EXPERIMENT FOUR

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EDITORIAL:

Experiment enters this its fourth issue with a new cover, a new printer, and most important of all, some new writing.

The time now seems right to review this and previous issues of the magazine in an attempt to evaluate both its progress and its place as a forum for young writers at the University. Previous issues have come in for some justifiable criticism. The first and second issues were physically poor, being badly printed, uneven in layout and crammed with typographical errors. We hope that these faults have to some extent been remedied in this issue. Our aim has been to produce a more attractive format at a cheaper cost. At this point it may be remarked that our finances don't run to the production of finely printed magazines like the now obsolete "Arachne" and "Hilltop" nor does the present standard of our writing warrant such fine excesses.

But what of the contents? These have naturally produced a variety of opinions. The quality has been uneven, but we remain convinced that some promising work has been produced and that the magazine has contributed towards the personal development of several of our contributors.

If this is confirmed, then the presence of "Experiment" is more than justified.

One critic has referred to our committee and contributors as being an esoteric group; his letter has been included in this issue. In so far as we have in common some sort of devotion to the task of writing, his use of the word 'esoteric' is maybe valid. Nevertheless, his letter is disturbing in that it implies that any university group united in endeavours to print and produce original work, might be regarded by the very nature of their task as 'esoteric'.

Surely the University should stimulate original work and personal vision in addition to providing the machinery of society with its annual quota of professionally trained graduates. If it fails to do this then it fails to cater fully for the variety of intelligence at its disposal.

Peter Bland.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to submit the following criticism to your journal:-
Dear Sir,

A PIECE OF MUD

"Experiment" is a gigantic doodle, grown so fast that no one dare debunk it. In my opinion the contributions to your magazine dangerously border on the cynical. After reading the past issues I now have a clue into what Goering meant by "reaching for his revolver when he heard the word "culture."

What latent meaning in "a pakeha tramper drying his gear by the fire." What mystery in stubbing one's toe on a clay path (why, I could write about it for pages); in a drunk outside a country pub! How Mature (with a capital M) we must be, to analyse emotions so minutely, picking at our fellow-humans with the tweezers of words, much as an amateur zoologist would dissect a Weta. The intention may have been a fine description of the act, the sensation, the experience, but the result smells of morbid egocentricity, and "Experiment" becomes the identity-card of self-styled gods. Each pathetic line speaks "I am bored, intellectually and sensationally" - (can there be no rescue of appetite from satiety).

Your contributors and readers are obviously trying to build an esoteric group obsessed with the trivia of life, pretending that it is not, cannot be true, that they are static, sterile; that futility is the air they breath; and that the fluid in their vessels, instead of oxygenating human blood is formaldehyde. (Apologies to Merrill Moore).

"Experiment" lacks commonsense, good-humour, and restraint. I say: scrap the present style and leave gloomy introspection to neurotics.

Sincerely,

PHILISTINE HUBERT HEINE.

(Author of "How to Lose Friends and Antagonise People."
We voyaged out for Ithaca
In search of who knows what
Idle and fabled bauble,
And this is what we got:
An offer of right reason
For everything Man did,
But in thought's winter season
Our trinket still lay hid.

That isn't what we wanted.
It isn't here at all.
Our dreams are as the shadows
That waver on the wall.

We marched as armoured warriors
Strong clad for iron deeds,
Ready to follow anywhere
That the path of action leads;
But all we got was glory,
A medal to put on,
Old men to tell the story
Of the battles we won.

That isn't what we wanted.
It isn't here at all.
The trumpet-voice of victory
Echoes thin and small.

We tramped the roads as tinkers.
We hadn't any goal
Except to crack the clinkers
When we spat upon the coal.
At our burners in the twilight
Content to sit and gaze,
Joy in our hearts as bright
As the faces in the blaze.

If that isn't what we wanted
Is it anywhere at all
Between the first shoot's leaping
And the last leaf's fall?

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Some kinder season when magnolia
Burdened the tree limbs we all set foot
On these Arcadian shores, glad to be here,
But the hopes we sowed in that season have not taken root.

After a time those who were here before us,
Who cannot understand our love for the mountains,
Came in the night and spilled the blood of our lambs,
And now they would turn us out in the winter rains.

What are we to do, oh what can we do,
For our children are crying, faces chapped by the wind,
And the ground beneath the hedges is heavy with snowdrift
And no other country comes in to the heart and mind?

Are we to loiter chill by the winter roadside
Crouched by our shattered cartwheel damp and numb,
Murmuring empty prayers to the iron earth
At each stopping of breath and stiffening of limb?

We must do this, or creep away in the darkness
With no farewell for friend nor snatch of a song
To warm us on our way, and with unwilling feet
Trudge after a broken king.

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TO POETS, FORTY AND OVER

Now that your mask of Orpheus
Is flabby from disuse,
Why not restore your Muse
To the arms of Morpheus?
"You'll come into the house for meals from now on. I can't be bothered traipsing over to the back every five minutes."

Clevedon knew, or hoped, it was a kindly gesture. Mrs. Tate had that knack of putting people at their unease.

He much preferred his bach. The house had a mothball and carbolic smell that seemed to deter the very air; antiseptic no doubt; like a morgue, clean, cold not comfortable.

Breakfast was not a pleasant meal. He had lifted, but luckily not applied, his spoon, when Mrs. looked hard at Mr., who began to mumble into his plate of porridge. Mr. and Mrs. had their heads down. His eye caught Mary's. She winked, a broad, country wink.

Mr. ate in the same limping, undecided way he did everything, pick at this pick at that. He said little. Mrs. supplied the conversation, sniping from behind the milk-jug.

"I told you not to put them in the home paddock; it wouldn't be so bad if there was a decent fence around the house."

Mr. hunched a little further over his meal, an island of silence.

It was his silence that drove Mrs. on and one; if only to force a response. Clevedon felt embarrassed for them both.

"Yes Clevedon," she said, bringing him into it, "The lazy brute wouldn't even get up to them. One o'clock in the morning and me in me nightgown. Now what di'you think of that?"
Clevedon tried to pass it off. "These things happen."

"They'll happen once too often, that they will."

An uneasy muttering lull while she manipulated the rashers and eggs out of the pan onto the plates.

Don't forget you're driving me and Mrs. Stendal to W.D. today."

"Today?"

"Did you think I said yesterday?"

"I was going to do those pigs."

"What! You haven't done them yet? The poor brutes. Well, you'll have to get started. What are y'sitting there for? And don't forget, be here sharp at ten, we'll want to leave by a quarter past."

About time you learnt to drive yourself, thought Clevedon, putting answers into the husband's mouth. But none came. Slowly Mr. Tate rose, his bulk casting its shadow over the whole table. That's what made it so ridiculous; she wasn't much higher than his elbow.

But when you saw his rolling walk, knit one, slip one, you could understand her perpetual exasperation. He was so slow, so tentative.

"It was his knee," she said, "He'd hurt it one season and I told him not to play the next. But he was bull-headed stubborn in those days -" there was a faint note of nostalgia, but the bitterness soon seeped through - "I've milked, I've worked with him from sun-up to sun-down, I've skimped and saved for twenty-three years. Up till now, we haven't been able to afford the help, apart from haymaking, that is. This was the wrong farm for us, like. There was a place in the Coromandel's we would've taken, but he wasn't game to tackle sheep. Game to go out and get his leg smashed though."

Clevedon learned from their neighbour, Mr. Henry, that it was through football, ironically enough, that the Tates had first met.
"He'd gone with the team to Hamilton. Good lookin' chap he was in those days. Whirlwind wedding, it was. Came up here and thought she was a cut above the locals. But the women, bless their hearts, they soon cut her down to size. It wasn't until last year she became secretary of the W.D... Go a long way in that direction, too, talk the legs off a chair....."

It was a relief to get out of that house. His boots scuffed up little clouds of dust and the sun blazed down from a blank sky, lulling him into an unaccustomed sense of peace. But not so Mr. Tate -

"I heard you come in. Lucky the Mrs. didn't wake," he said "Tomcattin' round the district already."

Clevedon grinned. It had been a good night last night. Not the usual helter-skelter from pub to pub and a boozeroo outside the dance. He'd got himself tangled with a girl. The boys hadn't liked it much, but that didn't worry him now.

"Reckon you'll be fit enough fer this lot?"

Mr. was giving him the usual sidelong stare, "Done your dash, eh?"

He hoicked and spat. "Get away with murder, nowadays. Don't know what's come over the country."

A little gob of spittle ran down his chin, "In amongst the heifers, eh? Don't think I don't know, I've seen 'em, butter wouldn't melt in their mouths."

"Lay off them high school girls, boy, you'll be getting your name in the papers, if you're not careful."

The papers...Mr. Tate pawing them eagerly, Crimes of Violence, Sexual Offences, Juvenile Delinquency, the same second-hand pleasure as he was getting now.

It was almost possible to ignore him - a perfect day - too hot for work though.

Clevedon would have liked to have gone up the hill, lie in the grass and let the wind blow over him. It was the
next best thing to swimming, but the sea was thirty winding miles away.

"Ah, here comes Mr. Henry, dead on the dot, for once. Just nip up to the shed and get the dettol, will you?"

Mr. Henry as usual, wanted to talk, but old Tate was itching to get the job over and done.

"Come on, Clevedon, don't just stand there, drive them up."

Mr. Tate stood at the gate, shuffling the pack, boars from the sows, boars to the pen, sows up the race and out. Mr. Henry stood back and talked, talked, talked, but when the time came, he was in the middle of it, nosing a hind leg, pulling an unwilling squealer from the huddle. Then, while Clevedon took the leg-ropes, Mr. Tate mooed the snout and pulled the pig stretched out on the rope; Mr. Henry flipped him over and he lay, belly-up waiting the knife.

It was the first time Clevedon had seen it done. Mr. Tate cut quickly, neatly. He poured dettol into the two red slits on the belly, the ropes were unleashed for the next, and the finished one lay there, sucking air and pissing gently.

The first one wasn't so bad. But by the fifth, Clevedon wasn't feeling too happy about it. The reek, the heat, the sound of the pigs as the knife and piners cut and plucked and a sudden hot gush of piss across his face forced him out to the tap. He let the water gush down over his head and shoulders.

"Come on boy, we can't take time off for you."

"You'll get used to it," said Mr. Tate, his hands and arms smeared and slimy, his face dripping. "Make a man out of you."

"Yeah, just like Jack Tate," said Mr. Henry, with a wink.

The next was a big one, about seven months.

"Been left too long," said Mr. Tate.
"He's gonna miss his," said Mr. Henry.

The boar on the répes screamed to a mute heaven; the sound seemed to come at Clevedon through great tunnels of pain and heat; the whole flank of the pig rippled and shuddered as the knife slit and the pincers went in.

"Aren't they beauties, though," said Mr. Tate, lifting them in his hand. "Young Clevedon here could do with a pair like this."

"A pound, if not two," said Mr. Henry, "He was well hung."

"Jeezuz!

Mr. Tate had been a little careless in loosening the noose. The boar had clamped its jaws over his hand. The teeth had gone through in at least three places. It was streaming blood. Mr. Tate poured dettol over it. "That'll do for now," he said, "Let's get the job done."

"I'll just put a handkerchief round that. Here," said Mr. Henry.

Clevedon was under the tap again. The hills were a long, long way away.

Then, to his relief he saw Mrs. Tate, walking down the road towards them, all dolled up, fit to kill.

"Come on Clevedon, can't you take it, boy? Takes more'n a bit o' tomcattin' nights to make a man. Here, have a go with the knife."

It was slippery with blood.

"Have we got time for any more?" asked Clevedon, "What about Mrs. Tate -?"

"Aw, bugger her," said Mr. Tate.

Clevedon and Mr. Henry exchanged glances. "That's the way to treat them," said Mr. Henry.
"Here she comes now," Clevedon warned them.

"I got tired of waiting," she said, "Oh, good morning, Mr. Henry." She turned back to her husband. "Better get washed at the shed. Mrs. Stendal is waiting at the house."

Without a word he left them, knit one, slip one, up the hill to the shed.

As they watched, one of the pigs tried to escape from the ropes. Mr. Henry gave it a sudden, savage prod with his boot.

"Poor bloody brute," he said.

Mrs. Tate raised her eyebrows and turned away without a word.

\[ ... \]

Mary had gone over to see her people and Clevedon was sitting in the kitchen, flipping the pages of the "Free Lance", wondering whether to get lunch for himself after all, when he heard the sound of a car, coming very slowly, turning in at the gate, and then Mrs. Tate's voice coming up the path.

"And how long do you think I had to wait for you this morning? But no, you'd grudge me a skimpy five minutes, would you - " Kick, kick, off with her shoes in the porch - "Like you've grudged me - "

Seeing Clevedon in the kitchen silenced her; she cast a cold eye over him, from milking soaks to magazine. "And how long might you have been here?"

"'Bout twenty minutes," he said.

"Long enough to get lunch. I suppose you've had yours, have you?"

"No, where was it?" said Clevedon innocently.

"Well, you may as well put the kettle on while I get changed, and you could stoke the fire."
The look in her eyes implied that he could have done all this twenty minutes ago. He tried not to let it worry him. He wasn't paid to do Mary's work.

"Did you finish the pigs?" asked Mr. Tate.

"Yes."

"Well, that's really good. Never thought you would've. I was thinking we might manage to clean up those pukekos if we had time. Must've been about twenty of the blighters there when I went over yesterday."

"Yes, so you were saying."

"You should see what they've done to those turnips."

"One gun'll need cleaning. I'll go and get -"

"You're not trying to tell me, boy. Get them all, will you? I'll give them a good going over. The oil's on the coalshed shelf, I think."

Lazy old beggar, Clevedon thought. By the time he'd found everything, Mrs. was back making a great show of filling the kettle and stoking the fire herself.

"Let's see the three--oh. Mr. squatted on the step with it.

"You know that I won't have guns in my kitchen, John. You haven't got time anyway."

Mr. had his head down, apparently deaf. His finger was tracing a line down the walnut stock.

"A lovely gun," he murmured. He turned to Clevedon, "That's one thing about shooting, boy. Football's good for, say, ten years. But as long as you've hands and eyes you can shoot. I may not be quite the shot I was. Many a
fellow that can't - "

"Yes, yes, we all know about you. Now out you go. I'm not having loaded guns in my kitchen."

She'd touched him on a matter of pride.

"Loaded! Huh!" Mr. turned deliberately away from her and asked Cleve, "Got the oil? This bolt's not as free as she should be."

He drew it back, palmed it into place.

Clevedon was watching Mr. Tate, head down, muttering at his gun, ignoring his wife as she clattered her displeasure with the dishes, hustling through the everyday ritual of the meal, the bright sunlit kitchen, the ordinary things that you don't think about until afterwards.

The gun sprang beneath Mr. Tate's hands. The intolerable noise of the shot echoed into a silence louder than sound. You could hear Mrs. choking and bubbling for breath.

Mr. Tate was down on his knees in front of her.

"Martha, Martha, Martha!"

There was a big, bright red bubble underneath her chin. It grew slowly, and suddenly it had gone, spreading into the carpet.

She had no throat.

Numbly, Clevedon went from cupboard to cupboard, looking for newspapers, to put under her, to soak it up.

The bubbling and fluttering had stopped.

"What're you friggin' about for, ring the doctor, damn you!"

Clevedon stopped. What was he doing with that pile of
papers? He stacked them carefully under the cushion on the easy chair, picked up the 'phone, didn't know the number, churned through the book, found he was looking at the New Plymouth section, fumbled through the local numbers, glanced across and realized, she was quite, quite dead.

By chance he saw Police Station, 33.

"Double three, please."

The girl at the exchange sounded strangely normal, as if nothing had happened.

Silence, as he waited, except for the ticking of the big clock and three sparrows squabbling outside the window-pane. He felt much better, spoke almost casually to the sergeant.

"Clevedon Wright here. There's been an accident. Mrs. Tate's been shot."

"You wouldn't be trying to have me on, would you, now?"

"I tell you she's shot." He lowered his voice. "She's dead. It was an accident."

"Who's speaking?"

"Clevedon Wright. I work at Tate's place."

"Now, let's get this straight. You work at Tate's? George Tate's?"

"No. Jack."

"What. Jack Tate?"

"Yes. Mrs. Tate's shot. It was an accident. He was cleaning his gun and -"

"Have you rung the doctor?"

"I tell you she's dead."
"Makes no difference. Ring - oh no, I'd better do that. Now just hold everything, I'll be right out -" 

"Here give it to me!" Mr. Tate grabbed the 'phone. 

"That you Bill? Martha's dead Bill, I did it, I killed her, Bill, can you hear me, are you there Bill? No, wait, I want to tell you, I knew it would happen, she told me not to, but I didn't care, I shot her, she's dead Bill, and I did it. It's all right, I'll pay the price. That's only right isn't it? Bill, are you there, Bill? I'm only sorry it's you, boy, because we -" 

Clevedon tried to take the 'phone back, but Mr. Tate held on. Across the mouthpiece, Clevedon told him, "Go and lie on the bed, Mr. Tate, he'll be right out. No, I won't tell him anything. All right, all right."

Clevedon tried to make his voice as calm as he could. 

"Look, I was here, I saw it happen and it was definitely an accident." He lowered his voice, "I tell you, I think he's a bit - a bit off balance."

Mr. Tate reappeared. "Give it to me. I'll talk to him." He barged at Clevedon. "Whose 'phone is it?"

"Are you there, Bill? There Bill? Working. Are you there, Bill?" But the line was dead.

Mr. Tate looked reproachfully at Clevedon, as if he were responsible, and went into the kitchen. Clevedon thought he'd better get the brandy and give the old boy a tot. Luckily he looked in the kitchen first, and no sooner looked than leapt.

It was a good thing Tate was shaky. He couldn't quite get the bullet into the breech. Clevedon had the rifle, and Tate, in a huff, threw the bullet on the concrete floor of the porch.

The crazy old fool. What would he want to go and do a thing like that for?
"Anybody home?"

Trust him, he can smell trouble a mile off -

"Ah, Cleve, d'you think you could give me a hand with - what's up?"

Clevedon stood back, let him see in.

Mr. Henry's jaw fell, but only for a moment. He brought it up, shut it tight, and, to cover his confusion, dealt with the problem in army style.

"She'll be dead .... Seen 'em before like that. Nothing we can do about it."

"But what about him. He's -"

"Seen 'em like that before. Got the shakes. Same as shellsnack. Put 'em in bed and keep 'em warm. Got a whisky?"

With Mr. out of the way, Clevedon stood in the hall and told Mr. Henry what had happened. He didn't like the way Mr. Henry was looking at him, as if he didn't believe him.

"I tell you it's true," Clevedon reiterated.

Mr. Henry reached out an arm, took a firm grip of Cleve's shoulder and said, "Now look boy, you needn't try and kid me."

"But I tell you, I saw it, it's true."

"That's the style boy. But you don't bluff me, no siree. Tate just wasn't the type to leave a gun loaded or even to point it, unless he meant to. Man, you don't know how careful he was. And a crack shot too - that shot was just his style. But you needn't worry about the cops boy, they don't know what I know."

"But he's good as told them he did it on the 'phone."
"Clevedon, Clevedon." Mr. Tate's voice sounded very weak.

Clevedon went in but he didn't seem to have anything to say after all. Probably just wanted the company, poor brute. There, but for the grace of God, go I, Clevedon wondered, now where had he heard that?

He didn't want to become involved, turned to go.

"Don't go yet," said the old man, "You know I'm going to pay the price, don't you? We all have these little secrets, you wouldn't begrudge me that, would you? I was three years at Mt. Eden, you know - on the right side of the bars though, ha ha!"

"I thought you'd always been on the farm."

"No, I had a fair spell away from home. Things were tough in those days -"

His voice droned away like a fly in the safe, while Clevedon sat, half-stifled in that box of a room. He could hear Mr. Henry prowling round the house, playing at being detective. Why couldn't he help look after Tate? Clevedon felt slightly sick. His eyes flickered round the walls to the small, high-set window with its blank patch of sky, three lurid prints - "The Blessing", "Crucifixion" and "Ascension", the bare dresser, the dark wardrobe and Mrs. Tate's corsets peeping out of the cabinet.

He was only too happy to hear Mr. Henry's "I think we can leave him now."

"Clevedon, there's something I want to get clear. Exactly what did he tell the - Jeezuz, here he comes now! Remember, I'll back you up boy, all the way - but I don't think we've got a show."

"They went to school together, didn't they?"

"Ah, but a cop's a cop wherever you go."

They went to the verandah and waited for the sergeant.
"Ah, good afternoon Mr. Henry!" The sergeant nodded at Clevedon. "Where's Mr. Tate?"

"We've got him in bed. He's damn near off his rocker," said Mr. Henry.

"That's right," said Clevedon, and almost went on to tell how the old boy tried to shoot himself. But anyway, who was to judge? What good would it do to tell them that? Mr. Henry was handling it well. Clevedon decided to stay quiet until he was asked.

"You saw all this?" the sergeant turned on him.

He told his story. The sergeant didn't even seem interested, much less impressed.

"And you say it was an accident," he spoke flatly.

The door opened and in came Mr. Tate. "Hullo, Bill," he said, "Clevedon's a good boy, but you mustn't believe him. He knows it wasn't no accident. Now, you can get all the talking over with an' get on with the job."

"How did it happen? Suppose you show me where you both were?"

They went through all that had happened, except that this time Mr. Tate aimed the rifle.

He put it aside, and passed his hand over his eyes. "Look, will that do? I can't take much more."

"You're shivering. Better get back into bed," said the sergeant.

He looked at the body: "I knew her. Knew both of them well. Funny things happen."

"It was an accident," said Clevedon.

" Couldn't be anything but," added Mr. Henry.
"These things have to be decided by the law. And as far as I'm concerned," the sergeant paused, savouring a sense of power, "It was an act of God, as you say. But the old boy will have to be certified. We won't have to worry about his testimony - I know the doc pretty well, we all went to school together, so that looks after that. No point in making trouble."

"That's right," said Mr. Henry, "What's done is done."

All men together. No need for niceties. As far as Mr. Henry and the sergeant were concerned, she'd had it coming. Clevendon had done a good job of covering up, but he didn't bluff them, no siree.

**

TEDDY BOY                                      JOHN BOYD

Juke-box, jungle and flood of neon light
Fire the unspoken boredom of his eyes;
He leans at corners, gestured in defeat,
Ignoring the sly-eyed girl whose look speaks lies.
A prophet or Apollo of the time,
He assumes indifference, an all-protecting guile,
To public eyes the image and fact of crime:
They do not like a man who cannot smile.

His song is one with a juke-box by the bar
Whose anguish speaks for his and other tongues;
He is the man of a moment not his own
Shifting beneath his feet, an unmapped mire:
The scapegoat reason for a public wrong
Who begging bread, received instead a stone.

**
Are you afraid of shadows against the sky?
Lovers must trace each tortuous step today,
Tread softly, softly, lest the morning die.

Close in the night I hear her bird's voice cry
And my heart's blind gospel drives her far away:
Are you afraid of shadows against the sky?

The child I once knew becomes the girl that my
Spring yearns for. She sings a fresh summer's lay,
Tread softly, softly, lest the morning die.

The pilloried hours of love will soon pass by,
The ravaged leaves will again float in the bay:
Are you afraid of shadows against the sky?

Here is the world, the world's veins run dry,
Ever the bright blood runs from red to grey,
Tread softly, softly, lest the morning die.

Oh must I listen to lips always moved to lie,
Heed the deceitful one that will not stay?
Are you afraid of shadows against the sky?
Tread softly, softly, lest the morning die.
It was just one brief week,
A space of days cut from the calendar -
This was my holiday. I speak
Of a time for rest and relaxation
Which was strongly recommended
By a former friend of mine....
Potato-picking - ah! the ideal occupation,
Potato-picking - ah, the fine
The vibrant touch of sun and wind combined,
Ah, that peasant closeness to the earth!

That closeness was indeed too close for me -
In convalescence painfully I find
That as each vertebra unshackles free
From its arched agony, as each bone
Creaks complainingly, this verdict must I pass
Upon potato-picking:

If there is a place that smells of brimstone
Where sulphurous smoke and red flames licking
Illumine an eternal scene of woe,
Then any failure on the part of sinners
To stoke the fires according to each order
Of those horned characters who run the show,
Will be punished by a trip across the border
To a fair land where there is no brimstone smell
But where there are potatoes, big potatoes,
Just waiting to be picked - like hell!

**
Bardolph Beaumont Chambers. His name was the only remarkable thing about him. He spent his days as a clerk in a lawyer's office but ironically both hated and was terrified by the mention of any kind of court action. He believed in tradition, democracy and the efficacy of black molasses for purifying the blood. He had lost all ambition long ago. When he had been a young man he had been anxious to become a lawyer; but, not being able to complete his degree, he had married instead, acquired a little black car and a washing machine and settled down in a suburban house where he had lived ever since. For twenty-two years he had been married to a wife as mild and unassuming as himself and although there had been no children they had enjoyed a moderately happy married life. Mr. Chambers was too mild to have any sins; apart from the common sins of everyday - polite lies on the telephone, stealing a few pencils now and then and sometimes cheating at whist - his life was quite exemplary. Once, he had nearly been involved in an affair with a blonde waitress but she ran away with a baker who had divorced his wife. He used to dream about the waitress in later life and, had adultery not been so difficult, he might have tried someone else.

His fellow travellers on the five twenty-five saw him as a thin little man with slightly bowed legs. Always he looked very spruce in his grey suit and often, at the office, some of the younger clerks who dressed too gaily were exhorted to be like Mr. Chambers, to be respectable. He was unimaginative and in unusual circumstances he became quite bewildered; often, indeed, he became quite lost. However, for most things he was dependable - 'a good man' his friends called him. Bardolph Beaumont Chambers never thought of himself as 'a good man'; he never thought of himself at all. He was just an ordinary man.

He walked home from the station one night, humming softly, thinking about the potatoes and chops which would be waiting for him. He smiled to himself. On the road, four or five boys about eight to ten years old were playing
football so he went across to the other side of the street to be out of their way. At home, he ate his chops and potatoes with relish, read the newspaper then, after a short chat with his wife, fell asleep.

Three days later when he was again coming home, he noticed that the boys had changed their game to cricket. 'Summer coming in', he thought, and remembered rather sentimentally, as he stepped over a boy's navy blue jacket on the pavement, the days of his own youth.

'Out!' a boy shouted. The soap box which they were using for wickets fell over on its side.

Mr. Chambers could not resist calling out genially 'Well bowled!' But the boys stared at him so strangely that he began to feel he had done something wrong. He hurried on his way.

The boys stood looking after him. 'Gosh! Doesn't that guy walk funny?' said one.

'Yes, doesn't he!' Another boy rolled along the road, imitating Mr. Chambers.

The boy who had been bowled said, 'He's bow-legged, that's what he is. That's why he walks funny.'

They all laughed and began to walk all over the road with legs bent in imitation of Mr. Chambers, grinning to each other while a red haired boy mouthed in a voice resembling that of Mr. Chambers, 'Well bowled! Well bowled!'

The next evening, Mr. Chambers passed them again but did not venture to say anything. He felt a slight twinge of embarrassment and as he turned the corner he heard a boy shouting, 'Hiya Shorty!' He scuttled on homewards.

'Wonder what his name is?' asked one boy, laughing.

'Yeah, I wonder.'

'Let's follow him home and see if we can find out!'
'Yes, let's!'

'Come on!'

They all crept round the corner, keeping up against the thick green hedge, watching Mr. Chambers who was walking briskly about two hundred yards ahead of them. At last, a few streets further on, he turned in at his own gate. The boys waited cautiously for some time then stole up and read the brass nameplate on the gate: B.B. Chambers.

'So that's his name!' Mr. Chambers. B.B. Chambers. B.B.C. British Broadcasting Corporation. Huh! Wait till we see him again!

For a few nights after this Mr. Chambers kept his head averted and tried to stop his ears as he walked past the boys playing cricket. Then on the third night he heard a voice calling out, 'Hi! Mr. Chambers! Mr. China Chambers! How's the B.B.C?' He started and looked round to find the boys all standing laughing at him. They stopped jeering when he looked round but as he turned away again he heard them calling, 'Hi Shorty!'

Once round the corner, he looked apprehensively in all directions to see if anyone else had heard. Fortunately there was no one in sight. He sighed. Should he tell his wife? No. She would think he was making something out of nothing. The boys would soon forget it anyway. Over his ham and egg he forgot it himself.

'Mrs. Batcock came up today to see if I would be secretary of the women's sewing club,' his wife said.

His thoughts reverted to the boys. 'Oh! And what did you tell her?'. He could not conceive how they had learned his name.

'I told her I'd think it over and see what you said.'

'Mmm. How could they have -?'

'What was that, Bardolph?'
'Oh, nothing, nothing. My thoughts were wandering.'

He wondered if he should tell her. Yes, he might as well.

'I was think -'

'Ohi! I forgot to tell you,' his wife interrupted excitedly, 'Miss Hornblow's cat had five kittens in the bath and.....'

Mr. Chambers decided not to tell her after all.

The weekend gave him some respite from the taunts of the boys but on Monday evening, as the train drew into his station, he began to feel afraid. He walked down the street slowly, not sure whether to go with the crowd in the hope that the boys would be too frightened to shout at him, or whether to wait, in case they did shout at him when he was with the crowd and humiliate him. For a moment, he thought they were not there but as he entered the street he saw that they had only moved their soap box further along the road. He was alone.

'Ha! Here comes the B.B.C? ' One boy leaned on the bat, another on the soap box, ready to run.

'Just come here and say that!' Mr. Chambers muttered.

'Just come here and say that!' echoed the red haired boy who had imitated him before. The others burst into laughter.

'I'll smack your back-side you cheeky young imp!' threatened Mr. Chambers.

'I'll smack your back-side you cheeky young imp!' came the echo.

Mr. Chambers walked on, upset and uneasy and as he reached the corner a few stones fell on the pavement beside him. He increased his pace and walked home frowning.

On Tuesday morning at the office, Mr. Stibbs, one of the partners in the firm, came up to him and slapped his
shoulder. 'Well, Bardolph, old chap,' he said smiling broadly, 'and whose backside are you going to smack?'

Mr. Chambers flushed deeply.

'I was using your telephone and I couldn't help seeing that your blotter's covered with the phrase "smack your backside." What does it mean, old boy?'

Mr. Chambers sighed with relief and laughed nervously. 'Oh, nothing! Just a bad dream. My mind must have been wandering.'

'Not feeling too well, perhaps? More seriously, Mr. Chambers, there have been one or two mistakes in accounts and things coming from your section lately,' Mr. Stibbs continued. 'Now I know we can't always be perfect but I do - you know - I hope you'll be able to - well - keep your mind on the - mm - job. Perhaps you need a holiday?'

'No, I'm sorry. I've been a bit worried recently by a few details but I'll try to be more careful.'

'Oh, quite all right, old chap! Come to me if I can be of any assistance, you know!' Mr. Stibbs nodded and went out.

Mr. Chambers groaned to himself. The thing was beginning to get beyond him. Perhaps he could go home another way, he reflected. But he did not want to do that. Or perhaps he could rush into one of the houses in the street and demand that the parents take action. But that might lead to the police court. He grimaced in distaste.

All afternoon he forced himself to do his work thoroughly. Nevertheless, every time he signed his name or his initials, his thoughts became confused with soap boxes and nicknames and cricket and the British Broadcasting Corporation. As it approached five o'clock he felt himself becoming unpleasantly tense and began to search his mind for some kind of excuse to go home later. He would go down to the pub. No, he wouldn't. He hadn't been in a hotel for years. No other business? No. Well, they might not be there anyway.
On the train he travelled with a young schoolteacher whom he knew and chatted nervously with him. The young man noticed his uneasiness but did not remark upon it. They alighted at the same station. However, since the young man lived on the other side of the railway, they had to part, but they stood on the platform and talked for about ten minutes until the young man said cheerfully, 'Well, I'll have to be —'

Mr. Chambers interrupted him and talked loudly and quickly about some intricate legal procedure, carefully avoiding all reference to the court.

The young man was rather surprised. Five minutes later, he repeated, 'Well, I must be —'

But Mr. Chambers raised his voice and kept on talking somewhat incoherently.

The young man looked at him anxiously and thought he detected signs of fear in his eyes. He realised too that Mr. Chambers was clinging a little desperately to his presence. A feeling of repulsion seized him. 'I must go,' he said curtly. 'Goodbye, Mr. Chambers!'

Mr. Chambers gazed after him then set off home, filled with dread. The wretched boys were playing cricket again. He saw them whisper together when he came into the street and as he came nearer he could see the mockery and hostility in their small faces. As he walked past they were silent and for one happy instant he thought they were going to leave him.

Then a voice whispered, 'One, two, three.'

Suddenly, they all began chanting, 'B.B.C B.B.C Bum Boy Chambers B.B.C B.B.C B.B.C Bum Boy Chambers B.B.C...'

As he reached the corner, a lump in his throat, a stone hit him on the back of his leg. He winced but did not look round.

'I shall be home later tomorrow night, dear,' he told his wife. 'I have some business to do in town.'
'Yes, all right. One of Miss Hornblow's kittens has died - I mean one of her cat's kittens. She's heartbroken. I think she's going to keep the other four. That'll be seven cats she has. Isn't it dreadful?'

Mr. Chambers smiled wearily. 'Isn't it?' He was thinking about something else.

On Wednesday, Mr. Stibbs again complained of mistakes in his work. He invited Mr. Chambers into his office, bade him sit down, talked to him and offered him cigarettes. 'Now my dear chap', he concluded, 'this just can't go on. As I said, the firm lost thirty seven pounds as a result of one of these errors and we can't afford it. I'm afraid something must be worrying you. We've never had anything like this from you before; you've always been very dependable. Now Bardolph, old boy, I don't want to be personal or anything like that, but for the sake of the firm is - er - is your private life all right? No domestic worries? No financial worries? I mean - well - I'll be only too glad to help you.'

Mr. Chambers shook his head. He frowned inwardly; he could not possibly tell Mr. Stibbs about the boys. 'No nothing like that. I'm afraid, Mr. Stibbs, I don't know what it is. My nerves have gone. Perhaps I'd better do as you suggested and take a holiday.'

'Yes, I think so. And the sooner, the better. We'll waive formalities and you can have a couple of weeks from tonight.'

At lunch time, Mr. Chambers wandered dismally through the crowded city streets. He was worried by the thought of losing two weeks' wages but even that was overshadowed by the thought that he would have to face the boys again that night. He remembered the stone hitting his leg. He reached down and rubbed the spot; it was still sore. In his stomach there was a faintly empty feeling which sent short spasms of fear through him. Ugh! He would go down to the pub and forget those little ruffians in a few whiskies. It was a long, long time since he had tasted whisky and the thought of the glowing barley flavour running down his throat and smoking between his temples cheered him a little.
Five o'clock struck. He cleared his tray and locked the safe. In the hotel bar he saw some fellow clerks and joined them in the middle of a heated conversation about juvenile delinquency.

'I don't think the kids now are any worse than they've ever been,' asserted one man with a plastic raincoat.

Mr. Chambers sipped his whisky and muttered darkly, 'You don't know them'.

Another man, wearing a battered tweed hat and a pale purple tie, said, 'What the kids of today need is less books for education for their brains and more sticks for application to their posteriors. That's my view. Less ruddy psychology and more whippings. That's what they need.'

'Yes, that's the idea,' said Mr. Chambers, finishing his fourth whisky.

When he came off the train he felt quite exultant. 'Ah life is a most excellent thing,' he exclaimed to a genteel looking matron. 'Madam, life is divine! Manifested in lowly fashion in the body of a cat it shines forth in unsurpassable magnificence, in splendid glory from the spirit of man. Sweeter than nectar and more bitter than the poison of asps, its essence is uncertainty, its purposes contradictions and its end is the grave. Your Majesty -'

The sober lady looked alarmed. 'Ow! Ow yes indeed!' She hurried away from him.

He forgot about the boys but as he turned into the street they stopped their game. One boy lay down on the road and yelled, 'Yah! Bandy! I can see the sky through your legs Mr. B.B.C.!' The other boys rolled along the street. 'Yah! Bandy Bum Boy's drunk! Old China Chamber is full up! Ha! B.B.C. is drunk! Yahoo!'

Mr. Chambers laughed to himself. His fear was forgotten. He rushed on one of the boys and cracked his hand across his face. The boy fell over and the soap box fell on top of his legs. Mr. Chambers laughed. He jumped up and down on the box which broke into splinters. The boy lay on the road screaming.
And the magistrate said, 'Guilty.' He collected his papers. 'Mr. Chambers, there will be no sentence; you will be on probation for twelve months. But let me give you a friendly warning: anything like a repetition will automatically call for the maximum penalty for this kind of offence - twelve months' imprisonment. I still don't understand the affair properly. I know you've explained but - but your behaviour was so peculiar and your rage so... so uncalled for....!

**

TWO WEEKEND POEMS

I

FRIDAY NIGHT AND MONDAY'S MOURNING

PETER BLAND

The day's four seasons sidle down to early dark
In the teeming town and bugling trollies bungle
Round the window-studded streets, where bullying Boys and grinning girls, gander to steaming Coffee stalls; and so another Friday night
Has wedged me tight in kerb-side clatter,
Ringing change, endless chatter, ripe fruit, frying batter,
Coloured cloth, salesman's patter, perfume, candy and tobacco.

Yet while the town sucks purses dry, I think
Of Monday, sharp and sly, for Friday's a gypsy Who lives on a lie and plucks your palm of silver.
But whatever we sow, on Monday we reap, five more Days to the end of the week, and the pangs of birth
End the weekend sleep, in the light of a Monday morning.

**
A steeple shuttles out its flock of bells, waking
The avenue to late breakfast and the crackle
Of motor mowers from the neighbouring park.
The suburbs reprieved, discover with delight
Their gift of time to tamper and tinkle with.

Some take Sunday like a laxative;
Intoxicated with seventh-day freedom
Revert to infancy, build castles in the sand;
Or park the car and listen to the band,
Watching the world go by in cinemascopie.

Foreign and familiar faces gather sun struck
On the promenade, where summer is secondary
To what this season's lovers wear, who,
Enchanted and self-engrossed, scatter the sea,
Tumbling like ripe fruit from a paper bag.

The vacant city like an undiscovered pyramid
Lies open to the air; the star of last week's movie
Smiles in her nakedness across an empty street.
Some sailors from a foreign ship stare, half-afraid,
Wondering where the music and the laughter's gone.

***
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