

Write a commentary on one of the following:

1.

The afternoon darkened early and he was working peeringly in the semi-dusk when someone coughed behind him. A man and a woman stood in the aisle, and when his eyes were used to the better light on the church floor he noticed the woman was Marjory. The man said heartily, "Hullo, Duncan," and Marjory raised her hand and smiled. Thaw said "Hullo" and looked down

5 on them, smiling slightly. The man said, "We were visiting friends in Lenzie and we thought, old times and so forth, why not run in and see Duncan? So here we are." The man peered up through the ladders. "You must have cat's eyes to work in this light." "The switches are behind the door."

10 "No no. No no. I quite like it in this dimness, more mysterious, if you know what I mean ... Very impressive. Very impressive." Marjory said something he couldn't hear. He said, "What?" "This isn't your usual style of work, Duncan." After a short silence Thaw said, "I'm trying to show more air and light."

15 The man said, "So you are. So you are." He moved back into the body of the church, looking at the mural and quietly humming. He said, "You're nearly finished." "Far from it." "It looks finished to my untutored eye." Thaw indicated bits to be repainted.

20 "How much longer will you be on it?" "A few weeks." "Then what will you do. Teach?" "I don't know." He turned round and pretended to work. After a moment he heard the man cough and say,

25 "Well, Marjory," and, "I think we'll be getting along now, Duncan." Thaw looked round and said goodbye. The two people had moved back into the middle of the church. The man said, "By the way, did you know Marjory and I are thinking of getting married?" "No." "Yes, we're thinking about it."

30 "Good." There was silence then the man said, "Well, goodbye, Duncan. When we're married you must look in on us. We still think of you now and again." Thaw shouted, "Good." The syllable clattered upon the ceiling and walls. At the door he saw Marjory look back and

35 raise her hand, but couldn't see if she was smiling or not. It was too dark to work now. He lay on the planks, his thoughts returning to Marjory in a puzzled way, like a tongue tip returning to a hole from which a tooth has been pulled. He was sure he had just seen a girl without special beauty or intelligence. He wondered why she had been all he wanted in a woman. She was as unlike Marjory as Mrs. Thaw's corpse had been

40 unlike his mother. He wished he had said something ironic and memorable but she had given him no chance. "This isn't your usual style of work, Duncan."

45 He shivered and climbed slowly down. His body felt unusually heavy. He switched on the lights and stared at the mural. It looked horrible. He went up into the gallery where he kept a large mirror for such emergencies. Reflected in it, the left and right sides transposed, the mural sometimes looked new and exciting when he had been working too close to it for too long. Now it appeared even worse than his naked eyes had seen. He flung the mirror onto the pews beneath shouting, "Not beauty! Not beauty! Nothing but hunger!"

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2.

(love song, with two goldfish)

(He's a drifter, always
floating around her, has
nowhere else to go. He wishes
she would sing, not much, just the scales;
5 or take some notice,
give him the fish eye.)

(Bounded by round walls
she makes fish eyes
and kissy lips at him, darts
10 behind pebbles, swallows
his charms hook, line and sinker)

(He's bowled over. He would
take her to the ocean, they could
count the waves. There,
15 in the submarine silence, they would share
their deepest secrets. Dive for pearls
like stars.)

(But her love's since
gone belly-up. His heart sinks
20 like a fish. He drinks
like a stone. Drowns those sorrows,
stares empty through glass.)

(the reason, she said
she wanted)
25 (and he could not give)
a life
beyond the
(bowl)

Grace Chua, from *QLRS* Vol. 2 No. 2, January 2003
