

BILLY BARKER

by Greydon Moore

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AN ALLEGORY ON THE END OF THE PISCEAN ERA

- Those ideas which were thought to make Billy Barker and its author important are also at an end — The whole world, not the swimming individual, is now the stage for the Aquarian Age. - Greydon Moore. 2005.

PART ONE

On a balcony which overlooks San Francisco in the late eighteen-sixties are two strange people. The woman stooping to wipe her coffee table can be described with one word - nightmarish. Everything about her is gross and grotesque. The overall effect is upped by heavy makeup, weird dress, bizarre hairdo. Tom nervously brushes lint off his faggotty clothes. He is a San Francisco actor who specializes in the style of the well-made play.

A large crucifix six feet high dominates one wall of the apartment. The head of the image looks out to the balcony. Trappings of the apartment are unpredictable. Colors are gaudy and bright, concentrating in the bright greens and orange. The furnishings are highly ornate being made of wrought iron. The artificiality of this home is blighted partially by a giant philodendron plant which grows hungrily almost to the ceiling near the door, plus a box of red geraniums on the balcony.

These two low beasts of humanity are Billy Barker's family. They wait now for the arrival of Billy and Mary his wife. Meanwhile the mother occupies herself with her regular

housework, working her routine so perfunctorily that it seems to have a beat, a rhythm of its own.

The Mother: Nice that they're going to make him a judge. Billy's a good man. A little odd, perhaps, you know, hard to understand, But ideal for Mary. Lucky lucky Mary ... (*trying it at different pitches*) Lucky lucky lucky lucky lucky ...

Tom: (*Peering over the balcony*) Mother, you should come and see the seagulls out there. They're such beautiful birds. One should feel inspired by their grace and freedom, I suppose, One shat in my eye as I was coming home this afternoon. I hate them. Such crude toilet training.

The Mother: What on earth is keeping those darling children of mine. It's almost time ... it's almost time ... (eating a jar of grapes before picking up again her rhythm of housecleaning, advancing now upon the giant philodendron by the front door).

Tom: Mother, Billy and Mary will NEVER get here in time. (*Suddenly he turns to face his mother*) If they don't arrive soon I'll have to leave house for the theatre and miss supper. But I feel good tonight, liberated, I'm going to have a great performance.

(*The mother is polishing each leaf of the philodendron with a milk dampened cloth.*) Now WHAT do you think could be keeping them - think - think - tock tock tick tick - (*clicking her tongue*).

Do you think he's making love to her again? Do you think they could be at this very second in the ecstasy ... ugh! (*repulsed*).

(*A seagull has dropped out of the sky, seems to hang in space out just beyond the balcony, peering oddly straight into the parlor. When Tom turns, confronting the gull head-on, with a startled screech it lifts and soars away*) (*Continuing*) ... but for a man whose past is as vague as Billy's, I suppose he could be capable of anything. Born illegitimate, you know...

(Suddenly the mother freezes. She presses her fingers to her temples. In this medianistic pose she cries) Stop! Beats! Yes, yes I hear them coming ...

Do you think he's beating Mary, mother? Cousin Thurlow told me privately of that gentleman named De Sade who used to hang his girlfriends by their toes and try them that way. And called it consciousness. Do you think Billy's having his troubles right now trying to expand his consciousness by seducing Mary as he's wriggling and screaming against her hot, steamy, upside-down body?

The tea will get hot. They should come for tea when the tea is not hot. They should come for cold tea, properly. *(Running to the balcony and peering over the edge to see if they are coming)* Ohhhh it's such a long way down ... it makes me feel disGUSTing, makes me feel like I'm swallowing myself, from the top of the head, inward ... suuuuuuuuuuucckkkkkk!

What is it that makes Billy so special, and yet so terrifying, mother?

(Turning her big eyes on him) Special?

I've studied that man from afar and I've watched him perform. Do you want to know what MY considered opinion is, I think he's too good to be true. Remember at the wedding what I said to dearest Mary? Watch that man ... watch him closely with your wary morning glory eyes. He's strange, off, something different, he's too good to be true. He says that even as a boy they used to tell him he was too good to be true. And now he's saying: oh boo hoo, oh boo hoo - I'm so full of life! Oh alas, Tom, what am I going to DO. I am so full of life, yet they won't hear me ...

(The mother has been dancing on her feet again, fairly leaping in the fervor of her housework from one part of the room to another. Her thick legs, exaggerated in their ugliness by the light terry cloth shift which swings about her knees, make dull but hurried thuds through the room. Fussing with her plants now she moves from the balcony to the table to the

front door and back to the balcony carrying her plants) Do you like - like them - do you - like the - do you like the plants better ... better this way ... or that way ...

I like them better the way they were in the first place. See those children playing down in the park? ... the teenaged sons and daughters of our illustrious and illumined aristocratic families? WELLL the other day I was telling Billy how nice it is to see such clean-cut and healthy boys and girls for a change. And HE got that haunted look in his eyes, and said, yeah, half of them are already alcoholics. I don't know whether I like that remark or not. It reflects on our good breeding.

(The famous actor rubs the genital that seems to weigh heavily in his tight pants, then spits angrily over the side of the balcony. In turning accidentally he knocks to the floor the cleaning cloth left behind on the ornate coffee table which has a glass top. Instantly the mother has pounced on the cloth, like an ever watchful vulture, throws it over the side. With gusto that is almost hideous she begins to manipulate the geranium plants, pruning them, moving the box from one poor location to another).

The Mother: I think the plants should be thrown out altogether. Beastly inconsiderate things. They put oxygen into the air, and too much oxygen is bad for the brain.

Tom: Yep, Billy's a strange combination, a strange flower. But we'll fix him soon enough, won't we, mother? You and I. I want you to have a flower. *(Picking a flower which he puts in her hair)* I want you to have my bath ready in twenty minutes. Don't forget the salts, Mother. I'm glad we're able to give Billy this rich full life of ours. He should learn to keep his opinions to himself. He had nothing, you know, before he seduced Mary into marrying him. Yesterday morning, at breakfast no less, he asked me if I knew what the term 'aesthetic man' meant, then smiled that maddening smile of his because he KNEW I didn't know what he meant. But we'll fix him soon enough, won't we, Mother, you and I ...

(There is a sudden commotion at the entranceway, with much giggling and snickering.) Mary laughs brightly out in the hallway. Her laugh is exceedingly rich and exciting for those who enjoy life. Billy Barker now bursts through the door, with Mary right behind. Mary, playing the game, has her hands in his back pockets, trying to hold him back. Mary is young, vivacious, with blond hair like the summer sun. This is how Billy sees her at this period of his crisis. She radiates, possessing no apparent hardness, contradiction, or searing spirit. This is a thrilling woman who, if so desiring, could arouse even the blackest hearts of man. Her husband Billy Barker is a noble figure, tall with all the right charisma, in his late twenties. He has recently formed a strong bond with Hardial but has not yet entered the struggle. He is vaguely aware at this time of the death and absurdities of his life with Mary, even so, he still ignores the messages and accepts this life without questioning.

The Mother: *(performing her ritual)* Children, How nice.

Yes, how nice ... *(says Billy, hanging his loose coat in the hallway)*.

The Mother: Watch your dirty boots ... out! out! outside! There, that's a good boy. Now Billy, will you come here, will you throw those plants over the balcony ... *(and warning him with a great rolling of her vulgar eyes)* ... watch out for those children down there.

Billy eyes her with faint amusement.

Tom, suddenly launching himself from the sofa: Mary, how lovely you look ... Mother see see ...

Stepping into the room Billy says: Sorry we're late, we've just come from the tailors. So, what do you think of my tweed suit?

Tom: It stinks.

Billy: Oh, it does, does it? My, my, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, please regard how the EMPEROR'S new clothes

speak for themselves!

The Mother speaks: Now isn't that a shame, the tea is almost hot. We simply can't have the tea hot. We must have tea cold, properly. (Filling teacups on the dining room table) Do you really like Tom's clothes, Billy? Oh they're SO expressive for an actor. I mean, I helped him select them and that's important ... hot! ... how terrible. (*She leaves the room*).

Tom, suddenly turning to Billy: You don't like me very much. (*Tom never looks directly at Billy's eyes, only at his body, or at the wall behind*).

Billy: Awwwww don't go away mad ... just go away ... tell him Mary.

Billy, you DON'T like my brother very much, do you.
He doesn't like ME very much.

Tom: What do you mean, telling Lu-Ellen that I am 'sensitive man'. I am an actor, one of the best in San Francisco. Don't ever forget it.

Billy, please. You simply have to give Tom the proper chance. How many times must I ASK you. He's sensitive, and he IS my brother. And I'd like you to show a little more respect for other people from now on ... I know Tom has one or two peculiar ideas, but after all he is still human.

Human! Good Lord - He's god, spelled backwards, with a capital D.

(*Tom, of all incredible things, has been staring intently at the wall*) Shhhhh ... quiet! ... what's that funny noise ...?

(Mary, at the mirror, fixing her hair): What funny noise?

Billy: (Like a dog, baying to the moon) Awwoooo ... it is the howling of your consciousness -

Tom: I hear a strange noise ... the walls are coming in ...

(*Just then the door from the bedroom flies open and the mother enters, stopping before Mary to look enraptured up into her face*). Oh she has such an innocent face.

Tom: Ah yes, a beautiful innocent face. How nice. A beautiful face never hurt anyone.

Billy: Every day in the courtrooms I see beautiful innocent faces committing crimes against humanity. Every day I listen to their innocent faces and I see their lies and deceptions. It's an innocent face with a black heart, that's what fills me with horror.

Do you love me?

(The question is Mary's, to which Billy teasingly makes a grand announcement) And now for the big news ... Sunday, August 29 exactly one year ago today was my wedding day and I can't live without Mary. Yes I love you very much Mary. Without your love I'd probably die, flake off, wither on the vine, blow off on the harvest wind ...

Tom: Well I can't see that it matters whether or not a man has conviction. Now take me for instance, I'm not one to inquire indiscriminately into CRAP like aesthetic truths or a man's motives ... I'm a down to earth actor ... I'm a realist who goes by the rule of ...

Billy, cutting in: You're a bloody faggot.

Mother: (Like a rifle shot) What!

(A heavy silence).

Tom: And I suppose you're the epitome of ... of ...

Billy: (a simple statement) Yes I am.

Mother, something must be done about this man. He doesn't fit. His very presence in our house is a mockery of good taste. (Mollifying him) Tom, Tom, good brother Tom, how you have misunderstood me, HOW could I possibly threaten you, or mother, or the hypocrites at court, or anybody ...

Tom: (as Billy goes to put an arm around his shoulder) Don't-you-touch-me *(revulsed)*.

(Surprised, Billy with a mood of false gaiety, tries to regain some dignity by interjecting) It's too bad you haven't had a chance to meet Hardial. I think it would be a good idea if we could all get together for dinner this week, then we can meet each other properly.

(While he talks Billy casually gives the crucifix on the wall

a gentle nudge, which tips it off balance. The figure executes a slow, almost deliberate roll, hangs upside-down with its head only a few inches from the floor, and quivers oddly. The most incredible thing is that no one seems to notice it but Billy)

Mother: Dinner? When?

Billy: Tomorrow night. Here, at your place. I figure around six o'clock should be a good o'clock.

Mary: *(suddenly erupting)* Arrrrggggue ... I can't make it. Oh gee Billy I'm awfully sorry but I can't go into details right now. You understand, don't you? ... Madame Yaaz down the hill, she promised to create my new hairstyling for Mavis' party Saturday night. I'm very lucky because EVERYbody wants her. *(Noticing his face)* Oh you CAN come to the party, darling? ... don't hurt me, you can come ... can't you?

Oh god, the whole thing is beginning to fill me with apprehension. Mary, yesterday Hardial said an amazing thing. He said that all my life I have been manipulated ...

You'd better come if you value your life! Famous or not we want you. Some of Mavis' girlfriends want to meet you - the illustrious Billy Barker, Mary's Billy Barker, that's what they're saying. Anyway, tomorrow mother and I have to go across the hill and we won't be back until Saturday. Well, don't look so pained, darling. Sleeping alone won't kill you. Mother, I've married a greedy lion, but at heart my Billy is just an insatiable little brat.

Billy: *(wounded)* You bloody liar.

(Hot) No one calls me a liar.

Tom: *(sarcastically)* tsk ... tsk ... tsk ... love.

Mother: Oh for god's sake you've given me a headache, *(agitated, she suddenly grabs one of the geranium plants and flings it over the balcony)* ... lucky Mary ... lucky lucky lucky lucky ...

Tom: Whatever do you waste your time, and our time, with such ... waste, as this Hardial man or whatever he is. Frankly I don't even think he exists.

Billy: How little you understand Tom. How poor you are. Hardial is a chemist, a philosopher, and a poet. But what does it matter? I give my love, my guts, my humanity to Hardial.

Mother: Tom is right. Tom is not poor. I hear such nasty stories ... dirty ... they're talking about you and Hardial ...

Awww come on you people give Hardial a chance. You're just like relentless beasts, vultures (*gestures*) vultch ... vultch... vultch What are you? ... You say nothing. You know nothing, You feel nothing. What are you? Vegetables?

Tom: I deeply resent that remark.

Mary: He came back. The significant thing is he came back from someplace to see Billy, he came back. He came to see ...

Tom: Billy:

Back, Mary? Back.

What difference does it make. He's here. He's visiting ... (*at Tom*) (*angrily*) Look, asshole, if you smirk once more I'll... Man what a bizarre family! fantastic ... god! Hardial was out visiting friends in Louisiana. When he got well enough to travel he left Louisiana and came straight here just to see me. You know why? Because I had become 'alive' to him. He loved me. And that alone makes me feel I'm still worth something in this miserable life. Did you know there are people who worship this man. There are others who hate his guts.

PART TWO

November by the zodiac.

It is a strange place to find the woman, moving up the single rutted street of a worn town, to turn at last directly into the doorway of the one wooden hotel.

She strides defiantly into his room. The man softened lies unshaven and unwashed. He is sprawled on his back across the unmade bed, clad only in his undershorts. His clothes and his few other possessions are flung through the room.

Crossing to peer down at the sleeping figure, Mary, in an odd gesture of feeling, sadly passes her hand over the length of his near-nude body without touching him. Then her face turns hard. It is unfortunate that she is so attractive for she wears her beauty loudly which tends to degrade her in the environment of this cheap hotel room. Her clothes with their bizarrely sparking colors, are fashionable even in San Francisco. Her hair is now darker, her clothes however are quite clean, and her upswept hairstyle takes an hour to put in place.

As for Billy Barker, who was last seen seven months ago in San Francisco, his youthful face has become a mirror of the strange despair that is surely destroying him.

Now Mary begins to move angrily through the room, examining it with calculated contempt. She finds the letters on the dresser and begins to look through them, finding only a couple of bills of currency which she quietly slips into her blouse. She examines the letters again, this time more carefully. Finally in silent fury she throws them on the floor. She now turns to his few belongings, picking them up one at a time. She picks up his boot, smells it - disgust. She finds his dirty pants in a heap under the chair and smells the crotch - again disgust. In disgust she starts to cram his dirty clothes into the wastebasket, then gives it up.

Crossing suddenly to the door, she opens it, and slams it

with a resounding crash.

Billy: (*violently sitting up in bed*) What in hell. What the hell are you doing here!

(*First condemning the room with her eyes, then him*)
Mother would have a fit! ... mother would JUST have a fit!
(They stare oddly at each other).

Whew, it smells like a pig sty in here. Oh boy what mother would say -

What are you doing here!

Why Billy, darling, whatever happened to your brand new exclusively tailored tweed suit. (*Crumpled on the chair is a ragged suit coat. The pants she has already stuffed in the wastebasket. She takes the suit coat to the window to examine it.*) Why darling you've been rolling in the gutter, haven't you. How delightful. Have you been drinking darling?

(*Grabbing the jacket*) Shut up. (on the bedside table is a half bottle of cheap alcohol. She sees it and takes it and holds it sideways in the light, as if to look for fingerprints) You know I don't drink.

Oh?

I have nothing to say to you. Leave me alone.

(*As Billy fumbles into his pants*) (*tauntingly*) Why Billy darling you're not dressed yet for the opera. Oh don't TELL me we're going to become sensitive again. Haven't we already had enough? Look at you - a tramp, a bum, unshaven and stinking, just like your foul smelling friend Hardial. (*A sudden note of hysteria*) Don't look at me like that -

(*With infinite patience*) Mary, please, enough. You've done a terrible thing in following me here. Please go.

Go! Go! are you out of your mind? It's only seven o'clock. It's not even time for our hot tea. Some like it HOT, you know. You know. (*Crossing to the chair she flings his suit coat to the floor and plants herself in the chair. She stares rigidly ahead, on the verge of tears, she may at any moment start bawling like a child*).

(He studies her silent crying in the chair) Drink?

Where are the letters?

There are none.

You are my husband and I have pursued you for seven miserable months. At least you could have answered one of my letters.

Please go.

But, Billy, what exactly do you want?

But how can I think of wanting when ten different people want me to be ten different things? Isn't it simply enough that I want to be left alone and I want to be what I am? *(When she regards him - silent and intractable)* You've taken just about everything I've got. Do you want more? Have you so much avarice? Here - *(taking a six-inch knife from the dresser and deliberately opening his fly, pulling out his genitals)* - here, why don't you take my sex organs too and be done with it. Here *(offering her the knife)* you want them so badly, take them, and go away.

(Smiling suddenly) Billy that was very good, yes, you're really coming along very nicely. *(Then in sudden defence)* Well how do you think I felt. Him coming to the house all the time and shouting about the people he met, and accusing them of being so WRETCHEDly ignorant. Masturbation! OH that vulgar word! And he'd call them masturbators, and sit there drinking our best whiskey, moaning about them. I came home one night, and he was there, throwing my best cut glass pieces into the fireplace. *(With scorn)* Oh it was SO sweet, he wanted to hear the different sounds of the glass shattering in the fireplace.

(By now he realizes that she isn't going to leave willingly. There is a futility in his subdued voice) What do you want?

I want you to become my proper husband again. I want you to come back home to San Francisco where you belong. Properly.

That's impossible.

Shit.

Please, Mary, it hurts ... it hurts ... you don't know how your presence here is killing me ... please go.

Well aren't we the magnificent tower of torn soul. And just what do you think we women do, when our husbands walk out and leave us laughing it up with the hags in San Francisco. I don't mean to get banal and prosaic at a time like this, our big dramatic moment together, but, yes, mother was right, yes she was, didn't she say it ... didn't she say it...

Oh yes ... your mother ... the bag of Baghdad ...

(Smiling - smirking more - lewdly from the side of her mouth, having enjoyed the pun) Very good pun ...

But don't you see, all of this is nothing. Tomorrow I'm leaving for Horsefly, and then that will be the last you'll ever see of me.

What! Again! Haven't you yet learned your lesson? Now don't tell me, surely you don't mean ... oh darling oh no don't tell me you're going to find us a pot of gold? Oh Billy how beautiful ... (laughing) ... how beautiful!

(So he contemplates her in dead silence. What else can he do).

Billy I was crushed, I was - to use your word - 'horrified' when you left me like that, I mean, didn't we build something nice together, All you said was 'I'm going to join the gold rush.' You didn't even say sorry.

Why not? Why not the gold rush? Do you think for one minute I like this? (indicates the room) Did you think, for instance, I like standing rooted in vigorous masturbation in that court room defending those ethical monsters of San Francisco, because they could PAY me?

But what about ME? It wasn't easy coming all that way eighteen hundred miles looking for you. The Cariboo Trail is pretty hard on a woman, you know. Man, I mean I even walked over the top of a mountain, over seventy miles, in bare feet, with blisters, looking for my husband.

Tough titty.

How can you be so MEAN! If only you knew how much - *(she turns and butts her cigarette in the ashtray on the dresser)* - I've suffered because of you, I can't STAND pain. Or sleeping like a common whore in those cheap hotels. Ugh, and those UGLY squaws, if they're not drunk, they're ... ugh how horrible. And what about when I fell off my horse and cut my head open - look, look! ... see the monstrosity! *(scar)* - oh I can't THINK of the indignities I've suffered in the last seven months because of you. *(On the verge of tears)* I was so mortified when you left. *(She pauses)* You should hear what they're whispering about you back in San Francisco ...

Billy? ... Billy?

What do I care what those cocks and robbers say.

Then what about ME.

But don't you see, Mary, how can I go back? Even the thoughts torment me night and day. What will I go back to?

There's nothing more I want. I had nothing with you ... what have I left to lose ... one two button my shoe ... three four close the door ...

Oh for heaven's sake stop acting as if you were ten years old. Gold! Billy how can you be so blind. You can't go off to the wilderness like Lothario to the rescue simply to find gold.

And who told you? Alex did it. He got over four hundred thousand bucks.

Right here at Boston Bar.

Lover, I can't believe this is really you. Look at your face. Look at your eyes, LOOK AT THEM! *(At this cue quietly he goes to the mirror and sadly contemplates himself, but suddenly he recoils in horror at the spectre which appears suddenly in the mirror).*

No - no - no - *(Visibly shaken, he staggers to the liquor bottle and drinks deeply).*

I'm sorry. But you know you're really not the martyr

type. Let's face it, you're too soft and flabby - I should know. You're acting like a bigger fool than I ever gave you credit for. Congratulations. Mother and Tom were certainly right this time...

All right, if this is your desire, then I'm sorry, you are striving for death. I've tried to be kind to you, but you've asked for it. Well Mary, get ready, here comes the first killing. What a wonderful trio of horrors you three make, you and your mother and Tom. Selfish, egocentric, each of you. Greedy. Hopelessly unaware ... you know, I looked at myself in the mirror exactly seven months ago. That was not my face. That body you manipulated and the clothes it wore and the ridiculously bad lawyer it called itself, and the money, the prestige, it belonged to someone else. It was enslaved sensuously figure and flesh by you and your mother. And by San Francisco. And ... and ... And I have so much life inside of me, and, oh what's the use. I cried, Mary.

Oh dear, how sad, have you died again Billy? Oh I'm so sad. - my sweet agonizing cancer of my life ... go, please. You told me he willed a TREE to death. Billy? ... I mean ... I mean ... oh shit.

... he used to sing to me, I have a pain in my heart, I have a pain in my heart! Again and again he used to sing it, and I used to smile and listen amused to his strange high pitched voice.

And finally I began to wonder why he sang it so persistently. Then one day I began to bleed for you. And then it was so simple, I had a pain in my heart too. Let me confront you with some truths about yourself. Just be quiet and let me finish. You're a vain, deluded woman who has no real concept of love - you've been misled hopelessly by your own terrible mistakes: you've become enslaved by your genital irritation - your genital itch is driving you nuts! No ... let me finish ... you saw me at Lu-ellen's party that first night and you liked my guts, decided to seduce me on the very spot, and even so,

I played along with your cheap trick. You than took it upon yourself to talk me out of philosophical pursuits, 'philosophical cherries' you called them, and talked me into taking up law - 'the honourable profession!' Well, then, after profaning my mind and character, you wanted to profane my body too. So I submitted to your insatiable appetites, I tip-toed up and down, up and down dark hallways of your mansion in the middle of the night, getting my cock ready. God I die when I see evil glitter come into your eyes and hear you groaning and know that soon I will die again, for all you want is leg-thrashing grinding sex. You want to be ravished until there's no more music to it. Yet you can't be satisfied. But it was love, you cried. Oh you were so happy! - I don't want that kind of proffering, from you or anybody. I want something else.

You can't throw up your wife and just walk out on your career over one man. (*To herself*) Oh HOW am I going to make him stop -? Billy what kind of an utter fool is going to rush off into strange country without money and without friends or without hope or experience ... to find something that isn't even there.

But what else can a man do? I, you, we still have to live our whole lifetimes together, even though I will try to escape your sight and your contamination. That's pain, that's suffering, that's what life is ... I still love you Mary, but what can I do? that is life ... soon even the wedding gifts go rusty, And then ... (*A pause*).

Why don't you come off it. Hardial was a bum. How can you possibly believe that such a pervert, a homosexual, crude ignorant man could possibly be good, as you say he is?

Leave me alone! Leave me alone! ... leave me alone.

Did you know Hardial used to come into our house during the night and sit there at our kitchen table, all night, yes breaking my best glasses, and writing his ridiculous poetry.

God must you remind me ... (regaining his self composure)
He was the one beauty of my life, Hardial. I remember one

morning, I lay in bed and I could hear birds sing at sunrise and the sun was hot at my window. You were away again, visiting mother. Hardial was downstairs at the kitchen table, big, like the ghost of awareness, talking to himself, writing poetry aloud. It was such a crazy thing to be doing at that hour, but it was so human. And I wanted to go to him, but I didn't feel like getting out of bed. Later when I came downstairs, in protest he'd stuck my boots and shoes in a row like symbolic soldiers all across the front of our house, on the spikes of our eaves. And left a beautiful yellow hyacinth glowing from the keyhole, So I wrote a poem for Hardial: 'as I awoke this morning, Hardial was gone, and there were shoes on the spikes of the eaves and a yellow flower in the keyhole, Thank you for putting the flowers on the eaves. The shoe in the keyhole has wilted in the noonday sun!'

It stinks. It doesn't even make sense.

Yes it is beautiful. But you can't understand. (*He hesitates, groping for the right words to explain*) (*then*) We shared something, Hardial and I, we loved each other, humanly. He was 'alive' for me and I was 'alive' for him. And that poem is something you and I could never share. We have no poetry. Don't you see, Mary, you're like an old woman with withered tits who is viciously clinging to the remnants of your fading looks, and you know, you clutch so desperately and tenaciously that your tits become everything you possess and you become that ugliness You know what? you're a woman who is very conscious of her own ugliness.

Well you should talk What about that hot little tete à tete MAN relationship between you and that ... Hardial.

(*Livid with passion*) (*shaking*) You ugly - don't you profane - oh god don't you EVER talk that way -

Billy how can you torture yourself like this. Billy look at me ... (*gently*) Look at me, I'm your wife. We used to be so happy before Hardial came, Billy look at me,

You're dead. Gone. My sweet dearly beloved agonizing

cancer of my life, get out. Leave me alone. Go. *(She sits in stony silence, contemplating him unemotionally. When after a few minutes she has not moved, he lies back on the bed)*
 Okay, Mary, what do you want?

I want you ... back.

That's impossible. There's nothing left to go back to.

Billy what am I going to do with you. You bad little boy, I need you. I love you. Is that what you want me to say? I love you? I love you? If that's what you want I'll say it darling, I'll say anything, Oh darling how can you be so cruel, oh I can't live without you, I'll die without you, I'll expire, faint, wither on the vine, blow away in the first puff of the winter wind - or the harvest moon - or whatever the hell it was -

- *(softly but desperately)* Stop it Mary, You're much too ugly for such humiliation.

I don't love you anymore.

(He shrugs)

(A new tack) I'm sorry ...

Yeah yeah of course you're sorry. Look what you did to Hardial. You're like a great beast greedy greedy picking away licking the very guts out of me. GET OUT!

I didn't come eighteen hundred miles to be thrown out by my husband. I'll stay until you come to your senses.

You won't do what I ask, you won't listen. Get out. By god I'll fix you ...

Don't you dare touch me - *(Mary is rigid with impotent anger. Before she can speak, Billy, pushed past endurance by her madness, with all the meanness of revenge for the past seven months of hell existence, he cruelly, solidly, deliberately delivers a blow into her face. And even as she staggers aback, stunned, to the door, he has taken her and shoved her mightily through the door. Now he paces the room, obviously tortured by the intensity of his emotion, squeezed in the grip of some incomprehensible despair).*

(Raging on the verge of tears) What else can a man do

when his wife is dead ... she is dead ...

Mary tries the door from the outside, finds it locked, makes a half plea to Billy, then gives it up. With a queer sob she turns and runs into the street.

PART THREE

Picture the whole metaphysical experience; a small campfire with two men - one Billy Barker of San Francisco. And the dark night smelling of forest. Moonglow is gone, there is no moon. The stars in the mountain air are a smear of galaxies and a billion winking lights.

Shapes and things have filled the night with madness. Mountains which have grown out of the ponderous still of the night move in heavy shapes out of existential awareness beyond the shadows of the fire. The evergreens are screaming, reaching in from the outer rim of shadows almost to the fire.

Near at hand is the bright sound of a creek. The creek runs downhill over rocks, cold, clear, teeming with water babies, stones tolling in the water; it gurgles gold! gold! - the sound of his desire; the sound is very close indeed. Instead of a mighty creek it could be a mere trickle of water oozing like tears out of the ferns on the side of the mountain and splashing noisily over the fern-covered rocks down towards the campsite. It doesn't really matter. Only the whole metaphysical experience really counts.

He is neither lost nor won - the man crouching by the fire is neither old nor young. Polling the fire, he now adds a couple of pieces of wood. Now sitting on his haunches, he waits quietly. Of a sudden the hiss and spit of the fire are interrupted by the other man urinating heavily in the nearby creek. There is nothing subtle about it. The sound fills the whole night and goes on like it will never stop. When suddenly Billy explodes with laughter, rocking back on his haunches and slapping his thighs, Graham calls out: Hey, what's so cockbustin' funny, man?

You! Well bravo! You are magnificent! Hah hah what fantastic penis strength (the 'r' of strength is rolled for empha-

sis) Yes, Graham, even the moose and racoons were suitably impressed.

(Silence in the bushes) (Then, cautiously) What do you mean, 'penis strength'?

But my friend why do you have to prove your masculinity? And you use such crude, obvious tricks, I can see that you're a man.

(Finished, Graham comes crashing lightly into the fire circle where Billy chuckling still, leans on his knees gently blowing life into the smouldering fire).

- What do you mean? prove my masculinity ... I ain't tryin' t' prove nothin'!

Oh but you are. Billy knows. Look at you blush. You're not very subtle, you know. You went to that creek over there and you deliberately pissed with the strength of a horse, hoping Billy was all ears, and when it began to sound like a horse, then, you see, you proved something. But you're going about it all wrong. There are better tests. When I was a boy of nine and ten in the orphanage we used to tie strings around rocks and hang these from the ends of our cocks, and practice.

(A long silence) What a funny guy you are. *(Again a pause)* I can't figure you out at all. *(Again hesitation)* I mean, sometimes I believe you and sometimes ... I can't ... man yer strange ...

But why? I have been most completely sincere with you. The problem is that the same old problem still haunts you, you still aren't listening. Yer' different tonight. Yu' SOUND different. I can't figure it.

Maybe so. Could be the metaphysics of the night. I've been thinking of Hardial.

(At the mention of the dreaded name, Graham hastily withdraws, fumbles for a few desperate seconds with the billy can on the fire. Then he drags the whisky flask out of his bedroll. Coming to sit near Billy, he says brightly): Hey, remember that thing you said when we were pannin' up the creek today,

I bin thinkin' 'bout what you said, 'bout him an' the dead tree.
(Graham shakes his head loosely and laughs to himself).

(Billy): - one night I came into his room, it was very late. Hardial was still there, still awake, watering a miniature cherry tree, a tree I'd given him two weeks before as a joke, a present for his birthday. Now the tree had wilted. It was barely alive. He sensed right away why I looked so puzzled. No no, he said, you do not understand! ... the tree is not dying! I am willing it to death! When I questioned him, he said the tree had strength; "when I need energy, I absorb the strength of that tree", he said. But why WILL such a beautiful tree to death, I asked. Why not? he said, soon I will grow a better one in my mind.

All this time you bin talking 'bout Hardial, Billy, an' you ain't never explained, what happened to him ... you ain't never told me what happened to him ... like how come he ain't here, huh ...

(An explosive, almost insane laugh in the night. A wind starts up in the trees. Still laughing, sort of, Billy slips into the shadows and comes back with an armload of firewood) ... to see a world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wildflower; hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour - but you wouldn't understand such eternity ... no. (Laying wood on the fire) You're too wrapped up in your own hysterical rush for recognition, or gold, or sex, or whatever it is you crave from life. Graham, what do you CRAVE out of life?

Gold, I guess, first thing off.

(Still chuckling to himself) Where's Hardial ... hah ha ha hideous, hideous, hideous. *(Then)* Listen to the sound of the night Graham. Listen to it. In all my life I have never heard the wind in the trees or heard water running downhill over rocks, or the night singing. I surprise myself, Graham, I never knew I could feel so much poetry. Where I come from we don't have time for life, only for making reputations, and money, piles of money.

Did yu' know I ache for you, man.

What?

I mean yer exciting. I don't see what's so funny.

Oh come on Graham Maximy, you're making a profanity of love. (*Suddenly angry*) Why? Why? are you so bloody weak! Are YOU trying to kill me too? How many times have I tried to make you understand! Hell, I thought me n' you were buddies. Ain't that why you asked me t' be yer partner? I seen yu, I seen yu watching me in Horse Fly with those soft eyes of yours. Why d' yu think I came t' this asshole of the world, so's we could, so you ... well so what! we ain't never goin' t' find gold up here ... I like yu ... out here who's gonna know, huh? we're all alone out here ... just you 'n me ... who's gonna know?

But Graham what more can I do than love you? (*Amused*) You flatter me. I think this is hilariously funny. You. Hah hah hah ... yep, I'm jest a faggoty li'l ol' honeydew teenage target, that's me. (Then) I'm genuinely sorry for the way things are working out for you. But that's what life is. We have no money, my wife stole what little I had. But we still have our bare fists. So, now, we either stay and strike it rich together, or ... leave it at that, okay?

(For a long while they sit lost in thought, the hiss of the fire, all the emotions there, their thoughts filling the night with images)

Billy: Soft you! A word or two before you go. Know you ... by that strange beast, humanity?

Per christ sake ...!

Never mind. Never mind. I can't make you change your mind ...

Nope. I'm gettin' out, first thing, crack of dawn tomorrow.

Why?

I told yu, there ain't no gold. I know more'n you do 'bout prospectin' an' things so that finishes it. No more talk.

How can you be so BLIND Graham. Have I misjudged you so badly? After you came 150 miles over the mountains carrying such a dismal load up from Horse Fly you want to quit! Remember how you strived to walk before me. Remember the day we got here, you were already pitching camp before I could begin to unload my pack, I thought then you might have the necessary strength. I thought, ahah - now there's a boy who has the guts to confront life, Now you want to destroy yourself. It doesn't make sense. You've seen the perfect layout of our creek. Listen to the creek, forget your pith and fireball sex and listen to it. It's telling you man, there's gold here alright, a fortune in gold. Listen to the water murmur, we're going to strike it rich, richer beyond our wildest imaginings ...

It's fools gold! It's fool's gold. Old Chief Buckles, he's a prospector bin lookin' these parts for 35 years and if he says there ain't no gold then there AIN'T nothing here, Man! face up to realities ...

(Interrupting softly) No no you don't understand, reality is anything I want to make it.

Aw come off it, I'm jest a kid 19 years old, but there's some things I know, and one of 'em is yer wastin' yer time searchin' the creek fer something that don't exist.

Graham! Graham! You haven't listened. You haven't heard me. That is the whole bloody trouble. We're not going to look in the creek. The gold is under it. We simply have to dig a little, we have to work a little harder. You'll see tomorrow, we'll start our shaft right about where ...

(Hysterically) I can't I can't I can't ... I can't stand it anymore You're killin' me, Every second I stay here is killin' me, I want to eat agin, I want whisky. Look! Look! *(The flask is empty)* I hear yer voice, I smell you. You take my hand 'n say, 'n say: Graham, come here ... WILL YOU COME HERE! *(imitating Billy, dramatically)* and you show me yer fool's gold lyin' there in yer god damned pan, Man! I mean I lie awake nights thinkin' 'bout yer body, I want to get down and blow.

Shit.

(With infinite compassion) Shhhhhh ... Graham ... come over here. Look, Look. *(They go to the forest edge where Billy points to the vague shapes of evergreens, A moon now glimmers over the mountain tops across the gorge)* There are my ghosts. The forests are filled with ghosts. Can you not feel it. Can't you hear them groaning in the trees? Come here Graham ... look at the hoary ghosts, they are all out there, waiting, They are the ghosts of my past hiding in the future, while the present goes on tormenting my life,

Cut it out *(Trying to edge away from Billy, back to the campfire)* Yer crazy, with all yer ghost stuff ...

Shhh ... *(drawing him even closer to the edge of the forest)* *(addressing the screaming shadows)* ahah now I see you, you sneaky fellow! Come over here Graham, I want you to meet my father. Hello hot pants. Are you looking for my mother? She's out in the streets, in the snow, giving birth to Billy Barker Oh! hello there sister superior insensate. Oh, ahem, a thousand pardons, Tom, I am indeed sorry, I didn't mean to dethrone you, an honest man's mistake, I say, hey, there goes Mary the monster. Hi sweetie poo what are YOU doing in the bushes?

Graham: *(Cupping his hands and making a ghostly sound)*
Wanting yooooooooooooo ...

Graham was that you?

Hah hah I'm over here Billy come an' get me, come an' get me hah hah ...

Oh you silly ass don't you know anything!

I'm leavin' first thing, crack of dawn tomorrow.

Billy: I figure we should sink the shaft ... *(pacing out a circle near the fire)* here! Loose overburden ... the slight depression ... yes, yes *(mulling)* this spot should do nicely ... go away! ghosts - boo!

(The spot is directly under Graham's sleeping bag).

(Meanwhile Graham draws his bedroll over to the fire,

settles into it then indifferently watches Billy diligently measuring out his mine, pacing back and forth, back and forth).

Whatfer yu lookin' gold, Billy?

But what else can a man do. To fight - I used to think ... I surely don't know.

(Sleepily) Night ... Billy ... Barker.

(The ponderous grue of the night closes in upon the campsite. The ghosts whisper and scurry through the dark and silent trees, silhouetted by a stark moon. The background chatter of frogs and crickets and the creek burlbling in the distance seems to grow closer, louder. The fire is dying. All is still. Billy suddenly leaps to his feet frantically brushing his body).

Ants! Boy ... *(brushing majestically)* nothing like ants crawling around in your undershirt to keep you thrashing. *(Throwing a few logs on the fire he blows on it until the flames leap. Brightly)* Brrr ... bloody cold. I feel so bloody strange. Creepy out here so far from everything, with those shadows. Boo! ... GO AWAY! ... LEAVE ME ALONE! *(Sitting on his heels)* Bark! Bark! their jaws do spark! humanity's coming to town! *(Pause)* I can't sleep. Hey are you asleep yet? *(spoken to Graham).*

(A silence).

Hey! Graham! Have you fallen asleep on me, you bad boy. Then wake up. Let's go for a long walk ... WILL YOU GET UP! *(kicking Graham's bedroll).*

Per christ's sake, let me sleep ... C'mon c'mon what kind of a man are you. On our very last night together you want to sleep. C'mon you are obligated to talk. *(Kicks Graham hard)* WE ARE GOING TO TALK!

(Billy's body has begun to shake imperceptibly).

(Reluctantly Graham tugs his bedroll closer to the fire. He sits upright with his roll wrapped around his shoulders. He says nothing. He does nothing. Only stares resentfully into the fire).

Billy: My messages have been clearly precise. It's you!

It's you! who masturbate. How poor you are, all of you, blind without reason, knowing nothing but opinions, filling your wine glass minds with meaningless desires, aching for self, how little you understand. Yet, why do you want to annihilate me, why? I am innocent. You want me to take off my pants and go do a dance before your eyes - don't you see how you make me suffer? (*With rage now because in reply Graham, looking somehow significantly insignificant huddled by the fire only picks his nose and spits onto the red coals, making the coals go pop*) Well all RIGHT, sit there silent and dumb - destroy yourself! Dam you dam you! - all of it! So you've come for the harvest, have you? Well bravo! man of stone! - no no, not strength you fool; granite! Inert, Graham, like a vegetable. And I can't even pity you anymore, because pity is so devastating.

(There is no reply to this).

Did I ever tell you about Hardial? By the time he was eight his family gave up trying to understand him. Except his mother who never stopped trying. Even when the children of the village blamed him for their hideous crimes, only his mother went straight to the jail and passionately denied his guilt. Because he was her son. She loved him. But still you don't understand. You're too stupid, Dead. If I give you forty dollars, we're friends, right? What if I give you love, instead. I had a friend once...

I had a pretty good friend once, him 'n me were buddies at the Yale strike an' came in together on a small claim on the river and it paid us a livin' for awhile. Then dried up on us. My buddy took off while I was still scratchin' around Yale fer pickin's. We ain't buddies no more.

There's so much you could learn, Graham. Forget the booze and the gold, what does it matter? Life is much more important. Life is ... I remember one evening in San Francisco, the ocean water was clear and warm, the tide was in further than I'd ever seen it before. It washed up hard against

the banks of the cliffs, and Hardial and I rolled up our pant cuffs and climbed over the rocks and driftwood and waded knee deep in our shoes and socks, walking along the beach. It was beautiful. Later Hardial and I sat alone on the sand cliffs a little distance apart drying our feet in the friendly sand, watching the sunset scream its horizons across the sky, just like the color of this fire, the whole sky was screaming sunset, We sat locked in time for a long time saying nothing, yet acutely aware of each other's presence, what was there to say? I'll never forget that warm glow; yet, till later, we walked the hills in the night-hysteria of the city ignoring the squalor of drunks and the whiskey voiced women wailing for their demon lovers, we ignored all this, and instead talked of our relationship. Here we were, two grown men of profession, behaving like silly uninhibited children singing and lancing in joy along the street in our bare feet under the Elm trees. Even when Mary passed by in her carriage, rattling the windows disapprovingly, I didn't mind. The moon was greener and brighter than I'd ever seen it before Hardial quietly said: there's the man in the moon. I looked, and there he was laughing at me. For the first time in my life I saw him then, I remember how I felt at that moment, keen, so full of awareness -I could see! I could see! Oh I laughed with the inner knowledge of so many beauties. Yet, in a funny sort of way I was horribly lonely, because I thought all of a sudden about my life with Mary and as a lawyer and judge and realized suddenly how barren was my life, "Ah that's life; that's what life IS, Hardial said to me. "Life is infinite pain. And pain is suffering," Too bad he wasn't a woman. Too bad we could never have been lovers. God, I used to look into his fantastic face and see the incredible humanity of his face and think to myself I loved him. I even compared him to ... Graham? ... Graham? ... *(No response)* ... I see you've destroyed yourself utterly by falling asleep again.

(Again there is no response, Suddenly Billy grabs the

bedroll and shakes Graham violently out of it).

Graham: Fuck off asshole I'll ram your teeth down yer buggerin' throat ...

(Screaming) I .. am ... talking ... to ... you ...

(They confront each other intently for a moment - a strange kind of confrontation).

All right, Billy, all right ...

See ... always my problem ... always same dead fish.

Mothers hanging up in the air. Graham, come here, look, see the stars ... the moon Graham, look at it, the man in the moon, look, look, he is smiling ... aw what's the use. You're dead inside, all of you, the Graham Maximy's, the Tom's, the Mary's, you're all dead. So much mackerel. Okay, let's kick the dirt on the fire. Why don't we blow out the fire like good little boys and go beddy-bys Take a nice deep breath with our lungsy wungsies and go nightie nightems, and get up nice and early for the big day Hello day! Hello trees! Hello birds! ... here comes Graham Maximy back from destiny, back to Horse Fly to challenge the thieves of consciousness, buddy...

(Although Graham is the indistinct figure, huddled there, a sorry figure indeed, his sobs come like rifle shots barking in the night)

(After a pregnant pause) Graham ... I'm sorry. (Again a pause) Honest, I didn't mean to shame you. I didn't know you were going to cry ...

DON'T YOU TOUCH ME!

(Anguished, Graham begins to remake his bedroll. He accidentally nudges the fire With an almost audible groan it splits apart, showing a face wracked in agony, and from out of the centre the sparks leap skyward like streaming worms to become entangled in the branches of the trees, to dance and play there until the wind catches them and blows them fitfully, and slowly, out of sight. Only the cherry glow of the fire is left).

Billy: Hardial was an Aryan Indian from the Punjab

state. Tall, Slow moving. Quiet Very quiet. We talked often, staying together late into the night smoking, drinking scotch whisky. He told me about his boyhood in India. He used to sit under the banyan tree, his hair falling like black flax about his shoulders, and watch the other children of the village run down into the marketplace to steal pomegranates, or torment the cows drinking at the village fountain. How sad these children were, he said. So mean. So unaware. They even threw pomegranates at him while he sat there under his tree, and taunted him, called him names, like the messiah. While the parents, wielding their mighty cocks, wondered why this strange boy wasn't taken to the authorities and treated. And Hardial would sit and weep, the tears falling into his palms, burning holes in his flesh ... his passion burned in his mind so deeply. He wept at what they were doing to themselves. It was the children he suffered for, because they had so LITTLE in life, and he had so much. The time he came back from Louisiana to see me, I realized how simple it was, we were all the children. Mean. I ached to possess Hardial's awareness of life. I wanted his strength and humility, knowing that soon, in time, given sufficient preparation, I could evolve beyond even the pain. Then, then, Graham, I could have grown to love even the warriors. But I didn't have the strength. (For several seconds he stares, rigidly, directly into the fire) Dam her! Dam her!

(The birds have taken up abode far back in the mountains where the sun stirs. The sound drifts forward faint on the breath of wind. Nearby is the creek. Far away a bear goes crashing through the woods, And two small figures huddle by the fire; one of them Billy Barker of San Francisco)

Billy: How he hated my wife, She was the one woman in the world he hated. When they met for the first time, his face grew dark. He got up and silently left the room. I followed to see what had gone wrong, Hardial only said four words to me, 'our words that changed my life and crushed her forever.

He said, that woman is dead. But, I cried, how is she dead? Mary is beautiful. She has all the personality, family, good home, social prestige, all the amenities, I was hurt. I couldn't comprehend his strange despair of his. But he only shook his head grieving or me, saying I had been deceived by her physical deception. 'I looked deep into her eyes,' he said. "I have looked into the eyes of death." We never mentioned her name again. She was my wife.

(Graham has gone to sleep again. Now Billy is alone, the acute ache already upon him. In the brute force of the night is scream, too deep down and too far back to be heard, but it is here striving before him nevertheless)

Well, do you want me to tell you a little story? How I met Hardial? I came to him one day as a 'living' experience. This was an expression I couldn't fully understand until ten months ago ... ten months! ... One day we were alone in his room at the carding house. Suddenly he stiffened, an expression of unfathomable pleasure yet agonizing pain came into his face. He staggered to his feet and entered the bedroom shutting the door. After moment I became apprehensive and followed, found him lying on the bed drenched in sweat and utterly exhausted. You see, he had just had a transcendental experience - while we'd been talking a young girl who he'd last seen as a child in India, came into the room, 'living' as it were, as real to him as you and I, and passed through the table and advanced straight on into his body, entering him, literally becoming one with his body and soul. It hurts ... it hurts ... he said, exhausted on the bed ... you don't know what it's like! But the beautiful part was that I did know what he meant because I've had similar experiences - dreams: in our dreams, when the ghosts come round to possess us. At such times I've awakened warmed and excited, caught in the grue, remembering the dream. For days and sometimes weeks after I am haunted by the person of that dream. But you don't know what its like when you experience such a thing when you're

fully awake as I am, Hardial said. It is strong ... I keep telling you someday I will be killed by life. At the crucial moment my whole body stopped so that child could enter me, I could not move. I could not breathe. My body stopped a full thirty seconds. And it was so beautiful, he kept murmuring, ecstasy, don't you see, now how can I ever forget her? ... and yet, when it happens it is so excruciatingly painful. I am almost annihilated by the terrible pain. Each time it is stronger ... Isn't it funny, Graham, that this is how we became friends, by his terrible suffering. We'd met at the university in San Francisco where he was taking his PhD in chemistry. That same year he left for the eastern seaboard and I soon forgot him. But one morning I came to him, stepped out of the cherry bushes, shook the fruit off my body and seized him as he was walking through a garden in Louisiana, and entered him, spiritually, in the same way that child had. Now I was 'alive' in him. But the beauty of such ecstasy was almost too much for him, it almost annihilated him. Then, when he recovered, he left his friends, came straight back to San Francisco because now I was 'alive' in him. And that's when the tragedy began, I can still hear his quiet voice saying: we have so much beauty in ourselves, if only we could let it out, Billy. And so much pain. And pain, my friend, pain is living, alas that's what life IS. Suffering. And I would say yeah, huh huh, wishing to hell he'd go home and leave me alone so I could make love to Mary, because at first I never fully knew what he meant. But I know only too well what he meant. Those 'living' experiences had been happening to him since early childhood 'One day I am going to be killed by life' he kept telling me, shaking his mighty fist; 'you will see, someday that pain is going to kill me! Do you want to hear the cruellest joke life has ever played on a human being ... the night my wife, Mary, the night she came to him in all her horror and tried to enter him, that was the night ... that night he ... HE DIIIIIEED!

PART FOUR

The campsite has become a colossal wreck. Here, in the very trench of mountains under the blue ointment of god's sky, is a fervour of desolation- Billy Barker's mine shaft now dominates the hallowed ground where the fire once blew its cherry worms into the treetops. It is not a large shaft being hardly four feet to a side. A single man can hardly work in comfort at the bottom and two men would find it impossible. The hoist fits atop the open shaft and consists of a log and home-made crank handle with about fifty feet of rope extended into the hole. The ground for quite a distance is covered by mounds of gravel and spill. These are the waste material from the shaft.

Down the mountain trench some 50 feet from the shaft is the large creek which slides swiftly along the slope, tumbling down through the gorge and out, finally, onto a flatland which lies a mile distant around the bend. Except for the occasional moose and racoon the forest seems empty, A chink chink of a pick and shovel against loose gravel drifts out of the shaft.

Billy: (*In the shaft*) Ohhhhhh, the seduction of the stench. I stink ... therefore I am! Sniff sniff I smell Hottentot! I have a nose. But why not? I smell like a man ... god it stinks down here I'm going to throw up in about two minutes. (*Now Billy pulls himself painfully out of the shaft, tumbles onto the gravel, then leans exhausted against his castle. He is grubby, his old pants have quite a bag to them, the crotch sagging almost to the knees. Mud cakes his old and deformed boots. He scrapes what loose mud he can from his clothing and takes a long pull on a decanter of water. Restless now, he surveys his empire, looking first at the creek running downhill around the bend into the swamp, then looking up, behind him, to the cleft there in the mountains*).

(In a few minutes he staggers down to the water's edge

and there rinses his face, beard, ears, eyeballs, neck, arse, what-have-you. Taking off his boots he shakes them of loose gravel. Sniffs his underarm ... whew! In another minute he has hoisted the bucket out of the shaft. But there is nothing to show for his effort save a few crystals of iron pyrite clinking back and forth in the bottom of his gold pan.

Billy: Son of a bitch! Bloody quiet quiet QUIET! Not even a whimper of her hideous voice. *(Pause)* Pee-yeoo what a foul stench ... no sign ... not even a glimmer, a wink, a whisper. How many tons have I moved for nothing? Ten tons, twenty tons for nothing! That's the whole bloody trouble! Of course I'm not doing this correctly at all, according to rules of Tom's profession I'm supposed to stand here - thus, my hand on my breast - thus, and roll my scorching eyeballs to a muted heaven while the raging outpourings of my tormented soul roll heavily on into the bellows of time. Hey! ... you son of a bitch die! You're supposed to die! ... *(Quieter)* Well hah hah hah on you Mary I'm much too healthy. But what would you rather BE? Hardial cried; the agonized genius, or the happy vegetable. *(Overtaken by a brief spasm, suddenly he has a desperate need to hear a human voice, any voice, his own even) - (as loud as he can)* Hooooowwwmmmm! ... MY DOG HAS FLEAS! *(Down the shaft)* Mary ... Hey ... can you hear me down there. *(Dead silence)* Good. *(For a few minutes he sits atop one of the many piles of rubble, picking his nose. Suddenly he leaps to his feet)* Holy smokes I forgot what day it is. Sunday. Maybe. Saturday anyway. You're an atheist Billy Barker, did you know that. Y'know how come? ... if you weren't an atheist you would talk to your GOD at a time like this. Or if he wasn't around at least you could call upon one of his unethical disciples for a little hoary chit chat. But you Mr. William Stinky Barker who calls himself 'aesthetic' and 'aware' you are an atheist. *(For lack of anything better to do he tosses a few stones down his shaft. Finally he dumps out the bucket and pitches it back down the shaft, the crank*

handle going squeak, squeak squeak...).

(In time, an old man climbing a near-invisible trail makes his way up to the mine site. He is a prospector whose age is questionable for he SEEMS very old. He is a native Indian of central British Columbia, who has prospected for gold in these mountains and creeks, east of the Cariboo Trail, for many years).

Chief Buckles: *(Rapping the side of the shaft with his staff)*
Hey, Billy Barker whatcha' watch out fer them gold for ...

Billy: *(Overjoyed to see the chief)* Hey ... hello old man... *(bounding out of the shaft)* ... man it's good to see you again.

(As if continuing another conversation from the past)
Yep... *(Stooping to light his pipe)* ... you gotta watch out fer her Billy.

Sit down chief. Tell me about your trip to Horse Fly. Tell me about Horse Fly. Did you see Graham?

Listen me Billy ... see, this rich young cockbuster from south, he come Horse Fly lookin' fer gold claim to buy up ... maybe ...

I know that story already. You've told me that story already. Twice already.

I saw interestin' ting back up in them mountains. Ever see spoo-bor Billy?

A what ... a spoo-bor?

Them squirrels gather pine cones and eat them seeds, throw cones in big pile. Them furry critters must be smart ... see ... always leave them cones in the forest, in same place. Pretty soon she pile up ... big ... thirty feet 'cross maybe, twenty feet. Big spoo-bor.

Ho ho Buckles I know what you're up to but you won't fool Billy with your cheap trick. Now I have a question. What would YOU do?

Yessir ... them squirrels ain't so dumb as them white man... they store plenty seeds fer winter, it's them whisky jack's are

lazy. Yep. Buggers not want to gather own pine cones yessir much too smart. Squirrels them critters do the work. Squirrels hide pine cones all over the place, bury em, stomp on em, dump em on spoo-bor, hide em in hollow tree ... hard workin' ... like me. An' that ol' whisky jack he comes a hungry lookin' where them pine cones. When he hungry like me he head fer nearest tree. That squirrel in hole, he looks out, he sees that whisky jack comin', boy oh boy then the fur and feathers fly ... the whisky jack he comes barrelin' out the hole with squirrel clamped to his leg. Yep, thet squirrel smart man too. He wait till whisky jack flyin' over safe place, like spoo-bor, then let go ... down he fall like bird - rrrrrrrmmm - pink!

(Billy and the old Indian lean together against the shaft and laugh unrestrained. Unfortunately the laughter eventually dries up, leaving nothing behind. Taking his time the old man gropes in his pants pocket for a tiny tin whistle which, incredibly, he blows. It makes no sound).

Buckles: Mule Anna she wander off someplace no good ... maybe three days ago ... two maybe ... I blow whistle maybe she come back. *(He blows again. Again no sound).*

Billy: Can you whistle with your fingers? *(He tries but fails)* I used to be able to. Hey, can you roll your r's ... I can't do that, either ... boys at the orphanage used to call me trench mouth because I couldn't roll my r's, yep, those thieves of consciousness made me feel guilty and inadequate alright ... drrrr ... drrrr ... drrrr ... dam! ... drrrr ... drrrr. Can't do it - see Buckles why they condemned me!

(Intently confronting this unusual white man) You good man Billy. No understand what you say, what you do here, But you good good fella. But look. But look See how my hands have toughened. I'm not used to hard work and man, it's beautiful to be so tough. Down in limbo where I come from we're all too busy with whatever it is we crave out of life to look after ourselves properly. But that's not important anymore. Here, feel my calluses.

Sure tough ... strong.

You know what I enjoy most of all out here in this isolation? My hands. The ability to use my hands. Look at the scars! Four weeks ago these scars were blisters, and the blisters got blisters, and the second blisters infected, festered, and soon I gazed upon the bones of my rotting hands And I scraped the dirt off the bones, and went right on digging. But my hands have toughened along nicely now at twenty knots.

Man like you, I figer' he should dig here (*gestures ahead to the mountains*) ... here ... (*gestures to the east*) ... here ... (north) ... but not dig here Only fool's gold here Billy. I bin prospectin' this creek long time, long long time, before you born, a long time. I never seen gold Billy, Only fool's gold.

(*Shrugs*) Maybe. (*Shrugs*) Maybe, (*Suddenly angry*) Oh anguish ... anguish ... why does everybody ARGUE with me! (*Pushing Chief Buckles to the edge of the clearing*) You see the mountain here? this creek which comes out of it? Last spring when I stood here and watched the runoff roar down this gorge moving huge boulders and tons of gravel in the torrent - remember, we stood right on the bank down there by the whirlpool and listened to the screams of the boulders smashing together underwater like rifle shots. Is this not the same water system which feeds all the gold creeks from here to Horse Fly? I think the mother lode's back there in the mountains. I think gold has been washing down here for centuries, gathering in the crotch of this trough. But - aha - not in the creek itself, where you and the others have looked - no, no, its down below underground where the original creek bed lies. You assholes in Horse Fly can't see past the end of your purple wriggling noses. I'm tired of being criticized and laughed at by people who won't listen. Last week I found a few flakes in the pan. I can SEE it. Isn't that enough?

You good man Billy. (*Buckles has lifted his pack sack to his back and retaken his staff, ready to go on his way*).

Maybe. I'll keep a look out for the thieves who stole your

mule.

You good good man.

(Before the old man has crossed the clearing Billy suddenly calls him back. Opening his stores Billy takes out a half empty sack of corn meal, dumps most of it into another sack which he gives to chief Buckles, saying): Here, old man, take this, you need it more than I do. (The old man then labours with his staff on up the trail, is finally gone. Weary, Billy returns the corn meal to stores. Hardly ANYthing is left. Meanwhile a strange kind of shudder is creeping upon him, and in the instant he turns to his shaft he is transformed into a fantastic figure by the weird rhythm. In a moment it passes away, unnoticed).

(He climbs back down the shaft to do what he must do. Meanwhile, the sky begins to change - begins to fill with strange shapes which gradually become a sea of transparent bubbles, seething and growing in a sky of blue, green, and yellow colors).

(Billy stops digging. A moment of incoherent muttering follows. Suddenly he comes bursting out of the shaft, cranks up the bucket and spills it onto the ground. Without even going to the water for a wash he can see scattered dozens of nuggets. They are big. There is no fantastic response - just a giggle. Calmly he picks the nuggets from the gravel. At last he takes what black sand remains in his pan to the creek, returns forthwith with a layer of flakes in his burning palm, carefully pours the gold into a leather pouch).

Fantastic ... fantastic ... its mine ... mine ... well come out and sniff your rosegarden, NOW Mrs. Peabody. *(Dances a jig)* Yahoo! ... *(Shouting down the shaft, shaking his mighty fist in defiance)* Gold! I knew you were down there ... you cheat, you liar ... you mother fucker. I want jewels and diamonds, power ... beautiful women to fill my life - everything. I want them to listen to me ... *(wearily he collapses against the shaft)* *(softly)* I want Hardial. I'm a miner forty niner and I've lost

my Hardial. But Billy, you too? even you, ye gods not you too Billy not you too ... (*laments*) dead these twelve months ... arrgghh let me not think on it. (*Then, singing a nameless tune*) I have a pain in my heart ... I have a pain in my heart ... in my heart I have a pain ... (*again talking*) Gold! Gold! So I have found you. Dig dig dig dig - bark bark! - now THERE'S a sound to remember! t'was the sound of her hideous voice. Alas she did have a beautiful voice. What did Hardial mean, Mary tried to seduce him? 'That woman came into my room and threatened me' he said. I looked at her wriggling face. Mary, I said, what kind of a man am I if I permit such a sacrilege!! (*Laughing as if he were Hardial*) Hah hah hah hah ... and later Mary said: 'Well all RIGHT! So I DID go to his room. I asked him, I pleaded with him, to leave my husband alone!

(*At this Billy becomes restless again. He takes off his shirt and rinses it in the creek, waving the shirt merrily in the air to dry it, in the end puts it on wet*) (*Shouting loudly*) Hey is anyone out there? Are you out there god? Good, then you won't mind if I take off this dirty underwear. (*Going nude to the creek he washes both his pants and his ridiculous underwear. In the sky the seething bubbles have been changing again, gradually becoming different shades of red, yellow, orange, clamouring loudly across the zodiac of the mind*) (*Suddenly*) Why am I here? Why have I left my homeland and come to this God-forsaken place? All my life I have been manipulated. As a boy and as an adult people have tried to manipulate me, telling me to do this, I should do that. Nobody ever came to ask what I wanted, see how they BLED me! ... she even manipulated me out of my virginity. (*Suddenly overwhelmed again by the need to hear his own voice*) (*Raging*) I am William Anchile Barker, 29 last April, I had a mother who wouldn't love me... father ... was born a bastard in the streets of a bitter cold winter, was raised in an orphanage, married once, wife sterile no kids yet. Goal-oriented, enslaved with position, money,

debts, the whole catastrophe. (*Falsetto*) And now my death... what ghastly fashions Lu-ellen wore to the ho-hum, opera tonight. The person who rescued me from all this death was Indian. As a boy he used to sit under the banyan tree in his homeland and dream about becoming a man. This boy had guts. Determination. Yet he was tyrannized by my wife, by her family, friends, thrown out of houses, forced to live in pig sties and cheap hotels. He was avoided, spat on, bludgeoned day and night by San Francisco, charged with cheap tricks, lies, slander, greed, sexual pervert, academic washout, homosexual, insanity. One night he came to me wounded, stabbed to the core by their cheap tricks and hatred. He said 'I shall go crazy when I see them that way, how they want to masturbate themselves! We staggered together under the moon, and I saw his tortured eyes glitter and ached at what my people had done. That man could have saved humanity. That man could have taught the world how to love. Hey mountains, hey trees, (*opening his shirt*) Hey buggie boos, c'mon, come here, let me tell you about the men who horrified Hardial. Let me tell you about all the Graham Maximy's and the Tom's and Mary's ... let me tell you about Billy Barker of Bellows: This kind of a man is no good. His entire life he spends arguing about navels - if I die in Nazareth the law says, I shall be buried in Nazareth. If I die in Samaria, they will bury me in Samaria. But! - aha! - if I die exactly half way in between! here is a serious dilemma, where shall I be buried? And if I am to be buried, WHO SHALL BURY ME? Suppose I haven't died yet; if they are to carry me across the plains and subdue me at all before the barking dogs get to me is it because the boundry line for such decision passes through my heart, or my genitals? Poor Graham, if only he could have transcended his clap trap, if only he could have become a man. Am I such a man? Am I wishy washy? Am I a coward who runs away

persecuted and torn by life? I have strength. I have guts. If there is a god out there let him come out and confront me so that I can fight him with my bare fists. Or make me into a vegetable so that I can screw women sensuously. Oh horror I hear the barking dogs coming - back off! back off you f'king vultures stay away from me! Hardial oh god they all want to profane our humanity.

PART FIVE

Nothing is the same. Where trees in abundance once blew their messages into the forest an entire city has sprung into sight. There is nothing subtle about it. His city practically fills the trench. It follows the creek for three quarters of a mile down the hill and blankets the mountainside with tents and shacks almost to the summits.

The creek, much altered now, is hardly more than a trickle down the ravine, through the tailings. Both banks are covered with shafts, wooden sluice boxes, mounds of tailings, and other labours. While at the uppermost and where it all started is Billy Barker's abandoned mineshaft, smelling of weather.

Running parallel to the creek is the only street in the city. There is a second thoroughfare, a trail which crosses the creek on a makeshift bridge and services the other side. Elsewhere are paths which thread here and there up the sides of the ravine through the close quartered tents. From the back of the chinaman's shack built on the upper end of the street, a large picture window opens onto the street, which is a wagon road with deep ruts filled with trickles of water from the September rain. The window is actually an eye into another reality, for practically the whole of Barkerville strives into view from this window. Here on the street are the government assay offices, the noisy saloons, the wooden hotel, the whore house, the steeple of St. Savior's Anglican Church, and the small figure of Mary, her hands folded in her coat, slipping along the nits of the soggy street up the gradual slope towards the shack.

There is no answer when she knocks on the back door. Is he here, she asks; is THIS the place? She knocks again, hesitates, then enters to find him in a fitful sleep lying on a dirty cot. His blanket has fallen in a heap on the floor. Not quite certain anymore Mary paces the room for a few minutes. She has lost both her hard exterior and her sensuous glamour.

She is almost gentle. Cautiously so as not to disturb him she fixes the blanket over his legs, then prepares for a long wait. After a minute she cries out in horror:

O look at you! (*In deep sorrow*) My god what have they done to you. Billy: (*Rousing at her voice; his body alive with convulsions*) It hurts ... it hurts ...

Mary: (*Pained*) Good God I can hardly bear to look at you ... Mary ... Mary ... - please - the pain is killing me and I can't stop it...

(*Billy wraps the blanket tightly around his body so that only his terrible face peers out at her. He lies on the cold cot in the cold room close to the window. There is no glass in the window, the floor beneath the sash is stained from continual rain and the harsh weather*).

(*At this moment an enormous cornish water wheel which straddles the creek some quarter mile distant, slowly and ponderously begins to turn and the men under it run back and forth, shouting, trying to control it. Even at this distance its stiffness is audible as a high pitched shrieking*).

Mary: (*Confused*) What's happened to you!

I don't know.

What's brought you to be living in a place like this?

(*No answer*)

(*Becoming scared*) Where's your wealth. What are you doing (*gesturing to the bare walls*) holed up in the back room of the Chinese laundry?

(*Again nothing but his terrifying stare*).

Where's your gold?

I gave it away.

(*With an embarrassed laugh*) Oh dear, this isn't what I expected at all. In San Francisco you've become almost a legend. Everybody keeps talking about Billy Barker, like you were some kind of god. You're supposed to have discovered so much gold here, everybody getting rich. But ... this! (*Gestures to what is before their eyes*) Even the city is different from

what I expected. I expected to find something big. Spectacular. The newspapers in San Francisco said Barkerville was the largest city west of Chicago and North of San Francisco. But a city of tents a whole city of shacks and TENTS! Oh it's vile. (*Then*) Isn't it funny, I can just HEAR how Tom and mother would be criticising you if they were here and saw you this way. Funny, how I'm beginning to understand certain things about Hardial after all this time. You were right, I was always ugly. When you punched me in the face in that hotel room, I wasn't hurt or humiliated, I was enraged. I hated you, ohhhhhhhh how HATED you.

Hate, Mary? Hate? And I loved you.

(*Quietly*) Don't worry everything's going to be alright. (*Re-arranging his blanket to make him more comfortable.*) Oh dear -I didn't want Hardial to die, I only wanted him to leave you alone. Oh I feel so lost. What are we going to do, Billy? We can't go on teasing each other indefinitely. You belong in a proper home, with me, I have nothing anymore, except you. Where can I go? Billy please come back to San Francisco with me?

(*Billy looks at her incredulously. There is both the grotesque yet strange kind of certainty in his strange sounding voice*) With my mighty bare fists I made Barkerville. Shhhhh ... can you not hear it, the bums and whores and the wrecks of men, out there, screaming? I gave away ... I gave away ... (*he can't pronounce the word. Instead he utters*) anybody who asked for gold I gave them money. I even gave gold to Graham because he was sick inside and dying, and all they did was hang him for being a vagrant on the streets of Barkerville and throw my pouch of gold back in my face in contempt,, contempt, for a man who gave away money. (*Throwing off the blanket and struggling to his feet*) And I withered and cracked and my eyes went black and my face split open wet and dark and dripping and there, inside, were all your wriggling faces, laughing, manipulating me ... (*laughing suddenly, hideously*)

hah ha ahaaaa haaaaaa ... look at me ... can't you see ... you
people think I am immortal ... that I am a god ... THIS IS MY
IMMORTALITYYYYYYYYY ...

EPILOGUE

It is Billy Barker's weeping hour but the ghost is crying Billy is alone in the street. He has no shoes or decent clothing. His pants are tied with a piece of stained rope. Spread about him on the wooden sidewalk are his pitifully few belongings. This grinning creature is trying in his state of confusion to stuff these fragments into his rucksack - an accounting of his life so to speak, but they keep falling from his terrible hands. He is ignorant of the life around him; existing as it were near death only to pack his rucksack. Because his breathing is so effected he makes grunting noises due to his constant seizures. Frequently he collapses in a wave of nausea brought on by his condition only to rouse himself to resume trying to pack his rucksack.

Partially obliterated in the shadows, Mary watches in slow horror from a doorway. Some boys come running from behind the chinaman's. They are playing with gold nuggets, throwing them into the air and catching them on the run, One of the boys drops his nugget, which accidentally rolls under Billy's feet. The boy, about nine or ten years old, tries to reach between Billy's legs for the nugget but Billy sitting on the edge of the sidewalk does not see him and continues to pack his rucksack. Finally the boy looks up into Billy's face:

Hey gimmie my nugget, yu dumb son of a bitch.

All the boys laugh, and rush off, leaving Billy alone with his task.

The bubbles have begun to materialize in the sky over Barkerville, they seethe in a slow - shifting panoply of green, red, and orange colors that seem to drift forward, then recede, then grow again, to fade finally into the infinity of the mind.

There in the street a figure of Hardial begins to form, soon it towers over him an image of enormous beauty and strength

filling the whole street, it seems, waiting for Billy. Grinning still, Billy suddenly sees the image moving slowly away from him down the street. Now with his rucksack packed he struggles to his feet and starts, with his infinite capacity for suffering pain, to stagger after Hardial. But the ghost vanishes. Alone all of a sudden, what more can he do but cry - lifting his hands high over his head and screaming - because now he has lost even the capacity for feeling pain:

Oh hhhh Goddddd agonyyyyyyy

And now Mary suddenly comes forward, sharply out of depth, yet knowing already that it is too late for him. The echoes of his last cry gone, the strange figure stands there in the street, turning this way, that way, not knowing which way to go, his hands crossed futilely in front of his genitals, the urine dribbling in spurts down his leg. Beginning to weep, the spastic gradually succumbs to the great beast in him until his distorted cries become agonized wracks.

On a day late in October, late in the afternoon, a woman puts her arm around a shivering spastic and leads him gently along the rutted street, out of Barkerville. It is beginning to snow. She has put stockings on his feet and her coat over his shoulders. After a long time she says:

Yes, we're going home Billy. There, that's a good boy, keep trying ... cry Billy ...

He is smiling.

AT THE START OF THE AQUARIAN AGE

Just to say why Greydon Moore is an important and necessary broadcast on the Vancouver frequency. First thing is his phenomenal versatility - a neo-Renaissance cool. In an era of specialties, including the poet (rigid) poet, Greydon bangs his head against an amazing variety of walls. Began as drummer on the Vancouver scene in the early sixties, gigging with jazz musicians such as Don Thompson who became bass player in John Handy's awesome quintet. He has acted; a lead part as defence council in the award winning CBC Festival production of 'How To Break A Quarter-horse'. As character extra he turned up alongside Rita Tushingham for a scene in 'The Trap'. He was editor of the *Artisan* at UBC the year it was good. Lately Greydon has uncovered intriguing relationships between many fundamental constants in physics, like π , the speed of light, particle mass-energy, gravity; speculations which have mind-blown a good number of people, (impact with regard to the concrete value of poetic intuition - qua Goethe, qua Bergson). A brief period as publicity assistant for the Playhouse Theatre Company (1965). Then a year with a film producer who had contracts to produce major films on the west coast, tho these prospects failed when local financiers failed to provide operating capital to start productions.

Greydon has read poetry in many places, most recently on the pop folk-rock scene at both the *Retinal Circus* and the *Bistro*, bringing poetry to the population; and best of all, has published two volumes of richest poetry, *Themes From the Morning Mist* (1965), and *Form* (with C.D.N. Elsted 1967). On the academic side he has spoken at three UBC symposiums in the past two years.

Greydon is this intellectually omnivorous not because of any pretensions - anyone who knows him will tell you what an extremely unassuming person he is. On the contrary, it is because he lacks any kind of personal provincial vanity that he opens his mind to so many things considered beyond the poets province, things which many poets would drop like radioactive material. Consequently, his poetry is more expansive, more universal, like the poetry of Kenneth Patchen, or Cris Elsted which Greydon grooves on deeply. With this work, his first novel, he adds another constellation to his universe.

Greydon was born in Montreal in 1939. He will die, we hope, in Vancouver - but some time far removed on the continuum.

-Roy Starrs