

DREAM COMPROMISE



John O'Loughlin

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Short Prose by
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Of Centretruths Digital Media

CDM Prose

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PREFACE

This collection of short prose, originally dating from the autumn of 1981, includes what is arguably the most literary piece I have ever written – namely 'A Canine Crime', which deals with the problems of dog ownership in an age and society which has turned against such a thing, making it illegal.

Also of special note here is the erotically fetishistic 'Nolan's Investigations', which opens the collection on a lighter note, not to mention the partly autobiographical title-piece 'Dream Compromise', which has a trick in its tail, so to speak.... As, incidentally, does the collection as a whole, in that it ends with a series of aphorisms, in keeping with the broadly philosophical bias of the majority of my literary works.

John O'Loughlin, London 1981 (Revised 2024)

NOLAN'S INVESTIGATIONS

Gracefully, Bridget Nolan applied the clips of the white suspenders to the dark tops of her nylon stockings and, straightening up, regarded her legs with critical detachment in the wardrobe mirror. Yes, that appeared to do the job! Although the right clip needed to be adjusted a little, in order to bring it into line with the left one, so that the suspenders were equidistant down the middle of her thighs instead of slightly awry, as at present. She made the necessary adjustment and then regarded herself anew in the long mirror – this time with some satisfaction! For her underclothes looked pretty smart and sexy. The suspenders were every bit as fresh-looking as the nylon panties she was wearing for the first time. They didn't clash with the latter but formed a delicate harmony with them – a harmony in white. The clash, if anywhere, came with the dark tops of her stockings, which was as she liked it. There would soon be another clash lower down, when she stepped into her white shoes. But that, too, would be intentional.

Turning away from the mirror, Bridget reached into the wardrobe for the silk dress she was intending to wear out to dinner that evening – a white one which would go nicely, she thought, with everything else, including the stockings. She removed the hanger and put on the dress, letting it slide down over her slender body with obvious pleasure, since its contact with her skin was pleasantly smooth and cool. To be sure, it was a warm evening and the coolness of the dress felt agreeably refreshing to her, especially as she'd only a short while before taken a bath, which had somewhat warmed her up. Even with talcum powder one was apt to sweat a little in the circumstances! Indeed, a few beads of sweat were, at that very moment, cascading down her back, but she wasn't particularly conscious of them, what with the feel of the smooth dress against her skin. And neither was she particularly conscious of the sudden entry into the bedroom of her husband, who came creeping up behind her and put his hand on her back, causing her to jump with fright. He was a few inches taller than her, a fact which allowed him to peer over her shoulders or head with comparative ease. His short curly-black hair contrasted sharply with her long wavy-red hair, as he stood right behind her with a slightly mocking expression on his pallid face. "Aren't you ready yet?" he commented, while his hand caressed her back.

Bridget had recovered her composure and gone back to critically looking at herself in the mirror. However, the dress hadn't quite fallen into place, so that a large part of her left thigh was exposed to his gaze. He grew intrigued by what he saw and, although she quickly smoothed the offending part into place, she was too late to prevent him from becoming sexually aroused. For he proceeded to caress her back more firmly, continuing to gaze over her shoulder at where the exposed thigh had been. "Would you like to do me up," she requested, growing uncomfortably conscious of her exposed back. For she was afraid that if she didn't do something to cool him down, he'd mess her up, undoing the care she'd put into getting dressed.

"Certainly," he said, and he pulled the zip up the length of her back to the base of her nape. "But now I'd like you to lift it up," he added, thereby assuring her that he was still pretty warm.

She frowned slightly and pretended to ignore him.

"Go on!" he demanded more firmly. "You know what I mean."

Reluctantly, she raised the rim of her dress in both hands, until part of her thighs was exposed.

"Higher!" he cried, becoming impatient.

She lowered her eyes and, with ever so faint a blush, lifted up the rim to a point where the dark ridges of her stocking tops were on display. Yet even that evidently wasn't sufficient for him, since he immediately repeated himself, compelling her to expose the white suspenders.

"Aha! so that's it," he exclaimed, staring more closely over her shoulder at the reflection of her thighs in the wardrobe mirror. "Virginal innocence this time, is it?"

She smiled and nodded in equally faint measures, for an instant flashing her bright-blue eyes at him. "Satisfied?" she sneered, though she might've known better where *he* was concerned!

"Now let's see your briefs," he demanded, smiling lustily.

Once again she was obliged to respond in kind and lift her dress still higher,

doing so with noticeably less reluctance than before, because she was fairly proud of her new underclothes.

"Hmm, quite the little angel this evening, aren't we?" he remarked, as the first glimpse of her white panties came into view. "All spick-and-span. One would never think you had sexual proclivities, still less a cunt. But, of course, you have – in spite of your spiritual ambitions."

Bridget blushed anew, this time rather more deeply. Unfortunately she knew quite enough about his sexual proclivities by now, indeed she did! But he had to have his way if there was to be any peace in the house. One had to satisfy his whims as best one could. "Seen enough?" she at length asked, as the seconds ticked away and the business of holding her dress up became more tediously trying.

"In this context," her husband replied, his gaze still riveted on her latest exposure. "Although, while you're looking so seductive, you might as well get down on your knees."

"Oh, Barry!" she protested. "Do I have to?"

"Yes, get down on your damn knees!" he insisted implacably.

She knew from experience that it was useless arguing with him. He was her master, after all. She had to obey him.

"And keep your dress up," he reminded her.

Reluctantly she kept it held up, so that her thighs remained on display to his avid gaze.

"Now squat on your heels," Nolan directed, with obvious relish.

Again she obeyed him, drawing her legs slightly closer together in the process. Inevitably the flesh on her thighs spread out conspicuously, what with the pressure of her calves against them, and this, she knew, was precisely what he wanted to see. For, to him, it contradicted her spiritual pretensions.

Nolan chuckled to himself awhile, then knelt down beside her and ran his

hand up and down her nearest thigh a number of times. "What's this?" he sneered, referring to the seductive enlargement of the limb in question. "And what's this?" He'd thrust the hand between her thighs and was resting its palm against that part of her panties which covered her crotch. "Is this a fiction?"

She'd started to smile to herself as he said this. For it was only too obvious what he was getting at, especially as his hand had now begun to tickle her.

"And what's this?" he continued, sliding the hand further underneath her until it rested, with splayed fingers, against her rump. "Is this necessary for the spiritual life, too?"

It was still possible for her to treat his behaviour as a joke, in spite of the ironic sarcasm in his comments which, at another time, could've caused her to lose patience with him. For it was Saturday evening, after all, and Saturdays were somewhat different from other evenings so far as attitudes went. Had it been a Sunday or a Monday, she'd almost certainly have lost her patience with him – assuming he would've been stupid enough to try it on then. But, under the circumstances, one just had to relax a little and enjoy oneself as best one could. Otherwise every day would be too much alike! On Saturday evenings one just had to take one's husband's perverse little self-indulgences lightly.

"Oh, but you know what they really are, don't you?" Nolan declared, having removed his hand from the last 'this'. "You damned-well know why you were given them, don't you?"

"Why?" Bridget innocently rejoined.

"To seduce men with!" came his implacable response. "To enable you to sexually fulfil yourself! To get seed into your womb! That's why you were given them – those thighs, this cunt, that arse. Not to mention those arms, these tits, that nape, this face. Oh yes, all of it! They weren't intended to facilitate meditation, not even yoga! They were made to seduce men with!"

A fresh blush had appeared on Bridget's face with the reception of this self-evident information. For although she'd heard him speak like this before, she was still capable of being embarrassed, from time to time, by the coarseness of certain of the words he used, which assaulted her lady-like primness.

Needless to say, he used them specifically for that purpose, since it gave him pleasure to drag her body through the dirt of sexual slang in defiance of her spiritual pretensions. He knew that a word like 'cunt', used in a specific context at a certain time of day on a day like today, had the effect of diminishing her spiritual morale and making her more accessible to his sexual demands. It worked like a spell on her, bringing her completely under his influence. Occasionally he would flatter her by telling her what a beautiful cunt she was, as though he were Mellors and she the Lady Chatterley of D.H. Lawrence's most erotic novel. Occasionally, too, he'd flatter her by telling her what a beautiful cunt she had. But he never used the word in any other context or with anyone else, the way he'd sometimes use, say, the words 'dickhead' or 'arsehole' or even 'prick'. It was strictly *entre nous*, as between man and wife. And the wife, being a well-bred young lady, would retain a discreet silence and perhaps even allow herself the luxury of a faint blush. She would never say "I know."

Which was how it was on this occasion, when the possibility of an affirmative response presented itself. The temptation to immodesty had to be avoided, if one wasn't to compromise oneself in either one's own or one's husband's eyes. To give the game away with an honest admission would've been unthinkable! Nolan could insinuate all he liked, but one would never confirm him in his insinuations. One had to pretend otherwise.

"And you don't need me to remind you," he continued, ignoring her latest blush, "how many times they've succeeded in enabling you to seduce me. Oh no! You're perfectly well aware of the matter.... But I haven't finished with my little investigations yet. I've got other things to investigate. So I suggest you stretch out on the floor stomach uppermost, *toute de suite*."

Obediently, Bridget did as requested, since it was a bit late to remonstrate now. Seeing as the game had progressed this far, there seemed to be no earthly reason why it shouldn't progress a little further, maybe even reaching a climax or logical conclusion, if such a thing were possible with Nolan! Besides, she'd little doubt what was coming next. They'd played this particular game at least three times already. It was becoming rather predictable, not to say monotonous!

"Would you like me to lift up the rim of my dress again?" she ironically inquired of him.

"No, it will be raised back in any case," he blandly assured her, "since I'm going to raise your legs up myself, if you don't mind!" And, sure enough, that is precisely what he did, as he turned his back on her face and, straddling her stomach, lifted up her dark-stockinged legs by the ankles until her inverted feet were pressing against his lower abdomen. Now he could look down the entire length of her legs and note the gradual progress of their flesh towards its culmination in the ample contours of her seductive rump. There was nothing to impede his view of her new panties from this vantage point, which afforded him direct optical access, as it were, to the indisputable cynosure of her fleshy assets. Looking down at Bridget's rear from this angle was indeed a revelation, a confirmation of the woman's seductive power! And if she was blushing or feeling slightly insecure and vulnerable behind him, so much the better! That would teach her for playing the spiritual hypocrite and laying claim to certain religious aspirations which he lacked! That would put a dent in her spiritual pretensions for a while, even if it couldn't be guaranteed to completely demolish them. For he knew her well enough by now to know that she wouldn't give up those pretensions too easily, no matter what he did or said to her. No doubt, the fact that she was the daughter of a philosopher had something to do with it, making her more conscious of the spirit or, at any rate, the mind than would otherwise have been the case.

But she was still a woman, damn it, and therefore a creature, Nolan reasoned, in which flesh generally predominated over mind, in which appearance generally got the better of essence, the alpha of the omega. She was entitled to meditate, by all means, but meditation wouldn't change her into a man! She'd still possess all the physical charms with which nature had endowed her, including large breasts, the fluidal contents of which wouldn't take kindly to the proximity of too much airy breathing, and it was from the exploitation of those bountiful charms that she'd derive her *raison d'être* in life, not from the spirit! If she persisted in assuming the contrary, too bad! It would simply show that she was a victim of heredity, upbringing, and, to some extent, the times, which, as many people well knew, worked to further the development of masculinity or, at any rate, artificiality at the expense of the more natural feminine element in life. If she was primarily a victim of heredity and upbringing, there wasn't much Nolan supposed he could do about it. But to the extent that she might be a victim of the times, with her head up in the clouds of a prosperous career, he thought it possible she could be disillusioned to a degree which would make her more consciously feminine and, consequently, a better companion than she'd occasionally shown herself

to be. For although he wasn't entirely destitute of spiritual ambitions himself, he found their prevalence in a woman, especially a highly attractive and seductive one, both obnoxious and somehow irrelevant. Women weren't put into this world to develop their spirituality, he reflected, but to safeguard the flesh and thus keep the species going. Heaven, when it finally came, would be an entirely transcendent affair – pure spirit. To live with a well-endowed woman who regularly practised meditation for long stretches at a time, and somehow imagined that she was a potential candidate for the transcendental Beyond, was simply to live with a dupe! Better to disillusion her if one could. And how better, Nolan conjectured, than to make her thoroughly conscious of her seductive power and, if possible, undo or, at any rate, undermine her past conditioning? True, it mightn't prevent her from meditating, but at least it could serve to remind her of her rightful interests in life, to make her conscious of the necessity of taking her physical charms more seriously, since they were more than merely decorative. After all, one had to acknowledge the flesh to some extent, if mankind was to survive.

"Yes, what a pleasing arse you have," Nolan commented, once he'd studied the development of her flesh from the calves to the thighs, and then from the thighs to the ample contours of her buttocks. "There are few women who could be accused of outdoing *you*, where the extent of its seductive potential is concerned."

"Really?" Bridget responded, her intonation betraying a calculated degree of petulant indifference; for this was usually the point where her husband terminated his investigations. Yet no sooner had she given vent to that ... than she felt a degree of concern entering her mind. For, to her surprise, Nolan had now pulled her legs back to a point where her feet were almost level with her ears, having suddenly decided to squat down on her upended calves as though to pinion them or, at any rate, her shins to her chest. And this is precisely what he next proceeded to do, so that she was absolutely powerless to move. "Darling, what *are* you doing?" she asked, in rhetorical bewilderment. Had he gone completely crazy?

But no, Nolan was simply taking his investigations a stage further than previously, squatting down on her calves while resting a palm on each of her buttocks. He was scrutinizing her white-pantied rump from an even more advantageous vantage point. And not only scrutinizing it, but, to her greater surprise, caressing it, to boot! She was completely at his mercy!

"Yes, one can be under no doubt as to the quality of your arse, even with your briefs in the way," he remarked, ignoring her question. "But one will have to get rid of them, if one wishes to verify the quality of what lies beneath." And almost immediately, before she could say anything, he'd seized her briefs in both hands and begun to lift them away from her flesh, applying his teeth, in due course, to that part of them which had covered her sex. Before she could protest or inquire just what he thought he was doing, he'd bitten a hole there and begun to tear them down the middle by pulling their material in opposite directions, causing a three-inch rent to appear. Now he could scrutinize her sexual cynosure close-up.

"But, Barry, they're my new panties!" she protested, as the enormity of his fetishistic eccentricity began to dawn on her. "I bought them specially for this evening ..."

"Did you indeed?" Nolan responded unconcernedly. And, without further ado, he began to apply his lips to her sex, gently kissing it and simultaneously inhaling the musty odour which emanated from its soft skin. There was nothing she could do to prevent him; for even her arms were pinioned down either side of her chest. He had her exactly where he wanted her at that moment. After the first few preliminary kisses, his investigations became a little bolder, as he proceeded to probe her opening with his tongue and even – heavens! she could hardly fail to notice – nibble at her emerging clitoris with his sharp front teeth.

Yes, he was exploring her flesh all right, and what he'd discovered about it was sufficient to preclude him from changing his opinion of her spiritual pretensions. It simply confirmed him in it, making him, if anything, more determined to stick by his guns. For now that she was beginning to moan softly behind him, to experience her womanhood afresh, he could be under no doubt that the lesson he had to teach her was sinking in, and that she was responding to it in an appropriately sensuous manner. She would continue to respond to this lesson until he brought it to a thrilling conclusion. And then, well, then it was her duty to accompany him out to dinner dressed not in all-white, as it present, but in all-black – her proper colour. That was why he'd put a rent in her new panties!

LIVING IN THE CITY

Pascal had said that a man would save himself a lot of inconvenience if only he could learn to sit still in his room, scorning the outside world as much as possible. Matthew Ryan, a leading twentieth-century writer, had come, through bitter experience, to appreciate the shallowness and narrowness of Pascal's oft-quoted dictum. He had indeed spent a great deal of time sitting still in his room, but instead of saving him the suffering that would presumably have come from venturing out of it for any length of time, this reclusive habit had resulted in his experiencing more pain than ever he would've got from the outside world, had he chosen to dwell there in defiance of Pascal. But he hadn't done so, and for the simple fact that he was a writer who needed somewhere private to work. He couldn't bring himself to write in the reference department of the local library, despite its ample provisions for sedentary toil, since he would've been exposed to public scrutiny and become self-conscious. He would also have been exposed to the coughings and shufflings, comings and goings, questions and answers, wailings and slammings, snivellings and sneezings, etc., which figured so prominently in the reference room on an average busy day, while from the street he would've heard children crying or dogs barking or cars honking or workmen hammering or women shouting or any number of other extraneous noises which invaded all departments of the library at virtually any time of day!

No, he couldn't force himself to work in the local library. There was far too much noise about and, besides, he needed privacy. Serious writing regularly entailed periodic deliberations, not to mention frequent erasures or modifications of unsuitable material. He would've felt embarrassed to behave in such a way in public, particularly as he also needed to take periodic breaks from his work during which time, usually amounting to ten minutes, he'd simply be sitting there doing absolutely nothing. What he did or didn't do in private, on the other hand, was his own business, including the way he'd sometimes scrutinize a page close-up, on account of being very short-sighted. And so, eschewing the temptation – sometimes very pressing – to visit the local library or, for that matter, work in the local park when the weather was fine, he remained in his room, which became for him a kind of study. He'd no option *but* to remain there.

Yet, contrary to Pascal's wisdom, he didn't escape all that much suffering by remaining put. For it was one of the noisiest rooms conceivable, or, to be more precise, it was exposed to the noises emanating from other rooms of the lodging house, as well as to noises issuing from the surrounding external environment, as with the library. He kept the noise level in his own room down to a minimum, but his neighbours had, for the most part, no pressing desire to follow suit. Rather, they indulged in their various noises to the limit, or so it often seemed to him. Consequently the ordinarily difficult task of writing along seriously original philosophical lines was made doubly, nay, trebly difficult by the all-too-frequent prevalence of neighbour and environmental noises which, conspiring together, could only make for increased suffering. God knows, one suffered enough from one's work, without having to endure external noises as well! But there it was; by sitting still in his room, Matthew Ryan had discovered the relative and altogether limited applicability of Pascal's famous dictum. He'd actually come to despise it!

But here a discerning reader may well wonder why, if he hated noise so much, our writer couldn't find somewhere quieter to live. Well, the explanation here is simply that he couldn't *afford* anywhere quieter to live; that, for want of a sufficient income, he was obliged to remain in the relatively inexpensive accommodation in which he was living. But why, the reader might then wonder, was he in want of a sufficient income? Ah, the explanation there would have to be that he was a writer whose writings were too progressive and sophisticated to earn him a sufficient income and enable him to move to somewhere quieter. Yes, here was the paradoxical truth of the matter! For instead of serving to make him rich or, at any rate, moderately well-off, his writings only served to keep him poor, despite what he considered to be their intrinsic intellectual value. And they kept him in poverty because they were too elevated to appeal to the broad masses, the bourgeoisie, the work-a-day drudges – to all but a comparatively small number of persons who preferred the pursuit of truth to the indulgence of vice. They kept him poor *because* of their quality!

Oh, you may well wonder, but isn't it odd that work of quality should fail to be appreciated on its true merits and granted due recognition? Ah, you clearly fail to appreciate the nature of contemporary capitalist society if you wonder that! You fail to appreciate the fact that, the commercial requirements of publishers notwithstanding, a majority of people are simply incapable of recognizing the merits of a work of real quality. You haven't

realized that the majority of people in countries like England are too philistine to care anything for exceptional writings, but are only too willing to continue reading literary trash – assuming they read at all, that is! You haven't appreciated the hideous spiritual inequality which exists between man and man, as between the cultural Few and the philistine Many, not to mention the civil Many and the barbarous Few, the former indirectly sucking-up to the cultural Few and the latter indirectly sucked-up to by the philistine Many.

But, of course, Matthew Ryan *had* appreciated it, this inequality between man and man, and, being unable or unwilling to stoop to the popular level of fiction, had done his best to live with the fact, even if this *did* mean that he was obliged to resign himself to poverty while lesser writers grew wealthy on the stupidity and gullibility of the masses, grew rich by producing the kinds of writings which he, through spiritual nobility, was utterly *opposed* to producing. All he could do was carry-on with the kinds of writings which meant something to him and became him. And those writings were largely what kept him chained to the humble lodgings in which he lived – a prisoner of circumstances! There was no alternative fate, since he couldn't alter his style or content, bringing them more into line with popular taste, and thereby 'sell out', as the expression goes, to the lowest-common-philistine-denominator, producing not quality literature but commercial trash! A man is what he is, and nothing can change him. If he is destined to be like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche or Spengler or Hesse or Baudelaire or even Huysmans, there's little or nothing he can do to alter the fact. One doesn't choose to write for a mass readership; one is either disposed to doing so or indisposed, as the case may be. And for anyone with any degree of above-average intelligence and an appropriately serious temperament, there's not the slightest chance of one's being disposed to writing for the broad masses! There isn't the slightest chance of one's stooping to the level of adventure stories or thrillers or ghost stories or sentimental romances or war or crime novels or science fiction or horror or whatever else is usually read by a majority of the reading public, which is still a minority – even quite considerably so – of the public in general. One simply can't do it. And consequently one can't expect to make all that much money from what one *does* do – from work which seems to one of real literary value. On the contrary, one has no option but to accept the fact that only a comparatively small minority of persons would be capable of appreciating it, and only a fraction of those are actually going to appreciate it, no matter how progressively insightful in philosophical or other matters it may happen to be. Even Lenin and Marx didn't really write for the masses, the proletariat, but

for those who'd subsequently lead them. That's a significant distinction!

And so Matthew Ryan had come to accept the harsh reality into which circumstances had inexorably led him, contriving to persevere with it as best he could. In a sense there was no real alternative, short of suicide. But suicide wasn't something he particularly wanted to entertain, since death, whilst it might put an end to one's personal and professional problems, would hardly serve the world's improvement. For the world could only be improved and eventually transcended by people like him remaining in it, continuing to fight on behalf of quality and progress, continuing to impose his higher thought upon it. To kill oneself would simply be to destroy what opportunity one had, by living in the world, to work for the general good. It would be to succumb to the evil in life, to fall along the way, to allow the philistines to triumph over one. But the most enlightened people had to survive if the world was to be improved and, eventually, overcome by a superior system. They had to continue the war against the Devil, against everything low and evil, vain and predatory, superficial and mean. That was their *raison d'être* for being in the world, not simply to enjoy themselves. Only the people or, rather, a broad and usually youthful stratum of the masses could content themselves with self-enjoyment, with simple irresponsible hedonism – as Ryan had learnt to his cost! How many times, he reflected, had he struggled with his writings, during the day, while neighbours played rock 'n' roll or pop music on their record-players for hours on-end! Ah, it was terrible, the extent of the irresponsibility and inconsideration of these half-witted proletarians, these quintessentially mass types! Irresponsibility and inconsideration – weren't they the most frequent evils that one encountered in lodging-house accommodation?

Yes, there could be no doubt of that fact in Matthew Ryan's mind! He knew his neighbours well enough, by now, to know that much! He hadn't spent years dwelling among them to be blind or deaf to their abuses. He knew that, left to themselves, they tended to behave just as they pleased, without respect or consideration for anyone else. Indeed, there were times when he'd felt obliged to complain about the noise and humbly request that the volume of radio, television, record-player, or whatever, be turned down a bit.

Sometimes the neighbours responsible for the noise responded sympathetically. Sometimes not. On one occasion, when his next-door neighbour's radio had kept him awake late into the night, he'd received, as response to his eventual complaint at around 4.00am, a punch on the face and a barrage of highly abusive language that continued until after 4.30. The man

had evidently been drinking in the company of some woman, presumably his latest girlfriend, and, being desirous to impress her or, at any rate, not lose face, he'd resorted to violence and bad language when asked to show some consideration. Inevitably, Ryan had beat a gentlemanly if, under the circumstances, slightly ignominious retreat to his room, having no desire to indulge in physical violence with the man who, in any case, was older and physically stronger. Physical violence was all very well when one was on a par with the average muscular type, but when one was above it – ah! there could be no question of one's doing anything but turning the other cheek or, if one felt unduly endangered, threatening to sue the man for assault. After all, it isn't in the interests or nature of one who was more spiritually evolved to resort to physical violence, like a thug. The only kind of violence such a person could or should resort to is mental violence, like strong words or sharp looks, in accordance with his status as a gentleman, or someone who, for a number of reasons, was above physical threats. Mental violence was a gentleman's prerogative, in view of the fact that he shouldn't be expected to demean or compromise himself by indulging in physical violence. Only a 'man of the people', who also happened to be a coarse proletarian likely allergic to thought, could reasonably be expected to resort to the latter, since he was less mentally or intellectually evolved and, consequently, more under the influence of his senses, his emotions, his body. And this was precisely what Ryan's nearest neighbour *had* resorted to on the night in question!

However, as relations between them gradually quietened down again, he'd no reason to fear a repeat performance of that experience in future. Though he remained on his guard, so to speak, and refrained from acknowledging the man whenever they crossed on the stairs or in the hallway. It wasn't as though Duggan had become an enemy to him; just someone to be avoided and despised for his foul behaviour. An enemy, on the other hand, had to be someone closer to oneself, someone whom it was possible for one to hate rather than simply despise. His next-door neighbour was simply one of 'them', meaning an average Joe.

But Matthew Ryan had never gone out of his way to quarrel with average people or, more precisely, his neighbours. He'd simply wanted to carry on with his work and forget about them as much as possible. Yet much as he wished to forget about them, they didn't necessarily wish to forget about him, but preferred to remind him, on various occasions, that he was a stranger among them, a social outsider. They'd sometimes feign polite coughs or, alternatively, make vulgar wretching sounds or purposely drop things on the

floor (his ceiling) or slam doors and cupboards. They had a number of ways of reminding him of his social origins, of the fact that his behaviour was inherently different from and even morally superior to theirs. It didn't matter how socialist or progressive one considered oneself to be, they didn't care what one read or wrote or thought, but based their opinion of one on one's appearance, accent, general behaviour, and occupation. Had Marx, Engles, Lenin, or Trotsky been living in similar circumstances, matters probably wouldn't have been any different. The neighbours would've sensed their intellectual aloofness and accordingly taken measures to oppose them, no matter how humbly. For the difference between average people and those who are above average is essentially one of intelligence, and it matters little whether or not the latter use their greater intelligence to improve the former's lot – at least not to the former themselves. The fact that one's behaviour is different suffices to make them suspicious of one, to regard one as an enemy or, at any rate, a potential threat, whether for good or ill!

Thus Matthew Ryan hadn't struck-up friendly relations with any of his neighbours over the years of his confinement to this single room. He'd simply dwelt among them. But, in dwelling among them, he'd come to see them in a much clearer light than would've been possible had he still been living elsewhere – say, in the comparatively middle-class provinces. And in seeing them in such a light, he'd avoided the illusions which usually befell those who saw them less clearly, as from a rosy distance in the comparative safety of their suburban or provincial environments. He'd seen them as they *really were*, and that had been enough to convert him to socialism.

Previously he'd been an anti-bourgeois intellectual. Now he was a pro-proletarian intellectual. That was quite a distinction! He'd changed from being a kind of latter-day Baudelaire into being a kind of latter-day Lenin. He wanted to transform average people, in turn them into something higher and better than themselves – in a word, to overcome and elevate them beyond their human-all-too-human limitations.

Yes, there could be no doubt in his mind that most people had to be transformed, and thereby dragged out of their wretchedness and baseness. How long it would take to improve the quality of the race, he didn't pretend to know. But no matter how long the job had to be done, if life was to become better (or perhaps one should say less bad). There were basically only two types of people in the world at present: namely, mob types and nob types. The *raison d'être* of social progress, as he saw it, was to transform all mob types into nob types in due course, to raise the general level of human

life to a point where the highest possible type of nobility prevailed in the world at large, and mankind thus became spiritually united in their quest for ultimate transformation into a supreme level of being, if not actually into the Supreme Being itself! At present, however, the mob type, which mostly stemmed from the proletariat, was ranged against the nob type, which mostly stemmed from the bourgeoisie. This latter type was divisible between those who served themselves, as capitalist individuals, and those who served the masses, as socialists; between the hard-core of traditional bourgeoisie on the one hand, and the revolutionary supporters of the proletariat on the other hand. There was no such thing, as yet, as a proletarian nob. For at present the only possible kinds of nobility (using that word in its broadest sense) were either aristocratic or bourgeois, with the latter tending to predominate within various upper middle-class contexts. But bourgeois nobles can be in the proletariat's service, just as certain aristocratic ones were in the service of the bourgeoisie during the French Revolution, and this was certainly also true of many Bolsheviks at the time of the Russian Revolution! Their nobility was put to the service of the proletariat rather than predominantly reserved for themselves, as is generally the case with nobles of a traditional cast. But being a nob in the service of the mob doesn't mean that one intends to transform proletarians into bourgeoisie in due course, and Ryan was under no illusions whatsoever on this point. On the contrary, progress towards the highest possible type of nobility presupposed the transformation of proletarian mobs into proletarian nobles. The base clay, so to speak, of the urban environment had to be transformed into the highest possible nobility, not taken out of its rightful environment and reduced to a nobility compatible with the suburbs, if not the provinces! There could be no going back, so far as evolution was concerned! Willy-nilly, a new nobility had to be created!

But Matthew Ryan was essentially a bourgeois or, at any rate, an upper middle-class nob who, through force of circumstances, had become stranded in the city, and thereby cut off from his rightful provincial habitat. Being confined to the city, he'd not altogether surprisingly developed proletarian sympathies and become socially progressive, become revolutionary rather than remained rebellious, as had been the case when still a suburban youth. Yet he hadn't ceased to be intellectually upper middle-class through enforced confinement in the city, as his neighbours often reminded him. And even if they hadn't reminded him, he would've known it, known he was fundamentally a fish-out-of-water or, rather, a deep-sea fish languishing in the shallows, which was how he saw the artificial nature of the urban milieu, with its scarcity of vegetation.

Yet that's a relative matter, so let us return to the problem of our philosopher vis-à-vis his neighbours again, rather than remain in the realm of metaphysical speculation. Nevertheless, he was aware that his immediate neighbours were by no means untypical proletarians, being of a sensual disposition which allowed them to take city life more or less for granted. They were, he'd often noticed, of a different build from himself – either muscular or fleshy rather than thin. They were what the American psychologist W.H. Sheldon would've classified as mesomorphs or endomorphs rather than ectomorphs, like himself. And they'd absolutely no compunction about regularly visiting the local pubs or leaving cigarette butts lying around the house. Neither did they live alone, without the assistance of friends or the opposite sex. Had they done so, Ryan reflected, life might've been a bit quieter for him. But, of course, they couldn't be expected to do so, since they were too sensual to contemplate the prospect of remaining celibate and too vacuous to be capable of living alone for any length of time. They behaved in a manner which more or less guaranteed them mental health, free from crippling depressions, tensions, frustrations, and the like. Had Ryan stumbled upon a woman in the neighbourhood worthy of himself, life mightn't be so trying for him now either (assuming he would've been capable of responding to her in a relatively natural fashion – a somewhat debatable assumption in view of his urban-fostered lopsided spirituality!). But, unfortunately, he hadn't done so, since the only women he ever saw were either proletarians or unprepossessing petty-bourgeois types, and they could scarcely be expected to appeal to a man for whom cultural and intellectual company was a must, if he was to have any company at all. An average girl, even when attractive, would quickly have bored him, having very little in common with him. A woman had to be more than just a sex partner; she had to genuinely share his tastes and interests. And, by god! there were very few women in his neighbourhood who could be expected to do *that*.

No, an above-average man couldn't be expected to live with a female proletarian or otherwise unprepossessing type of woman. His father had tried and failed hopelessly, leaving him the victim of a broken marriage and a half-witted and fundamentally philistine mother whom he'd never ceased to despise. He'd absolutely no intention of making the same mistake himself, least of all with somebody who was also ethnically incompatible on account of her father's Protestant origins! If he were ever to live with a woman, she would have to be someone, on or near his own Catholic-derived wavelength, whom he could respect. But, at present, he was still hopelessly isolated and

therefore alone. The kind of woman he admired would probably be living in the provinces or maybe in another country, somewhere far from him. And, in all likelihood, she wouldn't be living amongst alien or hostile types either. On the contrary, she'd be living in accordance with the dualistic criteria of a compromise nobility, suburban and complete. How would he relate to her, after all this time cooped-up in the city? He wondered whether she'd be as interested in radical philosophy as himself? Probably not, he surmised.

A CANINE CRIME

Swiftly, though with agitated fingers, old Mrs Gilmour slid back the rusty bolt and pushed open the door leading to the cellar. Almost immediately a whining noise erupted from its murky depths, some yards below, followed by the scampering of paws and the rattle of a light chain. "Alright, Scotty, it's only me," the old woman murmured, as she switched on the electric light and, gently closing the door behind her, began, slowly and carefully, to descend the stone steps, as much from fear of dropping the plate of chopped-up meat she carried in her right hand as because of her age, which was past seventy. "It's only me, dearie," she repeated. For there was now much more excitement coming-up from the cellar than at first, though this was usually the case. Scotty was always anxious to see her, especially at meal times!

At last Mrs Gilmour reached the bottom of the steps, bearing the meat safely to its goal. "Shush! Not so much fuss," she protested, stretching out her free hand to pat Scotty on the nose. "Ah, how you strain at the leash, hungry one!" she added, before setting the plate down on the stone floor in front of the highly-excited spaniel who, having licked her fingers, straightaway proceeded to gobble-up the meat, as though he hadn't been fed in days. "There! There! Take you time," the old woman chided him, wagging a reproachful finger at the greedy dog. "You'll get tummy trouble!"

She straightened up and looked around the cellar, to check that everything was in order. Yes, there was still plenty of water in Scotty's drinking bowl and that was just as well, since too many trips up and down the stone steps were out of the question! Over in the far right-hand corner a little pile of droppings could be discerned, but that, too, was as it should be. "No worms, I trust?" Mrs Gilmour muttered, as she shuffled across to inspect the dung. "No, nothing to worry about, Scotty."

There was a small coal shovel and a heap of old newspapers lying nearby and, spreading out one of them on the floor in her usual patient fashion, Mrs Gilmour proceeded to shovel the dung onto the paper, making sure it was centrally positioned. Then she wrapped it up into a neat little parcel and carried it back with her towards the opposite corner from 'the toilet' (as the old lady regarded the crapping area), where 'the bedroom', or dog's basket,

was neatly made up, requiring only the slightest of adjustments to the soft cushions on which Scotty generally reposed. It was from here, through a bracket in the stone wall, that the slender chain holding him captive issued; though, being a long chain, his captivity wasn't confined to just a few feet, but embraced virtually the whole of the quite large cellar, so that he could move around fairly freely from corner to corner and even up to within a yard or two of the stone steps, as he did today in his impatience to greet his benefactress. Occasionally, however, he'd get himself caught-up in the chain, and so find life rather more constricting than formerly. But, as a rule, he was intelligent enough to avoid this inconvenience, even when he dragged the chain across his bed and ended-up more or less sleeping on it. Somehow, he had learnt to live with his chain, just as he'd learnt to live with his solitary confinement, broken only by occasional visits from the old woman. There was nothing he could do to get rid of it, since it was too strong to bite in half, though it did serve as a surrogate bone to gnaw on when the mood took him.

But old Mrs Gilmour couldn't have risked letting him off it, especially with the likelihood that, in his eagerness to greet her, he might bound up the steps and cause an accident either to herself or to the meat while she was painstakingly descending them. An accident could be fatal ... to both dog and owner alike! And then he might get out of the cellar altogether, run around the house or out into the street, barking at the top of his lungs. That would be terrible – even worse, if anything, than an accident on the steps! Obviously Scotty had to be chained up, as much for his own good as for ...

END OF PREVIEW