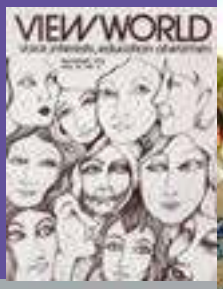
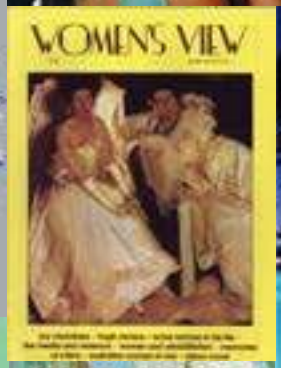
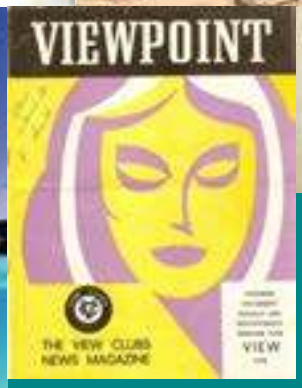
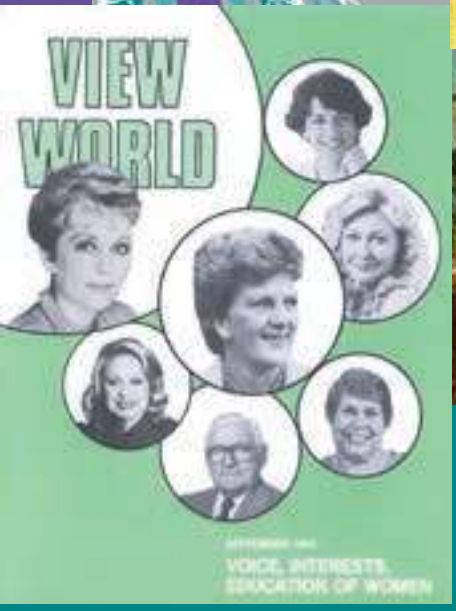
view

voice, interests and education of women









A Literary View

VIEW

FUN TIMES

FOREWORD

The Short Story Competition, begun in 1964, created wide interest among all VIEW Clubs and the enthusiasm of the members was evident by the number of women who felt inspired to submit entries. First Prize 30 guineas and a trophy, Second prize 15 guineas. The well-known author Kylie Tennant was the judge. That first competition, was won by Peta Hughes of the Lane Cove VIEW Club, "Monica and the Mink".

Over the next three decades the winning stories were published in the VIEW magazine. At times the magazine also published a range of other members' contributions. The authors chose familiar topics reflecting the world around them and the content of the stories cover a microcosm of the times.

There are stories of love, adversity, hardship, inequality and most commonly friendship; friendship burgeoning through adversity. Many stories reflect the underlying values of these VIEW women and reflect the latent literary talent which merely needed an outlet to flourish.

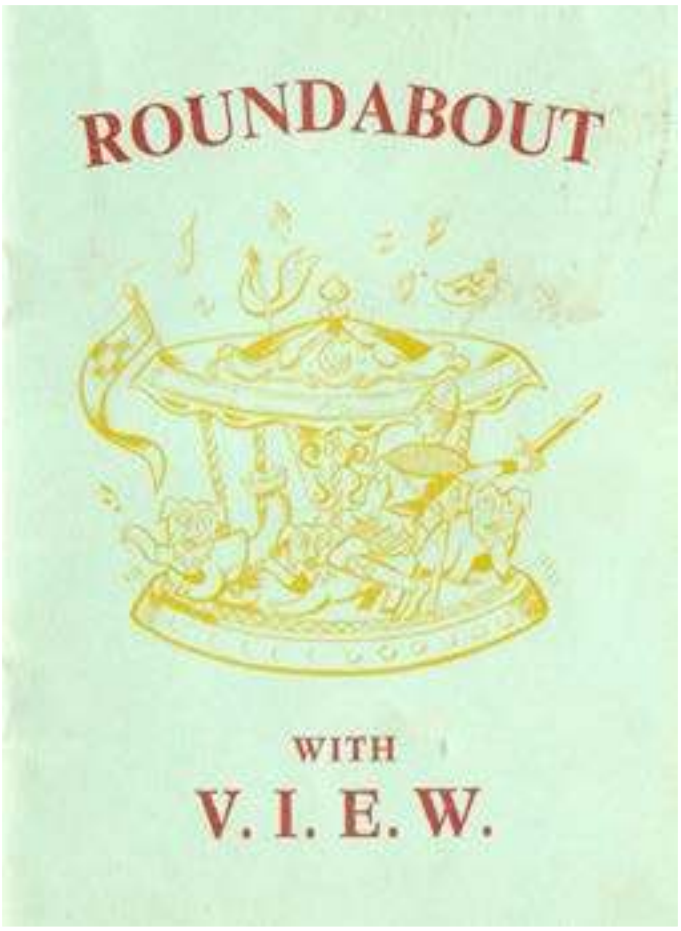
While reading through the magazines I realised this is a part of the VIEW history unknown to many of today's members. The idea of creating a collection of these stories has led to "A Literary VIEW", a compendium of VIEW Short Stories showcasing the amazing writing skills and creativity of our members.

Some writers were prolific, their names appearing frequently, while others wrote only one or two stories. Poetry also featured in many editions of the magazine.

The award continued until 1999 under a number of names. Begun as the State President's Literary Award it later became the Literary Award and in the late 1980's became known as The Editor's Award. In 1999 the Short Story Competition ceased.

This collection represents the first volume of a proposed series which gives recognition to the remarkable literary talent of VIEW Club members.

Susan Groenhout
Past National Vice President
Chair VIEW History Working Group



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ABOUT VIEW

Our Vision

Women creating and leading a more inclusive society

A valued part of The Smith Family

VIEW Clubs of Australia is a leading women's volunteer organisation and support network that empowers women to have their voices heard on issues of importance in Australian society. VIEW stands for Voice, Interests and Education of Women. Thousands of women across Australia belong to VIEW.

VIEW is the only national women's organisation solely focused on supporting and advocating for the education of young disadvantaged Australians. It is a non-religious, non-political organisation.

VIEW provides women with the opportunity to meet regularly with other women from all walks of life, establish lasting friends and help disadvantaged Australian children through supporting the work of children's charity, The Smith Family. Education and leadership opportunities are also part of the VIEW offering, in addition to the chance to be purposeful in supporting community need.

VIEW is a valued part of The Smith Family. Through social, community and fundraising activities VIEW members have supported the work of The Smith Family for more than 50 years.

More than 16,000 members across Australia, VIEW's reach and networks in local communities help to raise awareness and strengthen the impact of the work of The Smith Family.

VIEW is proud to be The Smith Family's single largest community sponsor of Learning for Life Students. Nationally, VIEW members sponsor more than 1, 100 disadvantaged students, enabling them to get the most from their education through assistance and support from The Smith Family's Learning for Life program.

We do this because we believe that by helping disadvantaged children succeed at school, we can have a lasting impact on their lives and potential generations to come.

ABOUT VIEW MAGAZINE

Since the publication of the first V.I.E.W. newsletter in September 1960, the magazine has undergone many changes in style, content and title. Originally called VIEW Points it was typed and copied in The Smith Family office.

In September 1961 ROUNDABOUT WITH V.I.E.W. was produced. A smaller book-like publication, "to give opportunity for clubs to publicise interesting activities and events and to keep members up to date and informed about VIEW Club ideas and programmes."

VIEWPOINT, appeared in about August 1962 with members asked to pay 1/- (10c.) per copy.

In July 1963 V.I.E.W. WORLD was published and continued in the same format for two years. Then in 1965 the magazine became more compact but with more content and was produced quarterly, with colour introduced VIEW WORLD remained as the magazine for twenty-eight years continuing as a forum for the women to voice their opinions on many issues and to develop their literary skills

In September 1991 the Spring Edition became Women's View. It was larger in size and contained 40 pages.
The name of the magazine again changed slightly in the Spring Edition of 1992 to WOMEN'S VIEW and in the Summer Edition 1997 to WOMEN's VIEW.
In 2000 the magazine again changed name to VIEW which remained until 2010, the 50th Anniversary of VIEW Clubs, when it became VIEW MATTERS and remains so today.

V.I.E.W. WORLD

VOICE INTEREST EDUCATION OF WOMEN

1st Prize Literary Competition (Amateur Section)

THE OLD MUSIC MASTER

By Mrs. Norrie Clarke
(Ryde Club)

Was my husband right about the old music master? I'll probably never know.

It all started when I answered an advertisement in the local paper, which read, "Piano lessons in own home. Apply Box 62." Suzie was so eager to learn the piano that although she was only five I was determined to give her the opportunity.

My husband and I had argued for months about lessons for Suzie; ever since Aunt Sarah had given me the piano, in fact.

Come to think of it, had there been no Aunt Sarah there would be no story.

Sarah Lancing had been one of the greatest concert pianists of her day. Now, crippled with arthritis, she was spending her declining years in a small convalescent home, "The Retreat", tucked away in one of the beautiful valleys of the Blue Mountains.

Years ago, I had hoped to follow in her musical footsteps. It was on the same piano that Aunt Sarah had used as a child that I practised my scales and exercises. Miss Watts, my teacher, said that I showed great promise. I can remember as if it were yesterday, the raps on the knuckles when my wrists started to sag, the tick of the metronome vibrating to the very tips of my fingers, until my scales were as smooth as syrup. Miss Watts was a martinet; nothing short of perfection pleased her. There were times when I hated her, with her tight-lipped shrivelled face and mousy grey hair dragged back into an insecure knot. At all times I respected her and feared her displeasure. If pupils displeased her, she refused to teach them, and as there was no other piano tutor in our remote little village, it was only through her that I could hope to achieve my burning ambition to be as great a pianist as Aunt Sarah.

Then one night, Miss Watts died quietly in her sleep. I can still recall the hopeless sadness I felt. My world had come to an end. Surely Miss Watts could have waited a few years longer! I had learned so little in six short months. Just enough to play a few perfect scales, master several studies, and copy spidery notes into a manuscript book.

For weeks I did not touch the piano. At 10 years of age I felt that my life was at an end too. If there was no music teacher, what was the use of living?

Time smoothed the sharp edges of my grief, but when I was seventeen I left home and came to the city, determined to fulfil my smouldering ambition. I would be a pianist — a great one!

What a hopeless dream. It took all the money I earned in the dress shop where I worked, to feed and clothe me.

Three years later I married Eric Barnes, and a year later Suzie was born, followed in two years by the twins. We weren't poor, but there certainly was no money to spare for luxuries. My dream of becoming a pianist faded.

Then, one glorious summer day, the letter arrived from Aunt Sarah. A kind friend had written it for her as her hands were too crippled to hold a pen.

"The time has come," she wrote, "for me to say goodbye to my beloved 'baby grand'. I know that you will cherish it. I remember your mother writing to me when I was in Paris, telling me how heartbroken you were when your music teacher died, and how you swore your life was ruined — imagine, at 10 years of age! There was nothing I could do at that time, but now perhaps my piano will give your little daughter the chance you once lost."

I spent a deliriously happy day rearranging furniture, so that there would be room for the piano. There wasn't much space in our small brick home in the new housing estate, but until now it had seemed like a palace compared with the cluttered little flat we had left a few months before.

By the time Eric came home, the children were as excited as I.

"Daddy, Daddy," Suzie yelled, "we're going to have a piano."

"A piano, a piano," chorused the twins.

"Aunt Sarah is giving us her piano," I shouted above the children's uproar.

In the face of all this enthusiasm, my practical husband forebore to point out that a baby grand piano just wouldn't fit in. That came later, when the children were in bed.

"Are you out of your mind, Lena?" he asked. "Just look at the way the furniture is huddled, like a bunch of frightened sheep, in the corner. And what in heaven's name have you done with my writing desk?"

I pointed out that when the piano arrived, the furniture would look perfectly all right, and what better place for a desk than in the bedroom! There were lots more I pointed out, including what a perfectly overbearing, heartless beast I had for a husband. It was our first real fight, and ended with me in tears, threatening to walk out.

In due course, the piano arrived. It not only dominated the room, it dominated our lives. The opulent satin sheen of its handsomely carved frame made our furniture look tawdry, but the changed perspective of the room was nothing compared with the change in Eric and me. Even when we weren't actually arguing, there was a vexatious undercurrent of discontent.

Now I was facing yet another quarrel. Mr. Portent, for that was the name of the music master whose advertisement I had answered, had telephoned. I hesitated when he said his fee was £1 a lesson, five lessons payable in advance. He pointed out apologetically that he had fares to pay, and there was the convenience of having the child taught in her own home.

"Oh, dear," I worried. "I do so want my little girl to have a chance, but I doubt whether my husband . . ."

"Now don't you worry," Mr. Portent interrupted. "We'll work out something. When would you like me to come?"

It was arranged that he should come on Friday afternoon at 5 o'clock.

Once again there was great excitement in the home. Ever since the 'phone call, I had been blotting out the certainty of Eric's displeasure with visions of my little daughter bowing to the tumultuous applause accorded a child prodigy. By the time Suzie arrived home from school, I had succeeded to the point where I threw discretion to the winds, and told her that she would be starting lessons on Friday.

At 5.30, when Eric's key rattled in the front door lock, he was met with more than the usual noise and enthusiasm. Over the delighted shrieks of the twins and the barking of Sam, our dog of uncertain breed, and the shrill, "Daddy, Daddy, guess what!" of Suzie, I tried to explain about the Music Master.

In the end I gave up and retired to the kitchen where saucepans were bubbling their contents over the stove.

After tea, with the children safely tucked up for the night, it was Eric who brought up the subject of the music lessons.

"Well, Suzie's in a great state about these piano lessons," he remarked acidly. "How much is it going to cost?"

"It might sound a lot," I started defensively, "but I'm sure it's going to be worth every penny, and considering the price of everything these days, it's quite cheap, and . . ."

"Tell me the worst," interrupted Eric.

"Well," I said defiantly, seeing the futility of stalling, "it's £1 a lesson, payable five lessons in advance."

"What!" he roared, "Payable in advance, indeed. Have you gone completely out of your mind, Lena? One pound a lesson is bad enough, but I refuse to pay £5 to someone who doesn't even give an address — just a box number! He'll probably take the money and that's the last we'll see of him!

"Yes, dear," I said in a trembling conciliatory voice, "I suppose you could be right, but . . ."

"Could be!" he exploded, "Honestly, you are the most naive woman. I know it gives you a nice cosy feeling to pretend that the world is full of honest citizens, but for heaven's sake grow up and face facts. If it wasn't for your ridiculous obsession about the piano, surely even you would be able to see through a trick like that."

"All right," I sighed, "suppose I ask him if he will let me pay each time, if I promise that Suzie will have six lessons."

"Ask him, nothing! You'll tell him that those are your terms." With which final utterance Eric dismissed the subject.

The next few days I wavered between hope and despair. The hope of seeing my dream fulfilled through my daughter, and the nagging fear that perhaps my husband was right. The Music Master became a symbol — for good or evil, I knew not which.

I was having a cup of tea to steady my nerves, on the Friday afternoon, when Suzie, who had been gazing through the front window for the past half hour, raced to the front door, shouting excitely, "He's here, he's here!"

As soon as I opened the door,

I knew that this was Mr. Portent. A slight little man, his whole appearance was dominated by his pompadour of silver hair, bushy eyebrows and luxurious moustache. He could have been any age, but the slight droop of his shoulders and his frail body in its shiny, worn dark suit suggested old age. His faded blue eyes behind steel r i m m e d spectacles looked dreamily into a distant world. "A world of Mozart and Beethoven," I decided.

I breathed a deep sigh. He was so like the treasured engraving of Grieg that my Aunt had once sent me that I knew for sure that everything was going to be wonderful. I'm not superstitious, but who could have denied the strange chain of circumstances — why, even the name, Portent.

Here my daydreaming came to a sudden halt. "Oh, Mr. Portent," I apologised, "I'm afraid I have been staring."

"That's quite all right, Mrs. Barnes," he said with a twinkling smile, "most people do."

"This must be Suzie," he continued.

Introductions were completed and I led the way to the loungeroom.

"What a beautiful instrument," he murmured, running his sensitive fingers over its rich polished wood. "This is a magnificent piano," he continued, "You must love music very much to possess such a treasure."

I hastened to tell him all about Aunt Sarah, of how she now lived at "The Retreat" in the Blue Mountains and could no longer keep her piano. I told him of my own hopes now transferred to my daughter. I even told him of the rows the piano had caused. It was when I was on the verge of confessing my husband's misgivings about him, that I came down to earth with a bump.

"I'm so sorry," I apologised, "I've been talking far too much."

"Not at all," he replied graciously, "what you have told me will be of great assistance."

Seeing my puzzled look, he explained, "There is more to teaching music than pointing out the crotchets and quavers. Music has soul. There are two kinds of pupil, the one who will never master more than the mechanics of the piano, the other who, given the chance, will be great. With such a mother, I'm sure Suzie will be a wonderful pianist."

"Mr. Portent," my voice almost squeaked with embarrassment, "before you go any further, what about payment. I'm afraid that I cannot afford to pay you the £5 today."

"Think no more of it, Mrs. Barnes," he said. "I can trust you. I don't need your money in advance."

I left Suzie to her music lesson, and floated out of the room on a rosy cloud of happiness. This was the most wonderful day of my life!

Eric came home just as Suzie's lesson was finishing. I hastily whispered that everything had been fixed up about payment, lest he spoil my day by asking pertinent questions of Mr. Portent, then took him into the loungeroom and introduced him to the Music Master.

Both bade each other a polite "Good Evening", and Mr. Portent told him (to my great delight) that he had a gifted little daughter.

"Her touch is superb," he had replied to my husband's sarcastic inquiry as to how he could know before the child had even learnt to play the piano.

After Mr. Portent had gone, Eric magnanimously agreed that there seemed no harm in the old bloke, but silenced my fatuous ravings about our great fortune in finding such a music master, by saying that he doubted whether the old codger could even play the piano.

That comment failed to deflate me. It was obviously the male ego, refusing to admit unconditional defeat.

The next week passed swiftly and happily, punctuated by the scale of C major, played almost incessantly by Suzie. Eric's parting remark on the day of Suzie's next lesson was, "I hope the old boy can teach her to play something with a bit more tune in it."

Mr. Portent did not let me down.

"Here is a pretty little piece for Suzie to learn," he said as Suzie seated herself at the piano that afternoon.

"What about a book of scales and a manuscript book?" I asked, thinking of the hours I had spent practising scales and copying the funny little stick men of crotchets and quavers into my manuscript book.

"Mrs. Barnes," he said, waving an admonitory finger at me, "I thought you were different from the usual run of pushing mothers."

Before I could protest, he continued.

"Give her time, plenty of time. Let her learn a few scales, a few simple pieces, but above all let her learn to love the piano. She will be a wonderful pianist if you don't kill her desire with mechanics. Forget theory for now. Let her play, not practise — don't kill the tender bud of genius."

Later that evening when I was extolling Mr. Portent's

understanding approach, instead of the enthusiasm for which I had vainly hoped, Eric replied, "The old fellow probably can't play more than a few notes himself. What a wonderful racket — pointing out a few notes on the piano and sitting back while some mother's little genius hammers them out."

I refused to be baited. The Music Master was the guiding star of my dreams.

The next week Mr. Portent was late. I joined Suzie in her vigil at the front window.

"Could anything have happened to him?" I worried. He looked such a frail man. Perhaps he was ill and all alone in his little room. Or maybe he had been knocked down by a car.

Now he would never realise the dream of having a piano of his own again. Even though I had only met Mr. Portent twice, I had learned quite a bit about him. He had told me how he used to play for the finest orchestras in the world. An accident had robbed his hands of their dexterity, and ill health had dogged his footsteps ever since. Now that he was giving lessons, it was possible to save a little and it wouldn't be long before he could replace the piano he had been forced to sell.

Recalling the pathos of his words brought tears to my eyes, and it was a very hazy figure I saw coming up the driveway ten minutes later.

"Oh, Mr. Portent," I greeted him in a quavering voice, "I thought something had happened to you."

"Thank you very much for your concern," he replied with a quiet smile, "but, you know, I'm only twenty minutes late — I missed the train."

"Thank goodness that's all it was," I replied fervently, "I couldn't bear to lose you."

"We all have to go some day, Mrs. Barnes," he replied ruefully. "Sometimes sooner than anyone expects. But enough of this gloomy talk. Come on, Suzie, let me hear how well you play your little piece."

Then, as an afterthought, he added: "I forgot to bring the book of Pianoforte Studies I promised Suzie today. I really am very sorry."

I went thoughtfully into the kitchen to start preparing tea. "Was there any truth in Eric's suggestion that Mr. Portent was a fake?" I dismissed such an ignoble thought — Eric was being nasty, and just because Suzie's music teacher did not have the same ideas of teaching as mine had years ago, there was no need for me to . . .

The telephone's shrill ring interrupted my thoughts.

"Mrs. Barnes?" queried a voice I did not recognise.

"Yes," I replied, mentally trying to work out who it could be.

"This is the matron from 'The Retreat.' Your Aunt is very ill, could you please come at once."

"Oh, no!" I sighed. "I mean, yes, of course. Oh, dear, I don't know — let me think for a minute — what can I do? My husband is not home yet, and there are the children . . ."

A voice from the loungeroom asked urgently: "What is it, Mrs. Barnes? Can I help? I don't want to intrude, I must seem very rude interrupting, but I couldn't help overhearing your distressed voice."

"It's my Aunt, she's ill and they want me to go to her. I'm her only close relative," I replied shakily.

"Tell them you'll go," Mr. Portent reassured me, "I'll stay with the children and as soon as your husband comes home he can take you."

"I can't thank you enough," I murmured, picking up the receiver that I had left dangling by its cord.

"Thank you for ringing, Matron. I'm sure my husband will drive me, and a good friend will look after my children."

"That's fine," replied the voice at the other end, "I'm sure everything will be all right, but you never can tell, a heart attack is a serious thing at her age. Goodbye, we'll be expecting you."

As I put the receiver down, Eric walked through the door. "What's wrong?" he asked urgently.

Tears were streaming down my face. I felt weak. It wasn't as if I had been really close to my Aunt. It was just that she was so much a part of my dream. The dream that had been taking on the concrete shape of reality with the advent of Aunt Sarah's piano and the old Music Master.

"I'm afraid your wife has had bad news," explained Mr. Portent who had been hovering in the background.

I found my voice, "It's Aunt Sarah — she's dying, I'm sure. Can you take me to see her, Eric?"

"But the children?" he queried.

"That's all right, Mr. Barnes, I'll look after them," Mr. Portent hastened to assure him.

Tea turned into a quick snack shared by Mr. Portent. He was wonderful. He couldn't do enough to help us get away.

We didn't speak much on the long drive to the Mountains. Eric's attempt at conversation fell flat.

"I'm sorry about the things I said about your dear old Music Master," he said in a gentle voice. "Even if he can't play a

note of music he really is a nice old chap."

"Yes, I suppose so," I answered vaguely.

"Come on, Lena," Eric urged, "snap out of it. The world hasn't come to an end. Your Aunt will probably get better."

I made no reply.

"For heaven's sake!" he added harshly, "why the great act — it isn't as if you were close to her."

"It's not that," I shook my head. "I feel as if something inside me has died. Don't ask me to explain, I can't."

The rest of the journey was made in silence.

When we arrived, a nurse answered our urgent ring on the doorbell.

"This is Mrs. Barnes," my husband explained. "How is her Aunt?"

"What is her Aunt's name, please?" queried the nurse.

"Miss Lancing," Eric replied. "But surely you must realise this. After all, you sent for Mrs. Barnes."

"Would you come inside, please, and wait a minute?" the nurse asked.

"Eric, we must get back home," I cried hysterically, "something is wrong. I know it."

"Come now, Lena, control yourself," Eric scolded, "Whatever is the matter with you. That nurse has probably only just come on duty — besides . . ."

Before Eric could say more, the Matron appeared. She was most puzzled about the whole thing. She hadn't sent for us. My Aunt was in good health. "Would I like to see her?" the Matron inquired.

"No!" I screamed wildly. "It's all because of her and her piano."

The Matron led us into her office and called a nurse to bring me a sedative. Whilst Eric telephone the police, I slumped in a chair, head in hands sobbing, "It's all my fault! Oh, my poor babies!"

We drove home at frantic speed. The police were there before us. The children were safe, thank God! They were fast asleep in their beds. When we were at last able to wake them they told us that the nice old Music Master had given them a lovely hot cup of cocoa, with lots of sugar in it, and tucked them up for the night.

The only thing missing was the piano.

The police eventually traced it, along with half a dozen others, to a second-hand piano shop. They had all been bought privately from a number of different suburbs in our district. The descriptions the hapless piano owners gave of the Music Master were all different, and so were the ruses he had employed to get them out of their houses to carry out his nefarious transactions.

Much later, when Aunt Sarah had been told the whole story, she insisted on selling her piano and buying us a small one. It fits into our lounge-room perfectly.

My "dream which became an obsession" is a thing of the past. Perhaps, in a way, the Music Master did us a favour. I could have ruined Suzie's life with that dream.

I do very little daydreaming now, but I can't help wondering idly every once in a while, "Was my husband right about the Old Music Master? Could he really play the piano, or only the scale of C Major and one simple little tune?"

I'll probably never know — unless the police catch him!

LITERARY COMPETITION

1st Prize (Professional Section), "The Looking Glass" by Mrs. Peta Hughes, of Lane Cove V.I.E.W. Club.

Also highly commended were "Old Simmo Could Pick 'Em" and "All Girls Together" both by Mrs. W. H. Williamson of Bankstown V.I.E.W. Club.

Entries were received from: Mrs. M. Berman of Maitland, Mrs. E. Berry of Belmont, Mrs. Britten of Cronulla, Mrs. E. Davis of Edgecliff, Mrs. G. Eastman of Redhead, Mrs. L. Fox of Potts Point, Mrs. E. Frazer of Neutral Bay, Mrs. R. Humphreys of Mayfield, Mrs. M. Lax of Strathfield, Mrs. T. Marsh of Thirroul, Mrs. M. McCauley of Seaforth, Mrs. K. McLeod of New Lambton, Mrs. L. Morely of New Lambton, Mrs. J. Morgan of Toronto, Mrs. N. Nelson of Rockdale, Mrs. L. Ollif of Hornsby, Mrs. B. Planner of Bankstown, Mrs. V. Rath of Oak Flats, Mrs. J. Ridley of Parramatta, Mrs. C. Seaby of Edgecliff, Mrs. G. Willats of Riverwood, Mrs. N. Wright of Campsie.

Some of the hard-working committee responsible for the Pymble V.I.E.W. Club's highly successful Fashion Parade. From left: Mesdames Gloria Guthrie, Beryl Champion (President), Jill Wilkinson, Irene McDonald, Elaine Hartley, Helen Brooke (Treasurer) and Mary Mullanny (Vice-president).

1. Belair
2. Past Presidents with NSW Volunteer Award
3. Women of View
4. Christmas 1964
5.
6. Brunswick Charter - Olga Denham (in hat)
7. Campsie B'day 63- Dulcie Callaghan (l) Heather Woods
8. Dec 1964 New Lambton VIEW Club (l-r) Josie Conway, Marie Gippel, Amy Sanders_wearing original VIEW badge.
9. Workshop 97
10. New Lambton VIEW Club President Mrs Inward with guest speaker_1964

CRY LOUD WITH NO VOICE

Winifred Thomas
MUDGEE VIEW CLUB
First Prize Short Story Competition 1975

Shimmering heat and dust clung together to form a hazy blanket over the weary hamlet, sprawling and decaying in the afternoon sun. Where the unsealed roads met, the two storeyed, green tiled hotel rose like a Victorian dowager, the iron lace across her ample bosom defying the encroaching decay. Around her feet, like frightened worshippers, the neglected shamble of houses clustered, spread and dwindled.

Beyond the sprawl the police station and residence, the school and school residence fought with their brick and tile to rise above the dejection around them. The only sign of life was a desultory trickle of smoke from a kerosene tin chimney and a few rags flapping on a wire line. Over all hung that terrible stillness born of hopelessness and idleness.

The hollow clang of the school bell struck the dozing air, shattering momentarily the stagnant stillness. In the school, as in a world apart, the reader of the social study lesson on the radio brought it to a close . . . "And now we leave our friends in under-privileged countries with the knowledge that only education and freedom from want will ensure the dignified survival of their future generations in our changing world. Goodbye, boys and girls."

"G-G-Gawd, I'm hungry," Syd muttered as he tidied his desk. He continued his conversation mentally; long ago he'd learnt that it spared him jeers and mockery. Always the damned same, the day before Endowment Day and the Social Service cheque. He'd raked up a bit of bread and dripping for their lunches but the little ones had been so hungry they'd eaten that. Had a fist fight with those thieving Morgans too. They were always hungry, they'd pinch any-body's tucker. More of them, too. Only him and Cissie to fight four big Morgans. He knew Cissie had had something to eat. He'd seen the station hand's kids give her their crusts. Gosh, he hoped Cissie wouldn't start pinching. Somehow girls pinching tucker made him feel crook.

He heard "Sir's" voice above the rumbling of his empty stomach. "Don't forget the form for your father to sign, Syd." Grinning, he raised the brown envelope to Sir and pushed it into the front of his shirt trusting that the one remaining button would stop it from falling out. Bursting with excitement, he knew an attempt to speak would be useless. The school doctor had explained it all to him. Speech therapy, about a year away in Sydney and he would be able to say what his mind thought so clearly. No more mockery and impatient shoving aside, no more of that terrible strangling helplessness.

Breathless and panting he reached home. Mum was sitting on the front door step reading a tattered copy of "True Love Stories". She didn't raise her head when he offered her the brown envelope and at the first gasping sounds of his explanation she said, "Give it to yer father."

Dad, sprawled on the stretcher that served as Syd's bed on the back verandah, was listening to the races the wireless had received a new battery last Social Service day. The letter waited unopened until the race finished, then Dad scanned it hurriedly. He cursed Syd for a stuttering fool, cursed government interference and rounded off by saying, "Yer gotta be a bloody law man to live and have kids these days."

Syd caught the envelope as his parent flicked it towards him, with instructions to "Put it up, I'll look at it again when I get time."

Eyes bright with unshed tears, the lump in his throat adding to his voiceless mouthing, he tried to explain its urgency only to be told, "Get out of me sight yer stuttering bugger." Propped up among a motley collection of empty bottles, papers, cracked cups, jars and tins on the old dresser it stood alone, austerely clean and reproachful.

Peeling off his shirt, Syd dropped it into the chipped enamel dish and walked across the broken verandah boards towards the tank. His father's irate voice from the stretcher made him hesitate.

"Go easy on the water, y'know the tank is leaking. Yer just like yer Granny. Put herself in her grave washing and scrubbing."

"W-w-w-won't w-w-w-waste m-m-m-m," but Syd didn't finish his reply. He never did when his father was around. He dodged out of sight to where the tap hung over the dirt yard and the leak made a puddle in the red dust.

His parent dragged himself off the protesting stretcher and went indoors yelling,

"Jessie, Jessie, come on. We'll go down to the pub and have a game of darts. See if we can get a beer on the slate." Syd heard his mother's feeble murmur of protest and then their feet scuffling in the dust as they went down the road.

The shirt washed with no soap was at least "water sweet" if not clean and he hung it over the wire fence to dry. At least it would look better tomorrow and Sir would be pleased. Sir never abused him for stuttering, listened patiently while he tried to speak his piece and encouraged him to write what he found easy to think yet couldn't say.

Shirt hung to dry he returned to the verandah and almost fell over the round tub, a drop of water sealed with scum and dust. A few drowned flies was evidence of one of his mother's sudden bursts of cleanliness. She had bathed the young ones and left the tub as the urge for cleanliness had left her. He grabbed the handle, tipped the water over the verandah edge, watched as it made rivulets in the dust and saw the dead flies float away.

Down the bottom of the yard the little ones were building roads in the dirt. He decided to let them play until he'd done his homework. Had to do it before it got too dark anyway because there was no kerosene for the lamp. Tomorrow was Endowment Day and if Mum paid a bit off the store bill they'd get a bottle of kerosene. Might even get a sausage for tea.

Even as he tried to concentrate on the homework his gaze kept wandering to the envelope on the dresser. Would it ever be signed? Gawd how he wished it was signed now. He still had to face tomorrow's abuse about it.

Homework finished he walked to the front door and sat on the slab that served as a step. He wished Cissie would come home. He hated her going up to the Gregory's place. Never knew what that crew might get up to and those boys were getting too foul mouthed. His plain face, old beyond his 12 years, was screwed now in deep worry lines. He pushed the straw-coloured hair from his forehead and the roots showed tan where dust and sweat had accumulated.

Like your Granny, Dad had said. How he wished Granny was here now. If he looked under the step he could still see tiny spots of white wash she had used on the step. He could just remember her. Vaguely he could recall walks to the railway station to see the train go through. Folks had gathered there for a yarn. But now the station was unattended and the train only went through once a week, nobody bothered to go for a yarn. Instead they went to the pub and kids could only play and fight on the steps outside. The saw mill had even closed down nobody wanted their sort of timber now. No "wheat lumping" either as the bulk loading was done at the big town silos. Not even a bit of bag sewing on the stations. He could remember boasts about sewing speed when the men yarned. No laughing and yarning now.

Syd hadn't thought much about things until that first trip to the big town for swimming. The bus that brought the station hands' kids to school had taken them on that never-to-be-forgotten trip. Took them every week now and each trip made Syd more aware of what could be if only! Those neat houses with gardens, that huge high school. He'd love to go there but knew he never would. He'd have to work alone by correspondence next year with what time and help Sir could spare him.

He had stayed awake half the night remembering that beautiful clean pool with tiles. He'd never seen so much

water before. He could even swim a bit. Sir had taught him and never once mentioned his tattered shorts that served as swimming trunks. Anyway, only the policeman's kids, the school teacher's kids and a couple of the station hands' kids had proper togs. The others from the little town had the same as he did.

He had tried to ask his mother why they didn't go and live in the big town and she, wary of his slow stuttering and doubtless weary of past thoughts of how to escape, had yelled, "Because that takes money. Money to move, money for rent, money to buy food until your father could get a job and we ain't got any money. Not even to get there. If we knock a bit off the store bill once a fortnight at least yer get a feed so shut up and be satisfied."

Cissie's arrival home interrupted his thoughts. She announced that she wasn't "going up there anymore to play. Those big boys are getting too good with their mauley hands," but she wouldn't say more. Syd decided he'd try and keep her closer to him. He'd seen what happened to so many of these little girls laughing and skylarking. If he mentioned it to Mum she would only box Cissie's ears, and his too, for thinking such things. No, he'd have to keep her closer to him.

Between them they dragged the young ones in and bundled them to bed, covering them with the tattered, threadbare blankets. The baby slept soundly in the old cane pram, an empty bottle clutched in his sticky paw.

Cissie bent to push the damp hair off his forehead and kissed him. Frankie was grizzling with toothache so Syd searched among the mess in the dresser drawer and, wedged in the crack at the back, found an aspro in a yellowing wrapper. He settled Frankie down in the stretcher bed they shared - they could battle with mosquitoes all night together.

All settled in their sheet-less, grubby beds he returned to the doorstep. In the distance he could hear the rumble of the traffic on the highway, so near and yet so far away. A world he had never seen until the swimming outings and the school excursions. A world from which he was barred forever unless something was done about his speech.

Even if his father signed the form of consent, Syd knew that he could never go. He could never leave the younger ones to battle for themselves, or leave Cissie to the fate of so many of the girls, "got at" by some bloke, another little baby born into this hopelessness.

He would write it down and try to explain to Sir. If he spoke it would be all garbled. The welfare man would call of course but he couldn't do anything.

They weren't flogged, they were fed when food was there and he guessed they sort of loved one another. His head dropped into his hands, tears spilled down his face, leaving clean streaks on his dusty cheeks. He smeared them away with the back of his hand. The words wrenched from his body fell loud on the quiet evening air.

"F-f-f-for g-g-g-gawd's s-s-s- sake, s-s-s-somebody help me! Oh g-g-g-gawd, h-h-h-help m-m-m-me someh-h-how!"

The pub lights glowed steadily on the corner and the Misses Evelyn and Ivy Joyner from the post office exchange, out for their evening stroll heard the cry. Ivy remarked, "That stuttering boy talks to himself now." Evelyn nodded her head knowingly and by mutual consent they walked a little faster. Not unladylike haste, but a little quickening of pace.

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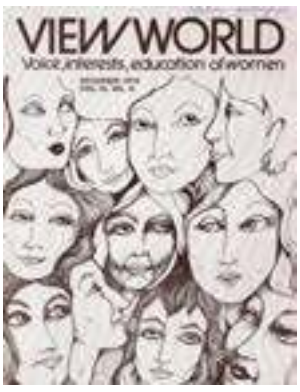

VIEW World June 1977

THE CLOSING OF A DOOR

Margaret Dawson
Springwood VIEW Club

Janet stood in the bedroom looking around her. No, there didn't seem to be any of her possessions left. She wiped away a tear — the time for tears was past. Her mind was made up.

God knows, she had tried to make Susan and Kay happy. That she, a teacher, should have failed so miserably!

She thought about the past two years. What more could she have done? Where had she gone wrong? Maybe if Colin had backed her up more...

When she had married him the children had been eight and nine. She had felt then she could make them happy. She hadn't made the mistake of trying to take their mother's place — the children remembered her too well for that. They had been very close and her death in a car accident had been a terrible blow to them.

She had met Colin at a parents' night at the school where she taught. She believed that the children had liked her then. It was only when she married their father and they thought she was trying to take their mother's place, that the hostility had shown through.

In little ways the pin pricks had built up.

"Will you tidy your room, Susan?"

"Mummy never expected me to keep my room tidy. She did everything for us. "No Kay, you can't stay up to watch television tonight."

"Mummy would" have let me."

Mummy would have done this, Mummy would have done that, until Janet had felt she was fighting a ghost with super powers.

One night she had spoken to Colin. "You must help me Colin. I don't want to take their mother's place, but if I'm to bring them up, they have to have some regard for me."

He had replied, "Oh, I'm sure they'll come around. Just give them time."

That had been six months ago. Matters had gone from bad to worse. The children, sensing their father's reluctance to chastise them, had been openly defiant. Janet had grown more distressed.

Things had come to a head when Kay and Susan asked if they might go to a friend's house after school. "If you do your homework first and put away your things, you may go for an hour. Don't be late — we are going visiting this evening." "Oh, visiting," Susan had pulled a face. "I hate silly visiting. All that stupid talk." They had left the house at 5.30pm without even saying they were going. Janet had gone to their room: the homework was half done nothing had been put away. Suddenly the tears had welled in her eyes. Would they ever accept her?

At 6.30pm Colin had arrived home. "Where are the girls?" "They've gone to a friend's house," she had replied. "They should be back any minute. I'll get tea."

By 7.30 it was almost dark and there was no sign of them. "I think I'll ring their friend's house and find out what's keeping them," Janet had said.

"Good idea." Colin was getting worried.

They had rung. "No," Mrs Jones said, "the children aren't here. We haven't seen them ... No, they didn't arrange to play here."

By eight o'clock they had been nearly frantic. "Do you have any idea where they might be?" Colin had asked. "No," Janet had replied "they never tell me anything." Colin had looked at her, surprised at the note of bitterness. "Well, I'm going to look for them."

"I'll stay here, in case they return," Janet had said. "If you don't find them soon I'll ring the police. Try the park first. They know they must not stay there after dark but they must be somewhere." Colin had driven off and in less than half an hour returned with two unrepentant girls.

"Where were they?" Janet had asked.

"Playing in the park with a gang of children."

"Why did you lie to me?" Janet had asked quietly.

Susan had tossed her head. "Aw, you wouldn't let us play in the park after its dark. The other kids do. You're a meanie. Mummy would have let us."

Suddenly something had snapped in Janet. She had slapped Susan's face as hard as she could. There was an appalled silence. Susan burst into tears and ran to her father. "I don't want her here. I hate her."

Janet stood, aghast at what she had done.

"You should apologise for hitting Susan," Colin had said, standing with his arms around Susan and Kay.

Janet had looked at the three of them, allied against her. "What about me?" she said bitterly. "Who will apologise to me?" She turned and left the room.

Since that miserable day it had been a subdued household. Colin had tried to speak to her and, at first, she had been prepared to listen. But when it became obvious his first concern was for Susan and the slap she had received, she closed her mind against them.

She had seen clearly there was only one avenue left for her — to leave them. If Colin had supported her even a little she could have stuck it out. All his love, too, was for his first wife. It wasn't enough for Janet. She wanted someone to love her for herself, not to be a substitute for ever for another woman.

She had made her plans. One morning she had gone to the city and by the end of the day she had found a job and a small flat. It wasn't much, but later when some of the pain had gone, she would find something else — build a new life for herself.

Should she talk to Colin? Tell him and the girls what she intended doing? No, she decided to leave a letter.

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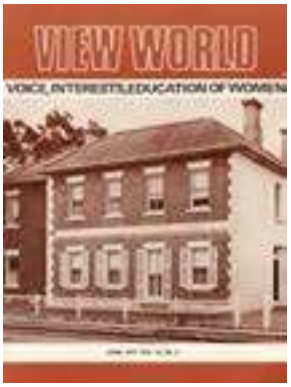

VIEW World December 1981

MARY'S DILEMMA

Milita Houlihan
Illawarra VIEW Club

It was a Saturday afternoon in late summer. Mary, was treating herself with some of her hard-earned pocket money. She pressed her face against the glass case of the sweet shop, frowning a little with concentration.

Mr. Potter looked at her over the rim of his spectacles which sat on the tip of his nose.

"Well now, Mary, Mary, quite contrary, what will you have today?"

Mary giggled. "I'll have six rainbow balls please," she said, untying her precious coin from the corner of her handkerchief as she spoke. Mr. Potter put the sweets in a paper bag, adding an extra one for good measure.

"Don't eat them all at once" he admonished with mock severity, handing them to Mary across the counter.

"I won't, I like to make them last! Bye, Mr. Potter!"

Once outside the shop Mary skipped along the deserted pavement. Popping one of the sweets in her mouth she sucked feverishly, taking it out every now and then to see if it had changed colour. When the ball had diminished enough in size she bit into it, savouring the tiny piece of chocolate in the centre.

Busy with her thoughts, she rounded the corner of the street, only to stop abruptly as she caught sight of the man. He was sitting on the grass strip, his back propped against the fence, his head lolling forward onto his chest.

Quite suddenly he sensed her presence and raised his head, transfixing her with his glassy stare as she stood there, perfectly still, her breath coming in quick panting gasps.

The man's unexpected presence had startled her. She realised instantly that he was very drunk, and, although every instinct told her to leave him, to run for home only half a dozen houses or so further along the street, she could not move, fear held her immobile.

Mumbling a few incoherent words, the man tried to raise his arm. Mary flicked her eyes toward the movement and saw that he was holding an almost empty rum bottle, which he was trying to put to his lips.

She watched, motionless, as the lolling head slowly came upright, his arm lifted and mouth and bottle met with a sickening gurgle. Some of the dark liquid dribbled down his chin and onto his shirt as he drank.

Not until the bottle was empty did he allow his arm to flop back to his side, the bottle rolled on the pavement as he leaned back.

The man motioned feebly with his hand and said "C'mere, girl!"

She desperately wanted to help him, but she was too afraid. She had already seen a great deal of drunkenness in her few short years and she knew all about the unpredictable violence which often accompanied it. But this was the first time she had witnessed such a scene as this. The man's total inability to control his movements held her fascinated despite her tear.

"C'mere girl!" he repeated, trying unsuccessfully to get to his feet. Mary looked at him with a mixture of pity and disgust, the fear receding as she realised his helplessness. He could not hurt her it he could not move, she reasoned. She closed her eyes for a moment and shivered remembering cruel blows administered by drunken, flailing hands on other occasions. Almost immediately, she was brought back to reality as the man spoke again, this time with a pleading in his voice which she could not ignore. "Help me, girl! For pity's sake, help me! "

Compassion moved her to action as he tried to stand. Placing her two arms around one of his, she held him firmly as he gradually eased himself to his feet. Once in a standing position, he lurched forward and she thought he would fall, but somehow managed to right himself. She loosened her grasp on his arm, placed it across her sturdy little shoulders and thus supporting him, spoke for the first time. "Come on Dad," she said softly, "I'll take you home."

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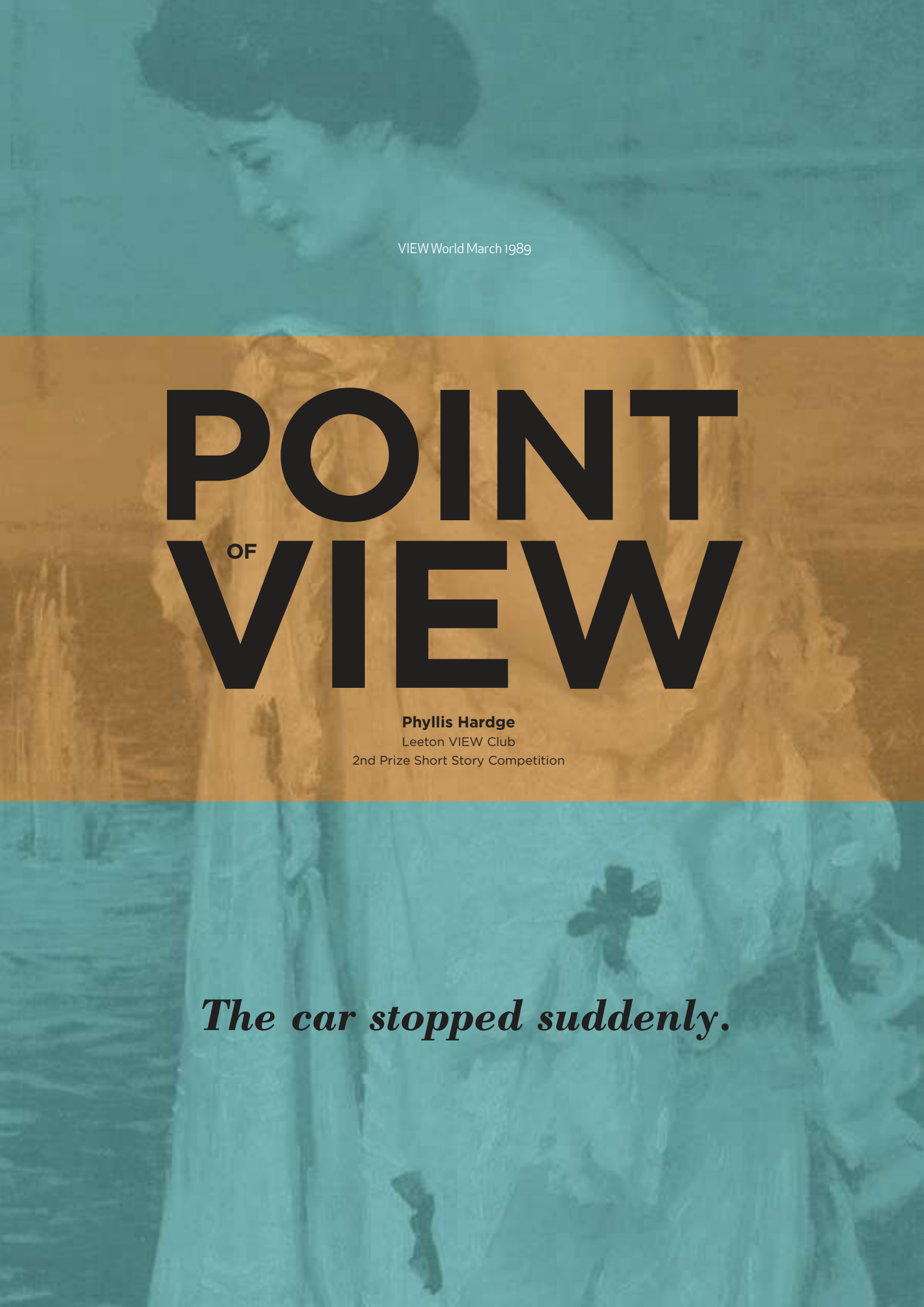
VIEW World March 1989

POINT OF VIEW

Phyllis Hardge
Leeton VIEW Club
2nd Prize Short Story Competition



The car stopped suddenly.

"Blow, there's a wall dividing this from the old part of the cemetery." The driver, looking about added, "that looks as if it might be the Presbytery, their land goes right down to the end, we'll go back, and go down there".

"Don't you think we'd better ask before we trespass, Evie?" asked Lois. Without reply Evie reversed, drove to the house and swung into the gate in a whirl of dust.

"I do think we should ask first," protested the nervous looking little woman, "it is private property after all."

"Oh, for goodness sake, Dorrie, if you're all so worried I'll ask," snapped the red-haired driver. She jumped from the car irritably, and strode to the door, put her finger on the bell-press and held it there.

An elderly woman opened the door.

"We are members of the Historic Tombstones Society," announced Evie grandly, "and I am leading a field research team to try to find any old graves of local or general historic interest in this area. We can't get to the older section of the cemetery from the main entrance. It'll be alright for us to go down through here won't it?"

"Well, I don't think Father would object, the woman replied, smiling, "but would you drive down slowly please'? It has been so dry. The dust…….you know?"

Evie merely gave a curt nod, climbed into the car and sped down the track, dust streaming behind.

"I thought you were asked to drive slowly," commented the fourth member of the party.

"It may suit Bushies to take all day to get something done Thelma, but if we want to achieve as much as we'd like we've no time to waste!"

The other three looked at each other; really, sometimes Evie did come on a bit strong! Still, it was only for three days.

"That'll likely be more than enough," thought Dorrie, "no wonder her son-in-law calls her Gingersnap!"

The search began, Evie enthusing over one headstone dated 1882, about the time of the little town's foundation. Odd name though; Jouhensten. Never heard of it before. Probably illiterate and it should have been Johnstone, she decided.

"Maybe some of them were illiterate, but I'd have thought they would know what their own names were," Lois said dryly.

Dorrie was tired. She wished she hadn't come when Kate had to drop out of the expedition. The Meetings with all the interesting history and the photos were fascinating, but grubbing around in what had been other peoples' grief was depressing. Too real, too close. She leaned on the wall, and her attention was drawn to a grave just beyond the division. Obviously new with grass neatly trimmed, the masses of flowers at its foot made her blink. They were so unsuitable! Purple and yellow dahlias, red zinnias, pink daisies with the red roses stuck in them looked garish.

"Like a brass band at a carnival," she thought, her gaze travelling to the wooden cross at the head; tears pricked as she read the lettering. Poor baby, only seventeen. Of course. She would have loved bright colours and loud bands. Then she recognised the name. She called back to the others.

"That's not a misspelt name, there's a new grave here, same name."

Evie came running, her expression reminiscent of a terrier that's cornered a rat.

"Great! Then they're still here; we'll be able to quiz them personally and get all the real history!"

"Our Evie couldn't be faulted for her sensitivity could she?" murmured Thelma, noting the date on the cross. Her question brought a wry smile and a faint headshake from Lois.

The utility came through the main gate stopping close to the grave claiming the women's attention. The man who alighted wore dusty work clothes and jacket, a wide brimmed hat was pulled

down over his face. He took no notice of them at all, walking slowly dragging his feet on the gravel.

"He's not an old man, but he looks as if life has completely beaten him," mused Thelma to herself.

As he reached the cross he seemed unsteady. Folding his arms on the top of it he laid his head on them for a few minutes, then pulled himself up and stood head bowed, with hands hanging limply at his sides. Suddenly he put his hand into the jacket pocket and produced a can of beer. Almost savagely he ripped off the pull ring, took a gulp of the liquid then walked up and down by the grave pouring the rest of the contents over it. He crushed the can in his hands and threw it down stamping it flat, and with great care placed it in the grass at the foot of the cross.

He fell rather than sat on the grass, face in his hands, head on his knees, his shoulders heaving.

The watching women recoiled in shocked horror.

"I've never known such wicked desecration," whispered Evie. Lois and Thelma clucked and moaned their dismay, Dorrie burst into tears.

"This must be reported at once," said Evie and they headed back towards the Presbytery.

"His grief seemed genuine somehow," said Thelma, "but still . .

"Maudlin drunk, the disgusting beast, defiling a young girl's grave. I'll get them to ring the police, the sooner that animal's behind bars the better," growled Evie.

She alighted opposite the Presbytery door, which was opened this time by the Priest. The watchers in the car saw her launch into a tirade and the Priest held up his hand as if to curb the flood of words. Disregarding the gesture, Evie continued on, seeming only to pause to ask a question of him. He shook his head and appeared to negate her story in some way. She shouted at him, and he stepped forward shaking his finger at her as he spoke, then turned and went inside, closing the door. She stared at it disbelievingly for a few moments and returned.

"I've never been so insulted in my life," she raged, and in answer to Thelma's question, "no, he is not going to call the police, but when I get back to Sydney I intend to contact the Archbishop, and tell him this whole sordid story, including what that disgustingly rude cleric said to me. It's not going to rest here, believe me."

"What did he say?" Lois asked.

"He said that I shouldn't set myself up as a judge without the prerequisite knowledge and that to become a worthy Christian I should learn love and charity to my fellow beings. Then he had the cheek to say, 'Never believe all you hear, and only half of what you think you see'. What next may I ask?"

The drive back to the hotel was made in shocked, puzzled silence.

"Hullo ladies, have a good morning?" asked the waitress as she approached them with a smile and offered the menu.

"I'm afraid not," Lois answered, "we witnessed a very distressing incident at the

Cemetery…….

"And when I reported it to the priest," interrupted Evie, "he insulted me. I have never heard such downright rudeness."

"Father Wallace was rude to you? Oh, I think you must have misunderstood him. He is the nicest, kindest person you could find. He wouldn't hurt anyone's feelings deliberately. It doesn't matter who or what they are, Father Wal is kind and good to everyone." The waitress was plainly shaken.

"So I suppose that's why he is protecting that drunken beast who poured beer all over a girl's grave," rasped Evie sarcastically, "he's so kind?"

"Oh, you saw Clarrie Jouhensten out there today." [The woman pronounced the name Yowunsteen.] "Yeah, I saw Clarrie and the boys taking the flowers out to her early this morning,

and I guessed where he was going when I saw him drive in at dinner time. Poor devil.

"That family has been here since time started, I believe, and from all accounts they were good people and the men were hard workers, but a bit solid on the booze. Clarrie's father was a drunk, no risk. A couple of his brothers can flog the grog too; but Clarrie had always been different from the others; he's never been drunk in his life. He and his wife weren't kill-joys. They'd have a drink at a party or at Christmas or something like that, but they hated drunkenness.

"Funny thing, most of that family had boys, hardly any girls, so when Sherryl was born there were great rejoicings. Clarrie and Pearl had two boys, Davey and young Greg later, but really Sherryl was their pride and joy. She was a pretty little thing. All three kids were as bright as buttons, good kids too. Then Pearl died when Sherryl was about ten. Clarrie was the saddest sight, he just couldn't seem to believe what had happened.

"His family offered to take the kids for him [they're a close lot if there's any trouble) but he said no way, he'd rear them. He did too. He was pretty strict with them, but liked them to enjoy sports, and saw that they got a lot of fun out of life. He stressed on them that they had to do well at school so they could get decent jobs and not have to spend their lives in hard slogging. They did real well, and Clarrie worked all the hours there were to buy them the books and things they needed for study. He taught them to be honest and truthful. They really copped an earful if he ever caught them out in a lie, so if those kids tell you something now, you know that they really believe it's the truth; but the worst crime, in Clarrie's eyes, is to make a promise and then not keep it. He really drilled that into them, and if those kids make a promise, you can bet your bottom dollar that they'll keep it. He made all those kids promise that they'd never touch the booze till they were grown up. He kept at them solidly over that. He reckoned that they might have inherited a weakness for drink that could ruin their lives, if they didn't watch themselves.

"The boys are pretty good at school and lessons, they say, but Sherryl was really clever, and she was going on to Uni. The Head said she'd have no trouble with her exams and Entrance, so it was all arranged, she was to have gone this year.

"She made her Debut last year, and Clarrie was that proud of her! Mind you, she did look lovely; but when it came to the splash of bubbly for the Debs, Sherryl had lemonade. You could see that got to her a bit, and I guess she and Clarrie had a few words about it, after the Ball. It seems he said that as soon as she was old enough to make up her own mind when and what and if she wanted to drink, she could, but she must never let other people make those decisions for her. She agreed, but asked just when did he think that would be? So he promised her that when she turned eighteen he would buy a can of beer and share it with her, and then she could decide for herself.

"A couple of months later, she got sick. Didn't seem much at first. They thought she had a bad dose of flu, but then she was moaning and crying with pains in her head. Clarrie called Doc Bruce, and the Doc rushed her to Sydney by ambulance right away. When Clarrie got to the hospital they told him there was only a very small chance that she'd recover, and that if she did, there was a big chance she would be hardly more than a vegetable. Some sort of meningitis they said it was.

"Poor beggar, first Pearl and now Sherryl! He's only keeping going for the boys' sake I reckon. All the life's gone out of him, you'd never guess what a game, fun loving bloke he used to be.

"He reckons he's always taught his wife to keep any promises they made and today he's going out to Sherryl to keep the one he made to her, and share a can with her, like he said. She'd have been eighteen today, y'see. I guess it's only half the promise though, she never did get the chance to decide for herself. Still, you can follow the drift of Clarrie's thinking. O'course, I suppose whether or not you think he did the right thing, just depends on how you look at it.

"D'youse wanna order now?"

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VIEW World June 1976

A BEGINNING TO FRIENDSHIP

Margaret Dawson
Springwood VIEW Club

The sky was grey and overcast. Elizabeth Rogers looked out her window at the choppy dull sea. She thought wryly the sea and sky reflected her mood.

Coming to live in this small coastal town had seemed such a wonderful idea when she and Robert had discussed it before his retirement. The year they had together had been wonderful. They had done all the things there hadn't been time for while he was working.

It had come to an abrupt end one cold April morning when Robert had suffered a fatal heart attack. Elizabeth had been nine years younger than her husband, so here she was, a lonely, middle-aged woman wondering what to do with her life. Should she sell and go back to town? Or find a job here, or...

Restlessly her mind went round and round. Peter her son had advised her to sell and take a flat in town so that she could be nearer him and his family. Much as Elizabeth loved her son, Babs her daughter-in-law, and their two children, something in her was reluctant to give up the dream she and Robert had planned for so long. Helen her daughter was overseas but wrote and told her she must do what made her happiest.

Elizabeth's house was on a slight hill overlooking a wide curving bay. There were other houses dotted about but, for the most part, occu¬pied only in the summer months by holidaying families.

When she and Robert had come to Nap Bay they hadn't worried about the near-deserted beach. There hadn't been a need for friends then. Now that summer was here, more people were visiting the Bay and Elizabeth spent more time walking with her dog along the sea front, listening to the happy laughter of the children, enjoying the people and their companionship.

But Elizabeth thought today's grey skies would prevent most people from spending the day at the beach. After breakfast she would take Angus, the dog, for a walk then spend the rest of the day reading. Always a lover of books, she spent more and more time reading.

She let herself out shutting the front door behind her. The dog ran on ahead, glancing around to make sure she was following. As she stepped briskly along, a pleasant-looking woman wearing a green coat and carrying a shopping bag passed her. They glanced at each other and smiled faintly.

Elizabeth walked right around the bay and then headed home. After lunch she glanced out the window. The woman was sitting on a seat on the grass verge over-looking the beach. She was obviously packing the remains of her lunch into the bag at her side.

"Must be cold for her out there," thought Elizabeth. She switched on the fire, picked up her book and sat in her favourite chair. At four o'clock she yawned and put down her book — time for a cup of tea. Going into the neat and shining kitchen she put on the kettle and laid a tray with a cup and saucer and biscuits for one. She sighed as she picked it up, if only there had been two cups on the tray. Carrying it into the lounge room she decided to sit by the window. She liked watching the sea in all its moods.

The woman in the green coat was still sitting there! Elizabeth was tempted to invite her in for a cup of tea but being naturally shy, she did nothing of the sort.

What on earth was the woman doing just sitting there? The last bus for Port Rean, 10 miles away, would be leaving soon and she hadn't noticed a parked car. In fact, on this cold day there had been only a couple of cars at the beach. The occupants hadn't lingered long.

Elizabeth shrugged. Oh well, it was none of her business.

When next she glanced through the window the seat was empty. It was almost dark now and as she was pulling the curtains she thought she saw something lying on the grass. She looked closer — there was someone! It looked like the woman in the green coat.

Quickly she ran across the road and over the grass. She knelt beside the woman who was lying face-down on the grass. Elizabeth turned her over gently and shook her, "Are you ill?" Bending over she saw the woman was unconscious. She thought she caught a faint smell from her breath. Was she drunk? Elizabeth looked at the neat figure, the greying hair and the well-polished shoes — she didn't have the appearance of a drunk.

She would have to get help — get an ambulance, quickly. In a few minutes she was making a phone call. Maybe she had better get the car and go with the sick woman to the hospital. She'd get ready, perhaps there was something she could do to help?

It didn't take long for the ambulance to arrive and Elizabeth took the men to the unconscious woman, now covered with one of Elizabeth's blankets. "Will she be all right?" she inquired of the ambulance men.

"Don't worry, they'll soon see what's wrong at the hospital," one of the men replied.

"I'm coming with you," she said. "I'll follow in my car. I'd like to know if she will be all right."

Quickly the unconscious figure was placed in the ambulance and they were on their way. At the hospital Elizabeth gave what information she could and handed over the shopping bag belonging to the patient.

The sister in charge was brisk and efficient. "If you would wait in there," she pointed to a waiting room, "we'll let you know when she has been examined what is wrong with her. You are a relative?"

"No." Elizabeth explained the circumstances of her being there.

"Very well," the sister replied. "We'll look into her bag. Her name is probably there."

Elizabeth sat in the waiting room wondering what was wrong with the woman she had seen for the first time that day, feeling as involved as if she had known her for years.

Later the sister came in. "Well," she said, "we have the patient's name, Mrs Jane Hickman. She's a little better now."

"What's wrong with her sister?" Elizabeth asked.

"She's in a diabetic coma. You cannot see her tonight I'm afraid, but you can visit her tomorrow if you would care to."

"Thank you," Elizabeth replied. "I would like to see if she is all right. I'll come tomorrow then. Goodnight sister."

The next day she bought flowers before going to the hospital. She wondered if she should buy other things for Mrs Hickman but decided to wait and see if her family had been to visit and seen to her needs.

When she arrived at the hospital Mrs Hickman was sitting up in bed looking a lot better. Elizabeth could see that she was rather older than herself, a round-faced, pleasant looking woman.

Mrs Hickman held out her hand. "How can I ever thank you," she said in a quiet, educated voice. "Sister Lucas has told me all about you and how kind you have been. What a fool you must think me?"

"No, no....not at all," Elizabeth replied. "I was only too glad to help."

"You must have thought I was quite out of my mind sitting there in the cold all day. The truth is, I have just retired from teaching and I miss it more than I can say. I have no family, I am a widow. Yesterday I felt I would like to sit by the sea and think about things. It was no sort of a day to do such a thing, I know, but some-times one has to get out of the house."

"Yes indeed," Elizabeth replied. "I know exactly how you feel. You live in Port Read Mrs Hickman?"

Jane Hickman nodded. "Yes, for many years."

In no time both women were chatting like old friends. When it was time to go Elizabeth rose reluctantly. She had really enjoyed their chat. "Would you like me to come again tomorrow, Mrs Hickman?" She had quite forgotten her shyness.

"Do call me Jane," the other woman replied. "Yes, I would love you to come if you wouldn't mind."

They shook hands and smiled warmly at each other. In both their minds was the same thought, the future.

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TRUST ME MUM

Margaret Paice Harriss
Springwood VIEW Club

"Mum, do you know where my soccer boots are?"

"Aren't they in your shoe cupboard?"

"No, I've looked there."

I put down my coffee cup with a sigh. My voice floated ahead of me along the hall: "Greg, I've told you so often to put your things away."

He was scrounging in the cupboard like a dog digging up a bone. "I've gotta find them Mum. I'm trying out for the school team today!"

"Then why couldn't you have looked for them last night?" I began opening and shutting drawers, "you'll miss the bus, Greg!"

Suddenly he slapped his thigh, a grin cleared the anxious frown. "Gee, I've just remembered. I left them in the garage because they were muddy." He rushed out, almost knocking me over, and was soon back swinging the mud-streaked soccer boots from their red laces.

"Greg, you'll squash your lunch!" I protested as he jammed the boots into his school case.

"Can't be helped, Mum. Gotta go. Bye!" His cool boy-lips touched my cheek briefly and I thought with a pang, he has to stoop now, to kiss me.

My coffee was cold. I toyed with the idea of making another cup, but today was Friday, and my yoga class was at 10. I'd promised to pick Alice up at 9.30.

It didn't take long to do the bare essentials of house work, but when I got to Greg's room it was a different proposition. I surveyed the mess – the unmade bed, clothes and pyjamas on the floor mixed up with the pile of stuff he'd unearthed while looking for the soccer boots. Oh lord, I thought, I feel like leaving the whole lot for him to clean up when he comes home. By force of habit I began picking up the clothes, shoes, a tennis racquet with broken strings. There was the brown sock I'd been looking for for weeks – must have been inside a shoe. And what was in that small, clear plastic envelope? I stooped to pick it up, noticing that it had been slit neatly along the top.

Inside was some sort of greenish-grey fibrous stuff which I couldn't identify. Was it some sort of tobacco? Can the young monkey be smoking behind my back? Well, they all do, don't they? Sooner or later they all try it. I wasn't above snitching the odd fag from my dad's cigarette packet when I was Greg's age. Still, I wouldn't have come at rolling my own. But this didn't really smell like tobacco. What did it remind me of? It looked a little bit like dried grass….

GRASS! It hit me like a bomb. Don't they call marijuana grass? But my son is only 13 years old. He wouldn't – would he?

I remembered all the talk which had been going around about drug taking among high school students. There had even been stories about Greg's school being involved and I'd asked him about it.

"Greg, has anyone ever offered you drugs? Do you know anyone at school who smokes whatsit – marijuana?" He had laughed. 'Don't be mad, Mum. That talk, it's a lotta bull. Nobody at my school smokes grass."

Of course he can't be, I reassured myself. I'd know, wouldn't I? They say you can tell. A niggling voice inside my head jeered: if you happen to be looking for symptoms, and if you know what you're looking for.

Anyway, where would he get the stuff? I remembered last night – late shopping night, at the Plaza. Greg hardly ever went with me but last night he wanted to, and he'd met up with that mob of kids he'd called 'me mates'. Scruffy looking lot! Well, no scruffier than Greg, I suppose – they will wear those awful jeans, and the fights we'd had over getting his hair cut. Now I came to think of it, Greg had looked at me in a funny way when I broke into the group to tell him I'd finished shopping and was ready to go home. They had grinned, nudged each other…was that when they'd slipped it to him?

Oh God, what ought I to do? Go up to the school. Or should it be the police? It was a crime, wasn't it – possession of? But could I report my own son? Dobbing him in, he'd call it. How often he had said, "Mum, you don't dob people in."

I thought of ringing Alice, telling her I wouldn't be going to yoga; but there was a whole day to get through somehow. Perhaps it would help me to think things out.

I showered and dressed, pulling shirt and slacks over my yoga tights and leotard. Alice was waiting for me at her corner. "Hi, Jane," she breezed, "how's it going?"

"Oh – all right." I leaned across to unlock the door for her. What would you think Alice, I wondered, if I told you I've just found out that Greg's smoking marijuana? But I wouldn't tell her. I liked Alice, we'd been friends for a long time, but I didn't want to talk about this. It was going to be hard enough to tell John – he'd just about murder Greg. Somehow, they never managed to see eye-to-eye about anything lately, Greg and his father. Was that why? Lack of communication was blamed for so much teenage revolt, wasn't it?

As I pulled out into the traffic I narrowly missed clipping another car. The driver blasted his horn and yelled, "Don't you have any indicators, lady?"

I don't know why I bothered going to yoga. I couldn't concentrate. I was inhaling when I ought to have been exhaling, using my right leg when everybody else was on their left.

The relaxation period was a dead loss where I was concerned. How can you relax when your brain is buzzing with the awful possibility of your only son being either a drug taker – or, a 'pusher'?

I dropped Alice off afterwards, refusing her offer of a bite of lunch. "I have a headache, Al," I said lamely, "I think I'll go straight home. You don't mind, do you?"

"Of course not, hon." But she looked at me shrewdly. I could almost hear her brain ticking over, wondering if John and I had had another of our rows.

It was an eternity to four o'clock, when Greg's bus was due, and all the time I was going over in my mind what had to be said to him and how.

At last the bus stopped at the end of our street and spewed forth its cargo of noisy youngsters. He came, as usual, racing the dog up the drive. His case scrunched as he slid it along the porch tiles and I had the door open before he had time to reach the latch. I looked at him, brown face half hidden by the untidy thatch of fair hair as he bent to pat the adoring spaniel. My throat was tight.

He glanced up, grinned, "Mum, I made

the team!"

I should have congratulated him, but all I could do was hold out the plastic envelope.

"Greg, what's this?"

He gave it only a passing glance as he headed for the refrigerator. "Oh that? Grass."

Hardly consoling. I followed him into the kitchen. "Where did you get it from? Now don't lie to me, Greg!"

"Huh? One hand on the fridge door. "On the golf course. Why?"

"So that's where they peddle the stuff. What were you going to do with it?" I asked coldly.

He reached for the milk bottle. "Oh, it's no good now, its dead. The green-keeper had just mown the greens when I was up there the other day, so I scraped up some of the cuttings and put them into that bag the tees came in. It was such nice fine grass I thought it would make a good lawn for my model city – but I left it in the golf bag and forgot all about it. Hey, what's the matter, Mum? You look funny?"

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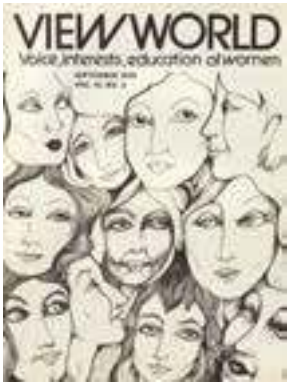

Robin Pickford

I am in my eighties, widowed, and now live in Bathurst NSW, which is closer to family.

I have always loved writing and still keep journals and diaries – using the computer, these days. Sadly, Bathurst VIEW Club folded years ago, although efforts are being made to re-open soon. I still keep in touch with Wellington club members.

In the 1970's, when VIEW Clubs were formed in many small country towns, suddenly there was a connection to other women across Australia and publication of the VIEW magazine made it easy to communicate.

My husband and I, with our four children, lived on our farming and grazing property near Wellington, NSW. Life on the land and raising four kids kept me occupied but it was not until I joined VIEW that I began writing stories and articles for my own interest.

VIEW magazine advertised an annual Display Day, held in Sydney Town Hall, and Short Story writing was one of the many sections.

In 1971, I submitted a couple of stories and to my amazement and delight, I won a First and a Third place.

Encouraged by this success, I submitted articles to other magazines - Women's Weekly, Post and local newspapers and to the VIEW magazine, and they were published. I kept participating successfully in the Story writing competitions, and gained confidence in my writing ability.

Holding a variety of positions on VIEW club committees has contributed enormously to my life, and has helped me develop assurance and confidence, as well as making valuable contacts and lifelong friendships.

VIEW has made me Grow, and I am thankful for those VIEW years in my life, which still continue.

INDIAN SUMMER

Else Colmer
Corrimal VIEW Club

Marion Brewster stirred. She looked at her watch, seven o'clock, must make a move, she thought. She knew if she didn't George would stay in bed, waiting as usual for the house to come to life.

Slowly she sat up and looked at her sleeping husband. She felt vaguely discontented. Today was her 45th birthday. Was this all there was to life? Getting up, cooking breakfast, getting George off to work, washing clothes and dishes, ironing, cooking dinner and waiting for her husband's ponderous footsteps on his return.

She looked at George again, round face — mouth a little open — double chin and near bald head. A kind man and a faithful husband, but oh, how boring he had become! In fact, George had always been boring.

She knew she should count her blessings — they had a good home and their children, Sara and Phillip, were both independent.

The trouble was within her. When the children had found their niches in life, well-meaning friends had advised her to find an outlet — some form of sport or a part-time job. She was not sport minded and what was she trained for? Housekeeping? She was sick of her own chores!

George asked nothing more than to jog along in their present cabbage-like existence. Even their sex life was dying an unnatural death. Once sex had been an important part of their lives, but with the advent of children, George gradually receded into the background, quite contentedly it appeared.

George grunted and opened his eyes. Normally they were nice brown eyes, but this morning they looked opaque. Why is it, she asked herself resentfully, that George (and she supposed herself, too) looked so frowsy in the mornings?

He yawned, "What time is it dear?"

"Time to get up I suppose," she replied shortly.

"Anything wrong Marion?"

No, should there be?"

The answer satisfied her husband, he said no more.

Marion rose and putting on her dressing gown looked in the mirror. She saw a slender woman with a youthful figure, brown hair going slightly grey, bright blue eyes, fairly good skin and (this she realised only too well) the sagging jawline which meant approaching middle age.

While she waited for the kettle to boil the phone rang.

"Hello Mother. Happy birthday." This was Sara ringing from London. "Sorry I can't get down, exams and all that jazz. You should get your present and card today. Hope you have a good birthday."

"Thank you darling."

Marion was touched by her daughter's call but was sorry she could not be home for her birthday. "Are you sure you can't make it?" she asked.

"Positive, but I'll come as soon as I can. And perhaps Stephen can get away from the hospital. Must go now Mother. Tons of love. Bye, bye."

Marion sighed. Oh well, mothers had to take a back seat sooner or later.

After a cup of tea she felt better, George appeared in the doorway, "I'll join you in a cuppa." He drank, as usual, rather noisily, blowing when it was too hot. Marion wondered whether she had always been so critical.

Thank heavens, she thought, George has forgotten this birthday. After years of hints she had deliberately allowed this one to come without reminders, not wanting to make it an occasion.

"Who was ringing so early Marion?" George inquired between mouthfuls.

"Sara," she replied.

His eyes lit up. "Ah, how nice. When is she coming home? Waiting for Stephen to get a weekend off I expect. We're lucky parents to have children like Sara and

Phillip."

"Yes," she replied slowly, "I suppose we are."

George chuckled. "You suppose! You mean you know we are."

How damned complacent can a man get, Marion thought fiercely. It's not luck, I worked hard bringing them up, denying myself small pleasures and turning myself into a cross between a medical journal and a Philadelphia lawyer so that George could retire behind his papers.

"Must be off now dear. Time and tide wait for no man." Beaming fondly at her he left for the city where he worked for a firm of importers.

Automatically she performed the routine chores. She remembered in bygone years the sense of satisfaction a spotless house had meant, the excitement she had felt buying small articles for the house. She gazed around her well-furnished home. Why had she lost all the small joys?

She felt rebellious. The mere thought of doing chores she had done thousands of times before then waiting for George to come home became unbearable. Today, she decided to do something entirely different.

First, she called a leading beauty salon in the city and made an appointment. Then, feeling reckless, she booked a taxi. Already she felt exhilarated.

She looked with distaste at the clothes in her wardrobe. How out of date they seemed! A navy suit she had bought a few months ago seemed her best choice. At the time she had thought it unsuitable — the skirt was too short. Today it seemed ideal.

She dressed carefully, giving more thought than usual to her accessories. When the taxi arrived she was ready and waiting.

At the beauty salon she thumbed through magazines wondering what hair style she would choose. But when the assistant asked her she replied, "Whatever you think".

The ultimate result was beyond Marion's dreams. Even the assistant was delighted. "You look a different woman Madam. That style definitely suits you."

"Thank you." Marion was lightheaded with pleasure. "I'd like an appointment next week for a facial, manicure and set."

When the first flush of excitement had passed, she wondered disconsolately who would really appreciate her changed appearance. Certainly not George. She had long ago ceased to wait for any praise from her husband.

As she did not feel like going home, Marion decided to have coffee in one of those dark expresso lounges.

After finishing coffee and toast, she lit a cigarette, her eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the gloom. Once she had been rather irritated by the darkness of these coffee lounges, now she felt soothed. So much so she was startled when a voice said "Good afternoon, may I join you?"

Looking up she saw a tall man, impeccably dressed in a dark lounge suit. "Why yes, I suppose so," she stammered. Good heavens, she

thought, can this be happening to me? It's all wrong.

The man sat down. "Don't look so apprehensive, I'm no monster. I saw you sitting alone and, as I'm alone too, I hoped you would allow me to join you.

"My name is Mark Branden. I'm spending a month's leave here before taking up an appointment in South America with my firm — an engineering firm by the way."

Marion was relieved by his frankness. "How very exciting, to go overseas, I mean. My name is Marion Brewster. My family consists of my husband, son and daughter. Have you any family?"

The man was silent for a moment. "I had," he answered shortly. He changed the subject. "What made you say going overseas would be exciting'? Do you find your life here dull?"

Inherent honesty made Marion reply, "Yes. Except for annual holidays, I've never left this country."

"I see, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." He studied her face thoughtfully.

Feeling embarrassed Marion looked at her watch. "Good grief, I didn't realise it was so late. I must be going or I'll miss my bus."

"I have my car outside. May I give you a lift?"

Determined to show him that she was no raw young girl afraid of the big bad wolf, she thanked him gracefully and accepted.

In the daylight she was able to see him, it seemed for the first time. And, she supposed ruefully, he too would see her in broad daylight. She saw his eyes were very blue and his hair very dark. He saw a woman, somewhat older than he had supposed, but very attractive, with lovely hair, eyes and features, softly feminine and obviously one with keen dress sense.

She gave him her address and gave herself up to the pleasure of his company, the drive and her sudden sense of well-being. His conversation seemed to bring out the best in her. She felt gay, witty and interesting.

She was sorry when they arrived at her home. "Thank you," she said lightly, "for a pleasant interlude in what promised to be a very ordinary day."

Mark looked away. "Shouldn't one be grateful for an ordinary day?"

"Not when ordinary days mean dull days," Marion replied.

"I see," Mark said slowly. "I wonder if you would take pity on a lonely man and take in dinner and a show with that same man sometime soon?. I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed your company. I realise you have commitments so if you refuse, which I fully expect you to, I still consider myself lucky to have entered that particular coffee lounge today."

Marion's first instinct was to refuse but some inner recklessness prompted her to accept. "I'll give you my telephone number so that we can both think about it and retreat gracefully if we change our minds."

"I won't change mine," he said quietly, "but you must have the choice. Thank you Marion for being unconventional."

In the quietness of the house Marion tried to collect her thoughts. Heavens, she thought, I must be mad. What would George, Sara and Phillip think? Not to mention neighbours and friends. And what did he mean by my being unconventional?

She felt oddly deflated yet guiltily excited. If Mark did telephone her, would she accept his invitation or would she stand by the strong moral code that was so much a part of her family life?

She forced herself to think of more mundane tasks. She would cook George a special dinner. It might help to salve her conscience.

George arrived while the dinner was cooking. "Hello Marion. How did things go today?"

"Fine, and you?"

"Mustn't complain. I think I'll change. Dinner smells good. Nice to have a good home to come to."

While George was changing the phone rang. Marion stood rigid. With hands not quite steady she picked it up. "Hello, Marion Brewster speaking."

"Hello Marion. Have you decided whether you will accept my invitation and if so when?"

"All right Mark. Would next Wednesday suit? I could meet you outside the coffee lounge at 7pm."

"My only objection is that it's too long to wait. I'll be looking forward to seeing you. Marion . .

Before he had finished, George came into the room. "Bye," she said hurriedly.

"Who was that?" George asked.

"Someone had the wrong number." Marion was appalled by the ease of the lie.

In spite of her preoccupation, the dinner satisfied George, although Marion felt ill at the thought that for the first time she was lying to George for a stranger about whom she knew absolutely nothing.

The next few days passed slowly. Marion threw herself into an orgy of spring cleaning so that Wednesday would come quicker. Once she saw Mark again she could put their friendship on a sensible footing and casually tell George about their meeting.

She knew George would believe whatever she told him. But she wanted to tell him, and believe in her own heart, that there was nothing in the chance meeting but friendship.

On Wednesday morning she was excited but a little fearful. "George," she said, "would you mind if I leave you a casserole for dinner tonight'?"

"Not at all my dear. Where are you going? Not wining and dining with some old flame I hope." He laughed heartily at his joke.

George's heavy humour was so near the truth that Marion was tempted to say "As long as you have your comfortable home and a cooked dinner would you really care'?" Instead she said, "No, just dinner with a friend. I shouldn't be late."

After he left for the office she rang the beauty salon and made an appointment.

Then she decided to buy a new suit.

Having tried most of the department stores, she was despairing of ever finding anything to suit her when in a small boutique she saw the very thing she had in mind. It was an aqua suit trimmed with small black buttons. And it fitted so well it could have been made for her. She told the attendant to send the dress she was wearing to her home and stepped out of the boutique feeling like a queen. Now for her beauty treatment and her appointment with Mark.

Marion arrived at the coffee lounge just after seven. When she saw Mark's car she did not know which feelings were uppermost — excitement, nervousness or guilt.

She looked up to see Mark standing beside her. Her heart lurched. Ridiculous, she told herself. Be your age. Don't spoil a very pleasant relationship.

Mark seemed genuinely happy to see her. She felt infected by his pleasure. "Hello Mark. I feel a very abandoned woman. Except for my husband, you are the first man I've ever kept an appointment with." She spoke the words defiantly. Now, she thought, he'll realise that I'm not just a pick-up.

"I'm sure it's not for want of being asked," Mark replied. "You look lovely and I'm proud to be your companion. Your husband is a very lucky man. Still, I imagine he knows that."

If George does know, Marion thought, he certainly keeps his thoughts to himself.

When Mark asked if she had any preferences for dinner she quickly said, "None whatever. I'm sure your choice will be perfect."

He drove for about 20 miles, then stopped outside a country club. "I thought you might like it here. It's one of my favourite spots. The cuisine is superb, good service, with a good floor show and dancing if you care for dancing. What do you think Marion?"

Marion liked what she saw. A swinging sign simply said "The Country Club". It had a gabled roof, with mullioned windows. In the darkness, discreet lights showed rolling lawns.

They were led into a thickly-carpeted dining room where individual tables surrounded a circular stage. An orchestra was playing soft seductive music. Marion thought, this atmosphere is distinctly 'plushy', a word her daughter used often.

While sipping his drink Mark asked, "No regrets?" His tone somehow conveyed intimacy and Marion felt her cheeks flush. "No. Why should there be? We are two mature people enjoying a lovely evening."

Mark smiled. "You almost made the word mature sound senile. I can assure you Marion I don't feel at all mature. Looking at you I feel as giddy as a teenager."

The drink made Marion daring. "Are you married Mark?"

His face darkened. "Yes, but we go our separate ways. Now, let's talk about something pleasant."

The drinks, delicious food, soft lights and romantic dinner music made Marion relaxed and replete. She leaned back in the chair. "What a lovely evening. I don't think a man could appreciate this the same way a woman does. To sit in lovely surroundings enjoying a perfectly delicious meal which I haven't had to plan or cook, and to have you Mark, as the ideal out to dinner companion, has made this evening perfect."

The drinks, delicious food, soft lights and romantic dinner music made Marion relaxed and replete. She leaned back in the chair.

Mark's blue eyes were alight with eagerness. "Marion, you can't realise what it means to a man to take out a woman like you, with your obvious enjoyment. The average woman imagines that the correct impression she must give is to appear completely blasé. Would you care to dance?"

"Love to." If only this could go on for ever, she thought, pushing unwelcome thoughts to the back of her mind. She gave herself to the pleasure of dancing. She knew Mark was holding her too close but somehow it didn't matter.

Suddenly Mark said, "Marion, I'm falling in love with you. You are so different from other women - so untouched, so fresh."

Her legs felt shaky. "Mark, would you mind taking me home now?"

His face darkened. "By all means."

The tension on the drive home was unbearable. Marion hoped that he would ask to see her again, then she hoped he wouldn't.

After what seemed an interminable time they reached Marion's home. Mark turned to her. "I'm sorry I spoke so impulsively Marion. I'm afraid I've spoiled my chances of seeing you again."

Against her better judgement Marion said, "Why not? It was still a lovely evening."

"You mean you'll come out with me again?" Relief showed in his voice.

"I must go now." Marion's courage was ebbing away.

"Next Wednesday, same place," his voice was urgent.

"Yes Mark. Again, many thanks for the lovely evening."

She was relieved that George was in bed. She crept quietly in beside him and from sheer habit he put his arm around her. "Everything all right dear?" he said sleepily.

"Yes George. Go back to sleep."

The next morning George asked a few ordinary questions about her night out to which Marion gave equally ordinary answers. Her husband accepted them without asking for too much detail.

The week passed much the same way as every other week had passed before she had met Mark, except the earlier elation Marion had felt now gave way to a certain nervousness. Even unobservant George sensed a change in her.

"You seem a bit on edge dear. Would you like me to take a week off so we can go away together? The change would do us both good. I'm not a very exciting husband but we get on all right together. Just lately, in fact, apart from the fact that you seem a bit on edge, I've never seen you looking better — as young as the girl I married." George laughed, embarrassed.

Marion was astonished. This was about the longest conversation her husband had made for years. As for the compliment, she couldn't remember when he had last made one.

When Wednesday came she mentioned casually that she would be out for dinner. He looked at her keenly but to her relief remarked that he wasn't too keen on evenings alone and would she think about his suggestion of a holiday.

On the way to meet Mark a feeling of remorse, not guilt, was with her. The sight of Mark, tall, impeccably dressed, brought back memories of their last meeting.

"I have good news Marion. My leave has been extended." He sounded like an excited schoolboy.

"That's marvellous Mark. By the way, where do you live?"

"I have a flat about 10 miles from the Country Club. In fact, it's on the way there. Would you care to see it?" In sheer embarrassment Marion had asked where he lived. Now she regretted it. To refuse would make her seem gauche. To accept could be dangerous.

"Well?" Mark looked so boyish and handsome that Marion felt her fears were groundless. If she couldn't control a situation at her age what chance was there for young people?

"That would be lovely Mark."

Marion enjoyed the drive. Their conversation was light and entertaining, by mutual consent family topics were avoided.

The flat was sparsely but tastefully furnished. As though in answer to Marion, he said a woman cleaned the flat.

Marion smiled, "I certainly did not picture you with a scrubbing brush in one hand and a vacuum in the other."

"Would you like a drink?"

She tried to meet the situation with humour. "I hope you haven't acquired any etchings in your travels." She realised her humour had not been appreciated. "A dry sherry would be nice."

Mark brought the drinks.

"Did you enjoy the Country Club last week?"

"Very much. You were saying that your leave had been extended. How much longer will you be in England?"

"Another month." He sat beside her. "Marion, you are pleased aren't you? It does mean something that we shall have longer together doesn't it?"

Suddenly Marion felt inadequate. Events seemed to be moving too quickly for her. "Of course Mark. You know I enjoy your company."

"Marion, don't speak like a schoolgirl. We're adults." He sat beside her, tilting her chin so that she had to look into his eyes.

She felt a sense of panic. The urgency in his body was reaching out to her. "Mark,

I... I don't know what to say."

Without warning she was in his arms, his lips were so demanding. "Don't say anything." She felt his hand cup her breast. She longed to respond but something made her fight back.

"No. No Mark. It wouldn't be right."

"Good God, now you say that. You're not a child. You knew what to expect when you asked to see my flat. You knew the way I felt when we went to the Country Club. I thought you felt the same." The frustrated words poured out.

"I know Mark. I am attracted to you, but I just don't want to feel dirty for the rest of my life.

"So my love is dirty."

Marion wrung her hands. "No Mark. I don't mean it to sound like that. It's just that I can't, that's all. Maybe it's my middleclass morality. I'm sorry."

"You're sorry." His face congested with anger. "That would be a classic understatement. I'll tell you what you are — a middle-aged woman wanting an Indian Summer but without the guts to go through with it."

Marion's face whitened.

She felt soiled and physically sick. Picking up her handbag she ran out into the street, hailed a taxi and sat huddled in the corner.

Eventually pride came to her rescue. George mustn't see her like this. She powdered her face and tried to disguise any marks the scene had left on her face.

Quickly she paid the fare and walked into the house. Her refuge, George, was watching TV. "Hello my dear. You're home early. I'm glad, the house is like a morgue without you. Don't make any more dinner appointments will you?"

"No, George. From now on we'll go out together."

George looked at her. "Been having a rough spell lately haven't you?" Marion was startled, until George went on, "Missing the children, and I'm not much company."

Suddenly Marion clung to him. "George, you are my rock of Gibraltar."

"It's getting late, let's go to bed." She turned away.

George mustn't see the tears in her eyes.

I'll lock up first, then I'll be with you."

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Milita Houlahan

Milita was born in Temora in 1927. Her literary talent became evident at an early age. Throughout her life she drew inspiration for writing from many sources including special occasion, nature, her deep love for family and friend, and her innate spirituality. For Milita, writing came as naturally to her as breathing.

After joining Illawarra VIEW Club in 1973 Milita remained an active member for 41 years, serving much of that time on committee. She often wrote poems or stories based on VIEW Talking Points.

At the urging of friends, Milita entered poetry and short stories in the VIEW magazine which won her several prizes over the years. Her proudest achievement was winning VIEW's 1982 Literary Award for her short story "Mary's Dilemma". Given her shyness and her considerable lack of self-confidence, this was a remarkable achievement.

Milita's literary contributions to VIEW were compiled into a home-published volume in 2010 to commemorate Illawarra VIEW Club's 40th birthday. Reading this booklet is like taking a trip down VIEW's memory lane recalling past national identities, former members and assorted special events.

Milita passed away on Mothers' Day 2016.

Her huge volume of poetry and short stories is a treasured legacy.

WOMEN's VIEW Summer 1995

D R O U G H T

Lis Khan
Winner Short Story Competition

The kitchen was like the inside of a steam iron. It was December and like most of country New South Wales the rural property Ingleburn, in the central western districts, was gripped by drought.

Outside the farmhouse. a myriad of cicadas, those flying meatballs of the Australian bush, were chorusing their bawdy Christmas greeting towards a deafening crescendo. Mackenzie, the pseudo-kelpie, snoozed on the covered verandah, occasionally snapping his laws or thumping his tail to discourage a persistent dragonfly.

Lucy pushed open the battered flyscreen door and went outside with a container full of kitchen scraps for the chooks. The hen house was the epitome of indolence. 'Here, chook-chook-chook", she called on reaching the enclosure. "Here, chook-chook-chook-chook-chook." The fowls slowly rose from earthen resting spots or ambled down from perches where they had been lolling in the shade.

As Lucy flung the proffered offerings through the makeshift gateway in the wire netting a dozen feathery, speckled bundles, incited by the daily ritual, began to flap and squawk and peck their way across the yard towards their benefactor.

Returning to the house Lucy paused to glance over at her small daughter. Helen, nimbly making her way through what in better years had been the vegetable patch. Sam. the object of Helen's attention, was propped up against an aging ghost gum, systematically tossing pieces of flaking bark at a bevy of flies hovering around a maturing cow pat. The boy nestled into the tree. His sister approached at a trot and began to cavort around the relic of an antiquated dray.

Helen had not yet fully out-grown that innate sense of trust and remained ignorant of the catastrophe that was overtaking her family. 'Let's play dwessups", the five-year-old urged her brother. "Let's have a concert here on the old cart." She chattered on excitedly. Grandiose thoughts of an afternoon's entertainment fully engaged her imagination. She babbled on, oblivious to her brother's darkening mood. Lucy smiled for her daughter's innocence. Absorbed in her own naive world of make-believe, Helen for the moment was content.

"Piss off". Sam snarled at his sister while flicking a piece of bark in her direction.

"Mum, Mum", the little girl shrieked, racing towards her mother, who had reached the verandah step. "Mum!" she repeated urgently. "Sam said a rude word." Her face was flushed and her eyes bright with anticipation at the reaction this important information would provoke.

"Did not!" Sam retorted sullenly.

Lucy sighed and turned towards her son. She adjusted the empty slops bowl on her hip. "Sam. come here to me at once", she called across the yard. "Don't you dare speak to your sister like that." She sighed again. At l3 Sam was becoming surly and withdrawn. Lucy felt a twang of guilt and love. She wanted so much to reassure him. She wanted to reach out and hug him; to tell him that the drought would break and that life on their embattled farm would soon return to normal.

She desperately wanted the kids to enjoy the Christmas pleasures of most city kids their age.

"It's all right, Sammy. It will be OK love", she had wanted to say. Instead she snapped, "if you can't speak nicely to your sister, then you can go inside and clean up that mess you call your room."

"It's not fair! Sam whined. 'You always take her side. You never believe me. It's not fair."

Lucy sighed again and went indoors.

Back in the kitchen she reflected upon the bride of nearly 18 years ago. She recalled the year young Sammy had been born. Herself heavy with the fruit of love, she had bitten into a large, ripe, fleshy peach harvested from their first real crop since planting their modest orchard. She had made a secret wish and had laughingly implored her husband Jack to do the same. "For luck, Jack", she had entreated. "Make a wish for luck."

"What sentimental nonsense", Lucy now thought aloud, running her finger along the dusty pantry shelf as she spoke.

It was amazing lust how much dust the place collected. Every gust of wind brought further mischief as it seeped through every crevice and sprayed the house with fine red grit. Every piece of furniture was targeted: their clothes, their hair, their crockery. Everything! It was impossible to keep the house in order no matter how hard Lucy tried.

Vaguely aroused by the droning of the tractor in the adjoining paddock. Mackenzie nudged the earth and stirred half-heartedly. Jack had spent most of the day with their neighbour, David Yeates, dragging cattle from the paddock's water hole. The usually voluptuous billabong had degenerated into a shrewdly disguised but deadly mud trap. Chameleon-like, it enticed the thirsty cattle to approach and drink. Sucked into the trembling graveyard and too weak to pull free, the miserable creatures remained stuck there until rescued or until the crows picked out their eyes.

Standing by the open window Lucy gazed out past the kids and across the parched, cracked landscape. Not a blade of green relieved the weariness. Three kurrajong trees stood poised on the hill, vulnerable against the stark horizon. Stripped to feed the starving stock, their naked limbs outstretched, they pantomimed a comic twist to the otherwise heartless situation. "The Three Wise Men", Lucy mused, "here to bestow their Christmas blessing." She bit her lip and contemplated the irony of it all

Perhaps prompted by a Hereford cow bellowing in the distance, Lucy turned and gazed towards the east. Dim memories of a far-off city, an almost forgotten legacy of childhood, stirred within her.

The afternoon post brought a copy of The Herald newspaper and a parcel from a Sydney Rotary Club. Inside the parcel there was a card. "The Hanlon family wishes you and yours all the very best for Christmas", the message read. It was signed "Steve and Katie Hanlon; Jacinta. Mark and Sally."

Precisely wrapped in expensive silver paper, the package yielded up a Christmas hamper, complete with pudding, ham, pickles and a bag of nuts. There was also a bottle of expensive moisturiser, shampoo and lollies for the kids. Lucy smarted at the gesture and tried to visualise Katie Hanlon and her family. "Snug in their upmarket city terrace no doubt", she reflected cynically.

Tucked inside the package was another envelope, it concealed the cut-out portrait of a rather doubtful Christmas fairy. A lethal looking

wand protruded from the subject's hands. An emerald star was rammed menacingly into its tip. Cascading yellow hair and crimson lipstick splashed across the brazen image. Wanton eyes leered out from the glitter sprinkled paper. Engraved with an immature hand, in large, deliberate lettering, was Sally's rounded Christmas offering.

"I made this especially for you", it began. "Do you have a little girl? I helped Mummy make the pudding. Daddy says that you are very poor. Are you poor? I hope Santa brings you some rain so you can have a proper Christmas. From Sally."

Lucy was moved by the child's candid greeting and she warmed towards the Hanlons. Tomorrow she would write a note of thanks. She would feel the luxury of the moisturiser on her skin. Lucy smiled at the thought of her children's pleasure at their discovery of the hamper on Christmas Day.

Through the open door the sound of the tractor intensified as the vehicle churned around the corner and into view. Mackenzie yawned and awkwardly arose. He gave a mighty stretch before sauntering off towards the gate. Lucy heard Jack shout across the yard to Sam. Soon father and son were busy unloading an emaciated calf from the tractor. By the time they came indoors Sam was chattering to his father 'man to man'.

The house filled with their presence. "Struth. I could murder a cold drink". Jack groaned as he slumped into a chair. His face and sandy hair were a mingled mess of sweat and grime. Just then Helen came flying in from the orchard where one of the fowls had snatched a shiny button from her hands.

"You look tired. Mum". Sam said gently. "Would you like a cup of tea?" Completely gone was the sulky temperament from earlier in the day.

Night! The familiar sounds of the Australian bush caressed the air. As Lucy browsed through The Herald she was confronted by unhappiness throughout the world. Civil unrest was devastating parts of Europe. A starving child from Somalia gazed out from a frame of print. Lucy winced at such brutality, her own dramas paling in its wake.

As she glanced around her family young Sally's greeting sprang to mind. No. they were not poor. Despite all their ups and downs, despite the uncertainty of their financial future, Lucy suddenly felt secure. She reflected upon the kurrajong trees: those symbolic 'Three Wise Men' up on the hill with their priceless gifts of peace and love. Lucy closed her eyes and listened to the night.

"Yes. Sally," she responded silently. "This family will indeed have a very 'proper Christmas".

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VIEW World December 1981

THAT OLD FEELING

Evelyn Paton

Julie's heart gave a familiar little flip. There he was again, looking better than any man had a right to. Lean and muscular, with a thatch of fair hair and blue eyes set in a tanned face, he always reminded her of a hero in a John Buchan novel.

She wanted to cry out, "Richard, Richard, it's me!" But instead, her eyes sheened with tears, she ducked into a doorway lest he should catch a glimpse of her.

Would she ever get used to losing him, she wondered, as she stood there forlornly. Would she ever forget him? Almost at once she knew the answer. "In about a hundred years," she whispered, emerging from her hiding place, looking this way and that like a survivor of a holocaust.

It was nearly three months since she and Richard had split up, yet the ache in her heart was still as intense as it had been then. Julie knew that they would never get back together again. That was the stuff of mushy romances, or of nineteen-thirties films, accompanied by soft sweet music played by unseen orchestras. Real life was different, it was colder, starker and without music. Besides there was a new girl now in Richard's life.

Julie had seen him some weeks earlier, accompanied by a long-legged girl with a willowy figure and shoulder length blonde hair, the very antithesis of herself, with her diminutive build, cap of straight dark hair, and elfin features. As Julie watched, the girl had leaned her pretty head on Richard's shoulder and they had laughed together in a shared intimacy which had sent a shaft of envy shooting through her.

Julie could not help remembering how amazed all their friends had been when she and Richard had started dating over a year ago — and how their amazement had turned to pleasure when the relationship actually bloomed.

It seemed to be an attraction of opposites. Julie was the first to admit that she was of a shy and retiring nature, whereas Richard was the original extrovert. He had dozens of friends, and was never in a place for more than five minutes before he had struck up some new acquaintanceship.

Julie was at her happiest when curled up in a chair listening to Liszt or Dvorak, or reading a Jane Austen novel. Richard was in his element at a football match, on a yacht, or downing a beer with his cronies.

Yet they had shared a wonderful rapport. They had never been short of laughs, their very differences seemed to bring them closer together. Sitting through a production of "La Boheme" he had actually enjoyed it, thanks to Julie's whispered explanations. Likewise, when he took her out sailing he had been proud when, due to a little homework, she actually knew the difference between a halyard and a sheet!

Sometimes, she wondered why they had ever parted. When the sharing stopped and the laughter died, it had been by mutual consent. Richard had been sent to another town to work for a while. Inevitably, he spent his

leisure hours there by joining a tennis club and going to the local pub, while Julie spent hers by watching videos, reading the latest books and generally avoiding all invitations that came her way.

Richard's visits home became less and less frequent. "It's no use," Julie had told him on one of these occasions. "It's not working." She had sounded so calm and sensible about it that he could never have guessed how much soul searching she had done in the nights when sleep eluded her.

He had looked despondently into his beer and had made no reply. To Julie, that was admission enough that he agreed with her. In time she convinced herself that it was all for the best, although her heart thought differently. It would keep returning to memories of Richard, like a limp little bird winging its way to its nest.

She did date one or two other men. Howard Gray worked in the same office, and when a new computer system was set up, he was only too happy to initiate her into its intricacies. He liked books and music and theatre too, or so he told her, and something might have developed between them had not Julie heard on the grapevine that Richard had returned. A tiny secret hope had budded that they might get back together again.

However, the sight of him with the blonde girl had killed that fragile hope faster than an early frost.

Now, as she mooched along the road, alone with her memories, the heavens opened and she felt even more miserable. To escape the rain, she turned into a cafe, by a co-incidence, one which occasionally she and Richard had frequented.

She was sitting slowly sipping her cappuccino and watching the rain needling down the windows when the door opened suddenly and a man erupted into the cafe, shaking the raindrops off his umbrella.

Julie was shaken as well. "Richard," she cried, her hand trembling as

she set her cup down on its saucer. And "Julie!" he exclaimed at almost the same instant. What looked like delight spread over his face, though Julie did not dare to hope that it was that. Instead she nervously twitched the tendrils of damp hair which were clinging to her forehead.

"It's lovely to see you," he greeted her. "You look marvellous!"

Julie shook her head and gave a travesty of a smile. She knew that she looked anything but marvellous, and recalled all the times that she had visualised meeting Richard again, and looking cool, sophisticated and immaculate.

"You do," persisted Richard.

"Lovely and fresh and radiant . . . and . .

"Wet," added Julie, and they both laughed. This was more like the harmony that they were used to. Studying him covertly she thought that he looked downcast and vulnerable, so unlike the old lively Richard that she had known before. Tenderness welled up inside her and she wanted to put her arms round him.

Instead, she found herself blurting out. "And how are you'? I heard that you've got a new girlfriend. I even saw you once." She paused and took a swift gulp of her coffee. "I'm very happy for you both. You looked as though you had a lot in common."

The waitress brought Richard's coffee and neither spoke for a moment. Richard looked ill at ease, then he gave a lopsided grin. "We do," he conceded. "Laura's her name. She's a terrific sportswoman."

Julie tried to look pleased over what seemed like the final death knell to their own frail compatibility. "Lovely for you," she said breezily. 'Just like Howard and myself. We're so compatible." Richard looked at her sharply. "Yes, I saw you one day with a bloke," he muttered. "I'm happy for you."

The glow in Julie's eyes could have been mistaken for excitement at the mention of Howard, instead of an effort to control the mounting wave of tears. "Yes," she went on brightly. "He's been teaching me the mysteries of

the computer."

Somehow they managed to finish their coffee, steering round the subject of their past together and their future apart. It didn't really leave much to speak about other than the weather.

Julie noticed that the rain had eased off and she stood up. "I must be off." She gave a sunny smile. "Got heaps to do."

"Me too," said Richard rising as well. Reluctantly, but with a certain degree of relief they smiled cautiously at each other and set off briskly in opposite directions.

As Julie passed the Art Gallery she observed that there was an exhibition of French impressionist artists showing. That would be as good a way as any to spend a wet afternoon she reflected, and joined the short queue of people waiting to get in. All at once, a broad shouldered figure with fair hair in front of her sent alarm bells ringing. Richard! What was he doing in a queue at the Art Gallery — and all on his own'?

She spun on her heel looking for an escape route to avoid the embarrassment of speaking to him again. But as though by some sixth sense, he too wheeled round and spotted her.

An awkward silence stretched between them like static electricity. Then a tentative smile crept over Richard's face. "I expect you're wondering what I'm doing in an Art Gallery — on my own," he muttered diffidently.

"Well…..began Julie, struggling to find words.

"The truth is," admitted Richard. "Laura and I split up a couple of weeks ago."

"But…..Julie's throat felt tight and her insides were doing peculiar things. "I thought you were so compatible."

Richard gave a wry grin. "Compatible?" His face looked rather sad. "I suppose in some ways we were," he replied slowly. "We did share the same interests." He paused, and his eyes raked Julie's face. "But somehow I missed the real sharing . . . the hopes and dreams. Even the frustrations! Do you know what I mean?"

Julie nodded wistfully. She did know, only too well. He looked like a little lost boy. Again, a she longed to hug him, to be hugged.

But he was regarding her quizzically. "Why are you here all alone though? What about Howard? Was that what you said his name was?"

Julie laughed dryly. "We never even started actually!" she confessed, hot colour flooding her face.

Richard simply spluttered with joy. "I wish you'd told me back in the cafe." he protested, drawing her towards him.

"I didn't want to spoil things for you and Laura," murmured Julie, her head against his chest. "Anyway." She looked up at him, wide eyed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

All at once, nothing seemed to matter anymore, no more explanations were needed. All they both knew was that it felt good to be back together, back where they belonged.

Richard deposited a loving kiss on her lips. He whispered, "As the song says, 'I saw you again and got that old feeling.' What about you?"

Julie nodded happily. "That old feeling is still in my heart," she agreed with a smile. Suddenly the sun emerged from behind the clouds. But it was more than sunshine. It was their old spark rekindled, the spark that each knew would never go out.

Julie raised her chin so that her eyes met his. "So where do we go from here?" she asked, a cautious note in her voice.

Richard looked at her with whimsical tenderness. "Well, first, I suggest that we go and see this exhibition. Then how about going to a pub for a drink and then having a Chinese meal?"

Julie sighed but it was a sigh of pure contentment. They might never be compatible, but they would always be versatile!

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WOMEN's VIEW Spring 1991

THE SECRET DIARY

Lis Khan
Winner Short Story Competition

The two phone calls came within minutes of one another, and left Diana in a state of shock.

Mrs Brennan's voice was cool and apologetic, the matron's cool and efficient.

"Didn't leave for work — tried to phone you — thought I should call the doctor — has been admitted — reluctant to act without your permission - must have certain necessities — has looked so ill - pneumonia – yes, it is still a serious illness, Mrs Frith."

Disjointed phrases raced through Diana's mind as she struggled to cope with her dismay and guilt.

It was two weeks since she had seen her mother, and she really had intended to slip over during the weekend. But she had been needed in the shop on Saturday morning and preparations for the dinner party at night, for one of Roger's important new clients and his wife and two other couples, had kept her busy for the whole afternoon.

On Sunday morning Emma had come with the baby and stayed until it was time to dress for the McMillan's' luncheon, then, when they had returned home, quite late, it had been essential to have Roger look at the figures for the shop. Diana enjoyed owning

the dress shop and working it in for four and a half days each week, loved the clothes and the clientele, but the figures always bothered her.

"You'll be sorry in later life, Diana." Her mother's voice came to her across the years, and she remembered the confrontation when she had wanted to leave school before reaching her Leaving Certificate year.

"Let the girl do as she pleases." Her father had sided with her, as usual. It's her life, not yours."

"No, Bob" Her mother's gentle voice had hardened. "If you are going to be irresponsible about her future, I'm not. She needs as much education as possible in today's world."

So Diana had continued at school, but her father's support had encouraged her laissez-faire attitude and she had just scraped through the exam, and had taken a position instead of going on to university, greatly disappointing her mother.

"You are only trying to live out your own frustrated ambitions through Di," her father had said, and she remembered her mother's stricken expression, knowing that the words were deeply hurtful, since her mother had given up her own career prospects to marry the handsome young Air Force officer, just before the end of the war, and to throw herself into the social life which was so important to him.

"Oh dear! I must pull myself together." Diana distractedly tried to think of the things she must do. Firstly, ring Linda Sloan and ask her to let the other girls know that bridge was off for the day. It would be too late to arrange for an alternative luncheon hostess at such short notice, but it couldn't be helped. She pushed the perishable food, which she had just bought, into the fridge and freezer, then rushed into the bedroom to grab her coat and car keys.

She hesitated beside the phone, before deciding that there was no point in worrying Emma and Jane yet. She would ring them both after she had been to the hospital.

"I'm glad you've come, Mrs Frith." The matron of the private hospital greeted her courteously, but with gravity. "Your mother is not only seriously ill but she is extremely debilitated. Do you realise how thin she is, emaciated, one might say'? Do you know why she has not been eating properly?"

"Why, no. I've no idea. I did realise that she has been getting very thin, and I've tried to persuade her to take more care of herself, especially in warming the house, but she is so ob…." Diana hesitated to say obstinate, when the matron was looking at her so critically, but that is the word she had used to Roger.

It had all started after her father's death, 19 years and 10 months earlier. Diana always remembered exactly how long it was since her father had died so suddenly, as she had adored him.

"I forbid it! I won't have my mother working behind the counter of such a place." Diana had been scandalised that her mother could contemplate taking the menial position she had mentioned.

But her furious protests had been met with a steady insistence by her mother that she must do something with her life, "And a woman of 48, with no qualifications, has very little choice. But don't worry, Di. None of your friends are likely to be shopping in that area."

"It's not that. It's just that it's so undignified for the wife of a prominent lawyer to descend to that level."

"You forget, Di, that I am no longer the wife of a prominent lawyer. I am the widow of a man who was no better than anyone else, especially in the eyes of his partners."

"His partners! Why should they not think well of him?"

"I can't tell you. All I can say is that there was a big upset, involving his partners,"

"That staid mob! I'm sure they were too straitlaced to see his point of view.'

"I don't think you should judge people without knowing the facts, Di. We won't discuss the matter again."

From that time Diana had watched her mother's deterioration and had lost patience with her. Although it wasn't long before she had improved her position and become a receptionist in a medical practice, she still lived very frugally.

Roger had commented scathingly on her parsimony and Diana, while resenting Roger's remarks, had been exasperated to see her once-elegant mother wearing clothes which were worn and outmoded.

"Why didn't you buy some new clothes and go to concerts and opera, like you used to?" She had asked impatiently. "You never entertain or visit friends, and I'm sure you're invited."

"My life is different now, but I'm happy. I still have books and music, and my garden."

Diana ignored this. "You never even come to our place."

"I hesitate to intrude on your busy lives. Besides, I have so little time."

"Then why don't you give up this ridiculous idea of working and live a normal life?"

"I promise to do that, Di, when the time is right"

With a start, Diana realised that the matron was waiting for her to come out of her reverie before showing her to her mother's room, and enumerating her mother's needs.

She experienced a shiver of fear when she saw the wraithlike figure, propped against piled up pillows, the shallowness of her breathing obvious, even under the oxygen tent.

She reached for her mother's hand and squeezed it tightly, but felt she couldn't speak.

Thankful that Mrs Brennan had not seen her, Diana quickly let herself into her mother's house. It had the deep chill of one which was never heated and she pulled her warm coat closely about her. She checked the fridge and the kitchen and found that there was no food which would go off'; in fact, there was very little food of any kind.

She hurried along to her mother's bedroom and opened the wardrobe. The only dressing gown was so shabby and threadbare that she couldn't possibly take it to the hospital. She would have to buy a new one. The nightdresses and underwear were no better.

Diana's exasperation began to return, but dissolved when she remembered the frail figure under the oxygen tent.

Diana's exasperation began to return, but dissolved when she remembered the frail figure under the oxygen tent.

She was closing the bottom drawer when she noticed a brown paper package, and she opened it without any sense of prying. She was surprised to find a large folder, holding a series of exercise books, dated in diary form, from 1 January. 1964.

The first entry read: 'Don't know why I still keep a diary. Certainly not for posterity, as I've achieved nothing and no-one is interested in me, not even my own husband and daughter. But habit dies hard, and I need a listening ear!'

The guilt which was already tormenting Diana became more acute.

Shaken, she opened the diary at random and the entry for To September, 1964 caught her eye. 'Bob took Diana to races. Could not hide annoyance when they came home. '

Diana clearly remembered that day. Her mother had certainly greeted them coolly, and had failed to share the excitement of Diana's win, much to the latter's chagrin. Spoilsport, as usual, she had fumed, over a silent dinner.

That night she had heard her mother's customarily quiet voice raised in anger, and had caught only the wards: "One is enough." Poor Daddy! She had sympathised with her father, and had not been surprised that he didn't invite her to the races again. The stunning outfit he had bought for her had been wasted, until she wore it to an afternoon wedding and met Roger.

That had been the beginning of another hassle. Diana had been attracted to Roger from the start. He was a good-looking young lawyer, with an easy manner like her father's. But, while her father had been content to be a partner in a long-established law firm, Roger was much more ambitious.

It had seemed quite illogical that her mother should disapprove of him, although Diana now conceded that her mother had probably seen in Roger traits which she, Diana, had been unwilling to acknowledge at the time.

Predictably, her father had been very much in favour of the match and, despite her mother's opposition, Diana had to admit that she had arranged a beautiful wedding. The diary entry for 7 November, 1968, read: 'Wedding an unqualified success. Di thanked me with real warmth.

Bob very complimentary. Hate his gambling but thankful for big win which paid for it all. Didn't have to sell any of Mother's antiques. '

She must have been joking! She couldn't possibly have contemplated selling any of Grandmothers superb antiques. It was just too crazy!

Diana felt that she had entered a nightmare world, where truth and fiction had become inseparable.

Why had her parents been so hard up, when her father was a successful and popular lawyer, and her mother the recipient of a modest private income? Certainly, their parties had been legendary, with her father the catalyst and her mother the perfect hostess. Despite their lack of closeness, Diana had always admired her mother's poise and dignity in that role.

That was why it had been so inconceivable that she should go to work one month after becoming a widow, and that she should still be working part-time, at the age of 68.

As teenagers, Diana's two daughters had almost given up visiting their grandmother. With the intolerance of youth, and the encouragement of Roger, they had despised her frugal lifestyle and. in winter, were unwilling to put up with the cold.

So Diana had been surprised by Emma's distress when her grandmother had declined the invitation to her wedding.

"She's too stingy to buy a new outfit," Roger had remarked scornfully, "while she's sitting on a fortune in that mausoleum of a house."

Diana had finally insisted that she have a new frock from the shop, and the old elegance had returned, although her mother had been only a shadow of her former self.

Suddenly realising that she was wasting time, Diana flipped through the diary, and as she was about to wrap it and put it away, a folded piece of paper fell to the floor.

A sense of deep foreboding swept over Diana, and she understood the reason, when she picked it up and saw that it was a suicide note from her father, and an admission that he had gambled away a large sum of his firm's money.

With shaking hands, she turned the diary pages back to the time of her father's death, and read the entry of a few days later: '3 September, 1973, Mr Langton came to discuss Bob's affairs. Very generously agreed to hush it all up, if I can repay total amount, without interest, over 20 years. Will be frightfully difficult, but I'll do it! Must first find a job."

Tears were streaming down Diana's cheeks and her hands were trembling so much that she could scarcely turn the pages, as she looked for the last entry, written in a shaky hand, the previous day: 'Only two repayments to make now, to preserve Diana's inheritance, protect Bob's good name, and be able to rest. Will destroy Bob's note and this diary then. '

Diana closed the folder and wept uncontrollably, until there were no tears left.

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IT SEEMED LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY

Rene Clark
St George Evening VIEW Club

It seemed like only yesterday that l had stood on the same verandah with the two rows of faces looking up at me.

The heat was still beating towards us from the dusty red road which passed the little weatherboard school. By some miracle the old bell still stood, albeit a little drunkenly, and had rung a jangled call once more for morning assembly.

To my left, school playground still stretched to meet the railway line with its tiny station where a train stopped twice each day — once on its way from Sydney and again on the return trip. Behind us was the same grassy paddock with its few shade trees. There the children used to leave their horses to graze while they learned to read and write and count. There was so much to remember.

I had been twenty when l received my first teaching appointment to the little wheat town in the south west of New South Wales, population 300. All my life had been spent in suburban Sydney in the care of loving parents and on that first morning when I stepped from the overnight train, I could have been on another planet.

Board had been arranged for me and everyone was kind and welcoming. At least six other young people employed in the town lived and laughed in the same household. My shyness and sudden homesickness were not helped by the information that the night before a competition had been held. A drawing of the new schoolteacher had to be made and the one which most resembled me was to receive the prize!

Yes, it did seem like only yesterday that I had faced my pupils for the first time. Four grades in one room, including kindergarten were quite a challenge and one for which no one could be adequately prepared. Equipment was minimal but gradually a plan and routine were established. It was like trying to play all the instruments of an orchestra simultaneously.

Those shy country children taught me a lot. How well I remember one extremely hot afternoon in the middle of story time. A ten year old boy suddenly jumped from his seat and banged all the windows tight shut. "A whirly, Miss," he explained. In a few minutes we were surrounded by a choking cloud of thick red dust which span like a top around the building, shutting out the sun and then was gone, dancing across the paddocks.

I realised how self-reliant they were. Some of them came long distances on horseback, alone, or in sulkies with brothers and sisters. They unsaddled their horses on arrival and then faced the same trip home again at the end of the day. There was Bruce, a six year old who rode five miles each way alone and who excused his lateness one morning by shyly telling me he had been thrown by his horse. It had taken him some time to remount. Now I think of the rows of mothers cars which block busy highways in our suburbs when they are waiting to transport children less than a kilometre.

My pupils were always reluctant to go home. After school finished they enjoyed unsupervised games of cricket or football in the school yard. It was their chance for companionship when farms were so scattered and perhaps also a way to avoid some of the chores which had to be done before bedtime.

They were very well informed on all matters to do with farming and growing crops, subjects on which I was completely ignorant. I remember Billy who had great trouble learning to read but who, one afternoon gave me a detailed description of the different strains of wheat and the necessary conditions for a good harvest.

The personalities and specific abilities of those children were still very clear to me. There was Marcia who kept her workbooks with meticulous care and Jim who smudged everything he wrote but who was adept at filling the inkwells from the old bottle in the cupboard after he had mixed the ink powder with water to the exact shade which pleased everyone.

I remember fussy little Gwen who looked after the younger ones and who was always ready to lift the lid of the piano and set up the music for me. Then there was Molly, a little 'slow learner'. As soon as my back was turned she would swiftly erase everything I had prepared on the blackboard for the next three lessons.

My life away from school became more and more pleasant. I was accepted into the circle of young people and learned to return their friendship. We travelled miles to neighbouring towns for balls in the winter months, returning often as the dawn broke. Then there was Sunday tennis and the dusty golf course where the magpies took our balls. I even fell in love or thought I did and forgot him as soon as the school year ended.

Now I realised that "yesterday" was forty years ago. The two rows of faces looking up at me were not those of children. There were grandparents among them, mothers of families, a bank manager, all adults remembering with me the pupils they once were.

The little town was celebrating its centenary and former residents had made a great effort to return. When I had accepted my invitation to attend the school I had no idea that so many of my class would be there to meet me.

For two hours we caught up on life stories. Jim had been killed in Korea. Gwen had married Les and had six children. Jean had flown down from a cattle station in western Queensland.

Forty years had been swept away in a spate of remembering.

It seemed like only yesterday. . .

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VIEW World March 1969

AFTER THE BALL

Mrs. W. Wilson
New Lambton Club
2nd Prize Literary Competition

It was a cold night and during the drive home Joanna was glad of the heater in the car. Why, she wondered irritably, did one always have to get out of warm clothes into an evening dress in the coldest part of the year? It seemed idiotic, and if she had her way formal occasions would be arranged only in balmy weather.

She pulled her fur coat closer around her shoulders and huddled into the corner of the seat. She supposed that now was the time to bring up the subject – heaven knows, she'd been looking for an opportunity all evening, but now that the time seemed right she felt spent and ill-used and not up to the effort.

She glanced at her husband, driving with what she considered an offensively self-satisfied expression. All very well for him, she reflected darkly; just like a man not to notice she was being unusually quiet and ask her what was wrong. Men were so obtuse.

The car's headlights swept up the drive and shone on the house. It seemed odd to see it in darkness after all the years of coming home to a baby sitter, but now the girls were in their teens they scorned the suggestion of having anyone in, even though she'd have been happier knowing someone was there.

"Come on, Jo!" Tom commanded. "Or are you going to sit there for what's left of the night?"

Joanna wondered how the women in the movies trained their men. It always fascinated her to see them sitting calmly, like royalty, waiting for their escort to leap around and open the car door. She supposed one had to go to America for that sort of treatment. Irritated afresh, she got out of the car and followed Tom into the house.

"Man, oh man!" he was muttering. "Will I be glad to hit the sack."

Joanna stopped at the door of the girls' room and looked in. They were fast asleep, Fran flat on her stomach, the bedclothes half off, Elizabeth lying primly and neatly, like an advertisement for somebody's blankets. Joanna tucked Fran in and dropped a kiss on their unconscious foreheads, feeling maternal and sentimental.

Tom was undoing his tie when she reached their room. "The best thing about going to a ball is getting home and climbing out of this confounded collar." He dropped the tie on the floor.

"Tom ..." she began tentatively, but he was looking with horror at the clock.

"Good grief, look at the time, and I have to be up at seven, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for that sales conference." Wearily, he ran his hand through his hair. It was a habit he had, and consequently his hair was always rumpled, giving him a boyish look which, under different circumstances, Joanna found rather endearing. He sat down to undo his shoes.

"Lord," he said, "what a dreary evening. There's something peculiarly depressing about a crowd of middle-aged people hopping about pretending they're having one heck of a good time on the strength of too much to drink."

Suddenly, he noticed her tight lipped silence,

"You're very quiet. Anything wrong?"

She hung up her coat. "I was only wondering when I was going to get a word in edgeways. I was also wondering what it was about the evening you found so dreary. You seemed to be having a wonderful time, cavorting around with that female."

He looked up, one shoe in hand. "That female happens to be the wife of a very

important client, for Pete's sake."

Joanna seated herself in what she hoped was a dignified manner at the dressing table and started to remove her make-up. "She's certainly well aware of that. She's not afraid to pull rank either," she observed.

"Well," his voice was defensive, "What was I supposed to do, ignore her?"

"I'd say that'd be almost impossible. The way she waves those artificial eyelashes of hers at every man within a fifty yard radius makes me sick". She regarded her own luxuriously curling lashes with complacency. "A couple of children to look after would do her the world of good."

"Oh, come off it, darling." His voice had the irritatingly tolerant note he always used when he felt she was being catty. "She's fairly young and quite attractive, and it must be pretty dull for her, married to old Philmore."

"Don't 'darling' me," she snapped. "I'm fed up with being left to sit and entertain all those boring men who either can't or won't dance. And, anyway, she shouldn't have married a man thirty years older if she wasn't prepared to accept the consequences. All that money should make up for a lot!"

"Well, you're in a nice, charitable mood, I must say!"

"Charitable, my eye! I object to having my husband annexed in that casual way." She swung around on the stool to face him.

"And don't pretend you weren't enjoying yourself - I didn't realise you knew all those fancy cha-cha steps. If you could have seen yourself - you looked an absolute idiot.

His expression was outraged. "Well, you're hardly in a position to criticise. What was that fellow from the next table you danced off with? I don't suppose that made a very good impression on old Philmore."

"Don't raise your voice, please - you'll wake the children," she said icily. "Although now they are teenagers I don't suppose it would hurt them to know how inconsiderate their father is. They have to learn sometime that marriage isn't a bed of roses."

"Don't make me laugh, you're better off now than you've ever been in your life! And don't change the subject. I asked you who that fellow was – he looked like a gigolo to me."

"Good grief, Tom," she said lightly.

"You ARE giving your age away - gigolos went out with button-sided boots. That was Bill Farrell, and you know perfectly well we met him at that deadly party Marie threw last week. He was about the only bright spot on THAT occasion, too, if I may say so."

"You may! From the girlish way you were gazing into his eyes I take it that you prefer his company to mine."

"YOUR company?" She threw her shoes into the cupboard with a crash. "You may remember that at Marie's party you spent most of the evening holding up the bar with Charles, lying about the size of that bream you caught."

"We were talking business. You don't seem to appreciate the fact that I spend most of my time trying to keep you in the style to which you were once unaccustomed! "

She sank down on the stool again and looked at herself in the glass. He was a brute. A wave of self-pity washed over her and tears welled in her eyes.

"Sometimes," she said in a small voice, "I wish we were still hard up. Things seemed to be more fun then."

"Oh, Lord, now you're going to weep. Don't be so childish!" He strode into their bathroom, pyjama legs flapping round his ankles. "I can just see you going back to that poky flat and doing all your own housework.

No car of your own and all those nappies to wash. You'd be miserable." His voice was muffled by toothpaste. A lot he cared whether she was weeping or not! Indignation dried her tears. She drew herself up majestically as he came back into the room and pointed to his scattered underclothes.

"Put those things in the laundry basket, please, not on the floor."

He stuck out his chin. "I'll leave them on the floor if I want to."

"Now who's being childish? And put that coat on a hanger. Don't leave it there for me to pick up - I'm not your servant."

"Well, if you were, you'd be the highest paid skivvy in town," he said nastily. "Just what did that new creation cost?"

"Oh, so you DID notice it was new. I don't know why I bother. I could wear sugar bags for all the notice you take."

"Oh, good grief, here we go again". He flung himself into the bed. "Are you, or are you not, ever coming to bed tonight? I have to be up early in ..."

"Yes, yes, I know, God's gift to the sales conference!" He wasn't the only one who could be nasty. "I can't come to bed because I can't get out of this infernal dress. The zipper's stuck."

"Oh. come over here and I'll have a look at it," he said resignedly. "Where are my glasses'""

Here. Now, be careful - don't tear - ouch, you caught my skin!" She rubbed her side ruefully and gave him a baleful look.

"Sorry!" he said, and grinned at her suddenly, his eyes twinkling at her over his glasses. Tom could never quarrel for long. His sense of humour always got the better of him. She looked at him, dear and rumpled and familiar in the glow of the bed lamp, and her anger evaporated. "Now, for the love of heaven tum out that confounded light and let's get some sleep," he said.

Joanna cleaned her teeth and crept into bed in the dark. The tree outside the window tossed in the night wind, and for a while she lay, wide-eyed, watching the strange, flickering shadows it cast on the wall. Suddenly, she could wait no longer. She cleared her throat.

"Tom".

"Mm?"

"Are you asleep?"

"Now, that's a damn silly question!"

"Tom, I just have to tell you, I've been trying to get round to it all night, but things just went from bad to worse.

Brace yourself . . . we're going to have another baby. I only found out for certain this afternoon."

There was a protracted silence. "Well, for goodness sake, Tom, say something," she wailed. "I know it's a blow when we were planning that overseas trip next year, but…."

There was a click as the bedside lamp went on. He sat up and looked at her expressionlessly for a moment, then a slow grin spread over his face,

"Tom," she gasped. "Do you mean you really don't MIND? You're actually GLAD? Oh. I was so scared you'd hate the whole idea. Maybe this time it'll be a boy! Darling," she laughed, her voice muffled, "for pity's sake be careful of my new hairdo, it cost a fortune!

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VIEW World March 1966

Peta Hughes
Lane Cove VIEW Club
This story was awarded 1st Prize in the Professional section of the literary competition

THE LOOKING GLASS

It belonged to my grandmother, and I had been in love with it always.

My enjoyment of it was not related to seeing the reflection of mv small self in the big, swinging mirror. I simply fell in love with it, the way a child will do sometimes, with an inanimate object that has a special appeal for it.

The mirror was set in an oval mahogany frame, mounted on a heavy base which was carved into little steps, supporting the slender fluted uprights to which the mirror was hinged.

The oval frame was unadorned, its smooth, rounded surface gleaming like dark red wine where the light fell upon it.

The mahogany was a living thing, warm and glowing, the fire of rubies deep in the heart of the rich, dark wood.

It stood on top of a heavy chest of drawers in my grandmother's room, and when I was alone in the room I used to climb up on the tapestry-covered cedar stool and run my hand lovingly over the satiny wood, marching my fingers up and down the little carved steps of the base, and, very gently, setting the mirror swinging between the fluted columns.

As the glass reflected the picture of me — a rather solemn-faced child with dark brown hair braided into plaits and tied with red ribbons — it seemed that the looking-glass was talking to me in a special, secret way as it swung slowly to and fro.

I was an imaginative child, full of dreams and fancies.

I pretended that the looking-glass was really mine.

It was waiting, up there on the tall chest, until the time when I would be a grown-up lady and could take it to live with me forever.

I loved it as no one else did, not even Grandmamma, who regarded my passion for it with tolerant amusement.

Grandmother Fraser lived alone in a big, old house at the edge of town, with only a housekeeper for company.

We were taken there on regular visits, my cousins and I, with our parents, and after tea in the old-fashioned parlour, we were sent out to play in the garden until it was time to leave.

I always made an excuse to slip back into the house, and while the elders were exchanging last bits of family news and gossip with Granny, I'd creep up the stairs and take a farewell peep at the looking-glass from the doorway of the room.

One of my cousins was a girl of my own age, whose name was Iris Meadowbank.

Her mother, Aunt Tessa, was my mother's sister. They were the youngest of the family, and close friends. Only two years separated them in age, and in looks they were very alike, with tall, slender figures, brown eyes and golden brown hair.

Iris had inherited the good looks of the Frasers and her colouring was even lovelier. She had the most beautiful hair, a sort of silvery-gilt, and her eyes were velvety pansy-brown, with golden lights.

I admired her enormously. Even her name was romantic, I thought, and in keeping with her beauty.

In comparison, I was very ordinary, I considered. I was like my father, brown-skinned, with perfectly straight mid-brown hair, blue grey eyes, and a sturdy frame.

My name too —- Mary Crane — seemed a pretty plain one compared with my cousin's.

It was impossible to be jealous of Iris, however. She had a happy-go-lucky nature and was not in any way vain. She enjoyed everything to the full, and was fun to be with. We were as close as our mothers had been at our age, and our friendship remained firm as we grew up.

When I was twenty-one I was given an overseas tour, as were the others in our family.

Iris had been abroad the year before, and on her return, appeared lovelier than ever, with an air of youthful sophistication added to her charms.

Her engagement to Victor Hardy, a handsome young design engineer, was announced at the family dinner given to celebrate my birthday.

I was leaving for London within a few days — it was the beginning of June —- and I made Iris promise not to get married during my absence.

"Of course not, silly." she said, gaily. "How could I get married without my chief bridesmaid?"

I liked Victor, but I thought it a pity that Iris was giving up a flowery name like Meadowbank for the unglamorous one of Hardy. (I was still very romantic.)

Iris, however, could scarcely wait to become Mrs. Victor Hardy. They had already chosen a flat in the city, and were looking around for the right kind of furnishings. Its chief attraction seemed to be that it had a room with a good light which Victor could use for the painting of pictures which was a corollary of his profession.

I went by myself to say good-bye to Grandmother Fraser.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and she was having a nap when I arrived. I sat in a chair by the window looking out over the lawns where I had romped as a child.

The room was much as it had always been, with its misty blue carpet and snowy bedcover and curtains. The chest of drawers and the old mahogany looking-glass had been moved to a back room, replaced by a modern dressing-table with an oblong mirror.

The massive old furniture was unpopular with the domestic help of the day, and Granny had had to make some concessions.

I was glad that the beautiful mahogany things were safely stored away, beyond the reach of careless, unloving hands.

Granny was a very old lady now, and there was a nurse as well as a housekeeper.

She had deteriorated a little mentally over the past year or so, and was apt to become confused in conversation.

When she awakened I came over to the bed and sat quietly until she was fully conscious.

We talked for a little while, or rather, I talked to her, telling her about the forthcoming trip and promising to write to her while I was away.

She nodded and smiled, and seemed to understand, but when I kissed her on leaving, she patted my hand feebly and said: "Goodbye, Margaret. Come and see me again soon."

Margaret is my mother's name, so I knew that Granny hadn't really recognised me at all.

She died while I was abroad, slipping away during sleep, without any awareness that death was at hand.

The family kept the news from me until I returned, in mid-December, not wishing to spoil my holiday.

I had loved my gentle old Granny and found it very hard to accept the sad fact that I would never see her again.

Something gracious seemed to have gone from our lives with Granny's passing. It was like the cessation of a melody I had known all my life and would never hear again.

The preparations for Iris' wedding were an inescapable distraction. I was, indeed, glad of all the last-minute jobs that had to be done.

One afternoon, a few days before the wedding, I went with Iris to hang the curtains in the flat. When the work was finished we sat down on the sofa in the living-room to drink the coffee we had brought with us in a vacuum flask. I was rather tired and felt like putting my feet up. I had been on night duty at the hospital where I was training, and was feeling the usual lethargy. Everything in the fiat was too new and un-used-looking to invite relaxation, however, so I sat, rather stiffly, on the edge of the sofa.

"How do you like it?" Iris asked, for the hundredth time, glancing around proudly, like a little girl showing off her doll's house.

"It's most artistic," I said, warmly. "You and Victor both have excellent taste." (Victor had designed some of the furniture – stark, modern designs, striking even by contemporary standards.)

"I know you prefer traditional stuff," Iris said, happily, "but we both like this. I think Victor is a genius!"

She poured the last of the coffee into my cup.

"Of course," she said, smiling at the spindle-legged chairs and coffee tables, "this will become passé in time, but we can always replace it. It's not expensive

I nodded, and drank my coffee without

further comment. It wasn't my idea of lovely furniture, but neither was it to be my home. It was right for Iris and Victor at this stage of their lives.

Perhaps they would always prefer the modern look while I would be forever charmed by the old that was called "cumbersome" and "heavy" today.

"Speaking of old world furniture," Iris said, suddenly, "(did you know that Gran left me a few of her museum pieces?"

I shook my head, feeling faintly anxious. I hadn't been inside Granny's house since my return, but I'd been hoping that it had been left exactly as it was. There was some family talk about selling it, with or without the furnishings, but nothing had been arranged. I still cherished an unrealistic hope that someday I would marry and live in the house myself, changing nothing.

Iris was saying something that aroused me from my dreaming…… "yes, that old bureau and the bedroom chairs and that antiquated looking-glass …. can you imagine them here ?"

Iris laughed, enjoying the delicious absurdity of the thought.

"Dear old Gran got a bit vague toward the end……couldn't seem to sort us out properly."

I heard myself saying in a queer voice, "Not the looking-glass? Not the old mahogany looking-glass?" A note of hysteria crept in as I stammered at Iris. "I can't believe it …. "

Iris stared in a puzzled way.

"What's wrong? What's upset you?"

And I replied, because I couldn't help it, "I always thought the looking-glass would be mine. I loved it. I really loved it."

Iris looked aghast. "Good heavens, I didn't know! It never entered my head! You could have had it all. With pleasure."

"Could have?" I repeated, feeling sick. "Do you mean you haven't got them?"

"I sold them," Iris said, in a very small voice. "I didn't think Gran would mind." She looked at me with the expression of someone confessing a crime.

"I bought the mosaic coffee table with the proceeds……."

There was nothing I could say that would express my feelings. I just sat there, dumbly, staring at the new, impractical oyster-coloured carpet.

"It's all right," I managed, finally. "You didn't know. And you had a perfect right to do what you liked with them. They were yours."

"I wonder," Iris said, unhappily. "I was beginning to think Gran made a mistake."

I looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"I don't think Gran meant them for me at all," she said, thoughtfully. "She didn't put the things she left us in her will, you know. $he simply told the nurse, in a casual way, 'The bedroom chairs, the bureau and the looking-glass are for Tessa's girl, and my rings and brooches are to go to Mary'. Something like that. I think, in fact I'm certain, she mixed up the names! Or maybe the nurse did.

It was possible, I admitted. Gran had known how I loved the old furniture, especially the looking-glass, and that I had never cared very much for jewellery.

"But it doesn't matter now," I said, listlessly. "They're gone. I'll never see my looking-glass again."

I was still too shocked to be tactful.

Iris tried hard to remember the name of the dealer to whom she had sold the things, but it was hopeless.

"I answered an ad in the paper. Local, I think. And the chap came and took them away the same day. He gave me twenty pounds for the lot." She thought hard, again.

"I think I signed a bit of paper, but I haven't got it now and I haven't the faintest recollection of his name."

There was nothing more to say. We tidied the flat, locked up and left in near silence.

"I want you to have the jewellery," I told Iris as we parted.

"There are some beautiful stones and you can have them put into modern settings. I'd like to keep one piece as a memento, if you don't mind. Perhaps a ring."

"It doesn't seem fair," Iris said. "To you, I mean. It leaves you with nothing."

I shrugged my indifference. I had never cared about acquiring things. The old mirror was something special.

Iris thanked me for the offer, kissed me warmly on the cheek and dashed off to her own entrancing world.

I waited until after the wedding, which was a gorgeous affair, and then I began my search.

I telephoned every second-hand furniture dealer in the book, without success. No one remembered a private sale four months ago: some of them wouldn't even listen to a description.

On my days off from the hospital where I was in training I browsed around the "old wares" shops, from the seamiest little places to the grandest "Antiques" hopefully describing grandmother's looking-glass to the proprietors.

All I ever got was a shake of the head, and sometimes, a patronising smile.

A year went by. At the end of it I realised the hopelessness of this haphazard searching, and gave up. I knew, though, that I would never cease to yearn for my lost treasure.

The old house was now on the market, and the contents remaining after the disposal of legacies were to be sold at auction. The proceeds of the sale of the house were to be divided equally amongst the grand-children, according to the will.

It was all very sad to me, this severance of the last links with Granny, and only my preoccupation with the forthcoming final examinations kept me from brooding over it.

And then—out of the blue — the most marvellous and exciting thing happened. I fell in love!

It began at Granny's house.

I had driven out for a last look over the rooms before the auction which was to take place shortly. Everything was under dust-covers and my footsteps echoed hollowly over the hard-wood floors from which the carpets had been rolled up.

Granny's gentle ghost seemed to accompany me as I wandered from room to room, bidding it all goodbye ....

I went out into the garden for a last stroll, and there was Peter ....

I didn't know who he was then, of course. He was just a tall, young man, sitting behind the wheel of a car in the driveway, a good-looking stranger whom I assumed had come to look at the house. A prospective buyer. Or, an agent.

He got out of the car when I appeared and came striding up the drive. He was very tall, with dark hair and deep blue eyes. He wasn't exactly handsome, but there was something very attractive about him. And familiar. I felt I should know him, but I didn't. He was a stranger.

"I've come to look over the house," he said, in explanation, "but the agent chap hasn't showed up."

He gave me a slightly anxious look.

"Are you interested in it, too?"

I began to explain my connection with the house.

"Of course!" he interrupted me suddenly. "You're Mrs. Fraser's granddaughter. I should have known."

He laughed and extended a hand.

"You're Mary! And I'm Peter Hunter. I used to play with you and your cousins when I came to stay with my granny. Remember? You were just a little girl and you had pigtails. I used to grab you by them when we played chasing games." He laughed again, with a hint of apology. "You probably hated me. I hope you've forgiven me?"

That was how it began.

I took Peter over the house and then back home to renew his acquaintance with my mother.

Over lunch he told us he was now a 'fully qualified medical practitioner', and had decided to go into general practice. He was looking around for a house which could combine consulting rooms and living quarters.

Grandmother Fraser's house was ideal, but of course, he admitted, ruefully, extravagantly large for a bachelor medico, not yet established. He'd have to find a smaller place.

He'd chosen the Glenmore district because his father and grandfather had been in practice here, and he wouldn't be quite unknown.

He spoke affectionately of his grandparents who were both dead now.

"They were tremendously good to me. They took the place of my parents, you know, after the accident in which they died. They put me through medical school and left me everything they had. I think they hoped I'd come back here."

We saw each other frequently after that day, and at a family dinner party to celebrate my passing my finals, Peter proposed. We announced our engagement the same evening.

I was thrilled and happy and felt sure that Granny was smiling down on us from some distant heaven.

The ring I chose to wear was the one I had kept as a memento of her, a heavy gold one with a setting of rubies and diamonds.

Peter suggested he have the stones put into a modern setting, but I declined. I didn't want it altered, except for an adjustment in size. It was much too big for my finger.

We took the ring to old Mr. Bell, a lifelong friend of the family who had been doing our jewellery repairs for two generations. Due to retire from business soon, he was quite gratified that one of his last" commissions was the altering of the ancient ring for a modern bride of "the family."

Peter and I were invited to drink a glass of wine with him to celebrate our engagement. After locking up the ruby ring carefully, he ushered us into his sitting room at the rear of his shop.

As I entered the familiar room, glancing casually around, I was suddenly shocked into complete immobility.

Unable to move, I could only stare, incredulously, at the opposite wall.

There, on the mantelpiece over the fireplace, in all its glory, was Grandmother's looking-glass…….. For a moment I thought I was going to faint with the over-whelming surprise.

I drank some of the wine Mr. Bell hurriedly produced, and smiled weakly at Peter who was all professional concern.

I put down my glass and with shaking hands examined the old beauty.

"It's hers. It's really hers," I quavered. "I thought it was lost forever, and it was here, all the time. So close, and I didn't know."

Mr. Bell explained matter-of-factly that he had seen the "looking-glass in the window of second-hand shop soon after Granny's death and had recognised it instantly from his many visits to the old house.

"It didn't seem right for it to be there," he said, quietly, "so I bought it on the spot. Thirty bob was all they asked for it."

"Sacrilege," I said, sternly, and Mr. Bell nodded.

Peter smiled, probably regarding us as a pair of sentimental fools.

My Granny's looking-glass . . .

It is in the room with me now, a wedding-present from Mr. Bell, reflecting the image of me as I sit at my desk, telling its story.

It is back home, its real home Grannies home, which Peter was able to buy with my share in it.

The old chairs and the chest are missing, but the looking-glass reigns supreme in the room up-stairs which is my private retreat.

And I know that Granny, wherever she is, is happy too, because I found what no one else had discovered—a little piece of paper, firmly glued beneath the base of the heavy stand-and on it is written, in my grandmother's hand, firm and clear,

"For Mary."

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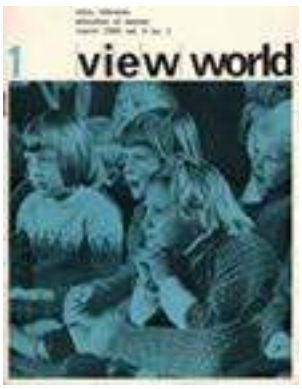

ONE 1 DAY

Phyllis Sutherland
Dee Why VIEW Club
3rd Prize Short Story Contest

Beyond some softly rolling hills, and sitting a' top the highest of them, is a white house, red roofed. The outhouses and barns are white, their roofs the same vivid red. An avenue of pines leads to the low white fence enclosing the home-stead, while in an adjacent paddock two horses crop the grass, ignoring the onslaughts of a dog who wants to play. Generally there is such an aura of peace and beauty about the scene that it is almost like a picture come to life.

On the day whose events are now related, sullen grey skies hung low over the countryside. A young woman stood on the wide verandah at the back of the house which over-looked the extensive property. There was about her none of the peaceful serenity of her surroundings.

She was tense and certainly despondent as she moved to the verandah railing to scan the country-side. Her thoughts on the incidents of the morning and the harsh words that sent her husband striding from the house — "We'll talk about this when you're in a better frame of mind. I'm going to the South Paddock to look at those fences."

But that had been five hours ago.

It had all started with a 'phone call from one of the wealthier graziers in the district. His twin daughters' 16th birthday was the following week and he was prepared to pay practically any sum asked if he could have for them the two horses now quietly grazing outside the garden fence. Like other country people over the last few years, Helen and Frank Phillips had been severely effected by the whims of the weather. For Helen, the chance of acquiring such a sum of ready cash had obliterated other aspects of the deal. Her husband, however, had been adamant, and the disappointed caller knew the horses would never leave their present home.

No matter how strongly she put her views, Helen found in Frank a calm but stubborn resistance, until, nerves overwrought by the worries of many months, she had lashed out.

The angry words were meant to hurt, and recalling now the mixture of sadness and surprise on his face, the tears flowed freely, and her clenched fist beat the wooden railing." He must know I'd hate to part with our lovely horses — but it seemed such a practical way of helping out."

She slumped into one of the verandah chairs and was soon oblivious of everything — even the radio's monotonous, droning tones. Instead, her thoughts were on the chance meeting in Sydney eight years ago of a boy and girl — he, a country lad, she, a city girl, both just 20.

Frank had allowed himself a short holiday from the property which occupied most of his time since the death of his parents a year before. Helen had revelled in showing the young man the city and her favourite haunts, and a bond grew between them. It was no surprise to friends and relations when the following Spring Frank brought Helen -— a lovely and happy bride — to make her home at Hill Haven.

There followed a succession of wonderful months. Helen had so much to learn about being a farmer's wife and Frank was more than willing to be teacher and guide. In time she recognised and shared with her energetic, hard-working husband his complete devotion to the land and all it stood for.

After three wonderful years, their child was born. The baby was christened William, after Frank's father, but he was soon Little Bill.

For the next 18 months, laughter was the keynote of their lives. There was plenty to do, especially at shearing time, but somehow there were always moments to play with Little Bill.

Then one morning Little Bill awoke fretful and grew more distressed as the day went on. Her mind passed quickly over the worries of that, and the following day, the agitated calls to the doctor, the nightmare ride into the hospital. There were three more days of anxious waiting, long sleepless vigils at their baby's bed-side; and finally the stark realisation that all the knowledge and skills of medicine had been futile against a determined virus.

Somehow, the two distraught young people stumbled through the weeks following Little Bill's death, turning to each other for the solace and strength to keep going.

There was much to be done at the homestead, but they worked with an intensity far greater than necessary — exhaustion they found, subdued some of the misery.

Among the many relations and friends who helped in different, unobtrusive ways was Tom Parker. He had been a close friend of Frank's folks for so many years that he was regarded as "family" and was known as Uncle Tom to the young couple.

One crisp autumn morning he rode over to Hill Haven leading two horses — fine frisky young animals. "I want you two to do me a favour. At last, I've got to admit it — I'm getting too darned old to cope with the likes of these", nodding towards

the capering colts. "They need young 'uns to properly care for them, so for goodness sake, please take them off my hands." He knew by the husky-voiced thanks of Frank and the damp cheek Helen pressed against his, that they well knew the real intentions behind his gift, and hastened on to say, "I've only ever called the smaller

horse what it already knows perfectly well," said Helen with a grin.

As time progressed there was no need for the word "master" in the relationship between the girl and her horse. Instead, girl and horse were in complete harmony enjoying early morning canters over dew-damped

beauty of the place, but its main value was of a practical nature.

Although it was fairly wide, it rarely ran at more than half capacity, nevertheless, it was the life's blood of the property. A bridge built across it in the early days gave access by foot to the lands beyond the far bank. The

one the Bay, so you can have the job of naming them."

Frank, stroking the other animal, said, "Well, if he's to be Bay, you've just to be Rum." And so it was that Bay and Rum took up residence and provided another outlet for their young owners.

Helen's riding instruction began with her husband telling her there was a lot of truth in the old saying, "You must let the horse know who's master". "Isn't that a bit humiliating, admitting to a

grass, or quiet evening walks by the river with Frank and his mount.

Uncle Tom was well satisfied. His "medicine" for heartbreak was proving most effective.

That spring and summer, Helen and Frank spent little of their leisure time alone — their friends saw to that. Picnic teas on the river bank became a favourite pastime. The river coursed through the farthest reaches of the property, adding greatly to the scenic

Land Rover had to take the longer route by road to reach the South paddocks which formed an extensive, fertile basin.

The winter following the dry, sunny days of that summer was a succession of clear blue skies and pleasant temperate days. As the days became months, anxious eyes scanned the horizon for rain clouds that never came. By summer's return all accepted the stark reality that this was drought!

Like others in the desperate years that followed. Helen and Frank saw brown dust where grass had once flourished; mud puddles where once there had been rivers; sheep dying on their feet. Their hearts were heavy and their pockets were becoming lighter, critically so.

Then the rains came, strong lashing rains that drenched the whole countryside. It was unbelievable — the turning point had come.

Far back to the north-west the river, swollen with waters it could no longer cope with, was tumultuously hurling them downstream. Warnings were given, and in their part of the country it was understood that floodwaters would arrive in 48 hours — floodwaters that their already full-flowing stream could not cope with.

Because of this, Frank had gone to the south paddocks to check fences and look for stray sheep. He had purposely gone on foot hoping to walk off the unpleasantness of the morning. He had already moved their pitifully depleted flock to high ground, where, like the home and outbuildings, they would be safe. Apart from the superintending task he was now engaged on, there was nothing to be done other than await the flood and its eventual abatement.

Helen, her eyes on the dull grey skies, reflected on the irony of it all. They had prayed so long for rain, and yet when it had ceased at daybreak, they had been relieved.

Suddenly the voice on the radio was no longer a background buzz — it had taken on a louder, staccato tone. She listened, then her lethargy vanished; she ran to the set to hear a repeat announcement. It was an urgent warning. To the North only a few miles away there had been a sudden cloudburst, resulting in a flash flood. No longer would there be a waiting period before the floodwaters arrived. They would now be converging on Hill Haven's stretch of river.

When the racing torrents reached the bank tops they would spill over and surge towards the lower, flat areas where Frank was working, ignorant of the news she was trying to take in. And Frank could not swim! It was one of the things he had always meant to "get around to", but it had never seemed very important.

She had to get to her husband in the quickest way possible. The horses! She must take the horses and go by the bridge.

She raced to them with the bridles in her hand — saddling would take precious minutes that must be put to better use. Feverishly she worked, and Bay and Rum sensing the urgency of the situation, stood immobile. Grateful to them for their understanding, Helen suddenly froze — the horses, her only means of helping Frank, she had wanted to trade for some paltry dollars. "Dear Heaven! I'm so ashamed!" she muttered as she clung momentarily to the animals. Then, the urgency of her mission recalled, she mounted and, leading Rum, made for the river.

Helen was dismayed to find the peaceful stream unrecognisable in the tossing, turbulent waterway. Already the bridge planking was covered, and as rider and horses carefully traversed it, Helen's fervent prayer was that this, their only avenue to safety, remain standing.

A few more minutes and she saw Frank, head down and striding purposefully towards the river. At least he realised his danger and Helen shouted a reassuring, somewhat frenzied, "Frank! We're up here." But the rushing waters drowned the sound.

More precious time passed before Frank, raising his head, saw the trio and raised a hand. At last they reached him, and the man and wife allowed themselves just one look at each other — a look that asked, and granted, forgiveness for the hurtful words of the morning; a look that embodied understanding of why such situations arise; a look that gave reassurance of the deep love and unity that was theirs.

Frank mounted, and turning to the horses, they made for the bridge. The sturdy little construction was valiantly standing its ground against the forces bent on its destruction. Bay and Rum, eyes dilated with fear, nevertheless did not hesitate to do the bidding of their riders who urged them across to the far bank and safety.

They pushed on until the river lay some quarter of a mile behind them, then turned and surveyed the changed landscape. Both were conscious of a deep sense of gratitude for just being there, unharmed.

A big, strong hand sought Helen's and they returned home. There was no need of words between them. After dismounting, Helen noticed a bulge in her husband's wind jacket and watched as he unzipped it and delved within to produce a tiny, forlorn lamb for her inspection.

Carefully he passed it to her. "I found this down in that far clump of trees — her mother must just have managed to bring her into the world then been too weak to help the poor little creature along. See if you can do anything for her while I rub down these two old faithfuls.

Several hours later, with Bay and Rum bedded in their stalls, Helen and Frank sat before a glowing fire in their gowns and slippers, quietly talking about the day's events. They no longer worried about what was happening beyond the river — no danger existed now for man or stock, and eventually things would return to normal. For a moment they were conscious of a great and satisfying relief.

Gazing into the rich hues of the flames, Helen wondered just how many emotions one human being can encompass in the short space of one day. She had experienced so many — from annoyance, anger, despair, self-reproach and shame to love and gratitude. Yet there was always room for more, she realised.

Cuddling the tiny woolly form on her lap, a deep tenderness engulfed her. The lamb had come into a turbulent world, no hope of help from the dead mother beside her, and now, fed and warmly wrapped, she was striving to take her allotted place.

"What will you call her?" Frank's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Something symbolic of this day, I think," she replied. "You see, despite all that was against her she made it! I think we'll call her Hope."

Frank grinned as he said, "Well, she's a pretty thin little Hope, but I've got a feeling she'll thrive. And, Mrs. Phillips, so will we! We'll make it along with skinny here!"

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VIEW World December 1977

THE DAY GRAN LIVED DANGEROUSLY

Lillian Archer
Tumut VIEW Club
Second Prize Short Story Competition

It was Julie who questioned the implications of the word "humane".

"You call it humane," she shouted, "to thrust a poor old, ineffectual, irascible, half deaf, unadaptable woman into this arena?"

Julie, at that time, was "doing" English Literature and was very word-conscious.

So were Bill and Dick. Their words were shorter, and not as clean, but they made their point with less tautology than Julie made hers. And everyone knew she was as mad as a beetle on its back, being expected to give up her room for a smaller and less strategically placed one.

Her room opened onto a small courtyard that became a happy oasis for Gran and anyone who called to see her. And there were plenty who called, mostly young people. They thought she was some kind of mythological figure with two heads, five arms and twice that number of feet.

The family did come down rather heavily on the feet, in telling about her, but for that they couldn't be blamed.

There was that startling habit she had of kicking the chair from under her when dinner was over (instead of half standing up and scraping it back as the rest of them did) not having the right kind of lackey, or manners, for a more elegant up-rising.

Then there was her quick, vigorous walk. Over a given course she could out-walk almost anyone; but she'd been well trained in her school days. Eight miles each day, she said, four there and four back.

"But Gran, why didn't you go in a car?" I asked when I was old enough to want to champion her against the harsh world of her youth.

"Car?" she said in a gentle voice that I sensed was for me alone, "I didn't even have a pony I could kick into a canter."

It was natural that there should be a special bond between her and me, the change in our family life having come about when the hand that held the bottle still ruled my world. And that hand had become our Gran's.

The trouble erupted, if I can so describe it, when our parents decided that the humane thing to do was to bring their only remaining parent to live with us. And while our mother must have known it would have some advantages, she could not have foreseen how the thin thread that held the family together would swing away from Dad and her; and in the swinging become a wily twist of grand-parental control.

This devious control Julie would never acknowledge although Gran, sitting opposite her at mealtimes, would lay her forearms on the table and, with head thrust forward, clamp her eyes on Julie's — a tribute that nerved her nimble-witted granddaughter to achieve heights of drama never touched before.

The fact that Julie's best thinking was only possible if she could do it out loud at the dinner table, preferably with her mouth full, was never commented upon. Her problems were too pressing for any such niggling.

When the meal, and the kicking and scraping, were over, an arm would slide through Julie's, and the invitation would come, "Let's go into our room and sort it out, shall we?"

Oh, she was tactful was our Gran, as well as deeply interested, not to say intermeddling. It was never "my room" always "ours".

With Dick and Bill the changeover was slow, but even more insidious.

Dick, always short of pocket money, had welcomed Gran as a possible replenisher. What he got were suggestions on how to EARN money, in a not too painful way. These were tossed into the middle of Dick's stormy pleas, and a final threat that he would find the purse she so carefully hid and steal the money.

She must have lashings of it, of course. Nobody could live as long as she had without amassing what to Dick, at the time, would be a fortune. The old always had money hidden away, but you could see daylight through their scattered bits of brain.

So thought, and said, Dick. But the others noticed that the truce, and there was always a truce, was sealed with a kiss free from threat or cajolery.

Bill's early defiance and slippery antics were covered by the statement, made to the old lady's face, "You can't KNOW anything. You're old."

Her suggestion that if this were so he'd better put the brake on his own aging process, glanced off Bill. He had already decided on a life that was short and resplendent, and free from any mind of toil.

As Gran said admiringly, "You're fast becoming a regular peacock, my boy. You no longer believe that everyone's skin colour is, or should be, a faded blue. You'd better give me those old

jeans of yours. I'll send them to the undeserving poor."

Inevitably, the time came when I, too, had to lay my cards on the table for Gran to read; but by that time our relationship was beyond quibbling. It was an honest exchange of ideas and ambitions that lay, most times, beneath the surface, covered by an affectionate understanding that nothing could shake.

"You're not using your nice little pushbike very much," she said one quiet afternoon.

She and I were being left at home in one another's care — an idea hardly in keeping with the fact that Gran had been left in charge of us all when our parents decided on a long holiday.

"Oh I can't stand peddling round on that thing any longer," I said using Bill's offhand manner.

"M-m-m-m," was her thoughtful response. "What's next, then? A skateboard? No, no. They're out, too."

"Aw Gran," I protested. She knew very well what I was saving for, out of the small amount of pocket money doled out to me.

"You want something faster, and faster. Yes, you want what Bill and Dick have now. Something that will take you nowhere in particular, at a speed that could shoot you off the edge of the earth." She put down her knitting and sighed deeply. "You, too, want to live dangerously."

"Aw it's not dangerous. Look at Bill and Dick. And all the others. They always come back.

At that there was a noise like the whole sky being ripped open, with the clouds tumbling down like a cascade of falsely fluffy boulders — Bill, Dick and a couple of friends burst into the room.

Steep. And slippery. It was both of these, but we scrambled up the rocky track, grabbing what support we could get from the thin saplings and sometimes the dying unreliable weeds.

"We're taking off, Gran," Bill said.

"Going where?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular. Just around the rump of the Mount. There'll be nothing to guide us. We'll make our own tracks. What about coming?"

He was joking, but Gran waited, as if considering it.

"Somebody with more wisdom than common sense maintained that one didn't live at all unless one lived dangerously," she said. "I always wanted to do that, but not without a purpose, an objective. Thanks all the same, Bill."

Grinning, Bill waved a hand and he and his friends jostled one another out into the courtyard.

Gran resumed her knitting and I sat watching her, my thoughts sliding stitch by stitch, from one needle to the other. The long years stretched ahead; the years that would have to be filled in, somehow, till I could join the pack, and shear through the air on a bike that was built to go nowhere in particular to the rhythm of its blurting exhaust.

Slowly I became aware of the fact that the most pressing moment is the present one, so I got up and stood in front of Gran.

"This side of the Mount, the foothill on this side, is pretty dangerous," I said, knowing how quickly the spark of an idea could jump the narrow gap between us.

"In what way?" she asked, rolling up her knitting.

"Oh well, it's a bit of a climb. It's slippery. And steep. But I think there's a view from the peak, right along the coast. That'd be an . . . an . .

"An objective, yes. I'd like that. Shall we take something to eat?

Again I borrowed Bill's manner. "Oh no, just a few biscuits. It's not as if we're going camping."

She stood and put her hand on my

shoulder. Our eyes locked as we pushed to the back of our minds the fact that I was too young, and she too old, for even the limited climb that I had suggested.

Steep. And slippery. It was both of these, but we scrambled up the rocky track, grabbing what support we could get from the thin saplings and sometimes the dying unreliable weeds.

Stopping frequently, we would breathlessly encourage one another.

"Keep it up, Gran. We'll reach the peak. We're nearly there, now."

"Yes, indeed," she gasped, taking hold of the long dry stalks of the skeleton weed. They came away in her hands and she started to slip backwards. Twisting, to see where she was going, she stumbled and began to roll down the slope.

"Oh Gran, stop. Stop," I cried. "I'm coming. I'll help you."

I couldn't stop her. One of the big rocks did that as she met it head on. When I reached her she was still. Her eyes were closed and I couldn't make her hear me, or feel my imploring hands on her face as I begged her to speak to me.

"Say something. PLEASE say something," I pleaded, on and on. It wasn't any good and I knew it.

Standing up, I looked around, seeing nothing, not even hearing the harsh voices of the cicadas, moved to protest against the brevity of their lives.

Looking down the way we had come, I dizzily rejected it.

Keeping on the track to the peak, I found a narrow, frightening path that led around to where Dick and Bill would probably come. There I waited and listened until, at last, I heard them.

While Bill and his friends went to find Gran, Dick took me home, and for a long time afterwards nothing was real to me.

In the courtyard outside her room, next morning, I watched the long shadowy finger of a tall tree begin to write the story of that day across the green paving stones. My teeth were clenched, my eyes staring; and I could say nothing when Julie came and stood beside me.

"Bill says she looks beautiful," Julie said. "He thinks we should go in and say goodbye."

I couldn't speak.

"Don't you want to?"

I unclenched my teeth. "No," I said. "If I say goodbye she'll really be gone. If I don't she'll be here, inside me, for all of my life. And that's what I want."

Julie's teeth were clenched too, and her eyes were staring. "Me too," she said, and went away.

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ONCE UPON A CHRISTMAS EVE

Winifred Potts
Mudgee VIEW Club

Christmas beetles whirled around the electric light like gold and bronze-tipped mobiles on a giant Christmas tree as they competed with the silver moths for the light and the right to self-destruction.

Further out the dimming rays fell gently on the semi-detached cottages, softening their scaling paint and scabby surfaces.

The heat still shimmered from the narrow pavement and the murmur of voices told of heat-weary souls on the doorsteps trying to catch the worn out breeze from the bay.

In the distance, the rattle of trams, closer the whirr of beetles and the soft murmur of human voices — a city Christmas carol, created by God and man.

In the circle of light a skinny little figure skidded to a halt. Lips parted from exertion, pinched face gaunt in the dusty light, her huge dark eyes glowed with excitement as she opened her bony little fist and gazed with hardly controlled glee at the treasure in her palm. A brand new penny glinting and glowing like a gorgeous jewel.

Tomorrow was Christmas Day and this was to be her Christmas present for Mum — this shining jewel, this hard-earned penny! She had lumped Dyson's fat baby on her hip for miles while Mrs Dyson did her Christmas shopping. Her husband worked on the trams, consequently she thought she was "class".

Anyway, the penny was good.

"Show the little ones Santa Claus," she had said. Lily knew there was no Santa Claus but she knew they would all get something tomorrow because Dad had done a week's Relief Work. Mum had put the baby in the old cane pram and walked to Paddy's Market. Nobody had seen what was in the pram when she came home but Lily

had heard her say the rest of the money must be used to keep the roof over their heads.

Mum would get a present tomorrow — this, her shining penny.

But she mustn't waste any more time. With luck they would be having tea when she got home and she could creep in unnoticed. Such joy awaited her in the bottom of Mum's chest of drawers! She trembled with anticipation as she thought of it and gloated as she sought among her collection of too big and too small clothing, a hiding place for the penny.

Gurgling with delight she tied the penny in a piece of rag that served as a hanky and stuffed it deftly up her bloomer leg. The elastic might hold it and if it did slip down she'd feel the rag.

She hugged to herself the joy in store at home — not the meat for tea or the chook or the plum pudding Mum had promised for Christmas dinner, but the treasure in Mum's bottom drawer! Like a whirlwind she set off towards the row of two-storey semi-detatcheds further down the street.

Where Mum was going to get meat and chook from she didn't know. Except the week on Relief, Dad hadn't worked for ages. Depression, Mum called it. The dole didn't allow much for meat, let alone chook and plum pudding.

Chook and pudding would be good of course, but that doll in the bottom drawer, her very own!

She paused to draw a breath and closed her eyes to conjure up a picture of that delicate china doll — softly tinted face, clear blue glass eyes, black lashes, golden hair in curls and a silk dress.

Grandma in England who, Mum said, "knew nothing of their circumstances", had sent it to her. Grandma sent her a present every Christmas because she was born in "the old country". The others were dismissed as Australians.

This year it was special because Lily was old enough to care for it. Care for it she really would. No other girl ever had such a doll, except in the stories at Sunday School about sad little rich girls. "Cost a fortune," Mum had said.

She skipped and ran in turns, breathing in gasps, as she tried to sing her secret. To steal into Mum's room, forbidden territory, and for one wonderful moment touch, even lift it out of the drawer and hold it; if she could escape upstairs unnoticed.

As she crept through the wash house, where the steaming copper and smell of wet feathers bore silent witness to the promised chook for Christmas dinner, she could hear the babble of voices and smell the spicy, wet-cloth aroma of Christmas pudding. Good, Mum was giving the young ones their tea.

Quick as lightning she ran up the creaky stairs and along the narrow hall — nobody had seen or heard her. The bedroom door was ajar, she felt along the wall for the chest of drawers. There.

Trembling, she groped for the matches and scraped one along the box. With unsteady hands she lit the candle and knelt to pull out the heavy bottom drawer.

She felt among the baby clothes Mum kept there — it seemed there was always a need for them — but no hardness touched her shaking fingers. Better put the candle on the floor. Its flickering light revealed no shape.

She lifted the clothes carefully at first but then with frenzied haste as fear began to dull her mind. The other drawers perhaps! Oddments of clothes spilled out as she became more frantic, hopeless exhausted tears spilling unchecked down her pallid cheeks.

She stood, oblivious of the penalty for trespassing in Mum's domain. Gone was the blithe spirit that had sped along the hall such a short time ago. Her footsteps echoed hollowly on the bare boards as she dragged herself to the kitchen.

For a second she stood in the open doorway; a heartbroken forlorn figure shrunken inside her ill-fitting clothes. A dry choking sob jerked from her tight throat and six pairs of eyes turned to stare, the babble of voices ceased.

In the stillness the rasping words seemed to be wrenched from her body. "It's gone! My doll!"

Mum moved towards her, half pitying, half stern. She made a hopeless, wavering gesture and turned to the stove saying, "Sit to your tea child, there's meat tonight."

Through the film of tears the faces at the table were nameless, except Herbie, who like a distorted grinning gnome opened his mouth to speak. Meat juice oozed from where his front teeth used to be and dribbled down his chin, "Yes, meat for tea and doll for dinner termorrer."

A scream rose in her throat and instinctively she reached for the rag in her bloomer leg to stifle it. Jerked out, the penny fell to the floor with a dull thud and rolled along the pattern less brown lino. Six heads turned to watch its silent progress as, glinting and glowing, it wandered and wavered, paused, balanced, then fell into a hole in front of the old black stove at Mum's feet.

In mute reproach it lay, dulled by the dark abyss into which fate had thrust it.

Mum stooped to pick it up. A weary tear mingled with perspiration splashed on the penny as she lifted it with thumb and forefinger. Arm outstretched to Lily she proffered the coin, washed clean, reflecting and radiating, a pure spectrum, a living light transforming all around it. For one split second all the glory and wonder of The Stable in Bethlehem filled the shabby kitchen.

The tear-stained child's face caught and held the magic moment, uncomprehending yet knowing. Her lips trembled to a smile, heaven reflected in her eyes.

Through misty eyes Mum saw the radiance, felt it flow, enfolding, forgiving and the penny hung between them, a shining symbol of everlasting hope.

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THE INNER STORM

VIEW World December 1978

Doris Noble
Parkes VIEW Club
1st Prize Short Story Competition

Stephanie, bent over a sink full of soap suds, wiped her perspiring brow with the back of her hand and impatiently pushed a damp tress of blonde hair from her eyes.

She wondered bitterly what her friends in Melbourne (where she had worked as a model) would think if they could see her now, standing before a pile of greasy dishes, clad in blue jeans and striped shirt with hair limp from the summer heat. They had all thought how romantic it was when she announced that she was to marry a handsome young squatter and go to live in his huge homestead in the outback country.

It had been a whirlwind courtship and the excitement of planning and preparing for the elaborate wedding had given her little time to consider what her future life would be like. The only one to sow a seed of doubt was Lance when, on the eve of her wedding, they sipped farewell drinks at the Catalina Club.

Lance was an up and coming young business tycoon and he and Stephanie had dated constantly over the years.

There was nothing special between them, but it suited Lance to have a beautiful, poised woman at his side and Stephanie had found him a charming escort. She knew that if they eventually married he would give her the best of everything and for a fleeting moment she wondered if she was making the right decision.

However, her wedding day was a happy one and the breakfast was a huge success. Any doubts she may have had were quelled when Bradley, her handsome, bronzed husband, brought her, his radiant young bride, to his station.

Spring had come early that year and she recalled how the fields had been covered with a rich carpet of green, dotted with well-fed cattle and woolly white sheep. How the crystal clear stream had glistened in the sunlight as it meandered through the property, fringed on either side by giant gums and weeping willows.

What a wonderful sight it had been when, topping the rise, the big white

house which was to be her home came into full view. Tall pines towered high above the rooftop and the wattles bowed low to the ground, heavy with an abundance of yellow blooms.

She had caught her breath t the sheer beauty of it all as a flock of grey and pink galahs rose, screeching in protest at being disturbed by the hum of the motor, and two jovial kookaburras perched on a nearby fence burst forth into peals of laughter.

The first few months had been happy ones. Stephanie had busied herself sewing new curtains and trying exotic dishes for her tired, dusty husband when he came in from the fields. But her yearn to return to the bright lights was gradually taking the place of the deep contentment she had felt first.

Bradley had taken a great deal of trouble getting her interested in her new life and the neighbours had been wonderful, going out of their way to be friendly.

Stephanie had to admit they were nice, but she was extremely bored with their limited conversation. She was heartily sick of hearing about the new variety of wheat, the fluctuating wool prices, the number of chickens Pam had reared and the high price Ella got for her turkeys. She didn't care about the modern new woolshed the Hartleys had erected or the prize bull the Ellises had bought at the cattle show. Even their dress, which had amused her so much when she first arrived in the community, was now annoying.

One Sunday a month a minister from the local town would travel out to one of the farms and conduct a service for all denominations in the little tin hut they called a church. It was a big day for them all and everyone would doll up in their best — the men in their navy striped suits, big brimmed hats and tan shoes or riding boots; the ladies in floral organdie and cretonne with silly tizzy hats perched on their heads.

The first service Stephanie had attended, everyone sat goggle-eyed at the tall, slim blonde in her smart, tailored suit. The minister's stirring words had fallen on deaf ears.

When the service was over the families would congregate for a midday meal with the minister before he hurried off to a neighbouring parish. The locals usually lingered until late afternoon, making small talk and swapping methods of farming. The youngsters ran riot, glad of their too infrequent get-togethers.

This function was always held at the Carpenter's homestead, situated near the church. It was a huge home and more than a hundred years had passed since its erection, although its brick work was in perfect condition and not a crack could be seen in the plaster.

Mrs Carpenter had superbly decorated each room in Queen Anne style and Stephanie was amazed at the huge floor area and the tall ceilings. Creeper-protected verandahs encircled the house and spacious lawns sloped down to a picturesque creek at the bottom of the garden.

Each family took it in turns to provide the luncheon and the white, sheet-covered trestles Mrs Carpenter set up groaned under the weight of all the food.

During the summer they ate fresh, crisp salads. In winter, when it was safe to light a fire, giant steaks and mountains of chops sizzled on the open barbecue, its tantalising odour wafting through the air. Mrs Carpenter always added a finishing touch to the meal by making her special camp-fire damper and spreading it with thick, home-made butter.

It was little wonder the women of the district were all slightly plump, Stephanie thought on her first visit as she watched them consume great plates of food. She remembered how they had cast concerned eyes over her too slim body and insisted she had double servings.

She had to admit, though, that her last inspection of her frame in a full-length mirror had pleased her. The once angular body had blossomed into soft round curves. She smiled as she pictured what her former manager's reaction would be.

He had always reminded her of a bantam rooster as he clucked around his chickens, prancing from one foot to the other and rubbing his hands together. A little man with a bald head and toothbrush moustache, he was capable of throwing the worst tantrums at the slightest weight gain in his models.

Stephanie wondered too if Lance would approve, then reproached

herself for having pondered over such a thing. After all, Bradley loved her however she looked and she always felt thrilled when she caught his admiring glances.

She sighed as she wiped the last dish and let her eyes wonder hopelessly across the once green countryside. Little rain had fallen in months and all that could be seen from the window was the thirsty brown earth, a few scrawny cattle and weary sheep, as brown as the earth itself. Even the trees were limp and wiltered, parched under the blazing sun.

The shimmering heat rippled relentlessly over the valley and glistening mirages appeared from nowhere, spreading like giant lakes across the flats. Stephanie shivered in spite of the heat as she thought of the many bushmen who had died of thirst and exposure, tortured by the ghost-like water.

She pictured the ill-fated men, in their delirium clawing across the searing desert, beckoned by the evil mocking mirages only to find as they reached the oasis that it had vanished completely or mysteriously reappeared further on.

Picking up the duster, she rubbed it over the table top. Tears of self-pity filled her eyes as she noticed rust-coloured clouds rising in the western sky, a promise of yet another dust storm. How she wished she was sitting in an air-conditioned club with her friends, sipping a long cool martini and talking their language. How she longed for Lance to tuck her into his long, sleek sports car and speed along the coast road with the sea breeze caressing their faces.

Tears now rolled down her cheeks and the deep depression that had been with her for days erupted into frantic desperation. She clutched her head and rocked back and forth in a frenzy, trying to gain control.

"I'm going mad, I'm going crazy in this place! I've got to get out," she cried aloud and sobs of frustration rocked her body.

A cold shower restored her composure and, resting on the bed, her mind began to form a plan. She knew beyond doubt that Bradley would never leave the land to live in the city, not even to fulfil her wishes. Besides, it would not be fair to expect such a drastic change for a country man and the chances of a good job in the city would be small.

Whatever happened she was determined to head for civilisation immediately. If they left as soon as Bradley got home, they would reach the little siding in time to catch the goods train back to the city. She dreaded the long, hot, dusty journey, but anything would be better than staying in this forsaken dump another minute.

What would she say to Bradley? That would be the hardest part. She knew she couldn't stand to see the hurt look in his eyes as she told him of her plans. It was a bad time to be running out on him, things were at their worst with the drought and all.

Just then she heard the cheerful whistle and the familiar bang of the screen door. Two seconds later the dusty face appeared around the corner. As he held out his arms regret flooded her, but with forced calmness she pushed him aside and told him what she had in mind.

Slowly, the broad shoulders slumped and the smile disappeared from his face. Sitting down on the bed he said very quietly, "I know you haven't been very happy lately and if that is what you want I won't stand in your way. But wait until tomorrow.

There's a vicious looking storm coming up and I wouldn't like to be caught going through the ranges in it."

Stephanie's lips tightened and she snapped the suitcase shut. "I'm not staying here another night. If you don't take me, I'll demand that one of the jackaroos drive me."

Half an hour later Stephanie and Bradley were bouncing along the dusty track in silence. The sky had grown dark and, as they approached the foothills, twigs and debris hurled across the road in front of them. Then the rain started, not just a few fine drops, but great heavy drops belted down on the cabin.

Within minutes their path was a slippery sliding track and Bradley fought to control the vehicle as it slid from side to side. The wind lashed the trees in its fury and Stephanie bit her lip to stop from begging Bradley to turn back. She had gone this far and nothing was going to stop her now.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash

followed almost immediately by a deafening crash. She felt herself being hurled into space, then nothing.

Later she was conscious of the storm raging about her and a funny pain in her head. Raising her cramped body, she became aware of branches sticking into her legs. She realised a tree must have fallen on the car.

Feeling about, her hand touched something sticky and wet. With a gasp she searched frantically under the seat for the flashlight Bradley always kept there. With shaking fingers she found the switch and shone the beam around, finally pausing on the body crumpled on the seat.

Bradley's face was very white and blood gushed freely from a deep gash on his forehead. Fighting back panic, she bent over him for a better look. He opened his eyes and smiled.

The relief was so acute that her head began to spin. The next thing she knew she was lying on a couch and kind hands were gently mopping her face with a damp cloth.

When her eyes became accustomed to the light she realised she was in a neighbour's kitchen and the kind hand belonged to her precious husband. There was a big piece of plaster over one eye and blood on his shirt, but there was love and concern written all over his face.

Stephanie buried her head in his neck and sobbed her relief. Deep in her heart she knew that there was no other place she would rather be. Bradley was far more precious than the bright lights and gay times of the city.

Silently she vowed that from now Pam wouldn't be the only one to rear all the chickens and next year Ella wouldn't be topping the market with her turkeys. It was time, too, Brad had that son he was always talking about. After that, perhaps if she was lucky, there might be a chubby-faced little girl to brighten their lives.

Old Mr and Mrs Kitchener insisted that they stay the night and, after a warm bath and two cups of sweet tea, Stephanie, clasped in her husband's arms, fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning dawned bright and clear. After breakfast Bradley and Mr Kitchener set off to see how badly damaged the car had been.

Mrs Kitchener brewed a fresh pot of tea and, with Stephanie, sat on the back steps in the warm sunshine.

"What an idiot I've been, putting poor Brad through all this and nearly getting us killed into the bargain," Stephanie blurted out.

Mrs Kitchener smiled wistfully and patted Stephanie's hand. "Would you believe I know exactly how you feel? Nearly 40 years ago I went through the same thing.

"Being born and bred in the city, I loathed this place when I married Tom. Well, I left him after six months and hitch-hiked all the way to Sydney. Funny though, when I got there the lights didn't seem so bright, the air didn't smell so good and the people all seemed too busy to stop and talk. I can tell you, it wasn't long before I came home to Tom and here I've been ever since.

"Don't feel too badly, dear," Mrs Kitchener comforted, "Brad understands how lonely you have been. He told Tom he had arranged a holiday for both of you after shearing. He's made reservations at the most exclusive hotel in the city for three, glorious weeks so you can see all your friends and visit all the places you desire. But my bet is that you'll be glad to get back to the bush where the sky is blue and the stars shine brighter.

"Mind you, my dear, things won't always be rosy. There will be droughts and bushfires and floods for some; the markets will be down and machinery and fuel bills up; the winters cold and the summers hot; the mosquitoes and flies unbearable at times. But it's all a challenge.

"Life is a challenge I suppose, but out here it's even more so. Be strong and work hard at your husband's side and you'll reap not only the golden crops, but golden fulfilment as well."

Stephanie smiled faintly as she looked at Mrs Kitchener's work-worn hands and kind happy face. "Yes," she whispered, "I believe I will."

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THE DAY

Pat Stevenson
New Lambton VIEW CLUB
This story won 2nd prize in the first
VIEW World Short Story Competition
judged by Kylie Tennant

The early morning sounds penetrated his sleep and he shifted slightly, clinging to the last vestiges of unconsciousness but knowing, even as he did so, that it was useless. Sighing heavily, without opening his eyes, he mentally went through the familiar routine that he knew was at that moment taking place in the kitchen.

Sure enough, as his ears picked up the clink of cutlery laid down on plate, his father's chair scraped back. There was a short mutter of words and then a firmly shut door. His mother took six steps; always six, he had counted them so many times.

He called, "Hurry up Ellen, you'll be late for school!"

Ellen's muffled voice replied and he mouthed the words with her: "Aw gee, just five more minutes."

"No, now." Another ten steps and a hand on his shoulder.

"Time to get up, coffees ready."

Always the same ritual, every day the same, every day the —. A red-hot hand seemed to clutch at his belly and he spun over on his back, eyes wide open, staring at the 'stained ceiling. No! Shouted his mind. Not the same! It is The Day!

It seemed to him that he remained stiff, his breathing suspended for an hour, but in fact, as he let out his breath in a long gasp, he could hear his sister protestingly swinging herself out of bed.

The Day. Thought about, planned about, argued about, for so long, and now it was here. What will have happened, he thought, before I am in this bed again? Will I even be in this bed tonight, or any night? Once more fear clutched at his stomach. He forced himself to lie still, and to try to resume the calm, fatalistic air with which he had committed himself to this thing. It was no different today than it had been yesterday, or the dozens of days previously when they had discussed it.

"Lennie, I'm telling you; you have just fifteen minutes to get that bus."

His mother's voice galvanised him. Without letting himself hesitate another second, he rose and lost himself in the split-second timetable which had him shaved, dressed and fed, and on the street corner with exactly thirty seconds to wait for the bus.

Familiar routine directed his movements also when this came along. He made his way to the rear, and leaned against the stanchion. There was a seat near the driver, but he had long ago given up expecting to sit on his journey and merely made sure he was braced in the way that enabled him to use both hands to hold his newspaper, and no amount of swaying or sudden stops would result in him moving the proverbial inch.

Until exactly one stop from his destination he remained immersed in the paper, then he folded it, placed it in his pocket, pulled the bell-cord, pushed his way to the exit and alighted from the bus the moment it stopped.

Around him the scurrying throng! No conversation, everyone intent on getting to work, the faces telling so much and so little. The young girls, the bundy-punchers, anxious, all but running, darting into all the little doorways that made up the entrances in this old and mainly dilapidated part of town. Then there were the slightly older ones with the "So-what-if-he-fires-me" look on their faces. Not dawdling by any means, merely quickening their pace a little as the insurance company clock showed 8.55. The young men, so similar to himself, kept up a brisk walk as they branched off into each building. Of the older, married-man-with-responsibilities, there was generally no sign. If they were on an executive level they would not appear for some time, if they were not, they were already at their jobs, showing the boss how more dependable they were than these young fellows.

Lennie swung into his own domain. An old, brown sandstone building of some six floors, built in the last century, and described in the Council's files as "Bad Fire Risk," a rabbits' warren if there ever was one, with over fifty small concerns housed on its rotting floorboards.

The elevator (surely one of Mr. Otis's first models) descended slowly to the ground level. Lennie never entered it without feeling that someone should send for a priest. The agonising slowness with which it carried its load upwards was only slightly better than the trip down, when after each stop it started again with a sickening short drop which made you sure your mangled remains would be found at the bottom of the lift-well.

The operator of this "antique" was only slightly younger than his charge. With a distressing habit of commencing conversations from where he had left off the last time he saw you, or someone he thought was you, it was common for the tenants to

find themselves involved in dialogue of which they understood not one word. He did not make any friends either by his tendency to leave the doors propped open whilst he nipped into the various offices to cadge "just one smoke" or "a little milk, or sugar, or coffee, or tea" for his morning break.

Lennie entered the elevator, praying that the old man would not choose this morning to give him a blow-by-blow description of his latest fight with the building manager. With his emergence from the chloroform of the morning newspaper, tension was once more building up inside him. Luckily, a young and new girl had entered with him, and the operator was occupied in trying to pierce her disdain by airing some of his witticisms, circa 1914, upon her.

Slowly they rose, each floor alike, only a bare wall, with a passage stretching either side and a faded letter board with "A. S. Brownlow, Accountant," "Wholesale Fur Trading Co.," "I. Tompkins, Solicitor" and the like, worn and so illegible that strangers entering the building had been known to spend an hour without finding the party they were seeking.

Lennie's company was the only one which occupied a whole floor, the fifth. It was a whole-sale toy firm and Lennie was a packer. He liked his job in a disinterested sort of way. He was going to night school, studying accountancy, although he had his doubts about 'his prospects, even when he was through. However, he was conscientious, neat, and quick at his present job and the foreman liked him. He had resolved to worry about the likelihood of an accountant's position when, and if, he received his degree.

He donned his dustcoat and walked into the storeroom. From every direction girls were descending upon it with dolls, hundreds and hundreds of dolls in great armfuls, stacking them all in huge mounds upon every available table. He walked to one end where an equivalent mountain of boxes stood and began methodically to place box on table, insert tissue paper, place inside doll, tuck more tissue carefully around her, put the lid on the box and place it on the conveyor belt at his right, whereon it disappeared into the next department.

This mechanical operation kept his hands busy and allowed his mind to wander where it would. How did I get into this? he wondered. How did I allow myself to be talked into this? Be honest, cried his conscience, you needed no one to talk you into it, you had the best arguments of them all!

Then what reason had I to take this step? Poverty in childhood? No that would not be true. Certainly there had never been enough money for more than essentials, but they had never starved. His father had had regular employment, a labourer, no more, but few were the weeks when he did not place a pay packet on the kitchen table, with always the same little joke, "There you are Mother, a little something I found on the way home."

This brought the automatic response, "That's lucky, Dad; it will come in handy for the Caribbean Cruise." As children they had thought this exchange was only rivalled by Burns and Allen.

"Wonder when they stopped saying that," he thought, and realised it had just slipped quietly into things of yesterday.

As doll after doll passed under his hands, he tried once more to work out just what had brought him to this event which could change his life.

Was it at school? Had he been bullied, ignored, suffered derision or antagonism? There again he could not in honesty answer "yes" to any of the questions.

He had had his bad times; who has not? That time when those Kelly kids from the next block had made his life misery by waiting for him on his way home and roughing him up. But he had ended that one exhilarating day when, in sheer desperation he had lashed out at "Red" Kelly at the same moment that "Red" had caught his heel in a grating and pitched forward on to Lennie's decidedly shaky out-stretched fist. The resulting black eye had been the talk of the neighbourhood and Lennie had found himself not only the hero of the junior school but an unbelieving member of the Kelly Gang.

"Any kid who can give our 'Red' a shiner like that will do us," the Kelly kids declared.

There was another agonising period in High School when he had fallen madly in love with Helen Masters, whose father owned a small tobacconist's store. To impress her he had gone in and ordered a packet of cigarettes but made the mistake of lighting one there and then. Romance died as he

coughed and choked and Mr. Masters administered hefty whacks on his back. No ardour could have lived through Helen's peals of laughter. But he had survived the blow and for quite a few years had been able to face Helen on the rare occasions he saw her, without a pang of any kind.

Which still left him with his problem unsolved. Why? He asked himself again. Why did I agree? Why indeed was I one of the instigators?

His hands slowed in their methodical work as he faced up to his answer. Because, he reasoned, in each man's life comes the time when he says: "Now. Now I must make my stand, say my piece, or fight my fight. Now I must act, or be forever damned."

Immersed in his thoughts, automatically boxing dolls, he did not hear Maurie, his close friend, approach. He jumped when touched lightly on the arm.

"It's lunch time. Coming for a snack?"

"Might as well," he answered, and pushed the button to stop the conveyor belt. The mound of dolls looked no smaller than when he had started. The girls had been bringing them in constantly all morning.

He went out with the other to wait for the elevator. There was a small group of them, young men, all employed in the ware-house. The old man grudgingly allowed them all into the cage, complaining that "one of these days he was going to stick to the limit the company declared could ride at one time."

They all ignored him and rode in silence to the ground floor and left in a bunch, blinking as they came out into the sunlight. It was cold, early winter, and it prompted them to keep a brisk pace as they went in search of the eating place they wanted.

No one paid any attention as they stopped outside the café for a second.

"O.K.?" asked Maurie, with an upward inflection, and they all nodded. The wintry sun shone down on their tense, young, black faces as they pushed open the door marked: '

"JOE'S COUNTER LUNCHES"

ALABAMA'S FINEST

WHITES ONLY.

It was The Day!

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THE LAMP

Trudy Crook
2nd Prize Short Story Competition

The lamp had been pushed right to the back of the shelf, hemmed in by generations of bits and pieces. Two chipped meat plates and an old cherry churn were all that saved it from being squeezed over the edge to join the other fragments on the floor of the shed. Not even a stray finger of sunshine penetrated to the depths where the old lamp stood, wrapped in its layers of dust and cobwebs.

Once, it had been new and brightly shining, its twin wicks trimmed and the chimney polished, its ruby glass bowls gleaming. But that was long ago. Long, long ago. . . . The lamp was new in the year that the great General Custer met his terrible defeat. The year that Mr. Bell invented his almost unbelievable flummery called the Telephonic Communication Apparatus.

Both events caused tremendous excitement in some parts of the world, but on the sheep-farms of the Riverina, folk had more immediate problems to concern them. It was spring-time, and the warm weather had come in quickly after the winter rains. The grass was lush and sweet, and the lambs and the blowflies arrived simultaneously. The men toiled from first light, standing up doddery old ewes with water-logged fleeces, crutching and half-shearing the fly struck sheep and dressing their suppurating wounds with home-brew concoctions to destroy the maggots and prevent infection. It was a spring to remember . . . a year to remember. It was1876.

Down by the creek, in the wattle and daub shack which was the first homestead on Targinnie, two women were totally occupied with the business at hand . . . the birthing of a baby.

The young mother had spent many months preparing for the birth of her child. Tiny lawn vests, long petticoats and gowns, all lovingly hand stitched, tucked and embroidered, some trimmed with precious lace from a bygone age. With busy needles she had knitted a profusion of tiny jackets and bootees, bonnets and coats, then finally she had made the birthing mat. Two long evenings she had sat, making the mat by the glow of the ruby glass lamp, stitching together the thick wads of newspapers to protect the bedding through the long hours of birth.

And then, eventually, blessedly, it was over and the pain and fear receded to the far corners of the shack, and the young mother slept.

The midwife crooned a little songlet as she cleaned and dressed the baby in her swaddling clothes. So many clothes for such a tiny babe! Fast as her fingers flew, the pile of clothes hardly seemed to diminish. There! It was finished. With years of experience in her hands, she deftly swept the long petticoat and gown up over the baby's feet and body and wrapped the long skirts about the child. Then she shook the babe, tied up like a little sausage, hard and firm, and tenderly laid her in the low crib.

She was their firstborn and they named her Eleanor.

With the passing of the seasons, the child thrived and grew and learned her letters by the light of the ruby glass lamp. There was a new home-stead now, of split logs with a grand iron roof and a verandah all around. The little crib seemed never empty until there were thirteen children at the table for the evening meal, by the light of the ruby glass lamp.

She met him when she was seventeen. A dashing young bullocky who reckoned on a good future in the sawmill game. They were wed in 1895 and the rest of the world celebrated the invention of Mr. Marconi's new Wireless Message Machine. But that was all in another world that evening as they were married in the little house in which they were to live. Such a bonny home it was! Brand new, with sawn board floor, and a separate bedroom. The fireplace glowed brightly behind a forest of kettles and pots suspended on chains from a bar in the chimney. Two large camp ovens bubbled gently as they kept hot on the hob, and the whole family gathered to see their Eleanor wed her Tom. The tiny bride, in her grey silk gown with grosgrain bows, led the dancing later, tapping her minute boots to the jigs and reels that poured from the concertinas.

Her wedding gift from her mother was the ruby glass lamp.

Eleanor and Tom bought a wood stove and the Wright brothers caused a sensation at Kitty Hawk. It was a bad year, 1903. It was the year Dickie died. Five children under seven and one by one they went down with diphtheria. Night after weary night she tended her choking children, dealing as best she could with fever and discomfort, by the light of the ruby glass lamp. The whole house was heavy with the smell of carbolic and the limewater kept boiling on the stove. She managed to drag four children back from the brink of death, but not Dickie . . .

It was months before she stopped watching for that bold little face to pop around the door . . . months before she gave up listening for his laugh

when the children were playing. She spent a lot of nights reading her Bible by the light of the ruby glass lamp. And soon there was another babe in the cradle.

She had eleven children, and the men marched off to war to show Kaiser Bill the error of his ways. She stayed home with her eleven children and cooked and cleaned, taught and washed and scrubbed and ran the sawmill with an iron hand.

All the long, lonely years of the war.

Tom died in 1937 after a long illness. Joe took over the mill and with six of the family married, they managed well enough. She had no sooner picked up the threads of her life when the call went out for the third time since her marriage, the young men answered that call and marched off to fight for King and country. Three of her four sons went and two came back. Bob the poet, Bob the dreamer, Bob the finest horseman in the district, perished in Burma building a cursed railway to God knows-where.

Again she spent a lot of nights reading her Bible by the light of the ruby glass lamp.

In 1958, decades behind the rest of the world, a momentous event occurred in that quiet little corner of the Riverina. Electricity! Improvements came thick and fast to the old homestead. Joe drove her to town for a glorious shopping spree. A refrigerator was top of the list, and a toaster, an iron (no more Mother Potts!), a jug and a washing machine. She was 82 years of age and she played with her new toys like a young bride!

Soon afterwards, the family decided (as families do) that she was too elderly to be running her own home, still caring for Joe, so she went to live with Dolly, her eldest. She arrived at Boongulla with the gathering of a century of hoarders, her mother's dresses and shoes, the bridle she'd had as a child on Targinnie — and the ruby glass lamp.

Life was peaceful and easy for her on Boongulla — for the first time in her life there was someone to anticipate her every need and wish — cosy cups of tea by the fire in the winter, leisurely strolls in the garden on fine days and all the time in the world to write letters to her far-flung family.

Every mail day brought a treasure-trove of family news, doings of grandchildren and eventually news from over-seas of her two great-grand-children!

The time came when she and Dolly moved to town to live in a snug new home and her first act was to buy a television set! At 87 she became a virtual authority on the workings of the set and the merits or otherwise of the various programmes. She would crochet or knit, take a glass of wine, catch up with all the family's activities, keep a close check on the cropping and stock situation on Boongulla and still not miss a beat of her favourite show.

The even tenor of her life remained unaltered for another eight years, until just after her 95th birthday she was publicly honoured as a pioneer of the district. A large gathering of people watched as she unveiled a plaque on the spot where she was born. She then made a speech and posed for photographers with great dignity and aplomb.

Six weeks later she was dead.

She was laid to rest beside her beloved Tom, close to tiny Dickie of so long ago. The wattles bloom over her and the bush birds chatter and sing. The sun that shines down through the big ironbark onto her headstone is the same sun that vainly gropes to bring a spark of life to the ruby glass lamp.

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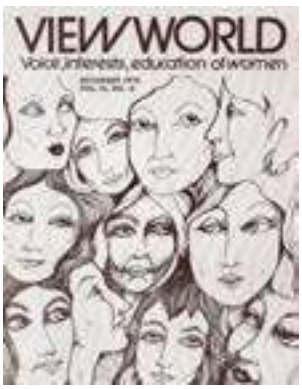

Logos 1960's-1970's

Logos 1980's

view

voice, interests and
education of women