

SCOTT MEREDITH

Literary Agency, Inc.

580 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036 • CIRCLE 5-5500

THE LILY POND

by Pietro Di Donato

Fiction
6,700 words

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It was so comfortable to be dead. Her feelings were now an elastic non-shatterable murky glass. Maybe she was the white palping roots at the bottom of the lily pond. Her eyes could look up and be somewhat aware of objects that came and went. But her eyes were not curious. Desire had returned to the water-bag of Time. There was no wanting. She was a periphery of nothingness. Her clock had no marking hands and the numerals had been erased. It was only that there was a streaming. She might be the sun sifting through the barred windows. She might be or not be anything. Yet, when you're dead the dictionary is a book of blank definitions. It was just that care had dissolved itself.

"Here's your lunch, Miss Cooper," said the attendant, Mary. The eyes of a corpse can burn, and cut ~~like a razor~~. Corinne Cooper's food-tray remained untouched. Time did not molest the dead of its passage.

Corinne was alone in the corridor that opened on many cell-~~like~~ rooms.

Streaming is a level flowing independent of adjectives. Streaming could have a body. It could claim any content and form and measure itself against infinitesimal or boundless proportion. Streaming could be a part or whole, one thing and all things without registry. Streaming could be an ego, or nowness, or futurity. It could be a was, an is, or a never be. The court and policing was beyond order, beyond good or bad. Beyond. Perhaps hands to wrest the victory would never be.

There were the voices of patients playing in the yard.

Laughter ran on the track of streaming. Blood ran through Corinne. That was the blood's own business. It couldn't matter what the blood did. She didn't wander in and out of the rooms. The rooms came to her. If you're dead and other things move, it's their fault. Something is always doing something to something. Labels outside the mind make labels in a mind. Maybe she was in the process of being born. And her eyes were older. And her eyes remained from lived lives.

Richard Dean focused blurringly in her detached line of vision. He was searching. She could remember time ahead but could not remember the moment she walked up to him.

He turned and was startled by her silent presence. She was clothed in a shift. Loose white cotton stockings hung down over her ankles and slippers. Around her smooth neck was a small golden cross suspended from a fine chain. Her limbs were bruised, her heavy auburn hair matted, her cheeks pale, and about her hyper-red lips was perspiration. The whites of her gray-green eyes were dilated and her pupils diminished to black points.

The lean face with the ^{splendid} large nose and olive skin opposite her was looking intensely and speaking. Even though a character is dead she can hear the sounds of the author's voice. She died because of a secret. Nothing is serious. All is equal, all is understood and forgiven in the gelid, opaque repose of death.

"Corinne-----how are you . . . ?"

'How was she?' What else did he expect?

She stared at him for a long, long time.

What could she say but, "Are you satisfied now?"

He suddenly felt terribly guilty for being sane.

Within her removed camera he faded to a blob.

"Corinne, don't you know me? I am Richard."

Her speech was to stare. The signal was lost.
The kindest thing he could do then was to leave her.
" . . . I'll see you, tomorrow, Corinne . . . "

What is tomorrow? Tomorrows might be mashed pasts
and futures.

He disappeared in the streaming.

Corinne. Corinne was a word. Words were dead things,
ghosts that went through walls.

"Alright, girls!" shouted the attendant out on the
grass, "Playtime's over! Let's go to dinner!"

There was a slushing clatter of shuffling women's
shoes, and mingled with it were songs, speeches and
imprecations. Keys unlocked and locked doors.
To Corinne they were frequencies that tuned in and receded.
"Hey, Cooper," said the burly attendant, Mary,
"Chow Time."

It was useless to order a catatonic about, but Mary
had heard that sometimes when they are in that state
they understood everything and noticed details.
So with a patient you never knew. You were supposed
to be surprised when they didn't surprise you.
"Anyhow, kid, what are you doing in the corridor?
You must not elope from your room, you bad girl.
Seven is your room. --Why do I bother to talk to you.
Come along, Cooper."

Mary pushed Corinne to the dining room. The patients lined up and received their food in trays from the worker-patients at the steam-wagon.

It was exquisite to be dead. The better life begins with death. The dead are not assaulted by smell and hunger. And there are so many hungers.

Corinne stood in a corner, forgotten. Maud, a colored patient, took Corinne to her room. She undressed Corinne and put her to bed. She patted the welts on Corinne's wrists.

"Honey, I'm glad to see you out of them straps. They tell me I had them on when I took sick. My man Bernard says I was tied up in the awful violent ward too. I don't remember."

Night in the asylum was a chrome gray-black nocturne. Corinne's eyelids stayed open.

Mrs. Finerty, the night attendant, smoked a cigarette at her desk in her cage in the ward. Now and then she called out to the ceaselessly chattering disturbed patients, "Quiet, girls! Get your beauty sleep!" Cacophonic voices went on and off from their uncharted islands of delusion, raucously smiting the darkness.

The dynamos in the powerhouse whirred, and smoke from the stacks poured against the stars. There were a few lights showing from the nurses' home. A hilarious party went on in a doctor's cottage. Two wide-awake guards drove slowly about the grounds. Out on the main highway the Interstate bus roared by. A faraway plane sang and blinked. In the operating room of the infirmary an emergency appendectomy on a patient was being performed. In the underground tunnels worker-patients wheeled carts of linen towards the laundry. Into the commissary straggled weary ^{attendants} ~~patients~~ for coffee.

Corinne lay inert. Corinne lay gazing through the barred window at the moon. The moon was a dead planet shining. Lonely frigid moon. The moon was also uncaring of its orbit. Corinne in the moon. She was being swallowed in cold whiteness. The moon was drowning her. Her lungs screamed.

Mrs. Finerty stirred. The scream had come from number seven. They'll do that for no reason. Then all was as before. Asylum nights drag and exhaustion finally makes for quiet. Mrs. Finerty continued to doze.

Doctor Berg discussed Miss Cooper with Richard Dean.

"Mr. Dean," he said sympathetically, "Why don't you stay away until we can bring her back to the point where she will be able to recognize you and make sense."

"If you don't mind, doctor, I'd like to visit her every day."

"She may remain this way indefinitely."

"She will awaken."

"We hope so. I've seen them in this retarded form of death snap out of it as though nothing happened, and yet we've had others go through all the stages of progressive deterioration and be shipped from the incontinent ward to the morgue."

"I wish you would permit me to be near her."

"Love?"

"No."

"What makes you think you can help her?"

"I feel it."

"Ego," smiled Dr. Berg, "It's unorthodox for us to permit a layman's therapy, or speculations rather, but in our profession we do not exclude any possibilities."

Corinne lay immersed in a tub. First the water was hot, then cold. She was a lily in Richard's pond. The seasons were changing from summer to winter.

Dr. Berg looked down upon her. He told Mary to prepare her for shock treatment.

A water lily can spy. The doctor was Richard pretending to be someone else. Now he was going to put electricity into her body.

She could tell him the truth that she had no body.

The body had been trouble. She was a pure element.

Virgins are pure. Nothing is lost in nature said the physics teacher or was it scientist Richard Dean?

Let Dr. Richard Dean do as he pleased. She was his idea.

Dr. Dean was God who created her. The dead are human too.

She had a tickling to laugh. Because of vowels and

consonants. Was there anything in her contract with

Dr. Dean about laughter? And now it was something about

electricity. The dead are sly. Now they were going to

wire a water lily.

Mary rubbed her dry and clothed her in a shift and slippers.

Mary brought her to electro-therapy. It wasn't pretty

to watch patients convulse and turn blue. There were

others before Corinne. Corinne was without emotion.

Corinne was a statue of flesh.

"Trust Mary," said Mary, "We're not going to hurt you one tiny bit."

What were these people doing in Dr. Dean's house?
Were they ghosts also?"

Two worker-patients strapped her onto the table.
Dr. Berg ran his hand over her thick auburn hair.
"There's a lot of beautiful woman here going to waste.
He clamped a padded tongue depressor into Corinne's
mouth and bent over her with the electrodes in his hands.

How could Dr. Dean do this to her? Let him. It
seems he was never satisfied.

The electrodes touched her temples.

The dead can be divided into atoms. There was the
crackling streaming that was magnified, and the trilling.
She was a network of singing glass through which
multi-colored neon flowed. Even the dead can't escape.

What was the song? Her hearing was in a cathedral forest
of tall whistling trees. And then the long high belling.
For how many years did it play? Monsignor Richard Dean
soared vastly from a great pulpit. She was frozen
in a glacier and her eyes were irridescent rays
beneath the surface.

It was Christmas morning. Next to the tree in the
ward was a portable common altar. The patients looked
about vacantly as the priest gave blessings.

The priest was surely Dr. Dean. And so was Santa Claus who passed out presents. Then there was Dr. Dean who had been coming to look at her and hold her hand for a thousand years. Or had his visits transpired all in a second? She was a bit worried because she seemed able to worry about it. And now her body was fretted by being dead. Because death could not last forever.

Richard Dean sat by her in the crowd of visitors and patients surrounding the lighted tree. Her fingers clung to his hand.

"Corinne, look at the Christmas tree. Try hard to think. Remember the night we met; you registered for my evening drama class at the high school. It was Christmas week too. The village and countryside was covered with snow. Remember that I had you over to my house on Christmas Eve? I drove you in the Ford. The car window wouldn't close; the snow came in and down our necks. You held a lighted ~~candle to the~~ candle to the windshield to melt the sleet. You met my brothers and sisters. You said our tree was perfect. Remember that bushy Christmas tree, Corinne?"

Of course. What a foolish question. Dr. Dean's sister was sweet to her, and admired her hair. One of his brothers had cut the tree down from the golf course at night and skipped home with it. They were chuckling about the robbery.

It was cozy roasting chestnuts and sipping creamy egg-nog by the fireplace. She wished she could live with Dr. Dean and his family. "I knew you'd like my sister, Anne, " he said, "you remind me a lot of Anne." That made her happy because she thought it brought her closer to him. She didn't want to leave his home that Christmas Eve.

For a moment it seemed to Richard that behind her impenetrability there was a shadow of cognizance. Was she smiling behind her mask? Was she going to weep? Her lips trembled, and her fingers tightened on his. "Corinne, you do remember the pretty stolen Christmas tree."

Her wan transparent face flushed, and then went pale again. To her his words ran into each other and his speech became a jumble. The reel had swiftly changed. She was in a foreign theatre.

Going to the asylum each day had become a ritual for Richard. The institution no longer seemed to him the ultimate limbo where all human dignity was violated. The employees and patients accepted him and looked forward to his visits. During the months he pondered over the only sentence Corinne had uttered, "Are you satisfied now?"

Mary, the attendant, was reading Richard Dean's novel.

Corinne saw his picture on the dust-jacket.

Why---she was a character of his. That's who she was.

And she had either strayed or was lost from his fancies.

There he is----sitting at his typewriter in the cottage.

"Corinne, I can't write. The truth does not want to go on paper. I'll lose my mind trying to say real

things." Now she's telling him he can't fail; his book

will be a success. "You won't know me then, Richard."

Oh no, he'll always be Richard. He's speaking on the

radio but it is not his own voice. His pictures are

in the newspapers and it's so hard to walk into the

pictures to him. His face is on the back of the book

--no it's mirrored on the lily pond--no he's standing

on the little bridge pointing out the lilies to her

--no she's looking up from the muddy bottom and his face is

laughing and shimmering down and he's not Richard no no no she

doesn't know who he is. Nothing is true. She

doesn't exist. She's a reflection in his brain.

She was aware of the aroma of coffee. It would be wonderful to drink coffee.

When Mary brought her the breakfast tray she reached for it.

"Don't you want me to feed you anymore?" asked Mary.

"How silly," she muttered.

"Good for you!" chortled Mary, "We'll have to celebrate

----this afternoon I'll fix you up nice and lovely

for Mr. Dean!"

"I haven't seen Dr. Dean for ages. Why doesn't he come? What have I done to him? ---I can't imagine . . . "

"Now-now, Corinne, you saw him yesterday. And he's not a doctor. Get that out of your head."

Mary was a liar. Dr. Dean was Dr. Dean. Was Mary deliberately trying to confuse her?"

"Mary, you know very well that he's my doctor."

"Have it your way; just so's you keep talking.

I thought the cat was going to keep your tongue forever."

Poor Mary; did she think she was talking to a child?

Why did Mary have to dress her? Was she that helpless?

She must be in a hospital. Maybe she was in an auto accident.

Mary brought her before the mirror in the washroom.

It seemed amusing. The old black and yellow flowered dress was baggy on her. She must have dropped a lot

of weight. "You have voluptuous lines," he had said,

"When you come out of your shell you'll be glamorous."

Where had he said that? It was frustrating not to be able to remember. She tried not to remember and the

next sentence followed, "The lily that is closing

into meagre identity---in the morning when it opens---

will be a gorgeous woman. A woman is not a sex or

a gender or a breed; a woman is an art."

*a woman
is God...*

Sunset on his lily pond. Somethings cannot be forgotten in this life, or any life.

Hunchback Nancy, Maud the colored girl, Granny Smith, the Duchess of Windsor and a dozen other patients had helped Mary care for Corinne during her catatonic months. Mary passed the word around that Corinne had begun to talk. "I recall how she spoke before the King in Buckingham Palace," reminisced the Duchess.

"Corinne Cooper is a real lady," said Nancy. Then making wheels against her head and motioning towards the Duchess she added, "She ain't loony like some people in this joint. And Miss Cooper's got a swell gentleman with a Buick."

She heard them discussing her. That could mean that she had an identity. Or were they forming her into an identity through their own eyes? Part of it made sense and some of it didn't. But they were kind. --Like a harmless babbling crowd in a meaningless dream.

When Richard Dean's car arrived Maud ran through the ward and shouted, "Whoopie, Corinne---here's your boy-friend!" At the entrance to the ~~reception~~ reception room Nancy greeted him. "Oh, Mr. Dean, you know what?---Miss Cooper ain't sick no more!"

The patients trailed him, calling out his name and giggling. Mary led Corinne to him. They had dressed her, rouged her cheeks and painted her nails. The red ribbon was a winsome touch in her long rich auburn hair.

"Ain't you gonner kiss your sweetheart," tittered Nancy.

He regretted that pity came to him. It should not have been that way.

Mary scolded the patients and herded them to the day ward. On the way they sang, "Mr. Dean loves Miss Cooper!"

They sat together as usual. The late afternoon dusk of departing winter softened the huge empty room.

In the distance could be heard the ravings from the men's wards. Spoons and plates clinked in the adjoining room.

"Corinne, Spring will come soon," he said, "We can go for walks. There's a farm, a golf course, and even

gardens here . . . " *Oh yes - Book of the month - Bright - it will be our fairy God mother-dear!*

It would be truly strange if the spell were evaporated and she spoke. He had gotten used to and contented

with just sitting with her and holding her hand.

It had become religion to have her mutely near, and then to leave and enjoy the women who were sure of themselves.

And purifying to return to her each day.

She was embarrassed, but couldn't remember the word embarrassed. Dr. Dean was a real living person. She wasn't. It wouldn't be right of her to ask him if he'd stay always. In his presence the fingers of her knowing could grasp a fraction of substantiality. She strove to ask him why he had deserted her. Where had he been? Or maybe it was: where had she been? Her tongue was not connected to her questioning.

"Corinne, Mary tells me that you think I'm 'Dr.' Dean."

She peered into his eyes and said, "You are the only friend I have. You would not fool me. You are Dr. Dean."

He dropped his eyes. Her eyes could convince. And her newly-found voice thrilled him. He told himself it was because of his empathy; yet he was grateful for the sensation. What had gone on in her mind before it stunned itself? Did she realize why she was there? It was too soon to ask. He'd speak of Spring instead. It might re-seed her will to fully awaken.

His words came through to her in spots. Somewhere in the blotted pages of her mental book Spring showed her Pluto, Persephone and a pomegranate. Dr. Dean changed shapes before her eyes. Her head was numb in places.

She needed glasses again. She wore glasses in parochial school. The rites of Spring in primitive times was a pagan festival said Sister Sebastian, pagan from pagano, meaning countryside, and there was a coal-man down the street named Pagano.

She couldn't control the fast-flipping picture-pages and the captions bunched and jammed. Why didn't Dr. Dean give her medicine for her headache. It was all no use.

Mary tip-toed in and whispered, "Sorry, Mr. Dean; Miss Cooper's bed-time. I've saved some hot dinner for her."

Mary was perverse; calling a doctor, 'Mister.'

As he was leaving Richard said, "I'll see you tomorrow, Corinne. Don't worry about anything. Be a good girl."

Mary put her arm around her. "Corinne Cooper is always a good girl."

This must be a hospital. It could be a hotel. Hadn't she seen a movie about a women's prison? Figuring things out was tiring. She ran her hands over the sheet. She could feel her limbs. Feeling was a pleasant discovery.

Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, Sis and Harold paid their weekly visit.

"My poor dear child!" cried Mrs. Cooper, "Thank the Lord you've come to! If you only knew how hard it is without you!"

"Everything going out and nothing coming in---"

Dr. Berg took Mrs. Cooper aside. Corinne heard her mother.

"Of course, doctor. I wouldn't upset my daughter for the world. Who knows better than I what her condition is!"

What condition? Even now that she was sick she couldn't get away from her family. Mother. It was unfortunate that she could never love her mother. The sharp colorless face had been upon her since childhood; the jarring voice, the constant plaint of better days in the past, her domestic puttering, her perpetual gabbling, downing and criticizing, her cliches and flights of sentimentality. No, mother didn't soothe the pains in her head. Nor could she get close to Father, Sis and Harold.

Sis pecked at her cheek. Gangling moody Harold didn't speak. He stood by with a Jehovah Witness Bible in his hand. Mr. Cooper, a heavy flaccid man with small hands, cleared his throat and said weakly, "You'll be alright . . ."

They were a trap shutting her in.

After Dr. Berg left Mrs. Cooper screeched, "At night I go through the agonies of hell thinking of you here in the asylum. But it was best to put you in the State Institution--you might have done something awful to yourself like your brother Alvin---I was afraid he'd go off--and he did!"

"The trouble with our blood is that it is too fine--
no fetlock stock in our strain---your great-grandfather's
statue still stands in Memphis---if Tracy Todd had not
been swindled by his partner we would not be living in
abject poverty today---I told you not to stay up nights
writing Lord-knows-what---you needed your strength for
the dress-shop--how humiliating for a Cooper!---you
overworked yourself---I told you not to, dear---
I thought I'd die when the doctor said you were insane."

Insane?

"Mother," admonished Sis wearily, "that Gone With The Wind
mouth of yours would hang anybody."

Insane?

At the end of the ward a hallucinated patient shouted
in terror, "Help! Help!"

Help! Help! Oh my God, help! Alvin shot himself!
Harold is crying from the top of the stairway. She's
running upstairs all unstrung. There's Alvin dying
on the bedroom floor----insane---She's insane!

Her eyes dilated. She screamed hysterically.

Dr.Berg cautioned the Cooper family not to visit her
in the following weeks.

The gruelling tension slackened. Her body was burningly fatigued. She floated in restful lethargy. Her slowly resurging mind delicately reached threads over the black questioning chasms, building of itself fragile pathways to thinking.

Richard Dean consulted with Dr. Berg as to her diet. ^{vitamins.} He sent her tasteful foods and relished watching her eat. She improved physically and became more conscious of her appearance. It was then that he sent the dressmaker to fashion her attractive clothes, and the beautician to care for her shining auburn hair.

During her showers she felt a growing exuberance in the awareness of her body. And to Corinne there came a newness of being. ^{Did not P say the body was the sacred flesh temple some where?} The Spring rains played day after day. She stood at the open barred windows and responded to their wetty freshness. Her mind fastened on relatively insignificant things, and her speech was simple but more articulate.

She sat with Richard, studying her dress and stroking her dress.

"You like your dress more than you like me," he said.

"I worked in a dress shop."

"Good, you remember. You used to wave to me when I walked by."

"You were a poor doctor then."

"Why do you say that?"

"I see you. You're wearing corduroy slacks, sport shoes, a navy blue trench coat and a grey fedora with the brim turned down. The girls said you wanted to look different, look like a genius."

"Did you agree with them?"

*(Quasabrick lays
discussing & could write
stories -*

"I told them you were a genius."

"Am I still a doctor?"

"You're my special doctor. And you did something mysterious to my mind."

"Why would I do any harm to you?"

"Oh, I don't resent it. You had to do it. Like an author who makes a character do things. You did it so that you could cure me. I didn't object."

He looked at her wonderingly.

She bent to him and confided, "But the secret will be between us alone."

He did not know how to answer. After a silence she said,

"I went to the movies in the recreation hall this morning."

"What picture did you see?"

"I saw you in a romance. I tried to get your attention.

You were too busy making love to her. I didn't think

she was much, but you looked very handsome. *indeed - !"*

He commanded her eyes and said firmly, "Corinne, I was not in the movie. Perhaps the actor resembled me. Now listen carefully---try to follow me. I am not a doctor. I am your friend. You must have faith in what I tell you." She removed her hand from his.

"Please don't call me 'doctor,' Corinne. Call me Richard, as you did before you fell ill--please believe me." Faith.

"How can I have faith in my scribbling when I've hardly faith in myself?" "Those were your words, Richard. What's wrong with your mind, Richard---don't you remember that I said, "Nothing can change my faith in you."

A week later he found her exhilarated.

"Richard, guess what! I'm a worker-patient! I was assigned to the infirmary today. I made beds and cleaned patients. I toted breakfast trays, and helped the nurse give out medicine. I fed oatmeal to a blind old woman who sits in a crib and thinks she's a baby. The patients call me 'nurse.' Oh, how I'm needed here! At noon Dr. Berg took me to the Commissary and treated me to a soda."

"Did the boys ogle you in the Commissary?"

"Richard, you're teasing."

She enthusiastically tried to accurately relate her impressions of the pathetic and humorous incidents of her day.

"Tomorrow we're going to scrub and wax Dr. Berg's office."

"I miss not being your doctor anymore, " he said with tristful lightness.

She held her hand to her forehead and said, "I must have said quite a few funny things when I was in 'that' condition."

"No . . . your words were magnetic keys and spiritual allegories. Someday when you're mind is strong enough I'd like to go over some of them with you."

"Must I answer all your curiosity then?"

"Why not?"

"The same instructor Dean of the Adult Education drama class."

"I see you're getting snippy again . . . !"

"What do you do when you're not with me? Or am I not supposed to ask? What do your girl-friends think of 'Corinne Cooper.'?"

"I spend a bit of my time hoping to get you out into the world."

He was sincere. But couldn't he have said more than that?

Wouldn't he ever go further than friendliness? Didn't he know what her illness was? Was he going to play his game until she was no longer a lily in his pond?

He said impressively, "I talked with the staff. They believe that in about a month you'll be able to go home."

Her loquacity ceased. She immediately became depressed.

He had taken her heart and mind. That didn't hurt too much. But after she would leave the asylum his interest in her would die. He'd go out of her life---as he had done before. That dreadful tremor shook her. It frightened her. She'd become ill again. And would she arise from the dead again?

She turned her head from him and said in a ~~whisper~~ whisper, "I don't want to go home. I agreed to come here because you told me to. You wanted me to help you write your second book. That evening on the lily pond you said you had a story in mind about a man who could only fall in love with a a water lily type of a girl---that he suffered in the night when it was closed and hidden in darkness. But that you couldn't do it because it didn't happen in your life and therefore you were creatively lost.

A chill went through him.

She said softly, "I can't leave here until our story is finished. Finished."

He gripped himself and stared at her.

It was the day of the annual Spring picnic. The picnic ground was the grassy field behind the superintendant's cottage. Nearby was a stone Quaker meetinghouse, and to the west was the blue-green sea.

Cooks broiled frankfurters and hamburgers. Under the shade trees were tables with refreshments.

When the patients, employees, and visitors were congregated the asylum band played Hail, Hail, the gang's all here.

Corinne was proud of Richard and clung to him.

After the games and contests they sat on the benches for the open air stage show.

He thought of his drama pupils----the evening Corinne entered the classroom---she sat up front between Higgins the Lingua-phone salesman, and the French seamstress, Madame Vitu. It had been impossible to fit the class into a suitable play. He hit upon the idea of having them act out their problems, and called it improvised drama.

"Ladies and gentleman!" bellowed the master of ceremonies, "With the greatest of pleasure I call upon Miss Cooper, the songbird star of Ward D. Miss Cooper will graciously sing for us her favorite song, Apple Blossom Time. I give you Miss Cooper!"

Richard pressed her hand. She arose and went up on the stage. She sang as one hypnotized.

She would be with him---in apple blossom time.....

The mass of patients did not make a sound. Her low voice captured the stillness. Her eyes were upon his face as she sang.

To him came the lily pond. She was by his side on the log bridge connecting the tiny island and the sloping green bank. They were leaning on the railing. The single tree on the island was a crab-apple in bloom. The evening breeze hushed the blossoms down upon the darkening water. He recalled being saddened by the slowly strangling lilies struggling for light.

"Look Corinne," he had said, "the apple blossoms are kissing my lilies to sleep . . . " And in a spate of poetic inspiration he had told her that he wouldn't be happy until the rosy cavalier of the dawn had heralded them back to life and beauty.

The band struck up a popular tune. Almost everybody mingled without question and danced.

It was the first time she was in his arms. He asked, Why . . . Corinne, why did this happen to you? Just what is it you want?"

"I . . . want . . . you!"

"---Was it---because of me?"

She had said it at last. She was tense, praying that he wouldn't say it shouldn't have happened---that it was all tragically wrong---a mistake---that he was terribly sorry." He stood speechless.

In asylum night the haunted bayed and cursed and groaned to the bland white moon. Corinne's eyes spoke to the moon. She had wanted Richard. That was it and it was no sin. She had wanted his person, his name, to be his wife and mother of his children. And finally she had said it. She could look into the past; it was no longer held from her.

"I'd do anything ~~wherever~~ to get that feeling where a story lives and writes itself. I'd do anything to get that magic!" Those had been his words. Under the pretense of improvised imagined drama he got his class to reveal their shame and passions.

One night as he walked her home he said excitedly, "I never let on that I know their little acts and monologues are not fictional. Their portrayals of the hidden truths about themselves is the show of shows. What material for my writing---a gold mine!"

But he kept his own truth clandestine, denied. There were his alternate extremes of religion and cynicism, his indiscreet risky affairs, and then his high-flown exhortation of the immoral. He lived in other people's lives and fled from the damaging consequences at the climax. She knew he had to do it. He was an artist and she understood him inside. He did not believe himself inside and feared the instability of his mind and character. But she believed in him.

It was only a few weeks after her brother Alvin's suicide that he had said to her in class, "Miss Cooper, do you think you can improvise for us the part of a girl who knows there is insanity in her family and fears that she is losing her mind?"

She played the part to please him. She shuddered as she played out her real fears. He was enthralled. And she was grateful to be able to affect him.

She could not go on forever working in the dress shop to support her burdensome family. Her mother fidgeted and gabbed about maids and mansions. Her father sat about the house dressed up, concentrating on an outdated World Almanac or poring through newspapers reading stock quotations, obituaries, and personal notices.

Morose brother Harold ate ravenously, showered many times a day and shut himself in his room. Sis kept the radio going from morning to night.

She used to pop in at Richard's house, chumming with his sister and kid brothers. He'd read his writings and have fits of doubt. She had prevented him from tearing up his manuscript.

When his book was published and became the bestseller he disappeared.

She made a scrapbook of his clippings, and heard him on the radio. His answers to her letters were few and formal.

In the dress shop a wealthy customer said to her,

"Do come sailing with us Sunday dear. You're pretty; the air will do you good. You'll meet the famous author, Richard Dean."

She fought to keep her composure when she saw him on the yacht. He was surprised and somewhat annoyed to meet her. He had brought a movie actress. He avoided talking about the old days. He said he had bought the big stone house with the lily pond.

Her long walks to the dress shop in the village were idylls filled with thoughts of him. One morning a sports car pulled up. "Hey dreamy!" he called, "Get in. Were you sleepwalking?" "Yes," she answered, "ever since I met you!" Naturally, he thought she was kidding. He drove to the seashore. His lean dark face showed ravages of dissipation.

He spoke bitterly about himself and his work.

She told him, "You said your second book would be about the girl who sacrifices her sanity for love."

"Someday," he sighed, "someday when it hits me right."

"That will be our book," she said, pretending to joke.

He then looked directly at her. She was ashamed of her thinness, anemia and faded clothes. She flushed under his objective eyes. "What does the x-ray read, measles or a fractured heart," she flipped at him in defense.

"You have good bonework, skin with possibilities, sexy hair and the gray-green eyes authors write about."

"I gather you approve of the architecture and the chemicals," she had said. "No ulterior motives behind the observation,"

he answered politely. "Well then, author, would you mind giving me back my bushel; it's chilly and I prefer to hide my light." "You know, Corinne," he continued

patronizingly, "you're a sleeper. Some day a smart guy is going to take you over, fatten you, put roses in your cheeks, dress you up, and have a stunning/^{good}wife."

She had wanted to cry. Instead, she laughed.

"A girl resents being labelled 'good.' It's almost eight-thirty. Now you may return Cinderella to the salt mine."

On the way to the dress shop he said soberly, "Don't you feel it's about time to let your family shift for themselves, and begin to live your own life?"

"You rate a normal life; a husband, home and children."

She remembered saying, "That's unromantic. I'll lie in my cardboard castle sleeping until you send Prince Charming---or come yourself. I might be a story for you." He looked at her quizzically. She knew he was pitying her. In front of the dress shop he turned to her.

"Steer clear of men like me," he said sincerely, "I'm trouble and not husband material. My success has made me a vampire. I'm full of promises that I hate and will not keep."

"How awful!" she had exclaimed mockingly. "I'd never let you love and ruin me!" How could she have told him that she would have loved and lived with him under any circumstances and regardless what he said or did? He said affectionately, "You do remind me of my sweet sister, Anne, as I told you long ago. But you've a spritely lip. If you could only write the way you talk you'd make a pretty author." She stepped out of the car and chuckled, "Then I'd be your ghostwriter and you could devote all your time to 'bad' girls." "That's a promise, Corinne!" he cried, and raced off.

He had noticed that she was a woman. She had hoped then that it would occur to him to take her. She was all too willing. She envisioned herself at the typewriter by his side, weaving stories, being needed, and part of him.

Then there was her visit to his big stone house. He was alone, but he treated her as though she were a nun. He played symphonic records, and as the evening reds and purples seared the sky he walked her down to the lily pond. His words were poetic, but not about her--- and she envied the lilies.

Night after night she lived in a fantasy writing the book he could not write---because a heroine had not lived it for him. The sleepless hours mounted her excitement until exhaustion trailed her off to flashes of restless slumber wherein she saw him looming towards her. In her waking hours she began to imagine him before her and spoke with him. He was on the street, in the skies, and in her room. At work she fainted. She was discharged and sent home. Everything slipped and moved away from her. She hardly recognized the people who spoke to her. Richard's face was with her but he eluded her touch. Dizzily she forced herself to go to the private hospital in the village. She told the doctor she was ill, that she would work for her keep and care. She remembered seeing Richard at the window of the hospital and running to the window calling, "Richard! Richard, save me!" She was sitting up feverishly in bed. He quietly opened the door. Somehow he had been notified. He stood there, not knowing what to do or say.

She had a rosary in her hand. She said, "You haven't just come Richard, you've been with me." She remembered telling him that she died at five that morning and knew the answer to all things for his sake. He nodded as though he believed her. The doctor who controlled the hospital entered and talked with him near the window. "Miss Cooper is a psychopathic case. We cannot keep her here. She'll have to be taken to the State Institution. Her parents have already signed the necessary papers." Richard seemed greatly interested. Probably it hit him right; the story. He stood at the foot of the bed. He didn't come to near. "Corinne," he said carefully, "you're a sick girl. Things will seem very weird to you for a while---don't fight them---don't take them too seriously---do as you're told---please." Yes, she would do as he wished. Later, the doctor, the nurse, and two men in white uniforms came in. They dressed her. She asked them if Richard had come to take her home. They said Richard was outside waiting to take her home. They led her to the rear of the hospital. When they carried her into the asylum ambulance she screamed Richard's name over and over, wanting him to save her, telling him that she couldn't go through with it.

She had said it now, "I want you." And he remained speechless. She could only have said it in the asylum, for it didn't matter what the insane said. Surely she had frightened him away. Who could love and marry a girl who had once been declared insane?

Richard visited her as an author, He did not love her. Alvin did kill himself. Richard did not want her. She'd have to die again. And stay dead. She saw the turgid swirling dread murky bottom of the lily pond.

Corinne did not touch her breakfast, nor did she join her fellow-worker-patients.

"You've got to be a good girl," cautioned Mary, "As much as we love you we want you out of here. Then you and Mr. Dean can drop in on us--for old time's sake. You wouldn't forget your friend, Mary, would you?" Corinne smiled wistfully.

What home? She had no home. This had been her home. She had gotten used to it. By now one didn't notice the morbid smells, the noises, the grotesque. This was home; the labyrinth of the unaccountable, the sanctuary of the faithful to passion, the temple of true lovers. In this her home solids were new unrepeated music, flesh was a flaming ghost, and walls were screens of metamorphosis.

Here the silent grandeur found place, here were they who had exceeded life. She was the stronger. She had descended into the underworld for him. She had redeemed him. And would he awaken and traverse the same path to her? This was her home.

He came that afternoon. It was the afternoon of gusts and greys. The skies were fraught, broken. She saw him from the barred window. He stopped on the path and talked with Dr. Berg.

She met him in the visiting room. She tried to print his face on her mind. Her only prayer was that when he left her forever his face would always be with her, and forever precious be.

He did not seem an author. He came with decision in his face. There read no curiosity.

They walked to the sea. What more could she say to him? They sat on a boulder. Gulls shrieked over the incoming tide. She felt united to him and torn from him by the heartbeat of the pounding waves. He turned from the view of the profound horizon and looked into her. "Harold," he said evenly, "admitted that Alvin's death was not suicide. He and Alvin were handling the rifle. It went off accidentally. He didn't have the courage to tell the truth.

"There is no insanity in your family. You broke down from overstrain. I'm taking you out of here today. You're going to live with me----as my wife. I've got your release. You're cured---and so am I. Our car is in front of the Administration building. You don't have to say a word. I want you and that is that. Let's go."

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