

THE ROOM

Elisabeth Harter

The door resisted but finally scraped open, exhaling musty odors from within. A waning moon of light on the opposite wall was reflected from a circular mirror on the right. Otherwise, the room was dark and inhabited by shadows. I fumbled along the wall and switched on a lamp—a dim bulb stuck incongruously in a converted gas socket. The shadows retreated and lurked in the corners. The veneer on the four-poster bed across from me was splitting away from its backing in the cold, damp air. I wondered who had slept there. The only other piece of furniture was a high oak bureau covered with an embroidered dresser scarf and a thick layer of dust. Above it was the mirror—almost too aged and cloudy, I could see now, to reflect at all. Next to it hung a small plaque inscribed with Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." "And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!" Who was the boy who used to sleep in this room and treasure this verse? Surely the boy was a man and a father himself by now. My eyes turned to the windows. Carcasses of flies cluttered the sills. Even the Venetian blinds seemed dead, their eye-lid slats closed and their lashes spun from cobwebs. I turned and stared beyond the faded yellow diamond-patterned wall, as though searching into the past. The pattern blurred and doubled for a minute. Then the diamonds merged again in front of my focus, but they yielded no clues. Suddenly, I cleared my head and switched off the light. The door scraped shut as I left, and the room remained alone with its secrets and its shadows.

Experiment No. XIV

David Scott

Methane and carbon dioxide are your
ancestors O' populace of this mundane
sphere.

In this experiment, conducted by Him,
 the earth is a simple culture dish,
 and growth that is—is from that.
 In the void, innumerable trays revolve—
 around the central light,
 almost all containing the proper medium
 to develop—be that what it may.

These spores with ego, mouldering and
 growing, slowly inundate this tray,
 with red, purple and black.

'Tis a fruitless span at the lab—
 and will allow till Tuesday week,
 then—if no useful penicillin develops—
 a scrub, a rinse and into the autoclave.

Mr. Sweet

Kathy Prochazka

Mr. Sweet is dead
 who used to laugh
 joy-voiced
 over Sunday-morning toast
 succulent
 with orange marmalade

 who used to laugh
 mirth-wonderful
 over my grandfather's jokes, a pipe
 fragrant
 between his nicotined teeth

Mr. Sweet is dead
 grave-frozen
 beneath silent clay
 I never knew I could care . . .
 Jesus! How he used to laugh!