

POINT OF DEPARTURE

by

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For as long as Edith Kenshaw could remember, spring and fall had excited her with a sense of possibility. In spring, she'd be impatient to work her garden; and the month of April would find her haunting the local garden shops and nurseries, eagerly browsing among tables of assorted seedlings and studying the lush pictures on brightly colored seed packets. Though she aspired to a disciplined restraint, she'd always caught herself buying more seeds than she could possibly use. But this spring, for the first time in memory, she had given very little thought to her garden. Now, in the first week of June, she had barely noticed the flowers blooming in her own and other people's yards. She had not organized her gardening tools. Not once had she been to a nursery to survey what plants were available.

And always in the fall, with the beginning of a new academic year at Marshall High School, she'd been eager to cultivate another sort of soil, and plant seeds of an altogether different kind. When her first-year students began to grope their way into the thickets of Latin grammar, she'd always entertained high hopes for all, never knowing in advance what individual capacities might emerge. As the weeks went by, however, a sort of natural selection would occur, and before the end of the term she would have a fairly good idea of who would not go on to Second-year. Sometimes a most unpromising student would surprise her by soldiering on to triumph in Caesar's *Gallic War*. And sometimes this unlikely person, having strengthened under Second-year's trials, would proceed to Virgil. But usually not. No, the students who elected to take Third-year were special—true adventurers. The self-elected elite.

She had always relished the anticipation of finding true scholars among the sophomores and of resuming work with the blossomers of previous years. But this year, the coming autumn—following the dismal spring she'd just concluded—promised nothing by way of hope or joy. She couldn't imagine either fall or spring ever doing so again.

So ran her thoughts late on a Friday afternoon as she sat alone in her classroom emptying her desk of the keepsakes and personal items she would take with her. The school year was done and commencement

over, with 842 seniors graduating. The building was quiet and nearly deserted. A few teachers were still about, tidying up remnants of the year's activity or preparing for their summer school offerings. The wall-clock showed ten till four.

For twenty-two years this classroom had served as her workshop, her private domain, her base of operations, her vantage point for surveying the world. Its three tall windows looked south from the third-floor, across the faculty parking lot to the cinder track and fieldhouse beyond. On warm spring days, with the windows open, faint shouts and the shrill of coaches' whistles accompanied class recitations. In winter, the old steam radiators below the window sills hissed and burbled.

Across the front wall stretched a chalkboard, carefully cleaned for the fall term. Along the back wall, waist-high shelves contained an unabridged English dictionary and other reference books, histories of Roman civilization, and assorted *National Geographics* which students used for extra-credit projects. Mounted above the shelves were framed black-and-white photographs of Roman remains: the Appian Way, with cypresses and umbrella pines; the Colosseum; the Castel Sant'Angelo; the Pantheon; the Forum—bisected by Mussolini's vile triumphalist avenue; various bridges, amphitheaters, aqueducts still standing about the Mediterranean. And, in the center of the wall, high up, near the molding that edged the ceiling, a large oil painting in vibrant colors of the helmeted heroic head of Aeneas, his bearded face in profile—calm, concerned, competent, gazing into the far distance toward the Rome he was destined to establish.

On the north wall was a large framed map depicting the Roman Empire at its point of maximum expansion. Between the map and the door leading to the hallway a long table held a large scale model of the domed Pantheon and a much smaller model of a Roman warship. Just inside the door stood Edith's desk, from which she could survey at an oblique angle the rows of chair-desks where the students performed their labors—and see if they held whispered conversations, passed notes, or used crib sheets for their oral translations.

It amazed and sobered her to reflect how much of her life had been spent in this classroom. Bearing the stamp of her personality, it was neat, orderly, efficiently arranged. And yet, for all that, it *wasn't* her room. It was institutional, the school's room. When she was gone, some other teacher would occupy it, and after that person, still another. And so on, to demolition.

The janitor had brought Edith several large cardboard boxes for packing her things, and had promised to carry them down to her car when she was finished. One box was already filled with the books she was taking. Most of those she had collected over the years she was leaving on the shelves. The old textbooks and the dictionary belonged to the school. The *National Geographics* were still useful. She had decided to leave the map of the Roman Empire, which had been carefully drawn and painted as an extra-credit project by two third-year students, Jerry Barker and Warren Jones, in 1941. She smiled faintly, recalling that the map contained two major errors which had escaped the boys' detection: the course of the Anas River in Hispanic Lusitania, and the shape of the northern boundary of Pannonia. Well, they'd still be there on the wall for the next Latin teacher and her students to discover.

The model of the Pantheon, built as a team project ten years ago, in 1948, was altogether too big to carry away, even if she'd wanted to. It served instructional purposes; and Hazel McClellan, whose students had shared in its creation, would probably want to have it in her classroom next door.

The model of the warship—built in 1952 by third-year students Fred Tindall, Bruce Denny, and Sharon Davidson—was much smaller in scale and beautifully crafted. Those students had been among her very best. She would take the ship home for careful display on her dining room sideboard.

She'd already decided that the framed photographs should stay.

The portrait of Aeneas, though, would have a place of honor in her living room. Mary Jo Ferris, the third-year student who had painted it in 1949, had presented it to be hung on the classroom wall; but Edith regarded the picture as her personal property. Mary Jo was unquestionably her most gifted student—and the only one to whom she'd ever given a graduation present: a small gold brooch inscribed for good luck, *Feliciter!* Married now, with one child, Mary Jo had gone on to get a master's degree in Classics and currently was teaching at Dunham College. In the closet beside the doorway was a small step-stool that Edith would use to bring the portrait down for packing. But for the moment she left Aeneas in place, so that she could commune with him from time to time as she sat at her desk cleaning out the drawers.

From the bottom drawer to the right of the kneehole she removed a stack of yearbooks—this year's, and one for each of the previous seven. They belonged at home with their fourteen fellows. Memory books for the students, referencing what for some would be their life's

most joyous time, for others an anguished period of pain, and for still others, simply a brief transitional passage from adolescent to adult concerns.

She began idly flipping through the earliest of the batch, the yearbook for 1951. Portraits of the graduating seniors. Athletic teams and their “pep” supporters in self-conscious group photos. Posed pictures of the faculty and staff in their “typical” work environments. There she was, on page 11, standing with Hazel McClellan, both of them in loose-fitting print dresses—she wearing sensible lace-up shoes and her coral necklace from Capri; Hazel, considerably taller, wearing her cameo brooch and flat-heeled loafers. It had always amused Edith that, from year to year, the expressions which she and Hazel wore in the photographs never varied. Both of them sober and restrained, with—at best—closed-mouth smiles. And while neither of them ever looked directly into the camera, her eyes were always alert and focused, Hazel’s somewhat undirected, staring vaguely into space. Poor Hazel. She’d always looked a little blank.

She continued turning pages. Leaders of student government with their self-assured, successful smiles. Shots of the school’s dramatic productions; choir and band; the senior prom. Special interest clubs for science, chess, Bible study, art, social service, journalism, speech and drama, Latin. Ah, yes.

Latin Club was already in existence when she’d come to Marshall High. Edith had always urged her students to join, since the club provided them an ideal way of supplementing their classroom experience, leading them far beyond the day to day struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and Virgil’s hexameters to enrich their understanding of Roman society, manners, and customs. Not all of the students enrolled in a given year chose to join the club, but the best students always did. And for deeper reasons, she was sure, than simply to appear in yet another of the yearbooks’ group photographs. There were films, team projects resulting in programs and reports, readings from authors not studied in coursework, and—as a highlight—every April, the Roman banquet.

She had inaugurated the Roman banquet when she’d become senior instructor upon Miss Grainger’s retirement in 1938. During the period 1942 to 1945, wartime rationing, anti-Italian feeling, and the prospect of the boys’ facing military conscription had lessened student interest. But after the War, the banquets had become larger and more elaborate as the school population grew and increasing numbers of students took Latin and joined the club. Nevertheless, the banquet’s

basic format had remained the same. Students would gather on a designated Friday evening in April to enjoy a meal catered by cafeteria staff. Food was set out on low tables, with couches alongside; and here the feasters would lie on their sides eating while the slaves stood behind them along the walls. Third-year students, representing the patrician class, wore elegant togas and gowns. Second-year students, representing skilled artisans, wealthy farmers, and the business community, ate at the same tables. First-year students, dressed in tunics, represented slaves; and after standing in attendance behind the patricians and serving the food, they went off to have their meal at tables some distance away. This April, she reflected, the slaves' duties had been lighter than ever before, since there were so few patricians—their numbers having been reduced by one-third from the previous year. As though plague or political upheaval had thinned their ranks.

Though it had always been one of the largest organizations at Marshall High, Latin Club had been steadily decreasing in size since its peak in 1950. She turned back to the page which contained the club photograph and counted the young faces ranked on the school's front steps. A total of 86. She pulled a thin notebook from the desk's central drawer and turned to the page on which she had recorded annually the club's membership totals. Scanning down the list, she saw that in 1953, the membership had been 79; in 1956, 64; and, in the year just ended, 58. Acutely aware of the decline while recording the yearly totals, she'd been profoundly troubled by what it portended: fewer students taking Virgil.

1949 was the peak, with 28 students in third-year Latin. In 1952, there were 25; in 1954, 23; in 1957, 18. This year, only 12—nine of them a group of close friends, who last week had graduated together. Next year, none.

Apprehensive about the coming fall, during the past spring she'd polled her second-year students to see how many planned to go on to Third-year. None had expressed the intention of continuing, though several were still trying to decide. The information had shocked her, then made her angry, then plunged her into a depression from which she hadn't yet recovered.

Her anger had sublimated into a determination to win the students over. It pained her now to recall the efforts she'd made—increasingly desperate—to incite her better second-year students to engage the *Aeneid*. Had there been the merest spark of interest, she would have expended all her energies to fan it into flame. But, engendering no positive response, her campaign had ended in defeat.

Marjean Atherton, her most promising student, had said that she would *like* to take Virgil, but that in applying for college admission, she'd be better off taking advanced English literature in her senior year.

Roger Innes, bright and bookish, had thought he'd be better off taking physics.

Paula Robinson, with her keen interest in the Augustan period, had merely said that, in her senior year, she didn't want to be harnessed with the sort of commitment the *Aeneid* demanded. Edith had been dumbfounded. "But you did so well with Caesar!" "I enjoyed Caesar," Paula had replied. "And I'd probably enjoy Virgil. I just want to do other things with my time. I'll only be a senior once."

Bill O'Rourke, conscientious and apologetic: "I'd really like to take Third-year, Miss Kenshaw. I don't find Latin easy, but I've made a solid 'B-plus' both years—"

"You've done well," she'd said quickly, "I've appreciated your hard work. And it's paid off. You'll be able to handle Virgil."

"The other thing is, I've been offered a part-time job. It'll start this summer and go on next year after school and help me save money for college. I don't feel I could put in the hours on the after-school job and spend the time needed to translate the *Aeneid*. I'd want to do the best I could." And Edith had found no reply to that.

Denise Faber had been blunt: "Well, sure, I thought about going on to Third-year. But *this* year satisfies my graduation requirement. And that's really all I want."

Tom Hughes hadn't been able to make up his mind. When she'd finally managed to corner him and ask directly whether he was going to take Third-year, he'd stammered, "Gee, Miss Kenshaw, I can't decide. I'd sure like to, but there's other things I want to do too. Some days I think I will, some days I think I won't."

"You did well in Second-year," she said. "I think you should go on."

He shook his head, looking truly confused and anguished. "I just can't decide!"

His vacillation was tiring her out. "Well, Tom, in making your decision, just remember this: *Disciplina virtus est.*"

"Discipline is virtue?"

"Discipline, yes, but 'disciplina' also means learning, knowledge, perseverance, regulation of one's life and habits. And 'virtus', Tom, means strength, courage, excellence, ability, personal competence, and—manliness." She'd been aware that this last was a barbed thrust

“A low blow,” her brother Howard would have called it), but in her frustration and despair she was willing to use whatever tactics might be effective.

Two days later, Tom had paused while leaving class to say that he’d decided not to take Third-year after all. “But,” he added, “I’d like to read the *Aeneid*. Is there a good translation you could recommend?” For a long moment she was silent, her eyes locked on his; and then she said, “There are three adequate translations. I’ll give you a list.”

To find herself reduced to wheedling, cajoling, and using emotional blackmail had been dispiriting. The fruitless effort had left her humiliated and demeaned. Recalling that process now, her face grew hot with shame.

And, for a brief while, she’d felt betrayed—particularly by Marjean, Denise, and Paula, but also by her own assumptions and expectations. Her bitterness was tempered by a nagging doubt: Was it perhaps her own fault? Had she become lazy and perfunctory in her teaching, taking student interest in Virgil for granted, presuming too much? The assessment of her own culpability was a steep hill to climb; but, when she’d reached the summit, she’d rejected the notions of betrayal and self-blame as indulgent self-pity. It wasn’t fair to blame the students for their choices, or how they ranked their priorities, or for not having an interest in a third year of Latin. Nor was it fair to blame herself for the students’ lack of interest. She had taught *this* Second-year as she always had, to the best of her ability. Within a week of knowing that there would be no third-year class, her sense of betrayal and personal failure, along with her diffuse and generalized anger, had quickly dissipated—to be overshadowed and supplanted by a profound, enduring sadness. And a fixed resolve.

She’d thereupon informed the principal that she was resigning her position at the end of the spring term. Shocked, he had urged her to reconsider. Standing firm, she’d explained her reasons. She wasn’t sure that he’d understood them. But she knew he was earnest in wishing her to stay; she was a good teacher, and when she left, he’d be faced with the challenge of finding another Latinist. They both knew that replacing her would be difficult.

On the following Sunday, she’d informed her brother and his wife Laura when she went to their house for their once-a-month family dinner. They had to know, and she was sure they wouldn’t try to dissuade her, nor judge her harshly, at least to her face.

Opening the door, Edith's fourteen-year-old niece greeted her with "Happy birthday!" Edith noticed that Karen had changed her hair style. "It's a ponytail, Aunt Edith. All the girls are wearing them."

And as she followed her into the living room, Edith was startled to see that Karen, even in her low-heeled loafers, was considerably taller than she. Am I shrinking, then? she thought. Dwindling away?

Her brother gave her a one-armed hug and handed her a glass of sherry. "Happy birthday, Edie. And here's to many more."

From the dining room doorway, Laura said "Good to see you, Edith. Dinner's just about ready."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No, no, the table's set. Relax and enjoy yourself. Today's *your* day." Laura vanished into the kitchen, taking Karen with her. Howard, expansive and obviously pleased with himself, drew Edith's attention to a large television set that diagonally filled a corner of the living room. "There," he said, "It came yesterday."

"But didn't you buy a new one just two years ago?"

"Yes, but this one's got a bigger screen. It's a Brentwood console. What do you think?"

"Well, it takes up a lot more room than the other one. It does have a pretty cabinet. Where did you put the bookshelf and whatnot stand?"

"Up in the spare bedroom. We don't use the encyclopedia much, and rarely look at the old *National Geographics*." He grinned at her, one eyebrow raised. "When are *you* going to get a TV? You're missing some really good programs: *Dragnet*, Jack Benny, network news."

"I really haven't thought about it, Howard." She felt she wasn't missing anything. It was chilling to think of millions of flickering black and white television screens ensconced in the nation's living rooms, commanding attention, exacting obeisance. The new household gods. *Lares novi*.

She'd smiled at the aptness of her pun: yes, they were *strange* gods, as well as new.

When they were seated at the table, Karen announced that she would be leaving early. "Janet and Cathy and I are going over to Darlene's and listen to records. Her record player's the best—"

"Then Darlene's is where you should play your music," Howard said. "Especially if it's Elvis Presley."

“Well, of course it is,” said Karen. “Most of what we want to listen to is.” She turned in her chair, with a hint of defiance. “Do *you* know Elvis’s music, Aunt Edith?”

“Well, yes, dear, I’ve heard some of it on the radio. They seem to play it all the time.”

“Do you like it?”

Something in Karen’s tone had warned Edith to be careful in formulating her reply. “I know that Elvis is very popular,” she said. “I don’t understand rock and roll very well, but I’m sure it marks a new direction in music. I try to keep an open mind.” No reason to dampen Karen’s enthusiasm by letting her know that her Aunt Edith despised Elvis Presley’s music. Karen nodded in satisfaction and shot a triumphant glance at her father.

The meal finished, Laura brought a birthday cake from the kitchen—yellow with white frosting—and Karen laid two neatly-wrapped packages at Edith’s place. One had the dimensions of an oversize coffee-table book; the other was small and flat. Edith chose it to open first.

“Many happy returns,” Karen said as Edith removed the wrapping. It was an Elvis Presley recording. “I know your phonograph plays 45 speed,” Karen continued. “The last time I was at your house, I saw that you didn’t have any Elvis, and I thought you might like this record. I like it a lot. On one side is *All Shook Up*, and on the other, *That’s When Your Heartaches Begin*.”

Edith adjusted her glasses and studied the two labels. The pertinence of the titles to her current state of mind was uncanny and disturbing. But she quickly rallied a response: “Thank you, dear, it’s very thoughtful of you. I’ll play it as soon as I get home.”

“Now open ours,” said Howard.

Their present was a formidable book with lustrous photographs on glossy paper: *A Pictorial Atlas of the Roman Empire*. Ten years ago, what a resource in her classroom this book would have been!

“We thought you might like it,” Laura said. “Pictures of all the places you’ve been. You’ve done more traveling than most!”

“From Hadrian’s Wall to Baalbek,” Edith said. “Carthage and Tyre. Nimes, Segovia, Cyrene.” And there they were, page after glowing page of arches, bridges, columns and mosaic floors, amphitheaters, aqueducts and roads—as left behind by vanished bureaucrats and departing legions. To be overrun by subsequent armies and native

opportunists who cannibalized the dressed stones and marble facings for their own houses, fences, churches, barns.

"It's a nice book," Karen said, finishing her cake. "I've got to go now. See you later!" And she was gone. Edith pushed her own unfinished cake aside. It was time to announce her decision.

"I wanted you both to be the first to know. I've resigned my teaching position as of this spring. I won't be going back in the fall."

As she'd expected, both of them were shocked. "Are you going to another school?" Laura asked.

"No. I'm quitting."

"Are you ill?" Howard asked.

"No. I simply don't want to teach any more."

"But you're only fifty-two. That's too young to retire."

"It's not retirement in the usual sense."

"But what about your pension? Have you worked long enough?"

"Not for a maximum pension. With two years out to get my master's degree, I've worked in the system twenty-nine years—from 1926 to '33 at Decatur Township, then since 1935, at Marshall High."

"But will that be enough for you to live on?" Howard asked. "How will you get by? Won't you have to find some other kind of work?"

She found herself becoming irritated. "Howard, I'm not trained for any other kind of work. Teaching Latin is all I know, all I've ever done. At my age, I don't want to learn an entirely new set of skills. I don't want to be a librarian, or work in an office, or clerk in a store. No indeed. I've got some money put away. I haven't spent it *all* on travel. And I've never touched my share of Mother's estate. I think I'll get by. And I certainly don't want to be hurried into something before I'm ready. *Tempus inane peto, requiem spatiumque furori, dum mea me victam doceat fortuna dolere.*"

Laura gave her a hesitant smile. "I'm sorry, Edith. Could you please explain what the Latin means?"

Embarrassed, Edith said, "*I'm* the one to apologize. I was quoting part of Dido's angry lament when she knows for a fact that Aeneas is leaving her. She says she wants a time of nothingness—respite and emotional space for her despair while her fate teaches her—in her conquered state—how to grieve. Though I don't share her love-madness, in every other way I feel about the same."

Howard had risen to stand behind his chair. "Edie, help me understand. Why, after all these years, do you suddenly not want to teach any more?"

His question was reasonable, given that she had used the same words herself a moment ago. But it didn't accurately state the case. It wasn't so much that she didn't *want* to teach; it was a matter of no longer seeing any point to it. How could she make Howard and Laura—who had never been teachers and who knew nothing of Latin instruction—understand the welter of complex factors feeding into and shaping her decision? Without this contextual knowledge, they would find a bald statement of her reason for quitting—that no students had signed up for third-year Latin—silly and absurd. And would conclude, therefore, that her quitting was irrational and foolish. No, she would have to make them see the importance of third-year Latin, make them understand why a study of Virgil's *Aeneid* not only honed students' aesthetic sensibilities and strengthened their powers for making refined discriminations, but also instilled in them a sense of ethics and fair play, and deepened their humanity. Matured them, in a word, for adult responsibility and good citizenship. For civitas.

She said crisply, "Sit down, Howard. You make me nervous." And when he had, she began her explanation in a precise, dry, and earnest manner. "When I came to Marshall High in the fall of 1935, there was one Latin teacher on staff, Miss Violet Grainger, who taught all three years of the sequence. I only taught first- and second-year classes—fundamentals, and Caesar's *Gallic War*. When she retired in 1938, I inherited her third-year classes, which focused on Virgil's *Aeneid*. In 1939, Hazel McClellan joined the staff, and so it's been to the present—she and I both teaching the first two years, and only I teaching the third.

"Year in, year out, my schedule never varied. Two classes of first-year Latin, two classes of second-year, and one of third. Since Latin is one of the languages that satisfies graduation requirements, most students take it for that reason—and for the help it provides for understanding English grammar and building English vocabulary.

"Some first-year students didn't take the second year. Of those who completed the second year, one-fourth elected to go on to the third, where reading the *Aeneid* presented them a great challenge, a pinnacle they were able to climb only after two years of preparation. These third-year students were of course the most gifted, disciplined, and committed to challenging themselves." And it was these students who'd made worthwhile her having to endure all of the bumbling incompetence of the less capable, the boredom, lackadaisical frittering, and dull, painful drudgery of those who early fell by the wayside or

obstinately held on till a graceful departure at the end of the second year.

Seeing that Laura was beginning to fidget, Edith hurried on. “Students require a certain level of maturation to grasp what Virgil presents in his poem. First-year students, at fifteen, generally haven’t lived long enough to appreciate the various types of loss and grieving that Virgil treats. Second-year students, at sixteen, are more able to grasp these things. But the seniors, at seventeen, are most capable. They’ve lived long enough to understand more intimately the sadness of loss and betrayal, the all-consuming powers of Eros, the possibility of innocent acts giving rise to tragic consequences.

“For these students, the value of the *Aeneid* is immeasurable. The poem extols and promotes necessary virtues: courage, fortitude, moderation. Strength in facing difficulties, perseverance, truthfulness. The pursuit of justice in human affairs. It builds character by presenting models of behavior, both positive and negative. It prepares people to assume adult responsibility, to be productive citizens and work for the common good—*pro bono publico*.” She was relieved to see that both Howard and Laura were listening intently. She hoped that she had made her case.

“For nearly twenty years, teaching the *Aeneid* has been my greatest joy. I’ve had hundreds of students engage with Virgil and exit into the world the better for it. And now, this spring—for the very first time—no students have signed up for next fall to take third-year Latin. Not one. The meaning of that is clear. The second-year students do not see the value of the *Aeneid* for their lives. For whatever reasons they may have, they’ve chosen not to go there. I don’t wish to continue teaching on these diminished terms.”

When she’d finished, they stared at her in silence. Then Howard asked, “Aren’t you being premature? Maybe what’s happening now is just a fluke. What if students sign up for Virgil the year after next?”

Edith responded with a wry, thin-lipped smile. “It will take this coming year to *see* what second-year people want to do the year after. And with no third-year students talking about Aeneas and the excitement and beauty of the poem, it will be less and less likely that anyone will sign up. Besides, for several years I’ve noticed other indications of declining interest. I’m not going to wait around to see what happens.”

Howard had simply shook his head. “But, Edie, what will you *do*?”

“To occupy my time? I don’t have concrete plans yet. I’ll continue living here, in my house. It’s paid for. But this fall I’ll be traveling.”

Laua had brightened at this. “Back to Italy? You’ve said there’s more there that you want to do.”

“No, not Italy. India, perhaps. New Zealand. Peru.” Wherever it was she went, it wouldn’t be Europe or North Africa.

Edith stacked the yearbooks into the largest of the cardboard boxes. The clock read 4:07. The desk drawers were nearly emptied. Into the wastebasket went her grammatical handouts, and the supplemental materials she’d routinely distributed on the works of Catullus, Ovid, Cicero, Horace, Martial and Juvenal. The pencils, erasers, paper clips, and twelve-inch ruler she left in the desk. She put her Murano glass paperweight into another of the boxes along with the small plaster bust of the Emperor Augustus, her appointment book, her spare fountain pen, a beautifully-illustrated essay on Etruscan art, and her volumes of the Loeb Classical Library. In the bottom drawer on the left side of the knee-hole, she found the bound copy of her Master’s thesis, completed in 1935: “Metrical Variation as a Function of Burlesque in Books I–XI of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*”.

Goodness! She hadn’t looked at her thesis for years. Her one claim to significant scholarship. She’d begun her graduate work at the depth of the Great Depression, and could afford to attend the university only because her father had given her the money he’d obtained from cashing in his savings bonds from the First World War. “It’s important that you get the degree,” he’d told her. “You’re twenty-eight years old, and, if you don’t get married, you’ll have to be able to support yourself. A Master’s will help you get a better job at a bigger school than Decatur Township.”

Graduate school had been stimulating but difficult and lonely. There were five other Master’s students in Classics, one of them studying Greek, and only one other woman—who was so shy and reclusive that a friendship wasn’t possible.

By tutoring two students in undergraduate Latin, Edith had helped defray her living expenses. Her coursework required her to read a group of authors with whom she’d previously had only a nodding acquaintance. Her thesis advisor, Dr. Wendell Garrett, was a rigorous mentor who demanded precision. He’d warmly encouraged her, letting her use some of the books in his private library. And finally, when he’d finished reading her final draft, he’d called her into his office for a conference. She’d been quite nervous taking her seat in front of his

desk. But then followed one of the memorable moments of her life. Professor Garrett had removed his glasses, lit his pipe, and said, "This is an excellent piece of work, Miss Kenshaw. One of the best theses it's been my pleasure to oversee. You've taught me much about Ovid's sense of irony." Dear man, she thought, as she saw again his bold approving signature on the first page. Dead since 1951.

She put the thesis into the box with the other things, stood up, and went to the closet to get the step-stool for bringing down the portrait of Aeneas.

Hazel McClellan came in from the hall, stood looking at the two boxes of keepsakes and the overflowing wastebasket. "It seems you're all packed up," she said.

"Well, there wasn't that much." Edith carried the step-stool to the base of the wall where Aeneas hung. "I'm leaving all the photographs and the map, I assumed you'd like to have the model of the Pantheon, since your students helped to make it."

"Yes, that's fine." Arms crossed over her chest, Hazel stood just inside the doorway clutching her elbows. Edith climbed onto the step-stool and reached upward to establish a firm grip on the picture frame. The ceiling was high, and for her it was a stretch to lift the frame sufficiently to free its suspension wire from the hanger.

"Do you need help?" Hazel asked.

"Thank you, no. I have it." And carefully she lowered the painting, balancing precariously for a moment as she stepped down from the stool. She stood Aeneas beside her cardboard boxes and the model ship.

Hazel said, "I wish you weren't leaving, Edith. I'm going to miss you so." She began plucking at her fingers, "We've been next door neighbors for over twenty years. Latin Club, the Roman banquet—we've always done everything together."

Well, not everything, thought Edith. You've never taught Virgil's *Aeneid*, and I never allowed *my* students to get extra credit for seeing such films as *Quo Vadis*, *The Robe*, and *Demetrius and the Gladiators*. "Yes, we've done a lot together," she said.

"I so rely on your judgment," Hazel continued, "and your energy. It frightens me to wonder how I'll get along without you."

Edith smiled reassuringly. "You'll manage, Hazel. You've always done a good job with the students, and they like you. That won't change."

“But I can’t handle four classes of First-year and four of Second! Not to mention Third-year, which you’ve always taught. I couldn’t begin to do what you’ve done with the *Aeneid!*”

True enough, Edith thought, but you probably won’t have to worry about that. Aloud, she said, “As long as Latin satisfies graduation requirements, First- and Second-year will be offered. The school won’t burden you with all the students. They’ll hire someone to replace me. As for Third-year, right now there isn’t any. If there ever is again, you’ll be able to handle it.” Or my replacement will, she thought.

“Will you come back to see me?” Hazel asked.

Edith nodded. “Of course. We’ve been friends for twenty years.”

“Do you know what you’re going to do? Are you going to travel, or get another job, or do volunteer work?”

“Everybody asks me that,” Edith said. “I haven’t decided what I’ll be doing. I’ll have to take stock, and come to terms with not going in to work every weekday. Who knows?—it may be like an extended summer vacation.” And then again, she reflected, it may not.

She returned the step-stool to the closet and drew out her coat and hat. It was time to ask the janitor to take her things down to the car.

Hazel was standing beside the doorway, her eyes moist. “It’s the end of an era,” she said, her voice trembling slightly.

“It is indeed,” said Edith.

Hazel stepped forward and gave Edith a quick sisterly hug. “We’ll miss you,” she whispered. “Good luck.”

Edith returned the hug. “And I’ll miss you. . . . Feliciter!” Together they left the room, and Edith gently closed the door.

After putting the clean dishes away and tidying up the kitchen, Edith went to the living room and turned on a reading light. Her cats, Dido and Cassandra, followed her, settled in on the couch, and began washing themselves.

Edith had unpacked her boxes and put things in their new places. One whole bookshelf was taken up by her volumes of Loeb’s Classical Library. The model Roman ship was safely on the dining room sideboard. The portrait of Aeneas hung prominently on the living room wall, having replaced a black and white engraving of Gerome’s “Death of Julius Caesar”, which had hung there for twenty years. The gift book from Howard and Laura took up most of the coffee table.

“Well, girls,” Edith said to the cats, “we’ve got the summer before us to make plans and settle some business matters. I’ve got many

letters to write. I've decided that I won't be here when school starts in the fall. I'll arrange for Karen to take care of you. You like her, and she likes you. That should work out nicely."

Thinking of Karen, she picked up the Elvis Presley recording she'd received for her birthday. "Well, I suppose I should play it." She went to the phonograph, removed the recording of the Brahms *Violin Concerto* which was on the turntable, and replaced it in its jacket. Then she slipped the adapter over the spindle and changed the speed to 45. "All right, Dido, Cassandra, which side will it be? *All Shook Up* or *That's When Your Heartaches Begin*?" The cats looked at her sleepy-eyed. "No preference, then? All right. I won't even look. We'll play whichever side comes up." She placed the record on the turntable, activated the changer, and went to her chair. The song was *That's When Your Heartaches Begin*.

Edith listened intently, and when it was finished, she said to the cats: "No, it's not my type of music. I'll stick with Bach and Mozart. But I think I see why Karen and her friends find it exciting. Howard should listen to it more carefully."

She pulled a magazine rack closer to her chair and took from it some nursery catalogs—brightly colored, glossy: seeds to plant, flowers to choose. No, she thought, putting them back. There'll be plenty of time this winter to study catalogs and plan for spring.

But now she needed to plan for fall. She pulled a group of travel brochures from the rack—brightly colored, glossy: places to go, things to see. She looked them over for awhile, pondering—then set them aside and whispered to the cats, "Well, girls, I'll tell you what: it's going to be New Zealand."

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