this tentativeness in the young, the inexperienced.

Within a few minutes Ron is clear out on the wing. He turns and shrugs, awaiting further instructions.

At this point I am trying to hand Ron the chute, which, in his haste to be obliging, he has left behind him in the cockpit. Ron is a bit too far out on the wing by now to retrieve the chute easily, unless I am willing to take it out to him. I wave it at him, trying to coax him to come and fetch it. I remain seated all the while. It is clear he will have to come all the way back down the wing to get the chute and, what with the picking up of the wind (the usual harbinger of a hurricane front), to do this now seems even more of a bother than . . . just going on without the chute.

Ron still doesn't cotton on: WHAT AM I SPOZED TO DO? (he's out near the wing tip) so he tries a few tentative gymnastics and dance steps. His shifting weight keeps us dipping and swerving to trim the craft, but in a little while we get the knack of making adjustments for that unpredictable moving weight out on the wingtip. We never know what he will try next. Charleston, jig — half-gainer?

Now Buzz moves his craft into position, tip to tip with the North American Chickenhawk. This is rather hard to do with the increasing gusts of the hurricane front buffeting us, but Buzz manages to close the gap to six or eight feet or so, which seems like enough space for Ron's final stunt. The old man winks at his old buddy and gives his boy the high sign.

And . . . uh. . .
"And what?"
Well it happens alright.

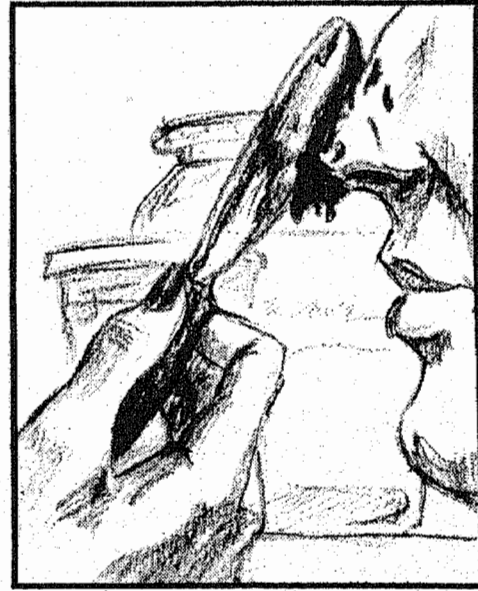
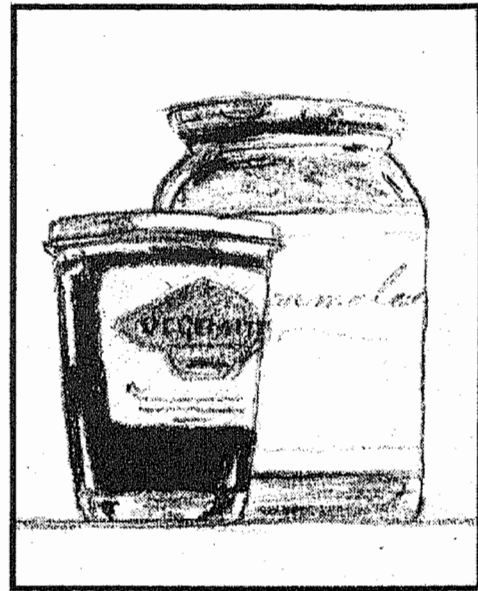
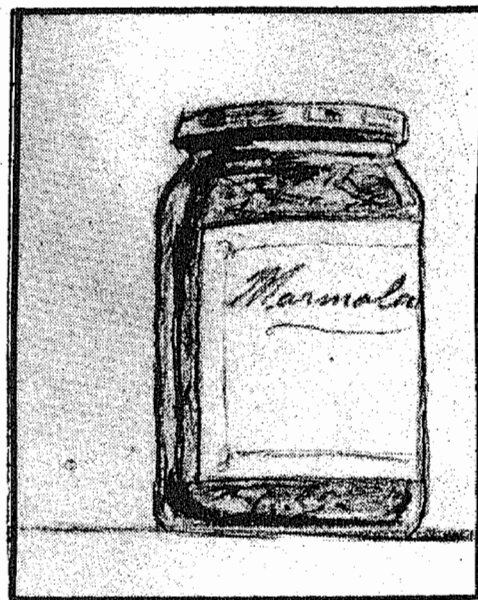
Barry Westburg was born in Iowa and lived mostly in California and New York before coming to Adelaide University as an English lecturer. He is the author of the critical study "The Confessional Fictions of Charles Dickens."

EQUAL THIRD PRIZE

BREAKFAST

BY ROXANNE BENNETT

"I have a womb."
"So what."
"What I mean is; I'm a woman."
"I knew that."
"Don't be sarcastic."
"Don't be stupid."
"I'm not. You treat me like a man."
"Not when we're in bed."
"It's not funny. I'm being quite serious."
"I still don't get your point."
"I want to give up work, have babies, eat chocolate, take valium, watch 'Days of Our Lives', wear curlers in my hair, and scuff around in fluffy slippers!"
"How positively distasteful,"
"Wouldn't you love me if I was like that?"
"You wouldn't be, so there is no point making comment."
"Pass me the marmalade.... Thank you."
"What did you do that for?"
"I like having marmalade on my nose."
"What are you trying to prove?"
"You thought I would never have marmalade on my nose so you have never commented on it, but I have got marmalade on my nose!"
"If you want a comment I think you look bloody silly."
"Do you still love me with marmalade on my nose?"
"Only if I can lick it off."
"Why can't we have a serious conversation without bringing sex into it?"
"You call this a serious conversation? You are sitting there in your 'Country Road' suit, covered in 'Christian Dior' make-up, smelling of french perfume with marmalade stuck on your nose, and you think we are having a serious conversation. I think the only serious thing was my offer to lick it off."
"I think we are missing the point."
"I never got it to miss it."
"I think I have explained myself adequately."
"Wipe the marmalade off. I can't take you seriously with marmalade on your nose."
"No!"
"Alright! You want to leave work and have babies. Ok. It would probably do you good. You haven't spent time at home since we were married. Of course you wouldn't be able to interrupt my writing, but there would be plenty for you to do; housework, shopping, and you could always make my coffee when I need it."
"I won't be a slave."
"Why not?"
"God you're a chauvinist, take that."
"I am not a chauvinist, and why did you put vegemite on my nose?"
"Because you don't understand, and you keep changing your views. One minute you want me to be independent, the next you want me to be a typecast housewife."
"Are you frustrated?"
"Yes."
"Do you want a baby?"
"No."
"Do you want to leave work?"
"No."
"Do you like marmalade on your nose?"
"No, but I want to have a choice whether to like it or not."
"I understand."
"Thank you. Do you like vegemite on your nose?"
"Only when you put it there."
"Do you love me?"
"Yes."
"Why?"
"Because you are the only lady I know who can wear marmalade on her nose and still look elegant."
"Does it match my eyeshadow?"
"No, the strawberry jam would have looked better."



CARRION

BY
MARK WARWICK LEAHY

sound or smell.
Her eyelids flickered, her bare shoulders jolted as if she were shivering in a dream. She unconsciously opened her mouth. He sat on the bed next to her and took hold of her right hand - it was warm, now. Then she opened her eyes, looked vacantly up at the ceiling. She blinked from the harsh fluro light.
"Hello," he said, softly.
She turned to him, surprised.
"Who are you?" she asked. Her voice was quiet. Meek.
He smiled; always the same first question. He had the answer ready:
"John," he said (first names sounded friendlier), "how are you?"
The usual response, no deviation:
"Fine. Dazed. I..I can't remember anything. I can't even remember who I am."
Always the same notes of fear, anguish, loss.
"You've been sleeping, that's all. Your name's Kim, Remember?"
"Kim?" she said, unsure. But saying it made it seem familiar. "Kim."
"O.K.? Feeling better?"
"What?..(then the look of pleasant surprise) Yes. I think I do. I don't feel unwell anyway. A little sore in the joints."
"Give us a kiss," he said, in a playful tone. "Why?"
That was a new question. Not part of the normal performance.
"Cause I want you to, silly," he laughed. She smiled with him.
"I feel great," she said, then pulled him towards her and kissed him.
She held him by the neck, her fingers beginning to caress his hair. She ran her hands over his shoulders, down his arched back.
"Take your clothes off," she whispered.
The game had begun; the 'programme' running to plan. Her memories of sexual enjoyment foregrounded by the 'searcher', it would be virtually impossible for her to not feel strong urges of sexual desire and excitement a few minutes after orientating herself. She was a sexual animal - fully primed.
"I like this game," she whispered in his ear.
He woke with the morning light on his face and blinked from the glare, adjusting his eyes to it. They were both lying on the bed, with the thin sheet shrouded over their bodies. She was still asleep, breathing regularly. He would have to kill her again soon.
"Who am I?" she asked, her head still on the pillow.
"I thought you were still asleep."
"I was. I'm awake now. You say I'm Kim. I don't remember."
"You've been ill. I'm looking after you," he told her.
"How ill?" she asked and sat up to confront him. He sensed distrust in her tone, as if she suspected he was hiding something from her. She was being surprisingly autonomous in her thoughts. He was tempted to tell her the truth, to see her reaction - he had always wanted to do that.
"How ill?" she asked again.
He smiled: "You were dead," he said matter-of-factly and studied her for a reaction.
"Dead?"
She seemed surprised but not, as he had expected, incredulous.
"Absolutely. You aren't really alive now. Just a resurrected corpse."
"You re-animated me?" she asked.
It was his turn to be surprised.
"Re-animated?"
"Revived me? Did you?"
"You aren't surprised? You believe me?"
"I...yes. I remember..."
"What?"
"I was...there's something at the back of my mind...it keeps trying to creep in."
"Think hard...try to remember."
"I...I was a research assistant or something..."
"This is interesting...you seem to have...do you remember anything else?"
"Like what?"
"Do you know about corpse regeneration? Posthumous animation?"
"No. Come to bed, Mally."
"What about...?"
"Bed! I'm ravenous!"
He laughed. He took hold of her, pushed her gently into the pillow and kissed her.
"Always the instincts," he whispered into her ear, "stronger than anything else."
Around mid-day, they awoke together again. He dressed, while she lay inert on the bed. Finally, she asked:
"Did you see me die?"
"What? No...why do you believe me? You should think I'm mad or something."
"Something at the back of my mind tells me you're telling the truth. I think I can remember dying..I'm not sure..."
"What do you remember?"
"I don't know. How did I die?"
"I forget...do you remember much?"
"No...just vague impressions, that's all. You don't remember how I died?"
"No. I come into contact with loads of dead

people in my work."
"If I am dead...you're using me," she accused.
"How?"
"I..I'm not sure. Why am I in bed with you?"
"Didn't you want to...?"
"Yes. Why? Did I know you before I died?"
"No."
"Now I'm alive...can't I go free? Tell me where I live."
He sat on the bed next to her. He was disturbed by her questions, wanted to probe her further, to test her mental capacity, to see how far she could go.
"You're really only a machine," he said, "not a person at all."
"A robot? I'm not really human?"
"Not a robot. You WERE alive once. Not any more though. You're just an organic machine. Still a corpse."
He looked into her eyes, but saw only bewilderment. She didn't understand him. Very little reasoning ability, he thought.
"The body is only a vehicle," he told her, "like a car. When you died, the driver left. I'm just taking advantage of the machine she left behind."
"I like this game," she whispered in his ear.

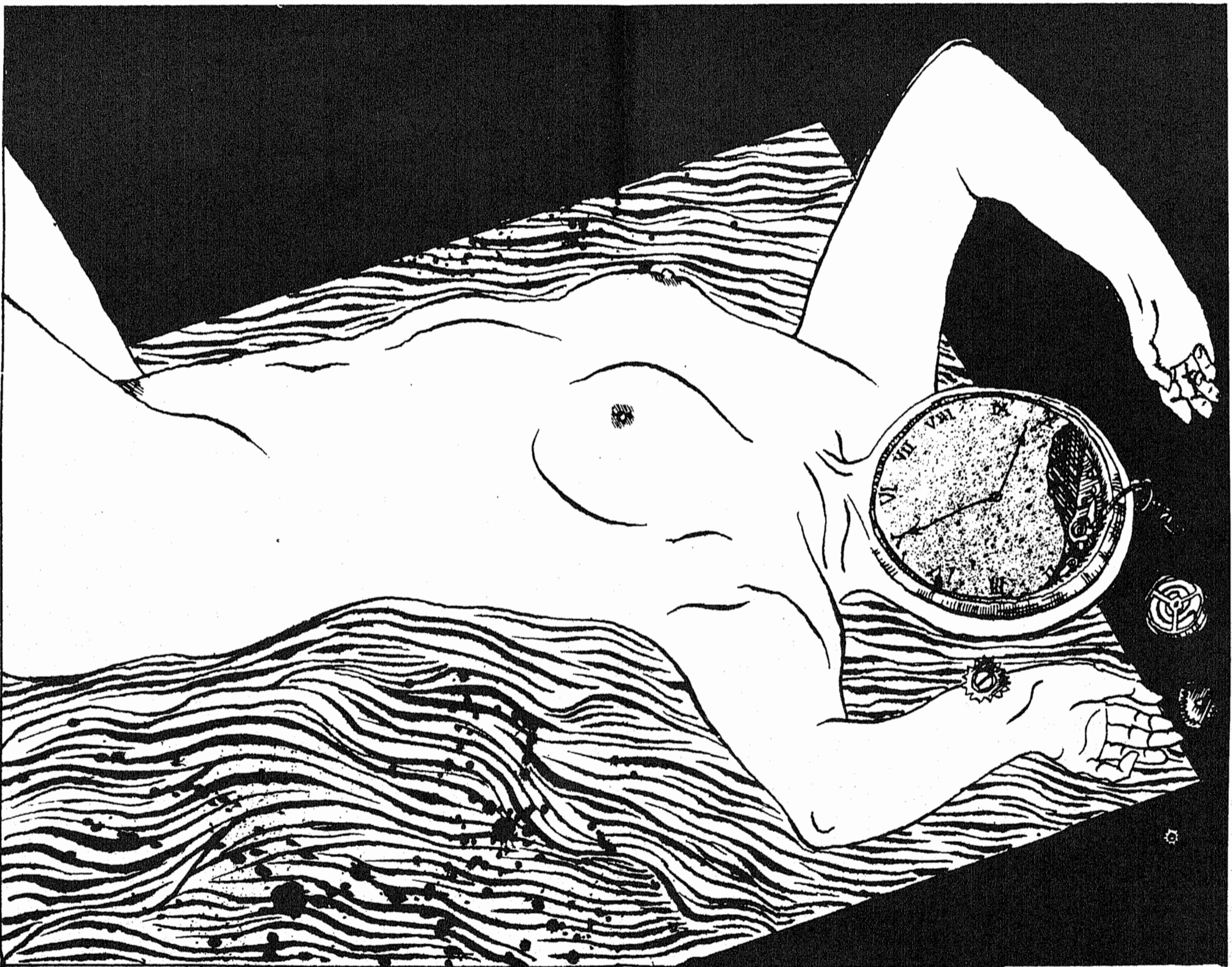
the involuntary rituals of the body and the brain, such as breathing and heart beating, but that's all. The rest of what's in the brain lies silent and oblivious of itself. Like a deserted cave. / bring in the cavern!" he said, with a flourish.
"Oh," she said, with not much conviction. He sighed impatiently.
"Not caverns that can think for themselves of course. To continue the analogy. / direct them. I select what memories I want in you and resurrect them. Some stray one's get in along the way, of course - like your memory of being a research assistant - but what's a few stray memories? Cobwebs."
"Cobwebs?"
"Cobwebs in a magnificent cathedral. It's an analogy."
"So what I think..."
"Is because I resurrected those thoughts. Basically."
"But...can't I think for myself?"
"Not much," he said unsympathetically, "no more than a highly advanced computer. You HAVE intelligence, but within very strict limitations."

to get it out. Like having a tin of food, but no tin-opener. And slowly the brain processes would disorganise themselves. Confusion: They'd decay. Then the body would decay as well. Malfunction. In a word: death. I'm sorry, but as a sexual machine, you're superb. As an intelligent being, a brain deficient moron has more initiative!"
"You..."
"As pretty as your thoughts are, they wouldn't be when they started jumbling: losing some, confusing some. Entropy's another word for it: the entire universal effect of entropy concentrated in a few hours. The breakdown..."
"Shut up!" she exclaimed. He was enjoying giving the lecture.
"See, it's beginning already," he taunted, "as your mind wanders, the predominant instincts sublimate..."
"I don't want to talk anymore, Mally," she said unhappily.
"What do you want?" he asked, grinning self-importantly.
"Come to bed," she said in a soft voice.
"See! That's the trouble with selecting memories within a very limited set of

"It's a toxin capsule. When I press it against your skin, it'll release a reserve of poison...you'll die in four seconds. Quite painlessly."
"But I don't want to die!" she cried.
"Look...we've gone through this. You're not really alive..."
"How can you kill me then?"
"Look...I'm not killing you as such. Turning you off would be a better phrase. Now, don't make me use violence."
He reached over to grab her arm, but she pushed him off the bed with her feet.
"No...just one more kiss! One more. Please!"
"No time, your programme..."
"Please. Just a kiss and then I won't struggle. Give me a kiss and I'll let you do what you want to me!"
"Promise?"
"I promise."
"Talk about foregrounding of sexual appetite!" he laughed. "Sex, even in the face of death. O.K. One kiss. You really are causing me problems this time!"
He knelt on the bed and bent over to kiss

her. He watched the effect his words were having on her. It was as if he were hitting her with a stick. She was cringing.
"You'd be in screaming pain. Burning in every fibre. And totally alone. No one would be able to help you. You'd die alone. Without a friend," he continued.
"I hate you!" she screamed.
He could see she was vulnerable; vulnerable and scared.
"Hate me if you like. But you can't kill me."
"I can," she contradicted, childishly.
"If you do you'll suffer more pain and fear than I can inflict."
"I don't believe you!"
"I revived you...brought you back to life... given you hours of pleasure. Doesn't that count?"
"You're a bastard!"
"Have I ever hurt you? Have I?"
"Not hurt...but..."
"I just want to give you a merciful end. That's all."
"You want to KILL me!"
"To HELP you. I CARE for you. Why do you think I've kept you for all these years?"
"Years?"
"You died six years ago. I've been reviving you ever since."
"Years?"
She was clearly stunned by this information.
"I thought..."
"Give me the cube. Don't hurt yourself."
She held the cube to her side, so that he couldn't snatch it away from her. She didn't want to kill him, but she would have to use it on him if he used force. It was the only way.
"Give it to me!" he shouted.
She had imagined that she had been revived for the first time yesterday. She never thought she had been used so many times before.
"Do you love me?" she asked, innocently.
"What! Did I resurrect THAT question?! If you like. Yes."
"What are we...?"
"Give me your hand," he interrupted. He softened his tone, so that he sounded like a father.
"Why?"
"You're a child. I won't hurt you. Hold my hand," he said, reassuringly.
"I don't trust you."
"I won't kill you. I promise. Perhaps there's another way. Perhaps I'm wrong. We'll talk about it. O.K.? Don't you like me?"
"I like you...but..."
She started to reach out to him, but hesitated. While she hesitated, he grabbed her. He smiled warmly at her (she smiled back: reassured), he held her hand, then gently crushed her palm in a closed fist, pressing the tiny needle into her flesh. Her eyes registered surprise and a brief instant of pain.
"Like a bee sting," he said.
She closed her eyes, still gripping the poison cube.
She died.
She fell heavily back into the pillow. He put a hand onto her chest: her heart was still beating, but she wasn't breathing. She was dead.
He took a notebook from his shirt pocket and made a few notes:
"SHE SHOWED A SURPRISING AMOUNT OF INITIATIVE AND AUTONOMOUS THOUGHT. HYPOTHESIS: AS I RESURRECT MEMORY CELLS, RANDOM MEMORIES ACCIDENTALLY GET IN. COULD IT BE THAT, OVER THE YEARS, THE BUILD UP OF THESE 'PASSENGER' MEMORIES HAS BEEN ENOUGH TO APPROXIMATE LOWER LEVEL AUTONOMOUS THINKING, AT THE LEVEL OF HANDICAPPED CHILD OR 'FREE THINKING' ROBOT DEVICE?"
He closed the notebook and slipped it back into his pocket. He looked down at the body on the bed.
"More subtly coloured than a perfect Goya..." he quoted from his favourite poem.
He took the cube from her relaxed hand and tossed it in the bin.
"Well, I won't be reviving you again," he said to himself. "Too dangerous. I don't want a repeat of today. Pity."
He lifted her from the bed and carried her to the next room, which he had converted into a modest laboratory, and put her on the table. Then he went over to the large bright window and closed the blind. He preferred the artificial - more uniform and cleaner - light of the fluro-tube. Then he returned to the body and looked down at it hungrily. He turned on a recorder which was on a bench next to the table.
"I am about to dissect Kim," he said, "DISSECT her," he repeated with relish.
He went into the bedroom and returned with his black bag, in which he always carried his dissecting tools.
"She's still warm," he said to the recorder, "fresh and pink."
He pinched the skin on her left arm.
"Couldn't be fresher."
He recorded all of his dissections and then played them for sexual amusement. On the bookcase over his television computer, there were 10 tapes: Mary, Tim, Sandra, Allacia, Ronda, Jana, Linnem, Lorral, Hope and Eloise. On the next bookcase was his

collection of specimens: hearts, lungs, eyes, hands, all bottled in preserving liquid.
He hummed a gentle song to himself as he laid out his dissecting tools, which shined like jewelry under the brilliant light: Paragon scalpels, scissors, forceps, a sharp-pointed bistoury and a saw. He picked up a scalpel, held it in front of his eyes, so that he could admire it gleaming thinly as the light reflected on its splendid surfaces.
"I am making an incision," he said, throwing his voice across the room to an invisible audience, "from the trachea to the vagina."
He stood over her, scalpel poised a few millimetres from the hollow of her neck. He paused to increase the pleasure of anticipation.
"My initial cut," he spoke slowly, playing each word to its potential, as if they were musical notes, "will be to the carotid artery. Just a simple application of just ever-so-slight pressure..."
He pressed the blade into the skin of the throat. The blood, still warm, splashed out. His sleeves were soaked. It ran freely from her throat, onto the plastic covered table. It reminded him of an overflowing pipe. Then he took out the knife and applied it again, this time more centrally. He carved downwards, slicing her open like raw meat. He pushed the fingers of his free hand into the parting flesh as he cut, pulling the folds apart.
By the time he had her open before him, he was sweating with exhaustion and excitement. A tear of blood ran down his pale cheek.
"THIS is it!" he exclaimed, "the REAL person!"
He looked up at the walls around him, as if he could see an audience.
"Not the pathetic thing we call the mind. That's just electrical discharges. Static. A release of momentary energy, accidentally giving the impression of something we call intelligence. But there's nothing there really. Can you see it? taste it? touch it? It's invisible. That's because there's nothing really there. Kill the body, stick a knife through it and the mind disappears forever. As if it was never there."
"Not the body. You can keep a body for always. Look at the Egyptians. With today's technology, you can keep a body forever and ever. A perfect cadaver for always. And with the art of revivification, you can even keep forever the moving parts. See a body breathe. Limit the filthy mind to a minimum. The functioning body uncontaminated!"
He wiped the blood from his cheek.
"This is the REAL person," he repeated. He reached into her and started cutting at her internal organs. Finally, he pulled out her wet heart. He took it down to the end of the table, beside her feet. His eyes were alive; he licked his lips. He ran a red finger lovingly over its slippery surface. He bent down and kissed it softly, tasted its raw meat and blood flavour. Then he took hold of a scalpel and some scissors and began cutting. He cut through the ascending aorta and the pulmonary artery, pulled the vessels forward, opened up the transverse sinus, ran his juicy fingers through the scarlet gristly pipe of the aorta, snipped along the glistening vena cava. He tore the cherry red, cochlear organ apart bit by bit, then lifted the tangled, succulent remains in his soaking hands and held them above his head, as if in offering to a god. He dropped it and it landed with a sticky slap, splattering the blood over the pure white of the floor. He stood over it, shivering, breathing in short gasps.
"The heart...a superb organ...pure... strong...full of the richness of colour," he panted.
Then he turned to face the body again, open, like a purse, its gleaming, gorgeous colours displayed like gaudy treasure. He could barely make up his mind where to play next. Finally, he began attacking the face, slicing around the eye, through the muscles, vessels and optic nerve, then pulled it from the head and held it in his fingers. He held it up to the light, a glistening, white ball, like a marble. As shiny as glass. He smiled with satisfaction, rested it carefully on the table and did the same to her other eye. He put them both in his hand, rolled them around his palm like white olives. He opened a jar and dropped them into the preserving liquid like pebbles into water. He put it on the shelf next to a dissected liver.
"She has BEAUTIFUL eyes," he said.
Then he returned to the body.
By mid-afternoon, he had taken her apart, slowly, delicately, with violence. She was only blubbery flesh and scraped bones. He only saved her eyes. The rest he swept up into a plastic bag and dragged the sloppy, bony mass downstairs, to the communal disinfectant and dispersed her into atoms. He spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning the blood from his laboratory.
He was too gorged and exhausted to eat. He showered, washed off the final perfumes of her body and went to bed early, so that he could go through the dissection again, in his mind, thinking himself into disjunctive dreams. In the morning he would have to go to work and would have to come home to a lonely house, with no body to keep him company through the night - only his collection in the other room. Until he found a fresh replacement, the memories of her recent anatomy would have to do.



"But..."
"You're just her memories..."
"I'm human."
"You THINK you're human. You're a machine."
"I remember things...a few things...if I have memory?"
"Don't think that when a person dies, when they leave the body, they leave no memories," he explained. He was becoming excited by the chance to discuss his work. "No. Do you know what memories are? Finely burnt in inscriptions in the brain-celligraphic markings. When the brain 'remembers' something, stores it away, it carves a micro-small hieroglyph in the brain: the deeper the mark, the stronger the memory. When you die, these markings are left. Like temple frescoes of dead civilisations. Cave paintings if you like. It's like a vast, badly arranged memory bank, left behind by a defunct computer. That's what I make use of."
"How?"
"Without autonomous self-directing principles, you'd still be a dead thing. Even with the body fully primed and functioning. Like a driverless car. O.K.?"
She nodded.
"The process of revivification resurrects

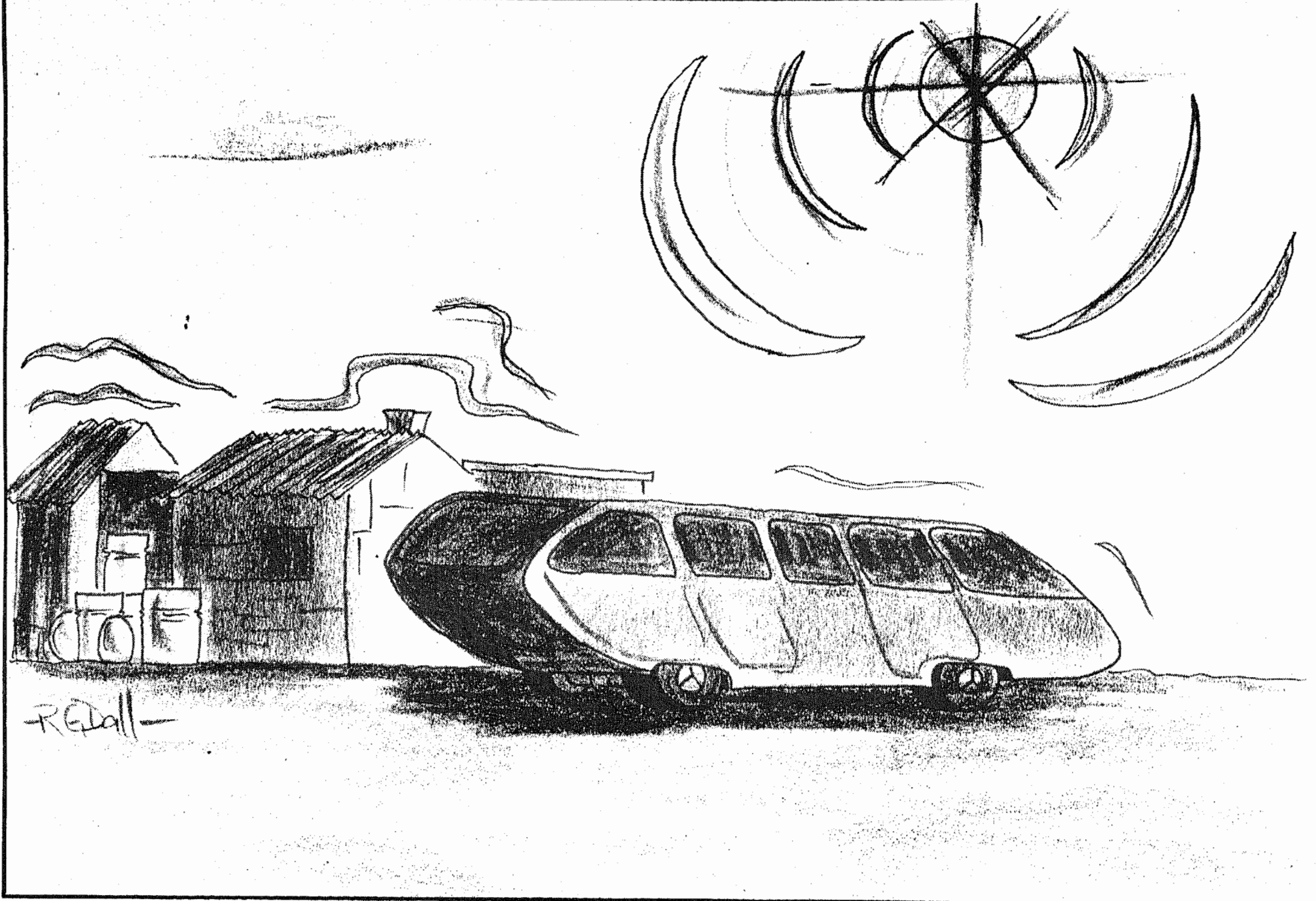
"Surely...I...I think for myself...you're just being..."
"No. You have only artificial intelligence. Manufactured, or at least, highly selected. You SEEM to be intelligent, but when you boil it all down, a child would be better equipped."
She lay back on the pillows. She seemed tired.
"I'm going to kill you again in a minute," he said.
"Why?! she exclaimed, sitting up again.
"It's easier to look after you that way. Active parts need attention. And the longer revived brain information remains active, the more erratic it becomes. And memory cells are highly corruptible. Organic cells don't last as long as silicon."
"I'm not a machine!" she said passionately. "I think for myself!"
"Never!" he laughed. "I've resurrected a sufficient number of memory cells in order to SIMULATE autonomous intelligence, that's all. If I left this room right now, you'd be dead tomorrow. Do you think a car can drive itself? even with its motor going? You wouldn't have the facilities for survival."
"But I..."
"All the knowledge you ever need is inside you somewhere, but you wouldn't know how

parameters. There's not much chance of conversation. You see, I foregrounded your sexual appetite, which means your concentration span, on other matters, is very limited. You haven't got much to play with. Intellectually."
He paused for effect.
"And there's a simple explanation," he continued, "instincts are already there. Do you understand what I mean? They are the deepest of deepest carvings, if you like. The things you put there with intelligence come after, are much finer, far less..."
"Oh, for...come to bed, Mally!" she said urgently, "I want you!"
He sighed. It was clearly pointless, he thought, trying to teach things to a corpse. She tried to pull him down onto the bed, but he pulled away from her.
"I can't. That was the last time."
"WHY?"
"Are you ready?" he asked, reaching into a black bag he kept beside the bed.
"What for?"
"Just a tiny injection."
"What is it?"
He held a small white cube in his hand, the size of a piece of sugar. It had a tiny silver needle protruding from one side - as thin as a hair.

her.
"Put that thing down, first. It frightens me," she pleaded, pointing to the toxin cube, "I don't want you pricking me when we're kissing!"
"I won't," he assured her.
"Please," she asked again.
He shrugged his shoulders. "O.K."
He put it on the cabinet next to the bed, then turned around to kiss her. She was sitting up again.
"What if...what if I killed you?" she asked.
"Hah! It'd do you no earthly good. None! As I've told you, you'd die anyway. Probably in pain and fear. A SUFFERING death. And how would you do it? You haven't..."
"With this," she said quickly, snatching at the cube. She managed to clutch it - he was taken by surprise and before he could tackle her, she had it.
"Don't be a fool!" he shouted. He leapt from the bed.
"I've got it," she grinned, holding it out of his reach.
"If you kill me you...you know what will happen next. You'll die horribly."
"I've got it," she said again, triumphantly.
"You'll die in agony. You won't know who you are, what you're doing. You'll feel your various parts falling to pieces slowly..."

He knelt on the bed and bent over to kiss her. He watched the effect his words were having on her. It was as if he were hitting her with a stick. She was cringing.
"You'd be in screaming pain. Burning in every fibre. And totally alone. No one would be able to help you. You'd die alone. Without a friend," he continued.
"I hate you!" she screamed.
He could see she was vulnerable; vulnerable and scared.
"Hate me if you like. But you can't kill me."
"I can," she contradicted, childishly.
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"I like you...but..."



UNTITLED

BY BUI TURNER

"O Phantom!" These were the only words of Portuguese he knew. Perhaps the phrase was a powerful invocation to Portuguese comic-book-cultists, but in the matter of securing food, lodgings and making travel arrangements, it was not particularly useful.

Actually, Isak could never quite put his finger on how he had acquired this particular piece of trivia. True, his knowledge of the Phantomic law was encyclopaedic: He was confinded he had read every issue of *The Phantom* comic delivered on Australia's shores. But he was sufficient of an internationalist to realise that the familiar cerise and black uniform; steely, disturbingly oriental masked slits for eyes; sledgehammer fists, with unnaturally symmetrical cuticles; did not originate in Australia. He suspected America, the centre of civilized modern culture.

An American friend had given him copies of *The Phantom* he had never seen on mere Australian news stands. He was grateful and flattered. Perhaps this friend had told him the Portuguese for 'The Phantom'. It certainly sounded far more impressive and potent than the English or American.

"O Phantom." He wondered idly what was Portuguese for 'The Ghost who walks' and 'He who never dies.' Endless jungle aphorisms sprang to mind, confusingly. Isak

Dickerson almost shook his head to concentrate on his present predicament.

He was not in Portugal. You may be forgiven for assuming he was, because of his speculations on the Portuguese language. 'O Phantom' may not in fact be Portuguese. I don't know any Portuguese. The phrase certainly is Brasileiro: the variety of Portuguese spoken in Brasil.

In fact, there is far more Portuguese, or Brasileiro (if the two are similar), spoken in Brasil, than in Portugal; or anywhere else in the world for that matter. There is also more Italian spoken here than in Italy, and, incidentally, more war criminals per Volkswagon assembly plant, than anywhere else in the world, except neighbouring Paraguay.

Whatever the case, the Phantom probably does not inhabit the jungles of South America, despite occasional encounters with anacondas and piranhas. Although, Isak had noted in more recent issues, around Vol. ... ah, ... 708, a tendency towards lost ruins favouring Incas or Aztecs, complete with *Zapatamostaccio'd 'banditos'*.

Isak was not naive. He knew *The Jungle*, as presented in the Phantom's world, was something less than authentic. It was eclectic. It selected the best from the best jungles: Wambisi Pygmies from Africa; tigers from Bengal; pirates from the Celebes. It was common knowledge that the Phantom had visited the Americas well before Eric the Red ... no, Isak speculated, not that early. There was the matter of his muskets. South America had seemed a doubtful proposition, Isak had considered, but definitely worth a flutter.

So here he was, stranded in the dust and scrubby heat, some 500 kilometres North of Brasilia. It was not the steamy, rococo jungle he had expected. It was, in fact, very like the dry, sparse bushland you could encounter anywhere West of Dubbo.

Isak was not impressed. The people were violent and unco-operative. They spoke no English. They didn't know where England was, let alone Australia. There was a certain U.S. familiarity limited to late-night-movie life style. Everyone starred in a B-Grade movie script.

Isak had taken the cheap bus. An English traveller warned him about uncertainties, but he had taken the cheap bus. Along the line there had been problems of an unspecified nature. He had been asked to pay for Special Services. At first he had declined to understand. When this became impossible, he declined to pay.

Isak had acted instinctively. He had not thought through the implications of his stand. Mr. Walker would have been impressed. Perhaps Mr. Walker would have understood that the Special Services involved staying on the bus.

Now Isak Dickerson was standing beside the 'road', watching for the very occasional bus to thunder by, through the heat and dust.

Everything here seemed to travel by bus. Isak suspected there were trucks, but they were never in evidence. Probably they whooshed by with bright lights in the night. It was immaterial to Isak's dilemma.

Brasil was certainly not the classless society the travel brochures had suggested. Even the buses were undemocratic.

Not that he had ever particularly observed buses in Australia, but sub-conscious cultural recall assured him that buses in Australia were all pretty much equal, at least when you were talking about thousands of miles.

Incidentally, this was another unpleasant surprise. Brasil was bigger than Australia, much bigger. Mercator, that perfidious old Flemish map-maker, had sold Isak a pup at school. Check out the new Peter's projection of the world, computer corrected, and you'll see what I mean. Reality is frequently unfamiliar.

However, in Brasil, there was one bus for the rich, and quite another for the poor. Poor buses were slow, unreliable and very personal. People squeezed into and onto you — hung out, flapping for hundreds of kilometres. They were travelling circuses of humanity. The rules by which they stopped or started, especially on the open road were a mystery to Isak. He had tried to flag them down. People waved and cheered, but they did not stop. In fury he stood in the middle of the track. If that cunning street urchin had not stolen the three kilos of his compact cassette recorder in Brasilia, he would have travelled to the coast alright, as a thin red smear across the bumper bar of the on-coming, on-going bus.

The rich travelled in anonymous, sleek, low-slung road-clippers. They approximated science fiction vacuum cleaners of the Buck Roger's era. Isak had never seen anything like them. From behind, you never heard them coming 'til the slip stream bunted you through a couple of 360's in the dust and they were gone. From the front there was a hint of speck in the grey heat haze, and thump! They were through, like a contour following Cruise missile. Not even much of a rooster trail to betray their passage.

Very unnerving. And he was becoming very thirsty. Heat stroke? How do you say, "I'm suffering from heat stroke," in Brasileiro? Did they have heat stroke in Brasil? He should have asked the tour company.

Fighting off quite understandable waves of depression, Isak squinted along the dusty ribbon, hoping for another mobile speck. There was something on the shimmering horizon. Something stationary; substantial. His legs were restored to authority, he felt almost jaunty. He refused to scrutinise for the first fifteen or so minutes, then took everything in with a rush.

The scene was not encouraging. Three or four ramshackle humpies straddled the track.

Packing cases of various sizes seemed the predominant building material. Flat tin from old road signs overlapped awkwardly with rusted corrugated iron. A series of mechanical infills resembled parts of truck and bus bodies. A litter of ten and twenty gallon drums suggested irregular vehicle stops.

Most of the drums were dry and rusted. Ones near the largest building glistened with oil and black dust. The settlement faced East, to the coast, just like Australia. Isak approached from the West, the back door. He noted that the building was roughly shored up with what looked like old iron girders — no timber at all. Man against the jungle.

Then he saw it.

The biggest road clipper of them all. A fat, black beetle — a slicked back, grand-cockroach of the highways. Even the barn-sized hydraulic doors were severely raked — everything seemed to close at a 45 degree angle. The front was bare of the usual chrome. A single marque badge, solid and iconic, proclaimed it a Mercedes.

He was still boggling as he came round the corner of the shed, and turned to his left. It was appropriate. His open mouth remained appropriate.

There, flanking a saloon style door, stood the Terrible Hairy Twins of Volara. Isak had last seen them roped together, propped against a door soon to be opened by the White Rajah's Vizier. The Phantom had flattened them both, against the odds, after terrible hand to hand combat. *The Jungle* would speak about it for years. He was surprised they had come up so well after the battering. But then no one was actually killed in the Phantom comics ... though there had been a disturbing tendency in recent issues...

They were huge men of native extraction — coarse, bestial faces, and long, black hair. The wool on their simian forearms was particularly incongruous. Amazonas Indians were generally bereft of bodily hair, Isak had noticed. At least they had the decency to wear T-shirts and cut down Levis, as opposed to the shapeless loincloths they affected in Vol 535 ('The Phantom's Rescue of Princess Valeri'). As Isak continued to stare, riveted, he observed they even possessed that lumpy, thick-print quality, that distorts bodily proportions in the older style comics.

But as Isak came closer, cautiously, he realised the 'wool' was simply a mottling effect caused by the play of bright sun and shadow, particularly the rusty overhanging mesh. Isak snook his head. Thirst and sun-stroke for sure, he thought.

The ugly 'Twins' slouched at the cantina doors, taking not the slightest interest in

CONT. PAGE 11

THE WEANING OF FATTY JACKSON

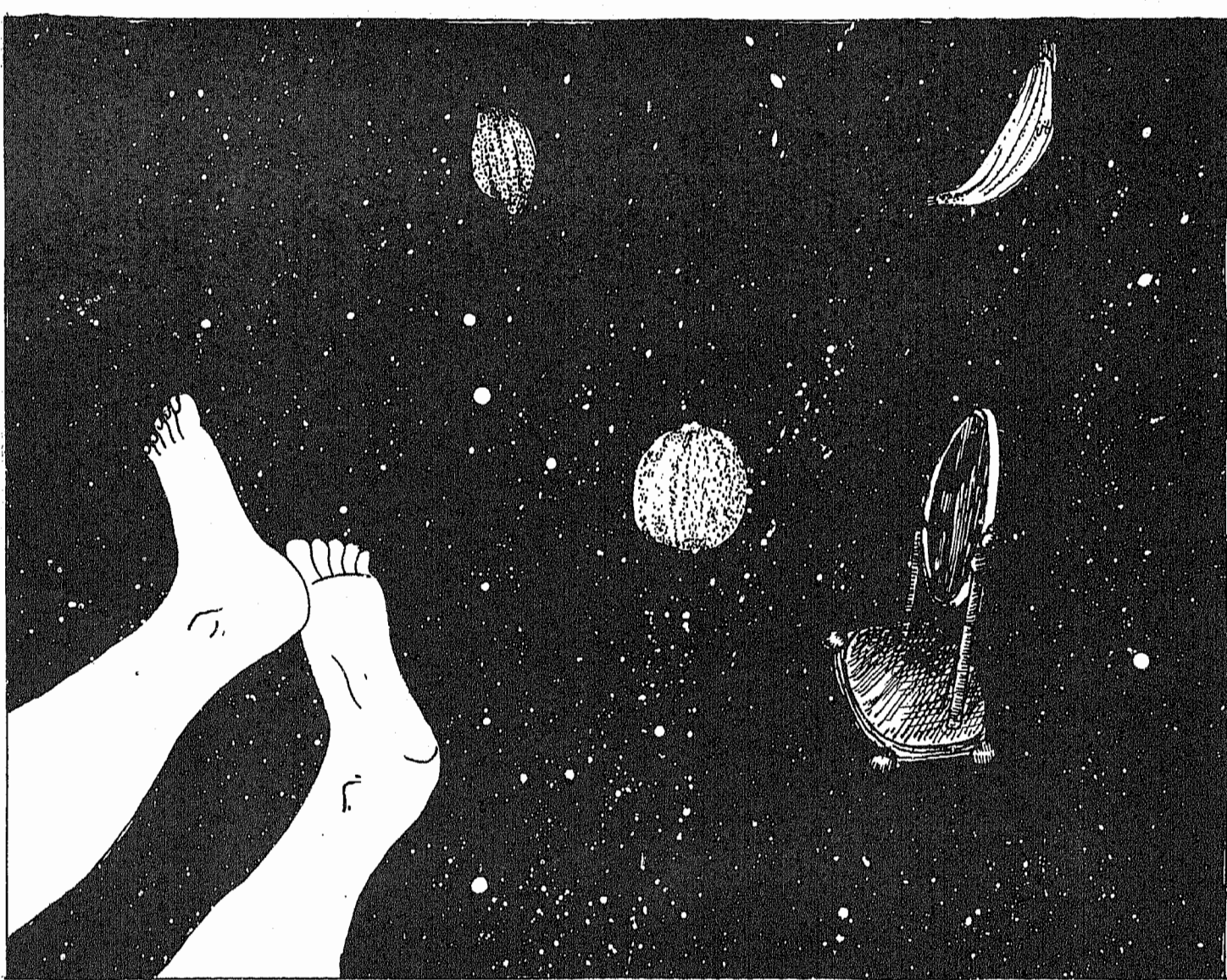
BY ANDRIS BANDERS

Fatty Jackson shot the bolt and panting slumped against the bathroom door. He quivered but felt momentarily safe. The laminex dinner table had suddenly scared him and he had needed to escape. It just felt terrible.

He rolled the tracksuit bottom over his bum and down his thighs to his ankles but the top gave him trouble. He huffed and groaned and cursed that the zippered one hadn't been washed and when he tried to pull this XXXOSSS off by the neck it stuck under his hanging armpits. When he tried the cross-arm method it was just as hopeless. His lips blubbered until he finally hooked the back band on the door handle, wriggled and slithered, raised his arms to the ceiling and slid to the cold tiled floor. The rest was relatively easy.

Fatty sidled to the full-length mirror and saw his white, hairless junket wobble back at him. He was always depressed by the view and rarely looked below the line of his sagging titties. Like fallen Yorkshire pudding, everything sagged. The bubbly details of his anatomy were far too cruel and he had found no solace in *Cleo* big-body-beautiful articles or the Fat is Good movement. Thousands of misguided fat people slapping each other on the back wasn't his cup of Earl Grey. A dejected Fatty stumbled from the sight in the mirror his mother had insisted on.

"I got to, I just got to," he mumbled. "Only four potatoes, I'll make it four; four little



ones." He approached the cringing scales like he was going to the Almighty and fearfully slid one foot onto the machine but held off with the other. With a deep breath Fatty committed himself and jumped on. His eyes squeezed shut but he could hear the accelerating pointer screaming like a Bamix blender, hitting the red line and shuddering to a halt. He bent over and peeped. Twenty two stone. Fatty jumped off and looked at the whole contraption like it had been contaminated with wet leprosy.

"Christ all bloody mighty. Why, why, why."

His grazing had thrown him headlong into another crisis that day. Hot Dog sauce had saturated his coat pocket and a Violet Crumble in his shirt pocket had melted and stained the Johnstone file that had been riding on his stomach to Mr. Zbriski's office.

The splotchy red handkerchief only succeeded in adding long streaks and circular smudges of Heinz sauce to the cover and on Monday the entire clerical section would know it had been friggin' Fatty Jackson. Reason enough to hide from one's reflection. "Damn and bloody shit," he shouted, covering his face and then held his breath.

The pink fluffy slippers shuffled up the passage.

"Fattee!" A seizing Sunbeam cake mixer. "Fattee! Fattee you're in there." She always spoke in announcements and he knew her powdered ear was pressed to the door, like a pink turkish delight covered in fine castor sugar.

"Yes Mum I'm here," he called back. "Who else would it bloodywell be," trailing off.

"You said something."

"Nothing Mum."

"Well don't catch cold. There's some roast I can't fit into the fridge. You'll have to help." The slippers padded away on the Cabbage Rose carpet.

He squeezed himself into the bath and the water climbed and spilled. If only something severe could lay him up, to sweat and suffer and shed pounds. A mammoth tropical fever would be ideal but his chances of malaria were as great as those of his mother preparing a lettuce salad for her growing boy.

Well he sure had grown. Since kindergarten his lunchbox had carried supplies for ten Newcastle miners and he

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Isak's approach. He surprised himself by strolling between them and briskly pushing the doors. The doors swung back at Isak awkwardly, so he staggered rather than strode into the shed.

It was dark after the sun. Three naked light globes. A single fan, none too secure, rotated the dry air, feebly. Isak was aware of a generator chugging behind the distorted music from an old tape recorder. It could have been music by *Santana*.

Five soldiers sat at a round table with one large bowl of rice, criss-crossed with leathery strips of meat. The dunked into a smaller bowl of beans. The group drank in swigs from a bottle of Bacardi. They took not the slightest notice of Isak. The pasty faced bartender, bald as the 'Twins' were hairy, did. "Senor."

The upward inflection was welcome. It went some way to lifting the B Grade depression.

"Er ... food ...?" Suggested Isak. "Ah ... drink?," miming the universally understood glass tilting at the universally agreed angle, back and forwards.

Rice and beans came down smack on the counter with a snarled identification that sounded like "fezjwarda".

Isak momentarily saw Devil, the Phantom's wolf hound, shaking a smarmy street rat.

Likewise, bang on the bar, a bright yellow labeled bottle — BRAMA CHOP. Dirty cruzieros changed hands. Isak drained the beer without pausing for breath. He was dizzy with thirst. He wanted water, but more beer was all he could manage with the bar tender.

The rice was claggy, the meat so rank and pungent, Isak gagged.

"Tortuga," offered the bar tender as explanation, and moved off to provide another bottle of Bacardi for the soldiers. One of them opened a mossy grin in Isak's direction, hunched his shoulders and made flapping motions, repeating, "Tortuga, tortuga." The meat was jerked turtle.

"Well, I'll tell you mate, in Australia, we eat shark," proclaimed Isak to the table in general. He made impressive looking chopping motions with two handfuls of shark-finger teeth.

Pleased with this act of national self-assertion, Isak made a mental note to take up

scuba diving on his return, and bite into a Great White Pointer somewhere left of the Barrier Reef.

At this moment another character split the doors. Black, top to toe, the tight fitting uniform seemed to scream — AIRFORCE. He may have been a member of the Blackhawk team, or from that print-run vintage. Terry and the Pirates? — Cold War Warriors from the Good Old US of A? Still, the braid and maroon silk scarf suggested South Vietnam Airforce, circa 1968. The business-like revolver on the hip was spot on. No, the jaw line was definitely wrong for the Blackhawks. He is an evil doer, thought Isak, and swayed belligerently forward.

Come on Isak, that's the beer talking. The all-black, jet jockey, was, in fact, The Driver. So he had a fat hand-gun. The 'soldiers' had guns. Everybody who works for somebody outside a city in Brasil, has a gun, or a knife, or a machete. It's a matter of status. Even in the *Phantom* comics the para-military reigns supreme.

The Pilot/Driver spoke rapidly to the bartender, who disappeared 'out the back'. The Pilot/Driver looked Isak up and down without interest.

"Give us a lift to the coast", offered Isak, in what he hoped was an optimistic tone. Isak watched the Pilot's eyes narrow. He glanced at his right hand, measuring distances and thinking of strategic retreats 'out the back'. He regretted that unlike the Phantom, he could not move with 'the speed of a jungle cat.'

The Pilot repeated the last word of Isak's request a "Cost", thickly and without comprehension. He turned away.

Two native girls appeared from 'out the back'. They carried exotic fruit (impossibly stacked), food, and unfamiliar bottles. As the pilot shepherded them into the dazzling sunlight, Isak noticed he could see right through their string tops. Pert breasts bob out to the great black Merc. They did not come back.

By now, many bottles of beer pressed on Isak's bladder. He would have to go 'out the back' himself, for mundane purposes. As he moved towards the indicated door, he was pleased to see the barman wearing an almost full length apron, authentic costume from

the Phantom's encounters with barmen. The door unexpectedly ushered him into the sunlight.

Natives and Europeans lolled in the shade of junked machinery, clasp bottles. He almost tripped over two elephantiasis victims, who pulled away quivering lumps of flesh, bestial and purple, that were once faces and limbs. Isak felt the lice jump.

Before him was a sewerage trough of two or three metres. The stench from the oily slime held him up. The littoral was congested with unimaginable rubbish, including decomposing vermin and heaps of dead cockroaches. It should not be like this, he thought.

The bus was going.

Isak knew it was the last bus out. The 'soldiers' laughed, slapped each other, and bought final bottles. Isak recalled his destination in a creep of horror.

"Fortaleza?" He spoke it hopefully.

A 'soldier' shrugged and thumbed over his shoulder at the midnight behemoth waiting outside. Isak simply followed them out, and in — the middle door. The front and rear doors, without windows, remained firmly closed. The mid-compartment was cramped and spartan, with padded benches along the sides. It was clearly, only for 'the boys'.

It was rum and cards and rum. Isak lost heavily. He did not want to play. The men in khaki, savage now and sweating, forced him on, hand after hand. Isak watched the road string out in an endless plume of dust. Then he was pushed on through the fluorescent dark by silent German diesels.

And of course, in the end, the money ran out. Then began terrible things with knives, and the unbuttoning of hard-starved military trousers. In terror and pain, Isak Dickerson, under sweaty male bodies, shouted out the only Brazilian he ever knew.

"O Phantom," he shouted, "O Phantom, O Phantom," like a great human drum, reverberating in the sheet metal confines of the black road clipper.

The internal rear door clicked open. The guards froze. A man stepped lightly into the compartment. His bare feet gripped the decking effortlessly against the sway of the bus. He was stocky, with muscular calves spreading the line of his cerise velure dressing gown. His hands were in slit pockets edged with black. Black wrap-around sunglasses surveyed the scene.

Isak caught a hint of perfume and corruption from the door ajar. A soft but authoritative voice galvanised one of the guards into clumsy action. Fumbling at pants and clutching his peaked cap, he stumbled into the front compartment. The bus decelerated and came to rest. Hydraulic doors hissed open to let in the dust and yellow light of a false dawn.

The next sequence unfolds frame by frame.

STILL FIRMLY PLANTED O Patrao, the Captain, the Chief, addresses Isak Dickerson.

A HITHERTO MOTIONLESS SPRAWL of bodies disentangle and scramble out of the way.

"WHEN PHANTOM IS ANGRY the Jungle shakes" ... old jungle saying.

(The address is incomprehensible except for the word PHANTOM. A question mark balloons over Isak's head).

THE CAPTAIN'S HANDS slide out of his pockets as he talks. Isak sees they are for the forming of fists: fists of rock.

THE NAIL CUTICLES are perfectly symmetrical.

(An exclamation mark balloons over Isak's head).

ISAK EDGES TOWARDS the wide doors, but he catches the sense of a single word, 'momento', and hesitates.

THE FIGURE IN THE CERISE SMOKING JACKET looks perplexed. He runs his hand through a greying crew cut. Purposely he steps back inside his compartment. HE REAPPEARS with a bundle of papers for Isak.

IN STRIDING THROUGH the cowering guards, he scoops up a handful of cruzieros from the bench, and hands these to Isak with the bundle.

ISAK STUMBLES backwards out, onto the road.

THE DOORS HISS SHUT on that scene, framed by the closing doors.

THE DIESELS POWER UP, and the great black juggernaut roars off into silent, black-line perspective.

Isak unrolled the bundle of comics and paper money, and saw in the dirty light the familiar masked features and white-out teeth on the covers. The artwork was identical, but the words incomprehensible to Isak.

The covers, however, proudly proclaimed in traditional red on blue, 'O PHANTOM'.

SOMETHING EVERY DAUGHTER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

BY JACQUELINE WRIGHT

It had probably been happening for the past three years. Deceptively slowly and gradually. For that reason it had gone unnoticed by my mother, Mrs. Constance Smedly, and her husband. When at last it had been identified the results were deemed "irreversible". There was nothing they could do. Everybody was very sympathetic. The family had a burst of compassionate and curious visitors who always left with dewy eyes and the parting whisper "if there is anything we can do, don't hesitate..."

I must have been the first to notice the tell-tale symptoms. I remember the exact day, it was suddenly so obvious that I poured melted butter from the broccoli dish onto Mr. Client's suit in surprise. Amidst the rush of apologies and the frantic dabbing of napkins I stared at my sister in utter disbelief. Her amber curls bounced free from her normally rigid coiffure. The red, rushed velvet dress fitted snugly around her hips and breasts. My heart beat rapidly in my throat until I nearly choked. Her legs were unmistakably slender and long. Her face was angelic; high cheek bones, almond shaped eyes, wide and blue like the colour of an autumn sky. A golden down covered her bare arms like fuzz on a peach. My God, I thought, she's beautiful. How the hell can I ever break it to her?

The alarm is set off. Voices chant in a low whisper, not a whisper, but a low, infuriating whisper. I can't hear the words but I know their tone; self-righteous, pharisaical. When the chanting is established, the authoritarian shouts intrude on every fourth beat. They issue command after command. Wait! Sit! Fetch! Obey! Serve! Usually the commands are less urgent but today they come at a faster pace, drumming desperately as if trying to make a point. You see it's all so cleverly devised, when I start to think sensibly, make independent decisions and form personal opinions an alarm is triggered off in my brain causing a bizzare choir to sing. Once I was sick, they told me I had P.D.S. a fatal side effect of Growing Up. They stopped P.D.S. by operating. The surgeons shrank my brain to make room for a motor from my mother's musical box. It used to play Eidelweiss but now it plays voices. I know because it doesn't work any more. It sits on the shelf above the sink, covered in dust and filled with bread ties.

Now comes the refrain, the booming, moralizing refrain, vibrating in the empty cavity of my skull. The voices smash against the motor causing the small silver wheels to

spin faster and faster until they whirl with the tempo. Desperately, they try and escape through my nose and ears which are blocked, from the inside, with rubber cement. They knock from one side of my head to the other, sounding like the crack of a cricket ball coming off the bat on a still summer's day and giving me a splitting headache. I flinch as they make their way down my vertebrae column digging their long, rusty hooks into the soft tissue of my spinal chord. They burst into my body, squeezing through my arteries and veins, sticking to my ribs like chewing gum, kicking me solidly in the kidneys. They make you convulse, by bruising you inside and there is only one way to stop them,

"Urrp."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Urrp."

"Grace!"

One burp is usually enough but sometimes it takes two or even three short ones to expel them all.

"Urp."

"Pardon yourself at once!"

But I can't, I lost my voice with my beauty at a time I can't remember. It's one of the unfortunate results of Growing Up. They said I might never get it back again. They said I lost it. The trouble is everytime I get close to finding it they send me back to the Institution.

So I sit on green lawns in old wicker chairs, listening to the summer cicadas humming. It's all very exclusive, only the best meals are served, from consommés, terrines, pastas and smoked haddock to curries, cream-cakes and good old apple pie. The gardens rate with those of Babylon and only the top doctors in their field treat us. We have croquet lawns, putting greens, tennis courts, swimming pools and a tall electric fence surrounding the entire premises. I can hear their talk. Her voice is high almost hysterical, his is deep and concerned. Dr. Rosenbloom is trying to be the cool voice of reason but, as much as he tries, he cannot stop the ends of his sentences from trembling. That is, when he can get one finished.

"My God man, do you fail to see the horrifying truth of this whole situation?"

"Mr. Smedly I appreciate your concern but..."

"Dr. Rosenbloom concern is not the word for it!"

"Distress then, but you must realize..."

"We realize that Gracie has had it, and now our youngest, Prue, is displaying the very same symptoms."

"It must be contagious."

"Mrs. Smedly..."

"It must only attack the young."

"Yes our studies do confirm that..."

"Don't your so called studies confirm a cure other than the gruesome one we had to take with Grace?"

"No I'm sorry Mr. Smedly, they don't."

So it's Prue next is it? My poor baby-sister Prue. What they are doing is all highly illegal. They ruled, only last year, that studies and experiments of P.D.S. be banned. Shhh! Listen...

"Yes, yes she is starting to argue with my husband and I, in fact, she timidly challenged a well known rule of etiquette the other day ... Yes John, I know it was only the arrangement of cutlery, but for God's sake look how Gracie started off! Then there was the day she swore and remember the time she wore odd socks?"

"Believe me Mrs. Smedly..."

"Constance."

"Mrs. Constance Smedly, I can appreciate your anxiety but there is no way Prue will ever get it. She's had the shots and the back-up medication. Puberty has been stalled for the maximum amount of time. To our knowledge, we have not yet treated any cases which have developed after vaccination. There is really no cause for alarm."



I know their plan, I know their whole game and Prue is their next victim.

It all started five years ago when the Holy Land sunk into the sea. One day it was there, the next day it wasn't. King, Queen, Dianna and the cliffs of Dover, all gone, except for a few pages of Shaw's 'Man and Superman' floating in, what was then, the Irish Sea. The press called it the sinking of Great Britain, the cynics deemed it the drowning of little England. With it went its cargo of morals and values, its survivors were a desperate and dying race. "It never rains but it pours" as my mother sadly remarked when they ruled that marriage be abolished. She formed sleep-outs, sit-ins, and hunger strikes supporting 'Moral Rights,' their moral rights. She was so involved in her cause she didn't notice her Gracie becoming beautiful; and beauty, so she said, was the first step towards immorality. Questioning their morals, challenging their morals, talking with boys, going out with boys, sleeping with boys, until I woke up in hospital one sunny morning and found that I couldn't ask for a glass of water. They took my voice away because I argued too much and was stupid enough to challenge their personal philosophy. The old race was experiencing the same problem as the Aborigines. Their offspring didn't want to live in bark huts on reserves when they could live in comfortable, furnished houses. They didn't want to learn hunting skills and how to find waterholes in the desert when they could go to the local pub and have a beer. Human beings are highly adaptable creatures. Without this trait we would have never got where we are now.

Shall I let you in on a little secret? P.D.S., or Personal Development Syndrome, isn't really a disease or "type of cancer" as I was initially told. It is a natural process of growing up. There is nothing strange or dangerous about it. Many parents have successfully stopped or hampered their offsprings' personal development. This is an unforgivable crime. There are people, like my mother and Dr. Rosenbloom, who are discovering ways of stopping immorality which they think is the result of P.D.S. Do you understand? It is much more horrendous than you could ever imagine. It's up to me and you, the few intelligent, speaking people, to stamp out this kind of practise. I've got the evidence to convince a whole army. It's tattooed on the inside of my skull. The tattoo is a cheap one so it's back-to-front and done in yellow — a little hard to see at times — but nevertheless it's there. I've written this all down and Kate's typed it up, but it's up to you to tell everybody.

The chapel at the northern end of the house was officially opened on a sultry summer's day. It was the day I came home. The air was sweet with love and sticky with pretentiousness. The teacher in the next block performed the opening speech and cut the pink ribbon which hung across the stained glass window. The window depicted the British flag set on top of rolling green hills and surrounded by various symbols such as Harrod's monogram, the Queen's head and Lord Snowdon's gumboots. The interior was decorated entirely in navy blue, white and red, with numerous low hanging plants that every adult visitor hanged their head on. Constance refused to raise them, she claimed the design was a 'Vogue Original'. Low hanging plants were trendy that year. The teacher had set a precedent in the district by erecting his very own chapel. The doctor, two doors down came a close second — just in front of the detective who had a bigger stained glass window and a spa. But Constance beat them all. With her husband's architectural knowhow and her highly developed decorative sense the Smedlys' chapel rated in the State's top ten, for the meantime anyway.

While they were drinking cups of tea and eating cucumber sandwiches, I hunted for my voice. I found chests full of my former belongings under the house. Everything smelt strongly of disinfectant and camphor. I searched the pockets of my tight, denim jeans pages of my fashion magazines. I even went so far as to check the contents of my cigarettes. Nothing. I could hear stifled screams, and moans of anxiety but I couldn't pinpoint them. Suddenly, the alarm was triggered off and the mad, frantic choir began to sing. But this time they were not in my head. Someone, somewhere had forgot to wind me up. The small silver wheels had ground slowly to a halt and the musical box in the kitchen began to tinkle.

Saturday night. A sly phone call proved that Prue wasn't at the local youth group painting scenery for the neglected children's Nativity play. Constance had tried herbal brews, mystic incantations and ritualistic chanting, all to no avail. Like Mr. Rosenbloom's drugs, these tactics were ineffective. The whole situation worsened when Prue fell in love and the more she loved the more beautiful she became. She carried an aura around the house which made Constance feel as if she were slowly suffocating in honey. I saw her prepare for

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battle. She bridled any logical feelings and climbed into her armour of martyrdom. She was determined to keep her daughter pickled in morality, if needs be. She began to mutter in rage as the clock ticked on past midnight. Hatred and irrationality, pressed its way into her soft, grey brain matter, like meat through a mincer. When the clock chimed two she began to rant and rave.

"Change in maternity hospital procedures killed my mother at birth. Change in the relationship between Britain and Germany killed my wealthy fiancée. Change in roadlaws rendered my car undriveable, last week. Change raped one daughter and is now in the process of raping another."

Constance hated change and kept a .25 pistol in her handbag just in case it got close enough to kill. The trouble was it always passed unnoticed, the sly and silent devil. At 3.00 am she made a cup of tea and fifteen minutes later there was a timid click as the front door opened. Constance emptied her cauldron into the sink and created a storm.

"You selfish, little cowl! Do you realize how worried your father and I have been? I have to get up early tomorrow morning to clean your bedroom and sew your skirt. Now, I will only have two hours sleep. I'm not like you. I'm getting old and sick. What have you been doing until four? ...No! Don't tell me I don't want to know. Your father and I are past caring. We've done so much for you, we've made oh, so many sacrifices. I can't go on like..."

Prue, in a drunken stupor, lurched towards Constance and with two powerful words hurtled her from the room.

That was the last straw. In the early hours of the morning Constance ran a cold bath and called my sister's Irish Setter, Scornag. She lifted Scornag into the bath and pushed him down beneath the surface of the water. Her body arched over. The dog struggled but she held it firmly on the bottom. I heard its bones crunch on the enamel bath as it fought for one last breath, but Constance was a too desperate enemy to beat. When the dog was limp and lifeless she threw it over the limb of a gum tree in the light of a full moon. She slipped the pill of morality between Prue's pearly teeth and down her slender throat.

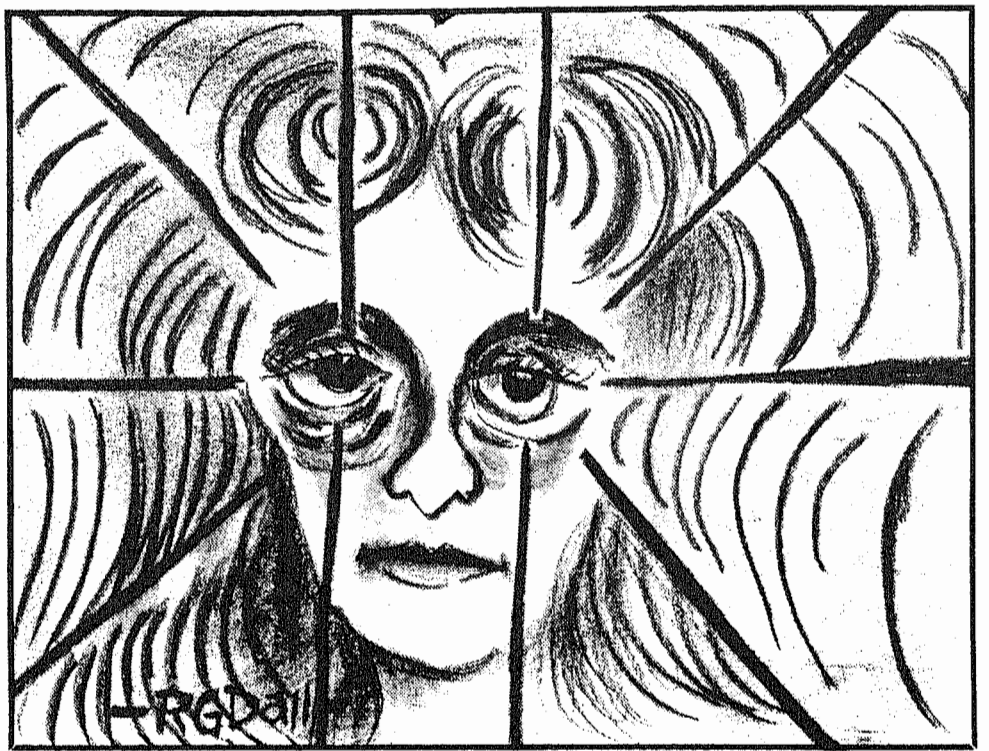
Prue slept through the next stifling day, so she didn't see what happened to her dog. The authorities came around to inspect the already maggot infested body. They declared it the work of a lunatic or very sick prankster and left in a hurry to scour the neighbourhood. As their car screeched up the gravel road a dead silence filled the air. I waited in terror like a bird who had been

taken by surprise by an eclipse on a warm autumn afternoon. Constance and her husband prayed in the chapel all morning. I couldn't hear their voices, I couldn't even hear the sound of my own steps when I walked up the steps. My mind was blank and muffled. If I could only see the tattoo in my head I would know what was happening. But somebody was holding a mirror between my eyes and the tattoo causing a pink light to reflect into my pupils. I tried to wake Prue. Maybe she could tell me what was going to happen. I stroked her cheeks and kissed her eyes but she didn't stir. So I slipped under her bed and frantically tried to remember what came next.

The crack of thirty-two windows and ten plates suddenly shook me from my daze. I banged my head on the frame of the bed and everything became obvious. My tattoo blazed like a lighted beacon. My mission was clear. Prue's beauty had cracked the glass and crockery; the house could not stand up to her power. A sweet, sticky substance poured from the roof and burst through walls and floors. I waded waist deep across the playroom to the entrance hall and was swept down the stairs by the swift flow. Then I saw them, carrying Prue on a narrow stretcher. She was covered by a starched white sheet, her arms and legs were fastened down and secured by bronze buckles. Constance followed the procession carrying the clock from the kitchen. Gliding on the smooth surface like a skater, I cut the down. Their lower lips quivered, they clenched their hands so tightly that they left sickle moons embedded in their palms. I watched them sink into the honey. Pale eyelids slowly closed and they disappeared down.

The rest is conveniently blank. I woke to see Prue's shining face. It was so radiant that it singed my eyelashes. She uncurled each one of my fingers that clenched a red piece of dagger shaped glass. She wiped blood from it with the hem of her velvet dress and started to cry. Her face sizzled and steamed, but she did not speak. Instead she held it to the light, slowly rotating it for an hour, maybe two. Set in glass was an ordinary house fly, perfectly preserved. Its wings were open and I could see diamond patterns. Suddenly with a quick tap Prue broke the glass and caught the fly in her hand. She tried to make me eat it, but I wasn't going to swallow a fly. We struggled without words but Prue was too strong. She put her hand tightly over my mouth and snapped my neck sharply around so I had to swallow.

"What happened to the honey?" I said.
 "There's a container full in the pantry and some nice bread to have it on," she answered.



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