Glenn Chapman

AN ACT OF LOVE

“Yes, I do sympathise with you. But everyone has his problems. You must be more tolerant of other people’s views. I wouldn’t worry, those men are only trying to be friendly... Oh, thank you for the coffee.”

Now I was an engineering student in my second year before they set me up at this Guest House, locked away in middle class suburbia. My grades were average and I did enjoy scuba diving, despite the fact that I had a tendency to dive down too deep. This was hardly any reason, though, for my being sent to wile away the rest of my days at an asylum disguised as a Guest House. I knew it was an asylum because everyone it it, besides me, was crazy.

Things had been going along pretty nicely on the outside before they locked me away. I had my whole future mapped out gloriously. Clean as a whistle, I was a booming success story if I ever saw one. Only two more years and I’d have been a graduate. Then I could stroll along to the Careers and Appointments Office and find out what was really happening in the world. I expect I would’ve become a little disillusioned with the professional world. Instead of accepting one of the hundreds of high paying engineering positions offered to me, I would flatly refuse. The plain, simple life was for me, because I’d always felt I’d been gifted with that rare ability to make something out of nothing. So, I could take a job cleaning windows with the confidence that I could see a lot from where I stood, all simplicities yielding to the probing forces of my inquiring mind. My ambition: to work my way up as high as I could go, as a window cleaner. People would be talking about me, the famous window cleaner, everywhere. Able to clean windows like no one before him and probably no one to come. Advertisers would soon be begging me to endorse their detergents, me being able to give them that particular dirt fighting punch with my amazing manoeuvres on the panes.

My own company, status, and power. But alas, it would all come to a crashing fall when the world discovered that I possessed a degree in engineering. They’d say, “Ah ha! No wonder he was such a shining success: he knew a little more than your average window cleaner!” Thus, they would strip me of all my fortune, leaving me penniless and seriously considering joining a religious cult as a way out.

I wasn’t just going to be a success in the business world — I’d find a nice girl to be my wife. Now, I took out a couple of girls from
university, but they were only interested in two things: marrying a man of greater status and wealth than themselves and screwing the most spunky men along the way. I knew I didn't fit either of these categories, so I wasn't going to find a wife or have any fun along the way. Feeling the need to be taught a few lessons, I'd consult a pornography book containing pictures of women and articles expressing how readers lived their lives. I'd start off intending to read this magazine from cover to cover but all I'd learn was how to get a suntan using special European tablets and how some young American's cock was always popping up to say "howdy" to whoever, or how some senior citizens were having sex on the floor of a greenhouse when they were supposed to be watering the plants. I'd sense that this information wouldn't help me at all to find a girl who would like me for what I was and want to spend her whole life with me, so I'd put the magazine down, and sigh.

I am quite pleased with the plan I had devised for my normally abnormal life in mainstream society. If it turned out that after years as a recluse I ended up ruling the country, I'd have everything perfectly worked out for my memoirs. In fact, I used to practise talking about my future life every night to myself, as a means of falling asleep. It used to result in wild distortions of the logical procedure I had devised. In the agony of night, I'd be thrusting around on my soaking sheets worried like hell over the fact that I'd change my mind about cleaning windows one day while looking in at an office cleaner. The nightmare was that I'd become terribly envious about the cleaner having a whole floor to be responsible for, while I only had a meagre old window. It didn't seem fair; but there was nothing I could do. I decided if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, so I switched jobs to become a common office cleaner. Further catastrophies followed. My fame as a gifted window cleaner would be shattered. There would be no advertising endorsements or fortune. For who ever heard of a full time office cleaner becoming a resounding success? It just doesn't happen like that. This isn't Hollywood, you know.

Not that I have to worry now, of course. I don't dream or talk about things which will never happen. It seems such frivolity. Now that they've locked me away in this asylum (Guest House), I have to resign myself to the destiny which is mine. I shall spend my life helping the poor mentally disturbed people around me to die. I figure they were doomed to die right from birth, just as everyone else is. Only they aren't victims of as many diseases as the outside people. In here, we don't have to guard against the corporate machine, the education machine, the culture machine, the fashion machine. All of these are contained in the factory of society, which all the outsiders work for. So, we're lucky. We can move straight on to death and receive the
biggest, and last, shock of our lives. Mind you, it won’t be as drastic for us as the outsiders. We’ve already had plenty of shocks of the electric persuasion. Apparently, it’s the only time one can feel totally pure. I care about these people and intend to help kill them. If they really liked me, they would’ve killed me, too. It hurts to think they don’t want me as a friend.

I’d love to kill the lady who just had a drink in my room. She lives next door and has a huge bald patch on her bowling ball head. Luckily she never talks, except when someone walks into her room. She lets out mighty howls then and curses you like sin. As an amateur psychiatrist, it’s hard for me to tell what’s wrong with her. I think it must have been something her father did, or her mother. For she was definitely born the way she is. Right from birth no one loved her, so she sought refuge at an early age in religion. The problem became worse when she turned two years old. Her father, staggering home intoxicated one night, raped her. This was terrible. For a child of two, the consequences of this action were incomprehensible. She didn’t know what was happening to her. It felt like death, yet she lived through it. I’d say this is what made her hair fall out. Despite all this, she is a human being and does respond in the so-called normal ways whenever she eats fruit. In short, she does have some fine qualities and these appeal to me, so much so that I want to kill her. I want to put her out of her misery and make her pure.

I wish they had’ve killed me.

During the spring holidays we had arranged to go to the city. Miss Bedford was our mathematics teacher. Sam was her best pupil. This annoyed me, because before Sam got kicked out of boarding school and came to our high school, I was the best mathematics student in our whole year level.

I used to pride myself on it.

I had called Miss Bedford, asking her if she’d like to come around to Sam’s house, which is where I was. Sam had wanted her to come around to his house but was too shy to ring her himself. My mother always told me that the shy ones were the worst. I, also, wanted Miss Bedford to visit Sam’s house, so I volunteered to ring her. At that stage, as far as I knew, I was still the top mathematics pupil. It wasn’t until the final examination that Sam emerged with a perfect score of one hundred while I had to vainly try to content myself with a stingy ninety six.

Forgive me if the paper is wet, for those joyous days strike such a tender chord in my heart. I loved life back then.

I was always the lively one; outgoing, talkative, cheeky. Sam was always dark. Moody. Deep. Nobody wanted to play with him;
they all wanted to play with me. Once in our English class, Sam had written an abstract poem entitled, “Lady with the Brooch,” inspired by a painting of the same name. On that particular day, however, our teacher happened to be wearing a brooch herself. Sam felt too embarrassed to hand in the poem, in case our teacher thought he had written it about her. Again, I jovially came to the rescue, not only handing in the poem to the teacher but also making a witty tongue-in-cheek remark, which I can no longer remember. In those days I felt as though the world were at my feet. Those were the days.

Miss Bedford agreed to visit Sam’s house. Actually she was quite keen, for she said she wasn’t doing anything at the time and asked how soon could she come. A lovely evening. We listened to Sam’s record collection which was modest yet somehow complete. Sam had begun to exhaust his personal favourites, and was asking for suggestions on what to play next.

“Carol King,” said I. “Why not play Carol King’s ‘Tapestry’, which you bought last week?”

I repeated this plea, in various tones, twenty-one times during the course of the evening. I did it every time a record finished and each time Miss Bedford, ignoring my suggestion completely, named another record from Sam’s collection. At the end of the evening, when Miss Bedford reluctantly left, I still hadn’t heard Carol King. It was at this moment I knew there was something wrong with me.

“Either Miss Bedford and Sam are insane to ignore me and my suggestion like that or I am so repulsive I may as well be burnt.”

Now I knew Miss Bedford and Sam were not insane. Just two weeks ago, we had spent two hours, fifty-three minutes and ten seconds laboriously discussing the finer points of circular dynamics and their application to the creative processes of working class, middle-aged men. Their minds were prefectly clear on the furthermost details while my subconscious mind and my eyes stayed glued to the clock on the wall, wondering if anyone else in history had paid the price for friendship that I was now doing.

In conclusion, they knew about me. They somehow knew I was a worthless hunk of matter. Yet, they tolerated me, allowed me into their company, vainly attempted to advise me. All year I had regarded them as my closest friends, guarding them from anyone else with lavish arrogance.

What a fool I’d been! So now they finally knew that I didn’t deserve to live. I was certain of what had to be. That night I knew there was but one thing left for me to do. The next day in the city, I would invite them to kill me.

The car ride down to the city was ordinary enough, I suppose. I
sat in the back seat, it seemed more proper as if I were already a corpse being carted along. On arrival, I set to work, admitting all my past crimes, all my morbid weaknesses. Racing out of restaurants and forcing Sam to look for me, only to tell him how he was wasting his time. I wrecked their day out, their holiday. Dominating, criticising, chastising every miniscule of communication between them, I had achieved all that I could.

“Yes, I’ve wanted my father to die ever since I was three years old.”

“I’m glad you were kicked out of boarding school and disgraced. It made you look so low. So unloved.”

“I want to be the best student with the highest marks. I’ll do anything for a mark.”

I gave up. In the back seat of the car going home, I cried. They’d won, the bastards. I couldn’t contain it any longer. Meanwhile they carried on talking as if nothing at all had happened. Probability and statistics, they were into now, and how it extends to so many other fields of endeavour. I made my stifled sobs louder, so that they’d have to acknowledge them.

“Are you crying, Craig? Mmm . . . well.”

“What’s the matter, Craig?”

So, I ended up here, at the Guest House. I suppose it’s not that bad really. I would’ve preferred to die, but now the highlight of my life is the nightly meal in the diningroom. And, yes. Now I hate them. Hate them, for showing me no compassion at all.