



he smile on the face of the great spirit was shedding its radiance over the earth spinning in its clouds, clouds that drift together, darken and burst.

It had been raining for several days.

Travelers floating in steam palaces upon the river make a memorandum of it, as a remarkable feature in the landscape, this seemingly permanent rain.

A single tear falls from the eye of Theodore Roosevelt.

You would tell yourself that it were no sad transition to pass suddenly, like these joyous waters we call tears, from a cheerful and stainless course, letting the pureness of your life evaporate into a halo, a rainbow crown, as you fall into the dim chasm of the grave.

An equally striking effect that must have long been familiar to these Netherlanders: if the rotating vanes of a windmill are viewed obliquely or directly from the side, they spontaneously reverse direction if there are no strong clues to the real direction of rotation; and, since we do not know if we are alive or dead, the same effect will have us flying up out of that dim chasm.

My words were falling into a dim chasm. The person at my side was lost in thought, or that thought was lost in the tulips that lined the river.

She was not a very smart little girl. She couldn't spell c-a-t unless you gave her the first two letters. Then she would add the final letter, the t. I found it rather curious that she could do this every time without fail, but could not, given the first letter, supply the following two.

"Jane," I began, turning to her.

We are not tempted to touch objects shown in a picture through the surface of the picture. What happens, however, if we remove the surface? She was as pretty as a picture, but one whose surface remained intact, one I dared not touch for fear of appearing ridiculous.

"Yes," she answered, turning to face me.

"I have that terrifying feeling of emptiness. I can feel the silence moving between us. I lie in bed at night with my foot in a plastic boot."

"To maintain the air pressure around the foot . . ."

"Yes. Otherwise it might simply explode, like the foot of the boy in that story. The delegates were having coffee in the North Lounge at 3 P.M. when the youth raced across the lawn north of the conference building between the Rose Garden and the East River, trailing a cloud of red and orange flame in the bright sun under the picture window."

"It seemed to take him forever. I remember it well. I held that cup of coffee for what seemed an eternity. It's like the boomerang. You see one flying and you are left with the impression that the flight lasted about half a minute, whereas its real duration was a mere eight seconds or so."

"Ah, appearance and reality."

"No, not really. The words appearance and reality are verbal opposites; we have invested them with their difference. But in reality they are the same thing. Just like the image and the material used to convey the image . . . a photograph, for instance. How can we have a photographic image without the photograph itself? Likewise, I'm sure, is the case of appearance and reality. Appearance in this case corresponds to the

image, reality to the photograph that conveys the image. You can't have one without the other."

She ended her statement with a small laugh, as if she had just brought a wildly witty story to its conclusion.

I laughed too, out of politeness. And once I was out of politeness, I moved in.

"Whatever emotions of awe or of dread a man has ever had will come surging through him when he is born on"—I gestured down river—"against angry green eddies and between jutting rocks, toward the great unbroken wall of crystal, which seems, for the moment, the outermost barrier of the universe itself." My voice had taken on a slightly angry, and at the same time arrogant tone.

"A feeling I adore," she rose to the occasion. "Like before giving a recital."

And, after rumbling a few pleasantries in German, she went straight to the piano. Using her left index finger, she pushed out a slow scale in the bass register. She pounded fiercely at the treble. Then she inhaled, yawned, flexed her powerful fingers and quietly began Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." Still playing, she got up and leaned into the instrument, peering quizzically into its interior.

To enhance the mood of the music, tape recordings of the creaking of trees, the grunts of frogs, the songs of night birds, the calls of coyotes, had been piped into the piano.

During all this the steam palace continued its stately motion down the river. The waves, also, had washed away the foundations of the river, so that no one could guess its original purpose.

Suddenly Jane jumped up and threw back her head, examining the sky as if it were the face of an old friend. Its smile broke into gradual hypnotic radiance that converted the rain into sheets of waving steam.

Jane leaped to the back of her head, examining the sky as if it were an old enemy. In that instant she discovered

what she feared most, that she possessed those very traits she hated in others: the clinging, the wanton desire to abdicate one's freedom in return for a little security this side of the grave. Poor Jane!

"I've managed to keep myself busy these twelve years inside of the giant's castle. Now I must somehow manage on the outside, an entirely different procedure." She drew her black hair back tight against her scalp and touched the small diamond embedded just behind her left frontal lobe. A monument to an age, she thought. And now the age is ended.

Jane was a reckless diver. She could explore sea-caves and sunken wrecks and come up unchanged in nature. If there were inhuman, sub-human, or superhuman creatures living in these waters, then these had been her playfellows. Their webbed fingers did not make her shudder. She did not miss the sunlight when she sank into their dim alien world.

But when breath gave out, when she shot up again from the element in which he could not live, then dazzled by the sunlight, she would go in search of him.

"Fasten your belts, please."

He folded up the horoscope of Jacy Florister, Esq., manager of the Flower Theater, London, England, who was on his way to confer with the American squad.

Los Angeles to New York, New York to London, London to New York—this was the rhythm of the future. London—New York—New York—London.

It would work out.

He spoke to her over cocktails, in a restaurant on Surrey Place:

"The final key has always eluded me," he said, "and I've decided that my search is as sterile and misdirected as the alchemist's search for the philosopher's stone. I've decided it is an error to think in terms of some secret or key or formula—something you can grasp in your hand, rather than

something that grasps you in its hand . . . But I am wrong. There is a secret, and it is now in the hands of evil and ignorant men. A secret beside which the atomic bomb is a noisy toy . . .”

She grimaced, sipped a little more cheap wine.

“Nightfall is even now being assembled, in the mountains of the world. Strange dung-dripping creatures are being manufactured in the madness of three men—three men who have unlocked nature’s deepest secret, the *genetic code* itself.”

She smiled a kindly smile. “That’s not news, Harry. We’ve been reading about this in the newspapers for some time.”

“What you’ve been reading about are the paltry chemical games of a few Swiss scientists . . . What I am telling you about is something altogether different, and infinitely more sinister.”

“Let’s go to my room.”

“Alright.”

They walked the fog shrouded avenue to her house, climbed the dark stair with its heavily ornamented railing.

“We must be very quiet. Dr. Rodin will be sleeping.”

There was a blue rug on the floor of her room, one chair, one chest, and a narrow bed. Stockings hung in the bathroom. A curious luminosity from the garden, where a lush red magnolia peeked in through an open shutter. Sometimes at dawn the gulls would come and walk busily about on her windowsills, jerking their little bodies like pigeons in sunlight.

She began undressing immediately, while he murmured stray strands of information in warning tones, about the cellular panic soon to inundate the world. “Madness. It’s pure madness. They’ve broken the locking system which gives form to matter . . . My dear Esmerelda, they are about to overthrow the principle of creation itself, dissolve the lovely structured essences of nature until only chaos prevails . . .”

She pulled the sheet up to hide her lovely vulnerable hands. The short nails that would take months to grow and acquire the elegance of the rest of her . . . He perused her drab body, saw the thoughts of sexual surrender racing in her eyes. Well, he thought, I got a sufficient number of sentiments into sentences. I have offended no one's taste and honesty. Now it is time to make love . . .

In the morning she rose first, irradiating herself. The creamy look returned and the lilt at the corners of the mouth. It was Jacy's doing: he had taken charge.

Someone could be heard moving about in the lower rooms. They surmised it was Doctor Rodin, getting ready to receive his early patients.

"I had a dream," he said.

"Oh? What was it?"

"I don't remember. It was one of those exquisite dreams from which there is a half-waking and then a sinking back into the dream, which begins all over again, only the second time it's a nightmare."

"Oh! I'm sorry." She looked visibly pained, as if it had been herself who had caused him to dream poorly.

At that moment a knock at the door. It was Ernest.

"Will you have eggs?" he inquired. His voice was low pitched, but delivered with singular intensity. You could tell he was madly fighting off the orders of Dr. Rodin, which still resounded in his skull . . .

"Why yes, thank you Ernest. And orange juice for me please."

"I'll skip breakfast," said Jacy.

"Oh, my dear! You must have a nibble!" The montage speeded up. "Remember we're going a long ways into the mountains, there won't be any restaurants up that way."

"Mmmm. All right then. Eggs eggs eggs! Eggs for Jacy, please. That's me. An egg for Jane too, Sir Ernest of the old school. Or will she eat two? Cook her two anyway—"

Ernest bowed and slipped away into the mist on the patio. Jane and Jacy turned toward each other to gaze into morning eyes. Jacy saw men and women hobbling forward on crutches to meet newcomers without unwrapping the overcoats which bound their knees. Jane saw a tall San Antonio man in somber black strolling about, hoping to find his horse.



across the street Mrs. James Abbot was preparing hot cereal at her stove when her kitchen began to tilt toward the back yard. A two-inch crack opened in the wall next to her refrigerator and a voice issued from the crack:

"Many times the idea has occurred to me that in certain serious moments in life some Spirit of the outer world becomes suddenly embodied in the form of an ordinary person and influences us without the individual in question having any knowledge of it or remembering anything about it."

Then the kitchen tilted back toward the front yard (and my house) and the crack neatly closed.

I was a shade perturbed. Nothing to signify, really, but still just a spot concerned. As I sat in the old flat, idly touching the strings of my banjolele, an instrument to which I had become wildly addicted of late, you couldn't have said that the brow was actually furrowed, and yet, on the other hand, you couldn't have stated absolutely that it wasn't. Perhaps the word "pensive" about covers it. It seemed to me that a situation fraught with embarrassing potentialities had arisen.

Embarrassing? Well, distasteful. What of poor Mrs. Abbott? I had spent years trying to convince her that she needn't put a period after Mrs, to which she repeatedly agreed but continued to dot her title. Insecurity. A woman

needs security. Some of them need to be behind bars. And now this. She was passive, frightened, naive.

To help her gain a feeling of power I suggested that she strike the couch from a standing position with a tennis racquet. Her reaction to my suggestion was surprising. She picked up the racquet gingerly, made a tentative gesture of hitting the couch, then dropped it precipitously, as though it were a loaded gun or a dismembered arm. She began to shake and to jump all over the room. It was several minutes before she could bring herself to pick up the racquet again. She struck another blow, damn well ruining my couch, and went jumping away, waving her arms like a bird.

And so it is with the friendships of mature years. In youth we sport and laugh with creatures giddy as ourselves, and think that we love them as we can never love again. But our winged friends fly away with the sunshine and leave us regretfully treading a solitary road.

Under the edge of my cap jutted a long broken road that started out in one direction and continued in another. Beneath it, a yellow-white mustache broke away on either side like foam cloven by a prow.

I returned neither that night, nor the next, nor on any night thereafter. And that is where my story ends—or begins, for I am returning in a hundred million ways. I told you, taking the words right out of my own mouth, embodied in the form of an ordinary person.

Finally the head of this person begins to move. I'm not sorry, thinking perhaps I'll have something radical to do before long. I can't leave her for a moment and put on the other glove. It is almost light now. What time is it? I asked the other. She didn't know.

"Steve Katz, if you're listening, don't take this to heart, but . . ."

It's something new. One guy keeps asking whether you want to write symphony music and the other guy makes

peculiar noises with his mouth. But the priest? The priest knows nothing.

The priest knew only that he came into church one morning and found Ernest squatting on the pavement mending a hole in his sox. He was such a good workman that they let him stay. They never knew where he came from. They didn't even know his nationality.

"Compadre, you know better the other?"

"Right. That's what I it seemed to me they used to you know they'd lie down in the middle of the aisle and cry, the women that is. And my brother Jesus would come in here, like something real off the street, and ho ho hum shout 'gimme that other transcript so I can read back Hemingway in his breakfast orange juice.' But that is just not what happened."

At that very moment, since the sunset was approaching, the crocodiles began to break their noses. After a great pain a formal feeler comes along the drain. The nerves sit ceremonious on their tombs. Wax is applied, the stiff quickens, the feet make mechanical go round along the boards of the floor. Around the ground of the air a quartz lamp flashes the signal for supper.

"Ernest! Ernest, it's time to eat!"

Ernest was soon located; for as Jacy came out into the corridor a voice filtered through the ventilator above the kitchen door. It was a low pitch, but delivered with singular intensity: "Its just something—wow—it's like a real thing that happened to me!"

The other guests took chairs around the big table. A nostalgic conversation ensued, gathering in energy and volume until nearly everyone forgot about the delicious turkey that was being served up.

"Christmas is going to be cancelled this year because of the Vietnam war."

"I knew we would get around to politics. Get it and forget it."

"I wish it could all get into perspective, don't you?"

"Yea, shit."

"I betcha a lot of fags picked up on that. If he was Superman he could have stole it."

"Yea, like Clark Kent or *Under a Glass Bell* by Anais Nin."

"That's a secret lesbian book."

"Right!" (laughter all round)

"There seems to be a lot of things going on underneath the story. Of course I wouldn't know about that 'cause I wasn't around at the time."

"When I was a child, well, it seems to me they used to you know they'd lie down in the middle of the aisle and take their clothes off."

For some minutes Dr. Rodin appeared plunged in meditation. Now he removed his pipe from his lips and spoke. "Its been a revivifying experience for Alice. We were commenting on it the other night at supper and saying that she really has come out of her shell."

"What about Jacy? Has he found work in Paris yet?"

"No, but Jane has agreed to support him if he'll fuck her at 6 A.M. instead of during the late show which she hates so much to miss."

"Oh, I'll bet Giorno was in on that."

"No, but he knew someone who was. What a horrible world they live in."

"The world of moola."

"Hey, that's a great title for a book about money! You know? Or economics or something?"

"*The World of Moola* by R. Mutt."

"You know what *moog* means in Armenian?"

"What?"

"It means *cutie*."

"Oh that's right, didn't Saroyan have a character by that name?"

"The world of paint."

"The world of paint. Yea, right, and we didn't think in any other medium."

"We thought in colored neon."

"Right. Flashing." Burp. Cat sounds under the table. A peculiar wet noise was heard approaching.

"Ah," Dr. Rodin ejaculated (all over the crepes!), "it's Barney Rosett! Not to be confused with Barney Rosset!"

Barney Rosett nodded and scraped and looked about the room pretending that no one was in it. But there were really about thirty-five people sitting around a long table and they were all looking at him!

"So sorry I'm late," he said. "I've been busy antiquing the beams all afternoon."

Dr. Rodin didn't especially like this man and his secret spite was expressed by loud puffing on his pipe. Huge clouds of snow-apple pipe tobacco smoke began to roll through the room. Everyone coughed intermittently. Ernest slipped away under cover of the smoke screen to finish his socks.

"Wonderful! He's one of my heros. Did you ever read his poetry?"

"Nup. Is he a good poet?"

"Is he good? What are you, a capitalist swine?" (laughter)

"Well, now that you put it in such endearing terms..."

"Ho Chi Minh wrote poetry?"

"Yea, he has a book of poetry that he wrote in prison you know?"

"Socialist poetry?"

"I thought it was Mao Tse Tung that wrote a book of poetry."

Barney Rosett, in the space of the thirty seconds since his entrance, had succeeded in capturing the attention of all present. Rodin was fuming (sic) and gave a secret signal to Alice to bring out the Rouge Flambeau.

"Hey, get the cat, she's growling!"

The cat, rather a large Siamese, had, it seemed, sensed the vibratory effervescence of its master, Dr. Rodin, and proceeded to sink its rather pointed teeth into the calf of Mr. Rosett.

"Hey! Get that foul animal off of me!"

"Minraud! Stop that Minraud!"

"This one's for the east coast," said Jane, running to help Alice with the dessert.

Four strong arms grappled with the hissing feline, and blood was spurting everywhere, all over the napkins and the chalices, all over the freshly shampooed carpet. At that moment Ernest ran back in to see what the commotion was and collided with the huge dessert platter coming the other way. What a scene! Meringue and marmalade over everything, just like in an old time movie. Rodin took the opportunity to slip away though the curtains onto the patio where he could puff his pipe in peace and muse on the orangeness of the harvest moon. Minraud, disengaged from her captors, followed suit and was soon rubbing against her master's leg, purring contentedly.

Within, the conversation resumed.

"What a cat!"

"Is that a poop I smell?"

"Yea."

"Hot poop! Pop hoop! Pot hoop!"

"Pop. Powp. Pooooop. The pop eats hot poop!"

"The pope pops pop poop. Vatican blues."

"Maybe the big bands are coming back."

"That's one of my favorite clichés. I can't believe it that that was actually being said in all seriousness five years ago. *The big bands are coming back.* Woo!"

"That's great 'cause like . . . ya know it's got to be a contradiction."

"I don't know, I found she especially hates that. She's incredibly mild mannered."

The night flares dwindled. Everyone heaved a sigh and relaxed. Alice led a parade into the livingroom and there the party gathered on rugs and couches to watch the flickering flames of a pine log fire. Everyone wondered what had happened to Rodin, no one suspected that the normally bouyant and extroverted old character actor was at this moment sulking on the veranda, with only his cat and the autumn moon for company.

But soon, in the space of night sky illuminated by orange shooting moonbeams, there appeared curving gray strips, arranged in ascending tones, the last of which faded into the darkness.

Dr. Rodin's attention had been fixed on this emergence for some time, though his aged, thin, intelligent lips continued to pull long and deeply on the pipe. The smoke would billow from his head, clinging to his generous moustaches and raging eyebrows, rolling upward to the fine, thick, white mane that burst from his skull. The strange strips of gray deepened in the graduations, as if a massive rainbow had been expanded and reproduced in black and white on the great everlasting page that is our sky.

Then, abruptly, it was gone.

Inside, the guests had proceeded as far as coffee; soup to nuts was their goal. Dr. Rodin slipped inside through the curtains and slid into an easy chair next to one occupied by Louise Malaronde. She was noticed dropping another lump in her tea, inclining an ear as she detected a faint rumble within the walls of her ancient body. She yawned—almost dozing—

opened her eyes and was surprised to find Rodin sitting opposite her. Sensing that she had been caught in a failing of the old, she roared indignantly:

"What did you say?"

The meaning of particular signals and of various expressive movements and sounds is not determined by an individually acquired convention, as is the case with human words, bz mz fz, but by innate instinctive norms of action and reaction. But Rodin knew what she was going to say even before she raised her eyelids, and she knew that he was there and that he knew what she was about to say: this of course had no bearing whatsoever on the inevitability of her saying it, nor did it deter his forthcoming remark, which was subject to the same instinctive laws as hers:

"I said you are looking more lovely than ever."

"Whatever beauty I might have is equalled only by your diplomacy," she parried.

"A diplomacy surpassed only by your wit," he thrust.

"Would you fetch me—not to change the subject—a triple brandy. . . doctor's orders," she smiled graciously and peered about his face.

"Love to," he said, moving his elbows like the wings of a chicken. Then, rising, he shook out the long roll of his robe in a regal, virile line, knocking his cigar from the table as he did so. He tied the belt very tightly, and, his heart hot with love and eagerness, strode like a conqueror down the hall, the cigar riding, for awhile, in the folds of his robe.

Maria instantly nodded out. Her unconsciousness spun downward, a swirling orange blue blur, as her ego let out the line. Then it rose to the seventh floor, then a downward dip to the fourth floor (the crowd gasped), then back to the tenth floor, where it hit her optic nerve and began to spin wildly.

She edged her way through the mourners, Minraud, true friend that he was, following her. First he suppressed his

laughter, then he said, "All those present were offended with you for this—except the deceased," and as he spoke there were tears in his eyes. And indeed, who knows if, amongst all those mourners at the graveside, we two, with our brandy in the dispatch case, were not the nearest soul-mates to the old doctor.

There is always the remote possibility that he is not deceased. Provision for premature burial had been made: if the name of the inventor could be considered prophetic, the invention of Albert Fearnaught of Indianapolis, Indiana, should give us cause for hope. His "Grave Signal" patented in 1882 consisted of an elaborate device to release a flag through the end of a tube which projected up from the foot of the grave if its occupant were to move a hand. Picture the scene. A deep hole in the ground, a box at the bottom of the hole, and a tube projecting up from the box. We are standing there, the wind is moving through the willows and the small flowers that grace the ground are nodding softly, tears swell in their ducts and burst forth onto the ground. Suddenly everyone is screaming and running pell-mell from the grave-site. A bolt of lightning explodes from the roaring clouds. It stabs the coffin, but—miraculously!—is frozen, a solid bolt of lightning, fixed forever in place, a magic monument to the great doctor.

"Squeak." A noise from the tube. The ground around us is shattered, by the beating of our dear friend's enormous heart. In a moment he emerges grinning from the carefully chiseled pit, dripping silt and sand.

He burned what was left of New York that morning at three. He took a match and moved into the city, touching the walls here and there with the flame. The city bloomed in great splashes of heat and light, it was ten square miles of illumination, big enough to be seen on Mars.

His heart beating rapidly with pain he returned to the hut. He held up a dusty bottle to the light. He poured five

glasses for the friends. Then he went out of the room. "Where are you going, Charles?" No answer. They heard the dim thuds of his footsteps ascending the hall stairs . . . "That man!"

They found him at six-thirty the next morning in the attic. The entire house was polished to brilliance. They found him in the attic polishing old trunks and old frames and old silver candlesticks and old chairs and old toys and vases and rocking horses and dusty civil war coins and old nails in the floorboards. He was half through the attic when the police officer walked up behind him with drawn revolver. "Polish?" asked Rodin, eyeing the gun.

"No, Irish," said the cop. "I'm afraid you'll be having to come with me, old lad."

Rodin shrugged, muttered something about the mice licking his stamp collection. He peered upwards. "Look," he said.

"What?"

"In the sky. Already. On the blackness a little touch of blue. See! The stars seem larger, the little ones and all those dime nebulosities we saw in empty space—they grow bright!"

The officer grunted. "Come with me," he said, poking Rodin with the gun.

Swiftly, steadily the day appeared. Grey summit after grey summit was overtaken by the blaze, turning the air to smoking white intensity. A surging bank of fog crept along to the west of us. The distant cliffs receded farther and farther, looming and changing through the whirl, foundering and vanishing in the confusion of sound. Nearer and nearer the steaming advance, as fast as the cloud in the prairie west wind. A rose haze, strange reddish shapes, tongues of vermillion flame writhed and danced. Spirals of vapor poured out of the long crag of night. A thin edge of intolerable effulgence that became a blazing sceptre, hurling its shaft of

heat. Blinded I groped for my incandescent blanket. The aerial garment of advancing day, a touch of the sun, the ground suddenly coughing under us a paste, a mud, a slushy liquefaction that hissed and bubbled into gas. I saw bubbles dancing on the dome. I saw the ghost of old Peliazar stomping out a melody of danger . . .

Then the gentleman on my left sat down and the gentleman on my right rose.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, and went on to speak about the art and poetry of the Romantic Era and of the Present. He also referred several times to the poetry which was going to be delivered here, and on these occasions he made a little bow in the direction of his left foot. I looked at the gentleman on my left and at the gentleman on my right. I was wondering which of them was the poet under surveillance when a terrible suspicion came into my mind. At that exact moment there appeared with terrific clarity on the retinas of my eyes the poster I'd seen hanging in the tobacconist's window, and I suddenly realized that unrealized notion which had impressed itself so deeply on my visceral organs that it could not be verbalized. Yes, I was quite sure now. In big red heavy letters there was my own name on the poster, smoke drifting above it.

My first reaction was to flee the scene of this obviously practical joke. But after awhile a terrible feeling that no, it wasn't that, it was something else, something different and more horrible, came upon me. For some years I had been aware that there was something wrong with my memory. I was quite conscious that there was a hole in a certain area of my brain, where the memory trails off into the unconscious. Had in truth I been invited to read this evening, and forgotten all about it? No, it couldn't be, and yet . . .

Suddenly, as if I were caught in a dream of undisciplined dimensions (sic), Mrs. Sam appeared in the place of the gentleman on my left. Three caustic doodles were

arranged in a savage circle around her left eye. In the center of the explosion four carnivorous fish could be seen nibbling speculatively at Mr. Sam's image, which floated in a resinous bath at the core of the apple (of her eye)—natch. Mrs Sam, dusty with debris and fallen plaster, waved impatiently towards six vanishing birds. These birds flurried east, bearing her copy of Semen's *Reservoir*.

I spoke directly to Mrs Sam, ranging over a veritable card catalogue of subjects, finally coming to rest on one subject that captivated my interest: herself. "Oh lovely señora, you of the splendid voice! How I love you in your trembling garment of love lace, your dark and mysterious breasts so visible to my x-ray eyes. Dr. Rodin is stranded in my splattered fermentation, a breeze is blowing directly onto the playing field from the left..." And more of the same. She was savagely beautiful and I wanted to rip away that thin garment she wore and have a go at fucking what I imagined would be the most voluptuous cuntflap I had ever occasion to kiss.

Mrs Sam was one girl in a million. She was four feet seven inches and wore sombrero and buckskins. A lovely electric revolver graced her gunbelt. I watched in awe as she mounted the revolver and fired it six times into her snatch. She then adjusted her garter with silken fingers and fixed me in a stare of such benevolence that I began to cry... I found myself falling, falling, falling, falling, into her arms and past her teeth and out toward the tonsil mountains of her throat, and out past third and down the left base line into the stands of her esophagus... And there was nothing I could do to stop this delicious falling. Nothing to do but acquiesce and continue falling, toward the plastic heart which I knew was beating weakly beneath the luscious lumps of her breasts.

"Does a plastic heart have love in it?" I asked.

"My dear, you surprise me! Of course a plastic heart has love in it. The love in a plastic heart is the love of many people who love other people and don't want other people to

die. So these people work all day and often all night to build a heart that will make people live longer. If you can think of how much love there would be in hundreds of real hearts, then you know how much love there is in a plastic heart!"

I was modified by this discourse. I was taken aback and set afloat, only to go awash on the shores of her next most confounding remark: "Do not tell the white people about this, dear friend, but Jesus is now upon the earth and he has a plastic heart. The dead will walk, they are alive again, through the miracles of modern science. Do not refuse to work for the white man and do not make any trouble until you leave them. They all have plastic hearts and these plastic hearts are easily wounded by contempt. And when the earth shakes do not be afraid. It will not hurt you. It is only the earth's plastic heart doing pushups . . ."

Her eyes were pins of human light sparking in an empty auditorium. All the other folks kept their eyes turned away, deep in themselves and the grey shadows around us. More grey shadows rolled off the stage, propelled by the fatuous voice of Rodin in drag. Yes, and I had not expected that.

Raymond Queneau was in the audience, sitting not too far behind us. He congratulated me in a hushed whisper on my recent success in the advertising game. I blushed, nodded, felt secretly pleased that this eminent author whom I so much respected should see fit to congratulate me! And all this time the eyelids of Mrs Sam were fluttering, irises glowing and flowing clockwise round their darkened pupils, and her hand was buried in my coat sleeves, tickling the crook of my arm.

I made a tremendous effort to break out of her aura and get to the free air of the streets. Branches from her forehead were wrapping me in vines, vines of jewel light, frosted brightness, the hammer of night was pounding the terrace of my skull . . .

I finally did burst free and ran so fast toward the exit that everyone turned angry eyes in my direction for disturbing their span of attention. When I reached the street I discovered that my wristwatch was gone.

The lovely bitch! The lovely bitch . . . I'd like to . . . but no, what purpose would it serve? None at all. None at all. Imagine, getting disturbed over a lost wristwatch when tomorrow is the millenium and one-third of the world will perish.



Imagine that!" she tittered. "Only two-thirds remaining."

"Perhaps it is best," lamented Maria. "Dear me, when I think of the tortured human beings writhing in straitjackets or perhaps held down in hot water by canvas fitted around their necks and the sides of the tubs, as I have seen them in too many institutions and psychopathic wards, which I have visited, I long to give these people injections."

"Injections?"

"Vitamin B6 and magnesium."

It was a shame, Lydia thought, patrolling the garden with a contemplative eye. Standing in a dazzle of full sunlight was the whitest young woman she had ever seen. The girl blazed. Her skin, which had the thick, mat white of a gardenia, though heavily powdered, shone through the make-up like a pearl impossibly luminous. Under a close white felt helmet her hair showed in two white-gold wedges. Her plain white pleated frock fluttered, outlining a short figure, too broad across the shoulders for beauty.

This white-hot creature seemed to have nothing better to do than glare toward the hotel and eat up the inside of her mouth with strong little jaws which twisted the drooping scarlet heart on the outside till it looked like a tortured valentine.

"Hell's bells," cursed the person, and worse than that, she fell on her knees and took to searching the ground beneath the hedge.

From the point of dialogue, the task was relatively easy because the scene bridges two conversations that deal with separation. Visually, however, the cut version seems incongruous. The young lady, who has her fall removed during the deleted passage, suddenly appears in short hair. And a man has materialized at her side.

It was dusk and as they were seated next to each other on the sofa, his arm around her shoulders while she held his free hand moist in both of hers; as the fire glowed a powerful wind rose and it rained outside so that drops on the dark panes, which were a deep blue of ink, by reflection left small snail's tracks across and down the glass in rows, for Mrs Weatherby had not drawn the curtains; as he could outline her heavy head laid next to his only in a soft blue with darker hair over her great eye above the gentle fire-wavering profile of her nose, and, because he was nearest to this living pile of coals in the grate, he could see into this eye, into the two transparencies which veiled it down to that last surface which at three separate points glowed with the fire's same rose; as he sat at her lazy side it must have seemed to him he was looking right into her, relaxed inert and warm, a being open to himself, the fire, and the comfort of indoors, but with three great furnaces quiescent in her lovely head just showing through eyeholes to warn a man, if warning were needed, that she could be very much awake, did entirely love him with molten metal within her bones, within the cool back of her skull which under its living weight of hair was deeply, deeply known by his fingers.

Between the interior of this sphere and space was a thin wall. The cold of space was seeping through, and the air layer next to the wall would be precipitating its moisture. Ice

would form on the wall thus forming a high-pressure area. The hotter air near the center of the sphere would make a low-pressure area. So, winds would be generated by the cold high-pressure air moving toward the center into the warm low-pressure region.

When I looked at her face, with its enormous green tilted eyes, I wanted to turn away. It was one of those moments when reality breaks through everything we know, when the eye of someone we know becomes just an eye, then just a composition of lines and colors, then simply something we are seeing, then we are merely seeing, then we are ebbing away before our very consciousness. . . searing flame engulfed me as the propellant charge shot me, seat and all, through the ball of fire: spatially an object may be three-dimensional in shape, may even create a three-dimensional effect through a juxtaposition of solids and voids coupled with a simultaneous diversity of views, or it may create a three-dimensional effect on a two-dimension surface. The state of Michigan, in the memory of one who is familiar with its topography, may actually materialize on the surface of a map of the terrain.

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, a dazzling toccatto of synaptical energy, and Rawson Clivedale ecstatically whispered, "Bach!" Or "back!"

Now, in the monastery, I tell Father Jane, "Well, he knew the risk and was willing to pay the price. How nice that he prayed before starting out."

"Yes," says Father Jane, "even a gangster prays."

I saw a well-dressed, smallish man in the gutters of New York, clutching his head and asking for a priest. He himself was a priest, but he did not feel he could perform the last rites on himself. I too am a priest, of sorts, I mean I have a diploma and everything which says I am a certified minister

of the American Religious Church, and so I knelt down and mumbled some gibberish into his ear: it was the tone that mattered, plus a little God thrown in here and there. The man died believing I had absolved him of his sins, and isn't that what matters? Then he saw the endless disc which God flings, every evening, in as straight a line as possible, with its parallel, into infinity. Each time it goes a little further, but never far enough. It is shocking to realize how much he has grown. We are several miles away from his feet and we have to point our chin up, practically breaking our necks, to scan the clouds, waiting for a feature to break through.

Then he takes a tape from a flat cardboard box and fits in onto his machine. But soon the time came when my heart was so heavy that I grabbed at anything that was good for a laugh. I even began to look kindly on Rawson's pet baboon, in spite of the fact that he was chewing the seat cover off the ambulance. The ambulance moves, sunlight through the windows, glimpses of chartreuse trees in bud. An oxygen cup is placed over my mouth. Another baboon bursts from my brain.

With this baboon I used to play duets, he on the violin, I at the piano. One day he surprised me by saying that Mozart was the greatest composer of all. Beethoven, he said, created his music, but the music of Mozart was of such purity and beauty that one felt he had merely found it, that it had always existed as part of the inner beauty of the Universe, waiting to be revealed.

You can see how reasonable this is if you think of agitating a stick in a lake to create waves. Whether you wiggle the stick from a stationary pier, or from a rushing speedboat, the waves, once generated, are on their own, and their speed had nothing to do with that of the stick.

To move within the zone of indifference, such is the ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living that this

ecstasy comes when one is most alive and totally unaware that one is alive. This ecstasy, this divine oblivion, comes to the artist in his sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, mad on the stricken field; it comes to the bricklayer as he is placing the final brick; and it comes to Rawson Clivedale, sounding his old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and which fled before him in the moonlight.

After he catches the tomatoes, he pours them into huge containers, partially filled with liquid. The ripest tomatoes sink to the bottom and the less ripe ones float at various levels. Scientists say that ripeness affects the specific gravity of the tomato and thus its floating ability.

"Then what does he do with them?" inquired Maria in a tone suggesting more politeness than genuine interest.

The face of her companion grew dim. It had been struck by something from within. Her eyes looked out at the world, not to receive impressions, but to send a message.

"Yeah, it's gonna be just like I said, everybody'll be running in these cycles, ya know."

"One hundred and forty-two conversational positions."

"By that time I'll be still alive."

"You hope."

"Huh. Still milking that old joke?"

"Listen, it's just very different, you know, and people relate to each other differently and... it's just... entirely different, you know? I don't feel as *free*, you know what I mean?"

"Yes, oh, by the way, about the grapes. I know you want me to tell you the truth about it, and the truth is that when I got back home from Vermont I found this package against the door, and could smell it fifty feet away. The grapes, I'm sorry to say, were reduced almost to a mass of rotting pulp, there were a few good ones and I picked out as many as I could, enough to get the taste and flavor of home

again, but the rest I had to throw away as the little bugs began to swarm around them."

"I understand. Don't worry about it."

"I know you don't believe me."

"I believe you."

"Do you think I disobeyed the rules?"

"I dunno. Language is the woman. Make your own rules."

"Oh man, are you still hung up in sex?"

"Listen, there's another side to that question. Every second there's airplanes, there's lights, going back and forth, you dig?"

"Sounds like Rodin talking."

"What?! He's a horrible guy, man! I don't hold him up as any great figure of the imagination, do you?"

"Well, I spent a nice evening with him once smoking dope and listening to Billy Holiday records. I didn't think he was any great genius, but . . . I did hear that there was another side of him that is really *horrible*."

"You mean he freaks out like a maniac?"

"Not that. I heard that too, but not that."

"What then?"

"Oh, I don't think we should talk about it. I mean there's seven hundred thousand guys all with a ticket that says they're a teacher, you know? So why pick on one lone liberated mind?"

"Well, I always thought of him as special. I remember a couple of times he came over and said let's do this and everybody went out; ya know, it was something nobody would have thought of and it was completely silly but everybody had a lot of fun, you know, and just sort of got out of their groveling holes and . . ."

"Well, now he's packed up and gone to Asshole, Michigan."

"Good riddance."

She rose, irradiating relief. The creamy look returned and the lilt at the corners of the mouth, and it was Jacy's doing. He had taken charge. She would catch her train.

He turned back and now he noticed near the tunnel-steps a small display window crammed with bright junk. Here was a place to make enquiries. He tried the door and found it locked; but just inside the window an envelope had been propped up. 'Back in five minutes,' was scribbled on it in a woman's hand. He glanced at his wrist-watch, and while he waited he examined the display within.

"Oh, there you are!"

"Have you been waiting long?"

"Not so long. The polarity thing is so much a part of me now, I don't notice the passage of time."

"Well, bring your dichotomies inside and we'll have some tea."

There was a dull pause, broken only by the whine of electric fire. The door to the little shop opened and they entered quickly through the beaded curtains.

"Maybe that's the first stage," he was saying. "But this thing about arrangements . . . I think I remember now where it first got into my mind. It was in highschool. I was reading this guy H.P. Lovecraft and . . . when he got into his cosmic tales, you know, there were all these prehuman civilizations that had lived on earth and some of them had been beaten and sent outside . . . by these Elder Gods, you know, who had *locked* them into a different dimension. And the people of earth who wanted to free them could only do that when the stars fell into the right arrangement, do ya understand?"

"Sugar?"

"No."

"Yes, it's incredible. All these weird people feeding into this incredible *switchboard*. It's very different from the world I remember as a child."

"That stands to reason. When you were a child you didn't know you had little parasites living on your eyelashes, either."

"Damn rotifers."

"Well, listen, they probably figure they got their *responsibility*, you know, toward the ecology of the body. And toward their readers, those mysterious whisps who inhabit the subways of the esophagus. Little straphangers late for work in the hair follicles . . ."

She laughed, her eyes betrayed an admiration for this man of sawdust with the voracious mouth. A fluid of mystical collaboration was slowly building up between them, both of them were aware of it with the exquisite sensitivity of master alchemists.

"I . . . I . . . would say that the uh highest levels of the spirit can be unlocked by uh . . . symbols, wouldn't you?"

"It would seem so."

"I guess that's what art is all about, isn't it?"

"It appears that way."

"It's work, our work, but it's really play, isn't it? I mean we are in love and all power belongs to love, to do anything, isn't that so?"

"Well . . . they either do or they don't, I guess."

"And if they do?"

"And if they don't?"

"I could take my shoe off and use my bare foot."

"That's prehistoric."

"Like the aircraft we sighted last Sunday?"

"Like that."

He turned on his own private lamp, and as he did so there was a buzz. As he pressed the reception button a cathedral-organ voice came emotionally over the wire. "Fred! Beatie! I'm in total darkness. What monstrous thing is happening now?!" The voice rose to hurricane violence as it howled past, and in the mirror he saw the door behind the counter burst its catch and swing back, revealing the

widening oblong of the inner room, the bedpost with a bright blue coat and a tie hanging over it, the corner of the dressing-table and the small, darkly shaded lamp.

Lying on the bed was the figure of a man, naked. As the door swept open the man raised his head and looked at the two lovers, a smile of unspeakable beatitude crumbling his facial earth . . .

He belched.

The darkness receded and diminished as the scene around it was increasingly revealed, the way, as we allow our eyes to travel down long paths made of words, the meaning of a sentence grows in clarity and fullness until it must, by necessity, stop. But stop only to recharge its energy, so that an incredible amount of activity was taking place between each sentence, some of which was registered on the faces of the speakers, some of which registered on the faces of the listeners, both groups taking care, at the same time, to display a series of expressions and attitudes which were utterly false, that is, attitudes which these people did not themselves believe in. Or so they thought.

The gray, bearded face of Doctor Rodin took on an aura of extraordinary naivete, of innocence even, as Maria Malaronde approached him, a strange gentleman on her arm. Apparently this stranger, so incongruous beside the majestic height of the great lady, was an old friend, an idea which struck Rodin as odd, since he had known her quite well himself for almost thirty years.

"Doctor," she began, then faltered . . . what is it? . . .

"Doctor, I have the great pleasure to present to you my nephew, Mr. P. P. Diapers, of the Dirty Doodie Diaper Company. P.P., Doctor Hector Rodin."

The Doctor bowed gravely, his beard brushing his knees, at which moment he simultaneously noted, with irritation, that his shoes were unlaced and that his back had a crick in it, so that when Mr. Diapers had returned to an erect

position, he found himself confronted with the massive back of the doctor. For a moment he imagined that this grand eccentric might be starting off the evening with flair, but as the seconds went by, and Maria grew agitated, and the doctor began to grunt loudly, he flew to the aid of the bent octogenarian.

"It is six o'clock, sir," he said.

Later, listening to the tape recorded in the room that day, Rodin heard that urgent, "It's six o'clock, sir," and almost immediately after that a series of whistles and a sentence in an almost human voice. The sentence could have been merely a bad imitation of, "It's six o'clock," but Rodin and the rest of the people listening to the tape thought it sounded more like, "This is a trick," very clearly said, even if in more of a hiss than a statement. Rather than providing further evidence, however, the tape served only to complicate the already existing information.

It turned out, later, that Diaper's father, several times a day, would stand before the mirror, holding his son's head alongside his own so that the boy could see his own lip movements at the same time as those of his father. With his hand, the elder Diapers would move the boy's lips, forcing him to make sounds. The first sound he learned was that of a locomotive, then gradually how to fill in the scene, so that by the time he reached puberty, the shades of evening had enveloped the snorting locomotive and the flying carriages, which seem rapidly to wind their way along the track to the shoulders of the youth . . . red and yellow sparks and rays of light proceeded from the opened furnace of the locomotive, and seemed to cast a wild glow on the cars . . . There is light, too, issuing from the carriages, showing how the passengers inside are passing away the time. Some of them are reading, some sleeping, some talking, some appear sullenly to look out of the windows, then withdraw their visages. A darkened portion of the train is passing a signal-box and the dim light

therefrom faintly lights up part of the train as it passes, leans into a bend, then straightens out and flies along beside the hand of the boy.

To appreciate the nature of this tour de force, one must remember that the darkness was still receding into the background.

"May I suggest, sir, that you simply continue your bow onto the floor? That is, do a somersault."

The aged crook appeared to nod, for he then gave a little push with his toes and, his legs tucked neatly into his beer belly, he completed a very smooth forward roll. No one noticed that he had at the same time managed to tie his shoes.

"Diapers? Diapers, you say?"

"Yes, Hector, Diapers. Of course you silly goose," and here she laughed giddily at her familiarity with the distinguished Nobel Prize winner, "it's not his real name, it was adopted for business reasons."

Before Diapers managed to get in a word, Rodin hastened to ask, "Well, then what is your real name, if I may ask."

"My real name... hmmm... yes, most interesting..." And here his gaze, following the dwindling of his mentality, wandered over the decor of the dining car.

A porter went through the car paging a "Banana god."

"Is that me?" cried Diapers.

Maria placed a calming hand on his arm and gently guided him back into his former repose, casting, as she did, a smile warm with understanding at the Doctor. Yes, he understood, this young man is quite insane. The pretence maintained by Maria was a silent suggestion to Rodin that he too maintain the charade, but it was the identical message her face sent, from time to time, when the Doctor's attention

was absorbed in his dinner, to the wild-haired young man at her side.

Presently, after an evening tour of the various apartments and sleeping accommodations, Maria and the young fellow found themselves sitting in an old-fashioned parlor (lace doilies everywhere), toe to toe in conversation.

"Dr. Rodin is certainly a remarkable individual, wouldn't you say?" the mad youth said abruptly, in the midst of a discussion about the cows and trees whizzing past.

"Why . . . uh, yes, now that you mention it." Maria put a handkerchief nervously to her lips.

"I noticed it right away this afternoon, when we had tea together in the caboose. From the moment our conversation began, Dr. Rodin was entirely himself, relaxed, smiling, bouyant, not a wrinkle on his brow . . . He spoke to me with affection of Adolf Hitler, of Goebels, Himmler, Goring, Doenitz. He spoke of the inhumanity of the conquering Allies toward defeated Germany. He spoke, with hope, of the probability that America would join resurrected Germany in a third World War against Russia. I'm afraid I listened more with wonder than dismay, being something of a Hitlerphile myself. In fact, his accounts of his personal visits with Herr Hitler left me somewhat shaken with admiration . . . Did you know that this Rodin was once a priest, Hitler's personal confessor at the time of the invasion of Poland? And after that, throwing off the holy robes, he became Hitler's personal consultant in all matters relating to the dissecting of Jews? One trembles at the thought—one quakes with awe, yea even adoration of this Rodin, this giant among men!"

The red-haired youth gesticulated wildly, plunging about the narrow compartment with the demeanor of an orangutang. Maria thought quickly how she might calm his fury, lest he break perchance the airtight seal of the windows.

Such an accident would cause both calamity and catastrophe, for the train on which they traveled moved at seven hundred miles an hour, nearly twice the speed of an echo. A continuous vacuum enveloped the plunging express and would suck everyone instantly through the shattered ports into the raging throat of the wind . . . As she began to speak, Maria looked nervously at the red fires that burned brightly in the distant dark outside, and then at the hair of this boy, which seemed as bright as any fire, and twice as wild . . .

"Don't you think that Rodin has become merely a malicious gossip, even as he slides into the senility of his great age, or perhaps he feels embittered toward his fellow Jews, and his memory is faulty, colored by his paranoia. It is extremely doubtful, my dear young man, that this Rodin ever knew Hitler, least of all *spoke* with him. I should know, after all, I have been his lover for thirty-seven years!"

As these words left her full red lips, she raised the bottle of sherry *fino* in a sign that they should drink. The youth grew suddenly quiet, relaxed, even inward, as if the storm of his thoughts had blown out to sea . . . But perhaps it was simply the eye of the hurricane that rested now behind his steel-gray eyes. Perhaps in another moment he would . . .

She took no chances. As she poured the dry delicacy into the thin glasses she rubbed her plump pussy softly against his knee. *Meowwww* her breath seemed to say, as it unfurled across her teeth like the furry flag of the cat nation. The red-haired youth reached around and put his hand under her short skirt and massaged her rear with a soft caress. As he raised the sherry *fino* to his lips, Maria leaned over and stuck her tongue in his ear—

"Ah, señor, señor," she sighed. Then with bold eyes she asked: "Engrase el coche?"

The boy twiddled the dials of her breasts and winked.

"Some other night, babe."

She went limp with desire.

"Señor, you are a man among men."

"No, A boy among men, perhaps, or an adolescent. You see I am a virgin, madame."

"No!" Her tongue literally lolled out of her mouth at the fresh surge of excitement and lust that wracked her libido. The youth smiled, patted her hand, and poured another sherry. He didn't even wince as she bent indelicately to sniff his crotch, almost as a dog would do.

"Yes," she said, "you are a virgin. The odor is significant."

The red-haired youth rose and took down his suitcase from the rack. All this as the train ran clickety-click through the switches and crossings. More trains were visible, on either side, freight trains groaning with cargo for the distant shores, meat and vegetables for the starving farmers. And long passenger trains, silver zephyrs and pullman too, pulled by huge black chugging locomotives that boiled the whitest steam . . . They were coming into Chicago, hog butcher to the world, axis of the vast wheel of cities glittering in the North American night.

The red-haired one opened his portmanteau carefully, and removed a strange apparatus which he proceeded to inspect and assemble. He then attached a tiny piece of metal, smeared with honey, to the ceiling of the compartment. This was in turn wired to a galvanometer which he placed on the floor of the compartment. Another square of metal, smeared in guava jelly, he stuck among the hairs of Maria's cunt-bag, and then, ignoring her protests, he released about a thousand flies into the room, from a glass jar he had secreted under his socks.

"My dear boy, what are you doing?"

"A simple experiment, my good lady. The electricity discharged by these poor flies will pass through the galvanometer into the folds of your fine Spanish cunt, and as I enter you your cunt will proceed to wobble and sparkle

violently, sending you into a sexual tailspin such as you've never experienced."

"Oh!" was all she could say. Neither of them noticed the lines of helmeted policemen—a blue blurr—moving in formation through the streets of the city, nor the crowds of Monday workers, slouch-shouldered and weeping, off to their meager lunches in restaurant and bar, delicatessen and hotdog stand. The Playboy building whizzed past in the jewel-like noon light. The stockyards drew near, with their tantalizing perfume of stench. This was downtown Chicago. This was the flutter of wings of a drowned city, this sound that came muffled and dull through the thick sealed windows of the train . . .

And now his body was making the stock responses. Tightening of the larynx, minimal pain in the frenum, a shuddering along the arteries, a sense of slight levitation. His penis stood straight as steel as he released it from his pants and prepared to enter her. He had an apocalyptic vision of her insides—all a churned mess of slop and fiber, cream oozing sluggishly through the pipes, flavoring liquors ready to self-ignite, a frothing sea of souring wine. A small Indian township could have been nourished for a day on it all, he knew that, and it made him angry somehow to think of that, and his anger made his stub of a prick that much harder and harder and vehement in its plunge.

Outside the procession of the great city's life was still rolling by, great arterial highways full of sound like a mighty wind. He felt a twinge of guilt at his madness, which was now releasing its full fury toward this lovely receptacle, this graven urn of delights, this fleshy cave of night with its face of simple naivete and openness, a child she seemed to him then, as he took her, and he would have been short-circuited by remorse had he not quickly told himself: isn't the angry punitive seed more potent than the good gentle stuff that dribbles out in the pink-sheeted marriage beds? And the such.

How strange to feel one's teeth die, one by one, cell
igniting cell, galaxies of cells in dying brilliance . . .
She had one of those cunts that fits like a glove.



and his hands were chilly.

Long flying curls of water rolled out inside his fingers and broke beneath his fingernails.

Tiny longhaired ideas were gliding in on the rushing surface of his id as he raised his eyes to the blaze of curling tresses and felt himself caught in their swirl and swept away with a throbbing heart amid the lightning and the blasts of a hurricane of beauty.

A bluebird flies over a mountain.

Or heath hen? It sounded like a heath hen. About the size of a ruffed grouse, the heath hen often made a mournful hooting which one observer, myself, said might be simulated by blowing across the open mouth of a small vial. In flight it often gave vent to what sounded, heard in the early morning mists or in the falling light of evening across the vast, storm-buffed plain, like a burst of demonic laughter.

You have also heard the loon laughing under the rocks.

You know that by 1929, a bad year all round, only one heath hen, a male named Murgatroid, survived. It came alone to a field on the farm of James Green in West Tisbury on Martha's Vineyard and went through an abbreviated version of the usual mating ritual. In 1930 it appeared again but omitted any courtship maneuvers and uttered no sound. It came to the same spot once more in the spring of the follow-

ing year and then was seen no more. One animal, and with it its race, disappears into the ecology and the cockroaches applaud as another rises from the depths, like the umbellula, throwing its bluish glow through the dredge net, like dawn when you are in bed with a person whom you love madly and you are fucking slowly and softly rising in the half-light so marvelously that you don't know who you are and the door busts open and a man is spraying bullets into your head . . .

The young man straightened his composure and leaned toward the beautiful figure that was Maria Malaronde.

"Maria," he said, "let me tell you a story. One day I stopped at a red light next to an office building going up in L.A. and I watched the way the hod carriers piled their bricks in the hod, very fast, and in a diamond shape so you could see through all those bricks. The green signal came and I went to the studio and I said, 'Someday I'll do that with girls'—and I did."

Maria appeared uncertain. A man who is in the habit of smiling in the mirror at his handsome face and stalwart figure, if you show him their radiograph, will have face to face with that rosary of bones labelled as being the image of himself, the same surprise of error as the visitor to an art gallery who, on coming to the portrait of a girl, reads in his catalogue, "Dromedary Resting". Or was her confusion this simple? Was it perhaps like that of the observer who on a clear day is gazing down a street which ends a block away with a row of houses forming the background at the end of the street? He is talking to and looking directly at a companion only a short distance away. Soon this person (apparently) begins to move down the street until she [yes, a lady] reaches the background of houses at the end, and then she slowly comes back to her original position. The movement in both directions is distinctly perceived. During this movement there occurs no vagueness of outline or contour, no blurring or confusion of features, no loss or diminuation

of consciousness or vision on the part of the observer: the person observed seems distinct and substantial in character. The perceived object moves in relation to surrounding objects. There is no movement of the visual field as a whole. The object decreases in size during the backward movement and increases in size during the forward return movement. The young man, noticing Maria's momentary lapse of attention, appears troubled himself.

"What is it, Maria?" he asked, the question directed more to his lady friend than to himself.

"It? . . . it?"

The two words she had uttered were not the same.

She stood. He rose to meet her. The table fell away beneath them with a dramatic dip. Had someone drugged their beverages?

"I should like to go be in my cabin," she stated.

He walked her to the door, but somehow the image of the hod with its bricks stacked in a diamond shape of girls followed them. This is not uncommon. After-images may be seen after looking intently at any object and then directing one's attention toward a blank surface such as a wall. In this case the blankness had been mental, an emptiness which had thrown the image of the diamond into abrupt relief. But when they arose to go the image was superimposed on their attention so that the head of a bald gentleman near the door appeared to be bathed in sparkles.

Across the aisle from him a squat man in a yellow hat stuffed a dead cigar into the corner of his mouth and rolled a black, four-pound, lopsided ball down the aisle. It curved sharply and made its way between two other balls and toward the target, a smaller white ball. But the ball had been thrown too hard and the bowler's partner, a sturdy woman in her 60's stepped aside as the ball rolled past her, then cackled, "Too much Geritol on that one, Ev."

Ev smirked.

He had expected to see his ball stop next to the smaller ball. It had not done so. The difference between his expectation and the result was the measure of his disappointment, but the disappointment was raised in power like an X in algebra and inside his head he heard a tremendous noise, as if a gigantic rock were striking the head of a great man and the population were raising its voice to sing one long sinister note. Ev was a poor loser.

The golden voice of the Senate.

Foreign wars is the cause of it.

Paw says: it's the Russians. And the fucking Chinese got the ICBM shores of hell extended now along the coast of America, mother turn out the light and sleep in dread. Lay your tiny paperback on the night-table . . .

That night, lying beside his wife, Ev heard the drone of mighty engines in the black sky, the stars went off and on. It was a nightmare, but he awoke only to find she was gone and the figure of a white monk was fleeing across the patio . . . He turned on his side and she was sleeping quietly beside him. She turned on her side spewing hard luck story, he thought of watching a fly on the ceiling. She sounded like the press. He began to read her front page:

"After a short time the casualties moved in single file back up the hill. As they reached the crest of the hill they suddenly spun to the right in unison forming a line. Some dropped to one knee. Then they opened fire on the National Guard."

A horde of newsmen poured into this little town on the northeastern tip of her nose. He sway, his name was blown away in the dust, she leaned toward him and whispered: "you fuck me now?"

She laughed. She put her book out of existence. She assembled her body in its most personal pose. She seeks not to impose idea or image upon the events that followed. But I thought: a fast curve to break your love. It's what you get for

being here, near her. The devil gives you his blessing . . . Strobe view of a football game, the glimmer of a pass interception as it soars across the universe into the kitchen where Maria is emanating soft dissatisfaction.

I reach for her cunt and slash until it is luminous dancing subtle flirtations with the wind god. Back and forth on tiptoe in front of the TV, breaking views of white Pontiacs and fistfights. Now here's the end of *Ulysses* starring Kirk Douglas. Deeply satisfying to the subconscious somehow to see Ulysses returning to Ithaca to kill his fucking enemies.

Rodin hands me a bottle of coke that is cold and flat but quenches my thirst. I swig the cold coke and hand it to Maria. What does living and fighting in the jungle have to do with spending an hour with the kiddies helping them to break windows? China does have the A-bomb you know. Also the H-bomb. Also a population of 800,000,000 people which will double in the next two decades. I surmise she is preparing herself for war.

Listen, Cassaba, I was asleep on the front lawn when the sky opened up and God appeared with all his angels and associates.

"In twenty-four hours," he said, "everyone in the world will die."

So everybody goes in the house and trembles and lays his head against the pillow and smells the dandruff he left there three nights ago and says goodbye little dandruff, we've been together a long time you and I . . .

The sky is dark.

A vulture is sitting on my front lawn.

The sun is coming out from behind some clouds. It is an advertisement for handbags.

I am about to break into song, painful and personal.

"Why, O Lord, why this injustice in your universe?"

The song came as a cavernous sound, strangely melodious, beginning on a low pitch, slowly rising to a higher

frequency at which it sounded for a moment like a combined oboe and muted cornet, trailing off into an eerie high-pitched undulating wail like melancholy bagpipes fading into silence.

And then the silence faded into an auditory void.

"Nobody knows how he makes the sounds," said one of the policemen whom I now recognize to be Rodin. "He has no vocal chords, but we think it has something to do with wind streams flowing through air layers of varying density."

"Now what does this mean?" I asked.

"It means that the Cosmic Tone is not of one wavelength, but that it embraces all wavelengths, like an um-ditty-wah-wah. So we gain a new understanding of the Infinite. The vector here is not one of infinite frequency but it is composed of an infinite number of frequencies, one of which was the famed Golden Voice—frequencies, with infinite tonal significance—cosmically. So what we have here is one dimension, one qualitative dimension: universal periodicity."

The old savant paused to allow his words to sink in. It is possible he noted how they were bouncing off my understanding, because he quickly resumed his explanation.

"Given that I have an iron bar at 0°C. which measures 2 metres. I then heat it to, say, 80°C. and, measuring it again, find that it is now 200.192 cm. It has expanded .192 cm."

"There are a hundred centimeters in a metre," I nodded.

"Right. Okay, now suppose I allow it to cool to 0°C. again and find that it measure, as before, 2 metres, but on heating it up to 80°C. again it still measure 2 metres. Only one thing could have happened. My measure must have expanded in exactly the same proportions as the bar."

Now I understood, "Similarly, there is a difference between the look of an idea and the act of looking at the idea. The latter activity, which attempts to exhibit the ultimate condition of all speech (logos), marks the point of

distinction—a methodological distinction only—between the whatness of the world and its meaningfulness.”

“And when the whatness of the world and its meaningfulness merge into an insoluble unity the Cosmic Tone is heard . . . or should I say Cosmic Tune?”

We are walking towards a dark door through the cracks of which flicker intermittently the Northern Lights. From the other side of the door comes the rattle of something like a rapidfire gun swiftly biting off its belts of cartridges, each one of which is a century.

The door leads to a shadowy space threaded with crackling bits of sprayed lightning. The noise pierces my ears. Somewhere I hear the voice of an elderly man shouting, “I will tell you nothing!” I hold myself straight, rigid in fact, and I button up my overcoat which had brushed against a sinister-looking machine made of copper. Rodin, whose face looks pleasantly benign in the flashing light, takes one step forward. I humbly do the same. The soldiers watch me furtively. I feel partly like a green thumb about to be attacked by wild plants, partly like this simile, self-conscious, doubled back on myself, trapped, hideously trapped in space and time forever.

A few miles across town she cried as she went in and clapped her hands to her head, “Oh, tea, tea, tea and crumpets, how divine of your darkling, and so grand, just for us two. You know I think I will take my hat off,” and doing this she wandered round looking at pictures on the walls.

“They are sending a report,” shouts the venerable Doctor over the din.

One of these was of Nero fiddling while Rome burned, on a marble terrace. He stood to his violin and eight fat women reclined on mattresses in front while behind was what was evidently a great conflagration.

“Negro and his wives,” she said and passed on.

These words enter the basin and, cooled by a stream of water, are transformed into a high-frequency current which is fed into the Cosmic Tone. This streamer with wire coils is the "self" which regulates the frequency of the current, the relay which turns it on and off, as indicated by a key on which a young man wearing a white blouse and shut up in a glass box plays the dots and dashes.

Another was one of those reproductions of French eighteenth-century paintings which shows a large bed with covers turned back and half in, half out of it a fat girl with fat legs sticking out of her night-dress and one man menacing and another disappearing behind curtains.

I was of course both men, or rather a single man sawed in half, the front half approaches menacingly and the back half recedes menacingly: the pleasurable feeling one gets from this is in the act of separation: the woman is sawed in half by the magician and a tall man from San Antonio is wandering around looking for you.

"You are the most beautiful person in the world," I said to her as sincerely as possible.

She burst into tears, her face screwed up and got red and she held her handkerchief to her nose and sniffled as if that was where her tears were coming from.

"Oh my God," I said and then my knees went so that I thought I would sink to the ground, where I was standing, and without doing so I noticed that we are releasing violet flashes from our heads which are floating in strawberry fields. How gingerly I tread! Don't want to crush the strawberries! The fog is rolling in! Will we be able to mow the lawn? Everything about me is not mysterious. A sapper leans over a glass aperture in which he sees how a pump empties a lamp of its molecules. I bend over beside him. In the tube I see a wavy lilac line which grows larger second by second and then fades away in dreamy irradiations in which furrows appear and widen.

The figure of Mr Mickey Mouse is hopping from furrow to furrow. The wider the furrow the longer the leap, until he is making tremendously long leaps. About 800 yards I'd say. All the while he is reading a newspaper.

"Princess Anne Unhorsed," he reads aloud, "Tidworth, England, May 24 (A.P.)—Princess Anne was thrown from her horse in jumping competition today and was heard to say, 'I saw bloody stars.'"

I am moving now with Mickey. Over us the stars, silver on a dark green background, have begun to drip tiny, perfectly round drops of red blood which hit an invisible plane and begin to run in long streaks. Of course it is the Doctor operating.

He looks down at me and says, "Hello there young guy." Quietly he leads the way out of the operating theater and down a long white corridor to a sunny room with a glass wall facing the inevitable fjord. There is a couch by the window and a table of light wood on which water hyacinths are growing in a yellow bowl. The room smells of ozone and flowers.

"The Victorians were great believers in ozone," laughs Rodin, "and it is quite lethal. 'The ozone of the ocean's zone . . . ' Quite silly, of course. But you are not interested in the miscellaneous musings of an old fogey's addled brain."

"Yes I am," I said. And then realizing what I had said I said, "I mean . . ."

Rodin laughed. Then he stopped and laughed once again.

He motioned me to the chair opposite what looks like a bust wrapped in bandages.

"We call her Medusa, now isn't that cute?" He fiddles with some dials above Medusa's head and steps to one side. Something slides off Medusa's right shoulder and hits me right in the heart. I am dying. Heart breathing brain stops. A final phrase darkening, "Don't forget to be gone tomorrow . . ."

But it is not true. Just as a lower case letter c can be corrected on many typewriters to form a perfect o, my life backspaced in time and I was corrected—transformed. The cat disappeared behind the oatmeal box.

This happens to me every second of my life.



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