

Barry Humphries/Patrick White 63

## MISS SLATTERY AND HER DEMON LOVER

Patrick White

He stood holding the door just so far. A chain on it too. 'This,' she said, 'is Better Sales Pty Ltd.' Turning to a fresh page, 'Market research,' she explained. 'We want you to help us, and hope, indirectly, to help you.'

She moistened her mouth, easing a threat into an ethical compromise, technique pushed to the point where almost everyone was convinced. Only for herself the page on her pad would glare drearily blank.

Oh dear, do not be difficult, she would have said for choice to some old continental number whose afternoon sleep she had ruined.

'Fah! do you vornt?' he asked.

'I want to ask you some questions,' she said.

She could be very patient when paid.

'Questions?'

Was he going to close the door?

'Not you. Necessarily. The housewife.'

She looked down the street, a good one, at the end of which the midday sun was waiting to deal her a blow.

'Housewife?'

At least he was slipping the chain.

'Nho! Nho! Nho!'

At least he was not going to grudge her a look.

'No lady?' she asked. 'Of any kind?'

'Nho! Nefert! Nho! I would not keep any vooman of a permanent description.'

'That is frank,' she answered. 'You don't like them.'

Her silences were hurting.

'Oh, I libke! How I libke! Zet is why!'

'Let us get down to business?' she said, looking at her blank pad. 'Since there is no lady, do you favour Priceless Pearl? Laundry starch. No. Kwik Kreem Breakfast Treat? Well,' she said, 'it's a kind of porridge that doesn't get lumps.'

'Fah! is porritch?'

'It is something the Scotch invented. It is, well, just porridge, Mr Tibor.'

'Szabo.'

'It is Tibor on the bell.'

'I am Hoongaharian,' he said. 'In Hoongary ze nimes are beck to front. Szabo Tibor. You onderstend?'

He could not enlist too much of himself, as if it were necessary to explain all such matters with passionate physical emphasis.

'Yes,' she said. 'I see. Now.'

He had those short, but white teeth. He was not all that old; rather, he had reached a phase where age becomes elastic. His shoes could have cost him a whole week's pay. Altogether, all over, he was rather suède, brown suède, not above her shoulder. And hips. He had hips!

But the hall looked lovely, behind him, in black and white.

'Vinyl tiles?' Her toe pointed. 'Or lino?'

After all, she was in business.

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*Lady* record but I'd  
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because—if you can go to  
entertainment.

1958

'Fahrt? Hoh! Nho! Zet is all from marble.'

'Like in a bank!'

'Yehs.'

'Well, now! Where did you find all that?'

'I brought it. Oh, yehs. I bring everyting. Here zere is nossing. Nossing. Oh, come, Mr Tibor—Szabo—we Australians are not all that uncivilized. Not in 1961.'

'Civilahsed! I will learn you fahrt is civilahsed!'

She had never believed intensely in the advantages of knowledge, so that it was too ridiculous to find herself walking through the marble halls of Tibor Szabo Tibor. But so cool. Hearing the door click, she remembered the women they saw into pieces, and leave in railway cloak-rooms, or dispose of in back yards, or simply dump in the Harbour.

There it was, too. For Szabo Tibor had brought a View. Though at that hour of day the water might have been cut out of zinc, or aluminium, which is sharper.

'You have got it good here,' she said.

It was the kind of situation she had thought about, but never quite found herself in, and the strangeness of it made her languid, acting out a part she had seen others play, over-litahsized.

'Everyting I het *moss* be feuhrst class,' Szabo Tibor was explaining. 'Fahrt is your nime, please?'

'Oh,' she said. 'Slattery. Miss Slattery.'

'Zet is too match. Fahrt little nime else, please?'

Miss Slattery looked sad.

'I hate to tell you,' she said. 'I was christened Dimity. But my friends, he added, 'call me Pete.'

'Vitch is venorse? Fahrt for a nime is zet? Pete!'

'It is better than going through life with Dimity attached.'

'I will call you nossing,' Szabo Tibor announced.

Miss Slattery was walking around in someone else's room, with large, unlikely strides, but it made her feel better. The rugs were so easy, and so very white, she hadn't taken her two-piece to the cleaner.

'A nime is not necessary,' Szabo Tibor was saying. 'Take off your her, please; it is not necessary neither.'

Miss Slattery did as she was told.

'I am not the hatty type, you know. They have us wear them for business reasons.'

She shook out her hair, to which the bottle had contributed, not altogether successfully, though certain lights gave it a look of its own, she hoped: tawny, luminous, dappled. There was the separate lock, too, which she had persuaded to hang in the way she wanted.

An Australian girl, he saw. Another Australian girl.

Oh dear, he was older perhaps than she had thought. But cuddly. By instinct she was kind. Only wanted to giggle. At some old red dy bear in suede.

Szabo Tibor said:

'Sit.'

'Funny,' she said, running her hands into the depths of the chair, a habit she always meant to get out of, 'I have never mixed business and pleasure before.'

But Szabo Tibor had brought something very small and sweet, which ran two fiery wires out of her throat and down her nose.

'It is good. Who?'  
'I don't know about *that*'—she coughed—'Mr Szabo. It's effective, though!'

'In Australien,' Mr Szabo said, and he was kneeling now, 'peoples call me Tibby.'

'Well! Have you a sense of humour?'  
'Yehs! Yehs!' he said, and smiled. 'Witz?'

When men started kneeling she wanted more than ever to giggle. But Tibby Szabo was growing sterner.

'In Australien,' he said, 'no *Witz*. Nho! Novair!'

Shaking a forefinger at her. So that she became fascinated. It was so plump, for a finger, banana-coloured, with hackles of little black hairs.

'Do you understand all right. I am nossing.'

She liked it, too.

'Then fah is it?' asked Tibby Szabo, looking at his finger.

'I am always surprised,' she answered, 'at the part texture plays.'

'Are you intellectual girl?'

'My mind,' she said, re-crossing her legs, 'turned to fudge at puberty. Isn't that delicious?'

'Fah is futch?'

'Oh dear,' she said, 'you're a whale for knowing. Aren't there the things you just accept?'

She made her lock hang, for this old number who wouldn't leave off kneeling by the chair. Not so very old, though. The little gaps between his white teeth left him looking sort of defenceless.

Then Tibby Szabo took her arm, as though it didn't belong to her. The whole thing was pretty peculiar, but not as peculiar as it should have been. He took her arm, as if it were, say, a cob of corn. As if he had been chewing on a cob of corn. She wanted to giggle, and did. Supposing Mum and Wendy had seen! They would have had a real good laugh.

'You have the funnest ways,' she said, 'Tib!'

As Tibby Szabo kept on going up and down her arm.

When he started on the shoulder, she said:

'Stop! What do you think I am?'

He heard enough to alter course.

A man's head in your lap somehow always made you feel it was trying to fool itself—it looked so detached, improbable, and ridiculous.

He turned his eyes on them, as if knowing: here is the greatest sucker for eyes. Oh God, nothing ever went deeper than eyes. She was a goner.

'Oh God,' she said, 'I am not like this!'

She was nothing like what she thought she was like. So she learned. She was the trampline queen. She was an enormous, staggy spider. She was a rubber doll.

'You Australian girls are visout *Temperament*,' Tibby Szabo complained. 'You are all gிக்க and talk. Passion is not to resist.'

'I just about broke every bone in my body not resisting,' Miss Slattery had to protest.

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Her body that continued fluctuating overhead.

'Who ever heard of a glass ceiling?'

'Plenty glass ceiling. Zet is to see vis.'

'Tibby,' she asked, 'this wouldn't be—mink?'

'Yehs. Yehs. Meenk beds arc goot for ze body.'

'I'll say!' she said.

She was so relaxed. She was half-dead. When it was possible to lift an arm, the long silken shadders took possession of her skin, and she realised the southerly had come, off the water, in at the window, giving her the goose-flesh.

'We're gunna catch a cold,' she warned, and coughed.

'It is goot.'

'I am glad to know that something is good,' she said, sitting up, destroying the composition in the ceiling. 'This sort of thing is all very well, but are you going to let me love you?'

Rounding on him. This fat and hairy man.

'Loft? Fahn excekly do you mean?'

'Oh, Tibby!' she said.

Again he was fixing his eyes on her, extinct by now, but even in that dormancy they made her want to die. Or give. Or was it possible to give and live?

'Go to sleep,' he ordered.

'Oh, Tibby!'

She fell back floppy whimpety but dozed. Once she looked sideways at his death-mask. She looked at the ceiling, too. It was not unlike those art-city photographs she had always tried to avoid, in the papers, after the War. It was incredible, but always had been.

By the time Miss Slattery stepped into the street, carrying her business hat, evening had drenched the good address with the mellow light. Ripened pears. She trod through it, tilted, stilled, tentative. Her neck was horribly stiff.

After that there was the Providential, for she did not remain with Better Sales Pty Ltd; she was informed that her services would no longer be required. What was it, they asked, had made her so unreliable? She said she had become distracted.

In the circumstances she was fortunate to find the position with the Providential. There, too, she made friends with Phyllis Wimbles.

'A Hungarian,' Phyllis said, 'I never met a girl I knew decided to go through the religions. But gave up at the Occultists.'

'Why?'

'She simply got scared. They buried a man alive, one Saturday afternoon, over at Balmoral.'

When old Huthnance came out of his office.

'Miss Slattery,' he asked, 'where is that Dewhurst policy?'

He was rather a sweetie really.

'Oh yes,' Miss Slattery said, 'I was checking.'

'What is there to check?' Huthnance asked.

'Well,' Miss Slattery said.

And Huthnance smiled. He was still at the smiling stage.

Thursday evenings Miss Slattery kept for Tibby Szabo. She would go there Saturdays too, usually staying over till Sunday, when they would breakfast in the continental style.

There was the Saturday Miss Slattery decided to give Tibby Szabo a treat. Domesticity jacked her up on her heels; she was full of secrecy and little ways.

When Tibby asked:

'Fah! is zet?'

'What is what?'

'Zet stench! Zet blue *smoke* you are mecking in my kitchenette. Fah! are you repurting?'

'That is a baked dinner, Miss Slattery answered. A leg of lamb, with pumpkin and two other veg.'

'Lemb?' cried Tibby Szabo. 'Lemb! It stinks. Nefet in Budapest did lemb so much as cross ze doorways.'

And he opened the oven, and tossed the leg into the Harbour.

Miss Slattery cried then, or sat, rather, making her handkerchief into a ball.

Tibby Szabo prepared himself a snack. He had *Paprikawurst*, a breast of cold paprika chicken, paprikas in oil, paprika in cream cheese, and finally, she suspected, paprika.

'Eart!' he advised.

'A tiny crumb would choke me.'

'You are not crying?' he asked through some remains of paprika.

'So! Sink-ing!'

Afterwards he made love to her, and because she had chosen love, she embraced it with a sad abandon, on the milk coverlet, under the glass sky.

Once, certainly, she sat up and said:

'It is all so *carnal!*'

'You use zeeze intellectual venords.'

He had the paprika chicken in his teeth.

There was the telephone, too, with which Miss Slattery had to contend. 'Igen! Igen! IGEN!' Tibby Szabo would shout, and bash the receiver on somebody anonymous.

'All this *igg* stuff!' she said.

It began to get on her nerves.

'Denn idiots!' Tibby Szabo complained.

'How do you make your money, Tib?' Miss Slattery asked, picking at the milk coverlet.

'I am Hoongahrian,' he said. 'It come to me over ze telephown.'

Presently Szabo Tibor announced he was on his way to inspect several properties he owned around the city.

He had given her a key, at least, so that she might come and go. 'And you have had keys cut,' she asked, 'for all these other women, for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday in all these other flats?'

How he laughed.

'At last a real *Witz!* An Austrahian *Witz!*' he said on going.

It seemed no time before he returned.

'Fah!' he said, 'you are still here?'

'I am the passive type,' she replied.

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Indeed, she was so passive she had practically set in her own flesh beneath that glass conscience of a ceiling. Although a mild evening was ready to soothe, she shivered for her more than nakedness. When she stuck her head out the window, there were the rhinestones of Sydney glittering on the neck of darkness. But it was a splendour she saw could only dissolve.

'You Australian girls,' observed Tibby Szabo, 'even you are not all gizzle, you are all cry.'

'Yes,' she said. 'I know,' she said, 'it makes things difficult. To be Australian.'

And when he popped inside her mouth a kiss like Turkish delight in action, she was less than ever able to take herself in hand.

They drove around in Tibby's Jag. Because naturally Tibby Szabo had a Jag.

'Let us go to Manly,' she said. 'I have got to look at the Pacific Ocean.' Tibby drove, sometimes in short, disgusted bursts, at others in long, lovely demonstrations of speed, or swooning swirls. His driving was so much the expression of Tibby Szabo himself. He was wearing the little cigar-coloured hat.

'Of course,' said Miss Slattery through her hair, 'I know you well enough to know that Manly is not Balaton.'

'Balaton?'

Tibby jumped a pedestrian crossing.

'Fah! do you know about Balaton?'

'I went to school,' she said. 'I saw it on the map. You had to look at something. And there it was. A gap in the middle of Hungary.'

She never tired of watching his hands. As he drove, the soft, cajoling palms would whiten.

Afterwards when they were drawn up in comfort, inside the sounds of sea and pines, and had bought the paper-bagful of prawns, and the prawn-coloured people were squelching past, Tibby Szabo had to ask:

'Are you trying to spy on me viz all zese kvestions of Balaton?'

'All these questions? One bare mention!'

'Prawn-shells tinkle as they hit the asphalt.'

'I wouldn't open any drawer, not if I had the key. There's only one secret,' she said, 'I want to know the answer to.'

'But Balaton?'

'So blue. Bluer than anything we've got. So everything,' she said. 'The sand-sprinkled people were going up and down. The soles of their feet were injured to it.'

Tibby Szabo spat on the asphalt. It smoked.

'It isn't nice,' she said, 'to spit.'

The tips of her fingers tasted of the salt-sweet prawns. The glassy rollers uncurling on the sand, might have taked a little farther and swallowed her down, if she had not been engulfed already in deeper, glassier caverns.

'Fah! is zis secret?' Tibby asked.

'Oh!'

She had to laugh.

'It is us,' she said. 'What does it add up to?'

'Fah! it edds up to? I give you a hell-of-a good time. I pay ze electricity.'

end ze gess. I put you in ze way of cut-price frocks. You hef arranged sings pretty nice.

Suddenly too many prawn-shells were clinging to Miss Slattery's fingers. 'That is not what I mean,' she choked. 'When you love someone, I mean. I mean it's sort of difficult to put. When you could put your head in the gas-oven, and damn who's gunna pay the bill.'

Because she did not have the words, she got out her lipstick, and began to persecute her mouth. Ladies were looking by now into the expensive car. Their glass eyes expressed surprise.

'Loft! Tibby Szabo laughed. 'Loft is viz ze sahou!' Then he grew very angry; he could have been throwing his hand away. 'Fahrt do zay know of lof?' he shouted. 'Here zere is only strike and bodies!'

Then they were looking into each other, each with an expression that suggested they might not arrive beyond a discovery just made. Miss Slattery lobbed the paper-bag almost into the municipal bin.

'I am sursty,' Tibby complained. Indeed, salt had formed in the corners of his mouth. Could it be that he was going to risk drinking deeper of the dregs?

'This Pacific Ocean,' Miss Slattery said, or cried, 'is all on the same note. Drive us home, Tibby, she said, 'and make love to me.' As he released the brake, the prawn-coloured bodies on the asphalt continued to lumber up and down, regardless.

'Listen,' Miss Slattery said, 'a girl friend of Phyllis Wimble's called Apple is giving a party in Woolloomooloo. Saturday night, Phyllis says. It's going to be bohemian.'

Szabo Tibor drew down his lower lip. 'Austrahlian-bohemian-proveenshul. Zere is nossing venorse zan bohemian-proveenshul.'

'Try it and see,' Miss Slattery advised, and bitterly added: 'A lot was discovered only by mistake.' 'And fahrt is zis Epple?' 'She is an oxywelder.'

'A vooman? Fahrt does she oxyweld?' 'I dunno. Objects and things. Apple is an artist.'

Apple was a big girl in built-up hair and pixie glasses. The night of the party most of her objects had been removed, all except what she said was her major work.

'This is *Hypotomuse of Angst*,' she explained. 'It is considered very powerful.' 'Will you have claret?' Apple asked. 'Or perhaps you prefer Scotch or gin. That will depend on whoever brings it along.'

Apple's party got under way. It was an old house, a large room running in many directions, walls full of Lovely Textures.

'Almost everybody here,' Phyllis Wimble confided, 'is doing something.' 'What have you brought, Phyl?' Miss Slattery asked. 'He is a grazier,' Phyllis said, 'that a nurse I know got tired of.'

'He is all body,' Miss Slattery said, now that she had learnt. 'What do you expect?'

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Those who had them were tuning their guitars.  
 'Those are the Spanish guitarists,' Phyllis explained. 'And these are English reddies off a liner. They are only the atmosphere. It's Apple's friends who are doing things.'

'Looks a bit,' the grazier hinted.

Phyllis shushed him.

'You are having it, Tib,' Miss Slattery said.

Tibby Szabo drew down his hip.

'I will get drunk. On Eppie's plonk.'

She saw that his teeth were ever so slightly decalcified. She saw that he was a little, fat, black man, whom she had loved, and loved still. From habit. Like biting your nails.

I must get out of it, she said. But you didn't, nor out of biting your nails, until you forgot; then it was over.

The dancing had begun, and soon the kissing. The twangling of guitars broke the light into splinters. The slurr of claret stained the jokes. The reddies danced. The grazier danced the Spanish dances. His elastic-sides were so authentic. Apple fell upon her bottom.

Not everyone, not yet, had discovered Tibby Szabo was a little, fat, black man, with serrated teeth like a shark's. There was a girl called Felicia who came and sat in Tibby's lap. Though he opened his knees and she shot through, it might not have bothered Miss Slattery if Felicia had stayed.

'They say,' Phyllis Wimble whispered, 'they are all madly queer.'

'Don't you know by now,' Miss Slattery said, 'that everyone is always queer?'

But Phyllis Wimble could turn narky.

'Everyone, we presume, but Tibby Szabo.'

Then Miss Slattery laughed and laughed.

'Tibby Szabo,' she laughed, 'is just about the queerest thing I've met.'

'Fah is zeh?' Tibby asked.

'Nossing, darling,' Miss Slattery answered. 'I love you with all my body, and never my soul.'

It was all so *mouvemente*, said one of Apple's friends.

The grazier danced. He danced the Spanish dances. He danced bareheaded, and in his Lesbian hat. He danced in his shirt, and later, without.

'They say,' whispered Phyllis Wimble, 'there are two men locked in the lavatory together. One is a teddy, but they haven't worked out who the other can be.'

'Perhaps he is a social-realist,' Miss Slattery suggested.

She had a pain.

The brick-red grazier produced a stockwhip, too fresh from the shop, too stiff, but it smelled intoxicatingly of leather.

'Oh,' Miss Slattery cried, 'stockwhips are never made, they were there in the beginning.'

As the grazier uncoiled his brand-new whip, the lash fell glisteningly. It flicked a corner of her memory, unrolling a sheet of blazing blue, carpets of dust, cartie rubbing and straining past. She could not have kept it out even if she had wanted to. The electric sun beating on her head. The smell of old, swamy leather had made her drunker than bulk claret.



'Oh, God, I'm gonna burn up!' Miss Slattery protested.

And took off her top.

She was alarmingly smooth, unscathed. Other skins, she knew, withered

in the sun. She remembered the scabs on her dad's knuckles.

She had to get up then.

'Give, George!' she commanded. 'You're about the crummiest crack I

ever listened to.'

Miss Slattery stood with the stockwhip. Her breasts snoozed. Or con-

templated. She could have been awaiting inspiration. So Tibby Szabo

noticed, leaning forward to follow to its source the faintest blue, of veins

explored on previous expeditions.

Then, suddenly, Miss Slattery cracked, scattering the full room. She

filled it with shrieks, disgust, and admiration. The horsehair gaily stung

the air. Miss Slattery cracked an abstract painting off the wall. She cracked

a cork out of a bottle.

'Bravo, Petuska! Tibby Szabo shouted. 'Vaz you efer in a tseerkooos?'

He was sitting forward.

'Yeah,' she said, 'a Hungarian one!'

And let the horsehair curl round Tibby's thigh.

He was sitting forward. Tibby Szabo began to sing:

*'Csak egy kislány*

*van a világon,*

*az is az én*

*drága galambó-o-om!*

He was sitting forward with eyes half-closed, clapping and singing.

*Hooray for love,*  
*it rots you, . . .*

Miss Slattery sang.

She cracked a cigarette out of the grazier's lips.

*'A jó Isten*  
*de nagyon szeret,*

sang Tibby Szabo,

*'bogy nekem adta*  
*a legszebbik-e-e-et!'*

Then everybody was singing everything they had to sing, guitars disin-

tegrating, for none could compete against the syrup from Tibby Szabo's

compulsive violin.

While Miss Slattery cracked. Breasts jumping and frolicking. Her hair

was so brittle. Lifted it once again, though, under the tawny sun, hawking

dust, drunk on the smell of the tepid canvas water-bags.

Miss Slattery cracked once more, and brought down the sun from out of

the sky.

It is not unlikely that the world will end in thunder. From the sound of

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it, somebody must have overturned *Hypotenuse of Angst*. Professionals screamers had begun to scream. The darkness filled with hands.

'Come close, Petuska.'

It was Tibby Szabo.

'I will screen you,' he promised, and caressed.

When a Large Person appeared with a candle. She was like a scene.

'These studios,' the Large Person announced, 'are let for purposes of

creative art, and the exchange of intellectual ideas. I am not accustomed to

louts—and worse,' here she looked at Miss Slatery's upper half, 'wrecking

the premises,' she said. 'As there has never been any suspicion that this is a

Bad House, I must ask you all to leave.'

So everybody did, for there was the Large Person's husband behind her,

looking as though he might mean business. Everybody shoved and poured,

there was a singing, a crumpling of music on the stairs. There was a

hugging and a kissing in the street. Somebody had lost his pants. It was

raining finely.

Tibby Szabo drove off very quickly, in case a lift might be asked for.

'Put on your top, Petuska,' he advised. 'You will ketch a colt.'

It sounded reasonable. She was bundling elaborately into armholes.

'Waddayaknow?' Miss Slatery said. 'We've come away with the gra-

zier's whip!'

'Het vee?' Tibby Szabo remarked.

So they drove in Tibby's Jag. They were on a spiral.

'I am so tired,' Miss Slatery admitted.

And again:

'I am awful tired.'

She was staring down at those white rugs in Tibby's flat. The soft, white,

serious pile. She was propped on her elbows. Knees apart. Must be looking

bloody awful.

'Petuska,' he was trying it out, 'will you perhaps do vun more creck of ze

whip?'

He could have been addressing a convalescent.

'Oh, but I am tired. I am done,' she said.

'Just vun little vun.'

Then Miss Slatery got real angry.

'You and this goddam lousy whip! I wish I'd never set eyes on either!'

Nor did she bother where she lashed.

'Achi! Oh! Ay-yay-yay! Petuska!'

Miss Slatery cracked.

'What are the people gunna say when they hear you holler like that?'

As she cracked, and lashed.

'Ay! It is none of ze people's business. Powff! Yay-yay-yay-yay!' Tibby

Szabo cried. 'Just vun little vun more!'

And when at last she toppled, he covered her very tenderly where she

lay.

'Did anyone ever want you to put on boots?'

'What ever for?' asked Phyllis Wimple.

But Miss Slatery found she had fetched the wrong file.

'Ah, dear,' she said, resuming. 'It's time I thought about a change,' she

said. 'I'm feeling sort of tired.'

'Hair looks dead,' said Phyllis Wimbie. 'That is always the danger signal.'

'Try a new rinse.'

'A nice strawberry.'

Miss Slatery, whose habit had been to keep Thursday evening for Tibby Szabo, could not bear to any more. Saturdays she still went, but at night, for the nights were less spiteful than the days.

'Vair vas you, Petuska, Sursday evening?' Tibby Szabo had begun to ask.

'I sat at home and watched the telly.'

'Zen I will install ze telly for here!'

'Ah,' she said, 'the telly is something that requires the maximum of concentration.'

'Are you changing, Petuska?' Tibby asked.

'Everything is changing,' Miss Slatery said. 'It is an axiom of nature.'

She laughed rather short.

'That,' she said, 'is something I think I learned at school. Same time as Balaton.'

It was dreadful, really, for everyone concerned, for Tibby Szabo had begun to ring the Providential. With urgent communications for a friend.

Would she envisage Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday?

However impersonally she might handle the instrument, that old Huth-nance would come in and catch her on the phone. Miss Slatery saw that

Huthnace and she had almost reached the point of no return.

'No,' she replied. 'Not Thursday. Or any other day but what was agreed. Saturday, I said.'

She slammed it down.

So Miss Slatery would drag through the moist evenings, in which the scatter hibiscus had furled. No more trumpets. Her hair hung dank, as she trailed through the acid, yellow light, towards the good address at which

her lover lived.

'I am developing a muscle,' she caught herself saying, and looked round to see if anyone had heard.

It was the same night that Tibby Szabo cried out from the bottom of the pit:

'Why em I condemned to suffer?'

Stretched on mink, Miss Slatery lay, idly flicking at her varnished toes. Without looking at the view, she knew the thimstones of Sydney had never glittered so heartlessly.

'Fahrt for do you torture me?'

'But that is what you wanted,' she said.

Flicking, Listless.

'Petuska, I will gif you anysink!'

'Nossing,' she said. 'I am going,' she said.

'Gowing? Ven vec are so suited to each ozzert!'

Miss Slatery flicked.

'I am sick,' she said, 'I am sick of cutting a rug out of your fat Hungarian behind.'

The horsehair lash shimmered and glistened between her toes.

'But fahrt will you do visout me?'

'I am going to find myself a thin Australian.'

... of Angst. Professors  
... with hands.

... She was like a score

... I am not accustomed to

... body shoved and poured

... will kerch a colt.

... gratefully into armholes.

... come away with the gra-

... spiral.

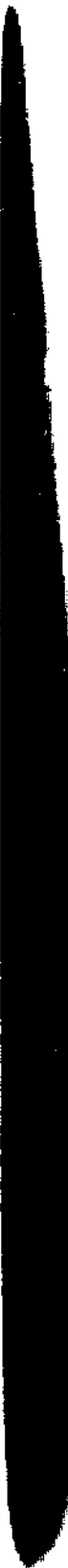
... boy's hat. The soft white

... never set eyes on either

... ear you holler like that?

... very tenderly where she

... about a change,' she



Tibby was on his knees again.  
'I am gunna get married,' Miss Slattery said, 'and have a washing-machine.'

'Yay-yay-yay! Petuska!'

Then Miss Slattery took a look at Tibby's eyes, and re-discovered a suppliant poodle, seen at the window of an empty house, at dusk. She had never been very doggy, though.

'Are you ze Detel perhaps?' cried Tibby Szabo.

'We Australians are not all that unnatural,' she said.

And hated herself, just a little.

As for Tibby Szabo, he was licking the back of her hand.

'Vee will make a finenshul arrangement. Pretty substenshul.'

'No go!' Miss Slattery said.

But that is precisely what she did. She got up and pitched the grazier's stockwhip out of the window, and when she had put on her clothes, and licked her lips once or twice, and shuffled her hair together—she went.

(1963)

'Only one little girl

in the world,

and she is

my dear little dove!

The good God

must love me indeed

to have given me

the most beautiful one!