

BOY'S OWN FANZINE



Number 1, March 1971

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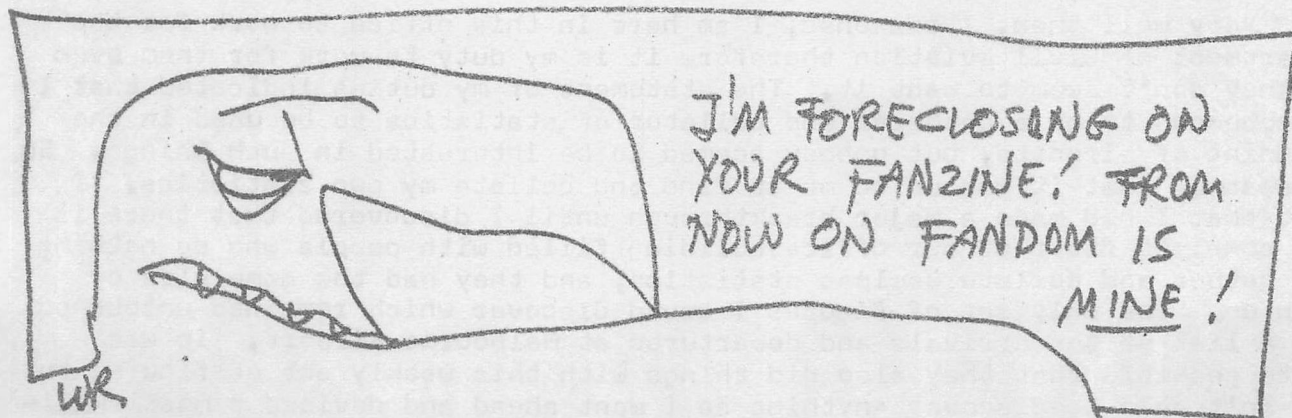
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Illustrations by William Rotsler, Wrr and Elizabeth Foyster
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GEORGE

If, like me, you are a public servant, it is quite possible that you and I suffer from the same occupational hazard - boredom. You arrive at work and find yourself confronted by a full day of just about nothing to do. With luck somebody might require your

services for an hour or so but what do you do with the other six hours and twenty-one minutes? If you are anything like me you feel like tearing sheets of paper into exceedingly small pieces. You also feel like going home where you can be bored in comfort.

One day a couple of years ago I sat down and tackled the problem of my boredom logically: there wasn't anything else for me to do that day. The easiest way to overcome the problem would be to read a book but the people who are in charge of the office don't appreciate that kind of thing. I could possibly read fanzines. That had definite possibilities but it had to be considered carefully. If I were to be able to conduct any outside activity I had to contrive to make it appear as if I were actually working.

It occurred to me that since fanzines are printed sheets stapled together all I had to do was to pull out the staples and read the single sheets as if they were official reports or something of that nature.* There was, however, a significant drawback to this scheme - I refer in particular to the distressing habit that most faneds have of printing illustrations. It might be possible to convince the people at work that a page out of a fanzine was a report on the underground piping installations at Sydney Airport, but my efforts would be strained beyond reasonable limits if the sheet had a picture of a half-naked woman engaged in combat with some ugly monstrosity. So that little scheme was out unless faneds cooperated by producing illustrationless fanzines and unfortunately Bruce Gillespie does not produce SF Commentary often enough for me to have something to read every day.

Writing letters offered a possible source of occupation but nobody can read my hand-written scrawl and even I don't have that many people to correspond with when I can't have copies of fanzines lying around to write letters of comment on.

So fanac appeared to be out of the question.

Very well then, I reasoned, I am here in this office to work for the Department of Civil Aviation therefore it is my duty to work for them even if they don't seem to want it. The statement of my duties indicated that I am supposed to be a gatherer and collator of statistics to be used in the planning of airports, but nobody seemed to be interested in such things. So I reasoned that it was up to me to find and collate my own statistics. I felt that I had made a major breakthrough until I discovered that there is one complete floor of our office building filled with people who do nothing but gather and collate useless statistics, and they had the game already sewn up. The only set of figures I could discover which remained untouched was a list of the arrivals and departures at Melbourne Airport. It was quite possible that they also did things with this weekly set of figures but I wasn't able to discover anything so I went ahead and devised a most skill-

ful method whereby, from one foolscap sheet, I could fill up four sets of columns of figures every week and draw three cunning little graphs - all of obviously no use to anybody.

What fun! At first this task occupied lots and lots of time while I devised and improved my system but, after a month or so, I found it increasingly easy to manipulate the figures and draw the graphs so that it only took a couple of hours and there was all the rest of the week stretched out before me, barren and lifeless. I tried my utmost to derive more columns of figures from the list but there was a limit to the trivia that even I could derive from it, even in my desperate condition.

The future looked incredibly gloomy and each day I was going further up the wall in my bored frustration until, one day, inspiration struck.

The Department has files that it uses to plug up its workings and keep people occupied. There is a floor of people who do nothing but play with them all day. In my blindness I had never realised the full potential of the file until that day. Sure, I had used them before after a fashion, moving them around on my desk to form various geometric patterns, but it was child's play when compared with the revelation I had. The basis of my discovery was quite simple - there are lots of sheets of paper on a file and most of them have writing on them and this writing can be read. Of course, most of the writing is incredibly boring, but that is beside the point. It seemed to me that if I had to spend the entire day sitting around doing nothing and being bored it would be no harder and potentially a great deal more enjoyable to sit around and read files and not be quite so bored.

Now I'm not claiming any special intelligence but it occurred to me that if I were to begin occupying my time with files I might as well do it in a proper manner - a devious and intricate manner as befits a public servant.

Before I began to use files to occupy myself I spent a little time in studying my prey. My extra care and diligence were well rewarded. I discovered that the figures by which each file was identified were not, as I had previously imagined, just random numbers. The numbers are carefully selected by a system that some extremely devious public servant had figured out many years ago - no doubt in the hope of occupying himself. Thus, if you came upon a file upon which a '6' was the first number you would find that the file invariably dealt with an aircraft accident at some time and some place (I suspect that the numbers following '6' would tell you the time and the place, but as yet I have not been able to crack the code.). If you saw a file with the first two numbers being '67' you would find that the file dealt with an airport somewhere in the state of Victoria: '66' numbers deal with the state of New South Wales and '65' numbers deal with airports in Queensland and even though I have not, as yet, discovered the files or the numbers for the files on airports in other states I know that there are airports in those states somewhere and thus there must be files.

When I tell you that what I have related about file numbers above is a mere scraping of the surface you will understand something of the excitement I sometimes feel, and I'm still learning. These days, when I feel particularly adventurous I simply pick up my telephone and ask the people who look

after the files to send me one, the number of which I simply pick out of my head. Then I sit back and wait to see what discovery I am about to make. On the other hand, if I feel more formal, I can use one of several methods I have devised to choose the number through a series of random mathematical manipulations.

Oh yes, I could go on and on about the wonderful discoveries I have made in the last couple of years. Unfortunately Don Symons' article has taken up too much of my room and I find myself a little cramped. I'm sure that there are many useful tips that I could pass on to you if you find yourself in a position similar to mine. I am also sure that you are far more likely to find yourself working for a public service department than flying as a steward on a flying boat. Come to think of it, you are far more likely to find yourself working in a position similar to mine than you are to find yourself skipping stones across country streams with Lee Harding - that article should go and it would if only John Foyster weren't so strong-willed.

John and I aren't coeditors for nothing so that there is no possible way in which he can take this page away from me and I intend to fill it up the way I see fit - in explaining my latest discovery concerning files.

In one of the more obscure corners of our office building there is a Xerox machine. The connection between files and Xerox machines is that if I see a particularly interesting sheet of paper on a file I can go down to the copying machine and get some copies made of it. When I first started this practice I considered the possibility of starting my own filing system but the space that such a thing would need was a little more than I could afford - the carbon paper that I've collected over the last five years is a little too bulky and a little too near my heart to be thrown away for mere photocopies and mere pieces of ordinary paper. My alternative is to get the copies and then go around trying to give them to somebody.

I've found this a most socially rewarding occupation. Through it I have discovered a man who can whistle all the classics but who doesn't know the name of any of them and I have also discovered his associate who can't whistle a note but who can name them all. I have come to meet a Victorian League footballer and a professional boxer who makes money on the side at the office. Other interesting characters include a skydiving freak who has a great gash across his throat which he collected when he almost decapitated himself with his reserve 'chute, a clerk who claims to have been in a group that played Creedance Clearwater Revival music before they were ever heard of, a most attractive young woman - who is unfortunately married - and a long-haired hippie weirdo who turns on with alcohol. I have talked to people who have told me what it was like to be in the bomber streams over Germany in the last World War, what it is like to watch the surf come in at Big Sur or the difficulties of building airstrips in New Guinea.

Unfortunately none of these people have shown much interest in the copies I've tried to fob off on them. Either they are lacking in a proper sense of what the Department of Civil Aviation exists for or they are far too busy trying to keep themselves occupied with their own little tasks.

It may sound vaguely heretical to call a \$50 million airport something

that somebody uses to fill in time between 8.30 and 4.51 but if you are to survive in the public service this is the perspective that you have to take. The only difference between myself and the engineer who designs the airport is that before he joined the public service he spent a few years in a university combatting boredom.

Talking about boredom, here's yet another editorial.

Leigh Edmonds

TRACK

BOY'S OWN FANZINE AND WHAT IT STANDS FOR

Boy's Own Fanzine has been created to fill a gap in the fanzine-publishing world. Boy's Own Fanzine is designed to represent all that is clean and worthy in science fiction fandom. We, that is to say Leigh Edmonds and I, are much concerned by the overt and covert immorality in science fiction fandom and we hope that through these pages we will be able to combat all that is unhealthy and unclean (and almost certainly Peking-inspired) in fandom.

Indeed, what we most regret is that we have not been able to present Boy's Own Fanzine. Had only we been able to advocate cold hip-baths earlier we are sure that fewer science fiction fans would need glasses.

Our intentions are illustrated to some extent by the contents of this issue: for example, in the short article describing the adventures of two youths far from civilisation in the wilds of Victoria we observe the battle between Man and Nature in all its ferocity. We are sure you will enjoy 'Camping' by Apollo Papayannou.

Don Symons' article describes the gay times aboard a British flying boat in the late 'forties. It seems to be a rollicking good yarn, but there are parts of it we do not understand.

As for our title: we have long been impressed with the opportunities arising, acronymically speaking, from the use of the word 'fanzine' in a fanzine title. The most recent example, from David Malone, has produced the euphonious DMSFF.

MY ARSE, AND WELCOME TO IT

Back in nineteen ought four (or 1954, New Style) the Melbourne City Fathers, having somehow connived their way into the running of the 1956 Olympic Games, cast about for some age-old Melbourne custom which could be newly-created to form a tourist attraction. The name of the genius who thought of a mish-mash of marching girls, floats and water-skiing has escaped my normally retentive memory. But there are one or

two other points worth noting.

'Let us have' said the City Fathers 'a typical Australian name for this ages-old Australian custom.' They consulted Bill Onus, a venerable coloured gentleman, who proposed the name 'Moomba' for this exciting festival.

'It means "Get together and have fun".' said Bill Onus.

Last year Mr. Onus, whose career in the boomerang-throwing and carving business (strictly for the white massa trade) was rapidly coming to a close as a result of his advanced age, confessed that he had dissimulated. 'Moomba', it seems, actually means 'my arse'.

One up to the boongs.

This issue of Boy's Own Fanzine is being published during Moomba 1971. Yesterday Elizabeth and I took Jillian to see the Great Moscow Circus, which actually isn't so bad. I noted with interest the massive profit being acquired by Coca-cola sellers as a result of their thoughtful 33 1/3 % markup. But as we returned home we passed a small tent from which aboriginal folk were trying to sell boomerangs and such. Apparently they no longer play a large role in Moomba celebrations.

One up to the kuries.

THE BOY'S OWN FANZINE AWARDS

A specially-invited committee, consisting of me, has made the following selections for our awards for this issue. I guess that in Esquire they would have been called Dubious Achievement Awards.

Australian Awards

John Ryan - least prejudiced fan. In the February ANZAPA mailing John wrote: (in re Gary Mason) 'As for your record on getting out mailings, I think you have every reason to be pleased with your performance ... and if the next OE can do as well the membership should have no complaints.' This 'no complaints' policy does not apparently extend into the past, John Ryan's comments on the first ANZAPA OE (whose record for getting out mailings is almost identical with that of Gary Mason) being couched rather differently.

Gary Mason - for the power to cloud men's minds.

Focal Point - for unbiased news reporting.

Arnie Katz and Jay Kinney - for chivalry.

(hah, you weren't watching me closely enough, so I'm sneaking the international awards in right here.)

Ted White - for 'win friends and influence people' replies to letterhacks.

Then there are a few awards for special services; awards in categories which are not likely to occur again. For example there an award for

Special services to British Fandom - the British Post Office.

And I think there's only room for one more award now. This one goes to the

FAPA members and officials involved in the recent amendment to radically alter the structure of the waiting list: to them the Slow and Sure wins the Race Award.

THE UGLY AMERICAN

There's a moderately cryptic comment in HAVERINGS 47 which I could briefly decipher here with profit, I think. Ethel Lindsay says '...and I was personally pleased to read that John had agreed with something I had written.' She's reviewing an issue of NORSTRILIAN NEWS in which I discussed an earlier remark of hers in a review of a North American fanzine. A remark was made about the quality of reproduction of English fanzines, and Ethel commented: 'Economics are what govern this factor - a fact that some US fans will ignore. Isn't it bad enough to be richer than us without being bitchy about it too?' I don't know that I agree entirely with Ethel's remark, but certainly the HEICON should have emphasised some aspects of what she said. It certainly seems to me that to whine about the lack of money in a poorer country is to invite a bullet in the back. But it is also quite plain that some Americans (not necessarily the ones Ethel is talking about) don't realise that they are in fact sneering at their fellow human beings; and at the moment there is not a seller's market for ignorance and irresponsibility. Anyway, I'm not going to discuss this matter at length, but I do think, as Ethel suggests, that it is worth talking about.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The asterisk in Leigh Edmonds' editorial is to allow me to point out to you that Leigh nevertheless destaples his fanzines. This is sometimes a matter of concern to those who buy his old fanzines.

Prices and trades: We are not particularly eager to go into international financial deals. On the whole American fans seem to be slightly unaware of what is going on in that small area (I still laugh over Leigh's story of the American fan who tried to spend an Australian dollar bill in the local drugstore), and we would prefer the usual methods to the sticky dime circuit which probably wouldn't be worth the effort. Locally, we can manage.

Contents: We are overstocked on gold-smuggling stories at the moment, but anything else would be welcome. As we both like fanhistory I am sure we'll be able to dredge some skeleton from a cupboard in about three months time.

Production: Although Leigh and I do co-edit this thing (to the extent that proposed contributions have to be acceptable to us both) I am to blame for the looks of this one. It is almost six years since I tried to use any art in a fanzine and what little I knew is definitely rusty. I must admit that it didn't help to have nice clear line drawings come back on electrostencil looking like Virgil Finlays. Then the hot summer sun didn't help the show-through much. All in all, a less than happy experiment. But we come back for more, and it would be v. nice to have you with us.

John Foyster

THE PAUL STEVENS LECTURES

inaugural address by
Professor Humphrey Tape

(script by John Bangsund)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have been invited by the Vice Chancellor of this University, the Dean of the Faculty of Biblical Engineering, the Gatekeeper at the Main Entrance, the promoter of this diversion, Mr. Stevens, the Organizing Committee of this convention, and, indeed, by seventy-four per cent of a random sampling of convention members, not to read this small paper to you this evening.

As you well know, I have devoted the last forty-three years to the study of ektrochiasology. I can say, truthfully, and without false modesty, that as a result of my labours in this lonely field of learning, the science of ektrochiasology is today in its infancy. You may very well say to me, 'Sir if the science is still in its infancy today, after you have worked at it for forty-three years, that doesn't say a hell of a lot for your work, does

it?' I reply, with candour and becoming humility, 'HA! - how little you know, eh?'

My researches were years, nay decades, ahead of their time. The pure science of ektrochiasology existed long before we had a technology capable of providing an object to study!

But I can hear some of you saying, 'What is ektrochiasology?' - and it is to you eager, questioning, wideawake young people that I wish to address my remarks.

Ektrochiasology is the study of ektrochiasomes - or, in everyday slang, run-offs on longplaying gramophone records.

People have often asked me how I came to decide, back in 1928, to devote my life to the study of the run-offs on longplaying gramophone records. I have tried to explain patiently to them the sense of dedication that a scholarly man feels when he has completed his formal university training, and it's a matter of either finding a congenial and preferably obscure branch of learning in which to specialize - or getting a job. But they rarely listen. They just want to know where I found longplaying records in 1928.

It is because of this wilfull ignorance that ektrochiasology is today in its infancy and not the glorious international field of progress and co-operation it rightfully should be!

Do you know that there is no Professorial Chair in Ektrochiasology at any institution of learning anywhere in the world, except right here in Victoria, at the University of Ard-Knox?!

Look at the mess the world is in! War, hunger, pollution, traffic problems, race hatred, ignorance and violence everywhere, postage increases - ach! what a life! You invent new weapons of destruction and you make millions. You put up ugly buildings everywhere and you make millions. You spoil the land and the water and the atmosphere with smoke and muck from your chimneys factories and you make millions. You write science fiction - but that's irrelevant.

There are 943,278 institutions on this planet where you can learn to invent weapons and build buildings and pollute the atmosphere - but only one - ONE! where the beneficial, harmless science of ektrochiasology may be studied.

Think about that.

From the looks on your intelligent young faces I can see that you are not thinking about that at all. You are still wondering where I found longplaying records in 1928.

Ah well. Of course, in 1928 there was no such thing as a longplaying record. I must be frank with you. You have difficulty in conceiving of a time when there was no television, no stereo, no LP records. You are so young. There was a time when there were no Beatles, when LSD meant money, when Beethoven's Song Of Joy was in German and lasted twenty minutes.

But in 1928, after seventeen years studying the history and theory of musical orthography, I decided that longplaying records needed to exist!

Without them the science of ektrochiasology was doomed. I could not allow this to happen. I devoted my life to studying and promoting ektrochiasomes. Now I must tell you how this all started, how I first stumbled on the existence of these things, twenty years before technology allowed them to exist.

One day in August, 1928, I was sitting alone in my cell at the University of Ard-Knox, smoking my pipe, reflecting in a bitter-sweet, melancholy sort of way on Man's Folly and what I would do for a living the next year. On my lap I had a volume of Vivaldi's Masses in D - the well-known Kaltgrund Masses of 1740, dedicated to Count Kaltgrund von Obereisenbahnenknotenpunktenhimundhierschieber-Mitknobson.

(Interestingly enough, these Masses are rarely preformed today, although one tune from them has survived and was quite popular in America some time ago, particularly among the negro folk. I refer, of course, to 'Masses in D Cold Cold Ground'.)

Anyway, there I was, idly wool-gathering, when I noticed that I had dropped some pipe tobacco on the open pages of the book. I tried to brush them away, but found that I couldn't. What an extraordinary thing! I held the book up to my eyes to see why the tobacco was stuck there, and to my amazement found that it was not tobacco at all. The marks were on the page.

Now, this was strange indeed. The marks occurred after the end of one of the Masses. By rights the music was finished, yet here, quite clearly, after the final triumphant 'Missa Est', the last magnificent note of trumpet, organ, strings and choir, here was something more!

I immediately turned to the end of the next Mass in the book, and - there they were again! INCREDIBLE! The marks looked like specks of ink accidentally scattered on the score by a careless printer - yet, believe me, printers were not careless in those days, my friends. There must be some reason for those marks.

From that romantic beginning the science of ektrochiasology grew, ladies and gentlemen.

My researches took me to the original manuscripts. I discovered that Vivaldi had indeed written those marks. I checked with other works by Vivaldi, and all of them had the marks. I turned to other composers, and - my God! - every manuscript I examined had marks on the page after the final note of the work concerned.

When I first published my discoveries in 1930, in the University of Ard-Knox Journal of Musical Orthography, they were unanimously acclaimed by music scholars the world over as arrant poppycock.

I was not distressed. I knew, deep down, that these marks I had discovered were placed there by the composers, and, furthermore, that they meant something. What they meant, I did not know, but I determined to find out.

Friends... It took me fourteen years to realize what I had stumbled on.

I was relaxing under the baobab trees down behind the lockers at the University one day in June 1944, idly talking with young Dudley Fortescue, who had just come onto the staff as senior reader in Comparative Plumbing.



I was sitting alone in my cell



unanimously acclaimed by music scholars the world over

We were discussing the Test matches, and rubbishing the younger generation with its long hair and idiotic pop music - Sinatra, Crosby, Glenn Miller - crazy, way-out stuff - and we got talking about ektrochiasomes.

Well, you know, in those terrible war-torn years, with all their insecurity and uncertainty, conversation seemed invariably to turn to ektrochiasomes sooner or later.

And suddenly I realized that to play these strange notes, you would really need a vinyl plastic disc, preferably about 12 inches in diameter, turning at about 33 revolutions per minute, some carefully-placed grooves towards the disc's centre, and a needle of some description. I rushed back to my cell, dragged out some old bits of vinyl and a few needles, and rigged up the necessary instrument within a few hours.

What a breakthrough! Now the great classics could be heard in their full glory for the VERY FIRST TIME. Wow!

But, you wouldn't believe the opposition I came up against trying to present my discovery to the music-loving public. It took almost another seven years before the idea got across, and - I am furious whenever I think about it - it was a science fiction writer named Arthur C. Clarke who patented the discovery!

(Later on I discovered he was just trying to get his own back on me. Back in 1941 I patented the communications satellite, which he claimed also to have thought of, but that's another story...)

Today, as I remarked earlier, the science of ektrochiasology is still in its infancy. All the theory is known, and the equipment is available for reproducing ektrochiasomes, but there is just so much work to be done and so few to do it.

I would like to conclude this address by playing for you just a few really superb ektrochiasomes from my collections. They will, perhaps, give you some insight into a fascinating world you might never have suspected even existed - particularly if you have an automatic record-player.

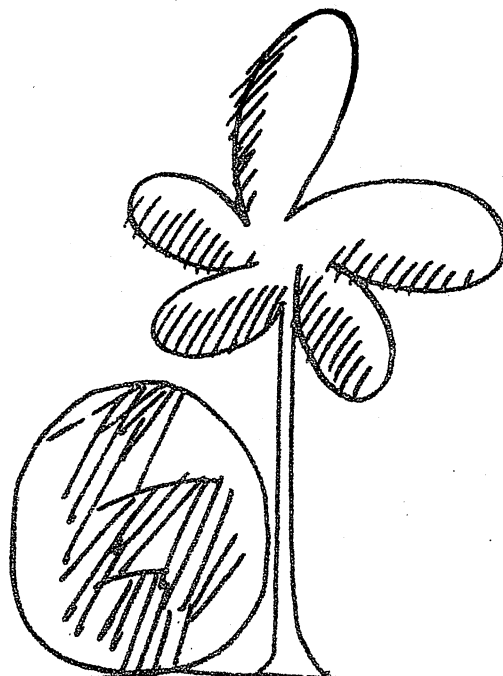
1. The first example is from a very early work by King Alfonso the Mad of Spain. You will recognize at once the very primitive nature of the music. It comes from the 14 Little Gavottes and Ho-Downs of 1378, and was intended to be played during sessions of the inquisition. The particular one I will play was intended to be performed by two lutes, a brass serpent, four bagpipes and well-tempered Rack.
2. Jumping several centuries, we come to the great Viennese composer, Carl Emmanuel Frescobaldi, who in many ways foreshadowed the even greater Bach. This little run-off is from the Prelude & Several Fugues in various Keys for solo tenor whoopsichord.
3. And now, the great Bach himself. Norman Vincent Bach wrote perhaps some of the most magnificent ektrochiasomes in all music. This particular example is from the Great Organ Mass of 1693, and I think you will find it, as I do, a most deeply

moving experience.

4. The next three examples speak for themselves. Everyone is familiar with the tremendous development of the symphony in the hands of those three angry young men, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. It is fascinating to see the complexity of the form increasing as we move from the first to the last of these composers. The intense emotion of Beethoven was rarely more evident than in the example we shall hear.
5. I'm jumping a bit here. There are those who say modern composers have lost touch with the classical tradition. I find this impossible to believe, and I will demonstrate. This run-off is by the modern composer John Cage. I'm sure you will agree with me that nothing has been lost, when you compare the Beethoven extract we have just heard with these few bars from Cage.....
6. Now, a sweet melancholy piece from a late symphony of Sibelius. You can almost feel the bleak, icy winds of the Finnish tundra in this excerpt. If you really try, that is.
7. Now, a quite cheerful marching, banner-waving, crowd-pleasing run-off by Shostakovich. Incredible as it might seem to us, this particular passage infuriated Stalin when it was first performed in 1938, and Shostakovich was forced to apologize and then re-write the run-off. Luckily a more liberal subsequent regime has allowed the original to be recorded, and here it is, performed by the Leningrad Philharmonic under Gregory Constantinovich Mulch.
8. No survey of the ektrochiasome would be complete, or even representative, without an example of that incredible man Wagner. Richard Wagner never did things by halves. During the course of his Ring of the Nibelungs he has no less than 38 run-offs. In this, the very last run-off from Gotterdammerung, the discerning listener will discover not only the themes from the previous 37, but also every last one of the 2,198 leitmotifs which appear during the opera.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

(text from a speech delivered at the 10th Australian Science Fiction Convention.)



TELL ME
THE STORY
OF YOUR LIFE
OR
ALL
ABOUT
ONE BLADE
OF GRASS

WHICHEVER COMES FIRST ♡♡♡♡

Walen

COUP D'OR

R D Symons

I hadn't been listening: there was nothing new in the situation. We were six airline stewards sitting in a Karachi hotel room over afternoon tea, talking about ways of making money and, as usual, speculating (or perhaps being evasive) about the gold business. In the course of my few months with the company, I had become sure that it existed and wanted to get into it. I wanted to make some money quickly and was willing to gamble.

I hadn't heard Cohen's name mentioned, but I suddenly became aware that Micky was protesting about something: protesting too much, I thought.

'I tried Cohen; I went in his shop every time I was in Cairo. He kept promising me some business, then all he wanted in the end was some American fountain pens from Hong Kong.'

There was nothing, really, to go on. It was just my intuitive feeling that he knew something. He was a hard little Northerner from Liverpool who knew the West End intimately. Perhaps Cohen really was no good; perhaps he was just one of those false leads which I should have to follow and eliminate. I learned from the conversation that his shop was in Suliman Pasha Street: I should look for it.

I was flying with a first steward named David, with whom I had flown

twice before as a second steward. He was a homosexual ex-marine. One night in Singapore he had asked me to stay out of the hotel room while he seduced a young British soldier he had met in town. I had, naturally, gained his confidence. He was sure there was a gold business and wanted to get into it: later he did. He believed that a flight engineer and a radio officer with whom each of us had flown were already in it. Arthur, the radio officer, was certainly a conspicuous spender. (One night at the Seaview Hotel in Singapore, where we stayed, I found him accompanied by a middle-aged Chinese who was introduced to me as Lam Wang Choon: Arthur invited me to have a drink with them. The Chinese was dressed in ordinary white cotton trousers and would have been commonplace behind any Singapore shop counter, but led us out to an American car of immaculate, ~~frimabian~~ vulgarity. I found, that evening, that if I looked at anything - an unfamiliar bottle behind a bar, a bowl of shark's fin soup being carried past by a waiter, a taxi dancer - he offered to buy it for me. Arthur, it seemed, was an important guest. It occurred to me that I was perhaps being watched, that I might be recruited, if I appeared to be suitable for whatever business they were in. But whatever it was, it had been dealt with that evening and they were out merely to enjoy themselves. I left them at the 'New World'.

The Worlds at Singapore - there were three of them, the 'Happy World', the 'Great World' and the 'New World' - were unlike anything I had seen before: crowded funfairs, but without mechanical amusements. There were bars and little restaurants with the cuisine of half a dozen races, stalls selling gaudy shirts and all the toys and gadgetry of Japan, a small stadium with boxing, wrestling or basketball, an open air rostrum like a Victorian bandstand for the simple, gay form of Malay dancing, small Indian, Siamese and Chinese theatres both modern and archaic: once, a concert of fifteenth century Pekingese songs, the girl singing seated with white makeup as artificial as the tonal intervals of the song, and a dance hall with Philipino musicians and Chinese and Malay taxi dancers, the Chinese retaining some of their delicacy to Western eyes in spite of being part time prostitutes, the Malays full-breasted and quite beautiful in their lace jackets and long skirts.

We sat at a table in the dance hall in the 'New World'. Lam Wang Choon ordered drinks and called over two of the Chinese girls to sit with us. I had several drinks with one and decided to go home with her, partly to accept the gift which Lam Wang Choon might be offering to me, a barbarous but possibly useful Westerner, partly to bow myself out of the party because I didn't think I should learn anything that night, but mainly because she attracted me.)

On the way back to England, I found Cohen's shop in Cairo: it was closed. Cohen, as I later heard, had advance knowledge that the flying boat base was to be moved to Alexandria and was setting up another shop there as a cover for his more private affairs. Hythe flying boats, in 1948, were a leisurely form of travel. Except for two nights of the trip we flew only by day, and slept ashore in a different country each night.

I happened to meet Bob in London. He had joined the company at the same time as I had and we had been together on the training course. He was

a failed Anglo-Irish actor, a gifted mimic and a charming phoney. I was in the Mitre, just off Shaftesbury Avenue, the only pub in England that has a Frenchman for a licensee, when he came in. Within a very short time we were talking about gold. One's private thoughts are seldom unique; the Marquis de Sade is remarkable not for his singularity but for his consistency. I let Bob talk, but he didn't seem to know any more than I already knew.

I had ten days leave between trips and it was an idyllic English summer, but I was impatient to get out of the country again. When I reported back to Southampton I found that I had been promoted to first steward; as a result, an adventure was awaiting me at Rangoon.

At Cairo, passengers were not allowed into the city and slept on a houseboat at the Nile base. An aircraft was delayed there, the houseboat and the usual crew hotel were full and for one night our crew moved into the Edwardian splendours of Shopboards, whose Imperial associations disappeared in flames during the revolution. I dined on a pigeon with rice, then left the hotel alone. I turned out of the Opera Square into Malika Farida Street, walking again among the scenes and smells which had become familiar to me during three years of the war. I stopped at Tommy's bar and wondered, as I had wondered seven years earlier, how I could steal the enormous ashtray on the bar, which enjoined one, in six languages, to drink Johnny Walker. Perhaps that, too, disappeared in the revolution. I was in no hurry; I had a feeling that Cohen was the man, that all in good time we should become acquainted.

At the corner of Suliman Pasha and Malika Farida, looking in through the large windows, I saw John, with, of all things, an apparently English girl. He had been a bomber pilot during the war and had joined the airline at the same time as Bob and I. He was a country lover from Ringwood in the New Forest who had spent much of his spare time during our training whittling by hand a new stock for a shotgun out of a prized piece of walnut. I went into the bar and he greeted me gaily.

'Would you like a stuffed olive?' he shouted.

He slid the dish of olives and salt nuts along the bar towards me. It was one of his simple jokes; the girl's name was Olive. She took it well. She was a stewardess who normally flew on the South African route. Flying boats to the far east carried two stewards only, but she and John were on a special charter flight together, carrying a cargo of schoolchildren to join their parents in Malaya for the long summer holiday. Cohen's shop was only two hundred yards away and I was sorry, now, that I had gone into the bar, much as I liked John.

We came out of the American Bar and strolled down Suliman Pasha to go on to Groppi's, past Cphen's place. It was closed again. We drank and gossiped for the rest of the evening and I left them on Suliman Pasha. They were staying at the Pyramides, our usual place. I walked back along Malika Farida, past gharri drivers touting for prostitutes and importunate shoeshine boys and carbine-carrying, leather-gaitered policemen.

Approaching Rangoon, we flew over jungle, dense and monotonously green. The top of the jungle looked like a green floor of vegetation, except where

a river revealed a green canyon of a depth that was strangely disconcerting. All the visible levels, the floor of the aircraft cabin, the green floor of the jungle top and the water beyond that, seemed insubstantial. Then we were over the great brown Irrawaddy river and the serene, golden pinnacle of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda rose out of the city to our briefly superior level. The crew launch drifted in to the half wrecked wooden pier, a stevedore put my bar box ashore, a Customs officer wired through the lock and joined the ends of the wire with an official lead seal. Rangoon, so soon after the war, was a very disordered city: neither the airline nor the Customs people had any safe storage ashore and I had to take the bar stock into my room for the night.

Consequently the stewards' room became a social centre; aircraft bar prices were far below the local level, which was outrageous. As soon as I arrived in my room I slid the lead seal off the wire and opened the bar. The rest of the crew came in for drinks before dinner and soon we were joined by Rocky Riordan from the American Embassy, Lofty Wilson, an English operator at the civil aviation wireless station, and some others. The week before, we heard, the Burmese had held their annual water festival, when everyone turns hoses on everyone else. Rocky and Lofty had had a merry time, driving around near-naked in a jeep. I thought Lofty was probably queer, so that it might have had some sort of fetishist significance to him.

There was someone I hadn't met before, a hard-looking character with a deep tan and lined cheeks. Lofty went to the unusual trouble of giving me a proper introduction to him, unusual in the free-for-all that these boisterous Rangoon occasions became.

He was an Australian journalist, Percy Jackson, of the Sydney Morning Herald and the London News Chronicle. He came down to dinner with us and afterwards took me aside to the one furnished corner of the main lounge. The hotel had been damaged in air raids and a new floor was being laid, Chinese carpenters sanding and polishing by hand. He went straight to the point. Although there was no official censorship in Burma, it was difficult to get copy out by cable. There was serious unrest in the country: the Karens, the hill people of one province, were openly rebelling against the Rangoon government. Copy tended to be held up for days in the cable office and frequently went out in a garbled version. Would I take his copy to Scott-Brown, his News Chronicle colleague in Singapore? He told me to read it first, so that I should know what I was carrying, since it was actually illegal for aircrew to carry letters. I read it and agreed. It was the first time I had read cablese outside the pages of Evelyn Waugh's SCOOP and I found the form more interesting than the content. One of the crew was coming over to join us and I slipped the packet into my pocket. We were drinking imported Dutch beer at this stage, very cold and very good. I had sold all I could spare out of the aircraft bar box and couldn't restock until Singapore. We went out to a restaurant in the city, surprisingly opulent in that disorderly capital and scandalously expensive. The floor show consisted of a rather plump, youngish, Anglo-Burmese queer in a dance representing Lord Krishna embarrassing some milkmaids, I believe.

At Kalang airport at Singapore, I telephoned Scott-Brown, who arrived there in about ten minutes, all effusive, middle-class English gratitude.

But it was all I wanted: I had ideas about the freedom of the press. And eventually I got another sort of reward.

Olive and John were in Singapore a day ahead of me and one afternoon we went to the Singapore Swimming Club. While we were changing I tried to find out if he had been investigating the gold business. I wasn't sure that I wanted him to; he was, perhaps, too much the simple extrovert, but he was thinking of rejoining the RAF, which he had left as a Flight Lieutenant, and didn't seem to be very interested in gold, beyond gossiping about it in the usual, conjectural way. Later, when the three of us were sitting at the poolside, washing the salt out of our mouths with a Tom Collins, he started talking about it again and I felt a momentary annoyance. Illogically, I felt that I had already something to hide.

But there was nothing, yet. I met my wife at Southampton with an Australian ham, a bunch of mimosa bought at Marseilles that morning and a box of that incomparable confection, Calisson d'Aix-en-Provence. We now had a small flat in Southampton. When I arrived there I searched through the back copies of the News Chronicle, which happened to be the morning paper we read, and found the article I had delivered to Scott-Brown in Singapore. I told her the story of this. I hadn't yet told her anything about gold.

On my next trip Arthur, the radio officer, was one of the crew; I was pleased. At Aix-en-Provence, the first night stop of the trip, he suggested that we go out for some oysters before dinner. The navigator joined us. We had several large trays of oysters and too much of the local vin blanc ordinaire. Then, the navigator insisted, we had to visit another bar, the Cheval Blanc. I remember, some time later, feeling very unsteady on my feet while I watched the play at the roulette table in the Casino Municipale, then nothing more until being wakened for a pre-dawn breakfast before the twenty-four kilos drive to Lake Marignan and the flying boat base. I love France and would willingly have slept under a tree along one of those pale provincial avenues in the Provencale late summer. Perhaps I tried and felt the cold. I nursed a hangover all the way to Cairo the following day. Cohen wasn't there and I went to bed early.

The day eastbound out of Cairo was one that I hated, one that impressed upon me my menial position in the sky. Except for a possible, brief glimpse of southern Palestine, as it was then, little towns like Rehovoth and Peth Tikvah which I had known and admired during the war, it was desert all the way to Basrah, where we refuelled. Flying boats were not pressurised: we flew at eight thousand feet where convection currents from the desert beneath us buffeted the aircraft all over the sky. Flying is the most tedious form of travel and the company served extensive meals to alleviate the boredom. We had a busy bar trade. The heat, the turbulence, and finally, the washing-up in a sink twelve inches square and six inches deep invariably sickened me. After Basrah, we crossed the Persian Gulf in the calm air of late afternoon, with only afternoon tea to be served.

I had a case of kippered herrings in the ice box, which I had brought out for Tommy, the beery cockney coxswain at the shore base at Bahrein. He came aboard for them as soon as we had moored and I had opened the hatches. Before changing for dinner we went into Arthur's room to drink, first the cold beer which Tommy sent up and then more, for which we despatched the

room bearer. Even with air conditioning, the rooms were hot; to go out on the verandah was like opening the door of an oven. I was ready for the shower which gives the only relief to be obtained there: in the Gulf, even the sea is too warm - the water evaporating on the skin and leaving it sticky with salt. The rest of the crew went out, one by one, until only Arthur and I were left.

He stood up, pulled the lapel of his tropical uniform jacket away from his damp shirt and said, 'Will I be glad to get this lot off!'

I thought there was a note of ambiguity in his voice, the suggestion of a private joke. I looked closely and thought I could see rectangular shapes under his shirt, pressing out against the sweat-darkened cloth. I gambled.

'A friend of Cohen's, eh?'

He turned and looked at me, unable to conceal his surprise. His face showed tension as well as fatigue.

'Do you know Cohen?'

I shrugged and didn't answer. I knew, by now, that nobody talked. It was possible, it seemed, to be carrying a load of gold and not know that another member of one's crew was doing the same. Tens of thousands of pounds worth of gold was going into Karachi every week, more was going into Bombay, still more from Singapore up to Calcutta, some of this, perhaps, being smuggled out of Australia to be sold above the official world price. The two highest markets in the world were India and Macao. These facts became known to me later.

Nobody talked: I tried to look knowledgeable and discreet. Most men would have a confidant; for me, if I were in the business, it might be Dave, the ex-marine, or Arthur himself. He locked the door and took off his jacket and shirt. Underneath, he was wearing a kind of roughly-stitched waistcoat, cut out of an old British army shirt; the plates of metal were sewn into it. I finished my beer, looking down into the glass, trying to look as though I had seen it all before, but tightly controlling the excitement I felt on actually being in the presence of the stuff for the first time.

We now had a tacit relationship. When we arrived at Karachi, another eastbound flying boat had landed just ahead of ours. When we entered the customs hall there seemed to be some excitement in the air, centred on a group of four Arab passengers, who were at the counter with their luggage open before them. As I watched, a customs officer came in, carrying a hammer and chisel and began to cut out the lid of a steel trunk belonging to one of the Arabs. When he had cut a few inches along the lid I could see cotton wool showing white through the cut. He chiselled round a corner and pulled up a jagged triangle of the sheet metal. A thick plate of gold, similar in size to Arthur's could now be seen, packed in cotton wool in the double lid of the trunk. I looked at the Arabs; they seemed to be possessed by an Islamic fatalism. The customs officers, three uniformed men and a sari-clad woman, were elated and giggling. They would receive a very large cash bonus, based on the value of the gold, for a mere half hour's work.

After they had cut out all the lid and extracted the gold which it contained, they went to work on the rest of the luggage. A heavy leather suitcase was torn apart; the metal frame was made of solid gold. A flat round loaf was broken and was found to have had an ingot baked inside it.

I realised that this kind of smuggling that I was trying to get into was a personal and pure form of gambling. It was thus demonstrated to me, in that half hour of waiting, that I should be a solitary. If they thought you had something, they could tear you apart until they found it. I should be on my own, but the payoff would be all mine, too. The conventional forms of gambling offered no stimulus to be compared with this, and had, in fact, never appealed to me.

I looked for Arthur and found him leaning against the wall by a window, looking out on to the beach of Korangi Creek. He was acting out the part of a busy radio officer, tired after a long day's flight, watching, from time to time, the business at the counter, then looking out again towards the two aircraft swinging down the tide at their buoys, at the rocks along the water's edge which sheltered good crabs. I went over to him; he might need moral support and I might need him.

'How long are they going to take with that lot?' he asked, wearily.

It was not long. Two of the customs men came along the counter to our luggage, which was now being brought in by the stevedores. I went over. The officer asked, gaily, 'Which is yours?'

I pushed my tin trunk, Indian-made and similar to the one which had just been torn apart, my overnight bag and my steward's briefcase together and started to pull the zip of the overnight bag.

'No, no,' he laughed, and started down the line of luggage, putting his chalk mark on everything, indiscriminately, well satisfied, apparently, with the day's work. I wondered how Arthur felt; would it be an anti-climax? Perhaps, but the only rational reaction was relief.

Arthur spread himself over two seats in the crew bus and affected a Noel Coward song all the way to Karachi, a mildly mocking sentimentality. I could imagine him behaving in the same way after a particularly bad bombing raid during the war, flying back over the North Sea to a bleak Lincolnshire airfield. Sometimes, he would adopt a camp manner, but I didn't think he was queer.

The desert road passed the Parsee Tower of Silence with the vultures hovering above it and took us into that most provincial of capitals, Karachi, where we should have three days rest. It has one main street, a bazaar, a street of brothels and nautch girls near the docks, drinks at the Gymkhana, no longer an exclusively white club, a lugubrious White Russian running the Central Hotel which had the only floor show in town, an Islamic outpost which bore little resemblance to the masses of humanity of Calcutta and the river plains. Arthur and I went out together frequently. I waited for him to say something more, but he did not.

Jackson was waiting at Rangoon; he came to the bedroom session round the bar-box and gave me more copy for Singapore. At Kalang airport, Scott-Brown was effusive as ever, enthused 'You must come round for dinner while

you're here, old boy' then hurried off to file the copy without telling me where. Sometimes the English find it damned hard to break through their class barriers; what was I, after all, but an airborne waiter? Arthur would disappear in the evenings. One night I found him in the bar of the Prince's Restaurant in Orchard Road, listening to a drunken upcountry Englishman shooting 'tiger'. On another occasion, quite drunk and alone, he sat in a bar opposite the Cathay cinema, singing softly into a Singapore gin sling.

At Rangoon on the homeward flight there was another journalist waiting to see me. Lofty Wilson once again made the introductions then moved away. It was Bruce Douglas of the London Daily Mail. He too wanted to get copy out of Rangoon, this time to Calcutta, and I agreed. He gave me the copy, unsealed, and a letter, both addressed to a Colonel Spencer at the Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta. It was only a refuelling stop; we should be about an hour on board the houseboat for refreshments. I was to telephone Spencer, who would come out to Bally Ghat to see me. Douglas was anxious about the letter.

'Look after this, old boy, for God's sake. See that it goes to nobody but Spencer.'

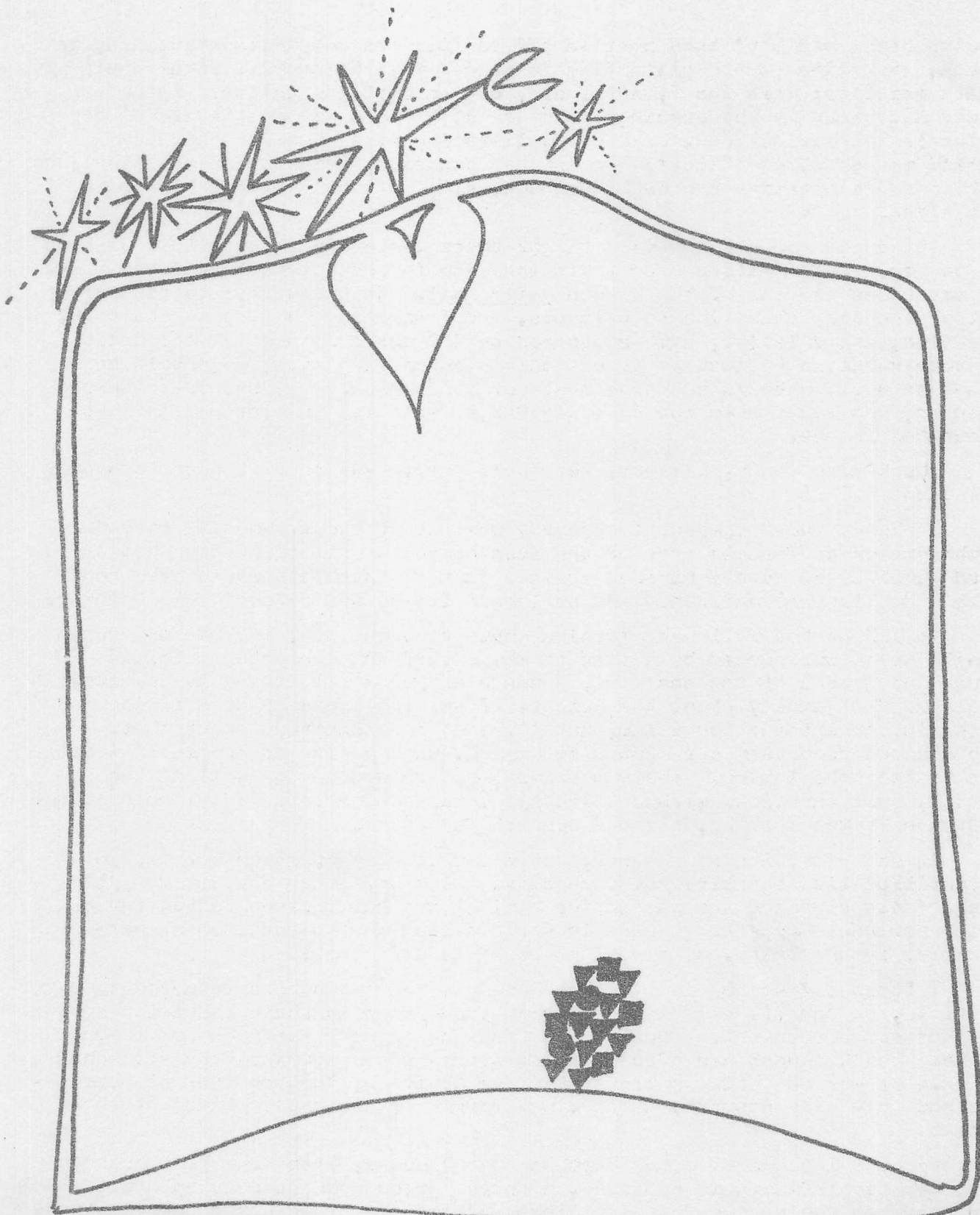
Jackson, whose company I enjoyed, was out of town. Douglas stayed with some of us for the rest of the evening and we all drank too much of the good Dutch beer. Rocky Riordan arrived just as the party would have gone into a decline and enlivened and prolonged it: he was a formidable drinker.

In flight the following morning, over tropical sea, islands of even, jungle green surrounded by a ring of white surf and the pale, metallic blues and greens of the shallows, a hangover perhaps lowering my spirits, I began to feel uneasy about the letter. I shouldn't have been carrying it, according to international law, but I wasn't too concerned about that. Jackson had been very straight with me; why was Douglas so furtive? I decided to read the letter. There was a one-gallon urn on the wall of the pantry, over the sink, with an electric immersion heater. I switched it on and when it was boiling, steamed open the envelope.

It was something of a shock, yet had what seemed, at that time, an air of thriller-like banality and unreality. Perhaps, after a great war, the world feels cleansed and purged for a time, its belligerence sated for a brief period. Now, after events in North Africa and the actions of mercenaries in the Congo, my reactions would be different.

I learned from the letter that Douglas, and two others referred to by initials, G. and Y., were involved with the Karens in their rebellion against the Rangoon government. Douglas was pressing Spencer for arms and ammunition; he asked what had become of the promised consignment from Brisbane. He said G. was operating a transmitter at Moulmein, that another transmitter was now in use in Rangoon, that Y. was upcountry and out of touch at the moment.

Later I learned from the Burmese that Douglas, Grant and Younghusband were British officers in Force 12, a secret group commanded by Spencer, which had operated behind the Japanese lines and had organised Karen guerilla warfare against the Japs. They all spoke the language. According to the



I AM TRAPPED HERE BY EVENTS

Atala '69

Burmese they were now organising, or at least leading, the movement for Karen independence. This would be of considerable benefit to foreign interests which owned oil and mining in the Karen country and who now feared nationalisation by the ruling Burmese party, the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League, whose conventionally socialist leaders had received a leftish education at English universities. Reading the letter in the aircraft pantry I was unaware of these ramifications, but it still seemed that there was an unwarranted intervention in the affairs of another country. I was still in my early twenties, still somewhat idealistic, leftish, and conscious that Burma had been granted independence by a British government for which I had voted. My private aim was to make some money out of flying; I was about to adopt a dichotomous public aim, but the dichotomy did not give rise to a conflict. We only live once and while I might cast a left-wing vote for what I thought was the public good, it was only one of millions and I had plenty of time to pursue my own, private, good.

I copied the letter, resealed the original in its envelope, then had a long drink of fruit juice and aspirin before preparing morning coffee. I didn't enjoy alcohol in flight.

At Bally Gat I liked to get off the aircraft as quickly as possible. The great, deep river was surprisingly swift and was said to have a bad undertow. When the refuelling launch came alongside it was first earthed to the aircraft to balance the static potential between the two. One spark of static electricity from the hose nozzle to the aircraft could set everything on fire and I didn't like the idea of swimming ashore. I had heard stories of bodies which had been taken by the undertow fifty or sixty miles down river, to be washed up on one of the islands of the delta.

I phoned Spencer's hotel from the houseboat and spoke to him. He said he would come straight out to Bally Gat. I watched and waited for him, sat around with the crew, walked around the deck of the houseboat, checked the lunch that was being sent on board the aircraft, but he didn't come. I never knew why. I posted the letter and Douglas's press copy to him from the houseboat. Since I was no longer taking his part, I felt less need for conspiratorial care.

We had a rather stupid captain for that trip. He was afraid of making a commonsense decision which would upset the flight schedule. The maximum flight duration of the flying boats was eight hours, plus a compulsory safety margin of one hour. Headwinds across India gave us a flight plan of nine and a quarter hours: the captain said weakly 'We'll try, the weather might change', and so I missed an opportunity to meet Spencer. I didn't know about this until the navigator came down off the flight deck during lunch. As a result of the skipper's decision we spent an unpleasant night at Allahabad. The Jumna River was low before the monsoon; the engineer, the second steward and I became a baggage party and hauled the overnight baggage a mile upriver in a small and unreliable motorboat to an old and leaning jetty. On entering the hotel, the first thing I noticed was a full length life-sized portrait of Chandra Bose, the leader of an Indian army which fought for the Japanese against the British. At the bar they were quite chauvinistic about Indian beer. Two of the passengers, Australian speedway riders returning to England for the season, were equally sceptical. The bar-

man, after considerable delay, thought he might have some Australian beer.

One of the Australians smiled on the company: 'Hey, maybe we'll get a Tooth's Lager.'

The beer, when it arrived, was Canadian - probably a relic of the war years.

My bed that night had a mattress, one sheet, no mosquito net and no ceiling fan. I wrapped the sheet round me like a shroud, but the mosquitoes still found a way in. The loo was a bucket out on the verandah.

The emergency base was unable to supply us with enough petrol to take us through to Karachi and at about midday of the following day we made a short refuelling stop on a lake in a small Prince's state called Raj Samand. Before landing we were warned over the radio not to throw any refuse into the lake: it was sacred. It was also occupied by crocodiles.

Mr. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, died that day. When we arrived at Karachi everything was closed for three days of mourning. Boris, the big pessimistic Russian who ran the Central Hotel, opened the restaurant as usual and put on the floor show, the Eurasian dancer and the Hungarian fiddler playing Grieg, and a mob burned down the hotel. Between courses, during dinner at the Palace Hotel, I went outside to look at the flames against the night sky. On the following morning I took a gharry, one of the shabby, horse-drawn victorias of the east, from the rank outside the Palace Hotel and told the driver to take me to the Burmese Embassy. I was admitted by a Burmese clerk who told me that the embassy was closed for Mr. Jinnah. I impressed upon him that I wanted to see someone important and he went off, to return with another Burmese. This one gave me his card, told me his name, announced that he was the third secretary of the embassy and asked what he could do for me. I showed him my copy of Douglas's letter, read it through with him and explained its origin. He was surprised, unsure what to do next. He went off and returned with another Burmese, who gave me his card, his name (Boh Tun Hlah) and announced himself as the second secretary of the embassy. I went through the letter again and told my story. He looked thoughtful, appeared to arrive at a decision, and said 'come this way, please.'. I wondered if he had learned the phrase in England, had heard it used by a dentist's receptionist or a clerk in a Whitehall ministry. He led us, four in number now, into an office, whose occupant stood up behind the desk, gave me his card and introduced himself as the first secretary, U Tin Shwe. I went through all the business of the letter and the story again: my lines were becoming familiar. He was silent for a moment and then announced 'I will go and see H.E.'. The title was used in a self-conscious manner.

Boh Tun Hlah, the second secretary, sat and chatted to me while we waited. He had travelled with the airline and told me what he thought of the various forms of travel. The first secretary appeared at the door, said something in his own language to Boh Tun Hlah, then invited me to come and meet H.E.

He stood up as our little procession entered the room and approached his desk, gave me his card 'H.E. U Pe Kin, Ambassador for the Union of Burma' shook my hand and listened with keen interest as I told my story for

the fourth and last time. When I had finished, he read through the letter again, then leaned back in his chair with what must surely have been an indiscreetly self-satisfied absence of diplomatic guile, and asked 'How can we thank you for this?'

I suppose it was the time to name the price. But apart from the fact that I had no idea of the strength of the market, I was not really playing the market at all. I thought, but found it too embarrassing to say it, that I was capable of acting upon political principle. He took my measure and the moment slipped away from me.

'Get some drinks' he told the second secretary, and asked me what I would like. For some reason I said 'Pink Gin', not one of my usual tipples, perhaps because it sounded English and because H.E. seemed about to adopt something similar to a hearty English undergraduate manner, something which had, perhaps, become a habit with him at Oxford or at Fabian Society meetings. We had two or three drinks then it was decided that we should all go to the residence for lunch. When we took our places at the table, the ambassador gave an order to the Pakistani servant: 'Pink Gin for our guest'. I had to drink pink gin for the rest of the afternoon. Lunch, when it arrived was chicken with, inevitably, a piquant sauce, unknown to me but undistinguished. After the meal, H.E., distrusting the servant with the percolator, asked the second secretary to make tolerable coffee.

The following day we went for a fishing trip in the harbour, catching nothing but blowfish, a poisonous creature which blows itself up to the size and roundness of a tennis ball and can be bounced on the deck of a boat. There were four of us: two of the secretaries, myself and a character who was not Burmese, yet familiar in some way, a local photographer. Something that was said made me realise that he was a Japanese. At first I was shocked that the Burmese could be friendly with him, so soon after the war, then I realised that he stood in the same relation to them as a German to me, and I would have gone fishing with a German. The real difference between east and west was not Kipling's difference: it consisted of social and political realities with which my generation had to learn to live.

The Burmese were extremely hospitable; the embassy car took me back to the Palace, waited while I bathed and changed, then took me back to the residence for dinner. This, and other similar incidents, proved invaluable later.

Three days after the fishing trip I was in Cairo, and the city served me well. The lights shone in Cohen's window on his cameras and watches and pieces of jewellery and his door stood open to the hot night air of Suliman Pasha Street. I looked on his window and he examined me from the other side, leaning against his counter. When I thought he had learned, through the glass, all that he was capable of learning about me, I went in. I asked the price of cameras, adopting the posture that I was only an airline steward and unfortunately couldn't afford the ones he was showing me. I said it with what I hoped was adreprecating but faintly conspiratorial smile. After ten or fifteen minutes of this shadow boxing he came to the point.

'You want to do business?': it was a statement, not a question. 'Who told you about me?'

I said nobody had told me: I had kept my eyes open. I let him press me for an answer and told him I knew of two stewards who did business with him, Micky, who had protested too much in Karachi, and another named Eddie. I wasn't absolutely sure they were in it, but his silence seemed to confirm my guess. There was a touch of blackmail in my mentioning their names - since I knew about them, I was potentially dangerous though clearly purchasable. Cohen enrolled me with the words: 'All right, we do business.'. He explained the code.

'You write to tell me when you come back to Cairo. If it is, say, the fifteenth of the month, you write to tell me that the price of the fountain pens I was asking about is fifteen piastres. We do business.'

I wrote to him from Southampton as soon as I knew the important date, asked about the health of his family and himself, congratulated his daughter, Yetta, on gaining her baccalaureate (he had told me to put this in) and told him the price of the pens. I was restless in Southampton. We went up to London for a few days of extravagant dining out in Soho and saw two new American musicals, OKLAHOMA and ANNIE GET YOUR GUN. I wanted to begin spending money, already.

I met David, the ex-marine, by chance one evening and suggested, maliciously, a Pernod at the Fitzroy. A beef bandit himself, I knew he would hate the bitchy, half-discreet queers who inhabited that ostentatiously neglected, first-world-war-decorated pub, Kitchener's faded, dusty finger pointing at the backs of people at the bar. Dave sought redemption by talking of other things: probably he had that puritan tendency to believe that being queer was in some way cleaner than what you did with girls to get babies. He smilingly evaded my question as to whether he had managed to get into the gold business and so encouraged me to believe that he had. He told a story about a navigator who, it was said, had taken gold from Cairo to Karachi, opium from Rangoon to Singapore, more gold from Singapore to Calcutta and, converting all his profits at Cairo into diamonds, had taken the diamonds to a pre-arranged sale in London. He was said to have made over nine hundred in one trip, but had sworn never to carry drugs again: it was too frightening. He had wanted the money quickly on this occasion, in order to buy a house at Bournemouth.

I was fortunate: my next trip was to be a charter flight to Karachi and back: four days out, a day in Karachi and then three days back. It was to be my proving flight as a gold smuggler, from my point of view as well as Cohen's. I should be able to demonstrate my reliability to him, explore the experience and get back quickly to England with a profit, avoiding the flesh-pots of Singapore.

In Aix, I went out to the Cheval Blanc alone. Near the central fountain of the town from which the boulevards radiate, there was a carnival set up along the side of the widest avenue. I stood to watch for a while and noticed a girl standing alone. She didn't seem to belong to the local crowd at all. Later I saw her in a bar where there was dancing and asked her to dance. She knew a little English and I a little French. When we left the bar we walked along the boulevard and sat on one of the benches. When I kissed her, she let my hand stay on her breast, then on her thigh. At the Hotel du Roy Rene we had a couple of drinks in the cocktail bar; when we

left the barman said 'Bon soir, mam'selle, bon nuit, m'sieur', with Gallic concealment of his private thoughts and I took her to my room. Beside me in the bed she started to tremble - she seemed badly frightened. It was disconcerting, almost an affront: I was preoccupied with the whole of life, too preoccupied to be neurotically or dangerously intense about love-making. I wanted light-hearted pleasure, I wanted to measure myself against Gaul to find out whether I was learning to shake off the puritan conscience of the Anglosaxons and Gaul was letting me down. I tried to soothe her, hoping that becoming calmer she would warm to me, but nothing happened. I stroked her hair and her shoulder, but she kept her face concealed against my chest. Then, I remembered, I was about to embark on an important adventure in Cairo. I tried to console myself with the thought that I could afford to be generous: there would be other girls. I made myself comfortable with her, the pleasure of her warm smooth body against mine. She was asleep first. In the morning, I let her out into the grounds of the hotel.

At breakfast the engineer said 'So you had the airline girl last night?'

I looked at him enquiringly.

'That's what the locals call her, apparently. She's always chasing aircrew. She wanted one of the boys to take her to England. Probably wants a British passport.'

Perhaps, I thought, she had collaborated, and France was something she no longer wished to remember.

When I went into Cohen's shop in Cairo, he took me into the back room and said 'Take off your shirt.'

He had the gold ready for me, sewn into the waistcoat arrangement, plates of metal larger than a postcard and a good quarter of an inch thick, each piece stamped 996. This denoted the quality, '996 touch', 99.6 per cent, pure gold. It was a hot night in Cairo and the gold dragged on my shoulders. It weighed about thirty pounds. He explained to me now that I was an independent, that my pay would be based on the difference between the market price in Cairo and the higher one in Karachi, ninety-six rupees per tola against about one hundred and eight in Karachi. A rupee was one and sixpence sterling and a tola about half a fine ounce. I had over six hundred tolas, about five thousand pounds worth. I was to take it to Najam Halai, who could be found at number three, Jamshed Quarter, in Karachi. I was on my own and nobody could help me if I was caught. Much of the gold taken into Karachi was smuggled across the Indian border and sold in Bombay, where it would fetch a hundred and twenty. I was on my own and the customs men at Korangi Creek could get a big bonus for catching me.

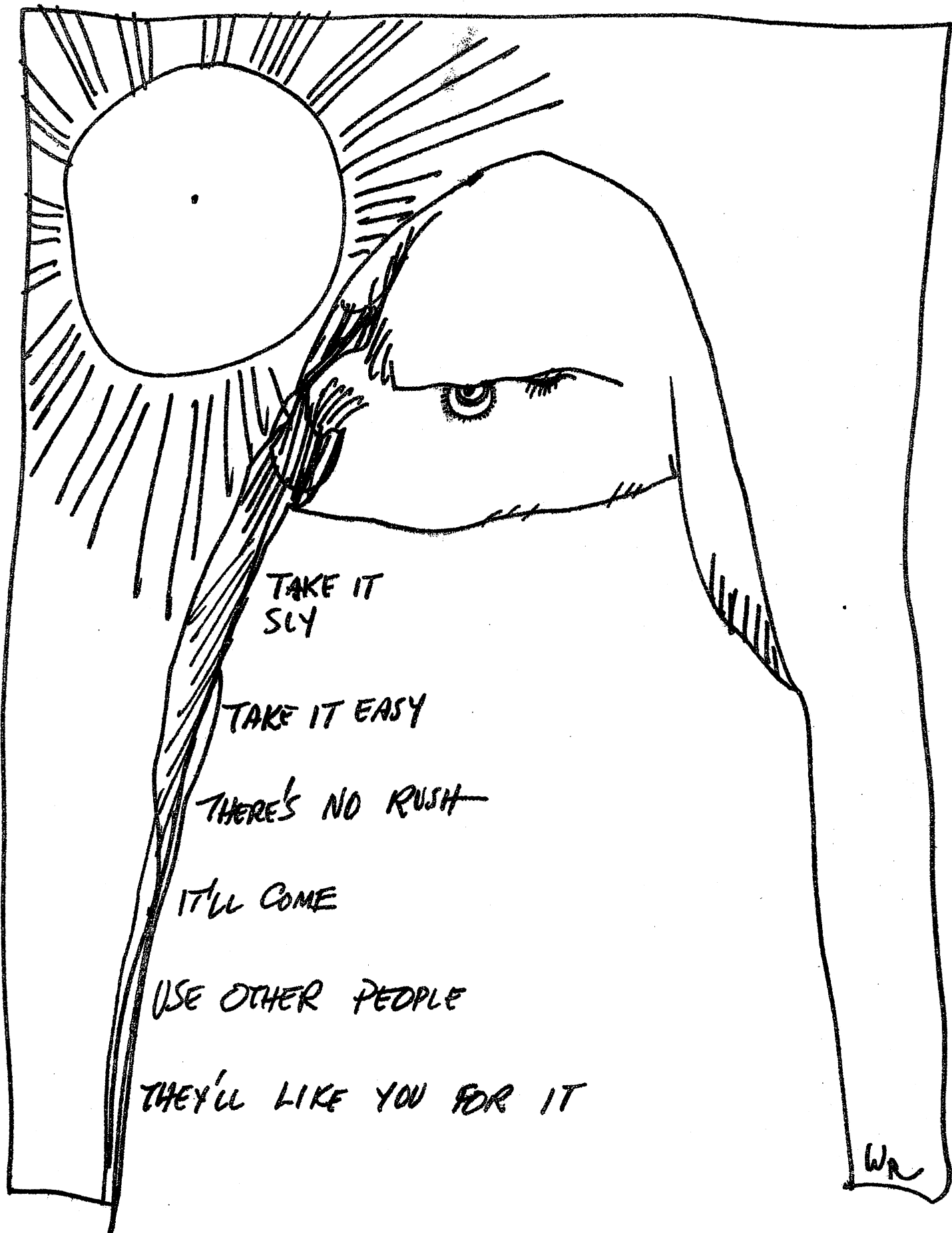
From Bahrain we had bad weather with cloud up to eleven thousand feet and plenty of turbulence. Flying boats were not pressurised and normally flew at eight thousand feet. At ten thousand feet oxygen should be used by active crew members, at thirteen thousand, by everyone. We flew at twelve thousand, above the worst of the weather. The cabin heating was inadequate at that altitude and ice formed on the unlined outer wall of the pantry and obscured the port. The weight of metal on my chest made me breathless, my lips blue with oxygen starvation. Before serving lunch I went into the loo, took off the waistcoat and locked it in the bar box. I put it on again just

before landing at Karachi, while changing into tropical uniform out of the white jacket and blue trousers which stewards wore in flight.

The Pakistan health authorities were very strict about disinfecting aircraft which had come through Cairo. We taxied up to the buoy; the navigator, with head and shoulders out of the mooring hatch in the nose, found the line, made fast and closed the hatch again. We rocked on the slight swell of the creek, conscious of flight deck voices in the new silence, the skipper answering someone ashore over the radio telephone. The temperature in the cabins began to rise, the sealed metal hull riding under the late afternoon sun lowering in the sky towards Arabia - then the Health launch arrived. I opened the forward hatch, admitted the two blue-uniformed Pakistanis and closed it again. One of them had a DDT bomb, a pressure vessel about the size of a hand grenade. He opened the valve and went through the aircraft, spreading a suffocating spray everywhere, while the heat in the cabins increased. Finally, he declared us pure. I opened the hatch from which the passengers would leave, went forward, fastened back the forward hatch which the health men had left swinging open and met the shore catering officer coming aboard.

On this occasion we should have only one full day in Karachi, leaving again soon after midnight on the following night, probably with few passengers and an easy trip home. I was excited now and had to concentrate on being normal; the arrangements with the catering man, a garrulous Indian, seemed trivial and irrelevant. My real business, my *raison d'être*, was under my shirt and in what resolution and acting ability I could command when confronting my natural enemy behind the customs counter. I was exhausted after the unpleasant crossing of the Oman Peninsula and the Arabian Sea and began to feel my way into living the part; we all looked tired and I let it provide the reason for my condition. From memory, I went through the motions of having my luggage examined, recalling the routine of it, repeating things I had said on previous occasions, clinging to the commonplace. My baggage, closed again and with fresh chalk marks, was taken off the counter by a stevedore and added to the pile by the outward door of the Customs shed. I had to go into the office behind the counter to sign the bar stock into bond. Usually, taking a short cut, I climbed over the counter. I put one foot on the barrier and was about to heave myself and thirty pounds of metal over when I knew I shouldn't make it easily. My heart began to pound after six hours of oxygen starvation. Watched by the Customs man, to whom I made a little joke about 'that girl in Cairo', I walked along to a gate in the barrier and back to the office. I leaned over the desk to sign the forms, hoping the man sitting there wasn't examining me closely. When I stood up, I kept the exhausted pose, my shoulders drooping and my jacket loose and untidy at the front so that the contours of the metal would not be revealed.

I walked through the Customs hall and out into the redder sunlight to the waiting crew bus, trying to prepare myself for disaster if I should hear an official voice recalling me. I dropped into a seat on the bus with the beginning of an incredulous feeling of relief and elation conflicting with a desperate need to get away from the place. The driver had his head out of the window and was engaged in stupid peasant gossip with one of the stevedores. Their singsong Indian voices seemed to be making one conditional clause after another as if nothing could be settled about anything, while I



TAKE IT
SLY

TAKE IT EASY

THERE'S NO RUSH

IT'LL COME

USE OTHER PEOPLE

THEY'LL LIKE YOU FOR IT

Wn

had a single positive urgency. I could have crushed them.

Then, incredibly, the liberation of movement. The driver turned the steering wheel as we left the gates of the compound, reassured by habits as insubstantial as his previous gossip and the lightly loaded bus bumping along the desert road to Karachi, past dunes and small salt pools and the vultures over the Tower of Silence.

In my room at the Palace I dropped on the bed. The bearer brought in tea and took off my shoes, an action which had embarrassed me when I had first experienced it in India. When he had gone, I locked the door, stripped off my jacket and shirt and dropped the gold on to the lid of my trunk at the foot of the bed. Then I poured the tea.

I sat drinking the hot tea and looked at the bundle of metal in its khaki dress; the gold and I had got through, we were existentially there, as simple and unconditional realities. I glimpsed something of the unconditional nature of freedom. All that had happened was in the past; only the living moment held any potentialities. The situation gave me the opportunity, if I should so choose, of keeping it all for myself, a profit made in one incisive action, instead of months, perhaps years, of making a few hundred pounds each trip. I could make the gain and end the risk by one simple action. Having already become a carrier, it seemed that to remain a mere carrier was to cease to make progress beyond the point which I had reached when Cohen took me into his confidence. Cohen had been important in those weeks when I had been waiting to meet him, but the self-affirmative process called for new action, or one lapsed into mere routine.

I showered and changed and went down to the bazaar. In a Parsee gold- and silversmith's shop I said I wanted to sell some gold. They asked how much I had and I told them I would show it to them in the back room, where I took off my shirt and removed the metal from the waistcoat. A corner of each piece was rubbed on a smooth black stone. The yellow streak deposited was stroked with a small brush dipped in acid and remained resistant. We came to the price. On the way into town I had bought a copy of the English language newspaper, DAWN; it gave the price of the day as a hundred and eight rupees per tola. I asked for a hundred and seven and held to that figure. They agreed at last and asked if I would take a cheque for the total. I insisted on cash. The head man thought for a moment, then said, 'All right, you wait here.'

He left the shop and a boy came in with a bottle of orangeade for me. I could smell Indian cooking. A cow put its head in the door and was pushed away by one of the men. What I took to be a small company of mendicant dancing girls came by the shop; one came in for alms, holding out a tambourine containing a few pice and I realised they were queers. I wasn't anxious; the gold was on the table in front of us. I had put it back in the garment so that I could, if necessary, pick it up and get out of the place quickly. We were only a few yards from Elphinstone Street, the main thoroughfare; there would be taxis about.

But there was no cause for anxiety; within twenty minutes the man was back with a bag full of hundred-rupee notes. The banks were closed, but anything can be arranged in India. We counted the money, then I took the

gold out of the pockets in which it had travelled from Cairo and replaced it with wads of notes. The money was bulkier than the metal and was, I thought, more likely to show under my shirt. I put my shirt on again, over it, shook hands all round, went down to the corner and took a taxi back to the hotel.

The Burmese were waiting there for me. I wanted my dinner, but they were convivially insistent on pink gins for everyone. I drank more gin than I cared for on an empty stomach, then it was announced that we were going down to the residence. H.E. was waiting there with another bottle of gin and little dishes of nuts and highly-flavoured, fried meat balls. He came to the point fairly quickly, to my relief. Dinner had receded beyond either hope or desire. I wanted to ride out the evening as quietly and briefly as possible and then get to bed. My last bed in the Persian Gulf seemed months away.

Spencer had been ordered out of India by the British High Commissioner. Douglas had been arrested in Rangoon and was to be put on trial there. They wanted me, when I arrived in London, to swear an affidavit setting out my part in the affair. Later, in all probability, they would want me to go to Rangoon to give evidence at the trial. They would, I thought, have to fly me out through Ankara, or some other route that went nowhere near Cairo and, preferably, by an American airline. If I got through Egypt on my way back, this time, I didn't want to go anywhere near the place again for several years. I agreed to H.E.'s requests and we drank more pink gin. The second secretary went for his Rolleiflex and we all took flash photographs of each other. The film was processed by the Japanese photographer the following morning and the prints given to me at midday. I could discern the wads of notes under my sharkskin shirt.

The embassy car had taken me to the residence for lunch. The crew bus would leave the hotel at six o'clock, we should be taken to Korangi Creek, given rooms in the company's rest house there and could get some sleep before the midnight takeoff. The next step in the affair was getting closer and I didn't yet know how I was going to handle it. I got back to the Palace about five and found that Bob had arrived on a homeward flight from Hong Kong. I saw what to do. I told him all that had happened and that I had decided to go back with him. He was still a second steward. I should go sick immediately, complaining of dysentery symptoms, his first steward would have to take my aircraft on that night and I would recover in time to make the homeward trip with Bob, three days later.

We enjoyed ourselves as best we could. I hadn't seen much of him since our training days. He was, of course, a charming phoney: underneath the thepian mannerisms and the frequent mimicry which he practised, he had an unhealthy love of violence which I was deliberately exploiting. If he looked forward to a fight in Cairo, he might find he could get one, in addition to what he would get out of me. His company was stimulating in a shallow way, the constant repartee, the quick change from one voice to another, from stage Irish to chapel Welsh, to what he called 'the sibilant consonants' of the queer's manner. I took him once to meet the Burmese, but he couldn't lower the barrier of his lower middle class British prejudice. I think they disliked him, too.

One night all the bars in town had closed, one by one, and we decided to get drunk. I had a few hundred rupee notes with me and we found a trishaw boy who said he knew where we could get some beer, after we had refused his offer of palm toddy. We only wanted to get drunk, Bob told him in his Welsh voice, 'not crippled, man'. He seemed to be wandering aimlessly round the town so we paid him off and hailed a passing taxi. The driver was a little drunk himself and said he knew a place. His first attempt was unsuccessful; the house seemed deserted. He took us down to Napier Road, the brothel area, lights in the houses and radios playing quarter-tone music, open booths of vendors on the street, men on the pavements. He went up a dark alley between two buildings while we waited by a cigarette booth, then, reappearing, beckoned us to follow him. We found ourselves in a yard of beaten earth. Round the walls there were prone bodies on charpoys, the Indian string-and-wood beds, and in the centre of the yard, a very thin character in a very tight, sharp suit, sitting on an old wooden chair and dispensing hemp cigarettes. From Middle East experience I recognised the hashish smell in the hot night air, competing with all the other Asiatic smells. We told him what we wanted; he went to a hut in the corner of the yard and brought out a carton of American canned beer. It seemed it was the best that Karachi could offer at that time of night. The price wasn't too criminal and we took it into the taxi and tried to get the driver a little more drunk on the way back to the hotel.

I told the Pakistani doctor of the remarkable recovery which his treatment had brought about; I encouraged him to feel how well-chosen had been the expensive Swiss drug he had prescribed for me, and joined Bob's crew at Korangi Creek. My fears had receded considerably now that I had made a decision and was faced with the next stage of the affair. Bob and I vied in efficiency in our service to the passengers. On the surface it was goodnatured, but he didn't like being junior to me. It served to pass the waiting time, the suspension in the sky which brought us nearer to another landing on the Nile. We breakfasted at Bahrein and after breakfast, waiting for the launch, threw bread to foot-long fish nosing against the jetty, then made the short crossing to Basrah, where Bob had a ham for the shore engineers' mess, a ham which had to be smuggled ashore in that Moslem country. During our short refuelling stop there, an American Constellation aircraft landed on the adjoining airfield by the Shatt el Arab river. A disembarking passenger came into the airport lounge, an American oil driller, wearing a Texan hat, high-heeled boots and a very good New York suit. Word came from the first officer to go back on board and we set out on the last leg to Cairo, climbing out over the date plantations and the reticulated irrigation channels, out over the desert.

We had the usual bumpy crossing of the desert, a short respite after crossing the Sinai coast and while flying over the Mediterranean, then more bumps over the Delta. By the time we landed at Cairo, I was tense. I had to find a way through, now I had to play it by ear. Going ashore in the launch the familiar smell of Egypt, a compound of petrol and faeces, assailed my empty stomach. I saw Cohen on the river bank, pretending to be one of the casual onlookers. I knew he wouldn't dare to speak to me there. In any case, he couldn't have got close enough for that before the crew bus took us away. I had only been in my room at the Hotel du Pyramides for a

minute when I was told there was a phone call for me.

He didn't mention his name.

'Are you coming round to see me?'

'Yes, I'll be round as soon as I've had some dinner, about half past seven.'

He must have known that the gold had not been delivered and had been kept in suspense by my arriving three days later than he had expected me; nothing else, I thought, would have made him show himself at the base. I bathed and changed and went along the corridor to Bob's room to tell him about the phone call. We went down to dinner and found John there. He was eastbound.

'How are the stuffed olives tonight?' I asked.

'I saw her in Southampton this last standoff. She's back on the East Africa run.'

I was delighted to see him there; I was glad of all the friends I could muster. I told him all that had happened and that I was now going to see Cohen. He and Bob were to wait in the bar across the street and watch Cohen's place. If I didn't come out within half an hour they were to come in and find out why. It seemed a slightly unreal arrangement, a crime novel cliché. I could see that John was a little uneasy about it, then he smiled ruefully.

'I should have known that you two bastards would get mixed up in something.'

I considered myself essentially different to Bob, but since John had given our party a majority in the tribunal, I let it pass. We went out and along Suliman Pasha Street to my critical confrontation.

Cohen pushed me straight into the back room and put himself between me and the door. I tried to look surprised. I found it difficult to imagine what his resources for a policy of violence might be. In a crime novel, a Beretta or a Luger would, perhaps, have appeared on the scene, or at least a sinister henchman. I realised that in this department of real life I didn't know the form. And, possibly, Cohen was a little man, a front man, who had never prepared himself for the danger with which he was now faced. I couldn't form an opinion and didn't want to. I could only play whatever hand he dealt me. I thought of it in those hackneyed terms. Prejudgement could bedevil my reactions. Somehow I felt a reasonably assured, but possibly naive, confidence. If I were missing, Cohen might think it easy for someone to trace me from the hotel to his shop, but the feeling was more one of absurdity. In real life, one simply didn't get knifed and dropped in the Nile; it was too dramatic.

The questioning started. He fired the questions at me and was so anxious he could hardly wait for the answers. I could see that I was the more self-possessed, that I could choose my answers more carefully than he could choose his questions, which came out in a torrent from his poor, frightened, Jewish soul. I felt sorry for him: he made me aware of the inescapable insecurity of his race.

I said I had been unable to find Najam Halai. I let him drag it out of me that I had left the gold with very good, reliable friends in Karachi, that next time I should pick it up and deliver it. I didn't want to say who the friends were. Lying, I tried to believe my own story and devoted a part of my mind to mental histrionics. I could see Boh Tun Hlah, the second secretary, bending before the open door of a safe in the residence. It was night, there were shaded lamps on occasional tables. I half-believed it and told Cohen that the gold was safe.

He called in his daughter, Yetta. She was about seventeen and pretty, fairer of skin and hair than I had expected. It was a poor move; she was as unattainable as the front row of the chorus. In any case, she was as scared as her father. She repeated something Cohen had said again and again.

'If we lose this money you kill us.'

I substituted 'ruin' for 'kill' and still thought it Jewish overstatement.

I allowed myself to soften towards her, while conscious of the scornful authoritative Jewish wife she would one day become. To her I released the big lie, the lie which had become the obvious instrument as soon as I had said that the gold had been left in Karachi. I told her it was in the safe in the Burmese Embassy: they were very good and influential friends of mine.

They had a short conversation in Greek. When he brought her into the room, Cohen had spoken in French. Now, in case I knew any French, he used another of the four or five languages available to the middle class of Egypt. Cohen went to the telephone and booked a call to Karachi. Yetta kept on probing with what force she could command, rather than with any depth or insight, with something of the manner of her father. The suspense was beginning to tell on me and I was repressing a certain amount of bad temper. I wondered if I could take the offensive, put on an English act and march out of the shop telling them that I was sick of their distrust, that they'd damn well find out in time that the business would go through, that they were not the only ones who faced risk, but I was aware that I didn't believe in it sufficiently. I had never attempted righteous indignation in real life and didn't know how to do it with conviction. If Cohen spoke to the Burmese the best I could hope for was a refusal by them to talk about anything to do with my affairs, but I thought it safe to assume that they would, in fact, do that. In this way, they would acknowledge that they knew me, yet leave it to me to explain the mysteries of the situation to Cohen.

Then Bob and John walked in, Bob with his spurious actor's smile, saying 'We arranged to meet a friend here', briefly touching the side of his nose with an apparently thoughtless but slightly and comically pugilistic gesture, quite lost on Cohen, John behind him, uneasy but game.

Cohen looked at us and must have feared the worst, but just then his call came through. He seemed to have spoken to one of his own people there. He had at least, he admitted, confirmed that I was friendly with the Burmese Embassy. I think part of him began to want to believe my story. He was still between me and the street but knew that he had lost the initiative. Then he had an idea.

'All right, I give you half. You give me a cheque for two thousand five hundred.'

I was secretly jubilant.

'But I can't' I protested. 'I haven't got two and a half thousand.'

'Never mind, you give me the cheque. Next time, you deliver the gold and I give you the cheque back.'

He had regained his thrusting, Jewish manner; he felt purposeful now that he was doing something. If it were possible, we would let me go back to Karachi to deliver the gold and then dispense with me, obviously. With a show of reluctance I made out the cheque, the biggest I had ever seen, so unreal that it reminded me of a child's play money. I assured him again that the gold was in the safest possible place, protected by diplomatic immunity, that it would be delivered on my next trip and that I was most anxious to recover my cheque. I had stepped out of the back room to write out the cheque on the shop counter, a move which brought me close to the door, and now I got out, restraining a blind, desperate impulse to run for it. There was about the ordinary crowds along the pavements an air of unreality, like the feeling I had known as a child, leaving a cinema after total submission to the drama. The world was half an hour older; how had it spent the time? There had been a recess in my life. We walked along to the American Bar at the corner of Malika Farida; we had to be casual.

But my courage had collapsed. I made out a useful cheque for John, one which would not be stopped at the bank, as Cohen's would be. The hand holding the pen was shaking; I was no James Bond. The large brandy and dry ginger burned my throat and made me feel sick; the olives and salt peanuts looked nauseous. I couldn't think of a single thing, from booze to Beethoven, which would bring me peace. All I wanted was to get out of Cairo as quickly as possible. I stayed with Bob and John as late as I decently could and locked my door when I went to bed.

Breakfast was early in that stale air that dining rooms have after the previous night's eating and drinking, four tables laid ready in a corner of the room, two for my crew and two for John's who were halfway through the meal, a copy of the 'Egyptian Mail' passed across to our table with a headline about political parties with Arabic names, another front-page story about an incident in Berlin, small Egyptian eggs on the plate and creamy butter with very white bread rolls. John came over and put a large, firm hand on my shoulder.

'How's the head?' he asked, and went on to create, for the rest of the crew, a myth about my capacity for brandy.

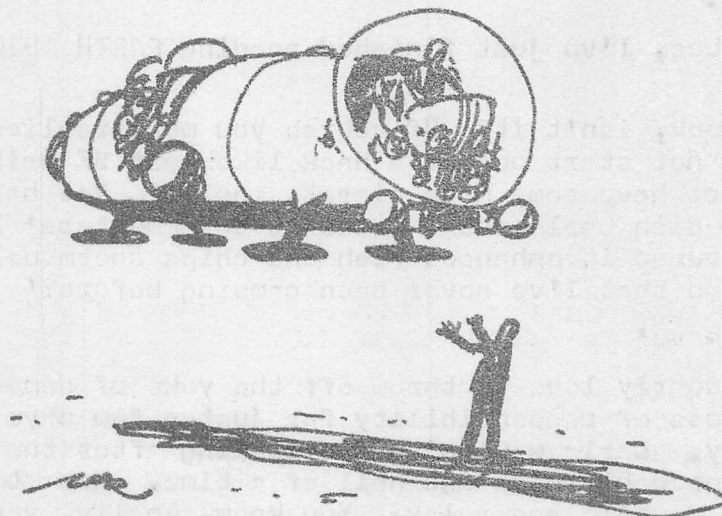
'Recovering slowly' I assured him. I got up and walked away from the table to say goodbye to him and to thank him.

The crew bus parked in the street outside, the classicist front of the Mixed Terminal; the remaining Egyptian small change given as a tip to the luggage porter, a glimpse along Suliman Pasha, still with a morning coolness in the shade between the high buildings, sweepers hosing the road in Malika Farida, the open space of the Opera Square and then miles of squalor, of black-draped women. How refreshingly gay Rangoon had always seemed, where

women walked side by side with their men, smoking mild, black cheroots and arguing with them. Here were pavement displays of earthenware vessels, awful butcher's booths, open to the street and the flies, camels delaying the traffic and then a row of date palms, an open gate in a high fence and, for the last time, the flying boat base. The airline's only usefulness to me, now, was as a means of getting home; the work of feeding the passengers and crew seemed an irrelevant imposition.

Bob left me in the pantry and went through the cabins, receiving the passengers, while I simply leaned on the bench, looking at Egypt. It was nearly eight years since I had first seen it, during the war. Bob fastened the hatches, climbed the ladder to the flight deck and shouted to the skipper 'All secure below, sir' in these few minutes when the voices of the crew could still be heard. The engines were started and we taxied up river. At the turning point each engine was run up in turn and subsided again, then all four roardd smoothly and evenly together and we began our run downstream. I should have been strapped in my seat in the pantry, but wanted to see all I could. The aircraft tilted on to the step, in a tail-down attitude and the wash covered the pantry window; when it fell away, the rippled surface of the river could be seen as a smaller, static pattern. We were airborne.

There was a parcel of hundred-rupee notes in the bar box, worth nearly five thousand pounds, which had been guarded all night by the Egyptian Customs: soon I should walk into our small flat in Southampton, throw a shower of them into the air and shout 'We're rich!'.



CAMPING

Apollo Papayannou

As I watched his beady eyes flick this way and that, now taking in the unfolding panorama of virgin timberland and now casting self-satisfied glances in my direction, I wondered what had possessed me to agree to take Lee Harding on a camping/fishing/shooting and relaxing trip into the wilds of Victoria.

Can you imagine what it's like to be verbally bludgeoned by a guy who seems to be a mixture of Napoleon, Stanley Kubrick, Cordwainer Smith and Bertrand Russell with just a pinch of De Sade? (I hope I've got all the names down correctly - I never was much at dictation.) Consider the following dialogue:

'By the way, Lee, I've just finished reading EARTH ABIDES and I thought....'

'Tremendous book, isn't it? Of course you must realise that unlike myself Stewart did not start out as a hack like most SF writers and to the perceptive intellect have some more claret, Apollo? Not bad is it? Goes rather well with a dish Carla and I tried at the Foysters' last week, or was it? No. Of course it enhances fish and chips enormously. Anyway, as I was saying; do you that I've never been camping before?'

'Really? I'd have'

'And I would dearly love to throw off the yoke of domesticity and this damned albatross of responsibility for just a few days - and live like Tarzan, or somebody. Carla wouldn't mind looking after the zoo without me - in fact she would probably have one hell of a time. How about it? Come on, let's get away for a while and relax. You know, Apollo, you must learn how

to relax. As Cordwainer Smith said - or was it Konrad Lorenz...?'

'But Lee, I'm busy and'

'Terrific. That's a great idea. I must tell Carla that I'm going camping with a real expert.'

'Yes, but it's the wrong time for'

'Marvellous! I can just see us both pitted against Mother Nature. I'll bring a flagon of red and my little note-book and think about my novel. As Thoreau said'

This dialogue was repeated, with minor variations, for many days, until I finally relented and went ahead with the plans for our trip, although I must admit that, for most of this time, I was haunted by a constant nightmare of seeing myself pursued by a green, multi-limbed and pith-helmetted SF writer through the forests of Australia. But happily, as we left the millstones of suburbia behind us and the beautiful bitter-sweet smell of giant eucalypts assailed our nostrils, our anxieties and fears* and our subconscious tensions began to wash away, helped along by the beauty around us, the peace and the clean, crisp air, the soothing lullaby of a Volkswagen engine, and our friendship.

Discussion jumped from one subject to another. First books, then films, people, philosophy, SF and etc. (Lee is an expert on etc.), until we found a delightful spot on the banks of the Aberfeldie River, several miles from Walhalla, a ghost town of Australia's Gold era.

As I drove the VW over the expansive stone-covered 'beach' Lee decided that this would be the ideal site for the Utopia he had always dreamed of. A haven teeming with nubile, golden-haired maidens whose only duty would be to provide sustenance and pleasure for the tired author.

'Can't you see us, Apollo,' he enthused, 'with the sound of the river washing over all those little pebbles and the trees whispering confidences to each other while we sit back and have grapes peeled for us by a dozen or so contented females?'

And while he mused on in this manner I discovered yet another of Harding's hidden talents. He spent hours every day picking up the smooth circular stones that abounded on this Elysian beach and skimming them across the surface of the river and up the opposite bank. Anything to get out of work. And not only is he a master stone-skimmer, but as I also found, to my chagrin, he is a talented marksman!'

After watching me repeatedly miss the targets I had set up (several discarded tin cans), he snatched the rifle anxiously from my nervous hands, reloaded with swift and accomplished movements of his slender white hands and pumped a dozen bullets (surely silver!) into the innocent metal. He turned towards me and casually blew the cordite smoke from the muzzle, and I shall never forget his maniacal grin, the cruel twitch of his mouth, the beady eyes and the Eli Wallach stance he assumed as he stomped my ego into the dust.

*Lee swears that he has none

Those of you who know Harding well also know that above all else he loves good food - even to the exclusion of books, recorded music, women... and his ever-present nasal spray. So I allowed him to plan and prepare our first evening meal. And once again he dealt a heavy blow to my damaged ego. The meal was superb: steak marinated for several hours in a concoction of red wine, oregano, salt and pepper, cooked slowly in the frypan, with a side dish of baked beans done to perfection in the can, the whole effort magnificently topped off with a succulent hot sauce made from sliced green peppers tomatoes, and tiny pieces of bacon. All this was washed down our hungry gullets by generous glugs of mountain-stream-cooled Burgundy, and finally with rich black coffee brewed from fresh mountain water and New Guinea beans. And afterwards we watched the sun set quietly on our first day of freedom.

The following day was one that Victorians dream about and seldom get: cool breezes, a clear sky and a hot sun. And if anyone had happened to be lurking in the undergrowth he would have seen two naked apes disporting to themselves with some enthusiasm, the one with spectacles clutching a notebook and pencil while reclining in a bananalounge, the other (rather more hirsute) busily rehearsing some experimental ape sequences for the remark of 2001.

And thus we remained pleasurably occupied for several days, letting the sunlight take its time drying the poisons of civilization from out of our systems. Little did I realise at the time that Harding had captured for posterity (and on film!) some of my better ape imitations. But, as Tarzan would have said with a shrug of his hairy shoulders, 'Umgawa.'

Eventually we had to head homewards again, but this time it was with some sense of gratification. We both felt refreshed and revitalised. Both our batteries carried a full charge of fresh enthusiasm and the prospect before us no longer seemed discouraging.

As we neared home I turned to Harding and said, 'I must admit that I enjoy camping with you, mostly because you don't need to be told when something needs doing.'

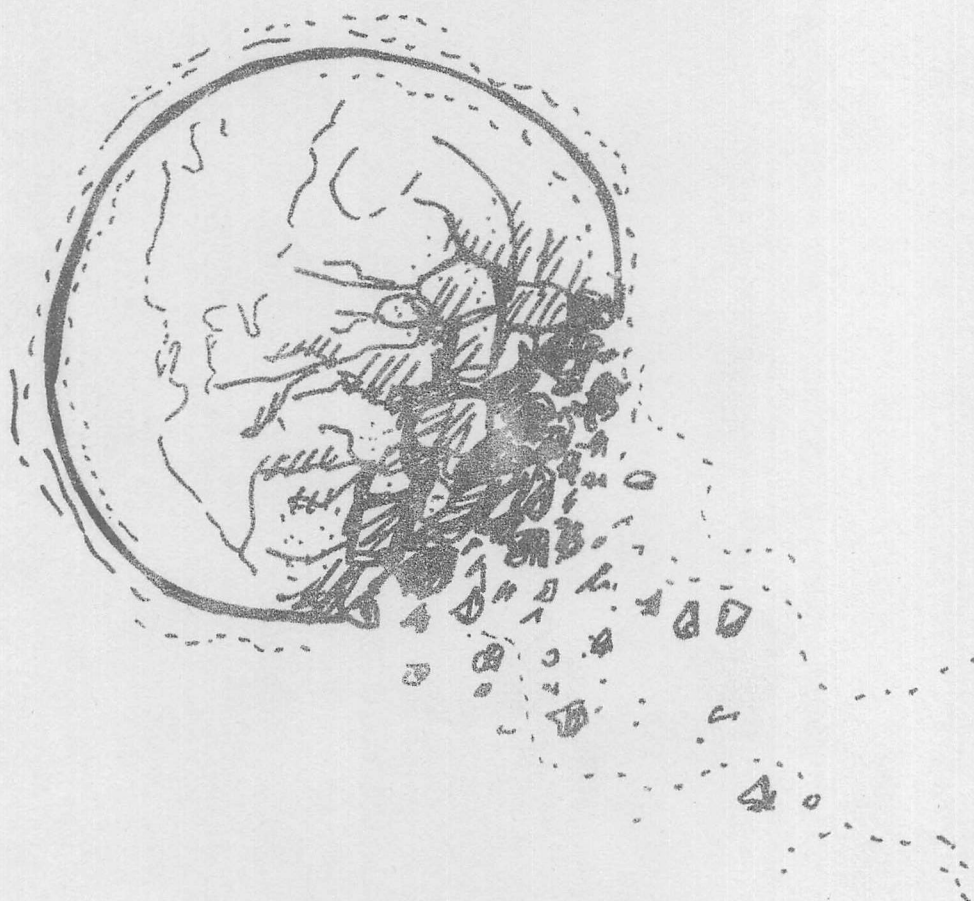
My fellow camper reclined in his seat and smiled blissfully at the countryside. 'Well, I suppose the main reason I enjoy camping with you, Apollo, is that you don't go around reminding me that things need to be done.....'

We headed back for the Basin, happy in the knowledge that we had left our respective albatrosses dead and behind us for the time being, but knowing only too well that our women would be waiting for us with fresh one, all nicely stitched and stuffed and ready to throw around our shoulders the minute we arrived home.

But for those few brief days we had been free.

Recorded women? No, it'll never catch on.

IT'S STARTED



ROTSLOK