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W.H.S. Johnston's House - 1952 to 1959

author, farmer, sportsman - and much more

His "Janus" contributions

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"JUNGLE POEM"

Red parakeets and green macaws
Flutter and scream as the leopard's paws
Deal death to the gaudy colourists
Of the lush green jungles and steamy mists.
Above, the jungle rears in its might;
Above is the day-of the jungle, the night.
Now a foolish Oryx charges across
The clearing of Mungra, the Rhinoceros,
Now the chase is wild and free
The Oryx clears a fallen tree;
But the Rhino with all his cumbrous strength
Has to yield to the speed of the Oryx at length,
And with deep-throated bellows vents his rage
Upon anything which obstructs his passage.
Mungra sulks, boiling with wrath.
Beware to the creature which crosses his path.

Pearly fish beneath emerald seas
Glide in the kingdom of coral trees.
With leering jaws a shark arrives:
The jewels of the sea swim for their lives
In groves of Sea Anemones, seeking cover,
Thus outwitting the sleek sea rover.
Meanwhile on the waves a drama takes shape:
A mighty Blue Whale seeks for escape.
The killer whales are in full cry
And now it's clear the Blue Whale must die.
Around the scene the water is boiling
The big Blue Whale for his life is toiling.
Then comes the fatal strife;
The Blue Whale has lost the quest for life.
This is the rule concerning these lives:
It is only the fittest which survives.

A. SZEPESY

“\$500,000,000 WORTH OF DEATH”

BEADS OF PERSPIRATION were breaking out on Matherson's forehead as he stared panic - stricken at the Lexometer. They were already 120 million miles out of Laramie, the shining new planet which had great deposits of Rolonite in its mountains. It was a particularly long journey from Laramie to the nearest planet Zombeida, in fact even the security freighters were taking a big chance in shipping Rolonite. Matherson was a smuggler and there would be no base for him to adio back to and no refuelling ship to help him out. It was as he realised this that "Lucky" Wilmot came in. "What's wrong?" he asked sharply, then his eyes too became riveted on the Lexometer. "Good God!" he gasped, "how did that happen; I thought we were full up with fuel."

"So did I," answered Matherson hopelessly. Both men knew that there was only one thing to do. "We'll have to give up hope I'm afraid; might as well radio the patrol base right away."

Wilmot went out of the room to inform his radio beamist that all was lost and that even digging up Melanite nuggets on Auto for fifty years or so was preferable to falling through space for ever.

As he stepped into the radio beamist's cabin he became aware of a fluorescent silver light coming from the opposite end of the compartment, in fact from the Milon padded Rolonite crates. All thoughts of the fuel shortage on board his ship were sent reeling from his brain as he realised that the very contraband upon which he had built his hopes of a vast fortune was to be his downfall. The deadly omni-activeness of the Rolonite had eaten its way through even the tough Milon padded crates. Before he had come from Zombeida on this hazardous expedition, he had, quite naturally, supposed that Rolonite was carried in Milon reinforced crates. As was obvious now, this was not the case. Also the radio was absolutely useless now because the Rolonite rays intercepted the beams. There was only one faint hope in his mind. They would have to jump out of the space-doomed ship, clad, of course, in Vartan suits, and use their booster rockets to send them in the direction of Zombeida. After this they were in the hands of what was called by scientists "Geno-optimism" and what was called by Wilmot, "luck." Still, he thought, he had always been called "Lucky" Wilmot.

Last of all the crew to leave 500 million dollars' worth of death behind him was Wilmot. He kicked out into space in the general direction of Zombeida and flicked over the booster-rocket switch. Utter hopelessness, mingled with despair and righteous indignation filled his mind; surely a man was allowed to expect a certain amount of luck when in a position such as his. Most men would have been overcome by fear when faced with the proposition of falling through space for ever. Not Wilmot, however. The only thing that worried him was why, in Sirius, men called him "Lucky" Wilmot.

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"WHAT IS THIS LIFE, IF ?"

EXAMINATIONS what torturous visions this dreaded word conjures up in the mind of the inexperienced boy, what remorse wells up within his soul at the awful sentence of the calendar. Like a dying man he sees his past life before him and lives once more the shady deals in marbles transacted beneath a desk during "geographical internment." He ponders upon his past follies, and successes, he sighs, a happy sigh, for is he not worth one hundred and thirty-four marbles? Then his mind turns to rosy thoughts of suicide, to all he will leave behind him, one hundred and thirty-four marbles and a broken hearted Rosie next door; that is the importance of examinations and its effect on early life.

After much superfluous worrying the moment arrives, the first day of the Common Entrance Examination. Upon coming out of his first petrified coma the small boy looks at his questions, he stares hard, and finds that unless his sight is failing him the questions are quite easy. The small boy now smells a rat; how could those infernal torturers set such an easy question? There must be a catch somewhere he thinks, and promptly puts down the wrong answer. With a combination of luck and heavenly guidance he reaches the end of the examination. Pale and quaking within, with a slightly puzzled but somewhat relieved expression on his face, the small boy trudges home. There are six months to wait before the final results of the examination are known, six months of nerve-wracking suspense during which the small boy undergoes many amazing changes. It is now, and not as many people think later, that alcoholic stupors, chain smoking, the imbibing of opium and heroine begin.

When the time of judgment draws near you see not playful little boys, but hardened cynics (the only ones who are not hardened cynics by now are the marble millionaires, and they are crooks).

Older now, and much wiser, with a hard shell of cynicism, the boy remains unshaken by examinations and results. Instead he harnesses them to meet his own ends and improves his tennis, cricket or chess during the spare hours provided by the commencement of the summer examinations. It is now that the cold, cunning and ruthless brains begin to appear and this period sees the birth of many future financial tycoons . . . and the appearance of that contemporary scourge, the ulcer. Even now, however, nervousness is not completely absent, as is shown by the number who take up piano lessons. Then comes the greatest change and mark of superiority yet seen, the actual enjoyment of the "end of the year" examinations.

Older still, more wise and yet more foolish, the boy faces the "god", which over-shadows all his secondary school life, the General Certificate of Education. The intense preparation for this, the king of school examinations, is marked by the stooping walk, the pouches beneath the eyes, the paleness of complexion and the hysterical fits of despair which grip that long suffering predecessor of man, the

boy. There is now a crack in what used to be a hard protective shell of cynicism, mental fatigue.

Nearing the actual days of examinations another amazing change in this much-transformed creature, becomes apparent; he becomes more cheerful, whistles as he walks (now athletic and erect) and appreciates the non-existent beauty of the grimy galaxy of buildings which form his home town. Alas and alack! This is a sure sign of the sad but unavoidable overthrow of his only friend and protector in this world of woe, cynicism. Rhapsodising blissfully upon the graceful beauty of the ink blot before him, he is unaware of the gloating glances darted in his direction by those doleful demons the examiners. He is jolted and considerably shaken by the magical and sinister appearance of the question paper before him. By the time he has waded through the mortifying list of questions very little of his original good humour remains, and he relapses once more into the abysmal depths of gloom! As paper follows paper, day after day, hour after hour, he realizes what great men Attila the Hun, Nero, Kublai Khan, Hitler and Mussolini were.

The boy's sense of the morbid and horrifying grows as he realizes the unmistakable error he has committed by passing, with one, two and threes and so qualifying to take higher level examinations. As the fanatical gleam in his eye improves so Uncle Adolf approves.

The boy, now almost a man, basks with supreme content and contempt in the sunshine of his achievement in the higher level examination. He thinks now of Dracula, Frankenstein and Hyde merely as old and valuable acquaintances. As he ponders the meaning of his success, he thinks that perhaps Messieurs Ghoul, Attila and Rasputin of the board of examiners are not so bad after all.

Once more "Uncle Adolf" looking down from his heavenly abode (he now takes turns with Big Brother) approves.

A. SZEPESY (IIIA)

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“THE TWO-TIMER” (after E. Hemingway)

IT WAS DARK. There'd been a lot of rain about that afternoon. The wet sidewalks shone under the street lamps. It was quiet. Two small guys came round the corner. They were moving at a brisk walk. A drunk lurched up out of the gutter in front of them. The one on the left slapped him down with a black-jack. The drunk lay still in the gutter. The two little guys hurried on. They came to a big grey block of flats. They stopped outside. They looked round a bit and went in.

"Hey, Al, you sure this is the right place?"

"Yeah, guess so," from the little guy on the right.

"You reckon he'll be in here."

"Yeah, guess so."

"Two-to-one, he's drunk."

"Yeah, he'll be tight."

They got to the fourth storey and stopped outside a dingy, brown door.

The little guy called Al took out a key. He fiddled about with the lock a bit.

"Hey, Luz, it's hookey, won't budge."

"Have another go."

"Guess I will."

This time the door opened. They went in quietly. But quietly. Al first. They were in a small apartment, kind of cob-webby and cheap.

"Guess things ain't so good with him," whispered Al.

"They're gonna be worse."

"Yeah, they're gonna be worse."

A light came out from under a door a way down the hall. They went towards it. Al tripped over a mat lying in the shadows. He didn't make much sound as he regained his balance. He was light and quick on his feet.

"That you, Honey?" said a big voice from behind the door.

"He thinks we're his girl," said Al.

"Yeah, the sucker, the big lousy two-timing sucker."

"Shall we go to see him?"

"Yeah, let's go to see him."

"Hey, baby, got some bourbon out there?" said the drunk voice inside.

"No, but we got somethin' just as lethal," whispered Luz.

"Yeah, guess we have," said Al.

They opened the door and went in. A big guy lay sprawled on a divan by the wall. He was big. Must have had plenty muscles once. They were running to fat in some places now. Guess he could still pack a punch though. The big guy was tight. He was ugly when he was tight. Ugly most of the time but more so when he was tight.

"Guess you're drunk again, big boy."

"Huh?"

"Guess you're just damn tight, you floatin' slab of alcohol."

"Whatcha say?"

"Aw shuddup!"

"Sorry, baby."

"He's so blind drunk he don't know us from his girl."

"Got some rye, honey?"

"Aw you're hell drunk already."

"Huh?"

"You're hell drunk already."

"Who says so?"

"Listen two-timer" - Luz this time - "You're going places."

"The hell I am."

"Yeah, guess you'll go there, you won't make the grade upstairs anyway."

"What's that?" the big guy wasn't too cock-eyed to know when something was wrong. He was scared.

"Guess he came in blind and I guess he's going out blind."

"Yeah, he always was tight."

"Yeah, guess so, even when he was two-timing us."

"Guess so."

"Come on, Al, let's get going quick, the girl may be coming back."

"Yeah. let's jerk this blind greaser and go."

They took a razor out each. Handy slick lethal razors. They both had gloves on. They both looked matter-of-fact. Like they were doing an office job. When they went over to the big guy he was sleeping heavily, he was dead, blind, drunk. As they went briskly down the side walk he was sleeping peacefully. Only he wasn't drunk.

A. SZEPESY (IVA)

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“UN PAYSAGE”

JE VOIS UN PAYSAGE, un paysage bleu et vide et infini. C'est d'un bleu profond mais un bleu qui possède une charne vivante et étrange. En le regardant, j'aperçois un petit point d'argent qui flamboie dans la profondeur du bleu. Dans le cortège de ce point jaillit une raie vapoureuse et blanche qui grandit pour enfin disparaître dans le bleu éternel du ciel d'été.

Après la tombée de la nuit on voit beaucoup de points d'argent, mais ils ne flamboient pas avec la grace rapide de l'autre: ils étincellent tranquilles et d'une lumière qui ne change depuis des siècles. Il y a aussi une grande balle d'or qui sourit bénigne sur le monde endormi, C'est la nuit, mais elle est tranquille, d'une chaleur délicieuse et vivante, vraiment une des nuits d'été faites particulièrement pour les amoureux.

Le vent est formidable, et les grands nuages, gris et déchiquetés, courent devant lui, tout comme les petites feuilles rouges et brunes et ratatinées qui avaient dansé en automne. Il fait froid et le soleil se cache dans l'épaule des nuages devant les yeux des gens gelés. Il fait froid, il gèle, il neige: c'est l'hiver.

Les étoiles étincellent par intervalles, c'est que les nuages courent devant le vent encore, comme s'ils doivent faire le tour du monde avant le retour du soleil. Il gèle, et le ciel est dur et ennemi, et dans la nuit les nuages ont une teinte bleue et sombre. Les seuls habitants du ciel sont les étoiles, les dieux dorment depuis bien des siècles, et le ciel est le ciel gelé et désolé de la nuit d'hiver.

A. SZEPESY (VI)

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“BROTHERS”

THE TREES WERE stretching crooked arms towards the sky. Small, black trees, stunted and crippled by the cold. The sky itself was a glowering grey, dappled here and there by hurrying clouds. All around was the snow, thick and white and silent. The vast whiteness was broken only here and there by the black figures of the trees. Nothing moved but the clouds and the rising wind.

They had hunted a long way that day. But they found nothing. The winter was hard and cold and the game was gone. There was little food left and they needed the game. There was really only food for one, but they were brothers and they shared it. Both of them were hungry, and the cold and the snow were all around them. He carried the gun, there was only one. He was the better shot, and anyway they were brothers. They were tired and hungry and there was so little food. The snow was wide and empty. He had the gun. But then they were brothers. The harsh sky was looming over them and the wind was chasing the clouds. His bones were aching and he stumbled in the snow. The gun slipped on his back. But they were brothers. The cold was poking its fingers through his furs and his eyes ached from the snow. His brother moved ahead of him. He was stronger and moved more quickly. There was little food and his brother would live longer than he would. He tripped on his snow-shoes and his brother moved further ahead of him.

Then he slipped the gun off his shoulder and killed his brother. The report skittered out over the snow and was lost in the scurrying sky.

His brother was lying on his stomach. He was small and thin and the heels of his snow-shoes were touching. His arms were stretched out in front of him in the snow. He didn't move. He was dead.

The man with the gun turned and started back through the snow. He moved quickly and looked every so often at the sky. He carried his gun across his back and moved leaning forward on the wind.

There were clouds and the wind was rising. The gun was heavy on his back and the cold was nibbling at his toes. He looked at the racing clouds and then back at the snow. He had a long way to go and he was hungry.

Fine snow was beginning to trickle from the clouds and was carried along on the wind. He looked at the sky and the clouds and moved on more quickly.

He had come a long way and his legs were aching. The snow, falling faster now and thicker, was blotting out their footprints. The flakes were growing and the wind was harrying the formless clouds. His gun was flapping on his back and the sweat trickled down his legs.

He couldn't see the trail and the sky was gone. White shafts of snow were falling all around him and the wind was throwing it, in his eyes. His legs were moving more slowly now and his head was lolling on his shoulders. But he moved on for a long time. His feet were slipping in the snow and the wind was catching him off balance. All around him a moving whiteness. He was staggering and his feet were sinking further in the snow. The sweat was icing up on his legs and he couldn't see. He was alone in a vast, white blindness.

His snow-shoe caught on something soft and he fell on his face, in the snow. The wind was screaming and the quiet snow covered the brothers in a shroud of white.

A. SZEPESY (VI)

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“REFLECTIONS”

THE SUN was staring down from a heavy sky. The air was full of dust and a hard, dry heat that not even the nearby sea could soften. Everything was a dry grey or a dusty brown and there was no fresh or rich colour anywhere. Even the beer was flat and warm. I stared around the little bar and noted the dingy walls and faded furniture. There were cracks in the ceiling and dosing flies buzzed aimlessly around. An electric fan carved futile circles out of the baking air and gave the heat a droning, relentless voice of its own. I got up and walked slowly outside. There had been no people in the bar and there were few outside. Flat, pasty faces walking past, flat and with nothing behind them.

As I crossed the road I could feel the heat of the tar through the soles of my shoes. I looked up at the houses. Old, dusty, tired houses begrimed and covered with soot. They stood there patient and immovable, sweating silently in the heat. It was funny how those old houses seemed to be more than just bricks and mortar, how they seemed in some way to have a certain life which was more than mere existence. It was funny how these old houses were more sympathetic and friendly than those flat, shallow faces, those facades for emptiness which walked along the street. They didn't move around, they didn't hustle to see, they just waited for life to come to them and what they saw was enough. Nothing was kept secret from them and they could hear and see several lives at once, lives of people who didn't know that they lived and therefore didn't bother to hide anything from them. They didn't move but they shared several lives at once and so they were both inside and outside themselves whereas man could move but was locked forever in the castle of his skin. Man could speak but he was always alone with himself and no amount of moving or speaking or drinking could change that. A house could have new tenants but a man could only have moods. The sky seemed to be crowding in on the earth in an earnest endeavour to crush the overloaded air into a yet more intolerable position. A dull glare came down from the oppressive clouds and was reflected from the simmering Tarmac of the road. A piece of thistle down floated up from some abandoned garden and floated effortlessly out over the grimy quay, mounting on some hidden breeze and seeming incredibly light and free in all the dusty heaviness of the day. I stopped and watched it away gently in the distance over the idling sea.

A. SZEPESY (VI)