Two Novellas

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ABSTRACT

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The common theme of these two novellas is the beastliness of the twentieth century. In "Family," a father lavishes love upon mankind, but, in so doing, blights his own life and the lives of his wife and children. "The Continental" presents a man of civilized sensibility who has dedicated his life to a search for the Beautiful through an appreciation of art and sensuality. The search leads at last to a vision of horror and brutality. The thematic variations are reflected in writing which is by turns awkward, blithe, stilted, and highly decorated.

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FAMILY

A Novella

in

Three Parts

FAMILY

In the Night, Heinrich Himmler . . .

In the night, Heinrich Himmler came to her as she lay waiting for sleep. He came from behind, stepping slowly, carefully in the unfamiliar dark. She knew him by the faint creek of his leather boots, by his prim decorum in sitting so near the edge of her narrow bed, by his voice.

Even in a whisper, his voice squeaked and rasped at the same time. Jane understood some German, and she caught a few words: "mein Schatz" and "schönes Mädchen." "Though you could hardly call me a Mädchen," she added in a characteristically wry tone of voice. As he whispered his endearments to her, Heinrich Himmler stroked her exposed shoulder, the nape of her neck

where lay the feathery curls which, for me, for many, suggested her frailty.

"If I were Jewish," she remarked, "there might be some point to it, some reason. Natalie and Sheila have both spent a lot of time thinking about Nazis and the camps. I mean, they both lost, I don't know, lots of relatives. They don't talk about it with me much, but I think it's on their minds a lot, the whole thing about uniforms and genocide and men. It goes together for them. But I've never cared about politics, not historical politics anyway, except when it involved women, so . . ."

Indeed, she had a very English name: Jane Seymour. Very Anglo-Norman? To satisfy the curiosity: Lady Jane Seymour was Henry VIII's third wife; they were married in 1536 and she died a year later, aged 26, while giving birth to the boy who became Edward VI. "My namesake was sacrificed for dynastic considerations, murdered for a man's vanity, his need to perpetuate himself. But Edward was sickly and died at the age of sixteen. I take ironic pleasure in knowing that the two children of Henry who made it to adulthood and the throne were women, both hard as nails, and Elizabeth was one of the best rulers England ever had, if not the best."

Jane made this speech in a dark bar some time after one in the morning. The drink had mellowed us both, but

Jane was a bit prickly at the mellowest. When I suggested Jane Seymour's death might be more accurately seen as evidence of the danger of primipara births in those days, she scoffed and insisted that Jane had probably been light and slim and, at twenty six, far too old to be bearing her first child. "Light and slim like you," I thought of saying, but held my tongue. Compliments angered her. You'll have guessed that Jane was at that time (spring of 75) what was then commonly called a "women's libber," but is now (1983) called a "feminist," a less awkward term. So of course she was a bit prickly. I apologize for the atrocious pun lurking in "prickly"; it is not intended and the word exactly catches the particular kind of sensitivity feminists so often display. The sense I mean is not one of attack, but of defence, prickly like the cactus, dangerous to rash hands. Let me hasten to add that I think a woman who is not some sort of feminist is a fool: and a man who isn't sympathetic is a lout, a barbarian or worse.

This is one of several things I want to say about Jane, but I have let it degenerate in adjectives: prickly, dangerous, sympathetic. I am a novelist, so I'd rather you remember the particular incident: her remarks about Lady Jane Seymour's death, the tone of her voice.

And this is also a convenient place to describe Jane physically. Light and slim, yes, and about five-seven. An attractive, comfortable figure which she often hid in indifferent shirts and jeans, sometimes showed with offhand pride in attractive skirts and dresses. (I'm back to adjectives again, heavy adjectives, blunt statement, crude structure; oh, where are the elfin words, the blithe sentences, the felicitous forms I once commanded? Don't think about it. Go on.) Light brown hair which she sometimes wore down to her shoulders, more often kept pinned up, so exposing those feathery curls at the nape. A pleasant, musical voice with an English accent of sorts; I believe she was a Canadian but had been brought up abroad. Her feet were long and slim and looked very delicate in the kind of loafer with a very short vamp over the toes and which I always associate with ads in The New Yorker. Jane thought her feet too big, but from the remarks of many women I have met, the Duchess of Windsor might as well have said: "A woman can never be too slim or too rich or too small of foot." Similarly Jane's nose was long and thin; and yes, she thought it too big and I thought it her best feature. She had high cheekbones, softly edged lips, surprisingly small teeth and pale blue eyes which either looked at you with searching candour (her head cocked

slightly to her right) or which gazed, squinting, into the distance as she groped for an answer, a question, a word, a phrase, a perception. And this is the second important thing I want to say about her: her intelligence was always engaged.

As I implied, she was a careful listener. Her characteristic speech was either a fast, articulate tumble of words or, frequently, that pause and gaze into the distance as she tried to grasp the concept, to give it words. The first few would come slowly, then she would turn her eyes upon you and the words would tumble from her.

Of course, she was, as the phrase had it, "a child of the sixties," which means she was actually a child of the forties or early fifties, 1949, I believe. The phrase means she cared about the issues, about people, about the absolute necessity of making the world a better place, along with the conviction that corrupt government was everywhere trying to enslave humankind. And, of course, there were the drugs. I have never been a user, preferring beer and cigarettes in immoderate amounts, but Jane, so far as I can tell, consumed large quantities of drugs at certain periods in the late sixties and early seventies. I am guessing from casual remarks she made and from the circles in which she moved. What effect

the drugs had on her I'll leave to the estimation of those with more experience. The phrase also suggests sex; this whole story is about Jane and sex.

The point is that Jane was a serious and concerned young woman interested in the world around her, interested in doing something worthwhile with herself, and willing to take chances.

So she tried things. As all her sort did in Canada, she lived a while in Vancouver. As some others did, she served with CUSO, a year or so in South America, I believe. She got a B.A. in one of the social sciences and started a Masters. Usually she lived alone; sometimes she lived with men or with women. Whether that went beyond cohabitation with either the men or the women I have no idea. On the whole, the living with others seems not to have been very successful. The prickliness, doubtless, and she placed a very high value on independence.

But in the night Heinrich Himmler came to her bed and she lay still while he reached under the covers and stroked her back, moved his soft, pudgy, moist hand along her spine. She lay with her eyes open, but saw nothing because of the darkness of the room. Yet she sensed the shape and nature of her visitor; the creak of

the leather, the smell of it, and other smells, too. "A cologne I didn't recognize, but it was" -- gazing as I have described, holding her breath -- "a simple smell . . . not a complicated one. I know that's redundant, but . . . it was a simple, direct fragrance. Not musk but perhaps some flower smell though not one I recognized, the sort of thing they sell to little girls as play perfumes or put in cheap soap. You'd never fob it off on a grown woman, not even on a man these days, so I knew it was an old scent, a thirties scent; and not something made in Paris, either, but made in the man's own Deutschland. Or Bulgaria. Vulgaria. It was simple like a three-word sentence: 'I like hamburgers.' Maybe it was from Hamburg. Anyway . . ." The trite play on words is not meant to suggest her intelligence, for she had ample, but rather its restlessness, touching upon something, turning it around, backwards, moving on. Sometimes, as when she felt comfortable or half drunk, these flights could be hilarious or fascinating to watch like the flight of a nighthawk.

"And the smell of the uniform: some fabrics have their own particular odour and a blouse that has been washed perhaps smells of the soap or the fabric softener or the fresh air if it has been dried on the line. But

his uniform had a musty, sweaty smell, moderately strong. I was amazed, really, because the man was the head of the SS and surely he didn't have to pay for his own dry cleaning. And then, of course, I remembered they probably didn't have dry cleaning back then, so how would you get the smell out of clothes you couldn't wash? You had to air them, no doubt, and hang them in closets with sachets to add a pretty smell to mask the soiled smell because there was no way to get rid of it.

"And . . . the buttons on the cuffs of the sleeve caught on the sheet when he reached under to touch . . ."

To touch her body, naked under the covers. I expect it was naked; she didn't tell me, so I am guessing from the time of year -- the "visitations" as she called them came in the late spring, early summer and the nights were warm that year -- and from my own experience of her bedtime routine. The first time I was with her in her apartment, she arose and took a flannelette nightdress from the hook on the back of the door.

"Do you always wear one of those?"

"Only in winter. When it's cold. I hate being cold."

And yes, Jane and I were lovers, although only for a short while. This passage in our friendship was not particularly important to either of us. Without being

either indiscreet or exhibitionistic, let me just say that we got on pleasantly enough in bed, but not famously. After a few weeks we talked it over briefly and decided to go back to being just friends, a relief to both of us. She did sleep over at my place a few times after that, but only because I lived downtown, it was late at night, and she didn't want to pay the cab fare on to her place. (For Montrealers: I lived on Peel just above Sherbrooke, while she lived on Esplanade across from the tennis courts.) "We can, if you'd like," she said on one of these occasions. "After all those beers?" I replied, and we snuggled against one another, happier in friendship than in love. (For all the nonsense that came out of the sixties, there also came moments like that; the possibility of moments like that.)

From my memory of making love with her, I'll add one indiscreet word: self-absorbed. A deadening, latinate term, though the English half is lively enough to most of us. At any rate, while it says nothing about Jane's lovemaking, it says much about Jane, about her nature. I remarked that she cared about issues: but she took them personally. The lies of Viet Nam, the meaningless slaughter, these were lies to her, slaughter of her people. The sordid, contemptible twisting of the Watergate business was an affront to her own integrity,

her insistence on truth-telling. Air pollution poisoned the air she was breathing right now, here in this room, water pollution fouled the water in this very glass she held in her hand. As for the saturation of food with chemical fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides, they were saturating her body, going into the lining of her stomach, into her bloodstream, to all the organs, muscles, bones of her body, accumulating in the bone marrow, the fatty tissue. I remember meeting her one summer afternoon on the crowded corner of Mountain and de Maisonneuve. Before I could suggest a drink, she was talking about agribusiness. Her midriff was bare between white slacks and a blouse tied in front; she grabbed a roll of flesh, a very small roll because there was little fat on her, and declared:

"Look at this; see this fatty tissue here?" and any number of eyes in the passing throng clearly did see it. "Do you know what chemicals have collected in this little bit of my body because those bastards in agribusiness have to make their profits? Do you have any idea? Let me tell you, then . . ." and she went on to list an amazing number of di-oxy-phospho-nitrite-ates which, I have no doubt, really were inside that winsome roll of flesh, and inside me and you too. But Jane seemed to take it all personally, as if the agribusiness

conglomerates were poisoning everyone in North America because it was the only practical way of getting at Jane Seymour. It was this aspect of her that I found hardest to take. I steered her to the Bistro on Mountain Street and we found a table on the tiny front terrace.

"Something has to be done. It's criminal," she said.

She was drinking a Pernod because it was somehow more organic than my beer. Quite possibly this was so; I don't want to make her seem a fool or a crank, but she did things like that. So did lots of others.

"I'm sorry Jane, I'm just a couple of years too old to be of much use. I hate marching for causes."

Jane marched for every cause of the moderate left. We talked over things to do without getting anywhere.

"Have you thought of moving to the country?" I asked. "If you grew your own food . . ."

The gaze, then: "I visited a few communes out in B.C., and a couple in the Townships and one in Vermont and . . . I don't think they work out very well. I mean, without all those machines, you don't have time for anything else. And that whole back-to-the-land movement was . . . well, it was well-meaning and sweet . . . sort of like . . . sort of like walking nude in a snowy field because it's pure and you're pure and you

want to express your oneness with the whiteness and all that and it's great as a concept, but mostly you freeze to death. Anyway, the answer is in the cities because our civilization is a city civilization. The orders to use those chemicals, the chemicals themselves, they come from city boardrooms and sales offices and labs and factories. Anyway, you know all that. So how have you been? I haven't seen you since . . ."

She wasn't really a bore, you see. Actually, the conversation about fertilizers and such went on for half an hour or more before she changed the subject, but she did change it. Nor was asking me about myself mere politeness. She was one of those who really want to know. She was different from most in that she allowed you to slip away from the question with formula answers; but if you did want to unburden yourself, she could listen.

An old joke. A young woman applied for entry to a great women's college. Soon, her mother received a questionnaire from the college asking, among other things: "Is your daughter a good leader?" She thought a moment, then wrote: "No, but I believe she is a good follower." The college replied: "We are pleased to accept your daughter's application; with 149 leaders, the first-year class will need at least one follower."

I mean that most of us are only too happy to talk, but only a few will listen; and, self-absorbed though she was, Jane was a good listener. I think she was looking for evidence, for signs, for clues to the hows and whys of life; she was willing to listen because she had not yet made up her own mind. I mentioned that she was of the moderate left. But so were almost all thinking people her age. The moderate left in the late sixties, early seventies was not so much a political position as a way of life. With it came a comforting confidence in who were friends and who enemies, what was right, what wrong. But while Jane always marched in the end, she had to make up her own mind each time, independently, on the evidence. When the call came for a ban on California grapes, Jane suspended purchases while she studied the issue. First she read about it in several safely left journals, then went to William F. Buckley's National Review not so much because she was willing to be convinced, but because she thought the left journals tended to preach to the converted (and the right journals too, of course) and she wanted to be sure there were no thorny or sneaky or even valid objections out there. Of course, this scrupulous fairness, or near fairness, was tiring. To be more accurate, it was psychically exhausting. And perhaps

this is where Heinrich Himmler comes in.

Heinrich Himmler came to her bed in the small hours when she lay still, wishing her mind would be still, yearning for rest, for release from . . . trying to be fair? The struggle for truth, for good action, was becoming too much for her, was dragging her down. So when Heinrich Himmler came to her those many times during that spring and summer, her resistance was low and she had no way to defend herself against his moist hands, his whispered endearments, his lies. No, she could not quite catch his German, but she knew from repetitive, hypnotic tone that he was telling her lies, trying to poison her mind. As she tried to understand why he was there, she saw at once that he was already inside her mind, that he was merely a fantasy or projection of her own thoughts or fears or dreams. (I have never studied psychology, so I will not try to explain the nature of the thing. Jane said that when he came to her she was neither asleep nor awake, if that is any help.) But therefore, if he was already there, inside her mind, was her mind already poisoned? Hopelessly poisoned? These questions and many others she put to me the time she told me of the visitations. Of course, I had no answers.

I would like to be able to give the whole of that conversation, but it lasted from happy hour Friday, through dinner and drinks and more drinks, and finished when we fell asleep around five-thirty Saturday morning. Mostly I listened and asked questions. (Yes, I valued Jane's listening because I value it in myself; I have worked at it.) The conclusion Jane came to, talked through with me that night, was that she ought to find out about Himmler and so, perhaps, lay the ghost, as it were. While he was an unknown, almost mythic, figure he was terrifying, but if he were known . . . And if she could know him, could she better know what inside herself threw him out into the room?

But before I explain what she found and how she interpreted it, I should mention what Himmler was doing to Jane on these visits.

When Heinrich Himmler came to her and stroked her body, Jane Seymour was weak and defenceless, her mind in turmoil, her spirit depleted. With his creaking boots and slightly rank uniform and simple cologne and an overtone of gun-oil from his pistol, Heinrich Himmler came to her bed and toyed with her. He did not take his clothes off, he did not kiss her, he just stroked her naked body with his soft, moist hand and whispered

poisonous endearments into her ear and, with his hand, brought her to some sort of sexual arousal . . . or satisfaction?

The shock the first time it happened was stunning, but the humiliation which followed was clearly worse. (He came to her, I gather, about three times a week for several months; whether he continued after her talk with me, I do not know; and no, she did not tell me any practical details.) But worst of all, she knew she was no longer simply one victim among many, of the poisons and injustices and cruelties of the world, but now she was a victim of her own mind. She spoke for hours about masochism and women and men, about ambition and daring and strength and courage and sanity, about Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath and many other women.

"I don't expect to be famous like Hannah Arendt or Simone de Beauvoir or whatever. I don't think I'm a genius or that I can solve all the problems of the world. Just now, I'd be happy if I could simply keep my own problems in control, never mind solve them. I mean, I'd be happy if I could find a quiet little lecturing job and work on my Masters and help a few students and be useful around the women's centre and maybe make some small contribution to solving the big problems. But now, betrayed from the inside: I mean, how did it get in

there? Who put it there? Was it my parents? Or society? Or men? Or me? Damn it, I don't think I did it to myself. I have taken chances, sure, but not really wild chances. I think I've been careful . . . reasonably careful. I didn't run off to Tibet, I ran off to Vancouver. I haven't slept with hundreds of men, I've only slept with . . . a small number. Drugs and booze . . . well, in moderate excess, but I'm not addicted and I don't sense any damage yet; anyway, I don't think they're to blame. But this guilt . . . doubt . . . anger . . . thing, it's been here since . . . since I was seven or eight, I think. And, damn it, it's in me just because I'm intelligent and I care and, most of all, because I'm a woman."

Well, there were twelve hours of that sort of thing. No doubt it sounds familiar, perhaps it is irritating, but it is not insane; we laughed over the Tibet-Vancouver remark. Yet Himmler had arisen from the depths of her to possess, defile her body, her mind.

Consequent to her decision to find out more about Himmler, Jane went the next day to the McLennan Library at McGill to do some reading. At least, I assume she did, for that's where she was going when she left my apartment (I lived a block away) but I did not see her again for several months. I called a few times, but she

was never in or wasn't answering or the phone was off the hook. When I did see her again, in early September, I believe, we were with other people in a bar and I only spoke privately with her for a few minutes outside the toilets. She had been to a shrink and then another one.

"But I've had it up to here with them. I've been to half a dozen over the years and I've never : . . I don't know, it has never done me much good. I think the whole psychology-psychiatry gang ask the wrong questions somehow . . . they see the world in the wrong frame of reference or something. I'd explain, but . . ."

She was having trouble meeting my eyes (or anyone else's that evening as far as I could judge.)

But I had to ask her.

"And . . . the visitations?"

"Himmler?"

"I'm sorry, don't answer if . . ."

"No, it's okay, he's gone. At least in the way he was appearing last spring: I think he's still in there. Anyway, I don't know how much you know about him, but don't bother. He was a boring, stupid, nasty little bureaucrat. By an accident of history he got on a political wave and rode it to the top where he carried out lots of boring, stupid, nasty, insane

little schemes. The mass murders you know about, but he was also into lunacy like selective breeding and . . . oh, there was a scheme to steal away the bastard children fathered by German troops on suitable women in occupied countries. He was a megalomaniac postal clerk whacking people with a megalomaniac's date stamp. Or maybe a claims adjustment clerk in the head office of an insurance company: 'Box C, line 32 is incorrectly entered, therefore your claim to humanity is rejected.' Which makes it all even more humiliating. Why couldn't it have been Genghis Khan or Attila the Hun; someone with flair, at least? Look, uhh . . ."

She was dancing on the spot so I went back to the table; when she returned, she finished her drink and left.

Her friend Natalie is convinced that that fall Jane suffered the final humiliation . . . brutality? What word suffices? She thinks Jane was raped. If so, Jane seems to have told no one; but then, she was very private in some ways. She could tell me at length about Himmler, but refuse to discuss menstrual cramps with another woman.

There is no point speculating on whether or not

it happened, because we will never know. In a sense, she had already been raped from within by Himmler; or, say, the effect was much the same.

I want to explain what I feel about rape, so here is a picture.

In a Metro station on a warm Friday evening in springtime. The girls, the young women, are going dancing. Some are with boyfriends, some with other girls. They wear clothes in many different styles: neat, dressy, sloppy, weird, colourful, drab, tight, baggy, modest, revealing. (This is the season of punk and preppy, very eclectic; I think the kids are ahead of the designers for once.) The miniskirt is back, along with lots of bright colours like turquoise, red, pink and mauve; hair styles are wild and dramatic; jewellery is big and bright.

The girls are chattering and laughing, their voices singing out in the echoing halls, whispering, while their eyes revolve and wheel, squint and grow large. What are they talking about? Surely about the same things as the Heathers and Judys and Barbaras of my youth. Not quite, for I grew up before dope and the pill. (How wise we thought ourselves then.) A few years ago they were children, in a few more most will be

married. But tonight in their coltish heels, their eyeshadow and dangling earrings they are adventuring out from home; in an hour, in rooms exploding with light and sound, they'll dance and dance and maybe try themselves in love. "The young in one another's arms," as Yeats put it. And if we're middle-aged and reasonably sane, we enjoy their chatter and laughter and their eyes, which brighten the world a little. And we wish them well on their journeys.

But the rapist hates their laughter. In the Metro station he lurks in the shadows by the concrete pillar and mutters to himself, his eyes moving restlessly, and he twitches in the shadows as his mind twitches in its shadows, his mind a cold, slimy creature, dweller in a dank and stinking underworld. He hates the girls in their light and laughter, in their glory, they enrage him, he wants to make their laughter a scream of terror, their light a smear of filth, their glory bloodstains on a torn rag.

But this creature also defiles my paper (I used to write of more pleasant folk) and I don't want to go on with him. Is he not too romantically evil? What about the clean-shaven rapist in the three piece suit? But I meant this to be a picture of his mind, not of him. Still, I seem to recall Hannah Arendt saying

something to the effect that evil is ultimately banal. Perhaps like Himmler the real rapist is dull, leaden, lumpish, stupid, boring, ordinary. Ordinary like the man walking beside you. Ordinary like me?

In any case, I hope Jane did not suffer rape.

I did not see her again, but she called me on my birthday, December 14th, to wish me greetings. She said her parents had rented a place in Barbados for a month or so and she was going down to visit over Christmas. She rarely spoke of her parents; they still lived overseas and Jane had not seen them for several years.

"Sounds great," I said. "Sun and salt water and long cool rum drinks. I envy you."

"Yeah, I'm going to see if I can't get myself straightened out. The winter depresses me, all the grey and the slush and the cold. I've always liked sunlight, ever since I was a little girl. Sunlight and laughter."

She said more, but it isn't important. For, a few days later, she flew to Barbados; she killed herself on the sixth of January, 1977.

Speaking of Himmler and what she had concluded was causing the visitations, she had said: "It's in me

just because I'm intelligent and I care and, most of all, because I'm a woman."

And what "it" had driven out of her life:

"Sunshine and laughter."

I wrote this account of Jane Seymour in April, 1983, just under eight years after Himmler began coming to her. I don't know that it is very successful. Far too many adjectives and abstract nouns. And while the frequently fractured syntax perfectly illustrates my feelings about Jane and the difficulty of describing her and perhaps even catches something of Jane herself, there are too many words and phrases more appropriate to formal or academic essays. I have not managed to give Jane flesh, though I think the nape of her neck was not too badly done.

No, even that is clichéd.

But if I haven't succeeded in the fiction writer's job of making this particular person real for you, perhaps I have reminded you of someone like her, some other intelligent, thoughtful, concerned (those adjectives again) young woman troubled by the times, by the lies, by the terribly difficult questions she faces merely because she is a woman. There are so many of them and they could use our help, even if it is only to

listen when they speak; or perhaps just to leave them alone. Only a small proportion commit suicide; somewhat more have serious breakdowns; and many -- most, I hope -- survive and win through to some sort of peace with themselves and the world, some sort of . . . not complacency, but, perhaps, solace. But they all suffer. When I think of their sufferings, their struggles, and for some, their suicides, I weep, as I weep now for Jane.

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Today is Sunday, April 24th, 1983. Montreal today is gloomy and rainy and cold; appropriate to my mood. I have been mercifully free from essay marking this weekend and my wife, an airline flight attendant, is in Paris on a layover. So in the quiet emptiness of this house I began, on Friday, this story. And story it is, fiction. It is the first writing I have done in nearly two years. (But ten years since my last published book, two failed novels, ten years of failure, doubt, humiliation, self-loathing. (No, that doesn't matter. Go on. Next time, something airy. (But in this century?))) The image of a young woman troubled by some sort of brutal Nazi fantasy is not, I know, original. I gather it plays some part in a recent novel called <u>The White Hotel</u> and Sylvia Plath uses it

in her poem "Daddy." I can only say that the young woman and Himmler have been on my mind since at least 1968 and I first tried to write a version of this story in about 1970. Does it matter that there was not a real Jane Seymour? I don't think so, but I hope you found her convincing. And I'm afraid you almost certainly know one woman like her. When I said just before the last space break that I weep for Jane, I was not lying: I really was crying here in this cold house on this darkening day before my typewriter. Sympathy perhaps. Or perhaps the vanity of the writer.

Some later incidents. While I was writing this story my wife really was in Paris. She was also being robbed in the Bir Hakeim Metro station. She and another woman flight attendant chased the robbers six blocks, beat them into submission, and took back the money.

Several weeks later, an ex-student of mine was working late at the concession stand of a movie theatre and, because it was the first pleasant night this spring, rather romantically decided to walk home at four in the morning. Three blocks later she found herself standing in the middle of the street while four grinning men advanced upon her slowly. A taxi appeared and she escaped.

The week after that I was having dinner with my wife and two other flight attendants in a restaurant. They are all bright, cheerful, outgoing women. One has written a novel, another is opening her own business. Between them, the three have twelve language fluencies and can get along in another half dozen or so. ("It gets easier after the fourth or fifth.") It is not surprising, then, that they have many things to talk about. But they also spent half an hour on the dangers of parking lots and how they deal with them.

These are anecdotes about women I know who are, in one way and another, dealing with the dangers around them. In the past few months I have found myself in streets and Metro stations and shopping centres looking at these people with the breasts and wider hips and beardless chins, half the human race, and wondering why they are the victims, preyed upon, threatened, beaten, raped by the other half, my half. I have no answer. But I have written about Jane.

Although there never was a Jane Seymour, there was a young woman in a bar. We were half a dozen at the now-gone banquette table in the bar of the Pique-Assiette restaurant. I have forgotten her name, though I could find it easily enough with a few phone calls. I will

not phone. She spent most of the time talking with my wife. I seem to recall that they talked about feminism. We may have met her a second time, but I don't remember it. She was rather more attractive than I have made Jane. Aside from this sketchy information, all I know of her is that a few months later, just before Christmas of 1976, she went to visit her parents who were staying in Barbados. There she killed herself.

I feel so helpless.

FAMILY

The Princess
The Boeing and
The Hot Pastrami Sandwich

Ian knew he was perhaps sentimental, even silly, but he was moved by landscape and the air in it. I live in the world and this is the world, he thought, as he broke down out of the cloud into the clear air and floated to a stop in the powder snow just below the avalanche platform. This Austrian valley stretching off to the right and left was deep -- he could not see the valley floor from here -- and steep-walled, the sides dark with rock faces and precarious evergreens picked out by the snow: a dramatic and gloomy scene. But what moved him most was the mist clinging to the mountains across and below, the mist woven through the trees, seeming still. He thought

that the people who, over the centuries, lived in these valleys and who spent the long winters looking up at such mist, who climbed up through the dark woods and into the mist, would naturally come to believe in strange beings dwelling here: werewolves, goblins, trolls. Yet I don't feel gloomy because of the mist; rather, I feel . . . peaceful, mildly exhilarated, privileged to see the mist, because . . . because it is below me. And he turned and skied down into the forest, the mist.

Stephanie did not share this interest in landscape: hers was a social bent. At midday, eating wurst and dark rye in the mid-mountain restaurant, she talked of the people around them.

"You'd think the British Government had imposed currency controls," she remarked. "This is the third day in a row that couple has been brown-bagging it."

She knew they were English because their outfits were at least fifteen years out of date and the woman had watery blue eyes. "And only an English woman could have that colour hair; I think it's some sort of old fashioned rinse they buy at Boots or Marks and Spencer where it is stocked not for profit but as a tradition."

Stephanie could go on for hours like this: acute, perhaps cutting, but rarely cruel and never nasty. She

was entranced by the hand movements of the English woman, the precise, almost prissy way she would select a triangle of sandwich from its waxed paper wrapper and insert it between her teeth with her lips withdrawn slightly so as not to get soiled; how, nevertheless, after chewing each piece of sandwich, the English woman cleansed her lips with a paper napkin, making sure the few crumbs were carried back to the wax paper. Sometimes a crumb fell to the table; methodically she plucked it up and placed it with the others while lifting her watery blue eyes and sweeping her gaze across the windows.

"It's absolutely, quintessentially middle-class English. I bet they're chewing each mouthful a set number of times. And contrast her with either of the Stuttgart women over there . . ." They had parked next to the two German couples at the lift base and had noted the Stuttgart licence plates.

Ian looked and followed the argument: she was right, of course. But he was more interested in the window beside their table, the two walls of windows and the mid-mountain view of the valley and of the wisps of mist which suddenly evoked in his mind a passage played on the oboe, something, he thought, by Schubert.

". . . while the hair on <u>his</u> hands is . . .

inappropriate: it seems almost obscene . . ."

Stephanie was talking now about the English man's hands, neat, plump and offensive.

The oboe line took a turn which caused a wave of melancholy to surge through him; with difficulty Ian controlled the tears, turning away from the streamers of mist and examining the fall of Stephanie's hair, straight and brown with a henna tint; beautiful hair. And the glint and vivacity of her blue eyes, how lively; he loved the sparkle of her life, like the sun on the blue waters of Penobscot Bay last summer. They had been in Maine visiting Stephanie's Aunt Ethel and Uncle Edgar who had a house on the water in Searsport. Every day Ian stole an hour or two of reading on the lawn but read little, for the light on the water, the light glistening in the clear air above the bay, ravished him.

How clear-headed must people be who live with this light before them, with this air around them. Twenty or thirty miles away, the cumulus-humilis clouds floated white and benign over the ocean, clearly visible; overhead, on its weathered pole, the Stars and Stripes snapped in the breeze. Every spring Uncle Edger retired the old flag and raised a new one, the red, white and blue strong and assertive, the new cloth heavy as

sailcloth. Once New England had been powerful among the United States because of clear-headed, vigourous people; but it was powerful no longer. He must read some American history to find out what had happened: had the clarity failed, or had a different Texan or Californian clarity bested it, made it irrelevant?

But the clear air was most like Stephanie's mind and he loved her for the clarity, the vigour and the agility of her mind sparkling before him. She was the business manager of their union, paid the bills, reorganized the mortgage from time to time, booked their hotels and flights, wheedled window seats for Ian. From a Qantas window seat, while she slept beside him, Ian watched moonlight shining on towering clouds over the South Pacific, stared down into the depths between the clouds and pondered the immensity of the Pacific, wondered at the idea of lazy happiness the Pacific evoked in him, so different from the brutal menace of the North Atlantic. He remembered a line in a book, something like: "The USS Bashful chugged slowly between the islands of Apathy and Tedium with an occasional side-trip to Monotony." The names suggested the boredom of the sailors in an irrelevant backwater of World War II, but for Ian the important thing was the immensity of the ocean under the hot blue sky decorated

with towering but harmless clouds. He thought of a television series about the war in which the Pacific had seemed so, and the goings-on across the Gilberts, Marshalls, Carolines and Marianas seemed, however gigantic in human terms, somehow small and insignificant in oceanic terms. Surely more important was that Gauguin and Stevenson had come here seeking peace rather than adventure. Was there something about these skies that granted a comforting humility? Not a humility which suggested the vanity of human desires, the futility of action, but the proper scale of man's state in the universe. And just as the North Atlantic could be peaceful in reality (as on Penobscot Bay) so the Pacific could be brutal; and somehow this was all connected with the Enola Gay in a sky of towering clouds; and the fireball and the towering cloud that sunny Sunday morning.

And presently Ian was able to watch the glow of dawn grow over the Tasman Sea, lighting the depths between the clouds, dispelling the moonlight mystery and revealing, at last, the blue waters, green growing luxuriance and red tiled roofs of Sydney under the sun.

Ian and Stephanie had one child, Elizabeth, who shared qualities from both of them. Her hair, blond in infancy like Ian's, darkened like Stephanie's and she

had Stephanie's quick, chatty sanity. Yet she could lie quiet in her father's lap while he read to her about the princess with the golden cup and the silver cup and the tin cup and the wicked stepmother who tried to steal them.

"Am I a princess, Daddy?"

"You're my princess, Lisa."

"But maybe you're not my real father and Mummy's not my real mother and my real Mummy and Daddy are a king and queen in a faraway land and they're hiding me from the wicked stepmother. Couldn't that be, Daddy?"

"It could be, I suppose, but then someday a herald from the king and queen would come and take you back to be a princess and you wouldn't see Mummy and Daddy anymore."

"Oh yes I would, because I would be a princess and I would give commands and you and Mummy would get on a Boeing 747 and fly to the faraway land and visit me in the palace all 'spenses paid."

She was six years old when the herald came to her disguised as a drunk in a late model car; as far as is known, she did not become a princess in a faraway land; nor were commands given in regard to Boeing 747 flights; and her light faded from their lives ever so gradually, like the fading light of a northern summer sunset; and

all their lives her memory glowed like the sun on the horizon.

Sunsets, though, were too easy, too obvious, like the beauty of Rio de Janeiro: Ian had decided that cityscapes were a form of landscape, and took a perverse pleasure in strolling about Edinburgh in the chill drizzles of January.

"By the Water of Leith, we sat down and wept," he murmured. Stephanie, with a more sensible attitude toward gestures, hustled him off to a talky pub on Rose Street and a pint of Leith Heavy for each of them, pun intended. She did not mention Elizabeth -- what was the point? -- but talked instead of the bright Celtic humour in the Scottish eyes, the languid curl of humour in the voices which caressed and piqued the words. "There is a generosity about the Scots which is most appealing. The Irish have sharper tongues, I think, they're more interested in pinching you into a reaction. It's easy to see why the Irish have a greater reputation for charm and laughter than the Scots, because they make jokes for an audience, they always have one eye on the listeners, looking for reaction, approval, a conspiracy of wit. The Scots, on the other hand, make a joke just for the friend and give it privately as a gift; theirs is a domestic friendship, warm and cosy. The Irish are

performers on public display, and are therefore like actors, always a bit false and a bit disreputable. Now look at the group of three by the window, the girl with the green scarf and the two men. For some reason which I can't guess for sure, although she is with the tall guy, she is trying to flatter the one in the blue sweater. Why she is doing it is not important -- perhaps he's had a fight with his girlfriend; anyway, I don't mean she's trying to promote an affair with him -- but she is definitely making up to him, but is doing it without making anyone, especially the tall one, uncomfortable. That touch on the sleeve, see, and the way she leans forward slightly when she laughs: those are inclusive gestures when we see that her other elbow is always near the tall one and her eyes go to the tall one quickly and without change during the laugh. She is flirting, of course, but openly and innocently, to promote the unity and warmth of friendship, not the division and . . . guile of an affair."

But while she went shopping along Princes Street, he walked in the drizzle through the squares and crescents of New Town, a section of cityscape remarkable, perhaps unique in the world, for its civilized unity and warmth, its lack of division and guile. In the late afternoon gloom, he stood in Charlotte Square swept by

winds and sheets of rain and considered the admirable Adams' proportions about him. Here one could well imagine Hume's clarity, sanity and especially his good cheer (even though Hume had surely been dead before the square was built); here one could accept the notion of a semi-barbaric people bootstrapping themselves into a moral, intellectual and scientific force in the world; here one could look from the deepening darkness at the warmth of the windows of gold light and the people within, warm and chatty. He stood in Charlotte Square for some time gazing at the windows while the wet wind harried him; and so he mourned his daughter.

Stephanie had always been alert to his moods, but had thought it wise to leave him to "moon on his own." His suggestions about a trip to Greenland enraged her, for Elizabeth had been her daughter too. She took him instead to Cortina where, yes, he was entranced by the Dolomites changing colour through the day, a shimmer of colours: rose, rose pink, pink, dark pink, red, red gold, gold, pale gold, ochre, buff, sand, pale orange, salmon, salmon pink, and so to pink again; a useless list of words, he said to Stephanie, because the colours of the mountains were too delicate, too evanescent for words.

Too evanescent indeed, said Stephanie to herself,

and tried to interest him in people; though Cortina is an international resort, everyone becomes Italian to a degree, enamoured of display, of pose, of excess, of opera.

"Italians are, of course, the most transparent and the most opaque of Europeans, for their motivations are all operatic: simple and childishly obvious. At the same time, however, we have to suspect that behind all the shouting and laughter and waving of hands there might be real human beings who think and feel just as we do; who, could they be cornered and somehow forced to stop acting, would admit to the ordinary muddle of ambiguous and obscure emotions. 'Yes, it is true, we Italians are basically human beings like the rest of you. Heavens, I suppose we're no different from the Swiss. Imagine! But I think perhaps our centuries of political instability -- an accident of history more than an expression of character -- have forced us in upon our families and the privacy of our own souls. When public life is always false, when it always means something other than what it pretends, then we adapt by becoming performers: actors and singers. Our deep affinity for opera is, as you have pointed out, Signora Stephanie, obvious enough to the point of cliché, but it is nonetheless real. But inside, yes, we Italians

are just like everyone else, even the Swiss.'"

"He didn't say that to you."

"He did."

"I wish I'd been here to hear it. He certainly didn't look very reflective."

Ian had, on a pretext, snuck out to look at the mountains under the moonlight to see if they changed colour (they did) and Stephanie had filled in the time talking at the bar with Emilio whom they had met when he and his rather plain young wife had been seated with them at dinner. Emilio, as Ian had suggested, was handsome, even beautiful, the classic tall, dark Italian with delicate yet masculine features, a voice like the caress of true love (heartbreakingly beautiful with an undertone of poignant sadness) and gestures which displayed, with pellucid clarity, a remarkable range of simple, obvious, direct emotions utterly devoid of obscurity or ambiguity. Or, as Stephanie had put it, "Pretty but boring."

Now she said: "Ah, but he was reflective."

"What do you mean, 'was'?"

"Well, as soon as he said Italians were like the Swiss -- said it the second time, I mean, at the conclusion -- his face began to change, rather as if he had choked on his drink, which he may well have done.

His eyes began to bulge out, his cheeks took on a red flush and his lips began to tremble. He staggered to his feet and had to hold on to the bar with one hand while the other rested, palm outwards, on his brow. His eyes looked up to heaven in supplication, his eyelids fluttered, then gradually he seemed to regain control. When his legs were steady, he let go of the bar, held one hand to his heart, flourished the other in the air and began to sing some aria by, I think, Donizetti. But before he was two lines into it his body was wracked by spasms and he began another one, this time sad, so that he went down on one knee, clasped his hands before him in prayer and began to weep. Two lines into that one his body froze for a few seconds, then he leapt to his feet and gave a scornful 'Ha!' and began the derisive song of a young hero defying tyranny. He went through half a dozen of these changes, the variety remarkable, the clarity perfect, but they began to come faster, one beginning before the other was quite over. Gradually he was moving toward the balcony door over there. By this time, of course, he had the attention of the room. With the door open, he grabbed the red cape of the woman -- you remember, the one in black who was sitting on the beige couch -- wrapped himself in it, paused, then vaulted out, up to

the railing, turned to sing snatches from ten arias, then leaped off."

"But it's thirty feet to the ground there!"

"Not to worry: he disappeared in a flash of light and a puff of smoke. Opera, you must remember, is an essentially harmless entertainment."

But while Ian enjoyed the felicity of her wit, he was thinking of the white wastes of Greenland and less than a year later, in storms of argument, they separated, he not to Greenland but to Arabia; she, after considering London and Paris, to New York. Of course, he was seeking some sort of cleansing purity under the sun, craving the simplicity of a stark land under blue sky; but he found government regulations about travel, he found jovial and sharklike businessmen in his hotel: a computer programmer, a construction engineer, a stock consultant, a hotel architect, a highway contractor, a perfume manufacturer, a pipeline surveyor, a salesman of executive jets; and he found money; and air conditioning. Thus, when Stephanie called and suggested he visit her in New York, he accepted with rather more enthusiasm than he let on.

They were both beaten by the frustration of their grief for Elizabeth and by their separation and wanted a way back, not so much to what had been, but to something like it, something they could live through

together. Ian recognized that she was the wiser of the two and put himself in her hands. Indeed, by coming to New York he was admitting he could not live without her and she was right. He worried that perhaps she would talk to him endlessly about people and how people must get on and talk and deal with one another and he was prepared to endure this, but she did not do it. Instead, after a certain amount of hesitation -- a day or two while he talked of the loathesome hotel life of Riyadh -- she came to a decision and showed him:

a one-armed man who smiled,

an aged, reclusive actress buying oranges,

Berman the tailor who joked as he smoked and coughed his lungs out,

three child prostitutes joking with a cop,

an off-duty cop who bought them many drinks and, in the small hours, wept for all the lost people of his city,

a little old lady from Dubuque,

a struggling actress from Sandusky,

Berman the deli owner who claimed he made the best hot pastrami sandwich in New York ("by which, of course, I mean the woild"), and who certainly made a great one,

the body of a heroin addict, black, about fourteen,

three fat ladies squinching up their eyes with

delight as they bit into pastries,

a famous writer-actor-director playing clarinet rather warily in a club,

two chess players in the park, both from one of the Baltic republics, one small, neat and quiet, the other large, dishevelled and talkative,

a man who danced with his wife, repeatedly, and obviously loved it,

a young woman on a street corner who seemed not to have enough hands for her briefcase, portfolio, shopping bag, suit jacket, wallet and lunchbag, and who smiled with all her teeth when a truck driver whistled at her, but did not whistle back,

a young woman studying viola at a famous music school who laughed brightly but nevertheless committed suicide a few weeks later,

a flight attendant who said, "Memphis? No, we don't have a base in Memphis, but I wish we did: no more Memphis layovers!"

an insurance executive who wrote fine poetry,

a well-known movie actor, a specialist in villains, who bowed graciously as he held open the door of a shop for a young woman he did not know and who did not recognize him,

a pickpocket getting caught and shrugging,

a man in a business suit standing in the middle of traffic with tears running down his cheeks,

a man whose clothes were held together with safety pins and who claimed the earth is crystalline and will shatter if we all get together and hum the right note,

a man who said, "The fish import business? What I don't know about the fish import business you could roll into a ball and stuff up a mosquito's nose and still have room for my wife's left bazoom and let me tell you, my wife is built, ya know what I mean?"

a roomful of people having sexual intercourse with strangers,

two smashing transvestites who, for two and a half hours, explained Monteverdi's place in the history of western music, nay, of western civilization,

ten lords aleaping,

eleven pipers piping,

twelve drummers (one the leader of his own band) drumming,

and old Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all,

and Ian had to admit to Stephanie's victory so that, although she loved him more than ever and conceded that their next trip should be down the storybook, castellated Rhine from Mainz to Cologne, he had to concede that it should be on a boat filled with people drinking

and singing and dancing,

and so it was,

and they lived fairly happily for quite a while afterwards.

FAMILY

The Garden of the Hesperides

After the rough and tumble of the great world, I have brought myself to this haven so as to enjoy whatever tranquility and genial exertion may be left to me in this life. My health is better than I have a right to expect, my finances are reasonably secure, and the house is sufficient for my needs. I am an hour and a half from the nearest city, near enough for convenience and far enough for some hope of peace. Having not so much retired as disengaged myself from the world, I gather I can look forward to a dozen more years of what some call "golden age."

I am not naive enough to think there is anything golden about even a fairly painless decline into death.

The elasticity and bloom of youth had gone from my skin by the time I was forty, my once excellent eyes needed help by forty-five, and a few years later I began to ask people to repeat what they had said. Now my digestion has become querulous and my joints rickety, while my body is subject to the ebb and flow of prophetic aches. More distressing is that my memory fails me at times, so that I confuse people and places, the order of events, and transpose half-vague conversations. Perhaps the advantage is that I shall be forced to look forward and not back.

No, I do not expect the years remaining to me to be golden. From what I have seen of the world I shall be contented if they are merely leaden. However, considering that my wife, my daughter, and my granddaughter are all dead before me, I expect I should be thankful I am alive at all.

Apart from the business of relocating here, my seven months of retirement have not been particularly busy, and for the first time in years I have had time for reflection. I have not done any systematic thinking, nor have I come up with any random thoughts of use to anyone. But this morning, while reading the newspaper, I realized something about my own view of the world

which surprised me: for years now I have regarded global catastrophe as inevitable. War, pestilence, famine: in some combination, sooner or later, slowly or quickly, they shall come to us, and such glories as the human race has wrought upon this earth shall crumble into dust.

I knew I had believed this for a long time, because as soon as the thought took words, I saw that it explained, or at least fitted in with, certain hitherto confusing or surprising attitudes I hold. My years with UNRRA in Europe after the War were fruitful because we had funds to work with (never enough, of course), we could see the lot of the refugees improving, and Europe did get reconstructed. But much of my work since then in Africa with the Economic Development Agency has been a matter of two-steps-forward, one-step-back. The late fifties and early sixties, when so many of the colonies were blossoming into independence, seemed to promise so much good, but the seventies and eighties have delivered disappointment and frustration. Of course, the saddest, most dramatic for me was Biafra. Friends dead, work in ruin: why did I not give up in despair after that devastation? I only worked on one job in Uganda (an agricultural diversification project in the late sixties) but how could I continue in a profession of hope after hearing of Idi Amin's charnel house? I was not involved

in Somalia and was in Ethiopia only before the worst troubles, but some of my closest colleagues were in both. Even second-hand, the stories leave one numb, speechless. The Congo, Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic: need I go on? Of course I should, because so few people out here in the West really know, really understand about the endless ocean of black bodies lying splayed upon those sun-baked plains, but someday perhaps I'll write a book about it.

I kept on in spite of those and other horrors because it seems I have believed the ultimate horror, the ultimate silence, is inevitable. Surely this is a paradox? No, I think the answer goes something like this: No matter how horrible this sight before me, I have in my mind's eye seen the worst; if I could face that, I can face this; if I can face this, I can get on with the job of trying to make this less bad than it is.

I don't know that this makes much sense, but I rather think that is how I must have been thinking about it. At any rate, it is all a startling revelation to me.

I might add that I long ago lost whatever religion I had, and I have always considered this sort of convoluted philosophizing to be a waste of time, an

indulgence. I must find something to do with myself.

Reflecting upon it, I see that the logic of my apocalyptic vision makes sense. But more important is the conclusion: what am I to do now? In fact, I plan to write a few articles and I shall continue to attend conferences -- Rabat last month and Lugano next. But the fact is that I have disengaged. Thirty-eight years of hopeless labour in a cause of hope have made me old and tired. More precisely, my soul is tired.

So I looked about me and decided to take up gardening. A failure as an angel in the great world, I shall try my hand as a god in this little one.

My little world here on the coast of British Columbia is particularly suited to gardening in that the area has mild winters, moderate summers, and generous rainfall.

Mild! Moderate! Generous! Nature here is helpful, bountiful, kind, smiling; my neighbours complain of fog, of three days without sunshine, of "terrible heat" when the sun is but smiling and, next winter, will no doubt whine when stretches of cold keep them from the golf courses. I hope I may continue to restrain myself in the face of this shocking and selfish ignorance. For I

shudder when I think of the extremes of violence which nature regularly visits upon the human race in much of Africa, Asia and South America: a brutal sun baking the land for months on end; torrential rains washing away huts, tracks, crops, everything; droughts lasting a year, three, a decade; such riotous fecundity that if a garden be left unweeded for a few days it will be submerged in jungle; such a profusion of wildlife that, should the garden survive the climate or the jungle, it will surely be devoured by a lightning invasion of some sort of animal or insect from the legions of devourers which swarm across the continents.

But I am disengaged, am I not?

I live on a spit of land shaped very much like Florida except that the rocky tail, like the Keys, curves off to the east, not the west. Where the spit joins the mainland, I also own a chunk up to the road. The whole measures nearly a kilometer from road to tip and is about one hundred meters wide at its widest point. The height of land is a spine running the length and near the western or windward shoreline so that the drop there is steep, while the land falls gently to the eastern lee shore. Most of the land is covered with pine and spruce trees. Those near the road are tall and straight, those on the peninsula are shorter, while those on the western

lip are stunted and contorted by the wind.

All about are mountains. They soar up beyond the road and form a solid, majestic wall on the far side of the Sound. I should say that the idea of gardening here is absurd. The site possesses such ravishing natural beauty that anything I could do would probably detract rather than enhance. But in some places the underbrush is rather heavy, in others the pathways are overgrown, and some of the steps down to the beach on the lee shore need mending. So I see myself not as a creator of a garden, but as a caretaker, a neatener of a garden which is already here.

Each morning for the past few days I have cleared underbrush and have made considerable headway. The indigenous trees are clean things on the whole and do not drop much debris. The bushes in the edges grow thickly, but I see no reason to trim them back except in a few places where they hinder movement or hide a view. I am contenting myself with neatening the forest floor in a radius of about fifty meters in each direction from the house; this gets me as far as the water on three sides and to the first turn in the driveway. This should be enough: domestic around the house and wild further off.

On the front of the house -- angled toward the Keys -- there is a large veranda (which the real estate agent called a "deck") and off this veranda there is a lawn about thirty meters square. It seems once to have been bordered with shrubs and flowers, but to have been neglected for some years. I have decided to try to revive it. This goes somewhat beyond my original intention of neatening nature, but I don't think a smallish house garden violates the spirit of the place.

The great thing, it seems to me, is to live in harmony with the world around. Nature here is so benevolent that to live in harmony with it should be a pleasure. Only louts and barbarians could want to do otherwise. Living with one's fellow man, however, seems more than some of my countrymen can manage, as an encounter this morning made clear to me.

I was buying a few groceries in a convenience store. As I waited to pay, I remarked in a vacant, conversational way to the pudgy man behind the counter that prices keep on going up.

"Know why?" he asked in a tone of voice which suggested that I did not, that he did, and that he was going to tell me. As a veteran of well over a third of a century in international economics, I know the main lines of all the more commonly accepted explanations of

price rises and of a number of the more bizarre ones, but the easiest course seemed to be polite ignorance.

"No. Why?"

The grocer took a can of frozen orange juice from my hand and pushed it in front of my face.

"There you are, mister," he said. "Read it and weep. Here we are in God's own country and the government shoves this crap down our throats, so the whole damn shebang is going to hell in a handcart."

"Orange juice?" I asked. There rushed through my mind the thought that he was a lunatic who held the view that vitamin-C is poison. Then I thought he was objecting to some sort of government policy on the importation of canned juices in competition with local produce -- British Columbia is a great apple growing province and such arguments are, not surprisingly, extremely common throughout the world.

"No, this!" he said, jabbing his finger at the label. "This here crap. They're always shooting their mouths off about pornography, but compared with this, what's a few tit pictures, eh?"

I shook my head, speechless.

"Jacks the goddamn prices on everything, people can't afford to buy as much, sales go down, people get laid off, more unemployment, so more crime, taxes go

up, there's frustration, more robberies, more drugs, more violence, rape: the whole goddamn shebang is going down the tubes and there's the reason, plain as the nose on your face."

In desperation I managed a reply.

"I'm sorry, but I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about. If you mean to suggest that orange juice causes rape, I'm afraid that . . ."

"Not the juice! The French! Look around you! Everything in this goddamn store got to have French labels, see. Look here, and here! See? And here . . ."

But I heard no more, for I was out the door and driving away. After half a mile I pulled into a lay-by and parked because I was shaking uncontrollably and would surely have killed myself or someone else.

Madness.

At work abroad, I was always pleased to be able to say: I am a Canadian; I am nobody; I am everybody.

Sheer madness.

Two days ago while I was in Vancouver on a variety of chores I bought three books on gardening. The largest deals with gardening in all its practical aspects, the second deals with problems particular to the Pacific Northwest, while the third is a history of gardens.

This last one fascinated me, for I discovered that not all gardens are designed upon the same principles and that, in fact, great wars of philosophy and taste have been waged over gardens. I also learned to my surprise -- only the ignorant could have been surprised by this -- that gardens have been around since at least the time of the Egyptians.

Their gardens seem to have been largely practical. They grew fruit and vegetables, not flowers, and water was for irrigation and transportation. Yet they planted in regular rows, so they knew they were ordering nature, and under the hot sun of the Nile Valley they certainly appreciated the cooling shade of the trees, the bright refreshment of the pools.

It seems Nebuchadnezzar may have built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon as a reminder, for a wife, of the wooded mountains of her homeland. This story reminds one of the tale of the Portuguese prince who married the Scandinavian princess. She yearly pined for the snows of home, until at last he had the hills of the Algarve planted with almond trees. When they flowered, they turned the hills white as snow and the princess was happy.

As I read my books and compare what I see there with

what I see growing, I realize I know the names of only a very few plants. From memories of my maternal grandmother's garden I recognize pansy, petunia and sweet pea. From my paternal grandmother's, nasturtium and morning-glory. Roses, tulips and daffodils everyone can recognize, of course, but it seems every slightly different one has its own name. In addition, there are families within families. I had heard of moss, damask and tea roses, for example, but could not have recognized any. Now I find these groups are rather old-fashioned and that whole families have arisen of which I am ignorant. This is abysmally slight knowledge with which to embark upon a career as a gardener. I am humbled.

I am further humbled, indeed humiliated, by my ignorance of the plants of Africa. I remember Gwen talking about frangipani, hibiscus, acacia and so on, and must certainly have seen them right in front of my nose, for she used to say, "A table without flowers is like a life without laughter." And I recall spending hours reading reports in a succession of gardens which she must have laboured over when I was away. I am beginning to realize those gardens must have taken a lot of work and needed a lot of knowledge and taste. I could certainly use her knowledge now.

It appears that the Greeks were indifferent gardeners. What little tillable soil Greece had, had to be used for sustenance crops; and, without delving into cause and effect, the Greeks preferred the social life of the agora.

Surprisingly, those practical, bureaucratic Romans held gardens in high esteem, a rare case of their ability to create beauty rather than simply buy it, imitate it, or loot it from subject peoples. The gardens of the patricians were as massive and elaborate as the royal gardens of a few centuries ago or the great public gardens of today. The merely well-to-do had courtyard gardens which are the ancestors of the courtyard gardens of modern Spain: I recall feeling cooler for the solace promised by a few tantalizing glimpses into those deep interiors behind the iron grilles. The Romans were the first to use flowers and such architectural elements as columns and statues as pure decoration. They delighted in fountains rising in jets and falling in cascades, in the serenity of pools, and with their engineering skills could make everything workable and long-lasting.

Of course, there was also the Garden of Eden, but that is a different sort of thing altogether: an imaginary garden.

Still, I am creating imaginary gardens for my

little world, trying to fit them to this landscape. So far they are all inappropriate: wrong landscape, wrong size, wrong philosophy, wrong elements. I did walk back to check the overflow of my water cistern and found it substantial, so I could introduce flowing water in some form or other to my garden. Surely there would be some sort of stream or pool or fall which would not be a violation? The possibilities intrigue me.

I am tempted to think Gwen was one of those people who acquire complex bodies of knowledge with their mothers' milk; I learn from books. Of course, the English have always been great gardeners, and I suppose it would have been impossible for her to have grown up in her Hampshire home without learning at least the names of plants, the order of their blooming, something of pests and diseases and so on. Yet she must have had a feeling for plants, for their needs in food and water, for the arrangement of colour. And although she must have been steadily accumulating knowledge over the years, I never saw her writing down lists of plants, or drawing coloured diagrams of flowerbed layouts, or consulting tables of pesticides. I suppose she must have asked advice from neighbours and, in the hours or days or weeks when I was away, there must have been times when she lay back with

a gardening book; I'm sure I remember seeing some about over the years.

Yet learning was different for her than it was for me. More round, somehow.

Our word paradise can be traced back to the Old Persian pairidaeza meaning an area walled around or enclosed; thus a park. What a marvellous connection: to think of the afterlife, the reward for virtue, as an eternal garden!

The Persians divided their gardens into four with water because they believed the world to be quartered by four great rivers. At the centre, the four channels usually met in a pool. At some point there was a pavillion or at least a place to sit, so that the body could rest shaded from the summer sun and sheltered from the winter wind, and the soul could be soothed and delighted by the tinkling of water and the warbling of birds, by the harmonies of music and the sanities of order.

Always the Persians paired flowering fruit trees with slim, evergreen cypresses. The springtime blossoms of the cherry or plum spoke of life ever renewed, while the cypress, whose stump will never sprout again if the tree be cut, betokened death.

The Persian garden, therefore, was a promise in this life of the next, a glimpse into eternity. This idea is testimony to the ability of the human spirit to rise above the swamps of hatred, brutality, indifference.

Yet how can I, who know of starvation, disease, ignorance, betrayal, degradation -- unbelieveable, unspeakable miseries -- how can I believe in such a garden?

Here is a situation typical of the life I lived while I was in service; it is a commonplace in the lives of all my colleagues.

I am standing at the window of my room in a large, air-conditioned international hotel in some African capital. If I were part of a large delegation, the police would have removed all the unsightly poor from a five block radius around the hotel. But I am here alone for a routine meeting with the Minister of Development, so I am able to see the wretched of the earth hobbling, crawling, clawing their ways through the heat and dust of the grandiose but pathetic garden of Independence Square. Even from this fifth floor window, I can see the deformed limbs, the bloated bellies, the swollen joints; the growths on throats, armpits and groins. For some of those humans in front of my eyes, the end is

near, beyond the skills of doctors. For others, the cure is as easy and as cheap as a single injection. For many the answer is as simple and as impossible as a proper diet. I am not a saint and I like to think I am not a fool. I am not medically trained. So I say to myself something like this:

If this meeting with the Minister is successful, then we shall have a framework for the schedule of transfers for the farm implement scheme; and if the remaining five meetings are similarly satisfactory, if the government remains stable, if the neighbouring countries do not make mischief, if the larger powers do not interfere, if the three delegates to the International Commission on Small Industry Development continue to report satisfactorily on the project (one is against it, one is wavering), if the budget is not cut, if the economy of the world remains stable, and if . . . any number of ifs: if all that, then perhaps I will have been of some help. I will not, of course, have been any help to those poor wretches down there in the square, the ones who have inspired all this concern, the ones before my eyes, but I may perhaps be of some small help to their children, or, more likely, to some person who today is walking tall, proud, fairly healthy, fairly prosperous on a distant hillside, but who, in two

years, because of some catastrophe of weather, of insects, of disease, of war, will be down there crawling across that patch of dirt, degraded to beggary. Thus my colleagues and I learned to turn our eyes from the window, click open the briefcase, square up the files, and get on with the job.

So, after a year of getting used to it, I have spent most of my adult life walking through the valley of the shadow and have managed to keep myself sane and pointed at the objectives. But now, when I contemplate living in my paradise, I am tormented by the spectre of those degraded multitudes, and all delight is gone from my garden.

This afternoon I was in the garden centre standing in front of bins of bulbs. Oniony things in net bags with colourful labels: crocus, narcissus, daffodil, tulip, hyacinth. I was considering whether to buy some now or to wait for fall or whether indeed my garden needed bulbs and, if so, where. Now, I am a man who has supervised the disbursement of hundreds of millions of dollars which have influenced the lives of millions of people. Yet the decisions over the bulbs seemed intolerably large, beyond my ability. Suddenly tears sprang to my eyes and I found myself thinking of Gwen and I had to move to the parking

lot where I sat in my car for five minutes or so. When at last I regained control of myself, I drove home and lay upon the chesterfield where I alternately dozed and pondered what had happened, why I missed her so much. I am not sure I have the answers, but I believe I have managed to make a few things clear to myself.

I don't know what people mean by love or by happiness in marriage. I expect I know as well as the next fellow, but I am not able to define these ideas. Certainly we were passionate enough for the first few years and the passion transmuted easily to affection. Certainly she was always comfortable to be with. We had our share of squabbles, I suppose, but I can barely remember her being angry with me, still less my being angry with her. She was of generally cheerful disposition, though rather quiet -- perhaps self-absorbed -- unless we had guests in. Sufficient unto herself, I might put it.

She was always a good housekeeper and that is a tribute when one considers the variety of rented houses and rented furniture, the different foods available, and sometimes not so available. Of the many postings, Washington, New York and Geneva were relatively easy, I expect, but Enugu and Lagos, Accra, Dar-es-Salaam, and Bujumbura must have been trying at times, despite the

generous allowances and quasi-diplomatic status. I was not surprised when she announced she would not let Ian and Jane be packed off to boarding school in Europe. She had been through that herself and remembered well the fear and the loneliness. She never forgave her parents. Because the children needed better educations than they were getting, and because we were faced just then with moving from Dar to Addis Ababa, I agreed all three of them would be better off in Geneva.

Gwen did not come with me again on an African posting. She was planning to join me in Mombasa that final year, but at the last minute she decided to stay in Geneva. I thought perhaps she had lost all sense of adventure and reminded her what a pleasant place Mombasa is, but the real reason, which she kept from me, was that the doctors had just told her about the cancer.

When I found out, during our Christmas holiday in Barbados, I at once gave up the Mombasa posting (I had only been there three months) and arranged to return to a headquarters job in Geneva so as to be with her.

"You should have told me," I said.

"You were so looking forward to Mombasa," she replied. "I didn't want to keep you from it."

"Under the circumstances?"

"You so enjoy the work."

"There is no lack of work at headquarters."

"It's not the same, though, not at all the same."

She was saying I loved the fieldwork more than I loved her. But I have little talent and less taste for such fine discriminations. Quite possibly she was right, although I don't remember any particular regret at relinquishing the posting. It seemed clear to me that my duty was to be with her.

I always did the best job I could, but I always accepted the dictum: No one is indispensable. So I didn't think Africa would be any the worse off without me. Indeed, I have often thought Africa would be better off without the white race entirely.

In any case, I went back to Geneva with Gwen for those last ten months. I gather she must have been in great pain, especially at the end, but if so she did not let on. Her progress down to death was a mystery to me, as much a mystery as her life, the life she gave Ian and Jane, the warm glow she spread around us all.

Sufficient unto herself: during those final months she often said I was a great comfort to her, but I took this to be the reflexive gratitude of one who felt herself a burden to others. I do not know what I ever did for her besides pay the bills. I have always seen my salary

as a by-product of work I would have done anyway. Besides, what else did I have to spend it on?

No, she lived and died a mystery to me and now I am retired and I wish she were with me here on this veranda this evening, so that we could sit together watching the shadows in the garden deepen from green to blue to purple, so that I could ask her what bulbs to buy and where and when to plant them; and when I knew her answers, perhaps I could begin to know her.

And that is why I wept.

The gardens of Renaissance Italy were meant to impress the viewer with the magnificence and taste of the owners. I am inclined to think this was even more so in the gardens Italy inspired: those designed by Le Brun and Le Nôtre in the France of Louis XIV.

There are differences. Because Italy is so hilly, its gardens tend to be vertical, and this led to wonderful elaboration in the use of falling water, while the great French chateaux were mostly built on level ground, and thus use horizontal vistas with flat water. There are also technical differences -- in the designs of parterres and terraces, for example -- but for me the most important is one I have only guessed at. I suspect that while the Italian prince or cardinal

would say, "Look at my magnificent garden. Marvellous, is it not? Let us go for a stroll in it so that we may enjoy its delights!" The French duke or count, on the other hand, would have been saying, "See my magnificent garden. Is it not splendid? Now let us return to the salon and discuss . . ." whatever it was they had to talk about: politics, art, the grandeur of France. I mean that, from what I read, from what the photographs suggest, the gardens of France seem inhospitable, cheerless.

While this generalization is probably worth as much as such generalizations usually are, I note that Italy was a divided country of weak principalities, while France under Louis XIV was the greatest country in Europe.

But in the end, despite the intellectual challenge in trying to understand such gardens, they are irrelevant to me, for they require vast riches. They also require armies of peasant labour, a repugnant idea.

From my practical and historical gardening books, I learned that around my front lawn I probably have what is called a herbaceous border. This is a nineteenth century English idea, and is the most adaptable gardening theory ever. What it amounts to is this: in the strip between the fence and the lawn you plant

whatever you like. Obviously the tallest plants stand at the back, the shortest in front, and the others in between. The great thing is variety and apparent randomness which is yet ordered and pleasing all year round.

But one man's flower is another man's weed. Yesterday and today I weeded and trimmed my suspected border, trying to discern the scheme intended by the previous god. The task was not an easy one, but I think I have not made many errors. The problem is that even such things as clumps of grass may be part of the garden. It seems, for example, that I have a specimen of pampas grass which will flower one of these days. I agonized long over a lot of lumpy things in the ground, and concluded at last that they were rhizomes. Heaven knows what they will produce; iris, I suspect. A brazen clump of stalks appears to be a peony.

When I was done my weeding, I tilled what soil I could get at, lavished fertilizer in the interstices, and used an edging tool on the lawn. Now as I sit here on the veranda with my gin and tonic in the glow of the evening I find it all looks very much like a garden. That is, I can sense a mind behind the creation. This benign predecessor god has made an orderly, comfortable

little world, while the randomness implies a generous and hospitable freedom. How unlike the savage gods which devastate Africa.

The theory most appropriate to the grounds outside my immediate garden is the one which developed in England in the eighteenth century and went on to conquer Europe: the Bois de Boulogne or the Bois de Vincennes in Paris, for example, or the English Garden in Munich. The core of the theory is that Nature is herself a great gardener, only somewhat lazy and slovenly and in need of someone to attend to the details.

The theory has about it a pleasing modesty and includes no looming threats of grandeur, expense, or peasant labour. In practice, of course, the great English gardeners of the time, Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton, were as prone as Le Nôtre to move hills, divert rivers, and hew down forests. Yet this was only needed when they were working in what they saw as flawed landscape. I have no reason or excuse for such massive meddling.

More and more I have been coming to the conclusion that I will never be able to enjoy my garden and grounds while others are in misery. One solution which occurred to me was to make a beautiful park which I would then

leave to the community. This could probably be called the artist's answer. He may not be able to save lives, so he hopes to ennoble those who survive on their own. A tenuous argument, I must say, but it seemed worth a try.

So I walked about and tried to imagine what sort of park I might make. Here I imagined a family eating a picnic lunch laid on a cloth spread under the high pines; here an old couple contemplating the sea from a bench in the shelter of some flowering bushes; and, on the headland, a pair of young lovers arm in arm watching the moon rise over the Sound. With these pictures in my head, I went to see the mayor of the town. Long experience has taught me that government cooperation from the beginning is crucial. Long experience should also have taught me what to expect.

He was typical of his kind: stupid but cunning, and with such a pretence of affable openness that one knew at once that he was hiding something. Of course, he was very keen about my park and begged me to go on, all the while crossing and uncrossing his legs and fidgeting with a letter-knife which was enamelled with some brightly coloured device. A palm tree?

I told him about my visions of his citizens strolling about and enjoying themselves in my idyllic

little world. He nodded enthusiastically until I got to the young lovers.

"Moonlight? I don't think we want to push that aspect of our development, do we?"

It was a palm tree.

"I beg your pardon?"

And a sunset.

"Well, Lover's Lane, Nooky Nook. We got enough girls in trouble around here without giving them a special place for doing it. And there's no lack of dirty-minded media types, either. Think of the headlines: Panty Paradise."

I resented his perversion of paradise.

"I'm sure security could be worked out," I said. "Other municipalities manage, after all. At worst, the gate could be locked at night."

He had evidently noticed my interest in the letter-knife, for he laid it ostentatiously before me, so that I was encouraged to read the legend: "Greetings from the Maui Commission of Tourism and Real Estate Development."

"And of course," I went on, "I would be there."

"I thought you said . . ."

"Perhaps I didn't make myself clear. I was thinking of giving the park to the town when I die."

"Oh. Yeah."

He gave me an appraising once-over and concluded I could be expected to survive his term of office.

"But after a year or two of basic work I would open the park to the public, then spend what years I have left maintaining and improving it. The great thing is that it would be a gradual approach in which I would take into account the suggestions of the users and adapt the plans accordingly."

"I see, yeah."

He nodded and stared at the ceiling in a struggle of cogitation. This was the result:

"It all depends on federal or provincial money. If we play our cards right, this could be a gold mine. I just got to check out a few contacts in Victoria."

"Well, that really isn't the point of it. You see, while I am not rich, I'm sure I can afford to buy whatever bushes or flowers I'll need."

"Yeah, sure, but the parking lot alone will run you five thou, easy. Then there's the access road. You got to widen that. Then the comfort stations -- they'd take a hell of a big tank and dispersal field. Though we might just get permission to pump it straight into the Sound. But, what the hell, with the big boys paying the shot, why not go for broke?"

I was chagrined. The fact is that I, a veteran negotiator of hundreds of projects, had forgotten what he so delicately called "comfort stations." I had, however, thought of the parking lot and had done some preliminary costing; his five thousand was highly optimistic. But over the years I have learned enough about septic tanks to be able to guess at once that the soil on my little spit does not have anything like the absorption capacity which would be required by a system large enough to handle the job. In other words, from this point on, I knew my dream was only a dream.

Therefore, during the remainder of the interview, I was guilty of leading him on. However, I am reasonably certain that while I was agreeing to a government funded septic farm system, costing perhaps ten thousand, he was planning either to pump raw sewage into the Sound, or to try for the several hundred thousand needed for a full-scale sewage treatment plant.

"An excellent idea," I said of his funding proposal, "but it reminds me that we should also consider the intake aspect."

"Huh?"

"Well, since people can be expected to put out fluids, they can also be expected to take them in. We should think of drinking fountains . . . and perhaps a

little kiosk offering soft drinks."

It took him less than five minutes to expand the kiosk into a licensed restaurant with beer garden. With my naughty encouragement he had soon added a marina, a condominium development, and an all-season resort hotel.

"And with all these people around," I remarked, "we certainly will have solved the lover's lane problem."

"Yeah, that's right!"

As I took my leave, he was reaching for the telephone.

A pitiful victory, that. From reading between the lines of the local newspaper, I learn that the mayor is a real estate developer in a province governed by real estate developers. No doubt he would accept a bribe if it were discreet enough, and no doubt street repair contracts are awarded on criteria other than those set out in the municipal by-laws. But the streets actually will be repaired and the largest bribe the mayor can command will likely be a week in Hawaii with his wife. Or perhaps a woman not his wife.

But this is small potatoes compared with the levels of corruption I have witnessed in Africa. I know of rulers whose idea of "dash" is twenty percent of government revenue, and of one who, in the six years

before he was butchered and fed to the dogs, annually mulcted over sixty percent. Bureaucracies in which an official's income from dash is ten times the official income are the rule rather than the exception. In perhaps the most flagrant case I encountered, the entire quarterly subvention (from an agency not my own, I'm pleased to say) toward a hydro-electric project was appropriated. The ruler simply stepped out of the presidential palace into his limousine, was driven across the square to an international bank, and handed over the cheque. Five minutes later the entire amount, over twenty-seven million dollars (U.S.), was telexed to the ruler's personal corporation in Luxembourg.

The whole pathetic complex of Third World government and business corruption has been analysed, and various cures have been tried and have failed. Common sense tells us that economic development, education, and a more equitable income distribution will reduce it to acceptable levels. That is, it will become like our mayor's, and what a wonderful state of affairs that would be.

Why then am I irritated by him? Because of his spiritual poverty, I expect.

I am sitting as usual on my veranda as the sun sets. Through the trees I can see over the water to the head of

the Sound where the town lies surrounded by mountains. I see the smokestack of the lumber mill (the smoke not clean, of course, but tolerable), I see the dock where the fishermen land their catches, and there I can see the beach upon which, on a recent hot day, I could just make out mothers and children bathing, while there on the rise is the hospital which, despite recent cutbacks, provides excellent service. The setting sun bathes the town in a glow which makes it look an outpost of heaven, a town fit for angels.

Life in such a town should exalt the spirit, but the mayor dreams of parking lots, fast food concessions, and sewage treatment plants. And why not? People must have spaces to park their cars, junk food in moderation is a harmless enough pleasure, while raw sewage breeds disease.

So what right have I, sitting in my retirement garden, to feel superior? No right at all.

After the sun moved around enough to grant some shade, I got to work repairing the steps which curve down from the garden to the beach. There are three separate flights of steps joined by pathways. The steps are made of creosoted railway ties with gravel fill. Some timbers have to be replaced, the fill everywhere topped

up, and the banking cut back where it has fallen in.

It was heavy work, so I rested often. During one rest I sat looking down the long, graceful curve of walk and steps and suddenly found myself thinking of Gwen. It seemed to me she would have enjoyed the gentle falling curve of the walk, and that she should be here to enjoy it, and that it was all somehow <u>like</u> her.

And then I thought of the disease which killed her and how it is not like other diseases. The cancer which invaded her body is not (so far as I know) a germ or a bacteria, not some sort of infection, but rather some alien idea or principle which perverts the natural harmony of the body cells, so that parts which should live more or less in peace with one another are at war. And I thought this was like Africa invaded not so much by the white man, but by our alien principles. Capitalism and communism, Christianity and Islam, nationalism and high technology: all of these were inimical to Africa as it was. And while aboriginal Africa was certainly not perfect -- disease and tribalism were endemic -- at least the problems were African, and the Africans could deal with them. But once import our ideas and you have to import people like me to administer those ideas. The Africans understood and could live with their own Death, but their philosophies

cannot deal with our Death.

I am reminded of a quip from the fifties when Eisenhower was building the Interstate Highway System: "The dangerous two-lane highways of the past which caused frequent two-car collisions have been replaced with modern six-lane interstates on which fifty or even a hundred cars can collide and dozens can die at once."

Or: spears and arrows kill people, guns kill many.

Or: a spear is an idea made into wood and metal; so is the gun; which is the better idea?

Or: was I part of the disease or part of the cure?

A telephone call today from my daughter-in-law, Stephanie. She and Ian are in New York, which was a surprise to me, and they are inviting me to join them on a Rhine cruise in May. The cruise is to celebrate their getting together again. This was also a surprise, as I hadn't known they were apart. I am pleased to hear they are patching up whatever their differences were; I expect the problems have something to do with the death of their daughter last winter. It seemed to me Stephanie was trying to master her grief, hoping I would not try any maudlin phrases, so I kept off the subject. She will recover from her grief in a few years without any help from me, for she is a sane and energetic young

woman. I have always approved of the marriage in the hope that she might brighten Ian's character. A quiet, imaginative child, he has become a gloomy, restless adult. I think Stephanie would be happy enough to settle down in London or New York, but to suit his whims she follows him all over the world. I suppose I am to blame for the transient life he had as a child, but he actually seems to enjoy jet travel.

Because I concentrated on Africa, I have had a few direct dealings with either the Chinese or the Japanese. My two visits to Beijing were brief. I remember little besides immensely elaborate banquets which I was too tired to enjoy, and slow but fruitful discussions about a Chinese sponsored technical assistance package for a Tanzanian railway project. The Japanese I have met much more often, of course, because they have been active internationally for so much more of the post-War period, but I met them not so much as Japanese, but as colleagues in the trade.

I may have had a glimpse of a Chinese garden -- I don't remember -- but I do recall being taken to a Japanese tea garden in Kyoto. I should go back a few steps. In the arrogance of my youth I thought it possible to understand another culture. I now regard

this notion as highly tenuous, especially in regard to a culture very different from one's own. That the Japanese are more conscious than we are of belonging to a society is a cliché, but this does not make it any less true. The Japanese really do see myriad connections in things and acts, connections with their fellow Japanese, with their history, with their islands, with the cosmos. So the tea garden and the tea ceremony are not just casual things.

Now, as an official of an international agency, I was early and often exposed to the revered shrines and sacred ceremonies of a hundred societies. I quickly learned to avoid most and, when attendance was absolutely necessary, to solicit a briefing from a trustworthy local so as to avoid gaffes such as eating with the excremental hand; to prepare myself for the unpalatable, such as dog, slug, and lizard; and to avoid entirely displays of impossible barbarity such as the ritual mutilation of girls' sexual organs. I had heard that the tea ceremony was extremely tedious and offered numerous possibilities for blunders, nonetheless I had to attend.

My memory of it is dim, for it must have been twenty-five years ago. I remember having to stoop very low in order to pass through the gate into the garden;

when I saw that my hosts also had to stoop, I assumed the height of the average Japanese had increased since the gate had been built. I remember that the walkway through the garden was rather awkward. It meandered and one had to walk on stones which seemed awkwardly placed. Of the ceremony I remember only sore knees, endless bowing, and amazement at finding a nation which could make even more fuss than the English over a drink as insipid as tea.

My book of garden history explains all this. The gate is deliberately low so that one is made to stoop as a token of humility. The stones are awkwardly placed so that one walks slowly enough to enjoy the garden. Certain stones invite the guest to stop and admire a particularly pleasant view. The tea ceremony itself is rich in symbolism and significance: it has to do with history, society, integration, discipline, balance, and so on.

Of the other sorts of Japanese gardens I read with interest but little comprehension. I read of the 238 primary rocks possible in a garden and of their symbolic meanings; of the eleven (or is it thirteen?) sorts of waterfall; of the principles which must govern a garden's design: cause and effect, male and female, active and passive, horizontal and vertical, light and shadow; I

read that there must be a balance of the five elements, the four seasons, all weathers, night and day, and so on.

My slightly sarcastic tone is not for the Japanese and their gardens, both of which I consider adornments of creation, but rather for myself and my ignorance, and the impossibility of my correcting my ignorance before I die. Japanese gardens are clearly the most highly evolved in the world, and to understand them fully one would have to have a profound knowledge of Japan. Indeed, one would have to become Japanese. I do not have the time.

I think I may be able to use certain ideas which are embodied by Japanese gardens. The most important is a sense of harmony within the garden, this reflecting most profoundly an attempt to be in harmony with nature, with society, with the cosmos. I cannot expect to understand Japanese harmony, but I can try to find harmonies of my own.

To be in harmony with my fellow citizens, however, I shall have to pave my garden, eschew the use of any language but ungrammatical and obscene English, and measure everything in Imperial units. I had thought hatred of the French language was the consuming lunacy of the area, but it appears the French in Quebec are far

enough away to remain more a theoretical than a real threat, despite the ubiquity of frozen orange juice. No, the greatest passion hereabouts is hatred of the metric system, which the government is gradually imposing on the country. That the system was invented by a Frenchman is an added irritation. The great local passion is the right to buy gasoline in Imperial gallons, rather than in liters. I discovered that the issue is considered to be fundamental: more important than the possibility of another Arab oil embargo, more important than the size of existing reserves, more important even than the actual price of the gasoline. Obscure references in the newspaper led me to a radio "talk show" where the subject of gallons and liters has apparently been all the rage (both senses) for months. Although I could not, of course, see the callers, it was clear that many were foaming at the mouth. It appears that advocacy of the metric system is at least as heinous a crime as high treason or sexual assault upon the Queen: these analogies were used several times. I was at first amused by this madness, then appalled, but finally depressed. What does it say for man that, if you give him a paradise in which to dwell ("God's Country," as they say around here), he nonetheless finds this sort of foolishness with which to torment himself

and his neighbours?

I began this meditation with some hopeful words on harmony; now this madness. I wonder how the Japanese would view it all.

To Lugano in two days for the conference. Lugano is on Lake Como and not far from Lake Maggiore which has in it the great island palace and garden called Isola Bella. Perhaps I can wangle a visit from one of my hosts. Age and eminence, however humble, have their compensations.

While I go to this conference to keep up with things, to meet old colleagues, and perhaps to enjoy the sightseeing for once, I seem to recall having spent an absurb amount of my life at conferences. I was always preparing for them, travelling to them, being at them, returning from them, reporting on them. I am beginning to see that I should have spent more time at home with my family, in the gardens Gwen grew for us. Perhaps if I had, Ian might not have been so gloomy, man and boy; and perhaps my daughter Jane might still be alive. Like Ian, she was a restless and solemn adult, but I recall her as a child of sunny laughter.

The picture which comes most readily to mind is of Jane, at four or five years of age, wearing a blue dress with white shoes and stockings. She is in a garden -- it would have been our house in Washington,

I expect -- and the sun is golden all about. Jane is laughing while a large, black dog licks her face; but she stands her ground, brave girl. In the end, brave or not, she could no longer stand her ground.

I recall her that last day in Barbados before she killed herself. I passed her in the hallway as I was walking to the garden with a plate of lunch and, inevitably, a report. Jane was standing before a mirror, and as I approached I greeted her, but got no reply. She had only just gotten up, so I assumed she was thinking about her hair or her make-up. But when I got outside I remembered she seemed to wear little make-up, and her hair seemed not to have been washed. An indelicate addition: she had always been most fastidious about the nuisance odours of femininity, but was not so that day. I decided she was planning a swim and would freshen up later. Had Gwen been there, she might have sensed something wrong, but she was in Bridgetown shopping, and when I picked her up later we went straight to the university for a reception, then to dinner. When we returned that night, Jane was dead.

She had only just learned about her mother's cancer, so Gwen tried to take the blame, but that made no sense. The final note contained little beyond

cryptic references to disarmament, world hunger, racism, and the status of women. Surely this sort of large social concern suggests that if either parent were to blame, it had to be me. In any case, how could anyone blame Gwen for anything?

I am beginning to wonder if this all means I have been a failure as a husband and father. When Gwen offered me gardens of delight, I filled them with official documents. When little Jane came laughing to me in the garden and demanded, "Daddy, Daddy, tell me a story!" I lifted her up and told her about the world beyond the garden gate. And now that I have my own garden, I have no one who can share its delight with me.

Do I then blame myself?

Yes.

Or this murderous century?

Perhaps.

Yet I must go on.

But to what purpose?

And what of my garden?

As I was loading my luggage into the car, the mayor drove up, bringing with him a representative from a pizza franchising company. This man had made a special detour

here while visiting Vancouver from headquarters in Fort Worth. I held up my garment bag and shrugged.

The mayor was jovial.

"Oh well, this is more important. You can take a later flight."

I explained that I wasn't going to Edmonton or San Francisco, and a later flight was, at the earliest, tomorrow.

"Five minutes, just give us five minutes."

No.

He grew desperate.

"We'll drive to Vancouver with you."

This led to a tangle of possibilities ("Well then, you could go with Mr. Knapp in his car, I'll bring yours along behind, leave it in long term parking and Mr. Knapp and me will . . .") all of which I rejected.

He grew surly, then offensive. When he kicked a rock onto the lawn, I told him firmly that people who did such things obviously did not see eye to eye with me on parks and gardens, and I was going.

"You can't do this to me," he cried. "I'll make you pay. You won't believe what I can do with zoning regulations, Pops!"

I drove away cursing him under my breath, but soon enough settled down to curse myself for naively bringing

about the entire affair.

On the flight from Vancouver to London last week, I whiled away the hours thinking of ways of using water in my garden. The overflow from my cistern is certainly strong enough to keep a small brook babbling and any pools clean and sweet. I decided the best idea would be a stream issuing from behind a trio of rhododendrons, meandering between rocky banks across the garden, making a small cascade into a pool where the lawn terraces down a meter to the lower level. It could then be directed out into the bit of woods where I planted some bulbs in order that next spring I might have "a host of golden daffodils."

I had taken the provision of photocopying a dozen plans of the area and, with the aid of coloured pencils as recommended in my gardening book, I drew several elaborations of the garden with stream, cascade, and pool. The Japanese, who love symbolism and loathe symmetry in their gardens, suggest that a stream should enter from the east, meander to the south, and exit to the west. Unfortunately, because of the way Nature saw fit to drop my little paradise upon this earth, my stream would have to enter from the west, meander south, then exit east. No matter for me, a westerner with little

feeling for the symbolic. In any case, I think I came up with a number of pleasing layouts for my stream. I especially like the placing of the pool on the lower level and have half a dozen ideas for edging it to best advantage with beds of water-loving plants and, on the shady side, a seat where one could sit and read on a hot day, the birdsong and the cascade making the very air musical.

For the cascade itself, I had originally thought of a simple veil of water, but my reading on Japanese gardens convinced me something more natural would be better. The Japanese make this sort of classification: single stream above, divided below; divided above, single below; divided, heavier flow to one side; and so on. I worked on a number of different plans, but decided I would probably base my final choice upon whichever rocks I have at hand for the job. Western pragmatism.

So, as I flew six miles above the Arctic desolation, I cast my imagination back to my garden and forward in time, musing upon the music of falling water, the sparkle of liquid light.

But the conference seems to have solved all my gardening problems for at least the next six months. I have accepted a consultancy with an EDA commission

on small business development in West Africa. I do not know why I did this. We begin in Abidjan in ten days.

Although the Côte d'Ivoire is the great developmental success of Africa, I have never much liked Abidjan. Every time I go there I am made to waste at least a day touring the industrial estates. Of course, I understand and approve of the rationale behind these vasts stretches of concrete-block-metal-roof buildings, the tangles of pipes, the fences and tarmac, but they seem much of a muchness to me, whether they be in Abidjan, Abadan, Singapore or Winterthur.

I am sitting on my veranda in the dying glow of evening, looking into the purple shadows of my garden. This is surely the last of my evenings here for a while. When the six months are over, I may be so discouraged with Africa, with the conferences, the twisting and turning, the lies, the corruption, the bullying of the superpowers, the posturing of demagogues, that I will come back here to work on my garden.

I don't know, but somehow I doubt that I shall. With Gwen and Jane dead and Ian and Stephanie ever on the move, what affections I have in this world are for a few old colleagues in the trade, for the job itself. I don't know. This dreaming land almost captured me

with its mountains and mist, its sea and soft light. But I seem to need engagement, struggle in order to stay alive.

But I have a scheme. Instead of returning, I shall photocopy some more plans of the garden and others of the entire property. International agency officials spend much of their lives in hotels, airports, and airplanes. The efficient fellows learn to work in such places, the gregarious chat, the thoughtful read: I shall work on my garden. With my coloured pencils, I shall draw it at various times of the day; I shall make up schedules and plans for the round of the year; for planting, fertilizing, weeding, blooming. If in my travels I see an attractive plant, I shall ask its name and see if I can work it into my garden.

And before I leave here the day after tomorrow, I shall make a preliminary list of the great gardens of the world, so that if I am near any of them I may arrange a side-trip. Sometimes there will be a useful idea. (For a variety of reasons, I was unable to visit Isola Bella; perhaps next time.) The commission has a meeting tentatively planned for Estoril in a month, and nearby is the famous palace garden of Queluz with its tiles, called azulejos; I shall definitely visit.

These little trips will help me to bear what I

know is coming, but the real solace will be my imaginary garden. Surely the green of it will comfort me when the jumbo jet next disgorges me, and again I gaze upon the running sores, the twisted limbs, the clutching brown hands, surely cool breezes from it will restore my soul when next I walk into the lazy, swirling colour, the drifting red dust, the blinding light, the hot, sweet breath of Africa.

Surely?

THE CONTINENTAL

A Novella

in

Two Parts

THE CONTINENTAL

Red Velvet, Black Lace

Wednesday, May 17
Thursday, May 18
1893

As Mademoiselle Fifi moved the curling tongs through the blue flame of the spirit lamp, then applied them to the tissue-papered curl, she glanced from under her long lashes at the reflection of the American: a most bizarre creature. In her nearly three years with Madame Eugénie she had known many curious men, and indeed considered men incomprehensible beings driven by desires which might as well have animated the stars in their distant courses, so foreign were they to her. Because they were all strange, the particularities of their desires were a matter of indifference to her, and thus Madame Eugénie steered the odder ones to Fifi.

"Fifi is my curator," Madame would say. "As in a museum, she takes care of the rare ones."

So Fifi had learned to disport herself in furs, satins, velvets and feathers; she had developed the theatricality to play a schoolgirl, a Persian houri, a nun, a sailor; she could counterfeit an affinity for shoes, flowers, incense and cigars. Of course, there were limits. The English vice was strictly monitored within the precincts of Madame Eugénie's -- there had been a nasty incident with a milord some years earlier -- and a sweaty Belgian rich from the Congo who had made a request involving a snake had been treated most frostily.

"But Madame, I myself would supply the creature and together we would administer the soporific. Be assured, Madame, that . . ."

"You may be assured, Monsieur, that this is a respectable establishment. I may call it a museum in jest, but it is neither a circus nor a zoological garden. Begone!"

"An artificial snake?" in desperation.

"Hamid! Monsieur will be leaving now."

But the more common caprices of men were acceptable enough to both Fifi and Madame Eugénie. Men had desires; they would be satisfied; and one might turn a profit in the process. Fifi's own desires closely resembled Madame's: a hoard of savings and all possible

inside information about the goings-on of the Bourse. Recently, for example, a most obliging gentleman friend from the Quai d'Orsay had given Fifi warning of an impending "incident" in North Africa which together with hints Madame had gathered about adjustments in Austro-Hungarian naval policy had enabled the ladies to make a tidy profit in German armament shares. However, the Bourse was for the speculative enlargement of one's cache: the steady income came from the desires of men, rich men like this American, Kenniston Thorson, and his harmless but outlandish quirk.

"Will Monsieur not have some champagne?" she asked as she laid aside the tongs and took up her brush.

"Thank you, no, Fifi, eleven in the morning is too early for me to be drinking champagne, but do order a glass for yourself. And if you would be so kind, perhaps you could ask Berthe to bring me a café crême."

There now: this was not naïveté on his part, but frank generosity, for although it was real champagne reasonably priced, he must know he would be charged for the whole bottle and she would get a commission.

"Perhaps Monsieur had a night which was slightly over-exuberant? Champagne would be soothing."

The suggestion was not dangerous: he would reject it.

"No, no, my dear, champagne with luncheon, champagne with pheasant, champagne with a song, champagne with

ladies and laughter all the night long, but not champagne in the morning; that would be too much of a good thing even for me. But you enjoy yours. No, I prefer coffee. Wouldn't you like some yourself? With your champagne, of course."

In truth she would, but she suspected he was teasing her and declined.

When old Berthe had departed, Fifi asked Kenniston if he would not rather sit on the red chair and enjoy his coffee there in the light of the vanity table.

"I believe I shall, Mademoiselle Fifi. Thank you."

Like all the Americans she had met -- perhaps six others -- he was tall, about 180 cm. she guessed, and very healthy looking, testimony to his wealth and to the fructuous land across the ocean. He was well-muscled, she had reason to know, and took care that he should remain so. Three mornings a week he worked out in the gymnasium of Théophile Blok, the ex-boxer, and his prowess at the Club de Tennis Giraudoux had, it seemed, embarrassed a number of the members. His wager with Fanchon the professional runner, their three circuits of the Bois de Boulogne, and the shocking result were a matter of public record, the event having been well covered in several of the newspapers despite efforts by Fanchon's backers.

This healthy body Monsieur Thorson kept dressed in some of the best and most fashionable clothes Paris could provide. Today he wore black and in his black gloved hands (gloves of kid so light it took her breath away) he held a walking stick of ebony topped with a rose of solid silver which echoed the white rose in his lapel. On the table lay his black hat which was trimmed with a ribbon thinner than any other in town; it would cause a stir when he went to lunch. She wondered if he particularly enjoyed wearing hats because of his prematurely balding head; she made bold to ask him as much.

"My dear Mademoiselle Fifi, back home on the banks of the Wabash, we have a rhyme that goes:

Three thangs
Manhood brangs:
Taxes vex
Like a hex;
The grave will call
One and all;
But falling hair
Is easy to bear.

Now I don't think I can make that rhyme in French, but it means . . ."

So he was a man who cared about his looks, cared how he dressed himself, but had no silly vanities. And yet . . . yet this bizarre desire: she noticed the interest in the tilt of his head as she reached for the

little dar of rouge. She could understand a man wishing to watch a woman remove her clothes, but to watch as she did her hair, applied her maquillage, donned her clothes: this was outside her experience, clearly something American, perhaps the result of life among half-naked savages.

"And if I may be permitted another question, what did Monsieur do last night that did not involve a surfeit of champagne?"

"You may certainly ask, for my life is an open book. Well, perhaps not from cinq à sept, but after that I strolled over to the Café Claude in the Boulevard des Italiens for an ice with old Bouguereau who invited me to the private view of the Salon today. Then I called on Wedekind and together we took in Feydeau's new thing."

"Was it as good as his last?"

"Better, better. What economy he exercises, what a light touch. Rather reminds me of your technique with eyelashes."

Fifi blushed.

"Silly man. Go on, what did you next?"

"Late dinner from Monsieur Frédéric: I consumed the five thousand seven hundred and forty sixth caneton Tour d'Argent. It was heavenly."

"You make my mouth water. Then what?"

"To the Moulin Rouge for champagne, you'll be pleased to hear, with the usual bunch: Bruant was very witty, but Lautrec had to be carried home. Suzanne Valadon says he is destroying himself."

"Very likely. And then?"

"Why then, as you very well know, I came to say goodnight to Madame and her young ladies. And back home to the Sixteenth as the sun was rising."

"A full evening indeed."

"A normal evening in Paris, I am delighted to say."

"And now another day: how will you fill this one?"

With this, Mademoiselle Fifi turned to face him while lifting her hands in a pretence of making adjustments to her hair; so she displayed with pride her tiny waist in its tight corset of red velvet brocade trimmed with black lace; and pouted most winsomely.

"I am not entirely sure, but I know what I shall do next."

And he began to peel off a glove.

Lunch, the de rigeur lunch before the private viewing at the Salon, was truite de mer sauce verte at Ledoyen. Most of the official painting world was there along with wives, mistresses, models, friends, enemies, and a potpourri of hangers-on. Charpentier chatted with

Gérôme and Daudet (Alphonse, not Léon), Zola groused at Maurras, Anatole France tossed out mordant witticisms for Lady Randolph Churchill and Count Kinsky, while D'Indy tried to peek at the notebook of the ubiquitous Edmond de Goncourt. However, Kenniston Thorson was most interested in Jacques Joseph Tissot. Once a fashionable painter of narrative scenes from bourgeois life, he had turned in old age to illustrating the Bible. Kenniston, a bemused freethinker, considered this direction lunacy, but wished to honour the man for the delights he had produced in his past: Kenniston owned three Tissots. But after half an hour with his host, Bouguereau, and with Tissot, he was stolen away by Henri Gauthier-Villars the publisher, writer and music critic.

"Ahh, Thorson, just the man I wanted to see."

Willy, to call him by the pen name he used off the page as well as on, wanted to see everyone, and as he talked his eyes moved restlessly over the crowd, picking over the faces with the swift discrimination of a gardener culling deadheads. For Willy was not so much a publisher or writer or even editor as he was a literary middleman, an entrepreneur of bookish schemes. In the firm belief that one could and usually did tell a book from its cover, Willy employed a stable of underpaid

hacks to write his works, but used the most talented and expensive designers in Paris for his covers. Willy was, truth to tell, a tout.

"I expected to see you the other evening at Madame de Caillavet's, Willy, but I heard you were out of town."

"Yes, I went to the country to get married. Gabrielle, my dear," he said, half turning to the slip of a girl behind him, "this is Monsieur Thorson; Thorson, my wife, Gabrielle."

She smiled, made a miniature curtsey, and did some magic with her enormous eyes.

"Come, let us find a table and get down to business," said Willy as he bulled his way through to a vacant place near Meilhac and Halévy the playwrights.

"Now look here, Kenniston, I'm sure you're either effete or you're trying to get better terms which I simply can't afford to give you. I have costs, too, you know: typesetters these days . . ."

He raised his eyes in supplication.

Kenniston chuckled.

"No, Willy, you don't understand: the project is hopeless. I could no more . . ."

"Nonsense, you're a man of the world, you know all there is to be known of the subject, and what you don't

know you could invent."

"I could not have knowledge of something which I doubt even exists in the real world, thus I could not invent with conviction."

"Real world? Conviction? Good God man, who needs this sort of crutch? All that is needed is a suggestive direction and a fertile imagination."

"An imagination greater than mine would be required to write a book about tribadism among the society ladies of Indianapolis. I'm not on principle against the fabulous, but my heart would have to be in it before I could set pen to paper."

"But you wouldn't do the writing!" spluttered Willy. "I have my drudges for that. My dear fellow, you are a gentleman. I only want you to provide some local colour: describe for us the vice of Indianapolis, the better known maisons closes, the names of the most talented grisettes, tell us what unnatural practices are most common. The readers of Paris are jaded; they need exotica."

"They could find more exotica in this room than in the entire state of Indiana."

Not that there weren't some interesting ladies in his home state, but unfortunately they were few and far between and damnably difficult to cultivate. For this

reason, Kenniston had left Indiana and, financed by his share of the income from his family's limestone quarries, had fared forth in search of love. First to Chicago which he thought altogether too crude; then to New York which was obsessed with wealth; then to Boston where, between classes at Harvard, he found sport with the landlady of his boarding house, a thirtyish Irish widow named Bridget Bourke.

Bridget was the first woman he met who not only enjoyed the pleasures of the flesh, but actively sought them out. Every fall she took in eight likely-looking students and while they investigated Harvard she investigated them. When her choice was made a few weeks into the term, she applied her considerable charm and, within a few days, conquered. If the boy proved a dunce he left the house, but if he showed a suitable aptitude he was moved into the room next to Bridget's where a connecting door made late evening lessons convenient.

"You are my best professor," Kenniston remarked to her one night as they lay languid in the pale light of the city.

"Sure and you're my best student too."

"Then let's get married, Bridget, and stay together always."

But Bridget was the wiser; he must travel the world

in search of love while she remained to nurture her procession of scholars. In the meantime she must school him in the ways of woman; he must learn the secrets of her body and, more important, the secrets of her mind.

"You men think us coy and secretive craytures, but if you know us well you can read our hearts as easily as you read from that book. Do it again, the part I liked."

And he read, from Swinburne:

> We are not sure of sorrow,
> And joy was never sure;
> Today will die tomorrow;
> Time stoops to no man's lure;
> And love grown faint and fretful,
> With lips but half regretful
> Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
> Weeps that no loves endure.

"'With lips but half regretful . . .' Now isn't that just lovely, though? Poor fools that we are, we women can always be bought with a tender word, but we crave the shelter too of a man's strength. Now, when you know when to give which, you'll be lord of all you survey."

True to her word she sent him away at the end of the year; and true to her word she had given him the keys to a woman's heart. In search of others like her he went to Dublin, but was rudely shocked by the poverty and the priest-ridden morality of the town. On to London, where he spent several years in delightful dalliance with a

number of ladies from society and the stage; then to Vienna for romance as rich as the schlagobers on the coffee. But he was really just practicing, grooming himself, honing his skills for the passages to come in the greatest arena of love: Paris!

"Perhaps we should forget about the demimonde of Indianapolis altogether, then," Willy mused. "What about an account of savage rites among the Red Indians: blood sacrifices of delectable virgins under the full moon, that sort of thing?"

"I'm afraid I know very little about the Indians. In Indiana at least, they have been peaceful for some eighty years now."

"But one hears of massacres, scalpings, horrendous deeds committed by these brutes."

"I'm afraid that what there is of that happens out on the Great Plains, far to the west of Indiana."

"What a shame. Still, I'm convinced you could invent something . . . piquant for the readers of Paris. What do you think of it all, my dear?"

Evidently Willy had at last recollected that he was married; what was even more evident was that he was not interested in her answer for without waiting for a reply he raised his glass to Curnonsky, then abruptly went off to speak with him. Curnonsky, called by some the Prince

of Gastronomes, could not be asked to leave his table.

"You must excuse my husband, Monsieur Thorson; he is a very busy man."

"No excuse is necessary, Madame. I know Willy quite well. His energy is proverbial."

"This is all a great adventure for a little country girl like me. All these famous people are quite intimidating."

"Have no fear, for you will find them just like everyone else except that they are, perhaps, more at ease with themselves than most people. And they are always intrigued by beauty."

She lowered her face and raised her enormous gray eyes at him. Clearly she knew her best feature. She was, in fact, not a beauty, but was lively and attractive: thin, a sort of miniature fox.

"No, I am sure I shall be regarded as a boorish country girl with nothing at all of value to say."

"My dear Madame Gauthier-Villars, did you not understand from what your husband and I were saying that I myself am far more the country bumpkin than you are? I come from a part of the world that was trackless forest a mere hundred years ago, while you are, if I am not mistaken in identifying your accent, a native of Burgundy. That is to say, a native of the very Eden of

France, civilized these two thousand years and more. These people talk with me, Madame, thus all the more will they pay attention to you."

"You are a charming flatterer."

"Not at all. And let me begin by repeating the question your husband asked you: what do you think the jaded readers of Paris want?"

"I don't know about the jaded readers of Paris," she replied, "but it seems to me a writer should only describe what he has seen. He should look long and hard at the things that please him and write about them exactly as they are."

"And what of things that don't please him?"

"He should look even longer and harder at them," she giggled.

Kenniston was truly impressed by her insight and realized with something of a shock that she was hardly twenty and until two nights ago had probably always slept under her parents' roof.

"I think, Madame, that the famous artists of Paris should listen to you very carefully indeed."

"Hush, Monsieur, you will be overheard and thought a fool for saying such things."

"And we Americans are very informal. You must call me Kenniston."

"I believe I shall, Kenniston. And because you are the first person in Paris to befriend me, and the very first American I have ever met, you must call me Gabrielle, though I think we should not tutoyer one another, at least not when my husband is around. Are we betrayers, do you think?"

"I am sure we are not," he replied with a twinkle in his eyes. "Conspirators in innocence, perhaps."

Presently Monsieur Willy, who had visited half a dozen tables, returned muttering about percentages and overheads and mopping his brow.

"The trouble with all these artists," he said, "is that they haven't the slightest idea of the value of a franc. My God, the things I have to bear."

"Then perhaps," said Kenniston, "I should not put forward my idea for a book: it would involve a certain amount of artistic understanding."

"No, tell me, tell me. What is it: a Tahitian idyll, perhaps? Exquisite lusts in Japan?"

"On the contrary. It came to me -- out of the air, you might say -- that what is most interesting is right before our noses."

"Absurd, a ridiculous idea. What say, mon petit chou?"

"Oh, I'm sure you're right."

"Now Willy, you must listen to my suggestion before condemning it. Look about you and what do you see?"

"A room full of artists with grand ideas and no more sense of financial reality than . . . than dear Gabrielle here."

"But those artists do have what you say is required for a book: imagination. My suggestion is that you get each to write or dictate for you a . . . a little dream of love, a little piquant tale of the imagination. You understand what I mean."

"Never mind Gabrielle here, she'll have to learn about the wicked world sometime and the sooner the better. Every artist's erotic daydream, that's what you're talking about. It would never work. Without their names attached to the stories the book would be just another piece of improbable pornography. And before allowing their names to be used, they'd . . . they'd take a tramcar to hell."

"But if everyone on the tramcar wore a mask? I mean that the names would be listed at the beginning, but there would be no way of connecting names to stories. It would be the greatest guessing game of the year: it would be a sort of collection of contes a clés."

Willy sat transfixed: obviously he was considering

the combinations possible, the best candidates for a contribution. But no:

"Charity, that's the answer. I'll tell them all the profits will go to some suitable charity and if they press me I'll say I'm only taking a small fee as organizer, editor and front man. And expenses, of course."

"You could donate the profits to the Académie Française, perhaps."

"Exactly, Kenniston, exactly. By God, if Tocqueville were here today he would be proud to see how far your half-savage country has come. This tramcar project shows an astuteness which must be the result of a certain amount of discriminating civilization. Are there Frenchmen in your Indiana?"

"There were some trading posts there in the eighteenth century."

"Ahh, that would explain it."

Kenniston Thorson accepted this compliment with a polite bow meant to cover his amusement. Monsieur Willy was pleased with himself, with his wife, with the world: he beamed.

When the private viewing was over, Kenniston Thorson took Bouguereau and Tissot along the Champs-Élysées to

Fouquet's for an aperitif and a chat about the show. The old gentlemen were pleased with the seemingly unlimited technical virtuosity of the Salon painters, with their attention to archaeological detail, the richness of implication in incident. But they sensed that something was wrong: the traditions were being attacked.

"If that anarchist Courbet had been shot in '48, everything would have been fine," said Tissot, who had himself been involved with the Commune. "The rot began with him. Then Manet. I don't understand, I really do not understand."

"Frankly," said Bouguereau, "I blame Corot. A Trojan horse, that's what he was, soft in the head. Always arguing that we should be patient with the young. Patient with slovenly technique is what it amounts to."

"Corot? Rubens, more like. The Frenchman Poussin was right and the Belgian Rubens was wrong."

Kenniston, who owned and enjoyed work by both Tissot and Bouguereau, was also buying things by Van Gogh, Gauguin and Lautrec and by unknown youngsters like Bonnard, Salies and Matisse: he let his attention shift from the table to the light which filled the air of the city. Was this perhaps the real reason he had

come to Paris, in search of air like velvet? But no, for in that case he would have gone to the Mediterranean. But the air was certainly wonderful, and the light caressed the eye as velvet caressed the skin, as the lips of a woman caressed his throat as he lay on a velvet bed. The woman was the Comtesse Amalie de Luvernet with whom he had been conducting a languid affair since shortly after his arrival in Paris the year before. Three times a week he paid her a visit from cinq à sept while her husband, whose tastes were exclusively pederastic, dallied elsewhere. Amalie's sensibility was so exquisite, so delicate, that she could only bear the act when one of the partners was completely passive.

"Secretions are deplorable," she remarked early in their liaison. "I find them wholly unnecessary."

Once he had covered her eyes with a blindfold, then trailed a silk stocking endlessly across her body until she was rigid; he brought about her crisis by touching her somewhat intimately with velvet. Afterwards she described the experience as "brutal."

Today, however, she was in a talking mood and he found himself acquiescent; while she babbled on about the Baron de Charlus and Comtesse Anne de Noailles, Kenniston dipped a madeleine in his tea, slipped it onto

his tongue, and allowed his mind to drift on a sea of memories, set adrift by the lilt of the voice, the haze of pink and white, the haze of scent.

What was he seeking? Since he had wandered away from Indiana, since Bridget Bourke had sent him burning from Boston, what had he been looking for?

Lust?

Love?

Surely not love.

Certainly not marriage.

What then?

Why had he spent those many months about the stage doors, dressing rooms, boxes of the London theatre world, exchanging cigars with Pinero, listening to Beerbohm Tree's questionable scholarship?

So that he could get close to Ellen Terry and Lily Langtry, of course.

So that he could flirt with iridescence.

But to what end? Was it all in the service of the moment; was he simply a collection of cultivated senses? Of questing ganglia?

To what end his competition in seduction with Schnitzler in Vienna?

Also in Vienna: why his mad pursuit of that méchante Countess Larisch? To what end their frothy tumblings?

". . . said to me that General Boulanger had not just been wrong, but mad. To which dear, dear de Vogüé added: 'No, not mad, but bad and certainly dangerous to know.' Frankly, one wonders what it's all coming to. I'm sure I don't know, and I'm too tired to guess. Be a darling: massage my feet for me."

So for the remaining half hour of their time together, he held her silk stockinged feet in his lap and kneaded one then the other a few minutes at a time while the exquisite Comtesse Amalie de Luvernet spoke more and more slowly, more and more softly, until she caught her breath and her voice stuttered into silence in the violet twilight.

After a light soup and a truffle omelette at Fuyot on the Boulevard des Capucines, he joined Fauré and a few of his students for a performance of Siegfried, the Germanic ponderousness of which left the composer shaking his head with perplexity.

"He had melody in him, his harmonic ideas advanced music in this century, and his structural conceptions were genius, but there is that omnipresent philosophizing and symbolizing and such which is all too typical, I'm afraid, of those so-serious people to the east of us. Certainly there are things to be learned from Wagner,

but when the Ring comes to an end it leaves one slightly more convinced of universal misery, of eternal suffering and that's all! You can see how gay and stimulating it is! In fact it is penitence in the noblest meaning of the word, it is in fact almost contrition. Yes, he is powerful. And yet . . ."

Kenniston's gaze wandered absently to the opera goers milling about in front of the Café de la Paix. Through this chatting, gesticulating crowd strode three army officers, artillery by their insignia. They sounded a jarring note, the cocky tilt of their képis, their nonchalant shrugs suggesting a confident impatience with these aimless civilians: Sedan would never be far from their thoughts.

"And yet . . . there must be another way?" Kenniston asked.

"Exactly, but no one seems able to see it. For example, present day audiences are indifferent to the limpid, sincere music of Saint-Saëns to whom I find myself closest."

"I hope you are the one to find that other way."

"Say rather: some other way. I hope I may."

Presently Fauré and his students departed while a thoughtful Kenniston Thorson hailed a cab and asked to be taken to the Place Blanche. The driver did not need

further details; in a few minutes he pulled to a halt and the doorman of the Moulin Rouge sprang forward to help Kenniston to the sidewalk.

"Monsieur looks particularly gay and expansive this evening," he essayed.

"Indeed, Michel, I feel gay and expansive; nothing but champagne tonight!" And with a wink he slipped the man a generous banknote. Expansive indeed, but not gay, for a number of questions bothered him and behind those questions he sensed a mystery shrouded in darkness. Could Fauré and Wagner both be right? Was Willy correct in arguing that imagination solved all the problems? And what was disturbing about Gabrielle's luminous gray eyes? But Toulouse-Lautrec beckoned from their usual table while La Goulue (in a backless dress with shoulders puffed larger than any others in town) embraced him, kissed him, murmured to him: "You were late and I was devastated; you are here and I am elated."

"Unhand him, you hussy," cried Lautrec, "you simply want to despoil his sensibility with your crass appeal to his eroticism, but I need his judgement, his sense of what is right and fitting, and thus of what is beautiful."

"But am I not beautiful?" she demanded.

"For a common salope you are not too bad," and

patted her behind.

"For a common salope I have better manners at least than some soi-disant aristocrats I could mention," and bussed him on the forehead while winking at Kenniston. Lautrec beamed like a cat on a velvet cushion.

"A common salope, but a witty one. Now begone. Sit down, my friend, sit down. Gilles, more champagne and don't open the bottle until you get to the table, you spawn of a camel." (The waiter was slightly hunchbacked.) "By God, you are so slack that you give deformity a bad name. Now my friend, how are you this evening?"

"Henri, a man who could be sad in Paris would be sad in heaven."

"Nonsense. You are simply being American. France is a mother to us all, but Paris is as much a harlot as the girls at Madame Eugénie's. The gaiety is assumed like the false eyelashes, the paint on the cheeks, the whalebone stays. But the artist sees beneath the flesh to the disease, the corruption, the mortality of the quivering jelly within."

The first time Kenniston had heard this argument from Lautrec he had wondered at the apparent contradiction between the artist's theory and his work.

Fortunately he kept the question to himself and heard it answered a few nights later when it had been asked by a fatuous little Irishman named Frank Harris.

"What a lot of rot!" cried Harris. "You haven't the remotest idea of form, of the roundness of the human body. You only paint outlines and therefore it is self-evident that you cannot be expressing anything about the essence of the forms. Very pretty surfaces, my dear fellow, but it isn't art. You take my advice and stick to posters."

For some minutes the air was thick with oaths; then it was thick with champagne; then with champagne bottles. Monsieur Lautrec was a regular and valued customer, so he retained his table; Harris was unceremoniously tossed into the street.

"Do you see what I mean?" Lautrec asked now, reflecting on that evening. "Do you understand why that fool was so completely wrong?"

"I could make an educated guess, Henri, but why should I lecture you when you could so easily be lecturing me?"

Lautrec, who was too sensible to accept this proposition with any more than the modicum of modesty it deserved, began without ceremony to explain his position.

"There is at the centre of painting an apparent paradox: painting is an art which takes surfaces for its immediate subject and uses surfaces for its medium. But the only art worth the fleas on a streetwalker's crotch is art which deals with essences. In some cases it is the essence of a generality, in others the essence of a particularity, but always it is essences. How this paradox is to be explained is the central question of all aesthetic theory in regard to painting; and how it is to be solved in practice is the central problem for all painters. That fool who was tossed out that night clearly believes that Michelangelo is greater than El Greco and that Ingres is greater than Goya. Now possibly El Greco was inferior to Michelangelo, though I would take some convincing, but there is simply no question that Goya was one of the greatest painters the western world has ever seen: Michelangelo -- never mind Ingres -- was just a sculptor on holiday compared with Goya. Or take Rembrandt: the light within, Kenniston, the light within, that is central to the whole affair. But it is only through the manipulation of surfaces that we can see, understand, express that light of form within. Now watch Jane Avril there. A beautiful woman, you will no doubt remark. And I paint her with due regard for

the line of her nose, the length of her fingers, the tilt of her neck. But do I, do you, does anyone care about such photographic concerns? Absurd! Absurd and grotesque, my friend: look at the self-absorption of the face, the shoulders, the waist and hips. Look, my friend, and you will see what artists have always seen in such an event: woman, mortal woman in love with eternity, the eternity that lives within her dance. That, Monsieur, is what I shall paint. Gilles! Champagne!"

"Champagne, yes, but the stress of your position seems to be illustrative, Henri, and that seems to falsify the intent in your work which is more decorative than you seem to admit here. The balance is the thing, surely, not the excess."

"Ha! Kenniston, you are becoming wiser than I am with words. When I first met you, you were ignorant, but you wanted to learn. I express myself in paint, but when I try to explain myself I lie, as you correctly point out. Balance, of course, always that balance and a dozen others. Balance even in extremity, even in asymmetry. There you are: put that down on paper, explore a few ramifications, and you've got another article for the Revue Blanche. Don't let Aurier know or he'll grab the idea. Now, what have you

to say about colour? We talk about forms, but what is colour and what is light? Tell me what you saw around you today, tell me what you learned."

"Well, today I attended the private view of the Salon, so I didn't learn much that would interest you. However . . ."

Kenniston Thorson scratched at his goatee a moment.

"You must not be provoked if I make a provocative statement, Henri, but it begins with the English. Imagine: the English who for centuries have been the most incompetent painters in Europe. Yet it was John Constable and Turner who opened -- or re-opened -- the eyes of Europe to colour. I'll not bother with the connections -- you know them all well enough -- but France recaptured the lead with the Impressionists, who, above all, purified the palatte. At the same time they saw that colour only exists in light. We both love that 'Girl with Parasol' I bought from Monet last year: the light is simply ravishing. And when I visited him last month in Rouen he was doing a series of things on the cathedral façade, a different canvas for every hour of the day. Wonderful stuff and, again, ravishing.

"Yet the interest they take in light seems to preclude the use of the intellect. A brief digression. When I think of colour I also think of chromaticism

which is a word in musical theory derived from the Greek for colour. As I have mentioned, I play the flute a bit so I try to follow trends in the field. The use of chromaticism as opposed to -- or as an alternative to, or an extension from -- diatonic harmony has increased dramatically in the course of the century. It can be found in Chopin and Wagner, for example, but is being extended in the works of some Austrians I have been watching. From what I understood Monsieur Fauré to be saying this evening, it is also on the increase here in France. His students seem quite excited by the possibilities . . ."

"Wait now, who are these Austrians you speak of?"

"One is an old codger named Bruckner who meanders on at the organ for hours; then there is a young wildman named Mahler who largely conducts opera; but the one I know best is a writer of lieder named Hugo Wolf, He is as good as Schubert and perhaps better."

"Never heard of any of them."

"It doesn't matter. What I mean is that this chromatic movement is a way of extending the colour range in musical harmony. I think the movement has a way to go yet and will lead to some dramatic developments. And I think something the same is happening in the use of colour in painting, It was there in poor Vincent's

work and in Gauguin's, especially the stuff he has brought back this time. From what they have been doing I would guess one of the extensions we are seeing is a freer use of colour, but free not from convention, but from visual actuality itself."

"Go on, my friend, go on."

Lautrec lighted a thin cigar and puffed passionately.

"Well, if we take Poussin as the exponent of perfect balance in colour, a balance that goes beyond nature's, then we can draw a straight historical line from him to Ingres. A theory which survives that long must have great value, it must correspond in some important way to the . . . what shall I call it? . . . the sensual needs of the painter's eye. But of course it had become a tyranny despite itself. Thus it is only by unbalancing colour in ways that would have distressed Poussin that new balances may be arrived at.

"The unbalancing which Monet and the others have adopted is charming, but it is too objective in the end. And the obsession with colour in light to the exclusion of everything else is a kind of drunkenness, if you wish."

"Drunkenness of any sort is a state dear to me: drunkenness is exaltation. On, go on!"

"Well, this drunkenness with colour in light

makes some wonderful paintings, but I think Vincent and Paul and yourself use colour, among other things, to try to get at something which is just not there objectively on the surfaces, but you also try to express something about your own subjective relationship with the object. Take that one of Cha-U-Kao which you showed me the other day: the golden yellow tulle of the skirt which cuts the picture horizontally is madly unnecessary, totally out of balance, yet it makes the picture, does it not?"

"Indeed yes!"

"So it seems to me that you progress, Henri, through a balancing of extremes."

"Ah-ha!"

"Now, we have been speaking about colour, but you work with other extremes. In composition you take wild chances with asymmetry -- the Japanese business -- while you also take wild chances with unbalancing flat and round or illustrative and decorative elements; and any number of other elements. But I began with the illustrative and the decorative, so I'll stop there too. To repeat my opening proposition: your very precariousness of balance in a number of areas makes a combination of imbalances which leads to a new kind of balance, new truths. And so the worlds of painting and

music have turned for centuries and go on turning."

"Admirable! You are my best teacher, I swear. And if you keep it up, you'll be my best pupil. In fact, why don't you take some lessons from me? A man with your mind and at least a little talent ought to be able to manage something. Eh? What do you say?"

"I should be most honoured, Henri, but I would be terrified of wasting your time."

"Nonsense, for I plan to learn from your mistakes. We'll discuss the details later. In the meantime: Gilles! Champagne and be quick about it, you oaf!"

When Jane Avril finished her set, she winked at Kenniston and he slipped away to her dressing room. Sometimes she so lost herself in her dance that her crisis came upon her while the audience watched unknowing; other times the dance was merely routine and had no effect upon her; and from time to time she found herself aroused but unsatisfied when her dance ended. Then she would beckon to her current favourite who would come to give her release. Kenniston Thorson had been her favourite these seven months.

After the first time she murmured just audibly: "Yes, he has the touch."

At another time: "You know women too well, perhaps.

I think you could be dangerous."

And one thoughtful evening: "When I am with you, it is as if I am still dancing."

These passages with Jane were of no great moment to either of them: he was but giving the famous dancer the adulation all of lively society wished to lay before her; she was using his services to enhance her performance. As she called upon the best coiffeur, masseur or couturier, so she invited the most renowned swordsman in town to soothe her nerves. Now, when the cries and the sighs were done, when the honeyed silence had sweetened her soul, she rose from him and sat before her mirror to repair the damage while Kenniston, amused at her businesslike efficiency, watched her over a glass of champagne.

"You interest me," she remarked as she shifted her eyes back and forth between the reflections of her face and of his. "Many men are frightened or disgusted to see make-up being applied, but not you. Why is this?"

"I enjoy it because it is an art, moreover an erotic one. It is an art whereby one of nature's most fascinating creatures -- a fully grown woman -- transforms herself into something even more fascinating: a figment of the imagination. Many men cannot tell the difference, or wish the difference did not exist, thus they fear the

revelation of truth. I adore it."

"But here you see stage make-up which is crude because it is not meant to be seen up close. Furthermore, when you are close to a performer you encounter . . . let me call it the scent of strenuous artistry. Even worse, costumes cannot be cleaned or even aired every day. I am a phantasm of beauty in motion at five meters; up close I must remind you most forcibly that I am mere flesh and blood; while one week out of four . . ."

She shrugged questioningly.

"These encounters enable me to hold the phantasm and the reality in my mind at the same time; this is much more interesting than either one alone."

"This is remarkable. Are other Americans like you?"

"Only a very few, I suspect."

"A good thing: the world cannot bear too much truth."

Madame Eugénie's was neither the largest nor the most expensive house in Paris, but it was the best, for Madame had the genius to know that pleasure, not lubricity, is the chief commodity sought from such establishments. Hers was in the Place Vendôme just

opposite the Ritz and reassuringly near the Ministry of Justice and the residence of the Military Governor of Paris. It was a pleasant stroll from the centres of politics, diplomacy, commerce, finance and the arts. The security was quiet but comprehensive. Although Madame was assiduous in collecting her due -- "I offer pleasure, not charity," she would remark -- all money matters were handled with discretion and toleration; the itemized bill presented at the end of a visit was always correct and reliable regulars were granted credit at reasonable rates.

Madame -- or her backers -- had not been niggardly over decoration and appointments: it was said that the silk for the wall panels would have been rejected by Marie Antoinette as too expensive, while the paintings were, without exception, real works by Academy artists, although Lautrec's scathing comments were beginning to suggest a few examples of more advanced taste might be appropriate.

Of course, the twenty or so girls were the crème de la crème. That they were beautiful and skilled goes without saying. They came from a number of countries on three continents, thus most spoke several languages. More important, all could carry on a conversation. Because a position with Madame Eugénie was the acme

of the profession, there was never a lack of applicants; so Madame could afford to be cheerful about girls who wished to leave. Indeed, several had gone on to brilliant positions in society.

Perhaps the greatest appeal of Madame Eugénie's arose from several small generosities unexampled in rival houses. In the first place, half the main floor -- one up from the street -- was given over to common rooms. There was the central salon with its bar, its several groupings of chairs and banquettes, and the small stage occupied by a succession of talented musicians and used, on occasion, for little shows or tableaux which enabled Madame Eugénie to introduce new girls to her regulars and enabled the girls to show off some of their more eccentric talents. Next was the library: more than one visitor had complained that he had lost track of time there among the best of the classics and the moderns, the several dozen journals, the racks of newspapers. An alcove near the cloakroom held a ticker tape machine, while tucked in a corner next to Madame's office was a small room suitable for private conferences -- rumour had it that certain secret protocols to a possible Franco-Russian alliance had been worked out there -- but it was usually in use as

a card room; it was without windows so that time did not pass there, but ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the players; or of nations.

However, the nicest example of Madame's generosity of spirit (though not of money, for she had ample return from it) was the private stock of a perfectly acceptable champagne which was quite reasonably priced at all times and offered in frank gratuity at various times during the day along with heaping trays of hors d'oeuvres and pastries trotted over from the Ritz kitchens.

"Fine wine, exquisite food, intelligent and witty conversation with beautiful women in an atmosphere of artistry and taste: is this not, indeed, a definition of France herself?"

The speaker of this encomium had been none other than Felix Faure, a devoted patron of Madame's house and a politician widely seen as a future President of the Republic. In fact, as Kenniston stepped from the gilded lift, handed his hat, cape, and walking stick to the attendant, and stepped into the salon, he saw M. Faure seated in the center of the room with Mademoiselle Jojo in one arm, Mademoiselle Didi in the other, and a great laugh rolling from his throat.

Kenniston Thorson had barely time to pluck a glass of champagne from a passing tray when Arthur Balfour and George Wyndham, stopping in on their way home from the Riviera, pulled him aside and demanded his analysis of probable American reactions to certain possible events in Latin America.

"Good heavens, gentlemen, ask me about the width of lapels in the Rue de la Paix and I shall tell you, but of these large matters I am entirely ignorant."

His protestation notwithstanding, he allowed himself to be led to a secluded corner for a chat. As the Englishmen very well knew, he did from time to time carry out certain delicate tasks for the American government, so they listened with some interest as, for twenty minutes, he enlarged upon the significance to the American character of certain phenomena: the new 10,000-ton class of battleships; the obsession with silver; the lure of the Pacific; the future prospects of the patricians of New England.

"Trenchant as always," remarked Balfour. "πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω."

While Kenniston blushed, Wyndham clapped him on the shoulder and waved for more champagne. "Now you must tell us about lapels, old chap!"

"No, he must tell us who is the most beautiful!"

cried Mademoiselle Didi.

"It ith I, thay it ith I!" lisped buxom Fräulein Annaliese in her Austrian accent.

"No, you fat German pig, it is I that he will choose," asserted Mademoiselle Bobo, the lithe giantess from the Côte d'Ivoire; her muscles flexed beneath the snowy corset which compressed her slim torso and waist; languidly she raised one ebony leg encased in white silk, lifting it higher and higher until the heel rested on his shoulder.

"Gentlemen," Kenniston pleaded, "you must see that this judgement of Paris will require a nicer discrimination than the rather crude suggestions I have just been giving you. Thus I am afraid I shall have to retire to more peaceful surroundings to consider my choice."

"Don't take any bribes," advised Drumont the newspaper publisher.

So Kenniston made his way toward the stairs while the ladies danced around him chirruping, giggling and caressing: Bobo in her white satin with black velvet ribbon for the trim; blonde and pink Annaliese in black satin with gold velvet trim; and Didi in blue velvet with white lace.

Presently a door closed, muffling their laughter.

Some hours later, the ladies played out, Kenniston took a seat in the library and called for coffee and cognac. As he sipped, he perused several newspapers: how silly, vapid and hysterical it all seemed somehow. He realized that politics is, of necessity, a cacaphony of strident contention, but when one was not personally engaged in it, how unnecessary it all seemed; and he threw down the papers in a heap.

"Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame . . ." he said softly. The waste of humankind in hatred and anger, striving for the downfall, enslavement, death of one's fellow man: how shocking. Why will not man strive for happiness? Surely there would be enough to go around if only we could get together and try. Or is it but a personal thing? And he recited quietly:

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

And he bowed his head, for he had many lovers and no Love.

"You are sad, Monsieur?" murmured Mademoiselle Fifi as she sat on the arm on his chair. "I have only a

little English, but I think that poem is not a happy one."

He put one arm around her waist held tight in its red velvet, the other hand on the leg in its black silk; he smiled up at her through a film of tears.

"Yes, you are quite right, Mademoiselle Fifi, it is a sad poem, and I should certainly not be thinking of it here in this gayest house in gay Paris."

"At this time of the morning, it often happens that a few of our guests are sad, and sometimes some of the girls. Madame is always most attentive at this hour. The sadness is natural, I think, but I also know it will pass; it always passes."

"I am not so sure. The Germans have a word for this kind of sadness: Weltschmerz. I am not sure, but sometimes I fear I suffer from this sadness, this world-weariness. I hope I do not."

Mademoiselle Fifi pondered a moment, then said decisively: "If you will put yourself in my hands for an hour or two, I shall see what I can do about helping you defeat this sadness. Madame will understand that I am with you. Do you agree?"

"I am entirely in your hands."

She left the room and returned a very few minutes later doing the last buttons on the front of a blue

dress.

"I am not suggesting anything very surprising or special, Monsieur, merely a walk to Les Halles for some onion soup."

"Excellent: I haven't been there for months."

He had, of course, never seen Mademoiselle Fifi in anything but the scanty satins, velvets, and laces of her costumes, so the blue dress was interesting because it was so commonsensical. Thanks to Bridget's lessons, however, he was immediately comfortable with this different woman and as they stepped into the street he offered her his arm as if they were husband and wife out for a stroll.

"Thank you, Monsieur."

"You are most welcome, Mademoiselle."

She smiled, noticing the slight hesitation.

"You may call me Françoise, Monsieur."

"Delighted, Françoise."

Fifi had been a sober, down-to-earth girl; Françoise was much the same but was also more thoughtful and more breezy. She enjoyed food, she said, because she was from Franche-Comté, whose inhabitants ate better than any in France except perhaps the Burgundians. The beef in Franche-Comté was the tastiest in France, she claimed, the game pâté simply superb, while the wine

of Arbois, which has the colour of the skin of an onion, was a rarity and shamefully underrated by the soi-disant experts.

"But the fish stews! My mother makes one with pike and crayfish which . . ."

So they walked along the Rue St. Honoré into the sunrise. With his literary bent, Kenniston made as if to turn into the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but Françoise kept on and turned into the Rue de Sauval. After a moment of reflection he realized she wished to avoid passing the Rue du Pelican whose gaudy ladies would remind Françoise of Fifi; and worse: of the future in store for Françoise should Fifi fail to earn enough, should she fail in her frugality. But the alternate route took them past the house where Molière had been born, a more congenial shade, Kenniston thought, so that sanity and wit hung over the table at Le Chien qui Fume where, wedged between beefy porters, they spooned up the pungent soup with its rich, melted cheese. And as Françoise talked of pigeon pâté, of trout and quenelles of pike, of all the ways morels could be eaten, Kenniston enjoyed the obvious sensuality of this hearty country girl while also thinking that she had not had time to undo her corset and so was certainly dressed in Mademoiselle Fifi's

red velvet underneath the blue dress and no one knew it but he; for even Françoise had obviously forgotten that other gaudy world and was far from Paris, wandering instead through the wooded valleys of home.

So what is the reality, Kenniston wondered, what woman sits here before me, and who does she think sits before her? These porters growling and muttering around us, did they wonder about themselves as they heaved the baskets of lettuce onto the wagons? But surely it was Zola who could best ask those questions, Zola who could best translate the answers into a language his readers could understand. With illustrations by Daumier (may he rest in peace) or Goya. And music by . . . but he could not think of a suitable composer because . . . because music does not work that way?

But of course the answer was that both Fifi and Françoise were here along with several others Kenniston did not know about; and all together they made up a whole woman, some aspects of whom he was privileged to know. But she had just remarked that the only true onion soup was the sort made in her own village. "Kirsch first and last," she explained. "Before anything you put a small splash of kirsch and you finish it by floating another splash on the cheese.

And the cheese should properly be Comté, not Gruyère. Made so it is miraculous, but of course one doesn't expect such niceties in Paris."

Several porters had been listening open-mouthed to this speech; now they erupted against the heresy.

"I beg leave to suggest that Mademoiselle is incorrect in her opinion: Parisians know quite well what goes into onion soup. Manifestly this is so because onion soup was invented in Paris by Parisians."

"Where the soup was invented is perhaps a matter of speculation -- though the cheese, whether Gruyère or Comté, is a mountain cheese -- but of the foul stench in the air of Paris which, from birth, clogs the nostrils and throats of Parisians there can be no doubt. It is a well known fact that a person born and raised in Paris has inferior organs of smell and taste. Whereas in mountain areas such as Franche-Comté, where one breathes pure, clean mountain air, it is possible to taste one's food. And to make judgements on it."

"Mademoiselle may be correct in her assessment of the corrupting influences of the atmosphere of Paris, but both you and this other gentleman are wrong in your statements about the origins of this soup: it is, of course, from Lyon."

"Incredible!"

"Absurd!"

"I wish to point out that the essence of the dish, evidenced by its very name, is onion, and onion has, from time immemorial, been the foundation of Lyonnaise cuisine."

"You may all have one point or other about the basis of this great soup or of the cheese which adorns it, but you are mistaken in the most important thing: the final touch. Mademoiselle and her esteemed mother and their neighbours may well prefer kirsch -- local eccentricities are the life blood of French cuisine -- but the liquor which most exalts the taste of the onion and the cheese, the liquor of gold which, as a ring solemnizes and symbolizes a marriage, solemnizes and symbolizes the marriage of the onion and the cheese can only be calvados.

"Your Norman accent, Monsieur, betrayed your surprising prejudice long before you pronounced its name. In any case, everyone but yourself and Mademoiselle here will agree with me that the best liquor to use is the best liquor obtainable: cognac."

"Nonsense! What everyone including Mademoiselle will assert is that cognac, just because of its admirable lightness, is exactly the liquor one must not use in this rich soup which would overpower it.

No, a marc is the best, its humility appropriate to this soup of the streets, this soup which is the rightful property of those who work with their hands."

"Marc! What next, I ask you?" cried Françoise. "Shall we now have a Marseillais with his pastis? Why not a wily Gascon trying to insinuate armagnac into our soup?"

"And what is so humble about it? This onion soup can stand up for itself in the most exalted company as is amply proved every morning as we see finely dressed members of le gratin coming for their soupe gratinée, this soup which breathes with the earthy soul of the noblest people of all: the working classes."

"That is all very well, Monsieur, but I wish to correct certain fallacious statements which have been made in regard to the cheese . . ."

Will there ever come a time, Kenniston wondered, when such a conversation will be heard by the banks of the Wabash?

No, he answered, there will not.

As the cab clip-clopped up the Champs-Élysées toward his home in the Avenue Bugeaud, Kenniston Thorson returned to his problem of Mademoiselle Fifi's red velvet: how was one to get at the truth of things?

Art was certainly one answer, but not everyone was an artist. Moreover, artists' lives seemed to take such a toll: Gauguin impoverished, Van Gogh dead, de Maupassant mad and probably near death's door in Dr. Blanche's clinic. Even dear old Tissot, apparently sane, had, in his Biblical obsessions, obviously gone simple. And what of Lautrec? Here it was morning in Paris with light bathing the world in pearly glory while beyond doubt Lautrec lay stupefied by drink; not yet thirty, he would almost certainly be dead before forty.

Yet somehow the excess was necessary. "Drunkenness is exaltation," Henri had said. Somehow the best artists combined some breadth of view with some madness, some drunkenness: El Greco his elongations, Rembrandt his depths, Rubens his swirling colours and forms, Shakespeare his metaphors, and Henri, with balance from asymmetry, his depths explored through an obession with surfaces. Yes, they are all drunk with something, just as I am drunk with women, drunk with . . . the curl, the reticulation of women. Yes, all women. If only I could find such a one as Willy's wife, that enchanting little Gabrielle, then perhaps I could love just her. But no, not even with a woman like her: I love all women and woman in all her guises. I love that shopgirl there

on her way to work dappled by the light through the trees, I love that waitress pausing in the doorway -- oh! how ravishing the turn of her white wrist against the black door frame -- and who is that little schoolboy waving to? Yes, little fellow, smile in your mother's love which you will enjoy, but I shall not, though she has mine as she leans from her window all smiles and pink bursting bodice.

But what of Mademoiselle Fifi's red velvet and black lace? What of the rouge, the kohl, the perfume in her hair, the smoky silk stockings swishing on her legs? Were these trappings which so stirred him but the decoration to the illustration of love? But no, for this would belittle the decoration which was also part of the balance. No, he must not just accept the erotic, but embrace it, for it was of the essence in the answer which he could feel bulking in his mind: he must become drunk with the red velvet and all it meant, suffused with it so that the sight, the touch, the very memory of Fifi's red velvet coiled through his mind just as once, while he was trekking a deep, forested valley in the Vorarlberg, a song had come down to him from the craggy heights, the song of an unseen girl far above had come coiling down through the trees and filled the valley and filled his soul with its

clear liquid innocence.

He was about to let himself in when old Marcel, his concierge, opened the door with a proud smile and hastened to take his things. They settled some matters of business about the coach and the guests who were coming for dinner that evening, then Kenniston started up the stairs; he stopped and turned.

"Oh, Marcel, perhaps you could have Madame Maillol make me a pot of tea. It will help me sleep."

"Yes, Monsieur . . . and shall I have Mademoiselle Marie-Claire bring it up to your room?"

He smiled slyly as Kenniston Thorson paused.

Red velvet and black lace.

The girlish song in the deep green valley.

And . . .

Something more.

What had Marcel said?

Laughter?

"Yes, ask Mademoiselle Marie-Claire . . . if she would be so kind . . ."

Laughter.

The laughter rose in him, rumbled in him, tumbled from him, tumbled down the staircase and through the halls and all the rooms of that house and out into the

streets of Paris; and all who heard that laughter stopped still, amazed.

THE CONTINENTAL

Red Banner, Black Boots

Thursday, January 4
Friday, January 5
1923

The great express was speeding into the darkness past Bruges when Connie slipped out of her slip and ordered:

"From now on, call me Lulu!"

"Lulu?"

"Lulu," she confirmed. She stepped out of her step-ins and dangled them before Kenniston Thorson's face, brushed the black silk against his cheek, then flicked the garment over her shoulder and posed, arms akimbo.

"Yes, I am Lulu, exotic temptress of men, lurer of men . . . can I say 'lurer?' Is 'lurer' a word?"

"If it is not, invent it."

"Then I am lurid Lulu, lurer of men -- and quite

possibly of women, too -- destroyer of men, I will drive men out of their minds, for I will draw them to my frenzied body" -- she jerked her torso and her small breasts shuddered, brown-tipped, the tips hard in the chill of the wagon-lit compartment -- "and they shall destroy one another in their lust for Lulu, for Lulu shall remain a virgin -- well, I would if I were one and who's to know? -- Lulu the dancing virgin, Lulu the tangoing virgin, Our Lady of the Tango -- da-datta-da -- Lulu the dancing fool, and I will dance until I drive all men mad, until I myself am driven mad in my own frenzied dance, until I dance myself to death and then where will everyone be? Ha-hah!"

"Lost, of course."

"Yes, lost, everyone shall be lost utterly for love of Lulu, my God where are my gaspers, I must have smoke to calm my nerves and then shall we see whether or not my virginity has in fact returned? Why couldn't it have been arranged for virginity to be renewable, say, once a month with the curse? But then of course everyone would be a virgin and maidenheads would have no value and anyway, virginity is terribly tedious, don't you think?"

Kenniston Thorson cradled her to him, cupped her breast, tousled her cropped, henna-red hair.

"I have never been much interested in virgins," he replied. "I prefer mature, experienced women."

"Hah! There you are . . . now light me . . . mmm, yes, I needed that." She exhaled a cloud of smoke and, nude save for her white silk stockings, stood before the uncovered window as the lights of a little station flashed past.

"Here, World, see your Nemesis! For I am Lulu, Destroyer of Worlds!"

She pressed her thin body against the glass.

"Good God, that's cold! Hold me, warm me, mmm. And if you are so attracted to mature, experienced women, what are you doing with me, just twenty-two and totally inexperienced . . . well, largely inexperienced . . . of limited, if select, experience . . . well, experienced but immature . . . perhaps massively experienced . . . ravaged, as ravaged, as ravaged as . . . what is terribly ravaged?"

"That's Flanders just outside the window."

"Oh how boring: the War. Well, as ravaged as Flanders, then, but immature: so why me?"

"Because I would know you, Lulu."

"Do you mean Biblically or socially? Metaphysically? Ontologically? Psychoanalytically?"

"Historically."

"Oh, how dreadfully dreary: history again. History! I simply loathe history, it's nothing but a lot of old wars and kings and dates and figs and fugs. Ha! Forget history. Pack up your history in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile . . . does that feel nice?"

"Mmmm."

"That?"

"Mmm-hmmm."

"Want a lucifer to light your fag? No, it seems it's already on fire . . . yes, lie back . . ."

And presently, as he lay back watching, Lulu rode upon him, whimpering, clutching, tears of striving on her cheeks, tears of relief, and he watched, quizzical, marvelling, a tango:

Da-datta-da-datta-da-da-da-datta-da . . .

Through Brussels, dressed, along swaying corridors to the dining car, many-lighted, lamps with violet shades, hidden lights above, lights glowing on velvet, shimmering on silk, dancing on crystal, cutlery, spectacles, necklaces, bracelets, rings, cuff-links, tie-pins, stick-pins.

"Bonsoir, Mademoiselle . . . and Monsieur Thorson! Quel plaisir! I was told you were with us tonight."

"Good evening, Henri. The pleasure, I am sure, will be mine. Just like the old days, is it not?"

Not at all, of course: those days were gone, and these days but a pale reflection like the reflection in the window, wavering ghosts upon the darkness.

"Indeed it is, sir. You will be pleased to know that we have the best Zeeland mussels for you."

"Then we shall most certainly begin with a large bowl each, please, Henri. But I see other treats, less expected, thus even more welcome: Certainly you may dance on my table, Adele! . . . Ahh, Latimer, more research on the Gotha Programme? . . . Are you going through to Vienna, Miss Schlegel? . . . To Munich, of course . . . only connecting . . ."

At last he stopped before a woman who sat alone.

"Marie . . . may we join you?"

She was about Kenniston's age, a rather severe looking lady, handsome, proud, with her hair done à l'impératrice.

"Kenniston, is it really you? Well, you are a flatterer and a fraud, so of course you may join me. And you, my beauty, what is your name?"

Kenniston Thorson, wise in the ways of woman, had never learned the knack of predicting whether or not any two women would get along; ignoring the problem

led, on the whole, to reasonable results. In this case, Lulu blinked, then smiled.

"How do you do? I am Lulu Apraxina."

"My dear, my sympathies. I knew your people well before the War and, in fact, spent a lovely summer with the Countess Vera at their summer palace near Petersburg. She would be your . . . ."

"Chère Tante Verushka, she was so kind to me. I remember the Easter egg she gave me that holiday I spent with her when I was ten. It was of red enamel and had a portrait of me and one of cousin Nicky and there were tiny pearls that were his eyes . . ."

Kenniston listened in rapt wonder: he knew Lulu possessed a fine talent for invention, but the Easter egg was an acutely convincing detail. Marie -- Countess Marie Larisch -- was no mean fabulizer herself; now she was not just helpful, but encouraging.

"Yes, Lulu, it is more than thirty years now since those days with Grisha along the blue-canopied shores of the Mediterranean, yet when I think back to that time I feel every wrinkle in my face vanish miraculously and once more I am that young woman, not quite thirty, neglected by her husband and grievously disappointed in love. "The world will never know the depth of the Russian soul," he declared to me, and a tear trickled

down her cheek.

"And when we were children, staying at the archduke's, my cousin's . . ."

Lulu, a modern miss, had once claimed to be unimpressed by titles, but she could not help becoming intrigued by the glitter of the Royal and Imperial Court in the days of the younger Strauss, by the extravagance, the elegance, the beauty, by the castles and palaces, by the liaisons of archduchesses. A fairy-tale world, but:

"But Aunt Sisi -- Tante Kaiserin -- forced George Larisch upon me in marriage, a marriage which was never more than amiable, and which ended because of a misunderstanding . . ."

She smiled at Kenniston and he lowered his eyes.

"But that world is gone, and I who was a 'Palastdame' am now but a nursing assistant, and glad of the work. However, I console myself by thinking of life as opera. I was once fortunate to be . . . near centre stage, but the direction changes, new composers write works I but dimly comprehend, and I am reduced to the chorus while others are promoted to the footlights. Yet it is still, is it not, my dear Kenniston, a privilege even to stand upon the stage?"

"Most assuredly, Marie."

"And you, young lady, I would guess from the look of you that you are destined to play some interesting parts on the stage of life."

"I certainly hope so!"

Several tables away, the Countess Geschwitz murmured to the Marquis Casti-Piani:

"She would be perfect for the part."

"Yes, I agree; we must procure her at once."

"But I must have her first, I desire her first."

"My dear Countess, she is not my type. I see no conflict."

"How?"

The Marquis lifted a spoonful of sugar; the white crystals spilled down.

Camembert, coffee, cognac:

"And now, my dear Kenniston, and sweet, exciting Lulu, I must leave you. I shall certainly be jolted awake when they drop the slip-coach for Munich before sunrise in Nürnburg and I am already sleepy. Oh, how boresome to be old!"

When Marie was gone, Lulu fidgeted with the sugar spoon and asked:

"Was it all true, everything she said?"

"She probably perked it up with some decoration, but most of it was true, yes."

"Tante Kaiserin and Tante Köni-whatever?"

"Yes, Aunt Sisi was a Kaiserin, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, one of the most beautiful women in Europe, and Tante Königin was Maria, Queen of Naples. There was also, as I recall, Aunt Helen, Princess of Thurn and Taxis, and Aunt Matilda, Countess Tristero, and Aunt Sophie, duchesse d'Alençon. Along with a number of kings and archdukes and so on."

"It sounds simply marvellous; I wish I could have been an empress."

"Well, it should have been marvellous -- and my own brief encounters with that world were certainly enjoyable -- but Marie herself seems to have lost most everything, though at least she is alive and sane. Aunt Sisi was assassinated, Cousin Rudolf, the Crown Prince, was a suicide, Uncle Max was executed in Mexico and his wife went mad. Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria was also Marie's uncle, I believe, and he drowned in mysterious circumstances, while his brother Otto spent most of his life in a padded cell. Then there was the Archduke Franz Ferdinand: he was Aunt Sisi's nephew and you know what happened to him."

"Now you're talking history again. I told you I'm

sick of history, it tires me. I'm going. I want to be alone."

She threw down the sugar spoon and was gone.

Kenniston understood, though he did not approve. He had, from time to time, indulged in all the fashionable drugs and, while he enjoyed the oblivion of absinthe, the attenuations of opium, he remained sceptical. Sobriety and sanity seemed to offer greater insights. And how many had he known who had slipped aside, undone, running to a paradise that became a mire, a shuddering quagmire of lost direction, lost definition? Of appetites though (swirling the cognac in the glass): how much had he indulged? A rare cigar after a club meal, perhaps; the alcohol which he but sipped, why only with meals these past twenty years; and yet his other appetite, still unquenched now in his seventh decade, seemingly undiminished, and he felt his heart leap: he could feel (his eyes unseeing) the tense rotundity of Lulu's buttock as she posed before the window, the negligent curl of crease where buttock met thigh, the miracle of heat . . .

He shook his head and found himself the subject of the quizzical gaze of a femme d'un certain âge who, several tables along, had just been seated with what seemed to be her husband and another couple. She seemed

vaguely familiar to him; returned his smile with a coquettish angling of the head. When he bowed -- more a slow nod -- she touched a finger to her lips in a discreet plea; yet she glanced at her watch then blinked, eyes owl-wide: dear God, she knows my desire and means to share it; am I so obvious, so easily read?

"Sir?"

"Er . . . yes?"

"Please sir, are you Mr. Kenniston Thorson?"

Before him stood an English schoolboy of about seventeen years.

"I am."

"Sir, I have read your book about the League and the self-determination of nations, and I wonder if you would clarify a few points for me?"

Kenniston beckoned the waiter. This was going to need more coffee.

"I expect I can try. What is your name, young man?"

"Taylor, sir. Alan Taylor."

"Well then, Taylor, sit you down and we shall have a chat about the self-determination of nations . . . or nationalism, as I prefer to call it. Now then, what questions did you have about my book?"

"Well, sir, you seem to be optimistic and generous about mankind, but you are not wholly in favour of

national movements. But peoples such as the Poles, the Czechs, the Serbs, and the Hungarians, all those peoples in Central and Eastern Europe have been yearning for freedom and independence for decades, for centuries. Surely they deserve independence as much as the Germans, the French, or the English. It seems to me so . . . so monstrous to question the very idea of self-determination. But you don't seem monstrous."

Kenniston smiled gently.

"Thank you. And I quite understand your dismay. Let me try to explain . . ."

But he would not be able to explain. In his book, he had "put forward with a perception we had not been led to expect from one of our trans-Atlantic cousins" (as Horatio Bottomley had put it in John Bull) an argument for the League of Nations as a control on the rampant lunacies of which individual states were capable. The balance of power had theoretically limited or prevented wars for several hundred years, but had also, it seemed, caused the greatest of all cataclysms. If the League was not the only answer, it was one attempt at an answer. As an American of international goodwill and more than a casual interest in affairs, Kenniston had been saddened by the Senate's vote against joining the League, for he was convinced his country had a part to

play in world affairs.

But he supported the League faute de mieux; for it was the creature either of England and France or of the small nations. Either way it was probably a failure and then who was to protect the great proliferation of states between the Baltic and the Mediterranean? With or without a settlement of the reparations problem, how long could Germany be kept weak? How benevolent were Russia and the Comintern? Would France ever forgive Verdun?

"Yes, I entirely agree: the glories of a national culture are among the glories of a civilization. I remember Percy Grainger waxing enthusiastic over the collecting of folk music -- we were out for a run together on Hampstead Heath; Percy is a great runner -- and he went into a passion insisting that if one could get at the reality and purity of folk music, one could get at the reality of a people. I should say that Percy is an Australian, studied in Germany, has collected a great deal of English folk music, but that his passion is for the North. He has collected in both Norway and Iceland and has written suites of their songs and airs. At any rate, he was telling me about one of his Norwegian things and how Grieg, near death, heard it and was most impressed, more than impressed. And then Percy

stopped on the spot -- in Parliament Hill Fields as I recall, a most extraordinary thing for him to do because he can run forever -- and he said to me: 'Kenniston, Edvard took my hand in his -- he could barely lift his hand -- and gazed at me with tears in his eyes. "Percy, my dear friend," he said, "in this suite you have captured a truth about the Norwegian soul. I thank you and all Norway thanks you." I tell you, Kenniston, that was the greatest moment of my life.' And he meant it, he meant it.

"Now you will notice the essential generosity of that story: a native of country A generously composes something for country B and the greatest native composer of country B generously praises him for it. A story to warm the soul, to encourage us to faith in the essential goodness of mankind. And I have no doubt such stories could be told of Poland, Hungary, and Italy, or of Lithuania, Romania, and Serbia.

"But let me tell you another story. Back home in Indiana where I come from there are two small towns. I'm not sure I remember their names, but let us say Boggsville in the valley and Mountain Grove three miles away on the hilltop. Well, a young man from Mountain Grove fell in love with a young woman from Boggsville and she with him, so they commenced to courting. But the

young man's mother found out and said: 'Boggsville? You're courting one of them painted hussies from Boggsville? Very common and no morals at all. Why, I wouldn't give you two cents for the lot of them.' And the mother of the young lady said: 'Mountain Grove? You're seeing one of them hillbillies from Mountain Grove? A bunch of fightin', feudin' hooligans who never wash or shave. Why, I wouldn't give you two cents for the lot of them.' Well, to make a long story short, when that matter was settled to the satisfaction of all concerned, it reminded one of a curtain scene from Thomas Kyd or Richard Wharfinger."

"But surely, sir, these are just ignorant country people who don't know any better?"

"Most of us are ignorant country folk who don't know any better, and the rest are ignorant city folk. And how much worse would the business be if the people involved were, say, Hungarians on the one side and Ukrainians on the other? Different flags, different languages, different churches, and nothing much in common besides bilateral symmetry. Add a lot of uniformed bands playing patriotic national songs, and politicians looking for favour, and generals looking for glory, and arms merchants looking for profit, and you have a nice little war on your hands. Change the

countries to Austria and Serbia, throw in several nets of alliances and an assassination and you have a war which has devastated a continent and has left a generation of young women without husbands."

"Yes sir, I see, but it seems to me that . . ."

Well, it is the right, the duty of young people to argue with old people. Kenniston signalled the waiter for more coffee but, upon a glance from the femme d'un certain âge, declined another cognac.

It seemed people could argue themselves into the most contorted positions if they started from the wrong premises. But how was one to discover the right premises? Like this young man, Kenniston had once thought he knew the workings of the world, and over the years he had been careful to test his beliefs again and again. Then had come the Great War: after Flanders, the Somme, and Verdun, who could believe in the sanity of mankind?

"But surely, sir, the example of Bismarck supports my thesis? Surely as the founder of the German Empire he was an arch-nationalist?'

"The German state and the German nation are not the same thing by any means, and the German question is the greatest question in European politics today, as it has been since the fall of Napoleonic France. Bismarck certainly knew some lines toward some possible answers,

so if you are interested in modern Europe you must understand him. I realize that for someone who obviously thinks of the Revolution of 1848 as the high point of the century Bismarck must seem the embodiment of evil, but you will have to confront him sooner or later and when you do I suggest you may find yourself coming to . . . respect him."

"I can't imagine that ever happening, sir," said Taylor with a firm shake of his head.

"Then I'll give you another line to investigate, but I'm afraid you'll find it even more outrageous than the first one."

"Sir?"

"If you are interested in nationalism and some fairly successful ways of dealing with it, you must study the Austro-Hungarian Empire."

"Successful! The Austro-Hungarian Empire! But it was a ramshackle, decrepit, tottering . . ."

He spluttered into silence: this suggestion was clearly so monstrous that he suspected Kenniston Thorson of ragging him, but Kenniston was quick to reassure him.

"And in its blundering was one of the major causes of the War, no doubt, and is now gone from the world, has disappeared so completely that one has to shake one's head and grab for the history books to be sure it was

ever there."

"A force of blackest reaction, sir! The Habsburgs who never learned anything and never forgot anything. Metternich! Austria, the oppressor of how many subject peoples?"

"Well yes, I don't suppose anyone ever called the Habsburgs a force for liberty. But what if you start somewhere else? What if you start by asking how men may live in peace with their neighbours and in reasonable security? At various times in its history, Austria tried a number of approaches. I don't know that any was ever a very great success for very long, but over a period of time a number of people lived in some peace even if not in ideal freedom. However, I am not trying to make a case for the ramshackle Austro-Hungarian Empire as a perfect model of good government. Rather, as with Bismarck, I suggest that anyone interested in the German question -- and its converse, the myriad questions of European nationalism and self-determination -- anyone interested in these things must consider the Empire."

"Seen that way . . ."

"May I offer you a last piece of wisdom . . . or of platitude?"

Young Taylor understood the discussion was over. He had not made the splash he had hoped for, perhaps,

but he was being treated as an honourable adversary.

"This may seem terribly pessimistic of me, young man, but here it is: Any damn fool can love and fight for his own nation, but only a wise and generous man can look favourably upon the good fortune of his neighbour's nation."

Taylor stood up and cleared his throat.

"As you say, sir, I have to consider your position too pessimistic. I believe that heaven on earth seemed nearer in 1848 than at any other moment in modern history."

"A nicely turned phrase. I sincerely hope you may be right. If you are not, God help us."

As the train paused at Herbesthal to let on the border officials, Kenniston rose and started toward his compartment. The femme d'un certain âge, with a murmur to her companions, was neatly ahead of him into the corridor. At the door at the end of the carriage, she stopped and turned.

"Could you?" she asked in German. "I never seem to have the strength."

She lifted her eyes toward him, blue eyes pale with the memory of melancholy, the fact of . . . of what? Apathy? Despair? The lids lifted to candid openness,

then slowly descended as her head descended and turned, a gesture of poignant, even pathetic submission.

"With pleasure."

"Pleasure?" she replied with a humourless laugh. "I used to believe in pleasure."

They entered the wagon-lit carriage.

"What do you believe in now?"

She opened the door to a compartment and leaned against the jamb.

"Betrayal . . . despair . . . appetite."

"And of these three, which is the greatest?"

She shrugged.

"Does it matter?"

The arrival of the border officials saved him the hollowness of words; when they were gone, he gave his answer by stepping past her into the compartment. If she is right, I might as well throw myself from the train -- so might we all -- but if I can turn her ghastly creed upside-down . . . well, what else does civilization mean?

She closed the door and presently the great express plunged into Germany.

When the train stopped in Cologne, Kenniston bought a copy of the Frankfurter Zeitung at the newspaper kiosk

and scanned it in the faint hope of something better from Paris. But the news from the Reparations Conference offered more despair. Kenniston read the several accounts with deepening gloom: clearly the talks had all but broken down. But what matter, for Poincaré had decided three weeks ago (as Kenniston knew from his own sources) that the French Army was to occupy the Ruhr by the middle of January at the latest. No, the Great War had not been the war to end all wars and was not, in fact, over yet, and now Germany lay prostrate before her conquerors, open to despoilation. Am I no better than the rest? he asked himself, and in disgust threw the paper down.

"Excuse me, sir, I believe I have the honour of addressing Mr. Kenniston Thorson?"

His first impression was that the stranger's eyes were of an unusually light blue. His smile, which spread ingratiatingly over his face, disclosed the ugliest teeth Kenniston had ever seen.

"Yes, but I don't believe I . . ."

"Allow me to present my card, Mr. Thorson. Arthur Norris, Gent. I wonder if . . . could we perhaps move over here, out of the light, as it were . . . yes, you see . . . dear me, things are so very complex these days."

"Yes," replied Kenniston and in an amused curiosity which for a few minutes might dispel the gloom he felt, he allowed himself to be led behind the newspaper kiosk. He realized, with interest, that Mr. Norris was wearing a wig.

"Now then, if you could explain . . ."

Mr. Norris said, with surprising petulance:

"All these frontiers . . . such a horrible nuisance."

"I quite agree. However . . ."

"Then perhaps, sir, as men of good will who share an animosity toward the petty obsessions of nationalist states, we . . ."

Mr. Norris took some time getting to the point, but it was clear enough when he did, and not entirely unexpected. Mr. Norris was offering to supply Kenniston with political and military intelligence from Berlin. Despite energetic denials, Kenniston was unable to convince Mr. Norris that such a market did not exist. Mr. Norris was, in fact, perfectly correct in his assumption, but hopelessly indiscreet in making his offer on a platform of the Cologne Station.

"Let us compromise, then," said Kenniston at last. "Let us say that I am not <u>just now</u> in the market for such wares as you are offering."

"In a few weeks? In the spring, perhaps? Before the summer manoeuvres?"

"Possibly."

"Ah, well, then I can hope that . . ."

"However, in the meantime I might be able to suggest someone who, now and then . . ." and he dictated certain numbers which Mr. Norris copied into his notebook.

"And I am to ask for Margot? Is she . . ."

"I doubt there is a real Margot, Mr. Norris."

"Of course . . . yes . . . how silly of me . . ."

"And might I request that when we return to the train we avoid one another?"

"There will be no problem about that, inasmuch as I am not continuing on to Vienna, but am taking the Paris-Berlin express which, if I am not very much mistaken, is just arriving on the next track."

"Ahh, changing trains . . ."

As they parted, Kenniston reflected that Mr. Norris was a cunning but stupid man; no doubt that was the source of his pathetic charm.

Kenniston was stepping back into the train when he heard brisk footsteps approaching.

"Kenniston!"

A tall, slim, elegant man flourished a broad-brimmed,

canary-yellow hat, a hat Kenniston immediately craved.

"Harry! What in heaven's name . . ."

With a German father and an Irish mother, Count Harry Kessler was by birth and by deepest conviction a cosmopolitan. He had been born and partly schooled in Paris, had gone on to Harrow, then to university in Germany. In 1914 he was in England and returned to the continent to fight for Germany; yet his companion on the cross-channel ferry was his friend Rodin, the sculptor. A left wing aristocrat, he had organized Lenin's famous train trip. Diplomat, discerning collector, writer, publisher, socialite: Harry had been a friend of Kenniston since the Algeciras Conference of 1906.

"Yes, I am supposed to be in Paris," said Harry, "but the conference is such a depressing farce that I had to get away for a few hours and I knew you were passing through tonight. I thought I might join you along the Rhine to Frankfurt and return to Paris from there."

"Let us go to the salon carriage; it will probably be empty at this hour."

"You are alone?" Harry enquired.

"Just now, yes. I am travelling with a young lady, but she is otherwise engaged at the moment."

Harry shook his head.

"Kenniston, as long as I have known you, you have been travelling with one young lady or another." He gave an appraising look. "But it seems to keep you young."

"Yes, I suppose I trade my experience for her youth. I don't know that it's much of a bargain for her, but I try to make sure it remains harmless enjoyment."

"And an education?"

"Oh indeed yes: Thomas Cook offers a tour of ante-bellum Europe under the personal direction of Kenniston Thorson, bon vivant and minor intriguer in the musty back halls of palaces, embassies, and . . . maisons closes. I wish she were here to meet you, but at dinner I was able to introduce her to Marie Larisch."

"Good God, that relic!" Harry chuckled.

"She's our age, Harry."

"Yes, but what a reminder of a world I thought buried. After Mayerling I expected her to lose herself in South America or Canada. Heaven knows my title is humble and unpretentious, but I try to give it some meaning with duty and service. You speak of musty palaces: it is people like Marie Larisch who made the Revolution inevitable."

Kenniston pushed open the door to the salon and paused to put an arm on Harry's shoulder.

"Patience, old friend. Marie and her sort are

irrelevant now, beyond our anger. What is important now is the Republic . . . and the future."

"You're right, of course. Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns and Wittelsbachs: how redoubtable their fortresses seemed, yet how chimerical they proved."

"Shall we drink to their successors?"

"You needn't tease me, Kenniston. I am painfully aware of the imperfections of our world."

"Count Kessler!" the steward exclaimed, "we did not expect you on this trip."

"And you don't in fact see me, Dieter, for I am not here."

"I understand perfectly. And you wish, gentlemen, to be left in peace, I am sure."

"With some coffee, if you could, please."

"Of course, sir."

"It is impossible," Harry remarked when they were settled, "to reform the Germans. You noticed the deference? Yet I am a socialist. Why, only a month ago, at the Trades Union Congress at the Hague, I was enjoying a rather mischievous speech by Karl Radek."

"Old habits die hard."

"Yes, I am afraid so. Unfortunately, servility is a most deeply rooted habit among my compatriots. As

deeply rooted as stubbornness among the French. Poincaré is utterly intransigent."

So they got down to a discussion of the reparations question. As with all serious international issues, any sane solution was impossible and any possible one absurd. Kenniston had long ago set his mind to search for the principles behind things. In his various diplomatic doings he worked perforce with details, half truths, maybes, but always he tried to get behind them to the elemental. Now, after half an hour, he concluded the problem was the French could not forget they had won the War and the Germans could not remember they had lost it.

"Kenniston?"

"I'm sorry; in old age, the mind wanders. Even worse, I was making an epigram when I should have been seeking wisdom."

He repeated it.

"Neat. That comes not from your mind wandering, but rather from your mind turning its subject round and round as a sculptor considers his piece. You know perfectly well epigrams are amusing and useful as glimpses; you also know they are not the whole story. The truth is to be found in the way many different things fit together in relation to one another. In a sense, because the relationship, not the parts, has the

truth, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

"Very well judged, Harry, very wise, I think."

"You should," replied Harry drily. "It is the position you explained to me over ten years ago."

As he laughed, Kenniston found himself stroking the fabric of the chair arm. The salon no doubt looked elegant enough from outside the window, but close up the nap was gone from the velvet.

"Harry, what if we think of the War as a release of energy just as, say, lightning is the release of electrical energy?"

"Yes."

"Then we could say that the energy, the tension, had been building all over Europe since . . :"

"Since at least 1870," Harry shrugged.

"Since the Congress of Vienna?"

"Perhaps it goes back to the first meetings between the Germans and the Romans."

"With another polarity between Germans and Slavs?"

"Absolutely."

"So the release of this energy in war is as uncontrollable, as destructive, as stupid, as exciting as lightning."

"Yes."

"And you needn't continue trying to hide your

impatience: I know all this is obvious, even trite. I'm trying to describe my sense of a phenomenon. Now look out the window: what do you see?"

"The Rhine . . . a town . . . Koblenz, I think."

"A town, yes, but what are you actually looking at, what do your eyes see?"

"Houses, streets, shops shuttered and waiting for the morning, here some small gardens by the rail line, streetlights, automobiles, three men, two of them helping a third who has obviously had too much to drink."

"Yes," said Kenniston, "all those things. Now ask yourself what they mean. The houses where human beings live in warmth here in a northern January, where they have some peace and privacy to beget and bring up children, to read books and look at pictures and perhaps even make something like a wall hanging or an embroidered hair ribbon or to paint a flowered frieze around the dining room. Perhaps they plant a garden or sing in a choir or just chat with a copain at the Stammtisch in the Bierstube. And perhaps they work in those shops, or for a larger business, or for the government, or for the company that keeps those streetlights glowing. . . . Oh, Harry, forgive me."

Any mention of the great German electrical company, the AEG, inevitably implied its remarkable founder, Emil

Rathenau, and by extension his son and successor, Walther. With face set, Harry stared out the window: since the turn of the century, since before he had known Kenniston, he had been a friend of Walther Rathenau, if that austere and brilliant man could be said to have had friends. Rathenau had been at once a soulful romantic and a profound intellectual; a philosopher and an engineer; a patron of the arts with exquisite taste and a shrewd, energetic businessman and industrialist; a Jew and an admirer of the blond, Teutonic ideal; a lover of freedom and equality, yet a supporter of the Hohenzollerns and the autocracy and aristocracy for which they stood; a lover of peace (the Great War had broken his spirit) who nonetheless organized German industry for total war and perhaps thereby kept the War going two or three years longer than it would have; one of the richest men in Germany, yet an apostle of socialism who preached the evils of inherited wealth . . .

"Beguiling . . . repellent . . . enigmatic Walther Rathenau. And his murderers, the real ones, will go free."

Denied a role in the Imperial government because he was a Jew, Rathenau had accepted the position of Foreign Minister in the Republic. The campaign against him in the Reichstag and in the nationalist press reached

hysterical heights and a gang of young nationalist thugs assassinated him in June of 1922. After a month they were all either dead or captured, but the nationalist press lords and politicians smirked in satisfaction and spread the lie that the bolsheviks were responsible.

"I hope to write his biography," said Harry. "He was not just fascinating, he was, in the profoundest sense, a human being."

"A Mensch."

"Yes . . . and when you speak of Rathenau and the AEG lighting up the night . . . I look out at the lights there, across the Rhine . . . reflecting on the water . . . the lights of the barges . . . the lights of a Germany trying to crawl back to . . . I don't say glory, for <u>that</u> régime was not glorious. Did I ever tell you about my visit to the Palace in December '18?"

"No, you didn't."

"This was a day or so after the revolutionary sailors had been driven from the building. There were still corpses in the entrance hall; I had walked through that hall for any number of receptions before the War. The damage wasn't great, although there had been looting, of course. But when I went through to the private apartments of the Emperor and Empress, I found myself astonished at the bad taste of the rubbish that was left:

chairs and carpets, cabinet fittings, some little botties, pill botties I suppose . . . it was all so trashy, so insipid. I remember a feeling of something morbid, oppressive about the rooms. One could not live in such an atmosphere of grotesque bad taste and remain sane; and here he had hatched his lunatic schemes. I don't mean to trivialize history by suggesting that the driving force behind great events is domestic decoration, but you could not stand there without reflecting that it must have . . . encouraged his pathologically excitable mind. I think there is something in this idea, smile though you will."

"Forgive me, Harry, I was thinking about your home in the Cranachstrasse."

Harry's home in Weimar was surely one of the most civilized interiors in Europe.

Kenniston added: "And I must agree to this extent: the idea of anyone being able to think a cruel thought or experience a barbaric emotion in your rooms is . . . absurd."

"Thank you, old friend. However, tonight I cannot keep the blackest thoughts from my mind. I was saying the lights reminded me of a Germany struggling . . . not back to that Imperial lunacy, but forward to . . . economic stability, a job for every able bodied man, a

decent home for every family, equality . . . and what's more important, a belief in equality, though heaven knows if the Germans can ever come to believe in such an idea . . . and most important of all, the highest quality for which a society can strive, perhaps: dignity. Not dignity for the state qua state, for that quickly turns into such shams as the East Africa adventure or monuments such as the Siegesallee statues, but dignity for every citizen, ordinary human dignity. If the Republic could attain that, it would have earned more glory than all the armies of history."

"Yes."

"Yes. Yet in two weeks the poilus will be marching in those streets just over there, in the industrial heartland of Germany, and the economy will come to a standstill, the society will be in chaos, and the jackals will be tearing at the body politic."

"Neither Gesellshaft nor Gemeinshaft?"

"If you wish; I find that dichotomy invidious."

The train seemed to pause as if to catch its breath, the coaches compressed together, extended again, shuddered slightly, then the train went smoothly on its way. At the far end of the salon, the waiter, nodding in his chair, woke and looked out the window. A glance at his watch, a scowl at the two old fools at their table,

the recollection of the big tip he was having to wait for, then back to sleep.

As the train drew in to Frankfurt Station, Harry was speculating on possible projects for his Cranach Press; he had already made his reputation as the publisher of some of the finest editions of the century.

"But what I would most like to do are a few more translations from German into English. How would you like to do the Duino Elegies for me, Kenniston?"

"Hmm . . . you tempt me, I must say . . ."

"Don't answer me now, but do think about it."

"No, I was thinking rather that I know of an English poetess who is already working on a translation of the Elegies. Her English poetry is quite good, I think, so I expect the Rilke will be at least interesting. I'll just note her address . . ."

"Vita Sackville-West? She would be related to Eddie?"

"His cousin, I believe. She is married to young Nicolson at the Foreign Office. I expect you know him?"

"Our paths have crossed."

On the platform they reviewed their diplomatic business, promised to get together again soon, embraced, parted.

Lulu, dazed, pulled the shade back an inch, gazed at the great number of soldiers milling about, boarding the train across the platform, among them a young soldier about ten feet away, blond, with a dimple in his chin.

"Now, my love," murmured Geschwitz, indicating the two rows of white crystals on the night table. "Now, while the train is still."

The blond soldier blinked slowly; his eyelashes were enormous; Lulu caught her breath.

Geschwitz ran her finger along the down in the small of Lulu's back.

"Or . . ."

"Not just now," said Lulu, turning to smile at her. "In five minutes. I'll return in five minutes. I promise."

When she summoned him from the carriage door, the soldier blinked his enormous lashes and smiled slowly.

"Quick, now, here, now," she said, pulling him into a vacant compartment, lifting her skirt.

In no time she was back with Geschwitz.

"Now," she smiled. "Now, more . . ."

The troops were at last aboard their special train and gone and the clock read 3:56 as the express slipped from the station. Kenniston went gratefully to his

compartment; he was too old for all-night ramblings and revellings. Lulu, clearly, was not, for she had not yet returned. Well, he was the last man with a right to be jealous, even inquisitive, about the comings and goings of women friends. Gratefully he changed into sleeping costume, then searched through his suitcase for a book: a slim new volume of advanced poetry which he put back at once; and a review copy of Le Blé en herbe with the inscription, "À K. T., Chéri, ta Gabrielle," from his beloved Colette. He laid this book gently upon the night table and climbed into bed.

Not yet.

Outside the window a town asleep, seeming empty. Under the streetlights a yellow fog licked and curled into the corners of the dark. He had not finished trying to explain to Harry what he meant about the lights, about the why of the lights, the why of the streets, the rails. Networks: why all these networks, these webs upon the jumble of the land? But the train crossed a river (the Main?) and he thought: Nature makes lines too, rivers and lakes and seacoasts, tree lines, climatic zones, geological strata, lines of elevation, weather fronts . . . isobars? isotherms? The routes of birds of passage like the routes of ships and aeroplanes. But Nature's lines arise at random from within inevitable laws of

science, while man's lines are thought made substance. Rathenau's father had had a vision of a Germany connected by electrical power lines and he gave that vision reality in the cables which ran there, down the streets of that town. The streets are lines, the pipes under them which carry fresh water to the clustered buildings and the other pipes which carry the sewage away; the rivers are straightened, their banks made firm, and where they do not flow there flow canals; and where mountains rise to block the roads and rails, man digs tunnels and the lines go on. But why?

What drives men to work together to make those lines? Why do Hans and Fritz go to work for the AEG or the Deutsche Bundesbahn at the age of seventeen and spend a life learning the special skills which keep the generators and transformers working, that move the goods wagons from factory sidings in one city, through marshalling yards, each wagon shifted from this siding to that, over this set of points, then this, then this until it is joined by others for shipment on more lines to Hamburg or Rotterdam or Antwerp and to the sidings of warehousing depots? A theory arising from an analysis of the medieval guilds would probably find the motive in the pride of workmanship, craftsmanship, of the thing well made, the job well done: the golden crusted bread,

round and hot upon the counter, and behind it the chubby baker dusted white, his pudgy hands open, offering, and his round face warm with a grin.

Yes, but . . .

But what had the master baker to do with the switchman employee in his hut, his breath mingling with the steam from his coffee, now, at four in the morning, and the mingled smells of the coffee, coal dust, cold sweat, grease and more grease, and the garlic from his hunk of wurst; the switchman for the small branch line who must remember to pull that lever eight times, no more, no less, eight times tonight, and ten times tomorrow, and six on Sundays, remember or a train will go thundering, shuddering, rolling, churning, plowing, cleaving, hissing, fizzing among the linden trees, and that lever has to be pulled correctly, winter and summer, year in and year out, war and peace, busy times and slack times, but all times for forty-five years without a single mistake or the switchman is a criminal, and if he does his job for forty-five years he has only not done wrong?

Is it enough that he is part of something, part of the network, the system, the idea that is bigger than him and his little hut, but encloses them, the idea which comes on silvered rails that stretch to Munich, to

Vienna, to Istanbul, to Baghdad? But why does he join the idea? His daily bread? And whose idea? And why the idea? Where does it come from?

Is it all just an idea to provide daily bread to a multitude? Daily bread and more daily bread: the workman gets his beer and wurst and the boss his champagne and caviar? Is that all there is to these ideas, dreams, visions? Is it all just men grabbing, grasping, twisting, grinding other men, women, children, animals, plants, water, soil, and rock, all just stuff, matter, raw material for chunking, chopping, crumbling, mulching into . . . what was the word? . . . slop? slip? slurry? some sort of liquid muck, where there's muck, there's money, and his own fortune founded in the limestone quarries of Indiana: all his pretensions to taste founded in muck, yes, he had long understood that fact (as he had long sought exaltation in the salt tang of sweat, the slip-slide of secretions, the fish smell of spilling seed) but had always believed Nature benign when invested with the spirit of man, believed in flesh, blood, earth, water: the sweet breath of springtime in Burgundy, the teeming breath of the land plowed and harrowed with manure, alive under the sun, trembling with growth.

But if April is cruel . . .

But if life is only process, if man is only

appetite: then all is barbarism . . . brutality . . . slavery . . . rape . . .

No, oh no, it could not, it must not . . .

But . . .

But he put his hands over his face and saw in his mind's eye a great plain gray under low clouds, the plain ringed by distant mountains from which rumbled sterile thunder without rain, the plain lumped with slag heaps and pitted with foul pools and across the plain ran a road and on the road slouched human creatures herded in rough lines by guards with machine pistols and a prisoner stumbled on the cracked earth and a guard fired a burst into the prisoner and another guard cut a female from the herd and pushed her down upon a rock and mounted her from behind like an animal and when he was done he offered her to another guard who shrugged and took her and then another did while the other prisoners groped together and avoided speech but a child or a dwarf watched so they shot the child and then they shot the female and there were no eyes here to see and they shuffled away across that dead land and the rats came and feasted upon the fallen meat burrowing into the carcasses in that dead land.

Kenniston wept.

Shuddered. His mind an ache.

Slept.

Lulu burst into the compartment just after nine and bounced on the bed.

"Wake up, wake up, they say there's trouble on the line and we're in Munich!"

"Munich? What trouble?"

"Snow, they said."

But this southern curve of a detour was more likely to have snow than the direct route through Nürnburg-Regensburg-Passau. No, he had seen the soldiers and the special train and could guess what sort of trouble was meant: there would be cracked skulls before this day was done; in Nürnburg, he rather suspected.

"And we are to stay here until at least the middle of the afternoon and I don't care if Marie did say Munich is a lovely city, I've barely heard of it so I'm sure it's just a boring, dull, little, provincial town like Bath or Chester with old buildings and no place to tango!"

Kenniston pulled back a corner of the shade: railway employees stood about gesturing, shrugging as passengers demanded answers.

"At least perhaps Marie got a good night's sleep out of it."

"If we see her, we can ask her to show us all the local hot spots."

"You are a cruel and sarcastic young lady. Marie may be matronly today, but she has lived a most interesting life. She is, after all, a Wittelsbach, though morganatic as I recall, and the Wittelsbachs have very lively reputations indeed. They also made Munich a rather attractive place. Would you like me to show you some of the sights?"

"Only if they're extravagant, immoral, or dangerous!"

"Oh, I promise you some perfect treats."

Several telephone calls and a certain amount of influence were required before Kenniston discovered that the first of these treats, a delicate fugitive through war and revolution, was hidden away from view, but because of old friendships, he was assured of access. However, when the cab turned into the avenue leading to the Nymphenburg Palace, Lulu threw herself back upon the seat with a groan.

"I refuse, this is absolutely too boring, it is not possible to tango in such a fusty, musty, dusty old horror, you are too cruel, you are an ox, an ass, a monster."

Nevertheless, she waited more or less patiently

while he settled matters with the guard and followed docilely enough along a gallery and into a room with three walls of identically sized portraits of beautiful women.

"This is called the Schönheits Galerie, the Gallery of Beauties. They were almost all done by one painter -- I don't recall his name -- about a hundred years ago on commission from the then king of Bavaria, Ludwig I, I believe."

"Was that Mad King Ludwig?"

"No, he came later in the century. This Ludwig was Marie's grandfather or uncle or whatever. The ladies are from all over Europe and from all social classes, from queens to commoners. One of them . . . let me see . . . yes, here she is: Helene Sedlmayr, the Schöne Münchnerin. She was the daughter of a cobbler, I think."

"How disgustingly sweet looking she is, such prim lips, such cowlike eyes, how treacly, how too, too morbid . . . though some of the embroidery on the costume might be interesting to have copied onto an evening frock. But the silver braiding is impossible. Frankly, I'd rather be me."

"Well then, what about this one?"

Lulu peered at the name plate.

"Jane, Lady Ellenborough?"

"Usually referred to in the history books as 'the notorious Lady Ellenborough.'"

"What made her notorious?"

"Her affairs with a number of famous and powerful men."

"Name one."

"If I'm not mistaken, she had a fling with Prince Felix Schwartzenberg who was Prime Minister to the Emperor Franz Josef, Marie's 'Uncle Kaiser.'"

"Very scandal-making in her time, I dare say, but these days it would hardly rate two sentences from Mr. Chatterbox in The Daily Excess and I get at least a paragraph a week."

"Well then, perhaps this one is scandalous enough for you; at least she was a dancer."

"Except for the flowers in her hair she looks more like a nun."

"I expect the costume is meant to be Spanish because she pretended to be a Spanish dancer. In fact, she was Irish."

"Irish! That would explain both the coarse features and the low morals. 'Lola Montez.' The name is vaguely familiar. What did she do besides dance?"

"She was what used to be called an adventuress, which means she was the same as Lady Ellenborough but had

no money of her own. In any case, she was one of the main causes of the fall of the very king who commissioned the portraits."

"How did she manage that?"

"By being the king's mistress, and by getting mixed up in politics, but mostly by being criminally extravagant. The usual thing."

"I would love to be so criminally extravagant that I could bring down a monarch, but there are so few left these days, and no one paid the slightest attention when David and I spent that dirty weekend together. Perhaps I could find a dictator somewhere. No? Oh, I would just love to be scandalous or notorious, but there's nothing left to do, it's all been done before, done, done, done. I shall die of boredom."

"Somehow I doubt that."

"However . . . I think I know of something I could do to delay the funeral for just a short while. Actually, all these beauties around us -- and I admit they are very beautiful -- are simply staring at me, gawking. I believe they're immensely curious about the modern woman, of which I am a most superb specimen -- surely that should be 'speciwomen?' -- and about my bob . . . and my burgundy silk stockings . . . and my step-ins of black silk milanese trimmed with cluny lace . . . and . . ."

And Kenniston Thorson stood as she held her hem at her hips and lifted her left leg slowly, sinuously, snakelike into the air, wavering, questing toward him, curling round his waist, holding her boyish body to his and now her arms curled round his neck to pull his mouth to her red, wet lips:

". . . and curious about . . . the twentieth century . . . is that not so . . . Schatzi? . . ."

Kenniston asked himself:

Is this also a violation?

As they made their way back across felicitously decorated Munich -- as decorated as the story of my life, Kenniston mused -- a pale lemon sunlight touched the distant Alps, glowed weakly over the Starnbergersee, then flickered out, so that when they got to the Hofgarten a shower of snow forced them to alight under the colonnade and they welcomed the cosy warmth, the aroma of chocolate, mint, and coffee in the pastry shop, a Mitteleuropa decadence seemingly unaffected by the tides of dynasty, empire, war, or revolution.

"If I am to keep my boyish figure, I must stop eating these naughty things, but they are just so absolutely scrumptious, don't you think?"

"A treat."

"On the other hand, why should I deny myself treats? What is life if we deny our desires? Obviously it leads to simply masses and masses of traumas. I mean to say, I could starve myself and stay lissome and lithe, but my unconscious would be absolutely bloated and disgusting from all the neuroses and even if I did gain weight I could always shed it by doing the tango for hours and hours and hours but that could hardly have any effect upon . . . but then it might, mightn't it? Yes yes, think of it, psychotherapy by tango because you see all psychological problems are caused by trauma in childhood, and yes I know you know, but the point is they are simply being repressed and the cure comes when you unrepress them and that's what dance is perfect for, d'you see? I mean it's virtually a religious experience isn't it, I mean ancient cultures thought of the dance as positively a sacred duty which I certainly agree with, I mean they say God is dead which is absolutely fabulous so far as I'm concerned so the great thing is to try to rediscover the roots of religion what it was that made man search for gods in the moon and the sun and the changing seasons and crops and human sacrifice and the corn god and holy prostitutes and those rituals because I'm absolutely convinced that it is all one together a great unity of the mind and the body and the spirit and the earth and

water and the elements and the planets and the thing that unifies it all is of course sexuality which is the basis of all understanding feeling knowledge I mean it's all sexuality Freud is definitelyright about that I mean he's the wisest man alive except for Rudolf Steiner and Aleister Crowley of course but Freud says the psyche is basically a sexual thing sexually motivated principle dynamic but the problem is the greatest problem both personally and socially and religiously and philosophically is that good sexuality a good sexual act which is both expressive and fulfilling and sane is only possible when the person performing the act is sane however the dance is like the sexual act I mean it arises from the depths of the psyche the unconscious and you can lose yourself in it the same way you do with sex but because it doesn't necessarily involve another person as the sexual act does then it is much easier to do you don't worry about the repressions and the traumas and so you are not repressed and the traumas are released and resolved in the dance so that if you danced and danced and danced you would be absolutely unrepressed which is why everyone is dance-mad these days mad to tango mad for ragtime mad for jazz because of the great trauma of the Great War we have to forget the War all of the Younger Set have to dance it absolutely out of existence because

history is nothing but traumas collections of traumas and repressions to hold us down keep us back keep all of society repressed because authority has to keep the masses under control or all the repressions of centuries would explode which is why revolution is just another kind of dance a frenzy that's what Marie said it was like here in Munich in the revolution a frenzy but she didn't like it because she didn't see that the frenzy was necessary and it was all a dance of people driven mad by centuries of repression and trauma and war and they had a frenzy of revolutionary dancing which was their way of trying to unblock the repression and resolve it and it's all so absolutely obvious that I am right that I am not going to say another word except that I am tired of coffee and tired of sitting and I want to tango and I want a drink so show me the way to the next whisky-bar!"

As they walked along the platform toward their carriage, Lulu sang out:

"Beautiful: dancing creates fantastic godlike energy!"

"Even though it was only a tea dance?"

"All dance is transcendent."

They were about to step aboard when Kenniston was greeted by a large, handsome man in a fur coat who had

evidently just arrived on the express from Vienna on the next track.

"Well, Kenniston, have you come to meet me? How did you know?"

"I certainly would have been here, Alban, had I known you were coming. Unfortunately I myself am just leaving for Vienna where I had hoped to see you. How long before you return?"

"That depends entirely upon the Bavarian State Opera and" -- he hefted his worn black briefcase -- "this: I finished it last spring and I've been having it privately printed."

"Wozzeck? Really? May I see a copy?"

"Drop in on Helene and she'll give you one."

The train crew fussed and fretted, so Kenniston followed Lulu on board and exchanged good-byes with Berg who shook his head at them and called:

"Eine Seele . . . Eine Seele, die sich im Jenseits den Schlaf aus den Augen reibt."

"What did he say?" demanded Lulu; she had not minded that the rest of the conversation had been in German, but she guessed this last was about her. "I do wish these foreigners would speak English."

"He said: A soul . . . on the other side . . . in Paradise, I think we'd say . . . who rubs the sleep from

her eyes. I expect it's a quotation."

"I knew I should have done my eyes again before we left the dance. Who is he, another count or marquis?"

"No, a composer. His name is Alban Berg."

"Is he any good?"

"I think he's a genius."

"Well, I've never heard of him."

"Not many people have yet. His music is very modern and rather difficult."

"He should write tangos."

Kenniston chuckled.

"If we see him in Vienna you must tell him that."

"I shall."

In the gathering gloom of late afternoon, the dying day, the great express eased out of Munich and curled across Bavaria, eastbound. They passed the Chiemsee in darkness and at Traunstein they met snow, so that they crossed the Austrian border and into Salzburg veiled, obscure. Kenniston, who knew and loved that city, peered from the dining car window, hoping to see something he could recognize, but was forced back into his mind, to his memory; and inevitably it was the music of Mozart which swelled there, floated in a gilded room of the Prince-Bishop's Palace . . . daa . . . da-daa . . .

da-daa . . . was it Busoni playing? Yes, Busoni and a small chamber orchestra around him: daa . . . da-daa . . . da-daa . . . da-da-da-da-daa . . . daa . . . notes languid, liquid in a room of gilt and velvet, felicitous as reason felt, inevitable as feelings lived through.

With but a pause to change engines on the train, they went on, trying for Vienna by midnight.

In the dining car the cutlery and crystal glittered, the waiters smiled and bowed and rushed, the diners held aloft glasses of champagne and toasted one another, the new year, the journey. Lulu opened her compact and began applying heavier lines around her eyes, drawing the points outward.

"It's the King Tut motif," she explained. "I am the reborn soul of an ancient Egyptian priestess. The mysteries of the Sphinx dwell within me, a terrible beauty is born in my gaze, blank and pitiless as the sun: Hah! For I am Lulu, Destroyer of Worlds!"

She waved gaily to the Countess Geschwitz; blinked, pouted toward a handsome and cocky young man in uniform, drew the lines out further.

I could have gotten off at Salzburg, could have gone west into the mountains, could have gone trekking a deep, forested valley there because . . .

But memory failed him.

The great express plunged on into the darkness, eastbound.

Laughter spilled, trilled from Lulu's red mouth, laughter like clinking crystal, laughter like cinder sparks whirling from her, brief in the winter night, like snowflakes whirling, filling the night, chill in the swirling dark all about, multitudinous, lost.

The End