EVEN WE

On the ragged fringe of Cape Town, a safe distance from the road that runs to the factories and shops of the new northern suburbs, skulks Windermere. It is not a slum, for a slum is something human. And Windermere is a corruption of the very earth, an eczema of shacks made from rusted tins, boxes and newspaper, without lights or drainage, and with the rubbish dump of the city rotting round it in the sunshine. When the rains come to the Cape in the middle months, the water lies in swelling lakes on the sunken ground, gathering itself to sweep through the shacks and leave only a wall or a piece of roof swirling behind. And afterwards, in the still heat of the Cape midsummer, the thin tin walls of the shacks suck up the sun, till the air locked inside them scalds wherever it touches. All the year round, day and night, the decay collects, till every breath is sour with the rot in the air. And stronger in the nostrils than even the decay is the fear and the waiting, the smell of a people crouched in hiding with its ear to the door.

Windermere is not for men and women, there is a defilement and a distraction about it that deny humanity. And yet there are 15,000 people who live there in gladness, clinging frantically to the thin ledge of their possession. For Windermere is an escape-route from the interminable starvation of the Reserves, a passage-way to the factories and kitchens of the Western Cape. And Windermere is a reconciliation.

In the policed locations of Langa and Nyanga a few miles away, single African men may find quarters in huge concrete barracks, or a man and woman together be permitted to patch a shack if they have both lived long enough in the area to qualify for residence under the Urban Areas Act. But only to Windermere, and a fistful of squatter camps like it, can the wives and the children come, in flight from the famine and the desolation of the rural Reserves, to live with their husbands and fathers and help keep each other alive a little while longer. For they are "illegal immigrants", smuggling themselves into Cape Town past the barriers of police and Native Affairs Department officials, and their right to live and work in the city lasts only as long as they can escape administrative scrutiny in the confusion of their shacks.

And that is why those who live in Windermere do so in

gladness and in great fear of the day when they will be able to do so no longer. For Windermere is a little money in the pocket and the first taste of milk. And Windermere is the living together of a husband and wife and the growing up of children under the eyes of their father, and Windermere is young men and women meeting together and the thrust of a people.

And now Windermere is to be destroyed. On the orders of the Minister of Native Affairs, the City Council is sending its servants to tear the shacks apart and the families inside them. For the women and children have no right to be in Cape Town. The Minister has said so. They must return to the Reserves, to the corner of the country that has been set aside for them to die in. And if the men would remain because of the money and because there is no work for them in the Reserves, they may do so, for the factories need them, and the farms, and the wheels that their owners have long forgotten how to turn. It is for them that the locations have been built, the sterilized concrete barracks of the "bachelors".

Windermere is to be destroyed; but not because it is a defilement of humanity. Its destruction has been ordered because some humanity still manages to survive in spite of it, because in the poisonous eruption of its shacks a people yet lives and perpetuates itself, and the Government would not have it so.

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In the lush oak country of South-West France, in the Department of Limousin, lies unburied the body of Oradour-sur-Glane. Once it was a community of 650 people, a village like all the other villages of France, with a few shops, a café where the men could sit through the long evenings around a bottle of wine, and a Church built high to stand guard over the squat, sturdy houses. And then war was declared, and the Nazis fell upon France.

One hot summer afternoon—Saturday, June 10, 1944—the German S.S. Division 'Das Reich' entered Oradour in a column and marching from house to house, ordered the villagers to gather in the Church. And when they had all gathered there, the doors were barred lest any should escape, and they were shot, 642 men, women and children, all who were in the village but for one, a woman, who hurled herself from a window and survived. Then, having done at last with the people, the soldiers marched back through the street, blowing up the houses and shops, one after the other, till only the Church remained standing with its dead inside.

When France was set free, the new government declared the body of Oradour-sur-Glane a national monument. Another Oradour has been built a few miles away, while the dead one has been left unburied, a stone skeleton cold in the sun-light and so still that one's feet make small explosions on the cobbles of the street. And the Church itself, with the bullet-scars on its walls, stands as the only grave-stone, an invisible accusation written indelibly upon it.

At the beginning of 1953, in the city of Bordeaux, the French government prosecuted 106 men for the murder of Oradour. 85 were not present in Court, for some had been killed in their turn on the beaches of Normandy, and others lay lost in the cellars of post-war Europe. But there were 21 men present to stand their trial, 7 Germans and 14 Alsatians, and about their guilt and the degree of their guilt there raged a long legal battle.

13 of the 14 Alsatians had been forcibly enlisted in the German army after Hitler's annexation of Alsace. And their Counsel declared that 'they had in effect been prisoners of the Waffen S.S. and could not therefore be held responsible for the actions of the latter. The contention that the accused should have deserted from the S.S. took no account of the instant reprisals that would have been visited upon their families. As for refusing to obey, two Alsatians in Italy had been hanged simply for raising an objection to an order'. For the 7 Germans, the Court heard another plea. 'Was it really the guilty who were on trial?', their Counsel asked. 'Was it not necessary to go higher? Surely Hitler was the real culprit. Was it possible that these young men were intellectually capable of disobeying barbaric orders?'

The Prosecuting Officer replied that 'no one ought to forget the pressure to which the Alsatians had been subject, but they were Frenchmen stationed in France and if they had wanted to they could have deserted, as most of them did in the Normandy campaign, when they were under a deluge of fire and steel.' 'If Hitler disposed of their bodies', he asked, 'did he dispose of their will?'

And Gustave Ochs of the S.S. Division 'Das Reich', when questioned by Judge Marcel St. Saens on whether he had known what he was doing at the time, said, ''It was abominable. I wept''.

# # #

There are many ways of killing a man. Shooting him is just quicker and cleaner than most others. He can be starved to death, slowly, so that the dying is hidden away in the years. Or he can be held fast in the sort of life that rots his body and his heart together, till even his capacity for wanting is worn away, and he fumbles his own way to the grave. No one has killed him with a twitch of a trigger, no one but those dying about him has seen him die. And no one feels any guilt, for so many are guilty, and guilt sufficiently shared lies as lightly as innocence. Yet he has been killed for all that, and his murder demands an accounting.

The killings of Windermere will be neither so quick nor so clean as were those of Oradour. And many more will die, men, women and children, than died on that hot summer afternoon in the village Church. Nor will the bodies ever be counted so that a man may say, "Here died so many men, women and children, on such a day". For who can tell the number of the women sent back to the Reserves who will shrivel up inside with the sterile land, the children who will scratch in the dust outside the hut in the morning and lie there in the dust with the flies under the same sun, the men who would have been men in the thrust of their time and who will grow instead an ageless old, imprisoned children, in the bleak labour barracks of the "bachelor" camps.

If there is any meaning at all in being a man, then are we guilty, all of us, of the massacre of Windermere, since we will watch it happen and, watching it happen, will do nothing to stop it. We have not ordered the murders, nor, once they have been ordered, have we busied ourselves strenuously to obey. Yet we, even we, who say to ech other, it is a cruelty and an ugliness beyond sanity, it is not men that do these things, and we would not do it or help in the doing of it, even we are guilty also.

Like the German who watched from his window the Jew being beaten up in the street beneath him and cried in his heart, it is wrong and I would not have it so, but if I run downstairs and throw myself between, surely I will be taken to one of their camps or be killed here below, in the street, with the Jew—as the German at the window was guilty, of the death of the Jew and all the deaths that followed, of Belsen and Oradour-sur-Glane, so are we guilty also. For what is done is done because we let it be done. Surely, it is we, even we, who by our silence and our quiet bodies are destroying the shacks of Windermere and the living and the not yet living that they guard.