

## A Poets Circle

At 4:30 in the afternoon Gleason's pub, near St. Stephen's Green and off Grafton Street was all but deserted. The presence of a old, dour faced street musician should not be overlooked. He sat in his preferred nook, his battered violin case staved away in a corner and pint of Guinness in front of him. On weekdays during the lunch hour he filled the halls of Grafton Street with an infernal caterwauling. Everything about him was worn; from the folds in his face, to the lining in his gut, to the contours of his mind ; for he was old, and senile and drunk. As he has little bearing on this narrative, I will say no more about him.

The two publicans were: publicans; I will say very little about them. But the group huddled in a corner of the room, to the left of the bar as one entered from the street were - POETS! One is therefore obliged to say a great deal about them. If one doesn't tell all that there is to tell concerning them, they will do it for themselves. It is just as well that one get the drop on them.

Their reunion this November afternoon was special in one respect, though otherwise differing little from the daily gathering which began soon after lunchtime and continued, with interruptions, until closing. On this day, in addition to scaling the heights of poetry on a scaffolding of beer barrels, this select coterie were also feting the return of Brendan Casey after a month of roving through Denmark, whither he had repaired to gratify a passion for Kierkegaard.

All of Brendan's 32 massive years were seated behind his third pint of stout. The very image of exuberant, if somewhat

dissipated, health, Brendan's mood vacillated between King Lear and Henry VIII. From time to time he curled his lips like a professional actor; a dark furrow creased his brow and he became Raskolnikov, or Stavrogin, or Captain Ahab. When he gripped your hand it was with the firm grasp of the stone guest from Don Giovanni.

" But I'm sure you all want to hear about those Danish birds!" he roared in the bass register:

" Well; they've got long cunts and short arses - har, har, har!!!"

This information was not received as being in the least way exceptional. Aleister McDonnell made bold to ask him if this was why he had returned to Ireland.

" Not a chance!", he growled, encompassing his audience by turning his head from side to side. He sniffed at his glass of stout, seemed to find it acceptable, and took a draught:

" In Hibernia-land, the arse is so god-damn big, the cunt gets swallowed up inside the bloody thing- Har, har, har!" Brendan Casey was in the habit of saving you the trouble of laughing at his jokes by doing it for you.

Peggy McGuire, a chubby girl with thick spectacles and a way of making people feel as if what they were saying wasn't worth listening to, commented:

" Well; that finishes the subject of Denmark, I guess." She stood up to go to the bar for another vodka and orange juice.

" Oh; haven't you heard?" Aleister remarked, in a tone of subtle insinuation, " It appears that DeGiorgio's exhibition isn't going too well."

If he had expected to witness Brendan bursting into flames, he was doomed for disappointment. Tapping his beer stein reflectively, Brendan merely replied:

" Oh. I didn't know he was in Dublin; I met him in England last month and he said he might be coming over here."

In addition to those of Aleister and Peggy, the muffled gasps around the table came from a young lady of rural antecedents named Siobhan Lacey; Mike Mulligan, a bearded romantic poet lost in the folds of his blue overcoat; and Padraic Parsons, poet and scholar in his 50s. Gazing into the depths of his pint of stout, Padraic appeared to be contemplating the play of sunlight on the bodies of the golden maidens of the Rhine.

Daylight was fast fading. One of the bartenders switched on the back lights. This gave little relief to the dreariness of the lifeless pub, with its large paint-covered ogive windows, its small cramped interior and mean floor covered only by a thin torn layer of black linoleum. If one were to say that Gleason's sometimes gave one the impression that the whole world had come to a dead stop, he would not be far wrong. There were moments here when time itself seemed to halt, like a jeep that has gotten its tires stuck in a mudslide. The sensation could be agreeable. One might hang out at Gleason's, chat for an hour or two, then leave carrying away a feeling that there had been neither advancement nor regression in the world's awesome dynamo.

At a distance of less than a yard the buzz of conversation at this table completely faded away . Even at the heart of the group

one couldn't help feeling that, despite the overbearing seriousness of those who were saying it, that just nothing was being said.

Aleister was the first to recover:

" There's something odd about that, Brendan, you know. To hear the fellow talk, Riccardo has a very different impression of what went on between the two of you."

" HMM? WHAT..! So what...I mean, how so?" Brendan appeared genuinely surprised. Siobhan leaned forward to catch every syllable of the conversation as Aleister went on, mercilessly:

" According to Riccardo, you invited him over here. He claims that you promised him an exhibition."

Casey bobbed his head from side to side in ever widening arcs. Coming abruptly to a full stop he faced Aleister squarely. On his lips twitched a dolphin-size smile. With his right hand he grasped him firmly on the shoulder.

" Aleister, my lad! Do you believe everything people tell you? Let me assure you, old boy, the sky isn't going to fall down. Har, har, har! No sir, that sky will be up there for a long time to come!" As if to indicate that the subject was no longer worthy of discussion he quickly turned away,

But the lean, pinch-faced, and allegedly consumptive Aleister would not be robbed of his prey:

"...Yes.. But something tells me you aren't too welcome in Riccardo DeGiorgio's company."

"Well then!" Casey stormed, banging the table with his fist and shouting in an exaggerated manner: " Let him come in here! I'll

be waiting for him! Look, man. I'm not afraid of some wog fairy!..  
Why; are you?"

Padraic Parsons , either having lost sight of the golden maidens or merely satisfied himself for the moment that they wouldn't go running away, lifted his shaggy head and beard. Glaring incredulously over the rims of his heavy spectacles through blood-shot eyes, he addressed both of them :

" Why bring it all up again? Why not just forget about it ?  
Why not let sleeping dogs lie!?"

Although Aleister had great respect for Padraic he had no intention of giving up:

" That's all right with me Padraic; yet Brendan claims to be unaware even of the fact of Riccardo's *being* in Ireland, while the rest of the world is insisting that Brendan brought him over here! I'm merely trying to get my stories straight, that's all."

" I did not bring this DeGiorgio bugger over here!  
That's a lie! " This time he banged *both* fists on the table, and even stomped his feet.

" Yes; but - " Aleister started to return to the attack; but Padraic, who cherished peace at any cost, and who intended to show that, despite his university affiliation, he had no fear of dirty words, yelled:

" Oh ,shut up, you asshole!!!" Upon which Aleister withdrew, for the time being at least . Padraic Parsons returned to his contemplation of the Lorelei. In the meantime Peggy McGuire had returned from the bar. She sat quietly, idly tapping her glass of

vodka. She seemed to think that all these shenanigans, perhaps life itself, were terribly dull, and said as much:

"Well, none of this is very interesting, I think."

"Hell!", Brendan blustered, "It's a frigging bore, if you want to know! Now look here: I've just come back from Denmark, laden with wild Scandinavian lore; and here we are again, in dirty old Dublin, where everybody wants to know how often his next-door neighbor brushes his teeth! If no-one can suggest a better topic of conversation, I damn well am going to leave!"

To show his displeasure, Brendan drained off half a pint of Guinness at a single gulp.

During this heated in-fighting Mike Mulligan, normally very talkative, had not said a word. Yielding to spontaneous impulse he lifted up his glass of stout and swore:

"I say we should all quaff a pint of Guinness, to honor the filthy name of Riccardo deGiorgio, that fabulous sodomite!"

Some trembling image which had hung suspended less than a foot in front of Parsons' dreamy eyes, audibly cracked. He was seriously annoyed:

"Look, you shit!", he whined, "Lay off, will you?" Taking the silence as his cue, he went on:

"You're just a mother-fucker, Mike! And a phoney! That's right! That's all you are! A mother-fucker and a phoney!"

After this powerful interjection, Padraic Parsons withdrew completely from the conversation, so much so that it was generally assumed that he had fallen asleep.

" Well, Mike!" Brendan turned on him the full force of his rude and comic mien:

" Have you, in my absence, won any new favors of the frigid bard?"

" Ay!" Mike wailed, tottering unsteadily, " But the whore of the muse, she hath a frizzly cunt! But I say to you, that we should both quaff a beaker of vintage stout, so that we may drink to the name of the greatest pre-Raphaelite of them all, Riccardo deGiorgio, the fabulous sodomite."

" SO!! Mike" Brendan replied irritably, rubbing the lapels of his jacket " I see you're just as obnoxious as you've ever been."

" That I am, that I am...", the rest being lost as Mike babbled anew in his cups.

" Well, I'll drink to him, if that will make you happy. I've nothing against the good man."

Carried away by the tremendous drama of the moment Brendan Casey lifted his weight fully erect to toast to the much maligned Riccardo deGiorgio. A tiny amount of stout still sloshing about the bottom of his glass was hoisted at the end of a pike-stiff arm as he boomed:

" To Signor Riccardo deGiorgio! An able man if there ever was one, who could, if so required, paint the amorous entanglements of Socrates with Alcibiades, and who, for all we know, has already done so on the soft epidermis of a whore's arse!"

This masterful speech received the applause it justly deserved. Brendan turned a face beaming with appreciation upon his elite audience, which now gave him its undivided attention,

" And I drink to the unholy name of Riccardo deGiorgio, the man chosen by Jesus, Joseph and Mary, to educate the backward Celtic homeland in the sins of the Holy Ghost!"

To judge from the applause this also went over quite well. Mike Mulligan stood up and started walking unsteadily towards the door.

" Where're you going, Mike?" Peggy called after him

" I'll be back in a moment; I'm only going out to bum a few quid."

Brendan took this opportunity to excuse himself and to make a trip to the bogs. The silence that descended over the collective could be heard as far away as West Meath. Peggy McGuire, yawned . Her whole body seemed to have been fashioned for sitting. Were her vodka not being maintained erect through inertia, it would probably have spilled into her lap. At last, chewing each word like a poppy seed before spitting it out, she said :

" I've just finished a poem."

Siobhan McKenna nodded with appropriate solemnity. She was the youngest among them, preferred speaking Irish to English, and claimed, probably truthfully, that she was descended from a long line of Irish minstrels. Her hair was long, black and straight, her skin sallow. Her lips were therefore in contrast quite ruby red. She rarely addressed any subject directly, and when she wasn't silent she tended to hysteria. She turned to Peggy:

"Is this another poem from your 'period of remorse'?"

"No", Peggy responded in her throaty and permanently bored alto, " I'm entering a new phase. I'd read it to you but I forgot to bring it with me. It's a short poem, only 8 lines."

Aleister McDonnell was led to remark that his thousand-line epic had just reached line 778 as of the night before. On the assumption that everyone was anxious to hear it, line 778 was immediately recited with passion and excellent diction:

*" Her tits awaiting, the overdose killed her !!"*

Which came as a shock to nobody, as all present realized that Aleister had been on a prolonged "beat-poetry" trip ever since he'd spent three months in London hanging out with the avant-garde.

"Well", Peggy droned, " I don't write that kind of poetry. I think it's rubbish."

Aleister laughed. Padraic Parsons suddenly went on the offensive:

" You've got no right to say that!", he snorted, " You write shit yourself, you know! Everything I've ever seen of yours is shit! Just shit!"

From Peggy's expression one would think the roof had caved in:

" Yes...well, I...Look, Padraic, let's discuss it.. some other time, when ... when you've had a few less drinks.. Is... is that all right?"

" Oh! I've got nothing against your poetry, Peggy! I just wanted you to see what it feels like to be told by someone you respect that your work is shit! That's all I was doing!"

" Well, I'm sorry", she went on monotonously, " but I think that poetry like that is rubbish. Aleister might be very gifted in that vein, but I don't believe there's anything in it of value for the history of poetry."

" So then!" Parsons raged, " What *do* you like? What do *you* think is valuable? The Charge of the Light Brigade ? Jabberwocky? Daffodils? What's the matter with words like "shit" and "cunt" ? They're perfectly good English words. They also, as it happens, perfectly express our age: *The Age Of Cunt* . You certainly must be aware, Peggy, of the fact that we live in the Age Of Cunt?" Parsons glowered at her with hatred.

Peggy blushed and reached nervously for her drink:

" I don't care... I don't like those words, and I don't use them. My favorite poet is Marvell, and he doesn't use words like that. So I don't see why I should have to."

" Someone can use the word, 'shit' in his poetry and be a bad poet, while someone else can refrain from using the word 'shit' and be a very good poet", Aleister explained for the benefit of all, " but I still think that my line 778 , " *Her tits awaiting, the overdose killed her !!*" is a good line, although I'm not sure of where I should place the comma."

Softly Siobhan sang the lines of an old ballad from Connemara. She had a quiet, lovely voice.

Clearly proud of what he had done there Brendan returned from the bogs, resuming his place at the table to the right of Aleister. Waving his right hand like a grandee and crooking his

prehensile forefinger he bellowed: " As the guest of honor I claim the right to buy drinks all around. What'll it be? Guinness for me. "

" Guinness!"

" A paddy!"

" Guinness!"

" I think I'll have another vodka."

Brendan looked around: " Where's Mike?"

" He went out to look for some money." Peggy explained.

Brendan sat down again and leaned his head against the wall:

" Well, I guess I can't buy him a drink then", he sighed, satisfied with having done his duty.

Mike Mulligan was indeed out in the street looking for money. In his periodic bouts of depression he sought prolonged refuge under a blanket of drunkenness. That Mike was not alcoholic by nature was clear from the great efforts he had to make to push himself into drinking, and by the enormous toll it took on him. Once initiated, these binges persisted until he had antagonized every last friend and made himself an object of universal censure.

So that on this 5:00 in the afternoon of a Dublin November, with the darkness falling rapidly and, as ever, a touch of rain in the air, the pedestrians on Grafton Street were astonished to behold an otherwise respectable and intelligent young man in his late twenties tottering down the street in a dangerous state of intoxication and demanding money from every passing stranger for the lost cause of Irish poetry. His face was covered with shaggy tufts of beard sprouting randomly like weeds, his blue overcoat

thrown open to show the world that his clothing, though rumpled and dirty, was properly middle-class.

He was well known to many of the people he touched up; or they knew his father, a lawyer much respected around Dublin. Or they recalled that Mike Mulligan, when sober, was considered, by some at any rate, to be a promising young man, with literary gifts and an aptitude for scholarship, who had done well in his first year at Trinity. His father would certainly have no trouble getting him a good position in his own firm, or with Radio Eirann, since he was so literary-minded.

Mike continued on down the street. When he tired of the cause of Irish poetry, he switched to singing scraps of Irish ballads, of which he knew many, holding his cap out into the drizzle and whining like a true beggar. People sadly shook their heads, sometimes gave him a few coins. The money mattered little, the satisfaction was in the doing of it.

Still following his luck, Mike reached the foot of Grafton Street. There he turned right into Dame Street. Suddenly he felt a tight grip on his shoulder. Turning around he confronted Peter Maloney, manager of the Open Studio, heading home after a hard day's work.

"Snap out of it, Mike! Stop acting like a baby! Come with me; I'm getting you some strong coffee."

Maloney's manner was infested with self-righteous urgency. Protesting for the sake of form Mike allowed himself to be led. To a casual on-looker it might have appeared that Mike was being dragged into the Golden Spoon by his coat collar. Inside the

restaurant Peter pushed him into a seat. He sat himself down opposite him, and glared as he forced Mike to bolt down two cups of black coffee. Then he said:

"What is it this time, Mike?"

"Peter", Mike whined, "I just don't know where to begin."

"Where're you coming from?"

"I was sitting in Gleason's, and.."

"*Gleason's!*" Pete Maloney, the Eternal Father, gasped, "You shouldn't go into Gleason's! That's a bad crowd..."

"Yes; well, I was in Gleason's, and Brendan Casey was there, and.."

"*Brendan Casey!*" Peter nearly fell out of his seat, "I didn't think he would have the nerve to show his face in Dublin so soon. Do you realize he's almost ruined the Open Studio?"

"Yes, Peter. Well, Brendan Casey is sitting in there; or was when I left them... And he was insulting Riccardo. And he was insulting me... I'm telling you, he was insulting *me* !

"*Riccardo!* What did he say about him?"

"... insulting me ..he called me *obnoxious* , and.."

"Good, good. But what did he say about Riccardo?"

"Riccardo? ..oh yes... he didn't say anything, Peter... No, in fact he did say something... No, I'm wrong... he called him a 'wog fairy' .. which, between you and me, is an outrage....and.."

"Listen, Mike! Is Brendan still there? Let's go back there as soon as you've finished up."

"Sure, Peter,... And you'll buy me a drink, too, won't you?"

Peter Maloney gritted his teeth as if he'd swallowed a bad tasting ball of phlegm:

" All right... But just one! That's all I'm getting you!"

" Fair enough, Peter." In a moment they were back out onto the street. Peter looked around, affecting not to know which direction to turn to get to Gleason's. Mike grabbed him by the arm and raced with him through the crowds up Grafton Street .

When they arrived at the open doors of Gleason's, Maloney wagged a finger in Mike's face:

" Remember! Only one. I'm not buying you any more than one!" Mike's face glowed like a beacon. He slapped Peter on the back:

" You're good, Peter! Honestly, you're the greatest person I know! "

They stepped inside. Gleason's now held about 30 customers. It would soon be filled to capacity. Peter Maloney spotted Brendan Casey instantly. He was sitting in the same place where Mike had left him, surrounded by the admiring crowd of poets. Peter strode impetuously across the room. Hovering directly over him he shook his fist, a bit self- consciously, in Brendan's face:

" You bastard!" , he swore, "You utter bastard!"

It was all Brendan could do to keep from falling through the floor. If there was one thing he dreaded more than anything else in the world, it was being called to account for anything he did. Life could be so nice, so cozy... if only one wasn't being obliged to justify one's behavior to the whole world on all occasions...

But, when one came down to it, it was really very hard to make Brendan Casey lose his cool:

" Why? Why, Peter ? " he laughed, "Come on, man. It's terribly rude of you to be calling me names in front of all these people!"

Maloney blushed: maybe Brendan was right.

" All right, Brendan...I'm sorry. But we've got to talk! Now! Privately."

" Look, Pete!" Brendan laughed again, nervously, "Some of my friends might get the impression that I'm your enemy. I've got nothing against you. I've got nothing against any man! If there's something you want to discuss with me alone, I've no objections." He stood up and faced his audience:

" I want everyone here to take note! Peter Maloney has just called me an *utter bastard* , in response to which I accede *immediately* to his request to talk things over in private. Why, I've never seen a better example of turning the other cheek!"

Peter was becoming increasingly impatient. He smacked his forehead with the heel of his left hand.

" Come on!...Come on!.."

" At least, Pete", Brendan requested, " You don't mind if I take a glass with me? You'll give me that consideration, I trust?"

Brendan went to the bar, ordered another glass of ale and went with Peter to a shaded corner at the back of the pub.

Peter began scolding him even before they were fully seated: "What do you mean?", his hoarse whisper had become a rasp,

" inviting Riccardo over to Ireland without clearing it with us ?  
His show is ruining the Open Studio!"

" What?!...Well, now look here, Peter! Don't start throwing out wild accusations at me! No sir, indeed: I refuse to answer any more wild accusations ." He smirked insolently as if he were being made fun of.

" No! *You* look here, Brendan !....DON'T get excited!" Peter begged, at the same time waving his arms. He lowered his voice: "No one is accusing you of anything. Did you, or did you not, invite Riccardo deGiorgio to come to Dublin?"

" Why...Why; yes I did. I told him he would like it here . Is there anything wrong with that?"

" Did you promise him an exhibition at the Open Studio? Did you call him back to urge him to fly his canvases over here for that exhibition?"

"Well, Peter." Tapping his glass, Brendan stared aimlessly at the floor. It would have to come out.

" What I said to him was that, since I'm on the board of directors of the Open Studio, I could probably get him a show."

" Did you advise him to ship his paintings over before the first of the month?"

" Why... yes...I did. But I didn't imagine he would see any connection between both suggestions."

" WHAT??!"

" I'm simply telling you the truth, Peter. At the time I expected to be in Dublin through to the end of the year. He said he wanted to come over in a few weeks, and I told him if he shipped

his canvases to Dublin right away, I would go to Shannon Airport to pick them up. He also said something about framing, so I said I could arrange that, too. He seemed so terribly upset, I just kept saying "Yes" to everything. That's the best way of dealing with people who are angry and upset, don't you agree, Peter?... But right after our conversation, I was given this chance to go to Denmark, so I went. I tried to call him before I left but his phone was disconnected. Why, Peter, wouldn't you have done the same thing?"

Maloney scowled darkly:

" Well, Brendan; you've really made a mess of it this time."

" Why; what happened? I don't understand."

" Because of *you*, Brendan, we had to give Riccardo his damn show. *Do you know what they can do to an Art Gallery in Dublin?*" Peter exploded, " That bastard has plastered the walls of the Open Studio from one end to the other, with *nothing but fucking* ! Why, on one of his bloody canvases he has the Pope screwing an animal! A bear! Maloney took out a newspaper out of his briefcase and unfolded it on the table:

" Read what the Irish Press has to say about us!"

Succumbing to the gloom which never lay far from hand, Brendan deflated like a pricked balloon. The article, which he rapidly skimmed, had this to say:

*THE IRISH PRESS, November 5, 1969 :*

*The Irish Nation can no longer be expected to tolerate the criminal outrage to its conscience shamelessly displayed on the walls of the Open Studio. One reads in the newspapers every day of*

*some errant lad who, contemptuous of the education given to him by the Christian Brothers, goes to London, Mother of every vice and sin, and falls into evil ways. That his elders were not strong enough to steel him from the paths of error is to their lasting shame. But The Nation as a whole must not allow England to spew its sewage of corruption over the fair Isle of the Saints.*

*Yet this is what the Open Studio is doing by permitting Mr. Riccardo deGiorgio, an Italian of known scandalous morals, and it appears, the social sensation of Kensington, to flaunt his filth across its walls. From the moment I walked into that gallery I could only cry " Satan! Get thee behind me!" At the Open Studio the other night your humble critic beheld such foul slime, such debased portraitures, such bestial fabrications that he refrains from shocking the decency of his readers by trying to describe it .*

*We, the IRISH PEOPLE, have the right to demand that our government protect the innocent minds of our children from such perverted filth "*

"So, Pete ", Brendan chuckled, " You and I know that the Irish Press is a kind of sick joke."

" Brendan; you and I don't count! Look: even I think Riccardo's stuff is revolting, but I'm broad-minded enough to keep my opinions to myself. Do you realize that ever since this vile show of his opened last week, we've been submerged with mail calling us everything from 'filth peddlers' to", he choked, " 'unbelieving Jews!'"

Brendan emitted a series of forced horse-laughs.

" Our windows have been broken!"

Peter rapped on the table. He was really angry,  
" Yesterday somebody tried to throw a bucket of mud on the walls. We were able to get him out of the building, but our *reputation* !", his face was poker-hot and his body trembled, *our reputation* ! in Dublin isn't worth a penny! It'll take years for us to gain back what that 'pansy' has ruined in a week. And Brendan: if you think that the Irish Press is a "sick joke", you should see what the Catholic Standard says about us!"

Brendan sudden pallor reflected the glimmering of the Celtic Twilight.

" The ...Irish Times didn't deal too kindly with us either. nor did the Independent. But you haven't heard the worst of it, yet. Some... idiot... got onto the Bishop of Cork, and from the look of it, we're to be *damned from the pulpit* this coming Sunday!"

" *Ahhhhhh!* " Brendan groaned, truly worried at last, " But look, man what do I have to do with all this? Where do I come in?"

" *You ?* " Peter screamed at him, " Why - why - why- ...it's all *you're* fault! First of all, *you* brought him over here. Then you placed us in such a position that we were literally *forced* to give him a show. Why!" Peter shouted, momentarily losing control, "I could knock your teeth down your throat!"

Brendan probably felt some fear. Yet, when all was said and done, it really was very hard to make him lose his cool.

" Look, man:", his laugh could be taken for an apology,  
" Suppose I said I was sorry? I'm really sorry, you know.. Yes, I'm very sorry about the whole thing. Yes...yes...Uh Huh.." As if to

invest more authenticity into his words, he accompanied them with a vigorous bobbing of the head.

"But....but what do you intend to do about it?" Peter growled.

"Do about it?" Brendan yelled, peering about wildly like a trapped animal, "What can I do about it? It's not my problem!!"

Peter continued to steam. However, he had not anticipated any constructive proposals coming from Brendan.

"Well... Riccardo's exhibition has got to go."

"When, Peter? Look: don't you go hurting his feelings again!"

"He's got to go, and the sooner the better... We're throwing his work out tomorrow morning."

"Well.....so...that settles it, doesn't it?"

"WHAT?"

"If he's got to go, get rid of him. That will solve all your problems, won't it?"

"But.... *you* brought him here!!!"

"Look, look, look!! No,no!! Brendan shook his head with impatience, "I'm really tired of hearing about it. I'm just not your man; all right? What do you think I can do about it anyway?"

Peter had calmed down. He had accepted the inevitable. He explained the situation to him as he would to a child:

"I want you to break the news to Bill Devlin. You're a friend of his."

"I don't understand. What's Bill got to do with deGiorgio?"

"When Riccardo came to Ireland, at *your* invitation, he didn't have anywhere to stay. Bill and Beatrice Devlin gave him a roof over his head for two weeks. Then Bill pressured us into

giving Riccardo a show; he also stayed up two nights framing his canvases. How the hell could you take it upon yourself to tell Riccardo that we would frame his canvases, when no gallery ...!" Peter Maloney realized he was getting angry again and stopped himself. Lowering his tone of voice he went on:

" Bill's going to be hopping mad when he learns that we've taken Riccardo's shit off the walls. I need you to smooth things over."

Brendan rocked slowly back and forth. Sweating and breathing heavily , he lowered his head into his hands. With so much cosmic anguish in evidence, even Peter Maloney had to relax his severity. In a few moments, Brendan leaned back in his chair and sighed:

" It's a deal. Bill and Beatrice are expecting me at their place tonight for a home-coming party . I'll tell him then."

"You're serious now?"

" I'll arrange everything. Don't you worry about a thing."

" I'm depending on you, Brendan." Peter rose from the and collected his coat, "I've got to go now. This place depresses me."

" Goodbye, Peter! Don't you worry about a thing! I'm your man! You know you can always depend on me!"