THE WHITE GARDEN

CARMEL BIRD

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Innocence is not to be trusted.

Graham Greene in *The Other Man*
interviews with Marie-Françoise Allain

Accept no imitations.

Meditations on the Life and Work of Thomas à Kempis
Carillo Mean

Patience obtains everything.

Saint Teresa of Avila

The White Garden was written during a two-year Fellowship from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. I am grateful to the Board for its support, and also to Arts Victoria for a travel grant that enabled me to visit the White Garden at Sissinghurst.

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THE ELEPHANT THOUGHTS OF DOCTOR AMBROSE GODDARD

I have always, for as long as I can recall, identified myself with the elephant. This is not something I readily admit because in my profession friends and colleagues are only too ready to leap in with an analysis, to place a facile interpretation on this most intimate, personal and colourful of facts. You will occasionally find me throwing people off the scent (supposing they are *on* the scent) by making reference in a light-hearted way to 'a herd of elephants' or to the fact that the elephant never forgets.

Certain African tribes believe that after death the chief of the tribe becomes an elephant matriarch, respected and honoured, and an ally when members of the tribe are hunting elephants. As I feel myself falling asleep at night I experience myself as the elephant matriarch, appearing in silence from a swirling mist, roaming hugely among thick greenery and large, colourful flowers, and then I drift back into the mist, fade, and, with soft lilac cloud-forms drawn across my eyes, I sleep. The feeling is profound and satisfying to me, and I have all my life sought to understand it. It is an element of the beauty of sleep itself, and is perhaps partly what has brought me to study the function of sleep in the life of the mind, the health of the mind, and to apply the science of what I have learned of sleep to my patients.

It was with fear and dread that I learned, when I was in my early teens, of John Merrick, the so-called Elephant Man. For a time my own elephant feelings had to be suppressed as I felt myself in danger of succumbing to the disease from which Merrick suffered. Consequently, my sleep was, for some months — it could have been a year, I'm not too sure — severely disturbed. Such are the fears that children suffer, unspoken. How could I, a healthy Australian boy, mad about cricket and football and science and even Shakespeare, how could I confide in anyone the reasons for my insomnia?

I recall my mother decided I had toothache — strange the

solutions we find to each other's problems — and I was always at the dentist. This was in the days before the elegant anaesthetics of recent years. Anything Mr Hudson did to me was painful in the extreme and only served to increase my nervousness and sleeplessness.

I lived in horror of the dentist, and I found it not too difficult to connect the thought of the tusks of an elephant with my own fairly respectable teeth. If I could remember dreams (and I can't, thank god) I would probably be able to recount wonderful tales of my tusks and my trunk and the colonies of vermin that live in the folds of my magnificent dream-elephant skin.

What really matters is that my *elephant consciousness* is always present so that I know I command great power and respect in the world in which I work. It's better than being a lion, in fact. Although I have never betrayed the depth of my elephant-being to Abigail, I know she has some inkling of my elephant thoughts because of the games we sometimes play where she rides me round the room before I turn on her and subdue her. This is very enjoyable.

On Sundays when I walk along the cliff-tops with the dogs, I adopt a wonderfully particular ambling gait. I stroll my elephant stroll across the top of the world; I look lordly down on the endless waves, crawling like furrows in a field, viridian, aquamarine, beneath me. I experience at those times a deep sense of well-being in my roaming large-animal self, and, in the solitude of the windy cliff-top, I trumpet and bellow to the sky.

MANDALA

A dead woman lies in a garden where all the flowers are white or silver or very pale. The death, in Melbourne, Australia, in 1967, was curiously dependent on events that happened long ago in Spain and France and England. It was a sudden death, the woman young and healthy, full of optimism and laughter and daring. For some time the death was seen as an accident, a freakish, random event, but as the connections with other people and other times became clear, a pattern emerged, and it was seen that something odd had taken place. Understanding what happened to this woman depends on knowledge of the people and events that touched her in her present time, and of the people and events from other times and other places that figured in the pattern ending in the garden.

Time and tone and tense and significance flatten out, and an event in one century lies side by side with an event in another, and another and another until something resembling a design in a broad piece of lace is formed. A cloth on a table, thread by thread, knot by knot, loop by loop. The centrepiece is not the body of the woman in the garden, but the image of two honeybees.

A number of small gardens were linked by vistas that appeared suddenly through gaps in walls and hedges, through arches, gateways and avenues of trees. Each vista finished with an arrangement of statues, of graceful shrubs in ornamental pots, or a glimpse of a convent built in the gothic style that was popular for churches, prisons and hospitals in the nineteenth century. One of the small gardens was called the White Garden. It was reached by stone steps which led down into it, and a series of low hedges defined it. The flowers grew within rectangles of the hedge. Visitors could sit on wide stone seats and enjoy the soothing, dreamy sight of pale flowers, silvery foliage, grey and golden stone.

It was summer, 3 February 1967. The sunny city beyond the walls of these gardens was troubled by the story of a man hanged

that morning within the prison of the city for the murder of a prison officer. Ronald Ryan was the hanged man's name, and it was a name never to be forgotten. He was known as 'The Last Man Hanged in Australia'. All over the country people stood still at eight o'clock that morning, stopped what they were doing and thought about death at the end of a rope within the prison walls. For many years afterwards people would say: 'I remember the day they hanged Ronald Ryan. It was stifling. There was a kind of pall across the city. You could smell death in the air.'

The wider world was preoccupied by the war in Indo-China.

But within the walls surrounding the gardens where the woman lay dead, life looked inward, paid no attention to the stories of wars and hangings. The gardens were in the grounds of the Mandala Psychiatric Clinic and, although the outer eye was led to views of statues and trees and convent walls and towers, the eye of the mind looked in on strange dark scenes.

The dead woman was Vickie Field. She lay sprawled across the steps to the White Garden for eighteen hours before anybody found her. One hand was at her throat; her hair, clotted with vomit, fell across her face. The man who found her was the director of the clinic, Ambrose Goddard. Every morning Ambrose walked the grounds, marking the dew on the grass with his footprints, breathing the scents of the early morning, enjoying the sight of leaves and flowers. He was lord of the empty garden, a garden where few people strolled. It was possible to look on the lawns and flower beds and see nobody, nothing moving. Inside the distant clinic building there was always activity. If one patient was in some kind of coma another was having a fit. The staff was forever stalking the corridors keeping order, following routines, stimulating, suppressing, medicating, washing, cleaning, feeding, disciplining. A particular type of life went on behind the old convent walls. In the garden that morning in 1967 the early light fell on the dewy body of Vickie, on her skin, shiny, transparent, white like wax; on her hair, which was a sinuous black fan that spread across her bloated face and out over the steps. Ambrose could see maggots at her mouth and eyes but no sign of blood or violence.

Vickie Field had a sister called Laura, and it took nearly

thirty years for Laura to unravel Vickie's story. During this time Laura conducted her own investigation of the people and events surrounding her sister's death. A lot of things she discovered were simply things that went on inside the minds of the people involved. But other things amounted to a dense web of lies used to conceal the true source of this and other deaths at Mandala.

Laura

There were some pretty weird things. I know they happened, but they are like bits of a dream. People, mostly women, died at Mandala as a result of treatments given by Dr Goddard. He would put them to sleep and keep them asleep for weeks. As they lay in their own excrement and vomit and blood and urine, naked, dying, their relatives would try to visit them, try to have the treatment stopped, but Goddard was God, and his word was law.

People who suffered in various ways at Mandala have gone to the papers and the courts, and they are still fighting, thirty years on, for their stories to be heard. They are the Mandala Action Group, and their stories are of relatives who died while having Deep Sleep treatment — that's barbiturate coma — or of people whose lives have been almost destroyed by the LSD and ECT they were given in Mandala. Perhaps it is because people are afraid of the mysteries of the mind that it has taken so long for the public to be made aware of the abuses that were suffered at Mandela. I say 'abuses' but really I mean murders. Ambrose Goddard murdered his patients in the name of psychiatry.

Vickie's story is different from the stories of the patients who died in Deep Sleep. For one thing, she wasn't really a patient or the relative of a patient. But she died in the grounds of the hospital and, although the curiosity of her death and her oddly bright clothing drew attention, on the surface, to a set of abnormal circumstances, there was nobody to take up her cause, nobody who could crack the facade of the Mandala Clinic. I can

say now that if Vickie's death had been examined at the time, and if Ambrose Goddard had been exposed and stopped, lives would have been saved. The *hand* of Ambrose Goddard was not on my sister's throat, but his lunatic *mind* was able to control the narrative that resulted in her death. Ambrose Goddard killed my sister.

Ambrose Goddard knew Vickie well because, from time to time, they were lovers. She had come to him as a patient once, but one consultation and a few tranquillisers had been enough to put her on her feet, or, as Ambrose would say, on her back. From the lawn above the White Garden Ambrose stood looking down at the body. It was Vickie, Victoria Alice Field — actress, singer, waitress, lover, corpse. It was Vickie, Victoria Alice Field. Twenty-eight years old. Five foot two. Eyes of blue. Ambrose went down closer to the body and saw the eyes, obscured by the hair, were open, had an intense look, were gazing into the distance, gazing through Ambrose into the unknown distance, remote, stark, blank, flat. Frightening. Her face was like the full pale moon, bloated. The blood had drained away. There was a sickly smell and the body was stiff.

Vickie Field. Good figure. Nice legs. Ambrose liked her to shave her pubic hair. He would shave it expertly himself. Her feet were small. Pretty. She was very dressed up — red boots, yellow skirt, green jacket. Her broad-brimmed scarlet hat had fallen and lay nearby on a clump of small white flowers. She was a splash of drama in the muted silver, green and grey and white of the garden where everything was still, as if waiting for something to happen. In a useless gesture Ambrose felt for Vickie's pulse. No leaf, no bird, no insect disturbed the air. Vickie was dead and Ambrose left her lying on the step as he returned to the hospital. He walked slowly at first, thinking, but when he came in sight of the building he started to run. He rushed through the front door and told the matron to call the police and an ambulance. He sent two senior nurses down to the garden to

wait with the body. The matron told the gatekeeper to open the gates for the authorities.

Ambrose waited on the steps of the clinic until the ambulance and the police came into sight. He took everyone down the gravel path to the White Garden. He hoped and half expected, in a mad, naive way, that the body might have vanished, disappeared into thin air, that he would have to explain his hallucination. He would say, 'I don't know what I was thinking of, Inspector. I could have sworn there was a woman lying dead in this part of the grounds. Dead for at least twelve hours. She was an ex-patient of mine, a woman I have not really thought of now for years, and she came to see me yesterday, saying she was depressed, and wearing such bright clothing, gaudy, odd. It seemed to me that she had died on the steps leading down to this little garden. Because of her depression I had made arrangements for her to come back to the hospital in two days for some treatment. A joke, that would be it. She would be playing a joke on me. I wonder why. The patients do strange things. And yet I swear she was dead. It was a corpse I saw. I realise now I need a holiday, some swimming and golf and lying in the sun.'

But Ambrose led the ambulance men up the gravel path, and for a moment it seemed everybody paused as the splash of red and green and yellow of Vickie's clothing caught their eye. Then they hurried forward. Local police arrived, and two policemen stood among the stalks of agapanthus while the ambulance officers pronounced the woman dead. The empty ambulance drove away; the police called the coroner's undertaker and the CIB.

'Yes,' Ambrose said to the detective sergeant, 'I knew the young woman. She's a patient I haven't seen for about two years. At least, until yesterday.'

'What time was that, doctor?'

'I think it was at lunch time. Yes, she was my last appointment before lunch. She was depressed. I made arrangements for her to come to the clinic for treatment in two days' time. Her name is Miss Field. Victoria. I called her Vickie. First names are used at the clinic.'

The uniformed policemen stood among the flowers like sen-

tries, waiting for some signal from the CIB sergeant. They sealed off the area around the White Garden with tapes, and it became the Crime Scene. Forensic officers from the Crime Scene Unit came. Photographs were taken, drawings, diagrams and notes. Vickie had died, probably from asphyxiation.

'Was she asthmatic, do you know?' the police doctor said to Ambrose.

'I fancy she was. Yes, I think so. I would need to check her records.'

The Homicide Squad arrives and the Body of the Deceased is taken away in the undertaker's long black hearse, escorted by police cars. Off to the City Morgue. The body is now an Exhibit. Ambrose rings his solicitor.

'Hugh,' he says, 'I found the blasted body, for Christ's sake. And I was more or less the last person to see the bitch alive.'

That night there was a storm. Most houses in the city were filled with vigorous discussions and thoughts of the man who had been executed in the morning. The home of Vickie Field's parents and sisters and brother was filled with anguish, sorrow and bewilderment at the sudden loss of their brightest star.

Ambrose Goddard had dinner at home with Abigail, his wife. They didn't draw the curtains, but sat at the table by the light of the candles and watched the storm as it illuminated and tormented the garden. Ambrose told Abigail about the awful thing that had happened at the clinic. A patient died in the garden, actually in the White Garden. Abigail drew her breath in.

'In the White Garden, my beautiful White Garden. Somebody died in my garden?'

'They think she must have had an asthma attack or something. Very odd. She was a rather odd woman really. I treated her about two years ago. Then she came in yesterday morning and said she was depressed. Yet she was dressed up in a big red hat and crazy bright clothes. All I did was get the girl to make an appointment for her to come back for treatment. I feel I should have admitted her there and then. This thing could have been avoided.'

'But she didn't take an overdose or anything?'

'Didn't look like it. Anyhow, who takes an overdose and goes and carks it in the grounds of a hospital?'

'They do funny things sometimes.'

'Damned funny. But no, it seems she must have had some kind of episode, asthma attack. We'll know before too long. The *last* thing I need is a body in the garden. What's this, summer pudding?'

They had the red summer fruits very cold with cream. With each flash of lightning their faces were momentarily blue, and blue flares would be struck from the silver knives on the table. It was late. The children were asleep. Ambrose was very tired.

'You need a good holiday. You put so much of yourself into the hospital. We should get away and play some golf, go swimming, lie in the sun on a tropical island.'

'You know it isn't possible, Abby.'

'I know. Just dreaming.'

FACSIMILE

The autopsy report on Vickie Field said the deceased suffered from an allergy to bee-sting. Death by asphyxiation resulted from acute laryngeal oedema arising from anaphylactic shock, which had occurred following the stings of two bees to the throat.

The police report gave a description of Vickie's clothing: Red hat, green jacket, yellow skirt. The deceased was wearing boots and stockings. She was not wearing underwear, was naked beneath her skirt and jacket, save for a lace garter belt and silk stockings. The stockings and the garter belt were scarlet. The deceased had been sitting on the step, enjoying the sunshine of the summer afternoon, when two bees crawled or flew into the folds of her collar and proceeded to sting her on the throat. The body of one bee was found, the other must have fallen into the garden. The death was accidental, caused by suffocation as a result of laryngeal oedema, which was in turn the result of the action of bee venom, introduced locally into the bloodstream by two bee-stings on the throat. The condition was exacerbated by the presence in the deceased of an allergy to bee-venom. Death probably ensued within ten minutes of the initial sting.

When Vickie was a schoolgirl they used to call her Miss Adventure. She was always in trouble of one kind or another. Her old schoolmates remembered that she was never ordinary, and could always get attention whenever she wanted it. They knew she would become an actress, never thought this awful thing would happen, talked about how scary it was because it seemed it could happen to anyone. Allergies could come on so suddenly. One woman said she knew a man who had been eating shellfish all his life, and then one night at dinner everyone had prawns, and this man just swelled up suddenly and was dead at the table in two minutes.

They wondered if she knew she was allergic to bees.

'Yes,' one of them said, 'I think she told me once she was. Allergic to bees. I *think* it was her.'

'She was wearing red stockings.'

'Oh, you know Vickie. And she wasn't even wearing underpants, I heard.'

'She hardly ever did. When she was at school she used to do cartwheels in the train in front of the boys. So everybody knew she didn't wear underpants.'

Vickie's yellow Toyota was parked in the street outside her flat and from time to time her phone would ring. The floor of her bedroom was littered with clothes and shoes when her older sister Eleanor came to collect everything and clean the flat. Eleanor packed the hats, scarves, velvet jackets and the jewellery, as well as photographs and letters and a jumble of personal papers. She found abook with Ambrose Goddard's name written in it and took it to Mandala. Ambrose met her in the foyer and took her into his office where he expressed his sadness at her sister's death, and told her that he felt a kind of personal responsibility because the tragedy had happened in the grounds of the clinic.

'Nobody ever thought the beehives on the property would cause a thing like this,' he said to Eleanor, and gave her a pot of honey. 'The patients design and paint the labels on the pots by hand, and the pots themselves are made in occupational therapy.' By this time he was looking past Eleanor, gazing out the window at the sky as he went on with a familiar speech. 'Some of the patients have gone on to become potters, gone out into the world with a fine new skill. They are well regarded in the art world. There's Sybil Cavallini for example. Did you see the special they did on her on television? Her things are now collectors' items and yet before she came here as a patient she had never worked with clay. In fact, she had a phobia, wouldn't touch dirt of any kind. Washed her hands all the time.'

His gaze came back to Eleanor and he saw that her eyes resembled the eyes of her dead sister.

'It is a very sad time for you,' he said, and showed her out.

She was not nearly as pretty as Vickie, and there was a kind of dullness and seriousness about her that irritated Ambrose. Respectable young woman wearing a brown floral dress.

News of the death in the garden was kept from the patients at

the clinic. They saw no newspapers or television, had no radios. A man was hanged; a woman died in a garden; somewhere there was a war. The patients at Mandala were sealed off from these events. Their visitors were asked to be quiet about the woman's death. The clinic was its own world, untouched as far as was possible by the world outside. Some visitors who had heard about what happened to Vickie, inquisitive, keen to see where the promising young depressed actress had died, walked down to the White Garden where they shivered and stood on the step and imagined they saw bees.

These visitors, thinking all the time about the dead woman, inspected the gladioli, which were so white and pure. They admired the oleander blooming white in the background. One visitor told another visitor the story of the Roman army that was wiped out when they ate porridge stirred with the poisonous twig of an oleander. With sharp, knowing fingers the visitors would pinch cuttings from the plants growing in this special and now tragic garden. As if, by taking home a bit of white geranium to grow in their own flowerbeds, they could somehow be close to and yet protected from the strange death of Vickie Field. Friendships sometimes grew up among regular visitors to Mandala, and people would exchange cuttings from their own gardens along with information about the patients' treatments. Being able to discuss with knowledge the merits of LSD and ECT and OT and Deep Sleep and Sodium Amytal with Ritalin and Largactil and all the rest gave them a thrill of power over the dangers and mysteries of sickness of the mind. They were above and beyond insanity themselves. Sometimes romance would bloom among the visitors as they exchanged their pharmacological and horticultural chat:

'The women who keep the bees are doing it as part of OT.'

'This White Garden's OT too.'

'Yes, two of the long-term patients designed it and everything, and they maintain it. They're both nuns of some kind I think.'

'Look at the double white petunia.'

'I've got that at home.'

'I wonder …'

'Of course. I'll pot some for you.'

And before long they would be visiting each other's gardens, which would lead to each other's kitchens, which were not far from each other's bedrooms. And so on.

The press was not interested in the death of an unknown actress in the grounds of a psychiatric clinic. It was not, after all, murder, not suicide, not the strike of lightning. There was a short report saying that a woman (28) had been found dead in the grounds of Mandala suffering from the effect of insect bites. As if the announcement of her age somehow explained something; or as if she was woman number twenty-eight, the latest in a line of dead women found in the grounds of the clinic. As if the insects were to be expected. As if the clinic was ordinary, its grounds like the grounds of any other hospital. No hint of the fact that an actress imitating an English novelist had died in an imitation of the novelist's garden, or even that a real and lovely woman had been stung by a real and angry bee. There was a funeral at the tiny wooden church near Vickie's parents' place. Reports on the death and related matters were taken at the local police station — statements from Ambrose and the ambulance men and the guard on the hospital gate who saw Vickie arrive in a cab. A statement from the cab driver who said she had been very cheerful. Six months after that there was a coroner's inquiry. Nothing amiss was found. The case was closed. When she died the public was in thrall to the story of the man who was hanged for shooting the prison guard. Later there were other stories. Vickie Field and her fatal allergy to bees was of no interest to the world, a small death in an obscure place — although the White Garden occasionally caught the imagination of the writers of gardening pages.

This garden was a small facsimile, an imitation, a gesture, a tribute to the White Garden that Vita Sackville-West made in Kent. What can have inspired the patients to choose to imitate that garden far away? The patients were particularly interested, it seemed, in the works of the writer. They were cultured and educated patients who were given every opportunity to bring themselves to health of mind and body. The doctor's wife was *devoted* to the idea of the gardens at Sissinghurst Castle in

Kent. She and Doyle, the caretaker and gardener at the hospital, collaborated in this instance to assist and support the patients in the creation of the White Garden.

On the one hand Ambrose wanted the outside world to know that he had encouraged two of his patients to design, construct and maintain the White Garden for therapeutic purposes; on the other he wished to avoid the public eye, wanted to proceed privately with the treatments and experiments at the clinic until he was ready to publish his great work. For over ten years Ambrose had been writing *Illumination*, a treatise on the treatment of deluded patients, showing how the long and careful nurture and observation of delusion could lead to remarkable insights into the human mind, and even to the eventual recovery of the patients themselves. Far from simply writing these sufferers off and letting them live and die in their deluded state, or attempting to bring them out of the delusion, Ambrose worked to *use* the delusion itself to bring about the recovery of a normal life. The idea owed something to the practice of R D Laing at Kingsley Hall, but was even more unorthodox and revolutionary. Ambrose intended his book to burst upon an unsuspecting world. No point having a lot of journalists poking about the place getting wind of what was going on, writing up stories giving vent to their own half-baked ideas. A woman from *Vogue* rang wanting to know what was the connection between the White Garden at Mandala and Vita Sackville-West's White Garden in Kent. The matron who took the call said she knew nothing about a garden in Kent and the doctor was giving no interviews at all.

In 1962 Ambrose bought the property from the Catholic Church. It was a convent and school, built in the 1870s on a rise in the centre of a park. There were tennis courts, a playground and a swimming pool, and the whole place was surrounded by a row of pine trees inside a fence of iron railings. The bluestone buildings were tall and grim with many narrow windows and a slender belfry striped green with age. An air of the fairy castle

played about the convent, mingled with a touch of the prison, a hint of the madhouse. You could imagine medieval ladies on horseback; peasants labouring in the fields. In the world enclosed by the iron railings there was fantasy at work, and Ambrose was attracted to this.

His colleagues said he had flipped his wig when he bought the convent. He would go broke, they said, with his fancy new style loony bin, and he would have to sell at a loss. They discussed the rumours they had heard about the beehives and the cultivation of vegetables and the making of bread.

The money came from Abigail's family, from the Pearl Lingerie fortune. What would her old man say if he knew. Turn in his grave. Abigail's father rested peacefully in the old seaside cemetery, close to the mansion built by *his* father, the house Ambrose and Abigail kept as their country retreat. 'That house keeps me sane,' Ambrose would say. 'I'll never sell it. It's family history.'

At Mandala Ambrose replaced the Victorian stained glass in the convent chapel with clear glass etched with images from nature — leaves and birds, impressions of waterfalls. He put soft green carpet on the floor, and heaps of large green cushions. You could lie on the floor of the chapel and gaze out at the trees and sky through the crystal scenes on the windows. Pause, breathe, meditate in the crystal chapel where bubbles hovered in the glass among phantom irises, blown by a mysterious breath, where a glassy spider's web beaded with dew hung in the air. As the angle of the sun changed throughout the day, rays entered some of the etched lines of the images and the white light was split into its colours, sending rainbows gliding and waltzing across the surfaces of the room.

There were classes in yoga and meditation in the chapel where the frozen stillness of the windows led out to the moving world of sky and sun and shade. Through wisps of drifting ectoplasm in the glass came an illusion of space and more space, reaching out, stretching sideways. Invisible presences hovered in the glass itself. See them, look away, and they are gone. The haunting face of a lovely woman. Gone. A naked man about to fly.

'The crystal chapel is a haven of peace where the world expands and vision grows, where troubled spirits can heal,' Ambrose said.

The matron of the clinic simply said, and said it often, that it cost a fortune in window-cleaning.

The chapel had to be kept locked. Patients could go there only under supervision because in a psychiatric clinic anything can happen. Patients might attack patients with cushions causing injury or suffocation. A lunatic could smash the glass and go berserk with slivers. Faces, throats, backs — these were never safe. Blood could be spilled on the smooth green carpet, splashed on the stone pillars, sprayed across the sweet airy windows. The chapel was locked for the safety of all.

It was an illusion of a chapel, a locked glass room for yoga classes where the patients, birds with clipped wings and crippled minds, fluttered and flopped and floated.

LSD was administered to groups in the chapel. The first time it was done, Ambrose invited his colleagues to join him in the experiment. It was his first experience with hallucinogenic drugs, and he was very cautious. He had read a great deal about the effects but was unprepared for what happened.

He felt, a few minutes after the injection, that he was gripped by something from the inside. He experienced a sensation of great helplessness and he fought against this. There was loud, unearthly sound, and he saw a terrible light coming towards him. Cascades of sound and intricacies of lines of light. Something was billowing, as if inside him there was a world enclosed in curtains that seemed to be made of some kind of flesh. It was all happening very fast, and the feeling of helplessness was paramount. Flesh, coloured with peach and flame, and the searing light and heat coming at him, with something, an edge of turquoise and emerald, coiling and twisting. He tried to reach out for this edge, to get hold of it, but it was also inside him. He seemed to move through a mirror, to see the great dark pupil of a ghastly eye. He would move through the mirror, back and forth, pulled and tormented. There was writing, tiny spidery writing in purple ink. He kept trying to read it, but he had lost the ability to read, to understand words. He knew it was English

but he couldn't make head nor tail of it. And then the words 'head nor tail' took on a life of their own and leapt at him, and he curled up on the floor like a serpent swallowing its own tail. He felt and heard himself uttering the words 'head nor tail' as he tried to unwind, but he was locked in the twined and twisted shape. Light and heat were prodding him with vicious fingers until he screamed and everything became scaly and slimy and dark and the next thing he knew he was flat on the floor with tears all over his face.

Some of the others in the chapel were also weeping, but on some the drug had almost no effect. They just sat there in a kind of trance that wasn't unpleasant except they were aware of what was going on around them and felt a strange kind of objectivity. They knew their colleagues were writhing and screaming, but they were detached from feeling.

This was the beginning of Ambrose's bold modern experiments using hallucinogens on the patients. He never knew how much would have what effect, and stressed the need for qualified, vigilant staff. It was strange, in this clinic where life was under such strict security, that the woman with the bee-sting was able to lie in the White Garden all night long, dead and undiscovered. The grounds are checked, but checked for movement, not for bodies. No patient was missing. Vickie Field was a visitor on this occasion, was supposed to have made her way from the clinic to the gate. Who would have thought she would go wandering down to the White Garden? And of course there were no dogs. Dogs would cause too much trouble with the patients. 'I am a dog-lover,' Ambrose said. 'At home we have three beautiful wolfhounds, great animals, wouldn't be without them.' But at the hospital he allowed only fish and birds; once he had permitted a woman to keep a box of silkworms. But not cats or dogs. In certain situations, pets are beneficial for sick people, but not in the psychiatric setting, not among deluded people because anything could happen. As with the glass in the chapel, and the cushions, Ambrose had to be very careful. He often said to Abigail, 'Anything could happen, you know.'

He made decisions about when patients could be trusted with such things as garden tools. The two women who looked after

the White Garden were completely safe. When they said they would like to make the garden, Ambrose brought in Abigail to talk to them. Abigail was a fund of gardening information.

'A White Garden doesn't mean you just go mad with the white flowers,' she said. 'It's all a matter of light and shade and dark greens and light greens and silvers and greys. The overall impression is a sort of shimmering whiteness. But you have to have elements of ivory and pink before you can get this effect. The white flowers are the last things to fade in a garden in the early evening, when the light goes. First the blues and violets vanish, and then the reds and oranges. Then the dark green, then the light green, and next yellow, cream and white. The white ones seem to linger and hover — even when you'd think there was no light at all to reflect. It's almost as if they store up light. And because they depend on insects that come out in the early evening they have strong fragrances that haunt the night air. I realise you won't be seeing all this, but it is good to know about it.'

After talking to the two patients who would make the White Garden, Abigail remarked to Ambrose that they seemed to be very alert.

'Alert, intelligent — mad as hatters,' Ambrose said.

But the garden they went on to make was beautiful, and Ambrose described it in detail in his book *Illumination*.

A SMALL SAMURAI IN LACQUERED VELVET

Ambrose wrote during the night, or in the early morning. The garden of his house — the house being a mansion built in the days when fortunes were made on the goldfields — ran down to the river. And under trees, above the water, was Ambrose's study where he wrote, read, listened to music. On one wall was displayed his collection of guns; two of the walls were hung with valuable paintings. The fourth wall was all glass and faced the river. Ambrose wrote on an old Remington that had belonged to his father. It was a study of the relationship between religion and psychiatry. In the writing Ambrose had discovered his own fascination with delusion — the meaning of delusion, the mechanics of delusion and belief. Not all delusion was religious in origin, but much was. His work took him into places that were strange, wonderful and mysterious. He had travelled to Italy to look at a house that flew there from the Holy Land centuries ago. He searched for the place in the mind where hallucination and objective truth cross paths. He explored the possibility that everything might happen somewhere *in* the human mind. He wrote up the cases of his own patients who believed themselves to be someone other than themselves. There were Virgin Marys, Christs and Gods, Marilyn Monroes and Elvis Presleys. Movie stars and even characters from literature took over the lives of Ambrose's patients. Jane Eyre sometimes screamed in an imaginary red room at Mandala.

At what point in the life of the 'character' does the deluded person enter? How can it be that a life is so sad and insignificant that the man or woman living the life must take on the persona of someone else? Where in the life and the mind does this happen, and how? Is it possible that dead people can inhabit the beings of living people?

Ambrose made minute study of the deluded patients in his care. There were some hospitals where doctors tried to

'cure' delusion; and others where delusion was tolerated with a kind of amusement. But at Mandala the deluded patients were given the means to develop and explore their delusion and hallucination. The patients would live full and interesting lives, and the doctor would gather more and more information for his study of the condition. Shirley Temple, dressed in frills and bows, danced, sang and brought sunshine into the lives of other patients; Saint Teresa of Avila lived the life of a great Spanish mystic, and was a source of inspiration to those around her in the clinic. In *Illumination* Ambrose Goddard would tell the world of the meaning of delusion, where it comes from, and why and how it functions.

For the thirty or so patients at Mandala, Ambrose was the centre of the world, the key to everything. Most of the patients were women, and many of them were in the clinic for a long, indefinite time. In 1967 it was possible to keep patients in the hospital for years if necessary, as long as they belonged to a private hospital fund. In some ways Mandala resembled a boarding school for infantile women who are seen by those around them as unable to live ordinary lives, to rise to the demands of everyday life, unable to take part in the rituals of family, work, friendship. They were women who were not able to sleep, not able to wake up, to eat, to wash, to stop washing, stop eating, stop pulling out their hair, stop screaming, crying, tipping bowls of soup over the heads of their children. They couldn't stop attacking their husbands with breadknives and gardening forks, couldn't stop taking off their clothes in the street. They were afraid to leave the house, afraid to speak, afraid to travel by air or sea, to eat jelly or potatoes. They smoked like chimneys, drank like fish, fell down the stairs, swallowed prescribed drugs like sugar candy. They thought they were mosquitoes, imagined they were made from snow or butter, and supposed they were somebody else. They were saints and movie stars and members of royalty from the past or the present. Some of them sat in silence staring into space, occasionally rocking gently in their chairs. One woman knew she was a foetus and spent most of her time curled up in a cupboard under the stairs, sucking her thumb.

Mandala was home. Handsome Doctor Goddard in his fine tweed jacket or else his lovely brocade one, all purple and black, with his crooked smile and bright penetrating eyes was their father, hero, lover, god. 'I love you, Ambrose Goddard, Doctor Ambrose, Doctor God,' they whispered as they fell asleep at night. In the heart of each of them was a conviction that Ambrose loved them too, would one day declare his love. Some women loved him so much they planned ways to kill him. He is mine. If I can't have him, nobody can.

'Doctor Goddard is coming this afternoon,' the women would say, 'and he is coming to see me, just me. For his visits I wear my satin slip with shoestring straps. Drop one strap. He looks down my cleavage with pleasure and I smile up at him. He holds my hand and looks into my eyes and then he grins in that way he has and when he says "Book her in for tomorrow morning, nurse" I know he means, he wants to be alone with me, to go to bed with me. I smile back at him and he pats my hand — and I *know*. If he turns back to look at me as he goes gut the door the spell will be broken and he will abandon me, will sacrifice our love to the demands of his great calling. But he doesn't look back. Our secret is safe; our love endures. Together we live the ultimate romance.'

After a while, behind the tall doors of Mandala, behind the windows locked and barred, within the mist, beyond the veil, beyond the light, beyond the darkness, the women ceased to exist in any ordinary way. Their territory was edged by a long row of pine trees and a stone fence with high railings. Every iron bar was pointed with an arrow-head, or a fleur-de-lis. The women were contained.

And children in suburban houses, children with soup bowls on their heads and rivulets of broth running down their foreheads, turned to their fathers who bore the marks of breadknives in their hearts — and the children said where is mum. The fathers said she packed her bags and went for a holiday and a rest and to get better; she went to Mandalay or Mississippi or Woop Woop or Wagga Wagga or the moon, went off with the man in the moon. Went into a world of her own, woosh, she went in a taxi through the gates of Mandalay or Mandala or Manderley.

Mum on the road to Manderlay where the flying fishes play. Mum as mysteriously dead and gone as Rebecca from *Rebecca*. Ma-ma in La-La-Land.

Ma-ma-ma-ma.

Mothers who gave up, who let themselves go, who thought all the time of suicide or murder or both, were sent to Mandala for their own good and for the good of their families. When they got round to talking to the woman in the next bed they would say: 'My aunt was staying with us and she went down the street to post a letter. It was five minutes, or ten at the most. And when she came back I was gone. By that I mean I had my breakdown. They all knew I was on the verge, could crack at any time. All alone in the house with the children at school and my husband at work all day and me alone in the house with the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner and too much to do and Auntie posting a letter down the street. I cried and cried — slow and quiet — and I stared at my hands that were red and cracked and sore. There were cracks at the corners of my mouth, the corners of my eyes, the corners of the room, the corners of the butter dish. Blood began to trickle from the butter. And then I had my breakdown. Auntie came back and she could see it had happened. She got my husband to come home and I couldn't stop crying, thought I would never ever stop. Cry me a river, cry me an ocean, cry myself to sleep. It was like the crying was outside me, some crying force that was out of my control. I remember some of it but the rest is a blank. My auntie asked me where my sponge bag was and I went crazy looking for it. I said it had been stolen and I could hear dogs barking in the distance. "They're out there," I said, "out there on the marshes looking for the thieves, hunting them down." She said yes, but not to worry. "You worry too much," she said. I know I do. I worry about everything. The house and the children and the ironing and the front gate — it won't close properly and things get in and out — dogs and cats and men in raincoats and people with guns and knives and great big bags of sugar — there's no control. She found my sponge bag in the bathroom, underneath the towels.

'"What's this then, girlie," she said, and I couldn't even recognise it. She put in new soap and toothpaste and a brand

new toothbrush, and a washer and some powder, baby powder. I remember all that about the sponge bag so vividly, and yet I never saw the thing again. I sometimes wonder if I imagined everything. But I know people pinch things in the hospital — and the toothbrush was brand new.

'Long red fingernails on long red fingers on long red hands go creep, creep, creep and then suddenly they go snatch! and your sponge bag's gone forever. Gone. I never had a *sponge* in my sponge bag. Sponges are animals you know. Once I looked into the water by the harbour — it was on my honeymoon, long, long ages before my breakdown — and I looked down into the water and saw that it was bobbing with every kind of dark and slimy floating thing. There was no room for boats or fish. And just below the surface of the water I saw the red hand. I remember saying to my husband — he was new then, and very shiny — "There's a dead body under the water. Look at the hand all red and bloated and reaching up, waving and calling for us to help." And he just laughed and said what an imagination. He said it was only an old rubber glove. "Calling out for someone to help with the dishes, I suppose," was what he said. We laughed. But for some reason I never forgot the sight of the red hand floating and disappearing and appearing and bobbing and feeling with its long fingers under the scummy water. Other things I forgot — other things about my honeymoon. I can't remember the hotel or anything like that. I remember some pine trees. And a cake we had in a funny old cake shop. Sex I can't remember. Funny, isn't it? Not remembering sex on your honeymoon. That's what honeymoons are supposed to be all about. Sex.'

Marjorie Bartlett entered the Mandala Clinic in a state of depression and confusion. Doctor Goddard spoke at length to her husband. He explained that Marjorie was depressed, obsessive and confused.

'Her thoughts run round and round, Mr — um — Bartlett. It's rather like a needle stuck in a groove on a record, if you follow me. She plays the same idea, word, phrase over and over in her brain and it gets so she can think of nothing else. She has a fixed notion that someone has removed her toilet articles, for

instance, and nothing will alter this opinion. I predict that even if she were to "find" the powder and soap and such like, she would not be shaken in her belief that someone took them from her out of malice.

'It's a mild form of paranoia. She has an obsessive fear that started out who knows where, and that has by now spilled over into most areas of life for her. Frightened of her own shadow, basically. The big one's sex. I'm speaking man to man here, Mr Umbartlett. What I know for a fact, and I feel sure you will readily understand, is that these women need a good fuck. Of course the sad thing is they have built up so much fear about every damned thing in the world, they can't do it. They break out in rashes at the very thought. You no doubt realise that Mrs Umbartlett has a terrible rash on her pussy. Enough to put any man off, if I may say so. This form of libido depression is frequently associated with violence of the type that you and your family have suffered. Think about the knife, for instance. Pardon me, but of course you think about it. The knife with which your wife attacked you.

'There is the clear sexual association of the weapon, the knife. They are always knifing people in the back, these women. Knifing one way or another. We had a woman in here at one time, for instance — her mother-in-law turned up at the house with a basket of hothouse tomatoes. Well the woman apparently grabbed the basket, upended the tomatoes all over the doormat, threw the basket in the air, and then grabbed a gardening fork and attacked the mother-in-law. You see what I mean. I tell you these things not to alarm you, but in an attempt to demonstrate the fact that these episodes are normal parts of abnormal behaviour, and to reassure you that the condition is curable. In the drawer of this desk I keep my pistol, which I assure you is ready at all times to menace one of these women when they get out of hand. See? Mind you I seldom have occasion. But you will understand it is a comfort, I may say a necessary comfort to me, that this little fellow lies in the drawer in wait and comes out Zupp! when I need him. Mr Browning .22 here gives them quite a scare.

'The woman I have just described now leads a perfectly

peaceful life with her family in rural France. I omitted to say that she was French — but that in no way accounts for the violence. *All* women, in my experience, of any racial or cultural type, are capable of these outbreaks. Something in the nature of the beast, if you follow.

'So Mrs Umbartlett — I will call her — er — Marjorie from now on — is depressed. I have prescribed a sedative for her and treatment will begin in the morning. Rest is of vital importance, rest and a sense of purpose. We have, as you have no doubt heard and read in the press, an unusually active program of occupational therapy. We are pioneers in the field, and your wife will have the opportunity to study china painting, pottery, water-colour, gardening — is she interested in beekeeping at all? I must give you a pot of honey before you leave. All patients, when they are well enough, are expected to help in the daily running of the clinic — cleaning and fetching and carrying and so on. A very high standard of personal hygiene is encouraged, although not at all times expected. We have a perfectly realistic understanding of these matters.

'The range of treatment at Mandala is very broad. Did I mention the foreign language program? I can honestly say that this is the only clinic in the world where the intellect is stimulated by the surroundings. I am working on an idea of introducing daily lessons in foreign languages — perhaps Latin, French and German — only in those patients who are in any way capable, of course. Swedish perhaps. Depression and hysteria are multifaceted, and must be approached from as many angles as possible. Mandarin Chinese. Japanese, naturally. Language laboratory. Heard of that, have you? A bit of a revolution really. Miracle in a way. Then at the other end of the scale there's recreation. It will possibly sound old-fashioned to a man like you, Mr Umbartlett, but here we follow a program of outdoor gymnastics, physical jerks to music. Line 'em up, turn on the record — "Sentimental Journey" is a favourite — and da-da-da a da-da-da-da-*dada* — there they go. This place used to be a school you know, in the bad old days. And we have retained the outdoor play equipment, walled up and locked of course. Can't have the girls getting too carried away on the swing. Well,

they're supervised. Always supervised. Everything here is under the strictest supervision. It's a pity in a way, but that's how it is with nervous disorders. Can't trust 'em for a minute.

'We have the anti-depressant drugs as well as the psychotropics. Some cases respond to amphetamines. We try a mixture. The human mind is a mystery that we are at last beginning to solve. Electro-Convulsive Therapy has been found to be effective in ninety-five per cent of cases — and your wife will have access here to the latest equipment from abroad. When I was in Sweden recently I ordered the newest machines. We are also having a remarkable success with Deep Sleep Therapy. Here again we are pioneers. It seems only fitting that a great young country such as ours should lead the field in this work. You may be familiar with the names Charcot and Mitchell — Silas Weir Mitchell — nineteenth-century fellows who early in the piece had some tinkling inkling of the notion that the big S — I refer of course to Sleep — was the key to the mind's recovery from troubles. The mind is a restless animal, and sometimes what a woman needs more than anything else in the world is the chance to sleep off whatever it is that is worrying her. The Rest Cure, the immobile good old Rest Cure, was as far as Mitchell got. Not bad, not bad. And Charcot, more French in his approach to these things, got the hang of hypnosis. Look-into-my-eyes and so forth sort of thing. I think he actually used the *term* "Deep Sleep" on some occasions. Had no idea what he was talking about, of course. Now I come to think of it, it could have been Bernheim that stumbled on Deep Sleep. I'm inclined to lump those chaps together sometimes — named the dogs after them, you know. I see you're smiling. Yes, we have Hippolyte Bernheim, Silas Weir Mitchell and Sigmund Freud, the Irish wolf-hounds. All good fellows.

'But, as I was saying, *somebody* had the inkling, the drift, when they talked about rest and sleep and general nodding off. Well of course it's a Biblical thing, isn't it? God gave Adam a dose of Deep Sleep and whipped out his rib while he was under. And here at Mandala we send the brain on a little holiday. The Deep Sleep ward is in fact named "Hawaii". Just the spot for a vacation from life's cares. Pack up your troubles, I say to them,

and wave them goodbye. And after all, Mr Umbartlett, what *is* sleep. Who knows? Shut-eye. You put out the light, put your head on the pillow, close your peepers, and dmmmmmh — off you go to dreamland. Zzzzzz. Shakespeare had the right idea — knits up the ravelled sleeve of care he said, didn't he? But that's your field, the old Will. Macbeth went round murdering sleep. What a villain. Sleep, Mother Nature's own elegant beauty treatment for the mind. Imagine a sleeping woman. What could be more inviting? When their eyes close and their muscles relax, and the sandman comes and they go off into the Land of Nod, they are putty, just simple putty in the hand. And it does them the *world* of good. I'll stake my reputation on that any day. Zzzzz.

'Then of course we have an advanced program of meditation, yoga and mild exercise. And for special cases we have the psychedelics — LSD, psilocybin. It's just a little *ch!* into the arm and the patient begins to lose contact with the reality around her, begins to make contact with the terrors within that torment the mind. She begins to make contact with a whole new world of possibility that opens up in extraordinary colour and light. These are the mind-expanding drugs which, when used under clinical conditions, can give patients a whole new way of seeing things, and can make all the difference in the world. I have undergone the experience myself in order to understand what the patients go through. And at Mandala we offer the psychedelic treatment to the relatives of our patients. Keep it in mind. You may wish to take advantage of it.'

The doctor gave Michael the impression that this long speech had been invented there and then for Michael's very own comfort and information. A light shone in Ambrose's eyes, and it was beamed at Michael — it was personal, intimate, kind, wise. It was the light of deep thought inspired by truth. It was a light you could trust. It seemed to Michael that a diffused glow circled the whole person of Ambrose. He was still a doctor in a tweed jacket in a book-lined office, but he was lightly bathed in an elusive radiance. Michael asked the doctor about surgery — brain surgery, lobotomy, leucotomy. He had listened to the doctor's speech about treatments and had been waiting for a

mention of the hot wire in the brain. If you cut something away will you cure the disease, jump the needle from the groove, set life in motion again?

'Yes,' said Dr Goddard, 'surgery is another alternative. Psychosurgery can be effective, very effective indeed in some cases. These cases are specially selected and again there is a ninety-five per cent success rate. But, never let anyone tell you it can be used with schizophrenics. Never. Disaster. And there is no such nonsense at Mandala as Group Therapy. Another fiasco dreamt up by who knows what feeble brain. Patients need their rest; the last thing they want is to sit around like a herd of deranged elephants showing off their anxieties and manias and phobias and god knows what to each other. No. These days we've got some very beautiful chemicals that allow us to achieve some incredibly stylish results in the mental functions of our patients. Think of the benefits of Largactil, for one thing. And Sodium Amytal with Ritalin. You'd be tickled pink, Mr Umbartlett. Tickled pink.'

The doctor was relaxed; he sat in his chair with his feet up on the desk. Michael Bartlett sat opposite him, tense, concentrating on every word, trying, through this comforting, genial, glowing man to make sense of what had happened to Marjorie, of what had brought her to the clinic.

Ambrose fished into the pocket of his jacket and brought out a handful of capsules. They lay in his open palm like the eggs of sinister and exotic spiders. Their shiny skins were marked with small letters and numbers — F63 on the ones that were half orange half blue, LOL5 on the pink and green, F33 on the blue, R365C on the violet and fawn — their colours and symbols part of a secret, powerful and deadly language. Here was salvation and damnation in the palm of the doctors hand. Michael looked at the capsules, and then he looked away. Ambrose smiled, jiggled the capsules, tossed them lightly in the air and caught them.

As Michael looked back at the doctor, and past the doctor's head, he fancied he caught a glimpse of a figure moving past the window. A slender woman dressed in the medieval brown habit of a nun, hurrying along with an armful of long grasses. Was

he beginning to see things? Ghosts of the old convent? Soon he would be talking to himself, throwing things at the children, throwing the children at the walls. He sat up straighter and took a breath to steady himself.

'Yes,' he said, about nothing in particular. 'Yes, I see. I understand.' His voice was quiet and troubled, and the doctor's words flowed over it.

'Have her right as rain in no time at all. You'll see. They come out of their Sleeping Beauty trance as bright as buttons and as fresh as daisies. Up and running, ready for anything, if you get my drift, as I'm quite sure you do. Visiting hours are on one of the cards in this folder. We'll have your wife back home in the twinkling of an eye.'

Ambrose handed Michael a small buff folder containing six cards. Michael stood in the office and looked at the cards. They gave information about different aspects of Mandala and they were of different sizes and colours so that they lay in the folder like samples of paint. The colours were dull and muddy, suggesting depression and repression. The olive green one was general information for the patient's family and friends. It said there was a kiosk where you could buy cigarettes and snacks, and included a warning against smoking in bed. The orange card told of meetings that ex-patients could come to in order to maintain contact with the clinic. The brown one was all about the occupational therapy programs, the pottery, the yoga, the bee-keeping, the gardening. Rust was about drugs and sedation and clothing and valuables; mustard was about lectures on sex that patients and their families could go to; and there was a card the colour of vomit that told of the opportunities for families and friends to experience the therapies offered to the patients.

As Michael read the cards, Ambrose gazed contentedly out the window. Michael fanned the cards out in his hand. Ambrose swung round to look at him and said, 'Of course those cards are the merest summary of things. No detail, no detail at all, really.' The light in his eyes drew Michael towards him. 'The papers for you to sign are these.' He handed Michael the documents that would place Marjorie in his care.

Michael signed. Ambrose smiled and stood up and gestured

out the window. 'See that woman,' he said warmly, 'the one in the habit. She is to all intents and purposes a Spanish saint. Her family have virtually given up on her. But when I've finished with her she'll make some lucky bastard a bloody good wife. Hard to believe, isn't it? But there are such beautiful chemicals around — things to open their minds and their legs. She'll come good in the end. And so will Marjorie. I promise.'

The interview was over. The doctor placed a friendly hand on Michael's shoulder and walked to the door with him.

Marjorie Bartlett was admitted to Mandala three weeks before the death of the young woman in the garden. On the day of the woman's death Marjorie was huddled under the camellia bush outside the doctor's window. She liked to sit there in her dressing gown, clutching her handbag to her chest, pretending she was an orphan who would one day be saved by Dr Goddard. He would come out and find her and lift her up and take her into his office and order fine new clothes for her, and dishes of wonderful food, and he would embrace her and propose marriage to her, his breath warm on her cheek, his strong arms around her. When she looked through the window she saw Ambrose with a lovely woman in a large red hat. She thought it must be his wicked wife. The doctor embraced his wife; he took off her hat and kissed her, and then he pulled the hat down over her eyes and she laughed and straightened the hat and patted the doctor on the chin.

'He is taking it on the chin,' Marjorie whispered to herself. 'One day things will be different and he will come to me.' She was as quiet as a mouse and as still as a statue under the camellia bush.

Marjorie was admitted; Michael left her there. He left her behind somewhere in the grim grey hospital. You could call it a clinic, talk about meditation and gardening, but it was a madhouse, and to Michael's sad eyes that is what it was. Marjorie was in the madhouse. He was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, the only comfort coming from the light of truth and kindness in the doctor's eyes.

Michael could not imagine where Marjorie was, what she was doing. He tried to make himself think of her asleep in a narrow

white bed with a smooth white cover, the curtains drawn across the window, the play of light on the back of the curtains making shadow patterns on the walls, on Marjorie's sleeping face. He tried to invent a sleeping beauty, a dreaming princess, but he could not. He tried to build a wall between himself and his visions of Marjorie in a pit of slime surrounded by raging creatures, half beast, half human. Their cries were pitiful but savage; their teeth dripped with black and silver slobber; their hair hung in tangled, stinking locks about their hairy shoulders, which were draped with rags. Gradually Marjorie's flowery nightdress faded and was replaced by greying tatters; her short pale hair fell out and her skull, covered with dark sores, shone with a horrible light. She snarled and bit and kicked and laughed with the other lunatics as they roamed round and round the pit. A nurse threw a bucket of raw meat down to them and they fought for it with cries and howls. Somebody died at the bottom of the heap. It was Marjorie.

Michael could not remember whether the doctor had said the words: Your wife is at the bottom of the heap. Had he said it, or had Michael imagined it? He hated himself for thinking or remembering those words. Had he thought them up, or had the doctor actually said them to him? What had the doctor said? The memory of the doctor was bathed in a pale glow; the doctor's eyes gleamed with bright goodness.

Michael kept walking down the drive towards the gate of the clinic. As he walked he thought of the word 'Mandala' and then he thought of Manderley, of the film *Rebecca*. It seemed to him that there was something of the haunting menace in the film hanging about the hospital. The name Manderley attached itself to the clinic and carried a sense of drama and tragedy into Michael's heart. He thought of baby Rebecca crying for her mother. He saw the image of Manderley burning. The burning house. Behind him the old convent stood in the centre of the gardens, on the rise, and Michael imagined, without looking back, the sight of each window filled with leaping flame, the glow of the burning building, the crackle of timber, showers of sparks against a night sky. You hear about places, mental hospitals, where the fire breaks out in the kitchen and spreads in

a few minutes to the wards; and the patients are locked in and can't escape and are overcome by smoke. Mental Patients Die in Fire. There is an inquiry. The health minister makes statements. The public wonders why there were no fire extinguishers in the building, no fire escapes. Everyone is sorry. It will never happen again.

Michael brought his thoughts back to the image of Marjorie sleeping peacefully in the white bed. She has been troubled and depressed. She needs to sleep it off, as Dr Goddard says. Dr Goddard is considered by many people to be the best psychiatrist in the country. Mandala is the most up-to-date clinic in the world. One day soon Marjorie will be better and they will pack a picnic and drive to the hills and pick strawberries in the sunshine.

The doctor spoke of sex. Marjorie is too tired for sex. Three children — and Rebecca still a baby. Marjorie has no energy for romance. That's all, surely. Dr Goddard said she was afraid of sex. But how could that be? Where does fear come into it? The doctor could have that wrong. In any case he said she would be right as rain in no time, right as rain. Right as rain, he said — not 'bottom of the heap'.

Tickled pink and open her mind and legs and right as rain. Michael's mind moved back and forth from images of Marjorie transformed into a naked sex-goddess, to thoughts of his happy family picking fruit in the summer to pictures of Marjorie asleep in the white hospital bed to visions of lunatics writhing in a dark and filthy cell. He thought of what the doctor had said about offering drug therapy to relatives of patients. Perhaps he needed that; perhaps he too needed a chance to rest his mind, or to expand it with visions of beauty and peace.

He reached the gate and showed his visitor's pass to the gatekeeper. He tried to think of other things, of the children and his students and golf and a glass of Scotch.

He drove home.

He had walked straight from the convent building to the gate. Three weeks later Vickie Field would not walk to the gate but would take the path to the White Garden, and would die there. She would sit on the steps and two bees would sting her

on the throat. The poison would be so strong that she would be overcome and unable to call out or go for help. Nobody would see or hear her. She would die from acute laryngeal oedema. She would choke to death. She would sit in the White Garden at the Mandala Clinic, thousands of miles from the White Garden in Kent, and she would be dressed to resemble a portrait of the woman who made the White Garden in Kent. This woman, Vita Sackville-West, was allergic to the stings of wasps. Perhaps also to the stings of bees, as Vickie was.

> One afternoon Vita was having tea with a friend in the garden when she was stung on the neck by a wasp. Her neck and tongue and gums swelled up and her friend took her to the hospital where she spent the night and lived to tell the tale of how she had been attacked by what she called a small samurai in lacquered velvet.

Michael Bartlett went home through the busy sunny streets to the empty house. The children were with his sister and her children. A flicker of fear went through Michael as he thought that perhaps one day his sister too would dissolve in tears at her kitchen table, and she too would have to be escorted, with a bag of toiletries and a hairbrush, to the iron gates of Mandala. He thought of a snowball effect — clumps of little children being gathered and shunted around as their mothers disappeared into the mystery world of the big old convent on the hill behind the trees. You would end up with someone like the old woman who lived in the shoe — some woman with so many children in her care she wouldn't know what to do. Meanwhile all the mothers would be locked in the burning building, their cries stifled by the sound of falling timber and the roar of the flames, the sky alight with showers of flying sparks.

Fathers were the ones who went out to offices and lecture rooms and construction sites and bars and golf courses. The women in the burning building; the children living in the shoe; the fathers driving cars to the office. There was Dr Goddard's far-fetched idea of giving the husbands and fathers some of the treatment enjoyed by the wives and mothers. Michael dismissed that idea from his mind. Not for him the LSD or the Deep Sleep. He had serious work to do in the world. He needed tenure and

superannuation and sabbatical leave and lunch at the University Club.

He walked up the path to the door of his house. The key scraped in the lock in an odd silence. He went into the hall where everything seemed cool and sane, where a soft good quiet had settled. The mirror on the hall table reflected a bowl of flowers. Michael entered his study, turned on the music, poured a Scotch, and sat in the armchair as a feeling of well-being drifted over him. Songs of the Auvergne, cool, clear and strangely perfect, filled the lonely study. He began to forget the menace he had felt all around him at Mandala. He began to rearrange his thoughts and to place Marjorie in good hands, in her narrow white hospital bed with the shadows playing through the curtains. Then he sat at his desk and his mind moved as it must to the matter of tomorrow's lecture to second-year English. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Michael became absorbed in the significance of the Pentangle and wrote: 'This is perhaps the most important sign in magic, the quintessence of the alchemists, as old as time. As old, at least, as recorded history. The Pentangle can be seen scratched on Babylonian pottery.'

As he wrote he heard the phone ringing. The sound brought his thoughts back to Marjorie and the children. He pushed back his chair and went into the hall to answer the phone. It was his sister. He answered her questions about Marjorie, and as he did so he could feel himself telling a story, sorting out the characters, the plot, the action as he went along. There was no place in this story for visions of the burning building, the seething pit of savage lunatics. Instead he said that Marjorie was resting, and was going to be OK. There was nothing to worry about, and the doctor was very reassuring. He had extremely modern ideas, and the grounds of the clinic were delightful, like a park. The staff very bright and efficient. The type of treatment depended on how things went. They would have to wait and see. There was a range of treatment available, and a program of occupational therapy. But surely, his sister said, a note of alarm in her voice, surely Marjorie wouldn't be staying there having occupational therapy. Wasn't that for long-term people? Michael

said they had to wait and see about everything. How were the children, he said. They were well and happy. Rebecca was such a lovely baby. Michael spoke to the children. 'We had green jelly. Rebecca nearly crawled into the swimming pool.' Michael said to his sister that he would make arrangements as soon as possible for someone to live in and look after the children at home.

Back at his desk he wrote that the Pentangle is a symbol conceived by Solomon to betoken holy truth. His mind was far, far away from what he was writing, and he felt a dreadful heaviness in his heart.

Vickie Field was drying her nails and flicking through a small red library book, *The Eagle and the Dove* by Vita Sackville-West. This book was part of the costume she was devising for her part as Vita. Not in a play, but as some effect Ambrose wanted at Mandala. She had to act the part of Vita in the White Garden. A publicity stunt of some kind.

The book was just a prop — it told her nothing about Vita. It was all about French and Spanish saints. Her knowledge of what to wear came from a coloured portrait in a book of pictures from a museum in Scotland — a picture of Vita as a young woman wearing a red hat, green jacket, gold skirt. Vickie added her own red boots.

BLACK MIRROR OF QUIET WATER

It was 1930 when Vita Sackville-West first saw Sissinghurst Castle in Kent and decided to buy it. She and Harold her husband wanted to make a new garden. Sissinghurst was like Sleeping Beauty's castle, and Vita said that she fell flat in love with it. Love at first sight as the bricks glowed pink in the late afternoon sun. The old moat was a black mirror in the twilight.

Vickie Field read a book about the garden Vita and Harold made. She imagined she was at Sissinghurst, imagined what the White Garden must be like, imagined she was at Knole, the great fortress where Vita grew up. Vickie read Vita's book about Knole. She imagined she was Vita sitting for her portrait in the scarlet hat and the emerald jacket and the golden skirt, holding the small red book in her left hand between slender thumb and long thin fingers. She sat on a straight brown chair with a stiff high back and gazed steadily and quietly at the portrait painter William Strang, and she stared out at the world with large cool dark eyes, mirrors of black water, shining.

Knole was the largest private house in England, and Vita, the only child of Lionel and Victoria, Lord and Lady Sackville, grew up there, climbing its fifty-two staircases and roaming its three hundred and sixty-five rooms. The buildings occupied four acres, and the land went on for a thousand. There were sixty servants. Furniture and paintings left behind by centuries filled the endless corridors, the secret stairways, the vast and gloomy attics.

The house and gardens were open to the public. Vita would put on a silk dress and show the visitors around. It was like a theatre in which she could perform and tell stories. By night it was an empty stage that she filled with the fruits of her imagina-

tion. Then she wore velvet cloaks and plumed hats and wielded a wonderful silver sword.

Statues of grand leopards decorated the wide front staircase, and other mythological beasts were painted or carved on the wooden surfaces throughout the house. Mermaids stood up boldly on their tails; birds, monkeys, winged horses, garlands of fruits swung and spilled across walls and mantels. Masks, tapestries and portraits hung on every wall — pictures of ancestors, princes and kings. Lady Sackville saw to it that bowls and urns of roses, lilies, gardenias, jasmine filled the house. There were flowers painted on the wooden furniture and woven into the velvets and brocades. In the King's Room the furniture was made from silver, hung with cherry-coloured satin, decorated with crimson and white ostrich plumes. The bed in the Spangle Bedroom was draped in scarlet satin into which were sewn millions of metal sequins so that the whole bed glittered as the breeze from the open windows ruffled the hangings. Vita played alone all over the house, talking to her dolls — Boysy, Dorothy, Clown Archie and Mary of New York.

Under the apple trees that grew in small square orchards there were irises and snapdragons. In spring the paths were edged with bluebells and daffodils, and when she was a child Vita would go into the summer house in the Sunk Garden to write novels inspired by the romance and history around her.

She wrote in immense ledgers. She sometimes tied other girls to the trees and thrashed their legs with nettles. She stuffed putty up their nostrils and gagged their mouths with handkerchiefs. She danced in and out of strawberry beds, cherry trees, on wet gravel, among honeysuckle and lavender. She played draughts with her silent grandfather who resembled a goblin; he kept plates of fruit for her in a drawer in the dining room. She fell in love with a girl called Violet and they dressed up in silks and velvets and chased each other up and down the stairs, in and out of fabled rooms hung with dark brocades and glinting with mirrors and silver swords.

William Strang painted Vita's portrait in the red hat when Vita was twenty-six, and married, and just beginning her adult

affair with her childhood sweetheart Violet. The portrait hangs in the Glasgow Museum.

Vickie Field stared hard at the print of this portrait, and tried to imagine herself as Vita.

Vita and Violet ran away to France, Vita dressing up as 'Julian' and booking into hotels with Violet as his mistress. The trouble it caused; the tears and storms and dramas with husbands and families; the fun and the pleasure and excitement; and the letters tied up with red ribbon and later burnt.

Vita fell in love with Sissinghurst Castle and it was there that she and Harold Nicolson designed and made the White Garden. Vickie longed to go to Kent, to see Sissinghurst, to walk along the paths where Vita walked. She wished somebody would write a play about all this, and she could star in it. She would be Vita. She would be brilliant, a brilliant Vita. It seemed that all Ambrose wanted her to do was dress up and put in appearances in the White Garden at Mandala. It was fun and easy, but Vita's story had started to inspire her. She tried on her costume and paraded in front of the mirror in her flat, imagining the mirror was edged with silver, the walls hung with tapestries, the bed draped in scarlet satin and sprinkled with stars and spangles. She read Vita's story in *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf.

'There's no need to get carried away with all this,' Ambrose told her. 'All I want you to do is dress up.' But into Vickie's imaginings there came a man called Paul. He worked at Sissinghurst as a gardener's boy, helping with the clearing of the cluttered heaps of rubbish that lay about the grounds — old bedsteads, sardine tins, ploughshares and cabbage stalks.

RIVULETS OF VIOLETS AND MATTRESSES OF ROSES

Paul

I was there from the beginning. Mrs Nicolson would go out in the moonlight, planting until midnight sometimes. I'd go home of an evening and then when I came back the next day there would be things done, new things, all according to the plans they had. Later on she would give me apples and cherries to take home to my brothers and sisters. And was I pleased when she wrote up about the garden in the newspaper. We were working on the new idea of a garden with white flowers — and grey and green and silver — and she wrote it up in the paper and I just swelled with pride to think that the thing I was doing all day was so new and important it was in the paper. She said about the yew hedge and the box edging of the White Garden (as it came to be known) and I thought — well, I keep all those yews and boxes in trim; that's me she's talking about, really. And who carried the grey flag stones then? Me, that's who. I was always so proud when I read those things in the paper. Like a secret knowledge. I knew she was meaning me, but for the other readers I was invisible.

When my uncle Uriel died they were going to throw out all his old clothes and Mrs Nicolson said would I bring them to Sissinghurst instead. So I did, and whenever we needed sacking for one thing or another we would use old uncle Uriel's jacket or trousers. My aunt read in the paper how we put trousers round the trunk of the mimosa in the winter to protect it from the cold, and she said she supposed they were Uriel's trousers then, and I said yes they would have been, and she was pleased about that.

The first thing we did after the war was get a start on the White Garden. Between the Tower Lawn and the Priest's House there was a rose garden, very sunny, and that was where we

put it. Winter 1949 we did the first planting — that was the willow-leaf pear. Roots and cuttings and seeds from all parts of the gardens were brought in. And so, as it happened, the new things they bought only cost three pounds altogether. You can hardly believe that. Gypsophila was new. I suggested the rabbits' ears myself. Mrs Nicolson always said she hoped a barn owl would come in the summer, at dusk, and haunt the White Garden. It did too. It was like some big silver spook out there in the twilight.

Mrs Nicolson collected cuttings wherever she went, and she carried a sponge bag that she put them in to bring them home for planting. She always had some potatoes with her and she would cut a groove in a potato and put the cutting in there to keep it alive for the journey. She kept track of all garden business in a big green book with gold letters on the front: 'V Sackville-West, The Garden'. She would move things round in the garden from one place to another, and she'd always make a note of it in the green book. It was like a Bible to her, and to us. She was always going out giving talks to garden societies and it was all written up in *Vogue*. One time the *Picture Post* sent round a photographer without even asking, and Mr Nicolson was furious and he stormed off to do some weeding. Well the woman followed him with the camera and got a picture of his backside under the forsythia. It was fun and games when they printed that one in the paper, but everything always blew over. It was like all Mrs Nicolson's girlfriends — and Mr Nicolson's boyfriends for that matter. There would be a bit of a storm and tempest, and then things would go on as usual. It always seemed to me they really loved each other, in a funny sort of way. And they had the garden. That was the important thing. I often think of how they used to walk together in the garden in the moonlight — of course the White Garden was very good in the moonlight, with the ghostly light of the flowers and leaves. And that owl. Every Sunday they would pick some flowers for Mr Nicolson to take up to his rooms in London. Glorious they were, those bunches of flowers. I was proud to think they were going up to London.

We had thousands of visitors always looking at the gardens.

The doves and the dovecote came to the orchard in about 1954. People loved the doves. Mrs Nicolson won prizes for the poems she wrote about Sissinghurst — and she never planted anything without knowing what soil it needed and how to get it right. 'Build up the underground constitution,' she used to say. She was just a natural gardener. And she talked in poetry some of the time. 'Rivulets of violets and mattresses of roses,' she would say. Things like that. Very poetic. And a real gift for colour. She would pick a bunch of something and stick it in the ground where she was thinking of growing it. If it worked in the bunch she knew she could go ahead with the planting. I never ever saw anybody else do that.

Once there was a time she went to visit her mother and there were no flowers out in Lady Sackville's garden — and her Ladyship was worried that her daughter would probably be scornful about this. So she sent a girl out to Marshall and Snellgrove to buy all kinds of artificial flowers — there were velvet ones with jewels and silk ones and paper ones — and she attached all these flowers to the plants in her garden. She was a funny one. Just imagine that. Mrs Nicolson came home and told everyone, and she laughed like anything and said it was hilarious. When you consider the planning and the time and all the thought and patience and skill that went into the garden at Sissinghurst — and then just think of sticking some velvet roses into a bush as if it was a hat or something. Take the White Garden, for an example — there's the weaving of the pattern of grey and green leaves and the little maze of box that sets off the white flowers. It's art — it's all art and nature all at once. And light. The way the light works and the way the plants work. Summer's the time for the White Garden, and then in autumn it's the Moat Walk — so much colour along the Moat Walk in the autumn. I like it here in the winter when there's no visitors and we do repairs to the buildings as well as the garden. Some of the trees and shrubs come into their own in the winter, and the people from outside never see that. In one of the poems — I know bits of the poems by heart — she says how parts of the garden in winter are 'a fragile note

touched from the brittle violin of frost' — I know exactly what she means.

It's special and lovely at Sissinghurst in the winter.

Christmas 1961 was very, very cold in Kent. Vita dreamt again a dream of many years before. She was setting plants in the garden in the winter dusk as the snow fell all around her. And as she worked on and on into the darkness and the snow fell deeper and deeper she saw that she was surrounded by the light of hundreds of burning candles in the snow. Gradually the snow buried the candles but didn't put them out. She looked up and saw that all about her were silent deer with flames on the tips of their antlers.

The next summer Vita died, and the room where she wrote in the tower at Sissinghurst stopped in time — the apricot velvet curtains, the old embroideries, the silks, velvets, bowls of flowers, books, rugs and blue beads from Persia, crystal rabbits from China, poems framed and hung on the walls — all stayed as she left them. Above the world, mysterious, the tower room of a princess. Snow fell again on the garden where roses hung from the apple trees, and the barn owl swooped through the grey-green shadows of the beloved White Garden.

On the bookshelves were Vita's books. There was a copy of *The Eagle and the Dove*, the book that Vickie borrowed from the library, the book about St Teresa of Avila and St Therese of Lisieux.

When Vita went to Normandy in 1937 she saw the house and shrine of St Therese of Lisieux. She found Lisieux a strange place, and was intrigued by the story of the saint. Back home in her tower she wrote: 'Think of writing a book on St Teresa of Avila and St ditto of Lisieux'. It was six years before she started the book, at a time when bombs were falling on Kent. Vita's precious purple glass plates were shattered, and she was filled with fears — afraid for all her loved ones, and afraid the army would steal the onions. Her imagination moved to Spain in the sixteenth century, France in the nineteenth. For six months she

dwelt with the women she called the two Theresas. She started the book with the words of the Spaniard: 'I look down on the world as from a great height and care very little what people say or know about me. Our Lord has made my life to me now a kind of sleep, for almost always what I see seems to me to be seen as in a dream, nor have I any great sense either of pleasure or of pain.'

SAINT DITTO OF LISIEUX

It was 1965. Therese Gillis was twenty, suffering from fear and depression. She was lying in a cubicle at the Mandala Clinic, having been injected with a mixture of Sodium Amytal and Ritalin. A tape-recorder by her bed was playing, recording anything Therese might say. Nothing could record her unspoken thoughts. She tried to think of good things. She thought of the water of the lake, and the lake was a looking glass where water birds flew and the clouds drifted upside down and the lilies opened pink and gold and white. Beautiful pink and gold and white. She decided she would say some of this into the tape-recorder. 'When I was little,' she said in a small voice that was almost a whisper, 'I used to go to the Looking-Glass Lake. Sometimes with my sisters and sometimes with my aunt, and sometimes by myself. I loved going there.'

Then her mind was so filled with memories that it became impossible for her to say anything at all. The doctor had said: 'Just say whatever comes into your head, and Sister will come and turn the tape over when it's finished on this side.' But so much came into her head there was nothing she could say.

She lay in the half-dark room with her head on a small pink pillow, her body covered by a pink blanket, the tape running. She ran her fingers over the blanket and she thought of the wide pink blanket with the satin edge that was on the bed where her mother and father slept. When Therese and her sisters were children they would get into the bed with their parents and lie like peas in a pod, their heads poking out of the blanket in a row.

The cubicle was hushed; there was a faint sound of movement from the tape-recorder. But no speech. Therese drifted into her parents' bed, and thought of the immediate past, of the tourniquet on her arm, and the sight of the doctor as he found the vein and then pricked it with the needle and pushed in the plunger. Therese looked gravely at him; he looked past her. As he pushed the plunger in he said, so that the sound dropped

into Therese's ear: 'Ch-ch'. Then he flicked the needle out and patted Therese on the arm and went out the door, followed by the nurse. 'Ch-ch' repeated in Therese's head. 'Ch-ch'. The image of her sisters under the blanket faded and so many thoughts rushed in that Therese had to clench her teeth and suck in her breath. Her thoughts concocted a kind of mental white noise so that her tongue was silent and she felt a choking sensation behind her eyes and a blankness in her heart. 'Ch-ch' she said a few times and this was recorded on the tape.

Therese was pretty. She had large green eyes and chestnut curls, peachy cheeks, slim body, long legs, no freckles, lovely smile. (I could fuck the arse off her, Ambrose thought as he left the cubicle. It was nice to stick needles into the veins of these depressed little beauties, for starters.)

Under the blanket, Therese was wearing a white cotton petticoat. She lay in the half dark and intoned 'ch-ch' and then she was quiet and tears formed in her eyes, slowly moved across her cheeks and rolled down into her ears. She began to concentrate on the making and the falling of the tears.

After an hour the nurse came back and turned the tape over. Therese lay in the bed and stared up at the ceiling which was grey and stippled. Light came in under the door and she wondered where it was coming from, who was on the other side of the door, what they were doing. She tried to identify the sounds she could hear, the noises nearby and in the distance. Far, far away was the traffic — cars and trams and trucks. She fancied she could hear the chirp of a bird outside the window, small animals darting in the grass, the breaking of a twig, the rattle of teacups, the sighs of lovers in a garden, the pressure of a kiss, the silky touch of a hand on her shoulder, on her breast. Nipples under the white cotton petticoat. Stipples on the ceiling. Silent weeping with her ears full of tears. Cups of salty teardrops on the side of her head. Her head on the pillow and the white noise of her thoughts choking in her throat.

At the end of another hour the nurse came back and took the tape-recorder away. Then she brought Therese a cup of tea and a biscuit with sugar on it. Therese ran her finger along the bumpy edge of the biscuit. She licked and sucked the sugar and then

dipped the biscuit in the tea. The nurse smiled. The nurse's uniform was pink and she had a badge pinned to the collar, and a watch that dangled on a chain. Therese looked closely at the badge and realised it was a gold oval with an image of Mickey Mouse on it. 'Good girl,' the nurse said. 'You can go back to your own bed now.'

There were five other women in beds in Therese's room on the third floor of the main convent building. This room was called 'The Sunroom' because it reached out beyond the walls of the house and caught the sun through its many windows. Therese put on her slippers and dressing gown and stood up unsteadily. The nurse supported her as they returned to the Sunroom. Therese's legs were weak, and her head felt strange, as if there was a pool of stagnant water behind her eyes. She felt so feeble, so unreal, so sad, and they often had to stop while she gathered the strength to go on. 'Sister,' she whispered, 'I think I'm going to be sick.' They turned off towards a toilet, but before they reached the door Therese had doubled over and vomited down the wall. The sister pressed a buzzer, and a patient on buzzer duty came skipping up the corridor. It was Shirley Temple.

'Go and get a bucket and mop and clean up this mess while I get the patient back to bed,' the nurse said. Shirley stared at the vomit on the wall and peered up at Therese. 'Don't stand there staring like an idiot, Shirley. Go and do as I say.' Shirley dropped a little curtsy and ran off to get the bucket and mop. She was a woman of about forty, wearing white socks and little girl shoes. She had a white dress with red polka dots and big flounces that reached just above her knees. Her hair was arranged in a flurry of sausage curls that bobbed up and down as she ran. She hummed and sang: 'On the good ship Lollipop, it's a short trip to the candy shop, and there you are — happy landings on a chocolate bar.' Soon she was back with the bucket, water, disinfectant, mop and cloth. She set about cleaning up the mess, humming cheerfully. The sister and Therese, who was by then almost fainting, stumbled towards the Sunroom.

The room was filled with a clear white light, and the air in there was fresh and sweet. It was Shirley Temple who kept the

air like that — she would open the windows, wipe everything with lavender disinfectant, scatter flowers, lightly spray the bedspreads with eau de Cologne. Like beds in a convent boarding school, six white iron bedsteads were lined up, the windows behind them, their feet pointing towards the door. Beside each bed was a locker and a wooden chair. Iron bars were attached to the outside of the windows. As Therese and the sister came into the room, three pairs of eyes stared at them in silence. Two other pairs of eyes were closed in sleep. The stares were not hostile, but were vacant with a hint of curiosity, like the stares of sleepy children. 'Better sit here while I give you a wash,' the sister said to Therese. Obediently Therese sat on the chair beside her bed while the sister fetched warm water from the bathroom that was kept locked at the end of the Sunroom. Soap and a cloth were taken from the locker beside the bed, and as the sister bent down to get out the towel, Therese fell forward in a faint and hit her face on the side of the locker. Three pairs of eyes opened a little wider to register the shock. Then the steady stares resumed.

Through two dulled minds went simple images of a bed, a girl, a cake of pink soap, a nurse in pink bending over, a falling girl, a thud. The other mind dreamt there was a beautiful girl in a thin white gown. She was sitting on a pure white chair, a princess on a princess chair. A servant was kneeling and washing her feet. The princess's face turned grey and then her face and body were covered with crisscross lines of spider web wrinkles. A crisis of crisscross, a cocoon of silken threads. Slowly the princess tipped forward, and, without a sound, she hit her head, which was made from cotton wool, on a small marble table. A fountain of blood spurted from her eye. The blood flowed fast and filled the room, and boats bobbed on the dark, sticky surface. The dreamer rocked in her boat in the middle of a lake of blood, her head filled with the sound of a washing machine. She reached from the boat to try to save the princess; she tried to scream, but no sound came. The princess

was drowning in the lake of blood; the blood was flowing from the windows and down the walls of the castle; the castle was weeping blood.

The sister lifted Therese onto the bed, straightened out her legs and then washed her face, neck, arms and hands. One cheek was grazed by the brush with the locker. The sister dabbed the graze with antiseptic. Therese opened her eyes as the antiseptic stung her face. The sister pulled her nightgown on over her underwear, tucked in the bedclothes, took her pulse and temperature. Normal. Thank goodness for that. She tidied away the soap and cloth and left Therese to sleep off her fatigue after the Amytal and Ritalin. She put the injury on record: 'Patient grazed side of face when getting into bed. Cleaned graze with Dettol.'

One of the other women in the Sunroom sat up in bed and took her sewing from her locker. It was her task from OT — a red, white and blue cloth octopus. She didn't use a needle, these being banned from the Sunroom, but she set about stuff ing the toy with crumpled bits of nylon stocking. As she stuffed the octopus she nodded at Therese and said in a loud voice: 'War Casualty. Extensive Facial Injuries. Internal Bleeding. Coma.'

And one of the other women said in a low, tired voice: 'Shut up, Florence Nightingale, and get on with your octopus.'

A woman who appeared to be asleep, and who didn't stir or open her eyes, said in the tone of a school mistress's authority: 'Quiet now, girls. No talking in the back row. Listen carefully and take notes.'

'Silly old bitch,' the second woman said.

Then all was silent again and the room was filled with the bright sunlight of the afternoon which cast the shadows of the bars across the beds.

It was a curious fact that nobody ever listened to the silent tape that Therese made when she lay in the cubicle. The tape had her name on it, and the next time she came up for Amytal and Ritalin it was used again. Her eyes went black after the fall, and Dr Goddard said: 'Been in a punch up with the nurses?' His voice was joking, but his eyes were cold. 'No point in that, milady. The nurses here are all trained thugs. Kill you as soon as look at you. I wouldn't ever get on the wrong side of them myself. You just watch your p's and q's and do as you would be done by. How do we feel after our first go at the truth drug? Clears the mind, doesn't it? Hasn't done much for your appearance, I must say. But you'll mend.' He laughed loudly and moved on. Therese made no attempt to answer him. It was three days before she saw him again, and he was only a blurred recollection, less defined than the images of her dreams and imaginings.

During those weeks Therese's mother visited her, bringing flowers, fruit, biscuits, chocolate, nightdresses. 'You must have something to eat, Therese. You'll never get better if you don't eat.' She took the washing away and came back each time with clean clothes. 'Sister says you're not eating, and not talking to anybody. But why is that? If you start to cooperate they'll let you have visitors. The others are dying to come and see you. They send their love. Mrs Darcy made you some rock cakes. Margaret's been promoted, put in charge of the whole primary school. And Louise has nearly finished the dress she's making. I have to go to Myers for the buttons. Frankie's going to have her hair permed she says, and Rosie and the children came over last night and they were so funny. Try and eat your meals, duck, and brighten yourself up a bit.' The voice tailed off. Therese lay silent and unresponsive in the bed. Her mother stared in desperation and anguish at the other women in the Sunroom. She patted and smoothed the cover on Therese's bed and looked kindly and earnestly into Therese's face. But her daughter's eyes were blank and her mouth was closed. Then suddenly Therese gripped her mother's hand and a violent light came into her eyes. 'Take me home,' she said. 'I want to go home.' But her mother shook her head in a bewildered little gesture and said, 'No, duck, the doctor says you've got a long way to go before

you can come home.' She hesitated and then she said, 'Bridie wanted me to tell you she's going to enter in six weeks.'

Therese heard these words about her sister Bridie who was going into the convent. She went white and rigid and moved away so that she was no longer touching her mother. Her mother had said the words in an attempt to get Therese to show some emotion, some interest. Now she thought that perhaps she had gone too far, misjudged, that she should not have told Therese at that moment. Bridget specially wanted Therese to know. But perhaps she should have asked the doctor if it was a wise thing to say. Therese was the youngest in the family, and so sensitive and strange. When Rosie got engaged to Vincent, Therese went hysterical and locked herself in the playhouse and wouldn't come out. They went into the playhouse afterwards and discovered that Therese had pulled all the dolls to pieces, scattering their heads and legs and arms around the floor. Now Therese stared coldly at the woman who sat anxiously at the bedside and said: 'Tell her I hate her.' Then she turned away, and her mother knew that she could say and do no more. She patted the bedclothes, lightly kissed the back of Therese's head, and left. At the front desk she spoke to a nurse: 'She isn't eating, Sister. We are very worried.' And the nurse, smiling up at her in reassurance said, 'Doctor would like you to make a time to see him.'

During Mrs Gillis's appointment Ambrose kept his feet on the floor beneath the desk. At one point it amused him to slide his hand into the desk drawer and run his fingers over the pistol he kept there. His little Browning .22 automatic. He smiled as he thought of shooting Mrs Gillis. (Dangerous lunatic Mrs Gillis who had threatened him with a sawn-off shotgun. No, mad Mrs Gillis who ran in brandishing a scimitar.) He looked at the scrawny woman in a linen overcoat, a woman with haunted and bewildered eyes. Her brow was furrowed with anxiety, her shoes were Italian, her huge tapestry handbag bulged with motherly love. Ambrose could hear her heart crying out for help. It could be, he thought, that she is more depressed than the daughter. But she has plenty to keep her busy, and doesn't give in so easily. The daughter is the youngest of a heap of Catholic girls.

Sexual repression. What they all need is a good fuck, a bloody good fuck. Father's an architect. Rich and busy building. Girls need a screw. Make a note: 'Could be the father screws the girls.' Any of the girls married? One. Any in convents? One going soon. So the one we've got here in the Sunroom is the baby, the pet. They have all spoilt her. Spoilt. Sounds like a crop of wheat. Spoilt by the floods. Therese, flooded by affection and love and too many toys, got too big for her boots and then she was crippled and depressed and wound up in the Sunroom. Makes bad sense. Very bad sense. Won't eat, won't talk, won't anything. Fading away. Needs to be taken in hand. Needs thrashing. Needs ECT, DST. Needs fuck.

'Theresa is in very good hands here, Mrs Gillis.' Ambrose rested his chin on his hand and smiled across the desk at Dorothy Gillis. She tried to smile. She was holding on tightly to the wooden handles of her bag which was placed on her knees. Her feet were neatly together on the carpet.

'She needs, she needs a period of rest and medication. She may well be a candidate for our new program of Deep Sleep Therapy which sends the brain on a little holiday.' Dorothy's eyes registered a flicker of desire for such a little holiday. 'But first we need to approach her problems through a program of what is called "truth drug". Therese has already undergone some sessions of this form of therapy, and she is, I can assure you, responding well. The truth drug isn't nearly as dramatic as it sounds. The patient is given a dose of Sodium Amytal and Ritalin and then speaks freely and easily into a tape-recorder. I later go through the tape with a fine-tooth comb and I note the salient points, the points of worry and conflict in the patient's mind. I bring these matters up with the patient at later appropriate times. These tapes are of course completely confidential between myself and the patient. It is usually possible with this type of treatment to bring the patient to a point where normal desires for food and social contact and so on are restored. And at that point it can be the time for Deep Sleep. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me, Mrs Gillis?'

'When is she going to be better?'

'Well, a month, two months. Who can say. Took her twenty

years to get this far, after all. Unravelling it all can take some time. But she is young and intelligent. An attractive young woman with everything to live for. What she needs is a good rest and the right medication.'

He brought his hands together, placed them on the desk and stood up. Dorothy got up and he put a firm hand of reassurance on her shoulder as they walked to the door. 'Feel that you can be in touch with us here at any time, Mrs Gillis. It is important that we should all work together to get Therese back on her feet.'

Several times Therese returned to the cubicle where she lay for hours in silence with the tape running. One day, in a kind of absence of mind, she began to speak, and what she said was recorded:

'It's really hard for someone to know how to start. You are here all alone and the tape-recorder is making a funny little noise as its wheels go slowly round and round and the ribbon runs on and on from one spool to the other and the face of the moment imprints on the ribbon as the ribbon runs like water and life the water of life and words come from my mouth and they land on the tape and the tape goes on and on, winding and winding, and I don't know what to say. So I put my hands to my face and my face is cold and I feel my blood draining away, seeping onto the ribbon as the ribbon runs, every thought, every breath, every blink of my eye, every word of my lips, the truth and the lies, goes whirry, whirry, whirry into the little black box like a magician's box, it's a trick, a trick by a Turk and a turkey at a Christmas dinner with bread stuffing and cranberry sauce like blood. Blood running from my mother into me and out again and into the little black box of blood and words blah, blah, blahed. "Ch-ch" the needle goes in and "zzzzz" the wooshy juice goes singing along to the heart that beats and sends the juicy juice sailing along to the poor dead brain. Poor little match-girl brain. Redhead, deadhead. And the brain goes "Zupp!" and the curtains open and the curtains swish and the audience sits back softly in the velvet armchairs and the armchairs float along in clouds and clouds of clouds. Pink. Things happen slowly and the feeling is nice — nice and quiet and soft and safe and sound like a baby in a cradle rock-a-bye-baby on the tree top and just

one little "ch-ch" and it's done, opened up, up and over, when the wind blows, and split the oyster.

'I used to lie in the big bed with my sisters called Frankie and Loulou and Margaret and Rosie and Bridie. Six peas in a pod my father said and I was the smallest pea. Sweet Pea. That's me. Sweet Pea. A pink satin ribbon ran all along the edge of the blanket and I would stroke the satin and sometimes I chewed the corner and sucked the woolly taste through the satin. I am trying to tell the story of all this. Every Sunday Father May would tell my father he had six *fine* girls, and then he would say that I was the little one, the Little Flower of the family. I was pink and white and sugar and rose petals. That was how I looked on the surface, on the skin of things. But secretly I sucked the satin on the blanket and played a quiet juicy tune on Myself. There are dirty words for Myself but I don't know them. Not really. Sometimes I think I know them. Nobody ever says. People smile. I said to Bridie to taste my fingers when I was playing on Myself and she sucked my fingers and then she laughed and then she slapped me and took my fingers in her mouth and bit them very hard. I loved her and she slapped me and bit me and pulled my hair. Then she would get into trouble. Bridie bit me, I would say, and I would cry and cry.

'We used to see the Girl in the wash-house. The Girl lingered by the wash-house door in the twilight. She was nearly as big as Bridie and she had a navy dress and school shoes and socks and her face was the same as the Mona Lisa. She smiled like that and she just stood there where the vines hang down over the lattice and there was a smoky look about her, and a perfect silence. She smiled and said nothing, ever. We weren't scared, but we always wished she would say something. Are you a ghost, I would say. Tell us. Speak to us. Sometimes I see her in the street. She never changes and she never speaks. She stands in misty doorways trying to tell me something, but she never, ever speaks. She could even be here in the hospital, somewhere. I wonder if Bridie ever sees her now. I never talk to Bridie. She's going into the convent, going away to Queensland. I'm glad it's Queensland because I never want to see her again. Go into your convent and stay there, Bridie, Sister Bridie, Bride of Christ,

Sister High and Mighty Bride of Christ. Merry Christmas. What ever happened to Roger Lewis. I thought you were supposed to marry him in a secret Protestant wedding with no family and just the cleaning lady and the postman to be witnesses and you in his sister's old wedding dress with the pearl buttons all the way up to the neck.

'Bridie is pretty. Everybody says Bridie is pretty. Too pretty to be a nun. Dad will pretend to be pleased, but I know he won't like it. Mum is pleased. Mum wished she had a vocation herself when she was young. Instead she had all of us and now the grandchildren, Rosie's children, and Mum never gets a minute to herself. She's a martyr to the family, the backbone, forever looking after Rosie's children while Rosie goes out working to pay off the mortgage, getting out our old toys and books and making gingerbread men run run as fast as you can, you can't catch me I'm the gingerbread man. And she takes them to the zoo to see the animals and go on the rides.

'I don't know why I'm telling you all this — this meaningless drivel, drivelling on about the convent and the zoo and the children and Bridie and Roger and the Girl at the wash-house door. I don't know why and— and I do know why. I'm saying all this to fill in the spaces in the air, because I'm scared of explaining the things I have never explained, the things nobody knows except me. It's too strange, the things I know, the things I think. They'd lock me up if they knew the truth about me. And I am locked up, and so that goes to show. So I might as well say anyway. I can't be more locked up than I am already. Locked up in the cellar and nobody hears you call, walled up in the tower. Let me out, let me be, let me die, let me be free, let me see. These are just words and I don't mean them. I don't mean a word of this; I just sing like a singsong like a ding-dong bell. What are words? What does it matter what I say, if I say these words or some other words. Who cares? Who's listening? Who has their ear to the keyhole, eye to the crack, nose to the grindstone. Is there anybody there, said the traveller, knocking at the moonlit door. Nobody. Someone came a-knocking at my wee, small door. But the Girl with the smile has vanished. Washed away with the tide. Washed away, splashed with muddy water and caught

in the tide and all washed away, all washed up, driftwood and drivel and dribble and trouble and double double toil and trouble. Sad, bad, mad. I am here. I am speaking to you. I am Therese — Therese Martin. The Little Flower. Sister Therese of the Infant Jesus and the Holy Face.'

The words stopped there but the tape kept running. Therese was dazed by her own soft words, and she stared far into space, seeing nothing of the grey ceiling above her, seeing nothing but an empty mist. She was conscious only of a feeling of elation, of having got the right answer at last, of breaking through a terrible barrier into a new and sweeter world. She was aware of a faint perfume around her, and of the distant sound of women intoning psalms. High cool voices in the beloved chapel of the convent in Normandy. For a long time Therese listened to the far-off harmonies and then she began to sing: 'Flower ye forth like the lily'. Her voice was high and sweet and pure. The sister on duty heard her singing and came into the cubicle. 'Nearly done then, are we?' she said, and Therese repeated her song, gazing in a strange way at the air, looking through the other woman, her face bright and shining. The sister had seen this kind of thing before and she thought very little of it. She was pleased that the patient was still in the bed and that the tape was still running. She left the room, but Therese had fallen silent and after a while the tape finished with a loud click. Therese lay there in a peaceful trance, her eyes wide and her cheeks flushed. Then the sister helped her back to bed in the Sunroom.

LITTLE FERRET, LITTLE QUEEN

On the bridge in the Norman town of Alencon, Zelie the Lacemaker met Louis the Clockmaker and they fell in love.

> If a thread breaks it must be dealt with carefully, and a knot must never be left visible in the lace itself. The length of the pendulum used governs the ratio of the wheels and pinions necessary to show true time.

Zelie and Louis were married in 1858.

> If the thread gets loose from the neck, and the bobbin begins to unwind after the work is started, it is only necessary to wind the bobbin to the length required and finish by winding the thread twice round the neck of the bobbin and pulling it taut. The time of vibration of a pendulum depends entirely on its length.

Zelie and Louis had nine children but four of them died when they were very young. The last of the children was a daughter who was born on a snowy night in January 1873. Her name was Therese — Marie Francoise Therese Martin.

Every morning Zelie and Louis went to Mass at 5.30, and the life of the whole family was marked by a devotion to God. It was the aim of Zelie and Louis to see their children enter the convent or the priesthood. The boys died, but all five girls went into the convent. Therese was to die there, very young, and would become a saint known to the world as 'The Little Flower'.

Therese kept a diary in which she wrote: 'You can hardly imagine how much I loved my mother and father. I showed my love in a thousand little ways.' Her father called her his little queen, and her mother called her her little ferret. Zelie died when Therese was four. The child was lifted up to kiss her dead mother's forehead, and then she was left alone outside the death chamber. She saw for the first time, with great shock, the coffin propped on its end against the wall. At that moment her naturally happy disposition deserted her, the sun in her spirit was blotted out by a terrible darkness which came and went throughout her life. After the funeral Louis took his five

daughters from Alencon to live in Lisieux where Zelie's family could help him and could nurture the children.

The house where Louis and his daughters lived in Lisieux was large, handsome and comfortable. It was called 'Les Buissonnets' and was furnished with polished mahogany and warm draperies. Therese had her own little garden decorated with shells and stones where she grew periwinkles and ferns. She also made a miniature altar in her garden where she placed flowers and lit candles and prayed. Her toys were a skipping rope, a draughtboard, a sailing boat, a doll, a bird cage, a toy piano and a toy stove. These things were preserved at Les Buissonnets after Therese's death. And her curls were hung in a glass case in the local church.

Therese Martin

The first word I ever learned to read was 'heaven'. Earth seems to be a place of exile and I dream of heaven. Everything on the altar in my bedroom is so small — tiny candlesticks and flower vases that hold the smallest posies I can find. It gives me such joy to scatter flowers beneath the feet of God. The sun shines so brightly on God's world and I turn my face to the sun. But I always remember the shadows and strange terrors that can appear in the midst of the clearest sunlight.

One afternoon I was standing by the window looking out into the garden and I was feeling very cheerful. I saw a man in front of the wash-house. He was dressed exactly like Papa, and was of the same height and bearing, but he was very bent and aged. His head was covered with a kind of thick veil. He wore a hat that resembled Papa's hat. I was suddenly gripped with a supernatural fear and I cried out Papa! in a trembling voice. But the mysterious figure seemed not to hear me, and, without even turning his head, he walked on towards the fir trees that divided the main path of the garden. I expected to see him on the other side of the trees, but this prophetic vision disappeared

completely. All this lasted only a moment, but the memory of it is as vivid as the vision itself. This mysterious image has come into my imagination time and time again, but it was fourteen years before I realised its significance. It was a prophecy of the terrible illness that overtook Papa — like a photograph taken in the future and handed to me fourteen years before its time. When Papa became ill he would hide his face from view under a cloth. The man in front of the wash-house — I never saw the vision again, but it visited my memory and my imagination with a force more powerful than the reality of everyday encounters.

Therese Gillis

The girl beside the wash-house, the girl at the wash-house door, she came back, over and over again. We all saw her, Mona Lisa of the wash-house. Golden skin and sliding eyes and a smile, the smile of a quiet, quiet mouse, quick as a flick of a mouse's tail in the green and misty twilight. She gets inside my dreaming head, that Mona Lisa Girl, and she slowly swells inside my head, inside me, filling all the spaces, inhabiting my body until my skin is stretched across her skin and all within me is that Mona Lisa Girl, moaning and laughing and humming inside my face and neck and hands. But not my legs. The Mona Lisa Girl has no legs, and that's the worst thing about her. She goes around in a floating way, existing only from just above the waist, just above her folded hands, her soft and golded golden god-crossed hands. She is looking out towards the stretching sea, looking for her mother in the sea.

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, men have named me. I contain the lady with the mystic smile. Am I warm, am I real, by the wash-house, or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art? Whatever happened to my feet? I had shoes, red shoes like a princess, and now my feet have gone, my legs have gone, I have no feeling below the waist. Paralysed from the waist down (or from the toes up) she is just what the doctor ordered. Just what a man needs to meet his needs. She doesn't feel a thing. Fuck out her brains. Toss her into the sea, doctor, back into the sea when you

have finished with her. Plenty more pebbles on the beach. Have you *seen* her pebbles? This girl has a bag full of snow-white pebbles, stones to mark the way. All along the seashore you will find white pebbles, and the sea rolls in and the waves wash over the stones and the sea sucks back and the secrets of the sea are safe. And the mermaid, seductive siren, will sing a sailor to his death. Sailor, beware. Beware the dumb mermaid, she is the most dangerous. They call her sometimes 'Daphne the deaf and dumb mermaid'. Watch out for her. She can bring the waves crashing, overwhelming the ship with her deaf, dumb, dead and boiling waves.

The reality of the sea. That was overwhelming. I remember the first time I ever saw the ocean. I could not take my eyes from it; it drew me like a giant magnet, and the majestic roaring of the waves filled me with a sense of the power and majesty of God.

I swam in the sea with my sisters; there was Bridie and Frankie and Loulou and Margaret and Rosie-Posie and they took me by the hands, by the legs, by the love and by the waves that broke on the edge of the shining sand. Like a ribbon of waters, a ribbon of daughters — all foaming and gleaming and bursting with bubbles and breaking with laughter, peals of laughter, pearls of wisdom, pale pink pearls of watery wisdom on the edge of the green-gold sand. I swam in the sea with my sisters, and God rode in on the tide; God rode in a boat on the tide. Rock-a-bye Godboat on the treetop. God trod on the sand with me and my sisters and sunlight and ribbons of watery love. I swam in the sea with my sisters.

When I was very young I had an illness that was caused by the devil. He was enraged that my sister Pauline had become a Carmelite and he wished to punish me for the harm our family was doing. But what the devil did not realise at that time was that the Queen of Heaven watched over me. I was her frail little flower that bloomed in the snow.

It was a time in my life when I always had a headache. One

night my uncle began speaking to me about my mother, and about the past, and he spoke so kindly and gently that I became very troubled and I began to sob, softly at first, and then loudly and deeply. Suddenly my uncle spoke less kindly. He said I was sentimental and melancholic and needed taking out of myself. He decided I must be kept thoroughly entertained, and given constant company. I must not creep away, he said, and dwell on the sadness of the past, but I must spend my time with my cousins and with girls of my own age. I found such girls so difficult and shallow, and they laughed at me and teased me. My head began to ache and throb as he spoke, and my whole being was as if gripped by hot irons. That night I became ill and it seemed that I would go insane. Or die. Pauline was about to take the veil, and I was desolated by my loss of her, and overcome with pain at my uncle's words.

I was delirious, yet I was sharply conscious of what I was saying and doing. It was as if there were two parts of me, one watching the thoughts and actions and feelings of the other, a sufferer and a helpless observer. I became so exhausted I would have let anyone do anything at all to me, even kill me. At times I longed for death to come. The devil had great power over me and was able to instil in me terrible fears — fears of the most ordinary things. The door looked like the entrance to a tomb, and the trees outside the window were great dark fingers reaching in to claim me. The devil danced in the shadows of the candlelight.

My head aches. I have received quick deep darts of electricity into the thick of my brain, and my brain is thick and aching with dead thoughts. A pathway has been cut into my thinking tissue, straight is the gate and narrow is the way. A narrow way has been cut through the yellow primroses and down the path runs electricity in the frying trying crying electri-city of the city of my brain. I had a memory, a recollection of companions rolled in sheets, moaning and groaning and tolling the bells of morning and noon and night. Through the brains of my companions ran the electric pathway, through the blooming scarlet primroses of the bright and brazen city of the dying and

the dead. I was in torment. I cried out in agony and nobody heard me, nobody came. I heard sometimes a murmuring as though a hundred hundred whispering voices hummed within my head and the voices all were saying: 'The boat, we are in the boat, in the same boat, all in the same boat. Beauty, beauty, Sleeping Beauty, put your feet, one foot after another on the electric pathway that runs between the frozen primroses in the icy fields of sleep.' And another voice calls out to me: 'Don't go. Don't go. Come back, don't sleep. Still waters run deep.' And the ache in my head booms out loud, loud, and everyone can hear it and they stare at me, stare at me and brush me aside like a cobweb. I drip with drops of silver water, beads of water on a slender single strand of a spider's web. The droplets shiver in the breeze, shiver and fall to the ground, to the frosty ground. Everything is hard and cold and stiff and white. White flowers bloom on cold branches of dark sticks. Sharp spines reach out to catch my flowing garment. I am an insect in a web.

I speak now of the month of May when the world is dressed in flowers, when the snow is but a memory and Mary Queen of Heaven smiles upon the earth. This Little Flower drooped and was about to die. My dear father, my own Papa, in anguish at my state, sent gold coins to the church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris so that Masses could be said for my recovery. As I lay in my bed at Les Buissonnets I turned to the statue of the Blessed Virgin that stood in my room, and I begged her to have pity on me. My sisters were with me, but I felt I was alone, and saw the Virgin begin to glow with a beauty beyond anything I had ever seen and she smiled at me with an infinite tenderness. As she did so, my pain vanished and a great sweetness entered my body and my soul. Two great tears crept down my face. My sister Marie saw me staring at the statue. She said, as with sudden inspiration, 'Therese is cured.'

A violet has come back to life. I am the life. I am the resurrection and the life. I am Violetta, she inhabits me, she is my habit, I am her heart. When I smile I smile with Violetta's lips, I laugh with Violetta's glossy eyes. I touch her cheeks with my finger-

tips and I feel the bloom of peaches, the flutter of the butterflies of her lashes. Into my butterfly, her butterfly, fly her swift sweet fingers. My little soldier fingers march ten thousand men up and up to the top of the hill and then march them down again.

We lie on the marble slab in the graveyard; an angel with folded hands and pointed wings smiles down on us. Our bodies in and out of each other are joined in a long long kiss, a shivering kiss so hot on the cold of the gravestone, a kiss from the twining twins of our toes, this little piggie, from our toes to the blood red blobs of blood of our blood-silk lips. The angel above us blazed with light, light the blue of startled kingfishers. The angel blazed with light.

The nuns insisted on talking to me. Did the statue blaze with light? What did our Blessed Mother say to me? They were so disappointed when all I could tell them was that the Blessed Virgin looked most lovely, and she smiled at me, and I was cured. They seemed to think that perhaps I had lied, perhaps I had not really been ill at all.

I recalled the tribulations of the Venerable Joan of Arc and I saw how small are my own trials compared with the great troubles of holy people. For true glory there is no need to perform outstanding deeds. I must remain hidden and must perform good deeds in secret humility. My glory would consist in becoming after my death a great saint.

I must remain hidden as a thought in the mind. Let my eyes be mirrors that reflect the world, pools where the sky and the clouds drift by, where dark mysterious thinking fish cruise beneath the surface, concealed from sight. I must never see the light of day. In the darkness of the waters I will hide underneath the rocks, in the shadows, in the depths of jasper waters. My eyes will not be the windows of my soul; my eyes will be reflectors. I have seen souls fly from open windows, fly on small blue wings, dart out suddenly and take off into the heavens. I will have shutters and mirrors and my thoughts will all be hidden deep inside the waters of my head. Keep me hidden, keep me as the apple of an eye; hide me in the shadow of a wing for I

am small and feeble and the world is dark and dangerous. I will wait in the earth, as a poppy waits in a poppy seed. I am the crumpled petals inside the hairy pod and I am the spirit of the poppy in the seed. I am a grain of sand, a drop of water. I will disappear forever, a drop in the ocean, a drop in a bucket.

I sat beneath a tree in the garden of a hospital somewhere — I think it was here — and I heard some children playing. There were three children two girls and a boy and I heard their laughter and the sound of their voices as they called to each other. Then they rode past me on bicycles, shining silver bicycles, glowing golden children, and I thought I must be seeing things. Sophie! Sophie! the boy called. And then he cried out Come back Jane! They all went spinning by on whirling wheels, three children moving through the world on bicycles. Where did they come from? Where were they going? They left behind them a fragrance of something fresh and fruity — it reminded me of chewing gum. It loses its fragrance and its flavour when you chew it for too long. Does your chewing gum lose its flavour on the bedpost overnight? Yes, yes, and yes.

God taught me mental prayer in secret. I would go into the space between my bed and the wall, and I would shut off this space with the bed curtain. There I used to think about God and life and eternity. Such things lose their fragrance when opened to the air.

On the day of my First Communion I, Therese, disappeared forever like a drop of water in the vastness of the ocean. I pledged myself to my heavenly Mother, and she looked down on her Little Flower and smiled. She placed her Jesus within the petals of her Little Flower. How sweet was the first kiss of Jesus to my soul! It was the kiss of love, and I gave myself to Jesus forever and ever.

THE SPACE BETWEEN THE BED AND THE WALL

Therese Gillis

At home, far away, in my attic bedroom, I have a cupboard in the roof, a roof cupboard, a truth cupboard where I keep my stones. Some of my stones came from the graveyard, some of them came from the beach. A boy gave me one. White stones, white bones, marble souls of marble angels. I sit on the floor and I count my stones, number my bones, and the hairs of my head are numbered. The stones — I stroke them, caress them, suck them, build with them, pray with them, pray to them. I give them secret names. To every soul in Heaven will be given a white stone, the sign of the secret name. With my stones in the cupboard I keep my tiny little books, my *Pippa Passes*, my *Early Poems of Dante Gabriel Rosetti*, my *Sleeping Beauty* and in the very moment when she felt the prick she fell down upon the bed and lay there for a hundred years in a deep, deep sleep. I have my *Golden Thoughts from the Imitation of Christ*. I love these books, and I curl up in the space between the bed and the wall where I have silky cushions and a feather quilt so old the feathers poke through the surface and fly into the air, and I read the books and stroke the golden edges of their pages. I feel the soft old leather of their covers with the tips of my fingers. Then as I hold the books, I lift up my skirt and slide them inside my butterfly. All alone with the golden thoughts and the quiet poems, I search again for Violetta and the angel and the blue light of heaven. I stretch out on the cushions in that magic out-of-time space and sometimes I read a golden thought and sometimes I hum a quiet song and I think of my sisters smacking me. I roll on my stones. She had three lilies in her hand and the stars in her hair were seven. That good and sweet affection wherewith thou art delighted now and then is a foretaste of the celestial country between the bed and the wall. She felt the prick and fell down upon the bed and lay there in a deep, deep sleep.

Therese Martin

When I received my Confirmation, which was not long after my First Communion, the bishop drew the mystic cross on my forehead, and I felt a gentle breeze entering my soul.

I had to return to school, and I felt myself to be set apart from my companions. During playtime I stood by a tree and thought of serious matters while the other girls skipped and laughed and whispered and played their frivolous games. When I buried dead birds some of the girls came to help me, and our cemetery was very pretty for we planted it with tiny shrubs. But in time I became so troubled by religious scruples that I could no longer go to school, and I went instead for private lessons to the home of Madame Papineau. There I used to overhear visitors remarking on how pretty I was, and what lovely hair I had. How very easy it would be to go astray. I remember once aching to go to confession, and not being able to rest until I had confessed my sinful pleasure at wearing a sky blue ribbon in my hair. At this time my beloved sister Marie went from me, from our home, into the convent at Lisieux. First Pauline, I thought, and now Marie. So I then turned to my four dead brothers and sisters in heaven, four little angels, and I talked to them about my longing soon to join them in heaven.

I wore a sky blue ribbon in my hair. Blue is for boys. My sisters loved me, little baby sister, and from the first moment I swam with them. I swam in the sea with my sisters. But my father and mother were sorry to see me. Girl number six then is it? There was wailing and gnashing of teeth and tearing of garments and hair out by the roots. Where is our son, our baby blue-eyed son, our sun, our star? Where is our prince, our king, our namesake? They murmured to each other in the dead of night. 'Let us take her,' they said, 'to the top of yonder hill, and there we will leave her naked and cold, new and naked and cold as a toad. We will leave her in the icy starlight and the animals will come out at night to look at her and marvel as she weeps. The long-eyed fox will sink into her his wonderfully needled teeth. Rip her open and snap up her heart in one triumphant chomp. Drag her off

like a torn-up chicken. A fox with a box of chicken guts and chips tied up with a sky blue ribbon.'

Nobody wanted the me of me. For my sisters I was a plaything, a live doll, a squealing toy. They dressed me in fairy wings and made me stand on the windowsill behind and above the Christmas tree. I was the fairy on the Christmas tree, silver sparkling twinkling dazzling. Blinding. I said: 'Do you think my hair is too short, too long?' And they said it was just right for a girl of my age. I was flooded with torrents of light; I blazed with heat. I was a beacon, a roman candle, a bright star in the starry firmament. So they hoisted me up and put me on top of the tree, and they left me there. That was the sad part. Lonely at the top, people used to say. Yes, I found it very lonely indeed at the top.

I was unendurable company for others when Marie entered the convent. I wept a great deal — my eyes were frequently red and my lips swollen with distress. It needed God to perform another miracle to make me grow up and come to my senses.

On Christmas Day the Holy Child Jesus who was only one hour old, but wise beyond all wisdom, came to me and flooded my small soul with torrents of light. So, on Christmas Day, 1886, I emerged from childhood. I look back on my life now and I see that when I was four and my mother died, I lost the strength of my soul. But now my strength returned.

I was a roman candle, a catherine wheel and it was fireworks night. They pinned me to a post and lit my fuse and I spun and fizzed and blazed and everybody was delighted. Who would have thought she had it in her, they said, such strength of character, such spark, such zip and zup and get up and go!

We had come home from Midnight Mass, Papa, Celine and I, and by the fire were my shoes with presents in them, just as they had always been at this time. I would always go upstairs and then come down again to open the presents and provide delight for my father, my King, with my cries of pleasure. However, on this night, as I was going up the stairs, I overheard my father saying impatiently, 'Thank goodness this is the last time we

shall have this kind of thing. Next year Therese will be too old for this.' I was filled with grief. Celine saw my distress, and said I should not go down and open my presents at all, since to do so would cause me too much pain. Ah, but Celine did not realise that the Therese she was speaking to was not the same Therese she had seen five minutes before. In those moments between my father's words and Celina's concern, I had grown up. I suppressed my tears and ran downstairs. I picked up my shoes from where they sat on the hearth, and I opened my presents one by one, exclaiming with joy. The clocks made and tended by my father's hand ticked in the house like the beating of happy hearts.

I have heard that the length of the pendulum determines the ratio of the wheels and pinions needed to show true time. True Time. Fine time, nice time, true time of time and tide, and how time flies. Time Bomb. True time is a time bomb. The time of vibration of a pendulum depends on its length. The vibration of love depends, I have heard, on its depth and intricacy. Still waters run deep, and deep in the heart you will find the heart strings, thick and thin smooth shining strings for plucking and playing tunes. True Love is determined by the time of vibration which depends on its length. But if the thread of the heart string gets loose and the bobbin begins to unwind, you can wind the bobbin to the length you want and finish by winding the thread twice round the neck of the bobbin and pulling it tight, tight, tight. Snap. You can snap a heart string, twang, like that. Twang.

On that Christmas day the third period of my life began, and I decided to dedicate myself to snatching souls from hell.

For my first soul, I chose the soul of a murderer, a man by the name of Pranzini who was condemned to die for his crimes. I prayed that God would forgive this man, and I asked for a sign. To my great joy my prayer was answered. I read in La Croix *that Pranzini had mounted the scaffold, still without confessing to his guilt, and when he was about to thrust his head beneath the blade of the guillotine he suddenly turned around. With a fierce*

and urgent gesture he seized the crucifix from the hands of the priest and he kissed with passion the Sacred Wounds. 'Pranzini was my first child'. I would from that time forward snatch many souls back from the fires of hell.

When Violetta scratched her legs on the blackberry bushes at the bottom of the garden, she lay down on the grass and we watched the bright bubbles of beady blood as they pushed up through the slits in the skin. 'Kiss them,' she said, and I kissed her wounds with passionate kisses, licking and sucking her sweet bubbly blood. She moaned and spoke of death and smeared my face with blood and blackberry juice. We ate blackberries until we were sick and I spattered pink gobs of vomit all over the grass as we rolled around in agony. Poisoned. We had been poisoned. Somebody had sprayed the ripe blackberries with a deadly thing. We would die, die together in agony and blood. We rushed for the hose and drank from its long red snake, splashing water into our mouths, spraying each other until we were drenched and the danger had all passed.

It was a most dangerous time of life. I was a young girl, and, when he was passing by me, Jesus saw that I was ripe for love. In his understanding of the peril I was in from the world and the flesh, he threw his cloak about me, washed me with water and anointed me with oil. He clothed me in linen and silk and decked me with jewels and priceless gems.

With infinite love he fed me on wheat and honey, and, seeing then my matchless beauty, he made me a great queen.

I was ripe for love. With my sisters I swam in the sea, and the sea threw its green cloak about me, decked me with pearls and with sapphires. And on the edge of the ocean, the edge of the world, I walked hand in hand with Violetta. We loved. Naked we swam in the waves, and in the creamy foam we would embrace. We shared mind and body and spirit. She spoke directly to my soul. And we ate bread and honey and drank fresh milk from old glass cups. 'Here's to the End of the World!' she used to say, and she would hold her cup aloft and take a long draught.

Violetta, people used to whisper, is more than a little crazy. She was Italian.

Jesus united me with Celine at this time, united us with bonds a hundred times stronger than the bonds of blood. He made us sisters of the spirit, following gaily in his own footsteps. Ripe for love, I was embraced by Jesus, united with Celine in the spirit.

What wonderful talks we had, Celine and I, at night upstairs in our room as the moon rose above the trees and its silvery light poured over the sleeping world. Stars glittered in the dark blue of the sky. One night as I stood by the window, I looked up at the heavens, and I saw, written in stars on the velvet cloth above me, my own name, Therese. I pointed this out to Celine, and we felt at that moment that everything was drawing our souls up to God.

I look up at the heavens and I see the stars. I close my eyes and look into the arching heavens within the dome of my skull and I see the velvet field of night cut by the pinpricks of screaming light. The waters within me are pulled this way and that by the power of the moon and the great tides come and go on my beaches. My stones are tears that have fallen from the eyes of the weeping moon. I am a silent girl, quiet as darkness, soft as a spider's web of wishful sleeping silk. My name is written in the stars, you know. Clearly written for all the world to see. Heaven deals with me directly.

I never spoke, never said a word to my confessor about what was going on in my soul. This was because I knew that the path I trod was so bright and straight I needed no guide but Jesus. God was dealing with me directly. There are scholars who spend their whole lives in study. If such scholars had questioned me at this time in my life they would have been amazed to come across a girl of only fourteen years who understood so much. I understood the secrets of perfection, secrets that all the learning in the world can not reveal.

The saints have this knowledge; they have it in their hearts.

The great Spanish mystic poet, St John of the Cross, said: 'I had neither guide nor light, except that which shone within my heart, and that guided me more surely than the midday sun to the place where He who knew me well awaited me.' In my own case, I knew that the place where my Jesus was waiting for me was the convent where my dear sisters Pauline and Marie were already professed.

French, Italian, Spanish — we were so very continental. The nuns at school were from a most French order, and they emphasised the importance of European culture. The life of the Little Flower was studied, naturally, in French. Violetta had a great gift for languages, and said I could probably learn Italian by drinking her blood. We would pick scabs from each other's body and then we would chew them and swallow them. Hers were very sweet. She said mine tasted of cinnamon.

It was Christmas when I watched my name being written in the stars, and it was at that time that I knew I had a vocation to follow Jesus. I began at once to respond to my vocation, but I met with nothing but obstacles. Celine also had her own vocation. I knew this, and she discovered that I too, her little sister, was to enter the convent. With great courage she accepted the knowledge of my secret. I was determined to enter Carmel one year from that Christmas of what I regard as my 'conversion'.

One of the great obstacles to my desire was the health of my dear king, Papa. He had suffered a paralysis and was becoming very, very frail. As well as this, a poisonous insect had bitten him on the neck, causing first an inflammation and then a growth. It was painful and horrible.

But I knew that I must soon tell him of my vocation and of my decision to enter the convent by Christmas. So, at sunset on the feast of Pentecost I sat by Papa at the well and I told him of my calling. We walked up and down the garden, weeping, and he seemed to feel the tranquil joy that comes from a sacrifice freely accepted. At one point we paused by a low wall where miniature white lilies were growing, and Papa plucked one of

the flowers and gave it to me. He then described the care that God has given to the creation and nurture of the lily. As he spoke I heard and understood the similarities between the life of this lily and my own life. I saw that Papa had taken the lily from the velvety moss of its bed, complete with its roots. The roots were unbroken and I knew this to be a sign that it would one day grow in more fertile soil, just as I would grow from the gentle valley of my childhood to the great height of Mount Carmel. I put the white flower in my book of The Imitation of Christ. *The stem broke from the root after a time, and it seemed that God was telling me He would soon break the bonds of His little flower, and would not leave her here to wither away on earth.*

The white flower is in the tiny book, the imitation book.

I always called it that, the imitation book. It is *Golden Thoughts from The Imitation of Christ*. I took it one day, stole it really, from my grandmother. I was playing in her sewing room, pulling out the carved drawers of the old sewing machine and counting the different sorts of buttons and reels of cotton. In one of the drawers I found the imitation book. It was bound in dark red kid, so worn and soft. So small and secret. Each Golden Thought was edged, boxed, in a line of red ink like blood. 'Unto the pure all things are pure.' I put the book in my pocket and later I placed it with my other treasures in my cupboard in the roof. I plucked a white violet with its green heart leaf and pressed it in the imitation book. It left no stain, and turned in time to paper.

There are 126 Golden Thoughts; 15 and 16 are missing.

As we walked in the garden, Papa gave me his permission to enter the convent. But there were to be many obstacles in my path. For one, my uncle would not consent. He said that to let an inexperienced girl of fifteen enter would do great harm to religion.

I was alone in the desert waste, my soul a fragile skiff tossing on a stormy sea.

Then began my dark night of the soul. The sky was dark with

clouds and rain fell in sorrow on the earth. Then Jesus intervened and my uncle changed his mind. But next the Superior of the convent said I must wait.

The heavens were black. I was in despair.

I was in black despair, in the coal black heaven of despair, white in a black heaven between the bed and the wall. I lay quite still on the cushions with my stones around me and books and beads and all my golden treasures and the pastel I did of Violetta, and also my teddy and dolly and golly. Oh Golliwog is a dirty dog. His face is as black as coal. But his skin is as white as the pale moonlight compared with the state of his soul. His soul. Compared with the state of his soul. The coal of the soul, oh golly gosh.

Raining cats and dogs and golliwogs. The thing about Golly is his hair. Hundreds of little black corkscrew curls that stick out all over his round soft head. I wind the woolly curls around my fingers and they spring away from my grip. Sometimes I chew them and pretend they are licorice. They taste only of wool. He doesn't mind if I chew his hair. Actually, he likes it; it stimulates his thoughts. Golliwog is a great thinker, as well as a dirty dog. He invented those tongs shaped like small black hands for picking up live coals. All his ideas are to do with coal and earth and fire. He has suggested we should get some candles and set the bed on fire. The idea is very appealing, appalling, appealing. Bright swift hot gold and scarlet tongues of little dancing flame go flicking along the edge of the downy mattress. Bliss. Hot bliss kiss. And when the fire was over the birds began to sing. Oh wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the king. After the fire you get the charred and blackened and ruined dead remains. They find my sizzled body, dead from inhalation of smoke and they look around and they say: Golly did it. Oh, that Gollywog is a dirty dog. Poor dear white Therese has frizzled up and gone to heaven, flown off like a pure sweet butterfly. Flit. Flit. Flit.

I had to prove my vocation was real, and I had to prove this to the Bishop himself. Papa made an appointment for us to go to

the palace. Nothing but my love of Jesus enabled me to overcome my shyness, my feeling of being so small and powerless. I spent a long time putting up my hair — it was the first time I had ever done this, and I looked different. I think it helped me to feel older and more experienced.

In the drawing room where Papa and I met the Bishop there were enormous armchairs. I had to sit in one of these, and I felt that it was big enough for me and all my sisters to sit in at once. I sat there and looked steadily at the Bishop, explaining that ever since I was three years old I had longed to give myself to God. I attempted to sound level-headed and unemotional, never allowing my true passion to display itself, for I knew that if I began to describe the depth of my conviction, I would be dismissed as an excitable child. The Bishop suggested I should perhaps stay home with Papa for a few more years. Papa spoke up and said that if the Bishop did not give me his permission to enter the convent, we would go on a pilgrimage to Rome and would put the case to the Holy Father. The Bishop was silent for a moment, and I held my breath. I was sure that Papa's words had turned the tide. But no. The Bishop smiled and said in a kind voice that he would have to consider his opinion. He would see to it that we heard his decision when we were in Rome.

At one time the Bishop placed his spectacles on the table in front of him. In the shining glass of the two lenses, I could see the perfect double vision of my perfect couple self, my soluble double trouble turmoil vision elf-self.

I was beside myself, a curved and shining double bubble reflection of me and me. Mimi, I said, and the Bishop smiled and patted my flesh-and-bone hand. While the Mimis in the mirrors shimmered with clear clean watery hatred of his apey hairy patting paw. Mimic my Mimi, I said to the Bishop, and he heard me say, 'What is the time?' He said it was early. Then he picked up his spectacles and with the left paw of the ape he placed them carefully on his sweaty nose. 'Pretty early,' he said, and he smiled his bishop-ape smile and I began to hum quietly to myself as the Mimis faded from his spectacles and slid gently,

as softly and gently as tears, back into my skin, back into my bloodstream and streamed like the slimy shapes of broken eggs into my heart. And were gone.

We walked in the garden with the Bishop, the gravel of the paths crunching under my feet. We stood beneath the trees, and a pure white dove alighted beside me. I blushed when Papa told the Bishop that I had put my hair up for the first time that morning. Ever since, whenever he has spoken of me to anyone, I believe that the Bishop has mentioned the fact about my hair. I felt that it had only served to emphasise my childishness, having the opposite from the desired effect.

It was three o'clock in the morning by my father's clocks when we set off for the railway station in Lisieux to begin our journey to Rome. We were in the company of other pilgrims, important titled people such as I had never met before. But to me their titles were quite empty and meaningless. Only in heaven will we know the titles of our true nobility, for in the Revelation St John speaks of the secret name God keeps for us there. God will give to His faithful each a white stone in which will be engraved a new name, the secret name of each faithful follower.

My white stones, white as sugar, smooth as marzipan, my bones, my marzipan bones. I took a stone into my mouth and I licked it, and then I sucked it. I tried to crunch it with my teeth but I became afraid. I imagined splinters of broken teeth filling my mouth, flooding my mouth with blood and bone and tooth and stone, tooth and nail. I went at the pebble tooth and nail. I swallowed the pebble whole, took into myself the shining egg of the moon. It stays inside me, in my pure and echoing self, swilled from side to side by the tides of time that swell and ebb and flow and boom through the watery hollows of my eggshell self. I moved all the other stones together, touching each other and I touched them and taught them, those students of purity. Beware the open mouth of me, I whispered to them, going up very, very close. Their perfect little invisible ears were open to suggestion and they took in every eerie word I said. Watch out for me, I

said to them. I will eat you up at the drop of a hat. I will open up my wide red mouth and grip you in my clean white teeth — such pearls of wisdom — and lash you with my rolling raving pointed slippery lying tongue. I will swallow you if you are not careful. Watch it. I devour. I put some of them inside my own most secret part, closed over them and lay for a while listening to them. I pushed them this way and that, and I was filled with a strange and warm sweet pleasure. And time stood still as stone, and before my eyes the things of the world became bright and sharp and vivid. An unbearable, almost unbearable, light surrounded every thing in sight.

On the train, the compartments were named after different saints. Ours was St Martin, and several people referred to Papa as Monsieur St Martin which sounded very sweet.

In Switzerland we saw the snow-covered mountains, and I rejoiced at the sight of my beloved snow. I love, love, love snow! I saw it as an omen for the good outcome of our pilgrimage. All my life the pure white snow has heralded for me moments of the greatest significance. We saw waterfalls and valleys filled with ferns and purple heather. I sketched the chalets and the graceful churches and the calm mirrors of the lakes. These scenes were, I knew, but a foretaste of heaven.

And next, Italy! In Milan I climbed to the roof of the marble cathedral. Celine came with me and we saw beneath us the whole city where the people moved to and fro in busy lines like the ants in our garden. Then Venice, where the air was filled with a silence broken only by the shouts of the gondoliers and the splash of their oars. Oh, Venice is charming and splendid — but it seemed to me to be very gloomy. There I saw the frightful cells of the underground dungeons, and I saw the Bridge of Sighs which is given that name because prisoners would sigh with relief at that point in their journey from the prison dungeons to the place of death. Death was preferable to imprisonment in the cellars of Venice. Afterwards we went to Padua where we venerated the holy relic of the tongue of St Anthony. And in Bologna we venerated the body of St Catherine whose

face is marked with the kiss of the Child Jesus. How I longed for such a mark, such a kiss.

Am I marked? Am I marked by a kiss? I kissed Violetta; she kissed me. She was my father; I was her daughter, and we kissed the way they do, fathers and daughters. True fathers and daughters — with passion. I think of Violetta sleeping, a picture of death, of beautiful violet death. She marked me with a kiss and then she slept, and she takes my voice. She takes my voice; I take her voice. I am not myself. No, I am no longer myself. Poor Therese, they said, she is not herself. She is not listening. She is not taking anything in. Not eating. Not drinking. Not thinking. Not winking, blinking, nodding. Not nodding off, not sleeping. But Violetta is sleeping, sleeping now far, far away. She took my voice away with her, and I am not myself. Violetta has roamed far from me, and she has my voice in her heart, leaving me, deaf and dumb Daphne, alone and silent by the edge of the sighing sea.

When we came to Loreto I was completely enchanted. There, in the Italian town of Loreto stood the holyhouse where Jesus had lived when he was a child. How wise of the Blessed Virgin to transport the house from the perils of the Holy Land to this quiet, primitive place of rest. I meditated on the miracle of a house that flies from one country to another, that transports its sacred stones across oceans and mountains. I gazed on the walls where Jesus had gazed, and I placed my rosary in the dish that he had used. The house is enclosed in the Basilica which is like a casket of white marble surrounding a precious diamond. I burned with the desire to receive the Bread of Angels inside the house itself rather than at the altar of the Basilica. I was told that it was not possible to fulfil this desire, but when Celine and I were in the Holy House we met a priest who had a special privilege to say Mass there. We explained to this priest that we wished most fervently to receive Jesus in the Holy House, and he immediately called for two Hosts to be placed on the paten for us.

In Rome we visited the Colosseum. I trembled as I stood

before the arena where the martyrs shed their blood for Jesus. I longed to kiss the ground. But I learned that the level of the soil has been raised so much since early times that the true surface of the arena lies eight yards below the earth. Piles of rubble cover the ground, and there is a barrier which prevented us from entering. However I discovered a place where Celine and I could get in, and we rushed forward before anyone could stop us. We ran down to the sacred spot marked by a cross where the martyrs died. We knelt, and my heart beat fast as I pressed my lips to the dust reddened by the blood of the first Christians. I begged that I too might be a martyr, and I felt deep within me that my prayer was answered. We picked up a few stones and climbed back up the perilous slope to where Papa was waiting.

I pressed my lips to the dust on the cold stone pavement, and all the stones were lying still and flat in the pattern of the honeycomb. Stone honeycomb. Honeycomb won't you be my baby. Honeycomb be my own. Just a hank of hair and a piece of bone made of walkin' talkin' honeycomb. Or however it goes. I closed my eyes and I saw the hexagons fitting into each other, repeating and repeating in a most wonderful way, in a most dreamy colour — they were not grey, but pearl, mother-of-pearl, gleaming in the moonlight that fell on the pattern like honey, like milk and honey, peaches and cream. With my lips to the dust of the stone pavement, I saw with an inner vision the beauty of the world as the strict pattern of the honeycomb, and I imagined I could hear the language bees speak to each other. I can watch the bees for hours as they work among the flowers and make their beelines for the hive. I love insects of all kinds, and I am not afraid. I am afraid of spiders. Perhaps I am a kind of insect, wary of my great enemy. I love the wings of insects, the lacy symmetry and the glassy panels. I stand very still and let the praying mantis walk along my arm. I love the tickle tickle of a bee walking in the palm of my hand. If you believe they will not sting you, they will not sting. I have stood among the lavender in my pale blue dress and I have let dozens of bees stick to me and walk about on me. I whisper their Latin name

— *Apis mellifera* — very pretty — as they bumble along on my skin and my clothes. Once I did a project on bees and I spent hours and hours of bliss in the nuns' garden 'doing my research'. One of the Sisters was terrified I was going to die from a sting. When she was at school a girl did an essay on bees and apparently did get stung and nearly died. I found that very exciting. And the names for things — perhaps I should have studied medicine — oedema, bronchospasm, dyspnoea, pruritus, ana phylaxis. I used to make up songs with those words. Bright clothes and sweet perfumes attract *Apis mellifera*. And people who are susceptible to bee venom turn yellow and get purple and blue marks under their eyes. They are giddy and hear strange noises and see strange sights. These facts made me long to be 'susceptible', wishing always to hear strange noises and see strange sights. I wore a bright purple dress from the theatrical wardrobe but nothing happened. *Apis mellifera* just came walking all over me without so much as a little kiss. I like to capture butterflies and look at them, at the shapes and patterns and colours, at the bloom. Then I am sorry. I am not meant to catch them, to be so close to them. Let them flit among the flowers. Flit.

Papa was astonished by what we had done at the Colosseum, but he did not chide us, for he knew that we were compelled by our love of God.

We went also to the Catacombs and there Celine and I lay down together in the ancient tomb of St Cecilia, and we carried off some of the earth sanctified by the holy relics of the saint. From this time St Cecilia became my favourite saint.

We lay down together on the mound that was the grave, our arms around each other, and I whispered 'Violetta' and she whispered 'Flower'. We were two flowers in the graveyard.

Two secrets in a whisper. Violetta traced a V with her finger in the dust of the path beside the grave, and then I traced a V beside it and it was a Double-You. Me and You makes Double-You, Double-Me. Trouble me. This was friendship, but this was trouble. We were heading for trouble, big trouble. Double

Trouble. We gave each other small mirrors, and when we were apart and lonely, we could look into the mirrors and know that the Double-You was there. Sometimes this sounds ridiculous. We were very young.

We were very sincere and vulnerable with a sense of the dramatic. Sometimes I have snatches of glimpses of the girl I was. Sometimes my head aches. I am not the girl I was, but I have my mirror image of my other self. This is so very complicated and it makes my head ache so. I have had my brains fried by the doctor, dictator, dickter, trickster, triste and sad and bad and mad. Fried brains are bad. Fried brains on black bread. Very bad. Come home to me, Violetta; Violetta, please come home. If I smash my mirror, will Violetta come?

In the church of St Agnes I met again a friend from my childhood, little St Agnes. I asked the guide if I could have a relic of St Agnes to take back to my dear sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus. But the guide refused. However, God took a hand, and placed a relic freely at my feet. As I stood gazing at a mosaic that dated from the time of the martyrs, a small fragment of red marble fell from the picture and lay winking beside my shoe. I knew that St Agnes herself had given me a souvenir of her house. I put the marble in my pocket and took it back to France with me.

I held in the flat warm palm of my soft white hand, the hand of a girl-angel. I held a fragment of dark purple marble.

A scrap of Violetta's heart. This she gave me in exchange for one of my white stones. I place the heart of Violetta in the centre of the circle of the stones and stare and stare until I move into a trance. Then I see and know and almost understand. I sit for hours in the shadows of the convent garden, sometimes playing on the swings we used to play on when Violetta still was here. I sit in silence and contemplate the image in the mirror. Is it me? Is it you? Is it Violetta? I hear the children playing — Sophie! Sophie! — in the distance. I see sometimes bright flashes of their clothing, and I imagine I can smell the daisy softness of their hair. Moonbeam children, Sophie and Jane and Sebastian. I

think they must be the doctor's children. With the way we play, night and day, me and the doctor, I could become the mother of the doctor's children. I wonder. I wonder how that would be? I stare at my eyes in the mirror and I think of Sophie, Jane, Sebastian and their brothers and sisters, my baby babies, Violetta and Violetta and Violetta, the Violetta triplets. 'I am God,' he would say, 'Doctor God, and this is my wife, Therese, and these are the Violettas.' What a funny idea.

I longed for and dreaded the day when I would see the Holy Father, Leo XIII himself. My very vocation depended on this meeting. Everyday I waited for news from the Bishop of Bayeux. No word came. My only hope of entering the convent at fifteen lay with the Holy Father. I had been forbidden to speak to him, but I determined to disobey. I trembled at the thought of speaking to the Pope in front of the cardinals, archbishops and bishops who surrounded his holypresence. I also knew that the Vicar-General of Bayeux would be there and would try to stop me from speaking.

On Sunday morning, 20 November, we went to Mass in the Chapel of the Sovereign Pontiff at eight o'clock. When I heard the words of the Gospel I was filled with new confidence for the words were: 'Do not be afraid, you, my little flock. Your father has determined to give you His kingdom.' I knew that God had spoken to me, and that my petition would be heard and granted.

The Holy Father sat on a dais dressed in a white cape and cassock. He was grand and beautiful and shone with the light of angels. One by one each pilgrim would advance and kneel before him, kiss first his foot and then his hand, and receive his blessing. At a touch from two of the Noble Guard each pilgrim was to rise and move on, going out into another room. The Vicar-General said in a loud voice to us that it was absolutely forbidden to speak to the Holy Father. My heart was beating madly. I looked at Celine and she whispered to me, 'Speak!' Papa had already gone. I was next.

A moment later I was kneeling before the Pope. I kissed his slipper and he offered me his hand. My eyes were wet with tears

and I looked up at him and then I said, 'Most Holy Father, I have a great favour to ask.'

The Pope leant forward until his face almost touched mine, and I felt his dark, searching eyes would pierce the depths of my soul.

'Most Holy Father, to mark your jubilee, allow me to enter Carmel at fifteen.'

The Vicar-General of Bayeux looked very astonished and angry and he said, 'Most Holy Father, she is a child who wants to be a Carmelite, and the authorities are now looking into the matter.'

'Very well, my child, do whatever they say.'

Clasping my hands and resting them on the Pope's knee, I made a final effort, 'O most Holy Father, if you say yes, everybody will be only too willing.'

He looked at me steadily and said in a clear voice, stressing every syllable, 'Come, come, you will enter if God wills.'

I was about to speak again, but two Noble Guards urged me to rise. They had to take me by the arms, and the Vicar-General helped them to get me to my feet. As I was being taken away, the Holy Father placed his fingers on my lips, and then he raised them in a gesture of blessing me. He gazed after me as I left his presence.

I felt a great peace deep within me, in spite of the tears I shed. The rain poured down on all the hills of Rome as I wept. The whole point of my journey to Rome had been destroyed.

The doctor and Therese and all the Violettas will go out on Sunday walks, and on visits to museums, concert halls, opera, the ballet. They will spend long holidays in London, Paris and Rome, and even New York and Acapulco. Their life together is *sensational*. In summer they walk on the pier, parade in the botanical gardens, are the toast of the town. In a velvet gown she's the toast of the town. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily — life is butter-dream.

For some time I had been accustomed to offer myself as a plaything to Jesus. I told him to treat me as a cheap little ball

which he could fling on the ground or kick or pierce — or leave neglected in a corner. Or press to his heart if it gave him pleasure. I longed to amuse the little Jesus and to offer myself to his childish whims. I saw in Rome that Jesus had taken me at my word, for here he pierced his little toy with a sharp and terrible point. He wanted to see what was inside me, and then, having seen, he let his little toy drop, and he went off to sleep.

I am a toy, a porcelain doll, the plaything of my sisters. They curl my hair and tie it up with satin ribbons, and they dress me in soft creamy lace and frothy snowy tulle. I have a straw bonnet with blue flowers on it. They put me in the dolls' pram and wheel me round the streets and tell me to pretend that I am dumb. I am supposed to be their poor little dumb sister called Daphne. The lady in the witch's house round the corner looks into the pram and says 'Hello Daphne' to me and I am not allowed to speak and when we are out of sight my sisters dissolve into squeals of hysterical laughter. 'She said it, she said it. Hello Daphne. Hello Daphne. We are the Gillis girls with our poor little deaf and dumb sister Daphne. Daffy-Down-Dilly the Downs Syndrome Girl.' And they gave me a licorice allsort. They trundled me round the street in the squeaky little pram — Daphne the deaf and dumb Downs Syndrome sister — and they dressed me and undressed me. One day they took off my underpants and held me on a cold iron bar until I screamed, and then they comforted me. 'What good girls they are,' my grandmother said. 'They won't let that little one cry for even a minute.' I was the plaything, but I loved them too, and when we went to the beach I ran on the sand with them and we swam in the sea. And I was pierced by a sharp and terrible point, slashed between the legs. Enter the doctor! Just like in a play. And the doctor enters. He enters the girl who lies drugged on the bed in the Sleeping Beauty Chamber. What a beauty! Look at this sleeping beauty. Will you just look!

The hotels we stayed in throughout the journey were all fit for a king. But wealth and luxury do not bring happiness. I was shut out of the one place I longed to be.

Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

My heart is in my mouth. On my sleeve. In my mouth on my sleeve. The dark purple piece of marble is under my tongue, as the apple of an eye in the shadow of my wing. I suck from the marble a marvellous syrup that stops my heart and fills my mind with light. This is my treasure, my heart, my dark purple girlfriend. Light-hearted, light-footed, light-fingered. Light as a feather she came and alighted on my tongue and I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. The tongues of angels lick me and flick up inside me and the lips of angels kiss me and caress me and suck me and I am licked by the tongues of men, particularly men.

Then, when we were in Assisi, I had an adventure. After we had visited the places blessed by the holiness of St Francis and St Clare, I found I had lost the buckle of my belt in the monastery, and I had to go back for it. As a result, I was late for the train, and I had to sit in the carriage with the Vicar-General of Bayeux himself. I was embarrassed and so was he. I felt like a fish out of water surrounded by all these important people. But the Vicar-General was charming, and he spoke to me and said he would do everything he could from now on to help me fulfil my ambition and follow my vocation. I thanked him with all my heart, and yet I wished silently that he had done more for me in Rome.

With a lighter heart I went to Florence, and there in the choir of the Carmelites I had a great privilege. The body of St Magdalene of Pazzi lies there enclosed by a grille. All the pilgrims wished to touch the tomb with their rosaries to obtain the saint's blessing, but only my hand was small enough to pass through the bars. It took a long time for me to complete this honourable task, but I was very proud to do so. I sensed that God was demonstrating the significance of my littleness in giving me this task. And once before, something similar had happened. It was in Rome when we venerated some fragments of the True Cross, two thorns and one of the sacred nails. When the monk in charge of the relics came to restore them to the altar, I asked him if I could touch them. He gave me permission to

do so, but I believe he thought I would be unable to reach them. However I pushed my little finger into a hole in the reliquary and I was just able to touch the precious nail stained by the blood of Jesus. I always behaved towards Jesus like a child who thinks she's allowed to do anything for love, and who regards her father's treasures as her own.

I pushed my little finger in the hole.

And so our journey homeward continued. We returned to France by a most beautiful way, running sometimes alongside the ocean. I would gaze out at the great vast waters. We travelled through groves of oranges and olives and past avenues of gracious palm trees.

At last we returned to Lisieux, to the little flowers beside the paths at Les Buissonnets, to father's faithful clocks ticking their steady heartbeats in the parlour and the hall.

I wrote a letter to the Bishop reminding him of his promise to tell me his decision. Christmas came and went and I still had not heard from him. Snow, my beloved snow, lay in a deep white sheet over the sad world. Then a letter came from Mother Marie of Gonzaga at the convent to say that she had received the Bishop's permission to admit me, but that I should wait until Easter.

With a light heart I went to Florence where I climbed to the roof of the marzipan cathedral and heard the church bells and felt the vibrations and the ding-dong bell of time. Ripe for love I loved the open sky above me, the blushing blue of the arching heavens. But the truth is, I have never been to Florence except in my dreams, my daydreams and my wandering wishes. I would fly with the wings of an angel, hand in hand, wing in glove — with Violetta, my Italian girl. I would go to Tuscany, to any part of Italy you can think of. I walked with Violetta (and this is the truth) — we were wearing our school pinafores with the angels' wings at the back — hand in hand softly up the path to my grandmother's house, for we had been summoned. Now my grandmother's name is Florence, and she is known for her

piety and brutality. Children, in her presence, are not heard, neither are they seen. She is far from deaf and blind, since she has the ears of a bat and the eyes of a soaring eagle. But with Violetta I arrived at my grandmother's dark front door and together we pulled the brass knob and together we heard the bell go tinkle tinkle tinkle high up in the hallway. And before any time at all had passed — or time stood still, or our hearts stood still in our mouths — my grandmother stood in the open doorway and without seeing us or hearing us she swept us both inside to the music room and showed us to her visitors — a priest and a coven of well-dressed women drinking tea — and we were described as angels, given a plate of cakes and sent into the garden never to be seen or heard again. 'Behave yourselves,' my grandmother said as she shut us out. Much later, when I was older and alone, I stole from my grandmother's sewing machine the *Imitation* that sits in the palm of my hand, waiting for an eagle to swoop.

Somebody, that day at Florence's house, somebody broke the mechanism of the mermaid wall-clock. Wrecked it so that it could not be fixed. The clock became an object, a reminder of the past, a statement of a moment when time stood still forever. Since Violetta and I were in the garden busy with a plate of cakes, we were assumed to be innocent, although suspicion forever cast its wondering shadow across us, wrinkled its brow and glanced sideways and long at us. Had we seen anybody, heard anything. Foolish questions. We were, of course, guilty. We wore our innocence with a touching sadness. The dear old clock was broken. Oh what a pity.

When the afternoon tea in the music room was progressing with its Lapsang Souchong and a little Schubert, we tiptoed in the side door and Violetta stood on the chair beneath the clock. She looked closely at the cherubs painted on the face, and slowly ran her fingers over the two wooden mermaids, their faces resembling washerwomen, that decorated the sides of the clock. Ticking its steady little heartbeats, the mermaid clock faced Violetta. 'It's been in our family for centuries,' I said. Then Violetta said she had always wanted to make time go backwards, and her fingers traced a path to the centre of

the clockface, and I watched as she pushed the minute hand anticlockwise. Round and round it went, slowly at first, then faster, and when it seemed to be whirling I looked away and watched Violetta in the mirror on the opposite wall. Her image moved the hand of the clock forward. I could see the great blue and white wings on the straps at the back of her pinafore, the huge bow at her waist a crisp and open butterfly. Butterflies are deaf. Part angel, part insect, part Italian, the back of Violetta was a sweet image of concentration as she twirled the hand on the mermaid clock — backwards or forwards or backwards. Round and round and round it went, the slim brass hand of the clock, and I looked back at Violetta's own true face and it was smiling and I was staring and at last there was a tiny twang — it was almost imperceptible — and a faint, faint grinding sound. And that was all.

'I think it might have stopped,' Violetta said.

All my life I had gazed up at the mermaid clock with its blue and orange pictures, the fat faces of the cherubs, the scaly tails of the mermaids. I had listened as its lonely tick marked the heartbeat of the house.

'Listen,' Violetta said. 'It isn't ticking.'

Something awful had happened. There was nothing to be done. She climbed down from the chair and we tiptoed back to the garden where we sat on a rock and ate the cakes.

It was the ninth of April, the day of my entry, the happiest day of my life. We had all gathered round the family table for the last time on the day before. The room was filled with flowers, and I saw in the eyes of my King great joy and pride and also a deep sadness. The clock under the glass bell in the dining room was ticking our poor earthly lives away, and I was beginning on my greatest journey. The next morning I left, with scarcely a glance at the house where I had spent so many happy years. I heard Mass in the company of many members of my family who were all sobbing at the thought that I was leaving them. I shed no tears, but as I made my way to the door of the enclosure which would take me forever, my heart beat so violently I thought I was going to die. The agony of such a moment has to

be experienced to be understood. I knelt before Papa to receive his blessing, and he knelt also, and he wept. The doors of Carmel closed behind me and I was embraced by a whole new family whose love and tenderness can not be guessed at by the outside world.

I swam in the sea with my sisters and the sea was as blue as the deep arched cloak of heaven, as blue as the wildest cornflower, as blue as light. With the fish we would glide between the branches of the underwater forests where the leaves sway gently with the motion of the water. Deep, deep in the deepest part of the deepest ocean we dwelt. In a place beyond darkness, a place of brilliant light. Our father's palace was made from coral and amber and studded with pearls. The shipwrecks were our playground; the dolphins were our pets. Beware of lurking dangers in the deep. I swam in the sea with my sisters, our hair like foam, our tails shimmering with the rainbows inspired by petrol spilling on wet tar. Holding hands we would ride up, up on the rising, curling swell. All the waters of the world, all the perfumes of Arabia, all the stars of heaven.

We were a troupe, a team, a laughter, a tranquillity, a marvel of mermaids. And I swam in the sea with my sisters, and the sun shone all day long.

The little cell where I lived gave me a special pleasure, a tranquil happiness where no cloud darkened my sky, where not the slightest breeze ruffled the waters on which my little boat was foaling. With profound joy I was able to say to myself, 'Now I am here for good, forever.' Although there were thorns on my path, there were also roses. I suffered from grievous spiritual dryness, and the Lord allowed the prioress to treat me with a great harshness and severity. Once when I had overlooked a cobweb in the cloister the prioress announced in front of all the nuns: 'It's easy to see our cloister is swept by a child of fifteen.' Then she said to me: 'Go and sweep the cobweb away and be more careful in future.' I could not see how to correct my faults such as my slowness and my lack of thoroughness. When I was a postulant the novice mistress sent

me to weed the garden every afternoon at half-past four. On the way I was certain to meet the prioress, and on one of these encounters she said loudly. 'This child does absolutely nothing. What kind of novice is one who has to be sent for a stroll every day?'

I now thank God for such firm and valuable training, a priceless favour. For what should I have become if I had been the pet of the community — as some people outside the convent thought I truly was. My love of suffering grew steadily, but nobody knew of it. This was the hidden flower I wanted to offer to Jesus, the flower that breathes out its perfume only in the garden of heaven. I found it hard to express to my confessor, Father Pinchon, how I felt. However, once, after I had made a general confession, he said to me: 'Before God, the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and all the saints, I declare that you have never committed a single mortal sin; thank Our Lord for what he has freely done for you without any merit on your part.' Father Pinchon's assurance seemed to come from God Himself.

I have imagined the end of the world where the world is a garden full of tangled weeds, weeds as tall as mountains, as old as the hills, weeds as thick as the legs of elephants, as tough as thoughts. Slime slides down the stems of every evil plant; cobwebs lace the air, bind the leaves together in a dark, damp matting. Let there be darkness and there was darkness and the weeds grew and the darkness flourished and there was an odour of mushrooms and I was trapped in a smooth glass egg, batting around inside the slippery shell, peering out through moisture into the gloom. The end of the world never ends, this is life everlasting, and I am the only creature I can find among all this dripping forest. All colour has gone, gone in a gondola with the going light.

One of the old nuns seemed to understand what I was going through, and at recreation one day she said to me: 'It strikes me, child, that you cannot have much to say to your superiors. Your soul is very simple, but when you are perfect you will be

more simple still. The nearer one gets to God, the simpler one becomes.'

My mind sometimes flies back to my early days in the convent when Papa used to embarrass me by sending gifts. Wonderful baskets offish, apples, cherries, plums, pears, green vegetables and wild bunches of flowers would appear as if from nowhere. Of course they were to be shared out, but everyone knew that my dear Papa was thinking of me alone. He once sent a white sugar mouse, just like the one my aunt had given me years before. It was as if he wanted to remind me that I was the youngest, the baby, the little white mouse in his life.

Yet I hope for colours and fruits and flowers, for sounds and laughter and music and words in golden letters on decorated pages. I hope and long for the perfume of roses and the juice of oranges. Blue bowls filled with pomegranates, figs. Pink glass dishes heaped with white marzipan mice glittering with sugar, sharp eyes, long tails, fine, fine whiskers. On deep red carpets I will lie, on silk velvet cushions I will read from embossed volumes of *The Imitation* brought to me on silver salvers by dark, mysterious servants.

I would walk along the corridors of the convent, where the walls are white, and slowly read the texts written in bold letters on the walls. Just to read and say softly aloud 'The Bread of Life' was enough; I could then put my feelings of embarrassment at Papa's love and attention out of my mind. I would walk along the cinder paths of the convent, past the rose bushes and the beds of geraniums, along the chestnut walk, and my heart would rejoice within me.

I am the little flower at the door of the tabernacle. So small was I when I made my First Confession that the priest could not see me, and did not know, at first, that I was there.

I am the little flower at the door of the tabernacle, so very, very small, and strong as an eyelash. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but I will not fall. I am the small

eternal flame at the door of the tabernacle. My light is the light of lights, my sister, my spouse, my white sugar mouse. Mouse in the wainscot will not wither. I sat in the sun with my sister, with Rosie, my sister Rosie, and she brushed and brushed and brushed my hair until there appeared in the air around me a bright golden halo. Look, look, Rosie said, Therese has got a halo, I brushed her up and polished her and she has got a halo. I had a halo. Sleek locks and glowing heavenly halo. The girl with the golden halo.

I sometimes let my thoughts ramble and they take me to the attic I inherited when my beloved Pauline left it to go into the convent. I had my aviary full of linnets and canaries, my baskets of grasses and dried flowers, my books, my crucifix, and my statues. In those days I wove a crown of forget-me-nots and daisies to hang on the statues. I had my desk with its green cloth and its hourglass which would forever remind me of the passing of time.

How I have loved always the deep quiet of the Great Silence that falls between Vespers and the dawn. I sometimes make myself recall and dwell upon such things as the nightmares that have visited me in the past. Like the demons I saw dancing in the garden at the time when my mother was so very ill.

I saw demons dancing in the garden. The colours were so bright, glowing, translucent, succulent. The red of the pomegranate, pink of the fig, blue of the swimmer crab, gold of flame and desire. I will dance with the demons in the dead of night; I will eat those demons up, eat, and eat and eat.

The time came for me to take the habit. It was the tenth of January, my Clothing Day. Against all expectation Papa had recovered from a second attack of paralysis. Nothing was missing on this day, not even snow. Oh, how I love snow! Even when I was a tiny child the whiteness of snow fascinated me, and now I wonder how I got this special fondness for it. Perhaps it is because I was a little winter flower

and the first thing I ever saw was the earth adorned with a mantle of white. On the day I received the habit I longed to see the world dressed in white — as I was. The day before was as mild as spring, and I gave up all hope of snow. By ten o'clock in the morning of the day there was still no sign of snow, and I thought there was no chance of having my childish wish fulfilled.

I swam in the sea with my sisters my mystery sisters and I danced in the garden with demons. Dance, dance, dance little lady, lady in the snow, snowchild in the storm. A whirling ice-maiden I dance and I swim and I fly with the wild flying insects. We fly north for the winter, north, south, east, west. Where to go? Where to go? I keep swimming. The sea is thick and dark, very, very thick and dark. There are ghosts in the sea, deep down.

My bridal gown was made from the purest white velvet and it shimmered with swansdown. It was adorned with lace made long ago by my mother. No earthly gown is fine enough to adorn the bride of Jesus, but I knew that mine was at least the most glorious gown on earth.

Two angels in black vestments embroidered with scenes from the life of Jesus; two barefoot angels with long white hands and wings of black and red and green and golden feathers lifted me up from the waves of the swimming sea and hovered above the water, holding me with nacreous fingers. The sky was pink and blue and green and gold and white birds flew behind us. Seals swim below. God's in his heaven, I suppose.

After the ceremony, as I stepped back into the enclosure, the first thing I saw was the statue of the Child Jesus smiling at me from the midst of flowers and the light of the candles. Then I turned towards the quadrangle and I saw at once that it was completely covered with snow. Since then, many people who knew of my longing for the snow have spoken of the 'little

miracle' of my Clothing Day. The Spouse of Virgins loves his lilies to be white as snow.

I close my eyes and with the eye of the mind I see the snow and I know I am in the eye of the storm, safe in the arms of the angels, above the waves, idle in the eye of the hurricane, held by the angels in a holding pattern pouring forth a silent song. I fold my hands in prayer; I peer from between my eyelashes and what I see is snow, snow like the softest feathers, snow like the petals of the almond tree, the first tree to bloom, the flowers of Aaron's rod. Biblical angels show me these things. They tell me not to look too closely; The light of heaven burns your eyeballs. Put your cool white trust in the doctor they say, and he will put his dark red dick in you. It is for the best.

Snow is cooling and consoling, silent, soft, gentle, sweet. Snow is the sugar of the earth.

As always, the Bishop spoke of how I had put up my hair when I visited him with Papa. He put his hands on my head as he talked, and I stood still for a long time as he stroked my head, and I thought of how Our Lord will lavish caresses on me in the presence of the saints. This attention from the Bishop was like a foretaste of the glories of heaven.

And so began the time of my betrothal to Jesus. But at this time also my spiritual dryness increased and I found no comfort on earth or in heaven. My boat was adrift, and yet, in this flood of grief I had so eagerly called down on myself, I was strangely happy, as happy as could be.

I was so little when my sister got married, and I had a long blue dress with a silver sash, and silver slippers too. A basket of flowers and a necklace of pearls. I went slip-slip-slipping and trip-trip-tripping along the path to the church and I was as good as gold, as quiet as a mouse and as good as sugar gold. The very smallest bridesmaid, the pet, scarcely recognisable as Daphne the deaf and dumb daughter.

There was a wedding cake as tall as a tree. My sister was so beautiful, her husband so very handsome, a dream couple. I fell

in love. And after the party I ran after them, the new husband and wife, Mr and Mrs, and I cried large terrible tears. 'Take me!' I screamed. 'Take me! Don't go without me. You're going without me. Come back. Take me!' But they were gone in the big white car. Gone into the night. I who was part of it all in blue and silver and a basket of flowers, I was left behind, cut off, left out, isolated in bewildered misery. Take me, I sobbed into my midnight pillow, take me, I whispered to the wall. And angels with black and red and golden wings came and took me to the stars.

One evening after Compline, during the Lenten Silence, I was searching for my lamp on the shelf. I searched in vain, and because of the Silence I could not ask about it. I realised a sister had taken it in mistake for her own. In the darkness of my cell my soul was flooded with divine light.

It was during this period that I was seized by a passion for the ugliest and most inconvenient things. The pretty little jug in my cell was replaced by a big quipped one, and I was delighted. And it wasn't only ugly objects that attracted me, but I also welcomed acts of injustice against myself. One day a small vase which someone had left lying behind a window was found broken. Our Novice Mistress thought I was guilty of having left the vase behind the window. She was very angry with me and told me roughly to be more careful in future. Without a word I kissed the ground and promised not to be untidy again. I had to remember that all will be revealed on the Day of Judgement.

Above all I tried to do my small good deeds in secret. I was preparing the gown of my soul for Jesus.

The gown of my soul is invisible. To the naked eye my soul is naked. I wrap my earthly body in mist, and I hide in a cloud of dandelion seeds that blow about me. But the gown of my soul is invisible, and my soul, my silent, weeping soul is naked.

Sometimes I think I have been put in a hospital where the doctor says I need lots of rest, plenty of sleep. He jabs me with a needle and it goes ch-ch-ch and I fall fast, fast, fast asleep. I

often don't know what happens then, but often too I half wake up, and sometimes I am quite surrounded by dead and dying people with a stench of death and dying and a strange green underwater light. Then other times I half wake up and I am all alone in a small pink room with the doctor, and I am naked and he is naked and with his body he parts me and enters me and ch-ch-ch he kisses me and sucks at me between the legs front and back. I have come to like this, to look forward very much to my episodes in the Sleeping Beauty Chamber. It takes your mind off everything else.

One time the doctor said he was an elephant and invited me to ride him round the zoo, by which he meant the room. Hey-di! Hey-di ho! The great big elephant is so slow! We both enjoyed that.

The day before my Profession was a day on which my vocation suddenly seemed as unreal as a dream. The devil persuaded me that life in Carmel was unsuitable for me, and he suggested that I was deceiving my superiors in entering a way of life to which I had not been called. He planted in me the knowledge that I had no vocation, and that I should go back into the world from which I had come.

But on the morning of my Profession peace swept over me, and I made my vows. Next to my heart I carried a letter saying: 'O Jesus, let my baptismal robe remain forever white.'

I took from my head my crown of roses and placed them at the foot of the statue of the Blessed Virgin, and I felt that time would never dim my joy. I became the bride of Jesus on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin. It was the little newborn Virgin who presented her little flower for the little Jesus. Everything was little on that day except for the graces I received and the peace I felt as I gazed at the stars in the evening sky and thought that I should soon ascend to heaven and be united with my divine spouse in eternal happiness.

I had a crown of silver roses for my sister's wedding. All the virgin Gillis sisters had crowns of silver roses. I was the smallest virgin, with great responsibility. I would carry a basket of

flowers. I would be left behind at the end, not really part of it at all. Happy ever after they went off, the bride and groom, and I had a basket of flowers and a crown of silver roses. Ring-a-ring-o-roses, all fall down. Deaf and dumb Daphne made a scene. Such a tantrum, such a bad-tempered girl, a spoilt brat, deserves a smack, give her a whack. Tacky Daphne. Smack, smack.

The day when I finally took the veil was a sad day because Papa was too ill to come and bless his little Queen.

A week later my cousin Jeanne married Doctor la Neele, and when she came to visit me she told me of the care she lavished on her husband. I was filled with fresh ardour for my beloved Jesus, and made greater efforts than ever to see that all I did was pleasing to the King of kings who had chosen me to be his bride. When I saw the letter announcing Jeanne's marriage I amused myself by composing an invitation which I read out to the novices. How trifling are the pleasures of an earthly union, compared with the glory of being the bride of Jesus!

I wrote:

ALMIGHTY GOD
Creator of Heaven and Earth
Supreme Sovereign of the Universe
and
THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY
Queen of the Court of Heaven
Announce to you the Spiritual marriage of their august son
JESUS
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS
with
Little Therese Martin
now princess and lady of the Kingdom of the Childhood of Jesus and His Passion, given to her as a dowry by her divine Spouse from which she holds her titles of nobility
OF THE CHILD JESUS and OF THE HOLY FACE
It was not possible to invite you to the wedding feast held on the Mountain of Carmel, 8 September 1899, as only the heavenly court was admitted, but you are nevertheless admitted to the At Home tomorrow, the Day of Eternity when Jesus, the Son of God, will come in the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead to the full splendour of his majesty. The hour being uncertain, you are asked to hold yourself in readiness and to watch.

For they that wait upon the Lord shall not be weary. Servants of the Lord, virgins at the temple, keepers of the flame. Weary and careworn, I am a worm in the wicked world.

I blunder through the mud and blind, deaf, dumb — dumb as a doornail and deaf as a ghost, dead as the hangman with his drop dead noose. I saw the bride and groom as they set off, swept off, going on their honeymoon. A word of warning to the groom, a word about the honeymoon. 'To fall into a jar of honey' means simply to die. Paint your slit with honey, Honey, before your wedding-night. And the queen bee kills the bridegroom — how — by tearing off his prick. First let him lick elixir, blood and honey, then rip him apart, throw him away. Paint with honey, get the money. That's the way to go.

I was granted a very special grace on the day Mother Genevieve died. Every sister hastened to seize a relic of our mother. I have a most precious one, for during her last agony I saw a tear shining on her eyelash like a diamond. It stayed there, and was the last tear she shed on earth. I saw it still glittering when her body was placed in the choir, and I took a scrap of linen and went to her without anyone seeing me. I wiped the tear from her eyelid, and now I possess that final teardrop.

In the rainbow light of the crystal oval of a tear you can see a bit of everything. You can see dragons, for instance, if you want to. Great flying, coiling, writhing, scaly monsters with yawning jaws spitting flame. They guard the treasure, and the treasure is the store of golden honey.

Imagine if you will a swarm of mad, wild bees. They move in a fierce body, writhing, whirling, wheeling. They are the dragon. The dragon will eat the maiden, eat her up. Gobble her. Chew her and swallow her and spit out her bones. She is no maiden; she is a slut, a whore, a merry little magdalene. See her suck the doctor's dick. What a little sucker. Just like a squelchy scarlet anemone found on a rock on a beach on a sunny afternoon in simple childhood when all the world was young and green and

innocent. I am his patient and he is my doctor and we pull our pants down and get stuck into it.

Then, one night after the death of Mother Genevieve I had a most comforting dream. My dreams are usually of no importance — I dream of woods and flowers and pretty little children and I catch birds and butterflies unlike any I have ever seen. However, this dream was of far greater significance. In it I saw Mother Genevieve, and she gave to each of us in the convent something that belonged to her. Her hands were empty when she came to me and I feared I would get nothing, but she looked at me tenderly and said: 'To you I leave my heart.' She repeated this three times, and I was overcome with joy.

The human heart is the seat of life, hollow, muscular, contractile. By its dilation and contraction it keeps up the circulation of the blood. Heartbeats on the heartstrings hammer out the minutes of your life. The tick-tick-tick of your tickling ticker whooshing the shining slip of scarlet bloody life. Heart and soul, put your heart and soul into the minutes of your life and dance on the dancing dance-floor until you drop. One-two-and then rock! One-two-and then roll! One-two-and then jump-tick-tock! It's good for your soul. I have sometimes been overcome with joy when he puts his tickler up inside me. One-two-and then rock! One-two-and then roll! We laugh like mad and he puts his hand over my mouth and I nearly choke. Don't die laughing, whatever you do, he says to me.

My nineteenth birthday was saddened by the death of the Prioress. This happened during the influenza epidemic of 1891, when many of our sisters died. One morning as I was getting up I had the distinct feeling that Sister Madeleine was dead. The corridor was pitch dark and I went to her in the darkness. She was lying on her mattress, dressed, and in the stillness of death. I went to the sacristy and brought back a crown of roses to place on her head.

During the epidemic there had not been enough altar breads to go around, and I was nervous one day as I approached

the altar. I had decided that if I received only part of a Host I would know that Jesus was only coming to me reluctantly. Oh, the joy when the priest gave me not one, but two separate Hosts!

There were two girls in the Bishop's spectacles, two separate girls, joined at the bridge of the Bishop's nose, forever linked in the matrimony of lenses, of those circles of glass, those mirrors of the gleaming world. One eye each, one eye per girl, girls sitting on his nose, occupying his spectacles. And does the Bishop have testicles? One per girl? Or are they shrivelled and ghostly — the ghostly testicles of the Bishop. Is he, beneath his black and seemly robes, a spectral concoction. Like an image in a mirror, in water, in the stuff that dreams, bad dreams are made of?

I adorn the altar with all the flowers we have here in abundance — the cornflowers, poppies and marguerites. I longed for my little friend the shy corncockle, and I searched for it in vain until one day God showed me where they were growing, and I was able to add them to the vases on the altar.

I longed for my sister Celine to come into the convent. Once when she was going to a party I wept, and I begged Our Lord to stop her from dancing. The relief when I learned that that is exactly what he did! To the amazement of everyone, Celine's partner found himself unable to dance even one step. All his body would allow him to do was to walk solemnly around the room with Celine by his side. This example of God's love increased my confidence and showed me that Jesus had put his mark on the forehead of my beloved Celine.

I felt the hand of God. He smiled on me. Dance little lady, shady lady, he said, and I took his hand. He smiled and I smiled and we twirled onto the dance-floor. We waltzed and we waltzed and we were as one. I felt the hand and heart and soul of God, and we danced in the moonlight and then it was over. And we popped a wondrous wonder-bomb of LSD and we fucked and fucked and fucked all night long, I think. He said that's what we

were doing. It felt like funny fun to me, but he was crying most of the time. I didn't care. He said I was cruel, a cruel mistress, whore and slut.

Then God finally took unto Himself our saintly father, my Papa, my King.

It was after Papa's death that Celine recognised her vocation and desired to enter the convent. At last the exiled dove came home to the nest.

I repeat the words of St John of the Cross over and over: 'I drank deep within the cellar of my Beloved.'

When I was between seventeen and eighteen the writings of St John of the Cross were my only spiritual food, and as I grew older the works of most religious writers left me unmoved. The Bible *and* The Imitation *of Thomas à Kempis — in them I find hidden manna and pure, substantial food.*

From *The Imitation* I took pages 121 and 123, and I tore them into little pieces and then I ate them for they are manna and spiritual food. In time I will eat the whole book. It only tastes like dust. What I have eaten so far, then is:

> 'Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.'

Time and tide.

Where will it all end? Does it end? I have eaten:

> 'When I am weak then I am strong.'

I will now have the power of the weak. Inherit the earth with the meek. So weak and little and poor and pale and frail and powerless, I will have *all* the power. I will have power over life and death.

I have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and I have done this in secret, in such dark secrecy that the power is mine. I have given in, given all, and now I am able to take. I am eating *The Imitation of Christ*. And you are what you eat.

> 'Wouldst thou attain unto a blessed life: then despise the life of the present.'

I have given in, given all and I wonder what I'm getting out of it. A lot of shit I reckon. Blood and shit.

> 'Grace is the mistress of truth, the mother of tears.'

I have wept. I have eaten two pages of the book. I will make a meal of it. Make no bones about that.

I have always wanted to become a saint, but I realised very early in my life that there is the same difference between me and a saint as there is between a great mountain and a humble grain of sand trodden underfoot. But in spite of my littleness I can still aim to be a saint. I look for a means of going to Heaven by a little way which is very short and very, very straight, a little way that is quite new, that I will invent. We live in an age of inventions. We no longer need to climb the stairs because there are elevators. I will find an elevator to carry me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the steep stairs of perfection. When one day I read in Scripture the words: 'Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me', I knew I had discovered The Way. I read on and it said: 'You shall be carried at the breast and upon the knees; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.'

And so there is no need for me to grow up; just the opposite. I must stay little and become less and less.

The angels with their wings coloured bright like Japanese dressing-gowns lifted me up and carried me across the waters, and the waters of the ocean were wild as night. I know nothing of love, but I know I must become less and less, fade out, die down, flicker. Think of the power of the spark. The spark will ignite the forest, start the inferno that will engulf the world. I'll be in that. Reckless, feckless, flickering fucker. Look at her angel wings. Regard, if you will, the marvellous wings and curtains of her sweet pink cunt.

God likes to bestow His wisdom on babes and sucklings. He that

is mighty hath done great things to me, and the greatest thing was to show me my littleness. My greatest martyrdom remained a secret from those around me for a long, long time. It happened as follows.

It all began on Holy Thursday when I went to bed. No sooner had my head touched the pillow than I felt a gush of warm liquid fill my mouth. I raised my handkerchief to my lips and wiped the substance away. I thought I was dying and my heart almost burst with joy. I had just put out the lamp in my cell and I restrained myself from lighting it for the purpose of examining the liquid in my mouth, and I went peacefully to sleep. When the bell for rising rang at five o'clock I remembered at once that I had some good news to check. So I went to the window and held my handkerchief to such light as was there, and I saw that the cloth was sodden with blood. I was sure that on the anniversary of His death my Beloved had let me hear His first call, like a gentle far-off murmur which heralded His joyful arrival. On that Good Friday I shared to the full the austerities of Carmel, and they have never seemed so delightful. The hope of going to heaven transported me with joy. But the following months were not always radiant, for a pitch-black cloud swept over my soul, and anyone who wishes to understand how dark this journey is must travel the same bleak, sunless tunnel.

My angels carried me like a parcel, skimming the waves, soaring to the stars. And inside the parcel my heart was ticking and pumping blood, round and round in the long thin tunnels of my parcel. Wrapped in white linen I was a small neat parcel of blood and bone and skin and sin. Up, up we go, flying with the Japanese angels. They carry their precious parcel through the fog of air and cloud. There is a pitch black sunless tunnel and we travel there. All light goes, like the light of life that fades from the eye when death has come. The lustre of life fades and drops away. I travel the sunless tunnel. Sometimes my head aches. And you can bet there are times when my cunt aches like anything, but it has to be worth it, doesn't it? Travelling

the sunless tunnel is no mean feat. Like Christopher Columbus discovering the new world.

In my belief in the bliss of heaven I was like Christopher Columbus whose genius sensed the existence of a new world. But at the time of the fatal Easter, quite suddenly, the mists of my dark adopted country sank into my very soul and smothered it. My knowledge of heaven vanished and I was left in a world of darkest despair.

When I sang of heaven I got no joy because I was singing only of what I wished to believe.

Since entering Carmel I often thought the fate of Noah's dove would be mine unless Jesus took me to heaven quickly. By this I mean that unless death came when I was young, I would surely be sent far away to live in exile among strangers in a strange convent. One day Jesus would open the window of the ark and tell me to fly to heathen shores, carrying with me the olive twig. This thought of being a missionary made my spirit soar.

To all intents and purposes I have had a happy life. I was the youngest favourite daughter of a very good family. I had the best education, and the best of everything that money could buy. You'd wonder where all this went wrong. Some faulty gene, some wicked fairy, some poisonous plant eaten by mistake or design in early childhood. Therese Gillis, they'll say, went round the twist and was put in a home and mixed with very bad mad company. She pretended she was raped by the very doctor who was there to help her. She changed by metamorphosis into a fine French saint, who was in turn a rose bush, which was in turn a raving slut. She was getting on so well, but then she up and committed suicide. It was so tragic, such a sad thing for the family. They never got over it. Never got over it. Never ever. Went round on their knees begging forgiveness and wondering where they had gone wrong and thinking perhaps if they had insisted on her doing more piano practice. The studies of Czerny have been known to work wonders for the souls of wayward girls. Or then perhaps there had been too much piano?

Had continental culture been overdone in her case? Who can tell. Therese Gillis was found hanging in the garden, and lots of foul stuff was running out of her and falling in a slow stream on the ground.

If the Blessed Virgin cured me of my illness, I wanted to answer the appeal of our community in Hanoi. I dreamt of a convent where I was unknown, and forced to endure the pain of exile. Suffering itself becomes the greatest of all joys when one seeks it like a precious treasure.

I have eaten page eight.

> 'Though I understand all knowledge and have not charity I am nothing.'

Well that's right. I am nothing. No thing. Therese No-Thing. And once upon a time I ate the Mona Lisa. That was a time and half. There she was, hanging around the wash-house door, and I opened up my mouth so wide, and slipped her head between my teeth, two rows of teeth cared for by expert dentists, and I lowered my tongue and let my gullet widen, widen until gulp! snap! like a crocodile with yellow eyes I swallowed her all up and she was gone, gone inside to inhabit me. Where do you live, they say to her, and she says, in a little voice that you can only just hear if you're lucky and if you have sharp ears, she says she lives in Therese No-Thing, and people are satisfied by her answer. It's a good one.

Sometimes I feel attracted to one particular sister and I go out of my way to dodge meeting another. But Jesus tells me it is the second sister I must love, and that I must pray for her, even though her manner tells me she has no love for me. There was a time when one of the nuns irritated me by whatever she did. So I made it a practice to be near her as often as I could, and never to betray my dislike. She asked me one day, with a beaming face, why I was so attracted to her and why I always gave her such a charming smile. I told her it was because she reminded me of God's love.

Bees fly on beelines, knowing where to go. My head aches, and I do not know the way. I feel my heart beating within me, my ears thudding with the thunder of my blood, and somewhere in a distant room a lunatic is playing a piano, drumming the low notes over and over in a dreadful ecstasy of droning rhythm. My hands over my ears — and the sound of the piano — is it in a cellar — is it in my ribcage — the sound of the piano goes on, and on, and on. It beats like the waves on the seashore, beat, boom, beat.

I have eaten page seventeen.

'Temptation comes upon temptation.'

I twist and turn in a torment of temptation. I am forever tempted by the sweet, sweet smell of death. Death is all around me in the writhing, groaning bodies in the beds, beneath the eerie light of the green glass lamp.

In the Sleeping Beauty Chamber I must mimic sleep, must ape the princess who pricked her finger and fell into a slumber for a hundred years. And princes came crashing through the hedges of prickles and vines and roses and blackberries and with their flaming swords they parted the curtains of the bedroom and parted the legs of the princess and with an elegant and princely gesture they insinuated their gold and silk and velvet members into the princess herself. Like jackhammers and jackasses the princes pleasured themselves with the body of the sleeping princess. You'd think she would wake up or die, or call for help, but no, the spell keeps the princess under, and so the tale goes on for a hundred sleeping years.

I remember when I was a postulant I sometimes longed to seek my own satisfaction and enjoy a little pleasure such as spending time with my beloved Reverend Mother. This longing was so strong that I was forced to hurry past her cell, and to clutch the balustrade to prevent myself turning back.

I have a perfect memory, intact. But assembled in many, many different ways. Today I will remember silver roses, and tomorrow they will be gold, last week glass. I loved the glass roses, so

fragile, resembling rain. I will never forget Violetta, a cut glass Italian girl who wore the face of love. The face of love is the face of death, as anybody knows.

My memories of the French convent twist and knot with recollections of my Melbourne schooldays. I see the snow in the garden, the man beside the wash-house, the Mona Lisa shadow girl — and the doctor turns to me, his hands red with the invisible blood of women he has murdered with his magic sleep. My mouth is stopped with silencing drugs and I cannot cry out. Will nobody cry out? They say women have died, are dying every day — in their sleep, in this strange place — this place where the doctor is the god and king, where sleep is the queen of heaven, and the face of death has no face of love.

I cannot bring myself to hunt through books for beautiful prayers. There are so many of them and I get a headache, and besides every prayer seems lovelier than the one before. I cannot possibly say them all, and I do not know which one to choose. So I behave like children who cannot read, and I tell God very simply what I want, and He understands.

I have a fragrant memory of something that happened a long time ago. I had the task, every evening at ten minutes to six, of accompanying Sister St Peter, who was very old and frail — and difficult — to the refectory. One winter evening, very cold and dark, I was performing this humble task when suddenly, away in the distance, I heard the music of a small orchestra. I pictured to myself a richly furnished and elaborately decorated drawing room, glowing with light, and filled with young women, fashionably dressed, and exchanging worldly compliments. Then I looked at the poor invalid I was guiding along, and I saw also the bare bricks of the simple cloister. The contrast moved me deeply, and then Our Lord poured onto the cloister that light of truth which so outshines the false glitter of earthly pleasure.

My head aches, my heart aches, my belly screams out for rest, and I hunt with a kind of fever for help. I hunt in the eyes of people, of Teresa and Shirley and the nurses, and no words

come to my lips. A terrible dumbness chokes me. I do not know the words. I search in the earth, in the stones of the walls for remedies. I consult my dear white stones. I seek in the pages of old books for remedies and incantations and prayers. All is dumb. All is silent. *The Imitation*. I have eaten page 106. Delicious. The taste of dust and ashes. Licorice allsorts. This book is my only source of nourishment.

'My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is my portion forever.'

'What is not savoury to him to whom Thou art savoury?'

Delicate flavour.

Tincture of tuberculosis, mint and meningitis. My head, my heart, my lungs — all ache and yearn for oblivion, seek the long night in the foul tunnels of hell and heaven. Teresa sits in the sunlight and reads the book her sisters sent to her. A book that came all the way from Wales. With the whales I swam with my sisters, with the seals, the angels and the whales. I have nudged sea-lions; I hope to ride an elephant. And afterwards on summer nights there were books to read. They read to me, my sisters, many books, many golden thoughts and smiling sentiments. The stories of the mists of time, the ticking of the misty clock. Turn back the hands of time; roll back the sands of time. We sat in the old brown armchair, one of my sisters or two, and they read to me the stories of red shoes and little mermaids. And I swam in the sea. Every day, that summer.

The trouble those girls had with their feet, their dancing feet in red slippers chop-chop-chopped off. Off with her feet! Their scaly shiny fishy tails cleft in two by the slash of the pain of the knife. And then when the mermaid, speechless, dumb, tried walking, her feet were as feet that moved across hot coals, feet that pattered on the points of swords upturned. She was dumb as a cucumber. The dumb mermaid and the footless maiden — footless, footloose — they stumbled along, blind leading blind, dumb leading footless, their faces radiant with beauty, transfigured by the pain of love.

True love and charity — these have not always been easy for me. At meditation I was for a long time always near a sister who

never stopped fidgeting. Perhaps I was the only one who could hear her — my ears are exceptionally sharp. My desire was to turn and stare at her until she stopped her noise, but deep down I knew it was better to endure it. I made no fuss at all, but sometimes I was soaked in sweat because of the strain. At last I tried to find some way of enduring this suffering calmly and even joyfully. Instead of trying not to hear the noise the sister made, I began to strive to listen to it very carefully as if it were a first-class concert.

Another time I was in the wash-house where another sister constantly splashed me with dirty water. Instead of drawing back, I made such efforts to want to be showered with dirty water that after half an hour I had genuinely taken a fancy to being splashed.

Sometimes I do not sleep for days, and days, and days. Then I sleep and I dream, and I dream of the sleep-doctor, sandman who comes to me with his needle and ch-ch-ch and I fall asleep in the Sleeping Beauty Chamber and I dream such dreams of violation and invasion. They are not dreams. This is what is going on. The doctor of sleep is the god of dreams, the prince of nightmares, and he springs upon me, satyr to nymph, and I am helpless, sound asleep in the palace, prised apart by the sword and the serpent. The face of lust is the face of the doctor; the eyes of lust are mine. This is my strange ambivalence. Little Flower he calls me. Open up Little Flower and show your petals to the sun. The god of the sun, the flower of the wayside. I am after all only a weak and helpless child. But such is the power of weakness, such is the knowledge of ignorance, that I, Sleeping Beauty, Deep Sleeping Mermaid, I have a gorgeous power over the Doctor of Sleep. It is a strange and satisfying power. The more he violates me, the tighter my power pulls around him. I am a net, a web, and he is a foolish elephant caught in my invisible chains. Stanger than strontium, known to be fusible at red heat. My greatest strength lies in death. *That* is the secret of my power. When I die in his arms, die beneath the weight of his body in its white coat, tweed jacket, satin vest, when I die in his embrace — ch-ch-ch — then I will be pronounced the winner,

the princess with the golden ball, the cup, the crown. The frog will lie astonished on my pillow; and I will be triumphant in death. He takes my head between his hands and I am aflame with power. In my secret, dumb, sleeping, sly and shy and winning way, I watch the doctor. This is my Little Way of the Mute.

MY LITTLE WAY

I am a very little *soul who can offer only* little *things to God. This is my* Little *Way.*

One wash day, as I was cheerfully being showered with dirty water, Mother Agnes of Jesus came out and took me aside to read me a letter from a young seminarian. He said in the letter that he had prayed to our mother, St Teresa, and she had inspired him to ask for a sister who would devote herself specially to his salvation, and to the salvation of the souls in his care. I was the one chosen to be the sister of the future missionary. My happiness was boundless! That St Teresa should send me my first brother, when for so long I had cherished the wish for a brother who was a priest. My own brothers died when they were very young, but here was God answering my prayer.

'I am God, and I am fucking a saint,' he said to me one afternoon in the Sleeping Beauty Chamber. 'What do you think of that, then?' So I said I thought it was nice and he laughed like anything.

One day at dawn I dreamt I was in the corridor, walking alone with Reverend Mother. Suddenly I saw three Carmelite nuns wearing their mantles and long veils, and I knew they were from heaven. I thought how happy I would be to see the face of one of them. As if my wish had been heard, the tallest of them walked towards me. I knelt. She lifted her veil and covered us both with it, and I looked into her face and recognised Mother Anne of Jesus, founder of Carmel in France. Her face shone with a beauty not of this earth; no ray of light came from it, and yet, in spite of the thick veil, which covered us both, I saw her whole face lit with a soft and gentle glow. She caressed me, and, moved by her love, I ventured to say: 'I implore you, Mother, to tell me if God is going to leave me on earth for long. Will He come for me soon?' She gave me a tender smile and she said: 'Yes, soon …

soon. I promise you.' I went on to say: 'Tell me also, Mother, if God is pleased with me. Does He want anything from me beyond my poor little desires and longings?'

As I spoke her face shone with a new splendour, and her gaze grew even more tender. She said: 'God asks nothing more from you. He is pleased, very pleased.' Her voice was so very sweet and gentle and wise. She took my head between her hands. I was aflame with joy.

When I woke from this dream I believed I knew, really knew, that heaven exists, and that souls dwell there who love me and look down on me as their child.

My angels carry me across the water, and they explain to me that heaven exists in the bliss of the hammock of their arms, in the nothing of the air, in the knowledge of the light. I have eaten of the book and I am weightless, borne along by angels in vestments with Japanese wings. We soar and we sing and our hymns are the hymns of the sun and the moon and the stars. The face of love is the face of the death of angels. The ears of the angels can hear the sounds that I, mute and musical, whisper to the stars.

I offer my neck to the sword of the executioner, fling wide my legs to take him into my power.

I long to be a martyr. From my childhood I have dreamt of martyrdom, and it is a dream which has grown more and more real in my little cell. I want to be scourged and crucified; I want to be flayed, flung into boiling oil. I long to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, to offer my neck to the sword of the executioner. I long, like Joan of Arc, to burn at the stake.

I am ground by the teeth of savage beasts, wild creatures gnaw me from within. I believe I am starving to death, and I live in a haze of ecstasy where my angels take me by the arms and the legs and skim across the water. Away. But wild animals such as I have never seen have gripped my heart and sunk their fangs into my soul. In a strange way this is beautiful. In my weakness

I am a victim of bright love and lust and sweetest death. In my place as a victim, I have power over all things. Wheeee!

Is there anywhere in the world a tinier, weaker soul than mine? How brightly the beacon of love burns — and I know how to reach it, and how to make its flames my own.

I am only a weak and helpless child, and yet it is my very weakness which has made me daring enough to offer myself to Jesus as a victim of his love. In order for love to be fully satisfied it must descend to nothingness and transform that nothingness into living fire.

I will show my love by scattering flowers. I will sweetly sing my hymn of love, even if I have to gather my roses from the midst of thorns — the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter my singing will be.

I am a silent nightingale, singing the sweetest song of all.

I am numb, and yet I feel everything. Starving, I am filled with fruits and nectars. I am dumb. Silence is a melody played in the heart. The thorn in my flesh can make me sing. Sleep little lady, says the doctor, and ch-ch-ch he pushes the needle in and I fall into a half sleep, a greenish slimy twilight and he parts my naked legs and ch-ch-ch he goes again inside me. And I sing a little, I make some singing sounds for him, for his pleasure, but I do not mean it. Moaning and laughing and singing inside my pearly skin. My song is mournful, and my heart is black. You never did see such blackness, like velvet only blacker, like down the deepest coalmine. Yeah.

Sometimes I wonder what use Jesus will have for my songs. Shall I die of grief at being so helpless?

I will spend my heaven doing good on earth. I will follow my Little Way for all eternity, and in the gardens of paradise I will gather roses; I will scatter the petals from on high, my gifts to all those souls I love on earth. A rain of roses will descend upon the world after I am gone.

In the gardens of paradise I will gather roses, and a rain of

roses will fall on every sleepyhead. Wake up, wake up, you sleepyhead. When the red, red robin goes bob bob bobbin along, along. There'll be no more sobbin when he starts throbbin his old sweet song. Wind the bobbin, the bob bob bobbin and pull, pull, pull the thread. Pull it tight, pull it taut. Taut as a tortoise tight in his shell. If the thread begins to unwind, you must wind it twice around the bobbin and pull it taut. Wind clockwise, clockwise in the silver mirror. And the time of vibration of a pendulum depends entirely on the length of the thread. So wind up the bobbin, roll out the barrel. And wind the thread twice around the neck and pull it taut. And a rain of red red robin roses will fall in a shower on the earth after I am gone. And a rain of blood and shit.

My Saviour is the Eagle who will one day swoop down on me and carry me off to the furnace of His love, plunge me into its burning depths that I may be an ecstatic victim forever and forever for all eternity.

LAST DAYS ON EARTH AND EARLY DAYS IN HEAVEN

Therese Martin was attacked by tuberculosis of the lungs and she spent her days alone in her cell or out in the sunshine, propped up in the bath chair that had belonged to her father. She coughed, a dry and rasping cough, and suffered from violent haemorrhages. She was given leeches, and cauterisation which meant she had to be stabbed with hot irons. When asked if she feared death she said she was as gay as a chaffinch. She said she was in great pain, as portions of her diseased lungs spilled out on her lips. She said she longed for this pain as it would take her to Jesus.

Her worst deprivation was that in her extreme pain and weakness she was unable to receive the Sacrament. Many of the sisters thought she was a saint, and they collected mementos which would become holy relics. Others thought she was a most ordinary, dull little nun with some delusions about herself. The last earthly pleasure she knew was seeing a dove fly in and perch on the sill of the open window, on the eve of her death. She was unable to breathe, and suddenly, she sat straight up in bed and cried out in a clear voice: 'My cup is full to the brim!' She looked at her crucifix and said her final words which were: 'I love Him. My God, I love You.'

Mysterious scents of flowers wafted through the convent in places where there were no flowers to be seen.

According to the custom, an obituary notice was to be sent out to all the Carmelite convents, and with Therese's notice was sent a copy of her last journal, her *Story of a Soul*. This book was read in the convents and then was lent to friends outside and before long the convent at Lisieux was flooded with orders for copies of Therese's autobiography from all over the world.

A seminarian who was dying from the same disease as Therese prayed to the dead sister, pressing a relic of her to his

heart. He was cured, the medical report saying: 'The destroyed and ravaged lungs had been replaced by new lungs'.

A miracle had taken place as the result of intercession to the Little Flower. Therese became known and loved and prayed to throughout the world, answering the prayers of her supplicants with more and more miracles, until the time came for her case for beatification to be investigated by the Vatican. She appeared to the faithful in visions, and was known to strew rose petals of all different colours round the beds of people about to be cured. Soldiers of all faiths carried pictures of Therese to protect them from the dangers of the First World War.

On May 17, 1925, Therese was canonised before a crowd of two hundred thousand people. As the ceremony ended, three white roses floated down from somewhere high above the people, and landed at the Pope's right hand.

THERESE AT MANDALA

Therese Gillis lay in her bed in the Sunroom, her eyes wide and staring, a strange smile on her mouth. She was not asleep, and yet she was not awake. Food and drink were brought to her, but she took nothing. For days she drifted in and out of this state, sometimes speaking in a high, clear voice, telling her novices of their faults, telling Jesus of her love for him, describing her Little Way, singing simple, childish hymns, speaking of Violetta, a beautiful Italian angel, laughing with her sisters at the beach, describing scenes of rape and seduction and murder. Sometimes she refused to speak for days at a time.

Shirley Temple watched over her, and would tell the others to leave Therese alone. 'She's better off if you leave her alone, you know,' Shirley said. 'She'll come out of it in her own good time.'

Therese said, in a sweet, dreamy, fluting voice: 'If the angels were to sweep heaven, the dust would be made of diamonds. Diamond dust.'

Shirley nodded and patted Therese on the arm, and said she wholeheartedly agreed with that.

Dorothy Gillis came to the Sunroom with roses fresh from the garden. 'Look, duck,' she said to Therese, 'your favourite pink roses from out the front.' In silence Therese took the flowers and pressed them to her face, smiling absently, her eyes distant, glazed, alight with some far-off flame. She lifted the gold cross on the chain around her throat, placed it on the coverlet, and one by one she plucked the petals from the roses, kissed them, and let them fall onto the cross. Her mother stared helplessly at her. 'Why don't you let me put them in a vase for you, Therese?' But Therese didn't answer her, continuing to scatter the petals on the cross, letting them slide onto the floor beside the bed.

Therese closed her eyes, seemed scarcely to be breathing. Shirley Temple in her polka dots kept passing the open door, skipping, humming to herself. The other women in the Sunroom

were curled up or stretched out stiffly in the beds, moaning softly, grunting, snoring, staring, sleeping.

The room was bright. Dorothy thought it could be a lovely room which long ago would have been filled with cane furniture and palms in brass pots. Dorothy put her hand on Therese's shoulder, at a loss for what to do or say. The roses she cut from the garden lay in pieces on the bed and on the floor. She began to talk quietly to her daughter, saying the first things that came into her head.

'We had a room with potted palms, at home, when I was little. It had a dark carpet, red, with Chinese patterns on it. And my grandmother would call out to me: "Dorothy, Dorothy, close the curtains now. The sun is coming in." So I would pull the curtains shut — they were heavy — and the light of day was shut out suddenly. It was gloomy in there, in the drawing room, and I felt a draught, a chill. I thought of people dying, and I listened to the ticking of the clock. It was that old Dutch wall-clock with mermaids painted on the side. There were photos of our ancestors on all the walls. I used to imagine ladies in the drawing room, ladies in pale silk dresses having tea, playing cards, painting with watercolours, drawing with pastels, putting photographs in their albums, playing violins and harps. We had a harp.

'And I used to play the violin, you know, a long time ago. On winter mornings I would cross the cloister garden carrying my wooden violin-case, wearing red woollen gloves. Granny knitted gloves for us all the time. She would say that the red wool was for the circulation. Beauty and goodness, she said, came from a healthy circulation. My violin teacher was Sister Marie-Catherine. She was French — young and pretty. In those days I dreamt of becoming a concert violinist. But they were only dreams, and I never told a living soul about the visions I had of myself in velvet and taffeta on the stage somewhere in Europe, playing a concerto, fingers flying. The bow was a magic wand, and the audience held its breath in rapturous suspense until

I played the final note. I loved the word "played". And then I thought of the applause, all hot and exciting and people throwing flowers and calling out. I practised scales and exercises and pieces and I passed my exams. Then Sister Marie-Catherine started to fade away. She went all transparent and her skin dissolved and she was a ghostly blue. Her eyes were huge and beautiful, but she had cancer of the brain, and one day she just disappeared completely and turned up as a tiny little corpse in the chapel. I sang in the choir at the funeral, and after that I put my violin away. I couldn't bear to play it.

'I don't know why I'm telling you all this now, duck. I want to talk to you but I just don't know what to say.'

Shirley Temple came into the room and stood next to Dorothy. 'She can hear everything you say. And I'm listening too, if that's all right. Go on, it's good.'

Dorothy blinked at her and faltered. Then she continued the story, telling it now to Shirley who smiled and nodded and murmured.

'Well then a new teacher came. She was a fat nun, very jolly. So it was never the same. One day another sister came to me in the garden and she said that Sister Marie-Catherine had left a gift for me — she wanted me to have her painting album of flower studies. And the nun gave it to me then. I remember I started to cry and ran up to the dormitory and threw myself down on the bed. I felt so confused — I thought I had been given a sort of relic. There were ten coloured pictures of flowers, things like Neapolitan violets, a study of carnations and nuts. Then there were colourless outlines on the opposite pages — to be painted. Most of these were half finished, half painted in by Sister Marie-Catherine. She had actually completed the picture of a gentian — and it was alive and sad and beautiful.'

'It's a lovely story. Very sad,' Shirley said. Her blue eyes and broad innocent smile were off-putting.

Dorothy looked around, and looked down at Therese who hadn't moved, showed no sign of listening.

'Go on, don't stop there,' Shirley said. 'It was just getting really good. What about the gentian?'

'Well that was all, really, except that on the backs of the

pictures, on the blank pages of the book, I found pencil sketches that Sister Marie-Catherine had done. I was surprised, even shocked by the poor quality of the drawing. I had such an idea of Sister Marie-Catherine as an artistic soul, you see. But these sketches were stiff and empty and weak. Unconvincing really — drawings of dreary things like boxes and paintbrushes and easels. I should tell you I have always been very interested in drawing, myself. It was hard to understand how a woman who could play her fiddle with such skill and emotion, and could colour the gentians so they kind of shifted on the page in the sunlight, how she could bring herself to draw these dull and meaningless things. And leave them in the same book as the pictures of pink roses and cloudy blue forget-me-nots. I turned over every page slowly. I think I was hoping to find something better. Then at the end of the book I found something I have never forgotten.'

'Go on, go on then,' Shirley said.

'It's not very interesting, really. But I found this pencil sketch that was done with real confidence. It filled up the whole page, for one thing. The outline resembled a naked woman — she was sitting with her back to you. So the bottom of the drawing was the shape of the woman's backside. Then the body was filled in with all these powerful drawings of flowers — cyclamens with buds that looked really rude, and there were twisting, twining vines. And some of the flowers had drops of dew dripping off them. Even though it was only a pencil drawing, it seemed to glisten, and to glow with colours in your mind. The vines actually looked like blood vessels, and some of the leaves and flowers looked like internal organs, not to mention private parts. It made me feel sick when I first saw it, and yet it fascinated me too.

'I don't know why I am saying all this just now.

'I realised years later that I was looking into Sister Marie-Catherine's heart and soul, somehow. And I knew at the time that it was wicked, obscene. I put it away in my trunk in the box room at school. Sometimes I wanted to go and get it out and look at it, but even the thought of doing that made me sick with

a kind of longing, and I would impose a discipline on myself — I'd stop myself from going to the trunk.'

'It must be hard for nuns, I suppose, that kind of thing.'

'Yes, I suppose it must.'

'What have you done with it?'

'It's on the top shelf of the linen press — with my old violin. And other things out of sight out of mind in the dark at the top of the cupboard. Old music books.'

'I sing,' Shirley said. 'Land sakes, I'm due to sing to the men in Three A any tick of the clock. Tick tock tick of the clock.' And she dashed out the door.

'Good riddance,' said a voice from the bed next to Therese.

Then Therese said in a loud voice: 'Where are my stones. You said you were bringing my white stones. Over and over again, day in, day out I ask you and you never bring them.'

'I'm sorry, duck. I forgot to give them to you. Here they are then, in my bag.'

Dorothy took out a black velvet pouch containing Therese's collection of milky stones. A smile crossed Therese's face as she reached out and took them. Rose petals slid from the bed to the floor. Therese pulled open the drawstring and let the stones clatter into her hand. They were like small eggs, large teardrops, beads of a moon goddess. Dorothy tried to tell herself the stones were as harmless as a stamp collection, but she also sensed in them something mysterious and sinister. She couldn't fathom why Therese had been collecting these things since she was little. Nobody could remember where or when the thing had started. Dorothy thought of telling the doctor about the stones, but then it seemed too trivial. What *did* the white pebbles mean to Therese? What did it matter, anyhow?

Therese had always been an unusual little girl, but now that she had had this breakdown, all her funny ways were taking on a dark and bewildering meaning. Her mother had not in fact forgotten to give Therese the stones, but she had been hoping Therese would forget about them.

With her hands cradling the white stones, Therese closed her eyes and fell back into her strange sleeping state. Her breathing became slower, and she spoke in a high clear voice that seemed

to come from somewhere above her head. She said: 'These white pebbles are good deeds. They will be weighed in the balance.'

Dorothy's face tightened in anguish. All the sadnesses, worries and frustrations of her life met for a moment in her lips and eyes, and settled there. Then she shook her shoulders and cupped her hands over Therese's hands which still held the cold stones. Therese slept. The other women in the Sunroom lay still, the faded pink coverlets heaped over the mounds of their bodies. The room resembled a container full of huge cocoons. Giant silkworms had gorged themselves on the leaves of the mulberry tree and had spun these cocoons back, long ago, back in time.

> The misty pink of the silky cocoons is the pink of the mingled blood of Pyramus and Thisbe, the pink of misfortune in love. The worms spin out their own sad message in the bloody pink of misfortune. They die a dreamless death within the silk sarcophagus. Some will freeze to death there, will never emerge, will wither away and remain forever as husks.

With the helpless shrug of resignation, Dorothy stood up, straightened the cloth that covered Therese, picked up the petals that had fallen on the floor and put them on the bedside cupboard. She threw the stems of the spoiled roses in the rubbish tin. She kissed her daughter on the forehead, glanced sadly round the Sunroom, and left. She headed for the reception desk and asked to see the doctor.

'I need to see Doctor Goddard. I must see him now.'

'I'm sorry, but the doctor is busy.'

'Then I must see him as soon as possible. It's very urgent. I'm worried about my daughter.'

'What seems to be the trouble?'

'She is in a kind of trance — or even a coma. I don't know.'

'That's to be expected, Mrs Gillis. It's certainly not at all unusual. I'll consult her records. She's had Amytal. And we've got her down for shock treatment and then next week she's in for Deep Sleep.'

'The sleep?'

'Yes, that's right. And so you see there's absolutely nothing to worry about.'

'But she seems to be so— so odd.'

'Well, most of our patients would seem odd to you or me.'

'I must see the doctor.'

'Well there's no appointment until — let me see — the week after next. Doctor can see you, Mrs Gillis, on Thursday afternoon, week after next.'

'I wish it was sooner. That's after the Shock and the Deep Sleep, isn't it?'

'Yes, and that is really all to the good. You will be able to discuss your daughter's progress.'

'Where is Doctor Goddard now?'

'Mrs Gillis, the doctor is out making house calls.'

'I didn't know he would make a house call.'

'There are times, circumstances. I really can't help you any further.'

With a feeling of deep chill and a sense of doom and powerlessness, Dorothy accepted what the nurse had said and went home. There was a lot to be done, getting Bridget ready to go to Queensland. But always at the back of Dorothy's mind was the nagging feeling that Therese was in some terrible kind of danger that she did not understand, could not put into words.

THE NATURAL LAW OF LAUNDRY

The house call that Ambrose made was to Vickie's flat. Vickie's Toyota was parked outside and Ambrose's Rover was parked behind it. And Vickie herself was lying on a purple velvet chaise longue, a piece of scenery from some old play. She was naked, posing on the purple velvet, her hands behind her head, her blue eyes filled with mischief. With a small razor Ambrose shaved her underarm and pubic hair. Vickie smiled serenely.

'There was a girl at school,' she said, 'and we used to call her Hazel Underarm.'

'Why?'

'She was obsessed with shaving and plucking. She used to spend whole days just plucking the hairs from her legs. Imagine. And she was gradually pulling out her eyelashes and eyebrows, and the last I heard of her she had started to pull out the hairs on her head.'

The razor scraped gently on the soft skin under Vickie's arm. 'Was she pretty?'

'Oh no. Ugly.'

'My girls in the clinic — some of them are covered in down, you know. Furry they are. It happens when they starve themselves. Funny, isn't it? There, you're done. Now I'll fuck you. Smooth, hairless, white marble woman. With eyelashes intact.'

Ambrose kissed her all over.

'Nice tits, you know, Victoria. Queen Victoria naked on the couch.'

'Analyse me, doctor.'

'OK, here we go. How's this?'

They teased and laughed like lovers on a beach in the sunshine — although the room was dark and dusty, and there was soiled clothing heaped about the floor and draped over the bits of broken furniture. The windows looked out onto a busy road and were smudged with grime, spider webs across the corners. Flowers, perfume, chocolates, and wine were heaped in stages of decay and disarray on a big table in the middle of the room.

A dressmaker's dummy stood crookedly on its single wooden leg in one corner of the room, a wooden peg for a head. Its naked body was carelessly draped with crumpled silk scarves, bright, caressing.

'Will you talk about me in your lecture tonight?' Vickie asked.

'I always talk about you, one way or another, Victoria darling. And I'm telling them about the virtues of our occupational therapy — the beekeeping and gardening and so on — and I'll draw the comparison with the useless busywork mad women used to have to do. Of course they still do those things in some places. And I talk about how they used to get women to sort seeds and grains — and then for fun I throw in a reference to Venus (that's you) and how she made Psyche (I think that's you too) sort out the beans from the barley and from the vetches and the poppy seeds. They like a bit of classical learning at these lectures you see.'

'Are you lecturing me?'

'Yes.'

'Go on then.'

'I tell them about how women in the madhouses in England used to be chained up and how they had everything that matters cut out of their cunts.'

'Why?'

'Oh, supposedly to stop them going mad all the time with sexual pleasure or whatever. *Then* the enlightened doctors had the brilliant idea of getting them to sort out beans and poppy seeds instead of being cut about. And *then* some genius invented laundry. You do realise, don't you, that doing laundry keeps women sane? We still have the laundry as a part of therapy, even at Mandala. All hand-done — *real* laundry. We wash and iron the shirts of all the barristers and judges and whatnot of Melbourne. The collars and cuffs you see at the Melbourne Club were all passed through the hands of the crazed laundresses of Mandala. Makes you think, doesn't it? You ought to do some laundry, Victoria. Look at all these dirty knickers. You'll go mad, you know, if you're not very careful. Awful lot of knickers here for a woman who never seems to wear any, don't you think?'

'Lingerie lunacy.'

Ambrose laughed. The sound was loud, confident, sexy.

'And you should straighten up and clean up the old dummy in the corner, Victoria. She's your guardian angel. I used to have one of those, you know. Well, I mean, there was one of those at home when I was a boy. Actually, I was sort of in love with her.' Here he laughed again. 'I mistook her for my ma-ma-mother, the old da-da-dummy. I'm a bit of a case-book example of something or other. See the wooden peg for the head? That looks exactly like my ma-ma-mother. Peg head.'

There was something alarming now in his laughter. Vickie looked away and said, 'Why don't you just give all your patients Deep Sleep and be done with it?'

'I probably would if I could get away with it. But you realise I have to be seen to develop all these other possibilities as well — specially the ones that don't frighten the horses — or the whores — like gardening. And I'm kind of interested in all that as well. The newspapers love my gardening patients. All very good for business. They can't *all* be asleep all the time you know. Most of the patients I see — and their families for that matter — just need a little blip-blip-blip — and a good fortnight's sleep and they're right as rain. More or less.'

'What about the long-term patients?'

'Oh them, poor things. They're too far gone to live in the world and so I give them somewhere to be. What would Shirley Temple do without Mandala, for example. And I need to study them, of course. *Illumination* is going to be the most fantastic breakthrough in all this stuff. New ground, absolutely new ground. The minefield of the human mind, that's what I'm onto, Victoria. Hallucinations — what do they signify? Delusions. Why? How? Where do these things come from — what are they for? I get the patients to go right *into* their worlds of delusion, and that way I can study them. Other people have always tried to get rid of the delusion, but I take the opposite approach — go right into the thing. If you want to be Joan of Arc, then I say, you go and be Joan of Arc. But what I want to know is — why *fucking Joan of Arc*, for Christsake? That's what I want to know. Why fucking Joan of Arc? In particular. Why did Shirley Temple hit on Shirley Temple?'

'Do you think Joan of Arc was really a man?'

'Maybe. Maybe not. But getting back to laundry—'

'Do we have to?'

'Once upon a time in French madhouses they had the laundry divided up according to the kinds of madness. Delirious women did the actual washing; imbeciles hung it out to dry; melancholics did the ironing; and then the monomaniacs folded it.'

'It always seems to be women.'

'Oh, it always is.'

'And why is Mandala mostly women?'

'Law of nature.'

'Therese's case is of course somewhat alarming and bewildering for you, and I can fully appreciate your worry, Mrs Gillis. However, I am very familiar with the problem, and I know that with the proper treatment, and allowing the thing time to take its course, there is no reason why Therese should not, in good time, recover her grip on everyday reality.'

Each word was like a wound to Dorothy's heart.

'In certain very sensitive people, people of intelligence and creative ability in particular, there are events, moments in life, when the only safe course is to allow the power of — call it the imagination if you like — to allow the power of the imagination to take over. The patient experiences two realities — this can happen in a split second — I have seen it — the dreadful pain of what is happening in the here and now, and the ease and beauty of the life of the imagination. The patients imagine themselves, fully, and without doubt or reservation, into the life and person of another — someone they admire greatly, someone they identify with, someone they wish, for a variety of complex reasons, to be. They become that person. It is one of the most mysterious safety valves of the human heart. A man is powerless and forlorn in his day-to-day life; he doesn't function at his work; his family life, if you follow me, is depressed — this man becomes Lord Byron and — ting! hey presto! — he is as happy as Larry. Or he takes on the person of Christ or Napoleon. I could take you up to the Men's Wing (which is a self-contained, fairly small operation up on the edge of the hill there) and show you how all this works, how it makes sense. But of course, you will have met Shirley Temple.'

'Yes. Yes I have met Shirley Temple.'

Dorothy felt her own grip on reality slipping away as Ambrose talked. She began to think of Shirley Temple as just a happy and useful woman, whereas before she had found her helpful but terrifying. She had classified Shirley as incurably insane — not necessarily dangerous, but quite mad.

'When Shirley has run her course she'll be as right as rain. And in the meantime, the world she is retreating from is not standing still — oh no — the life that woman left behind is righting itself in her absence, and she is on one glorious holiday here. She is — as far as she and I and everyone here is concerned — she *is* Shirley Temple. You see the treatment for what might be called deluded people here is completely different from anywhere else in the world. Here in Australia, at Mandala in particular, we are at the forefront of this work. Nobody here is going to try to stop that woman from being who she is (by that I mean Shirley Temple), and nobody is going to just tolerate her and patronise her. Oh no. Here at Mandala we encourage that woman to follow through her delusion (so called) to its logical consummation, whatever that may be. You may possibly have heard of the work of a British doctor, R D Laing? No? Ah, well Laing has a clinic in London, Kingsley Hall, where he practises what has come to be known as "anti-psychiatry". What this means, in effect, is that the patients are free to express themselves totally. If this means they draw breasts all over the walls from one end of the house to the other, so be it. That these drawings are done in excrement — so much the better. I see you are shocked. It is all a matter of entering into the story that patient is telling herself, letting the story write itself on the walls of the world. I have visited Kingsley Hall several times, and I've seen there at least one miracle in the making. A woman called Mary Barnes is developing into one of the finest painters in Britain — all as a result of being allowed to be herself, to paint — whatever — on the walls of Kingsley Hall. That's one of her pictures.'

Ambrose pointed to a painting of violent blue and yellow swirls. Black twigs, like burnt hands, stretched up through the waves of colour. Dorothy blinked.

'I go even further than Laing, you know. I allow the patients *total entry* into the world of delusion, entry through such doorways as the psychedelics. That's the very, very latest pathway to the secrets of the human mind. Go into the delusion, be whoever you are, see the truth at the very centre of things. Love,

that's what it's all about. Love. Love of self means love of the universe. Think of William Blake.'

Dorothy was aware that Ambrose had virtually forgotten she was there. He was a great bird in flight, a prophet preaching to a vast crowd, a man possessed by the truth.

Dorothy dared to interrupt him. She said: 'Therese, Doctor Goddard. What is happening to Therese?'

'Now Therese,' Ambrose went on, not pausing in the flow of his rhetoric, 'Therese Gillis has become St Therese of Lisieux, and no mistake.'

Dorothy felt her heart twist within her and saw momentarily the opening of a black abyss. She stared at Ambrose in complete belief, absolute understanding of what he said. Like a large spoonful of bitter medicine, Dorothy took it in.

Dorothy was taken in. She was a girl standing in a fairground with her hair in braids and a bag of cotton candy in her hand. She watched and listened as the man with the red face, the man in the tartan jacket and the dirty bowler hat shouted over the heads of the crowd: 'One bottle of Horsehoof Balm and all your worries are over! The quick cure for all kinds of pain. Horsehoof has no equal. It stops pain as if by magic — the action on the nerves is truly astonishing. Toothache, headache, earache, sore throat, chilblains, burns, blindness, bowel or liver complaints, sprains, bruises, neuralgia, cholera, dysentery, sudden or acute pains, typhoid, sore eyes, influenza, indigestion, ringing in the ears, heart disease, rheumatism, infertility, coughs, hay fever, cancer, nervous exhaustion and insect bites. Internal or external. Antiseptic and laxative. A soothing remedy for all pains. Gives immediate relief. In the words of the senior physician of the Mater Dolorosa Hospital in Rome, Italy: "Horsehoof is of considerable benefit in all forms of disease." This is a remedy derived from the fruiting bodies of the horsehoof fungus, known to the ancient Greeks and the Australian Aborigines for its remarkable healing properties. For one shilling only, you can place a bottle of this remarkable Horsehoof Balm in your home today. Don't delay. From the palace to the cottage the word is "Horsehoof"! Try it. Accept no imitations. Buy the genuine Horsehoof now! You will never look back.' The man's eyes

were alight with conviction. The crowd cheered and clapped and handed over their shillings. The man in the bowler hat finally held up the empty suitcase from which all the bottles of Horsehoof had been sold, waved to the crowd, and was gone.

'It is important, Mrs Gillis, as you will understand, that Therese should be given every encouragement. We must clothe her, as it were, in the habit to which she is entitled. Occupational Therapy will supply the fabric, and will supervise the making of the habit strictly in accordance with the rule laid down by the Order. Therese will participate in the dressmaking, although much of it will be done by others, and, if necessary, by professionals. She will be moved from the Sunroom and given her own cell in the old Convent Wing. It so happens that out in the Convent Wing we have St Teresa of Avila — a patient who has come a very long way since she first came to us. Are you familiar with the layout of the building? The Convent Wing is over to the west.'

'I know. You see, doctor, the girls, Therese included, came here to school when it was the Immaculate Heart.'

'A rather nice coincidence, you could call it.'

Dorothy looked down and blinked back her tears. She had a sudden clear recollection of Therese running down the path of the school towards her. Therese was wearing the pinafore the little ones had to put on over their uniforms. It was an old-fashioned apron, made from blue and white floral cotton, with a big bow at the back and huge floppy frills over the shoulders like wings. Therese ran towards her laughing and threw herself into Dorothy's arms.

Was this the moment for Dorothy Gillis to stand up and face Ambrose Goddard and tell him the idea of 'clothing' Therese was ridiculous? Was it now that she should tell him things had gone quite far enough, that she was simply going upstairs to pack up her daughter and take her home? What was all this nonsense about Therese being the Little Flower, and living in a cell next to St Teresa of Avila over in the old convent?

This *was* the moment, but the moment passed.

On the treatment report Ambrose wrote: Sod. Amytal/Ritalin completed. Patient given over to delusion. Course of further

treatment — DST, ECT, locate patient in convent cell accommodation, supply habit etc. Possible LSD. Weekly Review. Sleeping Beauty ward possible.

'There will be a strict weekly review of Therese's case, Mrs Gillis, in consultation with the nursing staff and the other doctors. Now, do you have any questions?'

Dorothy felt her entire body compose itself into a hunched, tormented question mark. Therese had slipped beyond her grasp, beyond her world, into some strange bright realm understood only by Dr Goddard. And Doctor Goddard stood before her now, his bowler hat a little crooked, his smile so reassuring, his suitcase again filled with shiny bottles of Horsehoof Balm. Dorothy held in her hand the soft pink cloud of cotton candy, crusts of sugar forming around her lips.

She stared in silence at the man with the Horsehoof Balm.

The question would not form.

ST TERESA OF AVILA

In the Welsh Vale of Towy there's a market town called Llandovery. If you turn left at the railway station and take the road that leads into the hills, you come to a gate and a lodge. A large round wooden sign says 'Llan Carmel'. The rule of life followed in this convent is that laid down in the reforms of Teresa of Avila in the sixteenth century in Spain. This convent has been here since 1934. The nuns lead an enclosed life of prayer and work, reciting the office, supporting themselves, knitting, making altar breads and honey. Soft bells ring to call the sisters to prayer, and at night the Great Silence falls, not to be broken until the first prayers of the morning.

In 1950 the Pryce-Jones family left the market town of Llandovery for a new life in Australia. It was a large family, and one of the daughters, Rosamund, always said she was going back to Llandovery to be a nun. Rosamund entered the Welsh convent in 1962. Her cell was made from an old railway guard's van, and was stark but warm and comfortable. The walls were white, the floor was bare, and there was a bed, a small bookshelf, a black cross, a thermos flask, a picture of St Teresa and a stoup of holy water.

Rosamund never took her final vows. She had what was described as a complete breakdown and returned to her family in Melbourne where she entered a small Catholic hospital for mental patients. She seemed to have gone into a world of her own where she was no longer Rosamund Pryce-Jones, but had become Teresa of Avila. She was humoured and cajoled and ridiculed and punished and treated with one kind of drug and another. When she failed to respond to treatments of drugs and ECT, her doctor consulted Ambrose Goddard on the question of a lobotomy for Rosamund. Ambrose suggested the Rosamund might come under his observation at Mandala while he assessed her case. So Rosamund was transferred to Mandala where it became clear that a lobotomy was not required. Instead she was given her habit and her cell and her life as the sixteenth-century

saint. This life Rosamund saw in bright, bright colours, and she saw it also as a kind of book that opened up before her. There was joy and optimism in her delusion. She thought of her life as a book of colours, a path of light split into its brilliant range of red-orange-yellow-green-blue-indigo-violet. A book of colours.

THE BOOK OF COLOURS

Chronology

1511 A son, Rodrigo, born to Dona Beatriz, wife of Don Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda
1515 A daughter, Teresa
1519 A son, Lorenzo
1520 A son, Antonio
1521 A son, Pedro
1522 Teresa and Rodrigo run away to fight the Moors
1528 A daughter, Juana
Death of Dona Beatriz
1531 Teresa goes to board at convent of Our Lady of Grace
1536 Teresa enters Carmelite convent of the Incarnation as a novice
1543 Death of Don Alonso
1562 Foundation by Teresa of first reformed Carmelite convent, Saint Joseph's
1565 Teresa completes writing of her *Life* and begins writing *The Way of Perfection*
1567–1582 Foundation of fifteen other houses (convents and monasteries)
1573 Begins writing *Foundations*
1577 Writes *Interior Castle*
1582 Teresa dies at convent at Alba de Tormes
1622 Teresa canonised

Black Veil

A black veil hides my face and my feet are bare in my hempen sandals. My habit is of thick brown wool, and very rough to the touch. I love the texture of this cloth. How it reminds me, by its very contrast, of the sweet soft surfaces I used to know. I retreat behind the eyelid of my veil and look into the wardrobe of my memory where silken shirts sing and whisper to me, where

velvet cloaks caress my shoulders, and where slippery satin petticoats slither round my legs.

Orange Skirt
The skirt I wore was orange — when I ran off with Rodrigo, when we went to fight the Moors. Our uncle chased us on horseback and brought us safe back home. But I remember the feeling of joy and freedom as we marched out along the road to defend our people and our faith. My skirt was orange and it was trimmed with strips of black velvet, thick galloons of velvet threaded with fine silver. I skipped and danced along — and sometimes I marched. We carried swords and little bags of food. Rodrigo carried water and a skin of stolen wine. But we came home in disgrace, and were confined for a time to the house and the garden.

The Lion-Coloured Walls
We played, Rodrigo and I, in the garden where the orange trees and nut trees were sheltered by walls the colour of lions. We read the stories of the lives of the saints, the bloody deaths of the martyrs, the visits of the great black devil. And we composed a book of romance and chivalry, inspired by the books my mother used to read. I read my mother's books in secret, since my father would not permit such frivolous ideas to enter my head. The Moors, the Lutherans and the American Indians leapt in their thousands through my imagination. Nothing was going to stop me and my brother from becoming heroes and martyrs.

Haze of Gold
Once at the beginnning of spring I saw the buds bursting on the poplars, and I saw round each tree a bright haze of pure gold that resembled the nimbus of a saint. I longed to burst forth like the trees, to glow with great deeds and dazzling thoughts. I was no scholar, but I could read and write and listen to my heart.

Threads of Violet Silk
I was a girl with a needle. I had my embroidery. I would sit on the seat under the twisted elm creating silky irises on ribbons

of dark velvet. The threads ran singing through my fingers as I wrote the messages of my heart on the cloth. As I wrote I listened to the sounds of the garden, the distant sounds of the street, and the music in the centre of my being. My father said my sewing was well done; my mother said in some surprise that she had never seen such irises. I had a desire to break forth from the flower forms and from the edges of the velvet, and to roam across bright meadows and clear streams and through sweet scented pines, threading my coloured silks in unknown patterns, writing through all of Spain the feelings in my heart. Every prick of the needle, every stitch, every dot was a drop that would become a trickle that would become a great flowing river of words and ideas and feelings. As the water went coursing over the pebbles of its stony bed, it was strewn with crystals by the sun.

The Saffron Sound of the Pipes

The devil can implant deep melancholy in the spirit, and the despondent soul should look at the sky and take a walk and create a little music of its own. My drum and pipes are never far away from me, and all my life I have danced for joy against the darkness of the devil. Gloomy clerics have shaken their heads at the saffron sound of the pipes, and at the sight of the nuns as they danced to the music. But I have seen the devil dissolve in black fury at the rattle of a tambourine.

Faded Mulberry-Red Tiles

I have taken a great but sad comfort throughout my life in the sight of sunlight as it filters through the bars of the windows onto the the faded tiles, mulberry-red, on the floor. The kitchen in my childhood home had such a floor, and I sat on the tiles for many hours in shock and despair on the day my mother died. I traced the edges of the tiles with my fingers, sometimes scraping out the grit that had lodged there. My baby sister Juana was crying loudly in her basket, but I was silent with my grief. My pretty mother had at last succumbed to her disease. I searched for her volumes of romance to hold for childish comfort, but they had vanished with the light in her eyes.

The Sky Was Indigo

I had a great fear of marriage, having seen my mother as she grew more feeble with each birth and retreated into a world of make-believe. The religious life held no more attraction for me than marriage did. The sky was heavy with a strange indigo the day I was delivered to the convent of our Lady of Grace to be a boarder. I was sixteen and very fond of the ways of the world. It was evening, and the shrill cries of swifts filled the air as their black wings scythed the dark blue heavens. I watched the nuns at prayer and I would see them weep with emotion at the Passion of Christ. It was in the convent of Our Lady of Grace that I learned the habit of weeping too easily. This habit has never left me, and has been a trouble to me. I became ill and returned home to my father's house where I finally received the knowledge that God was calling me to the religious life.

Luminous White Snow

I stole from my father's house, against my father's wishes, one morning in November when the snow lay white and luminous on the ground. I made my way on foot to the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation which lies half a mile to the north beyond the city walls of Avila. I went in an agony of emptiness, my bones ached, and I felt that the pain of death itself could be no greater than this. I felt at this time no love of God, and yet I knew that something was drawing me to the convent.

The Cinnamon Walls of the Incarnation

I crossed the humped bridge over the little stream and soon I saw the elms, their bare branches black against the snow, etched against the cinnamon walls of the Incarnation.

I drew in my breath and the crisp air entered my throat and lungs and I felt an intense pain. Summoning all my resolve I entered the vestibule where the floor was cobbled and the walls were white as snow. A great tangle of bell ropes hung from the beams of the roof. I pulled on the ropes, the bell rang and I was admitted through the huge studded door after much clinking of keys and scraping of bolts.

The Turquoise Virgin

I felt a rush of friendship and love as I passed one of the Virgins in the choir. She was richly robed in turquoise brocade, her crown a glittering silver halo. Her dainty feet stood on the crescent moon, and her cloak was edged with finely wrought silver roses. She was Our Lady of Good Health, and I felt my spirit lift as I moved past her. She was so like the glorious ladies I had left behind in the world, and yet she was so *unlike*, so other-worldly. The tiles beneath my feet were the old faded mulberry tiles of my home, and in that cold November morning I felt a spiritual warmth within them.

A Long Spear of Gold

Always I am questioned about the angel, and indeed this was the sweetest heavenly visitation I have ever known. He was close to me, on my left side, in bodily form. He was not large, but small of stature and most beautiful — his face burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seem to be all of fire. I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there was a little flame. The angel thrust the spear several times into my heart, piercing my very entrails. When the angel drew out the spear, he seemed to draw out also all that was inside my body, and to leave me on fire with a great love of God. This caused me pain of such intensity that I know I moaned aloud. Yet it was pain of immeasurable sweetness, ecstasy and bliss, and I could not wish to be rid of it. My soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God.

Silk-White Wings of Storks

The storks soar on their silk-white wings above the roofs of Avila, and they settle in their nests on the tops of the churches. I follow them with the eyes of my body, but heavenly visions I see with the eyes of my soul. They present themselves to my soul in the form of an inward picture, more powerful than any sight I see with my physical sense. And sometimes the vision is apprehended by my intellect alone, without the enhancement of pictorial signs.

Naturally, I have the greatest difficulty in explaining this

in words. These intellectual visions are clothed in a secret language; they are abstractions that make their impact in the deepest places in my soul. They are the most pure and direct communication it is possible to have. Visions I see with the eyes of the soul; voices I hear with the ears of the soul. I am like a traveller who returns from a land so unlike my own, so strange, so wonderful, that I have no words with which to tell what I have seen. Human language has not the power to convey what I have understood, and it falters and is well nigh useless. I can say that God is a bright cloud or a glittering diamond, that the Virgin is clothed in light, that the Holy Ghost is a dove that flutters above my head for the space of one *Ave* on wings made from tiny shells of unimagined brilliance, but these descriptions do not begin to convey what I have seen. There are no words.

The Glittering Tawny Eagle

Sometimes my hair would stand on end and I would go into a rapture. With no warning I would be carried up as though on the wings of a glittering tawny eagle, a giant against whom I had not the power to fight. And in the state of rapture that came upon me I would experience a strange, delectable loneliness. I would become wildly restless and my soul would wander from place to place in a plaintive search for God. On one occasion I found peace in the words I heard in the depth of my soul as a voice said to me: 'It is I. Be not afraid.'

The Lady in Lilac Brocade

It was the day of a great festival and the church was filled with grand ladies in velvets and brocades. I was conscious as I prayed that a woman in a lilac gown was staring at me and I realised that my feet had left the ground. I quickly instructed three of the nuns to hold me down to earth, but it was all that they could do to stop me from sailing up into the rafters. I sometimes grow weary with the worry of it all.

The Colourless Slime of Hell

I have been raised towards the blue of heaven, clutching at chairs and draperies as I rose, but I have also been plunged

spiritually into the mud, reptiles, stench and darkness of hell. It is a prison whence all colour has fled, where I have been enclosed in a hollow scooped out of a wall like a small and suffocating cupboard. And the devil himself has appeared to me in the most abominable forms. A terrible flame, casting no shadow, shot from his hideous body which sometimes resembled a toad, sometimes a leaping great black animal gnashing his teeth. He has pummelled me and strangled me, and because he is visible only to me, his antics cause the greatest bewilderment to the nuns. We must keep some holy water by us and sprinkle it all around, for evil spirits flee at the touch of one drop of blessed water.

Clear Honey Water

Grace is a shining river that flows, pale honey through meadows and glades where birds sing and bright flowers are scattered through the grasses like stars in the heavens. I have always delighted in water, in its purity; it is so practical, useful, mysterious and beautiful. I can stand for hours at a fountain just listening to the water and watching the drops as they fall. Sunlight on water is the light of God upon the soul. And a well is one of God's most wonderful gifts. The well at St Joseph's was a poor little trickle when we first came there, and the workmen laughed when I said I wanted if to be full of water for the convent. I took no heed of their scorn, and soon we had pure fresh water in abundance. How I love the story and the picture of the Samaritan woman at the well. We water our orchards from the well, drawing it forth by a windlass; or else we can water the orchards from a stream, if we are fortunate enough to find one nearby. But when the Lord sends rain from heaven to water roots and heart of the trees, that is truly wonderful. We are all invited to drink of God's Living Water which comes to us in many different ways — streams, great rivers, little pools. When I can see the world reflected in water my heart is light, and I know I have received one more instruction in God's love. I have been half drowned in icy water when crossing a river with my nuns, but we have always survived and reached the other side. Where

would the fish go if there were no water to swim in? What would become of the world if there were no water for washing?

A Chaplet of Red Roses

As we journeyed from one place to another, across mountains and plains and rivers and fields, in drought and snow and floods — and in fair weather many a time — I came to think of the Foundations of the convents as prayers in a chaplet.

We would make for Christ a chaplet from the darkest and most highly perfumed roses, red as love can be. When we had to stay at inns infested with vermin and filled with rough soldiers and mule-drivers, I would imagine roses and sunlight and the scent of fresh water, and when we set up each house, I made sure that rose bushes were planted there.

When we came to Seville I laughed with pleasure at the sight of all the roses — and the giant violets, the jasmine and the orange blossom. How I love orange flowers preserved in sugar. And for that matter the patio in the Seville convent resembled sugar icing. This was a kind of paradise on earth. The gardens were cool with fountains where the water fell like the hair of silvery mermaids. The white walls dazzled me — everything dazzled me with its elegance and lightness and a kind of tinkling laughter that echoed through the streets.

The Apple Green Silk of Rapture

There is a sound that silk makes, a rustle, a sigh. I am sometimes reminded of this sound when I am seized by a rapture. I am taken by a rapture so violent that I can offer no resistance. I seem to be raised to heaven, travelling on or within a liquid green light, a light that resembles and yet cannot resemble the sight and sound of the most glorious green silk. In Heaven I have seen my mother and father, visions that float in indescribable light. The brightness of the sun is pale and dull in comparison with the beauty of this light. The senses are filled with such profound bliss and joy and sweetness that no real description is possible. I have spoken many times to my confessors about this, and they have always comforted me in my strange doubts and feelings. I think it is remarkable that anyone believes me, and

yet they do. The Lord commands me to tell others what I see, and by virtue of this command my poor words become credible. I sometimes wish I could stay in a state of ecstasy forever, for when I return I am left with a great contempt for earthly things which seem like so much dross. I see the meanness of our occupations here below where we are detained until God calls us.

Crisp Green Lettuces

I always hope there will be fresh vegetables in heaven — and plenty of sardines, partridges, apples and orange-flower water. But especially bright green lettuces. How delightful it is when someone sends us the gift of a basket of lettuces.

Blue Lead of Winter Clouds

I suffer severely from pains in the heart. When the sky is dark with the sadness of winter, and this pain comes upon me, I am sorely troubled. The sky was the blue of lead, and my heart was sharply painful when a lady from a nearby house came to try to divert me. She brought with her in her kindness a casket of precious golden jewels which sparkled and glittered on the surface of my bedcover. I smiled when I saw them, and I began to feel a little better because of the lady's kindness. But how I laughed in my spirit at the thought that these shiny things are all we have on this earth to cheer us. I laughed that people should value such things when the Lord has great glory in store for us. In comparison with this glory the lady's jewels are but stones rolling in the dust.

The Colour of the Treasure of Heaven

No words exist to describe the sensation I have of the colours of the light in which our Heavenly Father shines.

I have heard that it is impossible to see the sun in dreams. What I have seen with the vision God has given me is something far, far brighter than the sun itself. I shall attempt to describe raptures, visions, events, feelings and understanding, and yet even these words are inadequate to encompass the meaning of what I would wish to convey. Sometimes the Lord speaks to me and reminds me of my wickedness. I weep and fall into

complete humiliation. But often after this humiliation I receive great favours and my spirit is so transported that I feel it to be entirely out of my body. Three times in this state I have seen the vision of Christ's most sacred humanity with wonderful clarity in the bosom of the Father. It was as if I saw without seeing, as if my human eyes had become the eyes of the spirit, and I saw what could not be seen. This is the most sublime vision that the Lord has given me the grace to know. And the colour of it all is like no colour I have ever seen on earth; it is as if all the colours of the rainbow that hangs in the sky after rain were but poor dull dripping lifeless imitations of the soaring lights of heaven. At these times I see not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of the soul.

The Dark Blue of Wisdom

Wherever I am I write every day of God's grace. This is a great joy and consolation to me. I also write, it seems, hundreds of letters to my family and to my many friends and patrons. I like to think of myself as a woman of Avila, following the tradition of the great Bishop Alfonso who wrote his three pages of wise prose every day of his life.

There is a dark blue clarity and truth in what he set down, a blue of heaven at midnight, of the sea that yields up the harvest of its fishes for our supper. Often with a letter I will send a trout to grace the table of my letter-reader. There is such pleasure in the sharing of small gifts of food and drink. Once when I lived with my nuns in the hospital at Burgos (we were looking for a house) I used to smuggle oranges and limes in my sleeves to take to the patients. My brother would send me sweets and sardines and figs and sea-bream. Sometimes when I close my eyes in terrible exhaustion I see the very blue of the Bishop's wisdom. Such peace comes over me. I am embraced by the mantle of the Queen of Heaven. As I crisscross the lands of my beloved Spain setting up the convents and establishing my nuns where they can best serve the Lord, I write. With great joy and satisfaction (and even a sigh of relief with my prayer of thanks) I saw my *Way of Perfection* completed in my own hand and bound in silk on which was embroidered the images of humble

yellow flowers. May some of my words be worthy of the great tradition of the Bishop.

Children Dancing
My eight-year-old niece Teresita as well as Isabella who is the little sister of Father Gracian lived with us in the convent for a time. They were like fairies flitting about the place, playing with statues of the Christ child and the shepherds and the Virgin, dancing and making up songs and poems and pieces of music. They were always laughing, dressed in the habits of tiny Carmelites. Teresita entered the convent at Avila when she was old enough. I was not present for her profession because I was too ill. I was near to death in the convent at Alba de Tormes.

Alba de Tormes
The convent here is a peaceful place, a haven. The walls are the colour of sand, and the gracious river runs nearby. I died in the convent at Alba de Tormes.

Water of Angels
A popular perfume at this time was called water of angels. They said they could detect its aroma on my deathbed. I knew only that I was tormented by violent bleeding from the lungs. It was the fourth of October, 1582 when I died and passed beyond the earth. During the hours between my death and burial a fragrance so sweet and powerful filled the room that they had to open the windows. For nine months I lay in the womb of the wall, bricked up against the violations of the world. And emanating from my resting place there was a perfume of violets and jasmine and of lilies. Also a nameless scent so beautiful that people would be overcome. To keep the nuns vigilant in the choir, I often made noises which startled them.

Fresh Blood, Bright as a Chrysanthemum
In secret and in the dead of night, by the light of a few candles, the Father Provincial and the nuns began to remove the stones that sealed up my tomb. They worked for four days in a steady fever of guilt and terror lest their plans to investigate the grave

should be discovered. They finally removed the coffin and exposed my features to the light of the candles. My habit, old and patched as it was, had rotted away, but my body was unchanged. The Father Provincial, wishing to retain a relic of my body, severed my left hand and took it away to be an object of veneration. A novice who had been born with no sense of smell was gifted with the ability to detect my perfume when she kissed my hand. This hand cured indigestion and cured also the murderous intent of a jealous husband when it was placed on his heart. The nuns removed my ragged mouldy clothing, washed my face and body, restored a habit to me, wrapped me in a sheet, and replaced me in the coffin which was again walled up in the chapel. For two years my resting place was undisturbed, but in Avila there was a move afoot to remove my body to the convent of St Joseph in my native city.

Once again, secretly, in the dead of night, they came for me. They opened up the wall and detected again the beautiful and unearthly fragrance. My body was intact but dry, and fresh blood, bright as a chrysanthemum, was visible on my handkerchief. This blood would leave an indelible stain on anything that touched it. The body-snatchers worked in haste, leaving behind for the nuns in Alba my left arm, minus, of course, the hand. And so I travelled back to Avila where news of the unchanged state of my remains soon got about.

The Bishop of Avila and a retinue came to St Joseph's in the winter, and on New Year's Day, before daybreak, they took me out into the gateway and placed me upright on a carpet. Every person present held a flaming torch. They saw the colour of my skin had darkened in the tomb, but my hair was as it had been when I died. My eyes had quite dried out, but my eyelids, it seems, were well preserved. I speak with something that resembles vanity. The people with their torches knelt and gazed and wept. And soon the news that I had been stolen from Alba reached the ears of the Duke and Duchess of that town. I know that the message travelled to the Duchess in a note that was hidden in a pie, made, I should say, from plump delicious partridges. The Duke then acquired an order from the Pope, and off I went again, by night, in secret, back to Alba de Tormes.

This time they placed me behind the choir grille and a rapturous crowd came to look. There were always miracles. Dying children were restored to life and vigour; limbs were healed; madness was replaced by lucidity and health. My final resting place was above the high altar in the church at Alba, after the fifth and final opening of my coffin as late as the middle of the eighteenth century. By this time, the desire of the people to possess a fragment of my body had resulted in the loss not only of my left hand and arm, but of my right foot, my fingers, and some ribs. Someone obtained my neck so that my head, missing the jaw and the left eye, lay disconnected from my body, on a crimson satin pillow. My heart also was separate, exposed in a reliquary for all to see. The wound inflicted by the spear of the angel, many years before, was still visible. I remember yet the pain that was of such surpassing sweetness.

The Lettuces

Heaven is a state of simple ecstasy. It is very busy. And yes, there are lettuces.

THE HONEYCOMB VERANDAH

Rosamund moved quietly, almost imperceptibly, into the life at Mandala. She spent her days in prayer and meditation in her cell in the old convent part of the hospital. The other cells were empty, their green doors all standing open in a row as if awaiting the arrival of a crocodile of nuns. Rosamund's room was furnished with a harsh simplicity and she liked it. Her meals were brought to her. She walked beneath the wide veranda where the old tiles were set in the pattern of a honeycomb. Ants lived under the pavement, throwing up little mounds of sand between the cracks. Rosamund would stare in fascination and disgust at the shapes of the sandhills. They resembled lips, pale brown lips of sand. She occasionally went into the hospital for LSD or ECT, but mostly she was left to follow her delusion. Ambrose sensed that the best way to treat Rosamund, the best way for him to explore the development and meaning of her deluded state, was in fact to medicate her lightly and to let her be the self she chose. However, in order to satisfy the health authorities and to get the appropriate refunds, while keeping Rosamund's fantasy alive, he had to follow certain conventions of more orthodox treatment. She would be at Mandala for a long time, and so her case history became a complex pattern of assessment and reassessment, with some episodes of ECT, some periods of DST, and the occasional administration of hallucinogens. These treatments usually had a bad effect on Rosamund, and it would take some time for her to readjust to her rule of life in the convent wing. She spent much of her time writing in her journals, writing poetic and random recollections of her life which were sometimes descriptions of the life of St Teresa, and sometimes an account of daily events in the hospital. The local priest, Father Anthony who had been at school with Ambrose, heard her confession and brought her communion once a week.

'The only thing,' he said to Ambrose, 'I wish she wouldn't bite her fingernails.'

Ambrose told Rosamund that Therese was coming.

'I think you will be very pleased to hear, Teresa,' he said, 'that one of your greatest followers and admirers is coming to stay very soon. She has been unwell, and is still being treated in the hospital, but as soon as she is up to it, she will have the cell next to yours.'

A frightened look crossed Teresa's face, as nameless suspicions darted through her mind.

'But this convent is full. All the cells are occupied. Look.' She gestured towards the corridor where all the green doors stood open, the small rooms empty.

'I must have forgotten to tell you,' Ambrose said, 'when you were over in the hospital for a while, one of the very old sisters passed away. Her cell is empty. The one next to yours.'

Rosamund was silent as she chewed her thumbnail and stared at the sky from her narrow window.

'Who is it then?'

'A woman called Therese Martin.'

'The Little Flower.'

'That's the one. I know you'll get on well. You have a lot in common.'

'I'll have to think about it.'

'There's plenty of time.'

Rosamund wrote a letter to Mother Perpetua in the convent in Wales. This new Foundation, she wrote, is blossoming. We are soon to welcome a French sister, a very special addition to our small convent here. She is Sister Therese whom you will remember. I recall you often used to quote the wisdom of her words to us, saying how she planned to spend her heaven doing good on earth. I hope she can fit in here; the idea is somewhat troubling to me. Please pray for us all at this time.

Mother Perpetua answered the letter and sent a gift. It was a copy of *The Eagle and the Dove* by Vita Sackville-West. 'Here is the story of both Teresas for you,' Mother Perpetua wrote. 'May their lives inspire you and comfort you. All your friends here send you their good wishes and we all remember you in our prayers.'

THE GIRL IN THE CELL NEXT-DOOR

Therese

So here's a pretty pass, a nice kettle of fish. I am delivered to the convent overnight, by dark, by moonlight, torchlight, candle-flame, and put in a cell beside the so-called Teresa of Avila. I will pretend, for the time being, that I believe it is she. Impossible, that woman never crossed the Spanish border — or first I heard of it, anyhow. They don't realise she's an Imposter. I'll play along, and in the end I'll expose her, and then they *will* be pleased and I might get a reward.

I wonder what sort of reward that would be? I do not want food — so often treats take the form of icecreams and cream cakes. Spew! I wish, I wish I could get a letter from Violetta, a Violetta-letta on violet-scented paper. I would certainly eat *that*! Yes, now I come to think of it, if they want me to eat (and they do, I can see it in their eyes, read it in the hairs of their armpits) they should serve up dishes of Violetta-lettas. But no mail has come. The girl in the cell next-door has stolen my mail, that's the problem. She thinks she has a right to take Violetta from me, but I will outwit and outfox her, you can be sure of that. She has no character of her own whatsoever, and has slipped willy-nilly into the habit of Teresa of Avila. I will try her out with Spanish.

Well I tried her out, and I am bamboozled to report that she speaks the language straight out of the sixteenth century. That was a turn-up for my books. What a shocking thought — she could be Teresa after all. But I don't care. I will not kowtow or toady or froggy or ratty to the likes of her. I am such a nice white lily. She is trying to make friends, actually. Some hope! She is often accompanied by a strange woman I have seen somewhere in the hospital, a Shirley Temple of a woman with a lovely singing voice. A kind, good girl who has often stood me in good stead and stood me up when I was falling down. I do get so very tired, and I have responsibilities to my lover, the doctor. I ride

him through the jungle, my great grey elephant doctor. Others will hunt him for his ivory, but I kiss him and hug him and soothe him with my body. He is a creature of legendary strength and wisdom and benevolence. But why did he let them put me next to the girl in the cell next-door? He must have had a reason, but part of the game we play is that I cannot ask him this. One of the rules is never ask. I can consult my stones if I really want the answer.

I believe if I watch and wait Violetta will eventually join this order. She always had a vocation, we knew that. But it depends what house they send her to. We could relive the playtimes of our schooldays on the swings and monkey-bars. She would kiss away my headaches. Oh, how my head aches. And often I am visited by the thought that Violetta has died. That could be the explanation for her long silence. Death. Would she not speak to me from the grave? We always said we would get in touch across the crossover between this and that. If I look up I may catch a glimpse of her with the wings of a deep purple angel, my Violetta. She stopped the clock, once upon a time, and we are stopped back there, stopped with the mermaid clock. Don't talk to me, I say, about rock-around-the-clock, because I'm not listening. Come back little violet, save me from this terrible headachy thing.

In the meantime I pass the time of day with Teresa in the cell alongside, that is all. It wouldn't pay to get too friendly with a snooty tart like that.

Teresa

The Little Flower has come to the cell next-door and she is very, very strange indeed. I think she must be ill, she is so pale and thin and silent and solitary. I expected her to be joyful, but she is like a ghost, a sliver of shadow in the twilight. There is something about her that frightens me, some darkness, a terrible blankness in the pupils of her eyes. I believe there is a violence in her, coiled up, ready to spring, to unleash an unknown malice in a storm of hatred or love. Love and hate, they are so similar. We pass the time of day.

I would much prefer to speak with finer minds, or with men and women of more vitality and wit. I once received the grace of discovering the telephone, and there have been times when I have had this discovery freely available to me so that I have spoken to my mother and father over great distances, and to such boon companions as dear John of the Cross. In this convent there is no telephone. I have complained but I fear my complaints have gone unheard, ignored. I remember when I flew from Wales to Melbourne, the first thing I did when I arrived, I placed a call to Llandovery and said (I remember this so distinctly), I said: 'This is Teresa,' and for some reason they misunderstood, and my mother and father also misunderstood. It was as if nobody could hear me, as if my voice, which I could hear plainly in my head and in the air around me, and even in a strangely magnified way in the instrument itself, as if my voice was inaudible, inaccessible to other people.

'Rosamund! Rosamund!' they wept, like characters in an opera. 'Oh woe is Rosamund!' And they proceeded to gnash their teeth and tear their hair and call for help. I telephoned old friends and some close relatives and their response was very solemn, and they said — it was like a litany — 'Rosamund? Rosamund?' And I said, 'Teresa.' I began to shout and then to scream, 'Teresa! Teresa! From Avila, Avila, Avila!' And in my frustration I began to dance and tear the curtains from their rods. I rushed into the street trailing a long green bundle of dusty drapes which scattered metal rings and fish-hooks as I ran. A crowd gathered by the side of the road. I ran until the curtains caught around a tree and I fell down into the gutter from where I was rescued by a number of policemen who showed me great respect and addressed me by my proper name, Teresa, and acompanied me to a place which was, if I recall, beside the sea.

I have travelled far and wide since then, and now I have this place to myself, well almost, and I can spend my days in meditation and comtemplation, with a certain amount of exercise and human intercourse. There are of course times when I am visited by the devil who straps me to the bed and attacks my

poor brain with bolts of lightning. Then there are the times of the visions — since coming here I have on several occasions seen Paradise.

THE EAGLE AND THE DOVE

Laura

I was only sixteen when Vickie died in 1967. I find it hard now, nearly thirty years later, to remember or even imagine the shock her death was to me. I idolised her all her life, longed with a loving desperation to participate in the magic of her. I had always wanted to be Vickie; then when she died I realised I had really wanted to be near her, to watch her and listen to her. I wanted to be outside Vickie, looking on. She was such a drama; everything was an act, a play, a terrific bit of fun. She was the oldest and I was the youngest. In the middle there were Eleanor and Peter. They stuck together, and I was isolated at the bottom; Vickie was isolated at the top. She used to make felt mice for me, and peg dolls. She taught me how to plait my hair and how to play the piano and sing. She would let me experiment with her powder and lipstick. Then when she went into acting she used to practise make-up on me. She taught me dancing. There was a step she called 'plucking the stars' where I stepped slowly along the edge of the carpet square, reaching up into the heavens, gathering the stars, collecting them in my arms. People said I resembled Vickie in looks. I believed them, passionately. Perhaps I did look like her then, but after she died, the look of Vickie seemed to fade from my face. I don't look like her now.

Then, that day in February 1967, I was at school, in the lab. It was Biology and we were going to cut up frogs. I remember how hot it was and how all the talk was about Ronald Ryan. He had been hanged at eight o'clock the day before. Ronald Ryan died in the morning, Vickie died in the afternoon, and by the next morning Ryan's body would have been under the earth. Vickie's body was lying in the hospital garden. I know now that because of the hot weather there were already maggots in Vickie's body. The teacher in her white coat came into the school lab and said I was wanted at the office. I don't even remember what the Head said to me. The next thing I remember is

being at home and the terrible silence and then somebody ringing up. My father answered the phone and said no, Vickie wasn't there. Then they must have asked him to take a message for Vickie. He went white and his voice was quiet and husky and he said there had been an accident and Vickie was hurt and that was all he could say. But we all knew that Vickie had died the day before in the garden of the hospital. Straight after that there were two calls from a woman with a wrong number. My father said hello and this woman just kept repeating in a croaky voice Scott? Scott?

Nobody at our place was called Scott. The phone seemed to be going mad in a world already mad and spinning into darkness.

I think everybody more or less forgot about me; they were so busy with the details of Vickie's death. The last time I saw Vickie was the night before she died. She came over for tea and borrowed a green jacket that belonged to my mother. She sat by the window in my bedroom and said she was modelling for something or other the next day and she had to dress up in the green jacket and a big red hat. She also had to carry a small red book. 'This book,' she said, and she took it out of her bag. '*The Eagle and the Dove*. Doesn't that sound nice, Laura,' she said. 'You could be the little dove, and I would be the eagle.'

There was an autopsy, a funeral, a coroner's inquiry, nothing suspicious. I was only the younger sister, and was left on the edge of things. Peter and Eleanor stuck together and I spun around in limbo somewhere. I stayed in my room a lot, but I can't remember what I did. I suppose I cried. Yes, I cried. And I think I stared for hours at a row of black elephants Vickie gave me once. I held one of the felt mice in my hand and days later I realised it had turned into a soggy lump of matted green stuff. I had to throw it away. My mother always used to get our names mixed up, mine and Vickie's, so that she often said Vickie-Laurie or Laurie-Vickie. She was never able to stop doing that, and yet after Vickie was dead she would gulp every time she said it. I would just blink and go blank and wait for her to get it right.

When Eleanor brought home all Vickie's things from her flat,

Mum said I could have the moonstone necklace and Vickie's watch. And I got the midnight blue velvet evening dress. At that time I didn't want these things; I only wanted Vickie. I think it took me years, actually, before I really believed she was gone. I went through the funeral in a trance, although I remember seeing Dr Goddard there, and I thought then that somehow he was to blame for everything. It was his hospital, and the bees were bred by his lunatics. He looked sad and composed and I thought he was acting a part. People said wasn't it wonderful that he came to the funeral of a patient. He sent a modest wreath of pale pink rosebuds and the card said it was from him and his family. It made me sick then, but I didn't quite know why. It makes me sicker now. I thought at the funeral that he was staring at me, but perhaps I just had an adolescent sense of my own central importance. The coffin was the real centre, and yet it was such a hollow and tragic centre that it seemed not to exist. It was blanketed with flowers and the church was full of actors and there was so much happening around me. I fainted.

When I came to I was in the choir vestry with Dr Goddard beside me. I became completely conscious and I looked into his eyes and I knew I hated him. I sensed in that moment that I was in the presence of evil. He reminded me of a huge malicious elephant, grey and wrinkled and infested with hateful vermin. Afterwards I tried to put this feeling aside, telling myself that it was melodramatic and only a reaction to all I was going through. That was the last time I saw him, although he tried to suggest to my father that I would benefit from some of his therapy.

Twenty years later I read in the paper that Mandala was being exposed as a sort of death camp where patients were used for experiments with Deep Sleep treatment and with hallucinogenic drugs, and where many deaths had occurred and many lives had been ruined. Before the doctor was brought before the public to answer for his actions, he shot himself.

Two days before the twentieth anniversary of my sister's death, Ambrose Goddard drove his grey Mercedes to a lonely place on a dirt road not far from his seaside retreat, formerly the home of his wife's family. He drank half a bottle of cheap Scotch, put his Ruger Blackhawk in his mouth and pulled the

trigger. A girl out riding early in the morning found him, the remains of him. The windows misted with a coating of brain tissue and blood, sharp fragments of skull and clumps of bloody hair blasted about the inside of the car. The girl was the same age as I had been when Vickie died, and by coincidence or whatever you call it her name was Vickie too. I realise those small coincidences mean absolutely nothing, but I can't help thinking about them.

I read it in the paper. Then later I read a longer account in a magazine. How he went to the house by the sea for a few days of rest, how the house was afterwards found to be filthy, a shambles, full of empty whisky bottles and vomit and thousands of scattered pills of all kinds and colours — confetti, it said in the paper, a confetti of sleeping pills and antidepressants. On a gold velvet sofa there were *millions* of white capsules like the eggs of some terrible spider, and somebody had attempted to set fire to the sofa. In a large basement room where there was a billiard table and a bar, the doctor's dogs, two beautiful wolfhounds, lay dead. They had been chained, each to a separate table leg, and shot. With a pistol, at close range.

Going back to the time when Vickie died — I went into a kind of trance for a long time, and I was not really in touch with reality. And yet I threw myself into my school work and I got good results in my exams. I had always talked about following Vickie and going on the stage, but now I became timid and I retreated, too shy to be an actress, often too shy to speak to anybody. I went instead to university and studied to be a librarian and really became the opposite of Vickie. My body seemed to obey my wish to become almost invisible. I look into my eyes and I think that they are dull. And I remember the spark and fire in my dead sister's eyes. My clothes are the conservative clothes of an old-fashioned librarian. Whatever became of Vickie's midnight blue velvet evening gown? Vickie would be shocked if she could see me. What a dreary creature, she would have thought. *She* was going to be the best actress in the country, in the whole world. That's what we used to say. I always wear Vickie's watch. Sometimes I wear the moonstones.

I have a sense of purpose now — unravelling the story of

Vickie's death, a story that must include the stories of so many other people. I can imagine Vickie saying, can hear her saying: It's weird, how all these stories came together in a bee-sting, really weird. Perhaps I have been invisible for so long, just long enough for the truth to begin to come to the surface. When the truth is out, maybe I will burst forth too, like a fabulous fresh butterfly, showing my wings to the sun.

Actually I was wearing the moonstones when I met Ivan Quinn. It was 1989 and we were both at an in-service weekend for municipal librarians. We played a game of croquet and then we were smoking outside in the sunlight and having a drink. Ivan said, 'Laura Field. Field. That's the name of one of my nuisance files.' When I asked him what he meant he said that one of his jobs at the library was to go through the lost and unreturned books. But apart from the day-to-day job of it, he was also doing a PhD on returns, overdue books, and lost books. When the library went onto computer in the mid-seventies, all the old files were stored in a cupboard, waiting to be thrown out. They never were thrown out, and Ivan took them home instead. He said they were like gold to him, these old card files of books and people. Just last week, he said, he was going through E and F, and there was a woman called Victoria Field who had had a book out for over twenty years.

I told him then that Vickie was my sister, and that she must have had the book out when she died. He was terribly embarrassed. But suddenly, for me, it was as if a light had gone on somewhere. I asked if he remembered what book it was, and he said he was sure it was *The Eagle and the Dove* by Vita Sackville-West. It was the book Vickie showed me the night before she died, and I began to realise Ivan might have just said the most important words I had ever heard. The red book went missing after Vickie died. What did that mean? Then I realised that he was saying the words many years too late. But perhaps not. For years I had searched my life and mind for a reason for Vickie's death. If the book had been among her things, Eleanor or someone would have sent it back to the library. Or perhaps not. There were so many unknown bits, after all this time. But something told me the lost library book mattered somehow. I

seemed to remember the green jacket coming home, and Vickie's red boots — and the skirt and hat that Mum had to return to the costume department at the theatre. But what had happened to *The Eagle and the Dove* by Vita Sackville-West?

It came out at the inquiry that Vickie was dressed up to resemble a portrait of Vita, and this was seen to be odd, but people reasoned it was because she was visiting the White Garden at the hospital, and had such a wild, dramatic streak. 'That,' people said, 'is just the sort of thing Vickie Field would do, dress up like Vita Sackville-West and pay a visit to a White Garden.' But I always wondered how that piece of play-acting tied in with what Ambrose Goddard said about Vickie coming to see him because she was depressed. If she was so depressed, why was she dressing up in all that stuff? She didn't seem to be depressed the night before she died. The taxi driver even described her as cheerful. But I was only sixteen, and I couldn't express my thoughts and feelings on all this at the time.

I had to keep telling myself that the clothes and the visit to the doctor were things I could never explain, and that the bee-stings were just fate, coincidence. They could happen to anyone — and anyone who was allergic could die in a few minutes. I had even forgotten the book Vickie said was part of the costume. Until Ivan said at the conference that it had never been returned to the library.

THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE

There was once a girl whose hair was as radiant as sunbeams and whose eyes were as bright as stars. She was studious and good, reading her Latin in the classroom and helping in her father's garden. On summer afternoons she would put down her rake and her shovel and sit among the purple flags beside the fishpond, reading her books. The fish which were jewelled like the walls of a robber's cave would break the surface of the water and talk to her.

One day, when the girl's head was bent over the pages of the book, her eyes downcast, she failed to see the evil one who chanced upon her. In the guise of a noble lord in suede and velvet with dark locks and glittering eyes, he quietly observed the girl at her task. Emerging from the bushes, he spoke to her in smooth and silken tones.

Before very long he said to her: 'Put down your little red book, my dear, and trust me, for I will tell you all you need to know. See here.' And he plucked the book from her gentle grasp, coaxed her until she lay back among the flags, and took her there and then, swift as the sting of a deadly insect, for his seed was poison and his heart was black.

The dead girl lay by the fishpond and the lord rose to his feet and made his way out of the garden and across the fields to his home. The red book slipped from the water's edge and slid beneath the surface of the pond where the fish swam round it in wonder and amazement. Realising that the girl was dead, they decided that the only thing to do was to swallow the book. And so the largest fish opened wide its shining jaws and with one great gulp it ate the little red book with all its knowledge.

The years passed, and the girl with hair like sunbeams and eyes like stars was almost forgotten. Almost, but not quite. For her little sister forever wondered what had happened to the girl, and what had become of the little red book. She travelled the world in search of an answer. She went along the highways and the oceans, and everywhere she went she asked the question:

'Have you seen my sister's little red book?' until people thought she must be simple, and, for the fun of it, sent her on wild goose chases and introduced her to red herrings. And time went on and time went on and the little sister met kings and prime ministers and emperors and doctors and simple folk. Some were good and some were bad, but none could tell her where she could find her sister's book.

Until one evening she chanced to sit down to supper in the hall of a wise man in the mountains. She could hear the music of dulcimers and fancied also she could catch from time to time the songs of angels.

'I am seeking my dead sister's red book of knowledge. Have you seen it anywhere?' she said.

'I have seen nothing, for I am blind,' the wise man said. 'For this I am sorry. But you may have the honour of cutting into portions this great fish I caught this morning in the river.' And so she took the silver knife and fork and she began to cut the fish. And as she sliced into the sweet white flesh she heard the angels singing louder, and the dulcimers playing more insistently, and she saw a pale unearthly light hovering around the fish that lay on the plate staring up at her. 'I think this is a most unusual fish,' she said. And the wise man said, 'So it is.'

When she had cut the fish, there in its belly lay the little red book, open at the page her sister had been reading. A chill ran through the dining room, and as the girl and the wise man held their breath, there entered a beautiful woman with hair as gold as sunbeams and with eyes that sparkled like the stars.

So the sisters were reunited and they feasted on the fish. They ate the book as well. You can be sure the evil lord was punished for his crimes once and for all. And the mouth of the person who last told all this is still warm.

'Victoria Field never returned her library book,' Ivan said.

'Victoria was my sister. She died.'

Ambrose Goddard was dead. Mandala was only a hideous memory.

It lived on in the hearts of people who had been hurt by it, people whose lives had been altered by the death at Mandala of a wife, a husband, a child; people who had almost died themselves; people whose minds had been shredded by psychedelic drugs or by ECT.

Ivan Quinn was intrigued by Laura's desire to find the lost library book. Michael Bartlett, he said, was a good place to start because Michael had taught Laura at university and was likely to be sympathetic, and because Michael's wife had died at Mandala.

Laura went round and round in her mind, chasing the idea that in going to Michael for help she would transgress some rule of decent behaviour. His wife had died in the Deep Sleep ward. Would he thank Laura for reminding him of that? And yet she had to know, had to begin somewhere.

Ivan suggested she should imagine Michael had the book himself. But how could Michael possibly have it? Who gave it to him; who took it from the dead body of Vickie? What if Vickie hadn't even *had* the book in the garden. Laura's mind was spinning with the possibilities. She would wake suddenly in the middle of the night and imagine that Michael Bartlett had died, that her only link with Vickie and the book had died in his sleep, fallen under a bus, been caught in terrorist crossfire at an international airport, suffered the fatal attack of a large dog in a suburban park.

Finally, Laura summoned the courage to write to Michael, asking if she could call on him, telling him she needed information about Mandala, but not saying why. He sent her a small white card saying he was pleased to hear from her, how was

she, and to call in one evening. He didn't know how he could help her, but he would if he could.

The hinge on the front gate was rusted and broken, and an air of faint sadness hung over the garden. Or was this Laura's imagination? Michael had never remarried, and lived in the house with his youngest daughter, Rebecca. Michael and Laura had coffee and biscuits in the study where an orange cat with long hair and a flat face lay curled under Michael's desk.

'That's Twisty,' Michael said.

Laura began to relax.

'Let me get this straight now,' Michael said. 'Your sister dressed up like a picture of Vita Sackville-West. You've recently seen a reproduction of the costume on the cover of a biography of Sackville-West. Complete with red book. Your sister went to visit Goddard. She never left the grounds of the hospital. And was found dead from a bee-sting the next morning. Part of the costume she was wearing was a red book, a copy, you say, of Sackville-West's *Eagle and Dove*. This book was never returned to the library from which Vickie borrowed it.

'And now, twenty years on, you are looking for the book. Why? Because you always felt there was something very odd about Vickie's death, and you think that if you can locate the book you will be closer to knowing something about the day Vickie died.'

'Yes, because why would somebody keep the book instead of taking it back to the library?'

'Carelessness.'

'Perhaps, but I have to know. I know I have to know.'

'You're like a princess with a quest. Looking for the one fish in the ocean that swallowed the ring.'

'I know. But it's as if for so many years I had to accept that the official version of what happened was true, and now I have a glimpse of the possibility of a different explanation. For some reason, somebody kept that book. Why?

'If I find out who, I might know why, and if I know why — it's as if I'm haunted by the restless spirit of my sister. She is telling me to do this so that she can be at peace. Something in

me died with her, and now it is coming to life again. I know this sounds completely nutty.'

'Supposing she never even took the book with her to the garden.'

'I know, I know. There are so many ways of looking at it. I sometimes think I'm going mad myself. But I just have to keep going.'

'Do you suspect Goddard?'

'Of what?'

'I don't know. An accidental overdose of drugs — and — well, getting the bees to sting her — no, that wouldn't work. If she was already dead bees wouldn't. Has it occurred to you that the book might have had things written in it, things that would incriminate somebody — Goddard for instance — in some way, and that he took the book and destroyed it?'

'Again, yes, I've thought of all that. But I still want to try to find the book. *Was* Ambrose Goddard the first person to find the body? Who was *really* the last person to see Vickie alive? I want to know who were some of the people working in the hospital — and who were the patients. Dr Goddard is dead, but I want to talk to people who were there.'

'There's an Action Group. Mandala Action Group — people trying to find redress for the injuries they or members of their families suffered. I have nothing to do with them. I take the attitude that Goddard is dead anyway, and Marjorie is dead, and in my opinion he killed her. And that's that.'

Michael paused, and Laura sensed the depth of his sadness at the memory of his wife. There was a split second when the ghostly presence of Marjorie Bartlett could be felt in the room, before Michael continued. 'I don't have the interest, or the heart, to go to meetings to discuss it. As far as I'm concerned, it's over. But they might be useful to you. Of course they would. Some of them were there. Of course their real interest, I gather, is to get William Vincent, the doctor who did most of the ECTs for Goddard, into court. And James Trent — he did the brain surgery. But those people, the Action Group, they'd talk to you.'

'But don't you see — one of them might have the book, and might never say.'

'Same goes for anyone you talk to.'

'Please, can you just tell me, then, about the people you remember at Mandala. Do you have any contact, at all, with anyone?'

'There's one. A strange, sweet woman who calls herself Shirley Temple. She sends me a Christmas card every year.'

'Do you keep the cards?'

'I think Rebecca does. I fancy there's a box in the hall cupboard with hundreds of old Christmas cards. But in any case, I do have her address. She's completely out of her tree in one way, but in another way she's very canny. In fact, now I come to think of it, she probably knew more about what went on in that hospital than anyone else.'

'Does she belong to the Action Group?'

'No. They have no time for poor old lunatics like Shirley. She's in a nursing home in the hills. If you want to see her, I suppose I could go with you. Or Ivan might go. I've caught your excitement about the little red book. Is this a murder hunt? Do you think your sister was murdered?'

'That's what I think in my heart. But I don't know. I just don't know.'

'Laura, I would say that the only murderer at Mandala was Ambrose Goddard. He was also the maddest person there. He's dead. Do you still want to go on?'

'Of course I do.'

'Of course you do. Now, have you talked to your other sister about the book? She might simply have forgotten to take it back to the library.'

'I don't really want to let Eleanor know what I'm doing. She'll think it's crazy. She'd try to stop me. And I know she would have taken the book back if she had it.'

'OK. Now before we go any further, I am going to tell you about my wife, Marjorie, because I think you ought to know just how things were at Mandala. I really never talk about this, but I can assure you I think about it, I still think about it, every day of my life.'

THE CASE OF MARJORIE BARTLETT

Michael told Laura that Marjorie was admitted to Mandala in January 1967.

She was underweight and suffering from depression. A month later, three days after the death of Vickie Field in the garden of the clinic, Marjorie died in the Royal Melbourne Hospital having been taken by ambulance from the Deep Sleep ward at Mandala in the middle of the night. Marjorie had been in the general Deep Sleep ward known as Hawaii where there were ten other patients under sedation. All these patients, including Marjorie, were naked, lying in urine and faeces and blood and vomit. They were covered in sores, and their breathing was laboured. They were in a state of deep sedation, and from time to time each of them would cry out in the terror of nightmare, shrieking as the devil of hallucination danced across their tortured minds. The ward was lit by one ghostly green light.

There was one nurse on duty, and one sister. The nurse went round once an hour to shine her torch on each patient. At 2:00 AM she looked at Marjorie and saw that the patient was dark blue and choking. The nurse called the sister who called the ambulance and then tried to reach Dr Goddard. His home telephone was answered by the young woman who looked after the children. She said there was nobody there but the children. The doctor and Mrs Goddard were out. She couldn't say where they were. Later it became clear that Dr Goddard had been in the other Deep Sleep ward, the one he called the 'Sleeping Beauty's Palace'. This was a single ward. The patient being treated there on the night that Marjorie died was Therese Gillis. In the Sleeping Beauty's Palace the doctor would administer to his sedated patients what he considered to be the ultimate treatment. He would rape them.

Marjorie died during her second Deep Sleep treatment. She had survived the first one which was seven days long, only to fall into a more severe depression. On the third night of the

second treatment she succumbed to the rapid onset of a virulent pneumonia. A time is reached, during the administration of barbiturates, when so much of a drug is needed to bring about artificial sleep that the side-effects are likely to cause death. Although the whole notion of the use of deep barbiturate sedation as a treatment had been dismissed as dangerous and ineffective by its pioneer Dr William Sargant in the fifties, Ambrose Goddard was convinced it could repair broken minds. He gave his patients four-hourly doses of Tuinal which was a combination of two barbiturates — Amylbarbitone and Quinalbarbitone. At any time during the four hours, if a patient began to rise from the deep sedation, he gave a dose of Neulactil. Larger and larger doses were needed as patients developed a tolerance to the cocktail of drugs. He would happily tell people that he was the biggest provider of Tuinal in the Southern Hemisphere. The sedated patients were given daily treatments of Electro-Convulsive Therapy during which they would scream and convulse, foam at the mouth and writhe, naked in their filthy beds. Sometimes they would fall from the bed and fracture bones, but usually they were firmly strapped to the bed.

If a patient's mental condition had not improved after three long sessions of sedation, the patient was pronounced hopeless and sent out for a lobotomy. Dr Goddard had discussed this possibility with Michael Bartlett, in the case of Marjorie. But Marjorie never got that far. Although most of her records disappeared mysteriously, there was a manila folder with her name on it, and on the back Dr Goddard had scribbled in pencil: 'Suddenly became pale and cyanosed. Air passage blocked. Ambulance called.' The nurses often saw the doctor alter records, alter death certificates. The hospital averaged one death per month, and the wonder and miracle is that the place lasted for ten years before a Royal Commission was called to investigate the deaths. Before he could be forced to face his crimes and humiliation, Ambrose Goddard took his own life. The Mandala Action Group would continue to call for the exposure of the other doctors involved, James Trent and William Vincent. How could these men claim *not* to have noticed that the patients in the Deep Sleep ward suffered from a range of complaints — pneumonia, dehydration,

constipation, drug rash, respiratory infections, urinary tract infections, urinary retention, excessive mucous, vomiting, falls and fractures, wild fluctuations in temperature. They had not noticed. Vincent did the ECTs and Trent did the brain surgery. They had noticed nothing amiss in the Deep Sleep ward.

It was incredible to the general public that all this was happening, was going on for ten years behind the walls of the old convent in a prosperous and respectable suburb. And Marjorie Bartlett, wife of Michael and mother of three little children, was only one of the fatalities at Mandala. Another one was Therese Gillis.

THE HORSE WITH THE GOLDEN MANE

Therese Gillis was admitted to Mandala towards the end of 1965, several months after the admission of Rosamund Pryce-Jones. Therese was the youngest Gillis girl, and she and all her sisters went to school at Immaculate Heart — which later became Mandala. Therese was familiar with the chapel before the mysterious light of blue and gold and ruby glass was replaced by transparency, when it was alert with tall plaster saints in pale plaster garments edged with gilt and sprinkled with bright stars. As a little girl she linked the chapel, in her mind, with the fairground carousel. She was the queen on the white wooden horse; she was the saint with the lily and long hair. She prayed that her front teeth would not come through crossed, and her prayer was answered; she prayed for and got the horse with the golden mane. She rode it into the forest, into the sunset, into the sea. She was the girl in the dark red dress who galloped off into the clouds. She prayed that Violetta da Fabriano would turn round and look at her during the hymn. 'O Flower of Grace! Divinest Flower! Maiden purest, Maiden rarest'. The sweet pure voices of the choir filled her eyes as well as her ears, her whole head, her whole heart; and Violetta's shining dark hair flicked quietly to the side, and from the corner of her pansy-black eyes she stared at Therese.

Those girls were inseparable, Therese and Violetta. Hand in hand in the corridors and on the gravel paths. Heads together underneath the trees. Passing notes, making gifts for each other from flowers and mirrors and ribbons. My darling Violetta; My Itty Bitty Therese. They hid behind the brick wall at the back of the convent orchard. They lay in the long grass and tickled and kissed and promised to love forever. They went together to Mademoiselle for extra French. They played piano duets and performed as twins in golden wigs at the ballet concert. They wrote poems and plays and put on recitals in the garden of Violetta's house. Under a weeping willow they played Romeo and Juliet and ate summer fruits from crystal bowls. They drank

Italian wine and kissed in the cool damp of the cellar. On hot afternoons they lay on velvet couches in vast dark rooms where the walls were painted in strange shades of umber and sienna and where magical chandeliers hung from ceilings painted all over with cherubs and golden leaves. They lay on the graves in the cemetery and wept for the dead and kissed. Violetta was considered by the nuns to be very special. Her mother was dead; she was her father's only child. She was a very bright girl, and destined to become a singer.

But Violetta's father married again and he packed up Violetta like extra luggage and whisked her off with her new mother and her new baby brother to a bigger house, a hillside of grapes, a grove of olives across the desert in Western Australia. Perhaps Violetta should stay on at the Immaculate Heart as a boarder? At first Mr da Fabriano said yes, but then he decided no, and Violetta had hysterics and was smacked and locked in her room. Therese thought she was going to die, and that Violetta would die as well, from grief. They were twelve. Violetta was taken out of school in the middle of the term, was kept at home to pack her things and pack herself and leave forever.

Therese and Violetta must both arrange to commit suicide to be together. They cannot get messages through by ordinary means. But their minds are so powerfully attuned that they communicate by thought. Starvation is too long and obvious. They have sometimes said if they were separated they would both die on a Wednesday afternoon, both slash their wrists with a carving knife. On an unremarkable Wednesday afternoon Therese and Violetta both score their wrists with kitchen knives. They draw, in fact, very little blood. Violetta is sedated by the doctor and put on a plane for Perth. Therese is put in hospital to have her tonsils out. The girls are forbidden to write to each other. Telepathy grows swiftly weaker across the desert.

Violetta was gone.

Therese got over the horrors of having her tonsils out. She recovered from the fear that as the surgeon reached into her mouth and down her throat he would damage her teeth. Her teeth were intact. Violetta was gone. Mademoiselle gave Therese extra tasks and responsibilities. Therese would sing the solo in

Les Noces du Papillon at the French soiree. At her extra lessons, Therese was now alone. But here the absence of Violetta was unbearably obvious. To discontinue extra French? Reverend Mother had an idea. Give the little one a challenge; give her a sweet and demanding task; let her read the autobiography of her namesake in the original. So Mademoiselle gave Therese the book of soft thick creamy pages with black and white photographs of the Little Flower. 'Photography was rather new then, *cocotte*, and we are very, very lucky to have these pictures of our Little Flower. Her sister was always there with her camera. Imagine.' Mademoiselle gave Therese a packet of dried rose petals from Lisieux, blessed in honour of the Little Flower. Therese kept the packet in a cigar box containing letters from Violetta, a photograph of Violetta with her dog, a brooch of enamelled violets arranged in the shape of a heart, crystallised violets in a tin. Therese hid the cigar box in a secret space at the back of her wardrobe.

In this space she also kept her collection of milk white stones. These stones were her children, her toys. They were the stones that led Hansel and Gretel home through the forest; they were pieces of the moon, the eggs of mysterious monsters, the gifts of golden angels. Therese could write messages with her stones, make pictures with them. They were the teeth of a witch. They whispered to her. Consoled her.

Her stones could dry her tears, could tell the future. Therese's eyes were often filled with sudden tears. Therese was forbidden to write to Violetta, to receive letters. Imagine, Mademoiselle said one day, imagine that Violetta is dead. Mademoiselle looked kindly at Therese across the table in the little library. Imagine that Violetta is dead. Had Mademoiselle really said that? Perhaps Therese had only imagined it. Perhaps a message was coming through from Violetta. Violetta was dying. Violetta was dead. But a photograph appeared in the *Women's Weekly*, a picture of Mr and Mrs da Fabriano and their baby son Maximilian and daughter Violetta at the wedding of Mrs da Fabriano's sister in Perth. Violetta was wearing the mantilla Therese had given her.

She loves me.

Then Therese began to dream that Violetta was dead. A picture of Mr and Mrs da Fabriano grieving at the funeral of their young daughter Violetta. Therese sat up in bed in sickness and horror. She sketched Violetta's funeral in her diary, and a soft delirium overcame her. She succumbed to fever, was possibly subject to hallucinations, and the doctor suggested she should go to the sea for a holiday. Therese and two of her sisters and a nurse, and, who knows how or why, Mademoiselle, spent three weeks of the summer together at the beach. Swimming and tennis and ice-creams and sunburn and dancing with boys on Friday and Saturday night in the church hall. So time went on, and Therese grew more and more fascinated by the life of the Little Flower.

It was when Mademoiselle returned to France because her mother was dying that Therese, again bereft, began to play a solitary game in which she pretended to *be* the Little Flower. From Normandy came cards from Mademoiselle, but there was no return address. *Mille Bons Baisers*. Therese could glide in and out of her Little Flower game, while showing no sign of it to other people. Therese is more settled now, they said. She seems to have got over all her childish worries. She's a different girl. Sweet. Serene.

She never refers to Violetta any more, thank goodness.

Like a sleepwalker Therese moved through school winning prizes in Literature and French and Music and Art.

When Bridget was preparing to go into the convent, Therese started to show the first signs for years of her old nervous troubles. I think Ambrose Goddard could possibly help her, the doctor said. There seems to be some possible delusion, or at least hallucination. Certainly depression and suicidal tendencies. Hysteria. A most unsettling time for a sensitive young woman, with her closest sister entering the convent.

So Therese went to Mandala, and she was given Sodium Amytal with Ritalin, and also electric shocks. She had so many injections of Largactil in her backside she couldn't walk, but skittered around on all fours, along corridors, up and down the stairs like a monkey. With relief she finally dropped into the life of the Little Flower, and then she became a special patient,

was given her cell beside the cell of Teresa of Avila, and she had long talks with Dr Goddard. During these talks which were taped, Therese was apparently ecstatic, and Ambrose felt a power within her that fascinated him and drew a deep response from his imagination. Therese was going to be the fullest and most detailed case of religious delusion in *Illumination*.

Ambrose saw this young woman had so imbibed the writing, the life, the personality of the nineteenth-century French saint that when her own fragile world finally collapsed at the betrayal, as she saw it, first of Violetta and then of her sister Bridget, she became, for her own comfort and survival, Therese of Lisieux. Between Bridget's betrayal and the time when Therese was swallowed up, or transformed by her own intimate knowledge of her namesake, there had been the treatments — some chemical, some electrical — that she received at Mandala. There were also episodes of vigorous love-making by the doctor. Without the intervention of these processes, perhaps Therese Gillis would never have developed her fully deluded condition. Or perhaps she would. In any case, convinced of her own powerlessness, and yet at the same time believing in an immature concept of her own omnipotence, she was a perfect ground for colonisation by the Little Flower.

Sitting duck, Ambrose thought. Therese Gillis was a sitting duck for Therese Martin. 'Celine and I are two little white chickens,' she said to Ambrose.

Therese sat on the floor in Ambrose's office, playing with her white stones, arranging them in circles, in spirals, in crosses, stars. She talked to them as a baby talks to toys.

She looked up from her game and said: 'Did I ever tell you about the jelly sandwiches? Well — I went out fishing with Papa, and as he fished I sat in silence by his side. I watched the clouds as they passed by, I watched their reflection in the water. I listened to the murmur of the wind in the trees, in the reeds, and my thoughts became very deep. I was drowning in my own still, dark, deep-sea thoughts. I roused myself at last from my drifting pleasure, and I unpacked the sandwiches my sisters had prepared for us. Thick white bread with yellow butter and berry jelly, all wrapped up in lettuce leaves and folded in a white

napkin. Imagine the bitterness of my disappointment when I found that the lovely scarlet jelly had gone a miserable pink and had sunk like blood into the bread. I wept and I knew what a very sad place the earth is. And I longed for heaven.'

'My mother died when I was nine,' Therese said to Ambrose. 'She is in heaven. Is your mother still alive, Doctor Goddard?' She sat on the floor surrounded by her white stones, a little nun in a magic circle on the blue and red of the Persian rug. 'Where is she, your mother? Is she dead too? Perhaps she is in heaven with my mother and my little brothers. Where is your mother?'

There were certain words, and 'mother' and 'dead' were among them, that came to Ambrose's lips with the greatest difficulty. Before he could frame them he would stop and stutter and stumble over the first sound. He now sat stiffly behind his great carved Italian desk and flattened his palms on the blotting pad, drawing in his breath. His fingers splayed out in front of him, springing tufts of blonde hair sprouting from the backs of his hands where the skin was faintly scaly. He rotated his head a few times was if to suggest there was some odd irritation lodged between his neck and his collar. She was peering up at him, the childish lunatic on the carpet, smiling and waiting politely but insistently for him to answer her question. Ambrose affected to smile, but his eyes were fixed and cold, and a dark blush had crept up his neck and across his cheeks. She was waiting.

'My m-m-m-m—' he began, and Therese sat quite still as the sound hummed in the silence of the room. M-m-m-m-m-m-m. He began again. Over and over he began and the patience and quiet smile of the young woman in front of him became almost intolerable. He had forgotten what she had asked him, intent only on conquering his inability to utter the shocking and pain-filled word. Love and fear and a toothy biting hatred twisted steadily into a knot in his heart so that his blood beat in his ears — and still the hum of the sound he was making droned out into the air. Finally he did succeed in saying the word, but then he had to deal with the next one, because his mother was dead. D-d-d-d-d-d-d hammered into the air between him and Therese, and still she sat among her stones, with her infinitely

patient face tilted up at him, her pale green eyes wide and kind and deadly.

Your mother is in heaven with my mother and the angels. My little brothers watch over her.

But Ambrose heard none of the twittering platitudes coming from the girl at his feet. He could hear only the rushing of his own blood and feel only the rhythm of an axe as he imagined hacking Therese to pieces.

The moment passed, and Ambrose broke with Therese's gaze and turned to look out the window. Sunlight shone on the shiny surface of the camellia leaves outside the glass, and as far as the eye could see stretched the green safe grounds of Mandala, a faint lilac haze softening the edges of the trees.

Ambrose ordered ECT for Therese for the next day. After the shock treatment, one of many, Therese lay on her bed in her cell, stunned, bewildered, her temples aching, her memory blurred now, and studded with gaps. The pale haze that hung about the trees in the grounds of the clinic had invaded her mind somehow, and she thought and saw and recalled and imagined as though struggling in a fog. Who was the woman in the cell next door? Who were all these people, and where was she? With each treatment of this kind she lost a little more of her grip on the meaning of the reality of the things around her. She thought of white stones. What did that mean?

Why was she thinking of white stones? She reached out as if to grasp the stones she thought she saw floating in the air just out of reach, but even as she seemed to touch them, they dissolved, slowly faded like a photographic image working backwards in a reverse developing fluid.

Teresa of Avila came to her bedside to comfort her. She brought with her the book that Vita wrote about the two saints.

'The sisters in Wales sent me this book. I am the eagle and you are the dove. It says we are saints. I am not really a saint.'

'Oh, but *I* am.'

And as the days went by and Therese's mind began to clear, she listened to the stories of their lives as written down in the book.

'You are the eagle and I am the dove. You are the bird of

bright vision. You fly high above the waters of the ocean, and have eyes that see the fish on the floor of the sea. At other times you fasten your eyes upon the sun and fly to God the father. I am the little white dove that sings of peace and true affection. I am innocent, defenceless. Do you think the sisters would send me also a book?'

'You may look at mine whenever you wish.'

'The kiss of the dove is the kiss of the soul. With one kiss the sacred dove brought the baby Jesus to his Mother. I am a dove; you may call me Columbine. You laugh Spanish laughter, but I am a sweet, sweet sweetmeat. A caramel. I melt in the mouth of God. I fly from the mouth of a dying man, and I dance in the light, on the water. My wings glisten with silver, and my feathers with yellow gold. I am the colour of air. I am nothing, nothing in the eye of God; a breath of thought in the palm of his hand. Keep me as the apple of an eye. Hide me in the shadow of a wing. Be ye as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves in gloves. My dove grey gloves are soft and silent, silver on the edge of my mind. If the feet of this fowl be hanged from a tree, that tree shall not bear fruit from thenceforth. I dream the unexpected. Hundreds of people travelling in great silver metal angels that fly above the earth. I dream that God is black. I ride the horse with the golden mane.'

'I dream only of my own severed arm.'

'Who is the woman who sought us out and wormed her way and wrote us down, found us out as tawny eagles and white doves?'

'West.'

'Test the west for frost is lost. Old mould is grey green and west is the nest.'

'Vita Sackville-West. She writes a lot of poetry and stories, and it says here she wrote a book about flowers. *Some Flowers*.'

'I'd be in that one too. The smallest dove, the smallest flower. I bloom in innocent insignificance under a glass moon.'

'Sister Michael, the one from my convent in Wales, has sent me a note about the writer's house. It is actually a castle called Sissinghurst. Perhaps she is dead. Sister Michael doesn't say. She says some of the sisters went to Kent for a visit. They were

staying near the house. It has been given to the National Trust. The gardens are going to be a public park, and there is a garden all full of white flowers. Only white. A white garden. Imagine a garden where all the flowers were white.'

'I think of a garden like that. A garden of innocent snow flowers, of the purest petals like white moths in the moonlight. Garden — danger — garden. You jumble up the letters and get danger. I used to have a garden once, with tiny daisies, blue and white, and roses, and sometimes a red tulip. I had a round garden, completely round, made from a circle of red bricks, and sometimes I think about it. And sometimes I'm happy, and sometimes I'm sad. Tulip happy, tulip sad. Running round the circle ring of roses.'

Therese's eyes were glazed and her gaze was fixed on a point far off.

'I see the clouds, *mouton*, *moutonner*. Mutton button glutton. Here comes Shirley Temple.'

Therese and Teresa sit on the bed in Therese's cell, the book lies between them, and as Shirley comes skipping in, they look up at her with a chilly composure.

'I heard you talking, I heard you talking about your dreams,' Shirley says. 'You should hear mine. I am an endless mine of information about dreams of mine. A bottomless pit like elephant shit. Laugh. You'll laugh yourself silly. Dr God can hardly control himself. Every Monday, just about, I go in there to the inner sanctum and I tell him all the dreams I've saved up for a week. We call it the dream bank. I make deposits. He does withdrawals. Under my supervision of course. He believes everything I say. I say, Oh, Dr God, I dreamt this and this and this. The shock of it, the murky dirty drainy dreams I have. He's not allowed to bat an eye, bat a wing, bat a belfry. Has to sit there in his chair with his socks up on the desk and listen while I open up the dream bank for him. Lies, all lies. Nearly. Sometimes I tell him what I truly dream. I don't dream much, myself. Monday sessions are one of my best times. It feels so good, making up the dingbat dreams for Goddy. I have the re-curring underwater-mermaid-sex-and-violence dream. And the recurring me-turning-into-the-daffodil dream. And these things

are all going into his great book, you know. His great big, fat pig book. And I have toothless-old-men-trying-to-eat-lettuce. And girls with glass bellies with lighted candles in them — these girls all sit on a banquet table and play with monkeys and my grandmother hangs from the rafters, dead as a sack of maggots, singing *Ave Maria* till the cows come home.

'I tell him all this with a straight gate face, and I show no fear, no laughter, no emotion whatsoever. That's what he finds most interesting, I've heard. I am so dead, he says. Of course he doesn't know. Best be dead here. Sparkling dead. That's me, Shirley Temple, the sparkling dead.'

Teresa said: 'This is a very small room, Shirley. And you are making too much noise. I will have to ask you to leave now.'

'So sorry, I'm sure, your saintlyship. No skin off my nose, by the skin of my teeth, the pricking of my thumbs. Thumbs up bums. Mind the step and steady as you go.' She turned to Therese. 'Putting you straight, I want you to know, I see you are a cutie-pie little killer girl. There's murder in your eye-pie and ants in your pants. You smile your china doll smile and close your tin saint's eyes and wear nun's underwear and at night you tear out children's eyes with your black fingernails.

'I will have to explain to you that I hate you, and I know you through and through. I have seen through your eyes into the blood vessels of your brain, and I see murder-stew. All this I tell to Dr God in dreambank time. I see through it all. I see through everything. I laugh. Listen while I laugh in the bath. Cackle crackle tickle wickle. Bye-bye baby.'

Shirley was gone.

Teresa sat stiffly and sadly on the bed, the book in her hands. It was a small green book with a brown paper cover. Therese followed Shirley with her gaze, then drew in her breath and stared out at the sky.

'She is a poor mad woman. We must pray for her,' Teresa said.

But Therese said: 'She frightens me.'

'Oh never mind her. Look, look at the letter from Sister Michael. Think of the garden filled with the white flowers. A white garden. We could make a little paradise here outside the window; we could make a garden of white roses, a garden of snow and moonlight.'

When Therese went to Ambrose with their thoughts of the white garden, he began to see her in a new light. Here was this deluded little nun, starving herself half to death — depressed, demented, deluded, drugged, sex-crazed — and she comes up with a bright idea. Who is this Vita Sackville-West?

THE GREAT GHOSTLY BARN OWL

Ambrose took the story home to Abigail, garden enthusiast, and she knew some things about Sissinghurst and its white garden. On her bookshelves in the morning room, a room of blue and gold and white that opened onto the sloping lawn, were Vita's gardening articles from *The Observer*, collected into books called *In Your Garden*.

As they drank their coffee after dinner, Abigail read aloud to Ambrose from Vita's article, 22 January 1950:

> In my grey, green and white garden you will survey a low sea of grey clumps of foliage, pierced here and there with tall white flowers. I visualize the white trumpets of dozens of Regale lilies coming up through the grey of southernwood and artemisia and cotton-lavender, with grey-and-white edging plants such as Dianthus Mrs Sinkins and the silvery mats of Stachy's Lantana, more familiar and so much nicer under its English names of Rabbits' Ears or Saviour's Flannel. There will be white pansies, and white peonies, and white irises with their grey leaves. The great ghostly barn owl will sweep silently across a pale garden in the twilight.

'Your lunatics will have to be supervised if they are going to do this properly.'

'Doyle will be the man for that. He's virtually the head gardener at the place. He's in charge of the apiary, what's more. You know Doyle.'

'Maybe I could help too, in a way.'

'Just the thing. Can they really do it? Well, even if they fall by the wayside, Doyle can carry the thing on, if he agrees. And you. What's "artemisia"?'

'It has lovely silvery filigree foliage. It's a kind of wormwood.'

'The things you know. Do we really want more wormwood and gall about the place though?'

They looked at pictures of white flowers and silver leaves, and Abigail's mind was racing, inspired by the creation of a little white garden within the grounds of the hospital. Her mind

and the mind of Therese were racing together — the doctor's wife and the doctor's patient both dreamt daydreams of iceberg roses and white owls.

Abigail walked, in her imagination, through the grounds of Mandala, searching for the place to cultivate the White Garden. Her mind kept returning to a hollow that lay behind a stand of cypress trees where she imagined steps of golden sandstone and a semicircle of box and the white marble statue of a girl. White salvia, white lavender. An almond tree in frothy blossom. Pure white jasmine, snowflake camellia, magnolia. And always she came back to the almond tree in flower. It would take some years to grow the almond tree, but it was the centre of Abigail's plan. It seemed to be a secret inspiration, a whispered poem, a little piece of knowledge whose meaning would one day be revealed. Like the tantalising creature of a dream that hovers in the waking mind long, long after day has succeeded night and the images of sleep have receded with the coming of the light. The faint pink blush of almond froth, one drop of blood mixed with snow.

'We used to have a great big almond tree at home,' Abigail said to Ambrose at breakfast. 'We could have an almond tree.'

'Where?'

'In the White Garden at the clinic, darling.'

'Oh, yes. Have whatever goes. Whatever takes your fancy. The saints will want to choose some things too, don't forget. Come and see Doyle. I'll get him to ring you to make a time.'

'Today?'

'You're keen. I suppose today.'

'And have you ever seen lilies, you know, those huge ones like tiger lilies — only white — and you shine a light on them, and they throw a dark shadow, just like you'd expect — but as well as that they throw a luminous white reflection out past the shadow, so there's a negative and a positive picture of the lilies on the surface of the floor or the table or whatever. Did you ever see that?'

'No darling, I never saw that. You must show me one time. Grow some lilies in the White Garden and we'll have a display, an exhibition of shadows and light. Get Doyle onto it.'

And Abigail Goddard, her hair pale and smooth, her limbs long and slim, eyes bright, lips full, teeth regular and gleaming, laugh sweet, fingers long and clever, conversation sparkling, breasts inviting, voice sexy — Abigail dresses the way the doctor's wife would dress to call on the head gardener of the exclusive lunatic asylum, and her satin underwear slithers round her thighs, her Italian shoes caress her dainty feet. Silk and wool, in mysterious earthy shades, create a misty greenness all about her. She drives up to the door of Mandala and swings — she is so elegant — from her shiny Rover. Hello Joyce, I've come to see Doyle. He's expecting me.

When the gardener looked that day at the eyes of the doctor's wife, he thought how large they were, how beautiful. A sort of green — or was it amber. Her hair, he saw, was soft, smooth, long and glinting gold. It would ripple just a bit in the sun when Abigail moved her head. Her shoulders — Doyle watched as she gave a little shrug every now and again — there was an arrogant sweetness about the way she moved her shoulders.

'You could have it here,' he said, gesturing, his arm describing a broad arc, at the space behind the cypress trees.

'I would like to plant an almond tree, to have it, you know, as a kind of imaginative focus.' She gave a little smile.

'You could have an almond tree.' He spoke slowly, in a measured way, his eyes on some distant point in the clouds. She liked the way he spoke, the sound of his voice, the hairs on the back of his neck, the smell of earth and sweat.

Yes, it was run-of-the-mill. Lady Chatterley got away with it, but she was fiction.

They drove up to the hills one day and ordered azaleas and roses.

'Can we have white poppies?'

'Yes. Whatever you wish.'

When Sophie was at ballet and Sebastian was at cello and Ambrose was with Vickie Field at her flat, Abigail and Doyle were sitting very close, face to face, knee to knee in the blue room, looking at rose catalogues.

Abigail says she loves the scent of old roses. Doyle says they

ought to have White Butterfly. And the best white tea rose is Madame Cochet. And the trailing Dundee Rambler.

The waxy white bloom and the dark polished leaves of the Cherokee. Doyle smiles and says this is only a little garden, not to get carried away. Abigail thinks about this for a minute and then she says she will also be buying plants for the garden at the beach — she is about to redesign it.

Would Doyle consider helping? Would he have the time? He would. It's decided. One day soon Doyle will go to the beach house with Abigail to look at the garden and its possibilities.

Meantime, the White Garden at Mandala must be considered. Concentrate. The patients — suddenly they remember the patients — those two religious women have to be included in the plans. Yes, yes. We'll more or less plot it all out and then we'll bring them in. It's their thing, really, after all. Abigail's mind is already racing to the wider possibilities of her own garden. She imagines a bank of Blue Moon roses, and walking on the beach with Doyle.

I'm a bit too romantic, she tells him.

He says he is too. They are also both quite practical. He thinks to himself that the doctor's wife is a cool customer — and she's a very beautiful woman. She puzzles him.

At the gate that afternoon, she stood on tiptoes and kissed him lightly on the cheek. He placed his hand on her arm, looked into her eyes which were unfathomable and laughing, and then he drove away.

While Abigail flirted with the gardener, and Ambrose trifled with the actress, and Therese and Teresa hoped and dreamed and said the office, the White Garden was coming into being. Past and present merge and interweave, giving now a present tense, then a past. The White Garden would be Vickie Field's last sight on earth, and it was building itself, shaping its golden steps, preparing the soil, the humus, for the seeds and roots of fantasy and delight and death.

A lilac mist collected in the space behind the cypresses,

and into this mist came flying the idea of the garden, flying on threads of thought, on finest gossamer wires, like filigree, like air and like the materialisation of a wish.

The filaments of a fine blue vapour swirl through the atmosphere, wisps of smoke, hints of perfume blow and turn and mingle, gathering behind the cypresses, spinning and curling and making ghostly images by day, ghastly images by night. The idea of the White Garden is quivering into being, diaphanous, ectoplasmic, a mist, a sheen. Garden. Looked at another way, the letters spell 'danger'.

There's white, creamy white and pearly white. Climbers, trailers, teas, floribundas, damasks, mosses and musks. They choose Ophelia (hybrid tea), Penelope and Moonlight (hybrid musks), Wedding Day (climber), Iceberg (floribunda and climber) and Dr W van Fleet (climber). They order also a Green Rose, the flowers small, double and imperfectly developed. Flower parts are all really modified leaves.

Abigail and Doyle are in the blue room. Abigail gets up from the little table which is covered with catalogues and order forms. She stretches, smiles down at Doyle, and then she begins to remove her clothes. It is a lovely routine finale to their search for flowers for the White Garden. Afterwards she gives him her lace garter belt; he gives her his pearl-handled pocket knife. For the months of the laying out of the White Garden, they meet at her house, or at his caretaker's cottage in the grounds of the hospital, right under the doctor's nose.

They exchange many small gifts as on this first occasion, and when the designs for the White Garden and the beach garden are complete, things are over between Abigail and Doyle, as suddenly and as quietly as they began. Abigail will see the flowers grow and bloom, will marvel one day with Doyle at the sight of the Green Rose. And that is all. He goes his way and she goes hers — hers being much more exciting and complicated than his.

'I would like white tulips,' Therese said when Abigail asked for her opinion. And Teresa asked for lilies. The women in their habits helped with the digging of the garden, and they helped

to sow the narrow lawn, to put in some of the seedlings, to fill holes with water when trees and shrubs were being planted.

'Sometimes they seem un-mad,' Abigail said to Ambrose. 'But then I remember their habits are really theatre, and I remember they spend half their time in Deep Sleep. It's funny, really, having them in the garden. It looks quite medieval.'

Sometimes only one of the nuns would be working in the garden. The other, most often Therese, would be asleep in the hospital, Sleeping Beauty in the Sleeping Beauty ward where Ambrose, it must not be forgotten, would take his pleasure with her unconscious body. Ch-ch-ch just a little injection, and what every good nun needs is a good fuck.

Have you better in no time, sister.

Shirley Temple liked to water the flowers with a small watering-can, and to pat the earth around each plant.

A patient known as Molly Bloom would sit on a stone seat, stretched out in her white lace nightdress, intoning her soliloquy. Yes, she would say, and yes, yes, yes. Nobody took much notice of her except when she attempted to pick the flowers. Then Shirley chased her off with the hose and the pair of them were put to bed in disgrace. Molly died of pneumonia one day in the Deep Sleep ward. She had been dead for two days before anybody noticed. Well, a child had noticed, but nobody listened to her. Shirley Temple survived Mandala and was taken to live in a private institution in the hills, her fees paid by her family who wanted only to forget about her. Michael Bartlett gave Laura Shirley's address, and Ivan and Laura made an appointment to see her.

Laura

I don't know what I expected, but it was just an ordinary timber house surrounded by trees and vines. It looked dark and damp and sad from the outside, and there were old armchairs on the veranda, a pile of tattered magazines by the front door. When

you got in past the trees, you saw that there were bars on all the windows. I was glad Ivan was with me. It was scary. A man with a face as white as wet dough came to the door. He was nodding and smiling and he said he was Mr Brennan, the owner of the place, and they were expecting us. He took us into a kind of waiting room where there was a smell of stale cooking and dust and age and decay and a terrible sadness and despair. I wanted to run.

All around the walls, high up on a plate rail, they had china mugs commemorating things like the coronations of English kings and queens. There were bushes pushing up against the windows from the outside. It was a trap. In a glass case above the fireplace was a large stuffed trout.

'Sit down, do sit down. Make yourselves at home. Tea?'

Mr Brennan spoke softly but very firmly. We knew we would have to have tea. He rang a buzzer and almost at once a woman in a floral apron appeared, her head cocked on one side. She didn't speak, but took her orders from Mr Brennan.

'Tea for four, thank you, Mrs Davenport. Shirley will be joining us shortly.'

So the tea came on a bare wooden tray. White cups and saucers with blue rims and the crest of the Mercy Hospital and white plastic spoons. There were spots of tea-stain in the sugar.

Then there appeared in the doorway a tiny woman. She was wearing an ancient dress of pink frills, covered by a navy blue overcoat, a child's overcoat. Her face was fixed in a sinister, wide, sad smile.

Mr Brennan said to her: 'Sparkle, Shirley.'

And Shirley, standing in the doorway like a timid child, lowered her head, stretched her coat and dress away from her body, and bobbed a curtsy. As she did so she lifted her face to us and it was suddenly, briefly radiant.

I gave her some flowers we had brought for her, and she took them gracefully, but held them in a greedy grip.

'Miss Field would like to hear about your life, Shirley,' Mr Brennan said. Shirley didn't stir. 'Tell her about your garden, she wants to know about your garden.'

'Our England is a garden. Beg your pardon Mrs Arden, there's a chicken in your garden. My Bonny lies over the ocean.'

'Say something about the people you want to talk about,' Mr Brennan said.

I could scarcely talk — the woman was so tragic and lost, but I knew I had to try. So I said, 'I would love to know about you and your friends, Shirley. Do you ever think about the White Garden, and about Teresa or Therese?'

Her face set hard and her eyes seemed to cloud over as I spoke.

There was a long, long silence and I wanted to scream, but eventually Shirley began to speak in a low voice.

'Death comes in the cradle and in the grave where little flowers and pure white butterflies grow marked by death or marred by blood, married in the best sense in the grey, grey light of twilight when the moths and the mothers and the mummies and dummies carry their big white jugs of milk to the nursery stair where it's dark at night on the stair, very dark in hot weather and a man will leap from the shadows and rush and rush into your arms with famous discoveries of mortal hopes and buzzing of windswept bees and many, many dressmakers sail away in a sing boat, imagine, a single boat, with silks and satins and buttons and bows and you're all mine in buttons and bows.'

I became desperate and I said: 'A little red book. Do you remember a little red book?'

'All the books were red in those days. Red book, red chook, black look, black snake. Oh I remember the black snake all right. More than one. She had a big black bag of big black snakes and she tried to tell us they were licorice. But I knew the difference between skin and bone, skin and bone and frog and toad and jam and honey. The bees! So many bees and so much honey. Sweets to the sweet and gather ye rosebuds if that's what you want. Is that what you want, my dear? We sing for our supper, you know. Sing, sing, sing for our supper. You have to admit, things are not what they were. You just have to admit that. Roly-poly pudding. Golden syrup. I prefer honey. I really would prefer honey.'

'The bees,' I said, 'what do you remember about the bees?'

I was whispering, and she was whispering.

'Everything, my dear. I remember everything about the bees. And the fleas that tease in the high Pyrenees.'

I was silenced. Shirley began to hum tunelessly. The tea had gone cold. Mr Brennan raised his eyebrows at me. Ivan stood up. Shirley threw her arms around him and began to sob and scream, and Mr Brennan and the woman in the floral apron pulled her back and dragged her from the room, the flowers I had brought for her scattering a path behind her. There was nothing to do but leave.

I cried in the car going home, for the sadness of her life, and for the frustrating knowledge that somewhere in her scrambled brain she probably had the answer to my questions.

Shirley probably knew everything about my sister's death.

I wrote down what she had said, and I went over and over it, looking for clues until I nearly went mad myself. What did she mean about red books? Probably nothing.

THE HOTEL OF THE STARS

Laura

After the sad dead end of Shirley Temple, Michael put me on to Jane Wilson, the daughter of the woman who was the matron at Mandala. Jane and her mother used to live on the premises. I was nervous, but more hopeful. There was always the worry that any of these people were in some way guilty of a part in Vickie's death. I had to be very careful, and there was a fine line between being careful and finding out nothing. I also had to be credible. The whole thing was full of traps and pitfalls. I decided to pretend I was a journalist doing research into hospitals in the sixties. I had a notebook and a tape-recorder.

When I visited Jane I was alone. As well as the notebook and tape-recorder I took a bunch of violets and a tin of cookies. Ivan and Michael said this was a bizarre touch and a dead give-away. But I couldn't help it. For one thing I felt guilty about what I was doing, although I *had* to do it.

I gave the flowers and cookies to Jane at the door. It was a small wooden house, not unlike the place where I had seen Shirley Temple, but it didn't look so forlorn. There was a damp look about everything, a neat brick porch with pot-plants, floral curtains, so quietly, respectably sad. Jane placed the violets on top of the cookie tin and sat down on the sofa. My gifts were placed on her knees, and her hands were curled round the edge of the tin so that her fingertips met at the front. She had intense blue eyes but she looked old and tired, her body thin, her clothing drab. Her voice was low and she spoke softly, with a faint singsong as if she had rehearsed the things she said. Besides this, everything she said had a ring of truth about it — I can't explain any better. For some reason I felt I could believe everything she said. There was a deep urgency about her words, as if she had been waiting to tell a story, waiting for me, for this moment. Perhaps I imagined that; it's what I wanted to believe. I

sensed she was going to tell me something vital; I knew I would have to be patient.

Before we sat down she said, 'Welcome to the Hotel of the Stars.' She paused and pointed to the door at the end of the room where the words were picked out in gold across the top: Hotel of the Stars.

'Parker tells fortunes. He's my husband.'

The door was painted sky-blue and sprinkled with stars.

'I don't believe in it; he knows that,' she said. Her voice was solemn. 'But it pays the rent. *Parker* believes. And sometimes you have to admit there might be something in it. Things happen. Mainly we run an introduction agency, people meeting up according to their stars and how their transits are and so on. Parker's very good at it. Hotel of the Stars is very reliable. People get lucky in love when Parker's around. He'd have to be the best thing that ever happened to me. You should meet Parker. He'll be finished in there soon.'

I said I'd like to meet him, and I meant it. I was intrigued, but somehow shocked to find this business going on in the sad little house. I felt out of place, ridiculous on the old yellow sofa, and I started picking at the corner of a black cushion that had an Egyptian scene painted on it. I must have been staring nervously at the door of the Hotel of the Stars because Jane bounced the cookie tin on her knees and said brightly, as if to reassure me, 'Yes, Parker's in there with a client, but we don't have to worry. They come and go through the side door.' She paused again, and there was a funny little silence. Then she went on, 'But you said you wanted to talk about Mandala. What do you want to know? Where d'you want to start? I know the lot. The whole bloody lot. Ask me something.'

It's strange, I think, the way people will so readily tell their stories to you if you say you're a reporter. I wonder what would have happened if I had been honest and said I was just a member of the public, like her, just a woman looking for a clue to my sister's death.

I said I understood her late mother had been the matron, and I thought there were things she could perhaps tell me that would help me with research for my article.

'What research? I forget.'

'Into mental hospitals in the sixties.'

'I can tell you about Mandala from the beginning. It isn't pretty, you know.'

'I don't expect it to be.'

'It's worse than you think. Much worse. Sure you want to hear this?'

'I want to know.'

'It's best to start with myself. My knowledge of all this is related to who I am. Be patient, this is a long story, but it leads to Mandala right enough.'

'Okay.'

I switched on the tape and flipped back the page of my notebook. But I could feel myself tensing, and sighing inside. Would any of this ever lead to the red book, to an insight into what happened to Vickie?

Jane told me Joyce Wilson and her husband Felix adopted her when she was a baby. It was a long and at times rambling story, but when she said her view of Mandala was related to who she was, she was right. Her story came pouring out. This small drab woman sat quite still on the sofa clutching the flowers and the tin, and in a strangely confident monotone she told me about her life, the central and most horrifying parts of which happened at Mandala. She was a patient, as well as the matron's daughter, and was there at the time of Vickie's death. Even as a child she used to work alongside Shirley Temple, cleaning wards and caring for other patients. She knew a lot about Therese Gillis who used to fascinate her. This was very important to me.

JANE

'I was born in 1954 to a lady named Antonia. She wasn't married and so I was illegitimate and had to be given up for adoption. Two years ago I tried to find Antonia, but I found out she died

soon after I was born. She was only eighteen when she died. Think of that. My own daughter is nearly eighteen — I called her Antonia you know. And I sometimes look at her and try to imagine what it must have been like for my mother, all alone in the world and so young, with a baby and nobody to turn to. I reckon she died by her own hand. I have no evidence of that, but I can feel it. She drowned, actually. I know nothing about my real father, nothing at all. It's weird. Sometimes I have a fantasy about meeting him somewhere by some miracle or other. Once I asked Parker to help me arrange something. A miracle. Surely you know people, I say to Parker, people like mediums that can get in touch with the spirits of the dead, or the type of fortune-tellers that see into the future. People that could bring me at least news of my real father. But Parker says it's not so easy, and you have to believe. I suppose I half believe, in a way. He says they can read my Tarot, read my palm or whatever. But what I really want, you see, is a man ringing up one day and saying — Hello Jane, this is your Dad, and I can prove it. It isn't going to happen, though. Just wishful thinking, fantasy, eh?

'So Joyce and Felix adopted me and I don't remember how old I was when Felix started molesting me. Joyce knew about it; I'm certain Joyce knew, but she did nothing about it. I never said anything. Kids don't. We lived in the bush just outside the city. It seemed like the end of the earth to me because we went from living near the beach, right in the city, out into the hills. We had a kind of guest house in the bush. I remember one Christmas when I was seven and Felix took me and a girl from school out into the bush to cut down a pine tree. We were going to put it on the veranda and decorate it. This girl, her name was Jennifer, had brought bags of tinsel, all different colours. Out under the trees we found dozens of those red toadstools and I remember me and this girl hiding from Felix and picking the toadstools, and she said to me — Your father's rude. I knew then he must have touched her and exposed himself to her. I went completely cold, ice cold, and still. It was like I froze then and there on the spot. I wished I could die. I was totally speechless, like I was dead anyway. Jennifer was just sitting there on the ground with her legs crossed, breaking the toadstools up into bits. She had a

pink dress, and the pieces of bright red and yellow flesh were piled up in her lap. For a long, long time we said nothing, and then I said in a sort of whisper — Those things are poisonous. Just then my father, I mean Felix, came through the trees with the little pine tree over his shoulder and the axe dragging along the ground. He said — There you are. What d'you think of this then? — and he stood the tree up in front of us. Then he saw the bits of toadstool and he just exploded. He shouted at Jennifer — You should never touch those things! You'll die! Don't you know they're poisonous. Jennifer jumped up and the toadstools fell out of her dress and seemed to float to the ground in slow motion. She ran off through the bush back towards the house. Me and Felix stood in the clearing staring after her, then he hoisted the tree onto his shoulder again. — You carry the axe, he said. And we walked home across the fields in silence.

'We decorated the Christmas tree, but Jennifer was quiet and awkward. She stayed right next to my mother. My father just went on as if nothing had happened, and when all the tinsel was on the tree Jennifer said she was sick and her mother came to get her. I wished I could go with them. Then, that night — it was a few days before Christmas — I tried to run away. I got into a mad, blind panic, imagining I could walk to Jennifer's — it was probably five miles. I put on a jacket and packed some things in my school bag — fruit cake and my gold locket. I crept along the veranda at about nine o'clock. I was halfway up our drive when the front door flew open and my father was there, framed in the lighted doorway. He was huge like a giant, his horrible face in shadow. He yelled — Get back inside before I thrash the living daylights out of you. I started to run but I tripped just before the gate and he caught up with me, picked me up like a rabbit and took me inside. Like he said, he thrashed the living daylights out of me. This man who would fondle me and undress me and make me suck his cock — that night he took off his belt and thrashed me with it until I couldn't stand up.

'I think I first gave up on life that night. Something inside me died.

'It was just after that my mother went to work for Doctor Goddard, and later on we moved into a cottage in the grounds

of Mandala. To begin with I felt safe there. The doctor and the nurses were nice to me, and I could ride my bike all over the grounds. Sometimes Sophie and Sebastian Goddard came over and I would play with them. We'd play on the swings and the monkey bars that belonged to the school that used to be there. It was funny, really, Sophie and Sebastian being so nice. With a father like that — and a mother. She was pretty terrible. But they really were nice. For me their lives were like a fairy tale. They had so many toys and Sophie had such beautiful dresses. And shoes. You wouldn't believe the shoes she had. But there was a lot of work to be done — for me I mean — and I didn't get to play very often — what with the alterations and the cleaning and renovating. Once Sophie gave me a bracelet with a silver ballet dancer on it. I've still got it.

'Part of the old convent hadn't been used for years and every day after school I was sent up there to clean up. It was like Sleeping Beauty's Palace — well that's a laugh — Ambrose Goddard had his own version of Sleeping Beauty's Palace — hemmed in with blackberry bushes. Men came and cut the bushes back, then it was my turn to do most of the work.

'I've always been frightened of spiders. That place was full of them. Webs everywhere like a house in a horror movie, webs and great big fat scuttling black spiders with bright and evil eyes. But there was no question of not doing what I was told. Think of it — a nine- or ten-year-old girl alone in the dark and empty cells with a tin bucket of soapy water and a basket of cloths and brushes. Plus what seemed like my worst nightmares come true — all the spiders, all the hairy-legged spiders. Once I was bitten on the hand and it swelled up and I thought I was going to die from the sheer pain.

'Doctor Goddard said it was nothing to worry about.

'The paving stones of the veranda were arranged like honeycomb. Because nobody had walked there for a long time, weeds had sprung up in the cracks between the stones. I had to get down on my hands and knees and dig them out with a knife. I ended up being obsessed with the honeycomb pavement. I suppose being out on the veranda was better than facing the hairy monsters in the cells. Anyhow I got that pavement perfect.

But then what happened was the ants started excavating underneath, and all the lines, clean as a whistle, the lines between the stones — they filled up with mounds of sand left by the ants. I used to kick them over — I was so furious. Then I'd sweep the sand with the broom, whisk it off the edge of the veranda onto the gravel path. But before I kicked the sand away, I remember I used to squat down close to the pavement and stare at the sand and the patterns, and weep. Because of the shape of the stones, the mounds of sand took the form of little open mouths, gently smiling lips of sand. I would stare down at the lips of sand, run my fingers across them, careful not to disfigure them. Then I'd jump up and kick at them and grab the broom and sweep the sand away. I'd get a bucket of hot water and splash it across the pavement, hoping to drown the ants. But within days the piles of sand would be back, and I'd be kicking and weeping all over again.'

Because Jane told this strange and passionate anecdote in her soft singsong voice, it seemed to be a sinister story, the meaning of which remained just below the surface of my mind. I wanted to know more, to hear more. The stories she was telling of her life, far from being unrelated to my purpose, seemed in some dark unconscious way to be drawing me towards my destination. In her voice, which began to sound unearthly and remote, she wove, spider-like, a web of lines, a net of threads invisible yet strong as steel and light. The patterns of the honeycomb pavement rose sharply before my eyes and I saw the lips of sand, the moving armies of the ants, the delicate and geometric purpose of the spiders; I heard the sound of bees among the blossoms, saw the lines, the bee-lines they etched into the air as they flew between the honey and the hive; I caught the echo of the sweet songs of companies of nuns at prayer in the cells, the rush of angels' wings between the stars.

Jane stopped speaking as the door to Parker's room was opened. He stood there with his dog. An unremarkable man in grey cords and a blue and green checked shirt with his dog, a pit-bull terrier, by his side.

'Hello,' he said. 'I'm Parker. You must be Laura. Welcome to

the Hotel of the Stars. This is Taurus.' The dog wagged its tail and looked up at me. 'Sorry to interrupt. Tea time.'

As if commanded, Jane rose from the sofa and went swiftly to the kitchen. Her voice was different now, almost business-like.

'We haven't even really started the interview yet, Parker,' she said.

'We'll have a cuppa and then you can get on with it then.'

The man and Taurus stood oddly in the doorway of the Hotel of the Stars; I sat on the sofa, the tape still running, not quite knowing my place. Jane made the tea and brought it in with the open tin of cookies. It all seemed so normal. Afternoon tea in the suburbs with the astrologer, his wife, his dog, and a visitor looking for a clue to the possible murder of her sister long ago.

Parker, his mouth full of crumbs, said again, 'Welcome to the Hotel of the Stars.' And he gave me his business card. 'I can't tell you anything about old Doctor God and his Sleepytime, but if you want me to I can read your chart. When were you born? No, don't tell me. You're a Virgo.'

I said yes I was, and Parker smiled with satisfaction. I said I needed to get on with the interview and leave them in peace, and before long Parker and Taurus went back into the Hotel of the Stars and shut the door.

The spell Jane had been weaving was broken, but as soon as she took up her story I felt myself being pulled back into the invisible web. I was being drawn, I knew not how, towards the day my sister died.

Jane's voice dropped back into the singsong rhythm as she took up her story.

'When the main hospital was all fixed up and the beds were ready they started moving patients in. Ambrose Goddard was beside himself with pride and excitement. He had the chapel turned into a glass meditation and meeting room with carpet like green moss. It was all written up in the paper at the time because it was so advanced, and he was such a godsend to his patients. Then he started on his experiments with LSD. People just had to say they were depressed about their job or their marriage and Ambrose would have them in the chapel high as

kites at government expense. Then afterwards they told him all about it and he took notes to put in his so-called great book *Illumination*. Some book!

'I don't know when he started having an affair with my mother, but by the time the LSD sessions started, the affair was going strong. My mother would do absolutely anything for him. People would, you see. He could get away with murder — well he *did*. He literally got away with murder all the time, and people still treated him like some great good god. Actually my father had disappeared by this time, and me and my mother lived alone in the cottage in the grounds of Mandala. When I say she would do anything for him, I mean she thought nothing of handing me over to him for some so-called "treatments" of LSD, or psilocybin or whatever it was. I was one of the earliest, youngest "patients" to receive the benefit of those drugs in this country. It was the biggest nightmare for me. Believe me when I tell you that under LSD I became a rabbit, a white rabbit, running from a hunter. The whole world was pink, the most terrible pink, and I was the rabbit, running, running, running for my life. The hunter was always on the point of catching up with me to shoot me. I know I used to scream. I could hear my own screams, but I couldn't stop myself. I was inside and outside my own skin. I tell you, I was a rabbit. I could feel myself going mad. I would have the thought: "I'm going mad," and the words of the thought went spinning round and round in my head, round and round like the lines on a spinning top.

'They could see I was going mad. I tell you, I was so wiped out I didn't even *know* I was in for Deep Sleep. I didn't know until recently, when the records came to light (and many, many records have mysteriously disappeared). When I saw my records I discovered I had been at one time in Mandala for over a month. I was given ECT and Deep Sleep for a month, and I didn't even know. You can't imagine what that's like, to find out after twenty years that a month of your life was spent as a naked body in a room full of other naked bodies, men and women, constantly doped up with barbiturates, and zapped out with electric shocks. Remember I was a child. People around me would have died. The smell in that place was unbelievable

— all that piss and shit and blood and vomit — and the people groaning and screaming and writhing. We were strapped down. You realise that when Ambrose Goddard gave or ordered shock treatment, this didn't involve any anaesthetic. So you'd be conscious, and he or one of his offsiders would stick a rubber bite in your mouth and then apply the jelly and the pads to your head with a machine that had what he called "glissando". This sounds like a ballet step, doesn't it? Well it meant that the current was given to the patient gradually — it was supposed to reduce the shock. The real effect was that with the glissando the patient saw terrible flashes of bright light before going into a convulsion. The glissando was one of the cruelest things you could do to people. And of course patients were always charged for the anaesthetic they didn't get. And look at these papers.'

She handed me a pile of copies of medical records.

'You can keep those. I've got the originals,' she said.

There was a psychological appraisal that showed she had been given the following tests at the age of twelve:

Wechsler Bellvue Intelligence
Penrose Pattern Perception
Goldstein Scheerer
Vigotsky
Schapiro Orientation
Psycho-Galvanic Response
Zulliger Perception
High School Personality Factor
Critical Flicker Frequency

The result of these tests was that Jane was described as having poor moral judgement, high anxiety, below average control of detail, poor general knowledge, slow thinking, below average capacity to grasp abstract concepts. She had an excessive degree of repression that was utilised as a mechanism of emotional defence. Her temperament was mildly cyclothymic and her self-confidence was below average. She showed some disturbances in perception, indicating schizoid mechanisms. She was depressed and acting in a psychopathic fashion, her behaviour being classically that of the immature, emotional psychopath. She had strong disturbances in her emotional functioning,

which could be Oedipal in nature. She was driven towards male figures, but any relationship with them ended in unhappiness and even death. There were marked themes of violence and death in her fantasies, and she seemed to be depressed and bereft of emotional support.

It was shocking and horrible to see these comments about a twelve-year-old girl. Even more grotesque to see the signature of Ambrose Goddard at the end of the document.

'When I wasn't being used as a guinea pig for LSD or Deep Sleep, I had to work in the wards after school. There was a patient called Shirley Temple who was very nice to me. Can you believe it, we used to have fun, me and Shirley. She taught me songs, and how to play the mouth organ. We'd be mopping out the rooms or changing the sheets and singing old songs like "Danny Boy" or something. I used to love it when Shirley brushed my hair and did it up in curls or braids.

'The worst thing, of course, was working in the Deep Sleep ward. There were people with bedsores so bad their legs would be stuck together. I remember one boy like that, and his mother was down at the front office crying and hysterical saying she had to take him home. I saw my mother hustle that woman out the door and into a taxi. Then that night they had to call the woman and say her son had died of pneumonia.

'The very worst was when I went in and found a woman called Molly lying dead in her bed. She was blue. She used to go about the place in a white lace nightie, flinging her head back and saying, "Yes, yes," all the time. I was a bit frightened of Molly. Then this day I found her dead. I *thought* she was dead, and I went to the sister on duty and said would she go and look at Molly. She didn't, you know. That woman was dead for two days before anyone would listen to me. Hard to believe, isn't it? Bloom, Bloom — she was called Molly Bloom, like a flower. Then there was the one called the Little Flower.

'I was fascinated by that one. Mind you, she was even more frightening than Molly. Shirley used to warn me about the Little Flower. "Don't you go anywhere near that girl," Shirley would say. "She's not quite right in the head. And very naughty. Real

naughty. Kill you as soon as look at you." This only made the Little Flower more interesting to me. She thought she was a French saint, and she was allowed to dress up as a nun. That was one of Ambrose's theories — if you imagined you were Napoleon, you were supposed to go the whole hog and more or less *be* Napoleon. It was one of the great revolutionary breakthroughs at Mandala. Ambrose's book *Illumination* had all the case histories of these nuts in it. They could be anyone they liked, the more the merrier. Of course there was only one God — that was Ambrose. He really liked it when they called him Doctor God.

'The Little Flower lived out in the old convent, out where I had cleaned the cells and the honeycomb pavement. There was her and another saint, Teresa. Teresa became my friend. She was a very kind, sweet woman. I still see her to this day.

'She got better, by some miracle. Not many people recovered from being at Mandala you know. Rosamund is her name; she lives in a really lovely house with her husband Ron. He's a psychologist, of all things, but completely harmless. You probably ought to talk to Rosamund as well. It was when the Little Flower went crackers and killed herself that Rosamund started to see the light, actually. No wonder, I suppose, because Rosamund was one of the people that found Therese hanging from the monkey bars. That's a thing about suicide, isn't it. Who's going to find you? Rosamund had enough common sense left to pack her things and get the hell out of Mandala, and after that she snapped out of her idea she was a saint. Mind you, she really *is* a saint, a modern saint, if ever there was one.'

I became afraid Jane was going to leave out completely the story of the White Garden that the two nuns had made.

So I couldn't resist prompting her. 'Didn't they make a special garden, the two nuns?' I said.

'Oh yes, that was a thing. Very famous. The White Garden.

'Mrs Goddard came and supervised the planting and so on, and Doyle the gardener considered it to be his big achievement.

'I used to see him kissing Mrs Goddard down there behind the bushes. She was a real tart, Mrs Goddard, you know. It was a lovely garden. It's probably still there.'

I wanted so much to say: 'Yes, yes, it's still there. And my sister died in that garden.' I wanted to scream: 'Tell me what happened in the White Garden, the day they hanged Ronald Ryan. Remember that day? Do you remember? Do you remember Vickie Field, the girl in the red hat, the corpse in the White Garden?' But instead I said: 'And weren't there some beehives?'

'Beehives, yes. That was another one of Ambrose's special schemes. They got rid of them though because somebody got stung, one of Ambrose's girlfriends. She died, actually. The same day they hung Ronald Ryan. It was a spooky day.'

'How was that — she died?'

'I think she was allergic to the sting.'

Then I couldn't stand the charade any longer, and I said, 'I have to tell you, Jane, that woman was my sister Vickie.'

Jane was silent. She stared at me and her lower lip creased and her chin wrinkled and wobbled, and as tears began to flow down her cheeks she stood up and held out her arms to me and held me gently as we both wept. After a while we drew apart and Jane said softly, 'God, oh my God. What can I tell you. I can't remember properly. I didn't even know very much about it at the time. Just gossip among some of the nurses. It would have been hushed up in the hospital. You have to realise so many terrible and weird things happened in that place — this was only one of them. I'm sorry.'

'Rosamund, should I talk to Rosamund, do you think?'

'Yes, yes, talk to Rosamund. You should talk to Rosamund.'

There was no need for words, no need for explanations. I could feel an understanding flowing from Jane — and a kind of hope and love.

And so it was that I came to visit Rosamund.

DATE ON OR BEFORE WHICH ITEM MUST BE RETURNED

It was spring when I first visited Rosamund. I stood at the gate for a long time gazing at the blaze of tulips, a sea of shining cherry-red that lay between me and the house. A blaze, a sea — it was a carpet of scarlet light that glowed and sang and danced — beckoned, seduced and mesmerised. I felt a faint chill in the air, a shiver of strange expectation. Often I have thought that this feeling is something I have placed there in hindsight, a premonition added after the event. I mentally re-run the scene as if it were a movie where I stand at the gate looking across the field of flowers, up the winding path to the house of warm bricks with gables and windows divided into small diamond panes. The front door solid, dark, inviting. And I feel again the thrill that darted through me. I walk slowly up the path, seeming to part the tulips as I am drawn towards the house, unable to feel the ground beneath my feet, moving as in a dream, seeing with hallucinating eyes. This is the memory, the dream of what I saw and how I felt and what I did that day. And in my heart I know that the tulips in Rosamund's garden were the brightest sight that I have ever seen, and I know that I approached the house in a strange cloud of light and hope.

Rosamund had the red book.

It was on a shelf beside the other copy of *The Eagle and the Dove*, the old green one in the brown paper cover that came from the nuns in Wales. There would have been perhaps an hour, no more, between when I was standing at the gate looking at the tulips, and when I finally held the red book, tied up with a red ribbon, in my hands. So many books, a lack of order — Rosamund couldn't find *The Eagle and the Dove*, and yet she knew she had it somewhere. Even without it, she was able to tell me its true significance, to confirm my feeling that the book was a key to Vickie's death.

There were bookshelves all along the wall of the upstairs

landing. Books from floor to ceiling. Books in Ron's study; books in Rosamund's sitting room. Rosamund and I talked in her sitting room for a few minutes only, and then she took me up the stairs to see the view from the balcony. In one direction you could see right across the suburbs to the tall buildings of the city, and the other way you could see the hills. We stood on the balcony looking out, and looking down onto the tulips. A haze seemed to hang over the flowers. It was there, above the world, in that small bright space, that I finally spoke to Rosamund of the book. And when she found it, handed it to me, I saw that its due date was a date in January. It was already overdue when Vickie died.

'When my sister went to Mandala that day, she was, as you know, all decked out in green and red, and she was carrying a red book, a library book. I'd give anything,' I said, 'to know where that book is now.'

PATIENCE OBTAINS EVERYTHING

> 'I look down on the world as from a great height and care very little what people say or know about me. Our Lord has made my life to me now a kind of sleep, for almost always what I see seems to me to be seen as in a dream, nor have I any great sense either of pleasure or of pain.'
>
> Teresa of Avila

On a hot February afternoon in 1967 Vickie sat on the steps in the White Garden, pretending to read the story of the two saints. She was like a gaudy statue among the pale foliage and flowers, an elegant woman in a large red hat, her lips dark red and glossy. She waited for the two women she had been told to expect — women dressed in the simple brown garb of Carmelites and wearing the black veils of their imagined order. It was a stage setting, a nice little farce arranged by Ambrose partly so that he could see what effect it would have on the two deluded patients, partly because it was the kind of little drama that amused him. He would afterwards have an hilarious report from Vickie, and he would have some sort of story from each of the patients.

'Vita Sackville-West has written a book about you, and she wants to meet you, and to see the White Garden you have made,' he said to Teresa and Therese. 'She will be in the White Garden this afternoon, expecting you.'

To Vickie he spoke of the garden as a wonderful facsimile, of Vickie as a delightful imitation, a class act, and of the patients as his best examples of advanced delusion. 'I want to see what will happen when part of their fantasy, an aspect of their delusion, turns up in the garden and starts talking to them about— what are you going to talk about?'

'Oh, wild clematis, old man's beard, traveller's joy. That sort of thing.'

'Snail bait? Compost? Blood and bone?'

'Perhaps. Actually, I feel sorry for them. I'd rather like to just, you know, talk to them.'

'About the weather?'

'Maybe.'

'Remember you're meant to be this Vita woman.'

'I won't forget.'

After the visit in the garden, Vickie would return home and one day soon, when Ambrose had the time, she would tell him all about what happened.

But Therese Gillis did not want to meet Vita in the company of anybody. She wished, she longed, to meet this colourful stranger, this woman who had conjured the lives of the two saints into a narrative with photographs and quotations, to meet her alone. Alone in the White Garden which bore her stamp. Would Vita be pleased? Surely she would be flattered by the imitation. She would have advice, ideas. It was all like a lovely dream — the glowing garden (danger, danger) and the exotic visitor. A visitor specially for Therese. She could tell her about everything, perhaps, about her stones, about Violetta … Therese would come, in her thoughts, up against the problem of Teresa. Teresa must *not* be there.

It was simple, really. Teresa was afraid of insects. Therese was not. Therese went down to the beehives on the morning of Vita's visit and collected some bees in an old glass jar with holes punched in its rusty lid. She made several visits, each time gently releasing the bees that were in the bottle and collecting some fresh ones. The first time she went it was nearly eight o'clock in the morning; the man in the prison was about to be hanged. The whole city was waiting for the clocks to strike eight. Therese kept the the jar full of bees in her pocket, a dark and busy comfort throughout the morning.

'What are you grinning about?' Shirley Temple asked her. 'Saint Cheshire Cat that swallowed the cream, the canary. All grin. Grinning and sinning and licking your lips. Licking your chops. You look like the wolf that swallowed grandma. What's the time, Mr Wolf? Dinner time. Din-din-dinner time.'

'Shut up, Shirley. And don't hang around here. Go and do

your work down in the wards. Why don't they ever put you to sleep? You sing too much.'

'I sing for my supper. I sing, and sing. And the dreams! Do you realise I have the most vivid imagination in the whole world? I am going into Goddy's book as the best dreamer. Ever. *Beautiful Dreamer* — da-da-da-da. I am *Guinness Book of Records* stuff, you know. I might go on the stage. Me and Goddy. He does his thing — Look into my eyes — and I fall asleep, pretend to fall asleep, have a quick dream and wake up and tell him all about it. In front of the whole audience of the Princess Theatre. We've talked about it. You wait. You just wait and see. I have had the Mexican Bandit dream — and the Goldfish on the Roof dream. He *liked* that one. Laugh. He nearly wet himself. I do them in catatonic for him, you know. That's the way he likes it. Nearly *killed* himself laughing when I told him the Sinking of the Titanic. With music and lyrics. He threatened me with a gun. Fun with a gun. Shirley Temple and Doctor God will tickle your fancy with deep dark dreams of great big guns. God be nimble, God be quick.'

'Shut *up*.'

Therese turned to Teresa who was sitting on the edge of the honeycomb veranda and said, 'Why don't you stay here this time? I'll go and meet Vita by myself, and then next time she comes, you can come too. How would that be?'

'I'm coming too.'

'But you could have the afternoon to yourself. You could have some peace and quiet. What say I go and do this by myself, just this first time. You don't like meeting people.'

'Yes I do. I'm coming too.'

Therese sighed and ran her fingers over the glass jar in her pocket.

'You could read or paint.'

'I'm supposed to come, anyway. She wrote the book about both of us. And we both made the garden, don't forget. You were sick most of the time.'

'*You* were sick.'

Shirley Temple put her head round the corner and said, 'You are both sick. *Very, very* sick. I will call the doctor and have you

both put to bed, put to bye-byes, and *I'll* go and meet the duchess. Then you'll be sorry. Sick as dogs. And sorry as a rainbow trout.'

In the end Shirley stayed behind on the side veranda and the two nuns set off together towards the White Garden. The walked slowly in the still, brutal heat of the early afternoon, slowly as if in prayer or meditation, their eyes cast down, their hands out of sight beneath their habits. They walked past Ambrose's window and the doctor glanced out as they went by. He was rocking back in his chair, his feet on the desk, a cigar smouldering in the ashtray. On the desk a jumble of papers and two empty champagne glasses. Round the rim of one glass was the imprint of Vickie's dark red lips. The room was cooled by fans. He poured himself another glass, the moisture from the bottle dripping onto his desk blotter.

The nuns moved through the grounds, beneath the tall trees, past lawns and flowerbeds, muttering and arguing. The strong will of each clashing darkly with the other. (Go back. I won't. You'll be sorry. We'll see who's sorry.) Until they came in sight of the White Garden where Vita sat, still and vivid and bright, on the pale golden steps.

Therese stopped walking and said, '*Now* go back Teresa.'

But Teresa kept going. Therese took her roughly by the arm, jerking the bottle of bees from her pocket. Now Teresa stopped, staring in surprise at the bottle of angry bees. Then it happened so fast. Vita stood up at the sight of the tussle between the two nuns; Therese took the lid off the bottle; the bees flew in all directions; Teresa fled; Vickie was stung on the neck and sat down on the step in pain.

Therese scarcely knew what had happened. She stood blinking at the woman in the green jacket. The red hat and the red book had fallen to the earth. She put her jar back in her pocket and knelt beside the woman on the step. Vickie's eyes were wide with fear and pain, and her hands were at her throat.

'Run, run fast and get the doctor,' she said. 'I've been stung. I must stay here very still. *Run*.'

For a moment Therese stared into Vickie's eyes. Then she picked up the red book and ran in the direction of the hospital.

She ran until she reached the last stand of cypresses next to the main building. Then she stood for a time beneath the trees.

She turned round and took the path to the left, the path that led away from the hospital and up to the convent where Teresa was sitting in her cell weeping with rage and disappointment, and where Shirley was on the veranda step, pushing the mounds of sand left by the ants back into the cracks between the paving stones.

Therese went straight to her cell, ignoring Shirley, and hid the book among her treasures. If Vita came after her and demanded it back she would deny any knowledge of it. Her bees, intended only to frighten Teresa, had stung Vita. Therese sensed she was already in serious trouble. She would be punished with electricity, with LSD, and Deep Sleep. At least she would keep the book, a talisman, a gift to herself, something from the outside world. And it was the story Vita wrote about the two saints, it was the same as the book the nuns sent to Teresa. It had flown into her hands; she would guard it, read it, love it. Flown like a red angel into her hands at last.

Shirley knew that Therese had been up to mischief. She glimpsed the red cover of the book, and could tell when the little one carried on her heart a burden of guilt.

Vickie died on the steps of the garden.

It was weeks before Shirley, mad, canny, was able, almost, to work it out. Whispers among the staff. The book that suddenly appeared out of nowhere among Therese's things. The hatred Therese had suddenly developed for Teresa. But only in a mind like Shirley's would these things add up. And hers was a voice that was never really listened to.

It was years and years before the significance of the bees and the book and Therese and the death of Vickie Field were brought together, to a point, as Laura talked to Rosamund on the balcony, looking out over the sea of tulips.

Late on the night after Vickie's death Ambrose drove to her flat and let himself in, searching for anything that might link

him too closely with the dead woman. As usual things were all over the place. He found some books he had lent her, but there should have been more. In any case, they seemed harmless enough. He found it strangely moving to be in her house, knowing she was dead. He recalled the last time he had been there, the conversation about the dressmaker's dummy. In a foolish gesture of regret, in a moment of desire to preserve something of the lovely young actress, he took the dummy, draped in Vickie's scarves, in an awkward embrace and hustled it into his car. He felt a wave of sadness about to engulf him as he pushed the clumsy body with its wooden peg of a head across the back seat. It lay beneath its single unscrewed leg, completely forlorn and dismembered. For months it stayed behind a roll of carpet in the garage until he eventually took it to the house at the beach. There he stood the dummy in a corner of his billiard room. A pale brown linen woman-shape without arms, marked by a vertical split, in the middle of which could be seen some sort of wheel. A dumb, silent, eerie memory of Vickie Field. An even darker memory of the dummy his mother used to have in his childhood home.

Therese's mental state got swiftly worse. She returned to a kind of ecstasy of muteness in which nobody could reach her.

Her copy of *The Imitation* was always with her, as was the red copy of *The Eagle and the Dove*. Therese would leaf slowly through Vita's book, tracing the picture of the mermaid above the publisher's name — I swam in the sea with my sisters — turning entranced to the photograph of the Little Flower's childhood home in Lisieux — snow was falling. I rode on the horse with the golden mane. She was, as she had imagined she would be, subjected to many strange, cruel and different treatments. For weeks at a time she lay in the Deep Sleep ward, naked, part of the stew of filthy, naked bodies, writhing, groaning, screaming bodies strapped to narrow beds. Some of them died. Therese did not die. Her tough little body refused, in spite of everything, including lack of nourishment, to give up.

There came a time when Therese could do no more. 'I am not taking anything in. I am shutting down, closing up, and time is running out. Slowly my soul is seeping away, bleeding

sadly, quietly, relentless. I have a tearful hole in my soul. I see a bright unearthly light. It bathes me and draws me on. Is it the moon, mother-moon? I will be the death of a beautiful woman, the beautiful death of a beautiful flower, so small, so white, by the light of the moon. I must clear my head. Clear and clean and scrape out my brains. How Violetta will approve. Violetta will sit on the floor in her red silk jacket and laugh with approval. My sisters will be sorry, their little baby Daphne going from them. Deaf and dumb Daphne curled up and died. My father is a very old man, as old as time, Father Time. My mother has brought me stones.' In the clarity of blind confusion, suffocating in waves of self-love, breathless with gusts of a desire for power, Therese lost sight of herself.

She lay for days in her cell weeping silently. She easily stole the key to the playground where she and Violetta had pushed up into the clouds on the swing, had dangled and leapt from the horizontal ladder of the monkey bars.

It was said the bars at Immaculate Heart were higher than in any other school, risky and dangerous.

Starvation, chemicals, electricity — these things had failed to serve her. She searched her mind, her heart, her soul for help to come from Violetta. Where could she drown? There was nowhere to drown. The doctor had a gun in the drawer of his desk. How do you shoot yourself? What poisonous plants can you find in the garden — is there a laburnum here? If there is one thing, for sure, you can't do at Mandala, it's slash your wrists. They are very strict about that. She rolled some of her stones round in her pocket, between her fingers; six of the smallest stones she swallowed.

In her cell in the old convent at Mandala Therese placed all her poor little belongings in a row on the bed. Her hairbrush, towel, soap, deodorant, cold cream, toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss, books, rosary, folded clothing, an old card from Violetta — a wreath of violets on a pale green ground with 'All My Love, Violetta' in a round childish hand. Stones, white stones. She left behind most of her stones, although there were some in the pocket of her habit when she died. Why did she take nothing with her? Suicides can be so puzzling, their thought so far from

any rational sense. Her cell was bleak, spotless. Beside her rosary she put the red book tied up with a red ribbon, and what remained of *The Imitation of Christ*.

Therese crept into the playground, locked herself in, and, using her belt, hanged herself from the monkey bars. Climb the vertical ladder, reach out, loop the strap around a rung on the horizontal ladder, twist the strap into a figure eight. Put your head in the noose. Swing out. Pain, euphoria, light, dark, oblivion.

A scrawny caricature of a small medieval figure hanging by the neck, a sketch in sepia and charcoal, Therese Gillis died swiftly. Her eyes bulged out of their sockets, her bloated face was blue, and her tongue protruded from her mouth. The white gravel beneath the body of Therese was splashed with shit.

When all was said and done, Dorothy came to collect her things. Matron Wilson was with her — she was a mother herself. It was a shocking tragedy. What to do with the white stones? Bury them with the body perhaps. By the time Dorothy came, Teresa had already taken the red library book, this book that Therese had mysteriously acquired, and which she took to turning over and over in her hands.

Ambrose moved Teresa from the convent and put her in the Sunroom. He had had enough of these dangerous dramas and tragedies. Then, as if in response to all that had happened, week by week, in a mysterious striptease, Teresa shed parts of her habit until Rosamund Pryce-Jones finally emerged, peeling back the cocoon of death, choosing the naked skin of life. In a deep part of herself she knew what she was doing, but she was never able to articulate it. The death of Therese delivered to Rosamund a profound and resonating shock, and set her on a new and long slow path to recovery. Jane Wilson befriended her — together they gradually nourished each other, gave each other strength and understanding. They both needed so much, had been long in the strange prison of Mandala, damaged, frightened, small. Rosamund's family took her home, snatching her from the care of Ambrose Goddard. Too many strange and terrible things seemed to happen at Mandala. Rosamund was

still a wreck, and it was years before she led a normal life, free of doctors and medication.

So many strange and terrible things, indeed, took place at Mandala that they could no longer be ignored, and in due course a Royal Commission into the deaths of seven of the patients who had received Deep Sleep was called. Many more than seven had in fact died in Deep Sleep, but seven only could be verified. People were openly describing Ambrose Goddard as a murderer.

Twenty years after Vickie Field and Marjorie Bartlett and Therese Gillis died, Ambrose entered his garden study for the last time. He ran his fingers over the old-fashioned keys of his father's typewriter, feeling a rage twisting in his heart and rising within him. For a long time he stood in the room which had grown dark and cold, even menacing. He faced the glass wall, his back to the wall of firearms, and stared out into the trees. The untidy piles of his manuscript lay beside the typewriter on the desk which was otherwise empty. His rage was cold and growing stronger.

He took the typewriter in his arms — it was heavy and cumbersome — and went from his study out into the garden. He walked down the long lawn until he came to the little jetty that stood out over the river. Again for a long time Ambrose sat on the jetty staring at the water and the trees, the typewriter beside him. Then he stood, picked up the typewriter and swung it back, let it go. It tumbled into the river close to the jetty, and sank immediately. He looked down at the bubbles and the ripples until the surface was almost still again and he became aware that he was very cold.

He walked slowly back to the study where he began to weep.

The manuscript of *Illuminations*, thousands of pages of vast and jumbled thoughts, case histories, knowledge — words, words, words, black jumping spiders of letters and words and evil little scraps of punctuation — lay in dreadful heaps on the desk. Ambrose took it in bundles to the garden incinerator and stood for hours feeding the pages into the flames. He stood there

in the grip of an icy mood of dreadful compulsion as the Joan of Arcs, the Napoleons, the saints, movie stars, kings and queens, Rosamund and Therese, all caught at the edges, smoked, curled, flared — and were gone. Smoke and flame and ash. No words survived. No ideas.

The black marks on the pages were gone. In those hours, as he destroyed the evidence of his life's work, Ambrose was filled with hate — he hated the manuscript, hated the events that had brought him to this hatred, hated himself. He was engulfed in a loneliness that had been beyond his imagination. He experienced loneliness, but in an eerie way, he felt nothing. Ambrose gazed into the inferno of his book, his life, and he saw nothing. All was empty. Yet his rage was constant, his self-destructive gesture had become automatic, inevitable.

It was a Saturday; Abigail was gone for several days, off in the country somewhere lecturing on gardens. That was how it had been for some time, Ambrose alone, Abigail absent. They had loud and violent arguments whenever they were in the same room — arguments about everything, about money, the children, the houses, the hospital, the cars, the dogs. About Abigail's love affairs; about Ambrose's appetites. They would argue about the colours of the towels in the bathroom, the number of dirty dishes in the dishwasher.

The impending public exposure of Mandala was never discussed, although in his heart, Ambrose thought of little else. On this Saturday morning he finally selected his weapons, the Browning and the Ruger Blackhawk .44 Magnum, and drove to the beach. He drove calmly and steadily, relentlessly, planning how he would send the caretaker of the beach house off on a wild goose chase; how he would chain the dogs, his beloved wolfhounds, descendants of his dear old Silas, to the billiard table and shoot them. Then he would drive to a lonely place on one of the cliff tracks and end it all. A couple of drinks to get up his courage — if that's what it takes — and then a quick hot suck on the Ruger. His will was a mess. Let people sort things out themselves afterwards. He didn't care. Everything was a mess. Sophie and Sebastian — the thought of his children came to him as a thought of figures in a dream. He loved them. He

used to love them. He still loved them. They would soon know of the things he was supposed to have done. He was ashamed, unable to face the thought of Sophie and Sebastian. In his imagination he blew Abigail a kiss, a bitter, ugly goodbye kiss. He should have gotten hold of Abigail and shot her too, lined her up with the dogs and filled her with bullets. Or lined her up with the dummy in the corner of the billiard room and shot them both — Abigail and the dummy. But Ambrose was tired, very, very tired of the whole intricate shambles of his life. Better just to exit stage-left, with a good big bang. Shoot the dogs and blow your head off. Good shot, Ambrose.

His bitterness, his shame, stirred his blood, arrested his tears. His heart was beating hard, and he felt a kind of inspiration, a sharp, dark glory in the anticipation of his own annihilation. Nobody was going to have the satisfaction of getting Ambrose Goddard into court to justify his life, his theories, his glorious, daring, wonderful theories. It was the world's loss. An empty, yawning loss. For him there would be peace at last, at least oblivion. Rest in peace. Peace of mind. Give them first a piece of his mind. Lots of bits and pieces — like porridge all over the car.

His cold exaltation lasted until the moment the second dog lay dead on the floor of the billiard room. The lights hung low over the green cloth of the table, and Ambrose knelt, burying his face in the warm belly of the animal, his sobs inhuman rasps of dreadful, desolate sound.

Ambrose steadied himself and backed away. He left the pistol on the table, took a bottle of whisky from the bar and turned his back on the dressmaker's dummy in the gloomy corner of the room. He drank from the bottle, staring at the bodies of the two wolfhounds as they lay in a grotesque shape of peace. He took up the Ruger and tempted himself to use it, running the smooth tip of it around his gums, the roof of his mouth, tapping it against his teeth. He took the gun from his mouth and tapped his cheek-bone with the handle, listening to the muffled knocking in his ear, imagining the sudden crack and whip and spray of bone and mush and blood as he blew his head apart.

Every respectable suicide must leave a note. On the back of

a scrap of cereal packet, Ambrose wrote in pencil: 'Goodbye cruel world, I'm off to join a circus.' He left the message on the kitchen sink and, without looking at the dogs again, he went with his whisky and his Ruger to the car.

THE WHITE GARDEN

Laura

White flowers are for virgins and brides and corpses, a mingling of innocence, purity, sex and death. I remember this when the image of the garden at Mandala comes into my mind. The hospital at Mandala has gone, but the White Garden is still there, a showpiece in the grounds of a modern conference centre. Groups of visitors from all over the country, all over the world, come for conferences, and I suppose millions of photographs have been taken of the garden, a charming, odd little counterfeit of the garden in Kent. I went to the garden at the conference centre when the almond tree, Abigail's almond tree, was blooming — a lace bouquet of creamy blossoms frothing out from thin dark boughs. The flowering tree holds its breath above the golden steps where Vickie died, in the centre of the little stage of the garden. Low box hedges enclose the flowerbeds; silvery plants make a carpet from which rise green and white lilies. No longer a facsimile of Vita's garden, the White Garden in the grounds of the conference centre has grown its own shape and character.

I go alone to the garden with the red book in my hand. I sit on the step, holding the book, and I feel a deep sad peace. Ivan, Michael, Jane and Eleanor — I told them all that I have found the red book. I told them what it means, and as I did so I felt a lightness beginning to dawn in my heart. Tears come to my eyes and the snowstorm of the almond tree is a haze of iridescence. This is the location of the central problem of my whole life. A strange, false place. I wonder how it feels when people go to old battlefields where their brothers, fathers, lovers died; how it is when you pass every day the spot on the road where the accident happened. All Vickie's vitality gone in a moment, in the time it takes for a bee to sting. Ever since Rosamund gave me the library copy of *The Eagle and the Dove* I have been unable to bear to open it, have not untied its ribbon. I just have it with me all the time, in my shoulder bag, beside my bed, on the café

table, anywhere. It's a talisman, a token that I have kept faith with my sister in an odd and simple way.

Something evil happened here in this garden — many evil things happened at Mandala — I think of Marjorie Bartlett, Jane Wilson and Shirley Temple, Molly Bloom and Therese Gillis, and there were many others. In her own case, Vickie was not entirely blameless and she paid for her own dangerous mischief with her life. Her accidental death. When there is an accident we search for who or what to blame: if only *this* had not happened, or if only *that* had been the case, we say. If I had sent my child to a different school, she would not have been knocked down on the crossing; if the city fathers had seen fit to mend the railing on the bridge, the horse would not have shied, the family in the wagon would never have ended up in the river. Perhaps. Fate, fate, fate. What power determines the designs by which we live and die? If the sun did not shine, if the rain did not fall, if everything was different, nothing would have happened.

If Vickie had never met Ambrose Goddard, she might be alive today. Yet I can see how she came to be mixed up with him, how he came to be with her. People like Vickie and Ambrose are attracted to each other. I faced that fact a long time ago. She was so bright, so funny. I suppose he needed her; perhaps (and it goes against the grain to say it) she needed him. I often wonder about retribution — if Ambrose hadn't shot himself, would he today be in prison in atonement for the lives he took at Mandala? Would his clever lawyers have saved his skin? In any case he would not have been executed by the state because executions ended the day that Vickie died. The last man hanged was hanged that day; the first woman to die in the White Garden died then too. I wonder, when Ambrose ran off and killed his dogs and put the gun to his head, if he ever gave poor lovely, silly Vickie a passing thought. His suicide, so long after Vickie's death, resonates with the deaths of all the Deep Sleep victims, and with the death of Vickie. I wonder as well if he ever knew what really happened in the White Garden, how it came to be that Vickie was stung by that crazy little woman's bees. Did Therese confess to him what she had done? I imagine that she

would have, in her own peculiar way, and he would then have known exactly what had happened.

This place doesn't feel sinister, but neither is it ordinary. For me the White Garden is a monument to my sister, enclosing a scrap of beauty, capturing a sliver of time. And besides that, time has flattened out, bringing me to a point where all the players in the drama exist in my mind at once, woven and twisted together in my memory and imagination. Fixed. Blossoms drift onto the steps, the light of the sun shines through the petals on the tree and there are bees among the flowers. Sometimes a ray of light splits as it passes through a drop of water on an almond flower, and for a second there is a sparkle that winks a minute rainbow and then is gone.

I have kept faith with my sister; and I think of the sisters of poor crazed Therese. I don't know them, but there is a curious bond between me and them, for their sister murdered mine. People would say I overstate the case, that Therese was innocent, mischievous but innocent. She was, I daresay, insane. But innocence like hers is dangerous; it wields a subtle and a deadly power. I say she killed my sister; I say Ambrose Goddard *conspired* with her to kill my sister. It comes down to a matter of self-absorption and a wild and blissful carelessness of other human beings. And lies. So many lies are woven into the sticky web surrounding Vickie's death.

There was a time, long ago, when I imagined I could exact some revenge for Vickie's death, a time when anger and hatred filled me with the scarlet and the blackness of terrible vengeance. But since I have followed the convolutions of Vickie's fate, and have visited the lives of some of the people whose fates touched hers, I have come to a place of sorrow and serenity. Almost thirty years have passed, and now I sit in the White Garden where the almond tree blooms above me, a cloud of small white flowers like a blessing. I see in the distance, above the tops of the cypress trees, the towers of the convent. I hold the small red book in my hand, and I feel the closeness of my dead sister. That is all.

THE VIOLETTA LETTERS

A woman wearing a blue dress walks barefoot along a clifftop high above the sea, which is calm and clear and green as glass. The full skirt of the dress catches at the woman's knees and billows out behind her in the breeze. A worn leather satchel containing her shoes and books and cigarettes hangs from her shoulder, bumps against her thigh as she makes her steady way along the cliff. She is deep in thought. It is late afternooon. The place is lonely and remote; there is nothing between this woman and the sea.

She reaches a place at which the cliff juts far out into the sea, and there, high up on the point, she stands and stares for a long time at the horizon.

Laura Field has come to the clifftop, not very far from the Goddards' seaside retreat. It is the cliff where Ambrose used to walk his dogs. Laura knows this. She sits down on the grass and from her bag she takes the small red book, *The Eagle and the Dove*, unties the ribbon, opens the book and studies it page by page. She plans, when she has looked at it, to throw it into the sea. She reads the library stamp — date on or before which this item must be returned. The black and white photograph of the medieval walls of the city of Avila; the mermaid colophon of Michael Joseph Ltd, 26 Bloomsbury Street, London, WC1. The date, 1943. A note from Vita Sackville-West: 'Owing to the impossibility of communicating with France, I have been unable to ask permission from the Carmel of Lisieux for the reproductions of illustrations from *L'Histoire d'une âme*, but I trust that some day they may forgive me the unavoidable discourtesy.' 'Set and printed in Great Britain by Unwin Brothers Ltd, at the Gresham Press, Woking, in Bembo type, eleven point, leaded, and bound by James Burn.' A lion sits on top of an image of an open book which bears the words 'Book Production War Economy Standard'. A black and white photograph of a letter from St Teresa — an exuberant joy in the handwriting, the marks of ancient folds in the paper.

The woman comes to the end of the book, reads the poem Therese Martin wrote to Memory, and the prayer she wrote for France to offer to Joan of Arc, the Liberating Angel. Then she turns the page and finds, in very small neat handwriting, a collection of letters written on the blank section at the back. Across the top is written: 'The street I live is Loneliness / My house has no address / The letters that I write myself begin *Bonjour Tristesse*.' And following is a series of strange sad little notes, love letters, addressed to Therese in her own handwriting and signed by 'Violetta'.

The last letter is an entreaty from Violetta to Therese:

> Sweetest angel of damage and death, I instruct you to burn all my letters for I fear our plans to be together will be discovered. I will write no more. I further instruct you to meet me by the swings. We will be united as we have never before been united, and together we will don our wings and fly into the bright sun of eternity. My own heart's darling, come to me, I burn with longing.
>
> Violetta

Laura turns the pages over and over, reading and re-reading the Violetta letters. Then, without thinking, or so it seems to her, she begins to tear the pages of the book from their binding where they had long ago been assembled and fixed by James Burn. In a long, hypnotic ritual, she slowly releases single pages into the air. They flutter seaward in little flurries. Some pages she ignites with her cigarette lighter, and, as the pages burn, she lets them go, and they are taken up by a soft wind, blown, charred paper and ash, out to sea.

When Laura holds only the cover and the ribbon, she lets them drop over the edge of the cliff. The red wings of the cover open and close in downward flight towards the sea; the scarlet ribbon, serpentine, moves slowly.

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