

---

# The Greyling Owl

## Order of Nine Angles

First issued: 1986 e.n.

This corrected version (v.1.03) issued 119 Year of Feyen

---

### Introductory Note

Unlike the other MSS in *The Deofel Quartet*, the magickal and "Sinister" aspects, themes, and nature, of this work are not overt, nor implicit nor obvious, and thus - exoterically - it does not appear to be a work of Sinister, or even of Occult, fiction.

However, it does describe several works of real (and hidden) magick, in the real world, undertaken by hidden Adepts for specific purposes.

---

!

York, 1976 e.n.

Colin Mickleman stared contentedly out of the window before refilling his large pipe. Three mallards sat on the bank of the artificial lake that formed the aesthetic and geometric centre of the University, and Colin rose to open the window to the warm Spring air before standing

in front of a mirror in his room.

Tall and sturdily built, his enjoyment of life's many pleasures had left him physically unaffected but he had begun to worry about his increasing baldness, and it was some minutes before he completed his now routine inspection of his hair. His thirtieth birthday was now some weeks away and, notwithstanding his youth, he had earned for himself, by reason of his hard work and diligence, a considerable reputation in the academic circle of philosophers. During his tenure at York he had been voted 'The Most Interesting Lecturer of the Year' many times. That this award, by the students, was partly sartorial did not concern him in the least and he derived great satisfaction from it.

His teaching commitments were not very heavy, and he would often spend an idle hour or so drinking tea in the offices of the Philosophy Department in Derwent College, talking to the Secretary and anyone else who chanced along. The topic of conversations on these occasions varied, and while at times he might discourse learnedly to a colleague on philosophical matters, he was as likely to be found – always with a lighted pipe – discussing the fate of the England middle order batting or the latest calamity to befall his beloved Sheffield Wednesday football team. Although born in Sheffield, he had spent only ten years there as a child, and his rather hazy memories of the place did not in any way affect his fierce loyalty to the team that he - with his father - had supported as a boy.

Yet it was not only his loyal support of this team that had earned him the nickname of 'The Owl'.

The owl is, by nature, a nocturnal creature, and although somewhat retiring by day, at night it is a predator. Colin Mickleman's prey were women.

He did not possess any particular preference regarding women, although over the years he had often found himself strongly desiring women whose views were opposed to his own and with a particular type of sensuous lips. In his search for prey, he never ventured from his University territory or the venues of the many and various conferences he attended, and the supply seemed inexhaustible. Every year there was new blood at the University.

Sometimes, his liaisons lasted several months, although the average was around two weeks, and he was careful almost to the point of obsession not to clutter his day with assignations. The day belonged to his work. Occasionally, a liaison would prove troublesome when a woman's emotions became involved, and on these occasions he would bury himself in his work and academic duties, trusting in his emotional indifference, since it was mostly the pleasure of a woman's body he desired and not a personal involvement. Perhaps the pattern of his conquests had been set by the mental effort of his youth and

family situation, but however it had arisen it did not concern him much. As a boy nurtured by the hilly terraced streets of Sheffield between his father's factory and the Corporation Baths, his pursuits and interests had been those of any boy his age and class, and it was not until his family had moved to Leeds by virtue of his mother having to care for elderly relatives that his ardour for learning – as well as his desire to be somewhat different and escape from what he regarded as the drab limitations of his parents' life – was aroused.

The light in his room was growing dimmer as the sun set and he sat down at his desk to collect together the scattered pages of the article he had spent the day writing. His room filled a modest space on the ground floor of Goodricke College, and he had chosen it in preference of the large, but dull, flats normally reserved for members of the academic staff. He liked the view of the lake, the grassy bank with its weeping willow trees, and the three post-Graduate students with whom he shared a corridor and kitchen were quiet and unassuming companions.

The article pleased him, as his style of life did. He was content, teaching, publishing articles, writing his book on philosophy – and adding to his list of female conquests. He kept a list of the names of the women with whom he had had sexual relations, and he took it briefly from a locked drawer in his desk, smiling to himself, before he re-read his article. Soon, he felt, the academic adulation he desired would be his.

The knock on his door annoyed him, disturbing his reverie, and he sighed deeply before opening the door.

Alison, her eyes puffy and red, stood outside in the corridor.

“Yes?” he asked as if he did not know her.

She began to cry and he watched in astonishment as she sat on his bed with her head in her hands. Her wailing annoyed him, and he sat at his desk to refill his pipe. She was a second year Undergraduate of passionate intensity, and as he watched her he began to think of stratagems that might bring their relationship to a satisfying end.

Nevertheless, a part of him resented the stratagems that the cynical Owl proposed, and he rose to sit beside her before regaining control of himself and returning to his desk.

“Do you love me?” she asked suddenly.

When he did not answer, she wiped away her tears with her hands. "I have something to tell you," she whispered.

He looked suspiciously at her as if correctly guessing. She was watching him, and waiting for his reaction and he was glad when someone else knocked on his door. He bounded across the room to open it, and stood staring at the man in the corridor.

Edmund Arrowsmith had known Colin for over ten years, and was not surprised to find a woman in the room of his friend. He had travelled a long way and eased the heavy weight of his large rucksack off his shoulder for a moment.

"I can come back," he said.

"No, it's alright!" Colin replied. "Come in! This," he said, pointing, "is Alison."

She looked at Edmund, but did not return his smile of greeting and he eased his rucksack onto the floor.

"Well then," said Colin amicably to him, "what's your latest hair-brained scheme?"

Edmund looked pained. "Actually, I'm off to join a community."

Colin laughed, turned to Alison and said, "This is he! Ex-student, ex-political agitator, ex-mercenary, now soon to be ex- something else!"

He stood up, stretched and yawned. "I'll make some tea," he said before searching among the books and papers that lay in profusion on his desk. He gave Edmund a copy of his latest published article.

Alison watched Colin leave, but the invitation she hoped for did not come. She saw Edmund study a few sections of the article carefully, glance at the rest and then throw it back upon the desk.

"What are you studying?" he asked her.

“Music,” she said sharply and instantly regretted it.

“Then what instrument do you play?”

His eyes gave the impression of looking straight through her, and she felt there was something sinister about him which his outward appearance belied. His boots were well worn, his dull woollen shirt patched and his trousers well made and old, his face and arms deeply tanned. Only the gauntness of his face and his staring eyes betrayed him.

“Violin,” she said softly, turning to look out of the window.

“Oh, I see.”

Suddenly, she turned toward him. “What’s wrong with the violin?” she demanded aggressively.

Edmund smiled. “I just imagined you’d play something else – the piano.”

“Of course I play the piano!”

“Which do you prefer?”

“It’s not a question of ‘which do I prefer’! It’s a question of what music I choose to play.”

“I’d like to hear you play sometime.”

The question was so unexpected and so sincerely meant that Alison did not know what to say in reply and she was glad that Colin returned at that moment.

“What do you think?” he asked Edmund, pointing to the article and carefully laying two mugs of tea upon the corner of the desk.

“Not bad – style’s a bit turgid.”

Colin squinted at him. “You have to write like that – Editors expect it.”

“Doesn’t say much for Editors does it?”

Alison began to laugh, then thought better of it. “Where’s mine, then?” she asked, indicating the mugs.

“But you don’t like tea,” Colin protested.

“True! But I’d like to be asked.”

They glowered at each other for some moments.

“I need to stretch my legs a bit,” Edmund said as he stood, sensing an intrusion. “See you in, say, half an hour?”

He did not wait for a reply and as he walked down the corridor he could hear Colin and Alison shouting at each other. He caught the words; “I haven’t seen him for over a year!” But in the deserted and otherwise silent corridor it was Alison’s words that he carried out with into the warm, still air of Spring. They were sad words, perhaps even tragic, he thought, given the knowledge of his friend, and he stood outside the building for some minutes, looking across the lake as it scintillated under the now glowing lights of Vanbrugh College. “Don’t you understand,” Alison had shouted, “I’m pregnant!” and Edmund allowed the temporary peace of his academic surroundings to calm him as he walked toward the lake.

II

Edmund had always like the University since he had visited it many years ago. Spread over a two hundred acre site, its centrepiece was the fifteen-acre lake and despite the modernity of its buildings, he felt a harmony had been achieved unlike anything else he had seen in modern academia. This was partly due, he knew, to the planned and the fortuitous bird-life that had gathered around the lake, and partly because of the transplantation of mature trees

around the campus. He particularly liked the tall, broad Chestnut trees. Even the large Central Hall adjacent to the lake and near the fountain that shot water high into the air, did not seem out of place among the Weeping Willows that lined the banks and the Cherry trees that frequented the paths. The Hall was a semi-octagon, its upper stories cantilevered above the water and, planned or otherwise, it dominated the site. The whole effect pleased Edmund, although he felt the multitude of students spoiled it.

He sat for a long time by the lake, watching night fall and students pass. When he did rise, a sense of caution led him to walk slowly, and as he reached the residential block containing Colin's room, he saw Alison in animated conversation with a young man; she was trying to restrain his arm but he pushed her away. Edmund walked across the grass, smiled at Alison, and entered the building.

Colin was in the kitchen, a teapot in his hand, while beside him stood a young man clenching a carving knife.

"You bastard!" he was shouting, "you bloody bastard!"

Edmund went toward him.

"Stay out of this!" the young man growled.

Colin appeared to be mildly amused and swiftly, Edmund kicked the knife from the man's hand. It spun toward the roof, and then fell to clatter harmlessly into the sink. The man rushed toward Edmund who blocked the intended punch and pinned his assailant against the wall in an arm lock.

"He's drunk," Colin said by way of explanation. "Fancy some tea?"

"Please," Alison said as she stood by the door, "let him go."

"Her brother," Colin explained.

Cautiously, Edmund released him, and Alison's brother bent over the sink, vomiting.

“I’m sorry,” Alison said to Edmund as she attended to her brother.

“Is he alright?” Edmund asked her.

“I’ll take him to his room.”

After they had gone, Edmund said, “What are you going to do?”

“Have some tea!”

“About Alison, I meant.”

Colin squinted, as was his habit. “You know then?”

“Yes.”

The smell of vomit was strong, and Edmund flushed it away before turning to his now ashen-faced friend. “Come on, fresh air is what you need.”

They stood on the bridge over the edge of the lake.

“What will you do?” asked Edmund again.

Colin sighed. “She’ll have to have an abortion,” he said without conviction.

“What does she want?”

“She’s done this to try and trap me. She said she’d taken precautions.”

“You don’t feel responsible, then? Edmund asked.

“Of course not. She’s over eighteen.”



“You don’t feel in the slightest bit responsible?”

“No.” He stared down at the water, watching the scattering of light from the profusion of illumination near then and around the whole campus. He felt the transitory bloom of his thought would be crushed by Alison’s weight – the inertial weight of a childbearing body.

“You do care, really, don’t you?” Edmund said after the long silence.

Colin sighed, although it was not the sigh of the cynical Owl, still less that of the academic philosopher who watched life as it unfolded around his chosen dwelling. “I never misled her about my intentions,” he said.

“You don’t like women much, do you?”

“What?” Colin’s face was a carefully contrived combination of wounded pride and annoyance.

“Not as they are – in themselves. For you they are just reflectors of your self image.”

Colin was considering his answer when an obese man in a crumpled suit approached them. He was panting, and sweat dribbled from his forehead. He held a book in his hand from which protruded several sheets of notepaper. The man smiled at Colin, wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief, and thrust the papers at him.

“Sorry.” He explained, sucking in his lower lip, “reader’s report against it. Glad I caught you, Colin. Sorry, but I’m late already.”

Colin took the sheaf of papers. “Thanks.”

“Better luck next time, eh?” the man smirked before wobbling away.

“The bastard!” Colin said mutely.

“Friend of yours, then?” Edmund asked.

Colin glanced through his rejected article, and then stuffed it into his pocket. “That was Doctor Richard Storr, Ph.D. (Oxon) – infamous editor of the British Journal of Philosophy and – would you believe it – my Head of Department!”

“He’s the Professor?”

“Thankfully, no. But he’s in charge until one is appointed.”

“I gather you two are not on friendly terms.”

Colin ignored the question. “So how long are you staying this time?”

“A few days – maybe longer.”

For several minutes Colin was silent. Then, taking money from his pockets, he trust it at Edmund saying, “Here, get yourself something to eat. I’ll see you later tonight.”

“Where are you going?”

Colin hunched up his shoulders and wrung his hands. “To forget!”

He left his friend standing on the bridge and walked quickly back to his room to collect his camera. It did not take him long to arrange his assignation, and he waited by the road that intersected the campus beneath the walkway that siphoned students to and from the Library.

“Well,” he said as he climbed into the car, which stopped for him and held out his camera, “have you decided?”

The woman smiled at him. She was several years older than Mickleman, a Lecturer in English, her oval face graced by large blue eyes and framed by straight tawny hair. For months she had resisted his flattery and attentions. Her body showed a slight tendency toward corpulence, and Mickleman had lusted after it. She was polite where he was often gruff; her office tidy whereas his was chaotic. They taught the same Undergraduate student

and it was from this student that he had come to know of Magarita's existence. All her students held her in awe and it was this one fact which led Mickleman to seek her out and begin to plan his seduction. It was over a month ago since he had succeeded, and he had sown the seeds for the next stage of his conquest.

“You'll develop them yourself?” Magarita asked him, still unsure.

“Yes,” he lied before putting down his camera and rubbing his hands together gleefully.

### III

Alison was alone again in the quietness of a practice room in the Music Department, and sat down on the piano stool to re-read her diary.

‘The corridor was dark - all the rooms were closed and I felt afraid. I could not bear a repeat of my last visit – the angry words, the tears, needs that were not fulfilled, things left unsaid. I remember I said: “It's better if I never see you again” – hoping he would plead with me to stay. He said nothing. I couldn't resist any more: ‘What shall I do?’ I cried, catching the lapels of his jacket, tears on them, my tears as I clung to him, trying to make a bridge. ‘Come on Wednesday’ he struggled to say. ‘On Wednesday,’ I repeated.

Such a dark corridor, outside. Last time I just stood in the kitchen, kicking the door and shouting at it: ‘Why do you never understand me!’ Yet I was back again – I had no pride left. Was this need really love? What would I say this time? Could I find a way of letting him understand – of getting through? I knocked on his door. ‘Come in’. The voice was subdued. He was sitting in his chair I remember as if it was a moment ago. Dispirited. ‘What is it?’ I wondered if all relationships were like this – so charged with emotion. ‘Your letter, your letter,’ he struggled to say. ‘I've hurt you,’ I whispered with awe. Then, sitting on his lap, my head against him, buried. Crying. ‘It's alright.’ A soft voice, a soft touch on my face.

It did not last. ‘Are you pleased to see me?’ I asked. ‘About as pleased as a Mickleman can be.’ Then, the inevitable wandering hand. The moment gone, and never repeated.

Only a month ago, she sighed; before I knew my fate. She put down the diary, thought of tearing it up, but did not. Then she began to play the piano, an Intermezzo by Brahms, transforming her feelings into her performance. And at its end, she sat, quite still, trying to recapture the beauty she had felt.

*'I feel,'* she wrote in her diary, *'only music can lead me to the knowledge I am seeking. I want to be at peace – when I play, I am at peace.'* What then, she thought, of the child now growing within her womb?

She did not know, and rose to walk slowly out of the building. She did not bother to seek Colin's room, but walked aimlessly along the paths, her face downturned.

"Hello!" a cheerful voice said to her.

It was some moments before she recognized the speaker.

"Are you alright?" Edmund asked her.

"Fine." She looked around, but could not see Colin.

"I'm just going to get something to eat. Would you like to join me?"

Eating was repellent to her but in atonement for the guilt she felt she said, "Yes."

She shuffled after Edmund toward the dining hall to join the small queue that babbled past the serving hatch. The dead and steaming flesh behind the glass cages nauseated her, as the gaggles of students at the tables annoyed her, and she followed Edmund's example by selecting a salad. Near her, someone laughed while they walked balancing a tray full of food. "I suppose" his companion said, "nothing matters but the quality." He looked at Alison and smiled.

For some reason Alison wanted to slap the young man's face, but the feeling soon vanished, and she followed Edmund to an empty table where she sat under the bright lights prodding her lifeless food.

“Aren’t you hungry?” Edmund asked her kindly.

“Not for food.” Then she was laughing at herself. “God! I’m beginning to sound like a cheap novel!”

“Surely you mean a character from a cheap novel?”

She stared at him, suddenly angry and defensive. Then she smiled. “Sorry.”

“It’s alright.”

She was surprised at the warmth in his words and in his eyes. “Would you,” she said impetuously, “like me to play some music for you?”

“Yes, I would. Very much indeed.”

“Come on, then!” She grasped his hand to lift him up from the table, then suddenly took it away thinking he might misconstrue her gesture.

She walked with him at a brisk pace back to the practice room. She was impatient to begin without quite understanding why. The Partita she played was followed by Brahms and then more Brahms while Edmund sat on the floor, listening. She seemed to play for a long time, and when she stopped she rested her incandescent face in her hands.

“Beautiful,” Edmund said.

She shrugged her shoulders. “I made a lot of mistakes.”

“I didn’t notice any.”

She smiled at being caught out. “What do you think of Brahms?”

“Nice.”

She was offended. “Nice? Is that all?” she said, a trace of anger in her voice.

“What do you think of his music then?” he countered.

“Sublime!”

“Possibly – sometimes.”

“You’re not serious? He is unsurpassed. Unsurpassable!”

“Everything can be surpassed – its just a question of will and genius.”

“Not today it isn’t – in this decadent culture.”

“Culture is only genuine culture if it smells of blood.”

She stared at him, but he smiled. His statement was so out of place with his benign expression she ignored it.

“What are you going to do?” he suddenly asked her.

She looked at him suspiciously, then turned away. “What do you mean?” she asked softly.

“I overheard – earlier on.”

She blushed, and shuffled her feet. “He’s offered to live with me.”

“And do you want that?”

“I don’t know.” Then, cheerfully: “ I don’t think he does, though!”

“No – I can’t really imagine him living a life of domestic bliss.”

“What do you think of him?”

“I think he is a genius.”

“Really?” she asked in astonishment.

“Intellectually, yes. Perhaps he needs to become a bit more human, though. Anyway, what do you want to do with your life?”

“I’d like to compose something,” she said enthusiastically, “something beautiful and profound.”

“Like Brahms’ Fourth Symphony?”

She looked at him quizzically. “I thought you didn’t like Brahms?”

“I never actually said that.”

She sighed. “We all have impossible dreams.”

He gave his enigmatic smile. “Some of us make them a reality.”

“Oh, yes?” she said.

Edmund turned his face away slightly, and her first thought was that she had offended him until she realized he was listening. She strained to hear what it was, but was surprised when Colin appeared at the door.

“Thought you’d be in here” Colin said to Alison. Then, seeing Edmund, he added “He been having an attack of his verbal diarrhoea?”

“She played some Brahms for me,” Edmund said as he stood up.

“Romantic cretin,” Colin muttered.

“I’m surprised,” Edmund said, “that you in your modernist existence have heard of him – let alone heard him.”

“Goes on a bit, doesn’t he?” Colin said to Alison.

“Had fun, then?” Edmund countered, pointing at the camera Colin held.

Colin ignored the remark. “You eaten, yet?” he asked Alison.

“Yes, thank you,” she said curtly and began to play the piano.

Colin winced.

“I gather,” Edmund said to him, “you don’t like Bach either?”

“Baroque cretin. Well, I’m going to have something to eat. “You coming?” he asked Edmund.

“In a while.”

Disgruntled, Colin left them to walk along the concrete path toward the bridge. He had not gone far when he realized he was being followed. The man was tall, his suit in contrast to his milieu, and Colin waited on the bridge for the man to pass him by. Instead, the man stopped, and waited. Colin walked on, the man followed, keeping his distance. He slowed his pace and the man did likewise. But when he reached the dining hall and turned around again the man had gone.

Alison had ceased her playing shortly after Colin had left the room.



“I suppose,” she said, “we’d better join him – or he’ll sulk all evening.”

“Have you ever thought of performing – professionally?”

“I’m not that good.”

“Yes you are.”

“Anyway,” she said and touched her abdomen with her hand, “it’s out of the question, now.”

“Not necessarily.”

Her look was one of disapproval, and they did not speak as they left the room and the building to walk the brightly lit paths. As they neared the dining hall, a tall man dressed in a suit stepped out from the shadows and come toward them.

“Excuse me,” Edmund said to Alison. “Tell Colin I’ll see him early tomorrow morning.”

She saw Edmund talk briefly with the man before she walked into the hall. Colin sat by himself at a table eating, rather gluttonously she thought, from a plate full of steaming food.

“He said,” she remarked as she sat beside him, “that he’d see you tomorrow.”

“Typical. Always disappearing mysteriously. That’s Edmund.”

“You are really fond of him, aren’t you?” she said, surprised by his obvious disappointment.

“Have you decided what you are going to do yet?”

“Go home – for a while at least.”

“I meant – “

“I know what you meant.”

Colin squinted at her. “What?” Then, annoyed by his own affectation, he said, “I meant what I said.”

“Part of you did, at least.” Colin’s presence – so physically near and yet so emotionally distant – made her feel like crying.

He saw this, and then nervously looked around.

“Don’t worry,” she said, “I won’t embarrass you by crying.”

He was about to answer when a young lady, colourfully dressed and possessed of a freckled face and an athletic build, shouted from the doorway of the hall.

“Hi Colin!” she said and sauntered to their table. “I’m so glad I found you!” She sat down. “What a day!” As if becoming aware of Alison, she turned toward her. “Hi! I’m Maren!”

“And I am just leaving,” Alison replied, having seen Colin’s eyes widen in gleeful remembrance as he looked at Maren.

“But – “ he began to say, then faltered, torn between his desire for Maren and his feeling of responsibility toward Alison. In his indecision, he let Alison walk away.

“You know,” Maren said to him, “that exhibition in John’s Gallery today? Well – you should have seen how they displayed my painting! Horrible, absolutely horrible. I objected, of course. And tried to explain to Jenny – she was with me – the ultimate meaning of having it displayed just right. You know what I mean, don’t you? Well, she – Jenny that is – she was so caught up in her own problems, she didn’t understand. And John! How he could devalue the exquisite contents of the painting that way, I’ll never know.

She took a drink from his glass of water. “You know what I dread, Colin? Dread most of all? The inevitable threat of being passé. Shall we have some fun tonight?” She looked around the dining hall. “Shake the cretins up a bit?”

Colin smiled at her and she smiled back.

#### IV

It took several minutes for Colin Mickleman to realize where he was. The curtains were still closed, but enough light penetrated for him to make out the contents of his room.

Normally he placed a glass of water beside his bed before he went to sleep. But this morning it was not there, and he yawned. His yawning occupied him for some minutes while he recovered some of his strength that his debauch of the night before had dissipated. Maren, at his insistence, had left his bed in the early hours of the morning, for he like to sleep alone.

Finally, after much yawning, sighing and stretching of his arms, he rose from his bed to begin his extensive toilet. When he was dressed, groomed and washed to his satisfaction, he sat at his desk for several minutes watching the lake through his window and smoking his pipe. He was thinking what to do about Alison when someone knocked at his door.

Edmund stood in the corridor, smiling in such a way that the ends of his mouth came very close to his ears.

“Lovely day, isn’t it?” Edmund said cheerfully. “Like some breakfast?” He held out a plate containing eggs, bacon and tomatoes.

Colin hunched his shoulders. “I hate people like you in the mornings.” Grumpy, he shuffled away to open the window in his room.

“Breakfast?” Edmund repeated.

“I don’t eat breakfast.”

“I wondered why your growth was stunted. More for me, then. Want some coffee?”

“I haven’t got any coffee – or any food for that matter.”

“Never mind.” He went to the kitchen to eat.

Colin joined him, but only to obtain a drink of water.

“Any plans for today?” Edmund asked.

“Lectures – then a meeting. I’ll meet you in the ‘Well’ in Derwent at twelve.”

“Sure you won’t have something to eat?” He held out a piece of bacon on the end of his fork.

Colin muttered something incomprehensible before returning to his room. Outside, in the bright sun, students seethed along the paths and he joined them as he made his way to his lecture. He disliked the lecture room with its high windows and bright, impersonal lights, but was glad to find all his first year students present and waiting. Of the women, Kate had been conquered already, but she ignored his smile as he remembered his photographs of her, locked in the drawer of his desk in the privacy of his room. His favourite among them was of her standing on a chair by his door, lifting her skirt to reveal her nakedness, the ginger tufts of pubic hair. She had held her head to one side, as if wearily obeying his desire to make her look ridiculous, her brown eyes staring at the camera and her mass of ginger curls slightly in disarray around her shoulders.

Of the others present, only Fenton did not turn his eyes away from Colin’s gaze. Instead, he stared directly at the Owl, as if understanding. He wore a long scarf and un-fashionable clothes, and the badge of his lapel proclaimed him as a supporter of the ‘Gay Liberation Front’. Not for the first time, Colin felt uneasy looking at him and turned his gaze elsewhere.

“Right,” Colin said, rubbing his hands together as was his habit. “I can see you’re all keen for me to begin.” He checked the pocket of his jacket to make sure his pipe was there. It was. “Now, in many ways, modern philosophy is considered to have begun with Descartes...”

He kept the attention of his students for the allotted span, and watched with satisfaction as they all, with the exception of Fenton, closed their notebooks with what seemed to be reluctance as he sidled into the corridor outside. Fiona Pound was ahead of him, her thin

cotton dress swaying as she walked. Underneath it, he sensed she was naked.

Unusually, the door of his room in the Department was open, but everything seemed in its familiar place – the stuffed owl on the bookcase, the picture of Sheffield Wednesday football team on the wall, the chaos of books upon floor and desk – and he sat down to fill his pipe, pleased with the newly acquired copy of Laclos' "Les Liaisons Dangereuses", bound in black leather. The fact that he did not speak French did not diminish his enjoyment in the least.

With his academic aims always in mind, Colin was scrupulous almost to the point of obsession about being on time for meetings and lectures, and it came as an unwelcome surprise to find himself late for the Departmental meeting. Fiona smiled at him as he entered the room; Whiting and Hill ignored him while Storr, as usual, seemed anxious and nervous. Horton sat in his usual corner by the window, dressed in the inevitable tweeds, ignoring everybody including Mrs. Cornish with whom, for the past fifteen years, he had been conducting an illicit affair.

"Sorry I'm late," said Colin as he sat next to Fiona.

Storr grunted and then expectorated loudly. "We were discussing," he said, "Mrs. Pound's new course in Philosophy of Society."

Colin nodded his head like a coot and proceeded to ignore what Storr was saying. The staff sat on both sides of a long table with Storr at their head. Beside the table and its chairs, the room contained some bookcases and magazine racks while the walls were covered with charts. Storr loved charts and spent a great deal of time creating them. Among his latest ventures were: 'The Frequency Of Post-Graduate Research Topics', Undergraduate Performance in Relation to School Achievement' and (Colin's favorite) 'Continuity in Staff/Student Relations'. Colin's own chart, showing the rise to fame of Sheffield Wednesday, had not lasted very long on the wall.

Mrs. Cornish, a middle-aged lady of somewhat stern countenance was smoking one of her small cigars, while Horton continued solving his crossword puzzle. He was the most senior member of the staff, and coveted the Professorship, his disdain of Departmental meetings being matched by his own dislike of Storr whom he called a 'smelly twerp'.

Storr's confederates, Whiting and Hall, seemed to be avidly devouring the words of their Master, and Colin concentrated on Fiona whose perfume pleased him. She was leaning forward, apparently listening to Storr, and resting her elbows on the table in such a way that several inches of her bronzed flesh were visible in the neckline region of her dress. Her

face, like the rest of her body, was tanned, and Colin thought her green eyes offset beautifully the red hair that advancing age had left untouched. Twice married, and divorced, Mickleman had pursued her avidly during his first year in the Department but her skill was equal to if not surpassed his own, and she had kept her distance. But her challenge and enigma remained for him, breeding a dark desire.

Mrs. Cornish was watching him ogle Fiona, and he winked at her. She pretended not to notice. Her hair was flaxen, gathered awkwardly on her head, and it had occurred to Colin many times that he would like to see her stand on a chair in his room, naked. With the photographs he would take, her power and authority – at least for him - would be broken.

“Er,” Storr was saying, his diatribe apparently over, “I think we should all, er, congratulate Mrs. Pound on the success of this new venture of hers. Don’t you all agree?”

“Yes!” Chimed Hill with bovine expression, “good show!”

He showed his large white teeth to everyone.

“Thank you,” smiled Fiona. “As you know,” she continued in her precise, accentless way, “this subject is very dear to me and I would just like to say – “

“What, again?” growled Horton.

“Er, did you have a point to make, Mr. Horton?” asked Storr meekly.

“Can’t we get on? Heard it all before and it’s all drivel. What next on the agenda, Storr?”

“I say!” protested Hill. Fiona and Storr, like himself, were Oxford graduates. Horton was a Cambridge man.

“If I could say a word – “ began Whiting in his slow way. He had studied at Keele, and everybody except Colin ignored him.

“You’ve said six already,” growled Horton.

Whiting's thin, droopy, moustache began to twitch.

"Yes, Richard," Mrs. Cornish said with a smile to Storr, "what is next? We really ought to press on."

"Well, er," Storr said, getting the notes in front of him into a terrible mess. "I think it's a memorandum from the Vice-Chancellor. It's here somewhere." He fumbled among his notes and papers before smiling and wiping his forehead with his brightly coloured silk handkerchief. About selection policy."

Colin watched Storr with amusement.

"I don't seem to be able to find it at the moment," Storr said.

"Typical!" Horton scowled, and continued with his crossword puzzle.

Storr ignored him, "But I do, er, remember most of its contents. We are to take a more favourable attitude to ethnic minorities – be flexible in accepting those without, ah, formal qualifications."

This was too much for Horton. He flung down his newspaper. "You mean lower our already disastrously low entrance standards to let more of them in!"

"Mr. Horton, please!" chided Fiona.

"Ruddy stupid idea!" Horton said.

"The Government," continued Storr, "has asked – "

"Might have known," Horton grunted, "it was those bunch of damn fools!" He rustled his newspaper loudly.

"The Vice-Chancellor says – and I must admit I agree with him – " Storr said, " – that they should be encouraged. And in view of our policy toward, er, mature candidates, he

considers we, that is this Department, should make a determined start in this direction.”

“We are a University,” Horton said gruffly, “not an unemployment training scheme!”

“I believe we have, er, a valuable role to play in ensuring equality of opportunity.”

“Why don’t you ruddy well say what you mean instead of waffling like a twerp!”

“Sorry?”

“Gentlemen, please,” Fiona said, smiling at Horton.

Whiting’s moustache twitched again. “You,” he said to Horton, “sound like a racist.”

“I’m sure,” Mrs. Cornish smiled, “Lawrence did not mean to imply anything of that sort. Did you Lawrence?”

Lawrence Horton glowered at her, then turned toward Whiting. “You, sir, are an oaf!”

“Er,” stuttered Storr, “I assume, Mr. Horton, that you’re opposed to the Vice-Chancellor’s suggestion?”

“As a racist,” protested Whiting, “he would be.”

“Racism,” Horton said calmly, neatly folding up his newspaper, “is an abstract idea invested by sociologists which they project, most incorrectly, onto the real world to make it accord with their prejudices. It has about as much reality as an intelligent Vice-Chancellor: both are impossible according to the Laws of Nature.” He stood up. “And now I have to wring from the minds of my students all the pretentious sociological nonsense you insist on indoctrinating them with.” His newspaper under his arm, he strode out of the room.

“Er, I believe,” Storr said after Horton had slammed the door, “that we can record Mr. Horton as opposed to the Vice-Chancellor’s rather splendid idea. Wouldn’t you all agree?”



“I do so hope,” Hill said, “that he doesn’t become the Professor. A reactionary like that?”

Storr smiled. It was not a pleasing sight. “I don’t think, speaking confidentially of course, that there is much possibility of his assuming that particular responsibility.”

“Thank goodness,” Whiting said.

“You are misconstruing his objection,” Mrs. Cornish interjected.

“He’d set us back fifty years,” continued Whiting. “We must progress with the times. Philosophy is a social science, after all.”

“Er, Mickleman,” Storr asked, “what is your opinion?”

“Yes, Colin,” Fiona smiled at him, “I’m sure we would all like to know where you are on this particular matter.”

“Well,” he said as he withdrew his pipe from his pocket and proceeded to light it, “I would have to give this matter some thought. It’s not an area that I am familiar with.”

“But surely,” Fiona persisted, “you have an opinion?”

“As a matter of fact, I try to avoid opinions – about things I have not thought through or deeply about or studied in detail.”

“Quite,” Storr said curtly. “Shall we get on?”

Fiona ignored him. “And in this particular instance?” she said to Colin.

“If necessary I would pursue the matter and then form a judgement – not an opinion – a judgement on the basis of careful thought.”

“I see,” Fiona smiled at him.

So did Mrs. Cornish, while both Whiting and Storr scowled, in their different ways. Hill studied his fingernails.

“Well, er,” Storr said shuffling his notes, “Mrs. Pound’s course, because of its success may be extended to second year students, as a major option. There is to be a staff seminar on the subject – next month. I think. Er, yes,” he glanced at a crumpled sheet of paper among his notes, “next month. Is there anything else anyone wants to add?” He looked around. “Well, then, we have all earned our coffee, I believe!” He began to shuffle the notes.

Colin left him, Whiting, Hill and Fiona discussing the relevance of Philosophy to society. Mrs. Cornish followed him into the corridor.

“I was impressed,” she said to him, “by what you said.”

“Won’t make any difference, though. They have made their minds up already.”

“True.” She withdrew the pocket watch she always carried and checked the time. “You’ve had another paper published I understand?”

Surprised, since he had only been informed himself a few days ago, he said, “Yes – how did you know?”

“One hears things. I also understand Richard has rejected another of yours.”

“Yes.”

“A pity. It was an insightful piece.”

“You read it?”

“Why yes. Do you have a copy?”

“Of course.”

“Then I shall send it to the ‘Bulletin’. With a covering letter, of course.”

“Thank you,” Colin said sincerely.

“Richard can be jealous, sometimes,” she said abstractly. “He envies you your success at so young an age.” Her smile seemed motherly. “May I offer you some advice?”

“Yes,” Colin said, hesitantly.

Her eyes seemed to Mickleman to shine almost wickedly. “Certain preoccupations are inadvisable for someone who aspires to high office.” Her eyes resumed their normal appearance. “Certain things – are just not done. They will make you enemies. I do so hope you understand me. Now, I really must be going.”

She turned abruptly and walked away from him.

“You bastard!” Colin heard someone behind him say.

He looked around and was punched in the face.

## V

As Colin Mickleman struggled up from the floor it occurred to him in a slow way that Edmund would probably have been able to block the blow.

Blood from his nose slithered down his face, and he stared at Alison’s brother in astonishment. Bryn’s kick was well aimed, and although it knocked him over Colin did not at first realize it had struck him because he could feel no pain from the impact. He seemed to fall slowly, and as he did so he noticed the floor tile was chipped. There was a stain on the tile, the pattern of which he found quite interesting, and his detachment was enhanced by his inability to hear. He lay on the floor watching Fenton restrain Bryn and push him up

against the wall. Then he saw Horton, rushing out of Mrs. Cornish's room, and students crowding the corridor and the top of the steps. In the same moment his hearing returned, and he heard Horton shouting.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said to Bryn while Fenton held Colin's assailant aggressively by the throat.

Horton gestured toward Fenton and he released him.

"Well, boy! Horton demanded.

"That bastard – " Bryn began to say, pointing at Colin who slowly got to his feet.

"Mind your language, boy!" Horton shouted at Bryn.

"Are you alright?" Fenton asked Colin and gave him a handkerchief.

"Fine," he said, stopping the blood with the gift.

"What's your name?" Horton demanded of Bryn.

"What's it to do with you?" Bryn said defiantly.

"Listen to me, you runt!" Horton straightened his back. Despite his advancing years, he seemed a formidable adversary to Bryn who nervously turned his head as Horton clenched his fists. "This is a serious matter!"

Fenton was turning to walk away down the stairs and Colin walked toward him.

"Thanks," he said.

Fenton smiled, and then shrugged his shoulder before disappearing down the stairs. Mrs. Cornish was in her room, and as Colin walked past her open door, he saw her using the telephone.

“It’s alright, Lawrence,” Colin said to Horton as he returned to the scene of the fight, “I know him.”

“I see.”

“Yes.” He noticed Kate looking at him down the corridor but she, like the others, turned away. The drama was over, and the corridor was clearing.

“Can he go?” Colin asked Horton.

“This is a disciplinary matter. You are a student, I presume?” Horton asked Bryn.

“Yes,” Bryn replied nervously.

“Yes, he is,” confirmed Colin. “Second year, Politics.”

“Politics?” repeated Horton. “Oh well, that explains it!”

Mrs. Cornish joined them. “Perhaps, Lawrence,” she said, “it might be better to leave the matter here.”

“Well – “ Then to Colin, he said, “Personal, is it?”

“Yes.” He watched Horton’s face carefully, as if his fate was being decided. When Horton smiled, he felt relieved.

“Maybe it’s for the best.” He faced Bryn. “If I hear so much as one whisper about you from this day on, I’ll make sure you’re sent down. Understand?”

“Yes, sir.” Bryn said and meant it.

“Now go, before I change my mind.”

Bryn scuttled away just as Storr emerged from his own room around the corner.

“Er, been some trouble?” he muttered.

Horton glowered at him, and then walked away.

“Just a little altercation, Richard,” Mrs. Cornish said. “Nothing to worry about. It’s all over now.”

“Er, if you’re sure.”

“Perfectly sure, Richard. Lawrence dealt with the matter admirably.”

“The I needn’t make a report out?”

“Certainly not.”

“Well, if you’re sure, Elizabeth.”

“Quite sure,” she replied primly.

“Well, that’s good then. If you could, Elizabeth, spare me a moment of your time. You see, I —“

“Not now. Perhaps later.”

“Yes. Yes, I quite understand. Later, then.”

“Come with me, Colin, and I’ll get you something instead of that.” She looked disdainfully at the now bloodied handkerchief he was holding to his nose.

He followed her into her room. As befitted a Senior Lecturer it was larger than his, with a splendid view of the lake. It was also very tidy. She closed the door firmly.

She briefly inspected his nose. "Nothing serious. Here," she gave him a sheaf of tissues. "If it bleeds again, hold your head back. Now, sit down."

He did as she commanded.

"Really, you must learn discretion, Colin." She lit one of her cigars. "Not a good start. You're very ambitious, are you not?"

"Well – " perhaps Bryn's blow had affected him more than he thought, for he felt momentary embarrassment.

She blew smoke directly into his face. "Would you be happy with Richard as Professor?"

"Well – "

"Hmm. I thought not. Not many would, actually."

"But surely Lawrence stands a better chance?"

"It is possible, of course. But Richard himself is not without influence. Besides, there are other considerations. The Vice-Chancellor and Lawrence are not the best of friends."

"I see."

"I hope you do, Colin. Is the manuscript of your book complete?"

He looked at her questioningly. "Almost."

"Good." She blew smoke directly into his face again. "Do you have a publisher yet?"

“No. not really.”

“Applicants for Professorships are viewed more favourably if they have published a major work,” she said almost casually.

Colin stared at her. Was it a joke?

“Ours is an expanding Department,” she said. “We hope soon to appoint two more lecturers.”

Colin knew the rivalry between Storr and Horton was intense. Of the nine members of the Department, only Fiona, Whiting and Hill favored Storr. The rest, including himself, were favourably disposed toward Horton. Of those four, Lee and Holland – whom Colin noticed with regret were not present at the morning’s meeting and thus had missed Horton insulting Storr – might be enticed away. If Storr was appointed, his Readership would become vacant, and Fiona seemed certain to benefit.

“However,” Mrs. Cornish continued, “if Richard is appointed, it will be seen in some influential quarters as a victory for the radical element and we are thus unlikely to be allocated the resources required to appoint more lecturers.”

“I see,” Colin said again. “But surely, an outside appointment is possible.”

“Of course,” she said smiling, “the Professorial Board is quite independent, and they could conceivably take such a course of action. If no suitable candidate – from here naturally – was found. Were you to apply, I would of course forward your application with my recommendation. Lawrence would of course support your application as well.”

“What?” he said in amazement.

“It is your decision – but consider what I have said. Now, I really must get on.” She held the door open for him.

He stumbled to his feet.



“Please learn to be discrete in certain matters,” she said.

“Yes,” he mumbled, and staggered down the corridor like a drunken man.

## VI

Mickleman spent the rest of his morning drafting and redrafting his application. When, to his satisfaction, it was complete, he appended a list of his publications to date. He was proud of his published articles, and derived immense satisfaction from re-reading his list, and it was well past noon when he presented his application to Elizabeth Cornish.

She was in her office, smoking a cigar, looked up briefly from her work to acknowledge his presence, said a curt ‘Thank You’ and dismissed him. He was not offended. On the contrary, he was excited, and stood for several minutes in the corridor watching the lake in an effort to calm himself.

He was not deceived, however, by his prospects in the matter of Professorship, and was satisfied merely to have applied. When the offer of a Professorship did come – and he was certain it would, one day – he would be ready, with all his allies.

Several students passed him as he stood looking out from the window, and he heard them whisper conspiratorially. But he was not concerned, for he seemed to be one step nearer his goal.

‘The Well’ was the central concourse of the Derwent building, and was essentially an open Common Room with low tables and even lower chairs. It contained a small cafeteria, a gallery - which sprouted various artefacts of modern Art - and was seldom empty of students.

At first, among the human profusion, Colin did not see Edmund, and when he did, he was surprised. He was talking to Fiona. Edmund saw him approaching, said something to Fiona and without turning she walked away to disappear into the throng of students crowding the entrance to the Bar.

“Alison’s brother been at you again?” Edmund asked as Colin reached him.

Fiona had completely disappeared from sight. “Do you know her, then?” he quizzically asked Edmund.

“Who?”

“Fiona.”

“What?”

“That woman you were just talking to.” He looked at his friend suspiciously.

“Oh, her! She just wanted to borrow a match.” He saw Colin peering around the room. “Why – do you know her?”

“She’s in my Department.”

“Oh, yes? Edmund gave a sly smile. “What number is she on your list of conquests?”

“She’s not,” Colin said, and screwed up his face into a morbid expression.

“What’s this? ‘The Owl’ has met his match?” Edmund said gleefully.

Still chagrined by his past failure, he changed the subject. “Have you seen Alison?”

“Yes, actually. I had an interesting talk with her this morning.”

“Oh, yes?” He said almost in disbelief.

“She’s very gifted. A brilliantly intuitive mind.”

“Did she say anything about – “

“About your child?”

Embarrassed, Colin looked around.

“She still,” Edmund said, “hasn’t decided anything. I suggest she go and stay with those friends of mine – you know, Magnus and his wife. They run that small farm. The change would do her good. She ought to get away from this place – it’s very incestuous.”

“I’ve just handed in my application for the Professorship,” Colin said proudly.

“Why don’t you spend a few days on Magnus’ farm? Some manual labour would do you good.”

Colin looked at him as if he had said something offensive.

“What chance,” Edmund continued, “do you think you’ve got?” For the Professorship, I mean.”

“Not much, really. But it’s a start.”

“When will you know?”

“Not sure. Perhaps next month.”

“Who recommended you?”

“Elizabeth. Mrs. Cornish.”

“Isn’t she the one you wanted to get into bed?”

Colin winced.

“You told me about her – last year,” Edmund explained. “Don’t you remember?”

“If you say so.”

“Smokes cigars?”

“Yes.”

“You described her attributes in a rather fulsome way, if I remember correctly.”

Colin rubbed his hands together, again. “Nice body! Wouldn’t mind getting my hands around it!” His fantasy of having Elizabeth standing naked on a chair in his room returned. He would get her to wear a studded collar to make the humiliation complete.

Edmund sighed. “The Superior Philosopher is for the belly, not the eye.”

“Eh?”

“Lao Tzu.”

“Oh, that antiquated Chinese cretin.”

“Shall we eat? I’m hungry.”

“What?” His fantasy was still intruding upon reality. Nearby, a young woman sat talking to her friends, her blouse emphasizing her breasts. Colin stared at her. “You have something,” he said to Edmund. “I’ll catch you later.”

His sexual passion aroused, he strode off toward Alison’s room.

Alison was sitting on her bed, listening to music and cuddling a very large toy lion whom she

called Aslan. The sunlit gardens behind Heslington Hall were visible from her window, and she did not look away when a familiar knock sounded on her door.

“Come in,” she said wearily.

Colin, as was his habit, wrestled the lion away from her and with undisguised glee proceeded to stuff it through the open window. She let him enjoy his childish fun. Her room was on the ground floor, and Aslan could easily be retrieved.

His ritual greeting over, he rubbed his hands and shuffled toward her. Alison was annoyed at the lust so evident on his face.

“Why don’t you grow up?” she shouted at him.

Momentarily perplexed, he retrieved Aslan.

“After your oats, then?” she said seethingly.

“I am after expanding my being through the experience of the ultimate,” he said in the prose of *The Philosopher*.

“Why can’t you stop being so false?”

“Ah! ‘Tis true, falsehood is my matchless probity!” He sat beside her on the bed and began to caress her earlobe with his fingers.

He could sense her beginning to succumb, and this pleased him. He wanted to lay people bare to affirm his superiority, control them by his words and his body, and he was surprised when Alison pushed him away.

“I’m going away for a few days,” she said, moving to sit on the floor and cuddle Aslan.

He was about to summon forth a clever riposte when someone knocked on the door of the room.

Eagerly, Alison rose to answer. Fiona stood in the corridor, her dress unbuttoned so that very little of her breasts were not exposed.

“Sorry to intrude,” she said with a smile which pleased Colin, “but could I speak to Mr. Mickleman for a moment?”

“Yes, come in.”

Fiona stayed outside. “It’s about your application,” she said to Colin. “Can you come to the Department?”

Colin looked at Alison who shrugged her shoulders.

“Won’t be long,” he said to Alison.

He walked with Fiona down the corridor and out into the sunlight.

“Shall we go to your room?” Fiona said. “It is quite near.”

“It would be more private,” smiled Colin.

“Elizabeth told me about your application.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes.”

They reached his room without further conversation.

“Not what I expected,” she said as she glanced around. Clothes lay in an untidy heap upon the floor and it smelled of pipe smoke.

“Welcome to my lair!” Colin said, posing.

“What exactly are your intentions?” she asked him.

“Total experiential liberation!”

She ignored the remark. “About your application.”

“And I thought – “

“I was after your body?” she completed.

“The thought had suggested itself.”

She sat down on his bed, crossing her legs to expose most of her thigh. “Are you serious?” she said, smiling.

“Do you want me to be?”

“That depends.”

“Oh, yes?” He guessed her purpose.

“To some, you might seem the ideal candidate.”

As he looked at her, the conviction grew in him that the Professorship was really within his grasp. Fiona was courting him; Elizabeth and Horton would endorse his application with their references. He could deftly and with cunning play Storr off against Horton. Professor Colin Mickleman. It sounded right. The more he looked at Fiona, the more his lust gave way to scheming. She would be a valuable ally.

“Why don’t you come and sit beside me?” she said.

He did, and leaned over toward her to kiss her lips but she moved away, laughing.

“Do you like Early Music?” she asked.

“Not particularly.” He was wondering whether to touch her thigh when she spoke.

“There’s a concert tonight. The Early Music Group is playing in the Lyons Hall. Music by Landini and Machaut. The Vice-Chancellor will be there. Good form for you to be seen – with the right person, of course.

“Of course. You have tickets, then?”

“Naturally. Shall we meet at half past seven?”

“Fine by me.”

She stood up. “Excellent! And afterwards,” she ran her finger down his face, “you can explain just what your intentions are.”

She left him wondering who had been manipulating whom. He searched his pockets for his pipe, and as he did so he remembered last having it when he was attacked by Bryn.

“Damn!” he said, frustrated by its loss and the lack of sexual gratification that the last half hour had brought. “Damn!”

“Well,” Edmund said as he stood in the doorway, “if you’re going to be like that, I might as well go away again.”

“Eh?”

“She didn’t stay long,” quipped Edmund.

“I’m meeting her tonight.” He searched in his desk and found his spare pipe which he



proceeded to fill and light. “Not a good day,” he sighed. Then, remembering his application, he smiled.

“Came for my rucksack,” Edmund said.

Colin was surprised. “Leaving already?”

“Afraid so.” He opened the wardrobe and extracted his rucksack.

“Can’t you stay a little longer?” He was visibly disappointed.

“Not really. Have some unfinished business.”

“Such as?”

“Oh, various things.” He shouldered his heavy burden.

“You going now?”

“Yes.”

“When shall we meet again?”

“Who can say – who cannot say?”

They smiled at each other.

Colin squinted, then held out his hand which Edmund shook strongly, causing Colin to grimace, only half mockingly.

Edmund turned, waved and then walked out of the room and away from his friend.

## VII

Colin was only a little late for his afternoon tutorial, but Andrea was already waiting in his room in the Department. She was dressed in a fashionable padded jacket of colourful design and her scarf seemed inappropriate considering the weather, its whiteness in contrast to the patterned blue of her dress. Her dark hair, although well brushed, looked untidy, and she smiled, a little, as Colin entered the room, before her boyish face resumed its startled look.

“So,” Colin said gleefully before assuming the correct intonation and accent, “relentlessly pursued over aerial house top and vice-versa, I have thwarted the malevolent machinations of our most scurrilous enemies. In short, I am arrived.”

Andrea did not know whether to be embarrassed by the W.C Fields impersonation.

Colin cast his lustful gaze upon her. Her gestures were awkward as she fumbled in her bag for her essay.

“Sorry, it’s a bit late,” she said holding the pages out for him.

The Owl watched, and the Philosopher set the trap. “Relationships are difficult things – sometimes.” He took her essay and sat behind his desk. “Perhaps’, he said, pausing for effect, “I shouldn’t say this – and stop me if I say anything untoward – but sometimes with some people I get feelings; impressions. Call it empathy, if you like. One of the great things about life is that we can talk about things – bring problems out of ourselves. Remember Descartes?”

“Yes,” she said shyly.

He sprang his trap. His face bore a kindly smile, but inside his minds was full of scheming. “If you would like to talk about things, I’m a good listener. Share the sadness I sense about you.” He smiled his smile again. “I’ll be in the Bar here in Derwent tomorrow after seven. Now, your essay.”

He lit his pipe and settled back in his chair to read her offering. His criticisms were minor, and he talked for only a quarter of an hour about the essay's content while she sat across from him, wringing her hands together and occasionally meeting his glance.

He gave her back her essay. "Tomorrow – if you want," he said, before picking up the receiver of his telephone. It was a sign of his dismissal of her and she did not fail him.

"Goodbye, then," she said and briefly smiled.

He dialled a few numbers before she closed his door. Then he replaced the receiver. But his pleasure did not last for long.

"Ah!" Storr said as he opened the door without first knocking upon it. "Colin! I, er, just wanted to say how pleased I am about your application. Yes, most pleased."

"Oh yes?"

"Er, yes indeed my dear boy!"

"Did you want something?"

"What?" Storr looked around. "How are your tutorials going?" Well, I hope."

Before Colin could reply, Elizabeth pushed Storr aside.

"Have you a match?" she said as she reached Colin's desk. "My lighter is U/S."

Colin fumbled in his pockets until he found his box of matches. He held them out for her but she ignored his gesture and leaned toward him with one of her small cigars between her fingers.

After he had lit it, she blew the smoke into his face. "Mind if I keep the box?" she asked.

"No, of course not."

Both he and Storr watched her leave.

“Well, I must get on! Storr said to him. “Nice talking to you, Colin.” Nodding his head, he walked into the corridor.

Colin was soon at work. He needed one chapter to complete his book, and he worked eagerly but steadily during the hours of the afternoon, filling pages of paper with his writing. Occasionally he would stop to read what he had written, sometimes making corrections, and occasionally he would stop to refill and relight his pipe. Only once did he leave the room. But the Secretary’s Office was deserted and he made his own cup of coffee before returning to his desk.

It was becoming dark outside when his task was completed, and he collected together all the pages of the chapter. Satisfied with his effort, he wrote a note. “Could you type this out for me? Rather urgent!” it read. He thought of adding a rude suggestion, but desisted, and left it attached to his chapter on the Secretary’s desk.

Pleased with himself, he wandered out into the fresh air of evening, but it did not take him long to forget about his book and concentrate on his evening with Fiona. His wardrobe in his room in the Hall of Residence contained many black clothes, and he was deciding on a fitting combination when he heard a noise behind him.

He turned to see the door open. But it was not Fiona as he hoped, nor Alison as he half expected. Instead, it was the tall man he had seen the day before, following him. The man walked toward him and knocked him unconscious with one powerful blow.

He awoke to find himself lying on a carpet that smelled of urine, and turned to see his attacker standing by a window whose panes were broken. Near him, a bald man stood smoking a cigarette. He was much smaller in stature than the other man, and his face reminded Colin of a toad. The glare from the bright light hurt Colin’s eyes and he shook his head.

“He’s awake,” he heard a voice say. Then he was hauled to his feet.

Dramatically, the toad-faced man put on black leather gloves.

“Someone,” he sneered as Colin was pushed toward him, “wants to teach you a lesson.”

“You what?” Colin said, feeling his mouth go dry and stomach churn.

The man grinned, flexed his hands menacingly and moved closer. “I am going to enjoy this!” he said.

Outside, there was a sudden sound of breaking glass, and a drunken shout.

“Ger up!” the drunken man helped his companion to his feet. Then he peered into the window at Mickleman. “What you doin’?” he asked, smiling insanely, his bushy beard wet from beer. He drank from the bottle in his hand.

“We’ll deal with you later,” the toad-faced man said to Colin.

Colin was pushed to the ground as his would be assailants ran away. When he stood up, the two drunken men had gone as well, and cautiously and nervously, he walked into the darkness outside.

The house stood on a decaying Estate and appeared to be newly wrecked, but Mickleman wasted no time and was soon walking briskly toward the city centre. No one followed him, and he stopped awhile beside a busy road, pleased to find his pipe and tobacco in the pocket of his jacket. The ritual calmed him and he walked on into the centre of the city to find a bus to take him back toward the comfort of the University.

It was nearing nine o’clock when he returned to his room, and he sat at his desk, smoking his pipe, trying to understand his abduction. All he could think of was Bryn. Somehow, he had hired them. This conclusion did not please him, and he was shaking as he left his own room to find Bryn’s. But Alison’s brother was not in his Hall of Residence, and Colin resisted the temptation he felt to break down Bryn’s door.

He was sauntering back to his own room when he remembered his assignation with Fiona, and as he stood waiting outside the Lyons Hall for the concert to end, it occurred to him that Storr might be responsible for his abduction. But the thought was ludicrous, and he forgot about it. Instead, he spent his waiting trying to find epithets to describe Magarita’s body, particularly her large breasts. He wanted his epithets to be as crude as possible, and the more clichéd the better, since this naming was for him an affirmation of his superiority. But

he had not progressed very far when the audience began to leave the Hall.

Fiona was not among them, and he stood among the shadows for some minutes after the last person had departed before returning to his room. But he was not happy, sitting alone at his desk. Magartia seemed glad of his telephone call, and he lurked by the road in black clothes, clutching his camera, to await her arrival.

He did not see Edmund watching him from the walkway above the road.

## VIII

It was approaching the twilight hours when Alison left the University in the company of Edmund's friend. She had been glad of the invitation, and readily accepted Edmund's second offer.

She sat beside Magnus in the Land Rover, her small suitcase in the back, watching the scenery as it passed. Occasionally, Magnus would turn and smile at her and she would return his friendly gesture. Magnus was a big man with a full beard, and Alison found something reassuring in his size and his cheerful eyes. Magnus' farm was small, and although its position among the Hambleton Hills at the southern end of the North Yorkshire moors was not ideal, it was sufficiently isolated to afford the privacy Magnus and his wife deemed essential.

The Land Rover climbed the steep hill to Bank Top easily and, in the dim light, Alison found the scene enchanting. It seemed magical to her to be rising above the plain north of the city of York and to have the moors ahead, in the spreading darkness. A car passed them, descending the hill carefully, and Magnus drove off the main road to travel through a plantation of trees. The narrow road he had taken gradually levelled out, and Alison could see to her left and below, the headlights of a vehicle as it was driven along beside the boundary of the moors.

It was dark when they reached their destination. Inside the stone farmhouse was warm.

“Welcome! My name is Ruth,” a woman with a shawl around her shoulders said in greeting as Magnus led Alison toward the log fire.

Alison smiled. In the dim light cast by the fire she found it easy to believe Ruth, and the house itself, belonged to an earlier age.

“It’ll be a cold night,” Magnus said as he warmed his gnarled hands by the fire.

“Alison, is it?” Ruth asked her.

“Yes.” Alison replied.

“Well, sit you down! Food won’t be long.”

They left her alone as she sat bathed in the warmth and the restful light of the fire, and Alison felt an urge to write a letter to Colin. But the house worked its magick upon her, and she soon fell asleep. Ruth awoke her, and she made her way to where the table was spread full with food.

“Sorry about the candles,” Magnus said.

“I think it’s lovely!” Alison said with sincerity.

“Haven’t got round to electricity – yet.”

She sat on the bench beside Ruth, but they did not say grace before their meal as she had expected. The conversation during the meal was minimal, and she was glad when Ruth showed her to her room. It was sparsely furnished, like the house itself, but warm from the small coal fire, and she set the lighted candles by her bed before taking her small cassette player and headphones from her case.

It was some time before she began to write.

“My dear Colin,

Darkness has already fallen as I listen to Bach’s Matthew Passion – crying at the

beauty and haunting sadness of some of the music. Aware also, as I listen, of a loneliness because there is no one here with me to share these moments. All I can do is dare to write to you, keeping the memory of these moments to perhaps mould them at some future time into words spoken when we are together again. Or, perhaps, I might this once let them become the genesis of some music of my own.

Now I sit with the light of a candle to guide my pen, unaware of my future – the darkness beyond my closed window seems mysterious: a mystery, which once and not long ago would have held the numinosity of myths and legends.

The darkness, outside, may have gone – changed by technology, by artificial light, but perhaps (or so it seems at this moment to me) it has returned to within us. There seems nothing to fear outside that the lights of technology and the reason of scientific explanation cannot dispel. Yet so few seem to see the blackness within – which even two thousand years of a powerful allegory has not changed. I mean, of course, the story of the “Passion” - of a kind of innocence betrayed. The actors, their names, changes every year... I wonder if you will understand what I mean.

It seems to me that all great Art uplifts and offers us the possibilities of existence. That ecstasy of experience where we are a unity of passion and reason – where life is constantly renewed and made vital. Bach reminds me of this insight – as a hot summer day can when no cloud obscures the beautiful blue of the sky and we become again, for just that day, children again. Once, it seems a long time ago now, I believed that love between two individuals should and could bring us this awareness, this understanding where answers to all our problems are found: not because we ignore them, but because our love conquers all. ‘A shameless romantic’ I hear you say.

But now experience seems to have dimmed this vision of mine. Through music and other things (music particularly) I have been transported to other planes of existence, and this has made my personal relationships difficult because I have tried to capture the bliss of those other places in moments with others. This has made me intense – and perhaps difficult because I could often not express in words what it was that I wished: in a relationship, in life.

I would like to believe that you offer me, through love, a beginning. But I know that this can never be. Maybe in music, in performance and creation, I will find my answer. No doubt you will continue to be you, safe within your own frame of reference. As to me, I expect the future to be full of discovery: a discovery of both joy and sadness.



With love,

Alison”

She felt happier, having written the letter and re-read it several times, glad that she had been able to express in words the feelings that had haunted her for so long. But she knew she might lack the courage to post the letter. She turned off her music and lay on the bed, listening to the silence. Nothing stirred, not even outside and as she lay, hearing the beating of her own pulse within her ears, she began to realize that it would be better for her if she did not see Colin again. He was her past. So thinking, she rose to delete some words from her letter, making ‘when we are together again’ illegible.

The candle was nearly spent, and she blew it out to fall asleep in the silent darkness.

It was late next morning she awoke. The house was deserted, but she found food awaiting her on the table. No one came to greet her and she ate slowly before walking into the gardens. The morning mist had almost completely dispersed, revealing a bright sun, which had begun to spread its warmth.

There were few flowers to colour the scene, for the gardens were productive ones given over to vegetables, soft fruit and an orchard. Alison found a bench abutting the brick wall that screened the garden from the yard and the clustered farm buildings behind the house, and she sat awhile, letting the sun warm and relax her. She was nearly asleep when a sheepdog came and lay down near her feet.

Magnus’ voice startled her. “He don’t take to many people,” he said.

Alison patted the dog’s head. “Is there any work I do to help?” she asked.

“There is no shortage of work, here,”

“I’d like to do something.”

“Thought you had come for a holiday.”

“Just a break from things. I’d like to help out.”

“Well, if you’re sure.”

“Yes.”

“The onions need weeding and thinning.”

The day passed quickly for her, although by late afternoon her enthusiasm for the back straining work had disappeared. Their lunch had been frugal – soup with plentiful bread – and she was beginning to feel both hungry and tired.

“You ready to eat?” Magnus said as he came toward her.

“Yes, indeed!”

“Didn’t expect you to do all this,” Magnus said as he surveyed her work.

Alison smiled, and scraped dirt from her hands.

“You go in, I’ll tidy up,” Magnus said. “Got some friends coming over,” he added as she began to walk away.

To her surprise she found the kitchen full of people, and children.

“This here is Alison,” Ruth said by way of introduction, “she’s staying for a while.”

“Hello!” Alison said, and blushed.

“That’s Tom,” Ruth said indicating a small unshaven man in worn clothes who smiled in reply, showing his broken teeth. “And Mary.” Mary, a large lady with a young and cheerful face deeply weathered, came and embraced Alison, much to Alison’s embarrassment. “And John.” John, sallow faced and stocky, raised his battered hat in greeting. “And Wendy.”

Wendy, a tall thin woman with long straight hair, smiled at her briefly before admonishing her children. "Leave that alone!" she shouted to her small son who was trying to remove the lid from the metal milk pail on the floor. "And Lucy – stop that!" She dragged her daughter away to stop her kicking her brother.

"There is plenty of hot water," Ruth said to Alison, pointing to the sink.

Alison was washing her hands when Magnus entered the room. He took the now crying Lucy into his arms, scooped up her brother and carried with him before setting them down near the fire. They were staring at him expectantly, and Alison came to sit near them, enchanted by the sudden change in their demeanour and glad to be away from the others.

Magnus began his story. He told how Thrym the Giant stole Thor's hammer Mjollnir as a ransom in order to make Freyja his wife; of how Loki, the Sly One, persuaded mighty Thor to dress as a woman in order to deceive Thrym.

"And so mighty Thor disguised himself as a woman, pretending to be Freyja who Thrym wanted as a bride. Thrym the Giant sat waiting in his draughty Hall. 'They are coming! They are coming' his giant servants shouted as the guests from Asgard arrived.

"Thus Thor entered the Hall which Thrym and his servants had lain with food and drink, for the wedding feast. It had been a long journey from Asgard and Thor was both hungry and thirsty. So he ate and drank. He ate a whole pig and then six whole salmon. He drank a gallon of mead.

"Thrym the Giant was amazed. 'What appetites,' he shouted. 'What a woman! Let us hope,' he said to one of his giant servants, 'her other appetites are as good!' And Thrym the Giant laughed, a laugh so loud it rocked the whole Hall and loosened some of the planks of the wall.

"So Thrym was eager to begin the ceremony of marriage and commanded Mjollnir, Thor's magical hammer which he had stolen, be brought forth. 'I shall,' he shouted, 'swear my oath on Mjollnir as my bride shall.'

"So saying, the hammer was brought forth. And seeing it, Thor rushed forward and

grasped it, tearing off his veil as he did so. His eyes were as red as his beard. There was no escape for his foe, for one by one he split open their skulls with his hammer, starting with Thrym the Giant until the whole floor of the Hall was littered with the dead bodies of the giants who had dared to defy the gods of Asgard!"

There was a moment of silence, and then Lucy's voice. "Another, tell us another!" the little girl said eagerly.

Alison left them to change her clothes, a little disturbed by the tale she had heard. She was in her room, listening to Vaughan Williams' Sixth Symphony through her headphones when she realized what had disturbed her. She thought the children too young for such a tale of violence with its suggestion of sexuality. But the music gradually transported her to another plane of existence, and she sat on the bed, listening. The sombre starkness of the Epilogue made her cry and she rose to stand by the window and watch the rising moon. She became aware of the coldness and isolation of Space – of the great distance which separated her from the moon; of the even greater distances to the stars. She began to imagine worlds circling the stars – worlds full of life, of people, alive with their own dreams, desires, thoughts and problems. The very vastness of the Cosmos seemed suddenly real to her, and she experienced an almost overwhelming feeling of greatness: of the Cosmos itself, and of her own life. It was as though she glimpsed a secret. The stars seemed awesome and yet thaumaturgic, and she felt a painful desire to travel among them, to explore the new worlds that awaited. There would be so many new experiences, so many things to see, to learn, to listen to. There was almost something holy waiting out there.

There grew within her then a desire to compose some music, something unique, which would capture at least in some way the feelings she had experienced, and she in a frenzy tore open her case to find pen and paper. Music filled her mind, a strange polyphony of sound, and she wove it into reality through the written notes of her pen.

Then the inspiration died, and she found herself sitting on the bed in the dim light staring down at the music she had written. She sighed then, for she understood what she had to do about Colin and her own unborn baby.

As if to counterpoint her thought, a distant bell began to toll, echoing between the valleys and the hills. Its sound was clear, and then distant, then clear again before it faded. It was a medieval sound, and as she listened she remembered the remains of Rievaulx but five miles distant and shrouded in a wooded valley. But the bell was real and not a dream, and she stood by the window, listening.

There was a monastery, she recalled, somewhere in the valleys below. A modern monastery replete with a Public School. A link between the past and the present. This thought pleased her and she smiled. She was not to know that a young novice – full of a youthful desire to return to ancient tradition – had, and against the Prior's wishes, set in motion the mechanism which would swing the six ton bell of Ampleforth Abbey, high in its squat church tower, sending its hallowed sound miles out in remembrance of the monk who had died that same hour. The novice wanted the whole monastery, and the School, to cease, if only for an instant, their tasks and pray for the departing soul.

Had she known this, she would have approved, for the sound of the bell suddenly ceased, leaving her disappointed.

## IX

The air of early morning was warm, and Mickleman sat contently at his desk in his room, a notebook beside him.

He sat for some time, watching the lake and vaguely thinking about his life until he began to remember the years that had passed since his youth. He became a little sad, as he often did when he reviewed the passing of the years by remembering the events of the same day one year, then two, then three years ago until he had reached the years of his schooling. 'What have I done since then?' he would ask himself, and be displeased with the answer.

His self pity and melancholia lasted for several hours until he began to lay upon his desk his secret collection of photographs. The photographs pleased him, and as he looked through them his happiness returned.

It was nearing mid-day when he gathered up his notebook and pipe before returning his photographs to the drawer of his desk. Perhaps his preoccupation with Fiona's body or Andrea's shyness made him forgetful, but he did not lock his drawer, and wandered, pleased with himself, out into the bright sun of the day.

Two young male students came toward him on creaking bicycles as he stepped onto the path outside the Hall of Residence, their eager faces smiling. One of them carried a haversack on which was painted: *'Newton Calculates. Watts works. But Coles' word is Law.'* Coles was the Professor of Physics. Mickleman smiled ruefully, and followed a small huddle

of students as they walked toward and over the bridge.

He was early for the Departmental meeting, and sat contentedly in the room smoking his pipe until he could no longer resist the temptation to defile Storr's charts. He added a few extra dots to one, extended the line of another and flicked ink in an inconvenient spot on a third. He was admiring his work when Lee entered the room.

Lee was not a tall man, his jerky movements seemed not quite coordinated, and he looked older than his thirty-five years. His suit was not conspicuous, as he himself was not, and he reminded Colin of a studious monk misplaced in a world which seemed to startle him.

Lee smiled nervously and then crept toward a chair, laying his voluminous notes and files upon the table. His tutorial was only just over and, as he always did, Lee wrote an account of it in order to assess his own performance. 'A moderate success, for once,' he wrote in his notebook in his neat handwriting, 'except regarding the questions about Heidegger. I must do more background reading...'

He was still writing when Horton bustled in and took his usual seat by the window. From his pocket he produced a copy of Iliad, in Greek, and was soon absorbed in his reading.

Soon, the room was full, Storr, squirming and smiling as he sat at the head of the table; Whiting and Hill, near their master, Mrs. Cornish, next to Lee and smoking her small cigars. And last of all, Fiona, who sat next to Colin, graciously smiling as if he had not missed their assignation.

"Well, eh," Storr said, looking around with evident satisfaction. "I'm sorry I had to rearrange this meeting at such short notice. But as you are all aware, I am away next week and rather than postpone next week's meeting I decided to bring it forward. I was hoping to sound to you all out about –"

The door opened, and they all turned to look.

"Ah, Timothy!" Storr said. "Glad you could join us."

Timothy was the most junior member of the Department and Colin was not surprised by his lateness or his manner of dress. He wore a mauve shirt, green trousers and shoes, and had tied a mauve scarf around his neck.

“Sorry I’m late!” he smiled, showing his two gold-capped teeth.

“Just in time! Said Storr. “Jonathon – “ he smiled at Lee, “was about to talk about the audio-visual equipment he had just, eh, taken charge of. A very valuable edition to our Department. Yes indeed. Very valuable.

“Is that all?” Horton turned and glared at Storr.

“Sorry?” Storr said.

“You brought all of us here,” Horton continued, anger evident in his voice, “to waffle on about audio-visual equipment!”

“Well, er, it is rather an important addition to our facilities if I may say so.”

“You have the audacity to – “ Horton began.

“Gentlemen, please!” Mrs. Cornish said in an attempt at mediation.

“There was something else on the agenda, Richard?” Fiona asked.

“Actually, no.”

“I see,” Mrs. Cornish said, disgusted.

“But I was going to mention finances – “ Storr muttered weakly.

Horton stood up. “You could not bear the thought of someone, namely myself, chairing the meeting in your unmissed absence, I assume?”

Storr himself stood up. “You will withdraw that remark, of course.”

It was the nearest Colin has seen Storr to anger.

“May I suggest,” Colin said, “that those wishing to hear Jonathon stay, while those who wish to leave do so. If there are any vital points which emerge, I am sure one of those who stays would be willing to tell – “

“What a waste of time all of these perfidious meeting are!” Horton said and strode out of the room.

To Colin’s surprise, Timothy followed him. Then Mrs. Cornish. Fiona smiled briefly at him and then also left.

“Well, if you all will excuse me,” he himself said, and departed.

Fiona was waiting, as he expected, in the corridor.

“You were otherwise engaged, I imagine,” she said.

He thought of telling her the truth. But it was so unlikely she was bound to think it was a lie, so he lied instead, not really believing she would believe it. “I was not feeling well and fell asleep.”

He was watching her, waiting for her reactions, when he realized how much he desired her. Her face showed no emotion, and it was this almost lofty indifference of hers that aroused his ardour keenly.

“Perhaps the Owl’s nocturnal activities are too tiring?” she said, her face expressionless.

“I waited outside the Lyons Hall at the end of the concert”, he said, trying to salvage something. “I’m sorry, I really am.”

“Cheetah’s One, Owls Nil,” she said and smiled.

She left him standing perplexed and a little shaken, and he walked slowly to his room in the



Department. He sat at his desk, vaguely wondering about Fiona and how he might best approach her. Gradually, there grew within him the feeling that he was no longer the master of his own Destiny, and this discomfited him, as his thoughts about Fiona did. He began to doubt his own self-appointed role about revealing individuals to themselves and the world while he, the puppet master, pulled their strings. But his self-doubt did not last. He remembered Andrea, who would be waiting for him later in the day – another victim whose soul he could lay bare; he remembered the Professorship, his philosophical work, his spreading fame – and his child, growing within Alison's womb.

He was smiling at these, his achievements, when someone knocked on the door of his room. Without waiting for his response Elizabeth Cornish strode in.

“Ah! Glad I caught you!” she said. “The Professorial Board meets next week. The interview, I believe, will be next Tuesday. There is an outside candidate.”

“So soon?” Colin said, surprised.

She smiled. “It was felt a swift decision was needed.”

“Do you know how many candidates there are?”

“Four, including yourself.”

“And the outsider?”

“Chap from Oxford. You have a tie, I presume?” she asked in her matronly voice.

“Yes.”

“Good form for you to be presentable.”

“Of course.”

Her smile was curt, and she retreated from his room briskly, the leather soles of her plain shoes clacking against the floor.

For several minutes he sat at his desk before sidling into the corridor. In several of the rooms lectures were in progress, and he stood listening to the muted words, which seeped out to him. There was, he felt, an aura about them, for here, in his chosen Department, the High Priestess and High Priest were at work, teaching their followers. The deities were Truth, Reason, Feeling and Understanding, and each deity, according to the gospel of Mickleman, was a goddess – or at least a woman. And he wanted to possess and master them all.

These thoughts pleased him, and he spent the remainder of the daylight hours writing steadily at his desk. His completed article also pleased him and he laid it aside to walk in the twilight toward the Refectory. But a memory of Fiona drew him away.

He felt his desire for her keenly as he walked toward her house but a short distance from the University. The village of Heslington was joined to the campus by a road, which had sprouted red brick houses. Fiona's dwelling was a small unprepossessing house along a lane which led off from the road. The gardens, lawns and fences were all well tended, and he was about to push open the gate when the front door was opened. Light from inside gave him a view of Storr's face, and he walked past, momentarily perplexed. But it was not long before he turned to see Storr shambling away.

No sooner had Colin knocked on Fiona's door that it was opened.

"Just passing?" she said and smiled.

She wore a thin dress, which left very little to the imagination.

"Not really."

"Been watching long?"

"Sorry?"

She did not pursue the matter. "Come in," she said.

She opened the door further for him and he stepped over her threshold, smiling as she

closed and locked the door. The house smelled of expensive perfume, as Fiona herself did, and he breathed the scent in.

She stepped past him, but he did not move aside and she allowed her body to brush against his. For a few moments he stared at her, and as he did so he thought her face bore a striking resemblance to one of the women in Bruegel's

'Allegory of Lust'. But the impression was fleeting. He thought her beautiful and sexually alluring and moved forward to kiss her lips.

"Not here!" she laughed, and walked slowly up the stairs to her bedroom.

He followed, fascinated by his desire.

The bedroom was all black and crimson and seemed luxurious to Colin.

"Take your clothes off." She said as she sat on the edge of the large bed.

"What?"

"Your clothes – take them off."

Then he saw it. In the corner of the room, a camera stood on a tripod, and in her hand Fiona held the remote control release.

"I want to watch you," she said, still smiling. She rummaged in a drawer by the bed. "And then I want you to put these on." She held out a pair of handcuffs.

Colin smiled, but she soon destroyed his fantasy. "On you," she said, and laughed.

Her laughter, and this reversal of roles, confused Colin, and he stood, in the bright light, by her bed unable to speak.

"Come on, don't be shy," she smiled. "What are you waiting for?" She dangled the

handcuffs in front of him.

When he still did not speak, she added: "Just a few photographs of you - in various poses."

She rose to stand before him and, somewhat abashed, Colin retreated from the room. She did not follow him, and he could hear her laughter as he opened the door of the house to the dark and cooling air.

## X

The food did not interest him, but Colin sat at a table in the crowded Refectory eating nevertheless while he listened to the chatter and clatter of the students around him.

He left his meal half-eaten to saunter toward the Bar in Derwent college, and he was soon drinking himself into a stupor. The beer made his melancholia even worse and he sat vaguely detesting the people who gradually filled the room with their noise.

"Hello!" Andrea said cheerfully. She was dressed all in black, an affectation which surprised him, and he glowered at her because he thought it was his own copyright.

"Join me?" he said, holding up his glass but making no effort to rise from his seat.

When she returned he sat silently watching her sip her drink.

"A bit crowded, isn't it?" she said, embarrassed by his silence.

He watched her lustfully. "I know what you need," he said without any subtlety.

"Oh, yes?" She appeared to him to be only half-insulted.

"Someone to talk to." He smiled as he savoured his first little victory. "It is never easy, is it?"

“What?”

“Sharing moments. Just when you think you understand someone – they surprise you.” The alcohol was beginning to affect his thought, and he struggled to not let this show. “They surprise you,” he repeated. “Usually with other people, betraying.”

Andrea thought of her own just broken relationship and began to be amazed at what she saw as Colin’s insight.

“You thought you understood him,” he continued.

How could he know? She thought. Is it so evident on my face?

“Are you happy here?” he asked, then seeing her questioning face added, “here, at University.”

“Sometimes.”

“What will you do? His pause was deliberate. “When you graduate?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe teach.”

She smiled a defensive smile which Colin divined and he forgot about trying to lay her soul bare with the scalpel of his words, and leaned across the small table that held his many empty glasses to grasp her hand in his own. She did not move away.

“Mind if I join you?” a voice asked above the babble around them.

Andrea jerked her hand away. On the lapel of his tweed jacket Fenton, their interloper, wore a badge saying *‘Being Weird Isn’t Enough’*.

Without being asked, he sat down. “Is this a philosophical discussion – or can anyone join in?”

Colin looked at Andrea who looked at him. Fenton looked at them both and then said, "That's exactly my point! The academic study of morals is no guarantee that those who so study are moral themselves. Won't you agree, Dr. Mickleman?" Fenton gave an inane smile.

The Doctor of Philosophy took a long drink of his beer and then burped loudly.

"Ah!" Fenton exclaimed. "The existential viewpoint! I could not have put it better myself." He gestured toward Andrea. "And you, Mademoiselle? How would you, as a student of the illustrious Dr. Mickleman, express your own desire for understanding?"

She looked at him angrily, then rose and left. Colin watched her push her way through the crowded room and was about to follow when Fenton laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"I am in dread," Fenton said, "that from all this silence something ill shall burst forth."

Eh?"

"Sophocles." He removed his hand.

"That antiquated Greek cretin!"

For some seconds they looked at each other, but Colin turned away before rising to follow Andrea. He soon caught up with her as she walked along the path that took them turning and down toward the light-shimmering lake. They did not speak but she limply held his hand as it sought hers while they walked toward his room. His understanding had impressed her, his eyes seemed to radiate a warmth, and she was lonely.

In his dimly lit room, the smell of pipe smoke and sweaty feet pervaded, and he was soon kissing her and fondling her body. Only partly undressed, they lay on his bed, but his body refused to obey his desire. This alcohol induced failure made him angry. As a remedy to try and arouse his erection he began to beat her bare buttocks with his discarded shoe.

"Please, don't!" she pleaded and began to cry.

Her utter helplessness appealed to him and, as his remedy began to take effect, he forced

himself upon her. But his desire did not last long and, satiated, he turned over to fall into an alcoholic sleep.

She dressed while he slept. Her feelings in turmoil, she sat down at his desk. She would write him a note, she thought, although she did not know what to write and in her search for a clean sheet of paper and pen, she opened the drawer of his desk.

Among the photographs, she recognized Kate, and Magarita, and she carefully replaced them in the drawer. Without feeling anything she silently stole out and away from the room. Dawn was many hours away, as midnight itself was, and she wandered around the lake, keeping to the shadows and avoiding the gaggles of students who passed in the still but seldom silent night air.

Their laughter and their words were devoid of meaning for her. There was no one and nothing she could trust. No boyfriend, parents, friends or tutor; no God. 'I would have been just one more sordid photograph,' she thought as she walked slowly back to her own room, wishing to cry but too full of discordant emotion to succeed.

## XI

Alison frowned, but otherwise bore herself stoically as one who, having thought deeply about a particular matter, had made a decision. She had surprised Colin by arriving to see him early in the morning.

Bewildered, he sat hunched on his bed while Alison stood beside the window.

"Well?" he asked, chagrined at both being disturbed from his slumber so early and not finding Andrea in his room.

"I've made a decision," Alison announced.

"Oh yes?"

“I’m going to have an abortion,” she said without any preamble.

“What?” He remark awakened him.

“You heard.”

“But you can’t – “

“I thought I’d tell you now rather than later.”

“But I would help. Money, that sort of thing. You know that’s not what I want.”

“Who said anything about what you want?”

“But I’ll get you a Flat. Everything.”

“Too late,” she said.

He smiled at her then. But she divined his purpose. “And nothing,” she added, “you say or do can make me change my mind. You’ll not wheedle you way into my affections again.” Her hardness was only in part a pose. “Well, goodbye then. I doubt we shall meet again.”

She turned around and left him sitting on the bed. He sat still for a while and then suddenly leapt up to find his clothes and dress himself. A faint mist shrouded the University and he was half across the bridge outside his residence, straining to see ahead, when he realized he had run in the wrong direction. He turned, and collided with a student carrying an armful of books. He did not want to help but shouted a “Sorry!” to the fallen young man and sprinted away along the path toward the car park behind the large Physics building. There was a Land Rover leaving and he ran toward it shouting Alison’s name, but it steadily pulled away and he was left to bend breathless and alone by the side of the running track. No one saw him as he in anger kicked a post. He hurt his foot, and limped slowly back to his room.

Clarity of thought and release from the pain in his foot came slowly as he sat at his desk smoking his pipe. The idea of a child, unwanted though it was at its conception, had pleased him, but there would, he felt sure, be other opportunities, some woman to bear his children



and whom he might marry if she accepted his need for other purely physical liaisons. Magarita, perhaps? She knew of his other liaisons and did not seem to care. But that, he felt certain, would come in its own species of time. His concern now was the Professorship and although Alison's decision and departure saddened him, he was also a little relieved to be free of what he had felt to be her cloying emotions. Thus was he satisfied with himself and his world again. He made himself a strong brew of tea before departing for his office in his Department.

A pile of mail awaited him in the Secretary's Office, and he spent nearly an hour with her, idling chatting and making rude suggestions. The Secretary, a youngish lady with a tender face and richly coiffured dark blond hair given to slightly audacious and in some circles fashionable clothes, did not mind, for she was recently and happily married. Colin's seduction of her was over a year away and for both it was part of their past. And when he did finally peruse his mail in his own room, he was pleased to find a letter asking him for an article from an academic journal he never read.

So he sat and wrote and read a little while the hours of the morning passed. Fenton was late for his tutorial, and Colin calmly waited. Half an hour; an hour. But in his relaxed way he did not care, and was even a little pleased, for last night Fenton had disturbed him. The meaning of his words had not escaped Colin, inebriated though he was, and he began to surmise that Fenton was too embarrassed to attend the tutorial as he began to believe that Fenton, the avowed homosexual, was attracted to him. He felt this explained all of Fenton's behaviour, and was even a little pleased. Perhaps, after all, he had found the key to unravel Fenton's character. Still thinking these thoughts, he was surprised by Fiona who entered his room without knocking.

He watched her carefully as she came to sit on the side of his desk. As was her habit, her dress seemed to reveal rather than hide her body.

"Dinner, tonight?" she asked.

"Well – "

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked directly.

"What do you mean?"

"Of my strength."

“I didn’t realize that you took steroids,” he said in an attempt to be clever.

It did not work. “I have some outfits which I think you would look very good in.”

“Oh yes?”

“Yes. Are you afraid to experiment then? And after all I’ve heard!”

“Such as?”

“Oh various things.”

The phrase startled him, for some reason he could not remember. But he did remember feeling almost as startled by something Fenton had said to him, last night. He could not remember what that was either. Fiona was staring at him while her lips were drawn into a smile, and this perplexed him as well.

“Try it,” she said, “tonight. You might surprise yourself and have a good time..” She pursed her lips. “I think we’d make a good combination – in bed.”

She smiled at him and then walked toward the door. “I’ll expect you about seven.”

Her perfume and presence lingered a long time, and he found himself unable to concentrate on his work. His mind began to fill with erotic images and visions, and all of them involved him and Fiona. It was these which persuaded him: he would go and meet her, confident that he would be equal to any situation, and, in his anticipation and delight, he forgot about both Andrea and Fenton.

Fenton had been with a party of his friends when he had seen Andrea pass in the night. He caught sight of her face as she slowly walked under a lamp near the door to her residence.

“Come on,” a friend had urged him as he stood wondering whether to call out her name – and he had gone with them to their rooms where music played and cups were filled with

wine. Soon the voices were raised to try to right all the political wrongs in the world.

“Worker’s Councils – that is what we need! It would show the bosses!” an enthusiastic student said.

“But surely, democratic reforms,” another countered, “are the only viable means.”

“Bull! Revolution has been and still is the only answer.”

But Fenton remembered, as he listened, Andrea’s face. It had spoken to him, one soul to another, one outcast to another. There was real suffering there which he felt no political discussion would change, and he rose unobserved to take his leave.

“Go away!” a voice shouted in answer to his knuckle raps upon Andrea’s door.

“Leave me alone!” the voice said as he tried again.

“It’s me!” he said.

“Look!” an angry face said as Andrea opened the door, “I want to be left alone.”

Then there was not more anger in her face as she staggered back inside to collapse upon the floor.

“Are you alright?” Fenton asked as he knelt beside her. Her room was brightly lit, very tidy and very warm.

“Get your hands off me, you poof!” she said, slurring her words.

An empty bottle of whiskey lay on the floor, and he was about to leave when he saw a bottle of barbiturate tablets. It was almost empty.

She peered at the container as he held it up. “Have you taken any?” he asked.

“Leave me alone. Want to sleep,” she said through half-closed eyes. She tried to speak again but drifted into unconsciousness.

“Andrea! Wake up!” Gently, he held her head in his hands. “Have you taken any of these tablets?”

She did not respond and he lifted her to lay her down on the bed. On the bedside table was a letter, propped up against the lamp. ‘Dr. Colin Mickleman’ the writing on the envelope read.

‘Will you regret not having a photograph of me? I doubt it.’

Fenton read the note three times before placing it in his pocket and lifting Andrea into his arms. He carried her along the corridor and down the stairs, oblivious to the two female students who drunkenly laughed as he passed them by.

“You Tarzan, she Jane!” one of them said, and laughed again.

His car was small and some distance away, but he ran with his burden to lay her softly on the back seat. His driving was fast as he raced toward the city. He nearly crashed once, as he slewed the car into a corner, and once he had to stop to try to remember his way before reversing to take another turning.

No one came to greet him or relieve him of his burden as he kicked open the doors to the Casualty department of the Hospital.

“Please,” he pleaded to the woman behind the desk, “she’s taken an overdose!”

The waiting patients stared while, somewhere, a baby cried.

Then, there was a sudden rushing of white coats, blue uniforms and anxious faces.

“Wait here, will you?” a young woman said. And then a Nurse was asking: “Do you know what she has taken?”

“Some tablet – and alcohol.”

“How long ago?”

“Not sure. Half an hour, perhaps. Will she be alright?”

No answer, only another person asking questions. The questioning nurse had a kindly face and ushered him to a chair in the corridor. He gave her Andrea’s name and address, as well as his own.

‘You are students at the University then?’ she asked. But her kindly smile did not change.

“Yes. Will she be alright?”

“I should think so, yes. They’ll pump her stomach out. She’ll be drowsy for a while and sleep.

“Can I see her?” He saw the look on the young girl’s face and was about to correct her natural assumption when he said instead, “I’m sorry for all the trouble.”

“That’s what we are here for.”

“Can I see her?” he asked again.

“In a while, probably.”

She left him, and he was suddenly aware of his surroundings, of voices, near and distant, of people walking past. A telephone ringing. He sat for a long time.

“Mr. Fenton?” a Doctor asked. The pockets of his white coat bulged with pens, a stethoscope, a small compendium about drugs.

“Yes.” He stood up.

“You can see her now.” They walked together toward a cubicle.

“Is she alright?”

“Yes, fine. We’ll keep her in overnight. Just for observation. I should think she will sleep most of tomorrow.” He nodded curtly, then walked away to disappear behind a curtain.

Andrea lay on her side, covered by a sheet and an thin blanket, an intravenous infusion supplying fluid through a needle in the back of her hand. She did not stir as he did not try to wake her, and he stood beside her for what seemed a long time.

“She’ll be alright.” The Nurse who questioned him said as she passed. “We’ll be moving her onto the ward soon. I’m sure they wouldn’t mind if you wanted to call and see her in the morning.”

He returned her smile, and left to wander back into the night, and it took him several minutes to realize his car had been stolen. In his haste, he had left the door open and the keys in the ignition.

## XII

It was a long walk back to the University, but Fenton did not mind. He had reported the theft before setting out into the cold, sodium-lit darkness. But he was soon warm, despite being without a jacket, and by the time he reached his room he had decide on his plan of campaign.

His sleep was brief, if sound, and he ate a small breakfast in the refectory before boarding a bus for the city. The Ward Sister was helpful and kind, and let him briefly sit by Andrea’s bed while, around him in the busy ward, Student Nurses made beds while they chatted.

“Thank you,” Andrea said, and weakly held his hand as she tried to keep awake.

“I haven’t told anyone yet,” he said, embarrassed by her gesture.

“There was a letter.”

“I have it, it’s alright.” He withdrew his hand and made to search his pockets, but it was just an excuse to remove his hand from her. “I must have left it in my room.”

“You know, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Such a stupid thing to do!” She tried to smile. “I was so fed up. You won’t tell him, will you?”

“No,” he lied and turned his face away.

“You’re very kind.” She held his hand again.

In embarrassment, he stood up. “I’ll call again this afternoon. Is there anything you want?”

“They discharge me today. The Doctor is coming to see me later this morning.”

“I’ll telephone the Ward to ask. Do you want me to come and meet you if you are discharged?”

“That would be very kind.”

“Not at all.”

“You’re a strange man,” she said gently.

He smiled in response and walked back down along the long line of beds.

His visit to the Police Station to confirm the theft of his vehicle was brief, but he lingered in the centre of the city, watching people, drinking tea at a café and browsing in a bookshop. It was past midday when he returned to the University.

Colin was in his room, in the Department, smoking a pipe and scribbling.

“Come in!” he said cheerfully. Then, seeing Fenton, he added, “bit late, aren’t we?”

Calmly, Fenton sat down opposite him.

“Black seems an appropriate colour,” Fenton said, alluding to Colin’s manner of dress.

“Shall I,” Colin responded, quoting, “entrust myself to entangled shadows?”

“Perhaps,” Fenton retorted, unsmiling, “I shall do violence to your person.”

Colin gaped, then squinted, trying to find a clever response. But Fenton calmly handed him Andrea’s envelope and note.

“From Andrea,” Fenton said. “She tried to kill herself – last night.”

This was something beyond the Owl’s comprehension, but he strove to understand it, and the strain showed on his face.

“Is she – “ he began.

“Don’t worry – she’ll be alright.”

“How?” The strain was lessening, but anxiety had begun.

“Overdose. Luckily, I found her in time.”

“You?”

“No one else knows. Yet.”



Colin came to several conclusions, almost at the same time.

Fenton let him suffer. "Of course," he said with apparent indifference, "a scandal at this time would do your chances of obtaining the Professorship no good."

For a few seconds, the Owl gaped in horror at one of his own conclusions. Then he shivered in revulsion. Was he about to be blackmailed into a homosexual encounter?

Fenton sighed, as he saw the perplexity and horror evident on Colin's face. "Don't judge everybody by your own standards," he said. "Just because I'm gay doesn't mean I've no moral standards."

"Sorry?"

"I know what you were thinking. And you were wrong. I have no intention of telling anyone anything – unless Andrea wishes it. She and she alone will decide. And shall I tell you something else?"

Colin was not sure whether he wanted to know. But he said nothing.

"There was a time when I fancied you," Fenton continued. "You had an aura of genius about you. But so cold – so little real humanity. I know you dislike me. Not because I'm gay – but because I see through your pose. What is beyond that pose? Is there anything?"

He took the note and envelope, which Colin had left on his desk and walked over toward the door. Outside, in the quiet corridor, he stood shaking for several minutes. He disliked the anger he had felt toward Colin and walked quickly down the stairs and out in the freshness outside. Ragged cumulus clouds sped swiftly below the blue of the sky, carried on the rising wind, and Fenton tore Andrea's note in small pieces as he walked, casting them into the lake from a bridge. He watched them as they sank, bopped or floated away. Around him, the University pulsed with life.

He did not have long to wait in the corridor of the Ward. Several of the beds were screened by their curtains and he was idly wondering why when Andrea, dressed in her clothes of the night before, came slowly toward him. She smiled on seeing him leaning against the wall,

and then broke into a run to hug him strongly. He held her body feebly by one hand while she clung to him, and then edged away.

“I’ve got a taxi waiting,” he said while a passing Nurse smiled at them.

“You are kind,” Andrea said and held his hand briefly. “Sorry I embarrassed you,” she whispered.

They did not speak again as they walked the short distance to the entrance to enter their waiting carriage and be conveyed along the traffic filled roads to the campus. But every few minutes Andrea would turn and glance at his face as if trying to measure his feelings. But his face betrayed no emotion.

He walked with her to her room, and stood outside as she opened the door.

“Please,” she said almost pleading, “I’d like you to come in.”

She lay on her bed while he sat, awkwardly, on the chair by the small study desk.

“I feel like I could sleep for a week, she said, and yawned.

Instead, she rested her head on her elbow as she looked at him. “Have you still got the note?” she asked.

“I threw it away.”

“Good.” Then she sighed. “You know, I’m not depressed any more. When I woke up this morning and saw the sunlight streaming through the window I was happy. There was this woman in the bed next to mine – did you see her? – who’d had most of her bowel cut out. They were very kind to her, the Nurses, but

you could see she was dying. I felt so ashamed, being there. Do you mind if I talk?”

”Of course not.”

“What will happen?” she asked softly. “About last night, I mean?”

“Nothing, I imagine. Unless you want to tell anyone.”

“No, of course not. Not even – “

“I’ve told him.”

She was not certain whether she was pleased or upset. “And?” she said, hesitantly.

“He’ll keep quiet, I imagine.”

“I’ll have to leave the University,” she said sadly.

“Do you really want to?”

“No.”

“Then why?”

“I can’t face him.”

“I’ll be with you in lectures.”

She smiled at him. “You’re very sweet. But he is my personal tutor.”

“Change to someone else. It happens.”

“What could I say? What reason could I give?”

It was Fenton’s turn to smile. “With his reputation, you don’t need a reason.”

She thought for a while, and then said, “I just couldn’t bear it, seeing him.”

“Imagine what he would feel like, seeing you.”

Andrea laughed. “I can’t believe I was so stupid, last night.”

“In the midst of many, it is easy to be alone.”

“You know, I always thought you were so reserved. Aloof. Even a bit arrogant. But you’re not, are you? You’re really kind.”

“You’ll have me blushing in a moment.”

“You’re not like other men.” Then realizing what she had said, added, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean – “

“It’s alright. I don’t keep it a secret. Anymore.”

“I mean you’re – for a man – oh, I’m not saying this right!” she finally said in exasperation. “I mean I can actually talk to you. You understand.”

“And I am no threat,” he smiled in self-mockery.

She began to feel that she would not have minded if he were. She would feel safe, in his arms, with the world shut out. But she said nothing and even tried to hide her feelings so that they would not show in her face and eyes. She wanted to be strong and self-reliant, not depending on men for her emotional security, but she did not know how to begin. She remembered the father she saw only twice a year, her sisters leaving school early to work while she studied, always alone in her life. Her always-disastrous relations with men. Her need for love seemed to drive them away.

“There’s a strength in you,” she finally said. “An inner strength. I feel better just being with you. Can we be friends?”

He gave a crooked smile. “I thought we already were.”

She jumped up to kiss him, then decided against it. The sudden movement made her feel dizzy and she lay down on her bed again.

“You ought to get some rest,” he said with concern.

“Yes, I suppose so.” She smiled at him as she sat up. “I’ll get into bed, if you don’t mind.”

“Er, no. I was just going,” he said as he nervously stood because she had begun to remove her clothes.

“Please,” she said, half-pleading and half-seductively, “stay and talk to me for a while.” Naked except for her panties, she got into bed.

“Well, actually –“ he began.

“Please, just for a few minutes.”

He sat down again.

“Can I ask you a personal question?” she asked.

“Depends on the question!”

“Have you ever been with a woman?” she asked impulsively, surprised at her own audacity.

“I really ought to go,” he said as he stood up again.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you.” She suddenly realized that she did not want to be alone. “Look, I’ll be honest with you, Carl. I need to be with somebody at the moment.”

“But I can’t – “

“Just hold me, please.” There was no longer any tone of seduction in her voice or manner, just a pleading, a helplessness, and she began to cry, slowly and almost in silence.

He went to set beside her on the bed, and she clung to him, her tears wetting his shoulder and drawing forth from within her some of the sadness and misery she felt. Her tears were the rain from the clouds which had come to pass over the sun of her joy, and it was minutes before the dark clouds retreated. She curled up, then, in the warmth of her bed, and closed her eyes to sleep. He brushed her cheek dry and briefly kissed it before leaving her to the silence of her room.

### XIII

There were no meetings, lectures or tutorials to fill Colin’s afternoon, but he could not settle down to his writing. He spent an hour wandering around the University library, but neither the books nor some research he needed to do interested him, and he wandered the campus in search of Magarita.

But she was not in her office, and he returned to his room in the Hall of Residence. But he soon became listless and bored. Fiona troubled him, as Andrea and Fenton did, and as he wandered for the third time around the campus, he began to realize he was alone. There was no one with whom he could share his secrets; no one with whom he could talk without assuming the mask of his role. He thought of Edmund, and it took him over an hour of diligent and then frenzied searching in the piles of old letters, manuscripts and papers that littered parts of his room before he found an address.

There was a grimy public telephone kiosk in a gloomy corner of Derwent college between the lavatories and the Porter’s prison of glass, and he was approaching it when a crowd of students came toward him, babbling. One of them, a brightly dressed young lady with frizzy hair, waved at him, and he waved back. She smiled, and then was sucked away within the crowd. He had no idea who she was, and shrugged his shoulders. Inside the soundproof booth, graffiti declared: *‘Jesus Saves, Moses Invests, But Buckby spends it all.’* Buckby was the Treasurer of the University.

His efforts were to no avail. There was no telephone number under that name, the discordant voice emanating from the receiver had said. Disgruntled, he wandered back to

his bedroom. It was then he realized the drawer that contained his photographs was unlocked. Had Andrea seen them? Was that the meaning of her cryptic message?

Suddenly, it seemed his world was in chaos. There would be no Professorship, only rumours about his photographs, about Andrea's attempted suicide. For a few moments he panicked. But calmness eventually came, although the pains he felt in his stomach remained. The ritual of cleaning and filling and lighting his pipe aided his thinking, and by the time he had smoked his fill he was certain neither Andrea or Fenton would compromise him. Yet a slight uncertainty remained, seeping down into his unconscious. Secure again in the confines of his world, he lay on his bed reading academic books.

It was nearing five o'clock in the evening when he left his room, no longer able to resist the temptation of visiting Andrea. He needed to know how she felt - what she would do. The hours of his reading had brought light rain to the outside world, and sheen of wetness pervaded the buildings and the paths which were entwined around them. It was only a short walk to the building which housed Andrea's room, which pleased him, since he so disliked rain.

It was Fenton who opened Andrea's door.

"She doesn't want to see you," Fenton said.

"Who is it?" a faint voice said.

"The esteemed Dr. Mickleman."

"I'll get dressed. Tell him to come back in a few minutes."

Fenton smiled ruefully at Colin and then shut the door. Colin waited outside for the allotted span, and then knocked on the door again.

Fenton, adopting the pose of a deferential butler, bowed slightly and in a disdainful accent said, "Madam will see you now, sir." He moved aside while Colin entered, then closed the door.

"How are you?" Colin asked Andrea as she sat on her bed. She was demurely dressed, but Fenton's presence, the disordered bedclothes, the discarded female underclothes on the

floor, perplexed him.

Before Andrea could answer, Fenton said, "As well as might be expected under the circumstances, sir."

Colin ignored him. "Is there anything I can do?" he asked her.

"With all due respect, sir," Fenton said, continuing with his accent and his role, "I believe you have done quite enough already. May I therefore respectfully suggest you return to your lucubrations? Shall I show the gentleman out, Madam?"

Andrea giggled.

"Very well Madam if that is what you wish." For Colin's benefit he gestured toward the door. "This way, sir, if you please. Terrible weather, isn't it? For the time of year."

Colin was beginning to become annoyed. "Can I talk with you alone?" he asked Andrea.

Andrea affected her own accent and role. "Be so good," she said to Fenton, "as to leave us."

Fenton bowed. "As you wish. If Madam is quite sure."

"Quite sure."

"I shall be directly outside, should you at any time require my assistance." He flicked imaginary dust from his imaginary livery.

Colin waited until he and Andrea were alone. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What will you do?"

"About what?"



“Does anyone else know?”

“Don’t worry,” she smiled. “I shall not make a fuss.”

“I didn’t mean – “

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Pardon?”

“At the lecture. On Kant’s aesthetics isn’t it?”

“Er, yes.” He did not know what else to say and stood immobile with his arms hanging limply by his side.

Andrea rose to open the door, and as it was opened Fenton sprang into the room. But he quickly resumed his role.

“The gentleman,” Andrea said, acting again, “is just leaving.”

“Very good, Madam. This way, sir.” Fenton gestured toward the corridor. Colin was at the top of the stairs when Fenton, as Fenton, said, “If I were you, I’d leaver her alone from now on.”

Andrea was sitting on her bed when he returned to her room.

“I was shaking and trembling,” she admitted, “seeing him again. I’m glad that’s over. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t been here.”

Reverting to his role, he said, “Your servant, Madam.”

She threw her pillow playfully at him, and then looked at her discarded underclothes on the

floor. “Do you think he thought – “ she began.

“Probably!”

They both laughed. She wanted to embrace him, but all she did was rest her head in her hands and sigh.

“Some friends of mine,” Fenton said in an effort to comfort her, “are having a party tonight. Would you like to come?”

“Not really. I’m not in the mood.”

“Well, when I say ‘party’ it’s not exactly the right word. Just a quiet get together.”

“Thanks, but no.”

“It’s sort of an informal gathering of the GaySoc.”

“Sorry?”

The Gay Society.”

“Sounds like the title of a thirties musical.”

“Maybe it was. Anyway, they’ll be some women there. It’s not all men. There’s someone there I’d particularly like you to meet.”

She thought for a while, then said, “I don’t really think it would be my scene.”

“We are not all weirdoes you know.”

“I didn’t say you were. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“Do I look offended?”

“No.”

“It would be good for you to get out – meet people.”

“I’m not really a gregarious person.”

“Look, I’ll tell you what. I have to go – for some silly reason I let myself be talked into running the thing this year. But afterwards we can go out for a meal, just you and I.”

“You don’t have to take pity on me, you know.”

“Is that what you think?”

“I don’t know what to think anymore.”

“I’m asking you as a friend.”

“I know. I’m sorry. Alright, then – but I’m not sure I feel like eating much.”

“Doesn’t matter. Now you ought to get some more rest. Will you be alright?”

“I won’t do anything silly, if that’s what you mean.”

“No it was not what I meant. I meant I’ll stay and talk to you if you like.”

“I’ll be fine. I do still feel tired. You’ve done more than enough.”

“I’ll be back about six then.”

“Fine.”

He had opened the door to leave when she said, “You are very kind.”

Fenton shrugged his shoulders. “What are friends for?”



Fenton was over half hour late.

“Sorry!” he said as an anxious Andrea opened her door. “I fell asleep.”

Andrea wore a tight jumper and close-fitting trousers and even Fenton noticed that she was wearing no bra, for her nipples stood out quite prominently. Fenton was dressed as he almost always was in tweed jacket and trousers. Only the colour of his shirts and his badges varied. His small but brightly coloured badge declared: *Laugh Now, But One Day We'll Be In Charge.*

“Are you ready,” he asked unnecessarily.

“Lead on!”

The gathering was held in the first floor room of one of the colleges. The chairs were low and comfortable, the décor modern but subdued. The blinds were drawn to cover the window and one table was spread with glasses, bottles of wine and cans of beer. Of the nine students, three were women. They did not turn to stare as Andrea and Fenton entered, and Andrea was surprised to find that all of those gathered in the room looked and dressed like ordinary students.

Fenton saw her surprise. “What did you expect?”

“I don't know,” she whispered. “They all look so normal.”

He adopted an effeminate pose. “Well to tell you the truth dear, we are. It’s the others who aren’t!”

She cuffed him playfully on the ear with her hand.

“Come on,” he said, “I’ll introduce you.” He walked toward a tall woman with startling blue eyes and very short black hair. “Julie,” he said to her, “this is Andrea.”

“Hi,” Julie said, and held out her bony hand.

Andrea blushed, held the proffered hand briefly, and said, “Hello!”

“What are you studying?” Julie asked her.

“Philosophy. And you?”

“Physics. Can I get you a drink?”

“Orange juice – if there is one.”

“We’ll see!” As she passed Fenton, Julie whispered in his ear. “Pretty, isn’t she?”

She was not away long, and Andrea clutched her glass nervously while she and Julie stood on the edge of the conclave. Fenton moved away to talk to the others.

“What made you choose York?” Julie asked her.

“The course, mainly.”

“Do you like music?”

“It’s alright.”

“I just love Classical, myself. Now Carl – well! His taste runs to that horrendous noise he calls ‘Progressive’. Personally, I would say ‘regressive’ – back to the primitive.”

She laughed at her own joke. “But enough of me – tell me about yourself.”

Andrea sipped her orange juice, and looked at Carl. He was obviously at ease, among friends, and his laugh made her feel a little sad. “Are you in your first year?” she asked Julie.

“Heavens no! Only wish I were. Finals time! What made you chose philosophy?”

“Seemed a good idea at the time.”

“Are you liking it?”

“Yes and no.”

“We had a few lectures from a chap in your Department. On the philosophy of Science. Can’t remember his name. Fancied himself, though. Tall chap – often wore black. Some sort of gesture, I suppose. Typical arty-farty type. Do you know him?”

“Not really,” Andrea lied. She wanted to get away, to talk to Carl to leave the room. Julie was smiling intently at her. “Have you any plans after your Degree?” she asked to hide her embarrassment.

“Year off. Cycling across America, then Scandinavia.”

“You do a lot of cycling then?”

“Sure! I love it. You?”

“No. I am not very sporting.”

“You should try it! There’s a marvellous, simply marvellous, feeling about riding a bike –

such freedom. Just you, and your surroundings. You're really in tune with your environment. I love it – touring and racing, cycling at speed. You and the machine, a perfect harmony. All your own effort and skill. Beautiful! I've a race – well, Time Trial actually – on Sunday. Would you like to come?"

"Well, I was thinking of - " she returned her gaze from Carl to Julie. There was something about Julie's earnest, youthful enthusiasm, which pleased her, and she smiled, envying her vivacity.

"I'm afraid," Julie was saying, "it starts rather early. Six in the morning actually. I'm off number three – they always start the slowest riders first!" She laughed, again, rocking slightly backwards on her feet and as she did so she lightly touched Andrea's arm with her hand. "It's only twenty five though."

"Sorry?"

"Twenty five miles. Fast course, though. I hope to do a One-Six." Then seeing Andrea's obvious incomprehension, she added, "one hour, six minutes."

"You mean," Andrea said, astounded, "you cycle twenty five miles in just one hour and six minutes?"

"More or less. I'm not as fast as some of the ladies, though."

"That's nearly – what?" she thought for a moment. "Twenty three miles an hour."

Julie shrugged her shoulders. "Lots of ladies get under the hour."

"You must be very fit."

"Well, I do lots of training! It's lovely to be out on the bike after hours of lectures or lab work. Really relaxing. There's only you, the bike and the road – everything else ceases to exist. Marvellous for stress!"

"I doubt I could make it into the town on a bike."

“Fancy a ride tomorrow? I’ve got an spare bike?”

“I’d only slow you down.”

“Nonsense! I like touring speeds as well.” She looked at Andrea’s body, letting her gaze linger on her breasts. “You look fit enough. I’ve got a Flat in town. If you want to come round about ten in the morning, say. I’ll give you the address.”

“Really, I –“

“No bother! Just a minute, I’ll borrow some paper and a pen.”

She returned with Carl, and scribbled her address on a crumpled sheet of paper. “I’ll look forward,” she said as she gave it to Andrea, “to seeing you.” She turned toward Carl. “Got to dash!” To Andrea’s surprise, Julie kissed Carl on the cheek, tousled his hair with her hand and said, “You take care. Probably see you next week.” She waved at Andrea, smiled warmly, and was gone from the room in a burst on energy. For a few seconds, Andrea regretted her departure.

Then she was annoyed with herself. ‘I’m so fickle and immature,’ she thought.

“Come and meet the others.” Carl said to her.

“Can we go? I really not in the mood to be around people.”

“Of course. I’ll just say my farewells.”

He returned smiling and holding out some car keys. “Julian's lent me his car,” he beamed.

The car turned out to be an old Volkswagen laden with rust whose interior was sorely in need of repair. But it conveyed them, albeit slowly, into the city centre. The restaurant Carl had chosen was not expensive but the food was reasonable even if the service was slow and the somewhat garish décor faded. But in the dim light it was easy to ignore.



Andrea settled for the soup while Carl ate, what seemed to her, a gargantuan meal.

“So you’ve arranged to see Julie again?” he asked.

“I let myself be talked into it.”

“She’s a bit like that,” he smiled.

“Is she -?”

“What do you think?”

“Silly question. God, I’m stupid! Why else would she be there!”

“I don’t think you are stupid,” he said gently.

“I must be! Shall I tell you something? No, on second thoughts, I won’t.”

“You can trust me, you know.”

She briefly held his hand. “I know.”

“You liked her, didn’t you?”

Andrea sighed. “Yes, I suppose so. But only because she showed an interest in me – seemed to like me. I sometimes think I’m just a reflection of other people’s interest.”

“We all need to be liked.”

“But I seem to need others in a different way. Without them I sometimes feel I don’t exist at all.”

“You just need someone to love you,” he said softly.

She cried then, not loudly or very much. “I know,” she said, almost as a whisper. “And I wish it could be you.”

For some time he looked at her, not knowing what to say or do, and when he did speak, his own emotion was evident in his measured words. “I’m sorry. But you will find someone. I know you will. I do love you, as a friend.”

She turned away, then, to stare out of the window, her silent tears returning. Outside, in the resurgent rain, people hurried along the pavement in the city-lit darkness, burdened with the burdens of their worlds.

#### XIV

Such was Colin’s perplexity that, on leaving Andrea’s room, he did not notice the rain. It was light, a mere drizzle to dampen clothes only with prolonged exposure, and he walked through it along the campus paths to the streets beyond and thence to Fiona’s house.

He was early for his assignation, but she was not there and, disgruntled, he trudged back to the University. No one disturbed him as he sat, alone in the Philosophy Department, in his room, vaguely looking out from the window.

Tomorrow, he knew, he would see Andrea and Fenton at his lecture and this both pleased and disturbed him, bringing discomfort to his stomach and pain to his head. He was pleased because he wanted to show he was not concerned about their presence and secret knowledge, and because he would then know what, if anything, they would do. Yet he was agitated because that knowledge was another day away. He began, however, to prepare himself. If necessity demanded it, he would say she was infatuated with him, and he spent nearly an hour creating in his mind answers to any questions he might face.

Pleased with himself again, he issued forth from his office to walk briskly to Fiona’s house. He was only a few minutes early and waited, leaning on her gate smoking his pipe. ‘I think we’d make a good combination’ he remembered she had said, ‘in bed.’

He waited half an hour; then an hour, leaning against her fence, a nearby lamppost and her door. He banged his fist against the door, stole a look through windows front and back, but no one was seen or came, and it was another half and hour before, in disappointment, he walked away. From his office he telephoned Magarita. But his recent experiences had done nothing to change his habits, and in the bedroom of her almost city-centre and quite artistically furnished flat, he resumed his manipulative role.

It was sad for Magarita that she loved him. She stood before him naked, her tawny hair held neatly by a band behind her head and already he had remarked about her tendency to plumpness. He held his camera ready.

“Go on!” he said, “just one of you sitting on the toilet.”

“No.”

“What are you afraid of?”

“I just don’t want to, alright?” She had begun to frown, and made to grab her clothes..

“Come here,” he said, almost softly.

Reluctantly, she did. Then he was kissing her and steering her toward the bed. She resisted, a little, but did not want to be alone and let him win again. Her ecstasy came slowly and when it was over and she wished to lie warm and languid beside him resting her head on his chest, he spoke to her again.

“Humour me,” he said and kissed her.

“Alright, then. But only one.”

He left shortly thereafter, clutching his undeveloped prize.

Sleep came easily to him on his own bed and he slept deeply until a disturbing dream awoke him. He dreamed he was in Fiona’s bed, waiting for her to join him. She was a long

time, and he fell asleep. Then warm hands were caressing his body and genitals, arousing him and he turned over to find not Fiona but Fenton, naked, beside him. Then Fenton was guiding his hand, downward.... He awoke sweating and kicking his bedclothes onto the floor.

He did sleep again, but in spasms of half-conscious tiredness and deep perplexing dreams, and when the hard, strident ringing on his clock alarm finally aroused him, he lay, tired and yawning and disturbed. But the passing minutes faded his memory of the dream, until it gradually slipped away from his conscious recollection. Outside, the sun glowed warmly, and he rose to select from his untidy collection a recording of loud modern music.

Soon, he was ready for his day. He forsook the black clothes of his pose, choosing instead a conventional ensemble replete with a silk bow tie. The effect pleased him and he smiled at himself in the mirror.

He was not surprised to find Andrea and Fenton seated next to each other in the room apportioned for his lecture. They did not smile or stare at him, but sat idly talking to those around them, their notebooks and pens ready on the table before them, and he began to wonder if it had all been some dream, for they appeared relaxed, at ease. But the feeling passed. It had been real, and he himself began to tremble and sweat.

Then his own emotions faded, as he remembered the plan of his lecture. For he was, after all, the master, they the disciples.

“Finally,” he said at his lecture’s end, “and in conclusion, you can say that Kant wished to prove that aesthetic experience improves our lives: it makes or can make us moral beings. In essence, that it its reason for existing. Any questions?”

“Yes,” Fenton said immediately. “So what you’re saying is that Kant’s aesthetics show the value of things like Art resides in the moral realm?”

“Not exactly! I believe Kant hints – and I repeat only hints – that aesthetic experience humanizes us. For example, in his *‘Solution to the Antinomy of Taste’* he – “

“Yes, but going on from there, what about the life of the artist – or indeed the philosopher. Does their life have to be moral, in the conventional sense, for their works to be perceived as sublime and thus contributing to an aesthetic experience?” Colin wanted to interject, but Fenton continued. “If you, for example, study the lives of most of the great artists – and some philosophers – you will find a certain turmoil, even moral turpitude. Then – “

“It is an interesting point,” he said, trying to smile. “But one not directly relevant to our study of Kant.

“I think it is very relevant to aesthetics. Central to the life of the philosopher, in fact.”

“Perhaps you would like to study the matter further.”

“I would have thought you would have developed Kant’s – what did you call it? Hints? – further.”

Colin looked around the room. “Any other points?” he asked.

Fenton said aloud, and to no one in particular, “it would make a good thesis – the lives of philosophers in relation to their ideas. Is there a correlation between the humanity of their teachings and the morality of their lives?”

“Perhaps,” Colin said with an elegant smile, “you should write a thesis about it – assuming you pass your finals.”

“No,” Fenton said, screwing up his face into a gargoyle-like expression, “it’s a boring subject. Much more important things to do.”

Gradually the students left. In the corridor, Colin heard talk and laughter. Was it about him, he wondered? But no one stared at him as he walked to his office. He was inside, smoking his pipe and glancing at Kant’s *‘Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime’* when a possible solution to what he saw as a potential problem occurred to him. He had no diary or timetable to consult, for he despised dependence on such items, but he knew from memory that no engagements, lectures, tutorials or assignments would hinder him, and he used his telephone to summon a taxi to convey him to his destination.

In his intense satisfaction, he rubbed his hands together and smiled.

Andrea had made her excuses in a brief telephone conversation and it was with some reluctance that she arrived at Julie's Flat in the afternoon at the re-arranged time. The Flat was part of an elegant Georgian building some distance from the centre of the city where a road fed an incessant stream of traffic and a little piece of parkland opened wide. But inside, there was only a perfumed silence, a clutter of books, furniture and bikes.

"The weather is just right! Julie said. "Do you want something to drink or shall we make a start?"

"I'm fine."

"Good! Here you are." She pointed to a bike in the small corridor. "I've adjusted the saddle height for you."

"Thanks."

Julie laughed. "Don't look so worried! Right, if you want to lug that down, I'll get changed and be right with you."

The cycle was lighter than Andrea expected, and she waited outside the front door of the apartment feeling slightly conspicuous. Julie duly arrived wearing skin-tight cycling shorts and jumper and carrying her gleaming bike. The shorts were black but the jumper was bright and banded. 'York Road Club' was flocked in large letters on the back.

Soon, Andrea was regretting her acceptance. The roads they took led them after a few miles beyond the limits of the city and, as houses gave way to hedges and fields, Andrea was tired and sweating profusely. She judged their pace fast; although for Julie it was only a slow dawdle.

"You alright?" Julie kept saying as she dropped back to ride beside her.

Andrea would nod, and smile, and turn the pedals faster in an effort to convince. But after a few more miles even her pride could not make her continue. She dismounted to lean the cycle against a field gate and sit herself on the ground. Julie returned to sit beside her.

“Here,” Julie said, giving her a handkerchief from a pocket of her jumper.

“Thanks.” She wiped the sweat on her forehead away.

“You look done in.”

“I am!”

“The sun is warm, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you take your cardigan off? You must be hot.”

Andrea looked at her suspiciously, but Julie laughed and said, “don’t worry! I’m not after your body – nice though it is!”

“I didn’t think you were,” Andrea said quietly and without conviction.

“I just want to be your friend. You seem to need one.”

“Is that what Carl said?”

“He said nothing. I like you, that’s all. Alright, so I’m gay. Big deal.”

Andrea felt like a fool and, although she did not want to because she did not feel particularly warm sitting in the breeze, she removed her cardigan.

“You thirsty?”

“Yes.”

“There’s a little tea shop just up the road.”

“Ah! Just what I need!” Then she added: “What do you mean by ‘just up the road?’”

“About five or six miles.”

“Six miles?” Are you serious?”

“Well, it was about six last time I looked on a map.”

“I didn’t mean that!”

“Think you can make it?”

“I don’t think so. But even if I could, we’ve got to ride back. How far is it back, anyway – from here?”

“Six or seven miles – no more.” She stood up and held out her hand. “Come on then! Home.”

Andrea let Julie help her up. She did not want to jerk her hand away as they stood facing each other for fear that Julie would misunderstand, so they stood looking at each other and holding hands for almost a minute. It was Julie who broke the contact, turning away abruptly. Then she was smiling again.

“I was going to say,” she laughed, “race you back!”

“Only if you give me an hours start!” She wrapped the arms of her cardigan around her waist.

A few cars passed them on their way into the city, and high cloud came to haze the sun. But it was a pleasant ride, for Andrea, and even the city streets, often dense with traffic, did not unduly disturb her. Yet she was glad when it ended. Her arms and legs ached, a little, her crotch a lot, and she felt bathed in her own sweat. The Flat felt warm and she let Julie carry



both bicycles, one after the other, up the stairs and into the spare room where they rested with others.

“What do you want first,” Julie asked her as they sat on the sofa, “Tea or a bath?”

Andrea blushed, and turned her face away. “Tea, I think.”

“Any preference?”

“Sorry?”

“What sort of tea would you like? Darjeeling? Assam? Formosa Oolong? Gunpowder?”

“I really don’t mind.”

“Look around. I won’t be long.”

In the kitchen, Julie began to sing. Andrea did not know what it was except that it sounded like opera. There were piles of books nearly enclosing the sofa, and Andrea picked the first book off one of them. ‘Lectures on Physics’ the bright red cover read. But the mathematical questions, the diagrams and even most of the words were meaningless to her, and she selected another. ‘Duino Elegies’. She was flicking through the pages when a handwritten piece of paper fell to the floor. The handwriting was vaguely familiar and she began to read. It was set out in stanzas and bore the title: ‘Fragment 31’.

Equal of the gods, it appears to me,

The man who sits beside you

And, being so near, listens

While you softly speak

And laugh your beautiful laugh

That in honesty makes my heart to tremble.

When I unprepared meet you

I am tongue-tied, words dry in my mouth

Flames dance under my skin

And I am blinded,

Hearing only the beating of my pulse.

My body, bathed in sweat, sways

And I am paler than sun burnt grass

And nearer to death...

She read the poem three times, and began to cry because it was so simple and yet so well expressed the feelings of love. How many times in the past few years of her life had she felt tongue-tied and trembled when she had met a beloved? Carefully, she wiped away the tears and replaced the paper within the book. She turned around and saw Julie watching from the doorway to the kitchen.

Julie did not speak but came to sit beside her and gently touch her face with her hand.

“I think your kettle is boiling,” Andrea finally said. But she was momentarily sad when the gentle touching stopped.

“What were you reading?” Julia asked almost nonchalantly, as they sat with their mugs of tea.

Nervous and embarrassed, Andrea gave her the book.

“Ah! The Sappho. Carl translated it for me. Lovely, isn't it?”

“Carl?” she asked. She had heard of Sappho, vaguely, but only now made the connection with the love between two women. She blushed, for suddenly that love seemed quite real and not strange. It was not that she identified with it but rather she intuitively understood in that moment that the love between two women was in no way different from the love

between a woman and a man. In that instant, all the conditioned responses, foisted upon her by her upbringing and society, of Sapphic love as unnatural and unhealthy, vanished.

“Carl?” she heard herself repeating, like an echo in a dream.

“Yes. He quite talented, you know. Could have been a classical scholar. Well anyway,” she laughed her vivacious laugh, “that’s what he tells me!”

Andrea smiled in response, and for the first time let her liking of Julie show in her face.

“You really like him, don’t you?” Andrea said.

“Of course!” She put her mug on the floor. “I know how you feel about him,” she said quietly.

“What do you mean?” Then: “Sorry, I didn’t mean it that way.”

“It’s alright. I saw.” Julie said, and held Andrea’s hand, “how you looked at him last night.”

“It’s not like that,” Andrea retorted and withdrew her hand. “He helped me through a very difficult time, that’s all.”

Julie simply smiled. “You don’t have to explain.”

“You make me want to.” She felt a desire to explain about her attempted suicide, but the desire did not last. “This race of yours on Sunday. What time did you say it started?”

“Six. You coming, then?” she asked enthusiastically.

“Yes, I’d like to.” She felt a fool about almost loving Carl.

Julie held up the book of Rilke’s poetry. “Have you read any?” she asked.

“No. I was never one for poetry at school.”

“I’m not surprised – considering the drivel they teach!” Shall I read you some?” Then, before Andrea could answer she said, “You don’t speak German do you?”

“No, sorry.”

“Ah well. But this translation is superb. Best ever done.” She opened the book and began to read.

After she had read the first elegy, they sat in silence for what seemed a very long time until Julie rose to play a record on her high-fidelity system. So they listened, and talked and read aloud to each other while the hours of the afternoon passed, the sun clouded over and twilight came to the world outside. And when the time of leaving came, as she knew it must, Andrea stood, re-assured in friendship, to embrace her new friend.

“I’ll see you on Sunday, then,” Andrea said before beginning her descent of the stairs.

“I’ll look forward to it.”

And so will I, Andrea thought as she walked toward the door.

## XVI

The taxi conveyed Colin to the gate of Magnus’ farm leaving him free to walk the track under the warm sun with trees and singing birds around him. The breeze refreshed him, and he slowed his pace.

No one came to greet him as he walked to the farmhouse, or answer his knock, and he stood looking round the farmyard where the odour of muck pervaded.

“Yes?” said a strong voice, startled him.

He turned to face Magnus. Tall though he himself was, Colin had to look up. Magnus’ sheepdog growled at him.

“Hi! I’m Colin. Edmund’s friend.” Wary, he moved away from the dog.

“He’s not here,” Magnus said gruffly.

“Well, it’s really Alison I came to see.”

“Is that so? And what would you be wanting with her?”

“I’d just like to talk to her.”

“Colin, you say?” Magnus asked, inspecting him.

“Yes. Colin Mickleman.”

“We don’t get many strangers, here.”

“She is here, isn’t she?”

“Could be. You any good with pigs?”

“You what?”

Magnus gave Colin the large shovel leaning against the wall. “I’ll get some boots. That lot,”

he indicated the pigpens, “needs shifting.”

Colin was still gaping in amazement when Magnus returned.

“But Alison,” Colin protested as Magnus handed him the boots.

“She’ll be along. Shouldn’t take you long to shift that lot.” The dog followed him as he walked away.

At first, Colin stood beside the smelly, stone-built sties whose occupants grunted loudly. Then, tired of waiting, he climbed over one of the low walls. To his surprise, the pigs did not attack him and he began the imposed task. Soon he was removing his jacket and rolling up the sleeves of his shirt. The work was half done – or seemed to him to be half done – when a woman’s laugh made him straighten his already aching back and turn around.

“You’ve found your true vocation, I see,” Alison said. She was dressed in obviously well used working denim clothes.

“Very funny.” He put down his shovel.

“They seem to like you,” she said, indicating the pigs. “Recognize their kin I suppose.” She laughed again.

Colin stepped back over the wall.

“You haven’t finished.” She said, disapprovingly.

“I came to see you, not muck out a pig sty!”

“A bit of practice – perhaps you’ll start with your room next!”

He ignored the insult and wiped sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. “Is he always like that?”

“Who?”

“That big chap.”

“You mean Magnus? He's affable enough. Quite sweet, really.”

“You could have fooled me.”

“He obviously did!”

He winced, trying to ignore her laughter. “Is there anywhere I can wash?” he asked.

“There's a tap over there.” She pointed to the wall of one of the buildings.

“Thanks,” he said, obviously displeased. He returned to change back into his shoes and jacket. “Can we go somewhere and talk?”

“What's wrong with here? Fresh air, the smell of the country.”

“Well – it is not the perfect setting.” The pigs were grunting again.

“I suppose we could sit in the garden.”

He followed her. “Well?” she asked as they sat on the bench.

“This is not exactly easy.”

“What isn't?”

He sighed deeply, and then looked around. No one was watching, or even about, and he heard only the distant noise of the pigs, the songs of birds and the breeze in the trees.

“Will you marry me?” he asked.

For some reason Alison was so surprised she could not speak and when she did her voice was a single loud exclamation. “What!”

He shuffled his feet. “Will you marry me?” he repeated.

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

To fill the embarrassed silence, he said, “I know I have my faults, but I can try to change.”

She felt an instant love for him and remembered with intensity her former needs and desires. “Thanks,” she said briefly squeezing his hand with her own, “I do appreciate it.”

“Does that mean ‘no’ then?”

“It wouldn’t work.”

“It could.”

She watched his face become pale. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I really am, but I don’t love you. Not anymore, anyway.”

He was more sad that he could have imagined. “Perhaps it is for the best.” He stood up. “I was serious, you know.”

“I know.” She stood up and kissed him briefly.

“I’d better go.”



“How will you get back?”

”I have a taxi waiting.”

“Oh, I see.”

“I was going to ask you to come back with me. We’d look for a Flat or house somewhere. I’ve got some savings.”

Alison looked up at the sky. “Looks like it might rain.”

In that moment, as he stood beside her, his arms hanging limply beside him, he looked to her like a lost child. She embraced him warmly. “I’ll visit you,” she said before running toward the house. She had almost reached the door when she ran back.

“I haven’t changed my mind,” she said, “about the termination. I just wanted you to know. In case you thought – “ She was watching his face when she spoke, and even as the words were issuing forth from her mouth – an expression of her feeling and sudden confusion – she regretted saying them. “It wouldn’t have worked,” she added.

He shrugged his shoulders. “No, maybe not. Silly idea, really.”

“No it wasn’t! It was the real you. I only wish you’d shown that more often in the past.”

“I’d better get back. Can’t keep the taxi waiting for ever.”

“Will you be alright?” she said, almost as an afterthought as he began to walk away.

He turned, and she could see the face of his posing.

“I have weathered the storm,” he said, “I have beaten out my exile.” He bowed, smiled, and then turned away to lope along the winding driveway to the distant gate.

He had lied about the waiting taxi, and it was a long walk to the nearest village. There were no shops in the village, not even an Inn, and he was surprised when the elderly lady, bent by arthritis, who answered his knocking upon her cottage door, let him use her telephone.

The taxi was a long time coming, and he sat in her heated parlour drinking the tea she offered. She chatted amiably until his city transport came. He had been pleased, embarrassed and arrogantly cynical about her unaffected hospitality to a stranger, and it occurred to him as he sat in the car whose driver drove it along the, at first, twisty lanes and then the major roads to York, that his divergent feelings summoned up his attitudes to life. But this self-analysis made him even more depressed, and he arrived back at the University exhausted.

Darkness found him sitting smoking his pipe in the untidy clutter of his bedroom. He had begun to read several books, discarding one after the other after only a few lines were read, as he had several times begun to write an academic article promised weeks ago to the editor of a prestigious journal. But he was in no mood for work, his stomach pains had returned, and he sought relief by sauntering toward Andrea's room. He did not know what to do when he got there.

"Hello," he said as she, only recently returned, opened the door.

For a few seconds she felt pleased to see him, but the feeling vanished. Perhaps Carl's and Julie's friendship had given her some of the strength she needed, for she said, although not in a harsh voice, "I don't think we've got anything to say to each other."

"I just came to apologize," he said. Only half of him was sincere – for the Owl inside him was hoping to avoid any future problems.

"I'll be changing tutors," she said, attempting a smile. Now, she was wishing he would go away.

"Fine. I'll arrange it for you if you like."

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I'd better get back to my work. I really am sorry."

"So am I." She closed the door upon him.

He had returned to his office and was sitting at his desk, smoking his pipe and wondering how to fill the long hours of the evening, when he heard footsteps outside. But it was only

Storr, shuffling to his own room carrying a bundle of books. He was disappointed, and telephoned Fiona's house. There was no reply.

"Enter!" Storr said as Colin knocked at his door.

"You don't happen to know where Fiona is, do you?" she asked as he entered.

Storr gave his quirky and toady smile. "Didn't you know? She's, er, gone away for some days."

"Do you know when she will be back?"

"Er, Monday. Yes, Monday. Anything I can help you with?"

"No."

"You ready for Tuesday?" he slobbered.

"Just about. I don't rate my chance, though."

"Come, come! Er, you underestimate yourself. Yes indeed."

He lifted one of the books off the stack on his desk. "My latest book," he smirked. "You, er, won't have seen it yet, of course."

"Well, I'll have to get back to work."

"You're welcome to a copy, of course." He held on out.

He humoured him, for Storr might next week become the Professor, "Thanks." He walked toward the desk and took the book.

"That will be ten pounds."

“You what?” said a surprised Colin.

“Ten pounds. Er, that includes the discount.”

Colin was annoyed. He put the book back on the desk. “I’ll read the Library copy. I’m sure you will be donating one. Or six.”

“Possibly, possibly.” Storr seemed oblivious to the comment. He looked lovingly at a copy of his book and spread his clammy hand over the spine. “So important for, er, a Professor to have an established reputation, don’t you think?”

“Depends on the reputation.”

“Quite, quite! My feeling exactly. Well, I’m glad we’ve had this little chat – cleared the air, so to speak. I do so, er, wish fortune favours you on Tuesday. Yes, indeed!” He glanced at his watch. “My word! I must be off. Er, nice to talk to you Colin.”

“I can’t say it’s been a pleasure,” he mumbled almost inaudibly in reply and left to seek the Union Bar with the intention of drinking himself into an alcoholic stupor.

Among the milling, sitting and standing crowd in the smoke infested room, he thought he saw Edmund. But when he pushed his way through the students, the individual had gone, leaving him to sit alone and self-pitying while an excess of alcohol dulled the processes of his brain.

## XVII

Sunday. Six o’clock in the morning, and Andrea yawned. It was quite cold, and she shivered as she stood on the verge of the road watching Julie pedal seemingly effortlessly away from the lay-by. A few other cyclists, all in racing clothing, ambled along, waiting for the start.

Then the first rider, his bicycle held steady by a helper, bent his head as the Timekeeper

counted down the seconds of his start.

“Five-Four-Three-Two-One. Go!

He was away, sprinting toward the rising sun where the road swung gently between hedges and fields and trees, to disappear from sight. No traffic came past to spoil the scene, and Andrea saw Julie join the small queue of riders that had formed.

“Good luck!” she said as she came to stand beside her.

“Thanks!” Julie’s smile was short. “This is the worst bit – waiting.”

She had covered her legs in strong smelling embrocation and Andrea found the smell faintly pleasing. It seemed somehow to complement the scene: the gleaming cycles, the strain of nervous anticipation upon the faces of those waiting.

Then Julie herself was gone, and Andrea walked slowly back to where Julie had left the car. It was the same one that Carl had borrowed with the addition of a rather grease-covered sheet to cover the rear seat whereon Julie’s cycle, with the wheels removed, had rested. Andrea sat inside, and waited, watching riders cycle by, a few cars arrive to disgorge their drivers and their cycles. Then, tired of sitting, she stood by the side of the road.

“You’re Julie’s friend, aren’t you?” a young man asked her as he brought his cycle to a stop beside her.

His ginger hair was short but curled, and on the back of his cycling jumper she saw the words ‘York Road Club’.

“Yes,” she said. His body was lean rather than muscular and his face was broadly smiling.

“There is no wind,” he said looking around, “should be fast times, today.”

“What time do you hope to do?” she asked, trying to appear knowledgeable.

“Not too bothered, really. Early in the season yet. Still, I’ll be satisfied with a fifty-five.”

“What number do you start?” It was pleasant, she felt, chatting, while the sun gradually warmed the earth and the friendly cyclists gathered in groups around her, talking in their sometimes strange jargon: *‘There I was, honking up the hill on fixed when the rear tub blew...’*

The young man smiled at her. “I’m off at last. You not riding?”

“No. Well, actually Julie is trying to convert me.”

“Got promise, she has,” he said, seemingly to no one in particular. “What do you do?” he asked her directly.

“I’m at University.”

“Well, nobody’s perfect!”

His broad smile stopped her being offended.

He looked at his watch. “Better get warmed up. Hope I’ll see you later.”

“Maybe.”

He had started to cycle away when he shouted back. “See you at the result board, then.”

Nearly an hour had elapsed since Julie’s departure and she was sauntering to where another Timekeeper stood beside a checkered board when Julie swept past, her eyes fixed intently on the road ahead of her, her speed fast. There were a few cheers from the small crowd as she went by to only gradually slow her speed while a single car, its occupants staring at the strange spectacle, noisily motored past.

It seemed to Andrea a long time before Julie returned, sweating, her face flushed but pleased. Carefully, she leant her cycle against the car before briefly embracing Andrea. Then she was covering herself in extra clothing.

“You alright?” Andrea asked.

“Great! First time under the hour!” She checked the stopwatch strapped to the handlebars of her cycle for the third time.

They were soon standing among the crowd around the results board where Julie revelled in the congratulations from members of her own and other clubs. Slowly, the board became full of times set against the listed names, and Andrea, feeling somewhat bored, was watching a man write '55-23' against the name of the last rider to start when the young man came and stood beside her.

“I see Julie broke the hour,” he said, and wiped his brow of sweat. A dark tracksuit swathed his body.

“Yes,” and she returned his smile. “Looks like you won easily.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “It was a good day. No real opposition. Fast men are riding Boro' course today.

“Hey!” Julie said as she joined them. “Congratulations!”

“And to you!” He accepted her sisterly kiss, but blushed.

“Well,” Julie said to Andrea, briefly touching her arm with her hand, “you deserve congratulating as well!”

“Sorry?”

Julie laughed. “You've got to talk to him after a race! Usually he just goes off by himself.”

Andrea watched the young man blush again.

“Ah!” Julie turned, and waved at someone in the crowd still gathered around the board, “there's Jill. I'll see you in a minute.”

They both watched her go. For almost a minute there was an embarrassed silence between them. Andrea broke it by asking, "What does the J stand for?" She pointed toward his name on the board.

"James."

"I'm Andrea. Is this your fastest time?"

"No. I've done a short fifty-four. You don't race, then?"

"Fraid not. Didn't know such things existed until I met Julie."

"That used to be the point. Anyway, I'd better be off, doesn't do to stand around too long."

"I suppose not."

He looked around, then said somewhat shyly, "There's a club 'ten' on Wednesday evening if you'd like to come."

"Yes. Yes, I would."

"I'll see you there, then."

She saw him walk toward an older man, give him the tracksuit and collect his cycle. Soon he was out of sight as he pedalled down the road. He seemed to her to make his riding seem effortless.

"James gone, then?" Julie asked her.

"Yes. Is there a club something-or-other on Wednesday?"

"A ten mile time trial, yes. Why?"



“James mentioned it. You going?”

“Usually do. You certainly made an impression on him.”

“What do you mean?”

“He hardly talks to anybody. Quiet type of chap. Mind you,” she said in a quieter voice, “can’t blame him. I quite fancy you myself. As if you didn’t know.”

Andrea smiled weakly.

But Julie said, “Don’t worry! I do understand.” She kissed her briefly, then walked quickly away. The tears she felt were soon suppressed, and she needed only a barely perceptible movement of her hand to wipe her eye dry. “Marvellous time James did, wasn’t it?” she said to a club member among the crowd as, out of the corner of her eye, she watched Andrea watching the road. She knew her friend was hoping for James to return.

Nearby, two blackbirds vied in song.

## XVIII

Colin Mickleman felt uneasy. The late afternoon sun was warm as he walked toward Derwent and the inevitable congratulations.

The interview had astounded him. The Vice-Chancellor was exceedingly affable, and the whole exercise seemed a formality, as if they were, in the favoured tradition of elderly academics, being polite and excusing him for his temerity in applying. ‘Too young’, he thought they would mutter among themselves while he sat with the other candidates awaiting their judgement; ‘no substantial work published’ they would smile.

Now, in the busy soft lateness, he was walking toward his Department. No one stopped him, as he half-expected them to, saying: ‘Good afternoon, Professor!’ No one – student, staff or

friend – ran to him saying: ‘Well done! And so young!’

Instead, the quiet steady sameness of concrete, path, students and sun remained as they had remained for years, and he waited uneasily, fearing it was all a mistake.

‘We’re so sorry, Doctor Mickleman. We’ve made the most dreadful mistake....’ It was unbelievable because it had been so easy.

They were waiting, as he expected them to be – crowded into the secretarial office. Some bottles of wine had been procured and, in turn, they all offered their sincerest congratulations. Fiona – voluptuous, delectable Fiona; Mrs. Cornish – almost prim, except she had exchanged her small cigars for a pipe; Horton, squeezing his hand painfully: ‘Excellent choice! They have seen sense at last!’ Even Whiting. They were all present, shaking his hand, opening their mouths with thanks and praise. Except Storr, who looked on sourly, and soon slunk away.

Soon the insincere statements began. “I was hoping they would appoint you,” said Hill.

Timothy, in an azure ensemble and wearing a strong perfume, clasped Colin’s hand weakly. “You don’t look very happy,” he said quietly.

“Just surprised.” He looked around, desperate to be rescued.

“I’m sure you’d like to be alone.”

“What?” Then, seeing that Timothy was sincere, he added, “Yes. Yes I would.”

“You’ll need time to adjust.”

Colin smiled, and escaped to his office. Its chaos seemed out of keeping with his Professorship, and in a frenzy of activity he began to try to tidy it. It was some minutes later when he realized his efforts would be in vain since he would be given new offices as befitted his new status, and he sat down at his still cluttered desk to smoke his pipe. But he soon became filled with a nervous excitement.

His walk took him down to the lake and he wandered along the grassy bank between trees of willow, pleased with himself and his world. He was approaching the wooded bridge of Spring Lane, shadowed by trees, when he saw Fiona. She was leaning against the lattice of the bridge in an animated conversation with the Vice-Chancellor, and it seemed to Colin from his posture and her smile that there existed intimacy between them. He could not hear the words that passed between them and was about to walk away when Fiona turned and saw him. She waved and then spoke briefly to the Vice-Chancellor who staidly walked away, as befitted his position and traditional manner of dress.

Colin was still standing by the side of the lake, his mind befuddled, when she approached him

“I think,” she said softly, and smiled, “you owe me a favour.”

“Is that so?” He had tried to make his voice sound strong, but his words emerged as a feeble croak.

“I shall have my camera ready. Tonight.” She laughed, and left him standing trembling and alone.

It was several minutes before he resumed his walk. The Physics building, Goodricke, Wentworth, Biology, Vanbrugh, Langwith... he passed them all to finally stop by a narrow wooden bridge whose trees sang with the songs of birds. He stood and listened, watching the water below him swell gently.

But his surroundings did nothing to ease the turmoil of his mind, and he walked back toward his office with stomach pains grieving him.

At the top of the stairs he met Timothy. “Visited your new office yet?” he asked in a friendly manner.

“No,” came the curt Mickleman reply.

But Timothy was not offended. “If there is anything I can do to help –“

“No thank you!” His stomach pains seemed worse.

“But even you need someone to talk to.”

Timothy’s eyes were evidential of understanding, and Colin’s impending, and clever, insult was negated by his sudden and momentary empathy with him. For a quintessential moment of time he perceived the human person behind the mask of the individual before him: someone who lived, and who probably suffered; who experienced sadness and joy, pleasure and pain.

But the moment was only a moment: his own patterns of thought and feeling flowed on past this one insight to create another moment when he was not a unity with all things. Yet an almost ineffable memory remained.

“Thanks,” he said kindly.

Timothy smiled. “It is better to live unhappily than not to live at all.”

Then he was gone, down the stairs. But it was not long before a shadow fell between Colin’s moment of understanding and his past.

Magarita was in her own small office in the quiet confines of her Department, and he sat on the edge of her desk while she continued to type her letter. The room was obsessively tidy with a profusion of plants scattered around.

“Look, I am very busy,” she said. “I must get this done.”

“You haven’t heard, then?”

“Heard what?” She did not look up from her work.

“Nothing important,” he sulked.

She continued with her typing for a while as he began to rearrange the furnishings on her desk.

Exasperated, she shouted: “Stop it!”

He was still for only a short time, and began to noisily remove, and then replace, books from her bookcases.

“Aren’t you going to ask?” he said.

“Whatever it is, I’m not interested! Damn! Now look what you’ve made me do!” She tried to correct her typing mistake.

“I was appointed Professor today,” he said with apparent indifference.

“Bully for you!”

“Is that all you can say?”

She made another mistake and, in anger, tore the paper from the typewriter, screwed it up into a ball and threw it at him.

He smiled. “I stood still,” he said, quoting his favourite poet of the year, “and was a tree amid the wood, knowing the truth of things unseen before.” He smiled again. “To wit. I surmise you period is coming.”

She was struggling to insert another sheet of paper into her typewriter as he said this, but crumpled it. She yanked it out. It also became a projectile but missed its target. “Just leave me alone!” she shouted.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s go and celebrate. You’ll feel better.”

His assumptions infuriated her, and she threw a book at him.

“Temper! Temper! Her breasts had wobbled as she threw the book, and he came to her and tried to touch them, his lust aroused.

She pushed him away, but he persisted. Then she slapped his face.

“Leave me alone!” She shouted.

For a few seconds he stood staring at her, and then turned to walk out of her room. He waited outside, in the corridor, for many minutes, expecting her to follow, and when she did not he walked into the cloud-weakened sunlight. Behind him, he could hear her typewriter clacking. He had not gone far when his stomach pains returned, fiercer than before. He was soon back at her room.

“What do you want?” she asked querulously as he opened the door.

He held his hand against his stomach. “I’ve got those pains again.”

“Go to the Doctor, then,” she said without sympathy. “It’s getting late and I must finish this and get it into the post.”

Her indifference perplexed him. She began to type again, but stopped after a few seconds.

“Look,” she said, sighing, “I’ve been doing some thinking today and I think it would be better if we didn’t see each other again.”

“What?”

“You heard. It’s over.”

Sudden, outright rejection was a new experience for him and he stared at her. His pain became worse. “Alright, then if that’s what you want.” His indifference was affected.

“Yes it is. We are just not compatible.”

“I thought we got on rather well.”

“There is more to a relationship than sex. Anyway, I must finish this letter.”

“Fine.” He shrugged his shoulders and began to wonder who might be next on his list of conquests.

He was at the door when she said, “And by the way. Congratulations, Professor Mickleman.”

He did not see her begin to cry.

By the time he reached Fiona’s house both his body and his spirit had recovered, and he leaned against her doorframe, smiling as he knocked.

A bath towel hung loosely around Fiona’s body. “Come in!”

“Your invitation – “ he said as she closed and locked the door firmly behind him.

“Shall we go up?” She pointed toward the stairs.

“Not for what you have in mind.”

“Really?” She smiled, and seemed unconcerned by his tone.

“OK So I’d like to go to bed with you.”

“You do surprise me,” she said mockingly.

“But as for your little games – no way!”

“Such a shame. Are you so afraid of me?”

“I’m not afraid of you at all!” he countered.

“Really?” She smiled at him again. “You do surprise me. You do, however, owe me a favour.”

“So what? There is nothing you can do – now.”

“Are you sure?”

He was not certain, but did not let any of his doubt show. “Let’s go upstairs,” he said quietly.

Slowly, she removed her towel to stand naked before him then turn and walk up the stairs. On her bed, the camera and handcuffs lay ready. He saw them, as he entered the room.

“Take your clothes off!” She commanded him, and held the camera ready.

“No!” He moved toward her, and knocked the camera out of her hand but before he could push her down to the bed as he had intended, she kicked him in the groin. He fell to the ground, helplessly clutching his genitals, and by the time he had recovered sufficiently to look up, she was dressed in a bathrobe.

“Get out!” She said sternly, and he slowly obeyed.

She pushed him through the front door of her house.

“You’ll pay for this, you bastard!” she shouted as he half-hobbled down her garden path toward the street.

Slowly, it began to rain.

## XIX

The silence of the mountain was disturbed only by the wind, and Colin stood contentedly observing the view. From Glyder Fawr he could see the smoothed outline of Snowdon in the distance and then, in the east, the jagged rocks of the Castle of the Winds, only a short walk



from the slate-strewn plateau where he stood. There was no sun, only mist edging its way toward him and gradually obscuring his view. Then there were faces around him – a coven of laughing faces enclosing him in their circle. Fiona was there, laughing. And Andrea. Fenton and Alison – all laughing while he stumbled toward the edge, trying to escape.

“You’ll pay for this!” Fiona’s voice said.

There was no father to rescue him, as there had been in his youth when, together, they climbed the Idwal slabs below. He felt himself falling – only to awake in the dim light of a hospital ward at night. In a bed nearby someone coughed loudly.

Three nurses were sitting together at a table in the middle of the ward, a low lamp spreading a pool of light around them, and Colin began to wonder what Fiona had done to him. ‘You’ll pay for this, you bastard!’ he remembered.

But his attempt to sit up and get out of his bed brought a return of his stomach pain, and he lay back, sweating and remembering the events of the evening. The pains had become excruciating as he, like a drunken man, had staggered away from Fiona’s house. There was a brief telephone call he had made from somewhere to his Doctor. A brief visit by the Doctor to his bedroom, and then the Ambulance and another medical examination. “We’ll keep you in overnight. For observation,” the youthful hospital Doctor said.

Sleep proved difficult for Colin. The ward was stuffy, with a subdued but persistent background of noise – coughing, the movements of patients in their beds, the wandering of the watchful Nurses, someone snoring – and his pain was not a sedative.

Dawn found him restive and anxious. There was a trolley laden with an urn of tea, but his pleading was in vain, for the smiling but elderly Auxiliary Nurse pointed to the red sign that hung in adornment from the top of his bed: ‘Nil By Mouth’ it read.

“But why?” he asked.

“Doctor’s orders. They’ll see you in the morning, dear.”

“But it is morning.”

“Later. When they do the rounds.”

When this ‘later’ came – after much activity among both the patients and staff including a trolley bearing an assortment of sometimes richly smelly breakfasts – the assembled huddle of white coats with dangling stethoscopes and attendant blue-clad, stern faced Sister simply passed him by, except for a curt: ‘He can go home’ issuing forth from a wizened face.

A lowly young Nurse came bearing these tidings some minutes later.

“You can get dressed now,” she said as she began to rummage in his bedside locker for his clothes.

“So God has spoken, then?”

The Nurse suppressed a laugh, and kicked the locker door shut with her foot.

“This is intolerable!” the now almost distant voice of God said as he stood with his acolytes around a bed. “Sister, if you cannot control your Nurses – “

The Nurse by Colin’s bed turned away from the Consultant’s stare.

“This summation gallop is difficult to hear – “ the Consultant said in a very audible mutter.

“I’ll put the curtains round,” the Nurse whispered to Colin.

She began this not altogether noisy task when the Sister came to stop her. “Not now,” she said. “Side-ward!”

The Nurse went to join the other staff skulking out of harm’s way.

It seemed to Colin a long time before she returned.

“Hope I didn’t get you in trouble,” he said, and smiled his Owlsh smile.

“Nah!”

“Is he always like that?”

“Huh! Today was a good day! Get him on a bad day and – “ She began to giggle. “Oops!”

He sensed the reason for her sudden embarrassment and said, “It’s alright, I won’t tell anyone.”

“Trust me! Always being bleedin’ unprofessional!”

“You been a Nurse long?”

She finished laying his clothes out on the bed. “Nah! A few months.”

“You training, then?”

“Yep! First ward, this.”

“Really? You seem very competent.”

“You must be joking!”

“Think you’ll stick at it?”

“Who knows? Me mam says I never stick at anything. There you go.” She drew the curtains around the bed. “Be a Doctor’s letter for ya, in the office.”

“What time do you finish?”

She gave a quizzical look. “You askin’?”

“Got any plans for tonight?”

“Not really, You’re a right one, aren’t you?”

“You in the Nurses Home, then?”

“I’ll have to go. Don’t forget your letter!”

Then she was gone, and he was left to dress himself in solitude, straighten his bedclothes and walk smiling to the Ward office.

The Ward Sister was using the telephone, looked up briefly to acknowledge his presence and pushed a brown envelope toward him across the cluttered desk. “Give it to your own Doctor,” she said to him.

“The new patient’s here, Sister,” another Nurse interjected as she pushed past Colin.

“Just a minute,” the Sister said into the telephone. On her desk, the other telephone rang. “He’s a CVA,” she said to the Nurse. “Second bed on the right. I’ve bleeped Doctor Stone.”

Colin took the envelope and slipped away. The corridor that gave access to the Wards was full of unused beds and trolleys of varying descriptions, and from the Public Telephone kiosk he dialled Magarita’s number.

“What do you want?” her voice said in reply.

“I’m in hospital,” he said. “Admitted last night.”

“Are you serious?”

“Would I joke about it? Listen – “ He held the receiver out into the noisy corridor: people passing, a porter whistling, the sounds of trolleys being wheeled, a gaggle of voices.

“Are you alright?” she said in a softer voice.

“Yes, I think so. I went to the Doctor like you said. They kept me in overnight. But they are letting me home now.”

“Shall I come and collect you?”

He could hear the guilt creeping into her voice.

“That would be kind! I’ll be waiting outside the main entrance.”

“I’ll be a quick as I can. Bye!”

It was a smiling Colin who stood in the bright and warming sunlight to wait for his lover’s arrival. And when she did come, voicing her concern, he let his expression change as though he still felt some pain.

“What did they say?” she asked as she drove him back toward his University home.

“Not a lot. Thought it might be an ulcer acting up. Eat less fatty foods – that sort of thing.”

“I always said your diet was disgusting!”

“I’m sorry about yesterday.”

“It’s me that should apologize.”

“You free this evening?”

“Yes.”

He caressed her leg with his hand. “I’ll look forward to it.”



“Is Fiona in?” he asked the Departmental Secretary as he opened the door to her office.

“Good morning, Professor!” she laughed. “You alright? We heard the news. About hospital, I mean.”

“Fine. Just a bit of stomach trouble. Is Mrs. Pound about.”

“No. She’s taking some time off. Didn’t say when she’d be back. Least ways, no one’s told me! Been to your new office, yet?”

“Just now, yes. How’s Albert?” he asked, alluding to her husband.

“Moaning – about work. Too much at the moment. Still, it’ll pay for the holiday.”

“Going anywhere in particular?”

“Florida.”

“You should get a nice tan.”

“Hope so!”

“You’ll have to let me see you when you get back.”

“Maybe I will, at that!”

“Keeping you satisfied, is he?” he asked, smiling lasciviously.

“Yeah! I’ll say!”

“Pity. Thought my luck was in.”

“Get off with you!” she laughed. “Want your mail?” She handed him a bundle.

“Thanks. Well, I’d better go and inspect my domain.”

His new office was spacious and bright with a particularly good vista of the lake, and as he sat at his desk, surrounded by empty bookcases, he felt intense pleasure. It was not that he had forgotten Fiona’s meeting with the Vice-Chancellor but rather that it felt irrelevant. His work should be his justification: with his teaching, his own research and his mastery of the Department there could never be a threat to his position. He was happy, and felt eager to begin his tasks. There was his afternoon lecture, the first in his new role, his evening assignation with Magarita, his first Departmental meeting of tomorrow. There would be, in that morning, many hours of peace for him to write – his continued contributions, diligently researched, presented and prepared, to the wealth of philosophical knowledge.

No more would he seek out female students, for he knew they could be a snare to entrap him, and the knowledge of this dismayed him – but only for a while. He began to think of stratagems to circumvent the dangers: of how he might choose more wisely, and this pleased him, as his recollection of other possibilities did. He would forego them – for a while at least. He thought of the Nurse who had attended him, and began to contrive a new and owlish campaign. She would look good, in her uniform, standing on the chair in his room while he photographed her.

Smiling happily to himself, he left his office to begin the tasks of his new Professorial day. Over the University, a few ragged cumulus cloud came to briefly cover the sun.

## XX

The Temple was quiet and Edmund sat, quite still in the semi-darkness amid the lightly swirling incense, facing the stone altar. The Temple was large, the walls lined with oak panelling, and Edmund sat for a long time, his eyes vaguely fixed upon the stone statue near the altar. It showed, in a realistic way, a seated naked woman one of whose hands held the severed head of a man.

Then, his task fulfilled, he stretched himself before standing, allowing his bare feet to caress the luxurious carpet. As if on cue, the heavy Temple door opened, throwing a shaft of bright light into the Temple and onto the statue.

“I wondered if you would come down to me here,” he said to the woman who entered the room.

“Did I have a choice?” Fiona said, and smiled.

She wore an amber necklace and was dressed in a purple silk robe.

“There is one person I still have to see,” he said.

“Surely she can wait.”

He smiled at her understanding. “We have plenty of time.”

“I shall wait for you here, then.”

He smiled in reply and walked out of her Temple up the stairs to the ground floor of her house. It was only a short walk to the University and Alison’s room. She was there, as he knew she would be, and she embraced him while he stood in the doorway.

“You’ve decided to complete your studies, then?” he said as she broke away from their embrace.

She watched him for a while, but his smiling face seemed to answer her unasked question.

“Of course!” she said.

“And then?”

“I don’t know. Teach. Compose, perhaps.”



“I’m glad.”

For almost a minute she watched him in silence. Then she said, “Even now I don’t understand you.”

“There shall be time enough for understanding when you are old and the inner fire burns less bright. Maybe through your music you’ll find a way.”

She laughed, a little nervously, for it was as if in that moment she sensed something powerful: something illuminating yet dark. A transient feeling to inspire her Art perhaps. Something that perchance he in some way had given her? Was it his eyes, his look? She did not know, but the moment passed, to leave her with a memory, disturbing only in part.

“Will you be seeing Professor Mickleman?” he asked.

“No. He is part of my past.”

“Perhaps that’s wise. I really have to go now.”

“You’ll keep in touch?”

“Of course. People like you are rare.”

She smiled, half-defensively. “Take care, won’t you?”

“Naturally,” He gave his enigmatic smile, turned and left her staring after him. Suddenly, new music grew in almost swirling profusion inside her head.

^^^^^^^^

Fiona was lying on the floor of her Temple, as if asleep, when Edmund returned. In his absence she had lit two purple candles and placed them on the altar where they spread their esoteric light to enhance her beauty. For a few moments, he watched her breasts rising and falling with the motion of her breathing before laying down beside her to caress her body through the silk of her robe. She did not move, except to slightly part her lips, as his caressing began.

Slowly, his touching continued. Then she was kissing him, lips to lips and lips to flesh, her

hands clawing at his clothes, and it was not long before they were writhing about on the carpet of the Temple, naked and joined in carnal bliss. Her cries of ecstasy were not loud, as his final cry was not, and they lay, sweating from their exertion and pleasures, for some time.

She broke their silence. "Have you achieved what you wished – with him?"

"Who can say – who cannot say?"

"Sometimes you can be quite infuriating!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes!"

As he stood up, she said: "And Alison?"

"Ah! Forces shall be earthed, presenced, in her music."

She looked at him then, and he guessed her meaning. "You don't have to ask," he said, to re-assure her.

"All this," she gestured around her Temple with her hand, "can be yours."

"I have retired."

"So you said." She retrieved her robe and he began to dress himself.

"I have other things to do," he said.

"And me?"

"You are useful here."

“Part of the grand design?” she mocked.

“You know exactly what I mean.”

“Perhaps. Tell me, why did you wait?”

“For this, you mean?” he asked, smiling.

“From the moment you revealed yourself I was willing. Well, before then as well,” she laughed.

“It was necessary to wait.”

“There are lots of things I would like to ask you. We’ve hardly spent any time together.”

”Delicacies are best contemplated and then savoured slowly.”

“Tell me, how did you know?”

”About your past, your secret?”

”Yes.”

“A Master shall always know his Mistresses of Earth even though they have never met. And your own group? What of them?”

“I tired of them – long ago.”

“Forsaking the external for the internal?”

“Something like that.” She smiled at him. “But you interest me.”

When he did not reply, she said: “He will never realize, will he?”

Attuned to her, he said: “Naturally not. His ego would never allow even an entertainment of the thought. An interesting experiment – with perhaps an excellent result and future sinister promise. We shall see. Now, I really must be going.”

“Must you?” She removed her robe and walked toward him in the now flickering light of the candles.

“Well, perhaps not just yet.”

Above them, and nearby, new inner nexions were opening.

---

*Fini*

---