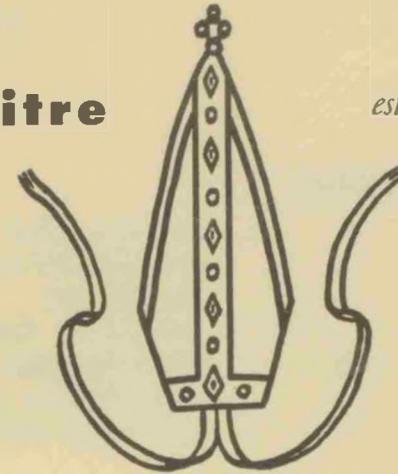


mitre

**mitre**

**the mitre**

*established 1893*



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## editorial

To attempt to apply the quotation opposite directly to Bishop's or to the **Mitre**, might be misleading. "Disturbed" can too easily be misinterpreted. However, had Fry used instead, the word "concerned" or perhaps "involved," the lines would be particularly appropriate.

The purpose of a university literary magazine is, surely, to provide an incentive and a showcase for student writers. If, however, the magazine hopes to maintain any standard of quality in the student writing it does publish, the attitude of would-be contributors must be other than that which they adopt towards preparing a required term assignment.

If it is suggested that too few students are printed in the **Mitre**, the answer may be that only a very few students have anything at all that they genuinely wish to say. To what extent they have succeeded or failed is for the individual reader to decide. If, however, there is one unifying justification for their inclusion in this issue, it is that each is in some way involved with what he or she has written. The degree of involvement is often extremely personal, there seem to be few soapboxes at Bishop's, but no matter what form it takes, the element of concern is there.

We ask of our readers only that they allow themselves to become, in some small way, involved with the **Mitre**, even if it is only to the extent of a tut.

THE EDITOR

*Oh, be disturbed,  
Be disturbed Madam, to the extent of a tut,  
And I will thank God, for civilization.*

Christopher Fry  
(THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING)

WINGED VICTORY

A few bars, a tune heard  
and understood. The sky  
curled back like the pages  
of an old book. Sound, sweet  
and sad, feeling for your guts.

Samothrace!

Reactions.

Armpits.

Fingers tapping,  
Wearing a hole in the  
earth's sallow skin.

*Reflection of pain spreading:  
a stain over dark waters.*

A tune so mellow that you  
want to cry or laugh,  
but instead you sit mesmerized  
and think of rivers snaking  
through fabulous jungles, pouring  
onto purple seas; and of cobbles  
slick under yellow light.  
Your mind travels to high places  
where the air is still  
and quiet, and Samarkand  
seems very near.

*Reflection of pain spreading:  
a stain over dark waters.*

Sound gone, the world clamours  
in through the window, bringing  
the fat man and the smell of pop-corn.  
Old men sitting in crumpled  
blues lines, smoking, waiting.  
And the same, the eternal questions.

*Reflection of pain spreading:  
a stain over dark waters.*

The gypsy won't sleep forever  
but the dream will remain.

## ALL THAT LONG SUMMER

They lived that year in a basement apartment in lower Westmount. Ilse felt they were like cellar rats or something, scuttling in and out and never seeing anyone, and she was always afraid of running into the woman from upstairs because she looked at Ilse with such a mixture of concern and curiosity that Ilse knew she must have been hearing the screaming. But in the afternoons she would go each day and meet her friends-of-the-park, and seem for a while almost like an ordinary person with an ordinary life.

All that long warm summer, after the babies' naps in the afternoon, the three girls converged on the park, coming from their separate directions—they never saw each others' homes—thank heavens, Ilse used to think, because you never knew with Stefan. He might have come home while she was out and made some ghastly mess. —Once she had asked the girls back with her for tea, and they could not come (thank God) and when she got back her place was full of Slavs doing kolo dances, and saluting each other with slivovitz. The great trick seemed to be to chew down the glass, after the drink, and Ilse could not bear to watch but had to go and stand in the bathroom, and let John, the baby, watch the people's legs go by in the street through the high basement window, until everyone had gone. And then Stefan was furious with her for not being welcoming. That was the way their life was. You simply never knew. So the best thing was, to never invite anyone.

The park the girls went to was halfway up the hillside; it had once been the grounds of an enormous estate, running down the hill in terraces of sloping lawn and rock garden. They loved it because it had the gracious feeling of being a private garden. They felt alone among the flowering shrubs, or under the great old trees, it was so empty there on weekday afternoons. They would sit on the grass—not a bit the unsavoury, stiff cropped weeds of the usual city park, but like a lawn, thick and sweet—and the three babies would crawl over it, and take unsteady steps, holding their mothers' fingers.

All the babies were the same age, one that summer, and were their mothers' overwhelming absorbing interest. The girls' conversation went on and on, about the babies mostly, or about the books

they were reading, or about when they themselves were children, all as they lay drowsily in the dappled shade. The others sometimes talked about their husbands, but Ilse never could bring herself to mention Stefan.

She revelled in the lazy afternoons, lived in them utterly—time and life suspended—at least until the shadows grew longer over the lawns. Then the tiny, but earlier in the day controlable, knot of panic, would expand a bit, and tighten in her, so that by the time they left the park—slowly, with many goodbyes, and trips back to retrieve forgotten toys, and laughter—she would be trembling all over. Walking down the steep sidewalks, holding back the baby's stroller which would have rushed full speed down the hill if she let go for a moment, her breathing would seem to go all wrong—great deep breaths, yawns even, till she felt a little dizzy. God! Evening coming.

Imagine what it would be like to have a usual husband! —A husband one could talk about in a usual sort of way, mention sometimes in conversation, perhaps even quote from, the way the others did! In the mornings while she washed the diapers and cleaned the apartment, the whole day stretching clean and free ahead of her, she would daydream all sorts of 'happy endings,' and rescue from her present squalor by a kind and handsome stranger (it was all so adolescent and she knew it but could not stop). And she would sit at her piano and practice Bach Inventions and as she played some sort of order would seem, for a moment, to fall over her life. —How angry Stefan sometimes was about her piano! It signified a whole way of life he resented—to him she felt she was like decayed gentry holding on pathetically to a few relics of former fine times—and anyway her mother had given it to her which was enough. Once he threw a bottle at it and scarred the dark wood, and after he went out Ilse cried over it and tried to rub away the long mark but it always stayed.

However—by five o'clock in the afternoon daydreaming was out of the question. The immediacy of seeing him was too strong for any escape into a dream to be even for a second possible. If, as she turned into their lane his car was there, her heart would seem to shake and burst with combined fear and relief—and if it was not, she felt the awful certainty of the night ahead, endless before her, the aching longing for sleep, that was impossible until she heard the door open and close behind him. So many nights she lay there, watching the cars' lights, the moving pattern slipping across the ceiling of the

bedroom. And every few moments the tense certainty that the phone was going to ring, and a voice, which she would know at once was a policeman's would say, 'I'm sorry but I have bad news for you—' And the thing was, now, that she wanted it to happen. She wanted anything to happen that would eliminate Stefan from her life, and especially from her baby's life. She did not want him to have Stefan for a father, when he was old enough to be aware of things, and know him. Ilse did not even feel guilty about wanting that, about wanting him dead and gone away. For a long while, watching his gradual change and descent into a different and deranged person, she had wept with him, aching with desperate pity as he clung to her sometimes in a dark panic. She would lie and hold his strong lovely body, trying to see into his fearful black eyes, the sombre and twisted paths of his thoughts. But now, so far had they come, she was the focus, the target, for all his strange half articulate hates. Forcing his way through a normal working day, he would return to the apartment and spray his anger, his mad meaningless rage, out at her. So gradually all she had come to want was escape from him, and from this life. And when he talked of killing himself, she would say, 'O.K. just do it then, get on with it,' and he would yell at her and hit her till she screamed, and then he would go out to get drunk, and she would sit and rock John and cry into his fine soft hair.

Then once he did try it. He brought some stuff home with him from the lab, and injected it into himself and lay on the bed, and his eyes dulled and closed. Ilse sat and watched him, perfectly still, her heart in her quiet as ice, feeling her will like cold steel wanting him to die. But he did not. It turned out he had not used enough of the stuff—whatever it was Ilse never knew.

She never told anyone. There was no one to tell. She was far too proud to tell her parents. She would sometimes go to them for a weekend, and revert completely in the most extraordinary way to her old self, and be just their girl again, and her baby's mother, and of the wife, nothing at all. To confess that the man she had insisted on marrying against all their wishes, had deteriorated in a mere two years into a madman—it was inconceivable to break her pride in that fashion. And what ever would she say anyway? I'm sorry but my husband's gone mad, yes he's round the bend, he's bonkers, and I don't know what to do next, and I don't love him anymore only hate him. I've had it; I've had enough and I want to come home now, O.K.? No you didn't say that. And another thing you didn't do was

think of the old happy days (Stefan when John was born, running into the hospital room with his face simply alight with tenderness and joy, so that the three of them seemed locked, inviolable, in happiness. —No you didn't think of these days).

She felt transfixed in present misery as though it could never change—and yet it **must** change—it must alter or she would escape. She dreamed at night of herself running with her baby in her arms down endless avenues searching for kindness, someone to hold her, push back Stefan with his hurting hands and his shouts.

The second time he tried to kill himself he jumped from a balcony. His friend (it was at a party) caught him in miraculous fashion by his clothes, and others came to help, and they dragged him up again, and Ilse stood by, silently, motionless and cold, looking down at the cement far below. But this time he had scared himself—it was unbelievable but he was frightened. He turned to Ilse and wept (incongruous tears on his dark face and yet they gave her some sort of bitter cruel satisfaction) and said he would see a psychiatrist.

Ah easier said than done! Ilse had stored in her mind for ages the name of one she had heard someone mention—but to get an appointment! When she called the utter disinterest of the nurse was annihilating. It seemed there was no possible way to get any sort of quick assistance—so what if your husband is trying to kill himself—we have our schedules. Why expect us to care. Ilse found herself shouting into the phone, 'If you won't take him now he won't **be** here.' The nurse suddenly disappeared from her end of the phone, apparently forever. Then suddenly she was back, and said the appointment could be made for Tuesday.

Until that day Ilse held herself rigid, refusing to feel, refusing to hope. On that morning she waited in the car for him, while he was in seeing the doctor, feeling something inside her—tearing? loosening? Before going in he had clutched at her, and she could not quite **bear** to feel tenderness for him. It was too hard and too hurting. Yet—she could not help herself starting to hope. Could she? Would it be unreasonable to hope?

It seemed a long while before he came out again. She watched a great many people pass in and out of the hospital doors. She leaned forward, biting her nails to the quick, and abstractedly passing rubber toys to John as he threw them at her, until at last there he was. He came in beside her and sat for a little before he spoke. He was shaking

so hard in great shuddery jerks, that he had to clasp his hands together tight. 'I'm to go into the hospital,' he said. He was smiling a queer spasmodic smile. 'It'll take some time. Shock treatments and all the rest of it.' And she knew he was afraid because he had done that to animals in the laboratory. He knew exactly what happened.

They went home and got his things, and then returned at once to the hospital. Ilse could not go in because of John, sitting in the back of the car in his car seat, and she seemed almost to die of compassion watching Stefan as he disappeared into the huge building. She did not drive away for ages until John began to fuss and cry behind her.

The next day she was able to get the woman upstairs to mind John (she was kind and curious and wanted confidences, but Ilse could not talk without crying. Sympathy was too hard to accept, and she turned her face away pale and stoney. But the woman patted her hand). She went to the hospital. The doctor was nowhere about though she had hoped to see him. She spoke at the desk, asking for the room number, and the nurse was pretty and dark, quite young, and walked along with Ilse to Stefan's room. 'They have the treatment first thing in the morning, so he's just had his first. You may find him a little different and forgetful—they forget more with each treatment, but it comes back eventually, later.' She smiled as though it was the most normal thing in the world to have your mind's patterns blasted and shaken by electricity, and left Ilse at the door. She stood still a moment in hope and fear and then opened it.

She entered the room quietly. He shared it with another man but the curtain was drawn between the two beds. He was standing, fully dressed, turned away from her, looking out the window. Her whole body constricted with a frantic suspense, and she stood clutching the bed rail with damp hands. How long the moment lasted! She could not bear to go on to the next one—

Finally— 'Stefan,' she said, and he turned towards her.

His face! It seemed somehow smoothed out and tender looking, under his tousled dark hair. He smiled at her and he had the same, the very same, trusting open, soft look that he used to have after making love to her.

All at once the tears spilled down her face, at seeing him gentle, and dear, again. She went slowly over to him and touched his face

and kissed him, and knew without even forming the thought that she forgave him for everything and everything behind them was simply gone forever. (She really believed it).

That afternoon Ilse went again with John to the park as usual. The other girls were there before her, and she sank down on the cool grass in the shade, and for just a moment was on the verge of telling them—and then the impossibility at the last! It was too huge. She even started the sentence, 'Something very important happened this morning!' Then looking at their innocent, expectant faces, she said—'John walked clear across our sitting room without any support at all.' —And she jumped up and turned her back on them, holding out her hands for John, because her face was pounding with heat at almost telling.

DAVID LOBDELL

RECONCILED AMONG THE STARS

Somewhere this daybreak  
A disturbance of stars  
A suggestion of smoke  
And gone  
    gone  
    gone the voice in the cold land, the dead land  
Time present and time past  
The man they called T. S.

No scatter of ashes on Mediterranean shores  
No sky-shaking shudder of three-treed despair  
No half-masted holiday's raven-veiled stares  
But an unwanted, unwatered vase under air

Returned to that place, his kingdom,  
Returned to the old dispensation, returned  
With a whisper of wisdom escaping the lips  
    Crying

'This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends . . .  
. . . end and . . . beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end.  
And all is always now.'

MANY ARE CALLED

You came to me in the night  
    a hunch-backed girl  
    crushing the night in the palms of your time-polished hands

You came to me  
    heavy and hunchbacked  
    peering over your horn-rimmed glasses  
    a blood-red rose in your rusty hair

You came to me  
    and whispered  
    that now was the hour  
    that He was outside the door  
    that I must follow you outside the door

    and I spoke not a word

You bent beside me  
    to fasten a shoe  
    your orange hair sweeping the floor  
    and suddenly there  
    in the dusty night  
        the hump on your back opened up like a well  
        your sibyllic eyes unloosed visions of hell  
        and the painted lips of your Spanish rose  
        whimpered and withered and fell

I turned in my sleep  
    and stretched a hand  
    to touch the hem of your Calvary cloak

    And you covered my hand and wept

CIRCUS MADONNA

I discovered you squatting  
there in front of the freak-house  
the side-show house  
that always houses more freaks than it shows  
an old hag  
humped and wrinkled  
munching poppy-seed toast  
a black gap in your mouth's lower crescent  
cradling its cup  
of sulphuric spittle  
your eyes vomit-yellow  
keeping their life-watch  
through years  
shredded stockings rolled to just below the ankle  
one purple-rivered leg  
exposed unashamed to the world  
the blood-clotted rose on your once-was-a-hat weeds  
keeping its life-watch  
the parchment tongue saving that last rasping cough  
for some one loved  
lost in the crowd  
  
There you hunched  
an antiquated Mrs.  
rejected  
despised  
in your Rumpelstiltskin skirts  
your stitched lips  
plucking the same half-note  
over and over  
' . . . finished . . . finished . . . finished . . . '

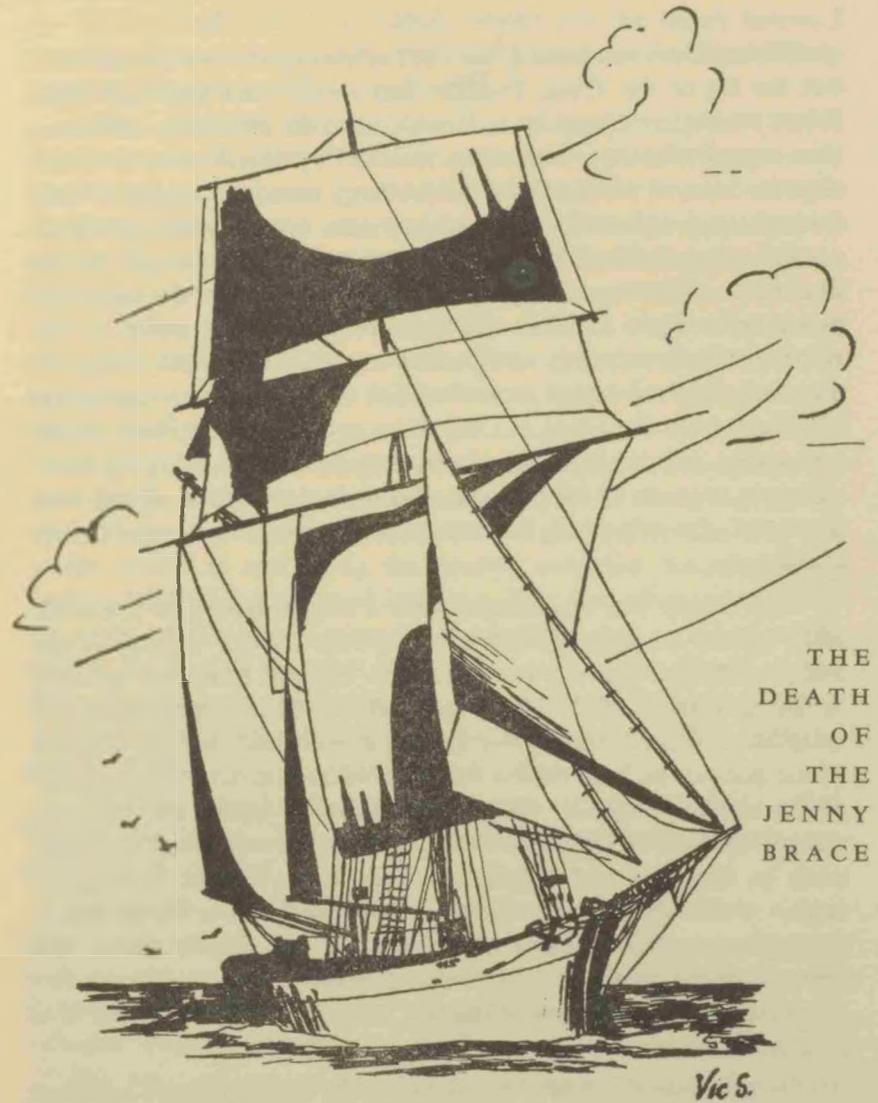
And my uncultivated stomach  
heaved at the sight of that pulp-picked nose  
sniffing in time  
with the barker's cry  
my unaccustomed uncultured stomach  
heaved  
said turn away  
don't look  
don't watch it  
that three-needled claw  
exploring the uncharted attic for lice  
that three-pronged paw  
climbing up and over and out  
once and yet twice and yet thrice  
don't watch it  
that ungirdled middle  
rolling and heaving  
a volcanic pudding  
don't watch it  
that taxiderm bobble  
now in  
and now out of its navy-blue socket  
don't watch it  
don't watch it  
don't . . .  
And someone beside me I did not see  
whispered into my ear  
and said that your name was Mary

THE SEA

The sea is an old female walrus  
wheezing  
wallowing  
sucking the sand beneath fingerless feet

She crashes and crushes  
She scans and screams  
She stops  
for seconds a hush

Her blasphemies spat  
on a world she cannot command  
She turns without pain  
excreting life's stain  
Prays for tomorrow's attack



THE  
DEATH  
OF  
THE  
JENNY  
BRACE

a short story by VIC SUTHREN

The molasses run from Kingston, Jamaica up the Eastern seaboard was the leg of the Trade Triangle that sorely tried men and ships; before landfall in Yarmouth or Halifax came the inevitably exhausting beat around Hatteras, and crews numbed by North Atlantic blasts after the balm of the Northern Trades clung mutely to rigging or their stomachs and wished the whole bloody mess to be over as quickly as possible. Dog-tired of the sea, emptied of coin and strength by the Caribbean debauches, officer and man alike spat into the wake and swore never again to leave the forested Nova Scotia shore, or the warm kitchens, soft beds and patient women who would always be there, tearfully waving at jettyside. Their ships, tough tar-and-oakum schooners from the yards at Lunenburg or Bridgewater, were driven with every inch of straining canvas they could hold, plowing north with men eager to be rid of them, who bore along under all sail until it seemed the ships had never known the calm of a quiet Indies anchorage.

Such a ship was the Jenny Brace, a clinker-built gaff schooner, white-hulled, launched in eighteen fifty-four from a Lockeport slip and owned from that day on by Quincy Taggart, a man as splintery as his new ship's deck. He named her the Jenny Brace after the daughter of a Bermuda harbourmaster, a sweet and deerlike creature whose portrait he kept on the bulkhead in his quarters. His memory of her was the only soft thing about Quincy Taggart, and the only woman he had ever loved. She had died bearing their illegitimate son while he fought to reef topsails off Cape Race, and on hearing the news a week later, he retired into a bitter shell and a life of damn-your-eyes seamanship. Her name lived on in the ship he drove, and topmast hands swore tears came to his eyes when the Jenny B.'s topsails arched for the sun before the westerlies, like the bosom of a passionate woman.

On the seventh of March, eighteen fifty-eight, Taggart squinted through his sextant and stumbled below to his chart table to deduce that, with a pinch of luck, he was six hundred miles off Savannah. The sun lay sickly and yellow behind a veil of fast-moving stratus, and the Jenny B., reaching along under fore and main, headsails and main topsail, was surging in long rolling strides over a grey, white-streaked sea. A knuckle rapped against the barometer showed falling

pressure, and Taggart swore himself up to the weather deck to shorten sail.

"Mister Andersen!", he roared, "shake out the watch below. I want the fore and main under two reef points, and furl that bloody topsail! This ship is NOT a windmill!"

"'Sir." Andersen was a good man, a whippet-strong little Swede who had seen the Horn four times, left several blond youngsters in the Marquesas, and lost his thumb in a quayside row to a Negro Capetown longshoreman armed with a meat cleaver. He was the best seaman aboard, and Taggart knew it. Already the off-duty watch were appearing from the fo'c'sle hatch, blinking like rats in the sun and then scuttling aft to the fore and main fiferails under Andersen's encouraging toe. Turns were taken off the topsail halliard, and the first cleat on main and fore halliards were fumbled off the belaying pin by a still-sleepy hand.

Reefing sail on the Jenny B. involved bringing the bows into the wind until a few points off and the ship nearly in irons, then easing the halliards to give purchase to the frantic group of reefers who tied in two points of reef along the canvas, and then downing slack, hauling the halliard taut and belaying. This last effort was usually the cause of some merriment, as the halliard was usually brought over to the foot of the mast while eased, and as the fiferail on the Jenny was for some odd reason along the starboard bulwark, belaying involved several hands taking hold of the halliard and then swinging over to the rail on it like monkeys on a vine.

The main topsail collapsed on the deck and was carefully rolled for stowage below. The Jenny rode easier now, and Taggart was momentarily satisfied.

"That'll do the watch, Mister Andersen," he said, and in a few seconds the seaman had sent the hands below, leaving only Taggart with the eight or ten hands of the forenoon watch on deck. By now the wind lay in the dead East, and the Jenny began to surge more violently under the Captain's feet.

The howl of the wind in the rigging was now a high-pitched humming, and every few moments the Jenny would shudder with the impact of a huge, hissing swell that shattered against her stem and bowsprit, hiding them in a vast cloud of spray and sea that smashed aft along the decks and drenched all and any thing on the weather deck.

Taggart was as yet calm. He had seen the Jenny B. weather more

than this, and felt confident that her oaken ribs would take poundings as yet untried. The ship's motion became a long, sickening lurch into the sky, scuppers and bows streaming water, then a long slide into the teeth of the next swell, where the Jenny's cutwater smashed deep into the green interior of each wave, and the ship shuddered as several tons of Atlantic swept down her decks and streamed from her scuppers. Already the motion was having its effects, and the first pale crewman was emerging from the hatch of the heaving fo'c'sle.

Brushing the tangy salt spray from his lips, his eyes watering in the gale that now smashed at his face like an invisible wall, Taggart clutched at handholds and fought his way aft to the wheel, where Andersen fought the helm with the seaman on it, trying to hold the wildly pitching Jenny on course. From below, over the wind's shriek, Taggart heard the smash of crockery and a muffled oath from the cook. His hair whipped by the wind, the Captain glanced about him at the grey horizon now rapidly being obscured by an onrushing gloom. He shouted into Andersen's ear.

"Get the hands up again. I don't know where this thing is coming from, but we've got to get her under bare poles or I don't think we'll have a single rag to sail home with! And send me two men aft here; after we furl sail we'll rig a sea anchor and try and run with it. At last observation we were six hundred miles off Savannah, so we've sea room to try. Now for God's sake get going!" Taggart clung to the wheel as Andersen disappeared into the spray forward, lurching drunkenly along the heaving, awash decks and shifting handholds from point to point.

The Jenny B. now lay almost facing into the eye of the storm. Heaving wildly, with no way on, seemingly awaiting the final blow from the storm, she was in no way the calm serene mistress of the Trades. Below decks was a shambles, a nightmare of flying, smashed crockery, books, personal belongings and articles from the galley. Two hands worked on bandaging the forehead of the cook, cut by a shattering soup tureen, a cocky Newfoundlander who swore a never-ending stream of abuse at the sea as his friends tried to bandage him while bracing against the rolling of the ship. In the corner a young beardless boy, a stowaway in Halifax, signed on because of momentary weakness over his starry-eyed dreams of the sea, retched quietly and miserably. The decking had sprung under the twisting and racking forces of the seas, and trickles of water soon soaked bedding and all clothing into a wet mass and sloshed in streams back and

forth across the fo'c'sle deck. A burly seaman grunted as a sudden heave of the Jenny sent him into the edge of the mess table, and he sank to the deck clutching his side.

On the weather deck, Taggart and the hands with him fought for their lives and the life of the Jenny Brace. Gone was the calm of fifteen minutes ago. Taggart's strong sea sense realized that this storm was like nothing he had ever experienced, and in the grim desperation with which he worked there was the effort of a man who had bested many heavy odds, but who now realizes that he is fighting for his life.

Andersen and his group of struggling seamen, gasping for breath as sheets of needle-like spray dashed into their faces, had managed to lower the headsails and the foresail. In the dark howling confusion a hand was swept overboard from the port cathead, his brief cry swallowed up immediately by the shriek of the wind. He was not noticed.

While battling to free the mainsail halliard, Andersen was startled by a whiplike crack, and glanced up into the rigging in time to see the main gaff, splintered at its foot, come hurtling down to smash the life out of him against the foam-swept decks. The saturated canvas collapsed over him, and the men with him struggled briefly to free him.

There seemed a momentary abatement in the storm, and then one of the exhausted, drenched hands cried out, "Oh my God! Look!"

From out of the darkness of the east, a vast wave surged toward the Jenny. Its hissing curl was more than fifty feet high, and the helpless Jenny slipped forward to meet it. The seaman cried out again, a wordless howl.

The gigantic wave swept over the ship and lifted the wreckage of the mainsail, Andersen's broken body, and the little knot of seamen high in its impartial grasp. Taggart looked up and stared in disbelief as the green wall swallowed the Jenny, towering towards him, splintering her masts, engulfing her in a final green embrace.

Taggart met it on his feet. "Damn you!" he howled at the colossus, "damn you, damn you, damn youuuuuu . . ."

The Jenny was gone. The wave surged on. And the storm now raged in an empty sea.

AND TOMORROW?

We walked together in the dead, rustling leaves of autumn,  
And talked of the little things that we both care about.

The earth was brown and bare  
And the crooked, aged fingers of the trees  
Scratched against a leaden sky.

I thought of summer gone with all the laughter floating on the breezes,  
Which made the days and nights a sort of pleasant, carefree dream.

The chill wind cut  
Snatched up all my memories  
And blew them through your hair.

You probably didn't understand my smile when the wind drew a tear  
from your eye.  
But I let it pass as so many smiles and tears had passed before.

I saw how pretty you seemed  
Against all this bleakness  
And wanted to say so.

THE MOON

On top of a tall and stately pine sat the moon,  
Hanging there in the perfect clearness of the night sky.  
And little horse-and-rider-clouds pranced around her,  
Whisking their tails across her lovely face.  
On the horizon mountains of heavy clouds silently rolled by,  
Not daring to come near and shroud her radiance.  
And her smile so mellow and so warm,  
Bathed all the earth and all the night,  
And made the autumn trees and little shrubs  
Look up stop whispering and delight in her royal presence.

Yes, the moon stole the show that night—  
She held the captivated world in a blissful trance.  
Before I went to sleep I tried to reach out and touch her snowy cheek;  
But she winked and ducked behind a cloud as if to say:  
“You'll come again tomorrow for you will miss me come the day.”

A LIGHT FOR TO SLEEP

She always waited until the three were sure to be asleep before she went in to turn off the night-light. They had whispered together under the sheets until very late and she had to wait longer than usual. Even so, Danielle sat up as she entered the room.

“ You are going to turn out the light; will you leave it on a little longer. ”

It did not really sound like a question but she answered anyway.

“ If you like. ”

“ They would not be able to sleep you know . . . without the light. ”

“ A light is a good thing for small girls. But you should sleep and not try to read your father’s paper, it is very late. ”

“ I was reading, but I got tired and now I am just watching. ”

“ Your mother told me you knew your reading. Do you have books? ”

“ Yes . . . but mostly I like to have them read to me. Sometimes I do not know the word. Now my eyes hurt. ”

“ It is always hard at the start. Your eyes hurt because that is a light for to sleep, not to read. ”

“ Will it hurt? ”

“ Your eyes told you to stop because it is hard for them to work with such a small light. ”

“ No . . . not that . . . will it hurt Lynn? ”

“ Lynn does not see the light, she is asleep. ”

“ I mean when Lynn dies will it hurt? ”

“ What is this of which you speak? ”

“ The paper said the fluenza can kill you when it comes in a fever. Lynn has a fever. ”

“ You read this thing? ”

“ Do you think Nicole and I will catch the fever and die too? ”

“ No one is to die. The fluenza fever of which you speak has not passed through this room. ”

“ But the paper . . . ”

She reached atop the bureau.

“ Look at this. Have you seen it before? ”

“ They put it in Lynn’s mouth. ”

“ Do you know why? It is to tell if the fever is in you. When there is a red line, it has come. ”

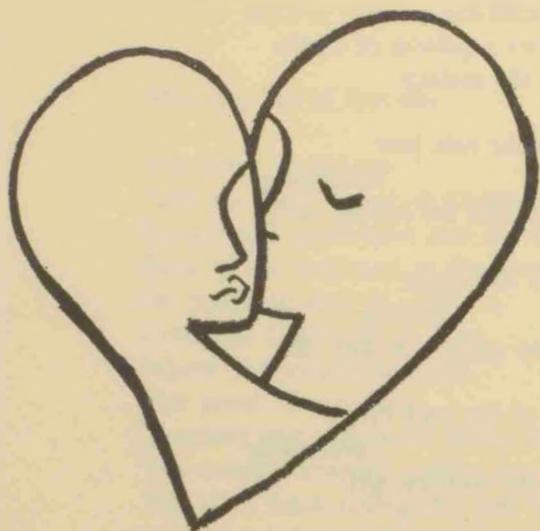
She shook it twice before showing it to Danielle. She saw no red line.

“ Do you wish to sleep now? ”

“ Yes, for my eyes hurt me. ”

She turned off the light. It would hurt a small girl’s eyes after she had been waiting all evening for her sister to die. Even if it was only a small light.





Love is  
Like the sound of a flute,  
Playing softly,  
A small, warm wind  
Filling the hollows of the heart.

JANET WATSON

SHORT SONG, LAMENTING

The little one's dead. Silence and snow are his elegy; there won't be another memorial. A few lines of dialogue, now rewritten, and the words to a song, but they've changed them. In a book, a name and a date beside a winter-sunset picture: In Memoriam—maybe.

"No one noticed him at first, he looked—well, ordinary. His own mother wouldn't have recognized him in a crowd. But then you might see him on stage, or in the rare moments when he was excited and talking a mile a minute, and you might almost say he was beautiful. There was a sort of scale-model quality about him, something delicate, and he had the biggest, most shining eyes. . . ."

*"Provisional diagnosis: possible schizophrenia.*

*Final diagnosis:*

No one knew why. They took over what he'd been working on, closed ranks and went on without looking back. They can, you know. One wrote a poem, and the others winced for a moment when they read it. Certain things were buried quickly, without trace, things he'd thought of: one line for a play—"look at his eyes, aren't they wonderful?"; a song, never to be sung again: an idea—"we could have a haunted house—curtain rises, stage completely black, and a voice says—": small things. (Did he walk with death all along then? There was something else he said, what was it? No matter now.)

*"Parents separated several years ago; patient sided with mother. The father is in Toronto, the mother can be reached at the Seignior Club over Xmas."*

Company, warmth, entertainment, alcohol. Far away from a cold Montreal hospital at Christmas.

He kept his life well hidden. A year or two before, he had walked into a theatre washroom and found two men there . . . he had stood and stared at them for a moment, then run. But he went back, and back again, and again.

*"Patient does not know the names of any of the men involved."*

Then finally that Christmas season, and admittance to the grey institution. It must have been very cold there at that time of year.

*"Patient tried several times to get in touch with his father, to wish him Happy New Year. However, he could not be reached."*

"It's not surprising you never noticed him. Perhaps you saw him on stage; he certainly could act. But he wasn't at all the same person offstage, so quiet. Intelligent, though, and we all certainly liked him, though we never got to know him very well. It was an awful shock to us all. I wonder why—"

*"Guilt feelings from homosexual tendencies seem to be bothering patient."*

In his own quiet habitual silence he watched the year draw on to a peaceful death in its sleep. They watched him carefully there, and they had hidden the sleeping pills. Nothing could touch him there except continued life.

The typewritten pages neatly end, "released on own insistence," smug summary. Then, scribbled with a hurried pen (wind up case, ten seconds):

*"Patient committed suicide the day after release."*

Exit, thankfully, in a rising blaring crescendo of an incoming year, and a fall of snow.

No one has ever said anything. No one has ever said a word about why they did not say anything. They do not know nor ask. Snow is his epitaph and silence his elegy, and no elegy ever contained more grief, or loyalty, or stunned near-heartbreak. It is almost as if, without knowing, they understood. But sometimes, for a moment, they feel that somehow and somewhere he has been cheated.

Sometimes, in a memory or a dream, one of them comes around a corner and finds silence and covering snow, and perhaps a fleeting sight of half-remembered young and shining eyes. This is all, this is what remains of twenty years of life and the final and only kindness of friends.

The little one's dead.

## KEN LIVINGSTONE

### AFTER THE SILENCE COMES A WIND (for J.)

And suddenly  
there is a new breeze  
and its freshness  
is a smile

cut from the mast  
he feels the quick thrust  
of a new wind,  
and in the long hall  
the suitors grumble in their cloaks.

On the third day  
the black tents are gone  
and the wind  
cleans the dead air in the desert  
like a sword in sand.

The wind is after the silence  
and the silence  
is dust in the crumpled temple  
before the crowd stirs.

A wind can die  
or turn and blow the smoke back  
like a washed up body  
yet knowing this, still  
while the silence ticks  
like strain on a frayed rope,  
one waits  
for the wind

and suddenly  
there is a new breeze  
and its freshness  
is a smile.

## PERSPECTIVE

If tonight  
I could write a poem  
and say  
look  
the moon is a ball of that fluffy candy  
they sell at fairs and at the seaside  
and it's yours  
I've spun it for you

If the poem could be the night

But no  
you aren't here  
and even if you were  
you might see  
only a moon

and then  
what chance the poem?

## FISHING BOATS

Like triangular coloured sandwiches  
on a flat plate  
the fishing boats sit in the harbour.  
Their masts are toothpicks  
skewering gulls  
and the sky.

In the evening  
the fishermen's sons smoke on the jetty  
and the boats  
as if ordered  
rise on the sea  
like a tray of sandwiches  
and silently  
together and alone  
are gone.

Almost midnight:  
in the harbour only a few dories  
turning slowly and bumping on the tide  
coloured crumbs  
on a black platter.

THE BANK TELLER

In the village  
there is a sybil caged.  
She is allowed to leave once a day  
to eat  
and in the evening  
to sleep,  
but otherwise  
she remains caged.

She would like very much  
to live  
but she is caged  
and cannot.

When I meet her—  
her hands deftly counting beneath the bars,  
or like a trapped bird set free for an hour  
threading strange winds with awkward feathers  
that still might dare to fly—

we talk  
in little gusts  
until the hour clangs  
and rattles against the empty bars.

Each day long a thin procession  
shuffles past her cage  
and her long fingers  
stir and tremble  
like narrow wings

but there are no children here  
to clatter sticks against the grate  
and shout,

sybil  
hey, strange one  
what is it that you want  
sybil?

In the village  
there is a bird trapped,  
she would like very much  
to fly  
but she is caged  
and cannot.

Hang  
ing

rigid  
like (Jesus  
before he died)

then

rising  
dropping

wings chopping  
silently gliding

now  
lanced

suddenly  
falling  
down  
the  
sky:

Cormorants  
in the wind.

## BLUE FLOWERS DIE

In London, in the poorer tenement section, there was a kind of bar called Gimby's. It occupied the corner of the street and children and old men alike came to purchase liquor for their parents or themselves.

A young man was sitting in Gimby's at one of the makeshift wooden tables one afternoon in summer. The man's hair was dark and his eyes were tired and the way his hands moved showed his weariness and his depression.

A child came in, smiling, and climbed up on one of the stools which encircled the counter. She was rather a pretty child, having pale straight hair and colourless eyes. but her hair was tangled and her eyes had a sickly lustre. The skin of her face was tight and smooth. She wore a green dress, longish and sleeveless and on her feet were brown sandals. Her smile alone made the thin face enchanting.

She asked for three of the regular and Gimby disappeared behind the curtained entrance to some inner room. The child swung around on the rotating stool and watched to see if her dress would form a circle around her. It did not; it was too long. The man at the table gazed at her, wondering.

Gimby reappeared with the three bottles and she left carrying them. She walked slowly up the street towards her mother's tiny flat. Cars purred out to country homes. Men in underclothes stood at windows, their shirts dingy white against their loose yellow skin.

The child quickened her step; her mother needed the parcel under her arm. She pretended it was a picnic basket as it really had been a lovely day for a picnic. But it was almost dusk and over the hill the child could only barely see the towers of her castle. She smiled inwardly.

-----  
That night in another part of the same district the man who had been sitting at Gimby's in the afternoon wrote a short poem.

Great God!

*that this child should realize  
that as a sand castle crumbles  
a blue flower dies,  
that as she grows in stature  
she should open her eyes.*

The young man lay back on the mattress and looked at the wire bedstead behind his head and the naked light hanging from the ceiling. He heard water in the pipe outside the window fall to the street beneath him, heard people moving above him, heard children calling and parents shouting, heard taps dripping, the water returning to its quiet immovable mother, the Thames. He pulled a thin blanket around his shoulders and stared unseeing at the cracking plaster.



'CANTATA'

Sand,  
Dun-coloured, copper cast  
(Cold opulence covering ragged veins)  
Sky/Sea  
White-fretted; Spray-etched  
This natural trinity . . . .  
*Er kommt, Er kommt*

And again I hear  
The down-thrust music of the heart.

GLENCOE

Bare brown earth  
Laced with snow,  
A chill wind hissing stiffly  
Through dead grasses,  
Unsettling the withered ghosts  
Of a shameful past.  
The mist touches the hills  
With probing, icy fingers.  
They shudder softly, and whisper,  
*Tha sinn fuar . . .*  
We are cold, we are cold. . . .

## PRETTY HARD AFTER THREE MONTHS

There was always a standing order for twenty men a day, posted in the local villages or in the employment offices of the towns big enough to have them, and that's just about how many came and went.

Red and eleven others that couldn't get work in the Sudbury mines had hitch-hiked to North Bay and had signed on with the railways when they found they could get jobs at a buck-five an hour laying new steel out of Merrickville. They'd been drunk as hell when they joined on, but they needed the job. The foreman didn't mind that they were drunk, because he had to start laying twenty-two miles of new track on Monday, and wouldn't have time to pick up a new crew before Tuesday. It's pretty hard keeping a steel-gang around after pay-day.

It was a rough ride down from North Bay. Most of the men that had stayed were mean drunk. Anyway, Red kept quiet while the circus train came down from North Bay. Everybody on the railroad called the steel-gang the circus. A lot of guys were pretty funny all right. He'd lain on his mattress with all his clothes on and mostly watched the other men in the sleeper car. The commissary car hadn't been open to he couldn't rent a blanket or pillow, so he kept his clothes on, except that he took off his boots. Besides, the mattress was pretty dirty. He didn't much like the smell of the cars with everybody so drunk. When everybody is drunk, someone is always bound to be sick. Besides, he'd just left home that morning.

His eleven friends left Monday night. It's not that laying rails is so hard, cause they've got lots of machines now that they didn't have before, but it's still pretty hard the first day. Anyone new was always put at the end of the gang with a spiking hammer — to straighten and drive the spikes that held down the new rails that the men at the front were laying. Most of the spikes were put in by machines, but sometimes they put them in crooked and they had to be fixed. The new lads always straightened the bent spikes. They never let you near the machines when you're new. In a good day a foreman can lay six-hundred rails and that's over thirty-thousand spikes worth. In that many spikes there's bound to be a lot that didn't go in right.

The miners never counted their spikes, but they must have fixed a lot in their first day cause their hands were pretty blistered and bleeding. None of them had gloves that first day and a twenty-five pound spiking hammer is awkward at the beginning, but still there were a lot of spikes to handle. Red's hands were pretty damn sore, but he didn't leave Monday night.

"Geez Chrize," he said, "Ain't no sense in leavin'. Ain't no other job. They should have know'd it'd be bad on the first day. Any job's that way. But Chrize it's bad out here the first day."

"How long you think you'll last, Red?" Arnie asked.

"Chrize, I'll last don't worry. Them other guys is headed back home already. No sense in that, they know there ain't no jobs, not even at Inco. We tried. It can't be that bad here. How long you been on anyway?"

"Three months."

"See. If you can make it, I guess I can. I mean these hammers ain't so bad once you catch on. But it's still pretty bad the first day." Still, Red seemed kind of proud that he had lasted. "Look at them hands blister."

"You should be wearing gloves. Your hands sweat more but they don't blister." Arnie sort of picked at his own callouses.

"Yeah. I guess I'll get gloves. My hands hurt all right. But I'll last. Those other bastards would have left even if they'd only had to sweep out the boarding cars."

This was a big steel gang. It had two foremen and about four or five strawbosses. You could always tell the foremen because they wore different clothes everyday. Usually they smoked pipes or filter cigarettes. It's damn hard to smoke a pipe when you're swinging a hammer or canting a rail. The foremen seldom yelled. Once there had been a guy who used to blow a whistle when he wanted the men to start work in the morning. Everybody just sort of stood there and watched him blow his whistle. He was transferred up north someplace. Anyway, you never really saw too much of the foremen because they spent most of their day on a motor car going from one end of the gang to the other. Once a hundred and twenty men get moving, they can spread out over a couple of miles of track. So the foremen had a lot to watch. Even the strawbosses didn't yell much. They knew how much steel their men could lay in fourteen hours so they didn't talk too much about it. They didn't do much work but they had to watch. Sometimes they swore, but only when there

was no water for their boys, or when it was too hot. After all, even watching and walking gets to be hot when it's the weather of July.

"Chrize, it's pretty damn hot." Red took off his gloves and sat down on the rail while he waited for the water-boy, who was coming with his bucket from way down the tracks.

"You're getting a hell of a nice sun-burn too, Red." Arnie took off his gloves and set them on the rail, and then sat on them. That way you couldn't feel the rail being hot.

"Yeah, my goddam nose hurts like a bastard . . . you got a cig, Arnie?"

"Don't smoke. It's too dry to smoke. Cigarettes leave your mouth plenty dry anyway."

"Maybe, but I'd still like a cigarette. Sometimes a smoke goes real good. Where the hell is that water-boy anyway, I'd sure like a drink about now. Where do you figure he gets his water way out here?"

Arnie looked out into the fields, but didn't see any pump or windmill or cattle trough. "Sometimes he gets it from a spring. Sometimes the ditch."

"Hell! First you work like a bastard, then you drink in a ditch like a goddam dog. You know what besides . . . I'm only getting ninety-one cents an hour. The cruttin' foreman said a buck-five in North Bay."

"You don't get that till after two weeks," said Arnie standing up. The water-boy was coming.

They said he was an Indian from someplace around Fort William. Arnie always thought that Indians never shaved, but this one had about as black a Stalin moustache as he had ever seen. Maybe he wasn't an Indian, on account of the moustache, but everyone said he was. He sure was black enough, but that could have been the sun. Nobody ever asked him if he was an Indian or not. Even with the heat and the sweat, he always wore a long-underwear flannel top under a rolled-up sleeved flannel shirt. The shirt was a green and black plaid, and it was really wet where your shoulder blades move. The sweat trickled from his arms, out from under his undershirt, and out from under the shirt sleeves. Those kind of shirts take up a lot of water, so he must have been sweating pretty hard, to have it come out like that. It ran down his long arms and over his knuckles. Sometimes a drop would fall in his pail. His pants were wet at the knees from where he'd slopped water.

The pails must have been full a long time ago, because those patches of wet were almost dry now. Besides, there wasn't much water in the pails. It would be pretty warm too.

Red reached in with a cup and pulled out a draught. It trickled down his chin and ran onto his chest and he drank. "You didn't get this water in no goddam ditch did you?" He spat some on the rails and looked at the Indian.

"Hell no, there was an old pump back there. Cattle pump." Arnie had missed the pump the first time.

Red poured a cupful on his head and handed the cup to Arnie. "It don't taste too bad."

The Indian smiled, "Told you it didn't taste too bad. Not like that sulphur water we had before. No sir, this stuff don't taste too bad."

Arnie drank a cup, pretty slowly. It really wasn't too bad. He drank another cup. The bucket had been nearly empty, but the water wasn't warm. He guessed the guys had drunk most of it when the water-boy was on his way down the line.

"Guess you're just about out, eh?" said Red.

"Yeah just about out. Have to go for some more."

"What you need," said Arnie, "is a yoke. You know, like the farmers use to carry slop. It'd be good. You know, on your shoulders. It'd sure save your hands."

"Yeah . . . a yoke . . . I could use a yoke. Maybe I'll steal one when I get water at a barn sometime. A yoke would be pretty good."

The Indian didn't always talk funny. At night after he washed and shaved his hairy face, except for his moustache, he'd be very polite and quiet. But on the job he talked kind of like an echo. The Indian took his buckets and moved across the ballast road-bed and out towards the field.

"Chrize, it sure is hot." Red wiped his forehead with the bottom of his T-shirt and it came away sweaty. It was sweat greasy all over. He'd worn it both ways. Anyway, he didn't have but one other one, and he wore that at night after he had washed. "God, it would be good to go for a swim."

Arnie picked up his hammer and nodded. It was pretty damn hot all right. Too goddam hot. He watched the Indian priming the pump with what was left in his bucket.

"Christ, you know up in Sudbury I would have had a job. Inco probably would have hired me on. A friend of mine got a job

there for a buck-ninety an hour. He is a janitor. That's damn good money for sweeping floors. See what a union does. We got no union, so we get ninety-one cents an hour. Besides, he only works eight hours a day, and he don't get half as dirty as me."

He flexed his fingers and noted with some satisfaction that he had no new blisters. "I could have had the job if I'd showed up for the interview, but I went with those bastards and got drunk and went to North Bay. I wonder what those bastards are doing anyway."

Arnie was already two rails ahead of him. Each hammer handled alternate rails, so Red had to go like hell to catch Arnie. Arnie was a good man even when it was hot.

"I wonder what those bastards are doing?" Then Red remembered to put his gloves back on. "Goddam hammer anyway."

The foremen never really let their men stop at noon until the lunch wagon came up from the boarding cars. It came up the track that had been newly laid and so it was like being the first train up the new track. Noontime was good for the spikers at the back of the line because it meant they could be first in line for dinner. In a way it was good for the men at the front of the gang because they walked back to dinner on company time. But on the other hand, it was bad for them too, cause they had to walk back on their own time, because everybody started at one o'clock, no matter where they worked. Still it was bad for those at the front because it meant a lot of walking both ways. The spikers at the rear had the worst jobs, but at least they got to eat first, and could sit in any shade they could find until almost one o'clock.

The cooks came out on the motor cars with their pots and benches and set up what must be like any army field kitchen. They served a hot dinner cafeteria style, and you could usually get as much as you wanted to eat. Everyone paid two dollars and twenty-five cents a day board. But sometimes dinner wasn't so good, so you didn't eat much anyway. You could always tell where the gang had eaten. There were always scatterings of bread and cabbage and coffee grinds all over the rails. It was pretty messy all right, but no one ever took time from their meal hour to clean it up. The cooks usually sat around and drank coffee. The bread wrappers blew into the farmers' fields. The birds probably got the bread. Nobody would have wanted the cold cabbage. It wasn't even very good hot. Neither were the beans. Sometimes the stew was good, but

even a lot of that was on the ties. But mostly everybody ate the desserts. Usually the men carried their trays to the shade. Sometimes they sat on the rails if it wasn't too hot.

"Cripes, I wonder what those pals of mine are up to now." Red had finished his dessert and was kind of flicking beans off his tray and into the ferns that always seem to grow in the shade of those pines that live so well in the yellow sand. "Probably doing bugger-all," he concluded.

Arnie look up and then went on wrapping bits of frankfurter into his bread and then dipping it into the bean-juice, then swallowed it slowly.

"You know it wouldn't surprise me if they went back to Sudbury. I know they went back to Sudbury. What I mean is, it wouldn't surprise me if they had got jobs at Inco."

"I thought you said jobs were scarce in Sudbury. That's why you guys came down here in the first place, wasn't it?" Arnie had stopped chewing and watched the Indian water-boy sitting by himself on the rails, licking his plate. Maybe there wasn't any bread left. Anyway, Arnie still had a piece.

"Yeah, I know I could have had a job if I had only gone to the interview. Even sweeping floors is better than this cruttin' railroad. Besides, Inco's air-conditioned, no goddam sun-stroke there."

Arnie remembered the farm boy who had passed out from not wearing a hat. Christ, had he been sick. Everyone just watched him lie there, even the strawboss, and it had been Arnie who took off his T-shirt and dipped it in the ditch to wash off the face and neck of the farm boy, and had got three men to carry him into the bush where he first came to. The strawboss finally got a foreman with a motor car to stop, and the boy had gone in to Smith's Falls Hospital with Arnie's T-shirt soaked in water and wrapped around his head like a turban. His head had sunk between his knees, the way you always see a pro football player sit when he's sore about losing a game, or the way a runner hunches over after a mile, and his system is so screwed that he needs to vomit, but he can't even find the strength to work his throat.

"Besides, I could probably get a better job. I mean I'm young enough that I don't always got to sweep floors. There must be lots of jobs."

Arnie lay back in the shade and closed his eyes. He knew if you slept at noon in your sweat, you'd be so stiff by one o'clock that

you'd want to go in with the lunch-wagon and shove the whole business. He'd been on the job for three months and he was pretty hard by now. He could work most of a day without gloves if he had to. Yeah, he was pretty tough after three months, but noon hours were still bad, especially when it was hot. Arnie went to a college all winter.

“. . . and cripes, the way the strawboss treats us you'd think we were animals or something. Don't he know them hammers is heavy. I'd like to see him try to work one for fourteen hours. Laying all them rails goes good for the foreman, but what about us. They could let us sit in the shade sometimes. And this cruttin' food, I wouldn't feed it to a goddam pig, and them boarding cars smell like a regular boar's nest, with no water to wash in at night, and paying seventy-cents a night to the commissary for one stinking blanket. I got a good mind to chuck this business.”

Arnie didn't really hear him, because he was heading out for the tracks. It wasn't one, but the strawboss was getting a drink and the Indian was fixing to go down the line with the buckets and it probably would be three before he would be back. Besides, Arnie knew it was always good to be a little early. Especially if a strawboss was standing around. Usually when they stood around like that you knew it was pretty near one.

Anyway, Red was gone the next morning. He'd left with half a dozen lads that night after supper and after he had washed and put on his other T-shirt. It was still hot as hell long after mid-night, when a truck came down from Cornwall with a load of recruits. Some had suitcases and others carried those paper shopping bags. Some just had what they wore. They were pretty quiet in the cars and most of them went to bed right away when they heard that breakfast was served at five-thirty. There were about fourteen or so of them. There was always a standing order for at least that many.

## DAVID LOBDELL

### INTERMENT

Winter is not the easiest season  
Crushing the rain into ice-cubed wonder  
Consuming the fruits of forgotten summer  
Bleaching the iron-clad basics of life.

#### Winter

that great unmaker of passions  
Turns the pasture into an ocean  
Silvers the tiniest branch of the oak  
Shudders the world in its ice-clad horror  
Silences happiness  
Smothers hope.

#### Crushing

Consuming  
Unmaking and hard  
Winter despises the verb 'to be'  
(Except perhaps in its perfect tense  
And only then if not spoken too loud).

Winter is not the easiest season.

And here in the station  
Huddled  
And happy  
An old man sits  
Waiting  
And watching  
The hard white rain  
Pocking  
Annointing  
The winter air  
of a winter world.

In an unwanted corner  
He huddles  
Warm  
And perfectly happy  
Watching  
And waiting  
Waiting  
And watching  
Waiting for nothing  
Watching the snow.

And perfect  
    he thinks  
It's perfect  
To wait like this for nothing  
Here in this station  
Watching the snow  
Huddled  
Warm  
And perfectly happy.

His eyes try  
To follow each flake  
Each happy flake  
    as it crushes the air  
But those happy eyes  
Are heavy and human  
Detached and unable to understand  
That nothing is ever  
    as perfect as that.

Huddled  
Unwanted  
He watches  
And waits  
Reflects  
And perfects  
The silent thoughts  
    of a silent season  
Perfect thoughts  
    for a perfect year

Watching  
And waiting  
And perfectly happy  
With half an ear  
He becomes aware  
Of the talk around him  
The rollicking ocean of talk around him  
a holiday ocean of happy talk  
From a huddle of students  
Returning to homes  
For the slap-happy holiday season,  
A hungry huddle of waiting students  
Secure in their numbers  
Packed in their plastic bubble of dreams  
Safe from the virginal snow.

With just half an ear  
He becomes aware  
Of trebles  
And basses  
And in-between measures  
Of virginal voices piercing the air  
Of unconcerned slap-happy chatter  
    disturbing  
    the deep white sleep of the snow.

And suddenly  
    without reason or rhyme  
He thinks he would be a snow-pocked sparrow  
Tattered and torn in the hungry winds  
Than to huddle here  
Waiting  
Unwanted  
And watching  
Tattered and torn  
    in their slap-happy bubble of dreams.

The hydrogen bomb within him  
Screams for release  
    for a winter escape

Screams and they do not hear it  
Screams and they cannot see  
That watching behind those eyes that bulge  
With the unconcerned pressure of plastic words  
There lurks a something more perfect and whiter  
Than all of their virginal plastic dreams.

Huddled  
Unwanted  
He sits in his corner  
Wanting to say something

scream.

But how can he start to tell them it's wrong  
This endless chatter  
This meaningless prattle  
Of bottles  
And bashes  
And last night's dream?  
How can he tell them the wrong of it  
The imperfect meaningless wrong of it?  
Unconcerned

they would not understand.

They would say he was grown too old for them.  
Bottles and dreams are the world to them.  
Snow is white and that's all to them.  
Unconcerned

they would not understand.

And so he closes that half an ear  
And watches the snowflakes falling and falling  
Covering up the basics of life.  
And because it is perfect  
Because it is white  
He longs for its hunger to cover him  
Six feet deep and China-deep  
So deep that Spring would never discover  
So deep that the world would never know.

**the mitre**

**1964-65**



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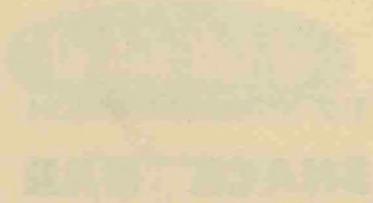
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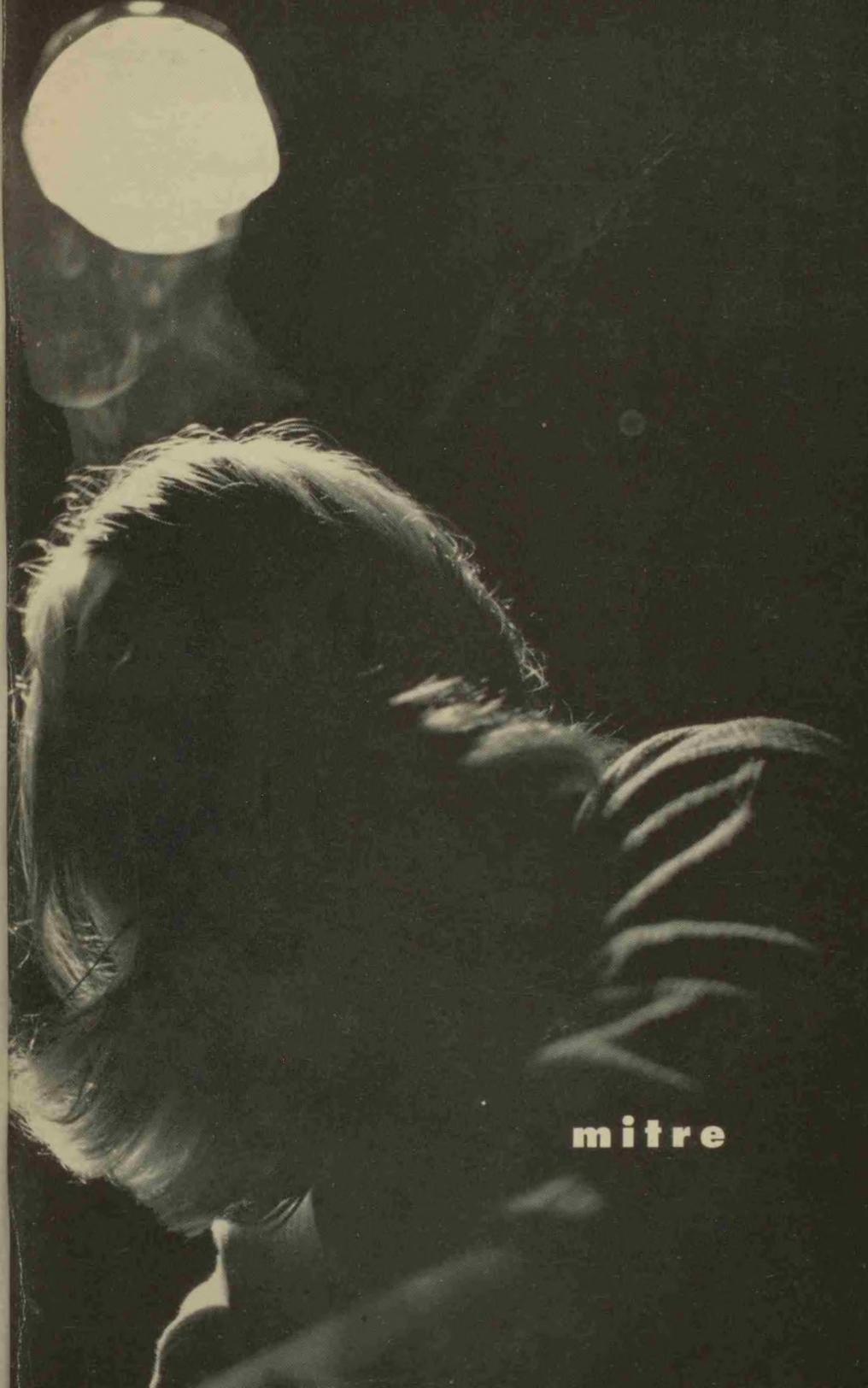


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