

scorned and ridiculed. And no doubt, my mother will rant and rave and wonder where she went wrong.

But when I look into the mirror now, I do not avert my eyes. I see before me a proud woman who has risen above the petty criticisms of society . . . to excel in a field where she stands alone, and unsurpassed. A woman who has come upon the firm conviction that unless we know who we are . . . and what we simply cannot bring ourselves to do . . . we will forever be the slaves . . . rather than the masters of . . . the dustball.

## A THEORY GROWS OLD

Karen Greene

Maybe he was old and crippled, but look at how fortunate he had been. Look at how many of his senile decrepit friends had taken up lodging in convalescent homes. No, he would never settle for that. Every picture-filled pamphlet with sauna and lounge scene found its way to the trash. Meadow Brook, Hillside, Leisure Village, Happy Valley—he had been recipient of all their “propaganda paper products.” Morning after morning he could be heard growling from his cushioned throne when Faith, his granddaughter, greeted him with the mail. Then Anita waited to hear the rustling of letters, pamphlets, and cards flying through the air like heaven bound doves. This was followed by silence—absolute and complete.

Within minutes Faith would emerge from her grandfather's room looking peaked, sometimes on the verge of tears. The wrinkled brow and clenching lips were a stranger to the face that usually glowed with the goodness of life. She was stunning with her long red hair and steel-blue eyes which seemed to laugh at the world. Unlike her mother, she failed to inherit the Moreheads' overly sharp jaw and gaunt cheeks. Perhaps these were to come with age. Anita liked to flatter herself saying that her daughter was her duplicate, but it was obvious that Faith was Jack Pearson's daughter. Everything reflected Jack, even Faith's ski slide nose and front bucktooth. She spoke with the same articulate tongue, used the identical hand gestures, and loved horse racing on Saturday afternoons.

Anita sat contemplating her father's condition. If only he hadn't had that stroke last year maybe the family could have had some peace. It was senseless now to try to change things. Homes were for invalids, which he was not, and Jack would never approve. It was true that he was her father, but Jack ruled the house. What he said was respected. If only—

The clock had just chimed twelve when Anita's thoughts were interrupted by the gruff voice from the bedroom shouting, "Anita!"

"Coming, father!" Quickly she rose and practically ran to aid "the Fuhrer."

On entering the room she saw her father propped high on his pillows. There was a disinfectant odor in the air which lingered and choked visitors unfamiliar to the surroundings and the situations. The old hospital bed had become a permanent monument along with the chrome roller table which was used for meals and eternal checker games. Rays of sunlight attempted to filter through the frilly curtains to be reflected off the sterile green walls. The room had formerly served as Jack's den. A bookcase bedecked with the typical statue of Darwin's theory (the ape contemplating a skull) was the only remnant of the clinical room's past. Many nights Anita had sat in the den on a huge overstuffed sofa (which had now been replaced by a special vaporizing system) watching Jack ponder over his law books. That was many years ago.

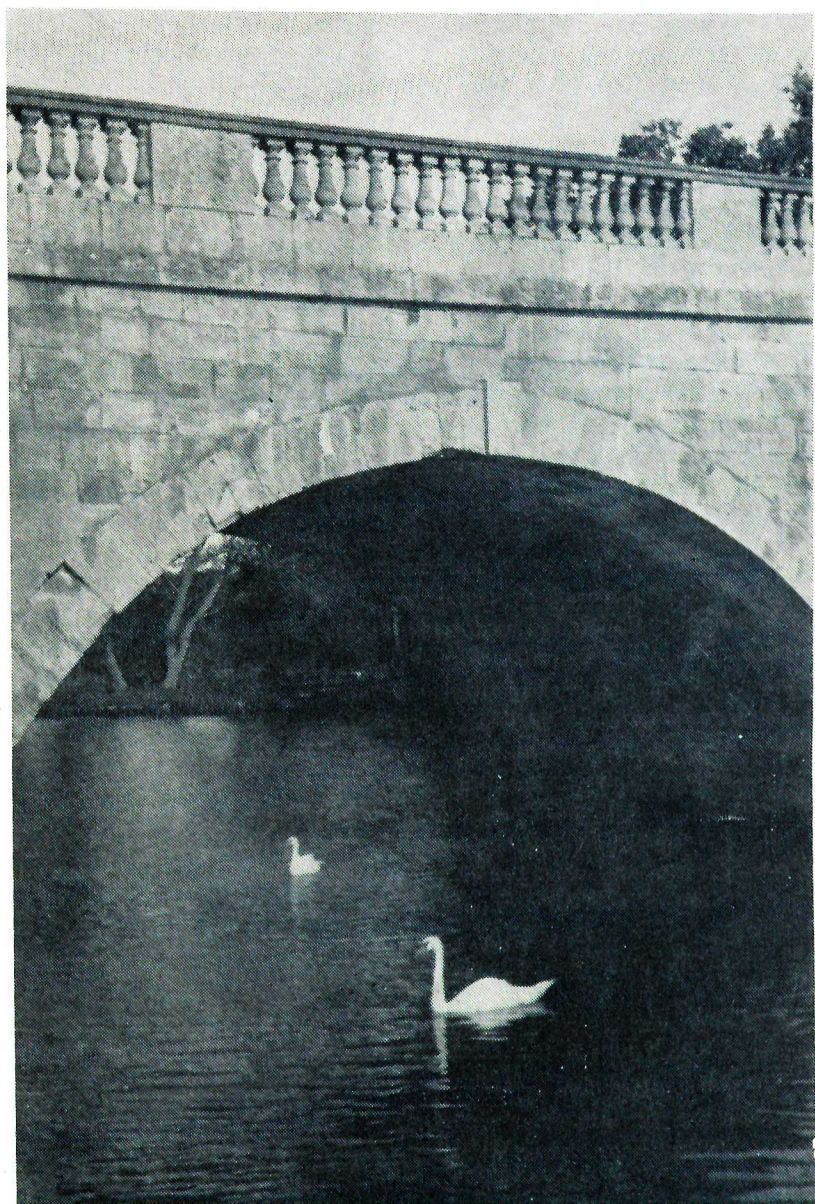
"Anita, do you think I could have some light in this prison?" the old man piped in.

"Surely, but you know what the doctor said. It's time you start doing things for yourself. If you want sunlight—you know where the curtain string is."

"Damn doctors!" he shouted. "It's all their fault that I'm here in the first place. Fools! Inconsistent bas—"

"That's no way to talk!" Anita screamed, "They've done everything for you. They've saved your life."

With that the old man sent the roller table, still set with breakfast dishes, sailing into the wall. Remains of toast, teabags and a china tea set flew against a maple set of drawers and scattered like dust particles. Anita stood there amazed and infuriated. She bit down hard on her lip as she gazed at the greyhaired man who still sat erect on his throne. There was complete silence. Her father's eyes were downcast as she stared directly at him never taking her gaze off him for a second.



The moment was interrupted by the banging of the front door. It was Faith home for lunch. A faint humming could be heard as the girl approached the sick room. Finally her head popped around the corner.

"Hi, Gramps."

Mr. Morehead lifted his eyes, which now sparkled, to his granddaughter. There she stood almost a full-grown adult. Next year she would be going to college. Then what would happen?

Faith piped up again, "It's stuffy in here," as she opened the frilly curtains.

The sunlight poured in and sent a bright streak of light across Anita's swarthy face. It made her grimace and abruptly leave the room. There was nothing to be said. The afternoon passed quickly. Faith had been anxious to return to school after her usual bland oatmeal lunch with her grandfather. Today he was even allowed rice pudding. As Faith tiptoed from the room with the tray, Anita could not help noticing the pile of china fragments and tea bags. The girl never inquired as to what had happened.

Anita spent the rest of the afternoon ironing in front of the television. Rarely did she tune in the soap operas, but today was an exception. Over the shadowy somber background music she heard an occasional cough from her father's room. He had not rung the bell next to his bed all day. At 3:30 Anita quietly walked into the room. He was sitting on the edge of the bed with his feet dangling off the floor. Between his front teeth he clenched a black puffing cigar. He seemed dazed.

When he saw his daughter he spoke out jovially, "Miriam! My-my-my how nice you look! What are you fixing for dinner? Are the children home?"

Anita could not answer. Yes, the doctor said this was common. There was nothing they could do. Without hesitating Anita turned and walked from the room. The name "Miriam" echoed behind her.

Back in the kitchen Anita found the potatoes boiling over and Jack standing with his briefcase in the doorway. Anita warmly welcomed her husband.

"It's been a long day," Jack said.

"Ditto."

The couple sat down to share the day's events and make plans for a future that never materialized. Maybe some day they would travel to some far-off island. They sat there conversing over the frequent coughs from the other room.

At last Anita tearfully added, "He was terrible today."

"I'm sorry," Jack replied.

"I can't take much more of this. It's not fair to us or Faith. It's ruining our family."

"Anita," the voice was firm, "it isn't that bad. It hasn't jeopardized our relationship and besides, Faith loves him!"

Tears streamed down Anita's face as she screamed, "You're not with him twenty-four hours a day!"

Another rapsy cough was heard as Jack replied, "I know and I can sympathize with you, but he is your father."

If you care so much—why haven't you gone in to see him today? You've been home an hour. Sure you love him—sure you care—is that why you never go in to see him? Is that why you never sit with him and play checkers or smoke cigars?

Jack let her cry. He knew that this had been hard on Anita. For several minutes silence fell on the scene.

Jack rose and said, "Come on—let's go talk to him."

Without a word Anita rose and together they walked through the living room until they met the oak door. Jack quietly turned the knob and they proceeded in. On the chrome table was an opened box of cigars. The flimsy white curtains were still open, but now gloomy twilight penetrated. Everything was in usual array, yet the room did not appear as sterile. A layer of dust had accumulated on the statute of "Darwin's theory." Finally their eyes fell on the old man. He was perfectly flat on the bed with his head tilted back. The mouth was open as if gasping for air and his eyes were shut. His skin had an unusual pale color. There was silence. Jack took Anita's hand, the only motion the room felt. Chills ran up her spine. It had happened. Just then the kitchen door was heard creaking open. It was Faith.

