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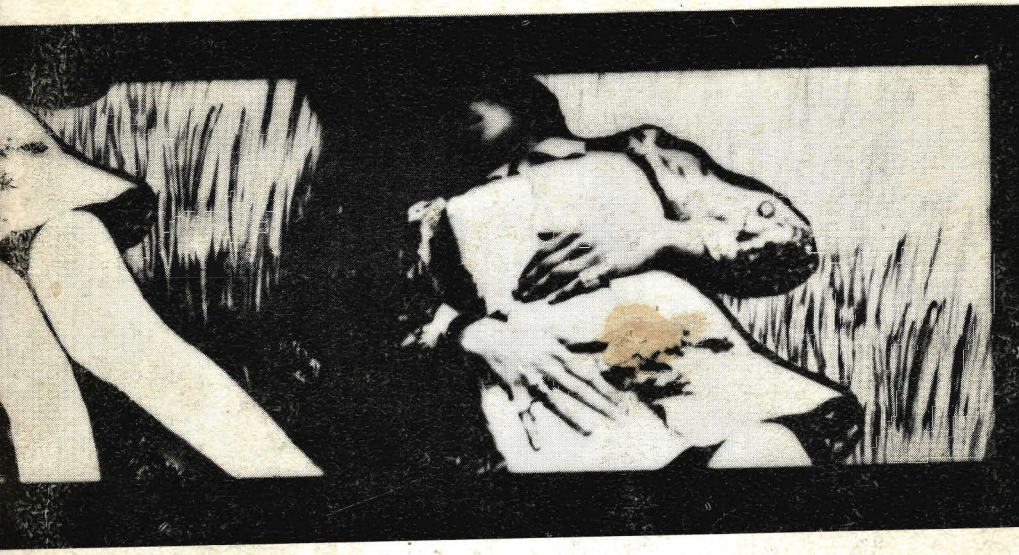

Bolt

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NOTES

On Being Non-Political

The English Academy has recently drawn heavy public criticism. The matters at issue are now relatively clear. The Academy was asked to nominate a candidate for the Verwoerd Prize for Literature to celebrate the first Republican decade. They refused, arguing that the name Verwoerd was unacceptable because of its definite political overtones. They proposed three other names for the prize. These the government refused. No award was made. Subsequently the Academy has been violently attacked in public.

The initial result of this encounter has been to allay the suspicion, which was widespread, that the Academy was assuming a public character not dissimilar to that of the Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns – a sort of English speaking cultural arm of the government. It is a relief to have that character publically repudiated. The Academy still wishes to maintain itself as a non-political body solely concerned with the cultural life of English speaking South Africa. This may turn out to be a naive hope but, at present, it seems to me to be a stand worth supporting. The Academy does have a function which is not directly political. As presently interpreted this function is one of maintaining standards – of usage, in text books, in journalism and in creative writing. The Academy sees itself as both appeal court and guardian of the culture.

This is certainly non-political but it seems to me to be culturally, too passive a stance. Our need is not so much for standards and correctness but rather for vitality and growth. English South African culture has dormant within it concepts, assumptions and conditions which constitute, potentially at least, a distinct challenge to the established cultural life of the country. The Academy's active function could be to help articulate, develop and disseminate these basic characteristics and qualities. What I have in mind amounts to more than drumming up a historical tradition or holding annual prestige conferences. The Academy should enter the cultural life of the country directly – promoting drama projects, study groups, teacher's courses, poetry readings, visiting lecturers etc. etc.

This would still be non-political but would reverberate beyond the purely cultural activities.

Seismograph

Earlier this year Contrast *published a selection from its volumes of the last decade under the title* Seismograph. *The immediate comment invited by the title is "No earthquake". In the book the non-fiction is far and away the most interesting material, the prose fiction a good deal less so and the poetry is uniformly and dismally boring. These odd effects are not the result of bad editing or of personal feebleness but are I think, reflections of deeper and more general cultural conditions – or of this reader's prejudices.*

History

When the official Oxford History of South Africa Vol. II *arrives minus one chapter – removed by the publishers on legal advice – one tends to reach for ones Orwell. But the case is not quite so simple. The "Oxford" history is a conscious adversary of the nationally established Afrikaner view of history itself so neatly expressed in Clouts's line:-*

"History was thatched into his *roof"*

Implicit in the "Oxford" view is the belief that history is the product of mans evolving reconciliations and adjustments of multiple pressures. The Afrikaner sees history as **his.** *Caricatured somewhat it is that Eve bit the apple to create B.J. Vorster. There is only one line of development. All opposed pressures are evil and all contributory ones good.*

It is a pity to have been robbed of the dramatic confrontation of these views by the publishers legal advisers.

Jotting

Jan Smuts airport – the nation's frowsty foyer – boasts one tatty bookshop. It contains one hardback novel; **The Dawn Comes Twice** *by Jack Cope, banned over a year ago with terrific publicity. It was real, I checked. It didn't seem to be a plant either. Maybe for those leaving on exit permits only!*

Amagoduka at Glencoe Station

We travelled a long journey
Through the wattle forests of Vryheid,
Crossed the low-levelled Blood River
Flowing languidly, completely dispirited.

We passed the coalfields of Dundee –
Blackheads in the wrinkled veld –
Until our train ultimately came
To a hissing stop at Glencoe.

Many people got off
Leaving the enraged train
To snort and charge at the night
On its way to Durban.
"The train from Durban to Johannesburg
Will arrive here at 11 o'clock before midnight,"
The black and red uniformed man announced.

The time was 8 p.m.

I picked up my suitcase;
Sagging under the weight of a heavy overcoat
I shambled to the "Non-European Males" waiting room.

The room was crowded
The air hung like a pall of choking odour,
A mixture of rotten meat, tobacco and sour beer.

Windows were shut tight
Against the sharp bite of winter.
Even railway coaches shivered
Under the thick layer of frost.

Amagoduka sat on the bare floor
Their faces sucking the warmth
Of the coal fire cracking at the corner.

They chewed dry bread,
Scooped corned beef with rusty knives
And drank 'mqombothi' from a plastic can
Which was passed from mouth to mouth.

They spoke in animated voices
And laughed in thunderous peals.

A girl peeped through the door
They shuddered at the sudden cold blast,
Jumped up to grab and leer at her
Hau! Ngeni sisi (Oh! come in sister).

She shied like a frightened filly
Banged the door and bolted.

They broke into a roar.

One of them picked up a guitar
Plucked it with broken finger nails
Caressed its strings with a castor-oil bottle.

It sighed like a love-lorn lass.
"You play down! Play D! " He whispered.

Another joined in a concertina,
Its sound fluttered in flowery notes
Like a butterfly picking pollen from flower to flower

The two began to sing in accompaniment
Their voices crying for the mountains and the hills
Stripped naked of their green garments.

They crossed rivers and streams
Gouged dry by the rays of the sun,
Where lowing cattle genuflected
For a blade of grass and a drop of water
On riverbeds littered with carcasses and bones.

They spoke of hollow-cheeked maidens
Heaving drums of brakish water
From a faraway fountain.

They told of big-bellied babies
Sucking festering fingers
Instead of their mothers' shrivelled breasts.

Two cockroaches
As big as overcoat buttons
Jived across the floor
Snatched meat and breadcrumbs
And scurried back to their lair.

The whole group joined in unison
Curious eyes peered through frosted windows
"Ekhaya Bafowethu!" ("Home brothers")

'We come from across the Umfolozi River
We are going to Egoli! Egoli! Egoli!
Where they'll turn us into moles
That eat the gold dust
And spit out sputums of blood.

We'll live in compounds
Where young men are pampered
Into partners for older men.

We'll visit pleasure houses
Where a whore waits for a fee
To leave your balls burning
With syphilitic fire

If the gods are with us —
Oh beloved gods of our ancestors
Have you forsaken us —
We'll return home
To find our wives nursing
Babies unknown to us
But only to the mothers and the loafers.'

Oswald Mtshali

PLOUGHING

Christopher Mann

Enormous red the metallic sun.
Frisking tyres spurt
Gravel in the long stable of tractors.

On the throttle bar my thumb
Looks preposterous, pink, soft.
This creature fed on petrol, champs.

Being urban, to discover the urban
Assertively here, meaning
More in method than machinery,

Is not so much a disappointment
As a clarification. Jolting

Down the noisy road I practice

Tenacity for the burning gritty
Veils, for dismembered
In the furrows mice.

A balance must be struck
Between the sensitivity that kills
And total indifference.

Yesterday the farmer finding
On the brown skull of veld his yellow
Combine stopped, took a wrench

And once twice
Beat the labourer across his mouth.
The discs grip down, churn and rip

The rubble of clods and stalk straight.
Plough, harvest. The sun shrunken
Sears like white hot coin.

Agapi

Elicos Eliades

We sang by the sea
about you, Agapi
and we searched for you
and we called for you
but you never came.

Much travelled, gone, distant
Agapi
whom I still know so well
the friend of the night was laughing
the friend of the night was weeping
the friend of the night did not love me.

Agapi, travelling
with a gramophone under your arm
gone
the glow of a red light fading in the darkness
distant
like an endless row of empty cages
I remember the day
when the summer noon
was sleeping in your hands.

Your feet had a definite movement
speaking of going, leaving, flying
even though you kept saying
for ever, yes, for ever.

They were not late in coming
the sidewalks at night
not sinful not even damned
but white in their hopelessness
and the horses drawing
the carriage of long journeys.
They vanished
with the galloping of that first day
when we gently let the summer noon
go to sleep in your hands.

The rain came too
vicious, violent, without conscience
flooding the rivers, the lakes, the seas
wiping off my fingers
the feeling of fresh caresses.

In which life now
Agapi
the houses, the streets, the days, the nights
in which life
with what carnations, with what breezes
will they dream about your eyes
that gave their colour to the sails
that gave names to the stars.

Today you are nothing more
than a blue sheet of paper
I can not call you ocean, springtime, wind
I can not call you my Agapi
you are only a blue sheet of paper
which I wave every night by the sea
and I still don't know
if I'm welcoming you
and I still don't know
if I'm saying goodbye.

The Colossus of Rhodes

Stephen Gray

Harriet said Lindos was the second town on Rhodes. Mrs Karla Samsourian, wife of Joseph Samsourian, mother of Harriet, but a woman in her own right, lay back in the Hotel Aphrodite above the bay of Lindos, and thought about how the hell they'd gotten there.

She'd arrived with her daughter that afternoon, sharing an overnight case which couldn't possibly be enough for their stay. The moment they set foot off the sweaty, unwholesome Greek bus, the old woman had collared them. Harriet said that according to *Europe on $5* there were no hotels in Lindos. The Hotel Aphrodite was really the old woman's private home in which they had a room leading out onto the roof. Below was the courtyard with pebble mosaics in it. Mosaics had been a pain in the neck for Mrs Samsourian since that same morning.

They were in the palace of the Grand Frankish Master of the town of Rhodes. The panorama gave way to the harbour with its embracing arms. On the end of each arm were the pediments where the bronze feet of the colossus had stood.

"Get an eyeful of that mosaic, Harriet," Mrs Samsourian had said. "Dolphins, how beautiful. Oh Harriet, if your father were here I wouldn't lay down my head till he says we can have it, for the aquarium back in Connecticut. Did you ever see anything so exquisite, such craftmanship, honey? Now wasn't it worth crossing the Atlantic to see that? "

But Harriet was gazing out the palace window.

"Harriet, we simply must have one." She came face to face with her blank daughter.

Harriet didn't normally smile. She found it confusing to express anything visually. She barely kept up vocal contact with her mother now either.

"What's the matter, darling?" Mrs Samsourian was concerned. She stroked her daughter's hair.

"Nothing, Karla. I can see the colossus, that's all. But you wouldn't understand."

Mrs Samsourian let the golden charms on her bracelet trickle down her daughter's shoulders. They were solid gold and Joseph had bought them for her en route--miniature Eiffel Towers, Apollos and gondolas. "Now,

Harriet, we have to take the ancients on credit, don't we? I mean, we don't know there was a colossus in the first place."

"There was," Harriet said, "I can just see it standing there right now, like on the postcards."

"Honey, come and look at this mosaic."

"Imagine, Karla," her daughter taunted her, "getting rowed across the Aegean by galley slaves, and then being welcomed by that massive thing. It's getting taller and taller, your boat comes to no bigger than its toes. Then you enter the calmer water and relax, drifting in, right in between its legs." Mrs Samsourian stopped her itchy, stroking movement. "It's almost obscene. Isn't it, Karla?"

"It would have been swathed in robes, honey."

"It was colossal, I know."

"Don't brood on such things, it's not good for you."

"It must have been huge."

Harriet had that white make-up on. It was difficult for Mrs Samsourian to believe they were related in terms either of blood, genes, time or taste. She crossed to the mosaic and stood on it with irritation.

"Hurry, Karla, we're going to Lindos, don't forget. The purser said it's great there. Not one hotel in Lindos, so we can live like the people. Hurry, Karla."

"This mosaic has such cute dolphins--."

"Oh, Karla, we've *done* this town. The bus goes any moment. Are you coming with me or not?"Harriet slouched through to the palace exit.

Mrs Samsourian chased after her, catching at her dark glasses and sunhat. "Harriet, why do you always do, and want, and get the very opposite of what *I* want for you? Always? Can't I do anything right? The mosaic is so pretty. The colossus never existed, you know that. You prefer to choose it instead of the things under your very own nose. Sometimes I think you do it to spite me. What's wrong between us, honey? We've come five thousand miles at your wish. Can't I do anything right?"

****

It was unsettlingly hot in Lindos that evening. The old Greek woman cackled and jabbered in the courtyard downstairs. No doubt she would be quieter if there were more guests. It was impossible to rest. Harriet had taken the money to buy two TV dinners. As finding palatable food was a problem in the Middle East, Joseph had ensured they need never eat off the Adriatica ship. If only they'd sailed on with it.

Mrs Samsourian's hair was undone, so the breeze from the roof blew it like flies landing on her forehead. The walls and windowframes were so dazzling. The whole town of Lindos was white and cubic, as Harriet said. Each cubic house clustered away from the alleys, white cube against white cube. Now the flat roofs were bedrooms in summertime.

The yellow dog in the courtyard was whimpering. She thought,Joseph Samsourian would want to know where Harriet is. She's gone to buy a family dinner, just for ourselves.

These poor European dogs never have a square meal. Always scavenging for food and affection and cutting their eyes on tincans. Strays should be put out, we can never have a meal in peace, her husband says. In Paris, when Harriet translated all the menus only to find they were printed in English on the other side, in Geneva, by the Prado and under the Vatican, in Vienna and Frankfurt and Copenhagen, especially in Venice they were pursued by stray dogs. Even when Joseph decided he had a business contract—— haven't I mentioned it to you, Venice isn't habitable in August, far far better take a cruise meanwhile, you know how slowly Italian industry moves, Karla. Then he came to wave them off on the Adriatica ship, followed by dogs. And now he was propping Venice up with reinforced concrete, and Harriet had made her foolishly, foolishly jump ship. Off to Larnaca, Beirut, Haifa, Beirut, Larnaca it sailed, and she longed for it to return for them.

She slumped over on the bed, Harriet had been away one whole hour. She promised she'd be back in fifteen minutes. It isn't easy to be a mother when you're forty five. Mrs Karla Marghereta Florence Samsourian wound up the alarm, figuring that if she chose an end to her hopeless sleep it would induce a beginning.

****

Harriet returned in time to switch off her mother's alarm before it burst. She unloaded a can of corned beef, two dry rolls and half a handful of notes and coins. She tiptoed to the light by the mirror and combed her long black hair into place. She must use the waterproof mascara tomorrow.

The yellow dog followed her in from the fuchsia bed in the courtyard. It was bat-eared. "Keep quiet, little dog." Harriet gave it a pat on the head. It sat and panted close to Mrs Samsourian's bed.

Harriet went out onto the roof. She never doubted that this was the right place to be. The doors of the houses were ochre, green and blue by day, purple in the moonlight, and each had a small black hand on it as a knocker. A special type of hand, like Demetrios'. She could make out the outline of the Acropolis. If she had the guts, she'd get Demetrios to take her there right now. The columns stuck up gigantically. But she hardly knew him. The boattrip and movie would be a better idea.

It was cool at last. She perched on a chair on the roof, her hands on the insides of her thighs. Her arms were suntanned and sparkled in the rising moonlight.

The only way she could keep track of her thoughts was with a straight face. She didn't know whether to unravel or plan first. The latter depended on the former. Of all things it was an old Barbara Stanwyck movie they were going to show in the yard of the grocery store tomorrow night. All she could think of was Barbara Stanwyck. Her father said Barbara Stanwyck had staying power. If only Joseph were still a talent-scout for movies, he'd

pick Demetrios.

Demetrios' hands aren't hairy. So maybe his chest and legs aren't hairy. Tomorrow night at the movies they would look up from Barbara Stanwyck at the stars, and his hands would be smooth.

She ran over the scene in her mind. She asked him for two TV dinners. The store was deserted. Demetrios spoke terrible English. She tried French on him but that was worse.

"Hello," she said, "my mother's sick and I want American food."

"You American? " Demetrios said.

"Why yes, how did you guess? "

Then he said he wanted to go to the States. "New York, New York, plenty dollars."

"Why yes," said Harriet, "that's close by. We live in Connecticut actually."

Demetrios plucked a can of corned beef off the shelf. He was holding it out to her as a question.

"That'll be fine, if you have no TV dinners," she said. "And I'll grab some bread to go with it."

He was standing up the ladder, reaching for the top shelf. He really was impressive. He held out a can of milk. Harriet had to reach right across the counter to catch it. He was a real joker. The label read: MOTHER'S BEST BREAST MILK which was advertised everywhere.

"No, just a loaf of bread, thanks," she rejected it. He was down on the floor again, his hands on the counter in front of her. "Say, are you going to New York? After a while in New York, you could come back and buy up half of Lindos."

She shouldn't have said that as though money counted so much. The qualities he had, for example, were priceless.

"For ever I go to America," he said.

"Are you *really* going?" she pressed. "Oh, I'll be back there when you come."

She had to check precisely on what he had said: "Of course I go--for you."

She was leaning over the counter too, paying for the can of corned beef. Then his hand was close to her navel as if he was going to push it and start a machine, she added: "You do speak good English."

"I see America in the movies."

"Oh, what's showing?"

Then she stooped over the counter because Demetrios was whispering in her ear: "*For you* I go to America." That was when he said it.

He always talked in the present tense. She knew he wasn't going to the States that moment. Obviously he identified her with the U.S. She wasn't sure to accept or reject the compliment.

Instead she scrutinised him with his hand on her belly. "You have pretty teeth," she said candidly.

"Of course," he replied.

"Not all Greeks have pretty teeth. I haven't seen many Greeks, but you have exceptional teeth, very sound, healthy."

"You have teeth in America?"

"No, you *don't understand*. I mean these." She put her finger on his lower lip. "*Teeth*, you know. We all have them." She ran her nail along his bottom teeth. That sounded good.

"Ah," he grasped it, "my teeth is Greek teeth."

She was hoping he would bend down and kiss her. She burst into giggles. And he invited her to the movies tomorrow night.

She caught herself: "I'll have two rolls and it's tomorrow night the movie?"

"Of course," he replied, handing her the last of the rolls. His hands were very unhairy. He went on talking: "You go to America by ship?"

"No, we fly back by Panam. But I'd much rather you'd take me there in one of your little boats, Demetrios."

Then he said a kinky line: "The sea is very bumpy."

It wasn't bumpy now, it was placid as sheetglass below Lindos.

****

Mrs Samsourian grunted in her sleep, and the yellow dog, as if in reply, whined. The whining woke her.

"Harriet, where *have* you been——."

"I've been all over Lindos, every little stone——."

"How could you——."

"Trying to find some edible food, they've never heard of TV dinners."

"I'm not hungry." Mrs Samsourian sat up. She was about to remark that at least it was cooler now——her brows were in a sweat and her pancake make-up was chilled through. "No, Harriet, I'm not hungry at all. I've got to lose weight. So it's a shame you stayed out so long for no good reason."

Harriet loped to the bedside table, hooked up the can of corned beef and started to uncurl the lid.

"What you doing that for, honey? I just said I was not hungry."

"Well maybe I am, Karla. Did you think of that?"

"Oh honey, I'm *sorry*. You must be starving. We can go get breakfast in a proper hotel tomorrow."

"There isn't one."

"But are you sure, Harriet?"

"Look, don't you see the whole point, Karla——not to be like tourists. Tomorrow morning we'll take donkeys to the Acropolis, not breakfast. We make a light luncheon in the courtyard outside. Nights we go to the taverna for our main meal under the grapevines. It's all planned."

"You do present me with things, Harriet dear."

"And in the afternoon we take a boatride. You'd like that, Karla, now be honest with yourself. I know someone'll take us out. He's hired already, I hired him."

Mrs Samsourian gave a jerk of shock. She grabbed up her hair and held her face, as if the dog on the floor was going to savage her. Harriet emptied the corned beef over the table to deflect the animal.

"I didn't notice that dog there," Mrs Samsourian scrutinised it chasing rolls and corned beef. It ate gently enough but very quickly, licked its lips with one short revolution and left its tongue hanging out.

Eventually Mrs Samsourian settled on one complaint: "Why didn't you warn me you'd stay out so long? I'm glad you planned such a nice day, but why didn't you warn me?"

Harriet wouldn't answer.

"Oh, you're utterly impossible," her mother concluded, "impossible. I'm not part of your life at all, cepting when you want money. You know that don't you?"

****

The next day was going to be perfect——it was all arranged.

With the white dawn they had Nescafe and jam brought them in bed by the old woman who footnoted her every gesture in never-ending Greek. They reclined in their sheets as the bay bleached through shades of blue. The town was alive round them: donkeys clattering through the labyrinth of the alleys bearing triumphant, Chat tourists; old men dragging ice from door to door; children carrying folkweave shirts to the arcade to sell.

The mother and daughter had slept with the dog between them. They felt there was nothing they couldn't do together now.

At 9.00 a.m. Harriet did have two donkeys lined up. She took ages discussing prices with a smoothy Greek. "Fine, Demetrios," Harriet nodded.

By 9.10 they were off, the bat-eared dog trotting behind them.

"Who's he?" Mrs Samsourian asked.

"Who, Demetrios?"

"I caught his name, but who *is* he?"

"We're hiring a boat from him at three."

"Does he speak French?" Mrs Samsourian wanted to know. "You must keep in practice."

"Look ahead of you, Karla, or you'll fall off."

The willing donkeys clattered higher and higher, their drivers behind swatting them.

"I do think it's superb, the Acropolis, Harriet."

"What are you going to call the dog, Karla?"

"Is it still following?"

"Look ahead."

Demetrios the boatman came up beside Harriet, resting his arm on her donkey's saddle. Harriet gazed past her mother, a vague smile on her face. Mrs Samsourian was bending down to cheer the dog.

As she rose, clunking her donkey ever on, she said: "I'm sure your friend speaks perfect French, but tell him to leave off."

The yellow dog bounced through the overflow of the houses being washed. It was a gallant dog. Mrs Samsourian thought she'd christen it Hector after the battle of Troy. Harriet agreed, turning as gracefully as she could in the saddle to call: "Hector, Hector," and see if Demetrios was following them right up.

They stepped off into the shadows of the columns, Hector snuffled around. "I don't mind you taking the night out, Harriet, as long as you ask me first," said Mrs Samsourian, "you know that."

"Can I ask you then?"

"Didn't I just say you could?"

Mrs Samsourian paused, about to remark that the second bay on the other side must be the traditional landing place of Saint Paul.

"Can I go out tonight then? Demetrios has invited me to the movie."

"If you've asked, you can, Harriet."

On the way down from the Acropolis, the donkeys stopped for Harriet to pick up a photo that had been taken of them on the way up. In the print Mrs Samsourian's rear was the foreground as she bent to the dog and Harriet was smiling frozenly as Demetrios brought his arm up to her waist.

****

The boat trip as organised by Harriet was a great success too.

For the occasion Harriet spent a long time redoing her make-up. Her lips were pearly white around pearly teeth.

Mrs Samsourian tied her sunhat on all the tighter because it was blazing hot.

At 3.00 p.m. they stood on the pier with Hector resting on a rug and pair of flippers the old Greek woman insisted they borrow. Mrs Samsourian had listened to everything the old woman, who really was a hag, kept nattering on about all during lunch. She was making notes for a talk she would give on The Life of a Greek Widow.

Now there was silence, except for the cicadas on land and the lap, lap of the sea. Demetrios helped mother and daughter into the boat. The dog Hector positioned himself on the very prow, more faithful than any human.

Mrs Samsourian spread the rug on the first bench. Demetrios struggled with the engine till they were cruising rhythmically from the land towards the open.

"Where's he taking us, Harriet?"

"To the *other* bay, it's quieter there. Don't worry about a thing, it's all taken care of." She sat right in front of Demetrios, the centre of the colourful boat. He clicked his tongue as if apologising for the engine which ran perfectly now. Harriet knew they were communicating somehow.

Mrs Samsourian made an attept at conversing with the boatman too.

All he said back was: "The sea is not bumpy."

"No, of course it isn't bumpy," she returned with scorn. And she gave up asking her daughter to face forward to enjoy the view.

Feeling utterly deserted, she clambered up to Hector on the prow and dangled her toes into the sea. Her insteps cut the wash. She felt more comfortable with the non-commital dog, watching rocks and wrecks slide along, blue and underneath——another world so close she need only fall away down into it.

****

Harriet was stunning in her bikini. All those crowded hours on the sundeck of the Adriatica ship had tanned her evenly all over, from her hairline to the edges of her feet. She watched Demetrios, his every move, turning her head to follow in sympathy. He moved the gascan from one side to another. He stood up once in a while to stretch and had various fishing gadgets tied to the belt of his swimsuit.

They passed close in below the Acropolis, the cliffs hanging overhead. The sea crawled up the rock and peeled back off, revealing paler, naked rock, like underwear sliding off flesh. She was devouring Demetrios. She had never seen anyone like him before——he was proud, rugged, dignified, inscrutable. He was aloof, extraordinary, and he wanted to go to America and the movies. He was also shy. She wanted more than anything to be loved by him.

The blue and yellow boat with its painted fisheyes puttered into a bay which was even further than Saint Paul's. They were isolated and bleary with heat. Demetrios switched off his engine. The boat nestled in its own foam, extremely far from anywhere at all. It was dreamland.

Demetrios and Harriet were over the side, swimming close to one another. "Come on, Karla, it's delicious." Harriet's hair trailed behind her. Water trickled down his neck and he swam effortlessly.

Mrs Samsourian had second thoughts about swimming at all, even if it

would solve the bath problem——Hector would be anxious if he was left alone, who would control the boat if Demetrios' hopeless anchor of a stone on the end of a string got snagged off. But those weren't the real reasons, and it wasn't because she had forgotten how to swim. She knew that the bright water was for young people to wallow in.

Harriet's flippers carried her way ahead on ripple after invigorating ripple. Demetrios was beside her but they couldn't talk with their mouths gushing with water. She had something to tell him; she wanted solemly to discuss it with him——how he could, well, *marry* her and they go back to the States together. It was easy.

When they reached a landfall, Demetrios helped her out of the sea. She couldn't walk on the rock without the flippers it was so cruelly volcanic.

He picked his way over to the other end of their little island, bending down. Harriet called for him to come back so that they could talk about her idea.

But Demetrios was intent on something else. He was reaching down clefts and pulling up stuff. He called back: "Hello, hello," and threw them towards her. They whistled through the sky, trailing streamers of seaweed. They landed *crunch* near her, contracting up bundles of needles. "Demetrios, be careful! " She was afraid one would land on her by accident. "Come beside me and we can talk rather, Demetrios."

But he was enjoying hooking out so many. More and more landed close by her. She hoped they would go away. She loathed sea urchins at close range.

Demetrios hopped back over the rock. He smiled hugely at her.

"Very good," she said. "But what are we going to do with them all? We're not near anywhere to cook them, Demetrios." His name still had a particular flavour.

"You like?" Demetios asked.

"Well, I guess so."

"All for you," he said.

"Well, thanks, Demetrios, I appreciate it, but——."

He sat her down and took his place beside her. She avoided studying the sea urchin in his hands.

"Now listen, Demetrios," she was going to say, "I've been thinking over a lot of things altogether. For a start we can go to the movie together, I want to see Barbara Stanwyck again." And she would continue: "Then you must meet my father, he's great, and he'll see you get to the U.S. It's all fixed."

Demetrios turned the sea urchin over, avoiding pressure on the spines. He was humming very deeply. He unhooked a bronze pin from his waist and inserted it into the heart of the sea urchin. The lump of seafood contracted.

"*Hey*," Harriet flapped a foot, "leave that poor thing. I want to talk to you." There was one drop on the end of his nose. Salt shone on his eyelid. Things were going on in Harriet she'd never experienced before––she clasped her arms round the Greek's neck and as she breathed her bikini rubbed up and down his chest. "Oh––it'll be *lovely*," she whispered. It was such an intense moment, she bunched her eyes closed and trembled and wished it would come true.

Once she'd let him go, he did nothing. He only scraped round in the sea urchin and removed the pin with a slither of meat on it. He grinned and held it up to her.

"No, you try first." She jerked out her hand to push it away.

So he ate it, rolling his eyes in enjoyment. She couldn't take this. She realised how impossible it all was. She was hopelessly repulsed by the way he chewed. Her costume was impaled on the rock and she couldn't move without assistance from him. He was going to make her eat the next bit and the next one––raw. She'd made a fool of herself with her advances.

She was forced to accept––it was like chewing gum and she gulped it down. She made a polite grin to cover her disgust.

Now Demetrios might no longer exist, he who knew her secrets and forced her to eat something she couldn't stand. It would make her happier if she never saw him again.

He was threading all those sea urchins through the core onto a string. He would offer them to her for dinner under the grapevines.

She had been so proud about him.

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Hector the dog was whimpering his head off, crawling along the prow on his stomach. He was upset about being deserted.

Harriet drew herself into the boat one end and Demetrios the other. She skipped over the rug and to the prow, rocking the boat considerably.

Karla was certainly not there. She had left behind her sunhat, glasses and her charm bracelet which was piled over a slip of paper. "*Shush*, Hector."

The note read: HARRIET DEAR, DON'T EXPECT ME BACK.

Demetrios was packing the sea urchins into a wet sack. The boat was at a severe angle with the propellor almost out of the water. Hector teetered on the edge, ready to break off into the sea in search of Karla Samsourian.

"Shut up, dog, oh do shut up."

Demetrios was laughing because the boat almost capsized.

"Demetrios, please," Harriet said, "*please* stop that. I feel sick." She leaped to counterbalance, and her fingers went through another of the slips of paper her mother perpetually wrote her notes on. She grapped the dog whose forelegs quivered as if it had been beaten.

"Demetrios," Harriet called, "listen. Can we look for my mother please. She's committed suicide."

A squall set in and the sea was getting very bumpy. Demetrios didn't understand. Harriet explained again, holding the soggy note up to his face. "It says she's not coming back," and she mimed how her mother held her nose and plunged overboard, came up and gasped and went down and came up and went down.

"Mama," said Demetrios.

"Who else, for God's sake, she was here and now she's gone."

"Mama! "

"Yes, *Mama*! " Harriet cried. "Quickly, quickly, quickly." She threw herself at the string and yanked at the anchor. "Start the engine, *quickly*."

"Mama?"

"Yes, my *Mama is missing*."

Demetrios was in control. He elbowed Harriet out of the way. He started the engine with one tug, grabbed in the anchor, stood with the tiller between his ankles and called on all the saints. He held one hand up to his eye to shield it from the sun.

There was nothing for her to do. She knelt on the prow beside Hector whose coat glistened where Karla's charms had combed his hair out. "Don't worry, little dog, we'll find her." And the dog climbed up her thighs to her lap for consolation. Yes, Joseph, *we did*, we covered the shore, every little rock and inlet, it was all horribly real, she just slipped off the boat without our seeing. The boatman was Greek but she spoke fluent English. We didn't notice, I promise. She said she wouldn't quit to boat, she was frightened of the water. It couldn't be sunstroke, she had her hat. We got some sea urchins for her. Hector——you know she befriended a little yellow dog——was also very upset. It was an accident, a *terrible accident, Joseph*, please believe me, we really did get on so well. Demetrios was just a boatman, Mama hired him.

"*Mama! Mama!* " Demetrios called over the water. He guided the boat in and out of every creek off Lindos.

"Come back, Mama," Harriet yelled. She gave in to tears she hadn't cried for years and years.

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Mrs Karla Samsourian drifted into an inlet on the other side of the bay. Her face was out of the water, but after such a soaking her make-up had slid down her face to form a ring round her neck. There was a pale bridge on her nose where her sunglasses habitually stuck.

She sat on the bottom of the shallows, wiping her face on her arms. There was a pain in each of her lungs. Her heart was beating so fast she could hear it smashing up her. If Hector had paddled after her, he wouldn't have

made it. She sat there on her haunches, too exhausted to flop out onto the pebbles. The sea was warm and comforting now that she knew she could get out of it. She drew a deep breath and choked on it.

There was a crooning Greek voice. Her ears were gurgling out sea water and it was a mistake. No passing Greek would ever know she was there. Not like the purser who woke her every night for dinner on the ship. The old Greek woman would congratulate her on swimming so far. She *was* losing weight. She must get back to Lindos and tell the old woman how she had broken with her daughter. The old woman would understand. She *must* get there first and move out to the big hotel. Harriet and Hector could sniff her out there, if they bothered to feel so inclined. Meanwhile Demetrios could *keep* Harriet.

Mrs Samsourian stood up. Then she fell back into the water. Her kneecaps had come adrift. She was too numb to be really terrified as the boat approached her. She wanted to duck for cover.

Harriet could see her now. She wondered whether her daughter or the dog would be the first to jump off and retrieve her. Demetrios must have told them to stay put while he brought the boat nearer.

"Hello, Mama," Demetrios called as he cut off his engine.

Harriet had nothing to say. It was a crisis so she put on her blankest face. She was throttling Hector so that he couldn't greet her either.

"Harriet, I hoped I'd never see you again," Mrs Samsourian said resignedly, frisking her arms through the shallows. "I had a great swim."

Harriet bundled her head up in Hector and drew the rug right over herself.

"Has Demetrios turned out okay, Harriet?"

The girl didn't answer.

"I've been out of the way an hour or so and I just wanted to know."

Harriet was choking the dog so that he couldn't yap.

"Demetrios is very considerate towards me—aren't you, Demetrios? I'd be glad if you helped me onto your boat, my legs are a bit tired."

"Of course," he said, rowing the last lap.

"Greek men are difficult to come to terms with though."

"Of course, Mama," he said.

"Cut the Mama bit, and get me out of here."

She reached up her hands. The Greek clutched her wrists. It was ages since she had felt such solid wrists. He was smiling at her, all Greek confidence and power.

The sun was going down behind his back. Mrs Samsourian glared up at his huge silhouette. His toes were over the edge of the boat. He began hauling. Mrs Samsourian's arms yelled with pain. She too had lost.

From her vantage point, the Greek with his arms pulling was colossal.

Stephen Gray

MOTHER'S OUT

Mother's out. Her spirit floats
In motes of powder through the window.
The scarf she left could blindfold her
In spite for all she doesn't know.

For a long time I practice Debussy
One piece – sforzando ... ppp ...
The postman drops a letter through
The door. Postmark "Kimberley".
From her old friend who had the hard
Life. No need to steam *that* open.
Chairs creak. I read. Her books look pure
When I put them back but words of sin
Stick to my fingers. I mix coke
With my brandy. For safety nibble a clove.

The "girl" tying her apron on comes up
From the kia at five. I watch her begin
The supper and am sober. I wait now
For the small hat with the ruby pin
Bobbing along the darkening hedge –
Am ready to jump back into my skin.

Ruth Keech

HISTORICAL AFTERNOON

She was nearly ninety-eight and my only chance
of meeting history. Older than anything I had seen of man,
older than the wagon-wheel on show behind the square of glass
at the entrance to the village hall. I knew her house began
with the Ten Kafir Wars, cattle-raids, loaded wagons moving towards
valleys of freedom. One day they sent me there. How afraid I was
of its velveteen darkness, the pall of polish on furniture and
floorboards.
Time on the dresser accumulated doilies intricate as her face,
by texts illumined, propped on toothless cowrie-shells. Her voice
cracked to reach common pitch and send out greetings. In the pause
that followed, I followed the strands in the knotted fringes that
led to a choice
of secrets in her embroidered shawl. In its wooden wreath
the commemorating side-board mirror found my face lonely without
relics
as she was lonely with hers. I stood to get away and found release
out in her back-yard that skirted with a barbed-wire fence
a primordial mountain. A griqua herd-boy flashed his pail at me.
I greeted him. I had to speak. History and I were gasping for
our breath.

Ruth Keech

Running an Errand

I took my mother's message thirty years
ago to old Tant Bet. She lived
five minutes walk away. It was an end-
of-winter windy day that kept me short
of breath. My numbed hands pushed my pockets out
untempted by her hedge of prickly pears.

The loose-latched gate gave me an entry clear
then whined behind my back as I went in.
A rooster hopped against a gust of grit.
Water through the wind-pump gushed and swam
lifting a tide of leaves the sullen dam
had caught and left the dusty yard blown bare.

The house was sleeping in the wintry light
until a window flashed, a door flew wide,
the blue-flame stove in the warm inside
hissed up and roared! A warning shout
in Afrikaans or Xhosa kept me out.
I waited for the kitchen to subside.

There stays a message that I have not given.
In ten years time perhaps I'll find out why
that day a ruffled rooster seemed to fly,
a clanking wind-pump raised its arms to sing,
I burned with joy at flames of paraffin
and why a creaking gate could start a sermon.

Ruth Keech

Out of Work

Soapsuds deflated by the sun
subside in rotting grass.
The clothes-line breathes a life-line in
the breeze. The day begun
Harilal steps from his rushing home,
his head held high as the rusting roof
clamped down with pensioned parts of cars.
Flicking his hair with carefree comb
he treads the matted footpath down,
by-passes dog-eared cannas, scares
the bamboo-skinny hens that skip aloof.
Then leaps a bank and makes his way to town.

At night he may wonder how
one grows old on nothing,
may start to sense that out of work
he's out of half his life. But now
this summer morning nothing
is clothed in shapes of girls that sway
in tinselled saris. Shop displays allow
him dreams he never can wear out.
Now this summer morning
the lure of luck still turns about
at corners, makes him stub his fag-end out
and hold his breath before he risks his throw.

On this summer morning
just not enough summer mornings
have dawned on him to add his name
beyond all hope of doubt
to those who've lost the game
before they threw the six to let them start.

Ruth Keech

l.a.y.e – by fiona morphet

There's a special kind of surprise you get when you walk behind a girl thinking how pretty she is, and you take bigger steps to get alongside her, and even her ears don't tell you, and then you catch up with her, and see her face, and it says everything about why she's walking on her own. And when she glances round to see who's staring, and you try to pretend you weren't, she nearly always smiles because you're looking at her so intently, and you just wish you were very far away. It takes a long time to wipe an eager look off your face without seeming a moron. One day I'll learn to tell by their hair or ankles or something – though it's amazing how many ugly girls do have beautiful legs – or maybe one day I'll learn not to mind about their faces.

This girl I met last Tuesday was like that. I'd been in town looking around in the record exchange, and come home on the bus. It was so hot the women in the bus didn't even mind having the windows open. They mind a lot when they're on their way to town, or coming back from the hairdresser, but not when they're coming home with a lot of packets and their faces greasy from pounding round the shops. This girl was already on the bus when I got on, but I only noticed her when I had sat down on one of the high seats at the back. She had smooth blonde hair tied back with a scarf which was knotted on so that traily blue ends blew in the wind as the bus went along. Her neck and what I could see of her arms had this smooth pale look too, and she had some kind of creamy silk blouse on. I looked at her all the way up out of town, and thought about how she probably had a cool bubble-bath every evening, and walked about on wall-to-wall carpeting listening to records, and slept in soft silk sheets, with a glass she'd drunk milk from drying beside her. She looked as if she hardly ever went to parties, except perhaps cocktails by a swimming pool.

Just as I realised we were nearly at my stop, she suddenly reached up to press the bell, and a lot of thin gold bangles tinkled down into her elbow crook. If we hadn't been so near my stop I would probably have just looked out of the window to see her face and gone on, but as it was I was nearly home, and without hardly thinking I got up too. She really **jumped** off the bus and her skirt was so short I saw these pretty backs of knees before I jumped off too and hurried to keep up with her. She was spinning along.

You've got the idea already – by the time I'd caught up enough to see her face I wished I hadn't. She had this unforgiveably big nose, and a thin mouth stretched in a smile at me, and her skin was certainly pale but in a kind of thick way like my mother's marshmallow handbag. But she was already smiling so I couldn't just back off, and she was also – which was worse – actually speaking, saying hullo and going on smiling. So I got to walking beside her, thinking what the hell – we'll probably pass my gate or

even hers soon enough, and I can say goodbye nice to have met you. So I said hullo back, and then asked her if she'd been shopping, and she said no she'd been to art class. "You mean painting pictures?" I said, and she replied, "Well sort of, but at present we're just doing sketches of a model," "Hope she's pretty," I said, and then wished I hadn't. But she didn't mind, and said, "Not her face much, but she's got a lovely body." "You mean you draw her body – you're doing **nudes**?" "Well yes I suppose you can call it that – it's life drawing." "Where do you keep your books and things then?" I'd seen girls from the art college coming home on the bus with big folders under their arms – pretty weird clothes they usually had too. "Oh I leave them there," she said, "I go every day so it's more convenient." "Yes I suppose so."

What happened next was that we got to the stop-street where there are a lot of islands and a rather complicated intersection of traffic, and there was this ricksha-boy with a ricksha full of vegetables – a sack of potatoes and two more of beans and onions and a crate of avocado-pears – waiting to cross one bit of the intersection. I suppose you couldn't really call him a boy, he was a man, and quite old, with a bald black head like an Easter egg, and wrinkles down the back of his neck with bristles of hair on them. He was having a hard time because of course none of the cars would wait for him, and anyway with a ricksha it's not like a car – you can't accelerate and shoot off through a gap – you have to balance the thing and get up your own steam from dead stop. He was sweating like a warthog and it did seem a terrible thing – I mean a human being between shafts like that, even if he was a black, and probably earning his living honestly instead of loafing. So I was feeling a bit sorry for him, and what with the whole thing being rather peculiar it suddenly came into my head to get him, hire him I mean, to give us a ride. That's what rickshas usually do, only the poor ones without any decorations get hired to carry vegetables, so I quickly thought how much money I had on me, which was about fifty cents, and that we could probably get him to take us somewhere, and he would be quite grateful. So I said "How would you like a ride in a ricksha?" thinking she would enjoy the idea too. She looked at me very oddly and said, "But he's busy, he's taking someone's marketing home." "But would you like to anyway?" "Yes I would," she said with a funny straight-lipped grin, "I'd love to, but I don't think we should ask." "You'll see," I said, and went up to him. I can speak a bit of their language – my mother always speaks it to them at home – so I said "Funa ride lapa lo park." He didn't even look round, he was watching the traffic, so I joggled the shaft nearest me and said louder "Wena funa sebenza?" He looked round then and said something I didn't understand. So I said, feeling a bit of a fool, "How far wena taking lo vegetable?" and he said at once, "One-eight-four Benson." Benson Road was the road going uphill from there and I knew 184 was just a few houses up, so I said "Tina funa ride lapa lo park" and then gave up. He sort of grunted and said, "Yebo", so I called to the girl, who was standing on the island, "Come on, he'll take us from just up the road there."

We followed him up the road, and waited while he called out a girl who

took the vegetables round to the back of the house. When the ricksha was empty you could see it was really old and decrepit, the seat that used to be red leathery stuff worn down to cotton threads, but we got in. She asked me then what my name was, and it seemed odd – should have been me asking – but I got her name in exchange – Esme. There are some names I really don't go for. Anyway we were sitting there on this old red seat, and I told the boy to go to the park along the road. As soon as he picked up the shafts and we fell back against the leaning-part, I wished to hell I hadn't got myself in the whole stupid scene. He was old, older than us by a long way, and he just hauled the ricksha into a trotting-pace, and the blue shorts he had on were just about threadbare over his buttocks, though the muscles in his thighs and arms were something I've seen chaps going to gym week after week to try and develop. Somehow the laugh had gone out of the whole thing. He smelled bloody strong too.

It didn't take long to get there, and I gave him literally all the change I had on me except twenty-five cents that I kept to buy cigarettes. Esme hadn't said anything the whole way, and of course she wasn't scared in the ricksha, but she'd gripped on to the side as if she was. I was glad to have the old chap out of sight, and glad too that he hadn't gone in for thanking me much, but just gone off down towards the market, I suppose to see if he could get another job before closing-time.

We walked down the tarmac path between bushes with coloured leaves. There was an Indian gardener raking black earth over the grass under the big trees where it wasn't growing too well. Esme suddenly went over to him and asked what it was he was putting on the grass – "Our lawn at home needs something on it," she said, "but I never know what the best stuff is." "You know what it is?" he said, a kind of grin on his face, "Kaffir shit – they got it down in the location, and we got to put it here. Corporation compost they calling it." He grinned again at me, and scratched himself through his blue overalls. I couldn't think of anything to say so I walked off after Esme. It's terrible the way Indians and blacks hate each other – when I was a kid they had riots after an Indian pushed a native through a shop-window, and for days they were going around knifing each other. Just about the whole police-force had to be used to control them.

Esme went and sat on the grass under some trees, though there was a bench nearby. I asked her if she'd like a Coke or anything from the tearoom, though I was hoping she'd say no, as I still wanted to buy cigarettes. She did say no. In fact she did even better – in her bag she had a packet of yellow peaches she said she'd bought from an Indian in the street, so we had one each. They were hard but sweet, and we went on sucking the stones where bits of peach cling on. It seemed funny she was saying so little – most girls I've taken out, and I've taken out a good few, talk nearly all the time. I quite like the way a girl will keep up the talking side, as if that was her part of being taken out, while you do the paying and buying tickets and Cokes. I only don't like it when you get round to kissing them and then they sometimes keep up the talking as a way of stopping you going too far. But with Esme I found myself having to say things, asking her what she

thought of the town, having got the idea she was from overseas. But it turned out she'd lived all her life here, so that fell flat. Then I asked her what she usually did in the evenings, and she told me she read books and sometimes went for a walk. "After dark?" I said. "Oh yes," she said, 'it's nice and cool and the gardens all smell clearer then." "But you want to watch out," I said, and she asked – stupidly I thought – "Why?" "Oh people wandering around," I answered, "You never know what might happen." "Well it never does," she replied. I supposed it didn't, not with her looks, but didn't say so.

She got up then and said, "Let's go and see the animals." We strolled off through the zoo gates; she seemed to be leading the way, and she made immediately for the tortoises. I hadn't been there since I was a kid, but the place doesn't change, and the way she was going seemed back-to-front to me. We always used to go to the parrots first, to try and make them talk. The tortoises were all sleeping it seemed, under their shells, and some children were tapping them with sticks. One little boy was leaning right over the fence, slapping a big tortoise with his hand, but it's head stayed inside. Then I noticed one tortoise begin to move slowly up to another, pushing it as if it couldn't see its way and was trying stupidly to climb over it. But soon I realised it wasn't trying to climb over it at all, it was climbing on, and right there, the kids watching, this thing started to screw the other one, slowly and with what looked like painful effort. I wondered what the kids thought – I couldn't remember the tortoises ever doing this when I used to see them. But the way it had to engineer itself on – "Christ!" I thought, "Who would want to be a tortoise!" It worked up a sort of rhythm, a terrible clicking farting sound as if it had a lot of air inside its shell, but going on and on as if it was never going to stop. "What are they doing?" the little boy asked his father. "Fighting," he replied, quite cool. I'll remember that for when my kids ask me one day. When I looked round at Esme I saw she was laughing, and didn't seem in the least embarrassed, but I didn't like being there with her, though I probably would have stayed to watch if there'd been no-one else around. So I walked off, hoping she'd follow, which she did.

We made our way up to the top of the park, where the grass grows long and soft, and there are a lot of bushes. Here she sat down on the grass again, and to my amazement started to ask me about myself. It wouldn't have been specially unusual, I mean girls do, and they've every right to, but the **kind** of thing she asked! "Do you work? ... Don't you mind not having a job? ... Do you like your studies? ... Isn't it hard doing it all by correspondence? ... Have you always stayed at home? ... Does your mother like having you stay with her? ... Do you like your mother? ... Do you talk a lot to her? ... What do you talk about?" It was getting so I couldn't stand it, I mean I was just giving stupid answers, so I thought there's only one thing for it, I'll just have to treat her like I treat any girl I take out **by choice**. So I said "That's too many questions from such a beautiful mouth," and put my hands on her shoulders and pressed her down on the grass and kissed her and went on kissing her. It wasn't bad at all – no, it was better than that, she had a terrific way of kissing, and I found myself thinking

that her nose didn't get in the way at all, and that she must have had a lot of practice keeping it out of the way. All the time I knew this was a crazy way to be thinking, because what was happening to all the other parts of me except my brain wasn't crazy at all, at least it was, but not in the same way. It wasn't long before it wasn't her doing the main kissing, it was me, and me wanting more than kisses, wanting to lay her flat down and do fantastic things to her. I wanted to make her feel it was me and not her who was doing it all.

There wasn't any refusal at all. If there had been I would never have gone on, but while the brain part of me was wishing to have her push me off so everything could go back to normal again, the rest of me was rolling right onto her, over her, pressing into her till I could feel her whole shape and her legs; her short skirt wasn't covering her much any more. But really it was her making me do it. She slid out sideways and somehow with one hand got her pants off and got back again under me, and what could I do but follow as she led, and do what she wanted? But still I was wanting it to be me, and then she let it be me, and allowed me all, and didn't lead any more, and it was me, and her following.

It was all right while I was in her – better than all right – it was great. But then it was over, and Christ! I couldn't stand it then. Somehow, from the floating spaces, I knew I had to find a way of getting back to normal. Not easy with your pants down, so I pulled them up, and she dressed herself and did up the blouse buttons that had come undone. She lay then with one arm across her eyes to shield them from the sun that glinted through the leaves, but her eyes were open. She said nothing, but she smiled most distinctly.

That was about the end of it. It must have been about – no, it was – the worst moment of my life, me half-lying there on the grass, out of sight of any other people, seeing the smile on her face, and knowing that more than anything else I wanted to get up and reach the gate and get along the road home and never see her again. But not knowing how. If she hadn't spoken I might never have made it, because I was pinned down by a sick tangled-up feeling, quite apart from the usual loose-limbed floating-without-feet sense you have when you've had a girl. But she did speak. "You're shocked," she said. "No I'm not," I said. "Yes you are – you don't have girls do this kind of thing to you." "You needn't think this is the first time." I said quickly. "No, of course not," she said. "I knew that, but I meant the kind of girls you go out with don't take you up to the top of the park and lie down with you." "Well why did you?" I asked. "Because I liked you, I like it, I like your neck, and your middle, and the belt round it and your jeans, and I wanted them undone." "You talk as if I'm some sort of stud," I said. "No, I don't mean to," she answered, "I meant I really liked your body." That gave me a chance. "My body's not just anybody's," I said, and felt furious at the stupid rhyme of it. She laughed immediately. "You needn't laugh," I said, "you started it" "**Did** I?" she asked, and I remembered the whole damn bus-ride, and going up behind her. I could never say to any girl what I felt like saying then, how it had been the back of her neck and the backs of her

knees that had done it all. I didn't want to hurt her, just to get out. So I said, "Look I'm sorry, it's all been a big mistake, I mean I hardly know you." "That's what's so nice," she said. "Well I don't think so. And there's somebody else anyway. And if you don't mind I'm going."

I went. She stayed there under the trees. I went fast, then ran down the slopes, then my legs felt shaky so I walked. I walked all the way home.

When I got home my mother started in at me about how she'd kept lunch waiting and was I going to condescend to eat today? I got the stuff out of the oven on its warm plate. Savoury mince. But when I tried to eat all I could think of was "Kaffir shit" and I couldn't finish it, and just went up to my room. At last. Everything was there like it always was, my record covers on the wall above the bed, and Lindy's photo on the table, and the usual clobber of clothes and shoes on the floor where my mother leaves them to try and make me be tidy.

I lay on my back for a while. Then I turned over and tried to sleep. But my mother came to the door asking if I wanted to send anything to the dry-cleaners as she was going out. I yelled "No!" and heard the front door close. So I tried to think it all out, how Esme had treated me as if I was just her property. But that wasn't quite the trouble. I got up and started hunting in my drawers. What I was looking for was the photos of Lindy that I took just before she went off to University. There are some terrific ones, the best is of her under a waterfall wearing only her shorts, and also one of us kissing which a friend of mine took – not a very real kiss with him watching but a nice photo anyway. I couldn't find exactly where I'd put them, and instead I came across a box that has inside it a bracelet that I was going to give to Lindy, only we'd quarrelled the day before she left, and what with her getting her things ready and us making it up I'd forgotten the bracelet. Actually I thought I'd keep it until she came back, because I wanted to be sure she was mine and hadn't gone out with a whole lot of other chaps. It was made of green squares, a kind of plastic, only they look like marbly stuff or those semi-precious stones. I knew I'd give it to her one day. I knew it was hers really, and was waiting till she came back. I'd got it only for her.

Somehow the bracelet proved the whole thing for me. I'd never give something like that to Esme. She'd got me and had me, and I hadn't even had to try for her. I wouldn't ever have needed to buy her anything, she was for free. She was probably still in the park there, thinking I would come back. She could wait. I don't like that sort of thing, for free.

THE BOROUGH FRINGE

Out this way someone is delivering
houses. Every three months another
half-dozen arrive.
Double garages
spawn and are about to gulp
the houses.
Grass starts to creep
over the blanks of quarter-acre plots.

An age of Alsatians, Dobermans
and Great Danes dawns. The garages
regress to kennels, a plasticised fence
inherits each house.
And now Volkswagens
begin to mate in the driveways.

II

In late September the first big rains
are allocated. Factory effluents
foam the gullies, and well-greased eels
make cross-country moves at night.

My car has a mournful catarrh and I walk home.

I see sinkholes in most of the lawns
and crazed concrete strips careening
up eroded drives. A marooned
anxiety wells in the throats of dogs.

As usual I see no-one, not counting
stray blacks and children, one itinerant
burlesqueing hawker of straw brooms

And you, old snow-top gallivanter
whose saucer of a smile balances
apple-cheeks of Amsterdam, trotting
your knickety-knock of a mare
around our shaky perimeter.

Mike Kirkwood

THE ADVENTURES OF SIMPLICISSIMUS

Extract Two:

The Trial By Fire

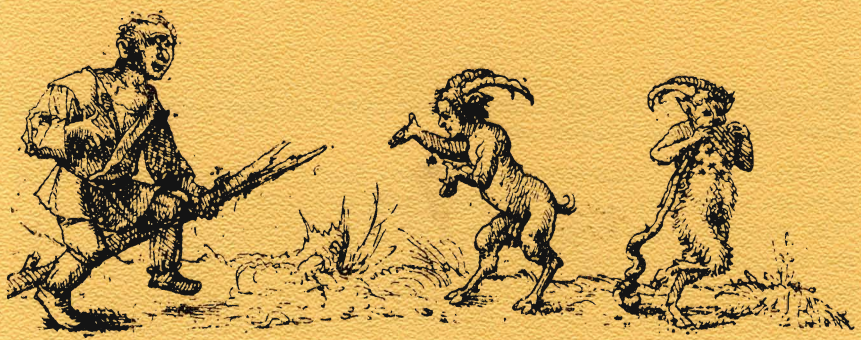
Synopsis:

Simplicius lives for several years with the Hermit, but on his death wanders off into the town of Hanau, where he is captured. The Governor of the garrison there employs him as his page. He fits in with his new job (to use his phrase) 'about as well as a donkey in a game of chess'. From the Hermit he has got a good grounding in theology, but he knows nothing of the ways of the world. These frequently shock him, and the bite of his satire gains him enemies as well as an appreciative audience. On the other hand his ignorance and his unfamiliarity with civilized behaviour cannot help but give frequent occasion of disgust to the polite society of the garrison.. Can we blame the Governor if he wants to formalize the special position that Simplicius is already beginning to fill at his court?

Simplicius is carried off to Hell by a company of four devils, and is regaled there with the best Spanish wine.

Shortly after the Commissaire had left, my friend the Parson had me called in secret to his lodgings —— and here's what he had to tell me, beginning: "Oh, Simplicius; the thought of your youth torments my conscience, and the miserable future they've planned for you moves me to pity. Listen, my child, and know that out of all doubt your master is determined to destroy your reason and make you into his fool. I know he's already having a costume made for the purpose. Tomorrow, listen, you will be introduced into that school where you are to unlearn your intelligence; and in that school they'll give you such a terrible working-over that, unless God and certain natural expedients intervene to prevent it, you will necessarily

be transformed into a witless lunatic. But now —— this being an evil thing and a serious business, and bearing in mind your Hermit's devoutness, as well as your own innocence, I want to help you with my advice and the necessary aid, and in all Christian charity give this powder into your possession. Now listen to what I teach you and drink this mixture, which will strengthen your brain and your memory, so that you'll be able to get through the experience with your mind untouched. And take this ointment also; rub your temples with it, also your spine, your neck, and nostrils —— and be warned you must doctor yourself with these two substances at night, before you go to sleep, as you can't be sure at any time that you won't be fetched out of bed. But make sure nobody gets to hear of my warning and the medicine I've given you, or it'll go ill with both of us. And when they have you in this hell's cure, don't believe all you're told; and yet, while you're about it, act as though you believe it all. And speak as little as possible, so that your educators mayn't know that with you they're simply threshing straw; or they'll change the manner of your sufferings, though I can't know how they intend to proceed with you. But when finally you are in your fool's clothes, come to me again, so I can advise you further. In the mean time be sure I'll pray unstintingly that your health and reason may be spared." With this he gave me the powder and ointment he had been speaking about, and I went off with them to my room.



As the Parson said, so it happened. I'd just fallen asleep, when four men dressed like appalling devils came to my bed, and there started leaping about like the retinue of the Lord of Misrule on All Fool's day. One was carrying a glowing sheep-hook, and another had a torch. The other two meanwhile would be leaping backward and forward over my bed; then finally dragged me out, tugged me around with them in a mad dance, and forced my limbs into my clothes. I carried on as though I believed them to be the real thing: actual, natural devils come to carry me off. I produced a chaos of terrified yells and whimperings, and acted out the most grotesque contortions of horror. Then they announced that I was to go off with them, and proceeded to tie up my head in a flannel, so tight I could neither hear, nor see, nor shout for help. They led me —— (me helpless, and shivering like an aspen-leaf) —— on long detours, up and down staircases, then finally into a cellar where a great fire was burning; here they unbound my head and set to drinking my health in Malvasier. They were getting on like a house on fire with their task of persuading me I was dead and was in the chasm of Hell, for I was naturally going to believe every word that they uttered. "Hey, speed up the drinking there," they would say (whenever they thought of it), "seeing you're going to keep us company for always. Show any signs of being a spoilsport, or wanting to stay a sober citizen, and we've orders to pitch you into the fire." Poor devils, they tried hard to disguise their voices so I wouldn't know them; but I could hear straight away they were some of my master's scouts —— still, I didn't let on but laughed all the while in my sleeve to think that these, who wanted to make me a fool, should meantime be such fools to me. I drank my part of the Spanish wine, but they had more than I did, as such heavenly nectar seldom came their direction, and I'll swear they'd had too much before I had. But when I felt the right moment was upon us I stumbled backwards and forwards as I'd so often seen my master's guests do, and eventually gave expression to a lack of desire for liquor and an overpowering impulse to fall asleep.

But then they drove me and shoved me with their sheephook which every now and then they laid in the fire to keep it hot, chasing me from one corner of the cellar to the next, so that it looked as if it were they who were going insane: I was to drink some more, or at the very least not to go to sleep, and when in my confusion I fell down (as I made sure I did, often) they grabbed me again and made as if they would throw me into the fire. So it went, a life like that of a falcon being waked, no easy cross to bear. I'd have outlasted them in this game of drunkenness and sleep, but they weren't all there all the time, but took turns, so that in the end I must have given out first. Three days and two nights I spent in that smoky cellar, without light except for what Hell's bonfire provided; my head began to roar and sing as though it were bursting —— I urgently needed **some** plan: **any** plan that would free me of both torturers and torture. In the end I did as the fox does, who urinates in the face of the hounds when he can no longer hope to escape them. Since Nature anyway drove me to fulfil my obligation, I simultaneously set myself vomiting by sticking a finger down my throat; with the result that I both filled my

pants and covered my jerkin, paying my share of the drinks with so intolerable a stench, that even my guardian devils found it hard to keep company with me. What they did then was to lay me in a sheet of canvas, and beat me so unmercifully that I was robbed of my senses and lay there for dead. I don't know what else they may have done to me; by that time I was gone to the world.

Simplicius, having passed through Hell and Heaven, is translated into a calf.

When I came to I wasn't in the old bare cellar with the devils any more. I found myself in a richly-furnished room — and in the care of three old women who must have been among the most unlovely creatures that Mother Earth had yet brought forth. I took these (on warily opening my eyes) for actual spirits out of Hell, and don't doubt that if I'd read the old pagan poets I'd have been able to identify them as the three Furies. At least one of them I must then have recognized as Tisiphone no less, risen up from the Underworld to rob me of my wits like Athamantis — I should have known this, because I knew I was only there in order to be driven mad. This crone had eyes like jack-o'-lanterns, and between the two of them a long, bony, hawk-like nose, the point of which actually touched her lower lip. Two teeth there were in her mouth, and no more — but those two were very well-developed: long, thick, and round — like a marriage-ring finger in shape, and in colour like marriage-ring gold. To be fair, there was enough tooth-material there to fill a whole mouth: it was just unevenly bestowed. Her complexion was like Spanish leather, and her white hair was wierdly disordered, she having been fetched straight out of bed. As for her breasts, they were two flabby cow-bladders, with two thirds of the air gone out of them. And at the end of each hung a brown-black nipple, half a finger long. Truly an alarming sight, enough to cure the most lascivious old buck of the love-madness. And the other two were no prettier, except that they had flat noses like monkeys, and were slightly more carefully dressed. When I had recovered a bit I realized that the one was the woman who did the dishes, and the other two were the wives of some of the scouts.

I pretended I couldn't move a finger, and indeed it was true that my bones turned to water when these three honest old grannies undressed me frog-naked and then started cleaning me up like a little child. Still, such treatment **did** give a sense of luxury. They gave evidence of considerable patience and compassion while on the job, and I was almost minded to let them know how my case wasn't as bad as it seemed. But still I thought: "No, Simplicius! Don't you go putting your trust in an old woman. Think rather what an achievement it will have been to have swindled three such crafty old nags — women acient in cunning, such as would serve to catch the devil on an empty heath. Courage! expect to do great things when **you've** aged up to it."

After they were finished with me they laid me in a fine bed, where I fell

asleep without waiting for the cradle to rock; and they must have gone away, taking with them my clothes and the things they had used to wash me. As far as I could make out I slept for over twenty-four hours this time, and when I woke up again two pretty boys with wings on were standing beside my bed. Someone had dressed them up in white — with taffeta ribbons, pearls, jewels, gold chains, and all sorts of other costly ornaments. These wished to convince me (in their role as angels) that now I

was in Heaven, having escaped the devil and his dam, and passed through the Purgatorial flames with flying colours. Now I should wish for whatever was close to my heart, they said, as there was more than enough there of everything, or at least it stood in their power to obtain whatever I asked for. I was suffering from thirst, however, and seeing the goblet in front of me, all I asked for was the drink, which was granted with great alacrity. But what the goblet contained was not wine; it was instead the sweet gift of a sleeping-potion, that I drank down without pause, and I fell asleep again the minute my body had absorbed it.

The next day I woke again (having slept out the interval) and found I was no longer in my bed in the finely furnished room, nor in the company of my two angels, least of all in Heaven itself. I was in the goose-pen. Once again fearful darkness surrounded me, as in the cellar; and I noted that I now had on a new set of clothes made of calf-skin — what's more with the rough side turned outwards. The trousers were Polish or Swabian in style, and the jerkin cut in an even more ridiculous fashion, I guess: above the collar it had been lengthened into a hood like a monk's cowl. This had been drawn over my head — and it had been ornamented with two nice long ass's ears. I couldn't stop myself laughing at my own misfortune — it was so obvious from both the nest and the feathers what sort of bird I was intended to be.

I had also time then to contemplate my situation, and think about what would be to my best advantage. I decided that from then on I would always play the fool as completely as I was able; and I'd bide my time until a change in my fortunes presented itself.

How Simplicius fared in this bestial disguise.

I could easily have let myself out of the pen, but as I was supposed to be a fool I didn't. In fact I went one step further than acting the part of a man who hadn't the sense to exit from a place on his own initiative; I even started carrying on like a hungry calf yearning after its mother. My animal complaint was soon heard by those whose business it had been made to wait for the first signs of new life from me; two soldiers came up to the goose-pen and asked who was inside. "You idiots," I answered, "can't you hear there's a calf in here?" They opened the gate and took me out, expressing great wonderment at a calf's being able to speak — in which they were as forced and unnatural as two newly-engaged players who couldn't con their part, so that I kept wanting to help them out. They began discussing what they should do with me and finally agreed to make a presentation of me to the Governor, and he'd give them more for me (being a calf who could speak) than the butcher would. They asked me how things were with me. I answered, "Pretty bad." They asked why. "Because," I said, "it seems to be the custom in this place to lock up perfectly decent calves in goose-pens. You fellows might as well know that if I'm to grow up into a proper ox, you should bring me up as befits a proper calf." After some more silly talk they drove me across the road to the Governor's dwelling. A large crowd of small boys followed on our heels; and as these were all making calf-noises as energetically as I was, a blind man might have said that someone was driving a herd of calves along. But if you had your sight we were no more and no less than a gaggle of young and old fools.

And so I was presented before the Governor by the two soldiers, just like the best prize brought home by a hunting-party. He gave the soldiers their tip and then promised to give me the best present I could think of. All's not gold that glitters, said the goldsmith's apprentice, and so I thought too. I said: "That's fine, master, you must just not lock me up in a goose-pen; we calves can't stand such treatment, not if we're to grow up into well-built cattle." The Governor comforted me with repeated assurances, and thought himself fortunate, no doubt, to have made himself such a noble fool out of the original material. But I thought: "Just wait, friendly master; I've survived the trial by fire, and have been hardened in the process. No let's see which of us two will make the other dance to his drumbeat.

At that moment an evacuated farmer chose to drive his cattle to the trough. The minute I saw this I was haring off to join them, making my calf-noises and doing as if I wanted to **kleza** from them. These cattle, when I came up to them, were more horrified than they would have been at the sight of a wolf, even though my hide should have demonstrated my kinship with them. In fact they got as fractious and shy, and scattered as quickly, as if a nest of hornets had been let loose among them in August, so that their owner couldn't bring them together again, during which time great fun was had by all. In no time a crowd of people had gathered to watch, and my master, splitting his sides with laughter, was pleased to say, at last: "One fool makes

a hundred." "Yes," thought I, "and you're the one that was meant when they thought of that proverb."

In the same way as everybody called me Calf during that time, so I had special nicknames for everyone. These frequently struck many people and in particular my master as very witty, for I christened everyone according to his character. In short, everyone took me for a shallow-witted idiot, and I regarded them every one as right brilliant fools. As far as I can make out, this is still the way things are in the world: everyone content with his own intelligence, and convinced he's cleverer than all the others.

The sport that I had set in motion with the farmer's cattle made the short morning even shorter — it was then close to the winter solstice. I waited as usual at the midday meal, mixing some eccentricities in with my normal behaviour; and when the time came for me to eat, nobody could get me to take any kind of human food or drink. All I wanted was grass — which wasn't to be had at that time. My master had a pair of fresh calf-skins fetched from the slaughter-house and dressed up two little boys in them. He got these to sit at table with me, gave us winter salad to start with, and told us to tuck in; he even had a real calf brought in and had it persuaded to eat with handfuls of salt. I gazed at all this as though I couldn't understand it (though by this time I must admit I was secretly longing to join in). "Yes, yes," they said, when they saw I was not enthusiastic, "it's nothing new to find calves even eating meat, fish, cheese, butter, everything you can think of. Hell! They even drink themselves under the table sometimes. The creatures know what's good for them." — "Yes," they went on, "it's even come to that pass that there's very little difference between calves and men; are you alone not going to join the new movement?"

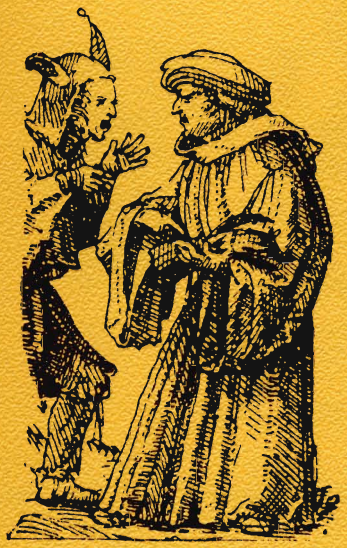
I was the more ready to believe this as I was by then hungry. It had nothing to do with the fact that I had already seen people behave more swinishly than swine; what! more fiercely than lions, more lustfully than goats; yes,

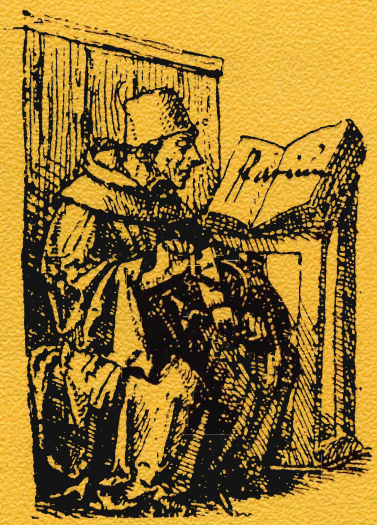
more enviously than dogs, more wildly than horses, more coarsely than donkeys, more drunkenly than cattle, more cunningly than foxes, more greedily than wolves, more foolishly than apes and certainly more poisonly than toads and adders — and all these animal people had eaten human

food, although it was only in shape that they differed from beasts, and though they didn't have the innocence of a calf, not by a long chalk. So I fed with my fellow cattle, as my appetite had bidden me, and if someone not in the know had seen us sitting there, he would have thought Circe had come alive again, to make beasts of men — an art which my master fully understood and practised. My supper went just like my lunch. And just as my dinner-table friends (or, if you like, my parasites) were obliged to eat with me in order to get **me** to eat, they also had to sleep with me, as my master wouldn't have me sleeping in the cowshed.

And all this I did, in order to make proper fools of those who would make a fool of me. And I drew this conclusion, that God in his mercy gives every man, in every situation into which He hauled them, enough mother wit for his self-preservation. I also noted that — professor or no professor — there were many who believed they were the only ones with brains, and who thought themselves king of the playground, and forgot that on the other side of the mountain there are also folk.

When I woke in the morning my calf-eared bed-fellows were gone; and so I got up quietly, and while the Adjutant was off to get the key for the city gates I slipped out of the house and went over to see my friend the Parson. Him I told everything I had experienced, both in Heaven and in Hell. And when he saw that I was beginning to have a bad conscience about deceiving so many people (and my master in particular) by playing the madman so earnestly, he said to me: "You must mind yourself not to have any qualms about this thing. Our crazy world only asks to be deceived. If they've left you your reason then, go use it to your best advantage. Think of yourself as having, like the phoenix, passed on through the flame from ignorance to understanding, born again now to a new form of existence. But bear in mind with all this that you are not yet over the ditch, that you have climbed into your fool's motley under great danger of losing your reason — and the times are such that no-one can





know whether you will ever be able to quit that livery alive. Think it over. A man can run into Hell speedy, but getting out again will cost him a humming and a ha-ing and a scratching his beard. You're not nearly so well-equipped to escape the dangers that lie ahead of you as you may think. And now you'll be much more in need of care and intelligence than you were in those days when you knew nothing of either intelligence or its opposite. Keep your sense of your own limitations —— and for the time being wait: your luck may one day change."

His speech was purposely inconsistent in its tone towards me —— for I fancy he could see it in my face that I thought highly of myself, having got through with his help and with such masterly cunning on my side. I for my part could see he was growing restless, and wearied with me —— that's what his expression said —— and after all, what was he getting out of it all? For these reasons I changed my tune, and made a point of thanking him specially warmly for the miraculous medicines he had given me to hold my wits together —— in fact I even went so far as to make all sorts of impossible promises of one day paying him back for the favour he had done me.

This tickled him in the right place and put him in a good mood again, for he started off in high-flown praise of his medicine and told me how Simonides Melicus had introduced an art that Metrodorus Sceptius had perfected after much effort: namely to teach people to be able to repeat, word for word, everything that they had once heard or read —— and this, so he said, would have been impossible without the intellectually stimulating medicines with which he had treated me.

"My dear Pastor," I thought to myself, "what I read in your own books while I was living with my Hermit gave a very different reason for the mnemonic skill of your Sceptius." However I was wise enough not to say anything; truth to tell, it was only when I was chosen to be a fool that I first began to find my way around, and to watch my speech like a man who knew what he was doing.