

A Complicated Nature

AT A PARTY ONCE Attridge overheard a woman saying he gave her the shivers. "Vicious-tongued," this woman, a Mrs de Paul, had said. "Forked like a serpent's."

It was true, and he admitted it to himself without apology, though "sharp" was how he preferred to describe the quality the woman had referred to. He couldn't help it if his quick eye had a way of rooting out other people's defects and didn't particularly bother to search for virtues.

Sharp about other people, he was sharp about himself as well: confessing his own defects, he found his virtues tedious. He was kind and generous to the people he chose as his friends, and took it for granted that he should be. He was a tidy man, but took no credit for that since being tidy was part of his nature. He was meticulous about his dress, and he was cultured, being particularly keen on opera—especially the operas of Wagner—and on Velasquez. He had developed his own good taste, and was proud of the job he had made of it.

A man of fifty, with reddish hair which had greyed a little, and spectacles with fine, colourless rims, he was given to slimming, for the weight he had gained in middle age rounded his face and made it pinker than he cared for: vanity was a weakness in him.

Attridge had once been married. In 1952 his parents had died, his father in February and his mother in November. Attridge had been their only child and had always lived with them. Disliking—or so he then considered—the solitude their death left him in, he married in 1953 a girl called Bernice Golder, but this most unfortunate conjunction had lasted only three months. "Nasty dry old thing," his ex-wife had screamed at him on their honeymoon in Siena, and he had enraged her further by pointing out that nasty and dry he

might be but old he wasn't. "You were never young," she had replied more calmly than before. "Even as a child you must have been like dust." That wasn't so, he tried to explain; the truth was that he had a complicated nature. But she didn't listen to him.

Attridge lived alone now, existing comfortably on profits from the shares his parents had left him. He occupied a flat in a block, doing all his own cooking and taking pride in the small dinner parties he gave. His flat was just as his good taste wished it to be. The bathroom was tiled with blue Italian tiles, his bedroom severe and male, the hall warmly rust. His sitting-room, he privately judged, reflected a part of himself that did not come into the open, a mysterious element that even he knew little about and could only guess at. He'd saved up for the Egyptian rugs, scarlet and black and brown, on the waxed oak boards. He'd bought the first one in 1959 and each year subsequently had contrived to put aside his January and February Anglo-American Telegraph dividends until the floor was covered. He'd bought the last one a year ago.

On the walls of the room there was pale blue hessian, a background for his four tiny Velasquez drawings, and for the Toulouse-Lautrec drawing and the Degas, and the two brown charcoal studies, school of Michelangelo. There was a sofa and a sofa-table, authenticated Sheraton, and a Regency table in marble and gold that he had almost made up his mind to get rid of, and some Staffordshire figures. There was drama in the decoration and arrangement of the room, a quite flamboyant drama that Attridge felt was related to the latent element in himself, part of his complicated nature.

"I'm hopeless in an emergency," he said in this room one afternoon, speaking with off-

putting asperity into his ivory-coloured telephone. A woman called Mrs Matara, who lived in the flat above him, appeared not to hear him. "Something has gone wrong, you see," she explained in an upset voice, adding that she'd have to come down. She then abruptly replaced the receiver.

It was an afternoon in late November. It was raining, and already—at half-past three—twilight had settled in. From a window of his sitting-room Attridge had been gazing at all this when his telephone rang. He'd been looking at the rain dismally falling and lights going on in other windows and at a man, five storeys down, sweeping sodden leaves from the concrete forecourt of the block of flats. When the phone rang he'd thought it might be his friend, old Mrs Harcourt-Egan. He and Mrs Harcourt-Egan were to go together to Persepolis in a fortnight's time and there were still some minor arrangements to be made, although the essential booking had naturally been completed long since. It had been a considerable surprise to hear himself addressed by name in a voice he had been quite unable to place. He'd greeted Mrs Matara once or twice in the lift and that was all: she and her husband had moved into the flats only a year ago.

"I do so apologise," Mrs Matara said when he opened the door to her. Against his will he welcomed her into the hall and she, knowing the geography of the flat since it was the same as her own, made for the sitting-room. "It's really terrible of me," she said, "only I honestly don't know where to turn." She spoke in a rushed and agitated manner, and he sighed as he followed her, resolving to point out when she revealed what her trouble was that Chamberlain, the janitor at the flats, was specially employed to deal with tenants' difficulties. She was just the kind of woman to make a nuisance of herself with a neighbour, you could tell that by looking at her. It irritated him that he hadn't sized her up better when he'd met her in the lift.

SHE WAS A WOMAN of about the same age as himself, he guessed, small and thin and black-haired, though the hair, he also guessed, was almost certainly dyed. He wondered if she might be Jewish, which

would account for her emotional condition: she had a Jewish look, and the name was presumably foreign. Her husband, whom he had also only met in the lift, had a look about the eyes which Attridge now said to himself might well have been developed in the clothing business. Of Austrian origin, he hazarded, or possibly even Polish. Mrs Matara had an accent of some kind, although her English appeared otherwise to be perfect. She was not out of the top drawer, but then people of the Jewish race rarely were. His own ex-wife, Jewish also, had most certainly not been.

Mrs Matara sat on the edge of a chair that he had bought for ninety guineas fifteen years ago. It was almost certainly Sheraton, a high-backed chair with slim arms in inlaid walnut. He'd had it resprung and upholstered and covered in striped pink, four different shades.

"A really ghastly thing," Mrs Matara said. "A terrible thing has happened in my flat, Mr Attridge."

She'd fused the whole place. She couldn't turn a tap off. The garbage disposal unit had failed. His wife had made a ridiculous fuss when, because of her own stupidity, she'd broken her electric hair-curling apparatus on their honeymoon. Grotesque she'd looked with the plastic objects in her hair, he'd been relieved that they didn't work.

"I really can't mend anything," he said. "Chamberlain is there for that, you know."

She shook her head. She was like a small bird sitting there, a wren or an undersized sparrow. A Jewish sparrow, he said to himself, pleased with this analogy. She had a handkerchief between her fingers, a small piece of material, which she now raised to her face. She touched her eyes with it, one after the other. When she spoke again she said that a man had died in her flat.

"Good heavens!"

"It's terrible!" Mrs Matara cried. "Oh, my God!"

He poured brandy from a Georgian decanter that Mrs Harcourt-Egan had given him three Christmases ago, after their trip to Sicily. She'd given him a pair, in appreciation of what she called his kindness on that holiday. The gesture had been far too generous: the decanters were family heirlooms, and he'd done so little for her in Sicily apart from reading *Northanger Abbey* aloud when she'd had her stomach upset.

The man, he guessed, was not Mr Matara. No woman would say that a man had died, meaning her husband. Attridge imagined that a window-cleaner had fallen off a step-ladder. Quite clearly, he saw in his mind's eye a step-ladder standing at a window and the body of a man in white overalls huddled on the ground. He even saw Mrs Matara bending over the body, attempting to establish its condition.

"Drink it all," he said, placing the brandy glass in Mrs Matara's right hand, hoping as he did so that she wasn't going to drop it.

She didn't drop it. She drank the brandy and then, to Attridge's surprise, held out the glass in a clear request for more.

"Oh, if only you would," she said as he poured it, and he realised that while he'd been pouring the first glass, while his mind had been wandering back to the occasion in Sicily and the gift of the decanters, his guest had made some demand of him.

"You could say he was a friend," Mrs Matara said.

SHE WENT ON talking. The man who had died had died of a heart attack. The presence of his body in her flat was an embarrassment. She told a story of a love affair that had begun six years ago. She went into details: she had met the man at a party given by people called Morton, the man was married, what point was there in hurting a dead man's wife? What point was there in upsetting her own husband, when he need never know? She rose and crossed the room to the brandy decanter. The man, she said, had died in the bed that was her husband's as well as hers.

"I wouldn't have come here—oh God, I wouldn't have come here if I hadn't been desperate." Her voice was shrill. She was nearly hysterical, The brandy had brought out two patches of brightness in her cheeks. Her eyes were watering again, but she did not now touch them with the handkerchief. The water ran, over the bright patches, trailing mascara and other make-up with it.

"I sat for hours," she cried. "Well, it seemed like hours. I sat there looking at him. We were both without a stitch, Mr Attridge."

"Good heavens!"

"I didn't feel anything at all. I didn't love him, you know. All I felt was, Oh God what

a thing to happen!"

Attridge poured himself some brandy, feeling the need of it. She reminded him quite strongly of his ex-wife, not just because of the Jewish thing or the nuisance she was making of herself but because of the way she had so casually said they'd been without a stitch. In Siena on their honeymoon his ex-wife had constantly been flaunting her nakedness, striding about their bedroom. "The trouble with you," she'd said, "you like your nudes on canvas."

"You could say he was a friend," Mrs Matara said again. She wanted him to come with her to her flat. She wanted him to help her dress the man. In the name of humanity, she was suggesting, they should falsify the location of death.

He shook his head, outraged and considerably repelled. The images in his mind were most unpleasant. There was the naked male body, dead on a bed. There were Mrs Matara and himself pulling the man's clothes on to his body, struggling because *rigor mortis* was setting in.

"Oh God, what can I do?" cried Mrs Matara.

"I think you should telephone a doctor, Mrs Matara."

"Oh, what use's a doctor, for God's sake? The man's dead."

"It's usual—"

"Look, one minute we're having lunch—an omelette, just as usual, and salad and Pouilly Fuissé—and the next minute the poor man's dead."

"I thought you said—"

"Oh, you know what I mean. 'Lovely, oh darling, lovely,' he said, and then he collapsed. Well, I didn't know he'd collapsed. I mean, I didn't know he was dead. He collapsed just like he always collapses. Post-coital—"

"I'd rather not hear—"

"Oh, for Jesus sake!" She was shouting. She was on her feet, again approaching the decanter. Her hair had fallen out of the pins that held it and was now dishevelled. Her lipstick was blurred, some of it even smeared her chin. She looked most unattractive, he considered.

"I cannot help you in this matter, Mrs Matara," he said as firmly as he could. "I can telephone a doctor—"

"Will you for God's sake stop about a doctor!"

"I cannot assist you with your friend, Mrs Matara."

"All I want you to do is to help me put his clothes back on. He's too heavy, I can't do it myself—"

"I'm very sorry, Mrs Matara."

"And slip him down here. The lift is only a few yards—"

"That's quite impossible."

She went close to him, with her glass considerably replenished. She pushed her face at his in a way that he considered predatory. He was aware of the smell of her scent, and of another smell that he couldn't prevent himself from thinking must be the smell of sexual intercourse: he had read of this odour in a book by Ernest Hemingway.

"My husband and I are a contentedly married couple," she said, with her lips so near to his that they almost touched. "That man upstairs has a wife who doesn't know a thing, an innocent woman. Don't you understand such things, Mr Attridge? Don't you see what will happen if the dead body of my lover is discovered in my husband's bed? Can't you visualise the pain it'll cause?"

He moved away. It was a long time since he had felt so angry and yet he was determined to control his anger. The woman knew nothing of civilised behaviour or she wouldn't have come bursting into the privacy of a stranger, with preposterous and unlawful suggestions. The woman, for all he knew, was unbalanced.

"I'm sorry," he said in what he hoped was an icy voice. "I'm sorry, but for a start I do not see how you and your husband could possibly be a contentedly married couple."

"I'm telling you we are. I'm telling you my lover was contentedly married also. Listen, Mr Attridge." She approached him again, closing in on him like an animal, he considered. "Listen, Mr Attridge: we met for physical reasons, once a week at lunch time. For five years, ever since the Mortons' party, we've been meeting once a week, for an omelette and Pouilly Fuissé, and sex. It had nothing to do with our two marriages. But it will now: that woman will see her marriage as a failure now. She'll mourn it for the rest of her days, when she should be mourning her husband. I'll be divorced."

"You should have thought of that—"

SHE HIT HIM with her right hand. She hit him on the face, the palm of her hand stinging the pink, plump flesh.

"Mrs Matara!"

He had meant to shout her name, but instead his protest came from him in a shrill whisper. Since his honeymoon no one had struck him, and he recalled the fear he'd felt when he'd been struck then, in the bedroom in Siena. "I could kill you," his ex-wife had shouted at him. "I'd kill you if you weren't dead already."

"I must ask you to go, Mrs Matara," he said in the same shrill whisper. He cleared his throat. "At once," he said, in a more successful voice.

She shook her head. She said he had no right to tell her what she should have thought of. She was upset as few women can ever be upset: in all decency and humanity it wasn't fair to say she should have thought of that. She cried out noisily in his sitting-room and he felt that he was in a nightmare. It had all the horror and absurdity and violence of a nightmare: the woman standing in front of him with water coming out of her eyes, drinking his brandy and hitting him.

She spoke softly then, not in her violent way. She placed the brandy glass on the marble surface of the Regency table and stood there with her head down. He knew she was still weeping even though he couldn't see her face and couldn't hear any noise coming from her. She whispered that she was sorry.

"Please forgive me, Mr Attridge. I'm very sorry."

He nodded, implying that he accepted this apology. It was all very nasty, but for the woman it was naturally an upsetting thing to happen. He imagined, when a little time had passed, telling the story to Mrs Harcourt-Egan and to others, relating how a woman, to all intents and purposes a stranger to him, had telephoned him to say she was in need of assistance and then had come down from her flat with this awful tragedy to relate. He imagined himself describing Mrs Matara, how at first she'd seemed quite smart and then had become dishevelled, how she'd helped herself to his brandy and had suddenly struck him. He imagined Mrs Harcourt-Egan

and others gasping when he said that. He seemed to see his own slight smile as he went on to say that the woman could not be blamed. He heard himself saying that the end of the matter was that Mrs Matara just went away.

But in fact Mrs Matara did not go away. Mrs Matara continued to stand, weeping quietly.

"I'm sorry too," he said, feeling that the words, with the finality he'd slipped into them, would cause her to move to the door of the sitting-room.

"If you'd just help me," she said, with her head still bent. "Just to get his clothes on."

He began to reply. He made a noise in his throat.

"I can't manage," she said, "on my own."

She raised her head and looked across the room at him. Her face was blotched all over now, with make-up and tears. Her hair had fallen down a little more, and from where he stood Attridge thought he could see quite large areas of grey beneath the black. A rash of some kind, or it might have been flushing, had appeared on her neck.

"I wouldn't bother you," she said, "if I could manage on my own." She would have telephoned a friend, she said, except there wouldn't be time for a friend to get to the block of flats. "There's very little time, you see," she said.

IT WAS THEN, while she spoke those words, that Attridge felt the first hint of excitement. It was the same kind of excitement that he experienced just before the final curtain of *Tannhauser*, or whenever, in the Uffizi, he looked upon Credi's Annunciation. Mrs Matara was a wretched, unattractive creature who had been conducting a typical hole-in-corner affair and had received her just rewards. It was hard to feel sorry for her, and yet for some reason it was harder not to. The man who had died had got off scot-free, leaving her to face the music miserably on her own. "You're inhuman," his ex-wife had said in Siena. "You're incapable of love. Or sympathy, or anything else." She'd stood there in her underclothes, taunting him: tall and dark and beautiful she'd been, like a Rubens creature.

"I'll manage," Mrs Matara said, moving towards the door.

He did not move himself. She'd been so impatient, all the time in Siena. She didn't even want to sit in the square and watch the people. She'd been lethargic in the cathedral. All she'd ever wanted was to try again in bed. "You don't like women," she'd said, sitting up with a glass of Brolio in her hand, smoking a cigarette.

He followed Mrs Matara into the hall, and an image entered his mind of the dead man's wife. He saw her as Mrs Matara had described her, as an innocent woman who believed herself faithfully loved. He saw her as a woman with fair hair, in a garden, simply dressed. She had borne the children of the man who now lay obscenely dead, she had made a home for him and had entertained his tedious business friends, and now she was destined to suffer. It was a lie to say he didn't like women, it was absurd to say he was incapable of sympathy.

Once more he felt a hint of excitement. It was a confused feeling now, belonging as much in his body as in his mind. In a dim kind of way he seemed again to be telling the story to Mrs Harcourt-Egan or to someone else. Telling it, his voice was quiet. It spoke of the compassion he had suddenly felt for the small unattractive Jewish woman and for another woman, a total stranger whom he'd never even seen. "A moment of truth," his voice explained to Mrs Harcourt-Egan and others. "I could not pass these women by."

He knew it was true. The excitement he felt had to do with sympathy, and the compassion that had been engendered in it. His complicated nature worked in that way: there had to be drama, like the drama of a man dead in a bed, and the beauty of being unable to pass the women by, as real as the beauty of the Madonna of the Meadow. With her cigarette and her Brolio, his ex-wife wouldn't have understood that in a million years. In their bedroom in Siena she had expected something ordinary to take place, an act that rats performed.

Never in his entire life had Attridge felt as he felt now. It was the most extraordinary, and for all he knew the most important, occasion in his life. As though watching a play, he saw himself assisting the dead, naked man into his clothes. It would be enough to put his clothes on, no need to move the body from one flat to another, enough to move it

from the bedroom. "We put it in the lift and left it there," his voice said, still telling the story. "'No need,' I said to her, 'to involve my flat at all.' She agreed; she had no option. The man became a man who'd had a heart attack in a lift. A travelling salesman, God knows who he was."

The story was beautiful. It was extravagant and flamboyant, incredible almost, like all good art. Who really believed in the Madonna of the Meadow, until jabbed by the genius of Bellini? *The Magic Flute* was an impossible occasion, until Mozart's music charged you like an electric current.

"Yes, Mr Attridge?"

He moved towards her, fearing to speak lest his voice emerged from him in the shrill whisper that had possessed it before. He nodded at Mrs Matara, agreeing in this way to assist her.

HURRYING THROUGH the hall and hurrying up the stairs because one flight of stairs was quicker than the lift, he felt the excitement continuing in his body. Actually it would be many months before he could tell Mrs Harcourt-Egan or anyone else about any of it. It seemed, for the moment at least, to be entirely private.

"What was he?" he asked on the stairs in a whisper.

"Was?"

"Professionally." He was impatient, more urgent now than she. "Salesman or something, was he?"

She shook her head. Her friend had been a dealer in antiques, she said.

Another Jew, he thought. But he was pleased because the man could have been on his way to see him, since dealers in antiques did sometimes visit him. Mrs Matara might have said to the man, at another party given by the Mortons or anywhere else you liked, that Mr Attridge, a collector of pictures and Staffordshire china, lived in the flat below hers. She could have said to Attridge that she knew a man who might have stuff that would interest him and then the man might have telephoned him, and he'd have said come round one afternoon. And in the lift the man collapsed and died.

She had her latchkey in her hand, about to insert it into the lock of her flat door. Her

hand was shaking. Surprising himself, he gripped her arm, preventing her from completing the action with the key.

"Will you promise me," he said, "to move away from these flats? As soon as you conveniently can?"

"My God, of course! How could I stay?"

"I'd find it awkward, meeting you about the place, Mrs Matara. Is that a bargain?"

"Yes, yes."

She turned the key in the lock. They entered a hall that was of the exact proportions as Attridge's but different in other ways. It was a most unpleasant hall, he considered, with bell chimes in it, and two oil paintings that appeared to be the work of some emergent African, one being of negro children playing on crimson sand, the other of a negro girl with a baby at her breast.

"Oh, God!" Mrs Matara cried, turning suddenly, unable to proceed. She pushed herself at him, her sharp head embedding itself in his chest, her hands grasping the jacket of his grey suit.

"Don't worry," he said, dragging his eyes away from the painting of the children on the crimson sand. One of her hands had ceased to grasp his jacket and had fallen into one of his. It was cold and had a fleshless feel.

"We have to do it," he said, and for a second he saw himself as he would see himself in retrospect: standing with the Jewish woman in her hall, holding her hand to comfort her.

While they still stood there, just as he was about to propel her forward, there was a noise.

"My God!" whispered Mrs Matara.

He knew she was thinking that her husband had returned, and he thought the same himself. Her husband had come back sooner than he usually did. He had found a corpse and was about to find his wife holding hands with a neighbour in the hall.

"Hey!" a voice said.

"My God!" cried Mrs Matara, rushing forward, into the room that Attridge knew was her sitting-room.

There was the mumble of another voice, and then the sound of Mrs Matara's tears. It was a man's voice, but the man was not her husband: the atmosphere that came from the scene wasn't right for that.

"There now," the other voice was saying in

the sitting-room. "There now, there now."

The noise of Mrs Matara's weeping continued, and the man appeared at the door of the sitting-room. He was fully dressed, a sallow man, tall and black-haired, with a beard. He'd guessed what had happened, he said, as soon as he heard voices in the hall: he'd guessed that Mrs Matara had gone to get help. In an extremely casual way he said he was really quite all right, just a little groggy due to the silly blackout he'd had. Mrs Matara was a customer of his, he explained, he was in the antique business. "I just passed out," he said. He smiled at Attridge. He'd had a few silly blackouts recently and despite what his doctor said about there being nothing to worry about, he'd have to be more careful. Really embarrassing, it was, plopping out in a client's sitting-room.

Mrs Matara appeared in the sitting-room doorway. She leaned against it, as though requiring its support. She giggled through her tears and the man spoke sharply to her, forgetting she was meant to be his client. He warned her against becoming hysterical.

"My God, you'd be hysterical," Mrs Matara cried, "if you'd been through all that cauffle."

"Now, now—"

"For Christ's sake, I thought you were a goner. Didn't I?" she cried, addressing Attridge without looking at him and not waiting for him to reply. "I rushed downstairs to this man here. I was in a frightful state. Wasn't I?" she said to Attridge.

"Yes."

"We were going to put your clothes on and dump you in his flat."

Attridge shook his head, endeavouring to imply that that was not accurate, that he'd never have agreed to the use of his flat for this purpose. But neither of them was paying any attention to him. The man was looking embarrassed, Mrs Matara was grim.

"You should damn well have told me if you were having blackouts."

"I'm sorry," the man said. "I'm sorry you were troubled," he said to Attridge. "Please forgive Mrs Matara."

"Forgive you, you mean!" she cried. "Forgive you for being such a damn fool!"

"Do try to pull yourself together, Miriam."

"I tell you, I thought you were dead."

"Well, I'm not. I had a little blackout—"

"Oh for Christ's sake, stop about your wretched blackout!"

THE WAY SHE SAID THAT reminded Attridge very much of his ex-wife. He'd had a headache once, he remembered, and she'd protested in just the same impatient tone of voice, employing almost the same words. She'd married again, of course—a man called Saunders in ICI.

"At least be civil," the man said to Mrs Matara.

They were two of the most unpleasant people Attridge had ever come across. It was a pity the man hadn't died. He'd run to fat and was oily, there was a shower of dandruff on his jacket. You could see his stomach straining his shirt, one of the shirt-buttons had actually given way.

"Well, thank you," Mrs Matara said, approaching Attridge with her right hand held out. She said it gracelessly, as a duty. The same hand had struck him on the face and later had slipped for comfort into one of his. It was hard and cold when he shook it, with the same fleshless feel as before. "We still have a secret," Mrs Matara said. She smiled at him in her dutiful way, without displaying interest in him.

The man had opened the halldoor of the flat. He stood by it, smiling also, anxious for Attridge to go.

"This afternoon's a secret," Mrs Matara murmured, dropping her eyes in a girlish pretence. "All this," she said, indicating her friend. "I'm sorry I hit you."

"Hit him?"

"When we were upset. Downstairs. I hit him." She giggled, apparently unable to help herself.

"Great God!" The man giggled also.

"It doesn't matter," Attridge said.

But it did matter. The secret she spoke of wasn't worth having because it was sordid and nothing else. It was hardly the kind of thing he'd wish to mull over in private, and certainly not the kind he'd wish to tell Mrs Harcourt-Egan or anyone else. Yet the other story might even have reached his ex-wife, it was not impossible. He imagined her hearing it, and her amazement that a man whom she'd once likened to dust had in the cause of compassion falsified the circumstances of a

death. He couldn't imagine the man his ex-wife had married doing such a thing, or Mrs Matara's husband, or the dandruffy man who now stood by the door of the flat. Such men would have been frightened out of their wits.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye," the man said, smiling at the door.

ATTRIDGE WANTED to say something. He wanted to linger for a moment longer and to mention his ex-wife. He wanted to tell them what he had never told another soul, that his ex-wife had done terrible things to him. He disliked all Jewish people, he wanted to say, because of his ex-wife and her lack of understanding. Marriage repelled him because of her. It was she who had made him vicious-tongued. It was she who had embittered him.

He looked from one face to the other. They would not understand and they would not be capable of making an effort, as he had when faced with the woman's predicament. He had always been a little on the cold side, he knew that well. But his ex-wife might have drawn on the other aspects of his nature and dispelled the coldness. Instead of displaying all that impatience, she might have cosseted him and accepted his complications. The love she sought would have come in its own good time, as sympathy and compassion had eventually come that afternoon. Warmth was buried deep in some people, he wanted to say to the two faces in the hall but he knew that, like his ex-wife, the faces would not understand.

As he went he heard the click of the door behind him and imagined a hushed giggling in the hall. He would be feeling like a prince if the man had really died.

Leicester Square : May 1974

Will Shakespeare leans at ease,
 his right arm on a pillar topped with books,
 his stone cloak unruffled in the breeze,
 as constantly across the square he looks,
 where letters five feet high,
 announce Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*
 and what we take to be
 the eyes of Dr Eckleburg.
 But these are brown not blue?
 We look again
 to find they are the two
 enormous boobs of Jenny,
 "a ride like you never had before",
 the *Swinging Stewardess*
 of the film that's shown next door;
 and, as if to stress
 the confusion of fantasies and themes,
 and, still, a good wine needs no bush,
 while *Gatsby* seems
 to have no more than lettering,
 Jenny's full-frontal dreams
 are cut short at the hips.
 Though Shakespeare always had it sorted in his head:
 for the one a tragedy, for the other
 the second-best bed.

John Cotton