

Illustrations by Ann Rosenberg, after a Chinese Pillow Book.

Daryl Rasmussen / CLOISONS (PARTITIONS)

You may call me whipping cream, a wax-dipped flower, locked up for my time-lapse expanding imagination, a deep-frozen paperweight fly in amber, but I am *Philip Owen Plume*. Somewhere snowflakes dance. Somewhere the girl with ebon hair.

And you, fat-face Klitchintzski? What about you? Are you aghast as I am? You and your ample (it seems) circumstantial evidence? You and your no-skin skin game? God, if only once, just once, I, Plume could mush your rotten-pumpkin nose into my canned corn beef and cabbages! Dead cow is only repugnant, Klitchintzski.

I have worked for countless years in the same china shop, *Kingcups and Queens*, hunting for this baroque intaglio or that plain-spoken pattern between the amber rows of pine shelving at back, kicking empty wickerwork crates through dunes of bamboo shavings, and tittle-tattling over the nabob brow of the counter with browsing does. Coffee spoons you say? It is a matter of degree: I had ladled out my life with *salt and mustard* spoons. Each gauzy day was a neatly pre-measured tea bag. Indeed, the eventful anticyclone (you'll soon see it) that stirred about me those last free days and strained me out on the fourth and strained me out on the lactic fourth was not the customary cuppa I was addicted to.

I repeat: *I am astonished!* Perhaps even my bewilderment, sausage and mustard in a bun, was a thing prepared by Klitchintzski.

The first time I saw him (April 1) he was on his haunches vulturing (a succulent fat lean) over a whipform rivulet discharging the abdominal end of an oblong puddle at a cross-path in Peter's Park. It had been an incessant mercurial day in Tea Town: sun, wind, and hail and as I approached him (head on but obliquely) from across the turbid water of the puddle the rain fairly thundered and thwacked the ground. The surface of the puddle was suffused with little argent-olive bubbles, each reflecting the vault of the sky in its own node. Klitchintzski's hat diverted jets down his collar. His face was beryl-green and his gabardine was a loofah.

I stopped inside his limit of vision to offer this Water Rat the shelter of my umbrella. He, himself, deliberately lifted his stoned attention (limited vision) from the cross-hatches on the rill as if accusing (!) that I had barged in on his inheritance of thought and asked me how to stop a Pol — from drowning. I was sheep-sheared and prepared to smack my generosity, on the wrists, but his midas grin flashed and his hair-lip whined, “You don’t.” I had been a galosh heel (twice) and although he himself knew it he made no attempt to console me. Klitchintzski was a whipper in every sense of the word.

I clutched my umbrella (keeping it to myself) and reluctantly precipitated a jelly dum dum of my own, “Did you hear about the Pol — parachutiste?”

“Yes,” his buck-shot eyes bounced up to mine, “he opens on impact. Har-har-har. Do you smoke after intercourse?” offering me a lean Warsaw Corridor Cigar.

I whisked out my billiard, Sobranie, and Black Cat Matches. We acquainted ourselves over our fires, the rain vaporized, I contracted my umbrella, and the meniscus of the puddle began to fathom jungle in reflection. My squat inarticulator wrung a crimped paper boat out of his gabardine pocket and sent it down the thin channel. The puffin then loosened his scarf. Welts from that too-tight noose. I scanned the tree tops for a tactful alibi to escape under, winced at the glistening bristles on the back of his nacreous neck, then at the boat on the thin skin of the transparent trickle. Klitchintzski began to grin again.

"It's a queer day. Know any astrology?"

"Huh?"

"Anything about Uranus?" he asked.

"My what?"

The paper sampan was caught on a halo downstream. I freed the boat by extricating the dam with my fingertips and a bulging curiosity. It was perfectly egg-shaped: a white and blue porcelain testicle. "This is a rare little Humpty," I held it, scintillating up to the sun, in my gaudy red-bloated clutch. The boat oscillated away.



Klitchintzski's chops were lipo-agape, "What is it?" and "Let me see?"

I ceded the egg with a grudge — such a treasure was not to be re-excavated (again). "It's willow-pattern English China. Thomas Minton and all that." I asked if he knew the story. He said, and I knew he was lying, that he didn't. "The mandarin's secretary elopes with the princess. They escape across the bridge, there, and

live in the tea house, there." Pointing, pointing. "The mandarin is in a huff about this so he collects his aids and stalks the tea house. The raid is a bust because the lovers turn into sparrows and (see the sparrows, no, up there?) re-move to the willows."

Klitchintzski was out to lunch. He pocketed my egg and got up to leave. He was short so I told him a rude joke. An aperitif, I stupidly thought, with my pilfered egg. Klitchintzski was an ear. "There was this drunk who came home simply gassed one night and asked his wife to have one last drink with him before tucking in. She refused and tucked in on her own while the drip went to the bar, made himself a double gin fizz and sat disconsolately sipping. He finished it and squeezing up for another called to his wife, 'Hey, Honey, does a lemon have legs?' 'No,' came the rejoinder. 'Well then I've just squished the piss out of your canary.' " Klitchintzski did not laugh, instead, his quadruple chin dropped and his face blossomed. A livid maraschino hatching plans. He thanked me more than I deserved and hustled off up the colonnade, a lemon, a hot and heavy lemonade himself, with legs. I turned in my own direction for my steaming bathtub and dried apricocks.

That first brief hobnob with glib Klitchintzski did not distill out a drip of my concern. But if it had, If — then what prostrations (and castrations) might I have side-stepped? How many zillion ways might I have returned home that Wednesday, detouring Peter's Park and this paltry prison. *Could* I have erected a dike against his diabolical concoctions or was that first stagnant cock-play *the* peremptory tu-whitt, tu-whoo in his loopy fetish for intrigue? Seems so. The cad, the slimy earwig in his borggy gabardine!

Wednesday I walked home from the shop in the same stupid direction. Facetious Klit — was sitting solidly on a bench in all his blubbery obesity under the arbour, aboral to his former Tuesday position. I now imagine that he almost burst with excitementations when he saw me (saw me coming, as it were), but by the time I was close enough his conjectural fascination had submerged like the sapphire-in-the-mud puddle of the previous day.

Garlic (sausage), humbug (poor camouflage), and perspiration exhaled from his still saturated gabardine. "Proves he slept in it," I told myself sitting down with as little salutation as I could muster. He fiddled with something (the porcelain globule?) in his pocket. "Billiards," I inwardly snickered and audibly tolled out two etiquette-pamphlet-second-encounter-questions: the first, if he was married, and the second, how he could spend his post meridiems so leisurely. I was probing his financial guts, which were tell-tale enough judging the sauna face, *pompadour d'homme* wavy hair (disheveled) and the manicured nailth and gross cabochon ring that primped through it.

"I am a sybarite," he needn't have confessed, "and a wife, especially a beautiful and kindly one, is but the embodiment of that love." I prepared to put my foot in my mouth for a third, but Klitchintzski held up his piggy hand for silence. I complied, remaining taciturn throughout his copious monologue, as much as it pained me. I have not tried to capture (why would I?) his over-abundant stammerings and unemphatic rests.

"My patrimony included a string of butcher shops." (My vegetarian stomach threw up a riot of revolt into my mouth.) "I can afford being a sybarite. My wife is a valorous creature, keeps house, cooks Cantonese, and still has enough *jeunesse* and energy left in her tiny body to pursue her own resplendent interests with, yes, you guessed it, added ease.

"We have no children. I would keep servants, but she abhors people sucking up to her. She's just a pet. We don't live far and enjoy entertaining. If you're ever free . . ." he left off, a nasty joke. I strained to clear my throat, but before the phlegm was up Klitchintzski rushed on. Beneath his bunk I could only squeak *sotto voce* by shifting my prat from what was becoming tender and well over-done: my spare time. ". . . of course it is up to you entirely.

"She is a Chinese. For months at a time we appear anti-social, rather we don't appear at all and reside in the gardener's cottage *au derrière*. She cooks more and cleans less. As of last night we are enduring just one of those little interludes — a variation on a toy pye-ana. She is contrapuntally tired. Has too many things going at once." He fidgeted and transferred the egg to his other pocket. Snooker.

"She was brought up in Canton by her father, a monarchist, and fully feels (she has never told me why, but I can almost see lash scars on her mother's back reflected in her eyes as she looks at me — pity) the obligations a wife must show her master. Twelve years ago, seventeen and pig-tailed, she was given notice by The Party (party, pah!) to report for work in the gold mines at Nangtsien. Instead, her father bade her take the family heirloom, a solid golden egg inscribed with two diametrically opposed phoenixes (overlooked by the New Authorities). She did. To the blacksmith. He hammered the gold to leaf. She sewed the leaf into a belt and flitted along the muddy goat-gut backroads to the ocean. Reaching the shore she slid her body into chicken grease and began swimming an ideally semi-circular route around the Tach'an Peninsula hoping to land near Kowloon, a short saunter into wizard Hong Kong and a ferry ride to Victoria.

"However, a bald storm blew up late in the afternoon . . ." (I, Plume, began a sneezing fit at this point in Klit's narrative) "... forcing her to land on Tach'an. She had not yet escaped The Party nor its cold-blue machine guns. The tempest ravaged On Ly for two more days. She had only raw piddocks and limpets to eat under the scanty shelter of runt loquats and corkscrew pines.

"As the sun spread its strawberry sepals and ox-blood petals on the third morning she again magnetized for Kowloon across the Deep Bay. Her muscles were jelly, so much of the day she could barely tread water and think only of not dropping the gold-leaf belt to the bottom of the green-tea sea.

"Next morning black-slickered prawn-fishermen found the spent swimmerette on their beach north of Kowloon. They revived her, my denuded darling, fed her and sent her along the road to the Emerald City of Oz, Hong Kong. She sold the gold to another of her father's contacts, bought a serviceable passport and sailed here within the month.

"She had worked in a Chinese laundry (no better than a gold mine) for five years until I decided to take a walking trip to V. Village.

"The day I arrived was liquid lunch, spurting cumulo-nimbus, like yesterday. My clothes, the only ones I had with me, got sopping so I went to the laundry. On Ly was alone there and . . . well," the bugger actually blushed, "you can guess the rest for yourself." I let on that I couldn't. "We seduced each other in the back place on a pile of dirty linen. Benzoline hung in the air, the iron was steaming and an ancient finger in the vestibule was flicking on the service bell. I assure you it was most erotic.

"I was quick to free her from other people's sheets. But that was eight years ago," he almost looked pitiable. "I no longer think I am deserving. Eight years can do a lot of damage to a man's hood. You can see that for yourself." I could. I sneezed. "Nevertheless," he continued, "I must go and buy those canaries you suggested." His mood had looped the loop. "It seems we both have a way with little birds. Here, take my address . . ." Peach card. Curlicue monogram. "You will visit . . . please?" I sneezed again and said I would.



All of my insipid thoughts that evening were concentrated on Klitchintzski. My imagination was stiff, reeling in coils, branching into bulbous abscesses, yet always backsliding to the issue of that droopy fatguts and the beautiful story of his wife, On Ly. I could not derail myself from the kinetics of Klit's infernal inertial locomotive. I was not aware I was on a monorail at all, as much as I despise linear thought.

I wandered about my garret from window to lonely window, neglected, and so smelted my perogies into case-hardened pellets, then garburated the lot. My dinner consisted of tepid sour cream, cool scummy borscht, and a bowlful, and a bowelful, of gripe from an undiagnosed agent. (Q.E.D.)

Looking closer in the bathroom of that night I can see myself, sneezing dew upon my looking-glass face. Bubbles on a puddle. Pubbles on a buddle. My face now a mosaic, now a shimmering forest, now all but obliterated.

I slithered in bed rather earlier than usual. As I lay there, groggy, stressed, a silk-shorted pugilist pommeled me with sand-sacks of sleep, and out of the dark corners behind my chintz partition emerged a vision of rum Klitchintzski in overcoat. He flung it open releasing a tiny sparrow in pig-tails and tight chemise. It glided and cheeped about my skull no matter which way I rolled over and over. I could not corral it. I even (even!) tried to tie its french-curving trajectories into sheepshanks and clove-hitches (doubtless an absurd notion to the truly wakeful), but it wormed its way out of this inscribing first an epicanthus, then kohl-shadowed eyes, a tiny nose, and On Ly's soft floppy lips, which tightened and cat-bawled as sparrow dissolved and gabardine debauched only in a spray of clotted face-cloths, cheesy (Sardo) socks, gelatinized g-strings, and crusted panties. "We seduced each other . . ." his nettlesome hair-lip, " . . . I assure you it was most erotic . . ." holding her frail, limp, glowing, exhausted body draped over his left arm as he erected the scaffolding, guppy-like, with his right, disseminating for a second thrust, this time in a dream nine *a l'hauteur* extension, " . . . a variation on a toy piano . . ." the ghoulish organist humped over the dainty limbs of berceuse On Ly on Plume's bedstead!



I sat up and switched on the lamp, determined to justify my sour hatred for priapistic onanistic Klit. "Was it merely because he was self-sufficient? Certainly not! Just because Plume must slave his life away in that disgusting little shoppe . . . no, he is not the covetous type. Perhaps, then, because he was lonely . . . No! That would be the last thing." I got my women when I pleased, you can bank on that, and petty

bickerings over vacuum shifts, ah it's not worth it. No I loathed the bastard because he had his claws into On Ly.

"Imagine Plume, a man of twenty-nine, *Mesdames and Messieurs de la cour*, under-reaching around to grab the flabby buttocks of a *cinquante ans* cow, ploughing her in diurnal rhythms, his nose buried in her flaccid putrid udders, pretending to enjoy . . . Sirs, he could not even rise to the occasion, could never enjoy the buttermilk rumballs of such an art deco hag. And poor On Ly, whipped up under the grotty instant-replayed spasm of that cornucopial polar bear . . . !"

By God I knew what I must do: Free Her From the Tyrant! Live out the willow-ware story. Thinks he does her a fever. "I assure you . . ." his pelvis in circular motion, "most erotic, most erotic, most erotic . . ." My stomach curdled. Oesophagus in reverse. I slept and awoke with four and twenty canaries in my pit, the weary light still on, my nose clotted, and sour glair on the sheets.

I was in a jitter all Thursday anticipating my next tryst with Klitchintzski. I broke half a crateful of the best Limoges tea-cups and saucers, which both grounded me and upset Rives, the boss, abominably. The poor flabbergasted man was in such a huff that he began threatening everyone in the shop, customers included, which did nothing to console my watery position on the premises. (I found a note: "Beat it!" (signed) Killer, meanly pinned to the walnut chiffonier with a silver butterknife.) I began to wonder if I should meddle less in Klit's affairs with On Ly, who, after all, might be content, if not happy in the lick of luxury. Oh, Plume, you incontinent cock-sparrow! Had I but further heeded my own advice.

As I stepped out at five a light windless drizzle began to sugar down from the thin icing overcast. In spite of that I side-tracked my usual short religious route to the park in order to enter the fluff-weight fray by the same colonnade by which Klitchintzski had exited the day previous. But my theatrics were nipped in the bud. The rain had sopped the bench and it would never do (oh no!) for him to douche his massaged flanks so brutishly. He was standing, his back towards me, looking at the latticed climbers and April shoots of the arbour. My entrance ignored, the puddle re-accumulating, and to add insult to snubbery I make bold to record our colloquy in this form:

KLIT (turns on his heel to pug-face me) *Not so punctual today, hmmm?*

PLUME *Detention. I had to sit on my hands and chamois the cups. I broke valuable china today. (Toady.)*

KLIT *Oh, (garbled pretense) no Moorcroft vases, I trust. I shouldn't think that that little shop would carry (clumsy, very clumsy) anything of real value. (over saxonate, a little too fluid for my tastes, his face was flushed fuschia.)*

PLUME *No, my paycheck has only been dented, that would have tore it into a thimbleful of incorrigible square millimeters. Totalled confetti. All the knight's horses and all the king's men.*

KLIT *(indifferently) I suppose. (My squandered vocals. How might I turn the conversation on top of On Ly? His pocket giving birth to a bottle of gin (Gordon's) pulled down to the boar-wolf's ears.) Here, have a shwig.*



PLUME *(lips wetted on sparks and fire.) So this (ugh) is what you do all day, you rascal, sipping in the rain.*

KLIT *Rainsha good mixsher. (sea shells she sells.)*

PLUME *Yes, (sotto voce) it's doubtless the carbaoxylic acid that keeps you on your feet. Did your little lady like the canaries?*

KLIT *Adored them! You should have sheen her on her tiptoes in white tights after*

ballet — she's a ballerina, you know — attituding and arabeshqueing as she reached up to feed the two little twitching things. Shplendid. Shimplly shplendid. (blooming and salivating on Plume's umbrella, remarkable caprice though, on tiptoes himself, but from where had he really extracted those two euphonious technicalities? he recapped himself with the bottle.)

PLUME *(trimming down to procure an invite.) Love is indeed a fragile plant. You must feed and spray daily.*

KLIT *(secreting from every bore.) Such a dove. Silver-lined. Indefatigable. (etc., etc.,) and she should like to see the man who proposed such a charming gift.)*

PLUME *And I should like to see her! (down boy!)*

KLIT *By all means, old boy, you shall. Not today. I musht shober up. . . . (burst of sibilations) . . . tomorrow, then . . . yesh . . . Friday . . . (Plume nods, a grinning yes.) . . . that'sh shettled then. Tomorrow.*

He tawled off. "Goodbye," I mimicked from my anytime atoll, having gained such, what proved, a mustard-seed victory. He skirted around me, almost too frolicsome, kicked pieces of refuse out of the puddle, pirouetted and shouted back to ask if I had his number. Nod. "Tomorrow," I thought, "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, you old fart."

"You must be patient," I told my dinner. "Control. Control. Control." But I *was* titillated to be meeting her, wanted, craved to see how much of a pygmalion Klitchintzski had pulled over her subtle embonpoint, hungered to pat her cling-peach peach-cleft, thirsted to graze on white thighs and steal her gently off his meat-hooks — not quite literally, mind, I was merely priming the pumps.

No phantoms loomed behind my chintz partition that night. No nightmares pecked my stomach. No. Instead I slept, tucked and snuggled, with the resolved expectation of a calm child on a cold, raw Christmas Eve. Mixed nuts and silvered balls tomorrow.

Not a jot of porcelain did I break next day. In fact I was so useful to Mr. Rives, humming and bustling about the shop, that I was sent off early. I went straight to the park. No dilly-dally. No Klitchintzski. I cooled my buttocks on the bench. A half-hour zoomed by and then the sun set a snail's pace. My head nearly whirligigged off its post. Klit still doesn't show. "Why has he changed his haunt after three days running?" I got up. "Probably some quirk in his weekly premeditations. He's got to be at home. Didn't he say he would be?"

Amidst my addleheadedness I found myself in a delicatessen with a cylinder of escargots in one arm and the index finger of my other pointing out that (no, no, yes, that-one-there) tray of Ukranian sausages after not having chewed flesh since I was a young pup. ("Oh, God," I scream in the night, "the lumps in the gruel, the 'pork,' is really the minced musculature of my late morse-code buddy, the man no longer in the next cell!") The escargot's glissade in purgation to the meat store floor and Philip Plume is seen running through the streets before a trail of vomit hoping to catch the basic eruption in the cup of his bidet.

I dawdled in the bathtub, re-shaved my jaw — barbaric nicks — put on my best plaid bow-tie (truly a gala event for me) and tweed sportscoat (all gone for straight stripes now). I anticipated a nice chatty evening in the Klitchintzski temporary cottage; by the fireside, I supposed, and no work tomorrow, I knew.

Night had fallen into the thick prelude of a fog as I lit out for the corner store to buy an aspidistra for Mrs. K. Breathing was a chore, but awaiting me were silk partitions and pillows, ghostly bamboo curtains, surely, Ming and champlève, possibly, paragon cloisonné, doubtless, and the ballerina serving oolong and almond cookies entirely on Hewitt and Ledbetter willow-ware — crumbs for the canaries. I was almost running, heedless of the fog, before I saw the rusted gates.

The black mansion loomed up beside the path I neophytically tiptoed along towards the cottage in the back. There it is: hunched under cascading willows, of course, and abstract larches, one light off and one light on. A taint of gasoline loiters in the air. I approach the door and knock, firmly, as one expected.

No answer. Silence, except for the wind in the willows and a hist from inside. "An air bubble in hot water pipes." I think, perusing the aspidistra's reaction to the chill, its leaves unmistakably curling under. I fillip an aphid from my thumbnail off into the night. I knock again and squeak, "Is anyone home?" Hist. I turn the delft-blue porcelain doorknob — my head is drowning in the gas — and slowly kick open the door. A blast of gas. I drop the aspidistra on the porch, step back out of the yellow light, put my hankie to my mouth, and charge into the past.

My God! The room was a mess: burnt toast crumbs and careless ashes all over the floor, stacks of dirty dishes and empty gin bottles in the sink, garlic sausage carcasses draped over the chairs — not a touch of femininity in the place — and Klitchintzski lying over in the corner on a couch that the cheapest slut wouldn't put her puss on. He was quite dead.

I turned off the enamel gas handle on the stove, looked around for a telephone (none), a bottle of Gordon's (with a boar), and opened the windows. He was dead all right as were the canaries caged in the other room. Did Klitchintzski fall asleep with the gas on? No, Plume, it was switched to 'high.' He must have turned it on himself. His nose was blue, smirking almost, his fingers stiffened over the porcelain marble.

I understood, or so I thought, Klitchintzski's deeper compassionate self for the first and only time. I knew what that lecherous smirk — it *was* a smirk — meant. He was egging me on. "She's all yours, Plume," his corpse seemed to expire. "She's all mine," I stunned the dead canaries, "mine and the phoenix in my throb." I leapt at the gin and sat beside Klitchintzski's head. I rested it on my lap. But when I relaxed, my brain made the connection: where in the hell is On Ly anyway? Maybe she's made a getaway and left some ticket stub to tell me where she is. Maybe she'll phone. Maybe she's asleep in the mansion. Maybe she did Klitchintzski in herself.

"Obviously I've been here for some time," I told myself, belting down the gin and searching the joint for evidence (of what?). Nothing in the toilet. Nothing in the garbage. No empty ampoule. No obvious needle marks. Evidence, evidence and (Son of a whip and willow-bitch!) there was some!

Night had permeated the other room and was cooling the sweat from its yellow walls. I rolled the squat message out of the typewriter,

Glad for you could making
it. Me mee you Chinese
laundry at V. Village.
Two a.m. Me you o.k.?

— On Ly

Red type. I ran my fingers over the keys, a fatal mistake, and decided (why not?) to meet her at V. Village in the laundry at two a.m.

I re-anaesthetized my goose-bumping breath and thumping pulse. I also pocketed the note, picked up my aspidistra, and kissed *au revoir* to asphyxiated Klitchintzski with his hemorrhaged lungs, cheap partitions, cracked plaster, limp carbuncled neck and to the brown wet bubble of garlic sausage on the seat of his trousers. My hand was again over my mouth, but I see now that his incontinence was in no less perfect balance with my own. It was too late that I thought of taking the porcelain globe, but as I think back on it Klitchintzski's *rigor mortis* of the fist would have necessitated a crow-bar to pry it loose.

I started off for the last train to V. sticking my thumbs into plums that were not mine, out to scavenge this ripe plump peach on a crisp pile of linen, to hike her thighs onto the counter — resolved not to be an innocent bystander where the air reeked of coitus and profit.

So off I strutted to the station as snugly unsuspecting as any loony hooked up by the filigree, filoplume, fruit-of-the-loom diapers of the palpable present, smug in my intent, stiff beneath the one-way bristles of my brigadier moustache, yet all too under-conscious of the chill night's boney fingertips tickling my slender rib-cage *sous les* armpit falls of my unreasonable, unseasonable tweed sportscoat. Yes, it was cold! But my mind was not focused there on the flesh-eating monkey tricks of the station platform, not at all eye to stammering phosphorescent eye with the slimy nocturnal perverts. Three chem students inverted a cigarette vending machine, pocketed the packets and excreted their own into the slit before the dozey station-master turned. No, I was on a much higher plateau then, tiptoeing (again) lambent across palm and pedestal lily pads with my saucy soubrette, On Ly.

I almost forgot to ring the police about kaput Klitchintzski. Yes, they would “be right over to check it out, Sir, and could you spell out your last name, please . . .” (No, thank you.) “. . . and where are you located now, Sir? . . .” I put down the receiver, brushing aside the flaking integument of common sense. In the peak-hat heat of momentum I poppy-cock peacocked onto the train.

When it rolled forward under the deserted girders and glass I began, in retrograde, to muse on Klitchintzski. Very odd that I should be on the train to V. Village at this late hour. Odder that I had left his steaming body behind not an hour ago.

The chem students had filled the coach with smoke. I began to cough — what am I doing here? — to hack — what am I after? — to wheeze — a rendezvous, a glimpse, a grovelling stab — to cough, to wheeze — what have I stooped to? And so before the conductor confiscated the fags I had thoroughly hauled myself over the coals. “I’m disgusted with myself. Running after an ill- illegal immigrant! Probably won’t be there anyway, but just sit tight and see how things turn out,” I told myself. “Pah! Oriental mirage, willow-ware secretaries, indeed! Typewriter notes, balder — but the note *is* real (!!) and here, here it is in my hand, and I am real, yes,” and there I was again in cloud-cuckoo-land. “Here I come, Swimmer of Seas, Carrier of the Solid Gold Egg with Two Diametrically Opposed Phoenixes. Oh Thou Truant of the Gold Mines at Nangtsien . . . Phoenixes?

“Did I murmur ‘Phoenixes’?”

At that extemporization I began to smell the rat, dead-rat Klitchintzski himself. The train drove on over a clack in the track. I was resolved to pluck On Ly, but deep down inside I knew damn well a phoenix wasn't an oriental symbol. “Ach, stupid Klitchintzski probably just muddled the story. They were rooks or cocks or dicky-birds or tit-willows or something. Sure.” The train pushed on. I was swinging down on On Ly from a pomegranate tree, grunting, groaning, gesticulating with my purling wet tongue. The train stopped.

I ran. She would be there in a slurpy fur and a sleek shade-of-blush SL. A brilliant and brutal peach. A wet dream. But because I had never been to V. Village I had no idea where the laundry might be. The streets were deserted except for a car purring deep down an alley that I passed. I glanced at my watch: two-fifteen. I was late, I was lost in the streets, and my legs were flying off at their hinges. I ran up and down the rows of notary publics, shoemakers, bookmakers, and matchmakers. I turned the last corner. Laundry!

I stopped to catch my breath; my pulse was pounding in my ears and my nose was bleeding a sickly-sweet back into my mouth; and walked up to the door. I pushed the buzzer (again no answer), tried the knob (locked), and ironed my bloody nose against the window between my hands. “All right, spread your hands out on the glass and don't turn around.”

I was frisked, was pushed into a squad car, and, as we prowled down to ‘headquarters,’ was read my rights. The desk sergeant, who looked remarkably like Klitchintzski, charged me (I'm certainly not guilty of *that*, fuck-face!) and instructed his flunky to ‘clap this scallop in solitary.’ Fat indulgence in a small pond.

That is all there is to tell except for what you know already: the supplementary note found (where else?) on a supplementary typewriter in the foyer of the Klitchintzski mansion on royal-cream vellum,

You will find my executioner
at V. Village, running in to
stand in front of the Chinese
laundry like the fool he is.
Stood up.

— Klitchintzski

No fingerprints on those keys at all. No wife. No On Ly.

Frankly; and I say this with all the sincerity and detachment as befits the innocent bystander that I am, the case looks bleak for me. It seems I've been well sewn into a life sentence. It seems that podgy bourgeois Klitchintzski has given his death thwack and thunderclap whereas his life of decadence and wild drink was barren ground.

I am masking deception when I say that it was *Klitchintzski* who planted that porcelain marble, that it was that which inticed me to tell the willow-ware story to him, that it was *he* who coaxed me to re-tell the rude jokes on which he based his entire nasty no-wife story, and *he* who incited me, and excited me, to step on the open overcoat of his trap.

And what am I to grab at? Nothing. Nothing but a joke. Nothing but a world in which filthy old, filthy rich old lechers can yank a man, me, Philip Plume, an honest teacup-and-saucer shop man off of park bench and into his own hara-kiri fetish. I tell you, you may think me mad, but I have nothing to hang onto. Nothing but a great masturbational farce: without caress, without a tender kiss, *sans* even a promptive picture.

Oh On Ly! I have nothing. The end has justified and obliterated Klitchintzski's means. I have been locked up, and will be tried and executed for my imagination. I regret my turnstyle mind. I apologize for my contretemps.