TEEN MAY 1972

CORA


*'The Agora*
*was essentially*
*the plenary assembly*
*where*
*all the laoi gathered,*
*all the citizens*
*in the town,*
*all the warriors*
*in the camp,*
*in short*
*The whole mass*
*of those who had*
*no place*
*in the Council.'*

*G. Glotz*
*The Greek City*

# CONTENTS




AGORA acknowledges with gratitude a grant from the North Carolina Council of the Arts that largely made possible the contents of this issue.

# THREE POEMS BY CHARLES C. SULLIVAN

## I

Carmen was so tiny
he once hid
the great presence
of his pocket-size self
behind the curtain
on the window-sill
waiting in the wings
for the dean
he was dodging
to give up the ghost
of his search
as he could fly
back into our laps
giggling in his
best Newarkese
about how it was all
just a magic act

a mafia altar boy
more gifted in affection
than a girl
filled with emotions infused
in a chosen too few
a gemini-driven extremist
either a budding seminarian
or an apprentice pill-pusher
a life led at the intense ends
of glad & sad, good & bad
but above all else
he became the things he did
even in his innocent evil
he was shot through with style
he had a knack for being

freaked-out one night
the priest in him gone
the pill-pusher coming on
we hunted not for them but him
in the moonless rain's
running red clay
praying his name
through the cathedral dark
of the unlistening Abbey woods
we saw his shadow everywhere
but not a sign of him

## ". . .LOYAL IN THE BOND WE SHARE"

*"Gather we from far-flung places*
*loyal in the bond*
*we share. . ."*

(Abbey Alma Mater)

beneath the feet of the patron saint
tears and raindrops glistening
untamed on his wild child's face

covered with coats
and cradled in our arms
we carried Carmen
back to the room
and kept him warm
as best we could
watching as night
came apart at the seams
and the demons
decided to leave
spooked by the dawn
and our vigil

finally waking
he laughed
with the ease
of a scream
making believe
we had just
imagined it all

## II

The summer we were apart
and the cops chased
your bad side into death
what went through your mind
in the very end's
instant replay of a lifetime?
Was it the ordination
we laughed you out of
as we mocked you
for getting too close to Jesus
and too far from us?
Did the priest
we wouldn't let you be
rise up before you
to welcome you with open arms
to the wish we stood in the way of?
I wonder, you latin leprachaun,
if we had left you alone

would you be alive today
Father Carmen, star of Saturday confessions
absolving us from that
and all the other sins
love sometimes seems to lead to
giving us a bargain on penance
because you knew us better
than the commandments

## III

Sometimes, on the spur
of some loaded moment
you pop up, still alive
an out of sight guardian angel
Puck perched on my shoulder
hitting notes on some
rock 'n roll ballad
we once did a drunken duet to
and I will take my cue
and call for another cool one
to confirm the memory's voice
as I join you again
both of us alive and well
communing in our song

my life, your death
lost in the silent sing-along joy
of our remembered harmony

## "IT'S A BARNUM & BAILEY WORLD. . ."

When the chips are down
my mother has dealings with statues

a simple soul's prayerful whisper
in the stone ear
of the Infant of Prague

& Prest-O! Change-O!
just like magic
or a commercial come true
the smiling little baby
sprouts a sudden crop of singles
only she can see
& greases my mom's imaginative palm
like some sainted loan shark
solely interested in the more
impoverished members of the Mystical Body

which only goes to show
that faith as blind as love
lets the God we trust
keep us from being caught
a day late & a dollar short

& so my mother stays saved
in her own special way
championing the faith
just when it works
which is seemingly all of the time
content to be kneeling
in the remains of her life
at the novenas that have her number

a most faithful mistress
preserving all her mummied kisses
for her exposed & relic-cold lovers
their hushed & loyal angel
well before her time
buried beneath the dreamy power
of their dead & holy bones

# THE ROLY POLY BOAT CHIME

An original toy

(my son & I
playing at bathtime

from the tub half-filled
to his pint-size
he watches with giggles

as I sit
on the lidded john
tossing up and down
a see-through phony world
of sea and ships

In my hands
deftly balancing
in a ball
dry water ringing out
the sea-going chime
of stuck ships
in a still painted sea

for now it is the least
any father could do
to be this two-bit Atlas

a gesture
so more beautiful
than playful)

they say that it is Unbreakable

## SHELLS

*Gregory G. Jedzinak*

*Unfold dim eyes, like new-found shells.*
*Behold hidden things denied.*
*Children spy them flashing at the water's edge.*

*Turn, deaf ears, to radial shells.*
*Hear primeval songs and trumpets sound.*
*Children laughing hear them near the shore.*

*Open, clenched fist, to stretching hands of shell.*
*Touch eternal treasures.*
*Little ones gather them from under sand.*

*All were children once.*

## ECHOES TO COME

*N. Naughton*

*The deep blue serpent*
*of time*
*bound me in*
*coils of*
*maze-like confusion*
*until I cried out*
*only to be*
*dropped*
*into obscure channels*
*leading*
*to an uncertain*
*fortune.*

*Torn loose*
*running*
*screaming*
*dancing to musical strains of*
*rain which pound my face,*
*wind, which frees my hair,*
*steals my breath*
*as I'm sucked through*
*the clock*
*to undefined birth*
*and my scream*
*echoes faintly*
*in corridors of tomorrow.*

# TWO POEMS BY KENNETH RADER

## SLEDDING

When we were young and on those winter nights
when the snow on the cemetery roads
was packed hard for sledding, my friend's father
would drive us on his truck among the dead
and find the highest hill for us, and then,
with the truck's headlights serving as our moon,
we'd slide down the icy roadway past slabs
of bright tombstones, not ten feet from our heads.
Like fast and fleeting winter songs we'd swerve,
laughing and screaming, crashing round the curves,
yet always aware that the dead were near
and waiting to snatch us with frozen hands.
The pure snows of illusion, I suppose,
to dream that the dead live or want to live,
that they are not glad to be gone from here;
and yet, those nights, it seemed to me they did.
But soon the wind cracked coldly through the trees,
and masquerading angels that we were
(or yet devils, for we smiled like sinners),
our pink cheeks freezing and our toes uncurled,
we left the dead to the quivering stars
and climbed the truck and rode back to this world.

## THE GRIEVING LOVER

In my previous life, I must have been
the village idiot; for I have heard
that God reverses our former selves
and here I am now a bright man with words.
Yet we are not toppled entirely.
For I find in reflections that same fool,
moping about in his pajamas,
sitting in zoos conversing with llamas,
and seeking the meaning of x, y, z.
All because you left me.

## REFLECTIONS

*(In a Redwood Grove)*

*Now, Lord,*
*I have seen the beauty of your house*
*And the place where your glory dwells*
*Have loved it and my love is fear. . .*

*Sheer beauty blinds my sight, my ear is*
*Liquid wound to wind weave in your leafy height;*
*Bright sound of brook-rush down dancing over*
*rock and brush*
*Soft sifts the star hush of your glade;*
*Hearts made such as mine cannot contain,*
*strain too much,*
*Your fingers touch the earth and my grain touch*
*To leave it clear; sere sound of silence in my*
*soul is self or*
*Self's fear, the soughing of your voice too*
*near:*

*"Who hears here rest and die*
*Where death is not decay,*
*Life's way is death and still*
*My house is green."*

*Enough!*
*The words too dear. What mind hath seen*
*I will not hear of,*
*Not stay, will fly to where another voice*
*That other voice in me will cheer.*

—P.B.

# A SHORT NOTE ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY

By Veronica Miller

Our fundamental presuppositions structure reality for us rather than reflect it as it is. Our presuppositions generate the world as a structure of meanings. I contend that certain major ideas in Western Civilization provide the ideological basis of the destruction of all life. This is true despite the claim that the West, as opposed to other cultures, respects life.

Beginning with our religious tradition, we find the thesis that man is the center of nature, that nature exists merely as a means to his salvation and as a symbol of a higher reality. The geocentric theory, popular in the Middle Ages, portrays graphically this ontological thesis. Although modern science refuted man's centrality in a factual sense, man did not surrender this delusion. Rather, he has employed science as the knowledge which would give him the power to act out his delusion in fact. Nature becomes the means of salvation in time as it loses its symbolic function and becomes an object of study.

Then, we meet the Cartesian thesis of the absolute distinction between consciousness and material reality. Apparently, this distinction along with mathematics as the language of science was necessary as a heuristic device, for the oriental cultures which have viewed nature as an organic whole and man as a part of the whole have never developed significant science or technology on their own. But the effect of the Cartesian distinction was to place value, rationality, meaning, and purpose in consciousness and to see the rest of nature as void of these. The medieval contempt for the world continues in a secular form which creates for man a sense of alienation from the world. We are but isolated and temporary accidents in a world quite different from us. Camus says that rational man faces irrational nature and the relation between the two is the Absurd. Whatever anyone's philosophic persuasion his experience and common sense is likely to be Cartesian. That is, he experiences himself as an isolated consciousness in a body separate from the rest of reality, a unit unto himself. Nature discloses itself as the adversary to be tamed and conquered; life is to be faced up to, once we come into a world in which we are irrelevant spectators.

Further, we inherit the definition of man as rational animal, along with absolute confidence in reason and a strong distrust of animality. With Hume, reason and sentiment are separated, so that sentiment becomes a-rational and linked to the animal we may not trust. We entrust our personal lives, our collective destiny as a species, and all of life to a schizoid calculator. Animality or emotion without reason may be blind, but it is not a hazard to all life. Reason unintegrated with earth and passion is without piety, irrational and destructive. As long as reason played a relatively small role in man's survival, neither man nor life stood in jeopardy. But reason finally came into its own, long after every memory of a sacral nature had been effaced.

Even our present approach to the ecological crisis shows we have not lost confidence in the reason which produced our present situation, for we believe that we need simply to *make reason more far-seeing, more reasonable so that* we can solve the problem. As we sit here, articles are being published on the yet-to-come intrusions into human biology, psychology, and social life by persons, including scientists, who never question the wisdom of their interference in life. We need always more control, never the letting-be.

And in this country more than any other, we believe that existence precedes essence, not so much in the form of existentialism as an assertion of freedom, but as pragmatists who would form infinitely plastic human nature into something better. To Americans, the most ridiculous reason to advance for doing something in a certain way is that this is the way it has always been done. In terms of evolution, this is frequently the best reason for doing something.

Reason alone is not enough. We must denounce our collective hallucinations about reality and experience reality as it is. We are not the center or the purpose of life, but only one of its many expressions. We are not isolated units, but everything to which we are related. Each of us is a particular point where the process of the universe as a whole comes to self-awareness. It is not enough to accept these propositions intellectually; they must be experienced as fact. Their truth is already being made manifest, for we see that environmental destruction means self-destruction, which would not be true if we were isolated self-sufficient units.

Most of us would agree with Kant that a man is not to be used merely as a means but is to be seen as an end in himself, even though our personal practice often conflicts with this maxim and the practices of institutions almost always do. Those who are psychologically wise in human affairs know that genuine friendship and benevolence are possible only by (1) seeing the integrity of the other, (2) letting him be what he is, (3) taking care not to infringe on his integrity, (4) maintaining reciprocity. I suggest that these attitudes must extend to all life, that other life is not to be used merely as a means but is to be recognized as an end in itself. Nature has an integrity of its own and we must be its caretakers, taking care, using sparingly so as to spare, making adjustments for our intrustions according to reciprocity so as not to infringe on its integrity that it may be what it is. Primitive man in agricultural societies gives back to nature in the form of blood sacrifices to restore the balance. In sacred myth, essence precedes existence; things are done now because the gods taught them that way at the beginning. We shall fail in piety unless we perceive nature as sacred, experience ourselves as part of the all and the all as part of us. To give up our false status sounds degrading in the abstract; but in the concrete it is precisely to experience the Holy, the Sacred, the Nameless God in all of nature and ourselves, the goal of the great mystics. Our piety towards nature and friendship among men will spontaneously emerge and we be the saviors and care-takers of life.

# THE BALLOONS OF SÃO JOÃO

**By Charles Edward Eaton**

ON THE NIGHT OF SÃO JOÃO one always looked back. Even an American discovered that if he lived in Rio until the chilly end of June came around.

It was the close of one of the most beloved of the saint's days which fell at the beginning of the southern winter. The Carnival season long past and the heat of the summer over, a mildly astringent mood gathered in the tropical spirit, filling it with nuances, the echoes of endeavor and desire. It was a time, therefore, in which one felt an appetite and yet an ache within the heart as though the inner core of life should yield a special response which circumstances had failed to ask of it.

The day had been perfect, a still, shining pendulosity exuded in a golden whim of the earth, too suave and soft to have portent, hanging in a poise whose intent of floating away forever into space or simply waiting, without violence, for time to darken around its rim could not be detected. But one missed in the autumnal aura the threat and promise of falling leaves, bits of the universe that filled the air with passage, a sense of exit that would become entrance, a willingness of death as a means of life. It was a day without daemon or without motion until the night came when, looking back, one remembered.

For George Hastings it culminated a week of quiet goodbyes, each one neatly and pleasantly done, and, though he could have vaguely longed for something more, there had been no violent shaking of the boughs of sensation. Perhaps it was this delusive golden weather with its clear, endless waiting as though all that it could teach the heart were patience with things as they are.

NOW there was no special, final goodbye to be said, and the last evening in Rio was for himself alone. It was a wistful time, and he was glad that he had given his feelings a chance to roam. Of course there was always one more person available in any departure, someone with the eternal sense of being left behind, who might have converged with him in a night of dissipation and, together, they could have drowned the inevitable, looming nostalgia in a conventional riot of farewell. But then there would always be the morning-after when the plane must take off, the sudden choking in the throat as though the heart itself took flight.

The others, his friends, he was sure, had made a clean business of it. They had said goodbye and only much later, perhaps, the overtones would come back to them and light up the last handclasp, the ultimate expression. But, after all, so it must be. They had been given no largesse between phases, no time for the luxury of reflection. Their eyes were still filled with images of surrounding struggle. They had already seen, or supposed they had, the detached, encompassing look of the Traveller in his. After all, it was he who was going home. It was he, their hearts told them in a common desire to believe that all flight is toward something better, who was going away.

The past, then, had really said goodbye. Now it was his turn, and, not knowing what else to do, he had come, almost with a sense of ceremony, to walk along the beach and finally to sit on one of the stone benches looking toward the white breakers and the darkness beyond. He could not have stayed in the Hotel Gloria where he had lived for more than four years, for it contained too much of the self that recognized no farewell. Here, he could tug at the base of these years gently, while his nerves, searching for a place to hold on, could explore the great, open night which contained there, above, the dark continent, spangled with its cities, which he called home.

HE looked up at the balloons of São João which were drifting out to sea. They glowed with a flame-colored haze, expanding luminously as they floated slowly outward and

upward. Their beauty was spectral and, somehow, plaintive, the poignant consummation of the day, a lovely human tribute to a saint much cherished for his passion and intensity. He tried to remember the legend of their origin, but it belonged to a folk-lore not his own, hence tenuously contained in his memory, and, being of a non-scientific mind, he had only vaguely planned each year to find out how they were made and what made them glow. But, in imagination, he could see the ritual of their release: the families on top of the apartment buildings, the father, grave, skilled in the chemistry of the balloons, the patient mother, peering into the night as though she sought an anchorage there, the children, their faces shining with wonder and delight, drawn outward in longing as the baubles of gauzy flame climbed higher than even sight could finally reach.

These drifting lights in the sky contributed to the ease of introspection, and George felt a largeness of soul—he could think of nothing else to call it—which gave him a sense of being near, yet far, of being at the heart of things and able to command the peripheral view. Ruefully he wished that such had been his mood more often during his "trial by Embassy." Nothing really bad had happened. His mission as assistant to the Press Attaché had been completed now that the war was over, and he was going home. That was all.

AND yet it was not all. There was his **malaise**, his dissatisfaction with things as they had turned out, a sense of defeat beneath an apparent success. The attrition of the years in the Embassy had taken its toll of his ideals—he could see it now. He could see, too, that this had not been everything that was wrong. There was a sense of incompleteness, of not belonging. He should have been at war, taking the swimmer's chance in the mainstream of the world's passions. The fact that he had a bad back and couldn't be drafted didn't account for his sense of honor which was healthy and demanding; and even from the first, when he gave himself time to think, he felt buried away while everyone he knew grew tall and mythical with heroism and sacrifice.

It was no wonder he had plunged into his work with such furious intensity, almost as though he would construct single-handed the ideal of American democracy abroad until he had fallen back upon routine, discouraged by the exclusiveness of the tight little group who formed a dictature around the Ambassador. Even the Brazilians had not taken much of a fancy to him. Physically dark-haired, brown-eyed, too much like them, he was not the type they expected in an American—the Nordic, sanguine dynamo of good will. And, morally, well, he must have seemed a little dreary with his penchant for brooding over the right and wrong of things, his disposition tinged with melancholy.

But it wasn't only that. He could have taken his failure among the Brazilians, his rejection by the Embassy crowd. Even when one is alone and thinks of oneself alone, he reflected, honesty comes slowly. Tonight, as usual, it was taking him a long time to admit that there was only one defeat that had really mattered. Nothing else was making it so difficult to leave Brazil; nothing else so tinged with hostility his return to the States. Memory was here where she was not; she was there where memory probably did not exist at all.

ARABELLA ELIOT—it added up to that, although all the rest, of course, had made it worse. They had seemed to get along so miraculously at first—he had never been much of a swain with the girls at home. She, like him, was physically "un-American," dark-haired, brown-eyed, and olive-skinned with something even Oriental about her which made her nickname of "Arab" seem all the more appropriate. Though not really beautiful, she was easy to be with, and seemed like him in other ways, steady and conscientious in her secretarial job, and perhaps a little left out. It had done wonders for him to have been able to "trap" an American girl—a Brazilian never would have been the same. And having done

so abroad had given him an extra thrill as though it emphasized the American choice in them, assuring him of a hold on his country that he had never had before.

All the last year he had brooded about how it had turned out. He had gone over all of the times with her he could recall to discover where he had begun to make his mistake. But they simply came back to that night of tremendous shock when she had said near the close of what he had thought was a usual evening, "I've something to tell you, George, something you won't like."

"Like last night when you were too sleepy to let me come in for a nightcap. What is this anyway? A new kind of rationing?"

"Look, George, don't joke. It just makes it harder. There's something I've been trying to tell you for weeks. But you just won't let me." In the dim light of the corridor she looked very determined as though he had been rapping noisily on her door at a late hour.

"Wait a minute, Arab!" He grabbed her arm. "You're not in trouble?"

"Yes," she broke down. "Plenty, I'm afraid, with you. There's something I have to explain tonight. I think you'd better come in after all."

SHE mixed drinks for them immediately and sat down on the sofa with him, leaving a light only at the far corner of the room as though she did not want to see his face too clearly.

"There's someone else," she said finally. "I might as well say it just like that. I know you'll think I'm a heel and perhaps I am."

"Who is it?"

"You don't know him. I couldn't tell you anyway. He's married. We never go out together. That's why you never suspected."

"How long have you known him?" he heard himself asking calmly though he had a strong desire to beat her mercilessly.

"Three months. I met him at an Embassy dance."

"Is he going to marry you? They usually don't, you know."

"He says he will," she said, ignoring his sarcasm. "He's going to get a divorce. They're shipping him back to the States next week. He's going to arrange it then."

"You're going too, I suppose."

"Yes, but alone. The week after."

"You bitch!" he said, not able to control himself any longer. "You lying, scheming, little bitch! What do you think you've been doing with me all these months?" He got up and walked back and forth before the sofa, wanting to hurl something at the single light in the far corner, tumbling them into darkness so that she would have to struggle past him in order to illuminate the room again, and if she dared to touch him, he would make her remember forever what he was. He would make her know that all their months of civilized and affectionate friendship held this dark and basic animal thing within it.

"Don't say that, George. Don't be any more cruel than you have to." She was almost weeping. "You won't believe this, but I still love you."

"That's so old and stale it smells. I suppose you like my soul and his body. Is that it?" His violence grew in him like a negative form of possession. If he couldn't have her, he would tear her to bits.

"No, anything but that," she answered. "It's just the other way around. There's something in him I need. It's not just physical as you think." She took a long draught of her drink and continued. "Try to understand it this way. We're alike, you and I—even you say that. Very much alike. Except that you are strong and I'm weak. I'd spend the rest of my life just feeling like a left-over part of your personality. No one believes this, but if two

people are alike, both of them must be strong or one of them becomes a captive of the other and they'll never grow up, grow out of what they are, change, as everyone must do if he wants to really keep on living." She paused and looked at him as though he still would, even had the right, to strike her. "He's strong too," she said. "But so different from me that he's able to share his strength. That gives me something to grow on. He makes me feel free," she ended with a desperate flourish.

"Are you sure you don't mean loose?" he asked limply and without venom. Something wiry, some feeling of being as strong as she thought he was had gone out of him now. There was nothing, after all, to tie a noose with.

"George," she said softly. "I love you, but don't you see, it isn't enough?"

"Evidently not," he said. "Though why, I don't know."

"Ten years from now that would be all we'd be left with. It would mean a kind of death," she went on. "And I don't want to die. Not yet anyway. Not without learning why it is I live."

"Oh, don't be so damn philosophical," he said. "You don't need to explain anymore. I'm on my way. I hope it works out—whatever it is you want so much. Whatever it is we had—well, it probably wasn't love."

BUT HE hadn't really been "on his way." It was too devastating a blow to his ego to bow out without a struggle. He had thought that Arabella was the only victory he was going to get out of this war, but now she had turned out to be another man's booty. She was threatening to go off with something that was his—her love for him—and he wanted it back. It was as simple as that. During the two weeks that were left, he pestered her to see him and, when she wouldn't do that, he waylaid her in the corridors of the Embassy and haunted her in the streets of Rio. One night when he trapped her at the door of her apartment, he thought he was going to strangle her, forcing her against the wall as if she were a shadow he meant to press back into his flesh. And it seemed for a moment that she hesitated and was going to respond to some stranger in him. But he had never done anything violent to a woman in his life, and, when he released her, he felt filling back pneumatically into her body some desire which was stronger than his. Looking back now, it seemed that it was a strange, dark, adhesive moment which he had somehow failed to recognize and that all which had gone before had been a mere matter of words. Somehow his chance to assert a vital connection had passed, and Arabella, in the end, had left him with a cloudy mass of unresolved feeling.

So there it was, the heart of it all, floating treacherously, statically in mind, hung on thousands of little strings of memory, diffused throughout his being as if the power of motion were atrophied forever so that the movement along the **avenida** was a different continuum of life from his, miraculous and to be envied, brushing him magnetically with the scuff of its forward flow. He remembered painfully that one of the most delightful things about Arabella, at least the girl he thought he knew, was the way she quickened his life. The obstructions of the world hadn't mattered anymore; he had simply walked through them with a new and secret power of dematerialization. But now the old inertia had come back heavier than ever; distances were incredibly far—the simple lifting of an arm or taking of a step often required a prodigious effort as though he, alone, moved in a thickening muck of time.

BEHIND him, half of Rio, with its traditional love of promenade, was out to see the balloons of São João. He remembered how often he had walked with the crowd full of his own motion, not hearing them, not seeing them, so bound was his brain into some microscopic worry about his work or, more often, some fanatical concern for Arabella until

the whole globe, though he strode back and forth across it powerfully, had no more than a day's width, animated by one or two tyrannical voices. But, tonight, the people were **there**, at last, moving on a belt of change, leaving a kind of afterbreeze of restlessness in their train. Imperceptibly, it made his mood more pliant, and he let his feelings stretch a little like a plant in the night wind, wondering why he so seldom had recognized how healing suppleness can be.

Two young men walked by, their leather jackets buttoned against the chill of the sea air. They sat down not far from him on a bench under a street lamp, oblivious of everyone, for they were talking excitedly in the final, heated way of an argument too long drawn out.

"But, Hugh, you've got to see it. England's through. You know it is." The English sentence, oiled with a trace of Brazilian accent, slid rapidly through the night.

"Don't be absurd, Julio. We'll pull out of this. You'll see." The second voice was drier, slower, completely unpracticed, spending the language more deliberately since it owned it entirely.

"Look, let's put it this way. You're Anglo-Brazilian. You've lived here all your life. You've got nothing to lose if England goes down. Then why take it so personally?"

"What makes you think I am? I merely happen to believe in her, quite abstractly. I want her to endure. Who was it that said if there wasn't a God we'd have to create one? Well, I'm rather like that about England. I can't imagine the world without her."

"Oh, 'There'll always be an England,' never fear, my boy, an England of sorts, that is. But who cares? She's been wearing the world around her middle long enough. They're making her do a strip-tease now, and high time, I say. Tomorrow she'll drop India. But that won't be enough. 'Take it off!' they'll yell until the old doxy stands bare-assed before the world. And, **meu filho**, it won't do any good to stand up and cry, 'Stop it, fellows! That's my mother!' "

"If that's your idea of humor, I think it's pretty weak. Why don't you cut it out? You're beginning to sound like some half-baked socialist."

GEORGE took a sidelong glance at the pair. They must be about his age, he thought, and he had an impulse to join them which tugged at the heavily anchored base of his feelings. Hugh was tall, slender, almost ceremonious in the way he talked and gestured sparely, his lean, unresponsive face like a match that didn't want to be struck. Julio, curly-haired, dark, short, compact as a fuse, handled the explosive potential of his temperament without care. As he jostled his companion and gambled with his tolerance, it was apparent that they had become good friends on a purely human level, on the basis of many things overlooked and left unsaid.

"What an old Tory you are!" The lyrical voice had broken through the caul of softness now, plunging sharply. "I never thought you were a snob, but, in the long run, it comes down to that. A snob is a man who won't give up when he knows he's wrong. Anything can happen to him, and he still thinks he's superior. That's England and you. If the handwriting on the wall isn't in English, well, Fate is just a damn illiterate and not to be listened to. Why don't you wake up? This is the age of Everyman, didn't you know?"

"I was waiting for that." There was a disturbed tone in the quiet voice now, a stirring among its restraints. "You've heard of Max Beerbohm, haven't you? When someone told him the world belonged to the common man for the next hundred years, he said, 'Thank God we can hope for something better after that.' "

"Well, old man, you wait and see. After the War, there'll be only America and Russia who count. Cut off the arms of the Empire and the Old Octopus is going to end up as the Leech of the Atlantic."

The beleagured Englishman got up, gaunt and tired, and looked vaguely around him, up at the sky, as a man who has watched someone die might do, recording an invisible tremor of departure. "There's no use talking to you now, Julio." He paused and looked at his friend with an almost masculine tenderness as though he were putting to bed a child he would never see again. "We've been friends a long time. But ever since the War, I don't know what's happened. We seem to be fighting it out between us. It oughtn't to be, but it is. It's the little lies that do it and the secrets kept, the little things we say or don't say. Then one day, when the world goes wrong, you've got a stranger beside you instead of a friend. I suppose that's the trouble, Julio, we've begun to haunt each other." He stuck his hand out stiffly, "Well, good night, old man. Chin up!" He turned and walked away.

"Hugh! Wait a minute." The voice rose spasmodically like the tail of a grounded kite. "I've got something I want to say." But the friend did not look back, seeming to grow taller and thinner as he strode along, gathering in the distance a cerement of night-mist around his body, holding his lead on the other who trailed him like a footpad.

George measured the pace of their passage through the darkness, and he could hear their footsteps in his blood as though he walked the gap of silence in between, pursuing and pursued, and he would have liked to run ahead or turn and run back, leaving some vestigial, hesitant shape of them all at the sundering point of darkness. It somehow reminded him of Arabella; everything now that stirred his interest did. Almost any action observed or voice heard, if he could moralize them at all, found their way back to something he remembered of her. It was as though he were left with a single metaphor of infinite relatedness.

THE farthest balloon that he could see was a floating phantom now. Dim and nearly amorphous, its ovality all but lost, it glimmered like an astral ectoplasm about to be absorbed once more into the nature of things. But others were rising in various degrees of rubescence according to their height, so that the earth might have been imagined as like a pit from which welled the bubbles of some ruddy natural humor. Nothing could have been more confluent with what he would have liked to feel. It was as though the night were giving him a casual, almost tardy, delicately offered avatar of letting-go. The flowing of the people at his back was a current of many tones, eddying against him, warm or cool, hot or glacial, sometimes threatening to break over him in a wave and drench his flesh with its knowledge. Sitting quietly, not trying to hear, he could allow himself to be chosen by the voices themselves.

"Not here, Jean Paul, not here." The French words brushed the night with the swift stroke of a woman's terror.

George looked up the sidewalk just in time to see a woman freeing herself from a young man who had put his arm around her. Enough light fell upon her face to show her dark hair and petite features. She was about forty, and George imagined immediately that she was married, a European refugee, as was her companion most probably. The young man was very white and blond, with a **mèche** of soft hair curving boyishly on one side of his forehead, a sort who could probably look many different ages between the scale of twenty and thirty according to his whim and state of mind.

"You're ashamed, aren't you?" the young man asked loudly as though he wanted to be heard. "You're ashamed to be seen with me. You're afraid someone will see and tell."

"No, no," she said nervously. "But do be quiet." Her hand moved upward out of her restraint as if she would have stroked his hair if they had been alone.

"Why should I? I love you, and you love me. Such things need saying. Such things need shouting. But you're ashamed about the only thing that matters. Here it's one kind of quietness—a fear of being overheard. There, with all your friends, it's another kind—a deadly inner silence with everyone knowing and pretending not to know."

"But there's only one who really mustn't know, darling," she said, keeping her voice as low as possible. "But then, that's why we mustn't talk about it with the others so that if he finds out, it will be through himself alone."

"And why shouldn't he?" The blondness in him seemed darker now, and one could see that for her there were many color changes in his tone from light to tawny-dark.

"Surely you now why. It would hurt him too much, particularly knowing it was you."

"The stupid ass." Now his voice was on her like a whip, harsh as taut, brown leather. "Even he has to learn that there isn't any special way. We love out of our needs and longings. The whole story-book conception makes me sick. You know how it goes—the man a little older, the woman a little weaker, the man a little richer—But, my God, you believe in it too."

"Don't," she said, tugging at his sleeve. "Please don't, darling. You're making a scene."

"So I'm making a scene! What does it matter? Sometimes I think I hate you." He pulled away from her roughly. "I love you, but I don't like you. I can't stand your being so proper."

"I'm sorry I can't help being what I am. Let's not quarrel. Let's go back now. We can talk better there." She put her arm in his, and this time he yielded.

"All right, but you mustn't be so jumpy. You act as if we were a couple of criminals."

"How can I help it? There's no one but you. And I ask myself over and over, how can it go on much longer."

THE woman spoke at last as though anyone now might hear her final secret, and George wondered how much the truth was worth, uttered in despair, beaten out of the soul by the flagella of human pressures. Of course, the young man was right in a way, but George shuddered at his "rightness." Arabella had been right, he had been right too, and that had been the trouble. He turned and watched the quarreling lovers ascend the steps of an apartment house nearby, saying to himself, "When they pull apart, and they will, they will forget to remember who was right. They will wonder why they let it matter." The woman turned at the entrance which was open to the night air, looked quickly up and down the street, and hurried toward the elevator where the young man waited with a scowl on his face.

"I am listening to people for the first time in a long time, really listening to the sound they make." The sentence thought was also so clearly and powerfully felt that George wondered if he had not spoken aloud. It didn't matter though. If only he had remembered this more often instead of allowing himself to see and hear just enough of people to keep from bumping into them, prowling among the gray shapes of his own fears and frustrations until the only city he knew was intramural.

A YOUNG, blond American sailor passed by, the freshest thing that the night had yielded, tall, large-boned, sanguinely glowing, in his white uniform a compact cylinder of American physical power. He walked casually, soft on his feet for his big frame, as though he were used to getting around easily, a member of the most mobile race on earth. A young Brazilian moved by his side, almost trotting like a short-legged animal to keep up with the American's casual stride. Dressed in a flimsy white shirt, duck pants, and native sandals, he was a mestizo of a muddy color, and his face was pathetically ugly, as though the warfare of the races in his blood had cancelled the strength of all and left only a battered, bulbous animal pulp with flabby indentations for its features. George had seen many of his kind. It was obvious that he was an **empregado**, a house boy, a sort that roamed the beaches every night. Most of them trailed the sailors on shore leave, looking upon those in American service as a kind of romantic modern knight, begging them for money, offering them girls in return. So used was George to their stock proposals, several having accosted him and received the coldest of receptions, that what the boy was saying hardly registered.

"**Moco**, boy, boy," he said in broken English. "You lika me? You lika me?"

"Sure, fella," the sailor said easily, smiling. "What's on your mind? Got a pretty sister at home?" He looked at the Brazilian without a trace of hostility as if he might have been a peddler of trinkets.

"No, **moco**, no." There was a plaintive whine to the voice now. "You maka fun of me. I got no sister. I wanna be you friend."

"Sure, boy. Whatta you say? How about a beer? This one's on me."

"You know unnerstan. I lika you. I gotta nice room. I wanna you be **meu marido**, my husband." The voice was wheedling now.

"Wait a minute!" the sailor said, sounding as though he were reining in a horse. "Whatta you think I am. Some kind of queer?"

"I lika you. You lika me too. I do everything woman does. **E gostoso, moco.** I giva you love, **moco**, love." The face looked sick with its longing. The hectic sensuality was all that existed in the large, oily eyes, almost frightened with their own desire.

Suddenly the sailor let his anger swell in him and stood there in the night like a great white vengeance glowering over the little **empregado** who shriveled with despair, looking up at the candescence of his desire.

"Beat it, Bud, or you won't know what hit you," the sailor said, and he looked around himself in the circle of the street-light as though it were an arena of awakened suspicion.

"Oh, **moco**, I wanna you make me happy." The cry of the Brazilian made George shiver as they moved off rapidly into their hurt and outraged worlds of separation. He could think only of that flaming, white anger tearing through the night. Right, yes, right in its way, but cruel with indignation, leaving behind it nothing but the cylinder of that other body parched in its loneliness. "Love is of that which a man wants and has not. Love wants and has not beauty"—the words of Plato that had been a Biblical book to him in college came quite naturally into his mind, cool, lucid, soothing, like an old prophecy gently confirming itself, and yet somehow not quite adequate to the situation either.

IT WAS NEARLY midnight, and George remembered the early hour of his departure, but he did not want to leave. What was he waiting for? Perhaps for someone to speak to him and bind him to this continent again, dispelling his mood of farewell? Waiting for one of these stories, emerging and dying at his back to surround and involve him? Waiting for someone to walk forward, strike him, embrace him, blandish or revile him? He, too, would have liked to let loose a balloon across the night of São João and watch it rise, tear asunder in a blaze, or hover and drift higher, beyond sight, and wonder, if it burst there in the unknown, how far the ripples of its flame would spread into the darkness. Only a year ago, he and Arabella had sat on this same bench, so engrossed in each other they had been only faintly aware that the night was hung with these strange and lovely lanterns, these lights that had no other purpose than their beauty.

But, no, perhaps it had not been that way at all. There he went again attributing thoughts and feelings to Arabella she had probably never had. This was the riskiest thing the heart ever did, making an airtight construction for two. You simply couldn't hermetically seal another person in an idea you had of him. The wretched paradox, of course, was that you **did** have to think about people, "construct" them in a sense, or they had no meaning, but then you had to let them live. Idealism was all right as long as you didn't make an Iron Maiden of it. It had to be porous; it had to be full of vital chances for metamorphosis. Respect was not enough; you needed to love the thick, unmanageable stuff of life. You had to be continually checking to see if that supposedly inferior source was being vigorously drunk from like Breughel's peasants while you stood outside with an empty wine glass in your hand.

There was, he noticed a wonderful duality in the horizontal motion of the crowd and the fire in the sky as though one generated and released a reluctant spiral, gently straining upward, and the voices were like muted cries of a cosmic effort. Already another human convergence or a human solitude bloomed at his back—two, for a moment, in a globe of anger, lust, love, friendship—one, in a circle of peace, terror, or loneliness. And still another and another until the night was filled with efflorescence: **Darling, darling, pasarinha, little bird, there is no one else. . . .She's a puta, she's a whore, and you love her!. . . .We'll meet tomorrow between five and seven. He never expects me home till then. . . .When I tried to explain, he treated me as though he were a god, and I knew when I saw him again, he'd give me that hard look of his and crush me like a worm. . . .Ah, Madame, you weep because I have lied to you. May I remind you of what Clotilde de Vaux said to the dissappointed: "It is unworthy of noble natures to divulge the sorrow they feel."....Oh, meu Deus, you've got to give me some money, I must go away. Away before they know. . . .My dear, do not worry whether you love me. When you really know, that will be the time to say goodbye. . . .I'll strangle you if I find you with him again. I'll break you like a match between my fingers. . . .Mamãe, Chico told me in school today that he loved me. What did he mean, Mamãe? Like you, like God? Will I ever know, Mamãe?. . . . Darling, darling, when the evening darkens over and it grows cold around the heart, the whirling earth seems ready to stop. But, listen, it pauses for us, saying one word: together—over and over: together.**

AS GEORGE rose to go, another flurry of fire-balloons strung a slow chain of light across the sky. How many of them had drifted toward America, he wondered? Of course, they would never last so long a voyage, but, at least, they would cast their flake of fire upon the wind and color and warm it in its northern passage. Others were drifting south, east, and west. Perhaps in his dreams tonight, he thought as he drove nearer the Gloria, his gravest and loveliest farewell might come to him as the image of a tireless human hand that released unceasingly these delicate, gauzy globes of fire to burst in a pyrotechnic blaze or gently, wistfully, drift toward the farthest corners of the night.

# THE EASTER GIFT

By

**H. Allen Morris**

Lila Caffrin stared at the delicate Easter lilies in the foil-wrapped pot. Her thoughts drifted like hazy patches of fog as she silently rocked in the slatted chair next to her bed.

*This big house, and me–an invalid. This rocker. How long must I mold here: If I had a wheel chair it would be different. Oh God, please let him think of me. Let him remember. This room! Laughter, singing. Where I was loved. And the piano. How the judge would play it! His deep-throated voice singing. . .Oh God!*

A dusty cobweb crept down from the chipped crystal knobs of the now-sealed doors. From beyond the closed door leading to the over-sized dining room she could hear Del, her maid of thirty-eight years, humming while she prepared dinner as she had done a thousand afternoons of her life.

*I never dreamed this room would be a bedroom then. Bedroom? A cell. My cell. My lonely, dark cell.*

She fumbled for the mirror on the small bamboo table next to her chair. In one unsteady hand she held it while the other brushed limp strands of wispy cotton hair. She moved the mirror slowly dead front, focusing her eyes at the misty image. The chalk face. The skin hanging loose from her chin, folding into patterns like limp leather.

*Was it only fifty years ago when Will looked deep into this face? Did he look deep? Oh yes, it was deep. So deep. He was so tender. What was it: Flower. . .his fairest flower. . .Oh God, the words. . .were they ever really said? "Lila, dearest one, you are the fairest flower in this garden." Did he say that? The words no longer ring through my tired mind.*

*And that letter. Where is it? It must be in my hope chest in the attic. Let's see. Yes. "Dearest one. . .I have picked the rose from the sacred garden and shame fills me." Shame? How does he know shame? I thought he did–then. Did he? Why did I let him? I loved him. . .he loved me. He wanted me. . .then. It was a happy wedding and we were happy those first years. There was laughter, children. Where are they? I thought Eddie and his family would be here. Eddie? Where does he live now?*

*Got to quit thinking. . .got to. It makes me so weary.* "Del, come here!" Her voice squeaked sharply. "Come here and turn on the television."

"Yes, Miss Lila, I'm comin. I shore am comin right now."

She could hear the swinging door from the kitchen pop open as Del made her way into the bedroom.

"Here I am, Miss Lila. Now what did you want me to do?"

"Turn on the television, Del. I don't want to miss 'Love of Life'."

As Del shuffled to the new television set near her chair she said: "You shore do get wrapped up in dem shows, Miss Lila. Why I ain't never heard of no misery like on dem shows. Don't it make you sad? Don't it, Miss Lila?"

She quizically replied: "Sad? No, Del, not sad. They help me to forget."

Del's chocolate skin wrinkled around her wide mouth as she said: "You shore talk funny sometimes, Miss Lila. I can't for the life of me see what you like dem shows for." Del returned to her work as the gray tube in the television glowed to life.

The rumbling voice of the announcer boomed: ". . .and join us for another exciting chaper of 'Love of Life'. But first a word from our sponsor."

As the jingle played Lila Caffrin's thoughts again drifted. *How did it happen? When? I should have allowed him to leave then. Oh God! But not divorce. I couldn't have lived.*

*No one knew. Not one soul. Thank God! Twenty years. It's too long to live with a man who can't say a loving word. An eternity. . .more than an eternity. He never called me wife after that.*

Her throat felt as dry as her cracked skin and she called to Del. "Del, get me something cold to drink." Thinking her words had not been heard she again called: "Del? Del, please bring me some iced tea."

She heard the refrigerator open and the clink of ice on glass and then the heavy footsteps of Del as she came towards the door.

"Here you are, Miss Lila. Do you want some cookies, too?" Del handed the tall sweating glass to her.

"No. No, thank you, Del."

As Del started to return to the kitchen Lila Caffrin asked: "Del, has Eddie and his family called today? I thought they were coming for Easter."

A pained expression crossed Del's face. "Eddie? Mr. Eddie, Miss Lila?"

"Yes, Eddie! He was coming for Easter, wasn't he?"

"Miss Lila, honey, don't you remember? Mr. Eddie done gone to join his maker two years ago now."

"His maker?" *(The accident. Yes, yes, now I remember.)* "I guess I forgot, Del. Sometimes it's so hard to remember. What about Estelle? Did she call?"

"No ma'm. She been living in Florida with her new husband, Miss Lila. Don't you remember nothin?"

As she searched for an answer, Del said: "Miss Lila, I gotta go. I hear somebody knockin at the back door."

"Yes, of course, Del. Do go on and do what you have to."

The moving figures on the television screen caused patterns of light to dance across the shadowy room as Lila Caffrin continued to tunnel through her disjointed thoughts.

*How could I forget about Eddie? So much has happened. I do believe Eddie knew about us. Did he? Now, I'll never know. He was the oldest and he might have guessed. Children know when things are not right. I wonder where William is. He said he would be home for dinner. Did he have a trial? I wonder who he is judging now?*

Del's heavy nasal voice called from the kitchen and interrupted her thoughts. "Miss Lila, Miss Lila. Dere's a big pretty box a boy done brought in here and he says it's for you."

Del barked to the young shabbily dressed boy. "Boy, go on and set it down on the floor next to Miss Lila's chair. Go right through the dining room and the next room is her own."

Del followed the delivery boy into the bedroom. The boy carefully put the gaily wrapped box on the floor and left without speaking.

"They sure are haughty nowadays, ain't thy? Nobody seems to act like they used to, Miss Lila.

Lila Caffrin didn't hear her. Her entire attention was focused on the box. *He remembered. Just like before, he remembered. Will the note inside say love? Does he still remember now to say love?*

"Look what a pretty red ribbon, Miss Lila. It shore is a big box ain't it. Wonder what it can be?"

Del said excitedly: "Want me to open it, Miss Lila?" Without waiting for a reply she stooped to lift the ribbon.

"Yes, Del, do open it."

A rustling sound seemed to be far away. Paper was being torn and Lila Caffrin walked deeper into her dream.

*A chair? A wheel chair! Folded. I can travel with it. I can go to church again. Oh God! He remembered I wanted a chair. Yes, he did say he would think about it. Bright aluminum... beautiful bright. . .like silver. It's over. At last. . .my old Will!*

Del's voice brought her back from memories of an old love. "Miss Lila, I got it open for you."

Lila Caffrin's heart thundered in her throat. Her tongue became dry as parchment. "Well, Del. What is it? What is it?"

Reaching down into the box Del said: "Why, Miss Lila, look here! It's books. Must be at leat ten. Ain't they pretty! All black and gold. And here's a note for you."

Del picked up the yellow creased paper and handed it to her. With shaking hands Lila slowly unfolded the paper and read: "The Easter Bunny. See page 234, vol II." There was no signature. It was his writing, but there was no signature and he had not written love. The paper slipped from her bent fingers as her dim eyes clouded with liquid pain.

"Hand me the second book, Del."

Del picked it out of the box and handed the heavy volume to her, laying it carefully on her lap.

Lila Caffrin slowly lifted the shiny pages as if they were made of something she had never seen. She stopped at page 234. It was headed in bold black letters: JUDGE WILLIAM MONTAGUE CAFFRIN. PROMINENT LAWYER AND BELOVED FAMILY MAN.

She sat like some ancient stone statue and fixed her furious gaze on that strange word, "BELOVED."

# DePLOMB

## A Second Homage To William Carlos Williams

Aegidius Coot was neither a man nor a mouse by his own calculation, but he was old before he had discovered it. And then he had fashioned a state of mind for himself which appraised, by design, the resultant ambivalence as though it should have been a license to self-pity; it was true, for example, that often he thought of himself as neither "this" nor "that." Oftener he said, "and you have done nothing." At length he had grown accustomed to thinking: "I should as well be dead as to sit here in this dry month thinking as I do, thinking that I have nothing and that I **am** nothing."

The mewing creak of the bed upon which he sat thence suggested another vision of his doom by which he fancied himself rocking endlessly on the top of an insignificant pedestal. Besides that, he thought himself able to walk, but unwilling; inclined to speak, but unknowing. Finally he believed that he needed to cry, but he could not find hiw own face.

It does not matter how he had got that way since he, himself, did not know, and though he attempted hopelessly to blame the situation on ill health, on age, on idleness, he could find nothing to make sense of the lethargy which, in the first place, guided even his willingness to be aware of himself.

But he **was**, on occasion, aware of himself, and often the fraceful spirit of his otherwise phlegmatic temperament took over and led him to think that he danced rustically before his bedroom mirror naked. It was at such times that he enjoyed the company of his only true friend, the white mule called DePlomb, who was by nature innocent, and by nature humorless as well. But as innocence was hard to beat for proper companionship, Aegidius Coot forgave the dullness and took pleasure in believing that the company of his only true friend was something which hinted at an identity, a certain independent identity too, which he hoped might sometime emerge out of the open air of his dreams.

At such times, too, who was to say that Aegidius Coot was not the genius of his household? And he fancied that he was Petronius. Speaking to the white nule as if possessing its perfect and instinctive animalness, he also believed himself Louis Quatorze.

With an apprehensive **gouter**, he looked upon the white mule and belched, and then his eyes drew up into divisible specks as though they were patches on a wrinkled piece of seersucker. As the momentary genuis of his household he could suddenly walk, and words fell from his tongue like toothpaste bubbles. He was altogether exuberant at the prospects of being able to cry, as well, and the white mule brayed frantically to know that the sudden perfect joy of great dreams should have come there undaunted and that his friend, Aegidius Coot, should well have depended on him for such intensity as that. Hushed by the very frenzy of it, these two friends grew drunk with mutual admiration, and DePlomb said, "how fine your sense of beauty, Mr. Coot; how fine your presence, as it is this presence which gives me hope and which sustains me to my visits. It is your presence, my friend, which, by prescription, allows me some identity myself."

"Oh yes," Mr. Coot replied. He curled up upon the bed, forgetting his infirmity altogether, and with considerable determination got to repeating for his companion the story of his life. The old man, finding himself faintly jealous of the white mule's innocence, edited it all, of course, and spoke principally of hurtful things like the time with Miss Rudely upon

the beach at Delphi (how she had left him with the last of his passions and had also extracted from him his only $15). He said, "DePlomb, and then there was the time when I, bear of a man that I am, had got to loving Hiss Sybil Dowson too. Sybil the pliant. Sybil the lusty. And she had power over me. It was the power of love which she had over me, and I would have done anything. Alas, she could love and **that** only! She could not **see**, and she was totally incapable of hearing."

The white mule studied uprightly, consistently meriting the attention of his protege with a close and unhesitating pliance. He tenderly struck the fibers of his hearer's soul with noble phrases like: "oh how I do understand, how I do sympathize; it was never, never your fault and you are a man for it!"

Mr. Coot said, "I **knew** you would understand." He leaned forward, closer to the white mule. "Yes," he said, "Miss Sybil Dowson had the flesh of an infant, the white, silken flesh of a baby, and she had great brown and clever eyes. Her hair was silken as well, and you must believe me when I tell you that she was perfect; and you must believe me when I tell you that she was my wife, the mother of my children."

DePlomb plumed his own pale mane upwards with a plomb as if the stiffness had snuffed out a tick or had guided his temples to a more heightened attention. He seemed momentarily in consternation, and he was unable to hide it.

Mr. Coote, then aware of the change, spoke in a sympathetic whisper to ask, "what is it?"

The white mule said, "I must hear more if I am to understand fully. I had feared that you were going to desert me. I had feared that there was to be no more."

"I will tell you whatever you want to hear," Aegidius Coot said. To which the white mule demanded several explicit confidences of the intimate sort, among them the old man's confession that he had once suffered a form of the clap.

But the white mule was not interested precisely in **that** type of information, he said. Rather, he suggested, "I am interested in knowing what is the **real** you. The you which exists underneath those things which you have chosen to tell me in order to make me aware of your suffering."

"I **have** suffered," Mr. Coot mused candidly, but he said it with that strained whine which customarily suggests a fetish for having the last word. The old man peered (like a judge with his mind made up) towards the head of his white mule which bobbed there instinctively. "No, I don't believe it," the mule's disposition suggested, but DePlomb actually said nothing.

"I have worked all my life," Coot answered, even so. "I kept my family in respectability all my life. They are gone now; they have left, and they have left me nothing but this fever in a dry month. They have grown away from me, or else died, and now I have only your single friendship."

"But **I** have no power ever you." the white mule said.

"Is **that** what you demand?" Aegidius Coot replied. He took his feet from their rest on the bedpost. The gesture of former ease and trust had got suddenly to be fidgety.

"I **demand** nothing. I **ask** for consideration. I listen to you and I accept you for what you have told me you are. I construe it as respect, first of all, and, second of all, I feel it as a certain loyalty. I will neither betray you, Mr. Coot, nor run from your needs. What of me, however? I am here on **your** terms. I must care about you on **your** terms."

Mr. Coot grew less interested in the conversation. His nervousness then took

the form of a slow renege. Whatever the sort of repulsion that seemed eminent upon his face, there was, as well, a certain curious entreaty; and the white mule, seeing it, reading it for what he alone presumed was its meaning, had thought his friend in some peculiar cry.

"I see," he said. "You do not understand, do you, that I should wish to have terms, that I must cry out as well."

The white mule began to whine, his own dignity suddenly a question by its own right. He thought of the probable cause for the feeling, its presentiment being that rather casual but subterranean need of his to remain with his master. Baited like a captive fish for the food which must be given at the hand of a lover of movement, the captivator, DePlomb had sadly endured his own burst of self-denial in order to restore the master to former comfort. He did not wish to risk dismissal, for all too often Coot had lately taken to forgetting their former rapport. The vast misture of age and growing independence had seemed, therefore, an additional indignity which the white mule was required to suffer. He knew, momentarily, that he had better let the master select the remaining subject of conversation.

"First I want to talk about the state of the world," said Coot. "First of all is the fact that we are being hoodwinked by the government. Then, as if that were not all, we are being sold clothing that will not last. Our very controls on the indignity of it have descended and now we are the pawns of automobile salesmen and dealers in drugs. Were my children with me this very day I should have to say 'take care of your automobile, child.' That is what I would have to say."

"I believe you, Mr. Coot."

"And were my wife with me today I would have to say, 'careful dear, that the food you buy for the children is not pumped full of paste!' You see, do you not, that it is a wretched condition? You see, of course, that one cannot love when he must worry over such things. It is the truth, the honest truth."

"And yet you have neither your wife nor your children, Mr. Coot. Rather, you have only me," sighed the white mule.

The former swaggering master had got suddenly humbled by the words, but they had not served as an appraisal. The hour itself rather sustained him than gave him a mind, and though his heart beat frantically, he could not tell his white mule how indeed he missed his wife and children; how, indeed, the present absence was having its own effect. Instead, he grew the more remote and his poor white mule was forced to a dramatic retraction as though he should have to shrink from the genius and leave him with his decision: and leave him with his surrounding torment.

As it was, Mr. Coot did not cry out, and the white mule slowly began to desire that his master would do so. He said, "I wish you would cry out. I wish you would find a means to unleash what you cannot. I am concerned that you have a proper understanding of your own sol. First of all, I cannot fathom why you need me and then don't need me."

Mr. Coot observed his charge. Then, with a truer displeasure.

"I never said I needed you," he said.

"You summoned me; and you speak to me of your causes. You tell me of your fears!"

"You are a gossip, DePlomb," Coot responded, "and I fear that I must accommodate your foolish demands or else be destroyed by my own confidences to you. But I have lied to you regularly, and so my only comfort, my only safeguard, is in knowing that you **must** be uncertain as to the real truth of anything I have said."

"**Are** we not friends?" the white mule cried; he cried it plainly, and he meant it

that way.

The old man shuddered that his sober friend should have begun an old battle again, its momentary thrust hinged so well on the question **and** disposition which he loathed more than any of the white mule's contentions. It was thus that he thought of how their conversations always came to that, always: that question, that silly cry, that infantile demand! He had as well only to imagine the next entreaty as though it were exactly what it had always been. The white mule drew up his face into a mew and cried more loudly, "your **terms** again, ever your **terms**!"

And Aegidius Coot thought: how shall I ever rid myself of his cries? However did I manage to provoke him to such feelings? Did I not know from the first **what** he was, **who** he was? Did I not regard him for his loathsomeness from the very beginning? Yet. . . ."

Mr. Coot's silence very nearly possessed the white mule's soul and the fearful animal tried fitfully to gallop in the struggle of it. His own heart raved with innocent jealousy, adolescent in its longings. Thence his fury spewed forth like a fast closing of iron gates.

Disturbed at his impertinence, Mr. Coot swatted him well, and then he cursed the white mule. The momentary genius thought that he was a prince suddenly given the kingship, and suddenly all-powerful; then he could grant life or death. For the white mule he decreed the latter, though life itself could no longer have been beauteous to the white mule, who, nonetheless, always cried out: "I am your friend, Mr. Coot, your only friend!"

The old man fidgeted grimly on the edge of his bed as the mirror before him nearly seemed to laugh. The wide reflection bore the subtle attack of an all-seeing great eye, and Aegidius Coot, now aware of himself being watched, could no longer pretend at his own great stature. What you got, therefore, was another image of the old man in a dry month, and he told himself, right gingerly but with a former humility, how fairly true it was that he amounted to nothing. The white mule, dead but for that life Mr. Coot had imagined for him in the first place, lay drenched in his own white blood, but smiling with the normal animal instinct. It was as if being nothing were the only way to having a true friend.

—Robert Early