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A STEP FROM THE WORK

ROMUALD LENECH

Stretching resignedly in my office chair, I gazed through half-closed eyes at the commonplace glass of unfinished tea and thought reluctantly of the noise penetrating from the street through the entry door. I had just come back from my vacation and shuddered at the thought of the specter of boredom.

"Now there won’t be any surprises or adventures," I groaned in despair.

Stretching again in my chair, I noticed a hatchet suspended from the ceiling over my seat at the desk, its blade facing me. It was not so much a hatchet as a powerful, gleaming axe, swaying slightly on an invisible thread.

I shrugged resignedly—nothing out of the ordinary.

True enough, the chair could not be pushed forcefully back from under the desk to examine the suspended ironware, because trying to give the desk a strong push, instead of shifting as usual towards the wall, it rose up slightly, drawn and simultaneously prevented by an invisible power. When I attempted to sit down on the elevated chair, its being nailed to the floor by the weight of my body caused the suspended axe to move and drop two feet over my head, after which it moved up to its previous position.

A reversible connection, I thought. The whole thing must obviously be connected with a system of metal threads more transparent than nylon. Technology is advancing.
Next day, not much could tear me away from remembering the pleasures of my vacation. After clearing up some bits of official stuff, eyes closed, I could hear a noise in my head like a shell, the damp rain-soaked woods, the damp singing-birds, the damp water in the lake, the fairy-tale colored clouds. When I absently struck my head on the desk, the sounds of a carefree Viennese waltz came to me, and immediately afterwards the stern noises of some song interlarded with stars, with the scraping and dry bangings of breaking objects. Soon afterwards, the sounds of the waltz.

Obviously, they have fitted my desk with a button that switches on music, I thought sleepily.

After two days of heroic efforts to work and yielding in turn to vacation mirages, in the shell of my head there resounded nothing more than wet pine forests, rain clouds and a moist lake, and birds singing up above. Assuredly under the influence of the music from under the top of my desk. Then, however, there came the memories of mushrooms from under moss. This was the result of kicking my foot under the desk as I stretched out in the chair. For I struck my shoe on an empty tin-can, like a mushroom in a wood. But the can did not fly off its stem, because it was screwed to the floor. I decided to examine this phenomenon more closely. In addition to the tin-can I also discovered more tin objects under my neighbor's desk and in various corners of the room. Amidst empty cans of coffee of various shapes, empty cans of fruit dominated, also some old springs, pipes, and photographs of film stars in metal frames.

After a week's struggle with boredom following my vacation, success seemed at hand. The damp woods and lake disappeared from the resounding shell of my head. Only the little mushrooms remained. I had, therefore, more time for work, observation and thought. In the right corner of the room I noticed a hook driven into the wall, which wasn't there before my vacation. When I tried to loosen it with my fingers, a fine shower fell from under the lamp which hung in the middle of the room.

Someone unknown, friendly, maybe some good protective spirit or some kind of intelligence coded into the machine is trying to help me disperse the specter of boredom. Thank you, intelligence, I thought.

After a few days, straight from the street, the clatter of tramways and car screeches, a young man with an interesting appearance ran into my room.

I guessed that he wasn't one of the clients of our company. He fixed his searching look at me and it felt as if he had squeezed my throat with his hand. I lightly swung in my chair. I felt as if, to the
beat of the axe swinging from the ceiling, wings had started to grow on my shoulders. But the young man would not allow me to make use of those wings. He told me to get up from my chair and said with impertinence: “I hope you didn’t spoil my construction. I have put so much work into this creation of mine, that I will not let any mere . . .”

“The draught,” I interrupted him, “maybe the exit door should be closed?”

“It’s not worth it,” said the newcomer. “In a moment they will bring the Element of Man here.” He looked carefully around the room, penetrating all the corners, and counted the cans and springs scattered on the floor.

“You are lucky they are all in place,” he said, “the arrangement is very important. Among these objects the spectators will be able to walk freely, like in a forest. They will enter the heart of my creation.”

“Attach this to the chair,” he shouted to his friends, who all four, with terrible muscular agony, towed the metal body of a mannequin from the street and noisily sat it in my chair. The young newcomer put the steel paw of the mannequin on the desk and threw the two meters long right leg over the top till it touched the hook in the wall. He plugged in the roll of cables attached to the rib of the Element of Man. Into the right hand of the Element he put a completely new can of conserves produced by our company.

“You probably don’t understand my construction,” he turned to me with pity. “It will be a combination of pure art and the advertising of our conserves.” He documented this statement by plugging the construction into the outlet. The Element of Man, composed of a few metal plates and an iron ball symbolizing the head, was swinging in the chair with a force that I as a normal man couldn’t even dream of possessing.

He set the hidden lever into motion more effectively than I had managed, because the axe started to slide down from the ceiling in a swinging movement, and with great force started to alternately hit the can of conserves standing on the desk and the head of the mannequin sitting in the chair. With enormous pressure the left hand of the Element pushed the button which released from under the top of the desk Viennese waltzes intermixed with songs illustrating the breaking of bones. At the same time the right leg hit the hook with a swinging motion, causing a shower of rain to fall from under the lamp.

“You were a step from creation,” said the artist-structor, looking at me with reproach, “but I knew that you would be too weak to put the construction into motion.”
In the meantime, the axe hit with an alternating rhythm—once at the can of conserves, once at the steel head, striking sheafs of sparks. The door leading to the street was opened widely. The constructor’s friends were just placing an inscription over it—‘‘Exposition-tasting’’—inviting the customers to buy our conserves. Crowds were pushing inside and two girls from the bookkeeping department collected high entrance fees.

I, still somewhat nonsensically, lingered around the office, looking for a new place at the desk. But that wasn’t what was really absorbing me. Gradually, with every beat of the hatchet into the metal objects, an acute pulsation started in my head which changed into a hammering, bursting my skull.

Was I, because of a long stay at the center of the construction, becoming part of it? There was no time to lose. I ran from the room and into the street. I felt that the post-vacation boredom which was oppressing me was receding, and I also realized that the joints of my skull were moving apart under my fingers, tangibly and literally.
DEATH

R. M. CHUCKOVICH

There was a time when my thoughts roamed freely in the vastness of the Universe. My spirit thrived, and my joy was “ultimate” in this place of unending space. I was anything . . . I was nothing . . . I was everything . . . My wings spanned the distance of Eternity. I visited “the far corners,” and I touched upon the meaning of Existence. There were no boundaries in this place—no fences—no rules. There were none of the restrictive bindings that I fear and know I must now face. These inevitable shackles surround me in this “tube” of destiny—a hulking horror stalking its helpless prey—unavoidable—undefeatable—waiting, waiting—to hobble me—to envelop me—to control and monopolize my being. My future is the destruction of the “greatness” that was.

There is a word “they” use called “Time.” I know not its meaning. I know only that mine is “short.” Soon I am to enter this place—a captive—, a prisoner locked tightly on a minute plot of dirt—a tiny speck—a closet with no door—a place with no exit, save death. This, of course, I am only allowed to know now. When the time comes for my entry my memory will disappear—my beloved freedom will not only cease to exist, but it will be as if this memory never was. The sadness is overwhelming when I think of being denied the pleasure of savouring what I once possessed.

I shiver as I watch the quivering vessel pumping fluid of what “they” call “Life” into my now restricted form. It is red and warm
and is definitely having a pronounced effect on my dimensions. Why only a moment ago I felt a tentacle emerge from my left side. And now one has appeared on my right. "They" call these things "arms"—of what use are they? Why, as I was, there was nothing I couldn't touch! I look at these ridiculous, clumsy implements through slits in a portion of my form "they" call a "head." Why, as I was, there was nothing I couldn't see!

Oh, how have they managed to gather my boundless thoughts and spirits and cram them into this tiny boned cavern? There was a time when I wouldn't have asked that question! At least I'm aware that my comprehensions are perishing. At least I'm struggling to "remain." Their murdering of my soul won't come easy!

I am truly losing my perspective now... This thing called "Time" I find increasingly difficult to fight. My past is becoming a vague image, a whirling faded memory that I am not quite sure ever existed. My thoughts are no longer repulsed by the red fluid, but rather they hunger for it in an obsession-like fashion. My form has grown substantially. I realize that I must submit. The fight is useless.

Oh, the pain in seeing only that which is in front of you! It is truly blindness this thing "they" call "Life."

No! I must not yield! I must wage battle against this horror! Is not submission the intolerable crime? The unforgivable sin? There I go "thinking" again, restricting myself. What is happening to me? Has my wing-span narrowed to this? I must not lose control. I must attack with the forces at hand!

How useless, how futile, is this kicking with these tiny things they call “feet.” At least the sounds penetrating from the outside are warm and loving. I wonder why my useless war amuses them so. Their delight is confusing and of no consolation. Perhaps a more violent kick will put a stop to their pleasure... No... it only enhances it! Strange is their reaction...

Am I actually engaged in this absurd conversation with myself? Is this worthless trivia actually flowing from my thoughts and spirits? Did I feel myself slip? Yes... I am slipping! Lower... lower! Where am I going? Oh yes—it’s the “Moment”! It has arrived!

What moment? Where was I? What was I? I don’t remember. Did I make a sound? That sound? A “Cry”? What is a “Cry”? Is that all I can do? Cry? It’s all disappearing! Everything is vanishing! Please Help Me!

I'm Dying!!
There was a small, weak man.

His life progressed without excitement, with a minimum of pleasure and pain.

Until the day when he discovered that a plant was growing in the innermost part of his body: green with stem and leaves.

From that moment on he refused to move, refused to speak, merely let his body rest in a chair from morning till night. And from night till morning.

Each morning he opened his mouth wide, and with a mirror he contemplated the green plant which grew inside his body. He saw the leaves and the stem framed by the dark red oral cavity. They were green.

A month later it became clear to him that the plant was carnivorous. He began to have pains in his stomach, up through his throat and in his mouth.

But he knew that it still was necessary to remain at rest. The least disturbance could deform the plant. He grasped the chair's armrests with his hands and pressed his feet hard against the floor. All in order to be able to bear the pain. But he remained sitting. His eyeballs protruded as if he were staring at an infinitely distant point. His hair began to fall out and his skin cracked and would not heal. But he remained sitting without a sound.

He remained sitting until the plant penetrated the nape of his neck—and it was too late anyway.
I awoke and opened my eyes in darkness. How does the darkness of closed eyes differ from the darkness of open eyes?

But I didn’t have time to ponder the question. I had to write down my dream, as quickly as possible.

I sat up in bed. I reached for the light switch. I sat in bed until my eyes were used to the light. I looked at the slippers near my feet and noticed that one of them pointed towards me and the other away from me. I was puzzled. Before lying down in bed, I always leave my slippers pointing away from the bed. Then why did one of them point towards me now? I wasn’t so very sleepy before going to bed that I would have done something like that. But I had no time to puzzle this out either. I rose and went to the desk. I opened my book of dreams. It was a two-hundred page notebook, two-thirds full already. In a few days I shall have to ask for another notebook.

As I took the cap off the pen, I remembered that I had to wind the clock. I put the cap on the back of the pen and placed it in the open notebook. I rose and went towards the clock upon the shelf. I have made a strict rule: wind the clock whenever you get up. It would take just a few seconds. I couldn’t forget the dream so quickly.

Holding the clock in my left hand, I was about to start winding it, when I saw an unusual black dot on the face. I held the clock close to my eyes.

A spider. It was a tiny spider. He was under the crystal, inside the clock.
A spider in the clock! Does he want to weave a web in there? Idiot. If the clock stopped, he might have a chance.

With my right hand I tapped twice on the glass where the spider stood. He scurried away. I tapped again at the spot where he stopped. He ran again. I tapped on the glass again.

Then I realized he had gotten in somehow and now he didn’t know how to get out.

I smiled. I shook the clock in my hand. Then I tapped on the glass again where the spider was. He ran. The moment he stopped, I tapped over the spot. Then again. Then again.

The spider kept running from place to place. Then I stopped tapping for a few seconds. I watched the spider.

Then I shook the clock violently with both hands.

When I had stopped shaking the clock, the spider crouched at a spot near the rim of the face. He started crawling slowly toward the minute hand.

I watched him.

Then I gripped the knob that turns the hands and turned them as fast as I could. The unsuspecting spider was knocked aside by the blow. I turned the hands again.

This happened three or four times and then I realized that the spider was trying to keep away from the rim of the face, that is, to stay near the center of the clock. I soon saw why. The minute hand was not entirely straight from end to end. It turned inward near the rim. Near the center the hand was at a greater elevation from the surface of the face. So when the spider was near the rim he could be hit by the minute hand, but if he stood near the center he was more or less safe in the space between the hand and the white surface.

Smart little bastard, I said to myself.

For a few seconds I watched the spider and the hands of the clock. Then I turned the knob again. This time I concentrated my attention on the hour hand. The hour hand moved more slowly, of course, but it was below the minute hand, and thus closer to the surface of the clock. The spider couldn’t escape a blow by the hour hand. I went on turning the hands quickly and kept the spider moving. When he got out of the reach of the hour hand, I would hit him with the minute hand. When he ran toward the center, I was after him again with the hour hand.

This went on for a while. Then I found the spider at the very rim of the face, in the narrow strip between the numbers and the rim. Actually he was quite safe here, for the minute hand does not
reach beyond the numbers. If he stayed in this no-man's-land, the spider had nothing to fear from me.

But I was smarter. I spun the minute hand as quickly as possible close past the spider. Although the hand did not touch him, its pointed end, like a sword, swept so near him that he panicked and foolishly ran toward the center. Then I hit him again with the hour hand. This happened two or three times.

By now, the spider had taken quite a beating. He wasn't able to move quickly any more. He was dazed, staggering like a bull in the ring. Later, he could only crawl about with difficulty.

My clock's alarm hand is in a small circle just above the center of the clock. This hand practically grazes the surface of the clock. When the hour hand sweeps over the upper part of the clock, it intersects the circle of the alarm hand.

Hitting him with the hour hand, I forced the spider to move to the upper half of the clock. Then skillfully, I turned the alarm hand and passed it under the hour hand. The space between the hour hand and the alarm hand was extremely narrow. The spider's body was crushed between the two.

For a few seconds I kept standing with the clock in my palm. Then I put the clock on the desk. I watched the spider hung on the cross formed by the hour hand and the alarm hand.

Then I was hit by a sudden shock.

I had forgotten to wind the clock.

Not only that, I had turned the hands!

I had turned the hands, round and round, without a moment's thought. And, before doing such a thing, I hadn't even noted what time it was!

I had gone to bed at about three-thirty. But who knew what time it was now? I might have slept any number of hours. Two hours. Three hours. Six hours. Eight hours. Or perhaps just half an hour.

The hour hand now stood between twelve and one, and the minute hand near six. So it was twelve-thirty. But did that mean anything? That wasn't necessarily the correct time. The correct time, at this moment, was probably a far cry from what the clock showed. A clock will tell the time you want it to. That doesn't mean it's telling the correct time.

It wasn't twelve-thirty. And I didn't know what time it was. For I had turned the hands of the clock, as though I were out of my mind.

I could never again answer the question, "What time is it?" For so many years I had taken care of my clock. I made a habit of winding it whenever I got out of bed, so that it would not stop. It was a
good clock, very accurate, something you could rely on. And now that was all over.

I sat in the chair with my chin upon my arms, my arms crossed upon the desk.

Suddenly I lifted my head and looked at the clock. I had a great idea.

Why not believe it was twelve-thirty? Actually twelve-thirty?

All it needed was a moment's decision. It's twelve-thirty, I would say to myself. In two hours it would be two-thirty. Three-thirty after three hours. Five o'clock after four and a half hours. No argument, no misgivings. An act of faith.

The idea gave me life.

But only for a short time. In my heart I knew it wouldn't do, that I could never really swallow it. I might say, "Well, it's a quarter to four," but deep down inside I would know it was a damned lie, that it was NOT a quarter to four.

I had to admit that henceforth I couldn't truthfully answer the question, "What time is it?" Thus it is that a man, one day, finds himself unable to answer simple questions.

I rose from the desk.

I ran my fingers through my hair and went to a corner of the room near the bed. I looked at the clock. Then I walked to another corner, where I keep my book racks. I stood there, looking at the clock. As if it were a time bomb that might go off at any moment.

Then I went toward the light switch. I put my finger on the switch, turned and looked at the clock. I pressed the switch and the room was in darkness. In the darkness, in the spot I was still staring at, was the clock.

Slowly, step by step, I started moving in the direction of the clock. When I was about four paces from the desk, I could hear the faint ticking. I took another step. The ticking grew louder. Another step. Then another. I bent down. I placed my ear close to the clock. I listened to its ticking.

Who could have realized that this careful counting was a hoax? The damned clock was ticking away as if it told you nothing but the correct time.

I quickly rose and went and switched the light on. I looked at the clock. As if I expected it to give a start!

It ticked away, mindlessly.

It was at this point that I noticed my dream-book lying open upon the desk, and realized that I had forgotten the dream.

But I merely took note of the fact; I didn't particularly feel any-
thing. I quietly went to the desk, closed the notebook and put it away in a desk drawer.

Then I threw myself on the bed and lay there for some time.

I got out of the bed and stretched myself. I must think of other things too, I told myself. I decided to get some exercise. First, I did some yoga. Then I opened the door of my room and stood in the doorway.

I was standing where the light from the passage in front of my room intersects with the light in my room. The lights in the passage give out a bluish light, whereas the light in my room is very white.

Outside my room the passage extends left and right. At regular intervals in both directions it curves slightly. So you cannot see very far in either direction. There are lights in the passage too, but on the right there are no lights beyond the third bend. I don’t know why. On the left, as far as I know, the lights never end. I go jogging frequently, to the left of course.

Today I turned back at the fifth bend in the passage. By the time I got to my room I was breathing hard. I wiped the sweat from my face. I wondered if they had cut down on the oxygen recently.

I relaxed in my armchair for a few minutes. Then I was hungry. I got out of the chair and went to the food room on the left. A fresh supply of cans had arrived a few days ago. I selected two or three.

As I ate I noticed a picture on one of the cans. It showed a sunrise. Or perhaps a sunset. For a while I thought about the life of the people on earth’s surface. I thought of the day and the night, the sunshine, the rain.

I finished eating and returned to my room.

I picked up the clock on the desk and put it back on the shelf. After a moment’s thought, I turned the clock around. No use looking at the clock any more, I said to myself.

I sat again in the armchair with a book. But the sight of the clock with its back to me almost made me cry, so I got up and turned it around again.

I found it hard to concentrate on reading, so I got up again and put the book back in the rack. I didn’t know what to do next.

I don’t know why, but I felt like going for a walk in the passage to the right, where there are no lights beyond the third bend.

I walked up to the third bend. The last light is just before the bend. I walked past the bend and stood in the dim light, looking into the dark tunnel ahead. I had never walked beyond this point in the passage. This time I walked on. I couldn’t even see a dim glow at my back. It was as if the passage were made of cement darkness.
Then I stopped. I waved my arms in the dark, for no reason. I didn’t even see them. I knew only because they were my arms.

I kept standing for a few minutes. Then something unexpected happened. I remembered the dream. I remembered it very clearly, as if I were actually seeing it.

It was like this: I was jogging down the passage to the left of my room. Suddenly the lights in the passage went out and it was pitch dark. I stopped dead in my tracks. I was so terrified that I forgot whether I was running away from my room or toward it. So I didn’t know whether to go on running in the same direction or turn around.

Here I had awakened.

I turned back. In a few minutes I could see the glow of the light around the third bend. I came into the light again. I walked briskly to my room. I opened the desk drawer, pulled out the notebook and wrote out the dream.

I was tired. I switched the light off and went to sleep.

When I woke up my head was slightly heavy. I don’t think I slept long.

Out of habit I reached for the clock. My hand froze in mid-air. The clock wasn’t ticking.

It had stopped.

In all the excitement earlier I had forgotten to wind the clock.

I picked up the clock. I held it close to my ear. Then I held it before me. It had stopped at a quarter of seven.

I thought, if a man dies you can’t tell what time he died by looking at him, but if a clock stops you can tell what time it stopped by looking at it.

I put the clock on the desk and sat on the edge of my bed.

I didn’t have any feelings now about having let the clock stop. Not even about having turned its hands.

I got up, went to the desk and picked up the clock. The alarm was set for four. I began turning the minute and hour hands. It was like dragging a dead man’s body.

The hour hand came to four. Instantly the alarm began ringing. Like the frantic tolling of a death-knell.

Or an incessant clamoring: Arise, arise.
I write I
No words. Is sufficient with words issuf
must continue, the attempt, must, gladly.
It.

I
write I.
Always something.
I now see clearly. I now see clearly. I now see clearly. I now see clearly. I now see clearly. I now see clearly. I now see clearly.
Nothing is superfluous, is superf.
Time, inscrutable, is lacking, always something, is now clear, time which, always something, will naturally, naturally I should, worth the effort, unless.
Now see clearly, now clearly, now.
I have written I.
The beginning, in one word, time, one other, one.
Nobody can deny that.
The beginning could.
I.
Nothing, is the least essential.
Again, the beginning, not too often, help, time is running, first and last, everything goes, from first to, running out, the quickest, too easy, the situation.

It is.

Minutia, it is, conscious, could, incidentally.

The remainder, time naturally, naturally, unforeseen, I mean, time, reduce and expand, time and thereafter, few are lacking, until is exploited, talk about, minutia, quite simple, everything, the report.

Or rather.

Without hesitation, certainty, my other, without exaggeration, the assignment, not without firmness, yes exactly, result, sults, to confuse, this test, I feel, therefore should nothing.

The greatest possible exploitation, realize clearly, the day’s length, from the one extreme to, sleep without suffering, more precisely, sleep, now realize clearly, the assignment, but I don’t exist in order to, without suffering, an oversight, surely, so they say, now things are going, reservation, unless, well, before or, demand of me, result, I enjoy, insistence, the suffering, oversimplified form, additional effectiveness, last line, additional effectiveness, went well, sluggishly, but.

Now.

Not regressing.

Thereupon, becomes, maybe.

Neither.

Certainty, essential, that which can be demonstrated, the matter, if that word, an attempt, the investigations, everything can, exercises too, I need, chances, to be used, to be put in, if only order, essential. which can be demonstrated, the matter, if it, occurs to, thought, me.

Uncert. Rather.

Nothing can continue, not why, time,

I remember I.

Easier, even if I, in the beginning, important, expansions follow, limitation, worth serious consideration, but I don’t exist, words could, help, not, mind’s, farther away, correction, perhaps without me obv naturally, naturally, idea, somewhat more difficult, no danger, even if the solution, big words, the result.

Is,

theory the report words should support will organism for food trap except for perhaps words before again distance certain write slowly up rest.

The conclusion, with, the thinking, indeed only just thin, with-
out criticism, naturally, naturally, difficult to imagine, a comparison which only, in brief, time should not however, a prerequisite, the whole thing is not without.

Then I remember, the first time, I, see now clearly, repetition, of the words, could certainly, the first time, from.

Time.

Some pain, exaggerated, followed by, and this, sooner or, the result, I should then, since.

Nobody deny.
Renewed idea, hidden.
Work, so to speak.

The first assumption, if not, at most right in between, incidentally, difficult to, my own knowledge, opinion, perhaps, a sort of failure, or, the first, one could, instead of.

A new thought, too much, perhaps a new, a few, again perhaps.

I want now to.
In that I here, without complaint, a simple action, have written.
When I, from one time to.

I wouldn't want, good is not, a bit of fear, without a reason, certainty, again and, badly, reluctantly deny, no objection, arrange, too easy.

Not quite clear.
I see now, unless.
No exactly, this.

Important, absolutely, a lot, ill-founded, I should remember, from the start, naturally it became, naturally, incoherent but clear, and I therefore, excursio, incidentally, to give up, but no reason.

The work, the size, the proofs are, my hand. I.

The rest is
When the father came to live with his son, the caretaker of a summer house, there was no room for him in the quarters filled by his son’s family. The son spoke with the lady of the summer house, and she allowed the old man to settle down for the time being behind the bungalow, in the lean-to which covered the firewood bin, the well and its pump, and an outside toilet. The old man used the john every half hour and made one cigarette after another with straw from the mattress on which he slept two-thirds of the day. When the owner of the summer house saw that the old man would only leave if forced out, she felt sorry for his son. She built a lean-to alongside the hut in which his family lived and installed an outhouse which she had promised sometime before. The old man moved.

The new john didn’t have a water tank. The old man found himself obliged to carry a bucket of water every half hour. He felt as if he had been caught in a trap. He rolled up his mattress and returned to the lean-to behind the kitchen of the summer house, and when the owner’s family arrived on the week-end he snuck back to his son’s hut. However he did not go unobserved. The owner’s wife saw him and realizing that he would move again as soon as their backs were turned, she went to speak to the caretaker. The caretaker, ashamed of his father’s behavior, promised that it wouldn’t happen again.

The first week, although his son pleaded with him all the time, the old man only moved out just before the vacationers returned. The
second week his son tried to starve him out. But the old man, who was more or less accustomed to fasting, seemed not to notice the lack of food. The son gave up, fearing that his father might melt away and die without even noticing it. On the eve of the vacationers’ return, the old man gave no sign of moving. Exasperated, the son went looking for him, but was content, in the beginning, to try and convince him with words. The old man, seated cross-legged on the straw mattress, listened to him while rolling a cigarette and glaring at him out of the corner of his eye with a rancorous look. When his son finished talking, the father’s toothless mouth exploded in an obscene response. The son drew back offended and decided at that very moment to turn to force as a last resort. Bending down, he grabbed the corners of the mattress and, looking behind so as not to trip, began to tug at the mattress, resolved to drag it out of there, old man and all. The old man grabbed hold of the water pump, and the mattress flew out from under his body. His son went tumbling backwards out through the doorway. Regaining his balance, he came in again, trembling with rage. But his father had disappeared. He was already breathing a sigh of relief when he noticed that the door to the john was closed. The old man had locked himself in. The wall of the john left a triangular opening beneath the sloping roof. The caretaker got a wooden box, placed it against the wall of the john, and climbed up. Looking down, he saw his father seated on the toilet, calmly giving the finishing touches to a cigarette he had just rolled. Without getting off the box, the son turned and managed to reach a broom leaning against the wall nearest the kitchen. He passed the long broom handle over the partition and, standing on tip-toes, tried to force open the wooden latch from the inside. When he saw the broom handle, the old man jumped up and held the latch shut with his two hands. His son beat at the old man’s hand until suddenly the latch spun over and the door opened under the pressure of his knee, allowing him to insert the toe of his shoe in the crack. Seeing that he was about to lose the match, the old man immediately let go of the door. The caretaker came down from the box without taking his foot out of the door. He leaned the broom against the wall, then pushed his way in. His father had disappeared again. Expecting to catch him still in the act of climbing over the partition, he looked up and found the old man atop the water tank. Straddling it, hugging it, clinging to it with his knees, hanging on with his feet, his fingernails, his very gums, the old man stared down wide-eyed with terror. Burning with rage at such absurd obstinacy, the caretaker got up on the toilet bowl, holding on for balance to the cord from the water tank (which precipitated a noisy flushing), grabbed
the old man by one of his legs and by his belt and violently began to shake and pull him. His body seemed glued to the metal tank. The old man put his forehead against the lid of the tank, hiding his face, and began to sob in a thin, strangulated way. All of a sudden, the son stopped still, pierced by an emotion which was not yet totally foreign to him. But the same moment he came back to his senses. He stepped down from the toilet bowl, went to get the hand ax from on top of the woodpile, and came back to the john. He climbed back onto the toilet bowl and began to chop off his father’s head. He wanted to avoid useless suffering as much as possible. He thought the corpse would loosen its hold immediately. Instead, it rigidified even more in its posture of gruesome tenacity. There was nothing else to do but take it off, piece by piece, bit by bit, and, still in the end the fingernails remained embedded in the rusty metal of the water tank.
Too big for me alone. I really had never thought about it. I feel it today. I am surrounded by a lifeless space, like a hibernating being, made of air. Insensate cubic meters compress me in the center—although I’m not sure it’s the exact center—of the room. In the distance, beyond the darkness, some medallions, I’ve been told, indefatigably repeat the tiresome harmony of the washable paper on the walls.

The armchair. The chair is important. Almost the protagonist of my waiting. I cannot do anything else. The pleasures of memory, and things impossible to forget are born from our union over and over again. Gentle monsters which woo me with the illusion of a scanty present, of an impossible future. Gentle monsters which keep dimming unhurriedly, with a certain, with an infamous gladness until they become harsh and bland like the armchair, misshapen like it, which is black or maroon or gray certainly.

I’ve heard his voice several times already. The telephone gives it a metallic, impersonal quality. I knew his presence would make its way here some day. His calls have prepared me minutely. He won’t be late; he’s always been punctual. Years of waiting and now. . .

The door. A knock. It is the door. I open slowly. I am in front of him. Neither joy nor sorrow. No sentimentalities. We’re to talk. Yes of course. About so many things. Naturally. Although I resist, many, too many things appear before me. In a bundle, tumultuously, without priorities or order.
A partly rusted railing in a yet tranquil village, with room to turn around, and get dirty, and fall down, and get up crying with hurting knees. My mother, with skirts to hide in and banish childhood's imaginary terrors, standing there, very clear at first, then dimmer, sad and black at the end, black like everything else, but not like her.

Not her. She remains the same. Determined and evasive, tender and sensible, almost masculine, with her ridiculous twelve years, and her calm accent and her strong arms and happy brown eyes, hidden in the yesterday that comes back just barely outlined for a fleeting instant, lost in the endless caricature which my memory recurrently forms.

He also appears. At my side, as if serving as a contrast to my poor and eternal nothingness. But he is different and is bound to make it evident: elegant, cordial and sociable, so that the negation of these qualities may be visible in me. And his silence. Not that sonorous silence which everything around me produces now, that suggestive silence which crowds on me objects which have lost their light. Young. He is younger. A few years which seem more. I never could best him at anything; only in sorrowing, in being insignificant.

It was even worse then. Why did they have to compare us? No, it doesn't matter, not now. But I never asked for triumphs, or scorn. A pleasant corner, almost secret, and a few books; that's all. Then the Renaissance was shapes and colors, not dark against dark, not farewell and black. She had changed by now. For no reason she preferred art and color and shape. A big surprise for them, for everyone, although perhaps she never liked the Renaissance.

And my father, stupidly enchanted with his ingenuity and vitality; probably feeling sorry for me, or for himself for having a son like me. At times I think I was afraid of him, adored him and hated him all at once. If he had only not made me go with him. . . . He was happy and the car was fast. Strong enough to mock my fear. You have to step on it on the highway, avoid the potholes, come to a screeching stop at the railing. But you, his favorite son, had to be there, speeding —life is yours—in front of the estate, showing off your cruel, smiling energy. A sudden turn and an age-old tree. Without any screeching stop. In my dreams I've seen your absurd, crazed image, which has never understood. The bandages still covered my eyes when I found out that he had died. Satisfied, quite possibly, to see you active and safe. He hardly heard anything about me. He died too quickly.

We didn't know the value of his only legacy, this watch that I keep because it belongs to me. It's the first time you've envied me
something. And you’ve come to beg for it. I’ve never asked you for anything. Not even after the accident, when she decided not to share my darkness, nor to renew my understanding of objects in order to delay my forgetting, to keep a flower from becoming merely an aroma, and a dog from limiting its existence to a bark and a fleeting touch, and a wall from being an endless, monotonous smoothness.

But it was you, who didn’t need to study the aspect of things. You had them before you. You could take them. You could destroy them. It had to happen. She became yours. That’s enough. But not the watch. I’ve told you before. It’s useless. It’s my meagre comfort; the last bulwark of my dignity, it would tell you so, if it could speak. Famous antiquarian, only this item is lacking to round out your exposition. You’ll keep on lacking it. Money’s of no use; it’s not a question of money. You really don’t understand? You never could understand me. Don’t you know that the perfectly regular sound of its ticking keeps repeating my whole life, without interruptions, without irregularities, imper­turbable, that it’s my compass and measure that links me with the past, so it cannot entirely erase your enthusiasm and insensitivity? Don’t you see that its engraved surface in my fingers is a consolation, a clock for my inferiority?

Yes, look it over carefully. Truly, a real jewel. But don’t touch it; leave it in my hand. Don’t try to take it by force. I’ll not permit it. It’s not to belong to you even for a few hours. I’m going to prevent it. Let go of it! My fingers won’t let go. They have waited for many years without knowing exactly why. You’re driving them to violence. Your neck is too weak for your intense life. No, money’s of no use. It’s too late. Even if my brain should give the order, my hands wouldn’t heed it. They’re defending my wealth; it’s my heart. Understand? Tick-tock, tick-tock, and so on continually, every second of every day. My fingers do know it, and so they’re not going to stop squeezing. Your body is falling. You’re at my feet. Motionless. You’re still clutching the watch in your fist; a real jewel. Right? Here, under your jacket, I should hear the sound of life, that was yours. Remember? But you are silent. You are quiet. Silent and quiet. I, only very tired. I had waited for your visit for so long. I must get back to the armchair; I must be myself again.

I’m in it; it’s soft and in the center. It’s strange; you should be beside my right shoe and I can’t manage to touch you. I’m not nervous, although a little worn out maybe. I’ve been waiting for you for so long. You’ve always been punctual. The watch can be entrusted to a brother, even if it’s as valuable as this one. I think it will complete the exposition satisfactorily. The door. I hear somebody knocking. It’s the door. I open slowly.
HICCUPS

BENNY ANDERSEN

As far back as I can remember, I have enjoyed hiccuping, and my only regret is that I cannot bring about the hiccups in the way one evokes other pleasurable sensations. They choose their own day and time. To be sure they can arise in connection with rapid consumption of cold liquids, but don’t think that I can get them going by swilling cold water or beer. That usually only causes a sick stomach; hiccups can’t be forced.

But when the miracle finally happens, I have to watch out. First of all I must be careful not to attract attention, and since hiccups almost always arrive when I am at a party with many people, the situation is difficult, especially since the highest degree of enjoyment is to emit a real loud, uninhibited hiccup. So I try to hold it in first gear, and for the time being it just rumbles a bit in my throat now and then or manifests itself through a sudden jerk of the head which can be camouflaged with ordinary nods or by tossing my hair back as if a fly were bothering me. Afterwards I may discreetly look around for a way out so that I can smuggle my hiccup out into the hall, into the garden or to the bathroom where it can finally sing out, but alas, only seldom do I get that far, for as a rule some sharp ear or eye has observed me: “Oh, you have the hiccups—I can cure that.”

The cold water with which one usually starts the treatment is still all right. In the beginning I was nervous about that, but now I know that the hiccups aren’t damaged by it, just as little as by vinegar with sugar in it and whatever else one comes up with as the unfailing
remedy. I calmly drink these things, joylessly, in order to show my good intentions. For I'd just as well not say that I should like to keep my hiccups; people think that I want to avoid imposing on them and find me only the more touching and helpless: "That is really admirable of you to pretend that it doesn't bother you, but we'll help you, just rely on us."

Now come the hard tests: I stand on my head; I stand on one leg with a glass of water on my forehead; but I submit to everything in order to keep a good relationship with the other guests, and I do want to be invited again, not because the party interests me especially but because being together with many festively clad people puts me into that vibrant mood which constitutes such fertile ground for my hiccups.

Next I count backwards from fifty with my mouth full of water, and blushing I dry the drops of water off my jacket when, at twenty-four, a powerful hiccup blasts the water out of my mouth. But people smile encouragingly; the fact that I am a difficult case only increases the suspense. It would indeed be sad if the hiccups had capitulated already because of a sip of water; no, this is better than any party game. The gentlemen take off their jackets and heatedly debate what one now should resort to; the ladies rush in and out with pitchers full of splashing cold water; after a while the floor is a mess.

But at a certain moment it becomes quiet, everyone is looking at me silently with sparkling eyes. I move up against the wall and lose a hiccup for it is clear to me that they are going to scare me. That has, to be sure, never damaged my hiccups, and I really have nothing against people suddenly shouting "Boo" behind me, if only I don't know it beforehand. But the fact that I know it makes me nervous. From what direction will it come, what can they come up with, who is going to start? Frightened, I stare at them; indeed, I'll give a start in acknowledgement if they will only hurry up and get it over with.

But now they can see I am on guard. There is a continued silence; to be heard are only my recurrent hiccups which I now let have free rein, at least to enjoy them to the fullest as long as I may. But I can see the worst is on its way. They all know there is one remedy which never fails, and one they have kept till the end, after everything else was unsuccessful. They look at each other—who wants to take the initiative? There is no risk connected with it; the money is safe enough. Finally someone takes out his wallet, pulls out a ten-crown note and holds it up: One more hiccup, and it's yours. This is terrible. I try with all my might to hold the next hiccup down, in order not to offend anyone and not rob the man of his ten crowns which he does not dream of being in danger. I know it only makes things worse to hold back
the hiccup, but what can I do aside from gaining time and hoping for a miracle—that suddenly the doorbell will ring or a thunderstorm will break loose or there will happen something entirely different which can distract their attention. I press my tongue back into my throat like a cork with the result that the hiccup, when it finally comes, takes a running start all the way down from my kidneys and blasts itself a way out into the open with unbelievable power, so that I bang my head against the wall.

Everyone looks down into his coffee cup without moving or saying anything. For a moment the challenger stands paralyzed with his ten-crown note before flinging it over to me with a contemptuous air. And I am forced to take it. It isn’t even of any use to say I am sorry; there is nothing to do. Everybody ignores me from now on. I can only wait for an opportunity to sneak out the door, downstairs and away, hiccuping sorrowfully.

After such an experience I keep to myself for a long time, but sooner or later my craving, not for company, but to hiccup, becomes so urgent that I again start to seek association with others and to ingratiate myself into social circles; now the question is to find some people who don’t know me and my unfortunate inclination.

It is difficult in a smaller town constantly to reestablish a circle of acquaintances, I therefore have plans to move to the capital; there should be plenty of possibilities there.
"Your Majesty, when we compare
the present life of man with that
of time of which we have no knowledge,
it seems to me like the swift flight
of a lone sparrow through the
banqueting-hall where you sit in the
winter months to dine with your thanes
and counsellors. Inside there is a
comforting fire to warm the room; outside,
the wintry storms of snow and rain are
raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in
through one door of the hall, and out
through another."
—Bede The Venerable

I had just placed my right foot on the outer threshold and taken
the faceted glass doorknob in my hand when I felt a strong, somewhat
police-like, grasp upon my arm.

It was extremely dark and foggy.
I whirled, gave the knob a turn, and bolted inside.
But not quickly enough. It tackled me in the front hallway.
I’m a large man. Extraordinarily strong, I’ve been given to under-
stand. And without cowardice. It might even be said I’m a touch too
aggressive in my readiness to close in combat with anyone or any-
thing.
At least there was light now. I rolled, then kicked my assailant solidly; I heard his back smash into the hallway wall. Though light there was, it wasn’t sufficient for me to size up my adversary in toto. Still, physical man that I am, I followed up my kick by leaping upon it and taking what seemed to be its neck in my hands.

Again and again I slammed it against the wall, then sat back against my own wall and tried to make out its dimensions. It had substance; I had felt that much when I kicked it, then when I had it between my hands. We had definitely been in physical combat. I was certain.

But it had no exact physical shape. It moved and changed rather amoebically, but much much more quickly, of course. And I can only describe its colour in terms of shadow. What are the colours of shadow?

Other than that, I’m afraid I have nothing more to report concerning its appearance.

I arose and pointed toward the door.
It arose and spanned the doorway.
Try as I might (at one point, I did get the front door open) I could not push it back out into the darkness of the front porch, because it had too many points of leverage even for my superior strength.
I turned and walked into the livingroom. It followed nimbly, almost happily.
At my desk, I sat and bethought myself. My wife and children seemed to sense I was grappling with a decision. But they couldn’t seem to see it stationed there directly across the room from my desk. It was perhaps their faith in the endlessness of time that prohibited their perception of what I saw so very clearly.

Senseless to phone the police; if my wife and children could not see it, certainly the police—who knew me far less well than my own family—couldn’t see it either. I might even be jailed for the constabulary equivalent of turning in a “false alarm.”

I tried to ignore it and work. Work was always my most exquisite opiate. But when I looked up over my papers, I discovered the shadow-form dancing with movements somewhat jubilant, somewhat lugubrious, like certain Greek group dances.
I knew then and there I would never be able to concentrate on my work again, so long as that presence remained.

To the horror of my wife and the terror of my children, I lost my temper (I consider myself of even disposition, as a rule. My wife was once heard to comment that she needed me because she was moody; my even, cool temper was a foil for her ups and downs) and hurled a
heavy agate bookend across the room at it. The bookend was so heavy that accuracy was too fond a hope. It crashed through the glass door of a bookcase on the farther wall. Then I began throwing the books fallen over when the bookend was removed: reference books, volumes I had authored, volumes written by others. Some of these struck it, but it seemed uninjured. Then it began casting them back at me—with astounding accuracy. One of my own books struck me so hard between the eyes that I feared I would lose consciousness.

I took refuge bending down behind the desk.

I bolted for the front hallway, but found it blocking the doorway. There was no prying it loose.

When I returned to my desk, it returned to its post across the room.

Deciding on a new approach, I commanded my wife to bring my fishing, hunting, and photographic gear. I had caught record fish and shot dangerous animals in my life. My photographs had won numerous prizes.

Somewhat settled down from my earlier fury, I took these articles across the room and placed them at its feet, if feet they could be called.

I waited.

They were ignored.

My ire rose again. I retrieved the articles, returned to my desk, and began throwing them at it. I might have loaded and fired one of the rifles at it, but there was an ordinance in the urban area where I lived against shooting firearms. And so I threw shotguns, rifles, pistols at it, as well as fishing and photographic gear. It seemed once or twice that fishing lures with their three-pronged hooks had lodged in its substance, but they fell free to the floor after a while.

Again everything was flung back with deadly accuracy. A lure penetrated the skin of my cheek beyond the barb of the hook before I could duck behind my desk again.

I emerged from behind the desk, blood streaming from the hook in my cheek, rolling my shirt-sleeve up over the huge biceps of my right arm. It was my intention to persuade it that whichever of us won an arm-wrestling contest should leave the house. I conveyed the proposal by sign-language. It responded by dancing the same dance as before. Enough of that. I struck it in its center with all the strength I could summon. It stopped and stood for a moment, then continued its unique dance.

Back to my desk.

My degrees and diplomas, of course.
I thought of the early lines of FAUST:

Habe, nun, ach, Philosophie
Juristerei und Medizin
und leider auch Theologie
durchaus studiert, mit heissem Bemühn.
Da steh' ich nun, ich armer Tor,
und bin so klug als wie zuvor!

I raced about the room removing my various distinctions framed on the walls, academic and others, and piled them on my desk. It seemed indifferent to my academic and other accomplishments. I threw them one by one across the room at it. They sailed like the flat rocks a boy skips upon the water. Because the protective glass and frames of most of them burst upon impact with the far wall, it could only sail a few back at me. I hadn’t even to stoop behind the desk.

Even in the midst of my rage, I began to wonder whether these missiles I threw should be named weapons . . . or sacrifices. What, ultimately, does one do with the parts of his human meaning, once he has created them? If sacrifices, then sacrifices to what or whom? If weapons, then even with them, how does one attack an enemy so vast and polymorphous?

Certainly my superior sexuality was a matter to be considered. Several dim possibilities flashed across my mind, but I dismissed them all as undesirable or impracticable.

My frustration drove me to frenzy. I took my wife in my hands, raised her above my head, ran toward the shadow and hurled her. Then the children one by one. It paid no attention to the bodies about it on the floor.

I found myself quite dehydrated. I almost caught myself calling to my wife for a glass of water, but the words didn’t leave my lips. I got up from my desk, went into the kitchen, and turned on the tap.

Out of the corner of my eye, as I drank, I noticed it there blocking the doorway between kitchen and the rest of the house. I was undecided whether to attempt to crash like a football player through the obstacle before me, or open the back door and try, through trickery, to get it outside and bolt the door against it.

I chose the latter course. Water-glass in one hand, I hooked the thumb of the other through a belt-loop, whistled a light melody, and strolled in the direction of the back door, feigning all the casualness I could muster. On my way toward the back door, I paused at the kitchen window and peered out at the intense darkness. Inscrutable. After
draining the last bit of water from my glass, I placed it on the table. The table seemed pitifully little changed in aspect for the presence of my empty glass.

As I sauntered directly toward the back door, I noticed it was quickly closing the distance between us. Excellent. Precisely according to plan. I stood a few moments and dissembled to ignore the presence which I could feel very close to me; I pretended to contemplate the darkness through the window of the back door.

I then turned to face it, at the same time grasping the doorknob behind me. I planned to catch it off-balance, throw the door wide while I laid hands upon it, and cast it outside into the darkness before it could brace itself against the door-frame.

But something happened—quite unexpectedly, as they say. When I turned the doorknob behind me, I found the door to be locked. Doubtless my wife had locked it against burglars. The house contained many valuable things. By the time I had turned the key in the lock, it was quite alert to my plot, unfortunately. Nevertheless a plan is a plan: I turned the knob, the door swung wide, and when I took hold of the shadow, it grasped me too, and by some trick of balance and leverage, shot me out the back door of my own dwelling.

I found myself face-down and dazed upon the ground. Not being one to yield in a fight so long as I could still possess my faculties and stand on my feet, I rolled over in the darkness, shaking my head to rid myself of the daze, then looked around for my opponent. I should have to learn that trick it employed.

But it was nowhere to be seen. I thought it might have gone back inside the house. But neither was the house itself in sight.

I crawled over the area where the house should have been, but there was nothing. No evidence whatsoever that a house had ever stood there.

No lights anywhere. And the city in which I lived had been a large one.

As I sat bewildered, the ground beneath me seemed not ground at all. Rather more like water. There was really nothing firm on which to stand. When I attempted to stand up, my feet simply sank into the strange blackness beneath me.

There were no coordinates at all. Without light and without land into which one might drive a survey-stake, there was nothing knowable or known.

Nothing whatsoever.

The fishing lure seemed to have fallen free of my cheek somehow.
In the room, a star and a yellow flower. Far away in the distance, a cube of iron. The cube of iron was a thousand meters high and a thousand meters wide. It was cold and moved slowly. It spun leisurely, drifting away from the yellow flower and the star. Surrounded by shadows, it was dark and without light in the center; only stillness and silence, the murmur of a faint wind coming out of who knows where, a chair in the middle with its feet in the air and a small man sitting in it. The small man was old, skinny, and hungry with long bony hands and curved nails. He was dressed in tails, a white shirt and a bow tie; he was also wearing leggings. His hair was very long and straight and hung over the tails of his coat. They swayed together like the pendulum of a clock. I don’t know how the chair remained in the center of the cube, but the man sat up straight, bound by an endless chain fastened together with locks; you could only see the paleness of his face, the long hair, the thin hands, one foot and the tails of his coat; everything else was covered with chains. He wasn’t very cold. His eyes were open, dreamless; he was looking straight ahead, never turning to look around; he had no reason to, he saw nothing.

In addition to the faint wind, you could hear the small man breathing and the beating of his heart as it palpitated from time to time. His thought roamed from one corner of the room to the other and returned to spin through his head before it left again.
The tranquility and the silence were curious. You could hear a sound, a long, penetrating note. A pure sound, perfect, unique; a disturbing sound, a sound that enhanced what was in the center of the cube; it was meant for him and he rejoiced upon learning that he wasn’t deaf. It was a low note, too low and too loud; as it ascended one step it seemed more pleasing to the small man.

The cube, spinning slowly, moved away from the yellow flower and the star; the cube, spinning slowly, returned to the yellow flower and the star.

There was a low note, it ascended one step and entered the star. The small man saw from a distance, in the corner of the cube, a star giving off a beam, just one beam that passed through the feet of the chair. He could see it clearly, it was white. The star was white, its beam was white, and the note was now not so low. The star was in the corner, the small man in the center, and the beam was stretching over to the other side. You could see a yellow point at the other side, a yellow point that was coming closer.

There was a note that was not very low, a white star, its white beam, and a yellow object. It had come very close and was in front of him. It was a flower, a huge flower, bright yellow, and the white beam illuminated it. The small man remembered the color red, but not the color yellow, and he liked this very much. And the flower, not for its color, but for being there, was a flower meant for him.

He once had chains, now he has a note that is not very low, a white star, the white beam of a star, and a yellow flower. His thought travels from one corner to the other, returns so he can hear a note and see a star, a beam of light and a flower.

With the note, the light and the flower, his heart beats more quickly, he breathes more heavily, and the locks unfasten themselves. He is free, he walks around. He seems weak, but runs easily: he wants to be where he finds himself. He runs through the cube, he examines it: it is an iron cube; he touches it, passes his fingers over every centimeter of its surface; it is cold. He measures it: a thousand meters long, a thousand meters high, a thousand meters wide. He runs, gets tired and wants to leave the iron cube. He seizes the star and the flower, records the note in his mind, gathers momentum and leaves.
It’s always the same: someone comes up and looks at me (looks at me with his eyes—of course—but also, and even more intensely, with his ideas, his memories, his fears, his desires); he comes up to me because it’s his duty in this practical world where I play my role like the rest, or perhaps because he needs to break through the solitude and communicate with someone; well, this last statement is not certain, or at least not in the best sense of the word—I have observed that everyone is ignorant of his true solitude and strives to compensate for some imbalance in his desolate world without abandoning it altogether, nothing more.

It’s always the same when someone comes up and looks at me: serpents crawl out from my head—black ones, white ones, blue ones, striped ones, polka dots, speckled—lots of serpents, very excited, that circle about, entangle themselves, twist around, cold serpents, very smooth, they brush against the nape of my neck, my temples, my cheeks; at times they cover my eyes, making me shiver.

When someone comes up and looks at me it’s always the same: with my serpent’s eyes, I penetrate him, I explore him, I analyze him, I get to know him, I predict him, I petrify him, I don’t paralyze him; he continues to act as always but all his movements are like a stone, and all his acts, seen in an instant, outline a complicated stone, no less a stone for being complicated. He doesn’t come from any par-
ticular place, he doesn't go off in any particular direction, he's there knocked down and some will o' the wisp ("I," it says) passes through him; he's there knocked down, immobile among innumerable analogous stones, a will o' the wisp passes through them ("I," they say) from one end to the other.

It's always the same; someone believes he is coming up and looking at me from his resplendent fatuity; then my serpents start hissing and with the true light of their eyes illuminate the entire stone.

It's always like that; someone believes he is looking at me, he doesn't see my serpent's hair nor the one hundred and forty-four eyes of real fire: he only sees my dark face and the tatoos of my face, (extravagances of fashion, he thinks) and my green eyes without gardens, but in my gaze, nourished by seventy-two non-restricted gazes, a flash of light overcomes the luminosity of the will o' the wisp and the entire complicated stone lies before me and before itself without any mystery or questions. The petrification consists in that; it's a matter of seconds; later the shadow ("I," it says) and the will o' the wisp return, plus the memory of a fundamental terror.

Will it always be like this? I drift among starry fields with my long hair suspended and dispersed; stone asteroids multiply in all directions. Multicolored asteroids, multicolored serpents. I dream that a naked boy approaches from behind and shows me a polished copper mirror. I dream that I see for the last time my face and my serpents and the marvelous tatoos of my face. I dream that they ignite for the last time my green emeralds without gardens.
DEAR MAX

MICHAEL McCORMACK

Dear Max,

I fear I love Marie too much. Perhaps she and I have been lovers for too long. Something is very wrong. We see each other every day. Each morning we wait at the same subway station. She at her end of the platform, and I at mine. I think Marie holds a very good job. She dresses like an important person. Of course, I have never spoken to her. She is far above me. Still, I am mad for her.

Dear Max,

A woman is running for President. Her name is Stephanie Wellstead. I always wear one of her buttons. I hope she wins. I think she will.

Dear Max,

I have decided that Platonic love is foolish. I have also decided that the contemplative life is a waste. At least for a man like me. I want action.

Dear Max,

In accordance with my recent decision to abandon my mild, philosophical former existence, I have broken off my love affair with Marie.
Dear Max,

Stephanie Wellstead is going great guns. What surprises everyone is that she rose to her position of power through nonpolitical channels.

Dear Max,

I quit my job at the plant, and I took a new one. In my new occupation I wear bright clothes, and I strike out against the world's sadness.

Dear Max,

Now I am certain that Stephanie Wellstead will win. She was never a Senator or a Representative. She founded her own national public interest organization.

Dear Max,

Last night, after my last performance, I met Minerva. Together, we lost my virginity. Somewhere between the tent and the wagon where I live.

Dear Max,

Yesterday Stephanie debated her opponents on television. She has two opponents, one Republican and one Democrat. The two men made fools of each other.

Dear Max,

Minerva and I have escaped from the circus. We are living in a very strange place. Eleven other couples live here with us.

Dear Max,

All twenty-four of us listen to music. I love music. I hate politicians. I hate generals. I love vegetables. We are a family.

Dear Max,

Today I spent many hours thinking about the good old days with Marie. I thought about the subway. I missed the contemplative life.

Dear Max,

This place where we live is very bare. Today I went out to a used book store. I bought many books and lugged them home.
Dear Max,

Stephanie Wellstead is President. All day long I celebrated. Alone. All the other people here are strangely silent. I miss Marie.

Dear Max,

Last night they burned my books. Minerva and all of her friends tied me up, stripped off their clothes, and made a great fire of my books.

Dear Max,

President Wellstead will soon be inaugurated. Strange things are brewing around here. They kept the ashes from the book fire. They wear them on their foreheads.

Dear Max,

I feel like I’m back at the circus. I never felt happy at the circus. They’ve bought us all costumes. Twenty-four identical costumes.

Dear Max,

Last night I dreamed I saw Marie again. She and I were waiting at the station. We were there alone, and we were happy.

Dear Max,

Tomorrow we are going to the Inauguration. Minerva says that we all have to wear our identical costumes. Otherwise we can’t go.

Dear Max,

I’m not sure at all what will happen. Minerva has given each of us a gun. When she gives the signal, I must fire in the air. Otherwise she’ll shoot me.

Dear Max,

It was horrible. President Wellstead got up to take her oath. Then all of a sudden Minerva gave me the signal. I fired my gun, and the others shot theirs.

Dear Max,

Most of us escaped. Now I am riding a train across the country. Many of the people in this car are crying. The newspapers are full of the tragedy.
Dear Max,

We are passing by the mountains. Sometimes in the subway I would think of mountains when I looked at Marie. She was lovely. So are these mountains.

Dear Max,

I have been captured. They are keeping me in a cold cell. My cell is a lot like the subway. I miss the contemplative life. I do.

Dear Max,

Today they asked me several hundred true/false questions. I closed my eyes and dreamed about Marie. I answered their questions randomly.

Dear Max,

I've been keeping this diary for your sake. When you're born, this diary will be yours. I wanted to let you know what kind of a man your father was. But after that operation they performed on me today, there's probably little chance now that you'll ever be born at all. Lucky you. Unless Marie is carrying you now.

THREE PRISONERS

MICHAEL McCORMACK

Caves on the steep, gray bluffs above the ocean were yawning as the wind mourned day's departure. While a jaunty breeze raced up and down the beach, the sea slopped wave upon wave; and a grinning half-moon spelled the clear night's zenith. For the third time, I rapped on the oaken front door of that white, two-story mansion. All its windows were droning a low yellow light through the chilly blue air toward the waves. Since no one responded to my knocking, I twisted the cold, ornate knob, and I shouldered that heavy door open—into a bleak, musty vestibule. My salty lips fell open; they formed one inquiring syllable: "Ben?"

Because no sound answered my voice, I stepped through the vestibule into the living room, where the soft yellow light hummed
deep, and low. My eyes flashed round the room. My lips opened up, but my voice would not speak. A deep gasp fell into my lungs. This living room was empty: no people, no furniture. The room’s only occupant, other than me, jutted down from the ceiling. A merry chandelier. With its circle of flickering flames, it twinkled and sang. Gaudy and fat, the blazing crown hung down from the center of the ceiling. That solemn circle glistened with mirth and evil, and it swayed like a radiant joke, mocking the plaintive emptiness beneath it.

Afraid of the quietness which lurked in that chamber like the rhythmless theme song of death, my sorrowful heart drummed impatiently; it tried to burst out of my ribcage. My eyes became enormous. The ring of fire above me drew my eyes up to itself. The smiling fires froze my anxious senses. Unseen fingers stroked my naked brain. My salt-encrusted lips began to smile. I smiled as my pounding heart poured waves of mounting fear against the peace, the somnambulant peace which this smug source of light tried to bury in the pit of my heart. I clamped my eyes shut, and I rushed from that room to the kitchen.

The kitchen was perfectly empty, but a grand chandelier hung there too. The lofty circle of chuckling flames seemed to taunt me about my solitude. I slowly backed off from the heart of the kitchen, and I raced to the dining room. I stumbled, fell, stood up, and trembled because this chamber, like the other two before it, was empty. A shudder rippled up and down my spine. A chandelier purred at the apex of that dining room. My horror flung me toward the yawning doorway. I fled from the dining room. I hurried away down a dark hall.

My own sweat salted my eyes and my lips. I shoved open door after door of that house. Each room was just as bare as the last one had been. Yet a towering wreath of candles lit each chamber. As I climbed the broad staircase, I invoked his name again. “Ben?”

Now I thought I heard a singing sound. It filtered down the stairs from up above. I wandered through the mansion’s second story. I opened each door. Each room was empty, and a chandelier hung from each ceiling.

Ben seldom went out of his house. I had been there many times. I was sure he had asked me to supper. I walked toward the end of the hall. The singing grew louder. I opened the door of the last room. This room also appeared to be empty. But I wheeled to my right when I heard a thin voice singing.

Winter imprisons squirrels in trees.
Cached nuts fill their stomachs.
They cannot know
If nuts or snow
Will be the first to go.

In the corner, spectral and waxen in the deep yellow stain of the candles, sat Ben. Skeletonlike and wasted, Ben was naked. His jaw hung limp. His lips were dry and cracked. One eye was huge. The other was withered. His trembling fingers were much too long. Every fingernail was gnawed away. Ben was bald. His hair had been up-rooted. The skeleton raised his arms, and all his fingers reached in my direction: I moved away, stepping backward, until the ring of the chandelier encompassed my head. Pointing at those lights with all his fingers, Ben grinned and whined.

“You see? You see? It doesn’t really matter.” Then in stage whisper he added, “Let me!”

That noisome pile of bones stood up. I shrieked, “Ben!”

He assured me, “There’ll be no trouble.” This grisly version of my friend took a step toward me.

I shuddered and warned him, “Keep back.”

“It’s too late. There’s nothing to talk about now.”

His merry old grin stabbed my eyeballs. Tottering, swaying, and grabbing, he approached me. I screamed and bolted out the door. I slammed it in his shriveled face and locked it. His bony fingers scratched the heavy door. Ben moaned. “You hate me very much. You do. You do.”

I rushed down the stairway and out the front door; and racing away through the sand, I heard Ben chanting his song, through an open window, into the darkness.

2

Once again the weight of revolution lay on the land. Arnaldo Grauperra looked down through his cell’s tiny window at the afternoon’s fields of ripening sugar cane, a hundred feet below. No one worked the fields, and there were neither trucks nor wagons on the road that cut toward him through the cane.

“No,” he said. “I cannot.”

Behind him, Father Carjona replied, “At least you are not a political prisoner here.”

“Not a political prisoner?” Arnaldo asked sternly, as he turned to face the priest. “I cannot move about. I cannot speak with the people. Neither can I do anything to help them in any way.”

“You must have patience.”
“Patience?” Arnaldo grabbed the tassel of his habit.
“You can best help by remaining alive.”
“As I live, some of those whom I have sworn to serve are dying. And which man ever served his country by waiting?”
“Life is precious. Be thankful that your wife and children have it.” Arnaldo looked at the crucifix on the stone wall. Then he looked down at the floor. “In America.”
“We cannot always understand the ways of God.” Arnaldo clenched his whole body. “I have no family. No home. And no country. And all I can do here is sit. And rot.” He wheeled around and slammed his palm against the wall. After a moment he looked at the priest again.
“I wish that I had your faith.”
“Faith is in us all. It must simply be realized and accepted.” Arnaldo returned to the window.
“I try to see clearly, but often my eyes distort the world.”
“You must ask Our Lord for help.”
“I have tried that. But something is missing.”
“Sometimes grief can overwhelm one’s reason. Never surrender to despair, and never try to outguess God.” Arnaldo sat down on his cot. “I am sorry about my attitude. I am grateful that you hide me here. It must be what God wants. And I must stay.”

Outside, a jeep roared down the road toward the monastery. Four soldiers rode in the jeep. Each of the soldiers wore green. And three of them held rifles.

3

The forest was full of fallen trees. They lay among the trees that stood alive and strong. Winter would soon be upon him, but Nick would be ready. A quarter of his one-room cabin was devoted to food and supplies, one quarter to his desk, books, and papers, and the remaining half to his stove, a few trunks, and a bed.

Late in October Nick came in from chopping wood and dropped his gloves on his bed. He laid his heavy coat on them, and he laid his hat on his coat. The stove was only warm. So he opened its grating and stirred some orange coals out of the ashes. He would add more wood later.

The window near the stove showed him nothing but dark green trees and the blue sky beyond the horizon. The forest smelled like
pine air freshener, and it was always sighing.

For almost two months Nick had seen no one but the birds. He went to his desk and found a pencil. Its tip was worn down, so he put it into a small plastic sharpener and twisted it three times. When it came out, the tip was still flat, but enough graphite had been exposed to make writing possible.

Nick found one of several black bound notebooks in a drawer. He opened the volume and recorded a note. "October 19—chopped wood—two hours." For a minute he paged back through the notebook. Then he returned it to its drawer, and he put the pencil away.

Nick stretched and yawned. He walked to the corner and took a paperback *Moby Dick* off the top of a pile of books. He went to his bed and lay down. The light would be good for a few more hours, so Nick continued his third rereading of the novel.

After reading for one hour, Nick jumped up and crossed the room to where he kept his food. He found a small can of pork and beans. After he peeled off the label, he removed the lid with a can opener, and he set the tin can on the stove. Then he got a spoon from the desk and he stirred his supper.

While his supper heated up, Nick returned *Moby Dick* to the book pile. He pulled a magazine out of a stack. It was a three-month-old copy of *Time*. He read one article, put the magazine back on the stack, and went back to the stove to stir his beans. He lifted them off the stove with a pot holder, and he ate them with a spoon.

After supper Nick put his coat on. He went outdoors, threw his bean can into the deep hole he had dug for garbage, got some wood from under a plastic tarpaulin, took it into the cabin, and built a larger fire in the stove. Then he lay down on the bed. For a while he whistled some songs. He got up to try the radio. All the stations were still off the air.

Because night was coming soon, Nick decided to read before bed and take advantage of the remaining sunlight. He read an article in *Business Week* about how no future depression could ever be as severe as the one in the thirties. By the time he had finished the article, the light was almost gone. Nick rolled the magazine up and threw it across the room. He chuckled and looked at the front page of the *New York Times* for August 24. It hung on a nail on the wall. That was the day that the President made the announcement, and the day that people started looting homes.
Stefano Cusumano, ENCOUNT, 1971, oil on canvas, Photo W. Rosenblum.
Stefano Cusumano, Epilogue, triptych, 1968-1969, oil on canvas, Photo W. Rosenblum.
The street was cold. It was Saturday at dusk, but I was heading home, not going out. I passed a coffee bar and bought a pack of cigarettes. Twenty cigarettes. They were the twenty friends who were going to spend the night with me.

The door closed shut like a farewell to the street. But the door always closes like that. It closed with a muffled, hoarse sound. But that is how it always closes. A sound that seems the adieu of a condemned man. But the door simply had closed and that is how it always closes. Every day it closes just like that.

Light the stove, heat up some rice, fry an egg. Fat sizzles and spurts out, burning my hands. The food was good. It really was, though I left practically half of it on my plate. There was a bit of shell in the egg and I thought of apologizing to myself for this. I smiled at the thought. I think I smiled. I must have smiled. It was only a little piece of shell.

I searched in the silence of the pantry for some insect, but they had already gone to sleep in anticipation of Sunday morning. Then I spoke aloud. I had to hear something and I spoke aloud. It was only a banal phrase. If there had been someone near-by, he would have said that I was going crazy. I would have smiled. But there wasn’t anyone. I could have said whatever I wanted to. There was no one to hear me. I could have rolled on the floor, taken off all my clothes, pulled out my hair, moaned, cried, sobbed, remained absolutely mute, there was nobody to see me. Nobody to hear me. No one at all. I could even have died.

In the morning the baker asked me if everything was alright. I smiled and said that it was. In the street my neighbor asked me if everything was O.K. I said yes and smiled. My boss asked me the same question and I, smiling, said yes. The afternoon came, and my cousin asked me if all was going well and I smiled, saying yes, all is going well. Later, an acquaintance asked me if everything was fine and I smiled and said, yes, everything is just fine.
MIRACLES OF THE DOG, JERONIMO
PERICLES PRADE

A mystery in the village. Known to various generations, Jeronimo was white, noble, dignified. Nobody, and that includes the well-informed mid-wife, Vanya, had ever heard the dog bark. Everyone feared him with an almost sacred respect. My grandfather, an old butterfly hunter from Harla wood, knows incredible stories, and four of them captivated me.

The first tells how Jeronimo, when he was leading the cowhands of Arecuza across a ford of the Rio Venda, fought for hours with a school of thousands of piranhas, defeating them with his luminous stare under water; the second recounts how, after a violent downpour of rocks, the dog carried off on his back a child, rescued from the bottom of a gold mine, protecting it with a strange wire fan; the third gives proof of an irresistible vocation: in the year 1812 he didn’t miss any of the burials of suicides, remaining over their graves until out of each sprang a beautiful poisonous clover; the fourth is the equivalent of a prediction: whenever he might go around the Church of St. Egidio three times, the next person to drown would be recognizable by the appearance of an unexpected tattoo on his face.

But these innumerable stories, all of them true, didn’t impress the local inhabitants as much as the fact that he always remained silent. To tell you the truth, nobody had ever seen Jeronimo open his mouth even to eat.
Sandor, the violent Jesuit, had a destructive idea a few days ago. He called together the various families for Sunday Mass, intoning in a grave voice:

"Jeronimo is the evil that has come down upon our heads. We must extirpate him. The devil is behind his age-long silence."

On the date set, the enormous dog, impassive, standing up against the sacristy door, was a sad statue of flesh. At the end of the sermon, he walked between the pews, slowly, silently so as the better to hear the death sentence. Without delay he approached the curate who exorcised him, going through the gestures of a well-known ritual.

Suddenly, taking everyone by surprise, the vicar threw himself on Jeronimo, trying with abnormal strength to open his mouth. Unable to restrain himself, he shouted: "It's the devil, it's the devil. Help me!"

The whole crowd, in a rage, threw itself in the direction of the animal. Many men were needed to overpower him. Then, tired out and miserable, he surrendered.

Scarcely had the priest time to open the dog's mouth, when a long tongue of fire, a serpent of infinite flames, entangled itself in the clothing of the believers, starting the worst conflagration of which mankind has yet to hear.
There were two friends, that much we know. They had neither friendship nor intimacy with practically anyone else. They held themselves apart. In the city there were whispers and veiled allusions. Then all of a sudden, that morning, they turned up dead, the two of them—poisoned. Rumor and counter-rumor, a mystery! Doubts, questions, searching inquiries in the air. But nothing more was discovered. Is death the end of a game or the beginning of all our secrets?

A youth with melancholy eyes passing rapidly through the streets of the old city: thus people saw him: a strange figure, tall, blond, always absorbed in himself. His parents came from Germany in 1933, on the final crossing of the steamship Norderdieck, and from a little foundry built up a vast industry. L. . . had been born here, an only child. For long periods—long absences?—he would remain locked up alone in the great old house (The house, the great house, wrapped in dense foliage, fluttering palm trees). From childhood. . . a kid running through the high fields, the smoke-filled air? As for the rest (the movement of hidden times): everything again enshrouded in mists—travels? studies? The only thing that was known was his liking for model planes.

But one day people meet, they find each other—those so destined. There they were, then, together, taking classes in engineering.

Before this, however, M. . . had arrived in the city. Tall—or rather not very tall—a pallid complexion, with black eyes and hair. He was someone who excited attention, always half up in the air, enig-
matic. And also quite versatile: he understood and worked at various things at the same time: electricity, acoustics, photography. But he didn't stay for long with any one occupation, quite quickly he would lose interest. Sometimes he would rise full of expansiveness, but then, suddenly, he might sink into a bottomless isolation. When can one ever understand someone else in his inner depths?

The house began to appear all lit up late at night, all the lights in all the chambers burning, that house which had always remained hidden in shadows and secrets. But it was only that hypnotic brightness, nothing else—silence continued to reign, protruding out into the night. All that was known was that the two of them were inside—alone? The servants said nothing, made no comments, old faithful figures, immutable.

On certain occasions there were parties. On such nights the great house would appear half lit up, just on the ground floor. But these parties were different, with little noise and little brilliance, attended by unknown visitors, never seen in the city before. Even afterwards no one discovered who they were, those young women of transparent color and diaphanous attire, those young men in extravagant regalia.

An old cabaret, with vast halls and few lights, formerly a luxurious place, now in faded disuse, where women with sad eyes and pallid faces congregated to await those who required them, was the favorite destination of their nocturnal outings.

At dawn on the day they were to graduate, the house rose up wrapped in shadows. In the morning the alarm was given and the living room door was knocked down. On the floor lay the bodies, their faces serene, in repose, L. . . still holding a chalice, M. . . prostrate, facing the opposite way, another chalice shattered beside him. Later it was discovered that for the first time since they had begun to get together there, they had asked for a bottle of champagne. “A toast. . . ” heard the servant, as he placed on the table, immersed in ice, the old bottle of Verzy 1931.

Almost everything that was noised about afterwards was disconcerting and contradictory: an act of madness, a murder? mutual suicide? . . . Did both of them know what was in their drink, or did only one of them? But which one? Or did they know nothing about it, someone else putting poison in their glasses, in the drink? Or: horrid scenario, fantastic test: how far could they go, travel, survive, on the frontier between the all and the nothing, the imponderable line where everything begins and ends or, not at all like that—everything quite the opposite of what one imagines?

The case remains open.
"Tell me your sins, my son."
"I sinned with my eyes..."
"Yes..."
"I..."

"Don't be afraid, my son, it is not I who listens to you, but Our Lord Jesus Christ who is present here, ready to pardon those who come to Him with a repentant heart. Now then."

"I saw my next door neighbor... undressed..."
" Completely?"
"Partly..."
"What part, my son?"
"From the waist up..."
"Really. She had nothing on top?"
"Well, yeah..."
"How old is she; is she grown up?"
"Well, yeah..."
"How did it happen?"
"How..."

"I'm asking you how it happened that you saw her like that? Was it she who provoked you?"
"No. She was lying down, sleeping..."
"Sleeping?"
"Well, yeah..."
"You mean to say she didn't see you?"
"No..."
"She wasn't just pretending?"
"I don't think so..."
"Think?"
"She was sleeping..."
"Was her door open or did you see her through the key hole?"
"The door. It was open... Just a bit..."
“Might she have left it like that on purpose? Or...”
“I don’t know...”
“Does she generally lie down like that?”
“I don’t know...”
“How long did you watch her?”
“A few minutes...”
“Was there someone else in the room with you?”
“No...”
“Did you know about her and therefore go and watch, or was it by accident?”
“By accident...”
“And what did you do? You didn’t think of getting away from there?”
“No...”
“You didn’t even think of it?”
“I don’t know... I...”
“Don’t be afraid, my son, a pure heart need hide nothing from God; He, in his infinite generosity and wisdom will know how to understand and pardon us.”
“I wanted to go on watching...”
“Yes.”
“It was as if I were bewitched...”
“The spell of the devil. He makes sin more attractive in order to captivate souls and lead them to perdition. It was the devil who was there in the room, in the body of the girl, my son.”
“At the time I didn’t think it was a sin; I watched the way people watch when they see a beautiful thing for the first time... It was afterwards that I thought...”
“It is a machination of the devil, he wanted you to continue watching in order to conquer your heart, that’s why you didn’t feel that you were sinning. He makes sin seem not to be sin and one sins without noticing that one is sinning. The devil is most clever.”
“Afterwards I repented and said an act of contrition...”
“Yes. And what else?... Was that the first time, or had it happened before?”
“More or less...”
“More or less? Are you trying to say that...”
“It’s just that...”
“You can speak, my son, don’t be afraid.”
“Once...”
“This same girl?”
“Well, yeah... She was in her nightgown; a semi-transparent
nightgown. . ."
"Which allowed you to make out her nude form?"
"Well, yeah. . ."
"Her complete nudity?"
"No. Like this time. . ."
"Yes, of course. It was in her house that you saw her like that?"
"It was. . ."
"She was alone?"
"She was. . ."
"And her parents?"
"They were on a trip. . ."
"Her parents travel a lot, don't they?"
"They travel. . ."
"Yes, I know—that is to say. . ."
"I had gone there to get a book. She was in her bedroom and she called me. . ."
"She didn't try to cover herself with something else?"
"No. . ."
"And she wasn't ashamed to be like that?"
"No. . . I tried to turn away my eyes, but she herself wasn't concerned. I tried to get out of there right away, but it was as if something had hold of me, it seemed as if I were nailed to the spot. . ."
"And she? What did she do? Did she speak to you?"
"She spoke. . ."
"What kind of things did she say?"
"The usual. . ."
"She didn't say anything improper?"
"No. . . But the way she looked, the way she was sitting. . ."
"Yes? What way? An improper position?"
"Well, yeah. . . Showing her legs. . ."
"I understand. And her look? Was there some immorality in it, some provocation?"
"There was. . ."
"I know."
"But I made an excuse and left. . ."
"You did very well, my son, that's exactly what you should have done. Did you think of the gravity of the situation, that is that if you had stayed the sin could have been much worse?"
"I thought. . ."
"Isn't that what was in her look?"
"That? . . ."
"The promise of that grave sin."
"It was . . ."

"Or was it merely a simple provocation? What I mean is, do you think that she intended to lead you to sin with her—you understand what I am saying, don’t you—or was she simply provoking you, without any further intentions?"

"No . . ."

"No what? She wanted to sin?"

"Well, yeah . . ."

"You imagined this or her behavior suggested it?"

"Her behavior . . ."

"But isn’t her family quite proper, aren’t they very Catholic?"

"Well, yeah . . ."

"And you think that she would do such a thing? You don’t . . ."

"I had already heard Mama saying that she wasn’t behaving well . . . That she isn’t a girl any more . . ."

"I understand. Is it only your mother or do others say the same thing?"

"I only listen to Mama. She doesn’t like me to go there. . . ."

"I know. She does very well, she is watching over your soul. Was it many days before the second time that this happened, or was it shortly before, this that you are telling me about? . . ."

"Shortly . . ."

"A few days ago?"

"Well, yeah . . ."

"Do you mean to say that her parents still haven’t returned?"

"No . . ."

"They are generally away a great deal?"

"They are . . ."

"And she stays home alone?"

"The maid stays with her . . ."

"And her brother—that is to say, she must have a brother, doesn’t she?"

"She does, but he’s almost always out at the ranch, he only comes to town on Sundays . . ."

"Yes, yes, of course. Very good—that is to say . . . Well . . . And what else, my son, any other sins?"

"No, only this one . . ."

"Then let us ask pardon of God and the Most Holy Virgin for these sins which you have committed and beg for the grace of a sincere repentance and never again turn back to offend the heart of his Divine Son who suffered and died on the cross for our sins and for our salvation . . . Say an act of contrition.”
THE MESSAGE OF THE BIRDS
ROBERT FOX

There was a sorcerer who lived alone with his young wife, secluded in an enchanted grove, as all sorcerers should be. They lived remote from the commerce, industry and poverty which surrounded them, dwelling within a magical environment he was said to have created.

It was known only among a few that the beauty of his residence came from his artifice and not from an incantation, for he was an industrious laborer who belittled his magic, and did not try to substitute it for what he could accomplish with his own hands. It was true though that his hedges, trees and fences sometimes realigned themselves in more comfortable and more advantageous positions, but he declaimed any influence over their actions. “If I somehow managed to impart a living spirit to them, I would hope to accomplish the same with humanity.”

Before long, he convinced himself he had a serious message for the outside world, and broke out of his isolation. His message had nothing at all to do with his alleged sorceries; he simply pleaded for a freeing of the spirit, and a breaking of all repressive barriers. He said everyone was endowed with a vital spirit which they must maintain contact with to remain truly alive. He spoke and wrote a verse (or prose) that was unlike anything anyone had ever heard, and his small audiences were baffled by his syntax and his invented words. He printed his writing in small editions, but outside editors refused to publish his work because it was obscure to them.
He managed though to obtain a small devoted following. But the transformation of his followers frightened many onlookers, for his admirers not only adopted his mannerisms, they also began to speak his obscure tongue. Some outsiders claimed that he was a demon, and if he chose you, you were doomed—if you gave yourself to him, what was left of your fragmented spirit fled, and your body became tenanted by his soul, for it is common knowledge that demons must constantly inhabit additional bodies. It was also maintained that if a follower started to give himself over, and then changed his mind, his own hands would rise up against his throat, and he would be powerless against them. But no such “suicides” were ever reported.

The sorcerer began to age, and vanity got the best of him. The outside world was not responding to his message as he had hoped. His public presentations were received cautiously as entertainment, but few could decode his meanings. His paintings as well received a warm response, but simply because of the awe they inspired in their evanescence—for no one could remember paintings that transformed themselves, or drawings which gracefully came to life. Some compared them to cartoons, and of course, they did not get the message. He presented pageants with his followers, and only a few actors were able to play their parts with a charm and grace comparable to their leader. The rest simply looked like a bunch of awkward parrots, and this enraged him.

“If I had the power, I would change them all to birds, singing with the sweetest of human voices!” he declared in his anger. And almost as quickly, many of his followers were turned into birds. No one had ever seen anything like them before. They were small but were illuminated from within by a blue-green iridescence. Their song too was unlike anything ever heard before from aerial species—it blended the sweetest of bird voices with human-sounding words. They issued their call constantly, whether alone or in groups, and their voices maintained a sad resemblance to human speech. Audubon members and readers of poetry alike strained to hear the message, but could not decipher it. Many left embarrassed and feeling base because the human brain could not decode such marvelous tones.

But as they were such a rare and exotic bird, they were not allowed to roam free. Though they proliferated rapidly, many were caught and shipped to zoos all over the world. A few wealthy individuals added them to their personal aviaries, and hunters ran rampant after the rest, claiming that the balance of nature was seriously upset by the sudden appearance of this new species.
For the first time in at least half a year Evarist thought about the Colossus, and while he thought about her, shuffling aimlessly but rapidly along, he got the urge to visit the corpse garden where, in good time, they had planted her in the ground with noses pinched tight, when the white fruit juice already ran along all the openings and she swelled up in an unprecedented, no longer human offence, flouting all order and propriety, a silent explosion-like ripening into an infernal mirth.

Without choosing any particular route, guided by an uncanny and completely new sense of direction, he cheerfully shambled along the streets whose pavement was enameled, baked by sunlight, swinging his arms and muttering.

Around him the day was under way in a continuing detonation. Clouds of dust quivered in the sun. Blood-red geraniums clashed in front of the windows of the dwellings, geraniums that had lost the chance for development they had pursued since prehistoric times, that were doomed to dwarfing. Heaps of the most disparate objects lay flung together in shop windows and department stores, nonetheless still attempting to suggest a certain orderliness. Hordes of traffic lights let Evarist pass unhindered, continually leaping from red to bottle-green in the nick of time. Cars transformed into gleaming many-colored marbles rattled and clattered through all the grooves of the stone city, never touching, for they were held on a visible string from the control tower room of a small boy. Stuck fast to their saddles,
screaming heatedly, cyclists in flight flogged their mounts with their feet and lay their flapping sail-ears. The sputtering of scooters made all the glassware jingle fiercely. Policemen, scarecrows, stood at all the important intersections easing the enormous muddle and helping it start again with wooden gestures.

All over the sidewalks dogs were busy sniffing each other; in passing, pedestrians separated them, with snarls and kicks, before they could come together. The clanking of the bunches of keys and coins which filled the pockets of the knights of respectability was deafening. The whole city stank of gas, suntan oil, garbage, baby soap and detergents. The men all swathed in dull black or mouse grey costumes which contrasted sickly with the egg yellow light in which they were shown.

Nevertheless the women, Evarist ascertained, possessed a more developed, less sepulchral taste. They wore transparent garments, reminiscent of flower petals, which contained all the colors of the rainbow and left large portions of their necks, breasts, backs and thighs uncovered in a refreshing manner. Embraced by a sort of flower-like rapture they paraded down the streets quasi-attentively looking in windows and moving their conversing lips, but actually only paying attention to themselves, to the surfaces of the shop windows which they used exclusively as mirrors, to their unceasing sampling of their inhaled fragrance, to their red lips softly closing over each other, to the form and movement of their awning eyelids, soft visors behind which they only seemingly attended to their surroundings, almost constantly keeping their eyes turned into the infra-red depths of their own unthinking and therefore mysterious beings.

A chaste enraptured lover, Evarist almost drifted past them, refreshing himself in the lavender fragrances, in the dozens of perfumes with which they had besprayed and besprinkled the secret hollows of their bodies, almost fanatically in love with them all, sensing them all to be sisters, addressing them in his mind with merry roguish speeches and declarations of devotion, completely disinterested and without intentions clouded by, for example, egotism.

He realized that the women lived closer to the truth and in narrower contact with it than the men of the city. Not one of them, as he observed, would have stopped repeatedly and resentfully thrown a stone at a boxer overcome by the mating urge and chased the animal to flight. The women themselves were mild-tempered animals adorned with flowers who had nothing evil in mind, concealed no hidden designs. The only danger they were vulnerable to and which threatened them was their susceptibility to being influenced, a sus-
ceptibility which, as he noted more than once during his intractable walk, the gloomily clad men used. By nature the women were yielding, the men demanding, full of power lust.

From the way he saw a young half-naked woman, made up as a flower fairy, become intoxicated and dissolve into a mist of flower-sweet willessness under the harsh chopping chatter of an emaciated umbrellaed hypocrite, he realized what a risk the women ran despite their natural lead.

He who wants to found a kingdom must begin by winning the women over to his ideas, the saying went. The whole world stood open to him who had the women in the palm of his hand, doors swung open which had previously been hermetically locked.

I must bear this in mind, thought Evarist. Perhaps some day he would need the women's help in attaining a goal whose general outlines weren't even clear to him yet.

On the edge of the city, where the dust was thinner and the sunlight even stronger, he stood still before the mighty, rust-gnawed railing of a stone-built trellis straddled by a metal banner. Its curling letters proclaimed the motto

MEMENTO PUTREFIERI

Behind it lay the corpse garden, swathed in honey and balsam fragrances, where groups of laborers were busy raising colossal sunken flagstones and laying them again. To Evarist's delight there weren't any other strollers to be seen. Aside from the noises, the calm laughter of the workers and the misfiring of their instruments on the stones, it was quiet, and there was even a light breeze blowing through the richly leaved oiled trees which were so plentiful. Butterflies skipped from flower to flower, bees buzzed and burrowed in their appetizing obliging calyxes.

Evarist passed a gilt sundial and noticed that some twenty yards away a group of workmen were resting for a moment from their labors, which appeared to be quite hard, on a deep hole. They had stuck their spades in the ground and, with a pitcher in their hands and a rolled cigarette in the corners of their mouths, they sat quietly and neutrally regarding him. He walked towards them and, at a warning shout from one of the men, abruptly came to a halt.

"Hey there!" called the man, a young fellow with blond sideburns and sky-blue eyes, "get the hell outa here, you!"

Suddenly Evarist saw that both he and some of the other men had rubber gloves on that reached to their elbows and wore hip boots
full of yellow earth and blackish sediment.

"The public actually ain't allowed in here," another, older man, apparently the foreman, called out obligingly enough, "we're diggin' somethin' up. Rules say we oughta do it with a strong fence round the whole thing. But we're in a rush. It happens sometimes and then we gotta hurry up, with no messin' around."

"Hurry, in what way?" said Evarist, trying to peer into the hole. The men began to laugh in a circumspect way and beamingly winked at each other. One of them held his nose between his thumb and index finger and bared his wide white teeth.

"Yeah, well look," said the foreman, standing up and walking over to Evarist, "you people ain't got the haziest notion. You bring your corpse to the garden or you go there yourself and so far as you're concerned that's that. But not for us. Sometimes that's only the beginning for us. You get all sortsa tomfoolery with the corpses once they're under the ground. Sometimes they'll simply be damned if they'll lie still. They don't set no store by the resurrection of their flesh, so to speak. Course we prefer it when they lie still. Respectable corpses do, too. But fortunately there's unrespectable rascals too, otherwise we might as well go into the buildin' business. Go laze about on the roof. Anyhow fewer and fewer folks come to the garden every week."

"And the unrespectable corpses?" said Evarist in some suspense.

"Well, they more or less just go their own way a bit," answered the foreman, "I normally don't talk none about it to visitors. You're an exception and not some young brat who'll joke around about it. 'Cause it's nothin' to laugh at, though you'll understand it happens to us occasionally. After all, it's our profession and we have fun with it, we laugh ourselves stupid often enough about all the unrespectable stinkers. They play the silliest tricks. Especially lately, now it's gettin' on to summer, more than one of 'ems had a gas bag. These guys've nearly always croaked from some nasty sinful disease or other. They simply rise up out of the pit like dough. Sometimes there's no stoppin' it. Weighing 'em down with stone only works once. And the family don't always like the idea. Tombstones cost big money nowadays. That's well known, they know it. They flatly refuse to dig into their pockets for their corpse. And they're right, what's the use of a stinker like that anyway except as dung for the garden? Whatta they care? Besides, sometimes there ain't even time to let the family know. One day you tuck the bastard nicely in, the next he's already kicked himself free and in the evening you gotta pick the worms outa your hair. In a case like that there's only one thing to do and that's haul the
crap out and dig a deeper hole. That's what we're doin' now, for example. If you wanna, I guess you can have a peek. Here."

He turned around and walked over to a metal vehicle a few yards away from the hole which resembled a dumping cart.

"I'd advise you to hold your nose or hold your handkerchief in front of it," said the foreman, "if you ain't used to it you'll think you're gonna be knocked out flat by the stink. And it's poisonous too, for that matter. If you got a cut somewhere and some of that junk gets on it, you're a goner if you don't run straight to a doctor."

White slips of skeleton parts or roots stuck out here and there from the dung or mud-like substance lying in the overflowing dumping cart. It all seemed to have been ladled out of a cesspool stagnating in its frothy pulp. Tiny crystal-clear gas bells floated all over the surface of the jelly, linking up to form coils and continually bubbling to the surface like small burps.

"A well-known criminal lawyer," declared the foreman, "we hadn't even got him under before he began to disputate."

He spoke the last words loudly, half turning towards his fellow workers who immediately burst out laughing.

"The old shrews fly off the handle too," continued the foreman, while Evarist's eyes probed the pit which was at least three yards deep, "they've usually got some rotten disease or other, in their stomachs if possible. While they were alive the whole mess there was already festering and molding from tumors. When one like that comes along we say to each other, he could become a stinker, there's somethin' fishy about this paunch. And that's how it always turns out."

The young man with the sideburns joined them. He looked at Evarist with a glance of half-recognition and then hesitantly said:

"Haven't I seen you before here, some time ago; a half year ago or so?"

"That's right, I buried my wife then," said Evarist.

He had taken out his handkerchief and smothered his rising fit of laughter in it.

"You don't come here too often otherwise," said the young man somewhat scornfully, "seems to me this is the first time since the burial."

"Yes, I had a lot to do, business and such," said Evarist, who had himself entirely in hand now and skillfully squelched the quiet gasps that welled up in his breast.

"That's how it goes," said the foreman agreeably, "when you grow older and ain't so steady on your legs no more. And what difference does it make. You come here anyhow eventually I say, one way.
or another. In the end you get afraid of the pit and you think, well, why not have a look now, how do they work that exactly. Can't do no harm. It does more for the peace of the soul than rushin' through little prayers and scheming with the pastor and his cronies.”

“That wife of yours,” said the young man, “she was really some­thing. I remember her perfectly. The way she carried on!”

“The stuff was already running out when she'd just died,” said Evarist, “she swelled up idiotically. They had to enlarge the coffin right away.”

He spoke with a certain sensuality which seemed to please the two workers.

“I remember her perfectly,” said the young man again, “do you, Magus? You remember, don’t you? The suds were bursting between the planks before she even went under. What a woman, brrrr!”

“That wasn’t a woman, that was an invalid colossus,” said Evarist slowly, “she could hardly walk while she was alive. She sat behind the window peering at the street all day long. She hated flowers like the plague. She almost never spoke. Sometimes she moved her hands a little. That was all.”

Perhaps aroused by his confabulators, he found he had to force himself to hold back the wild curses and allegations which wanted to spurt from his lips.

“Tuttuttut,” said the foreman, “you shouldn’t talk about a stiff like that if you ain’t a corpse gardener. That ain’t good style.”

“Still seems to me he’s dead right,” said the young man, confusedly eyeing Evarist with a sort of awe and horror.

“But you still remember how she shoved the whole damn mess to the top. We spent at least a day and a night on it and when she finally lay in a new bed it still wasn’t over.”

“Now you mention it, yeah,” said the foreman, “I do recollect it now. That was a filthy skunk. Worst stinker we’ve had here in years. A real swamp of a hag. So. And you’re her widower?”

He looked Evarist over from top to toe, appraisingly, but didn’t seem to find a single encouraging sign of the past year or so on him.

“Oh well,” he said good-naturedly, “they got their good sides too. All the mess they make is good for the garden, like I already said. Just look—the trees you see here are the highest and healthiest in the whole neighborhood. That’s the work of the stinkers. An ordinary corpse keeps the grass fit, but a stinker has more up his shirt-sleeves, I always say. He can keep up an entire forest all by himself. I’m dead set against cremation, if only because of the stinkers. Stick a stinker in a bare patch of ground and within a year you got flowers
and bushes by the barrel. Their sap is the best fertilizer there is. Just look around—ever seen such trees? That’s the work of the unrespectable corpses from beginning to end, the dung-whores, so to speak, you can take it from me.”

He glanced at the reclining workers and in an apologetic tone said to Evarist:

“We gotta get to work again, the break’s over, I won’t keep you no more. Of course you want to go to your wife. See you, sooner or later.”

He winked at the laughing men as they stood up, threw their butts in the pit and picked up their tools.

“It’s that way, if I’m not mistaken,” the young man called after Evarist, making a vague gesture that took in half the garden.

Thanking them for their information with a wave, Evarist withdrew, leisurely inspecting the tree trunks which were indeed abnormally massive and had root talons sticking out here and there high above the ground, the luscious tall grass and the hard, strong shrub bushes which flourished on all sides.

He found the mound of earth the Colossus’ remains lay under without much difficulty and stretched out with a feeling of contentment on the high layer of sod which had covered the mound, under a gigantic and yet seemingly very young elm, in the rustling foliage. From its depths a bird repeatedly struck his clear tuning fork.
Another one? he would ask smiling; watch out or you’ll get drunk, and I soon understood it was his polite way of saying that he had to close the bar and go home. He also didn’t have a place to go. Usually he didn’t like too much the idea of going home. Usually people I like, or who like me, don’t like to go home. Usually we’re always escaping, escaping from I don’t know exactly what, always farther away from home. It’s damned hot at home, it’s damned cold at home. He didn’t like to go home, he didn’t have a place to go. He was a widower and running a bar filled his life. In the same way other things filled my life. Quite often he would send the bartenders home, would close the doors and the two of us would remain by ourselves. Then he would allow himself the right to drink something peacefully, preferably red wine. It was amusing to see his purple lips and the pleasure he took in drinking slowly as if by moving his lips and tongue, by an almost imperceptible smack, his gaze lost in the distance, he wanted to re-capture the distant taste of another wine. His gentle eyes floated far away.

He was a fat and good man. He loved his work and he even showed sympathy for the drunkards when they didn’t create a disturbance. He didn’t have a family, he didn’t have anyone, and in a certain way those daily customers, many of them old acquaintances, were the constellation of his life, the children he had never had, the wife that had departed so soon.

Do you remember him? he asked me one night, when, the doors shut, the chairs on the tables, the two of us had remained by ourselves. I remembered him well, for how could I have forgotten his figure, that aging boy’s face of his, which made his age indeterminate. At times he looked like a haggard old man, with deep circles under his eyes, his expression sorrowful and resigned, a despair we immediately sensed (he always sat by himself at a table in the back of the room, his eyes staring, lost in some distant region); at other times, when
something happened inside him, a thought, maybe a memory, he be­
came a restless boy drinking furtively, his eyes alert, watchful, frighten­
ed. We never spoke to each other, we merely exchanged greetings. But I
know that he didn't dislike me, in the same way that I felt a certain
tenderness for him, an unrestrained compassion for his great loneliness,
which I expressed in a smile, a friendly gaze. He had been born old,
sorrowful, unlucky. He drank his whiskey, always on the rocks, slowly
and steadily. His deep eyes were riveted to the door, as if he were
expecting someone. It never happened that an acquaintance of his
stepped in, but even so he waited. At first I worried about that expect­
ancy, then I got used to the anxiety that dwelt in his eyes. He went
on drinking his whiskey, and watching the bar door. I had never seen
him completely drunk, and when he walked out with an unsteady
gait, he bore himself with dignity, a way of undoing the uncertainty
of his steps.

I remembered his thin, pale hands, the polished nails, the Zodiac
ring. I was always curious to learn about his sign, but nowadays I
know that he must have been a Capricorn because of his behavior, of
his gloomy, withdrawn, tense, introspective, mysterious, forlorn and
contemplative manner. He must have been a Capricorn, I always
recognize Capricorns. There was something feminine about his ges­
tures, but it was hardly noticeable. He held his glass tightly and quite
often I had the impression that he would have liked to crush it. I hadn't
a clue to what was going on inside him. Capricorns usually don't re­
veal much about themselves. He was a Capricorn, it was quite obvious.

Yes, I remember him, I said. A sad case, Alfredo said, but life is
full of ruses. I looked at Alfredo's fat face, there was nothing philosophi­
cal about him, he was merely making a remark. He was in a talkative
mood. He liked to talk, and when he got started on his favorite topics,
the devil and astrology, he talked without stopping. He was the one
who taught me how to recognize a Capricorn. He had his illuminating
moments. Once, as I was leafing through some reproductions of Cé­
zanne, just by looking at a painting of trees in winter he said, happy
about his discovery, he can only be a Capricorn, he has the soul of a
Capricorn. As I smiled in disbelief, thinking that this passion of his of
discovering Capricorns had become a mania, he asked me who the
painter was. Cézanne, a Frenchman, I replied. For God's sake, he said,
restless, look up his birthdate. To my surprise, the biographical in­
formation disclosed: Aix-en-Provence, 19 janvier, 1839. He smiled
happy, happier than if I myself had painted one of the paintings of
Cézanne. Besides Capricorns, he used to talk about the presence of
the devil, about the cases he knew. In the matter of temptations, the

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devil couldn’t be matched. His devil wasn’t too metaphysical, he was part of everyday life, he was always present, fighting with men, or allying himself with a few.

One can never know when the devil enters a person, Alfredo said. He stood quiet for a moment, then filled his glass again. Have you ever suspected that he was? he asked. I don’t know, I replied, those eyes, that boyish attitude, those gestures might perhaps betray him . . . but sometimes we are mistaken, it’s a child’s soul. I’ve never been mistaken, Alfredo said, I can tell those poor bastards.

We stood silent; I was trying to remember what Rodrigo looked like, I was tallying shreds of memories. Rodrigo or Olimpio. His real name was Olimpio. Rodrigo was the name of the captain. After the captain’s death, when his plane crashed into the sea, he started to use the captain’s name. Only his old acquaintances called him Olimpio, which he disliked, Alfredo told me.

He was, Alfredo said. One day, when drunker than usual, he opened his heart to me. I had never seen a man open himself like that, tell what he told me, Alfredo said. I didn’t know what to do when I saw his despair, his restrained weeping, his frankness in telling me about his passion. It was then that Alfredo first learned that his name was Olimpio, not Rodrigo. Rodrigo was the captain, Olimpio said, his eyes filled with tears. Alfredo couldn’t bear the sight of a man weeping, he prayed to God not to let that man cry. Have another whiskey, Alfredo said. Yes, said Olimpio, wiping the tears that threatened to run out of his eyes.

I can say that my life ended with Rodrigo’s death, Olimpio said. I’m another man, or rather, I’m nothing. I started to use his name to resurrect him, to place him alive inside me so that death wouldn’t be his only owner.

You can well imagine how I felt, Alfredo said. A person just doesn’t know what to say at such moments. Any word, any display of sympathy creates an ambiguous atmosphere, it looks as if you’re one too. I felt like stroking his head, like caressing him, he looked so forlorn. I’ve never seen such suffering. The feelings one has—this thought crossed my mind, reprimanding me for my desire to shield that poor, lonesome, lost bastard, Alfredo said. Sometimes you think that a thought is your own, but it isn’t, it’s the devil’s who’s already entered you.

Olimpio had business matters in Belém. At least once a week he went to Belém. The trips were long and tiring, especially to him, who couldn’t sleep on a plane. Wide awake, he watched the sleeping passengers and envied them their security and courage that put them
to sleep. He leaned his head against the cold glass of the window and peered into the darkness of night outside. The noise of the engines penetrated night’s closed and endless world. Sometimes the stars and the moon were out, but solitude weighed heavily. For hours he would stay staring at the navigation light on the wing, at the fire from the engine which couldn’t be seen in the daylight. A floating nutshell entrusted to invisible forces. He wasn’t afraid; in the plane’s large belly he coldly registered sensations. He couldn’t sleep, that was all. Because he couldn’t sleep, and because sometimes he couldn’t bear the loneliness, when he had exhausted all his memories and the well was empty, he got up to chat with the stewardess. Quite often the stewardess would also be asleep. That was how he got to know the captain. He, like him, didn’t sleep. That was how he got to know the captain, who had been flying that route for three years.

Alfredo stopped for a moment, sipped some wine, and said, it’s strange all this I’ve been telling you. At times I can’t quite figure it out, or I do figure it out very clearly, and I’m astounded. Why do people tell us things? Maybe to get some support, maybe to make us participate in their world. Yes, he said, we really have to stop and watch life, to observe and draw our conclusions. It’s educational, the world is full of mysteries, the devil is everywhere. Give me another whiskey, I said; he did, and proceeded.

There was a whole life between Olimpio and the captain. I tried to imagine the life of those two with the help of what Alfredo told me. Alfredo also tried to imagine because it’s impossible to completely grasp such things without the help of the imagination. Those thin, pale hands, the long fingers, the Zodiac ring. Capricorns are like that, I know.

Then the captain died. Then came Olimpio’s long struggle with memories and death. He wouldn’t let himself be the loser. It was a very unequal fight, Olimpio against death. Olimpio would always come out the loser. A man can know many things, but he cannot know certain things. He would come out the loser, for sure. But he didn’t accept it, a man cannot easily accept it, his pain was greater than the endless night he watched from the plane’s large belly.

Nights were now dense, peopled with memories and despair. How long it took to arrive! The plane penetrated night’s darkness. He no longer watched the night, the fire, the navigation light. Sleepless, tense, he tried to recreate in himself a world lost forever.

Did I tell you he was a Capricorn? Alfredo asked. You didn’t have to, I said, I recognize Capricorns. Alfredo smiled and reached for a bottle of wine on the shelf.
Everybody asleep, Rodrigo noted. He looked at his watch. We must be over Bahia, he concluded. The captain taught me. It's very simple, all you have to do is to trace on the map and compute, he remembered. The captain knew his job. It was safe to travel with Captain Rodrigo. Even so, one day he plunged down into the sea for good.

He couldn't tell whether the feeling was hunger. It wasn't hunger, it was more like a lump in his throat, a hollow in his stomach. His eyes filled with tears.

Anything wrong? the stewardess asked with a delicacy he couldn't determine whether stemming from professional concern or compassion for his suffering. He didn't like others to feel sorry for him; likewise, he didn't want them to know about his suffering. This was a territory all his own, the world that still remained. He didn't want the presence of strangers, he needed suffering. No, he said, I couldn't sleep, so I started to think and some sad memories came to my mind. Is it noticeable? he asked. And if he were to tell this stewardess everything? he thought. There was a perverse strain in him, a desire to insult, to shock, to abase himself, to befoul everything. Yes, she said, I've been watching you for a long time. I couldn't sleep either. Would you like something? I have whiskey in there, would you like some?

Before he had time to reply she got up and went for the whiskey. Why that intimacy? Why her informality, why didn't she address him as sir, when it was her duty to serve him? I have whiskey in there, would you like some? What I'm going to tell her will put an end to all this delicacy, this softness of voice, he thought with hatred. But she was already back, next to him.

Feeling any better? she asked. Yes, he said, whiskey has a way of spreading itself inside the chest; it feels good. She took a sip. What are you thinking about? she asked. Nothing, he said, I can't sleep, that's all. Neither can I; strange, isn't it, in my profession? I sleep very little, then I get anxious. When it lasts too long I take a pill, but I don't like to, I'd rather stay awake. Seconal is bad, you take one, then you get that terrible urge to take the whole phial. Anyhow, that's the way it is with me. Rodrigo stared at the stewardess' eyes. The stewardess wasn't frightened by Rodrigo's eyes. I was thinking about a captain I used to know, he said. Strange, she said, I was also thinking about a captain I used to know, that's why I couldn't sleep. Some more whiskey? she asked. Yes, a stiff one, maybe then I'll be able to sleep, he said. She helped him to the whiskey, then poured some into her glass. She was taking hers straight. I'm not supposed to drink while on duty, she said, but at this hour, since everybody is asleep...
What’s your name? she asked. Rodrigo, he said. He looked at the stewardess and saw that she was crying. What’s the matter? he asked. Nothing, she said, except that I was just thinking about a captain I used to know, his name was Rodrigo.

Olimpio felt a thud deep down in his chest. Everything was collapsing. The plane might crash, he was safe, nobody would know about them. The stewardess looked at him in astonishment. What is it, are you feeling ill? No, he said, I was also thinking about a captain whose name was Rodrigo.

In fact, my name is not Rodrigo, but Olimpio, he said, beginning his story. She listened, her eyes glowing in the darkness. There were no longer tears in her eyes, as he noted at one time, but a hard glow that pierced the soul. He told his story, and she listened, tense, unfathomable.

The stewardess took his hand and pressed it hard against her breasts. A long silence weighed them down. Outside, night was dense, the plane was cutting through darkness.

Kiss me, she said. Rodrigo kissed her. Harder, she asked, crush me. Rodrigo hugged her with all his strength, as if he wanted to destroy her. So, it was with you that he betrayed me, the two of them thought at the same time. Ravenous, devouring, desperate, they didn’t say anything. The plane sailed through a heavy, round night, and they were alone in the darkness.

Would you like another whiskey? Alfredo asked me. No, I’ve had enough. I think I’m already drunk. I stopped for a moment, I had to think. I don’t quite get it—then they went to São Paulo and shared the same room? And they made love fiercely, Alfredo said. As only despairing creatures know how, I thought, dazed.

I don’t know what else Alfredo told me. Everything is jumbled up in my mind. The alcoholic fog was stronger now. A navigation light twinkled ceaselessly. My feet tingled, the muscles in my face felt anesthetized. The light was red, it seemed to be making a plea to me. Only I could understand it. The hollowed plane, carrying darkness, was piercing night, penetrating it like a finger sinking in flesh in a dream, like a fish crossing through the water of a fishbowl—all one and the same substance: as if there was no separation between the world and the things man created. I have to get some sleep soon, I can’t bear it, I’m falling, who knows maybe a Seconal—in a flash the nocturnal figure of the stewardess thought inside me. A phial, I heard quite distinctly inside me—the stewardess’ voice, which I had never heard. The two of them killed themselves with gas, Alfredo said, sustaining me. I didn’t know whether it was a conclusion or a warning.
THE LAST NARRATIVE OF FAIRISS TERRY, JR.
LEE K. ABBOTT, JR.

Given a world where any statement uttered half-seriously becomes axiomatic and that axiom prophetic, we don’t, except in the most vulgar sense, tell stories anymore; the narrative is, if not dead, certainly moribund. Nor, I might add, do we listen to stories much anymore. What we do tell others and listen to ourselves remains a mystery. Lies, perhaps. In any case, we have exhausted the narrative mode; we just don’t bother with narration:

The plot: a man (I don’t know what kind of man just yet), a day away from nervous collapse, grieving after a failed paradise, permits himself an affair with the married woman next door, an act for which he expects and is ultimately granted punishment. The man is both enough a product and an indictment of his time to realize that, his subliminal Calvinism aside, he must confess his rather abstract and—if the truth be known—joyless deed to the injured husband. The man’s name is Fairiss Terry. I don’t know what his lie is.

Fairiss came from a long line of shirkers. His father, after twenty years in the Service, the last six as a Major, finally shirked the Army. His grandfather, a year almost to the day before he died, shirked the summer hotel business. His great-grandfather, in a doubtlessly ostentatious gesture of foolishness and pique, shirked his Anglican ancestry. Fairiss’ women, on the other hand, were famous for their perseverance. Fairiss’ mother, a woman bitterly resigned to her loss of beauty, believed in a rather academic God. Fairiss’ grandmother, another resignation, believed in spending inheritance money. And Fairiss’ great-
grandmother—it would follow—believed in shirkers.

Because Fairiss was an only child, he grew up much over-valued. His toys, to use his own words, were of “the first water.” He had few playmates, and those who managed to overlook his contrariness and single-mindedness soon tired of this skinny, snobbish bore sulking and stepping on their feelings. He came to puberty late, played no sports, save golf (which he abandoned quite abruptly on the seventh hole of the Father-Son tournament in 1952 at the country club), and wished he had a comic book Ray-gun with which to eliminate everyone who made his days insufferable. Surprisingly, he could be gallant, inventive, pleasantly aggressive, charming to a crude but nonetheless acceptable degree, and mildly tolerant. In those moods, his manner seemed to say Please, you must forgive me. I’m impulsive, rash, I’m easily tempted. True, I’m often mean, petty, cruel. I expect condemnation. For the most part, however, he was narrow-minded, quickly riled, and unforgiving as hell. On those days, his face didn’t say anything at all: it lied.

On the day he decided to lie with his neighbor’s wife, Fairiss purposefully drove the nose of his Mustang into the right rear fender of—so the man said later—a newly reconditioned Buick of some substance. Had he questioned his motives, Fairiss would surely have explained his behavior as anal, impetuous, childish; instead, he accused the Buick-man of negligence, grossly indulged.

No one remembers who threw the first punch. Witnesses, one of whom sided with Fairiss, offer conflicting reports. Despite such bullying of details, one thing is certain: after the two combatants were separated by the police, who—fittingly enough—issued a citation to Fairiss, he repaired to his home, parked his crippled auto in the drive, and—after a rather clinical study of his battered face—decided to shirk his neighbor.

A woman of unimpeachable beauty (perhaps too beautiful for such a conscientious man as her husband), Eva remembered Fairiss, except for the bruises and welts on his face, as a mildly attractive man. Not in her league anyway. From a housewife-friend, herself not terribly ingenuous, we learn that Eva distrusted Fairiss, thought him—as only a ravishing, tempestuous beauty can—as somehow unworthy, but perhaps all the more desirable because of his lack of merit. From Eva herself we learn that when Fairiss presented himself at her door, clad only in his shorts, she felt pity, and equal parts of horror, awe, and doom.

What happened then? asks Eva’s woman-friend.

(Perhaps it is a measure of a man’s sadness that fresh from a car...
wreck, his face still tender as orange pulp, when he semi-nakedly confronts his neighbor-lady, gorgeous in her shock, he neither laughs nor cries, but grabs her by the shirt-front and hits her in the trachea with his fist.)

Indeed, what did happen? Eva recalls the subsequent hours with the same guilt and self-recrimination that she remembers the time her husband, then only one of her “dates,” drove her to the Bottomless Lakes, told her he loved her, then tentatively felt her breasts for lumps.

Fairiss took what he described as his pleasure; that is, still suffering from vertigo, the small gyroscope that was his brain canted almost imperceptibly, he carried his unresisting Eva to her bedroom, laid her on the bed, forced her legs apart, and tried, however valiantly, to drive his lie through her stomach to her throat.

And then? Next?
He stopped.

Sometimes it was hard for Fairiss not to howl. He concentrated upon hectoring his rage into submission. As a boy, he counted steps; as a teenager, injustices; as a man he counted his sorrows the way a nun tells her beads. (Fairiss says that when he was a child he suffered from allergies so severe that for him to sleep his parents had to tie his hands and feet to the crib. He tells Eva, now trembling beneath him, that even today he finds it virtually impossible for him to sleep unbound.)

Some more observations about Fairiss: it is true that as a youngster he was often violent. From his teachers, themselves not often implacable, we discover that he refused to play George Washington’s dog in a Flag Day pageant, that he often swam naked in the irrigation ditch behind his house, that he stole nickels from his father’s change bowl. Another teacher claims that in the fourth grade, Fairiss, even then incautious, punched a plate glass window behind which cowered a girl of preliterate beauty: Eva.

He is still hitting her now.

Beneath Fairiss, Eva responds to his base desires with unguarded enthusiasm. She knows her husband as a mean man, jealously reserved, whose lack of passion is as much a part of him as his blood type.

Eva believes she loves Fairiss. Which is not to say she regrets any less her penchant for truth or the fact that the moment she encountered Fairiss on her doorstep, a demonic grin his only present, she lost the desire to tell stories anymore.

While it is true that Fairiss was often moody, he could, on occasion, become cloyingly precious: Having been invited to the sixteenth
birthday party of a girl of only passing acquaintance, Fairiss had somehow forgotten to buy a gift (Perhaps he was mystified at his inclusion in such an event); at the last minute, however, his mother, seeing her boy so distraught, offered him the pick of anything in her jewelry box as a gift, any bauble he might choose; so proud was he of his choice, his offering, that at the party he presented his little velvet-covered box to the girl with the same ceremonious ritual a King might have reserved for the crowning of his Queen; so in awe of his generosity and tenderness was Fairiss that when Eva cried 'Eek!' he remained transfixed by the sight of a miniature fender from a crumpled Buick of some substance, offered by way of fore-token.

Giddy, incontinent, Eva watches Fairiss make his way home. Inexplicably, she is relieved he is gone. Yet, viewing his march home, she feels slightly nauseous, the same way she felt the night she mistakenly allowed her husband-to-be to sleep with her in her parent’s guestroom and, in the course of their narrative, let him step on her feelings.

He was insistent, the man she would later marry. And, when he suggested they excuse themselves to the guestroom, she capitulated, knowing her folks were out of the house for the evening, convinced that he, she and it would be beautiful.

Once undressed, the bed the dominant piece of furniture in an otherwise asceptic room, he confessed between kisses his virginity, notwithstanding the prostitute he and his buddy had shared the summer after their graduation from military school.

Tell me about it, she said, vaguely titillated that the man-boy who lay beside her, his right hand roughly fingering a nipple, who had taken eight “dates” to even kiss her, had once commanded the moxie to bed a Las Vegas, Nevada whore for fifteen dollars. Tell me about it.

There’s nothing to tell, he said. We paid for it. She was beautiful.

I see, beautiful.

I was second, he said. I waited in sort of an anteroom, a foyer really, where all around me stood these women in nightgowns or panties and bras.

Were they beautiful too?

Yes, he answered, his forefinger stuck on a nipple, his mind stuck on the image of a roomful of women so pruriently democratic.

Did you like it?

They asked us our names and where we were from. They seemed genuinely interested in us. As people, I mean.

They probably were, Eva said. Why that one? Why did you wait?
I told you. She was spectacular. Just like any other girl. You wouldn't know she was a prostitute just by looking at her.

You wouldn't?

Later, after it was all over, we both agreed that we'd like to date her.

For a long time after his tale, the two of them lay in the dark, their breathing almost simultaneous. After a while, when his fingers resumed their prickly journey across her flesh, in a voice almost shaky with fright, the man Eva married in front of a Peace Justice asked her to roll over so he could make love to her from behind.

I mention this only to show that even then, before she had begun taking herself seriously, there were men like Fairiss who, if reduced to their lowest common denominator, would demand that she watch out for herself, that she of limited awareness acquiesce when they grabbed her breasts and twisted them like television dials.

An hour or so later (Fairiss has forsaken his neighbor's concern for time), Fairiss stands at his picture window, watching Eva's husband park his car and nervously greet her at the door. She seems disoriented, awkward. Her clumsiness is rather pathetic, and Fairiss feels it his duty to rescue her.

From another source we learn that Fairiss dresses quickly but not hastily, choosing for himself a clean pair of slacks, a sport shirt with an alligator stitched above his heart, and rubber shower thongs. He feels himself on the verge of a minor, but nonetheless crucial, epiphany, one which he has anticipated since he forsook his father in mid-stroke in 1952.

(It is a function of a good mystery that you always find what you’re looking for, especially when you are not actively looking for it; and it was with this same surprise that Fairiss, when he stopped in front of the bathroom mirror to police his appearance, recognized the man who had so willfully urged the indelicate nose of his Mustang into Eva's husband's mystery.)

Can you come over?

Eva generally means what she says, and in this case she does wish Fairiss' company, but not the outraged audience of the man, her husband, whose hand so fiercely grips her elbow.

It is Eva who meets him at the door, her face tear-stained and red. Behind her, the lower half of his body in shadows, stands her husband, a rictus smile ground into his face.

(While it is probably true that people under severe stress frequently alter their normal behavior, it is not quite accurate to say that husbands and liars, however tense, are capable of such leaps of
faith. Therefore, with almost left-handed regret, Fairiss accepts the man’s offer of a drink, a chair, and, the obvious contradiction aside, some conversation.)

Together, they sit at the points of a triangle, Fairiss’ attention bouncing from man to woman and back again. Seemingly outflanked, Fairiss feels his chagrin as a kind of vile, adamantine lump in his belly. It is the same lump, he understands, as the one he discovered following the evening the girl at the drive-in movie placed his clammy right hand squarely on the neck of her own curly-haired narrative.

Like Eva’s husband’s whore, Fairiss’ companion was gorgeous, more mature than the girls of her own age, and, recounting the courage he’d mustered in just asking her out, Fairiss vowed his time at the movie would not be wasted.

He was tactful, polite, even a bit solicitous, and when he suggested they move into the back seat of his father’s car on the pretext that it was more comfortable, Fairiss was pleasantly surprised that she agreed so readily.

Once settled, his arm looped casually around her shoulders, her head against his chest, Fairiss dared to softly stroke the outside of her hip, his movements hopefully appropriate and mannerly.

Please, she whispered, her voice coming out of the darkness beneath him.

On the screen fifty yards in front, they watched the scarred image of a monster movie, one subplot of which was a woman’s almost maniacal efforts to shed her boyfriend.

Please, she said.

What? What do you want me to do?

Just Please.

It was then, during a twenty foot high two-shot of unrivaled fury and malice, that the girl, no more slovenly than her intimates, guided Fairiss’ clenched hand over the broad, flat plain of her abdomen to the V of her legs. It was then, Fairiss’ attention suspended between the monster on the screen and the one in his lap, his brain functioning in numbed slow-motion, that he allowed his hand, now resting underneath her dress on her thigh, to tug so reluctantly at her shirk.

Fairiss remembered nothing else from that evening. As he told others, he blacked out. He doesn’t even recall how the two of them got home. But what he does remember with such clarity it humbles him is the smell, salty and sweet, of a girl—who cannot forget!—still sticky on his plot: Eva.

Fairiss?
When he looks up, Fairiss sees Eva’s husband standing beside him, looking as if he has a secret to share.

Fairiss, what do you think you’re doing?

So frustrated is he by the husband’s stubborn, inert ignorance, Fairiss almost leaps out of his chair to strangle the man. Instead, he furiously grinds himself into the chair, hoping to retreat into the fabric and disappear somewhere in the dust and coils. When the man raises his hand to scratch his temple, Fairiss actually flinches.

When it was over, Fairiss felt cheated. He thought he might apologize, offer himself as a tool of reconciliation. Still later, however, he recovered his anger. Eva’s husband was an animal, a mistake! Eva herself was . . . well, was there ever a woman he could so love?

Eva and Fairiss made love two or three times after that, once in the presence of her monster, but it was no good; for Fairiss could not shake from his mind, the moment her husband struck him, the image of his narrative—spinning eighteen years in orbit above the meticulously groomed putting green at his father’s Country Club—now beginning to tumble aimlessly back to earth, the sparks of disintegrating re-entry already marking its trail.
Juan roved about in circles of power, where the Savior was supposed to be, and before evident signs that things were not going well—at least they had not gone well in his forty years of existence—he had the courage to say, "Some things are not going very well."

The man beside him heard him; but since the man wore no uniform and his face was normal, Juan relaxed.

"You mustn't relax," the man said, "because I'm a guardian, and I heard what you said."

His voice was kind, soft, and violent.

Juan swallowed and, feeling the fear begin to flow up his legs, noted how the man's eyes glowed with some mad secret.

"You were about to change the order," the man assured him.

"I was just passing by," Juan said, feeling how futile words were, "and I thought I'd say something. I think I said—I said it to myself—some things weren't going very well."

"But I heard and those weren't exactly your words. I believe I heard—and I'm never wrong—everything goes badly, not some things, as you say now. So you're trying to change the order—I mean, you've put all the others in danger."

"I meant to say that many people have problems, that one can't always say what he feels, that there are many people in jail because they said what they thought—that's what I tried to say, not because I thought it, but because it happens, or both things at the same time."

"That's the best definition of subversion I've ever heard in my
life. You’re afraid, aren’t you? And exactly what do you think of me?”
Juan, though his fear weakened him, said, “You’re repulsive.”
“Then,” said the guardian, “you’d better start running, although you know it’s useless. But not running would be shameful, because that would mean you deny your own freedom.”
Juan began to run slowly, proving his persecutor was right, and consoled himself by thinking that if he hadn’t fled, the guardian would have seized him somehow. Both fled, running through the dirty streets of the indifferent city. The persecutor for one instant thought this was the ideal flight—not only for capturing his victim but for preserving the order. He never looked at his victim. This routine part of the action gave him no special pleasure.
In the heart of the city, the guardian came up beside Juan.
“It strikes me that it’s better not to run. Almost everybody runs in these cases; that’s how they lose. And although we want you alive, don’t think you’d be faster than bullets. Even in this crowd I could tell the back of your head.”
Despite these words, the city looked cheerful now. A group of girls came out of a studio. In the show windows, the colorful objects, despite the winter, brought home the springtime joy of the sea.
The guardian, who was sweating a little because of his fat, took out some papers and said, “You could be filling out these questionnaires with your views and personal data. You’ll save yourself a long wait in the jail office.”
Juan, without answering and without taking the papers the man handed him, saw the glow in his eye, which was intolerable, and began to run—to the gradual indifference of the people who were not changing the order as he was.
Again the pursuer came up beside him.
“I understand your desire to flee like this, but I can’t run. I’m a family man and the strain could do me a lot of harm. Besides, I’m about to retire. I’ll run up to the corner just to please you, but then I’ll have to stop.”
At the corner Juan saw that his pursuer did stop—and made signs, trying to tell him he would wait there. Not seeing his face made Juan almost calm.
When Juan got to the suburb where he lived, the pursuer had disappeared. At the door of his house, his own family barred his way. “If you’ve fallen into disgrace, it would be better to give yourself up. They’re looking for you,” they told him. He stood still for an instant, but even his stillness was a flight.
From that moment, and the more he walked along the many
streets looking for that congruent self to flee from, he felt he was somebody else and was afraid of himself. His skin was as cold and rough no doubt as the skin of all the prisoners who long since filled the prisons of the south.

Fatigue halted him near the place where his pursuer had halted. People passing looked at him sometimes as at a beggar, sometimes a man whom they are going to justify, and always a stranger who captures the attention by bearing banners and halos without knowing he wears them. They looked at him as if saying Stupid or Poor man! but discreetly, without hurting him too much. He had sat down on a mailbox, his hands over his head. The girls from the studio went by. A few raised their arms to wave. Others smiled with understanding. Somebody told him to get off the mailbox to avoid attracting so much attention.

He sat on the curb and could not avoid the thought that things were not going very well. But the important thing is not to trust anyone but accept what happens, not to trust your own thoughts, not to be led astray or be too attentive, and to reject every impulse which doesn't help save me, he thought. And, far off, the pursuer heard every one of his thoughts.

While he was thinking all that, some of the girls from the studio still went on smiling and in a strange way still his pursuer kept asking him to fill out the questionnaires. Even the girls’ smiles warned him of the futility and the needed brevity of his thoughts. A voice which—miraculously—he could trust said, “I saw everything. You don’t have to tell me a thing. I heard all you said. Half the city heard you. I tried to warn your family, but they already knew. Besides, they complained because this will bring them trouble. In any case, I brought you this bottle so you can get drunk enough to stand all this.”

“Are you sure the bottle has nothing to do with my detention?”

“I can assure you it doesn’t. But I was with your future jailer—he says he’s expecting you.”

“I knew I couldn’t trust anybody.”

“Why do you say that? It would be easy to blame me for everything you did today. Or do you intend to complicate things for the rest of us? Why do you say that?”

“Because you can’t trust anybody now. You can’t even trust yourself in times like these,” Juan said, bowing his head.
I returned from work feeling strangely unwell and lay down on the bed to rest for a moment. Immediately, stifling nausea rose in my throat, breath stuck in my chest, and a red, silk-like veil drew in front of my eyes. I knew I would never be able to reach the telephone and call the doctor. In the hallway, I heard the neighbor’s footsteps and, gathering my remaining strength, I kicked and overturned a chair; I could not shout any more. The neighbor paused. I grunted. I sensed that he was listening attentively. I grunted again; he knocked and entered, not waiting for a response. Seeing me lie there, helpless and gasping for air like a choking fish, he rushed to the telephone and lifted the receiver. Pain pinched my heart like pincers, and I fell into a deep pit of darkness and silence.

A loud, insistent telephone ring made me regain consciousness. Long, black lines flashed before my eyes, the room slowly swam out of a milky fog—as slowly as an image appears on a television screen. The telephone rang persistently, half an arm’s length away from my head. At first I was not too surprised to see that the telephone had been moved, it seemed natural—the neighbor, while taking care of me, had pushed the telephone stand closer to the bed. I lifted the receiver, but it slipped from my oddly stiff fingers and crashed against some dish. A wave of sickening perfume welled up. A woman’s voice shouted in the receiver “hello, hello!”; I lifted the receiver once more and pressed it firmly to my ear.

“Listening,” I said.

“Is that Comrade ———?” and the woman named my neighbor.

“No, but I can call him to the phone,” I replied.

“To whom am I speaking?” the woman asked, sounding frightened.
"Comrade ------," and I stated my name.

"Have you no shame," the woman sobbed, "Comrade ------ (and she said my name) died two days ago."

"Irma!" I shouted, but the woman was already hanging up.

Suddenly cold sweat beaded my forehead, I noticed that I was lying in my room on top of a table, dressed in a black, unfamiliar suit and black slippers, and the white edge of the black slippers horrified me especially. As I sat up, my elbow knocked over a dish of eau de cologne. I—dead? I'm alive! Alive. Although it's incredible that Irma should call while I am still alive. It's been two years since we parted in bitterest hatred. But still—I'm certain I'm alive, not having hallucinations after death. My heart thudded in my chest, loud and regular. Slowly I lowered my feet to the floor and took a few steps. The mattress had been taken from the bed and propped against a wall, otherwise nothing in the room had been touched, only both windows had been thrown wide open and April wind flapped the curtains. It occurred to me that, just lying there, I could catch a cold. While I shut the windows my conviction grew that I had been the victim of a nasty joke. I had been tricked into drinking something doped and, while I lay unconscious, the jokesters had dressed me in burial garments, put me on the table, and were awaiting what I would do now. Where had they hidden? Villainous jokesters! It seemed to me someone was sitting in the closet; I rushed to it and tore the door open. Empty hangers clattered from the sudden movement, like the teeth of a carelessly tossed skull. Aha! Irma is also in on this joke; who else would have dared to take away my clothes? "Where are you?" I shouted and ran into the hallway.

 Silence reigned in the apartment. I went to the neighbor's door and rattled the handle repeatedly. The door was locked. I returned to my room, gliding on the soft soles of my burial slippers as noiselessly as a ghost.

 I rang up information and asked for today's date. "The twenty-fourth," was the reply. Indeed, I had slept for three days. I was ready to dial my work number when I heard someone put a key into the outside door. I quickly jumped on the table and stretched out. I was sure I would see the nasty jokesters immediately. After a moment the neighbor entered my room. His face seemed full of hypocritical sorrow; apparently he was sorry that I had not awakened yet and noticed his fine April fool's joke. Through lowered lashes I regarded him for a few seconds. Just you wait, I'll show you!

 "Aha!" I roared and sat up suddenly.

The neighbor retreated so quickly that the back of his head hit
the door frame, covering his eyes with both hands in one unconscious, horrified motion. He collapsed on the floor, his body limp, half-sitting, half-squatting, his head hanging between his knees.

I realized that he was innocent.

As soon as I realized this, two men carrying a coffin entered the apartment.

"This is the place," one of them said. "Look, the poor man has been propped up against the door."

The neighbor opened his eyes.

"Tomorrow they would have buried you," he whispered. "What a horrible mistake."

After a brief, polite exchange with the coffin carriers, the revolting wooden box was taken away. The neighbor told me that there had not been the slightest doubt about my death, the doctor had made out the death certificate, Irma had removed some of my things (she had been the first to be notified), my papers had been sent wherever a dead man's papers must be turned in. "Your resurrection is more than a miracle," he said.

"Many will be miraculously surprised," I replied.

A few days passed. My place of employment sent me a pass to a rest home. My curious resurrection was even reported in the newspapers, truly something unheard of, a phenomenal event in the history of medicine. One last thing remained to be settled—getting back my papers.

After two hours of futile discussions I came out on the street, choking in helpless fury. I was afraid I would die a second time of fury. What a mess! I have to prove that I am I, prove it by hundreds of affidavits, bits of paper, while my living presence is disregarded, does not count as proof.

"At present you are a fiction," I was told. "We can't issue any papers until you have supplied the necessary affidavits."

"I'm not asking you to issue new papers, I only want you to return mine, the ones I used to have."

"We can't," I was told. "It's unheard of, a dead man calling for his papers! Who will believe it?"

"But surely you believe me!"

"I don't count! I'm a little man. Of course I believe you. But it might happen that others don't believe me. And how will I be able to prove it later? The death certificate is in your name?"

"Yes," I was forced to agree, "but I'm alive, look, here's the doctor's affidavit proving it."

"Bring an affidavit that this affidavit is not forged."
"But that sort of thing can go on forever."

He stood up and opened a cupboard.

"You see?" he asked.

All the shelves were jammed with brochures. Blue, red, grey, lettuce-colored, carrot-colored, lavender, yellow folders were jammed in tight rows.

"You see? Every day I receive three such brochures, and each brochure is full of instructions in the smallest print possible. There aren’t enough letters in the alphabet to indicate all the headings and subheadings. You see? My hands and feet are tied. Don’t do that, don’t do this. Do that, but only after you have done this. This, bis, is, you see!"

He even tripped over his tongue, he sympathized with me so much, but evidently he couldn’t help me in any way, his hands and feet were truly tied.

"Then cable the central office, ask for instructions what to do in my case."

"An unheard-of case," he replied. "You think I’d get a reply immediately? At the central office they, too, do things over and over, so that the answer will only get here in several months, this fall."

"I need papers right away. I have to go to the rest home, and in our country as you know, you can’t take a step without papers."

"Yes," he said, "we too would have to punish you for going against our own regime. Of course I’m only joking, but please understand, you’ll have to wait. I’d like to, we’d like to, they’d like to, but not a chance, not a chance!"

No, he was not tripping over his tongue, evidently he always talked like that.

I did understand him, in his place I would have acted the same. But I was not the usual caller, a petitioner, I was I! I?! I? The more I looked at him the more familiar he seemed, and finally I got up the courage to ask:

"Pardon me, but tell me, aren’t you my neighbor?"

"Yes," he replied immediately, "I am."

"But you know everything that happened. You saw it all yourself."

"It’s for your own good. Please don’t get familiar," he replied.

"I’m on duty. We’ll talk about it at home."

"Give me back my papers."

"I’m not allowed to."

"Just you wait," I said, "when you die and come back to life, and come to me to beg for papers, I’ll refuse you too. I’ll refuse you."

"I won’t come back to life," he replied. "I’ll die and stay dead.
It’s a mistake to come back to life.”

“That’s what I thought too,” I said, “before my resurrection.”

When I returned home I saw strange people in my room. A man, his wife, and two children were knocking on the walls, testing the floor boards to make sure they were not rotten, pushing the furniture about.

“Papa, papa,” yelled the smaller boy, “this place has a lot more light than our old apartment.”

“That’s so, my boy,” papa replied.

“Comrade, what are you doing here?” I asked.

“And who are you?”

“I live here!”

The man chuckled. “Jokes aside, citizen. The man who used to live here lies in the cemetery. Look, here’s my living assignment. And now I shall kindly ask you to leave my room!”

The neighbor hadn’t returned from work yet. I could only seek help from the building superintendent.

“I do understand,” the superintendent said, “but the room assignment has been issued. We don’t make out the assignments. What can I do?”

Now I had been tossed out on the street. Dark April skies lowered over the city. From a phone booth I called my place of employment; I was told that the pass to the rest home would not be issued, yes, it had been issued, but now they wouldn’t be able to do it because I had died, anyway, it was an awful mess, I should untangle it all myself, and yes, what should they do with the salary I had coming—donate it to the child care center or pay it out to some heir?

After putting down the receiver I did not know where to go, where to wander. All that had happened seemed like some monstrous April fool’s joke. A farce! A horror. I had to be so unlucky and come back to life! Damn it, I thought, there will be a storm in a moment. Rain began to fall, then thunder rumbled and the skies opened. I stood in the middle of the sidewalk and warm, lively rivulets streamed down my face. Irma had taken away all my clothes, therefore I was walking around in the black funeral suit, and standing in the rain, I noticed much too late that it was made of paper and was dissolving like a napkin in a bucket of water. I moved my arms and the sleeves came away from the shoulders. Luckily part of the pants still held around my loins, they were protected by the jacket corners, but then they too gradually began to dissolve. Naked as the newborn—it flashed through my mind. And I’ll have to start all over again from the beginning.
DON PASCUAL
WAS BURIED ALONE
CONCHA ALZOLA

She had finally had enough of his airs of masculine superiority, and to such a degree that she decided to teach him a lesson.

The small house, the room off the adjoining patio, which had been used to store utensils and tools, was the logical setting for the occasion.

They began by throwing out that pile of assorted, useless things they had stored there over the space of almost three generations. They set about shining some bronze pears on grandmother’s bed; an old-style gramophone, “His Master’s Voice,” with its corresponding paraphernalia which included two primitive Paderewski gravures that could be heard more clearly using a lemon tree thorn instead of a needle; the cage for the last of godmother’s canaries.

In an immense box of rough wood and larger than an ordinary trunk, they found, rolled up, an endless number of operatic scores, from the time mother used to play the piano—and father chose the repertory—and another endless number of pianola rolls, from the time when she was too ill to strike the keys. The mice had gotten into them, and altered the grooves of the pianola scores. A small mouse, very cute and gray, remained in sight. But the dampness of the little house had produced its natural enemy, a hideous scorpion with powerful pincers, which, when the last layer of papers was parted, suddenly surged
out in front of the desolate mouse. He didn’t do anything to save the mouse. It’s the law of life and the species. And that the scorpion might finish poisoning the poor creature wasn’t, in the end, but one more proof of what he had always preached: that some beings are strong and others weak (women, of course, weak) and that strength is the unquestionable external sign of superiority (of men, naturally).

Which, extended to the higher plane of human existence, it was presumed that the sciences are strong and masculine, because they are exact and consistent, and the arts are weak, always subject to interpretation, and what is worse, bearers of that incredible quantity of sentimentality, definitely a woman’s trait. Thinking about it in depth—he could go on—what can you say a person has gained who has produced a novel of four hundred pages?

Which, also applied to the most everyday and simple levels of life, would mean that mother had died because of historical necessity, caused by her own weak condition of womanhood, and not because father, as an oversight, let her become dehydrated.

When all the rubbish was finally disposed of, through the passive medium of the trash cart, or the violent medium of fire, a wide space of more than twenty square feet was left clear in the little house, stiffened by moss and dampness. What remained was scraped and white-washed. And white-washed and cleaned.

The little flagstones in the floor, made of a rough, red material, were somewhat unequal where they protruded from a mat of maize leaves, the same one that they had both wrapped themselves up in while playing and in which the household dog had wrestled with them, butting them with his nose. At that time he, with his superior masculine ability, replaced a pair of broken tiles in the roof and stretched an electrical wire from the house, after which came civilization: a record player, a lamp, a table of the hardest natural oak, and a pair of chairs. Along the walls began to appear shelves filled with books—mathematics, physics, and chemistry (the younger sisters and the poor relatives tolerated it all in the hope of arriving at an explanation in time by means of an education) and many history books . . . science, of course, because when considered at length, how else could the history of human progress be measured if it were not by those precious facts.

The exact same thing happens with people. Anyone who isn’t able to complete at least a second level education doesn’t deserve to be considered a human being. And the reverse: a person capable of completing a second level education is capable of carrying out anything, no matter how difficult. Including literature? She asked with
feigned meekness. Including literature, he concluded. He had fallen into the trap. It only remained for her to arrange the details of the wager.

To return to him as he was then, the older of the two. A perfect adolescent with large eyes, furiously trying to comb his hair back. His shirt always well-starched, with his short sleeves rolled up to show off his biceps. His air in general sweet and melancholy like his mother. His head filled with the extreme and authoritarian ideas of his father, for whom the decadence of the Western world had been consumed when Caruso died.

And take a look at her, the younger. On the outside the feminine replica of her father. Within ... she didn't know for certain at that time. Her head overflowing with what her father and brother considered the scum of the world: novels. And always a vague impulse to say something, but to say it with the precision and morbid hardness of ancient marble. Her father, unlike her brother, wasn't the incarnation of anti-literature, but something she perceived as even worse: Castelar, Tamayo, and Baus. A kind of required honorability of basis and form, associated with an audience of ... virgins, perhaps, as Michelet had demanded. Living with such an emphatic being, what kind of life could her mother have had, who, even at the piano, had to play in order to humor the others. ... Too young to understand, to penetrate esoteric matters. After all, what is happiness? To have married the promised lover of one’s infancy, certainly. But, couldn’t there be something more? And, above all, why can’t a young woman rest until she reaches the point of allowing herself to die?

The terms of the wager ended up quite simple. Within a time limit of forty-eight hours of incessant work, her brother, with his pains-taking lower-case letters, would have to write a story—neither length nor style mattered; simply something recognizable as such—a story perfectly contained within itself. Or, if unable to do it, he would give up part of the book shelves so “the others” could inhabit them, and a corner of the work table for her, representing the others; to scribble papers at her pleasure. He would forever suspend all sorts of jokes, innuendoes, deprecating commentaries, smart remarks, and the rest of his brotherly repertory about the inferior intelligence of women, and about the time they waste with reading—and how much more with writing!—things that lead to nothing; to nothing positive, practical, or measurable in exact units. If, on the contrary, her brother produced a story, as would be expected of a person who had completed a fourth—fourth!—level education, within the time limit of forty-eight hours, she would forever relinquish the fine arts and would begin some serious
study on a formal basis; although clearly it would not be in the history of science, because women can't even dream that with their limitations they might be able to contend with infinitesimal calculus. (Madame Curie, finally, was a competent laboratory worker.)

On the other hand, the preparations for the wager took up part of a week and were more painstaking than for an African safari. Paper, by the reams. A dozen pens with good points. Canned goods and other things to eat and drink. An electric hot plate, and a cooking stove, just in case the hot plate broke down. An Argand lamp with a bright light, just in case the electricity failed. A blanket in case it cooled down during the night, etc., etc., etc.

When everything was ready, her brother introduced a Cartesian doubt: what can you write a story about? Neither of the two had ever left the family circle; “human passions” appeared to them as an abstract list without any identifiable personal contents. And they were precisely what stirred in all that fictional trash he detested from the depths of his puritan soul. No other remedy remained—he would write about what he knew best: his own family, his own house... which, after a brief analysis, proved to be overwhelmed by the presence of their father, whether he was with them or not.

Her brother experienced a strange fear. If it were possible, in spite of everything, to say somewhere, in some way what the children really thought about having a “lord of the manor” for a father. A sordid miser, a... Victorian, she prompted. Who would ever know about it? The subject was concerned less than anyone else. Distant. Unprepared for what was being plotted under his very nose. In the dining room, noisily sipping his soup. Around the house, at dawn the thundering sound of his wooden slippers; counting the glasses that had possibly been broken by carelessness; closing latches and bolts at all the doors... and what really was going on inside of him. In short, why not do it? To hang him. Or drag him tied to racing horses until he was dismembered. Or kill him and throw him to the dogs. To burn him and scatter his ashes in the air, so they could never be reconstructed. To destroy him in seventeen thousand ways... and to prepare some pompous funeral rites. Which no one would come to, of course. With priests spouting Latin jargon from their mouths, like toads and snakes. And extravagant funeral coaches winding through the streets to the music of Chopin.

The slender, adolescent hand, gradually being covered by a thick hair, trembled lightly when the sister and brother finally parted from one another. That took place on a Saturday at one in the afternoon. The following Monday at the same time the recluse would have to
emerge from the imprisonment of the little house with a story in his
hand. Meanwhile, she would take care of the situation in the house.
She would say that her brother had a very difficult exam, and that was
the cause of his mysterious confinement. Not one word, of course,
about the wager . . . or about the funeral.

Saturday night there were two major attempts to make her brother
come out. Now in her bed, twice she heard the stentorian noise of the
slippers clattering along the corridor toward the patio door—her father
peering into the darkness.

On Sunday afternoon a new attempt to get into the brother's room.
A relatively tranquil night. And finally Monday, and one o'clock in the
afternoon.

Her brother hadn't opened the door yet, and she waited full of
apprehension. At every instant it seemed that she saw him appear
with his clothing drenched in the blood of the victim's vital organs,
the weapon in his hand, still hot . . . He had dark circles under his
eyes, emaciated, but he came out surrounded by an unmistakable air
of defeat.

Did you kill him?—she was going to insist, but she knew im­
mediately that it was useless to expect too much. A mountain of papers
—and not one drop of blood!—lay scattered over the matting; the
matting they wrapped themselves in while playing. His pens were
gnawed on, and were scattered wherever signs of the struggle could
be seen. On the table, on a sheet of paper, a single line was written,
that was all that her brother had succeeded in composing. Very well
done, there could be no mistake, and for the title no less, "Oh, superior
and stronger men!" It would have to be her now, using a pen with the
 cruelty of a stiletto, who would have to eradicate their father from
their lives.
Captain Iden, a chaplain, opened the door of his room and dragged his gnarled body out into smog and incandescent air. Gasping, he sat down on the bench. In spite of the heat, he had the coat of his uniform buttoned up to the neck; he wore the same blue and red colors as the sign above his head: Salvation Army.

Iden sighed. Men could just not have the power to do so much evil! Yesterday they had entered the mission hall and finally sat down before him: Samson the coal merchant, Hutin the papermaker, Jessen the fishmonger, and the doctor. Quite late and unexpected, Daniel, a public ward, sneaked in, unwashed, still covered with coal dust. He immediately sat down by the door on a chair in the last row. Captain Iden did not want Daniel in his audience. It was because of him that he had just expounded the Hassein motif for the respectable townspeople. In Hassein, a Malaysian sailor who was murdered sixty years ago by his ship's crew because of the color of his skin, they should have recognized Daniel. Now Daniel had not yet been killed; he sat in the room quite alive. Among smudges of dirt on his face were also spots of unobjectionable white skin. But, as a half-dead derelict and
alien, he was as black as any Negro.

"The Lord Justice who handed down the death sentence then was a simpleton," the doctor said loudly.

"They should have kicked him out of town," Hutin added.

"Like all people of their sort," Samson spat out.

"A toast to the Captain of Lady Douglas," the doctor mocked.

"Down with Hassein," the fishmonger said coldly.

The heat of the previous day still clung to the cramped town square and permeated the early morning air. Clouds of oil smoke shrouded the cobblestones from the arch of the doorway to Hutin's paper factory. Hutin had turned on his oil-powered motors. The whirling machines roared in the shop. Samson, the coal merchant, unloaded his truck. He dumped the coal on the sidewalk. Daniel had to drag it in scuttles to the storage bin. A tar pot smoldered in front of the doctor's house. A worker knelt beside the doorway and rubbed the hot tar smooth with a wooden trowel.

In his shop Jessen fished out a carp from the tank for the doctor's housekeeper and with bluish red hands pressed the jerking fish to the block, loosened his right hand from the edge of the gill, gripped the knife, and cut.

"There, Hassein," he said, "in spite of the Salvation Army." He threw a quick glance at the bench on the south end of the square and at Iden, the chaplain.

"Just look at Daniel," the doctor's housekeeper said to Jessen, who was wiping the bloody scales from his hands.

"Just another Hassein," Jessen said.

Daniel was just about to cross the square to help Samson with the unloading. Under the coal dust his face flushed dark red. On his protruding lower lip was a crusted layer of soot. Suddenly he stopped beside the cast iron fountain in the middle of the square. Above him hung the motionless cloud which had formed from Hutin's carbon monoxide, the tar smoke, and Samson's coal dust. Daniel rested against the stone base of the fountain, leaned his head back on the rim, and stared up at the dense cloud of smoke. Under the mask of soot and dust, his face paled. It stayed that way for thirty seconds; then the redness returned. He lowered his head, looked around apprehensively and started toward Samson's truck.

Hutin, the papermaker, saw Jessen butcher the carp, Samson throw the coal onto the sidewalk, and Captain Iden leave his office. There in his shop, looking out over the square, he tore up the cardboard which he had attempted to make from sphagnum moss. It was as useless as the paper he had tried to manufacture from peat moss.
for ten years. He discovered that he was being watched by the doctor, who stood at an open window on the second floor of his house. He was annoyed that the doctor saw him with the cardboard in his hand. Hutin waved casually, and the doctor nodded to him. At Hutin's feet lay a mousetrap, which he himself had designed and constructed. Over many obstacles, through several doors and passageways, the tiny animals would come to strips of fried bacon and a basin of water in which they drowned. Today two had been trapped in the basin. One of them still lived and tried feebly to climb up the rusty metal wall. Her black, glazed eyes glittered with the frenzy of death. She opened wide her thin, silent, rose-colored jaws. With a remnant of cardboard Hutin plunged her under again and again. "Drink, Hassein," he said. And as he exchanged a greeting with Captain Iden, who returned it wearily and gravely, he pressed the mouse to the bottom of the pan. At that moment he saw Daniel start across the square, and he saw how the boy stood and grew pale at the fountain.

Iden stood up to help Daniel. But as he laboriously stepped forward, Daniel was already hurrying toward Samson. That the coal peddler shot a lump of coal at the boy did not escape the captain. "Hassein," Samson probably yelled, but the captain heard only the word "Ass."

In finishing up yesterday the doctor had forgotten to kill the wounded, half-dead pigeon, because he had to hurry to accompany Hutin to the service. The creature had lost only a little blood. The wound still gaped, but one could no longer see the left abdominal air sack. The hardiness of wild pigeons vis-a-vis that of domestic was really astonishing! With thumb and middle finger the doctor pressed the bird's trachea together. Even he felt a shortness of breath; the air in the workroom was spent and hot. He and Samson had tippled there until dawn. The schnapps glasses were still standing beside the pigeon. He left the bird and opened the window. In Hutin's hand he saw the cardboard. He had to force himself not to laugh, because he had joked with Samson over Iden's Hassein and Hutin's peatboard works. His cheerfulness vanished suddenly, however, under the captain's stern look. He did not wave but leaned out the window in order to see more clearly just how Jessen was stabbing the carp. Then he stepped back and enclosed the pigeon's neck in his fist. I have to see who is master here, he thought. From the table he could also overlook the square; and together with Iden, Hutin, Samson, and Jessen, he watched Daniel, followed his path as far as the fountain and thought of Hassein.

Around four in the morning Daniel had already been awakened by the drunken Samson: "Out, you little whelp, out, Hassein!" The
railway car had to be unloaded during the night in order to save the next day’s parking fee, but the doctor’s schnapps had caused the coal and the pigeon to be forgotten. Samson staggered around the bulging vehicle: “When I come back that other truck better be full!” He leered at Daniel: “You are another criminal just like Hassein.” With that he staggered off the loading ramp. Daniel trembled from weakness. After finishing his work, he crossed the square toward his tormentor. He sought support at the base of the fountain. A web of strange thoughts entangled him and turned him into Hassein.

He perceived the gangway. Although it was not even very hot in Gascogne, his bare feet burned on the deck.

“I should have gone back. Now I must die,” he lamented.

“They don’t mean it like that, Hassein,” the seaman Charles Hunt said.

From the fountain Daniel looked up above the roof tops of the buildings of the little community where he had taken refuge, but then once more he was sitting in the narrow hole of the ship that Captain Iden had described so well. Thirst cauterized him like acid. Only the peace of approaching death was sweet. With Hunt came light; he also brought him water, ship’s biscuit, and meat.

“They say I wasn’t even fit to feed the boiler. They pour sea water on my food. With filth they defile my . . . kerchief.”

“Your turban,” Hunt helped him.

“They spit when I pray. They spit on me when they wake me.”

“Every voyage will end one day,” Hunt consoled him.

“My skin is dark.”

“You know that when you were about to jump overboard Gleaves saved you.”

“He struck me as I uttered my prayer of death.”

“They have searched for you for two days now. For the present they have given it up.”

“But not Gleaves,” Hassein whispered. He trembled with the remembrance of the insult.

In the night after Hunt’s visit, he left his hiding-place to search for a weapon in order to protect himself from Gleaves, who would not let him die. Unobserved in the dark, starless night, he reached the galley. He took the cook’s great cleaver and returned to his hiding-place in the fo’c’s’cle. He slept with the handle in his fist. The toe of Gleaves’ shoe caught him in the side. He sprang up and retreated to the farthest black corner of the compartment. His weapon of steel flashed.

“What do you really want, Mutineer?” Gleaves asked.
"I am in misery. I want to die."

Gleaves left, and Hunt did not return to comfort and strengthen Hassein. It was probably only eight days, but it was also eight lifetimes in a desiccated, filthy prison darkness. He awoke on a brier bush of fiery dagger points. The darkness took on immense form. It slowly sifted burning sand into his mouth. From a distance they called to him, and at last he heard Hunt's good voice. It was difficult to understand him; he had been traveling so long. Painfully he understood that the men wanted the coal upon which he lay for the galley, and that he would get water for it. In his weakness he filled the pail, and the water came. Blessed oasis in the black desert of fiery quartz and flaming steel which had no resting place for him. The water allowed his mind to live again and wander for eons—twenty eons. In this eternity he conceived an idea of deliverance from his humiliation. That time on the quay at Gascogne Captain Cocks greeted him like a brother: he heard from the seamen's agent how fluently he spoke the strange language, and how capable he was. Covered with coal dust, Hassein moved slowly to the captain's cabin. Like a very young child he could only place one foot in front of the other, but happiness carried him light as a feather. He touched the sleeping captain softly on the shoulder. When he saw Hassein with the cleaver, Cocks leaped up and screamed. On deck Gleaves and the ship's carpenter overpowered him. They beat him to a pulp and put him in irons. Hunt came at noon and silently took the chains off him. Hassein sought his old hiding-place. In the evening he listened as they nailed down the hatch above him. The soundless peace took possession of him again. The majestic silence was a spirit which waited and watched for him. At dawn they loosened the hatch cover and substituted a grating for it.

His life up to now had not been as long as this time here, where he did not live and where he could not die. At last he reached the brink of the desert of rustling sands. Low halls with tiny cells engulfed him. In the presence of his attendant, who never left him, he had to undress and bathe himself. The humiliation was hard to bear. Later he was hired out. He came to the colliery and Samson.

Someone called out his name loudly. Now at last he was really Hassein. He had not been too certain of his name before. He raised himself up to obey a sharp command and tried to pull himself up on the sacks of coal so that he could stand erect. But he sank back into the dagger point bush.

"Hassein!" Hunt whispered. "Listen to me!"

"I hear you, dear Master," Hassein gasped.

"I am not your master. I'm your friend. Give it up. They are
afraid of you. They will kill you if you don’t come to me.”
Hassein propped himself up:
“Is it you, Charles Hunt?”
“It’s me. I tell you, they will kill you out of fear. Now please, Iegin{quote}
beg you, for my sake.”
“Gleaves fears me? All of them?”
“All,” Hunt said. “It’s as if they’re insane.”
Hassein floated on a wave of uplift and emotion. Hunt could not
see his tears. How Hassein loved them now! But suddenly he gave up
his dream.
“So tell them quickly who I really am. If they would only re­
spect me a little.”
“Ah,” Hunt groaned, “ah, Hassein.” He wrung his hands in de­
spair.
“I have surely tried it,” Hassein said after a while, “but I can­
not die.”
The darkness carried Charles Hunt away. Men’s voices and light
fell like hail into the room. His foot was shattered. Rats bit and tore
flesh and bones to bits. He only saw the jagged lightning, which ac­
companied the shot, and he screamed. Sea water flowed down on him
and rose slowly in the compartment. He tried to rest his head on a
sack of coal. The salt water burned his wound. He opened his eyes
and saw the merciless faces. He could recognize Captain Cocks, Gleaves,
Evans, the first helmsman, and the seamen Webster and Christiansen.
He heard Hunt’s good voice. Then his hip was torn open. The shot
came long after the blow to his hip. Now his life was shattered in this
place. A rushing wind bore it away. It was easy to bear. He sang. No
Gleaves stopped him from his deathsong praising an austere and en­
during silver wall.
Hunt lowered himself down, tied a line around Hassein’s waist,
and was pulling him up. In the distance Hassein saw the red faces in
their savage ecstasy. He also saw Webster’s hand approach his temple,
and behind Webster he recognized Hunt, who, with anguish and de­
spair, threw his arms upward.
After the shot his vision dimmed, but out of the darkness and the
silence of death, the fountain, windows, roofs, and the coal on the
sidewalk surged up in the dense smoldering vapor. It was that old
eternal horror. Over there on the bench Hunt or Iden stretched forth
his arms. Such was Daniel’s comfort as he hurried on toward Samson.
Captain Iden let his arms fall. He straightened up. His courage
returned. He had looked into the eyes of the hunter and into the eyes
of the hunted. He knew now what had to be done.
Since his appearance in my dreams, he has been in a certain way my dog. Since these days I have no dog but certainly plenty of hardships, it's good to relax with a little night playmate, which doesn't even demand moving out of bed. You only need to fall asleep with the desire, useless to express to anyone, for those hours of fun—frivolous and childish, I admit—for him to appear, eager to play or, with a dog's superior understanding, to lie gently beside me.

If anyone asked, I wouldn't know how to describe it; but in dreams I'd recognize him, infallibly, in the midst of a pack of hounds composed of identical brothers. I mean, if he was really a visible, indisputable puppy from the very first, something he has when I think of him suggests that he is different—a thought that came to me gradually, as in a delayed integration. That's why his name, Reduced, seems contradictory although it matches his physique. But it isn't that he has become smaller, much less that he is in process of diminishing. Neither—here's another problem—do I notice, no matter how much I watch, that he grows even a smidgeon since, as is so natural, young dogs develop almost from day to day—so they say, exaggerating a bit. This gives him a quality of immutability which gives me little peace. If Reduced, my Reduced—this jovial, good little dog that's such a good friend—does not change, it's because he has the fixity of a dream, only a dream. So my Reduced is like a persistent nightmare which always returns—the same, torturing; and although he cannot be considered in any way a nightmare (if he were he'd be a loveable one), precisely like nightmares he startles my heart—not at the moment one's over, but during the day because of the never very remote probability that at night he may not come back.

That's why—admitting it is a dream—I must transfer him to my waking life. If it is a dream, I shall have in this wretched life of mine—although under the sun, sunless—a dream. If it is a dream, I shall not have to fear his definitive absence one night because, despite his having done nothing to make me judge him so, he could be inconstant and pass on his shadowy footsteps into the dreams of one of my neighbors. Alive in this world—it's indisputable—he can die. But I shall think of his death as I do of my own: I shall think it is something which does not come, although desired, if it is not directly sought.
I've already talked with Reduced. I frankly confessed my anxieties, which perhaps hadn't escaped him earlier because he is very shrewd, very informed. I begged him to give up nights and come. He asked me not to demand the answer until last night. His answer does not respond directly to my plea. He says yes, he likes being my dog and we can spend more time together; but in turn he proposes something which also obliges me to delay the answer until I think it over carefully.

Tonight I must reply. In a few hours I have to decide. It's terribly hard to make up my mind to what Reduced wishes—for Reduced wants me to go with him; I mean he wants me to go with him into dreams.

**Translator H. E. Francis**

**FRIEND ENEMY**

**ANTONIO DI BENEDETTO**

They were my father’s and left to me. Maybe I shall never touch them—two boxes of books of ancient chemistry mixed with some on cabbalism, astrology, and chiromancy. With the chemistry books he was up to no good: falsifying wines and liquors. I think he used them because they're more effective than any of the other books—divining lotteries, for example. I've carted them to all the pensions because I don't dare sell them or throw them out. They hold something of my father or he had something of them, and I have nothing of him except them.

Except them and silence. He was certainly not mute, but it was because of him: I was nineteen and in love. I went into the bathroom and there was my father, in the tub, under the shower, yes—but hanging from the pipe.

* * *

The *pericote*, which when young could already be confused with a mature rat, came in one day during the siesta, perhaps escaping from some kid's persecution. The kids swim out back there, in the canal, under the willow. They spend hours naked, raising Cain. They throw stones at cans or little animals. They explore caves. From time to time one dies—one of the kids, I mean—dies from drowning.

The rat would seek, yes—his fear scarcely digested—the protection of my father's boxes of mixed Cabbala. My father would have said, Poverty; he announces poverty. I, thinking about that, would have had to ask, Still more poverty?

I went on yearning for sleep, which, unconcerned about me, did things halfway: sleep did not swallow me up.
Because of the impossibility of participating in conversation, one of course avoids taking part and no one is bothered by his silence. Rovira, a reporter who’s in the habit of telling stories and who told me this one, always had something for everybody. I caught clearly the word Hamelin, but no other, as one sees the texture but not the frame. But I didn’t make any connection because I wasn’t looking for one, nor did anything more than the sound interest me.

Then, just recently, going to my room, in a rush all I could then remember came to me, which is all that I can still remember: “The Pied Piper of Hamelin”—a little old man with long white hair who plays a cornet and a multitude of rats who pass by him and hurl themselves into the river. With the sketch a poem—“by the English writer” —which mentions a flute, not a cornet, and says that the rats, spellbound, followed the flutist—followed on and on, and all plunged into the water, and the village was freed from the plague. But later there was a vengeance—I don’t know by whom, if by the rats against the flutist or if by the flutist against the people of the town because they did not pay him.

Perhaps, I thought, the rat is still in my room. Perhaps this rat will come or some other he’ll take a liking to, and they’ll reproduce. Perhaps in this way from my room I could launch a plague of rats against the whole pension, against the whole city. But I didn’t want to harm anyone. I was thinking, that’s all.

That night the rat was there, inside a box. Late, in my sleeplessness, deliberately thinking about my childhood, I heard him gnawing at his latest food—my father’s books.

I gave the box a kick, but afterward he kept at it. I kept on too, listening to him.

Those books defy me, but I want to save them. I didn’t want the rat eating them. I took him bread crumbs. I stuffed them through the cracks and that night I didn’t hear his teeth grinding paper. I took him crumbs all the time, but not every night was he satisfied with them. Still, I did something to save the books.

I collected crumbs from the dining room table. Only the crust satisfies me. I leave the center, especially since one woman frightened her child—in front of me, the bitch!—by telling him not to eat the center, which makes you fat, for the center is the food of fools and mutes.

I’ve always discarded it, but I never stuffed my pockets with it before. The girl knew it and asked why I did so now. I wanted to play the comic, so I wrote in my notebook, “It’s for my son.” But that didn’t amuse her. Another night she remembered my reply, seeing me collect
crumbs left over by all the boarders, and asked how old my son was. I didn't know what to answer because I wanted to keep the joke going and nothing clever came to me. But she was festive and, without awaiting an answer to the first question, asked a second, "What's your son's name?" At the table, drinking his coffee, Rovira was talking. He was telling them about war—or a war. I jotted on my pad for her, "War."

"Hey! His name's War. A baby named War!"

Then, because of my success, the answer to her first question was easy: "He's as old as mankind—even older." But she was no longer listening to me.

I was writing something, a letter, and the cover of the crate creaked. The top was being forced from inside, splintering second by second.

It couldn't be one of my father's formulas; it had to be the rat, which I had forgotten, forgotten now for three days, from the pure emotion of having received that letter from my sister after so many years. I wasn't alone after all.

I wasn't alone in the world, no; but at that moment, in my room, so late, yes I was—and without a voice, which I needed so badly when he broke through and stuck out the fat head of a well-fed beast, when he stuck out—filthy monster—half his fat body and two still-tiny feet. He was a disgusting, ugly monster who looked at me as if in protest, as if announcing punishment, vengeance, and Now I'm going for you while you're lost in the impotence of your own fear.

He still couldn't get out because his stomach was surely too big for him, and the slight lapse of respite in my terror, shameful but justified, allowed me to escape from the chair and climb onto the bed. He struggled harder and lunged, lunged at me; but fell like a spurt of condensed milk, from pure fat and grease, pure bread and paper. And—enormous, hideous, baring his teeth—he advanced and advanced, sticky, dragging, until I felt in my hand my pen and thrust it like a dagger. It penetrated the stomach. I saw blood spurt in a dirty flow, arch, a falling but constant flow.

I grew weak. I fell onto my bed, on my back, abandoned, overcome. Fear and disgust forced me into a deathly lassitude and forced me—oh, miracle!—forced out of me a sound. I didn't know what it was. I believed it to be, I wanted it to be, a flute. And my little flow of voice was terror terminating in music like a flute's.

He made a trail of blood to the canal. I couldn't look at him. Never would I look at him. And yet I see him emptying himself like a gleaming dirty bag with pen sunk into a well of red ink.
A son, the midwife says, and I hear her give the date and time of birth, note down length, weight and sex.

He swallowed some amniotic fluid. He’s blue in the face. He’s screaming. For a moment I register the cry of the newborn child and the data the midwife is listing. I think of the old woman in the house out back—she had a son too. He’s forty now. His mother died yesterday, without her son. I wonder: What did she want from her son when she brought him into the world? What do you want from this child that you just pushed out of you, that you should take up and perhaps lick off, like a cat does her kittens? This is a little crazy.

Or: How will it be when your bundle here is forty, when you are old and perhaps even think you are being poisoned? When you believe it all the last weeks of your life?

Sometimes your friend came to visit. You wouldn’t accept any-
thing edible from anyone else anymore, but you let her shop for you.

When she went to the little general store across the street, she was waited on first. She could only buy pre-packaged things, sealed milk and meat spreads in cellophane—anonimously prepared wares. There was surely no one who hated you in those food packaging plants.

Your friend could pretend better than you. For the last ten years of your life you had played the role of the eccentric old lady, but your character was no longer in demand. Finally you believed it yourself, and your persecution complex wasn't even your last big number. This fear of actually being poisoned! While your son is travelling somewhere. Absorbed by business, concerned with getting positions someone else loses. He knows how to do that. He was a good student; he has never lost, only won more; knowledge, and little personality; marketable.

And only one obsession. Like you. He sits at his desk, a heavy piece of furniture, oak, in the middle of his construction business, making money on the building boom, on rising prices and cheap foreign labor. Behind him is a wood-panelled wall and his management, in front of him his contracts.

As you raised him, so has he become.

I come out of the anesthesia, hear the midwife announcing my son. Date, time, weight, length fifty-two centimeters. See a nurse take him to the newborn station, think: it's still a bundle of needs, hunger and sleep, this miniature edition of a man; think of the possibilities of raising him.

Think: you want to make a peaceable man of him.

You raised him right where he belonged. For him the world began among machines, construction sites and board rooms.

My son's going to get up in the world, you said.

When he was thirty, he had his obsession, his construction business, a wife and children, his order and his old mother in the house out behind the business. There she sat every day at the window looking over the courtyard past the front building to the street. Saw that the housekeeper was pregnant, was sweeping the courtyard. Later saw the child running along beside the housekeeper, who was going into the main building with a pail and scrubrag to clean the hall of the construction and real-estate firm.

The old woman got along well with the other people in the building. Now and then her friend came, who had not married and had no son. She had always worked. What could she tell her friend about her son? At thirty he had reached his goal and his obsession. Sat at his desk and cut fat white erasers into paper-thin slices with a razor blade.
He thought of marzipan and his secretary, a pretty young girl. She had to buy him supplies of fat, white, plush erasers at wholesale. Otherwise he was a man an advertising agency could have drawn up. A whiskey, pipe and underwear man, an electronics and robot man, a sport car and cologne man, efficient, clever and vital, confident, in top shape and capable.

A man as you imagine him, in four-color print and Cinemascope. A man who is trained and ready, behind a desk or in a foxhole. One who is universally useful, especially when things become serious. A catastrophe.

Your son, the midwife says, and the nurse holds him up in front of me. Seven pounds and fifty-two centimeters. We both came through the birth with no complications. He was just a little blue in the face. He had swallowed amniotic fluid.

Your son, the midwife said. Does she mean the one imitating the men shot in westerns, the one with the holster on his hip, the one standing there with his legs spread apart, pelvis forward, always ready to slay the enemy? A notch in his Colt—a corpse.

Nurtured up from his diapers by his mother, he’ll become a man, schooled between nursery and kitchen, between racetrack and hobby-horse.

Your son.

Or do you want more?

You loved him, as one loves a souvenir in a shop window. You rehearsed how to make a man out of a male child. His role and your stage directions were pre-established.

He is five years old when he draws his first fantasies on the walls of his nursery. Fantasies in a neat room, between four white-painted walls. On the one wall he projects his father, has him standing there wide-legged, always prepared, laden with TV, refrigerator and washing machine, in his back hand the new car. You’ll knock the games out of him, fantasies on a white wall, where you can’t find a single speck. Then he draws a lion on the wall, that his father is strangling with his bare hands.

That boy, with his strange ideas.

Until he has the lion bite. Now he draws his two guns, shoots from the hip with both hands, and finishes off his father, who dies his movie death.

You’ll laugh.

A silly game.

That boy.

Now you are dead. Died of a heart attack.
Three days later your friend finds you and notifies your son. She cleans out your wardrobe and piles the old clothes on the floor.

What can I do with them, says your son, and gives them to charity. The housekeeper says, she thought she was being poisoned. My mother always had strange ideas, says your son. He bought your role as the eccentric old lady. He gives the knick-knacks in the window to your friend.

At your funeral he's carrying soft white paper-thin slices of eraser in his coat pocket; he has his secretary with him. He says he will mourn for you. A son, says the midwife, and I hear her announce date and time, note length, weight and sex.

Seven pounds. A lightweight. I imagine how he'll grow up. He's a few minutes old, and already you're laying your plans. I'm figuring out the possibilities of making the person I love out of him.

You dismiss the future of the western heroes. Colts and notches are out. Computers and robots are interchangeable, my son.

When things become serious, you won't let them draft you, you and the others. I think through the possibilities. Is that why you've brought him into the world, to change it?
A PORTRAIT OF
ION CARAION
MARGUERITE DORIAN

In 1943, in a Europe plowed by war, and his country under fascist occupation, a young Romanian poet wrote in his debut volume: “Once, when I shall be a great poet hired at farms of images...”

The poem was sarcastically planning for a doubtful future, for life was a “schizoid wound” lived in a landscape of war and disaster among “blood bakeries” and “evenings like cattle slaughtered at the wall;” in gangrenous cities “youth wiped life’s stable with loneliness” and “stars climbed to the heart’s window / and stared into brothels where you shed your soul / in the cyanide-burned pail.” His poems were raging, burning with the fever of a youth that would reform the world, denouncing the waxworks of this decayed time. The volume was promptly seized by the fascist censorship but the prophecy of that verse has come to pass: three decades and eleven volumes of poems later, Ion Caraion is simply that “great poet” and his work a landmark in contemporary Eastern poetry.

If Caraion’s name continues to be absent from current English anthologies of Eastern European poetry, depriving the reader of one of its important aspects, the fact can be blamed on Caraion’s own untranslatability combined with the difficulty of bridging two traditions of poetry, the Western and the Eastern one. Much as we view poetry as a universal experience, the miracle which unifies human diversity, and we regard the vast body of poems of the world as fragments of the same meteor, the form in which this universal miracle happens too often proves to be welded to a very specific tradition. Caraion is a case in point.

English translators have already remarked on the strange bones on which East European poetry grows and called it an experience somewhat outside the Western tradition. The strange bones on which Romanian poetry grows are possibly the bones of the lyrical tradition and what goes into their making ultimately evades analytical decanting: the curve of a certain landscape; the reverberation of sharply defined seasons; a rich, original body of folklore with ballads, legends and myths and that unique form of Romanian song called doina,
practiced in verse for many hundreds of years to the accompaniment of the flute by migrating shepherds; Ovid’s exile on the shores of the Black Sea; echoes of Byzantine civilization; a tradition of metaphorical thinking which nimbly grasps life in its most secluded, warmest stirrings; and, of course, a language in itself immensely lyrical in its everyday functional task, the instrument of a human being that extends easily into song.

The essentially lyric quality of Romanian poetry is not verbose exaltation of diffuse emotions. Lyricism is a fever of clairvoyance—a paradox on which the very act of poetry is built—and can be a hot line to the mysteries of the universe, a means of self-scrutiny and self-knowledge. The aphoristic, compressed power of Ion Caraion’s two-line poems is the power of lyricism brought to its highest pyroclastic form:

MANKIND

Fruit burst forth in cosmos
For the only and last time

STONES
to C. Brancusi

Like nature—beautiful without knowing—
in the shade and the sun
sleep the bones of the earth.

The caustic voice of Caraion’s first works, Panopticum, Cintece negre (Black Songs) and Omul profilat pe cer (Man Outlined Against the Sky) expands and grows in the poetry of his mature years. Eseu (Essay), Dimineata nimanui (Nobody’s Morning) and Necunoscutul fenestrelor (The Unknown of the Windows) are a complete universe, a replica built in every form of poetry which he masters with cool authority, quite in contrast with the high temperatures at which his poetry breathes. The theme is still the tragedy of existence, yet the poet of this period can balance disaster and transfiguration, sustain miracle and disillusionment, witness genesis and destruction. Caraion has not surrendered his anger nor has he, in fact, acquired a sense of harmony or cosmic balance. The substantiality, the steadfastness of his universe comes from the presence of a whole new series of poems where his moral commitment is no longer stated in the well-known corrosive voice but springs now from a core of strength and purity.
he no longer cares to conceal. The poems are simply that high lyrical
tide which seems to be “given” once in a while in a poet’s life—not
too often and not to every poet—a mysterious presence which sepa­
rates the permanent value from the merely contemporary one. This
great lyrical surge announced itself early in Caraion’s work when,
among the burning skies of his Black Songs a poem like “Clasicism”
(“Classicism”) strikes a high, pure note of wonderment at life, but
gathers momentum only in his later work with pieces like “Geneze”
(“Genesis”), “Carmen seculare,” “Tirzia din tara vinturilor” (“The
Late Love from the Country of the Winds”) or the poem “Dumnezeu”
(“God”) in the cycle “Cele patru cercuri ale signuratatii” (“The
Four Circles of Loneliness”). These poems are, in fact, a celebration
of life, more ardent, more satisfying and more complete than pure
joy, a rare visitor on Caraion’s planet.

With the volumes Cirtita si aproapele (The Mole and its Kin)
and Cimitirul din stele (The Graveyard in the Stars), the voice of
Black Songs returns. The experience which has sent the man to the
limits of his endurance is not directly named but the poems heave a
cry that burns black holes into the sky, extinguishes one star after
the other:

AT THE ROTTEN SEA

We shall torture you, we shall kill you and we shall laugh
then we will be killed and others will laugh
we are old enough and shrewd enough
not to care
everything is truth, even the lie
everything is lie, even truth—
darkness begets itself.

Turned inward like a knife closing into its own sheath, the flesh
and the soul sick with existing and with witnessing, the poet suffers
the poem which now seems to come as if against his own will, like
short jolts of illness, of fever. The pleasure in words, in the lattice­
work of his earlier craft is lost, speech becomes “these little sad in­
ventions: the words.” Charged, aphoristic, taut, torn out of a mono­
lithic silence, the silence of despair, his verse acquires the density of
prophetic utterance, encloses in a snug envelope all the sense and the
nonsense of the universe: “And yet I know murders are being cele­
brated somewhere” and “the earth has eaten its own wells” and “I’ve
been at the prophets’ fair and/ I rolled in the grass of the word tamers/
I know the pain in the eyes/ turned inward to eat up their tears.

Yet poetry would not be extinct. "With a simple flower, the heart/ divides the world in two" and "in every stone lies a Sleeping Beauty." Man claws his way back out of the abyss. The moments of "illumination" return but they lead now to a different source. His cycle, "Vase de sacrificiu" ("Ritual Vessels"), re-examines the theme of his earlier "God," this time not in the "circle of loneliness." Orchestretrated with the search of mankind, the poet's quest loses itself in a brotherhood with man's naive and primitive ancestors, a brotherhood of terror and transfiguration.

The unbearable poignancy which marks Ion Caraion's art is here, at the bleeding confluence of these two aspects of his universe: the man who has witnessed humanity degrading and destroying man can also "walk the fields with the chick of the partridge/ light in my palms." His poetry troubles us and gratifies us and feeds us because he is his own "man outlined against the sky," a helpless man plotted against infinity; Caraion's art speaks of this anonymity, of its fevers and its passions with such force that his poetry becomes a cry for protecting man, for saving him and in the end, The Unknown of the Windows is the one to whom all the windows look up in hope and Nobody's Morning becomes everyone's.
Ion Caraion

TOMORROW THE PAST COMES

No longer for me is there anything late. All is late.
The blood runs like a subway through capitals.
And the past is everywhere like the blood.
    In the sunrise of the rivers red
with lightning and groups of centaurs
there was a kind of light—I don’t know what kind of light that was.
    In the fog much becomes clear.

Ion Caraion

ABYSS

I am the tumbling stone.
I was at the prophets' fair and
I rolled in the grass of the word-tamers.
I know the pain in the eyes
turned inward to eat up their tears.

The water frisked a while among trout.
The wind lingered a while at the gates.
You turn back in yourself.
Close yourself in the dead.
You are the tumbling stone.

Ion Caraion

ALWAYS, IN MARCH

Even uprooted, still their flowers
going on blooming, the trees
looked around them: centuries old and adamant.
Always in March
racing the torrents, driving to despair essentiality
the trees were overwhelming.

They mauled each other, they mingled
like ghosts
like planets
or
like a bag of enormous silences
mingling with the time inside the bag.
With the time devastated by immobility.

Better: like some electors of light
invaded by their own restlessness and doubts.

And then the seeds would burst forth.

*Ion Caraion*

**UNORNAMENTATION**

No one discovers anything for you, alone
you discover the miracles you can believe in.
All other miracles have died a thousand times
in a thousand people
and no one wonders about them any longer
but to lie again and again.

This weariness was needed, needed
these solitudes to surround me,
to be without splendor, to heed
as before the symmetrical air—
... not to be able to tell anything.

To hear
the gunfire, the spoken sadness
of the city
twice ornamented in red.

With barrels
stained green by absence,
needed the wound, needed the wind
unlimited and chaste. And the tear
forbidding sleep.
Nothing but the shadow. Under butterflies
another sky deceives.

No one discovers anything for you, alone
you linger
in the verdigris of grass among skulls and crayfish.
A thousand birds walk without a magus—
and then it is silence, it is weariness,
always there is someone who won't be gone enough.

**Ion Caraion**

**TOAST**

To those who lead ships and trains in the night
to the dam keepers like dragons locked
in the rhythm and incendiary saps of doing—
rest assured I shall not move from here
look into our thoughts; no one anywhere ever would forsake them
for you can't forsake the laws of being;
to the lips that will stop the conceivers of death
to the pith of the secret and of the bread to the artificers of tradition
to the earth to the fountain to the boulders to the ladders
walked by the sister of the mirror-maker
to the fickle one to the miner’s lamp to the constant one to the pilot
soaring to await the moribund—
rest assured that time should not be wounded by a single doubt;
to the one who comes out of the woods in time
to the doctor’s hand like a heliotropic system
to the fingers groping for the candlestick of smile or the star or the brow
to the continuities to the fever to the silence to the earthenware
of certitude with which mind meets men
to the leaves awakening beside birds raving
to the snowflakes to the squirrel redder than wine
to the newborns who together with the sun with the air with the snows
with temptation shall flood the zodiac—
rest assured and clink your glass! Present are also the ones who are not
it's just that their hearts are graced with wind
it's just that their blood is loaded with glosses
their voices are heard from afar
and through the midnight firs
moves the tide of unanimous vigils.
You lift the glass
and in the heart of blizzards and of durations
the voices of those who aren't here
scatter the fears shake the mountains caress the seas open the legend.
Trust in their delight
from afar transparent like fog;
to the unanimous laws of being
to those who divine for the smile and the horizons
and who guide the magnesium of essential toys
to the eyes that shall not sleep a wink tonight
like a scarf of electrons in the unfoldings of this New Year like

near the lips of the moon near the lips of the sun
we shall be together all the time—
tower of space gathering
in its cup
all the grapes of light.
It's just that our words would reach them like fantastical paths
and cover them with love and transparence.

**Ion Caraion**

**SHAPES**

All around the waters flow into eternity
like the shape of thought into the shape of pain.
Hallucinating silences
dance on the salver of the equinoxes.
Here the past and the future lie down in flames.

Cardinal points
Solitude—God

Your body was born spirit ·
Edwin Honig

PASSES FOR NICANOR PARRA

Imagine it’s late and you’ve dreamed
you dreamed there are no prisons anywhere
and no prisoners

A naked man comes up to test your smile
You cut him off
He returns smiling and in chains

At ease with wife and children
you sail together toward an island
At the helm you know the boat is sinking

The children try to bail out but it’s too late
You leap into the sea When you turn
the boat sails by with wife and children cheering

You are thinking of an old friend who died
You turn in your chair and he is there
filling the doorway smiling

You rise and he walks towards you
As you leave the room he sits down in your chair
You return to see him watch you enter smiling

He sits beside you as you try to rise
If only he’d move or stand up himself
you’d spring to your feet in a flash

You make a last effort but it’s no use
You turn to glare at him
He is weeping inconsolably

You are in a strange city watching
knots of men all day binding lamp posts
with flowers and flying banners

At nightfall when you strain to see what’s up
they chain and dump you before the marching band
advancing with hatchets instead of trumpets
Bohdan Antonych

FOREVER

Gray overcoats sink into wine-dark streets.  
The shadows slur the girls like colors from cave paintings.  
Golden tea in a glass. The urge to lean  
out a window and drink blue coolness,  
and look on as the sad star  
throws a parting kiss to her falling sister,  
who will never shine,  
in a constellation.  
And so night  
washes the city poppies of melancholy.

Wrapping the blue fur of sky over his humped back  
the chauffeur rocks in a drowsy limousine.

The lame streetlight—a broken flower—in ashes  
of snow—sifts green suet from the jar of night.  
Dark and winding stairs, slashed overcoat, the last drop of laughter,  
and the moon—a demonic white bird of prey—  
and the silky bullet of cutthroats sleepwalking through deep shadows,  
will strike your heart like a chord,  
will strike it, kiss it, and shut  
your squinty eyelids like the last sister.  
The gray overcoats dig into their pockets for stars  
to pay the girls for five minutes of love.

Wrapping the blue fur of sky over his humped back  
the chauffeur rocks in a drowsy limousine.
Bohdan Antonych

GRAVEYARD OF CARS

In a graveyard of machines, dead cars sleep like hunks of fractured stars,
red flowers of mold mark time rusted into metal,
only the sun’s unknown nucleus rocks like an eternal truth we can't grasp hold of, the blue essence of benzine.

Like jackals, human scavengers rend the metal corpses, spreading their poverty and greed like merchandise through the marketplace, and in gascolored nights the metal corpses serve as beds of love for the cripples and whores, through whom the spiked stars funnel their vapors.

As we dig the bones of pangolines out from under the scored rock, so men will unearth the metal bones of our cities. Girls with nameless flowers, palmtrees growing bread, green rue, rising cities with skyblue squares where fire-lions cavort, and the edgy shadows, shaky phantoms, get up from under the earth, squares, grass.

Metropolis, with the palms of your brick walls cover the eyes of these cars forever!

Bohdan Antonych

HORSESHOES

Spring comes in on a hundred carts, the violin bows bend like bows.
Rain is sifted out of the clouds and the deacon lights the candles.

But we are not yet ready to ride, though the contrabass urges us on. Let the blacksmiths forge our horseshoes from the flesh of the moon.
Bohdan Antonych

SIGN OF THE LION

Kingdom of dead flowers, the desert sleeps,
in a red-gold shirt of sands.
The sow-thistle, thorny predator,
sun's ecstasy and charge of lightning.

Live candles breathe over earth's tomb,
rough weeds flare into a burning bush.
Like branches parted by the hands
the pits of faith will open.

You see eternity—opal skies—
the roar of fiery red rivers.
The Lion rules from beyond the hills of time,
sign of monarchs, warriors, and prophets.

The sun darkens a cloud of birds
crowned by cerulean laurels,
and thunder's golden signature
will go down in the pages of the desert.

The thunder's autograph in the royal book
is written by the winds of Sinai,
from high cliffs which wear
the garland of god's lightning.

Wind from Sinai, smash the open tablets!
Without you I am no more than an empty jar.
The day stands watch over the prophetic springs,
and the nights like the black spine of a Bible.

Bohdan Antonych

STORM

The storm bends gray alders
that huddle together in fear.
The red sky asks for mercy,
for a moment to breathe.
A pole of wind stands up again—
lightnings charge until poppies
squint their bright red eyes,
bowing to the messengers of fear.

A cry of clarinets and the howling
of night's astronomer—the fox.
Thunder cuts a tin plate
out of the red horsecloth sky.

Beyond the storm the clear horizon
digs up the holes in clouds.
And then my words, whetted like swords,
clash with lightning bolts.

Bohdan Antonych

DUET

Slowly we turn to earth as to a cradle,
tied by the green knots of herbs—two captive chords.
The sun's ax cuts into an oakstump,
moth music, kind wind, proud idol of oak.

Day ferries us—warm bodies that meld
into each other like two dreams, two flowers.
Warmed by the fur of moths you'll barter stars
for whispers, blood for green music. The sky chimes.

The wind sleeps beyond horizons, and our faithful stars,
our fates, wait in the sea's suburbs,
wait for the earth to make them real. We'll push aside
all dross and carry ecstasy to the stars.

Blood's fire hurts. Arrows of eyebrows pierce,
and the wall of melody above is like an echo,
like winged wind. Our fate's in the hands of the stars.
Green and thirsty like earth you burn. You are music.
Hugo Claus

ACHTER TRALIES

Zaterdag zondag maandag trage week en weke dagen

Een stilleven een landschap een portret

De wenkbrauwen van een vrouw
Die zich sluiten als ik nader

Het landschap waarin blonde kalveren waden
Waar het weder van erbarmen
In het Pruisisch blauw der weiden ligt gebrand

Toen heb ik nog een stilleven geschilderd
Met onherkenbare wenkbrauwen en een mond als een maan
Met een spiraal als een verlossende trompet
In het Jerusalem van mijn kamer.

Hugo Claus

De schapen door de vossen aangerand
in uier en buik gebeten
leven tot's morgens vroeg.

Zo blaat ik stiller al. Herinnering
wordt dagdroom, het zwellend leven kalk.

(In de karige zon kauwen de schapen.)

Zonder tanden, geen gezang.
Zonder zwavel, geen vlam.

En het muierslied wordt een mechanisch
alarm. Het gedicht is een zwam.
Hugo Claus

BEHIND BARS

Saturday sunday monday slow week and weak days

A still life a landscape a portrait

A woman’s eyelids
closing as I come near

The landscape with blonde cattle wading
with the season of pity
burnt into the Prussian blue of the fields

And I painted yet another still life
with unrecognizable eyebrows and a mouth like a moon
and a spiral like a redeeming trumpet
in the Jerusalem of my room.

Hugo Claus

The sheep, assaulted by foxes and
wounded in udder and belly,
live until dawn.

Thus my bleating quietly dies. Memory
fades into daydream,
swelling life into chalk.

(And in the sparse sun the grazing sheep.)

No song without teeth.
No flame without sulphur.

And the mutineers’ song fades into
a mechanical alarm. The poem is a fungus.
Hugo Claus

In die tijd, in den beginne, ontsnapte de taal uit het middenrif.


Tussen vele waarschuwingen, geschift tussen tong en tand leerde ik:

haat     nood     vlies
wraak    moord    verlies

Hugo Claus

De bron werd een tij en de planeet, een der zovele,
met een maan in haar baan
die de zee doet zwellen en de vrouwen kende haar getijden: vermaningen,
slaap en geweld.

Verbluft herkenden wij de daad: de echo van de zon: het woord
dat de dingen dekt, het bekende verwekt.
Hugo Claus

In those days, in the beginning, language escaped from the midriff.

Rut, need, hunger. And you:
a source, a counterform.

From among numberless warnings,
sorted out between tongue and teeth,
I gathered:

- hunger
- murder
- membrane
- revenge
- malice
- loss

Hugo Claus

The spring grew into a tide
and the planet, one among many,
(in its orbit a moon
making seas swell, and women)
knew its tidal waves: exhortations,
sleep and violence.

Stunned, we recognized the act:
the echo of the sun: the word,
covering
what is there, begetting what is known.
Robert Bringhurst

PORTRAIT IN BLOOD

Dance draws the blood to focus
through the muscle of the dancer, through
the watcher's eye, dance draws
the nerve to focus and the mind through the nerve
to the eye, to the blood
of the dancer, the watcher,
the dance of the dancers
echoing beyond them, echo into song, as of
song into singing. . .

the dance that is sculpture
of the form of man in time,
the dance that is portraiture
in motion, in time,

the dance that is joy
of the body in motion,
rhythm written in the body
and the body in motion,

the dance that is motion
made order, the dance
that is order made motion
in space and in time,

the dance that is order
in time, creating place, creating
order in the interface
of motion, space and time

The dance draws time
and space to focus, which is place, and place is
order gone beyond the place
of order. Order echoes, order
eddies back, or boomerangs,
entering into the ear, the eye,
the nerve, the blood, the red bone, drawing
the body into dance, the mind into the dance,
dance into other dance, echo into new
re-echo, gesture into gesture, as of
song into song, creating
echoes between them,
intertwining tempo, texture,
picture, imbrication
of melody, of deep and shallow
shoalwater currents, waves,
combers, breakers, tides, tides running
full, hurtling, climbing, swirling, tides that mash the moorings
under the stage, topple the seats, scatter the dancers, drive
the mind into the dead end of the tooth, the torn nail

listen at the stillness,
listen for the sound

of the grace that will be thunder
that will run the grace aground and under
it all the accidental
order of unordered
space and time,
the opportunity to dance
from time to time,
sometimes with patience and with pleasure
and sometimes with adventure
and sometimes in terror, going
faster and faster. . .

the dance that is sculpture
of the form of man in time,
the dance that is portraiture
in motion, in time,

the dance that is joy
of the body in motion,
rhythm written in the body
and the body in motion,

the dance that is motion
made order, the dance
that is order made motion
in space and in time,
the dance that is order
in time, creating place, creating
order in the interface
of motion, space and time.

Robert Bringhurst

JEBEL SANEEN, LEBANON

There is a secret of the mountain and the sea
and of the bone and the unleashed blood
I make with you.
There is a secret of the uncarved stone
and of the lands that make men’s gods
I make with you.
I need your love to make my hate come true.

Robert Bringhurst

SONG OF THE SUMMIT

The difference is nothing you can see—only
the dressed edge of the air
over those stones, and the air goes
der deeper into the lung, like a long fang,
clean as magnesium. Breathing
always hollows out a basin,

leaving nothing in the blood
except an empty
cup, usable for drinking

anything the mind finds—bitter
light or bright darkness or the cold
corner of immeasurable distance.
This is what remains: the pitted blood
out looking for the vein,
tasting of the tempered tooth and the vanished flame.

Robert Bringhurst

THE GREENLAND STONE

Gods immersed in the masked
North American air
vanish like cryolite,
vanish like the kayak’s
white stone anchor hitting
bright blue arctic water.

The snowfall in the stone
clears when the lightfall slows
the way the heart’s thought, the eye’s
mossy chalcedony
and the mind’s wet marrow
clarify when it quickens.
Jayanta Mahapatra

SAMSARA

In a sky shaking itself
from the long burning rains,
the first grasses of cirrus.

The year’s new-painted gods
block traffic in the town’s streets.

Somewhere a fair Brahman priest
waits haughtily by the temple doors.

A prayer falls,
testing movement, the shadowy light of the spirit.
Offerings of marigolds, fruit and shaven hair
stare like terrified men.

The centre is the past that circles the grass.

This past
is the name of the future that lives inside.

Jayanta Mahapatra

SLEEP

Does the universe
    hide behind
her symbolic darkness?

Deep shafts where
the white wake of moonlight
    will not reach,
where we wait to be comforted,
gulls sliding down
the face of night like lost eyes,
    wondering
of that world impossible to give.
Jayanta Mahapatra

AMONG THE TREES

Trees deep set in the gathering dark,
the stench of worms in the summer heat.

A lean long night
clatters down the burning hills.

On the riverbank a jackal
slinks past a smouldering skull
into a thickening of grasses.

Somewhere beyond the village,
dumbly watching a mongrel
sidle up to a begging three-year-old
and sniff his naked penis,

I feel my future hop up and down my throat,
as though embarrassed, not knowing where to settle,
as though its story had lost its load of blood.

The trees stand there before me;
a guilt, a pain, or a little mercy—
have I grown my trees with them?
Are they really there, and all their crowded branches?

The rest would be silence, making up its mind.
In that mysterious world beyond my shape,
nothing can be seen or measured. At times
I see it smile, coaxing a promise out of me.

Jayanta Mahapatra

INDIAN IDYLL

Here, on some slab of common stone,
the blue shadows of worship rest;
a grey owl flies past,
the ends of a sacred verse flutter and disperse.
In the dim oil light
a man looks at the girl he had once married.
The last cart winds down by the hillock beyond.
Earth-grass is tipped with silver in the rain.

Sleep descends, a river calmly overflows its banks.
On the stained stone a small puddle trembles
in the ghost-light of the moon.
Is it the earth that catches its breath?
Or is one there?
Only a shredded prayer flag keeps twisting in the wind.

Something in a woman’s eyes tempts confessions
from her husband as they stretch out to sleep.
A time never lost, rising in fog, that floats upon
gnarled old trees charring the flesh, beneath the stars,
the gods casually breezing through the air, among bones.

Jayanta Mahapatra

AT THE BURNING GROUND

The dead ones draw close, looking over the edge
along the riverbank where a new pyre flames high;
the river moves farther away in thick smoke;
two gray wood-pigeons as though half-awake
grope around like new ashramites in Rishikesh.
The spell of vermillion burns the flesh,
embroidered fires on some banyan skin.
All dead faces appear the same;
is it their silence which flashes on the water,
stands in triumph to my gesture of defiance?
I gaze long at myself in the river,
unable to make out the features with which
I am familiar—
only an unexpected darkness that lives alone
under the stone which carries me home,
as though I had never grown up,
impertinent, wild child
who would have to be taught his lesson.
Jayanta Mahapatra

NOWHERE

Where does nowhere lie?
Between the sodden sack of night
and the sudden sunlight of purpose
that slips across the grass?

Is nowhere an empty room
rising like a god,
flapping up into the sky?
Its great hand seeking the silent clouds of hope?

It stops short in the middle of a sentence.
It reaches. Where my heavy hands hold each other
behind my back, as I pace my room, waiting, listening;
slumped in the shadows of another summer.

I endure near me the sound of talk and laughter,
the empty room sensing I am trying to smile.
Something sends the wind rushing into me.
It’s only nowhere performing, telling me where.
Harold Town, ENIGMA, 1965, Courtesy Mazelow Gallery, Toronto, Photo J. Reeves.
Harold Town, ENIGMA-AFTER EISEN'S CHEF-D'OEUVRE, 1966, Courtesy Mazelow Gallery, Toronto, Photo J. Reeves.
Henrik Nordbrandt

I NAT.

I nat er jeg træt nok
til at sove i fængslerne
og i flodlejerne
under de sneklædte bjaerge
og jeg kan synke med skibene
laenket til rorbaenkene
i blomsterduften under Afrikas kyster.
I nat er jeg træt nok
til at gøre min grav smuk
med pinefulde erindringar
som først bliver mine
efterhanden som jeg glemmer dem.
I nat kan jeg føle
mine blodarer hele vejen ud
til der bliver sort.
Og tyng en af mit skelet
skal fortaelle mig, i nat
højden på de bjaergpas
som jeg overstiger i mine dromme.

Henrik Nordbrandt

HJEMKOMSTEN.

Dine foraeldre
er blevet foraeldre
til andre
og dine soskene, naboer.
Naboerne
er blevet naboer til andre
og de andre bor
i andre byer.
I de andre byer vender de hjem
nojagtigt som du.
Og de finder dig
ligesa lidt
som du finder dem.
Henrik Nordbrandt

TONIGHT

Tonight I am tired enough
to sleep in the prisons
and in the river beds
under the snow-clad mountains
and I can sink with the ships
chained to the galley thwarts
in the flower scent under Africa’s coasts.
Tonight I am tired enough
to garnish my grave beautifully
with tormented memories
which only become mine
as I gradually forget them.
Tonight I can trace
my veins all the way out
until things go black.
And the weight of my skeleton
will tell me tonight
the height of the mountain passes
which I go beyond in my dreams.

Henrik Nordbrandt

THE HOMECOMING

Your parents
have become parents
to others
and your brothers and sisters, neighbors.
The neighbors
have become neighbors to others
and the others live
in other cities.
In the other cities they come back home
exactly as you do.
And they find you
no more than
you find them.
Henrik Nordbrandt

STATION

den ode perron
har drukket sig maet
i de vaeskende ure
istapper gennemborer
alle glas
alle visere tier

i nattens
vinterstore ventesal
fisker ingen sovende oldinge
deres dromme op af knasthuller
ingen saelsomt bemalede vogne
bringer palmer
til forblaeste billetluger
kun frosne skove
soger tvivlende bevaegelse
kun fugle nedstobt i rodder
leder efter deres stemmer
og sma hvide gnavere
slaeber mishandlede cykler
gennem smuldrende longange
men kviste
tarne og karnapper
skyder ud i rummet

og drankerasyn blomstrer
med blaudkraengede laeber
bestovet af den forste sne

fjerne forkrigstog
nedlaegger bragende
deres skinner i landskabet
pa vejene
farer ligtagtild
i begravelsesklokkers virvar
Henrik Nordbrandt

STATION

cut through
the glass
of all the poisonous dripping clocks
all the hour-hands keep silent

in the night's
winter-huge waiting room
no dozing old men fish
out their dreams from knotholes
no mysteriously painted railroad cars
bring palm trees
to windswept ticket windows

only frozen forests
skeptically look for movement
only birds cemented to roots
search for their voices
and small white rodents
drag battered bicycles
through crumbling passages
but twigs
towers and bay windows
jut out into space

and drunkard faces bloom
with blue inverted lips
pollinated by the first snow

distant pre-war trains
lay down their rails in the landscape
with a thundering clang
while on the roads
burial processions lose their way
in the chaos of funeral bells
og et sted
devaeges du af tiden
ubevaegeligt sammenkrunnet
om et bestemt billede
i et ubegrundet tog
gennem et uforanderligt
blat landskab

Henrik Nordbrandt
DIGTET SOM VILLE EN BLOMST

selvfortærende munde bevandrede hinanden
sojler af gips sprojtede op om stemmerne

imellem levende mumiekon og abnet statuehud
var dit ansigt alene

en handgribelig del
af blomsterbedenes stilhed i natten

en blomst sprang ud af din mund
fordi digtet ville det

men selv da grammofonens nal
havde gennemboret ordene

stod dit ansigt tilbage på min hand
som endnu et digt

der ikke ville andet end netop
vaere et ansigt for den laesende
and somewhere  
you are moved by time  
arched immovably  
around a particular picture  
in an ungrounded train  
through an immutable  
blue landscape

Henrik Nordbrandt

THE POEM THAT WISHED A FLOWER

self-devouring mouths wandered over each other  
pillars of plaster spurted around the voices

between living mummy genitals and exposed statue flesh  
your face alone was

a tangible part  
of the flowerbeds’ night silence

a flower blossomed from your mouth  
because the poem wished it

but even when the phonograph’s needle  
had penetrated the words

your face remained imprinted on my hand  
like yet another poem

that wished for nothing but simply to  
be a face for the reader
Henrik Nordbrandt

NAR ET MENNESKE DOR

Nar et menneske dor
bliver dets omgivelser tilbage:

Bjaergene i det fjerne
kvarterets huse
og vejen som om sondagen
gar over en traebro
lige inden den forer ud af byen.

Og forarssolkinnet
som lidt ud pa eftermiddagen
nar en hylde med boget
og tidsskrifter, som uden tvivl
engang var nye.

Det er ikke spor maerkeligt.
Men det har ikke desto mindre
ofte undret mig.

Henrik Nordbrandt

HVOR VI END REJSER HEN.

Hvor vi end rejser hen, kommer vi altid for sent
til det vi engang tog afsted for at finde.
Og i hvilke byer vi end opholder os
er det de huse, det er for sent at vende tilbage til
de haver, det er for sent at tilbringe en maneskinsnat i
og de kvinder, det er for sent at elske
som plager os med deres uhandgribelige naervaer.

Og hvilke gader vi end synes at kende
forer de os udenom de blomsterhaver, vi leder efter
og som spredes deres tunge duft over kvarteret.
Og hvilke huse vi end vender tilbage til
ankommer vi for sent om natten til at blive genkendt.
Og hvilke floder vi end spejler os i
ser vi forst os selv nar vi har vendt ryggen til.
Henrik Nordbrandt

WHEN A PERSON DIES

When a person dies
his surroundings remain behind:

The mountains in the distance
the neighborhood's houses
and the road that on Sunday
goes over a wooden bridge
just before it leads out of town.

And the spring sunshine
that somewhat late in the afternoon
reaches a shelf of books
and magazines which undoubtedly
were once new.

It's not a bit strange.

But all the same it has
often surprised me.

Henrik Nordbrandt

NO MATTER WHERE WE TRAVEL.

No matter where we travel, we always arrive too late
for that which we once departed to find.
And in whatever cities we stay
it's the houses it is too late to return to
the gardens it is too late to spend a moonlit night in
and the women it is too late to love
that plague us with their intangible presence.

And whatever streets we think we know
lead us outside the flower gardens we are looking for
whose heavy fragrance spreads over the neighborhood.
And whatever houses we return to
we arrive too late at night to be recognized.
And whatever rivers we are reflected in
we first see ourselves when we have turned our backs.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

LEE K. ABBOTT. JR. has published short fiction with *Prism international*, *Epoch*, *Kansas Quarterly* and other journals. He is currently enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Arkansas.

CONCEPCION T. ALZOLA was born in Havana, Cuba in 1930. Since 1950 she has published novels, anthologies and collections of short fiction. She has received grants from UNESCO of England and the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica de Madrid to pursue research into Cuban folklore.

BENNY ANDERSEN was born in Copenhagen in 1929. He has published several volumes of poetry, plays, children's books, and two collections of short stories. "Hiccups," published in this issue of *Mundus Artium*, was taken from a collection of short fiction titled *The Pillows*.

BOHDAN ANTONYCH is a Ukrainian poet who died in 1937 at the age of twenty-eight. His poetry books were divided into poems about country life and poems about city life.

JAMES BARNES is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Northeast Missouri State University. He has published both translations and his poetry in many journals.

ALBERTS BELS is a Soviet Latvian writer. The story published in this issue of *Mundus Artium* marks his first appearance in English translation. The story is taken from a 1968 collection, *Es pats lidzenuma*.

ANTONIO DI BENEDETTO was born in Mendoza, Argentina in 1927, where he is currently the editor of the newspaper *Los Andes*. His fiction includes *Mundo animal* (1953), *El pentágono* (1955), *Zama* (1956), *Declinación y ángel* (1958), *El silenciero* (1964), and *Two Stories* (1965).

MAJA BESTER is doing post-graduate work in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan.
BOHDAN BOYCHUCK has published five books of poetry in Ukranian and is co-editor of Co-Ordinates: An Anthology of Modern Ukranian Poetry in the West, published in 1969. He has translated Beckett, Jimenez, Cummings and others into Ukranian.

J. M. BRICEÑO-GUERRERO lives in Merida, Venezuela where he teaches at the Universidad de los Andes. He has published two novels, Dóulos Oukoón and Triandáfila, under the pen name of Jonuel Brigue.

ROBERT BRINGHURST has published two volumes of poetry: The Shipwright's Log (1972), and Cadastre (1973). He recently was awarded the Follet-Curry Poetry Prize. Both his poems and translations from Greek, Arabic, French and Latin have appeared in numerous journals.

MANUEL CAPETILLO is a young Mexican writer who has published a novel, El cadáver del tío. The novel is included in the 'Colección Letras Mexicanas' series of the Fondo de Cultura Económica publishing house.

NADIA CHRISTENSEN has published poems, literary criticism and translations in Spain, Chile, England, Canada and the United States. She recently co-translated a Danish novel which will be published by Harper & Row.

R. M. CHUCKOVICH was born in Santa Monica, California in 1940. His writing credits include a television cartoon series, and two motion picture screenplays.

HUGO CLAUS was born in Bruges, Belgium in 1929. An original member of the "Movement of the Fifties" which revolutionized Dutch and Flemish poetry around 1950, his literary output includes over fifty titles consisting of plays, novels, stories and poems.

STEFANO CUSUMANO was born in Tampa, Florida in 1912. He has received numerous awards and has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Carnegie Institute, and the Tweed Museum. He is currently preparing a collection of "Demonstration" drawings for his book on structural drawing.

MARGUERITE DORIAN has published poetry in Romanian and prose in English. Her latest novel, The Waterbearer, is to be published soon by Macmillan.

AUTRAN DOURADO has written seven novels and has been awarded several major literary prizes in Brazil. A Barca dos Homens, a novel which was named Book of the Year by the Brazilian Union of Writers in 1961, has been translated into German, French and Spanish. The stories published in this issue are taken from Solidão (1972).
RAUL CALDAS FILHO was born in Santa Catarina, Brazil in 1940. His “crônicas” (short short stories) have appeared in an anthology called *Crônicas*, and he has recently published a book of short stories.

H. E. FRANCIS is a writer, translator and editor. A recent short story was awarded the Best Story 1974 by the *Kansas Quarterly*. He is founding editor of *Poem* and poetry editor of *This Issue*. Mr. Francis teaches English at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

ROBERT FOX is a well-published writer living in Southeastern Ohio who edits The Carpenter Press.

ELOAH F. GIACOMELLI has taught in Brazil at both the high school and university levels. Her translations from the Portuguese have appeared in numerous North American periodicals. She now resides in Vancouver, British Columbia.

STUART M. GROSS has published numerous translations of Latin American fiction, including works by Ernesto Sábato. Professor Gross recently retired from active teaching in the English Department at the University of Maine.

JACQUES HAMELINK is a Dutch fiction writer. The selection in this issue is taken from a larger prose piece *Ranuncle*, and is reproduced here with the permission of the Foundation for the Promotion of the Translation of Dutch Literary Works.

HARRY HASKELL is a poet and translator from Chicago, Illinois.

RUDOLF HAUSNER was born in Vienna in 1914. He is a member of the “Vienna School of Fantastic Realism,” whose first exhibition was in 1959 and recently at the Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, 1965 and in Tokyo, Kobe and Nagoya, Japan, 1972. He received the “Preis der Stadt Wien” for painting in 1969 while Professor at the Hochschule für bildende Kunste in Hamburg and the Kunstakademie in Vienna. His most recent creations were exhibited in a one-man show at the Brusberg Galerie, Hannover, 1975.

THEO HERMANS has studied Germanic languages at Ghent University, and Comparative Literature at the Universities of Essex and Warwick in England. He is at present lecturing in the English Department at the University of Algiers.

RICARDO HOFFMANN was born in 1937 in Santa Catarina, Brazil. Based on his first novel (*A Superficie*, 1967), Hoffmann was named ‘novelist of the year’ by the *Journal de Brasil*. His second novel, *Crônica de Medo*, appeared in 1972.
SVEN HOLM was born in 1940 in Copenhagen. He has published four novels and two collections of short stories. From 1965-1967 he also edited the influential anthology Sengehesten.

EDWIN HONIG has published numerous translations and critical studies including the definitive book on Lorca. His most recent publication is a book of poems, *Shake a Spear with me, John Berryman* (1974). He is a professor of Comparative Literature at Brown University.

JULIE HUNT is studying in the English Graduate Program at the University of New Mexico. She has published several translations of Latin American literature.

ROMUALD LENECH is the pseudonym for a young writer who lives in Cracow, Poland. The story which appears in this issue of *Mundus Artium* was first published in the literary weekly, *Zycie literackie*.

ALEXIS LEVITIN has held teaching positions at Dartmouth and Tufts. In 1972 he was hired by the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina to develop a new graduate program in English and American literature. After two years of teaching in Brazil, he returned to New York where, for the past year, he has been translating modern Brazilian poetry and prose.

SVEN AGE MADSEN was born in Arhus, Denmark in 1939. His literary production consists mostly of prose works. His most recent collection of short fiction is *Maskeballet* (1970).

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA is a young writer from Orissa, India. His work has appeared in *Critical Quarterly, The Malahat Review, New York Quarterly, Meanjin Quarterly*, and *TLS*.

LEONIE A. MARX is currently working on a comparative study of the short story in Germany and Denmark after 1945, at the University of Illinois, Urbana. She co-authored with Herbert Kunst, "Brecht's 'Lux in Tenebris'," which was published in a 1973 issue of *Monatshefte*.

MICHAEL MCCORMACK was born in Montana, raised in South Dakota, graduated from Harvard, and lives in New York.

ANGELIKA MECHTEL is a young German short story writer. One of her best known collections of short stories is *Die feinen Totengräber* (1968).

DANIEL MOYANO is a young Argentine writer. Among his recent prose publications is a short novel *El trino del diablo*, (1974), and the collection of stories, *El estuche del cocodrilo*, from which "Kafka 72" is taken.
HENRIK NORDBRANDT was born in 1945 in Copenhagen. Four volumes of his poetry have been published, and translations of his poetry have appeared in journals and anthologies in Europe, the United States and Canada.

FRANCISCO PESQUEIRA MUS is a young Spanish writer who currently lives in Barcelona. He was awarded First Prize in the international literary contest of the review Entre Nosotros in 1974.

PERICLES PRADE was born in 1942 in Santa Catarina, Brazil. He has published three books of poetry and a collection of short stories, Os Milagres do Cão Jeronimo. He is a Federal Judge in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina.

MARK RUDMAN has published translations of Russian and Ukrainian poets in many journals including The Atlantic and Harper's. He is currently involved with the Poets in the Schools Program, teaching children to write poetry.

VILAS SARANG has published short stories and poems in several journals, including the special Asian issue of Tri-Quarterly. He has also appeared in Modern Indian Poetry in English and New Writing in India.

ILZE SEDRIKA-LEVIS currently teaches English at De Anza College. She is Associate Editor of Jaunā Gaita, and a contributing editor for MLA Abstracts.

GUSTAV SCHENK is a German novelist and short story writer. His works include an autobiographical novel Strassen der Unrast and two collections of short stories, Der Rattenkrieg (1947) and Das Buch der Gifte (1953).

HAROLD TOWN is one of Canada's most prolific artists. The two drawings reproduced are from his "Enigma" series dating from 1964-1969. His works are in most major museums and he is represented by the Mazelow Gallery, Toronto.

ELLIOTT URDANG is a child psychiatrist. He has translated material from Lermontov and Mallarmé.

LUIS VILELA is a well known Brazilian short story writer.

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