

TOWARDS
ANOTHER
SUMMER

Janet Frame

COUNTERPOINT
BERKELEY

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Books by Janet Frame:

The Lagoon and other Stories (1951) short stories

Owls Do Cry (1957) novel

Faces in the Water (1961) novel

The Edge of the Alphabet (1962) novel

Scented Gardens for the Blind (1963) novel

Snowman Snowman: Fables and Fantasies (1963) short stories *The Reservoir: Stories and Sketches* (1963) short stories

The Adaptable Man (1965) novel

A State of Siege (1966) novel

The Reservoir and other stories (1966) short stories

The Pocket Mirror (1967) poetry

The Rainbirds (1968) novel (also published as *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room*)

Mona Minim and the Smell of the Sun (1969) children's book *Intensive Care* (1970) novel

Daughter Buffalo (1972) novel

Living in the Maniototo (1979) novel

To The Is-Land (1982) autobiography

You Are Now Entering the Human Heart (1983) short stories

An Angel at My Table (1984) autobiography

The Envoy from Mirror City (1985) autobiography

The Carpathians (1988) novel

The Goose Bath (2006) poetry

Towards Another Summer (2007) novel

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‘. . . and from their haunted bay
The godwits vanish towards another summer.
Everywhere in light and calm the murmuring
Shadow of departure; distance looks our way;
And none knows where he will lie down at night.’

—*Charles Brasch, from ‘The Islands’*

Part One

The Weekend

When she came to this country her body had stopped growing, her bones had accepted enough Antipodean deposit to last until her death, her hair that once flamed ginger in the southern sun was fading and dust-coloured in the new hemisphere, and she was thirty, unmarried except for a few adulterous months with an American writer (self-styled) who woke in the morning, said

—I write best on an empty stomach, pulled a small piece of paper from his tweed coat hanging on the end of the double bed, and wrote one line. One line every day. She too was a writer, self-styled, and it was in between the second and third parts of her novel ‘in progress’ that the weekend intruded itself; it stuck in the gullet of her novel; nothing could move out or in, her book was in danger of becoming a ‘fosterchild of silence’.

Therefore she applied literary surgery to free her characters for their impelled dance or flight; she wrote the story of the weekend.

It snowed. For weeks the plants in the garden had a shocked grey look that made you think they’d had a stroke and would die - the same look was in the face of the old man who collapsed on the pavement outside Victoria Station, and the ambulance men wrapped him in a grey blanket, and the crowd said

—Is he dead, Can you tell, when their face is grey like that . . .

Soot left fingerprints everywhere; after the first night of glossy snowfilled sleep the city had its own lust with its own lust of smoke, torn paper and bus tickets. The twelve crocuses in the front garden of her flat softened in their tawny shell and pushed forth limp cream-coloured shoots. The tree by the wall at the corner that had shed its leaves before Christmas, continued mysteriously to release dry crackling skeletons that drifted against the back door and over the drains, covering the small coral reef of rubble that splattered at the mouth of the downpipe. In the back yard there were three tubs of plants - two evergreen trees, evergreen in name only, for their stout leathery leaves were shrouded in soot; and one geranium, its leaves withered, its stalks like tendrils of ageing hair growing from the soot and slush-covered earth. Were the geraniums dead? Every time she looked at them she asked were they dead, for in her own country she had never known geraniums not to be in blossom, they possessed too much fire to let themselves lie dormant, ‘banked’ during the long winter night with their own death-grey ashes.

In my own country.

She didn’t use that phrase as much now as when she had first arrived. Then it was At Home, Back Home, Where I come from . . . It’s funny over here, you . . . whereas we always . . . you do this, we do that . . . you . . . we . . . here . . . there . . .

And then there was the matter of the Southern Cross, trying to fit shadowy stars into an already crowded northern sky, pushing out Aldebaran, the Bear, dizzy with trying to replace even the swimming city lights with lonely southern stars, but not being able to reach far enough across the earth to capture them; then giving up, forgetting We, there, us, back home, where I come from, in my own country; reminded now by only one or two things - the weather in its climate; the drooping geranium.

surely if the geranium died everything would die?

Inside, the electric fires sucked in and blew out the same tired stuffy air; the pedal dustbin in the kitchen was filled with empty soup tins; the bathroom walls glittered with damp moss, the congealed moisture of last week's wet washing.

She sat typing her novel.

End of Part Two.

Part Three, page one, page two, page three, 'they told me you had been to her, and mentioned me to him' . . .

Page four.

Then one morning the *Times* for Mr Burton, the *Director's Journal* for Mr Willow, a letter from Nigeria for Mr and Mrs Mill-Semple, a circular for Grace - Dailies Bureau - are your dailies clean, efficient, punctual? Also for Grace the carefully addressed postcard—Miss Grace Cleave: Do you know the temperature is point one-five degrees warmer in Relham than in London. Come and bask in it! Philip Thirkettle.

Now journeys were not simple matters for Grace; nothing is simple if your mind is a fetch-and-carry wanderer from sliced perilous outer world to secret safe inner world; if when night comes your thought creeps out like a furred animal concealed in the dark, to find, seize, and kill its food and drag it back to the secret house in the secret world, only to discover that the secret world has disappeared and has so enlarged that it's a public nightmare; if then strange beasts walk upside down like flies on the ceiling; crimson wings flap, the curtains fly; a sad man wearing a blue waistcoat with green buttons sits in the centre of the room, crying because he has swallowed the mirror and it hurts and he burps flashes of glass and light; if crakes move and cry; the world is flipped, unrolled down the vast marble stair; a stained threadbare carpet; the hollow silver dancing shoes, hunting-horns . . .

It's no use saying Freud, Freud. People do, you know. Like squeezing a stale sponge.

Nothing was simple, known, safe, believed, identified. Boundaries were not possible, where nothing finished, shapes encircled, and there was no beginning. A storm raged, and Grace Cleave was standing in the midst of it, one hand pressing her skirt against her knees, the other pressing her dust-coloured fading hair fast against her skull. In these circumstances it needed courage to go among people, even for five or ten minutes. A weekend in Relham with Philip Thirkettle, his wife Anne, her father Reuben and perhaps - Grace did not know - one or two children - seemed a promise of nightmare. No escape. Two or three days. The problems of what time to get up, go to bed, what to say, where to go, and where had reached, for Grace, the limits of insolubility: you see, during the night Grace Cleave had changed to a migratory bird.

Oh she could laugh at the fact now, although at first she had been frightened. In the afternoon the announcer reading the weather report before the one o'clock news had said,

—A thaw warning. A slow thaw is spreading, with rain, from the west.

Grace went to the window of the sitting room and looked out and felt in her bones the slow thaw moving from the west, and felt her blood stop, swirl to left, to right, in order to rehearse its war spring flowing; a porous grey raincloud moved in her head and stayed, soaking her once clear and precise thoughts, exuding them as ragged links of silver, raindrops of vague mist.

She looked beyond the lights of the car saleroom - European Cars, and the tall flats with the floating staircases, underfloor heating, nine hundred and ninety-nine years' lease, into the dark sky where a small ray of sunlight pushed its way through the dense hedge of cloud and stood, green-sleeved, yellow-capped, in a suddenly-summer lane, shining. Her skin grew warm, she released the skirt held stonily-fast against her knees, moved from the window and flopped, anyhow, legs spread, into the deep easy chair which the agent, checking the inventory of the furniture, had described as part of a 'three-piece suite, cushioned, with floral covers'. And that night Grace didn't continue with page forty of the third part of her novel. She went to bed early, carrying a sleeping tablet in a little aluminium foil dish which had held a Lyons' Individual Apple Pie. She took the pill, slept, and woke at midnight and lay thinking of temperature, light, migratory birds, Coriolis force; and the slow thaw spreading with rain, from the west; and the misty cloud gathering in her head, and her freely flowing blood released from its glacial well; and her heart beat faster as she felt on the skin of her arms and legs, her breasts and belly, and even on top of her head the tiny prickling beginning of the growth of feathers. She jerked her arm from the bedclothes and plunged the white knob which switched on the bedlam; she threw back the blankets and examined her skin. No feathers. Only a sensation of down and quills, and these, with other manifestations of the other world, could be kept secret; no one else need learn of it. In a way, it was a relief to discover her true identity. For so long she had felt not-human, yet had been unable to move towards an alternative species; now the solution had been found for her; she was a migratory bird; warbler, wagtail, yellowhammer? cuckoo-shrike, bobolink, skua? albatross, orange-bishop, godwit?

She slept, and woke again when the early morning traffic had begun to flow and the first underground trains shuddered through the earth, they seemed quite near, she wondered if the line were direct beneath her flat, she always meant to ask about it but kept forgetting to locate the regular five-minute shudder. Ah, then she remembered. She knew she had been concentrating on traffic in order to forget her most urgent topic of thought; she had changed to a migratory bird.

How do you feel? she asked herself, no longer afraid, almost enjoying the humour of the situation.

—OK, she replied. Not much different, only relieved that at last I know; but it's going to be lonelier than ever now, there's the thought that once I've established myself as a bird there'll be no stopping me, I might change to another species, I might move on and on - where? I don't know, but farther and farther away from the human world.

She buried her face in her pillow; she tried to find reasons among the coloured lights flashing from

the back of her eyes, among the red and yellow stripes, the brown trees, the sun moving in the we
corner on the end of a crimson string. Why a migratory bird? No doubt because I've journeyed from
the other side of the world. Perhaps I'm homesick for my own country and have not realised it. Am
homesick? I haven't thought of my land for so long; my land and my people, that's how it is spoke
like a prayer, the kind which murmurs I possess rather than I want, an arrangement of congratulation
between myself and God; I've tried to forget my land and my people; when the magazines arrive
thrust them unopened at the back of the wardrobe; but I read the letters - Do you remember Willy
Flute, you know Willy Flute who used to hang round Mary Macintosh, well he's dead. Willy Flute
With the sunlit eyes? Mary Macintosh? The stuck-up tart in the Post Office at the Motor License
Counter? No, I don't remember them, I am rocked to sleep, numbed, at least *I'm* not going to write
poems and stories which begin *In My Country*, and are filled with nostalgia for 'branches stirrin'
'across the moon' - where? At Oamaru, Timaru, Waianakarua? No, that way of thinking and dreamin'
is not for me.

I'm a migratory bird. Stork, swallow, nightingale, cuckoo, shearwater. Sooty shearwater - you
remember they live in burrows, you catch them down south, and they cover your mouth and face with
dark brown grease, it's like eating earth made into flesh and fat, and afterwards you're so heavy you
seem to sink into a fat-swilled grave, deep, warm as a muttonbird burrow - there, I've said it. Mutton
bird. No. Sooty shearwater. And there's the Maori name *titi*, old Jimmy Wanaka knew it, he was my
father's oldest friend, the first Maori engine-driver in the country - you remember the weekends they
fished together for salmon, the time they left their fish in the engine shed 'out the Waitaki' while they
went for a meal, and the fish was stolen, and mother composed the inevitable ditty, - there followed
mumbled last line which no one could understand, the kind of tone used for putting across vulgarity
except that my mother could never be 'vulgar' . . .

'One day when Jim and I went up
to the house for a bite and sup,
someone stole into the shed
where we were to lay our bed;
someone stole our salmon, someone stole our salmon,
I know 'twas only gammon -'

Oh no, I must not remember, Grace thought. I'm a migratory bird. I live in London. The Southern
Cross cuts through my heart instead of through the sky, and I can't see it or walk beneath it, and
don't care, I don't care. I no longer milk cows or sit all day watching a flock of sheep, or walk beneath
the bark-stripped gum trees by creeks and waterfalls bedded with golden pebbles; what sparkling air
I've never seen so many leaves, spring, summer, autumn and winter, I'm buried in leaves, see my
hand reaching up from their softness, Help.

Here - the trembling ever unbroken shell of traffic. Blossoming cars at the wayside. The trap comparisons as futile as racing to put potatoes in a basket.

Smiling, Grace Cleave got up, washed, dressed, made her bed, and no longer afraid of being migratory bird she went to the window and looked out again at the slow thaw arriving, with rain, from the west. Then she unbolted the back and front doors, slid the chains from their grooves (burglars! robbery every night!), unsnipped the Yale snib, released the Chubb lock, and opening the front door she went upstairs to collect the mail.

—Miss Grace Cleave. Do you know the temperature is point one-five degrees warmer in Relha than in London. Come and bask in it. Philip.

Grace Cleave, as I've told you, was a writer, although landlords with financial fears preferred her introduce herself as a 'journalist' or a 'private student' or 'someone engaged in professional work'. It was those who described themselves as writers, she learned, who appeared in Court on the charge of not having paid their rent, fares, bills for meals eaten recklessly in cafes. In a mocking voice the prosecuting counsel would remark,

—He describes himself as a writer, Sir.

—A writer? Dear me, I thought writers were highly paid these days. Television, films etc. Why not pull yourself together young man and try to get into television, write something the public want, don't get mixed up with these fringe people crusading for peace and poetry, put yourself in a well-paid job and then I won't have you before me month after month for defrauding estate agents, restaurants, British Railways . . . these offences can lead to something worse . . . your father was a civil servant too . . .

A writer collected complications, like the sooty dust that made an indelible stain on your clothes when you walked through a paddock of *paspalum* - that was in Auckland. Province full of ticking insects, loud-throated birds, warbling, chirruping, striking bells, the air like polished silver . . .

Being a writer, and returning home tired after every venture, you are so surprised to find on yourself a slowly spreading stain of publisher, critic, agent. You turn in panic to the household hints in *Pea Cyclopaedia*; running your finger down the list of stains - acid, blacklead, blood, candlegrease, grease, ink, marking ink, Indian ink, nailpolish, nicotine rust scorch sealingwax soot tar whitewash wine, and the remedies - water, turpentine, methylated spirits, carbon tetrachloride, photographic hypo, vinegar. You wonder which stain and which remedy would apply to publisher, agent, critic. Nailpolish? Blood? Wine? Candlegrease? Photographic hypo? Then you realise there's nothing, you can neither identify the stain nor remove it. Feeling resigned, depressed, you set out on your new venture, returning once more through the paddock of *paspalum*; and the stain spreads.

At the close of her latest venture when she was walking slowly back home, Grace collected an interview with someone from a magazine. Bother. Acetic acid? Photographic hypo? It was no use, there was only the time-proved long-drawn-out remedy that her mother used to adopt, inspiring faith and impatience by her faith in it.

—The air will take it out. Exposure to the air is the best remedy.

But there was so much air, and how could you communicate with it, to tell it to stop by and help, and how did you know which air to address?

The man from the magazine came to the flat. From the second armchair of the suite with floral coverings he asked Grace questions to which she replied from the first armchair. All was in order. She muttered

—I've nothing much to say, I can't talk of anything. Influences? Oh let me see, let me see.

Silence.

Philip Thirkettle had the newly-bathed, immersed look of English intellectuals. He gestured readily, he was eager, lively. Grace had put on her blue checked skirt and her blue nylon cardigan with the hem dipped front and plucked one or two hairs from between her breasts in case they showed when she leaned down, but she needn't have worried. She had been liberal with deodorant too, gritty white neutral-smelling substance in a small pink jar, but again she needn't have worried. It was her mind he wanted to reach, and nobody, by conversation, could ever reach Grace's mind. Like the grave, it was a 'private place', and could not be shared.

Influences?

Oh the usual I suppose.

—How do you go about your work?

—Oh, I, wait a minute, I can't think, I've never been interviewed in my life before, I can't think I'm senile - do you think I'm going senile?

She made tea. They stood drinking it in the kitchen. She waved towards the refrigerator which throbbed like an incubator surrounded by nursery-coloured walls and 'working surfaces'.

—I'm not used to this. I've just moved in. I've never had a flat of my own before.

He told her about his wife, his father-in-law, the time he had spent in New Zealand.

—New Zealand? Well, I wouldn't know, she said, dismissing the country.—I've been so long away. This is my home now. There's gentleness here.

He insisted. Remember this, remember that.

—I don't remember. I wouldn't know. It wasn't in my time. That was after I left . . .

—Don't you ever want to go back?

Grace smiled thoughtfully, choosing her answer from an uncomplicated store of samples put aside for the purpose.

—I was a certified lunatic in New Zealand. Go back? I was advised to sell hats for my salvation.

A spasm of sympathy crossed Philip's face. Good God, she thought, I've said the wrong thing, the tender mind etc.

—But don't you miss it all, I mean . . . don't you miss it? Don't you prefer it to - this?

—I don't know, I don't know. I miss the rivers of course. Oh yes, I miss the rivers, and the

mountain chains. I've never been interviewed before.

—Forget about being interviewed. We're drinking tea.

—I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I've never been interviewed before. Philip Thirkettle looked embarrassed.

—Don't apologise. Listen, why not come up and stay with us, anytime. You'll like Anne, you'll like Anne's father, he was a sheep-farmer once, you can talk to him about sheep, diseases of sheep, liver fluke, footrot-

—Pulpy kidney, pulpy kidney-

—Do come. Anytime. Why not Christmas?

—Christmas?

—Think about it. Goodbye now.

—Goodbye, Grace said, adding desperately as he went out

—I've never been interviewed in my life before!

A month before Christmas Grace went into hospital, into the wrong zone for her 'residential area', and during her four weeks in hospital she was terrified of being spirited away to a different 'zone' where there would not be as much kindness or understanding. Intermittently, she felt safe. She learned two songs - 'I want to be Bobby's girl' and 'Let's twist again as we did last summer'.

There was much activity - dancing, painting, games. Once Grace played a game of chess with the doctor in one of the side rooms. He had a bald patch as round as a penny on the back of his head. Leaning forward, carefully, deliberately moving his black pawn, he snatched her bishop en passant.

—I'll mate you yet, he said.—I'll mate you.

The room was small and hot. Grace blushed.

She left the hospital, returned to the flat, and spent Christmas reading Samuel Pepys, *To My Account* and only once or twice she remembered the Thirkettles and the hurried notes they had written.

—So glad you're coming for Christmas. There's a train in the afternoon. Book or you'll have to stand in the corridor. Philip will meet you at the station.

—I've had to go into hospital . . .

—We're sorry about this. Why not come when you've left hospital? You can stay in bed all day if you wish.

—OK. Later then, the end of January, early February.

And then, suddenly, between Part Two and Part Three of the new novel, this card, *Come and bask in* . . . This card, arriving just when the decision had been made which she had been awaiting for years, ever since she ceased being human, ever since she retired to her private world, although keeping open certain necessary vague lines of fatuous communication with the outside world: she was a migratory bird. Stork, swallow, muttonbird? Godwit?

How could she explain to anyone? How could she go anywhere for the weekend without remarking at some time, in some place, causing everyone to look terrified or sympathetic or embarrassed,

—You know, of course, that I'm not a human being, I'm a migratory bird.

She laughed hysterically when she thought of the situations which might arise.

—There's a possible explanation, her doctor said wisely when she told him.—Are you eating or sleeping? You must eat, you know. Let me put it on record that you must eat.

Sitting at the terrible banquet she thought herself like the comedian in the films who waiting in vain for his food, signalling waiters who ignore him, finally seizes the menu and begins to chew it, then starts on the tablecloth, breaks off a leg of the chair or the table, his hunger can't wait any longer, and what a screaming of laughter from the audience, oh was ever anything so amusing, such eating is :

amusing.

—Of course I eat, Grace said coldly.

—Fine, fine. I just wanted to put it on record.

She caught the forty-five bus back to her flat and looked miserably out of the sitting room window at the pile of dead leaves, packets, papers, bus tickets - there was a man this moment passing the flat. There. Screwing up his bus ticket and throwing it over the low brick wall into the garden. Bus tickets, cigarette packets and papers, chocolate wrappers, all kinds of refuse were thrown into the garden. Sometimes Grace took the hard broom from the coat cupboard in the hall and swept vigorously at the pile of tickets, while people passing (clean, affluent, with leather cases and confident glances) looked astonished, thinking, at the sight of Grace, What a treasure of a daily. When the snow had melted and the shocked plants were revealed in all their ragged lifelessness, impatient for signs of green growth, Grace tugged many of them from the earth. Immediately regretting her impulse, she tried to plant them again although their roots were severed. Against the wall of the Offices of the Examining Board the row of severed plants still stood in brave deceit, and no one would have guessed that the sap in their stems had drained for ever, cut off from the source. Grace gave these plants extra attention. When she entered the flat through the garden she was careful to walk just once or twice beside them in the hope that her nearness would provide the reassurance necessary for resurrection, but it was no use, she had never been deceived in matters of life and death, she could not hope to deceive the plants she had uprooted. News had to be broken quickly, cleanly; snap; a mound of earth or of special care was no concealment.

A certain pleasure was added to Grace's relief at establishing herself as a migratory bird. She found that she understood the characters in her novel. Her words flowed, she was excited, she could see everyone and everything. She ticked off the days in her diary and thought, Not many weeks now and I'll be finished my story, then I'll be able to emerge to prowling the streets and sniff the spring air.

It's like this:

She spoke to herself,

—Ready. Ah, the cameras wheeled into place, the microphones adjusted. She climbs in, looks back. Regrets? The door is clamped shut. The people of the world retreat. Rejoicing fiercely in her aloneness, she is anything now, nothing human - an egg, a hibernating tortoise, a hazelnut; she will circle the earth, like a marble rolled in the dark mouth of the sky; and ha, she'll soon be in space, she'll address her body, her food, her instruments as dogs, Down there, Down! The whirling floating fragments rasp like tongues against her skin, seize her flesh; everything rises around her, like vomit; this is the day when space, not sea or earth, gives up its dead. She smiles, she murmurs, What ever moored me?, peering at the stars, the pursuing fires, the earth wonderfully cultivated with plant brick stores and not a sign of moving people, animals, insects, commotions of love. Down, dream, down!

Communication is lost.

A faulty instrument, human error; the private pleasure of the certainty of her death, the public premature mourning for a heroine; on the seas the collection of little boats moving into the area of her recovery to witness the end; flags flying; a regatta; representatives native and foreign.

Her ship explodes, is burned; flash in the sky, stain in the sea; nothing human recovered. The boats disperse, the representatives native and foreign return to make statements, issue bulletins.

Night. The writer emerges from her dream.

—Oh God why have I been deceived? Which world do I inhabit?

Down, dream, down!

Every few days the cracked-wheat loaf, ninepence halfpenny, has to be bought; on Fridays the milk bill, seven half pints at fourpence halfpenny, paid; half a dozen eggs a week, half a pound of cheese; the daily newspaper, the literary weekly, the Sunday paper, thud, like a dangerous piece of scaffolding or a plank blown by a high wind out of the sky from a never-completed building - what's it going to be in the end, you ask. A cathedral, a little house, a railway station, a hangar? It's too high to see the structure, velvet sky sags with fog, the newspaper with its insertion, the insertion within the insertion within the insertion (ah, technicolour!) lies heavily on the foot and heart.

Also, there are visits here and there to consult the stains in their places of origin - the publisher with the soft voice (a bookie giving a quiet tip) and the aura of after-shave lotion; his peony-faced son with the quenched dark eyes; his head reader; editors, editors, the agent worried over his diet and elimination; visits from people, too. The phone rings. Time after time when the phone rings it is Some wrong number, but tonight it is Harvey.

—A friend in the States gave me your address. Can I come over tonight, about nine?

Pause.

An American medical student? That *will* be pleasant. Tête-à-tête, sherry, coffee. Do I look like a writer? I should have straight black hair falling over my shoulders; my face should be pimpled and pasty; my shoes should be split at the sides; yet I should look *interesting*. Do I look like anybody, like myself? I wish I knew what to say, I wish I didn't dry up when confronted with people. A slight hope tonight; sherry; tête-à-tête.

Pause.

—Yes, do come. I'll expect you at nine.

—May I bring my girlfriend?

Pause.

—Do, do.

The old frustrated witch dancing around the cauldron,

'and like a rat without a tail,
in a sieve I'll thither sail,
I'll do, I'll do and I'll do . . .'

Just after nine that evening the doorbell rang and Grace admitted Harvey and his girlfriend Sylvia.

—I'm Harvey.

—I'm Grace.

—I'm Sylvia.

Smiles, everyone established, and while Grace showed them into the sitting room with its floor

suite, its lamp standard, desk, reproduction winetables, electric fire, Chinese prints, Beautiful New Zealand Calendar, postcard of Beethoven ('Celui à qui ma musique se fera comprendre sera délivré de toutes les misères où les autres se traînent'), she thought, These Americans are fitted with a revolving radar tower for picking up women.

She remembered her own American, pleasurably inhabiting her past; their impulsive loving over a period long enough for it to gather rainbow tints, reflections, absorbing sea and sky and almost blossom before it became the usual miraculous bubble-nothing, and she and he, surprised, spread their wet fingers, breathed on them, blew them dry, and there was not a sign anywhere that anyone might know; nothing; only the shadow, the preserved memory; already the acid in which it was embalmed was corroding it; she had hoped that wouldn't happen, but how could she have prevented it? How could she have made love with someone who at the moment of climax began to recite *Gunga Din*. Perhaps that was not so unfortunate - he could have recited lines from *If*, 'If you can keep your head when all about you . . . if you can walk with kings nor lose the common touch . . .'

The common touch.

Although Grace had prepared her information on Klinefelter's Syndrome, it seemed that Harvey was now pursuing a different line of research. His girlfriend lectured in Economics, she said.

He was dark, inarticulate, and looked frail.

Grace poured sherry. The other world intruded. She could say little.

—Nice flat you've got here. Where Sylvia stays there's a skylight in the bathroom and the snow falls on the lavatory seat-

—It's been snowing a long time. Will it ever stop?

—Weeks. Do you know marihuana?

—Who?

—Marihuana.

—I've read somewhere, I've heard, you can grow and harvest it in London. Where I lived in Ibiza (Ah, now she would talk to them, she would tell them of the moonlight sharp as flute-music on the cobblestones.)

—Yes I know someone who lived in Ibiza. He's a writer.

—You mean, Sylvia, he *calls* himself a writer. He'd like to stop by and see you sometime.

—Oh?

Grace poured another sherry. She could feel a flush spreading over her cheeks, making its centre a furnace in two spots on either side of her nose.

—No, I don't smoke.

—You don't? Sylvia doesn't, do you Sylvie?

Sylvie!

—And I don't care for it myself.

Observing them carefully, Grace knew a sudden feeling of superiority. They were young, flowing

so conventionally wanting to be unconventional. There was a small element of hero-worship, too, their attitude to her, although perhaps it had been stifled by their discovery that she, a writer, lived in a flat which held a three-piece suite with floral covers. They had been disappointed that she had so much interest in marihuana. They fitted so neatly into the psychological classification *Positively Adolescent* that Grace began to doubt their ability ever to escape, to struggle through the bleak, unfriendly no-man's-land, risking starvation, wounding, death, to the next acceptable age-area prepared for them.

(Feeling for a moment the lonely chilling wind between her shoulder-blades, Grace drew her breath in a quick gasp and shiver.)

They stared at her. She was silent. Dare she lean forward, she wondered, and ask, as one who had escaped,

—Harvey, Sylvia, do you intend to be wedged for ever? Wedged. What do you mean?

—Can you move quite freely where you are? Sure? When you get to no-man's-land you will be able to run, dance, shout, starve, die. Don't you feel cramped?

Immensely superior, free, a member of another generation, Grace refilled the sherry glasses slopping a little over the edge of the glass-topped table.

—Oh, the carpet!

Yes, the carpet. The agent had been careful to state that it was new and of good quality. The carpet, the chairs, the floral covers, the Chinese print above the mantelpiece, the reproduction wine tables . . .

Harvey and Sylvia were talking together. Grace thought, I must try to listen, to concentrate, to make some intelligent remark. After all, I'm a writer, and many writers are intelligent, and didn't I manage quite successfully with those tests at the hospital, matching patterns, fitting blocks together, emptying and filling five and seven pint vessels, striking out words and ideas which did not apply?

—You go to the theatre much?

—No, Grace said quickly.—I'm meaning to, some time. I saw *Macbeth*. Yes, I saw *Macbeth*. Duncan was an old man wandering around in a nightshirt.

—Oh? (Politely.)

Perhaps they're not interested in Shakespeare, Grace thought. They're more interested in the avant garde plays. They do madmen very well on the stage these days. I *know*. But to me, if I consider the matter, the avant garde plays are as much behind the times as Shakespeare.

—More sherry? Oh, sorry, there's no more. Coffee?

Harvey stood up. He had been sitting on the sofa. Grace had been surprised when they sat on different chairs, she had expected them to sit together, to embarrass her with exchanged glances and entwined limbs, but they had separated and established themselves each in a prim attitude on the edge of the sofa and chair. Grace had been disappointed that they did not fit in entirely to her classification . . . didn't everyone know that all Americans . . . all students . . .

Harvey would make a good psychiatrist, although his face had not yet that certain expression which

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