



uster was the last man to die. He blew us a parting kiss; then, wreathed in baroque spires of golden light, like a radiating Bernini, he ascended into the clear blue sky of October. His figure diminished to a pinpoint, then beyond. Like the Incredible Shrinking Man, he had just leaped into eternity.

Two by two, the rotund warriors leaped into the sky after him and slapped their heavy silk belts with a sound like the bursting of an inflated paper bag, while their heavy exhaling resembled the sound of the crumpling of the exploded bag, which a gull swooped up to snare in its beak and fly away with. Then the warriors, baring their souls to a world gone mad, met head-on in the sky, sending out brain-waves to the farthest reaches of the amphitheater.

By 8:30 that night, he met the legal requirement for death—tracings of his brain waves were flat, the amphitheater was empty and the concession stands were closed—but a slim hope remained because the waves sometimes fade out and then, inexplicably, come back. On the autopsy tables of state hospitals it is relatively common experience to find spoons, stones, pieces of scrap iron, wood, paper, cores, etc. in the stomach or intestines of patients who were affected by an advanced stage of schizophrenia.

I was an example of that.

I was quick and very strong and a tremendous leaper because I had swallowed a spring. This remarkable spring has enabled me to outjump men several inches taller.

In fact, both Clivedale and I stood and watched two Swiss guides enact the "mortal combat", throwing dummies over the precipice. The silence deepened and behind the pines the sun began to grow huge and shoot invisible arrows, though it had still some way to travel before it sank for the night behind the hills covered with rhododendrons. It poured its tremendous energies straight at Clivedale—I stepped aside—and with such violence that his eyes watered and he had to shut them against the dazzle.

One day at the end of February 1935, I remembered, a small wellformed man posed for his photograph astride a bicycle, one foot on the pedal, one hand balancing against the bricks of a building or wall. The winter sunlight made him half close his eyes, but he was smiling faintly, and the lock of thick fair hair which fell over his forehead continued down onto his gray flannel suit, plaid muffler and, as a matter of course, his saddle Oxford shoes.

The effect on viewers was like seeing a photograph of a painting of a shadow of a statue of a man.

"The opposite of pull is push," explained one of the guides, moving a dummy backward and then forward. "So I literally push it with my fingers. It used to get all wrinkled up. Then I put it on my knee and pressed a rubber band on it, usually on the head, gradually letting the rubber band return to normal. The head, unable to wrinkle, did what it wanted to do—it shrank with the rubber band."

"Can't somebody take this flex off me?" demanded Clivedale of an inattentive universe, adding, as I unwreathed him, "And do the taps in the lobby function, by any chance? I should rather like to wash the dust of ages off my hands." He stepped out of the loosened circles of wire and made his exit.

The crude silhouette of a skier is seen poised at the height of an outline of a mountain slope covered with snow. Without moving his arms, his descent begins, and he goes down the slope in slow, jerky movements. At the bottom of the mountain he encounters the picture frame, through which he crashes and skis off across the wall.

Here is how he did it: either a bit of steel is sewn to the muscle, or minute steel filings are injected by needle into the muscle. When an electromagnet is turned on, the metal is drawn toward it, carrying the muscle along with it, toward those great golden heights.

A piece of rain fell and hit the ground.

I walked over and picked it up.

"Invisible ink?" I suggested.

"I don't think so," you answered.

Then at last I heard your voice as it came to me across those alarming distances, your voice neither imagined nor recorded, but real.

At once there was communication. It was as if each listened to the same inner music, wordless but full of meaning, and Ernest's pause lasted long enough for her men to turn and follow her look. They had been arguing with her, dummies, and her head was still lifted in deprecation of their vehemence. Now she crooked her ear as she gave me a slight but very kind smile, one I cannot ever forget, and I was transformed into a happy creature padding over the earth in my moccasins toward her and her waterfall. I had never before had such a welcome from a woman, though she did nothing but murmur names, didn't even give me her hand. But when she smiled the sun came out like a tiny sun magnified billions of times and so dazzled me that I had to force myself to remember my sunglasses.

We knelt quiet for three or four minutes, our eyes closed, our minds leaning close to each other and to the inner edges of life, its triangles pulsing. Then it started, the feel of

power coming out of her rhomboid and into my hand and out of her hand and into my rhomboid. It came slow at first, then in a quick surge as Billy-Jean gave way inside to the urge.

"Fear death!" I cried, incredulous, "Good God, how can you be so dense, sir? I am ready whenever my Maker wishes to call me. What I fear is what happened to my poor friend, the Sultan of Morocco. Poor devil, he died on the operating table, in blood and stench, in a mess of instruments, never knowing that he had died. He even tried rising from the table. What a tragic way to go! No, sir, I do not fear death. I fear only sleep. Therefore I never sleep."

The train had just left Newcastle-upon-Tyne and was dashing through the landscape.

A great sadness creeps over me. I am alive, quite alive, and very healthy in every part of my physical being. But—and here's the rub—in the evening a dusk-laden blue mist descends over my mind, and I find myself lying on the grass in the garden behind our house, hands folded gently over my receding waistline, watching a tiny bee drink from my nose . . .

Then, quicker than suddenly, the vapor and the disc vanished, and the child plunged to the ground. Not a sound from his lips.

Cradling my candle as carefully as I could I ran down the porch steps and took huge leaps across the yard and into the field. In a moment I was at the side of the child, bending over him to lift an eyelid and feel his pulse and hold a mirror in front of his mouth. Behind I could hear the others, coming out of the house.

The child was dead. Lifting him we could see that his neck was broken, probably by the fall.

A tree jumped up out of the ground beside him, a tree with a limb.

There was nothing we could do. We couldn't even maintain the pace. Our legs became heavy and then slowed

down. When this happened the rotation caught up with them, swept them upward until they fell off the sides of the landscape and back onto the part below them. Only to be carried upward and dropped again.

They crashed to a stop.

For several moments, we could only lie flat, but our brainwaves began to whip mildly in the evening light. Rawson sprang up and said, "Father, we've got to get rid of these statues! So far, we've been lucky to have them around, but if this starts rolling again, and it sure as hell will, we might not be so lucky next time."

"Ah!" And there was another dull pause, broken only by the whine of the electric fire. Then father got up from his chair and went out quietly between the curtains.

"It is not," he said from behind them, "in my nature to perform tasks befitting the woman—nor is it in my nature to perform those befitting a man."

Name after name arose at the soft night-summons, formed itself to an entity with remembrance, became firm by memory, became through memory a participant in creation . . . Did a cock crow in the distance? Were there dogs barking out there? The footfall of the guard, surrendered from un-space, the wall fountain drizzling distinctly, the window sash framing an abundance of stars, the head of the snake conjurer flaking quietly in their midst . . .

Breath quickened the silence, breath filled the night . . . And growing out of the night and the silence was that which was always at hand, the breathing world-sleep. The darkness was breathing again, becoming more and more formed, more and more creaturely, more and more earthly, richer and richer in shadows. At first shapelessly, scarcely recognizable, in a certain sense like a point of noise, in scraps of tone and in separate tones, then condensing and collecting in audible form, the creaturly approaching; it was a creaking and rattling moan, and it came towards us from the peasant

carts that were traveling long in ever-narrowing rows bringing victuals to the morning market; sleepy-slow they moved onward, with a rumbling of wheels in pavement ruts, the creaking of axles, the gritty stroke of the wheel-rims on the curbstones, the click of chains and harness, and the soft heavy pulling gait of the animals came into an evenness of step that was like the march of the breath.

Why should all this not remain forever? Why should such effortless felicity change? And no change occurred. Indeed, one could have imagined that even the proceedings inside the room, though taking their course, were not subject to change. Nevertheless they became more significant, more and more extensive. Pregnant with the scent of flowers lifted on the odor of vinegar, the peaceful breath of being lingered on, yet the same moment it was growing, and the harmonious order of the world came to be a whisper charged with warm freshness; this was consummation, and the wonder of it was only that it had ever been otherwise. Now everything was given its proper place, one that might well be retained forever. Impetuously though gently, room and landscape united, the flowers pushed up impetuously in the field, they grew higher than any house, piercing the tree-tops and embracing the sky; human beings swarmed like ants among the plants, setting camp in their shade, making diminutive squeaks of conversation, reclining against their stems, smoking miniature pipes tamped full of fresh tobacco . . .

The physician, Rodin, was still standing in front of the window, and he too could be seen yonder in the circle of frolicking girls, as with a courteous, critical manner he continued to comb the blond beard of his obese face, keeping the mirror close at hand—the mirror reflected the entire scene: mossy springs that rose from an even softer sleep, greening arbutuses which tremulously tinged the mossy moisture, glowing and drying in the noonday, the juniper as well as the chestnut tree heavy with shaggy fruit, and the tiny

mirrors on the taunt grapes that hung from ripening wine-shoot, these too were mirrored. . . . Oh, mirrored nearness, mirrored buoyance, oh how easy it seemed in this reflecting reflection to become one of those yonder, helping the guards to hurl the dummies, helping to tread the juice-sacs in the wine-press. . . . The liquid of nostalgia rose in Rodin's throat. . . . He choked momentarily, and the souls of the people around him participated in the outermost surface as well as in the most invisible yet somehow visible home-depth of that human heart looking out from pulsing infinity. Somewhere there was meeting, meeting without end, alluring by its tender, trepidant longing. The odors of laurel and of blossoms arched across the rivers and floated from grove to grove, carrying with them the gentle salutes of those who communed happily together; and the towns dimming in the distance of light had shed their names so that they were only softly palpitating air. Did the slave still have the milk at hand? Rodin doubted. Raising the cup of coffee to his lips, he cried, ravishing the warm liquor with his lips and then with his tongue and throat and stomach and bowels drawing tight with the hot warmth of moistening tips of stomach grass, flesh tips waving in tide-pools of digestive juices, and thus it appeared in reflection, surrounded by the river-hemming poplars dedicated to Montezuma . . .

I am alive, quite alive, in every part of me.

Cassaba smiled a long slow smile, beginning in the eyes, gliding to the softly shining skin of his temples, as though the tender veins which showed beneath must also share in the smiling, and slowly, quite imperceptibly, the smile melted to the lips which trembled as if under a kiss before they opened to smile, disclosing the edges of teeth, the edge of skull bone, the ivory collar of rocky bone. . . . The shimmering silvery expanse of seawater smiling flowed, ebbbed, then was transformed by smiling into the spoken word:

"It is not . . ."

Rodin turned and grinned a quick enigmatic grin through the brushes of his teeth.

"Stay and rest, Cassaba. Stay and rest in my shade. You are home to me, and home my shadows, folding you to rest . . ."

Thus we sat, the pair of us, in the shade of the great tree of a man, and I felt his hands move toward me and tremble blissfully in my hair. . . .

Thus we sat, shrouded in shadows, and a living communion was being bestowed upon us, growing out of our heads, growing into something unalterable, unchangeable, though as yet only a sensing breath, only an anticipatory motion of air in the ventricles of her vapor-vents. . . . But although this communion was physical, blood and breath melting together, mutual existence melting into oneness, nevertheless the slave was able to walk through it, as if by himself, as if both of his arms were free in their chains, free to move and free to carry the burden of his awakening out through the flesh doors of her mind, out through the french doors of her patio, out through the rose trellises of her love-garden, out through the picket-gate of her most outer reality, out through the filigree of her most seductive underwear . . .

Goodbye, goodbye lovely goddess of death . . .

But their hands remained placed one into the other, linked into one another, and the knobs of their knuckles made the slow rubbing motion so familiar to lovers of every nation . . . every age . . .

It became necessary to rebuke the slave.

"Go away from us," she said, casting a darkening eye in the direction of the young Negro.

But the slave paid no attention to her.

"It is not," he said from behind them, "in my nature to perform tasks befitting the woman—nor is it in my nature to perform tasks befitting the man."



"I," and Ernest went back to underline it, "I have been crawling all over the ceilings of the workrooms between the rafters and the roofs . . ."

"I wasn't aware of any workrooms up there," I interjected.

"... and I may tell you..." he shot me an angry smirk, "that wires—naked wires—are lying on boards set across the cat-runs, and that they are fastened down with saddle clips. Wood casing—china switches—the entire place will have to be re-wired. That's all there is to it."

"OK Donnie, I agree, wipe the dog dood off the whole fucking planet."

I pulled the sheet up and hid her vulnerable hands—the short nails that would require months to grow and acquire the elegance of the rest of her—padded in my socks to the next room, Donnie trailing along, dust drifting off his shoulders down the hall.

In a sense, Donnie is a throwback to the stars of the Forties, who themselves were simply shadows cast in the bright morning of the nation. The lights were exceedingly bright now, radio tubes blazing where you put the laughter. Yet in the age of the television commercial he is sadly superfluous, an anachronism, an illegible sundial serene in the afternoon shadows, a terrific stud acting out a masculine charade that has lost all meaning. That is why, to save him (and the world from his sort), I must change entirely his sense of himself, much in the same way he insists on rewiring the attic. Already he is taking pleasure in removing the china switches and taking them to the reservoir and dropping them in.

And then there is El Pinto's beautiful wife, who runs around too much for a woman who is observing her third anniversary with her second husband. Cold, unemotional, she claims that Donnie doesn't understand her, which is so true he can't think why he laughed when she said it. True in a

sense, untrue in another. The bacon is sputtering quietly in the kitchen and I know this woman has no business being here with me.

Donnie picked his nose with a thumb and forefinger. He is convinced that when a woman is present, let alone four of them, the air is tainted with perfume. Sometimes it is, naturally, but not then and there. I have a good nose and I hadn't smelled any.

As I stride toward the television on which a brilliant pianist is playing Brahms before an enthralled audience, Donald laughs and says, "Here the weird, unfamiliar notes creep in. Suddenly a puff of smoke, a man falls to the floor dead . . . in his pocket, a box of exploding aspirins!!"

And indeed these very things proceeded to take place before my eyes.

A woman spilled and then dropped a cup of coffee. She burst into tears. The scene switches to downtown where, standing on sidewalks that run alongside some rather imaginary office buildings, in one of which I sit, people are craning their necks and staring anxiously into the sky. I too am staring into the sky. The phones are ringing. I flick my cigarette out the window and watch it bounce, in a parabola of sparks, onto the roof of the adjacent building, where an aged colored man is tending a roof garden.

He is apparently unaware of the seriousness of the situation. With his free hand he slowly pulls weeds and works some mulch into the soil. Just then he took his hand out of his pocket for the first time. There was a jewelled bracelet in the hand. Rows of neat diamonds make blue daggers of light that slash wildly at the hothouse "windows".

A strange humor, heated more and more and more and become too abundant, rose to my head and the fiery particles that charged it, striking sharply against the windows of my eyes, produced therein a kind of dazzling mirage. I rubbed my eyes.

No use. Nothing succeeded. Betty saw a beautiful tree, glowing in the powerful wattage of the headlines, and she told herself that in a few seconds it would whiz past her and fade away. But now it seemed imprinted upon her vision and would not leave.

On the floor there was a rug, a chair, a chest of drawers and a bed. A magnolia looked in from the garden side and sometimes gulls would float down on the window-ledge and peer into the magnolias and speak their gibberish.

"Well, listen," I heard with my ear, "he used Highway 50, taking the MacArthur Freeway rather than Nimitz. After those tricky interchanges at Oakland he swept down to the Bay Bridge toll plaza. On the Bridge he shattered the 50 m.p.h. limit. Took the Ninth Street off-ramp and took a straight shot across Market and over to Van Ness. At 11:56 he turned into the Crescent Motors used car lot on Van Ness and Eddy, cut the motor and lights and got something out of the glove compartment. Then there were three or four shots..."

The voice faded behind a blurring picture which re-focused into the face of a news interviewer. "Hello," he said, "I'm Philip Warner reporting on Camel cigarettes from Manchester England."

Behind him vague waves of gray shifted.

"Today we are visiting with Mr. John Murray, a retired customs inspector who goes through 40 cigarettes a day plus 2 ounces of pipe tobacco on weekends. And on special occasions he has a cigar. He isn't afraid of cancer because he doesn't smoke—he eats tobacco. Yes, *eats*."

"Yes I've been eating cigarettes Camel cigarettes for 35 years and have never seen a doctor in my life. I'm as fit as a fiddle and as strong as a bull. Eating tobacco has done me no harm. In fact, I think it has improved my health."

The camera pulls back to show Philip Warner standing next to Mr. Murray, who pulls a cigarette sandwich out of his pocket and takes a healthy chomp.

"Tastes good," says a muffled voice, that of neither of the gentlemen. The words "Tastes good" are spelled out across the screen.

The drive up the coast was more stunning than ever. To the left, swelling, rising, spreading in dripping creamy fingers over the rocks that were wooded with tiny palms and ferns—the eternal hand had been playing its solitary tune for two years now.

"Well, it's a stupid story and can be told in two words," began the general complacently. He shifted his weight and tapped a long gray ash into the ash tray. "Two years ago—yes, nearly two—just after they opened the new railway—I was already in civilian dress and busy about an affair of great importance in connection with giving up the service. I took a first class ticket, went in, sat down and began to smoke. Or rather I went on smoking. I had lighted up my cigar before. I was alone in the compartment. Smoking was not prohibited, nor was it allowed. It was sort of half allowed, as it usually is. Of course it depends on the person. The window was down. Just before the whistle sounded, two ladies with a lap-dog seated themselves just opposite me. One of them was dressed in gorgeous style in light blue; the other more soberly in black silk with a cape. They were nice-looking, had a disdainful air, and talked English. I took no notice, of course, and went on smoking. I did hesitate, but I went on smoking close to the window, for the window was open. The lap-dog was lying on the pale blue lady's knee. It was a tiny creature no bigger than my fist, black with white paws, quite a curiosity. It had a silver collar with a motto on it. I did nothing. But I noticed the ladies seemed annoyed, at my cigar no doubt. One of them stared at me through her tortoise-shell lorgnette. I did nothing, again, for they said nothing. If they had said anything, warned me, asked me—there is such a thing as language afterall! But they were silent . . . Suddenly, without the slightest preface—I assure you without the slightest, as though she had

suddenly taken leave of her senses—the pale blue one snatched the cigar out of my hand and flung it out of the window. The train was racing along. I gazed at her aghast. A savage woman, yes, positively a woman of quite a savage type; yet a plump, comfortable-looking, tall, fair woman, with rosy cheeks (too rosy, in fact). Her eyes glared at me. Without uttering a word and with extraordinary courtesy, the most perfect, the most refined courtesy, I delicately picked up the lap-dog by the collar and flung it out of the window after the cigar! It uttered one squeal.”

I glanced over at this extraordinary man. He was looking out the window on his side, puffing at his cigar, as if he were unaware that he had just told me this incredible story. Bright gray hairs bristled on the back of his brilliant military head, and I imagined, as I shifted my eyes back to the road, that the hairs continued down his back to the tip of his spine. As I have indicated, however, spraying paint on a gull's back has too great an effect on the gull's behavior to make for a sound experiment, and the role played by this feature remains obscure.



ll this without blinking an eye.

I see you, reader, profoundly interested, your left hand in the front pocket of your white trousers. I see you laughing, child-like, your head lost among the profusion of golden curls which swirls around it . . . the curls which your mother carefully combs each morning with her teeth.

Here there appeared the regrettable silhouette, mutilated beyond recognition, and the seven dancers ceased their ramshackle rambles about the stage to peer discourteously at the audience. The lights dimmed. The noise of the cafe downstairs drifted up thru the old floorboards. We sat back in our seats as the stage rolled away into a grassy plain without edges, unfurling waves of the ocean, the pale blue ocean, the ocean yellow with pleasure and the sky suddenly green in the odor from her cigar.

It was a wonderful surprise. Life in the jungle isn't easy, and we welcome every chance to forget the eyeball-to-eyeball stare of the demented orangutang. I personally lived to a certain extent in a state of fear all the time I was in Laos. Fear of isolation, fear of loneliness and fear of the great forest . . .

Leaning forward I took her hand away from my face, tilted her chin up and ran my fingers through the snow piled on top of her head. It was as soft and as fine as it looked in the morning light, and when my fingers touched her cheek,

she smiled, frost-bitten at the corners. Her eyes, lids suddenly lowered in shame, let the beauty come through all the way, all the way into my long pungent nose. "This is ridiculous," I said. There was a faint smell of rubbing alcohol about her, a clean pungent odor that seemed to reinforce the cameraman's impression.

We all stood before the camera, completely naked. A bellicose narcotic flavored the air. Ribosa Emanuel Assuaves gestured compliantly toward the approaching van lights. "Easy does it, Jesus," he said.

Jesus did it, easy as he could. The cameraman didn't even think to stop the camera. Finally Doctor Rodin shouted in extreme hesitation toward the gong corpses, who had drifted silent and dark into the room . . . "Stop! Cut! Hit the lights!"

Slightly shaking, the lights went up, as if going through the jumps. I have never forgotten the scene which slipped into focus at that dangling moment. The dim lights of a wrecking crew flickered eerily over the once glittering Diamond Horseshoe (below). The ambulance moved, sunlight burst through the windows, an oxygen cup was raised from Lilly's mouth, I sucked angrily at the odor of nothingness . . .

The Old Man, as the press agents like to call him, took a tape from a flat cardboard box and fitted it onto the machine. "On this tape," he said, "are three short recordings made by three persons who came to me for help. They are not identified, of course. I want you to listen to the recordings and see if you can pick out the two-word phrase that is the common denominator to all three recordings."

All three recordings played at once. We listened carefully. I heard the phrase "death-watch" repeated in all three recordings. I raised my hand after the recordings stopped. The electronic jitters.

"Yes, Jesus, do you have the phrase for us?"

"Death-watch," I said, a little triumphant at my own expense. At that moment I was amazed to hear snaps and

clicks. Then he pointed to a little volcano of sawdust. "The beetle's been getting closer to the surface for the last few days," he explained.

Presently a slender quarter-inch beetle stepped out of the sawdust. "I'll miss him, the little booby." The beetle sneezed his last.

The lights went up. The audience cheered madly. A short man in a gray suit walked onstage from the wings. Everyone grew restive as he opened to speak. I felt that God had sent this strange rough man. He was rough, and the roughness gave you courage, for he had so much himself. He was one of the big smugglers across. I know he smuggled across for money, but it didn't matter. God bless this rough man in his home town of Purgatory, where he has now gone, to spend a few short fire-singed years before passing into the larger container of heaven.

Once, caught in a downpour, he took off his hat and held it under his coat. Asked why, he explained, with admirable logic, that the rain would damage the hat, but his hair would be none the worse for its wetting. This knack for going instinctively to the heart of a matter was the secret of his major scientific discoveries—this and his extraordinary feeling for beauty.

The audience, at this point, sighed—a long sigh of release. The waiting was over. The joy would now begin:

A long tall beauty, naked to the skin, draped in flowing folds of her own black hair, stepped on toes to the center of the stage. All eyes were on the girl, washing her breasts, her lovely breasts with tear fluid, licking the postage stamp of her vulvus operandi. Sampans sailed into the harbor of her eyes; two of them, huddled together, resting easily in the lap and swallow of the evening tide. . . . Several cameras were lashed against her smooth rib cage, focusing in on the brilliant noon-day sun that rose between her legs. The clear water of her voice sent us all into fairy land, and she stepped down into the audience, walked quietly among us, kissing one, caressing



another with her tapering fingers, allowing another to touch her cunt. . .

"This is a storybook world, this is a storybook girl, this is a storybook a storybook . . ." She kept repeating these words, softly as one massages the good Danish leather of one's tobacco pouch, softly as one adjusts the binoculars one has trained on her lovely face from the third balcony of the old Paramount.

Downstairs, a boisterous fight is in progress, the crashing of glassware is audible to us, us who are upstairs, sitting in the creaking old seats of this creaking old theater, watching this creaking old drama unfold before our creaking souls . . .

Now the girl carefully examined the plaid sack of an old man's coat, with its narrow neck opening and its numerous holes closing, and then asked, "Say—what kind of dog do you have?"

My semen sped through the darkness toward her. My head fell back and my eyes rolled up to the stars in the sky where the constellation of meaning flew apart and combined in new, more interesting configurations of star insurance.

I lay back in my seat, breathing heavily. She approached. She approached me, Yastan Stambull, and licked the semen off my toes. And then she took a step back. Her face assumed such an expression of terror that I am forbidden to describe it. Suddenly her arms and legs began to gyrate as she stumbled backwards, breaking into a run, her slick sassy ass bobbing down the aisle toward the nearest exit. The walls drifted as she ran, drifted away as fog, revealing the hole expanse of the universe, and she ran faster than any horse, on out through the suburbs of town, straight into the fields of soybean and cotton, up over the hill and down the other side, disappearing in a blur that fades into stingy memories of touch and tear, crease the plain nose of your Jew, forget not this crowded department store window. Now, savages, you may break the treaties you swore with the prisoner.

Eat pancakes, fellow philanderers, swipe an old bus ticket on the way to the club. Blub blub. Jek. Lip tup. Toop topp the spinach loop. Degouse.

As we neared the German border, I watched tidy gardens race by, then woods of elm, pine, spruce, and birch, glinting in the early morning explosion.

She was beautiful, running beside me, without a sign of exhaustion. Soon her breathing stopped; her heart stopped beating. Then like a sleepwalker she turned and walked into the sea.

I took a small plastic "disc" out of my pocket, feeling like a Hercules who has been ordered to make a small incision in a pair of lace undies.

Training the disc toward the low flying clouds, I triggered the information button, calibrated the stinger dial at zer-three-twenty-two, and flopped.

The viscous surface of consciousness jelled four hours later.

Lucy was standing over me, one nipple poking through the glistening wet strands of her hair.

"Clive, you look so funny!"

But my visit to the art museum had not been without results. Sitting up, dusting myself off, I relayed the new information to my assistant, Lucy Fuck.

I knew it was time for a long vacation.

The jowls of my suspenders oscillated suddenly with a gaseous endeous suppleness resembling the way a wasp fastens on the remains of a human corpse.

Lucy screamed. Jumping up quickly I slapped her a good one on the rump, kissed her lips quickly, bobbed my hat in the direction of Paris, and set off at a steady clip.

She followed, stopping from time to time to pick flowers and put them in her hat.

When the Harvard term came to an end, I gave lectures in a few other universities. Lucy would stand by my

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side during these mental extravaganzas, pouring ice-water on my sweating brown leg. Her library had the most scientific card-index in the world, so she was virtually indispensable and up-to-date.

The summers of 1903 and 1904 were spent at Churt and Tilford. I made a practice of wandering about the common every night from eleven to one, by which means I came to know the three different noises made by my nightjars.



lew in from Miami Beach BOAC.

I discovered an endless horizon, vast inflamed skies traversed by a thousand flying rockets, meteors, all of which came flashing down in golden sprays—sapphire sparks shot through with emerald, azure at the edges. Where I sat the azure reflected off the shining silver wing onto my eyes and off them onto the figure of the priest, silver cross in his right hand, as he bent over a burly epileptic sprawled out in the aisle.

“What is your name? What is your name? Speak or I will burn this cross into your forehead!” He was not addressing the sick man, a Moslem tannery foremen named Mohammed Ahmed Abassy, but the devil thought to be lurking within.

Soon Mr. Abassy began to moan. When the priest placed the cross to his lips he sputtered, “No, no—you will hurt me!”

Onlookers accepted this as the voice of the devil, though I, an onlooker, did not. I felt it was some kind of trick.

“Who are you? Are you from land or water?” the priest cried, gripping one of Mr. Abassy’s fingers in accordance with the custom of the Copts. “How long have you been in there?” cried the priest.

“Twenty years. I want to go now.”

"You are not a liar?"

"No, I speak the truth, and I will depart."

"Give me some sign where you will go out."

"From the foot, from the left one," was the reply.

Mr. Abassy's foot rose from the floor and trembled in the air, as if something was trying to escape from it. Then it fell back limply.

Beyond the candlelight, a woman began the shrill trilling cry that Arab women use in moments of great joy.

The episode concluded, I returned to my drawings and plans. I had designed a marvelous thing for my native city. As regards its appearance, the form of the thing corresponds to all the artistic forms discovered in our age. These forms are the simplest possible: cubes, cylinders, spheres, cones, segments of circles, spherical planes, sections from these, etc. It is desirable that it should be made as large as possible, as is only natural in view of the size of the buildings in our town. A succession of the simplest forms (cubes) is to contain halls for lectures and gymnastics, premises for agitation and other rooms, which can be used for different purposes as required; these premises, however, are not to be museums or libraries of any kind, their character should preferably be shifting, the way one's insides do when rain drops rapidly though the air . . . The thing also contains an agitation center, from which one can turn to the entire city with different types of appeals, proclamations and pamphlets. Special motorcycles and cars could constitute a highly mobile, continuously available tool of agitation—therefore we need a garage. On one of the wings one can also attach a giant screen, on which it would be possible in the evenings with the help of a film reel—visible from a great distance—to send the latest news from cultural and political life throughout the world. For the reception of instant information a radio receiver of worldwide range is to be installed, together with a telegraph station and a telephone and other forms of com-

munication, with jagged lines coming from the antennae. One wing should be equipped with a projector station that can write letters in light in the sky (there are particularly good opportunities for this in the north); with such letters, it would be possible to compose different slogans in connection with current events. Also, prominent artists could come and do drawings in the sky . . .

When you're 25-26 you've got demons inside and you're stretching, your leg is shaking. When you're 36-37-38 which is where I am at, you're at peace. You want to go get in your Cortez camper and go out with your wife and kids into the back country. My eyes have that faraway look, with enough crinkle not to let them be theatrical. Years of staring into the blue Hawaiian guitar sliding void have burned this cold blue into my eyes.

Strange things happen to you when you spend most of your life flying through the air. It gets to the stewardesses too. You can see them gliding up and down the aisles: so many nightmares in which they fall fiery and screaming into the mouth of a vicious smoke-toned chow dog. Absolute terror, administered in tiny night-to-night dosages, has chemically changed their personalities . . .

Below us, in the desert, a camel sags to the ground . . .

I remember one gal . . . horrible.

Smiling, she breathes deep, stands poised and steps out into emptiness. The gray wall of her brains hurtles up around her, but with an effort of will she withholds the pulse of strength that would support her in midair. The ground rushes nearer, the effort mounts intolerably. At the last moment she releases it, the surge buoys her up in a brief paroxysmal joy. She comes to rest inches away from the hard stone.

Upon it was spread a small towel, with three red lines at each end, between which lay sandwiches, bottled drinks,

potato chips, paper plates, etc. Silence. The forest falls in silence, no one is there to hear it, in the middle of nowhere. Lewis and Anne come out, came out, clutching a blanket laughing and chattering, followed by monkeys that cover their paths with branches that dust the ground they step on . . .

“Emile . . . Emile . . .”

Huh, I opened my eyes on which a beard was growing.

Duluozi laughed and climbed out of his seat.

A large Russian lady appeared in the cockpit doorway.

“You want to know what I think of your jets travel? I spit on your jets. Pfui! Pfui!”

Some large globs of phlegm fell on the floor.

My plans for the building lay crumpled on the floor. Seeing them there, not far from the phlegm, and Duluozi had already skipped down the stairs and into the arms of his beautiful young wife, laughing and kissing, and she showing him the wonderful lunch she has prepared for him as they drive back home, projecting it on the sky . . . I was overwhelmed with a sense of my own personal abilities, not only to do anything on this earth, but also my ability to pierce the darkness that shrouds my soul. Say goodnight.

I carefully folded the airplane and returned it to my briefcase.

I removed my earphones and placed them on the instrument panel.

Marian put on her bathrobe, walked to the desk, and started to reach for the poster. Suddenly she turned around and went into the front room without turning on the light. Her clothes were over the back of a chair. Quietly she put them on. Then she went to the door, stepped into the hall, and went to the stairs. Blue-grey dust wedged into the corners.

At the front door she saw Dr. Rodin trying to get in. When she opened it for him he grinned at her, scratched his thin wrapping paper colored hair, and crashed into the door-jamb.

"Dr. Rodin!" she said. "Are you all right?"

"Just a bit of a fall," he said, choking back a bloody spasm.

Outside the breeze from the sea lapped the houses and wedged into the corners of the streets. Her black dress was buttoned tight around her neck, and her black hair (once it had been braided with a silver chain, and she had danced naked with a short red-haired man, whose shoulders were broad, whose words were quietly wise, whose laugh was the growl of a bear, whose uniform was that of the Mexican army . . .)

"Well, Dr." she said, "come in and sit by the fire while I fix your favorite connection of brandy and tea."

"I'm rather tired," whispered the hoarse throat of Dr. Rodin. His forehead gleamed with the wattage of tomorrow's headlines. In a few seconds he would whizz past her face and fade away into his bedroom, and his image would imprint itself on her retina, and stay with her the whole night, as she lay between the thin pages of memory . . .

When she woke, the phone was ringing again. There were two mice in the biscuit tin, eating crumbs. They paid no attention to the ringing of the phone, but when she got up, they skittered away. She picked up the phone. Outside, the quiet residential street, with its huge rustling elms, was still quiet. And dark. The sun was hiding behind the earth.

"Hello," she said, "this is Marian."

He laughed, and a stabbing pain tore through her head. She hung up the phone.

Going to the window she drew back the curtains and looked out on the silent street. A long sigh escaped her lips.



Her shoulders drooped. She began to cry. Turning around, she went to the bathroom.

For the rest of the night she dreamt she was assisting Dr. Rodin in surgery. He was removing a lung from a jelly donut. The patient was an Indian, who cried big tears of lead that burned her white stockings and hospital shoes.

Oh so carefully the good Doctor made the incision and drew back the folds of fat that shrouded the boy's rib cage. Then he inserted a c-clamp and screwed the ribs apart. "Oh-oh," he said. "I was afraid of this."

"Afraid of what, Doctor?" She bent close to see. The good Doctor's breath stunk of gin.

"This boy has bubbles," said Dr. Rodin.

In the morning she rises, puts on her clothes, and goes out to buy Rodin's newspaper. Now there is a murmur of talk in her ears. She can hear them, the trolley car boys, making fun of her in their seats by the window. She looks at the first boy very sharply and he returns her stare. For a long while they look at each other, with fixed stares, neither wanting to be the first to look away. Quite suddenly the boy's head begins to separate at the forehead, revealing the naked interior of his skull. She finds herself looking into a room dominated by a huge oblong slab of marble, three times the height of a man. Though solid, it appears to be fluid, and she remarks to herself how hypnotic its motion . . .

Smiling, she breathes deeply, stands and takes a motherly pose before the boy. She leans to peer into raspberry interior of his head. The gray walls hurtle upward around her. With an effort of will she withholds the pulse of strength that would support her in mid-air. The floor rushes near, the effort mounts intolerably. At the last moment she releases her breath and feels herself buoyed up on a fountain

of paroxysmal joy. She comes to rest inches away from the hard stone.

The boy touched her hand. She shivered involuntarily. The boy began to speak, very evenly, very quietly. The words he spoke voiced the deepest concerns of her own shattered identity:

"Señora—may I call you señora? You say, I hear you say, 'we are both fucked.' You also say 'we have to find a balance.' You believe that this balance will be found through love, love of another, love of me perhaps . . .

"Señora, I don't know just what you mean. Do you mean love for a man, or do you mean love for God, i.e. Godhead in yourself, or do you mean love of life or love of everything that is? Personally I do not feel too unbalanced. This does not mean I'm not! On the contrary, I have been aware of the fact of my insanity for so long that it does not worry me in itself, no, and you should not worry about it either . . .

"However, how to achieve a balance is something that worries me. Not in a general way, but in a sexual regard—you know that for a long time the main concern of my life has been sexual and it will continue until I can solve the problem. . . . No, don't let things bother you, don't close your sensibilities, but remember that it is the world that is wrong, not you, and that for the present you should just fuck the world and discover the ultimate solidness of your very own soul. We might take the visionary as an example: love may be the answer, but in the modern world it may well not be. There isn't enough mystery, the answer to our existence is in the deepest mystery that we can discover, and this mystery is in ourselves and in the world we see through ourselves. . . . We must love first of all, we must extend ourselves outward, because no matter what anyone might say, we have to find

out for ourselves, and if love isn't the answer, then we have to see that ourselves, and then look somewhere else. . . . In a word, we're fucked, buddy . . ."

"That's just what I'm afraid of," she said. "I'll never know whether I haven't gone completely bongo at last."

"Marian, I love you."

She looked into the steel-gray eyes of the lad. Now she saw how innocent he was, innocent of her ways, innocent of all the activities that enfold and divide (in the same cruel moment) the earth's surface and all who live upon it . . .

"You don't understand, do you?" she said. "You can't see why it is impossible."

For three minutes he did not reply. Quietly, unobtrusively, he was masturbating against her leg. Finally he spoke:

"Go away," he said.

She knew that he was waiting there, baiting his trap with silence. She went out on to the veranda and looked at the snow-laden city. It seemed very bright in the full glare of the afternoon. She counted to twenty, to fifty, to one hundred. The numbers had a calming effect. They made sense. Each number was just one more than the number that had preceded it, and the next number was one more than that. She counted as far as one hundred and ninety-eight. Suddenly the knocking on the door was renewed, louder than ever. Soundlessly she let herself go and dropped fourteen floors to the soft, powdery snow.

A moment later the phone rang.

Sunset in the African rain forest. The splendor of these sunsets. The charming noise of the word "splendor". A chimpanzee arrives on the scene, clutching a banana, which he drops on seeing the view. For a full fifteen minutes he

stands, swaying in the svelt wind, transported by the rich flickering reds of dusk . . . Then he withdraws silently into a thicket, forgetting the banana . . .

That afternoon Rodin went out and bought the papers. There was no mention of Hauser and O'Brien.

"Which is a pretty strange combination," six words which formed in my head and were in turn spoken by a voice I recognized as my own.

"Yes, one so rarely sees a deviled ham, spinach and Frito sandwich," laughed my mother, sitting on the edge of the bed, a paper plate on her knees, a cigarette in one hand and a drink in the other.

She was a wonderful woman, my mother. I was standing over by the window, which was moderately dirty, the sunlight behind me, and I was leaning against the wall admiring her as she ate, drank, smoked and talked at the same time. All with perfect ease and composure, with genuine grace. I also admired the way she managed to keep her roller skates from clacking and making irritating noises, as almost anything out of its element will do.

I mean roller skates are appropriate on the street or in the roller rink, but in the bedroom? Mother rose from the bed and glided over to the bureau, where she left her plate and drink.

"I'll just *run over* this outside," she said, holding the cigarette up. I could see her flipping it up the sidewalk six or eight yards—she had developed a powerful flipping motion, the same one you see people absent-mindedly using to catapult boogers—and then, going into her racer's crouch, darting down the sidewalk, a gray blur pursuing the rolling cigarette, a small child chases a ball into the street and trips, landing on a large white bandage . . .

I tend to lose them . . .

The bandages . . .

What should I do, then? Tell Stella and the kids? Tell them about the trick paneling in my little study—I mean that is an image to give you an idea of . . .

. . . little study which I slip through and come down here to the basement and have a smoke from time to time. Some Negro lives down here. Why should I mind? He never bothers anyone, in fact no one in the house knows about him. I don't think I've ever said a word to him. I just tiptoe down and there he sits, on some straw in the corner, biting his toenails and grinning that great grinning grin of his . . . maybe I should ask him about raking the leaves . . .

Then after a while I have my smoke and I "drift" back upstairs. When the little lady comes into my study, there I am, reading a book, page 252 to be exact, or page 257 because I'm holding it upsidetown and my shirt is smudged in one or two spots with soot and dirt . . . I am smiling, then a little laugh slips out of the far corner of my mouth and it slips into my wife's ear and it goes up to her brain where it gets recharged and shoots down to her vocal machine and she too laughs, she comes over to the armchair and sits down on the edge, she looks at herself in the mirror and then she looks into my eyes and I notice that she is completely naked . . .

"Go ahead," she replied indifferently. Her eyes were radiant but not for him . . . three new flowers by the gate . . .

You as a boy had always scorned your father because he said you were a buttery hypocrite and therefore had impressed everyone with your sincere, agonized expression, but now the patterns you had grown on your face, the 6 to 7 hundred hairs which made a dark black line under your nose, added a note of duplicity to the symphony of your face . . .

blagh

you have just cut that face with the razor, actually the neck, actually a kitchen knife, the coffee is up and you're lying on the floor bleeding your blood onto the floor, under

your ear, you hear it rushing by, like a mighty big river, over which wind is blowing the same way the water runs. She leaned over in the canoe and shouted over his shoulder, shouted until her breath stirred his moustache. But her avidity shriveled the confidence with its heat and it shattered the momentum with its hammer, and he found he could not speak—could not roll away an insomniac so sleepy in his brain.

It is as if he were a raspberry inside the mouth of a bear who has been living at the zoo for 25 years. There wasn't much of a reason to say anything, so he just kept paddling and whistling the same inane tune that had been dogging him since early morning, when he had pushed himself up and out of bed—his Saint Bernard was already waiting at the door, probably drunk, better check the little barrel . . . Soon he flung himself into the mood of this new river, so completely he believed in doing this, and his demeanor, available to absolutely no one, took on an air of duplicity.

The young man in front of him, the young man with the uncanny eyes, was bathed in clear sunlight, and the birds came down sometimes and peered into his eyes, so supernatural they seemed.

I preferred to come blasting by in my big powerful motorboat and push giant waves against their frail craft, then shriek out my demonic laughter, shaking my fist, and speed away, jacking off . . . The only thing that bothered me were the wires that were attached to the top of the boat and extended up into the sky. Besides giving the impression that my boat was a toy, or marionette, they often slapped against each other and got tangled up. Of course I didn't have to undo them. Actually once, they were, like, perfectly straight, they went straight up, perfect parallels, and I was out strolling on deck one night and there was this glow between them, as if the thing were a filament in an electrical light bulb. Up in the glow was this girl, whom I didn't recognize right off,

but as sets of concepts shot through my mind, none of them fitting, I remember noticing that the more confused I became the more clear her image grew, until, confused, heartsick, afraid, I went running down the road in the moonlight, driven quite mad by my pointless and humiliating love.

No, I do not solicit your sympathy, on the contrary, I spit on it. Have you ever done "La Bamba"? Or is that a dance? I don't believe it is, old bean he says, eyeing me suspiciously. I take another long draw on my already lukewarm beer and gaze out over the square. I can't bring myself to look down onto the square itself, for there is the same man who has been following me for the past several days and I am afraid he will recognize me.

"I didn't catch the name."

"Well," I laughed, "I didn't throw it . . ."

A sickly fading smile spread over his face.

"What's wrong?"

"Don't you recognize me?" he asks. Of course he asks.

I point my chin at his expression and sight down my nose, squinting my eyes. I was about to say no when a series of ever-brightening flashes of light swept over my nervous system.

My father had died in 1936. As we left the house to go to the funeral, my brother-in-law asked us which one had given the fingers to the undertaker. Not one of us had thought of them. So Bill dashed back into the house, got the fingers, and surreptitiously dropped them into the casket as we walked past it for the last time . . .

Why do I record this incident? Because it serves to illuminate. The picture of Bill must be complete. The girl is sleeping next to the old man, but the fingers, dissevered in the accident, were recovered and preserved . . .

Lylla, my wife and companion, so dead these long years, so distant from my touch, I bow my head to you, pour

out the juice of thought to you, give you to savour of this pie. The remnant is for the Jews. The undecided ones. Squalid horsefarms simmer in the African sun. Along the speckled coast, we fly BOAC, notice the thin white thread of the ocean's waves rushing the ragged shores . . .

Indignation burns in my heart, for what crimes we committed together, in those days when we knew each other. Our squad never squabbled. Embedded in our heart was a sense of justice and fair play. Such ideas congested our transplants. We lived on badderlocks for a month, then began the long trek into the guts of Africa.

I see now that I was remiss in my duty. I shouldn't have let the sharks get you. The streamy yellow sunlight gathered in balls on your forehead as you lay in the dust under the Tekka tree. The snake had vanished. The guide-book lay torn and dirty at your feet. In his buffalo robe the huge Watusi looks ravishing to the homosexual eye . . .

Like transparent alabaster statues we stood and nourished ourselves on sunsets. For three weeks we survived in this amazing fashion. I was overjoyed to discover that my delicate digestive system had recovered its stability. And my cough disappeared. Looking down I saw your remains mouldering behind the tent, but that didn't destroy my new found peace of soul. Already your bones were showing through! And—ugh—the juices were fermenting under the hide, in the hot afternoons, causing the little white worms to be very active under that translucent skin that once was Beauty . .

A fly buzzed. I coughed.

A thought struck me at random leaving this bruise you see as you watch me now from your picture on the wall.

It all ties together, doesn't it? The cosmic chain of events, not a chain at all but a mosaic, piece by piece assembling, each fragment a joyous savoured moment, each instant examined and forgotten, but never lost . . . our peripheral vision picking up every drab particle and assigning it a



place in the field . . . At last, when the configuration is complete, we—you and I—take each other and vanish into the subtle red and yellow frame-colors, knowledge touching us inside and outside, knowledge being the very fluid we are immersed in . . .

The faceboat mounts the rider and descends into the sky.

An enormous cranberry hangs stationary above the skyline. Four teamsters come over the mountain, whipping teams of beautiful draft horses. The fire in the eye of the first horse is suddenly extinguished and the entire scene freezes.

Four days later an old friend knocks on your door and before you have even said hello he blurts out the news: your wife has been found alive in a city deep in the jungle. She has become a sacred White Queen, leading a tribe of purple savages in uncouth orgies of self-destruction. She is known to participate enthusiastically in all their obscene rituals and amoral practices. Never again will the face of this former debutante grace the dance halls of Europe and the drawing rooms of America. Without another word your friend departs, doffing his hat.

You close the door and weep for awhile, standing with your head in a pot of geraniums. After a few minutes you pick up your little bag and step over the ashes and walk into the Missouri night, letting go of the past. Suddenly, inexplicably, you are free, free of all ties, free of envy, free of malice toward this woman who has betrayed you. Now you can pass quietly from this dream into the next, tomorrow's dream of being a race car driver and winning the Indianapolis 500. You own nothing, you have no regrets, your wants are minimal. Stick out your thumb and hitch a ride to the stars!

—Enter Johnny Television. Johnny Television jerked his mind off the fingerprints, their prevalence in fiction, and their total absence in real life. The eye tends to expand the

inside corner of a room and to shrink the outside corners of structures, he thought, while his lips moved, pronouncing the words aloud.

"Well, that's a good idea, now," said Moresby, handsomely.

Moresby stood at the door of his Main Street mansion. He was now old and dry enough to blow away, yet seemed held to the earth by fibers of his curiosity and his hovering falcon's interest in sinning humanity. He greeted me with a dry vital twist of his claw.

Down the hallway came the delicate sound of flashbulbs hitting the carpet, and behind these sounds came Television.

"Supposing it were a plumber, or a man to see about the electric light—that sort of man?" he began uncertainly.

The result of all this is, of course, to throw one back more and more upon oneself. Everything that would normally be learnt from other people—new words, new ideas, new ways of looking at things—is ruled out. So that a large part of one's being never really develops. One remains rather like a child, only surrounded by a shimmer, or glow, and as the years go by this ghostly light grows brighter until, at the onset of senility, it begins to dim. At death it quite goes out.

But about new ways of looking at things: what's the point? Illusions of various kinds can occur in any of the senses, and they can cross over between the senses. For example, small objects feel considerably heavier than larger objects of exactly the same weight. I would prefer to simply pick up an object and have it be its own weight.

All this time Television had been babbling away. I was in no hurry, for the folded force of my nature was so carefully creased that it took time to flatten it out even a little. And besides, I get paid by the hour. So I just kept looking right into his eyes and from time to time an Mmm.

"May I take a look?"

They went on talking. Television put what other questions occurred to him . . .

. . . biplanes crossed overhead but the main ground had now been explored, and nothing of further importance cropped up. Moresby, in spite of his efforts, evidently felt his position strongly, and Television pressed him to stay to lunch. They could raid the icebox, and who would object? A novel luncheon, and a change of scene, a change of companionship, was the best tonic anyone could prescribe, especially for someone who is not in the least ill.

They went into the kitchen while I fiddled around in the living room. The world is going to shit and the eye tends to expand the inside corner of the room. The photogs were gone. On the walls hung engravings of whales frolicking, lying at ease and thrashing in their death throes. But in all these attitudes the whales were consistent in that they spouted and that the spout was tinged with blood.

Pierre, her small son, had died six years ago at about this time, his fat short legs sinking deeper and deeper into the boiling sand as he tried to hold his ground against an ongoing wave—what is the name of that Victor Hugo poem about the man sinking into quicksand?—while his mother gave herself up to passion in the arms of a young sailor behind a dune.

And now it has come to this.

You have a deep ripping cough, a bent back and a passion for cigarettes. At night you hear this growling from the chimney and you finger your .45 under the pillow. There is no sure cure for your acid indigestion, for you are a hundred million miles from reality, across from the Bronx Community College.

Madman that I was, to linger so long before I fled! Up to then he had hunted by scent, and his movement was slow. But he had actually seen me as I started to run . . . Now, as he came around the curve, he was springing in great bounds! The moonlight shone upon his huge projecting eyes, the row

of enormous teeth in a gaping mouth, and the gleaming fringe of claws upon short, grasping forearms . . .

With a scream of terror I rushed wildly down the path. Behind me the thick gasps came louder and louder. The heavy footfall shaking the ground . . . I expected to feel his jaws slip over my head at any instant . . . And then I was falling . . .

A burlap sky  
drifted through  
the window . . .

The king was dying of laughter as I recounted these adventures with his pet Tyrannosaurus Rex.

"Lucky for you the tiger trap was empty!"

"Huh? Did you see my ankle? What do you think made these three holes?"

Hot stifling nightshadow, the temple gongs broke our ear drums, beads of sweat glistened salty in the corners of his eyes . . . His woman was there, on his dark skin her soft fingers worked the gold fabric, wet with dying naked trembling breasts, chill of dying . . . a silver thread drawn tight and snaps . . .

"Tell me, Boston, what is it brings you to these parts?"

"Your woman," I whispered hoarsely, "she is very beautiful . . ." I looked at her face, with its enormous tilted green eyes. I wanted to turn away. It was one of those moments when reality breaks through just a little too insistently to bear. Cammie had very thin hair, for her constant hanging and beating did not allow it to grow. Her cheekbones and chin were darkly bruised, and her forehead was dreadfully scarred with self-inflicted wounds. As I looked at her, I must confess that I felt very little compassion . . .

"Did you hear my question, sir?" The King looked archly in my direction, noticing the way my eyes stitched rainbows across his queen's nakedness . . . In my imagination

I was watching little corks popping out of little bottles on the grocer's shelves, and the goo spurting out in black geysers over all the food and soap and boxes. It had something to do with my love for this woman of Arabia . . .

"Humph," said King Pongileoni. "I can see your attention is elsewhere!—Maestro! Give us music! There will be no more conversation this rainy night!"

Somewhere behind embroidered curtains, Maestro obliged. The blowing and scraping of anonymous fiddlers shook the air of the great hall, and set the glass of the windows to vibrating. This in turn shook the air in my Lord Edward's apartment on the further side. The shaking air rattled Lord Edward's *membrana tympani*; the interlocked *malleus, incus* and stirrup bones were set in motion so as to agitate the membrane of the oval window and raise an infinitesimal storm in the fluid of the labyrinth. The hairy endings of the auditory nerve shuddered like weeds in a rough sea; a vast number of obscure miracles were performed in the brain, and Lord Edward whispered ecstatically: "Bach!"

I, in the meantime, had moved to the side of the demure princess, who in her turn had shyly accepted my advances, allowing me to touch her leg and hand, and her lip quivered as our eyes locked in focus. Her foam-flecked breast shimmered red in red moonlight through the portico . . . The King was snoring loudly on the divan behind us . . .

"Now is our chance, Cammilliatta . . ."

Her glassy eyes went blank. She fell over like a store dummy and the King sat up choking with laughter. "Hah! Hah! You thought to make advances to the wife of the King, my dear English friend! Well, see now how I have guarded against such an eventuality, by the use of this puppet, worked by the hands of my master puppeteer, Mr. Wallace Joint!! . . . Come down here, Joint, show yourself to our friend Mr. Boston!" And he burst into fresh spitting coughing fits of

insane glee, holding his stomach and pointing at my reddened face. "Look! He is ashamed!"

I winced. "Listen, your excellent highness," I said, in the most even tone at my command, "I don't consider your trick the least bit funny, in fact I'm afraid the joke is rather on you, for I did make love to the princess herself, not two nights ago, in the west garden!"

"Hah!" Spit, cough, more hideous laughing. "English fool!" Cough, spit. "You really are a dunce! Do you think that was really my own woman you made love to? Do you think it was in fact a woman at all? No, again I'm afraid I must credit good M. Joint, who allowed himself to be used in this matter . . . He's manufactured a nifty sort of strap-on for these occasions, and . . ."

But not another word escaped his flapping burp flaps, for Princess Cammie herself appeared suddenly through the curtain behind him, a knife clenched in her raised hand—

"Cammie!"

"Don't cry, Dr. Boston, I have heard enough of this man's blasphemy! Wallace Joint has been out of commission for several weeks—it was indeed I you held near you in the garden, and it was I who worked the strings of this marvelous puppet!" And with that, cold steel splashed blood and moonlight over the face of King Pongileoni, and he slumped forward with a gargling cry of despair . . .

"He is dead." Lord Edward himself pronounced these words from behind the dias. As the King's lady ran to embrace me I noticed Lord Edward surreptitiously operating her strings . . .

Lord Edward exited the scene, humming the last few bars of a Bach cantata. I stepped over the remains of the King and dragged the puppet Cammilliata after me, towards the great window where the moon hung wispy green over an aching jungle night . . . In the distance, on the crest of the

hill, the first of King Pongileoni's huge pets began ascending into the sky, yelping. Soon the heavens were full of their glorious glowing bodies. A golden light of overwhelming beauty flooded the scene, so that even the guards along the outer walls had to turn to admire it.

It reminded me of something...something I could not quite put my finger on...