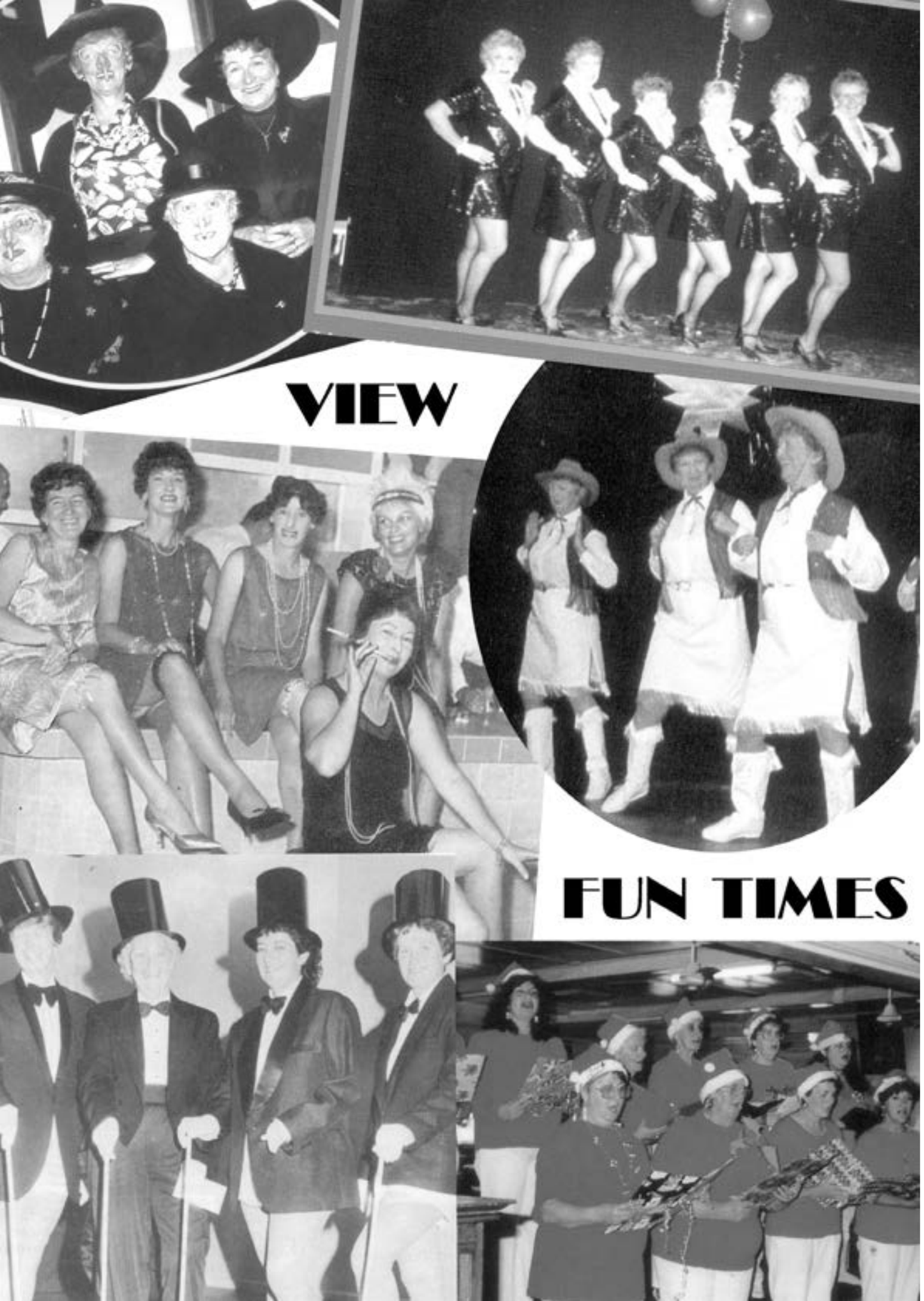
view

voice, interests and education of women

# A Literary View




# FOREWORD

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

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

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

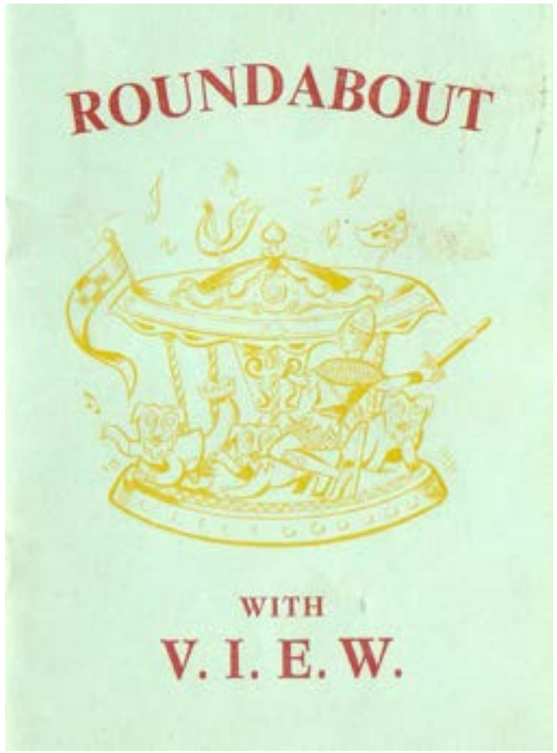
While reading through the magazines I realised this is a part of the VIEW history unknown to many of today's members. The idea of creating a collection of these stories has led to "A Literary VIEW", a compendium of VIEW Short Stories showcasing the amazing writing skills and creativity of our members.

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

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

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

Susan Groenhout
Past National Vice President
Chair VIEW History Working Group

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# ABOUT VIEW

Our Vision

*Women creating and leading a more inclusive society*

## A valued part of The Smith Family

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# ABOUT VIEW MAGAZINE

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

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

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

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

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

# V.I.E.W. WORLD

VOICE INTEREST EDUCATION OF WOMEN



1st Prize Literary Competition (Amateur Section)

## THE OLD MUSIC MASTER

*By Mrs. Norrie Clarke*
*(Ryde Club)*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Tell me the worst," interrupted Eric.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This must be Suzie," he continued.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Portent did not let me down.

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

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

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

Before I could protest, he continued.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The telephone's shrill ring interrupted my thoughts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But the children?" he queried.

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

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

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

"I'm sorry about the things I said about your dear old Music Master," he said in a gentle voice. "Even if he can't play a note of music he really is a nice old chap."

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

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

I made no reply.

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

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

The rest of the journey was made in silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The only thing missing was the piano.

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

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

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

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

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

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## LITERARY COMPETITION

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

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

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

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


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


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# An Island Wedding

**Stella Wilkinson**
Tuggerah Lakes VIEW Club

"What are we going to do about it Morna?" The man leaning on the rail of the island-bound ship turned to his companion and placed his hand lightly on her arm.

The girl did not appear to have heard him for she remained staring at the sea, shimmering in the moonlight. The man repeated his question. With an obvious effort the girl brought her wandering thoughts back to the present, but her intent eyes still regarded the dancing water.

"Do?" she said tonelessly. "Just nothing."

"But we must! I can't give you up now."

"It's useless to talk about it Ron." Her eyes left the water and she turned to look up into his troubled face. "I have thought about it for hours and hours and I've decided that there is absolutely nothing we can do."

"But surely Keith would understand. I'll see him when we arrive and tell him "

"Nothing!" Morna interrupted. "Oh don't you see? We can't treat him like that. You are his best friend and I am his fiancée."

"Oh damn!" Ron turned once more to the moonlit water. Was it possible, he asked himself, that only four weeks ago, on receiving a letter from Keith, he had made arrangements for this trip with such a light heart? Now it seemed that his life must always have been bound up with that of the beautiful girl at his side.

Keith's letter had come as a surprise. "You have always promised to come and see the islands for yourself, old man," he had written, "and now that your holidays are due I want you to do something for me. Morna is coming on a ship that leaves Sydney in a couple of weeks and I'd like you to come with her. You would be able to look after her for me, then, be best man at our wedding."

Look after Morna? His mouth twisted into an ironic smile. Well, he supposed he had done that. He had tried to make everything pleasant for her. Was it his fault he had fallen in love with her?

He remembered having met Morna a couple of years before when Keith was down on leave. Even then he had wondered at the girl promising to marry a man so much older than herself. Why, Keith must be nearly 10 years older! To Ron's way of thinking, that was a lot too much.

Well, he had come on this trip; tomorrow they would be landing and they would have to meet Keith face to face, the secret of their love locked in their hearts.

A sudden revulsion shook him. He couldn't do it! He'd tell Keith and

"I think I'll turn in now, Ron." Morna's voice broke suddenly across his thoughts.

He made one last effort. "Morna, I must tell Keith."

"No, my dear, you won't. You know I love you, but Keith has waited all these years and has been so generous to me in many ways. It seems he always gives and never takes. Well, now it's his turn and he is going to get his happiness. If we had known before we started it might have been different, but Keith has been counting the days and I'll not go back on my word."

"Then you don't love me as I love you," he declared hotly.

Morna looked at him steadily. "Don't hurt me anymore, please Ron," she begged. "I've had enough to bear already, believe me!"

"Darling, forgive me. It's just that I'm nearly crazy with worry."

"I know so am I, but my conscience would give me no peace if I broke my word to Keith now. My mind is quite made up. So goodnight, my dear. Goodbye!"

After she had gone Ron stayed at the ship's side for a long time. His eyes showed the fierce battle that was raging within him. When at last he went below, the fight was over. toryMorna had won!

They landed next day. Ron kept well away as they neared the wharf. He knew that Keith would come on board as soon as the ship drew alongside and he felt that he could not witness the meeting.

But he was not left alone for long. As he stood, idly watching passengers leaving the ship, a hand fell on his shoulder and a well remembered voice exclaimed: "Ron, old fellow! How delighted I am to see you! Morna tells me that you have taken great care of her on the way up. Well, now you are both in my hands, so come along."

They went straight to Keith's house for dinner. The meal seemed unending. Morna practically refused to meet his eyes and only spoke when it was absolutely necessary. The burden of the conversation, therefore, rested with Keith and Ron. Naturally Keith was in excellent spirits and had hundreds of questions to ask, all of which Ron did his best to answer.

Eventually Keith sensed that something was wrong with Morna. "Morna," he said gently, "you seem tired by all the excitement of the morning. Why not go and rest for a while?"

"Thank you," Morna lifted grateful eyes to his. "I do feel a bit washed out. Are you sure you don't mind?"

"Run along, my dear. Ron and I can amuse each other for hours, I'll wager. We've plenty to talk about after all this time!"

When Morna left them Ron's brain seemed to clear. He bombarded Keith with many 'do you remembers' and gave him all the news and gossip from Sydney.

When Keith suddenly asked, "Well what do you think of Morna?" he was able to reply in quite a natural voice, "She's stunning, old man! You're one of the luckiest beggers under the sun."

"Believe me I know that," Keith replied.

The strain of the next few days was terrible for both Ron and Morna and at times Ron felt that anyone with half an eye could see the trouble. He marvelled that Keith did not guess. But, as far as he could tell, Keith seemed quite unaware that all was not as it should be.

It came as a severe shock therefore, when, one after-noon as they were all resting in the cool of the verandah, Keith said, quite calmly as if he were making some remark about the weather: "Aren't you two trying to keep something from me?"

Ron jumped as though he'd been shot and, while Morna's eyes remained fixed on the knitting which was keeping her fingers busy, Keith heard a sharp intake of breath, as if she had suddenly plunged into icy water.

"What the deuce do you mean?" Ron demanded.

Keith looked round at him and a smile lit his rugged features. "Quit fooling, young man," he advised.

"You silly kids, I knew almost as soon as you landed. Now, why didn't you make a clean breast of it?"

He turned to Morna. "I suppose you didn't want to hurt me my dear. It didn't occur to either of you, I suppose, that I might not object very much?"

Morna and Ron stared in utter amazement.

"You, you don't mind, Keith?" Ron stammered.

"Not in the slightest, dear boy. Morna and I have been parted for the last two years and one can't expect things to be quite the same as they were. Naturally, had Morna still cared for me I would never have spoken, but as things are, I guess it's all for the best."

"You seem quite anxious to be rid of me," Morna flared. The unexpected turn of events had unnerved her. Curiously, it hurt! Pride, she supposed. It made her want to hit back.

"No more anxious than you are to be rid of me," Keith returned lightly. "But come, don't let's quarrel. I've thought it all out these last few days. We'll have an island wedding and honey-moon as planned. The only difference will be the bridegroom! It will give everyone such a lot to talk about, bless 'em'

"We can't do that," Ron said hastily. '

"Why not? The people expect a wedding and they'll get one! Anyhow, talk it over together, then we can make up our minds."

Keith rose, and with a slight wave of his hand and a 'so long children', disappeared into the house. Morna and Ron looked at each other as though they thought they must be dreaming.

"Morna, darling. I just can't believe it," Ron whispered.

"Nor I. Oh dear, just think how near we came to making a mess of things! It's a bit humiliating all the same to find oneself not wanted. I do think that Keith might have written long ago and told me he had stopped caring for me."

A thought came to Ron and he voiced it before he realised what he was doing. "I wonder why he asked us to come together?"

"Perhaps," Morna replied a trifle bitterly, "he thought we might fall in love and that it would be an easy way out for him."

"Well, we did, didn't we sweetheart?" Ron said putting his arm around her. "And I think Keith is a real sport offering us a wedding and honeymoon already made."

"Our wedding, Morna, do you realise? Come, let's forgive Keith, whatever his motive. Let's tell him that the wedding is OK."

So Keith had his way. There was a wedding, reception and honeymoon, just as had been arranged. The only departure from the original plan was a trifling one — just a change of bridegrooms!

This, of course, caused much comment; it was, in fact, a nine day wonder. But it soon passed and before long people began to forget that Keith should have been a married man. He settled back quickly and unobtrusively into the niche he had always occupied in their society and as he refused to be 'pumped' or to answer questions, he was soon left in peace.

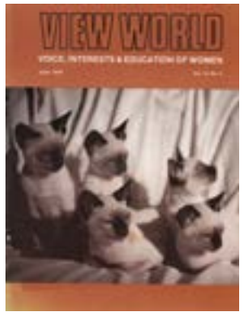
Now it was all over. Morna and Ron were returning to Sydney, their glorious honey-moon a lovely memory for the future. Together they were starting a new life. They would be very happy, Keith thought, and he smiled as if the thought was a very pleasant one.

He was seated at a window which commanded a fine view of the harbour and he could see the ship slowly gliding away, taking with it the two happy young people.

As he watched he seemed to be back again in that room with his great friend, Dr Robert Graham. Dear old Bob! They had been like brothers.

Again he seemed to hear that voice, broken, sympathetic: "Keith, old man, it hurts like hell to have to tell you but it can't be more than six months, maybe not as long as that

His eyes on the slowly moving ship, Keith whispered softly, "Goodbye little sweetheart. Thank God I lived long enough to achieve your happiness. Goodbye, my love . . ."



VIEW World June 1972

# HOW A MAN DIES

**Molly Lawrence**
Wellington VIEW Club.
2nd Prize Short Story Contest

Tom Barclay turned into his office and walked across to the desk. He stopped with his hand on the back of the chair in front of it, his fingers smoothing the wood, feeling it, then deliberately feeling it again with every separate finger. Then he twisted slightly to look back at himself in the mirrored over-mantel.

"You're a big bastard," he sneered, "you're not worth two bob!" He pushed the chair away and squared up to his reflection. His eyes ran down his long, broad frame. He flexed his arm, watching the muscle bulge beneath the thin shirt.

That solid flesh was so much meat, rotten meat, in which the worm already squirmed. He winced away from the picture.

What did a cancer look like really, he wondered? What was this thing which in six months' time would beat the body of his…..or so the doctors reckoned.

His hands clenched. "I won't let them do this to me," he muttered. "I won't let…… it's more than a sentence of death, it's a promise of Hell!"

He sank into the chair and dropped his face into his hands. Before Margaret, he had held himself in…..Margaret, his wife, whom he loved and wanted to go on loving. And there was young Tom. Tommie, they called him, but he'd be Tom presently. In six little months, six endless months, six months of agony of mind and, yes, body…..agony of body! God, he was frightened of that…..Yes, in six months' time, his son could be Tom.

They'd only had the one, this boy, but he'd look after his mother. At least he, this rotting disintegrating older Tom could rely on that.

Disintegrating? He placed a hand on his shoulder, moved it down to his chest….. Could the doctor be wrong? These things, this flesh of his was real, hard, breathing, working!

Ah, what was the use? It was true, all of it, the trip into town, anxious but not really fearful, the doctor's surgery, his kindness…..and Margaret's eyes. Oh, yes, this was for real. His mouth twisted as Tommie's expression came to him.

There in the surgery and with Margaret driving them both home again, he had been quiet, quiet with the instinctive need of any hurt animal to hide. Now, voiceless screams rent him. "I can't take it! Blast them, I won't take it, I don't have to…..I'll jump the gun."

He was still. The gun.

Eyes blank, he left the desk and went to the rifle hung against the wall, took it down and returned to his chair.

Sideways to his desk, he fondled the sleek stock, the cold, unfeeling barrel. He ground the butt against the floor, gently scraping it against the boards, the infinitesimal sound of his action a thunder in his ears. His hand moved upwards, winced away from the trigger, on to the muzzle. Taut, unmoving, he did no more for the moment. Then, gently, he fitted the cold mouth of the rifle to his own. In a moment that could not be real, he moved his lips against the steel, tasted it, kissed it! Surely this was better?

He raised his eyes to the window and, for the first time, looked beyond it. There was the land on which he had spent this body of his, spent it freely, satisfyingly, lovingly, for 30 years.

The rifle sagged against the desk as Barclay looked at his paddocks. Some sheep moved single file, hurrying, and purposelessly as he very well knew, across the nearer paddock. In the next, the ground lay waiting to be sown. It was soaked from the drenching rain the week-end had brought and the wheat would have a good start this year. He saw the wheat growing, saw it a green sheen over the dark ground, saw it a thick, rippling green carpet, saw it yellowing, heavy headed, saw the harvester going into it.

A horseman was bringing in a cow and a calf. Tommie? Yes, it was Tommie. He was interested in spite of himself. What was the matter with that cow, for Heaven's sake? The calf seemed active enough. He made to rise, and was immediately reminded of the rifle, and of himself. Tommie must handle this as he must handle everything from now on.

His hand tightened on the barrel of the rifle.

Tommie was only 23. He was a worker, and he had a bit of nous, good with animals, too, but he hadn't much experience of the financial side of running a property. Perhaps he, big Tom, had kept that side of it in his own hands a bit too much. This business with the bank, for instance…..They wouldn't have needed the extra money if they weren't buying the other place, but……Well, how the Hell was a man to know he'd never need it!

How was he to know that in six months' time, all the ground he'd ever want was a six by two hole! Six months? Or…..today?

For the moment, he was impatient of that and pushed the rifle away from him. He wanted to clarify his thoughts about Tommie and this Bank business. Would it be better, in the light of this new knowledge thrust upon him, would it be better to let the other place go? It was not a decision to be made easily.

This place had always had its limitations. The two together would make a really good property, and Tommy would surely marry. He grinned involuntarily. That little Skipton girl would see to that, and he hoped she did. She was good value, that girl. What was that she'd told him once? Yes, that was it……A cricket eleven! She meant to make it a team. Well, Tommie might need the two places.

But would the Bank see it that way with him, the father, gone and this place Tommie's? Mightn't they reckon this place enough for a youngster starting out? He cursed softly. If this thing of his had only come in three months' time, the loan from the bank would have been through, or so far on the way that there'd be no pulling out of it, by the Bank anyway.

A glint showed in his eye.

Everything had its price. If he wanted Tommie to have the other place, it looked like he'd have to pay for it. To pay with what? The horror of what lay ahead struck him again and his hand tightened on the rifle once more.

And at once he stiffened. He knew he was no longer alone. Glancing sideways into the mirror, he saw Margaret, her eyes wide, her hands on the door-frame, tight, white-knuckled. How long had she been there?

For a long, still moment, his eyes held hers in the cold glass. "I won't do it, Margaret," he said presently, and that was true now. Dear Lord, he had forgotten Margaret……

She swallowed, then spoke huskily. "It is for you to decide that Tom," she said. "You must do…..oh, it's your own business what you do about this, Tom." She lifted her chin and blinked. "I wouldn't hold you, darling. Nor would Tommie," she finished.

"Margaret, Margaret…..."

He rose clumsily and she ran towards him. He held her to him closely, and for a time neither said anything more. Then she drew away, the tears coming unchecked now. She stumbled against the rifle and shuddered away from it.

Tom Barclay looked down at it, stared at it. "Do you know, Meg," he said then, "I didn't load the blessed thing." He grabbed her arms and shook her gently. "It'll be all right, old girl, don't worry any more, but go. I must ring the Bank. I was to call in, remember? But, of course, we forgot all about them..... But just remember, everything's going to be all right, d'you hear me? All right!"

# NEVER AGAIN!

**Gwen O'Grady**
Gorokan VIEW Club
1st Prize Winner Short Story Competition

VIEW World December 1985

*Meg woke with a start, cold and clammy with fear. "John! John! Are you alright?"*

*She reached out and touched him to make sure he was real. What a terrible dream!*

*Serves her right for reading so late last night.*

*John murmured sleepily, "Another one of your premonitions, Meg? This ESP*

*nonsense is getting a bit much, isn't it? What was it this time?"*

*"Oh John, the feeling was awful. All l can remember is losing you and being*

*terrified — something to do with water and blackness. You can swim, can't you'?"*

*"Well enough. Stop worrying, will you? You're on holidays now."*

*Meg still couldn't shake off the feeling that she had been sent a warning of some*

*kind. Doing her best to relax and be sensible, she leant back in her deck chair on the*

*after deck of the cruise ship "Salamanda" and let the tropical mid-winter sun warm*

*her upturned face.*

*tory*

Today was the highlight of their entire holiday as far as Meg was concerned for they were to visit the water caves of Sawailau on one of the remote Yasawa Islands of Fiji. They did not really know what to expect, but Meg had read where, in a cave reached only by an underwater entrance, there were to be seen ancient rock engravings thousands of years old. She hoped they were included in today's itinerary.

Another flash of fear! Water caves — water and blackness. Was that what she was being warned about? "Don't be idiotic, Meg." She spoke severely to herself. "Who would be warning you — the spirits or something?" She relaxed back in her deck chair again.

Her reverie was interrupted by a loud cry of "All ashore!"

Meg studied the steep cliff face as the pitching boat neared the coral-strewn beach. "I can't see any caves," she muttered to her neighbour. "They must be pretty small."

They leapt ashore and gathered around their Fijian guide William, a tall, very large and muscular man. "Leave all your gear here," he commanded. "You won't need any of that." Masks, snorkels, flippers, hats, towels and sandshoes were deposited as their owners followed William across the beach. They climbed up steps cut into the rocky side of a mountain, paused for breath and then climbed some more. There were murmurings among the members of the party, "Water caves up here? Impossible!"

"Just follow me. You'll see," said William.

At that the rocky path disappeared into a cleft in the mountainside and they descended some more rock steps. Meg clutched Johns arm, straining to see in the half-light. As her eyes became accustomed to the dimness, she began to look around her. She ran her hand over the cool smoothness of the limestone rock as she passed. She lifted her head, then gasped in astonishment. The other members of the party followed her pointing finger to the cave roof high over their heads. "It must be a hundred metres high!" she exclaimed.

The chattering ceased and the entire group stood dumbfounded as they gazed about them. They were standing on a limestone ledge about three metres above very deep water. The smooth sides of the cave rose sheer to almost meet at the roof. Through a tiny opening in the roof could be seen glimpses of green vegetation outlined against a patch of blue sky. A long shaft of sunlight momentarily penetrated the gloom overhead.

"It's like a cathedral," said John in a hushed voice. Even his whisper echoed and re-echoed in the confined space. No one moved, not wanting to break the spell. Then a cloud passed across the sun and the shaft of sunlight disappeared.

"Everybody in the water!" The echoes of William's booming voice startled them back to reality.

"How?" said Meg, the practical one.

"Down the ladder, then jump."

It was only then that they noticed iron rungs driven into the ledge beneath almost, but not quite, reaching the water.

"How deep is it?" asked one of the less brave explorers.

"Only about twenty feet," said William. "Don't worry, you can tread water quite easily."

At this the weaker swimmers promptly sat down and refused to budge.

"Chicken!" yelled Meg as she leapt into mid-air and plunged into the clear water. As the water closed over her head she heard an enormous "Splosh!", the sound exaggerated in the confined space. "I really must go on a diet," she thought to herself as she kicked her way back to the surface. Bodies plunged all around her as the others leapt in, one after the other. Waves bounced off the walls and slapped their faces as they spluttered laughingly together.

"We're making enough noise to wake the dead," giggled Meg as they all trod water and then began to explore the nooks and crannies of this remarkable place. The water was clear but colder than the waters of the lagoons where they had been swimming earlier. It also tasted slightly brackish.

"Where does the water come from?" asked John of William, "It can't be tidal. We're too far above sea level. And I can't see a river or waterfall anywhere."

"No one knows," answered William. "It's salt water all right. But no one has been able to find out how it gets here. Right now, follow me."

"Follow you where?" asked one of the swimmers. I can't see anything else and there is only one way out — the way we came in."

"Over here," answered William, and swam over to what seemed to be an impenetrable wall of rock. "We're going to dive down and swim through an opening in the rock into another cave."

"Oh no we're not. Here's one who isn't," came from one of the more timid souls. Several more of the group turned tail and fled. They gathered several metres away, watching.

"It's quite safe. I'll go through first and wave my arm in the opening. Come

through one at a time. Take a deep breath, dive, swim straight ahead and don't come up until I pull you through." William dived and his large frame disappeared from view.

"O.K. Who's first?" a ghostly voice asked from the other side of the rock wall.

"I'll go," said one of the younger ones as he dived and also disappeared. "Wow!" said another spectral voice shortly after.

"What can you see?"

"I'm not going to tell you. Come on through and see for yourselves."

"As they were swallowed up one by one, Meg's knees turned to jelly. "I'm a strong swimmer, but I don't like the idea at all of being cut off by that rock wall," she thought. She turned to John apprehensive, "Are you going in? After that horrible dream, I still feel a bit scared."

"Who's chicken now?" replied John scornfully.

"I'm off. See you." He dived and disappeared.

Still in a state of indecision, Meg remembered the rock engravings — petroglyphs, the book had called them. "They must be in that inner cave. I can't see them out here anywhere. I really would

like to see them."

"Looks like I'm the only oldie still game," she called to the cowards clustered on the rock ledge.

"Here goes!"

She waited until she saw a waving arm in the shadowy depths, inhaled deeply, dived and swam through an invisible opening in the rock, grabbing frantically at the arm ahead. Being very buoyant she bobbed upwards too soon and cracked her head on the underside of the rock wall. Meg resisted the impulse to gasp in pain as she was dragged through the opening and up to the surface where she gratefully inhaled copious amounts of fresh air.

It was pitch dark. Meg could not see even the vaguest outline of anything at all. "Where is everybody?" she asked nervously.

"Here, right next to you," answered several equally nervous voices. "Me too!" — this time from John.

The sepulchral tones of their voices gave the impression of close confinement. Meg felt that her head must be almost touching the roof and a feeling of claustrophobia overwhelmed her.

Frantically treading water, she scrabbled for a handhold on the smooth wall near her. Most of her carefully-manicured fingernails broke with the effort but she managed to get a precarious hold with the very tips of her fingers. How they ached! She did not think that she could hold on like this for very long.

As her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. she could faintly see a number of other bodies close beside her. Meg tried vainly to fight down the terrifying claustrophobia. "I have to get out of here. I can't stand it."

Then, quite suddenly, a shaft of sunlight penetrated the gloom and the veil of darkness lifted. Meg looked up and there, hundreds of feet up, was a tiny opening in the cave roof, through which the sky could now be seen. "Hundreds of feet up" — Meg felt rather foolish. She could see the others now, quite clearly, as they hung suspended in the pale green, luminescent water. Her fear left her then and she joined the other swimmers in exploring this fabulous grotto.

"Follow me!" William's hollow-sounding voice reverberated from the cave walls as he led them in and out of groups of limestone columns and pointed out stalactites hanging from the roof.

"I AM glad I stuck it out'" Meg remarked to John.

"Aren't you?"

A narrow ledge caught her eye and she trod water to study it. She tried to lift herself up out of the water to see, but it was out of her reach. She remembered what she had read about the engravings. They were said to be strange markings – not a written language, because the characters were randomly spaced, nor could they be dismissed as haphazard scribblings because very similar engravings were found elsewhere. The experts quoted in the book thought that they could only have magical or symbolical meanings.

"I wonder," thought Meg, "if that shelf was used as a throne in the old days — for a priest, or even an idol of one of their god-chiefs, like Degei. I'll ask William."

She turned around. Everyone had disappeared!

Which way did they all go'? All the rock formations looked the same. She called out, "Where are you?"

Voices answered, not very helpfully, "Here!"

"They can't be too far away," thought Meg as she swam in what she thought was the most likely direction. Then the light disappeared as a cloud passed over the sun high overhead. In the dimness, Meg stopped, turned several times and became confused. She became aware of how cold the water was. "My arms and legs are aching," she thought. 'I can't tread water for too much longer."

She tried again, questioningly, "Hello?"



The answer came back from the opposite side of a rockface, "Hoo — hoo — hoo — ha — ha. . "

Meg looked around apprehensively. "I wish they wouldn't fool around in here. There's something spooky about the whole place. We might upset the spirits or something."

Worried now, she called out, "I can't find you! How did you get in there? Do I have to dive again'?

John? William?"

William's deep voice came back, "No, stay put. I'll get to you."

She had no idea now from which direction his voice had come. She was completely disorientated. Arms and legs aching even more, she trod water rapidly, trying to warm up a little. It seemed to be getting harder to breathe now. She could not see the roof. "What if I run out of air?"

Alarmed now, "John, where are you?" Louder, "William, hurry up! I don't like it here." No answer.

"What if he has gone in the wrong direction? I can't last much longer. I'm so cold." Her arms and

legs felt like lead now. Her kicking slowed and she began to gasp. She swallowed a mouthful of

water. Coughing and spluttering, she tried to kick more vigorously. She could not keep it up. She

was so tired. She swallowed another mouthful. Then panic set in. She screamed "Help! Someone!

Anyone! I'm in trouble! Hel. . . Another mouthful. No answer.

"There's nothing to hold onto Desperately she tried to cling to the smooth rock wall. There was not even a fingerhold. Painfully she reached upwards again and again, but sank beneath the water each time as her grabbing hands slipped uselessly down the rock. Another kick brought her face above the surface and she gulped air convulsively. Another attempt at a scream ended in a muffled gurgle as she slipped down once more.

Sheer terror engulfed her. "I'm going to die in here! I can't. I'm not ready to die. I've got too much still to do." One more frantic kick, a feeble gasp for air. "They'll never find me. It's too late." Helplessly she hung, completely submerged, her remaining strength ebbing fast. Vague images and faces passed through her mind. "John, oh John. .

It was peaceful, just floating around. . . She drifted in and out of consciousness. No cold anymore. . . Why struggle? . . . So quiet. . . so peaceful. . . so nice. . . so. ...

Sharp pain penetrated her unconscious state.

"No!. Leave me alone! . . . I don't want to come back." Once again pain dragged her back to semi-consciousness. She became dimly aware of movement, of vague sounds, then of splashing water. She coughed violently. Air! She inhaled deeply again and again as consciousness returned. With it came memory. "I was drowning. What happened?" she thought. She flung out her arms and felt something solid. "What's holding me up?" She sensed then that she was being held. Strong arms supported her as she, gratefully breathed and breathed beautiful, beautiful air.

In the half-light she could see William's very worried face. "Thought we'd lost you. Lucky you've got long hair. I saw it waving around in the water and pulled you up by it."

Meg realised then what had caused the pain which dragged her back to consciousness.

"William! Oh William!" She locked her arms around him and clung to him like a leech. "How can I ever thank you enough?" She sobbed and sobbed. "Please take me out of here, please."

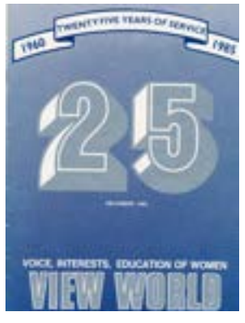
To dive and swim through the opening in the rock wall once more took every remaining ounce of Meg's courage. She had no choice. It was the only way out.

She bobbed to the water's surface and spluttered, helpless. Willing hands helped her up onto the rock ledge where she collapsed, her chest heaving. "Never again! Never! The spirit ancestors can keep their caves and petroglyphs.

That dream was a warning after all, wasn't it, John?

"John? John! Where's my husband?"

"Wasn't he with you?"



VIEW World June 1976

# The PRIVILEGED LIFE

**Peggy Rose**
Corrimal VIEW Club

*Waratah Crescent was a cul-de-sac lined with new, large, architect-designed homes, all equipped with swimming pools and landscaped gardens.*

The one exception on this privileged street was the Simpson's old farm house set on two blocks of land where a small flock of sheep, with coloured fleeces, grazed. A wilderness of flowers and vegetables was protected from them by wire netting.

There was no communication between the Simpsons and Waratah Crescent. They gave no dinner parties, their children alone went to the State School. Someone had read of an award to Mrs Simpson for spinning — or was it weaving?

And Mr Simpson had been spotted at the Council by a rate-paying resident. Presumably he was a clerk. The other men never saw him drinking.

Secretly all the husbands envied him his freedom from mortgages (the house had been his parents' home), from lawn mowing and from the burden of outrageous school fees.

Lyn and David Bower lived in number 17 with their children. David's American firm demanded such devotion to profits plus obligatory golf on Saturday afternoons — many "contacts" were made on golf links — that David, with luck, depending on trains and the Boss, saw his children for ten minutes before they went to bed. On Sundays, he and Lyn entertained at or were invited to tennis, bar-b-ques or pool parties. If the children were not welcome, Mrs Green came to mind them.

Lyn kept her house spotless and up to date. She took it as a compliment when her mother remarked "it's as cosy as a showroom, dear."

Julie and Mark had a beautifully appointed bedroom each full of TV sets, cassette players, desks, innumerable toys. They were expected to confine their activities to these rooms. Lyn didn't care for books and games scattered about and certainly no smelly pets were allowed.

David insisted — and Lyn agreed wholeheartedly — that the children be given every advantage.

So every day after school Lyn drove them to music lessons, swimming practice, tennis coaching. Then she supervised their homework (secretly wondering why she had to explain so much work and hear so much spelling after paying those enormous school fees) and prepared their supper.

Neither she nor David cared to share a dinner table with children who slurped their food and told long, rambling stories about school.

Mrs Green came usually three or four nights each week when the Bowers went out on David's expense account (he prayed it would never be taxed!). Mrs Green behaved just like their grandmothers did, letting them make toffee, cuddling them while she read stories, played cards and cut out dolls clothes. They loved her.

This particular Saturday, Lyn wasn't feeling very bright. Both she and David would have enjoyed staying at home tonight watching TV (which they pretended to despise) or trying to sort out the bills. But this was a Polo Dinner and they were both anxious to get into that social set where so many "contacts" awaited them. To this end the children were having riding lessons every Saturday afternoon, "no wonder I'm worn out," thought Lyn as she remembered Mark screaming for the entire lesson because he was scared of the enormous horse with the enormous teeth. Julie had wept in sympathy. Perhaps six was a bit young when he was so reluctant.

The phone interrupted her thoughts. It was Mrs Green apologising in a weak rasping voice. She would have come tonight, flu or no flu, but her daughter wouldn't allow her. Anyway she might give the germs to the little angels.

"Ah, Mrs Green," wailed Lyn, forgetting to sympathise, "we must go to this thing tonight. Do you know anyone else?" "Tracey Simpson sits sometimes," Mrs Green answered through a fusillade of coughs. "She's only fifteen but very sensible. Well brought up. I must go, Mrs Bower. I feel faint. Simpsons are in the phone book."

To Lyn's chagrin, Mrs Simpson wasn't at all anxious to have Tracey employed and earning a few dollars.

"She usually only goes to our friends and then only till nine o'clock or so. If you're going to be late Tracey can bring the children here. She'll come and get them about four o'clock." Lyn told David furiously, "She might have added, 'just this once as a favour!"

On Sunday mornings Julie and Mark were strictly forbidden to disturb their parents. Julie fixed up their cereal and they ate fruit for breakfast.

But this Sunday was very different. About nine o'clock two excited children with rosy faces and glowing eyes burst into the bedroom, climbed into bed with Lyn and David and began to talk, interrupting each other and forgetting to finish sentences.

Lyn kissed them both "You enjoyed yourselves?" she asked and got her answer in bursts.

"It was whizz. They don't have an old pool they have to clean. They go the beach. We went before breakfast on the bus! Can we go on a bus ride, Mum? Mr Simpson took us and Peter showed us how to fish."

"Shut up, Julie. Peter is fourteen, Dad — the others are all cissy girls. He showed me how to bowl overarm. And he made his own desk of boxes. It's whizz. And Peter and his father did up a lot of old bikes and they all have one. Even the mother. Peter is going to be a mechanic. Can we go riding at the bike track?"

"Mum, Mrs Simpson is going to have a dear little baby. That will be five children. Can we have three little babies, Mum, to make us five? Tracey showed me the clothes — like dolls' dresses.

Tracey is lovely, Mum. She's going to university soon and she says I can go too if I learn to read."

"Mrs Simpson let us make chips and hamburgers on the bar-b-que. It's like a real camp — not gas, like ours. And Mr Simpson made porridge for breakfast. Real porridge with brown sugar. Why don't we have coloured sugar, Mum?"

The girls all sleep in one room and have the prettiest cupboards made up of boxes. Isn't that clever? Mrs Simpson covered them with covers all over roses. And the walls are covered with Mrs Simpson's hangings. Much prettier colours than our old pictures."

"The Picasso prints!" Lyn murmured to herself.

Mark took a breath to make his big announcement, "And Dad, I rode their old horse and I wasn't scared a bit!"

David smiled at him through his hangover.

"His name is Don and he pulled a cart for a hundred years, Mr Simpson told me. He liked me and ate an apple right out of my hand. And, Mum I told them about riding lessons and how those horses frighten me. He said we can borrow Don. Won't that be fun? And Mr Simpson read us a story. They only hire TV in the school holidays.

What does "hire" mean, Dad?"

Julie, being female. had the last word: "Mum, it's lovely, at the Simpson's place. Could you go out every night so we can go there? And we'll take Mrs Green too."






# BE LOV-ERS STILL

**Peggy Dawson**
Springwood VIEW Club

"Onward Christian Soldiers."

As Catherine walked up the flagged garden path she heard the thin, uncertain voice.

"Oh dear!" she thought with a sinking feeling, "Liddy's been drinking again." This particular hymn was one she had heard for years, when her old friend had too much to drink.

For the thousandth time she wondered what made Liddy behave in this way. Before Catherine's marriage to Ben a year ago, she had lived with her family next door to Liddy, her husband Jim and simple-minded sister Jinny. Jinny had lived with the couple for as long as Catherine could remember. She had been a small quiet woman with dark curly hair and large brown eyes that followed you around, while all the time her body was quite still. Just the eyes moved.

There were six children in Catherine's family. She had often wondered if the noisy brood next door had made up to the Soames for their own childlessness.

She and Liddy had always been particularly close. As a child, often in need of peace away from her noisy overcrowded home, she had often escaped to the house next door. There the quietness and shine of it all would calm her spirit. She often had meals by the fire with her old friend.

Her favourite thing in Liddy's house was

looking at the wedding pictures and Hymn book that the Minister had given the newly wed young couple on their marriage. On the fly leaf was written the words:

'Be Lovers Still'

June 7th, 1918.

She never tired of hearing about the wedding, Jim so tall and straight in his Army uniform, Liddy and her bridesmaid both in blue silk. Liddy's hat was wide-brimmed, blue with a huge silk rose. The fact that Catherine's own wedding had been in the same Church was a great joy to her.

The two-day honeymoon spent at a small fishing village only twenty miles away was a story she could repeat by heart. She had always been able to hear the sound of soft waves breaking on a shore in the moonlight. She had heard the story so often Catherine felt she had walked on those June nights by the ocean.

Sometimes her Mother would get annoyed. "Why don't you move in next door then? Spend a lot of time there you do, that's for sure," she would snap at her dreamer of a daughter.

The two houses were set in a valley at the foot of a Welsh mountain. Fields that were covered in dog daisies in summer stretched behind. At the bottom of the long gardens ran a river. Peaceful in summer, it became a raging torrent in winter. On cold winter nights Catherine would lie in bed with her sister listening to the rushing water.

Now, she stood in the open doorway in the clear sunshine. The only time she could remember the thick brown door closed was after dark and on cold wet days. It was as if Liddy could not bear the door to be shut.

She stepped into the old fashioned room, her friend was sitting by a coal fire, even on this warm summer day. She was in her early sixties, thin, bent, wearing a black dress with a cream lace collar. She looked up; the green eyes lit up as she saw Catherine.

"Well, there's lovely to see you my gel. Come in, come in." The glass in her hand was quickly pushed out of sight. "Hello Liddy. how are you?"

Catherine moved forward and kissed the soft cheek.

She was shocked at the other woman's appearance. In the two months since she had last seen her Liddy had aged, the back more bent, her hands thinner. The sorrow Catherine had always seen in Liddy's eyes seemed to have deepened.

"Where is Jim?" she asked.

"Down in the village. Gone to see his butties at the Lamb. Likes to see his old mates."

"Of course. I am sorry to have missed him though."

"And how is that lovely boy of yours? Alright is he?"

"Fine thanks. We are both fine. We love our house, it is so peaceful."

They smiled at each other remembering Catherine's search for peace in days past. "Have a cup of tea gel and a bit of something to eat."

Liddy got up and swayed slightly.

Catherine jumped up.

"You sit down. I'll put the kettle on and make it. Won't take a minute."

She filled the kettle at the sink in the small, dark, back kitchen and put it on the fire. When the kettle had boiled and the tea was made, Catherine sat opposite her old friend.

"I've got some wonderful news for you Liddy," she said, smiling, "I'm going to have a baby in January."

The woman sitting in the chair across from her looked up. Suddenly her hands flew to her face and wild crying burst from her. Her body rocked in the chair.

Catherine stared horrified.

"Liddy what is it? What have I said'? I thought you would be pleased. That's why I came to see you today. Aren't you happy for me?"

Gradually the crying stopped; Liddy wiped her eyes with the edge of her dress.

Catherine took a clean hankie out of her bag and gave it to Liddy.

She dried off her face and took Catherine's hand.

"Oh gel, of course I'm glad. Indeed, there's happy I am for you. Your own child. And there's a good Mother you'll be."

The tears started again. The girl knelt beside the woman in the chair.

"Did you want children? Is that it? Weren't the little horrors next door enough for you."

She smiled at Liddy, but there was no answering smile back. Just a look of utter sadness.

"Could you never have a baby?" Catherine said.

She hesitated about asking such a question. They had never discussed personal matters in their long friendship before. Liddy was a very reticent, old-fashioned woman, a product of her times.

"I don't know."

The answer came flatly.

"You mean you never saw a Doctor."

There was silence, the older woman turned her head gazing at the fire and whispered.

"I never liked Men."

"What do you mean?" Catherine asked, "I don't understand." She thought of Jim, kind, patient and gentle. Who could not like Liddy's husband?

There was silence again. Liddy's hands were clenched tightly together. Slow tears ran down her face. Then her voice came slow and painful.

"My Mam — she always said — men like touching you — things like that — were dirty — my Mam said it was wrong, that a good girl kept herself clean — then there was always our Jinny in the other room. She was here when we came back from our honey-moon. I didn't want her with me you know gel, but my Mam made me promise to look after her. She being simple like. I hated her always looking at me with those big eyes. I always felt she was looking through the keyhole and listening.

"I couldn't you see gel, I just couldn't and when she died three years ago it was much too late. Too late...

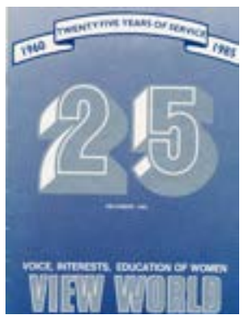
"But," Catherine broke in, her voice shocked, "You mean you and Jim have lived together for 40 years. Shared that room upstairs and all the time you never... "

"No. No!"

"Oh, Liddy."

Catherine threw her arms around her friend and felt her own tears. She thought of the words in the Hymn Book, "Be Lovers Still".

Oh God! she thought with anguish. Oh God, the wasted years.



# Daffodils for Adam

VIEW World. September 1979

**Edith Budgen**
Castle Hill VIEW Club

Time drifted by slowly in the small seaside town. The winter was over and the first of the spring holiday makers were arriving. The House on the Hill lay silent under a high-arched canopy of grey sky. The lazy flight of the seagulls gave way to a hurried flutter as they- returned to shelter before a gathering storm.

Shafts of eerie light fell across a room of the house. The large grandfather clock on the stairs ticked out a measured beat. The old cat languidly stretched out to full length on the hearth rug.

Suddenly the door from the garden swung open. Adam's ageing form entered, his figure tall and imposing despite his declining years. The finely chiselled features of his sensitive face still bore the marks of his holy office, a priest of the church, a man of God.

Many summers had passed since his slender hands had last stretched out over his flock in blessing. Now, he tended his small garden. But he was held in high esteem by all who remembered his love and understanding over the many years.

Adam glanced around the room, his eyes finally resting on his favourite armchair. Maybe he should rest now. He could hear the thunder rumbling in the distance: soon the rain would come. It would be welcome – the recently planted beans needed it badly.

Lowering his form into the chair, he stretched full length the legs that over the years had carried him over many miles in the service of others. His silver hair flowed over the cushion at the back of the chair as his head relaxed. His fine hands slipped to his side and he drifted slowly into the depths of sleep.

The sunlight streamed across his book-lined study of long ago. A tome lay open on the table and an invisible hand slowly turned its pages. A voice gently announced, "This is reflective of your life, my Son."

As the voice died away, a lithe figure came from the garden and stood at the French window in the sunlight. Her flimsy gown was tied at the waist with blue ribbon and her fair hair floated in the breeze. On her arm was a basket of freshly picked daffodils. Her gay laughter filled the study. But alas, as he looked towards her basket, her laughter ceased and the daffodils withered and turned to stone. Then she laughed again and the stones turned back to daffodils. Rachel, my beloved one.

Some thought her flighty, this gay, illusive creature; frail and pampered, a banker's daughter. He recalled that his stern father had warned him against a hasty attachment with her. In agony of indecision, he had often knelt before the altar pleading for divine guidance.

Now she faded from his sight and a wide river lay before him, winding and clear. The day was sunny and warm and a gentle breeze stirred the daffodils growing on the banks of the river.

There were many boats on the river that day, but Adam's attention was focused on just one. Free of his cassock, a vestment of his clerical office, he was dressed in flannels and blazer, a tiny gold cross on each lapel. As the oars gently skimmed the water, he looked at his beloved with devoted tenderness and a wave of desire enveloped his being. The long yellow ribbons of her sunbonnet floated in the breeze and the daffodils seemed to nod their heads in approval.

The tome still lay open on the study table and, with a sudden breeze,

several pages blew over, as though turned hurriedly by the hand. As they turned, the ringing of church bells sounded out clearly on a spring afternoon. The distant strains of an organ blended with the bells. Through a church door, out into the sunlight, stepped a bride and groom. Rachel, my beloved; my wife.

Summer followed spring and they lived together in the House on the Hill in a state of blissful happiness. Time moved swiftly and the summer-days gave way to the chill of autumn when the tinted leaves, blown from the trees, scurried and twirled at the whim of the wind.

Now the trees stood bare and ghostly on a stormy wintery evening. The roar of the sea could be heard clearly as the waves crashed onto the rocks below the House on the Hill. Streaks of lightning flashed across the dark sky and the deafening roar of thunder resounded through the nearby hills.

As the rain lashed against the house, anxious faces appeared at the window beckoning him towards the shore. There the angry sea had cast up on the sand the prostrate bodies of storm-tossed fishermen. As he knelt beside them, the gleam from his lantern revealed the pale faces of the lifeless forms. With his cross high, he moved quietly among the women, seeking to extend sympathy and love to those who sorrowed.

The grandfather clock back at the house chimed the mid-night hour. Beside a bed upstairs knelt a devoted man. On the bed lay his beloved wife, hovering on the brink of the Great Beyond. In a crib beside the bed were their children — a man child, sturdy and strong like his father; a girl child, petite and fair like her mother.

Adam's gaze fell once more to the tome on his study table. A page turned and it was spring again. The sunlight sparkled on the blue sea; the daffodils in the fields swayed in the breeze. But the pale hand of death had borne her away. Rachel, my beloved.

Season followed season and time merged into many, many years.

The blistering heat of the midday sun beamed down on a shabby attic room in a back alley of a crowded city. The unkempt figure of a man sat at a bare table, his gaunt features showing the marks of destitution. Years of debauchery and neglect had reduced him to his present state. He was far removed from his happy boyhood days at the House on the Hill.

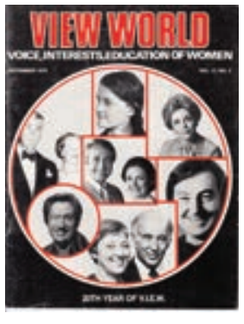
The tragic figure of his son receded from Adam as another page of the tome turned. There were very few pages left and the book still lay open.

Adam stirred. The last roll of thunder rumbled in the distance. The clock on the stairs chimed the hour. The armchair creaked as he stretched his legs and raised his head from the cushion at the back of the chair. The cat on the hearth rug purred languidly as Adam forced his mind back from sleep. The storm was over.

Sunlight shone through the window and the rain drops glistened on the trees in the garden. Adam's eyes, following the sun's rays across the familiar room, fell on the table. There, gleaming in the sunlight, lay a bunch of daffodils. A wave of memories and longing swept over his soul.

Beside the golden flowers was a message from his loving daughter. The past with its sorrows fell from him. The present with its joys and love filled his heart. The future he could safely leave in the hands of his God.

Until the day when the last pages of the tome turned and the book finally closed, he would wait with patience and thankfulness.






# FIFTY POUNDS

**Marjorie Baulman**
Springwood V.I.E.W Club.

Susie took one of her cheap dance frocks off the hanger and thought, "another day, how I hate this life".

Being a taxi dancer during the depression years was hardly a job one would take from choice. It was exhausting work six nights a week. She was undernourished and utterly weary.

The fact that her partners often smelt of liquor and acted as though their tickets entitled them to more than dances, seemed to threaten her last shred of self-respect.

She had given the matter endless thought, but it was better than sleeping in the park and not eating. There was no alternative.

A week later, on Sunday when the hall was closed for the night, it was Susie's turn to help sweep the floor. As she pushed the wide broom ahead of her, she noticed a paper bag which seemed to have something inside it.

She picked it up, glanced inside and nearly fainted. Taking a firm grip on the broom handle, she slipped the paper bag and its contents down the front of her dress.

Locked in her room Susie counted the money. Fifty pounds. No point giving it to Sam, her boss. He would simply pocket it. She pinned it to her singlet and prepared for bed.

During the next few days she thought constantly of the money. She realised it gave her what she needed most — the confidence and means to find

another job. She would use it for this, then if her hopes were realised, she could still hand the money in at the police station.

Saying goodbye to Sam, Susie caught a bus uptown and later that afternoon found a bed sitter with a gas ring and use of facilities for 15 shillings per week. It was only an attic, but it was spotlessly clean. The window looked out over the city, not into a brick wall as did many of the others she had seen.

Day after day she walked the city looking for work as a cook, housekeeper or waitress. But without success. She still had half her last week's pay and the fifty pound intact, but her shoes were wearing thin.

Eventually her landlady, Mrs Rose, said, "Did you try Benny's? He's my sister's son-in-law and has a little place four blocks up and sells snacks. Must be good because he has a lot of regulars."

Susie thanked her, went to Benny's and got a job as waitress for one month while his present waitress was recovering from an operation.

She bought leather for her shoes, a bunch of violets for Mrs Rose and went to bed feeling reprieved.

One day Miss Stanton, one of the regulars at Benny's, called her over. "I have watched you work," she said. "You are quick and neat and I understand you are leaving in a week's time. Can you do plain cooking?"

"Yes," Susie replied, "I learned from Mum on the farm."

"Then," said the businesslike Miss Stanton, "I need a housekeeper. My present girl is going to Queensland to be married. The job is live in, all found, and, £2.10.0 a week. Here is my card. It's a nice apartment and I think you'll be happy."

Susie accepted in something akin to delirium.

On Sunday afternoon she rang the bell at the apartment and Miss Stanton let her in. The place was large and tastefully furnished, but the first thing Susie noticed was the wall to wall carpets and the heating. No more thin blankets and chilblains.

Miss Stanton explained her duties and showed her the room which was to be hers. It was furnished with a white lacquered suite, rose sprigged curtains and bedspread. There was an easy chair with cushions in the corner. In the wardrobe were four navy linen frocks with white collars and cuffs, a navy cardigan and a navy top coat for when she did the marketing in winter.

Utterly grateful and quite overcome, Susie looked up at Miss Stanton who knew her feelings exactly but said briskly, "I thought size 12 would be correct. Let's have some tea."

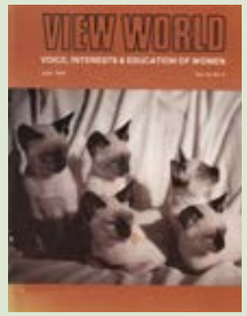
On her first day off Susie called at the police station.

"I found this," she said, handing the £50 to the desk sergeant.

"H'm," he said peeling off one of the notes and holding it up to the light.

"These are some of Willie's. He won't be making any more where he is now. We caught up with him and his counterfeiting last week."

He looked at her kindly. "Good thing you didn't try to spend any of this Miss."




# L E F T o V E R S

**Chrys Russell**
Twin Towns VIEW Club.

VIEW World September 1982

**Emma looked at the two plates before her, pushed them away. Bitterness was sour in her mouth.**

She walked to the window, looked out at the grey streaming rain, saw daughter Anne get into her little car and start off slowly along the street.

She shivered, walked back to the fire and sank into the red velvet armchair.

Anne had said "I've brought you some of the leftovers from the party. We had a marvellous time, sorry you weren't well enough to come".

Anne had chattered on about the food she had prepared, the wedding anniversary presents they had received, the warm thanks of the guests for such a wonderful party.

Emma scarcely heard. Not well enough to come? Anne had assumed that at 70, with her arthritis, Emma would not feel able to go. But she knew she would have enjoyed it — she had met most of the guests, loved to be with young people, above all would have had a chance to talk with David, secretly her favourite grandchild. His keen enquiring mind seemed to bridge the sixty-year gap with no effort.

"Gram" he would say, "I love talking to you. Tell me a story about when Dad was little, or about Grandad".

She heard Anne's voice again — "I bought a dreamy dress especially for the party. Its tartan jersey, fits beautifully. Expensive, but worth it. You must come over one day and see it".

Emma thought resentfully that as a girl she rarely had a new dress. Many times her mother would say — the words might differ, but the meaning was the same "Emma don't be difficult. That dress is perfectly good — your sister Alice wore it five years ago, no one will remember it now."

Same thing with her school uniform and books — second hand. She had enjoyed school, particularly maths and science. But when she decided she wanted to go to university to study further, her father had said "Impossible, Emma. Your brother must have a good education, because one day he will have a family to support. We just won't have enough money to send you to university. Better concentrate on typing and shorthand, so you can get a job in an office."

At sixteen she had joined her father's interior decorating business. After a year of typing letters and doing odd jobs, she found she was acquiring a knowledge of patterns and colour, a feel for textures and co-ordination of fabrics. She took an increasing part in helping her father with advice and

She still remembered the day a customer, a middle-aged wealthy lady, had said to her father "I'm thrilled with your daughter's ideas for redecorating my new lounge. The colour scheme is very original. She will be a partner for you in the future."

But her father had said, casually, "Yes, Emma's doing well, could make a career in this. Not here, though. It's a small business and of course I'll be leaving it to her brother".

Emma got up impatiently, moved round the room, poked the fire, picked up Ken's photograph from the piano. Ken had died six years ago, but the sense of loss still remained.

She was seventeen when she realised that she loved Ken, her sister's boyfriend. With the hopeless desperation of adolescence she watched them leave on outings in his car, or sit making plans for their future marriage.

Always shy and introspective, she had been overshadowed by Alice's exuberance, felt smothered by her crowd of noisy friends and avoided them as much as possible. She had tried to tell herself that she would get over this feeling for Ken, and find a boyfriend of her own, but others seemed insipid in comparison with him.

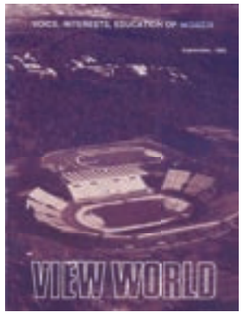
Across the years she remembered Alice's sharp voice — "I've seen the way you look at Ken, you're in love with him, aren't you? Well I don't want him, you can have him. I've found someone else, with much more money and I intend to marry him. You can have Ken — if you can get him."

Her marriage to Ken took place three years later, a happy marriage in a quiet way. His job as an accountant was not well paid, so their budget was limited. Clothing and education for their two children, Anne and John, were expensive, but she managed, even if there was little money for extras. There were several occasions when there was a choice between a new coat for herself or a suit for John; she put herself second, without feeling deprived. She loved her family, enjoyed cooking and caring for them.

The two children married. She missed the stereo noise, the constantly ringing telephone, the sudden request "Is it all right if Keith stays to dinner, Mum?" But money was easier, and they had time to indulge in books and music, go to theatres and concerts. Life became a pleasant quiet backwater; she shared with Ken a gentle companionship which lasted while middle age slipped imperceptibly into old age. Since his death, she had tried to fill the empty time with other interests — baby-sitting, knitting for her grandchildren, visits to friends.

She looked again at the two plates before her, the left-overs from the party. Suddenly she realised that leftovers had played a large part in her life — education, career, husband. Yet on the whole she had enjoyed life, known moments of great happiness and fulfilment. If along the way she'd had to take her share of the left-overs, wasn't that what life was all about'?

She picked up her fork and began to eat.






# Nothing of Value

**Phyl Gye**
Maroubra V.I.E.W. Club

VIEW World March 1979

Little Mrs O'Shea was upset. Upset was hardly the word – she was panic stricken! The contents of her rather shabby handbag were spread over the table and it wasn't there.

The roomy old bag she carried over her arm when she went shopping contained what she called her 'bits and pieces'. Yes, her glasses were there, also her purse, a couple of crushed hankies, a comb, two laybys but no wallet!

"Now, take a hold of yourself," she admonished.

"Sit down and think. But first, the kettle for a cup of tea."

She eased herself into the old comfortable chair and tried to think of each place she had visited at the shopping centre. Her list had been small and most of her shopping had been done at the supermarket.

Please God whoever had found it would pass it in. She murmured a short prayer to St Anthony. That's if it had been found. There had been such a crowd there it easily could have been kicked under one of the fixtures.

The kettle boiled, she made the tea and buttered, or rather spread margarine, on some bread. While she had this snack she'd put her parcels away, then she'd go to the shops and make inquiries.

A short time later Mrs O'Shea approached the girl at the inquiry desk in the supermarket, only to be told that the wallet hadn't been handed in.

The girl looked kindly at Mrs O'Shea. "Don't give up," she said. "People are funny you know. They can be honest and intend to return something, but take it home first. It might even be advertised — maybe by someone looking for a reward."

She noticed the worried look that came into Mrs O'Shea's faded blue eyes. "Look, I'll tell you what I'll

do, I'll paste a notice in the window. You pop in tomorrow and I might have some good news for you." She smiled encouragement at Mrs

O'Shea and waved aside her thanks.

After calling into a couple of shops where she'd purchased goods, Mrs O'Shea returned home without recovering the wallet.

The little bedsitter was her home now Mike had gone. The family had married years before. Kate lived interstate and only rarely visited Sydney because of the high cost of the fares. But she was a good girl and wrote often with news of her children. Now and again she enclosed snapshots.

Mrs O'Shea glanced at the dressing table where the latest snap was propped up against a vase. Maureen was growing fast and, she thought, would be like her mother. Little Micky – well, he was sturdy and short and somehow he reminded her of herself as a child.

She sighed when she thought of her son Mike, or rather Michael, as he preferred to be called. He'd done well as a dentist. It had been quite a struggle to pay the fees to get him through but she had gladly made the necessary sacrifices. Michael had always been a bright boy and hadn't minded the study entailed.

In the 10 years of his marriage to Ann, Michael seemed to have grown away. He called to see her regularly, but that was the trouble — it was a call, not a visit. Young Meg and Frank would tire of the cramped quarters and after about half an hour would ask when they could leave. She understood their need to feel free to run around, but as she was seldom invited to Michael's home, she felt as though she'd never been really close to them.

Oh, Ann and Michael did their duty. For Christmas and birthdays, they either sent a taxi or called for her and she would spend the day at their large, sprawling home in one of the better suburbs. But the rest of the year it was just calls. More often than not Michael would slip a $10 note into her hand on leaving. Kind? Yes. But it didn't fill the long, lonely weeks.

She remembered with pleasure the early days of the twins' lives. How she'd been called to baby sit while Ann and Michael were out. What delight they'd given her. It brought back memories of her own youth when Kate and Michael were small. She and Mike had loved them both so.

Mrs O'Shea tried to shrug off the feeling of misery that had settled on her. By nature she was a bright soul. She usually had a cheery word for her neighbours when she stopped to enjoy a gossip with them. Today, however, she didn't feel like talking to anyone.

She switched on her radio and tuned in to one of the talk-back programmes. She enjoyed these and would often throw in a remark of her own, agreeing or disagreeing with the views expressed.

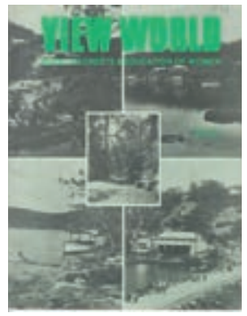
She knitted until it was time to prepare her evening meal after which she sat reading the paper to a background of radio music.

The next morning it took all her patience not to rush down to the shop first thing. The girl saw her coming and nodded. "I think I have some good news for you," she smiled. "This answers your description, it was handed in late yesterday."

Mrs O'Shea's eyes shone as she saw the shabby old wallet. "That's it my dear. I'm so happy to get it back. It contains nothing of value, just things I wouldn't like to lose."

Nothing of value! The girl had looked through it and knew the contents — a folded lilac ribbon, most likely from a wreath; birth notices; a pressed flower, perhaps from a bridal spray; and other small sentimental tokens.

No nothing of value moneywise, but a little piece of the old dear's heart. Almost angrily she brushed the sudden tears from her eyes and turned to her typewriter. Poor old duck!






VIEW World December 1985

# A Pleasant Wet Day – Ironing & Dreaming

**G. McMillan**
Twin Towns VIEW Club

# “Rain, rain Come again another day.”

Looking over the basket of accumulated ironing, across the fence to the street, I can hear the cheerful voices of schoolchildren on their way to the Bus Stop. The spiteful, spitting rain seems to be splashing from their brilliantly yellow rain coats to throw defiance back into the black sky, which grows even darker at this apparent indifference.

Rain, and still more rain; but of no consequence to those happy youngsters.

How well I remember being told by my Mother never to paddle in flooded gutters nor through those lovely big puddles left by the rain, wearing my shoes. So I always went barefooted. Even if my Mother did not think it was a very good idea. I was six and lived in Cairns, a place of sudden downpours and many opportunities for paddling.

There is the seasonal cyclonic rain that tears at the sky and earth, teeming tropical rain that leaves the atmosphere even more humid than before the storm rain with flashing lightning and clashes of thunder, bringing relief. On these special nights the stars shine brighter, as if all the dirt and dust of years has been washed away with the worries of the day.

Then there is that winter rain, steady and accompanied by a freezing “breeze” sending out urgent signals “to put another log on the fire”.

Welcoming summer rain soaks down through the arid ground where the roots and leaves of plants reach out for this precious life-saver — but the very best of all is to hear the gentle pitter-patter, on the roof comforting those tucked cosily in bed.

I’ve been rained “on” in all kinds of places from Chillagoe, Innisfail, Tangalooma, Brisbane through to Wagga Wagga, Dubbo, Cobar and at Broken Hill. This was another story.

I had three visits to the famous “Silver City” and three times it rained. I am left to guess the real reason for the enthusiastic farewells I received.

Could it have been the pleasure of my informed conversations? my scintillating personality (hardly), my beauty (never), or was it due to the fact that it always rained during my visits?

Rain in that arid area is an event not to be quietly nor quickly accepted as an everyday routine.

Man and beast, the hot, dry earth, all gratefully reach out as if to a life-line thrown from a sinking

ship. People walk with shoulders held straighter and buildings glisten as they are washed of the red dust.

And the desert. . . the desert is no more. In its place is a vital, living transformation. Nature produces a sea of colour. Multi-coloured flowers amid green foliage covers this former red, bare land. The ’roo hops with lighter and longer leaps.

The birds fly swiftly along snatching at the sudden clouds of insects brought by the heat and rain. So,

perhaps I WAS regarded as a Rain-Maker, 20th Century style.

The sky has grown even darker, the rain drops have become blotches bashing at the window.

Hope we don’t have a flood I am thinking, as I carefully fold another shirt just ironed, I expect there are good floods and bad, depending on where you are, what you are doing.

It is heart-breaking to clear and clean a home, rescuing beloved possessions from mud, slime and rotting debris. Then ten days later, the scene is replayed. How hard it is to wait as calmly as

possible and watch the creeping water again, then wait, trying to keep even calmer, as the murky water recedes. The strong survive to face another flood, another day. . . the weak depart with broken spirits.

Rain — Angel or Devil?

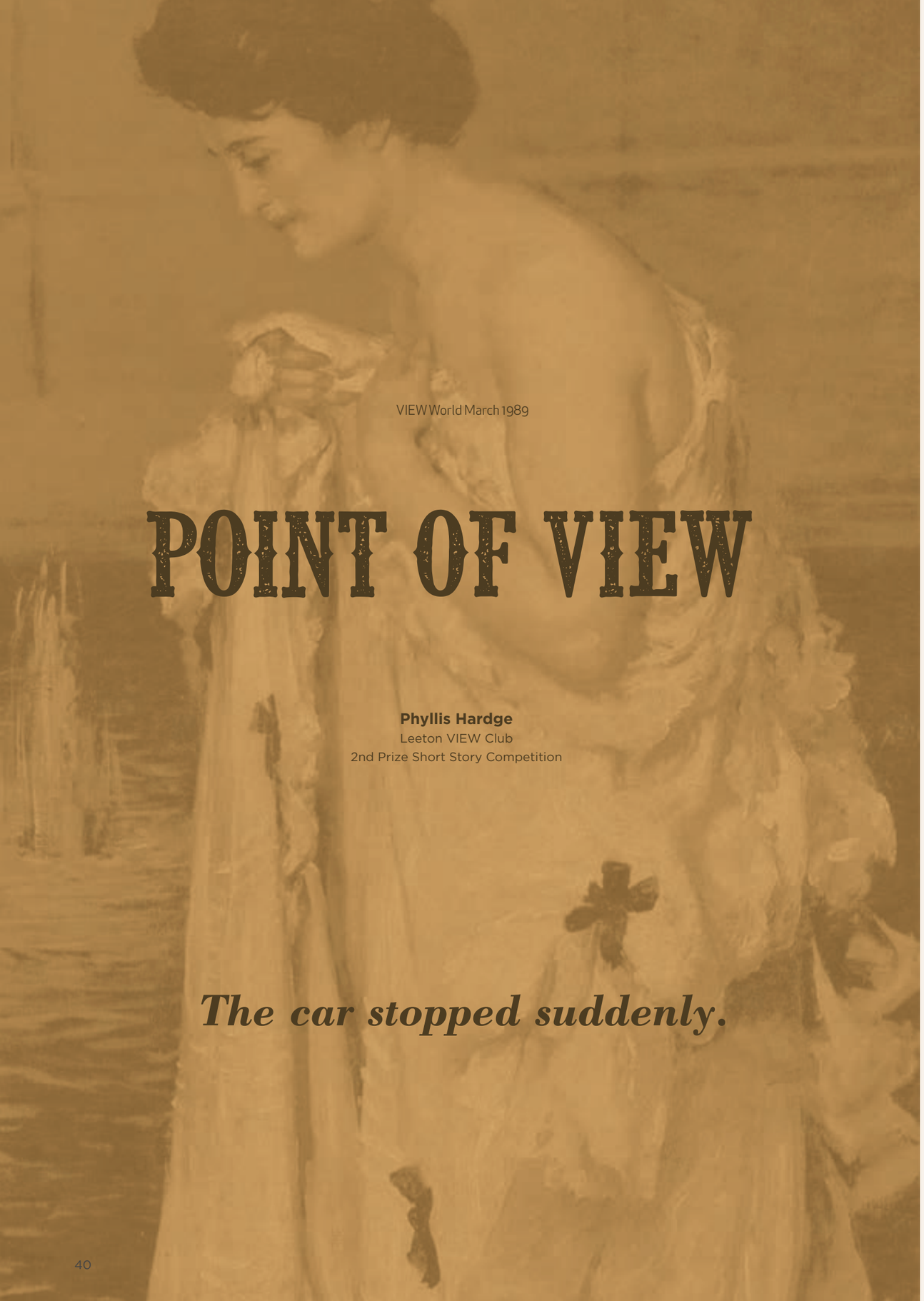
Unlike the floodwaters, my ironing is rapidly decreasing, my dreams switch to another Continent. . .

I am in Yosemite, California’s National Park, walking along a glistening wet pathway carpeted with fallen autumn leaves from century old weathered trees, flowering shrubs and dripping vines. Before me are the falls with their veils of spray shrouded by the gentle falling rain. Soft, soft rain that smothers the sounds of small animals, the birds, preening themselves on old fern covered logs, or searching for a grub or worm.

Drat that crease! Instead of watching what I am doing I have my glasses focussed on the forbidding, towering face of El Capitan. It is a pinnacle of rock, its tip hidden high up in the rain. Five adventurous mountain climbers are attempting the climb. Yes. . .Yes. . . I CAN just see them. There they are perched on a tiny ledge, secured by ropes and iron wedges.

Through the rain they appear as red and yellow dots, their clothing in contrast to the steep, wet walls. Five days to the top to sleep snugly in hammocks secured to the rock face, and three days to descend. I turn away, pleased to feel the solid, soggy earth under my feet.

As well as enjoying some lively dreams, I have finished the ironing — thanks for listening.



VIEW World March 1989

# POINT OF VIEW

**Phyllis Hardge**
Leeton VIEW Club
2nd Prize Short Story Competition

***The car stopped suddenly.***

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

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

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

**"it's private property . . ."**

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

An elderly woman opened the door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**"probably illiterate . . ."**

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

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

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

**"red zinnias, pink daisies . . . so unsuitable . . ."**

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

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

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

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

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

The utility came through the main gate stopping close to the grave claiming the women's attention. The man who alighted wore dusty work clothes and jacket, a wide brimmed hat was pulled down over his face. He took no notice of them at all, walking slowly dragging his feet on the gravel.

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

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

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

> "produced a can of beer . . ."

The watching women recoiled in shocked horror.

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

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

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

"Maudlin drunk, the disgusting beast, defiling a young

girl's grave. I'll get them to ring the police, the sooner that animal's behind bars the better," growled Evie.

She alighted opposite the Presbytery door, which was opened this time by the Priest. The watchers in the car saw her launch into a tirade and the Priest held up his hand as if to curb the flood of words. Disregarding the gesture, Evie continued on, seeming only to pause to ask a question of him. He shook his head and appeared to negate her story in some way.

She shouted at him, and he stepped forward shaking his finger at her as he spoke, then turned and went inside, closing the door. She stared at it disbelievingly for a few moments and returned.

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

"What did he say?" Lois asked.

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

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

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

> "never believe all you hear! . . ."

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

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

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

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

"Oh, you saw Clarrie Jouhensten out there today." [The woman pronounced the name Yowunsteen.] "Yeah, I saw Clarrie and the boys taking the flowers out to her early this morning, and I guessed where he was going when I saw him drive in at dinner time. Poor devil.

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

They'd have a drink at a party or

> "[she] was their pride and joy . . ."

at Christmas or something like that, but they hated drunkenness.

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

"His family offered to take the kids for him [they're a close lot if there's any trouble] but he said no way. he'd rear them. He did too. He was pretty strict with them, but liked them to enjoy sports, and saw that they got a lot of fun out of life. He stressed on them that they had to do well at school so they could get decent jobs and not have to spend their lives in hard slogging. They did real well, and Clarrie worked all the hours there were to buy them the books and things they needed for study. He taught them to be honest and truthful. They really copped an earful if he ever caught them out in a lie, so if those kids tell you something now, you know that they really believe it's the truth; but the worst crime, in Clarrie's eyes, is to make a promise and then not keep it. He really drilled that into them, and if those kids make a promise, you can bet your bottom dollar that they'll keep it.

He made all those kids promise

> "Sherryl was really clever . . ."

that they'd never touch the booze till they were grown up. He kept at them solidly over that. He reckoned that they might have inherited a weakness for drink that could ruin their lives, if they didn't watch themselves.

"The boys are pretty good at school and lessons, they say, but Sherryl was really clever, and she was going on to Uni. The Head said she'd have no trouble with her exams and Entrance, so it was all arranged, she was to have gone this year. "She made her Debut last year, and Clarrie was that proud of her! Mind you, she did look lovely; but when it came to the splash of bubbly for the Debs, Sherryl had lemonade. You could see that got to her a bit, and I guess she and Clarrie had a few words about it, after the Ball. It seems he said that as soon as she was old enough to make up her own mind when and what and if she wanted to drink, she could, but she must never let other people make those decisions for her. She agreed, but asked just when did he think that would be'? So he promised her that when she turned eighteen he would buy a can of beer and share it with her, and then she could decide for herself.

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

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

"He reckons he's always taught his wife to keep any promises they made and today he's going out to Sherryl to keep the one he made to her, and share a can with her, like he said. She'd have been eighteen today, y'see. I guess it's only half the promise though, she never did get the chance to decide for

**"some sort of meningitis . . ."**

herself. Still, you can follow the drift of Clarrie's thinking. O'course, I suppose whether or not you think he did the right thing, just depends on how you look at it.

"D'youse wanna order now?"



VIEW World June 1975

# A POT OF GOLD

**Margaret Dawson**
Springwood VIEW Club

Bess counted the money in her shabby purse. One dollar and fifty cents. Oh well, there were only a few days left to pension day. Not that it went very far in these days of high prices. She often thought it would be nice if she could manage something to brighten up her drab room. She looked around her at the faded but spotlessly clean curtains and the threadbare carpet. She smoothed the cover of her divan, which should have been replaced years ago but somehow the money never seemed to stretch that far. By the time she bought food and a few essentials there was always too little left over.

And of course, there was Bobby, her beloved cat. Picking him up, she sat in her only comfortable chair by the window overlooking the street. Bess spent most of her time these days looking into the street. She liked watching people go by or just to sit dreaming of the past, of the days when her husband had been alive and they had lived in the country.

They would have liked a large family but they had only one son, Allan. Funny, she could hardly remember how she felt when he had been killed in an accident after the war had ended. It was like remembering a memory.

She rocked gently in her chair absently smoothing the cat, letting her mind drift over the past, living again the days that had gone forever. Bess dozed in her chair unmindful of the street, of the people hurrying along wrapped up against the winter winds. Later she awoke and counted out the money again. Milk, she thought, bread, something for Bobby, maybe a chop for herself. There should be just enough to see her through. She glanced at the clock, not three yet. There would be time to go down to the market where she could often get things a few cents cheaper. Slowly she got to her feet.

She dressed herself smoothing her white hair. "Won't be long Bobby", she often talked to the cat. There was no one else.

"We will have tea when I get back." The cat wrapped himself around her legs purring loudly.

She shut the door of her room and made her way down the flight of stairs and into the street. She shivered in her thin coat. Still, the walk to the market would soon warm her up. By the time she reached the market she was out of breath but, as always, she enjoyed the busy stalls and the people.

Cut off as she was from human companionship, her trips to the bustling place was a great joy to her. Bess paused by the stalls looking for bargains. Later in the afternoon it was often possible to pick up vegetables cheaply. The stall-holders knew her figure well and had grown to admire her.

Suddenly she stopped. It was a flower stall and normally she passed by, but today she could not take her eyes off the glowing yellow before her. Chrysanthemums! A pot of chrysanthemums right here in the middle of winter. She touched them gently and bent to smell the tangy fragrance. For a moment she was a girl again in her father's garden gathering blooms for her mother; she too had loved them.

"Like them Gran?" the cheeky face grinned at her from behind the stall.

"They are lovely," she answered. "How much are they?" She couldn't keep the note of hope and pleading out of her voice.

"Well," the young man looked at the old woman standing before him. He was about to tell her how much they really cost when something about the blue eyes looking at him touched his young and rather cynical heart.

"Aw, you can have 'em for a dollar." Bess's hand shook as she counted out the money and handed it over. "Thank you." She smiled a smile of pure happiness as she took the wrapped pot of flowers and turned away. The young man gazed after her. "God, I must be getting soft in my old age."

When Bess got outside she suddenly stopped — she had only fifty cents left! Oh well, she would buy food for Bobby and make do with what was left. There was enough milk for a cup of tea tonight and in

the morning, there would be a tin of something in her cupboard.

She hugged the pot of chrysanthemums to her breast breathing in their fragrance. She hurried the remainder of the way home feeling a sense of happiness that she had not known for a long time. Her step was light — the bright glowing yellow of the flowers she carried seemed to fill the late afternoon with a life of their own.

She opened the door. The cat was asleep in her chair by the window. "Bobby," the old woman cried, "aren't they lovely!" She bustled about filling a jug of water to water her plant. "I think I will put them by the window where they can catch the sun in the morning."

Tomorrow she would get up early and watch the sunlight light up the flowers. She made herself a cup of tea, somehow she wasn't hungry tonight.

Tonight all her senses seemed to be heightened. Tomorrow she could lie and look at her glorious chrysanthemums. In a strange sort of way she seemed close to her husband and son. At eight o'clock she put Bobby out for his evening walk in the small back garden. She stood at the door in the cold night air waiting for him. She looked up at the stars.

Early next morning the sun came up slowly over the rooftops, its rays searching out Bess's window, lighting up the yellow chrysanthemums, giving the curly petals a glowing life of their own. From the bed there was no movement, no breath of life, just an old woman with a small smile on her still face.




# QUIET TIME

VIEW World June 1979

**Phyl Gye**
Maroubra VIEW Club

Pat Tyler was grateful for the strong support of her husband's arm as they walked up the path of the holiday cottage they'd taken for a fortnight. She was surprised how weak her illness had left her. It had been two weeks since her release from hospital and sometimes she felt she'd never get her strength back.

Pat had always been so full of energy and the slight woman who tired so easily and frequently burst into tears was a stranger to her — a stranger with whom her normal self had no patience.

It was her first serious illness and by now she had expected to feel on top of the world. Having babies had been easy. In fact, her abounding health and energy during her pregnancies had been the envy of all her women friends. Now here she was, tired and longing to rest. And after only a two-hour car journey!

Vikki, Andrew and the baby of the family, Martin, tagging behind the others, hurried ahead, anxious to see the place that was to be their home for the next two weeks. Vikki's long legs helped her to be first and she stood peeping in the windows.

"Mum, Dad, it looks dreamy! Hurry and let's see inside." She raced back and caught hold of her mother's other arm. "Mum you'll soon get well here. Smell the sea, isn't it lovely'? You can lie on the beach all day while we swim. And we'll be as good as gold, won't we kids?"

Her young brothers were banging the doorknocker although they knew the house was empty. It was as though they just had to do something to express their high spirits.

When Anthony had opened the house and flung wide the windows of the living room, he glanced at Pat who was standing holding tightly to the back of a chair. She gave him a wavering smile, "Don't you think we'd better unload the car?"

"We! That's what you think! You, my pet, are going to sit in this nice big chair and give orders while we slave. We'll have you back to work soon enough, don't worry. Your days of playing ladies are nearly over." He took her firmly by the shoulders and led her to a big chair by the window. She gave him a grateful smile and he kissed her lightly.

Vikki and Andrew helped unload the car while little Martin explored the

house, running to his mother with excited comments. This was the first time he could remember sleeping anywhere except in his own bed.

When everything had been brought in Anthony suggested that she rest on the bed while they went to the store. But Pat shook her head saying that she'd rather rest near the window and enjoy the lovely view of the bay. Chattering they trooped out of the house ordering her not to do anything until their return.

She listened to their voices dying away and closed her eyes, glad of this quiet time to herself. The kids were wonderful and Anthony so understanding. Tomorrow she would make an effort to join in their activities, but now she would relax and enjoy these blessed moments of rest.

Later, how much later she did not know, she opened her eyes to find the daylight had nearly gone. Heaped on the table were the things from the store. Apparently the family had returned and, finding her sleeping, had gone off again. She felt better and decided to freshen up and start a meal before their return.

Opening the bedroom door, she flicked the light switch. No light! With a start she saw a shadowy form in front of her. "Who's there?" she asked, feeling a prickle of fear. Silence. There was some one there, man or woman she couldn't be sure. The blurred whiteness of a face and an indistinct figure seemed to merge in the half dark. The curtains were drawn across the windows and she could barely make out anything in the room.

"Please, who are you? What do you want?" Her voice was shaking with fear. What could she do, turn and run? But her legs felt like jelly. The house that looked such a haven on their arrival a short time before, now seemed menacing.

She was conscious of the silence broken by the wind. Someone or something shared the room with her. Every ghost story she'd ever heard flashed through her mind and the seconds she stood there seemed an eternity as her fear increased. The palms of her hands became clammy and her legs felt as though they would give way under her.

The wind rose to a shriek and the door behind her banged closed. She was shut in with this horror. With an effort she tried to scream, but only a strangled sob escaped her lips as she crumpled to the floor in a dead faint.

Pat opened her eyes to the babbled voices of her beloved family. The light was on and they were gathered around the bed, their faces showing their concern. Anthony was rubbing her icy hands. There kids, she's alright now. Better nip outside and give her a moment of quiet."

As the trio dutifully filed out of the room they smiled as if to reassure her. "I'll set the table Mum," Vikki said as she closed the door.

Quiet! That was one thing she didn't want just now! Clinging tightly to Anthony's hand she asked, "Did I faint? That. . . that thing . . . has it gone?"

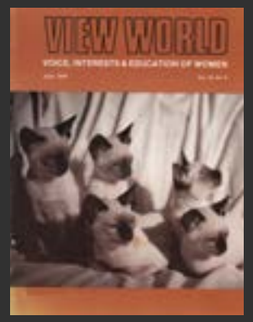
"Thing? What thing?" he asked, bewildered.

At the end of her story he laughed. "You silly goose. Look, there's your ghost!" He pointed to the mirror in the tall robe that stood facing the door.

"You see pet, it was your own reflection in the mirror! We had to go and see Mrs Mac about having the electricity turned on, it had been forgotten. You gave us a bad scare when we found you on the floor."

Pat laughed shakily. "What a start for a holiday. Help me up darling. I've had enough quiet to last me a lifetime! From today I'm on the job again."

Laughingly she added, "I'll accept lots of help, of course."






VIEW World June 1977

# SAMANTHA SPARROW – IN MEMORIUM

**Kay Gordon**
Wellington VIEW Club

**For a short while last summer, a sparrow lived with us.**

Incredibly tiny and fragile, it was nothing more than a handful of feathers and one transparent leg. But the charm and delightful personality of this little creature will remain in our hearts always.

It was the weekend the school vacations began, 10 days before Christmas: wheat harvesting was in full swing; the weather was hot and trying, with the threat of bushfires ever present. Christmas was approaching with alarming haste, reminding me of all the presents yet to be bought and wrapped, of all the cooking to be done. The last thing I needed was a baby sparrow.

The children found it under a tree and brought it into the house, pleading, "May we keep it'? It's only a baby and it's fallen from the nest — its little foot is hurt, too. The cats will get it if we don't keep it... please, Mum?"

I inspected the foundling doubtfully. its chances of survival certainly did not look good. The claw on one leg was withered and twisted; it had hardly any feathers, only a bit of grey down; and it continually cried to be fed, opening its beak and whole throat until its tongue was revealed.

"It's too young to survive," I told the children. "And it needs parents to feed it with worms and insects and things."

"I'll feed it," volunteered my daughter. 'I know it's probably hopeless, but we'll try to rear it."

Fortunately, I had knocked down an old swallow's nest from the garage recently, so the children retrieved that and placed the baby sparrow in it.

They experimented for ages with diet; crumbs were no good, nor flies — they seemed too dry and the baby couldn't swallow them. Slugs or worms were acceptable but they were impossible to find in any quantity in our western summer.

Finally, rolled oats soaked in water was found to be a suitable food and on this homely fare the sparrow thrived.

My daughters fed it with a pair of tweezers, pushing the meal down its throat as the parent birds would have done. About three tweezers-full of oats satisfied it for about half an hour, then the hopeful "tweet, tweet" would begin again.

It was a constant job. When we went to town for the day, baby sparrow, in its nest in a shoe box, would have to come too so that it could be fed.

We were growing fond of the tiny nuisance and, when after a week it was still alive, we christened it Sam Sparrow.

"Then if it turns out to be a girl, we can call her Samantha!" my daughter exclaimed.

About this time we acquired a cage, not so much to keep Sam in as to keep the three cats out. With the cage came various bird toys: a red swing, a blue mirror and a little gold bell. It was rather an incongruous sight and one that always made me smile — the gaily coloured toys which should have had a gaily coloured bird to go with them, did not match the small, brown, rather bedraggled looking bundle of feathers perched in a corner.

But what he lacked in glamour Sam made up for in sheer personality! How he quivered with joy and excitement when one of us entered the room! Chirping and fluttering, he hopped from one perch to the other, anticipating the moment when we would open the door of his cage and take him out.

We all shared the job of feeding him now — even the man of the house was often found offering him a drop of water or a tweezerful of oats, "He sounded hungry," he'd explain sheepishly.

We began to wonder just what sparrows do live on, in their natural state, so the children and I went exploring in the bird section of our local library. We found out quite a lot.

Sparrows are not native to Australia, but were introduced from Europe. There are two types — the house sparrow, which is very small; and the tree sparrow, which is much larger. (Sam, we decided, must be a house sparrow.) They live mainly on the seeds of certain plants, and insects.

The book we used had colour illustrations of male and female birds and we found, to our surprise, that Sam really was Samantha! The male bird has much darker feathers on its throat.

After reading that sparrows eat seeds, we decided to wean Sam on to budgerigar seed. He (sorry, she) didn't object and cheerfully swallowed a few when we dropped them down her neck. Gradually, she began to help herself to water and seeds.

Her greatest delight was to be allowed out of the cage to flutter around. She didn't fly much and never did learn to fly upward from the ground.

She could, however, fly down and from person to person — although her sense of direction wasn't the best and quite often she would miss her target. We wondered if the crippled foot had anything to do with this?

Although she loved to perch on someone's shoulder and peck gently at tendrils of hair, Sam also took great enjoyment from rough-textured fabrics such as carpets and chenille bedspreads. She used them as a grooming aid, I think, and would rub her-self along them in a curious swimming motion.

One evening, Sam's love of being out of the cage nearly ended in tragedy. The children, not noticing our big white cat snoozing under a chair, opened the cage door. Sam eagerly fluttered out. The cat sprang – screams from the children — and the limp little body lay lifelessly, blood welling slowly from its breast.

The children carried it in, eyes imploring me, "Do something, Mum."

I was quite sure Sam was as good as dead, yet something – "hope springs eternal", I suppose – prompted me to place the tiny body back in the cage.

"There's nothing we can do, I told the heartbroken children, "only leave the bird quietly, and wait." About 20 minutes later Sam shook her head, staggered rather groggily to her feet and started pecking at her seed.

But her miraculous escape didn't leave her entirely unscathed. Her right eye was damaged, and never opened properly again, and the clotted blood on her breast feathers put her off balance for some time.

To our chagrin, friends who heard about our bird all reacted in the same way:

"Oh, no! Not a sparrow! You wouldn't be bothered with one of those wretched little nuisances, surely! You ought to wring its neck!"

"I know what I'd do with it – give it to the cat!"

"You should see what they do to my lettuces!"

In vain did we point out the charm of small, one-legged sparrows.

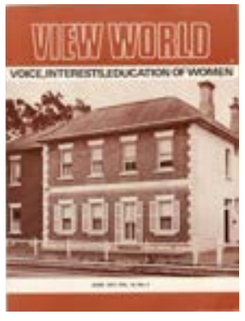
Towards the end of January, Sam seemed to grow quieter. Almost imperceptibly she was fading away. Never very robust, she now seemed almost transparent and her voice grew fainter, too. Some days she was unable to chirp at all.

One very hot day in early February we could tell she was not at all well, but all our efforts to revive her were in vain.

Sam wearily put her head under her wing and went to sleep – a sleep from which she never woke.

Was our diet for her inadequate, I wonder? Was the weather too hot for so frail a creature? Whatever the reason, Sam's death brought sadness to us all. And yet, we are glad that we were privileged to know her, even for so short a time.

She was an absurd, one-legged, cock-eyed little sparrow, but the happiness she gave us last summer will never be forgotten.



# Still Wondering

*Over the years, as knowledge grew, when I thought of that night, piecing things together, I'd often wonder. Why didn't Mother ask me, a hefty lad about 12 years old, to help her lift that huge iron boiler? It's as clear now as when it happened, so many years ago. Perhaps because I'm old the past comes alive when the future holds less.*

VIEW World December 1978

**Winifred Potts**
Mudgee Day VIEW Club
1st Prize Short Story Competition.

This is how it started. We lived on a selection, Dad, Mother and us six kids. Dad and George, the eldest boy, went away working quite a bit. They had to until the place got going. Rose helped Mother, so did Amy who was what was termed in those days a "bit simple".

I came after Amy, the man about the place when Dad and George were away. Alfie and Bob were much younger. Amy mothered them and did a good job. We all took care of Amy. Pretty, like a doll, but you had to show her what to do and repeat it until she understood. Always happy, always gentle.

Mother was a big, soft-hearted woman; sick people, the weak, sick animals could all rely on her. Self-reliant in any emergency, she had to be, isolated as we were in those days. She was strict with us, right was right, no in betweens, but busy as she must have been filling our mouths, covering our backs, we always got a word and a pat as she went past.

It was the day Rose cut her hand with the meat chopper. I remember how calm Mother was and even now wonder how she did such a good job with Rose's hand then, helped by me, cleaned up the mess. One of the Johnson boys arrived, about eight he was, and said his mother was poorly — could one of the girls go over for a day or two?

The women had to help one another and went miles through the bush to do it. If Dad was away the boys had to go for help. I'd been sent off to fetch Grannie James when Alfie was born. Before Bob was born I woke up that mother was resting the big bread loaf on her apron to slice it so Grannie would soon be sent for again.

To get back to the Johnsons. Rose couldn't go so Mother asked Amy if she would like to go. Mother would take her over in the cart and see her all fixed up for the night. Amy was happy. I remember how pleased she was, I think it was the thought of so many babies. Johnsons were all "steps and stairs" as they used to say.

Mother gathered up food and set off saying she'd be a bit late getting home, not to worry. I knew what that meant. She'd see Amy and the children fed and ready for bed and Mrs Johnson alright before she left Amy. Young Johnson had said, when asked, that his "Dad is away dam sinking".

It was dark when Mother got home. I heard her tell Rose that Mrs Johnson only needed a rest from babies as she was expecting again. I'd been hunted off to bed because "little pigs have big ears". Kids in those days didn't know much. All I knew about "expecting" was a present, no need to go to bed for that!

Late next day Mother set off in the cart to collect Amy and see to Mrs Johnson. It was very late when they reached home. I was half asleep but Mother was relieved that Mr Johnson was home. Amy seemed extra quiet.

"She's tired, probably fretted," said Mother. "I shouldn't have let her stay."

Amy grew quieter as the weeks went by, not like our lovable girl, she cried a lot. I know now Mother thought her mental condition was getting worse.

It was my job to fill the wood box before I set off on the three mile walk to the slab bush school and since I liked to chase lizards and do a bit of bird nesting on the way, I was at the wood heap early. Queer noises from the other side made me go round and look. There was Amy, retching and crying, crouched like a terrified animal.

I tried to comfort her but she kept saying, "He did awful things to me. He said I'd die if I told anyone. I'm dying Clem."

Like a scared rabbit I dashed away yelling for Mother. If I close my eyes I can still see her apron flying and hear the swish of her skirts as she ran past me to the wood heap. She half carried Amy to the house. I was hunted off to school.

You could hear through the cracks in the slab walls. I heard Dad say he'd "go over and shoot the mongrel". Mother replied "No man of mine will swing for that hound. Anyway, we can't prove anything, Amy being a bit simple."

If little pigs have big ears, mine should be like an elephant's. Months went by. Amy grew bigger and quieter. Mother, Dad and Rose seemed to get old, no more fun in the house.

Then came the night when I thought I'd had a nightmare. Someone was screaming and calling Mother for help. Laying awake, terrified, the piercing screams followed by moans went on and on and I knew it was no nightmare. I'd pulled the blanket over my head,

but gathering courage I peeped out and saw light through the cracks in the wall, so I went into the kitchen.

Rose and Dad were there, Rose crying, Dad just staring. Grannie James came out of Mother's room and beckoned Dad. Next thing I heard him gallop off on the horse. Rose took me back to bed and we cried together because by then I realised that it was our Amy in pain. The screams and moans went on, it seemed, for hours, but slowly they subsided to a whimpering puppy noise.

About daybreak, just before the doctor's buggy drove up, the house became suddenly quiet and Rose left me. I could hear Mother weeping in the kitchen. Amy had died.

They buried her in the little bush cemetery. The baby was buried with her.

Neighbours came from miles around to help and comfort, but when they were gone the house was suddenly silent. Mother was like a walking ghost. I'll never forget her face, set, dry, hard like marble. Dad was suddenly an old man.

As my life went on, it was fading from my memory, pushed to the back of my mind by the present. I couldn't understand why it wasn't the same for Mother and Dad. There was no fun in the house now. Mother worked harder than ever, like a machine, no feeling, no expression. She seemed all hard and dry.

It must have been months after Amy died when the oldest Johnson boy appeared at the back door. The lad was frightened. His father was away, he said, and his mother was "real crook". Would someone come over?

You could see the change in Mother, she came to life in a flash. All her old bustling briskness returned, orders flew, the cart was loaded with food, the bottle of Schnapps well packed for safety. Mother never went on a mercy errand without the bottle of Schnapps. Funny, you never see it now.

Anyway, I went with her. It was a rough trip over bush tracks, Mother smiling again, driving the old horse like a race. Young Johnson and I enjoyed the break-neck speed and thrills.

We arrived to find Mrs Johnson a gibbering wreck and the kids like half-starved, terrified rabbits. Cheerfully Mother threw out orders, bustled about, settled Mrs Johnson with a drop of Schnapps, fed the flock of kids, cleaned up. She put a lump of meat in the huge iron boiler and hung it on the hook in the open fireplace. I covered the meat with water then put in a turnip and potatoes. I know Mother added other things. It smelt good. She had food in iron pots on the hobs to simmer.

When Mother bedded the kids down she wanted me to go to bed "because we're staying until that man comes home, no matter when". I preferred to sit at the table with my head on my arms and listen to the boiler bubbling and the plop it made every so often as the steam built up and lifted the lid.

Goodness knows what time it was when Mr Johnson lurched in. I was half asleep, but remember waking to see him take off his coat. Thinking we'd go home now, I forced myself wide awake. He was staring at Mother who stood in front of the fireplace. Even I, a boy, could feel the tension, sort of shocked silence.

Mother broke it. "Now you're home, Mr Johnson, I'll be off. I've cooked something for tomorrow. Will you help me lift the boiler off the fire?"

He tried to straighten up, as drunks will when they know they're expected to be sober, and moved to the fireplace. Mother removed the boiler lid, as she said, "to make it a bit lighter", and gave him a piece of sugar bag to hold the handle.

To reach the handle and get below the mantle shelf, he had to crouch down with head and shoulders in the fireplace. There was an upward bend in the handle of those boilers to prevent them from sliding on the hooks, so it had to be lifted a couple of inches upwards. I heard Mother say, "I'll lift this end." He definitely held the other side because I saw his grip on it.

The piercing scream lifted me out of the chair and round to the hearth where Mr Johnson was screaming and writhing on the floor, clutching at his groin which his squatting position had made into a basin for the boiling stew. Grovelling in the sticky mess, yelling, cursing, as it continued to spew out on the dirt floor.

His attempts to rise were useless and he fell forward in the slimy, muddy stew. Strange how you remember little things, like a piece of turnip on his moustachios, orange and shiny.

For a woman who could rise to any emergency, Mother was like a statue, just staring. The noise brought Mrs Johnson out of the bedroom, Mother came to life and pushed her back and shut the door. She quietly told me to "ride for your father".

I grabbed the horse, still tethered to the veranda post, and took off with Mr Johnson's screams ringing in my ears.

It was all so sudden, so unexpected, but accidents always are. Believe me, a ride at night through ring-barked country is no pleasure trip, but I reckon I did it in record time.

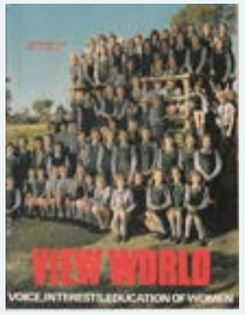
Dad and George took off when I gasped out the story. From what I gathered they put Mr Johnson in the dray and carted him 20 miles to the doctor. Mother couldn't go with Dad and George. She couldn't leave Mrs Johnson and the kids.

Anyway, Mr Johnson died, they didn't have any of the needles and things they have today.

You'd often hear people talk about how good Mother was to the Johnsons in their trouble. She was too; she seemed to come alive again, like she was before Amy died. Mrs Johnson never seemed to be poorly again. She and Mother were close friends until they died, old women.

The Johnsons stayed on their selection because at least they were among friends and could get a feed — no widow's pensions in those days. The boys grew up with us, decent blokes, too.

Strange though, why she didn't ask me to help lift the boiler.



# THE CAREFREE YEARS

**Mrs. M. G. Pickford**
Wellington VIEW Club
1st Prize: Short Story Competition
1970

*Ann sat on her narrow bed, watching the other girls as they flitted, pirouetted and posed in front of the mirror like a flock of huge white butterflies.*

On these special nights ordinary school discipline was relaxed, the only uniformity of clothes being the colour—and suddenly the girls blossomed; slim fashionable shoes enhancing the curves of slender young legs, everyday pigtails coaxed and teased into elegant coiffures.

Glancing down at her own too generously proportioned figure and plump short legs which no fashionable shoes could ever refine, Ann sighed. It was hard to be 16 years old and to know that no amount of primping and fussing before the mirror could make her look anything but what she was: short, frankly fat and bespectacled.

Ann never noticed her one really good feature, her thick brown hair which waved softly about her pensive face.

"Come along, girls, hurry up — you must surely be dressed by this!" The rather flustered face of Miss 'Lake, the English Mistress, appeared at the door. "The buses are just arriving, so do come along — we must be there to greet our guests."

Scolding and exhorting, she shooed the girls before her along the corridor and down the winding staircase.

"I do assure you the girls are not kept in isolation," the Headmistress always told parents who entrusted their daughters to her care. "On the contrary, we firmly believe that the opposite sexes should be allowed to have normal social contact. and learn the social graces in each others' company. We enjoy visits from the boys of our neighbouring school twice each term for a dance. And this, we feel, helps the girls enormously to achieve poise and self-confidence."

And so they waited now in a twittering group at the foot of the steps, as the boys alighted from the buses, the girls who had special friends pushing forward to greet them.

"And how are you feeling cherub?" a gay voice at her ear made Ann start. "Feeling all glamorous and gorgeous? Is to-night going to be the big night?"

"What big night?" Ann asked, bewildered.

"Why, the big night you finally get yourself a boyfriend," Beverley laughed. "It's about time, isn't it?"

Ann flushed and moved thankfully away as the forward-surging mass of bodies pushed against them into the long dining-room, which looked oddly bare with the tables removed and the chairs shoved back against the wall, a few of the older and bolder mingling here and there in the centre of the room.

The music, provided by a trio of drums, piano and trumpet, commenced with a bright, quick, foot-tapping beat, and Anne experienced the all-too-familiar feeling of dread clutch at her insides.

A brave smile fixed on her face, she watched as the boys, in bashful ones and twos, then in a mob, slid across the waxed floor to choose their partners. As the crowd of dancers pushed, pulled and jostled each other happily around the room, Ann saw, miserably, that only three or four others like herself were left sitting in terrible isolation along the wall.

She braced herself for the humiliation which inevitably followed. Miss Lake, a trio of dejected looking boys behind her, was bearing down on those unfortunate wallflowers with gay implacability.

"Come along, girls," she chided archly. "Up you get — here are these handsome young fellows just dying to dance with you."

She paused in front of Ann, a malicious smile curving her mouth as she pulled one of the boys forward. "You two should be soul-mates," she giggled as she moved on. "You're just made for each other!"

Ann raised her eyes to the boy in front of her, expecting to meet, as usual, the 'cornered fox' look, or, even worse, total rejection. Instead, gazing back at her steadily from behind horn-rimmed glasses, she saw what could have been her twin. He was short, chubby and serious. For a moment they stared at each other, then he spoke gravely. "Would you mind having this dance with me?"

Ann rose wordlessly and his hand timidly took hers, tentatively touched her waist, as they moved forward, stumbling a little.

For a while they danced in silence. adjusting to each other's steps. Ann found that they moved together quite well, and allowed herself to relax a little, drawing a deep breath. She glanced shyly at him, and this time, as he met her eyes, he smiled.

"I'm John," he said simply.

"I'm Ann," she responded.

"Ann," he repeated. "That's a pretty name. It's my mother's name, too."

"Oh," she said faintly. She tried desperately to think of something interesting to say.

"Er—do you live near here?" she ventured at last.

"No." He told her the name of a remote country town. "My Dad owns a property there."

"Oh." She tried to picture him riding behind a mob of sheep, but her imagination failed to see his plump little body astride a horse. She caught a fragment of conversation as Bev danced past with a tall, ruggedly good-looking youth — something about football. Here was a topic of conversation.

"Er—do you play football?"

There was a long pause, and looking at him again, she could have bitten her tongue. How could this bespectacled fat boy ever aspire to football?

"No, I'm afraid not," he answered at last, apologetically.

The music ended abruptly, and he took her arm to walk her to her seat.

"Thank you very much. I enjoyed that," he told her, and Ann, smiling. Was about to reply when a shriek of laughter assailed them. Bev, her arm tucked through that of her football playing friend, was doubled over in mirth.

"Oh, how gorgeous!" she gasped. "Tweedledum and Tweedledee! Two dear little kempie dolls! Oh, I thought I was seeing double for a minute!" She gave way to laughter again, and the crowd around her smiled appreciatively. John disappeared into the throng of people and Ann shrunk inwardly.

"Why?" she wondered silently.

"Why must they spoil things for us?"

The music started again, this time a slow fox-trot, and Ann waited unexpectantly while most of the others moved off with their partners.

Suddenly her downcast eyes saw a pair of sturdy black shoes halt squarely in front of herself. Raising her eyes incredulously she saw John, a hesitant smile on his face.

"Would you mind dancing with me again?" he stammered and she stood up thankfully. This time, Miss Lake wouldn't have to find her a partner.

They circled the floor, this time feeling more at ease in each other's company. Hesitantly at first they began to talk. He told her something of his life at home, and she told him a little of hers.

They discovered a mutual love of books and reading.

"I've heard that short-sighted people always love to read," she remarked, able for the first time to mention her handicap easily.

"Then it must be true," John agreed. "We're two cases to prove it."

They were smiling as the music stopped and in the interval which followed John didn't return immediately to the boys' side of the room, but lingered talking.

When the next dance began, he claimed her as his partner at once. Ann, flattered but still unable to believe that someone could actually want to dance with her, at last voiced her feelings.

"John – er – you don't have to dance with me, you know."

He glanced at her surprised, and she rushed on. "I mean, just because Miss Lake brought you — um — there must be other girls you'd rather dance with?"

Her voice trailed off uncertainly, and John, smiling, tightened his grip on her hand.

"But there aren't any other girls I'd rather dance with," he told her, his steady blue eyes fixed on hers. "I know I don't have to. but I like dancing with you. I feel at ease with you. You — you're the nicest girl I ever met." He stumbled a little over the words.

"I am?" Ann breathed, unbelieving. "But there are lots of much prettier girls than I —"

"You look pretty to me," John said softly. "And you have truly beautiful hair."

Ann moved in a daze. She couldn't believe that anyone would think of her like this. Stealing a glance at John she reflected that really, he was a very nice boy. His eyes were so clear and blue, and his voice so low and deep. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, next time the boys visited, she had someone to meet like the others?

When the music ended, they parted with a smile, silently acknowledging that they'd have the next dance together, also.

Ann, dreaming, was brought back to reality when she heard her name mentioned by the tittering group in front of her.

"Ann and her beau, aren't they screams?" giggled Yvonne. "Dancing around so solemnly, like little twin dumplings."

"Both peering out from behind their glasses," gasped another.

Heavens wouldn't it be funny if he tried to kiss her good-night! Their glasses would meet first — crash, smash, bang!"

The group, uncaring of whether or not she heard, convulsed with laughter, then Bev's voice, loud and solemn, rose above the mirth.

"No, but seriously, girls — it's undignified, isn't it? I mean, if it were me, I'd rather sit out every dance with my self-respect than be humiliated by dancing with a squirt like that!"

As the music started again, she hushed the others into silence.

"Shh . . . here he comes again. The great Heart-Throb himself."

Ann, stunned and shamed, heard this last remark with horror. He mustn't come back now, so that they could be laughed at again.

"Go away—go away," she begged wordlessly. "Don't come near me — please don't!"

But she could see him plodding confidently across the floor, a smile on his lips.

She dropped her head, fixed her eyes on the floor, hoping somehow, he wouldn't see her, but the shiny black shoes stopped in front of her, his voice spoke her name.

"Ann? We're having this dance, aren't we?"

Sick, humiliated and helpless, she raised her head and looked at him. He was fat, ugly and bespectacled, and suddenly she hated him for it.

"No!" she uttered chokingly. "No, I'm not having this dance with you – go away. Just because I'm still at school I don't have to dance with you if I don't want to. I'm sick of dancing with you! Go away!"

His face, mouth hanging slightly open, looked at her with disbelief, horror and finally, acceptance. It was the acceptance which knifed Ann like a physical pain in the chest. He turned awkwardly and blundered across the room, bumping into dancers as he fled.

Ann turned around for the group of girls whose words had caused her outburst. Now they would acknowledge that she had dignity and self-respect!

But they were all gone, they'd joined the dancers on the floor, no longer interested, not really caring about her at all. Alone, in hideous isolation, she sat against the wall.

Miss Lake, she saw, was heading her way with a couple of miserable looking boys in tow, and, unable to bear any more, Ann rose and fled for the sanctuary of the bathroom.

As she neared the door, she saw John with awful clarity. He was sitting erect, his unseeing eyes staring straight ahead, on his face an expression of utter despair that Ann recognised, for she felt it on her own face.

She gazed hauntedly at her own reflection, mirrored on the bathroom wall.

"What have I done!" she whispered, her lips moving. "How could I have done that to John, the only person who was kind to me . . . the one who said I was the nicest girl he'd ever met! Why? Why did I ever say those things?"

She bowed her head, and the slow, agonised tears splashed down onto her hand.

# THE MIRROR

**Irene Mannering**
Central VIEW Club

***The old shop had stood in the village for as long as the villagers could remember. There was a tradition that the shop stood on the same site as an old Roman temple and it was believed that the walls of the shop contained stones which had belonged to a temple dedicated to the god Mithras.***

Whatever the truth the stones were certainly old and had weathered over the centuries to a soft silvery gray.

Old Harry, the owner, was always to be found in the front room of the little shop, which was also his home. He sat in an old rocking chair that had served his father and his grandfather and probably his grandfather's father before him. No matter what time of day it was, old Harry seemed to be sleepily rocking the hours away in his old chair. No-one knew how old he was. Some of the villagers had known him all their lives and they were now in their 70s and 80s.

The tiny shop nestled under the shadow of the old Norman church, its bottle glass windows covered in dust, inside the shop was stocked with old books, ornaments, stuffed animals, broken bits of jewellery and the usual hodgepodge of artefacts found in many a second-hand shop. The villagers called it junk.

Old Harry would smile and say: 'Ah! There's many an old treasure for them's who like to look for it."

The children loved to visit Harry and he would give them books to read of dragons, princesses and magic. He would let them dress up in the old clothes from the tin trunks scattered around the floor and many a young girl would wind beads around her neck and pretend to be a princess. The young village lads would prance about with the rusty swords in their dreams defending castles of yesteryear.

One day a young couple drove up to the village in their fast sleek car looking for a place to stop to buy a cool drink and to rest for a while before proceeding on their journey.

It was a hot and dreamy sort of day, the tiny village seemingly slumbering in the hot sunshine. She wandered along cobblestone streets gazing at the picturesque shop windows and the tiny thatched cottages with their flower-bedecked windows. Suddenly she stopped and peered into the windows of Old Harry's shop. Whether it was a shaft of sunlight penetrating the dusty windows, she was never able to say, but suddenly her eye was attracted to something which sparkled in the corner of the window.

The doorbell jangled as she entered into the dark and cool interior of the shop. She called out: 'is anyone here?"

Old Harry's quiet voice seemed to appear out of nowhere and through the gloom she was able to make out a little gnome of a man coming toward her. He was dressed in dark brown corduroy trousers tied beneath the knees with string. An old tartan shirt and sandals completed his attire.

The girl smiled when she saw his kindly old face with twinkling blue eyes peering up at her.

"I say", she said, "any chance of looking at the small basket of things in the corner of the window?'

Old Harry |just looked at her and then shuffled over to the window. He seemed to know exactly what had attracted the girl to that particular basket and he lifted out a small hand mirror. It wasn't made of glass but of some sort of metal blackened with age and carved around the edges with strange animals and symbols.

He silently handed it to the girl, who took it from his hand and lifted it to her face and as she did so the mirror twitched in her hand, the animals and carvings seemed to move and writhe and then to glow. She shook her head: it was probably the poor light in the shop playing tricks on her eyes. Suddenly she dropped the mirror to the floor.

"It burns", she whispered. "It's horrible. I don't like it. Take it away."

Old Harry bent and picked the mirror off the floor. He gazed at the girl and softly said to her: "Look in the mirror. What do you see?"

The girl, her face paling as if by fear glanced in the mirror and then putting her hands in front of her face whispered as if to herself. "It can't be me. I'm not like that."

She pushed the mirror away, her hands shaking. Harry silently replaced the mirror in the window as the girl, pale and trembling, hurried from the shop.

The young man sauntered over to meet her and noticing her pale face and trembling hands asked her what was wrong.

She tried to explain about the mirror but he handed her a bottle of lemonade and told her to pull herself together and to "hurry up, you know we are dining with Roger and Valerie this evening. Roger is putting me on to a good thing and I know I can make money out of his idea. For goodness sake, old girl, what are you wasting your time in this god-forsaken place for?"

She told him she had just been looking in the old shop window; she didn't tell him what she had seen in the mirror. Surely she had been mistaken? She couldn't be that woman, living in a grand home, but alone, friendless, her face greedy and grasping.

She did not love the young man, but he had money, lots of it. She had always wanted to be rich: surely happiness would follow? The mirror had told her what her life would be if she married the young man and she was frightened. She shook her head as if to shake away the memory of what she had seen, but the picture stayed to haunt her for many months to come.

What if it were true? What if she became the woman in the mirror? The young man was ambitious, he was not caring, but — he had money, lots of it.

For many a month she was troubled — it was up to her to decide her fate.

Three years passed. Old Harry was still sitting in his rocking chair when the shop bell tinkled, waking him from his dream. He sat up in the chair, a little smile wrinkling his face: it was the very young lady who had called on him a few years ago. She was older and prettier, Harry thought.

She smiled at Old Harry, saying: "Do you remember me? I came into your shop some years ago and you showed me an old mirror. Do you still have it?"

He shuffled over to the window and took out the blackened mirror and handed it to her. Her hands were trembling as she put out her hand to take the mirror. Slowly she put it up to her face and looked into its dark surface.

She lifted her eyes to Harry's face and smiled and then laughed softly. Old Harry laughed with her. The mirror shimmered and glowed. The little animals and cherubs engraved round the mirror now seemed friendly and smiling.

The young girl said to Old Harry: "Look, look into the mirror: do you see?"

She handed the mirror back to Old Harry and ran gaily into the street calling to a young man sitting on his motor bike.

"Remember the old mirror I told you

about'? It's still here; come quickly."

The young man got off his motor bike and entered the shop. Harry smiled at him, noting it was a different man to the last time.

He picked up the mirror and said ruefully To Old Harry: "You know what women are: They have fancies." He stared and stared in the mirror, which remained dark and lifeless in his hand. "I can't see a thing: you are imaging things,"

"Look again, oh, do look again," pleaded the young woman. "Can't you see? I can see us when we are older and we have three young children, two boys and a girl and we are so happy."

"I can't see anything," insisted the young man. "It's just an old mirror. Come along now. We have a long way to go. We should leave now before it gets too dark."

They left the shop and as they went out of the door the young woman turned and said a silent "thank you" to Old Harry. They knew she had heeded the warning of the mirror.

Old Harry put the mirror gently back into the basket in the corner of the shop window and returned to his rocking chair and closed his eyes as the shop returned to its usual silence.







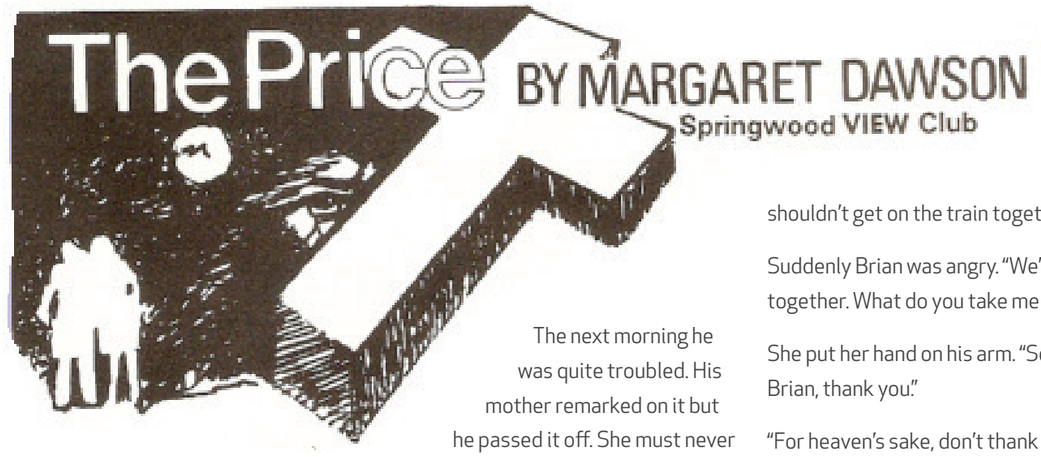
The phone rang in the comfortable, tastefully furnished room. Mrs Linden came out of the kitchen wiping her hands on a cloth. She picked up the receiver and in a well-modulated voice that fitted the groomed appearance, said, "Janet Linden speaking".

**Margaret Dawson**
Springwood VIEW Club

# THE PRICE

# The Price

BY MARGARET DAWSON
Springwood VIEW Club



"Hello Mrs Linden. May I speak to Brian please? It's Jenny."

"Yes Jenny, I'll fetch him dear. How are you?"

"I'm fine thanks." The young voice sounded strained.

Mrs Linden smiled, young people were always dramatizing. At 17, Jenny was no exception.

"Brian," she called, "Jenny's on the phone."

"I'm coming." Brian left his room and walked down the hall.

Almost 20, he was a tall, dark-haired, good looking boy.

He was Janet's adored only son. For the past two years he had worked in a bank in the neighbouring town, about 20 miles away. He had known Jenny since high school. Now she was completing her last year. An intelligent, ambitious girl, she hoped to go to university.

He picked up the phone.

"Hi Jenny."

"Brian," her voice was urgent, "I've got to see you.

Tonight, it can't wait."

"We have a date on Saturday, a couple of days away," he laughed. "Can't you wait

to see me?"

"Brian, please don't laugh."

Suddenly he felt cold. "What is it? What's . . . " His mother walked into the room and not wanting her to know there was anything wrong, he added, "Can't you make it on Saturday?"

"I can't tell you on the phone, I must see youtonight – at the coffee shop in half an hour."

"I'll see if I can borrow the car. I don't think Dad is using it." He put the phone down slowly. Jenny wasn't given to hysterical scenes. She'd always been a calm sort of a girl. Fun to be with. A cold finger of fear touched him.

His father needed the car but told Brian he would drop him at the church near the coffee shop.

As he was leaving the house his mother inquired, "Is everything all right dear?"

"Sure," he replied. "She probably needs some help with one of the subjects for her exam. Bye Mum."

When he got out of the car he ran to the High Street.

He and Jenny usually met outside the coffee shop. She was there waiting, a slim pretty girl with red-gold hair. When she turned he could see she was very pale and strained.

"Brian!" She ran towards him and he put his arms around her.

"It's all right Jen. it's all right. What is it? What's wrong?"

"We can't talk here," she replied. "We'll go to the park – there shouldn't be anyone there. I must talk to you alone." She was trembling.

He put his arm protectively around her as they walked towards the park. It was deserted at this hour. The scent of jasmine filled the air as they sat down on a bench and faced each other. He took her hands in his. "Now Jen, what is it?"

"Brian, oh Brian, I'm going to have a baby." She burst into wild crying.

"Don't cry Jenny, don't cry." He held her tightly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I had a test done. I didn't want to worry you until I was sure."

"You should have told me You shouldn't have worried about it alone. It will be all right. We'll get married."

She pulled away from him

"No, we're too young. You have years yet before you finish your accountancy course and I want to go to uni. I don't want a baby." She burst into fresh tears. "Why did we ever go to the beach that night?" She looked at him as if she hated him.

Brian paled. "But Jen, it was only once. You weren't just any girl, I love you. I thought you loved me."

Their lovemaking that night had seemed natural and right A warm night, the sand, waves curling softly on the shore, Jenny being in his arms.

When his gentle kisses had become more urgent, she had not stopped him. She had put her arms around him and pressed herself closer to him.

Now she was looking at him as if she hated him.

Suddenly she threw herself into his arms. "I didn't mean that. I do love you. I do. But I'm so frightened. Brian, what will we do? What will our parents say? How shall we ever face them?"

"We'll do whatever you want Jen."

She sat quite still. "I want an abortion." Her voice was flat, without expression.

He felt sick. "An abortion! isn't that dangerous? I don't want anything to happen to you."

"I want an abortion," she repeated. "Brian, can you find out where I can go? I don't want to ask Dr Fisher; he might tell my mother. No one is to know. Can you find out how much it will cost?"

She swallowed. "Have you got any money?"

He put his head in his hands, then looked at her. "Oh Jen," his voice was miserable. "Isn't there some other way?"

"What other way?" She seemed old, remote. "Can you find out tomorrow? Let's get it over with." She seemed quite calm, only the pallor of her face betraying the strain she was under. She would not think of this thing in her body as a baby, a potential human being.

Brian sighed, "All right, I'll find out at tech. tomorrow. One of the fellows might know." He took her in his arms, "I wish this hadn't happened Jen."

She smiled shakily. "When it's all over, we'll forget it." But both of them knew that something good and innocent had gone forever.

The next morning he was quite troubled. His mother remarked on it but he passed it off. She must never know the truth.

When he asked one of the fellows at the college if he knew where a girl could get an abortion he got a knowing look. "Girlfriend get herself knocked up then?"

Brian flushed. "No. it's for a friend." He could see he wasn't believed but he got the phone number and address he wanted, and the cash.

When he met Jenny he gave her the address and the money. She looked so young and defenceless he wanted to persuade her not to go through with it, but kept silent knowing it would be no good.

"I'll ring tomorrow and make an appointment." Jenny was like someone in a trance, as if it was all happening to someone else.

"I'll come to the city with you," Brian said. "I wish I could borrow Dad's car but he'll need it for work." He longed to put his arms around her and comfort her but he knew she would only freeze and move away. He could understand how she felt but bitterly regretted it.

"I'd like you to come with me. We'll have to think of some excuse for going. They mustn't know. Perhaps we shouldn't get on the train together."

Suddenly Brian was angry. "We'll go together. What do you take me for?"

She put her hand on his arm. "Sorry Brian, thank you."

"For heaven's sake, don't thank me." He was becoming as touchy as she was.

The following evening they met in the park. As Brian sat waiting for Jenny he felt he would hate the smell of jasmine forever. He heard her footsteps on the path. She sat down beside him and without preamble said, "It's all arranged. Friday at 11 o'clock. "

She sounded determined but when he took her hand the tears ran unchecked down her face. "Jen, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," Brian said miserably.

They got off the train in the city at 10.30. In the train they had sat silently holding hands. It was like some horrible nightmare.

"We'll get a taxi." Brian led the way to the rank and gave the driver the address.

The taxi stopped in front of a tall grey building. While Brian paid the fare, Jenny stood looking up at the building.

She turned to him. "I'll go up by myself. Wait here for me."

He nodded, unable to reply. Jenny disappeared into the greyness. Restlessly he walked up and down. She had to be all right.

He was greatly relieved to see her

come out of the building and rushed to her. "Are you all right?"

"I'm all right," She was pale but composed.

"Come on," he took her arm, "we 'll go and have a coffee. There should be a cafe nearby."

Soon they were seated at a corner table. Brian ordered two cups of coffee and placed one before her. She put both hands around the cup and drank it.

Suddenly the cup crashed to the table. She bent over clutching her stomach.

Brian jumped up. "What is it?" His voice was alarmed. She was deathly white and

bent over the table.

"I'm bleeding." Her voice was frightened, "Brian, help me."

He ran around the table to her. She got to her feet. To his horror there was a pool of blood on the chair. She collapsed back on to the chair.

He ran to the counter. "For God's sake, get an ambulance quickly."

The man behind the counter looked at Jenny and without a word picked up the phone.

The ambulance men were gentle with her. One looked at Brian, "What happened?"

"She's had an abortion."

The words were wrung from him. The attendant nodded, put Jenny on a stretcher and drove quickly to the hospital.

Brian sat by Jenny's side. He felt numb; this couldn't be happening, not to him and Jenny.

At the hospital Jenny was taken from his sight. He was asked to sit and wait. The sister was brisk, "Name of patient, age, what exactly has happened?"

Numbly he answered her questions. "Please," he begged, "how is she'? Will she be all right?"

"Doctor will see you as soon as he's examined the patient. Just wait please." He nodded and sat down again, his head in his hands.

The footsteps stopped in front of him. He noted the well-polished brown shoes, the creased trousers, and, as his gaze travelled upwards, the kind face above the white coat.

"How is she?" His voice was just a whisper.

"I'm afraid we couldn't save her. . . "

"No!" Brian leaped to his feet. "No, she's not dead, she's not. She can't be. Where is she?" Wildly he looked around. "I want to see

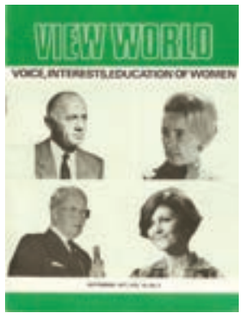
her."

The doctor took his arm. "I'm sorry, there was a haemorrhage . . . "

Brian thrust him aside and ran down a corridor, out into the street. She wasn't dead, not Jenny, not his girl. He thought of her, laughing in the sun, running towards him, splashing water over him in the sea. She was so alive.

"No, no." He ran on in the busy street bumping into people, not seeing them. He stared down at the lonely years ahead.

"Oh Jenny," he cried. "Jenny. Oh my God."






# The Singing Woman

VIEW World December 1988

**Dorothy Dowd**
Springwood V.I.E.W. Club
1st Prize Short Story Competition

The shot rang out, loud and clear, accompanied by the first tentative wails of a newborn child. The magpies, stilled momentarily, took up once more their chorus to the coming dawn.

Mary Fraser, sleeping fitfully on the bank of the Lachlan, awakened to the gunshot and realised that the surveyor's wife had had her child. Mary had slept little as she too awaited the birth of her baby. She heard her husband calling across the river to the surveyor Noble who had fired the shot and then his footsteps coming closer to her.

"They have a son" Daniel told her, his dour Lowlands voice telling her more than that. It told her that he. too, would like a son and hoped for a boy this time.

"The woman won't be long, Mary. now don't fret so". He started making up the fire and getting out the mugs for tea.

Daniel was an itinerant trader on the goldfields. He sold his goods from the back of a covered wagon. He carried all sorts of goods; tea. flour, salt and other basics; clothing and piece goods; miners' tools and other necessities. Being thrifty he planned to open a store on the new gold-fields around Bathurst. They had left Ballarat in good time for Mary's confinement at Bathurst, but he heard of a consignment of tea for sale in Forbes and could not resist the deal. Tea was a scarce commodity in the colony and it was going at a fair price. He could make a good profit.

Daniel has explained all this to Mary, privately hoping they would reach a township before Mary went into labour. Mary, too, hoped they would not be on the road when the child was due. Towards dusk the previous evening when they saw the lights of the surveyor's camp they thought they had arrived at a settlement. By chance the surveyor's wife was expecting her first child and it was good fortune that the surveyor, John Noble, had asked at an aboriginal camp up river if they had a midwife. There was one in the camp and Noble and Daniel Fraser made a deal. The midwife would attend both women and when the first child was safely delivered the father would fire a shot into the air.

**"They have a son," Daniel told her**

Then the woman would go on to help the delivery of the second baby.

The men shook hands on the deal and sent off a black lad to tell the woman to come, while Mrs Noble and Mary smiled at each other, talked about the heat, the flies and their longing for their ordeals to be over. They said good-bye when the black woman had come and Daniel and Mary pitched a temporary camp on higher ground across the river. As they forded the river bed Daniel told the children how the aborigines travelled along the shallow river in boats made out of gum trees, hollowed out with stones sharpened for the purpose.

Lying on the river bank, grass tussocks boring into her tender flesh, Mary thought about the incredibility of her presence on the bank of this muddy river awaiting the birth of her fourth child. How different from the life she envisaged as a young girl in Ireland. The terror of the potato famine when the only survivors of her family were herself and an elder brother who emigrated to Australia under the harsh bounty system. Her meeting with Daniel who had taken her into his house as a housekeeper and eventually married her. Strange, too, this joining of a young Irish girl and the strict, silent Scotsman.

Mary had hated leaving the security of their little home in Bendigo for the unknown dangers of the Australian outback.

The long trek north in the hot summer was an ordeal in her advanced state of pregnancy.

**"She began to cry passionately and hopelessly"**

And it was embarrassing for her, a modest Irish woman to be the focus of the hungry eyes of the bushmen standing around grog shanties along the track, and in the small townships they passed through. She begged Daniel to let her drive the mules but he refused, telling her they were too mettlesome for her to handle. Mary longed for the return of the thinness and suppleness of her body and to be rid of the heat and flies and the smell of dust in the air.

While Daniel made the fire and went down to the river for water Mary lifted herself from the ground and went across to the wagon to wake the three little girls. Suddenly she became engulfed in pain. She walked heavily across to the river bank to tell Daniel, stifling the spasms that were coming more quickly now.

Wrapping herself in a blanket she lay on the river bank and suddenly all the pent-up frustration of the dreadful journey were released, and she began to cry passionately and hopelessly. She cried for her lost youth, her homeland, the surveyor's wife with her delicate frightened face. She thought of her three daughters and their unknown future.

Her tears fell for the lost Daniel once so whimsical and gentle – not the Daniel with an eye for the main chance who was acquiring a fondness for the golden nuggets he was beginning to accumulate. But most bitterly of all she cried at the thought of the black woman delivering her child – touching her with those black hands. The very idea terrified her and racked her whole being until her sobbing became a lament for women everywhere in travail.

Daniel came towards her followed by the tall large woman. Mary began to scream and the children ran to her only to be turned away by Daniel in a harsh high voice filled with anger.

All at once Mary was lifted from the ground and carried into the tent. Two black arms were holding her against a voluminous bosom and she was being cradled gently and soothingly. She laid in the bunk as the woman began to prepare her for the birth, massaging her to ease her pain. Daniel appeared with a mug of tea but Mary was conscious of little but the sweltering heat and the huge gentle woman with her crooning voice.

Now and then Daniel came by with hot water and mugs of tea and she was aware of the dismayed faces of the three girls peering around the side of the tent. All through her labour the woman sang a kind of crooning lullaby.

When the familiar sense of imminent birth came to Mary the voice became louder and louder. Pain and sweat intensified. The woman's gentle touch communicated her sympathy. The baby was coming now, surely and quickly and the woman sang joyfully. Abruptly the cry of the newborn child mingled with the woman's voice, both loud and strong.

It was all over now. Mary lay drowsing – a new daughter in her arms, the other children close by with Daniel. Night was falling and the reflections on the river beginning to fade.

**"The huge gentle woman with her crooning voice"**

And from upstream they could hear the crooning voice of the black midwife as she paddled her boat to her home.

# THE VISITOR

**Miss Samantha Hennessey filled the brown teapot and set it on the stove to draw. A buttered scone waited on a plate on the table and the small kitchen had an inviting warmth, pleasant on a winter's day in the mountains.**

Samantha moved restlessly around the room for the few minutes necessary for the tea to reach its full flavour then picked up the pot and set it down beside her cup. She sat in the rocker and tried to relax but the problem that occupied her thoughts day and night added bitterness to the tea and took the flavour from the scone.

Around the old house, the bush pressed in, stopped from taking over the garden only by Samantha's spasmodic efforts at clearing and burning off. However, she was no gardener and the plants she hopefully set in place of the pulled-out scrub did not flourish. This was a source of disappointment but she did not let it depress her. Some people had green fingers and some did not — she was one of the unlucky ones.

The three years since her retirement from a Sydney solicitor's office and arrival in Springwood had passed quietly. At first she had felt lost in the silence of the mountains — the lack of amenities in the weatherboard cottage had been a trial. But, as the months passed, she found herself sinking into the atmosphere and ceasing to miss communication with city dwellers.

But now the whole situation had changed. Four months ago — Samantha had circled the date on the kitchen calendar — sounds of men's voices and the whine of a chain saw had come down the unmade road running past her property.

VIEW World March 1976

**Marjorie Adams**
Springwood VIEW Club


She had gone to investigate and arrived just in time to see a tall gum crash to the ground. Horrified, she had stared at the notice nailed to a tree. In plain black letters it advised that P.S. Smithson, of Buckley Street, Lawson was building a house on this block.

She had hurried home and, in great distress, sat on the verandah looking at the bush on the other side of the road. Her mind's eye could see it cut down, replaced by a row of horrible fibro houses full of noisy children, smelly cars and barking dogs.

Since then Samantha had left the house only to occasionally escape through the back gate and along the overgrown path which wound sharply down the side of the gully to a tiny creek. Here she would sit brooding, wondering what she would do when, as she thought, hell was let loose in her road.

The short hours of winter daylight faded and darkness gradually blotted out the mmountains. The rain which had held off for the past hour, began to fall heavily.

Samantha had finished her tea and scone when a sudden sound at the back door made her start nervously. Holding her breath, she listened intently until it was repeated ... then she relaxed. It was only the miaow of a cat.

She dismissed the sound and bestirred herself to put wood on the dying fire. But the miaow was repeated, this time accompanied by the scratching of sharp claws on the back door. Bother the thing, thought Samantha. She would have to chase it away otherwise it would spoil the new blue paint she had applied only a week before.

Opening the door a little she made shooing noises into the darkness. Suddenly, something shot past her legs into the kitchen. Shutting the door to the driving rain, she looked with annoyance at the intruder crouched under the table.

Such a miserable small kitten she had never seen. Its black fur stuck together in points and it shivered uncontrollably. "Why, you poor little thing, you've been out in the rain for hours by the look of you." She bent down, picked up the struggling kitten and returned to the rocker.

"I'm not going to hurt you. Ouch," a sharp claw sank into her finger, "that's not very nice considering I'm only trying to help. Here, keep still while I get you dry." She dragged a towel from the rail by the sink and wrapped it around the soaked little body.

The kitten ceased to struggle and allowed itself to be dried. "That's better. Now, I'll put you down by the stove and get you something to drink". The small animal shook itself uncertainly, but the cold had stiffened its legs and it collapsed into a furry heap.

"What a miserable object you are." Samantha's words were callous but she looked kindly at her self-invited guest. "I wonder where you came from? You're rather smart with that dicky under your chin and now you're drying off your coat looks nice and thick."

On her walks she often saw cats which had been let loose in the bush by people who no longer wanted them. But they were wild and untouchable — this kitten obviously belonged to someone who cared. The warmth gradually loosened the small body and the kitten began to lick its fur vigorously and show other signs that it was far from down and out.

Samantha poured some milk into a saucer and set it on the hearth rug. After sniffing it suspiciously, the visitor's tiny pink tongue lapped it up hungrily. You're a cool customer, Samantha laughed as, milk finished, the kitten folded his front paws under his chest and went to sleep. "Well, you can stay here until I decide what to do with you."

Suddenly she realised that she was hungry, something which had not happened to her for quite a while. Somehow her appetite had disappeared during the worry about the building up the road. She fried two eggs and some cold potatoes, added a tomato, two slices of toast and made a good meal.

Bedtime came and, apart from a short interlude of face washing after which he went back to sleep, Blacky, as she had decided to call the kitten, showed no signs of wanting to depart. Samantha, who could not bring herself to put any animal out on such a night, went to bed leaving Blacky asleep on

the mat. She was determined to get rid of him next morning.

Settling herself comfortably in the warm bed, she turned out the light and was on the verge of sleep when a small body jumped on the bed and snuggled down beside her.

"Oh, no you don't." She stretched her hand to push the intruder on to the floor. Instead, when her fingers touched the warm fur, they gently patted the small head. Purring loudly Blacky curled up in the crook of her arm and slept.

Samantha lay quite still, listening to the rain on the roof. Unexpectedly, the presence of the soft little body was a comfort. Perhaps she had been lonely without knowing it? Lonely, not for other human beings (they cut down the trees and destroyed the bush), but for a cat or dog — they did no harm.

Morning came with a clear sky and bright winter sunshine. Samantha and Blacky rose and went into the kitchen for breakfast. A knock at the front door interrupted the preparations. Opening it, Samantha saw two children — a boy of about 10 and a small, tearful girl.

"Yes?" Samantha's voice was cold.

"Sorry to trouble you, but my sister's lost her kitten and we wondered if you'd seen it."

With a sense of depression, Samantha replied stiffly. "A cat came here last night, very wet and miserable. People who have animals should look after them."

Ignoring this homily, the small girl gave a joyful scream. "Look Peter! It's Puddles and he's all right." She pushed past Samantha and ran to where the kitten was sitting regarding the group with calm, yellow eyes.

The boy was apologetic. "You see, miss, the cat was frightened by a dog yesterday and disappeared into the bush and we've been looking for it. It's Jenny's pet but coming up here to live has scared it. We're going to live in the new house down the road."

It was just as she had feared, thought Samantha. Children, dogs and cats. But one of the cats was Blacky — she refused to call him Puddles.

Jenny gathered the kitten into her arms, where he rested peacefully, looking at Samantha with what she was sure was a friendly grin.

She said sharply, "Perhaps you could ask your mother where I could get a kitten just like this one. Good for catching mice," she finished lamely.

"You could come and see Mum, she'll tell you." The boy spoke awkwardly. "She'll be glad to see you 'cause she said she was afraid there would be no neighbours so far out."

Samantha nodded not wanting to show her eagerness and closed the door after the children. Well mannered, the boy, and the little girl was a pretty child. What a silly name to call a cat. Well, her own would be black, too, but with a more civilised name. Jet — no, that was too short. Midnight — no, that wouldn't do either.

Samantha was humming as she walked back to the kitchen and her delayed breakfast.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Logos 1980's



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voice, interests and
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