

Fragile Interlude

Margaret Clyne

THE evening was warm and still. There had been one short glimpse of a pale moon, but now dark clouds hung low over the water. The small lake was encircled with a necklace of lighted windows as the cottagers got ready to attend the weekly dance at the summer school.

One large cottage was unusually noisy. Hurrying footsteps resounded loudly on the bar floors, and the excited chatter was constantly interrupted by bursts of laughter. Clutching wraps, screaming nonsense to each other, happy girls ran through the wooded yard to cars driven by chaperoning parents.

One girl, about thirteen years old, relaxed on the old-fashioned couch after they had all left. Her headache was not so acute, now that the confusion was over. She reflected drowsily that the peace was lots more fun than watching girls with peeling backs dancing with sun-burned students.

The cottage was old and creaky, and after a while the punctuated quietness was queer and lonesome. In the corner of the room the one lamp spotlighted two worn reed rockers; they looked very large and empty. The unaccustomed solitude pushed her out to the porch and she was a little relieved to see that the nice old couple in the second cottage had their Japanese lantern lighted.

She wandered down to the step at the pier, finally sat down, stuck her elbows on her knees, and propped her face in cupped hands. Gazing idly at the dark, smooth water, she decided whimsically that the row of dim, white piers was a giant picket fence and the anchored boats were flower pots on the posts.

"It's only when I am alone that I can think of things like that," she thought. "The others would laugh."

A slight breeze ruffled the lake and tossed faint phrases of music to her. Tiny waves playfully slapped the boats and tried to climb the shallow sea wall. The little old wild cherry tree above her rustled a welcome to the cool, soft winds.

The clouds started floating away, allowing an occasional star to peep through. Suddenly the whole lake was lighted with ethereal magic, and a brilliant, shimmering path stretched from the deep waters right to her feet.

"It's silver lamé, embroidered with rhinestones," she mused delightedly, "and I am the only one who can see the dragon-fly fairies dancing on it."

The girl raised happy eyes and became rigid and breathless, entranced with the beauty of the silver moon shining at her through the leaves.

"The moon wears a black lace mantle," she whispered. Her thin,

awkward body quivered with emotion as she thought, "It's like a poem! Poets must live in an enchanted world like this!"

She sensed the shifting pattern of light and shadow on her rapt, upturned face and it seemed a special wisdom was being given to her. Slowly, ecstatically, she tried to translate her feelings into words, murmuring the lines aloud.

"The moon is holding court, wise and serene,
With all the grace of a heavenly queen.
Through the ages she has reigned at night,
Transformed ugliness with glorious light.
She smiles down through the lacy tree,
And I, being mortal, can but try to see
The incredible beauty her silver has wrought—"

What would rhyme with wrought? She shivered. It was a long while since the moonlight had set the piers gleaming and laid the path of dancing moonbeams on the water. "Has wrought on a drab world—"

The staccato sounds made by car doors, shrill laughter, high heels, banging screens, jerked her to her feet. The cottage looked huge and alien in the cold light.

The Rose

Charlotte Walton

WHEN James Kennedy had completed the construction of his fortune, he set about building his home. He had gathered for himself the greatest wealth and power a man could amass in his day, and he applied the same energy and determination to his house. When he had finished, he owned one of the most beautiful homes a man could create. Into his perfect setting he put his most prized possession, his Rose.

The house was a delight to the Rose. Every part of it, from the thick, soft carpets to the sloping lawns, had been ordered for her comfort. When Lucas woke her each morning by walking up from the place below her feet where he slept and pushing his cold nose into her hand, birds were singing in the tree outside her window and the sunlight penetrated the sheets, covering her like a warm blanket.

She and Lucas spent the days roaming the long halls, searching for the doorknobs of unfamiliar rooms, playing delightedly with the buttons and gadgets they found in unexpected places, or exploring the rose gardens and lawns. Sometimes, if they were lucky, they would discover the way to the garden house, where they could sit on the smooth benches and listen to the fountains splash over the rock gardens. If they were tired of walking they could lie on the soft