

through the brown streaked window. He closed his eyes and forgot.

A jolt awakened him in time for his stop. He got off. Two small boys on the corner laughed as they threw pebbles which bounced against the yellow-orange sides of the bus. They danced about in unrestrained gaiety like two leaves in the wind. They ran off down the alley filled with brown-stained boxes and yellowed newspapers.

Dan watched the two boys. A glaze filled his eyes. The free, easy ways of children. New thoughts—black, oily streets; stolen pennies; sweet apples coated with a red crust; blue bruises on red, swollen arms; robbers attacked by policemen with wooden guns.

He opened the door with the scaled varnish. Lois was on the couch. Sleeping again. But she tired so easily now. The late evening sunlight came through a triangle tear in the faded blue curtains and played with the golden strands in her hair.

She was pretty that way. The lashes made little blue-black semi-circles on her pale cheeks. Her mouth pulled into that little pout with the lower lip full. She was small, thin. Really thinner than when he had first met her.

Yes, on the bridge. In the park. With white swans slipping over the pond in stately authority. And they had talked, aimlessly, easily while walking on under green maple trees in the soft, humid shade.

But so much had happened since then. Breakfast. He had been unkind again—unconsciously, of course. He loved her. Yes, especially at times like these when he watched her. But he got some strange, unrecognized pleasure from hurting her in all the little ways. As if she were to blame for his failure. Making up for his deficiencies.

But if he lost her—Dan knelt and started to kiss her gently. But his hand recoiled from her arm as if he had touched a snake. Cold. Her face was damp. And cold. The skin felt like the cool metal of his lunch pail. And small globs of white plaster had congeled on her fingertips and under the nails. One of the nails was broken. Red-brown stains of dried blood had fallen on her dress. She wasn't breathing. She wasn't—

The tears fell on her pale cotton dress leaving little dark stains of apology next to the blood spots.

Vertigo

Jessie Cochran

THE ELEVATOR was the first thing to be endured. It was an express, all the way to the nineteenth floor, and gave Carolyn the horrifying sensation of plunging upward. She closed her eyes and tried to stop thinking that there was absolutely nothing under her. The chilly terror left only minutes after she was in her mother's hospital room.

It was a nice room, as such rooms go, with an air conditioner and the venetian blinds pulled down and adjusted so you didn't have to see how high up you were. The room was dominated, of course, by the tall iron bed and the old lady lying in it.

"Hello, Mother." She let the door close with a hospital-like shushing noise and managed a smile.

"Why Carolyn!" There was a pause . . . mustering her strength, she ventured, "Did you bring my check?"

"Yes, I remembered this time."

The old lady's head sank back to the pillows where she had craned it up in a comical fashion, though deadly serious, and she laughed. "This is costing me a whole lot, you know. My bank account is getting low. Is that another new dress you have on?"

Carolyn sat down in the one chair and lit a cigarette, noting automatically her shaking hands. *How long does it take, she wondered, to get rid of this? It's so hot I think I'll lose my mind. I haven't been down here in the summer for years and years. . . .*

"Yes, I haven't been down here in the summer for years and years and I don't have any summer clothes at all. Mostly winter. Anyway nothing for weather like this. I haven't been here in the summer for years—" she stopped, gratefully, because she knew she was beginning to babble, as her mother hawked and spat into a Kleenex.

"It's my throat, I've got to keep it clear of phlegm. All the time I have to cough and spit. You don't know what a narrow scrape I had. Did you know I was on I.V.'s for two weeks?" She opened her eyes to point up the drama and gritted her front teeth against each other. Carolyn shook her head slowly in solemn awe. "Two weeks, and nothing to eat except what they got into me through that tube. I don't know why they didn't let me go." She laughed merrily at the very idea and Carolyn laughed, too. Why, indeed.

"It all happened so funny. There I was—I had gotten up just as usual and bathed and done my hair and was going down for the paper—when I got this *funny* feeling like a heart attack, sort of black, but then I had the doctor's number right there by the phone, my darling doctor, I just love him, so I called and he said, 'Katey, you just stay right there and I'll be out—'."

And so they put you in the hospital with your third stroke, thought Carolyn. We'd all thought you'd stop with your third stroke, as I wish you had stopped with your third baby instead of going on to four. If you had, I'd be a Maeterlinck baby now, sitting up in heaven waiting around, with at least a chance. But the frightful, daily reiterated story of the third stroke was continuing and her mother's coughing, rasping voice couldn't be shut out.

"And when Dr. Calloway examines me I don't know where examination ends and monkey business begins, if you get what I mean." She leered out of old flat eyes, grown dead brown now and couched in wrinkles, smiling flirtatiously. Somewhere in Carolyn's

midsection a hand slowly squeezed and then let go. *Now that air conditioner*, she thought. *That's a splendid air conditioner and one that anyone would want . . . just don't think about what she says.* "He's quite free with his hands, just like my morning nurse, that what's her name. I never can think of it. Some funny name. Why, she doesn't think any more about handling my body than you would about a stick." Hawk. Spit into Kleenex.

And then there's the elevator on the way down, too. I have to make that and I have to make the drive home, but then I can have a drink—three drinks—and then I'll eat and then take a thorazine and go to bed. Good. If it were only done. She completed the rest of her day two times, slowly, imagining how she would do it, and her mother's voice came in again.

"I hated the Milltowns, they made me sleep all the time, but on that Thorazine I was just as happy!"

Before she thought, Carolyn said, "I take Thorazine, too."

"You. What do you need it for? You haven't had a stroke. What could possibly be the matter with you?"

"I don't know. Just nerves. I'm jumpy, I guess."

"Well, you oughtn't to dope yourself up with all those pills. When I was your age I was busy raising babies and had so much to do I was thankful just to fall into bed at night." Another comical gesture, this one indicative of falling into bed at night, was accomplished by a flailing of the skinny arms and the mouth pulled down and in.

She now began the long process of sitting up, gasping and bugging out her eyes, the gray braids tied with ribbons falling forward over her bony shoulders. She was making it, as always. "Give me some help here, Carolyn. Help your old mother."

Thinking "I won't touch you," Carolyn sprang forward and put her arm behind her mother's shoulders. They felt like the wings of chickens. "These thin, wirey women never die," her father had said, and then he'd cut out for good.

"I wish the doctor would come while you're here so you could meet him. He's so darling. Do you know how he makes me feel? He makes me feel young and desirable, and that's the way I *think* about myself. I'm not old. I'm young and desirable. All my men friends—pardon me, I have to spit, just a minute, hand me the Kleenex, will you—all my men friends—ha-ha—tell me I'm cute and have a good shape. Right before this happened the butcher told me I was his favorite customer and I know it's because he thinks my shape is nice. And it is nice, I know that. That dress you have on is a little tight across the midriff, isn't it? I hope it doesn't shrink when it's washed. I have lots of men friends, you know. The bus driver used to wait for me, and the milkman always chats on the back porch, though I have to be a leetle careful of him, such a big young buck."

For a quick, lucid moment Carolyn saw her mother as someone

else, perceived her objectively and not through the tear-drenched, fuddling years of childhood, and realized her mother was happy as a clam. All alone in the blazingly hot apartment her mother sat day after day, cozily examining her successes with milkmen and bus drivers, turning them over and over and stroking them, a Midas endlessly contemplating something more exciting than gold. After the stream of babies she had turned to babying her flourishing ego which had flourished even more, had grown and extended itself like a tropical liana and obscured the sky, leaving only itself to be nourished and tended. Devoted as a handmaiden or concubine, she performed her cherished task, lifting the brimming pitchers of hallucination proudly and really quite seriously. *The comical bit, thought Carolyn, the comical act is her only touch left with reality. It's just in case someone might guess—what?* How real it all is to her? She was getting confused again so she lit another cigarette, this time almost not making it. Her hand gave a sudden jerk and the cigarette flew into the folds of her skirt, her brand new skirt, and before she could find it the odor of scorched cloth filled the room. The old woman jerked around, sniffing the air.

"My God, don't burn me up now after what I've been through. You smoke too much anyway." She sighed. "I don't know, sometimes, I just don't know about you girls. When I think of Linda dead from drinking and Lucy coming down here to see me a nervous wreck—I really worry about her, she's so mean—and Margaret not even speaking to her mother, living right here in the same town. I just don't know."

And how about yours truly, thought Carolyn. You don't know about the analyst I went to and was too afraid to go back to for the very reason I went to him in the first place. Anxiety disorder, Mamma dear. That's me. That's me in pseudo-scientific terms. A pretty little psycho-neurosis for your prettiest little girl, the baby. Vomiting up the tanglewood tales of childhood for that cold little man, you emerged something of the ogre in the piece, the giant who lives under the bridge, the witch in the cottage, the mad queen rapaciously poisoning on a grand scale. Do you remember? The time you slapped me senseless for breaking a handmirror given free by the bakery, and you said I had supernatural powers, that I broke mirrors because there was something strange about me. I believed you, Mother!

"I think I'll just stand up, maybe walk around for a little bit if you'll help me, Carolyn. Come on now."

The time you listed my lovers, poor moral idiot that I was that wouldn't even kiss, including in your roster two of my girl friends. The time I turned around from the sink and saw you approaching with a milk bottle upraised to strike me from behind and all I could think of to say was "What did I do?" I wasn't a baby any more then, was I, but was that my fault? I wanted to be a baby, but I got so big.

"Carolyn, come help me." She had braced her hands on the side of the mattress, and was shuffling with her feet for the stool. "Come bring the little stool over here so I can get up."

Shut up, Mother, I'm remembering. The years of being told I was unpopular, "not at all like my other girls," and then finally when boys asked me out you'd be waiting up at the door, to one side of the door, and would leap out spitting venom and filth at them. The time—

"Carolyn, help me!" The old woman was listing crazily on the side of the bed now, just hanging on, one hand dangling uselessly in paralysis. "Ring for the nurse. Quick!"

The time you had appendicitis and refused to let me call the doctor when I wanted to, no, instead you sent me for the woman who lived across the street, and when I brought her in you said, "Would you please call the doctor? Carolyn refuses to and I think I'm dying." Remember the look of contempt on the woman's face as she dialed the doctor's number, and the smirk you gave me, even through your pain? Remember? How old was I then, thirteen or fourteen? But the woman wouldn't let me play with her daughter after that, and the daughter was my best friend.

"Carolyn for the love of God, help me. Why are you doing this?"

Slowly and with great effort Carolyn focused her eyes and saw her mother, the braids of hair falling wildly across her face, the arm ridged with straining tendons, the veins raised huge and blue with effort. She seemed to Carolyn to become, all at once, two dimensional, flat as a photograph of some old, old, melodrama, or a painting of a religieuse, contorted in the grip of hallucination: The Agony of Ste. Someone.

It was a mystification to Carolyn, this old woman, this picture of an old woman half in and half out of bed. She just couldn't place the name. Now who? Did she work somewhere, some store that Carolyn frequented? It was like meeting the mailman out of uniform, or the milkman. She knew that she knew her, but from where? Perhaps a teacher from grade school; they always looked the same, they never changed. Oh, she wished that she knew. Her mind strained with the effort of trying to remember, strained and then felt light and peculiar, and she squinted her eyes with the effort of remembering. The peculiar, light feeling crept down from her head, along her arms and to her fingertips and she became afraid she would be engulfed and never be able to move again if she didn't remember who this old woman was. She rose from her chair to get a better look at the face but remembered—just in time—that this was forbidden. *Don't go near, don't touch!* What a narrow escape, she had almost touched her! She sat down in the chair again and looked at the figure on the bed with great pity, great regret. The poor old thing was going to fall, that much was clear, and how terribly sad that it was forbidden Carolyn to help her. She was

trying to scream now, but her energy was being exerted in holding with claw-like hands onto the sheets, which were slowly slipping. Her breath was coming in animal grunts, through lips strained back over teeth, each gasp a paroxysm of terror.

It took her about five more minutes to fall, and it was about fifteen minutes later that the nurse came in for her afternoon round of temperature-taking and found the old woman, quite dead, and her daughter sitting in the chair beside her, shaking her head ruefully over the pity of it all, smoking a cigarette.

The Trauma of Truth

Clarice Noland

KNOWLEDGE is wondrously enlightening, throwing off the shackles of ignorance which bind man to a lowly, unimaginative life, giving him wings with which to soar to gloriously dizzy heights of understanding, and yet making him humbly appreciative of the world and what mankind has achieved with the faculties given him by a magnanimous God. Much has been said about how little man knows; much has been expressed stressing his incompetence. But, consider what he does know and what he has accomplished in a relatively short span of time on the celestial calendar. Knowledge, painfully gathered through eons upon eons, has placed man upon an ever-spiraling staircase to the stars, with each step freeing humanity from a disease, helping man to better his way of life, giving him a greater comprehension of his environment. By knowledge man is freed from the innate characteristic of fabricating a reason for everything within his capacity to conceive. To him the truths revealed by knowledge are often as fantastic as the fallacies. Knowledge may be awesome; yet this knowledge which raises man to undreamed of heights may also heave him headlong out of his blissful security into an abyss of despair and disillusionment. As a result, many beliefs of our childhood, a period in life which we view as having an impenetrable sanctity, are brutally smashed by the crushing weight of an unsuspected truth. The person, a victim of his own ignorance, wanders blindly in a cloud of disenchantment, feeling he has been forsaken by humanity and missing, perhaps for the first time, the invulnerability of childish dreams. "So clear and deep are my fancies of things I wish were true," deplores a popular song, voicing the lamentations of all men robbed of their dreams.

Several years ago I felt that the world, so loving and warm, had suddenly deserted me in the middle of a horrible nightmare. I was alone, I felt, to confront this perplexing situation. Never had I recognized how fully and unquestioningly I believed that I knew the exact whereabouts of heaven. How vividly can I yet recall, still with an involuntary shudder, the fateful words of my Sunday school teacher.