

**THE IDYLL AND THE
WARRIOR**

(Recollections of Edgar Mittelholzer)

By Jacqueline Mittelholzer

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The Caribbean Press

*“Two elements have always lived within me, side by side and in restless harmony, something, no doubt, after the fashion of uranium atoms. Any positive disturbance, and the precarious symbiosis dissolved into roaring chaos. The Idyll element dreamed of a peaceful, sylvan situation (‘a Book of Verse – and Thou beside me’) and life proceeding with oiled precision, secure under cosy, twilit rafters, with rain, thunder and lightning, sunshine and the rustling of trees providing a simple, satisfying variety in the flow of the days and the weeks and months, even the years. The Warrior Element listened always to the sound of Conflict, was perpetually alert to the raw actuality of Life, perpetually ready to resist, to repulse, to do battle to the death with any foe that might appear, Greensleeves weaving through the Sword motif from **The Ring**.*

Edgar Mittelholzer, *A Swarthy Boy*

“God. A Supreme Being ... Yes ... I believe – have always believed – in myself.”

Edgar Mittelholzer, last lines of *The Harrowing of Hubertus*

INTRODUCTION

I first met Edgar on a coach, going to the annual Writers' Summer School in Derbyshire.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked, and I replied: "No." Our first conversation included graveyards and old churches; reincarnation – in which we both believed; and writing. He told me how he liked to make the characters in his novels "a little nutty", for he felt this would excuse any extraordinary incidents he invented. In *The Weather in Middenshot*¹, for example, there is an old man who believes – or pretends to believe – that his very living and present wife is dead. Whenever he needs to communicate with her, he stages a spiritualistic séance. And in *A Tinkling in the Twilight* (which Edgar had just published, in 1959, when I met him) many ideas, about which the author was really quite serious, are put across in a mocking fashion – yoga, reincarnation, and views on crime and punishment.

Was it the down-to-earth side of him, or was it an inconsistent lack of sureness, that made a person who usually wrote and spoke with such conviction, use this mocking cover? In either case, he cannot have been content to let his beliefs rest with the light-hearted tone of the two novels just mentioned; for later came the outspoken *The Piling of Clouds*, *The Wounded and the Worried* and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*.

I remember being impressed by the way Edgar (who, in that year when we met, had fourteen published novels and one non-fiction work, *With a Carib Eye*, to his credit) behaved at the school with all the modesty of a beginner.

Born in Guyana (then British Guiana) in 1909, he was living in London, Maida Vale – when I met him. He had been married previously, and had four children, but was divorced. His first wife was a Trinidadian. At the end of the 1939-45 war, when, following some dispute, he was discharged from the Trinidad Naval Reserve, he lived for six years in Trinidad. In 1948 he managed to come to England, and worked with

the British Council, helping in a “typing pool”, until he began to live entirely by his writing. In 1952, following a literary award, he moved with his family to Montreal for a while, to work on *The Harrowing of Hubertus*, the second of the *Kaywana* trilogy. Then, due to the long, cold Canadian winter, they moved to Barbados and were in the West Indies for three years, until they returned to England in 1956.

In Georgetown, Guyana, he had once worked as a meteorologist. He was fascinated by weather, and at home we had a number of charts, thermometers, barometers and hygrometers. One sees his interest in weather in many of the novels. *The Weather in Middenshot* and *The Weather Family* are obvious examples. The sections in *The Weather in Middenshot* are divided by the weather, and in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* by the seasons.

Edgar had always had a chequered career with his writing. He felt he was fated to be unlucky. His first published novel, *Corentyne Thunder* (1941) was produced only after a lot of “ups and downs”, and there was an interval of nine years before the appearance of the next one – *A Morning at the Office*. In *A Swarthy Boy* (the autobiography of his early years), Edgar describes his first struggles to publish: how he sent manuscripts to publishers in England, and always had the next script half completed by the time the preceding one returned. Also, he describes this, and the adventures of such novels as were in the end published, in his article, *A Pleasant Career* (published in the Barbadian journal, *BIM*, June 1983).

Although he became known as a leading “West Indian novelist”, Edgar never liked the label. In fact, he used to point out that Guyana is not, strictly speaking, part of the West Indies. All his later novels were set in England, though the early ones were, naturally, of the Caribbean. He always liked to write about settings with which he was familiar. As it happens, one of his own favourites among his novels has a Guyanese setting, *Shadows Move Among Them*.

At the time when I met him, he was publishing two novels a year. He could write his works very fast, straight off the typewriter, seldom making a rough draft before the final copy (“fair copy” as he always called it).

In his last two years, he had written two books very important to him, as if they must be written before too late: *A Swarthy Boy* – and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*. The latter contains much of his thoughts and feelings – from his political ideas, to his belief in yoga and in the occult. He had composed several versions of this novel before the published one; but it is the last version, the known one, which we shall have to consider – if only because I cannot track down the other versions! Published in 1965, this last one concerns what are still ongoing social problems. I shall return to it in a later chapter.

Throughout his later novels – *The Piling of Clouds*, *The Wounded and the Worried*, *Uncle Paul*, *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*, *The Jilkington Drama* – Edgar was experimenting with a style of writing in which he avoided “stream of consciousness” and where, in fact, what the characters were thinking would not be mentioned at all. “She seemed to be thinking” would be used instead of “she thought”. The effect is of the story unfolding objectively as it would through the eyes of a perceptive observer. Sometimes the character talks aloud to herself, and I thought this contrived, until I noticed how much one actually does this. Most of the characters’ reactions have to be seen through the dialogue, as in a play. My husband had (without finding a market for them) written a number of plays, and at one time belonged to a play-writing circle in London.

Edgar’s great musical hero was Wagner, and in connection with this, there was another kind of experimental writing that he evolved in his last few years. It was to make use of the Wagnerian *Leitmotiv* system in writing. I shall give examples of this, too, in another chapter. Here again, understanding the story depends upon the dialogue. The *Leitmotifs* are all in the descriptive passages. The two books in which the technique is used are *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning* (the latter contains an explanatory foreword). The author hoped to make them part of a trilogy, but this did not happen. I encouraged him to write the experimental *Latticed Echoes*, and he dedicated it to me. The only other book he was to dedicate to any people was the final version of *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* with its strongly expressed, reactionary views – to the fourteen publishers who turned it down.

Edgar had always felt he would be more at home in England than in his native country. He loved England; had been educated to think of her as the mother country and therefore, in a sense, the homeland; and he preferred the British climate to the tropical one. Yet, after a while in England, he seemed almost as though he would have been more at home in Germany. He claimed that it was through the Germanic part of him that there came the great admiration he had for discipline in any form. Perhaps his romantic streak could have been partly from the same source. He thought so.

It was the contrasts in Edgar which made him so interesting as a man, and which add to the interest of him as a writer.

For the five years of our marriage, we lived in a rented cottage in the grounds of a larger house. We used to collect wild flowers. We did not have a garden of our own, but in the time of our first landlady, we were allowed to use part of the garden, and she gave me the light task of cutting the dead heads off the roses. There was a seat where one could sit in this part of the garden, and it was I who used it mostly. Edgar planted some of the wild flowers in a pot just outside the cottage. We had spent our honeymoon on the Rhine, and I had picked a sprig of privet in Boppard. We brought it home and Edgar planted it. I have moved several times since then, but still have a cutting taken from a hedge that grew from that first plant.

Edgar used to make dandelion wine and blackberry wine. In a sense, he loved the countryside. We went for walks along the lanes and sometimes in the fields around our home in Surrey, near the Hampshire border. He painted water-colours, mostly of trees, and we had several of his paintings of views we could see from the window or nearby.

In one of his lighter novels, *Of Trees and the Sea*, his sketches of Caribbean trees are the most delightful part. He had a deep feeling for beauty, as shows also in the descriptive passages of his novels. This is how *Of Trees and the Sea* opens – the verbal sketch following the pictorial one:

“They could hear the wind making a quiet swishing amidst the leaves of the big manchineel tree outside their windows, a subtle and rather solemn sound in the early morning, for manchineels

are solemn trees, huge and filled with deep frowns within their dense foliage ... "

In this book, each section of the fantasy is woven around a sea scene or a kind of tree. These are Caribbean scenes, but in the later works, there are many descriptions of the English countryside. Here is a passage from *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*:

"No presences on the Left Hand Path could stand up to the surge of love that rose from a field of wheat or barley in May sunshine. Nothing evil, you felt, could be abroad when the wind thrust its fingers through the swaying bearded lines of green solidly massed on solid earth."

Here, woven into this almost mystic approach, we see again Edgar's love of nature, which was part of the gentler side of him.

His death was in a sense violent, certainly horrific. He has been described as having this streak of violence, which found its outlet in demanding that extreme measures be used against violent criminals. Certainly the conflict between softness and harshness was even stronger in him than in most people. In his spoken opinions as in his novels, he stressed so much the theme of strength and weakness, and it is significant that he himself has been called both "strong" and "weak", according to the viewpoints of various people.

It is interesting that this preoccupation with violence and criminality is something Edgar had in common with the well-known writer, Colin Wilson, but each deals with the theme in quite a different way. Wilson's sympathy for the criminal can make him seem hard towards the victim. Edgar's indignation on behalf of the victim leaves no sympathy for the criminal. Wilson's main preoccupation is to explore the mind of the criminal, in which Edgar does not openly express interest. Yet the two writers have something in common, and Edgar himself refers in his own novel, *The Piling of Clouds*, to Wilson's *Ritual in the Dark* of similar, though not identical, theme.

Whether one agrees with Edgar's views on crime or not (I don't), there is logic in them. He said that the law should see murderers or potential murderers as incorrigible, and put them to death for the sake of protecting society. Edgar recommended cyanide as more merciful than hanging, but was in favour of sterner punishments altogether. He realised that most ordinary people were on his side, but that the "fashionable intellectuals" were against him. I think he did not allow that many of these intellectuals whom he despised were deep and compassionate thinkers.

Psychiatrists and their attempts to cure people with homicidal tendencies? N.B.G. according to Edgar. He prided himself on being unpredictable, and was tolerant of other tendencies that many people with his kind of views are not, such as homosexuality, which was not so well accepted then as it is now. A pair of homosexuals (not then called "gays") appear in ... *Mrs. Chatham* and one of them in particular is portrayed as a likeable character.

He felt that his views on crime and violence were the reason he had difficulty in getting two of his later books published, *The Piling of Clouds* and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*, but it was due to his way of expressing them rather than the views themselves. Edgar shows some recognition of this in his character, Harpo (in ...*Mrs. Chatham*) who is brusque and rude in reaction to what he feels is the polite dishonesty of English society, and has the same difficulty over getting a series of essays published.

Edgar must have hated the violence in others all the more because of the deep conflict in himself. Many people were impressed by the gentle side of his nature. As a husband, he was protective – and domestic. He used to be a familiar sight in Farnham where we lived - a tall, spare figure, striding rapidly, doing the shopping with his "hold-all". I was much younger than Edgar, and not so strong-willed. Neither was I confident or practical. I used to be afraid that I would never have a chance to learn to do things for myself. He liked to be completely in charge and do things his own way.

After his death, going over everything I seemed to have done wrong, I told a friend, an artist, Mary Wondrausch, who has since become well-known for her pottery:

"I never knew when to stop in an argument."

"Why should you have always had to be the one to know when to stop?" she demanded - she had met Edgar.

Yet he could evoke great affection and sympathy. Could make one enter his world – his own peculiar way of seeing things.

Did Edgar have a sense of humour? Another friend of ours, Mary Lawrence, wrote about him in her diary:

"An ascetic who likes his electric blanket – he is genuinely different, really modest, and the only person I've ever liked who entirely lacked a sense of humour."

This Mary was a writer, whom I had met at a circle in Guildford, and who also attended the summer school at Swanwick. She was gushing, but intelligent, quite attractive, and in her forties. She wore a lot of make-up, especially eye-shadow, and usually a wide-brimmed hat (of which she had a huge selection on the top of her wardrobe). It showed some humour in Edgar that he always referred to her, in private between us, as "she of the eye-shadow", amused that I (who never wore much make-up) had remarked upon it.

He was often on a different wavelength from anyone else. Once, while we were having dinner with Mary Wondrausch, he told her in a shocked way that he'd found out I did not know what black pudding was, and she teased him:

*"But, **Edgar**, do you mean you **married** Jackie although she didn't know what black pudding is?"* (her (bold) italics; she spoke in italics).

"I didn't realise, then, that she didn't know," he replied quite seriously, merely stating a fact, and couldn't understand what we were laughing at.

If not humour, he had a macabre sense of fun, making poltergeist noises around the cottage, tapping on the walls and windows – the same weirdness that appears in many of the characters and books: for example, the chiller, *Eltonsbrody*; old Jarrow and other characters - notably a Dickensian-

style couple called “North and Southerby” in *The Weather in Middenshot*. These characters were deliberately Dickensian, Edgar was an admirer of Dickens and shows this also in the title of his work, *A Tale of Three Places* (set in Trinidad, England, and the West Indian island of St. Lucia).

The striking feature of *Eltonsbrody* is that the old lady, Mrs. Scaife, likes and psychically recognizes everyone with the Mark (an attraction to the macabre and gruesome) and has premonitions about everyone with the Shadow (i.e. who is going to die). More of this later.

At school, Edgar was noted as a humorist, but this was schoolboy buffoonery. He would repeat over and over something that had gone down well the first time. On one occasion the master had to tell him:

“Mittelholzer, the point of that joke has deteriorated.”

I don't think Edgar saw any humour in the ordinary annoying events that go wrong in life and can make you laugh afterwards. Perhaps this was one of his great misfortunes. He would put such events down to carelessness, and even if they were trivial, would take them very seriously. For example, the reason he gave for not letting me do the household shopping, he explained as being triggered off in the first instance – in the early days of our marriage –by his noting my absent-mindedness when I left a coat behind at my mother's. Edgar himself when shopping took meticulous notes on the prices of everything, jotting them down as he purchased each item, and was correct that I would never have managed to do this with a long list. He was concerned about our limited budget. There was not a print-out of items and prices in those days.

Serious difficulties, imperfections in his life – major problems with money, and people not understanding or appreciating what he tried to say in his novels - became real tragedies, built up like the “piling of clouds”, and therefore these imperfections were a major cause of Edgar taking his own life.

The cottage we lived in had trees – beeches and elms – around it in the grounds of the bigger house. It was quiet, but

Edgar loved his routine. He got up early and prepared the breakfast; shopped and went to the library in the morning; wrote in the afternoons; read, or listened to the radio (no television – fewer people had them then) in the evenings. Among the lighter books that he liked were the original James Bond stories by Ian Fleming. He used to bring these and other novels (mostly novels) from the local library. He also liked to have a brief afternoon rest – and brief evening walk.

I did not smoke, but Edgar smoked a disciplined five cigarettes a day.

In the evenings we sometimes listened to records - Wagner perhaps. Sometimes we went to the theatre, usually the Farnham rep. Our visitors were close friends. Mary Lawrence came with her husband, Roger, who was a gentle businessman and inventor of household gadgets, a quiet foil to flamboyant Mary. And relatives, such as Edgar's brothers and sister-in-law, my mother and aunts; and once my girl cousin came to stay; also old school-friends of mine visited. We never met his West Indian friends, except for the light-skinned Frank Collymore, editor of the Barbados magazine, *Bim*. Others, some with darker skins, turned up for Edgar's funeral – Colin Rickards, Andrew Salkey, Jan Carew, George Lamming ... Never having been permitted to meet them before, and being in an emotional state, I disappeared into the bathroom with a fit of the giggles. I was aged twenty-seven at the time.

I don't know why he did not invite these interesting people in his lifetime. Perhaps it was that they were fellow writers rather than personal friends. Andrew Salkey was both, and Edgar had helped him when Andrew came to this country as a writer. As writers, they would have been more interesting to me than many of the folk he did invite. Perhaps Edgar liked to invite people who shared his increasingly reactionary views. He disliked keeping pets and being what he called "sentimental" about animals. One of his English friends, visiting us, advocated collecting cats in sacks and giving them to scientists in laboratories for vivisection.

"*They need them,*" he said.

I am not saying this is a typical "white", certainly not a typically English point of view. However, as Edgar noted,

many English people are hypocrites, coddling their pets, but closing their eyes to what they do not wish to see.

His brother, Arthur, was interested in birds and nature, and once told Edgar (who must have suggested otherwise) that you could not “stamp out a little bird” just because it makes a mess. In his novel, *A Tinkling in the Twilight*, Edgar writes that his rather autobiographical character, Brian Liddard, likes the bird songs, “but not the birds”. However, Arthur agreed with Edgar that women who were “sentimental” about animals would not hesitate to wear a fur coat. This may have been true of more women in those days. I have a dreadful feeling that I, who could be so outspoken, and would never have worn a fur coat, did not say anything – probably, in my insecurity, fearing a typical rebuff from Edgar about my lack of dress sense in general.

There were many stimulating discussions on all manner of subjects. However, towards the end of his life, people did not serve as distractions to Edgar’s worries and problems. Not even the sort of people, like Mary and Roger, with whom we used to enjoy discussing literature, politics, religion (esoteric), ideas. There were material problems, and concerning these he had a strong sense of responsibility. This shows another of the contrasts in him – part of the contrast between the poetic streak and the practicality, the love of discipline and order.

It would not be true to say that he disliked people. He liked women particularly. When he started work with the British Council, he was delighted to be working in a room full of women – to the surprise of the very English man who offered him the post. Also Edgar expressed an affection for children, seeing in them a freshness and innocence. With women and children, he discovered a “softness” that he did not find (or even advocate) in men.

Edgar had a way of not listening to someone with whom he strongly disagreed. He really was not interested, and felt for the moment that such a person was beneath contempt. Yet, like any novelist, he was interested in people. Tom Dellow, the somewhat autobiographical character in his book, *The Wounded and the Worried*, expresses a preference for travelling by ‘bus.

"I like the bus. I can watch the faces of the people."

This reminds me of times when we used to listen to the sound of the bus passing by on the road outside our cottage. Especially there was a late-night 'bus, climbing the hill, when all other sounds were subdued. Often it went by when we were in bed, and it was at some particular time around eleven o'clock.

"Der autobus geht vorbei," (the bus goes by) Edgar would say in German, and he would wonder about the people on the 'bus and their individual lives. He expressed the same interest as Tom in being with the people on a 'bus, in the BBC **'Monitor'** programme in which he featured (referred to below), and there is a clip of him riding on the 'bus.

These vehicles featured a great deal in our life as neither of us were drivers. Edgar felt that he did not have the aptitude or temperament for it. I am sure he would have decided the same about me! He did not agree with people undertaking something at which he felt they were unlikely to succeed. This affected his attitude to me, and also shows in his book, *The Piling of Clouds* when the autobiographical character, Peter, discourages his daughter, Jeannette's dancing lessons because she is sturdy and thick-hipped and does not have the build for dancing.

When people were in trouble, as when Mary "of the eye-shadow" and her husband lost most of their money, nobody could be more sympathetic than Edgar – nobody could more sincerely and un-self-consciously feel for them.

He was considerate, too, in the presents he gave. An umbrella was obtained promptly for my mother when hers was broken; and he sent money presents whenever he could afford it for his parents, sister and aunt in Guyana. An old woman in their hometown, New Amsterdam, was praying one day, literally not knowing "where the next meal was coming from". Edgar turned up at her door, with some of his poor savings, and gave them to her – an answer to prayer. It was one of his brothers who told me this, and when I asked Edgar about it, he replied modestly:

"Yes, I did give her presents from time to time."

As I re-write this in 2009², *The Guyana Annual* (editor: Petamber Persaud) has come out, with tributes to Edgar because this year is the anniversary of his birth. I have been moved by these tributes and particularly by one from his sister, Lucille Mittelholzer:

“Many glowing tributes have been paid to my brother as a writer, but to those who knew the real Edgar he will be remembered most of all for his quiet thoughtfulness, his determination and persistency.

He never bore malice at any time – and therein lay his greatness.

‘Running to Church won’t make me a Christian,’ he often said. ‘I prefer to live my Christianity,’ and this he did in no small measure – unknown to the world.’

That he said this, surprises me a little, and I think it must be Lucille’s own rendering or interpretation. She was most devout, but Edgar as I knew him, and indeed ever since he gave up the traditions in which he was raised (Anglican on his mother’s side, Lutheran on his father’s) for Eastern philosophy, did not claim to be a Christian. Be this as it may, Lucille continues:

“Writing to me from Barbados after the terrible hurricane of 1954, I gained a further insight into my brother’s character. In his letter he said that, farther down the Maxwell Road, there lived all alone an African old lady in a little hut, and fearing that she would be swept away, he sent his little daughter with her nurse to fetch the old lady to his home before the storm broke, where she remained for a few days ...”

This seems like the Edgar I fell in love with – “the real Edgar”.

Once he cured a woman of agoraphobia – simply by arguing with her. Through his great honesty, he could make people see themselves without his necessarily seeming to have understood them. He did not seem to dig deep into motives, but could frequently hit the nail on the head about the facts. I noticed this sometimes when he criticized me – and when he criticized my own writing.

I would like to suggest again that his earlier self may have shown his sympathy and understanding more clearly. He may have been more like the Edgar I encountered first – “the Idyll” more than “the Warrior”. He seems to have become embittered, and this appears to have developed just during the few years before I met him. He became cynical and more Right Wing – and yet I have been told by Juanita Cox that he claimed to be a Communist. She is a serious researcher on Edgar, his life and work, and among other writings about him has now completed a thesis (2013). However, I am surprised that he ever called himself Communist, for he detested “labels”, but he was certainly more Socialist in his outlook as shows in his early work, notably *A Morning at the Office* (1950). To return to the more recent time:

“Intermingled with my Swiss-German, French and English blood there is African, and though I can think of not a single occasion on which I have been discriminated against or humiliated because of this circumstance, I am perfectly aware that I would not be so fortunate in Johannesburg or Miami. This is why I shall have to die without seeing these places, for I should not relish being insulted by barbarian inferiors with pink skin, however authentic the pink!”³.

(At Forty-three – a Personal View of the World (1954))

Compare this with:

*“The instant you mention race riots in this country, or America, or **apartheid** in South Africa, your Would-rotter cries out in horror and gets hysterical about the Terrible White Man. This I consider pussyfoot nonsense. **Apartheid** is pretty shocking, I admit. They’ve certainly taken it too far, but by God! Put yourself in the place of the whites there. But for them, the Africans would still be running savage in the bush and killing and eating each other ... These Boers aren’t simply birds of passage out to exploit the country and move on. They’ve made it what it was over two centuries, and they’ve made it their home. Well, surely they have a strong case for protecting themselves against the huge mass of blacks who would swamp them out of existence ... It’s all so sweet and good to be idealistic and say that the blacks are human*

and should be given equal rights with the whites, but it's easy to be idealistic from the outside - "

(The Piling of Clouds, 1961)

"Would-rotter" is a term which in Edgar's novel, *The Piling of Clouds*, he used for people who, he considered, held effete attitudes to life. They represented the rot in society - a pun on "wood-rot".

Another contrast was that Edgar thought you became part of the "rot" that he felt had set in on British society if you kept animals as pets. Yet, more than once, he brought home, for me to look after, a bird that had been knocked down in the road. And he took great interest in feeding the birds that appeared on our windowsill.

He himself, in conversation and in *A Swarthy Boy*, spoke of the conflict in him between "the warrior" and "the idyll". The insistence on contrasting "soft" and "hard" streaks appears, too, in the well-known trilogy, *The Children of Kaywana*, *The Harrowing of Hubertus* and *Kaywana Blood*. The old plantation family whose history Edgar traces have a dominant "strong" streak, battling all the time with the undercurrent of a "weak" streak. This historical trilogy (which concerns mixture of blood and race - a mixture which was in Edgar) is his great "strength versus weakness" epic, but the "strong" element is often ruthless and sadistic.

Edgar researched for the *Kaywana* series meticulously, spending long hours in the British library. The *Kaywana* family, descended from a native "Indian" girl and a Dutch plantation owner, are imaginary, but I wonder if Edgar based them at all on the Mittelholzers, and saw their contrasting streaks as being in himself. There is the historical Mittelholzer who came to Guyana from Switzerland, and is mentioned briefly.

Other contrasts in our life together were the actual contrasts between Edgar and myself. There was the difference in our ages, experience and temperaments. For example, Edgar poured scorn on idealistic movements, while I had taken part in a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament march from Aldermaston just a few days before our wedding in April, 1960.

Although it was he who had the “coloured” blood, it was he who in our arguments would put the case for the whites in South Africa, or Rhodesia (as it then was), or in any news item concerning racial friction. We ourselves seemed sheltered from such things where we lived by the Surrey/Hampshire border. I don’t think it occurred to me that we could be involved personally – until an event near the end of Edgar’s life.

We liked many of the same kinds of books and music. He introduced me to many such things. We were both interested in the occult, read books about Yoga, reincarnation, astral projection, supernatural phenomena, long before such ideas were as popular as they are today.

Scolded by Edgar for not being sufficiently orderly, I found it restricting, yet occasionally steady, to live with someone who liked so fixed a routine. Of course, the routine changed a little after the birth of our son, whom we called “Leodegar”, a family name of some kinsfolk Edgar discovered, the Mittelholzers who had lived for centuries in Appenzell, Switzerland. It was always the name of the first-born son.

“If we have a son,” Edgar told them in German when we were visiting the family, *“we shall call him ‘Leodegar’.”*

When Edgar first saw Leo (whose dark eyes in particular are unmistakably like Edgar’s) he pretended to be appalled at how much he resembled him.

“He scowled at me, man!”

The baby had its thumb in its mouth. Edgar took it out. The baby put it back. Foretaste of battle of wills in the future? He was very fond of Leodegar. Called him “boy”. Used to give him his bath even when I wanted to. Feed him when I went out. Teach him German phrases. But “the future” only went on for a little more than two years after the baby’s birth. Leo was born in December, 1962, and Edgar died on May 5th – fifth day of the fifth month – 1965. He always said that “five” was his unlucky number.

NOTES:

¹ "Middenshot" is based upon Bagshot in Surrey, where Edgar lived with his first wife and children from 1948-52.

² Much of this work has been re-written at various times, so there will be several such different dates referred to.

³ I cannot resist the following jingle by Edgar, just discovered, dated 7th April, 1957 (just over two years before I met Edgar):

SONG OF IGNORANCE

"But where in the world is Jamaica?"
"My brother was there in the war.
Well, his letters were postmarked Malaya,
Which is the capital I'm sure."

"I say, how do you live in Jamaica?"
The English ask so innocently:
"Do you live in trees like the puma,
And how come you can speak as we?"

"The Island of Guiana!" said an M.P.,
Stout champion of British colonies,
Excusing the bubble in B.G.,
In the House of Commons if you please.

"Where is Jamaica in Trinidad? –
My geography's a bit hazy,"
I said, "It's not really that bad,
Just a thousand miles apart in the sea."

Then there was the nurse in on the incision;
Brother, what a sight to see!
She wheeled round and startled her companion:
"He's got red blood gore-blimey!"

This was not the sort of subject Edgar exclaimed about when I knew him – certainly not part of his diatribes. Incidentally, I know it was a long time ago, but is that last stanza based on fact?

CHAPTER ONE: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Edgar was forty-nine when I met him, but my first impression was that he was in his thirties. To my young self anyway, he did not seem like someone over forty by the time he died when he was really fifty-five. The passing of the actuality of Edgar was the more heart-rending because of his vitality. I am sure this vitality must have been what first struck most people who met him. One moment you are sitting peacefully by yourself, unaware of his existence; then:

"Is this seat taken?"

"No," you reply, and he is so very much there. Of course, you do not realise straightaway what has hit you. You just know that you have met another unusual person; you do not appreciate the extent of the uniqueness, or what will happen.

The "passing of the actuality" was, for years, very much on my mind. Edgar was as real as the daily routine, and as those extra-real moments of love-making, and is now to all appearances just something I am writing about. This has made the very fact of writing about him seem unreal. The past is never quite recapture-able. It can be remembered as vivid, but the actuality goes. The actuality of the freckle on the rim of his right ear, and the one on his lower lip.

Edgar was tall and spare, alert, energetic-looking.

He had many freckles, arranged like constellations on his face, showing up in their darker shade than the rest of his brown. With big nose and ears, his ears stuck out sufficiently to have earned him as a boy the nickname, "Bat-ears". By the time I knew him, his dark hair was thinning. He wore it cut very short, but claimed that when he was boy his mother made him wear it in a long plait to show off its straightness (i.e. no African kink). His mother denied this. I am sure eyes hold expression. Edgar's dark, bright eyes had such a powerful range from hard, flashing, to incredibly soft.

It comes back to me now that he always put on a different expression from any of his normal when he looked in the

mirror, as an actor might. So did he ever know how he really looked? Do any of us know how we look?

His dark eyes and, to quote his own word, "swarthy" complexion showed his "coloured origin"; yet I do not believe this was one of the first things I noticed about him. It was not an aspect that he stressed very much, but I think it must have put up a bigger fight against the "master race" German blood than did anything else. This must have added to his conflict.

"The instant you mention race riots in this country, or America, or apartheid in South Africa, your Would-rotter cries out in horror and gets hysterical about the Terrible White Man. This I consider pussyfoot nonsense."

The paragraph which I quoted earlier from *The Piling of Clouds* gives the exact spirit of his way of speaking when angry. When he spoke verbally in this strain, his whole body quivered with some deep, angry emotion – more hysterical than the supposed "would-rotter"! When not angry, his rather clipped, Germanic way of speaking cut through his Guyanese accent.

Edgar asked me once in our summer school week:

"Does my age alarm you?"

"I don't know what your age is," I replied, having been afraid to ask him before, for I knew this would force me to tell him my own age. Lacking confidence, I was ashamed that people usually thought of me as about sixteen. It made me feel foolish when I had to confess that I was really twenty-one.

I did lack confidence, not having made a great success of my education, or of any work since I left school. Had reached sixth form standard at a grammar school. Had then done secretarial work; work with children; and had spent a rather disastrous month in a bookshop. As for men, any man who really liked me at that time often turned out to be much older than myself, and I felt more at ease with, and interested in, older men. Freud might have had an explanation. I was an only child whose father died when I was aged just nine.

"Tell me something," Edgar would say when I was quiet and shy. This meant: "Talk to me" and was most appealing. I think this went on throughout our brief life together.

During our first conversations, I must have shown him my concern that I had failed to do what was expected of me educationally. Much later, I fulfilled my ambition in this direction, but at the time I can remember him saying:

"Well, I never went to university either!"

But this was not his or his parents' aim, nor a likely aim in British Guiana at that time. The main preoccupation with a "good class" or "high colour" family seems to have been to get a "Government job". At first Edgar was taught by a governess; then at a series of private schools, and then began to do well when he won a scholarship to Berbice High School where discipline was strict; for a strict discipline and routine always made him feel at home.

I had worked hard at my writing, and had won a scholarship to the summer school the previous year. Without this, I would not have known of the summer school, nor have met Edgar. I was filled with awe at the published books I saw on sale, all written by members of the summer school, and felt that one day I would be in their situation. Perhaps I did have confidence here! I stood in the reading room, handling a copy of *A Tinkling in the Twilight*.

"Is that yours?" asked someone, meaning did I write it?

"No," I replied, *"my friend's."*

Edgar glanced at me, pleased that after knowing him for a couple of days I called him my friend. He was sensitive, easily moved by signs of love and friendship.

He asked me the question about his age in what we called the "Cow Place". It was when we were standing in the "Cow Place" that he asked me to marry him. This, in the grounds of the conference centre, was an arbour from which we could look out between trees to where cows grazed. We could see in the distance a slag heap, a railway line, and a little engine chugging backwards and forwards at work there. The "Cow Place" was a phrase which always called up magic for us afterwards; was a place where we spent some of our first beautiful moments.

"Beautiful Moments" should really be written with initials in capitals – the way Edgar would have written it, I think – to evoke the atmosphere of how we could bring love to each other's faces by saying: *"Do you remember ...?"*; how I wanted

to cry when, during any serious dispute, I remembered them; how they were always a reassuring memory at the time of any trouble we shared; how Edgar in his leave-taking letter just before his death wrote:

"We have had some wonderful moments together. Let the memory of them help you to endure my absence."

Yes, the memory of them. But the actuality? Perhaps cows still graze in that field. As I write about this, not for the first time, but now in 2007, the year when the slip of a girl, who was so taken up with Edgar, will be seventy, I could endure to see that field; the pain has long gone; there have been other pains and joys; but there was a time when I could not have born to see it.

"Keep your little pointed chin up!" he used to say in times of trouble.

The conference centre was The Hayes at Swanwick in Derbyshire. It was that lovely summer of 1959, and moonlit evenings were laid on for us by our whimsical gods. Or perhaps Edgar's 'thin, grey man of fate' of whom he always spoke was not in such a 'thin, grey' mood as usual.

I slept in a cubicle in the Garden House, the new wing of the building, made for German prisoners during the second world war. Edgar slept in the old part, the Quadrangle. We used to meet in the vineyard which was attached to the Quadrangle, and we went for walks before breakfast. We walked along a field path; saw dew on cobwebs; rosebay willowherb. We walked to where we had a better view of the little railway and saw the cows from a different side of their field. We kissed, and then returned, usually hearing the breakfast bell a little before we arrived. Sometime I used to trot to keep up with Edgar's rapid stride. Yet it was not the stride so much. It was just the speed and energy with which he moved, taking normal or even short paces for his height, *"six foot one in socks, six foot two in shoes"*, as he was fond of explaining.

In the evenings, we used to stand for long periods in the beech-fringed drive. Once we were startled by a moonlit animal in the field by the driveway. We were never able to

recall afterwards whether it had been a cow or a goat. I remember so well the effect of moonlight and being in love at the same time; a world of intensified feeling. I remember so well the cool feel of his shirt over thin-ness and boniness – different from other summers when he was less of a stranger to me. Naturally there were passionate moments, but readers of his books might scarcely believe that he could stand so long just quietly with his arms round a woman.

Afterwards I went on a walking holiday with my cousin and a group in the Peak District. That is another story, but Edgar met me off the train upon my return to London. From then on, I used to visit him each Saturday at his flat in Maida Vale or, alternatively, he would spend the weekend with my mother and self at our small cottage at the end of a gravelly lane in Elstead, a little village near Godalming in Surrey. It is amazing how sheltered I was – or how different things were in those days! I suppose it would have been different if I had been living away from home – no one would have been any the wiser - but as things were, I could not have stayed the night with him without causing tremendous concern to my mother – in fact, one might say it was forbidden. The only time it happened was when we were going to the opera to hear the first part of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. I was intended to spend the night at the flat of a married cousin, but Edgar was not well, so I stayed with him. There was quite an outcry in the family. Unfortunately, we did not get to see the opera either!

There was the time when we almost decided not to get married, after all. In *The Piling of Clouds*, Edgar makes the young girl, Lilian, a C.N.D. supporter, say in a stammering way to the character, Peter Elmfold who (not in appearance, but in attitude) resembles Edgar:

"I'd be cold if – if you tried to make love to me seriously. I'd want you physically, but – but my spirit would refuse ... I'd be aware of the difference in us – how you see things in one way and I in another way ... I'd know that you despise me for being – for my weak outlook, as you call it. This would be a barrier between us – I couldn't be closely intimate with you knowing this."

Perhaps Edgar was trying to tell me something here – or maybe I did say something like this, but failed to stick to it. Of course differences in a marriage are more important than the temporary love affair that Peter (already married) and Lilian are considering; so perhaps, even more than Lilian, I should have reached this decision, but somehow I never did – not quite.

Perhaps I said this to him when, a couple of weeks before our wedding, we met at Loushall House Cottage (in Dippenhall, Farnham, Surrey, near the Hampshire border) to discuss whether we should get married - or "*call the whole thing off*" as the song says. Edgar had chosen the house, with my agreement, and already moved in there. He had rented this house so that we could live near my mother.

"*Your worst enemy is your silence,*" he said. This is because I had not confessed until this last couple of weeks that I intended to go on the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament's Easter march from Aldermaston just before the wedding. I think it was an argument ensuing from this confession that triggered off our doubts.

"*With your altruistic views,*" he told me, "*you may have chosen the wrong walk in life, getting married. You should have been a female Albert Schweitzer – only you are not so practical as a Schweitzer would have to be!*"

I think Schweitzer must have been prominent in the news at the time, for there *are* females. Why not Mother Teresa? Maybe I should have lived this kind of life – or at least waited to marry until I met someone with ideals more like my own – as I have done now, towards what must be the end of my time on earth.

CHAPTER TWO: OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Our wedding, in April 1960, was a small family affair – at a Unitarian church in Godalming, Surrey. My mother's people were Unitarian; my grandfather had been a Unitarian minister. The wedding was followed by an unofficial reception, with no speeches, at my mother's house. Two obliging guests possessed cars, and everyone came to see the cottage where Edgar and I were going to live. We were to spend the night at the cottage, then would set off for our honeymoon on the Rhine (German part of the Rhine, naturally) the next morning. Edgar knew all about it as he had been there the previous year.

The atmosphere of the honeymoon was happiness and strangeness, and a more light-hearted Edgar than I have known at any other time.

There was the *Sessellift* (chair lift) in Boppard, and the way we were both frightened of the height, of floating out through space, when we had a ride in it. The noise it made when it went over the points seemed to intensify our misgivings. Edgar made matters worse by mimicking the sound each time, just before it happened. There was a good view of the Rhine which we did not really appreciate that time, but enjoyed many other views of this river, with its own peculiar green-silver colour, very limpid, very clean-looking.

We picked a sprig of privet, the one that grew afterwards, and a spray of some other greenery I found and displayed on the balcony of our hotel room in Boppard for May Day.

There was the sound of the horns of the *Schleppkahn* (barges) on the river, a sound especially noticeable at night when there were not so many other sounds. And there was the sound of bells always ringing in Boppard. We liked the ruins of the old walls around the towns. We both liked the little towns, Boppard and Oberwesel, better than big Köln (Cologne).

We drank *Apfelsaft* (apple-juice) and Rhine or Mosel wine.

There was many a *Schloss* (castle), and along the banks of

all the riverside towns where we stayed, were stalls selling curiosities – little decorated cups and saucers. We bought some for ourselves and some as presents. We sent postcards to our parents and others. Both Edgar’s parents were alive then. In fact, his father survived him.

One night in Koblenz, I woke up, crying out: “*Help! Help me!*” (quoted by Edgar, lover of German phrases, as “*Hilfe! Hilfe!*” for the rest of his life). I could not in the least remember what dream had prompted the shout. Edgar insisted that I sleep on the inner side of the bed for the rest of the night – so that, as he explained quite seriously, he could protect me from the evil spirits. But I think it was not evil spirits. It was some premonition about the future – or more fancifully, some recollection of the past (as in a past life) with Edgar!

There were two dreams or premonitions I experienced before we were married. One was of the romantic, gentle Edgar, as I mostly knew him then, sitting beside me in a train or some such vehicle on a journey, and suddenly sitting up very straight, disciplinary and judgmental, as at that time I had not seen him before. The other was of a deer running from a wolf, but she was captured, escaped once, was caught again and swallowed up. I always see a deer as my inward symbol. This is not to say that Edgar was a wolf. The wolf was the situation from which with some part of myself I was trying to escape.

The grounds of the cottage where we lived for the next five years were on a slope. Another cottage had an upstairs and downstairs. It was semi-detached from ours, farther up, nearer the main house. Ours was all upstairs, except for the “store-room” under the house, but we rejoiced in an extra sitting-room. We climbed fourteen steps to our front door. Fourteen, or was it sixteen? I used to count these in the later years with our baby son. Jasmine grew against the wall under the front window. The house in whose wooded grounds the cottage stood was called “Loushall House”. We had the awkward address of “Loushall House Cottage” –our neighbours dwelling in “Loushall Barn Cottage”. In the previous century, the building that had been converted into these two cottages had been a barn. Not a lodge, as you might

think, but people lodged there. "Loushall" was "Louse Hall" because of the hops grown on the Surrey-Hampshire border. Londoners who came down for the hop-picking season were called 'London lice' by local hop-pickers, who were annoyed with them for stealing the work.

"Loushall Barn Cottage" changed tenants from time to time, while we stayed on in the neighbouring cottage. Our first and longest remaining neighbours were an Irishwoman and her two grown-up daughters. Once or twice I heard a furious argument between the three of them through the thin wall that divided our houses, and I think arguments of ours must have been heard in the same way.

Our warmest room was the sitting-room where the Rayburn was.

Edgar was always the one who handled the Rayburn, the stove set in an alcove, keeping the room warm, and providing hot water all the year round. It was not allowed to go out except in very special circumstances, and was almost a living member of the household. Other rooms did get very cold in the winter and the house was wired so that electric heating could only be used in a limited way. Our landlady's son, who visited her frequently, inserted fibreglass in our roof. This was supposed to make the house cool in the summer, warm in the winter, and we used to joke about our 'central heating'.

A corridor ran along the length of the house inside. To go along the corridor to the two bedrooms seemed to give much the same effect as going upstairs in a double-storey house. We had our own bedroom plus what we called the 'spare room' until it became 'Leodegar's room'. The corridor evoked staircase type fantasies.

"As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there ..."

Edgar imagined a "howling terror" would rush towards us along the corridor.

We had a capacious loft. Sometimes he tried to block with stones the gaps in the eaves through which birds were forever straying. An incident, or series of incidents, in *The Piling*

of *Clouds* is based on the way birds used to stray into our roof.

"The bird again. The blackbird in the roof. Daylight broke about a quarter to four, and as it broke the bird in the roof began to thump and flutter. And Peter woke. Peter swore. Sally slept on. Peter put his pillow over his ear, and settled down again to sleep. He dozed off. But, after a silence of about two minutes, the bird made an onslaught on the skylight ... "

One day when we were in the middle of a big argument, our landlady (our first landlady, the one with the son who inserted the fibreglass) knocked on our door. She was a thin, white-haired, elderly Scottish lady – "lady" being the operative word, for she was very much so. She seemed always to have a rather nervous manner, anxious to please, but then a number of people were like this in Edgar's presence. Bewildered by our raised voices on this occasion, she must have thought we were in the middle of a dreadful quarrel.

"I was going shopping," she said, clasping her hands together anxiously. *"I wondered if you wanted anything in the town. That is - "* Normally she never asked us this.

"Be honest!" Edgar laughed. *"You heard raised voices and you wondered what was going on."*

"It's all right," I said. *"We were talking about South Africa."*

"Oh, I see!" she replied, not seeing.

At least, that is how I remembered the incident. Not long afterwards, we were having another argument – this time as to which of us had the presence of mind to explain that we were talking about South Africa. It occurs to me now, perhaps we both explained to her!

We were on pleasant terms with this first landlord, whom I will call Mrs. Hillsley as in my play, a brave soul who had lived alone for sixteen years in the big house. She *must* have been brave to do this, for she did give the impression of being naturally nervous. In addition to her son, she had a noisy grandson who kept his homemade car in the garage under our cottage. Or rather, it was the car that was noisy – and smoky.

Mrs. Hillsley's views on South Africa coincided with Edgar's, the conventional views of the Conservative "upper class" at the time, more predictable in her than in him. In *The Piling of Clouds* Edgar says that *apartheid* "... is pretty shocking, I admit. They've taken it too far, but by God! Put yourself in the place of the whites there ... " He then goes on to explain why it is *not* particularly shocking, and how they have *not* taken it too far, concluding this typical speech by his mouthpiece, Peter, with:

"This is what life is like, and we've just got to face it. It's a continual struggle between the strong and the weak. If you keep strong and vigilant you win out; you triumph over those who are weaker. It doesn't sound Christian and humane and democratic – but there it is. It's Life, and if you try to ignore the way life functions, down you go!"

The blurb on the hard-cover edition of *The Children of Kaywana* (Secker and Warburg) sums up the theme of this book as:

"In strength lies salvation and survival; in weakness defeat and destruction. But strength abused can be equally as disastrous as weakness."

When I wrote about this before, I queried how much Edgar would have been in agreement with the second part of this statement, but in his portrayal of the slave uprising, I suppose he was. On the other hand, he could not get round it, for it really happened. He could not say the slaves were quelled and subdued, for they were not. He did a great deal of research for *Kaywana* and the trilogy was sensational but honest.

I could not really discuss subjects such as South Africa with Edgar, for I expect we both got too emotional, but why? We were not directly concerned. I shouted, as loud as he did, but shriller, my young self trying to "get a word in", and finished up feeling "hurt" because of the opinions he would express about my lack of intelligence, character, guts etc. He became so emotional on this subject. This cannot have been merely

due to his own mixed blood. He had the same exaggerated way of expressing himself on the crime question; and against pacifism, non-violence and animal-lovers – all causes dear to me. His voice, face and eyes were very expressive, so he could put into his tone, and gesture, the same dramatic venom that is apparent in some of his written words. I have seen him give an impression of a “wiggling, simpering, sissy pacifist”. The effect was weird in the extreme, and not at all evocative of pacifists one has known.

Edgar despised what he called “weak” ways of putting an argument and mentioned that part of the “over ripe”, “softened” condition of the British was evident in the apologetic way arguments were used in newspapers and conversation. “*In my opinion ...*”, “*it seems to me ...*”. “*I may be wrong, but ...*” – these were the kind of phrases he did not like or use.

His intrinsic attitude was this uncompromising one. Maybe he could be said just to have left off the “in my opinion” because it was “weak” or inartistic – if it were not that there did not seem to be any “*in my opinion*” in his mind. Not even on small personal issues. I can remember an afternoon when Edgar, who was trying to win a fortune on the football pools, called the radio commentator a “*damn’ fool*” for giving the horse racing results first. He did not say this with mild irritability, but with real indignation. His younger brother, Arthur, who was spending the day with us, remarked reprovingly that other people might be anxious to hear the horse racing results.

“Well, *other people perhaps,*” said Edgar, as if this was not relevant at all.

However, by this time he had become depressingly fanatical about the football results, seeing these chancy noughts and crosses as his one hope of obtaining enough money to support his two families in the way he felt he ought. I hated this; it was not a joke; but we joked sometimes about my hatred of the sight of a football coupon. Unless he is earning money by something straightforward like an outside job, one feels that a writer should be devoting his working time to writing, and be finding it rewarding, remuneratively or otherwise. We reached the stage where Edgar was taking

his pools schemes quite as seriously as his writing. Like the rest of the "Would-rotters" I was accused of being too apologetic, and among other things of being so in connection with the pools. If I argued the probable fruitlessness of gambling upon them, he said that I was not encouraging him; but if I mentioned more gently that I *hoped* he would win something, he might still ferret out that I was discouraging him, "*in your own half-hearted way*".

Yet for small things such as were my normal expressions of affection (like sitting on the arm of his chair when we had both been engrossed in writing or reading and I suddenly felt that one or the other of us needed company), he often showed a gratitude that surprised me. Perhaps this bore out his statement that his past life had been so unlucky that he expected little from people nowadays.

I would have regarded most arguments between Edgar and myself as trivial if they had been against a background of being sure of myself as the housewife – this seemed important at the time! Using in his domestic life the same authoritarian methods that he advocated in his books and speech, Edgar kept the housekeeping money, did the shopping – and most of the cooking. My inexperience and inefficiency were his excuse, but I was not given the chance to learn. There was some weakness in Edgar himself, for if an individual is really sure of himself, he does not mind standing back and letting another person experiment.

Yet in a sense there was something fine about Edgar's non-compromise attitude. Just as I tolerate other people's weaknesses, I always have to endure my own or I would not be able to live with myself. Edgar could never tolerate anything, inside or outside himself that seemed to him wrong, and surely this is one of the reasons why he killed himself in the end. Surely most people have to be a little tolerant of themselves, their situation, other people, the world, because otherwise they would not be able to face these things.

Edgar could really wound my super-sensitive self, making impersonal arguments personal. Yet this conviction of manner could make arguments stimulating, especially when others were joining in. I think of the two friends in particular – Mary "of the eye-shadow" and her husband, Roger. With them

we used to discuss yoga, Buddhism, reincarnation, crime and punishment. Long after Edgar's death the three of us continued to discuss yoga, Buddhism, reincarnation – enjoyably – but something was gone from us because Edgar had always been the leader – an urgent, magnetic leader. When I re-married I saw them no more, but somehow heard later that Mary had hanged herself – and I felt that her great admiration for Edgar must have had something to do with it, since he, too, had taken his own life.

Returning to the early days, I shall always remember that Edgar and I were both wearing black shirts when we first met. It added to the sense of appointment about the whole thing. We were both wearing them, too, when we went on our first walk together after we came home from the honeymoon. It was a sunny afternoon in May and we were exploring around the area of our new home. It became so hot, we went into a bluebell wood, removed our vests, replaced our black shirts. I am not sure we ever found the exact spot again. It would have looked different without the bluebells. Why did we not search for them other years? I don't remember doing so, but always look for bluebells now – and used to, years before, as a child. Why would I not have looked for them with Edgar? He was interested in wild flowers – and liked blue varieties. He planted wild chicory in a pot – or rather, pots of various sizes and made out of different materials. Once it was an old biscuit tin. We placed the plant on the wall at the top of the stone steps leading up to our cottage. He liked the chicory for its clear, pure blue. Blue was his favourite colour followed by all pastel shades. Red was too fiery – like the side of himself he most admired and least liked.

One day a young man said: "*I don't want to be nasty, but ...*" and asked us to leave a field where we were reading under a haystack. We did a lot of reading. Sometimes we both read the same book at the same time, literally, waiting to turn the page until the other one was ready. Afterwards between ourselves we always called the young man the "*non-nasty boy*". I don't remember if he was connected with the farmer we used to visit sometimes, but I expect he was, as most of the fields belonged to this farmer. Edgar was interested in the farm, the

rotation of the corn crops, waiting for the winter wheat to come up.

We used to visit the farmer occasionally in the evenings – winter evenings especially. There was the scent of the old-fashioned log fire. His two sons would come in from working on the farm – I don't think one of them was the “*non-nasty boy*”. The neighbours would arrive, but the little girl would stay in the room while she tried to do her homework. At some stage in the evening, the farmer's wife would bring round tea and home-made cakes. It would all have had a traditional, picturesque atmosphere, with the log fire at the centre, if it had not been for the television – which was, in fact, the centre. It was intriguing how the TV and conversation could exist alongside each other – especially as the former must have been a novelty.

Edgar was far more interested in wild flowers than in wild animals and birds, or so he said. He did not like to take too much interest in living creatures - unless they were human. It was all linked up with his idea that it was “soft” to keep pets. Yet he said that he once had a pet lizard which used to sit on his typewriter.

There was a family of foxes. They used to play in and out of the bushes at the end of a grass path near our home. We could just see them from our window – we would get out the binoculars and both of us enjoyed watching them. Then there were the birds – two young chaffinches – which Edgar brought home at different times. He would not have them in the house, but we kept them in the “store-room” under the steps, and I used to feed them. One of them died. The other one seemed un-injured. When I discovered that Edgar had found it under the trees near our house, I took it back there. It disappeared, and I hope this means its parents found it.

We went for evening walks along the country lanes. There was an avenue, with owls that we could see and hear when we were out in the autumn and winter twilight. Also there were Sunday morning walks – no other morning would have fitted in with Edgar's routine, but these Sunday excursions became part of it. This would have been after, each Sunday morning early, I'd spun on my bike down the steep Dippenhall road and struggled back up the heavy climb with the Sunday

papers. *The Observer* was mine, and Edgar's *The Sunday Telegraph*. I used to enjoy this trip – the bike ride, and a task of my own with which I was entrusted! Our walks were in the opposite direction, leading past fields with cows or grain as far as the Surrey-Hampshire border. I made this walk again before I left the cottage forever after Edgar had died. It was only on my way back that I realised it was, in fact, a Sunday morning. Perhaps he had been prompting me.

When we returned from our walks, we used to drink light wine. Often it was Edgar's home-made dandelion wine.

Some of the most charming memories concern Edgar and our little boy, Leodegar. Edgar deserved what he had always wanted, a house he owned himself, if only to adorn the air of pride with which he carried his small son over the threshold when we first brought him back from the hospital (but, of course, he had a house and children through his previous marriage). He arranged everything in the room we were preparing to use for the baby. Framed a picture as part of a special present for the little boy to have in his room. It was part of a bigger water-colour that Edgar had painted himself. It was one which had not succeeded as a composition, but now he had cut out and framed this small section which I had always admired – a little composition on its own, with the sun low in the sky behind two groups of dark pine-trees. I still have this painting.

Our home's electrical limitations meant that we must not have both our electric heaters on together, or the radio on at the same time as one of them. Edgar was clever at making arrangements to combat the cold. It was that bitterly cold winter of 1962-63 – and practically impossible to keep the room at a warm enough temperature for a newborn baby. At night, Edgar used to wrap the child round and round in a yellow cocoon of blanket and pin it with the special babies' safety pins. We helped the baby to get his little starfish hands into a fairly free position at the top, and we had the heater on a chair (safely so) facing the cot all night. Edgar organized with scientific precision the nightly arrangement of the blankets on the cot.

He did a large amount of the baby's washing. In those days we did not have a washing machine.

When Leodegar reached the sitting up stage, he used to sit sometimes on his father's knee when Edgar was typing (on his manual typewriter, of course. No computer in those days). The resemblance was striking between them – the child like a miniature Edgar, but fairer in skin, and naturally with rounder outlines. There were the nearly black eyes – everything similar, yet softened on the baby's face.

Even as a baby, Leodegar obeyed his father with a promptness with which he would not obey me. He was fascinated by him, and would laugh with him, but not to the same extent as he would with me. He seemed to regard him with a little awe, and probably was not quite at ease with him. When he began to chatter in baby phrases, most of the chatter was directed at me. When we all three went for a walk, Leodegar in the pushchair did not talk. When Leo and I went alone, he did.

My mother and aunt (a retired district nurse) lived together in the old home in Elstead, and used to come to tea with us once a week. They and the baby boy and I would be in one room, while Edgar would be typing in the other. He would join us just for tea. The little boy, who would have been taking everyone else for granted, laughing and joking with us in a baby fashion, would keep his eyes on his father from the moment the latter entered the room.

"Gone!" he said once with an air of wonder, when Edgar had got up abruptly and hurried back to work again.

Where we lived, paths and fields surrounded us. We seemed beset by people who wanted to keep these private. Even when nobody had said a particular field or path was private, it was not quite the freedom of the open countryside to which I had been used. I do not think we felt or minded this a great deal until right at the end, when Loushall House changed hands and, with our young child growing, we no longer had the freedom of the garden.

Returning to the time of the baby's birth, I remember the awed voice of an excessively romantic companion of mine in the maternity ward, when she saw Edgar:

"He's a man, isn't he!"

He certainly was. He had something about him that many women recognized at once and, due to the deep roots of sex in one's being, especially when young, I was perhaps prouder of this than of anything else, but I was proud too of the respect people seemed to have for his intellect and success as a writer. Most of them had little knowledge of how dispirited he had become about this success.

I was proud of the masculinity, the brains and the success in themselves, but also of people's respect. I have mentioned my lack of confidence. I suppose I was glad for people to see where I had hit a honey pot – I won't say "jackpot", for that sounds like money. Money we lacked, and it was Edgar, not I, who was particularly distressed about this.

Once Edgar was interviewed at home for the BBC '**Monitor**' programme. I enjoyed this. Pleasant men, cameras and lamps all over the house: "*Scene two, take one*" and "*Cut*"; and routine turned topsy-turvy. However, the interview itself was something of a farce. It was fitted together in such a complicated fashion that it took two and a half days to stage and complete a ten-minute interview. And so many of Edgar's answers had to be altered, toned down, or put in a more conventional fashion –not the way to get the best out of him. But, after all, it was only for ten minutes. To get at the whole truth about Edgar – without simplifying, without "*toning him down*" – would be a lifetime's study. There are those who may do this, whereas what I can mainly contribute are my own reminiscences and insights. As much as anyone, I have loved and respected Edgar, and have been interested in him for what he really was. Also, having a great sense of the mystery in any human being (as did he), I can only hope, with what seem my fragmentary jottings when compared with Edgar's actuality, that I approach somewhere near the truth of him.

CHAPTER THREE: EDGAR AND THE ESOTERIC – A TINKLING IN THE TWILIGHT, THE WOUNDED AND THE WORRIED, THE ALONENESS OF MRS. CHATHAM

*“You are still religious, then?”
‘In a special way – very much ...’*

All magic, except the magic of evil, is wholesome.”

Edgar Mittelholzer, *The Wounded and the Worried*

It is always difficult to define what is meant by “esoteric” or, conversely, whether “esoteric” is the best term for a subject. Perhaps “religious ... In a special way” is as good a definition as any. A meaning of “esoteric” is “hidden knowledge”. Another term, overlapping the same area, is “holistic”, meaning “whole”, therefore embracing a wide range of subjects covering all human experience, but applied particularly to the kind of subject of which I am thinking, such as might also be called “spiritual”. With the word, “holistic”, there is generally the thought of alternative healing, such as homeopathy, acupuncture, or healing with aromas, sounds or colours. All these ideas are also included under the heading, “New Age Philosophy”, but this phrase seems to have negative connotations for many people. It has appeared since Edgar’s time, but includes old concepts, re-emerging, such as a belief in reincarnation, interest in Yoga, meditation, astral projection – all topics of interest to him. He had books on astral projection, and *Hatha* yoga. We used to practise *pranayama*, simple breathing exercises, when out walking. *Hatha* yoga comprises most of yoga as it is understood in the West – practical exercises, meditation and breathing.

Edgar was brought up with a strict Lutheran background on his father’s side, and Anglican on his mother’s. As a boy, he became an altar-server in the Church of England.

An “elderly gentleman”, an old family friend, introduced him to Yoga and Oriental philosophy at the age of nineteen. It is interesting that Edgar wrote (in his essay, *At Forty-three, - a Personal View of the World*) that this man, in spite of being “careless in dress and habits”, was “the first human being who gave me a feeling of genuine awe ... To listen to him logically and earnestly rending to bits orthodox beliefs and conventions was, to me, a feat to marvel at. Here, I told myself, was a big intellect, the human spirit – lo and behold! – at its highest. Here was a real instance of the triumph of Spirit over Flesh.” Here also we have an instance of Edgar recognizing the high qualities of someone over-riding personal dress and habits of which even the young Edgar would have been critical. Long before I read about this, he told me of the man and the two contrasting aspects of his nature. Perhaps it is not really so amazing that they were in contrast, and I recall that Edgar appreciated this; for the “elderly gentleman’s” mind was not on physical matters, except for the physical side of practising of Yoga.

What is important here is that Edgar, always a thinker and a rebel, found that this man’s philosophy nourished his own enquiring mind in a way that traditional Christianity did not. Sometimes people asked Edgar if he was a Buddhist, but he never actually became one, being a free thinker. However, what he learnt from this family friend led him to persist in studying Eastern philosophy, and had a marked influence for the rest of his life.

The books in which he referred particularly to these subjects were among the later works - those written while he lived in England. There are, however, in the Caribbean novels, references to ghosts, spirits, myths and mythology - particularly *Shadows Move Among Them*, *My Bones and my Flute* and *Eltonsbrody*. The latter two are primarily a ghost story and a horror story, respectively. The final version of *Eltonsbrody* was actually written in 1960, when he was in England, but is set in Barbados. Going back a bit, in *Shadows ...* Edgar treats more seriously the subject of the importance of myth in religion. *Shadows ...* is the third published novel (1951), but shows that even at this early stage he has no faith or belief in dogmatic, traditional Christianity. The leader of the community in the jungle, in this novel, is a parson, but not a

conventional parson. He teaches his congregation myths, but not the conventional Bible stories.

The three novels in which Edgar mainly dealt with spiritual or esoteric subjects (such as reincarnation, Yoga, astral projection, and sometimes healing) are *A Tinkling in the Twilight* (just published when I met him, in 1959) and two others during those last six years of life: *The Wounded and the Worried* (1962) and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* (1965).

A Tinkling in the Twilight is a comprehensive novel, containing most of his thoughts, feelings and attitudes, albeit in light-hearted vein. The narrator is Brian Liddard, a bookseller, who lives in rooms above his shop in Paddington, London. For the last five years, he has been studying and practising Yoga, training his mind through meditation and breathing exercises, to attain enlightenment. He leads a disciplined life, never varying in his routine. It is almost the life of a recluse, his only associates being his assistant, Miss Gregg, and his customers. On his regular evening walk he speaks to some of the prostitutes whom he meets, but nothing more, for he has renounced the world of the flesh. Imagine his surprise, then, when one evening he finds himself just outside the house of one of these girls, who evidently thinks that he approached her before. This is the first of a series of time shifts that occur with increasing frequency throughout the novel. The author has worked out these mixed sequences of time with great skill. At the start of the book, there is a quotation from T. S. Elliot. Here I give the most relevant part:

“Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past ... “

T. S. Elliot, ‘Burnt Norton’ (*The Four Quartets*).

Edgar was an admirer of Elliot who wrote a great deal on this theme of time, especially in *The Four Quartets*. Towards the end of the story, we find Brian by a lake in Middenshot - a fictitious name for the village of Bagshot in Surrey, where Edgar lived with his first wife, Roma, and their children, and

where he also set an earlier novel, *The Weather in Middenshot*. In the present work, Brian sits calmly by the lake, having planned to take his own life that evening. He is reading Elliot's *East Coker* (another of the quartets). There are lines here that Edgar often quoted, especially:

“O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark ...”

and was clearly inspired by this for a poem of his own, *Death in Prospect* (see the end of this biography).

Edgar also methodically planned his own death and, unlike Brian, in the end succeeded. Brian attains a happier outcome through the help of Margaret, whom he meets in Middenshot. Margaret becomes his girlfriend, and shares his esoteric interests. She pretends to go along with his suicide plan, but in the end foils it (I should have been more like Margaret!). They both practise Yoga and breathing exercises, and have many enlightening discussions.

Buddhism is a path of using practices such as meditation for spiritual development, leading to enlightenment. Life, as most people experience it, is unsatisfactory, characterized by suffering and impermanence whilst the process of change continues from one life to the next. This contains the concept of reincarnation. There are “four noble truths”, and through these we can escape from this wheel of rebirth. They are, firstly to understand the experience of suffering – that, like pleasure, it is of an illusory nature, affected by our own attitudes; secondly, that this is caused by selfish craving which is a force of karma (law of cause and effect, continuing from life to life); thirdly, through understanding this, to renounce attachment to anything and develop peace of mind; fourthly to practise the Buddhist way of life. Do not kill; do not steal; do not lie; do not drink intoxicants – and do not be unchaste.

Brian does occasionally drink alcohol, for one of the time shifts concerns buying some sherry. He is also haunted by visions of provocative nymphs. This is through his perseverance in practising celibacy, which goes against the grain, as it would with Edgar. He fears that these visions or hallucinations may lead him into perverted sexual behaviour, thus becoming a danger to women. Like his creator, he

believes that anyone with such tendencies should be removed, so this is why he has planned his own death.

However, after Margaret has thwarted his suicide attempt they agree to get married, to have children, and lead a more balanced life.

“Do not kill” is usually intended by Buddhists to embrace pacifism and vegetarianism. Brian practises the latter, but merely thinks of this as part of a healthy life-plan, which would indeed be another valid motive in Buddhism. Edgar was not a vegetarian, nor was he a pacifist. Brian would not have been in favour of pacifism either, as he was not against opposing violence with violence. In a scene where he is transported to the year 2039 he is told: “We put an end to crime ... We just got rid of criminals. Painlessly, too ... Cyanide or morphine. We gave them the choice.” Brian does not dispute the rightness of this. No self-respecting character of Edgar’s would.

Another favourite poet was the Persian, Omar Khayyam, and in *A Tinkling in the Twilight*, Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat* and Elliot’s *Four Quartets* are the two books that Brian always carries around with him. A link is that the *Rubaiyat* is also about the transience of life, but with its celebration of “women, wine and song” (“*A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse – and Thou beside me singing in the Wilderness*”) it balances out the more ascetic teachings of the Buddha. Yet maybe Edgar never reconciled the dichotomy, and this is one of the reasons why he took his own life in the end.

In *The Wounded and the Worried* Tom Dellow, an ex-parson, mystic, occultist, but no unpractical dreamer, seems to act as guide to the three main female characters. Each of these women is beset by one of the three *Gunas* - shackles, desires, states of mind - which are said in Eastern philosophy to bind us to the cycle of rebirth. Tom is humble enough to admit that he is probably held by all three *Gunas* himself. Indeed, we all are, until we attain enlightenment.

The *Gunas* are:

- *Sattvas* – search for “wisdom, truth and knowledge” - represented by the character, Gwen Wellings, a retired headmistress, in his novel. This is the noblest of the *Gunas*.
- *Rajas* – “sensual pleasure,” passion, “greed” - represented by Stella Burges, a young American woman, though Stella is not necessarily subject to greed.

- *Tamas* – “indifference, lethargy, cowardliness” - represented by Fanny Newbold, though if I did not know Edgar, I would find it surprising that he accuses Fanny of this as, even though she might seem hesitant in her manner and “weak” (in Mittelholzer terminology), she is the retired matron of a hospital, and has had the courage and enterprise to set up the present scheme to welcome people into her house (the other three protagonists) who have, like herself, attempted suicide. This is the setting for the main theme of the book. He seems to have “got it wrong” about a character of his own creation, though he does appear to sympathise with her sometimes. I think it possible that a writer can sometimes create a character so well that she comes alive beyond her author’s conscious understanding or definition of her. At the end of the story, she takes on another nursing vocation, while Tom and Stella take over the running of the establishment to help those who have attempted suicide.

I say that the situation of the four would-be suicides whom, including herself, Fanny has brought together is the main *setting* for the theme; for just as important as a theme in itself is Tom’s philosophy, and how he tries to teach and help the three women: Stella, through satisfying her sexual desire; Fanny, through appealing to her sense of beauty and atmosphere by taking her to a high sung Eucharist; Gwen, taking her on an outing, and also finding her an occupation in knitting him a pullover, but most importantly, saving her life. So her life is saved a second time, her first suicide attempt having failed through the timely action of a neighbour, the second through the psychic intervention of Tom.

Both Fanny and Gwen feel “empty” since their retirement. To all three women, he speaks about his philosophy. Here is how he speaks to Fanny about her “emptiness”:

“It’s because you try so hard to do something about your emptiness that it persists. Forget that there is a pressure of events around you. Forget that you have obligations to anyone or anything. Become aware of the trees and the grass, of the clouds - or the sunshine when there is sunshine. Of the scents outside. The scent of dead leaves and of damp earth. Become aware of the sound of water dripping when it rains, the sound of birds fluttering or

twittering, of traffic, of the crackling of the fire. Let your mind and your spirit circle easily, casually around these things, and you'll find that, all of a sudden, it will occur to you that you have cast off a burden, that you are in some mysterious way, free and at ease. You'll want to smile, and even laugh, without knowing why ... You'll feel a humming inside ... a pain of well-being ... a searing, light trembling and you'll know that the flame that is you is burning clearly and shedding a radiance of peace about you so that others will become aware of it too."

Beautiful! So why is he himself not at ease? I think many of us have this dichotomy. It was, according to the story, his sensitivity at being "sneered at" about his beliefs that made Tom try to take his own life. He tells Stella:

*" ... I won't be completely happy until I get you all to believe in what I believe. If I could even get you to a point where you won't sneer, you won't be sceptical, won't tell me I'm mad, I'd be content ... That's what makes me want to fly from this earth, Stella. The sneers, the sceptical smirks, of people who are supposed to be intelligent, enlightened. It gives me a terrible feeling of despair – an exasperation and frustration beyond all endurance – sneered at for what I know to be the truth. Yes, for what **I know**. **I know!** Not what I've guessed at, but I **know**."*

However, others cannot know this unless it were at firsthand, though Edgar seems convinced without having had the out-of-the-body experiences attributed to Tom in the book. I think it is possible to feel that you "know" in this way, but you cannot force others to be so sure. Why did people's non-acceptance of his beliefs cause such distress? Edgar spoke to me also of his fear of ridicule (for example, in our first conversation on the coach). Even in those less enlightened days – just the dawn of the freedom of thought that developed in the sixties - did everyone sneer? Folk did not have to believe what he said. Did he not understand if he believed in reincarnation, *karma*, spiritual evolution, that some were younger souls and not ready for such knowledge, just as he himself would not have been at one time, just as young children would not understand university studies? He must

have been aware of this, for the character, Herbert, speaks of the different stages of soul development in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*. It is not merely about intelligence. It is about spiritual awakening. Was Edgar's distress because he lacked companionship in understanding and studying these matters? In those last six years, I gave him this companionship, but he seemed to come to despise me for what he considered my weakness in other ways. Perhaps this is why I am so defensive about Fanny! Part of the "weakness" was disagreeing with him on other matters, for he did need to be agreed with. This is a very human trait, the need for moral support and it is something we look for in our partners, but this, too, is a weakness, if we are going to be strict about what is weak. Be this as it may, liberal and pacifist views, such as mine, were, according to Edgar, "weakness".

While I knew this man who was (and is) a mystery to many people, he is in some ways still a mystery to me.

STRANGER

I look into your eyes as into an obscure mirror,
O stranger whom I call my lover.
Who are you? Who are you, stranger?
O lover whom I call a stranger,
you are no stranger
than my own eyes in a clear mirror.

"What are psychic experiences?" asks Fanny, and this what we may all ask. *"Do they include seeing ghosts – or hearing odd sounds ... Telepathy? Clairvoyance?"* Tom's are mainly about astral projection, he also has healing powers, and practises Yoga, mainly breathing exercises, as did Edgar. We are told that, before the story opens, Tom was arrested on suspicion of murder because the victim (herself psychic – Tom had been working for her as a gardener) had seen him appear in her bedroom a week before she was killed, and word got around among her Theosophist friends. The police could not understand that the appearance had been in his astral form.

Since writing this, I have learnt that a parallel to what happened to Tom is thought to have befallen Edgar when

serving in the Trinidad Navy in the wartime. According to one version of events, he was attempting to practise astral projection (perhaps succeeding) with a fellow serviceman, who unfortunately happened to die a week later. Because of this apparently, Edgar was arrested. He was released, but labelled “mad” because of his occult beliefs and practices. This, if true, would explain his fear of ridicule to an extent that I did not understand before. The analogy is surely deliberate, for the Theosophist’s name in *The Wounded and the Worried* is *Benbow* – the same as the name of the ship on which Edgar was serving! I do not remember him ever telling me about the incident. I heard the story from Juanita Cox whom I mentioned earlier, but she explains that it is “purely anecdotal” and may be true, not true - or partly true.

Edgar and I were in tune on psychic matters, but there were many things that he did not tell me, for I cannot remember him referring to such (conscious?) symbols as the *Benbow*. This is understandable, for some experiences hurt too much to share personally. At least he shared them in a different way in his novel.

In the story, Fanny has asked her guests to keep diaries as a form of therapy, but what they are not supposed to know is that when she goes into their rooms for a daily check-up, she glances into these diaries to assess their progress. Tom “susses” this, and while still writing the diary that Fanny reads, keeps another secret diary.

Inspiration for this was as follows. Edgar told me how he knew if Roma, his former wife, had been looking through his letters. I think now that this was a hint to me that he knew when I had been doing so. They were laid out so neatly in his drawer – letters to him on a file with carbon copies of his typed replies (no computers in those days) - that it was tempting to look at them and read them. He was so meticulous that he knew if a pen had been moved out of position, so no wonder he knew if someone had been reading his letters. Tom has the same characteristics.

The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham, as its title suggests, is about how Sheila Chatham, newly widowed, desires to live unto herself alone. "Aloneness" is different from "loneliness".

"I'm determined to be myself," says Sheila, a doctor's widow. "I'm determined to know myself, realise myself, feel that I'm alive in a living, positive way. And to do this I must act on my own, and in my own way, I must tread my own path – alone."

Her attempts to live literally alone are thwarted by her neighbours: Archie Chiffers, a likeable homosexual, and his partner, Finey; Mary Heathcote, CND supporter and anti-vivisectionist, therefore a figure of fun to Edgar, but I feel that she was based on his impressions of my mother whom I know to have been a sincere and deep thinker, who shared our spiritual interests (or mine at least, for she was not much in communication with Edgar). Other characters, neighbours of Sheila, were: Whitley Scanlan, a publisher, his sister, Diana, and his schizophrenic wife, Susan. These play a significant part in the story (particularly Susan), but most significant of all are the Lessier family who arrive from New Zealand, and move into a house in the lane (in the earlier version of ... *Mrs. Chatham* they were from Barbados).

Herbert is like a Guru to Shelia, and helps her to find her way on the spiritual path. He backs up his brother, Harpo, by justifying capital punishment in the following rather original way. Harpo is the character who expresses Edgar's views on crime and punishment. Herbert says:

"You see, our minds and spirits have been firmly and rigidly moulded by conventional religious teaching. 'Thou shalt not kill.' It's one of the ten commandments. But the trouble, my dear, is that this cosmic scheme of things that we call life, existence, isn't as simple as that. If we could stand aside and view the universe dispassionately, we'd realise that many of the things we consider horrible are only so because our own limited minds have been conditioned into seeing them as such. Death is not horrible. It's merely a switch-over from one nature of cosmic vibration to another. Or to try to put it more conventionally, a change of state of being. If I kill a fly or a bird, or a dog or a man, I haven't really snuffed out a life ... "

True, a criminal murderer also could justify himself like this, but Herbert goes on:

"Now, the trouble about love is that we generally make the mistake of being sentimental in our conception. We think of love as being associated only with tenderness, compassion, kindness. Love can, and does, cover these things. But they are only one department, so to speak, of a fluid element. The truth is this. Love is simply harmony. When we act in harmony with the laws of the cosmos we are acting with love. When we act in disharmony we put ourselves out of tune with the great all-swamping flood of love and things go wrong."

Edgar may describe this as "all-swamping", but it is surely limited. Certainly Love is about acting in harmony. However, it is still Love. That is the meaning of the word, whether in a human way, or on a spiritual level. Punishment in the form of a deterrent could be part of it, but I feel only if in the form of helping also the offender to reform. Retributive punishment is not Love.

" ... In the spirit world it's love (that) counts, and the grand people there are the people who shine most with the light of love ... we ought to try and feel loving towards everyone, be they ever so humble or ever so wicked ... "

(*The Boy Who Saw True*, ed. **Cyril Scott**, see below).

... *Mrs. Chatham* contains passages that conflict so that, despite the author's distinctive style, one might not know that they had issued from the same mind. There are the sensitive ones that recognize the life that had been in the "*corpses of the leaves*". And there are the insensitive ones, such as a passage referring to the "*bleating of (an) R.S.P.C.A official*" as if even the very moderate form of protection to animals represented by the R.S.P.C.A. should be stamped out and animals not recognized as sentient, vulnerable creatures at all. And yet Edgar said that he loved "*the birds and wild creatures*", but did he? Only as part of the landscape perhaps - and the songs. There is a sentence in *A Tinkling in the Twilight* where he says

that he (or rather, Brian) likes the bird songs, but not the birds. This would be because he was thinking of bird droppings, and also untidiness in the eaves!

However, *A Tinkling ...* was written before the days when we used to feed the birds on the sill outside our window. A passage in *Uncle Paul* (1963) seems to be based on this:

"The chaffinches returned. 'Twee-cheet! Twee-cheet!' they cried. He patted her wrist and glanced towards the window, smiled, murmured: 'Lovely, aren't they. Like you. So untroubled and serene."

Uncle Paul is one of the last books that Edgar wrote.

He was interested in the book called *The Boy Who Saw True*. This is claimed to be the true diary of a boy, written in Victorian times, who can see auras and spirits of the departed, and so on. At first he does not realise that he is different from anyone else – that everyone cannot see these things. As a young child, he refers to the auras he sees around people as their "lights". His innocence may have been inspiration for a child – a small girl in *The Wounded and the Worried* - who sees Fanny's grandfather and does not realise that this is a ghost or spirit. There are many child characters in Edgar's books, and he was fond of children.

"He who hath a great brain may nevertheless have an evil heart, but he who hath a great heart will never have an evil brain, even though it may be lacking in forcefulness."

(The Boy who Saw True)

I think Edgar knew this really. Once he said that he would be happy if a companion was "*with him in spirit*" even if she did not share his intellectual capacity.

Cyril Scott, the editor of *The Boy Who Saw True*, was a Theosophist, and Edgar referred to Theosophy in *The Wounded and the Worried*. While we lived in Farnham, I belonged to the Theosophical society, but Edgar was not a "joiner" of any society. He came once to a meeting at the Farnham Lodge, as it was called, and in his usual outspoken fashion, he made remarks about the possible fraudulence of Madame Blavatsky,

the well known co-founder of the society. It was as if he had attended a Christian evangelical meeting and denied the Divinity and saving power of Jesus, and there was uproar. He did not get on well with the lady at whose house the meeting was held – she kept a vast number of cats! An elderly spinster, she became dark pink in the face with anger and distress at his forceful comments on Blavatsky, and others were deeply disturbed also. The meeting was so disrupted that it had to be held again at a later date.

To end this chapter on a more uplifting note:

"I can see that -," says Sheila Chatham, about spiritual truth, *"but as though at a distance."*

"One day," Herbert tells her, *"you'll travel towards it and reach it."*

And at the end of the book she says:

"Now I know I have it in me to crash through to the Light straight as a rod."

However, I believe that Edgar chose *Mrs. Chatham* and her forerunner, *Angela Vimiero*, for their feminine, receptive approach - different from his own at least outwardly, even though he, too, was a student of spiritual teachings. Sheila Chatham says that she wonders what "radiant essence" she will finally draw out of all the experiences and ideas that, even in her aloneness, or perhaps because of it, are being poured into her.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BIRD IN THE ROOF – THE PILING OF CLOUDS

“Many of us are mentally cruel without intending to be so. It’s one of the hazards of living a civilized life.”

Edgar Mittelholzer, *The Piling of Clouds*

The novel, *The Piling of Clouds*, is a typical example of the style and content of Edgar’s work during those last few years of his life when I knew him. The idea in the present chapter is to interweave episodes in *The Piling of Clouds* with events in our own life together that seem to have been an inspiration for these.

The Piling ... is set in a natural family situation. Not feeling that mine and Edgar’s was quite such a situation – seldom quite at ease – I perhaps did not realise that he could be natural in one. Separately, he had been in a real family – and so had I. Similarly, on re-reading the book now as if I did not know Edgar, it becomes clear that Sally, a protagonist, is a more sympathetic character than remembered. Here are earlier words written by myself about Sally:

*“A woman friend - not a woman with a very high regard for women - has told me, for instance, how natural she found Sally’s wild reactions throughout **The Piling of Clouds**. How, she has asked me, did Edgar get so expertly inside a feminine mind? Yet, to me, there seems to be something strident, unnatural, un-subtle and un-feminine about Sally and similar characters - “*

This woman friend was Mary - “she of the eye-shadow”.

Re-reading showed Sally softer than I’d thought, many of her reactions natural, spontaneous and feminine. I was judging the book, or Sally at least, to some extent by the side of Edgar I had come to know and did not care for. However, you have to be reading the book to notice the softer side of Sally. Putting it aside for a while, she like “similar characters” still has that “strident” feel predominant in memory.

The novel commences with a great deal of description of Charles Pruthwick. The opening sentence:

“A habit Charles Pruthwick had recently acquired was to clench his hand tight and hammer his thigh slowly. Suddenly, in the middle of reading a book, he would do this.”

Incidentally, there seems to be a discrepancy in this opening to the novel, and (as often with Edgar’s writing in the period when we were together) I wonder whether I remarked on it at the time. Charles is quizzing his neighbours’ daughter, Jeannette, about how her reading is getting on.

“I can read all the words under this picture. Would you like me to read them for you?”

‘I’ll take it for granted you can. You’re a bright girl.’

Since Edgar had children of his own, this is strange. Jeannette is depicted as a bright child of nine. She would be reading books fluently, not boasting that she could read words under a picture. In addition to past memories, I have been watching my own grandchildren!¹

Even commenting on this interweaves with our life together, for was I too nervous of Edgar to comment – I who would argue with him about pacifist and racial issues? It is quite possible, for there was this paradox in *me*.

“But I digress” (Edgar would disapprove of the cliché).

We learn more about Charles, and his background – he is now an Inspector of Taxes in a central London district– and there is the significant fact that he acts as “baby-sitter” for his neighbours, the Elmfolds. He is friendly with Peter and Sally Elmfold, and Jeannette, who is the “baby” for whom he sits. There are further hints about Charles, when he and Jeannette are alone, observing an injured bird, a speckled thrush (the first “bird in the roof”, I was going to say, but this one was *on* the roof). It is difficult, knowing the ending so well, and not remembering feelings on first reading the novel, to know whether these hints can make the reader foresee the ending. I think they might, but it is like a puzzle. Once you know the answer it seems so simple. There are some more strongly

give-away passages – for example, photos he has of naked little girls. Jeannette finds out, Charles discovers that she has been looking at them, and the reactions of both (hers completely innocent) are well portrayed. It is a powerful scene. In fact, one sees how apt is the title, *The Piling of Clouds*, for other incidents build up to this one – and others follow it, throughout the narrative of the book, piling up to the horrific climax.

Most of the story is centred around the Whitsun holiday that all spend together in the countryside, in a house rented by Molly, Sally's mother. Molly owns a dog, tolerated more than his owner by their creator, for he is a dignified Airedale who refuses to wear the "molly-coddling" coat (no pun intended, as far as I know) that she has knitted for him. The old barn-like cottage and surroundings where they stay is like our home, standing like ours in the grounds of a bigger house.

"They could see a building ahead of them now. It stood on a slope of ground amidst a crowd of elms and beeches and one or two pines. It was a spreading place, half-timbered, but featuring a lot of red brick in one or two wings. 'That couldn't be the place!' Sally exclaimed. 'It's too big. That's a whole house.' She had hardly spoken, however, when beyond the house appeared another place, much smaller, with a long slate roof, low and flattish. It was of red brick at one end and grey stone at the other, and resembled two match-boxes of giant size stuck together end to end. It was surrounded by beeches and elms and pines ... "

It is near Farnham, and the same place names are used: Odiham, Wrecclesham, Crondall. A bird, perhaps a blackbird or a thrush, perhaps a chaffinch, becomes trapped in the roof, flying in through one of the gaps in the eaves of the old cottage and unable to fly out again. This happened in our barn-like flat in real life.

Note the sensitive description of the plight of the bird:

"Throughout their love-making, they heard it, fluttering and thumping above the ceiling. Trying desperately to find the opening through which it had entered, but without success. A disturbing noise. Shadowy and containing unknown possibilities. The

plywood seemed to vibrate sometimes when it thumped. It made scratching noises when it seemed to walk quickly along the ceiling. Then flutter-flutter again against the rafters. Animated, panicky."

Contrast this with Peter's impatience. "Oh, balls!" he exclaims. Looking at the text now, it is not quite clear whether he or Sally says: "*It's beginning to get on my nerves, blast it!*" Either of them might say this, as there is further dialogue featuring their impatience later, and the contrast would not be surprising if this were just the attitude of the characters, but it was Edgar's own attitude. True, the loft is over their part of the house, including their bedroom, and the bird keeps them awake. In fairness, Sally does say: "*We can't let it stay in there indefinitely, Peter. It'll batter itself to death.*" Other characters are more sympathetic to the bird, but one of these is Molly, a figure of fun and scorn to Edgar, a bit similar, under her skin, to Mary in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*.

"Molly ... said: 'But aren't you concerned about the poor creature's fate?' Her hands were still clasped together anxiously as they had been since she had made her suggestion about leaving the trapdoor open. Peter chuckled and said: 'If I could do anything to help it escape I'd do it, but I'll be frank and tell you its fate is no great concern to me.'"

Others are the child, Jeannette, and Lilian, a niece of a friend of Molly's. Lilian is staying with them, recuperating from an illness – pneumonia, contracted through getting wet on the Aldermaston march. Yes, she is a CND supporter, but treated more gently than Molly, and more gentle in her opposition to Peter's views.

So when the bird is trapped in the loft, Edgar makes Lilian less persistent about trying to rescue it alive than I was. On the other hand, in the play that I wrote about Edgar and myself, I make the character whom I, too, call 'Lilian' more persistent about it than I – wishful thinking! In the novel, Peter puts a stray cat in the loft to kill the bird. In my play, it is Richard (Edgar) himself who does this. Yet I cannot remember what happened to the bird in real life – I suppose it just became quiet, more likely by death through starvation than

by escaping. Did we try putting food up there for it? Just inside the trap-door entrance to the loft? Ideas occur to me now, through going back over it, just as ideas occur to Lilian in the play. Her suggestion, rather an obvious one, of leaving the trapdoor open, attributed not unfavourably to Molly in the book, did actually occur in real life.

In the play I link the fictional cat incident with a real life one that (unless I've missed something!) happened at a different time and had no connection with the bird in the roof. Yet Edgar, too, seems to have linked both in his novel, but did not tell the real life story of the cat.

A stray black and white one (same colours as in *The Piling ...*) started visiting us and I wanted to give it milk, but Edgar had strictly rationed the milk that was delivered to our doorstep and would not let me do this.

Then at twilight we went for our regular walk along the lane in the Crondall direction.

"Oh, look!" I exclaimed before we had set out far from the Loushall drive. "*The cat! It's following us.*"

I always find it difficult to describe, explain or understand the reaction. Edgar turned on the cat with incredible fury, growling and brandishing the stick that he always carried with him. It was not so much a walking stick as a means of defence against imaginary attack. He kept such a stick beside his bed at night. In *The Piling of Clouds* Peter keeps a gun. I flung myself against Edgar, thinking he was going to injure the cat – or maybe I was just upset that he was frightening it and chasing it away. I am sure he was in fights in his youth (I heard that there was one with his sister, involving a knife!), but personally I have never known him physically attack anyone or any creature – except a fly!²

"*What are you doing at all?*" shouted Edgar. I suppose we were shouting and screaming at each other.

I suppose that we then walked on silently. When we returned home, he scarcely spoke to me all the evening. This was not unusual. There had been sulks when we had fallen out before – and would be again. Normally they just passed over, but on one occasion I remember the exact moment of reconciliation. We had twin beds just touching each other. I was in bed, and Edgar was sitting on the far side of the other

bed, facing away from me. I spoke, making some overture of friendship, and I saw his large ears (“bat ears” as they’d called them at school) actually twitch in response. On the occasion of the cat, it was he who made the first move of reconciliation.

“This affair of the cat, it brought it all to a head,” he said, meaning our differences.

As did the bird.

I have written a great deal about the bird in this chapter. In the play, it may just have occurred to me as a dramatic event. But writing this chapter, I realise that it had a great deal of significance – the preoccupation of both of us with the bird – unavoidable because of the constant fluttering, pattering, thumping, but there was more to it than this, bringing out our different attitudes. There must have been many such episodes, but this is the one that stands out – plus the cat.

Nor was it just one bird. Edgar’s preoccupation with minor tragedies shows in a dialogue between Peter and Jeannette concerning the injured bird they found and tried to care for. Early one morning, Jeannette wakes the household. She has found the bird dead in the crate where they’d placed it, and Jeannette expresses the distress that the author may have understood. As would be expected, Peter tells her that the death is part of the reality of life. Edgar must have been very much aware of suffering, tragedy, noticing it, in the same way as I do, even in what might seem to some people to be small and insignificant events. He may have hardened himself deliberately.

There *was* a real life link with the cat to a bird. One morning I heard a sardonic laugh from Edgar:

“Ha! Look at your friend, the cat! It’s killed a bird.” He was trying to draw my attention to the harsh reality of life. But I was aware of this reality. What was the cat supposed to do? No one was feeding it.

Here is a conclusion, concerning the conclusion to the novel, and it refers again to Edgar’s treatment of Sally.

The Elmfolds return from an outing to watch a play in Farnham, to find that Jeannette has been killed in a sexual assault by Charles, their trusted friend and baby-sitter, who has been battling inwardly all this time with his secret paedophilia – his fantasy search for a “little sister”, a game

he plays with Jeannette. Peter slaps his wife's face when she becomes hysterical - appropriate treatment for hysteria, but in the circumstances you would have supposed that husband and wife would comfort each other.

"*Cut out the hysteria!*" he says. The whole scene carries on like this.

Pruthwick, scarcely in a position as "human vermin", and at this extraordinary moment, to make moral points, does so, and contrasts her unfavourably with Peter.

"You see the difference between you two, Peter? You were so right. Now she's faced with the Sunday newspaper situation she has no mercy. She wants me to suffer the way I'll suffer most. Prison or Broadmoor. Because I ask for instant death she wants to deny me it. Vindictive ..."

Her child has just been killed, for God's sake! She is not to be expected to reason out her reaction, even if she might do so later. And yet we are treated to a sermon with which we know, from the rest of Edgar's writing, that he agrees.

"Vindictive. It's human nature of course, but your Would-rotter never takes human reactions into consideration. He's always academic in his humaneness ... " and so on.

Sally, of course, gets the blame (from the author) for having triggered off Charles's perverted action. In her ignorance she instigated sex with him earlier, but Peter is harsh with her even though he does not know about this. One of the most repulsive parts of the whole scene is, to me, the way Peter's anger is directed against Sally and the author seems to justify this. This is repulsive because it is unconsciously so – the rest of the scene is necessarily tragic and horrific. One reader wrote to Edgar, assuming that Peter's character and attitudes were intended to be presented as flawed, and that Edgar was giving virtually the opposite message to the one he was giving. If this had been so, and therefore Edgar had *intentionally* shown Peter as behaving in an obnoxious way, the scene would surely have been more acceptable, but of course this would have been impossible with the message

he was putting across. The portrayal of Charles not as the “monster” of the tabloids, was – while necessary for the story - again a stroke of the author seeing beyond himself, if we are to judge from the rest of his descriptions of “human vermin”.

NOTES:

¹ In fairness to Edgar, I have been reminded since by Juanita Cox that Edgar did originally intend the child to be four years old, but the publishers, Putnam, in view of the nature of what happened to her and possible public reaction, insisted that he make her older.

² I recall now that Edgar used to swat flies, smearing the walls and windows. When I protested, he remarked:

“You just don’t like me killing the flies. You don’t care about smears on walls and windows”

In fact, I was concerned about both, but realise that most people feel it is okay to swat flies. I was more like many a Buddhist than Edgar in this respect, yet remember that at a later time (not when with Edgar) I used a fly spray. This was when I was with what I might call my “middle family”. Nowadays, with a husband who is vegetarian like myself, we are not infested with flies (which are attracted by meat, and are natural scavengers, clearing up nature’s debris) and I would not do it now. Is this relevant? Well, it shows a preoccupation shared with Edgar on this kind of subject. There is a passage in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* where the character, Mary, and her CND friend do not want to kill the flies, and he makes this seem ridiculous.

CHAPTER FIVE: OTHER NOVELS

"Of all that is written, I love only what a person hath written with blood. Write with blood and thou wilt find that blood is spirit."

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

"Everything that Edgar Mittelholzer writes is blazing with life."

Pamela Hansford Johnson

Edgar could always write his novels quickly and easily. He said he did not understand why so many authors spoke of "writer's block". He probably thought it showed lack of will-power.

"What is this getting 'stuck'?"

I don't know whether William Golding suffered from "writer's block" or C. P. Snow got "stuck". These are two writers about whom Edgar used to become sarcastic concerning the slowness with which their work appeared; also, some other writers, but these are the two names which spring to mind. All the same, he greatly admired Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and although Snow's work was not to Edgar's own taste, he recognized it as the work of a writer of stature. However, he used to say that it was the "correct thing" to have work appear as infrequently as possible - to make people wait for it - and that because he could not do this himself, he would never be entirely successful - a trace of bitterness here, even though it was said as a joke. It may be that, in some cases, work that takes longer to write, contains more depth than Edgar's. Not that Edgar's writing lacks depth - I sometimes think it is at a half-way stage. The characterization shows an understanding of how people react and behave, but often without a deepness of sympathy for them. The nature descriptions are beautiful, but somehow guarded - perhaps not consciously. Perhaps the depth of feeling that you would find in some writers is not there, and I am unfairly asking Edgar to be a Henry Williamson or a D. H. Lawrence when he was a different kind of author.

Or I am asking him to be a poet, as indeed he was sometimes, and I wish more of his poetry had been preserved (see *Death in Prospect*).

A heroine of his was the novelist, Iris Murdoch who, it seemed, wrote fast - her books coming out at frequent intervals. In a discussion group series he held once at a return visit to the Writers' Summer School, he used her book, *An Unofficial Rose*, as his example of what a novel should be.

Edgar's Guyanese and Caribbean novels were published over a period of nineteen years, from *Corentyne Thunder* (1941) to *Eltonsbrody* (1960). *Corentyne Thunder* centres around a peasant family, but just as much features those who prided themselves on being of "higher" class. *A Morning at the Office* shows a cross-section of people, imprisoned in a snobbish class system. This book, set in Trinidad, is a social commentary on its time. *Shadows Move Among Them*, a realistic fantasy, shows Edgar's early ideal of people of mixed races, living together on a basis of equality, discipline and sexual freedom. Then there is the well-known *Kaywana* trilogy, tracing the history of the van Groenwegel family, descendents of a "half-breed Indian" woman and a slave-trader. Set mostly in the days of slaves and their masters, this epic work stresses one of Edgar's favourite themes - strength *versus* weakness. Other novels are *The Life and Death of Sylvoia* (a tragic tale about a girl of mixed race), *My Bones and my Flute* (a ghost story), *Of Trees and the Sea*, *A Tale of Three Places* and *The Weather Family*.

Corentyne Thunder, the first of Edgar's published novels is set on the Corentyne coast of Guyana (then British Guiana). It is about Ramgolall, an East Indian cow-minder and his family. He has hoarded money in a canister in his hut, and slowly increased his herd of cows, while keeping both his wives in poverty. Sosee, his daughter by his first wife, is the mistress of Big Man Weldon, a white planter, and this is a source of financial satisfaction to Ramgolall. He has two daughters by his second marriage.

The story is just as much about Geoffry (*sic*), the eldest son of Sosee and Big Man. Geoffry is light-skinned. Fascinated by his peasant relatives, he starts a relationship with his half-sister, Kattree, but abandons her when she becomes pregnant, lest this get in the way of his ambitions.

Another peasant, Jannee, is tried for murder. He is cleared with the aid of an expensive lawyer, but with dire consequences to Ramgolall. Beena, his other daughter, who is in love with Jannee, has stolen the money from Ramgolall's canister.

This book was first published in 1941, reprinted in 1972, and re-published in 2009. It contains much atmosphere and description of landscape. Out of all Edgar's novels, British or Caribbean, this is, I believe, almost the only published one that has peasants as some of its central characters. There are many slaves, playing central, passionate roles, in the *Kaywana* series. This could hardly be avoided. However, Edgar rebelled against the constant emphasis on Creolese, West Indian peasants and their dialects, in the work of most West Indian writers. He has not over-emphasized them even in *Corentyne Thunder*, but the peasants are definitely there, solid and even principle characters, so that the story has a particularly balanced effect. Since writing this, I have re-read *Corentyne Thunder*, and have realised how beautifully it is written – more so, and with more depth perhaps than with many of Edgar's later works. It belies what I have said when seeming to belittle his feelings for nature, but it was his own country, and I was thinking of his English descriptions.

A Morning at the Office (published 1950) contains a cross-section of characters of varying race and class. This book has been likened to Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* because of the interwoven streams of consciousness – and indeed, *A Morning at the Office* was produced by Woolf's publishers, the Hogarth Press. The book is an excellent social commentary. It also contains a delightful children's fairy story.

Shadows Move Among Them, following after, was not accepted by the Hogarth Press. "I think you've gone off the rails this time, Mittelholzer," said Leonard Woolf (see Edgar's article, 'A Pleasant Career'). It was a question of attitude.

With intensity, yet a certain humorous detachment, the novel (finally published in 1951) involves passion, madness, fantasy - all taking place in a community headed by one of his stern father-figures, a most out-of-the-ordinary parson. The community of mixed races, set in the jungle, practises the religion of Jesus the Man. Not Jesus, however, as most New Testament readers would recognize him - not even those who

do interpret him as more man than God. Does *Shadows ...* reveal something of what Edgar felt Jesus stood for? (see quotation below from *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* and my comment). But the main scheme of the religion in *Shadows ...* is to make a fantasy of religion itself - to say that it is a myth and must be enjoyed as such. The book is charged with atmosphere, and has some beautiful descriptions of tropical landscape. The character of the passionate, fanciful child, Olivia, epitomizes the atmosphere of the book.

This work contains, in the policy of Reverend Harmston, the parson, Olivia's father, the author's crime-and-punishment views, and also his sexual freedom, in addition to unorthodox religion; so this early work already carries three of his main themes.

Interwoven with the atmosphere, is the following interesting piece of information, which I cannot resist quoting:

"Another boat was going past on the river. This time Gregory heard a rhythmical wooden thud that resisted the splash of the water, and Olivia murmured: 'It's a woman paddling.'"

'How do you know?'

'Women always make that dup-dup noise with the paddle on the side of the boat. Men never. Nobody knows why.'"

Gregory is the neurotic English cousin, intended as a contrast to the community in which he finds himself, and as a representative of modern "sick" civilization. He seems to be even insane at one stage, but it is an early example of the unconvincing insanity that occurs in Mittelholzer novels, which appears to be a disguise for something else. Gregory finds healing and peace in this community - escape from the past and from memories of his dead wife - and he finds love in the person of Mabel, Olivia's elder sister.

There shows up in this novel Edgar's interest in naturism, and I have visited with him a naturist centre, but no longer remember where it was - it might have been "Silverleigh", still existent, in Kent - nor do I have the article some reporter wrote about us there, headed "nymph and novelist".

The Mad MacMullochs, written under the pseudonym of Austin Woodsley, shows a more light-hearted, if more bizarre,

version of a community like the one in *Shadows* ... The Mittelholzer style is still completely recognizable in the "Woodsley" tale. It was published in 1959 the year that I met Edgar.

One of Edgar's fantasies is *The Adding Machine* (1954), a novella, a grim yet entertaining adult fairy tale. Introducing the book, Edgar states that it is "*a fable for capitalists and commercialists*". This is interesting to me as it is almost the only experience I have of Edgar directly criticizing such people, but (as stated elsewhere in this biography) he was Socialist, almost Communist, in his younger days, and the Socialist comment on society is revealed in his early novel, *A Morning at the Office*, known in the American edition as *A Morning in Trinidad*..

The following were the books that Edgar wrote during the period that I was with him. When we met, he had just published *A Tinkling in the Twilight*, written about in Chapter Three. The last nine were:

<i>Latticed Echoes</i> –	1960
<i>Eltonsbrody</i> –	1960
<i>Thunder Returning</i> –	1961
<i>The Piling of Clouds</i> –	1961
<i>The Wounded and the Worried</i> –	1962
<i>A Swarthy Boy</i> –	1962
<i>Uncle Paul</i> –	1963
<i>The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham</i> –	1964
<i>The Jilkington Drama</i> –	1965

Perhaps the most significant of these books were:

The Piling of Clouds - written about in another chapter.

The Wounded and the Worried - written about in another chapter.

A Swarthy Boy – to be written about in the chapter on Edgar's childhood.

Uncle Paul - up till now, only referred to briefly.

The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham - written about in another chapter, but with aspects that can be added to in this one.

The Jilkington Drama.

It is useful to look at these under two main headings that were both on Edgar's mind all the time that I knew him. One was criminal justice and the other was suicide. The novels singled out here are all concerned with these preoccupations. Another main theme was the esoteric, but this was explored in Chapter Three. It may recur. As mentioned, *A Tinkling in the Twilight* was about all these subjects.

English novels were published from the time of *The Weather in Middenshot* (1952) until *The Jilkington Drama* just before his death in 1965, and the climax of this novel is, as with Edgar's life, a bizarre suicide. Others that have this theme are *The Wounded and the Worried* and – at the end - *The Piling of Clouds*. However, the thought was always there, as far back in the days of the early work as *The Life and Death of Sylvia* (1953).

The main English works that show Edgar's ideas on crime and punishment are *The Weather in Middenshot*, *The Piling of Clouds* and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* - the latter two in more serious vein, and *The Piling of Clouds* being particularly horrifying. Yet, beguiled by Edgar's insistence that *The Weather in Middenshot* has been told in a light-hearted way, I feel I have not done justice to this work in the past. The characters (e.g. old Jarrow's rather charming, spinster-ish daughter, Grace, who does not like change or to leave the "beaten track") comprise some of Edgar's best characterization and the interweaving of the various characters' subjective thoughts is powerful and fascinating. In the non- subjective parts, there are too many tirades (too many characters with the same opinions!), but the book contains the following interesting passage:

"To take upon myself to dispose of the lives of two of my fellowmen. Why not ... if these two fellowmen have proven themselves unfit to live among decent men! Why should I be considered wrong to have put an end to their lives! What about the airmen ... who were sent with an atomic bomb to drop on Hiroshima! At one flash they wiped out eighty thousand human beings – virtually all of them ordinary simple townsfolk going about their usual day's routine. They weren't menacing anyone. They weren't active soldiers armed with tanks and guns – just townspeople. Mothers and small children, schoolboys and schoolgirls, bank clerks, shop assistants,

old ladies and old gentlemen sitting quietly in parlours – or the Japanese equivalent of parlours. At one flash – eighty thousand people done to death. Were the airmen who performed that splendid deed sentenced to death? No. They were probably decorated. They were killing eighty thousand people for the good of the rest of mankind. Oh, Noble Allies we! How justified we were in sending them on to Nagasaki to do the same thing! All, mind you, for the good of the rest of the world. For freedom! Well, if that is so, why ought I – Herbert Jarrow be sentenced to death for killing off two humans ... two humans with twisted brains who have raped, strangled and killed.”

The book was written not so long after the war. An earlier passage shows how Edgar felt Nazism could have been nipped in the bud long before the war.

If we return to the Caribbean books, the crime and punishment theme appears strongly in *Shadows Move Among Them*.

Using that quotation from Nietzsche when writing about Edgar before, I went on to comment that *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* is written from the heart. I am not so sure now that it is so in the Nietzschean sense. What is it that it seems to lack? It is more shrill, dogmatic, than written from the heart. Thus *Spake Zarathustra* was a favourite of Edgar’s and contains his kind of philosophy, but is like a poem, and even in the English translation (i.e. not the original German, so you might expect it would lose something) it has great depth of feeling. There is an earlier version of ... *Mrs. Chatham*, now untraceable, that was written from the heart, and there was an unpublished novel entitled *Angela Vimiero* that I have never read, but I believe it was on the same theme of a woman’s experiences and reflections on life.

Professor Michael Gilkes showed me notes for his since completed thesis. He refers much to the reactionary character, Harpo (Harpenden) Lessier – non-existent in the first version of ... *Mrs. Chatham*, less central in the first manuscripts of the second version, before moving very much to the centre of the canvas when the book was revised to become the published version. I am grateful to Gilkes who showed me this article, thus drawing my attention to

something so significant and symbolic in Edgar's development.

Alva, another Lessier brother, is the advocate for free sex in the first ... *Mrs. Chatham*, but in the second version is a completely minor character, while Edgar ceased to stress this aspect so much. The intended incestuous relationship between Alva and the Lessier sister, Jasmine, is not mentioned in the final revision for publication. I remember when Edgar told me that he had decided reference to this relationship was unnecessary.

Even Herbert, surely the main didactic character in the first version, who acts as Sheila Chatham's spiritual *guru*, is replaced a great deal by Harpo in the final version. There are various additions and omissions in the last version - all contributing to bringing Harpo's attitude into the foreground, rather than other attitudes in which Edgar may have been more interested in the past.

However, even the final ... *Mrs. Chatham*, being on the whole a rounded work, contains many of the best aspects of Edgar's writing. The last chapter, the "coda", is based on a walk the heroine takes in the snow, similar to a walk we took, the same whitened corner of the world on the same date - New Year's Day, 1962. He kept a meticulous diary. Not a chatty one, but one in which such items as what time he had got up, whether we had made love (indicated by symbols), the weather and temperature conditions of the day, and other regular entries, were recorded without fail. Edgar planned the fictional days in many of his novels so that they matched the real days. He checked his diary to make the weather match correctly. This could not have been noticed by his readers, but is interesting. There is no way of noticing such day-to-day accuracy unless it has been pointed out and the appropriate diary supplied. Yet the system has a favourable effect on the atmosphere and authenticity of a book. The "coda" comes alive, partly because it is based not only on real countryside with which Edgar was familiar, but on real weather that had appealed to him in real time. From the "coda":

"The garden and the garage, the field beyond the fence, the meadow beyond the birches and the Mulrairie cottage - and the birches and the cottage itself - everything was woolly-white with snow. And

it was snowing. In large, dense flakes. With a purposeful, hushed intensity."

Edgar felt that atmosphere was a most important factor in a novel. Nearly each part of *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham* begins with a description of the changing seasons.

"The scent of the long dead summer rose from the rotting leaves ... "

... *Mrs. Chatham* has other aspects. It contains Edgar's unique view of humour - mainly through the character of Susan, a schizophrenic. Susan never addresses her remarks directly to anyone to whom she is supposed to be speaking, but - with effect, in the descriptions of this - to some object. Here is part of a scene in Sheila Chatham's conservatory:

"Your dog loves me, I believe," she (Susan) said, smiling at a pot of cyclamen ... Susan told a vine with large, shiny, heartshaped leaves: 'My literary genius doesn't permit me an interest in gardens ... "

Susan is an example of the sex-crazed female¹ who crops up in a number of Edgar's novels. Her laugh resembles "*metal filings falling on a kettle-drum*" and "*knives falling on a tombstone*". She is afraid of conceiving because she thinks it will interfere with her literary work. Susan has had one literary success, but we gather that her work is deteriorating because of her mental condition. Repelled by her aversion to the natural outcome of lovemaking and the restrictions she puts on him, her husband no longer goes to bed with her. Therefore, she becomes frustrated, sketches a penis from memory, puts scent on her pubic hairs, and lies about naked in the front garden. She treats Sheila Chatham to a German evening and other extempore entertainments whenever Sheila keeps her company while Susan's husband and sister-in-law are out. She is a mouthpiece for Edgar's rational and rationalized ideas - yet is the irrational danger to the rational. Sheila is rational. This symbolism seems to be unintentional. When Susan strikes Mrs. Chatham with a fruit-knife, the conscious moral drawn is that Mrs. Chatham - like the

"Would-rotters" mentioned in *The Piling of Clouds* - was kind but not tough enough.

Like old Jarrow, the "madman" in *The Weather in Middenshot*, Susan thinks up ways of exhibiting her "madness". As with Jarrow, we are never allowed to be quite sure how much of her mental disorder is real, or how much she fakes it. As with Jarrow, she makes it an excuse for expressing views that Edgar has felt would be unpopular. However, her views are endorsed by supposedly sane members of the cast. Jarrow had supporters, but - in Susan's case - she, rather, is one of the supporters.

Many of the passages about crime and punishment, and the author's views on the need for toughening society, employ absurd phrases - such as "*yelping Marxists*" and the afore-mentioned "*wiggling, simpering, sissy pacifists*", etc. What about Gandhi, Dick Sheppard, Donald Soper and many others? Such phrases of Edgar's, provoked by anger, provoke anger in themselves. This is the problem experienced by Harpo Lessier, and Edgar recognizes this, but seems to feel himself and Harpo to be justified. Sometimes the views are well expressed. Asked if he believes in Christian love, Harpo states:

"If you mean turn-the-cheek love - no, I can love a landscape. I can love the sky, the birds and wild creatures, the state of being alive and feeling a tingling of well-being. I can love the beauty in art - music, pictures, the drama, poetry. I can let myself be saturated by a love for all these - and for decent human beings. But I can't love evil. I feel it my duty to combat evil in whatever form I find it, whether insect vermin, dirt, or the human vermin that our civilised government allow to proliferate ..."

In a Caribbean novel, *The Weather Family*, a character who shows tenderness towards bees is portrayed sympathetically. And in *The Life and Death of Sylvia*, Sylvia's creator is on the side of her perplexity and distaste when her boyfriend speaks of killing a lizard "for fun". I say "Sylvia's creator", but she was based on a real life young woman who, unlike the character in the novel, did not commit suicide.

Although I believe Edgar was always basically the same as the Edgar I knew, several of his writings, and several hints he

let slip verbally, make one feel that he hardened as he grew older. Bitterness and disappointment would have struck at the vulnerable, romantic side of his nature, and the warrior side would have reacted by becoming stronger.

Since I wrote this I have discovered (through Juanita Cox and Edgar's sister, Lucille) that Edgar wrote the article, '**At Forty-three - a Personal View of the World**', which by an ironic trick of fate, shows that some of the changes may have come about shortly before I met him.

A difficult life softens, mellows some people, but hardens others. Edgar seems to have been afraid of his own "soft side". This is the converse to his hatred of criminal violence.

... *Mrs. Chatham* contains some thoughts about Jesus Christ.

"Well, believe me," says Herbert, "I'm pretty sure we haven't been given the whole story of Christ's philosophy in the Gospels. That's the trouble. When men become fond of any philosophy or religious doctrine, they lose sight of scruples. They doctor everything to suit their crusade. They sift whatever's awkward from their records and twist whatever's twistable. Christ was a high soul, and he let himself be crucified because he knew it would leave a big impression on posterity, but believe me, he wasn't the meek-and-mild namby-pamby he's depicted as -"

It is easier to know what Edgar believed Jesus was not than what he believed he was. However, one of Edgar's own favourites among his novels, *Shadows Move Among Them*, has this theme (see above).

Also mentioned in the Caribbean section above, was that Edgar did not, with a few exceptions, make peasants central characters. This continued into his English novels. There are some fairly solid, if unpleasant, Surrey/Hampshire working-class characters in ... *Mrs. Chatham*, but it does not seem that Edgar has quite mastered their tricks of speech. If I'd had the courage to be more critical of his work at the time, I could have helped him here, being more steeped in this part of the world. I used to proof-read for him.

Some of the early novels seem to have more depth than the later ones, due I think to being set in the kind of environment in which the author was steeped from childhood - and to their

entering directly into the characters' thoughts as he had not yet evolved his "she seemed to be thinking" style. The earlier, unpublished ... *Mrs. Chatham*, in a tropical setting, had its special charm because of the more subjective approach. *A Tale of Three Places* and *The Life and Death of Sylvia* also enter directly into the thoughts and feelings of the central characters.

One of the novels in the more recent manner is *Uncle Paul*. The character of "Uncle Paul" is almost a self-portrait, like Richard Lehrer in *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning*; like Peter in *The Piling of Clouds*; and perhaps like Tom in *The Wounded and the Worried* or Harpo in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*. Less like the more directly autobiographical sketch, the character called Milton, who befriends the heroine in *The Life and Death of Sylvia*. This character or at least this name, also appears as the narrator, in *My Bones and my Flute*, a ghost story.

Uncle Paul is portrayed as being of part-Jewish, part-German descent. The parallel with Edgar's case is obvious, and he admitted it himself. But he often spoke of being perplexed by the persecution of the Jews, in a way that he seemed not to be by the persecution of "coloured" and black people. He said he found it strange that the race from which Jesus had sprung should have been so persecuted in Christian parts of the world. I suppose one reason, though not justifiable, is that the Jewish race took part in the crucifixion.

The novel was written after *The Wounded and the Worried* and *A Swarthy Boy*. It was published in 1963. I do not know if I am only flattering myself that this is what Edgar intended, but nowadays I see something of my earlier self in Valerie, the wise child – in reverse almost, for she was a child of fourteen, old for her years. I must have been twenty-four when he wrote the book, shortly before the birth of our son; twenty-five when the novel was published, with the baby newly born. However, Edgar saw me as a child myself – and he was right. I was a child in many ways, old as the hills in others – like Valerie.

Valerie's love for "Uncle Paul" seems more sexual than I remember fourteen-year-old girl-love as being, but I was

young for my age - yes, then, too – so a child at fourteen, and an adolescent in my twenties! Uncle Paul is Valerie's first love. He is friendly in an innocent way with a number of youngsters in this book. Children feature in many of the novels. But Valerie, sensitively portrayed, would like his relationship with her to be romantic and sexual. She is a fanciful child, and a little reminiscent of Olivia in *Shadows Move Among Them*. Her love for Uncle Paul is not consummated – he is too responsible for that. Yet this love of a child seems to be a recurring theme – again, in reverse here, but somehow reminiscent of the far less innocent situation in *A Piling of Clouds* – Charles Pruthwick's paedophilia, and in particular, his feelings for Jeannette. The "little sister" game that he plays with her is a version of another recurring theme. There are the brother and sister, Alva and Jasmine, in ... *Mrs. Chatham*, portrayed in earlier versions than the published one as incestuous. Now Paul is shown to have been in love with his sister, Freya. *Uncle Paul*, like so many of the novels, has a tragic ending.

Here are a few words from – and about – the two novels, *Leitmotifs* in *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning*.

"Perpetually ... distant artillery ... giant bees trapped ... basement ... core detached ... fight ... march".

"Create ... image ... feather-bed tilting ... dark ... waves ... daze ... actuality ... fancy ... dipping ... rocking ... illusion ... insecurity ... circumference."

These are the complete list of key words for the two Richard Lehrer *leitmotifs*. Richard is an intentional self-portrait. It is only the second set of words that is supposed to represent Richard's brooding and insecurity; yet both seem to convey the brooding excitement, urgent activity, nervous strength and the "insecurity" - perhaps even the restless yearning for darkness and peace.

The *Leitmotiv* system is used in the two novels as follows. Phrases are used in the text just as musical phrases are employed in Wagner's *Ring* cycle, which Edgar had in mind, to introduce each appearance of a character or a recurring theme. These phrases are interwoven in many variations and

form most of the text. It would be impossible to follow the story through them alone, but it can be followed through the straightforward dialogue passages, as in reading a play. In *Thunder Returning* stream of consciousness passages have been used also. Rather impatiently, he wrote a foreword to explain the technique in *Thunder Returning* as many readers had found it difficult to understand it in *Latticed Echoes*.

The phrases, supposed to be disconnected from each other, cannot fail to call up pictures, and we see the "giant bees" buzzing agitatedly, trapped in the basement. The unconscious coming to the fore - I believe this is a significant phrase to use about Edgar. His unconscious must have been so full of emotive energy which produced his powerful personality, and then one could see it sparking off further energy, contradictions to his rationalizing, disciplined conscious mind, causing the strange blind alleys.

I am using the Jungian word, "unconscious" now, rather than the Freudian "subconscious". The unconscious sounds as if it has more power, and is what James Joyce tapped into. Whatever you call it, I think Edgar did not care for the unconscious which, perhaps by accident, he could use in a Joycean fashion. Edgar himself denies, in his forward to *Thunder Returning*, a comparison that critics, reviewers of *Latticed Echoes*, made to Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. This beautiful novel of hers contains no passages that do not make immediate sense, even though the depth and meaning may take a while to be absorbed, and it is far truer to compare Edgar's work with Joyce, especially *Finnigan's Wake*.

"Water winds, and thunder ripples. Hearts beat, and distant artillery trembles. A phantom flickers, and a serpent twists. Boom-gloom-doom, snarls the worm, and the meadow lurks, lonely and windless, in a violet evening. Doom-gloom-fang, says a bitter midnight sea ..."

(Thunder Returning)

What other explanation than the unconscious is there for some of these phrases? From what other source could come those genius strokes of juxtaposition of words? What made him choose "*infant dark*" as a phrase for one of the characters?

And then something that excited him less - something that made less impact on him in real life - is more thinly treated. The complete *Motiv* for London, as shown in the foreword to *Thunder Returning* is: "*Traffic of Oxford Street under a beige sky*" - an atmospheric description of a small part of London in a certain kind of weather, even distinctive because of the "beige", but that is all.

I think that one of the reasons why Wagner's and some other music (Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, for example) meant so much to Edgar was because it can convey deep, compulsive feelings, archetypal knowledge perhaps - without adding the embarrassment of words - just as Edgar's own combinations of *Motivs* are not intended to be studied for sense. The stream of consciousness in *Thunder Returning* may be closer to Woolf, but seems mainly to carry the story along.

The evocative phrases appear not only in *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning*, but in many of the novels. There are the unbalanced remarks of Garvin, the hero of *The Jilkington Drama*. In Garvin, Edgar falls back on his old "nutty" character disguise, and the character dies a similar death to Edgar's, setting himself alight with fireworks on Bonfire Night. In *My Bones and my Flute* the phrases are telling as the old Dutchman descends into the dark. Added to these are the notes he invented for his flute - the notes that condemn him.

Or compare old Jarrow in *The Weather in Middenshot*:

"We know not where we are, oh, Lord. The brume is everywhere and policemen are on the move. We have halted here to think our way through the gloom, but where can we find a haven or a heaven in the wild welter wrapped like wool around us?"

This is a picture of Jarrow trapped with a psychopath whom he is pursuing in the fog, but the psychopath seems like his alter-ego, and the description is intense.

Returning to the *Leitmotiv* novels, Edgar had intended to write a third book to make them into a trilogy. This would have been a very different kind of trilogy from the *Kaywana* series. I have the *Leitmotiv* books listed among the English novels, because they were written in that later period, and in

a new experimental style, but in fact they were set mostly in the author's home town of New Amsterdam. The third of the trilogy was to take place on his beloved Rhine.

In between *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning* Edgar produced *Eltonsbrody*, another novel with a Caribbean setting that was completed during his last years in England. It is set in the island of Barbados. A young English artist with the giveaway autobiographical name of (Milton) Woodsley (as in the author of *The Mad MacMullochs*) arrives to paint a picture of the atmospheric house and grounds, "Eltonsbrody", owned by the deceptively charming old lady, Mrs. Scaithe, and he becomes involved in the chilling happenings which, it gradually becomes apparent, are engineered by the old lady herself.

Someone recently asked me:

"Whom do you think this extraordinary old lady is based upon?"

And then I realised that she is based on Edgar himself, with his macabre sense of humour, but she carries it to extremes in her actions. She can see the Mark and the Shadow in people. The Shadow on someone tells her that such a person is going to die. This reflects Edgar's obsession with death. The Mark she recognises in the narrator, Woodsley – the fascination with the dark, the weird and the strange. Every author and story-writer is in his characters to some extent. This led me on to consider how much of Edgar is in his. I have mentioned them above. Those that are obviously autobiographical are Geoffry in *Corentyne Thunder* and Milton in *The Life and Death of Sylvia* and *My Bones and my Flute*, Woodsley in *Eltonsbrody*, Richard Lehrer in *Latticed Echoes* and *Thunder Returning*, and to some extent Tom in *The Wounded and the Worried*. More subtle resemblances are in Gregory in *Shadows Move among Them*, Mr. Holme (very much the Idyll) in *The Weather in Middenshot*, Brian in *A Tinkling in the Twilight*, and Garvin in *The Jilkington Drama* (the last novel), but Garvin's final action identifies him more fully with Edgar. Neither should we forget *Uncle Paul* who turns against the fascists he has supported. His Jewish blood, as we have seen, is the equivalent of Edgar's African heritage.

Then there are those who represent his political views: Peter in *The Piling of Clouds*, with Charles as the shadow side;

old Jarrow in *The Weather in Middenshot*; Harpo in *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*.

Representing the spiritual views, Tom stands out in *The Wounded and the Worried*; Brian in *A Tinkling in the Twilight*; Herbert in ... *Mrs. Chatham*. It would have been interesting if Herbert's political views could have been different from Harpo's reactionary ones, but of course this would not have worked, as between them, both characters are putting forward the main parts of Edgar's philosophy to the receptive if strong-minded Sheila Chatham. Sheila herself could in part be called the feminine side of Edgar, absorbing, reflecting, thinking, feeling. She does this throughout his life and changes with him.

The character, Milton, in *The Life and Death of Sylvia* (just *Sylvia* in the American edition), is autobiographical, and Edgar met the heroine in real life. The fictional Sylvia shares, as did the real Sylvia, Edgar's influences from their mixed race. In the fictional account, there may be a touch of *Mrs. Chatham*, the female character into whose receptive experiences he enters deeply. Sylvia shares his death-wish and in the fictional account carries it out. An illuminating dissertation on *Sylvia* has been written, *What Influenced Mittelholzer's Sylvia?* by Juanita Cox.

"It will be so peaceful," Sylvia, contemplating suicide, tells Milton, "knowing that all my miseries will be disappearing behind me. All the plaguing problems we've talked about. The purpose in my being alive and if it's hereditary and environment that has made me what I am – all this will be going behind me into blankness."

NOTES:

¹ The first time I wrote notes for this chapter, in my *Bim* 19 article, I made a special feature of the "sex-crazed female" – perhaps another projection of Edgar and his desires.

One is Clarice in *The Weather Family*. Malverne is an amusing exhibitionist in *Eltonsbrody* - amusing but this entire work has chilling twists and turns. Ellen in *Shadows ...* is like a repellent version of Malverne. Both are native servant girls in a tropical setting. However, in *Shadows ...* nearly everyone, male or female, desires someone intensely, and Ellen is no exception. It is part of the warm, compelling, enchanted atmosphere.

In the unpublished play about the Christ-figure whom Edgar calls "Mr. Lampton", there is Lavinia. She offers herself to Mr. Lampton, whom she hates. Lavinia has at least a family likeness to the "sex-crazed females". So has Hyacinth in *The Weather in Middenshot* who loves to be "rough-handled" - knocked about - but who wins her real love, the gentle Mr. Holmes, from the spinsterly yet sympathetically portrayed Grace, old Jarrow's daughter. So has Stella in *The Wounded and the Worried* - the representative of the *Rajas* (passion and power) *Guna*.

Some of the passionate girls who do not pursue so brazenly are charming - more likeable than the ones who do - showing in this respect how true to life Edgar's characterization can be. Quite subtle is Constance in *A Tale of Three Places*. Yet in this novel, too, there is a hint that the male can only keep his dignity by allowing the female to pursue. Not always so! At the beginning of *Children of Kaywana*, the whole dynasty is started through the man almost taking the girl, Kaywana by force. This is intended as an example of strength. However, she has led him on.

CHAPTER SIX: EDGAR'S CHILDHOOD: A SWARTHY BOY

"So he (the photographer) had to take me as I was, with mouth set, with thunder on my brows."

(A Swarthy Boy)

*"For nearly ten years after I had left British Guiana (in December, 1941, I left), I was subject to a recurring nightmare ... I would find myself on the **stelling** at New Amsterdam (**stelling** is the Dutch word for wharf, but is still used in British Guiana). I had returned, at last, to my home town, and it was good to be back after such a long absence –yet, as I moved into the streets and tried to make my way home, I would begin to feel uncertain; a trapped, claustrophobic panic would gradually take possession of me."*

(With a Carib Eye, 1958)

A Swarthy Boy is Edgar's only long, non-fiction work apart from *With a Carib Eye*. It is an autobiography of his childhood and youth, taking him to the age of nineteen. Written in 1963, two years before his tragic death, he never intended to produce a sequel.

As a boy, he served in the Anglican church.

"Defend, O Lord, this Thy servant Edgar."

The main preoccupation seems to have been a struggle for precedence among the boy servers. Edgar's religious upbringing was strict, if varied, and this was one form of discipline that did not have a lasting appeal. It did not help him to derive consolation from orthodox Western religion later in life. In fact, from the age of nineteen, he became interested in the philosophy and some of the practice (mainly, the breathing exercises) of Yoga, and this continued for the rest of his life.

The Mittelholzer household was dominated by its womenfolk, and the strict Congregationalist grandmother (his mother's parent) owned the house. Edgar's father appears to have been a complex individual, but he was not the

prevailing influence in the household (yet had a great deal of influence on Edgar's mind and emotions). In *A Swarthy Boy* there are lively character sketches of father, aunts and the grandmother, Rebecca Leblanc (wife of the not so religious David Leblanc, who had left her before Edgar was born). Yes, it was Rebecca who was the powerful personality in the household. A photograph shows her looking very determined with Bible in hand. She could tell Bible stories with conviction, making them come to life in a dramatic if frightening way, and Edgar enjoyed this.

His emotional mother was alternately harsh and a molly-coddler. She chastised with a leather strap called "Tickle Toby", until Edgar turned on her in his early teens.

"The older I get," writes Edgar in A Swarthy Boy, "the greater grows my contempt for the pontifications of psychologists. People, I am convinced, are born what they are. Environment and 'traumatic' experience cannot change character. Put an honest, decent individual in a sewer and he will emerge honest and decent. Under the best conditions, a neurotic will remain a neurotic. A sane man will still be sane after he has been made to stand on his head for a year. We are each of us a mass of inherited contradictions and inconsistencies. There is no set 'behaviour pattern'. This is my firm belief."

This passage is placed between a description of his mother's severities and contradictions, and an account of his father's violent, though merely verbal, displays of temper which made the little boy "urinate in terror". In the paragraph, which I have quoted in full, I believe Edgar intended to make some statement about his mother, not about himself, but it is not at all obvious. Surely there is some reason unknown to its author for its presence - defiance at the effect upon himself of his background - an effect which, one feels, did exist though he would have denied it. One of Edgar's brothers, Mervyn Mittelholzer, told me of feeling the influence of their repressive upbringing, and the same brother later made the following comment in a letter:

“Edgar was considerably older, more experienced and sophisticated than I ... I seemed ... incapable of appreciating his potential at that time and could only succeed in seeing in him a rather irksome rebel, since as a result, there occurred all too frequent bouts of acrimony of a domestic nature – irksome (to me) who would rather a more peaceful and ‘submissive’ existence prevailed ... I was of the kind preferring to ‘bottle up’ in myself the objectionable things dictated by the prevailed authority whereas Edgar ‘called a spade a spade’ – which Dad used to describe as being ‘more candid than polite’ –and of course contributed nothing to a peaceful existence.”

The effect on the rebel, Edgar was more complex and, while natural tendencies leaned that way, must have contributed to the defiant attitude he had to life.

Passages in *A Swarthy Boy* reveal the incidents, not all of them bad, which impressed Edgar intensely. As with other talented people, his memories included many events in the first years of his life. There was a wind-up toy that frightened him, a prancing donkey and cart, when he was one year old. There was an erotic memory of “*...my nurse, a shapely negro girl, seated on a travelling trunk in the corridor outside the main bedroom, with me in her lap, casually fumbling out a full breast and letting me fondle it ...*”

He continues with another very early memory “*...of being held in the arms of this or another nurse at the pantry window on the other side of the cottage. From this window, we could look straight out into the open doorway – the north eastern entrance – of All Saints’ Church, not more than a hundred yards distant in Church Street.*”

The detail is vivid, and he must have been under two years old.

“I can see at this moment the pendant cluster of electric lights glittering in the pews, and recall the feeling of anxiety I had because my father and mother was at Evensong and I was alone with the nurse at home. I kept asking her when they would come home, and she kept assuring me: ‘As soon as the service is over.’”

This was before the immediate family had moved to live with the grandmother and the aunts. It was also before the birth of Edgar’s sister in 1911.

Another memory was of quarrels breaking out between his parents. His mother would burst into tears, and he would weep in sympathy.

Edgar used to be taken to visit at the manse, the home of his paternal grandfather, the Lutheran minister, and remembered the parson bending down to kiss him.

“ His black beard awed me. And it had a scent of its own. Was it ginger or a cross between ginger and talcum powder? His eyes were kindly and humorous, but I was always tense in his presence.”

Edgar attributed this tension in part to the presence of his father *“whom I feared”*. It seems to me now that the tension could have been almost entirely caused by this, for his father used to put him through some kind of a quiz in the presence of the grandfather, to show off the little boy’s knowledge and intelligence – his *“compensatory side”*; for Edgar, the first-born, was dark-skinned, or at least *“swarthy”*, and his father resented this. Of course, Edgar could not understand the reason at this young age.

“All I knew was that something made him perpetually impatient with me ...” Then comes the *“young of a sheep”* episode. In an attempt, it seemed, to demonstrate Edgar’s *“compensatory side”* to the grandfather, he would ask questions in order to display the little boy’s knowledge and intelligence. The incident made an indelible impression, for Edgar writes:

“As clearly as though it happened yesterday, I can see myself, a small boy of three, standing beside my grandfather’s bed upstairs ... My grandfather was bedridden at the time. My father quizzed me as usual, and I managed to answer correctly the first two or three questions. Then he leaned towards me and asked: ‘And now tell Grandpa - what is the young of a sheep called?’

‘A calf,’ I replied.

‘Don’t be silly!’” barked my father. “What is the young of a sheep called? A sheep?”

This goes on for a while. The grandfather remonstrates from the bed, with the father repeatedly shouting his question and literally *“dancing with rage”* (a habit of his), with the child

blurting out desperate, wrong answers and crying - until his aunt Carrie comes to his rescue.

A similarly frightening experience to the one with Edgar's father is that with the governess, his first teacher, Eugenie Fraser. She used to lock him in a small, dusty room at the back of the house when he could not spell the words she had given him to learn.

"I can see the rhombuses of sunlight on the dusty floor of that tiny room and live through again at this moment the vacant solitude that seemed to grip me."

I think it is interesting –and poetically suitable – that Edgar employed the phrase, "*rhombuses of sunlight*". "*Rhombuses*" is not a word he would have known at the time; and, in describing the incident long afterwards in his book, he might have used the word, "*diamonds*". But "*diamonds of sunlight*" would be beautiful, and there was nothing beautiful about that room.

"If I told a psychiatrist that I suffer from claustrophobia - and I do have an irrational fear of lifts and of being locked into bathrooms and lavatories - he would probably say that these early experiences are what brought about this state of things. Yet, how would he explain the fact I feel an ordinate sense of safety in a ship's cabin, no matter how tiny it may be? I am never happier and more free from any sensation of dread or panic than when settling down to sleep or moving about in a ship's cabin."

Surrounded by water in the womb?

Let us be thankful that far fewer frustrated spinsters such as Eugenie exist, or such Dickensian methods of "teaching", in this partially enlightened age. As Edgar describes the incident, it has stayed in his mind. The impatient, continual repetition of questions that the child cannot answer, making it all the more impossible for him to answer, seems to make the experience so similar to the "*young of a sheep*" incident.

As far as mere logic was concerned, Edgar easily excused his father's dislike of his dark complexion when he was born at 2 a.m. on the 16th of December, 1909:

"For my father, it was an occasion of momentous disappointment. I turned out to be a swarthy boy!"

Edgar wondered whether his father, well-read as a young man, had heard of Mendelism!

"Himself fair-complexioned with hair of European texture, as were his brothers and sisters (save Anna, the youngest) and his wife also fair-complexioned and European in appearance, he had, naturally, assumed that the chances were heavy in favour of a fair-complexioned baby ..."

"... He has my empathy." Edgar much preferred this word, in all contexts, to the more emotional "sympathy". "It requires the minimum of effort for me to put myself in his place. In a community like that, at that time, he would have had to be superhuman not to be disappointed."

I would query this, concerning one's own child, but respect Edgar's knowledge of the time and place.

The first-born was the only "swarthy" one. Edgar's sister and brothers all turned out to be fair-skinned.

While Edgar was still a very small boy, his father, through a piece of misfortune recounted in *A Swarthy Boy*, lost his job as clerk in a big merchant firm. It was during the difficulties of this unemployed period that the family moved in with Rebecca Leblanc (the grandmother) and the aunts. This was the Coburg Street house in which Edgar grew up. The job which his father later acquired as assistant town clerk was not well paid, so the accommodation arrangement was never altered.

Edgar's father did not accept his unemployed period at all well. His pride was, naturally, hurt. William Austin Mittelholzer (my husband's own middle name was Austin; they were called after a bishop) had much in common with Edgar, yet was evidently a less dominant personality, since the womenfolk were left to make all the family decisions.

After a description of Edgar's shy and retiring Uncle Bertie (of whom Edgar always spoke with tender, amused affection), he writes about his father that he:

“ ... was shy and self-effacing, too. Right into middle age, in fact. And he was dreamy - but in somewhat different fashion, compared with his brother. He was a scheming dreamer, and his big dream was to travel to England and Europe ... and in 1901 he realised his dream. He had saved enough money to travel ... He wrote a long account of his trip which still exists, neatly typewritten and bound, with a small water-colour sketch of Lake Geneva done by himself on the cover.”

I do not know the whereabouts of this book, which would be most intriguing, but Edgar's father was also a Freemason, and I have discovered a copy of his compilation, records and sketches of the jubilee (fiftieth anniversary) of "Ituni" lodge of which he was a member. His letter when bestowing this booklet upon Edgar, is of some interest, written in copperplate style, dated 25/10/1947:

“Dear Barno,

The subject matter will not interest you as a non-mason; I present it as a literary (and pictorial) production of mine.

Early this year our Permanent Committee requested me as one of the oldest surviving members of the Lodge, to compile a history for their jubilee, nor have I disappointed them. Received high compliments generally, amongst whom are the brothers, July (well educated men) and Mr. Gibson, the retired Manager of Post ... (who gave me my three Degrees in 1903.

The pictures, with the exception of the photo of Mr. Gibson, and the interior views, are all by my own pen and ink. The picture of the Reading Rooms is from a very old pen-and-ink drawing that appeared in "Christmas Tide" some forty-odd years ago. You can see the antiquity from the now obsolete horse-and-buggy on the premises.”

The letter is signed simply "Dad". The nickname, Barno, is derived from Edgar's youthful stamp collecting hobby - a schoolboy nickname - and his father must have adopted it (this seems to show a friendly aspect of their relationship). In *A Swarthy Boy* Edgar records that he sent up for a certain European stamp advertised by someone name Barnet, and encouraged several other boys to do likewise, but the stamps never arrived. Hence the chaffing and the nickname.

Other more tender memories of his father than the “*young of the sheep*” incident were of when he used to bring peanuts to Edgar and his sister, Lucille, after school, and later to the younger brothers, Mervyn and Arthur, when they waited in the school yard, or on the steps of the Lutheran church where black nurses with charges would congregate. Edgar and Lucille with their own nurse, or their father, were always kept a little apart. These were the times when their father used to pay most attention to his children.

“He would stroke our heads and murmur: ‘Goat-hair.’ Then with a glance towards the nurses: ‘Not sheep-wool. They have sheep-wool.’ And he would stroke his own hair and smile and add: ‘We have goat hair.’”

I am not sure what is the merit in having “*goat-hair*” rather than “*sheep-wool*”. Of course, it is the racial implication and prejudice, but the analogy is strange. Biblically, it is the other way round, concerning the sheep and the goats! The passage in *A Swarthy Boy* continues to show that it was Edgar’s father who instilled in him his pride in German blood, quoting a certain Mr. Von Ravensburg, the father of the boys, Fritz and Otto, two of Edgar’s friends and contemporaries.

“Just one drop of that great blood. Just one drop in your veins and it makes you different from everyone else. German blood!”

The period was during the First World War and Edgar goes on to write about his father’s horror, shared with the mother and aunts at “*some account of German brutality in Belgium or France – some atrocity story of women and children being bayoneted in cold blood.*” This is the same contrast of feeling that was in Edgar himself.

“Chip-chip-tramp!” –the sound of the father’s footsteps coming across the square - Edgar had an ear for what syllables were formed for him by sounds. Earlier in the same book, he writes:

“There could be no mistaking church time. The air jingled with the criss-cross tangle of church bells. From the north came

the middle register belem-belem of the Presbyterians Church. From the East the hoary clang-clang of the Congregational Chapel. From the South-East the soft, velvety, haughty beng-beng of the Anglican All-Saints Parish-church. From the South-West, the high-pitched fire-bell-like Lutheran church pilling-pilling!"

This appeared in our son – aged three when I noted this. "Why does the telephone say, turn, turn, Mummy?" ... "Sheep say, er, er! Not baa, baa!"

Edgar describes his father as "*shy and self-effacing*". A more macho male figure (like David Leblanc, but in a different way) was Uncle Bishop. He was an explorer who led expeditions into the jungle.

It was the women of the household who were the main factors in deciding on Edgar's future career, with Edgar himself making more positive contributions to the discussion than his father.

"*Time you went into harness!*" is the phrase and attitude he remembers as his father's main contribution. I wonder if the comment was hurtful, for Edgar himself was for further education, and was as a result of the discussions allowed in the end to sit the Senior School Certificate, which he did successfully, before taking the government civil service job.

However, his main ambition had always been to be a writer, and he filled up many exercise books with stories that were read by his friends, looking forward to the next instalment with great enthusiasm.

There were indelible incidents concerning his mother. One involved a hat which he lost. He had been left sitting on a seat by the nurse with the hat beside him. It disappeared and turned up in the wrong place, making it appear that he had wandered near a lake where he had been forbidden to go – and where he had not gone, but his mother did not believe him, and punished him severely. His mother seems to have suffered from anxiety. Clearly she'd been afraid he had fallen into the lake. He had to be escorted to and from school by a servant with an umbrella, becoming a figure of fun to the other children who call him "Umbrella boy!" His mother feared exposing him to the sun. There was also the difficulty he had, to persuade her to let him join the boy-scouts; nor, due to

expense, was he permitted to wear the uniform straightaway once he did join; nor was he permitted to go on the first big camping expedition:

“What! On the Corentyne Coast to sleep in the open air.’

‘In tents, Mother.’

‘I don’t care. You’re not accustomed to such a thing. Do you want to contract tuberculosis?’”

There was the ordeal he and his sister, Lucille, were forced to undergo when they were made to take calomel capsules to purify the system. It cast a shadow over each holiday time.

As the sister, the only daughter, grew older, she was not allowed to go out with young men.

“Men were allowed to court Lucille at home but only under the watchful eye of her mother. This inevitably stifled conversation.”

(Juanita Cox).

Edgar said that this must have been what ruined lovely Lucille’s chances of marriage, but Cox writes:

“I get the impression though that Lucille wanted to live an independent life and so didn’t find the idea of marriage particularly appealing. Her grandmother often told them stories about her husband’s infidelities and it seems that Lucille also had the impression that men were untrustworthy.”

Juanita Cox was well acquainted with Lucille, who died (2012) at the age of one hundred and one.¹

Those are just a few examples of the Victorian-style upbringing. Edgar said that he was not bitter against either of his parents, and I am sure he was not so in the sense of bearing malice. There are pleasanter references, as noted with the father. With the mother, Edgar describes a true incident when, in *The Life and Death of Sylvia*, he writes of how the autobiographical character, Milton who, as Edgar did as a young man, is trying to make a living for himself in Georgetown, keeps finding bank notes that his mother has concealed among his clothing. Whatever else can be said about

her, Edgar's mother adored him, and cared for him as best she could.

Despite the restrictions, it would not be fair to say that Edgar did not enjoy his childhood. There were the pranks described in *A Swarthy Boy* with relish – schoolboy relish, in fact: the story of tomfoolery during a school Nature Study project at Berbice High School; also the story of a raid of the mangoes at the Presbyterian manse, belonging to the Reverend and Mrs. Nichols who, Edgar wrote, were “*extremely mean*” with their mangoes:

“I decided one day on a plan I considered above board. Ironically, however, I caught it literally in the neck. Eric, Cyril Chu, a Chinese boy – both form-mates – and I were on our way home one afternoon when I mooted a mango raid ... I suggested our going up to the house and asking the Nicholsons for permission to pick some; they would either tell us we could not or point out the worst tree and probably watch us take two or three half-ripe specimens and then order us off ... I had other ideas in mind; the point was to get permission to pick the fruit; once they gave us permission, off we would dart and make our own selection from the trees we chose. Eric and Cyril hesitated. Who was going to go and ask? I would, I said, and looking virtuous and respectable, I went up the long stairway and knocked at the door. Mrs. Nichols herself appeared. ‘Can I have some mangoes, please?’ I asked. She seemed very surprised, hesitated, then said: ‘Very well, I’ll let you have some.’ She turned off at once to go inside, and I dashed down to the others and said: ‘She said yes.” Off we streaked to the best trees – the trees that bore the pinkest and most tempting fruit. Swiftly we got to work, and were engrossed in the operation when Cyril suddenly hissed: ‘Nicholls coming! Look!’ and dashed off towards the gap in the hedge, followed by Eric. I heard a sound like hoof-beats in a cowboy film and saw the Reverend Mr. Nichols galloping towards me, instinctively made to dash off, then stopped. Why should I run? I had asked permission. ‘I’ve caught you, you little thief!’ panted Mr. Nichols, and grabbed me by the back of my neck. I jerked myself free and said haughtily: ‘I asked permission. I asked Mrs. Nichols. We weren’t stealing them.’ He barked: ‘You’re a liar! You never asked.’ This got me angry, and I flung the mangoes I had picked down on the grass and told him he could keep

them. "I did ask. You can go and find out from her if you don't believe me." He recoiled, looking uncertain, and then we heard Mrs. Nichols' voice. We went towards the house and she verified that I had asked for some mangoes. 'But I went inside to get them for you.' She was holding in her hands two or three ugly-looking green-skinned fruit. 'These were what I was bringing to the door to give to you, but you'd gone.' I told her no thanks, and began to move off. I left them looking a little shamefaced, and flustered, and rejoined the other boys in the road. The operation was not an entire failure, because Eric and Cyril had managed to carry off one or two pink-skinned mangoes despite their hasty retreat."

Edgar seems to be right back in the mango raid – in his boyish reactions of the time – as he writes this, as with all his escapades. In *A Swarthy Boy* we find schoolboy pranks; masculine conceit; catcalling at girls; reading Nelson Lees and Sexton Blakes ... In many ways Edgar was a normal, healthy boy. But more so. He took everything so intensely. This intensity, he said, was unlike the attitude of his life-long, extrovert friend, whom he refers to as "Fisky" or later, "Johnny" or "J.P".

"J.P." is almost the only exception to the rule that Edgar, by his own account, did not have great friendships with members of his own sex. From an early age, he had infatuations for girls – big girls and little girls.

Edgar was not an unhappy child or teenager. There were the "crazes" such as the stamp-collecting with "J.P"; the thrillers he read: "Dr. Wang-Fu", a character he pretended to be; the boy-scouts; being a server in the church; and writing stories.

Later he was not interested in such ideas for a career as his parents had for him. His real ambition was his writing. In 1937 he self-published *Creole Chips* and sold it from door-to-door. Edgar wrote first short stories, then novels. He bombarded publishers with them. As well as involving hard work, this was an expensive task, for he did not have much money, and he had to send all his work overseas to English publishers. There were no significant publishers in his native land. Eventually he was the first of the writers from South America or the West Indies to reach Britain – both through publications and physically.

Race relations would not have been an obstacle to Edgar in his search for a job. In the appendix to the autobiography, he describes the set-up:

“Had I been an adult in 1909, the year of my birth, it is just possible that I might have felt the disadvantage of my swarthy complexion, for at that time complexion was sometimes a barrier to advancement, especially in the Civil Service and big commercial firms; and that is, advancement right to the top. My maternal grandfather, for instance, acted as Postmaster General, but could not be confirmed in this post purely on account of his complexion – swarthy like mine. Yet it must be pointed out that racial prejudice in British Guiana, even in those days, was not an outright fact. The colony was too British in spirit by then (a century of continuous British rule had elapsed and the polite hypocrisy of the British forbade public display of prejudice).

Further, the pure whites were (and still are) a very small minority, and simply could not afford to show open discrimination or practise any unpleasant form of segregation.”

Edgar goes on to write that it was his own class – *“people of coloured admixture but fair or olive complexions who dispensed any colour snobbery ... looked down upon the East Indian sugar plantation labourers (‘coolies’ as we called them whether they were labourers or even became doctors or barristers or Civil Servants). It was my class which considered the Portuguese social inferiors because of their background of door-to-door peddling, rum-shops, salt-good shops and pawn-shops and their low standards of living.”* They even treated *“the Chinese sweet-sellers and shop-keepers”* as if they were of lower status, and *“young Englishmen who came out to serve on the sugar plantation were deemed ... white riff-raff”*. The Negroes were, of course, serving people.

He saw his writing struggle, as I suppose he saw everything, as a battle (he played complicated war-games as a child). He details his early struggles in *A Swarthy Boy* (as well as in his article, *A Pleasant Career*. He writes of his first rejection from a publisher:

“Not a rejection, but a repulse. For in my imagination the whole thing had taken on the flavour of a military campaign ... The enemy was Life-cum-editors-and -publishers-in-London.”

I think it significant (though not an entirely strange or unusual human attitude) that Edgar wrote of life as part of the enemy forces, not as part of a neutral battlefield. The publishers themselves are “enemy” – as earlier were the owners of the mangoes.

“Sieg oder Tod!” Edgar often said. *“Victory or death!”* are the last words of his autobiography. The book only takes him to the age of nineteen. But right at the end of the long struggle of his actual life, we know that he decided he had not achieved *Sieg*, when many people would have thought that with his successes he had.

There are various ways of reacting to such gifts as life yields up. There are various ways of taking part in a mango raid. When you see the enemy approaching, you can run off – like Eric and Cyril – with such mangoes as you have gained. Or in a proud, quixotic fashion you can fling all your mangoes back in the face of the foe who has insulted you.

NOTE:

¹ Lucille lived a fulfilled life, travelled twice to England, though not during my time of knowing Edgar. She worked with the Red Cross and the Girl Guides, and helped with the establishing of an old people’s home in New Amsterdam. Lucille was awarded an M.B.E. for her social services work. This was in 1966, the year after Edgar died. As did Juanita, I met her only in her old age.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHY DID EDGAR KILL HIMSELF?

Edgar felt a misfit because his views on life were not generally accepted, or not in the circles where he thought they ought to be. He was exasperated because, while most of the people he met in the daily round agreed with his views on crime, and a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* brought a dozen letters supporting him, yet the *intelligentsia* were against him, so that he felt persecuted, sure that their attitudes, poor reviews of his books etc. were interfering with his literary reputation and the publication of his work. Certainly his views, and his uncompromising way of expressing them, were what made it so difficult to publish two of his later novels, *The Piling of Clouds* and *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*.

He felt isolated, too, in his views upon the occult, which again were expressed most seriously in later works, *The Wounded and the Worried* and again ... *Mrs. Chatham*.

Edgar would not have killed himself if he could have supported our son and myself, and his other family, as he wanted. And he wanted to do it all himself. We used a little of my own private income, but in the months after his death I was always regretting the fact that I did not persuade him to use more. Even now I think, why did I not go out and get a job? It would have been against his will, but I think he would have respected me more for it in the end. It was not as if he allowed me to do much at home. I do remember attempting to get a secretarial post once, probably before the baby was born, but I had so little confidence at the time.

I have mentioned his preoccupation with the football pools. He had a system by which he could win a little money back each week, but not enough to make it worthwhile. I wished he would sometimes have said to me, or to *anyone*, the way that most people speak to each other: "*What do you think we should do?*" or "*What should I do?*" about any situation. But he would seldom even phrase it as a suggestion. He would just say: "*We must do this.*"

Or even if we were both involved:

"I'm going to do this."

A conversation arose from a news item, about a married man who gave up his secure job to devote himself to some kind of altruistic work – I forget exactly what the work was.

"My dear girl," said Edgar, *"it was his duty to keep his safe job to make sure he could support his wife."*

"But they both agreed," I argued. *"She wanted him to be free to follow his vocation. She didn't want to hold him back."*

"That doesn't matter. He should have known what was his duty, and as the man he should have been the deciding factor."

Come to think of it, Edgar's writing was the equivalent of this man's vocation, making the reasoning doubly illogical!

Edgar had a strongly developed sense of the man having to be the "deciding factor", but if discussion had been quite free between us, it is possible that we might have solved the problems. Instead, there was the same inhibition which had held me back from taking over some of the household tasks which he had claimed. Sometimes it would take days for me to summon up courage to make a suggestion to Edgar. Sometimes I would not make the suggestion at all. This was due to something in his attitude. It was also due to a regression to something in me which had made me, as a shy, sheltered schoolgirl in my teens, often take days to summon courage to invite a friend home to tea.

Discussions, the household set-up, everything was gradually becoming freer between Edgar and myself.

"What are you getting for lunch?" I would say, making sure I was part of the arrangement when he went out for his regular morning shopping. In the early days, he would bring the simple things he would cook for lunch – mostly it would be he who would cook them – without me knowing what they were going to be. I would cook potatoes and greens, while he would grate carrot and cut up tomatoes. For the main dish, regular items would appear, but not all of them on regular days. However, mince was always on Mondays. I was allowed to cook the mince, but once he would not believe that I had remembered a certain ingredient, from his usual recipe, because I had added the ingredients in the "wrong" order.

After a while, in the later days, he would tell me what he was getting for lunch, knowing that I would ask. We had these rituals.

Discussions, I think, became completely free in the last two days of his life. He seemed natural about everything – things about which he would previously have been inflexible. He seemed so much more relaxed. It awoke in me, too optimistic, a hope for the future. I realise now that the warrior was stilled in him because in his own mind everything was settled. Life had always been a battle. Now there was nothing more to fight, because he was leaving it. Or any warrior's thoughts that might remain were keyed up to the final act of will. Also, of course, he must have put on a false cheerfulness for my benefit. I must have been blind! I was laughing and playing with the baby boy on the afternoon of May 5th, 1965, the day Edgar died. Edgar suddenly exclaimed in a strange way:

"Oh, you two!"

"What is it?" I asked, going over to him, knowing how depressed he had been of late, and how he had commented sometimes, as if from a far distance, on the life-loving qualities of the boy and myself. *"All this frivolity around you?"*

"Yes. Yes, that is it. Yes."

That morning, too, the two-year-old had said: *"Mummy, Daddy,"* in a satisfied tone about the two principal people in his life. I had laughed. Edgar had not laughed.

Let us go back a couple of months – to February 27th, a Saturday, in my diary: *"I've been feeling very close to Edgar ... because of houses."* This refers to our house-hunting activities. We had been told by our new landlord and the leading spirit, his wife, that we must leave the cottage because their daughter was getting married and wanted it (soon after Edgar's death and my departure, the whole property – main house and cottages – was put up for auction). In spite of the problem, I was pleased, excited - like a little girl who is given a grown-up task – that I seemed to be taking my full part in the search for somewhere else to rent. I suppose I did not guess to quite what an extent Edgar had lost interest in life, and that he was leaving some things to me because of this.

Edgar did not really want to rent another cottage. He felt that at his age and with his responsibilities, he ought to be able to *buy* a house. This I did realise, but again, perhaps not how strongly he felt it. There was a lot of pride in Edgar, not always a bad thing, but it can be a handicap, as at this time.

With our new landlords, I use the word in the plural, because in this case it was so much the *wife* who was the deciding factor – the man worked with electronics, but at home did what he was told. They had come from what was then Rhodesia. To this day, I do not know the truth of it, but we suspected that they did not like Edgar's complexion. This was almost the only time that there was any hint of racial prejudice arising for us in a personal way, as opposed to our theoretical arguments about it.

Our house-hunting trials are a history in themselves. Our landlords did first of all intend to buy a cottage we were to rent from them in Bordon, nearby on the Hampshire border. Before the sale was complete, the lady who owned the cottage died, and her son then refused to sell. Our landlords presently found another small place and offered it to us at a reduced rent. I did not see this place myself, but was delighted when Edgar announced that we would not have it, for I had not liked its description from the beginning.

All this time, our landlords had not interfered with our next-door-neighbours (a Scottish couple just then) although they had been tenants for a far briefer period than we had.

We now had to look around for ourselves, and we became quite enthusiastic about rooms in a Puttenham house, but in the ends its tenants were unable to leave, due to some snags appearing in their own plans. And now Edgar lost interest completely. Any semblance of enthusiasm he showed after this, any house he went with me or alone to see, I realise now – and he said as much in his leave-taking letter – was so much star-dust thrown in my eyes to hide the imminence of his death. I say "imminence" advisedly, for he did not disguise the fact that it might happen some time. He had made at least two previous attempts on his life – once since our marriage, and once in the nineteen-thirties. The death *Motiv* was so much a part of his character. In the thirties, it had appeared as a way out because it had seemed as if he would never be able to

leave British Guiana (as it was then called) and come to England as he wanted. He was sharing a bedroom with his brother, Mervyn, at the time, who did not notice anything wrong. Edgar took an overdose of tablets, and woke up in the morning with nothing worse than a stomach ache.

I don't know whether my forewarned state added to the guilt feelings I suffered; for one is bound to feel guilty after a death of that kind. Even following a natural death, you have regrets. The hints given to me beforehand were partly so that the event would not come as a complete shock, and partly because Edgar needed someone to talk to. They seemed framed in such a way that I could not pass them on, except in an even more veiled way, to relatives and well-wishers. I could only say to people who knew his history:

"Edgar is very depressed again."

Or so it seemed - I thought afterwards I could have been more forthcoming - maybe even thought so at the time, but did not know how to do it.

His diary for the last three days of his life was true to its usual routine of notes. It ran like this:

"May 3rd, Monday. Mid: (midday) 50 degrees (91) temperature fifty degrees Fahrenheit; humidity ninety-one) Bar (barometer) 22.62 (time) - 10.30. Got up at 6.10 a.m. Wrote various letters. To town. Posted letter to Gloria. Shopped. Library. Rested (well). Wrote Lucille. Bed 10.45 - Love. Evening - strong winds and drizzle 45 (91). 52 degrees (83)."

The last two sets of figures refer to early morning and late evening temperature and humidity. Lucille, Edgar's sister, was the one surviving sibling, at the age of ninety-nine when I re-wrote this in 2010. The next year I attended her 100th birthday. Gloria was a cousin. She was an outspoken journalist in Guyana - British Guiana, as it was when she came over from there to visit us and others. Her married name was D'Ornellas, but she was one of the dynamic Mittelholzers. There seem to have been two types - the dynamic and the conventional.

To continue with the last two days of Edgar's diary:

*"May 4th, Tuesday. Mid – 48 degrees (91). Bar: 28.60 – 10.45. Got up at 6.20. Wrote various letters. To town. Shopped. Calm in spirit but inwardly tense. Domestic behaviour quite normal. Rested (not well). Wrote various letters (Paulius & Jac.). Evening read **Portrait of a Genius, but ...** " Walk 8.50. Bed 11.10. Evening – Broken cloud. S.W. wind. Showery and sunny periods 47 degrees (91)."*

Portrait of a Genius, but ... is Richard Aldington's biography of D. H. Laurence. "Paulius" (real name, Pauline) admired Edgar's work, corresponded with him, and visited us once. This eccentric, estranged wife of Paul Gallico wrote copious notes that she hoped Edgar could compile into a book for her. She was a film writer.

May 5th, 1965, the day of Edgar's death, is a less complete entry, but tries valiantly:

"Got up 6.15 a.m. Occasional sunny periods. Variegated cloud ... 45 degrees (90). 50 degrees (93)."

I ought to have guessed the significance of the pools work giving way to typing out letters. If I had seen that one was to myself! Many little things I remember from the last few days – things that I know now must have been planned so that we would have a happy leave-taking without too many regrets. Edgar was always a good planner. It is not his fault that I thought for a long time afterwards about the ways I must have failed him. Even the difficulties over the housekeeping would probably not have occurred if I had been a more confident, competent person. It was good of him to bring the conversation round at cocoa-time, one of those evenings, to how much we meant to each other.

And the cocoa reminds me. "*Keine Klumpen,*" he used to say, trying to get me to make cocoa without lumps in it, for I was allowed to make the cocoa. If only we could have been as light-hearted about all such things!

He was thoughtful to others about his death. For instance, he left a note to our landlord's wife, explaining that she must not blame herself: that his death-wish sprang from something much deeper than recent difficulties.

Those last impressions! Pulling on jeans and, I suppose, something over my nightdress when, after getting ready for bed, I realised that Edgar was not coming back from his late evening walk. Dashing out (strange to hear next-door-neighbour, exercising dog, call out: "Good-night" in matter-of-fact way). *Mustn't go far ... little boy alone in house.* I hurried along the lane, calling: "Edgar! Edgar! Edgar!" Dashed back. Wonderful if in some mysterious way, he had got back while I was out. No. The light was on, but – as I knew already – I had left it on myself. I then found a letter in a drawer, but didn't stop to read it before 'phoning Farnham police. There was also a watch labelled "For Arthur" - his brother – I believe I may have seen this first.

Later, when I told Arthur, on the phone, about the suicide, his first reaction was to exclaim:

"What a stupid thing to do!"

Arthur (a lawyer) was the youngest of the three brothers, but now that I think of it, he was almost an uncle figure to Edgar, in the way he talked to him, having not such a fiery temperament, or genius, but more commonsense.

Returning to the earlier moment:

"I THINK MY HUSBAND HAS TRIED TO KILL HIMSELF,"

I told the police.

"Yes, madam. What is your name?"

The search went on all night. Our landlord's blonde wife ran down the drive in her nightdress, thinking because of all the excitement that something had happened to her elder daughter, who was out. The police were kind and helpful. The sergeant stood out as an intelligent man, big-built, with a face that was strong, square, and sensitive.

Before all this began, I had gone out that Wednesday evening to a meeting of the Guildford Poetry Society. Earlier in the day I had doubted whether to go. With hindsight, I see the odd way Edgar looked at me when I mentioned my brief lack of enthusiasm.

A poet friend gave me a lift home (in fact, a rather lovely Irish poet, Carla Lanyon – lovely in herself and in her poetry). I ran up the drive, up the steps to the front door – I used to run a lot in those days! Edgar was waiting at the door. I had on his favourite dress – dark blue with lilac flowers. He

laughed at the light-hearted things I told him about the poetry evening. I realise now that he must have laughed with his nerves; cannot have taken in what I was saying. The courage he must have had! I told him things gaily, encouraged by the recent more relaxed mood of his that had followed what I'd called to our friends the "very depressed" one.

"Let's have some Rhine wine," he said. I know now why he suggested this. Partly to steady his nerves, but also Rhine wine was always a ritual between us. He drank it standing up, then he went out for his "walk". He had waited until I came home because of Leodegar who, he said, had been "very good", not woken once. I wondered slightly why he remarked on this; for he did not usually, unless I asked, when I had been out; and the baby hardly ever did wake at night. Of course, it must have been for the sake of finding something natural to say, and perhaps to leave a memory that he had looked after the boy faithfully, even if now for the last time.

Considerate again, he wrote in his leave-taking letter that he would have done what he did one evening that week anyway, but he had picked that day because it had been easier, while I was out, to complete his final preparations.

His death was charged with a feeling of fate, and it is peculiar how his friends have said so, too; for suicide is not fate in the sense that a car accident or coronary thrombosis is so. At least I used to think it was not – and tell Edgar that it was not. I am not so sure now. He himself had a strong fate feeling about everything.

Death had always been a possible way out. He could not understand why people wanted to come to terms with life when it persisted in not going according to plan. An old woman used to cycle every day up the hill, along the road that passed our house. My husband wondered what determination made her ride the bicycle all the way up the steep hill, and what it was that made life worthwhile to her. I suppose her age must have made him wonder all the more. He puzzled about her to the extent of jotting down a note. Perhaps he thought of using her in a novel.

Edgar's death was part of his no-compromise attitude to life. People call suicide "*a coward's way out*". It is certainly a way out – to somewhere – but perhaps not a coward's way. It

needs a great deal of a certain kind of courage – especially by the method he chose. He chose it at last as the most reliable method. At least twice before, he had taken tablets, and recovered. The first suicide attempt that I know about was when he was in his thirties, as I mentioned earlier. The second time was when he was with me. Not literally. Then too he had gone out into a field, to save the unpleasantness of a body being found at home. Then too, finding a note, I had phoned the police, but on that earlier occasion they found him in time. He groaned when describing to me how he had woken up in hospital and seen “four walls”, showing that he was still on this earth. It was at the time of *The Piling of Clouds* rejection and before the baby’s birth.

At the time of Edgar’s last and successful suicide attempt, similar suicides by Buddhists had been in the news. Again, the flamboyant death ties up dramatically with the ending of Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung* that Edgar had been playing two days previously – obviously with this in mind.

Edgar seemed to need to reassure himself in many ways about his strength. Certainly he has done so now. If it does not require strength of will to pour paraffin over oneself and set fire to it, I do not know what does. He wrote in his letter that he had worked out a way to perform the deed painlessly. It still haunts me, but I hope he was right.

The death also ties up with the ending of *The Jilkington Drama*, his last work, in which Garvin Jilkington deliberately sets himself alight with some fireworks on Guy Fawkes Night, and dies in hospital. Strange though it may now seem (but it shows how much, in some ways, I was under Edgar’s influence) I had at one time thought this was pure coincidence – he had spoken so much of the light-hearted nature of this novel, and how it was (unlike so much of his later work) not a story with a “message” or special meaning. Now I am convinced that such a coincidence is not possible.

Edgar was fascinated by death, frequently quoting T.S. Elliot’s:

“O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark ... “

I disputed with him his attitude; yet in an odd way, I seem to have been on his side. A sense of achievement comes thrilling back to me sometimes nowadays when I remember that he got the strange thing he wanted in the end.

DEATH IN PROSPECT

Dimly ...

Suave ...

But so deadly soon –

The maimed and the mean and the brave;
And when the Gaunt Man treads – clip-clop,
When auricle and ventricle halt and pump,
And, halting, pump and pump – and stop:

Let there be soft fanfare.

Down into the glass-green sea,
Quick into ashes with electric fire,
Or if they settle what is left of me
With just the dank earth-worms –
With all the common fellows in the mire,

I shall not care,

For I shall be a rustling in the gloom;
A shadowed breathing in a room –
And how I shall smile to watch
The same old drumming pageant onward move:
Birth at dawn;
Babies into warriors, into poets, into gun-men –
To trumpet-blaze at noon;
And the clerks in their groove –

The dull and the beautiful and the brave –

Unto evening

Approaching like a purple rumour then;

Dimly ...

Suave ...

But so deadly soon.

Edgar Mittelholzer (written in the 1930's)

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS



Edgar Mittelholzer



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Lucille Mittelholzer

FATE AND THE WARRIOR

(a play based on recollections of Edgar
Mittelholzer)

BACKGROUND

Time: 1959-65.

Setting: mainly Farnham, Surrey, UK

I knew Edgar Mittelholzer for the last six years of his life and was married to him for the last five of them. The names have been disguised for greater freedom in writing, both as regards dramatic licence and, paradoxically, because of the essential truth of the play. The main interest is that, despite a touch of fantasy, it is a real life story about the conflict, final years and tragic death of this remarkable Guyanese novelist, as I would expect to make clear in any credits or promotion of the play. Scenes from Edgar's novels are woven into it, so these too would reveal his true identity to those who know his work. Most of the drama is based on my own memories and shown in a series of domestic scenes. A version of the play once received a retainer's fee from the Royal Court Theatre although it was not produced in the end. No strings were attached and I have now re-written it. I have previously written some articles about Edgar. One was published in the *Contemporary Review* (September 1996) and another much longer version was in the West Indian magazine, *BIM* (June 1983). I have drawn particularly on this longer memoir, which many have said was helpful to their understanding of Edgar and his novels. Post-graduate students have used it in their research when writing about the man and his work. There was also a shorter article of mine in an earlier issue of *BIM*. The Mittelholzer novels that I have used in the play are direct scenes from *A Tinkling in the Twilight* and *The Weather in Middenshot*. Less directly, *The Piling of Clouds* is featured; and phrases from *The Aloneness of Mrs. Chatham*. There are also some of Edgar's memories from his autobiography, *A Swarthy Boy* on which the dialogue in the first scene is based. Edgar's poem on death is used in full in the play (scene 12).

SYNOPSIS

LILIAN meets **RICHARD** on the coach on the way to the Writers' Summer School in Derbyshire. Twenty-one-year-old **LILIAN** won a scholarship to this same summer school the previous year, whereas **RICHARD**, at forty-nine, is an established novelist.

He came over to England from Guyana (then British Guiana) in 1946. **LILIAN** is a shorthand typist who regrets missing the chance to go to university. The year is now 1959.

The courtship of **LILIAN** and previously divorced **RICHARD** is rapid and, despite disparity in age, her widowed mother's misgivings etc., they are soon married. The conflict in the play is within **RICHARD**, but also in the personalities of these two protagonists - **RICHARD** dominant, with Right Wing views; **LILIAN** a CND supporter, with a shy, rather hesitant nature. They do share an interest in mysticism and the occult.

A third significant character is the Thin **GREY MAN** of Fate who haunts **RICHARD** and seems like an omen of death. Presently **RICHARD** and **LILIAN** have a baby son, but **RICHARD** has a perpetual death-wish. He has bad luck, struggling to depend on his writing for a living. Yet his suicidal feelings may have originated in racial conflict - around and within the man - including the apparent rejection by his father, who would nowadays be called a racist, but whose attitude was fairly normal in his time and place. In the play I have used the term, "racialist", because the word, "racist", was not in common usage in the 1960's. Born in British Guiana in 1909, **RICHARD** was the only dark-skinned member of the family - and continued to be so when his younger sister and brothers were born. He himself would not agree with such a psychological explanation for his death-wish.

The drama culminates in his tragic and painful suicide.

CAST

RICHARD FAUSTENHEIMER: of not very marked "West Indian" appearance; swarthy skin; large ears if possible and freckles; straight hair, thinning by the time of our play, as he is in his fifties throughout most of it; "high" nose, i.e. the nose is more Caucasian than African though a bit broad; bright, dark eyes; tall - "*six foot two in shoes, six foot one in socks*" as he is fond of explaining; alert and virile - very much alive for someone who talks so much about death. Often wears a dressing-gown over his shirt and cords in the house. Rather Germanic speech and manner, part-natural, part-deliberate, cuts through his Guyanese accent.

LILIAN: a young woman in her twenties; slim with brown hair and blue-grey eyes; average height; rather quiet and hesitant.

MARY: gushing but intelligent; lots of make-up, particularly eye-shadow; in her forties; quite attractive. Usually wears a wide-brimmed hat.

DRIVER - of coach

GREY MAN: a mysterious figure; any age; "Thin Grey Man of Fate" - "Gaunt Man of Death".

WOMAN - passenger in coach.

MRS. HILLSEY: elderly Scottish lady, white-haired, lady-like; a bit nervous, anxious to please, but then a lot of people are like this with **RICHARD**.

MOTHER - to LILIAN: I once described her as "*small and dark, shy and eager, like a little bird*".

DAVID, husband to **MARY**: a likeable businessman and an inventor. He is quiet, reflective, without the flamboyant personality and appearance of **MARY** who is the dominant partner.

GIRL - in maternity ward.

FROM THE NOVELS ((Slightly Adapted)

A Tinkling in the Twilight:

BRIAN: a bookseller.

MARGARET: his girlfriend.

The Weather in Middenshot:

EXECUTIONER

JARROW

NON-SPEAKING PARTS:

OTHER PASSENGERS on coach.

WAITRESS

Black **NURSE** in maternity ward.

Optional - a few others in wedding group. **LILIAN** has several aunts, another uncle, cousins, and a former school-friend. **RICHARD** has two brothers, lighter-skinned than himself, but has not invited other guests.

Note:- The parts of **EXECUTIONER** and **JARROW** should be doubled with the parts of **GREY MAN** and **RICHARD** respectively.

SCENE 1: 2, BARN COTTAGES

- the living-room where most of the action is set.

MUSIC: *GREENSLEEVES* and *WAGNER'S* sword *Motiv*
from *THE RING*

RICHARD: Two elements have always lived in me ...

LILIAN: ... Side by side.

RICHARD: In restless harmony. The precarious symbiosis -

LILIAN: The what?

RICHARD: SYM-BI-O-SIS. Dictionary definition - "Relationship between different organisms living in close association." Like uranium atoms. Any positive disturbance, and the symbiosis melts into roaring chaos. Two elements have always lived in me.

LILIAN: The Idyllic Element dreams of a peaceful, sylvan situation.

RICHARD: "A Book of Verse - and Thou ... "

LILIAN: "Thou Beside Me."

RICHARD: Life proceeding with oiled precision.

LILIAN: Secure under cosy twilit rafters.

RICHARD: With rain, thunder and lightning ...

LILIAN: Sunshine and the rustling of trees ...

RICHARD: Providing a simple, satisfying variety in the flow of the days and the weeks ...

LILIAN: The months - even the years.

RICHARD: The Warrior Element listens always to the sound of Conflict, is perpetually alert to the raw actuality of Life, perpetually ready to resist, to repulse, to do battle to the death -

LILIAN: To the death?

RICHARD: To the death - with any foe that may appear.

SCENE 2: INSIDE OF A COACH

OTHER PASSENGERS are in their places. Enter **LILIAN L.** (doorway into coach), hurrying - she was afraid that she was late. Sit down in coach, and fumbles in her handbag - she is looking for a pen. Enter **RICHARD L.** He is wearing a black shirt and corduroy trousers. **LILIAN** is wearing a black shirt-blouse and red skirt. Enter **DRIVER L.** **RICHARD** looks at middle-aged **WOMAN** in seat behind **LILIAN**, looks at **MARY** across gangway from **LILIAN**, looks at **LILIAN**.

RICHARD: Is this seat taken?

LILIAN: No. (**RICHARD** sits down beside her) Do you - do you have a pen I could borrow?

RICHARD: A pin?

LILIAN: A pen.

MARY is writing on a small cardboard disc.

RICHARD: (to **MARY**) Excuse me, may we borrow your pen?

MARY: Yes, of course, my dear.

MARY finishes writing and hands pen to **RICHARD**.

RICHARD: Thank you.

He passes pen to **LILIAN**.

LILIAN: Thank you.

RICHARD: What are these discs for?

LILIAN: You see, we have to put our names on them, and what we write - or want to write.

RICHARD: And what do *you* write?

LILIAN: Poetry. And I'm writing a novel. What do you write?

RICHARD: Novels. (*Quite modestly*) I have fourteen published novels.

LILIAN: (*impressed*) Fourteen!

LILIAN *finishes writing on her disc.*

RICHARD: I'd better write on mine. (*She passes him the pen. Coach starts, juggling his hand*) Oh, balls!

LILIAN: (*watching as he writes*) Richard ... Fausten ... Fausten ...

RICHARD: Just call me Richard. Don't try to twist your tongue round the Faustenheimer, for God's sake!

LILIAN: (*smiling at him*) Richard.

RICHARD: (*reading what she has written*) Lilian -

LILIAN: With fourteen published novels, you should come to this summer school as a lecturer, not a student.

RICHARD: But I'm always ready to learn, my dear. All my life I'm learning -

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 3: THE COACH

- some time later.

DRIVER *stands up.*

DRIVER: Right, folks! You got 'alf an hour's coffee break. See you back 'ere at eleven-thirty.

MARY, WOMAN and OTHER PASSENGERS, *mainly middle-aged women, file out of the coach. LILIAN hangs back, waiting for RICHARD. Then they all go out.*

SCENE 4: A CAFE

GREY MAN sits alone at one table with his cup of coffee. **MARY** enters with the **OTHER PASSENGERS**, including **WOMAN**, and they all sit around various tables. Then **RICHARD** and **LILIAN** enter and sit down.

Enter **BRIAN** and **MARGARET**. They sit down at another table. *Mime: while they converse, the WAITRESS moves among the tables, taking orders, bringing cups of coffee, cakes etc. Several times RICHARD and LILIAN glance across at BRIAN and MARGARET.*

BRIAN: (*eager anticipation*) It's there, isn't it? The thing? You've brought it? (**MARGARET** puts finger and thumb into the pocket of her jeans and brings out a small phial. Passes it to him under the table. He peers at it surreptitiously) Six drops? (**MARGARET** nods). Thanks, Margaret. I knew I could depend on you. Lucky your brother is a chemist. I'm just a bookseller. I can read up about the things, that's all.

MARGARET: And now I'm waiting.

BRIAN: For what?

MARGARET: For you to explain what you wanted it for. You promised.

BRIAN: Did I?

MARGARET: Virtually.

BRIAN: But not categorically.

MARGARET: Don't quibble, Brian. Explain what it's all about.

BRIAN: Suppose I tell you it might be upsetting for you if I did?

MARGARET: *(smiling mysteriously)* I'd anticipated something like this.

BRIAN: Had you? *(Pause)* Then you don't insist.

MARGARET: I think it would be fair if you kept your promise and explained. *(Shrugging)* If you don't, well ...

BRIAN: Margaret, you baffle me.

MARGARET: Do I? *(She smiles again, seductively, leaning across the table and looking straight into his eyes)* I'm not a fool, Brian. I suppose you know I'm not?

BRIAN: I know. You're looking very seductive this morning. I like the pony-tail - and the white shirt. Light and summery and figure-revealing.

MARGARET: But not revealing what I wish to conceal.

BRIAN: True. *(baffled frown)* Tell me, Margaret, you don't suspect me of anything fishy.

MARGARET: *(shakes her head, gaze lowered)* Not fishy - but peculiar. *(Stage whisper)* And I'm still waiting for you to explain what you want this cyanide for.

BRIAN: *(glancing nervously around cafe)* Shshsh! *(Peering again at the phial before slipping it into his pocket)* Herein are the means to the end I have in view.

MARGARET: Whose end, Brian? Whose end?

SCENE 5: THE COACH

RICHARD, LILIAN, WOMAN and OTHER PASSENGERS *come in and sit down again. Enter GREY MAN, who was not on board before.*

GREY MAN: *(to WOMAN sitting behind LILIAN)* Is anyone sitting here?

WOMAN: *(good-naturedly)* I can't see anyone.

GREY MAN *smiles and sits down next to her. DRIVER counts heads, including MARY as she enters late, hurrying, with a carrier-bag marked "New Fashions".*

DRIVER: *(to MARY as she passes him)* That's blooming funny! Seems like one extra.

MARY: *(who is a bit of a snob)* Don't be impertinent, driver!

MARY *wears elegant clothes, a wide-brimmed hat, a lot of make-up, particularly eye-shadow, and is easily recognizable.*

DRIVER: Not you, Mrs.'Oity-toity! But someone ...

MARY: *(a bit angry, a bit abashed)* Oh! Well, you must have miscounted.

DRIVER: Yeah. *(Easy-going)* Anyway, better'n leaving someone be'ind!

WOMAN: *(to GREY MAN now sitting beside her)* Have you just joined us?

GREY MAN: In a manner of speaking - yes.

WOMAN *looks at him, puzzled.*

RICHARD: (to *LILIAN* as coach starts) Something strange happened in that cafe.

LILIAN: Do you think so?

RICHARD: Didn't you sense it?

LILIAN: I - I think so. Was it something to do with that couple at the table next to us?

RICHARD: Could have been. (*Changed tone*) Fancy you coming with me for that coffee break. I thought you would go with those women. (*LILIAN smiles and looks down. RICHARD reads her disc again*) Lillian Reilly.

LILIAN: Some people call me Lin.

RICHARD: I shall always call you Lillian. More feminine.

LILIAN: You sound as if you're going to know me for a long time. Perhaps we've met before ...

RICHARD: In a past life?

LILIAN: Yes.

RICHARD: Do you believe in that?

LILIAN: I think so.

RICHARD: I do. But I don't tell everyone. Ideas like that seem a little nutty. I make some characters in my novels a little nutty so as to excuse any extraordinary views I want them to put across. There's old Jarrow ... Crime and punishment ...

SCENE 6: THE COMMON,
"MIDDENSHOT", SURREY

- Fog

RICHARD *plays* JARROW and GREY MAN *plays* EXECUTIONER. JARROW has a black overcoat and the EXECUTIONER a fawn one. It is wintry, foggy weather. Suppressed hatred, mock-friendship throughout JARROW and EXECUTIONER scenes.

EXECUTIONER: Now, there, my man!

JARROW: What man?

EXECUTIONER: You there, my man! Stop!

JARROW: I've stopped.

EXECUTIONER: I see you dimly.

JARROW: I see you dimly, too, in the fog.

EXECUTIONER: You know me.

JARROW: I think I ought to.

EXECUTIONER: I'm a killer, my man.

JARROW: I know you're a killer.

EXECUTIONER: Who told you?

JARROW: The wireless told me.

EXECUTIONER: And so you're seeking me, my man?

JARROW: You *and* myself I'm seeking.

EXECUTIONER: Queer talk.

JARROW: I'm your brother, Executioner.

EXECUTIONER: You know my title, then?

JARROW: I know it, my Lord High X.

EXECUTIONER: Who told you?

JARROW: The wireless told me. You're an escaped rapist - murderer. Lord High Executioner is your nickname.

EXECUTIONER: And you're my brother?

JARROW: Me.

EXECUTIONER: Name?

JARROW: Jarrow.

EXECUTIONER: Not Barrow?

JARROW: I'm your brother. Me Jarrow.

EXECUTIONER: Cain, remember, killed his brother.

JARROW: Are you Cain?

EXECUTIONER: And you may soon be Abel.

JARROW: (*thinks it over*) No. I'm Jarrow.

EXECUTIONER: My brother?

JARROW: Your mental brother.

EXECUTIONER: I'm armed, Jarrow.

JARROW: Me too. With a kitchen knife.

EXECUTIONER: And a stick.

JARROW: And a stick.

EXECUTIONER: You're hunting me, Jarrow.

JARROW: And myself as well. (*aside*) I plan to pretend to help him. Then I shall execute *him* personally, because the law won't.

**SCENE 7: IN THE GROUNDS OF THE
HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE,
SWANWICK, DERBYSHIRE**

- Moonlight

RICHARD and LILIAN, with arms around each other, kiss
(**RICHARD in shirt and cords; LILIAN in summer dress**).

RICHARD: *Ich liebe dich. Es gibt keine Worte.*

LILIAN: What does that mean?

RICHARD: I love you. There are no words.

LILIAN: I love you, too.

RICHARD: (*“Sharp intake of breath”. They walk*). But doesn't my age alarm you?

LILIAN: I don't really know how old you are.

RICHARD: Forty-nine. How - ?

LILIAN: (*hastily*) I'm twenty-one. I don't like to tell people how old I am, because they usually think I'm quite a bit younger, and this makes me feel silly. That's why I didn't ask you - because I knew then you'd ask me.

RICHARD: I'm glad you're, at least, twenty-one. Well, what do you think?

LILIAN: Think? - Oh, I see! I didn't think you were as old as forty-nine. But it doesn't matter.

RICHARD: Don't you have a boyfriend?

LILIAN: I did have.

RICHARD: I don't want to step into anyone's shoes.

LILIAN: No, it's been finished for some time.

RICHARD: Like my marriage. But the divorce has only just come through.. Seems a long while ago I got married in Trinidad. I was in the Trinidad Navy during the war. Seems a long while ago. After I was demobbed, I set out to try my fortunes in England - nineteen forty-eight. You were a little girl in forty-eight.

LILIAN: That was the year my father died - No, that's wrong. Which was that very cold winter in the forties?

RICHARD: Well, *Liebchen*, I wasn't here.

LILIAN: Oh, of course! How silly of me!

RICHARD: But, as a matter of fact, I do know. With my interest in weather - and I worked as a meteorologist once - I was bound to hear of it. Forty-seven. It was forty-seven. But it started in forty-six.

LILIAN: Yes. I was nine then. He died at the start of that very cold winter. That winter even we children got tired of the snow, it went on so long. You'd have liked my father.

RICHARD: What did he do?

LILIAN: He was an actor - but not by the time I was born.

RICHARD: Once an actor, always an actor, I would guess - like a writer.

LILIAN: His health broke down - T.B. He got better, in a sanatorium, but he was never very strong afterwards. He died of a stroke. Aged fifty-two. He had the bluest eyes I've ever seen.

RICHARD: Seems a long while ago I sailed for England, bringing with me the script of what proved to be my first published novel. But what a disaster! Through some slip, I wasn't given the proofs to correct. When I read through the published book, the printer's devils began to appear. I can't pass lightly over imperfections - in myself or anyone else.

LILIAN: (*aside*) That's it! That's why I'm a little afraid of him.

RICHARD: What's the matter, Lilian? Am I walking too fast for you?

LILIAN: (*breathlessly*) No.

RICHARD: (*pausing and gazing at her intently*) You don't seem to have much confidence. I wonder why. You have friends?

LILIAN: Yes ... some very good friends.

RICHARD: Boyfriends?

LILIAN: I told you.

RICHARD: Just the one?

LILIAN: I didn't have boyfriends at school when the others did. At least, not since the days I thought of boys as people to climb trees with.

RICHARD: I was always falling in love, but I too was a late starter - action-wise.

LILIAN: Some men and boys have seemed attracted to me. Something always goes wrong. I'm never sure if I'm - if I'm ...

RICHARD: If you're attractive or not? Don't *I* prove something? I've known lots of women.

LILIAN: Only perhaps that you're different - that you and I are drawn together because we're different in some way. I've had a number of friends like that. But, you see, lots of the kids at school made fun of me - because I was shy - different.

RICHARD: "Different, different, different"! Everyone is "different" when you get to know them. All the same, I was a normal, healthy schoolboy. I was an annoying clown. A master had to tell me on one occasion: "Faustenheimer, the point of that joke has deteriorated."

LILIAN: I didn't do everything that was expected of me at school. I've had some jobs since, but I haven't always kept them. I've worked with children. I lost one job in a bookshop because all I did was read the books!

RICHARD: And now you're a secretary. Where?

LILIAN: Shorthand typist. At a correspondence college. I was meant ... I wanted to go university, but I didn't do well enough. It doesn't matter ... All I really wanted to do was write. That's how I won a scholarship to this summer school last year.

RICHARD: Well, *I* never went to university either. I've had any number of jobs. My parents wanted me to have a career in the civil service. But this didn't come off. All *I* ever wanted to do was write. (*He kisses her*) Lovely, eh? Lovely. Even moonlit evenings are laid on for us by Fate -

Enter GREY MAN enjoying an evening stroll.

GREY MAN: Good evening.

RICHARD/LILIAN: Good evening.

GREY MAN *passes by.*

LILIAN: Have we seen that man before?

RICHARD: He was on the coach with us. I haven't seen him since.

LILIAN: He must have been with us all the time. You shivered.

RICHARD: A chill in the air. Lilian, will you marry me?

LILIAN: Yes.

RICHARD: Are you sure my age ... ?

LILIAN: We've been into this. It doesn't alarm me. (*Change*) It might alarm my mother. But she'll get used to it. (*Watching GREY MAN go*) You know, I've got the most odd feeling he first joined us in that cafe.

RICHARD: That may be where he first joined *you*, my dear girl! To me, he looks like my Thin Grey Man of Fate.

LILIAN: Who is he - your Thin Grey Fatal Man?

RICHARD: Not Fatal. Fateful. Some day Fatal.

SCENE 8: 2, BARN COTTAGES,
Spring 1960

Window backstage overlooks from a slight height the slope with the trees. RICHARD is seated on an upright chair by a small blue-topped table; LILIAN with legs curled up on a small ottoman on the other side of the table. LILIAN, previously short-haired, has now grown a pony-tail. She wears a smock-like dress. RICHARD wears a dressing-gown over his shirt and cords as he often does in house.

RICHARD: Your worst enemy is your silence.

LILIAN: *(defensive)* How do you mean?

RICHARD: For instance, you didn't tell me that you wanted to go on this Aldermaston march thing - until a week or two before our wedding.

LILIAN: Well, the Aldermaston march *is* a week before our wedding.

RICHARD: *(nodding)* Exactly, quite. Your mind should be full of preparations for the wedding. Now suddenly I hear you want to go on this pussyfoot march.

LILIAN: I wonder if pussies get blisters. You know I'm interested in the nuclear disarmament movement.

RICHARD: I didn't know until recently that you were chief cook and bottle-washer.

LILIAN: I'm not.

RICHARD: *(waving his arm to indicate the room)* Look at me! I've moved from Maida Vale into this cottage I've rented here, so that we can be near your mother, and I've been getting it ready for us -

LILIAN: It's very nice. And I think my mother likes you better now. But, you see, I think this is a matter of principle. Also - I think - a means of defence -

RICHARD: (*short laugh*) Nuclear disarmament a means of defence!

LILIAN: To show you how I mean to go on - that ... that I don't mean to change completely when we marry. Isn't there a danger you could make me seem to do this? You've got a very strong will. You know that, don't you?

RICHARD: But until lately I didn't know what you're like. What you don't want to change *from*. Your worst enemy is your silence.

LILIAN: I'm sorry. But ... but that's what we've met to discuss, isn't it? Whether we are suitable, after all, to get married?

RICHARD: Maybe you've chosen the wrong walk in life. With your altruistic views - love of mankind instead of just one man - you shouldn't get married. You should be a female Albert Schweitzer. Only, you're not so practical as a Schweitzer would have to be.

LILIAN: I didn't know that we were so different - you and I.

RICHARD: Didn't - or didn't want to? We've had some beautiful moments together, Lilian, but often only your shadow is with me.

LILIAN: The real me is a little afraid of you - and so she doesn't always appear. There was a side of *you* which didn't appear at first - when I used to visit you in London.

RICHARD: Two elements have always lived within me - the Idyll - and the Warrior.

LILIAN: At first, I didn't see the Warrior.

RICHARD: Didn't - or didn't want to? And aren't you a little bit attracted to him?

LILIAN: Yes, but ... married to you, I'd be conscious of the difference between us - how you see things in one way and I in another way ... I'd know you despise me for being - for my weak outlook, as you call it ... And even my carelessness over little things. All this would be a barrier between us - Why don't we postpone the wedding for a few weeks - perhaps not see each other - and then see how we feel?

RICHARD: No. No, we couldn't do that.

LILIAN: Why not? Isn't that what you yourself were suggesting when you spoke about Schweitzer?

RICHARD: I was saying you may have chosen the wrong walk in life in getting married. But you must decide now. Either we get married or we don't. I never compromise. Nothing will be different in a few weeks.

LILIAN: Only, it would give us time to think things over. After all, we've only known each other a few months.

RICHARD: (*who likes to be exact*) Eight.

LILIAN: Well, that's only a few.

RICHARD: I myself have thought. I've thought well. I asked you to marry me, didn't I! I haven't changed my mind.

LILIAN: But you said that *I* haven't thought, and - and you were right.

She starts to move away towards the door L. To enter or exit the room from outdoors, you have to pass through the kitchen offstage on the left.

RICHARD: *(burying his head in his hands)* I won't be here in a few weeks time. Not on this earth. I just know I won't.

At the door LILIAN hesitates. Comes back and puts her arms round him.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 9: 2, BARN COTTAGES

- a few minutes later

RICHARD and LILIAN *are side by side on the ottoman.*

RICHARD: Did I ever tell you that once, in my late twenties, I did try to kill myself?

LILIAN: Yes, you said you took some tablets.

RICHARD: They were supposed to burn my stomach out. I woke up in the morning. Nothing different. I just saw the usual four walls around me. I was living with my parents, sharing a room with my brother. No one knew anything about what had happened - what I'd tried to make happen. I woke up and there were the same four walls around me. *(Groans)* Four walls!

LILIAN: But why did you ... ?

RICHARD: The struggle for existence - for a free existence - for what I wanted. Many, many years before I could get my novels accepted.

LILIAN: I understand.

RICHARD: Now that I'm on my own again, all that struggle seems for nothing. And still the uncertainty, trying to live off the royalties and maintain my divorced wife and family.

LILIAN: I've - I've got a little money.

RICHARD: I don't want your money, Lilian. I should be the provider.

LILIAN: Richard, can I ask you something?

RICHARD: Go ahead!

LILIAN: You've sometimes told me ... Your father's rejection of you - because of your dark skin -

RICHARD: I wouldn't call it "rejection". It has nothing to do with my death-wish, if that's what you're thinking.

LILIAN *looks thoughtful.*

SCENE 10: 2, BARN COTTAGES,
- April 1960

RICHARD *is casually dressed in his cords and a brown shirt. Enter LILIAN L. who is wearing an anorak and jeans. She takes off the anorak.*

RICHARD: (*looking at the jeans*) Never saw those before.

LILIAN: I wore them on the march.

RICHARD: I like them. Make you look like a rodent.

LILIAN: Thank you!

RICHARD: (*hastily*) An attractive rodent. (*Change*) I heard from you know who today. She and I, we couldn't get on, but sometimes in my son's eyes - the one I call the unfortunate one - sometimes in his eyes, I see his mother, and this makes me feel soft about her, even now the divorce has come through. Weakness!

LILIAN: (*taking his hand*) "Weakness"? No, it wouldn't be natural if you didn't feel like this. You must have lots of memories you share.

RICHARD: Wise child! (*Knock at the door*) Ah, here's Mrs. Hillsley, your future landlady. You haven't met yet. Come in, Mrs. Hillsley. (*Enter MRS. HILLSLEY L and he says quite proudly*) Mrs. H., this is Lilian.

MRS. HILLSLEY: Ah, Lilian! I've heard a lot about you, but you look even younger than I expected.

LILIAN: People think I'm younger than I am.

MRS. HILLSLEY: Even so ... Well, we must have a chat some time - about arrangements. Shall I ask the milkman to call when you move in? I know that Mr. Fausten ... Fausten ...

RICHARD: Richard.

MRS. HILLSLEY: I know that Richard hasn't bothered up till now.

RICHARD: I thought we could keep the arrangement I have now. I buy these tins of milk. For myself, I'm happy with the house-keeping arrangements I have now. I like things to run smoothly.

MRS. HILLSLEY: Ah! You'll find there's plenty of variety when your wife gets in.

LILIAN: Yes, I think I would like some fresh milk.

RICHARD: All right, poopsie. (*Exit MRS. HILLSLEY. LILIAN looks troubled, shaking her head*) What is it, *Liebchen*? What's the matter?

LILIAN: Nothing. (*Aside*) The shadow ... It will be difficult for me to come out of my shadow ... come out of his shadow ... and make decisions when I'm with him. (*Steps forward, and continues in more cheerful voice, addressing the audience*) The wedding in April, nineteen-sixty was a small family affair - just a few friends and relatives, including my mother, including my teenage cousin and her parents. My cousin was bridesmaid.

RICHARD: (*steps forward*) My two younger brothers came, and Dora, the Chinese wife of one of them - all those of my family who were in England.

LILIAN: After a small reception at my mother's, a few of the guests came on to see where Richard and I were going to live.

RICHARD: I'd arranged we'd spend the first night here before going on our honeymoon - to *Deutschland*, of course - Germany, my favourite country. *Das Vaterland!*

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 11: 2, BARN COTTAGES

The upright chair and small ottoman are still by the window on either side of the small blue table. There is a green sofa in this room which was not here in the earlier living-room scenes.

Enter RICHARD, LILIAN, MOTHER, MARY *and* DAVID L.

MARY: "2 BARN COTTAGES" - my dear! What a quaint name!

LILIAN: Is it? I never thought of it like that. You can see it's converted from a barn. Our side of the building is all upstairs.

RICHARD: You saw the cottages as we came along. The red brick is the side where our neighbours live. The grey stone is our side. Looks like two giant matchboxes stuck together end to end. Our side is all upstairs - over a storeroom. A corridor runs half the length of our flat, linking the bedrooms with the rest of it.

LILIAN: Serving the same sort of purpose as a staircase.

RICHARD: The real staircase, as you can see, is the steps outside. (*to* LILIAN) We can have all kinds of fantasies living here. A howling terror may rush towards us along that corridor.

LILIAN: A staircase fantasy.

There is a loud noise as from a motor engine and smoke rises up by the window at back of stage. Everyone looks startled. DAVID and MOTHER speak together:

DAVID: What the hell - ?

MOTHER: What's that?

RICHARD: *(to the visitors)* I forgot to point out that the flat is also over a garage, which is next to the storeroom! That's our landlady's grandson. He's always tinkering with his home-built sports' car.

DAVID: I'll move my car out of the way then.

MARY: In fact, it's time we were off. Leave you to your own devices. See you again soon, darlings.

Hugs and kisses.

DAVID: *(to LILIAN)* We'll give your mother a lift home.
(to MOTHER) We'll give you a lift home, Mrs. R.

Exit MOTHER, MARY and DAVID L.

Another car engine sound. RICHARD and LILIAN through the window watch DAVID'S departing car.

LILIAN: It won't be a howling terror which comes along that corridor. It will be your Thin, Grey Man of Fate.

Enter GREY MAN R. To enter or exit the room from indoors you have to pass along the corridor on the right.

RICHARD: Or the Gaunt Man of Death.

LILIAN: Why do you still speak of death - when we're going on our honeymoon?

RICHARD: Dimly ...
Suave ...
But so deadly soon -
The maimed and the mean and the brave;

GREY MAN: And when the Gaunt Man treads - clip-clop,
When auricle and ventricle halt and pump,
And, halting, pump - and stop:

LILIAN: Let there be soft fanfare.

RICHARD: Down into the glass-green sea,
Quick into ashes with electric fire,
Or if they settle what is left of me
With just the dank earth-worms -
With all the common fellows in the mire,

GREY MAN: I shall not care,

RICHARD: For I shall be a rustling in the gloom;

GREY MAN: A shadowed breathing in a room -

RICHARD: And how I shall smile to watch
The same old drumming pageant onward move:
Birth at dawn;
Babies into warriors, into poets, into gun-men -

GREY MAN: To trumpet-blaze at noon;
And the clerks in their groove -

LILIAN: The dull and the beauteous and the brave -

GREY MAN: (*approaching*)
Unto evening,
Approaching like a purple rumour then;
Dimly ...
Suave ...

RICHARD: But so deadly soon.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 12: 2, BARN COTTAGES

A typewriter now stands upon the blue-topped table. RICHARD and LILIAN are seated on the sofa. A book is open on LILIAN'S lap. At first she is reading it. RICHARD is reading the 'Daily Telegraph'. There is a fluttering, thumping sound, more or less continuous.

RICHARD: What's that?

LILIAN: It's in the roof.

RICHARD: It's a bird. It must have got in through the eaves. I noticed one or two open spaces among the stones blocking the eaves. Oh, damn!

More thumping and fluttering.

LILIAN: Poor thing! I suppose it can't find its way out.

RICHARD: It's probably a chaffinch. Hear them outside!

LILIAN: (*argumentative*) Why not a blackbird or a thrush?

RICHARD: Shut up and listen.

Silence.

LILIAN: (*about to read her book again*) It seems to have got out at last. (**RICHARD** *frowns and clicks his tongue. Wags his head*) What's the matter? The bird is quiet now.

RICHARD: Not the bird.

LILIAN: (*penny drops*) Oh, I see! It's the book I'm reading. Why do you dislike it so much?

RICHARD: *Ritual in the Dark* by Colin Wilson. To give the author his due, it's well-written.

LILIAN: Yes, your library book. And you read it right through - on our honeymoon. You always abandon books which you don't like or get bored with.

RICHARD: That's just it. I didn't get bored.

LILIAN: Well, what's wrong with it? (*Laughs*) Silly of me! As if I didn't know.

RICHARD: How far have you got with the book? I don't want to spoil it for you.

LILIAN: I've nearly finished it. You can say what you like.

RICHARD: Tell me this then. I know that you're a Would-rotter -

LILIAN: A what?

RICHARD: Haven't I mentioned Would-rotters before? It's a pun of mine. W-O-U-L-D. (*Tapping LILIAN'S head*) Or W-double-O-d. Would-rotters. They're boring holes in our society. Whenever they open their mouths, or put pen to paper, you can hear the Would-rot trickling down. They'd have us all rot away till the whole structure of everything that was built up in the past comes crashing down, and leaves the dust of another Dark Age swirling about the ruins. Would-rotters!

LILIAN: And I'm one of these? Thanks very much!

RICHARD: Tell me this. Did you honestly have any sympathy with the Jack the Ripper character in that book? And did you agree with the attitude of this hero chap?

LILIAN: (*hesitates, then says*) Not exactly. It was terrible killing all those women in Whitechapel. But the man was sick in his mind. I could see with that in a way, couldn't you?

RICHARD: I could. But what I could also see was the sickness of our whole society as shown by the weak sentimental piffle spouted by the hero bloke - the chap who befriended the killer, and even helped him to elude the police, The author expects us to feel that his hero was well justified in acting as he did - that it was a civilised way to handle the matter. That's what infuriates me, my dear girl.

LILIAN: I think I see why it infuriates you. It infuriates most people. If you show sympathy for the killer -

RICHARD: I don't.

LILIAN: Not you. If *one* shows sympathy for the killer, people think one has no sympathy for the victim. So it's much easier to show sympathy for the victim than for the killer - and I'm surprised you think so many people do. Show it for the killer, I mean. I know you think so, from what you're always saying about our "sick" society.

RICHARD: *You* show no sympathy for the victim with your naive, "turn the other cheek" ideals.

LILIAN: I think the reasoning in the book was good. If more people, like Colin Wilson, try to explore the causes of this kind of mental illness - this kind of crime - maybe it can be cured - prevented.

RICHARD: Naivety again! You see, you've led a sheltered life in that little Surrey village, only child of a widowed mother.

LILIAN: And with you I still live in a Surrey village - an even smaller one.

RICHARD: (*half mocking, half serious in his enthusiasm for accuracy*) No, you must be more accurate than that, man! This is not even a village. This is part of the town of Farnham. But a hamlet, up here on the hill, right on the outskirts. I like it myself. I've wanted to withdraw from much of life.

LILIAN: My life is just starting. I want things to happen to me. Never mind. This is nothing to do with not living right in boring old Farnham. (*Caressing him*) "Swarthy Boy"! You and your right wing views! There's this racialism of yours. You of all people shouldn't be a racist. Sometimes you sound as if you're against people like yourself.

RICHARD: (*but with some tenderness, responding to her caress*) There you go again. "Shouldn't be" you say. Never the raw actuality. Never the truth.

Flutter, thump. They glance up, then back at each other.

LILIAN: It's still trapped.

RICHARD: Obviously.

LILIAN: Poor thing! (*Change*) I am trying to understand the truth, Richard. You said your father was against you because of your swarthy skin.

RICHARD: "Against" me - I suppose you could say that. He was always picking on me. I'm not a "racist", as you call it, although the word may apply to more things than you're thinking of. I don't hate Negroes and coloured people, if that's what you mean. But my father did. Must have felt it deeply that December morning when I was born. He was fair-complexioned with European hair, like most of his brothers and sister. His wife was fair-complexioned and European-looking. But there it was. His first-born - yes, a swarthy boy! At that time he'd have had to be superhuman not to be disappointed. It was the kind of thing which mattered in New Amsterdam, British Guiana, that year of nineteen-o-nine.

LILIAN: But aren't you affected by his attitude?

RICHARD: Not in the least, my dear girl! I'm no more affected than by my mother's alternate severity and softness. The older I get the greater grows my contempt for psychologists. People, I'm convinced, are born what they are. A sane man will be sane even after he's been made to stand on his head for a year. We're each of us a mass of contradictions and inconsistencies. There's no set "behaviour pattern". This is my firm belief.

LILIAN: "Set"? I agree it isn't a "set" pattern. But I think we are influenced -

RICHARD: My father had his violent tempers. He often made me shiver and pee in terror when he shouted at me, but he never once gave me a flogging, nor my sister and brothers. He'd dance with rage (*Demonstrates, shuffling his feet about, clenching his fists and shaking them at LILIAN*). But he never struck a blow. My mother was soft and sentimental - molly-coddled us - but she'd change abruptly and beat us with a leather thong. As you know, we were brought up in an almost mid-Victorian style, strict, religious - Lutherans on my father's side - Anglicans and Congregationalists on my mother's. I'm the only rebel in the family. And this has nothing to do with my dark skin - or my father's attitude towards me. Don't you believe that I am what I am?

LILIAN: Yes, I do. But -

RICHARD: We have to be realists, my dear. This "racialism" you refer to - I don't feel that all coloured people are saints, and white people depraved no-goods.

LILIAN: Of course not! Neither do I -

RICHARD: (*ignoring this*) This is one of the symptoms of Would-rot. The instant you mention race riots in this country, or America, or *apartheid* in South Africa, your Would-rotter cries out in horror and gets hysterical about the Terrible White Man. This I consider pussyfoot nonsense. *Apartheid* is pretty shocking, I admit. They've certainly taken it too far, but by God! Put yourself in the place of the whites there. But for them, the Africans would still be running savage in the bush and killing and eating each other -

LILIAN: And developing at their own pace. They weren't all cannibals!

RICHARD: These Boers aren't simply birds of passage out to exploit the country and move on. They've made it what it was over two centuries, and they've made it their home. Well, surely they have a strong case for protecting themselves against the huge mass of blacks who would swamp them out of existence.

LILIAN: Would that happen?

RICHARD: It's all so sweet and good to be idealistic and say that the blacks are human and should be given equal rights with the whites, but it's easy to be idealistic from the outside -

LILIAN: Idealistic to say that the blacks are human?

RICHARD: If you were born and bred there yourself, you might feel very differently from how you do now.

LILIAN: I don't think I would. Like you, I am what I am - in my thoughts and feelings. I would feel that the blacks have first right to be out there. It's their country - and that they've been more exploited than helped by the whites settling there. And suppose one of us was a black person out there, or - as you are - coloured?

RICHARD: (*waving aside her comment*) It's only fear - a feeling of self-preservation - that drives the white South Africans to behave as they do towards the blacks and coloureds there.

LILIAN: I can't believe this.

RICHARD: Be realistic. Try to imagine yourself one of them - one of the whites - and you'll see they *have* to be firm. They *have* to be vigilant. Or their whole heritage would be lost in a trice. All these black men we often read of as being ill-used and down-trodden wouldn't hesitate, if they were given the chance, to rape and murder and commit far more shocking atrocities than the Nazis could ever have thought up.

LILIAN: I can't believe this. (*Change*) Or that you shouldn't blame those who've made them so angry that it's even possible. If I were to accuse any people of being like the Nazis, I would ... I would ...

RICHARD: You would accuse the South African whites?

LILIAN: (*gaining conviction. Raised voice*) For suppressing a whole race - yes!

RICHARD: (*animatedly*) Naivety again! Human beings are cruel, you know, Lilian. This is what life is like, and we've just got to face it. It's a continual struggle between the strong and the weak. If you keep strong and vigilant, you win out. You triumph over those who are weaker. It doesn't sound Christian and humane and democratic - but there it is. Life is cruel.

LILIAN: And you feel that everyone must be cruel to each other in order to survive? Not try kindness?

RICHARD: (*raised voice*) I didn't say that.

LILIAN: (*raised voice*) You sound as if you're saying *apartheid* is *not* wrong - and the whites have *not* carried it too far.

RICHARD: What if I am? Why are you so concerned about it? These people are thousands of miles away from us -

LILIAN: *You're* concerned about the white people out there

RICHARD: But dispassionately.

LILIAN: You don't sound dispassionate. (*A knock*) There's someone at the door.

RICHARD: Obviously.

LILIAN *goes to answer it. Enter MRS. HILLSLEY L.*

MRS. HILLSLEY: (*clasping her hands together anxiously*) I was just passing. I thought I'd call and see if there's anything you want in town. That is -

RICHARD: (*laughs, glancing at the open window*) Be honest. You heard raised voices and you came to see if anything was wrong

LILIAN: It's all right, Mrs. Hillsley, we were talking about South Africa.

MRS. HILLSLEY: (*not "seeing"*) Oh! I see.

RICHARD: Moreover, we have a bird trapped in our roof.

MRS. HILLSLEY: Oh dear!

RICHARD: (*hand up*) Listen! (*They all listen. There is silence*) Perhaps it's found its way out. Would you like some of my dandelion wine, Mrs. Hillsley?

MRS. HILLSLEY: No, thanks. I must away!

Exit Mrs. Hillsley. There is an extra loud series of thump, thump, flutter, flutter.

LILIAN: It's still there.

RICHARD: It's beginning to get on my nerves, blast it!

RICHARD *stands on a chair, and taps the ceiling thrice. Silence. Then quick patter of tiny feet. Flutter of wings.*

LILIAN: (*anxiously*) Can't we get it out?

RICHARD: I'll fetch the stepladder, and we can look in the loft.

Exit RICHARD and LILIAN L. They are now in the kitchen.

LILIAN: (*offstage*) I'd like to see the bird.

RICHARD: (*offstage*) Good. ("*Good*" is his rather Germanic way of saying "*All right*" or as it would be nowadays "*Fine*"). *Gut.* I'll hold the ladder for you. (*Pause*). Can you see it?

LILIAN: (*offstage*) Just a glimpse - but it's sort of behind that boiler. I think it *is* a blackbird or a thrush.

RICHARD: (*offstage*) You can't fool me, man. It's too dark to see well in there.

Re-enter RICHARD and LILIAN L.

LILIAN: It's too big for a chaffinch. I wonder if it would be a good idea if we leave the trap-door open. It may be attracted down by the light.

RICHARD: An idea. Not like you to have an idea.

LILIAN: I have more than you think. (*Wounded, serious*) Why do you always say I have no ideas? You didn't say this before we were married. (*Reflectively*) I suppose it's because I'm still a little afraid of you - afraid to tell you my ideas - even the simple ones.

RICHARD: Good, we'll leave the trap-door open.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 13: 2, BARN COTTAGES

Enter RICHARD R, yawning whoopingly, pyjamas under his habitual dressing-gown. Enter LILIAN R in nightdress and dressing-gown. He looks at her and laughs.

RICHARD: You, too? I couldn't get back to sleep.

LILIAN: I couldn't either. Well, not after it got light. When the bird started up again.

RICHARD: *(nodding)* Exactly, quite.

LILIAN: *(wanders across to the window backstage)* Oh, look! That black and white cat again. I'm always seeing it. It's very thin. I believe it's a stray. I'll - I'll take it a saucer of milk.

RICHARD: No, you won't, man! That's our milk which I order specially, on my limited budget, a pint a day. There's just a little left for breakfast, the same as always. This is the sort of reason why I can't trust you to look after the housekeeping.

LILIAN: Why won't you give me a chance? If *that's* the sort of reason ... Any normal housewife is not so rigid that she can't spare a little milk for a stray cat. It looks as if it's starving.

RICHARD: *(short bark of laughter)* Better put it in the roof to catch the bird. Kill two birds with one stone - by killing one bird with one cat.

LILIAN: Oh, Richard, you wouldn't! *(Change)* By the way, I've arranged to go to my mother's today.

RICHARD: Good, I remember (*Goes up to her, his own mood changing*) Come back to bed. The bird can stop us sleeping, but it can't stop us - (*Telephone rings*) Oh, balls! Who can that be at this hour? I'll bet it's your mother ...

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 14: 2, BARN COTTAGES

RICHARD and LILIAN are finishing a frugal evening meal, bread and cheese and cake, cocoa. Flutter, thump.

RICHARD: I've had a look up there again. It's obvious why the bird isn't attracted down by the light through the trap-door. I can just twist myself to see round that boiler. It keeps flying up to the skylight behind there, trying desperately to get out.

LILIAN: We could try from the outside. It's a low roof. I mean, with the way the ground slopes here - we can reach it from the back of the house.

RICHARD: I tried that - while you were at your mother's. There was no way of getting the skylight open. It's a fixture, not intended to be opened.

LILIAN: Couldn't you crawl along inside the loft and try to shoo the bird towards the trap-door opening? Or I'd do it if you like. I'm smaller than you.

RICHARD: (*shaking his head*) The space is too restricted between the rafters and the ceiling for either of us. And even if we did succeed in squirming along, we'd put a foot through the plywood -

LILIAN: Isn't it worth the risk?

RICHARD: But there's no guarantee, even then, that we'd get the bird to fly through the trap-door. The cold tank stands plumb in the way. When I looked through the skylight, I couldn't see a light shining from the trap-door.

LILIAN: I still hope we can get it out. It was ... It was nice of you to try so hard. Climb on the roof and look in the skylight and all that ... when you'd pretended to have no compassion for the bird.

RICHARD: I didn't say that, did I!

LILIAN: That you had no compassion for the bird? I suppose not. But you said -

Flutter, thump.

RICHARD: (*taking out and lighting a cigarette*) But I must admit I'm principally concerned with getting rid of that racket it kicks up. I can't stand another day - or night - like this.

LILIAN: Yet twice you've brought home injured birds for me to feed and look after.

RICHARD: (*nodding*) Exactly, quite. I'm not the monster people make out.

LILIAN: What people? I don't make out you're a monster.

SCENE 15.

Walking with LILIAN (who is in her jeans) RICHARD is wearing a cap and swinging a stick. We hear a "miaow".

LILIAN: Oh, look! That same black and white cat, it's following us.

RICHARD: *(shouts and kicks out at the animal, brandishing his stick, and makes the noise a man makes when chasing off an animal, but particularly ferociously, something like:) Grrrrrrrrrr!*

LILIAN: *(flings herself between him and the cat)* No, Richard, no!

They shout and scream as RICHARD turns upon her in the same astonishing fury with which he had turned upon the cat.

RICHARD: What are you doing at all, man? What are you doing at all?

SCENE 16: 2, BARN COTTAGES

LILIAN *is at breakfast - cereal and toast. Place laid for RICHARD.*

LILIAN: You haven't spoken to me all night.

RICHARD: (*offstage*) That's because we've been asleep.

LILIAN: Why don't you be honest, the same as you tell other people? You haven't spoken to me since the cat incident last night. And I can't see that I've done anything wrong. I hate it when you sulk. I wish you would just be angry and then let it all be over. (*Change*) If I *have* done something wrong, I'm sorry.

Enter RICHARD, bringing her a boiled egg, and placing his hand on her shoulder)

RICHARD: Lilian -

LILIAN: (*surprised*) Are you trying to say *you're* sorry?

RICHARD: No, I'm not, man. I never say I'm sorry. It's like denying oneself - the truth of oneself. But this time you're right. We should make it up. This business with the cat seemed to bring everything to a head. (*More fluttering and thumping in the roof*) That blasted bird again! We must have slept through it.

LILIAN: Or perhaps it slept through the night. Now it sees the day ... I wonder - I wonder - could we break the skylight?

RICHARD: No, my dear girl, it belongs to Mrs. Hillsley.

LILIAN: We could ask her -

RICHARD: No, I can't afford to pay for it.

LILIAN: I can -

RICHARD: No, we mustn't do that, man! Not for a bird.
(*Sound of a 'bus in the distance*) *Der Autobus geht vorbei.* I wonder who's on that 'bus ... what individual soul ...

SCENE 17: 2, BARN COTTAGES

RICHARD: (*offstage L*) Little job for you, pussy. Lilian will say it's inhumane, but not me. I'm a realist. (*We hear a miaow and he says*) Shshsh! You go and do a little job for me, pussy.

Enter LILIAN in dressing-gown and nightdress from the bedroom corridor L. She listens to RICHARD'S voice and crosses to the kitchen door R. Her jaw drops as she surveys the scene.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 18: 2, BARN COTTAGES

LILIAN: I don't feel like any breakfast.

RICHARD: What about some people to cheer you up, poopsie?

LILIAN: I don't need people to cheer me up. I'm not very good at socializing.

RICHARD: I myself am not. But what about Mary - she of the eye-shadow - whom we made friends with at Swanwick?

LILIAN: Yes, she and her husband, David, who came to our wedding. They live in Guildford - not far from us.

RICHARD: What does he do?

LILIAN: He's an inventor.

RICHARD: That's impressive!

LILIAN: Well, he invents kitchen appliances for some big firm.

RICHARD: Nice fellow.

LILIAN: Yes.

RICHARD: Let's ask them round for supper.

LILIAN: All right.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 19: 2, BARN COTTAGES

RICHARD, LILIAN, MARY and DAVID are at supper. Now that she is not wearing one of her wide-brimmed hats, **MARY'S** hair is revealed as beautifully groomed and brunette.

RICHARD: Do you like my fried chicken? It's cooked with herbs and garlic.

Murmurs of approval.

DAVID: Well, what exactly are your views on how these murderers and rapists should be dealt with, then, Richard?

RICHARD: The one solution is eradication. Not by hanging. Painlessly. A mere jab of the hyperdermic. Two or three drops of cyanide. But the point is to clean out the Human Vermin as they arise. In batches at first, because they're cluttered thick all over the place. Then in ones and twos as they crop up after the big clean-out.

LILIAN: It does sound like a Nazi regime.

MARY: (*gazing at him admiringly*) I'm with you, Richard.

RICHARD: It's the general softness that's responsible for these fellows going bad, you know. The Human Vermin. *They* know society is soft. Why, look what's happening at the moment! The move is to end capital punishment. And corporal punishment - Oh, no, you can't ill-treat the poor fellows like that! And the police? You can't give them firearms. They might be tempted to use them against the thugs. The *thugs* are armed of course. Behind all this is the weakness, the sentimentality, the crumbly cheesiness of our society. The animal lovers drool. The unilateralists squeak -

LILIAN: (*holding out limp hands, palms down, like paws in front of her*) Squeak, squeak!

RICHARD: (*acting out a caricature impression*) The wiggling, simpering, sissy pacifists -

LILIAN: What about love?

DAVID: Love - it's a sweeping term.

RICHARD: What kind of love, my dear girl?

LILIAN: Do you believe in Christian love?

RICHARD: (*pouring white wine for everyone*) If you mean turn-the-cheek love - no. I can love a landscape. I can love the sky, the birds and wild creatures, the state of being alive, a tingling sense of well-being. I can love decent human beings. But I can't love evil. I feel it my duty to fight evil in whatever form I find it, whether insect vermin, dirt, or the Human Vermin. But, you see, our minds and spirits have been firmly and rigidly moulded by conventional religious teaching. "Thou shalt not kill." It's one of the ten commandments.

DAVID: The old Jewish law was always pretty strict, though. Not soft. "An eye for an eye." There's this contradiction between the Old Testament and the New. What you're really disputing is the New Testament teaching - indeed, the Christian teaching

MARY: "Turn-the-cheek love"

LILIAN: You see, you can hate and fight evil, but not hate and destroy the person who commits it.

DAVID: "Hate the sin, but love the sinner."

LILIAN: (*gratefully*) Yes.

DAVID: Isn't that what Christ teaches, Richard?

RICHARD: Well, believe me, I'm pretty sure we haven't been given the whole story of Christ's philosophy in the Gospels. That's the trouble. When men become fond of any philosophy or religious doctrine, they lose sight of scruples. They doctor everything to suit their crusade. They sift whatever's awkward from their records and twist whatever's twistable. Christ was a high soul, and he let himself be crucified because he knew it would leave a big impression on posterity, but believe me, he wasn't the meek-and-mild namby-pamby he's depicted as -

LILIAN: I -

RICHARD: If you'll remember, one incident, at least, slipped through. When he went into the temple and found those money-lenders and other rascals desecrating the place, what did he do? Smile sweetly and ask them to leave like good boys? No. He knocked over their tables and drove them out. Yes. He knew it was an occasion for violence - and he used violence.

DAVID: I think he just lost his temper!

LILIAN: I don't see him as "namby-pamby" in the "meek-and-mild" parts. It's hard to "turn the other cheek". But who's to say that isn't as true - or more true - to Christ's nature than the incident in the temple? Anyone can speak about the truth being twisted. Jesus isn't here to answer you back, any more than he is to answer back the first Gospel writers. It does seem to me that your interpretation would alter the whole point of Christian teachings.

RICHARD: "The whole point of Christian teachings"! Well, I don't know that it matters too much. We talk about Christianity. It's just that we hear so much of it in the West and - like you, *Leibchen* - I come from a religious background. A Lutheran pastor for a grandfather -

LILIAN: Mine was a Unitarian minister.

RICHARD: (*nodding*) Exactly, quite. And on the other side of the family, I had a Bible-punching grandma, with her charming rake of a husband. I remember the fervour she put into the Bible stories she told my sister and me. There was the entertaining side of it, but they were full of fire and brimstone.

LILIAN: Unitarians are not so strict. There is more love.

MARY: I agree with Richard. Christian teaching is not so important. I'm more of a Buddhist myself. (**DAVID** *smiles and nods*. **RICHARD** and **LILIAN** *stare at MARY*) What's the matter?

LILIAN: You don't look like a Buddhist.

MARY: My dears, what should a Buddhist look like? Aren't you a Buddhist, Richard?

RICHARD: I share some of their views. But I never join anything.

LILIAN: Anyhow Christianity - Buddhism - it's the same kind of teaching.

DAVID *smiles and nods*. **RICHARD** and **MARY** *stare at LILIAN*.

RICHARD: My dear girl!

LILIAN: Not to you, Richard, because you don't centre them round love and non-violence, but I believe they both have this in their pure form. (*Looking ruefully at chicken-bones which she is collecting up on top of a pile of plates*) Buddhism ... vegetarianism ...

RICHARD: I don't want any of that rabbit food muck in this house, Lilian!

MARY: I'm not a vegetarian!

DAVID: Neither am I. But most Buddhists are. Vegetarianism is an example of how love and non-violence are shown to more perfection in Buddhism. Like pacifism - with which Richard doesn't agree either!

RICHARD: Do you?

DAVID: Er - Well, not exactly.

LILIAN: Pacifism ... I know it's a difficult issue ...

RICHARD: Wise child!

LILIAN: (*gaining confidence*) But I think pacifism should be in Christianity as much as in Buddhism. "Put up thy sword ... " And there's this central thing of the cross, which makes Christ special for me. I can't believe the crucifixion was just a piece of showmanship, as you seem to think, Richard.

RICHARD: (*getting up to refill the wineglasses*) I've invented this character, "Mr. Lampton". He goes from lodging-house to lodging-house with his secret hidden in his suitcase. He's a Christ-figure. He appears to each man, each woman, as what they want him to be. But Grandma Rachel didn't speculate about these things. Mind you, she had imagination. She would make my sister and me sit in small chairs in front of her in the dining-room, and tell us Bible stories. (*Still standing, he demonstrates how his grandmother would have stood and gestured*). This was when I first heard stories like the Flood, David and Goliath, Samson and the Philistines, Jezebel ... Grandma had an illustrated Bible and showed us the pictures to back up her stories. Here was the army of Pharaoh being engulfed by the Red Sea. Here was Samson pushing aside the two giant pillars, and the whole house collapsing around him, people falling in a tangle of arms and legs from the roof over his head ... My sister and I looked forward to these occasions. Grandma was a great storyteller. There were no halfway shades in her scheme of things. People were either good or bad. A villain was a villain and his fate was in no doubt. He would end up with Satan and his Black Angels in Hell. The

hero or heroine would sail up to Heaven to get wings and drink milk and honey to the perpetual accompaniment of harp music. And Grandma made it sound convincing, so confident was she.

LILIAN: (*serving some fruit-salad*) There must be a lot of Grandma Rachel in you.

RICHARD: She spun round me an atmosphere of security. Nothing, I felt, could possibly go wrong when she was present. The heavenly Guardian Angels were on her side, and though Satan's Black Angels might be hovering up in the darkness of the rafters -

LILIAN: "The darkness of the rafters" - I often try to picture that house from how you describe it.

RICHARD: It's a little difficult to convey to someone who has never lived in Guiana. You could see the rafters in our roof. The roof - a great inverted V of gloom, which sheltered almost everything! The huge spiders! (*Shuddering*) To this day, I dislike any spiders - even our little British ones.

LILIAN: (*to MARY and DAVID*) Yes, I have to move them out of the bath for him.

RICHARD: But those! You could hear them at night, scurrying along up there in the roof. (*Mimics the sound*) "Dub-dub-dub!" It all added to the remote terrors of the place. But at least there were Grandma's guardian angels. At least there was Grandma, solid as a rock.

DAVID: Oh, for such conviction now!

MARY: Well, Richard has it - and Lilian in her way.

DAVID: Have you always had such Right Wing views, Richard?

RICHARD: Don't you share them?

DAVID: Some of them. Not so extreme. But I've heard your views on race ... colour ... They seem unusual, to say the least, in a West Indian writer.

RICHARD: I don't see myself as a West Indian writer. B.G. is not even strictly speaking part of the West Indies. It's part of Southern America. I'm just a writer - a novelist.

LILIAN: What about your German blood that you're so proud of?

RICHARD: Yes, I adhere to my German blood. The Swiss German who came over to become a plantation owner. I have of course other European blood - French .. British.

DAVID: Yet you seem to deny the African.

RICHARD: A minor part. Slave-blood.

DAVID: But powerful. No wonder there's conflict.

RICHARD: As to whether I've always had Right Wing views, it depends on the subject. You see, my dear chap, I think for myself. And I'm unpredictable. This is why my publishers have turned down my latest book - on crime and punishment. Violent criminals ...

MARY: But, Richard darling! Surely you've written on this theme before, so ...

DAVID: Yes, not so unpredictable. They accepted it before, didn't they?

RICHARD: (*fetching book from shelf*) Look! My earlier novel was more light-hearted.

LILIAN: But with a grim undertone.

RICHARD *hands book to* **DAVID.**

**SCENE 20: THE COMMON,
"MIDDENSHOT", SURREY
- FOG**

EXECUTIONER: You're hunting me, Jarrow

JARROW: And myself as well.

EXECUTIONER: Where are you going?

JARROW: Trying to go.

EXECUTIONER: Where's that?

JARROW: Limbo-land.

EXECUTIONER: Queer talk, Jarrow.

JARROW: There's a berry in my brain.

EXECUTIONER: I'm beginning to believe, Jarrow.

JARROW: Believe what, my lord?

EXECUTIONER: That we're brotherly in brain.

JARROW: Brainy brothers both.

EXECUTIONER: What a foggy-woggy morning!

JARROW: What a foggy-woggy life.

EXECUTIONER: Listen, Jarrow!

JARROW: I'm listening.

Sounds off.

EXECUTIONER: Hear them?

JARROW: Dogs.

EXECUTIONER: Dogs and men.

JARROW: Hunting you, Lord High X.

EXECUTIONER: Hunting me.

JARROW: (*sarcastically*) Poor brother!

EXECUTIONER: They won't get me today, Jarrow.

JARROW: But they'll get you in the end.

EXECUTIONER: Are you friend or enemy, Jarrow?

JARROW: Friend and brother.

EXECUTIONER: I wonder.

JARROW: Wonder what?

EXECUTIONER: If you're fool or friend.

JARROW: Friend. Friend to help you.

EXECUTIONER: (*aside*) Fool! (*Then to JARROW*) You really mean to help then.

JARROW: I really mean to help you.

EXECUTIONER: Dear Brother Jarrow.

JARROW: Dear Brother Lord High Executioner ... Remember, Lord, your coat is fawn.

EXECUTIONER: How did you know - in this fog?

JARROW: The wireless told me.

EXECUTIONER: I'm armed though, Jarrow.

JARROW: With an axe?

EXECUTIONER: With a gun.

JARROW: Oh, modern Executioner!

EXECUTIONER: You live near here?

JARROW: I live near here.

EXECUTIONER: Alone?

JARROW: With a wife.

EXECUTIONER: A complication.

JARROW: No, a consolation.

EXECUTIONER: Is she on our side?

JARROW: Hard to tell, in this foggy-woggy world.

EXECUTIONER: Then you must think, Jarrow.

JARROW: I have thought, my Lord. She is not against us - yet she is not for us.

EXECUTIONER: Then we must think some more.

JARROW: Let us think, High Lord X. (*Voice over*) We know not where we are, oh, Lord. The brume is everywhere and policemen are on the move. We have halted here to think our way through the gloom, but where can we find a haven or a heaven in the wild welter wrapped like wool around us? Think, Jarrow. Plot how you'll bring him down. It was one

like him that raped your Paula and bred in her the bastard she never wanted - the bastard that took her life by being born foot first. An ex-Borstal lad he is, Jarrow. Do for him! Down with him!

SCENE 21: 2, BARN COTTAGES

MARY and DAVID are sitting on the green sofa, looking at the book. LILIAN and RICHARD are clearing away the supper things.

MARY: (getting up) Darlings, let me help you.

RICHARD, LILIAN and MARY carry things into kitchen

DAVID: (who is still looking at book) But why do you need to justify Jarrow with psychology if you say what he's doing is right? You don't believe in psychology! And why do you say that he's hunting himself? Is there violence in Jarrow? Is the violence in Jarrow? Are Jarrow and the Executioner the same?

RICHARD: (coming back into room) You have to read it from cover to cover, man!

DAVID: Oh! Sorry. All the same, I still think - (Change) Want any help?

RICHARD: (glancing towards kitchen) Mary has it under control.

DAVID: And Lilian! You don't give Lilian much credit.

RICHARD: She's a dreamer.

DAVID: It's only some washing-up, for God's sake!

SCENE 22: A MATERNITY WARD

Black NURSE hands baby to LILIAN. There is a young GIRL in the bed next to LILIAN'S. RICHARD and MOTHER, LILIAN'S mother, are looking at the baby.

MOTHER: He's rather a darling, isn't he! What are you going to call him?

LILIAN: I don't know. Richard likes German names.

RICHARD: (*bending over baby*) He scowled at me, man! He looks just like me.

MOTHER: Don't worry! They change ...

RICHARD and MOTHER *kiss LILIAN and leave.*

GIRL: (*in next bed, gazing admiringly after RICHARD*)
He's a man, isn't he!

LILIAN: I hope so! What about *your* husband then?

GIRL: Yes. Your baby's a man as well.

LILIAN: What about your baby?

GIRL: Got you there! Mine's a little girl.

LILIAN: (*pointing at window*) Look! It's snowing.

GIRL: Warm in here. We'll have to keep our babies warm when we get home. It's going to be a very cold winter, they say.

SCENE 23: 2, BARN COTTAGES

LILIAN *plays with a bigger version of the baby, perhaps a real child.*

LILIAN: Hear that, Richard? He said "Mummy, Daddy." I'm sure he said "Mummy, Daddy."

RICHARD: *(sadly)* Oh, you two!

LILIAN: *(goes and puts her arm round RICHARD)* What's the matter? All this frivolity around you?

RICHARD: Yes ... Yes, that *is* it. Yes.

RICHARD *plays with baby.*

LILIAN: *(comes forward and says)* Richard was very fond of our son. Nicknamed him "Mr. Busy-body". Fed him and changed his nappies if I went out. Always gave him his bath even when I wanted to do this. If the child put his hand in his mouth, Richard took it out. The baby put it back again. Foretaste of battle of wills in the future? But things began to go wrong again. The next book was turned down by fourteen publishers before being published ... The "future" only went on for two and a half years after the baby's birth.

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 24: 2, BARN COTTAGES

RICHARD *sits writing at the small formica-topped table.*
Enter GREY MAN.

RICHARD: *(after a moment looks up from writing and challenges him)* Who are you? I didn't see you come in.

GREY MAN: Grey Man.

RICHARD: What kind of a name is that?

GREY MAN: *My name.*

RICHARD: I don't know you.

GREY MAN: I know *you*. I'm your Thin Grey Man of Fate of whom you often speak.

RICHARD: Or the Gaunt Man of Death.

GREY MAN: What are you doing?

RICHARD: Writing a letter. I've been writing letters all this week - to say goodbye to people. I've been planning my death.

GREY MAN: Planning your death ... for when?

RICHARD: Tonight.

GREY MAN: Your hand is shaking.

RICHARD: A little. That's the human side of me coming out. Sometimes I feel there's something almost inhuman in my calmness. All this week I've been making preparations.

GREY MAN: But why? Why this terrible death you've planned?

RICHARD: (*looks at him searchingly*) How do you know what kind of a death?

GREY MAN: *Benzin Tod.* Petrol death.

RICHARD: Sit down. I think you do know me. (*As the GREY MAN sits, RICHARD goes to the cupboard to fetch a bottle of wine and two small glasses*) Glass of wine? I will myself. It's part of my routine to have a glass of ruby wine -

GREY MAN: Just one glass.

RICHARD: Always just one small glass. Every evening. (*Pouring the drinks*) I always have a routine. For everything. Discipline, you see. How do you think I could carry out tonight's plan without discipline? German discipline. (**GREY MAN stands and they raise their glasses to each other**) *Prosit!*

GREY MAN: *Prosit!*

RICHARD: *Sieg Heil!*

GREY MAN: Hail victory!

RICHARD: But "Why this terrible death?" you ask. I don't see it as terrible, but it's foolproof. Not like taking tablets. It's because of the Conflict, man.

GREY MAN: Racial conflict - one time around you - now within you - always within you.

RICHARD: Spiritual conflict.

GREY MAN: That, too. So what's made all the conflict so loud in your ears just now? What's tipped the precarious "uranium atoms" into "roaring chaos"?

RICHARD: For one thing, I'm in danger of being thrust back into the literary limbo out of which I've struggled so hard to climb. Trying to support two families by my writing is no joke, my dear chap.

GREY MAN: Your latest book contains both your pet subjects, doesn't it? Crime - and your thoughts on the afterlife.

RICHARD: I know I'm on the right path.

GREY MAN: By the way, why did your landlady, Mrs. Hillsley, sell her house?

RICHARD: Oh, you heard about that then! She's gone home to Scotland.

GREY MAN: What about your new landlord and his wife? Has this anything to do with the resurgence of the death-wish?

RICHARD: They haven't helped the situation at all. They come from Rhodesia. I don't think they like my complexion.

GREY MAN: They offered you a new cottage, *saying* that their daughter wants this one because she's getting married.

RICHARD: True. But first they had to buy the new cottage. The deal fell through. So we've been house-hunting - or rented-accommodation-hunting. I've left a lot of it to Lilian.

GREY MAN: Lilian, excited like a little girl given a grownup task because you're letting her do something.

RICHARD: You know about Lilian, too? Well, she found a place in Puttenham, but after all the tenant doesn't want to leave. I don't want to rent another cottage. I'm letting her carry on just to put her off the scent. It's my duty as a man to *buy* a house - to provide for our security. I can't. That's why I've lost interest. *Sieg oder Tod!*

GREY MAN: Victory or death. And you've been defeated?

RICHARD: I can't brook defeat.

GREY MAN: So you'll commit *harikari*. Who are you writing to?

RICHARD: To Lilian. Poor little thing! To put so much upon her! I've chosen this night, when she's gone to her poetry meeting. Chosen this night to make my final preparations. I've placed the petrol can ready, hidden in a corner of the field.

GREY MAN: But until she comes, you won't actually do the deed.

RICHARD: Oh, no! We've a little baby boy. He's asleep in the next room. So I can't leave now. But I've been getting Lilian used to me going out for a walk last thing at night. When she comes, I shall go for my final walk - But you know these things. You know all about me. My Thin Grey Man of Fate.

GREY MAN: Or the Gaunt Man of Death.

**SCENE 25: THE COMMON,
"MIDDENSHOT", SURREY.**

- Fog

JARROW and EXECUTIONER stand with their heads bowed in thought. Both have their coats on.

JARROW: My Lord.

EXECUTIONER: Quiet, I'm thinking.

JARROW: I have thought.

EXECUTIONER: Well?

JARROW: My coat is black. Not fawn like yours.

EXECUTIONER: Well?

JARROW: And I have a room that's black. *(Aside)* I'll pretend I plan to conceal him in my coal cellar.

EXECUTIONER: You have?

JARROW: I have.

EXECUTIONER: But I have a hut in the woods, Jarrow.

JARROW: Is it safe in the hut?

EXECUTIONER: There's a secret cellar that's safe.

JARROW: A hut with a cellar?

EXECUTIONER: Strange but true, Jarrow. It's a partly filled up well over which the hut was built.

JARROW: And is the cellar safe?

EXECUTIONER: I hid there all yesterday.

JARROW: Didn't they search the hut?

EXECUTIONER: I heard them above me searching.

JARROW: Have you food?

EXECUTIONER: Enough for two more days.

JARROW: Have you money?

EXECUTIONER: About ten pounds.

JARROW: Then you have no worries, my X High Lord.

EXECUTIONER: (*suspicious*) And Jarrow is my brother?

JARROW: And your friend.

EXECUTIONER: He had better be.

JARROW: I have a room that is black.

EXECUTIONER: Yes?

JARROW: Called a coal-house.

EXECUTIONER: You have a wife.

JARROW: She will notice nothing.

EXECUTIONER: Let us think, Jarrow.

JARROW: My Lord, I have thought.

EXECUTIONER: So have I.

JARROW: The dogs and men have gone.

EXECUTIONER: I've eluded them.

JARROW: Clever, my Lord High X.

EXECUTIONER: (*whinnying laugh*) Hee, hee, hee!

JARROW: (*deeper laugh*) Haw, haw, haw!

EXECUTIONER: Good fellow, Jarrow.

JARROW: Good fellow to you, too.

EXECUTIONER: (*whinnying, galloping round like a horse*)
Hee, hee!

JARROW: (*mocking hatred*) Whoa!

EXECUTIONER: (*hatred*) I'm no cab-horse, Jarrow.

JARROW: But your coat is fawn.

EXECUTIONER: Yours is black.

JARROW: Like the heart of a rapist.

EXECUTIONER: Suppose we exchange.

JARROW: That, Lord, is what I thought.

EXECUTIONER: Two minds with one black thought.

JARROW: Like my coal-house.

EXECUTIONER: That's black, too. So I thought.

JARROW: Two minds with a cold, black thought.

EXECUTIONER: Here's my coat, Jarrow.

JARROW: Here's mine, Lord.

They exchange coats.

EXECUTIONER: Any need for further thought?

JARROW: No need whatever, my Lord. *(aside)* In future I'll do the thinking for both of us, you lordly louse. *(To EXECUTIONER)* And now for action, Lord.

EXECUTIONER: Action?

JARROW: *(taking his arm)* Arm in arm we go.

EXECUTIONER: *(catching his mood)* Frolicking, rollicking?

JARROW: Rollicking through the fog.

EXECUTIONER: Come, then, Jarrow. Arm in arm.

JARROW: And a song to keep us warm.

EXECUTIONER: A song?

JARROW: Skipping and singing, Lord, to the tune of 'Round the mulberry bush'.

EXECUTIONER: Hee, hee! Come on, then, Jarrow.

JARROW: Here we go, Lord. One, two, three.

Linking arms, they dance along their way, sometimes changing arms so that they face opposite ways to each other and dance round in a circle. With the song, JARROW starts off, EXECUTIONER joining in as he gets the hang of it.

JARROW: Here we go gathering blood and bones!
Blood and bones! Blood and bones!
Here we go gathering blood and bones!
This dark and foggy morning!

EXECUTIONER: Hee, hee!

JARROW: Haw, haw! Come on. All together ...

JARROW/EXECUTIONER:

Oh, here we go gathering blood and bones!
Blood and bones! Blood and bones!
Oh, here we go gathering blood and bones!

EXECUTIONER: Hee, hee ...

JARROW: Haw, haw ...

JARROW/EXECUTIONER:

This dark and foggy morning!

JARROW *pulls out his kitchen knife and stabs the EXECUTIONER in the back. EXECUTIONER's laugh changes to a whinnying scream and he falls.*

JARROW: Haw, haw! Lie there, you lousy lord.

SCENE 26: 2, BARN COTTAGES

RICHARD *as before. Enter LILIAN L.*

RICHARD: Hello, poopsie. Back from your poetry meeting?

LILIAN: If I said something like that to you, you would say "Obviously". How's "Mr. Busy-body"?

RICHARD: He's been very good. Let's have a glass of ruby wine.

LILIAN: Not like you to have a glass of wine as late as this. Did you wait for me? (*Looks at glasses on table*) No, you've had one already - two! Was somebody here?

RICHARD: Only myself.

LILIAN: Not like you to leave dirty glasses! More like me.

RICHARD: (*goes to the cupboard and fetches another small glass for LILIAN*) Elasticity, my dear girl. (*Fills her glass and his with ruby wine*) I must have elasticity in my routine. (*They drink*) I'm going out for my walk. (*Brightly*) My usual evening walk, you know.

RICHARD *fetches his cap and stick.*

LIGHTS DIM.

SCENE 27: 2, BARN COTTAGES

Re-enter LILIAN L., barefoot, wearing dressing-gown and nightdress. Takes off watch from her wrist. Looks at it. Looks at clock on mantelpiece. Suddenly seems to realise.

LILIAN: The drawer! He always leaves notes in the drawer!

LILIAN: *(Runs to drawer in sideboard. Fumbles and takes out note. Reads)* "Goodbye, Lilli, please forgive me. I'm so tired. I can't resolve the conflict. *Ich liebe dich*. Thank you for everything and remember our beautiful moments."

LILIAN *gasps and runs to door R. Changes her mind and runs back into room. Picks up telephone by window. Smoke rises, seen through this window.*

MUSIC - Death March from Wagner's 'Götterdämmerung'.

END

