



MOON DANCE

BROOKE BIAZ



# moon dance

**BROOKE BIAZ**

Parlor Press

*West Lafayette, Indiana*

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*To the folks at Mission Control: it's been a long time coming, and thanks for the cheese.*



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*Well, it's a marvelous night for a moondance  
With the stars up above in your eyes . . .*

—Van Morrison

*A search has begun to locate the original film footage of  
man's first steps on the Moon.*

—BBC News, Aug. 14, 2006



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## SC.1

### MARE FECUNDITATIS

*Probably the first seeds of the idea were sown by the great fantastic author Jules Verne—he directed my thought along certain channels, then came desire, and after that the work of the mind.*

—Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Rocket Scientist



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## 1

### LIFE OR DEATH

Word comes this morning that the lodgers are returning. My mother's lovers are returning and I, Maxim Moonface, must open the curtains. I must calm my heart which dances the Monkey two-step these days to the beat of a pace-o-matic gizmo. I must keep quiet about Che in the kitchen, who's been working the entire month to restore our appearances. . . . Who says, after all, that he won't turn out to be the Warhol of muscle? The Picasso of skin and bone? The . . . Of course, his hands aren't what they used to be. Andique Garnet's nose, for instance, has re-emerged ill-affixed, long and twisted whereas, if I recall, it was once perfectly invisible. Also, inevitably, there is the question of Dorothy's breasts. Inevitably and unavoidably, because these breasts do not appear as a reflection of her true spiritual self. Perky breasts and suited to the task of filling a cup; but they are made, when all's said and done, out of her armpits. . . . O but let me not be too critical. After all, Che, skilled as he is, has nothing left to work from but the covers of *IT* magazine and *Suck*. No surprise, therefore, that several of our brand spanking genitals bear an uncanny resemblance to the yoni and linga of famous but now retired persons. Our Mounts of Venus, for instance, are all turning out



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like that of Ms Germaine Greer! . . . But at least, this morning, all my babaloos have heard the good news. . . . That's them screeching their delight in the room next door as the sirens, my pear-shaped partners, stand on the verandah pounding the door, shouting "Let us in! Let us in!" and raising their harpies' arms at the sight of yet another moonlit night. And to think this entire flock once swooped on young Moonface unrequitedly, around and around in the dark, their hands plumbing enthusiastically for his moderately sized but crusty Mare Fecunditatis (which Che has now given a certain aged genital majesty, I feel, with ribs like brass amulets and a foreskin of such momentous rolls that it looks not unlike a blossoming camellia). Round and round me like a feathered human mandala, barely dressed in cheesecloths and seersuckers and the flowers of white frangipani in wonderfully long chains, orbiting bobble-eyed and carrying several dogged-eared copies of *Love's Body*. . . . Whereas these days all they wish to do is to fly out to freaking Antigua!, or The Maldives, or The Whitsundays. Cutesy plump 747 tourists in cabins built of aero-fibre. (*Man!* technology astounds me.) Them making noises about broken staircases and fallen arches and Maxim's latest offspring being born into "Clear water."

"So take a holiday," I call out to them—but they seem to be looking for something more permanent.

Dare I say, my partners have turned maritime once more, hoping to set sail for the Sea of Nectar, the Lake of Dreams, the intriguing Bay of Rainbows. . . . I mean to say, they're hoping to try that first great Dutch experiment again (before PROVO), building dykes and so forth, but in reverse, so that all that we once dredged up, dried out and walled into our world, they wish to send



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awash. All that we formed together as sure as moonrock, they wish to dissolve into their own wild embryonic seas. Their giant albatross wombs of . . . As if pregnant mothers, like *sirens*, can recall their emotional landscape!

*Ha! Ha!* But now the lodgers are coming back! Now our legs will dangle anew from the towering piles of notes and monographs that Dr. (pending) Roszak once called “his immensely popular research.” With Tito, who occupied the first room, we’ll eat. Eat! Hongo Gusisados. Avgolemono soup. Rissotto alla Milanese. Pindaetotokk. Eat! Eat! We’ll consume the entire world. And Zimmerman! Yes, Zimmerman’s returning too. Stupendous! Tomorrow we’ll go Watusiing on The Corso. Frugging and gugging and sheehugging down Raglan Road. Funky Chickening all over the verandah. Music produced stereophonically will rise again from the Great Cheese’s Matosha Brand, crack watt from watt and bloom in the thickly composted seed-beds of our garden (hand-composited, as it were, by Proctor Van Pruss, who once worked in linotype for the *E . . . News*, occupying the unique position of knowing no words for which a trail of flowers and twigs could not be substituted). . . . *Hey!* we’ll go swimming! Swimming in the aromatic peat of the North Head Treatment Works. Splashing tarry as if in the wake of Apollo himself, the Saturn V rocket (which reminds me of the ancient story of Cronus, the eater of his own children—who spewed them forth years later, fully grown. *O a related story to my own that is!*) Spewing forth children and LOX and kerosene, Maxim remembers. Swimming in blue kerosene by day and splashing in tarry black by night. *Man!* we’ll break free from gravity, cut ourselves from the slough, distantly separate light from sound, wield lightning like handshakes, be hawks



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and doves and dolphins again, sprout apples and fire and poetry alternately, ride the salty sea-breezes of Macarthur Park, follow day-glo rivers which will rush down the whirling, divergent avenues of the Vale on Vale, cut rock-n-roll runnels bravely across the gentrified desert of The Esplanade. Tie-dye butterflies will flutter in swarms onto Queenscliff Beach from our cocoons forty-one years in the waiting. Goony birds will fall grinning from clear skies. Fruit bats will carry paddy-melons in their claws and waft Indian musk through the succulent branches of all these frangipani. And Columbia, our Columbia . . . Of course, flight schedules will call for some enigmatic pussy-footing. Dare I say, new flaps must now be cut in solid old doors. A significant return such as this demands the release of numerous technicolor-coated felines. Yes, cats must be let out of bags. What must be told finally, it appears, is the story of a pregnancy. A gestation of considerable dimensions. A confinement in which there were infinite configurations, in which days became months and months years (not so unusual really; in the hospital next door there are several recent examples of similar occurrences and there is, of course, the pressing question of the sirens' own confinements). But a pregnancy . . . *Yes!* A pregnancy should be mentioned which, multiplied by an unexpected paternity and the singular will of my mother, took on a character of its own. A pregnancy which lasted, by my calculations, for a period of nine years.



Once upon a time, and a very very . . . Once upon a time, or . . . Well, the story of my conception is plain enough. On the evening of December 1, 1960, my mother's mother, Lucille Trymelow, a Fairlight impresario, stepped out into her garden, unaware of the role her daughter was



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about to play, and was struck forthwith by the notion that the sky—which was clear enough to be revealing the right ascension of the constellations Gemini, Mercury, and Apollo, but as dark as Hell—this same southern sky was producing torrential rain. She stood quite still with her face grokking upward toward a billion twinkling stars, allowing the rain to teem over her, filling the cusps of her cheeks as lukewarm marzipan might flow and fill the craters of a sponge cake, allowing it to trickle and then begin to fill her ears which, she was sure, had picked up the first strains of “Spirto Gentil” on the wind and was reciting them into the lyric of “Died For Love,” gathering a familiar summer walnutiness as the wind picked up, whirling rain and now leaves down upon her, chorus to verse, chord to chord, crab apple vibrato . . .

Lucille Trymelow, I’m talking about, my grandmother, an unsung South Steyne impresario, (whom *Variety* Magazine lists in the cast of *Ishtar* and not correctly as an extra in the much earlier flick: *Pallas Athene*). A professional booking agent considered by Sal Lunacharsky, Milton Fujii, Ramon Gomez, among others, to be “A-Okay!,” top banana on the Hoover and Doover, an all-round theatrical representative. As smooth as the very best cream cheese. Try—mellow (Mrs.) not Tremelo, which was the name of a group of accomplished bandola and hurdy-gurdy players who didn’t tour the south until a few years later, singing “Silence is Golden.” Try . . . mell . . . ow. But it makes perfect sense that, early on, some confusion should exist. After all, she’d been married to show business for well-nigh quarter of a century. Wedded to it like a gaseous ring to a giant and unseeing Saturn—like Adelaida to Andrey, Lyon Burke to Anne, Mr. Portnoy to the long-questioning Mrs., and giving herself over in



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the several layers of her velveteen skirts and phlox floral bodices to produce that Cinderella and ball-gown look of a woman who long ago cracked off a glass slipper for her one and only prince.

*Man!* you could pick this love of life in her whole composure; which, even though Maxim reveals her standing dumbly in the rain, I know to be bold as a treble clef, curled over, big assed and baby faced so that while anyone could estimate her age by her rings and the furrows of her bark there was also a fair wad that was brandspanking and green about her, a certain readiness budding out on her solid limbs. . . . But now, don't you see, she's beginning to bawl. Her tears are thick and sticky and flow together like marzipan in cusps, her famous hair a God-awful mess in this star-shower, her nightgown is dripping onto the brown lawn and suddenly, now . . . she drops to her knees.

No surprise to discover my grandmother had that very afternoon attended the funeral of her husband (Ever samsara, endless cycle of birth and rebirth, care now for the cremated!)

“O, his tonsils were silver, his belly a copper pan-nikin, his tones were golden. A husband of infinitely solid metal!”

Him laid to rest among the hummocks of Rookwood Lawn Cemetery. Poured into a brass urn, which was finely and quite beautifully etched, and slipped peacefully into a hole four inches by three in front of mourners his daughter hadn't seen (*Not freaking once!*) around our neighborhood. Men who'd fought the Japanese on several dubious fronts from Sanananda to Finschafen, Wewak to Balikpapan and on to the Fly River where soldiers' heads were occasionally removed for good sport by natives who



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knew nothing about modern warfare. Him lowered into the earth to a trooping of color from the Returned Servicemen's League and the seven saluting seconders of the 1st Raglan Road Boy Scouts. Crooners in cravats with tie pins and berets. Roustabouts, shearers, ring-barkers and bulldozer drivers (the elegance of their dozers nearby with their bold rippers and mouldboards!). All of them bawling at the sight of poor brassy "Bibbidi-Bobbodi-Boo" slipped in like a hose-fitting below the grass, the soil kind of crusty at that time of year and crumbling prematurely in on him while T. B. Bull, the school principal and lay preacher of the newly formed Charismatic Church, cried out "Witness before ye O Lord: a small man with a big voice! He sung us all as high as Heaven!" And everyone whispering in chorus: "Ain't that the freaking truth?"



So the Widow Creamcheese knelt down glassy and blue in the night rain. In another hemisphere an official snow chiaroscuro was plopping from the roofs of Dnepropetrovsk to play havoc with the afternoon traffic, but down in the south where the roofs were made of corrugated tin and sprung with boat orchids even the cicadas were declaring "We know where it's at, babe!" and beginning to nuzzle the soil until their proboscides found weak fissures and their claws began to scrape their way determinedly toward the surface.

And what, after all, was driving through a widow's mind? What occurred as soil drummed "Taps" on a polished brass urn while inside the ashes of her husband's only 45 single stuck from the ashen lips of a suit made by Saint Larope and cicadas passing by, whom the local children call the green grocer, the yellow baker, and the black prince, dipped their bejewelled heads . . . ? Just this: that



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the time had come to make a few changes around the place. Keeping in mind the esteem in which she held her late husband, and what he might say. Big-hearted goof-ball. Never tired of slipping into “You Wild and Mossy Mountains.” Loved to kid around on a warm night like this. Steamed up on hot nights like a purty spurty little marrow. Sung like a counter-tenor when his dander was raised. *Ho ho!* And all around her the green grocers, the yellow bakers, the black princes of summer were emerging to claw their way across kikuyu and clasp their rigid selves to furrowed grey bark. Abdomens rutting and barking in articulated revelry. Climbing eucalypts and calistemons and now into the frugiferous gnarls of the ancient mulberries. The heavy rain not deterring them one bit because, possessed of irresistible seasonal logic, they shed hard outer casings, quickly dry their impossibly filament wings and (cast upon only by stars) set about orchestrating a song in praise and illumination of insect birth and insect life.



“New Moon tonight,” shouted the widow from the back garden. “The brightest stars are only those that are dying.”

“Three theories,” called her daughter from the kitchen window. “Dig it, ma? A lunar trinity. The theory of fission in which a single planet, Earth, was formed and, as it cooled, spun so quickly that it flattened into a kind of cradle and then into a barbecue sausage and then, finally, it split right in two, sending a piece of itself up onto the stage to shine nightly over us. The double theory also, huh, in which earth and moon formed in the same solar condensation, but one half smaller, brilliant, but sad and sick. And then the captive theory, right, in which a solid



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body already formed and ancient reached out and grasped a younger body flying past and . . .”

*“O Daff! But how could a man who was such an itsy bitsy baby go ahead and kill himself dead?”*

The two of them had no other reason to be awake so late in the evening. The XVIIth Olympiad had closed three months before, so they could no longer sit in cane musnuds with their ears curled up against the BBC World Service while the redolent King-O-the-Southern-Airwaves, Mr. Garrison O’Grady, reported Rome-side: “It’s Gold! Gold! Gold!”

No reason for my mother to be in the kitchen late at night and my grandmother out in the garden, except a father-n-husband twelve hours under the clover. My grandmother’s dished face pooling bigtime in the starlight. Soaked through to the marrow (if only we could all reach in now and give her a proper toweling) when finally, ears momentarily unplugged, she notices the rain-song has changed. It’s not a song at all now but a conversation. This rain is speaking out loud. A “*Shoo-shoo-shoo!*” making itself heard above the teeming on the garden shale, becoming louder and distinctively tromboned. So she shook the water from her eyes, tugged back snakes of once magnificent hair, stood up and peered over the paling fence to find her neighbor, the Principal T. B. Bull, standing in his yard spraying his fruit trees with a garden hose. Spraying and intoning “*Shoo-shoo! Shoo-shoo!*” with an old-handed teacher’s belligerence.

And now the bats begin to whorl overhead, their red foxy faces pursed like rosebuds in the starlight, their wings rubberized and engineered in silhouette, their dung trails flying purple behind them, a screeching going across the



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sky, and the aroma was of peach and of apricot and the first sweet Morello plums of summer.

## Calonyction Aculeatum: The Moonflower

In Columbia next morning Daffodil, unslept, flat on her back on the linoleum kitchen floor, lay sweating in the tropical heat, her feet brown and big and bare and propped up on the door jamb, her white hair spread over the linoleum like light, her mouth open but momentarily unable to speak (her voice had become as inconsequential as the unfilled spaces between the air). Though I am not yet conceived, this is the mother I remember, her sounds: the rush of her blood as it filtered through her capillaries and was replenished, her heart thunderous, clapping out its beat with a tambourine jangle she shared with her own mother, her breathing, ever higher pitched and shorter than the breathing of anyone I knew. Somehow, during that night, she'd taken on her mature morphology—which is to say, I would shortly come to know her perfectly, both from the outside and from within, travel the labyrinthine pathways of her circulatory system, observe the cleverness of her endocrine glands, each glandular secretion metered in respect of dilution by blood and the distance it has to travel, the blue voltage of her nervous system, its amperage and alternating currents—so I can report accurately: her systems were in disarray.

They say the duodenum is shaped like a C; in the days following her father's death Daffodil Trymelow's had taken on the malevolent form of an S, wrapping hard around her pancreas like a rock boa. There were mountains forming inside her, volcanoes, valleys, gorges, rivers, larval plains as vast and as shifting as deserts over which a



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dim lantern hung, as if it was hung in a window, an auro-  
ra borealis, a projector of shadows, a spectrum of shapes  
and puppetry (or am I thinking of the faces of children  
caught in the flare of fireworks?).

“O that awful T. B. Bu . . .” she began.

“O that awful T. B. Bu . . .” she began again.

Then, noticing her own mother also lost in thought,  
she slopped buttermilk between a butter knife and her  
forefinger and licked her finger with a tongue as lithe as  
a water skink’s.

Meanwhile, the sun tipped up over the horizon and,  
first striking the rising green hill of MacArthur Park, soon  
lit our garden which, in the short week since my grandfa-  
ther’s death, had already grown wild. Without warning,  
the radiogram in the conservatory announced: “The In-  
ternational Summit of Presidents has failed.” “A scientist  
(somewhere) has developed the laser gun.” “The queen of  
England herself has given birth to a son. This is the first  
birth to a reigning monarch in one hundred years.” My  
grandmother’s house, Columbia, drew in a breath. In the  
trees outside there were starlings whose nests, it could be  
heard, were in the roof of the house. There were sparrows  
and magpies and scaly-breasted lorikeets, parakeets and  
cockatoos, white and black, ibis, spoonbills, bowerbirds  
and brush turkeys. There were gulls and kingfishers.

The garden drew in the sun, heaved, and began to  
breathe. In the streets of South Steyne, Tsvoklovsky, the  
baker, was tossing white, doughy water from his doorway  
into the back lane and splashing it against the wheels of  
his van; Arnhold, the butcher, was arriving on his bicy-  
cle and leaning it against the telegraph pole outside his  
shop so that at frequent intervals throughout the day it  
would be toppled by passers-by and he would come out



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in his bloody white apron with its blue stripes faded and he would right the bicycle and stand there a moment, gnawing at his tongue, finally scratching vacantly at the pink pate beneath his cap, spit, and disappear back into the shop. To all this, my grandmother's house seemed unaware. Its wide cedar staircase wound up silently from the front doorway, which was still open. On the dresser in the hall there were suit jackets, which had been removed in the heat of the previous day and somehow found their way home in my grandparent's car, crowded into the back seat. In corners of the ante-room and lounge, in the conservatory corners and the fibro cement corners of the laundry, something funereal had descended, a dust-like grey, mealy beach sand, and a hoariness had formed on the cobwebs, as if they had been fixed in plaster of Paris, and then there was the smell, the mordant, brackish aroma of old halls and small hotels and dressing rooms with threadbare chaises longue and cushions printed with country scenes and filled with wood shavings. Columbia, it seemed, had suddenly become unfamiliar and unfriendly toward them.

"Now what are we going to do?" asked the Great Cheese, simply.

-----

"Your father was a happy man, and deserved better."

-----

"Well, a young woman shouldn't complain," she continued. "And the house is our own and the soil's rich and the land doesn't flood. Perhaps an advertisement." She took a bite of a sandwich of fat-back bacon and hard cheese and drank strong black tea from a mug with a chip in its rim.



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“That awful . . .” my mother attempted a third time, but still unable to draw her own mother along this line of thought, shouted through the wide French doors of the verandah: “Bull-bull to Bluey T. Bull!”

And so a name was born on that day after an island funeral. A name which I would never hear spoken, but which would come to me, nevertheless, like a mantra during my long confinement.

“*Bull-bull!*” my mother shouting it out in sequential notes. “Bull-bull-bull to Charismatic T. Bull!” until finally her own mother was roused to announce.

“Daffodil, we must take in a lodger.”

“Bull-de-bull! *Ha Ha!*”

“What else can we do?”

And then, quite unexpectedly, my grandmother joined in; mother and daughter leaning back against the front wall of the kitchen, the day heating up outside, their legs bare and cool on the linoleum, their heads back, their eyes closed and their mouths stretched wide, shouting together:

“Bull! Bull! Bull!”

Columbia rang out, its garden burst with frangipani and orange wattle, with bottlebrush and boronia, dragonflies lifted themselves over the giant cups of the chalice vine, blue-tongue lizards peeked lickingly from ridges of red sandstone, black snakes hid momentarily in their holes, and the sound of the wild goofing lament of the remaining Trymelows broke through the gumwood doors of this very room, and spun up through the house, winding up the cedar stairs and along the landing, poking into the bedrooms and filling them, slipping along the sallow tiles of the bathroom and across the shiny surface of the Bosendorfer piano in the conservatory, finding gaps in



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the wood walls to pierce, the lament spreading itself this way until it tumbled out and down onto The Esplanade (as our own sounds would soon after tumble), where it took on the character of unexplained noise, catching the attention of early morning office workers heading toward the ferry terminus for the city and of Mr. Leacon unlocking the jinker chains on the shutter of his news agency and of the swimmers testing the black, morning water in the sea pool, finally crossing the path of the first surfers of the day, with gun-boards balanced like the arms of scales on their heads, the boards tipping forward and back as they scurried across the Esplanade and onto the low wet basalt of the headland, and on toward the swell which had risen overnight and now was crashing down in great tubular waves on the coral outcrop of the Fairy Bower.



Dressed in silver crinoline over a fine green Lincoln velvet, Lucille Creamcheese stepped out her front door on the morning of December 2, 1960, determined to make a good impression out on her own. She carried in her velvet breast pocket, which bore a striking resemblance to the soft under-ear of a rhinoceros, an advertisement which would appear shortly in the personal column of the South Steyne E . . . News under the inauspicious caption “ROOMS AVAILABLE” and hove down onto Raglan in the direction of The Corso where, behind the geometric shapes of the salon Five-O, Mrs. Magdalen Forsythe did good business. A salon for the ladies, looking out on the golden quarter mile of Queenscliff Beach, the sea-breeze blowing sets and rinses regularly at thirty knots and the sand of The Steyne thick as molecules in the salt air. These sure had bejewelled our Magdalen For-



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sythe and she carried herself of late with a scrumptious endocrine posture—rumors that ‘the old insect only does permanents and peroxidizing to pay Internal Revenue’ and a better job being done on account of her being completely disengaged . . . Approximately then at her mother’s flipping open of last December’s *Woman’s Day* from the pile marked “Strictly Customers,” Daffodil Rosa stepped into the bathroom. Deserted, her own hair had grown long and, because she had been taken out of high school (as result of her father’s you-know) and spent the last week wafting between the red soil of Columbia and the sand banks and channels of the South Steyne wash, its color had naturally bleached to a diaphanous white. She mushed this new, diaphanous hair into a tail behind (a jaunty pony); she twisted it into a twirl uptop (a Turramurra turtle); she flip-flopped a handful of it in a pink silk bandanna until, convinced after what had happened that she could no longer make anything right, she fetched the nail scissors her mother kept on the sideboard and, not pausing to position them at one angle or another, she snipped off the final six inches.

*No! No!* No, she didn’t care. I hear talk these days from my partners who themselves once sailed into South Steyne proclaiming like sirens that they were pilgrims following the direction of who-knows-what dharma and now telling my babaloos that the Trymelow girl’s hair was where it was at.

“Being diaphanous your grandmama’s hair dug full moonlight.”

“White white, shining bright!”

“Short hair, long hair, love hair, song hair!”

“Hair! Hair! *Hair!*”



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My partners take their lead from thirty days at the Lyceum when Daffodil Trymelow played a minor role in an amateur production of *Lysistrata* . . . *But no!* Man, I've spent too long on hair already! It wasn't what sprung from my mother's head that guided her life; though its attributes were undeniable, its vigor and luster; each time she cut it, it simply grew back: golden to white, trailing and streaming its way through this house until, years later, when it succumbed to a thinness up front and an unfortunate grayness. And yet to me, who gestated in the wisps and diaphanous glow of its oiliness and lankiness, it seemed that finally it had assumed its rightful position . . . pulled back, blued and eclipsed by the sight of her most felicitous gift.

O to the glory of inheritance! What a grand fate to be entrusted with an emblem such as this! My jaw is a crescent. A jaw modelled on the rim of a wheel. Feel the bone, how it curves toward the upper hemisphere so that in spite of what you might like to do with the hair, left parting or right, you cannot change the geometry. This face of mine is round! Round as a frisbee, a hoola hoop, a yo-yo, round as peace itself. I'm no more self-congratulatory than the next bod, but this inheritance is certainly distinctive. No Matterhorn or mouth popping out. Nothing for poets writing in the heroic couplet!

Alone, her hair floated feathery to the wash-basin, the tin tub on the green linoleum. A girl of fifteen (born, to be accurate, on June 6, 1945), squirming herself into a skirt as narrow as a lead pencil, a blouse said to resemble a Dior; fitting into a pair of Clarke stylefits, applying powder from a mother's Bake-O tin until, catching the chimes in the ante-room, she left the house in the direction of a supermarket we came to call The Pink Cow.



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Don't she look just like . . . like Grace Kelly heading down our Corso? Missed out marrying the prince, but possessing all the charm of *High Society* and as sleek as a porpoise besides. Already a big girl, naturally, but only in the way of her mother. Extraterrestrial: made of soil and more soil but carrying it in places it was most needed, filling it with a darkness in daylight and a full cream cheese glow at night. Her now grieving face a geography in which all things were reflected. The three lodgers being once heard to say: "O the stories that face tells." Tito Livio adding: "She is as evasive as the tide." And Siemens Roszak, whose claims on her were similar but often kept to himself: "It's imperial looks your mother has, not principles." And Bobby Zimmerman, strumming across nine loose strings on a guitar he told me was a Gretsch Ranger (Names had such incantatory properties in my childhood!): "Don't she weave a beautiful web," he sang, "to snare Iphianassa upon."

Just like that most subtle of actresses, Grace Kelly, except that her skin was much darker, ebonious at that time of year, and she was heading, after all, for an appointment with Comptroller Wilmers at the supermarket which, in those days before Maxim was conceived, had lost it's real name to the weather-worn sign that hung over its delicatessen:

Save money and think  
of the cow in the pink.  
The things on the blink  
We bought it at Pink.  
The meat, does it stink . . . ?



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So it goes. . . . Only, freeze things there a moment—because as she reached The Esplanade, which backs the beach at South Steyne and then curls around the Fairy Bower like the rings of an Olympiad, she experienced a moment of past hog-tying the present: . . . That is: she witnessed her father’s resurrection. *No!* not of his true and, by now, wantonly furfuraceous self but of the shape, the shadow of him past—printed, as if she’s in Hiroshima, on the wall outside Leacon’s Beachside News Agency. A cigar Indian who was far too similar to her father to be anyone other. No mistaking, after all, that granity brow, that full and, let’s admit it, aristocratic lip. Struck in a pose as if he was about to stretch out his patriarchal arms around her, palms flat as if she must give him something, his fingers seven inches extensile and so strong that they looked ready to roll her up, and all of him proned forward into a crescendo so terrible that the sight made a *hush* like the sea and the shadow turned to flesh and blood and stopped her dead-still.

. . . When, finally, she gathered courage enough to slip by (amber eyes forced to the side of auburn sockets) he showed no fatherly pride in her bravery but contrived only to appear again, this time high over Dutch Hoyle’s Tattoor, selling cigarettes on an awning crinkle-cut and flaked by salt air: *Woodbine’s! They’re Great!?* And again: in the window of the Wee Bill and Bully Hotel, somehow set in glass like a white cabbage moth.

“What’s this, pop! Why do you . . . ?”

Daffodil Rosa, big though she was, flung herself holus-bolus down onto Queenscliff Beach. The sand below the South Steyne retainer wall, being soft, allowed girlish fingers to dig deep to find the sea-soak; her perfectly round face pushed into the topside dry. Wanting,



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yes, to see her father. Wanting, no, not to see. Her head stuck in ostrich-bob—and there in the dark of the sand subject to a clattering film of his final days. . . . How, in the Gun Club in Cooktown, on a monsoonal day in late November, her father sang “Kisses Sweeter than Wine” until he reached for his mike stand and it launched him twelve feet, forward, soaring over his once ardent fans, to land. . . . Cutting now to a close up of his face with his white tongue poking from the corner of his bloodless lips and five regular patrons looking at him spread-eagle over their counter lunches and his eyes so dreamy that she was sure he would shortly wake and begin his act: “Have you heard the one *Ho Ho!* about Icarus . . . ?” A film even with intermissions so that out in the foyer with jelly-cup and butter corn she could watch the nurse types coming from the hospital next door to raise and lower him and prognoses fat and ugly camped right on her pillow at night when talk was low and hidden behind nurse hands, “Cooked from the inside . . .” “Like a weenie, I tell you.” Dear dear . . .” “Closest thing to a Dagwood-dog I ever saw.” “Fried up 240 volts like a flathead fillet.” And the more documentary this film the more she had to dig her incandescent head into the sand and poke her similarly spherical backside up. The beach boys loved it.

. . . *No! No!* babaloos, not those inchoate schoolies from Queenscliff High, who learned the words *primal* and *goddess* from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and were jiggling calculus in order to interrogate bully mullet stuck by the low tide in the silvery rock-pools of the breakwater. Not those little gudgeons. Older boys, boys old enough to be fathers (though in my case, you’ll see, suspicions turn elsewhere) arriving on The Esplanade on big black growlers. Rocker boys from the west who bounced



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Norton motorcycles, Triumphs, and Hogs up onto the footpath outside Dutch Hoyle's and birded the Dutch himself (him promising he would art-up their private regions for free—but probably didn't) and who brought with them always the tools of trade, the screwdrivers, the wrenches, their hammers and cycles. Those rockers, and the surfer-boys whose bleached look was so complete that from the distance they appeared to have a radiance about their heads, a five pointed shimmering, and their bodies tanned in stripes from the folds of their skin as they paddled out into rolling whickapoodies. . . . The entire gang, The South Steyne Hogwinders, saw Daffodil Rosa and made from her that siren of sirens, Brigitte Bardot.

"There are more things in heaven and earth," they said, "than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Or maybe Maxim is mistaken and that is what Chief Rocket Designer Korolev said to the Russian astronauts Komarov, Feoktistov, and Yegorov. What the Hogwinders actually said was:

"The Hog 74 is much larger than the 45, only it has a considerably lower gear-to-pinion ratio."

Meanwhile, haunted by a singing father who continued to crave his appearance on billboards, Daffodil Rosa dove headlong into the sea. She met the currents of the riptide as she would meet the currents of Dr. Pfizer, the Cambridge oncological engineer, later in life: riding them some way, making abrupt judgments, rolling her body in order to give the cold shoulder, until just after eleven she swam in, dressed, dried briskly on her blouse and strode off in the direction of The Corso and the "Pink Cow" Supermarket.

Didn't it matter that wet swathes showed through her brand spanking skirt and Dior? Didn't she care that salt



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water had dissolved powder, rouge, Diamante mascara? These questions I ask for the benefit of setting the scene and come up with the demonstrative: “No, she did not!”

Bather wet and with eyes blacked up like an opossum’s, Daffodil Rosa strode forward with a partly-formed purpose in mind. She paused only once, at the window of Yo’s Light and Electrical, where crowds in those days still gathered daily, *Ha Ha!* and *Did you see that!*, blocking the footpath, and she pushed her way forward to see behind glass and the most beautiful “Terms Available,” tele-vision. TV so new that it was diapered in tickets and tickertape “Wow!” “Gee!” in the convivial script of Mr. Yo himself “Bigtime Happening!” (for Yo, with his squiggles and squirls, would one day demonstrate to baby Maxim how a tele-vision might be mistaken, in some instances, for a close personal friend). On the TV, Miss Lucille Ball and Mr. Desi Arnaz saying “Some fellows here from Cuba, Ricky.” “Arrr Cubana! Swell!” respectively in a cabinet with speakers the size of the well respected Caddie convertible. Television which stopped workmen building the Kuringai Expressway and caused the government to issue the health warning: ‘No box during smoko!’ Maxim’s mother was not interested. . . . Or did not know herself interested; because, she said: “*Pollytics*, babe, means nothing to me.” and maybe the S.S. Iron Monarch was steaming toward us with four government tugs joggling beside its tremendous hull and the captain having instructions to assay ore for the making of seven million Singer sewing machines, two hundred Austin cars, five dozen Humber bridges . . . She noticed none of it, being beyond the airwaves of The George Jessel Show and The Circuit Rider and the silver airliner of Imperial Airways with faces framed in the portholes.



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“We do what we must,” I call to my partners up the hallway. “It’s no way to behave: this pounding on closed doors.” All of South Steyne *hushed* and *wooded* in the mid-morning breeze while my mother, Daffodil, wet-swathed, black-eyed and diaphanous, was directed down a corridor to a glass door marked “Private.” As I watch now the glass door is opening and through the gap can be seen a beckoning finger. It is a finger of extraordinary boniness, a horny, skeletal thing that comes out of the film *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* and juts toward her, trimming to a point of split nail. “Yes you, girlie.” And, when Daffodil Rosa enters, the owner of the finger and the boney hand to which it is attached, Miss Celia Wilmers (comptroller) stares and considers, even as she closes the door, that this little chick don’t look like no “Pink Cow” girl. O no, not this one. “Her mouth,” Miss Wilmers is telling herself, “is cheeky.” “Her eyes,” she dutifully records, “don’t reveal any aptitude.” “Her face—*Will you get aload atthat!*—is perfectly round!” Nevertheless, the interview goes ahead and, spurred on by thoughts of an impresario who always could get good box office in any circumstances, Daffodil Rosa makes amends. She confesses a secret desire to serve, reveals that she can charm howls of delight from shopping vixens, shows resolve for the divine cycles of work time and is duly rewarded with the chance to wear black-n-white, sensible shoes, neat hose, no finger make-up, pink lipstick (no other), blue eyes, hair back. Starting tomorrow.

. . . Well naturally and, newly anointed, she left the store, neither the daughter that she had been nor the mother that she was shortly to become. Her chopped hair in the wind twirled into a cloudy crown. Stick thin Thommo K. watched from his vantage point on the



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break, turning at the sight of her to catch a whickry which towered right over him until it curled into a jagged green barrel and swallowed him whole. Watched also by Nicky the rockerroller whose body would soon become a famous canvas and whose imported Hog would one day catch the eye of a lovelorn sociologist named Haberdash Stanopoulous. She swept away from the beach and toward the harbor in order to catch the bus which wended up around Lilyfield and Lavender Bay to the clubhouse where her mother was now standing before a meeting of the Returned Servicemen's auxiliary and announcing her intention "to step down forthwith in light of the tragedy that has befallen . . ." Salt dried on Daffodil's lashes and broke away now to make her eyes stream. Shiny shoes tightened on her feet. Swathes dried white on black pencil skirt. She crossed Corso, Cleveland, Bungaree, Bruntnell, and joined (momentarily) the queue beneath the bottle and cream government bus-stop on Kokonau, while the harbor in its summer frizzle . . . What *hey-ho* is white and green and riddled with kelp? What buffets ferries of the Public Transport Department in the direction of the convict lighthouse of Pinchgut? What surges into the boat-houses built by reef cruisers and middle-aged men in search of Mr. Marlon Brando? Who—as the bus arrived poked to the windows with soldier cadets from the base at North Head—who wandered off along the harborfront, a fatherless working girl of fifteen?

*Mare Fecunditatis!* Sea of Fertility from which the astronauts Conrad and Bean would later return certain larvas, proving that in creation and conception some substances are a lot freaking younger than identical others. "To measure the actual age of larvas," says Columbia's resident geologist, Emeritus Professor Andique Garnet,



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“you strobe the rate the parent radioactant seeps into the daughter. The maturity of the rock Dig it? can then be figured from the true number of parents to daughters in the scene.” “Sure-thing Andy,” Maxim answers confusedly, “but what happens when this daughter is still as fluid as larva? . . .” And so Daffodil Rosa enters the rollicking wooden framework of Abner Zimmerman’s Fun Pier. The sea licks up sea walls, frightening white doves into the muscular arms of Moreton Bay figs. The wind blows in through the boards, whistling Dixie tunes through the hoardings, joining the bells of the Bally machines, *Hey, Kiss Me, Dealer*, The Hogwinders in leather and stovepipes swinging pole to sparking pole, call suggestively “Want a ride or will you chuck up?” and watch her pass. Now the Queenscliff High gudgeons counting pennies and ha’pennies behind the grinning Squid of Twenty Thousand Leagues. Wandering past Pyramids, Harri-man Incorporated, Salem Witches, King Kong, Gunpowder Plot, Eiffel Tower, War of the Worlds, Lovecraft’s Follies, Steam Engine, Cavor’s Sphere, Astolpho the Seer (Now featuring!), until finally the iron roof is gone and the pier opens and there, two storeys high, is Poseidon, his mares, argonauts and trident, 3-D over the archway and ticket booth of the South Steyne Oceanarium.

It’s humid inside. Naturally. Briny. The walls are green with it. There are flaking reliefs of Vasco da Gama, Dirk Hartog, Captain James Cook, Captain Nemo. And the brine makes the wooden stairs slippery. A gramophone somewhere plays “I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside” over which a voice begins “From the deep, creatures . . .” and then crackles, fizzes, continues “. . . magnificent and mysterious. Denizens of man’s final fron . . .” As Daff, eyes tuning in now to the half-light, turns to the deni-



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zens in the glass tanks: black eels rock-hiding, jellyfish bumper-to-bumper letting down stalactitic tentacles; and down further, the spiny cod, the puffer, the bull roat. Down. Down. Down she goes. Now harlequins in tanks lit phosphorescent, the impossibly purple, the fluorescent red, fish with crescents so perfectly drawn they cannot be . . . flat fish, fish with false eyes, until she has descended into the central rotunda. A round tank, and through its convex scratched windows another visitor she notices, a man, standing higher up in a shaft of light opposite. Now a school of slimy mackerel sweep toward the glass, check, and then away. Now a brown grouper loping, older than the history of humanity and supporting what appears to be a crusty foam ball on its back. And then the tank becomes hazy, windy green again and the man opposite presses his nose to the glass and points and grins and Daff moves to the next window and waits. But there is nothing. The tank appears empty. She spies once or twice a shadow, the sandy riflings of a Chinese manta, a glint of the man opposite who appears to be speaking to her, his mouth moving in a queer fish-like rhythm, opening and closing and forming his lips into pillows. But by now mama has made her decision and moved on, past entire walls of fluorescent corals and crustaceans in species, past Closed Temporarily for Cleaning, and is climbing a new set of stairs. There are voices somewhere, a song, and the continuous enthusiasm of the recorded commentary. . . . Upward, until she's squinting in a shaft of the sun and the wind catches the sand which has blown onto the decking and she cups her eyes away from it and peers out over the harbor, sighting in the distance the eleven o'clock ferry. Witnessing ferry passengers. Gunnel-crowding. Flying towels printed "Curling, Shooting, Trimming . . ." and



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“Ride the Wild . . . !” Day-trippers and big-spenders, old-timers and vacationers, battling seasickness, eyes fixed on points out in front. She is in view not a moment when her arms begin to limber and stretch. Before battling eyes: a girl of fifteen climbing high on the railing of the Oceanarium, wearing blouse and pencil skirt and tight-fitting shoes, hands now clamping over her eyes, her white hair dancing the Watusi, her skin as sun-tanned as a lizard, her face as round as . . . and suddenly she plunges.



Drowning, when all's said and done, is an efficient solution to the insurmountable problem of loneliness. Therefore my fatherless mother plunged and entered the rarefied world of the suicide. She entered it impetuously but without remorse. She went willingly and took with her no evidence of her life. Her plunge reperculated through water, concentric circled, reverberated, spun and revolved. Green water engulfed her and light became diffused. Sea-salt spun cool and watery and made filament like webs and these webs entangled but also supported her. Water became speckled as if in the process of shedding its skin, and whirled according to unseen cycles and equally undiscoverable currents. Currents carried sunlight and sunlight, as it does, pushed darkness out. Darkness went and sound, “I do like to be beside . . .,” denizen commentary, the low chug-chugging beat of Taronga ferry engines and the pealing bells of the fun pier, was muted into the music of Frankie Avalon and Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs and there, Daffodil, drowning, observed several species of migratory fish swirling and dancing in progressive Prides of Erin, a manta ray, that graceful filterer of waste, shoveling sand, a grouper loping, lumbering with pouting lips like the toes of boots, a loggerhead turtle car-



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rying its hundreds of soft-shelled and yolk feeding young, and the last thing she saw, pressing her round face to the thick green safety glass, taking in water with the ease of air, letting water flow through passages and pores and water fill cavities and the terrible deep hole within, was a tableau of an anonymous pair making love in the steamy rotunda of an oceanarium.

## The One Domino Theory

*Man!* A death as simply executed, as skillfully performed and as exquisitely presented as this was going to be popular. What family could prevent it? Nebulous Daffodil, floating as she did with her arms and legs forming the points of a bright star. Who would circumvent such a simple but consummately beautiful end. Petals becoming clouds on a sea-green surface. Diaphanous. Aglow. What begins in show biz as a splash becomes, in no time, a wave. I note today's *E . . . News* editorial which recalls the third of my grandmother's lodgers: ZIMMERMAN IS RETURNING: FIRST SIGHTING IN THIRTY YEARS OF SOUTH STEYNE'S SAD MARIONETTE.

Today the Jokerman has risen from his bed. Wild orchid plants threaten again to bloom uncontrollably on the patrolled stretch of Queenscliff Beach. Who knows what abomination will soon snake its supine self out from the gates of Columbia, and prevent the efficient flow of seaside traffic. Why friends, in no time at all our babes in the wood will again adorn themselves with bright shoulder tattoos in the shape of hearts and peace. Hairy Monkees will swing down from their trees



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to screech soprano in the evenings, twisting and cavorting uncontrollably through South Steyne and laughing out silly and wild and purple over the Muzak of our beds. God help us!

“Yes!” Maxim’s lactating partners are screeching through the gaps in the door. “Yes! Yes! hote-de-tote, God help you if you don’t open up and give us our children.”

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“If you don’t let us in, maybe we call the newspapers too. Do you hear?”

*Arrrb!* But newspapers—who can take seriously the lining of so many budgerigar’s cages.

“Maybe what you’re doing with those babaloos is kidnapping, huh? What do you say?”

Facts only then. Nothing else.

In those days of the Domino Theory and the Colombo Plan Mr. Maurice Manticora was paid well to compose powerful headlines before investigating stories. As this was a method of ensuring deadlines were met, and as our suburb had come to believe that the moral prerogative of supply far outweighed that of accuracy, and as, alternatively, the news would have consisted of nothing more accordant than numerous blank spaces which, no matter how well blocked or bordered or otherwise composed would nevertheless have remained blank, this was deemed sound practice. And so, being conscientious, Mr. Manticora was responsible for the following: CASTRO FORCES TURNED BACK and ROCK AND ROLL, YOU’RE NOT SERIOUS! and MISS ELIZABETH TAYLOR IN LOVE and MONKEYS RETURN FROM SPACE and much later WELCOME PRESIDENT MARCOS. He was a man of considerable integrity, dif-



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ficult to get to know, with a single twisted black brow revealing the fissures and valleys of his job and a nose in bold type. . . . Therefore, in good faith and sometime before leaving for the oceanarium, he composed the following: HIGH DIVER DROWNS IN DEEP DEPRESSION and proffered the premature: “We lost her in the kelp. God! And the sharks . . .,” says a constable who refuses to be named. “It’s too horrible. Please!”

Then, as now, what masquerades as reasonably veracious copy? I report, more accurately, three natives fished my mother out with a boat-hook. One of them, King Billy, who was hard of hearing, kept on and on, “Boy-o-boy, she don’t seem to be breathing.” and pulling at his ears as a sure sign of trouble. But to the aurally astute—sure, there was breathing and there was heaving and, also, there was telling “Hey, you guys, I’m fine now!” but nobody seemed to be listening.

When Sgt Joel Atherton arrived in the company of four probationers and two dedicated accident hounds of the Royal Ambulance in milk caps and pharmacy coats they set up a GHQ behind The Squid and emptied the fun pier. Miss Daffodil Trymelow was wrapped awkwardly in a rain coat and placed in a warm room with the fishmeal and sea-salt until the owners of the premises could be contacted and charges laid. Citing, that was, damage of an unspecified sort. Each young, probationary constable, with the glimmer of new moustaches on their lips, later composing a statutory declaration: “On the oath of God, and the Commissioner, we swear these fish, so named, have freaked out.” Indeed, since mama’s submergence and subsequent deep swimming the demeanour of the South Steyne Oceanarium’s internal sea seemed altered—as if the water had been unusually stirred, cold



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blood brought to the boil, and it was the opinion of the superstitious natives, who had worked in the company of cold denizens since colonization, that their fish had suffered the same fate as all creatures who turn their eyes upward in the event of a solar eclipse and that soon they would die and then—O the cost! And what would Mr. and Mrs. Carlson say, huh, already into Abner Zimmerman for several months rent and so forth, and also having just taken full possession of their son after five years of sending him to his grandparents (for financial reasons politely not to be mentioned), to find their business on the brink of collapse and all because of this girlie.

“Yowi!” said the natives. . . . And now, a trinket to show. A show and tell, babaloos. This in my hand, taken gently between fingers because it is as fragile as a babaloo’s breath. Over the years its natural elasticity has been lost and it has become brittle. White and jagged: it is a portion of eggshell, but not that of the domestic fowls that came to the suburb of South Steyne ignominiously, crated twenty-to-a-box aboard the S. S. Supply to support the appetites of transported convicts; not that I would find as a child in our guttering, the lice-carrying starling or sparrow or, if I climbed high, high onto the grand turrets and lattice of Columbia from where I could see my mother and the three lodgers throwing frisbees like flying saucers through the tangled colors of our garden, the beautiful but endangered pink-crested kingfisher, whose egg was as lumpish and as patterned as a globe. But not this. It is the elongated shell of the loggerhead turtle. The smallest portion because, naturally, the rest was broken in the birth. . . . That while the probationers were learning the methods of search and destroy they would employ in coming years, while Maurice Manticora was entering



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Daffodil's room to write a story which was already published, the great loggerhead (which in previous generations had been kept by sailors, upside down on deck as food for ten days, whose shell had been turned into combs and brooches for the invisible wife of Governor Macquarie) heaved herself out of the water and onto the wooden decking and there, in the manner of great turtles (with heterogeneity and rigor), gave birth to one hundred, two hundred, three hundred rocket shaped eggs from which, a few weeks later, flibbertigibbets hatched, flinging their scaly wings about and beat a hundred paths to the open sea. This being the first and last time in recorded history that not a single infant would be lost to predators.

"Humble apologies," said Sgt. Atherton, as the proprietors stepped through the pier's Gate of Horn. "The fact of the matter: a young lady has just now dove on into your tank and damaged your stock."

But Chezter and Neva Carlson only casually acknowledged him. The boy holding their hands was crying vauntingly, and they climbed directly upstairs to their apartment behind Poseidon's protective trident (the sarge tramping after them) and settled the child in his nursery painted not with fishes but with mammals of the roguish kind: Smoky, Bugs, Bambi; and adorned at the cothead with the cutesy peg of: CHE CHE, Cheval, who appears a little later at the rear of a camera as well as in front, conducting experiments in exposure and aperture and practical methods for studying human physiognomy.

"It is a matter," Atherton insisted, "of due public safety."

Meaning that other young people might follow this precious Daff into the fishtank if an example wasn't made. Yet he couldn't even raise a spark of interest in the



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Carlsons, who shared with Abner Zimmerman the occupation of the pier. The sergeant's military record, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) retired, not preparing him . . . either for Chezter, who believed in that brand new, desultory brand of South Steyne shopkeeping known as (among other things) Galbraithianism, nor for Neva whose lifelong and unschooled clairvoyance joined with new motherhood to produce: "Na! Che will be famous!" "Che Che will be President!" "This beautiful gidgy of mine will make such a difference!" "Wait-n-see! Wait-n-see!" . . . While downstairs in a room housing blood-n-bone, beach worms, chicken gut, mish-mash and the pipes and boxes of filtration Maurice Manticora was making himself at home and committing to paper the second Trymelow to carry the weight of a masthead.

"So," he began, "let me get it straight—you plunged into the pool huh? because you were depressed and believed yourself unattractive huh?"

It doesn't take a savant to see that dark-eyed Manticora is not inclined toward the objective correlative, that he's already fallen for my mother's diaphanous looks (a fact which cannot signal good news ahead), and that the follow-up he's just thought about writing will bear only a passing relationship with reality. Recalling, in this, the strange epidemic about to sweep through the whole of South Steyne.

As quickly as TV antennas were going up on the new estates—joining Hills Clothes Hoists, chalk-box fibrocement, roaring Victa motormowers—the real magic of the teakwood box became apparent. South Steyne citizens discovered it subjecting their dead lives to all kinds of engrossing largesse; its cleverness was insatiable, its wittiness commendable, its profoundness undeniable, its



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intuition culminating a few short years later in the (accidental?) screening of the assassination of a president, which *E. . . News* could only outdo by considerable speculation and Worldwide Bingo.

Meanwhile, word of her daughter's plunge has reached the Widow Cheese and she's on her way.



Widowhood made of my grandmother a junction from which you could follow to her base the heaviness of the past and to her (now marvellously entangled and brilliantly peroxidic) hair the lightness and brightness of the future. Split around mid-waist by a rope belt, she soon would bulb-out down low and thin in the apex until she resembled, just before her death, a tear-drop or, alternatively, the flame of a bright burning candle. . . . We both had this distinction. My conception, likewise, was to be a common junction and when I was developed enough to realize this and share with Lucille Trymelow my feelings it is a fact that we laughed and sang out without a care: "So we two Pozzos are the beginning and the end of things, the debut and *Ho! Ho!* the finale!"

. . . Only now, I'm a little unnerved by hare-brained rumors that Messrs Zimmerman, Livio and Roszak have been held up. The lodgers, held up! So for the moment I will, after all, only be able to introduce you to my mother, and must wait a moment to point out my fa . . .

Well, leaving that question aside, it is to beginnings and ends I turn, because it seems that, when news of her daughter's plunging reached the auditorium of the Fairlight Returned Servicemen's League Lucille Trymelow was already beginning to feel the first effects of not having slept for an entire week, of an announcement made, a future uncertain, a house too empty, a garden overgrow-



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ing, of the summer heat and the roaring forties of the southern sea. In summary: of all those malevolent spir-its from which a twenty-five year marriage had protected her. . . . To make matters worse, the people around her, in a climate which had always prided itself in the motto “Nothing by Halves,” were entering the period of the Co-lumbo Plan and the final days of the rule of President Domino whose eyebrows were so tall that they clicked clocked back and forth as he spoke, keeping time for his people and recalling to mind the first song I ever heard:

*Ding Ding Domino, we children sing O  
Here's to the red, white and blue  
There's blood on our hands  
And blow them Asch-ians  
'Cos God knows we all love you.*

But let's not bring a singing voice into it just yet. . . . Unparalleled prosperity, unprecedented President Dom-ino with infinite honorary degrees, a presidential car sweeps regularly along The Esplanade surveying the ef-fects of our urban sprawl, and a brand new widow smiles awkwardly at old biddy No.10 who is issuing an invita-tion to afternoon tea as the husbands of the Great Wars file past with palms out-turned on their foreheads in re-spect of a dead crooner and gruff military looks brought on by news of another university soon to be built to house foreign students arriving on the Colombo Plan.

*Hey-ho* the Colombo Plan which first introduced Maxim to talk of other worlds (the Third World, that is, by which he was sure was meant a world external and eagerly waiting—a fact which gave an unborn child great comfort). A third world of foreignness sailing to make a



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new home amongst us, revealing to us: Alien Lives. And from which came Tito Livio, who became, by his own insistence, my loving uncle (“Tito,” he once said to me, “such as in the case of the famous partisan leader.”)—though his love owed more to a certain night on Queenscliff Beach than I was immediately to understand. Whose own short-lived father experienced, as he sailed for The South, a dilemma similar to the one the Great Cheese was experiencing as she drove away. . . .

“The times,” she was saying to herself, “have got to be changing. I cannot go on. What am I to do?”

Driving now toward the fun pier and into the sights of Joel Atherton who was fascinated by the deserted dodgems and pleased to conduct the kind of search for which four years of jungle training had prepared him. Great Cheese parking at the rear of Lovecraft’s Follies to step into the policeman’s vision.

*“What’s this!”*

(Is it true that the sergeant’s substantial jaw dropped at the sight of the woman approaching him?)

“Fine bearing!”

*“What’s this?”* Mrs. Trymelow demanding again (being a mother unable to see her only little flower.) “You have no right to withhold . . .” Which only succeeds in igniting a policeman’s secret pride: “Every right, madam!”

(I cast momentarily out into my bird-filled garden and am reminded that in those same hours of December, 1960, word came that they had found Adolf Eichmann, the Austrian gasman, in the jungle. I make no bones about on whose side the moonlight was falling. The side, that is, of the relatives of Seminole and Tuscarora Indians who watched the Nazi’s arrest dressed in no more than



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hemp string and palmetto and wondered what truly civilized citizens were all about).

“My daughter shall be brought to me immediately!”

“Missus,” the sarge says, “the girl’s got herself in strife. Some, anyways, with this swimming business.”

“O, it’s too bad isn’t it what happens when a kid’s abandoned?”

“Public nuisance we’re calling it.”

And the Widow Creamcheese: “O too too bad!”

At which point Daffodil Rosa picks up a little of the conversation, asks the journalist Manticora to please *shoosh* his motory mouth a moment, and cocks an ear to the storeroom door.

“Sure is a shame to see a pretty thing like your . . .”

“A shame!” bellows Great Cheese. “No shame is great enough to describe how I am feeling standing here.’ But now grief has finally overcome anger and she cannot do any other than revert to the role she has played for twenty-five years. The role of sequin stitcher, patent polisher, flies fastener, tie-straightener, mike checker (O the guilt that poor woman feels!) Her single most accomplished contribution: that of impresario. . . .” And to think my husband and I were there on the beach at the Maroubra rescue of ’44. Three freak waves. A thousand souls swept out to sea—and on a Sunday! Kids, rightly. Too bad if there had been no one at home. But there were a hundred strong swimmers in the chair that day, so for every ten flapping so-n-sos there was one good and heroic man (Bless them and vicki verki!) and when they got the first hundred ashore and made them sit there with their heads between their knees and a two pound preserver firming the breadbox then those heroes went right back out on the rip to pull in a hundred more!” . . .”Don’t quote me,



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Snow, but I was there. Wore a shingle and everything. A young woman, rightly, and working (if you remember the place) for The Empire on Campbell.”

She takes breath, proceeds: “Heroes like Simpson, need I mention, and his donkey, who carried the wounded across the Hellespont without thought or concern for their lives—until Simpson was hit. Who then marched out for Chunuk Bair, not at all sure whether he was alive or dead but no less determined anyhow, and that he carried out a thousand rescues around the dug-in Hell holes of Lone Pine before it finally occurred to him that his heart was fatally pierced.” Momentarily wiping her giant’s brow. “. . . And Flynn, heroic Flynn of the Interior, the Flying Doctor, who single-handedly built every hospital and mission for three thousand miles. Do I need . . . ? And have you not yourself been humbled by the thought of young Charlie Sturt, carrying a boat on his back for sixteen years because he believed in the true and everlasting existence of an inland sea?”

O to see Lucille Trymelow in full flight! Witness Maxim’s ever-loving grandmama! And Maxim not yet conceived, knowing as he listens that what she says is accurate in every important detail. That from within her is suddenly bursting out an entire world, so that it is obvious that while some folks have looked at her and considered her big-boned or big-gutted, big-headed or plumpo at best she can now be seen to be not half the size required for the spunk of bold history she carries.

. . . “*Heroic types!* Like . . . Like . . . Like Yuri Gagarin! It’s an outrage, sergeant, to hear of the diving of one’s own when the rest of you brave souls have your hearts set on soaring and should I now wish to offer an apology it would be in the words of the explorer, Peron. . . .” Of



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Peron,” echoes Daffodil behind the door, and flashes a fifteen year old smile at Manticora which melts his virtuous heart clean away. . . .”Peron who, on his travels, witnessed a forty foot flood, where valley’s were cooler than the mountains and hailstones were fireworks. ‘This,’ he cried, is no ordinary circumstance.’ Imagine it! Imagine sergeant, that you are Peron in the frozen air of somewhere entirely new. Imagine the stirring and quickening of the soil, and the silent uprising of unknown vegetation in unearthly ascending fleshliness and in spikes. Imagine the parallax drift of so-called *fixed* stars, in reality evermoving from immeasurably remote eons to infinitely remote futures in comparison with which the years, threescore and ten, of allotted human life formed a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity.’ . . . Are you getting my drift, Snow Atherton? Gees, so what did my daughter say to herself: ‘I come to a place where five avenues meet and the oaks which form them are so extremely tall that they appear to support in the heavens a high garden-plot of greenery.’ And on this woeful day, sir, when everything is so novel and unexpected. Whether she is how to say, Miss Lunatic, is anyone’s guess. Or cries out ‘Good morrow to you Daniel O’Rourke’ and dives willy-nilly into fish-tanks. Not usually. *No, sir!* . . .” The girl is destined for big things. A fact which lays out clear beneath me—like a chart. . . . O dreams she’s had! No red-faced farm girl, this one. No fragment of angry candy. No life she’s got planned to be set in plaster of Paris. A girl going strength to strength . . . up until now. And don’t forget Peron himself collected, on one island alone, twenty-three thousand unknown seeds, birds, reptiles, plants and minerals, not knowing whether they were law-abiding or law-defying. And just think—even President Domino has edema of



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late. Pulmonary. *Gees!* who doesn't know what it's like, Snow, to be overtaken by the size and shape of terrible events, especially when you're young and not knowing the ropes and he, whose tonsils were silver as everybody knows, is now gone? . . . *Gone!* Are you realizing already what I'm getting at: the risk was minimal compared to the imagination required? And what a relief to find there are still some head honchos like yourself who would put life on the line for the purposes of showing the youngsters, soandsos they can be, who should know better but have not quite worked out what we know, and that we should feel the privilege and generosity of knowing, because that rightly is the spirit of the way the thing is accomplished . . .”

And so, *hey-ho*, a deal was struck.

## Stranger than Fiction

From that moment on, I can report, here in this house grew a Daffodil who sung piscicultural. My mother, who gave to the piscine: attentions previously denied. Who found in the company of fish: mutual satisfaction, the memories of the silver tonsils of her father reflected in the scales of sea bream and mullet. Attached herself to the idea of motherhood by getting close to that most birth-prone of creatures. Fish, who live by the famous novelists' principle: one can give birth to the many. Fish, deadset, who grok not a thing in return. Crustaceans dealt with equally, without prejudice. She made of those first hours in Carlson's oceanarium: relief extremo.

“Which is more,” I hear from beyond the door “than she felt on first learning of her offspring. More affection she provided, I'll tell you, to the scaly, the goggle-eyed,



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the thin-lipped, the poisonous, than to her own flesh and . . .”

*No no!* Because the distinct circumstances of my gestation decreed that a mother and her babaloo be . . . It’s no big deal. Bigger things happen! A president is about to be elected who will flicker, glow, and be snuffed out before I’m old enough to take possession of my own hands. Contestants on the TV quiz *21* will mysteriously reveal answers before they have been asked questions and, circumventing accusations of sorcery and demonology, their reward is: a great deal of money; while, beneath the sea, a crew circumnavigating—not once rising to sample the air—will swear they’ve discovered the proper environment for humankind.

“Inner space, ipso facto, could provide sustainable life-supporting resources for umpteen years.”

O thrill to the bubbling joys of self-containment! A scientist is about to write a book entitled *The Sciences Were Never at War*. Who suspected it, anyhow? *Man!* one thing at a time.

. . . Daffodil Rosa, both sea-loving and sun-bathing, entered the world of the aqueous. The air was thick with the nitrous bubbles of tanks and thin with oxygen and her head was spinning. She fed the denizens on the hour, every hour, and though mamas and papas worldwide are now crying “Sweetie, they don’t eat that much.” “Stop! Stop! those dang pets of yours’ll explode!,” they were destined to do well (as we all will—you’ll see). Pink mollies to receive, in time, their fluorescent pinkness. Neon tetras to have returned to them their natural spectrum. Bass, minnow, crappie, gar, sturgeon, shad. Species alive-o! Tripping along on mama-attentions while her loneliness swum beneath the surface of something



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else. Breathed deep on the de-oxygenated atmosphere. Shoveling seasalt *Hey-ho! Hey-ho!* Watched over by three natives who considered her effect on the fish an instance of devilment as yet unresolved. There would be dark consequences to all this life-giving, they were sure. Bad vibes. Why so—the barbed, the spined, bullrout, stonefish, ratfish, cobblerfish, fortescue, shark *yakkai!*—beasties all rise up to this one’s ministrations. Bad, bad vibes this young one brings. . . . But what could be more innocent than giving a world cycles? What more than the rhythmic patterns she provided? Counting out the amounts of issue as she went. Initiating tides in the still ponds of artificiality. Swirling currents and rips, sand spurts and spouts. Switching on lamps and reticulation to provide the effects of the seasons. And feeding. Her arms deep in a bag of mishmash. Deep deep so that up to her shoulders now there was a coat of powdery white. Dipping down down so that cupped in two white hands that will one day clasp burgeoning belly, one day feel for an unborn’s head, one day cradle dripping babaloo; brimming and dripping through fingers which will . . . there is blood-n-bone, chicken gut, the offal and entrails that only fish could love, visceral sip and sop. And now a smell close by which proves everlasting. The fishiness, the saltiness, the bloodiness, the scent of loneliness diminishing to be overcome by something new: an aroma of impatience, drouth, concupiscence—the perfume, that is, of an insatiable hunger (along with the occasional hint of another, made by machinery, books, resins, refuse and guitars: the fertile aroma of three tenderfoot lodgers-to-be).



Meanwhile, Lucille Trymelow had done the right thing, and so she drove home. She made short work of the hair-



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pins and narrow thoroughfares of Fairlight. Whisking A40 like it was the outer of her own rolling body. Pressing it forward so that the politeness and quaintness of its design seemed unthreatened by the pace of life that was approaching. Driving below the balconies where new arrivals in Mr. Chesty singlets loosely hung their arms and bellies and shouted in accents “Getchaearsfixed!” to the radiolas cranking out “Calcutta” and “Let’s do The Twist.” Blackies, yellowies, reddieys, brownies who came south on the promises of the Columbo Plan to learn all there was about industrialism, professionalism, technocracy, manufactured medicine, Programd instruction. Ten pound white-as-ghost immigrants also, who would soon fill the aisles of the factories rising on the Vale escarpment, dealing mostly in processing and forwarding: best quality ores and ites, the wool-clip and the wheat. She screeches past all this . . . as time, in an Einsteinian way, refracts back exactly five years to 1955 and, in “Pink Cow” aisles of Lakeland Pencils, Perkins Paste, Decca 45s, Smiths Crisps, Berlei Support-Cup Brassieres two plump chicks, planning just in time, are making a pact. The lights are low but the shelves rightly sparkle with their evening’s work, their tinseling and glass baubling, their holly stenciling for this season’s yule which imports five new brands of antiperspirant (bodies present their true colors in the tropics); transistor radios from Japan which are carried in one hand only and which, Charismatic T Bull claims, suck the juice right out of your sockets at twice the running cost to yourself and are made of leather that isn’t leather; clippers that do short back and sides, quick as pie. And the two plump chicks bunch up together. Good workers. First rate. Miss Wilmers is very proud. Destined for Counter Senior or Lay-by. . . . Their



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hands meet over a broke-open packet of Mackintosh's Cream Caramels, behind the counter MANCHESTER, and right smack there in the midst of clandestine lipsucking, dribbling, stick-jawing they agree to make a pact: "Now that we have done this thing we marry well and kiss this place goodbye!"

Stranger than fiction, this truth. Stranger than . . . O, hindsight, that gives with one hand and takes away with the other! But progress is never upfront. It spins back and forth, fibrous and mazy like wool from a loom. These two 1955 fatties should not appear pig-ignorant because, by the time I'm conceived (not long now, I can assure you), they will have become the respectable mamas of two brothers of mine, Haberdash and the hairless Sweets. Take note: there were ancient agenda and there was concord. In the sewing rooms of several thousand State High Schools, on the opposite quadrilateral to woodworking, technical drawing, metalcrafting, girls not much younger than Daffodil Rosa (some older, in fact, but not in mind. O no!) sewed needlepoint hearts and saleable pincushions for Dr. Barnado's Busy Bees. (Secrets: the uses of pennies accumulated in a man's dicky pocket, clandestine methods of strapping down an eight month bulge. Curses: the stiletto heel, all night rollers). Who doesn't accept a reasonable human being would consider such pacts? . . . "Now that we have done this thing," said the Einsteinian two, "we cannot turn back."

. . . And so, the Widow Creamcheese wheels on, her eyes drying as she drives with her window open through South Steyne; A40 humming with perhaps a loving mechanical beat, a steadying drum roll of final release; while below, her daughter, a mother-to-be, carrying a bucket of visceral sip sop, approaches the first of her glass oceans.



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Oceans lime green and new. From within, fishes glitter. Mouths gape. Fins flurry, like wings. Steam wafts. Waters rise. The rotunda, round as a wheel, a frisbee, a hoop, maybe the sign for peace, is speckled with bright sunlight from outside and begins simultaneously to fill with the splashes of anticipated feeding. But now Daff has dropped her bucket, turning slowly at first and then faster. Faster, and then faster, whirling like the center of a stylus as she sees herself reflected ten times over, her face in every fishtank, silent and familiar, over and over, the round diaphanous moon face of her thoroughly lovelorn reflection. . . .