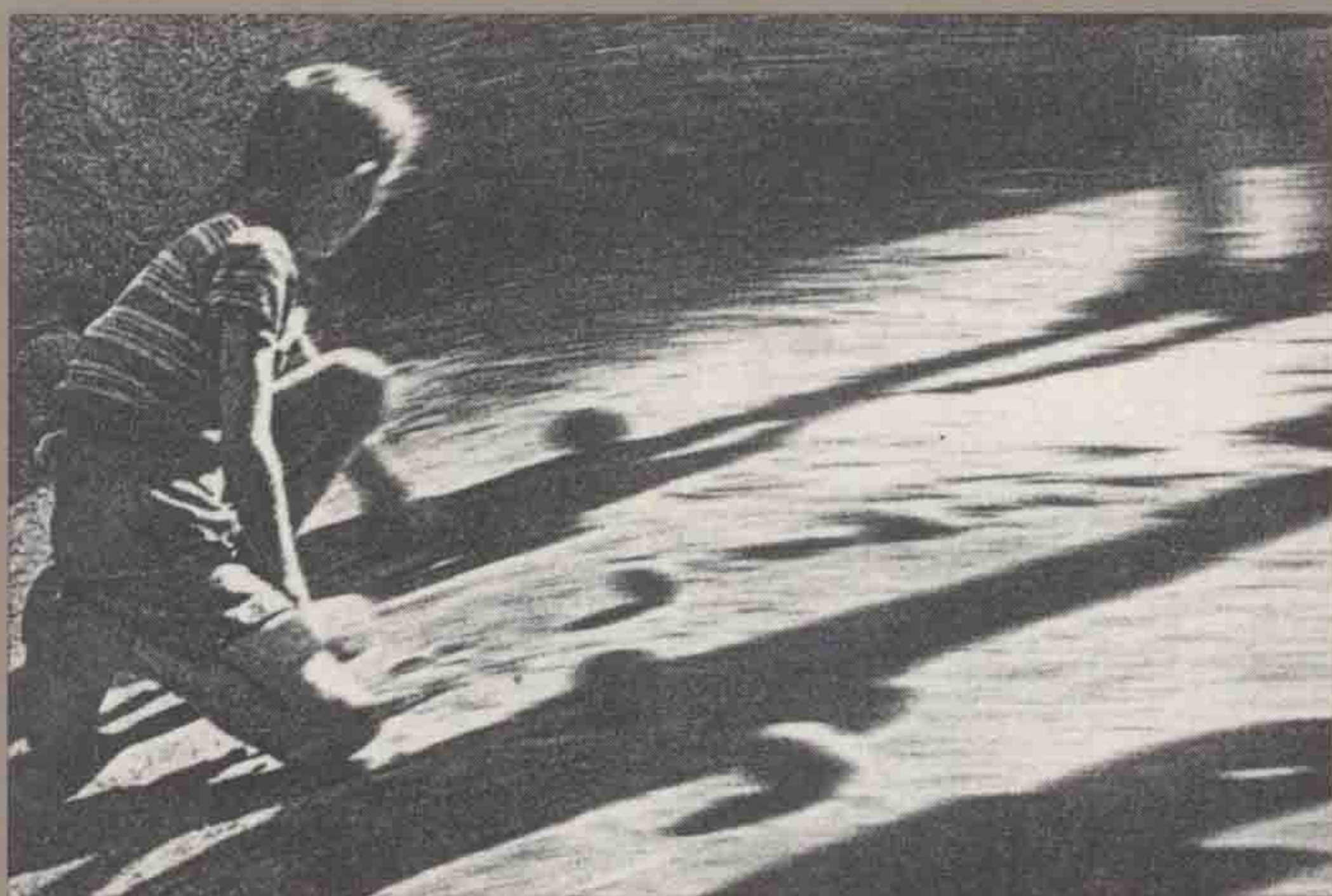


# *THE Enduring*



# *Disguises*

THREE NOVELLAS BY

*Alan Gould*

# *THE Enduring Disguises*

THREE NOVELLAS BY  
*Alan Gould*



The verse from Leonard Cohen's song  
'So long Marianne' is reprinted  
by permission of Chappell & Intersong  
Music Group (Aust.) Limited.

*All characters in this book are  
entirely fictitious, and no reference  
is intended to any living person.*

*Creative writing programme assisted by the  
Literature Board of the Australia Council,  
the Federal Government's arts funding  
and advisory body.*

**ANGUS & ROBERTSON PUBLISHERS**

*Unit 4, Eden Park, 31 Waterloo Road,  
North Ryde, NSW, Australia 2113, and  
16 Golden Square, London W1R 4BN,  
United Kingdom*

*This book is copyright.  
Apart from any fair dealing for the  
purposes of private study, research,  
criticism or review, as permitted  
under the Copyright Act, no part may  
be reproduced by any process without  
written permission. Inquiries should  
be addressed to the publishers.*

*First published in Australia  
by Angus & Robertson Publishers in 1988  
First published in the United Kingdom  
by Angus & Robertson (UK) in 1988*

*Copyright © Alan Gould 1988*

*National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-publication data.*

*Gould, Alan, 1949–  
The enduring disguises.  
ISBN 0 207 15524 0.*

*I. Title.*

*A823'.3*

*Typeset in 11 pt. English Times by Best-set Typesetter Ltd  
Printed in Australia by Griffin Press Limited*

*Part of “Decency and Honour” has been  
previously published in Overland.*

*The author would like to acknowledge the  
assistance of the Literature Board of the  
Australia Council in providing him with a  
Senior Fellowship in 1984.*

# CONTENTS

<i>The Clayfield</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Decency and Honour</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>A Paperknife and a Broken Oar</i>	<i>219</i>

# CONTENTS

<i>The Clayfield</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Decency and Honour</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>A Paperknife and a Broken Oar</i>	<i>219</i>





# 1

## MAJOR GUPPY'S GIRLS

When the Ballesters moved into Number Three, Bernard could still smell the fresh paint on the walls of the bedrooms. The move was made on a day when sleet had turned into a persistent cold rain. Around the cluster of married quarters the clays of the whole shire oozed and glistened, while the afternoon seemed to be in a hurry to turn into evening. Water dripped from the tarpaulin of the big truck, darkened the berets and glossed the faces of the soldiers who were unloading the furniture and carrying it inside. At the bottom of the stairs was a sergeant from Stores who was going through an inventory with Lieutenant Colonel Ballester, ticking off the items as they were brought in — sideboard, one mahogany; blankets, fifteen cream (they were more the colour of custard, thought Bernard); armchairs, three fawn... Bernard and his sister Lyn dashed this way and that, inspecting the various rooms of the new house. In the kitchen they found a pint of milk and a homemade cake left there with a note from a Mrs Guppy.

‘We must have them over,’ announced Mrs Ballester.

It turned out that the Guppys lived at Number One and had moved in just before Christmas. Between the Ballesters and the Guppys lived a Major Somebody who, it seemed, didn’t mix. Despite the fact that it was still the middle of winter he had already dug over his garden and planted bulbs, creating order from the morass of clay and builder’s rubble that characterised the allotments. Most of the other houses in The Close were still unoccupied.

‘We moved here in January of 1956 — when there was *nothing*,’ Bernard was to tell Barbara Stamp fifteen months later, adopting a very superior tone. He felt comfortable and impressive in the role of pioneer and veteran, even if he knew it wasn’t strictly appropriate. In fact, parts of the



camp, down Outram Crescent, Gillespie Road, and some of the sergeants' quarters, had been occupied as far back as 1953. That was the year of the new queen's coronation which was about the first event that Bernard could remember.

However, in February 1956 the houses in The Close were indeed new. Too new. They were built of red bricks, which shone with a plastic lustre when it rained. The identical houses looked...well...sort-of-plonked-down in the clay, which was the colour of fudge. And the wintry trees, which resembled scribble, did nothing to allay the starkness of these quarters. They were unhistorical, thought Bernard, who, at the age of seven, had begun to form obscure prejudices about certain things. The Ballesters' previous posting had been Singapore, where they had occupied a rambling white house half hidden by greenery. There had been a view across a *kampong* to the Straits. They'd had Ah Moon, who was the *amah*, and Fasil, who was the *kaboon*. *Kampong*, *amah* and *kaboon* had been a part of Bernard's vocabulary from the first. He had been four when the family was posted to Singapore, and so had formed the impression that the rambling white house with its servants and foliage, its fans and shutters, had an existence that was ancient, and somehow proper, intimate with his own condition in life.

Unlike these houses on the army estate near the township of Aspen Hatch. Rectangles with two bevelled edges, a chimney, symmetrical windows and a door in the middle, they looked like square heads wearing hats.

'They're easy to draw,' announced the boy, setting to work on the dining room carpet one rainy afternoon. 'They're a cinch,' he told the Guppy girls, Brenda and Joyce, who were being looked after for an hour or so by Mrs Ballester while their own mother was out. Bernard had learnt the word 'cinch' from a boy called Toby Manch, whom he had encountered a few days previously behind the sergeants' quarters.

'Cinch is slang,' said Brenda Guppy, the younger and more forthcoming of the two.

'What does slang mean?' asked Bernard.



‘Our mother says that slang’s what lazy people talk,’ replied Brenda. ‘Doesn’t she say that, Joyce?’

Joyce chose to smile and nod her agreement rather than commit herself to words.

‘Cinch isn’t lazy,’ Bernard objected.

‘Yes, it is,’ insisted Brenda. ‘It’s the way Americans talk. You ask our mother.’

Bernard bowed to the wisdom of Mrs Guppy, who was really a Boothroyd from somewhere called West Riding and who, the boy had already discovered, was something of a steamroller in both her appearance and manner. The three children drew on the paper that Mrs Ballester had provided while the latter read her book.

‘There! Finished the house! Now I’m going to draw a battle,’ announced Bernard.

Mrs Ballester looked up from her page. ‘No, Bernard. Why don’t you draw things you can actually see? That’s what grown-up artists have to do, and that’s what you’ll have to do when you start school next week. So, there’s no harm in practising.’ Mrs Ballester had been a schoolteacher herself — army of course. She had the gift, perhaps in excess, of providing life with directions. She took a vase from the sideboard and placed it before her son. ‘Here you are. You draw this.’

‘Aw, that’s boring.’ But he drew the vase. On the whole it was comfortable to follow his mother’s direction, and the vase turned out to be a cinch too. However this time, when he had finished his drawing, he turned his paper over without announcement and commenced his battle scene, his nose an inch or two above the sheet and his pencils wagging back and forth as he marshalled the ranks of red stick-men against the ranks of black. While he drew he made the clicking sounds of swordplay and the swish, thud, eugh! sounds of longbows, crossbows and siege equipment. His own name, Ballester, he knew was derived from one of these siege machines and his father had told him that his ancestors had once been knights in France; it seemed to Bernard he had known this information for a long, long



time, and it affected powerfully his idea of himself.

Meanwhile his mother chose to ignore the tiny plosions that issued from her son on the floor. The Guppy girls worked carefully at their respective houses. Brenda filled in the grid of red bricks bit by bit, using a ruler, and included the gutters and the tiles and the curtains. Joyce planted a great number of trees and flowers, using the full range of coloured pencils that was available.

‘Whose house do you think is the best one, Mrs Ballester?’ asked Brenda.

Bernard’s mother scanned the drawings of the two sisters.

‘Well, goodness,’ she said. ‘I must say that I think Joyce’s drawing is very *colourful*.’

‘Yes, but which is the most *real*.’

‘I think yours is very well *drawn*, Brenda.’

‘What about mine?’ asked Bernard, looking up from the slaughter.

‘I think that yours is perhaps a little slapdash, Bernard.’

The boy took a look at the two drawings which had been recommended and shrugged. They were just *houses*. He returned to the slaughter.

Later the three of them were sent out for some fresh air, clad in overcoats, scarves and gloves. The road had not yet been tarred, and so had been churned to a quagmire by the one tonners and five tonners that were sent from Stores to deliver furniture. On wet days you could sink up to the rims of your wellingtons and the soupy clay could spill over and run down your leg like cold sick. But today there had been a cold snap, so the puddles in the ruts had frozen in white irregular shapes and the crests of the ruts were as sharp as saw blades. The three went round stamping on the ice, which was the thickness of a windowpane. Sometimes it was just ice, and sometimes there was water underneath.

‘Ooooh! I’ve got a bootful,’ shrieked Joyce, to whom accidents tended to happen.

‘I’m going to suck a piece of it,’ said Bernard, picking up a jag of ice in his mitten.



‘It’s dirty. It’s frozen mud!’ said Brenda.

‘Looks clean to me.’ This was true; the ice was furry white until you sucked it, then it was grey with brilliant crisscrosses of air inside it. It reminded Bernard of a television screen he had seen in a shop window recently. Some people were getting televisions.

So the three of them sucked on jags of ice, spitting out the odd piece of grit. Mrs Guppy returned home, her shoulders rounded like a boulder beneath the weight of her two wickerwork baskets.

‘What’s your father in?’ asked Bernard.

‘Service Corps. What’s yours?’

‘Ordinance Corps. How high’s your father?’

‘Major.’

‘Mine’s a Lieutenant Colonel.’

They sucked on in silence for a few moments, looking at the row of houses, putting in their ‘fresh air’ time. The one feature that differed from house to house was the colour of the front door. The Guppy’s door was a glossy blue, like the deep end of the club swimming pool in Singapore. The door of Number Two where the Major Somebody lived was pink — ‘You’d need to be weak to want a *pink* door,’ observed Bernard, voicing another of his obscure prejudices. The colour of the Ballester front door vaguely depressed the boy. It was grey, the colour of the school uniform he had just been bought. In Singapore there had been no school uniforms.

‘What’s *he* like?’ asked Bernard, indicating the unfortunate major of the pink door.

‘He told on us when we fetched our ball from his garden and trod on all his newly planted bulbs and stuff,’ said Joyce.

‘What did your father do to you?’ Trouble of any kind always awed Bernard and his voice had a tendency to grow smaller when he talked of it.

‘Our father didn’t do anything because it’s not him that tells us off,’ replied Joyce. ‘It’s our mother that tells us off and punishes.’

‘Shut up, Joyce,’ said Brenda.



‘What did she do?’ pursued Bernard.

‘It’s none of your business anyway,’ announced Brenda. ‘Joyce! We’re going back to our house now.’ Brenda stalked off and Joyce followed her younger sister without demur, leaving Bernard on the unmade street, sucking thoughtfully on a jag of ice.

## 2

There was the first day of school to get through. Bernard had started school in Singapore, but this school was going to be different. For one thing, he was going to have to catch a bus with children he didn’t know and drive for miles and miles past houses and shops until he didn’t know where he was any more. And for another thing, this school wasn’t just army. There would be children there from Aspen Hatch and, from the larger town of Barnford, children of civilians. Knowing this to be the case made the prospect of his first day at the school all the more scary. Army children were like yourself. You knew where you were.

He walked down the corridor with his mother on one side and the rotund headmaster on the other. The walls were hung with navy blue raincoats and the lino floor was patterned with dirty footprints. There was a strange, rather unpleasant smell of wet clothes. When he entered Miss Cottrell’s classroom he was unprepared for so many faces. There were more than he could take in. One or two he recognised — Brenda, Toby Manch, and a more recent acquaintance, Clive Pilliger. But the rest were unfamiliar. And they all looked so exuberant, so brutally cheerful, so very at home behind their rows of desks. The boy instinctively disliked them and felt as though he were being delivered up.

‘I don’t want to stay here,’ he whimpered. It was terrible to feel so terrible in front of these forty staring faces.



His mother leaned over him and reminded him of his promise. And indeed he had pledged to be brave and to behave in a manner that was becoming. But this moment of being handed over to Miss Cottrell and her classroom, which was festooned with lots of silly watercolours, it was *awful*.

Miss Cottrell, the boy had to admit, was friendly and soothing in a brisk kind of way. Her grey hair had a wave at the sides and the front that made it look like a tricorne hat. She wore a blue serge skirt and a dark blue cardigan, and the outfit hinted at an immense stability, while the lines that flickered suddenly around her eyes and mouth when she smiled suggested that here was an ally. She had dismissed Mrs Ballester and the headmaster almost before Bernard was aware of it and was introducing the boy to the forty faces. Bernard, she told them, knew a great deal about a place called Singapore which was in the Empire and was a very important harbour. She placed the boy in a seat next to Brenda and gave the latter instructions to show him where to get the morning milk, and so on. Miss Cottrell, it transpired, was a solace.

And after a day or so, school turned out to be alright. It was lonely in the playground at first. How did you actually get to join in any of the noisy games that were going on all over the tarmac compound? No one came up and said, 'Do you want to play with us, Ballester, or what?' The boy stood watching at the edge of one game that involved a queer kind of chant. It began with Brenda turning her back on a group of children and tossing a tennis ball over her shoulder. There was a rush for the ball, and when one person had secured it, all the participants put their hands behind their backs and advanced chanting, 'Quee-nie! Quee-nie! Who-oo's got the ball!'

Brenda turned and scanned their faces. 'Kirsten's got it.'

The group all took one step forward. 'Quee-nie! Quee-nie! Who-ooo's got the ball!'

Brenda tried another name. Again everyone took one step forward and chanted. From his vantage point Bernard could see Toby sidle up to Clive, surreptitiously pass him the



ball and nod vigorously at where Joyce was standing. Brenda also noticed the shuffling.

‘Toby Manch has got it!’

‘No, I ain’t.’

Everyone took another step forward. ‘Quee-nie! Quee-nie! Who-ooo’s got the ball!’

‘You cheated, Toby Manch! You *had* it.’

‘No, I didn’t.’

‘Now Clive’s got it.’

But Clive, Bernard saw, was in the act of passing the tennis ball to Joyce. Clive’s trick was to keep his hands behind his back and say nothing.

‘Joyce, you’ve got it,’ cried Brenda in a tone that implied no more hanky-panky. Joyce had a higher standard of honesty than either Toby or Clive; she was prone, as a result, to the giggles. So she kept her eyes glued to the ground while she was convulsed.

‘You’ve *got* it, Joyce.’

‘No, she ain’t,’ said Toby, who was pretending to receive something back from Clive. The rest of the game’s players were all vastly amused by Clive’s and Toby’s antics. It seemed to be a conspiracy against Brenda. They chanted again and moved forward another pace so that they were milling around the girl. Joyce was rocked with fresh gusts of the giggles.

‘You’re a dirty little cheat, Toby Manch,’ said Brenda, jutting her face to within an inch or two of Toby’s, ‘and I’m not going to play with you.’ Toby grinned and made eyes at her as she walked off and stood next to Bernard, glowering. ‘They’re all stee-oopid,’ she hissed.

It’s an odd kind of game, mused the colonel’s son. It doesn’t seem to be much fun.

In February there were bluebells and snowdrops growing wild along the backs of the gardens of the estate. The spring arrived with winds and brown buds that were sticky like sweets, and which after a week or so thrust out miniature leaves like pairs of tiny hands. On Sunday afternoons Bernard was made to accompany his father, mother and



sister on walks down the Whinberry Lane. This was a narrow, dark lane, with ivy covering the high banks, and trees on the ridges either side which made a cage overhead and which were just beginning to turn green.

In April Colonel Ballester planted a back lawn and the men came and made a proper tarred road in The Close. A few daffodils yellowed under the kitchen window and the major next door had splashes of yellow and pink everywhere from his bulbs.

In May it was Bernard's birthday. Birthdays were good, of course, because of what you got. But in another way they were bad, because for the birthday tea you had to put on the stiff, caramel-coloured shirt. The shirt was Best. You hated caramel and felt stupid wearing it.

Presents came in two kinds. The hard, square parcels were the most promising, so long as they didn't turn out to be something sensible like a set of compasses and protractors for school. His father bought him two silver six-guns with revolving chambers. Then there were the squashy, shapeless parcels. These were not very promising at all. You always knew they would be clothes, or handkerchiefs, or the like. The Guppy girls gave him a present like this. It turned out to be a woollen thing their mother had knitted.

'It's a balaclava, Bernard,' said his mother, holding up the item. 'How useful for next winter that will be. I think you should say a special thank you to Mrs Guppy, don't you?'

'What's a...' the boy furrowed his brow for the pronunciation, '...balcalava?'

'It's for keeping your head warm — like a hat and scarf rolled into one,' his mother supplied enthusiastically.

'Thank you,' said Bernard solemnly to Mrs Guppy, who waited, large as a dinosaur and flanked by her two girls who were wearing their party frocks, also homemade.

Bernard's elder sister, Lyn, supervised the tea, ensuring that sandwiches were eaten before jelly. It was always quite safe to leave things in Lyn's hands, said Mrs Ballester. The girl was eleven, and really very sensible. The Ballesters and