

Evening party, Aldous Huxley

EVENING PARTY

"SANS Espoir, sans Espoir . . ." sang the lady while the piano laboriously opened its box of old sardines in treacle. One detected ptomaine in the syrup.

Sans Espoir . . . I thought of the rhymes—soir, nonchaloir, reposoir—the dying falls of a symbolism grown sadly suicidal before the broad Flemish back of the singer, the dewlaps of her audience. Sans Espoir. The listeners wore the frozen rapture of those who gaze upon the uplifted Host.

Catching one another's eye, we had a simultaneous vision of pews, of hyenas and hysteria.

Three candles were burning. They behaved like English aristocrats in a French novel—perfectly, impassively. I tried to imitate their milordliness.

One of the candles flickered, snickered. Was it a draught or was it laughter?

Flickering, snickering—candles, you betrayed me. I had to laugh too.

The end