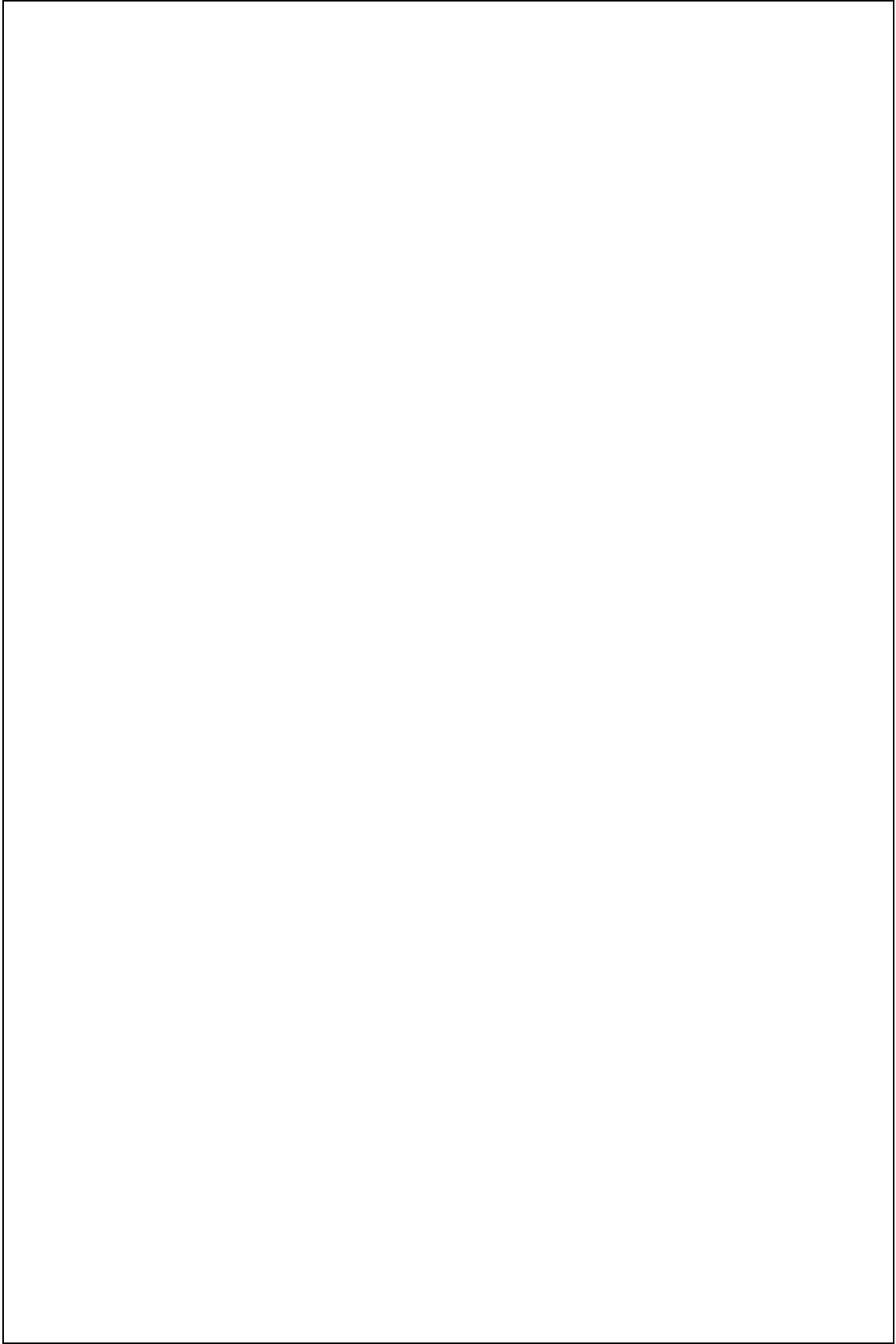
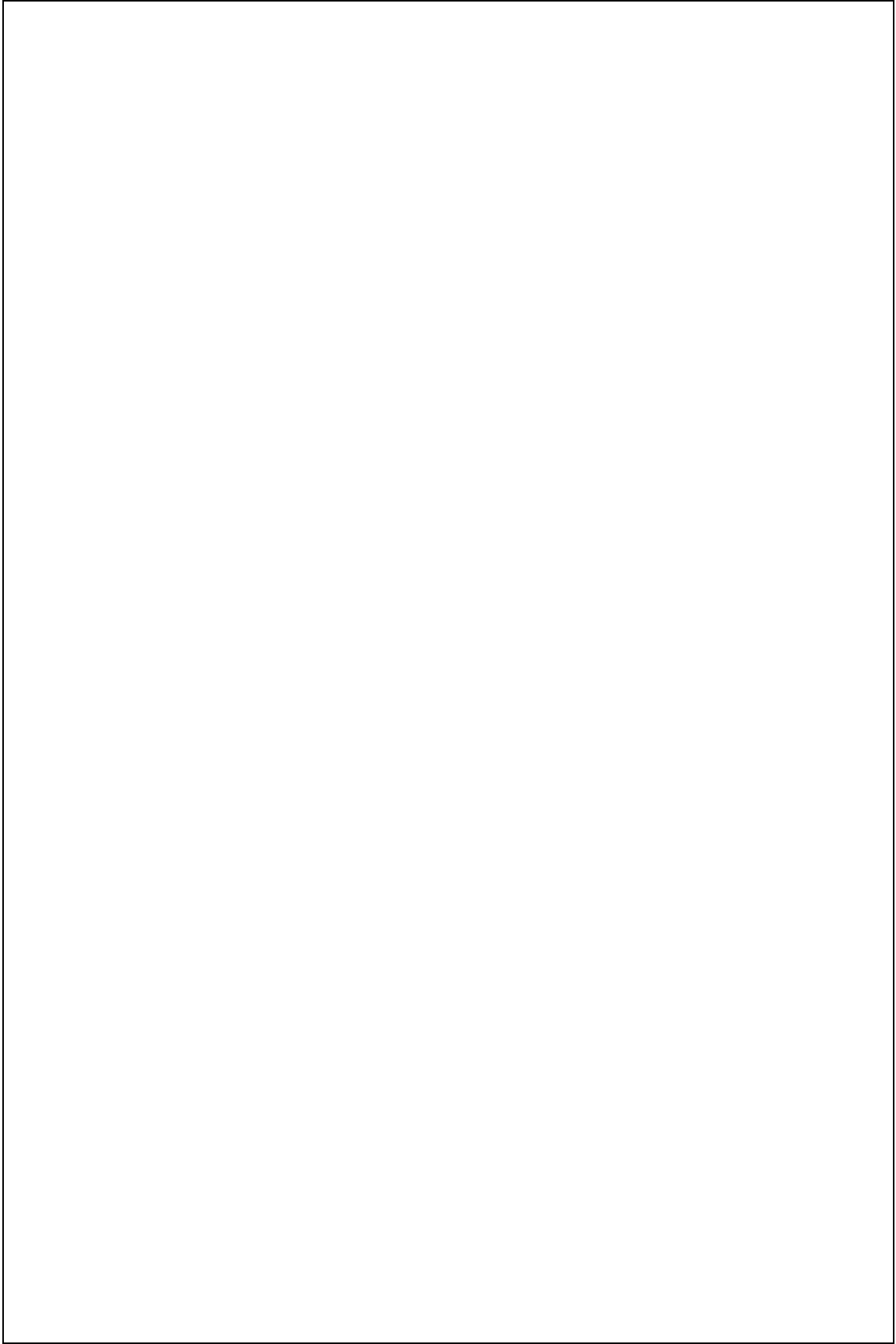


Encore



Arrivals



something here inside cannot be denied



With my ear suckered to the wall, I could just make out the faint strains: *ba-boomp ba-boomp ba-boomp ba-boomp*. The yellowy-grey paint stank of sour condensation. The blankets on which I knelt stank of dead wet dog. My skin stank of fairy soap, harsh and green. I listened, rapt: *ba-boomp ba-boomp*, then a thin low vibration which I translated adroitly into the lyrics. *I of course replied... something here inside...* A yell from downstairs drowned out next door's wireless and Mum's voice bellowed over it, "Just hold *still*, hold *still*, hold *still*!" in a bass-rhythm to Jimmy's screams. Banging accompanied them, a drum-beat to complete the domestic harmony – Danny and the wooden spoons on the aluminium pot. *TIK-tikka-tik-tik, TIK-tikka-tik-tik*. No-one, and I mean *no-one*, not even Buddy Rich, could bang things like my little brother. Mum's

voice broke off from her chorus to bellow, "Stop that bloody noise!"

Bath-day in the King household. I'd already been through the clanking tub, its galvanised tin freezing even when the water was straight-from-the-kettle hot. I'd been scalded, scrubbed raw, stung in the eyes with evil soap, and was personally safe from it for another week, but the worst was still to come.

I drew my knees in tight and thrust the balls of my palms hard against my ears. The horsehair blanket scratched my bare feet. Muffled yells trailed on as I lifted my eyes. The ceiling stain spread in concentric circles, like layer after layer of pee. In the centre, it was as brown as the inside of the teapot; at the furthest edges, touching the wall, it faded to dirty rainwater. No help from that quarter.

I turned around instead, knelt on the warm patch where I'd been sitting, and pressed my hands palm-to-palm. My fingertips were icy on my chin. My eyes closed piously, then opened again to look at Dad as I prayed. Well – not at *Dad*, precisely, on account of his being dead, but a picture of Dad. Well – not a picture either, not precisely, because Mum had ripped that off the wall and torn it up, then thrown the little pieces in the electric fire, which started a real fire, which killed it. But where the picture of Dad *had* been, a square of black mould had grown, and remained. Thus with my eyes fixed devoutly on the mould, I began.

"Here at the hour of our need," I recited, "Where are you, you bastard, eh. Tell me that; will you. What have you ever done for us. Just like you; to bloody leave us, no thought but for yourself,

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and not much thought there neither. If you hadn't gone and topped yourself, none of this would ever have bloody happened. Useless good-for-nothing layabout excuse for a man, in kingdom come, for thine be the glory, the power and the –" I fumbled, and repeated, "glory," then surged on to the finish, "Forever and ever. Oh man."

Thunder sounded on the stairs. The ceiling wobbled like the skin on rice-pudding. Surely only a man's weight... My heart jumped into the middle of my throat, stopping breath and blood all at once – this time, he'd heard my prayers – the door burst open. It was only Jimmy, butt-naked and red as a post box, bringing a fresh waft of soap into the dankness. He slammed the door behind him, which set the ceiling a-quivering again, and fell back to catch his breath. From below us, a pure and awful wail rose and struck us both in the heart. I met his eyes, all bloodshot and red-rimmed from where the soap got in. We both glanced at the door, ready to move if the other did, and neither of us stirred. When Danny screamed again, we couldn't meet each other's eyes. We were bigger than him, see, so his protection was our sacred duty, but neither of us were quite as big as Mum yet. Danny's bath continued, unabated. Jimmy joined me kneeling on the bed and, our eyes squeezed shut, we troubled dead Dad with our bootless cries.

Dad topped himself just after my fifth birthday, when Jimmy was three and Mum was pregnant with Danny. He was twenty-five. One might reasonably assume he did it to get away from Mum, or

ALAN LYONS

at least her cooking. He and I had spent a companionable afternoon throwing up her coronation chicken and Dad joked that at least we were on our knees for the coronation, like good and loyal subjects, and then he killed himself. Not right there, obviously – but the day after, or the week after. So what with that timing, one might think a man tied by law to such culinary skills would have all the reason he needed to make an end of it, but the truth runs deeper than that.

The truth was, he was a King man, and that's all there was to it. All the King men in living memory and dead had taken their own lives. Dad stuck his head in the gas oven, newly installed, while I was at school and Mum was out. By King standards, it was discreet and self-effacing. His father drove an Austin-7 into a tree. *His* father shot himself with his own service revolver in 1917, when his leave ended and the summons back to the trenches came. His father gutted himself with a Zulu spear – most manly and brave, and probably an attempt to pass it off as enemy action. That way, his widow would get a pension. It would have been convincing, too, if he hadn't been on a ship anchored a mile off the South African coast. *His* father threw himself in front of an Underground train in 1868, the first recorded suicide by that means. We were all quite proud of his forward-looking perspicuity. It could have been an *homage* to his own father, who launched himself under an overground train before the eyes of his horrified seven-year-old son. But you couldn't blame him: when he was only five, his own father, seized with brain fever, had thrown himself from the ship's mast as they drew back into Falmouth. Before that, records were

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tenuous; no-one could say for certain the line was unbroken, but enough parish records of nooses and bridge-jumps existed to confirm suspicions. That was just how it was: the King men killed themselves, and not one ever made it to the age of thirty.

You wouldn't think suicide could be genetic, but somehow they all clung onto their desperate and unhappy lives long enough to launch the next generation. My dad had done unusually well, generating a full trio of male heirs before succumbing to his fate, but he'd made a terrible error of judgement: he had done so with Mum. Left to her mercy, I wasn't sure we'd even live long enough to choose the manner of our deaths, and judging by Danny's gurgles and squeals, he was even now meeting his watery doom.

I opened my eyes a crack. Soundless tears were running down Jimmy's face. His mouth was clamped shut against the shameful sobs – he wasn't going to snuffle and embarrass himself in front of me. I grandly forgave his weakness. After all, he was only little. He couldn't expect to possess my bravery. A scream worse than the rest split my ear-drums, reminding me how little my bravery was worth to my babyest brother. I sprang from the bed, ready to rescue him from his bath, when the pitter-patter of little feet shot across the floor and up the stairs.

“You slippery little...!”

Mum thundered up after him and Jimmy raced to the door to open it for him, but Danny had already jabbed the loft's trap door aside with the window pole: a familiar, hollow thunk. The ladder smacked against the wood. A moment later, the ceiling creaked

and shook. He was dancing from attic beam to attic beam between the bright-pink, prickly insulation. (Getting that on your bare skin was worse than a dozen bath-times, be the scrubbing brush ever so rough.)

“Get down here!” We heard Mum thump onto a rung of the ladder and waited for it to snap. *Thump – creak.* Next rung. We stared horrified at each other, then up. Mum *never* climbed into the loft. If she was enraged enough to haul herself up that ladder... If she caught him now...

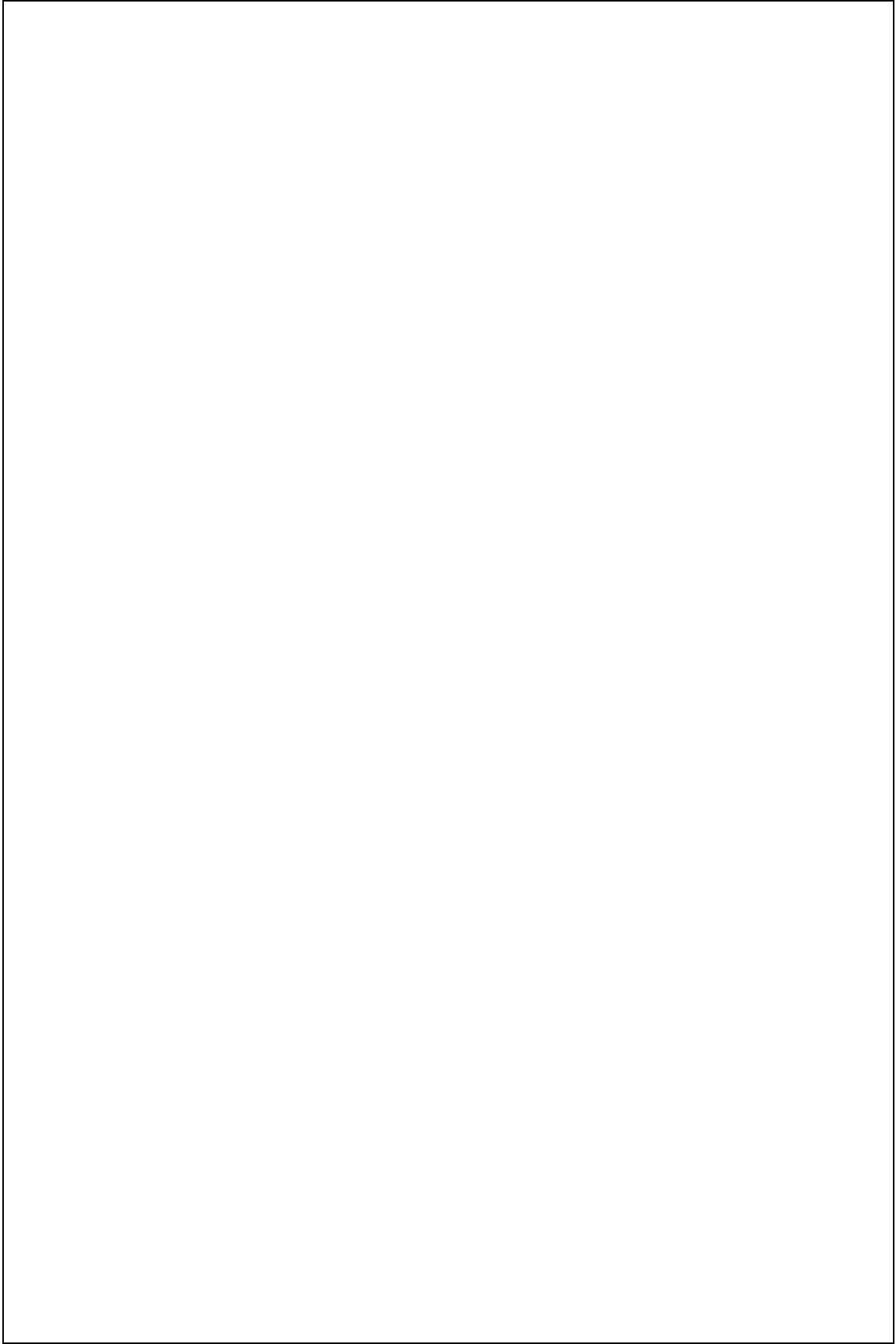
I sprang back to the bed and gabbled frantically: “Here-at-the-hour-of-our-need-where-are-you-you-bastard-eh-tell-me-that-will-you-what-have-you-ever-done-for-us –”

Mom’s feet stomped on the trapdoor’s frame, the ceiling rolled like a wave, Danny screamed, then thunder broke off mid-roll. An atomic flash lit up my world. All was still. The bomb had hit. Where the ceiling had been, Danny dangled from a roof beam, naked and skinny and covered in soap, like a long piece of string with arms. No-one made a whisper. Even Mum was silent. The walls were white. The horsehair blanket was white. The mould-spot was sticky with white. The rug and the floorboards were white. The bed frames were white. Jimmy was completely white, from his hair to his ankles; his feet were buried in white plaster. I looked down at my own white self and found drifts of white paper all over my legs, and cradled in my arms, a guitar (white). One hand must have risen to catch it and grabbed its neck. My other arm slumped over it. My thumb rested on the strings, and twitched.

ENCORE

Into the whiteness and silence, a twang reverberated: the first chord. A string snapped and whiplashed into a coil.

Jimmy told me later it wasn't all completely white, because the blood pouring down the side of my face was brilliant red, but I will always remember as a moment of perfect whiteness the day my dad gave me his guitar. The birth of The Suicide Kings. The answer to all our prayers. I was eleven years old.



we are gathered here today



“Mr King!”

The stewardess launches herself at him and into his arms, barrelling the two of them across the corridor. The door to the first class lounge swings discreetly shut on its muffled hinges, leaving Tommy with nothing more than a confused impression of mingling faces. Her momentum thuds him gently into the wall, expensively striped in maroon and cream. She bounces softly off him.

“I’m sorry – I’m so sorry.” Breathless, she straightens her uniform and her professionalism. She’s smartly tailored, polished, and groomed, every hair in place. He, in contrast, wears jeans and a black t-shirt; long silver hair falls loose over his shoulders.

He compresses a grin: “Happens all the time,” and she chuckles gratifyingly beneath her polished and coiffed hair. As his sandal

steps around her, her high heels perform in a neat sidestep, barring his entrance again.

"I'm sorry – uh –" A glance at her right breast reveals her to be an Angela. "I'm sorry, Angela, I really do have to go."

Her arms swing out to grab the doorframes. Her eyes widen in alarm, although her expression is resolutely calm and charming. "I'm afraid, Mr King, I *do* have to ask you to wait here a moment."

"I'm in a bit of a hurry –"

His hand reaches for the door; she glides in front of it. "We're really very sorry for any inconvenience, we won't keep you here a moment. If I can bring you a coffee or anything else from the hospitality suite..."

"What's the matter?"

"Mr St Clare is inside."

Tommy leans back against the stripy wallpaper. "Right. And he's asked me to be kept out?"

"Given the legal situation –" she begins, and stops, advisedly.

"I don't have a problem seeing him – but in any case, won't his lawyers form a defensive ring?"

"I *do* understand, Mr King, but we *do* try to avoid any unpleasantness and I *am* under strict instructions –"

"Never mind, love," he says genially. "I'm only after my mum anyway. Just haul her out here – she's easy to spot, two foot high, hair like a yellow pot-scrubber, skin like last week's teabags, and on the flight you had to cut off her drinks and take away her lighter."

The stewardess turns deadpan. "I'll see if Mrs King is ready yet."

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He switches his ipod back on while he waits and thumps his head lightly on the wall to the beat. It echoes hollow and soft. Linen paper and deep-pile carpet, but behind it MDF and under it concrete. He presses play: Tannhäuser fills his ears: slow heavy choral voices smooth out the world. In its solemn loveliness, he finds a pang of regret for his description of his mother, and then, as the pilgrims continue their song, all his anxieties about seeing her ease. He closes his eyes as the strings begin to whisper, the voices build, then the choir rises like stone, the strings flood down like a waterfall – the world, for an instant, is a place of perfection. His eyes flicker open. The stewardess is standing outside the door. She's alone.

“Uh – Mrs King would like to finish her drink first.”

“Oh, no.” He presses his fingers deep into his eyeballs. “Can't you take it away or something?”

“She *is* a first-class passenger – unless she becomes aggressive or unruly...”

“I know.” He sighs. “Look – what I said earlier – you won't repeat it will you? I know the papers are gasping for dirt, they'll probably offer you some way-out sum, but if she read that...”

“Um...” Her eyes have turned sharp and hungry, the asking-for-something look.

“Do you want me to bribe you?” he asks flatly, disappointed.

“Not at all! No – I don't want money – uh...” The asking-look turns begging.

He stares, confounded; comprehension dawns; his smile spreads. Let Richard St Clare buy people off all he likes; he hasn't yet understood that people want more than money.

"You're not allowed to ask, are you?" Tommy grins.

She shakes her head, pink-cheeked.

"May I offer you an autograph?" he says gallantly, formally. She swiftly produces a permanent marker and a CD from her bag – it's *On The Way To Wembley*, the best-of rather than the full eight hours, but still the choice of a die-hard fan.

"Good girl scout, you come prepared." He winks.

"It's not for me," – defensive, over-eager, as he bends over the cover notes to write his name – "It's for –"

"Your daughter, yeah."

"My mum, actually."

His pen spasms.

The private places of power can be cleared of awkward meetings, but the airport's huge hall is public. Silhouetted against the bright plate glass of Terminal 5, the press are tugging at their cameramen's leads and surge forward. He pushes on through, smiling "No comment, no comment," until he realises his mother is no longer tottering alongside at his ankles. He whiplashes around.

"Disgraceful, the standards these days," she's declaring to the avid lenses in her worst posh accent. One wrinkled arm brandishes a gin-and-tonic. How did she sneak *that* out? "The manner in which Hai was treated by hwaht perpetrates to be a first-class establishment –"

ENCORE

“Mum!” He reaches down to take her elbow.

She jerks free, sloshing the drink onto her fingers where it runs down the funnels of her wrinkled knuckles. “Ere, you hold that, Tommy, I’ve lost me fags. Now where are they, now what’re me knickers doing in my handbag? That’s not them...” A light rain of underwear, pens, used tissues and mobiles descends around her.

“Tommy, is this a reconciliation with your mum?”

“How do you feel about not fronting your own charity CD?”

“Are you afraid of facing Richard St Clare?”

“Does this mean you’ve put the past behind you?”

“Isn’t your foundation just papering over the cracks? Do you really believe you’re making a difference to people’s lives?”

“Mrs King, are you proud of your son’s achievements?”

“Mrs King, how do you feel about him marrying –”

Tommy lunges protectively in front of his mother. “Richard St Clare isn’t yet ready to embrace the new spirit of positivity and freedom. I will continue to fight this issue, because I believe in freedom, and I believe in the power of music, but I want to reiterate that this is not a personal –”

“*Has* I was saying...” Mum appears under his elbow. She’s found her cigarette and is trying to light the wrong end. The reporters, crying with silent laughter, keep nudging the cameramen for more snaps, though they need no prompting.

“Mr St Clare!” cries one, staring beyond them.

A lean, immaculately-suited man has emerged, his face keen, his eyebrows thick and black though his hair is silver. He is carefully, craftily, statesmanlike.

Tommy hands his mother's drink to the Daily Mail and hurriedly guides her, still flicking at her lighter, through the mêlée. The reporters pour onwards. From behind him, Richard St Clare's drawl rolls out across the shiny terminal floor and echoes in its lofty piping.

"Tommy King is nothing but a has-been and a burn-out, he's wasted his life and he's desperate to recapture his little moment of fame. This is a publicity stunt for him, but it is also a dangerous precedent—"

The sliding door cuts off Richard's last word as Tommy and his mother emerge into the summery morning. Breezes sweep up at them in the sudden silence.

"How's the house in Spain working out?" asks Tommy, awkwardly.

"Don't you go digging for compliments!" says Lizzy sharply. "Now *has* I was saying, those poncy little tarts on the aeroplane..."

"... ridiculous, as if you could kill anyone with a pair of nail scissors, and no refund, three quid they cost me, and bottled water, what'm I supposed to do with bottled water? Drown the pilot?"

"Mum —"

"At my age, you got to keep sipping, your body don't tell you you're thirsty, you ave to be ahead of it, and then they take it away, can you credit it? Even on the plane, they're that full of themselves and all their precious little rules, no idea of how to treat quality, do you know, they wouldn't serve me, *me*, I mean if a helpless old lady can't enjoy a quiet sherry these days I don't know *what* it's coming

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to, what next, that's what I'd like to know, they going to ban the pubs?

"Mum, I need to warn you –"

"Oh, I know, you don't need to tell *me*, they've already stopped us smoking in them, what's a pub without smoke, they'll ruin them all, I tell you, bossing us around and telling us how to live, it's a nanny state, all this health-and-safety bollocks, it's political correctness gone mad, what next eh, banning us smoking in our own homes, that's what, and then what, we'll all be out on the streets and they'll ban that next, they've as good as done that –"

Mum yelling is familiar, but this incessant prating is something new. Perhaps, he reasons, grasping at straws, she has missed speaking English – but in Cala en Porter, she'd be hard pushed to find someone speaking Spanish. He chose it for that precise reason; Mum doesn't take kindly to foreigners, however much she enjoys their weather.

"Look, before we get back, I need to –"

"That van's brake lights've gone off, it's moving, go on, get in gear."

"It doesn't *have* gears." He conquers another metre of the M25 and draws to a halt.

"*Ma-a-ry Be-e-e-ell...*" sings the radio. He flicks it off sharply.

"Mum –"

"You want to be in the other lane, the fast one, that one's moving alright, don't know what you want to be stuck in this one for."

"This is the lane for our turn-off."

“We’re not there yet though, are we? We could drive in that fast lane there then change back, further up, ahead of all this lot.” She stubs her cigarette out in the change tray, and lights another. Tommy slides down his window without comment.

“You just slide that up again, little cigarette smoke won’t hurt you, it’s all that monocide whatsit out there, from the cars, that’s the bad stuff, why don’t they ban cars, then eh? Freezing in here as it is, without you inviting the whole of London in, why can’t you get a car with proper heating? I still don’t understand why we couldn’t go in the limousine, Mick Jagger drives in a limousine –”

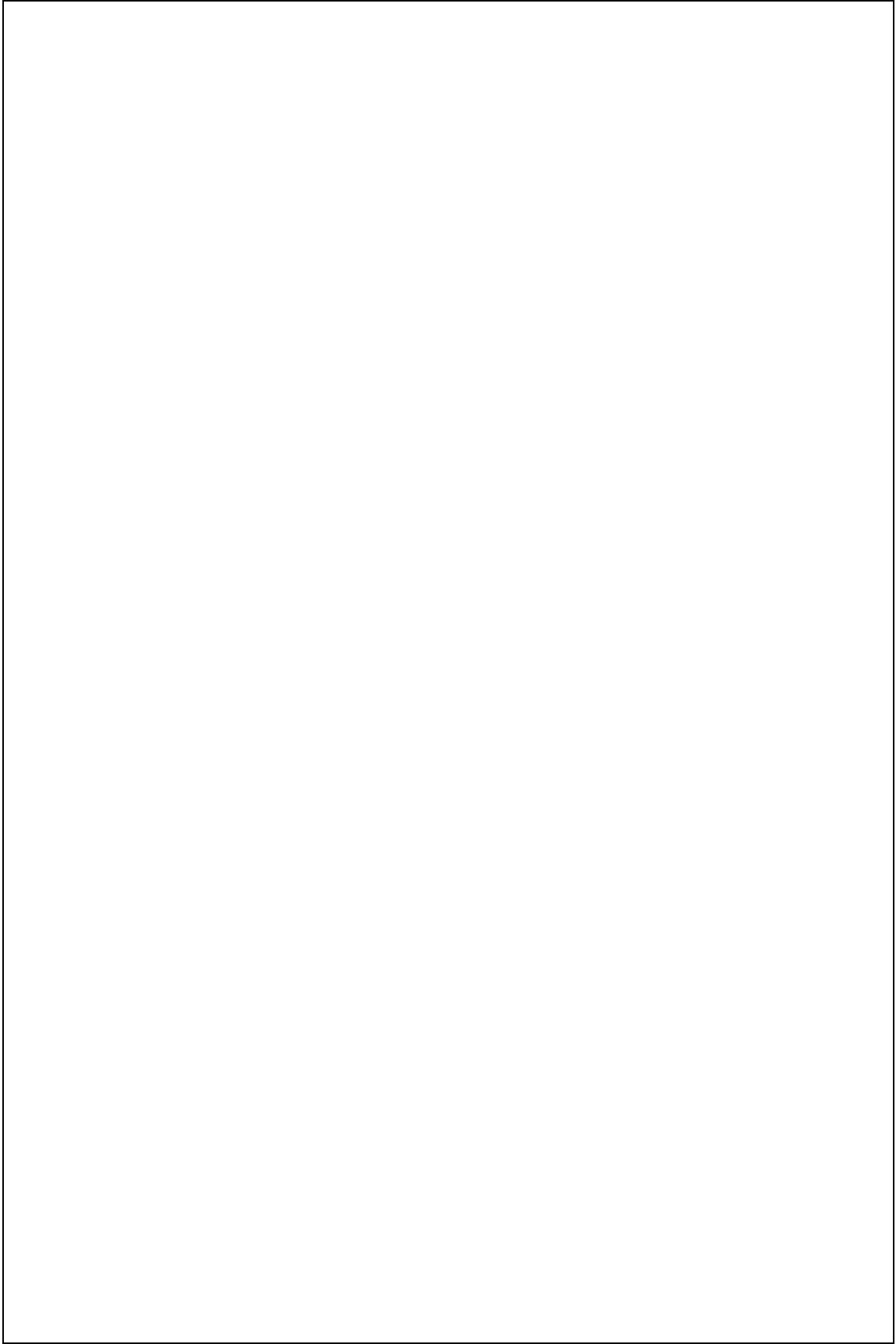
“Mick Jagger is a ponce,” retorts Tommy automatically, thumbing the heating up from 28 to 36. “The limousine was only there as a decoy, though. Look, Mum –”

“Moving again, you want to keep an eye on the traffic instead of rabbiting on, you were always a dreamer, never could buckle down to a job properly...”

As the traffic creaks towards the M40 turnoff, his mum’s cracked and derisory tones spread on – long hair at his time of life, getting married at his time of life, the government’s nannying and lack of care, those bastard immigrants coming over here, taking our jobs and sitting around on the dole doing nothing (this in response to a truck declaring “Polski”), the unavailability of refreshments on the motorway. Tommy clutches the Alpha Romeo’s wheel and gazes despairingly at the yellowing air and swathes of overheated tarmac, trying to think of a soothing mantra. *I could be stuck here*, he realises despairingly, *in this traffic, in this ghastly monologue, for the rest of my life.*

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And at his time of life, as Mum would say, that is a real possibility. Then Richard St Clare, that spiteful greedy grasping power-hungry cretin, will win by default, and all Tommy's work undone. He fumbles in his pocket and discreetly swallows a heart tablet.



take out the papers *and* the trash



It all began with the toaster. Fat, powder-blue, gleaming shiny-and-matt all at once, it crouched on the oiled tablecloth and ceremoniously ejected toast. Sliced bread went in, Bertie depressed the lever until it clicked, and then we knelt on the kitchen chairs and peered at its fiery filaments until – bam! Toast.

Mrs Carlsberg smiled and moved around us in her powder-blue apron, wiping clean the crumbs off her wipe-clean tablecloth, peeling potatoes with a specially-designed potato peeler, clipping white roses for her powder-blue melamine vase. Her apron, her tablecloth, her kitchen curtains, her shiny new linoleum, even her cupboard fronts were all powder-blue – but not her eyes. My mother's were. I clung to that distinction over Bertie Carlsberg, who otherwise trounced me on every level of status and let me

know it. He wouldn't even let me operate the toaster, but his mother's presence ensured that of every pair of slices, I got one. All that Friday afternoon, we made and buttered and ate toast, and Mrs Carlsberg just smiled her bright-red smile and wiped and peeled. I feared seeming greedy, by the fifth slice, but Bertie kept masticating implacably, so I forced it down. We didn't have an automatic toaster at my house. We didn't have much bread to put in one.

Mr Carlsberg strode in as the loaf gave out. He chucked Bertie under the chin, kissed Mrs Carlsberg right on the lips there in front of us (his own came away tinged with red; I felt like a witness to an indecent act) and asked how I liked his new appliance.

"It's just fine, sir," I gurgled, larded up to the gills with unaccustomed fat.

"I'll bet your parents will be down at my store for one, tomorrow!"

"Yes, sir," I lied loyally.

"We can hardly keep up production," he beamed, and patted it affectionately. "Of course," and here his face darkened a little, "Lots of them are going off to Yoorup. We rescued them in the war and you think that'd be enough, but we're still rescuing them. That's American money going off to Yoorup, son, and American toasters that rightly belong in American households. Something for nothing, that's what they want over there in Yoorup. Handouts! Still" – he brightened again – "It's good for business!"

"Is toasters all you make?" I blurted out, before I considered how rudely the question seemed to dismiss the toaster.

ENCORE

Mr Carlsberg didn't take offence, though. He sat down right there at the kitchen table, with the beer Mrs Carlsberg had given him, and looked Bertie and me in the eyes, practically man-to-man. "Now you boys listen to me. You think I make toasters?"

We nodded uncertainly.

"Uh-uh. Toasters come out. But what I *make* is jobs."

I had to rush off then, for my evening paper round, but his words played in my ears and the toaster danced in front of my eyes. The next morning, straining at my pedals to deliver even fatter newspapers to the houses to which I'd given their last news bundle only ten hours before, I was still gnawing at it. This job wasn't going to buy me a toaster. The household budget was a bigger hole than I could fill with a dozen paper rounds and had a long list of priorities before toasters. I wasn't Yoorup, so no-one was going to give me a toaster – not that I *wanted* handouts, I added hastily. Even the toaster itself wasn't exactly what I wanted. If Mom had a matching new kitchen like Mrs Carlsberg that would be something, but that still wasn't *it*. Besides, Mom didn't need everything wipe-clean to keep it spick 'n span. I'd heard her tell someone Mrs Carlsberg was a slattern at heart who only needed all those labour-saving devices because she was afraid of hard work. We didn't need to waste money on that nonsense. We St Clares weren't afraid of hard work.

All morning I fretted away at it as I worked down my list of Saturday chores, written out in Mom's neat handwriting and left on the table. The house seemed determined to defeat us: its grass sprang

up to knee-height when you turned your back, wood rotted the instant you finished nailing it in, iron rusted overnight, and for every roof tile I replaced, another slid off in the next thunderstorm. It had belonged to Dad's father, and his father before him, who had bought it when they were grand and wealthy, before the depression stole everything but the house. Now, huge and crumbling, it creaked in the growing air pressure. It swayed in our fierce Illinois winds. The chandeliers, never sold, rattled and rusted. It wanted to be decrepit, wreathed in vines and cobwebs, thick with dust. Well, I fixed the outside and cut back the vines and Mom swept away the cobwebs and dusted it down and between us, we would not be defeated.

As I hammered and cut, I kept returning to that toaster and what Mr Carlsberg had said. I wanted to do that – to make jobs – but not, somehow, toasters. But what? Hair standing on end with static, I waded through outside's humidity to inside's whitened gloom. My footsteps echoed in each room as I looked for Mom. (She didn't like me to shout. She was Bostonian; she thought it was bad manners.) On the third floor, in the hollowed-out space of the once-upon-a-time drawing room, I found a man's shadowy silhouette by the window, stone-still, staring outwards. I was retreating on quiet feet when he spoke.

"Storm coming."

I edged forward. My eyes followed his. Far off on the horizon, a bloated tadpole of cloud trailed its tail along the ground. Without moving, it grew slightly: it was headed straight for us.

"That there is," I said cautiously, and risked a glance at his face.

ENCORE

He nodded abstractedly. “Richard. It’s you.” One of his lucid days, then, but even so he never lost that vague and helpless air as if he stood in another world. When I was little, I thought the photos on the mantelpiece were a different man – only when I was nine did I put two and two together, that the man marrying my Mom in the photo could *only* be Dad, despite those keen eyes and proud grin, despite the air of being alive that the grey man in our house certainly lacked.

“Have you seen Mom?”

“Who?”

“Mom – uh – Mrs St Clare...”

He frowned, struggling to place the name, and by dinner still hadn’t remembered who either of us were.

In bed that night, listening to the house moan in protest at the rising winds, I realised it wasn’t *just* toasters and that my dad would never be able to buy me one. It was toasters, kettles, televisions, vacuum cleaners, washing machines – it wasn’t just what we didn’t have, but everything that was invented, made, sold, but *not* linoleum. For some reason, vacuum cleaners counted but linoleum didn’t. And following the toaster was the wrong way. There was *something else*.

The shutters clattered in their hooks against the clapboard. The copper chandelier above my bed groaned in its fixing. Its copper leaves shivered. Every room had them, defunct and darkened, but nonetheless a reminder that we were St Clares, persons of stature still. The storm intensified. Sitting up, I could see by lightening

flares that the huge purple tail was sweeping parallel now, sparing us its destruction but still dragging all around it a frenzy of rain, wind and stabs of light. What *was* it? I knew Mr Carlsberg had said he made jobs, but you had to make something else as well, to do that, and I could taste it on my tongue but not find it. The rain hit the roof like the fist of God. I cowered backwards in bed, up against the wall – was I too big to run for Mom, was that babyish? The wall behind me shuddered and slid away from under me; from my parents' room, Dad began to scream like a baby. Lightening licked around the house, thunderclaps smacked against the windows, and downstairs glass shattered. I curled up tight on my back, as if being smaller meant the storm wouldn't hit me, my hands white-knuckled on the blanket. Then came a sound so profound that it wasn't even noise but a shuddering of the earth's own foundations, a throbbing in my bones, a massive reverberation in which every object in the house participated, and with it – light. The chandelier in my room blazed white. The chandelier in the hall was alive, crackling with light. The whole house shone like a torch, impossibly bright, as if every light in the house were on – *but they weren't wired up. They had no bulbs.*

And I saw what was in front of me, what I was meant to see, what I'd been gnawing away at: electricity. More than electricity, *power.*

That was the night Dad died. The light and the noise was too much for him, the doctor said; he probably thought he was back in the war. Last time his mind gave way; this time, his heart did. To my

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astonishment, Mom was heartbroken – “All those years I waited, thinking he’d come back,” she sobbed, “And he never did, he *never did!*”

I couldn’t share her grief, however hard I’d tried. I never knew the man she was crying for, only the shadow. Besides, he did come back, however briefly, for me. From his other world, he’d stepped over and told me – a storm was coming, and it was me.