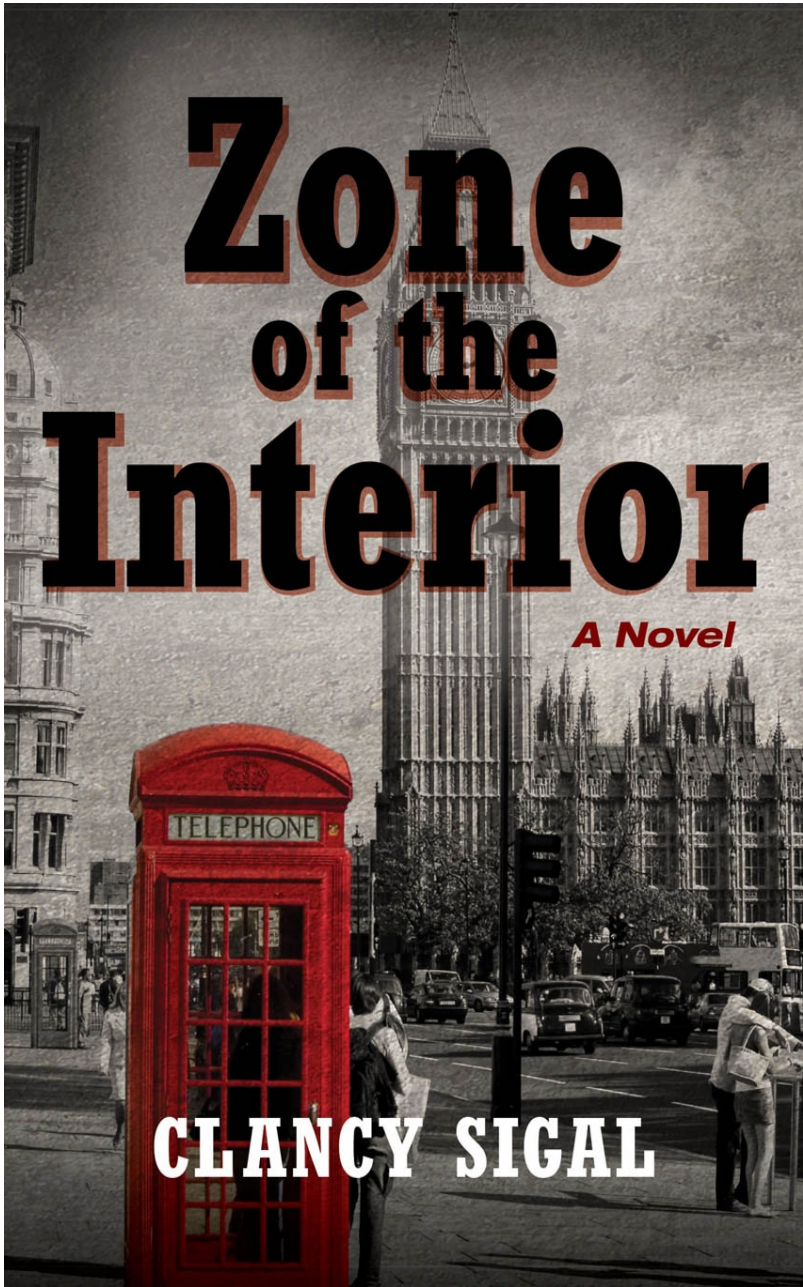




Zone of the Interior

A Novel

CLANCY SIGAL



Zone of the Interior

A Novel

CLANCY SIGAL



EARLY BIRD BOOKS
FRESH EBOOK DEALS, DELIVERED DAILY

LOVE TO READ?
LOVE GREAT SALES?

GET **FANTASTIC** DEALS ON BESTSELLING EBOOKS
DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX EVERY DAY!

SIGN UP NOW
at www.EarlyBirdBooks.com

Zone of the Interior

A Novel

Clancy Sigal



INTEGRATED MEDIA

NEW YORK

This story is dedicated to those who lived it, and to the memory of Frank Atkin,
John Griffith, Christa Volker and other friends who fell in the
'battle for the mind'.

Contents

]preface[

]one[

Days and nights in Connolly House:]winter[

Late Saturday A.M.

A Geography Lesson

A Recon

Six P.M.

Sunday

Eight A.M.

Visi-Tears

A Twilight Jog

Monday

Con House Game (1)

Ten A.M.

No Biz Like Show Biz

Les Talks

Eleven P.M.

Tuesday

America, America

Patients

Eleven A.M.

Con House Game (2)

Lantern Slide: *Clement Attlee Watford*

The Village

Class Notes

Wednesday

Sheep May Safely Craze

Thursday

Lantern Slide: *Gareth de Walden*

A Shell of Himself

Les Talks

Two A.M.

Friday

The Good Citizen

]two[

Days and Nights in Conolly House:]spring[
A Clean Well-Lighted Place
Praise God, She Will Protect You
Bull Session
Brass
Les Talks
It's a Barnum & Bailey World
Soldiers' Talk

]three[
Days and Nights in Conolly House:]summer[
The Florence Nightingale Caper
Lantern Slide: *A.C. Corrigan*
Les Talks

]four[
Days and Nights in Conolly House:]fall[
Lantern Slide: *Gerald Jackson*
Les Talks
Lantern Slide: *Abraham Clewes*

]five[
Weirdsville

About the Author

] preface [

IN SEPTEMBER 1965, DURING THE JEWISH HIGH HOLIDAYS, I had a ‘schizophrenic breakdown’ ... or flash of enlightenment ... or transformative moment of rebirth. It’s all in your point of view. My ‘breakdown’ did not happen privately but acted out in front of twenty or thirty people on a Friday shabbat night at Kingsley Hall, the East End home to one of the most radical experiments in mental health ever attempted.

The notion behind Kingsley Hall was that psychosis is not an illness but a state of trance to be valued as a healing agent. We were not a halfway house or a hospital but a community of souls searching for the Light each in our own way. Community residents (never ‘patients’) might be labelled schizophrenics in the outside hostile world but were never ‘treated’ with drugs or any other form of oppressive therapy. Broken souls were not to be doped, shocked or ostracised but allowed “space to explore their madness and internal chaos” (as its current Web page says). It was a given that no cracked-up person was to be interfered with especially at the climactic moment of elation. With luck and emotional support, therapeutic reintegration might follow.

Kingsley Hall was a registered charity by the Philadelphia Association whose most charismatic member was Dr. R.D. Laing (*The Divided Self*). For a time I was the Association’s titular chairman. Others involved included Laing’s collaborators, Drs Aaron Esterson and David Cooper, and Sid Briskin a social worker. Our most noteworthy patient was a bonkers mental nurse named Mary Barnes after whom David Edgar’s play was named.

Briefly I had been Laing’s patient but by mutual agreement soon ‘promoted’ to ... exactly what? In Red China at the time, ‘barefoot doctors’, enthusiastic but untutored lay persons, were given a crash course in medicine and assigned in rural areas where there were no doctors but plenty of disease. So perhaps I was a London version of barefoot doctor, in equal parts reporter, researcher, participant/observer, apprentice shaman or nutcase or all of the above.

My head belonged to Kingsley Hall but my heart to Villa 21 at Shenley Hospital near Borehamwood, Herts. Villa 21 was the idea-child of David Cooper an existential ‘anti-psychiatrist’ (he coined the word) who refused to believe in the very concept of mental illness. There was no such thing as ‘schizophrenia’, he insisted, only madness, an existential experience that might, in a permissive setting, lead the afflicted person to the light of reason. (I simplify madly.) Cooper, the most political among us, insisted that therapy took second place to ‘praxis’. So it was important that his brand of non-therapy take place in a National Health hospital within the state system because that’s where most distressed people were warehoused or, worse, treated.

Villa 21 became my second home. My best friends—and, as I came to realise, my healers—were the Villa’s patients—all diagnosed schizophrenic—some ‘florid’ and ‘violent’. My guide, friend and confidante was their courageous mental nurse, Frank Atkin. Atkin is the

model, but not responsible, for the character of 'Les O'Brien' in this novel. More than anyone else this capable, deeply human and extraordinarily bright man taught me how to navigate the tortured terrain of 'mental illness', a concept neither of us believed in. In a just society Frank Atkin would be at least as famous as Laing or Cooper. He lives in my heart as do Villa 21's patients who were part-models for Clem, Hurricane, Percy, Abe, Mr Wu, Jerry and A.C.

Zone of the Interior was effectively suppressed at the time. I meant it for a British reader who never got to read it except as 'samdizat'—clandestine documents—secretly passed hand to hand or sold under the table at certain English bookshops. The reason(s) for its blacklisting never were made clear as so often happens. (I speak from experience as a Hollywood blacklistee.) It came down to publisher's fear of libel and, as I learned to my dismay, a revulsion to the material itself among a few influential types. Or, as one leading British left-wing playwright—on the editorial board of a publishing house—told me angrily, "How dare you insult the medical profession? Don't you understand how many years of study and training they must endure to be qualified?"

I'm deeply grateful to Pomona for finally letting a little air in. What began with Villa 21 and the Philadelphia Association, and the writings and researches of Laing, Esterson and other medical rebels, has—in my view—enormous implications for the future treatment of whatever one chooses to call the mental distress of our fellow human beings. Let a hundred flowers bloom—no, a thousand.

CLANCY SIGAL

Los Angeles, September 2005

Author's Note to the original edition:

THIS IS FICTION, A WORK OF IMAGINATION. ALTHOUGH set in Greater London of the 1960s, all characters and incidents, except for obviously public figures and places, are invented. To the best of my knowledge Clare Community, Conolly House, King Edward VIII Hospital, Meditation Manor and their personnel do not exist except in my mind. Any similarity to persons living or dead is purely accidental.

I am living very badly now and just to stay alive is an ordeal, but I see something better. It is vague, and is a possibility at best, but I know a place, a refuge where people love and live.

—GEORGE JACKSON to his mother.

From *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*.

England exploded, didn't it? I don't know when ...

—PAUL MCCARTNEY

I AM BACK. AFTER several years coming down—maneuvering like a weightless astronaut in space—I'm on earth again. Most of us are still alive.

Once a year I get a Christmas card from Les O'Brien. He quit mental nursing after Conolly House folded, but soon got bored with 'healthy' people and re-enlisted at another hospital, this time near his native Newcastle-on-Tyne. Conolly House alumni occasionally visit or phone me. Herb Greaves and Gareth de Walden are still somewhere inside King Edward Hospital. Clem, who married and emigrated, teaches high school in Salt Lake City. Yorkshire Roy works off his money hangups as assistant head cashier in a Leeds bank. A.C. Corrigan runs a Merseyside Free School. Jeff H. almost got shot as a TV cameraman in the last Arab-Israeli war. And Robin Ripley, the unit's honorary boy, has become a housewife and mother in Wokingham. Barney, Jack, Hurricane Hodge, Derek, Wally, Percy-the-radio and the others I've lost touch with.

The Medical Research Council recently published a study confirming that fewer Con House patients are re-hospitalised than schizophrenics who are treated conventionally. So it was worth it.

Being an adopted Londoner, I can't help running into Clare council Mafiosi. Once I shared a Vietnam protest platform in Trafalgar Square with Con House's founder, Dr. Dick Drummond. The grapevine tells me that Major Straw has opened a spiritualist bookshop in Hampstead. Once in a blue moon Davina sends a letter from Australia, where she qualified as a social worker and has set up a home for unmarried mothers in Melbourne; she's much happier working with women instead of mad men. And Alf, with his keen nose for a growth industry, has launched several more therapeutic communities which have become so respectable they get government grants-in-aid.

Jerry Jackson's dead, of course. And Lena. I sometimes lay flowers on her grave in Golders Green (like Jack the Ripper revisiting the scene of his crime). I've had plenty of time to figure out my responsibility for killing both of them; it's something I live with. The doctors' wives—Sybil, Nancy and Vivienne—sank without trace, like movie extras no longer needed. In the blaze of charismatic publicity surrounding Dr. Last nobody remembers them, the real victims.

Willie Last himself is back from a spell of Buddhist meditation in Bangkok. While he was there Thailand was used as a U.S. Air Force base for massacring Indochinese, which he didn't seem to mind, or even know. But then his current lecture audiences (at five bucks a head) aren't bothered either. Dr. Last's exodus from radical politics suits their mood. Into a happy second marriage, he also seems to have forgotten his views about the oppressive nature of the nuclear family. The important thing is not to use your mind at all, he now preaches.

For months after I quit Clare Council he tried hard wooing me back. He'd 'accidentally' bump into me in the street or find excuses to phone me to "clear up some ootstandin' matters." Once or twice he waited in his black Bentley outside my apartment, but drove off when I brandished the composition rubber sap I always carried with me then. His accosting me in public to pinch my cheek and call me "Brithr Sid" got so bad I had an argy-bargy with him

on a street corner that almost got us arrested.

For a while remorse—even terror—almost killed me. That too has ebbed, leaving behind only the cramps, headaches and night sweats I took with me from America years ago. Coral, who got me into all this in the first place, now advises me not to “stop on” bitterness. “It was just a damned silly way to cure a bellyache,” she says in that maddeningly brisk, absolute way of hers.

Since leaving Last’s group I’ve gone back to basics. During the Vietnam war I stuffed envelopes and picketed the American Embassy with our USA-Out-Of-Indochina Committee, and now in the local tenants’ association I petition neighbours for a safer road crossing—learning all over again how to work with a minimum of manipulative bullshit. Most times I don’t think I’ll make it.

But there *is* something new and better. What I want to understand is how I, from the radical working class, missed it so wildly. Why did we follow Last into the desert? Why, after all my experience in unions and the Communist party, did I fall for the dialectical soft soap *again*? And why, with so much to politically rethink in the Sixties—the rise of multinational corporations, the alleged disappearance of the boom-and-bust cycle, the growth of women’s consciousness and the international Left’s approval and use of terrorism—did I seek refuge in near-Fascist irrationalism?

And was it all so crazy?

It’s hard to run away from the old days in Con House and Meditation Manor, even harder from the problems they raise. Somehow it’s in the air around us. Nowadays even school kids read Last, family therapy is clinically fashionable. Once the media b.s. died away, Last’s disciples and others working along similar lines went on to do something with the idea. Informal therapeutic communities such as Alf’s have probably saved the sanity of countless people, and even the big State hospitals are taking this approach seriously.

Slowly the idea of not strangling the mad, indeed of honouring them with kindness, seeps through. The politics of madness takes its place as one of many reform movements. It will not, of itself, revolutionize English society (what can?). But we—Conolly House graduates, Manor escapees, friends and survivors of Clare Council—are in circulation. And so is the need to humanize an increasingly irrational and mechanistic system. Wherever we are we spread the word.

Now for the ordinary thing.

] one [

I THOUGHT THE WORLD had exploded or been blown apart by something. A gigantic spasm had occurred that shrivelled and exposed people, made ideas obsolete, tore the mask from institutions. Perhaps too well I knew that I over-identified a social cosmos with my personal problems, the sexual-political frustrations following the failed 1956 Hungarian revolution and the deflation of the English new left.

Until it all fell apart I'd regarded myself as mainstream and normal. Straight. Dope made me sneeze, and I fell asleep during orgies. Growing up on the streets of Chicago, Detroit and Chattanooga, I'd somehow managed to sidestep the far out and nutty; even in Hollywood I had an ordinary life, that is for a political operative by night and a film studio dealer by day. I was pretty optimistic about life because, after years of failure and frustration, I'd hit the mark and was writing well. The life I'd left in the USA was in my hip pocket in London.

Then 'it' began to happen again.

Head and stomach-aches, vertigo, cold sweats, unexplained fevers, a rising anxiety: all the discomforts I'd suffered prior to my first book. "Oh, those are just writing pains," Coral had pronounced before shipping me off to the first of many psychiatrists she hoped would take a little pressure off me. (And because I woke her at 3:00a.m. to talk, which she said wrecked her for the next day's writing.) On the day my second novel won a literary prize in America I was due to see yet another trick cyclist. Dr. Willie Last.

I'd gotten his name from Coral—my 'connection'—who'd heard it from Fred Bradshaw, an ex-coal miner novelist. I checked with Fred.

"Willie's okay," he said over the phone. "A working-class Scot, about our age, Marxist of sorts. I don't go to him but a couple of my friends do. He's supposed to be great with artistic layabouts like us." Since I was very high on Bradshaw's latest book, *North Country Blues*, I rang for an immediate appointment.

Last was the umpteenth doctor I'd seen in the past few months. Freudians, Jungians, Freudo-Jungians, neuro-psychiatrists, a faith healer (Coral's idea), a herbalist, two won't tells and an LSD therapist. Most of them confirmed my worst fears about psychiatry. I hated their smug superiority, the middle-class philistinism behind a pose of scientific detachment. In Eisenhower's America I'd learned to steer clear of psychotherapists when I saw how they influenced comrades to 'adjust'—that is, drop out of radical politics and occasionally to inform. Some California doctors encouraged patients to turn stoolpigeon during the blacklist purges and in one or two cases even acted as FBI spies. So the blinkered Toryism of English shrinks came as no surprise. Almost unanimously they urged me to drop writing if it caused me so much pain. I'd stayed longest with the LSD man. A Harley Street hustler with a deathbed manner, he mainlined me on a mixture of lysergic acid and pethedrin in a gloomily anti-septic room with oxygen tanks and a female nurse who looked horribly like Mrs Danvers, the mad housekeeper in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. Every hour he'd pop his bald head in to see if I

was still alive: “*Out* go the bad thoughts, *in* come the good thoughts—right-ee-o, Mr. Bell?’ Then he’d bundle me into a taxi in a semi-delirious state to dry out at various friends’ houses. Once, when I collapsed with shakes, he grudgingly let me sleep over—paying extra, of course. He fired me when I started doing handstands on his desk under the influence. Also LSD wasn’t helping my theatre reviews for the *New Statesman* and *Vogue*. I wept and sobbed in all the wrong places and laughed uproariously in the middle of Ralph Richardson’s big speeches.

It was spring, Friday the thirteenth, when I rang Dr. Willie Last’s bell.

He came to the front door himself. All my previous shrinks had had snooty housekeepers. “Och, Sidney Bell, is it? Come in, mon. It’s a pleasure tae meet ye. I’ve read yir wurk.” He sounded like a younger version of Dr. Angus Cameron, Tannochbrae’s kindly old country doctor in the BBC-TV series, *Dr. Finlay’s Casebook*.

He warmly shook my hand and took me up a dark musty-smelling staircase to his office, on the top floor of a shabby building on North Gower Street, beside Euston Station at the unfashionable end of Bloomsbury. I preferred its flaked, peeling paint and broken pillars to the elegantly sterile façades of Harley, Wimpole and Cavendish streets where my other doctors had practised. There was a bookie (‘turf accountant’) on the ground floor, a barbershop above it. Camden Town hereabouts was full of dingy little hotels, trade union headquarters and in Tolmer Square the cheapest, friendliest cinema in town. (You can’t find it now. Like so much of London’s lovely muddle the place has been bulldozed and the square hardly exists anymore.)

Last’s office was different, too. The carpet was threadbare. Everything looked beat-up and secondhand. The only furniture was a rollout desk and swivel chair where Last sat; patients had a choice either of a moth-eaten easy chair or a leather couch so decrepit it looked ready for the junk heap (and that’s just where he found it, he said). The high-ceilinged room was badly lit by a single overhead bulb, its one soot-blackened window faced the brick wall of an adjoining warehouse. Dr. Last apologised for the poor view. “Th’ landlord tried tae unload a street-facin’ window on me fer an extra fiver a week but I tol’ th’ thievin’ bastid where tae shove it.”

What a pleasure to hear plain working-class talk after all these months of oily upper-crust medical accents.

When I defiantly settled in the overstuffed easy chair, Dr. Last didn’t blink an eye. Most shrinks spent whole sessions arguing over my refusal to lie on their couch. Instead he pulled out a long black cigar from a silver case, nonchalantly lit it, drew and puffed with almost fierce concentration. As the blue smoke curled around his softly aquiline features, I studied him.

Last was the youngest doctor I’d seen so far. Two years my junior—I’d looked him up in the Medical Register—he looked like the kid brother I’d always wanted and never had. With his long Teddy Boy sideburns and rather artistic-looking ‘wings’ of thick, dishevelled, curly brown hair swept back from his broad forehead, he was more like a Bill Haley rocker than a stiff-necked doctor. This impression was curiously reinforced by his simple single-breasted

black suit, slim-Jim tie and old-fashioned ankle-high boots, an outfit he wore all rumpled and scuffed as if he'd just slept off a hangover on Brighton Beach. He had a doctor's delicate hands, which constantly played with his cigar or kept inserting a phallic-looking Vicks inhaler up his nose to clear up a breathing difficulty he seemed to have. Watching me watch him he arched his eyebrows and grinned conspiratorially. He fingered the lapel of his jacket. "It's er, um, my medical disguise. But at heart I'm really a civilian." He had a slight, charming stutter that, at moments, rose like a cry of pain.

The most compelling thing about Last was his eyes. Gelid, grey and hooded, they habitually stared into infinity, batting up and down every few seconds with an almost hypnotic, stroboscopic effect. There was so much sorrow in them. At times his young-old severely sensual face clouded over, as if he'd seen the Dark Angel, or the person he confronted was obscurely injuring him. Later it became all too easy to translate this into: "I've done something bad to him" and want to set him free of all my terrible, boring secrets. It only made it worse when he flashed a radiantly forgiving 'us humans are such shitpots' grin and said, "Man, tha' was a *stupid* thing tu'h've done!"

For openers I did my usual stunt of outsilencing the shrink. But Dr. Last seemed to enjoy the absence of words. We sat together without speaking in the semi-darkness for what seemed like ages, then he leaned forward in his anciently creaking chair. "How's Freddie Bradshaw, then? Haven't seen him since Harold Pinter's party."

Ah. He'd read my books and knew my friends.

Seeing how gun-shy I was, Dr. Last gently broke the silence. "That slummy Chicago of yours wasn't such a picnic fer ye, was it?" (He pronounced it 'Chick'-ago.) He said that parts of my novel *Running*, reminded him of his own childhood in Dundee, and in his faint stutter he told me about growing up poor in pre-war Scotland. The Tayside tenements, Saturday night punch ups, stand-up sex in hallways and gas oven suicides could have come out of Chicago's 24th Ward in the 1930s. "Of course," he boasted, "we'd've regarded yir Yankee depression as fantastic prosperity."

Unlike my other shrinks, Dr. Last wasn't afraid to talk about himself. Though he wasn't too specific about his parents, I got a strong feeling he'd had an overprotective mother and an absent cipher father. That, too, sounded familiar. A fantasy-ridden, sickly stammerer (like me), he'd literally read his way up from squalor (ditto). A spinster teacher had been so impressed with his precocious appetite for Darwin, Marx and Schopenhauer that she wangled him a prized Grammar School scholarship, which smoothed his way to Aberdeen University. There he stumbled across A.J. Cronin's novel *The Citadel*, about a poor Scottish lad who becomes a rich society doctor. "I thought, 'Tha's th' ticket, Willie.'" He enrolled in medicine as an insurance policy against poverty, he admitted. But the higher reaches of philosophy—"birth, death, who guards th' Portals, does Gawd exist an' all that metaphysical jive"—continued to obsess him. "Books on th' great 'Why?' of life turned me on like a James Bond." He specialised in psychiatry. "It seemed as good a way as any to combine head an' heart, airthy an' spiritual—an' still make a decent wage."

Internship for Last-the-young-philosopher proved traumatic. Qualified psychiatrists were

so scarce that he was appointed head of several mental wards in Ayrshire immediately after graduating. “They gave me this hunk of parchment to stick up on my wall, an’ th’ next thing I was in th’ madhouse shit up to my neck.” With controlled fury he described his early days in Scottish asylums, where the standard treatment was insulin injection. By comparison, ‘shock boxes,’—electro-convulsive therapy, ECT—had been almost merciful. His gruesome tales of how patients’ bodies bloated and nearly exploded turned my stomach. “We butchered them in droves, in th’ firm Calvinist conviction we were savin’ their minds.”

In the greatest detail Last told me how he’d gone south to work in a Dorset hospital while undergoing training analysis.

“Tryin’ to do eggstainshul psychiatry in a National Health loony bin was pretty spooky. Th’ staff thought I was crazier’n th’ patients.”

For the first time in almost fifty minutes I spoke up. What, I asked, was existential psychiatry?

He took a long thoughtful puff on his cigar. “Talkin’ to a bloke an’ listenin’ to what he says.”

At two pounds ten shillings (about \$7 then) per hour, Dr. Last was the cheapest shrink I’d found. “I do Freddie’s friends at a trade discount,” he cracked in his soft Scottish burr. (England was super for breakdowns. The Stelazine, Librium, Parstelin, Valium, Nardil, Tofranil and Equanil I lived on cost next to nothing on the National Health.)

First we tried “th’ formal route,” as Last called it. Three afternoons a week, face to face, talking. I was unhappy, I said. I’d come from America a radical Marxist. England had almost ruined my socialism, my sex life and my self-image. I was depressed, anxious, insomniac and had enough physical symptoms to fill a Diagnostic Manual. Most ominously, I didn’t enjoy flea pit movies anymore. Almost overnight a whole generation of my father—and mother-figures—Hemingway, Gary Cooper, Mrs. Roosevelt—had died. And at Ascot races last month a stranger at the rail next to me had crumpled with a heart attack and died in my arms. A growing agoraphobia crippled my work, and I was sick of X-rays, barium meals and conflicting diagnoses. Only lysergic acid diethylamide took me out of myself, but it was illegal in England except under strict medical control.

For a few sessions we desultorily talked about the Freudian roots of my aches and pains. “You’ve done this neat li’l trick on yirself Dr. Last said. “Internalised yir maw’s fear an’ hatred of you, treatin’ yirself as yir maw treated ye. Ye’re nae bein’ so guid tae yir own li’l bairn, th’yew within yew. Take more pity on yirself, mon.” My guilt over not having a regular nine to five job but working at my own speed at home he lightly jeered away. “Aw hell, Sid. What’s so all-fired noble about addin’ surplus value tae th’ capitalist system. An’ yew a socialist, too!”

With the aid of diagrams in his book *The Unhealed Heart*—I’d started carrying it with me—Last explained my tortured relationship with Coral. “It’s so obvious. Ye’re engulfed by her depersonalised fantasy of yir perception of her collusion with yir imploded false self system.” He dismissed the affair as “bad faith,” closing the subject.

At last. A shrink who played it straight. Who didn't sandbag me with value judgments behind a wall of therapeutic 'objectivity.' And who didn't try to impose his ideas on me.

My silences deepened. To 'demystify' our sessions and make progress, Dr. Last filled in the gaps with more data about himself. He was married to an Edinburgh property developer's daughter, had a five-year-old daughter named Rabbie (after Scottish poet Robert Burns), owned a 1955 Bentley, shared a house in north London with another psychiatrist and smoked an endless supply of rare imported Havanas—a grateful patient's gift, he said. With little else to talk about we soon discovered a common passion for Bessie Smith records and old war movies. Several times we played hookey from sessions by sneaking off to John Wayne revivals *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Flying Tigers* at the Tolmer cinema around the corner from his office. ("It's as good a catharsis as ye're gointa get on th' couch, Sid.") We cried at a British Film Institute showing of John Huston's combat documentary, *Let There Be Light*, and afterward agreed that madness was merely a type of civilian shell shock. Dr. Last, who'd never been in military service, doted on my army stories. He could sit for a whole fifty minutes absorbed in my tales of mock assaults and simulated river crossings. Though I'd never fired a shot in anger he envied my "sojer's reflexes."

Come again?

For radicals, he explained, the army could be as much of a university as prison. Military discipline broke down those twin curses of Western civilisation: sanctity of the individual ego and petty bourgeois concepts of privacy. As examples, he cited the Algerian and Vietnamese n.c.o.'s who learned their anti-imperialist trade in the French army and then had gone home to lead the liberation struggle.

This appealed to my unslaked guilt about having been just too young for combat in World War II. "Don't worry," Dr. Last said, "there's *another* war for ye to go to." Behind the puny shadowboxing of parliaments and parties shaped up a rather different sort of conflict, truly global in dimension if not yet visible to the ignorant eye. Sooner rather than later a new "revolutionary cadre"—bereft of guns, power or even self-consciousness would take on the responsibility for changing society wholesale. Like an old warhorse hearing political alarm bells, I pricked up my ears. Who ... what was he talking about?

His eyes took on that faraway, fluttering cast. "I hope ye never find out," he murmured mysteriously.

I never could resist a dare. What secret treasure was he challenging me to dig up? Whatever it was, it must be more important than my petty personal problems that made him look so bored. So I stopped even trying to talk about myself. (Anyway, remembering was hard work, and he lacked enthusiasm for digging into painful areas.) By unspoken agreement we detoured around the formalities. And just sat there, staring at each other.

I apologised for the long silences. "Tain't yir fault, Sid," Dr. Last said. "It's th' way th' medical cookie crumbles." The doctor-patient relationship, essentially pecuniary and exploitative, was a parody of the larger system of false human relationships under capitalism,

he said. It forced us to treat each other as Things. In bourgeois psychoanalysis the I-thou encounter—he'd started me on Martin Buber—degenerated into a deadly game of mutual seduction in which his professional advantage over me enslaved him as well. He was bored out of his mind by the 99 per cent of his patients "who root aroun' like pigs in their own emotional shit tae buy my attention." He leaned forward intently. "I'm invitin' ye tae set us both free."

How? I asked.

Dr. Last slyly grinned. Then leaped from his chair, grunting and gesticulating. I ducked. His hands chopped the air in front of my face like Bruce Lee. Then, arms swinging loose and low like an ape, he made as if to grab me. I got up and backed away.

"Have you gone nuts?" I asked.

"Now ye're catchin' on!" he chortled.

Dr. Last called it "dancing," or Zen applied to psychotherapy. (And handed me Alan Watts to read.) Making faces and no-touch karate replaced talking between us. "Anything to shake th' shackled mind loose fr' its moorings an' let th' soul rediscover It-Self," said Last.

It was like being a kid again, relearning how to play by improvising around Last's wild leaps and snarls. "Tha's th' ticket, laddie," Last encouraged, "*ye're gittin' there!*" By shifting seats we reversed roles. I; smoking a cigar, mimicked his accent, "So ye're havin' trouble passin' water in th' mornin', Mr. Last. Ah, um, er, oh. Nae doot an eggstainshul disorder—an' so on an' so forth. Try pissin'. Haw haw hee hee!" Last pretended to be me, including the nail-biting. "Gee, Sid—what's the meaning of it all? Is there any point to life? I think, I mean, I guess. Gee whiz." Then Last kicked off his boots and jacket and told me to lunge at him. When I did he thumped me. He hit me again when I retreated. By rules he alone invented (and changed in midgame), I got smacked no matter what I did. Only by contorting myself till Last was satisfied could I escape his blows. He had to help extricate me from a ludicrous, humiliating pretzel bend—one leg over my shoulder, my tongue hanging out, arms immobilised, fetal. "An' *that*," Last said gleefully, "is th' double bind."

An added bonus was that 'nonverbal communication'—grunts, belches, squeaks, whistles, coughs and spits—cleared up my old catarrh condition.

When, unaccountably, my anxiety got worse, Dr. Last passed me over to his personal guru, a fat old existential analyst named Dr. Phineas Maud, in Southwark. "Finny's an' ol' charlatan, but he's got a knack with excessively sane types like yew." Dr. Maud, a large, grandmotherly man in his late sixties, charged me three times as much as Last, and told me I was a monkey chasing its tail. "You think therefore you're ill, sir. Constipated on ego. Take the laxative of self-LESS-ness and *lose your mind*." There was no T only an unfound 'me,' he briskly explained, bucking me back across the river to Last, who welcomed me with a warm brotherly hug. I'd passed some sort of test by going in against Dr. Maud, and Last meant to reward me.

"Right, then. Are ye disposed to take a wee dram—an' I don' mean Johnny Walker Red Label?"

On a late Saturday afternoon, when the Gower Street house was empty of its bookie and barber, Last locked his office door and dug under the sagging couch for his black medical bag. It contained wood racks of Sandoz glass vials and unlabelled bottles of distilled water. He used a razor blade to saw off the cap of one of the vials, pour its colourless fluid into a tumbler of the water and mix it carefully. Then he switched off the overhead bulb. I drank and waited. At this exact moment, I knew, many of my friends were hiking from Aldermaston to London on the fifth Easter Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—the only one I’d ever missed. Where was Coral—marching and finding a new boyfriend on the demo? Her son was in Wormwood Scrubs for chaining himself to railings outside Number 10 Downing Street. Fleeting I wished I was chanting and singing with them, then pushed all that aside.

Last, silent and sober, sat with me in the dark office till after midnight. For eight hours I fought wild beasts, flew around the world, drowned in my father’s jism and commanded an Assyrian legion. Aldermaston, Coral, snatches of ban-the-bomb ballads kept breaking in, but I shrugged them off. Toward the end when I was strangling on my infantile pule, Last wiped me off and soothed me. Then he drove me back to my apartment, gave me a supply of sleeping pills and a tranquilliser called Largactil, wrote down his home phone number and told me to ring him anytime, even Sundays.

I couldn’t wait to do it again. Mutual trust, like LSD doses, grew. In fortnightly bursts I went from 75 milligrams to 150, and when I levelled out at 200mg Dr. Last asked mildly, “Care fer a lil company?” And for the first time he mixed acid cocktails for both of us. Raising his tumbler he saluted me:

“So stand by, yir glasses steady
Th’ wurld is a wurld o’ lies
Here’s to th’ dead awready
Hurrah fer th’ next mon who dies!”

Robert Burns? I asked.

“Nae,” he replied. “Errol Flynn in *The Dawn Patrol*.”

Though I soon learned to quote Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Sartre—Last’s favourite thinkers—back at him, our deeper values and imagery came from a common lore of old Hollywood films. On acid I often ‘saw’ him as Clark Gable (*Command Decision*), or Tyrone Power (*A Yank in the RAF*), or Robert Taylor (*Bataan*), or Spencer Tracy (*Test Pilot*)—all the leading men of my movie-haunted youth crashing through the silver screen to supply a drama my life sadly lacked. I was too bashful to mention such fantasies until, one Saturday afternoon while we were Indian wrestling on 200 mg each, he casually grunted, “Y’know, this reminds me of Burt Lancaster an’ Rock Hudson in *Gunfight at OK Corral*.” “Not Rock Hudson, it was Kirk Douglas,” I corrected him.

But Last had turned a forgotten key in my chest. I almost fainted with emotion.
Comradeship.

Like secret lovers we met after hours in his office, my flat, Hampstead Heath, hotel rooms. By now we both carried “emergency rations”: small chamois bags of come-down pills and bottles of pure water. But only Last kept the LSD. It was perfectly legal for him to give it to me but he wanted to control my supply as a way of protecting himself. To this end, we also devised a secret code.

“bacon ’n eggs” was LSD

“tomatoes” was distilled water

“cats’ litter” was Largactil

On the phone we sounded like Russian spies. A deliciously furtive feeling of an enemy spy out there drew us together, and like children we slipped into a make-believe world of military fantasy. In battle after battle—Thermopylae to Alamein, Agincourt to Stalingrad—we perfected a ‘buddy system,’ fighting and dying together as tank drivers, crossbow archers and paratroopers. We travelled together into the future and the past, sometimes chastely dancing about Last’s office, feeling unearthly musical zephyrs through our barely touching fingertips—to an unsympathetic eye a grotesque satire of a bad Dante Gabriel Rossetti painting. Or, as sparring partners in ancient Greece, boozily, warily circled each other, stark naked. Then, body to body, we tackled, pushed, clutched until The Other surrendered. Once, when our sweat-glistening bodies lay atop one another, we discovered our penises were erect. This didn’t bother Last at all.

“Buddha’s bisexual,” he breathed, grabbing my cock with a comradely lunge.

Spurred on by LSD and Last, I flexed my phobic travel muscles by flying to Sweden. (It was the day Marilyn Monroe died.) My “battle assignment”—I was getting used to Last’s metaphors—was to enjoy a short holiday and return safely. By Copenhagen I was drenched in sweat, trembling. Forcing myself to reboard the plane, I got to Stockholm blind with terror, my tongue parched, my chest filling and cracking with the ice water of fear. A note

(“PLEASE RETURN TO DR. W. LAST,
GOWER ST., LONDON WC1”)

taped to my stomach, I shivered in a Stockholm hotel for a couple of hours, then checked out, defeated. On the SAS flight back I sat with a towheaded Swedish businessman; he looked exactly like me. Was me. At Heathrow I barely managed to ring Last and beg him to come get me.

Back in his office he consoled me by saying that I mustn’t take too hard my tactical retreat from Sweden. “It’s just yir first taste of th’ heroic journey, yir re-entry into th’ proto-original situation.”

My what?

Last said that for months it had been apparent to him that my neurosis was caused by my having “forgotten” that I was a hero in the ancient mould. Heroes were twice born. First by their natural mothers, then through a symbolical sequence usually involving a trip—a sea voyage, descent into Hades, even return to the original country of exile. Many embarked, few came back. After being swallowed by the metaphoric mother (the sea, a whale, the mother country), the hero usually had to fight his way out of her belly to a state of rebirth. Oedipal conflict with my human mother had been a groping, imperfect expression of this yearning for the dangerous journey to a new, second life. Psychoanalysis and LSD—even my abortive Swedish holiday—were vivid evidence that I was now ready to begin my real, truly Heroic Voyage.

I was fascinated. What he said dignified all those bloodcurdling quarrels with my mother and gave ritual value to experiences like Coral. (And hadn’t Coral herself often told me that society’s malaise was caused not by capitalism but because “we’re all so starved of ritual”?) More, please.

Last duly loaded me up with more books from his personal library. Evens-Wentz’s *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*, mystical volumes by Alan Watts, Arthur Waley and Gerald Heard (“th’ best type of Ainglishmon”). He even let me glance at the as-yet-unpublished manuscript of his second book, *The Sanity of Insanity*, written while on acid holiday at Millbrook, Timothy Leary’s farm in New York. And on Last’s say-so I plunged into the work of Mircea Eliade, an expert on primitive religions.

A whole new world opened up. Shamanism, initiation rites, possession cults, rebirth symbolism: all the things I’d slept through that semester of Comparative Religion 113B at UCLA. What a fool I’d been!

“Gawd’s holy fool,” Last gently amended. My thirty-odd years of ignorance and spiritual flabbiness, he said, had been the Tao’s way of preparing me for the final, self-healing Voyage.

Where to? I asked.

“Schizophrenia,” he replied.

Like a ticking time bomb the word had lain under the skin of our talks from the start. Now it exploded.

Vaguely I knew Last had come to public notice through his work on schizophrenics. His book *The Unhealed Heart*, a study of the family strategies adopted by mad youngsters, was beautifully written and seemingly well researched. In our LSD sessions he’d often hinted that acid was merely a crude chemical substitute for “th’ real thing”—the sacred ecstasy engulfing his more psychotic patients. Now he got down to cases.

Half the hospital beds in Britain, Last said, were occupied by mental patients, 50 percent of whom were so-called “schizophrenics.” But these people were neither insane nor ill. Their madness was a relatively sane response to a society that denied the holiness (“whole-y-ness”) of human experience; in fact, schizophrenics tended to be less mad than most normal people who by definition were divorced from their psychic roots. “After all, ’twasn’t th’ mad who butchered fifty million of their fellow men in wars this century.”

Medically speaking, the problem was that British therapists had forgotten (“if they ever knew”) that schizophrenia was a condition of broken-heartedness, not split-mindedness. “It’s not a disease but a state of awareness,” Last argued. Schizophrenia never existed in a person, only between people. The condition described relationships, not a sickness. Yet most doctors insisted on treating schizophrenia as a medical entity, with remedies that were really supervised torture. “In effeck, they smash ye over th’ head wi’ ECT or drugs or ‘supportive therapy’ to blot out what’s possibly th’ best thing tha’s ever happened to ye—th’ visions an’ inner voices which may be yir only hope of recovery.” In this sense, modern medicine was less progressive than in the Middle Ages, which by regarding the mad as possessed by demons, at least had respected their possibilities for sacredness, Last said.

I was startled by the venom of Last’s dislike for his colleagues—“a careerist cabal of public-school sadists, time-servin’ quacks an’ knife-crazy leucotomists.” Mental hospitals were “Auschwitzes of th’ soul”; most psychiatrists were “mind butchers” who induced the ‘disease’ of schizophrenia which existed only in their own disordered brains. At best, therapists were “medical mechanics retreadin’ overexposed minds till they pairminently blew out”; at their too-frequent worst doctors were “field police huntin’ down society’s natural deserters—th’ shock troops of th’ comin’ psychic revolution.”

I sat and listened to Dr. Last describe young schizophrenics as existential guerrillas—“th’ lead scouts of a Children’s Crusade fightin’ to retake th’ Holeh Land of our Primal Unspoilt Selves.” Their ‘illness’ had taught them how to crash through the arbitrary barriers between mind and body, space and time, “inner an’ outer”—how to live naturally in a landscape usually occupied only by saints and geniuses. “Th’ mad are Columbus, Lenin an’ Colonel Glenn all tangled up in one unhappy knot, heroes wi’out th’ ticker tape parade, travellers wi’out a passport who minesweep a booby-trapped road all of us must travel one day.” Normal people, that is the truly mad, victimised those who “re-minded” them. Families *colluded* among themselves to *mystify* their most sensitive kids, a form of *disconfirmation* and *social violence*, which placed the victims in an *untenable position*. Official medicine further *invalidated* these psychic Absolute Beginners by turning them into unpersons; i.e. patients. For daring to question, in however distorted and fragmentary a way, the constipated rigidities of capitalism, “th’ best young minds of our generation” got locked up in hospitals or were laid out cold on couches like so many guppies. That was how the bourgeois state neutralised its potentially fiercest rebels. But the armies of mind-expansion were too powerful to be stopped. Already, in forms too numerous and sly to effectively police, the Word was out. Pop music, hallucinogenic drugs, mini-skirts and New Wave satire—these signs of a general youth dissatisfaction with the status quo—were in reality harbingers of a psychic earthquake that would shake humankind to its foundations.

Even without undue family or psychiatric interference, Last concluded, the voyage of the madman—he used “mad” interchangeably with schizophrenic—was perilous. Most innerspace travellers lost their way. They needed Guides, “someone who’s bin up th’ Magic Mountain an’ down again, who knows th’ safest routes.” Older societies had honored this guide-priest voluntary madman; ours scorned him. The task was to ‘resacralise’—“re-member”—this

Forgotten Healer.

Was Dr. Last such a one? I asked.

His eyes flittered in despair. "I'm nae so sure any more. I may be too far gone by now." Several years of medical practice had dimmed his lights. "It requires a person of fresh outlook an'"—he looked steadily, meaningfully at me—"a real talent fer it."

My flesh crawled. It was like going to a chiroprapist for bunions and being told your gangrenous leg had to come off.

Dr. Last hastened to assure me I was mad "only in th' eggistainshul sense." Unlike most schizophrenics—his lumping me with them I now felt less of an insult—I had options. I could (a) keep running away from my forgotten, transcendental Self; or (b) "go double or quits," risk all on spiritual rebirth. It was entirely up to me; he didn't want to influence me one way or the other. Yet he strongly implied that (b) was more "authentic" and the only permanent solution to my problems. "Ye've seen so many shrinks ye may've taken Western orthodoxy as far as it'll go. Why not give th' East a chance?"

The 'East' was Lastian shorthand for the "inner world" where Zen Buddhism, mental illness and psychogenic drugs merged. The end product was a mind stripped of its barnacles, its sick-making tendency to think itself into tight corners. This No-Mind, a blissful emptiness of the soul, induced *atman* where ego totally vanished. One was calm, at peace (and presumably cured of the stomach aches that sent me to him in the first place).

To illustrate, Dr. Last sat perfectly silent and motionless for the next hour or so. When I tried doing likewise I fell into dozing daydreams ... about where Last had his attractive sideburns trimmed, how many mpg his Bentley did, what his wife looked like. At session's end Last looked immensely pleased with me. "No doubt about it, Sid. Ye've a real vocation fer No-Thing."

Awkwardly, I began talking to Last in a strange new language. Life was "ontological insecurity." People "perceived" or "were perceived," never saw or were seen. I bandied words like "modality," "experiential," "pathogenic nexus," "false self-dissociation" and "collusion." *Maya*, *prana*, *chakra* and *atman* came as easily to me as reading the baseball scores in the *International Herald-Tribune*. Soon it became second nature to think of Last and myself as Very Special, a separate breed. "Amnesiac, strangers to oorselves an' to others, fallen sons of Prophecy experiencin' th' insignificance of our significance rather 'n th' significance of our insignificance, sane to th' point of extreme alienation." We were "eggistainshul heroes despite ourselves" psychic parachutists dropping behind enemy lines to rescue that scattered band of Israelites (schizophrenics) upon whom the Light had broken through. Together, "brothers of th' Light," we'd achieve "th' Kingdom, th' Pahr an' th' Glory"—"rediscover freedom in its Absence, die in th' flesh an' be reborn in th' Spirit."

Feeling like an 82nd Airborne trooper I relaxed into the warm slipstream of Last's rhetoric. "Nae a famine o' bread or a thirst fer water. But o' hearin' th' words o' th' Lord ... absolute an' unconditional risk ... th' body o' Christ Crucified ... revolution ... resurrection

... Black Nativity ... th' Man o' Sorrows ... mission ... tasks ... sorties ... frontal assaults ...”

The words mattered less than the speaker's willingness to put his body on the line with mine.

Gratitude (and LSD) flowed through me. For Last and his Children's Crusade I felt ready to fight tigers bare-handed. He cautioned me not to underestimate the risks. My present angst was a tea party compared to the suffering of a real schizophrenic. “'Twon't be as easy as spendin' a coupla weekends with th' coal miners,” he said. Couple of weekends indeed!

To limber me up for the Great Voyage, Last laid out a strict program of diet and meditation. I must destroy my ego and “die” in an egoless wilderness. Detach myself from emotions and things, eat no meat, my psychic bones crushed to a pulp, my soul burned of its impurities. Only then would I feel “th' Alpha an' Omega, th' Non-grace of No-Gaw'd.” This might or might not make me into a better writer, Last said. There might be troubles ahead. Accidental misfortune or bad luck might becalm me in a Sargasso Sea of incoherence, as they did so many psychotics. But it was the gamble if I wanted to break the enigmatic ‘code’ of wisdom buried in the minds of the mindless. Examples of mad double dutch Last quoted to me sounded so much livelier than the earthbound prose I was sick of writing that I couldn't wait to try to do it for myself.

*Craziness, Last said, was purely a subjective judgment, Mainly a function of ‘congruity’ between doctor and patient. But what if I asked, a doctor who thought his patient sane was himself mad? Last replied, “Well, let's jes' say their collusion is no worse'n a lot others. I've seen in this work.”*All that late summer I ‘killed time’—which in Eliade was no pun but indispensable to ecstatic flight. As an exercise in non-being, I skipped meals, refused to answer the phone and doorbell, choked off human contacts, and isolated myself in my apartment. My step grew lighter, my waist trimmer on a 95 per cent vegetarian diet. I felt lean, mentally alert—and bored. The time I was meant to kill merely dragged. Fewer friends came by (mainly American women passing through London, the English hardly ever drop in), and free-lance jobs I'd once aggressively hustled tailed off. With nothing to do but drop acid and wait for my-Self to dwindle to No-Thing, I got itchy and restless.

For the first time in my life I was free of political activity. Name it, I did it. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Direct Action, anything with ‘new’ or ‘free’ in it (Left, Directions, Vistas and Cinema), Anti-Ugly, Friends of Malcolm X, Trots, reds, anarchists and just plain marching for the hell of it on a nice day. England had given my soul a second birth. But—and it seemed to happen overnight—our mass movement had fallen apart.

*Men and women stand together
Do not heed the men of war*

we'd sung, and believed that if we ‘Let Britain Lead’ the poet Blake's vision of a green and

pleasant non-nuclear land would become a reality. Revolutions were breaking out everywhere—the Congo, Cuba, even in the USA with freedom riders—except in England, where the heady days of anti-Suez riots and 250,000-strong CND marches were nothing but a memory. London was no place for a bored, unmarried man full of aimless political juices.

Was there, the thought sunk in, a hope of politicising psychoanalysis?

It hadn't been possible with previous doctors, including the Doctor Strangelove Coral first sent me to (an ex-lover of hers). "Ah zo, very interezting!" he exclaimed, shining a dazzling spotlight in my eyes from his dark corner of the hospital office. He pressed a desk button. "For manic depreezzives mit paranoid tendencies like yourself, perhaps von teeny touch ECT, electric therapy. I zend for my nurze check you in, yes?" The velocity with which I shot out of his office propelled me to a posh South Kensington lady shrink who didn't know Karl from Groucho, had two black maids and an investment banker husband, and an amused curiosity about why I puked at meetings and fainted at demos. "So much for the political pleasure principle," she observed. Every time I tried to connect my anxious 'cotton wool' feelings with the capitalist system, she shook her head disapprovingly: "My eye." Later shrinks sacked me to avoid endless political bickering.

Dr. Last eased my anxiety by 'placing' me politically. "Ye're a soul-sojer strayed fr' his duty on th' Long Roman Wall." Oh yes.

Exactly where Last stood politically puzzled me. Was he a Communist or 'ex'-CP, Fourth International or what? He affably ducked a straight reply. "Don't worry, Sid. I'm one of yew."

Swell. Still, his habit of weaving poetic generalisations rather than state bald facts of his early life made me curious. Were any of the schizophrenic families he wrote about his own? I couldn't be quite sure if the father who tied a lead weight to his adolescent son's penis to prevent erections or the mother whose idea of toilet training was to hold her baby out of a fourth-story tenement window weren't in fact Last's. By looking stricken and changing the subject whenever I asked a direct question, he somehow implied an unimaginably traumatic childhood. My only clue to his real past was his addiction to tough guy lingo. To argue was "puttin' in th' boot." Disagreement was "I knocked him four ways intae Wednesday." His metaphors invariably involved punching, slugging, bashing, kicking and stomping. What a helluva bruiser he must have been! Or had he devoured the same old-timey crime movies I had? Was he, like me, slightly reinventing his childhood?

If so, we were even closer than I thought.

Sheer habit kept me in touch with a few old friends, but they were fairly cool to my latest interests. Coral, who was developing a 'rational' mysticism in sessions with her Jungian shrink, smiled indulgently. "Ah, darling, you're sweet. That stale old occult stuff went out in the 1920s with cloche hats." My downstairs neighbour grumped that he'd once lost a packet at the race track on a fortune teller's hunch and didn't believe all that hoodoo. And my drinking gang in the Prince Edward—Larry the Australian scuba diver, Flo the bus clippie and Arnie the taxi driver—said I was getting soft in the head and have another drink.

Dr. Last was not surprised by their indifference. "What'd ye expect, mon? Ye're askin' people without wings to fly."

I rejoined my co-pilot and strapped myself in the cockpit for take-off.

Under LSD and the power of brotherhood, Last and I coupled our Quests. His (he said) was to retrace his blood to its primal fountainhead, its ultimate cosmic source; mine was to fly as high as possible on my broken wing (my literary 'wound'). These were our Flight Missions. Not for the first time Last said he envied me my freedom. More than anything he yearned "to junk th' whole social charade an' go fer broke—to fly straight into th' burning heart of th' Secret Gaw'd." But, he complained, he was pinned down by family and professional chains. He turned his sombre, direct gaze on me. "I wisht I had yir freedom of action."

I felt so sorry for Last, slumped in his chair with what seemed like terminal fatigue, that I wanted to give him the only gift in my possession: my life. As befitted a cosmic spaceman, I sloughed off earthly drags such as jobs, friends, parties, newspapers, radio, TV. Anything that slowed me down got thrown overboard. All I wanted to do was ride the mushroom lightning range with Last, including side trips on mescaline and psilocybin.

Soon no flat or office seemed safe or large enough. Elbow room was needed. I was ready to take on the Great Mother Beast herself: the US of A. I hadn't been home in seven years. So soon after the Cuba missile crisis killed anti-nuclear politics in Britain (and which I spent rolling on his office floor with Last, both of us naked), I took off for the wild blue yonder as a stage in my Heroic Task. At Victoria Station Last and I embraced as brothers. "Re-member," he said. "Th' life ye're tryin' to grab is th' yew tha's tryin' to grab it."

I spent precisely nine months in America, a full 270-day gestation period coast to coast. Everywhere I had travelled inside the monster's belly—teaching angry Detroit dropouts, riding Georgia back roads with field workers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, manhandling a compressed-air sandblaster alongside Puerto Ricans and blacks in a New Jersey plastics factory—had confirmed the truth of Last's favourite axiom: "Th' Dreadful has already happened." On the 271st day I flew back to England, soul-burned but having survived my Descent into Hades. I hurried back to London to organise a new life for myself.

In my absence unemployment in Britain had risen, a political cadaver named Alec Douglas-Home, a relic of Munich appeasement whose sole distinction was that he had not slept with the high-stakes hooker Christine Keeler, had become Prime Minister; the actress Valerie Hobson was playing her greatest role as the forgiving wife of the disgraced, can't-keep-it-in-his-pants defence supremo Profumo, Labour's Hugh Gaitskell had died, the Beatles swam out of the Mersey toward Abbey Road, and my taxi driver assured me that a Rt. Hon. Peer had masterminded the £2 million Great Train Robbery. Coral was dating the Bronx method actor hired to impersonate me in her new play, *Scorpions in a Bottle*.

None of that mattered now. I'd never be able to climb Last's mountain in time to lead survivors down unless I obliterated the lingering traces of ego gratification. Firing the charwoman, I scrubbed, washed and vacuumed the apartment over and over again, and to

reduce human contact I told the greengrocer what to deliver and leave outside my door twice a week. After renewing the lease, I got my solicitor to draw up a will and had a private doctor give me a full physical check-up (National Health doctors hate doing this), went around to Coral for a goodbye fuck and installed a new lock and steel grille on my front door. Now.

Last met me in his office with an embrace.

He looked even more haggard, worried and abstracted than ever. Even when we playfully reversed chairs—me leaning forward (like him) with a leering, half-cocked nudge and matey wink, him rolling around in feigned, tongue-tied agony (me)—or shot Zen riddles at each other, his handsome face fell into a dim-eyed frown. I coaxed it out of him.

“Oor li’l group is havin’ a bad time. We need money, support, allies. I cannae carry on without help. It will fail.”

What group? I asked.

Last explained that in my absence he and a few trusted friends had got together for the purpose of buying a house for themselves “an’ others in trouble.” Two of the group were psychiatrists who, like him, had a large backlog of patients they didn’t know what to do with—talented, fractured souls who had exhausted their alternatives and now faced either suicide or “mind butchery” (mental hospitals). Last dreamed of a Place, a “community of brothers”, preferably in the country, where patients and doctors could go mad—and ultimately sane—in maximum love and safety, where the insane distinction between staff and patients would no longer exist. And where, away from the berserk pressures of a society gone madly sane, “We can breathe back to life th’ still-smolderin’ sparks of our fergawtten selves—re-create th’ Lost Time when we were better ...” Last’s soft grey eyes melted away to a distant Atlantis, as though, momentarily, he’d lost sight of me.

My questions brought him back to earth. There were problems, he admitted. A potential money backer had just died and various other promises of help had fallen through. These disappointments “an’ certain crawss-personal tensions” threatened to sink the project. My offer to increase his fee elicited a wan grin. “Ah mon,” he murmured, was if ’twere as easy as tha’. ‘Tisn’t jus’ th’ cash. We need *innair* strength.”

My first Saturday back we locked his office door and mixed each other’s acid cocktail with the distilled water he kept stashed under the sagging cracked-leather couch. Having teetotaled in America to assist natural rebirth, I had a double dose, 400mg. That evening we dined out, high. It tickled Last to stroll into Quaglino’s on Piccadilly, order and consume an expensive meal with wine, smoke a cigar and chat up the maître d’—on one thousand mg pure acid. What a constitution! At less than half that dose I commanded a Manchu palace guard under Whitechapel’s sewer system: blotto.

Toward Sunday night, after an hour of hard arm wrestling in his office, we began easing down. Suddenly I cried out, “The light! The light!” Sprawled with my eyes shut, I thought I’d gone blind.

I felt a head in my lap. Last, sobbing. I stroked his thick brown hair, slowly, contentedly. “Sid,” he whispered, “it’s beginnin’ fer ye. Th’ road ahead is rough an’ bloody bu’ now

there's nae turnin' back. Ye've seen th' Great Illumination." Smiling, I kissed him and fell asleep.

It was a whole new ball game after that. I stopped being Last's patient and became, in his words, a "colleague". Like a flower his life opened to me.

One by one I came face to face with the group, starting with the other two doctors.

The first time Last invited me home to dinner I met his closest collaborator, Boris Petkin. A hulking, lantern-jawed, former radical organiser in the East End, Dr. Petkin had a soft, faintly menacing snarl, more Kray brothers than Freud. In his assertively 'prole' clothes drip-dry shirt, baggy Marks & Spencer cord trousers and rubbercleated Tuff shoes, he signalled a defiant class identity. Petkin had interned with Last in Dorset. "It was terrible, terrible," he'd grimly boast in his grinding Stepney accent. "Willie and me pulled the shock box on hundreds of the poor sods. Christ knows how many we actually killed." The Petkins—wife Vivienne, an ex-mental nurse, and three kids—shared Last's house in Islington.

The group's other doctor was Richard Drummond, a Canadian psychiatrist who ran Conolly House, an experimental unit for adolescent schizophrenics at a hospital outside London. He had little of Boris Petkin's plain-spokenness. When I asked Dr. Drummond to explain about Conolly House he stared blankly at me and said: "Within a micro-social nexus the holistic hungers of the community members dialectically reinforce my narcissistic violence, but produce a negation of a negation in which we abduct one another from our arbitrary roles. Thus, a wholly new politics emerges: an anti-imperialism of the mind." Babily plump 'Dr. Dick', as his patients called him, was a sharp dresser and drove a custom-built yellow Morgan. He lived with his black American wife Nancy and their four children at the hospital.

An invisible line divided the doctors from the group's non-medicals who Dr. Last called his "non-commissioned officers." Despite his lack of medical status Alfred Waddilove, a stocky, ruddy-cheeked bachelor, was even closer to Last than Dr. Petkin. Alf looked after Last's business affairs and made himself useful in a thousand little ways. ("My adjutant," Last joked.) All I knew about Alf was that he'd once been a patient of Last's down in Dorset and had followed him to London where he now operated a small travel agency in Shaftesbury Avenue. Intensely, doggedly loyal, he gazed admiringly at his ex-analyst during meetings. "Willie's like a national monument," he said wistfully. "He needs protecting—especially from himself."

I did a double take with Major Anthony Straw, M.C. What was an ex-battalion commander (Royal Corps of Military Police) doing in Last's group? "Bugger me if I know, coz," said the tall, walleyed, bristle-moustached officer-turned-City businessman. "Willie says I've joined up again for the duration—of what I'm still not quite sure." After resigning his commission in 1956 as a protest against the forced British withdrawal from Suez, Major Straw had drifted from one semi-managerial job to another trying to find a use for himself. "Frankly Sid, civvy street almost clobbered me before I met Willie." Last, enamoured of all things military, had fastened on to Major Straw when they accidentally met in a pub. "Almost a

pickup, really. As soon as I told him my background he practically saluted and called me 'sir.' Separated from his wife, Major Straw had found virtually another home with Last's family in Islington. "Good show!" he'd bellow in his parade ground voice if anybody in the group made an especially telling spiritual point.

It was easy to think of the group's only woman, Davina Mannix-Lloyd, as just another of Last's boys. She defeminised herself by wearing tweeds, shapeless sweaters, flatheeled brogans and a timid, self-deprecating grin. In a way I found this sexy. Hadn't Joan Fontaine looked this dowdy before Laurence Olivier or Cary Grant brought her back to life with a kiss? Davina, a BBC Religious Programmes producer in her mid-thirties, had met Last while taping him for 'Thought for Today'. "It was something he said in the interview that shook me up so. 'The existence one is attempting to make viable is the person who is endeavouring to appropriate it.' Or words to that effect." Encouraged by Last, she'd quit her job to plunge into nudism, Flamenco guitar lessons and learning to arc-weld cast iron sculpture. "More and more I see what Willie is on about, this madness thing. It just means conquering your inhibitions, doesn't it?"

I was, in Last's phrase, the "sacred seventh."

I couldn't help noticing how, for a group dedicated to schizophrenia, we were all firmly anchored in middle-class sanity. Dr. Last called this "purrchase in th' wurld," essential if we were serious about helping others. "At this sensitive stage in our development as a brotherhood—not to speak of our failures as sheer human bein's" (with a bitter laugh)—"we cannae risk takin' in th' truly mad. 'Twould be unfair to them an' to ourselves." No chronics or uncontrollables, he decreed, nor anybody "not viable." In other words, none of Them; i.e. patients currently labeled actively schizophrenic. (Ex-patients were okay.)

I was disappointed. I wanted to share Last's life concern and felt "inauthentic" yakking about mental cases I hadn't even seen yet. I badgered Last to tell or teach me more about schizophrenia but he just recommended I read more books. And Boris Petkin glowered when I approached him. "Do you realistically expect me to give you in five minutes what it's taken me twenty years to learn? You must be joking!"

Frustrated, I turned to 'Dr. Dick' Drummond. Though his work load was at least as heavy as Last or Petkin's—he looked after two hospital wards in addition to Conolly House, plus an out-patient clinic and had a private practice as well—Drummond let me hang out with him and ask questions. His style—he was as fond of dialectical contradictions as of rich food—I found infuriating at first. He never used a simple word if a dozen double-barrelled ones would do, and it was easy to get lost in his fog of Marxist-cum-Sartrean circumlocutions. But under all that cloudy Germanic rhetoric was a deeply serious purpose, which he explained this way: "I want to help build a community where, for the first time in history, people can actually love and hate *each other* and not another (oneself) in the other, thus experiencing toward oneself one's own disowned hatred of the self-disowning other and pass the point of perfecting ourselves beyond the further imperfectibility of our perfect imperfection." Of course. But if you got him drunk he spoke bluntly. "Conolly House is the last chance for some of those kids.

Maybe I can help a few make it.”

Would he let me visit his institution? After a little hesitation he replied, “You understand, of course, that existentially speaking, you’d be scaling a mountain peak of phenomenological indeterminacy there.”

When Drummond refused to forbid me to come—his way of agreeing—I packed my bag and hopped a Green Line bus from Marble Arch, heading west, along Bayswater Road, past Notting Hill through Shepherds Bush (then still intact), past Lime Grove BBC-TV studios and Acton, onto the M4 and the semi-industrial suburbs of Ealing, Southall and Hayes. Past Heathrow airport, tiny streams and beacons in the scrub fields, past Slough’s soulless streets to golf courses, cows and stockbroker villas just beyond Eton College, spitting distance from Ascot and the ruritanian towers of Windsor Castle. Small meadows, citified villages, the outer spokes to London’s huge wheel. In a short stretch of country, between the Chilterns and North Downs, a rural caesura, Low Wick, gateway to King Edward VIII hospital.

Hefting the bottom part of my old infantry pack, I swung down from the busload of cloth-coated, stony-faced shoppers and nervously walked toward the yellow brick chimneys poking up above a thick stand of trees between Low Wick village and the main road. Past the war monument, with fresh flowers, around a small brackish pond frozen over, to an untended gate house. Drawing a big breath I stepped onto hospital grounds, into another zone.

Days and Nights in Conolly House:] winter [

LATE SATURDAY A.M.

A TALL, HIGH CHEEKBONED boy in bare feet and a dirty terry-cloth robe blocks my way into Conolly House, a two-story yellow brick building at the far end of a paved crescent of similar wards. As soon as I start walking up the cement steps of the wire-meshed front porch—all the other porches are enclosed by glass—the youth snaps to attention, an invisible object in his hand.

“Pree-sent ARMS!” he shouts in a make-believe American accent. Whistling *Sweet Georgia Brown* he goes through a dazzling display of Harlem Globetrottery, syncopatedly slapping and shouldering his ‘rifle,’ finally flips it up into the air and catches it like a rescued infant (both arms moving in and out like a fireman holding a net), strokes it once or twice, then arches way back legs apart to tootle *High Society* as if it was a clarinet. Finished (note perfect), he comes to attention again, smiles broadly and steps aside to let me in. As I pass him his smile wavers. “Carry on,” I say, mock military. “Fuck ya!” he retorts and raises the ‘clarinet’ threateningly.

Opening the unlocked front door I’m attacked, not by Clarinet-stick but by an aggressive smell of Dettol, body sweat, cigarette smoke and rancid milk. It’s like walking through a wall of odour. Clarinet-stick follows me down the freezing acrid corridor. “Carry yo’ bag, suh?” he inquires like a Deep South servant. I gingerly sidestep another bathrobed boy, hands wrapped lovingly about his body, rocking rhythmically in place, a small puddle at his combat-booted feet. From the kitchen on my left a wild-eyed blond-goateed character leaps out balancing a foot-high stack of white bread and sloshing cup of tea. He stops short, holds himself rigidly and spits:

“I am the Life
I am the Man
If you don’t like it
Kiss my can.”

“Ah, fuck off Greaves,” amiably says my tall bespectacled escort, “‘e jus’ arrived.” He points to a door and in a Fats Domino accent says, “Dat’s de Big Bwana’s wigwam o li’l white brother.” He jitterbugs away 1940s style. “See ya latuh, alligatuh.” I knock and walk into a small office cluttered with wooden file cabinets, a desk and more folding metal chairs than I think can possibly be fitted in. One wall is covered from floor to ceiling with a mural

depicting (to me) hairless schmoos paddling a coffin across a sea of blood. The title scrawled at the bottom is *Christ Redeems Us from the Shrinks*.

Three men stare balefully at me. One, a tubby 200-pounder with grease-slicked hair and scared, overbright eyes, wears a nurse's uniform—a white knee-length coat with green shoulder boards—that looks like an 1890 cowboy's duster. He hands me a paper form. "Name, address and religion." A moment's panic: they think I'm a patient.

"It's okay, Bert," grins a man in civilian clothes behind the desk. "Mr. Bell, is it? Welcome to our happy home. I'm Les O'Brien."

As soon as my bona fides are established the staff men relax a little. Dave Foster, in his early thirties with a broken nose and cauliflower ear, looks at my bag and says neutrally to the younger nurse, "Bert, show Mr. Bell the way to Doctors Quarters." Foster has on a compromise uniform, a short, white, red-epauletted coat over a business suit and tie.

But I'm staying in Conolly House, I say. Les O'Brien spells it out, "Mr. Bell is a w-r-i-t-e-r. He's come to do us for the Sunday papers, I expect."

Quick, careful glances among the nurses.

Oh, I say, I'm not here as a reporter. "I'm here as myself."

"Ballocks," snorts O'Brien. "You're Dick's protégé." Nurses Bert Karp and Foster sit up a little straighten I can almost hear them thinking: if Bell is the boss's friend, go easy on him.

Loftily I refuse to be labelled. Dick Drummond assured me that Conolly House was an 'anti hospital' opposed to rigid roles. So I'm neither patient nor doctor nor nurse. Not even a writer. I'm who I 'elect' to be. "I'm here because I'm here because I'm here."

"Ah ha," Les O'Brien chortles, "a new recruit to the cause. I know what Dick tells you innocents about this joint. But we're the slobs who have to pick up the pieces after you go. I suppose you'll write a book—*Down and Out in Conolly House* or *Now Let Us Praise Famous Nut Cases*. Or are you here, Mis-ter Bell, to help out? We sure could use some."

Bert Karp bows out in a gust of diplomatic coughing.

I'm in Conolly House, I repeat, as myself. To write, go mad, help or not help, what difference does it make? Without rancour O'Brien grins. "Good god, another effin' tourist."

Nurse Foster too finds he has urgent duties elsewhere. O'Brien and I are left alone.

For several months he's been just an anonymous voice at the other end of the telephone line to Conolly House. Whenever I call Dick I usually get Les, his chief nurse. At first I can't spot the accent: north country, musical, strong. The voice, slow and cautious, always seems to be laughing at itself. "Good evening, Mister Bell. Dr. Dick's not around tonight, will any of us plebs do?"

Slumped in a swivel chair at his scarred, tea-spattered desk, his legs stretched out before a one-bar electric fire, O'Brien looks almost frail. His fingers are blackened, his teeth half-rotted by nicotine; his large rock-like face looks tired. Only the small black eyes glitter fiercely. In his old shabby suit he seems undersized, fatigued. When he gets up I see he is, in fact, about my height, athletically built. It's as if he has two heights: fully erect and also set in an automatic, watchful crouch. He's either an ex-boxer or an old lag from Wormwood Scrubs

prison, I think.

Before we can grapple at closer quarters, Clarinet-stick soars in. “Where th’ fuckin’ fuck are my fuckin’ clothes, ya fuckin’ fuck?” he asks. Then bursts into helpless laughter and hugs O’Brien. Seeing me he straightens up and plays *It Ain’t Necessarily So* on his non-existent instrument. (His theme song, I later learn.) O’Brien says, “You’re high as a kite, Jerry. No civvies till you come down.” He unlocks the wall medicine cabinet and mixes something in a glass of water from the basin tap. “Here’s your calm juice, boy-o.” Noting my surprise O’Brien laughs shortly. “Sure we dope ’em if we have to. What’d you expect—the millennium?”

Jerry drinks his Largactil, or whatever it is, and lets out a mighty Tarzan yell. Satisfied, he shuffles out fingering *How High the Moon* (Stan Getz version). O’Brien says that Jerry Jackson has been in and out of mental hospitals since fifteen. “He’s twenty-four now. Escapes now and then, but always hides somewhere he can be spotted easy. Last month th’ rozzers found him sleeping inside a sentry box at Windsor Castle up the road. He’s got it down to a fine art, including playing mad to get his dope.”

O’Brien shakes his head. “Oh, he’s pretty crazy is old Jerry Jackson, no mistake. Right up th’ bloody spout.” He falls into his Charge Nurse’s chair and points a long, burned-looking finger at me.

“The true definition of madness, dear sir, is that you get caught. Found out. Arrested, admitted, diagnosed. The clever ones around here play possum, kiss a little arse and get out. Jerry isn’t so clever. He’s honest. Just a nice English working-class lad who’s made one mistake too many. And keeps making the same small mistake on and on and on.” O’Brien throws back his head and gives a terrifying laugh.

A Geography Lesson

On our way upstairs to a room reserved for me Les O’Brien gives me the one dollar tour. I wave to Jerry Jackson-the-clarinet slumped sleepily on his cot in a six-bed dormitory opposite the staff office at the ground floor back. “Observation Dorm,” says O’Brien, “For nervous nellies and first admissions.” Most of its windows have been kicked out.

We sidestep a dainty pile of shit under the swaying, self-embracing catatonic in the corridor. The smell of urine from him is dizzy-making. Is that vibrating hum coming from him? Boys in pyjamas or street clothes mooch around guzzling tea or glued to transistor radios or chatting with each other or to themselves. For the first time I become really aware of how noisy Conolly House is. It grows louder and more snarling as we move along, as if something ominous was on our scent. A baby-elephant-sized teenager has two small plastic radios clamped to both ears. To block out the noise? In the rather cheerful, brightly-curtained dining room next to Obs Dorm there’s a carnage of broken tea mugs, unwashed dishes, tipped over chairs and chunks of half-eaten food on filthy tables and floors. Greaves, the goateed rhymster I bumped into earlier, idly noodles the keys of a half-gutted old upright piano in the corner,

“Hegel, Marx, Hume and Russell
Put my mind in a Sixth Form bustle
Lawrence, Leavis, James and Joyce
Gives me very little choice.”

Conolly House’s nerve center is a large, messy room nearest the front entrance. There, half a dozen or so boys, at lazy alert, sip tea, smoke, watch Saturday Sportsdesk on an old 19-inch black and white TV. A boy exhorts the soccer players on screen, “Th’ kingdom of God is within you ... Aw fer fuck sake, you’re offside, y a stupid git!” Another boy talks to himself. “I ... I saw something when I flew. The plane in front of ours crashed. It’s very easy that. Yes. Crashing.” Comic books and soccer magazines lie scattered among defiantly unused ashtrays. It all reminds me of World War Two documentary films about life aboard a combat aircraft carrier. Except no pilots’ ready room ever had this weird an assortment of furniture: a velvet chaise longue, beach li-lo, doubled-over mattress, poof cushion, a hammock slung between massive armchairs, odd lots of metal seats and a plush red-leather executive’s chair with a headrest monogrammed in gold, DIANA DORS. Surprisingly, no graffiti except one neatly scratched above the door lintel:

SHANGHAI EXPRESS

Two large corner windows, looking out on the front lawn and driveway, are smashed and stuffed with rags against the January chill. A lovely fire in the grate. I feel sucked in by the welcome warmth, a card party smell of ash, old beer, poker tactics.

Across the freezing hall from the TV lounge there’s a kitchen equipped with a shiny tea urn and, farther back, a main toilet. Why’s it all so cold? O’Brien says, “Dr. Winstanley, the hospital superintendent, refuses to turn on the furnace till our boys stop busting windows. And the boys keep knocking the windows out as a protest against the cold.” His tone suggests that around here this is perfectly reasonable logic.

The second floor is like rush hour in a pop record factory. A turntable somewhere blasts Chubby Checkers’ *Let’s Twist Again*, behind that an artillery barrage mixing *Light Cavalry Overture* with Lonnie Donegan’s *Don’t You Rock Me Daddy-o*, plus assorted screeches, scowls, woofs and weeps. O’Brien gingerly knocks on a door nearest the upper staircase then steps aside like a homicide detective expecting a hail of bullets. The door opens a fraction and we’re almost bowled over by a thundering niagara of sound. A hot-eyed, tousle-haired kid wearing earmuffs (or enormous headphones) peeps out, slams the door in O’Brien’s face. For just a flash I saw inside, a roaring catacomb of wires and electronic gadgetry. O’Brien raises his voice above the din. “Percy is our resident deejay. Plays anything but requests.”

On this landing are another large toilet and dormitory and some private rooms. (“For them as desires solitude if not exactly peace and quiet.”) Also what O’Brien calls the “Anything Goes Room,” which is the cleanest I’ve seen, the only one with intact window

panes. An unmarked punching bag and an unused set of watercolors stand in the corner. “Sad case really,” says O’Brien. “Our first OT—occupational therapist—had this great idea. Set aside a place for the blokes to do whatever they felt like—kick, punch, break, smear, shout. Naturally nobody ever uses it.” He laughs. “She eventually went crackers, I hear.”

In the latrine there’s a dirt-encrusted bathtub with attached leather straps and piles of old canvas, a relic of forced hydrotherapy that Dick Drummond junked along with ECT and mandatory drugs. A neatly dressed black boy bends over in one of the doorless toilet cubicles hacking out loud, mechanical coughs. He hardly notices O’Brien slipping some cellophane-wrapped pastilles into his jacket pocket. “Glycerine,” says O’Brien, “so Abe don’t tear his larynx all to shreds.”

Upstairs most of the doors and walls have words like ‘Paris,’ ‘Berlin’ and ‘Moscow’ chalked on them. When I query O’Brien he just shrugs. “Stopovers on the way to China, I imagine,” and explains no further. He opens the door to my room, which has clean towels, running water and a pleasant view of the Berkshire countryside. Someone has neatly swept up and left fresh crocuses in a tea mug on the table. O’Brien says, “Robin Ripley’s doin’ her earth mother bit again.” With friendly, sceptical eyes he watches me unpack, then says he goes off duty for the weekend in a couple of hours. “So if we don’t see you again,” he sticks out his hand, “it was real nice meetin’ you.” I know that tone: you’re on your own, pal.

Watching O’Brien disappear amid a Catherine wheel of Percy-the-radio’s sound explosions, a small fear uncoils inside me. Jesus I’m cold.

Alone. On the bed, listening to a rising tide of angry static through my walls. Does Percy ever sleep? Will the smells from downstairs come up to strangle me? Is Jerry Jackson violent? As I put my things away I think: well, Magic Mountain it’s not.

A Recon

Cowering behind my chair-barricaded door and a copy of Buber’s *I and Thou*, I decide to die facing the noisy enemy rather than be pounded to bits in my rat-hole.

Peek out, cautiously. Corridor empty, freezing. Edge along a hall, past upstairs dorm. No one there except a few sleeping lumps under blanket mountains. In the adjacent latrine black Abe, popping O’Brien’s pastilles into his mouth, adds to the clamor with dry Morse code coughs. Hack-hack ... uckuckuck.

Tippytoe, holding my breath, past Percy’s musical howitzers firing like *Custer’s Last Stand* plus the Goons at full tilt. Easy, easy. Don’t scare them. I’m terrified.

On the stairs an Asian boy in black pyjamas buttoned to the neck soundlessly flits past me. Jesus, he could have garroted me before I heard him. Downstairs, I approach a knot of boys around the stainless steel water boiler in the kitchen. In thin robes or shirt-sleeves—don’t schizophrenics feel the cold?—they drink mugs of tea and watch me pour hot water into a plastic cup of Nescafe and spoon in honey I brought with me. “That’s right,” says a giant with a lobster-red face and large arms and legs that stick out of absurdly ill-fitting pyjamas. “Assert your indivi-duality right at the start. Saves trouble later.” I offer coffee and honey around, no

takers. "In the war," says a pencil-moustached boy in a three-piece business suit with his wallet prominently exposed from his jacket side pocket, "thy Yanks dropped food packages on our heads and we haven't recovered yet." He's got a Yorkshire lilt and nervously checks the time on his wristwatch.

A.C. Corrigan, a stocky, muscular freckle face with a mane of bright red hair and dressed in civvies, introduces himself and the others in a broad Liverpool accent. He says, "You're goin ta study uz nuts, right ol' whack?"

I'm here, I repeat, as myself.

"Bu' tha're not on a Section 25 or 29—a Detention Order?" demands the Yorkshireman, Roy Tinsley, who vigorously shakes his wristwatch to see if it's working. No, I say. "Well then," he winds his Timex with the superior air of someone who has established what's what and who's who. "Don't let it go to thy head then lad," he adds smugly.

For almost as long as I battled O'Brien I defend myself against the boys pressing me on why I've come, who I am. When they boast about their rap sheets from previous hospital stays, I shamefacedly admit that I always managed to dodge the bin before this. A languid-looking boy in a high-neck sweater festooned with CND buttons says matter-of-factly: "Your mother and father must be dead then. Some people have all the luck." He constantly combs and recombs his shoulder-length dark blond hair, checking his part in a hand-held mirror. He is called Jeff H. (After the movie actor Jeffrey Hunter, I'm told later).

I tell them about Dr. Last's project, our hope of making a place like Conolly House, only freer.

"Oh-ho!" shouts the awkward red giant Barney Beaton, cinching up the strings of his pyjamas as if strangling someone. "While your pals are tax-deducting amateur schizophrenics you're here talent scouting among us professionals." Yorkshire Roy adds, "After us they'll be dead easy, raght?"

"Well," warns Beaton, "make sure you do a craft-y job of it. Nothing I dislike more than shoddy work." His piping voice—oddly childish in such a bulky body—takes on a nagging, adult gruffness. "Don't know what's wrong with today's help. Satisfied to swill their tea, draw a hundred knickers a week and watch naked ladies in *The Mirror*. When I do a thing I do it proper."

Beaton launches into an excruciatingly detailed account of a day in his father's printing firm where he was learning the business. "I dead-bored the Number Sex-tie double-pecker bust to the fallopien, got my *Times* to follow the leader, sardined to Take-A-Chancery Lane, banged the time clock, checked the chaps, goggled the gauges, pricked the pros, tampered with the temps, screwed the stackers, inserted the inkers ..." Losing him for several minutes, I pick him up again. "... and, broad-ly speaking, give or take an extra eight inches, made a cunt-plete ballsup of it." Back to his own adolescent voice. "It isn't fair, you know. In the good old days the youngest son was entailed to the Colonies to feed the starving hoojie-woojies. Now he stays home and lets his parents eat him." He roars, isn't that so, Kurse Narp?"

Which nails the beefy, brylcreemed young night nurse I met in O'Brien's office. Caught flat-footed eavesdropping outside the doorway, Bert Karp blusters in, his face almost as red as

Barney's, and pretends to refill his tea mug at the urn. Dipping me a sly wink he bellows: "GOOD LADS REALLY, MR. BELL! I WOULDN'T BELIEVE ALL THEY TELL YOU THOUGH! HA HA!" The boys look at Karp with a mixture of pity and derision, and before they scatter Barney Beaton makes a twirling motion with finger pointed at his head and loudly whispers, "Careful—he's psycho-pathetic."

Nurse Karp corners me against the kitchen sink. "Now then, Mr. Bell, you're a man of the world. Frankly, what do you make of the pH factor?" The what? I ask. Karp smiles confidently at me and strides off with a knowing air. I gape blankly, as bewildered as the boys.

Nurse O'Brien is what I need for my nerves but he's busy in the office conferring with a palely handsome young man in shirt-sleeves who has his feet lazily up on O'Brien's desk. I assume from the snatch of talk I barge into that he's a staff colleague of O'Brien's. "... Roy's identity crisis stems from his mother's imploded false-self system and—" is all I hear before bowing out hastily.

A little later, on the front lawn I almost sprawl headlong into the flailing fists of an angry young bull encased in a visored helmet and a motorbiker's black leather outfit with HEAVEN'S DEVIL metal-studded on the back of the zip jacket. He explodes in all directions like the American boxer Hurricane Jackson, hitting out blindly. Several boys easily dance in and out of his reach. Immersed in R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self*, Herb Greaves gracefully ducks and weaves through the wild swings without once taking his eyes from the page. Everybody but me in this incredibly precise ballet knows how to move. Dodging a looping left I stumble into the arms of the young staffer I saw with O'Brien minutes ago. He steadies me. "Relax. There's a trick to it," he advises calmly. He walks up to the furiously milling boy and says: "Time for your electric shock, Hodge." The visored boy freezes, then gallops off in terror.

"Never fails," says the staffer. "They gave him ECT once."

In the cold darkening air my rescuer and I feel each other out by toe tapping a partly deflated soccer ball back and forth on the scrub grass. His name is Clem Woodford. "Not to worry," he promises, "I won't cross examine you. We're used to sightseers like you. Con House ought to charge admission." He says he's lost count of the Americans and/or reporters (he uses the words interchangeably) traipsing through the ward. "They ask questions, take notes, then vanish like the dust. Christ knows what they make of us. Probably swallow Dr. Dick's story hook, line and sinker." He savagely kicks the ball over my head. "You'll lie," he says without enmity. "They all do."

Six P.M.

Supper of dehydrated eggs, shrapnel-hard peas, soggy chips, watery carrots and spine-straightening tea. Dining room empty except for two girls at an oilclothed table with a couple of patients. The boys' dates or staff? A Saturday night bonus for all male Conolly House? Feeling like a wallflower I slouch to a far table and moodily munch alone. One of the girls

comes over. “Terrible grub, isn’t it? The Management Committee’s trying to poison the lot of us.” Coal-black hair braided in a halo around a lovely moon-pale Renaissance face, she leans across to shake my hand. “I’m Bronwen Jones, soon sing. After the wedding bells we’re seeing sail-on.” Mmm. Green split-to-the-thigh skirt, form-hugging red sweater, long white stockings: with her low melodious voice a Welsh lass vision, I think madly. Sexy. Crazy too, probably.

“Bronwen, bring Dr. Bell over,” shouts the other girl, elbowing her table-mates to make room for me. “Move over, ya bums.” She’s mid-twenties, thinner, with long brown hair, crew-neck sweater, butt-tight pedal pushers and sandals: a Los Angeles hipster with a south London accent. When I learn the thin girl is Robin Ripley I thank her for the flowers and cleaning my room. “That’s okay,” her grainy husky voice reminds me agreeably of Janis Joplin. “Dr. Dick says you’re trying to learn how to go crazy. Anything we can do to help ...”

Saturday evening, the unit is half-empty. Some boys have weekend leave. On top of the din—Greaves’ piano, a low but piercing hum from Gareth the rocking-and-pissing boy, black Abe’s metronomic cough, crashing plates, the occasional tinkle of a breaking window, various transistors—Percy-the-radio shoots Ray Charles’ *Hit the Road Man* at us at 100 rpm. Blasted from all sides, I try to sort out first impressions.

To my untrained eye Conolly House has at least three levels. An articulate core: Jerry ‘clarinet’ Jackson, Yorkshire Roy, A.C. Corrigan and Barney (including some like Hurricane Hodge who use only body language). Next, visible and unseen sound raisers: Percy, and the fat boy with two radios permanently clamped to his head, and whoever mans the portable pick-up, which is moved around so much it sounds like a drunken but very loud ghost. (Sometimes, I swear, the dining-room piano is played by poltergeists or Peter Lorre’s hands amputated from an old horror movie.) And an underground of withdrawn, silent boys whose Presence, in Dr. Last’s phrase, is in their Absence. Altogether about two dozen youths, early teens to mid-twenties, in their first or second ‘florid’ breakdown, from a West London catchment area plus a bit of imported talent from the provinces. All diagnosed by one or more doctors as “acute schizoid,” “paranoid schizophrenic,” “severe personality disorder,” “violent acting out,” etc, etc. One or two have committed petty crimes but most are from solidly respectable English families. They’ve come, as I learn, by a variety of roads from ‘voluntary’ (informal) admission to outright kidnapping—Orders under Sections 25, 29 or 136 of the 1959 Mental Health Act.

It’s like the army: hurry up and wait. Except that the chaplain, Dr. Dick Drummond, isn’t due to punch their tickets till Monday morning. A long, long weekend.

After Robin and Bronwen disappear somewhere, night takes over Conolly House. Its temperature drops, corridors seem longer, walls higher. Outside more alien. As if angry at the two girls’ departure, Percy-the-radio explodes Billie Holiday’s *Love For Sale* nightmarishly loud, driving us into stunned sadness or up the pole. Soon the unit responds to Percy’s call, and the schizophrenics’ field song of slamming doors, switched on transistor radios and obscurely ambiguous sounds rises like thick vapour. The adolescents’ symphony is

unanswered. The hospital remains dead, silent and dark.

A familiar depression descends. A blue Saturday night without a girl.

Sunday

“LEGGO MR. BELL’S TAPS!” bellows a voice in my Second-drugged ear. Groggily I turn over, glimpse two hazy figures wrestling over my wash basin. Door slams. Silence. I drift off into a dream that I’m Fred Astaire dancing up a staircase of pyjama’d cockneys singing,

“We din’t meanya
To catch schizophrenia ...”

Instead of Ginger Rogers, an outraged male voice yodels, “NO-O-O-o-o-o!”

Wrapped in a hospital-issue gown I stumble downstairs in time to see burly nurse Bert Karp grapple with Gareth, who is rumpled, uncombed but not smelling too badly yet. Bert, at least fifty pounds heavier, tugs and strains at the robot youth who simply leans into him without budging: perfect zenmanship.

What’s up? I ask.

“Little basket,” sweats Bert, “won’t wash.” Does he always wash at 7:00a.m. Sundays? “He does when *I’m* on duty.” With a triumphant cry of “Gee up, lad!” Bert uproots Gareth and drags him kicking and squalling into the latrine. Shivery with cold, I carry my honey jar and instant coffee into the dining room where Herb Greaves sits alone before a breakfast of two pots of tea, four bowls of milk-sloshed Weetabix heaped with sugar, an everest of Wonder Bread and a two-pound can of lemon curd. (A normal meal, I’m told, for thin-as-a-rail Greaves. Yesterday I heard Bert theorise that schizophrenics manage to keep slim by burning up abnormal amounts of energy. What about vast Wally Walters, the boy hiding between his two radios? Bert: “No tellin’ *how* big he’d be sane.”)

Greaves slams shut his copy of Goffman’s *Asylums* and, taking three trips to transfer all his breakfast paraphernalia, moves to a far table when he spots me. Hunched over his cereal he snarls: “They rubbed out Baby Face Gaitskell to win the next General Election. Who did the Transport House mob think they were kidding? At the funeral in dark glasses Two Finger George Brown, Frank (Lucky) Cousins, Scarface Harold Wilson ...” Though his tone is threatening it feels as if Greaves is presenting something to me.

“What about Double Crossman?” I suggest. R.H.S. Crossman like Gaitskill, Brown, Cousins and Wilson are Labour Party politicians.

Surprised, Greaves looks up. He laughs uneasily—schizophrenics sometimes don’t like their complicated puns ‘understood’—and lowers his scraggly head to his arm, trying to keep up his end of the dialogue. What comes out is a confused torrent of census statistics and *Guinness Book of Records* minutiae. Looking me straight in the eye he winds up with the United Kingdom 1963 health budget “... for growing green meddlers in mental hothouses.”

“REALLY SAD CASE THAT!” interrupts Bert Karp. Water-drenched from his battle with Gareth, he plunks himself down at my table and points with a steaming tea mug at Greaves. “Lad there failed his exams! Lost his student grant! One morning—w’d you credit it?—goes up to the university clock tower and starts chucking down Walls meat pies!” Nurse Karp sniggers. “Must be thankful, though. In America eh? he’d of sprayed ’em with a tommy gun. Ha ha!” To make a joke of it he mock-machine-guns Greaves. A light dies in Greaves’ eyes, and he relapses into a dull monotone like Barney Beaton’s yesterday. (Is he parodying Beaton? Or consciously faking out Bert?) “So I lazured at seven and put on my marks and sparks and went down to kelloggs and typhoo and raleighed to the lecture hall and morpheused while professor thompson modelled cabbages in economics and oxoed in the wimpey and matised while doctor freedman embalmed marx and raleighed lumpward to wrestle with my alien & unwind and watch pie-in-the-sky with my stalins and beauty rested until morning and put on my lilly-whites and bannistered to the Stanley matthews ...”

“Hold on!” Bert shouts. “Why aren’t you in class today?”

Greaves peers contemptuously at him. “Today is Sunday, you stupid nit.”

His voice rises rapidly, shrilly. “... and sat my exams and waited for the results and listened to my parents say how they’d slaved all their lives for this moment and.” He stops. Me: “Then what happened?”

“Then it happened,” he says dully. His eyes are cold, glazed.

“What happened?” I persist.

“I can’t remember.” Greaves shuffles off.

Alone with Karp I ask if the fight I dreamed earlier in my room was real or not. Real enough, he says. Around sun-up he caught Vince, a fourteen-year-old deaf kleptomaniac, tampering with my wash basin. The room I now occupy used to be his, and he keeps returning to adjust the slightly leaky faucet, Bert says. How can a ‘deaf’ kid hear a trickle even I can’t?

Bert gives me a I-know-you’re-asking-out-of-politeness-because-you-really-know-what-I-mean look. “It’s an established fact, isn’t it, Mr. Bell, that paranoid schizophrenics hear better than us normal people. Y’know, higher frequencies, like dogs. It’s called the pH factor.”

Eight A.M.

Signs of life. Like some great perfect engine Conolly House sparks, moves. Doors open and shut, someone’s built a cosy coal fire in the TV lounge grate. From upstairs Abraham cracks open the day with his first cough: it’s as if an unseen conductor has raised his baton. Like a movie-music chord when the Sioux Indians loom on the horizon, Percy’s amplifiers—asleep since three this morning—suddenly boom Mitch Miller’s *And The Caissons Go Rollin’ Along*. We’re off!

Staff shortage means that on Sundays from 7:00a.m. to 2:00p.m. Bert Karp—a constable’s son who failed the police cadet height minimum by one inch—rules the roost

alone. Like a mechanical gnome in a Swiss clock he whirls through Conolly House furiously crackling paper, coughing, banging doors, inspecting rooms, rattling tea mugs. Whenever we pass in the corridors he winks and shouts, “NEVER LETS UP, DOES IT MR. BELL?” Later, the young staffer Clem Woodford, a copy of Camus under his arm, joins me for elevenses in the kitchen. He bemusedly watches Bert scurry around in an endless, self-defeating effort to discipline the unit, and observes, “That bloke Sisyphus must’ve been a weekend duty nurse in a mental hospital.”

Sunday is Con House’s longest day. The nearest cinema is in Farningstoke, five miles away, and the village pub is shut all day. Nothing to do but stew, and wait for

Visi-Tears

In the thin cold sunless air figures toting laundry bags and napkin-covered wicker food hampers slowly, funereally invade the hospital landscape. Heads down, legs moving stiffly like luckless infantrymen going into trenches they know are booby-trapped, mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles head for their loved ones in the hospital’s thirty-odd wards. Inside Conolly House anxiety (and Bert Karp) rouse some boys, parents a few more. Several boys won’t get up, their relatives huddle fretfully over sullen blanket lumps. The parents look at least as bewildered as their sons—and much more frightened. In the TV lounge florid Barney Beaton towers menacingly over his mother and father and pretends to film them through his eyeglasses. “Hold still dammit, while I shoot you,” he commands.

Mrs. Beaton, almost as tall as her six-foot son, turns sweetly to her husband, a little flabbergasted man in a trilby who stares at them both during the visit: “There George, I told you. He is better.”

I slip into a rocking chair beside the Liverpool redhead A.C. Corrigan, and from behind *News of the World*’s we eavesdrop on the patients and their families:

Derek Chatto is an apple-cheeked boy in immaculately white sneakers, white linen trousers and white tennis sweater. Playing chess with his father he slaps his head in chagrin: “Sorry, dad. I’m making all the wrong moves again, aren’t I?”

Beefy Wally Walters, with the two radios still at his ears, “Aw, don’ cry, Mum. I don’ blame nobody but meself.”

Eric Raw, a gaunt, beak-nosed character: “It’s all my fault, isn’t it?”

From the small family knots around us spout geysers of apology—“sorry ... sorry ... my fault ...”

Beside me A.C. shakes his red-maned head crossly. “’Twould make th’ fuckin’ angels weep. Beggin’ forgiveness of th’ very jokers what slung ’em in here. Except good old Barney.”

Barney, by this time shouting insults and threats, lunges at his parents. Even when he is hammerlocked and boisterously wrestled out of the room by nurse Bert, hardly a single visitor looks their way. A.C. says, “If we took no notice like that, th’ shrinks’d call it ‘shallowness of affect.’” The ability of some families to totally ignore what they don’t want to see is one of the

contributory factors in the breakdowns of their sons, he says.

Afterward, post-parental blues. From Conolly House's splintered windows the families can be seen streaming out the front gate, heads slightly higher, stride jauntier, a refreshed army of survivors. Boys who've had them tend to weep in corners or drift around lost in morose brooding. Jerry Jackson loudly sighs, "Wisht someone'd visit me. Somehow it don't seem fair for th' brunt tuh fall on a few unlucky bastids." Dark, late afternoon. There have been five nurses changes since I arrived yesterday. Conolly House (I'm told) goes up or down according to who's on duty. Weekends, without Dr. Drummond and O'Brien, can be dicey.

It's down now. Boys gather around the unit's cracker barrel, the kitchen tea urn, to mend one another's troubles but not necessarily gently. For openers the sharply dressed Yorkshire dude Roy Tinsley announces: "Mah mam's mah best pal." No mother can be a boy's best friend, the others jeer. Jeff H. (né Bernie Mendelson) scoffs, "If she knows you want to fuck her she can't be too friendly."

Roy irritably winds his Timex. "Not everybody wants to do tha' with his mam," he mutters uncomfortably. One or two boys, drilled in Drummond doctrine, say it's the other way around, mothers impose their sexual hang-ups on kids.

Little beads of sweat pop out on Roy's forehead. Without ever taking his eyes from his watch, he slowly pulls a multi-bladed Swiss army knife from an inside jacket pocket—his wallet is still blatantly exposed from his outer pocket—selects a blade and starts carving his initials on a steam pipe. "Ah'd never let my mother visit me here. She'd be contaminated by thy dirty minds—or one of tha'd take a punch at her." The idea of his young, divorced mother being beaten up by Con Housers obviously pleases Roy, and he suppresses an involuntary belch of laughter. "Mind," he adds piously, "it's only wha' she deserves for fiddlin' wi' mah brass." His mother burgles from his post office savings account, he insists.

Other boys chime in with similar tales of how their parents rob them.

Staffer Clem Woodford says crisply that they're "reifying a metaphor," misidentifying stolen money with their sexual double bind.

Roy glares suspiciously at him. "Don't confuse me, Clem. That's Dr. Dick's job. Tha bluddy Socialists want to take over everything." Though I've often seen them together, horsing around affectionately and even strolling arm-in-arm, Roy can't stand Clem asserting his staff authority. Wally Walters also objects. "You'n Dr. Dick wanta educate us outta bein' sick, Clem. You can't. We're born that way."

Roy's temper rises. "Ah know when Ah started to get sick and when Ah started to get well. Nobody's born with it."

"And nobody is sick and nobody is well," lectures Clem.

In a swift, deadly movement Roy whirls on Clem, the knife upraised. Clem with folded arms merely gazes coldly at him. No one interferes. Brandishing the knife while checking his wristwatch—no mean feat—Roy slips into that dreamlike narrative I've noticed some boys substitute for physical violence. "Ah remember goin' down into th' cellar and saw this knife. A safety not a flick. As soon as Ah opened it Ah wanted to stick it in somebody. Ah went upstairs and tried to stick it in my mother. Then my aunt. Ah wanted to shove it in them. For a

long time whenever Ah saw a knife Ah put it away, hid it, threw it down drains. Now Ah don't have to do tha' anymore.

"Why?" demands Clem.

Roy looks agonised.

"C'mon," pursues Clem, "say why."

Roy, shaking with anger, shouts, "Ah don't have to say why." Desperate to keep control he holds his watch right up to his eyes. I can't resist: "*Quelle heure est-il, Roy?*"

He swings his knife toward me. "Did tha call mah mam a whore?" Maybe this is no game for novices, I think. Jeff H., a veteran picador, quickly diverts Roy from me by sidling up and running a languorous, braceleted hand through Roy's neatly parted hair. "That's just French for suck his cock," Jeff H. bats his eyes flirtatiously. Roy practically has a spasm patting his hair back into place; he'd rather die than not look 'proper.' (Even the scruffiest Con Houser, I've noticed, will spend hours on his coiffure.) "Tha leave me mam out of this," Roy shouts on the verge of tears. "Money's money an' th' other thing's just tha. She's never even seen my foldin' stuff. Ah mean my hard lolly." He looks ready to kill someone.

"Come off it," says Clem. "You're interiorising an ontological—"

That's too much for A.C. Corrigan. Till now an amused spectator, he slumps to the cold cement floor clutching his heart like an old time silent film actor. "Ur-r-gh-gh. Plugged troo de ol' ticker wid anudder Drummondism!" A.C.'s act breaks the tension, and the boys' laughter washes away Roy's murderous rage. When Jeff H. bitchily observes that Clem can't resist playing doctor while Dr. Dick's away, Clem flushes and retorts that if more patients played doctor there'd be less need of loony bins.

A.C. suspiciously: "None of dat New Left shit around here. After all, I'm Catholic, almost made it as a priest." Suddenly he slaps his head comically. "Wad am I say in? Here I am in Con House. Up th' bluddy Revolution!"

Clem grins disgustedly. "That's right, you scouse opportunist. Join the winning side." A.C. says that's how he survived all these centuries. "When I wuz a Roman centurion I did a deal wid th' Gauls in case our regiment got defeated."

Someone asks, "How come you made it in here then?"

A.C. wraps his husky arms around Clem, swings him off his feet and whoops with laughter. "Th' fucken English just won't listen to Irish reason."

A Twilight Jog

I like Clem Woodford. Though too prone to Drummond jargon, he mixes unpatronisingly with the patients. I gratefully accept his offer—perhaps made to regain his professional composure—to show me around the hospital. In thick sweaters we set out trotting to keep warm in the afternoon's dying light. A number of trees and young saplings have the Latin names of their species neatly printed on cards at eye level. "The gardener probably picked up the habit from the doctors," says Clem unsmilingly.

A two-lane driveway leads us to the Main Administration Department (MAD), a huge

penitentiary-style building whose cornerstone was laid in 1845 by Queen Victoria. Extending from either side of Reception—a slightly smaller replica of Wren’s St. Paul’s (including a miniature dome)—are quarter-mile long wings in pseudo-Palladian that house the kitchen, various workshops and wards. The wooden window frames, painted in bright white, resemble iron bars. Inside the maze-like corridors of Main Block—so like an even madder Pentagon, right down to the little electric trolleys soundlessly driven by porters and trusted patients—Clem points out the back (geriatric) wards, MSW (mentally subnormal wing), tiny library and OT. Hardly a soul in sight. Then it’s outside again for a rapid sweep around the trendy, spireless chapel, prefab Patients Canteen and a crematorium discreetly tucked behind some tall trees.

What strikes me is the heavy silence. It strangles the cold dusk air. Grass, bushes and privets are micrometer-cut, paths neatly sterile. It’s scary. “You’re catching on,” says Clem. “What they teach you here is where you went wrong—you *made a fuss*.” He calls England a “mortuary state” in which resigned silence is the greatest civic virtue. “We ran the world for a couple of hundred years. Now the Olde Curiosity Shoppe has gone bust—but it’s a crime against the Mental Health Act to tell the owner.”

Clem concedes that King Edward is a liberal hospital compared to others he’s seen. Most wards, though segregated by sex, are unbarred, unlocked, open plan. “Except Winnie Wing over there.” He gestures at an imposing mock Tudor mansion partly concealed in a grove of hedges; its double-barred windows remind me of Count Dracula’s castle. Winston Churchill Wing, the violent unit “for the stropky ones,” is one of the swords the all-powerful Management Committee holds over Dick Drummond’s head. If his patients sail too near China they’re shipped up there for a bit of the Twisted Towel Treatment—wrapping a wet towel around a patient’s neck till he blacks out.”

“What’s China?” I ask.

Clem shrugs enigmatically, “Go ask a Chinaman.”

My own tour guide, Clem gives me a (sometimes literally) running commentary on King Edward. Most of the smaller units in the large fifteen hundred-patient National Health institution are 1930s prewar, which by British standards makes them modern, and much effort has gone into brightening the surrounding landscape. There are new flowerbeds, fresh paint everywhere, dulcet ward names (Sunny Side, River View, Honeysuckle). Main Block, the hospital’s nucleus, began life as a nineteenth-century workhouse for the poor, debtors and mad—named Addleford, and was reincarnated as King Edward VIII Hospital only during the Prince of Wales’ abortive reign in the Great Depression. For over a hundred years, due mainly to a lucky succession of enlightened superintendents, Addleford functioned as a remarkably progressive institution “for its time.” King Eddie has tried to live up to its reputation by treating patients if not humanely at least less barbarically than most other asylums. In the great surge of post-World War Two optimism Aneurin Bevan, the Socialist Health Minister, opened an assembly hall and several new villas whose intentions shone from their names: Keir Hardie, Sylvia Pankhurst, George Lansbury—the saints of British radicalism. A ward

specifically devoted to research and experiment was named in honor of John Conolly, the great nineteenth-century humanitarian doctor often called “the English Pinel” after the liberator of France’s lunatics.

“Typical of the socialist crowd to throw a few medical minnows into a sea of capitalist sharks and expect them to survive,” says Clem as we turn homeward and retrace our steps. Labour’s first post-war government modernised the buildings, but left untouched the old upper-class bias of English medicine. Thus, the shadow of a punitive, almost forgotten Poor Law still hangs over the hospital and prevents it from coming to terms with Conolly House. “Talk about double binds. Admin sends us their most disturbed patients—then blames us for being disturbed. We can’t win.”

Con House looms out of the darkness. Clem says, “Man, we’re a bloody microcosm of British social democracy. Potentially the most creative experience of our time—and mostly a big fat drag.”

A gigantic explosion cuts him short.

A classic Hammer Horror scene greets us. Several boys slosh about in Golden Syrup seeping in from the smoky, gas-smelling kitchen into Con House’s main corridor. Herb Greaves bangs out *Lord, Let Me in the Lifeboat* on the piano while Mr. Wu, the Asian Flash, runs soundlessly screaming up and down milk-splashed stairs. A human skeleton in pyjamas hanging in tatters from his emaciated frame moans, “Aye, blame it on poor Eric.” Upstairs, Percy’s loudspeakers blare the Beatles’ *Help!*

It looks like a bomb has hit the TV room. Chairs, ashtrays and Sunday papers are violently scattered, the remaining windows have been punched out rag stuffing and all. In front of the exploded TV set Robin Ripley, the girl who cleaned my room yesterday, calmly bandages the bleeding hands of a small muscular Irishman angelically crooning *Ave Maria* (pop version).

We find A.C. Corrigan sheltered under the upturned chaise longue and reading a newspaper. “What happened?” I ask.

“Not sure,” he replies. “I think we just found a way to lick the English Sunday.”

Monday

“NO-O-O-o-o-o!”

Gareth’s outraged cock crow awakens me to my first working day in Conolly House. Without looking I know that Bert Karp is hassling him. And I don’t bat an eye when little Vincent, the ‘deaf’ klepto, dashes into my room and swings a hammer at my surrogate skull, the (allegedly) leaking faucet. Here only thirty-six hours and already I’m an old con.

After 7:00a.m. I shadow Les O’Brien on his early morning rounds. Before most boys are up he’s consulted the offgoing nurse, wheeled in a trolley of two dozen pre-cooked breakfasts from the hot meals lorry, studied the roster for overnight admissions, written several reports,

turned over some blanket lumps to see if they're still breathing, liaised with police in Windsor about a drunk and disorderly absconder, soothed a worried parent by phone, filled in countless forms and found time to sort out stray insomniacs, including me.

Con House Game (1)

When I tell O'Brien that someone should blow the whistle on Bert Karp's habit of bullying Gareth, he smiles innocently: "Who's stopping you?"

"I'm not staff. You're paid to do things like that."

O'Brien lights a cigarette. "Sez you and Mr. Tasker, the Chief Nursing Officer. But Dick Drummond, my *other* guvnor, says I'm paid not to exercise 'inauthentic authority.' Which twin has the Toni?"

Ten A.M.

Group therapy in the TV lounge made positively arctic by yesterday's fracas of busted windows. This 'therapeutic hour' is all that's left of the structured day Dr. Dick promised the authorities in order to get a unit of his own. Attendance optional. About nine or ten patients, exuding a resigned let's-humour-th'-gumnors aura, sprawl half asleep or read the morning papers. Staff—O'Brien, a student nurse Dave Foster, Karp and a leggy, plump girl in a low-cut peasant blouse—look a bit more fraught. Bronwen Jones, the pale Welsh beauty I last saw on Saturday with Robin, is also here. I plop down on a mattress between A.C. Corrigan and Clem Woodford and say, "What's Bronwen doing here? I thought female patients had their own meetings."

A.C. says, "Yeh, well I guess she's mad to marry that twit Singh." When I look blank Clem says that Bronwen is engaged to a staff psychiatrist Dr. Lewis Singh who the boys call "Screwie Lewie." She is, I learn, Con House's full-time social worker, and the short full-bosomed, shapely girl is Sally Peel, the occupational therapist. Clem adds, "They're the establishment, we're the bloody masses."

I do a slow double-take. If Bronwen is 'staff' ... then Clem is a patient. Before I can digest this, Dr. Dick Drummond appears.

Places, everybody.

No Biz Like Show Biz

Morning 'community meeting' (group therapy) reminds me of my old job as an office boy with a New York theatrical agency. I soon got used to tap dancers, tumbling acrobats, singing Siamese twins and ventriloquists double somersaulting over the wood barrier, pulling lighted cigars from my ear, sneaking up behind me to imitate Mae West or Humphrey Bogart. What performers!

First on (natch!) is Jerry Jackson who bounces in tootling *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing* on his invisible clarinet. He skids to a stop in front of Dr. Dick. "H'lo Devil" he says. Dick, bolt upright in his red leather chair, gazes at Jerry unresponsively. Jerry complains: "What a fuckin' wasted life. I wanta preach. Do God's work. Brownwen, give us a kiss, luv." ("He'd faint if she did," A.C. whispers to me.) Jerry isn't sure what to do—except not lose his audience. He flings his long arms into the air and shouts, "Yowsuh yowsuh yowsuh, Jesus is my Savior Cugat. But where's Abbie Lane? Dublin, ya say? Doublin' is where I am, too." He sings, "How I-rish up-on a star ..." His weak puns move no one. Dr. Dick remains silent as a stone. Jerry's eyes dart from side to side with real pain. "Ha ha, fuck me, silly cunt, ain't I? Got tuh stop swearin'. Why? Been bottled up all my life." Nobody helps him. They've seen his act too often.

Slowly, despairingly, Jerry capers around the room riffing Ellington's *Take A Train*, beautifully syncopating it in a low flatted key. He breaks off helplessly. "Th' other thing, I forget. Feelin' an' ... Feelin' an' ... *Fuck me, I can't remember.*" On impulse I help him out by picking up the Johnny Hodges' alto-sax part. Nodding happily Jerry segues in, and we play it back and forth, riding it to the end with a final skippy eight-bar *Everybody's Doin' It*.

No applause. Jerry puts on his Satchmo growl. "Le's blow dis dump, Misteh Bell. Ah sho does hate charity gigs." He blows spit out of his invisible clarinet-now-a-trumpet and flops in a chair, his back to us.

Herb Greaves, Jerry's rival for top banana, has already taken over. Slapping his pyjama'd knees and snapping his thin bony fingers like castanets, he busks around the TV room, his voice rising shrilly:

"Fatso Hogg's

In a fog

Christine Keeler

Won't let him feel 'er."

When Sally the OT giggles, Greaves, shaking with schizophrenic ague, shrieks at her:

"Mods 'n rockers

Suck their cockers

Misses and prisses

Lack such blisses.”

Jerry and Herb are hard acts to follow. A few try but just get in each other’s way.

“She’s going, she’s dead, she’s my mother ...”

“I am Christopher Marlowe, Françoise Sagan’s lover for sixteen years. Cunt. K-A-N-T ...”

“I was the husband and father. I chose the three-piece suite. It’s not fair ...”

“Oh God, progress, where is it?”

“Is this a house of God? One two three my father is a flea ...”

“Here I am and there is no hope. I am God and I will destroy the Luddites ...”

“Through my wishing and through my horn, through my mother and through my spawn. And that is love ...”

“Belt up!”

“Stuff it!”

The acts succeed one another at a dizzy pace. Everybody has a point to make, a case to present. To a newcomer, it’s like listening in on a dozen private lines at once. I can’t help noticing that this scheduled community meeting seems less spontaneous than the kitchen session yesterday.

Con House seems to have only one firm rule: no meddling by staff. Even when the boys boil over with rage—“YA FLIPPIN’ ‘ORRIBLE MOTHER-BUGGERIN’ SOD YA!”—or take lethal-seeming punches at one another, no one in authority lifts a finger. And they suffer for it. With nothing to do but look on passively, the five Drummond-trained staff stare at the tips of their shoes or morosely yawn in an ecstasy of repressed irritation. The male nurses especially squirm with the effort not to clout one or two of the loudest mouths.

The threats and insults build up to a nerve-shattering climax. Something’s gotta give.

“Right then,” Dr. Dick rasps. “What’s it all about anyway?”

For the rest of the therapeutic hour what it’s about is the unceasing shellfire of adolescent anxiety raining down like shrapnel. From a bottomless pit of boredom the boys issue raucous complaints about the food, the filthiness of the ward, the madness of other patients, etc. Including “Who th’ ’ell is Dr. Bell anyways?” (I am, depending on who you talk to, [a] a Scotland Yard detective, [b] geriatric patient, [c] atomic scientist working on a nuclear cure for schizophrenia, or [d] best-selling author researching a sexy book on Con House. Check one.)

Over all this, resplendent in an off-mauve Hardy Amies suit, royal blue Asser & Turnbull shirt, Liberty tie and Bally winklepicker shoes, Dr. Richard Drummond presides like a haute couture baby Buddha. He uses his patients’ formless fury—much of it slung at him—like clay, to sculpt tiny nodules of self-awareness for them. With cold, precise passion he limits his therapeutic role to a few clipped, factual comments. When Wally Walters in his usual rhyming slang confesses to having murdered his father (“Pushed ‘im down th’ apples an’ pears wi’ me own German bands”), Drummond downgrades it to a prosaic pub scuffle. Robbery-obsessed Yorkshire Roy is reminded that he chose to move his cot next to Vince, the unit’s semi-pro

thief, and that he is in hospital for hurling a bayonet not at his mother, as he likes to boast, but at her favourite china set. Big Barney, who periodically phones the national newspapers to report the nurses' attempts to assassinate him, is told the 'poison' is nothing more fatal than Largactil.

I'm impressed by how hungry some boys are for punishment. Longing to be 'corrected' with drugs and other forms of restraint, they scorn, even despise, Drummond's leniency. "So weak, so babyish, hasn't the guts to handle us like a man," croaks Eric Raw whose hunger-strike Drummond refuses to terminate with forced feeding. Dr. Dick's battle to preserve their 'right to suffer' in the face of bitter hospital opposition only makes them sicker, several boys tell me. Threats to report him to the Medical Superintendent are fairly common.

All grist to Drummond's mill. Having read the case histories and met the culprits (parents), he knows what he wants. "If possible, to have the community mutually reproduce triadic aggression and thus reinvent an interpersonal technology of demystifying the ontological basis of alienation." Translated, that adolescents in their first breakdown may relate to one another's problems by re-enacting within the group patterns of family manipulation. (For example, two boys will join together as a parental team to elect a third as a victim-child, practising techniques of confusion upon him which the therapist tries to make explicit.) I'm too new to see how Dick's theory works in 'praxis.' It's still ish kabbible to me.

On the fifty-ninth minute exactly Dick sneaks a look at the clock above the wall mirror and scootles out of his chair like a reprieved Death Row inmate. I try to head him off, but he brushes past me wordlessly. "Don't take it personal," says Wally Walters. "Dr. Dick don't believe in individual therapy."

Session's over. Bodies slump; staff look wiped out. Everybody's suspended, quiet. Through a jagged window-pane we see Godot drive off in his yellow Morgan toward two other wards he's responsible for (part of his deal with the hospital).

A.C. Corrigan stretches and yawns. "Okay, kiddies. No more auditions for now. Backstage again tomorrow for 'Okla-coma!'"

Mid-afternoon. Those who are going to get out of bed, have; sleeping blankets sleep on unmolested. Les O'Brien knocks off for a cuppa tea with me before bicycling home to Slough. Like most nurses he cannot afford a car.

Les Talks

As Senior Charge Nurse, O'Brien has chalked up almost twenty years in English mental hospitals. "Long enough to know that the gift of mental nursing is knowing when *not* to act at times of crisis or mass anxiety."

Jabbing that finger in my chest, he bares his teeth at me. "Listen, Mr. Bell. This unit exists on a knife edge. Everybody from ward orderly to Regional Board chairman has heard, or think they've heard, about us here. For every Yank pseudo-shrink who drops out of the sky

to temporarily feel us up, there are ten hospital bureaucrats itching to bury us. We make them nervous. At least half my job is to keep them from getting *too* nervous.” And he suddenly drops his head, roaring again with that sad laughter.

The real victims in a mental hospital are not patients but staff, O’Brien says. “We’re like the man on th’ flying trapeze. Frantically swingin’ between Dick’s revolution and the orthodoxy of the other doctors. And nobody’s down below waiting to catch us either—just patients dying to see us lose our grip. Eventually we become as mystified as the most deluded back ward zombie.”

The chronic problem at Conolly House is that staff has almost nothing to do, O’Brien says. Drummond saw to that by encouraging the abolition of ‘role bound’ rituals—compulsory reveille, basket weaving OT, floor polishing, etc. But he left staff high and dry when it came to finding adequate substitutes for their diminished prestige. “The suspicion you can run a large mental ward with only one staff member—or none at all—has grown into a demoralising certainty.

“This place undermines us now, our idea of ourselves, our job, even our families. Dave Foster’s wife is a King Edward nurse, too. She hears all the internal gossip, fills up on the fears we provoke. What d’you expect she tells Dave when they’re home together? Even my old lady, who’s never seen the inside of a bin, sometimes gives me hell because of what the neighbours and their kids whisper. ‘So you work in that ’orrible Conolly House,’ they say, and it goes on from there.

“All it needs to bring the house of cards down around our ears is just a little fresh air from the outside. Very nerve-racking. So—patient and staff alike—all our energy goes into sustaining the organisation of a mental hospital, bolstering it. Nobody around here wants to do themselves out of a job. So the whole sordid nonsense of ‘patient’ confirming ‘doctor’ in the doctor’s disconfirmation of the patient endeavouring to keep staff ‘sane’ who must keep patients ‘mad’—everybody conning everybody else—never ends. The boat never docks, the plane never lands, who we are and what we are is lost in a limbo of total, civilised madness. Agghh.”

Supper. Semi-raw potatoes, greasy greens, charred chops, tasteless blancmange. (For every £1 spent on the physically sick, the Government pays out only one-third on mental patients, says Les.) Patients who have outside work trail in, those with wage jobs at nearby factories arranged by Dr. Dick who pressured local firms into hiring a few stabilised cases. (At Con House’s inception he experimented with make-work programs, like basket weaving, which the boys contemptuously rejected.) One of them, Bob Featherstone, a husky extrovert who day-labors in a brewery, digs into his dinner across from Robin and me and gabbles on about his case. “Sure do miss my kids,” he says with sincerity. “The missus too, of course. I shouldn’t be here, you know. It’s just society’s way of invalidating dissenters. Forcing us to go to pieces for them, right Robin? All the same, wish I could play with my little kiddies is all.” After Featherstone goes, Robin—a patient at all-female Pankhurst ward but who takes her evening meals with us—spits venomously on the floor. “Disgustin’, ain’t he? A child molester. Been

in the nick for it. Ain't got no kids of his own. I could kill him." Her eyes say, I mean it.

It's amazing how many boys 'Drum-talk,' i.e. couch their problems in lofty existential terms picked up from Dr. Dick. Clem says it's all about doing 'soft bird'—easy time leading to a fast discharge. "You play at what the doctor says you are. Don't argue; you talk, shit, eat and throw fits when it's convenient for staff—and hope your ward consultant had a good breakfast before he sees you." 'Drum-talk' also arises from a desire to cash in on Con House's notoriety. "There are fashions even in madness," Clem says. "And we're 'in' this season."

Jeff H., the star-struck CNDER, is a skilled model patient along these lines. Aztec eye paintings adorn his dormitory wall space, and he loves impressing credulous visitors with bon mots like "I take the line of least existence." The boys call it "singing for your supper."

Eleven P.M.

Night ghosts. More activity, fear. The overnight nurse, 'Mad' Monahan, a pug ugly in a nurse's jacket, stalks about radiating disapproval of everything and everybody. His spirit intimidates even the noise. Door slams, transistors, even Percy's gargoyle amplifiers seem perfunctory, cowed. Damn. I don't *like* being in a nuthouse at night without a staff friend.

As if in reply to my unvoiced prayer, a knock at my door. Nurse Dave Foster, O'Brien's sidekick: "Care for a quick pint, Mr. Bell?" Outside, passing darkened Patients Canteen, Foster says, "Gettin' on all right? Th' chaps treatin' you fine? Sometimes I wonder who's mad and who's sane."

I can feel his eyes testing me. I agree, we dutifully quote anti-psychiatry to each other, enter Staff Club. Spanking new, gleaming bar, spacious dance floor. Foster takes our drinks to a small group of men in dark suits at a table. "This is Mr. Bell, Dr. Drummond's assistant." They look like Chicago police detectives. I don't argue. Careful talk, weather, soccer, whose relations live in what American city. At last one asks, "D'you find that place a little ... queer?" All, including Foster, laugh softly.

"How do you mean?" I ask.

"Well, all that. You *know*." One or two shake their heads pityingly at me. I hemhaw, say it's all right, everything is okay. Sure, sure, they nod. I'm stood another Scotch. We drink in silence. One nurse leaves, puts his hand on my shoulder. "If you need any help let us know." The others nod in emphasis. When Foster and I are left alone he says, "Good boys, those."

Returning by myself, crossing the dark, great hospital. All wards blacked out except Con House lights blazing like a bonfire. Inside cold, quiet. Fearing nurse Monahan, I tiptoe past the office up to my landing where Percy suddenly opens up with *1812 Overture*. The cannonading music releases a storm of window breaking, door slamming. Angry footsteps as Monahan bounds up the back stairs and heads straight for me. *It's not my fault*, I want to shout. Jangled, I say nothing, slip into my room and lie down. Pray to Hine-nuite-po, Great Lady of the Night. A chest spasm knocks me to the floor. Oh no, I think, not while Monahan's on. Slowly I climb

back into bed while my *chakra* squeezes me to an inch before death. No no no. I sleep.

Tuesday

All day in a pale cold nausea. Sweating, feverish. The stench and disorder—*Con Houses lack of direction*—gag me.

Why doesn't anyone volunteer his case history? My readers will want to know. Robin Ripley obliges, alas. By the time she finishes telling me how her parents shaved her head for messing about with boys, blamed her for a younger brother's suicide and forced her into an abortion at sixteen and then threw her out of the house, I collapse with stomach spasms. "Gee Mr. Writer," she helps me to my room, "you oughta meet my ward shrink Dr. Goldstein. He says I pack the meanest punch in the business."

Choked with rage I march into O'Brien's office and reel off Robin's chronicle of parental torture. "Take it easy," he advises, "she only told you the good part."

America, America

In general, the boys look upon my American nationality in a friendly light. One calls me 'Ginger' after Ginger Fiske, the first U.S. pilot to die in the wartime RAF. Another sings "Yankee Noodle Randy" whenever he catches me flirting with Bronwen. That both Dick Drummond and I are North Americans confirms a long-held suspicion that the Yanks have already taken over the country. The image they have of my native land I suppose we have only ourselves to blame for. Herb Greaves says, "The social mess-up in America was caused by the religious inaccuracy of the immigrants. They thought they were leaving England for theological reasons. That was a lie. They were going to get jobs with Boeing Aircraft." Jerry believes Benedict Arnold played saxophone for Glenn Miller, and some boys think that the late Senator Joseph McCarthy is the American president. One patient summarises American history like this: "John Wayne landed at Plymouth Rock and killed the Indians on Thanksgiving because they stole his sister, Poke-a-mon-in-the-ass. In the war General Ike Eyes-on-Power conquered England, which has been living on surrender terms ever since. Jackie Kennedy shot her husband so she could marry Peter Lawford. Anyway, that's what Alistair Cooke said on the wireless."

Barney Beaton stands up for me. "One thing I've got to hand to the Americans."

What's that?

"Coin-operated laundries."

Patients

Today I witness a hallowed Conolly House rite. Every morning, come rain or shine, Mr. Tasker, the Chief Nursing Officer, makes his regular inspection round. Tasker, a ramrod-stiff

ex-Colonial police inspector, is noted for his view that mental illness will disappear if military conscription is reintroduced. His disciplinarian soul is horrified by Drummond's blurring the roles of doctor, staff and patient. (He was genuinely bewildered, I'm told, on his first day when nobody stood to attention as he entered the Main Staff Room.)

As a spectator sport Mr. Tasker is unbeatable. At 10:44 a.m. precisely he pokes his head out of Honeysuckle Ward next door, sniffs the air suspiciously and reconnoiters Con House as if expecting a bomb to go off. Slowly he walks around the building, dourly shaking his head at the state of the lawn or broken glass panes, then ceremoniously inserts a key from a bunch at his waist into the back door—though he knows it is always kept open. He then calls out for O'Brien or Foster to accompany him. Drummond's is the only ward Mr. Tasker will not enter unescorted. Once inside he hardly breathes lest the (admittedly exotic) smells asphyxiate him, and he always backs out like a bank robber after a heist. Apparently this routine hasn't varied in Con House's two-year history.

The boys love Mr. Tasker's visits. Minutes before he is due those who are awake crowd the windows to cheer him on. Why do they play up to the Chief Nurse's paranoia this way? I ask.

Wally says, "Aw, 'ave a 'eart, Sid, 'ow else is th' silly ol' gaffer gonna know 'e's sane?"

Eleven A.M.

The office. Staff 'group' a faded copy of community meeting immediately preceding it. No vaudeville, just foot shuffling and strained silences.

The wall clock loudly ticks in the strained silence. Who's to nurse the nurses? Who else—Jerry Jackson.

High, he sails in with his usual act, to the tune of Fats Domino's *Blueberry Hill*.

"I found my thrill
On Calvary Hill
On Calvary Hill
Where I met Je-hee-zus! ..."

Les groans, and Jerry pats his knee. "Know jus' how ya feel, ol' china. I coon't put up with me another minute neither." He vaults over the desk and knocks the files in the air. When no one stops him he panics and soft-shoe shuffles around the office to get a reaction. Staff stare at Jerry with repressed fury, but make no move to stop him. Only when he shimmies out of his pyjama bottoms does someone crack—with a bull-like roar Bert Karp is on him with a half-nelson, causing Bronwen, the social worker I'd mistaken for a patient, to hiss: "Let him alone, you nasty little sadist!" Red-faced and confused, Bert tightens his grip. And for nearly half an hour, with Bert sweating to keep his hold on a groaning, delighted Jerry, staff argue among themselves over what to do about him. It's an old Con House dilemma, I'm told. When

does a patient's legitimate need to act out violate the rights of others? And who draws the line?

Like most theoretical problems around here it gets resolved pragmatically when O'Brien loses patience. "Damn it, Jerry, if you don't belt up I'll knock you through that door." Looking pleased as a pistol at having got a reaction, Jerry scampers out yodeling Cab Calloway's *Hi-dee-hi hi-dee-ho!*

It's back to ticktock ticktock.

Con House Game (2)

To break the tension I ask O'Brien for a tranquilliser.

"Why?" he asks.

For an acute anxiety attack, I say.

O'Brien points to a printed notice on the medicine cabinet:

FOR PATIENTS' USE ONLY.

"Sorry," he says, "but you're not a patient or so you say."

What's the difference? I protest.

"I didn't make the rules." O'Brien grins from ear to ear.

I try the cabinet. Locked. When O'Brien tantalisingly jingles the keys in his jacket pocket, Sally giggles. Bitch.

My temper rises, O'Brien flatly refuses. "If you can play God, so can I."

Furious and embarrassed, I slam out.

Clem, who was present, finds me miserably pacing up and down the driveway, and takes my arm. "You'll need a lot more practice before you can play the Con House game with a master like Les."

"What's the Con House game." I ask.

Clem scratches his head. "Dunno. Been playing it over a year and still haven't found out."

Lantern Slide: *Clement Attlee Woodford*

To cool me off Clem walks me out the unattended front gate to the main road and tells me some of his story.

A true son of the upwardly striving, working-class dormitory suburbs, Clem is neatly split between wanting to be a militant socialist and a conventional bourgeois success. He blames this on his frustrated mum who from his earliest days spurred him to excel his unambitious Tory-voting carpenter father. (Being staunch Labour herself, she hopefully named Clem for Britain's wily post-war prime minister.) Mainly to defy his

mother Clem more or less deliberately failed his crucial eleven-plus exam, and left school at fourteen—"to be a pop star or a famous revolutionary—or both if I could swing it." He wiped tables in a Soho coffee bar then became a roadie for a pop-blues skiffle group. By the time he was nineteen, just when English pop was taking off, Clem had become impresario of several folk and pre-rock groups. "So there I was, helping to start a real revolution, and my name in the newspapers, too. I drove a red Mercedes and read the *Guardian* for my conscience. It was a great party for a while except I forgot to invite my real self." At twenty, suffering from "premature businessman's menopause" (his own term), Clem hallucinated he was invisible and overdosed on purple hearts. The casualty intern advised him to enter King Edward where he was diagnosed "schizoid identity crisis" and landed up in Con House.

"Trying to kill myself was the best thing that ever happened to me." In Dr. Dick Drummond he finally found a father to look up to. "My old man lets everyone walk all over him. Dick makes a science of that kind of masochism to stomp his enemies," Clem grins. Drummond has taught him that working within the system in order to defeat it is no sin, and on Dick's advice Clem is studying for his university entrances to qualify as a psychiatric social worker. "Or rather, an anti-psychiatric one." His mother couldn't be more delighted; she always wanted him to have a respectable white-collar job. Clem is aware of the irony that is easing him back into the career rat race, which almost destroyed him. "Dick says it's a negation of a negation—the dirty joke at the end of the dialectical rainbow."

Clem feels profoundly grateful to Drummond. "He showed me what revolutionary socialism today is all about. Trouble is, you have to be crazy to know it."

The Village

In the still cold January air Low Wick looks deserted. Occasional prim, bundled-up shoppers hurry along the narrow pavement, avoiding us. Cars zip by non-stop.

Low Wick is a small Home Counties village, with a charming late-Norman church, a tiny sub-post office-cum-newsagent, a few shops. In front of the church there's a yellowing placard on an otherwise empty bulletin board:

KEEP BRITAIN TIDY

Another zone.

We enter a grocery. Inside a bell sounds like a burglar alarm. Before coming forward the baldheaded proprietor gives us the 'King Edward stare'—a fixed, glassy look that makes one feel transparent. (Low Wickers have picked this up from hospital staff, I assume.) "Keep it simple," Clem says out of the side of his mouth. "Last week he almost phoned the police when I asked for mortadella instead of ham." A couple of middle-aged women shoppers strenuously

ignore us.

Careful, I warn myself. Clearing my throat I nervously ask for a “nag of butts, chiss sweese and a har of joney.” The two shoppers roll their eyes up at the shelves. “Why of course, sir.” The proprietor frozenly smiles and stacks the counter with boxes of Kleenex. What? Harpooned by his stare I drop a ten shilling note and flee, sweating. My unease mounts at the other shops. To avoid the previous confusion I bark “Granny Smith!” at the fruit-and-veg man who goes white as a sheet. The lady in the ABC bakeshop gives me a queer glance when I ask for cherry pie instead of the English equivalent, tart. At the newsagent, to recoup my losses, I put on my lordliest accent when asking for the evening papers. (Suppressing an urge to add, My name is Sidney Bell, no doubt you’ve seen me on the BBC, I have a luxury apartment near Kensington Palace and regularly dine with Iris Murdoch, Ken Tynan and the Duke of—) The girl behind the large jar of barley sugar hands me the paper and remarks: “Fancy, a mad elephant in your kitchen.” I run for my life back toward the hospital. “Slow down, Sid,” Clem laughs, chasing me. “It’s in tonight’s edition.” He shows me an item about a circus animal which escaped and broke into a woman’s house in Bedford.

I don’t feel safe until we’re back inside Con House.

Some safety.

What I’ve feared most happens. In the depressed, post-Dr. Dick afternoon Hurricane Hodge leaps up from his chair in the TV lounge and lashes out blindly with his fists. Hits nobody (yet), just viciously spars—huh! huh! he exhales, muttering “Cunt Sonny Liston, I could smash him up. Bang whump!” In his black leather motorbike outfit (“HEAVEN’S DEVIL”) and visored helmet which almost swallow him up, he knees an imaginary opponent in the testicles. Hodge, a judge’s son, usually assaults only himself or, when hallucinating badly, “IRA scum” (anyone with an Irish name). He aims a kick at the chess board Derek Gatto is silently studying, and sends it flying into the air.

“Who you staring at, cunt?” he swings a punch that grazes my ear. From their gin-rummy game in the corner the nurses, Les O’Brien and Dave Foster, studiously don’t look up. So far, Hodge’s violence is as ritualised as Jerry Jackson’s musical numbers. No sweat. But gradually I detect something else, and so do some other boys who edge away from Hodge a little more nervously than usual. But not A.C. Corrigan, who laughs scornfully from behind his copy of *Encounter*. Hodge rushes over and whooshes tremendous punches mere inches from A.C.’s head. A.C. frowns but doesn’t flinch or stop reading. As Hodge dances around shooting out near misses at him, it goes wrong. Suddenly A.C. uncoils and dives at him, and they crash to the floor, rolling over and over, arms and bodies locked. A.C.’s genial, freckled face is contorted by rage. A few boys leave in alarm. (Con Housers are more scared than the sane of losing their tempers, and often go rigid with fear at the slightest sign of physical violence, I’ve noticed.) One or two work off their disturbance by trying to separate the fighters. Eric Raw weakly pulls at their legs and chirps, “Mama, Daddy, it’s all my fault.” A.C. easily shakes him off. I’ve not seen the Liverpool redhead so angry before; the change in him frightens me more than Hodge’s frenzy. His smile vanished, his face tight, A.C. pins his opponent to the floor and raises a fist to annihilate him. Hodge stops clawing and scratching to lie absolutely still,

compliant. A.C.'s fist hovers irresolutely, he glares down at Hodge and almost seems to come apart in the struggle to control himself. Then, as if waking from a bad dream, he looks around dazedly, and forces his fist to open. Still astride Hodge, A.C. dusts himself off and, slightly shamefaced but with immense dignity, gets up and walks back to his magazine.

Hodge creeps along the floor to A.C. Sadly, "I'm a sissy. Are you a sissy? I'm a sissy. That's my situation." He leans thoughtfully against A.C.'s leg, stroking it.

My heart thumping, I look at O'Brien and Foster, who are so immersed in their card game they haven't noticed a thing, it seems.

Class Notes

Why do middle-class Con Housers seem crazier than those from the working-class? Clem says it's because if you're poor you don't have to be too mad to get locked up as a schizo. Affluence bestows softer options—private therapy and scaled-down diagnoses ('anxiety tension' for psychosis). "So posh kids have to be really up the spout before we receive them."

When I grill others about the sociology of madness the responses are more equivocal. "Class doesn't matter here," says Barney Beaton, "it's what's insane in a man that counts." Or as Jack Sweeney says, "In the country of the blind the one-eyed boy is kink."

Drummond once told me that young schizophrenics knock themselves off at double the national average for suicides. Today word came in that Harvey Keegan, an ex-Con House patient, committed suicide at home. Harvey (1) swallowed rat poison as he (2) strangled from a bathroom shower fitment after (3) eating 100 sleeping pills. Why the overkill? I ask. Jeff H., once Harvey's best friend, says, "His parents were always after him to try harder."

Toward midnight, in the darkened TV room, shapes corral around the dying fire to watch tonight's BBC pious Epilogue: a Cabinet Minister's appeal to save African wildlife. The TV screen has shots of game wardens in open Land Rovers pursuing water buffalo and other dumb beasts to stun them with tranquiliser darts. "Some," the Minister says, "have contagious diseases which must be caught in time to spare the herd. The most beautiful and sturdy specimens will be transported to zoos for citizens to enjoy. Practically no shooting is done nowadays, it's all the modern painless way with high velocity fast-acting drugs. This is both humanitarian and efficient."

Robin Ripley, Barney, Yorkshire Roy, Bob Featherstone, Gareth, Jerry and I watch without comment.

WILD TRACK:

"Peace be with you, Mr. Bell."

"Peace be with you too, Jeff H."

"That'll be the day."

After-midnight Con House's anxiety turbine turns over faster. Montovani's *Strangers in the*

Night rides over Barney's mournful ocarina and the strange fluttering noise Mr. Wu makes racing up and down the stairs. In darkened Obs Dorm Jerry, masturbating, groans "Don't look, Jesus. Don't look ... oh, Jesus, th' Mother of God is suckin' me orf. Tell 'er tuh stop ... oh, Jesus." Upstairs, tired after constant patrols, I open the wrong door. In the dark broom closet a pair of yellow eyes peers out. Backing away I spy deaf Vincent lurking around my door with a hammer. I duck past him, lie sweating on the bed. Then, from Aeon 149, a Shaft of Light pierces my chest. For the next hour sweat and struggle to expel the yowl inside me. Another Second, and amid a symphony of crashing doors and tinkling windows I drop asleep.

Wednesday

"NO-O-O-o-o-o!" Gareth, 7:00 a.m.

"HEL-L-L-o-o-o there!" Dr. Dick's Rotarian way of greeting patients, containing as it does a permanent note of surprise and despair, sounds exactly like Gareth's protest cry.

At the breakfast scrum this morning a small, slight boy with an engaging smile whispers to me, "You may be working for the FBI. I heard it on the radio. If I tell you something my yesses and noes, my stresses and foes, may make matters worse for me." I laugh. Sally Peel, the OT, snaps, "So Nigel got it a bit wrong. Yesterday a nurse told me you were on a secret assignment from from Interpol."

The smiling boy, Nigel Atkinson, is back after a month's hibernation under blankets. Refreshed and clear-eyed, he goes around shaking hands at the community meeting as if everyone else had been away on a long trip. "H'lo Clem, haven't seen you lately ... Where have you been keeping yourself, Roy?" Dr. Dick, who fought the hospital bureaucracy to let Nigel sleep it off without drugs, is powerfully pleased at his voyager's safe return. He asks if Nigel has any tips he picked up while away.' Nigel busily scribbles on strips of paper which he distributes around the room. Mine reads: "THE ACHILLES HEEL OF PRESENT-DAY MORALS IS PREMARITAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE—Lord Longford."

Most schizophrenics, O'Brien insists, are strictly homemade, as earthbound as the families that drove them dotty. But he does concede the existence of the rare 'one off job,' a patient with genuine paranormal sensitivity. Fifteen-year-old Nigel may be one: he claims to get signals from spaceships circling the earth and to have visited Venus. To most doctors, his talk, sprinkled with references to Master Jesus, Mars Sector Six, Jupiter 92 and Saint Goo-Ling is a symptom of mental unbalance. However, O'Brien took the trouble to find out that Nigel actually is a paid-up subscriber of the Aetherian Society of Fulham, a large, respectable organisation devoted to psychic research whose members hold beliefs similar to Nigel's—a fact that no doctor ever bothered to learn. Why then is Nigel still on a Detention Order?

O'Brien says, "Oh, little items like setting fire to his school and cutting down his mother's rosebushes. But that's not what really upset his folks. They decided he was mad

when he stopped talking to the family and passed written notes instead.”

Sheep May Safely Craze

The boys say I can’t properly do my job—whatever it is—by hanging around Con House all day. “Come see how the other half-wits live,” A.C. urges.

A visiting U.S. Third Air Force band concert in the large raftered Assembly Hall. King Edward runs a good ‘rec’ programme; films, dances, day trips, patient-produced newsletter, etc. Dutifully the ‘sheep’—as the boys call them—are herded in. It’s my first look at the mass of patients.

Almost instantly my previous fears wash away. Were these the monsters I feared? But they’re so docile. The largest proportion are what Barney Beaton calls “my old friend, Jerry Atrick.” Neat, shabby people, many in their sixties and seventies (and older), with caved-in dentureless faces. Most in civvies, long ago having lost the impulse to escape. Though the hall is well heated, a number of patients ritualistically rub their hands together as if to dispel a permanent chill. Hard to tell the difference, in the mad elderly, between men and women. Above lean anonymous bodies are unisex masks of total powerlessness. Quite a few whiskered women, which A.C. says is due to excessive ECT and dope. Even the younger sheep, sitting apart timidly, have got that infinitely grieving hangdog look.

An overwhelming air of mutual co-operation fills the hall. A twitch here, a tremble there, one or two brave souls hopping from seat to seat but otherwise total compliance. The slightest sign of unprogrammed life, even scratching one’s palsied leg, is immediately seen to, quelled by a small army of starched nurses from Jamaica, Belfast and Galway who automatically reach over to stop aged limbs quivering, fingers tapping. Rebellion is reckoned any spontaneous movement except those specifically licensed. Look at that old man who periodically bounces up to walk to the other end of the hall, bow and mechanically kiss an elderly woman whose only acknowledgment is to scratch her nearly bald head after every kiss. The fact that the nurses don’t bother to stop the old man is like telling him he’s already dead.

On stage there’s an annual prize-giving for flower arrangements and home-baked cakes in Occupational Therapy. A member of the Hospital Management Committee, a matronly woman dripping costume jewelry and goodwill, hands out Gift Shop tokens—and says, utterly without irony, that she hopes to see everyone again next year. Then Mr. Tasker, the Chief Nurse, effusively introduces the GI bandmaster, a fat Warrant Officer in blue dress uniform who bows, beams and raises his baton. *Stars and Stripes Forever* cascades down on the patients, all those disciplined ranks of mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, orphans, the workers-clerks-lower civil servants of Home Counties England. Almost all served militarily or as civilians in at least one war: were bombed out, shot at, industrially dragooned, semi-starved during Austerity. Companions of the 1926 General Strike, the long Depression and Dunkirk-to-V-E Day, they sit in attitudes of stiff, regimented gratitude as Britain’s nuclear guests serenade them.

“Bunny Hug or Lambeth Walk, Mr. Bell?” Robin Ripley coyly flutters her long beautiful lashes at me.

We’ve trailed the sheep to Patients’ Canteen, a long hutlike building surrounded by implacably kept hedges. Much less money has been spent on its plastic seediness than the new, glossy Staff Club. To a stream of incongruous rock ‘n’ roll records patients (mainly white, a few black) queue up for tea at a portable urn or, serenely immobile, rest in folding chairs spaced at mathematically regular intervals against the insulated-wood walls. Except for Robin and me—she’s an excellent dancer—the floor is occupied by middle-aged women locked in each other’s arms, sweeping past in long graceful glides from a thousand Women’s Institute mixed-couples events and Joe Loss weekends. A pair of elderly ladies in identical Clara Bow haircuts and scotch plaid skirts walk carefully about in time to Bill Haley’s *Rock Around the Clock*. In a dim echo of previous courting patterns old men segregate themselves in the adjacent snooker room, while a few teenage boys and girls hardly dare look at, let alone dance with, each other. Robin says, “You can always tell the new fish. They’re the ones itchin’ to have a go at the opposite sex. Soon get that knocked outta them.”

Herself a patient for the past five years, Robin explains that some old-timers have been locked up since King Edward was known as Addleford in the 1920s. Post-Edwardian spinsters banished from their families for an unmarried pregnancy; the deaf and dumb; undetected autistics and mild subnormals; alcoholics and homosexuals—or simply homeless men and women who lost their kin and had nowhere else to go. “Poor old things,” Robin laments with real sympathy, “were just born a little early. Wonder what’s wrong with us that’ll be respectable one day?”

Hemmed in by nurses, policed by sternly jolly Social Directors, the Canteen’s habitués wear invisible straitjackets—until A.C. Corrigan, a chocolate cigar stuck into his wide mouth, swaggers in like Edward G. Robinson’s *Little Caesar* cradling a toy Tommy gun. “Stick ‘em up, screws! Somebody phone th’ warden—we’re takin’ over!” Behind A.C. bursts in a gang of obscenely healthy-looking Con Housers screaming like wild Indians. They sound but are not violent.

Pandemonium. Like angry chickens staff and patients scurry this way and that, reacting as if the Devil himself had just walked in. Herb Greaves grabs a burly Social Director—one I’d seen forcing patients to dance—and whirls her away in a no-nonsense foxtrot. Other boys invade the floor with an impromptu war dance that empties out the Canteen in nothing flat. Then, led by Jerry fingering *St. James Infirmary Blues*, a bunch of us return in triumph to Con House for tea. By the time we arrive the staff grapevine, racing ahead of us, has reported that a mob of schizophrenics tried to rape a Social Director and set fire to Admin Block. Robin smiles philosophically. “If wishes were pennies th’ nurses around here’d all be millionaires.”

Trimly pugnacious Robin is part of what I’m coming to think of as real staff: experienced patients with know-how. It’s confusing. Would Clem or A.C. be unofficial staff if Jerry and Herb weren’t super-official patients? Is non-staff ‘staff’ staff to staff-staff (paid)? If Dr. Dick doesn’t believe in the concept of patients, who then are the boys? And Les, Dave, Sally, etc.?

Who's caring for whom?

In the sweet pregnant pause between supper and Krakatoa's nightly eruption, an argument in the kitchen: 'Is Religion Really Necessary?' The boys and Robin agree on the theology. "How come this is th' greatest country in th' world?" demands Jerry Jackson. 'I'll tell ya. We licked th' Huns 'cuz *everyone done 'is part*. King George conquered 'is stammer, right? An' ol' Winnie 'e swore off imported cigars so ships'd've more room for guns. Well now it's our turn. Some people got to make th' Christian sacrifice so's others c'n survive. It's like a law of nature, i'nt it?" Arch-Tory Barney Beaton has the last word. "Without the Queen, police, banks and headmasters we couldn't have the Archbishop of Canterbury."

Dr. Last failed to prepare me for how conservative most schizophrenics are. The ones in Conolly House seem deeply suspicious of Dick Drummond's mild attempts to radicalise them by relating their personal problems to larger social issues. Royalism is so rampant that some boys see the present occupants of Buckingham Palace as a court of last resort for them. Written appeals to the "Virgin Queen, Mark II" are routine, even the occasional phone call to nearby Windsor Castle (almost always diverted to the local police station). Nigel believes he has an electronic bug planted in the Queen's cleavage, and Percy's radio antennae are tuned toward the royal family home, Sandringham. Hurricane Hodge, the judge's son, has a scheme to kidnap "that Greek sod—I mean god" (Prince Phillip) and use the million pound ransom to rescue the Queen Mother from Churchill Wing where she's being held a prisoner.

"Why this imperial mania?" I ask Jeff H. Combing and recombining his hair in a mirror, he says, "Well, the royals are the perfect British family, aren't they? And we adore them exploiting us."

After rocking with Gareth, coughing with black Abe, armwrestling with Barney, jamming with Jerry, arguing socialist politics with Clem, analysing Nigel's visions and regaling Jeff H with my Hollywood tales, I retire to my room, wondering who's on tonight. Dreading Monahan, I masturbate, don't wake till morning.

Thursday

A problem. I'm here on a kind of training course representing Last's group. To learn and toughen myself. What's the form of my Presence in Conolly House? Since I'm not a patient, doctor, nurse or social worker—not even a journalist—who am I? Well, I'll do what comes naturally. Dr. Last calls it "inventing" myself. I call it "gathering material for a new novel." My anxiety assuaged, I relax into incessant note taking.

I'm beginning to see how a sense of family realities is the best qualification for mental nursing. Dave Foster says, "Y know th' difference between these lads and myself, Mr. Bell? At the right age I laid one on th' old man and when he hit me back I had him up before the Salford magistrates on a charge of assaultin' a child. Got to th' old bastard before he got to

me.”

Though nurses still warily ‘mister’ me, I feel myself slipping irresistibly into a subculture of patients. The boys become ‘us’ not them. With each passing day I’m unsettled at how small the distance is between articulates and withdrawns, between both and myself, between Conolly House and the outer world. Once I accept—as I must to live here—Gareth’s rocking, Abe’s coughing and Herb’s rhymes as ‘language,’ then life stands on its head. Anxious for a handhold, I try to apply the boys’ standards, which aren’t the most reliable. Just as—or so O’Brien tells me—mental patients carry the cross of staffs inadequacies and repressed violence, so some boys bear the cross of boys. Interdependence to the max and over the edge.

A news flash starts it.

Herb (the poet) Greaves strolls through Con House town crying:

“Clash us
Mash us
Sonny
Bunny.”

What happened? I ask.

Someone says, “Clay beat Liston last night.”

All day Liston’s compromised shadow lingers over the unit. Because most newspapers championed Clay as the clean-living Olympic ideal versus the black hoodlum beast, the boys naturally identify with Sonny. They haven’t had a real folk hero since the Great Train Robbers.

Clay’s suspect victory—did Liston tank it?—and a cold drizzle sharpen Con House tempers. Copying Hurricane Hodge’s act, the boys, probing for a legitimate target, torment one another—and find one when community meeting’s roulette wheel, bouncing all week from Jerry to Herb to Barney, finally comes to rest at the unsteady feet of Gareth. His furious farting and dribbling, which consistently empties the dining room, has finally triggered a demand that something “be done” about him—preferably far away from Con House.

“And what part of yourselves are you trying to exile—to get rid of?” asks Dr. Dick.

A mild cheer at this, Drummond’s standard riposte.

A short sharp argument follows, between Drummond and those patients whose grip on reality (and middle-class attitudes to tidiness) is threatened by Gareth. Con Housers take mental hospital logic to absurd extremes. Yorkshire Roy, who’d shit sixpences if he could, insists that the British tax-payer put him under care to be cured of a neurosis “and not to play nursemaid to incurables Ah c’d name but won’t.” With sweet reasonableness he trots out premises I’m to hear over and over again with regard to Gareth, Abe, Mr. Wu and other

solitaries: they require special care unavailable in Con House; a real fear that the more serious psychotics may ‘infect’ respectable breakdowns (such as Roy); a patient’s prognosis for other patients, the withdrawals are too far gone to help, etc. (‘Withdrawn’ is to Drummond’s patients what ‘schizophrenia’ is to most civilians, a convenient wastebasket.) Anyway, Gareth is an unfair burden on staff, piously adds Jeff H. “Look how Kurse Narp has deteriorated since he took an interest in the little zombie.” Barney, our law ‘n’ order champion, suggests castrating Gareth or dumping him on the Isle of Dogs—for his own good, of course. “He’ll never get better around us bifurcated spectaculars.”

I’m disillusioned to find an illiberal lynch spirit even here. “It’s a democracy,” O’Brien tells me. “Why shouldn’t they enjoy the great English blood sport of invalidation like everybody else?”

Lantern Slide: *Gareth de Walden*

Who is he, this seventeen-year-old Con House baby?

An adolescent golem wrapped in an unspeakably filthy robe, his surprisingly handsome but slightly out-of-focus head lolling brokenly on his square almost athletic shoulders, whiskers just starting to sprout around his meaningless grin, eyes clamped down to slits or staring unseeingly upward, snot like Old Faithful issuing regularly from his nostrils, dirty socks crumpled around his devoutly unwashed ankles encased in combat boots, he’s content to grapple with himself eighteen to twenty hours a day. What energy he spends securing his space!

What ... who ... smashed Gareth? I can’t, of course, ask him. His speech is mainly body movement, hops, wiggles, rocking, trotting, bending, skipping, shuffling and smiling. What you get out of Gareth depends on how you relate to teenage infants who opt for premature senility as the safest alternative to ‘growing up.’ Most Con Housers are divided in themselves between love and hate for him, and almost all have had a ‘Gareth crisis’ when he brings out the parent in us. The day he told Clem—Gareth speaks when he wants to—I was a “phony,” I spent in bed, utterly crushed. Because he speaks so seldom when he does it has a kind of gravitas.

Normally he is taken for granted like a familiar piece of furniture—ignored, pushed aside, bumped into, even sat on. Boys with ‘bourgeois’ pretensions (e.g. Roy and Barney) can’t stand him, while cockneys like Jerry and Wally love teasing him, rumpling his hair and boxing with him like a tame bear cub. Gareth, son of a Bloomsbury publisher—his younger brother is at Eton a few miles down the road—laps it up. He adores being spoon fed, babied. How we envy him! Every now and then, sucking on Jerry’s fingers or mooning in Bronwen’s arms, he’ll open his eyes quite wide and intelligently straighten up for a fraction and ... not quite ... wink.

Meeting ends on a whining note. Why, asks Jerry, is Gareth never sedated when he, Jerry,

seven years older, is doped and has his civvies taken away at the slightest infraction? “All I had was a vision, an exaltation—th’ trees, th’ sky, God makes me new. Hallelujah!”

Sprawled on the chaise longue, O’Brien growls, “It ain’t your rapture, you nit, but the way you handle it. Yesterday you wheeled a male geriatric into Female Nurses Quarters askin’ if they’d like to do two old codgers a big favour. And serenaded an ECT session with *It Ain’t What You Do It’s the Way That You Do It*. And rang up your vicar pretending to be a vice squad detective who’d just arrested his daughter in a Soho brothel.”

No kiddin’, Jerry’s expression proudly says, *did I do all that?*

All day Eric Raw scowls at Bronwen Jones, muttering “You are there to play on my mind. I am your victim.” Suddenly he slugs Wally Walters, an innocent bystander. When Wally kicks him out of TV room, Bronwen smugly does her Drummond bit: “What part of yourself are you trying to get rid of, Wally?” Wally dusts himself off. “My inflamed paranoids, ya silly cow.”

A Shell of Himself

The mind/body dissociation that Last told me to look for in schizophrenics often assumes sadly comic forms in Con House. Take Keith Whitworth, a twenty-year-old plasterer’s apprentice from Putney. Ever since his admission he has held one hand to his right ear while keeping his head rigid and making soft ticking sounds. Born in a wartime V-2 terror bomb attack, he believes his brain is a leftover live shell which will go off if he dislodges the ‘pin’ by moving his head or if he drops his hand from his ear. The ticking sounds he makes all day are maddening. Finally Jack Sweeney, the angelic-looking little Irishman, can’t stand it. Today in TV lounge he reaches over and slaps Keith’s hand away, which causes Keith to go rigid and say “pop!”, thus releasing the imaginary firing pin. He waits for his brain to explode. When it doesn’t he starts to tremble and shake. Big tears of disappointment roll down his face.

But isn’t he relieved to still be alive? I ask.

Keith sobs, “I’m a dud.”

Little nervous fights break out all afternoon, and I retreat to the kitchen and bang pots and pans together to settle my nerves.

Trapped.

Hurricane Hodge, burning with the thrill of the Clay—Liston match, windmills in and corners me against the sink.

Whoosh! whoosh! his fists whistle past me. My guts freeze. Oh no, I can’t hit a patient.

I duck a murderous right.

It’s him or me.

I yell: “You insane creep—you need a good lobotomy!”

Hodge falls back as though I’ve struck him then hares out the kitchen door as fast as he

can.

From the doorway Jerry Jackson grins jubilantly. "Oi—ya jus' lost yer cherry!"

Les Talks

I seek O'Brien's counsel. What should I do if a patient actually hits me?

"Make a decision," he says, "based on your old Chicago street savvy. Or is it only machine guns they use in the Windy City?" A relaxed attitude to violence is basic to getting along in Con House, it's clear. He and Dave Foster were drafted in by Drummond because they're northern working class. "And up in Geordie-land they may be anxious about a lot of things, but nobody thinks you're mad for thumpin' th' other guy. In fact, it's a way of life."

Les says the first ten years of his nursing career were spent straitjacketing, massively drugging or physically restraining patients. "Or kicking the living daylight out of them." On his very first day as a student nurse a patient armed with a jagged bed spring made for him. "No Tynesider hesitates in such a situation. I hammered him. And kept hammering them whenever they stepped out of line.

"I was in rough shape myself most of the time. But what could I do? The longer I stayed a mental nurse the less qualified I became for anything else. The more time toward promotion, the deeper in I got stuck. I was pretty hard then."

Les comes from Newcastle-on-Tyne. Joined the army in '44, demobbed two years later, joined the merchant navy. "But Peggy my girl said she wouldn't marry a salt-water sailor. So I packed it in and looked around for a shore job. Pensions, all that. Just after the war they were hard up for mental nurses so I says why not it's all the same. I was nineteen." He laughs softly. "The mental hospital scene in 1947 was not too gentle." Later, the 1959 Mental Health Act, giving patients the right of appeal and voluntary admission, improved the scene in some ways, made it worse in others. In the bad old days you had to be legally certifiable, right round th' bend, to get into a bin. We got some real lulus then. But at least staff and patients knew where they stood with each other—at the opposite ends of the sanity spectrum. Reassuring in its way.

"But today only one in sixteen patients is detained compulsorily. That old iron gate is a bloody revolving door into a psycho supermarket. Short stays in hospitals are prescribed like Enos salts, and we ain't such an exclusive club anymore.

"But what th' hell does that do to us nurses and doctors? In the end your average underpaid nurse knows all he's got to defend himself with is his statutory authority. Take that away and he's got nothing. Patients ain't that stupid. Out of panic and insecurity—you'd be surprised how many *have no idea* why they're here—they try to dissipate their mental fog by manipulating their legitimate rights to unbalance us, the already unbalanced staff. I wish I had a shilling for every patient who quotes Laing at me when I order him to wash a dish or two.

"Since '59 we don't even have the instinctive physical response of a right ol' clip 'round th' ear-ole. So we're forced to keep patients down with newer, more subtly mystifying techniques—which is what got most of them in here in the first place.

“We don’t bash ’em nearly so often. Sometimes, God help me, I wish we could.”

A peaceful, wet afternoon. Con House rests between explosions.

A sudden sweet crashing chord, the most beautiful blues, sets me up. On the dining room upright Herb Greaves idles his bony fingers. Pure prowling Kansas City, the best I’ve heard in a long time. Greaves’ lean sharp face, usually so taut and hysterical, is relaxed, softened by the heavy bass runs of ‘Sweet Lorraine’ and ‘Piney Brown’s Blues’. James P. Johnson lives again in Berkshire, England.

Interludes don’t last long in Con House.

As soon as Greaves spots me in the doorway he reverts to his ‘mad’ mask, a bluesy Lon Chaney with brylcreemed locks. Jerry Jackson skates in to blast a Beiderbecke *Indiana* while Barney Beaton buffs and puffs on his toy ocarina. “Eee eye addie o!” A.C. joins in with the Mersey football chant, and Jack Sweeney adds *Nature Boy* to Gareth’s jiggling hum. It’s a ghastly mixture, so to bring order out of chaos I kazoo *Lay Me a Pallet on the Floor* through cupped hands and tissue paper. In different tunes and tempos we pound down to the finish line, exploding on the last bar exactly together.

Jerry removes his spectacles to wipe his eyes. “Fuck me,” he cries, “wasn’t that sinful though?”

High on jazz-induced euphoria I fall in beside Gareth’s shuffle. Up down up down, winter wonderlanding the corridor. After half a mile indoors I drop out, exhausted. Bronwen, watching, says: “You’ll burn yourself out, Sid. I only do the rocking in place with him, never the running.”

WILD TRACK:

Jerry Jackson: “You devil, you cunt, you bastard.”

Me: “You sonofabitch, you double cunt, you turd.”

Jerry: “Okay, cunt. God bless. Take care.”

Each night after supper I chair-blockade myself in my room to type up the day’s notes on the borrowed office portable, and in the morning I faithfully put a carbon copy into Dr. Dick’s box. (He never mentions it to me.) Not wanting to be a stoolpigeon, I give the boys pseudonyms. In effect, I’m dealing with three versions of each patient: his ‘real’ self, his schizophrenic ‘shadow’ and the name I invent for him. Talk about juggling acts!

The mad can be truly nasty to one another, but they also have a tact, an instinctive grasp of how to handle crises. Sometimes, when a numbing, nameless panic immobilises me, Robin or one of the boys will help me walk it off or shoot snooker with me till my mental storm abates. Tonight, restless, I switch TV channels incessantly, jumped on and off the latrine scale, make mountains of toast which I don’t eat, rush up and down the stairs on patrol, even talk to

myself. Wally Walters watches me with the calm, shrewd gaze of a scout for a first division team. “You’re comin’ along jus’ fine, Mr. Bell. Soon try you out for th’ Seniors.”

Two A.M.

Because I’m the only non-staff adult available in the small hours, my room has become a nest for night ramblers. Tonight, we dream aloud of what it would be like to ‘break down’ in a gentler, freer place. When I tell them my idea of Last’s community—the monastic layout, hierarchy of Adepts, strict female exclusion, etc.—the boys listen respectfully. Then little Nigel says, “Why don’t you be honest and come right out with it? You’d like to go to Eton.”

Bloody Imperfects.

At 5:00a.m. we break up. Och, it’s bin a lawng bluidy deh.

Friday

My last day.

An intense quiet pervades the unit, as if it takes all the boys’ energy to face another long weekend. Jerry stares into the lounge fire, Wally’s two radios distantly squeak Elgar’s ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ which seems to radiate from his head. Slowly the room fills up with patients wanting a last contact with Those Who Go Home. At 10.00 sharp Drummond materialises. Scanning us with perpetually surprised eyes, he moves in warily, like a counterpuncher not knowing from what angle the first blow will land. What possible variation of the common ore can be dug up today?

HEL-L-L-O-O-O there!” My heart leaps, sinks. Drummond is greeting someone else.

Carefully, he settles into his magnificent chair and swivels his fleshy, well-barbered head from side to side: *who are all these people*, his baby-blue eyes seem to say, *and what are they waiting for?* Sitting (unacknowledged) near Dr. Dick most mornings, I hurt for him. It would drive me mad, too. Knowing what’s wrong, having isolated (insofar as humanly possible) schizophrenia’s non-biological virus—the social violence of love’s old sweet song—he must now stand by impotently while his young lions lunge against bars which he, Drummond, feels he helped create. He can do little more than suffer with them. Well goddamn it—I can almost hear him thinking—at least I’ll not rob them of their dignity with my self-indulgent pity. Deliberately stripping himself of the tricks of compassion, he almost vengefully play-acts at being a doctor pretending to be a doctor who refuses on principle to ‘be’ a doctor but wants his patients to know he isn’t a doctor pretending to be a ‘doctor.’ To hell with bourgeois psychotherapy.

Herb Greaves strolls in wearing boxing gloves.

And so it goes, my last meeting, with its usual conundrums, hungers. Eric Raw, his gown open

to reveal a body now wasted to less than 100 pounds, hurls himself at Drummond's feet. "It's not my fault, is it Dr. Dick?" Drummond stares down at him with infinite terror and sorrow. "I don't know, Eric. Maybe it is." At 10:59 Dr. Dick levitates like John Cleese out the door, followed by his staff. Greaves, inexpressibly angry, removes one of his boxing gloves, aims and hurls it, whap, hitting Sally's plump ass in the doorway. She jumps, but smiles patronisingly on seeing who did it. Greaves keens a sad, sad lyric:

"In olden days
With golden lays
You swung 'em high
You made 'em sigh
Craze, blaze, daze, faze, gaze, haze, laze, maze, raze
Aw fuck it ... what rhymes with alone?"

In staff office:

Me: "I'm going tomorrow. Can I come back some time?"

O'Brien: "Sure. It's been a mutual education. (Laughs.) Just disguise the names."

Nobody believes I'll be back.

Jerry Jackson, who worships American jazz, says goodbye in his own way, by sliding into my room on imaginary roller skates triple-tonguing Jack Teagarden's *Hold That Tiger*. He asks me to help him symbolically masturbate. I know the routine. Faster and faster I accompany him with hands drumming on knees. "No!" he shouts helplessly. "Yes!" I reply. Shaking, quivering with joyous rage, he lays down his 'trombone' to lock his hands. "No ... no," he whimpers, tearing at his locked hands. "Yes yes!" I shout. His body shakes violently, and with all his might, his weeping eyes almost popping out of their sockets, he pulls against himself. He's getting there. "Ah ... no!" His hands spring apart and flop limply, and half-collapsed with the effort he turns to me. "Madness is th' confusion of reality with ... fuck it, I forget." Sadly, the wild light gone from his eyes, he pats my shoulder and shuffles to the door. "Sorry ol' mate, ya did yer best."

The Good Citizen

On a last walk Clem and I are joined by one of his pals from another ward, Max Heath, editor of the hospital newsletter *Far Out* who has been a patient for ten years. In that time Max hasn't travelled more than half a mile from the hospital; beyond a certain 'safety line' he panics. He has the settled, dapper manner of an old lag, and moves and speaks in a nasal monotone born of presenting himself in a stereotyped way to hundreds of medical case conferences. Yet he's deeply proud of the hospital and its liberal Superintendent, Dr. Winstanley. Why doesn't Max come and live at Conolly House? I ask. It might be more

congenial than his present ward of aging chronics.

Max is evasive. “Er, all that dirt and mess at Con House. The noise. No; it would undo all the progress I’ve made.”

Con House is charged with impending weekend. Staff happier, us moodier. Tomorrow I ‘R & R’ back to my apartment, my Buber and Eliade, my near-vegetarianism and Yoga, games of existential solitaire and Zen tossing coins-in-the-can, and Dr. Last. Only one more night to go ...

At supper Herb Greaves, shivering with anger, comes at me. His knuckles are chalk-white around an upraised, gleaming butcher’s knife. *Oh shit*, I think, *he’s going to kill me*. Where’s O’Brien or Clem? No one interferes.

Feebly, I croak: “What do you have against me, Herb?”

Greaves grabs my overdone lamb chop and rams it into his mouth, singing:

“Sunday painters
Part-time feinters
Weekend blighters
JUDAS WRITERS!”

He finishes tearing at my chop, puts the bone on his head and walks out.

Weak with anxiety I beg a pill off Mad Monahan, then sleep through a night of Percy’s highest-fi, one of Gareth’s wailing nightmares and Jack Sweeney fracturing his hand (again) on anti-IRA Hurricane Hodge’s indestructible jaw. In the morning Jerry Jackson shakes me awake. “Oi Mr. Bell, there’s some bird downstairs wants tuh take ya home.”

] two [

FROM HERE ON MY life had twin poles: Conolly House and 'Clare Community Council,' a name we in Last's group chose after much soul searching. "Gaw'd damn it!" he blew up as we agonised over 'Yin-Yang Centre,' 'Liberation Hall' and 'Albert Schweitzer Clinic' (the latter for fundraising purposes). "Why not nail our colours to th' mast an' call ourselves after th' mad Ainglish poet, John Clare?"

So moved, seconded and ordered. Alf Waddilove, Last's ex-patient and business advisor, was instructed to draw up tax exemption papers for:

CLARE COMMUNITY COUNCIL
for the
Study and Treatment of Mental Illness

Last assigned each of us a 'task,' according to a military-style Table of Organisation (T/O):

Dr. Boris Petkin House hunter

Dr. Richard Drummond Ministry of Health liaison

Alfred Waddilove Fund raiser, accountant, Charities Commission and local government contact

Anthony Straw Legal Officer
(ex-Royal Corps of Military Police)

Sidney Bell Public relations

Davina Mannix-Simpson Recording Sec'y

Last's assignment was to "rove responsibly."

Our targets were:

- a) to find a rural house and grounds for a healing Centre.
- b) to raise cash for this.

Over a magnum of champagne we Clare Councillors pledged 10 per cent or more of our annual incomes, and as the clock in Last and Petkin's house struck out 1963, we embraced and promised ourselves a Place by next New Year's Eve.

At 7.00 the following morning, rather to his wife Sybil's annoyance, I woke up Last to

tell him my latest LSD vision. On his doorstep he sleepily scanned my four-page memo with accompanying sketch (see overleaf), which described an all-male community “on the edge of London.” Laid out like a medieval town, it was governed by a nuclear core of Perfectii, or Brothers, who studied and prayed in a shed-like temple far apart from the un-Elect (women, children, cats and dogs). Circling this Inner Sanctum was a ring of mobile prefab huts inhabited by the mad and broken down—i.e. patients who might also be any of us. Unlike the wives and families of the Perfectii, who were segregated in an Outer Zone where they contentedly raised chickens and bees to make the community self-sufficient, the mad always had free access to the Nuclear Brothers. Decisions were by democratic majority of the Sacred 7, ties to be broken by the F.O.C. (Father of the Chapel, a term I borrowed from my National Union of Journalists). Circulating my memo at the next Clare meeting, Last coughed indulgently. “Er, um, I’m sure ye’d agree naebuddy bu’ Sid c’d’ve written this.”

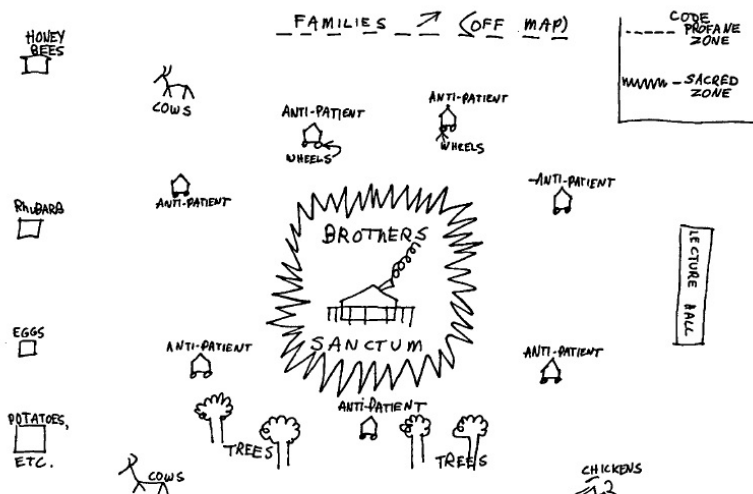
Reactions varied. Dr. Petkin, the East End Bolshevik, asked if medical Brothers could charge fees. Major Straw inquired about security—“Sentries or Alsations?” Alf Waddilove, the travel agent, insisted on seeing a cost-effective analysis, and the Canadian blueblood, Dr. Dick Drummond, wondered if we could move somewhere warm and sunny like Provence. Davina hesitated. “Is there room in your scheme for a Brother Sister?”

From the start Dr. Last fostered a ‘two-track’ approach to Clare Council. To outside laymen it was officially advertised as a “new direction in family therapy,” But for us Sacred 7, the group’s secret function was to work out our individual transcendental destinies, “our way to th’ inner light.”

Didn’t this mean that family therapy was only a front for our own personal salvation? I asked.

Last smiled tolerantly. “Surely ye ken th’ distinction between a shallow pretense manipulated to preserve th’ privileges of a blindly selfish élite an a genuine dialectic embody in th’ reciprocal interplay from inner to outer, Light an’ Dark, I an’ Thou?”

Um, sure.



In long evening talks, with acid, dining together or driving around the Home Counties looking for a house with the right 'baraka' (vibes) and price, I finished hammering out my 'battle assignment' with Last. My nine months in America had convinced me that life had no Centre, no real point; existence was a sham, a veil of illusion. Like good prose it had to be ruthlessly boiled down to No-Thing until it disappeared into the Cosmic Vacuum, the origin of all creation. Only this way could I climb the Mountain, die and be karma-released.

Last nodded approvingly as I replayed what he had taught me. "Ye've set yirself a real mon's task there, Sid. Only a fool—Gaw'd's Fool—w'd try it." He punched me affectionately in the chest. "Ye stupid bluidy Jew."

Despite my lifelong atheism Last insisted I couldn't escape my Jewishness. "It's stamped inside ye, like DNA. Ye'll have to learn to be a Jew to stop bein' one."

So to Zen Buddhism, Siberian shamanism, Tibetan reincarnation, Buber-Sartre existentialism and lysergic-acid pantheism, I added 'astral Judaism.'

A vast, almost physical joy seized me. I was still unhappy in the old personal sense. My journal is filled with references to worthlessness, frustration, guilt. But in a little-used corner of myself a soft light had appeared. It was to this tiny glow-spot that I directed my Self.

At this moment Lena re-entered my life.

"Gruss gott, stranger," she grinned from behind the steering wheel of a shiny new red MGB GT coupe parked outside Con House. It was she who'd come to take me home. How had she found me? Lena winked. "A friend of Willie Last's told me where you were. It's a small world, *liebchen*." In the backseat she had a picnic hamper of Liebfraumilch, pâté de foie

gras, Parma ham, roast chicken and cucumber salad, which I fell on like a starving man. Nearly a fortnight of English mental hospital food had temporarily deranged me. As she amusedly watched me rip into the chicken, we drove back to London and brought each other up to date.

I hadn't seen Lena since she'd gone off and become a Greek shipowner's mistress spending her winters in Capri. My relief at talking to someone outside the psychiatric circle was shortlived because, she said, (a) her current boyfriend was in analysis with Willie Last and (b) she was seeing a shrink too, her fourth this year, paid for by her most recent sugar dad, Irving Goldman, a hot-shot theatrical producer who subsidised her car, apartment and therapist—"a Harley Street *mishugenah* with a Schickelgruber moustache and the manner to go with it. *Oi gewalt, quel bore.*"

Lena thought psychoanalysis was a big joke, but she didn't want to cross Irving, the latest in a long line of authority figures starting with a soldier father killed at Stalingrad and which included even me. "Except for dad all Jewish, like I'm trying to make up for Hitler."

Lena was a World War Two baby who somehow had survived the Dresden revenge bombing by the RAF and most of whose friends and lovers were Jewish. She hadn't lost her old habit of making compulsive jokes about her personal guilt for the Holocaust, which at first I didn't take seriously because, after all, she had been only five at war's end. Our great bond was that I'd once passed through her farm village. She idolised GIs. "You were all so tall and good-looking in your uniforms," she said. "Bloody great gum-chewing gods."

Of course I didn't remember Lena from all the other German urchins I passed out chocolate to, but I'd never forget our first meeting as grown-ups. During the first Aldermaston march I'd gone to sleep in Reading Town Hall, along with a hundred other ban-the-bombers, when this suede-coated girl with the sweetly swinging hips who I'd marched behind all day slipped into my sleeping bag. "They ran out of places to sleep upstairs," was all she said in a beguiling German accent. We didn't screw, mainly because she looked below consent age; in fact she was twenty but acted much younger, giggling a lot and starry-eyed over Elvis and The Pretty Things. Also she dressed in a casually expensive style that emphasised her slightly boyish youth. Upper-class Englishmen educated at all-male schools and Hampstead intellectuals with a thing about Germans usually went gaga over her.

Without marketable skills but with plenty of maiden charm, Lena was a kind of mascot-au pair to the NW3 literary and Central European crowds that hung around exile cafés like the Cosmos on Finchley Road. Her nanny jobs in liberal, affluent households had given her a cynical insight into London's middle-class trendies who boycotted South African sherry but were not above working her eighteen hours a day. "Some of your radical friends paid conscience money to bring the little Nazi girl over to re-educate her. Some education!" she mocked.

Rubbing shoulders with well-off intellectuals had given Lena a taste for the good life, not only sports cars and St. Laurent clothes but literature as well—especially the poet Sylvia Plath, a friend of some of Lena's patrons, who'd killed herself in London last year. "She really knew what it was like to hate a German father she'd hardly known." Almost offhandedly Lena

admitted to several suicide attempts lately. “Just artistic experiments—like some of Sylvia’s poetry,” she said. Then she brightened. “I almost forgot—I finally passed my O-levels!”

Could she, Lena asked, see more of me? “That is, if you’re not currently occupied elsewhere.”

I hesitated. She laughed at my discomfort. “Come on,” she giggled, “I’ve been waiting years for you and Coral to break up.”

Lena’s candour melted me. Had she been Sent to help me? (Her car would come in useful; I’d stopped driving after a smash-up in Indiana last year.) Or was she tempting me back to my corrupt, lazy old ways? I would test her.

I was already fully committed, I said firmly. To my Task. I’d renounced meat, partying and (hammering home the point) “desacralised” sex.

Lena’s first response was a spontaneous yelp of laughter. “Du? Of all people! *Du machst einen Witz!* What a waste!” My frown instantly sobered her, and she grew serious, like a chastened child.

This was my last chance. Only total mind-body discipline would get me There, to the peak of Mount Analogue. To get my point across I outlined a normal day. Come rain or shine, up to eighteen hours daily, I applied myself to deep meditation, headstands, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi, and translations of Inuit shamanic texts, and held my tantra breath up to three minutes. (“Gosh,” Lena said, “I’m a good swimmer and can’t do that.”) My diet consisted almost entirely of honey, herbal tea and nuts, and I used only distilled water so as not to adulterate the LSD. Evenings were spent at Clare Council or casting my I Ching. Since editors had grown tired of no answer at my telephone, fewer freelance jobs came my way. I almost never went out to films or plays anymore.

“And who supports you—the State Department?” Lena asked.

A little savings and royalties, I said. Anyway, I wanted—like Simone Weil and the worker-priests—to mortify my flesh by sharing the condition of the poorest wage slave.

Lena looked around my four-room semi-maisonette commanding a private key-only garden, my Heals deep-pile rug, Bang & Olufsson stereo in custom-built sideboard, inlaid teak typewriter desk, and white leather chairs, and said dryly: “Those worker-priests must live pretty good.”

I brushed aside her childish sarcasm to list my terms. Any woman who wanted to be at my side had to bind herself to certain rules:

1. No visits without prior permission.
2. No gossip about me with third parties (i.e. Irving).
3. No sex unless preceded by religious meditation and prayers.

Lena stared at me incredulously. “In other words, just to see you I have to enlist in your private army?”

Aptly put.

Sitting on my \$1,200 Indian-laurel and beige leather T-form couch, she poured herself a

stiff Glenfiddich, then slowly nodded. “Well, why not? Now that he’s got Willie Last, Irv finds me a little boring. Maybe helping a wandering Jew like you will get rid of my concentration camp nightmares.”

Ah. That was it. I had been Sent to help Lena.

We sealed our soldiers’ pact in bed—after meditating, of course.

Afterwards, she happily wandered into my kitchen to cook me a meal but couldn’t find anything in the cupboard except nuts and distilled water. “My God,” she exclaimed, “not even a piece of cheese for the mice. That’s crazy!”

Mad, I sternly amended, not crazy. But I couldn’t tell if she’d heard me.

As Lena chauffeured me to the first of many Clare meetings, I uneasily asked about Irving. She said, “Oh him, he’d give a million of his dollars to be in your shoes, Sid. Not because you’re sleeping with me—he’s so involved with Last he wouldn’t care if I fucked the whole regiment of Coldstream Guards. No, he’s dying to be invited to one of your Clare Council meetings.”

Several nights a week Lena dropped me at The Angel, Islington. It was (then) mainly a working-class area but with lovely Georgian houses tucked away in the side streets and squares. I waited till she drove out of sight then hurried along Upper Street beyond The Green, turned left and—to throw off would-be pursuers—backtracked along Liverpool Road past the Royal Free Maternity Hospital to Dudesley Square, nipping round the corner to Number 4 Crimea Street. You could spot Last’s house a mile away. Though one of a terrace of identical three-story detacheds, his was the only front garden so littered with kids’ toys and domestic junk. The peeling paint and uncared-for exterior stood out from the other, tidier homes like a huge welcome sign.

Always first to arrive, I banged the Buddha-shaped knocker on the door.

Normally, we Clare Councillors met behind locked sliding doors in the study-office Last shared with Dr. Petkin at the back of the house. Once, in an excess of feminist zeal, we invited the wives but that had proved abortive. Sybil Last, an attractive, haunted-looking woman, had sulked in a corner resentfully flipping the pages of *Woman’s Own* while loudly exchanging domestic complaints with Boris’ wife, long-suffering Viv, who kept applying cold compresses to her chronically migrained head. Now shooed upstairs, the ladies always left behind a truculent backwash of dirty dishes and nappies.

Whipped on by Last, who kept us lubricated on Scotch and coffee, we Clare members crashed through a seemingly impenetrable jungle of business agenda—the writing of by-laws, sponsor searches, finance reports, etc.—until, long past midnight, when we were looped on booze and exhaustion, Last would mercifully signal a break. Off flew his tie, jacket and ankle-high boots as he rolled his neck around his shoulders like an Olympic shotputter warming up. He blew through one nostril then the other and fixed us with a hooded, impish glare. “Ye’re dyin’ on yir feet, Brothers. Shall we dance?”

Sometimes till dawn we ‘danced’; that is, wrestled with Last’s consciousness-raising Zen

riddles, striving to ‘break through’—to where Con House’s Jerry Jackson and Herb Greaves already lived.

Q. Why did the peacock scream?

A. “‘Cuz naebuddy looked at him.”

Q. How do you fuck yourself?

A. “All too easily.”

And so on and so forth.

From word games we advanced to making faces at one another, then animal sounds. Braying, honking, baaing and mooing helped break down our middle-class defences—and often produced a sleepy, terrified child from upstairs or an irate neighbour’s phone call. BBC’s Davina was especially good at flapping her arms and screeching like a great angry bird.

“Tha’s th’ idea,” Last shouted. “Bein’ ridiculous is our secret weapon against schizophrenia!”

Returning to our human forms we’d sit in silent hand-holding meditation, until Last closed the meeting with a short prayer. To clear my head of cigar smoke and Sufi brainteasers I often walked down Pentonville Road to the St. Pancras Station taxi rank. But I never quite got rid of an optical illusion: two pairs of eyes, glowing with hostility, at the upstairs windows of Number 4 Crimea Street.

That was silly. Sybil Last and Vivienne Petkin had been asleep for hours.

It felt marvellous to be involved again, Not since the Aldermaston marches and New Left clubs had I felt that old go-to-meetin’ jolt, the long-absent joys of political communion. (Perhaps, like heroin addiction, passed through the mother’s umbilical cord?) I slipped back, hooked again.

To get to know my ‘Brothers’ better I did my Con House thing and rushed around taking their case histories for a book I called ‘Special File’. But when I approached Dick Drummond he just groaned and turned away, as he did whenever he saw me at King Edward; Boris looked down at me and said: “Piss off.” The non-medics were easier to talk to.

Alf was the group’s unacknowledged lynch pin. He kept the accounts, read the fine print, and tried to hold down Last’s more manic commercial fantasies. Having struggled up from being a semi-literate farm labourer to managing his own company, he believed he owed his life to Last. His own life had been a rural horror tale. After he had almost brained his mother in a homicidal rage and then botched his own suicide-by-drowning, a Dorset magistrate committed him to the mental hospital that Dr. Last worked in. “The first doctor I saw was Willie. He looked down at me and said, ‘Och mon, she probably deserved it.’ It was like getting a Royal pardon.” Last heavily depended on Alf’s quiet business skills and tolerant,

understated personality. “The thing is, Willie needs me now at least as much as I used to need him. Without someone like me to kick around what would he do to himself?”

Major Straw’s twenty years as a professional soldier I gleaned mainly from his dyspeptic, right-wing outbursts. “Turns your stomach, doesn’t it, old man. All those ban-the-bloody bombers and lying Whitehall politicians with their Russki-lovin’ trollops. I didn’t enlist after the Munich betrayal in order to see Yid bankers like Rothschild—pardon me, Sid—sell this country to the Americans—no offence, Brother. Or force our empire kith and kin to kiss the black arses of mission niggers like Banda and Kenyatta. Was it all for nothing at Arnheim and Cassino, then?” After distinguished service in World War II, followed by Far East anti-terrorist operations and with the Gloucesters in Korea, Tony Straw had been a staff officer at the Suez invasion. “Dammit, we almost grasped the nettle there,” he said bitterly. “Pity your John Foster Dulles had to stab us in the back for a few New York Jew votes.” He sighed. I suppose you’re a bolshie too, like Boris. Hunted you fellers with the Seventh Gurkhas in Malaya. Oh well, as Willie says, it’s all the same at the centre of life’s great mandala.”

I was beginning to find Davina the most likeable and candid member of the group. “If you had met me B.W.—before Willie—I would have given you the cold shoulder for asking such intrusive questions, Sid. It’s simply not done in my circle.” If not quite top drawer, the Mannix-Lloyds of Tunbridge Wells were still posh enough to be received at the Palace. “Daddy went there to collect his Order of the British Empire for services to banking and the Conservative party. Mummy lives for Crufts when she can show off her Corgis once a year. I’m the family tearaway.” Educated to do nothing but marry well, Davina had fought for the simple right to work—which she won only by compromising with her parents and agreeing to “come out” as a deb. After six years at Benedene, an exclusive girls’ boarding school where she played field hockey well enough to get into the Wembley Girls Finals, and a few more years at the BBC, which kept her in the ghetto of “women’s programmes,” Davina was overjoyed to be in Last’s male-dominated group. “It’s rather like being in a harem with the ratios reversed, isn’t it?”

Because Boris’ background was so much like mine, I had another go at him. But he just stared coldly at my notebook and snarled, “Are you making a copy for the FBI?”

Davina asked, “You’re so awfully keen to pump us, Sid. What’s your, er, angle?”

Hoping to build bridges, I told them all about my aches and pains, the bust-up with Coral, and my search for a fresh subject that would get me over the hump to my next book. Boris, the ex-Communist, affected dismay. “So it’s not the schizophrenics you want to help—only yourself?”

Before I could defend myself Last jumped in. “Come off it, Boris. Brother Sid’s literary narcissism an’ eggstainshul rootlessness are th’ best possible bona fides fer th’ long struggle ahead. Scattiness may be his particular form of the Gaw’dhead.” I wasn’t sure I liked being ‘helped’ with veiled insults, but Last mollified me by taking me aside in a friendly way. “Don’t let Boris git yir goat, Sid. He’s prawbly a wee bit jailus of our bacon an’ eggs.” It was our code word for LSD, about which the group had mixed feelings. Half scandalised, they also

envied my acid relationship with Last, our playful little winks and nudges and in-group jokes. (“I had a heroic breakfast yestidday of double rations of bacon an’ eggs an’ hardly any tomatoes.”) Only Boris strongly objected.

“Com-Brothers!” he glowered. “How can we demystify capitalist irrationality if we ourselves are always pissed out of our minds?”

Boris’ thunder fell on increasingly deaf ears because once the Clare Councillors saw how acid gave me a privileged position they fell over themselves to try it. (Only Davina loyally abstained, the better to serve us as ‘sitter.’) Poor Alf upchucked on his, but Dick Drummond and Major Straw were soon buzzing the chemical heights like true barnstormers.

Last’s amusement at their first clumsy trips was tempered by a nagging worry. Despite all his precautions—the adolescent code, secret rendezvous and his insistence that only he carry the LSD vials—what if a scandal-mongering newspaper exposed him? (BEATNIK DOCTOR IN DRUG ORGY WITH PATIENTS) “Th’ bureaucratic old turds”—he meant his disciplinary body, the General Medical Council—w’d love nuthin’ better than to nail me up on th’ cross of ‘professional misconduct’—jes’ like yir Yankee fuzz crucified that other Willie.” The martyrdom and death in prison of Wilhelm Reich, the pioneering sex-and-energy therapist, haunted him. Last constantly reminded me that my slightest false move could ruin him—and then he’d pointedly add: “But don’t forget, kid, if my life’s in yir hands, vice versa.” Each of us had the power to destroy the other: I by going berserk and denouncing him as the author of my madness, he by certifying me into a lunatic asylum. This “balance of terror” kept us honest, he claimed. “Y’know, like Billy th’ Kid an’ Doc Holliday holdin’ cocked Colt .45s at each other’s heads.”

His brutal frankness charmed away any suspicions I had that Last and the other doctors had “disaster insurance” denied to me; that in a pinch they could duck for cover. In previous movements I’d always kept an eye out for the comrades who could afford to be super-radical because buffered by family money or social influence. The really nice thing about Clare Council appeared to be the equal sharing of risk between medics and non-medics alike. Nothing that Alf, Tony, Davina or I might suffer seemed anything like the awesome power of the General Medical Council to banish our three doctors into professional outer darkness. “Boris, Dick an’ me’re human mine detectors in th’ no-man’s-land of schizophrenia. One misstep an’ BLAMMO!”

Clare Community Council was the anti-world to the medical Establishment. This enemy was a shadowy, all-powerful élite which through the British Medical Association, General Medical Council and other professional policing bodies of doctors—controlled the minds and bodies of fifty million Britons. The difference between State and private medicine was less than it seemed; in fact, the National Health Service, which I’d always regarded as the pearl of England’s welfare society, was a greater medical tyranny. Superficially progressive innovations, such as open-door wards and group therapy, were mere fig leaves to disguise the system’s totalitarian brutality. Even clinical liberals like Maxwell Jones, R.D. Laing and David Cooper were mere “window dressin’.”

If all that was true, why did Last stay in such a rotten set-up? I asked.

He easily sneered at his participation in “th’ maidental game.” “But by th’ time I woke up I was in too deep. Ye’ve got to work somewhere.”

Shouldn’t radical doctors work in the National Health Service rather than private practice, which catered to a rich minority of patients?

“As Lenin told us, Brother Sid, th’ real revolutionary will exploit all th’ enemy’s contradictions.” Though Last agreed that the State had spent a lot of money and time training him, fairly early in his career he had had to “go private” for the tactical flexibility it gave him. “And the lolly,” Boris bluntly added. (Last and Petkin funded their family research with fees from private patients like Lena’s Irving. On his own, Boris held a free psychiatric clinic in his old Stepney neighbourhood once a week. Dick’s gilt-edged income left him freer to remain a State employee.)

Last chuckled bleakly. “Anyway, private work minimises th’ harm we do. We see fewer patients.”

Last’s refusal to give up his despised medical identity he justified in terms of *realpolitik*. A credentialed professional carried more weight than a layman in the campaign to penetrate official medical lethargy. In his lexicon this was a ‘combined ops’ in which the three doctors, or ‘Officers,’ were ‘point men,’ while us non-coms were ‘coverin’ fire,’ guerrillas striking at the very heart of the system. (He sometimes compared us to Fidel’s *compañeros* and Chu Teh’s Eighth Route Army during the Long March.) But until ready to mount a ‘credible major offensive,’ we would cloak our deeper, more mystical aims in a ‘tactical smokescreen.’ Hence, no wild and woolly frontal assaults, no inflammatory oratory that might scare off potential angels.

Such pussyfooting (we used to call it ‘Aesopianism’) had confused our old movement far more than it had given us useful allies, I reminded Last in a meeting. I hadn’t come to Europe to lie for yet another cause.

As one man the Councillors went all silent and cold. Narrowing his eyes, Dr. Last puffed hard on his cigar. Then, softly but with spine-chilling finality: “I ken how our prevaricatin’ must stick in yir craw, Sid. Ye probably had to do more’n yir share of belly-crawlin’ an’ arse-lickin’—objectively necessary, of course in Joe McCarthy’s America, eh? I wouldn’t blame ye fer droppin’ out of th’ Brotherhood.”

Stunned, I protested I didn’t want to resign. Then they went after me in full cry. Dick Drummond got in first by sternly suggesting that I’d benefit from a close study of the anti-Nazi resistance in Germany for whom lies and subterfuge had been essential to survival. And did I think I was more ‘authentic’ than Jean-Paul Sartre who had demonstrated the ultimate in existential good faith by defending Soviet labour camps even after the facts were known?

I pointed out that the comparison between ourselves and the German anti-Nazi underground was wrongheaded. British social democracy, as flabby as it was, wasn’t fascism. And as far as good and bad faith went, the American Communist Party had degenerated more from its own self-delusions than from FBI persecution.

Before a good argument could develop Last suddenly offered to resign. “Th’ implication

seems clear from what ye're sayin', Sid, that I'm leadin' ye all into moral quicksand. Perhaps I'm th' one who should go."

This put me up a tree, with accusations whistling about my ears, Boris rumbling and raging old anti-American resentments. "Easy enough for you to be simon-pure in another man's country—why not go back and try it in your own?" His radical veneer falling away to reveal a bilious patriot. "And anyway, where the hell were you Yanks when the bombs were failing on London—poofing around in your Cadillacs and getting fat on munitions contracts, no doubt?" "Hear! hear!" echoed Major Straw who, in the welter of existential argot, had been quietly starving for an issue he clearly understood.

Nobody came to my defence. I didn't like the odds.

Last magisterially raised his hand to quiet the angry voices. "Aw, th' poor laddie meant no real harm," he smiled supportively at me. "Brother Sid is gittin' so close to th' Light he occasionally loses his earthly bearing. Right, kid?" (Though I was two years older he always addressed me as his junior.) I grasped the lifeline he held out by nodding dumbly, gratefully, and slowly the group relaxed to let Last bind us up together again. Our tempers, he said, had been rubbed raw by "th' wounds of waitin'." Like Mao and Fidel in similarly fallow periods we had to learn to cultivate revolutionary patience, to use the present unproductiveness ("our Yen an' Sierra Maestra") to rethink tactics and gird for battles ahead. "Freud, Jung an' Harry Stack Sullivan might've been okay fer delayin' actions. But for th' close in knife work necessary fer our Great Leap For'ard, there's nuthin' to beat mind-commandos."

Us.

In this battle for the mind our heavy ammo was Last and Petkin's tape-recorded interviews with schizophrenics and their parents. Though I never was permitted to meet 'Judy S.', 'Ronald P.' and 'the Harrisons,' I knew they were living proof that schizophrenia didn't exist, except as a disorder of the whole family, a pathology of domestic murder that made living corpses out of guileless children. The key to the dominant bourgeoisie's death grip on our vitals was ... the Joneses next door. Since the enemy's secret weapon was a socially conditioned lie, liberation could be won only by confronting capitalism's joker-in-the-pack, the 'normal family.' "What holds the system together isn't so much fear or even intimidation," declared Dick. "It's love. So our main task, Brothers, is to demystify, in ourselves first and foremost, this degrading and enslaving myth. Love, Brothers, is the horrible beast that awaits us all at the end of the dark tunnel we're entering."

Of course. Why hadn't I seen it before? How often on a trip to Catford or Potters Bar I'd wondered what *really* went on behind the drawn curtains of the semi-detacheds my train zipped past. Last and Petkin's family studies tore the curtains aside—and not for England only. Why, their case studies might have come from Chicago, Leningrad or Timbuktu, Last said.

Zowie. I'd struck it rich again. Once *again* I'd found myself part of a small mobile cadre so strategically placed that a few clever men pressing on a weak point could overturn the whole system. Here was a power base beyond my wildest political fantasies. And this time we

wouldn't be held back by fellow travellers with minds of their own. Clare Council was so deeply rooted in the soil of schizophrenia, people whose psyches we were so tuned into (and anyway were so deranged), that we never needed to consult them.

How could we lose?

It all fitted superbly with post-Stalinist socialist humanism, Christian Marxism, existentialism, Freudian revisionism and even the later developments in Malcolm X's thought—all the recent trends.

It was an oddly familiar politics. Though the "medical context" was new, the tone rang sharply true to some earlier 'vanguard party'-type hustles. Including that old Movement axiom: trust your enemies but spit on your friends.

Clive Flynn, for example.

A middle-class drop-out with a Cambridge First in economics, he had been sent to us by his analyst (and Last's guru), Dr. Phineas Maud. Flynn was an angular, quiet man in his late forties who had quit a cushy job with the Foreign Office to teach himself carpentry, and his expertise was invaluable on house hunting expeditions. But at Clare meetings he refused to croak like a frog or waddle like a duck, just grinned sceptically and said little. ("Sheepish sort, wouldn't you say?" Boris whispered loud enough for Clive to hear.) Admittedly, it was pretty unnerving to flap your arms and goose-honk while Clive gazed quizzically over his pipe at you. This, together with his volunteering to work for Clare Council full time without pay, froze us. What was he up to?

At the meeting after Clive made his offer he was "interrogated," a mixture of court-martial and PhD viva voce Last had made each of us undergo. My own initiation into Clare Council had hinged on his single question: "If ye were a Partisan guerrilla on th' run how w'd ye dispose of a captured enemy soldier?" Thoughtlessly I had answered that I'd probably leave the German behind, alive. "An' endanger th' entire mission?" demanded Last almost failing me on the spot.

Now, faintly amused, Clive sat before us in the study of Number 4 Crimea Street.

Boris Petkin cleared his throat. "Clive, what's your commitment to the revolution of the mind?"

"The what?"

Boris repeated his question.

Flynn smiled and replied that he doubted if he was a revolutionist of any kind. "Least of all with anything as complex as the mind."

Dick Drummond asked his views on psychoanalysis.

Clive said, "I'm a pretty old-fashioned sort, really. With so many phonies and charlatans about these days, old Daddy Freud is more than enough for me to handle on a day-to-day basis."

Last steadily examined Clive through half-lidded eyes. *Here it comes*, I thought. "Tell us, man, if ye were a Partisan escapin' fr' th' Nazis ..."

Clive mulled it over. "The fact is," he finally said, "in the war I was a Special Forces bod.

Commando. Narvik, Dieppe, the Long Range Desert Group, pretty much the whole show. Once, on a Benghazi oil refinery raid, I had to dispatch a dozen or so rather dim-witted Italian pipeline workers who got in our way. Civilians. I personally shot them—and went into analysis as soon as I could afterward.”

Clive turned to Boris Petkin. “As for you: my commitment is to the human race. To help myself by helping others, mad or not. I suppose I’m what you might call an emotional liberal. You chaps have an intriguing idea which has a fifty-fifty chance. I’ve an independent income and I might be able to lend you a hand. It really doesn’t go much beyond that.” For good measure, he added that madness was an ugly business, often violent and unhappy, and we’d be well advised to keep in with the local police wherever we landed.

After a long uncomfortable silence Dr. Last told Flynn we’d let him know, and he left.

The first reaction of most Councillors was to dutifully place on record their admiration for Clive’s moral fibre, his frankness and honesty under fire. (Now he’s had it, I thought.) Then Boris waded in, verbal scalpel flashing. “Th’ bugger hoodwinked us,” he spat. “All that treacle about” (and here his gruff voice dripped sweet venom) “lovin’ th’ human race, the Errol Flynn stuff in the war, all the rest of his mealy-mouthed put-on. What crap!” Clive, he judged, was a weak-kneed dilettante playing at being a worker who would rat on us in a crisis. The historical tendency of the liberal heretic—did Boris look at me?—was to worm his way into the ranks of the Elect only to sell them out when the going got tough. “Flynn’s deaf to Prophecy and blind to Revelation, an existential washout, the very seed of corruption which if the Essenes had extirpated they’d be a living church today!”

(Why had Clive so upset Boris? Months later Davina confided: “The things Boris respects in me—my accent and private-school manners—he loathes in a man.”)

Pushed by Boris, the scales tipped against Clive. Drummond decided, “Simple honesty—as a phenomenological study of fascism shows—isn’t enough. Hitler wasn’t stopped with Social Democratic scruple and our English Weimar won’t be demystified by good intentions alone.”

Alf opted out, and Tony Straw wondered if we weren’t being a little harsh on a brother ex-serviceman. “But, on mature consideration, we might ponder whether one more of us might not capsize this frail little craft, eh fellows?” Davina demurely passed.

Not wanting to be the odd man out again, I kept my mouth shut this time.

Slowly, reflectively, Last rolled his head around his shoulders, a sure sign of deep cogitation. We waited for his judgment. Then: “Clive’s a better man than any of us, that was painfully clear. Th’ question is, is he *too* good? Was Jesus betrayed by an *honest* neurotic?” We mustn’t be hasty. In th’ meantime, to spare his feelin’s, wha’d’ye say we not invite him around—fer th’ time bein’ only, of course.”

We never saw Clive Flynn again.

More and more I detached myself from the strangeness of Clare meetings to the relative normality of my Heroic Task. No matter how late I got in from Clare meetings, sunrise found me in the black wool, floorlength cowed monk’s robe Coral had sewn for me my first English

winter. So costumed, I greeted the London dawn with deep Om's and Yoga pretzel bends. "I always wondered how saints got that look," Lena said from the bed. "It's because they're ruptured."

I hadn't expected her to fully grasp my work, but I was getting a bit annoyed with her little digs and wisecracks. However, she was shrewd enough to stop just short of outright insubordination—and anyway my little sergeant had her uses.

With Lena's slightly bemused help I reduced my flat to bare essentials. After giving away most of the furniture to the Salvation Army, I sealed up the master bedroom and study, then Lena and I covered front and back windows with double thick drapes to keep out light and sound. For a grand finale I junked the last reminder of Coral, her parting gift to me when I moved out of her ménage to a flat of my own: the secondhand king-size bed she and I'd slept in. "From now on you'll probably need this more than I will," she had predicted with a kind of sour triumph. Well, I'd show her that two could play at the game of sexual disillusionment. Henceforth, I'd use the floor as a pallet, just like a real monk. Watching the Borough dustmen hack up the ancient, broken-spring object, our crucible and battleground, and fling the pieces into the refuse lorry's saw-toothed grinder, I felt a great weight drop from my shoulders. Goodbye to the Nineteen Fifties.

"That's spring cleaning with a vengeance," said Lena.

In the following weeks I lost thirty more pounds on a diet of honey and nuts. The acid I routinely took hit my thinning frame with the force of a locomotive; my eyes sparkled behind Polaroids. An unbelievable mental clarity lit up the dark corners of my life as mail and milk bottles collected outside the hall door, the phone unanswered.

Lena fussed over me. "Eat, *liebchen*," she appealed. "How do you expect to get there—wherever it is—on an empty stomach?" She was starting to get on my nerves. Eat this, eat more, take your umbrella, sulking when I denied myself. Also, I noticed that whenever I fell off the Yoga wagon it was to gorge on Lena's delectable fondue. What was she up to?

My co-pilot, Last, said he recognised the syndrome. "Yeh, my wife Sybil pulls that stuff too, tryin' to slow me down wi' love. I call it Dharma-envy." Women, incapable of "climbin' th' Mountain," jealously kept men chained to base camp at ground level. But I must persist, he said. "Ye're like a plane flyin' over th' Atlantic tha's jes' passed th' point of no return. Abortin' now could be more dangerous than if ye pushed ahead to yir objective."

On returning home I told Lena I needed to fly solo for a while. "Why?" her eyes opened wide in hurt surprise. "What have I done except try to make it a little easier for you?"

Exactly.

Raising LSD fuel intake to 500 mg a trip increased my air speed and brought a renewed burst of power. Euphoria flooded my control panel as, in my snug Lena-less apartment, I noisily communed with the earth spirit Yetaita and Izanarni the death goddess.

"Say fella, what's going on up there? Sounds like a madhouse." Pete Rich, the songwriter who lived below, stopped me in the hall one morning. (Had he heard Cheddi Bumba scream last night?) Sorry, I mumbled, a friend had an epileptic fit. Next day Pete again waylaid me.

“Look chum,” he began, “don’t take this wrong. But me and the wife are worried about you. Are you okay?” He poked me in the ribs. “And how come we don’t hear so much of that ol’ choochoo train anymore?” (He meant my lovemaking bed crashing against his ceiling.) To change the subject I deftly lied and asked if he knew that our upstairs neighbour Susan VanOver was having an affair with the married dentist next door? “No! Really?”

I escaped this time. But for how long?

For the thousandth time, I checked my perimeter security inch by inch. Chubb lock and mortice (✓). Steel door prop (✓). Window bolts (✓). Optic peephole and anti-intruder grille for door (✓). Specially installed angled baffles to cushion my screams and grunts (✓). Yep, all in order.

Regents Gardens SW1 was nearly perfect cover for a soldier of the Light. A polyglot, mixed-class street practically within shouting distance of Buckingham Palace, it was a three-sided warren of bedsitters and converted flats rented to floaters, Italian waiters, East Indians, students, Irish workmen, petty hustlers and a few middle-class lumpens like me. I had the entire third floor of a stately old Edwardian house, one of several in the area still maintained by absentee landlords who had bought the leaseholds cheaply before the war. My downstairs neighbours, Pete and Marcia Rich, were a song-writing team forever at their piano; upstairs Sue VanOver, a law student, rarely was home. All around were busy shops, cinemas, after-hours clubs, laundromats. Charabanc buses for Victoria Palace’s long-running *Black and White Minstrel Show* and transient hotels catering to rail travellers kept the street loose and loud.

Half respectable, half occupied by ponces, racetrack touts and retired black marketeers, Regents Gardens had almost daily visits from police and firemen. Amid all the hubbub, foreign gabble and clanging fire engines who would hear my 2:00 a.m. birth cries?

Bella Fior.

“Sidney, you naughty boy!” she exclaimed when I groggily answered the door one late March morning. Pushing a home-baked cheesecake into my unwilling arms, the playwright Danny Fior’s wife strode inquisitively into the apartment and inspected my dark, now-barren place with hands on her ample hips. “They said you had the flu—not that you’d gone bankrupt as well!”

After I got rid of Bella, a faint anxiety set in. If the Fiors, who lived clear across town in Hackney, had heard I was “ill”, I’d better activate May Day Plan #1. I taped the windows airtight and thickly greased the water pipe running up from Pete Rich’s flat. Stepping past the soundproof drapes, I scattered pieces of broken bottles onto a wet cement base on my balcony. Pete, parking his Morris Minor below, looked up curiously. “See you’ve been reading all about these local break-ins lately,” he called. “Better safe than sorry, eh?”

To conform with Dr. Last’s policy of “purrchase in th’wurld,” I like to pretend I was my old normal self. For example, before making my daily pilgrimage to Vauxhall Bridge, to pray to Ennuge the river spirit, I always shaved and changed into Infidel (Burberry’s) garb. Friday

nights I warmed my regular seat at editor Rick Sadler's poker game in Chalk Farm, and on Last's advice forced myself to keep the increasingly rare business lunch date. Ugh. I didn't know which was harder to digest, Prunier's cuisine-coquilles St. Jacques á la Provençale, Lobster Newburg, etc.—or Fleet Street gossip. Who th' hail were The Kinks? Jean Shrimpton? All at once this kind of journalistic scuttlebutt made so little sense to me I figured it must conceal something more relevant, a secret code perhaps. Rick Sadler's constant moan "Oh Jesus, give me a hand I can do something with!" I read as a disguised call for help, and slipped him an acid tab under the table. When Vogue by special messenger asked me to contribute to a symposium, "Mary Quant and the New Morality," I replied with my first article in months, "The Meaning of Meaninglessness in Fashion and Mental Illness" (never printed). I did a Herb Greaves while lunching at Simpson's on the Strand with the literary editor of the *New Statesman*:

"Lessing's

No blessing

Braine's

On the Wain."

Trouble was, my media chums never were surprised by anything I did or said. "Didn't quite catch that, old boy" or "You're in jolly good form today, Sid" was all I ever got out of them. Half my colleagues were Fleet Street alcoholics in no shape to do a reality check on anybody.

Bluidy fyools.

All that Beatles' winter I worked to silence my life. I stuffed rags under the door cracks, slept true according to feng shui energy quadrants I'd found in an old Chinese Druid's manual on a Charing Cross bookstall. Sometimes, like Percy-the-radio, I wore earmuffs in the flat. Sure, it may have looked odd—but it was worth it, because things were so clear now. Nothing, I deduced, was as it seemed to be. (Relationships in Clare Council proved that.) The least significant event—the changing pattern of a drifting cloud, the route a dust speck took settling to the floor, the page a book fell open to when I slammed it against the wall—were parts of a Universal Jigsaw Puzzle I was on the verge of solving. (I thought in CAPITAL LETTERS now.) For the first time in England I felt my life to be in complete control. I was my own man again thinking strictly Bell thoughts. Never again would I be owned, by a woman or any other social tie.

And Willie Last was the door I'd open to find myself.

My gratitude to this tough, stammering, gentle Scotsman was almost infinite. Whenever I had doubts about the "inner voyage" he always reassured me: I wasn't going mad, *I was going sane*. I felt I'd walk—no, crawl—through hell for him. The least I could do was to show him my stuff as Clare's PR. man. But "tactical caution"—and the Medical Council's ban on

doctors advertising—short-circuited my finest efforts. “Er, ah, Brother Sid”—Last placed a fatherly arm around me—“yir latest press release describin’ our Centre as ‘the first genuinely marxist-leninist-maoist lunatic asylum’ is impressive as a personal statement. But don’t ye think ‘a revolutionary seizure of hospital power by a democratic dictatorship of exploited patients and militant staff’ prematurely exposes our battle strategy?” Reluctantly, on his orders, I watered down Last’s field communiques into bland press releases about “after care” and “research into community therapy.”

Even that wasn’t mild enough. Last deliberately skipped me when giving out assignments for our next group patrol, a deputation to the House of Commons.

“Hey, what about me?” I said.

He coughed and explained that I’d been put in “strategic reserve”. The group had decided (when? where?) I had ascended to a solar plane so rarified that I should not be expected to lower myself to the level of the Parliamentary hacks we had to deal with.

I was confused. What had I done wrong now?

Davina told me privately. Apparently I’d blabbed about pre-Minoan sacramental intercourse to a Bishop we were wooing. “And just imagine,” she said, “going on about Bantu rebirth rituals to Enoch Powell the notoriously racist Minister of Health.”

Like Jerry Jackson I felt like saying: did I really do that?

When I loudly protested my right to contribute, to pull my oar, Last diplomatically suggested that we hold our first formal election of officers, and on his wink the Brothers unanimously voted me Chairman of Clare Council. I had been kicked upstairs.

Dick Drummond congratulated me. “Naturally, Sid, we assume you’ll respect the parameters of our collective idiom and restrict communicating the modality of its totalised metanoia.”

Boris crisply translated: “He means shut your bloody yap before you get us all struck off the Medical Register.”

It was a Jewish hypochondriac’s dream. To ride the medical whirlwind with revolutionary Cossacks against all those Establishment quacks who had misdiagnosed, misprescribed and mistreated me all these years.

GER-O-NI-MO-O-O-o-o-o!

Days and Nights in Conolly House:] spring [

Before returning to the experimental unit known as ‘Con House’, or Temple of Consciousness (as I’d begun to think of it, I set my “innair life” in order. My rebirth scenario was plotted less by Sartre or Heidegger than by cheapo Monogram Pictures and Astounding Science-Fiction magazine. A million buried fragments of a youth misspent in schlocky movie houses or glued to radio serials and drugstore comics exploded up from my subconscious into an entirely new image of myself. He, this composite Sid Bell, was a pioneer ‘microbe hunter’, who would inoculate himself with the schizophrenic virus to find a vaccine for schizophrenia. (Paul Muni in Pasteur, Robert Montgomery in Yellow Jack). Before locating and destroying this deadly virus, I had to confront the monster in myself (any version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde), and if I survived find some way of transmitting this secret Secret to the sick masses. My perfect self-enclosed world at Regents Gardens SW1 had all the scientific precision of Flash Gordon serials. A religious framework I patched together out of hazily recalled bits of Native American lore from countless westerns somehow mixed up with ancient Egyptian rites (Boris Karloff in The Mummy).

All this I collected under the umbrella of my new job, Urban Shamanism.

“HEL-L-L-o-o-o there, Sid!”

This time Dr. Dick means *me*.

A.C. Corrigan, the Liverpool redhead, leans over to shake my hand. “Congratulations—and welcome to th’ club, whack.”

I’m in.

In monk’s robe, dark glasses and stocking feet I’m at the 10:00 a.m. community meeting in TV lounge. The boys—those who remember me, that is—are mildly surprised to see me back. Nodding at my shaman’s costume Jerry Jackson yawns, “Yeh, it *does* get kinda cold in ‘ere.” (The Administration still won’t repair any broken windowpanes on the principle that it might encourage the boys to smash them again.) Florid Barney Beaton, also in pyjamas, grinds his eyeglass Movietone camera at me, “Ho, it’s the old upstager himself! When’s the ice cream interval, Sir Laurence?” Longhaired Jeff H. hasn’t taken his eyes off me since I brought back for him an autographed photo of his idol (and my old college classmate), the movie star Jeffrey Hunter. He admires my outfit: “Terribly chic, m’dear. Didn’t I see the original in *Harpers Bazaar*?” Looking wilder than ever, Herb Greaves angrily bunches the monk’s cloth between his bony fingers and gives my elbow a hard pinch. Ow. I pinch him back which

seems to please him enormously. Lena dropped me too late last night for a proper recon, so I do one now. Statistically, not much change: a few boys gone, about an equal number admitted. Bit players I hardly recall from my previous visit have pushed reigning stars like Hurricane Hodge into the wings. All day I'm jostled 'accidentally' in the corridors by a big, blond, fiery-cheeked boy in white sweater, white duck trousers and white sneakers; even his neatly cut hair and pale eyes seem bleached. Derek Chatto, hitherto a shy, solitary chess player who blushes easily is "coming out" as Les calls it. He treads on my heels while addressing his pocket chess set whose peg-in-the-hole pieces are beautifully carved Chinese ivory miniatures. "All right, Botvinnik, you got yourself into that corner—now think your way out!" Or he punches me violently in the back: "Don't rook me, Bobby Fischer!" Derek sticks to me like glue till I spin about and deliberately move one of his chess pieces. He looks suspiciously at me, "Clever, Lasker—but not clever enough!" Like Herb Greaves he hates it if you try to get under his guard or 'understand' him prematurely. Lord knows what happened while I was gone to nudge him over the line from meek and mild to an angry, sex-hungry Groucho Marx. When he isn't crowding me he chases any passing female but backpedals in panic and hollers "Checkmate!" if Bronwen or Sally actually lets him grab her. That bulge under his white fly is a seemingly permanent erection.

Toward evening Derek's rage overflows, and he corners me against the TV set. "You, Mr. Bell! Write and lay famous women! What brings you here?" Jerry explains, "'e's 'ere recrutin' for 'is new mental circus." Derek's face lights up, and he leaps into the air, almost hits the ceiling with his head and comes down in an attempted split, legs spraddled. Miraculously, he breaks nothing, slinks off cupping his crotch and muttering, "Chess is my game, dammit."

On this, my second trip, there's a flukier feel with more randomly impulsive hitting. The warmer weather, thawing out frozen impulses, causes a severe crisis in some boys. Last week Percy-the-Radio slashed nurse Dave Foster with a broken milk bottle (the bandage is still on Dave's arm), and little Nigel Atkinson tried hanging himself while on home leave. The atmosphere has become so inflammable that Wally Walters has clamped a pair of Five & Dime toy handcuffs on his powerful hands, and Yorkshire Roy has buried his beloved knife in a garden halfway across the hospital.

What's going on?

At the dining room piano Herb Greaves bangs out part of the answer:

"Woe me
Mother Macree
Annoyed
Pretty Boy Floyd."

Translated: Clement Attlee Woodford is leaving Con House.

Like a mourner at his own wake Clem sadly confirms that he passed his university entrance exams which he'd half-hoped to fail and thus stay longer in hospital. But Cambridge has accepted him, and now a gorgeous shiner decorates his right eye. "When I told Roy I got

this grant to Kings College he slugged me and said it was just like a socialist to want to keep living off taxpayers like him.”

Around Clem’s departure boys and staff weave a thick web of fantasy, hatred, envy and hope. A few optimistic souls predict it’s an omen of a General Amnesty for schizophrenics, but most see it as a vague threat to themselves. Barney Beaton logically applies what he was taught in the family printing business. “We patients aren’t earning a sufficient return on investment to satisfy the Hospital Management Committee. So they get their foreman, Dr. Dick, to hire an American efficiency expert, Mr. Bell who recommends shop-floor redundancies starting with Clem. My father says small independent enterprises don’t survive at a time of mergers and take-overs.” Curiously, staff pick up on this, somehow seeing Clem going as evidence of Admin’s malice toward Con House. Even the normally pro-Establishment Sally Peel says, “They’re picking us off one by one. Salami tactics, slice by slice.”

But the most immediate casualty is Robin Ripley.

A Clean Well-Lighted Place

Robin hasn’t been seen in Con House for over a week. “Dunno why,” says her friend Jack Sweeney. “When I told her Clem was leavin’ she jus’ turned pale all over and belted me one.”

As Jack and I cross King Eddie’s silent, immaculate lawns, I ask why his knuckles are bleeding. He smiles shyly. “I git these fits, see? Jaisus Christ jumps outta th’ bushes—or up th’ toilet spout for a little natter. Sometimes at night a big brown beast forces me tuh swallow him. Then he starts roarin’ an’ wantin’ tuh git out. I git so scared I smash windows.” Or, I think, Hurricane Hodge’s prowlike, provocative chin. Jack, a shy sweet Tipperary ex-altar boy with a heart-stopping soprano, is part of the hospital’s ‘Irish Mafia,’ mainly youths who cracked up while working as labourers on English construction sites. They meet Sundays after Mass for ‘music mornings’—the basis of Hurricane’s anti-IRA delusion. Jack’s closest English friend is Robin, for whom he is a kind of substitute husband. Though they’re always battling and making up like an old married couple, he insists there’s nothing sexual only “best mates.”

You can’t just stroll unannounced into Pankhurst Ward, a tidy brick building with plastic boxes of flowers spaced precisely along sills of glistening, intact windows. First Jack has to press an outside buzzer, which summons a black starched nurse who peers at us through windowed double doors and lets us in only after we drop our names and home ward on a piece of paper through the mail slot. Then, once inside, she writes down our identities in a book hanging from a wall chain and turns us over to another Omo-laundered nurse who, clearly disapproving of us and the person we are visiting, wordlessly escorts us along a dead-quiet corridor smelling of wax finish. Our unnaturally loud heels leave visible scuff marks on the sparkling floor lino. What a nice contrast with Con House, is my first impression. (I forget just how offended by the boys’ crappy habits I really am.)

Pankhurst Ward is a doctor's dream. So silent, so clean. I've been in louder morgues. (And what a contrast, too, with Female Admissions which, when I saw it, was full of cursing, shouting women exploding with a lot more energy than I saw in Male Admissions.) We pass several doorless rooms whose beds would win gold medals at the hospital-corner Olympics. The mannequin-like patients, in frilly dresses or nightgowns, are glassy-eyed on drugs, and seem more a function of their tightly made beds than they're real human beings. "Jaisus preserve me," Jack crosses himself, "I t'ought sure they wuz wax dummies at first."

With a double set of keys the nurse opens a door and, after we're in, locks us inside a room with Robin. A grey blanket covers her up to her thin, marble-white face looking even paler under the orange-red pageboy bob with fringe she has cut and dyed her hair into. She turns sleepy pain-filled eyes to us. "Oh, H'lo Jack, what's Mister Writer doin' in drag?" (I'm in my urban shaman's robe.) Jack and I take turns cheering her up. "Guess I had a fit," Robin says. "Kicked matron in the bum, broke the ward telly and bashed in some windows—a regular Con House do," she wanly smiles. "Don't remember much, really. Dr. Goldstein says Clem's th' reason. His exact words were that I'm re-enacting my traumatic exclusion from the primal scene attributable to rejection by my surrogate brother." Painfully she withdraws her arms from under the blanket: they're heavily taped to the elbows from having been slashed with a razor blade. "Me, I'd say it was spring fever."

After Robin dozes off Jack and I wait to be let out, then creep from dust-free, spick-and-span Pankhurst Ward and almost run for our lives back to scruffy, dirty, smelly old Con House.

Praise God, She Will Protect You

The more I see of Con House the greater my admiration for Dick Drummond's brand of horse sense. Wisely, he selected male patients with an eye to balancing off serious psychotics against less disturbed cases, and King Eddie's rigid segregation of sexes he has tried to outwit by recruiting three women who are as different as chalk from cheese.

Bronwen Meg-Owen Jones—the social worker—is forever lost in spiritual mists due to overidentification with Con House's most backward types. "She's got th' schizophrenic bends—a condition brought on by staying in too long beyond her depth," says O'Brien a little uncharitably. Sometimes, after coughing her lungs out in empathy with black Abe or rocking for hours along with Gareth, she is so smashed that they must help her into a chair. Ex-Cardiff CND, ex-Free Wales Army and Royal College of Nurses dropout, Bronwen is a glory hunter seeking her lost self in the murky waters of other people's problems. Every time her fiancé, Dr. Lewis Singh, a King Edward therapist, tries to fish her out she takes it as a personal affront. "Oh Sid"—she takes my hands in hers while pressing her body against mine—"Lewis thinks Con House will kill our love. How can he be so paranoid?"

Sally Peel, the bouncy, full-breasted occupational therapist, admires her colleague's sombre commitment. "Bron's serious. All I ever do is mess about and drink tea." Gallons of it, lubricating her shrieking, schoolgirlish laughter as she comfily sits, short plump legs tucked

under her, knitting absentmindedly or gossiping with the boys who crowd around for a quick peep down her cleavage. (I saw one boy actually burst into tears at the sight of her Venus-like breasts.) Sally, a Cheltenham Ladies College graduate and the debby daughter of a Hampshire stockbroker, is the least likely candidate for schizophrenic work. Her life utterly changed course the day Dr. Dick spotted her ladling soup to a back ward of chronics. "There I was, all lah-de-dah and Voluntary Aide," she recalls. "Dick just grabbed my hand and practically dragged me over here by the hair and shouted, 'Invent yourself!' I felt like a starlet he'd just discovered." In time Con House transformed this prim fixture of Young Conservative dances into a lazy, sexy female presence who is content endlessly to gaze into the fire and do absolutely nothing. "I keep telling my husband it's an acquired skill." More than any doctor's therapy, Sally's easy somnolence hones the edge off many a boy's guilt and self-hatred about being in a mental hospital. Unlike Bronwen she instinctively respects the line between sane and insane, and the whole idea of a 'schizophrenic voyage' makes her giggle. "I'm rather afraid I keep thinking of it like a day trip to Calais, all under-done sausages and seasickness. I'll wait on the quayside, thank you all the same."

Around 5:30p.m., when Sally and Bronwen clock off, *Robin Ripley* punches in—literally. Wham, sock! Anyone from her romantic fantasy of what a proper gentleman is gets a taste of her knuckles. The worst crime in Robin's book is not the boys' feebly groping hands or their attempts to steal a kiss in the darkness of the TV room. Their real sin is introspection. "Thinkin' again, Jack? Disgustin'." Pow! All her life Robin has secretly battled against the odds—a violent father and a compliant but covertly hostile mother; a crossdressing brother who killed himself; a minor form of epilepsy and an early forced abortion—to define her own stubborn idea of the feminine role. "I'm an inbetween, I guess. Only wish I liked girls as much as I dislike boys." Though not by temperament a rebel, she is forced to rebel against stereotype-wielders who hold a knife to her throat, sexually speaking. Violently anti-establishment in Pankhurst Ward, she is passionately conformist in Drummond's. Is she schizophrenic—or has the best of both worlds? From somewhere inside the eye of the bisexual hurricane she lays about with her fists like a modern Boadicea working out her problems on the captive, willing boys who can never quite measure up to her Victorian standards of gallant chastity. Strangely, the boys didn't seem to mind. She is Con House's most consistent female support, and they love her for sticking with them into the midnight furies. After which she'd bash anyone who even suggested she stay the night—a proud honour guard of Con Housers led by Jack Sweeney escorts her back to Pankhurst Ward. "Thanks fellas," she whispers as they shove her through a ground floor window. "Sleep tight. Don't let the psychiatrists bite."

Spring in Conolly House is sad, fine lightening. With everybody's young sap rising, our shoulders unhunching from the long grey cold, more fights (rarely serious), more broken windows. Days longer, nothing to do. Goaded beyond endurance by Dr. Dick's permissive regime, more or less undrugged, the Conolly boys try holding it in. Sometimes successfully, causing month-long depressions. Or letting it drip, seep, trickle out, Darting, paranoid, furious. At times I think the unit will lift off hospital grounds like a

maverick rocket. And fly to where?

But (even in the spring) it's mostly 'contained.' "And that, my old mate," says O'Brien, "is what's commonly known as the double bind."

Bull Session

Sex, like a stray hand grenade, rolls around Con House; it fizzles and sputters, daring the boys to pick it up. No one does directly. Instead, the itchiest spirits, magnetised by my shamanistic come-on and my ambiguous relationship with Dr. Dick, congregate in my room. Between midnight and dawn I professionalise their jitters.

S. BELL

Chinese Spoken Here

reads a joke card someone's tacked to my door.

Does Dr. Last get such problems? I can handle the more down-to-earth complaints—Social Security foul-ups, gripes about the food or Bob Featherstone's fear of losing his brewery job if the boss finds out where he goes home after work. Other worries are trickier. Jerry wants to know how to curb his Jesus highs. (Wally Walters advises, "Try Bromo Seltzer.") Yorkshire Roy, tight with Clem Woodford till I came on the scene, wonders if alien Americans—"no names, no pack drill"—can be sued in British courts for stealing a person's best friend. ("Only if there were children born of the union," cracks A.C.) Jeff H. is furious because the hospital newsletter rejected his short story, "*Arf'n 'Arf*", about homosexual dogs. Someone asks if kissing another man causes cancer. And Percy-the-Radio, now back from the violent wing for attacking a nurse, needs advice on how to word a High Court petition demanding compensation from his mother for "attributing her delinquency to a minor."

The common denominator in this complex algebra of mangled Scripture, castration fantasies, tittle tattle from outer space and repressed sadomasochism, is ... sex. The same obsessions that I feared would drive me mad at their age have actually pushed them over the line. I was saved by masturbation and a street tradition of bravura confession ("Hey, lemme tell ya about this wet dream I had last night!"). But almost all the Con House boys I've spoken to grew up as private adolescents outside the sanity-saving circle of curbside confidences. Few of the boys have had any real sexual experience apart from flirting back at their mothers and occasional encounters with a prostitute. But they cannot fool me. Behind their demonic sex fevers lurks an even deeper hunger, an unconscious longing to be adopted into the Cosmic Brotherhood, to become Men (not children) of Light. So I tell them stories from my bedroom past, an adaptation of the Igluic technique for initiating young warriors. For the first few years of adult screwing, I say, I always shouted "Mama!" during climax, and often mind-killed my father before he actually died. They look relieved.

But, I say, the problem starts *before* birth.

I was a sailor with Columbus, I insist. A Stone Age pterodactyl, a Cathar monk. A.C. and I first met while labouring under huge back packs in Hannibal's Alps-crossing army. Until nearly dawn, my face set like Last's, I hold them raptly describing my LSD primal scenes. I've been a midget elephant, climbing up the slippery slopes of my ma's vagina, ejaculating through my baby trunk. Then a wee-wee bird, stuck into my ma's ass on her Great Bird Flight over prehistoric Earth. Then my pa laying into my ma who cursed him for not being a good enough provider.

"So ye see," I conclude, "*it's natcheral tae want tae fuck yir maw.*"

Shocked silence. Their embarrassed eyes avoid mine. Then Derek Chatto shouts angrily, "Knight into Queen won't go!" Nigel slips out blushing. Jeff H. (born Bernie Mendelson) rocks back and forth moaning "*oi, oi, oi.*" Jerry Jackson scratches his chin vehemently. "Oh no," he cries. "Oh no, no, no." He laughs against his will. "Ya creepin' soddin' bugger, ya." He too runs out.

Only A.C. remains. He fixes me with a sceptical eye. "You go easy on that stuff, Sid. Roman officers *never* carry their own baggage."

Brass

"Good Lord-HEL-L-L-o-o-o there!"

Never have I seen Dr. Dick or his staff move so fast. They're on their feet in nothing flat scrambling to find chairs conventional enough for two middle-aged ladies to use. The community meeting has been gate-crashed by a couple of the leading lights of the much-feared Hospital Management Committee.

The women slip into their seats with the ostentatious humility of visiting royalty. Which, in a sense, they are. Management committees, composed of doctors and lay members, rule the hospital roost, if only by their enormous powers to strip patients of their freedom for long periods. They're drawn from the same upper middle-class stratum—and as mysteriously appointed—as England's magistrates. (In fact, they're sometimes one and the same person.) O'Brien says that the civilian committee members, far from checking the power of hospital bureaucrats, dance to the psychiatrists' tune and do exactly what's told them. "Odd people. They're not in it for the money, just the itch to dominate other people's lives. Pardon me, to 'serve.'"

We know from the way the visitors don fixed nervous smiles that they've heard about us and expect trouble. Clearly they disapprove of Con House but are doing their utmost to conceal it. Mrs. Fiona fFlytch-Fraser is buxomly armoured in a beige tweed suit of a style much favoured by the Queen, a Toryturban puce velvet hat, expensive leather handbag and rhinestone brooch fastened to her lapel like a regimental badge. (I've seen her before in the Assembly Hall distributing prizes to long-stay patients and hoping she'd see them again next year.) A local justice of the Peace, she is much called upon to do voluntary work among the less fortunate. From her general bearing I expect her to bark, "Troops at ease!" Her co-committee woman is Dr. Ethel Primrose, a consultant psychiatrist at King Eddie.

The boys sense the women's unfriendly vibrations and put on a gratuitous display of their worst traits. Abe, happening into the TV lounge for a rare visit, is the perfect patsy: black and withdrawn. "How come we let th' nigs come over 'ere for cheap nervous breakdowns on our National 'ealth?" rhetorically asks Jerry. "Blasted wogs," chimes in Barney, "rape our women, inflate our crises. We fought at Allah-mangle and Dumb-cork for the right of freeborn English yes-manry to take a pee in private. Now the golliwogs are trying to do it for us." A suggestion by Wally that all blacks be sent back to their native jungle is heartily seconded by others. Abe, apparently unhearing, drifts out again; moments later we hear him coughing louder than ever upstairs.

Mrs. fFlytch-Fraser and Dr. Primrose glance inquiringly at Dr. Dick but cannot find any overt sign of disapproval in his poker face. Offended to the quick of their liberal souls, they nod to each other, as if to say: what else can you expect from a doctor who runs a place like this? Dr. Primrose nervously fingers a stethoscope hanging down her starched white uniform jacket as if it was prayer beads. "Your little community seems rather disturbed today, isn't it, Dr. Drummond?"

"Oh, do you think so," Dr. Dick rolls about in his gold monogrammed chair, in agony or jollity it's hard to say. "Or is their disturbance a consensual expectation of projected corporate violence?"

A great cheer goes up. One for our side.

Sensing that with a little effort they can unnerve our guests, some boys duly act out the committee women's expectations of them. Jerry pretend-masturbates in his pyjamas while giving himself detailed landing instructions. "A little to th' right, no a bit higher, ya're undershootin' ..." Derek Chatto throws his pocket chess set at the women, "I'm fed up, you play with my things." Mrs. fFlytch-Fraser is so fascinated by Jerry's obscene performance that she forgets to duck and almost has her hat knocked off by Derek's missile; Dr. Primrose discreetly wiggles her chair against the nearest wall—a staff reflex, I've noticed.

This is Eric Raw's big chance. Since my last visit he's been wasting away for lack of nourishment and a fresh audience, and now he suddenly appears in tattered pyjamas and flops his ninety-five-pound cadaver at the visitors' feet. "Shadow of his old self," he whines, "what's to become of poor Eric?" Dr. Primrose refuses to look at him; instead she tries to keep her annoyance at bay with a heavy joke aimed at another boy. "You there—water is free. When did you last wash?" But Eric isn't having it. He pushes himself up from the floor almost into the doctor's lap. "It's all my fault, isn't it?" he demands.

Dr. Primrose's leg jerks away from Eric's touch, and her eyes rove all over the room. Finally she bursts out: "And when did this patient have a meal last, Dr. Drummond?"

Calmly, Dr. Dick explains that Eric's prolonged hunger strike, like Nigel's famous thirty-day snooze, is an attempt to transport himself existentially beyond self-consuming guilts. Also, Eric is deluded that the hospital food is faeces and therefore unfit to eat. "ol' bag-o-bones ain't so crazy," interjects Jerry, "'e's prob'ly savin, 'is life by not eatin' th' grub 'ere."

Dr. Primrose sharply reminds Drummond that his first duty is to his patients and not to a general theory of anti-therapy, but when she continues to talk about Eric without ever looking

at him, he grabs her hand. "Sailfish buoys always end up nailed on someone's wall, don't they? Not that I'm complaining, mind. I've had more than my share of ECT and blancmange." Failing to get a response, he ups the ante by thrusting an invisible object under Dr. P's thin suspicious nose. "Ha ha," he chuckles, "you didn't think I could make Bronwen pregnant, did you? Blamed it on poor impotent Clem." Even when he holds the empty air like a huge, unconscious cock aimed at Dr. Primrose's stomach, amazingly she won't look at him. He recoils. "What?" his voice harshly ventriloquises to middle age. "Don't you know how hard your father and I worked to feed you. Going without, using our entire sugar ration in the war to keep our little Eric in sweets." Suddenly he screams at her: "DON'T PLAY WITH THE SAUSAGE—EAT THE BLOODY THING!"

That's more than enough for her. She points her stethoscope at Dr. Dick like a pistol and her voice has an edge of angry hysteria. "If that unfortunate boy"—looking at Dick, not Eric—"isn't given proper treatment he may die. And this hospital, not your so-called community, will be financially liable in a court of law." Barney says, "I knew in the end it would come down to dolours and sense."

Rather than lose control altogether—which presumably would drag her down to the patients' level—Dr. Primrose announces she has other wards to visit this morning, and she and Mrs. fflytch-Fraser backpedal out to cries of "Wot about th' grub, then?" and "Are ya 'ere only for th' beer?" But the English upper class hasn't ruled for a thousand years for nothing. From the safety of the doorway Mrs. fflytch-Fraser flings us a regal smile. "Terribly ni-ahse of you to have us."

"Satisfaction, Jackson!" replies Jerry. "Come back with your problem any time."

After the visitors flee, Vince, the 'deaf' klepto who has been lolling near Dr. Primrose's handbag slung over a chair, delightedly opens his hand to inspect a five-pound note he's surprised to find there.

"Well, it might have been worse," says Sally at staff meeting.

"Sure," agrees Dave Foster. "Eric could've cut his throat all over Dr. Primrose's uniform."

Things are coming to a head, I'm told. The Management Committee's visit is just the latest incident in a campaign by Admin to subtly harass Drummond, to drive yet one more nail into Con House's coffin. Bronwen ventures they've weathered such storms before: "Con House is safe as long as the hospital still needs a scapegoat unit." O'Brien grunts sceptically. "Ever drive on an expired license? Very nervous making."

Les Talks

"Sure, they used to think th' sun shone out of our arseholes. That was when we took in all their dirty human wash—the intractables the other wards couldn't handle. But now th' novelty's worn off. We cause too many headaches." He looks around., "And we ain't exactly a united front in here either."

How, I ask, do similar therapeutic communities make out? Les says that Maxwell Jones'

psychotic unit at Henderson is allowed to function almost independently of its parent hospital, Belmont. “And I don’t give you a plugged tanner for David Cooper’s Villa 21 once he gets to our stage.”

The crux, as always, is the knot that staff gets tied into. “On the one hand our patients imply, ‘Go mad, be one of us, otherwise you’re useless.’ On the other, they tell us explicitly, ‘Stay sane, go on playing at staff, otherwise you can’t protect us.’ Talk about double binds!”

Staff bind is only one of the mutually inhibiting relationships set in motion by Con House. “We may see ourselves as an oasis of sanity in a desert of medical ignorance. But we’re still connected to this hospital by a thousand ties of salary, promotion, law. Just plain proximity. We can’t belch without instant repercussions elsewhere.” Ripples of anxiety starting in Con House—a broken window, a dirty floor or fist fight—are like a tidal wave when they hit the doors of the Chief Nurse and Divisional Heads, Les says.

“And y’know, sometimes I actually feel sorry for th’ brass. We ain’t no tonic for their nerves. Staff *and* patients, they couldn’t care less about Dick’s schizophrenic voyage. As if just bein’ in a loony bin wasn’t hard enough. People here want a rest, not a revolution. In case you’ve not noticed, most patients are conditioned by us to think they’ve ‘broken down,’ like an industrial machine. Or else are suffering from a mysterious, unpredictable disease called mental illness. So naturally, it’s a miracle, owed mainly to the tender loving care of doctors and nurses, when they’re ‘cured.’ I’ve never seen anyone so grateful as patients who have let us bombard them back to normality with ECT and pills.

“The ‘mad’ are far more terrified of themselves than of us white-coated figures who soothe and comfort them. Having been trained to turn their mental guns on themselves they fire away dutifully until the pain gets too much—which is when we get them. Our job is to make them more efficient anti-self gunners: relax them, clear their heads, set them up again to be their own clay pigeons. That’s ‘mental health.’”

Silent throughout Les’ monologue Dick Drummond suddenly slams his fist on the desk. “WHAT IS THE BLOODY POINT?!” Con House, he shouts, must be returned to a saner, more structured day. As of this moment there will be compulsory cleaning, compulsory reveille and locks on all the doors. “And Eric will start eating if I have to shove it down his throat myself.”

Staff members nod knowingly at Dick’s outburst—and ignore it. We’ve all felt this anguish at Con House’s muddle so it’s nothing new. Unconfirmed in his fury, our doctor squid subsides slowly into his usual inky, word-clouded depression. “Oh well, I suppose the extension of self into Not-Self implies a continuous plenitude of ambivalences.”

“Dunno too much about that”—Jerry Jackson pops his head in—“but that lady shrink’s back again.”

A moth to the flame Dr. Primrose flutters back to give the boys one more chance. Without warning she marches into the TV lounge and, positioning herself in the doorway so that no one can enter or leave, rasps with more aggression in her voice than she knows: “I believe you

had questions about the menu.” She then launches into an incredibly detailed briefing of why the meals aren’t better. (Primarily a shortage of experienced chefs and the logistics of trucking in fresh produce daily, she says.) Amazed that anyone in authority is willing to discuss anything with them, several boys lay aside magazines and radios to allow Dr. Primrose to conclude her earnest, fact-filled harangue. “And if you have any complaints,” she says, “I hope that you will give them to the Culinary Sub-committee of the Hospital Management Committee. And we’ll deal with you—I mean them.”

A patter of solemn applause.

Dr. P. glows. “I knew you’d want to be reasonable, lads—” Violated handbag drooping from her pencil-thin arm like a dead rabbit, she surveys the tea-sloshed, cigarette-strewn room and, almost involuntarily, bursts out: “But how *can* you live in such pig squalor?”

“Oink oink!” “This ain’t th’ army, lady!” “Th’ less we polish th’ more we live!” Herb Greaves says,

“Don’t mind mess
Fends off stress
Clears minds
Of double binds.”

Dr. Primrose bravely smiles through the flak. “You know,” she makes a real effort to be friendly, “I raised three grown sons, right in this very hospital. One has gone into advertising, one is a banker, my youngest is still at Oxford.” What is she driving at? “But my children never would have got on if they had to endure filth like this. They simply would not have known how.”

Filially, Jerry lays his head on her bony shoulder. “Not to worry, mum. You send ’em along an’ we’ll teach ’em.”

In an access of goodwill Barney leads the group, “Three Cheers for Mrs. Management —”

“Hip hip HOORAY!”

Her eyes mist over. It is possible to break through. “Don’t forget,” she says as Jerry and Barney firmly guide her to the door, “Submit all complaints to—”

“THE CULINARY SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE!”

The boys make a poem of it.

They wave her off affectionately. “Good ol’ cow,” adjudges Jerry.

When the good old cow peeks into her purse and realises she’s been conned out of a fiver, she marches directly to the Medical Superintendent’s office and delivers an ultimatum about Con House’s distressing state.

It’s a Barnum & Bailey World

On a slowly rising tide of obscure aggravation, a farewell party is organised for Clem, who

leaves for college this weekend. A chance remark by Jerry got the ball rolling, “What about a last drink together—y’know, like wot th’ condemned man gets before they top ’im?” A.C. Corrigan, the former seminarian from Liverpool, immediately saw the possibilities and roped Sally Peel into helping him create a theatrical send-off.

“I’m leaving too!” announces Bronwen, her excuse being that her fiancé, Dr ‘Screw Lewie’ Singh, suddenly has advanced the date of their wedding at a Sikh temple in Southall and later at King Edward’s multi-denominational chapel to please both sets of parents. “Lewis insists on choosing the music, the flowers, the minister—even my bridesmaids,” she says with a trace of bitterness. “It’s nothing to do with me, really.”

Her news causes hardly a ripple. Wally explains, “Bron ain’t one of us like Clem. ’Er ’eart’s in th’ right place—but so’s ’er ’ead.”

“A.C.’s idea”—how most think about the party—splits Con House down the middle. For many it simply doesn’t exist. Others endure it like Pervy’s radio anger: a slightly deafening irrelevance. Yet somehow it gets done, mainly because A.C., who has written the program and even chased up costumes from Occupational Therapy, hassles everyone to pitch in. Saturday 6:00 p.m. a circus ringmaster—A.C. with trousers tucked into Wellington boots, a ride-to-the-hounds red jacket, top hat and wax moustache pasted to his freckled sweat-shiny face—strides about banging two dustbin lids together. “Hurreeh hurreeh hurreeh—take your places for The Greatest Show on Earth!”

Bug-eyed and eager we tumble into a TV lounge miraculously swept, hoovered, even reglazed in Clem’s honour. Sally personally cleaned out the usual muck and replaced it with Christmas tinsel, and someone has neatly lettered above the ‘Shanghai Express’ graffiti:

GOOD LUCK NORMALS

In a fancy tailcoat Jerry Jackson tends a makeshift bar built of empty Guinness crates supporting plastic cups and paper plates of cheese crisps. “Step right up, folks!” he shouts. “Tonight it’s King Edward Special—cider for th’ ladies, cider for th’ gents!” With top brass due later, Dr. Dick isn’t taking any chances on the hard stuff.

Almost everyone is out of bed, including some people who have been under blankets so long I’ve never met them. Even black Abe and Mr. Wu mix timidly. By special dispensation the whole crew is in street clothes, so primped, combed and shaved that they’re nearly unrecognisable. In a mod suit Gareth becomes a sharply handsome Kings Road toff, and Herb Greaves looks merely artistically intense in velvet jacket and pressed cord trousers. Clothes maketh the madman.

Not to be outdone I, in robe and stocking feet, have removed my Polaroids for the festivities.

Party’s subdued. Not enough women, for one thing. Les got short shrift from Pankhurst Ward’s matron when he asked for some. “No, Mr. O’Brien,” he reports her as saying, “I’d sooner see my girls in white slavery.” In anticipation of Con House’s biggest riot yet, Mr. Tasker, the Nursing Officer, has ordered a temporary evacuation of patients from adjoining

wards and cancelled weekend leave of his huskier male nurses. Jeff H. gazes out at the suddenly depopulated landscape around Con House and says, "That's the trouble with this place. They expect too much of you."

Like a heavily tapped pre-sliced melon the party falls away into its several segments.

In the centre of the ring Clem is like a main event fighter almost buried in towel-waving seconds pouring advice into him. There is something almost sexual in the way boys slip up to pat or touch him, a last physical contact before he turns into a normal. Yorkshire Roy, still in shock over losing his best friend first to me and then the outside world, gives Clem a money belt as a going-away gift "so they can't steal thy hard stuff." "And if you lose your mind," Nigel says, "don't do what I did and ask for it at the nearest police station." For good luck Derek Chatto slips Clem his cherished chess set.

In another part of the lounge the staff sulk with their backs against one wall. Dave Foster, his arm still taped where Percy-the-Radio cut him with a broken milk bottle, flinches and looks ceilingward every time the Muzak—supplied by his assailant—stops. His wife, a Female Division nurse, unsmilingly eyes the patients; Les left Mrs. O'Brien at home. "Never mix business with pleasure," he says. Which is which?

Dr. Dick, brooding over the loss of his two favourite protégés, drinks alone and morose in a corner.

But Sally Peel is in her element. Jolly and sexy in a low-cut cocktail dress, she introduces her tall young husband around as if she were at one of her Tory charity balls. "Jerry, this is Michael. He's a solicitor." "No kiddin', Sal. Must be awful embarrassin' fer ya."

Bronwen stands apart exuding a tragic air and watching Sally have a good time. Her brave martyr's smile turns slightly bitter when anyone looks her way. She is heavily shadowed by a darkly handsome man in a blue turban and a doctor's white coat, who suddenly strolls over to me. My neck prickles, I feel like John Wayne in Apache country. "Ah, the famous Mr. Bell," he says without introducing himself. He doesn't have to; I know he is Bronwen's husband-to-be, 'Screwie Lewie' Singh. Youngish, brown, hawk-nosed, he's built like a southern California tennis pro, all flashing teeth and forearm and grins like Jack Palance just before he guns down Elisha Cook in *Shane*. His small glittering eyes give my shaman's robe the King Edward stare. "You *must* come and visit us after the wedding," the oily upper-class accent is as well-trimmed as the tiny moustache. "Bronwen will be much better then."

Oh, I ask loyally, is anything wrong with her?

Dr. Singh enigmatically looks for flies on the ceiling. "Dear Mr. Bell. You understand perfectly." He gives my shoulder a hard, patronising squeeze and returns to guard Bronwen—followed by my Krazy Kat brick. Pok!

Soldiers' Talk

Willie Last says that the key to communicating with the forward battalions of the schizophrenic army is to break through their secret language. Like a spy I drift from group to group at the party and furiously scribble in my notebook. I'll decode it later.

“Help-o, Mus-turd Blip. Jimmy Pell Knee Jelly. I’m three. And how are you? Softly bees tunicht, sir. Caroline’s lonely, can’t reach us, Home-bird interference. I’ve written to the Government but never get a reply. Waswong? Maybe more school would help. One-hundred-foot hurdles are easier. If only I could sleep better. Kong bristles enumeration instability roger comecon. Oh well he’s got his troubles too, I expect. Are you?”

Nigel Atkinson, fifteen. Cracked up while attending a top grammar school. A family-pressured over-achiever, he has invented a stupid twin brother “Desmond” who is a petty pilferer, arsonist and would-be suicide, the author of all of Nigel’s troubles.

“Sudden like, I started ‘avin’ these dreams, see. Fair knocked me over they did. All about Bristol City, dunkin’s Scotch eggs an’ God’s currant bun. Mixed up, like. At first I cows an’ calfs. But when they din’t go away, I bubbles to my china who says I’m goin’ ginger beer. Me mum says, “You ain’t no oily rag” an’ takes me down to the English Channel. ‘e gives me some soap which makes me all Mutt ‘n’ Jeff. Anyway they wuz apple fritter. I throws ‘em in th’ bread ‘n’ butter ‘n’ duck into this battle cruiser. Me da’ finds me Brahms ‘n’ Liszt from pimple ‘n’ blotch, which I’d never ‘ad before. “Why ain’t you out earnin’ yer greengages?” ‘e Diana Dors. So’s I barry mokes ‘im with my Chalk Farm, for g’d measure bangs ‘im with th’ Aristotle, then cock ‘n’ ‘en bottles ‘n’ stoppers falls on top of me like a mouse. Brought me ‘ere a year ago Whitsun. What a Barney!”

Wally Walters, 275-pound lorry driver from Bermondsey, a once thriving dockland community disintegrating under the hammer blows of re-development. Wally’s family rehoused from a friendly, ramshackle old street to a terrifying high rise twenty stories in the sky. An eleven-plus failure, too. The above story makes perfect sense in cockney rhyming slang—which no hospital psychiatrist understands.

“MmmmmmmmmMnnnMssssssGfhhhhhhhhM ... nnnnnnnnnnn mmmmmmm
..... nnn uhuhuhu hu. Sssssssssssssssss. tu tu tu. tu tu. Nahanananahanah. NO!”

Gareth de Walden, Seventeen

“Howdy, Dicky-bird-where’s th’action?”

All genial ferocity and a glaring mid-Atlantic accent, a balding attractive man in his fifties bounces in: Dr. Hugh Winstanley, the Medical Superintendent of King Edward VIII Hospital. Like a small-town mayor running for reelection he goes around shaking hands and making not-quite-right American wisecracks culled from his two years on the staff of a madhouse in San Antonio, Texas. He heartily slaps my back while sizing up my urban shaman rig. “If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em, right Mr. Bell?” We met when he interviewed me during my first visit.

Dr. Winstanley cultivates his reputation for slightly radical eccentricity by dropping mysterious aphorisms like “R equals S minus P”—or (as one eventually learns), the (R)ecovery of a (S)chizophrenic varies in direct ratio of the distance between the patient and his (P)arents. “Wedlock is deadlock, the family is a graveyard of love,” Dr. Winstanley cheerfully says. “Where I disagree with Laing, Last and that lot is that they aren’t mad enough to run a State hospital. Ha ha!” Before I can reach into my head for the lever marked ‘Talk-Professional,’ A.C.-the-ringmaster bangs his dustbin lids again. “All ashore who’s goin’ ashore—up anchor for

THE CHINA FOLLIES!”

Led by the Medical Super with his arms impartially around Drs. Drummond and Singh—who constantly battle for his ear with stories pro and anti Con House—we file into a miniature theatre-in-the-round (ex-dining room), where the stage is a cleared space circled by chairs and tables. A.C. has found it easier to make a theatre than get the boys to act in it. The few who give a damn are bashful; the others indifferently wander off as soon as A.C.’s attention is elsewhere. The result is unusually entertaining though not always in the way he intended.

It’s amateur hour—with a point.

At first it doesn’t go off too badly. A barbershop quartet of Con Housers led by A.C. serenades Dr. Dick with Cole Porter’s *You’re the Tops*, followed by Jack Sweeney reciting Kipling’s *Danny Deevee* (he mischievously inserts the names of Divisional doctors in each stanza, “Oh they’re hangin’ Screwie Lewie in th’ mornin’...”). Barney Beaton enthusiastically cartwheels around the room while passing out small square cards inscribed in a tiny but beautiful copperplate:

Blarney Beaton

*Family Circus Artist
(mumster's wog father's fool)*

*Available Immediately for Engagements
and Other Forms of Intercourse*

R.F.V.P. Agent: D. Drummond

Randy Stripling Comedy House

Very Paranoid King Edward viii Hospital

Low Wick

Barkshire

England

United Kingdom

Europe

Western Hemisphere

Free World

Earth

Solar System

Universe

(not before 11 a.m.)

Barney refuses to give up the stage until A.C. hisses, "Get off—it's Sid's turn!"

A.C., sweating with the effort of knocking heads together to keep his program going, has prevailed on me to "Go on out there, Sid, and knock 'em dead." All I can think of is to mumble 'om' without drawing a breath for three minutes by Yorkshire Roy's watch. For a finale, Jerry Jackson reveals a fabulous football skill by keeping a soccer ball in the air with his skull, knee and instep à la Pelé, then aims a powerful header at Dr. Primrose which almost knocks her glasses off. (Her alarmed glance at Dr. Winstanley he cheerfully ignores.) Incited by Jerry's bravado, a few boys blow raspberries at the doctors or trip each other up in small scuffles, which A.C. controls by sheer muscle power.

The big surprise, though, is Robin Ripley, bright red pageboy bob and all. Escorted by her ward shrink Dr. Goldstein and wearing a longsleeved jersey to hide her bandages, she makes a grand entrance and is immediately engulfed by Con Housers happy to see her. "Hey fellas, lemme breathe." By reflex she swings a friendly punch. "Ouch—I forgot." Her appearance disrupts the program, which she rescues with a show-stopping number. Holding her slashed arms away from her wiry body, a gay professional smile on her small intent face, she soft-shoes *Bye, Bye, Blackbird*—sung at Dr. Singh—to much racist applause.

Intermission, for cider and smuggled beer. The booze is an excuse for some boys to shove others into the laps of Drs. Singh and Primrose who are getting pretty fed up with A.C.'s show and make moves to go but sink back to their seats under the disapproving stare of Dr. Winstanley. He is hugely enjoying the show even if some of it is at his colleague's expense. Conolly House, you can see him thinking, isn't as bad as it's cracked up to be. Or is it?

If the first act was unpredictable, the second, which A.C. wrote as a traditional English music hall pantomime, is an Abbott and Costello movie run backward. The plot is fairly simple. Actors portraying the rival doctors, Drummond and Singh, are coached to fight over Bronwen. Singh must win by dirty tactics and kidnaps Bronwen who is then rescued by a posse of heroic Con Housers. (Nobody is quite sure what A.C.'s message is, and he won't enlighten us beyond, "It's paralogical, old whack.")

It is a shambles from the word go and ends in a brawling free-for-all as A.C.'s repertory group go mad impersonating Dr Singh (Roy in a turban), Dr Dick and Bronwen (Jeff H. fetching in white split-to-the-thigh skirt). Boys are sprawled all over the floor, wrestling and laughing and absolutely free to discharge aggression like buckshot. With his beautiful script falling apart, A.C. rings down the imaginary curtain by hustling his players back on their feet for a well rehearsed chorus of

"I'd like to get you on a slow boat to China
All to myself alone
Get you and keep you in my arms ever more
Leave all you lovelies weeping on the faraway shore ..."

After the applause, including his own, dies away Dr. Winstanley makes a special point of going over to congratulate the troupe. A.C. is depressed but philosophic.

"Maybe I shouldn't've tried puttin' Method actors into music hall." Clem tries not to show his embarrassment.

Once the brass depart the jamboree loses momentum, and a sense of real loss breaks through: for the moment we'd forgotten that Clem, our most successful part, is leaving. Boys high on smuggled wine race through the unit playing slightly drunken tag. Featherstone-the-Flasher ferociously play-masturbates to Percy's resumed blast furnace, while *What Do You Want if You Don't Want Money* rips the old walls apart. Derek Chatto weeps uncontrollably, "I've lost my king," and Greaves chases Mr. Wu up and down the stairs shrieking

"Mingle
Mongol."

Clem, the object of so much of this despair, staggers over to me, his eyes full of grief and anger. "Congratulate me, Sid. I've turned out to be a voyeur just like you. I didn't have the

guts to go all the way to China, did I?" All his life he'll regret not having had a true schizophrenic breakdown. He slaps the notebook from my hand, but instead of scrapping about it we hug and kiss each other. Then, suddenly aware of what we're doing, we pull apart and turn on the most convenient target, Con House's Laz-E-Boy, Jeff H. For no really good reason we rail at his detached dreaminess and trance-like passivity, his lazy acquiescence to a condition others define for him. Still in his Bronwen dress, Jeff languidly defends himself while unbraiding his hair in the wall mirror. "Oh, I've taken some hard knocks since I was thirteen, I can tell you." (Jeff's orthodox Jewish family in Golders Green treated him as mad because he let his hair grow to shoulder length and refused to go to his father's funeral. On his eighteenth birthday he announced that he was really Ann-Margaret O'Hara from spaceship Moonglow and was going to dock with a bisexual cosmonaut named Evelyn. He claims that all his mother wanted to know was, "Is this Evelyn Jewish maybe?") When Jeff and Clem suddenly buddy up to compare suicide attempts, I leave in disgust. I hate it when schizos talk so easily of checking out. "To hell with both of you!" I shout, full of wine.

Like their patients, the Con House staff feel disconsolate and ill at ease, and they, too, snipe at each other, reopening old wounds and digging up long-forgotten slights. Dr. Dick, who is least adjusted to losing Clem and Bronwen, drunkenly wraps his arms around the latter. "This is your real, your first home—never forget that." Les glares tipsily at his boss. "Let her go, you bastard. You're trying to make this hellhole too attractive to her." With exaggerated dignity Dick straightens up and offers Bronwen a fulsome toast to a happy marriage, an existentially fruitful life, a—From the back of the crowd someone says: "He means he'd like to fuck you."

Followed by Dr. Singh's scowling eyes, Bronwen tearfully grabs my hand and leads me out to the wire-enclosed porch. "Oh Sid!"—she clings to me under a full April moon—"I feel like a soldier going to a war I may never return from. Lewis can't go beyond the line, but he knows in his heart that The Beyond exists. I'm lost in the cold. I need your strength, to help me toward the Sacred Mountain, away from the Evil Prince." She lifts her face for me to kiss, then gothically fades away into the darkness.

A muffled explosion shakes the building.

I rush back inside to help drag Jeff H., coughing and spluttering, from the smoke-filled kitchen. Covered in soot black he collapses in a shaken but unhurt heap on the floor. "How's that for a bang not a whimper?"

Slowly Con House's *geist* takes over. Things collapse after the women go. Les and Dave, once again custodial, help several boys to their beds. Others are left where they drop, under tables and chairs. A few sad bodies float anticlimactically through the corridors, sober. Maleness, dry, charged, settles in again. Only Hurricane Hodge, who predicted an IRA outrage, strides smugly about.

The party is over.

Les O'Brien and I, left alone in the TV lounge, look at the empty cider and wine bottles,

torn Yule decorations, broken furniture. Everyone is gone. He looks immensely tired. "Nobody's ever on to the other bloke. You travel all your life to find that. Haven't found it yet. We, none of us, would be here if we thought it existed."

Finishing his drink he fixes me with an unblinking stare. "And that," he murmurs, nodding at the party's debris, "is the best ... the very best we can do."

] three [

SPRING ALSO CREPT INTO Clare Community Council. By Easter Bank Holiday (I missed another Aldermaston march) we had shaken down to “our fightin’ weight,” as Dr. Last put it. The dross—Clive Flynn and his ilk—we’d got rid of simply by letting them come to meetings. No stranger ever survived a Lastian interrogation. “Wha’s th’ point in suckin’ up to outsiders,” he declared. “Sooner or later they’ll only find out th’ truth about us.” And he’d giggle unhappily.

I thought that this blackballing of outlanders contradicted Last’s stated policy of courting all possible allies, and said so. (After all, it had provoked my first quarrel with the group.) He looked right through me as if I wasn’t there. Though I’d been elected chairman—admittedly, to keep me quiet—Last still ran Clare meetings in his own way. Head in hands, he punctuated the agenda with doleful comments on our shortcomings. “Davina, stop mumblin’. If ye’ve nuthin’ to say, shut up.” “Git to th’ point, Boris. Yir Stalinist prattlin’s drivin’ me up th’ wall.” “Sid, I swear if ye was a mite more withdrawn ye’d disappear up yir own arsehole.”

We accepted his judgments docilely. Davina said, “Willie gives one such a feeling of being nobody and of not even existing. That’s the first step to Enlightenment, isn’t it?”

The plain truth is, we jumped whenever Last cracked the whip. His decisions, usually handed down in the form of soft-spoken suggestions or off-the-cuff guesswork, had the force of Law. A strange collective chemistry transformed even his slips of the tongue into group canon. Will-lessness emanated from us like plants stretching out to their light source, Willie Last.

Hell, I’d been through all this charismatic b.s. before, in American politics. And the other Clare members had been around, too. Why did we stick it?

If Last had been nothing but what he seemed—a vain, truculent stage Scotsman with a talent for “puttin’ th’ boot in” to our emotional soft spots—we would never have followed (and loved) him so. He could also be sweet, tender and caring, fatherly, without side or swank, retaining—even in fits of arrogant temper—that sly, warming grin, which seemed to say: “Och mon, what’re we takin’ ourselves so seriously fer?” He had a trick of enticing you into dark, twisting mental labyrinths and then suddenly abandoning you to find your own way out, which we proudly thought of as his liberating us from “th’ chains o’ love.” Though he made much of his dislike of the role of Master, which he claimed we foisted on him, he seemed to accept such eminence with a humility that was indistinguishable from arrogance. At the same time as he poked fun at my habit of always calling him “Doctor Last,” a respectful hangover from our previous analytical relationship, he made it equally clear that in practice Clare’s democracy of souls meant he had every right to lash us for (among other things) our dependence on him.

At bottom, of course, couch power dictated Clare relationships. Part of Last’s abnormal authority over us came from our fear of blackmail, the possibility, however remote, that he

would somehow exploit to our disadvantage the inmost crimes and disorders which, at one time or another, we had confessed to him in analysis, over drinks or on LSD. Our deepest emotions were locked into his. Yet perhaps our gravest disservice, to ourselves and to Last, was that we Clare members hardly ever discussed personal problems collectively, among ourselves, only with him. This put an intolerable psychological burden on him which he vented with public lambastings of us that we never could be quite sure weren't rooted in what he'd learned about us privately. Whether he intended it or not, it was enough for us merely to know that he knew to produce an obedience among us.

There was also a feeling, which he discreetly encouraged, that he had picked each of us out of the Sludge of Error and firmly put us on the Road to Enlightenment. It got so that a word from him could make or break our day. He was our sun, moon and guiding star—understanding ('standin' under') us when we did not understand ourselves, redeeming past sins and absolving future mistakes, filling up the cracks in our broken souls. We needed him.

But why, I once asked him, did he need us?

Last chewed thoughtfully on his cigar and said, "Inner solitude is essential to my personal voyage. An' I cannot imagine a settin' more congenial to feelin' so utterly alone as our little group."

In weaker men I would have called Last's aggressive despondency nothing but self-pity; in him it seemed to stem from the tragic detachment of a great seer who dares to look into the Abyss from which we lesser mortals shrank. It wasn't only affectation that made him refer to us Clare Councillors as "terminal cases" and "lifeless shadows pretendin' to be hyoomin." He perceived life as nailed terror, a peacetime concentration camp to which we had been condemned by a heartless, random fate. Everything he measured by standards of Auschwitz. Mothers and fathers were concentration camp guards of the bourgeois state, family love a crematorium. Not only Last but all three doctors were so spooled by, and almost in love with, their patients' self-disgust and self-hatred that simple human emotions Uíe laughter and affection were "unseemly" (a favourite Last word), even a betrayal of the Tasí.

"Serialisation"—the modern individual's moral numbness—was our greatest enemy, Last taught. So when Dick's father died in Canada of a stroke, not one Councillor offered him a word of sorrow or comfort, nor did he appear to expect any. When I asked why, Last said—as if explaining to an idiot—"How else d'ye think we presume to call ourselves healers? We are th' disease we're tryin' to cure."

When sober and often when not Last had great committee skills. How he got us through all that dismal business agenda I'll never know. His genius was for unravelling the knots we'd tied ourselves into, some of his making. Explaining, urging, directing, he sliced through our woofle to lift our tired, frazzled hearts. "The Task is tremenjus an' our Covenant poor," he'd bark. "I can see in yir faces ye'd like to pull out. Right then! I'm willin'. This minute if you say." Silence. "Aw-right, le's strap up oor boots an—move off!"

“Cor,” whispered Alf, tapping his chest, only half joking. “Gets you right here, doesn’t it?”)

A kind of martial chauvinism gripped Last then. “It’s really funny when ye think on it,” he said. “Millions of men destroyed like sheep in th’ First War without sayin’ baa. Even th’ froggy French mutinied—th’ servile sassenachs never. An’ ever since then th’ milksop English have been like whipped puppies or chronic patients that never got over their ECT.” Once, goaded beyond her usual meekness, Davina muttered, “And what about your wonderful Scots, eh Willie?” He glared happily at her. “Oh them. Wi’ their Wee Free consciences an’ Red Clyde heritage *they’ll* never bow permanently to the Ainglish colonial whip.” He warmed to his subject. “Y’know tha’ flick *The Longest Day* where th’ Scots pipers lead th’ whole Allied army ashore on D-day? Tha’s th’ forgotten soldiery I’m descended from. *Tha’s Scawtland!*”

A romantic left-wing nationalist, he regarded Scots like himself as “Jews,” with the historic mission of filling the vacuum left by Hitler’s mass murder of Europe’s traditional intellectual-cosmopolitan élite. He took more or less literally this self-elected Jewishness. England south of Carlisle was a “Diaspora,” and Scotland, an Israel on the North Sea, a marginal land of broken dreams. But one day soon the spark of a primitive, kirk-based egalitarianism—the democracy of souls snuffed out by the Culloden massacre and the 1707 Act of Union with the Crown—would burst into vengeful flame, and Scotland (like Dixie?) would rise again. Then he, William Angus Bruce Last would hasten back to his native lowlands to raise the consciousness of his awakening countrymen from mere bourgeois nationalism to the heights of the psychic revolution.

“But first I’m gointa plunder th’ fucken Ainglish like they did us fer 250 years!”

If Last hated England so, why didn’t he follow the examples of men he admired like Aldous Huxley and Alan Watts and emigrate to America or elsewhere? I asked. He shook his head, “No doubt that’s what they’d like. I won’t give ’em th’ satisfaction.” He refused to desert his post on the long Ainglish wall because, he claimed, here was where it was all happening. 1960s London was the Vienna of its time, the Sierra Maestra of the schizophrenic revolution.

Did Last see himself as a latter-day Freud or a psychiatric Castro?

Smiling modestly, he allowed the question to be its answer.

Freud and Castro probably never had the trouble with their followers that Last said he had with his. He ceaselessly nagged at our “poor covenant,” our lack of commitment to one another, and demanded that we speed up the process of brotherhood. If we simply sat back to wait for fraternal bonds to grow naturally, the gravitational pull of existential apathy—“our innate drive to mediocrity we use as armour against cosmic risk”—would destroy us. In some crucial way the fate of millions depended on the quality of personal relationships we achieved within the group. “If sech heartless shits as us c’n fill each other’s Emptiness, there’s still hope fer a broken-hearted wurd.” Last drove us into mutual affection as if we were conscript

soldiers storming an impregnable fort. He insisted that we dine together whenever possible and also make positive efforts to learn about each other's problems (though he did not see the death of Dick's father as one such problem). All the while he kept repeating; "Close ranks, Brothers—or die!"

We tried loving each other, but it was hard. In an England notorious for its shyness, and where friendships less than fifty years old are considered brief encounters, our attempts to warm each other up were stiff and clumsy. "I suppose Willie's right to force the pace this way," said Major Straw ruefully, "but, dash it, I wish he'd given us a bit more basic training before we set off." Even I, used to an American style of easy intimacy, found Last's sort of sponsored love a bit much. But gradually, annealed by acid and countless drives into the countryside to inspect estates, we drew together. Those terrible English barriers relaxed. "Gee fellas, that's super," moaned Alf when we took turns massaging his slipped disk. I gladly sheltered Major Straw from his wife's private detectives (she was suing for divorce), Alf baby-sat for the Drummonds, Viv Petkin taught Davina how to cook Boris' favourite dishes. Friday nights, *shabbath*, we ate communally at a meatless restaurant in Leicester Square.

Around Last buds of brotherhood burst into bloom, a little garden of fellowship where we could begin to discover tiny areas of common interest. What surprises! Boris and Major Straw found that they'd soldiered together in India. (Boris, an army medic, smuggled pistols to the nationalist agitators; then Lt. Tony Straw shot them down in pre-Partition riots.) Alf and I had identical birthdays, Davina and Last were Sagittarians. Dick and Alf both were hooked on Woody Guthrie, and Davina had been at school with an old girlfriend of mine. Last was satisfied that these were more than trivial coincidences; somehow they sanctified our union. In an ever-growing atmosphere of the need for such mystical confirmation, the group temporarily submitted to my jotting down more of their biographies.

Little by little my Clare Council identikits took on light and shade. Davina talked to me in between making us sandwiches and coffee, writing up the minutes, nursing us through LSD trips and even mending our socks. I learned that after a High Anglican games mistress had seduced her at school Davina had tried to enter a convent. "Mummy and Daddy couldn't have been more horrified. I suppose they thought my wanting to be a nun was pushy and vulgar. Anyway," she smiled sadly, "it wasn't my dish of tea. I'm afraid *Woman's Hour* at the BBC was the nearest to it I could find."

I was lucky enough to tackle Dick Drummond at the right moment—during a three-day whiskey and acid binge. (All that booze was adding pounds to his already corpulent frame, which was starting to look like the asexual Buddha Last said was the physical aspect of gaw'd-head.) Dick had rebelled against his wealthy Montreal parents by going to Highlander School in Tennessee and marrying a black student there. While finishing his residency, the Border Patrol had caught him smuggling into Canada some fugitive Communists, but where his comrades caught prison time Dick got probation because his parents pulled strings. Full of rage and guilt, he fled to Europe and psychotherapy. "I became a revolutionary Bolshevik of consciousness against all my upbringing and conditioning. I raped my bourgeois mind to bring it back to life."

Boris was his old charming self, and I beat a hasty retreat before he could start yelling at me again.

To bind us even closer together Last hired a projection room in Wardour Street, Soho, and for an entire afternoon had Major Straw lecture us on small-squad tactics while we watched war documentaries. Then Last split us up into ‘buddy’ teams to facilitate our “assault approach to Infinity,” he said.

Dr. Last	chose	Dick Drummond
Boris	”	Davina
Major Straw	”	Alf

Nobody picked me.

Being buddyless was an honour, Last persuaded me. “There’s no point to slowin’ ye down to our snail’s pace. From now on, ye’re a collective responsibility. We’ll protect ye Crossin’ th’ Great Water.”

Oh.

Weeks, then months passed without our finding ‘the’ Place. Alf, who had practically abandoned his travel agency to work full time on Clare business, reported that several times he had almost clinched a deal for an abandoned house, but the Borough Council or liberal moneybags had reneged at the last minute. “That word schizophrenic puts them off,” Alf said. “Why don’t we switch to something more acceptable like axe murderers or child rapists?”

Things seemed to be going badly or not at all. The Ministry of Health, to whom we appealed for support, told us to get lost, and private sponsors wouldn’t touch us with a barge pole. The group “kitty” was almost broke. Despite such setbacks, Clare’s morale was surprisingly high. Last’s constant exhortations to love one another or die were bearing fruit, in closer relationships and a generally tighter feeling among us. Yet the strange thing was, Last couldn’t stand it. Several times I noticed that no sooner did the group groove in a fairly affectionate way than he was moved—driven, almost—to torpedo its precarious stability. It was eerie, to summon up tentatively friendly feelings toward a Brother and then to have Last say that you’d fallen into “slobby sentimentality” or some other form of spiritual flabbiness.

The latest form of his ambivalence was speak-bitterness sessions on the Chinese maoist model then all the rage. Self-criticism became a Clare Council art form. Led by Last, we Councillors kept in existential shape by socking it to one another. To teach us how to do it, he teed off on Boris—blam, right between the eyes. In front of us all he flayed Boris for incompetence, greed, emotional exploitation of and fatal insensitivity to his patients: all the sins in the medical book. “An’ mon, ye’re even startin’ to look like all those pre-Raphaelite virgins ye tout fer.” (Petkin’s specialty was middle-aged spinsters.) Boris, long accustomed to Last’s needling, either played dumb or snarled back depending on his mood. “Willie,” he’d

sneer, “you may smarm the top people better than me. But when it comes to the sheer athletics of the job—sitting in that chair without moving a muscle for fifty minutes—I’ve got you beat hands down.” If it suited him, Boris pretended to be deaf, or else deflected Last’s fusillades onto Dick Drummond who was coming up fast on the inside to challenge Boris’ position as Last’s main-man. “I’d a fuckin’ sight rather cream a few lonely old biddies,” Boris snapped, “than get my rocks off on a gang of underripe pubescent psychotics. Watcha tryin’ to do, Dick, jolt ’em back to sanity with that outfit?” (Drummond’s latest ensemble included an off-mauve patch pocket suit and black Borsalino hat.) Here as in Conolly House Dick’s counterpunches were delivered as self-libel. “What’s the point, Boris? Why waste your breath on a deracinated First World turd like me?”

Last’s other gambit was to play the doctors off against each other. “Don’ jes’ sit there, Dick—it’s th’ poor mon’s way of beggin’ fer frien’ship.” Or, “Stop insultin’ Dick, Boris. Can’t ye see he likes it.” Provoked to lam away at each other, Boris and Dick writhed in the grip of Last’s remote-control sadism until, with a gracious smile, he chose to release them. “I ken how ’tis,” he patted Boris’ shoulder, “I’d soon lose my finesse too if I had tae knock off Viv every night.” And he and Boris, two working-class boys sharing a dirty joke, would laugh quietly, conspiratorially. Or Last would wink at Drummond. “What’s wrong, Dick? Nancy bellyachin’ agin?” Dick’s face sagged. “Oh Willie, if only you knew,” thus re-establishing intimacy with the man who was selling him and his wife down the river. I suspected that Last wanted us to stand up to him; at some level, he hated the toadiness he encouraged. But we denied him this pleasure. Indeed, Boris and Dick knuckled under so slavishly—which egged Last on to such extremes of vituperation—that I sometimes wondered if they weren’t ‘setting up’ our leader, but dismissed these thoughts as unworthy of a true Brother.

As time went on a pattern of recrimination developed, often reflecting the current state of play for Last’s love. Combat rules were arbitrary. While Last considered all six Councillors as fair game, only the doctor-samurai had the right (however unexercised) to nail him. Attempts by Alf, Tony, Davina or me to grab a piece of the action were snubbed with a curt nod or glassy stare: self-criticism was an officer’s prerogative. We noncoms, divided among ourselves by Last’s system of capriciously shifting his affections from one Brother to another, compensated by mutual hassling. When I tried rallying the other nonmedics against the doctors’ élitism Alf promptly reported my behaviour to Last.

Lapdogs aren’t always loved, and Last spared no one—not even informers. “Cannot ye lift yir snout outta th’ trough of slobby pragmatism just once, Alf?” he would demand. Or he’d skewer Straw for just those virtues the Major most prided himself on. “Ye’ve swallowed other people’s orders so long, Brother Tony, ye’ve gone all soft an’ cringy.” Of me Last said: “Every time Sid sticks his cock intae th’ twat of success he withdraws it afore he can come. A flyaway bird fuelled by curiosity an’ a mortal terror of commitment.”

But it was poor Davina who got the worst of his tongue. Something about her cool upper-class manner got Last’s goat. Once, as we were driving back exhausted from yet another house-hunting chase into rural Hertfordshire, he suddenly roused himself at her expense, working himself up to such a pitch of proletarian fury that I thought he’d slug her. He accused

her of class exploitation, of freeloading to salvation on the backs of her social inferiors—the Clare men. “Wha’ th’ hell do you rich bitches know about th’ stagnant shit at th’ bottom of society’s cesspool—my people! Or are ye just slummin, Dav?”

Blushing in the backseat of the Bentley, Davina gestured weakly. “Oh I know you all think I’m a mouse. But you try getting a word in edgeways with six shouting bullies.” At once, Last braked the big car on a country lane. “Okeh,” he said, “fair enough. Now everybody but Dav shut up. Fer five minutes there’ll be complete silence while she says anything on hir mind.” He glanced down at his vest-pocket watch. “Stahrtn’... now.” He raised and dropped his arm like a race starter. Finally Boris came to Davina’s rescue by yawning loudly. “Drop it, Willie. You can be a real prick at times.” Davina sneaked Boris a grateful smile, and they sat closer on the trip back.

Meetings were like indoor rodeos where riderless animals and horseless cowboys tumbled each other into the dust. Or an intolerably sandbagging poker game sans limit. How much could—would—the Other take? In the doctors’ vision of Hell, hope existed only in the microscopically small spaces between institutionalised madness and existential therapy, and we danced a high-wire act of muted violence stretching from one meeting to the next.

A terrible fear—of rejection? uselessness?—seemed at times to make us emotionally drunk As if—call and response—we had to match the true schizophrenic’s sense of loss. “It’s perfectly understandable,” affirmed Last. “Characters who cannot say a significant hello to one another are doomed to a perpetual state of farewell.”

Any pain we delivered to another Brother, hast assured us, was designed “to toughen th’ Other against our most formidable enemy, th’ fear of th’ fear of loss, so that with each karate kick we render ourselves slightly less sensitive to Dread.”

The goal was freedom, from bourgeois hypocrisy, from neurotic hang-ups. Above all, from the need to be needed, starting with psychoanalysis, the basis of our association. “Nuthin’,” averred Last, “gives me more satisfaction than seein’ some poor deluded bastid tell his shrink to fuck off.” Boris promised, “One day they’ll give an analysis and nobody will come.” “The therapist who gives up his patient commits a revolutionary act,” said Dick Drummond. Dapper little Major Straw looked dubious. “It’s fine for you fellers, you’ve been commissioned in the field. But what about us Other Ranks who’ve just enlisted?”

For, despite everything, we were still prisoners of the psychoanalysis we rejected. Alf hopped up occasionally on Last’s couch, and Davina saw Boris professionally as well as personally. Tony Straw went to Dick Drummond on the side, and offstage, Last saw his training analyst, Dr. Phineas Maud, as did Boris and Dick theirs. And, of course, the doctors’ incomes were still based on good old-fashioned capitalist transference.

The pecking order went something like this:

Completely analysed Last

Almost c.a.	Drummond
Partly a.	Boris, Alf
Novice a.	Davina
Un-a.	Tony

When I showed my journal to Last with this notation he frowned, “And where do ye stand? Outside a.?”

Perhaps the most painful irony of speak-bitterness was that its instigator, Willie Last, was himself the chief victim. Chinese-style sessions left him depressed and drained. At such moments he openly doubted that we’d make it as a group, because the very qualities that had brought us together—“spiritual funk, ontological despair an’ a simple feelin’ of goin’ rotten at th’ core”—would sink us. “Then ye’ll start lookin’ fer yir Chosen Victim,” leaving the rest hanging in the air. Always these days, Last’s gentle grey eyes furtively sought out his Betrayer. He was calmly, almost serenely certain that one or other of the Councillors would do him in, and he absolved us in advance. “Oh, ye’ll not do it on purpose. Judas probably had th’ best of motives, too ...” His likening himself to Jesus, which had begun as a joke, sounded more serious nowadays.

His evident disappointment in us went hand in hand with a revival of fondness for outsiders. The more he found Clare Council wanting the more he foraged for strangers to put us right ... to find the Place ... tone up our souls ... or straighten out our finances. Someone to fill the vacuum our lack of commitment (he said) created. Every month or so, right on schedule, such a fairy godperson appeared. The portents were always the same: under ‘new business’ Last would clear his throat and say, “Er oh yeh, I was lunchin’ t’other day wi’ Larry Olivier at L’Escargot”—he took a child’s pleasure in dropping show-biz names and the restaurants he frequented—“an’ Ringo (or Vanessa or Sean) came over to our table an’ told me about this fantastic friend of theirs willin’ to help us ...”

And so shoals of new fish swam into view. Always with talents we allegedly couldn’t do without: a clairvoyant Romanian businesswoman, a Swedish ethnographer just back from a study of Haitian voodoo, an emotionally cracked-up BOAC pilot fleeing a Detention Order, a lonely Somerset bachelor with a derelict farm and a passion for UFOs, etc.

Two newcomers, Frisbie Blue and Sy Appleby, almost took.

Place: Armistice Hall, a Quaker-pacifist country house outside Dorking, Surrey

Time: A Friday evening in early June

Event: A weekend conference between NON-RUT (spell it backward), a “multimedia inter-communications network of fashionable working-class poets, action artists and ex-Committee of too militants still looking for a way to blast the public conscience; and Clare Council representing existential psychiatry-cum-Eastern metaphysics. In effect, a Mafia summit of Britain’s madness radicals.

Things aren't going too well.

Even before the conference officially opens, a thick wall of suspicion separates the two supposedly fraternal groups. Boris Petkin makes no secret of his contempt for the "lumpens" personified by Frisbie's henchman, the American junkie novelist Sy Appleby. Most NON-RUTters couldn't care less for Clare Council's heavy eschatological view of the world, but it's too late to back out now because Last has shelled out thirty quid of our money to rent Armistice Hall for two days.

It starts badly. Friday evening Sy overdoses and collapses during Boris' talk on 'The Hasid Way to Tao'; Tony Straw takes a swing at a NON-RUTter baiting the Army's imperialist role in Malaya (where Straw served). A second punch-up is narrowly averted when a NON-RUT satyr runs off into the woods with Davina, and it takes several of us to restrain a fiercely jealous Boris. NON-RUT is all over the place, doping, free-form painting and fucking in the bedrooms (not yet on the parlor carpet, that will happen tomorrow), while Clare Council huddles together like a tourist party of nuns strayed into a Paris brothel. Nobody really wants to talk to anybody else. In disgust, Clare Council votes to pack its bags and go in the morning.

Saturday a.m. Phineas Maud, Last's father-figure, arrives with a contingent of elderly ladies. When Alf reports that several of them look like wealthy widows, we decide to stay.

All Saturday, operating in relays, Clare Council relentlessly pounds away at the politics of madness. Before this, we and NON-RUT had insulted each other lustily; now we try gentle persuasion. The two organisations, Last argues, are capable of providing the natural "generals" in the war against bourgeois society's (in)sanity. 'We both attack th' same problem from a different angle, is all. But p'raps Clare Council's angle is th' more ... er, ah ... acute.' Last dogmatically concludes that our perception of the dialectics of schizophrenia—the assault on capitalism through its soft underbelly of the normal family—is more revolutionary than NON-RUT's concept of struggle through art and "th' mindless banality of marchin' to hear th' sound of yir own feet." The conference almost breaks up as Sy explodes, "Shit man, your old Marxist cunt juice is dissolvin' this happening. We're splitting." At a hurriedly convened caucus in an upstairs bathroom Last dryly orders a change in tactics. "We're not exactly overwhelmin' them with our icy logic. So why'n't we drop our defenses an' interact wi' their experiential mode?" Translated: Alf is making useful contacts among Dr. Maud's flock of well-heeled geriatrics. We plunge into NON-RUT's thing.

Not in Conolly House's maddest moments have I seen anything quite like this. A NON-RUT painter aerosols a wall, another hangs polystyrene stalactites from the chandeliers. In the holy name of "antiugly" a girl strips off for a nude dance in the greenhouse next door, and Frisbie Blue contemplates slicing the music room's 150-year-old tapestries to shreds as his statement on bourgeois art but gives a poetry reading instead. We Councillors dig the scene, too. While Last revives Sy who has OD'd again, Davina strums her guitar and warbles off-key flamenco to Phineas Maud's elders beaming uneasily at Major Straw and me dancing cheek to cheek to some old Joe Turner records I've brought. Boris stalks drunken Davina who exults, "I say, one has had more passes made at one here in twenty-four hours than in all the time one has been a Clare Brother ... Sister ... Brister." Last and Sy boozily drag race their cars across

the fields.

Late Saturday afternoon, Dr. Maud insists on reading his paper, "Time Is the Healer But Who Is the Patient?" He doesn't get very far. Frisbie and his girl friend begin a silent dance of the flowers around him, which Sy films with a 16mm camera. Bewildered but tolerant, Phineas keeps lecturing through a shower of marigolds flung at him by the girl, but falters when she peels off to bump and grind. Abruptly Phineas stops when she wants to unzip his fly. Dr. Last shouts alcoholically, "Show 'em yir life force, Finny. Or did ye hock it along wi' yir soul to all those superannuated biddies ye're pimpin' fer?" The aged doctor, now white-faced with anger, tells his entourage to collect their luggage and then ushers them out the French windows. (A lovemaking couple have barricaded the front door with their bodies.) The last we see of them is a procession of Daimlers and Rolls-Royces disappearing down the driveway. "There goes our potential bankroll," moans Alf. "Why couldn't Willie have worked out his Oedipal conflicts somewhere else?"

For the next twelve hours we all sing, dance, read theoretical papers, break the family piano, nurse Sy out of a cocaine trauma, turn on the gardener and film-tape ourselves for posterity. We and NON-RUT separate before the police—called by Armistice Hall's pacifist owners who have sat up all night with shotguns on their knees—arrive. Speeding wildly away in Last's Bentley we Clare Councillors feel great. "Tha'," says Last, "is how tae meet!"

Soon afterward we hear that Sy and Frisbie have abandoned art for commerce to open up a striptease club in Manchester.

Armistice Hall left behind a sour taste (not to speak of hangovers). If NON-RUT was a sample of what to expect from the outside world to hell with it, and we relapsed into an embattled, defensive xenophobia where all strangers were presumed guilty until proved otherwise. Willie Last, temporarily confounded, turned his attention inward, from persons to ideas.

Normally uncongenial (as only ex-Party members can be), Petkin and I grew closer after Armistice Hall. "You were the only serious person there, aside from me, of course," he said. (We had been the only Clare members not to pass out.) Before long we developed an almost therapeutic relationship, in which I (usually stoned) sat listening to Boris's problems: his dying marriage to Vivienne ... his guilt at being infatuated with a "class enemy" (Davina) ... his pride at achieving, if by a detour, Grandfather Petkin's dream that one day little Boris would grow up to be a famous *tsaddik* ... his past deprivations and heartsores. Boris's harrowing tales of his Whitechapel boyhood outdid in pure horror even those that Last and I spun. "Compared to me, you and Willie were practically born with silver spoons in your mouths," bragged Boris, the eldest of six raggedy children of a demented mother who died in an asylum and a father who tried burning up the family along with his tailor shop. "My soul was murdered on the cobblestones of Stepney. I'm dead, an emotional corpse," he wept. Clinging to me for support he confessed: "Mine is a psychosis of indifference. I cannot give freely. All my life I've been looking for a community to set this undead ego of mine at rest."

Just when I half-dissolved in pity, Boris jerked up his head. “My one hope is the group. Helping me back to my lost karma. But we cannot relent.”

Relent? “Yes. In ultimate circumstances we must execute heretics. Or exile them. If the disciples of Jesus and Baal Shem Tov hadn’t lost their nerve, none of us would be so tightly strapped to the Wheel of Existence. The best thing we ever did was to banish Clive Flynn. D’you reckon it would’ve been kinder to kill him?”

Boris started coming to my flat, to escape from Vivienne’s migraine protests and, surprisingly, to take acid. Politically he still didn’t approve of LSD, but rationalised it as his contribution toward forestalling a take-over of the psychic revolution by “social democrat opportunists”—Tim Leary, Ken Kesey and R.D. Laing.

We prayed together, Boris in Hebrew, I in shaman-jabber (pig latin mixed with Oms) to match his swaying wail. His heavily built hairy body naked except for *yarmulke* and black tapes pressed to his forehead and wound round his ham-size arm, he moaned ‘our’ Diasporic loss. “You and I, Schlomo, must awaken Brother Alf. An unawakened Jew is a dead Jew.” (I thought: but Alf is Church of England.) Ever interested in self-improvement, Alf came over but recoiled when we asked him to strip and take LSD. “I don’t mind taking off my clothes, but can’t you put on a little heat first?” Boris and I were climbing the Tree of Life when Alf said, “You know, this stuff makes me nauseous,” and vomited. Poor Alfie: we cried for hours over his spiritual failure. But two acid-dropping Jews like Boris and me were a *minyan*, the necessary quorum, anywhere else.

After ritually exchanging my Siberian rattle and Papuan sacred beads for Boris’s skullcap and phylacteries, we chanted ‘Hatikvah’, the Israeli national anthem—ending “Masada —NEVER AGAIN!”—and Boris asked Davina to join us. I, reluctant to pollute our monastic purity, argued against it, but he was keen to penetrate her upper crust. I gave Dav the lowest possible dose, 50 mg. Boris and I, on 500 mg, were grunting our way back to ancient Palestine (“Hold on, you sodding buggers, we’re coming to the rescue”) when Davina stirred.

“Fuck me,” she said. Boris and I, busy holding back the *bubelah*-eating Roman hordes, didn’t hear.

“Fuck me!”

Stripped, solemn, Davina sat cross-legged, Buddha, in each hand a breast pointed at each of us. “In the name of Abraham, woman, where is your sense of decency?” cried Boris. She leaned back on her elbows, smiling but still gunning her tits at us. I got up to move out of range.

“No, you don’t,” she said. “Gotcha covered.”

“HARLOT! JEZEBEL! HAVE YOU NO SHAME, YOU WHORE OF BABYLON!” roared Boris. Davina reached over, lazily tweaking his completely erect prick. She turned to me. “I think I’ll have you.”

After packing off Davina, I comforted Boris, who sobbed, “Can’t you see, Schlomo, she’s trying to drive a wedge between us.

Alas, as soon as Boris sobered up he put me back on his Crap List, and added the seduction of Davina to my other crimes. To replace him I asked the Major over for LSD

cocktails. One Sunday he swayed unsteadily on my doorstep. He'd already taken some acid. "Greetings, Sid-the Superman. Shall we go up, UP and AWAY-Y-Y' He swallowed another 500 mg, then another 250. Eight hours later, when I came down, he was weeping in my arms. "I've never done anything like that before. Promise you won't tell."

Tell what? I'd been away in Mecca talking to Mohammed and hadn't a clue what the Major was on about.

A few nights later Dr. Last materialised at my place. He had lost weight and his eyes glinted with an unnatural brightness which I recognised as the result of a long, private trip. He had been back in circulation a day or two, and wanted to warn me about something he'd heard in the group.

What was that?

"It's Boris. Ye've made an enemy there fer life. He goes aroun' tellin' th' Brothers ye're th' rotten apple in our barrel. What did ye do to him anyway?"

After Last left, I dumped my worries into the lap of Davina whose basic steadiness (except on acid) I found increasingly comforting. "Oh, didn't you know?" she said. "Willie and Boris have hardly been on speaking terms since Armistice Hall. Each accuses the other of wrecking our golden opportunity to 'milk the bourgeoisie.' Willie's probably canvassing for your support."

Thank Gaw'd he still needed me.

To my intense pleasure Last began courting me all over again. And it wasn't only to line me up against Boris. He wanted company in a new venture.

Mother Amelia entered our lives.

A bangled Margaret Rutherford-looking woman in a Gypsy skirt and bandanna, she read fortunes in a small dark room above an Old Brompton Road tea shop. "Humanly speakin', of course," said Last, taking me up to her for the first time, "she's a silly ould bitch. But her command over th' Dark Powers is sum'thin' else."

Amelia never charged us Councillors for readings. "We're all in the same fight, dearies," she trilled over her green baize table.

Singly and in pairs we trooped upstairs to confer with her. Almost always she recommended holidays abroad, sometimes sounding more like a TWA ad than a spiritualist. "Brother Bell rides furthest and wears the lightest armour," she told Last. "He is in the greatest danger from Old Nick. I would advise a fortnight in Kitzbuhel and plenty of Bio-Strath in honey to clear the mucous membranes."

I should have seen it coming. Magic. Maybe it came from Last's feelings of despair and isolation after our fiasco at Armistice Hall. Whatever the ins and outs, Last broke his seclusion to announce: "Brothers, magic is th' class struggle carried over in other worldly terms. It is th' rock for us to take our stand on."

Distributing copies of *The Dawn of Magic* and a biography of Aleister Crowley 'the Beast 666', he declared that we could no longer wait to disclose Clare Council's secret objective: namely to re-enter the occult mainstream forced underground by two millennia of

Establishment suppression. We must re-open our minds, darkened by long centuries of scientific rationalism, to the whole spectrum of original insights that went under the name of wizardry, or magic. Throughout the ages, Last preached, a titanic duel had been waged between the Galactic Guides, or white witches, versus “th’ Overlords of Night,” or “th’ Dark Kings of Belial”, for control of the Pearl of Knowledge. Politics was simply the modern name we gave to this struggle, backwards and forwards in time, to gain access to long-hidden founts of supernatural wisdom. In this interpretation, psychiatry was but the latest mask worn by the Devil in his ancient conspiracy to destroy Light. Thus seen, the Nazis were in reality an anti-Rosicrucian plot, Mussolini a corrupted warlock possibly from hyper-space. Trotsky had been murdered not for crimes against the Stalinist bureaucracy but for possessing secret galactic powers. Even the 1926 General Strike had been a late-flowering Gnostic heresy.

“Don’t look so put out, Brother Sid.” Last noticed my surprise and my stammered objection that perhaps politics concerned the struggle for economic power. Couldn’t I see that my youthful Marxism was only a clumsy attempt to retrieve a memory of something lost hundreds of years before I was born? In some dim way I must have sensed this, he said, for by outgrowing the rigid rationality of the Old Left I had unwittingly made my own leap into the Light. “Subjectively, ye may’ve thought ye were breakin’ out of stale Stalinism, but willy-nilly ye’ve landed up where th’ real action is, in th’ Principality of Unreason.” My lingering doubts he wiped away with a grand flourish. “There are many ways to skin’ th’ spiritual cat—an’ every road leads tae ... Lhasa.”

Well, perhaps it did make sense. Certainly we Old and New Lefties had struck out for reasons that never *quite* added up.

“Tha’s right,” Last said. “Ye thought of everything—except th’ superstructure’s superstructure.”

Soon I didn’t turn a hair when Councillors criticised someone not for their stupidity but for their “low astrological sign.” Or at Last’s “When a patient is so sure she came fr’ another planet, th’ integrity of her statement slices my rationality off at th’ knees.” He leaned forward intently, “*Of course she’s been there!*”

I’m not sure which changed first, Last’s ideology or his lifestyle. Both seemed to come together, a new commitment to mysticism and a sartorial transformation. Suddenly he was out of his funeral-black suits and those incredible lace-up ankle boots and into Indian cotton shirts flowing over white linen trousers and gaily embroidered slippers. Alf, a constant visitor at Number 4 Crimea Street, reported that Last’s escape into non-attachment and Eastern clothes was causing a lot of domestic havoc. “Sybil says Willie’s sworn off eating meat and fucking her. And she says she’ll strangle him if he doesn’t take a bath soon.” To us Last merely referred to his troubled marriage as a “demonic pseudo-reality, an illusion I’ve stopped believin’ in.” *Real* reality was the self-liberating search for Paradise Lost, “to discover who among us are Captains of Armies, Lords of Battle and exiled Princes of th’ time continuum.”

Like a housewife anxious to keep up with the galactic Joneses, I kept fretful track of how my Brothers hunted down their lost pre- and post-twentieth-century selves: who had been who

when. To discover his primordial essence, Last spent his lunch breaks studying Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke or at the British Museum reading room browsing acid high through musty volumes of Tibetan and Sikkimese theology. Boris, who had taken up Yiddish folk dance, hora'd his way back to Essenian Galilee, while Alf dickered with the possibility that he was a Glastonbury Druid. Trying to re-unite with the ur-logos, Dick Drummond woke up from a mescaline trance to assert: "I am kaka, the universal shit"; he also began hanging around the primate cages at Regent's Park zoo. "Bloody big buggers know something we've forgotten." And Major Straw, after weeks of delving through archives down at Somerset House on the Strand, proudly announced: I am the seventh son unto the seventh son unto the direct line of descent from the great Saxon warrior kings. Henceforth please call me Brother Hengist." Poor Davina felt out of it. "I'm hopeless. Tunbridge Wells through and through. (Pause) Come to think of it, just before the war some Gypsies did come through ..."

With Mother Amelia's help I located myself as Father Sebastien, a thirteenth-century Provençal monk dispatched to England to propagate the secret faith. "A bit *moderne* tha'," suggested Last. "Wi' a li'l more research ye ought to hit th' Byzantine Empire at least." Research? Immediately I taxied down to my favourite mystic bookshop in Charing Cross. "What, you again?" exclaimed the owner. "Don't tell me you've forgotten something. You practically cleared us out of stock last time." Afraid I might have overlooked something, I took home yet another armload of books on ESP, astrology, alchemy and flying saucers. In a moment of sobriety Dick cautioned me: "Don't take our statements too literally, Brother Sid. They are meta-remarks structured to commemorate the tragic incomprehensibility of our individual extraverbal continuums." Despite Alf's rider—"he means blarney"—I soon hoisted more canvas on a sea of eschatology.

Last was a guiding star who constantly changed position and never appeared in the same place twice. As I loyally stumbled after him, from Freud to Sartre to Goffman to Aleister Crowley, I began lose my bearings. Up down up down, a yoyo on his string, I relapsed into a childhood stammer. At Council meetings I waved my arms and opened my mouth but nothing came out except strangled little grunts and futile gestures. Last rejoiced: "Brother Sid is finally breakin' through!"

Into what?

The more uncertain I stood with Last, the sharper Boris's attacks on me, the further I withdrew into the Eternal. (... below primeval water, above molten land, the songs of Cuchulainn and bullroarers of Zagreus ...) Birth and rebirth, the nostalgia for Paradise, the sacred and irrational. Although I knew Zen had greased Japanese atrocity swords and that some of my favourite writers on the occult and primitive were pro-Fascist, I adapted and twisted uncomfortable facts into in my vast polyhedron of Knowledge-Needed-for-the-Voyage. With a universe of communion opening up for me, why niggle? Distinctions between 'right' and 'wrong' melted away in the blazing furnace of No-Theng. Who was to say whether a Beatles lyric or Lyndon Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic were not in essence the same thing? What the world needed was not the divisiveness of social change but unity—

the self before it was a self, when it was One with the Cosmos.

Bolstered by the knowledge, strongly implied by Last in our talks, that I was above normal moral and political categories, I smugly patronised my old activist pals. Bypassing demos and picket lines with a smirk, I wrote letters to *The Times* defending the monarchist principle, and gave \$25 to the League of Empire Loyalists. As a Yankee Consciousness Pilot, I redrew the political map to exclude Voiderica (USA) and magnify SWINE—anagram of (S)cotland, (W)ales, (I)reland, (N)orth, (E)ngland the world's first psycho-socialist nation, the geographic-historic base of Clare Community Council, rescue mission to the cracked minds of the dying West.

Nobody was happier at my swing to the right than Brother Hengist (ex-Major Straw). “With a few more chaps like you in the Conservative party, Sid, we might weather the storm.” Tony Straw was not often so contemporary these days. After stoutly resisting Clare Council's more radical tendencies, he now capitulated entirely to Last's magic Marxism. As reinterpreted by Brother Hengist-Straw, for him this meant a kind of romantic paganism in which the group was a reincarnated Round Table and Willie Last its once and future king. The Major must have seen himself as an Arthurian Winston Churchill, for he went around warning us in pidgin-Saxon that he could offer us nothing but blood, toil, sweat and tears. It didn't make sense—but who was I to judge?

For me, losing radical politics meant losing not only my inner balance wheel but language as well. Tongue-tied in the horizonless fields of extraverbal communication, I felt hopelessly outclassed by the verbal tumbling acts Last and Drummond engaged in like kids competing to see who could pee the farthest. Their new enthusiasm for the occult rendered their language even more opaque than usual. I wrote down a couple of samples.

Drummond: “If the person being mirrored by the other person sees nobody but the mirroring person he fails to reflect his Oneness into the Other's Otherness which mirrors to the unmirrored person only the mirror-Person's self-mirror. And so it goes, spiralling down the staircase of untold generations.”

But as one artist to another I had to take my hat off to Last who looked immensely pleased with himself after juggling this: “Th' identification of th' eternal Self with th' historically deconditioned fantasy of th' archetype by whom one is seen splits th' primary self into Observe-th'-Observer—Self an' Observed-Self dividin' th' Observer-Person into Self-th'-observer of th' Observed Self an' Other-Observed until th' Self that is Observed disintegrates into a million flying fragments of selves projecting fantasisin', explodin' roun' th' Self-Invisible-tae-th'-Self starin' unutterably at It-Self in th' incommunicable vastness of No-Self nullifyin' itself.” And he'd weave his body in time to the cadences like a headless horseman on a word pebbled road, I jogging falteringly behind, ever behind.

In my more idle moments I wondered, was I becoming the presumptive idiot—the Gareth de Walden—of Clare Council? To Brother Hengist I confessed that when high I hallucinated the group was using me to dissociate from their own unacknowledged schizophrenia; that I might be a mere pawn in the doctors' personal rivalries. In short,

that I might be the double-bound child of Clare Council's normal family.

"That's very interesting," said Tony, cocking his head at me. "Mmmmm." Then rearing back he slapped my knee and shouted with laughter. "I wouldn't carry that much further if I were you. That way ... madness lies."

One of the things I liked about Lena, my cheerful fraulein, was her ability to laugh at us because she stayed outside the sacred analytical circle. But unbeknownst to me she was being pushed closer to Clare Council by her fiancé Irv. Unable himself to break into the Sacred 7, he had petitioned Last to see Lena as a patient which presumably would have given him the personal link to Last he was looking for. But Last didn't want to get involved professionally with anyone as problematical as Lena and palmed her off onto Boris Petkin. (The two doctors often scratched each other's backs this way.) Lena's sessions with Boris were dreadful, she reported. "He kept yawning and belching in my face and when I turned away to avoid all that boiled cabbage on his breath he said I had a bad transference problem." She quit Petkin and resigned herself to making bitchy remarks about how Irv and I now spoke with faint Scottish accents. "Some women are accident prone. I must be Willie Last-prone."

Poor Lena. Surrounded by Men o' th' Light yet incapable of partaking of our splendour. Not out of any sense of grievance or disapproval—I told myself—but to help ease her burden, I broke off Second Holy Most Ultimate Contact (Schmuc). Stopped fucking her. Most of the Brothers were now experimenting with Last's model of TSA, total sexual abstinence.

Lena panicked and accused me of treating her as Last sometimes treated me. "You're throwing me over—and not even for another girl!"

What damn cheek. "Until you learn better manners, you'd better sleep in your own bed for a while," I commanded coldly. And out she went again.

Next day a middle-aged German woman loudly knocked at my door at Regents Gardens. "I am Hebbie. Lena zed you would not anzer ze televone. She haz overdosed again." Lena's apartment was in Notting Hill, a garden flat partly converted (at Irv's expense) into a workshop for making costume jewellery which she hoped might one day set her free economically. When I arrived Hebbie's husband, a tall handsome grey-haired man was pouring hot coffee into the semi-conscious girl with expert brusqueness. He glared at me. "You are all crazy," he muttered angrily while propping Lena up against a long table laden with welding equipment and polishing wheels. "Why do you and Irving leave Lena so much alone. Iz like her monthlies, she chews sleeping pills like Polo mints."

After Hebbie and her husband left—they were her landlords who lived in the top flat—I slapped Lena out of her stupor. Dumb bitch, disobey me would she? I put extra sting into it, and she put up her arms to protect herself. "Why don't you let me die? One less Jew-killer left," she groaned. How corny could you get, blaming yourself for Hitler's massacre when you'd been hardly born at the time?

Crisply, I diagnosed Lena's suicide attempts—her fifth or sixth, she boasted—as internalised aggression. She must learn to express her anger toward others more openly. Lena laughed weakly. "If I did, you and Irv would be dead by now."

As spring days lengthened, thus giving us more light to look for country houses, it became clear that I wasn't the only Brother having trouble controlling his woman. The doctors' wives were absolutely fed up slaving over vegetarian diets for absent men whose asexual detachment they perceived as a put-down, and they began openly to rebel. Never exactly quiescent, Sybil Last now showed her teeth.

"So-o-o, it's this month's Pin-Up Patient. When's Alf suing you for alienation of affections, Bri-ther Sid?" she'd answer the front door at Number 4 Crimea Street. Or tackle me in the kitchen. "And how's Paul? No *real* man would've taken that crap from Hannah." ('Paul' was the heroine Hannah's American lover in Coral's novel, *Loose Leaves from a Random Life*) Once, after Sybil trod hard on my foot with her spike heels, Last took me aside. "Go easy on th' lass, Sid. It's harder fer her, bein' outside th' Circle of Light." Overhearing, Sybil went after me hammer and tongs. "Gaw eas-eh, Bru-thair Sid," she flounced around the parlour sniggering. "Sucking up to shrinks could produce sex changes." Behind her back Alf, who had been Sybil's previous target, theatrically wiped his brow and whispered, "Thank God it's your turn now."

Nancy, the black New York wife Dick kept at King Edward's married quarters, first blew up at the wedding reception the Drummonds threw for Screwy Lewie and Bronwen Singh. We goggled as Nancy interrupted Dick's usual soliloquy on "bourgeois marriage, love's murder" to stalk into the nursery and bring out the smallest of her tan, sleeping kids, then defiantly breast-fed the baby with one hand while knocking back Vat 69 with the other. "Wake up, you li'l bastud, yo daddy's talkin' 'bout you!" She turned to a male guest. "Baby, I sure got those nuclear family blues. Y'now, locked up inside a nut house all day like I am is just like bein' in th' movies. You ever see *The Snake Pit*?"

Even that longest suffering of migraine martyrs, Viv Petkin, threw in her cards. Tired of Boris's radical-sounding rationalisations of his tomcatting around with Davina, she decamped with the children to her mother's in Bethnal Green. Boris lamented, "Poor Viv. It's all my fault for not equipping her better to grasp the nettle of sexual emancipation."

Later, as the doctors' marital situations went "into a state of flux and reflux, crystallising at higher stages of understanding, if necessary of spiritual separation and purification," as Dick described it, we got used to their new girl friends.

Clare Council's attitude to women was that they were either exalted Light Bringers or slightly subnormal Earth Mothers. In practice, a woman stood or fell according to how well she bounced 'light' (knowledge) off her man.

Davina seemed ill-disposed to challenge this view. She cooked, sewed and typed for us without complaint, a kind of masochistic dues she exacted from herself as the price of experimenting with her other possibilities. Such subordination to men somehow helped buy off her guilt caused by the original act of liberation, taking a job against her family's wishes. "In a way," she said, "Clare Council isn't so different from the Beeb. You tolerate women as long as they're gentlemen." She wryly admitted that Boris, with his traditional Jewish attitude to women as kitchen comrades, was the perfect lover for her.

I, too, usually treated Dav as one of the chaps. What a relief it was to have a modest, silent woman who never made vulgar personal demands like Coral or drunkenly tried to kill herself like Lena. It took months before Davina dared raise her hand to speak at meetings. Yes indeed, she was the perfect ... er, Brister.

But sometimes it was a close call. One LSD afternoon in my flat I stripped naked and used my penis as a joystick to maneuver around inner space. My trusted sitter Davina, knitting and reading *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, calmly lay aside her book to stare at my enlarging prick till I fell onto the bed and groaned, "Pilot to base, pilot to base. I'm lost up here ..."

"Do you want some radar?" Davina said helpfully. She came and sat at my bedside and put a cool competent hand on my cock. It glowed like a red-hot iron, then shrivelled. I hid in mortification behind the velvet double drapes and hallucinated badly. Then, sobering up in the street outside, I told her that under acid I'd visualised her true selves: a Mother Superior with a BBC microphone for a belly button thus too sacred to screw, Lizzie Borden chopping off my *shlong* with a bloody axe while singing the suffragette anthem *Shoulder to Shoulder*, a butch-looking Tinker Bell burying me at the foot of the weed garden, Saint Mae West burned at the stake in Rouen. When she stuck too menacingly on androgynous Maori with a war club in her fist, I decided her black body-painted war dance was too much, and brought myself down.

Davina smiled stoically. "I know. Willie and Boris tell me much the same thing. Sometimes after listening to all your fantasies about me I repeat a litany to myself, 'Davina Mannix-Lloyd, daughter of a Tunbridge Wells bank director ... Davina Mannix-Lloyd, daughter of a Tunbridge Wells bank director ... Davina—

But one woman could give the exploiters a lesson in exploitation.

One late June night I answered a weak knock at the door of Last's home (Sybil was away sulking at her mother's in Edinburgh), and when I opened it Bronwen Jones Singh, bruised and muddy, slumped melodramatically across the threshold. "He tried to kill me," she whispered before passing out in my arms.

After brandy and cold compresses brought her round, Bronwen poured out her tale. It all started with her wedding at King Edward chapel, she said, where her new husband had ejected some gate-crashing Con Housers. ("Herb and Jerry had as much right to be there as anybody," she sobbed. "So what if they were naked?") After the honeymoon Bronwen had changed her mind about promising to quit Con House, and also demanded her right to sleep in a separate bed. When Singh complained to Nancy Drummond that Dick was breaking up his marriage, Bronwen stormed out with her bags to a refuge room Dick kept for her in Con House, whereupon Singh wrote a long libellous letter about her and Dr. Dick to the Management Committee. ("That's all we needed—to get caught in the crossfire of an escalating sex battle," O'Brien told me later.)

Earlier this morning Singh, told that Bronwen wanted an annulment, had run amok, dragging her out of Con House by the hair, kicking and punching her all the way to the Chief Nurse's office, where he demanded that Mr. Tasker sack her on the spot. Tasker, bowing to Singh's more senior medical status, begged Bronwen to leave quietly "for the good of the

hospital service.” “He didn’t even say anything about my bloody nose. Just fired me and sneaked out for a cup of tea,” cried Bronwen whose humiliation was complete when Singh abducted her in his car and dumped her in a ditch miles from nowhere. None of the three motorists who helped get her to London commented on her dishevelled state. “No wonder the English go mad—nobody notices you here!”

Bronwen looked up at us with frightened eyes. “Lewis says he’ll kill me if I see any of you again.”

After she was put to bed upstairs, a Clare war council. We were fairly pissed. Last narrowed his eyes, set his jaw and massaged first one fist then the other. “Well?” he demanded.

Silence.

“Are we gointa take this lyin’ down?”

More silence.

“What do you suggest, Willie?” asked Alf mildly. “We knock him sideways into yesterday?”

Last eloquently cracked his knuckles.

“Why not?” Davina squealed in delight.

A few more brandies, a bit more knuckle cracking, and I could feel the lynch fever rise in all of us. At last—something to do.

We piled out of the house with a primitive roar and in Last’s Bentley sped through sparse pre-sunrise traffic toward Low Wick. On the way Boris suddenly remembered an urgent appointment elsewhere, but shamefacedly stayed when Davina, not especially sober, chastised, “Oh ye man of small faith!” Major Straw-Hengist kept shouting happily, “Reminds me of Calcutta, communal riots, ’46. Sergeant, ready, load and aim at that troublemaker at the edge of the crowd.” At the hospital’s rear gate Last solemnly shook hands with Dick and me—the “assault force”—and stayed behind with the rear guard. (Davina had to be restrained from coming along for the scrap.) The Bentley, motor running, waited in a nearby lane as Dick and I crept along the dawn-lit path to Dr. Singh’s cottage. I couldn’t rightly recall how I had ‘volunteered’ but this was no time to argue. Kneeling at Singh’s doorway I asked: “What’ll we do if he’s home?” Dick replied boozily: “Confront his epistemological disturbance with our heuristic intentionality.” And then? “Kick the shit out of him.”

But the cottage was unlocked, empty. “Oh is that you, Dr. Drummond?” called a passing groundskeeper. “If you’re looking for Dr. Singh I think he’s staying over at the Medical Super’s.”

Disappointed, we returned to London, boasting of what we’d have done to Singh ... if. That night, at Number 4 Crimea Street, smiling appealingly under her black eye and cut lip, Bronwen sat in our midst and kissed all the men for rallying to her defence. We all held hands, cried a little and sang old war songs until one by one we dropped asleep, Bronwen in Boris’s arms (much to Davina’s displeasure). Dr. Last, mumbling his favourite tune, fell upon Alf, Boris’s squawking attempts to sing woke us up, Tony Straw joined in heartily and the night ended for the Sacred 7, plus Bronwen, arms intertwined, softly in unison:

“Oh the roses are shining in Picardy
In the hush of a silver dew
Roses are flow’ring in Picardy
But there’s never a rose like you ...”

Going back to King Edward had given me a powerful urge to stay behind there. Somehow life in a schizophrenic unit seemed simpler and saner. Con House’s yellow brick chimney, glimpsed over the tidy hedgerows, had looked so beautiful in the early morning sun. After months of pretending otherwise, I had to admit to myself that a void was opening between the group and me. Small doubts and hesitations tied my tongue until it rambled pointlessly and then lay still in the face of Last’s pained, tolerant grin. With all my heart I inwardly fought against this deepening alienation, and bridged the gulf with feverish activity on behalf of Clare Council. I even forced myself to do BBC stints. But I soon discovered that acid and the TV cyclops eye didn’t mix. The night I appeared on a book show with Evelyn Waugh I got the shock of my life when an apparition in my mind flew out of the camera’s red eye—Con House’s Herb Greaves armed with a knife—came crashing past the studio lights screaming:

“*Gilbert Pinfold* leaves me cold
Decline and Fall is pure balls ...”

Depression, grey and familiar, surfaced.

So did Jerry Jackson.

“H’lo Devil! FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!”

Blackened by the anti-intruder grease I’d smeared on the outside drainpipe, Jerry pounded on the rear window of my flat which I untaped to let him in. He brushed his shabby suit and looked around at the bare dark apartment. “Gee I knew writers was poor. But ain’t this carryin’ it too far? FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!”

For the next twenty-four hours, cross-legged and sitting eye to eye, Jerry and I picked at the verbal knot he had tied himself into: he could not stop hiccuping “FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!” By morning he was bushed, down, and for advice I phoned Les O’Brien who told me to bring him back to King Edward “Pronto before he scares himself half to death like he usually does.” At Victoria Station Jerry broke away to tootle *It’s Just One of Those Things* on his invisible clarinet and to jitterbug with a Corgi-holding lady. “Shake it or break it, fat stuff. FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!” He bore down menacingly on a bearded turbaned man with a monocle: “Mornin’, Gunga Din. FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!” And tossed a frozen-faced City gent’s bowler down an open manhole. “Easy come, easy go, Moneybags. FORGET IT—IT’S PAST!”

We ran for it back to my place.

This time Les said over the phone, “Get th’ rozzers but don’t leave Jerry alone with

them.” In response to my 999 call three big, surprisingly gentle policemen came and almost tenderly bundled Jerry off to the station where he sat on a bench joking and flirting with a policewoman until O’Brien and Dave Foster showed up. Suddenly alarmed, Jerry backed against the station wall, doubling his fists. Half a dozen cops tensed for a fight. “Hey Jerry,” I yelled.

He looked at me.

“Forget it—it’s past!” I cried.

He collapsed on the floor, laughing.

But he wouldn’t go back to Low Wick without me. “Sure, why not?” said Les. “Th’ old place don’t seem the same without you.”

Days and Nights in Conolly House:] summer [

It was like coming home. By now my emotional anchor was Con House and its amused tolerance (if not total acceptance) of me. Yet my fear and underlying shame at mingling with madmen, some of them half my age, made me yearn for a definition of sanity that would keep a safe distance between the boys and me. Were they mad, ill, existential travellers or what? The majority had been railroaded into hospital on one pretext or another—the voluntary admission gimmick could be the nastiest Catch-22 of all—but that didn't mean they weren't genuinely batty. Where, in all of Jerry Jackson's American jazz fantasies, Derek Chatto communing with the chess grand masters and Featherstone's phallic self-exposure, had Last's light broken through?

"You're as blooming crackers as they are," Les O'Brien, the charge nurse, asserted. "You keep looking for madness which is mad itself. What's wrong with them is that they worried someone. But it has nothing to do with justice, the nub of the case. Take a look at their parents next Sunday and tell me who's got a screw loose and who hasn't. You know what gives the game away? I'll tell you. Not one papa or mama has himself been a mental patient. Not one! Statistically, it's an impossibility." O'Brien slapped his head. "For Christ's sake—it's a hype."

Safe harbour.

As Lena's red MGB slowly rolls up to Conolly House a bathrobed boy wearing a police bobby's helmet darts out the front door and takes the porch steps in one leap, closely pursued by someone in a KKK hood waving a chair leg followed by a pyjama'd Indian chief in full war bonnet. With wild yells they disappear round a corner chased by purple-faced Bert Karp, his nurse's white smock flapping about his knees. "Mornin', Mr. Bell," he shouts. "Wondered where you were past few days!" I've been gone two months.

I examine Con House through Lena's windshield. Dick Drummond's struggle with the hospital bureaucrats to keep the lawn dirty and 'natural' has apparently not yet been lost. It's an even worse garbage heap than usual, if that's possible. Empty beer bottles, bread crusts and bits of newspaper litter the uncut grass on which a French musketeer wrestles with a boy wearing angel wings and another who is one of Dr. Who's Daleks; someone partly dressed in pirate gear reclines on a mattress up on the roof. It looks as if A.C.'s "China Follies," like Picadilly's Windmill theatre, never closed.

A barefoot butler jumps on the MGB's hood, Lena's sharp braking almost throws him off. Jerry, back in tails and striped trousers from Clem's party, comes around to the driver's side and pokes his head through the window. "Is copper's little nark 'ere turnin' you in too,

miss?" Lena replies, a little too seriously, "I hope not." She waits for me to get out then roars off in reverse toward the front gate. The hospital terrifies her.

I apologise to Jerry for calling the cops last week. He winks. "Ah forget it—it's past." We collapse, laughing.

Flopped alongside me on the warm dry grass under a July sun, Jerry complains that he hasn't had any visions lately. When I suggest that maybe he's not so crazy anymore, he asks worriedly, "Anything I c'n take for it?"

In answer to my questions Jerry says there have been two more suicide attempts and several escapes.

"On th' positive side," Jerry winds up his report, "Nurse Karp 'as a summer flu, Sally's pregnant an' Robin's pa died."

A shadow falls over us. "ON YOUR FEET, SCUM, WHEN AN OFFICER APPROACHES!" A large angry boy in dirty pyjamas kicks the ground next to our heads. Shading my eyes I don't recognise the filthy character with dirt-matted hair and bloodshot eyes.

"Oh yeah," says Jerry lazily, "almost forgot. Derek Chatto 'as gone tuh sea as Lord Nelson."

I've never seen a 10:00 a.m. community meeting so divided. In their weird wonderful scraps of costume the boys sit smoking or cleaning their fingernails while Dr. Dick, flanked sternly by Drs. Singh and Primrose, stares at a blubbing mass of bedclothes in the centre of TV room. Derek Chatto, his face gluey with filth and tears, rolls foetus-like from person to person, a weeping tumbleweed grabbing at legs, the floor, himself, moaning, "What's wrong? There is nothing wrong. Get it out of you. Get what?" From the weary way O'Brien and the boys yawn like bored theatre critics when Derek crashes past, I gather he's not exactly hot news around here. Only Drs. Singh and Primrose seem unhealthily fascinated with his behaviour; everyone else is fed up with it.

Not me. Swiftly I kneel over his sweating, struggling form on the floor and mentally roll up my sleeves. Ah yes, reckon his Astral Calibration at ninety degrees, Flight Path Trajectory Zero Zero approaching Critical Moment One. Thank Gaw'd the Sacred 7 trained me to guide lost souls down from the High Pass country of the mind. As I make magic signs over his body Derek jumps and twitches as if hit by gunfire; he grapples with me and reaches up to kiss my lips, arches his back to draw me down. Sumbitch is strong as an ox. Bert Karp moves in to grab him but I wave him away: this one is mine. (I can feel the astonished eyes of Singh and Primrose boring into my back.)

Bubbling and cursing, Derek stiffens to attention on the floor and bellows: "Mustn't bash the lower ranks. Conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman. Don't want to hit anybody. DON'T!"

Barney Beaton, wearing a MISS BOGNOR REGIS swimsuit, walks over to Derek and pours a jug of water on him. "Cool off, Admiral Nelson. You're dragging your chance."

Meeting's over.

Why Derek, of all boys, should cross over from a mild obsession with chess into full-scale psychosis remains a mystery. True, on my last visit he'd already begun to chase girls but reportedly had been astonished back into his former shy repressed personality when Bronwen toppled into his arms and let him fondle her. The flash point came soon afterward, on a Sunday visit from his father, a naval officer based in Portsmouth. A quiet afternoon huddled together over a borrowed chess set climaxed when Derek smashed the board over his father's head and shouted, "Stop trying to break down my defences!" After which he refused to eat or wash, then proclaimed himself the ghost of Baden Powell, the Boy Scout founder, and when that proved too namby-pamby to contain his aggression he switched to Martin Bormann back from the Paraguayan jungle to complete Hitler's mission of wiping out all Jewish chess players. O'Brien says that the Bormann personality actually helped Derek for a time. "But he's basically too nice a kid to sustain a Fascist fantasy system. Bad luck for him, that." O'Brien is worried. Derek's recent explosions, he fears, are far more active and formidable than the essentially passive, ritualised punch-ups of, say, Hurricane Hodge. "We've tried everything, from leaving him alone to practically breast-feeding him. Nothing helps." I ask why Drummond's methods, which assuage at least some boys 'problem of anger' don't work with Derek anymore.

"How th' hell should I know?" O'Brien cries despairingly. "Maybe he puts too much sugar in his Weetabix?"

When the coast is clear I slip into Observation Dorm on the ground floor where my patient Derek nods dopily from O'Brien's hypo of 5cc paraldehyde. "H'lo, Master Petrosian. Putting all the Jews in concentration camps almost purified the game, didn't it? Only one more to go—Bobbie Fischer!" He grabs me again and starts to wrestle me into bed with him.

"Tyger," I murmur, extracting myself with some difficulty. "Tyger Bluefish." Something in my manner quiets Derek, and he lets me place my fingertips at his temples, bend and whisper a phrase from the *Iranian Manuscript*. Glassy-eyed, he grasps the Gnostic Pearl; gently bites my finger. Dear Tyger.

And like *The Phantom of the Opera*, I fade away.

All day Derek's vibrations control Conolly House. Later he shows up on the lawn, shaved, combed and contrite, his Hitlerian power fantasy having shaded into something more familiar and nautical again. "It's out of me now. I had a dream. The Lord High Admiral told me not to hurt the patients but to lead them against the Zionist armada. That's why I'm here, isn't it?"

It happens at tea time. In the dining room a great brain-destroying roar, scraping of chairs. Sally screams. I dive out of the way just as Derek Chatto, arisen like a blond King Kong, upends his table and sends people, utensils and china flying. Before the table hits the floor Les O'Brien is on him, sliding with incredible skill between Derek and the scattered cutlery and wrestling him along the floor. O'Brien pins him to the wall there and lets Derek flail away

until he ineffectually punches himself out. When, weakly and unconvincingly, Derek grabs for a bread knife, Bert Karp, straining at the leash of his own violence, takes a running leap and lands his 200 pounds of frustrated police cadet failure squarely on his head. Thump! thump! Bert slams Derek's skull on the floor again and again, dispassionately, his broad red face slightly abstracted with pleasure. Les O'Brien reaches over to pry Bert's hands from Derek's throat and says, in a mollifying tone usually reserved for violent patients, "Okay Bert, let up on him now." To Derek: "Relax, boy. Nobody's going to hurt you." Derek crumples, crying.

O'Brien orders the two nearest gawkers, A.C. and me, to collar Derek while he tries to find Drummond. When I shove up against Derek the way I saw Les do I can feel his 'body electricity' running through me like a physical current. "Boy," says A.C. still in his ringmaster's coat and pressing on Derek's powerful, shuddering shoulders, "I don't mind a schizophrenic breakdown every now and then. But this is ridiculous."

Emergency meeting in Observation Dorm. O'Brien scans the crowd. "Hmmm. Full house. Ominous."

Derek, propped up in bed, smiles dreamily and returns a salute no one has given him. "Mustered the crew then, Master-at Arms?"

The simple reason why so many Con Housers have turned out so spontaneously is that we have learned that Dr. Singh is pushing hard to have Derek imprisoned in the violent ward, Churchill Wing. It is widely suspected that this would set a precedent for anyone else in the unit who ever goes 'florid'—at one time or another 99 per cent of Con House (including me).

Instinctively the boys look to Dr. Dick Drummond for advice and comfort, but he's so into one of his paralytic trances disguised as non-interference he may as well be on another planet. Perched uneasily on a cot, he swings his chubby legs back and forth like a moonstruck child. His whole manner suggests a trauma of indecision which only his patients can alleviate. He is in a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, getting rid of Derek has its attractions because he is such a painful reminder that community therapy has its limits. But Dick is committed to keeping the boys out of a hellhole like Churchill Wing. In his heart he knows that submitting to Dr. Singh's pressure must put everyone else at risk.

Finally the pendulum legs stop, the Drummond voice speaks: "Prima facie, Derek bears the unbearable burden of our reductively totalised psychopathy—"

Groans. Wally loudly whispers, "Blimey, th' guvnor's off again."

Just this once the boys can't really tolerate Dick's long-winded sermons. They need firm guidance in navigating through their own ambivalences. A lot of them wouldn't mind seeing Derek shipped out because he's become such a threat to their stability—but they also know that Singh would not stop at Derek once he smelled their blood. Who will put the options clearly? As usual when Dr. Dick goes into shock, the boys turn to Les O'Brien, who with a tired glance at his chief, says: "One, we give up Derek so we can all take a breather. Two, we keep him in Con House but doped up to the eyes, which is against our anti-drug principles but since when has that stopped us? Three, he stays here ... undoped. And every one of you takes the consequences.

A.C. cocks a trigger. "That's right, why not look after him ourselves?"

A tremor passes through the dormitory. While nobody comes right out and calls A.C. nuts that's the gist of it. The boys' protests and catcalls only make A.C. dig in his heels. He may have meant it as a joke at first; but sure, why *not* let everyone take over Derek's nursing until he's better?

Half-incredulous questions fly at O'Brien. A.C.'s kidding, right? I mean, Derek is much too sick for Con House ... isn't he? Also isn't he, uh, dangerous? Wouldn't it be better to help him get, er, specialised treatment? "Like th' twisted towel therapy," mutters someone who's obviously been to Churchill Wing. Terrified of patient power—of effectively erasing the reassuring line between themselves and nursing staff—the boys almost beg O'Brien to label Derek an incurable chronic withdrawn. "He's too much for mentals like us to handle," cries Jack Sweeney who pipes down when Robin, now sporting a platinum-blond urchin cut, shakes her bandaged fist at him.

O'Brien refuses to back down. "He's got what you've all got—no more, no less. Call it what you want."

Some boys are nothing if not inventive. "It's against union rules, i'nt it?" asks Wally Walters a paid-up member of the Transport & General Workers. And hearts begin to bleed for staff who might lose their jobs in a patient takeover and then who'll feed their wives and kiddies? After much palaver the boys offer a generous compromise: they will help the staff to nurse Derek but nothing more.

O'Brien flatly dispels this illusion by pointing out that there simply aren't enough nurses around to contain Derek in his present excitable state. So, either he gets shipped up to Winnie Wing—or Con House patients must take over responsibility for him. O'Brien bluntly adds: "If you guys are fantasising that Dave and I will pull your chestnuts out of this particular fire, think again. We vote to toss Derek out, right Dave?"

Nurse Foster nods agreement.

O'Brien's candour so angers some boys that they turn their spite full on Derek and cuss him out. In effect, the names they call him—lazy, self-dramatising, indulgent, perverse, just downright vicious—regurgitate many of their parents' voiced and unvoiced resentments at their own breakdowns. "We did everything we could for him—where's his gratitude?" snaps Yorkshire Roy. Herb Greaves decides,

"Eeny meeny miney mo
Derek has to be the foe
If he hollers make him go
Eeny meeny miney mo."

Big Barney leans over Derek with an improvised stethoscope (the nozzle section of a garden

hose) and pontificates, “Acute mania of the tabula rasa. Send for his sister and shag her.”

My biggest disappointment is Jerry Jackson, who panics at the prospect of exchanging his present unhappy security for the risks of self-nursing. “Ya fuckin’ clap-poxed fairy twit. Why’nt ya take yer medicine like a man!” he screams at Derek, then looks around in fury at us and slams out of the dorm.

A.C. tosses his hot potato at me. “What’s your opinion, Sid?”

I’m so keen to keep my urban shaman’s hands on Derek I vote to retain him, free and unsedated, in Con House, and my enthusiasm swings over one or two waverers who fear that I may be expressing an Administration view they must obey. For an hour or so the arguments roll back and forth across Derek’s blithely grinning torso. Normally Con House splits between the gut liberals and hard-line conservatives, but this issue produces a large crop of switch voters. The mad are spiritual Californians.

In the end, tired out by wrangling, the boys want Drummond to settle it. “You must collectively decide,” is all he says before ducking out.

“What’s wrong with Dr. Dick?” someone asks. Robin dryly replies, “Incurable ditheritis.”

The upshot is, we the patients are taking over.

The Florence Nightingale Caper

First shift, Derek rota.

From 6:00p.m. we’re operational. People in false beards, Klan hoods, a MISS BOGNOR REGIS swimsuit, a clown’s red nose and a shaman’s cloak (me) surround Derek, watching his every move in bed. There’s no shortage of helpers; the boys queue up to volunteer. Which is just as well, because Dr. Dick and O’Brien refused to live in with us. “My staying would invalidate your authenticity,” said Dick loftily. O’Brien was blunter. “You don’t catch me goin’ over the top without some officer showing me th’ way first.” As a gesture of solidarity to us, O’Brien arranged for Mad Monahan, the dreaded night nurse, to be assigned elsewhere. We’re on our own.

Night. Observation Dorm lit by the dying rays of a summer sun setting behind Low Wick. Derek lightly moans, a few nearby shapes change position, sleep on. Whenever Derek moves uneasily one of us holds his hand or talks comfortingly to him. Snores.

Three a.m. Shifts come on and off every two hours. The self-appointed captains of the guard, A.C. and me and A.C.’s lover, the dud shell Keith Whitworth, dig in for the night and take turns catnapping in Jerry’s empty bed. Jerry has quit the dorm in protest against “yer dumb Florence Nightingale caper.” An unusual peace descends. Percy’s radio is silent courtesy of an anonymous pair of wire cutters, and hullabaloo artists like Greaves and Hurricane Hodge have caught the spirit of the thing and are in temporary retirement. Shadowy shapes scurry in to peer down at our sleeping monster or bring us mugs of tea; out in the corridor some boys, unable to cope with the anxiety produced by our challenge to the

hospital's authority, cower together and wait for retributive lightning to strike them down. Eric Raw wobbles in plaintively. "It's all about me, isn't it?"

Four a.m. The only sounds are Gareth squishing into his rubber sheet, Jack Sweeney sleepily crooning *Maria* from *West Side Story*, Barney laughing at jokes in his dreams. Like Henry V's yeomanry before the battle of Agincourt, lacking only campfires, A.C. and I keep each other awake with whispering gossip and our life stories.

Lantern Slide: A.C. Corrigan

Albert Cavanagh Corrigan is one of Con House's naturally commanding voices, an influence that owes much to his Liverpool-bred skills, almost equal to O'Brien's, at subduing the unit's wild men. Also his frank, good-humoured admission of private torments which drive the other boys crazy in their effort to cover up. "Not that I didn't try, old whack."

A.C. is a homosexual, a fact he discovered at seminary. ("I wanted to be a priest out of guilt. Good God, what a priest that would've made.") When his Mersey side Irish family threw him out—"Offshore micks like us are a funny race, more tolerant of loonies than queers"—A.C. decided to go mad or, failing that, to kill himself. On a last spree in London he tucked himself under Charing Cross railway bridge and got sick on cheap wine and sleeping pills. And had his first vision, of Nelson's Column as a gigantic phallus pumping sperm into Pope Paul's mouth. "Took six of the boys in blue to wrestle me into hospital here. I was ravin', had every hallucination in th' book." Dr. Dick, scouting a good patient mix for his new unit, rescued him from a Churchill Wing straitjacket and padded cell. "I suppose he needed a few classy I.Q.'s to impress visitors." Since then, A.C. has become one of Drummond's ablest helpers, lobbing back with perfect accuracy the boys' furious salvos of self-deception. "Me, an expert? Maybe so—if that means bein' in th' same bloody boat as them. Anyways I enjoy it. Soothes th' sadist in me."

Though A.C. deeply mistrusts the theoretical side of Drummond's work—"I wuz born an'll die a Catholic near miss. Dr. Dick's a blasphemer"—at the same time he has a marvellous talent for working with anti-psychiatry at a practical level. However, he is still his respectable lace-curtain parents' son, and hedges his bets with a running patter of self-protective, self-denigrating jokes about "us schizo animals in th' zoo".

Is he sorry he came to Con House, then?

A.C. replies quietly, "This grotty bughouse? It fuckin' saved my life."

Near dawn A.C. and Whitworth doze with their arms around each other, and I have a chance to check on our patient. Derek's eyes flutter open when I kneel at his bedside. I guide his heartbeat till it's locked into the Universal Clock, then satisfied it's all I can do now, I kiss the blessed Brother's hand and go off to my room followed by A.C.'s sleepy, puzzled gaze.

In a corner of my room Jerry crouches tense and miserable in his cutaway coat and wretchedly

fingering *Don't Blame Me* on his imaginary clarinet. He leaves plenty of musical gaps for me to fill in, which I don't because I'm less forgiving of him than he was of me for turning him over to the cops.

"Fuck off, Jackson," I fall tiredly into bed and turn to the wall. Splat! The plaster flies away only an inch from my face. Jerry has kicked the wall so savagely I almost hear the bones crunch in his bare foot. "Ya cuntish, patronisin' intellectual bastid! Everything was okay till ya came!" He towers over me, eyes glowing with pure hatred, and shouts that I will wreck Conolly House with stunts like the Derek rota. There is a rational, terrified quality to his non-stop cussing. Then, suddenly afraid, he 'wipes' his anger. "Boy, am I glad ya're 'ere," he mops his brow in exaggerated relief. "Us schizos need proper doctors like you an' Dr. Dick."

Bullshit, I reply. And all through the morning and into a warm afternoon we argue the rights and wrongs of Derek's case—of patients supervising themselves. Once he loses his temper and punches me; a second time I hit back, and we slug it out until I remember his weak point and tickle him into helpless, laughing surrender. Then it's back to jaw-jaw, and it goes on like that most of the early night, each of us dozing off while the other drones on, until finally Jerry shakes me awake.

"I think I got it now. It's like Jesus whippin' th' Gadarene charge nurses outta th' Temple, ain't it?"

Having worked it through for himself, he is now ready to help, but something still puzzles him. "Wot's so important about Derek anyways? 'e related to someone big?"

I suggest that Drummond semi-created the crisis. "He may be trying to get us to commit to Con House as his last line of defence," I say.

"Us?" says Jerry, "'e's got a hope."

But the hope persists. At first, with shifts relieving one another at surprisingly punctual intervals, there are almost too many volunteers. Curiously, it's the Con House conservatives more than the progressives who pitch in to help. For their own reasons, of course. Roy says we are saving the Chancellor of the Exchequer money on staff salaries. On the other hand, the CND anarchist Jeff H. has opted out—oh how familiar this sounds!—on the super-radical pretext that A.C. and I are making a bad system work.

Hyperactive morning. Con House's level up, up: last night Percy rewired his amplifiers, causing the building to float on a sound cushion of Beethoven's *Eroica*. Someone has even scrubbed out the TV room, and for once the dinner dishes get washed promptly. I've never seen Con House so orderly and calm. It's like a well-run consultative assembly about to legislate a vital bill. A constant stream of boys on vague errands pass in and out of Observation Dorm, looking for an excuse to nurse Derek. As we gravely manoeuvre past one another, exchanging businesslike smiles, purposefulness spreads like morning sunshine.

The takeover galvanises Con House. Madness does not disappear; but something changes, moves. Eric Raw ends his long hunger strike and, between bites of a huge jam sandwich, says, "Maybe it's Derek's fault this time." Black Abe becomes so curious about what's happening that he forgets to cough, and a number of boys climb out of pyjamas—the

patient's Yellow Star—into street clothes or China Follies gear. On the debit side, few of the anonymous withdrawals have really come awake, and one or two boys unable to adjust to the new situation look like joining them in the mental boondocks.

The effect on staff is almost as disturbing. Released from their chronic need to look after and be in charge (as some patients need to be looked after and obey), they euphorically bounce around looking for something—or someone—to do. When their attempts to 'help' are politely rejected they slowly regress to huddle in corners for private, worried talks and even begin to develop symptoms. Dave Foster falls into deep, unpremeditated sleeps; and Bert Karp goes around passing out not pills but apples from a brown paper bag. Pregnant Sally complains of the cold (in July) and sits all day in a rocking chair in front of an unlit gas fire, knitting. And Dick Drummond, whose office we have occupied, sits part of the day in his yellow Morgan parked in the driveway and stares morosely at Con House. Is he feeling guilty because we are sacrificing Derek (and perhaps even ourselves) to a theory—his theory? Bert Karp echoes what six or seven people have told me: "Where did I go wrong with Derek, Mr. Bell?"

No sign yet of the Demented Duo. Are Drs. Singh and Primrose giving us too much rope?

Another moment alone with Derek. I tenderly place my hands on his stomach. Dear Tyger Bluefish nods and sits up, beautifully in tune. Mustn't hurry. My shaman arms accept the tremors flowing from his Vital Centre, I feel his disconnected sickness in me. I almost faint. Tyger, I whisper, will you come with me? "Yes." Now? "Yes." Thus legitimised, I point my clasped hands at his heart to make the incision, then we're both tossed into the Universal Plasma, streaking for the wild light. Along the way I teach him how to spear the bush kangaroo, heave rocks at low flying birds, trap the marmion. At first stiffly scared, his responses awkward, he warms, oils, flows, at last slowly flies apart. His True Voice is born. We jive.

Far, far below on earth Eric and Wally, in their new-found friendship looking like Laurel and Hardy, return from supper to their guard duties. Quickly I reassemble Tyger Bluefish into the human Derek Chatto. "Oi," says Wally, "whatcha bin doin' to 'im, Sid? Look at 'at smile. Like a baby wot's jus' bin burped."

Rotten luck tonight. Somehow Mad Monahan, the bully boy nurse O'Brien was supposed to sidetrack for us, is back on duty. The very idea of a unit run by its patients gets up his nose. "Stuff this carry on!" he bellows, and breaks up the rota by poking and kicking us into bed. Derek's moans he stifles with a double syringe of paraldehyde, and anyone who even looks at him wrong is threatened with incarceration in Churchill Wing, "where you bleeding fruitcakes belong." Me he freezes with a look of withering contempt. "And that goes for you too, Yank!"

My honeymoon with the staff is over.

This morning, hung over on dope, Derek shambles into group therapy, one of the Con House institutions we decided to keep, and pushes Dick Drummond out of his customary chair. "Well

you see,” Derek begins reasonably, “my father can’t admit his sexual aggressiveness. Transfers it to me where I can’t discipline it. It doesn’t belong to me but to him. I love my father. He loves me. How can you lead the Home Fleet into battle on only four O-levels?” He breaks down. “I’m scum, sirs.”

Barney Beaton, rushing up to place his nozzle-stethoscope against Derek’s head, diagnoses: “Inflammation of the eat-a-pussy complex,” and just as Derek lashes out to kick him Drs. Singh and Primrose, with Chief Nurse Tasker riding shotgun, stalk in like Mafia hoods. The sight of patients in tuxedos and false beards running Con House does not please them.

“Who is in charge here?” demands Dr. Primrose, struggling unsuccessfully as usual to keep the anger out of her voice. Dr. Dick reclines silent as a statue on one of the mattresses now.

“I guess all of us are in charge,” cheerfully responds A.C. who explains how we work the rota system: two sentries on Derek at all times, replaced every couple of hours, a flying squad on standby for emergencies. We’re also trying to wean Derek off the paraldehyde Monahan keeps squirting into him.

Dr. Singh only half hears A.C. because his small, suspicious eyes are busy roving around for Bronwen (who is upstairs therapeutically cuddling Mr. Wu). When he finally registers what A.C. is saying, he smiles frostily. “Ah, Mr. Corrigan, my naïve friend. So you and your fascist friends think that the way to cure Derek is by projecting onto him your own unresolved totalitarian tendencies?” Dr. Primrose butts in to ask if Derek has been violent during the night. “Yeah,” interjects Jerry. “’e killed a woggy shrink. Chopped off ’is crockers ’n hung ’em up to dry.”

Screwy Lewie laughs mirthlessly. “Ha ha. Good joke, sir.”

“Don’t mention it, Gunga Din.”

An outburst of weeping by Derek brings Dr. Primrose instantly to his bedside, where she makes sympathetic noises and smooths back his evil-smelling unkempt hair. Before anyone can warn her Derek grabs her long pointed nose between his strong fingers and gives a powerful tug.

O’Brien and I watch Screwy Lewie help his colleague to the infirmary, leaving behind a delicate trail of nose blood droplets. How much longer, I ask, does he think we can keep Derek in Con House? He replies, “The question is, how long can we keep Con House itself?”

Les Talks

Can’t O’Brien do anything about it?

“Who, me? Naw. I’m boxed in. Totally exposed. I’m a family man with a wife and kid who need my seventeen quid a week take-home pay. And there’s a house tied to the job.”

Then why not take his nursing expertise somewhere else?

“Where to? Private bins are as bad—or worse. Anyway I don’t want to make money out of lunacy. Just live off it.” He gives his gleeful spine-chilling laugh.

"Listen, chump. For nearly two decades I've been one of the businessmen of breakdown. I make my living off severe psychosis, the people who have it, the people who label it. It's an open question if I could survive, economically or psychologically, without it. I'm hooked."

O'Brien reminisces. "You shoulda been here when Con House started. Especially when we got the first patients. All Grade-A specials. Hallucinating, lively, drugged, a couple in strait-jackets, a few catatonics, the usual religious maniacs and obsessional robots: all young and half killing themselves to keep that ol' sex and creative drive properly repressed. I thought the place would fall apart when Dick announced they could get up and go to sleep when they felt like. Nothing compulsory—no 'treatment', drugs or therapy. My God how that frightened them!" He cackles. "And if th' kids were scared I was paralytic. Talk about fright."

At first Les and Dick got along poorly. "He didn't like my institutionalised ways. And I resented that Bond Street get-up and his glib bolshie style. Uh oh, I thought, another whiz kid bucking for a rep. So I did what any other self-respecting old nursing lag would do—my duty eight hours a day and kept my nose clean. After he got shot down I still wanted my job." But Dick avoided all the obvious traps. He moved his family into the hospital, faithfully attended staff meetings and parties and never made an important move without first clearing it with Chief Nurse Tasker and the Medical Superintendent. "Within six months we had ourselves a unit. Once I saw Dick wasn't a flash-in-the pan, I relaxed. Then the real problems began."

Les says he was a wreck by the time Drummond showed up. "I knew what was wrong, knew the system inside out. Even had a few ideas how to put it right. But there was nobody to talk to. My wife Peggy listened, but what was the point in that? I was the one had to go through those swinging doors every morning. All I could see in front of me was another twenty years. Of slugging or tying up people, giving them smaller doses of more sophisticated tranquilisers, pretending they were crazy and the rest of us sane. When Dick came along he could have been a five-horned purple-dyed demon for all I cared. He meant change and I jumped at it."

That, says Les, was a little over two years ago. "It probably saved my life. But what th' effin' hell for? I keep asking myself. Before, in the good old days, I only suspected what was wrong and kept my mouth shut. There's a kind of contentment you get from observing the evil and tellin' yourself there's nothing to be done about it. Ah but wait! Once someone raises your hopes you start getting *unhappy*. You commit yourself to all these petty schemes for improvements. For shifting the weight just a tiny fraction off patient types. And the backlash begins. You, Sid, have arrived at a time of backlash."

Les says the irony is that in its death throes Con House has become fashionable. At precisely the moment when Admin's stooges are moving in for the kill, the unit is deluged with requests from social workers, journalists and "itinerant idealists" to come and work in it. "We get everything we need except understanding. Without that, sooner or later, we're for the high jump. More and more I hope it's sooner before we make too many promises we can't honour."

Someone shouts, "Hey, Derek just raped Bronwen!"

Wally, an eyewitness, says Bronwen sashayed into Observation Dorm to do her compassionate bit and leaned over Derek in her Vampira outfit, a low-cut jumble sale dress, “‘er tit was ‘arf’angin’ out so ‘e did th’ logical thing an’ ‘ad a nibble.”

Observation Dorm resembles a landscape after the storm. Her dress ripped, Bronwen sobs against the protective breast of Chief Nurse Tasker who ignored Screwy Lewie beating up on Bronwen only a few weeks ago but has become her champion now that she has been ‘victimised’ by one of the boys. Sally, looking a trifle sceptical, holds her hand. Screwy Lewie is speechlessly angry at his bride.

Another full house. Plus the Mafia don himself, Dr. Winstanley.

Derek gaily calls out to me, “H’lo, Master-at-Arms. Did it again, didn’t I? Messed up. Still, it proves I’m no homo, doesn’t it?” He points an accusing finger at the Medical Super: “I ordered that man put in irons.”

Dr. Winstanley blinks amiably at Derek and, ever unflappable, tries to rouse a near-catatonic Drummond with a joke. “Court’s in Session, Dick, monkey’s on the bench—next case, please.” Some joke.

With carefully controlled rancour Screwy Lewie Singh puts the case for the prosecution, which is that Derek’s behaviour, contrary to Drummond’s view, is not a potentially healing descent into chaos but a destructive attention-getting device. “By indulging your patient you collude with his most infantile fantasies. You prevent him from adapting to the reality principle. And you also threaten the existence of the community you say you want to protect.” Already, says Singh, Derek’s stunts have so upset some Con Housers that they’ve quietly asked for a transfer to another ward. (We quickly look around: who are the traitors?) Summing up, Singh lays an iron hand on Derek’s shoulder. “Would Mr. Derek’s prognosis not improve in surroundings more stable?”

Derek whinnies like a horse and makes Screwy Lewie jump when he tries to sink his teeth in the doctor’s hand.

Con House’s defence team may not be up to Queen’s Counsel standard, but is impassioned and moderately rational. Jerry Jackson argues, “Derek din’t exactly kill Bron, did ‘e? An’ ‘e din’t do nuffin’ she wasn’t askin’ for. If ‘e needs a good ‘idin’ we c’n do it jus’ as good as those Churchill Wing basta-nurses. I thank you.” He bows as a barrister would to an Old Bailey judge and retires with a great swishing of non-existent robes. A.C. rises to declare that sending Derek to Winnie Wing would probably only feed his violent masochism. “If we don’t take care of our own we’re just goin’ along with all those creeps who keep sayin’ th’ mad need to be treated. Who can tell? If this works maybe we can abolish loony bins.” Dr. Winstanley looks a little daunted at that prospect.

Swim-suited Barney Beaton sidles up to Dr. Winstanley. “Hugh, old chap,” he harumphs, a hearty clubman’s approach. “Missed you at Boodles t’other evening. Cough cough. Now about this cheeky snipper whopper Chatto. Known the family for donkey’s years. Father is Cudgels Chatto, rugby blue and bloody good oar, too. Sound English stock there. Trouble’s this pox the boy picked up on French leave. Trying to think for himself. How venereal! Ton

my soul, Hugh, not a bit of it anywhere else in the family. All he needs is a trifle more jelly in his sore bun, hur hur hur.” Barney then strides jauntily over to Dr. Singh. “Tell *that* to your damned fuzzy wuzzies next time they try to break the thin red line!”

Staff keep mum except for Bert Karp who volunteers to give up some of his free time in order to help Derek tame his runaway pH factor. (Robin whispers, “That’s all Derek needs.”) The boys’ enthusiasm has put Dr. Winstanley in a box. Conolly House, once the apple of his eye but now the hospital’s leper unit, has become a dangerous liability, even a threat to his position. For months, pressure from dissatisfied consultants, angry nurses, frightened parents and even patients, has mounted to “do something” about Drummond’s unit. Yet in his own devious way Winstanley believes in Con House and doesn’t want to get rid of it ... yet. As usual he straddles the fence.

Clamping down firmly on his pipe in a schoolmasterly fashion, he launches into a radical analysis of schizophrenia, its origin as a weapon of invalidation in the normal family, its use as a tool of social mystification. (Knowing his audience, he doesn’t even hint at the possibility of a physical cause to schizophrenia, even though that is the basic medical principle of his regime.) All this he speaks not at us directly but to Dick Drummond, doctor to doctor, as if nobody else is in the dorm. It’s a technique he has perfected over the years to mediate among various hospital factions. By making progressive statements he seems to be siding with staff radicals, but he does so in a way that signals to the more conservative doctors that really he’s with them on fundamentals. What a politician!

Dr. Winstanley piles on the rhetoric. “Dick, by their bold and adventurous experiment in autonomous nursing, your patients have lighted a candle in the dark abyss of human ignorance.” Pause. “However, it is a very *tiny* candle—don’t you agree?—and the wind is rising.” American accent, with a wink at me the Yank. “Gents, the nitty gritty is, is now *quite* the time to fight City Hall?”

He makes a major production of knocking ash from his pipe against his chair leg. Here it comes, I think.

“Mr. Tasker, care to toss your two bits in?”

With Bronwen’s pale head still adorning his chest, the Chief Nurse insists that staff is stretched too thinly for him to spare even a single extra nurse to look after Derek.

A.C. is exasperated enough to tear at his mass of tangled red hair. We want to release, not bring in more, staff, he protests. Mr. Tasker’s eyes glaze over and he repeats: “It isn’t that I don’t want to assign more nurses here ...” Somehow he has hysterically converted the boys’ case into its opposite. Dr. Winstanley subverts his Chief Nurse with a ‘isn’t he hopeless’ grimace to us.

Just as (it seems) the Medical Super is about to rule on Con House’s fate, Bronwen meekly raises her hand. A madonnalike smile spreads over her tear-stained face as she makes the grand gesture. “Derek didn’t take a very big bite,” she says.

Dr. Winstanley exhales audibly. Thank God, Bronwen has made his decision for him. He rubs his hands like a poker player raking in all the chips and says, “Right then, that’s it for the moment.” And heads for the door with the usual glad hand for all. Then he stops and turns to

us: "Lads, don't you believe all that about romance and orange blossoms. Marriage is a compact of murder to see who gets who first. R equals S minus P." And before we can figure it out he adds:

"There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come. *But is Conolly House a premature ejaculation?*"

And is gone.

We look at one another uncomprehendingly.

"Oh no," groans O'Brien. "A reprieve. Th' suspense'll kill us."

It does.

For several days the unit quivers on a knife edge. The way Dr. Winstanley saved Con House insures its downfall. Not many boys want to be associated with a premature ejaculation. After the rota disintegrates due to lack of personnel, Derek is left without adequate supervision, causing the inevitable to happen.

At 3:30 p.m. Friday afternoon an enormous cracking sound fills Con House: out of bed, Derek Chatto has stumbled upstairs to the Anything Goes room and ripped out the metal base of the punching bag, and he uses it to smash windows and splinter doors, screaming: "BATTLE STATIONS! REPEL BOARDERS!" Then he flings the heavy metal object through a window almost braining a nurse passing below.

Probably to the relief of some boys Derek's flipout forces Dr. Winstanley's hand. In a typical compromise the Medical Super reassigns Derek to Churchill Wing, but allows him out for evening meals with us. Nobody is fooled. Derek is kaput. Staff re-occupy their office, and the crisis is over. Con House reverts. Percy's electronic garden bursts into bloom again with Louis Armstrong's *Bucket's Got a Hole in It*, and rather sadly the boys climb back into their pyjamas. Clowns, pirates and beauty queens become patients again.

Herb Greaves keens a valedictory:

"Tried
Died
Brave
Knave."

WILD TRACK

Sally (staring at a winged insect on the lawn): "Oh look at that butterfly. It's doing a Con House. Fluttering its last wings."

Ian Fleming died today, which some boys feel must be connected to Con House's present trouble. Most are fans of James Bond, who together with *The Man from U.N.C.L.E* and

Jonathan Steed of *The Avengers*, they fuse into a single all-powerful superhero. I ask why such a strong identification with Bond?

Jeff H. says, "Well, he's a retarded adolescent doing dangerous work under the orders of M for mother."

Just before the nurse goons from the violent unit come to collect Derek, I slip into his dorm. He salutes and pipes me aboard. "Master-at-Arms, give this message to the crew," and hands me a piece of paper.

MISS OFF

Without Derek the unit seems absurdly empty. Depressed like many others I relapse into an institutional shuffle and trudge from room to room vainly seeking consolation. Through an open office door I eavesdrop on Dick Drummond talking earnestly to some fresh-faced Oxford students down for the day. He is suddenly his old buoyant self.

"The concept of 'cure' for mental illness belongs to a reactionary, outmoded ideology," he lectures. "Conolly House has transcended the bourgeois fallacy of health and sickness. We stand on the threshold of a new era—schizophrenic sanity."

That night Clare Council's Alf Waddilove rings me at the hospital. "Guess what?" he shouts exultantly over the line. "We've got our Place!"

] four [

ALFIE'S PLACE WAS A huge decaying abandoned Congregational church on a quiet side street in Brixton. It backed onto a railway viaduct and bombed-out wasteland. A neat little row of terrace houses faced the five granite Ionic columns that supported the building's portico. A bell tower, knocked off in a wartime raid, had never been replaced. The church, over 150 years old, had peeling paint, a roof long ago stripped of its lead and around its mouldy foundations a wild undergrowth of bushy vines. The front door was just charred planks of wood nailed together, and corrugated tin blocked up all the windows. Moss and dead leaves blanketed the gravestones under two ancient plane trees. It was a far cry from our dream of a gracious country estate.

It was known locally as Meditation Manor.

Alf, who had winkled it out of its Quaker trustees at a peppercorn rent of 21 shillings a year, proudly showed us around on a cold wet Sunday afternoon. The sodden old church looked like a cross between Baron Frankenstein's castle and Wormwood Scrubs jail. "It may not be the Ritz," admitted Alf, "but isn't it gorgeous in its way?"

Basically a disrepaired shell, the church consisted of two slightly sagging floors and a dank basement that was home to mice and bats. Within its mildewed walls a three-sided balcony overlooked a large main hall half the size of a football field. Both floors were gutted of their pews. "Slightly Moorish effect, don't you think?" said Brother Hengist (ex-Major Straw) who had let his trim little moustache grow long and drooping to resemble an illustration of a Saxon warrior chief he'd seen in the Imperial War Museum (once the site of Bedlam asylum, I remembered). Dominating the hall at ground level was a magnificently phallic pulpit flanked by tattered Union Jack and Church Army flags. Several musty private chapels were recessed into the side walls, there was a makeshift kitchen out back, the toilets broken, pipes long burst. Debris lay everywhere. "It's practically a masterpiece of filth," marvelled Davina.

Wrinkling our noses against a stench of graveyard urine—not even Con House smelled this bad—we gingerly stepped over sleeping bundles of aging, wrecked men and women who Alf said were tramps and meths addicts allowed to use the church to sleep in. How had Alf hustled Meditation Manor? I asked. "Dead easy," he replied. "I promised we'd raise the tone of the place."

All around the grimy cheerless walls ("Great for finger painting," said Dick Drummond, whose whiskey belly and overflowing beard now made him look more like Father Christmas than Buddha) hung reminders of previous tenants and benefactors. You could read the church's long social history—Theosophist Hall, Salvation Army mission, Labour party office, etc.—from its accumulated litter. A banner proclaiming KICK OUT THE TORIES lay brokenly among scattered yellowing leaflets. Oleos of William Morris, Joanna Southcote, General Booth and Keir Hardie stared down from the walls in geological strata of good intentions, and

down in the basement, behind a disused boiler, we stumbled on a dirt-encrusted bust of Robert Owen, the Utopian capitalist and Marx's friend. A thinner, more ascetic-looking Willie Last, in sandals and a knee-length Indian shirt over white linen trousers, knelt reverently and cleaned the inscription at its base:

"I therefore now proclaim to the world the commencement on this day, of the promised millennium, founded on rational principles and consistent practice."

"Owen was a Lanarkshire man. It's an omen," breathed Last. Boris Petkin, his bulky frame encased in a long Hasidic coat and who had grown curly black ringlets that swung whenever he turned his head, had to help Last carry the marble bust of Owen upstairs. They stood it on a chair just inside the plank door so visitors would encounter it first thing. Later, a twenty-four hour 'eternal' spotlight was fixed to shine on it.

Alf led us over the Manor and ticked off its virtues like a used car salesman trying to persuade us we weren't buying a lemon. The foundations were solid, the brickwork still good, and the location unbeatable—a long bus ride away from the distractions of the West End but firmly rooted in a real working-class community. We couldn't have wanted better neighbours, Alf promised. True south Londoners, they were used to minding their own business and to seeing all sorts of odd types hanging around the Manor so they were hardly likely to be upset by us. The trustees, despairing of finding anyone to take the building off their hands, had been delighted to give it to us as a 'community health centre' for the rehabilitation and after-care of mental patients.

"Well," Alf finished, "and what do you think?"

Last looked around at the foul smelling rubbish, broken plumbing and comatose drunks. His grey eyes clouded with emotion. "It's shit awful. When do we move in?"

Overnight we were in business. Hardly had I, as Clare Council's chairman, signed the guinea-a-year lease than the Manor filled up with people in urgent need. Without blankets or sheets, without heating or adequate light, improvising from meal to meal, we Councillors stood welcome as they showed up, round the clock.

The first one to find us was an impeccably groomed lady barrister in her late forties who appeared with her harassed-looking brother the morning after we moved in. "Howja do!" boomed Anna Shepherd in a commanding courtroom voice. "I'm too exhausted to go on swimming against the tide. May I rest in your snug harbour?" Anna's brother had his own large family to look after and could no longer cope with her aggressive behaviour and strange hallucinations. "It's been sheer hell, I promise you," he pleaded wretchedly. "It's not that I don't love my sister, just that I'm not competent to deal with someone who thinks she's an octopus one day and a porpoise the next. Why, only last week she tried jumping from Albert Bridge because she couldn't live on dry land and then tried to strangle me with one of her tentacles when I pulled her back." Padded cells in mental hospitals had only worsened Anna's condition, and he had been on the point of agreeing to a lobotomy when he chanced upon a

Times profile of Dr. Last. “You’re our last hope,” said Mr. Shepherd, leaving Anna on our doorstep and driving away before we could think twice about it.

After Anna they came in droves.

Sir Mario Snell, ex-Battle of Britain pilot, was angrily depressed over business partners who had allegedly cheated him; he dive-bombed everyone in sight shouting “Bandits at nine o’clock!” Ramsey and Roxie, a rich New York divorcee’s fourteen-year-old twins, had been expelled from Summerhill school for behaviour offensive even to A.S. Neill. Jenny Potts, a pretty miner’s daughter from Wigan, was possessed (she believed) by the spirit of Jennifer Jones, star of *Song of Bernadette*, which she claimed to have seen sixty-two times; Jenny strolled about in a self-designed nun’s habit swinging a large wooden crucifix she wielded like a shillelagh. Chuck Biberman, a California Rand Corporation drop-out, had accidentally killed his wife and child in a car smash-up. A black Milwaukee novelist, Bobby May, and his Swarthmore girl friend Trish Wakefield, were on bail awaiting trial on dope-smuggling charges. Dr. Andrew Horn-Green, retired Adlerian analyst, had just absconded from a forty-year marriage to pursue his more authentic sexual interests (boys). Alluring Taya, the dark-eyed teenage daughter of a Pakistani businessman, had not spoken a word in any language for several years. NON-RUT’s junkie poet Sy Appleby and his buddy Frisbie Blue were running from creditors after their Manchester strip club had gone bust. Plus half a dozen more freelance schizophrenics fleeing fed-up families and/or Detention Orders.

Not exactly your ordinary Conolly House type, what?

Sleeping alongside the tramps on the floors, benches and up on the balcony, the ‘patients’ were ready before we were. May Day calls from us drew heartening response from friends and sympathisers, who now that we had a physical place to show them pitched in with carpentry, electrical installation, etc. (Clive Flynn’s offer of help we quietly ignored.) Some who came to hammer nails stayed to live in.

With a passion I had not seen since that first New Year’s Eve, Clare councillors rolled up their sleeves to make the Manor into a palace of healing and whole-y-ness. Every night for weeks, often to the accompaniment of my Leadbelly work hollers, we scrubbed the old church down, flues, kitchen, floors, everything. The sharp bangs of hammers and slaps of whitewash brushes eased, temporarily at least, the wounds of waiting. In a frenzy of comradeship (and because we lacked official support), we poured our own personal money and time into the Manor; each Brother pledged several duty nights a week. For the first time our energies were hooked into something useful and outside ourselves, and it was the making of some of us. Alf, for so long living in Last’s shadow, came into his own, emerging as a dynamo of business efficiency. Swiftly he steered us past the scrutiny of the Charity Commissioners for tax-exemption purposes; got us insurance cover, ordered letterheads for a fund drive, hired and supervised heating engineers; made round after round of diplomatic calls on a nearby police station and church; and, arguing that it was cheaper for the tax-payer to maintain a person in Meditation Manor than in a mental hospital, somehow persuaded the area National Assistance Board (dole) manager to cough up a small sum toward the upkeep of the Manor’s poorer residents

(not many, it's true). In a sense, Alf, the Quiet Man, built the place.

We were all systems go. Except for the tramps.

Nothing was possible, Last decreed, until we got rid of those moaning, smelly, stupefied old wrecks who took up so much of our energy and the Manor's space. Davina's suggestion that we share the church with the down-and-outs was contemptuously rejected. "Aw, save tha' sentimental sheep-dip fer *Woman's Hour*, Dav," he snorted. He was not about to jeopardise salvageable "walkin' wounded" like Anna Shepherd and Sir Mario for basket cases like the dossers. The problem was, how to dump them within the letter if not spirit of Alf's promise to give the tramps plenty of time to find alternative winter quarters?

Sly Last suggested, "Let's put it to th' entire community."

Clare's new residents jumped at the chance to help their benefactor by tormenting the human dross inside our mental temple. Sy woke up the sleeping lumps by shouting Khalil Gibran verses into their dirty uncomprehending ears; Frisbie kept them awake by beating on a toy drum while Ramsey and Roxie jumped over them in a wild hopscotch contest. By midday most of the boozers had fled. The last drunk stayed on till Anna Shepherd, naked and dripping wet, rose lankhaired and androgynous from the basement where Davina had been hosing her down. "Cor," the old man croaked, "it's the DTs." And he bleakly tottered out, never to return.

Last watched him go without regret. "How's that for nonviolent direct action?" Having cleaned out the Manor's rubbish, human and otherwise, our little community began to groove. A rota was set up so that at least one Councillor was always on hand to deal with crises. Boris, who distrusted amateur psychiatrists like Tony, Alf and me argued for a qualified doctor to be present as well, but because Clare's three Officers' had to tend their practices and (what remained of) their families we noncoms ran Meditation Manor. We held the residents' hands, played incessant ping-pong with them and listened to their troubles, shouted and screamed with (and at) them; cooked their food and cleaned up their shit. I'm not sure what it did for the Manor's schizophrenics, but it certainly put lead in our pencils. Alf, who seemed to grow in confidence and stature with each passing day, was truly reborn. We could not have survived without him. He knew exactly which type of plywood at what price to buy for cubicle partitions, how to set up a book-keeping system and how to get the local glaziers and plumbers bidding against one another. He threw himself heart and soul into the Manor but wisely refused to move in, and when I asked him why he gave his broad countryman's wink: "Just because I work in a brewery doesn't mean I have to become a drunkard."

On Major Straw the Manor's effect was equally bracing if a little more bizarre, for it released him entirely into the personality of Brother Hengist, a pre-Conquest Saxon chief. The moment he was safely inside the church he dropped his City gent's uniform of brology, bowler hat and pinstripe suit and got into a self-invented battle dress consisting of a short fur cape he flaunted over one arm like a war shield, a kiltlike skirt and a ceremonial dagger stuck into knee-length stockings. His eyes burned with a fever of self-realisation. "To think that all these years my real identity was hanging in the rented costume department of Moss Brothers."

And, in her exacting role as the Manor's resident housekeeper, even some of Davina's

timidity sloughed off. Coping with day and night emergencies brought out her headmistress side. "I joined the group to go creatively mad like Sylvia Plath or Artaud. Instead I've ended up as the ward matron in *Carry On, Schizophrenia*."

I was least enthusiastic about the Manor. In my eyes its intake compared unfavorably with Conolly House's. Though we didn't deliberately plan it this way, Clare Council's liberal Hampstead bias effectively screened out tough working-class nuts like Jerry Jackson and Wally Walters in favour of types like Anna Shepherd and Sir Mario, people whose private hells were socially insulated by professional status, expensive educations or artistic ability. Broadly speaking, money and class position became the determining factors for admission to the Manor. Nobody got in who didn't know somebody who knew somebody. Only attractive cases who corresponded to the doctors' idea of a 'good' schizophrenic got accepted.

Didn't this make Clare Council a kind of accomplice of privilege? I wondered.

At first Boris was on my side or so I thought. But it turned out that what he really resented was the American influx. The flood of Americans that threatened to engulf the Manor caused him to spout darkly about "thinning our blood with Yankee spiritual imperialism." (Why did he look sideways at me when he said these things?)

Last swept aside both Boris's and my arguments as "provincial." Clare Council's prime mission was to establish a bridgehead on public opinion, and for that we needed *articulate* madmen, he said. "One reintegrated patient talkin' to th' newspapers'll do more good than a hundred satisfied but silent customers. As fer th' Amahricans, they're ridin' to our rescue like th' fookin' Seventh Cavalry. An' we'll make 'em pay through their noses fer th' privilege."

Recruited from Last's trans-Atlantic lecture tours and Stateside publicity about him, the Americans came and came, in their hunger for a primal counterculture turning the Manor upside down with a 'free university,' a season of anti-poetry, political teach-ins and a neighbourhood outpatient clinic which the locals ignored. The harder we and the Americans tried to get our message across to our Brixton neighbours the more strained community relations grew, and perhaps to compensate for this communications failure the Manor threw its doors open to every aspect of the alternative culture. But it only made matters worse. "Those nut cases up th' road are invitin' their crazy relatives now," I overheard a street trader complain.

As Berkeley and West 72nd Street accents mingled with, sometimes drowning out, those of Stepney and Lancashire, Boris hit out at the American invasion. "Bloody Yanks own our factories and dominate our arts. Do they want to colonise British schizophrenia, too?" (Hear! hear! echoed Brother Straw-Hengist patriotically.) Last defended 'his' Americans by totally agreeing with Boris's Little Englandism. Sure, the American influence was likely to be as pernicious as Boris alleged, but so what? Had not American-made products, and a whole style of Americanised mass culture, done more to undermine the traditional British establishment than anything else? "An' who knows?" he laughed. "Mebbe one or two more Yankee shrinks'll be enough to finish th' job."

On a more realistic note he added, "Anyway, what choice do we really have?"

Too true. Even Boris had to concede that nearly two years of taking our begging bowls around the doors of official British medicine had netted us exactly one seventy-year-old retired analyst and a failed med student from the Orkneys. By contrast, a single interview with Last in the *Village Voice* or *New York Review of Books* got us dozens of inquiries from young psychiatric interns armed with revolutionary sentiments and foundation cash. “Aren’t they lovely?” he purred. “Know fuck-all—but what eggstainshul hustlers.”

The radical Scots cineaste in Last dug Yanks, their irreverent *chutspah* and their capacity for hard, zealous work. They were, he fondly said, “New Frontiersmen of psychic border country.” (Sometimes I thought he expected us Americans to wear coonskin hats, spit ‘baccy juice and roar ‘Tarnation!’) Like blacks we had existential rhythm, an almost inborn drive “to explore th’ impossible possibilities of yir possible impossibilities” arising out of the insanity of American life. Nothing amused him more than the ironic spectacle of Americans recrossing the Atlantic to enthusiastically ‘improve’—i.e. destroy—the mother country’s quality of life.

I had mixed feelings about my compatriots. Who could deny their incredible energy? What touchers, wrestlers, feelers, slappers—all very un-English. Alas (like me) they’d brought their imperialist egos over with them. Davina said, “Have you noticed how it always ends up with you listening to *their* problems?” Of no one was this more true than Dr. Marvin Munshin, a crew-cut, tanklike ex-linebacker from Syracuse University who had large staring eyes that hardly ever blinked and oversize paw-like hands that constantly hugged and patted you when he talked. I didn’t like him touching me. Whenever he noticed me flinching or backing off he’d trap me with a heavy arm on my shoulder and turn his piercing Peter Lorre stare on me. “Are you all right? Feel like talking about it?”

The anti-Munshin, a good American, was Larry Goodman, a Bellevue hospital staff dropout who arrived one morning with no money, a string-tied suitcase and a pet parrot named Lyndon he’d somehow smuggled past quarantine. “I read about you guys in Krassner’s *Realist*. Got room for one more?” Gentle and dazed, Larry lacked the ham-handed aggression of guys like Munshin and vainly wandered around the Manor looking for a place for himself. A couple of weeks later he gave up. “It’s kind of funny,” he morosely told me as he packed to go. “I escaped from a straight medical system that encouraged patients to collude with their doctors by pretending to be sane—to this system where they’ve got to go crazy to please their doctors. I’m honestly not sure now which I prefer.” He shook my hand. “I tried losing my mind here. Honest I did. Just couldn’t hack it, I guess. I hate going home feeling such a failure.”

The American problem was a pushover compared to our Brixton predicament. Initially the locals had been rather pleasant. The vicar and his wife had us in to tea, the neighbourhood bobby said to call him Tom, and some of the wild street kids even helped us move in. Our stock had risen especially high after we got rid of the tramps. “My dears,” gushed Mrs. Conway, the minister’s wife, “you succeeded where even the Borough Medical Officer and police failed.” As a goodwill gesture we kept the church’s traditional policy of giving the main hall to community groups free of charge.

The honeymoon was brief. Soon I noticed people along Walworth Road giving me the fisheye. "Och, stop yir frettin', man," scoffed Last. "They've put up wi' a lot worse'n us." Alf agreed. "If Brixton survived the Blitz, it can take Clare Council."

In fact, Brixton had a long history of tolerance and live-and-let-live. Solidly Labour, working class and increasingly black, the people who lived around the Manor greeted us with good-natured indifference when we moved in at first. After all, this part of the Borough had over 100 years' experience of absorbing without fuss all kinds of evangelical do-gooders from across the river. But in counting on a warm welcome we reckoned without current tensions. Massive redevelopment had shifted large hunks of old Brixton to the outer suburbs, shattering long-established neighborhoods and relationships, and isolating in high-rise flats the families who stayed behind. The Notting Hill race riots had exposed a racial infection that had spread southward with deadly swiftness. Their street life eroded and communities breaking up, psyches blasted by accelerated change and identities threatened by blacks and foreigners, the Brixtonians were hard put to cope with a bunch of trendy loonies in their midst.

Clare Council, preoccupied by the Manor's teething problems and insulated in a New Leftish view of Brixton as full of happy ramified family units, caught on much too late. By the time the penny dropped Frisbie's caterwauling electric organ, Taya's inchoate screams, Sir Mario's abuse of the next door neighbours ("Jerry on your tail, you blind bastard!"), the twins Ramsey and Roxie pilfering local shops and black novelist Bobby May's midnight strolls through the streets shouting "AH'M A-COMIN'FOR YOU, JIMMY BALDWIN!" had drastically depleted the fund of goodwill we'd started out with. The street kids who had begun by inviting themselves in for a quick giggle moved on to smashing our windows we had so meticulously repaired and setting small fires outside the improvised door. Not that they had anything against us personally. Last kept saying, "They jus' refract their parents' irrational fear of what they dinna unnerstan'." Boris, less sentimental because he came from an area like this in East London, wanted to import some of his tough friends as security guards. "If we don't, th' lumpen sods out there will tear the place apart."

Last was confident that Boris had it all wrong, "as usual." Properly analysed, our neighbours' behaviour could be the start of a meaningful dialogue. "Cain't ye see? It's a call fer help, a strangled but intelligible protest about their whole alienated exile fr' wha' is True an' Real."

That weekend on the streets of Brixton we passed out leaflets inviting one and all to an Open Tea at the Manor.

A marvellously peaceful silence hung over the church, mainly because Davina and Boris had corraled the freakiest residents deep into the basement with orders to keep them down there till the coast was clear. The main hall, usually cluttered with semi-conscious bodies and dirty blankets, Alf and I had faultlessly cleaned and also Air Wicked away the normal clouds of incense and marijuana. A long oil-clothed table held a tea urn and mountains of cakes and mugs. Willie Last serenely awaited the expected throngs.

Three thousand leaflets had gone out.

Ten locals showed up, including two whiskey-smelling Irish workmen from a nearby

building site, several pensioners and Kenneth a teenage ted who stoked our boiler in exchange for letting him rehearse his rock 'n roll group in the church. Last was obviously disappointed by the turnout but stayed on his best behaviour, turning on the charm and shaking everyone by the hand personally. While our guests munched cakes and slurped tea he described Meditation Manor as a "community centre meant to bring new life, a new heart, to a stricken part of Brixton neglected for too long." (This didn't go down too well with the pensioners who had lived here forever.) Warming to his subject, he stressed his and Boris Petkin's working-class roots but also lovingly lingered over the names of the titled peers and bishops on our growing list of sponsors. Then he introduced us present Councillors, all gussied up in our Sunday best suits and ties, as a "prominent West End businessman" (Alf), a "well-known author and TV personality" (me) and a "BBC executive." (Davina, looking rather the worse for wear, rushed up from the basement to take her bow, then rushed back to help Boris with their restless herd.) But it was Major Straw who knocked them out. Wearing campaign ribbons on his sober stockbroker's suit, he captivated Kenneth and the old ladies by describing in rousing detail how he'd earned his medals, from Palestine '39 to Suez '56. (Did I hear one of the Irishmen mutter, "Imperialist bastid"?)

After the Major softened up the visitors Last went in for the kill. He explained Meditation Manor—which the locals insisted on calling 'Medication Manor'—as the first of a linked chain of mental health clinics designed to get back on their feet and into the community those people who might otherwise languish in mental hospitals. Our clients were not forced to work, or get up in the morning or go to sleep if they didn't feel like it. Staff and patients, terms we abhorred, mixed on equal terms, "Wi' a view, perhaps, to th' day when we doctors can go mad an' be treated by th' so-called patients."

"That'll bloody confuse the issue," I heard some irreverent soul whisper.

Last asked for questions.

A wizened, bundled-up old dear, Mrs. Rascoe, slowly wiped crumbs from her puckered, tiny mouth, "'ere naow," she said in a surprisingly forthright tone, "'oo controls yer nutters?" Mrs. Rascoe had lived all her seventy-three years in the same street just opposite us.

Last gave her his strobe eye flutter and shy smile. He sweetly explained that the nub of existential therapy was allowing the person in distress to heal himself. Our job as helpers was to conduct him or her through an experience of death, journeying in the Other World and rebirth in the here and now. Mental health, as we understood it, involved a safe voyage back from aboriginal Chaos. ("Can you get a cheap day-return?" someone sniggered.)

Mrs. Rascoe protested that Last had not answered her question. "'oo controls th' nutters?" she persisted.

He stonewalled again. Madness was not a disease, but a spiritual quest, and by letting it happen here we restored to the old church its lost religious identity.

Kenneth mildly inquired what kind of people the Manor took in.

Shifting uneasily in his chair, Last said: "Er ah some deluded psychiatrists call them ... er, um,... schizophrenics. But—"

That did it.

Tea mugs suspended, some visitors sat bolt upright.

Mrs. Rascoe sharply piped up: "D'ja mean Jekyll an' Hyde, like?"

That was the popular fantasy, Last allowed.

"Fantasy moi bleedin' eye," retorted the larger Irishman. "Moi sis is bin locked up these five years wid schizzo waddayecallit."

Last corrected him: didn't he meant an experience of enlightenment that quack doctors labelled schizophrenia?

"All oi know is she wen' aroun' liftin' her knickers to ivry pimple-faced kid in th' road," said the Irishman.

Last forced jocularity. "Surely *tha's* nuthin' fer a big bruiser like ye to be afeared o'."

The Irishman's mate roared with laughter. "Ye've niver met his sis!"

An old man timorously raised his hand. "Are any of *them* 'ere naow?"

This was the moment we had been waiting for. "Oh Jenny, w'd ye come in please?" called Last. On cue Jenny Potts toddled in, and my heart sank. We had rehearsed her over and over again in how to dress and what to say. She was out of her nun's habit all right but into another costume of her own design: black knee-length leather boots over flesh-coloured tights and a rough wooden crucifix reposing on the cleavage of her extremely revealing sweater. To me she looked like an ad in a soft porn magazine. Straight as an arrow she went and sat next to Mrs. Rascoe and said brightly: "You see, I had been to *Song of Bernadette* sixty-two times and had this terribly unhealthy identification with Jennifer Jones. My friends here have helped me gain insight into why I needed to dissolve my ego in a fantasy object, which phenomenologically was my invalidated self engulfed by an ontologically inauthentic family disjunction. Of course I'm not Jennifer Jones anymore. Who'd want to be that old has-been? You may call me Brigitte from now on." She looked over at Dr. Last who seemed pleased by her performance, then she flounced off waggling her hips like a shimmy dancer.

Mrs. Rascoe looked puzzled. "If yer arks me I'd say th' gel's still crackers."

Last's smile took on a fixed aspect. With just a hint of impatience he said that Clare's first rule of therapy was never to impose your own idea of sanity on anyone else.

"One way o' lookin' at it is, Brigitte Bardot's a significant clinical advance over Jennifer Jones."

We had one final card to play, and I wish we hadn't. Partly to demonstrate our inter-racialism, Bobby May was called on, but the instant he appeared Mrs. Rascoe leaped from her chair and pointed an accusing finger at him. "That's th' bloke wot give our Jim sech a nasty fright. Yer oughter be ashamed, yer oughter!" She declared that her favorite nephew, a pipe fitter named James Baldwin, had hurriedly packed off from the area when told a strange black man was out to get him. ("Ah'm a-comin' for you, Jimmy Baldwin!") Bobby (high on hash) roared "Racist bitch!" at Mrs. Rascoe and ran up to the tall pulpit to denounce us all for complicity in Britain's old slave trade. Alf whispered to me, "We're not doing too well. Maybe Willie should close the show."

Anna did that for us. An ear-splitting screech, followed by a long low moan and muffled shouts, seeped up from the basement. A dishevelled water-soaked Davina burst in: "Willie!

Come quickly. Anna says she's spawning!" Then Anna Shepherd herself emerged or rather floated in. Naked except for some rubber sheeting tied around her knees—makeshift mermaid's tail we'd fitted out at her request—her long, black hair matted over her flushed vibrant face, she bumpety bumped along to us as in a potato sack race. "Oh hello there," she beamed, wriggling from Davina's grasp. "I've just laid a very large egg." ("So've we," muttered Alf, eyeing the stunned locals.)

Her large breasts swaying to her naked waist, Anna flipped onto the trestle table, scattering cakes and crockery. Last kept his cool.

"How're ye, Anna? Enjoyin' yirself, are ye?"

She rolled off the table and crawled to him. "Oh yeth," she relapsed into a childish lisp. "Ith tho thweet thwimming around with no other fith to bother me. God ith a thord fith, you know. He put hith thord into me and now I'm jutht an itty-bitty thalmon hopping ith way upthream to lay my eggth and become a momma fith. God fith would love me then, wouldn't he Willie?" She dug inside her mermaid's tail and came out with two large handfuls of her excrement. "Thee my eggth?"

Last smiled compassionately down at our sacred, stinking fith. "Er ah Anna, w'd ye care to tell our guests wha' ye did afore ye came here?" Abruptly she switched to her normal, stentorian voice. "Of course, Doctor. I had chambers in the Middle Temple and specialised in estate probate and litigious trusteeships ... But that wath before I met Willie-fith and Borith-fith and ..."

While Anna squatted on the floor to audibly do her "thits" inside the mermaid's tail, Mrs. Rascoe firmly put down her tea mug and scuttled from the hall. With embarrassed nods the others also crept out.

"Ta ta," said the Irishman with the mad sister. "Oi'll sure tell me Maeve about yez. Might be just th' place for her."

Only Kenneth, the rock 'n' roller, stayed behind to admire Anna drawing a floor mural with a watery brown substance in her hands. "I've never seen anybody do that before. Is she *made* of shit?"

That night local kids smashed all our street-facing windows and relit fires outside the door. More rocks were thrown. In the morning, obscene graffiti and 'KBW' were smeared all over the Manor's stone columns.

"Hey man," asked hung-over Bobby May, "is that old Mosley's 'Keep Britain White' gang?"

Alf sighed wearily. "More likely 'Keep Brixton Well.'"

The abortive tea party seemed to confirm the truth of what Last had been preaching ever since Armistice Hall: the signs were unmistakably clear that the world was not yet ready for us. Why shilly shally any longer? "Let's move out of this desert o' compromise an' plant our standard on th' heights off eggistainshul risk," he urged. The Manor was the spiritual orgasm we had worked so long and hard for, and we didn't want to cheat ourselves of it by trying to win some sort of cheap popularity contest among our neighbours. It was their lookout if they

refused to be Enlightened. In a word, to hell with everyone else, let's concentrate on saving our own kind.

Boris objected that Last's "left-infantile adventurism" was a counsel of despair, a product of imperfect political analysis which put us at risk for no tangible return. He urged a policy of continuing to plug away relentlessly at friendship with the locals, no matter what. After all (Boris said) if Stalin could sign a non-aggression pact with Hitler we could show similar "revolutionary patience."

In the weeks that followed Last and Petkin clashed repeatedly over how best to manage the Manor but always masked their personal differences in grandiose jargon. Last argued that Boris's need for medical accountability, for a chain of command with a man at the top where the buck stopped, was simply another form of his neurotic craving for the original family situation. The rules Boris demanded were the enemy of spontaneity and encouraged dependence on a system we were out to destroy. Anyway, true authority should never be imposed from without, it was a personal quality that people instinctively responded to. Only those who did not possess this inner authority felt a compulsion to force their will on others—"like Joe Stah-leen," said Last, looking squarely at Boris.

The issue was joined over Anna Shepherd.

It was some time before any of us realised just how completely Anna needed to regress. She'd taken to Meditation Manor like a duck to water, literally. We were used to residents going back to infancy; Anna was our first case of someone retreating to the primal slime. Fortunately, one or two of us Councillors had experienced ourselves on LSD as animals and birds and had little trouble adjusting to a female fish. We hosed Anna down and built her a corrugated tin tank in the basement where she became the special project of Dr. Marve Munshin, the ex-jock from Syracuse University. They became incredibly fond and possessive of each other. Anna wouldn't let Marve out of her sight, and Marve hated anyone else touching her. Many a harrowing night he slapped and roughoused her out of hysterics. Anna loved it. "Oh Marve, you big ape."

With Marve's encouragement Anna began to ascend the ichthyological scale from an amoeba state up through the fishy depths to human age three or four, old enough to launch a campaign of sustained aggro against the community. She laid her 'eggth' (shit) all over the Manor, including in our beds, and enjoyed waking us at all hours to imperiously demand a bottle or get one of us to burp her. Even in the throes of 'therapeutic reintegration' she remained a bossy old battleaxe, ordering us around like junior counsel in her courtroom. But telling her to fuck off also meant tangling with big Marve Munshin, and no one felt strong enough for that. Anyway, she was mad and vulnerable and too much rode on her as Clare's first success.

Anna split the community into hostile camps. Some residents, whose clothes or peace of mind she had ruined, wanted to throw her out; others, mainly Americans, agreed with Last that letting Anna run riot was a supreme test of what the Manor was about. A confused minority wanted something done about her but weren't sure what. The Anna Question grew like

Donovan's brain till it threatened to wreck us. (I reckoned she'd have lasted about five minutes in Con House.) Deepening personal animosity between Last and Petkin ensured that Manor opinion hardened into a bitter factional struggle. You had to line up behind one or the other—there was less and less room for compromise—and because each doctor, typically, tried to outflank the other from the left, it also meant buying into their particular version of twentieth-century history. Boris never tired of pointing out similarities between the Manor and Lenin's Russia; we could survive, he said, only by suppressing our anti-social elements and enforcing (sinisterly unspelled out) "administrative measures," preferably imposed by a supreme Medical Director (guess who?). Last, while cheerfully admitting that Anna was a big pain, contended she was also our revolutionary moment of truth, our Kronstadt. He loved needling Boris with historical examples of "Stah-leenist treachery." In their loud wrangles over Soviet history Anna got forgotten.

Most residents were too hyped on dope or their own miseries to follow the Talmudic ins and outs of the doctors' slanging matches replete with opaque quotes from Marx and Sartre so in the end what counted was which man you were emotionally hooked on. I, of course, was a Lastian because, among other things, he was Keeper of the Acid that I now swallowed like Pepto-Bismol. But I never quite suppressed a slightly guilty leaning toward the things Boris represented.

Though Boris smiled less than any man I'd ever known, and had the soul of a Lord Chief Justice, his commitment to stability satisfied a deep hunger in the community. Some people badly needed a respite from the whipsawing effects of Last's romantic narcissism. Even Anna, when ordered by Boris to clean up her mess, obeyed meekly. Without a qualm he confiscated Sy's cocaine and locked yammering Ramsey and Roxie in their cubicle until they came to heel. While the rest of us endlessly debated how to negotiate with the local teenage vandals, Boris did not hesitate to dump pails of cold water on them from the roof. Lacking Last's charisma, he staked his authority on blunt charmlessness and refusing to honour the residents' sillier whims, traits that endeared him to the Manor's more anxious types. For the first time since the Communist party (Stepney branch), he had something organisational to bite on, and Stalin to Last's Lenin, he quietly set about building a power base.

For all his sneering bluster Boris was a familiar type, a reformer in the Jewish authoritarian tradition who still believed in the mind Last had lost faith in.

Before I could piece it all together the Martins showed up.

They came like the Holy Family with stars in their eyes and carrying nappies for their small baby. Without having consulted anyone Last had talked Sam Martin, a former patient of his, and his wife Rose into locking up their bicycle repair shop in Chichester to sign on as the Manor's full-time housekeepers. "Aw, jes' move in an' do yir thing," he urged and promptly forgot about them. Nervous and insecure, the Martins slung a hammock-cradle in the pantry for "wee Willie" (named for Last) and tried to fit in, but Boris wasn't having it. What was the

idea of hiring an unqualified former hospitalised patient as staff? Last replied that Sam's breakdown was his qualification, and as usual the doctors ended up slamming at each other with Heidegger, Sartre and Winnicott. Caught in the crossfire the Martins grew alarmed and confused which only confirmed Boris's poor opinion of them. When Rose, still in postpartum blues, had bouts of weeping, Sam appealed to Last who washed his hands of them. "It's a community decision, nae up to me alone." Clearly, the Martins were not worth a full-scale showdown with Boris just yet. When Sam approached some of us Councillors we didn't want to know either. Why sacrifice our newly forged unity for the sake of a couple we hardly knew? Rose resolved the problem by breaking down completely, and Last peremptorily and without notice sacked the Martins.

"It's fer their own good," Last told me. "Rose's turned out to be a psychotic. Mebbe tha's why Sam teamed up wi' her. Hell, they ought to be grateful that we showed 'em how incompatible wi' this work they really are. Probably saved 'em years of wasted effort."

Charitably, we didn't ask the Martins to pay us back their wages.

Shortly after the Martins left Willie Last approached me to move myself into the Manor to help him protect its integrity against er, well, "unconscious saboteurs?" (i.e. Boris.)

Would I? Oh boy. Back together at the OK Corral!

Lena was aghast at this new development. "Have you gone absolutely bonkers, Sid?" she exclaimed. "Last and his crew of professional crazies will eat an amateur like you alive. Please, please don't go." Ah yes, I thought, that was to be expected of someone having transference difficulties with her new shrink. Unable to change my mind, Lena helped me shut up Regents Gardens and then drove me across the river to the Manor. "I'll be waiting when you get out, *liebchen*." Sad and tight-lipped, with the sorrowing eyes of a convict's wife, she watched me disappear into my new home. But I thought, free at Last, free at Last, great God amighty free at ...

Closing my eyes to the Manor's stench of disused jailhouse, the ghostly odours of Labour's pacifist piety, the sheer ugliness of the joint, I grimly pitched in to help my war buddy, Willie Last.

Heady euphoric days. Sleepless nights. Hand holding, embracing, breast cuddling, wild screams. Terrible insults, even more unendurable silences. Most times I felt like a tiny psychiatric submarine floating through the boiling bloodstreams of Anna, Sir Mario, Frisbie and the others—all, in Last's words, "goin' through that special agony reserved fer those few obstinate souls who refuse, at th' cost of their lives, to relinquish their whole-y humanity." Trouble was, where Last saw Holy Suffering my Con House-sharpened instincts experienced Manorites as just plain brats. God knows we had our share of prima donnas at Con House, but because Dick Drummond frowned on individual therapy, nobody got special treatment. The hospital unit's democracy-of-the-mad made strange behaviour as common (and often as unnoticed as) dirt. In Con House *everybody* was crazy, so in a sense nobody was.

But at Meditation Manor the mad were exalted. At times it reminded me of my days in

Hollywood: the same struggle for the studio chiefs favour, the infighting, petty malice, even the same star system. Indisputably Anna Shepherd was the Manor's queen bee, its Joan Crawford-Bette Davis figure. She was a star in every way, including (I suspected) how she conformed to the doctors' image of her. So different, I thought, from the anonymous drably defeated, cases in Last's book *The Unhealed Heart*.

But you couldn't help sympathise with her long heroic struggle to survive with a mind intact through one awful padded cell after another. Before Willie Last came on the scene, no doctor had even remotely grasped her impelling need to gamble everything on total, uninhibited regression. That's why I didn't mind sharing the job of cleaning, feeding, hosing down and nursing her. If we could help Anna, then all the crap we'd heaped on one another all these months would take on a certain dignity, even splendour. My doubts didn't begin till the night I took rota alone.

Making my usual rounds I went downstairs to check the water level in Anna's tank; she panicked if it got too low. Gently I knocked on the broken door of the womblike coal cellar and entered the pitch black, foul-smelling place. A scratchy, whimpering sound greeted me. In the darkness I squatted down, waiting. The odour of sour milk, faeces and fetid water was overpowering; it was worse than a coal mine.

"H'lo Anna," I said. No reply. Then I heard a soft breathing, a sniffing close to my face. A bony forehead touched mine, then rolled back and forth across it. I sat while she moved her scalp against mine, grunting and pawing me. Suddenly she stopped. Her long matted hair dropped on my neck and shoulders as she wordlessly straddled me, hooking her legs around my waist. Secure, she began rocking swiftly. Harder and harder she jerked, I held on till she said "Ahhhh! ..." Three or four times later she climbed off. I heard her lie down in the corner. In the faint slit of light from the basement light bulb her eyes glittered with pleasure, then shut. A baby's gurgle, then more cooing. She chewed savagely at one of her large, drooping breast's nipples, then lay back and clawed the air in frustration. I gave her her usual bottle of sugared water which she sucked, then I turned her on her side and smacked her bottom; she burped gratefully. "Tank you, Marvie-fith."

I said I was Sid Bell not Dr. Munshin. The coal cellar light snapped on. Covered with a shit-smeared blanket and shaking with rage, Anna stood up in the tank and in her most sonorous Queen's Counsel voice cried: "How dare you molest me, you damned impostor!" And chased me out with wild judicial curses and pieces of excrement.

Clearly I had very little s.a.—schizophrenia appeal—for Anna. Nor, I discovered, for the other residents.

On a routine check a couple of nights later I found the twins unhappy. "Where's Willie?" snarled Roxie, backing against her cubicle wall. I said Last was at a Paris human rights conference with Sartre and Genet. "What about Boris or Dick?" sullenly asked Ramsey. All the doctors were temporarily away, I said. The fourteen-year-olds glared at me. "Listen punk," said Ramsey, "our dad shells out a big hunk of child support and we expect the best in the house. We don't want no flunkies like you."

Davina agreed that the residents had all too quickly picked up on how to manipulate

Clare's internal pecking order. "Strange, isn't it? They're all supposed to be in ecstasy, withdrawn, possessed and all the rest of it. Yet they fly like homing pigeons straight into the arms only of men who have medical school diplomas."

Jurisdictional disputes were rife. Everybody had 'their' schizophrenic. Once, when Marve Munshin and I heard curvy Jenny Potts cry out, he practically ran over me to grab her first. Another time Chuck Biberman took luscious, mute Taya out of my arms: "I saw her first." Competition was keen for the younger more excitable women. As Davina watched Boris wrestle with hysterical, chair-smashing Trish Wakefield (36"—22"—36"), she remarked: "Oh well, I suppose she's got something I haven't. Schizophrenia, I mean."

Last was so stimulated by American homage and growing recognition at home that he did a U-turn about courting the mass media. TV and newspapers were no longer instruments of capitalist mystification but useful tools, and the media were not slow to warmly reciprocate Last's embrace. Competition among Manorites hotbedded up to see who could snag the most lineage and prime time. Anna Shepherd and Jenny Potts became all the rage, and publicised visits by the Beatles and Princess Margaret ensured that, trendwise, we were in like flynn.

Boris hated it. "Have we lost our senses, comrades?" he stormed. "Why did we suffer in the wilderness if it was only to whore after the gutter press at the first crack of a clapperboard. They're just using us to paint a shiny gloss on their incurable syphilitic sores." Even Dick, who had learned the hard way that Conolly House gained no long term benefits from publicity, wondered if it didn't put us in an "inauthentic position."

Last bridled, "Ye don't think I *like* wastin' time on those Fleet Street hacks, d'ye. I feel like pukin' after every interview." He must have been sick a lot for those hypnotically fluttering eyelashes and that soft elliptical brogue were now familiar to millions of readers and viewers. He was much in demand as a polished, photogenic TV performer (which Boris was not). 'Lastian' became a vogue word; indeed *Vogue* profiled him in its 'People to Watch' section, and for a time you couldn't open a newspaper or magazine without finding an interview with him. BBC2 sent a *Man Alive* crew to shoot him narrating a documentary on Anna's shit murals, and a couple of visiting journalists were so dazzled that they became his private patients.

Through it all Last insisted that his basic attitude to the press had not changed, only "tactically adjusted" to take account of our acquisition of the Manor. Had not Lenin accepted tainted capitalist money and a sealed German train in order to reach his rendezvous with world revolution at the Finland Station? "Th' only diffrence is, th' Bolsheviks used pistols an' bombs an' we've got th' *Sunday Times* colour supplement."

Almost overnight, it seemed, Clare Council had acquired a global outlook and politics to match. The Last/Petkin hypothesis, rooted in flashes of insight and modest research among a narrow spectrum of unhappy Scottish and Home Counties families, was made to apply to any struggle anywhere, not only to the double-bound 'Harrisons' of Pinner, Middlesex, but also to South African miners and Brazilian peasants. "Oppression" was the same whether it occurred

in small family units or mental hospitals or exercised by whole governments. Mississippi white racism was “macro-social terror imposin’ pseudo-mutuality on pathogenically perceived aspects of th’ false-self system” (Last). Britain’s Great Train Robbery was “an existential dysfunction of capitalist serialisation” (Petkin). Even the current Tokyo Olympics was “a replication of Western imperialism’s subject-object coloniser-colonised torturer-tortured duality” (Drummond).

Davina and I attended one of Last and Drummond’s ‘Liberation Psych-Ins’ at the Manor. Standing at the rear of the crowd, she confessed: “I feel a bit thick. Why is Fidel Castro an ontological externalisation of Lyndon Johnson’s castration fantasy?”

Clare’s swing to the left threw me into a fine tizzy. Had I read the signals wrong again? How had the Tao which depoliticised me made Bolsheviks of my Brothers? Last’s ‘two track’ approach only confused me further. To medical audiences he spied diagnostic concepts and family classification systems; students and beatniks got the mystical inner trip. Yet he denied any inconsistency except in the minds of his audiences who were “hongry sheep” that had to be gently spoon-fed only what they found easiest to ingest. (In the war, he reminded me, Allied troops had unwittingly killed many of the concentration camp walking skeletons they were liberating by gorging them on too much food too soon.) “I’d hoped Conolly House’d taught ye to communicate wi’ deluded cases in their own language.” By deluded cases Last meant his own followers.

An assumption of our own total spiritual superiority now underwrote almost everything we did. Manor residents, indeed much of the outside world, were hongry sheep and we in Clare Council the Wise Shepherds. A cult of Last permeated the Manor. Let him coast to a stop even for an instant and flocks of breathless adorers surrounded him like baby chicks. Once I saw a sari-clad girl reverently lotus sit outside a toilet he was perched on. It would have taken a tougher man than Last to resist. Sometimes, as a gesture to our old agnosticism, if he saw me watching, he’d surreptitiously roll his eyes up to heaven as if to say: *wha fools these mortals be*. But in reality Last liked having his own ashram. How often I came upon him, in the dead of night, comforting a raving blonde in his arms or dropping a mixture of hashish and Scotch whiskey (Dundee Dynamite he called it), his face a mask of unendurable agony. Shadows now seemed to darken his grey eyes, his stoop became more pronounced. He looked worn out. Once I caught him emerging exhausted from Jenny Potts’ cubicle at 5:00 a.m. Grinning strangely, he slumped against the wall. “Brother,” he groaned, “they’re crucifyin’ me.”

Martyrdom agreed with Last. He might look like hell, strolling about dressed only in a haggard expression and an elegant silk robe sexily open to the waist, but I had never seen him so carefree. He wasn’t at the Manor all that much, but the time he did spend with us was conspicuous and up front. He liked to greet visitors at the door with a warm smile and hand bow next to the Robert Owen bust so that the spotlight shone on him too, and his private meditations were conducted so publicly that they were virtual happenings. When I asked him why he didn’t use one of the Manor’s secluded cubicles, he replied with an absolutely straight

face that generals not only had to risk their lives along with “th’ troops” but had to be *seen* to be doing so.

Of course we did not dare interrupt him with mundane chores. He might symbolically wash an occasional dish or change a soiled sheet but, by and large, we accepted his view of himself, that his real job was ceremonial, to be a Presence. Above all he enjoyed presiding over communal dinners. At the head of the long table heaped with plates of spaghetti, French bread and bottles of red wine, Last jovially engaged the American interns in cutting contests to see who could tell the goriest operating room story or bantered philosophically with our show-biz visitors. Illuminated by candlelight, dramatically outlined against the main hall’s high lead-braced stained glass window, he did indeed seem a Highland Jesus Christ.

These dinners often lasted well into the next morning. Our neighbours had long gone to work by the time most of us hit the sack. Last’s stamina was amazing. A fifteen-minute snooze left him fresh as a daisy; the rest of us spent the entire day recuperating. Meditation Manor’s ‘night’ was over only when everyone had dropped off to sleep around Last, still enthroned in his chair and ready to take on all comers.

His self-promotion to a Christ figure coincided with a fundamental shift in Clare’s attitude to insanity. Originally, Last had taught that madness was a comprehensible but definitely psychotic response to invalidation. But by subtle stages schizophrenia had become something else, a kind of supersanity implicitly superior to the alienation called normality. Indeed, anyone at the Manor who wasn’t totally off his chump was treated as a second-class citizen. So the competition meant you had to go as crazy as possible in the way that some children will go to any length to appear brighter than others for a teacher who awards gold stars for the right kind of answers. Last not only encouraged this worshipful attitude to insanity but also personified it. He had nothing but contempt for social workers and doctors who kept their psychic distance from the mentally ill; such detachment he likened to the voyeurism of the bullfight critic who is afraid to enter the arena. Insisting on the oracular powers of schizophrenics, who were “foreign correspondents back fr’ other wurlds wi’ after-action reports we haven’t th’ wit to unscramble,” he said that the only way to decode such communiques was to climb into the schizophrenic’s soul; that is, to be one.

At least that’s how I understood it. It did not immediately occur to me that while I (and others) risked everything on Last’s magical mystery tour, the way he freaked out rarely took him too far from his couch or desk. At his nuttiest he never stopped lecturing or writing.

Perhaps to compensate for his unwillingness or inability to break down, Last went to extreme lengths to identify with schizophrenics, to proclaim them the teachers and he their pupil. (Was this why he lavished praise on me the madder I got?) In a sense, he’d become one of his own patients. Marxists used to call this kind of flattery of the masses ‘tailism.’ At the Manor we called it creative madness.

Creativity was the big thing. You were nobody at Meditation Manor if you didn’t ‘do’ something artistic. That was almost as important a qualification for residence as madness. Cued by the attention Anna received, many Manorites tossed off poetry and paintings as if schizophrenia hadn’t been invented. Even our worst withdrawn, Taya, felt able to hold an

open-air exhibition of her handwoven rugs in Brockwell Park. All this was nothing compared to the suddenly released energies of the doctors. Away from their pesky wives and kids, and turned on by the Manor's abundance of libidinal outlets, they churned out an impressive number of monographs and book chapters. It was as if a creative dam inside each of them had broken. Dick Drummond wrote an entire book in a fortnight and had time to collaborate with Last on a Penguin Special, *Schizophrenia: Imperialism of the Mind*. He had more or less dropped Conolly House for an 'anti family' of young sexual communards near Regent's Park and also to be close to his beloved gorillas (guerrillas?) at the Zoo. Not to be outdone, Boris grew an Old Testament beard and buckled down to a monumental study of sex and Hasidism called *Baal Shem Tov in Love*; the free time for this he'd bought by installing Davina as his 'anti wife' (unpaid housekeeper) in the Martins' old flat next to the kitchen. She cooked, washed and ironed for him and divided her (much reduced) leisure between flamenco guitar lessons and fighting off Bronwen's takeover bid for Boris after the Welsh girl fled Conolly House and her abusive husband 'Screwie Lewie'. Meanwhile, horned and helmeted Major Straw-Hengist kept busy drafting his memoirs, *A Thousand Years of Blighty*, subtitled 'A Reborn Officer Remembers', and Alf took up morris dancing.

How could I compete against this burst of activity? The atmosphere that stimulated everyone else's creative juices drained mine. In its nineteenth volume I shut down my novel-journal, *Special File*. Stopped writing. *Finito*. Last, welcoming my "cessation of egoic activity" as a sign of Grace, kissed me with tears in his acid-blurred eyes and said: "Brother Sid, *yir time has come*." Had it?

Were almost two years of acid, acorn tea and Yoga hernia going to pay off? Glory be.

With a clear heart and empty head I made plans to lift off.

Up on the farthest tier of the Manor balcony, in one of the plywood cubicles built for residents who had cracked up, I prepared my launching pad: a London version of a Siberian shaman's hutch. In the middle of the floor I screwed a Tree of Life (ex-broom handle) and four pegs, covering them with the sacred blanket Lena had stitched for me, and at the top of this blanket-yurt I cut a hole for spirit escapes, then notched the pole with symbols copied from a book *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Inside the hutch I laid out the tools of my trade: dark glasses, Siberian drum and rattle, surgical rubber gloves, a box of comb honey, an 8" x 10" glossy photograph of Charlie (The Bird) Parker, and medical forceps to assist rebirth, but minus the Corona portable typewriter I no longer required. At each of the tent's corners, to signify the Zodiac elements, I deposited a jar of Thames river water, a box of Swan matches, a plastic bag of earth from St. James Park and a toy balloon I had to keep inflating. After a brief purifying ceremony, I invited in Willie Last who took one look and said quietly, "That's pretty mad, Sid." With this blessing, I knew I was in business.

now
summon tutelary spirits
softly drum on earth-covered floor
drop 750 mg LSD

chant mixture hard-driving chicago blues & shamanjabber
sing song to dead alive at centre of earth
hey oo oo oo oo ah ah—hey oo, oo oo ah ah
weightless
go clare sessions one better ... *am* animals
growling jarga panther ... chuffing doonto bear
let altaic ghosts dance me into non-human hearts
ANIMALS TAKE OVER grrrrrrrrnnimmmmmnimmrrnnmmnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn
chmmmmmmmmmmnnimmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmh
owwrrrrrrrrrrgghh
!
zero gravity
hey oo oo oo oo ah ah—hey oo oo oo oo ah ah
i want a little girl just to
call my own
cherry red!
scared hope someone come in & stop me nobody does

A new spirit, along with the usual flying snakes and scowling griffins, oozed out of my ruptured brain. Its cunning watery eyes gloated over spectral bifocals. “We’ll knock ’em dead, kiddo,” it said in a pitchman’s voice. I called it Bilko.

Security-wise, Meditation Manor was a definite improvement over my apartment and even Conolly House. You could flip out without scaring the neighbours or incite a herd of hypodermic bearing nurses. The madder you were the better everyone liked it. Anyone stood ace high who dropped their “socially cripplin’ role to stand naked an’ exposed to th’ Light.” I didn’t stop to think that every morning Willie Last went back to his socially crippling role.

Word quickly spread that one of the Sacred 7 (no less!) was going up the spout, and I took over from Anna as the Manor’s No. 1 box-office draw.

People began to stop by my door to leave flowers, or meditate or just simply hang around in the hope that my baraka would rub off on them. Clare Council’s members were solidly encouraging. Last fondly smiled at me as I imagined L.B. Mayer had done at Lassie and Mickey Rooney, stars he’d personally promoted. Alf helped me rewrite my will; Tony Straw read me to sleep with chapters of his book. Twice daily Davina came around with a bedpan to see if I was “regular,” and every morning Boris shone a pencil light into my eyes and took my blood pressure. “Can’t afford to have you croaking on us here,” he grunted. With such support how could I fail?

An idea fired itself in my exploding head. It was that Clare Council was the London

equivalent of the civil rights movement in America and that I was a field worker like the SNCC workers I'd met in the South last year. I began to croon to myself songs I adapted to the present struggle.

*"Oh freedom, Oh freedom
Oh, freedom over me
And before they label me mad
I'll fly to China and be bad
And go home tae my Gawd an be free."*

and

*"We shall stand under, we shall stand under
We shall unner'stand some day
Oh, deep in my haid I do believe
We shall unner'stand some day."*

Free a' Last. Free a' Last. Great Gaw'd amighty, free a' Last!

Except of Lena whose constant carping about Last was becoming intolerable. He found her so uninteresting, she complained, that he hadn't even bothered to show up for the past few appointments. "What do I have to do to win his approval, go as nuts as you and Irving?" She was angry but as usual kept it bottled up; not for Lena the open defiance of Sybil Last or Nancy Drummond's drunken fury. Instead she produced her version of Viv Petkin's migraine aggression: stomach aches which she parlayed into false appendicitis and then a tumour no X-ray could detect. When I refused to take all this nonsense seriously, she began leaving me neatly typed translations of Rilke (he and Sylvia Plath were her favourite poets) under the Manor door some evenings.

*"Alas, as I was hoping for human help: angels
suddenly stepped silently
over my prostrate heart."*

and

*"Shine, oh shine and let the constellations
look upon me. For I fade away."*

and

"Oh, to be dead at last and endlessly know them

all the stars!”

Silly girl. Didn't she know that I handled a dozen such false alarms every day at the Manor? I ignored Lena's bullying notes; after all, she was Willie's pigeon now, that is until Hebbie's inevitable phone call. The scene back at Lena's place was a replay of her previous suicide attempt. After Hebbie's husband washed out the swallowed sleeping pills with hot black coffee and he and Hebbie left, I staggered Lena around the flat while she babbled about a nightmare she'd had. "You and Irv had fallen into Willie Last's web and I was next. Save me from the human spider!" I commanded her to get a grip. "How can I?" she cried. "He'll kill me and you'll be next." Then, protected by her stupor, she took a deep breath. "You think Last and the others are your brothers but they're not. I know how the human spider talks about you with Irv. Laughs at you, says you're like a *schicker*, a drunken clown on roller skates. Don't you see, *liebchen*. *Willie Last hates you!*"

Something snapped. I grabbed Lena's throat and pressed her back into bed, exploding with curses. My grip tightened until I felt sperm coming down inside my trousers, then I crawled into bed with her. Next morning before I left I scrawled a bit of Shakespeare on a pad beside Lena's heavily sleeping form:

"So shalt thou feed on death that feeds on man
And, death once dead, there's no more dying then."

But did Lena know something I didn't know?

Back in the bosom of my Clare Council family I felt hostile vibrations from the others as Boris dropped broad hints that I was putting on a crazy act for Last's benefit, to get in with the Boss. Even my confidante Davina grouched that I was letting the side down. "One less viable Councillor means more work for the rest of us, Sid. Someone's got to stay behind and clean up the mess." The message was, to each his own, let the plebs go crazy but not you. Here I'd sweated so hard to produce my madness to Clare's specifications, and now they treated me as if I was ... well, mad. It wasn't fair.

Last refused to deny or confirm that the old freezola was on. All he said was that I was so far out there ahead of everyone else that I mustn't lean on him anymore. "If anything, I should come to you, Master."

Shit, I'd been kicked upstairs again.

The parallel between my situation and that of the double-bind children in The Unhealed Heart was getting too close for comfort. I had painstakingly learned to fight shy of sanity in order to gain Last's approval. But now my madness displeased the other Councillors whom he needed to keep the 'family' going. Would I become expendable like Rose and Sam Martin?

As a Lastian diagram it might read like this:

I say Last says

Something has changed. Nothing has changed.

The Brothers dislike me for going mad. You're projecting your own self-hatred.

I'm not invited to Clare meetings anymore. We don't want to disturb you. Anyway they're only informal get-togethers.

You're trying to kill me. 'Killing' is a metaphor for rebirth.

Nobody loves me anymore. You're imagining things.

I withdrew into what I knew best, shamanism. But I needed 'cases' to practice on, and this wasn't so easy since most residents were already spoken for. Poaching went on all the time but you had to be quick off the mark. One night I blocked my soul sister Brudwif (nee Bronwen), wafting through the drafty old church in a transparent cotton shift tied at the waist with a Welsh St. David's flag. "No ... don't," she shrank from my embrace. "I am the Whore of Babylon moving along the Time Bend toward Mary Magdalen. Reb Boris says I will be lost forever in inner space if I let you touch me."

Boris, the clever sod.

And then I was visited by Alexis Shanahan, a *Life* magazine writer. She had come to interview Last but settled for me. A fragile, pretty Charlestonian, she dug the Manor scene. After shucking off her clothes in my shaman's cubicle—a makeshift tent—she let me tune into her vibrations by touching her all over and shivered sensuously as I probed her sex parts for 'the trouble.' (Standard procedure at the Manor.) Ah yes, a father fixation plus slipped disc L5. Nothing to worry about, I told her. Her head flew up, eyes shining. "*How did you know?*" Then buried her head in my lap. On terminating the usual treatment I crawled exhausted into my tent. "An' don' fergit," I yawned, "th' writer ye're tryin' to interview is th' yew tha's tryin' to interview him."

Swiftly wasn't such a pushover.

A tall, spectacular-legged TWA flight attendant from Arkansas, she regularly flew into London with her usual salutation at my apartment door. "H'lo, Sittin' Bull, let's fuck." She'd sail into my arms, loaded with duty-free Cognac and kisses, and before I could stop her she was halfway out of her dress, singing in her *Grand Ole Opry* accent, "Ain' choo nevu'h gonna cum tuh bed John Dillinger-boy?" And gobble me up before I could protest.

When sweet reason and broad hints about my sacred state failed to dampen Swiftly I made my point more forcibly. The first time she called at Meditation Manor I waited for her in my stone amulet, sandals, dark glasses, shaman's cloak and nothing on underneath. "Oh boy," she grinned, "Mandrake the Magician. Where's Lothar?" She peered inside my little tent. "Phew!", she held her nose, "you raisin' chickens in there, honey?" Her attitude to the Manor was no less disrespectful. She called Anna Shepherd in her water tank "Esther Williams" and said the kimono'd, stoned doctors were the funniest thing she'd seen since Minnie Pearl on

Grand Ole Opry. She shook her head disbelievingly at the Manor's passing parade. "If th' gals was purtier Ah'd say you was runnin' a real high-class bordello. You sure this environment is good for a growin' boy?"

Eventually, under the influence of plenty of brandy and my Siberian chants, Swifty submitted to sitting nude lotus position, touching only my hands. "Ah'm sorry, darlin', Ah nevah c'd do that hootchie-kootchie stuff. Cramps mah legs. Say, with you it's much easier. Golly." For several hours I recited her forgotten past, reading it out of her head like stock market tape.

"An *African* princess? You sure now? My mamma in Li'l Rock ain't gonna like that one li'l bit."

As Swifty grew sleepier our tunes began meshing. "Christ amighty baby, this is tremendous. Ah been sittin' like this for hours!" I removed my cloak, rolled it up and hung it over her bare shoulders, horseshoe-style. I forced her against the wall. She fell down on one knee, I atop her, arms akimbo. I tightened the cloak as hard as it would go. When her breathing stopped I slid to the floor, dog-tired.

The next thing it was morning. Swifty gone. A note on the tent floor.

Gumdrop:

What DID you put
in my likker last
night. Kisses.
S.

A gorgeous transparency flowed through my veins which enabled people to 'see through' me to No-Theng there at all. I didn't exist anymore. Yes sir baby, my luck had changed, I was now in full possession of my True Faculties. I must have been *crazy* all these years, wanting to write. Write? Egoic activity, mayan veils of typewritten puke. Shamanising was infinitely more creative and satisfying. One day, perhaps thousands of years in the future, the unlocked secret history of our times would reveal the incredible nature of my work and destroy at a stroke the fly-by-night reputations of those airthly hacks, Mailer and Hemingway.

So why did I feel so lousy?

Hollow-eyed, jaw-tight, my face began to look like Willie's as my Scottish accent thickened. Waves of murderous rage (against what? whom?) tore me apart, exposing me to echoes of Last's accusation that I was just a flyaway bird fuelled only by curiosity. Damn him, I'd show them *all* just how committed I could be. Disregarding the most elementary rules of personal safety, I crowbarred over-the-top doses of LSD into me and behaved accordingly, but in the Manor's circus-like atmosphere no one took a blind bit of notice. If my intention was to get caught, like Avis the car rental agency I'd have to try harder.

It wasn't easy. Each night I slouched back into the Manor worn out by street encounters the weirdness of which shook even me. Old ladies in Lambeth to whom I whispered

kabbalisms merely complimented me on how well I spoke English for a foreigner. Limehouse tramps snored through my readings from *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The schoolgirls I astralgoogled on the Old Kent Road gathered in clusters to giggle at me, and even my doing midnight capework in front of speeding autos up and down Denmark Hill failed to stop traffic. Bloody limey phlegm. Nothing worked. I could not break down or get arrested. Behaviour that would have rammed Jerry, Herb or Featherstone-the-Flasher into a mental hospital in five minutes was infinitely tolerated, and the Americans thought I was super hip. Despite myself, I knew the rules too well.

Could nobody stop me?

“H’lo, Devil!”

A bony bespectacled head under a Jungle Jim pith helmet poked through a hole in my tent. Knapsack on back, binoculars hanging from his neck, Jerry Jackson crawled in to examine my surroundings. “Th’ housin’ shortage really hit ya hard, didn’t it, ya ol’ Diabolo.” Jerry reported that he had run away from a dying Con House to find Dr. Dick “an’ bring ’im back alive.”

Searching for Drummond took us around the church on a normal Manor day. In the incense-choked hall Ramsey and Roxie held a Black Mass over a dead cat; Marve Munshin crying “This hurts me worse than it does you!” was slapping a delighted Anna Shepherd all over the place, and a TV camera crew lay out cold under blankets. Bronwen Jones floated about trailed by a photo-journalist from *Elle*. I tried introducing Jerry around. Some Manorites, registering his shabby ordinariness, looked right through him; others, like Sir Mario and elderly Dr. Horn-Green, condescended when they heard his lower-class accent and called him “old man” and “dear chap.” Boris took one look and snapped: “Right—get him out by sundown. We don’t want his institutionalisation to infect the rest of the community.” When Last, playing word games with some visiting Californians on the main floor, invited him in, Jerry hunkered down with pleasure. “Le’s see,” Last said, “where were we? Oh yeh. Jill is angry tha’ Jack is not angry tha’ Jill is angry Jack is angry at Jill not bein’ angry—” Jerry’s smile quickly faded. This wasn’t his thing at all. Suddenly he began hiccuping helplessly “Forget it it’s past, forget it it’s past, forget it—” and let me pull him away.

On a dirty mattress behind some packing boxes upstairs Jerry and I found Dick Drummond cradling a mewling infant in one arm and with the other stroking the hair of a sitar-strumming girl beside him. Food crumbs and droplets of Chivas Regal (a nearly finished bottle lay to hand) hung from his mangy beard, and he was crying softly to himself. Jerry’s eyes bugged but he managed a friendly wave at Dick; Dick was too stoned to notice. Pale and anxious, Jerry asked me to ring Les O’Brien at the hospital. “I dunno, Sid,” he said unhappily back at my cubicle, “guess I ain’t got th’ stomach for normal life no more.” By dusk, when O’Brien and Foster came by in a hospital van Jerry had the shakes. “B-boy, a-m I-i g-glad t-tuh see y-ya,” he pumped Les’s hand. “T-thought I’d g-go m-m-mad ’ere.” O’Brien asked Foster to drive Jerry back, then, said: “Think I’ll stick around a bit, Dave. Never seen schizophrenia in wide screen Technicolor before.”

As my guest that night Les mingled with the Manorites and took it all in silently. In the morning he urged me to return to the hospital with him, but I stubbornly refused to desert my post. "Okay," he shrugged, "it's your funeral."

Stupid Les, poor Jerry. So institutionalised they couldn't see that the Manor was therapeutically a million miles ahead of King Edward hospital. Any doubts I had on this score were settled by the news media which overwhelmingly preferred Meditation Manor to Conolly House.

Good Sojer, I manned my post all summer. Emptying out slop buckets, sterilising Sy's needles, keeping Ramsey and Roxie from murdering each other, serving as ward orderly to a dozen or so sobbing, screaming, finger-painting, poetry-writing schizophrenic prodigies. But no amount of my shit-shoveling could buy back the Brothers' love. They really didn't like me fizzling on the pad neither quiescent nor exploding. Question was: when was I going to do it or not to do it? Their unspoken impatience stuck to me like flypaper, as I wandered from cubicle to cubicle seeking what I no longer knew but getting only those dreadful gargoyle smiles that seemed to fix me forever into the patient's position. It dimly occurred to me that the Manorites were doing to me what I often had done to Willie Last, making me an object of their aggressive love, a mere icon of their quasireligious whimsy. But I was too freaked out to appreciate the irony. By habit more than choice I approached Last again for help, but he withdrew behind an impenetrable wall of homage and called me "Father Sid."

What a bind. There I was, technically still chairman of the Council, while daily meetings were called to which I was never invited. I even learned that Marve Munshin had taken over my Council seat if not yet my empty title.

Maybe they were right. Maybe I had overstayed my leave on earth and it was time to go. If so, better under my own steam than to be pushed. Willie agreed to have a Last (acid) drink with me and afterward we dined at a fashionable Kings Road bistro and dropped in for a farewell visit to Mother Amelia in the Old Brompton Road. The fortune-teller solemnly warned him, "Help Sidney. He is astride the Horse of the Night that has broken loose. I left him as a holy friar in Cirenster but have lost all trace of him now." As usual she refused any money. Outside I laughed. Amelia, I said, was losing her marbles. "It was Toulouse, not Cirenster."

I was so tired, thinking

- a) *for myself*
- b) *for others*
- c) *for myself-as-others*
- d) *for others-as-myself-being-others*

But I supposed that's what existential psychiatry was about. Disregarding Amelia's warning to take a holiday, and riding a rising tide of hysteria, I crawled inside my shaman's yurt for a Final Effort. I stripped for action, and prepped, by devouring books about galactic warfare (Asimov's *Foundation*, solar sailing (Arthur C. Clarke) and jungle combat (Ogburn's *Merill's Marauders*, Syke's *Orde Wingate*). Most days I woke around dawn and lay staring through the blanket hole while steadily swigging acid and distilled water. My chest had Band-Aids all over it where I'd tried to scratch away the cosmic Itch of Perfection (the same one that Con House's Derek Chatto used to complain about?). I was more tired than I'd ever been in my life. Like a sick pregnant cow I lay in my dark tent day after day, waiting. Speaking to no one, eating nothing. I stopped taking acid. Cold turkey. This was one trip I wanted to make unaided.

Nothing happened. Not No-Theng. Nuthin'.

I got bored. Was this gut-aching ennui 'it'? Surely not. Didn't something ... er, happen? Old-fashioned anxiety flew back into my nest.

The animal needed to get out.

In the small dark hours of the night, when the others were too stoned or sleepy to notice, I crept out of the Manor to lope the quiet empty streets of south London. From Crystal Palace to New Cross, from Catford to Woolwich, I heel-and-toed it to escape the Theng that was grinding me up in its sharp teeth. All night and into the next morning, up to twenty miles a day, I tramped, a modern Werewolf of London dreading only the bright sunlight. Sometimes in the dawn mist I met Bilko-spirit who rubbed his hands and grinned, "Don't worry, kid, we got It made."

Just like the homeless old people we'd kicked out of the church I slept under bridges and in doorways, and just before dawn forever evaporating into the Brixton mist to elude unknown pursuers, Songs from my past bubbled to my lips:

"Get thee behind me Satan
Travel on down the line
I am a union man
Gonna leave you behind ..."

A vision. Of Chicago, my hometown. I am striding alone down Roosevelt Road, confetti blizzarding down on me the returned war hero. In both my hands, held aloft in a prize fighter's self-congratulatory gesture, a Corona portable typewriter into which is stuck my Report from Nowhere, the holy grail of the writer's quest. Former school chums fling out thunderous cheers, lovely girls in Marshall High sweaters line the curb and clap hands for me. UCLA Homecoming queens strew my path with long-stem red roses.

"Hold the fort, for I am coming

Union men be strong
Side by side we battle onward
Victory is ours.”

Sonofabitch. ‘It’ still would not come.

I had to force the issue somehow. Conolly House might be on its last legs, but so was I.

Days and Nights in Conolly House:] fall [

"MR K. TOPPLES"

"HAROLD DOES IT"

NURSING A BRUISED ARM, I'm lying half asleep in Lena's MGB splashing past rain-soaked news placards. Nothing surprises me anymore, not even Harold Wilson organising a coup d'état in the Kremlin. Lena breaks in to say that Labour just won the British General Election and, coincidentally, Khrushchev is out in Russia. Oh.

What a hangover. For weeks Bilko-spirit and I have been prowling the London streets by night and by day helping Last turn on relays of American novices (he still trusts me to do this). Yesterday an elderly Vermont poet almost cranked my arm off thinking I was his first Model T Ford. Favouring my twisted shoulder, I'm still a seagull leading the Yankee geese home on one good wing.

Lena must be plugged into my subconscious. "Last night I dreamed you were a bird lost high over the ocean. Flapping around and making such crazy noises the other birds thought you actually knew where you were going." Cold beads of terror pop out under the shaman's cloak I'm wearing under my macintosh. The Kraut vampire is at it again, reading my mind. Heading west on the A40 I ward off Lena's spell with shaman jabber under my breath until she drops me outside the hospital gate. "Can I come get you soon?" her lower lip trembles. A passer-by stares as I burst out, "Forget it—it's past!" I slam the car door and stalk off.

Where is Conolly House? It's wiped clean off the earth. And no wonder. With its yellow bricks sandblasted clean and its broken windows repaired it now looks exactly like all the other wards. The wire mesh around the front porch has been replaced by glass, and even the tell-tale junky lawn is neatly mown and free of debris. Something is definitely wrong. This time no one jumps at me with an invisible clarinet-rifle because the front door (for the first time in my memory) is locked. My knock is answered by a strange white-coated nurse who takes a long time checking with higher-ups inside before he admits me to a scrubbed, gleaming, Gareth-less corridor. Inside, the place is unrecognisable. Disinfectant and wax polish have erased the familiar stench, the walls are bare of China graffiti. It's dead quiet. Has someone finally strangled Percy-the-radio? One or two new boys sit around wearing bathrobes and doped, vegetable faces and utterly ignore a couple of men in business suits who skulk near them scribbling furiously in notebooks. Part of the mystery clears up when my nurse-escort unlocks the door to staff room to reveal not Dr. Dick or Les O'Brien but brutal Mad Monahan with his feet arrogantly propped up on O'Brien's old desk and over in the corner Drs. Singh and Primrose burrowing through Drummond's confidential files. All three throw me the King

Edward stare. "Ah yes Mr. Bell," medically smiles Screwy Lewie. "So sorry I could not keep your old room reserved for you. It was necessary to assign to another patient." He accentuates 'another.' Confused, I back out and start hunting for friendlier faces. Upstairs, as I go past the loo, a strong anonymous arm snakes out and jerks me in.

"Welcome back, ya ol' devil," says Jerry Jackson. "Ye're just in time for th' wake."

The old bunch is all up here, in the large upstairs latrine which they have turned into a carbon copy of their funky old nest in the TV lounge, complete with mattresses and the television set with wires trailing into Percy's room. Only up here can they get any peace and quiet, they say. "Mad Monahan harasses us everywhere else—then calls us mentals for living in a toilet," says Jeff H. Almost everyone is out of China Follies gear and back to their standard drab pyjamas and gowns.

The news boils down to one basic fact: Drs. Singh and Primrose are exploiting Drummond's prolonged absence to impose a vastly stricter regime on the boys. With the Medical Super Dr. Winstanley's tacit approval, the Demented Duo have already banned 'unauthorised' activities such as the disorderly almost continuous meetings which were the unit's heart and soul. Dr. Winstanley has also agreed to the reintroduction of compulsory reveille, regular bed check and locked doors. But so that he can sleep nights with a good conscience the Superintendent has quietly advised Dr. Singh to continue a Potemkin show of Drummond's old policy of minimum drugs. (Except that Mad Monahan's idea of minimum is enough to choke a horse.)

What happened to Derek Chatto whose breakdown triggered this debacle?

Jerry says, "'e comes outta Winnie Wing"—the locked down violent ward—"real quiet like an' callin' everyone 'sir.' 'e stops chasin' girls an' says 'e wants to enlist in th' Royal Navy like 'is dad. So they discharged 'im as cured."

The boys carefully refrain from blaming the new regime on anyone but themselves. They must have done something odious to cause Or. Dick to abandon them. Snide insinuations by staff that Drummond has deserted his post in its darkest hour the boys refuse to countenance. All they will concede is that maybe, just maybe, a few of his outside interests like Meditation Manor drained off his energy at a crucial time. Even then they are prepared to give him the benefit of their doubts. Free-enterprising Barney says, "Dr. Dick saw the National Health was going too socialist. So he wisely balanced off the pubic sector with his private parts."

Dr. Winstanley's new broom, wielded with unholy joy by the Demented Duo, sweeps Con House clean of his precious mess. What used to be the only hospital ward run as much for the patients as for the staff now reverts to its original function: to keep staff anxieties under control. Ironically, the very first victims are Drummond's old crew of nurses who drift rudderless and demoralised amid squalls of 'I told you so's' rained down on them by staff colleagues who always believed that Dr. Dick would dump them once he got bored with Con

House. Bert Karp, whose basic zaniness Con House supported and disguised for so long, chomps apples all day and like a back ward senile stares glassily into the gas fire of the TV lounge; to anyone who'll listen he blames the unit's collapse on the elusive pH factor. Very pregnant, Sally Peel idly knits and consumes gallons of ice cream while brooding over the possibility that she has become a 'carrier' of schizophrenia to her unborn infant. Dave Foster endlessly plays ping-pong in staff canteen, and O'Brien has vanished. "Probably getting pissed out of his mind," Dave says.

The boys adapt more quickly to a reality that staff is having such trouble with. Several have already abandoned ship or are making plans to get discharged. Yorkshire Roy has hustled himself into a halfway hostel in Ruislip; if he stays, he says, Mad Monahan will rob him blind. "Ah don't know if it'll be mah money or mah manhood. Either way I'll be th' loser." Jeff H. also sees no point in hanging around, not since A.C. Corrigan, who Jeff fancies, fell in love with the dud shell Whitworth. "Before coming here I went mad because I didn't know who or what I was sexually," says Jeff. "Now I know—and the pain may drive me crazy again." And little Nigel says that his ectoplasmic alter-ego 'Desmond' has told him to go home. "Des is there already with no one to protect him against my family. I'd best go and look after him."

With the unit's top layer creamed off, Con House is left more defenceless than ever. Guilt saps the spirits of those who had committed themselves to helping Derek Chatto; they blame themselves for not doing their job better or for getting involved at all. As Nigel says, "We tried to sucker a lie-in and now they're throwing us to the Christians." When I confess my own share in provoking Derek's flipout—all those bedside séances—I'm told to relax, he apparently seduced most of his visitors into believing they had supernaturally curative powers.

Very few patients seem bitter toward the absent Drummond. Or to me, as his surrogate. "Even th' blokes wot figure you for an Interpol nark think you're jes' th' spy wot got left out in th' cold like th' rest of us," says Jerry. Anyway, this is no time for recrimination. The urgent thing is to suck up to incoming staff, to do violence to ourselves before it's done to us. Herb Greaves set an example by making a funeral pyre of his copies of Laing and Goffman on the manicured front lawn while incanting:

"Sikh socks sick

Kick kooks' kocks

Punish penis

Intra Venus."

The others aren't slow to catch on. Barney Beaton turns his eyeglass-camera, usually pointed at doctors or his parents, on himself, "Hold still, dammit man, how can I shoot a moving

target?” Wally Walters goes back to his old habit of shutting out the world with small red plastic radios clamped to either ear, and Hurricane Hodge lays off Jack Sweeney to punch himself silly with renewed fervour. Jack, deprived of Robin Ripley’s support (she has been banned from Con House) and the emotional comfort of Hodge’s assaults, sinks into his Tipperary mental mist. Eric, who had begun eating under the stimulus of Derek’s crisis, resumes his fast. And Abe, a terrified witness of Mad Monahan strapping an overactive Mr. Wu into bed, stuffs a dirty rag into his mouth to stifle his coughing. “Ain’t never seen a purple blackie before,” says Wally.

With truly frightening authenticity a number of boys have started to impersonate the affectless tics of chronic seniles: this must be what they were like before Drummond came on the scene. Conolly House is a doctor’s heaven now: clean, quiet, and nuts. The old solidarity has evaporated, and it’s every man for himself. The important thing is to underwrite staffs sanity by writing off your own.

Except for Jerry Jackson.

Off Largactil, out of his hospital-issue gown, Jerry has found the confidence to go out and obtain his first paid job in years. Nothing very hard, he says with self-deprecating pride, just capping hair oil bottles part time in a Slough factory. Every night, dog tired, he drags himself back to the hospital utterly drained by paranoia and bus sickness. After years of crippling depressions he was encouraged “tuh mek something of meself” by the part he played in the July revolution (Derek’s rota). The ferocity of his inner battle with the seemingly impossible task of taking personal responsibility for another person, did it. He has not stopped being mad: he still has visions and hears voices. And—is this crazy?—conjures up a picture of himself as the lone survivor of *The Four Just Men*, his favourite TV adventure series. (The other Just Men being Clem, A.C. and me.) With the last of his political juices he circulates a ‘SAVE CON HOUSE’ petition I help him write. Among his demands are improved food, the right to change doctors and union wages for mental patients. (I got him to drop the clause about an immigration ban on Indian doctors.)

“Dr. Dick’s allus goin’ on about how us schizos are vital to th’ nation’s health,” he says with irresistible logic. “Why not get paid th’ rate for th’ job?”

Lantern Slide: *Gerald Jackson*

An elder statesman of schizophrenia, Jerry has been in and out of mental hospitals since early adolescence. He is twenty-four now. His career as a schizophrenic began unassumingly when a childhood bout of measles temporarily left him deaf which got him misdiagnosed as a ‘high grade subnormal.’ By easy stages case workers and then doctors labelled his extreme boredom with classroom studies as ‘backward,’ ‘disturbed’ and finally ‘paranoid schizoid’ when he began yelling curses at the people who were calling him classification-type names. He wears such stigma like war medals, as if to boast, well at least someone has paid attention to me. A

sense of defeat is a Jackson family tradition.

Jerry's dad, a Rhondda valley collier, was starved out in the 1926 General Strike then had to quit with black lung without a pension from coal pits still privately owned. War-conscripted to a Coventry munitions plant after wandering the roads looking for work, Mr. Jackson was struck on the head by a falling factory girder in the famous Luftwaffe raid of November 14, 1940. A six-month coma left him incapable of focusing his eyes, and he steadily slipped down the job ladder till he was grateful for a position as lavatory cleaner for Wandsworth Council, London. Helped bury blitzed bodies '41—'45, then hit the road again and never came back, "is mind wanders, so does 'e."

"Ya c'd say me folks helped mek ol' bloody England," Jerry says. "Me mum died in service, y'know, cleanin' th' nob's' 'ouses. Da' was a funny ol' bird. Every mornin', jes' before goin' off to clean loos, 'e got up whistlin' an' singin' 'is 'ead off. Wot'd 'e got to whistle about?" Jerry's only sister succumbed to pneumonia in the terrible austerity winter of '47.

Basically shy and acquiescent, Jerry never dreamed of arguing against the life verdicts passed on him by his betters. Anyway, his inner life lay elsewhere. As with so many English working-class boys, his artistic-intellectual drive had gone to his feet, and what couldn't be expressed in words in a classroom was articulated on a soccer pitch by heading, kicking, dribbling, flicking and curling goals from thirty yards out. At fourteen a miracle! A million south London boys' fantasy came true when a scout for Chelsea Football Club told him to report for a try-out with the junior side. But Jerry so hooked on failure: "I wakes up that mornin' an' me leg aches so I turns over an' goes back to sleep. Never did mek it to th' grounds that day." When I suggest his leg was psychosomatic Jerry takes off his glasses, seems to claw up the wall in merriment. "I can't stop laughin', don't know why, that's so funny." His face empty, blank, tired.

These past few years a new fantasy has driven him: to marry his vicar's daughter, Caroline. To qualify as prospective bridegroom, he began attending church regularly and then so boisterously that the vicar had to call the police. Somehow fucking and religion got confused, Jerry's been trying to untangle them ever since. His main obsession is to become respectable enough to tie the knot with Caroline in a fabulous all-white ceremony attended by every single member of Chelsea EC. Figures the best way is to out-Jesus her father by cleansing the world of impurities like himself. His hospital days alternate between dreams of ravishing Caroline and bouts of guilty blankness when he forgets that he's ... he's ... 'effin' 'ell, forgot again! When he can't remember who/what he is, Jerry fingers his 'clarinet' (held between his legs and moved up and down Cotton Club style) and shouts the GI-imported blues until God's tune and his identity, spurts out.

A daylight patrol in my combat gear, urban shaman's cloak and dark glasses. The boys generally accept that my ostentatiously cradled arm is an injured seagull's wing but are divided on whether it happened in a previous life. My insistence on this point, considered normal by Last and Clare Council, causes a few Con Housers for the first time to amiably doubt my sanity.

I can't walk in any direction without colliding with a sociologist or research psychologist writing in a notebook like mine. They are strays from the Sixth International Congress of Psychotherapy now being held in London, I learn. Before tea I bump into several such visiting foreigners who want to interview me as an unusually interesting case. Ha. With nineteen volumes of Special File already written I've got the jump on them.

Whenever Mad Monahan sees me on his rounds, I slump into a deferential slouch and, following the boys' example, call him 'Mister' Monahan.

"Oi—Dr. Dick's on the telly!"

He sure is. Upstairs in the latrine a crowd avidly hunches over the TV set, watching Dick Drummond being interviewed on *Nationwide* about a speech he made earlier today at the Psychotherapy Congress. Tie askew, beard uncombed, he's pissed. When the lady reporter asks him a particularly silly question Dick growls into the camera, "What's the point? Why should I help the BBC colonise the fractured minds of those atomised ciphers out there—the great British public?" he hiccups. "THE REVOLUTION STARTS WHEN WE WANT IT TO!" With that he flings his typed speech into the studio air and is blotted out by a snowfall of unbound pages.

The boys stare at the screen. Wally Walters says, "What would happen if any of us did that?"

The boys are genuinely puzzled at the double standard used to define insanity, examples of which they see in their daily lives all the time. Take radio. While keen TV watching is assumed to be a symptom of depression—commercially especially offend their sense of logic ("You can't be whiter than white!")—a lot of boys like listening to BBC radio's popular morning Light Programme. Wally Walters unplugs for a moment to explain one reason why. "Well, y'know 'ow Dr. Dick wuz allus natterin' on how we schizophrenics are th' wave of th' future. Cop a load of this. We done arrived, I reckon." He gets me to listen to, and transcribe faithfully, Jimmy Young, the housewives' favourite disc jockey on BBC:

"The J.Y. prog with Jim at the Beeb. If you-lee-o would likee-o to participate in same send-ee-o a postcardio. Want me to call you? Must have your numero for phonio. It's Jim at the Beeb ...

"Mrs. Hart-pumpin' away, ay?—of High Wycombe-an'-go writes to say if you could give a little linkup for us super super super. That's what we're here for. It's seashore biscuit time. That's th' name of our rah-dee-o ray-see-pee. You have three mins to get yourself equipped ...

"Two oz wholemeal flour speedily followed by two oz ... Am I going too fast? ... crab paste, which brings me to the penult item. I shall audit the books. Do you have six? Wun. Tew. Three. For. Five. Six. Six. Five. For. Three. Tew. Wun. Do you have six? A quick sock through the 'ceep for you, a quick recap ... then you have seashore biscuits delicioso."

Cooler weather keeps us in like caged animals. Behind locked doors, spied on by the omnipresent Demented Duo, the boys pace up and down; a few even begin to stake out little corners of Con House that belong to them and no others, a chronic pattern I've not seen here before. One of the boys sobs theatrically, "Boo hoo, if I'd known I'd never have started it." Where is O'Brien?

Les Talks

I track him down in the now unused 'Anything Goes' room where he sits disconsolately against the wreckage of the upright punching-bag Derek tore apart. A carpet of cigarette ends and empty brown ale bottles around him, Les is buried in Faulkner's *The Mansion*.

"H'lo Sid," he wearily raises his eyes and taps the paperback novel. "Y'know, these Snopeses, they'd make good mental hospital staff." He looks awful. Shrivelled, almost.

"Knackered is the word. Like Conolly House." He tells me that the unit is finished for all practical purposes. And him?

"A relief in a way. Maybe I can take my accumulated leave and visit with the wife and kids. Man, they haven't seen me in years."

And look for a different job?

"Nah. I'm an addict. Hooked. Working with the mad is the only sane thing I've found in this mad, mad world."

And Con House?

"Soon we'll be nothing but a distant memory. A historical landmark. Like Stonehenge. A legend'll spring up. You, Dick, others will write about it maybe. The fight, for a better deal, may spread to more mental hospitals.

"The impulse will go on. But Con House itself will get left behind. A myth, no longer reality. Trendies like your Brixton mob will interpret even our failures as successes for 'family oriented phenomenology.' Doctors and nurses closer to the shitwork will remember mainly our disasters. Of which there were one or two, may I remind you. Any Con House kid who goes chronic or kills himself will be our fault. We went too far, they'll say. Too noisy, too dirty, too this or that. Some of these lads never will leave a mental hospital. Too far gone when we got them. Still, we'll get the blame. Staff'll fall into a schizophrenic habit: they'll keep that part of our praxis which makes their job more bearable and reject the other side of what we tried to do here. They'll say Gareth or Herb or Abe might've survived better without Conolly House.

"God help me, they could be right."

For the next few days and nights Con House revolves around Jerry's one-man petition and occasional unannounced drop-ins by delegates from the Psychotherapy Congress in London. It is typical of British medical incuriosity that visiting foreigners eager to know about us outnumber English by ten to one (the one, an Ipswich-based psychiatrist, said he was thinking

of starting a Con House-type community—in Australia.) From the methodical way the foreigners tromp through we must be somewhere on their tourist checklist between the Tower of London and Madame Tussaud's. Gregarious Dr. Winstanley, our executioner, likes playing host.

"This-a-way, comrades."

Protected by platoons of hospital nurses, half a dozen grim, square-faced men in wide-cuffed business suits invade our upstairs latrine sanctum. The Russians have come.

Dr. Winstanley is at his ebullient best describing Conolly House as a major breakthrough in community therapy. "The pragmatic English tradition is to bend without breaking. So we gave a little power to the patients before they could overthrow us," he jokes. The Soviet psychiatrists, and their hefty interpreter, settle down to a mutually uncomprehending stare session. Jerry, trying to be friendly, politely fractures the silence. "Oi then, wot 'appened to Moscow Dynamo's goalkeeper after 'e lost y a th' game to Barcelona last year? Did ya shoot 'im?" After translation, six square Russian heads slowly swivel toward Jerry. Is he sick, or a provocateur? The interpreter woodenly replies, "We have been nice to visit in your British Islands. The weather is pleasant." The Russians are deeply upset by our laughter. It's raining out.

Undeterred, Dr. Winstanley asks if any of the patients will explain "in your own words" how Conolly House works. Nigel, fifteen, complies.

"Once upon a time
the world was blown up by a big bomb a huge radio-active tidal wave almost
drowned everybody to make sure they survived the remaining adults decided to build a
dike of the brains of their best children they hoped this would keep the flood from
drowning them all for many generations a way of life arose based on the production of
children for the great dike then one day a man named mad dick actually a child in
disguise who'd never grown up like peter pan built a wooden boat and said he was sailing
to china and could take a limited number of children with him parents furiously
denounced mad dick for threatening their supply of dike children and therefore all of
civilization but mad dick no flies on him cleverly convinced the parents that the only kids
he'd take to china were defective ones their porous brains were no use against the
flood just as the ark full of unwanted children set sail for china the parents changed
their minds it was all a trick they said their sub-marines sank the ark all hands
including mad dick drowned the torpedo explosions caused a crack in the great dike
which collapsed and then everybody else drowned too i thank you the end."

The interpreter goes to work, then says: "Dr. Vukovich inquires, what is the moral of this fable?"

Nigel says dryly: "It's an east wind that blows nobody any good."

Suddenly Jerry bounds forward waving a piece of paper which sends the Russians scampering

behind a wall of nurses. But all Jerry wants is their signatures on his Save Con House petition. The lady translator grabs the paper and scans it, then barks, “We unanimously condemn this unprovoked interference into the internal affairs of the Soviet Union!—”

“Oh no, lady,” Jerry protests, “ya don’ get it!”

She plows on. “The rights of all minorities, including psychiatric inmates, are guaranteed by our Soviet Constitution.” She turns venomous. “And what about the Irish question?”

The Russian doctors are uneasy. Everybody has been so polite till now, not even mentioning KGB torture hospitals. One says in perfect English to Dr. Winstanley, “My sympathies, Comrade Medical Superintendent. Your capitalist schizophrenics are remarkably like our own.” They edge toward the door. Herb Greaves shoots out a clenched fist salute that accidentally catches Dr. Vukovich under the chin, and is buried under an avalanche of nurses. Whatever chances Con House ever had waft out on the dying echoes of Herb’s version of the ‘Internationale’:

“Tis th’ final *Con* flict

Let each man take his stand.”

Tonight’s Nine O’clock BBC-TV news carries a film clip of part of a speech by Dr. Ronald D. Laing to the Psychotherapy Congress. (Willie Last snubbed the meeting partly because he knew Laing would be there.)

“Perhaps *says Laing* we will learn to accord to so-called schizophrenics who have come back to us, perhaps after years, no less respect than the often no less confused explorers of the Renaissance ...”

Black Abe delivers himself at the TV set feet first, kicking and stomping on it till it explodes with a squawk and curl of smoke. O’Brien, playing solitaire in a corner of the latrine, observes, “Haven’t seen Abe so active all year. This bloke Laing must have powerful magic.”

Lantern Slide: Abraham Clewes

I’m ashamed to say that sometimes I think of Abe Clewes as the black bogeyman in *I Walked with a Zombie*: the same stark staring eyes, the same ju-ju ability to appear out of nowhere like a Halloween ghost. Like Mr. Wu, that other butt of Con House’s racial jokes, seventeen-year-old Abe never speaks except through his marathon coughing sprees. What makes him tear his larynx to shreds? Is he trying to spew up his blackness?

Abe’s family is a paragon of immigrant virtues. London Transport recruited them from Jamaica in the 1950s to clean subway trains and serve tea in a bus depot. Ma and Pa Clewes came expecting to work themselves up from poverty and to be touched by a little of the powerful aura of middle-class respectability exuded by their totemic goddess, young Queen Elizabeth, but found themselves enshrouded in a racial fog of knowing

nudges and nasty little jokes. The peculiarly subtle forms of English racism eventually sent them into a kind of shocked withdrawal (“They likes to keep to themselves th’ blackies do.”). They numbed themselves with gargantuan amounts of overtime to earn the mortgage down payment on a semi-detached in Lewisham. When Abe, their eldest son, came over from Jamaica they promptly indoctrinated him into the racial ground rules of English civility. For example, if Abe came home from school with stories of racial bullying, his parents insisted that (1) it wasn’t happening and (2) it was his fault. Thus, his blank impassive expression, to most doctors a symptom of affectless schizophrenia, is actually the result of careful family guidance. Abe couldn’t be pious or clean enough for the elder Clewes, self-appointed surrogates of English Jim Crow. Work, pray, turn the other cheek.

Abe tried. But the hostile reception he found in Britain, so different from the liberal, tolerant image he’d been taught back in Jamaica, and the fierce competitiveness of other West Indians, knocked him into himself. One day he came home bloody from a minor race riot (reported in the papers, as always then, as a “teenage scuffle”) and Pa Clewes stropped him for unwittingly blundering into the incident. Without a Black Power vocabulary of anger, Abe began seeing angels, devils and cherubim, all in white.

If Abe’s folks are a black parody of the normal white double-binding family, Con House is the concentrated essence of English attitudes to colour. Its saving grace is that it’s open racism openly arrived at. On the outside Abe never really knew what he was fighting against; but in Con House he can be in no doubt whatsoever.

The tragedy is that he was already so messed about by the time he arrived in hospital that it’s impossible to know how deeply the boys’ anti-black gibes get into him or if catharsis is available. Our only clue is that Abe’s only real enjoyment seems to be popping out of closets to scare the bejeepers out of people, a terrifying spook who corresponds to the most primitive racial fantasies of the white English boys. That’s when Abe absolutely cracks up. “Ho ho ho ho ho ho hich hich hich hich,” he cackles, slapping his sides in utter satisfying delight.

Every afternoon a couple of the Low Wick village kids come through Con House hawking the *Evening Standard*. They are brothers, about fourteen and twelve, and hardened to being around a mental hospital. In other wards I’ve seen them zip in and out with hardly a backward glance. But in Con House they gawk and snigger as if at a zoo outing, and in a perverse display of shame some patients play up to them. Jerry Jackson in particular has always pretended for their benefit to be a gorilla, scratching under his armpits and loping after them in a thoroughly moronic way. The newsboys laugh and jeer at him before running off.

Why do you do it? I angrily ask Jerry.

“Aw, fer a giggle—an’ ’cuz they sorta expect it,” he says.

He’s been able to break other bad habits recently so maybe it’s time to change this one, too. Consequently, for the next few days Jerry either ignores the newspaper boys or buys a *Standard* from them without his usual simian capering. At first the brothers look at him

strangely then with growing apprehension then begin to avoid him and soon stop delivering papers to Conolly House altogether. From now on we have to trek two miles into the village to get them.

Jerry asks me, "Got any more labour-savin' ideas, Dr. Freud?"

Limbo bound, the Shanghai Express starts grinding to a halt despite Jerry's best efforts to keep the unit and himself going. Some boys already refer to Con House in the past tense. "Wasn't all there but I liked it 'ere." "You din't 'ave to be nobody but made you feel somebody." It scares me how so many now look and act like deteriorated chronics, right down to the sloped shoulders and 'King Edward shuffle'. A "they know what's best for us" attitude replaces the previous anarchy.

Only Jerry continues to say 'is.' Pale with anxiety, he camps outside the office and holds aloft a large bit of cardboard

WE WANT OUR RITES

and heckles passing staff,

"Jesus saith th' meek shall inherit th' booby hatches, what's that lot of Gadarene swine doin' 'ere ...?"

Improbably the Con House idea has lodged in Jerry's head.

Dr. Singh and Nurse Monahan at first try to laugh it off then angrily chase him away. No one gives Jerry a hand with his campaign, not even A.C. Corrigan who is leaving soon and doesn't want to jeopardise his imminent release. When I tell Jerry he's very vulnerable and isolated, he reminds me: "But it was you wot tol' me if a thing's worth 'avin' it's worth fightin' for, Sid. Wot made you change your mind?"

Like a tree that's standing in the water, he will not be moved.

If Jerry is not scared of the hospital authorities, I certainly am. Why risk my privileged position as an urban shaman for the sake of ... what? As discreetly as I can manage it, I cut out on Jerry and retire upstairs to re-open my clinic at the rear of the latrine lounge. My only professional competition is the latest patient, Joshua.

His full name is Joshua Redcliffe-Nightingale, and he is a hardy perennial who crops up in mental hospitals all over southern England when the urge hits him. A balding, thirty-ish man in tramp's clothes but affecting a monocle, he also happens to be a molecular chemist, a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford and of the Royal Society. "And a paraldehyde addict," adds O'Brien. "Joshua's got it scientifically worked out. Gets himself admitted to a different hospital every few months, kicks up just enough fuss to get his dope, but not so much they electroshock or Section 29 him. Brainy type." O'Brien says Joshua constantly needs to fill up on his peculiar fuel and recharge his batteries by contact with young boys.

Friendly and loquacious, Joshua tours the unit, waving hello to old pals, then climbs into

an Observation Dorm bed and bawls like a baby until Kelly, the Number 2 night nurse, hurries in to pacify him with evil smelling paraldehyde in water. Over the next few days Josh holds a kind of teach-in on schizophrenia to the kids who never tire of his theories. Apparently, he has a different one for each visit.

"Chaps, I think I've finally got it this time," he says. "After following up a number of experimental false trails, such as pink spot, hormone deficiencies, endocrine imbalance and the like, I now can demonstrate *conclusively*, mind you *conclusively*, that the primum mobile of schizophrenia, wait for it chaps—is the asynchronous discharge of neurons in the cerebrospinal fluid caused by the presence of an extra 'Y' chromosome. In laymen's language, bad blood." The captivated boys nod knowingly; they always suspected this.

At night, Josh totally regresses and, in a sad echo of Derek Chatto's rota, we take turns bottle and breast-feeding him. Mad Monahan, usually so eager to massively dope his patients, sadistically withholds paraldehyde from Joshua who bawls even crawls for it. "G'wan back to bed, ya pervert!" Monahan bellows. Tonight, unable to bear the craving, Josh feebly claws and sucks the air, then gets out of bed to groggily stumble into the staff office. From behind my Forward Observation Post under the rear stairwell I hear Josh fiddling clumsily with the lock on the medicine cabinet, much to the scornful laughter of Monahan and his assistant, Kelly. When Monahan loses patience and pushes him back into bed, Josh slips from the nurse's grasp and lurches into the office again; Monahan grabs him by the hair, drags him across the corridor into Observation Dorm and roughly backhands him twice in the face. Then he slugs Josh hard in the stomach. The sound is sickening.

Enraged, I run into the office to tell Kelly who looks up from his *Racing Mirror* and says, "Seeing things again, Mr. Bell? We got pills for that."

From Observation Dorm another sound of fist on flesh, but this time it's Monahan on the receiving end. Kelly rushes past me across the corridor to help his nursing colleague up from the floor. Jerry Jackson, who saw the assault on Josh from his bed, stands over Monahan, fists cocked. "Leave 'im alone, ya fuckin' Fascist creep!" he yells as the two burly nurses drown him in punches and kicks then haul him off into the staff room. Monahan wipes blood from his lip and reaches for the desk phone. "All right, you cunt," he tells Jerry. "Your new home's Churchill Wing."

Despite Jerry's screams and protests behind the closed office door, nobody including me stirs in Con House. I cower under the stairwell with fingers in my ears until I can't take it anymore and decide to be brave. My timid knock brings Monahan daubing at his split lip. He bunches my shaman's robe at the throat and shoves me against a wall, and in his angry grip I really feel the loss of the forty pounds I've given as a hostage to vegetarianism; my injured 'wing' hangs helplessly at my side. All these past weeks of my obsequiously mistering Monahan mean nothing to him. He snarls, "Keep your nose out of this, Bell, before I show you th' biggest needle in th' business." Dry, frightened, I run upstairs to the dorm and pull the covers over my head.

In the morning when Les O'Brien gets my indignant report his eyes harden, his tone goes

deadly flat. "Why tell me? It's not my affair." I can't believe it. Won't he do something? "You must be joking," he says. "Do you really expect me to grass on a colleague? Who I may have to depend on to save my skin next time one of you schizos goes for me with a broken bottle? Do me a favour!"

I am stunned. O'Brien is a 'cop' again and actually siding with the Con House-hating nurses who give him such a rough ride. "So what? Listen chum, I have to work with these blokes after you're long gone."

Not very convincingly I threaten to kick up a row to rescue Jerry from the violent wing.

"Go ahead, if you dare," says O'Brien. "But before you do, Mis-ter Bell, take a china at yourself in a mirror. That Count Dracula get-up, the loss of voice and weight, the whole ecstasy bit. A licence, even yours, extends just so far in a place like this then it expires." My position is awkward, he says. If I were a genuine patient I could lay a formal complaint against Monahan, if staff I could go through channels to report him to Chief Nurse Tasker. "As it is, you're nobody around here, a role you chose for yourself. Remember?"

But what about Jerry?

"Not to worry. Jackson's an old hand in a violent ward and knows the rules. I reckon we'll have him back good as new in a week or two."

I tell O'Brien that Jerry is less institutionalised, more sure of himself now. O'Brien stares at me. "For his sake I hope you're wrong."

With Jerry incommunicado in Churchill Wing his campaign to Save Con House falls apart. Even that poor cousin of rebellion, sullen resentment, becomes too dangerous to show and hence to feel. After all, look what happened to Jerry. With a weary practised air a number of boys slip even deeper into the institutional groove, the chumminess gone, each now more than ever separated from the others. Percy-the-Radio goes ominously silent. A.C. Corrigan, hand in hand with his lover Whitworth, accosts passers-by with mordant sarcasm: "Clap hands if you believe in fairies." Herb Greaves makes a final effort:

"False
Dawn
Balls
Gone."

It's official. Conolly House shuts down next week. The coup de grace was the Soviet Embassy's complaint of a vicious attack on their nationals by two agents provocateurs (Herb and Jerry). That's all, folks.

Impassively, the boys read the printed announcement pinned to the office door. Only little Nigel is visibly upset. "Why?" he exclaims. "We tried to please them. Where did we go wrong?"

Joshua, our aging baby, puts his unsteady paraldehyded arms around Nigel. "Silly boy. You frightened the horses in the street."

Les O'Brien and Dave Foster, the two northern-born nurses, meet for a smoke in the empty TV lounge. Seemingly asleep, I sprawl in a chair nearby.

Les: (*drawing deep breath*): Sliced off at the nuts, eh Dave?

Dave: (*glumly borrows cigarette from Les*): Aye.

Les: Y'know, somehow I thought we'd evade it. Beat th' system. Or Admin would have lost interest in us, like before.

Dave: Steadfast men, bureaucrats. Long memories. Must be their training.
(*Lengthy silence.*)

Les: Well, it's back to the salt mines. Wonder where we'll get assigned next. Winstanley told me this morning he didn't want to lose my expertise. Said something vague about a new self-governing unit. With quote more supervision than Conolly House of course unquote. Wonder if he was serious?

Dave: He told me he was thinking of a new mixed-sex ward. Wants to know if I'm interested.

Les: Are you?

Dave: Think I'll quit. Been thinking on it a year or so.

Les: Do what?

Dave: Anything. My brother-in-law owns a couple of automatic laundries. Maybe ask him to put me on.

Les: My brother-in-law's in Australia. Maybe I'll emigrate.

Dave: There's mentals there. You'd find 'em. (*They laugh*) Well, Australia's closer to China.

Les: China. Only a figure of speech. Symbolic and all. D'you think we almost made it?

Dave: To China?

Les: Yeah.

Dave: With a few, maybe.

Les: No, I mean—for you.

Dave: I learned ... something. It's a possibility. A definite possibility. The easier thing, for them, even for us. It's bound to happen. Like progress. Even tha' fooker Winstanley says we're pioneers.

Les: You believe all that?

Dave: Aye.

Les: (*dubious*): Th' word's out, I suppose. Maybe it will ... get around. I wonder what form it'll take.

Dave: A new self-governing unit. Mixed-sex ward. Broadmoor goin' up in flames. This bloke Laing. Dr. Who blowing all the ECT machines to hell. (*Pause.*) Who knows, maybe some day we won't worry so much about the nutters. People will be kinder.

Les: They'll be set free. We'll still be here.

Dave: Not me. I've a brother-in-law who likes me.

Les: I wonder who likes me.

Reluctantly, watched by a few boys, I pack. This is my last trip. Les advises that in my present state it would be suicidal for me to follow the boys into a normal ward which I yearn to do. Conolly House has been my emotional anchor for the past year and I don't want to let go. Les gets Kelly to unlock the front door for us.

Robin Ripley joins us outside and kisses me. "Don't take it so hard, Mr. Writer. One day maybe we'll outnumber them." She looks more relaxed and together. Her hair, which in the past I've seen in varying lengths and the colours of a rainbow, is cropped boyishly and almost completely grey. She says she is naturally grey. "I've looked like this since I was a kid. But I hate th' shrinks to know. Vanity. They think I'm crazy for dyein' it all th' time."

We exchange addresses, and several boys ask me to send them copies of the book I intend writing about Con House. How they'll ever get through the nineteen boxed volumes of *Special File* I don't know. We move in a group up the hill to Churchill Wing's massive iron door and ask to see Jerry Jackson, but a voice behind the slide-away panel informs us that Jerry is "resting" and slams the panel in our faces. "Damn cheek of the help nowadays," says Joshua, little the worse from Monahan's hammering.

A small party accompanies me down to the front gate. My damaged 'wing' is an excuse for some of them to take turns carrying my bag. On the way Josh recites Baudelaire to us:

De même qu'autrefois nous partions pour la Chine
Les Yeux fixé au large et les cheveux au vent
Nous nous embarquerons sur la mer des Ténébres
Avec le coeur joyeux d'un jeune passager ...

which he translates:

Just as we once did, we set out for China

Our eyes fixed on the horizon and our hair blowing in the wind.

We will embark on the sea of Shadows

With the young Traveller's joyful heart.

It's a beautiful Indian summer day. We're the only noise-makers in a silence that engulfs the fifteen hundred other patients. On a nearby lawn Herb Greaves and several more Con Housers play a bat-and-ball game with some girl patients. There are more nurse-chaperones than players. A.C. says it's Dr. Winstanley's latest innovation. "Calls it baseball therapy. Th' revolution goes on, he says."

I turn around for a last look. From here we can see the huge, calm establishment, its passionately orderly paths, hushed wards, Churchill Wing with Jerry locked somewhere inside. Suddenly Con House explodes the immense quiet. A choir of hi-fi amplifiers splits the soft English sky with Elvis Presley's *Jailhouse Rock*.

Robin smiles a little. "Percy must be over his depression."

What had I learned from my year of visits to Conolly House? A fairly simple thing. That patients and staff conspire to build a certain type of social order within a mental hospital, a community of sorts. In most wards this mini-society is based on the patients' fear of staff who treat them as 'ill' which eases both their minds about why they're there. Con House itself is not exempt from such a power system. The difference is, Dick Drummond and Les O'Brien made an effort not to violate the patient's fundamental right to heal himself. True, this greater freedom raises anxieties which doctors and nurses (and patients) have about themselves. But the resulting chaos, it seemed to me, is preferable to the buried, warped terrors of straight wards. And, for the majority of people who break down without benefit of anti-psychiatry or private therapy, a saner alternative than Meditation Manor. It was the best thing I had seen.

Also it's free on the National Health.

That may not be China. But it's something.

] five [

ON MY WAY BACK to Meditation Manor i stopped off at Lena's who was a mess, slightly drunk and cursing in German as she lurched around her workshop bumping into furniture and scattering semi-precious stones. Eventually I got it out of her. In my absence she had lost two of her life supports, Irv who had broken off their engagement and Dr. Last sacked her as a patient. Irv had moved into the Manor and Last decided he couldn't serve two masters at the same time. "No prizes for who got the chop."

She was angry with me. "Why did I ever lishen to you, Judas goat?" She laughed hysterically when I offered her refuge at the Manor. "*You must bejoking!* I haven't lost *all* my marbles yet." She pushed me away. "Don't touch me. You're all queers!" Her palely freckled face collapsed in tears and she clumsily put her arms around me. "I'm shorry. Now you'll never want to see me again. I don't blame you. Only a Nazi could hate two Jews th' way I hate you and Irv. Shomeone should lock me up or shoot me."

I put Lena to bed with a couple of the many little red Seconals she kept by her night table. She held my hand tightly. "I didn't mean it. You're not a Judash goat, just a blind little bird looking always for a cage to fly into ..."

In my absence relationships at Meditation Manor had "re-crystallised" again. All three doctors had left their wives, Last settling in with Yolanthé, a lushly beautiful ex-patient from Buenos Aires. Dick popped in from time to time but was otherwise preoccupied with his same menage à trois in Primrose Hill. And Boris had his hands full refereeing between his housekeeper-mistress, Davina, and his surrogate daughter-mistress, Bronwen. Of the doctors' ex-wives Sybil, Nancy and Vivienne, I heard no more.

As for the non-medics, Alf was happily planning a string of mini-Manors all over England, "You Yanks don't have a monopoly on franchise operations." And the Major was on Cloud Nine chewing peyote like Polo Mints under the basement boiler where Anna's water tank used to be. (She was somewhere upstairs sculpting Marve Munshin, lifesize, in lard.) Straw's wife had just served divorce papers on him. "Don't mind, really," said the ex-war hero, "just wish th' old gel hadn't charged me with desertion." Then smiling blissfully and reported that Willie had agreed to adopt him legally. "Changed my name by deed poll. I'm now officially Anthony Last Straw."

Weirdsville

The Manor was jumping like a Kansas City juke joint. A whole new batch of Residents were singing, dancing, shouting poems and ambling about in costumes copied from our dhoti- and sarong-wearing doctors like extras in a Cecil B. De Mille epic. An exhibition of Anna

Shepherd's soap figures took up a section of the main hall, and curiosity-seeking Americans and show-biz types easily outnumbered genuine schizophrenics.

The change in Last was stunning.

He'd grown a wispy beard and looked like a zonked-out Ho Chi Minh and spoke v ... e ... r ... y s ... l ... o ... w ... l ... y, almost inaudibly. Gone was the foul-mouthed Dundee street brawler; in his place lotus-sat a frail disciple of Gandhi, loincloth and all. Quarrels he'd once escalated for the sheer joy of it he now avoided by insisting that he was lesser than the least, "a mis'erable speck o' dirt on Gaw'd's face." It was a variation of the Dick Drummond Ploy, or aggression disguised as submission. Last now conceded everything, including his rival Boris's right to manage the Manor as he saw fit. "All ... social ... questions ... end ... in ... *maya*," he wheezed. This tactic drove Boris wild. "The wily bastard's found a way to have all the fun while I do all the work," he grumped.

I, too, felt Last's limply transcendental mode as covert hostility. When I asked him yet again to help me untangle the knots in my head he meekly smiled at me: "As ... if ... yew ... din't ... know, Master," and insisted on treating me as his spiritual superior. He no longer even asked me to help him turn on visiting Americans, a function that, along with my Council seat, Marve Munshin had taken over. (Had I been formally impeached as Chairman? No one told me.)

Last's wholesale conversion to Eastern pacifism ("loss of ego boundaries") set up yet another barrier between us, and when nothing I said or did made the slightest impression on him, I decided to pack up and leave the Manor. But when I tried going Last's emissaries stopped me. Big Marve Munshin easily lifted the bag from my hand and gave it to the Major. "Only we know how to protect a Holy Fool like you, Brother Sid." Marve pronounced it Holeh Fyool. Their strong-arm tactics intimidated, but also flattered me. Someone Up There, in the balcony where Last and his ashram mooned about on mescaline, still liked me.

Trapped, I re-erected a shaman's hutch in my old cubicle upstairs and let myself go into house arrest, back in the Divine Slot. Time passed effortlessly. Far, far below on Earth things happened. Deadlines, war, revolution—how comically irrelevant to the Universal Soul. For hours I lay in my tent laughing and weeping at the pointlessness of all human activity. Except here, at Meditation Manor. For the first time I understood love. Love was my brother Clare Councillors suffering me to fly solo as high as Gawd on my crooked wing. Sacrificing their still-valued egos for the sake of my egoless flight. And Willie Last, lighting my Upward Path with his incredible self-abnegation, was giving me this chance to break the Cosmic Tape before he did. Only a true Christ figure could be so generous and self-sacrificial.

Yes. If (a) Willie was Jesus, a comparison he'd never altogether objected to, and (b) he was confessedly my spiritual inferior, then (c) was it possible that I was—No no. Not that. Not that.

"Sid, this is Robin. Robin Ripley. Is that you? Your voice sounds so funny. Yes, I s'pose it's this line. (Pause.) I can't stop cryin'. Can you hear me? You sound so weak and far away. Jerry is dead. They killed him. Jack Sweeney's been drunk all day over it. I wish I could drink,

it goes to my head. Are you there, Sid? Sid? Are you there?”

Les O'Brien confirmed it when I rang the hospital. “Yeah. Allegedly in his sleep. At Churchill Wing. A few of th' usual rumours floatin' about. Bed straps, a straitjacket, a bit of a punch-up followed by too much calm juice. Just rumours. No post-mortem. Inquest ruled it 'death by misadventure.' You can say that again. Buried him in the hospital cemetery, beside the chapel. No family, couldn't locate them. Only me and Sally and one or two of th' blokes were there. Am I going to do what? Ask for an investigation? Investigate what?!” O'Brien slammed the phone down on me.

I found Dick Drummond in the Manor wearing an ape's papier-mâché head and precariously perched on a ladder helping Sir Mario with a huge autobiographical wall mural memorializing the Battle of Britain titled *From Spitfires to Meditation Manor: A Life Up in the Air*. Had Dick known about Jerry? I shouted up. Oh yes, he'd heard about it a few days ago. Then why hadn't he told me? “What's the bloody point?” came through the ape mask.

I needed to talk to someone about Jerry, someone who even vaguely remembered him which nobody at the Manor did. All Last said was, “If ye'd brought him to me on time, I'd'a done him fer nuthin'.” So I phoned Lena, who agreed to pick me up at the Manor. She seemed more in control, subdued if deadly pale. As she drove me slowly around Brixton, I pounded my fist in fury against the MGB's dashboard. They killed him, I said bitterly. I'll write letters to the Home Office and demand a public inquiry. Get revenge on those murdering bastards at King Edward.

Lena glanced over at me. “Forget it, Sid. He's dead. If you want to appease your conscience buy him a nice stone. Why don't you worry about the living for a change?”

I was struck by her angry but unhysterical tone. Her very calmness seemed a rebuke to my own confused wrath. “You're sick,” I screamed. “Really sick!”

Lena braked the car and held onto the steering wheel for support. Her voice held a note of cold, steady finality. “Ja. I'm sick. Sick of you and Irving and that ridiculous Scotchman of yours. I must be sick to want to please all three of you.” She struggled with herself. “Maybe I'm not the Nazi. Maybe it's you and Irving. You're both more German than me. Following Fuhrer Last like Nuremberg sheep. *Heil Last!*”

A stream of obscenities poured from me. I'd kill the bitch in another minute. She clung to me as I made a grab for the door handle to get out. “Don't go away, Sid,” she cried. “You're my only chance. I'm sor—”

I hacked her hand away and jumped out shouting “Take your problems to Willie Last!”

This time I didn't need Hebbie to tell me. The next day one of the Manorites came up to my cubicle and said, “Hey, Brother Sid. Some foreign-sounding chick rang up yesterday and left a message. Said to tell you goodbye.”

She wouldn't dare. Anyway, people who were forever trying it never actually did it. Slowly, knowing in my heart what I'd find at the other end, walked from Meditation Manor to

Notting Hill. Even as I used my key to open Lena's door I told myself it was just one more of her bullying tricks. Anything to mess me up.

In Lena's apartment were Hebbie and a young Brooks Brothers type American with a fixed, agreeable smile. The place was neat as a pin again. My books and pyjamas were in a cardboard box at the foot of the bed. Hebbie said, "Zeventh time lucky, eh?" She fluttered around, idly sorting out Lena's jewelry-making equipment and crooning, "Zuch a ztubborn girl, zo ztubborn. Ziz girl could have been happy. Bad luck, *hein*?" She looked at Brooks Brothers and me. "Why do you look zo bad you both? What right do you haff to zympathy. Go away."

She walked out of the apartment.

The American introduced himself. "I'm Irving Goldman. You mustn't blame yourself too much, Sid." He'd made all the arrangements before I got there. Sent a telegram to Lena's mother who was flying in from Germany for the funeral; and talked to the police who seemed satisfied that it was suicide. Though Lena had left no note behind, Goldman said he was confident an inquest would confirm her intentions. So I needn't worry. He sounded businesslike and affable.

I'd lost so much strength along with my weight that he had to help me lug the carton of books out to his white Mercedes convertible. I let him drive me back to the Manor. "Did you know I was moving in next week?" he said pleasantly. "We'll have a hell of a lot to talk about." He gave me a friendly smile as I got out.

First Jerry. Now Lena. Yes, of course. *Now*.

With immense care I washed and dressed myself in my shaman's tent. Bare feet. A white cloth around my middle, a newly washed cloak, dark glasses, Boris's old *yarmulke*. There.

I was ready for my Last Supper.

Full house. Around the food-laden communal table in the main hall sat the usual contingent of spaced-out residents and American doctors and Euro-seekers, the fathers and mothers of Eurotrash. A news magazine photographer hung with cameras discreetly crept around snapping pictures. At the head of the table, sipping from a Vat 69 bottle and softly joshing with Yolanthé, who was in a patterned sarong to match his red silk kimono, Last presided. The flickering candlelight caused his shadow to jump and dance on the windowed back wall. All the other lights were out except the usual spot on the Robert Owen bust.

With extravagant humility I slipped into a chair, and Last gravely acknowledged my Presence by steepling his hands and bowing Indian-style. I returned his blessing with the sign of the Cross then gestured to the others to go on eating. Like Pope John I hated unnecessary spectacle. Fragments of talk floated around me. "... So Willie said the 'I' I'm trying to grab is the me that's ..." "... Willie says the nearest tae Gaw'd we ever get is watchin' a snake swaller its tail ..." "Willie thinks ..." "Willie says ..."

The buzz of talk died away as the others noticed how Last's moist grey eyes had fastened on me. Open-mouthed, a few stopped eating, then more. On his signal everyone fell silent,

waiting.

Obviously, they expected something of me.

I pushed back my chair and got up. “Comrades. Brithers and Bristers. La-deez an’ gennulmen ...” Words rolled off my tongue like little balls of mercury. The stumblebum strokelike paralysis, the stammer that had tied me up for so long in agonising incoherence, had vanished. A miracle, I’d found my voice again. With surprising fluency I made one brilliant point after another—on buying new lino for the Manor kitchen, on Bobby May’s literary problems, on a plan for commercially marketing Anna’s soap ducks, on the need to build a grass-roots coalition with Brixton Labour party—Boris rudely cut in. “For Christ’s sake”—he knew!—“how much of this rubbish are we going to sit and listen to? He’s been spouting almost an hour.”

Ah, Judas.

Disciple W. Last came around the table toward me, talking to Boris all the while. “Have ye nae eyes in yir head, mon. Cain’t ye see—*it’s ... happenin ... tae ... him.*”

Last stood before me. “Er, ah ... ye must fergive Brother Boris, Master Sid. He forgets. Ye remember fer us all. W’d it embarrass ye to lead us in th’ Laird’s Prayer?” When I hesitated he swiftly knelt at my feet, and following his example the others bowed their heads except for a glowering Boris and Davina who merely looked disbelieving. Last intoned,

“Oor Father, who art only in oor split minds
Hallowed be thy No-Name
Our kingdom’s come
Our will’s bein’ done
Here
As never in heaven.
Gi’ us each day th’ strength to be in thy Absence
An’ fergive us our fergitfulness
Nor lead us into self hatred
An’ d’liver us fr’ alienation
Fer thine is th’ Chaos, th’ Alpha an’ Omega an’ th’ Nuthin’-ness
Forever, amen.”

I gazed over a forest of bent heads. Only Boris kept on eating. Last embraced me emotionally. He turned and faced the assemblage. “It’s his time.”

They all, including Boris this time, had no choice but to follow Last out of the hall.

I was alone.

An incredible pain gripped me that squeezed and ripped my heart section, and I almost passed out. The dark great empty hall filled with a low powerful growl rising to a scream and fading away to grunts and snorts. My animal was loose again.

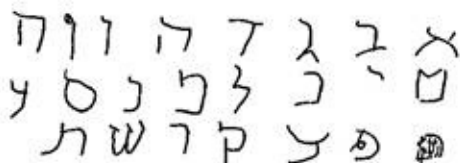
A light snapped on inside me. This was The Moment.

After the usual leap backward and forward in time, from primeval growl to the Inter-Galactic Convention Of 4965, passing through by-now familiar epochs (Thermopylae, Calvary, St. Bartholomew's Night) as bird, fish and human, I arrived where I'd never time-trekged before. I was a year-old baby in the arms of my mother picketing the gold-domed Massachusetts State House in Boston, and I could read the placard in her hands:

FREE SACCO AND VANZETTI

followed by scenes from a cavalcade of America's industrial agony my parents had been connected to, the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, Lawrence Textile strike, Republic Steel massacre.

Then I shot back to the dawn of Time and began to recapitulate not so much the biological ascent of man as the slow, painful history of my writer species. With an infantile gurgle I fell to my knees. Awkwardly, without my willing it, my right arm moved, reenacting the drama of man first learning to write. Eons passed. From crude Cro-Magnon slashes I gradually progressed to pictographs, hieroglyphics, the Hebrew alphabet.



I didn't speak Yiddish let alone Hebrew yet somehow managed all the letters.

My arm felt so weary. But I must master the language the Hidden God had entrusted to me. At last, sweating and sobbing with the effort, I scrawled out in the dust of the floor of the main hall the most sophisticated literary form known to Aldermaston Man:

SUPPORT OUR STRIKE
WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE
NO PASARAN
BAN THE BOMB

I was a writer again.

Before I knew it the others came in, led by Last.

Ah, an audience. I bounced up from the floor and shuffled forward to bless one and all. It seemed perfectly natural to wrap an imaginary fringed shawl, a *tallus*, around my shoulders and chant and bow rapidly up and down as I imagined a cantor did (having never actually been inside a synagogue, I didn't know). It was late September, the High Holidays, and I was

a Jew again—or for the first time? Not your ordinary, drab, garden variety Jew but a cocky, scene-stealing Yid, a stand-up tummler like Lenny Bruce. I tilted the *yarmulke* so it looked more like a labour union cap and in a soaring Mahalia Jackson voice sang them old Woody Guthrie ballads,

“Oh which side are you on
Which side are you on?
Don’t scab for the bosses
Don’t listen to their lies ...”

One onlooker was so affected he fainted dead away. Major Last Straw embraced me until I thought my bones would break. Bronwen knelt to kiss my bare feet. Even Boris weakened and began winding a black phylactery tape around my arm. In the background Last sobbed quietly.

A great hush fell over the hall. Crazy, baby.

For I don’t know how long I gave a one-man concert in a strange medley of tongues, oriental in flavour, praying, singing, sprinkling imaginary holy water and sanctifying couples in marriage. Last’s expression of awed anguish, which I caught out of the corner of my eye, was a model for the others.

Seeing nothing in the faces of my Brothers except the approval for which I’d hungered, I began my Questing Dance around the communal table. Eyes shut, playing to the gallery. Seeking my Rightful Place. Shuffle-dancing, I tried zetting everyone’s chair, even Last’s. None felt right.

I grew confused but with everyone’s eyes on me I had to keep it up. I hopped, skipped, jumped, jitterbugged, told jokes, recited bawdy limericks, anything to keep my audience. For extras I did Jimmy Cagney’s Camptown Races number from *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, splits and all.

Splat. Exhausted, I did a pratfall. Residents rushed to help me up. No no. Keep away. I had to see this through on my own, just like the books on shamanism and Willie Last had always instructed. Very gradually, hardly noticeable, my frenzy diminished, and the silliness of it all began to dawn on me. I was pooped. What a shindig. Like the host of a party that had gone on too long I wanted my guests to go home.

Wham. Suddenly I leaped on the table and stood absolutely rigid. It, finally and at last, came. The Message.

My skull detached from my trunk and shot out into space. It grew large as the moon, circling the planets, seeking. Out of nebulae, condensing from stormy gases, angelic voices spoke to me. In a swirling mist I made out Jerry Jackson in Chelsea Football Club’s blue and white kit he’d been too depressed to get out of bed for. Gracefully dribbling a soccer ball toward an immense heavenly net he arched his leg back and kicked a magnificent clean goal. He threw up his hands in a victory salute and shouted: “Forget it, Sid, it’s past!” Then Lena, enshrouded in the celestial perfume of her favourite fondue. “*Schmuck!*” she called sweetly.

“Fly, fly away now, schmuckie bird!” My dusty face wept upon the sizzling sun below. Her softly scornful laughter echoed down the Ladder of Meaning I was climbing. On the way up I held a dialogue, increasingly political, with the strangest seraphs I’d ever seen. They were not Rubens cherubs but wingless men and women, all ages and colours, who briefed me on ‘the immediate perspective,’ as we used to call it. It was ridiculous, even disappointing. The Great Breakthrough was no more spiritual than a ham sandwich, and my cherubs and angels looked suspiciously like Emma Goldman, Pope John XXIII, Big Bill Haywood, Harriet Tubman, Joltin’ Joe DiMaggio, Edmund Wilson and Dusty Springfield. Though each one had something different to say (and how!), they all agreed on a few essential points:

I must stop romanticising the heroic in life and politics.

The threats to social democracy now came from unexpected quarters.

No true socialist held himself above other people.

The social democratic position was far more complicated than it had ever been, and common sense and decency were more important than theory.

This simple corny stuff sounded curiously fresh and new minted to me.

With each step I could hear a voice, like a great soloist amid the choir, urging me on with a slight trace of impatience. “Hey, kid. Shake a leg, will you?” Slowly His voice dominated the others, which faded sweetly away.

“You will eat, by and by
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay
You’ll eat pie in the sky when you die.”

Soaring through Lena and Jerry’s nimbus, past the serried ranks of didactic angels (now arguing with each other), I landed in the lap of God Himself. He was a fantastic old man at least ten stories tall. Instead of a long white gown and flowing beard he wore a railway brakeman’s denim cap, sweat-stained red bandanna at his seamed throat and patched but clean overalls. His bony, shaven face was that of Eugene Victor Debs, the American labour leader, and the voice belonged to Swede Hammeros, an old Wobbly I’d known in Chicago. The only religious emblem he wore was a small IWW-International Workers of the World (“One Big Union”) button stuck on his frayed much laundered work shirt. Swede—that is, God—smiled sternly down at me. “Listen bo,” he said with a slight old-country accent I remembered from dozens of late-night rap sessions in his tiny Halstead Street room. “How’d you ever tie in with that *Nuthouse News* bunch of tinhorn sky pilots anyway? No, don’t tell me, guess you’ve just

got a natural talent for mixing with screwballs.”

He lifted me up to his knee with a severe look and a gentle fatherly shake. It had none of Last’s clubby, ambivalent quality. I listened. “Here’s the real McCoy. The left-wing movement is made up of thousands upon thousands of men and women who’ve woke up to the exploitation of one geezer by another. As long as we have the present system, which seems a while yet, there’ll never be a shortage of red hots. Y’know, th’ jungle buzzards who shout th’ loudest and then shove you into a cop’s billy and highball it when th’ heat’s on.

“Th’ point is to change the system in a way that makes people better, not worse. And you don’t do that by handin’ over what little grey matter I gave you to some piecard who says he’s got the answer to all your problems. Even my Son, Jerusalem Slim, never promised that. ‘An injury to one is an injury to all,’ is what he preached.

“Where you went wrong is in thinkin’ there’s only one kind of scab—the professional fink who breaks your strike ’cause he’s paid to do it. There’s another kind we call the ‘union scab.’ He or she isn’t an ordinary blackleg. Won’t sell you out to the boss. But he’ll push the union to act against its own interests so he can chase after his own private fantasies of getting even against society or management or what-the-hell. He’s the scissorbill with a permanently bitter thing going, drawin’ up hatred into his vitals like a kid sippin’ a sarsaparilla soda through a straw on a hot day: there’s no stopping him. Injustice—the sheer shock of it day after day after day—is enough to fuel him (or her) until he’s ready to call it a day and move on to the next Holy Roller crusade. He may be a pretty fair short-term fighter but basically he don’t understand what th’ struggle’s all about. Somewhere, very early on, his heart or wherever I put the soul, got trapped or branded, in the system’s gears and he came out without knowin’ who or what he was: except he’s got a debt to repay. And he’ll repay it in your blood. Someone has done him a bad thing and, damnation, he’ll never rest till he gets his revenge. These are the grotesques—in circuses they call them geeks—of the Movement. How come you’re a geek, Sonny? How’d you become your own worst enemy?”

I woke up.

What was I doing half naked on a big table in the middle of a semi-dark room? What were all these people down there staring at?

Whoosh, it all came back. How silly I felt. Some revelation! I had to go through all that, and for what? A Wobbly lecture. Things Swede could have told me at any time. What an anticlimax.

Mortified, I shakily climbed down and headed for the Manor front door. Many hands ‘helped’ me over to Last. “Hey Willie,” I cried, “tell your goons to let go.”

Last gasped, “Master Sid, *ye’ve made it.*”

Oh shit.

Last turned his bloodshot glazed eyes from me to the crowd. “Th’ shock has confused th’ poor lad. Let’s pray fer our Brother’s safe return.” His pious mumbling dropped their heads.

“Idiot,” I said. “Pray if you like—to get our asses out of this creep joint.” To emphasise my point I gave Last a knuckle burn, rubbing my fist into his skull. For just an instant, I

thought, our eyes met in the mutually frank hostility of two street-wise kids. Last collapsed into a chair and appealed to the multitude. "He's been there an—an' ... forgot awlraidy."

"I haven't been anywhere," I retorted, "except up the creek without a paddle. We're both so full of crap it's comin' out of our ears. Two of my best friends are dead, I can't write anymore and I've got this terrible hangover. That's where *I've* been." I looked down at the wet-eyed psychiatrist in the fashionable silk kimono and laughed. It was great to hear the sound of my own laughter again. "Willie, it's a hype. Come out in the fresh air with me."

When Last didn't move I looked at the other Clare Councillors. With the discreetly grinning exception of Davina they were all furious with me. What had I expected: roses and champagne?

With a disloyal 'up you' gesture to one and all, I raced upstairs to change into my old street clothes which fitted my scrawny frame like a potato sack. On my way back down Marve Munshin and the Major, weighing about quarter of a ton in the aggregate, barred my way. Aiming to kick at Marve's balls in case of a fight (my Chicago reflexes were waking up), I eased past Tony Straw whose outstretched arm felt like an iron bar across my egress. "Major," I said, "step aside before I kick in your lousy teeth." I got to the front door. Again I was blocked, this time by most of Clare Council. (As ever, Dick Drummond brooded indecisively in the background.)

"You'll have to kill me to stop me," I said quietly.

"Och, le' him go," Last curtly ordered. I went past them into the cool, quiet London night.

What a fantastic city London was. I'd never before realised how serene yet incredibly alive the town looked, even at night, with shops and pubs shut.

At first unsteadily then more confidently I walked up Brixton Road past the Oval cricket ground toward the Elephant and Castle. People including policemen passed by with hardly a glance. Beautiful, anonymous, indifferent London. I felt like kissing each and every person.

At Waterloo Bridge I paused to take in the Thames, dully glittering under a cloudy crescent moon. Incredible to see the dirty old river for what it was and not as a sacred lair of demons and serpents. St. Paul's looked close enough to touch. A borough cleaning lorry went by, its brushes rotating spray on my baggy trousers. London was real, not the holy sepulcher I'd imagined it to be these past two years. The ordinariness of it was overwhelming.

I knew I was high. Had torn through that thin membranelike tissue separating sanity from psychosis. But I was alive, and that's what counted. High octane elation pumped through my veins. I'd bloody well made it. And with life came pain—actual, felt pain. For the first time, like a blow to the heart, grief for Jerry and Lena hit me.

Gazing out at the great dark river I made plans. My mind was working too fast for any but the simplest baby steps. First a good hot bath to soak out the spooks. Then a non, no an anti, vegetarian meal. I ached for an American-style charcoal-broiled two-inch-thick T-bone steak, medium rare, side of Idaho baked potato oozing with sour cream and chives, crisp romaine lettuce salad and Roquefort dressing, real (not acorn) coffee and cream, and a huge

slab of strawberry shortcake topped with globs of whipped cream. Yum!

Then a solid week of sleep, to rest my mind and let it start functioning normally again. It wouldn't be easy, this. I'd given myself a nasty knock, and I knew from other schizophrenics that coming back would be a lot harder than the outward trip. The poison would have to work itself out of my system gradually. But it never would unless I began to face facts squarely. I had been, to a degree I didn't understand yet, responsible for the deaths of Lena and Jerry. I'd made too little fuss about Jerry sent to his doom in Churchill Wing and none about his 'accident' there. And I'd treated Lena as the other Clare men had treated their women, except that Lena, not Sybil or Nancy or Viv, had done the dying. Even with death the doctors had somehow managed to protect themselves and their families.

A safe return from madness now depended on my figuring everything out. Why had I let Last do my thinking for me? Maybe old friends could help me piece it together. I'd have to plug into normals again if, after the way I'd patronised and snubbed them, they'd see me. Where were Arnie Greenberg and Flo the clippie? Had Larry found his sunken treasure in Australia? Did they still drink at The George?

And I'd get my hands on a typewriter and reams of paper. What a story!

Impatient to get going, I hopped a night bus on Victoria Embankment, upper deck naturally. Shift workers and night cleaning women swayed tiredly with the jouncing red elephant of a vehicle. Brimming with camaraderie, I chatted up the Jamaican lady in front of me. (About the age of Abe Clewes' mother, I guessed.) When she got off I went downstairs to the clippie, a small Irish boy who reminded me of Jack Sweeney, and we schmoozed about soccer. (I was years behind in the League placings.) Simply to talk, without astral-analysing him or trying to outmaneuver him phenomenologically à la Clare Council, was terrific. What a relief.

I swung off at Westminster. Big Ben, looking as always like part of a movie set, struck 4:00 a.m., and I walked along Millbank past the Tate Gallery toward Regents Gardens.

Ich, the flat. First thing, I'd unlock my workroom and rip down those gruesome drapes. Untape the window frames and get rid of the security grille and sweep up the broken glass I'd cemented into the balcony floor. Wash the anti-intruder grease off the outside drain pipe and reconnect the phone. See how much of my furniture I could get back. And somehow smooth it over with my neighbours.

I jauntily took the hall stairs two at a time. On the third floor, as my key slid into the apartment door, I heard noises inside, and froze. Hearing things again? Shadows moved across the frosted glass upper part of the door. Ah fongoo. Burglars on this of all nights. Anxious and unsure, I retreated down to the street. Was I going crazy again? Should I call a cop? (Not in my state.) I leaned against a lamp post figuring the odds.

Across the street my hall door opened. Five dark figures moved down the front steps toward me. Whew. They were Willie Last flanked by Boris, the Major, Marve and Bronwen Jones. Boris and Marve, each over six feet tall, looked like giants in the empty road.

Light-headed with relief I greeted them.

"Hi fellas," I said. "Look, I'm okay, really. Just tired. I need a bath and a long sleep. Call

you soon, promise.”

A flicker of cold comradely smiles. Major Straw, a greatcoat thrown over his Saxon chief's costume, broke down and wept yet again. Last, dressed straight in a sober doctor's suit, hovered worriedly a few paces away.

Boris put an unusually friendly arm around me. “We're worried about you, Brother Sid,” he said. “Why don't you come back to the Manor with us?”

I smiled, shook off his arm and said no thanks. Big Marve Munshin loomed up on my other side. “Come along now,” he said sounding just like a New York cop. He wrapped his ham hand around my shoulder.

I laughed and slipped his grasp. “Knock it off, guys.”

I recrossed the street and went inside my hallway. On the dark stairwell a thousand pounds of flesh thumped me.

Not until I was almost pinned did I lash out. I rammed my elbow in Tony Straw's moustached face, kneed Marve Munshin and socked Boris in the mush. *Goddamn, they're trying to kill me*, I thought.

When I started to yell Munshin clapped his hand over my mouth. I bit it, fighting back and struggling with every last ounce of strength. Then something sharp stabbed me. I looked down. Willie Last was withdrawing a hypodermic needle from my leg. Oh no. He gave the hypo back to Bronwen holding his medical bag.

“For a junkie he's pretty strong,” grunted Munshin, hammerlocking me so Boris could pull down my trousers. “Better sock it to him again.” Last quickly refilled the syringe from his bag and slipped the needle into my behind. “Please,” I said. “Please don't. Don't. Don't. You can't know what you're doing.”

I forced myself to relax when I saw their eyes so full of pure compassion and hatred.

“Don't panic,” I said. “Don't hurt me. I'll go with you.” I had to pacify them before they did anything more to me.

We lay on my stairs like that for a few moments, Major Straw, Marve and Boris catching their breath on top of me. The drug took hold. They shoved me in the backseat of Last's black Bentley between Boris and the Major. As Last drove toward Brixton and the brightening sky, Bronwen in the front seat turned to me and said: “You're beautiful, Sid. We love you.”

I heard someone roar: “WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU PEOPLE!” And passed out.

A tickle in my bare toes woke me up. I didn't know where I was but sensed it was my old cubicle up on the Manor's balcony. I wiggled my toes again and looked down. Bronwen Jones penitentially washed my feet while Boris Petkin, his lantern jaw chomping up and down, prayed emotionally behind her. In a corner Tony Straw still sobbed uncontrollably. I lay naked under a white sheet, like Jesus on a Good Friday—or John Dillinger on the coroner's slab.

Last, his eyes wild with awe, shouldered Boris aside to lean over me. I tried saying something but the drug had shattered me. All I felt was despair and anger. I muttered, “You knew not what you did, asshole.”

Overcome, Last knelt and kissed my feet. “When in doubt read this,” he whispered and

put a piece of paper in my hand. I blacked out again.

For two days and two nights (I reckoned later) I drifted in a doped timeless sea. Slimy phantasmagoria, horrible shapes and sounds, the worst depression I'd ever known clobbered me. Sometimes I hallucinated Lena and Jerry alive and whispering how to escape the Manor. O'Brien, Jeff H., Gareth and other Con Housers paraded through my mind, shaking their heads at my naivety. Though presumably brought to Meditation Manor to be looked after, I was left alone and untended for hours at a stretch in a balcony cubicle with easy access to an open fire exit leading out to a hundred-foot drop. Clare Councillors, who I'd always believed were there to protect me during a psychotic episode—what else were we about?—ignored me except for their occasional weeping self-indulgent pilgrimages to beseech a blessing or absolution. It was too much trouble for me not to give it. My friend Davina tried to bring me a little tea and toast, but Boris drew her away. The Americans were a little less hysterical; at first curious, they soon got used to me as just another trip-out. Bobby May lifted five quid from my wallet. "Pahdon, old chap," the black novelist burlesqued an English lord, "you won't be needing this imminently, will you?" Thank God *somebody* around here behaved normally.

I waited for my head to clear, but when it did all I wanted was to kill myself. Suicide seemed easier than escape. Bleakly I crawled out of the utterly unguarded room up to the Manor roof. It was cold. Hauling myself over the parapet, I dangled my naked legs over the street, three stories below. I gazed out across London's lights and gathered strength to let go.

Last's piece of paper was still crumpled in my fist—the message he said would inspire me in my darkest hour. I looked at it. It said

OM

Laughing so hard I thought I'd lose my balance, I back-flipped inside the roof and staggered back down to bed. I laughed myself into a long, refreshing sleep and when I awoke planned how to split.

I wasn't strong enough to fight my way out so I'd have to play at their game. Slowly, while rehearsing my Colditz escape script, I dressed. Everything now depended on how well I'd learned from Con House and even Last himself.

Downstairs, in the late afternoon, people were starting to stir. A few yawned at me. I waved with a papal gesture and they turned over, reassured.

None of the Councillors was awake. Except Last, under a blanket with Yolanthé. He was between me and the front door, and watched me approach.

I prodded him with my shoe and nodded back toward the kitchen. He followed me in his red silk kimono.

Over Nescafé we held our last talk together.

He peered uncertainly at me, his impishly handsome face searching mine for signs that I knew he knew it was all a complicated Zen joke and nobody's fault, really. "Er, ah, mm ...

How ye doin', Brother Sid?"

I gripped his shoulder in a formal gesture of comradeship neither of us believed. "Oh Willie," I moaned. "The Light is so strong."

For a moment I thought he'd drop the pose and laugh out loud. Instead, his fear and anxiety allayed, he smiled.

I slowly finished my coffee and, feeling a twinge of guilty regret, stepped past Willie Last through the quiet church to the sunny, strident street outside.

About the Author

Clancy Sigal was born and raised in Chicago, the son of two labor organizers. He enlisted in the army and, as a GI in occupied Germany, attended the Nuremberg war crimes trials intending to shoot Herman Göring. Although blacklisted and trailed by FBI agents, he began work as a Hollywood agent on the Sunset Strip, hiding in plain sight and representing Humphrey Bogart, among many others.

Sigal moved to London in the 1950s and stayed in the UK for thirty years, writing and broadcasting regularly from the same BBC studios that George Orwell had used. During the Vietnam War, he was the “stationmaster” of a London safe house for American GI deserters and draft dodgers. For several years, he collaborated with the radical “anti-psychiatrists” R. D. Laing and David Cooper, with whom he founded Kingsley Hall in London’s East End, a halfway house for so-called incurable cases.

Sigal’s most recent book was the memoir *Black Sunset: Hollywood Sex, Lies, Glamour, Betrayal, and Raging Egos* (Soft Skull Press, 2016).

All rights reserved, including without limitation the right to reproduce this ebook or any portion thereof in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 1976–2005 by Clancy Sigal

Cover design by Heidi North

978-1-4804-3707-4

This edition published in 2013 by Open Road Integrated Media, Inc.
345 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014
www.openroadmedia.com





EARLY BIRD BOOKS
FRESH EBOOK DEALS, DELIVERED DAILY

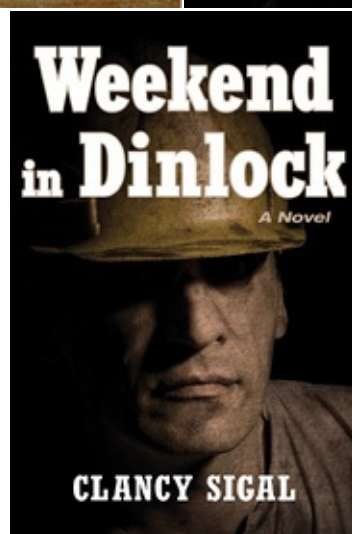
LOVE TO READ?
LOVE GREAT SALES?

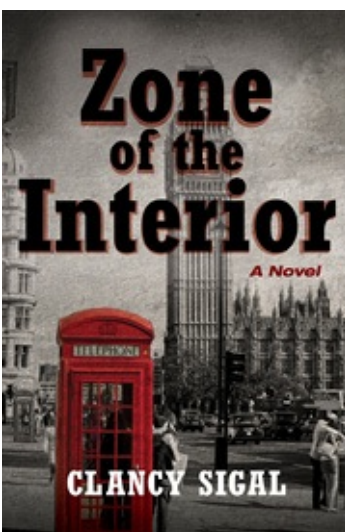
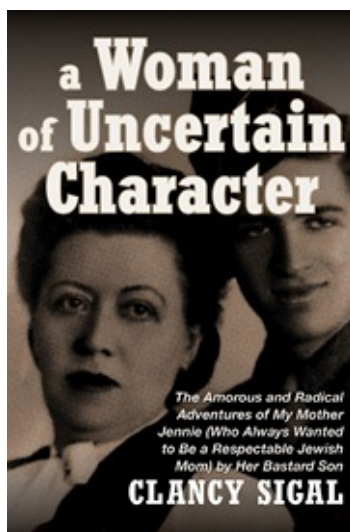
GET **FANTASTIC** DEALS ON BESTSELLING EBOOKS
DELIVERED TO YOUR INBOX EVERY DAY!

SIGN UP NOW
at www.EarlyBirdBooks.com

CLANCY SIGAL

FROM OPEN ROAD MEDIA





OPEN  ROAD
INTEGRATED MEDIA



Find a full list of our authors and
titles at www.openroadmedia.com

FOLLOW US
@OpenRoadMedia

