

Maurice Rowdon : Author and Philosopher

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Perimeter West excerpts

Excerpt: During these three years General Dessman had been Mayor, and he more than anyone was responsible for the building of the new city out of the ruins, for the electricity supply, for the cleaning of the sewers, for the quick demolitions, for the opening of schools and the university, for the institution of poor relief, for the charity camps in the forest at Lake End, for the opening of theatres and cinemas along Main Street, and for the restoration of the vast Technics factory on the east side of the canal. The new city, much smaller than its predecessor, extended only to within a mile or so of the frontier-posts---no one like to go nearer---with the result that it was encircled by a wide belt of ruins, seldom visited and always silent, which made a kind of protective no man's land, cutting the city off from its true rulers and giving people the illusion of safety. This was the Perimeter...

The survivors wore the look of people who did not quite believe in their own existence and were continually on the alert for a fresh catastrophe. Most of the citizens nowadays were pale, grey-haired too soon, mute, watchful, thin, and it was as if none of them believed in the possibility any more of warmth and mercy, in life going on safely, even though they knew there was no immediate danger of another war ...

Half the car crashes in the city could have been prevented by braking in time or swerving a little. But the drivers went towards each other fascinated, gripping their

wheels, staring before them, just as if they had always been under an unspoken sentence of death and this at last was what they had been waiting for so long, the moment of execution. They seemed not merely to accept an unnecessary death but to welcome it, as if the daily bombardments, the lack of food afterwards, the horrible occupation, had taught them that they could not be worthy of life, having attracted to themselves so much punishment.

At the same time they were cautious to the point of hysteria. Mothers tugged their children back from the kerb when there was hardly a vehicle in sight. Crowd gathered on the pavement waiting for the lights to change, then one man in a strange abandon of will darted over to the other side, another followed, then another, until all the crowd was undecided and began to move this way and that, and the traffic became equally undecided, skidding and swerving, so that a disaster came about and the crowd was suddenly fascinated, stilled by the peculiar silence of death all round them, death whose favourites they were, and the police cars began to come from the distance sound their bells...

Excerpt: The sight of Perrial with a new girl, standing near the French windows with her, laughing, touching her hand, leading her out on to the lawn down to the lake's edge, used to make a certain quick pain come into her stomach, at the very pit. So now, when she had rung Roquande a second time and there was no answer, this pain came again, and she knew at that moment, quite positively knew, that the awe she felt for him---her excitement whenever she was about to meet him — were undeserved and must soon be snatched away from her as everything else had been since the time of the bombardments. She saw quite clearly, too, that Jeanie was his equal, not herself. His brown skin, the slim hips and the eyes under which she felt safer than ever before in her life must return to their tragic elements, as ordained by the city, proceeding from a husband who did not understand her to disease, to screams, to sterility, turning from grief to grief. She felt the city as a living presence on the other side of the lake and hated it for a moment as she might hate a person, for owning her, for having her as part of its furniture, like the ruins themselves...