

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

CIRCULAR STORY

1.

"There is an empty house on Ghazeepore Road. Karl?" Johanna looked up from her pointwork, small eyes expectant behind the solemn wire rims.

"Yes. So?"

"So far from neighbours. And a large windbreak. That will be privacy."

"Always privacy. I do not seek privacy."

"You have work. You have your brother. I fear people Karl. I have to be honest."

A knock.

Karl stamped across the polished linoleum to the stable-door. Only his brother. Of course.

"Frederich. So."

"'schoen."

Silence. Johanna bent over her needlework. Never looking up. Frederich drew out his white handkerchief and blew.

"bitte."

Was she nearly smiling again?

2.

Karl is a hard worker. Karl has now spent years working on that cottage and it is indeed good. Every time I go there I think: it is good, all this Karl has done. I think I will buy a cottage too, acquire a wife, some little mouse like Johanna to bake bread and to keep my good house clean and neat. And then I look at Johanna and know Karl is a fool. If, perhaps, Johanna were more lively? No, Johanna is quiet as a mouse and will be always. Only, mice have hungry small teeth, they can chew through wood, bone, everything. Karl's hands are pitted and rough but she can chew through hands to the marrow. My hands are soft, soft as Johanna's were once – was it twenty years ago – when we all were young together, arriving. But mice breed. They have easy litters. Johanna – no. I should have murdered her then.

3.

There is an empty house on Ghazeepore Road. It hides behind a decaying windbreak of cypresses. The wind is cold, there, especially in winter. The glass is broken in one window, the rosetree has sprawled and then died. There are no other houses. Why does Karl drive past here again and again? Johanna is snug in their own cottage, so well maintained, close to shops and the public transport. What is it she really wants? Karl drives fast. His brother Frederick, Frederick should buy this house.

A sudden image of Johanna, looking up from her pointwork, small eyes gleaming behind the wire rims. Johanna and Frederick here, in this garden, crammed with flowers from the sagging rosebush. Is she nearly smiling again? Karl driving back towards town, hands pitted and rough. Hands pitted.

## ROBERT HANDICOTT

### DANCE BANDS

I have ten years' poems on the books, my semi-professional dance bands. Acts of all kinds: old time, boogie woogie, rock and roll, 60/40 – almost everything, and all good value. They may not be the Beatles – but who wants the Beatles? They love to make music. If seldom surprising, it's live.

My job is to get them odd bookings. They're grateful: a social, a New Year's party, they'll rock the old weatherboard walls of a hall till dawn, if the crowd's on its feet. – The drummers play all open work, but in time. The singers, no doubt, imitate; but are on the improve.