

Adolf Muschg

The Scythe Hand

PERHAPS THE COURT of Enquiry is not aware that with my late wife Elisabeth I farmed for 15 years at Frogs' Well and was of good repute there, had enough to live on, too, until the same burned to the ground for dubious reasons in the year 1951 with our son Christian, aged two at that time, and I also lost all our livestock, as well as vehicles, because the fire spread too fast and the fire brigade did not arrive in time. Frogs' Well had been in the family for more than a century, and my grandfather farmed it to everyone's satisfaction in his time. Consequently my father, deceased, was even elected to the School Board, and I take the liberty of mentioning that I was able to attend the Secondary School at Krummbach, because my mother, deceased, skimmed no sacrifice. Water could have been drawn from the hydrant by the well, but the fire chief insisted on his view that this was frozen over, which was quite correct, but all that was needed was to break the thin ice. So more than one hour passed before the hose was laid across from Hasenrain, and the main building too could not be saved. The death of Christian gave rise to many ugly rumours, although he was quite small and we had always looked after him well. That was a great blow to us at the time. Since the indemnity was never adequate and at first we were housed at Shady Bank, that too gave rise to sharp friction, and my dear wife survived it only for one year, because she had caught cold during the conflagration, which turned out to be cancer. That also is a cause of great distress to us, when everyone knew that we used to manage well and had been punished enough as it was, and had paid our ground-

rent regularly. But the indemnity was reduced out of malice, and the operation cost 5,000 francs, which I could hardly raise, and it became too much for the farmeress at Shady Bank, because of my daughters, although Lina was already 22 and gave a hand everywhere, as I did in the field, while they said that I scared the cows and therefore must not milk them. It wasn't Barbara's fault that she was only three years old, though she did cause a lot of work in which as a man I could not assist enough, and the farmeress at Shady Bank was herself expecting. So we had to move out and take out a lease for Torgel Alp from the municipality, for which I had reason to be grateful too, because the previous tenant had caught his death there after running down the farm and hanging himself. The place was too lonely for him as well.

So up on Torgel Alp nothing had been done for years, but Lina and I got the homestead back into working order, and we succeeded, too, in bringing up Barbara satisfactorily, so that she kept her health. Only her way to school was so long that in winter she could not always manage it, so that she fell behind and lost much joy, even though I cleared the track each morning and this wasn't even laid down in the contract.

I CLEARED THE ROAD as far as the dairy farm, but didn't hang about there, nor in the village, because of the people, not even to collect money owing for milk. If that gave rise to new rumours, that's typical, but the real trouble was the great remoteness of the homestead, which often set in as early as mid-October because of snow.

Also, I had to go over completely to dairy farming, which I should not have dreamed of doing at Frogs' Well, but carried out in the teeth of all sorts of obstacles.

Also, the ground-rent was so high that with the best will in the world we had to borrow again. At first I had the good luck to be able to graze 15–20 bullocks, privately, but then for no evident reason the number decreased, although I only asked for my due, the bullocks returned to the valley in good condition, too, but I never stayed there long enough to forestall the rumours. Furthermore, my older daughter Lina was often sick, which did not affect the running of the farm, since I kept her at her work and exertions all the same, and our younger one had had to learn early on to help her sister, even though this kept her away from school. I must add that Lina was a strong support for me without words and despite the pain she had in her belly, and would be still if she hadn't been taken into care now, for which she is not to blame, and I only hope that now she is receiving medical attention, because she has earned it. It was a blow to us when the municipality would send no more bullocks for grazing because of irregularities that were completely unfounded, or that were due only to all the special circumstances there, and because I didn't spend all my time defending myself, so that I was thrown back on my meagre resources.

Sheer slander it was, their saying that I was out of my mind, only because I could no longer control a twitching in my cheek, and I'm sure that caused no inconvenience to anyone, but never allowed a bad word to cross my lips, as the Vicar can testify, as long as he came to see us, that is, for he stopped, as everyone knows, until it was too late. When people wouldn't look at me because of the twitch, I sent Barbara out with the milk, which would have done her no harm, I'm sure, and she only bought the most necessary things at the shop, because we couldn't afford more in any case, and if she sometimes stayed for a while it was only because she had to wait and other people can afford more than they could in my time.

And if they say my milk wasn't 100%, no one has proved that and none of those gentlemen saw how I looked after my cattle, they always got fed before we did, and as for sick cows, I had no telephone to report such

a case if it occurred, so that the vet could get there in time, even though a jeep was put at his disposal by the municipality.

I TOO AM A MEMBER of the municipality, but that doesn't mean that my daughters can simply be taken into care, only because they aren't to blame for anything. It is always being said, too, that I ceased to go to church or to confession, but there I should like you to consider that I should have gone when the trouble started, but it was too far away, and so we had to cope with the trouble on our own. If that is sin, my daughters couldn't help it, and you gentlemen of the Court should admit it, because of their youth for one thing, because of their poverty for another, and you should take into account that, given all those things, Barbara may have been a bit backward. Nevertheless, when it had happened, no sort of deterioration took place in the household, no, it improved if anything, since at last we lived together in peace and could raise the ground-rent for once, which was like a miracle, and I thanked God for it, until the Vicar arrived and, after him, the Justice of the Peace, all because of the slander. For it is my opinion that if you leave a family alone for so long you must allow them to solve their problems in their own way. But since she has been taken into care now, I don't want to stand in the way of my daughter's happiness, only hope that this is what's in question, not somebody's profit because my daughter has learnt how to work, and I also request that there shall be no recriminations, because I did not corrupt her, although, as you know, unlawful acts did take place. These were only for the sake of peace, as Lina can confirm if she likes, and I forgive her in my heart, she must not fret because she got me into prison, for that was our fate, it seems, and that's all there is to it. So I will thank God that she came down from Torgel Alp, and beg the honourable Court only for some attention to her, so that she survives. I was fond of her, there's no getting away from it, and consequently could not do otherwise, and wouldn't know today what to do. And even my late wife would have had no objection, I know that, when I had the privilege to know her kind heart for 24 years, and she was glad, too, to be blessed with late

children, first Barbara, then Christian who stayed behind in the fire. That is why, too, she departed this life and left the family to their own devices, that was a bit much all at once, when on top of it you are penalised and have to move to Torgel Alp. If my older daughter Lina hadn't taken after her late mother, hadn't been the split image of her, I don't know what would have become of us up there.

One should not forget, though, that a girl has other thoughts in her head beyond housekeeping, even an older girl.

In any case Lina was no longer ill when you separated us, that may not have suited the Rev. Vicar, because his mind boggled, but then he was clerical and past the age when a person is tormented.

But should Lina now be ailing once more, then it's those people who did that to her, for my daughter has a strong constitution and recovers every time she is needed. I myself couldn't know—could I?—that at 57 I should be tormented again, and it was a cold morning too. I was about to go out and feed the cows, and I noticed that she hadn't lit the fire, but the kitchen was empty, and your breath froze in front of your nose. I was startled, dear Court of Enquiry, for I can only say that nothing like that had happened in 10 years, even when she did have a bellyache she'd drag herself downstairs and put the coffee on the stove. All the windows were covered in frost, and the place quiet as a churchyard, that's where she ought to have appeared to me, for it hadn't been as quiet as that since the death of my wife. But this didn't occur to me at that instant, I can promise you, it didn't come over me till later.

WENT UPSTAIRS to the bedroom, the little one was still asleep, for we'd always let her sleep when it was too cold, and there was only a little boxroom for her, but a warm bed, there she was cosiest, why take her anywhere else. My only thought was that there could be one fewer of us again, and that made me shake with fear, I never so much as knocked on Lina's door but tore it open. I only write this much so that you will know the circumstances, not so that you'll come to dirty conclusions again. For there in the cold

bedroom my wife sat in her shift, her bare shift, honourable Court of Enquiry, never turned her head but went on as before, leaning forward a little, so as to see herself in the mirror, only a small one it was, and passed the brush over her hair. But she did that so slowly that this slowness, together with the mere shift and the breath clouding the mirror, so that she had to wipe it clear with her free hand, all this cut into my heart and made me feel quite faint, I can't describe it, when my wife had been dead all those years. What are you doing, I asked, why don't you stop, or you'll catch cold. She said, without turning round: Why not, she said, quite calm and funny. Later she said she had dreamed of her mother, and only then, I promise you, I remembered that I too had dreamed of her mother, but by then it was too late.

As long as I stood there, by the door, I saw only that she didn't so much as turn round and, in consequence, that her hair had already turned grey in places. You should bear in mind that Lina was not quite 37, which is normal, save that as her father I had never paid attention to it, also the cold, and that the shock had left me in an abnormal state of mind. That is why everything happened so fast that I can't recall how it came about, I didn't lie about that, even though you want to know the exact details, but what's the use of them now. On my honour and salvation, all I know is that suddenly I felt relieved and Lina's face, with a rosy and languid look she hadn't had since her childhood, lay beside me on the pillow, and the two of us breathed. I am sorry I cannot tell you more, save that it happened, and that was all, and you are grown-up people after all, nor was I aware of the illegality of the act at that moment, but it wasn't my age, on the contrary, 57 doesn't amount to old age. I wish it did. Next item, I went to feed the animals, and when I returned Lina was at the stove as usual, humming a tune, and the coffee was already made. That's how it went till the evening, save that I couldn't get to sleep and was cruelly tormented. I drank several glasses of brandy, fill yourself up, I said to myself, and you won't feel so sore about it. But this was not the case, the whole mood of the place was changed, too, like at Christmas, for which reason I retired for self-abuse, as in all the previous years,

when tormented. The mood would not leave me, though, but you must not think that this happened often, I'd been tormented daily only in the 4 or 5 years after my wife's death, then once a month perhaps, and then it stopped completely and I lived like a decent widower. I said to myself, what's up, then, you have no right to any Christmas any more, have you, you aren't even sleepy, and so I took a walk over to the cattle, which nearly always helped.

Although by then I had only two cows of my own and six goats, and your breath froze on your nose, I got into a sweat as soon as I so much as looked at them, though I'd seen the same thing 1,000 times if I'd seen it once, and they turned their heads to look at me, too, as though they wanted to do something to me, as though bewitched, so that I went out again and on and on through the snow, as far as the place where I took it into my head to lie down, thinking that will make you feel better. But then in the cold it struck me that my daughters wouldn't be able to raise the money for my funeral, but would be exposed to mockery, though behind hands held to the face as usual, I didn't want them to suffer that, couldn't get my daughters out of my mind at all, but not in the way you think, and I got up again. So I suddenly found myself back at the homestead, must have walked in a semi-circle, that happens in snow. It wasn't my own homestead either, I'd always known that, but when you're tired and the above has occurred, you see things as though for the first time. So I stood like a stranger in front of this homestead and no longer knew what was what, was afraid to go in. I thought, something will happen of itself if you stand here long enough, sooner or later the music will stop, for I had heard music all that night, and the stars were out, it was getting colder fast, near dawn. But because the snow itself made everything bright I saw that a window upstairs was open, please, my God, don't, I said to that, but nothing helped, so I called out, shut it, then, shut it, you pig, yes, that's what I called out, but don't know whether she heard me, my voice was feeble too, and all remained as it was.

If I turned my head a bit I could see it more clearly, but still couldn't tell for certain what, if I looked at it straight it was there at one moment, gone the next, but it was something white all the time.

A MAN WANTS TO KNOW, gentlemen, whether someone his own is standing so long at an open window in such a frost and catching her death of it, so I went inside and upstairs, but it wasn't the torment, when I couldn't even feel my own feet. In Lina's bedroom everything was open, and the window too, but no one was standing there, and I began to fear what she might have done to herself. Stretched out my hand, I did, to where it was darkest, for that's where the bed was, till I felt something warm, something alive, that was there. Said, thank God for that, without her being able to hear me, because she was under the cover and I wanted to comfort her. But she held on to my hand and said, come on, then, you idiot, you chicken, she said it quite clearly, and I responded to it, because I suddenly lost all consciousness of myself, and it must have happened for the second time, for suddenly there was peace again and no music any more. You must not hold that chicken against my daughter, it was clearly meant to be a sort of joke. I had called out pig, too, and hadn't meant it. You can call that sin, but there was this cold all the time, and I'm no chicken I'm sorry to say, so I stayed till it was warm. No one thanks you, anyway, for suffering the cold, and the need is too great to be forgiven us, as the Vicar said, whether we live as husband and wife now or not.

AFTER THAT LINA was cured of her bellyache, we were kinder to each other too, and took good care of each other, and that year I could pay off my ground-rent in time, because a blessing had been put on it. Was able to buy two more cows and have all four served, and they produced cow calves and got a prize a year later, which was made possible because the judges at Krummbach didn't know so much about my situation, and it became evident that without prejudice I could manage well, received a loan from the Small Farmers' Assistance too, which enabled me to have the roof re-thatched and to build a long-needed reservoir, but created more bad blood in the village. For, High Court of Justice, it is true, on my oath, that one can stand on one's head, bad blood can't be made any better, especially if the village is small.

It is also true that I could have a new dress bought for each of my daughters, which nowadays is no luxury even in remote places, and I waited till the sales for that and certainly did not live in splendour and affluence. When we only had just enough for us to get used to our state of affairs.

As for me, I can only add that since the death of my lamented wife I had never lived in a family, but this was now the case more than ever. My younger daughter caught me singing, too, as I whitewashed the cowshed. That was more than I deserved, I'm sure, and I give all the credit for it to my dear daughters.

After finishing her school years Barbara did not want to take any employment, since she'd had enough teasing, the spasms in her face grew more violent too, which she must have inherited, though in myself I was not always aware of them. The vet couldn't find a good reason for them either, save that they were nervous, though I should have paid him to the last penny for his pills. So it came about that Barbara stayed with us, nor expressed any desire for an apprenticeship, which I should certainly have let her have, never wanting to deprive my daughters of anything, since I am fond of them both, though not in the way you think. Nor did I know that in the shed she was subject to regular molestation by the scythe hand, that Fülleman who is well known to you, who took advantage of her extremity, because she never said anything about it in public, perhaps thinking we had enough trouble already. It would have been better if she had, though, for in that case I should have bashed in the scythe hand's skull without qualms. What I am charged with, though, because the scythe hand got it out of her, that was quite different from the gossip it gave rise to, the reason why I am now in prison. Because I was fond of my daughter, and concerned about her health, about which I knew no better when even a vet wouldn't take the trouble, I couldn't resist, but I never implanted any pride in her on that score, so that she would go and boast to the scythe hand about something that certainly happened as an emergency measure and under the stress of too much molestation, when she was still half a child, as she is to this day.

For, High Court of Justice, you wouldn't

have done any different either if your daughter had begged for it so urgently and you couldn't bear to see her suffer, only because the girl doesn't know the facts of life, but was physically mature and plagued by it, again because of the remoteness of the homestead, which could happen only up on Torgel Alp. Our Frogs' Well was burnt down, as you know, my wife departed and I alone with the girls, of whom one was now 37, the other 21, a great gap, but not with regard to the female body, that makes it hard to show no love when Lina is better all at once, but the younger one sleeps just behind the thin partition and is tormented in her fashion.

Since she slept lightly I wanted to relieve her of that, there was no other motive, and the longer it went on the less anyone thought anything of it, if the scythe hand hadn't got it out of her, I bet he had his reasons. And if it is said that she burst into tears, I'd like to have seen you if as half a child still you'd got under the scythe hand, and that wasn't till 7 months later, the tears too came because of the Vicar, who got there late enough, it had never happened with me.

RATHER THE FACTS of the case were as follows, my younger daughter came to me in the spring, complaining that I didn't esteem her, because Lina was privileged, and she was only her sister. At first I dismissed that, till my younger girl went to bed ill and wouldn't get up again, the twitches in her face got so bad, too, that mine broke out again and I feared for her sanity, and she sang so loud when I was with Lina that I thought a sow was being stuck, but she never dared come in, because she was a decent girl. In March, though, she developed such a bellyache that I thought, Oh, hell, maybe it would be better for you to give her peace, talked about it with Lina, who'd turned into a real housewife. But it isn't true that she advised me to do it, she only knew, what must be, must be. So, when Lina had gone to the road house with the milk, I took Barbara a jug of milk warm from the cow to her bedroom, since I had to take everything up to her, which became troublesome, and it was March 23rd. She grabbed hold of my hand at once so that I could feel if there wasn't a swelling there, and when I felt her she started that cruel screaming again,

as well as spasms which ran visibly across her whole body, and I felt so sorry for her that I couldn't help myself but allowed what followed to occur. Then she got up quite amiable and smiled like a rogue, but I was too fond of my daughter to bear her any grudge, only begged her sincerely never to let it happen again. Whereupon she quite easily drank the milk which she had pushed far away from her before, then went quite sensibly to the kitchen and prepared an evening meal, which she hadn't done for a long time, indeed started cooking and frying so much that I got alarmed and we fed well that evening, in great obliviousness even drank brandy till it gave rise to new acts, and I was even the instigator, which I would beg to have taken into account today in my daughters' favour. That was March 23rd. For I must add that because of constant physical labour I am still full of sap, quite unexpectedly, nor knew any remedy for it till Lina took the matter into her hands, but this occurred with good will on both sides, like the relations with my younger daughter, which I did not need any more, as you will understand.

But let the respected Court tell me of a way to help a poor person like Barbara out of her predicament, when the partition is thin and there's no prospect of her finding a suitable man, when already at school she couldn't keep up, but only because of Torgel Alp, where one couldn't make a secret of our situation, as other people do. For, dear Court, poverty had come first, I must say that quite plainly, and poverty brings many troubles in its train, of which one can relieve only the most pressing, if no one else offers any help.

It would have been the first time I preferred one daughter to the other, that is why I had to take her on in turn, not because I was tormented. After that all went smoothly in our house, you can ask anyone, and if it was a sin and no one wants to have anything to do with us now, I do beseech you not to make too great an issue of our sexl. intercourse, for neither did we, but peace was the main thing, and we did not disturb anyone, but were never bedded on roses. And I assure you that the abomination was no unmitigated pleasure, a thing that is quite unknown on Torgel Alp, but only a kind of comfort.

EARLIER ON we did have a conscience about it, but that ceased because my daughters no longer suffered from a bellyache, and this was better than a deal of worrying about it and even made us quite merry at times in the winter. There are always people who talk about their conscience but don't tell a man all the same what's to be done against the cold or against pains, at least nobody told us. When the Vicar arrived at last we no longer expected him and didn't really know what to do about it, and nor did he. For he walked up quite slowly, Lina saw him from a long way off, and she said, O my God. So, when he could think of nothing to say but only asked, don't you want to confess, I could not back him up and answered, quite legitimately, I wouldn't know what to confess, and he replied, he thought I did know, and he couldn't even look me straight in the eyes. For years he could have observed how Barbara's or my face twitched, and my daughter Lina's bellyache, but all that had been nothing to him, not so now that all was going well, though without his blessing. I told him what I thought about that. He said that he never listened to gossip but was answerable for preventing the spreading of the bacillus, which would make half the community sick at the very mention of us, and that I could bear even less to be answerable for it, either towards God or towards my daughters. I said I could bear to be answerable for many things as long as a man needs help and the ways are not always clear to him, in short, I refused point-blank to make a confession of it, when he still couldn't look me in the face, but only stroked his hip with one hand.

I then offered him a glass of schnapps, whereupon he did not come in, but said: if you will not avail yourself of the secrecy of confession I must ask you as a fellow citizen to give yourself up, because otherwise you will be in trouble, you will make the village unhappy with your state of affairs, or would you prefer to have your roof set on fire one night? High Court of Justice, that gave me a fright, to hear him talk of a fire, when I had lost one child in a fire before, and there too the cause had remained obscure, although I had never given offence to anyone. Whereupon my daughter Barbara rushed into the room and made our distress very great by

screaming that the Vicar was a dirty old man and ought to wipe his nose after sticking it into everyone's pots, when it wasn't his business, and did the scythe hand confess too what he had done to her? So the cat was out of the bag, as far as the scythe hand was concerned, and it then came out that the same had repeatedly lain in wait for her when she was helpless because of the heavy pails she was carrying, and had grabbed hold of her in spite of her protests. Finally, at the end of June, he had gone so far as to bash her head against a stone near the milking-shed, so that she couldn't struggle, and used her, because there was no help for her nearby, and on top of that had said to her mockingly, how well the meadow had been mown already, and hadn't he hurt her? Whereupon my daughter had screamed in her half-conscious state, with his miserable stub he couldn't do anyone any harm, let alone any good. Whereupon the same had merely buttoned up his trousers, saying, all right, all the more power to our buck, who had all the nanny-goats to himself, now that the farmer had come to an agreement with his daughters, and she was to give his regards to the whole happy household, put on his hat and left. That was a sad speech, since it is well known that lonely men have to make do with animals, when for years they cannot find a single human being, something I did not do even in my worst plight, but only deviated from the straight and narrow path to give my daughters peace, of which certainly the younger one ought not to have bragged, nor did I ever implant such arrogance in her heart.

Nevertheless, High Court of Justice, you should take into account that she was used by the scythe hand, and this without any understanding between them.

I have always believed that in such things there must be an agreement, and that two are needed for that, even with poor folk, and a little joy, which even beasts do not fail to feel in their fashion. But between my daughters and me this was so, because we did it for the sake of warmth and it was not the most important thing, but so that the family would be kept together, nor was violence ever used. But the scythe hand confessed his crime to the Vicar and got rid of his sin by bringing down justice upon our homestead, and we all had to pay dearly for Barbara's little lapse into

pride. Now you want to know more than I can offer you, when the real shock and perdition came only after everyone took such a lively interest in the affair.

The scythe hand got off lightly because he is young and daft as a duck, but older flesh is never forgiven when it's tormented, and yet its trials are harder than those of any loud-mouthed young ruffian. But if my daughter Lina had been younger and without my fears, I should never have violated her, but it was because I saw her grey hairs and pity took hold of me like a rage that this daughter of mine was not to be taken for what she was, but must drag her bellyache around in silence all her life, which to this day seems more bestial to me than everything else. And this too was not because of the flesh, but because the flesh is tormented by a soul and has nothing left to hope for if it finds no warmth, something I could not bear to watch any longer. Everything else, as I have set it down, followed logically from that, because I could not slight Barbara, and never pursued those relations for their own sake, but only so that the girls should have some kindness in their lives.

And I raise no objection now if the whole responsibility falls on me, because men should always know better. I did not know better, only did what I could in those criminal acts to find the right course.

BY TAKING my daughters into care and appointing a guardian doubtless you know better, and I only ask that my daughters, because they are girls, will be spared as much of the disgrace as possible, perhaps in another valley, where they are not known. For we have never in our lives received as much attention as after the Vicar's visit, in which connection I will name only the Justice of the Peace, then Lina's old teacher, twice the constable, and then a regular police action even with dogs, as though we had ever thought of running away, when we couldn't even have known where to. All the nets are so tightly meshed everywhere. I have never seen my daughters again since then, and enough of cross-examinations, if I may say so, don't know whether they had to undergo them

too and if that was of any use, they will hardly have understood all your words, but surely taken them to heart. So let me apologise at this point on their behalf. Nor do I want to receive a letter ever again from my daughters, if that could do them harm, would only like to know whether they are well cared for as far as the circumstances permit, and should be much gratified to obtain an assurance to that effect from you. I also beg for instructions as to how, once and for all, I am to express myself under interrogation, since I can see very well that I was far from satisfying the gentlemen with my way of speaking, but may well have made matters even worse, though I spoke the truth.

About the abnormality in my face which I got rid of but which has now returned, I beg you not to be disturbed, nor to be put off by it, if that is possible. I shall manage all right.

Details of the criminal act, I am sorry to say, embarrass me, since the process is familiar enough to grown-up people, and I should only like to observe that most of those can go through the same in more favourable circumstances, nor do I believe that more is to be learnt about it from my daughters than what every real man or woman knows.

MAKE AN END OF IT, at last, honourable Court, because you are better off, or I could begin to say things I should be sorry about, all right, I will admit to having led my daughters into misdeamour, if you insist on it and I can lessen the plight of those girls by saying so.

Perhaps it is possible, too, to choose a guardian for my daughters who is not a clergyman. These, I regret to say, often fall into false assumptions which their wards then have to swallow, but can't always, which leads to tragedies.

Every man and woman is tormented in their way, and I have learnt that those who are stronger will then oppress others because of it, by which I don't mean to deny their good will, and please don't hold those words against me.

I have written to you only because my spoken words are not adequate for your satisfaction and because perhaps you will take the opportunity, none the less, to convey a greeting to my daughters, which I set down herewith, but this too not for my sake, but because in those years my daughters grew accustomed again to a little warmth.

May it please you to tell them that they are on my mind by day and night, but not in the way the High Court of Justice thinks.

Translated by Michael Hamburger

Mantovani at the Mental Hospital

Music on stand-by smoothes the ruffled air
 Of broken transmissions. Our minds are drawn
 To forget the hands at work on the wires,
 The urgent studios seeking to replace
 These lush minutes with a contact gone.
 We wait, unruffled, not adjusting our sets.
 This grey mansion, too, has seemed to hold
 A bland composure. Inmates have kept
 To courtyards, troubling none with broken faces,
 Always invisible beyond the lawn's
 Fountain and flowers. Passing we hear music;
 Over the bright shrubbery the lilting strings.

Frank Ormsby