American University of Central Asia

ACADEMIC ORIENTATION PROGRAM 2022

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

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"The Sound of Silence" lyrics

Simon & Garfunkel Lyrics

Hello, darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains
Within the sound of silence

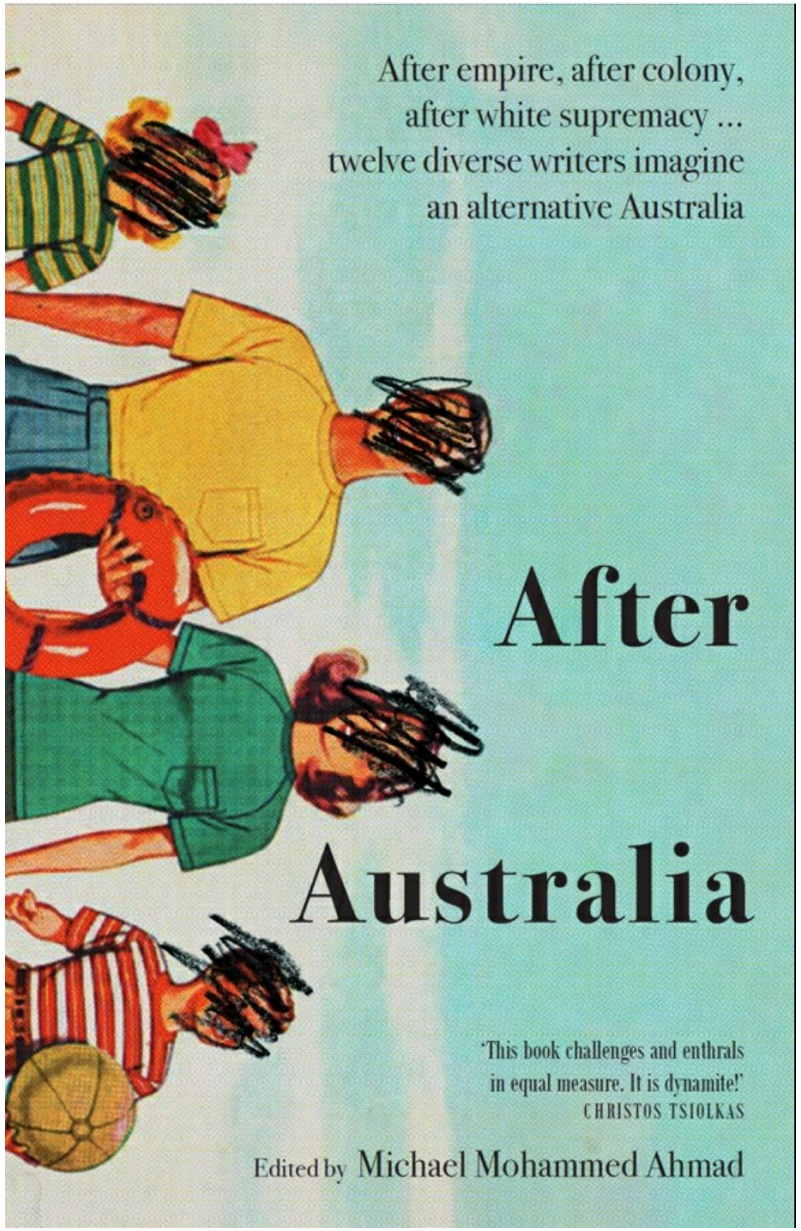
In restless dreams I walked alone
Narrow streets of cobblestone
'Neath the halo of a streetlamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light
That split the night
And touched the sound of silence

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
No one dared
Disturb the sound of silence

"Fools," said I, "You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows
Hear my words that I might teach you
Take my arms that I might reach you."

But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they made
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming
And the sign said, "The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls
And whispered in the sounds of silence."



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books that leave an impression

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Bu Liao Qing
by Michelle Law

At 10 pm, I go to meet my mum at the markets, where the stench of rotting fish is so strong I need to hold my nose. I'm surprised and terrified to find several other women (some my age, with their mothers, but mostly older women with their partners or friends) at the dock. What if the crowd gives us away? But the mothers, partners, and friends … they don't seem to care anymore. Their time was always up in this country, and because of what they're enabling tonight, they'll likely be dead by morning. Some of them are crying; all of them are whispering.

'Be brave. Our ancestors survived the same and so can you.'

'Where women's bodies go, trouble follows. Stay safe.'

'Don't cry, I will love you forever.'

'Your Po Po guessed I was a girl, and that you were a girl. You have a girl in there.'

One by one, they step into the boat.

It takes me some time to spot my mum but the moon is bright tonight and soon I see her standing alone at the end of the jetty, tapping her foot and holding a fresh flask of herb soup tightly against her chest like a cushion. When I'm close enough to make out her face, I see that she is crying, and I gasp aloud. She opens her mouth to speak and I hug her tightly, silencing her. A moment passes. Then she kisses me on the forehead and pushes me backwards into the boat with the flask of soup. I watch her walk into the dark night, back towards the train station. When she's out of view I stare into the open water, all those fish belly-up, and I vomit.

One morning Mum packs me a flask of herb soup and leads me to the front door, gripping my arm like I could topple at any moment. She rests her hand on the doorknob before I can reach it.

'You don't have to tell him,' she writes, and then erases. Most people use notepads, but we use small pieces of plastic packaging, the hardy stuff you need to cut through, because if we're ever inspected we can just say it's leftover rubbish. The plastic was Mum's idea; I guess you could call her clever, or paranoid, or both.

I don't respond, just pull on my boots and try ignoring the cramping feeling in my stomach. I make sure not to frown or rub the area; if I give anything away she'll stop me from going out at all. Mum watches me with her arms crossed, brow furrowed and squinting slightly; her glasses broke when an Official held her face down on the market floor when she got caught up in a riot last month. Her hair is greying from the temples even though she's still pretty young, had me in a panic in her early twenties after she learnt that she and everyone else in her generation wouldn't have another chance to be parents. As I open the door she sighs pointedly, and I have to hide my irritation. These days I mostly feel annoyance and guilt towards her. She was joyful in moments when I was younger, when it wasn't just us and it wasn't as hot.

I take one final look at our apartment: the windows painted black from inside, which means you can never quite tell whether it's morning or night; the worn furniture with shredded upholstery from our cat Rufus, who I'd attempted to hug goodbye before he scampered beneath my bed; the hardened, half-eaten bowl of plain congee on the table; the bowl of fruit Mum always makes sure to keep full – her one indulgence besides my train fares, and how most of our weekly allowance is spent. These days, one banana goes for about the same price as a new pair of shoes, but if you know who to haggle with at the markets you can come away with a whole hand of ladyfingers that you can freeze and ration for the year.

I start making my way down the hall when Mum calls out.

'Wait,' she says, and splays both hands out in the air, wriggling all her fingers, which means '10pm'. She does it twice for effect. I nod and jog down the stairs.

I take the tunnel to the station because it's boiling and I can't bear the idea of wearing my OCs (Outdoor Clothes) right now. Better to just stay underground where it's a couple of degrees cooler, although I can already feel my skin prickling and itching, and my fringe sticking to my forehead. The cramps make me sweat more. I almost sneaked one of Mum's painkillers this morning, but she said they're only for emergencies, and when I imagined her alone at home with no one to care for her except Rufus, who I'm sure would take a bite out of us if he had the chance, I couldn't go through with it. Instead I sat on the toilet with the lid down and the shower running so Mum couldn't hear me groaning in pain.

On the train, I open the flask of herb soup and take small sips. These days, I can periodically feel my saliva becoming thick and mucousy for no apparent reason; even the smell of rice is too much. I think back to two months ago, when I started throwing up and Mum wordlessly began collecting different herbs from jars she kept in her room. She'd served me up a bowl of soup and rested her hand on my shoulder, stoic, but tapping her foot, which is something she does when she's panicked. 'It might not keep,' I'd said, tears in my eyes. 'A lot of the time they don't keep.' She just sighed and went back to the stove.

There's a young man on the train about three rows ahead of me eating from a steel lunch box; he's pulled the layers out and spread them across his row of seats like a bento. For the first time I'm glad I can't stomach anything because if I had any appetite I'd probably knock him out for a taste of what he's eating. There's rice, marinated pork with brown onions and scallions (I can't remember the last time I ate real meat), some wilted greens, and kim chi. The greens look like spinach. Fresh spinach. I'm guessing he's a maintenance worker, doing one of the riskier jobs that pay tons. For one thing, he's chubby, well fed. He's also got a nice haircut and sparkly stud earrings peeking out from under his black hair. Most guys have buzz cuts, but his hair is properly styled so he looks like one of those Korean pop stars I've seen in archival videos. And nobody travels to the Old City besides maintenance workers and students, most of whom are poor, like me, although Mum and I are certainly not the poorest. He must be one of the electricians or plumbers or cleaners who manage the school buildings to

prevent any more big lawsuits happening. One year, before they started hiring workers, a mouldy ceiling collapsed on one student's head. She didn't die, but she got a concussion that led to her developing amnesia, and her parents sued the State government for millions and won … back when you could sue Officials. Another year, a student got electrocuted in a flooded basement because of damaged wiring. He *did* die.

The man is slurping his kimchi now, chewing so loudly and with his mouth wide open, so the pong of garlic and chilli, which I normally love, wafts from his big, stubbly mouth into the rest of the carriage. I take more small sips of my soup. Besides the kimchi pong, I'm getting motion sickness from travelling backwards. Mum said when she was growing up the train seats had a mechanism where you could switch the direction of the seats, which I thought was neat, but the levers are all rusted through now, have been for decades.

To distract myself from my stomach, I focus on what the man's focusing on: the passing landscape. There's not much to see through the tinted windows – empty office buildings smattered with bird droppings, weaving motorways dotted with a couple of stationary cars, and lots of ibises. They're perched everywhere: on street lights that lost their power long ago, without which you can't see much in the evenings unless there's a full moon, and on abandoned luxury cars reflecting the morning glare off their smashed-up windscreens. They stalk down the roads inspecting old food wrappers in that hunched, bobbing motion that makes them look like ancient apothecaries, which I had to play in *Romeo and Juliet* last term because everyone else 'would rather die than play a doctor'. I don't mind the ibises like other people do. At school (the building used to be this big-shot library) I read in this book called *The Definitive Australian Bird Guide* that ibises are native birds. Now they're just about the only ones left, and have started reclaiming the land.

There's a buzzing sound and the man whips out a phone. It's a bit smaller than the other heat-resistant bricks you see around (he's definitely rich) but it still has that keyboard with protruding buttons that make annoying clicking noises as you type. He's got a message, which he reads and thinks about before typing out a response and sending it. *What an idiot,* I think to myself. Sure, he's rich enough to have pork and spinach and the best technology, but I guess wealth and cleverness aren't mutually exclusive. It's not like they tell us that they're watching, that they're monitoring our every move – if they told us that there'd be more rioting than there already is. The control is unspoken, but you see it in the evening smoke rising from people's gardens or balconies (the messages they've written in their notepads that they must burn every night). You see it in the Officials silencing community leaders with emotional blackmail because they know the sexual stuff they've been watching online (the guys in class said they're apparently pornos of white women dressed as farm animals getting done up the butt because it's the only way community leaders can feel some semblance of control anymore, although none of the guys have admitted to watching the videos themselves). And you see it in the demand for Auslan literacy when applying for any kind of job, even at the markets. Actually, especially at the markets.

Okay, the man is donning his OCs now and I would thank God aloud if I believed in Him or Her and I wasn't burping up more bile. He packs his lunch box up and pushes sunglasses onto his face and makes his way towards the doors. He passes several people on the platform, about four or five men and women of colour, since it's peak hour and the factories are opening up for the day. There's also a white person – a kid, I'm guessing, from their height – trying to fit their arm into an ancient vending machine to grab a packet of chips, more out of boredom than anything; those chips are probably older than the kid and eating them would probably mean a trip to the doctor's and you'd rather try your luck dying at home than getting any real treatment. Mum says doctors used to be some of the most trustworthy and respected people before every diagnosis and every secret that patients shared with them became the government's business.

A couple of commuters watch the kid, mildly interested, but the others just stare ahead at nothing in particular while fanning themselves, too hot to be present. The kid's got scrappy OCs, probably the descendant of one of the few white workers whose families stood with ours during the first riot and lost their positions as a result. Once the water started rising, everyone wanted to escape the Old City, but there wasn't enough space in the west for us all. I start layering on my OCs, which are in good nick and better quality than most OCs you buy in a store or market, considering Mum had to sew extensions on as I grew. I slip on my long-sleeved shirt; trousers, which get tucked into my socks; a breathable balaclava; polarised sunglasses, and a wide-brimmed hat. I'm already sweating through the shirt, but it's nice to have something tight against my stomach; it eases the cramping.

We're moving into the heart of the Old City now – the end of the line. I can see the heat rising off the bitumen on the platform outside, and the gulls and ibises circling above the water, dried mud caked on their wings. For most of my life, I thought that seagulls and ibises were brown; Mum says the smart birds learnt to cover themselves with mud decades ago to protect themselves against UV rays, while the dumb ones are burnt and covered in cancerous growths or dead and eaten by their comrades or very desperate homeless folk. In the distance, I can make out the Opera House with its arched tips bent sideways like stretching dancers. Mum's told me about the shows she saw there as a child, how there were concerts and ballets and comedies before they shut the place down. There was even an ad for the Melbourne Cup projected onto the Opera House once, when Mum was growing up. Apparently the race caused a big uproar each year because the horses got abused, but I sort of wonder what would have been worse: the horses being shot after injuries then or the horses being boiled alive by the heat today?

The Opera House is boarded up now, but the rumour is that squatters have made nests in the balconies in the old concert hall, where they're high off the ground, far from the water and the mosquitoes breeding in it. If you can tolerate the damp and the cyclonic cold fronts that burst through the broken windows during winter, I can imagine the place making a classy home. You'd have plenty of space and you'd never get

bored, unlike the one-bedroom apartments most of us in the New City can afford.

I step off the train and into the open air, where the heat washes over me and makes it difficult to breathe. I take two steps at a time down the dead escalators. At the bottom, my shoes make a giant splash in the water because I forgot to make the extra leap onto the bridging plank to school.

'Shit,' I say aloud, although I never really swear (Mum's only ever had two rules and they're 'Don't swear unless you have to' and … and the other rule I broke), but it's fine because as always I'm the only person at the station. The only other noises around are the squawking birds and the grinding of the ferry bows against shop windows, like nails on a chalkboard, except deeper and sadder, almost a moan. When the ports flooded Circular Quay the ferries rose with the water and now their rusted, empty carcasses bob around the harbour aimlessly.

I'm desperate to get into the air conditioning at school. It's the last time we can feasibly be outdoors before summer; if heat exhaustion doesn't get you, dehydration will. Last year, when fewer people started coming to class because it was just too far out and their parents wanted to save their train fares for rations, I started skipping some classes and breaking into the library stacks, which we were technically banned from entering, but it was so dark and cool and untouched in there I couldn't resist. I found a drawer full of catalogued news articles that said there wouldn't be any cataclysmic disaster that would make the world unlivable for most of the human and animal population; the temperature would simply rise to a point where the climate was hotter than our bodies, which meant that we'd no longer be able to perspire, which meant that we'd slowly start to cook from the inside out. Frog in a pot kind of thing.

'When I read those articles in the paper I fell into a deep depression,' says my mum whenever I grill her about why she had me if she knew what lay ahead. 'I felt like I'd been so irresponsible choosing to have you.' That made me angry, her self-indulgence, because it meant that I couldn't be sad for myself. I just wanted her to say that she wanted me so badly she risked everything to have me.

After every conversation like this Mum looks at me, aghast, and says, 'I'm sorry.' Once, I asked her to clarify why and she said, 'I feel sorry for you,' and didn't stop crying to the point where I had to hug her and that made her cry harder. The only other time she cries is when she talks about my dad, her boyfriend who got king-hit by an Official while protesting, when I was a toddler. Apparently Dad was funny and had small eyes, like me. Mum says he liked to break rules.

Knowing that about Dad inspired me to break into the library. And it was actually there where Raymond and I always hooked up. I had liked him since the first day of school, when we were about twelve years old and he told the teacher he was only studying out of obligation.

'My parents don't even speak Mandarin but they're so desperate to be able to control one thing in their lives they're sending me here to "preserve our culture" because they "don't want me to lose myself like they have,"' he'd said, not bitterly, but matter-of-factly, like that was that, and could we please get on with the lesson now. I didn't have a crush on him then; I

just admired that he could speak like that – freely, without fear that the room might be bugged or something. I hadn't seen anyone, let alone another kid, have that much self-respect in public. I remember there being a suspended silence after he spoke, like the class and teacher half expected Officials to break through the ceiling and shoot Raymond dead. It was scary. After that, I avoided him most of the time. It wasn't until maybe two years ago that I started finding those qualities about him attractive. I also liked how he'd furrow his eyebrows when he was trying to get the strokes for a character in the right order; how he'd pack his own lunch, which was normally preserved fruit and congee with a sprinkling of salted peanuts that he kept in a giant container in his desk, and how he'd run his hands through his black, dead-straight hair when he was tired to wake himself up. His pants were also too tight because his parents couldn't afford to buy him new ones – so I understood that he was frugal and had a good butt.

'Can I sit here?' I said to him out of the blue one day, around last year. It took him by surprise; his dark eyes flickered from the whiteboard to mine. He always had hard eyes but in that moment of surprise I saw something shift – just a glimmer of softness. Being that close to him, I realised that I'd only ever seen him in profile before, from the safety of my desk – a strong, slightly stubbly jaw line pointed towards the teacher. Now I saw that he had a small, black freckle on his upper lip. His tanned skin was remarkably clear except for a trail of medium-sized pockmarks on his right cheek. When he spoke, I saw that his teeth were white and straight except for one of his front teeth, which curved slightly inwards. I liked these things about him the most, these imperfections that undercut yet somehow defined his handsomeness. I wondered what he thought staring back at me. That I had small, determined eyes, probably, but also that they suited me. That I was bony, with uneven bangs and a shoulder-length bob that I learnt to cut myself, and full lips hiding a chipped incisor from when I was so hungry as a child I tried eating gravel. I wondered if he ever watched me from across the room too. It wasn't that we weren't friendly to each other; we just rarely spoke unless it was part of a group assignment. I gestured to the desk beside him, which was ballsy on my part because the classroom was mostly empty these days, even on those days our teacher bothered to come.

'Sure,' he said, and then we learnt everything about each other through our words: him writing in his notebook and burning the evidence at night, and me scribbling away on my plastic packaging. I learnt that he had two younger sisters, and an older brother who had died of an asthma attack as a baby because of the dust storms. His great-great-grandparents on his dad's side moved to Sydney from Beijing and started a convenience store business which went bankrupt when his dad was a kid and now his parents worked in factories making OCs, which was ironic because they earned so little they couldn't even afford to buy the clothes they were making, had to get by on hand-me-downs from people in the community. Raymond's favourite food was salted eggs, which was something he only ever got on his birthdays. His skin always smelt of salt – probably sweat – but never of BO. And he had a Mongolian spot on his right butt cheek (he flashed me one day when a

teacher had their back to us) which never disappeared, even as he grew up. He loved fart jokes and used to have a massive crush on Cherrie, who's Eurasian, before his dad told him that her dad was a cruel and lousy gweilo – he was always cheating on his wife and he punished the workers with lower wages if they took bathroom breaks, so a couple of women had pissed themselves on the job. After Raymond's dad got sick with cancer he shat himself during a twelve-hour shift and had to walk home in his shit-filled pants.

I told Raymond about how my mum was born in Australia to older parents who ran a chain of Chinese restaurants across Sydney. I told him about how my gung gung and po po died from heat stroke when they stayed outdoors for too long trying to protect their restaurants from looters, and how after that Mum fell into a deep depression that only lifted when she met Dad (an international student from Singapore who teased her for only being able to speak English) and then returned after his death. I told him that besides Yu, my best friend was Rufus, who was not affectionate with me but once sat in the lap of another tenant in our building, which infuriated me, and that made Raymond laugh. I told him that for money Mum took on sewing jobs and sometimes travelled to the houses of Officials to do their wives' or mistresses' nails, and that if it weren't for the extra food Mum stole from their pantries – tea leaves, bread and pickles – sometimes we just wouldn't eat for a day. He learnt that my favourite food is ice cubes, which Mum and I get as a treat once a year from the only shop that has a generator large enough to power freezers. And that I have an ingrown toenail that formed when I had a growth spurt and had to wear the same, tight boots for six months until we could afford fabric for Mum to alter them.

One day Raymond found me in the library watching *Alien* for the billionth time, which I do when teachers don't turn up. He silently waited beside me until I stood and led him to the stacks and touched his cheek softly. Then we were kissing and pulling up each other's tops and I turned the volume up on the movie so no one could hear us as he hitched up my skirt, and that time, and all the other times, and just now when I accidentally stepped into the puddle near the station, are the only instances where I've sworn in my life.

'He can't keep a secret,' my mum had written when we figured out a plan. 'Don't you love him?'

I nodded. That's why I broke up with him.

'Then don't make him look guilty too,' she wrote, then erased, and then turned back to the congee on the stove.

'Mum,' I said, and she shot me a warning look, which was fine, but then a desperately sad look that seemed to contain the weight of everything she wanted to tell me and soothe me with. I suddenly felt angry because it hit me that I rarely got to hear her voice, which was warm and comforting, and what I deserve. The most I ever got to hear her speak was when she sang low, lovelorn Mandarin ballads she learnt from her grandmother that neither of us understands, except I've been deciphering the lyrics over the years. Some of them go*, 'Do you remember the long lane where we used to walk? Now only touched by the light of the lonely crescent moon … How could I forget, how could I ever forget? How could I forget the end of spring?'*

I don’t even make it to the school building before I see Raymond, Yu and Cherrie sitting inside the convenience store around the corner from school, their faded second-hand OCs balled up by their feet, except Cherrie’s, which are brand new and folded on her lap. You could spot Cherrie’s pale, pointy face – she bleaches her skin, not that she needs to with the level of sun protection her OCs afford – and bright lipstick from a mile away. Our teacher must have forgotten to turn up again, or she’s just done caring, or she can’t afford to travel into the Old City anymore, or she’s being held in detention somewhere by an Official for something she's said. Teachers are supposed to be impartial – they get in trouble for veering from the curriculum in the tiniest way. Last year a teacher disappeared when he brought an ancient tin of lychees to class. It was an heirloom left by his sister, who had been shot dead by a humiliated Official after she dumped him. We got to share the lychees with him on the anniversary of her death. He didn't tell us any of this, we were just happy to taste something new for the first time and a bit weirded out that he cried for most of the class, but it all came out when he didn't arrive at school the next day. Teachers can disappear for any reason. We've been through dozens of them since we started at school, so we've learnt not to get attached early on.

I enter the shop and pay for a chicken-flavoured instant noodle cup. Even though the flavours in the powder are more artificial than Cherrie the noodles taste homey and the idea of eating them doesn't make me feel nauseous. Yu and Cherrie are deep in a conversation, signing to each other excitedly. Cherrie's pretty up herself about being able to sign because her family has the money to fork out for Auslan classes, but Yu's grounded and only knows how to sign because her brother is deaf, so I'll get the goss about their conversation from her later. They don't see me, but Raymond does, and then pretends like he hasn't. I make my noodles at the self-serve station, which is just a hot water tap and some forks, and bring it over to the small table where they're sitting, by a blacked out window.

'Hey guys, I say, and take the seat beside Raymond. He bristles, but not angrily, more out of nervousness.

'Another fruitful day of learning,’ says Cherrie, brimming with sarcasm.

What's the point of coming all the way here if she's not even going to show up?' says Raymond, and I half-wonder whether he should have written that instead of spoken it, but at this point I'm too tired to care. I slept fourteen hours last night and I still feel lethargic. I wonder if I can really withstand months more of this feeling.

Classes have always taken place in the Old City, which was largely abandoned after sea levels rose higher and faster than anyone predicted, or believed would happen, sending most people inland and to the west, to the New City. Besides some graffiti, most of the buildings in the old City are remarkably intact, just empty. The Queen Victoria building is still regal-looking, even with all the smashed windows and the WHITES GO HOME' graffiti scrawled across the statue outside. And the Sydney Tower still rotates sometimes during cyclones – the words 'FUCK OFF' turn round and round in the sky since someone spraypainted them on the glass. If it weren't for the odour, people would probably have stayed, but few can stand

the smell of reeking, rotting fish and ibis shit, which coats almost everything. The rent is cheaper here, which means that most of the language schools are here. Typical ethnics.

'Ray,' says Yu, warningly. She drinks the rest of her broth. Hers is seafood-flavoured. 'You know it's not that simple.'

‘I'm going to quit classes,' says Ray. 'My parents need the money.' He makes sure not to look at Cherrie when he says this. Cherrie is not our friend – most people have been flung together in class due to a sheer lack of numbers. We're the last generation of 'native settlers' in the country, whatever that means, and so we have to stick together before the first intake of refugees, or so the Officials say.

'Then quit,' says Cherrie. 'What's keeping you here?' She raises her eyebrows at Raymond and me pointedly and sips on her drink, some passionfruit-flavoured thing. Of course none of us have ever tasted passionfruit in real life (most fresh food is shipped in for rich folk from the one plant bank that survived the Svalbard floods). Then Cherrie turns to Yu and clamps her nose shut with her thumb and forefinger. 'Why do you always get seafood flavour? Air not fishy enough for you already?'

'We can't eat any of those fish, says Yu, teasingly. She burps in Cherrie's face and Cherrie waves the burp away, disgusted. 'Aren't you curious about what tuna tasted like?'

‘No. Tuna was full of mercury, anyway,’ says Cherrie. Then she gently unfolds her OCs and starts getting dressed.

'Where are you going?' I ask, slurping down my noodles. They're good. I realise that I'm hungry.

'For a walk,' says Cherrie, tetchy. She glances at the three of us, aware that she's on the outer, and leaves. Anyone else, I would have warned. Who goes for walks outside in the daytime? For leisure? But Cherrie wears the top range of OCs, thanks to her parents, and is more protected outside than any high-ranking official. With Cherrie gone, Raymond seems to relax and even manages a smile with me.

'How have you been?' he asks.

'I'm okay. How's your dad?'

He shrugs, which means not good; the past couple of months his dad's been coughing up blood. He takes a swig of my noodle soup and sets the cup back down. He clears his throat.

‘I miss you,' he says.

'It's only been two weeks.'

‘I know, but you didn't come to class last week and I was worried. Are you feeling better?'

Yu stands up to bin her empty noodle cup and makes a show of browsing the shelves so Raymond and I can be alone.

‘Yeah. Just a bug.’

'Dad thought it was just a bug,' he says.

'Let's change the subject,' I say cheerily, my voice strained. I wave Yu over and she returns with a basket full of snacks: barley sugar, water crackers, and salty plums. I'm tempted to ask for some crackers, I'm still hungry, but I know the food is meant to last her for a while.

‘What were you and Cherrie talking about?' I ask.

Yu immediately whips out her notepad and scrawls madly, then shoves the paper into my face: 'SHE'S DATING A DOCTOR.' My stomach sinks. I read the next line: 'Bragging

about knowing top secret shit. GROSS.' 'Gross' is underlined twice.

There was a girl named Jasmine in our class who fainted last year. We all thought it was because of heat stroke. She was taken to a doctor to be monitored and when she woke up they'd taken her baby out of her while she was unconscious. They sent her home with two whopping fines: one, for concealment, and another, for not seeking an abortion. Then they brought her to the centre of the New City and made an example of her, kicking her in the stomach repeatedly so it would never happen again. Her family couldn't pay the fines so they were evicted from their home. Jasmine stopped coming to classes, and nobody knew where she or her family went after that. Most people suspected they died from starvation.

When Yu goes to pay for her snacks, Raymond reaches for my hand. I let him hold it. His hands are large and broad, the skin of his palms coarse with calluses from the extra factory work his dad brings home with him. I intertwine my fingers through his and he squeezes my fingers tight in response. My voice catches in my throat. We sit together in silence for some moments.

'Today was going to be my last class,' I say, finally. His attention snaps to me.

‘Why?’ he asks. I pull my hand away from his and he looks at me, wide-eyed. 'Where are you going?'

For a split second I want to tell him everything I don't care about my mum or Rufus, or being detained, or losing our apartment and starving to death. I wish that I could be with Raymond, and that our lives could be simple, and the days could be warm, but that the nights would be cool, and that we could have nourishing food, and that we could swim in open water, and eat fresh fruit and vegetables, and that I could have had the opportunity to make my own choices, even if they were mistakes, because they would have been my mistakes, and mine to make.

'I got a job at the market,’ I say. He grimaces, knows it's a lie.

'At which stall?' He takes my hand again, gently this time. I want desperately to hug him, to feel his broad, solid chest against my body, to smell his skin and taste its saltiness. I hope the kid looks like him.

Ostraka

by Claire G. Coleman

The sun is in its place and in this place the sun is like no other I have ever seen. Yesterday when they brought a man here, when he first felt the sun's heat, he had swooned, they had to carry and drag him into the cage. He has not woken yet, I am told, their petty revenge for the extra effort they had to make delivering him has left him half dead. A thing of meat, cooking in the tin-shed infirmary, he is unlikely to ever wake; I don't expect him to join me out here where I am.

I am stateless now, the law, the cops, border patrol has taken me from me, from place, from my country; left me with no country, no home, at all. I am within bars, not bars, the bars are metaphorical, I lean face first against a chain-link fence. I do not know what is outside, but bush, thicker than I have seen, thicker than I am capable of imagining.

That is how I know this is not a nightmare, or if it is; it's not mine. I would, therefore, desire to give this vision back to whoever owns it.

I am leaning face first against a fence, still the bush is too far away to properly smell it. It's too hot to stand there in the clear space before and beyond the fence - they cleared the life from before me so they can watch the wire - but I cannot drag myself away.

I can smell my sweat cooking.

Along the fence a man mumbles on a loop, I can hear the pattern, I can hear his voice rising and falling, but I cannot make out any words. He was there yesterday too. I can't remember if he was there the day before but it seems likely. He's even thinner than me, all cooked and starved down to skin and bone, I know the moment he stops mumbling he will mummify. I told the guards about him yesterday and they didn't care, or was it the day before. Should I mention it again today, or should I wait until tomorrow, those are the difficult questions; those are the only questions I am allowed to ponder here.

Tomorrow he might be dead, desiccated and silent, but to help him would risk my wellbeing; and yet to do nothing would risk my soul; risk the last vestige I have of me, the conviction that I am a good person ...

Yet, the guards don't like being made to do anything, or think, or care, or act human.

I push myself away from the fence and it twangs, there are dents in my skin where my weight pushed my loosening skin, my scrawny flesh and bones too hard against the wire. If I am not careful the wire-dents in my skin will become permanent, a lasting impression of my place here. Then, this place and I will be one and I will never leave.

I will never leave.

I try and saunter to the building containing the common room and the office. I have not sauntered for a while and have lost the knack but it's such a great word that I consider the matching action worth attempting. Any way of moving, other than slinking, is difficult when all movement must be from shade of tree to shade of building to shade of tree. There are places where open sky must be crossed, where the sun might kill anyone not careful enough.

In those places people swelter, which has a similar sound but is not close to the same thing. Someone is face down in the sun. I try to help them stand but they refuse. I get too hot trying; almost swoon myself. I stagger the rest of the way. The office is locked but outside, in the thin shade of the verandah, I see the crate with the mail in it is full. I have complained about it before, the mail being left there where anyone can steal it, where careless digging can perform unintended liberations of people's mail on to the floor where letters can be kicked into hidden places or trampled unreadable underfoot; or stolen by the wind. Fortunately few, if any, prisoners have discovered the mail is in.

I am more careful than some others will be, I dig through calmly, almost enjoying it, searching for letters with my name on them. There's nothing near the top, I remove the top layer and check it meticulously - taking care to forget the names as soon as I read them - pile the letters even more carefully. I collect the next layer down and read the name on every letter. Nothing for me there either.

I have made two neat piles with nothing for me in them.

Finally near the bottom of the box, a simple business-size envelope with my name on it and that is all, I secret the letter in my clothes, even now after they have let me take it from the crate they could confiscate it. Or someone could steal it, just to hurt me or to make me buy it back with precious smuggled luxuries.

Back in my room, in my shed the size of a cell, the size of a double bed and no bigger, I sit on my hard-as-wood, narrow-as-me bed. I am lucky, in a way, circumstance and danger has earned me a room on my own, I can lock the door, keep everyone but the guards at bay.

I savour the letter before I open it, brushing my fingers across the smooth paper of the envelope, read my name again and again, closing my eyes and opening them so they can again be surprised by its presence; even raising the unopened letter to my nose to smell it. It takes more strength than I thought I had to resist licking it.

Finally, there is nothing to do but open it, slowly, I make a game of trying not to tear any of the envelope; peeling back the flap millimetre by slow millimetre. I listen with full concentration to the sound of the contents slipping out of the envelope; unfold the paper slowly with my eyes closed so I don't catch an accidental early view of what the letter says.

I let my eyes open; I don't know if I can keep them closed any longer.

There's my name, after 'dear', there's the three neat paragraphs I would expect from a business or legal letter. No surprises there but I can still hope to find a pleasant shock in the contents.

I read quickly, unable to prolong the effort to my satisfaction.

My lawyer is coming to see me.

Tomorrow.

I cannot decide whether to jump out of my skin with excitement or cry with terror.

I decide instead to go to bed, to sleep. Whether tomorrow is exciting or terrifying; the best thing I could do is to make it

come faster by sleeping. The second-best thing I could do is to get some sleep and be well-rested. I close my eyes so I don't stare at the ceiling; grey unpainted metal, no ceiling at all, just the roof of the shed my room clearly is.

No matter how I try I cannot sleep, I fall down a hole towards memory but I cannot hold the memories either; assaulted by flashes of my time before the island, before the prison. There were people I can now barely remember, a job I am not sure I liked, people I loved, a house, a car. I hated my pile of junk car back then but now I miss it like a recently lost lover, I mourn it like a dead child. I can't even remember what model it was but I remember it was white between the rust.

It's a long night of alternation between staring at the ceiling and staring at the inside of my eyelids; a long night of sweaty heat and the squalling of night birds. Then I wake when the sun is blasting through the window of my room; tickling my face, tugging at my eyes.

I have no watch, no phone, no way but the sun and the movement of guards to check the time; I do not even recall having seen a timepiece in this place, this concentration camp, this prison, this hell-hole; my home. No, I refuse to see it as my home. Yes, it's now my home, I have nowhere else.

Rolling out of bed I wish I had more clothes than the stinking, sweaty, loose pants and t-shirt I am wearing; which are the only clothes I own. I have lived in them, slept in them, done everything in them for ... well I don't even know how long I have been here in this place. I do know that my clothes have been replaced after falling to pieces many times with outfits that are essentially identical but for their newness.

I don't know what time it is but the sun is high enough in the sky, the heat forceful enough, that I know I have overslept. None of the guards woke me this morning; normally they would blast us awake with noise, intentional, or pretending it's an accident. I hope I am not too late for visiting hours.

Rushing across the blowtorch-hot compound I dodge from shade to shade, already dripping with sweat, flies and other hateful flying things dive- bombing my eyes to steal my tears. I ignore the mosquito bites, the small flies miscalculating and getting stuck to my sweat, the laughing guards, the cold sweat on my back, the heat on my face.

There are people, if I can call such shabby, scabby skeletons people, milling around against a fence. On the other side of that fence is a space between fences, scattered with institutional plastic chairs and soggy paper. In there, below the looming razor-wire, under the dispassionate eyes of cameras, the visitors should be gathering so we, the prisoners, can talk to them through the fence.

But there is nobody there, on the other side of the wire, only empty fallen chairs that await them. I am too early.

I stretch my arms as far apart as they can go along the fence, grip tight like someone crucified; press my face so hard against the wire I can feel it bruising. There I will wait, while my fingers lock themselves painfully to the steel, while my face tries to become one with the fence, while my back blisters in the sun; even through clothes.

My name sneaks insistently into my ears and lights a match in my brain. I start to fight out of a hole I did not know I had fallen into; my thoughts feel like someone has staked them down.

My lawyer is white, his skin, the visible hair implants on his balding head, are glowing unpleasantly in the sunlight in a way that tells me he's going to regret being out there before long. I imagine those implants will itch tomorrow, the skin between them is already bright red and furious.

‘I have looked further into your case,’ my lawyer says with a voice like a briefcase lock. 'It's unprecedented, this situation, and there are some questions as to whether it's constitutional and whether it is supported by international laws and treaties but frankly, there seems to be little we can do.'

My voice comes to me like the hiss of escaping steam, 'I can't be left stateless, there must be something that can be done.' I know I sound scared; I look over to make sure nobody else can hear it.

To my left is a woman as scrappily dressed as I am, talking through the wire at a lawyer so like mine I don't know how I tell them apart. Her lawyer has a folder of papers, I look down and see mine does too, why did I not notice? And she, the detainee, looks like she should be as white as her lawyer but in the sun of that place she's the colour of a boiled lobster.

Something is tickling my ears and I realise it's words. I turn back to my lawyer and his mouth is moving, ‘... the law has long enabled them to indefinitely lock illegal immigrants, even refugees in detention, anybody ...' Then I am moving on, to the person to my right.

He has a beard that twenty-five years ago would have been fashionable but in this place is simply a clue he has been here a long time. He's shirtless, stupid, he wears proud blisters on his back like he plans to burn himself to death in protest without a fire. His beard and hair are ginger, he's almost on fire already, I wonder if he feels the heat of his hair; I wonder if it will cook his brain; wonder if it already has. His lawyer is a woman, and has a tablet not papers, but besides that is indistinguishable from mine.

The sun is too hot, I cannot concentrate on my lawyer's words, they are too big anyway and they keep joining the utterances of the other lawyers, forming alliances and picking fights. And I remember.

I was comfortable in an armchair in an airline members lounge, I was not alone but I cannot remember who I was with. A glass of wine was in my hand, all the wine I could ever want was free, to make the flights more comfortable. There was so much food, there was cheese; god I miss cheese. That world seems alien now.

I boarded a delayed plane to a conference; complained about the delay like being stuck at an airport was an unmitigated disaster and not just a First World problem. Then, meetings, talking, too many people who didn't matter and nowhere near enough time with the few people who did matter. I can't remember anymore which country I was in, all countries are the same when all I see are conference venues, airports, the entrails of planes, taxis, hotel rooms.

It's a small world when you travel within those spaces, every hotel is the same hotel, every plane is the same plane and so on; monotonous and deliriously dull.

I returned in a plane, once inside it, it could have been any plane; once I landed it could have been any airport. Passport in hand I stopped at immigration; staffed heavier than I had ever seen it; walls of suits, of uniforms, of whiteness and control. I handed over my passport, I was taken to a small room silent but for the sound of air sneaking down the ducts.

A suit that may or not have had something inside it came in, a hand that was so indistinct as to be indistinguishable from all other hands took my passport and examined it at length. That suit left without talking to me, another came in, later on I was no longer sure it was a different suit at all.

They left; left me there. I don't remember how long I sat there, in that room, windowless, intentionally plain; so quiet the air in the ducts were as loud as a shout. I couldn't resist, I tried the door, it was locked, no amount of force could get it

opened. I resisted the urge to release the scream I could feel rising.

Hours later they came, bound my hands tourniquet-tight with cable ties. I already didn't know what to do with my hands; I don't know what they thought I was planning. ‘Where are

you taking me?' I yelled; 'Where are we going?' I yelled; ‘Do you know who I am?' I yelled. Maybe they knew who I was because they referred to me by name, they used my name, as they dragged me bodily, bloodily, bound, onto a Hercules.

People I recognised from the conference and from the plane were there; we were all too pisspants terrified to talk to each other, to discuss what was happening.

There had been no way to talk on the plane once it departed, the engine noise made it almost impossible; nobody was talking to us anyway, none of us wanted to talk to each other. It was a voiceless, noisy trip to who knew where.

They had brought me to this place, this fenced compound, these sheds they called cabins, this jungle; inhospitable hell. I can't even remember how long ago that was.

The drone of my lawyer brings me back to the prison, the fence, the present.

'I was born in Australia, I have citizenship, I have no other citizenships, they can't leave me stateless.' I am squeaking like a door.

'They did,' says my lawyer with a sigh, his breath is shallow, like he is already dead, and my eyes are burning with tears I will not

acknowledge.

'You were declared a 'person of bad character' the country's new law, the 'Ostraka' law of 2039, allows people of bad character to be ostracised, they have declared the precedent set in the Athenian Democracy valid. Someone ostracised is no longer a citizen, it's effectively exile. We have challenged the law, many of us have.' My lawyer has a voice like water boiling in a saucepan. 'They have not managed to remove anybody yet, under the new laws, but they got you as you returned to the country. Once ostracised you arrived here as a non-citizen, an illegal immigrant. I have it here, he says, holding out a photocopy, 'your ostraka.'

‘What do I do?' I squeal like a whistling kettle.

I can barely understand him through the screaming in my ears, he rolls up a form from his

folder small enough to pass it through the wire, I snatch it before the guards can appear. Once it is in my hand I know they could not, would not take it; I know that rule well. I unroll the paper; read the title, 'Character Reference Form 1' it says.

‘Fill this in with the right names, I will be back tomorrow to collect it,' he says in a bored tone. ‘I have to leave the island tomorrow or I risk an ostraka myself.'

I stare at him, a metallic taste in my mouth like I have been sucking on the fence.

'All my friends,' I choke out of my lungs, 'all my friends, anybody who might give me a character reference, are in here.'

He shrugs, says, 'I have others to see,' then turns away.

I turn too, back towards the middle of the compound; towards my shed, my cabin, where I now know I will be spending the rest of my life; a form I have no use for gripped in my hand like it matters.

WILD PIGEON: A UYGHUR FABLE

by Nurmuhemmet Yasin

“Wild Pigeon” was originally published in the author's native Uyghur in late 2004 by the official *Kashgar Literature Journal.* Apparently reading the story as a tacit indictment of China's heavy-handed rule in its Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Chinese authorities arrested the author, Nurmuhemmet Yasin, on Nov. 29, 2004. The story is the fictional first-person narrative of a young pigeon—the son of a pigeon king—who is trapped and caged by humans when he ventures far from home. In the end, he commits suicide by swallowing a poisonous strawberry rather than sacrifice his freedom, just as his own father committed suicide under similiar conditions years earlier. "The poisons from the strawberry flow through me," the unnamed pigeon remarks to himself at the end. "Now, finally, I can die freely. I feel as if my soul is on fire—soaring and free". Yasin belongs to the Muslim Uyghur ethnic group that accounts for most of the population in Xinjiang, a vast territory rich in mineral resources and of great strategic importance to Beijing on its northwestern borders.

Closed-door trial without a lawyer

After a closed trial in February 2005 at which he was not permitted to hire a lawyer, Yasin was sentenced by the Kashgar Intermediate Court to 10 years in jail for inciting Uyghur separatism, sources told RFA's Uyghur service. His sentence was later upheld on appeal. I see everything clearly now—the sky is still deep blue and the world remains so beautiful, and everything is quiet and still. A group of pigeons gathers at the edge of cage around me, watching me, puzzled and surprised.

Yasin was transferred on May 19, 2005 to Urumchi No. 1 Jail, and he has been permitted no visitors since his arrest, according to sources who asked not to be named. At the time of his arrest, authorities confiscated Yasin’s personal computer, which contained an estimated 1,600 poems, commentaries, stories, and one unfinished novel, according to sources. How much of his work may one day be recovered is unknown. Yasin, born March 6, 1974, is married with two young sons. His story, titled “Yawa Kepter” in the Uyghur language, translates literally as “untamed or wild dove” or “untamed pigeon,” as Uyghur uses the same word for both species.

“Wild Pigeon” was translated from the Uyghur into English and Chinese by Dolkun Kamberi, director of RFA’s Uyghur service. Adapted for broadcast by RFA's Uyghur service. Edited in English by Sarah Jackson-Han and produced for the Web by Luisetta Mudie.

Translator's note: This story was first published in issue No. 5 of the 2004 Kashgar Literature Magazine by a young freelance writer, Nurmuhemmet Yasin, to widespread acclaim among the Uyghur people. The author has since been detained by the Chinese authorities because of its strong portrayal of a people deeply unhappy with life under Beijing's rule. RFA broadcast a dramatized version of the story in Uyghur earlier this year.

Image: RFA

Part 1

DREAM OR REALITY?

Here I am, seemingly in flight in the deep blue sky. I cannot tell if I am dreaming or awake. A bracing wind cuts into my wing—my spirit is soaring and my body is powerful and strong. The glow of morning seems endless, and sun streams brightly, beautifully on the world. Such beautiful landscapes! I climb ever higher as my spirits soar.

The strawberry fields disappear from view, and the world is suddenly broader, like a deep blue carpet spread out beneath me. This is a wonderland I have never seen before. I love this place as I love my hometown—with all my heart—all of it so beautiful beneath my wings.

Now houses and neighborhoods appear below, along with living, moving creatures—they must be the humans whom my mother warned me to avoid. Maybe my mother has grown old. They don't look dangerous to me—how could such creatures, who crawl so slowly on the Earth, be more powerful than birds who soar through the skies?

"Mankind's tricks are legion; their schemes are hidden in their bellies; be sure that you do not make carelessness your jailer."

Perhaps I am wrong, but they don't look so terrible. My mother has always told me they are treacherous, scheming creatures who would as soon trap and cage us as they would look at us. How can that be? Perhaps I am not bright enough to understand this. Suddenly I am overcome with the desire to see and know these humans, and I fly lower, hovering above them and seeing everything more clearly. And always my mother says to me: "Mankind's tricks are legion; their schemes are hidden in their bellies; be sure that you do not make carelessness your jailer."

Suddenly I know that I want to see these schemes of mankind. Why would they hide them in their bellies? This is impossible for me to understand.

THE DESCENT

I descend gradually, hovering in the air above the dwelling-places. The things below are now very clear to me. I can see people, their cows, their sheep and chickens, and many other things I've never seen before. A group of pigeons is flying around, with some of them perched on a branch.

I drop down to join in their conversation—or is to have a rest? I can't remember clearly now. My feelings at the time were quite confused. But I want very much to know more about their lives.

"Where are you from?" one pigeon asks me. He is older than the rest, but I cannot tell for sure if he is the leader of this group. Anyway, I am not one of them, so his position is not that important to me. And so I answer simply: "I am from the strawberry shoal."

I drop down to join in their conversation—or is to have a rest? I can't remember clearly now. My feelings at the time were quite confused. But I want very much to know more about their lives.

"I heard about that place from my grandpa—our ancestors also come from there," he replies. "But I thought it was quite far away—and that it would take months to fly here from there. We cannot fly so far. Perhaps you are lost?"

Was he so old he couldn't fly that small distance in a few days, as I had done? Perhaps he was far older even than he looked—or perhaps he was thinking of a different, more distant strawberry shoal. If his grandfather came from the same strawberry shoal, we might even be relatives, I think. But to the

old pigeon I reply: "I am not lost—I was practicing flying and came here intentionally. I've been flying for just a few days, but I haven't eaten anything since I left home."

WHAT IS A SOUL?

The old pigeon looks surprised. "You must be a wild pigeon," he says. "Everyone says we are not as brave as you, that we think no further than the branches on which we rest and the cages in which we sleep. I have always lived here and have ventured no farther out—and why should I? Here I have a branch for resting and a cage for living, and everything is ready-made for me. Why would we leave here—to suffer? Besides, I am married. I have a family. Where would I go? My hosts treat me well," he concludes, pecking a bit at his own feathers.

"I have heard some say that mankind is terrible," I reply. "They say that if humans catch us, they will enslave our souls. Is this true?"

"Soul? What's a soul, grandfather?" a young pigeon sitting beside me asks. I am stunned that he doesn't know this word, doesn't know what a soul is. What are these pigeons teaching their children? To live without a soul, without understanding what a soul is, is pointless. Do they not see this? To have a soul, to have freedom—these things cannot be bought or given as gifts; they are not to be had just through praying, either.

"Soul? What's a soul, grandfather?" a young pigeon sitting beside me asks. I am stunned that he doesn't know this word.

Freedom of the soul, I feel, was crucial for these pitiful pigeons. Without it, life is meaningless, and yet they seem never even to have heard of the word.

The old pigeon touches the head of his grandchild, saying: "I don't know either what a soul is. I once heard the word from my own grandfather, who heard the world from his great-grandfather. And he perhaps heard of it from his great-great-grandfather. My own grandfather sometimes said: 'We pigeons lost our souls a long time ago,' and perhaps this is the soul that this wild pigeon mentions now—and today we possess not even a shadow of such a thing."

The old pigeon turns to face me and asks, "Tell me, child, do you know what a soul is?"

THE PIGEONS' DEBATE

I freeze, realizing that I cannot begin to answer the very question my words have prompted. Finally, I reply, "I cannot. But my mother tells me I possess my father's daring and adventurous spirit…Once it matures, I will certainly know and understand what a soul is."

The old pigeon replies, "That must be your father's spirit in you now. It's not only our fathers' generations we have lost, but the soul of the entire pigeon community has already

disappeared. My mother and her family never mentioned the soul to us, either, nor have I used the word with my own children. So perhaps we have already entered an era without souls. How lovely it would be, to return to that earlier time." The old pigeon smiles, and falls into a pleasant reverie.

"Without your souls," I tell him, "generations of pigeons will be enslaved by human beings—who can make a meal of you at any time. Even if they set you free, you will not leave your family and your rations of food behind. You do not want to throw away your resting place, and a small amount of pigeon food. Yet you let your descendants became the slaves of mankind. You will need a leader, but first you must free your soul—and understand what a soul is. Why don't you come with me and we can try to ask my mother?"

"I already have one foot in the grave," he tells me, "and my pigeon cage is safe.

I cannot tell now whether it's the old pigeon or myself I want to educate about the soul. Perhaps it is both.

"I already have one foot in the grave," he tells me, "and my pigeon cage is safe. Where shall I look to understand the soul? I wouldn't recognize a soul if I saw one, and I wouldn't know where to look for it. And how will it help me if I find mine? Here our lives are peaceful. Nothing happens, and our lives are tranquil. How can I ask others to give up such a life to find something whose value we cannot see?"

I contemplate the old pigeon's words—which sound wise at first but, on reflection, are entirely wrong. Suddenly I feel ashamed, embarrassed, to find myself holding such a philosophical discussion with these pigeons, these soulless birds. I decide to go and find my mother.

STRANGE WORDS REPLACE MOTHER'S MILK

At this point, a group of pigeons descends to the branch beside us. I hear them speaking among themselves, but I cannot understand their words. Perhaps they are using their own mother tongue. We also have some such foreigners occasionally flying to our place. Are they foreign visitors? Friends or relatives of the old pigeon? I cannot tell. Nor can I tell whether they wish to include me in their discussion.

"How are you, my child," the old pigeon asks, pecking at the feathers of a smaller pigeon.

"Not good. I'm hungry," the smaller pigeon replies. "Why doesn't my mother feed me anymore?" The small pigeon talks on about pigeon food—I think I hear the word corn or millet, or hemp. They use many different names for pigeon food that I don't know. These tamed pigeons are very strange—so many of their words I don't recognize.

These tamed pigeons are very strange—so many of their words I don't recognize.

"Your mother is trying to save all the nourishment for the siblings you will have soon," the old pigeon replies. "You have to wait for the humans to come and feed us."

"I cannot wait—I should fly out to the desert and look for myself," the young bird replies.

"Please listen to me, my good little boy. It is too dangerous—if you go there, someone will catch you and eat you. Please don’t go." The small pigeon tries to calm its expression. These pigeons all seem to listen to this elder of the group.

ACCEPTANCE OF A CAGED LIFE

These pigeons are living among humans who would catch them and eat them, but how they can do this I don’t understand. Have I misunderstood the word "eat"? Maybe it means the same thing as "care for" in their dialect. If this is a borrowed word, maybe I misinterpreted it. And yet this is an important word—every pigeon must know it. My mother tells me to be careful—"don’t let the humans catch you and eat you." If these pigeons fear being caught and eaten, how can they possibly have lived among humans? Perhaps they have even forgotten that they have wings, and perhaps they wouldn’t want to leave the pigeon cage to which they have grown so accustomed.

"So, how is our host?" the small pigeon begins to ask the old pigeon.

"Very well," his elder replies.

"But perhaps our host is like other humans, and would catch and eat us if given the chance."

"That is different," the elder replied. "The humans keep us in the pigeon cage to feed us, and it is right that they would eat us if necessary; it is a necessity for mankind to be able to catch us and eat us. That is the way it should be. No pigeon among us is permitted to object to this arrangement."

WHO IS THE ENEMY?

Now I understand that "eat" has the same meaning here as it does at home. A moment ago I was trying to guess what exactly they mean when they say the word "eat." Now I don't have to guess any more.

"But our host has spilled all of our food—and the largest pigeon has eaten it all. I cannot begin to fight for the food I need. What can I do? I grow weaker and thinner by the day. I cannot survive this way for long."

"You too will grow up slowly, and you too will learn how to snatch a little food from around the big pigeon there. But you must on no account give away anything edible to others. That is how to survive here."

Pigeons should learn to be satisfied with what they have. Don’t try to argue for what is surplus to requirements.

"But, grandpa—" the young pigeon starts.

"That's enough, my child. Don’t say any more. Pigeons should learn to be satisfied with what they have. Don’t try to argue for what is surplus to requirements."

A LARGER SPACE

At this stage I feel compelled to speak, and I interrupt. "You have cut away at his freedom," I say. "You should give him a larger space. You should let him live at according to his own free will." I simply cannot remain silent. To live as the old pigeon suggests would destroy all fellowship among our species.

"Ah, you do not understand our situation," the older pigeon dismisses me. "To anger our host is impossible. If anyone disobeys his rules and ventures out from his territory, all of us will land inside a cage—staring out from behind bars for months. We would lose the very branch on which we are sitting."

What exactly is this thing, a pigeon cage? I have no hint, no clue. These pigeons say they are so terrified of landing in the cage, but at the same time they are afraid of losing it. Most perplexing of all is how any of these pigeons could bear to live among men. Have I discussed this with my own grandfather? I don't believe he ever gave me a clear answer.

What exactly is this thing, a pigeon cage? I have no hint, no clue. These pigeons say they are so terrified of landing in the cage, but at the same time they are afraid of losing it.

Instead I tell the older pigeon, "You sound exactly like one them—one of the men. Taking food from weaker and smaller pigeons and forbidding them to resist. Then you try very hard to cover your bad behavior. How can this environment provide for the growth and health of future generations? You are depraved—ignorant and stupid."

"Don't insult the humans," he replies indignantly. "Without them, we wouldn't be here today. Take your anti-human propaganda somewhere else."

How could he fail to see that I meant no harm—that I intended only to help? Perhaps I should explain further.

A DREAM OF DESTINY

"You have no sense of responsibility—you are condemning others to this existence; you are pushing your legacy to the edge of the bonfire," I continue. I want to go on, to press the same message even more vividly. But suddenly I hear a piercing sound and feel a vicious pain in my legs. I try to fly, but my wings hang empty at my sides. All the other pigeons fly up and hover above me.

"Look at you, stirring up trouble—now you will taste life inside a pigeon cage," one of them shouts. "Then let's see if you carry on this way again!"

Suddenly I understand. The old pigeon drew me in toward him to set me up so his host could catch me. Pain fills my heart. The humans weren't any danger to me—it was my own kind who betrayed me in hope of their own gain. I cannot understand it, and I am grieved. Suddenly I am seized with the idea that I cannot give in—as long as I can still break off my

legs, I can free myself. Using all of my strength, I fly one way and another in turn.

Pain fills my heart. The humans weren't any danger to me—it was my own kind who betrayed me in hope of their own gain.

"Don't be silly, child, stand up! What is the matter with you?" The voice is my mother's. She stares at me and I realize that I am unhurt.

My mother says:" "You had a nightmare." "I had a very terrible dream." I embrace my mother closely, and tell her everything in my dream.

"Child, in your dream you saw our destiny," she replies. "Mankind is pressing in on us, little by little, taking up what once was entirely our space. They want to chase us from the land we have occupied for thousands of years and to steal our land from us. They want to change the character of our heritage—to rob us of our intelligence and our kinship with one another. Strip us of our memory and identity. Perhaps in the near future, they will build factories and high-rises here, and the smoke that comes from making products we don't need will seep into the environment and poison our land and our water. Any rivers that remain won't flow pure and sweet as they do now but will run black with filth from the factories."

SETTING OUT FROM THE STRAWBERRY SHOAL

"This invasion by mankind is terrible," she says. "Future generations will never see pure water and clean air—and they will think that this is as it has always been. They will fall into mankind's trap. These humans are coming closer and closer to us now, and soon it will be too late to turn back. No one else can save us from this fate—we must save ourselves. Let's go outside. It's time for me to tell you about your father."

She leads me outside. Around us the land is covered in wildflowers and a carpet of green—no roads, no footprints, just an endless vast steppe. Our land sits on a cliff that overhangs a riverbank, with thousands of pigeon nests nearby. A pristine river flows beneath, sending a sort of lullaby us to where we stand. To me, this is the most beautiful and safest place on Earth. Without humans encroaching upon us, we might live in this paradise forever.

"This is your land," my mother says. "This is the land of your ancestors. Your father and grandfather, both leaders of all the pigeons in the territory, each helped to make it even more beautiful. Their work, their legacy, only raised us up even higher among the pigeons. The weight on your shoulders is heavy, and I hope only that you can follow in your father's brave footsteps. Every morning I have trained you, teaching you to fly hundreds of miles in a day. Your muscles are hard and strong and your wisdom is already great."

"This is your land," my mother says. "This is the land of your ancestors. Your father and grandfather, both leaders of all the pigeons in the territory, each helped to make it even more beautiful.

"Your body is mature, and now your mind, your intelligence, must catch up. Always, always be cautious with humans. Don't think that because they walk on the ground beneath us that you are safe. They have guns. They can shoot you down from thousands of meters away. Do you know how your father died?"

"No," I tell her. "You started to tell me once but then stopped, saying it wasn't yet time."

"Well, now the time has come," she says. "A few days ago, I saw several humans exploring around here. They followed us carefully with their eyes. We must find a safe place before they come here. It was at their hands that your father died."

A PROUD HERITAGE

"Please tell me, Mother. How did he fall into their hands?" My mother contemplates—her face is sad.

"One day, your father led a group of pigeons looking for food for us. Usually, they chose safe areas with plenty of food. Your father always led these missions—he was a strong and responsible leader. So this time he led the others out, but after several days he hadn't returned. I was terribly worried. Usually, if he found a place with a great deal of food more than a half-day's flight from here, we would move our nest. He would never go so far or stay so long away from home."

"In my heart I was certain he had had an accident. At that time, you and your younger brothers and sisters had only recently hatched, so I couldn't leave you to go and look for him. Eventually, after several months, one of the pigeons who flew out with your father returned. This only made me more certain that that your father had fallen into some kind of trap. Then all the rest of them returned safely—one after another. All except your father."

All the while I expect my mother to wail or lament, but here a brave glint comes into her eye.

"Your father was a pigeon king with a regal spirit. How could he protect the others if he could not protect himself? How could a pigeon who was trapped by humans come back and fulfill his role as pigeon king? The humans trapped him, kept him, and in keeping with the traditions of the royal household, he bit off his tongue. He couldn't bear one more second locked in that pigeon cage. The pigeon cage was dyed red with his blood. He refused their food and drink, and he lived exactly one week. He sacrificed himself. His spirit was truly free. I hope only that you will grow up to be like your father, a protector of freedom forever."

"Mammy, why couldn't my father find the opportunity to escape like other pigeons?"

FREEDOM OR DEATH

"The humans hoped your father would pair with another pigeon, a tamed pigeon, and produce mixed offspring

with her. But he could never have children who were kept as slaves—it would be too shameful for him. Those pigeons in your dream were the descendants of those who accepted slavery and begged for their own lives. Child, their souls are kept prisoner. A thousand deaths would be preferable to a life like that. You are the son of this brave pigeon. Keep his spirit alive in you," she says.

My mother's words shock my soul for a long time. I am infinitely delighted at being a son of such a brave pigeon, but I feel a surge of pride and happiness. My heart feels strong and proud. With all the love in my heart, I embrace my mother.

"Now you must go," she tells me. "I give you up for the sake of our motherland and all the pigeons. Don't leave these pigeons without a leader. The humans are more and more aggressive, using all manner of tactics to trap us. Go now and find a safe place for us, my child."

My wings are wet with my mother's tears. Now the meaning of my dream is clear: that I must go forth on an expedition. But by no means, I think, will I fall into a trap set by humans.

I fly farther and farther away, first along the river and then into the area where the humans make their homes. It is nothing like the dwelling place in my dream, but I am careful—flying higher and higher. My wings have enough power. I hear not human debate, but the music of the wind in my ears.

IN SEARCH OF A NEW HOME

These humans are not so strong and frightening, I think. If I fly too high, I fear I will miss my target. If I fly too far, it will affect our migration plan. To tell the truth, I disagree with my mother's migration plan. Our land is on a very high precipice—how can humans climb here when it is even difficult for pigeons? We were here, one after another, generation after generation, living a happy life. Why should we leave now, to run from humans who are weaker than we imagine? Now I am flying over the human settlements. I feel no danger. Perhaps my mother worries too much.

Now the sky is black. Everything around me is going dark, and now the world disappears in utter darkness. Everything disappears into the night, and I realize that I have been flying for an entire day, and I am exhausted. I must rest. I have already explored to the West, North, and South, and still I have found nowhere we can live. I haven't yet find a good place to which we can migrate.

Perhaps I have flown too high. Perhaps tomorrow I can fly East, at a lower altitude. The stars flicker in the sky. How can anyone who lives in such a world of beauty be afraid? Slowly I descend, falling into a tree. Tomorrow I will awaken, but I don't know where. Then I will start again, flying lower in the sky. Perhaps then I will be able to find us a new home.

Part 2

A lyrical voice awakens me, dredges me up from the deep, sweet sleep that belongs only to the very young and to those exhausted beyond measure. A group of pigeons flocks toward me—I hear their voices alongside their beating wings, and I am shocked to see that they look exactly like me. At first they resemble the pigeons in my dream, but when I look closely I can see that they are different.

First, though, I must find out where I can fill my empty stomach. I ask these pigeons where there is a safe place one can find food. They change the direction suddenly, flying away from the dwelling-places. I follow them.

AN EMPTY BELLY

"Where are you going?" I ask a pigeon at the back of the group.

"To the mill house."

"What will you do there?"

"Look for pigeon food"

"Are you looking for something to eat?"

His eyes are icy as he asks me, "So you are a wild pigeon?"

"Originally are you a wild pigeon?"

"Yes, I am from the strawberry shoal."

THE PIGEON-CATCHERS

I follow them to the mill house where I see large store of wheat covered with straw. The flavor is really sweet, and I think this storehouse looks good—without any trace of humans. The other pigeons look peaceful and contented. I also start to trust this peaceful environment, take courage, and fill my belly.

This is nothing like what my mother described of the outside world. I reach out trustingly for the wheat in front of me. Suddenly, a fierce power is choking my neck. I try to move away, as fast as an arrow shot from a bow, but find I am choking, and an unknown power is pulling me back, just as fast. I try to hide but I cannot—I am pulled down, flying, circling, without direction.

All the other pigeons scatter upward, and I fear I may crash to the ground as in my dream. I fear I am falling into human hands, but no humans are near. Time passes, but I have no idea how many hours elapse. Suddenly, two humans appear, and I think I have been caught—then the chokehold on my neck relaxes.

Suddenly, a fierce power is choking my neck. I try to move away, as fast as an arrow shot from a bow, but find I am choking, and an unknown power is pulling me back, just as fast. I try to hide but I cannot—I am pulled down, flying, circling, without direction.

"This is a wild pigeon," a younger-looking human says.

"Hold him firmly—tie up his wings so he won't fly away," says the other. Together they bind my wings, grasp my neck, and stare into my eyes.

"Hey, this is a great species—it's really good luck," the elder human says, turning me over and over in his hands for a closer look.

'SET HIM FREE'

"This wild pigeon is already useless—set him free," says the elder. "Set him free. He has already bitten off his tongue. When you catch this kind of pigeon, you have no choice but to set him free. Usually it's only the leader of the flock who will do this."

"At least let us keep him for eggs," the younger human protests.

"This kind of pigeon—he won't eat or drink if we keep him. He will resist and refuse until death."

"This kind of pigeon—he won't eat or drink if we keep him. He will resist and refuse until death."

The younger human is adamant. "We can't just let him go!"

"All right then, it's your choice. You'll see that I am telling the truth. I once caught such a pigeon and insisted on keeping it—but he lived only a week," says the elder.

THE ORDEAL OF THE CAGE

"I will certainly tame it," the younger human replies confidently."

You will never tame me, I think. I will find a way home. I am ashamed of myself for failing to take my mother's words to heart and then falling into a trap laid by humans. I draw all of my remaining strength and feel for a moment that I might fly free. Instead, I crash to the ground.

"Dirty bastard!" the younger human cries. "At least I bound up one wing—I suppose that kept him from flying free."

He packs me into a bag, apparently planning to take me with him somewhere. Perhaps he aims to bind both wings and put me in a cage. I see several pigeons behind iron bars, all gathered at one corner.

I see several pigeons behind iron bars, all gathered at one corner.

"You must have been very hungry indeed, or you wouldn't have fallen into my trap," says the younger human, as he places food and water in one corner of the iron cage. The instant he sets the food down, pigeons flock at the corner of cage, frantically rushing toward it. At this moment, anger burns through me and I wonder if crashing into the bars would deliver a fatal blow to my head and end this horror.

But my wing remains bound—and I am immobilized. I raise my head slightly toward the sun, thinking that in less than a day I have fallen into a trap set by humans. If my mother

could see me now, what would she think? I lower myself to the floor.

NEITHER EATING, NOR BEING EATEN

In my dream, I see my mother against a deep blue sky, calling to me. My father appears, tall and stately, and I feel proud of him. They call out to me again and I fly toward them—but they retreat. Again I fly toward my parents and again they retreat. I stop flying, and they stop as well. I am thirsty and call out, "Mother, water!"

A human voice shakes me back to consciousness. ""This pigeon is truly stubborn," the voice says. "He has been here five days and eaten nothing." It is the younger of the two humans who first caught me.

"Didn’t I tell you that feeding him would be useless?" his elder replies crossly.

Just let him go. To watch a pigeon such as this die slowly is too pitiful.

"But if he continues to fast, he will die. Wouldn’t it be better if I just cooked him now for broth for my child?"

The elder is derisive. "You’d get nothing much from him now and you’d probably fall ill. Just let him go. To watch a pigeon such as this die slowly is too pitiful"

"Setting him free does us no good," the younger man replies.

'NOTHING GOOD WILL COME OF THIS'

"Nothing good will come of this in any event."

"We should have made a soup of him immediately," the younger man says. As he tries to unbind my wings and place me on the cage floor, I summon all the strength I have left, thinking I might fly up to the sky. But the wire is too strong, and I cannot.

I want to hurtle toward the cage door and escape, but I cannot. This cage is supremely clever in its cruelty, I think, in allowing anyone caught inside ample view of the freedoms denied to him—with no hope of regaining them.

This cage is supremely clever in its cruelty, I think, in allowing anyone caught inside ample view of the freedoms denied to him—with no hope of regaining them.

The air inside and outside this cage are identical, I think, but the life possible on my side of these iron bars might just as well belong to a different universe. Whoever designed such a device was truly an iron fist with the blackest of hearts—determined to immobilize small creatures such as me even though I can bring them no conceivable benefit. By caging my body, they hope to enslave my soul, I think. I want to end my life but I cannot, and this is worst of all. "Heartless humans who killed my freedom," I want to cry out, "either set me free or let me die!"

A familiar smell comes to me, and then I see my mother—her eyes gleaming, anxious, noting in turn my

loosened feathers, my broken mouth, my pathetic, twisted wings.

THE SOUL'S RELEASE

"Forgive me, mother," I start to say. "I wasn't equal to the trust you placed in me. I am not fit to be your son." I lower my head, like a condemned criminal in the dock. Why couldn't I have died before she arrived here?

"You did everything in your power," she replies. "Now you must end this."

"But mama, I cannot," I tell her. "I am a prisoner—without energy, without strength. Much as I would like to die, I cannot."

"That is clear," she tells me. "And so I have come to bring you freedom."

"I no longer deserve freedom," I say. "I am no longer worthy of being your child."

"Then I shall tell you again—I have brought you freedom. You are still my brave child—you must not be forced to live like a slave but must be allowed to die bravely, with dignity," she says, pushing a bit of food toward me.

A HIGH PRICE FOR FREEDOM

"This strawberry is the poisonous variety—eat it, and it will set you free. Restore the honor of our flock. And remember always that true freedom comes only at a high price. Here, move your mouth closer to me."

I gaze at my mother for the last time. She seems peaceful, and brave. I stretch my damaged mouth out toward her. My beak, my only remaining weapon—an enemy to the humans, it protected and fed me, and then led me into the humans' trap. It is broken now, shattered by my failed collision with the iron bars.

Finally, I can die freely. I feel as if my soul is on fire—soaring and free.

The poisons from the strawberry flow through me like the sound of freedom itself, along with gratitude that now, now, finally, I can die freely. I feel as if my soul is on fire—soaring and free.

I see everything clearly now—the sky is still such a deep blue and the world remains so beautiful, and everything is so quiet and still. A group of pigeons gathers at the edge of cage around me, watching me, puzzled and surprised.

Maralbeshi County March 24, 2004

SIX POEMS FROM *THE JANUARY CHILDREN*

Safia Elhillo

Safia Elhillo is the author of The January Children (University of Nebraska Press, 2017). Sudanese by way of Washington, DC, she holds a BA from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study and an MFA in poetry from the New School. Elhillo is a Pushcart Prize nominee, receiving a special mention for the 2016 Pushcart Prize, and recipient of the 2015 Brunel International African Poetry Prize and the 2016 Sillerman First Book Prize for African Poets. She has received fellowships from Cave Canem, The Conversation, and Crescendo Literary and The Poetry Foundation's Poetry Incubator. With Fatimah Asghar, she is co-editor of the anthology Halal If You Hear Me (Haymarket Books, 2019).

ASMARANI MAKES PRAYER

verily everything that is lost will be
given a name & will not come back
but will live forever
& verily a border-shaped wound will
be licked clean by songs naming
the browngirl in particular
verily she will not heal but
verily the ghosts will
not leave her alone
verily when asked how
she got her name if telling the truth she
will say [a woman died & everything
wants a home]

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SILENCE

at the musician's club in omdourman
a singer is stabbed to death for playing
secular music the month before a violinist
on his way home is beaten by police his instrument
smashed to matchwood all the bars in khartoum
are closed down all the alcohol in khartoum poured
into the nile a new law forbids women from dancing
in the presence of men another bans song lyrics
that mention women's bodies

THE LAST TIME MARVIN GAYE WAS HEARD IN THE SUDAN

at a party in omdourman lights strung among the date palms
my not-yet mother honey legs in a skirt opens her mouth
& the night air is the gap in her teeth
she sings in a lilting english to a slow song
while bodies around her pair off & press close
before he is my father my father smokes
a cigarette & shows all his teeth when he laughs
wants to ask the darkgold girl how her english got so good
what the words mean & could he sing
something sometime into the gap in her teeth
but first police arrive
rip lanterns from trees & fire a shot
through the final notes of the song & tonight
my parents do not meet

PORTRAIT WITH ASYLUM

& then two boys from sunday school identical twins
beautiful boys *like the moon* my mother said dressed in

matching
outfits long into our teenage years both dead by twenty-five
& all the mothers in dc marlyand virginia [crossed an ocean &
thought it was enough to keep up safe] cooked for day &
packed into
the emptied house & later crowded around cups of sweet strong
tea
to trade theories *gang violence mugging hate*
crime islamophobia
xenophobia because they were too black because they were not
black enough murder mistaken identity accident though
probably not both times but all agreeing this would never have
happened if *we'd never come to this godless country* each still
haunted
by the brother back home twenty years missing the husband
shot in
the street daughters whipped through thin cotton blouses
but *back*
home this would never have happened not both not both

PORTRAIT OF ABDELHALIM HAFEZ AS ORPHEUS

after the funeral women poured
down from balconies fourteen brown
nightingales diving in the name of
a communal beloved the legend goes
a brownfaced head hair combed back
with water skims down the river nile
by night *o moon o you who have*
forgotten me survives the failed body
the storied mouth propped open
& a final song falls out
if you see my beloved reassure me reassure
me leaves no ripples
in its wake

EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT ABDELHALIM HAFEZ

once at a party he wore a white suit & vomited blood
in the hospital in his last days his hair was still
shellacked still neatly combed he loved his country
my beloved my mother abdelhalim was an orpan
abdelhalim was honest only when he sang
he swam in the river as a child
little brown boy shoulder-deep in dirty water abdelhalim
was always singing abdelhalim died in london
but it was the river nile that killed him *bilharzia liver damage*
massive uncontrolled bleeding did we make him up
[wait I'm getting to that part]
abdelhalim sings of his country as a beautiful girl
washing her hair in the canal & my country
[did i make him up] is the man I meet in the songs
the lover I waited to deserve only to learn
he is already dead i am most afraid of having nothing
to bring back so i never come home

All poems reprinted from *The January Children*, University of Nebraska Press, 2017, with permission by the author.

THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM [1]

by Edward FitzGerald

1

AWAKE! For Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And lo! the Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

2

Dreaming when Dawn's Left Hand was in the Sky
I heard a Voice within the Tavern cry,
"Awake, my Little ones, and fill the Cup
Before Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry."

3

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The Tavern shouted – "Open then the Door!
You know how little while we have to stay,
And once departed, may return no more."

4

Now the New Year reviving old Desires,
The thoughtful Soul to Solitude retires,
Where the WHITE HAND OF MOSES on the bough
Puts out, and Jesus from the Ground suspires.

[1]This version differs slightly from existing editions. Selection was based on a text designed to be heard rather than read.

5

Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no-one knows; But still the Vine her ancient Ruby yields, And still a Garden by the Water blows.

6

And David's Lips are lock't; but in divine
High piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine! *Red* Wine!" — the Nightingale cries to the Rose That yellow Cheek of her's to incarnadine.

7

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring The Winter Garment of Repentance fling: The Bird of Time has but a little way To fly — and Lo! the Bird is on the Wing.

8

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run, The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop; The Leaves of Life keep dropping One by One.

9

And look — a thousand Blossoms with the Day Woke

— and a thousand scatter'd
into Clay: And this first
Summer Month that brings the
Rose Shall take Jamshyd and
Kaikobad away.

10

Well let it take
them, what have
we to do With
Kaikobad and
Kaikhosru?
Let Zal and
Rustum thunder
as they will Or
Hatim call to
supper — heed
not you.

11

With me along some Strip of
Herbage strown That just
divides the desert from the
sown, Where name of slave
and Sultan scarce is known,
And pity Mahmud on his
golden Throne.

12

Here with a Loaf of
Bread beneath the
Bough, A Flask of
Wine, a Book of Verse
— and Thou Beside
me singing in the
wilderness — And
Wilderness is Paradise
enow.

13

"How sweet is mortal
Sovranty!" – think
some: Others – "How
blest the Paradise to
come!" Ah, take the
Cash and let the Credit
go Nor heed the
rumble of a distant
Drum!

14

Were it not Folly, Spider-like to spin
The Thread of present Life away to win
What? For ourselves
who know not if we shall
Breathe out the very
Breath we now breathe
in!

15

Look to the Rose
that blows about us
– "Lo, Laughing,"
she says, "into the
World I blow: At
once the silken
Tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its
Treasure on the
Garden throw."

16

The Worldly Hope
men set their Hearts
upon Turns Ashes –
or it prospers; and
anon, Like Snow
upon the Desert's
dusty Face Lighting
a little Hour or two –
is gone.

17

And those who
husbanded the
Golden Grain, And
those who flung it to
the Winds like Rain,
Alike to no such
aureate Earth are
turn'd As, buried
once, Men want dug
up again.

18

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai

Whose Doorways are
alternate Night and
Day, How Sultan
after Sultan with his
Pomp Abode his Hour
or two, and went his
way.

19

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep

The Courts where Jamshyd
gloried and drank deep; And
Bahram, that great Hunter –
the Wild Ass Stamps o'er his
head, but cannot break his
Sleep.

20

I sometimes think
that never blows so
red The Rose as
where some buried
Caesar bled;
That every
Hyacinth the Garden
wears Dropt in its
Lap from some once
lovely Head.

21

And this delightful
Herb whose tender
Green Fledges the
River's Lip on which
we lean — Ah, lean
upon it lightly! for
who knows From
what once lovely
Lip it springs
unseen!

22

Ah, my Beloved, fill the cup that clears

TO-DAY of past
Regrets and future
Fears — *Tomorrow?*
— Why, To-morrow I
may be Myself with
Yesterday's Sev'n
Thousand Years.

23

For some we loved, the
loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of
all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a
Round or two before,
And one by one crept
silently to Rest.

24

And we, that now make
merry in the Room They
left, and Summer dresses
in new Bloom, Ourselves
must we beneath the Couch

of Earth Descend,
ourselves to make a Couch
– for whom?

25

Ah, make the most of
what we yet may
spend, Before we too
into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under
Dust to lie, Sans Wine, sans
Song, sans Singer, and —
sans End!

26

Alike for those who for
TO-DAY prepare, And
those that after a TO-
MORROW stare, A
Muezzin from the
Tower of Darkness cries
"Fools! Your reward is
neither Here nor
There!"

27

Why, all the Saints and Sages
who discuss'd Of the Two
Worlds so learnedly, are
thrust Like foolish Prophets
forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their
mouths are stopt with Dust.

28

Oh, come with old
Khayyam, and leave the
Wise To talk; one thing
is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and
the Rest is Lies; The
Flower that once has
blown for ever dies.

29

Myself when young
did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint,
and heard great
Argument About it
and about: but
evermore
Came out by the same Door where in I went.

30

With them the Seed of
Wisdom did I sow,
And with my own
hand labour'd it to
grow: And this was all
the Harvest that I
reap'd — "I came like
Water, and like Wind I
go."

31

Into this
Universe, and
why not
knowing, Nor
whence, like
Water willy-
nilly flowing:
And out of it, as
Wind along the
Waste, I know
not *whither*,
willy-nilly
blowing.

32

What, without asking,
hither hurried,
whence? And without
asking, *whither*
hurried, *hence?* Oh,
many a Cup of this
forbidden Wine Must
drown the memory of
that insolence!

33

Up from Earth's Centre
though the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne
of Saturn sate, And
many a knot unravel'd by
the Road; But not the
Master-knot of Human
Fate.

34

There was a Door to which I
found no Key: There was a
Veil past which I could not
see: Some little talk awhile
of ME and THEE There
seem'd - and then no more of
THEE and ME.

35

Then of the
THEE IN ME
who works behind
The Veil, I lifted
up my hands to
find
A Lamp amid the Darkness
and I heard As from
Without – "THE ME
WITHIN THEE BLIND!"

36

Then to the
Lip of this
poor earthen
urn I lean'd
the Secret of
my Life to
learn
And Lip to Lip it
murmur'd – "While
you live, "Drink! – for
once dead you never
shall return.

37

I think the
Vessel, that with
fugitive
Articulation
answer'd, once
did live, And
drink; and Ah!
the cold Lip I
kiss'd How
many Kisses
might it take -
and give!

38

For in the Market-
place, one Dusk of
Day, I watch'd the
Potter thumping his
wet Clay: And with
its all obliterated
Tongue It murmur'd
- "Gently, Brother,
gently, pray!"

39

For has not such
a Story from of
Old Down
Man's
successive
generations
roll'd Of such a
clod of saturated
earth Cast by the
Maker into
Human mould?

40

And not a drop that
from our Cups we
throw For Earth to
drink of, but may
steal below To
quench the fire of
Anguish in some
Eye There hidden —
far beneath and long
ago.

41

As then the Tulip
for her morning
sup Of Heavenly
Vintage lifts her
chalice up Do
you, devoutly, do
the like, till
Heav'n To Earth
invert you like an
empty cup.

42

Perplext no
more with
Human and
Divine
Tomorrow's
tangle to the
winds resign
And lose your
fingers in the
tresses of The
Cypress-slender
Minister of
Wine.

43

And if the Wine you
drink, the Lip you press
End in what All begins
and ends in — Yes;
Think then you are
TODAY what
YESTERDAY You
were — TO-MORROW
you shall not be less.

44

While the Rose blows
along the River Brink,
With old Khayyam the
Ruby Vintage drink And
when the Angel with his
darker Draught Draws up
to Thee — take that and
do not shrink.

45

Why, if the
Soul can fling
the Dust aside,
And naked on
the Air of
Heaven ride,

Wer't not a Shame — wer't not a Shame for him In this clay carcase crippled to abide?

46

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest; The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest.

47

And fear not lest Existence closing your Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

48

When you and I behind the Veil are past O, but the long, long while the World shall last, Which of our Coming and Departure heeds As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast.

49

A Moment's Halt – a momentary taste Of BEING from the Well amid the Waste – And LO! – the phantom Caravan has reach'd The NOTHING it set out from – Oh make haste!

50

Would you that Spangle of Existence spend About THE SECRET — quick about it, Friend! A Hair perhaps divides the False and True — And upon what, prithee, may life depend?

51

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True Yes, and a single Alif were the clue — Could you but find it — to the Treasure-house, And peradventure to The MASTER too;

52

Whose secret Presence, through Creation's veins Running Quicksilver-like eludes your pains; Taking all shapes from Mah to Mahi; and They change and perish all — but He remains.

53

A moment guess'd —

then back behind the
Fold Immerst of
Darkness round the
Drama roll'd Which, for
the Pastime of Eternity,
He doth Himself contrive, enact, behold.

54

But if in vain, down on the
stubborn floor Of Earth, and
up to Heav'n's unopening
Door You gaze TODAY,
while You are You — how
then TOMORROW when
You shall be You no more?

55

Waste not your
Hour, nor in the
vain pursuit Of This
and That endeavour
and dispute; Better
be merry with the
fruitful grape Than
sadden after none,
or bitter, fruit.

56

You know, my Friends, how
long since in my House For
a new Marriage I did make
Carouse: Divorced old
barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of
the Vine to Spouse.

57

For "IS" and "IS-NOT"
though with Rule and
Line, And "UP-AND-
DOWN" without, I could
define, Of all that one
should care to fathom, I
Was never deep in
anything but – Wine.

58

Ah, but my Computations, People say,
Reduced the Year to better reckoning?--Nay,
'Twas only
striking from
the Calendar
Unborn To-
morrow, and
dead
Yesterday.

59

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
Came stealing through
the Dusk an Angel
Shape Bearing a Vessel
on his Shoulder; and He
bid me taste of it; and
'twas--the Grape!

60

The Grape that can
with Logic
absolute The Two-
and-Seventy
jarring Sects
confute: The
subtle Alchemist
that [can] in a
Trice Life's leaden
Metal into Gold
transmute:

61

But leave the Wise

to wrangle, and
with me The
Quarrel of the
Universe let be:
And, in some corner of the
Hubbub coucht, Make
Game of that which makes
as much of Thee.

62

Why, be this Juice the
growth of God, who
dare Blaspheme the
twisted tendril as a
Snare? A Blessing, we
should use it, should we
not? And if a Curse —
why, then. Who set it
there?

63

I must abjure the Balm of Life, I must,
Scared by some After-
reckoning ta'en on
trust, Or lured with
Hope of some Diviner
Drink, To fill the Cup
— when crumbled into
Dust!

64

Strange, is it not? that
of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the
door of Darkness
through, Not one
returns to tell us of the
Road, Which to
discover we must travel
too.

65

The Revelations of
Devout and Learn'd
Who rose before us,
and as Prophets burn'd,
Are all but Stories,
which, awoke from
Sleep They told their
fellows, and to Sleep
return'd.

66

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that
After-life to spell:
And by and by my
Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd "I
Myself am Heav'n
and Hell":

67

Heav'n but the Vision
of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the Shadow
of a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness
into which Ourselves,
So late emerg'd from,
shall so soon expire.

68

For in and out, above,
about, below, 'Tis
nothing but a Magic
Shadow-show, Play'd in
a Box whose Candle is
the Sun, Round which
we Phantom Figures
come and go.

69

'Tis all a Chequer-board of
Nights and Days Where
Destiny with Men for
Pieces plays: Hither and
thither moves, and mates,
and slays, And one by one
back in the Closet lays.

70

The Moving
Finger writes; and,
having writ,
Moves on: nor all
thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

71

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder
crawling coop'd we
live and die, Lift not
your hands to It for
help — for It As
impotently moves as
you or I.

72

YESTERDAY This Day's
Madness did prepare; TO-
MORROW'S Silence, Triumph,
or Despair: Drink! for you know
not whence you came, nor why:
Drink! for you know not why you
go, nor where.

73

The Vine had struck a fibre: which about
If clings my Being — let the Sufi flout;
Of my Base metal may be filed a Key,
That shall unlock the Door he howls without.

74

And this I know:
whether the one
True Light Kindle
to Love, or Wrath-
consume me quite,
One Flash of It
within the Tavern
caught Better
than in the
Temple lost
outright.

75

What! Out of
senseless Nothing
to provoke A
conscious
Something to
resent the yoke
Of unpermitted
Pleasure, under
pain Of
Everlasting
Penalties, if broke!

76

What! from his
helpless Creature
be repaid Pure
Gold for what he
lent us dross-
allay'd; Sue for a
Debt we never did
contract, And
cannot answer? —
Oh the sorry

trade!

77

Oh Thou, who
didst with pitfall
and with gin Beset
the Road I was to
wander in,
Thou wilt not with
Predestin'd Evil
round Enmesh me
and impute my
Fall to Sin!

78

Oh Thou, who Man of baser
Earth didst make, And ev'n
with Eden didst devise the
Snake: For all the Sin
wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd — Man's
Forgiveness give — and
take!

79

Listen again, One Evening at the Close
Of Ramazán,
ere the better
Moon arose, In
that old Potter's
Shop I stood
alone With the
clay Population
round in Rows.

80

And once again there
gather'd a scarce
heard Whisper
among them; as it
were, the stirr'd
Ashes of some all but
extinguisht Tongue
Which mine ear
kindled into living
Word.

81

Said one among them —
"Surely not in vain, "My
Substance from the
common Earth was ta'en, "
That He who subtly
wrought me into Shape
"Should stamp me back to
shapeless Earth again."

82

Another said — "Why, ne'er
a peevish Boy, "Would break
the Bowl from which he
drank in Joy; "And He that
with his hand the Vessel
made "Will surely not in
after Wrath destroy."

83

After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of more ungainly Make:
"They sneer at me for
leaning all awry; "What!
Did the Hand then of the
Potter shake?"

84

Whereat some one
of the loquacious
Lot — I think a
Sufi pipkin —
waxing hot —

"All this of Pot and
Potter — Tell me
then, "Who is the
Potter, pray, and
who the Pot?"

85

"Why", said another,
"Some there are who tell
"Of one who threatens he
will toss to Hell "The
luckless Pots he marr'd in
making — Pish! "He's a
Good Fellow, and 'twill all
be well."

86

Then said
another with a
long drawn Sigh,
"My Clay with
long oblivion is
gone dry: "But
fill me with the
old familiar
Juice, "Methinks
I might recover
by and by."

87

Ah, with the Grape
my fading Life
provide, And wash
my Body whence the
Life has died, And
in a Windingsheet of
Vine-leaf wrapt, So
bury me by some
sweet Garden-side

88

That ev'n my
buried Ashes
such a Snare
Of Perfume
shall fling up
into the Air,
As not a True Believer passing by
But shall be overtaken unaware.

89

Indeed the Idols I have loved so long
Have done my Credit in
Men's Eye much wrong,
Have drown'd my
Honour in a shallow Cup
And sold my Reputation
for a Song.

90

Indeed,
indeed,
Repentence
oft before I
swore – but
was I sober
when I
swore?
And then, and then came
Spring, and Rose-in-hand My
threadbare Penitence apieces
tore.

91

And much as Wine
has play'd the
Infidel, And robb'd
me of my Robe of

Honour – well, I
often wonder what
the Vintners buy
One half so precious
as the Goods they
sell.

92

Alas, that Spring should vanish
with the Rose! That Youth's
sweet-scented Manuscript
should close! The Nightingale
that in the Branches sang, Ah,
whence, and whither flown
again who knows!

93

Would that some
winged Angel ere
too late Arrest the
yet unfolded Roll
of Fate,
And make the
stern Recorder
otherwise
Enregister, or
quite obliterate!

94

Ah Love! could thou
and I with Fate
conspire To grasp
the sorry Scheme of
Things entire,
Would not we
shatter it to bits –
and then Re-mould
it nearer to the
Heart's Desire!

95

Ah, Moon of my
Delight who know'st
no wane, The Moon of
Heav'n is rising once
again: How oft
hereafter rising shall it
look
Through this same Garden after me – in vain!

96

And when Thyself with
shining Foot shall pass
Among the Guests Star-
scatter'd on the Grass,
And in thy joyous Errand
reach the Spot Where I
made one — turn down
an empty Glass

TAMAM SHUD (It is done.)

Catullus 8

Miser Catulle, desinas ineptire,
et quod vides perisse perditum ducas,
fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.
ibi illa multa cum iocosa fiebant,
quae tu volebas nec puella nolebat,
fulsere vere candidi tibi soles.
nunc iam illa non vult; tu quoque inpote<ns noli>,
nec quae fugit sectare, nec miser vive,
sed obstinata mente perfer, obdura.
vale, puella, iam Catullus obdurat,
nec te requiret nec rogabit invitam.
at tu dolebis, cum rogaberis nulla.
scelesta, vae te! quae tibi manet vita?
quis nunc te adibit? cui videberis bella?
quem nunc amabis? cuius esse diceris?
quem basiabis? cui labella mordebis?
at tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.

Latin text from *Catullus*, ed. D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 104.

POOR Catullus, 'tis time you should cease your folly, and account as lost what you see is lost. Once the days shone bright on you, when you used to go so often where my mistress led, she who was loved by me as none will ever be loved. There and then were given us those joys, so many, so merry, which you desired nor did my lady not desire. Bright to you, truly, shone the days. Now she desires no more – no more should you desire, poor madman, nor follow her who flies, nor live in misery, but with resolved mind endure, be firm. Farewell, my mistress; now Catullus is firm; he will not seek you nor ask you against your will. But you will be sorry, when your nightly favours are no more desired. Ah, poor wretch! what life is left for you? who now will visit you? to whom will you seem fair? whom now will you love? by whose name will you be called? whom will you kiss? whose lips will you bite? But you, Catullus, be resolved and firm.

Translation by F. W. Cornish, from *Catullus, Tibullus, and Pervigilium Veneris*, Loeb Classical Library 6 (London: Heinemann 1921), p. 11.

Break off
fallen Catullus
time to cut losses,
bright days shone once,
you followed a girl
here & there
loved as no other
perhaps
shall be loved,
then was the time
of love's *insouciance*,
your lust as her will
matching.
Bright days shone
on both of you.
Now,
a woman is unwilling,
Follow suit
weak as you are
no chasing of mirages
no fallen love,
a clean break
hard against the past.
Not again, Lesbia.
No more.
Catullus is clear.
He won't miss you.
He won't crave it.
It is cold.
But you will whine.
You are ruined.
What will your life be?
Who will 'visit' your room?
Who uncover that beauty?
Whom will you love?
Whose girl will you be?
Whom kiss?
Whose lips bite?
Enough. Break.
Catullus.
Against the past.

From *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, tr. Peter Whigham (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 59-60.

Miserable Catullus, stop being foolish
And admit it's over,
The sun shone on you those days
When your girl had you
When you gave it to her
        like nobody else ever will.
Everywhere together then, always at it
And you liked it and she can't say
                she didn't
Yes, those days glowed.
Now she doesn't want it: why
        should you, washed out
Want to. Don't trail her,
Don't eat yourself up alive,
Show some spunk, stand up
                and take it
So long, girl. Catullus
                can take it.
He won't bother you, he won't
                be bothered:
But you'll be, nights.
What do you want to live for?
Whom will you see?
Who'll say you're pretty?
Who'll give it to you now?
Whose name will you have?
Kiss what guy? bite whose
                lips?
Come on Catullus, you can
                take it.

From Louis Zukofsky, *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry* (New York: New Directions, 2011) pp. 88-89.

Miss her, Catullus? don't be so inept to rail
at what you see perish when perished is the case.
Full, sure once, candid the sunny days glowed, solace,
when you went about it as your girl would have it,
you loved her as no one else shall ever be loved.
Billowed in tumultuous joys and affianced,
why you would but will it and your girl would have it.
Full, sure, very candid the sun's rays glowed solace.
Now she won't love you: you, too, don't be weak, tense, null,
squirming after she runs off to miss her for life.
Said as if you meant it*: obstinate, obdurate.*
Vale! puling girl! I'm Catullus, *obdurate,*
I don't require it and don't beg uninvited:
won't you be doleful when no one, no one! begs you,
scalded, every night. Why do you want to live now?
Now who will be with you? Who'll see that you're lovely?
Whom will you love now and who will say that you're his?
Whom will you kiss? whose morsel of lips will you bite?
But you, Catullus, your destiny's *obdurate.*

From From Louis Zukofsky, *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry* (New York: New Directions, 2011), pp. 248-249

Wretched Catullus, stop this stupid tomfool stuff
and what you see has perished treat as lost for good.
Time was, every day for you the sun shone bright,
when you scurried off wherever *she* led *you* –
that girl you loved as no one shall again be loved.
There, when so many charming pleasures all went on,
things that *you* wanted, things *she* didn't quite turn down,
then for you truly every day the sun shone bright.
Now she's said *No*, so you too, feeble wretch, say *No.*
Don't chase reluctance, don't embrace a sad-sack life –
make up your mind, be stubborn, obdurate, hang tough!
So goodbye, sweetheart. Now Catullus *will* hang tough,
won't ask, "Where is she?" won't, since you've said *No*, beg, plead.
You'll soon be sorry, when you get these pleas no more-
bitch, wicked bitch, poor wretch, what life awaits *you* now?
Who'll now pursue you, still admire you for your looks?
Whom will you love now? Who will ever call you theirs?
Who'll get your kisses? Whose lips will you bite in play?
You, though, Catullus, keep your mind made up, *hang tough!*

The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition, tr. Peter Green (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 52.

Endurance test

Gutted, Jimmy, give over clowning,
And what you know is dead, leave so.
In dreams the sun tans me blondly meek,
Puppy stumbling wherever my girl strings me,
Loving her like we ain't loving no-one no more,
A blissful time of silly sentiment,
When you said 'Yes', and she never said 'No':
Without knowing, I let the sun bleach me white.
Now she don't want it, you too stop wanting it, not
Chase what splits, nor live in tears,
But with mind made cruel, endure.
Here's goodbye. See your Jimmy endure,
Ain't going to beg, ain't going to ask at all.
Hush your grieving when no-one comes calling.
You lovely bitch, what life's yours?
Who now visit you? Deem you fair?
Be loved by you? Call you his?
Be kissed by you? Bite your lips? Who?
Ah, you, Jimmy, destitute, endure.

From James Methven, *Precious Asses: Loosely from the Latin of Gaius Valerius Catullus* (Bridgend: Seren, 2009)

THE SOUND MACHINE

IT WAS A WARM summer evening and Klausner walked quickly through the front gate and around the side of the house and into the garden at the back. He went on down the garden until he came to a wooden shed and he unlocked the door, went inside and closed the door behind him.

The interior of the shed was an unpainted room. Against one wall, on the left, there was a long wooden workbench, and on it, among a littering of wires and batteries and small sharp tools, there stood a black box about three feet long, the shape of a child's coffin.

Klausner moved across the room to the box. The top of the box was open, and he bent down and began to poke and peer inside it among a mass of different-coloured wires and silver tubes. He picked up a piece of paper that lay beside the box, studied it carefully, put it down, peered inside the box and started running his fingers along the wires, tugging gently at them to test the connections, glancing back at the paper, then into the box, then at the paper again, checking each wire. He did this for perhaps an hour.

Then he put a hand around to the front of the box where there were three dials, and he began to twiddle them, watching at the same time the movement of the mechanism inside the box. All the while he kept speaking softly to himself, nodding his head, smiling sometimes, his hands always moving, the fingers moving swiftly, deftly, inside the box, his mouth twisting into curious shapes when a thing was delicate or difficult to do, saying, 'Yes ... Yes ... And now this one ... Yes ... Yes. But is this right? Is it – where's my diagram? ... Ah, yes ... Of course ... Yes, yes ... That's right ... And now ... Good ... Good ...Yes ... Yes, yes, yes.' His concentration was intense; his movements were quick; there was an air of urgency about the way he worked, of breathlessness, of strong suppressed excitement.

Suddenly he heard footsteps on the gravel path outside and he straightened and turned swiftly as the door opened and a tall man came in. It was Scott. It was only Scott, the doctor.

'Well, well, well,' the Doctor said. 'So this is where you hide yourself in the evenings.'

'Hullo, Scott,' Klausner said.

'I happened to be passing,' the Doctor told him, 'so I dropped in to see how you were. There was no one in the house, so I came on down here. How's that throat of yours been behaving?'

'It's all right. It's fine.'

'Now I'm here I might as well have a look at it.'

'Please don't trouble. I'm quite cured. I'm fine.'

The Doctor began to feel the tension in the room. He looked at the black box on the bench; then he looked at the man. 'You've got your hat on,' he said.

'Oh, have I?' Klausner reached up, removed the hat and put it on the bench.

The Doctor came up closer and bent down to look into the box. 'What's this?' he said. 'Making a radio?'

'No, just fooling around.'

'It's got rather complicated looking innards.'

'Yes.' Klausner seemed tense and distracted.

'What is it?' the Doctor asked. 'It's rather a frightening-looking thing, isn't it?'

'It's just an idea.'

'Yes?'

'It has to do with sound, that's all.'

'Good heavens, man! Don't you get enough of that sort of thing all day in your work?'

'I like sound.'

'So it seems.' The Doctor went to the door, turned, and said, 'Well, I won't disturb you. Glad your throat's not worrying you any more.' But he kept standing there looking at the box, intrigued by the remarkable complexity of its inside, curious to know what this strange patient of his was up to. 'What's it really for?' he asked. 'You've made me inquisitive.'

Klausner looked down at the box, then at the Doctor, and he reached up and began gently to scratch the lobe of his right ear. There was a pause. The Doctor stood by the door, waiting, smiling.

'All right, I'll tell you, if you're interested.' There was another pause, and the Doctor could see that Klausner was having trouble about how to begin.

He was shifting from one foot to the other, tugging at the lobe of his ear, looking at his feet, and then at last, slowly, he said. 'Well, it's

like this . . . the theory is very simple really. The human ear . . . you know that it can't hear everything. There are sounds that are so low-pitched or so high-pitched that it can't hear them.'

'Yes,' the Doctor said. 'Yes.'

'Well, speaking very roughly any note so high that it has more than fifteen thousand vibrations a second – we can't hear it. Dogs have better ears than us. You know you can buy a whistle whose note is so high-pitched that you can't hear it at all. But a dog can hear it.'

'Yes, I've seen one,' the Doctor said.

'Of course you have. And up the scale, higher than the note of that whistle, there is another note – a vibration if you like, but I prefer to think of it as a note. You can't hear that one either. And above that there is another and another rising right up the scale for ever and ever and ever, an endless succession of notes . . . an infinity of notes . . . there is a note – if only our ears could hear it – so high that it vibrates a million times a second . . . and another a million times as high as that . . . and on and on, higher and higher, as far as numbers go, which is . . . infinity . . . eternity . . . beyond the stars.'

Klausner was becoming more animated every moment. He was a frail man, nervous and twitchy, with always moving hands. His large head inclined towards his left shoulder as though his neck were not quite strong enough to support it rigidly. His face was smooth and pale, almost white, and the pale-grey eyes that blinked and peered from behind a pair of steel spectacles were bewildered, unfocused, remote. He was a frail, nervous, twitchy little man, a moth of a man, dreamy and distracted; suddenly fluttering and animated; and now the Doctor, looking at that strange pale face and those pale-grey eyes, felt that somehow there was about this little person a quality of distance, of immense immeasurable distance, as though the mind were far away from where the body was.

The Doctor waited for him to go on. Klausner sighed and clasped his hands tightly together. 'I believe,' he said, speaking more slowly now, 'that there is a whole world of sound about us all the time that we cannot hear. It is possible that up there in those high-pitched inaudible regions there is a new exciting music being made, with subtle harmonies and fierce grinding discords, a music so powerful that it would drive us mad if only our ears were tuned to hear the sound of it. There may be anything . . . for all we know there may –'

'Yes,' the Doctor said. 'But it's not very probable.'

'Why not? Why not?' Klausner pointed to a fly sitting on a small roll of copper wire on the workbench. 'You see that fly? What sort of noise is that fly making now? None – that one can hear. But for all we know the creature may be whistling like mad on a very high note, or barking or croaking or singing a song. It's got a mouth, hasn't it? It's got a throat?'

The Doctor looked at the fly and he smiled. He was still standing by the door with his hands on the doorknob. 'Well,' he said. 'So you're going to check up on that?'

'Some time ago,' Klausner said, 'I made a simple instrument that proved to me the existence of many odd inaudible sounds. Often I have sat and watched the needle of my instrument recording the presence of sound vibrations in the air when I myself could hear nothing. And *those* are the sounds I want to listen to. I want to know where they come from and who or what is making them.'

'And that machine on the table there,' the Doctor said, 'is that going to allow you to hear these noises?'

'It may. Who knows? So far, I've had no luck. But I've made some changes in it and tonight I'm ready for another trial. This machine,' he said, touching it with his hands, 'is designed to pick up sound vibrations that are too high-pitched for reception by the human ear, and to convert them to a scale of audible tones. I tune it in, almost like a radio.'

'How d'you mean?'

'It isn't complicated. Say I wish to listen to the squeak of a bat. That's a fairly high-pitched sound – about thirty thousand vibrations a second. The average human ear can't quite hear it. Now, if there were a bat flying around this room and I tuned in to thirty thousand on my machine, I would hear the squeaking of that bat very clearly. I would even hear the correct note – F sharp, or B flat, or whatever it might be – but merely at a much *lower pitch*. Don't you understand?'

The Doctor looked at the long, black coffin-box. 'And you're going to try it tonight?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I wish you luck.' He glanced at his watch. 'My goodness!' he said. 'I must fly. Good-bye, and thank you for telling me. I must call again sometime and find out what happened.' The Doctor went out and closed the door behind him.

For a while longer, Klausner fussed about with the wires in the black box; then he straightened up and in a soft excited whisper said, 'Now we'll try again . . . We'll take it out into the garden this time . . . and then perhaps . . . perhaps . . . the reception will be better. Lift it up now . . . carefully . . . Oh, my God, it's heavy!' He carried the box to

the door, found that he couldn't open the door without putting it down, carried it back, put it on the bench, opened the door, and then carried it with some difficulty into the garden. He placed the box carefully on a small wooden table that stood on the lawn. He returned to the shed and fetched a pair of earphones. He plugged the wire connections from the earphones into the machine and put the earphones over his ears. The movements of his hands were quick and precise. He was excited, and breathed loudly and quickly through his mouth. He kept on talking to himself with little words of comfort and encouragement, as though he were afraid – afraid that the machine might not work and afraid also of what might happen if it did.

He stood there in the garden beside the wooden table, so pale, small, and thin that he looked like an ancient, consumptive, bespectacled child. The sun had gone down. There was no wind, no sound at all. From where he stood, he could see over a low fence into the next garden, and there was a woman walking down the garden with a flower-basket on her arm. He watched her for a while without thinking about her at all. Then he turned to the box on the table and pressed a switch on its front. He put his left hand on the volume control and his right hand on the knob that moved a needle across a large central dial, like the wavelength dial of a radio. The dial was marked with many numbers, in a series of bands, starting at 15,000 and going on up to 1,000,000.

And now he was bending forward over the machine. His head was cocked to one side in a tense, listening attitude. His right hand was beginning to turn the knob. The needle was travelling slowly across the dial, so slowly he could hardly see it move, and in the earphones he could hear a faint, spasmodic crackling.

Behind this crackling sound he could hear a distant humming tone which was the noise of the machine itself, but that was all. As he listened, he became conscious of a curious sensation, a feeling that his ears were stretching out away from his head, that each ear was connected to his head by a thin stiff wire, like a tentacle, and that the wires were lengthening, that the ears were going up and up towards a secret and forbidden territory, a dangerous ultrasonic region where ears had never been before and had no right to be.

The little needle crept slowly across the dial, and suddenly he heard a shriek, a frightful piercing shriek, and he jumped and dropped his hands, catching hold of the edge of the table. He stared around him as if expecting to see the person who had shrieked. There was no one in sight except the woman in the garden next door, and it was certainly

not she. She was bending down, cutting yellow roses and putting them in her basket.

Again it came – a throatless, inhuman shriek, sharp and short, very clear and cold. The note itself possessed a minor, metallic quality that he had never heard before. Klausner looked around him, searching instinctively for the source of the noise. The woman next door was the only living thing in sight. He saw her reach down; take a rose stem in the fingers of one hand and snip the stem with a pair of scissors. Again he heard the scream.

It came at the exact moment when the rose stem was cut.

At this point, the woman straightened up, put the scissors in the basket with the roses and turned to walk away.

'Mrs Saunders!' Klausner shouted, his voice shrill with excitement. 'Oh, Mrs Saunders!'

And looking round, the woman saw her neighbour standing on his lawn – a fantastic, arm-waving little person with a pair of earphones on his head – calling to her in a voice so high and loud that she became alarmed.

'Cut another one! Please cut another one quickly!'

She stood still, staring at him. 'Why, Mr Klausner,' she said. 'What's the matter?'

'Please do as I ask,' he said. 'Cut just one more rose!'

Mrs Saunders had always believed her neighbour to be a rather peculiar person; now it seemed that he had gone completely crazy. She wondered whether she should run into the house and fetch her husband. No, she thought. No, he's harmless. I'll just humour him. 'Certainly, Mr Klausner, if you like,' she said. She took her scissors from the basket, bent down and snipped another rose.

Again Klausner heard that frightful, throatless shriek in the earphones: again it came at the exact moment the rose stem was cut. He took off the earphones and ran to the fence that separated the two gardens. 'All right,' he said. 'That's enough. No more. Please, no more.'

The woman stood there, a yellow rose in one hand, clippers in the other, looking at him.

'I'm going to tell you something, Mrs Saunders,' he said, 'something that you won't believe.' He put his hands on top of the fence and peered at her intently through his thick spectacles. 'You have, this evening, cut a basketful of roses. You have with a sharp pair of scissors cut through the stems of living things, and each rose that you cut screamed in the most terrible way. Did you know that, Mrs Saunders?'

'No,' she said. 'I certainly didn't know that.'

'It happens to be true,' he said. He was breathing rather rapidly, but he was trying to control his excitement. 'I heard them shrieking. Each time you cut one, I heard the cry of pain. A very high-pitched sound, approximately one hundred and thirty-two thousand vibrations a second. You couldn't possibly have heard it yourself. But *I* heard it.'

'Did you really, Mr Klausner?' She decided she would make a dash for the house in about five seconds.

'You might say,' he went on, 'that a rose bush has no nervous system to feel with, no throat to cry with. You'd be right. It hasn't. Not like ours, anyway. But *how do you know, Mrs Saunders*' – and here he leaned far over the fence and spoke in a fierce whisper – '*how do you know* that a rose bush doesn't feel as much pain when someone cuts its stem in two as you would feel if someone cut your wrist off with a garden shears? *How do you know that?* It's *alive*, isn't it?'

'Yes, Mr Klausner. Oh, yes – and good night.' Quickly she turned and ran up the garden to her house. Klausner went back to the table. He put on the earphones and stood for a while listening. He could still hear the faint crackling sound and the humming noise of the machine, but nothing more. He bent down and took hold of a small white daisy growing on the lawn. He took it between thumb and forefinger and slowly pulled it upward and sideways until the stem broke.

From the moment that he started pulling to the moment when the stem broke, he heard – he distinctly heard in the earphones – a faint high-pitched cry, curiously inanimate. He took another daisy and did it again. Once more he heard the cry, but he wasn't sure now that it expressed *pain*. No, it wasn't pain; it was surprise. Or was it? It didn't really express any of the feelings or emotions known to a human being. It was just a cry, a neutral, stony cry – a single emotionless noie, expressing nothing. It had been the same with the roses. He had been wrong in calling it a cry of pain. A flower probably didn't feel pain. It felt something else which we didn't know about – something called toin or spurl or plinuckment, or anything you like.

He stood up and removed the earphones. It was getting dark and he could see pricks of light shining in the windows of the houses all around him. Carefully he picked up the black box from the table, carried it into the shed and put it on the workbench. Then he went out, locked the door behind him and walked up to the house.

The next morning Klausner was up as soon as it was light. He dressed and went straight to the shed. He picked up the machine and carried it outside, clasping it to his chest with both hands, walking

unsteadily under its weight. He went past the house, out through the front gate, and across the road to the park. There he paused and looked around him; then he went on until he came to a large tree, a beech tree, and he placed the machine on the ground close to the trunk of the tree. Quickly he went back to the house and got an axe from the coal cellar and carried it across the road into the park. He put the axe on the ground beside the tree. Then he looked around him again, peering nervously through his thick glasses in every direction. There was no one about. It was six in the morning.

He put the earphones on his head and switched on the machine. He listened for a moment to the faint familiar humming sound; then he picked up the axe, took a stance with his legs wide apart and swung the axe as hard as he could at the base of the tree trunk. The blade cut deep into the wood and stuck there, and at the instant of impact he heard a most extraordinary noise in the earphones. It was a new noise, unlike any he had heard before – a harsh, noteless, enormous noise, a growling, low-pitched, screaming sound, not quick and short like the noise of the roses, but drawn out like a sob lasting for fully a minute, loudest at the moment when the axe struck, fading gradually fainter and fainter until it was gone.

Klausner stared in horror at the place where the blade of the axe had sunk into the woodflesh of the tree; then gently he took the axe handle, worked the blade loose and threw the thing to the ground. With his fingers he touched the gash that the axe had made in the wood, touching the edges of the gash, trying to press them together to close the wound, and he kept saying, 'Tree . . . oh, tree . . . I am sorry . . . I am sorry . . . but it will heal . . . it will heal fine . . .'

For a while he stood there with his hands upon the trunk of the great tree; then suddenly he turned away and hurried off out of the park, across the road, through the front gate and back into his house. He went to the telephone, consulted the book, dialled a number and waited. He held the receiver tightly in his left hand and tapped the table impatiently with his right. He heard the telephone buzzing at the other end, and then the click of a lifted receiver and a man's voice, a sleepy voice, saying: 'Hullo. Yes.'

'Dr Scott?' he said.

'Yes. Speaking.'

'Dr Scott. You must come at once – quickly, please.'

'Who is it speaking?'

'Klausner here, and you remember what I told you last night about my experience with sound, and how I hoped I might –'

'Yes, yes, of course, but what's the matter? Are you ill?'

'No, I'm not ill, but –'

'It's half-past six in the morning,' the Doctor said, 'and you call me but you are not ill.'

'Please come. Come quickly. I want someone to hear it. It's driving me mad! I can't believe it . . .'

The Doctor heard the frantic, almost hysterical note in the man's voice, the same note he was used to hearing in the voices of people who called up and said, 'There's been an accident. Come quickly.' He said slowly, 'You really want me to get out of bed and come over now?'

'Yes, now. At once, please.'

'All right, then – I'll come.'

Klausner sat down beside the telephone and waited. He tried to remember what the shriek of the tree had sounded like, but he couldn't. He could remember only that it had been enormous and frightful and that it had made him feel sick with horror. He tried to imagine what sort of noise a human would make if he had to stand anchored to the ground while someone deliberately swung a small sharp thing at his leg so that the blade cut in deep and wedged itself in the cut. Same sort of noise perhaps? No. Quite different. The noise of the tree was worse than any known human noise because of that frightening, toneless, throatless quality. He began to wonder about other living things, and he thought immediately of a field of wheat standing up straight and yellow and alive, with the mower going through it, cutting the stems, five hundred stems a second, every second. Oh, my God, what would *that* noise be like? Five hundred wheat plants screaming together and every second another five hundred being cut and screaming and – no, he thought, I do not want to go to a wheat field with my machine. I would never eat bread after that. But what about potatoes and cabbages and carrots and onions? And what about apples? Ah, no. Apples are all right. They fall off naturally when they are ripe. Apples are all right if you let them fall off instead of tearing them from the tree branch. But not vegetables. Not a potato for example. A potato would surely shriek; so would a carrot and an onion and a cabbage . . .

He heard the click of the front-gate latch and he jumped up and went out and saw the tall doctor coming down the patch, little black bag in hand.

'Well,' the Doctor said. 'Well, what's all the trouble?'

'Come with me, Doctor. I want you to hear it. I called you because you're the only one I've told. It's over the road in the park. Will you come now?'

The Doctor looked at him. He seemed calmer now. There was no sign of madness or hysteria; he was merely disturbed and excited.

They went across the road into the park and Klausner led the way to the great beech tree at the foot of which stood the long black coffin-box of the machine – and the axe.

'Why did you bring it out here?' the Doctor asked.

'I wanted a tree. There aren't any big trees in the garden.'

'And why the axe?'

'You'll see in a moment. But now please put on these earphones and listen. Listen carefully and tell me afterwards precisely what you hear. I want to make quite sure . . .'

The Doctor smiled and took the earphones and put them over his ears.

Klausner bent down and flicked the switch on the panel of the machine; then he picked up the axe and took his stance with his legs apart, ready to swing. For a moment he paused.

'Can you hear anything?' he said to the Doctor.

'Can I what?'

'Can you *hear* anything?'

'Just a humming noise.'

Klausner stood there with the axe in his hands trying to bring himself to swing, but the thought of the noise that the tree would make made him pause again.

'What are you waiting for?' the Doctor asked.

'Nothing.' Klausner answered, and then lifted the axe and swung it at the tree, and as he swung, he thought he felt, he could swear he felt a movement of the ground on which he stood. He felt a slight shifting of the earth beneath his feet as though the roots of the tree were moving underneath the soil, but it was too late to check the blow and the axe blade struck the tree and wedged deep into the wood. At that moment, high overhead, there was the cracking sound of wood splintering and the swishing sound of leaves brushing against other leaves and they both looked up and the Doctor cried, 'Watch out! Run, man! Quickly, run!'

The Doctor had ripped off the earphones and was running away fast, but Klausner stood spellbound, staring up at the great branch, sixty feet long at least, that was bending slowly downward, breaking and crackling and splintering at its thickest point, where it joined the main trunk of the tree. The branch came crashing down and Klausner

leapt aside just in time. It fell upon the machine and smashed it into pieces.

'Great heavens!' shouted the Doctor as he came running back. 'That was a near one! I thought it had got you!'

Klausner was staring at the tree. His large head was leaning to one side and upon his smooth white face there was a tense, horrified expression. Slowly he walked up to the tree and gently he prised the blade loose from the trunk.

'Did you hear it?' he said, turning to the Doctor. His voice was barely audible.

The Doctor was still out of breath from running and the excitement. 'Hear what?'

'In the earphones. Did you hear anything when the axe struck?'

The Doctor began to rub the back of his neck. 'Well,' he said, 'as a matter of fact . . .' He paused and frowned and bit his lower lip. 'No, I'm not sure. I couldn't be sure. I don't suppose I had the earphones on for more than a second after the axe struck.'

'Yes, yes, but what did you hear?'

'I don't know,' the Doctor said. 'I don't know what I heard. Probably the noise of the branch breaking.' He was speaking rapidly, rather irritably.

'What did it sound like?' Klausner leaned forward slightly, staring hard at the Doctor. '*Exactly* what did it sound like?'

'Oh hell!' the Doctor said. 'I really don't know. I was more interested in getting out of the way. Let's leave it.'

'Dr Scott, *what-did-it-sound-like?*'

'For God's sake, how could I tell, what with half the tree falling on me and having to run for my life?' The Doctor certainly seemed nervous. Klausner had sensed it now. He stood quite still, staring at the Doctor and for fully half a minute he didn't speak. The Doctor moved his feet, shrugged his shoulders and half turned to go. 'Well,' he said, 'we'd better get back.'

'Look,' said the little man, and now his smooth white face became suddenly suffused with colour. 'Look,' he said, 'you stitch this up.' He pointed to the last gash that the axe had made in the tree trunk. 'You stitch this up quickly.'

'Don't be silly,' the Doctor said.

'You do as I say. Stitch it up.' Klausner was gripping the axe handle and he spoke softly, in a curious, almost a threatening tone.

'Don't be silly,' the Doctor said. 'I can't stitch through wood. Come on. Let's get back.'

'So you can't stitch through wood?'

'No, of course not.'

'Have you got any iodine in your bag?'

'What if I have?'

'Then paint the cut with iodine. It'll sting, but that can't be helped.'

'Now look,' the Doctor said, and again he turned as if to go. 'Let's not be ridiculous. Let's get back to the house and then . . .'

'*Paint-the-cut-with-iodine.*'

The Doctor hesitated. He saw Klausner's hands tightening on the handle of the axe. He decided that his only alternative was to run away fast, and he certainly wasn't going to do that.

'All right,' he said. 'I'll paint it with iodine.'

He got his black bag which was lying on the grass about ten yards away, opened it and took out a bottle of iodine and some cotton wool. He went up to the tree trunk, uncorked the bottle, tipped some of the iodine on to the cotton wool, bent down and began to dab it into the cut. He kept one eye on Klausner who was standing motionless with the axe in his hands, watching him.

'Make sure you get it right in.'

'Yes,' the Doctor said.

'Now do the other one – the one just above it!'

The Doctor did as he was told.

'There you are,' he said. 'It's done.'

He straightened up and surveyed his work in a very serious manner. 'That should do nicely.'

Klausner came closer and gravely examined the two wounds.

'Yes,' he said, nodding his huge head slowly up and down. 'Yes, that will do nicely.' He stepped back a pace. 'You'll come and look at them again tomorrow?'

'Oh, yes,' the Doctor said. 'Of course.'

'And put some more iodine on?'

'If necessary, yes.'

'Thank you, Doctor,' Klausner said, and he nodded his head again and he dropped the axe and all at once he smiled, a wild, excited smile, and quickly the Doctor went over to him and gently he took him by the arm and he said, 'Come on, we must go now,' and suddenly they were walking away, the two of them, walking silently, rather hurriedly across the park, over the road, back to the house.

THE JEWISH WRITINGS

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WE REFUGEES

In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees." We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants." Our newspapers are papers for "Americans of German language"; and, as far as I know, there is not and never was any club founded by Hitler-persecuted people whose name indicated that its members were refugees.

A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge; but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical political opinion. With us the meaning of the term "refugee" has changed. Now "refugees" are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by refugee committees.

Before this war broke out we were even more sensitive about being called refugees. We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice, and we denied that our situation had anything to do with "so-called Jewish problems." Yes, we were "immigrants" or "newcomers" who had left our country because, one fine day, it no longer suited us to stay, or for purely economic reasons. We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic.

Our optimism, indeed, is admirable, even if we say so ourselves. The story of our struggle has finally become known. We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos

and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.

Nevertheless, as soon as we were saved—and most of us had to be saved several times—we started our new lives and tried to follow as closely as possible all the good advice our saviors passed on to us. We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine. In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans. The more optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like. It is true we sometimes raise objections when we are told to forget about our former work; and our former ideals are usually hard to throw over if our social standard is at stake. With the language, however, we find no difficulties: after a single year optimists are convinced they speak English as well as their mother tongue; and after two years they swear solemnly that they speak English better than any other language—their German is a language they hardly remember.

In order to forget more efficiently we rather avoid any allusion to concentration or internment camps we experienced in nearly all European countries—it might be interpreted as pessimism or lack of confidence in the new homeland. Besides, how often have we been told that nobody likes to listen to all that; hell is no longer a religious belief or a fantasy, but something as real as houses and stones and trees. Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.

Even among ourselves we don't speak about this past. Instead, we have found our own way of mastering an uncertain future. Since everybody plans and wishes and hopes, so do we. Apart from these general human attitudes, however, we try to clear up the future more scientifically. After so much bad luck we want a course as sure as a gun. Therefore, we leave the earth with all its uncertainties behind and we cast our eyes up to the sky. The stars tell us—rather than the newspapers—when Hitler will be defeated and when we shall become American citizens. We think the stars more reliable advisers than all

our friends; we learn from the stars when we should have lunch with our benefactors and on what day we have the best chances of filling out one of these countless questionnaires which accompany our present lives. Sometimes we don't rely even on the stars but rather on the lines of our hand or the signs of our handwriting. Thus we learn less about political events but more about our own dear selves, even though somehow psychoanalysis has gone out of fashion. Those happier times are past when bored ladies and gentlemen of high society conversed about the genial misdemeanors of their early childhood. They don't want ghost stories any more; it is real experiences that make their flesh creep. There is no longer any need of bewitching the past; it is spellbound enough in reality. Thus, in spite of our outspoken optimism, we use all sorts of magical tricks to conjure up the spirits of the future.

I don't know which memories and which thoughts nightly dwell in our dreams. I dare not ask for information, since I, too, had rather be an optimist. But sometimes I imagine that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved. I could even understand how our friends of the West Coast, during the curfew, should have had such curious notions as to believe that we are not only "prospective citizens" but present "enemy aliens." In daylight, of course, we become only "technically" enemy aliens—all refugees know this. But when technical reasons prevented you from leaving your home during the dark hours, it certainly was not easy to avoid some dark speculations about the relation between technicality and reality.

No, there is something wrong with our optimism. There are those odd optimists among us who, having made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way. They seem to prove that our proclaimed cheerfulness is based on a dangerous readiness for death. Brought up in the conviction that life is the highest good and death the greatest dismay, we became witnesses and victims of worse terrors than death—without having been able to discover a higher ideal than life. Thus, although death lost its horror for us, we became neither willing nor able to risk our lives for a cause. Instead of fighting—or thinking about how to become able to fight back—refugees have got used to wishing death to friends or relatives; if somebody dies, we cheerfully imagine all the trouble he has been saved. Finally many of us end by wishing that we, too, could be saved some trouble, and act accordingly.

Since 1938—since Hitler's invasion of Austria—we have seen how quickly eloquent optimism could change to speechless pessimism. As time went on, we got worse—even more optimistic and even more inclined to suicide. Austrian Jews under Schuschnigg were such a cheerful people—all impartial observers admired them. It was quite wonderful how deeply convinced they were that nothing could happen to them. But when German troops invaded the country and gentile neighbors started riots at Jewish homes, Austrian Jews began to commit suicide.

Unlike other suicides, our friends leave no explanation of their deed, no indictment, no charge against a world that had forced a desperate man to talk and to behave cheerfully to his very last day. Letters left by them are conventional, meaningless documents. Thus, funeral orations we make at their open graves are brief, embarrassed, and very hopeful. Nobody cares about motives; they seem to be clear to all of us.

I speak of unpopular facts; and it makes things worse that in order to prove my point I do not even dispose of the sole arguments which impress modern people—figures. Even those Jews who furiously deny the existence of the Jewish people give us a fair chance of survival as far as figures are concerned—how else could they prove that only a few Jews are criminals and that many Jews are being killed as good patriots in wartime? Through their effort to save the statistical life of the Jewish people we know that Jews had the lowest suicide rate among all civilized nations. I am quite sure those figures are no longer correct, but I cannot prove it with new figures, though I can certainly with new experiences. This might be sufficient for those skeptical souls who never were quite convinced that the measure of one's skull gives the exact idea of its content, or that statistics of crime show the exact level of national ethics. Anyhow, wherever European Jews are living today, they no longer behave according to statistical laws. Suicides occur not only among the panic-stricken people in Berlin and Vienna, in Bucharest or Paris, but in New York and Los Angeles, in Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

On the other hand, there has been little reported about suicides in the ghettos and concentration camps themselves. True, we had very few reports at all from Poland, but we have been fairly well informed about German and French concentration camps.

At the camp of Gurs, for instance, where I had the opportunity of spending

some time, I heard only once about suicide, and that was the suggestion of a collective action, apparently a kind of protest in order to vex the French. When some of us remarked that we had been shipped there "*pour crever*" in any case, the general mood turned suddenly into a violent courage to live. The general opinion held that one had to be abnormally asocial and unconcerned about general events if one was still able to interpret the whole accident as personal and individual bad luck and, accordingly, ended one's life personally and individually. But the same people, as soon as they returned to their own individual lives, being faced with seemingly individual problems, changed once more to this insane optimism which is next door to despair.

We are the first nonreligious Jews persecuted—and we are the first ones who, not only in extremis, answer with suicide. Perhaps the philosophers are right who teach that suicide is the best and supreme guarantee of human freedom: not being free to create our lives or the world in which we live, we nevertheless are free to throw life away and to leave the world. Pious Jews, certainly, cannot realize this negative liberty; they perceive murder in suicide, that is, destruction of what man never is able to make, interference with the rights of the Creator. *Adonai nathan veadonai lakach* ("The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away"); and they would add: *baruch shem adonai* ("blessed be the name of the Lord"). For them suicide, like murder, means a blasphemous attack on creation as a whole. The man who kills himself asserts that life is not worth living and the world not worth sheltering him.

Yet our suicides are no mad rebels who hurl defiance at life and the world, who try to kill in themselves the whole universe. Theirs is a quiet and modest way of vanishing; they seem to apologize for the violent solution they have found for their personal problems. In their opinion, generally, political events had nothing to do with their individual fate; in good or bad times they would believe solely in their personality. Now they find some mysterious shortcomings in themselves which prevent them from getting along. Having felt entitled from their earliest childhood to a certain social standard, they are failures in their own eyes if this standard cannot be kept any longer. Their optimism is the vain attempt to keep head above water. Behind this front of cheerfulness, they constantly struggle with despair of themselves. Finally, they die of a kind of selfishness.

If we are saved we feel humiliated, and if we are helped we feel degraded.

We fight like madmen for private existences with individual destinies, since we are afraid of becoming part of that miserable lot of *schnorrers* whom we, many of us former philanthropists, remember only too well. Just as once we failed to understand that the so-called *schnorrer* was a symbol of Jewish destiny and not a schlemiel, so today we don't feel entitled to Jewish solidarity; we cannot realize that we by ourselves are not so much concerned as the whole Jewish people. Sometimes this lack of comprehension has been strongly supported by our protectors. Thus, I remember a director of a great charity concern in Paris who, whenever he received the card of a German-Jewish intellectual with the inevitable "Dr." on it, used to exclaim at the top of his voice, "Herr Doktor, Herr Doktor, Herr Schnorrer, Herr Schnorrer!"

The conclusion we drew from such unpleasant experiences was simple enough. To be a doctor of philosophy no longer satisfied us; and we learned that in order to build a new life, one has first to improve on the old one. A nice little fairy tale has been invented to describe our behavior; a forlorn émigré dachshund, in his grief, begins to speak: "Once, when I was a St. Bernard . . ."

Our new friends, rather overwhelmed by so many stars and famous men, hardly understand that at the basis of all our descriptions of past splendors lies one human truth: once we were somebodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends, and even known by landlords as paying our rent regularly. Once we could buy our food and ride on the subway without being told we were undesirable. We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done; we already are so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have, where our birth certificates were filled out—and that Hitler didn't like us. We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food.

Under such circumstances, the St. Bernard grows bigger and bigger. I never can forget that young man who, when expected to accept a certain kind of work, sighed out, "You don't know to whom you speak; I was Section-manager in Karstadt's [a great department store in Berlin]." But there is also the deep despair of that middle-aged man who, going through countless shifts of different committees in order to be saved, finally exclaimed, "And

nobody here knows who I am!" Since nobody would treat him as a dignified human being, he began sending cables to great personalities and his big relations. He learned quickly that in this mad world it is much easier to be accepted as a "great man" than as a human being.

The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews. But having hardly crossed the French borderline, we were changed into *boches*. We were even told that we had to accept this designation if we really were against Hitler's racial theories. During seven years we played the ridiculous role of trying to be Frenchmen—at least, prospective citizens; but at the beginning of the war we were interned as *boches* all the same. In the meantime, however, most of us had indeed become such loyal Frenchmen that we could not even criticize a French governmental order; thus we declared it was all right to be interned. We were the first *prisonniers volontaires* history has ever seen. After the Germans invaded the country, the French government had only to change the name of the firm; having been jailed because we were Germans, we were not freed because we were Jews.

It is the same story all over the world, repeated again and again. In Europe the Nazis confiscated our property; but in Brazil we have to pay 30 percent of our wealth, like the most loyal member of the *Bund der Auslandsdeutschen*. In Paris we could not leave our homes after eight o'clock because we were Jews; but in Los Angeles we are restricted because we are "enemy aliens." Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are.

Unfortunately, things don't look any better when we meet with Jews. French Jewry was absolutely convinced that all Jews coming from beyond the Rhine were what they called *Polaks*—what German Jewry called *Ostjuden*. But those Jews who really came from Eastern Europe could not agree with their French brethren and called us *Jaeckes*. The sons of these *Jaecke*-haters—the second generation born in France and already duly assimilated—shared the opinion of the French Jewish upper classes. Thus, in the very same family, you could be called a *Jaecke* by the father and a *Polak* by the son.

Since the outbreak of the war and the catastrophe that has befallen European Jewry, the mere fact of being a refugee has prevented our mingling

with native Jewish society, some exceptions only proving the rule. These unwritten social laws, though never publicly admitted, have the great force of public opinion. And such a silent opinion and practice is more important for our daily lives than all official proclamations of hospitality and goodwill.

Man is a social animal and life is not easy for him when social ties are cut off. Moral standards are much easier kept in the texture of a society. Very few individuals have the strength to conserve their own integrity if their social, political, and legal status is completely confused. Lacking the courage to fight for a change of our social and legal status, we have decided instead, so many of us, to try a change of identity. And this curious behavior makes matters much worse. The confusion in which we live is partly our own work.

Some day somebody will write the true story of this Jewish emigration from Germany; and he will have to start with a description of that Mr. Cohn from Berlin, who had always been a 150 percent German, a German superpatriot. In 1933 that Mr. Cohn found refuge in Prague and very quickly became a convinced Czech patriot—as true and as loyal a Czech patriot as he had been a German one. Time went on and about 1937 the Czech government, already under some Nazi pressure, began to expel its Jewish refugees, disregarding the fact that they felt so strongly as prospective Czech citizens. Our Mr. Cohn then went to Vienna; to adjust oneself there a definite Austrian patriotism was required. The German invasion forced Mr. Cohn out of that country. He arrived in Paris at a bad moment and he never did receive a regular residence permit. Having already acquired a great skill in wishful thinking, he refused to take mere administrative measures seriously, convinced that he would spend his future life in France. Therefore, he prepared his adjustment to the French nation by identifying himself with "our" ancestor Vercingétorix. I think I had better not dilate on the further adventures of Mr. Cohn. As long as Mr. Cohn can't make up his mind to be what he actually is, a Jew, nobody can foretell all the mad changes he will still have to go through.

A man who wants to lose his self discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as is creation. But the recovering of a new personality is as difficult—and as hopeless—as a new creation of the world. Whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews. All our activities

are directed to attain this aim: we don't want to be refugees, since we don't want to be Jews; we pretend to be English-speaking people, since German-speaking immigrants of recent years are marked as Jews; we don't call ourselves stateless, since the majority of stateless people in the world are Jews; we are willing to become loyal Hottentots, only to hide the fact that we are Jews. We don't succeed and we can't succeed; under the cover of our "optimism" you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists.

With us from Germany the word "assimilation" received a "deep" philosophical meaning. You can hardly realize how serious we were about it. Assimilation did not mean the necessary adjustment to the country where we happened to be born and to the people whose language we happened to speak. We adjust in principle to everything and everybody. This attitude became quite clear to me once by the words of one of my compatriots who, apparently, knew how to express his feelings. Having just arrived in France, he founded one of these societies of adjustment in which German Jews asserted to each other that they were already Frenchmen. In his first speech he said: "We have been good Germans in Germany and therefore we shall be good Frenchmen in France." The public applauded enthusiastically and nobody laughed; we were happy to have learned how to prove our loyalty.

If patriotism were a matter of routine or practice, we should be the most patriotic people in the world. Let us go back to our Mr. Cohn; he certainly has beaten all records. He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains. But since patriotism is not yet believed to be a matter of practice, it is hard to convince people of the sincerity of our repeated transformations. This struggle makes our own society so intolerant; we demand full affirmation without our own group because we are not in the position to obtain it from the natives. The natives, confronted with such strange beings as we are, become suspicious; from their point of view, as a rule, only a loyalty to our old countries is understandable. That makes life very bitter for us. We might overcome this suspicion if we would explain that, being Jews, our patriotism in our original countries had rather a peculiar aspect. Though it was indeed sincere and deep-rooted. We wrote big volumes to prove it; paid an entire bureaucracy to explore its antiquity and to explain it statistically. We had scholars write philosophical dissertations on the predestined har-

mony between Jews and Frenchmen, Jews and Germans, Jews and Hungarians, Jews and . . . Our so frequently suspected loyalty of today has a long history. It is the history of 150 years of assimilated Jewry who performed an unprecedented feat: though proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same.

The desperate confusion of these Ulysses-wanderers who, unlike their great prototype, don't know who they are is easily explained by their perfect mania for refusing to keep their identity. This mania is much older than the last ten years, which revealed the profound absurdity of our existence. We are like people with a fixed idea who can't help trying continually to disguise an imaginary stigma. Thus we are enthusiastically fond of every new possibility which, being new, seems able to work miracles. We are fascinated by every new nationality in the same way as a woman of tidy size is delighted with every new dress which promises to give her the desired waistline. But she likes the new dress only as long as she believes in its miraculous qualities, and she will throw it away as soon as she discovers that it does not change her stature—or, for that matter, her status.

One may be surprised that the apparent uselessness of all our odd disguises has not yet been able to discourage us. If it is true that men seldom learn from history, it is also true that they may learn from personal experiences which, as in our case, are repeated time and again. But before you cast the first stone at us, remember that being a Jew does not give any legal status in this world. If we should start telling the truth that we are nothing but Jews, it would mean that we expose ourselves to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while; since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction. It is true that most of us depend entirely upon social standards; we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us; we are—and always were—ready to pay any price in order to be accepted by society. But it is equally true that the very few among us who have tried to get along without all these tricks and jokes of

adjustment and assimilation have paid a much higher price than they could afford: they jeopardized the few chances even outlaws are given in a topsy-turvy world.

The attitude of these few whom, following Bernard Lazare, one may call "conscious pariahs," can as little be explained by recent events alone as the attitude of our Mr. Cohn who tried by every means to become an upstart. Both are sons of the nineteenth century which, not knowing legal or political outlaws, knew only too well social pariahs and their counterpart, social parvenus. Modern Jewish history, having started with court Jews and continuing with Jewish millionaires and philanthropists, is apt to forget about this other thread of Jewish tradition—the tradition of Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Sholom Aleichem, of Bernard Lazare, Franz Kafka, or even Charlie Chaplin. It is the tradition of a minority of Jews who have not wanted to become upstarts, who preferred the status of "conscious pariah." All vaunted Jewish qualities—the "Jewish heart," humanity, humor, disinterested intelligence—are pariah qualities. All Jewish shortcomings—tactlessness, political stupidity, inferiority complexes, and money-grubbing—are characteristic of upstarts. There have always been Jews who did not think it worthwhile to change their humane attitude and their natural insight into reality for the narrowness of caste spirit or the essential unreality of financial transactions.

History has forced the status of outlaws upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. The latter have not yet accepted the great wisdom of Balzac's "On ne parvient pas deux fois"; thus they don't understand the wild dreams of the former and feel humiliated in sharing their fate. Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indecency," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.

1943

Letters to a Young Poet

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Edited by
Ray Soulard, Jr.

BURNING MAN BOOKS 2001

Paris
February 17, 1903

Dear Sir,

Your letter arrived just a few days ago. I want to thank you for the great confidence you have placed in me. That is all I can do. I cannot discuss your verses; for any attempt at criticism would be foreign to me. Nothing touches a work of art so little as words of criticism : they always result in more or less fortunate misunderstandings. Things aren't all so tangible and sayable as people would usually have us believe; most experiences are unsayable, they happen in a space that no word has ever entered, and more unsayable than all other things are works of art, those mysterious existences, whose life endures beside our own small, transitory life.

With this note as a preface, may I just tell you that your verses have no style of their own, although they do have silent and hidden beginnings of something personal. I feel this most clearly in the last poem, "My Soul." There, something of your own is trying to become word and melody. And in the lovely poem "To Leopardi" a kind of kinship with that great, solitary figure does perhaps appear. Nevertheless, the poems are not yet anything in themselves, not yet anything independent, even the last one and the one to Leopardi. Your kind letter, which accompanied them, managed to make clear to me various faults that I felt in reading your verses, though I am not able to name them specifically.
You ask whether your verses are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are upset when certain editors reject your work. Now (since you have said you want my advice) I beg you to stop doing that sort of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you — no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into

yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I write? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your while life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose. Don't write love poems; avoid those forms that are too facile and ordinary: they are the hardest to work with, and it takes great, fully ripened power to create something individual where good, even glorious, traditions exist in abundance. So rescue yourself from these general themes and write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty — describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember. If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame it; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is not poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds—wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attentions to it. Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance. — And if out of this turning-within, out of this immersion in your own world, poems come, then you will not think of asking anyone whether they are good or not. Nor will you try to inte4rest magazines in these works: for you will see them as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it. A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way one can judge it. So, dear Sir, I can't give you any advice but this: to go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows; at its source you will find the answer to the question whether you must create. Accept that answer, just as it is given to you, without trying to interpret it. Perhaps you will discover that you are called to be an artist. Then take the destiny upon yourself, and bear it, its burden and

its greatness, without ever asking what reward might come from outside. For the creator must be a world for himself and must find everything in himself and in Nature, to whom his whole life is devoted.

But after this descent into yourself and into your solitude, perhaps you will have to renounce becoming a poet (if, as I have said, one feels one could live without writing, then one shouldn't write at all). Nevertheless, even then, this self-searching that I as of you will not have been for nothing. Your life will still find its own paths from there, and that they may be good, rich, and wide is what I wish for you, more than I can say.

What else can I tell you? It seems to me that everything has its proper emphasis; and finally I want to add just one more bit of advice: to keep growing, silently and earnestly, through your while development; you couldn't disturb it any more violently than by looking outside and waiting for outside answers to question that only your innermost feeling, in your quietest hour, can perhaps answer.

It was a pleasure for me to find in your letter the name of Professor Horacek; I have great reverence for that kind, learned man, and a gratitude that has lasted through the years. Will you please tell him how I feel; it is very good of him to still think of me, and I appreciate it.

The poems that you entrusted me with I am sending back to you. And I thank you once more for your questions and sincere trust, of which, by answering as honestly as I can, I have tried to make myself a little worthier than I, as a stranger, really am.

Yours very truly,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Viareggio, near Pisa (Italy)
April 5, 1903

You must pardon me, dear Sir, for waiting until today to gratefully remember your letter of February 24: I have been unwell all this time, not really sick, but oppressed by an influenza-like debility, which has made me incapable of doing anything. And finally, since it just didn't want to improve, I came to this southern sea, whose beneficence helped me once before. But I am still not well, writing is difficult, and so you must accept these few lines instead of your letter I would have liked to send.

Of course, you must know that every letter of yours will always give me pleasure, and you must be indulgent with the answer, which will perhaps often leave you empty-handed; for ultimately, and precisely in the deepest and most important matters, we are unspeakably alone; and many things must happen, many things must go right, a whole constellation of events must be fulfilled, for one human being to successfully advise or help another.

Today I would like to tell you just two more things: Irony: Don't let yourself be controlled by it, especially during uncreative moments. When you are fully creative, try to use it, as one more way to take hold of life. Used purely, it too is pure, and one needn't be ashamed of it; but if you feel yourself becoming too familiar with it, if you are afraid of this growing familiarity, then turn to great and serious objects, in front of which it becomes small and helpless. Search into the depths of Things: there, irony never descends — and when you arrive at the edge of greatness, find out whether this way of perceiving the world arises from a necessity of your bei9ng. For under the influence of serious Things it will either fall away from you (if it is something accidental), or else (if it is really innate and belongs to you) it will grow strong, and become a serious tool and take its place among the instruments which you can form your art with.

And the second thing I want to tell you today is this:

Of all my books, I find only a few indispensable, and two of them are always with me, wherever I am. They are here, by my side: the Bible, and the books of the great Danish poet Jens Peter Jacobsen. Do you know his works? It is easy to find them, since some have been published in Reclam's Universal Library, in a very good translation. Get the little volume of Six Stories by J. P. Jacobsen and his novel Niels Lyhne, and begin with the first story in the former, which is called "Mogens." A whole world will envelop you, the happiness, the abundance, the inconceivable vastness of a world. Live for a while in these books, learn from them what you feel is worth learning, but most of all love them. This love will be returned to you thousands upon thousands of times, whatever your life may become — it will, I am sure go through the while fabric of your becoming, as one of the most important threads among all the threads of your experiences, disappointments, and joys.

If I were to say who has given me the greatest experience of the essence of creativity, its depths and eternity, there are just two names I would mention: Jacobsen, that great, great poet, and Auguste Rodin, the sculptor, who is without peer among all artists who are alive today. —

And all success upon your path!

Yours,
Rainer Marie Rilke

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Viareggio, near Pisa (Italy)
April 23, 1903

You gave me much pleasure, dear Sir, with your Easter letter; for it brought much good news of you, and the way you spoke about Jacobsen's great and beloved art showed me that I was not wrong to guide your life and its many question to this abundance.

Now Niels Lyhne will open to you, a book of splendors and depths; the more often one reads it, the more everything seems to be contained within it, from life's most imperceptible fragrances to the full, enormous taste of its heaviest fruits. In it there is nothing that does not seem to have been understood, held lived, and known in memory's wavering echo; no experience has been too unimportant, and the smallest event unfolds like a fate, and fate itself is like a wonderful, wide fabric in which every thread is guided by an infinitely tender hand and laid alongside another thread and is held and supported by a hundred others. You will experience the great happiness of reading this book for the first time, and will move through its numberless surprises as if you were in a new dream. But I can tell you that even later on one moves through these books, again and again, with the same astonishment and that they lose none of their wonderful power and relinquish none of the overwhelming enchantment that they had the first time one read them.

One just comes to enjoy them more and more, becomes more and more grateful, and somehow better and simpler in one's vision, deeper in one's faith in life, happier and greater in the way one lives. —

And later on, you will have to read the wonderful book of the fate and yearning of Marie Grubbe, and Jacobsen's letters and journals and fragments, and finally his verses which (even if they are just moderately well translated) live in infinite sound. (For this reason I would advise you to buy, when you can, the lovely Complete Edition of Jacobsen's works, which contains all of these. It is in

there volumes, well translated, published by Eugen Diederichs in Leipzig, and costs, I think, only five or six marks per volume.)

In your opinion of "Roses should have been here . . . " (that work of such incomparable delicacy and form) you are of course quite, quite incontestably right, as against the man who wrote the introduction. But let me make this request right away: Read as little as possible of literary criticism — such things are either partisan opinions, which have become petrified and meaningless, hardened and empty of life, or else they are just clever word-games, in which one view wins today, and tomorrow the opposite view. Works of art are of an infinite solitude, and no means of approach is so useless as criticism. Only love can touch and hold them and be fair to them. — Always trust yourself and your own feeling, as opposed to argumentations, discussions, or introductions of that sort; if it turns out that you are wrong, then the natural growth of your inner life will eventually guide you to other insights. Allow your judgments their own silent, undisturbed development, which, like all progress, must come from deep within and cannot be forced or hastened. Everything is gestation and then birthing. To let each impression and each embryo of a feeling come to completion, entirely in itself, in the dark, in the unsayable, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own understanding, and with deep humility and patience to wait for the hour when a new clarity is born: this alone is what it means to live as an artist: in understanding as in creating.

In this there is no measuring with time, a year doesn't matter, and ten years are nothing. Being an artist means: not numbering and counting, but ripening like a tree, which doesn't force its sap, and stands confidently in the storms of spring, not afraid that afterward summer may not come. It does come. But it comes only to those who are patient, who are there as if eternity lay before them, so unconcernedly silent and vast. I learn it every day of my life, learn it with pain I am grateful for: patience is everything!

Richard Dehmel: My experience with his books (and also, incidentally, with the man, whom I know slightly) is that whenever I have discovered one of his beautiful pages, I am always afraid that the next one will destroy the whole effect and change what is admirable into something unworthy. You have characterized him quite well with the phrase: "living and writing in heat." — And in fact the artist's experience lies so unbelievably close to the sexual, to its pain and its pleasure, that the two phenomena are really just different forms of one and the same longing and bliss. And if instead of "heat" one could say "sex" — sex in the

great, pure sense of the word, free of any sin attached to it by the Church — then his art would be very great and infinitely important. His poetic power is great and as strong as a primal instinct; it has its own relentless rhythms in itself explodes from him like a volcano.

But this power does not always seem completely straightforward and without pose. (But that is one of the most difficult tests for the creator: he must always remain unconscious, unaware of his best virtues, if he doesn't want to rob them of their candor and innocence!) And then, when, thundering through his being, it arrives at the sexual, it finds someone who is not quite so pure as it needs him to be. Instead of a completely ripe and pure world of sexuality, it finds a world that is not human enough, that is only male, is heat, thunder, and restlessness, and burdened with the old prejudice and arrogance with which the male has always disfigured and burdened love. Because he loves only as a male, and not as a human being, there is something narrow in his sexual feeling, something that seems wild, malicious, time-bound, uneternal, which diminishes his art and makes it ambiguous and doubtful. It is not immaculate, it is marked by time and by passion, and little of it will endure. (But most art is like that!) Even so, one can deeply enjoy what is great in it, only one must not get lost in it and become a hanger-on of Dehmel's world, which is so infinitely afraid, filled with adultery and confusion, and is far from the real fates, which make one suffer more than these time-bound afflictions do, but also give one more opportunity for greatness and more courage for eternity.

Finally, as to my own books, I wish I could send you any of them that might give you pleasure. But I am very poor, and my books, as soon as they are published, no longer belong to me. I can't even afford them myself — and, as I would so often like to, give them to those who would be kind to them.

So I am writing for you, on another slip of paper, the titles (and publishers) of my most recent books (the newest ones — all together I have published perhaps 12 or 13), and must leave it to you, dear Sir, to order one or two of them when you can.

I am glad that my books will be in your good hands.

With best wishes,

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

Worpswede, near Bremen
July 16, 1903

About ten days ago I left Paris, tired and quite sick, and traveled to this great northern plain, whose vastness and silence and sky ought to make me well again. But I arrived during a long period of rain; this is the first day it has begun to let up over the restlessly blowing landscape, and I am taking advantage of this moment of brightness to greet you , dear Sir.

My dear Mr. Kappus: I have left a letter from you unanswered for a long time; not because I had forgotten it — on the contrary: it is the kind that one reads again when one finds it among other letters, and I recognize you in it as if you were very near. It is your letter of May second, and I am sure you remember it. As I read it now, in the great silence of these distances, I am touched by your beautiful anxiety about life, even more than I was in Paris, where everything echoes and fades away differently because of the excessive noise that makes Things tremble. Here, where I am surrounded by an enormous landscape, which the winds move across as they come from the seas, here I feel that there is no one anywhere who can answer for you those questions and feelings which, in their depths, have a life of their own; for even the most articulate people are unable to help, since what words point to is so very delicate, is almost unsayable. But even so, I think that you will not have to remain without a solution if you trust in Things that are like the ones my eyes are now resting upon. If you trust in Nature, in the small Things that hardly anyone sees and that can so suddenly become huge, immeasurable; if you have this love for what is humble and try very simply, as someone who serves, to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier for you, more coherent and somehow more reconciling, not in your conscious mind perhaps, which stays behind, astonished, but in your innermost awareness, awakeness, and knowledge. You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I

can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. Perhaps you do carry within you the possibility of creating and forming, as an especially blessed and pure way of living; train your for that — but take whatever comes, with great trust, and as long as it comes out of your will, out of some need of your innermost self, then take it upon yourself, and don't hate anything. Sex is difficult; yes. But those tasks that have been entrusted to us are difficult; almost everything serious is difficult; and everything is serious. If you just recognize this and manage, out of yourself, out of your own talent and nature, out of your own experience and childhood and strength, to achieve a wholly individual relation to sex (one that is not influenced by convention and custom), then you will no longer have to be afraid of losing yourself and becoming unworthy of your dearest possession.

Bodily delight is a sensory experience, not any different from pure looking or the feeling with which a beautiful fruit fills the tongue; it is a great, an infinite learning that is given to us, a knowledge of the world, the fullness and the splendor of all knowledge. And it is not our acceptance of it that is bad; what is bad is that most people misuse this learning and squander it and apply it as a stimulant on the tired places of their lives and as a distraction rather than as a way of gathering themselves for their highest moments. People have even made eating into something else: necessity on the one hand, excess on the other; have muddied the clarity of this need, and all the deep, simple needs in which life renews itself have become just as muddy. But the individual can make them clear for himself and live them clearly (not the individual who is dependent, but the solitary man). He can remember that all beauty in animals and plants is a silent, enduring form of love and yearning, and he can see the animal, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and multiplying and growing, not out of physical pleasure, not out of physical pain, but bowing to necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain, and more powerful than will and withstanding. If only human beings could more humbly receive this mystery — which the world is filled with, even in its smallest Things —, could bear it, endure it, more solemnly, feel how terribly heavy it is, instead of taking it lightly. If only they could be more reverent

toward their own fruitfulness, which is essentially one, whether it is manifested as mental or physical; for mental creation too arises from the physical, is of one nature with it and only like a softer, more enraptured and more eternal repetition of bodily delight. "The thought of being a creator, of engendering, of shaping" is nothing without the continuous great confirmation and embodiment in the world, nothing without the thousandfold assent from Things and animals—and our enjoyment of it is so indescribably beautiful and rich only because it is full of inherited memories of the engendering and birthing of millions. In one creative thought a thousand forgotten nights of love come to life again and fill it with majesty and exaltation. And those who come together in the nights and are entwined in rocking delight perform a solemn task and gather sweetness, depth, and strength for the song of some future poets, who will appear in order to say ecstasies that are unsayable. And they call forth the future; and even if they have made a mistake and embrace blindly, the future comes anyway, a new human being arises, and on the foundation of the accident that seems to be accomplished here, there awakens the law by which a strong, determined seed forces its way through to the egg cell that openly advances to meet it. Don't be confused by surfaces; in the depths everything becomes law. And those who live the mystery falsely and badly (and they are very many) lose it only for themselves and nevertheless pass it on like a sealed letter, without knowing it. And don't be puzzled by how many names there are and how complex each life seems. Perhaps above them all there is a great motherhood, in the form of a communal yearning. The beauty of the girl, a being who (as you so beautifully say) "has not yet achieved anything," is motherhood that has a presentiment of itself and begins to prepare, becomes anxious, yearns. And the mother's beauty is motherhood that serves, and in the old woman there is a great remembering. And in the man too there is motherhood, it seems to me, physical and mental; his engendering is also a kind of birthing, and it is birthing when he creates out of his innermost fullness. And perhaps the sexes are more akin than people think, and the great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in one phenomenon: that man and woman, freed from all mistaken feelings and aversions, will seek each other not as opposites but as brother and sister, as neighbors, and will unite as human beings, in order to bear in common, simply, earnestly, and patiently, the heavy sex that has been laid upon them.

But everything that may someday be possible for many people, the solitary man can now, already, prepare and build with his own hands, which make fewer

mistakes. Therefore, dear Sir, love your solitude and try to sing out with the pain it causes you. for those who are near you are far away, you write, and this shows that the space around you is beginning to grow vast. And if what is near you is far away, then your vastness is already among the stars and is very great; be happy about your growth, in which of course you can't take anyone with you, and be gentle with those who stay behind; be confident and calm in front of them and don't torment them with your doubts and don't frighten them with your faith or joy, which they wouldn't be able to comprehend. Seek out some simple and true feeling of what you have in common with them, which doesn't necessarily have to alter when you yourself change again and again; when you see them, love life in a form that is not your own and be indulgent toward those who are growing old, who are afraid of the aloneness that you trust. Avoid providing material for the drama that is always stretched tight between parents and children; it uses up much of the children's strength and wastes the love of the elders, which acts and warms even if it doesn't comprehend. Don't ask for any advice from them and don't expect any understanding; but believe in a love that is being stored up for you like and inheritance, and have faith that in this love there is a strength and a blessing so large that you can travel as far as you wish without having to step outside it.

It is good that you will soon be entering a profession that will make you independent and will put you completely on your own, in every sense. Wait patiently to see whether your innermost life feels hemmed in by the form this profession imposes. I myself consider it a very difficult and very exacting one, since it is burdened with enormous conventions and leaves very little room for a personal interpretation of its duties. but your solitude will be a support and a home for you, even in the midst of very unfamiliar circumstances, and from it you will find all your paths. All my good wishes are ready to accompany you, and my faith is with you.

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Rome
October 29, 1903

Dear Sir,

I received your letter of August 29 in Florence, and it has taken me this long — two months — to answer. Please forgive this tardiness — but I don't like to write letters while I am traveling, because for letter writing I need more than the most necessary tools: some silence and solitude and a not too familiar hour. We arrived in Rome about six weeks ago, at a time when it was still empty, the hot, the notoriously feverish Rome, and this circumstance, along with other practical difficulties in finding a place to live, helped make the restlessness around us seem as if it would never end, and the unfamiliarity lay upon us with the weight of homelessness. In addition, Rome (if one has not yet become acquainted with it) makes one feel stifled with sadness for the first few days: through the gloomy and lifeless museum-atmosphere that it exhales, through the abundance of its pasts, which are brought forth and laboriously held up (pasts on which a tiny present subsists), through the terrible overvaluing, sustained by scholars and philologists and imitated by the ordinary tourist in Italy, of all the disfigured and decaying Things, which, after all, are essentially nothing more than accidental remains from another time and from a life that is not and should not be ours. Finally, after weeks of daily resistance, one finds oneself somewhat composed again, even though still a bit confused, and one says to oneself: No, there is not more beauty here than in other places, and all these objects, which have been marveled at by generation after generation, mended and restored by the hands of workmen, mean nothing, are nothing, and have no heart and no value; — but there is much beauty here, because everywhere there is much beauty. Waters infinitely full of life move along the ancient aqueducts into the great city and dance in the many city squares over white basins of stone and spread out in large,

spacious pools and murmur by day and lift up their murmuring to the night, which is vast here and starry and soft with winds. And there are gardens here, unforgettable boulevards, and staircases designed by Michelangelo, staircases constructed on the pattern of downward-gliding waters and, as they descend, widely giving birth to step out of wave. Through such impressions one gathers oneself, wins oneself back from the exacting multiplicity, which speaks and chatters there (and how talkative it is!), and one slowly learns to recognize the very few Things in which something eternal endures that one can love and something solitary that one can gently take part in.

I am still living in the city, on the Capitol, not far from the most beautiful equestrian statue that has come down to us from Roman art — the statue of Marcus Aurelius; but in a few weeks I will move into a quiet, simple room, an old summerhouse, which lies lost deep in a large park, hidden from the city, from its noises and incidents. There I will live all winter and enjoy the great silence, from which I expect the gift of happy, work-filled hours. . . .

From there, where I will be more at home, I will write you a longer letter, in which I will say something more about what you wrote me. Today I just need to tell you (and perhaps I am wrong not to have done this sooner) that the book you sent me (you said in your letter that it contained some works of yours) hasn't arrived. Was it sent back to you, perhaps from Worspwede? (They will not forward packages to foreign countries.) This is the most hopeful possibility, and I would be glad to have it confirmed. I do hope that the package hasn't been lost — unfortunately, the Italian mail service being what it is, that would not be anything unusual.

I would have been glad to have this book (as I am to have anything that comes from you); and any poems that have arisen in the meantime. I will always (if you entrust them to me) read and read again and experience as well and sincerely as I can. With greetings and good wishes,

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Rome
December 23, 1903

My dear Mr. Kappus,

I don't want you to be without a greeting from me when Christmas comes and when you, in the midst of the holiday, are bearing your solitude more heavily than usual. But when you notice that it is vast, you should be happy; for what (you should ask yourself) would a solitude be that was not vast; there is only one solitude, and it is vast, heavy, difficult to bear, and almost everyone has hours when he would gladly exchange it for any kind of sociability, however trivial or cheap, for the tiniest outward agreement with the first person who comes along, the most unworthy. . . . But perhaps these are the very hours during which solitude grows; for its growing is painful as the growing of boys and sad as the beginning of spring. But that must not confuse you. What is necessary, after all, is only this: solitude, vast inner solitude. To walk inside yourself and meet no one for hours — that is what you must be able to attain. To be solitary as you were when you were a child, when the grown-ups walked around involved with matters that seemed large and important because they looked so busy and because you didn't understand a thing about what they were doing.

And when you realize that their activities are shabby, that their vocations are petrified and no longer connected with life, why not then continue to look upon it all as a child would, as if you were looking at something unfamiliar, out of the depths of your own solitude, which is itself work and status and vocation? Why should you want to give up a child's wise not-understanding in exchange for defensiveness and scorn, since not-understanding is, after all, a way of being alone, whereas defensiveness and scorn are participation in precisely what, by these means, you want to separate yourself from.

Think, dear Sir, of the world that you carry inside you, and call this thinking

whatever you want to: a remembering of your own childhood or a yearning toward a future of your own — only be attentive to what is arising within you, and place that above everything you perceive around you. What is happening on your innermost self is worthy of your entire love; somehow you must find a way to work at it, and not lose too much time or too much courage in clarifying your attitude toward people. Who says that you have any attitude at all?— I know, your profession is hard and full of things that contradict you, and I foresaw your lament and knew that it would come. Now that it has come, there is nothing I can say to reassure you, I can only suggest that perhaps all professions are like that, filled with demands, filled with hostility toward the individual, saturated as it were with the hatred of those who find themselves mute and sullen in an insipid duty. The situation you must live in now is not more heavily burdened with conventions, prejudices, and false ideas than all the other situations, and if there are some that pretend to offer a greater freedom, there is nevertheless note that is, in itself, vast and spacious and connected to the important Things that the truest kind of life consists of. Only the individual who is solitary is placed under the deepest laws like a Thing, and when he walks out into the rising dawn or looks out into the event-filled evening and when he feels what is happening there, all situations drop from him as if from a dead man, though he stands in the midst of pure life. What you, dear Mr. Kappus, now have to experience as an officer, you would have felt in just the same way in any of the established professions; yes, even if, outside any position, you had simply tried to find some easy and independent contact with society, this feeling of being hemmed in would not have been spared you. — It is like this everywhere; but that is no cause for anxiety or sadness; if there is nothing you can share with other people, try to be close to Things; they will not abandon you; and the nights are still there, and the winds that move through the trees and across many lands; everything in the world of Things and animals is still filled with happening, which you can take part in; and children are still the way you were as a child, sad and happy in just the same way — and if you think of your childhood, you once again live among them, and the grown-ups are nothing, and their dignity has no value.

And if it frightens and torments you to think of childhood and of the simplicity and silence that accompanies it, because you can no longer believe in God, who appears in it everywhere, when ask yourself, dear Mr. Kappus, whether you have really lost God. Isn't it much truer to say that you have never yet possessed him? For when could that have been? Do you think that a child can

hold him, him whom grown men bear only with great effort and whose weight crushes the old? Do you suppose that someone who really has him could lose him like a little stone? Or don't you think that someone who once had him could only be lost by him? — But if you realize that he did not exist in your childhood, and did not exist previously, if you suspect that Christ was deluded by his yearning and Muhammad deceived by his pride — and if you are terrified to feel that even now he does not exist, even at this moment when we are talking about him — what justifies you then, if he never existed, in missing him like someone who has passed away and in searching for him as though he were lost?

Why don't you think of him as the one who is coming, who has been approaching from all eternity, the one who will someday arrive, the ultimate fruit of a tree whose leaves we are? What keeps you from projecting his birth into the ages that are coming into existence, and living your life as a painful and lovely day in the history of a great pregnancy? Don't you see how everything that happens is again and again a beginning, and couldn't it be His beginning, since, in itself, starting is always so beautiful? If he is the most perfect one, must not what is less perfect precede him, so that he can choose himself out of fullness and superabundance? — Must not he be the last one, so that he can include everything in himself, and what meaning would we have if he whom we are longing for has already existed?

As bees gather honey, so we collect what is sweetest out of all things and build Him. Even with the trivial, with the insignificant (as long as it is done out of love) we begin, with work and with the repose that comes afterward, with a silence or with a small solitary joy, with everything that we do alone, without anyone to join or help us, we start Him whom we will not live to see, just as our ancestors could not live to see us. And yet they, who passed away long ago, still exist in us, as predisposition, as burden upon our fate, as murmuring blood, and as gesture that rises up from the depths of time.

Is there anything that can deprive you of the hope that in this way you will someday exist in Him, who is the farthest, the outermost limit?

Dear Mr. Kappus, celebrate Christmas in this devout feeling, that perhaps He needs this very anguish of yours in order to being; these very days of your transition are perhaps the time when everything in you is working at Him, as you once worked at Him in your childhood, breathlessly. Be patient and without most solemn bitterness, and realize that the least we can do is to make coming into existence no more difficult for Him than the earth does for spring when it

wants to come.

And be glad and confident.

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Rome
May 14, 1904

My dear Mr. Kappus,

Much time has passed since I received your last letter. Please don't hold that against me; first it was work, then a number of interruptions, and finally poor health that again and again kept me from answering, because I wanted my answer to come to you out of peaceful and happy days. Now I feel somewhat better again (the beginning of spring with its moody, bad-tempered transitions was hard to bear here too) and once again, dear Mr. Kappus, I can greet you and talk to you (which I do with real pleasure) about this and that in response to your letter, as well as I can.

You see: I have copied out your sonnet, because I found that it is lovely and simple born in the shape that it moves in with such quiet decorum. It is the best poem of yours that you have let me read. And now I am giving you this copy because I know that it is important and full of new experience to rediscover a work of one's own in someone else's handwriting. Read the poem as if you had never seen it before, and you will feel in your innermost being how very much it is your own.

It was a pleasure for me to read this sonnet and your letter, often; I thank you for both.

And you should not let yourself be confused in your solitude by the fact that there is something in you that wants to move out of it. This very wish, if you use it calmly and prudently and like a tool, will help you spread out your solitude over a great distance. Most people have (with the help of conventions) turned their solutions toward what is easy and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must trust in what is difficult; everything alive trusts in it, everything in Nature grows and defends itself any way it can and is spontaneously itself, tries to be itself at all costs and against all opposition. We know little, but

that we must trust in what is difficult is a certainty that will never abandon us; it is good to be solitary, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult must be one more reason for us to do it.

It is also good to love: because love is difficult. For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been entrusted to us, the ultimate task, the final test and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation. That is why young people, who are beginners in everything, are not yet capable of love: it is something they must learn. With their whole being, with all their forces, gathered around their solitary, anxious, upward-beating heart, they must learn to love. But learning-time is always a long, secluded time ahead and far on into life, is—; solitude, a heightened and deepened kind of aloneness for the person who loves. Loving does not at first mean merging, surrendering, and uniting with another person (for what would a union be of two people who are unclarified, unfinished, and still incoherent—?), it is a high inducement for the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world, to become world in himself for the sake of another person; it is a great, demanding claim on him, something that chooses him and calls him to vast distances. Only in this sense, as the task of working on themselves ("to hearken and to hammer day and night"), may young people use the love that is given to them. Merging and surrendering and every kind of communion is not for them (who must still, for a long, long time, save and gather themselves); it is the ultimate, is perhaps that for which human lives are as yet barely large enough.

But this is what young people are so often and so disastrously wrong in doing they (who by their very nature are impatient) fling themselves at each other when love takes hold of them, they scatter themselves, just as they are, in all their messiness, disorder, bewilderment. . . . : And what can happen then? What can life do with this heap of half-broken things that they call their communion and that they would like to call their happiness, if that were possible, and their future? And so each of them loses himself for the sake of the other person, and loses the other, and many others who still wanted to come. And loses the vast distances and possibilities, gives up the approaching and fleeing of gentle, prescient Things in exchange for an unfruitful confusion, out of which nothing more can come; nothing but a bit of disgust, disappointment, and poverty, and the escape into one of the many conventions that have been put up in great numbers like public shelters on this most dangerous road. No area of human experience is so extensively provided with conventions as this one is: there are live-preservers of the most varied invention, boats and water wings; society has been able to create refuges of very sort, for since it preferred to take love-life as an amusement, it also had to give it an easy form, cheap, safe, and sure, as public amusements are.

It is true that many young people who love falsely, i.e., simply surrendering themselves and giving up their solitude (the average person will of course always go on doing that —), feel oppressed by their failure and want to make the situation they have landed in livable and fruitful in their own, personal way —. For their nature tells them that the questions of love, even more than everything else that is important, cannot be resolved publicly and according to this or that agreement; that they are questions, intimate questions from one human being to another, which in any case require a new, special, wholly personal answer —. But how can they, who have already flung themselves together and can no longer tell whose outlines are whose, who thus no longer possess anything of their won, how can they find a way out of themselves, out of the depths of their already buried solitude?

They act out of mutual helplessness, and then if, whit the best of intentions, they try to escape the conventions that is approaching them (marriage, for example), they fall into the clutches of some less obvious but just as deadly conventional solution. For then everything around them is — convention. Wherever people act out of a prematurely fused, muddy communion, every action is conventional: every relation that such confusion leads to has its own convention, however unusual (i.e., in the ordinary sense immoral) it may be; even separating would be a conventional step, an impersonal, accidental decision without strength and without fruit.

Whoever looks seriously will find that neither for death, which is difficult, nor for difficult love has any clarification, any solution, any hint of a path been perceived; and for both these tasks, which we carry wrapped up and hand on without opening, there is not general, agreed-upon rule that can be discovered. But in the same measure in which we begin to test life as individuals, these great Things will come to meet us, the individuals, with greater intimacy. The claims that the difficult work of love makes upon our development are greater than life, and we, as beginners, are not equal to them. But if we nevertheless endure and take this love upon us as burden and apprenticeship, instead of losing ourselves in the whole easy and frivolous game behind which people have hidden from the solemnity of their being, — then a small advance and a lightening will perhaps

be perceptible to those who come long after us. That would be much.

We are only just now beginning to consider the relation of one individual to a second individual objectively and without prejudice, and our attempts to live such relationships have no model before them. And yet in the changes that time has brought about there are already many things that can help our timid novitiate.

The girl and the woman, in their new, individual unfolding, will only in passing be imitators of male behavior and misbehavior and repeaters of male professions. After the uncertainty of such transitions, it will become obvious that women were going through the abundance and variation of those (often ridiculous) disguises just so that they could purify their own essential nature and wash out the deforming influences of the other sex. Women, in whom life lingers and dwells more immediately, more fruitfully, and more confidently, must surely have become riper and more human in their depths than light, easygoing man, who is not pulled down beneath the surface of life by the weight of any bodily fruit and who, arrogant and hasty, undervalues what he thinks he loves. This humanity of woman, carried in her womb through all her suffering and humiliation, will come to light when she has stripped off the conventions of mere femaleness in the transformations of her outward status, and those men who do not yet feel it approaching will be astonished by it. Someday (and even now, especially in the countries of northern Europe, trustworthy signs are already speaking and shining), someday there will be girls and women whose name will no longer mean the mere opposite of the male, but something in itself, something that makes one think not of any complement and limit, but only life and reality: the female human being.

This advance (at first very much against the will of the outdistanced men) will transform the love experience, which is now filled with error, will change it from the ground up, and reshape it into a relationship that is meant to be between one human being and another, no longer one that flows from man to woman. And this more human love (which will fulfill itself with infinite consideration and gentleness, and kindness and clarity in binding and releasing) will resemble what we are now preparing painfully and with great struggle: the love that consists in this: the two solitudes protect and border and greet each other. And one more thing: Don't think that the great love which was once granted to you, when you were a boy, has been lost; how can you know whether vast and generous wishes didn't ripen in you at that time, and purposes by which you are still living today? I believe that that love remains strong and intense in your memory because it was your first deep aloneness and the first inner work that you did on your life. — All good wished to you, dear Mr. Kappus!

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Borgebygard, Fladie, Sweden
August 12, 1904

I want to talk to you again for a little while, dear Mr. Kappus, although there is almost nothing I can say that will help you, and I can hardly find one useful word. You have had many sadnesses, large ones, which passed. And you say that even this passing was difficult and upsetting for you. But please, ask yourself whether these large sadnesses haven't rather gone right through you. Perhaps many things inside you have been transformed; perhaps somewhere, deep inside your being, you have undergone important changes while you were sad. The only sadnesses that are dangerous and unhealthy are the ones that we carry around in public in order to drown them out with the noise; like diseases that are treated superficially and foolishly, they just withdraw and after a short interval break out again all the more terribly; and gather inside us and are life, are life that is unlived, rejected, lost, life that we can die of. If only it were possible for us to see farther than our knowledge reaches, and even a little beyond the outworks of our presentiment, perhaps we would bear our sadnesses with greater trust than we have in our joys. For they are the moments when something new has entered us, something unknown; our feelings grow mute in shy embarrassment, everything in us withdraws, a silence arises, and the new experience, which no one knows, stands in the midst of it all and says nothing.

It seems to me that almost all our sadnesses are moments of tension, which we feel as paralysis because we no longer hear our astonished emotions living. Because we are alone with the unfamiliar presence that has entered us; because everything we trust and are used to is for a moment taken away from us; because we stand in the midst of a transition where we cannot remain standing. That is why the sadness passes: the new presence inside us, the presence that has been added, has entered our heart, has gone into its innermost chamber and is no longer even there, — is already in our bloodstream. And we don't know what it

was. We could easily be made to believe that nothing happened, and yet we have changed, as a house that a guest has entered changes. We can't say who has come, perhaps we will never know, but many signs indicate that the future enters us in this way in order to be transformed in us, long before it happens. And that is why it is so important to be solitary and attentive when one is sad: because the seemingly uneventful and motionless moment when our future steps into us is so much closer to life than that other loud and accidental point of time when it happens to us as if from outside. The quieter we are, the more patient and open we are in our sadnesses, the more deeply and serenely the new presence can enter us, and the more we can make it our own, the more it becomes our fate; and later on, when it "happens" (that is, steps forth out of us to other people), we will feel related and close to it in our innermost being. And that is necessary. It is necessary — and toward this point our development will move, little by little — that nothing alien happen to us, but only what has long been our own. People have already had to rethink so many concepts of motion; and they ill also gradually come to realize that what we call fate does not come into us from the outside, but emerges from us. It is only because so many people have not absorbed and transformed their fates while they were living in them that they have not realized what was emerging from them; it was so alien to them that they have not realized what was emerging from them; it was so alien to them that, in their confusion and fear, they thought it must have entered them at the very moment they became aware of it, for they swore they had never before found anything like that inside them. Just as people for a long time had a wrong idea about the sun's motion, they are even now wrong about the motion of what is to come. The future stands still, dear Mr. Kappus, but we move in infinite space.

How could it not be difficult for us?

And to speak of solitude again, it becomes clearer and clearer that fundamentally this is nothing that one can choose or refrain from. We are solitary. We can delude ourselves about this and act as if it were not true. That is all. But how much better it is to recognize that we are alone; yes, even to begin from this realization. It will, of course, make us dizzy; for all points that our eyes used to rest on are taken away from us, there is no longer anything near us, and everything far away is infinitely far. A man taken out of his room and, almost without preparation or transition, placed on the heights of a great mountain range, would feel something like that: an unequalled insecurity, an abandonment to the nameless, would almost annihilate him. He would feel he was falling or think he

was being catapulted out into space or exploded into a thousand pieces: what a colossal lie his brain would have to invent in order to catch up with and explain the situation of his senses. That is how all distances, all measures, change for the person who becomes solitary; many of these changes occur suddenly and then, as with the man on the mountaintop, unusual fantasies and strange feelings arise, which seem to grow out beyond all that is bearable. But it is necessary for us to experience that too. We must accept our reality as vastly as we possibly can; everything, even the unprecedented, must be possible within it. This is in the end the only kind of courage that is required of us: the courage to face the strangest, most unusual, most inexplicable experiences that can meet us. The fact that people have in this sense been cowardly has done infinite harm to life; the experiences that are called "apparitions," the whole so-called "spirit world," death, all these Things that are so closely related to us, have through our daily defensiveness been so entirely pushed out of life that the senses with which we might have been able to grasp them have atrophied. To say nothing of God. But the fear of the inexplicable has not only impoverished the reality of the individual; it has also narrowed the relationship between one human being and another, which has as it were been lifted out of the riverbed of infinite possibilities and set down in a fallow place on the bank, where nothing happens. For it is not only indolence that causes human relationships to be repeated from case to case with such unspeakable monotony and boredom; it is timidity before any new, inconceivable experience, which we don't think we can deal with. but only someone who is ready for everything, who doesn't exclude any experience, even the most incomprehensible, will live the relationship with another person as something alive and will himself sound the depths of his own being. for if we imagine this being of the individual as a larger or smaller room, it is obvious that most people come to know only one corner of their room, one spot near the window, one narrow strip on which they keep walking back and forth. In this way they have a certain security. And yet how much more human is the dangerous insecurity that drives those prisoners in Poe's stories to feel out the shapes of their horrible dungeons and not be strangers to the unspeakable terror of their cells. We, however, are not prisoners. No traps or snares have been set around us, and there is nothing that should frighten or upset us. We have been put into life as into the element we most accord with, and we have, moreover, through thousands of years of adaptation, come to resemble this life so greatly that when we hold still, through a fortunate mimicry we can hardly be differentiated from everything around us.

We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world, for it is not against us. If it has terrors, they are our terrors; if it has abysses, these abysses belong to us; if there are dangers, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life in accordance with the principle which tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us as the most alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience. How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races, the myths about dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses? Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

So you mustn't be frightened, dear Mr. Kappus, if a sadness rises in front of you, larger than any you have ever seen; if an anxiety, like light and cloud-shadows, moves over your hands and over everything you do. You must realize that something is happening to you, that life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hand and will not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any misery, any depression, since after all you don't know what work these conditions are doing inside you? Why do you want to persecute yourself with the question of where all this is coming from and where it is going? Since you know, after all, that you are in the midst of transitions and you wished for nothing so much as to change. If there is anything unhealthy in your reactions, just bear in mind that sickness is the means by which an organism frees itself from what is alien; so one must simply help it to be sick, to have its whole sickness and to break out with it, since that is the way it gets better. In you, dear Mr. Kappus, so much is happening now; you must be patient like someone who is sick, and confident like someone who is recovering; for perhaps you are both. And more: you are also the doctor, who has to watch over himself. But in every sickness there are many days when the doctor can do nothing but wait. And that is what you, insofar as you are your own doctor, must now do, more than anything else.

Don't observe yourself too closely. Don't be too quick to draw conclusions from what happens to you; simply let it happen. Otherwise it will be too easy for you to look with blame (that is: morally) at your past, which naturally has a share in everything that now meets you. But whatever errors, wishes, and yearnings of your boyhood are operating in you now are not what you remember and condemn. The extraordinary circumstances of a solitary and helpless childhood

are so difficult, so complicated, surrendered to so many influences and at the same time so cut off from all real connection with life that, where a vice enters it, one may not simply call it a vice. One must be so careful with names anyway; it is so often the name of an offense that a life shatters upon, not the nameless and personal action itself, which was perhaps a quite definite necessity of that life and could have been absorbed by it without any trouble. And the expenditure of energy seems to you so great only because you overvalue victory; it is not the "great thing" that you think you have achieved, although you are right about your feeling; the great thing is that there was already something there which you could replace that deception with, something true and real. Without this even your victory would have been just a moral reaction of no great significance; but in fact it has become a part of your life. Your life, dear Mr. Kappus, which I think of with so many good wishes. Do you remember how that life yearned out of childhood toward the "great thing"? I see that it is now yearning forth beyond the great thing toward the greater one. That is why it does not cease to be difficult, but that is also why it will not cease to grow.

And if there is one more thing that I must say to you, it is this: Don't think that the person who is trying to comfort you now lives untroubled among the simple and quiet words that sometimes give you much pleasure. His life has much trouble and sadness, and remains far behind yours. If it were otherwise, he would never have been able to find those words.

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Furuborg, Jonsered, in Sweden
November 4, 1904

My dear Mr. Kappus,

During this time that has passed without a letter, I have been partly traveling, partly so busy that I couldn't write. And even today writing is difficult for me, because I have already had to write so many letters that my hand is tired. If I could dictate, I would have much more to say to you, but as it is, please accept these few words as an answer to your long letter.

I think of you often, dear Mr. Kappus, and with such concentrated good wishes that somehow they ought to help you. Whether my letters really are a help, I often doubt. Don't say, "Yes, they are." Just accept them calmly and without many thanks, and let us wait for what wants to come.

There is probably no point in my going into your questions now; for what I could say about your tendency to doubt or about your inability to bring your outer and inner lives into harmony or about all the other thing that oppress you — : is just what I have already said: just the wish that you may find in yourself enough patience to endure and enough simplicity to have faith; that you may gain more and more confidence in what is difficult and in your solitude among other people. And as for the rest, let life happen to you. Believe me: life is in the right, always/

And about feelings: All feelings that concentrate you and lift you up are pure; only that feeling is impure which grasps just one side of your being and thus distorts you. Everything you can think of as you face your childhood, is good. Everything that makes more of you than you have ever been, even in your best hours, is right. Every intensification is good, if it is in your entire blood, if it isn't intoxication or muddiness, but joy which you can see into, clear to the bottom. Do you understand what I mean?

And your doubt can become a good quality if you train it. It must become knowing, it must become criticism. Ask it, whenever it wants to spoil something for you, why something is ugly, demand proofs from it, test it, and you will find it perhaps bewildered and embarrassed, perhaps also protesting. But don't give in, insist on arguments, and act in this way, attentive and persistent, every single time, and the day will come when instead of being a destroyer, it will become one of your best workers — perhaps the most intelligent of all the ones that are building your life.

That is all, dear Mr. Kappus, that I am able to tell you today. But I am sending you, along with this letter, the reprint of a small poem that has just appeared in the Prague German Labor. In it I speak to you further of life and death and of how both are great and glorious.

Yours,
Rainer Maria Rilke

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Paris
The day after Christmas, 1908

You must know, dear Mr. Kappus, how glad I was to have the lovely letter from you. The news that you give me, real and expressible as it now is again, seems to me good news, and the longer I thought it over, the more I felt that it was very good news indeed. That is really what I wanted to write you for Christmas Eve; but I have been variously and uninterruptedly living in my work this winter, and the ancient holiday arrived so quickly that I hardly had enough time to do the most necessary errands, much less to write.

But I have thought of you often during this holiday and imagined how silent you must be in your solitary fort amongst the empty hills, upon which those large southern winds fling themselves as if they wanted to devour them in large pieces. It must be immense, this silence, in which sounds and movements have room, and if one thinks that along with all this the presence of the distant sea also resounds, perhaps as the innermost note in this prehistoric harmony, then one can only wish that you are trustingly and patiently letting the magnificent solitude work upon you, this solitude which can no longer be erased from your life; which, in everything that is in store for you to experience and to do, will act as an anonymous influence, continuously and gently decisive, rather as the blood of our ancestors incessantly moves in us and combines with our own to form the unique, unrepeatable being that we are at every turning of our life.

Yes: I am glad you have that firm, sayable existence with you, that title, that uniform, that service, all that tangible and limited world, which in such surroundings, with such an isolated and not numerous body of men, takes on seriousness and necessity, and implies a vigilant application, above and beyond the frivolity and mere timepassing of the military profession, and not only permits a self-reliant attentiveness but actually cultivates it. And to be in circumstances that are working upon us, that from time to time place us in front of great

natural Things — that is all we need.

Art too is just a way of living, and however one lives, one can, without knowing, prepare for it; in everything real one is closer to it, more its neighbor, than in the unreal half-artistic professions, which, while they pretend to be close to art, in practice deny and attack the existence of all art — as, for example, all of journalism does and almost all criticism and three quarters of what is called (and wants to be called) literature. I am glad, in a word, that you have overcome the danger of landing in one of those professions, and are solitary and courageous, somewhere in a rugged reality. May the coming year support and strengthen you in that.

Always Yours,
R. M. Rilke

AUGUST 1963

Letter from Birmingham Jail

by Martin Luther King, Jr.

From the Birmingham jail, where he was imprisoned as a participant in nonviolent demonstrations against segregation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in longhand the letter which follows. It was his response to a public statement of concern and caution issued by eight white religious leaders of the South. Dr. King, who was born in 1929, did his undergraduate work at Morehouse College; attended the integrated Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, one of six black pupils among a hundred students, and the president of his class; and won a fellowship to Boston University for his Ph.D.

WHILE confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all of the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would be engaged in little else in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the argument of "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliate organizations all across the South, one being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary and possible, we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promises. So I am here, along with several members of my staff, because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational ties here.

Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth-century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Greco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider.

You deplore the demonstrations that are presently taking place in Birmingham. But I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being. I am sure that each of you would want to go beyond the superficial social analyst who looks

merely at effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. I would not hesitate to say that it is unfortunate that so-called demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham at this time, but I would say in more emphatic terms that it is even more unfortunate that the white power structure of this city left the Negro community with no other alternative.

IN ANY nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of them, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.

Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants, such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises, Reverend Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstration. As the weeks and months unfolded, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences of the past, we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through a process of self-purification. We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" and "Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?" We decided to set our direct-action program around the Easter season, realizing that, with exception of Christmas, this was the largest shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. Then it occurred to us that the March election was ahead, and so we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that Mr. Conner was in the runoff, we decided again to postpone action so that the demonstration could not be used to cloud the issues. At this time we agreed to begin our nonviolent witness the day after the runoff.

This reveals that we did not move irresponsibly into direct action. We, too, wanted to see Mr. Conner defeated, so we went through postponement after postponement to aid in this community need. After this we felt that direct action could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask, "Why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that

has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So, the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, "Why didn't you give the new administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that the new administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one before it acts. We will be sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Mr. Boutwell will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is much more articulate and gentle than Mr. Conner, they are both segregationists, dedicated to the task of maintaining the status quo. The hope I see in Mr. Boutwell is that he will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from the devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups are more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well timed" according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "wait." It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say "wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you

seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodyness" -- then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

YOU express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask, "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "An unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an "I - it" relationship for the "I - thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.

Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow, and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because it did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote, despite the fact that the Negroes constitute a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?

These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. There are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.

We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a Communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws.

I MUST make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time; and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn't this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical delvings precipitated the misguided popular mind to make him drink the hemlock? Isn't this like condemning

Jesus because His unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see, as federal courts have consistently affirmed, that it is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time. I received a letter this morning from a white brother in Texas which said, "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but is it possible that you are in too great of a religious hurry? It has taken Christianity almost 2000 years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." All that is said here grows out of a tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

YOU spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I started thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodyness" that they have adjusted to segregation, and, on the other hand, of a few Negroes in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because at points they profit by segregation, have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred and comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable devil. I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need not follow the do-nothingism of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. There is a more excellent way, of love and nonviolent protest. I'm grateful to God that, through the Negro church, the dimension of nonviolence entered our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, I am convinced that by now many streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who are working through the channels of nonviolent direct action and refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge

for freedom will eventually come. This is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom; something without has reminded him that he can gain it. Consciously and unconsciously, he has been swept in by what the Germans call the *Zeitgeist*, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. Recognizing this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand public demonstrations. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit- ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So I have not said to my people, "Get rid of your discontent." But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. Now this approach is being dismissed as extremist. I must admit that I was initially disappointed in being so categorized.

But as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love? -- "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice? -- "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ? -- "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist? -- "Here I stand; I can do no other so help me God." Was not John Bunyan an extremist? -- "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a mockery of my conscience." Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist? -- "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist? -- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate, or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this. Maybe I was too optimistic. Maybe I expected too much. I guess I should have realized that few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too small in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some, like Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, and James Dabbs, have written about our struggle in eloquent, prophetic, and understanding terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They sat in with us at lunch counters and rode in with us on the freedom rides. They have languished in filthy roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of angry policemen who see them as "dirty nigger lovers." They, unlike many of their moderate brothers, have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.

LET me rush on to mention my other disappointment. I have been disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful

of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, Reverend Stallings, for your Christian stand this past Sunday in welcoming Negroes to your Baptist Church worship service on a non-segregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Springhill College several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say that as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say it as a minister of the gospel who loves the church, who was nurtured in its bosom, who has been sustained by its Spiritual blessings, and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

I had the strange feeling when I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery several years ago that we would have the support of the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be some of our strongest allies. Instead, some few have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and with deep moral concern serve as the channel through which our just grievances could get to the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say, follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother. In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues which the gospel has nothing to do with," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular.

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they went on with the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven" and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the

average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson scratched across the pages of history the majestic word of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries our foreparents labored here without wages; they made cotton king; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation -- and yet out of a bottomless vitality our people continue to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

I must close now. But before closing I am impelled to mention one other point in your statement that troubled me profoundly.

You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I don't believe you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its angry violent dogs literally biting six unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I don't believe you would so quickly commend the policemen if you would observe their ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you would watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you would see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys, if you would observe them, as they did on two occasions, refusing to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I'm sorry that I can't join you in your praise for the police department.

It is true that they have been rather disciplined in their public handling of the demonstrators. In this sense they have been publicly "nonviolent." But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the last few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.

I wish you had commended the Negro demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of the most inhuman provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, courageously and with a majestic sense of purpose facing jeering and hostile mobs and the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman of

Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity, "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested." They will be young high school and college students, young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience's sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Never before have I written a letter this long -- or should I say a book? I'm afraid that it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else is there to do when you are alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell other than write long letters, think strange thoughts, and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that is an understatement of the truth and is indicative of an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything in this letter that is an overstatement of the truth and is indicative of my having a patience that makes me patient with anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

The Atlantic Monthly; *August 1963; The Negro Is Your Brother; Volume 212, No. 2; pages 78 - 88.*

Mountain Language

A PLAY BY

HAROLD PINTER

SAMUEL FRENCH LTD

MOUNTAIN LANGUAGE

First performed at the National Theatre on 20th October, 1988 with the following cast of characters:

Sergeant	Michael Gambon
Young Woman	Miranda Richardson
Officer	Julian Wadham
Elderly Woman	Eileen Atkins
Guard	George Harris
Prisoner	Tony Haygarth
Second Guard	Douglas McFerran
Hooded Man	Alex Hardy
Women	Jennifer Hill
	Irene MacDougall
	Kika Mirylees
	Charlotte Seago

Directed by Harold Pinter
Designed by Michael Taylor

CHARACTERS

Young Woman
Elderly Woman
Sergeant
Officer
Guard
Prisoner
Hooded Man
Second Guard

1

A Prison Wall

A line of women. An Elderly Woman, cradling her hand. A basket at her feet. A Young Woman with her arm around the Woman's shoulders

A Sergeant enters, followed by an Officer. The Sergeant points to the Young Woman

Sergeant Name?
Young Woman We've given our names.
Sergeant Name?
Young Woman We've given our names.
Sergeant Name?
Officer (*to the Sergeant*) Stop this shit. (*To the Young Woman*) Any complaints?
Young Woman She's been bitten.
Officer Who?

Pause

Who? Who's been bitten?
Young Woman She has. She has a torn hand. Look. Her hand has been bitten. This is blood.
Sergeant (*to the Young Woman*) What is your name?
Officer Shut up.

He walks over to the Elderly Woman

What's happened to your hand? Has someone bitten your hand?

The Woman slowly lifts her hand. He peers at it

Who did this? Who bit you?
Young Woman A Dobermann pinscher.
Officer Which one?

Pause

Which one?

Pause

Sergeant!

The Sergeant steps forward

Sergeant Sir!
Officer Look at this woman's hand. I think the thumb is going to come off. (*To the Elderly Woman*) Who did this?

She stares at him

Who did this?
Young Woman A big dog.
Officer What was his name?

Pause

What was his *name*?

Pause

Every dog has a *name*! They answer to their name. They are

given a name by their parents and that is their name, that is their *name*! Before they bite, they *state* their name. It's a formal procedure. They state their name and then they bite. What was his name? If you tell me one of our dogs bit this woman without giving his name I will have that dog shot!

Silence

Now — attention! Silence and attention! Sergeant!
Sergeant Sir?
Officer Take any complaints.
Sergeant Any complaints? Has anyone got any complaints?
Young Woman We were told to be here at nine o'clock this morning.
Sergeant Right. Quite right. Nine o'clock this morning. Absolutely right. What's your complaint?
Young Woman We were here at nine o'clock this morning. It's now five o'clock. We have been standing here for eight hours. In the snow. Your men let Dobermann pinschers frighten us. One bit this woman's hand.
Officer What was the name of this dog?

She looks at him

Young Woman I don't know his name.
Sergeant With permission, sir?
Officer Go ahead.
Sergeant Your husbands, your sons, your fathers, these men you have been waiting to see, are shithouses. They are enemies of the State. They are shithouses.

The Officer steps towards the Women

Officer Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand? You may not speak it. It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No-one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists. Any questions?
Young Woman I do not speak the mountain language.

Silence. The Officer and Sergeant slowly circle her. The Sergeant puts his hand on her bottom

Sergeant What language do you speak? What language do you speak with your arse?
Officer These women, Sergeant, have as yet committed no crime. Remember that.
Sergeant Sir! But you're not saying they're without sin?
Officer Oh, no. Oh, no, I'm not saying that.
Sergeant This one's full of it. She bounces with it.
Officer She doesn't speak the mountain language.

The Woman moves away from the Sergeant's hand and turns to face the two men

Young Woman My name is Sara Johnson. I have come to see my husband. It is my right. Where is he?
Officer Show me your papers.

She gives him a piece of paper. He examines it, turns to the Sergeant

He doesn't come from the mountains. He's in the wrong batch.
Sergeant So is she. She looks like a fucking intellectual to me.
Officer But you said her arse wobbled.
Sergeant Intellectual arses wobble the best.

Black-out

2
Visitors Room

A Prisoner sitting. The Elderly Woman sitting, with basket. A Guard standing behind her

The Prisoner and the Woman speak in a strong rural accent

Silence

Elderly Woman I have bread —

The Guard jabs her with a stick

Guard Forbidden. Language forbidden.

She looks at him. He jabs her

It's forbidden. (*To the Prisoner*) Tell her to speak the language of the capital.
Prisoner She can't speak it.

Silence

She doesn't speak it.

Silence

Elderly Woman I have apples —

The Guard jabs her

Guard (*shouting*) Forbidden! Forbidden forbidden forbidden! Jesus Christ! (*To the Prisoner*) Does she understand what I'm saying?
Prisoner No.
Guard Doesn't she?

He bends over her

Don't you?

She stares up at him

Prisoner She's old. She doesn't understand.
Guard Whose fault is that?

He laughs

Not mine, I can tell you. And I'll tell you another thing. I've got a wife and three kids. And you're all a pile of shit.

Silence

Prisoner I've got a wife and three kids.

Guard You've what?

Silence

You've got what?

Silence

What did you say to me? You've got what?

Silence

You've got *what*?

He picks up the telephone and dials one digit

Sergeant? I'm in the Blue Room ... yes ... I thought I should report, Sergeant ... I think I've got a joker in here.

The Lights dim to half. The figures are still. The following voice-over is heard

Elderly Woman's voice The baby is waiting for you.
Prisoner's voice Your hand has been bitten.
Elderly Woman's voice They are all waiting for you.
Prisoner's voice They have bitten my mother's hand.
Elderly Woman's voice When you come home there will be such a welcome for you. Everyone is waiting for you. They're all waiting for you. They're all waiting to see you.

The Lights come up to full

The Sergeant comes in

Sergeant What joker?

Black-out

3
Voice in the Darkness

Sergeant's voice Who's that fucking woman? What's that fucking woman doing here? Who let that fucking woman through that fucking door?
Second Guard's voice She's his wife.

The Lights come up

A corridor

A hooded Man held up by the Guard and the Sergeant. The Young Woman at a distance from them, staring at them

Sergeant What is this, a reception for Lady Duck Muck? Where's the bloody Babycham? Who's got the bloody Babycham for Lady Duck Muck?

He goes to the Young Woman

Hello, Miss. Sorry. A bit of a breakdown in administration, I'm afraid. They've sent you through the wrong door. Unbelievable. Someone'll be done for this. Anyway, in the meantime, what can I do for you, dear lady, as they used to say in the movies?

The Lights dim to half. The figures are still. The following voice-over is heard

Man's voice I watch you sleep. And then your eyes open. You look up at me above you and smile.

Young Woman's voice You smile. When my eyes open I see you above me and smile.
Man's voice We are out on a lake.
Young Woman's voice It is spring.
Man's voice I hold you. I warm you.
Young Woman's voice When my eyes are open I see you above me and smile.

The Lights come up to full. The hooded Man collapses. The Young Woman screams

Young Woman Charley!

The Sergeant clicks his finger

The Guard drags the Man off

Sergeant Yes, you've come in the wrong door. It must be the computer. The computer's got a double hernia. But I'll tell you what—if you want any information on any aspect of life in this place we've got a bloke comes into the office every Tuesday week, except when it rains. He's right on top of his chosen subject. Give him a tinkle one of these days and he'll see you all right. His name is Dokes. Joseph Dokes.
Young Woman Can I fuck him? If I fuck him, will everything be all right?
Sergeant Sure. No problem.
Young Woman Thank you.

Black-out

4
Visitors Room

Guard. Elderly Woman. Prisoner

Silence

The Prisoner has blood on his face. He sits trembling. The Woman is still. The Guard is looking out of a window. He turns to look at them both

Guard Oh, I forgot to tell you. They've changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.
Prisoner She can speak?
Guard Yes. Until further notice. New rules.

Pause

Prisoner Mother, you can speak.

Pause

Mother, I'm speaking to you. You see? We can speak. You can speak to me in our own language.

She is still

You can speak.

Pause

Mother. Can you hear me? I am speaking to you in our own language.

Pause

Do you hear me?

Pause

It's our language.

Pause

Can't you hear me? Do you hear me?

She does not respond

Mother?
Guard Tell her she can speak in her own language. New rules. Until further notice.
Prisoner Mother?

She does not respond. She sits still

The Prisoner's trembling grows. He falls from the chair on to his knees, begins to gasp and shake violently

The Sergeant walks into the room and studies the Prisoner shaking on the floor

Sergeant (*to the Guard*) Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they fuck it up.

Black-out

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST

1. A Prison Wall

On stage: Basket

Personal: **Young Woman**: piece of paper

2. Visitors room

On stage: 2 chairs
Basket
Telephone

Personal: **Guard**: stick

3. Voice in the Darkness

On stage: Nil

4. Visitors Room

On stage: 2 chairs
Basket

LIGHTING PLOT

Cue 1	To open *Full general lighting*	(Page 1)
Cue 2	**Sergeant**: "... wobble the best." *Black-out*	(Page 5)
Cue 3	To open 2. Visitors Room *Full general lighting*	(Page 5)
Cue 4	**Guard**: "...a joker in here." *Dim to half*	(Page 7)
Cue 5	**Elderly Woman's voice**: "...to see you." *Return to full general lighting*	(Page 7)
Cue 6	**Sergeant**: "What joker?" *Black-out*	(Page 7)
Cue 7	To open 3. Voice in the Darkness *Black-out*	(Page 8)
Cue 8	**Second Guard's voice**: "She's his wife." *Bring up full general lighting*	(Page 8)
Cue 9	**Sergeant**: "...to say in the movies?" *Dim to half*	(Page 8)
Cue 10	**Young Woman's voice**: "...and smile." *Return to full general lighting*	(Page 9)
Cue 11	**Young Woman**: "Thank you." *Black-out*	(Page 9)

Cue 12	To open 4. VISITORS ROOM *Full general lighting*	(Page 10)
Cue 13	**Sergeant:** "... and they fuck it up." *Black-out*	(Page 11)

EFFECTS PLOT

Cue 1	The Lights dim to half *Voice-over as script page 8*	(Page 8)
Cue 2	To open 3. VOICE IN THE DARKNESS *Voice-over as script page 9*	(Page 9)
Cue 3	The Lights dim to half *Voice-over as script pages 9-10*	(Page 9)

THE INVISIBLE CITIES

Italo Calvino

Translated from the Italian by William Weaver A Harvest Book A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book Harcourt Brace & Company San Diego New York London.

CONTENTS

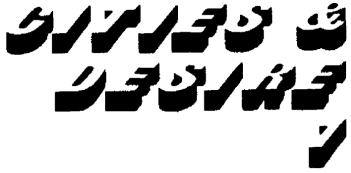
Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his. In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered, and the melancholy and relief of knowing we shall soon give up any thought of knowing and understanding them. There is a sense of emptiness that comes over us at evening, with the odor of the elephants after the rain and the sandalwood ashes growing cold in the braziers, a dizziness that makes rivers and mountains tremble on the fallow curves of the planispheres where they are portrayed, and rolls up, one after the other, the despatches announcing to us the collapse of the last enemy troops, from defeat to defeat, and flakes the wax of the seals of obscure kings who beseech our armies' protection, offering in exchange annual tributes of precious metals, tanned hides, and tortoise shell. It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter, that the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us the heirs of their long undoing. Only in Marco Polo's accounts was Kublai Khan able to

discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it could escape the termites' gnawing.

7

Leaving there and proceeding for three days toward the east, you reach Diomira, a city with sixty silver domes, bronze statues of all the gods, streets paved with lead, a crystal theater, a golden cock that crows each morning on a tower. All these beauties will already be familiar to the visitor, who has seen them also in other cities. But the special quality of this city for the man who arrives there on a September evening, when the days are growing shorter and the multicolored lamps are lighted all at once at the doors of the food stalls and from a terrace a woman's voice cries ooh!, is that he feels envy toward those who now believe they have once before lived an evening identical to this and who think they were happy, that time.

When a man rides a long time through wild regions he feels the desire for a city. Finally he comes to Isidora, a city where the buildings have spiral staircases encrusted with spiral seashells, where perfect telescopes and violins are made, where the foreigner hesitating between two women always encounters a third, where cockfights degenerate into bloody brawls among the bettors. He was thinking of all these things when he desired a city. Isidora, therefore, is the city of his dreams: with one difference. The dreamed-of city contained him as a young man; he arrives at Isidora in his old age. In the square there is the wall where the old men sit and watch the young go by; he is seated in a row with them. Desires are already memories.

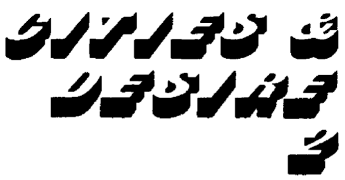


There are two ways of describing the city of Dorothea: you can say that four aluminum towers rise from its walls flanking seven gates with spring-operated drawbridges that span the moat whose water feeds four green canals which cross the city, dividing it into nine quarters, each with three hundred houses and seven hundred chimneys. And bearing in mind that the nubile girls of each quarter marry youths of other quarters and their parents exchange the goods that each family holds in monopoly—bergamot, sturgeon roe, astrolabes, amethysts—you can then work from these facts until you learn everything you wish about the city in the past, present, and future. Or else you can say, like the camel driver who took me there: "I arrived here in my first youth, one morning, many people were hurrying along the streets toward the market, the women had fine teeth and looked you straight in the eye, three soldiers on a platform played the trumpet, and all around wheels turned and colored banners fluttered in the wind. Before then I had known only the desert and the caravan routes. In the years that followed, my eyes returned to contemplate the desert expanses and the caravan routes; but now I know this path is only one of the many that opened before me on that morning in Dorothea."

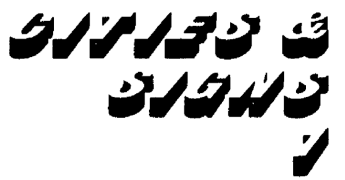
In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. I could tell you how many steps make up the streets rising like stairways, and the degree of the arcades' curves, and what kind of zinc scales cover the roofs; but I already know this would be the same as telling you nothing. The city does not consist of this, but of relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat's progress along it as he slips into the same window; the firing range of a gunboat which has suddenly appeared beyond the cape and the bomb that destroys the guttering; the rips in the fish net and the three old men seated on the dock mending nets and telling each other for the hundredth time the story of the gunboat of the usurper, who some say was the queen's illegitimate son, abandoned in his swaddling clothes there on the dock.

As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands. A description of Zaira as it is today should contain all Zaira's past.

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.



At the end of three days, moving southward, you come upon Anastasia, a city with concentric canals watering it and kites flying over it. I should now list the wares that can profitably be bought here: agate, onyx, chrysoprase, and other varieties of chalcedony; I should praise the flesh of the golden pheasant cooked here over fires of seasoned cherry wood and sprinkled with much sweet marjoram; and tell of the women I have seen bathing in the pool of a garden and who sometimes—it is said—invite the stranger to disrobe with them and chase them in the water. But with all this, I would not be telling you the city's true essence; for while the description of Anastasia awakens desires one at a time only to force you to stifle them, when you are in the heart of Anastasia one morning your desires waken all at once and surround you. The city appears to you as a whole where no desire is lost and of which you are a part, and since it enjoys everything you do not enjoy, you can do nothing but inhabit this desire and be content. Such is the power, sometimes called malignant, sometimes benign, that Anastasia, the treacherous city, possesses; if for eight hours a day you work as a cutter of agate, onyx, chrysoprase, your labor which gives form to desire takes from desire its form, and you believe you are enjoying Anastasia wholly when you are only its slave.



You walk for days among trees and among stones. Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and then only when it has recognized that thing as the sign of another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger's passage; a marsh announces a vein of water; the hibiscus flower, the end of winter. All the rest is silent and interchangeable; trees and stones are only what they are.

Finally the journey leads to the city of Tamara. You penetrate it along streets thick with signboards jutting from the walls. The eye does not see things but images of things that mean other things: pincers point out the tooth-drawer's house; a tankard, the tavern; halberds, the barracks; scales, the grocer's. Statues and shields depict lions, dolphins, towers, stars: a sign that something—who knows what?—has as its sign a lion or a dolphin or a tower or a star. Other signals warn of what is forbidden in a given place (to enter the alley with wagons, to urinate behind the kiosk, to fish with your pole from the bridge) and what is allowed (watering zebras, playing bowls, burning relatives' corpses). From the doors of the temples the gods' statues are seen, each portrayed with his attributes—the cornucopia, the hourglass, the medusa—so that the worshiper can recognize them and address his prayers correctly. If a building has no signboard or figure, its very form

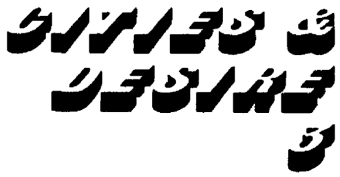
and the position it occupies in the city's order suffice to indicate its function: the palace, the prison, the mint, the Pythagorean school, the brothel. The wares, too, which the vendors display on their stalls are valuable not in themselves but as signs of other things: the embroidered headband stands for elegance; the gilded palanquin, power; the volumes of Averroes, learning; the ankle bracelet, voluptuousness. Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts.

However the city may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it. Outside, the land stretches, empty, to the horizon; the sky opens, with speeding clouds. In the shape that chance and wind give the clouds, you are already intent on recognizing figures: a sailing ship, a hand, an elephant. . . .

14

Beyond six rivers and three mountain ranges rises Zora, a city that no one, having seen it, can forget. But not because, like other memorable cities, it leaves an unusual image in your recollections. Zora has the quality of remaining in your memory point by point, in its succession of streets, of houses along the streets, and of doors and windows in the houses, though nothing in them possesses a special beauty or rarity. Zora's secret lies in the way your gaze runs over patterns following one another as in a musical score where not a note can be altered or displaced. The man who knows by heart how Zora is made, if he is unable to sleep at night, can imagine he is walking along the streets and he remembers the order by which the copper clock follows the barber's striped awning, then the fountain with the nine jets, the astronomer's glass tower, the melon vendor's kiosk, the statue of the hermit and the lion, the Turkish bath, the café at the corner, the alley that leads to the harbor. This city which cannot be expunged from the mind is like an armature, a honeycomb in whose cells each of us can place the things he wants to remember: names of famous men, virtues, numbers, vegetable and mineral classifications, dates of battles, constellations, parts of speech. Between each idea and each point of the itinerary an affinity or a contrast can be established, serving as an immediate aid to memory. So the world's most learned men are those who have memorized Zora.

But in vain I set out to visit the city: forced to remain motionless and always the same, in order to be more easily remembered, Zora has languished, disintegrated, disappeared. The earth has forgotten her.



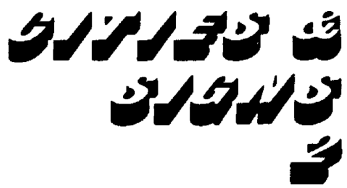
Despina can be reached in two ways: by ship or by camel. The city displays one face to the traveler arriving overland and a different one to him who arrives by sea.

When the camel driver sees, at the horizon of the tableland, the pinnacles of the skyscrapers come into view, the radar antennae, the white and red windsocks flapping, the chimneys belching smoke, he thinks of a ship; he knows it is a city, but he thinks of it as a vessel that will take him away from the desert, a windjammer about to cast off, with the breeze already swelling the sails, not yet unfurled, or a steamboat with its boiler vibrating in the iron keel; and he thinks of all the ports, the foreign merchandise the cranes unload on the docks, the taverns where crews of different flags break bottles over one another's heads, the lighted, ground-floor windows, each with a woman combing her hair.

In the coastline's haze, the sailor discerns the form of a camel's withers, an embroidered saddle with glittering fringe between two spotted humps, advancing and swaying; he knows it is a city, but he thinks of it as a camel from whose pack hang wineskins and bags of candied fruit, date wine, tobacco leaves, and already he sees himself at the head of a long caravan taking him away from the desert of the sea, toward oases of fresh water in the palm trees'

jagged shade, toward palaces of thick, whitewashed walls, tiled courts where girls are dancing barefoot, moving their arms, half-hidden by their veils, and half-revealed.

Each city receives its form from the desert it opposes; and so the camel driver and the sailor see Despina, a border city between two deserts.



Travelers return from the city of Zirma with distinct memories: a blind black man shouting in the crowd, a lunatic teetering on a skyscraper's cornice, a girl walking with a puma on a leash. Actually many of the blind men who tap their canes on Zirma's cobblestones are black; in every skyscraper there is someone going mad; all lunatics spend hours on cornices; there is no puma that some girl does not raise, as a whim. The city is redundant: it repeats itself so that something will stick in the mind.

I too am returning from Zirma: my memory includes dirigibles flying in all directions, at window level; streets of shops where tattoos are drawn on sailors' skin; underground trains crammed with obese women suffering from the humidity. My traveling companions, on the other hand, swear they saw only one dirigible hovering among the city's spires, only one tattoo artist arranging needles and inks and pierced patterns on his bench, only one fat woman fanning herself on a train's platform. Memory is redundant: it repeats signs so that the city can begin to exist.

Isaura, city of the thousand wells, is said to rise over a deep, subterranean lake. On all sides, wherever the inhabitants dig long vertical holes in the ground, they succeed in drawing up water, as far as the city extends, and no farther. Its green border repeats the dark outline of the buried lake; an invisible landscape conditions the visible one; everything that moves in the sunlight is driven by the lapping wave enclosed beneath the rock's calcareous sky.

Consequently two forms of religion exist in Isaura.

The city's gods, according to some people, live in the depths, in the black lake that feeds the underground streams. According to others, the gods live in the buckets that rise, suspended from a cable, as they appear over the edge of the wells, in the revolving pulleys, in the windlasses of the norias, in the pump handles, in the blades of the windmills that draw the water up from the drillings, in the trestles that support the twisting probes, in the reservoirs perched on stilts over the roofs, in the slender arches of the aqueducts, in all the columns of water, the vertical pipes, the plungers, the drains, all the way up to the weathercocks that surmount the airy scaffoldings of Isaura, a city that moves entirely upward.

Sent off to inspect the remote provinces, the Great Khan's envoys and tax-collectors duly returned to Kai-ping-fu and to the gardens of magnolias in whose shade Kublai strolled, listening to their long reports. The ambassadors were Persians, Armenians, Syrians, Copts, Turkomans; the emperor is he who is a foreigner to each of his subjects, and only through foreign eyes and ears could the empire manifest its existence to Kublai. In languages incomprehensible to the Khan, the envoys related information heard in languages incomprehensible to them: from this opaque, dense stridor emerged the revenues received by the imperial treasury, the first and last names of officials dismissed and decapitated, the dimensions of the canals that the narrow rivers fed in times of drought. But when the young Venetian made his report, a different communication was established between him and the emperor. Newly arrived and totally ignorant of the Levantine languages, Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder and of horror, animal barkings or hootings, or with objects he took from his knapsacks—ostrich plumes, pea-shooters, quartzes—which he arranged in front of him like chessmen. Returning from the missions on which Kublai sent him, the ingenious foreigner improvised pantomimes that the sovereign had to interpret: one city was depicted by the leap of a fish escaping the cormorant's beak to fall into a net; another city by a naked man running through fire

unscorched; a third by a skull, its teeth green with mold, clenching a round, white pearl. The Great Khan deciphered the signs, but the connection between them and the places visited remained uncertain; he never knew whether Marco wished to enact an adventure that had befallen him on his journey, an exploit of the city's founder, the prophecy of an astrologer, a rebus or a charade to indicate a name. But, obscure or obvious as it might be, everything Marco displayed had the power of emblems, which, once seen, cannot be forgotten or confused. In the Khan's mind the empire was reflected in a desert of labile and interchangeable data, like grains of sand, from which there appeared, for each city and province, the figures evoked by the Venetian's logogriphs.

As the seasons passed and his missions continued, Marco mastered the Tartar language and the national idioms and tribal dialects. Now his accounts were the most precise and detailed that the Great Khan could wish and there was no question or curiosity which they did not satisfy. And yet each piece of information about a place recalled to the emperor's mind that first gesture or object with which Marco had designated the place. The new fact received a meaning from that emblem and also added to the emblem a new meaning. Perhaps, Kublai thought, the empire is nothing but a zodiac of the mind's phantasms.

"On the day when I know all the emblems," he asked

Marco, "shall I be able to possess my empire, at last?"

And the Venetian answered: "Sire, do not believe it. On that day you will be an emblem among emblems."

23

"The other ambassadors warn me of famines, extortions, conspiracies, or else they inform me of newly discovered turquoise mines, advantageous prices in marten furs, suggestions for supplying damascened blades. And you?" the Great Khan asked Polo, "you return from lands equally distant and you can tell me only the thoughts that come to a man who sits on his doorstep at evening to enjoy the cool air. What is the use, then, of all your traveling?"

"It is evening. We are seated on the steps of your palace. There is a slight breeze," Marco Polo answered. "Whatever country my words may evoke around you, you will see it from such a vantage point, even if instead of the palace there is a village on pilings and the breeze carries the stench of a muddy estuary."

"My gaze is that of a man meditating, lost in thought—I admit it. But yours? You cross archipelagoes, tundras, mountain ranges. You would do as well never moving from here."

The Venetian knew that when Kublai became vexed with him, the emperor wanted to follow more clearly a private train of thought; so Marco's answers and objections took their place in a discourse already proceeding on its own, in the Great Khan's head. That is to say, between the two of them it did not matter whether questions and solutions were uttered aloud or whether each of the two went on pondering in silence. In fact, they were silent,

27

their eyes half-closed, reclining on cushions, swaying in hammocks, smoking long amber pipes.

Marco Polo imagined answering (or Kublai Khan imagined his answer) that the more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there; and he retraced the stages of his journeys, and he came to know the port from which he had set sail, and the familiar places of his youth, and the surroundings of home, and a little square of Venice where he gamboled as a child.

At this point Kublai Khan interrupted him or imagined interrupting him, or Marco Polo imagined himself interrupted, with a question such as: "You advance always with your head turned back?" or "Is what you see always behind you?" or rather, "Does your journey take place only in the past?"

All this so that Marco Polo could explain or imagine explaining or be imagined explaining or succeed finally in explaining to himself that what he sought was always something lying ahead, and even if it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced on his journey, because the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed: not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the more remote past. Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

Marco enters a city; he sees someone in a square living a life or an instant that could be his; he could now be in that man's place, if he had stopped in time, long ago; or if, long ago, at a crossroads, instead of taking one road he had taken the opposite one, and after long wandering he had come to be in the place of that man in that square. By now, from that real or hypothetical past of his, he is excluded; he cannot stop; he must go on to another city, where another of his pasts awaits him, or something perhaps that had been a possible future of his and is now someone else's present. Futures not achieved are only branches of the past: dead branches.

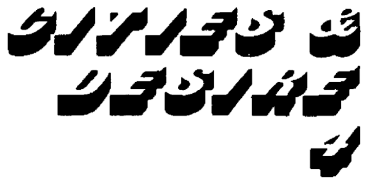
"Journeys to relive your past?" was the Khan's question at this point, a question which could also have been formulated: "Journeys to recover your future?"

And Marco's answer was: "Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveler recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have."

CITIES & MEMORY 3

In Maurilia, the traveler is invited to visit the city and, at the same time, to examine some old post cards that show it as it used to be: the same identical square with a hen in the place of the bus station, a bandstand in the place of the overpass, two young ladies with white parasols in the place of the munitions factory. If the traveler does not wish to disappoint the inhabitants, he must praise the postcard city and prefer it to the present one, though he must be careful to contain his regret at the changes within definite limits: admitting that the magnificence and prosperity of the metropolis Maurilia, when compared to the old, provincial Maurilia, cannot compensate for a certain lost grace, which, however, can be appreciated only now in the old post cards, whereas before, when that provincial Maurilia was before one's eyes, one saw absolutely nothing graceful and would see it even less today, if Maurilia had remained unchanged; and in any case the metropolis has the added attraction that, through what it has become, one can look back with nostalgia at what it was.

Beware of saying to them that sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves. At times even the names of the inhabitants remain the same, and their voices' accent, and also the features of the faces; but the gods who live beneath names and above places have gone off without a word and outsiders have settled in their place. It is pointless to ask whether the new ones are better or worse than the old, since there is no connection between them, just as the old post cards do not depict Maurilia as it was, but a different city which, by chance, was called Maurilia, like this one.



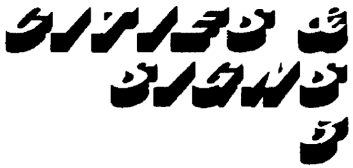
In the center of Fedora, that gray stone metropolis, stands a metal building with a crystal globe in every room. Looking into each globe, you see a blue city, the model of a different Fedora. These are the forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today. In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined a way of making it the ideal city, but while he constructed his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe.

The building with the globes is now Fedora's museum: every inhabitant visits it, chooses the city that corresponds to his desires, contemplates it, imagining his reflection in the medusa pond that would have collected the waters of the canal (if it had not been dried up), the view from the high canopied box along the avenue reserved for elephants (now banished from the city), the fun of sliding down the spiral, twisting minaret (which never found a pedestal from which to rise).

On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big, stone Fedora and the little Fedoras in glass globes. Not because they are all equally real, but because all are only assumptions.

32

The one contains what is accepted as necessary when it is not yet so; the others, what is imagined as possible and, a moment later, is possible no longer.



The man who is traveling and does not yet know the city awaiting him along his route wonders what the palace will be like, the barracks, the mill, the theater, the bazaar. In every city of the empire every building is different and set in a different order: but as soon as the stranger arrives at the unknown city and his eye penetrates the pine cone of pagodas and garrets and haymows, following the scrawl of canals, gardens, rubbish heaps, he immediately distinguishes which are the princes' palaces, the high priests' temples, the tavern, the prison, the slum. This—some say—confirms the hypothesis that each man bears in his mind a city made only of differences, a city without figures and without form, and the individual cities fill it up.

This is not true of Zoe. In every point of this city you can, in turn, sleep, make tools, cook, accumulate gold, disrobe, reign, sell, question oracles. Any one of its pyramid roofs could cover the leprosarium or the odalisques' baths. The traveler roams all around and has nothing but doubts: he is unable to distinguish the features of the city, the features he keeps distinct in his mind also mingle. He infers this: if existence in all its moments is all of itself, Zoe is the place of indivisible existence. But why, then, does the city exist? What line separates the inside from the outside, the rumble of wheels from the howl of wolves?

Now I shall tell of the city of Zenobia, which is wonderful in this fashion: though set on dry terrain it stands on high pilings, and the houses are of bamboo and zinc, with many platforms and balconies placed on stilts at various heights, crossing one another, linked by ladders and hanging sidewalks, surmounted by cone-roofed belvederes, barrels storing water, weather vanes, jutting pulleys, and fish poles, and cranes.

No one remembers what need or command or desire drove Zenobia's founders to give their city this form, and so there is no telling whether it was satisfied by the city as we see it today, which has perhaps grown through successive superimpositions from the first, now undecipherable plan. But what is certain is that if you ask an inhabitant of Zenobia to describe his vision of a happy life, it is always a city like Zenobia that he imagines, with its pilings and its suspended stairways, a Zenobia perhaps quite different, a-flutter with banners and ribbons, but always derived by combining elements of that first model.

This said, it is pointless trying to decide whether Zenobia is to be classified among happy cities or among the unhappy. It makes no sense to divide cities into these two species, but rather into another two: those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires either erase the city or are erased by it.

Proceeding eighty miles into the northwest wind, you reach the city of Euphemia, where the merchants of seven nations gather at every solstice and equinox. The boat that lands there with a cargo of ginger and cotton will set sail again, its hold filled with pistachio nuts and poppy seeds, and the caravan that has just unloaded sacks of nutmegs and raisins is already cramming its saddlebags with bolts of golden muslin for the return journey. But what drives men to travel up rivers and cross deserts to come here is not only the exchange of wares, which you could find, everywhere the same, in all the bazaars inside and outside the Great Khan's empire, scattered at your feet on the same yellow mats, in the shade of the same awnings protecting them from the flies, offered with the same lying reduction in prices. You do not come to Euphemia only to buy and sell, but also because at night, by the fires all around the market, seated on sacks or barrels or stretched out on piles of carpets, at each word that one man says—such as "wolf," "sister," "hidden treasure," "battle," "scabies," "lovers"—the others tell, each one, his tale of wolves, sisters, treasures, scabies, lovers, battles. And you know that in the long journey ahead of you, when to keep awake against the camel's swaying or the junk's rocking, you start summoning up your memories one by one, your wolf will have become another wolf, your sister a different sister, your battle other battles, on your return from Euphemia, the city where memory is traded at every solstice and at every equinox.

. . . Newly arrived and quite ignorant of the languages of the Levant, Marco Polo could express himself only by drawing objects from his baggage—drums, salt fish, necklaces of wart hogs' teeth—and pointing to them with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder or of horror, imitating the bay of the jackal, the hoot of the owl.

The connections between one element of the story and another were not always obvious to the emperor; the objects could have various meanings: a quiver filled with arrows could indicate the approach of war, or an abundance of game, or else an armorer's shop; an hourglass could mean time passing, or time past, or sand, or a place where hourglasses are made.

But what enhanced for Kublai every event or piece of news reported by his inarticulate informer was the space that remained around it, a void not filled with words. The descriptions of cities Marco Polo visited had this virtue: you could wander through them in thought, become lost, stop and enjoy the cool air, or run off.

As time went by, words began to replace objects and gestures in Marco's tales: first exclamations, isolated nouns, dry verbs, then phrases, ramified and leafy discourses, metaphors and tropes. The foreigner had learned to speak the emperor's language or the emperor to understand the language of the foreigner.

But you would have said communication between them

was less happy than in the past: to be sure, words were more useful than objects and gestures in listing the most important things of every province and city—monuments, markets, costumes, fauna and flora—and yet when Polo began to talk about how life must be in those places, day after day, evening after evening, words failed him, and little by little, he went back to relying on gestures, grimaces, glances.

So, for each city, after the fundamental information given in precise words, he followed with a mute commentary, holding up his hands, palms out, or backs, or sideways, in straight or oblique movements, spasmodic or slow. A new kind of dialogue was established: the Great Khan's white hands, heavy with rings, answered with stately movements the sinewy, agile hands of the merchant. As an understanding grew between them, their hands began to assume fixed attitudes, each of which corresponded to a shift of mood, in their alternation and repetition. And as the vocabulary of things was renewed with new samples of merchandise, the repertory of mute comment tended to become closed, stable. The pleasure of falling back on it also diminished in both; in their conversations, most of the time, they remained silent and immobile.

Kublai Khan had noticed that Marco Polo's cities resembled one another, as if the passage from one to another involved not a journey but a change of elements. Now, from each city Marco described to him, the Great Khan's mind set out on its own, and after dismantling the city piece by piece, he reconstructed it in other ways, substituting components, shifting them, inverting them.

Marco, meanwhile, continued reporting his journey, but the emperor was no longer listening.

Kublai interrupted him: "From now on I shall describe the cities and you will tell me if they exist and are as I have conceived them. I shall begin by asking you about a city of stairs, exposed to the sirocco, on a half-moon bay. Now I shall list some of the wonders it contains: a glass tank high as a cathedral so people can follow the swimming and flying of the swallow fish and draw auguries from them; a palm tree which plays the harp with its fronds in the wind; a square with a horseshoe marble table around it, a marble tablecloth, set with foods and beverages also of marble."

"Sire, your mind has been wandering. This is precisely the city I was telling you about when you interrupted me."

"You know it? Where is it? What is its name?"

"It has neither name nor place. I shall repeat the reason why I was describing it to you: from the number of imaginable cities we must exclude those whose elements are as-

sembled without a connecting thread, an inner rule, a perspective, a discourse. With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

"I have neither desires nor fears," the Khan declared, "and my dreams are composed either by my mind or by chance."

"Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours."

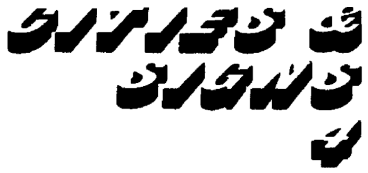
"Or the question it asks you, forcing you to answer, like Thebes through the mouth of the Sphinx."

From there, after six days and seven nights, you arrive at Zobeide, the white city, well exposed to the moon, with streets wound about themselves as in a skein. They tell this tale of its foundation: men of various nations had an identical dream. They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked. They dreamed of pursuing her. As they twisted and turned, each of them lost her. After the dream they set out in search of that city; they never found it, but they found one another; they decided to build a city like the one in the dream. In laying out the streets, each followed the course of his pursuit; at the spot where they had lost the fugitive's trail, they arranged spaces and walls differently from the dream, so she would be unable to escape again.

This was the city of Zobeide, where they settled, waiting for that scene to be repeated one night. None of them, asleep or awake, ever saw the woman again. The city's streets were streets where they went to work every day, with no link any more to the dreamed chase. Which, for that matter, had long been forgotten.

New men arrived from other lands, having had a dream like theirs, and in the city of Zobeide, they recognized something of the streets of the dream, and they changed the positions of arcades and stairways to resemble more closely the path of the pursued woman and so, at the spot where she had vanished, there would remain no avenue of escape.

The first to arrive could not understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap.



Of all the changes of language a traveler in distant lands must face, none equals that which awaits him in the city of Hypatia, because the change regards not words, but things. I entered Hypatia one morning, a magnolia garden was reflected in blue lagoons, I walked among the hedges, sure I would discover young and beautiful ladies bathing; but at the bottom of the water, crabs were biting the eyes of the suicides, stones tied around their necks, their hair green with seaweed.

I felt cheated and I decided to demand justice of the sultan. I climbed the porphyry steps of the palace with the highest domes, I crossed six tiled courtyards with fountains. The central hall was barred by iron gratings: convicts with black chains on their feet were hauling up basalt blocks from a quarry that opened underground.

I could only question the philosophers. I entered the great library, I became lost among shelves collapsing under the vellum bindings, I followed the alphabetical order of vanished alphabets, up and down halls, stairs, bridges. In the most remote papyrus cabinet, in a cloud of smoke, the dazed eyes of an adolescent appeared to me, as he lay on a mat, his lips glued to an opium pipe.

"Where is the sage?"

The smoker pointed out of the window. It was a

garden with children's games: ninepins, a swing, a top. The philosopher was seated on the lawn. He said: "Signs form a language, but not the one you think you know."

I realized I had to free myself from the images which in the past had announced to me the things I sought: only then would I succeed in understanding the language of Hypatia.

Now I have only to hear the neighing of horses and the cracking of whips and I am seized with amorous trepidation: in Hypatia you have to go to the stables and riding rings to see the beautiful women who mount the saddle, thighs naked, greaves on their calves, and as soon as a young foreigner approaches, they fling him on the piles of hay or sawdust and press their firm nipples against him.

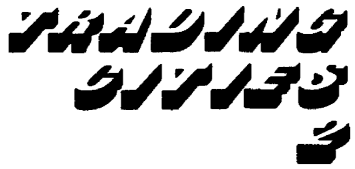
And when my spirit wants no stimulus or nourishment save music, I know it is to be sought in the cemeteries: the musicians hide in the tombs; from grave to grave flute trills, harp chords answer one another.

True, also in Hypatia the day will come when my only desire will be to leave. I know I must not go down to the harbor then, but climb the citadel's highest pinnacle and wait for a ship to go by up there. But will it ever go by? There is no language without deceit.

Whether Armilla is like this because it is unfinished or because it has been demolished, whether the cause is some enchantment or only a whim, I do not know. The fact remains that it has no walls, no ceilings, no floors: it has nothing that makes it seem a city, except the water pipes that rise vertically where the houses should be and spread out horizontally where the floors should be: a forest of pipes that end in taps, showers, spouts, overflows. Against the sky a lavabo's white stands out, or a bathtub, or some other porcelain, like late fruit still hanging from the boughs. You would think the plumbers had finished their job and gone away before the bricklayers arrived; or else their hydraulic systems, indestructible, had survived a catastrophe, an earthquake, or the corrosion of termites.

Abandoned before or after it was inhabited, Armilla cannot be called deserted. At any hour, raising your eyes among the pipes, you are likely to glimpse a young woman, or many young women, slender, not tall of stature, luxuriating in the bathtubs or arching their backs under the showers suspended in the void, washing or drying or perfuming themselves, or combing their long hair at a mirror. In the sun, the threads of water fanning from the showers glisten, the jets of the taps, the spurts, the splashes, the sponges' suds.

I have come to this explanation: the streams of water channeled in the pipes of Armilla have remained in the possession of nymphs and naiads. Accustomed to traveling along underground veins, they found it easy to enter into the new aquatic realm, to burst from multiple fountains, to find new mirrors, new games, new ways of enjoying the water. Their invasion may have driven out the human beings, or Armilla may have been built by humans as a votive offering to win the favor of the nymphs, offended at the misuse of the waters. In any case, now they seem content, these maidens: in the morning you hear them singing.



In Chloe, a great city, the people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping.

A girl comes along, twirling a parasol on her shoulder, and twirling slightly also her rounded hips. A woman in black comes along, showing her full age, her eyes restless beneath her veil, her lips trembling. A tattooed giant comes along; a young man with white hair; a female dwarf; two girls, twins, dressed in coral. Something runs among them, an exchange of glances like lines that connect one figure with another and draw arrows, stars, triangles, until all combinations are used up in a moment, and other characters come on to the scene: a blind man with a cheetah on a leash, a courtesan with an ostrich-plume fan, an ephebe, a Fat Woman. And thus, when some people happen to find themselves together, taking shelter from the rain under an arcade, or crowding beneath an awning of the bazaar, or stopping to listen to the band in the square, meetings, seductions, copulations, orgies are consummated among them without a word exchanged, without a finger touching anything, almost without an eye raised.

A voluptuous vibration constantly stirs Chloe, the most chaste of cities. If men and women began to live their ephemeral dreams, every phantom would become a person with whom to begin a story of pursuits, pretenses, misunderstandings, clashes, oppressions, and the carousel of fantasies would stop.

The ancients built Valdrada on the shores of a lake, with houses all verandas one above the other, and high streets whose railed parapets look out over the water. Thus the traveler, arriving, sees two cities: one erect above the lake, and the other reflected, upside down. Nothing exists or happens in the one Valdrada that the other Valdrada does not repeat, because the city was so constructed that its every point would be reflected in its mirror, and the Valdrada down in the water contains not only all the flutings and juttings of the facades that rise above the lake, but also the rooms' interiors with ceilings and floors, the perspective of the halls, the mirrors of the wardrobes.

Valdrada's inhabitants know that each of their actions is, at once, that action and its mirror-image, which possesses the special dignity of images, and this awareness prevents them from succumbing for a single moment to chance and forgetfulness. Even when lovers twist their naked bodies, skin against skin, seeking the position that will give one the most pleasure in the other, even when murderers plunge the knife into the black veins of the neck and more clotted blood pours out the more they press the blade that slips between the tendons, it is not so much their copulating or murdering that matters as the copulating or murdering of the images, limpid and cold in the mirror.

At times the mirror increases a thing's value, at times denies it. Not everything that seems valuable above the mirror maintains its force when mirrored. The twin cities are not equal, because nothing that exists or happens in Valdrada is symmetrical: every face and gesture is answered, from the mirror, by a face and gesture inverted, point by point. The two Valdradas live for each other, their eyes interlocked; but there is no love between them.

The Great Khan has dreamed of a city; he describes it to Marco Polo:

"The harbor faces north, in shadow. The docks are high over the black water, which slams against the retaining walls; stone steps descend, made slippery by seaweed. Boats smeared with tar are tied up, waiting for the departing passengers lingering on the quay to bid their families farewell. The farewells take place in silence, but with tears. It is cold; all wear shawls over their heads. A shout from the boatman puts a stop to the delays; the traveler huddles at the prow, moves off looking toward the group of those remaining behind; from the shore his features can no longer be discerned; the boat draws up beside a vessel riding at anchor; on the ladder a diminished form climbs up, vanishes; the rusted chain is heard being raised, scraping against the hawsepipe. The people remaining behind look over the ramparts above the rocks of the pier, their eyes following the ship until it rounds the cape; for the last time they wave a white rag.

"Set out, explore every coast, and seek this city," the Khan says to Marco. "Then come back and tell me if my dream corresponds to reality."

"Forgive me, my lord, there is no doubt that sooner or later I shall set sail from that dock," Marco says, "but I

shall not come back to tell you about it. The city exists and it has a simple secret: it knows only departures, not returns."

Lips clenched on the pipe's amber stem, his beard flattened against his amethyst choker, his big toes nervously arched in his silken slippers, Kublai Khan listened to Marco Polo's tales without raising an eyebrow. These were the evenings when a shadow of hypochondria weighed on his heart.

"Your cities do not exist. Perhaps they have never existed. It is sure they will never exist again. Why do you amuse yourself with consolatory fables? I know well that my empire is rotting like a corpse in a swamp, whose contagion infects the crows that peck it as well as the bamboo that grows, fertilized by its humors. Why do you not speak to me of this? Why do you lie to the emperor of the Tartars, foreigner?"

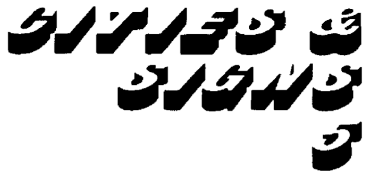
Polo knew it was best to fall in with the sovereign's dark mood. "Yes, the empire is sick, and, what is worse, it is trying to become accustomed to its sores. This is the aim of my explorations: examining the traces of happiness still to be glimpsed, I gauge its short supply. If you want to know how much darkness there is around you, you must sharpen your eyes, peering at the faint lights in the distance."

At other times, however, the Khan was seized by fits of euphoria. He would rise up on his cushions, measure with long strides the carpets spread over the paths at his feet, look out from the balustrades of the terraces to survey with

dazzled eye the expanse of the palace gardens lighted by the lanterns hung from the cedars.

"And yet I know," he would say, "that my empire is made of the stuff of crystals, its molecules arranged in a perfect pattern. Amid the surge of the elements, a splendid hard diamond takes shape, an immense, faceted, transparent mountain. Why do your travel impressions stop at disappointing appearances, never catching this implacable process? Why do you linger over inessential melancholies? Why do you hide from the emperor the grandeur of his destiny?"

And Marco answered: "While, at a sign from you, sire, the unique and final city raises its stainless walls, I am collecting the ashes of the other possible cities that vanish to make room for it, cities that can never be rebuilt or remembered. When you know at last the residue of unhappiness for which no precious stone can compensate, you will be able to calculate the exact number of carats toward which that final diamond must strive. Otherwise, your calculations will be mistaken from the very start."



No one, wise Kublai, knows better than you that the city must never be confused with the words that describe it. And yet between the one and the other there is a connection. If I describe to you Olivia, a city rich in products and in profits, I can indicate its prosperity only by speaking of filigree palaces with fringed cushions on the seats by the mullioned windows. Beyond the screen of a patio, spinning jets water a lawn where a white peacock spreads its tail. But from these words you realize at once how Olivia is shrouded in a cloud of soot and grease that sticks to the houses, that in the brawling streets, the shifting trailers crush pedestrians against the walls. If I must speak to you of the inhabitants' industry, I speak of the saddlers' shops smelling of leather, of the women chattering as they weave raffia rugs, of the hanging canals whose cascades move the paddles of the mills; but the image these words evoke in your enlightened mind is of the mandrel set against the teeth of the lathe, an action repeated by thousands of hands thousands of times at the pace established for each shift. If I must explain to you how Olivia's spirit tends toward a free life and a refined civilization, I will tell you of ladies who glide at night in illuminated canoes between the banks of a green estuary; but it is only to remind you that on the outskirts where men and women land every evening like lines of sleepwalkers, there is always someone who bursts out laughing in the darkness, releasing the flow of jokes and sarcasm.

This perhaps you do not know: that to talk of Olivia, I could not use different words. If there really were an Olivia of mullioned windows and peacocks, of saddlers and rug-weavers and canoes and estuaries, it would be a wretched, black, fly-ridden hole, and to describe it, I would have to fall back on the metaphors of soot, the creaking of wheels, repeated actions, sarcasm. Falsehood is never in words; it is in things.

THIN CITIES 4

The city of Sophronia is made up of two half-cities. In one there is the great roller coaster with its steep humps, the carousel with its chain spokes, the Ferris wheel of spinning cages, the death-ride with crouching motorcyclists, the big top with the clump of trapezes hanging in the middle. The other half-city is of stone and marble and cement, with the bank, the factories, the palaces, the slaughterhouse, the school, and all the rest. One of the half-cities is permanent, the other is temporary, and when the period of its sojourn is over, they uproot it, dismantle it, and take it off, transplanting it to the vacant lots of another half-city.

And so every year the day comes when the workmen remove the marble pediments, lower the stone walls, the cement pylons, take down the Ministry, the monument, the docks, the petroleum refinery, the hospital, load them on trailers, to follow from stand to stand their annual itinerary. Here remains the half-Sophronia of the shooting-galleries and the carousels, the shout suspended from the cart of the headlong roller coaster, and it begins to count the months, the days it must wait before the caravan returns and a complete life can begin again.

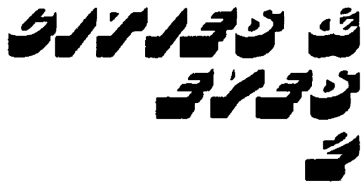
TRADING CITIES 5

When he enters the territory of which Eutropia is the capital, the traveler sees not one city but many, of equal size and not unlike one another, scattered over a vast, rolling plateau. Eutropia is not one, but all these cities together; only one is inhabited at a time, the others are empty; and this process is carried out in rotation. Now I shall tell you how. On the day when Eutropia's inhabitants feel the grip of weariness and no one can bear any longer his job, his relatives, his house and his life, debts, the people he must greet or who greet him, then the whole citizenry decides to move to the next city, which is there waiting for them, empty and good as new; there each will take up a new job, a different wife, will see another landscape on opening his window, and will spend his time with different pastimes, friends, gossip. So their life is renewed from move to move, among cities whose exposure or declivity or streams or winds make each site somehow different from the others. Since their society is ordered without great distinctions of wealth or authority, the passage from one function to another takes place almost without jolts; variety is guaranteed by the multiple assignments, so that in the span of a lifetime a man rarely returns to a job that has already been his.

Thus the city repeats its life, identical, shifting up and down on its empty chessboard. The inhabitants

repeat the same scenes, with the actors changed; they repeat the same speeches with variously combined accents; they open alternate mouths in identical yawns. Alone, among all the cities of the empire, Eutropia remains always the same. Mercury, god of the fickle, to whom the city is sacred, worked this ambiguous miracle.

65



It is the mood of the beholder which gives the city of Zemrude its form. If you go by whistling, your nose a-tilt behind the whistle, you will know it from below: window sills, flapping curtains, fountains. If you walk along hanging your head, your nails dug into the palms of your hands, your gaze will be held on the ground, in the gutters, the manhole covers, the fish scales, wastepaper. You cannot say that one aspect of the city is truer than the other, but you hear of the upper Zemrude chiefly from those who remember it, as they sink into the lower Zemrude, following every day the same stretches of street and finding again each morning the ill-humor of the day before, encrusted at the foot of the walls. For everyone, sooner or later, the day comes when we bring our gaze down along the drainpipes and we can no longer detach it from the cobblestones. The reverse is not impossible, but it is more rare: and so we continue walking through Zemrude's streets with eyes now digging into the cellars, the foundations, the wells.

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There is little I can tell you about Aglaura beyond the things its own inhabitants have always repeated: an array of proverbial virtues, of equally proverbial faults, a few eccentricities, some punctilious regard for rules. Ancient observers, whom there is no reason not to presume truthful, attributed to Aglaura its enduring assortment of qualities, surely comparing them to those of the other cities of their times. Perhaps neither the Aglaura that is reported nor the Aglaura that is visible has greatly changed since then, but what was bizarre has become usual, what seemed normal is now an oddity, and virtues and faults have lost merit or dishonor in a code of virtues and faults differently distributed. In this sense, nothing said of Aglaura is true, and yet these accounts create a solid and compact image of a city, whereas the haphazard opinions which might be inferred from living there have less substance. This is the result: the city that they speak of has much of what is needed to exist, whereas the city that exists on its site, exists less.

So if I wished to describe Aglaura to you, sticking to what I personally saw and experienced, I should have to tell you that it is a colorless city, without character, planted there at random. But this would not be true, either: at certain hours, in certain places along the street, you see opening before you the hint of something unmistakable, rare, perhaps magnificent; you would like to say what it is, but everything previously said of Aglaura imprisons your words and obliges you to repeat rather than say.

Therefore, the inhabitants still believe they live in an Aglaura which grows only with the name Aglaura and they do not notice the Aglaura that grows on the ground. And even I, who would like to keep the two cities distinct in my memory, can speak only of the one, because the recollection of the other, in the lack of words to fix it, has been lost.

"From now on, I'll describe the cities to you," the Khan had said, "in your journeys you will see if they exist."

But the cities visited by Marco Polo were always different from those thought of by the emperor.

"And yet I have constructed in my mind a model city from which all possible cities can be deduced," Kublai said. "It contains everything corresponding to the norm. Since the cities that exist diverge in varying degree from the norm, I need only foresee the exceptions to the norm and calculate the most probable combinations."

"I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all the others," Marco answered. "It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions. If such a city is the most improbable, by reducing the number of abnormal elements, we increase the probability that the city really exists. So I have only to subtract exceptions from my model, and in whatever direction I proceed, I will arrive at one of the cities which, always as an exception, exist. But I cannot force my operation beyond a certain limit: I would achieve cities too probable to be real."

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From the high balustrade of the palace the Great Khan watches his empire grow. First the line of the boundaries had expanded to embrace conquered territories, but the regiments' advance encountered half-deserted regions, scrubby villages of huts, marshes where the rice refused to sprout, emaciated peoples, dried rivers, reeds. "My empire has grown too far toward the outside. It is time," the Khan thought, "for it to grow within itself," and he dreamed of pomegranate groves, the fruit so ripe it burst its skin, zebus browning on the spit and dripping fat, veins of metal surfacing in landslips with glistening nuggets.

Now many seasons of abundance have filled the granaries. The rivers in flood have borne forests of beams to support the bronze roofs of temples and palaces. Caravans of slaves have shifted mountains of serpentine marble across the continent. The Great Khan contemplates an empire covered with cities that weigh upon the earth and upon mankind, crammed with wealth and traffic, overladen with ornaments and offices, complicated with mechanisms and hierarchies, swollen, tense, ponderous.

"The empire is being crushed by its own weight," Kublai thinks, and in his dreams now cities light as kites appear, pierced cities like laces, cities transparent as mosquito netting, cities like leaves' veins, cities lined like a hand's palm, filigree cities to be seen through their opaque and fictitious thickness.

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"I shall tell you what I dreamed last night," he says to Marco. "In the midst of a flat and yellow land, dotted with meteorites and erratic boulders, I saw from a distance the spires of a city rise, slender pinnacles, made in such a way that the moon in her journey can rest now on one, now on another, or sway from the cables of the cranes."

And Polo says: "The city of your dream is Lalage. Its inhabitants arranged these invitations to rest in the night sky so that the moon would grant everything in the city the power to grow and grow endlessly."

"There is something you do not know," the Khan adds. "The grateful moon has granted the city of Lalage a rarer privilege: to grow in lightness."

If you choose to believe me, good. Now I will tell how Octavia, the spider-web city, is made. There is a precipice between two steep mountains: the city is over the void, bound to the two crests with ropes and chains and catwalks. You walk on the little wooden ties, careful not to set your foot in the open spaces, or you cling to the hempen strands. Below there is nothing for hundreds and hundreds of feet: a few clouds glide past; farther down you can glimpse the chasm's bed.

This is the foundation of the city: a net which serves as passage and as support. All the rest, instead of rising up, is hung below: rope ladders, hammocks, houses made like sacks, clothes hangers, terraces like gondolas, skins of water, gas jets, spits, baskets on strings, dumb-waiters, showers, trapezes and rings for children's games, cable cars, chandeliers, pots with trailing plants.

Suspended over the abyss, the life of Octavia's inhabitants is less uncertain than in other cities. They know the net will last only so long.

Trading Cities 4

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing.

They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away.

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form.

Cities & Eyes 5

After a seven days' march through woodland, the traveler directed toward Baucis cannot see the city and yet he has arrived. The slender stilts that rise from the ground at a great distance from one another and are lost above the clouds support the city. You climb them with ladders. On the ground the inhabitants rarely show themselves: having already everything they need up there, they prefer not to come down. Nothing of the city touches the earth except those long flamingo legs on which it rests and, when the days are sunny, a pierced, angular shadow that falls on the foliage.

There are three hypotheses about the inhabitants of Baucis: that they hate the earth; that they respect it so much they avoid all contact; that they love it as it was before they existed and with spyglasses and telescopes aimed downward they never tire of examining it, leaf by leaf, stone by stone, ant by ant, contemplating with fascination their own absence.

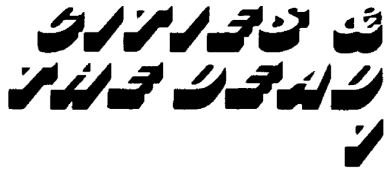
Gods of two species protect the city of Leandra. Both are too tiny to be seen and too numerous to be counted. One species stands at the doors of the houses, inside, next to the coatrack and the umbrella stand; in moves, they follow the families and install themselves in the new home at the consignment of the keys. The others stay in the kitchen, hiding by preference under pots or in the chimney flue or broom closet: they belong to the house, and when the family that has lived there goes away, they remain with the new tenants; perhaps they were already there before the house existed, among the weeds of the vacant lot, concealed in a rusty can; if the house is torn down and a huge block of fifty families is built in its place, they will be found, mulitplied, in the kitchens of that many apartments. To distinguish the two species we will call the first one Penates and the other Lares.

Within a given house, Lares do not necessarily stay with Lares, and Penates with Penates: they visit one another, they stroll together on the stucco cornices, on the radiator pipes; they comment on family events; not infrequently they quarrel; but they can also get along peacefully for years—seeing them all in a row, you are unable to tell them apart. The Lares have seen Penates of the most varied origins and customs pass through their walls; the Penates

have to make a place for themselves, rubbing elbows with Lares of illustrious, but decaying palaces, full of hauteur, or with Lares from tin shacks, susceptible and distrustful.

The true essence of Leandra is the subject of endless debate. The Penates believe they are the city's soul, even if they arrived last year; and they believe they take Leandra with them when they emigrate. The Lares consider the Penates temporary guests, importunate, intrusive; the real Leandra is theirs, which gives form to all it contains, the Leandra that was there before all these upstarts arrived and that will remain when all have gone away.

The two species have this in common: whatever happens in the family and in the city, they always criticize. The Penates bring out the old people, the great-grandparents, the great-aunts, the family of the past; the Lares talk about the environment before it was ruined. But this does not mean they live only on memories: they daydream of the careers the children will follow when they grow up (the Penates), or what this house in this neighborhood might become (the Lares) if it were in good hands. If you listen carefully, especially at night, you can hear them in the houses of Leandra, murmuring steadily, interrupting one another, huffing, bantering, amid ironic, stifled laughter.



At Melania, every time you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue: the braggart soldier and the parasite coming from a door meet the young wastrel and the prostitute; or else the miserly father from his threshold utters his final warnings to the amorous daughter and is interrupted by the foolish servant who is taking a note to the procuress. You return to Melania after years and you find the same dialogue still going on; in the meanwhile the parasite has died, and so have the procuress and the miserly father; but the braggart soldier, the amorous daughter, the foolish servant have taken their places, being replaced in their turn by the hypocrite, the confidante, the astrologer.

Melania's population renews itself: the participants in the dialogues die one by one and meanwhile those who will take their places are born, some in one role, some in another. When one changes role or abandons the square forever or makes his first entrance into it, there is a series of changes, until all the roles have been reassigned; but meanwhile the angry old man goes on replying to the witty maidservant, the usurer never ceases following the disinherited youth, the nurse consoles the stepdaughter, even if none of them keeps the same eyes and voice he had in the previous scene.

At times it may happen that a sole person will simultaneously take on two or more roles—tyrant, benefactor, messenger—or one role may be doubled, multiplied, assigned to a hundred, a thousand inhabitants of Melania: three thousand for the hypocrite, thirty thousand for the sponger, a hundred thousand king's sons fallen in low estate and awaiting recognition.

As time passes the roles, too, are no longer exactly the same as before; certainly the action they carry forward through intrigues and surprises leads toward some final denouement, which it continues to approach even when the plot seems to thicken more and more and the obstacles increase. If you look into the square in successive moments, you hear how from act to act the dialogue changes, even if the lives of Melania's inhabitants are too short for them to realize it.

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.

"But which is the stone that supports the bridge?" Kublai Khan asks.

"The bridge is not supported by one stone or another," Marco answers, "but by the line of the arch that they form."

Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: "Why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me."

Polo answers: "Without stones there is no arch."

"Did you ever happen to see a city resembling this one?" Kublai asked Marco Polo, extending his beringed hand from beneath the silken canopy of the imperial barge, to point to the bridges arching over the canals, the princely palaces whose marble doorsteps were immersed in the water, the bustle of light craft zigzagging, driven by long oars, the boats unloading baskets of vegetables at the market squares, the balconies, platforms, domes, campaniles, island gardens glowing green in the lagoon's grayness.

The emperor, accompanied by his foreign dignitary, was visiting Kin-sai, ancient capital of deposed dynasties, the latest pearl set in the Great Khan's crown.

"No, sire," Marco answered, "I should never have imagined a city like this could exist."

The emperor tried to peer into his eyes. The foreigner lowered his gaze. Kublai remained silent the whole day.

After sunset, on the terraces of the palace, Marco Polo expounded to the sovereign the results of his missions. As a rule the Great Khan concluded his day savoring these tales with half-closed eyes until his first yawn was the signal for the suite of pages to light the flames that guided the monarch to the Pavilion of the August Slumber. But this time Kublai seemed unwilling to give in to weariness. "Tell me another city," he insisted.

". . . You leave there and ride for three days between the northeast and east-by-northeast winds . . . " Marco

resumed saying, enumerating names and customs and wares of a great number of lands. His repertory could be called inexhaustible, but now he was the one who had to give in. Dawn had broken when he said: "Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know."

"There is still one of which you never speak."

Marco Polo bowed his head.

"Venice," the Khan said.

Marco smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?"

The emperor did not turn a hair. "And yet I have never heard you mention that name."

And Polo said: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice."

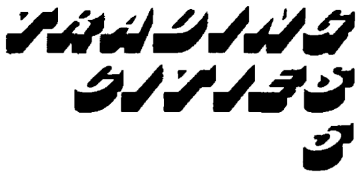
"When I ask you about other cities, I want to hear about them. And about Venice, when I ask you about Venice."

"To distinguish the other cities' qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice."

"You should then begin each tale of your travels from the departure, describing Venice as it is, all of it, not omitting anything you remember of it."

The lake's surface was barely wrinkled; the copper reflection of the ancient palace of the Sung was shattered into sparkling glints like floating leaves.

"Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased," Polo said. "Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have already lost it, little by little."



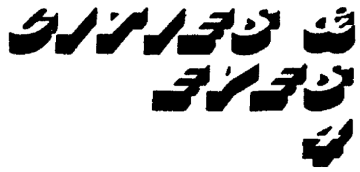
In Esmeralda, city of water, a network of canals and a network of streets span and intersect each other. To go from one place to another you have always the choice between land and boat: and since the shortest distance between two points in Esmeralda is not a straight line but a zigzag that ramifies in tortuous optional routes, the ways that open to each passerby are never two, but many, and they increase further for those who alternate a stretch by boat with one on dry land.

And so Esmeralda's inhabitants are spared the boredom of following the same streets every day. And that is not all: the network of routes is not arranged on one level, but follows instead an up-and-down course of steps, landings, cambered bridges, hanging streets. Combining segments of the various routes, elevated or on ground level, each inhabitant can enjoy every day the pleasure of a new itinerary to reach the same places. The most fixed and calm lives in Esmeralda are spent without any repetition.

Secret and adventurous lives, here as elsewhere, are subject to greater restrictions. Esmeralda's cats, thieves, illicit lovers move along higher, discontinuous ways, dropping from a rooftop to a balcony, following gutterings with acrobats' steps. Below, the rats run in the darkness of the sewers, one behind the other's tail, along with conspirators and smugglers:

they peep out of manholes and drainpipes, they slip through double bottoms and ditches, from one hiding place to another they drag crusts of cheese, contraband goods, kegs of gunpowder, crossing the city's compactness pierced by the spokes of underground passages.

A map of Esmeralda should include, marked in different colored inks, all these routes, solid and liquid, evident and hidden. It is more difficult to fix on the map the routes of the swallows, who cut the air over the roofs, dropping long invisible parabolas with their still wings, darting to gulp a mosquito, spiraling upward, grazing a pinnacle, dominating from every point of their airy paths all the points of the city.



When you have arrived at Phyllis, you rejoice in observing all the bridges over the canals, each different from the others: cambered, covered, on pillars, on barges, suspended, with tracery balustrades. And what a variety of windows looks down on the streets: mullioned, Moorish, lancet, pointed, surmounted by lunettes or stained-glass roses; how many kinds of pavement cover the ground: cobbles, slabs, gravel, blue and white tiles. At every point the city offers surprises to your view: a caper bush jutting from the fortress' walls, the statues of three queens on corbels, an onion dome with three smaller onions threaded on the spire. "Happy the man who has Phyllis before his eyes each day and who never ceases seeing the things it contains," you cry, with regret at having to leave the city when you can barely graze it with your glance.

But it so happens that, instead, you must stay in Phyllis and spend the rest of your days there. Soon the city fades before your eyes, the rose windows are expunged, the statues on the corbels, the domes. Like all of Phyllis's inhabitants, you follow zigzag lines from one street to another, you distinguish the patches of sunlight from the patches of shade, a door here, a stairway there, a bench where you can put down your basket, a hole where your foot stumbles if you are not careful. All the rest of the city is invisible. Phyllis is a space in which routes are drawn between points suspended in the void: the shortest way to reach that certain merchant's tent, avoiding that certain creditor's window. Your footsteps follow not what is outside the eyes, but what is within, buried, erased. If, of two arcades, one continues to seem more joyous, it is because thirty years ago a girl went by there, with broad, embroidered sleeves, or else it is only because that arcade catches the light at a certain hour like that other arcade, you cannot recall where.

Millions of eyes look up at windows, bridges, capers, and they might be scanning a blank page. Many are the cities like Phyllis, which elude the gaze of all, except the man who catches them by surprise.

For a long time Pyrrha to me was a fortified city on the slopes of a bay, with high windows and towers, enclosed like a goblet, with a central square deep as a well, with a well in its center. I had never seen it. It was one of the many cities where I had never arrived, that I conjured up, through its name: Euphrasia, Odile, Margara, Getullia. Pyrrha had its place among them, different from each of them, and like each of them, unmistakable to the mind's eye.

The day came when my travels took me to Pyrrha. As soon as I set foot there, everything I had imagined was forgotten; Pyrrha had become what is Pyrrha; and I thought I had always known that the sea is invisible from the city, hidden behind a dune of the low, rolling coast; that the streets are long and straight; that the houses are clumped at intervals, not high, and they are separated by open lots with stacks of lumber and with sawmills; that the wind stirs the vanes of the water pumps. From that moment on the name Pyrrha has brought to my mind this view, this light, this buzzing, this air in which a yellowish dust flies: obviously the name means this and could mean nothing but this.

My mind goes on containing a great number of cities I have never seen and will never see, names that bear with them a figure or a fragment or glimmer of an imagined figure: Getullia, Odile, Euphrasia, Margara. The city high above the bay is also there still, with the square enclosing the well, but I can no longer call it by a name, nor remember how I could ever have given it a name that means something entirely different.

Never in all my travels had I ventured as far as Adelma. It was dusk when I landed there. On the dock the sailor who caught the rope and tied it to the bollard resembled a man who had soldiered with me and was dead. It was the hour of the wholesale fish market. An old man was loading a basket of sea urchins on a cart; I thought I recognized him; when I turned, he had disappeared down an alley, but I realized that he looked like a fisherman who, already old when I was a child, could no longer be among the living. I was upset by the sight of a fever victim huddled on the ground, a blanket over his head: my father a few days before his death had yellow eyes and a growth of beard like this man. I turned my gaze aside; I no longer dared look anyone in the face.

I thought: "If Adelma is a city I am seeing in a dream, where you encounter only the dead, the dream frightens me. If Adelma is a real city, inhabited by living people, I need only continue looking at them and the resemblances will dissolve, alien faces will appear, bearing anguish. In either case it is best for me not to insist on staring at them."

A vegetable vendor was weighing a cabbage on a scales and put it in a basket dangling on a string a girl lowered from a balcony. The girl was identical with one in my village who had gone mad for love and killed herself. The vegetable vendor raised her face: she was my grandmother.

I thought: "You reach a moment in life when, among the people you have known, the dead outnumber the living. And the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms, for each one it finds the most suitable mask."

The stevedores climbed the steps in a line, bent beneath demijohns and barrels; their faces were hidden by sackcloth hoods; "Now they will straighten up and I will recognize them," I thought, with impatience and fear. But I could not take my eyes off them; if I turned my gaze just a little toward the crowd that crammed those narrow streets, I was assailed by unexpected faces, reappearing from far away, staring at me as if demanding recognition, as if to recognize me, as if they had already recognized me. Perhaps, for each of them, I also resembled someone who was dead. I had barely arrived at Adelma and I was already one of them, I had gone over to their side, absorbed in that kaleidoscope of eyes, wrinkles, grimaces.

I thought: "Perhaps Adelma is the city where you arrive dying and where each finds again the people he has known. This means I, too, am dead." And I also thought: "This means the beyond is not happy."

In Eudoxia, which spreads both upward and down, with winding alleys, steps, dead ends, hovels, a carpet is preserved in which you can observe the city's true form. At first sight nothing seems to resemble Eudoxia less than the design of that carpet, laid out in symmetrical motives whose patterns are repeated along straight and circular lines, interwoven with brilliantly colored spires, in a repetition that can be followed throughout the whole woof. But if you pause and examine it carefully, you become convinced that each place in the carpet corresponds to a place in the city and all the things contained in the city are included in the design, arranged according to their true relationship, which escapes your eye distracted by the bustle, the throngs, the shoving. All of Eudoxia's confusion, the mules' braying, the lampblack stains, the fish smell is what is evident in the incomplete perspective you grasp; but the carpet proves that there is a point from which the city shows its true proportions, the geometrical scheme implicit in its every, tiniest detail.

It is easy to get lost in Eudoxia: but when you concentrate and stare at the carpet, you recognize the street you were seeking in a crimson or indigo or magenta thread which, in a wide loop, brings you to the purple enclosure that is your real destination. Every inhabitant of Eudoxia compares the carpet's immobile order with his own image of the city, an anguish of his own, and each can find, concealed among the arabesques, an answer, the story of his life, the twists of fate.

An oracle was questioned about the mysterious bond between two objects so dissimilar as the carpet and the city. One of the two objects—the oracle replied—has the form the gods gave the starry sky and the orbits in which the worlds revolve; the other is an approximate reflection, like every human creation.

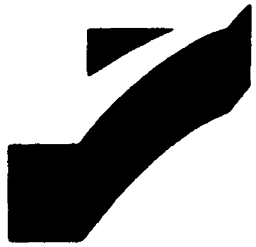
For some time the augurs had been sure that the carpet's harmonious pattern was of divine origin. The oracle was interpreted in this sense, arousing no controversy. But you could, similarly, come to the opposite conclusion: that the true map of the universe is the city of Eudoxia, just as it is, a stain that spreads out shapelessly, with crooked streets, houses that crumble one upon the other amid clouds of dust, fires, screams in the darkness.

". . . So then, yours is truly a journey through memory!" The Great Khan, his ears always sharp, sat up in his hammock every time he caught the hint of a sigh in Marco's speech. "It was to slough off a burden of nostalgia that you went so far away!" he exclaimed, or else: "You return from your voyages with a cargo of regrets!" And he added, sarcastically: "Meager purchases, to tell the truth, for a merchant of the Serenissima!"

This was the target of all Kublai's questions about the past and the future. For an hour he had been toying with it, like a cat with a mouse, and finally he had Marco with his back to the wall, attacking him, putting a knee on his chest, seizing him by the beard: "This is what I wanted to hear from you: confess what you are smuggling: moods, states of grace, elegies!"

These words and actions were perhaps only imagined, as the two, silent and motionless, watched the smoke rise slowly from their pipes. The cloud dissolved at times in a wisp of wind, or else remained suspended in mid-air; and the answer was in that cloud. As the puff carried the smoke away, Marco thought of the mists that cloud the expanse of the sea and the mountain ranges and, when dispelled, leave the air dry and diaphanous, revealing distant cities. It was beyond that screen of fickle humors that his gaze wished to arrive: the form of things can be discerned better at a distance.

Or else the cloud hovered, having barely left the lips, dense and slow, and suggested another vision: the exhalations that hang over the roofs of the metropolises, the opaque smoke that is not scattered, the hood of miasmata that weighs over the bituminous streets. Not the labile mists of memory nor the dry transparence, but the charring of burned lives that forms a scab on the city, the sponge swollen with vital matter that no longer flows, the jam of past, present, future that blocks existences calcified in the illusion of movement: this is what you would find at the end of your journey.



KUBLAI: *I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.*

POLO: *Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself again, always, in this garden, at this hour of the evening, in your august presence, though I continue, without a moment's pause, moving up a river green with crocodiles or counting the barrels of salted fish being lowered into the hold.*

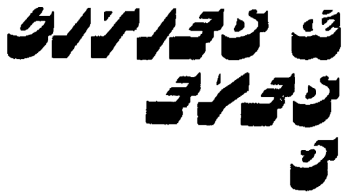
KUBLAI: *I, too, am not sure I am here, strolling among the porphyry fountains, listening to the plashing echo, and not riding, caked with sweat and blood, at the head of my army, conquering the lands you will have to describe, or cutting off the fingers of the attackers scaling the walls of a besieged fortress.*

POLO: *Perhaps this garden exists only in the shadow of our lowered eyelids, and we have never stopped: you, from raising dust on the fields of battle; and I, from bargaining for sacks of pepper in distant bazaars. But each time we half-close our eyes, in the midst of the din and the throng, we are allowed to withdraw here, dressed in silk kimonos, to*

ponder what we are seeing and living, to draw conclusions, to contemplate from the distance.

KUBLAI: *Perhaps this dialogue of ours is taking place between two beggars nicknamed Kublai Khan and Marco Polo; as they sift through a rubbish heap, piling up rusted flotsam, scraps of cloth, wastepaper, while drunk on the few sips of bad wine, they see all the treasure of the East shine around them.*

POLO: *Perhaps all that is left of the world is a wasteland covered with rubbish heaps, and the hanging garden of the Great Khan's palace. It is our eyelids that separate them, but we cannot know which is inside and which outside.*



When you have forded the river, when you have crossed the mountain pass, you suddenly find before you the city of Moriana, its alabaster gates transparent in the sunlight, its coral columns supporting pediments encrusted with serpentine, its villas all of glass like aquariums where the shadows of dancing girls with silvery scales swim beneath the medusa-shaped chandeliers. If this is not your first journey, you already know that cities like this have an obverse: you have only to walk in a semicircle and you will come into view of Moriana's hidden face, an expanse of rusting sheet metal, sackcloth, planks bristling with spikes, pipes black with soot, piles of tins, blind walls with fading signs, frames of staved-in straw chairs, ropes good only for hanging oneself from a rotten beam.

From one part to the other, the city seems to continue, in perspective, multiplying its repertory of images: but instead it has no thickness, it consists only of a face and an obverse, like a sheet of paper, with a figure on either side, which can neither be separated nor look at each other.

Clarice, the glorious city, has a tormented history. Several times it decayed, then burgeoned again, always keeping the first Clarice as an unparalleled model of every splendor, compared to which the city's present state can only cause more sighs at every fading of the stars.

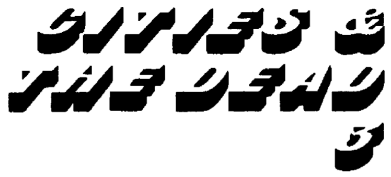
In its centuries of decadence, emptied by plagues, its height reduced by collapsing beams and cornices and by shifts of the terrain, rusted and stopped up through neglect or the lack of maintenance men, the city slowly became populated again as the survivors emerged from the basements and lairs, in hordes, swarming like rats, driven by their fury to rummage and gnaw, and yet also to collect and patch, like nesting birds. They grabbed everything that could be taken from where it was and put it in another place to serve a different use: brocade curtains ended up as sheets; in marble funerary urns they planted basil; wrought-iron gratings torn from the harem windows were used for roasting cat-meat on fires of inlaid wood. Put together with odd bits of the useless Clarice, a survivors' Clarice was taking shape, all huts and hovels, festering sewers, rabbit cages. And yet, almost nothing was lost of Clarice's former splendor; it was all there, merely arranged in a different order, no less appropriate to the inhabitants' needs than it had been before.

The days of poverty were followed by more joyous times: a sumptuous butterfly-Clarice emerged from the beggared chrysalis-Clarice. The new abundance made the city overflow with new materials, buildings, objects; new people flocked in from outside; nothing, no one had any connection with the former Clarice, or Clarices. And the more the new city settled triumphantly into the place and the name of the first Clarice, the more it realized it was moving away from it, destroying it no less rapidly than the rats and the mold. Despite its pride in its new wealth, the city, at heart, felt itself incongruous, alien, a usurper.

And then the shards of the original splendor that had been saved, by adapting them to more obscure needs, were again shifted. They were now preserved under glass bells, locked in display cases, set on velvet cushions, and not because they might still be used for anything, but because people wanted to reconstruct through them a city of which no one knew anything now.

More decadences, more burgeonings have followed one another in Clarice. Populations and customs have changed several times; the name, the site, and the objects hardest to break remain. Each new Clarice, compact as a living body with its smells and its breath, shows off, like a gem, what remains of the

ancient Clarices, fragmentary and dead. There is no knowing when the Corinthian capitals stood on the top of their columns: only one of them is remembered, since for many years, in a chicken run, it supported the basket where the hens laid their eggs, and from there it was moved to the Museum of Capitals, in line with other specimens of the collection. The order of the eras' succession has been lost; that a first Clarice existed is a widespread belief, but there are no proofs to support it. The capitals could have been in the chicken runs before they were in the temples, the marble urns could have been planted with basil before they were filled with dead bones. Only this is known for sure: a given number of objects is shifted within a given space, at times submerged by a quantity of new objects, at times worn out and not replaced; the rule is to shuffle them each time, then try to assemble them. Perhaps Clarice has always been only a confusion of chipped gimcracks, ill-assorted, obsolete.



No city is more inclined than Eusapia to enjoy life and flee care. And to make the leap from life to death less abrupt, the inhabitants have constructed an identical copy of their city, underground. All corpses, dried in such a way that the skeleton remains sheathed in yellow skin, are carried down there, to continue their former activities. And, of these activities, it is their carefree moments that take first place: most of the corpses are seated around laden tables, or placed in dancing positions, or made to play little trumpets. But all the trades and professions of the living Eusapia are also at work below ground, or at least those that the living performed with more contentment than irritation: the clockmaker, amid all the stopped clocks of his shop, places his parchment ear against an out-of-tune grandfather's clock; a barber, with dry brush, lathers the cheekbones of an actor learning his role, studying the script with hollow sockets; a girl with a laughing skull milks the carcass of a heifer.

To be sure, many of the living want a fate after death different from their lot in life: the necropolis is crowded with big-game hunters, mezzosopranos, bankers, violinists, duchesses, courtesans, generals—more than the living city ever contained.

The job of accompanying the dead down below and arranging them in the desired place is assigned to a confraternity of hooded brothers. No one else has access to the Eusapia of the dead and everything known about it has been learned from them.

They say that the same confraternity exists among the dead and that it never fails to lend a hand; the hooded brothers, after death, will perform the same job in the other Eusapia; rumor has it that some of them are already dead but continue going up and down. In any case, this confraternity's authority in the Eusapia of the living is vast.

They say that every time they go below they find something changed in the lower Eusapia; the dead make innovations in their city; not many, but surely the fruit of sober reflection, not passing whims. From one year to the next, they say, the Eusapia of the dead becomes unrecognizable. And the living, to keep up with them, also want to do everything that the hooded brothers tell them about the novelties of the dead. So the Eusapia of the living has taken to copying its underground copy.

They say that this has not just now begun to happen: actually it was the dead who built the upper Eusapia, in the image of their city. They say that in the twin cities there is no longer any way of knowing who is alive and who is dead.

sewers, prolonging the route of the human bowels, from black hole to black hole, until it splatters against the lowest subterranean floor, and from the lazy, encircled bubbles below, layer upon layer, a fecal city rises, with twisted spires.

In Beersheba's beliefs there is an element of truth and one of error. It is true that the city is accompanied by two projections of itself, one celestial and one infernal; but the citizens are mistaken about their consistency. The inferno that broods in the deepest subsoil of Beersheba is a city designed by the most authoritative architects, built with the most expensive materials on the market, with every device and mechanism and gear system functioning, decked with tassels and fringes and frills hanging from all the pipes and levers.

Intent on piling up its carats of perfection, Beersheba takes for virtue what is now a grim mania to fill the empty vessel of itself; the city does not know that its only moments of generous abandon are those when it becomes detached from itself, when it lets go, expands. Still, at the zenith of Beersheba there gravitates a celestial body that shines with all the city's riches, enclosed in the treasury of cast-off things: a planet a-flutter with potato peels, broken umbrellas, old socks, candy wrappings, paved with

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In the place of tools they imagine that the underground city has overturned rubbish bins, with cheese rinds, greasy paper, fish scales, dishwater, uneaten spaghetti, old bandages spilling from them. Or even that its substance is dark and malleable and thick, like the pitch that pours down from the

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tram tickets, fingernail-cuttings and pared calluses, eggshells. This is the celestial city, and in its heavens long-tailed comets fly past, released to rotate in space from the only free and happy action of the citizens of Beersheba, a city which, only when it shits, is not miserly, calculating, greedy.

The city of Leonia refashions itself every day: every morning the people wake between fresh sheets, wash with just-unwrapped cakes of soap, wear brand-new clothing, take from the latest model refrigerator still unopened tins, listening to the last-minute jingles from the most up-to-date radio.

On the sidewalks, encased in spotless plastic bags, the remains of yesterday's Leonia await the garbage truck. Not only squeezed tubes of toothpaste, blown-out light bulbs, newspapers, containers, wrappings, but also boilers, encyclopedias, pianos, procelain dinner services. It is not so much by the things that each day are manufactured, sold, bought that you can measure Leonia's opulence, but rather by the things that each day are thrown out to make room for the new. So you begin to wonder if Leonia's true passion is really, as they say, the enjoyment of new and different things, and not, instead, the joy of expelling, discarding, cleansing itself of a recurrent impurity. The fact is that street cleaners are welcomed like angels, and their task of removing the residue of yesterday's existence is surrounded by a respectful silence, like a ritual that inspires devotion, perhaps only because once things have been cast off nobody wants to have to think about them further.

Nobody wonders where, each day, they carry their load of refuse. Outside the city, surely; but each year

the city expands, and the street cleaners have to fall farther back. The bulk of the outflow increases and the piles rise higher, become stratified, extend over a wider perimeter. Besides, the more Leonia's talent for making new materials excels, the more the rubbish improves in quality, resists time, the elements, fermentations, combustions. A fortress of indestructible leftovers surrounds Leonia, dominating it on every side, like a chain of mountains.

This is the result: the more Leonia expels goods, the more it accumulates them; the scales of its past are soldered into a cuirass that cannot be removed. As the city is renewed each day, it preserves all of itself in its only definitive form: yesterday's sweepings piled up on the sweepings of the day before yesterday and of all its days and years and decades.

Leonia's rubbish little by little would invade the world, if, from beyond the final crest of its boundless rubbish heap, the street cleaners of other cities were not pressing, also pushing mountains of refuse in front of themselves. Perhaps the whole world, beyond Leonia's boundaries, is covered by craters of rubbish, each surrounding a metropolis in constant eruption. The boundaries between the alien, hostile cities are infected ramparts where the detritus of both support each other, overlap, mingle.

The greater its height grows, the more the danger

of a landslide looms: a tin can, an old tire, an unraveled wine flask, if it rolls toward Leonia, is enough to bring with it an avalanche of unmated shoes, calendars of bygone years, withered flowers, submerging the city in its own past, which it had tried in vain to reject, mingling with the past of the neighboring cities, finally clean. A cataclysm will flatten the sordid mountain range, canceling every trace of the metropolis always dressed in new clothes. In the nearby cities they are all ready, waiting with bulldozers to flatten the terrain, to push into the new territory, expand, and drive the new street cleaners still farther out.

POLO: . . . *Perhaps the terraces of this garden overlook only the lake of our mind.* . . .

KUBLAI: . . . *and however far our troubled enterprises as warriors and merchants may take us, we both harbor within ourselves this silent shade, this conversation of pauses, this evening that is always the same.*

POLO: *Unless the opposite hypothesis is correct: that those who strive in camps and ports exist only because we two think of them, here, enclosed among these bamboo hedges, motionless since time began.*

KUBLAI: *Unless toil, shouts, sores, stink do not exist; and only this azalea bush.*

POLO: *Unless porters, stonecutters, rubbish collectors, cooks cleaning the lights of chickens, washerwomen bent over stones, mothers stirring rice as they nurse their infants, exist only because we think them.*

KUBLAI: *To tell the truth, I never think them.*

POLO: *Then they do not exist.*

KUBLAI: *To me this conjecture does not seem to suit our purposes. Without them we could never remain here swaying, cocooned in our hammocks.*

POLO: *Then the hypothesis must be rejected. So the other hypothesis is true: they exist and we do not.*

KUBLAI: *We have proved that if we were here, we would not be.*

POLO: *And here, in fact, we are.*

From the foot of the Great Khan's throne a majolica pavement extended. Marco Polo, mute informant, spread out on it the samples of the wares he had brought back from his journeys to the ends of the empire: a helmet, a seashell, a coconut, a fan. Arranging the objects in a certain order on the black and white tiles, and occasionally shifting them with studied moves, the ambassador tried to depict for the monarch's eyes the vicissitudes of his travels, the conditions of the empire, the prerogatives of the distant provincial seats.

Kublai was a keen chess player; following Marco's movements, he observed that certain pieces implied or excluded the vicinity of other pieces and were shifted along certain lines. Ignoring the objects' variety of form, he could grasp the system of arranging one with respect to the others on the majolica floor. He thought: "If each city is like a game of chess, the day when I have learned the rules, I shall finally possess my empire, even if I shall never succeed in knowing all the cities it contains."

Actually, it was useless for Marco's speeches to employ all this bric-a-brac: a chessboard would have sufficed, with its specific pieces. To each piece, in turn, they could give an appropriate meaning: a knight could stand for a real horseman, or for a procession of coaches, an army on the march, an equestrian monument: a queen could be a lady looking down from her balcony, a fountain, a church with a pointed dome, a quince tree.

Returning from his last mission, Marco Polo found the Khan awaiting him, seated at a chessboard. With a gesture he invited the Venetian to sit opposite him and describe, with the help only of the chessmen, the cities he had visited. Marco did not lose heart. The Great Khan's chessmen were huge pieces of polished ivory: arranging on the board looming rooks and sulky knights, assembling swarms of pawns, drawing straight or oblique avenues like a queen's progress, Marco recreated the perspectives and the spaces of black and white cities on moonlit nights.

Contemplating these essential landscapes, Kublai reflected on the invisible order that sustains cities, on the rules that decreed how they rise, take shape and prosper, adapting themselves to the seasons, and then how they sadden and fall in ruins. At times he thought he was on the verge of discovering a coherent, harmonious system underlying the infinite deformities and discords, but no model could stand up to the comparison with the game of chess. Perhaps, instead of racking one's brain to suggest with the ivory pieces' scant help visions which were anyway destined to oblivion, it would suffice to play a game according to the rules, and to consider each successive state of the board as one of the countless forms that the system of forms assembles and destroys.

Now Kublai Khan no longer had to send Marco Polo on distant expeditions: he kept him playing endless games of chess. Knowledge of the empire was hidden in the pattern

drawn by the angular shifts of the knight, by the diagonal passages opened by the bishop's incursions, by the lumbering, cautious tread of the king and the humble pawn, by the inexorable ups and downs of every game.

The Great Khan tried to concentrate on the game: but now it was the game's purpose that eluded him. Each game ends in a gain or a loss: but of what? What were the true stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, a black or a white square remains. By disembodying his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which the empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes. It was reduced to a square of planed wood: nothingness. . . .

Irene is the city visible when you lean out from the edge of the plateau at the hour when the lights come on, and in the limpid air, the pink of the settlement can be discerned spread out in the distance below: where the windows are more concentrated, where it thins out in dimly lighted alleys, where it collects the shadows of gardens, where it raises towers with signal fires; and if the evening is misty, a hazy glow swells like a milky sponge at the foot of the gulleys.

Travelers on the plateau, shepherds shifting their flocks, bird-catchers watching their nets, hermits gathering greens: all look down and speak of Irene. At times the wind brings a music of bass drums and trumpets, the bang of firecrackers in the light-display of a festival; at times the rattle of guns, the explosion of a powder magazine in the sky yellow with the fires of civil war. Those who look down from the heights conjecture about what is happening in the city; they wonder if it would be pleasant or unpleasant to be in Irene that evening. Not that they have any intention of going there (in any case the roads winding down to the valley are bad), but Irene is a magnet for the eyes and thoughts of those who stay up above.

At this point Kublai Khan expects Marco to speak of Irene as it is seen from within. But Marco cannot do this: he has not succeeded in discovering which is the city that those of the plateau call Irene. For that matter, it is of slight importance: if you saw it, standing in its midst, it would be a different city; Irene is a name for a city in the distance, and if you approach, it changes.

For those who pass it without entering, the city is one thing; it is another for those who are trapped by it and never leave. There is the city where you arrive for the first time; and there is another city which you leave never to return. Each deserves a different name; perhaps I have already spoken of Irene under other names; perhaps I have spoken only of Irene.

What makes Argia different from other cities is that it has earth instead of air. The streets are completely filled with dirt, clay packs the rooms to the ceiling, on every stair another stairway is set in negative, over the roofs of the houses hang layers of rocky terrain like skies with clouds. We do not know if the inhabitants can move about the city, widening the worm tunnels and the crevices where roots twist: the dampness destroys people's bodies and they have scant strength; everyone is better off remaining still, prone; anyway, it is dark.

From up here, nothing of Argia can be seen; some say, "It's down below there," and we can only believe them. The place is deserted. At night, putting your ear to the ground, you can sometimes hear a door slam.

Cities & the Sky 5

Those who arrive at Thekla can see little of the city, beyond the plank fences, the sackcloth screens, the scaffoldings, the metal armatures, the wooden catwalks hanging from ropes or supported by sawhorses, the ladders, the trestles. If you ask, "Why is Thekla's construction taking such a long time?" the inhabitants continue hoisting sacks, lowering leaded strings, moving long brushes up and down, as they answer, "So that its destruction cannot begin." And if asked whether they fear that, once the scaffoldings are removed, the city may begin to crumble and fall to pieces, they add hastily, in a whisper, "Not only the city."

If, dissatisfied with the answers, someone puts his eye to a crack in a fence, he sees cranes pulling up other cranes, scaffoldings that embrace other scaffoldings, beams that prop up other beams. "What meaning does your construction have?" he asks. "What is the aim of a city under construction unless it is a city? Where is the plan you are following, the blueprint?"

"We will show it to you as soon as the working day is over; we cannot interrupt our work now," they answer.

Work stops at sunset. Darkness falls over the building site. The sky is filled with stars. "There is the blueprint," they say.

Continuous Cities 2

If on arriving at Trude I had not read the city's name written in big letters, I would have thought I was landing at the same airport from which I had taken off. The suburbs they drove me through were no different from the others, with the same little greenish and yellowish houses. Following the same signs we swung around the same flower beds in the same squares. The downtown streets displayed goods, packages, signs that had not changed at all. This was the first time I had come to Trude, but I already knew the hotel where I happened to be lodged; I had already heard and spoken my dialogues with the buyers and sellers of hardware; I had ended other days identically, looking through the same goblets at the same swaying navels.

Why come to Trude? I asked myself. And I already wanted to leave.

"You can resume your flight whenever you like," they said to me, "but you will arrive at another Trude, absolutely the same, detail by detail. The world is covered by a sole Trude which does not begin and does not end. Only the name of the airport changes."

In Olinda, if you go out with a magnifying glass and hunt carefully, you may find somewhere a point no bigger than the head of a pin which, if you look at it slightly enlarged, reveals within itself the roofs, the antennas, the skylights, the gardens, the pools, the streamers across the streets, the kiosks in the squares, the horse-racing track. That point does not remain there: a year later you will find it the size of half a lemon, then as large as a mushroom, then a soup plate. And then it becomes a full-size city, enclosed within the earlier city: a new city that forces its way ahead in the earlier city and presses it toward the outside.

Olinda is certainly not the only city that grows in concentric circles, like tree trunks which each year add one more ring. But in other cities there remains, in the center, the old narrow girdle of the walls from which the withered spires rise, the towers, the tiled roofs, the domes, while the new quarters sprawl around them like a loosened belt. Not Olinda: the old walls expand bearing the old quarters with them, enlarged, but maintaining their proportions on a broader horizon at the edges of the city; they surround the slightly newer quarters, which also grew up on the margins and became thinner to make room for still more recent ones pressing from inside; and so, on and on, to the heart of the city, a totally new

Olinda which, in its reduced dimensions retains the features and the flow of lymph of the first Olinda and of all the Olindas that have blossomed one from the other; and within this innermost circle there are already blossoming—though it is hard to discern them—the next Olinda and those that will grow after it.

. . . The Great Khan tried to concentrate on the game: but now it was the game's reason that eluded him. The end of every game is a gain or a loss: but of what? What were the real stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, nothingness remains: a black square, or a white one. By disembodying his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which the empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes; it was reduced to a square of planed wood.

Then Marco Polo spoke: "Your chessboard, sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibers are arranged? Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist."

Until then the Great Khan had not realized that the foreigner knew how to express himself fluently in his language, but it was not this fluency that amazed him.

"Here is a thicker pore: perhaps it was a larvum's nest; not a woodworm, because, once born, it would have begun to dig, but a caterpillar that gnawed the leaves and was the cause of the tree's being chosen for chopping down . . . This edge was scored by the wood carver with his gouge so that it would adhere to the next square, more protruding. . . ."

The quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood overwhelmed Kublai; Polo was already talking about ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down the rivers, of docks, of women at the windows. . . .

The Great Khan owns an atlas where all the cities of the empire and the neighboring realms are drawn, building by building and street by street, with walls, rivers, bridges, harbors, cliffs. He realizes that from Marco Polo's tales it is pointless to expect news of those places, which for that matter he knows well: how at Kambalu, capital of China, three square cities stand one within the other, each with four temples and four gates that are opened according to the seasons; how on the island of Java the rhinoceros rages, charging, with his murderous horn; how pearls are gathered on the ocean bed off the coasts of Malabar.

Kublai asks Marco, "When you return to the West, will you repeat to your people the same tales you tell me?"

"I speak and speak," Marco says, "but the listener retains only the words he is expecting. The description of the world to which you lend a benevolent ear is one thing; the description that will go the rounds of the groups of stevedores and gondoliers on the street outside my house the day of my return is another; and yet another, that which I might dictate late in life, if I were taken prisoner by Genoese pirates and put in irons in the same cell with a writer of adventure stories. It is not the voice that commands the story: it is the ear."

"At times I feel your voice is reaching me from far away, while I am prisoner of a gaudy and unlivable present, where all forms of human society have reached an extreme of their cycle and there is no imagining what new

forms they may assume. And I hear, from your voice, the invisible reasons which make cities live, through which perhaps, once dead, they will come to life again."

The Great Khan owns an atlas whose drawings depict the terrestrial globe all at once and continent by continent, the borders of the most distant realms, the ships' routes, the coastlines, the maps of the most illustrious metropolises and of the most opulent ports. He leafs through the maps before Marco Polo's eyes to put his knowledge to the test. The traveler recognizes Constantinople in the city which from three shores dominates a long strait, a narrow gulf, and an enclosed sea; he remembers that Jerusalem is set on two hills, of unequal height, facing each other; he has no hesitation in pointing to Samarkand and its gardens.

For other cities he falls back on descriptions handed down by word of mouth, or he guesses on the basis of scant indications: and so Granada, the streaked pearl of the caliphs; Lübeck, the neat, boreal port; Timbuktu, black with ebony and white with ivory; Paris, where millions of men come home every day grasping a wand of bread. In colored miniatures the atlas depicts inhabited places of unusual form: an oasis hidden in a fold of the desert from which only palm crests peer out is surely Nefta; a castle amid quicksands and cows grazing in meadows salted by the tides can only suggest Mont-Saint-Michel; and a pal-

ace that instead of rising within a city's walls contains within its own walls a city can only be Urbino.

The atlas depicts cities which neither Marco nor the geographers know exist or where they are, though they cannot be missing among the forms of possible cities: a Cuzco on a radial and multipartite plan which reflects the perfect order of its trade, a verdant Mexico on the lake dominated by Montezuma's palace, a Novgorod with bulb-shaped domes, a Lhassa whose white roofs rise over the cloudy roof of the world. For these, too, Marco says a name, no matter which, and suggests a route to reach them. It is known that names of places change as many times as there are foreign languages; and that every place can be reached from other places, by the most various roads and routes, by those who ride, or drive, or row, or fly.

"I think you recognize cities better on the atlas than when you visit them in person," the emperor says to Marco, snapping the volume shut.

And Polo answers, "Traveling, you realize that differences are lost: each city takes to resembling all cities, places exchange their form, order, distances, a shapeless dust cloud invades the continents. Your atlas preserves the differences intact: that assortment of qualities which are like the letters in a name."

The Great Khan owns an atlas in which are gathered the maps of all the cities: those whose walls rest on solid foun-

dations, those which fell in ruins and were swallowed up by the sand, those that will exist one day and in whose place now only hares' holes gape.

Marco Polo leafs through the pages; he recognizes Jericho, Ur, Carthage, he points to the landing at the mouth of the Scamander where the Achaean ships waited for ten years to take the besiegers back on board, until the horse nailed together by Ulysses was dragged by windlasses through the Scaean gates. But speaking of Troy, he happened to give the city the form of Constantinople and foresee the siege which Mohammed would lay for long months until, astute as Ulysses, he had his ships drawn at night up the streams from the Bosporus to the Golden Horn, skirting Pera and Galata. And from the mixture of those two cities a third emerged, which might be called San Francisco and which spans the Golden Gate and the bay with long, light bridges and sends open trams climbing its steep streets, and which might blossom as capital of the Pacific a millennium hence, after the long siege of three hundred years that would lead the races of the yellow and the black and the red to fuse with the surviving descendants of the whites in an empire more vast than the Great Khan's.

The atlas has these qualities: it reveals the form of cities that do not yet have a form or a name. There is the city in the shape of Amsterdam, a semicircle facing north, with concentric canals—the princes', the emperor's, the nobles';

there is the city in the shape of York, set among the high moors, walled, bristling with towers; there is the city in the shape of New Amsterdam known also as New York, crammed with towers of glass and steel on an oblong island between two rivers, with streets like deep canals, all of them straight, except Broadway.

The catalogue of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins. In the last pages of the atlas there is an outpouring of networks without beginning or end, cities in the shape of Los Angeles, in the shape of Kyōto-Ōsaka, without shape.

Like Laudomia, every city has at its side another city whose inhabitants are called by the same names: it is the Laudomia of the dead, the cemetery. But Laudomia's special faculty is that of being not only double, but triple; it comprehends, in short, a third Laudomia, the city of the unborn.

The properties of the double city are well known. The more the Laudomia of the living becomes crowded and expanded, the more the expanse of tombs increases beyond the walls. The streets of the Laudomia of the dead are just wide enough to allow the gravedigger's cart to pass, and many windowless buildings look out on them; but the pattern of the streets and the arrangement of the dwellings repeat those of the living Laudomia, and in both, families are more and more crowded together, in compartments crammed one above the other. On fine afternoons the living population pays a visit to the dead and they decipher their own names on their stone slabs: like the city of the living, this other city communicates a history of toil, anger, illusions, emotions; only here all has become necessary, divorced from chance, categorized, set in order. And to feel sure of itself, the living Laudomia has to seek in the Laudomia of the dead the explanation of itself, even at the risk of finding more there, or less: explanations for more than one Laudomia, for different cities

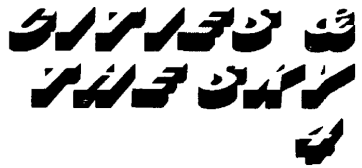
that could have been and were not, or reasons that are incomplete, contradictory, disappointing.

Rightly, Laudomia assigns an equally vast residence to those who are still to be born. Naturally the space is not in proportion to their number, which is presumably infinite, but since the area is empty, surrounded by an architecture all niches and bays and grooves, and since the unborn can be imagined of any size, big as mice or silkworms or ants or ants' eggs, there is nothing against imagining them erect or crouching on every object or bracket that juts from the walls, on every capital or plinth, lined up or dispersed, intent on the concerns of their future life, and so you can contemplate in a marble vein all Laudomia of a hundred or a thousand years hence, crowded with multitudes in clothing never seen before, all in eggplant-colored barracans, for example, or with turkey feathers on their turbans, and you can recognize your own descendants and those of other families, friendly or hostile, of debtors and creditors, continuing their affairs, revenges, marrying for love or for money. The living of Laudomia frequent the house of the unborn to interrogate them: footsteps echo beneath the hollow domes; the questions are asked in silence; and it is always about themselves that the living ask, not about those who are to come. One man is concerned with leaving behind him an

illustrious reputation, another wants his shame to be forgotten; all would like to follow the thread of their own actions' consequences; but the more they sharpen their eyes, the less they can discern a continuous line; the future inhabitants of Laudomia seem like dots, grains of dust, detached from any before or after.

The Laudomia of the unborn does not transmit, like the city of the dead, any sense of security to the inhabitants of the living Laudomia: only alarm. In the end, the visitors' thoughts find two paths open before them, and there is no telling which harbors more anguish: either you must think that the number of the unborn is far greater than the total of all the living and all the dead, and then in every pore of the stone there are invisible hordes, jammed on the funnel-sides as in the stands of a stadium, and since with each generation Laudomia's descendants are multiplied, every funnel contains hundreds of other funnels each with millions of persons who are to be born, thrusting their necks out and opening their mouths to escape suffocation. Or else you think that Laudomia, too, will disappear, no telling when, and all its citizens with it; in other words the generations will follow one another until they reach a certain number and will then go no further. Then the Laudomia of the dead and that of the unborn are like

the two bulbs of an hourglass which is not turned over; each passage between birth and death is a grain of sand that passes the neck, and there will be a last inhabitant of Laudomia born, a last grain to fall, which is now at the top of the pile, waiting.



Summoned to lay down the rules for the foundation of Perinthia, the astronomers established the place and the day according to the position of the stars; they drew the intersecting lines of the decumanus and the cardo, the first oriented to the passage of the sun and the other like the axis on which the heavens turn. They divided the map according to the twelve houses of the zodiac so that each temple and each neighborhood would receive the proper influence of the favoring constellations; they fixed the point in the walls where gates should be cut, foreseeing how each would frame an eclipse of the moon in the next thousand years. Perinthia—they guaranteed—would reflect the harmony of the firmament; nature's reason and the gods' benevolence would shape the inhabitants' destinies.

Following the astronomers' calculations precisely, Perinthia was constructed; various peoples came to populate it; the first generation born in Perinthia began to grow within its walls; and these citizens reached the age to marry and have children.

In Perinthia's streets and square today you encounter cripples, dwarfs, hunchbacks, obese men, bearded women. But the worse cannot be seen; guttural howls are heard from cellars and lofts, where families hide children with three heads or with six legs.

Perinthia's astronomers are faced with a difficult choice. Either they must admit that all their calculations were wrong and their figures are unable to describe the heavens, or else they must reveal that the order of the gods is reflected exactly in the city of monsters.

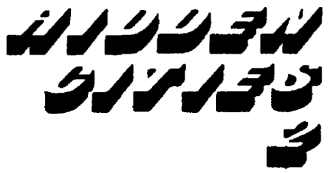
CONTINUOUS LINES

Each year in the course of my travels I stop at Procopia and take lodgings in the same room in the same inn. Ever since the first time I have lingered to contemplate the landscape to be seen by raising the curtain at the window: a ditch, a bridge, a little wall, a medlar, a field of corn, a bramble patch with blackberries, a chicken yard, the yellow hump of a hill, a white cloud, a stretch of blue sky shaped like a trapeze. The first time I am sure there was no one to be seen; it was only the following year that, at a movement among the leaves, I could discern a round, flat face, gnawing on an ear of corn. A year later there were three of them on the wall, and at my return I saw six, seated in a row, with their hands on their knees and some medlars in a dish. Each year, as soon as I entered the room, I raised the curtain and counted more faces: sixteen, including those down in the ditch; twenty-nine, of whom eight were perched in the medlar; forty-seven, besides those in the chicken house. They look alike, they seem polite, they have freckles on their cheeks, they smile, some have lips stained by blackberries. Soon I saw the whole bridge filled with round-faced characters, huddled, because they had no more room to move in; they chomped the kernels of corn, then they gnawed on the ears.

And so, as year followed year, I saw the ditch vanish, the tree, the bramble patch, hidden by hedges of calm smiles, between round cheeks, moving, chewing leaves. You have no idea how many people can be contained in a confined space like that little field of corn, especially when they are seated, hugging their knees, motionless. They must have been many more than they seemed: I saw the hump of the hill become covered with a thicker and thicker crowd; but now that the ones on the bridge have got into the habit of straddling one another's shoulders, my gaze can no longer reach that far.

This year, finally, as I raise the curtain, the window frames only an expanse of faces: from one corner to the other, at all levels and all distances, those round, motionless, entirely flat faces are seen, with a hint of a smile, and in their midst, many hands, grasping the shoulders of those in front. Even the sky has disappeared. I might as well leave the window.

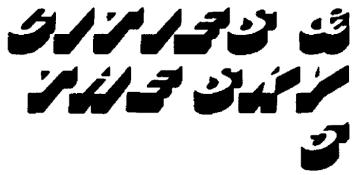
Not that it is easy for me to move. There are twenty-six of us lodged in my room: to shift my feet I have to disturb those crouching on the floor, I force my way among the knees of those seated on the chest of drawers and the elbows of those taking turns leaning on the bed: all very polite people, luckily.



In Raissa, life is not happy. People wring their hands as they walk in the streets, curse the crying children, lean on the railings over the river and press their fists to their temples. In the morning you wake from one bad dream and another begins. At the workbenches where, every moment, you hit your finger with a hammer or prick it with a needle, or over the columns of figures all awry in the ledgers of merchants and bankers, or at the rows of empty glasses on the zinc counters of the wineshops, the bent heads at least conceal the general grim gaze. Inside the houses it is worse, and you do not have to enter to learn this: in the summer the windows resound with quarrels and broken dishes.

And yet, in Raissa, at every moment there is a child in a window who laughs seeing a dog that has jumped on a shed to bite into a piece of polenta dropped by a stonemason who has shouted from the top of the scaffolding, "Darling, let me dip into it," to a young serving-maid who holds up a dish of ragout under the pergola, happy to serve it to the umbrella-maker who is celebrating a successful transaction, a white lace parasol bought to display at the races by a great lady in love with an officer who has smiled at her taking the last jump, happy man, and still happier his horse, flying over the obstacles, seeing a francolin flying in the sky, happy bird freed

from its cage by a painter happy at having painted it feather by feather, speckled with red and yellow in the illumination of that page in the volume where the philosopher says: "Also in Raissa, city of sadness, there runs an invisible thread that binds one living being to another for a moment, then unravels, then is stretched again between moving points as it draws new and rapid patterns so that at every second the unhappy city contains a happy city unaware of its own existence."



Andria was built so artfully that its every street follows a planet's orbit, and the buildings and the places of community life repeat the order of the constellations and the position of the most luminous stars: Antares, Alpheratz, Capricorn, the Cepheids. The city's calendar is so regulated that jobs and offices and ceremonies are arranged in a map corresponding to the firmament on that date: and thus the days on earth and the nights in the sky reflect each other.

Though it is painstakingly regimented, the city's life flows calmly like the motion of the celestial bodies and it acquires the inevitability of phenomena not subject to human caprice. In praising Andria's citizens for their productive industry and their spiritual ease, I was led to say: I can well understand how you, feeling yourselves part of an unchanging heaven, cogs in a meticulous clockwork, take care not to make the slightest change in your city and your habits. Andria is the only city I know where it is best to remain motionless in time.

They looked at one another dumbfounded. "But why? Whoever said such a thing?" And they led me to visit a suspended street recently opened over a bamboo grove, a shadow-theater under construction in the place of the municipal kennels, now moved to the pavilions of the former lazaretto, abolished when the last plague victims were cured, and—just inaugurated—a river port, a statue of Thales, a toboggan slide.

"And these innovations do not disturb your city's astral rhythm?" I asked.

"Our city and the sky correspond so perfectly," they answered, "that any change in Andria involves some novelty among the stars." The astronomers, after each change takes place in Andria, peer into their telescopes and report a nova's explosion, or a remote point in the firmament's change of color from orange to yellow, the expansion of a nebula, the bending of a spiral of the Milky Way. Each change implies a sequence of other changes, in Andria as among the stars: the city and the sky never remain the same.

As for the character of Andria's inhabitants, two virtues are worth mentioning: self-confidence and prudence. Convinced that every innovation in the city influences the sky's pattern, before taking any decision they calculate the risks and advantages for themselves and for the city and for all worlds.

CONTINUOUS CITIES 4

You reproach me because each of my stories takes you right into the heart of a city without telling you of the space that stretches between one city and the other, whether it is covered by seas, or fields of rye, larch forests, swamps. I will answer you with a story.

In the streets of Cecilia, an illustrious city, I met once a goatherd, driving a tinkling flock along the walls.

"Man blessed by heaven," he asked me, stopping, "can you tell me the name of the city in which we are?"

"May the gods accompany you!" I cried. "How can you fail to recognize the illustrious city of Cecilia?"

"Bear with me," that man answered. "I am a wandering herdsman. Sometimes my goats and I have to pass through cities; but we are unable to distinguish them. Ask me the names of the grazing lands: I know them all, the Meadow between the Cliffs, the Green Slope, the Shadowed Grass. Cities have no name for me: they are places without leaves, separating one pasture from another, and where the goats are frightened at street corners and scatter. The dog and I run to keep the flock together."

"I am the opposite of you," I said. "I recognize only cities and cannot distinguish what is outside them. In uninhabited places each stone and each

clump of grass mingles, in my eyes, with every other stone and clump."

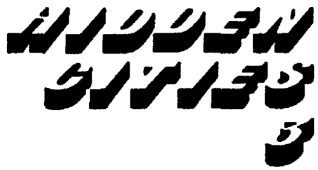
Many years have gone by since then; I have known many more cities and I have crossed continents. One day I was walking among rows of identical houses; I was lost. I asked a passerby: "May the immortals protect you, can you tell me where we are?"

"In Cecilia, worse luck!" he answered. "We have been wandering through its streets, my goats and I, for an age, and we cannot find our way out. . . ."

I recognized him, despite his long white beard; it was the same herdsman of long before. He was followed by a few, mangy goats, which did not even stink, they were so reduced to skin-and-bones. They cropped wastepaper in the rubbish bins.

"That cannot be!" I shouted. "I, too, entered a city, I cannot remember when, and since then I have gone on, deeper and deeper into its streets. But how have I managed to arrive where you say, when I was in another city, far far away from Cecilia, and I have not yet left it?"

"The places have mingled," the goatherd said. "Cecilia is everywhere. Here, once upon a time, there must have been the Meadow of the Low Sage. My goats recognize the grass on the traffic island."



A sibyl, questioned about Marozia's fate, said, "I see two cities: one of the rat, one of the swallow."

This was the interpretation of the oracle: today Marozia is a city where all run through leaden passages like packs of rats who tear from one another's teeth the leftovers which fall from the teeth of the most voracious ones; but a new century is about to begin in which all the inhabitants of Marozia will fly like swallows in the summer sky, calling one another as in a game, showing off, their wings still, as they swoop, clearing the air of mosquitos and gnats.

"It is time for the century of the rat to end and the century of the swallow to begin," the more determined said. In fact, already beneath the grim and petty rattish dominion, you could sense, among the less obvious people a pondering, the preparation of a swallowlike flight, heading for the transparent air with a deft flick of the tail, then tracing with their wings' blade the curve of an opening horizon.

I have come back to Marozia after many years: for some time the sibyl's prophecy is considered to have come true; the old century is dead and buried, the new is at its climax. The city has surely changed, and perhaps for the better. But the wings I have seen moving about are those of suspicious umbrellas under which heavy eyelids are lowered; there are people who believe they are flying, but it is already an

achievement if they can get off the ground flapping their batlike overcoats.

It also happens that, if you move along Marozia's compact walls, when you least expect it, you see a crack open and a different city appear. Then, an instant later, it has already vanished. Perhaps everything lies in knowing what words to speak, what actions to perform, and in what order and rhythm; or else someone s gaze, answer, gesture is enough; it is enough for someone to do something for the sheer pleasure of doing it, and for his pleasure to become the pleasure of others: at that moment, all spaces change, all heights, distances; the city is transfigured, becomes crystalline, transparent as a dragonfly. But everything must happen as if by chance, without attaching too much importance to it, without insisting that you are performing a decisive operation, remembering clearly that any moment the old Marozia will return and solder its ceiling of stone, cobwebs, and mold over all heads.

Was the oracle mistaken? Not necessarily. I interpret it in this way: Marozia consists of two cities, the rat's and the swallow's; both change with time, but their relationship does not change; the second is the one about to free itself from the first.

CONTINUOUS CITIES 3

To tell you about Penthesilea I should begin by describing the entrance to the city. You, no doubt, imagine seeing a girdle of walls rising from the dusty plain as you slowly approach the gate, guarded by customs men who are already casting oblique glances at your bundles. Until you have reached it you are outside it; you pass beneath an archway and you find yourself within the city; its compact thickness surrounds you; carved in its stone there is a pattern that will be revealed to you if you follow its jagged outline.

If this is what you believe, you are wrong: Penthesilea is different. You advance for hours and it is not clear to you whether you are already in the city's midst or still outside it. Like a lake with low shores lost in swamps, so Penthesilea spreads for miles around, a soupy city diluted in the plain; pale buildings back to back in mangy fields, among plank fences and corrugated-iron sheds. Every now and then at the edges of the street a cluster of constructions with shallow facades, very tall or very low, like a snaggle-toothed comb, seems to indicate that from there the city's texture will thicken. But you continue and you find instead other vague spaces, then a rusty suburb of workshops and warehouses, a cemetery, a carnival with Ferris wheel, a shambles; you

start down a street of scrawny shops which fades amid patches of leprous countryside.

If you ask the people you meet, "Where is Penthesilea?" they make a broad gesture which may mean "Here," or else "Farther on," or "All around you," or even "In the opposite direction."

"I mean the city," you ask, insistently.

"We come here every morning to work," someone answers, while others say, "We come back here at night to sleep."

"But the city where people live?" you ask.

"It must be that way," they say, and some raise their arms obliquely toward an aggregation of opaque polyhedrons on the horizon, while others indicate, behind you, the specter of other spires.

"Then I've gone past it without realizing it?"

"No, try going on straight ahead."

And so you continue, passing from outskirts to outskirts, and the time comes to leave Penthesilea. You ask for the road out of the city; you pass again the string of scattered suburbs like a freckled pigmentation; night falls; windows come alight, here more concentrated, sparser there.

You have given up trying to understand whether, hidden in some sac or wrinkle of these dilapidated surroundings there exists a Penthesilea the visitor can

recognize and remember, or whether Penthesilea is only the outskirts of itself. The question that now begins to gnaw at your mind is more anguished: outside Penthesilea does an outside exist? Or, no matter how far you go from the city, will you only pass from one limbo to another, never managing to leave it?

Recurrent invasions racked the city of Theodora in the centuries of its history; no sooner was one enemy routed than another gained strength and threatened the survival of the inhabitants. When the sky was cleared of condors, they had to face the propagation of serpents; the spiders' extermination allowed the flies to multiply into a black swarm; the victory over the termites left the city at the mercy of the woodworms. One by one the species incompatible to the city had to succumb and were extinguished. By dint of ripping away scales and carapaces, tearing off elytra and feathers, the people gave Theodora the exclusive image of human city that still distinguishes it.

But first, for many long years, it was uncertain whether or not the final victory would not go to the last species left to fight man's possession of the city: the rats. From each generation of rodents that the people managed to exterminate, the few surviviors gave birth to a tougher progeny, invulnerable to traps and resistant to all poison. In the space of a few weeks, the sewers of Theodora were repopulated with hordes of spreading rats. At last, with an extreme massacre, the murderous, versatile ingenuity of mankind defeated the overweening life-force of the enemy.

The city, great cemetery of the animal kingdom, was closed, aseptic, over the final buried corpses with

their last fleas and their last germs. Man had finally reestablished the order of the world which he had himself upset: no other living species existed to cast any doubts. To recall what had been fauna, Theodora's library would preserve on its shelves the volumes of Buffon and Linnaeus.

At least that is what Theodora's inhabitants believed, far from imagining that a forgotten fauna was stirring from its lethargy. Relegated for long eras to remote hiding places, ever since it had been deposed by the system of nonextinct species, the other fauna was coming back to the light from the library's basements where the incunabula were kept; it was leaping from the capitals and drainpipes, perching at the sleepers' bedside. Sphinxes, griffons, chimeras, dragons, hircocervi, harpies, hydras, unicorns, basilisks were resuming possession of their city.

I should not tell you of Berenice, the unjust city, which crowns with triglyphs, abaci, metopes the gears of its meat-grinding machines (the men assigned to polishing, when they raise their chins over the balustrades and contemplate the atria, stairways, porticos, feel even more imprisoned and short of stature). Instead, I should tell you of the hidden Berenice, the city of the just, handling makeshift materials in the shadowy rooms behind the shops and beneath the stairs, linking a network of wires and pipes and pulleys and pistons and counterweights that infiltrates like a climbing plant among the great cogged wheels (when they jam, a subdued ticking gives warning that a new precision mechanism is governing the city). Instead of describing to you the perfumed pools of the baths where the unjust of Berenice recline and weave their intrigues with rotund eloquence and observe with a proprietary eye the rotund flesh of the bathing odalisques, I should say to you how the just, always cautious to evade the spying sycophants and the Janizaries' mass arrests, recognize one another by their way of speaking, especially their pronunciation of commas and parentheses; from their habits which remain austere and innocent, avoiding complicated and nervous moods; from their sober but tasty cuisine, which evokes an ancient golden age: rice and celery soup, boiled beans, fried squash flowers.

From these data it is possible to deduce an image of the future Berenice, which will bring you closer to knowing the truth than any other information about the city as it is seen today. You must nevertheless bear in mind what I am about to say to you: in the seed of the city of the just, a malignant seed is hidden, in its turn: the certainty and pride of being in the right—and of being more just than many others who call themselves more just than the just. This seed ferments in bitterness, rivalry, resentment; and the natural desire of revenge on the unjust is colored by a yearning to be in their place and to act as they do. Another unjust city, though different from the first, is digging out its space within the double sheath of the unjust and just Berenices.

Having said this, I do not wish your eyes to catch a distorted image, so I must draw your attention to an intrinsic quality of this unjust city germinating secretly inside the secret just city: and this is the possible awakening—as if in an excited opening of windows—of a later love for justice, not yet subjected to rules, capable of reassembling a city still more just than it was before it became the vessel of injustice. But if you peer deeper into this new germ of justice you can discern a tiny spot that is spreading like the mounting tendency to impose what is

just through what is unjust, and perhaps this is the germ of an immense metropolis. . . .

From my words you will have reached the conclusion that the real Berenice is a temporal succession of different cities, alternately just and unjust. But what I wanted to warn you about is something else: all the future Berenices are already present in this instant, wrapped one within the other, confined, crammed, inextricable.

The Great Khan's atlas contains also the maps of the promised lands visited in thought but not yet discovered or founded: New Atlantis, Utopia, the City of the Sun, Oceana, Tamoé, New Harmony, New Lanark, Icaria.

Kublai asked Marco: "You, who go about exploring and who see signs, can tell me toward which of these futures the favoring winds are driving us."

"For these ports I could not draw a route on the map or set a date for the landing. At times all I need is a brief glimpse, an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape, a glint of lights in the fog, the dialogue of two passersby meeting in the crowd, and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop. Perhaps while we speak, it is rising, scattered, within the confines of your empire; you can hunt for it, but only in the way I have said."

Already the Great Khan was leafing through his atlas, over the maps of the cities that menace in nightmares and maledictions: Enoch, Babylon, Yahooland, Butua, Brave New World.

He said: "It is all useless, if the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us."

And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."

4′33″

John Cage

John Cage, in full **John Milton Cage, Jr.**, (born September 5, 1912, Los Angeles, California, U.S.—died August 12, 1992, New York, New York), American avant-garde composer whose inventive compositions and unorthodox ideas profoundly influenced mid-20th-century music.

The son of an inventor, Cage briefly attended Pomona College and then traveled in Europe for a time. Returning to the United States in 1931, he studied music with Richard Buhlig, Arnold Schoenberg, Adolph Weiss, and Henry Cowell. While teaching in Seattle (1938–40), Cage organized percussion ensembles to perform his compositions.

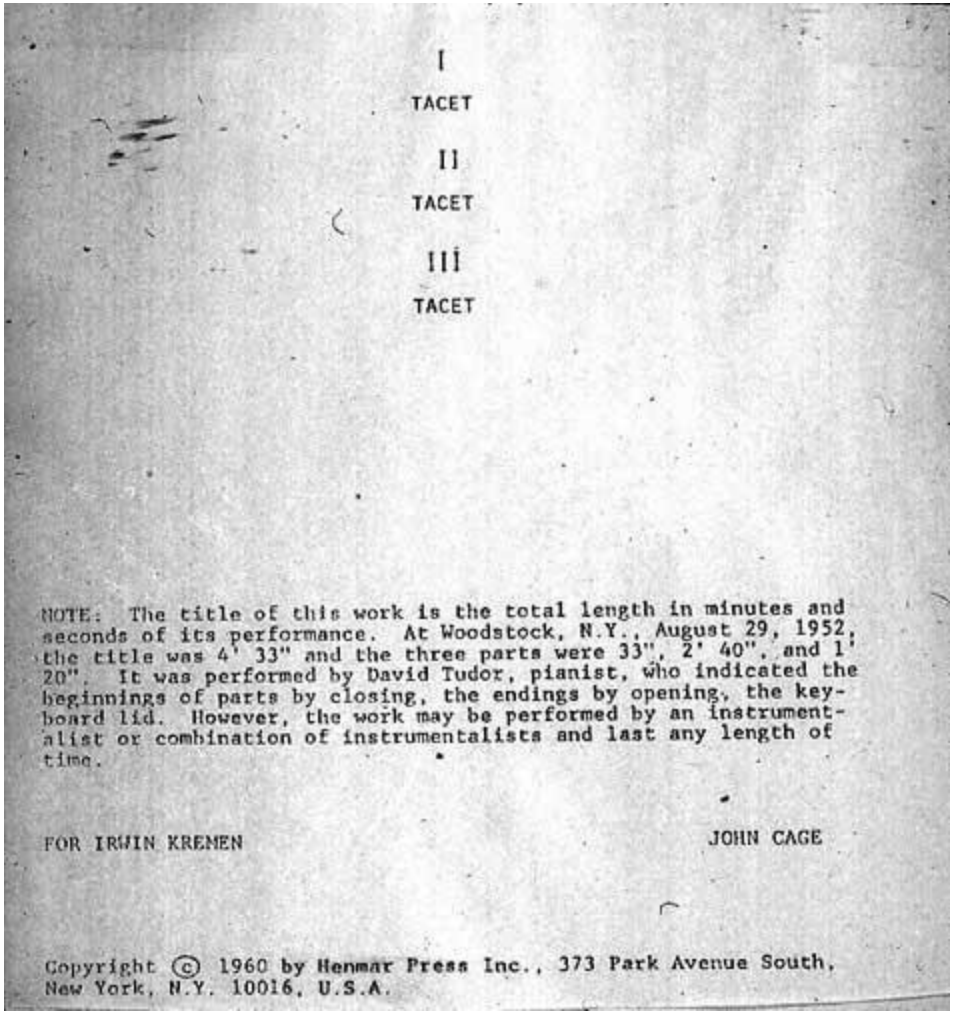
Among Cage's best-known works are *4′33″* (*Four Minutes and Thirty-three Seconds*, 1952), a piece in which the performer or performers remain utterly silent onstage for that amount of time (although the amount of time is left to the determination of the performer); *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951), for 12 randomly tuned radios, 24 performers, and conductor; the *Sonatas and Interludes* (1946–48) for prepared piano; *Fontana Mix* (1958), a piece based on a series of programmed transparent cards that, when superimposed, give a graph for the random selection of electronic sounds; *Cheap Imitation* (1969), an "impression" of the music of Erik Satie; and *Roaratorio* (1979), an electronic composition utilizing thousands of words found in James Joyce's novel *Finnegans Wake*.

Cage published several books, including *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961) and *M: Writings '67–'72* (1973). His influence extended to such established composers as Earle Brown, Lejaren Hiller, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff. More broadly, his work was recognized as significant in the development of traditions ranging from minimalist and electronic music to performance art.

4′33″ is musical composition by John Cage created in 1952 and first performed on August 29 of that year. It quickly became one of the most controversial musical works of the 20th century because it consisted of silence or, more precisely, ambient sound—what Cage called "the absence of intended sounds."

Cage conceived the piece in 1948, when he gave it the working title "Silent Prayer." The work's manuscript declared that it was written "for any instrument or combination of instruments." It then specified that there were three movements of set duration—33 seconds, 2 minutes 40 seconds, and 1 minute 20 seconds, respectively. For each movement, Cage's sole instruction to the performer(s) was "Tacet" (Latin: "[it] is silent," used in music to indicate that the musician is not to play). For the first performance of *4′33″*, pianist David Tudor used a stopwatch, opening or closing the keyboard lid at the designated intervals. Although most audience members at first had no idea what to make of Cage's composition—and, indeed, some left in a huff—it gradually became clear to the discerning that the work was intended to help the audience discover the impossibility of actual silence in life. Coughing audience members, squeaking seats, even departing footsteps became part of the unusual composition.

In March 2011 the music magazine *Gramophone*, in a playful homage to this work, published a review of a 21st-century recording by rock musicians of *4′33″* on the CD *Cage Against the Machine* (the title is a play on the name of the alternative rock group Rage Against the Machine, some members of which participated in the performance). The review identified the disc's features in a standard way, then ran a six-inch column devoid of type.



I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by an instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

FOR IRWIN KREMEN

JOHN CAGE

[John Cage's 4'33" - YouTube]

Silent Performance

Breath (1969)

by Samuel Beckett (Dublin 1906 – Paris 1989)

Breath is a 25-second play from Samuel Beckett. The stage directions consist of a birth cry, inhaling and exhaling, and a stage covered with filth and detritus.

Synopsis

Even for Beckett, whose later plays are often extremely short, *Breath* is an unusually terse work. Its length can be estimated from Beckett's detailed instructions in the script to be about 25 seconds. It consists of the sound of "an instant of recorded vagitus" (a birth-cry), followed by an amplified recording of somebody slowly inhaling and exhaling accompanied by an increase and decrease in the intensity of the light. There is then a second identical cry, and the piece ends. No people are seen onstage, but Beckett states that it should be "littered with miscellaneous rubbish." He did specify however that there were to be "no verticals", the rubbish was to be "all scattered and lying."

History

"Tynan had asked [Beckett] … to write a brief skit for an erotic review, and Beckett agreed when he heard that Edna O'Brien, Jules Feiffer, Leonard Melfi, John Lennon and Tynan himself were planning to contribute. All the contributions were to be listed anonymously on the programme so that none of the contributors would be identified with his writing." Beckett sent the text of the play on a postcard to Tynan. At the first production, his staging was altered to make the work fit in with the somewhat risque nature of the revue by adding naked bodies to the rubbish, suggesting that the work was about sexual intercourse. "In one of his few displays of public anger, Beckett called Tynan a 'liar' and a 'cheat', prompting Tynan to send a formal notice through his lawyers that he was not responsible for the travesty, which he claimed was due to others… Beckett decided the incident wasn't worth the argument and dropped it."
"85 million people saw 1314 performances making it easily Beckett's most viewed play."

Curtain.

1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish.Hold for about five seconds.

2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.

3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reachingminimum together (light as in I) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold for about five seconds.

Curtain.

Rubbish. No verticals, all scattered and lying.
Cry. Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two criesbe identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.
Breath. Amplified recording.
Maximum light. Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright,light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.

THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

BERTOLT BRECHT

Revised English version and Introduction by ERIC BENTLEY

INTRODUCTION

Berthold Brecht wrote Der Gate Mensch von Setzuan in Scandinavia at the end of the nineteen-thirties. It was originally dedicated to his wife Helene Weinel, to whose playing it was ideally suited. Even the male part of the role would have been nothing new for her: she had played the Young Comrade in The Measures Taken. Yet, in fact, The Good Woman had its world premiere in Zurich during World War II, when Frau Weigel was a refugee in America. And by the time the play was produced by the Berliner Ensemble she was too old for the role. Meanwhile there had been many American productions.

In 1941 Brecht had crossed the USSR on the Trans

Siberian Railway and had then sailed across the Pacific to San Pedro, California. I was doing my first year of teaching at the time in the University of California at Los Angeles, and one of my students, who had got himself a hand printing press, wanted to print some poems. Another student said that a German poet was in town and had no translator. The name was Brecht-I was not aware of ever having heard it, though another writer on Brecht has pictured me listening to Three Penny Opera records as an undergraduate in the middle thirties. I arranged to see the poet with a view to translating several of his poems for my student's press.

Herr Brecht was living in a very small frame house in Santa Monica, and I was shown into his bedroom, which was also his study. He had few or no books. But there was a typewriter, and copies of Freies Deutschland-which I later found to be a Communist magazine published in Mexico-were strewn about. In the typewriter was the very thin paper, folded double, which I later knew to be characteristic of the man. It was on this paper-the kind used for carbon copies when you have no onion skin-that I first saw any of the work of Brecht. He handed me a couple of sheets of it while he looked over the samples of my own work I had brought along.

My impression of the man himself is hard to recapture at this distance in time. It is possible that I took Brecht for a truly proletarian writer on the score of his current lack of cash and his general style of living and dress. This would no doubt have been naive of me. Yet the charm and power of the encounter had their source in just this naiveté, and especially in the fact that I had no sense of being in the company of a famous man. Quite a contrast to those meetings with Brecht which young people were to have in the nineteen-fifties, when the cropped head and the tieless shirt were well known in advance from a score of photographs and a hundred anecdotes! For all I knew, Brecht might have had a trunkful of ties under the bed, and it could have been by chance that he was tieless at the time ...or, as I say, it could have been because he was a "proletarian writer."

Most famous writers, of course, would have made sure that before I left after our first interview I did have a sense of their fame. Remarkable about Brecht was that he didn't bother about this. Here we see the real human value of what I came later to recognize as a certain delicate depersonalization of things which Brecht brought about. He did not try to find out much about me. He did not invite me to find out much about him. As in his plays, two people would encounter each other for the sake of what they have to do together. I was a student of German and of poetry. He was a German and had written some poems. I would therefore translate some of him.

On the spot. And with his collaboration. For he already knew enough English to have a pretty shrewd idea whether a given expression corresponded to the German. "Freilich, ich lebe in finsteren Zeiten!" That was the first line on one of the bits of tissue paper he had handed me. What did it mean? "Finstere Zeiten" are "dark ages." Was the reference to the Dark Ages? (I had no idea of the context.) "Nein, nein!" said the staccato voice. Then, after a puff at the cigar (not for me "the famous cigar"): "Nein, ich meine diese Zeiten, Herr Bentley, unsere-auch in Los Angeles kan es finster sein, nicht wahr?" He was teasing me a little. That, too, I would later regard as characteristic.

At the time it was simply new. ... Well, what about "freilich," what did one say in English for that? I suggested many things: "actually," "of course," “oh, yes,” “it's true." To each one, the quiet yet sharp voice said: "Nein! Nein!" And Brecht shook his head very decisively. We were discovering together that in our effort to translate his poetry we could not get past the very first word.

The poetry, says Robert Frost, is the untranslatable part. This truth was empirically confirmed by Brecht and myself, but luckily it is a truth which all are agreed in advance to defy, and a half-truth at that. A lot of poetry just as problematical as Brecht's has come down to us in more

languages than one-with whatever changes along the way. Although something must have happened to my student's hand press, for I never saw anything in print from it, I had begun translating Bertolt Brecht and am still doing so now, nearly a quarter of a century later.

For a while nothing was said about publication. But then Brecht wanted his poem “To the German Soldiers in the East" to come out. With him it was always a matter of the place and the time to publish something, considered not personally or "literarily," but politically: people in America should now read what he had to say about the German armies in Russia. So I translated that poem and sent it to Partisan Review. The choice. was politically inept, since the editors were violently anti-Communist, but then, being anti-Communist, they knew about Brecht, which at that date other editors didn't. In fact, Partisan had run a "big" article about him in 1941. I was a little upset when Dwight MacDonald, rejecting the poem for the magazine, told me how outrageous he considered its contents to be. (In 1965 an editor of Partisan was to ask me please not to fight the Cold War when criticizing the Brecht theatre in East Berlin. Well, it is good that times change.) "To the German Soldiers in the East" finally appeared in Ray B. West's magazine, the Rocky Mountain Review.

Meanwhile, I had my first sizable assignment from Brecht: to translate, if not for cash on the line, at any rate for possible publication and performance, his full-length play The Private Life of the Master Race. This sequence of scenes about life under the Nazis had just been staged in German in New York City by Berthold Viertel, whom I had got to know, and it was Viertel who urged upon Brecht the possibility of an English-language production there, if a translation was on hand. By this time, I was teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and the first performance of the English-language. Private Life took place in the unlikely environment of the South. My students and I even broadcast a good deal of it on the Asheville radio. And when we did a staged reading of the whole play at the college, the composer Fritz Cohen performed at the organ. I recall a version of the Horst Wessel Song with magnificently distorted harmonies.

The plan to do the play in New York did not die but unfolded too slowly. The war was almost over when finally, it was put on, and the public would not wish to hear another word about the Nazis for fifteen or twenty years. Also, the show itself was badly messed up. Brecht must have suspected from the beginning that it would be, for when he asked what the production outfit was called, and was told "The Theatre of Al Nations,” he had replied: "It's too many."

But Brecht publication in America had begun to get under way. Up to 1940 only the Three Penny Novel had been published, and that by a publisher whose interest in Brecht was nonexistent. The first publisher to show real interest was Jay Laughlin, founder and owner of New Directions. He had brought out a translation of Mother Courage in 1941. He had Private Life of the Master Race ready in 1944. Around this time even warmer interest in Brecht was shown by the firm of Reynal and Hitchcock, and Brecht signed a contract with them for an edition of his collected works, of which I was to be general editor. How much happier, as well as simpler, the history of American Brecht publishing would have been had the plan gone through! But Curtice Hitchcock, whose brain child it was, died soon after; the firm was sold to Harcourt, Brace; and Harcourt did not take over the Brecht project. It proved impossible to interest any other publisher at that time in taking on the collected works of Brecht. Faced with this new situation, Brecht asked me to get individual plays published whenever opportunity offered and by what ever publishing house. Until 1960 I found only one publisher who would take on a volume of Brecht at all, and I got him published largely by the device of choosing his plays for inclusion in my own drama anthologies. Even this sometimes seemed eccentric to publishers. For example, at Doubleday's, when Three Penny Opera was included in my Modern Theatre, my editor-in-chief, Jason Epstein, who otherwise never objected to any of my choices, inquired: "What are we doing publishing an opera libretto?" The one publisher to agree to bring out a volume of Brecht in these lean years was the University of Minnesota Press, which issued Parables for the Theatre in 1948. It cannot be said the publication created a sensation, or that the Press expected it to. But in the fifties Brecht caught on. The Good Woman and Chalk Circle - the two Parables of the Minnesota volume-were triumphantly produced in many countries, and Minnesota was able to lease paperback rights on their book to Grove Press in New York and London. Thereafter this became the best known of all Brecht books in English-speaking countries. And the two plays were performed far more than any of Brecht's others in British and American theatres.

The world premiere of The Caucasian Chalk Circle was at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, in the spring of 1948. The same spring The Good Woman had its American premiere at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. All the more enterprising colleges then began doing the parables, and professional activity followed along at its lower rate of speed. I accepted an invitation to direct the first professional production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle at Hedgerow Theatre, near Philadelphia, in the

summer of 1948. Meanwhile Utah Hagen had done a staged reading of The Good Woman in New York; she was later to play the title role in the first full production of the play in New York. Around 1950 The Caucasian Chalk Circle was among the small group of plays which brought together in Chicago the gifted people who would later be identified as members of "Second City" and "The Compass. " (I well recall the struggle we had getting any royalties out of them.) Both the parables eventually became plays that all the more ambitious professional theatres knew they had to do. The Actor's Workshop of San Francisco offered a lavish production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle in 1963. The Minnesota Theatre Company in Minneapolis did the play at the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in 1965.

A word about the text. It, too, has developed with the years. What Brecht said he wanted, for his first appearances in print in the United States, was a faithful word for-word reproduction of the German. This he got, save for some errors which were caught later, in the first edition published by Minnesota. The only significant omission from the book at that time was that of the Prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle. For the manuscript was delivered to the publishers at about the time of Brecht's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee in Washington (October 1947). It was on advice from him that the appearance of this Prologue was postponed. From which incident have come two false rumors: one, that the Prologue was written later and so had not been part of Brecht's original draft of the play; two, that the omission was made on my initiative and so constituted editorial interference. It should be added that when an author says, "Let's not include such and such a passage till later," he may well not foresee for how long he is postponing its inclusion. To insert a prologue, the printer has to redo a whole play. The Prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle, though found in the German manuscript Brecht sent me in 1945, did not appear in English until the Tulane Drama Review printed it at my request in 1959. Soon thereafter, it turned up in the Grove Evergreen paperback edition of the play.

Perhaps all good foreign plays should be published first in a very literal translation and subsequently in various attempts at a true equivalent, even, if necessary, in "adaptations." Some plays can have high literary quality in another language and at the same time be fairly literal transcriptions. Others have not proved so amenable. (I put it thus cautiously to allow for the possibility that some or all of them might prove so amenable at some future time.) Brecht toyed with the idea of his plays always being literally translated for publication and freely adapted for performance. But even this is not a perfect formula. Whenever the stage version is more plausible, has more character, more charm, vivacity, edge, or whatnot, reasonable readers will prefer it not only in the theatre but in the study: for it is more readable. Hence, when I had to discard the literal translation of The Good Woman for stage purposes, the nonliteral text that resulted was adjudged preferable by publishers and readers as well as producers and spectators. For the Phoenix Theatre production (New York, 1956) I decided to ignore the literal translation altogether and, working again with the German, to make a completely new rendering for the stage. Since all the larger libraries have copies of the first Minnesota edition, anyone who is curious about this can look up for himself what the differences are. The 1956 text does amount to "adaptation" in the sense that some passages have not been translated at all but deliberately omitted or changed. Luckily, the author was still alive when these changes were proposed, and when I last saw Brecht (June 1956) he approved them in principle. (He was not interested in inspecting the script line by line and probably was not well enough to do so in any case.)

In English, things have to be said more tersely than in German. Hence, English translations from German should always come out shorter than the original. Sometimes that is a matter of phraseology only: each sentence should come out shorter. But at other times the very thought and substance of a German text has to be made more compact in English, and in this case whole sentences of the original have to go. Now once you start this more drastic kind of "cutting" you also find yourself obliged to bridge the “gaps” you have made with new writing. This is one of the ways in which translation becomes adaptation... It did so in the reworking of The Good Woman J and those who wish to know exactly what Brecht said in every detail will, as I say, have to go to the German or the first Minnesota edition. Reprinted in this volume is the stage version used at the Phoenix, plus only the Epilogue which was not used in that show. (Since for a while Grove Press ran precisely the Phoenix text without the Epilogue, yet another false rumor circulated, and was exploited to compound the misunderstanding created by the rumor about the omitted Prologue to Chalk Circle: Brecht was for the second time being touched up by a translator hostile to Marxism. The coupling of the two rumors did not, of course, make sense, since the printings that omitted the Epilogue to The Good Woman contained the Prologue to Chalk Circle. Anyhow, the present editions contain both.)

For stage purposes, I found that everything in The Good Woman had to be said more briefly and swiftly in English than in the German, and I think the reader too will appreciate a terser, lighter textured piece of reading

matter. I would not make this identical statement about The Caucasian Chalk Circle. It is not an easier play to turn into English, but it is far less abstract and more poetic. Consequently, the obligation to keep each phrase is far greater, and the result of keeping each-or nearly each phrase seems a gain, rather than a loss. This does not mean that as soon as one has written out an "accurate" translation one has finished work. There remains an endless labor, this time not of trimming, cutting, and reshaping scenes, but of weighing one word against another, one phrase against another, and, finally, of trying to achieve a style that might serve as the style of this play. The renewed work on The Good Woman, since the method meant going back to zero, seemed more radical and while it lasted was indeed more intensive, yet in the end even more work may have been put in on Chalk Circle, though this work was done a little at a time and was wholly a matter of details. (A work of art is an accumulation of details.) Many of the changes made in the English text of Chalk Circle were incorporated in the Grove Evergreen printings of the early sixties. Many others were first printed in the present edition. Of special use to me in the selection of new readings was the Harvard University production of the play (1960) directed by John Hancock.

One has always to ask of a Brecht translation what German text it is based on, since Brecht himself was forever changing what he wrote. The present English version is in principle based on the manuscript supplied by Brecht in 1945.[1] This fact explains one or two things that might otherwise appear anomalous. For example, "Sezuan" was a city in the manuscript, though later it would be identified as "Szechwan," which is a province. Since Brecht obviously could not have had in mind a province when he wrote "a city," I consider the original reading sound and have kept it. It is in line with al Brecht's other "misunderstandings' of geography and even with a stage tradition that goes back to things like the "seacoast of Bohemia" in Shakespeare. Der kaukasische Kreidekreis was published in substantially the form I knew it, not in the book editions, but in the 1949 Brecht Supplement of the magazine Sinn und Form. Since nothing in the English of Chalk Circle is in the nature of "free adaptation," the reader can be sure that if he finds any passage there that is not in the German text he consults it is taken from some other German text. For instance, the scabrous bit about the soldier getting an erection from stabbing was omitted from later German versions. Conversely, at Brecht's request, I inserted some rhymes to introduce the Azdak trial scenes which had not been found in the 1945 manuscript. To sum up: my rendering of Chalk Circle claims to provide a line by line equivalent of the German, though "the German" is itself a flexible term in this context; while The Good Woman adheres far less closely to Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, which, however, readers can find translated literally in the first Minnesota edition.

-E. B.

Berlin, March 1965

[1] *In the spring of 1946 Reyna and Hitchcock brought out my book The Playwright as Thinker in which Brecht's as yet unpublished "parables" were summarized.

THE GOOD WOMAN OF SETZUAN

CHARACTERS

Wong, a water seller
Three Gods
Shen Te, a prostitute, later a shopkeeper
Mrs. Shin, former owner of Shen Te's shop
A Family of Eight (husband, wife, brother, sister-in-law, grandfather, nephew, niece, boy)
An Unemployed Man a Carpenter
Mrs. Mi Tzu, Shen Te's landlady
Yang Sun, an unemployed pilot, later a factory manager
An Old Whore a Policeman an Old Man
An Old Woman, his wife
Mr. Shu Fu, a barber
Mrs. Yang, mother of Yang Sun
Gentlemen, Voices, Children (three), etc.

PROLOGUE

At the gates of the half-Westernized city of Setzuan. Evening. WONG the water seller introduces himself to the audience.

WONG: I sell water here in the city of Setzuan. It isn't easy. When water is scarce, I have long distances to go in search of it, and when it is plentiful, I have no income. But in our part of the world there is nothing unusual about poverty. Many people think only the gods can save the situation. And I hear from some cattle merchant-who travels a lot-that some of the highest gods are on their way here at this very moment. Informed sources have it that heaven is quite disturbed at all the complaining. I've been coming out here to the city gates for three days now to bid these gods welcome. I want to be the first to greet them. What about those fellows over there? No, no, they work. And that one there has ink on his fingers, he's no god, he must be a clerk from the cement factory. Those two are another story. They look as though they'd like to beat you. But gods don't need to beat you, do they?

THREE GODS appear.
What about those three? Old-fashioned clothes dust on their feet-they must be gods! (He throws himself at their feet.) Do with me what you will, illustrious ones!

FIRST GOD (with an ear trumpet): Ah! (He is pleased.)
So we were expected?
WONG (giving them water): Oh, yes. And I knew you'd come.

FIRST GOD: We need somewhere to stay the night. You know of a place?

WONG: The whole town is at your service, illustrious ones! What sort of a place would you like?

The GODS eye each other.

FIRST GOD: Just try the first house you come to, my son.

WONG: That would be Mr. Fo's place.

FIRST GOD: Mr. Fo.

WONG: One moment! (He knocks at the first house.)
VOICE FROM MR. Fo's: No!

WONG returns a little nervously.

WONG: It's too bad. Mr. Fo isn't in. And his servants don't dare do a thing without his consent. He'll have a fit when he finds out who they turned away, won't he?
FIRST GOD (smiling): He will, won't he?
WONG: One moment! The next house is Mr. Cheng's. Won't he be thrilled!
FIRST GOD: Mr. Cheng.
WONG knocks.
VOICE FROM MR. CHENG's: Keep your gods. We have our own troubles!
WONG (back with the GODS): Mr. Cheng is very sorry, but he has a houseful of relations. I think some of them are a bad lot, and naturally, he wouldn't like you to see them.

THIRD GOD: Are we so terrible?

WONG: Well, only with bad people, of course. Everyone knows the province of Kwan is always having floods.
SECOND GOD: Really? How's that?

WONG: Why, because they're so irreligious.

SECOND GOD: Rubbish. It's because they neglected the dam.
FIRST GOD (to SECOND): Sh! (To WONG:) Your still in hopes, aren't you, my son?
WONG: Certainly. Al Setzuan is competing for the honor! What happened up to now is pure coincidence. I'll be back. (He walks away, but then stands undecided.)
SECOND GOD: What did I tell you?

THIRD GOD: It could be pure coincidence.
SECOND GOD: The same coincidence in Shun, Kwan, and Setzuan? People just aren't religious any more, let's face the fact. Our mission has failed!
FIRST GOD: Oh come, we might run into a good person any minute.
THIRD GOD: How did the resolution read? (Unrolling a scroll and reading from it:) "The world can stay as it is if enough people are found (at the word "found" he unrolls it a little more) living lives worthy of human beings." Good people, that is. Well, what about this water seller himself? He's good, or I'm very much mistaken.

SECOND GOD: You're very much mistaken. When he gave us a drink, I had the impression there was something odd about the cup. Well, look! (He shows the cup to the FIRST GOD.)
FIRS T GOD: A false bottom!

SECOND GOD: The man is a swindler.

FIRST GOD: Very well, count him out. That's one man among millions. And as a matter of fact, we only need one on our side. These atheists are saying, "The world must be changed because no one can be good and stay good." No one, eh? I say: let us find one-just one-and we have those fellows where we want them!
THIRD GOD (to WONG): Water seller, is it so hard to find a place to stay?
WONG: Nothing could be easier. It's just me. I don't go about it right.

THIRD GOD: Really?

He returns to the others. A GENTLEMAN passes by.

WONG: Oh dear, they're catching on. (He accosts the GENTLEMAN.) Excuse the intrusion, dear sir, but three gods have just turned up. Three of the very highest. They need a place for the night. Seize this rare opportunity to have real gods as your guests!
GENTLEMAN (laughing): A new way of finding free rooms for a gang of crooks. (Exit GENTLEMAN.)
WONG (shouting at him): Godless rascal! Have you no religion, gentleman of Setzuan? (Pause.) Patience, illustrious ones! (Pause.) There's only one person left. Shen Te, the prostitute. She can't say no. (Calls up to a window:) Shen Te!

SHEN TE opens the shutters and looks out.

WONG: Shen Te, it's Wong. They're here, and nobody wants them. Wil you take them?
SHEN TE: Oh, no, Wong, I'm expecting a gentleman.
WONG: Can't you forget about him for tonight?
SHEN TE: The rent has to be paid by tomorrow or I'll be out on the street.
WONG: This is no time for calculation, Shen Te.
SHEN TE: Stomachs rumble even on the Emperor's birth day, Wong.

WONG: Setzuan is one big dung hill!

SHEN TE: Oh, very well! I'll hide till my gentleman has come and gone. Then I'll take them. (She disappears.)

WONG: They mustn't see her gentleman or they'll know what she is.
FIRST GOD (who hasn't heard any of this): I think it's hopeless.

They approach WONG.

WONG (jumping, as he finds them behind him): A room has been found, illustrious ones! (He wipes sweat off his brow.)

SECOND GOD: Oh, good.
THIRD GOD: Let's see it.

WONG (nervously): Just a minute. It has to be tidied up a bit.
THIRD GOD: Then we'll sit down here and wait.
WONG (still more nervous): No, no! (Holding himself back.) Too much traffic, you know.
THIRD GOD (with a smile): Of course, if you want us to move.
They retire a little. They sit on a doorstep. WONG sits on the ground.
WONG (after a deep breath): You'll be staying with a single girl-the finest human being in Setzuan!
THIRD GOD: That's nice.

WONG (to the audience): They gave me such a look when I picked up my cup just now.

THIRD GOD: You're worn out, Wong.

WONG: A little, maybe.

FIRST GOD: Do people here have a hard time of it?

WONG: The good ones do.

FIRST GOD: What about yourself?
WONG: You mean I'm not good. That's true. And I don't have an easy time either!
During this dialogue, a GENTLEMAN has turned up in front of Shen Te's house, and has whistled several times. Each time WONG has given a start.

THIRD GOD (to WONG, softly): Psst! I think he's gone now.

WONG (confused and surprised): Ye-e-es.

The GENTLEMAN has left now, and SHEN TE has come down to the street.

SHEN TE (softly): Wong!
Getting no answer, she goes off down the street. WONG arrives just too late, forgetting his carrying pole.

WONG (softly): Shen Te! Shen Te! (To himself:) So she's gone off to earn the rent. Oh dear, I can't go to the gods again with no room to offer them. Having failed in the service of the gods, I shall run to my den in the sewer pipe down by the river and hide from their sight!

He rushes off. SHEN TE returns, looking for him, but finding the GODS. She stops in confusion.
SHEN TE: You are the illustrious ones? My name is Shen Te. It would please me very much if my simple room could be of use to you.

THIRD GOD: Where is the water seller, Miss Shen Te?

SHEN TE: I missed him, somehow.
FIRST GOD: Oh, he probably thought you weren't coming, and was afraid of telling us.

THIRD GOD (picking up the carrying pole): We'll leave this with you. He'll be needing it.

Led by SHEN TE, they go into the house. It grows dark, then light. Dawn. Again escorted by SHEN TE, who leads them through the half-light with a little lamp, the GODS take their leave.

FIRST GOD: Thank you, thank you, dear Shen Te, for your elegant hospitality! We shall not forget! And give our thanks to the water seller-he showed us a good human being.

SHEN TE: Oh, I'm not good. Let me tell you something: when Wong asked me to put you up, I hesitated.
FIRST GOD: It's all right to hesitate if you then go ahead! And in giving us that room you did much more that you knew. You proved that good people still exist, a point that has been disputed of late even in heaven. Farewell!
SECOND GOD: Farewell!

THIRD GOD: Farewell!

SHEN TE: Stop, illustrious ones! I'm not sure you're right. I'd like to be good, it's true, but there's the rent to pay. And that's not all: I sell myself for a living. Even so I can't make ends meet, there's too much competition. I'd like to honor my father and mother and speak nothing but the truth and not covet my neighbor's house. I should love to stay with one man. But how? How is it done? Even breaking a few of your commandments, I can hardly manage.

FIRST GOD (clearing his throat): These thoughts are but, urn, the misgivings of an unusually good woman!
THIRD GOD: Good-bye, Shen Te! Give our regards to the water seller!
SECOND GOD: And above all: be good! Farewell!

FIRST GOD: Farewell!

THIRD GOD: Farewell!

They start to wave good-bye.

SHEN TE: But everything is so expensive, I don't feel sure I can do it!
SECOND GOD: That's not in our sphere. We never meddle with economics.

THIRD GOD: One moment. (They stop.) Isn't it true she might do better if she had more money?
SECOND GOD: Come, come! How could we ever account? for it Up Above?

FIRST GOD: Oh, there are ways. (They put their heads together and confer in dumb show. To SHEN TE, with embarrassment:) As you say you can't pay your rent, well, urn, we're not paupers, so of course we insist on paying for our room. (Awkwardly thrusting money into her hand.) There! (Quickly.) But don't tell anyone! The incident is open to misinterpretation.

SECOND GOD: It certainly is!
FIRST GOD (defensively): But there's no law against it! It was never decreed that a god mustn't pay hotel bills!

The GODS leave.

A small tobacco shop. The shop is not as yet completely furnished and hasn't started doing business.

SHEN TE (to the audience): It's three days now since the gods left. When they said they wanted to pay for the room, I looked down at my hand, and there was more than a thousand silver dollars! I bought a tobacco shop with the money, and moved in yester day. I don't own the building, of course, but I can pay the rent, and I hope to do a lot of good here. Beginning with Mrs. Shin, who's just coming across the square with her pot. She had the shop before me, and yesterday she dropped in to ask for rice for her children. (Enter MRS. SHIN. Both women bow.) How do you do, Mrs. Shin.

MRS. SHIN: How do you do, Miss Shen Te. You like your new home?

SHEN TE: Indeed, yes. Did your children have a good night?
MRS. SHIN: In that hovel? The youngest 1s coughing already.

SHEN TE: Oh, dear!

MRS. SHIN: You're going to learn a thing or two in these slums.

SHEN TE: Slums? That's not what you said when you sold me the shop!

MRS. SHIN: Now don't start nagging! Robbing me and my innocent children of their home and then calling it a slum!

That's the limit! (She weeps.)
SHEN TE (tactfully): I'll get your rice.

MRS. SHIN: And a little cash while you're at it.
SHEN TE: I'm afraid I haven't sold anything yet.

MRS. SHIN (screeching): I've got to have it. Strip the clothes from my back and then cut my throat, will you? I know what I'll do: I'll dump my children on your doorstep! (She snatches the pot out of SHEN TE's hands.)
SHEN TE: Please don't be angry. You'll spill the rice.

Enter an elderly HUSBAND and WIFE with their shabbily dressed NEPHEW.

WIFE: Shen Te, dear! You've come into money, they tell me. And we haven't a roof over our heads! A tobacco shop. We had one too. But it's gone. Could we spend the night here; do you think?
NEPHEW (appraising the shop): Not bad!

WIFE: He's our nephew. We're inseparable!

MRS. SHIN: And who are these ... ladies and gentlemen?
SHEN TE: They put me up when I first came in from the country. (To the audience:) Of course, when my small purse was empty, they put me out on the street, and they may be afraid I'll do the same to them. (To the newcomers, kindly:) Come in, and welcome, though I've only one little room for you - it's behind the shop.
HUSBAND: That'll do. Don't worry.

WIFE (bringing SHEN TE some tea): We'll stay over here, so we won't be in your way. Did you make it a tobacco shop in memory of your first real home? We can certainly give you a hint or two! That's one reason we came.

MRS. SHIN (to SHEN TE): Very nice! As long as you have a few customers too!

HUSBAND: Sh! A customer!

Enter an UNEMPLOYED MAN, in rags.

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Excuse me. I'm unemployed.

MRS. SHIN laughs.

SHEN TE: Can I help you?

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Have you any damaged cigarettes? I thought there might be some damage when you're unpacking.
WIFE: What nerve, begging for tobacco! (Rhetorically.) Why don't they ask for bread?

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Bread is expensive. One cigarette butt and I'll be a new man.
SHEN TE (giving him cigarettes): That's very important to be a new man. You'll be my first customer and bring me luck.

The UNEMPLOYED MAN quickly lights a cigarette, inhales, and goes off coughing.

WIFE: Was that right, Shen Te, dear?
MRS. SHIN: If this is the opening of a shop, you can hold the closing at the end of the week.

HUSBAND: I bet he had money on him.

SHEN TE: Oh, no, he said he hadn't!

NEPHEW: How do you know he wasn't lying?

SHEN TE (angrily): How do you know he was?
WIFE (wagging her head): You're too good, Shen Te, dear. If you're going to keep this shop, you'll have to learn to say no.

HUSBAND: Tell them the place isn't yours to dispose of. Belongs to . . . some relative who insists on al ac counts being strictly in order

MRS. SHIN: That's right! What do you think you are-a? philanthropist?

SHEN TE (laughing): Very well, suppose I ask you for my rice back, Mrs. Shin?

WIFE (combatively, at MRS. SHIN): So that's her rice?
Enter the CARPENTER, a small man.
MRS. SHIN (who, at the sight of him, starts to hurry away): See you tomorrow, Miss Shen Te! (Exit MRS. SHIN.)
CARPENTER: Mrs. Shin, it's you I want!

WIFE (to SHEN TE): Has she some claim on you?

SHEN TE: She's hungry. That's a claim.
CARPENTER: Are you the new tenant? And filling up the shelves already? Well, they're not yours till they're paid for, ma'am. I'm the carpenter, so I should know.

SHEN TE: I took the shop "furnishings included."

CARPENTER: You're in league with that Mrs. Shin, of course. Al right. I demand my hundred silver dollars.
SHEN TE: I'm afraid I haven't got a hundred silver dollars.

CARPENTER: Then you'll find it. Or I'll have you arrested.
WIFE (whispering to SHEN TE): That relative: make it a cousin.

SHEN TE: Can't it wait till next month?

CARPENTER: No!

SHEN TE: Be a little patient, Mr. Carpenter, I can't settle all claims at once.

CARPENTER: Who's patient with me? (He grabs a shelf from the wall.) Pay up--or I take the shelves back!

WIFE: Shen Tel Dear! Why don't you let you . . . cousin settle this affair? (To CARPENTER:) Put your claim in writing. Shen Te's cousin will see you get paid.
CARPENTER (derisively): Cousin, eh?

HUSBAND: Cousin, yes.

CARPENTER: I know these cousins!
NEPHEW: Don't be silly. He's a personal friend of mine.
HUSBAND: What a man! Sharp as a razor!
CARPENTER: All right. I'll put my claim in writing. (Puts shelf on floor, sits on it, writes out bill.)

WIFE (to SHEN TE): He'd tear the dress off your back to get his shelves. Never recognize a claim. That's my motto.

SHEN TE: He's done a job, and wants something in return. It's shameful that I can't give it to him. What will the gods say?

HUSBAND: You did your bit when you took us in.

Enter the BROTHER, limping, and the SISTER-IN-LAW, pregnant.

BROTHER (to HUSBAND and WIFE): So this is where you're hiding out! There's family feeling for you! Leaving us on the comer!

WIFE (embarrassed, to SHEN TE): It's my brother and his wife. (To them :) Now stop grumbling, and sit quietly in that comer. (To SHEN TE:) It can't be helped. She's in her fifth month.

SHEN TE: Oh yes. Welcome!

WIFE (to the couple): Say thank you. (They mutter something.) The cups are there. (To SHEN TE:) Lucky you bought this shop when you did!

SHEN TE (laughing and bringing tea): Lucky indeed!

Enter MRS. MI TZU, the landlady.

MRS. MI TZU: Miss Shen Te? I am Mrs. Mi Tzu, your landlady. I hope our relationship will be a happy one. I like to think I give my tenants modern, personalized service. Here is your lease. (To the others, as SHEN TE reads the lease:) There's nothing like the opening of a little shop, is there? A moment of true beauty! (She is looking around.) Not very much on the shelves, of course. But everything in the gods' good time! Where are your references, Miss Shen Te?
SHEN TE: Do I have to have references?
MRS. MI TZU: After all, I haven't a notion who you are!
HUSBAND: Oh, we'd be glad to vouch for Miss Shen Te! We'd go through fire for her!
MRS. MI TZU: And who may you be?
HUSBAND (stammering): Ma Fu, tobacco dealer.

MRS. MI TZU: Where is your shop, Mr. Ma Fu?

HUSBAND: Well, urn, I haven't got a Shop - I've just sold it.
MRS. MI TZU: I see. (To SHEN TE:) Is there no one else that knows you?
WIFE (whispering to SHEN TE): Your cousin! Your cousin!

MRS. MI TZU: This is a respectable house, Miss Shen Te. I never sign a lease without certain assurances.

SHEN TE (slowly, her eyes downcast): I have a cousin.
MRS. MI TZU: On the square? Let's go over and see him. What does he do?

SHEN TE (as before): He lives in another city.
WIFE (prompting): Didn't you say he was in Shung?
SHEN TE: That's right. Shung.

HUSBAND (prompting): I had his name on the tip of my tongue. Mr.…
SHEN TE (with an effort): Mr. . . . Shui . . . Ta.
HUSBAND: That's it! Tall, skinny fellow!
SHEN TE: Shui Ta!
NEPHEW (to CARPENTER): You were in touch with him, weren't you? About the shelves?
CARPENTER (surlily): Give him this bill. (He hands it over.) I'll be back in the morning. (Exit CARPENTER.)
NEPHEW (calling after him, but with his eyes on MRS. MI TZU): Don't worry! Mr. Shui Ta pays on the nail!
MRS. MI TZU (looking closely at SHEN TE): I'll be happy to make his acquaintance, Miss Shen Te. (*Exit MRS. MI TZU.)*
Pause.
WIFE: By tomorrow morning she'll know more about you than you do yourself.
SISTER-IN-LAW (to NEPHEW): This thing isn't built to last.
Enter GRANDFATHER.

WIFE: It's Grandfather! (To SHEN TE:) Such a good old soul!

The BOY enters.
BOY (over his shoulder): Here they are!

WIFE: And the boy, how he's grown! But he always could eat enough for ten.

The NIECE enters.

WIFE (to SHEN TE): Our little niece from the country. There are more of us now than in your time. The less we had, the more there were of us; the more there were of us, the less we had. Give me the key. We must protect ourselves from unwanted guests. (She takes the key and locks the door.) Just make yourself at home. I'll light the little lamp.
NEPHEW (a big joke): I hope her cousin doesn't drop in tonight! The strict Mr. Shui Ta!

SISTER-IN-LAW laughs.

BROTHER (reaching for a cigarette): One cigarette more or less . . .

HUSBAND: One cigarette more or less.

They pile into the cigarettes. The BROTHER hands a jug of wine round.

NEPHEW: Mr. Shui Ta will pay for it!
GRANDFATHER (gravely, to SHEN TE): How do you do?

SHEN TE, a little taken aback by the belatedness of the greeting, bows. She has the carpenter's bill in one hand, the landlady's lease in the other.
WIFE: How about a bit of a song? To keep Shen Te's spirits up?
NEPHEW: Good idea. Grandfather: you start!

SONG OF THE SMOKE

GRANDFATHER:
I used to think (before old age beset me)
That brains could fil the pantry of the poor.
But where did all my cerebration get me?
I'm just as hungry as I was before.
So what's the use?
See the smoke float free into ever colder coldness!
It's the same with me.
HUSBAND:
The straight and narrow path leads to disaster
And so the crooked path I tried to tread.
That got me to disaster even faster.
{They say we shall be happy when we're dead.) So what's the use?
See the smoke float free
Into ever colder coldness!
It's the same with me.

NIECE:
Your older people, full of expectation,
At any moment now you'll walk the plank!
The futures for the younger generation!
Yes, even if that future is a blank. So what's the use?
See the smoke float free
Into ever colder coldness! It's the same with me.
NEPHEW (to the BROTHER): Where did you get that wine?

SISTER-IN-LAW (answering for the BROTHER): He pawned the sack of tobacco.
HUSBAND (stepping in): What? That tobacco was all we had to fall back on! You pig!

BROTHER: You'd call a man a pig because your wife was frigid! Did you refuse to drink it?

They fight. The shelves fall over.

SHEN TE (imploringly): Oh don't! Don't break everything! Take it, take it, take it all, but don't destroy a gift from the gods!

WIFE (disparagingly): This shop isn't big enough. I should never have mentioned it to Uncle and the others. When they arrive, it's going to be disgustingly over crowded.

SISTER-IN-LAW: And did you hear our gracious hostess? She cools off quick!

Voices outside. Knocking at the door.
UNCLE'S VOICE: Open the door!

WIFE: Uncle! Is that you, Uncle?

UNCLE's VOICE: Certainly, it's me. Auntie says to tell you she'll have the children here in ten minutes.

WIFE (to SHEN TE): I'll have to let him in.

SHEN TE (who scarcely hears her):
The little lifeboat is swiftly sent down. Too many men too greedily hold on to it as they drown.

1A

Wong's den in a sewer pipe.

WONG (crouching there): Al quiet! It's four days now since I left the city. The gods passed this way on the second day. I heard their steps on the bridge over there. They must be a long way off by this time, so I'm safe. (Breathing a sigh of relief, he curls up and goes to sleep. In his dream the pipe becomes transparent, and the GODS appear. Raising an arm, as if in self-defense:) I know, I know, illustrious ones! I found no one to give you a room-not in al Setzuan! There, it's out. Please continue on your way!

FIRST GOD (mildly): But you did find someone. Someone who took us in for the night, watched over us in us sleep, and in the early morning lighted us down to the street with a lamp.

WONG: It was . . . Shen Te that took you in?
THIRD GOD: Who else?
WONG: And I ran away! "She isn't coming," I thought, "she just can't afford it."

GODS (*singing*):
O you feeble, well-intentioned, and yet feeble chap Where there's need the fellow thinks there is no goodness!
When there's danger he thinks courage starts to ebb away!

Some people only see the seamy side!
What hasty judgment! What premature desperation!

WONG: I'm very *ashamed*, illustrious ones.

FIRST GOD: Do us a favor, water seller. Go back to Setzuan.
Find Shen Te, and give us a report on her. We hear that she's come into a little money. Show interest in her goodness-for no one can be good for long if goodness is not in demand. Meanwhile we shall continue the search, and find other good people. After which, the idle chatter about the impossibility of goodness will stop!

The GODS *vanish.*

2

A *knocking.*

WIFE: Shen Te! Someone at the door. Where is she anyway?

NEPHEW: She must be getting the breakfast. Mr. Shui Ta will pay for it.

The WIFE laughs and shuffles to the door. E*nte*r MR. SHUI TA *and the* CARPENTER.

WIFE: Who is it?

SHUI TA: I am Miss Shen Te's cousin.

WIFE: What?

SHUI TA: My name is Shui Ta.

WIFE: Her cousin?

NEPHEW: Her cousin?

NIECE: But that was a joke. She hasn't got a cousin.

HUSBAND: So early in the morning?

BROTHER: What's all the noise?

SISTER-IN-LAW: This fellow says he's her cousin.

BROTHER: Tell him to prove it.

NEPHEW: Right. If you're Shen Te's cousin, prove it by getting the breakfast.

SHUI TA: (whose regime begins as he puts out the lamp to save oil; loudly, to all present, asleep or awake): Would you all please get dressed! Customers will l be coming! I wish to open my shop!

HUSBAND: Your shop? Doesn't it belong to our good friend Shen Te?

SHUI TA shakes his head.

SISTER-IN-LAW: So we've been cheated. Where is the little liar?

SHUI TA: Miss Shen Te has been delayed. She wishes me to tell you there will be nothing she can do-now I am here.

WIFE (bowled over): I thought she was good!

NEPHEW: Do you have to believe him?

HUSBAND: I don't.

NEPHEW: Then do something.

HUSBAND: Certainly! I'll send out a search party at once. You, you, you, and you, go out and look for Shen Te. (As the GRANDFATHER rises and makes for the door.) Not you, Grandfather, you and I will hold the fort.

SHUI TA: You won't find Miss Shen Te. She has suspended her hospitable activity for an unlimited period. There are too many of you. She asked me to say: this is a tobacco shop, not a gold mine.
HUSBAND: Shen Te never said a thing like that. Boy, food! There's a bakery on the comer. Stuff your shirt full when they're not looking!
SISTER-IN-LAW: Don't overlook the raspberry tarts.

HUSBAND: And don't let the policeman see you.

The BOY leaves.
SHUI TA: Don't you depend on this shop now? Then why give it a bad name by stealing from the bakery?

NEPHEW: Don't listen to him. Let's find Shen Te. She'll give him a piece of her mind.

SISTER-IN-LAW: Don't forget to leave us some breakfast.

BROTHER, SISTER-IN-LAW, and NEPHEW leave.

SHUI TA {to the CARPENTER): You see, Mr. Carpenter, nothing has changed since the poet, eleven hundred years ago, penned these lines:
A governor was asked what was needed to save the freezing people in the city. He replied:
"A blanket ten thousand feet long to cover the city and all its suburbs."

He starts to tidy up the shop.

CARPENTER: Your cousin owes me money. I've got wit nesses. For the shelves.

SHUI TA: Yes, I have your bill. (He takes it out of his pocket.) Isn't a hundred silver dollars rather a lot?
CARPENTER: No deductions! I have a wife and children.

SHUI TA: How many children?

CARPENTER: Three.

SHUI TA: I'll make you an offer. Twenty silver dollars.

The HUSBAND laughs.
CARPENTER: You're crazy. Those shelves are real walnut.

SHUI TA: Very well. Take them away.
CARPENTER: What?
SHUI TA: They cost too much. Please take them away.

WIFE: Not bad! (And she, too, is laughing.)

CARPENTER (a little bewildered): Cal Shen Te, someone! (To SHUI TA:) She's good!
SHUI TA: Certainly. She's ruined.
CARPENTER (provoked into taking some of the shelves): All right, you can keep your tobacco on the floor.

SHUI TA (to the HUSBAND): Help him with the shelves.

HUSBAND (*grins and carries one shelf over to the door where the CARP ENTER now is*): Good-bye, shelves!
CARPENTER (to the HUSBAND): You dog! You want my family to starve?
SHUI TA: I repeat my offer. I have no desire to keep me tobacco on the floor. Twenty silver dollars.
CARPENTER (with desperate aggressiveness): One hundred!

SHUI TA shows indifference, looks through the window. The HUSBAND picks up several shelves.

CARPENTER (to HUSBAND): You needn't smash them against the doorpost, your idiot! (To SHUT TA:) These shelves were made to measure. They're no use anywhere else!

SHUI TA: Precisely.
The WIFE squeals with pleasure.
CARPENTER (giving up, sullenly): Take the shelves. Pay what you want to pay.

SHUI TA (*smoothly*): Twenty silver dollars.

He places two large coins on the table. The CARPENTER picks them up.

HUSBAND (brings the shelves back in): And quite enough too!
CARPENTER (slinking off): Quite enough to get drunk on.
HUSBAND (happily): Well, we got rid of him!
WIFE (weeping with fun, gives a rendition of the dialogue just spoken): "Real walnut," says he. "Very well, take them away," says his lordship. "I have three children," says he. "Twenty silver dollars," says his lordship. "They're no use anywhere else," says he. "Precisely," said his lordship! (She dissolves into shrieks of merriment.)
SHUI TA: And now: go!
HUSBAND: What's that?

SHUI TA: You're thieves, parasites. I'm giving you this chance. Go!
HUSBAND (summoning all his ancestral dignity): That sort deserves no answer. Besides, one should never shout on an empty stomach.
WIFE: Where's that boy?
SHUI TA: Exactly. The boy. I want · no stolen goods in this shop. (Very loudly.)! strongly advise you to leave! (But they remain seated, noses in the air. Quietly.) As you wish. (SHUI TA goes to the door. A POLICEMAN appears. SHUI TA bows.) I am addressing the officer in charge of this precinct?

POLICE MAN: That's right, Mr., urn, what was the name, sir?

SHUI TA: Mr. Shui Ta.

POLICEMAN: Yes, of course, sir.

They exchange a smile.

SHUI TA: Nice weather we're having. POLICEMAN: A little on the warm side, sir. SHUI TA: Oh, a little on the warm side.
HUSBAND (whispering to the WIFE): If he keeps it up till the boy's back, we're done for. (Tries to signal SHUI TA.)
SHUI TA (ignoring the signal): Weather, of course, is one thing indoors, another out on the dusty street!

POLICEMAN: Oh, quite another, sir!

WIFE (to the HUSBAND): It's all right as long as he's standing in the doorway - the boy will see him.
SHUI TA: Step inside for a moment! It's quite col indoors. My cousin and I have just opened the place. And we attach the

greatest importance to being on good terms with the, urn, authorities.
POLICEMAN (entering): Thank you, Mr. Shui Ta. It is cool!

HUSBAND (whispering to the WIFE): And now the boy won't see him.
SHUI TA (showing HUSBAND and WIFE to the POLICE MAN):
Visitors, I think my cousin knows them. They were just leaving.

HUSBAND (defeated): Ye-e-is, we were. just leaving.
SHUI TA: I'll tell my cousin you couldn't wait.

Noise from the street. Shouts of "Stop, Thief!"

POLICEMAN: What's that?

The BOY is in the doorway with cakes and buns and rolls spilling out of his shirt. The WIFE signals desperately to him to leave. He gets the idea. P
POLICEMAN: No, you don't! (He grabs the BOY by the collar.) Where's al this from?
BOY (vaguely pointing): Down the street.

POLICEMAN (grimly): So that's it. (Prepares to arrest the BOY.)
WIFE (stepping in): And we knew nothing about it. (To the BOY:) Nasty little thief!

POLICEMAN (dryly): Can you clarify the situation, Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA is silent.

POLICEMAN (who understands silence): Aha. You're all coming with me-to the station.

SHUI TA: I can hardly say how sorry I am that my establishment...

WIFE: Oh, he saw the boy leave not ten minutes ago!

SHUI TA: And to conceal the theft asked a policeman in?

POLICEMAN: Don't listen to her, Mr. Shui Ta, I'll be happy to relieve you of their presence one and al (To all three:) Out! (He drives them before him.)

GRANDFATHER (leaving last, gravely): Good morning!

POLICEMAN: Good morning!

SHUI TA, left alone, continues to tidy up. MRS. MI TZU breezes in.

MRS. MI TZU: You're her cousin, are you? Then have the goodness to explain what all this means police dragging people from a respectable house! By what right does your Miss Shen Te turn my property into a
house of assignation? -Well, as you see, I know all!

SHUI TA: Yes. My cousin has the worst possible reputation: that of being poor.

MRS. MI Tzu: No sentimental rubbish, Mr. Shui Ta. Your cousin was a common . . .

SHUI TA: Pauper. Let's use the uglier word.

MRS. MI TW: I'm speaking of her conduct, not her earnings. But there must have been earnings, or how did she buy all this? Several elderly gentlemen took care of it, I suppose. I repeat: this is a respectable house! I have tenants who prefer not to live under the same roof with such a person.

SHUI TA (quietly): How much do you want?

MRS. MI TZU (he is ahead of her now): I beg your pardon.

SHU! TA: To reassure yourself. To reassure your tenants. How much will l it cost?

MRS. MI TZU: You're a cool customer.

SHUI TA (picking up the lease): The rent is high. (He reads on.) I assume it's payable by the month?
MRS. MI TZU: Not in her case.

SHUI TA (looking up): What?
MRS. MI TZU: Six months' rent payable in advance. Two hundred silver dollars.
SHUI TA: Six . . .! Sheer usury! And where am I to find it?

MRS. MI TZU: You should have thought of that before.

shiur TA: Have you no heart, Mrs. MI Tzu? It's true Shen Te acted foolishly, being kind to all those people, but she'll improve with time. I'll see to it she does. She'll work her fingers to the bone to pay her rent, and all the time be as quiet as a mouse, as humble as a fly.

MRS. MI TZU: Her social background.

SHUI TA: Out of the depths! She came out of the depths! And before she'll go back there, she'll work, sacrifice, shrink from nothing... Such a tenant is worth her weight in gold, Mrs. MI TZU.

MRS. MI TZU: It's silver we were talking about, Mr. Shui Ta. Two hundred silver dollars or…

Enter the POLICEMAN.
POLICEMAN: Am I intruding, Mr. Shui Ta?

MRS. MI TZU: This tobacco shop is well known to the police, I see.

POLICEMAN: Mr. Shui Ta has done us a service, Mrs. MI Tzu. I am here to present our official felicitations!

MRS. MI Tzu: That means less than nothing to me, sir. Mr. Shui Ta, all I can say is: I hope your cousin will find my terms acceptable. Good day, gentlemen. (Exit.)

SHUI TA: Good day, ma'am.

Pause.
POLICEMAN: Mrs. MI Tzu a bit of a stumbling block, sir?
SHUI TA: She wants six months' rent in advance.
POLICEMAN: And you haven't got it, eh? (SHUI TA is silent.) But surely you can get it, sir? A man like you?

SHUI TA: What about a woman like Shen Te?

POLICE MAN: You're not staying, sir?
SHUI TA: No, and I won't be back. Do you smoke?

POLICEMAN (taking two cigars, and placing them both in his pocket): Thank you, sir - I see your point. Miss Te let's mince no words - Miss Shen Te lived by selling herself. "What else could she have done?" you ask. "How else was she to pay the rent?" True. But the fact remains, Mr. Shui Ta, it is not respectable. Why not? A very deep question. But, in the first place, love-love isn't bought and sold like cigars, Mr. Shui Ta. In the second place, it isn't respectable to go waltzing off with someone that's paying his way, so to speak-it must be for love! Thirdly and lastly, as the proverb has it: not for a h and full of rice but for love! (Pause. He is thinking hard.) "Well," you may say, "and what good is all this wisdom if the milk's already spilt?" Miss Shen Te is what she is. Is where she is. We have to face the fact that if she doesn't get hold of six months' rent pronto, she'll be back on the streets. The question then as I see it everything in this world is a matter of opinion-the question as I see it is: how is she _to get hold of this rent? How? Mr. Shui Ta: I don't know. (Pause.) I take that back, sir. It's just come to me. A husband. We must find her a husband!

Enter a little OLD WOMAN.

OLD WOMAN: A good cheap cigar for my husband, we'll have been married forty years tomorrow and we're having a little celebration.

SHUI TA: Forty years? And you still want to celebrate?

OLD WOMAN: As much as we can afford to. We have the carpet shop across the square. We'll be good neighbors; I hope?

SHUI TA: I hope so too.

POLICEMAN (who keeps making discoveries): Mr. Shui Ta, you know what we need? We need capital. And how do we acquire capital? We get married.

SHUI TA (to OLD WOMAN): I'm afraid I've been pestering this gentleman with my personal worries.

POLICEMAN (lyrically): We can't pay six months' rent, so what do we do? We marry money.

SHUI TA: That might not be easy.

POLICEMAN: Oh, I don't know. She's a good match. Has a nice, growing business. (To the OLD WOMAN:)

What do you think?

OLD WOMAN (undecided): Well-

POLICEMAN: Should she put an ad in the paper?

OLD WOMAN (not eager to commit herself): Well, if she agrees
POLICEMAN: I'll write it for her. You lend us a hand, and we write an ad for you! (He chuckles away to himself, takes out his notebook, wets the stump of a pencil between his lips, and writes away.)

SHUI TA (slowly): Not a bad idea.

POLICEMAN: "What . . . respectable. . . man. with small capital . . . widower . . . not excluded. . . desires . . . marriage . . . into flourishing . . . tobacco shop?" And now let's add: "Am... pretty. "No!
…"Prepossessing appearance."

SHUI TA: If you don't think that's an exaggeration?

OLD WOMAN: Oh, not a bit. I've seen her.

The POLICEMAN tears the page out of his notebook, and hands it over to SHUI TA.

SHU! TA (with horror in his voice): How much luck we need to keep our heads above water! How many ideas! How many friends! (To the POLICEMAN:) Thank you, sir, I think I see my way clear.

3

Evening in the municipal park. Noise of a plane overhead. YANG SUN, a young man in rags, is following the plane with his eyes: one can tell that the machine is describing a curve above the park. YANG SUN then takes a rope out of his pocket, looking anxiously about him as he does so. He moves toward a large will low. Enter two prostitutes, one the OLD WHORE, the other the NIECE whom we have al ready met.

NIECE: Hello. Coming with me?

YANG SUN (taken aback): If you'd like to buy me a diner.

OLD WHORE: Buy you a dinner! (To the NIECE:) Oh, we know him-it's the unemployed pilot. Waste no time on him!

NIECE: But he's the only man left in the park. And it's going to rain.

OLD WHORE: Oh, how do you know?

And they pass by. YANG SUN again looks about him, again takes his rope, and this time throws it round a branch of the will low tree. A gain he is interrupted. It is the two prostitutes returning-and in such a hurry they don't notice him.

NIECE: It's going to pour!

Enter SHEN TE.
OLD WHORE: There's that gorgon Shen Te! That drove your family out into the cold!

NIECE: It wasn't her. It was that cousin of hers. She offered to pay for the cakes. I've nothing against her.

OLD WHORE: I have, though. (So that SHEN TE can hear.) Now where could the little lady be off to? She m may be rich now but that won't stop her snatching our young men, will l it?

SHEN TE: I'm going to the tearoom by the pond.

NIECE: Is it true what they s ay? You're marrying a widower -with three children?

SHEN TE: Yes. I'm just going to see him.

YANG SUN (his patience at breaking point): Move on there! This is a park, not a whorehouse!

OLD WHORE: Shut your mouth!

But the two prostitutes leave.

YANG SUN: Even in the farthest corner of the park, even when it's raining, you can't get rid of them! (He spits.)

SHEN TE (overhearing this): And what right have you to scold them? (But at this point she sees the rope.) Oh!

YANG SUN: Well, what are you staring at?

SHEN TE: That rope. What is it for?

YANG SUN: Think! Think! I haven't a penny. Even if I had, I wouldn't spend it on you. I'd buy a drink of water.

The rain starts.

SHEN TE (still looking at the rope): What is the rope for? You mustn't!

YANG SUN: What's it to you? Clear out!

SHEN TE (irrelevantly): It's raining.

YANG SUN: Well, don't try to come under this tree.

SHEN TE: Oh, no. (She stays in the rain.)

YANG SUN: Now go away. (Pause.) For one thing, I don't like your looks, you're bowlegged.

SHEN TE (indignantly): That's not true!

YANG SUN: Well, don't show 'me to me. Look, it's raining. You better come under this tree.

Slowly, she takes shelter under the tree.

SHEN TE: Why did you want to do it?

YANG SUN: You really want to know? (Pause.) To get rid of you! (Pause.) You know what a flyer is?

SHEN TE: Oh yes, I've met a lot of pilots. At the tearoom.

YANG SUN: You call them flyers? Think they know what a machine is? Just because they have leather helmets? They gave the out sometime. "Go up to two thousand feet," tell them, "then let it fall, then pick it up again with a flick of the wrist at the last moment." Know what he'll say to that? "It's not in my contract." Then again, there's the landing problem. It's like landing on your own backside. It's no different, planes are human. Those fools don't understand. (Pause.) And I'm the biggest fool for reading the book on flying in the Peking school and skipping the page where it says: "We've got enough flyers and we don't need you." I'm a mail pilot with no mail. You understand that?

SHEN TE (shyly): Yes. I do.

YANG SUN: No, you don't. You'd never understand that.

SHEN TE: When we were little we had a crane with a broken wing. He made friends with us and was very good-natured about our jokes. He would strut along behind us and call out to stop us going too fast for him. But every spring and autumn when the cranes
flew over the villages in great swarms, he got quite restless. (Pause.) I understand that. (She bursts out crying.)

YANG SUN: Don't!

SHEN TE (quieting down): No.

YANG SUN: It's bad for the complexion.

SHEN TE (sniffing): I've stopped.

She dries her tears on her big sleeve. Leaning against the tree, but not looking at her, he reaches for her face.
YANG SUN: You can't even wipe your own face. (He is wiping it for her with his handkerchief. Pause.)

SHEN TE (still sobbing): I don't know anything!

YANG SUN: You interrupted me! What for?

SHEN TE: It's such a rainy day. You only wanted to do… that because it's such a rainy day. (To the
audience:)
In our country
The evenings should never be somber
High bridges over rivers
The gray hour between night and morning
And the long, long winter:
Such things are dangerous
For, with all the misery,
A very little is enough and men throw away an unbearable life.

Pause.

YANG SUN: Talk about yourself for a change.

SHEN TE: What about me? I have a shop.
YANG SUN (incredulous): You have a shop, have you? Never thought of walking the streets?

SHEN TE: I did walk the streets. Now I have a shop. YANG SUN (ironically): A gift of the gods, I suppose! SHEN TE: How did you know?
YANG SUN (even more ironical): One fine evening the gods turned up saying: here's some money!
SHEN TE (quickly): One fine morning.

YANG SUN (fed up): This isn't much of an entertainment.

Pause.
SHEN TE: I can play the zither a little. (Pause.) And I can mimic men. (Pause.) I got the shop, so the first thing I did was to give my zither away. I can be as stupid as a fish now, I said to myself, and it won't matter.
I'm rich now, I said
I walk alone, I sleep alone for a whole year, I said
I'll have nothing to do with a man.

YANG SUN: And now you're marrying one! The one at the tearoom by the pond?

SHEN TE is silent.

YANG SUN: What do you know about love?

SHEN TE: Everything.

YANG SUN: Nothing. (Pause.) Or d'you just mean you enjoyed it?

SHEN TE: No.

YANG SUN (again without turning to look at her, he strokes her cheek with his hand): You like that?

SHEN TE: Yes.

YANG SUN (breaking off): You're easily satisfied, I must say. (Pause.) What a town!

SHEN TE: You have no friends?

YANG SUN (defensively): Yes, I have! (Change of tone.) But they don't want to hear I'm still unemployed. "What?" they ask. "Is there still water in the sea?" You have friends?

SHEN TE (hesitating): Just a... cousin.

YANG SUN: Watch him carefully.

SHEN TE: He only came once. Then he went away. He won't be back. (YANG SUN is looking away.) But to be without hope, they say, is to be without goodness!

Pause.

YANG SUN: Go on talking. A voice is a voice.

SHEN TE: Once, when I was a little girl, I fell, with a load of brushwood. An old man picked me up. He gave me a penny too. Isn't it funny how people who don't have very much like to give some of it away? They must like to show what they can do, and how could they show it better than by being kind? Being wicked is just like being clumsy. When we sing a song, or build a machine, or plant some rice, we're being kind. Your kind.

YANG SUN: You make it sound easy.

SHEN TE: Oh, no. (Little pause.) Oh! A drop of rain!

YANG SUN: Where'd you feel it?

SHEN TE: Between the eyes.

YANG SUN: Near the right eye? Or the left?

SHEN TE: Near the left eye.
YANG SUN: Oh, good. (He is getting sleepy.) So you're through with men, eh?

SHEN TE (with a smile): But I'm not bowlegged.
YANG SUN: Perhaps not.
SHEN TE: Definitely not.
Pause.
YANG SUN (leaning wearily against the will low): I haven't had a drop to drink all day, I haven't eaten anything for two days. I couldn't love you if I tried.
Pause.

SHEN TE: I like it in the rain.
Enter WONG the water seller, singing.

THE SONG OF THE WA TER SELLER IN THE RAIN
"Buy my water," I am yelling and my fury restraining
For no water I'm selling
'Cause it's raining, 'cause it's raining!
I keep yelling: "Buy my water!" But no one's buying
Athirst and dying
And drinking and paying! Buy water!
Buy water, you dogs!
Nice to dream of lovely weather! Think of all the consternation
Were there no precipitation
Half a dozen years together!
Can't you hear them shrieking: "Water!" Pretending they adore me?
They all would go down on their knees
before me!
Down on your knees!
Go down on your knees, you dogs!
What are lawns and hedges thinking? What are fields and forests saying?
"At the clouds' breast we are drinking! And we've no idea who's paying!"
I keep yelling: "Buy my water!" But no one's buying

Athirst and dying
And drinking and paying! Buy water!
Buy water, you dogs!

The rain has stopped now. SHEN TE sees WONG and runs toward him.

SHEN TE: Wong! You're back! Your carrying pole's at the shop.

WONG: Oh, thank you, Shen Te. And how is life treating you?

SHEN TE: I've just met a brave and clever man. And I want to buy him a cup of your water.

WONG (bitterly): Throwback your head and open your mouth and you'll have all the water you need-

SHEN TE (*tenderly*):
I want your water, Wong
The water that has tired you so The water that you carried all this way The water that is hard to sell because
it's been raining.
I need it for the young man over there-he's a flyer!
A flyer is a bold man:
Braving the storms
In company with the clouds
He crosses the heavens
And brings to friends in faraway lands The friendly mail!

She pays WONG, and runs over to YANG SUN with the cup. But YANG SUN is fast asleep.

SHEN TE (*calling to WONG, with a laugh*): He' s fallen asleep! Despair and rain and I have worn him out!

3A

Wong's den. The sewer pipe is transparent, and the GODS again appear to WONG in a dream.

WONG (radiant): I've seen her, illustrious ones! And she hasn't changed!

FIRST GOD: That's good to hear.

WONG: She loves someone.

FIRST GOD: Let's hope the experience gives her the strength to stay good!

WONG: It does. She's doing good deeds all the time.

FIRST GOD: Ah? What sort? What sort of good deeds? Wong?

WONG: Well, she has a kind word for everybody.

FIRST GOD (eagerly): And then?

WONG: Hardly anyone leaves her shop without tobacco in his pocket-even if he can't pay for it.

FIRST GOD: Not bad at all. Next?

WONG: She's putting up a family of eight.

FIRST GOD (gleefully, to the SECOND GOD): Eight!
(To WONG:) And that's not all, of course!
WONG: She bought a cup of water from me even though it was raining.

FIRST GOD: Yes, yes, yes, all these smaller good deeds!
WONG: Even they run into money. A little tobacco shop doesn't make so much.
FIRST GOD (sententiously): A prudent gardener works miracles on the smallest plot.

WONG: She hands out rice every morning. That eats up half her earnings.
FIRST GOD (a little disappointed): Well, as a beginning…
WONG: They call her the Angel of the Slums-whatever the carpenter may say!

FIRST GOD: What's this? A carpenter speaks ill of her?
WONG: Oh, he only says her shelves weren't paid for in full.
SECOND GOD (who has a bad cold and can't pronounce his n's and m's): What's this? Not paying a carpenter? Why was that?

WONG: I suppose she didn't have the money.
SECOND GOD (severely): One pays what one owes, that's in our book of rules! First the letter of the law, then the spirit.

WONG: But it wasn't Shen Te, illustrious ones, it was her cousin. She called him in to help.

SECOND GOD: Then her cousin must never darken her threshold again!
WONG: Very well, illustrious ones! But in fairness to Shen Te, let me s ay that her cousin is a businessman.

FIRST GOD: Perhaps we should inquire what is customary? I find business quite unintelligible. But everybody's doing it. Business! Did the Seven Good Kings do business? Did Kung the Just sell fish?

SECOND GOD: In any case, such a thing must not occur again!

The GODS start to leave.
THIRD GOD: Forgive us for taking this tone with you, Wong, we haven't been getting enough sleep. The rich recommend us to the poor, and the poor tell us they haven't enough room.

SECOND GOD: Feeble, feeble, the best of them! FIRST GOD: No great deeds! No heroic daring! THIRD GOD: On such a small scale!
SECOND GOD: Sincere, yes, but what is actually achieved?

One can no longer hear them.

WONG (calling after them): I've thought of something,

illustrious ones: Perhaps you shouldn't ask-too much-all-at-once!

4

The square in front of Shen Te's tobacco shop. Besides Shen Te's place, two other shops are seen: the carpet shop and a barber's. Morning. Outside Shen Te's the GRAND FATHER, the SISTER-IN-LAW, the UNEMPLOYED MAN, and MRS. SHIN stand waiting.

SISTER-IN-LAW: She' s been out all night again.

MRS. SHIN: No sooner did we get rid of that crazy cousin of hers than Shen Te herself starts carrying on! Maybe she does give us an ounce of rice now and then, but can you depend on her? Can you depend on her?

Loud voices from the barber's.

VOICE OF SHU FU: What are you doing in my shop? Get out-at once!

VOICE OF WONG: But sir. They all let me sell . . .

WONG comes staggering out of the barber's shop pursued by MR. SHU FU, the barber - a fat man carrying a heavy curling iron.

SHU FU: Get out, I said! Pestering my customers with your slimy old water! Get out! Take your cup!

He holds out the cup. WONG reaches out for it. MR. SHU FU strikes his hand with the curling iron, which is hot. WONG howls.

SHU FU: You had it coming, my man!

Puffing, he returns to his shop. The UNEMPLOYED MAN picks up the cup and gives it to WONG.

UNEMPLOYED MAN: You can report that to the police.

WONG: My hand! It's smashed up! UNEMPLOYED MAN: Any bones broken? WONG: I can't move my fingers.

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Sit down. I'll put some water on it.

WONG sits.

MRS. SUN: The water won't cost you anything.

SISTER-IN-LAW: You might have got a bandage from Miss Shen Te till she took to staying out all night. It's a scandal.

MRS. SHIN (despondently): If you ask me, she's forgotten we ever existed!

Enter SHEN TE down the street, with a dish of rice.

SHEN TE (to the audience): How wonderful to see Setzuan in the early morning! I always used to stay in bed with my dirty blanket over my head afraid to wake up. This morning I saw the newspapers being de livered by little boys, the streets being washed by strong men, and fresh vegetables coming in

from the country on ox carts. It's a long walk from where Yang Sun lives, but I feel lighter at every step. They say you walk on air when you're in love, but it's even better walking on the rough earth, on the hard cement. In the early morning, the old city looks like a great heap of rubbish! Nice, though, with all its little lights. And the sky, so pink, so transparent, before the dust comes and muddies it! What a lot you miss if you never see your city rising from its slumbers like an honest old craftsman pumping his lungs full of air and reaching for his tools, as the poet says! (Cheerfully, to her waiting guests:) Good morning, everyone, here's your rice! (Distributing the rice, she comes upon WONG.) Good morning, Wong, I'm quite lightheaded today. On my way over, I looked at myself in all the shop windows. I'd love to be beautiful.

She slips into the carpet shop. MR. SHU FU has just emerged from his shop.

SHU FU (to the audience): It surprises me how beautiful Miss Shen Te is looking today! I never gave her a passing thought before. But now I've been gazing upon her comely form for exactly three minutes! I begin to suspect I am in love with her. She is overpoweringly attractive! (Crossly, to WONG:) Be off with you, rascal!

He returns to his shop. SHEN TE comes back out of the carpet shop with the OLD MAN, its proprietor, and his wife-whom we have already met-the OLD WOMAN. SHEN TE is wearing a shawl. The OLD MAN is holding up a looking glass for her.

OLD WOMAN: Isn't it lovely? We'll give you a reduction be cause there's a little hole in it.

SHEN TE (looking at another shawl on the OLD WOMAN's arm): The other one's nice too.
OLD WOMAN (smiling): Too bad there's no hole in that!
SHEN TE: That's right. My shop doesn't make very much.

OLD WOMAN: And your good deeds eat it all up! Be more careful, my dear…

SHEN TE (trying on the shawl with the hole): Just now, I'm lightheaded! Does the color suit me?

OLD WOMAN: You'd better ask a man.

SHEN TE (to the OLD MAN): Does the color suit me?

OLD MAN: You'd better ask your young friend.

SHEN TE: I'd like to have your opinion.

OLD MAN: It suits you very well. But wear it this way: the dull side out.

SHEN TE pays up.

OLD WOMAN: If you decide you don't like it, you can exchange it. (She pulls SHEN TE to one side.) Has he got money?

SHEN TE (with a laugh): Yang Sun? Oh, no.

OLD WOMAN: Then how're you going to pay your rent?

SHEN TE: I'd forgotten about that.

OLD WOMAN: And next Monday is the first of the month! Miss Shen Te, I've got something to say to you. After we (indicating her husband) got to know you, we had our doubts about that marriage ad. We thought it would be better if you'd let us help you. Out of our savings. We reckon we could lend you two hundred silver dollars. We don't need anything in writing you could pledge us your tobacco stock.
SHEN TE: You're prepared to lend money to a person like me?

OLD WOMAN: It's folks like you that need it. We'd think twice about lending anything to your cousin.

OLD MAN (coming up): All settled, my dear?

SHEN TE: I wish the gods could have heard what your wife was just saying, Mr. Ma. They're looking for good people who're happy-and helping me makes you happy because you know it was love that got me into difficulties!

The OLD COUPLE smile knowingly at each other.

OLD MAN: And here's the money, Miss Shen Te.

He hands her an envelope. SHEN TE takes it. She bows. They bow back. They return to their shop.

SHEN TE (holding up her envelope): Look, Wong, here's six months' rent! Don't you believe in miracles now? And how do you like my new shawl?

WONG: For the young fellow I saw you with in the park?

SHEN TE nods.

MRS. SHIN: Never mind all that. It's time you took a look at his hand!

SHEN TE: Have you hurt your hand?
MRS. SHIN: That barber smashed it with his hot curling iron. Right in front of our eyes.

SHEN TE (shocked at herself): And I never noticed! We must get you to a doctor this minute or who knows what will happen?

UNEMPLOYED MAN: It's not a doctor he should see, it's a judge. He can ask for compensation. The barber's filthy rich.

WONG: You think I have a chance?
MRS. SHIN (with relish): If it's really good and smashed. But is it?

WONG: I think so. It's very swollen. Could I get a pension?

MRS. SHIN: You'd need a witness.

WONG: Well, you al saw it. You could al testify.

He looks round. The UNEMPLOYED MAN, the GRAND FATHER, and the SISTER-IN-LAW are all sitting against the wall of the shop eating rice. Their concentration on eating is complete.

SHEN TE (to MRS. SHIN): You saw it yourself.

MRS. SHIN: I want nothing to do with the police. It's against my principles.
SHEN TE (to SISTER-IN-LAW): What about you?

SISTE R-IN-LAW: Me? I wasn't looking.

SHEN TE (to the GRANDFATHER, coaxingly): Grandfather, you'll testify, won't you?

SISTER-IN-LAW: And a lot of good that will do. He's simple-minded.
SHEN TE (to the UNEMPLOYED MAN): You seem to be the only witness left.

UNEMP LOYED MAN: My testimony would only hurt him. I've been picked up twice for begging.

SHEN TE: Your brother is assaulted, and you shut your eyes? He is hit, cries out in pain, and you are silent? The beast prowls, chooses and seizes his victim, and
you say: "Because we showed no displeasure, he has spared us." If no one present will be a witness, I will. I'll say I saw it.

MRS. SHIN (*solemnly*): The name for that is perjury.

WONG: I don't know if I can accept that. Though maybe I'll have to. (Looking at his hand.) Is it swollen enough, do you think? The swelling's not going down?

UNEMP LOYED MAN: No, no. the swelling's holding up well.

WONG: Yes. It's more swollen if anything. Maybe my wrist is broken after al. I'd better see a judge at once.

Holding his hand very carefully, and fixing his eyes on it, he runs off. MRS. SHIN goes quickly into the barber's shop.
UNEMPLOYED MAN (seeing her): She IS getting on the right side of Mr. Shu Fu.
SISTER-IN-LAW: You and I can't change the world, Shen Te.

SHEN TE: Go away! Go away all of you!

The UNEMPLOYED MAN, the SISTER-IN-LAW, and the GRANDFATHER stalk off, eating and sulking.

TO THE AUDIENCE: They've stopped answering
They stay put
They do as they're told
They don't care
Nothing can make them look up
But the smell of food.

Enter MRS. YANG, Yang Sun's mother, out of breath.

MRS. YANG: Miss Shen Te. My son has told me every thing. I am Mrs. Yang, Sun's mother. Just think. He's got an offer. Of a job as a pilot. A letter has just come. From the director of the airfield in Peking!

SHEN TE: So he can fly again? Isn't that wonderful!

MRS. YANG (less breathlessly all the time): They won't give him the job for nothing. They want five hundred silver dollars.

SHEN TE: We can't let money stand in his way, Mrs. Yang!

MRS. YANG: If only you could help him out!

SHEN TE: I have the shop. I can try! (She embraces MRS. YANG.) I happen to have two hundred with me now. Take it. (She gives her the old couple's money.)
It was a loan but they said I could repay it with
my tobacco stock.

MRS. YANG: And they were call Sun the Dead Pilot of Setzuan! A friend in need!

SHEN TE: We must find another three hundred.

MRS YANG: How?
SHEN TE: Let me think. (Slowly.) I know someone who can help. I didn't want to call on his services again, he's hard and cunning. But a flyer must fly. And I'll make this the last time.

Distant sound of a plane.

MRS. YANG: If the man you mentioned can do it. Oh, look, there's the morning mail plane, heading for Peking!

SHEN TE: The pilot can see us, let's wave!

They wave. The noise of the engine is louder.

MRS. YANG: You know that pilot up there?

SHEN TE: Wave, Mrs. Yang! I know the pilot who will be up there. He gave up hope. But he'll do it now. One man to raise himself above the misery, above us all. (To the audience:)
Yang Sun, my lover:
Braving the storms
In company with the clouds
Crossing the heavens
And bringing to friends in faraway lands The friendly mail!

4a

In front of the inner curtain. Enter SHEN TE, carrying Shui Ta's mask. She sings.

THE SONG OF DEFENSELESSNESS
In our country
A useful man needs luck
Only if he finds strong backers Can he prove himself useful.
The good can't defend themselves and

Even the gods are defenseless.
Oh, why don't the gods have their own ammunition and launch against badness their own expedition Enthroning the good and preventing sedition
And bringing the world to a peaceful condition?
Oh, why don't the gods do the buying and selling
Injustice forbidding, starvation dispelling
Give bread to each city and j oy to each dwelling? Oh, why don't the gods do the buying and selling?

She puts on SHUI TA's mask and sings in his voice.

You can only help one of your luckless brothers
By trampling down a dozen others.
Why is it the gods do not feel indignation
And come down in fury to end exploitation
Defeat all defeat and forbid desperation
Refusing to tolerate such toleration?
Why is it?

5

Shen Te's tobacco shop. Behind the counter, MR. SHUI TA, reading the paper. MRS. SHIN is cleaning up. She talks and he takes no notice.

MRS. SHIN: And when certain rumors get about, what happens to a little place like this? It goes to pot. I know. So, if you want my advice, Mr. Shui Ta, find out just what has been going on between Miss Shen Te and that Yang Sun from Yellow Street. And remember: a certain interest in Miss Shen Te has been expressed by the barber next door, a man with twelve houses and only one wife, who, for that matter, is likely to drop off at any time. A certain interest has been expressed. He was even inquiring about her means and, if that doesn't prove a man is getting serious, what would? (Still getting no response, she leaves with her bucket.)
YANG SUN's VOICE: Is that Miss Shen Te's tobacco shop?
MRS. SHIN's VOICE: Yes, it is, but it's Mr. Shui Ta who's here today.

SHUI TA runs to the mirror with the short, light steps of SHEN TE, and is just about to start primping, when he realizes his mistake, and turns away, with a short laugh.
Enter YANG SUN.
MRS. SHIN enters behind him and slips into the back room to eavesdrop.

YANG. SUN: I am Yang Sun. (SHUI TA bows.) Is Shen Te in?
SHUI TA: No.

YANG SUN: I guess you know our relationship? (He is inspecting the stock.) Quite a place! And I thought she was just talking big. I'll be flying again, all right. (He takes a cigar, solicits and receives a light from SHUI TA.) You think we can squeeze the other three hundred out of the tobacco stock?

SHUI TA: May I ask if it is your intention to sell at once?

YANG SUN: It was decent of her to come out with the two hundred but they aren't much use with the other three

hundred still missing.

SHUI TA: Shen Te was overhasty promising so much. She might have to sell the shop itself to raise it. Haste, they say, is the wind that blows the house down.

YANG SUN: Oh, she isn't a girl to keep a man waiting. For one thing or the other, if you take my meaning.

SHUI TA: I take your meaning.

YANG SUN (leering): Uh, huh.

SHUI TA: Would you explain what the five hundred silver dollars are for?

YANG SUN: Want to sound me out? Very well. The director of the Peking airfield is a friend of mine from flying school. I give him five hundred: he gets me the job.

SHUI TA: The price is high.
YANG SUN: Not as these things go. He'll have to fire one of the present pilots-for negligence. Only the man he has in mind isn't negligent. Not easy, you understand. You needn't mention that part of it to Shen Te.

SHUI TA (looking intently at YANG SUN): Mr. Yang Sun, you are asking my cousin to give up her possessions, leave her friends, and place her entire fate in your h ands. I presume you intend to marry her?

YANG SUN: I'd be prepared to.

Slight pause.

SHUI TA: Those two hundred silver dollars would pay the rent here for six months. If you were Shen Te wouldn't you be tempted to continue in business?

YANG SUN: What? Can you imagine Yang Sun the flyer behind a counter? (In an oily voice.) "A strong cigar or a mild one, worthy sir?" Not in this century!

SHUI TA: My cousin wishes to follow the promptings of her heart, and, from her own point of view, she may even have what is called the right to love. Accordingly, she has commissioned me to help you to this post. There is nothing here that I am not empowered to turn immediately into cash. Mrs. MI Tzu, the landlady, will advise me about the s ale.

Enter MRS. MI TZU.

MRS. MI TZU: Good morning, Mr. Shui Ta, you wish to see me about the rent? As you know it falls due the day after tomorrow.
SHUI TA: Circumstances have changed, Mrs. MI Tzu: my cousin is getting married. Her future husband here, Mr. Yang Sun, will be taking her to Peking. I am interested in selling the tobacco stock.

MRS. MI TZU: How much are you asking, Mr. Shui Ta?

YANG SUN: Three hundred sill-…

SHUI TA: Five hundred silver dollars.

MRS. MI Tzu: How much did she pay for it, Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA: A thousand. And very little has been sold.

MRS. MI TZU: She was robbed. But I'll make you a special offer if you'll promise to be out by the day after tomorrow. Three hundred silver dollars.

YANG SUN (shrugging): Take it, man, take it.

SHUI TA: It is not enough.

YANG SUN: Why not? Why not? Certainly, it's enough.

SHUI TA: Five hundred silver dollars.

YANG SUN: But why? We only need three!

SHUI TA (to MRS. MI TZU): Excuse me. (Takes YANG SUN on one side.) The tobacco stock is pledged to the old couple who gave my cousin the two hundred.

YANG SUN: Is it in writing?
SHUI TA: No.

YANG SUN (to MRS. MI TZU): Three hundred will do.
MRS. MI TZU: Of course, I need an assurance that Miss Shen Te is not in debt.

YANG SUN: Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA: She is not in debt.
YANG SUN: When can you let us have the money?
MRS. MI Tzu: The day after tomorrow. And remember: I'm doing this because I have a soft spot in my heart for young lovers! (Exit.)

YANG SUN (calling after her): Boxes, jars and sacks-three hundred for the lot and the pain's over! (To SHUI TA:) Where else can we raise money by the day after tomorrow?

SHUI TA: Nowhere. Haven't you enough for the trip and the first few weeks?

YANG SUN: Oh, certainly.

SHUI TA: How much, exactly.
YANG SUN: Oh, I'll dig it up, even if I have to steal it.
SHUI TA: I see.

YANG SUN: Well, don't fall off the roof. I'll get to Peking somehow.

SHUI TA: Two people can't travel for nothing.

YANG SUN (not giving SHUI TA a chance to answer): I'm leaving her behind. No milestones round my neck!
SHU! TA: Oh.

YANG SUN: Don't look at me like that!

SHUI TA: How precisely is my cousin to live?

YANG SUN: Oh, you'll think of something.

SHUI TA: A small request, Mr. Yang Sun. Leave the two hundred silver dollars here until you can show me two tickets for Peking.

YANG SUN: You learn to mind your own business, Mr. Shui Ta.

SHUI TA: I'm afraid Miss Shen Te may not wish to sell the shop when she discovers that…

YANG SUN: You don't know women. She'll want to. Even then.
SHUI TA (a slight outburst): She is a human being, sir! And not devoid of common sense!

YANG SUN: Shen Te is a woman: she is devoid of common sense. I only have to lay my hand on her shoulder, and church bells ring.

SHUI TA (with difficulty): Mr. Yang Sun!

YANG SUN: Mr. Shui Whatever-it-is!
SHUI TA: My cousin is devoted to you…because…

YANG SUN: Because I have my hands on her breasts. Give me a cigar. (He takes one for himself, stuffs a few more in his pocket, then changes his mind and takes the whole box.) Tell her I'll marry her, then bring me the three hundred. Or let her bring it. One or the other. *(Exit)*
MRS. SHIN (sticking her head out of the back room): Well, he has your cousin under his thumb, and doesn't care if al Yellow Street knows it!

SHUI TA (crying out): I've lost my shop! And he doesn't love me! (He runs berserk through the room, repeating these lines incoherently. Then stops suddenly, and addresses MRS. SHIN.) Mrs. Shin, you grew up in the gutter, like me. Are we lacking in hardness? I doubt it. If you steal a penny from me, I'll take you by the throat till you spit it out! You'd do the same to me. The times are bad, this city is hell, but we're like ants, we keep coming, up and up the walls, however smooth! Till bad luck comes. Being in love, for instance. One weakness is enough, and love is the deadliest.

MRS. SHIN (emerging from the back room): You should have a little talk with Mr. Shu Fu, the barber. He's a real gentleman and just the thing for your cousin. (She runs off.)

SHUI TA:
A caress becomes a stranglehold
A sigh of love turns to a cry of fear
Why are there vultures circling in the air?
A girl is going to meet her lover.

SHUI TA sits down and MR. SHU FU enters with MRS. SHIN.

SHUI TA: Mr. Shu Fu?
SHU FU: Mr. Shui Ta.

They both bow.
SHUI TA: I am told that you have expressed a certain inter Est in my cousin Shen Te. Let me set aside all propriety and confess: she is at this moment in grave danger.
SHU FU: Oh, dear!

SHUI TA: She has lost her shop, Mr. Shu Fu.

SHU FU: The charm of Miss Shen Te, Mr. Shui Ta, derives from the goodness, not of her shop, but of her heart. Men call her the Angel of the Slums.

SHU! TA: Yet her goodness has cost her two hundred silver dollars in a single day: we must put a stop to it.

SHU FU: Permit me to differ, Mr. Shui Ta. Let us, rather, open wide the gates to such goodness! Every morning, with pleasure tinged by affection, I watch her charitable ministrations. For they are hungry, and she giveth them to eat! Four of them, to be precise. Why only four? I ask. Why not four hundred? I hear she has been seeking shelter for the homeless. What about my humble cabins behind the cattle run? They are at her disposal. And so forth. And so on. Mr. Shui Ta, do you think Miss Shen Te could be persuaded to listen to certain ideas of mine? Ideas like these?

SHUI TA: Mr. Shu Fu, she would be honored.

Enter WONG and the POLICEMAN. MR. SHU FU turns abruptly away and studies the shelves.

WONG: Is Miss Shen Te here?

SHUI TA: No.
WONG: I am Wong the water seller. You are Mr. Shui Ta?
SHUI TA: I am.

WONG: I am a friend of Shen Te's.

SHUI TA: An intimate friend, I hear.

WONG (to the POLICEMAN): You see? (To SHUI TA:) It's because of my hand.

POLICEMAN: He hurt his hand, sir, that's a fact.

SHUI TA (quickly): You need a sling, I see. (He takes a shawl from the back room, and throws it to WONG.)

WONG: But that's her new shawl!

SHUI TA: She has no more use for it.

WONG: But she bought it to please someone!
SHUI TA: It happens to be no longer necessary.

WONG (making the sling): She is my only witness.

POLICEMAN: Mr. Shui Ta, your cousin is supposed to have seen the barber hit the water seller with a curling iron.

SHUI TA: I'm afraid my cousin was not present at the time.
WONG: But she was, sir! Just ask her! Isn't she in?
SHUI TA (gravely): Mr. Wong, my cousin has her own troubles. You wouldn't wish her to add to them by committing perjury?

WONG: But it was she that told me to go to the judge!

SHUI TA: Was the judge supposed to heal your hand?

MR. SHU FU turns quickly around. SHUI TA bows to SHU FU, and vice versa.

WONG (taking the sling off, and putting it back): I see how it is.

POLICEMAN: Well, I'll be on my way. (To WONG: And you be careful. If Mr. Shu Fu wasn't a man who tempers justice with mercy, as the saying is, you'd be in jail for libel. Be off with you!

Exit WONG, followed by POLICEMAN. SHUI TA: Profound apologies, Mr. Shu Fu.
SHU FU: Not at all, Mr. Shui Ta. (Pointing to the shawl.) The episode is over?

SHUI TA: It may take her time to recover. There are some fresh wounds.

SHU FU: We shall be discreet. Delicate. A short vacation could be arranged. . .

SHUI TA: First of course, you and she would have to talk things over.

SHU FU: At a small supper in a small, but high-class, restaurant.

SHUI TA: I'll go and find her. (Exit into back room.)

MRS. SHIN (sticking her head in again): Time for congratulations, Mr. Shu Fu?
SHU FU: Ah, Mrs. Shin! Please inform Miss Shen Te's guests they may take shelter in the cabins behind the cattle run!

MRS. SHIN nods, grinning.

SHU FU (to the audience): Well? What do you think of me, ladies and gentlemen? What could a man do more? Could he be less selfish? More farsighted? A small supper in a small but . . . Does that bring rather vulgar and clumsy thoughts into your mind? Ts, ts, ts. Nothing of the sort will occur. She won't even be touched. Not even accidentally while passing the salt. An exchange of ideas only. Over the flowers on the table-white chrysanthemums, by the way (he writes down a note of this) -yes, over the white chrysanthemums, two

young souls will . . . shall I say "find each other"? We shall NOT exploit the misfortune of others. Understanding? Yes. An offer of assistance? Certainly. But quietly. Almost inaudibly. Perhaps with a single glance. A glance that could also - also mean more.

MRS. SHIN (coming forward): Everything under control, Mr. Shu Fu?

SHU FU: Oh, Mrs. Shin, what do you know about this worthless rascal Yang Sun?

MRS. SHIN: Why, he's the most worthless rascal.
SHU FU: Is he really? You're sure? (As she opens her mouth.) From now on, he doesn't exist! Can't be found anywhere!

Enter YANG SUN.

YANG SUN: What's been going on here?

MRS. SHIN: shall I call Mr. Shui Ta, Mr. Shu Fu? He wouldn't want strangers in here!

SHU FU: Mr. Shui Ta is in conference with Miss Shen Te. Not to be disturbed.

YANG SUN: Shen Te here? I didn't see her come in. What kind of conference?

SHU FU (not letting him enter the back room): Patience, dear sir! And if by chance I have an inkling who you are, pray take note that Miss Shen Te and I are about to announce our engagement.

YANG SUN: What?

MRS. SHIN: You didn't expect that, did you?

YANG SUN is trying to push past the barber into the back room when SHEN TE comes out.

SHU FU: My dear Shen Te, ten thousand apologies! Per haps you . . .

YANG SUN: What is it, Shen Te? Have you gone crazy?

SHEN TE (breathless): My cousin and Mr. Shu Fu have come to an understanding. They wish me to hear Mr. Shu Fu's plans for helping the poor.

YANG SUN: Your cousin wants to part us.

SHEN TE: Yes.
YANG SUN: And you've agreed to it?
SHEN TE: Yes.

YANG SUN: They told you I was bad. (SHEN TE is silent.) And suppose I am. Does that make me need you less? I'm low, Shen Te, I have no money, I don't do the right thing but at least I put up a fight! (He is near her now, and speaks in an undertone.) Have you no eyes? Look at him. Have you

forgotten already?

SHEN TE: No.

YANG SUN: How it was raining?

SHEN TE: No.

YANG SUN: How you cut me down from the willow tree? Bought me water? Promised me money to fly with?

SHEN TE (shakily): Yang Sun, what do you want?

YANG SUN: I want you to come with me.

SHEN TE (in a small voice): Forgive me, Mr. Shu Fu, I want to go with Mr. Yang Sun.

YANG SUN: We're lovers you know. Give me the key to the shop. (SHEN TE takes the key from around her neck. YANG SUN puts it on the counter. To MRS. SHIN:) Leave it under the mat when you're through. Let's go, Shen Te.
SHU FU: But this is rape! Mr. Shui Tal!
YANG SUN (to SHEN TE): Tell him not to shout.
SHEN TE: Please don't shout for my cousin, Mr. Shu Fu. He doesn't agree with me, I know, but he's wrong.
(To the audience:)
I want to go with the man I love
I don't want to count the cost
I don't want to consider if it's wise
I don't want to know if he loves me
I want to go with the man I love.

YANG SUN: That's the spirit.

And the couple leave.

5a

In front of the inner curtain. SHEN TE in her wedding clothes, on the way to her wedding.

SHEN TE: Something terrible has happened. As I left the shop with Yang Sun, I found the old carpet dealer's wife waiting on the street, trembling all over. She told me her husband had taken to his bed sick with all the worry and excitement over the two hundred silver dollars they lent me. She said it would be best if I gave it back now. Of course, I had to s ay I would. She said she couldn't quite trust my cousin Shui Ta or even my fiancé Yang Sun. There were tears in her eyes. With my emotions in an uproar, I threw myself into Yang Sun's arms, I couldn't resist him. The things he'd said to Shui Ta had taught Shen Te nothing. Sinking into his arms, I said to myself:
To let no one, perish, not even oneself
To fill everyone with happiness, even oneself Is so good
How could I have forgotten those two old people? Yang Sun swept me away like a small hurricane. But he's not a bad m an, and he loves me. He'd rather work in the cement factory than owe his flying to a crime. Though, of course, flying is a great passion with Sun. Now, on the way to my· wedding, I waver between fear and joy.

6

The "private dining room" on the upper floor of a cheap restaurant in a poor section of town. With SHEN TE: the GRANDFATHER, the SISTER-IN-LAW, the NIECE, MRS. SHIN,
the UNEMPLOYED MAN. In a corner, alone, a PRIEST. A WAITER pouring wine. Downstage, YANG SUN talking to his MOTHER. He wears a dinner jacket.

YANG SUN: Bad news, Mamma. She came right out and told me she can't sell the shop for me. Some idiot is bringing a claim because he lent her the two hundred she gave you.

MRS. YANG: What did you say? Of course, you can't marry her now.

YANG SUN: It's no use saying anything to her. I've sent for her cousin, Mr. Shui Ta. He said there was nothing in writing.

MRS. YANG: Good idea. I'll go and look for him. Keep an eye on things.

Exit MRS. YANG. SHEN TE has been pouring wine.

SHEN TE (to the audience, pitcher in hand): I wasn't mistaken in him. He's bearing up well. Though it must have been an awful blow-giving up flying. I do love him so. (Calling across the room to him:) Sun, you haven't drunk a toast with the bride!

YANG SUN: What do we drink to?

SHEN TE: Why, to the future!

YANG sun: When the bridegroom's dinner jacket the expected guest hasn't arrived. The PRIEST shuts
the book with a bang, and makes for the door.

MRS. YANG: Where are you off to? It's only a matter of minutes.

PRIEST (watch in hand): Time goes on, Mrs. Yang, and I've another wedding to attend to. Also a funeral.

MRS. YANG (irately): D'you think we planned it this way? I was hoping to manage with one pitcher of wine, and we've run through two already. (Points to empty pitcher. Loudly.) My dear Shen Te, I don't know where your cousin can be keeping himself!

SHEN TE: My cousin?!

MRS. YANG: Certainly. I'm old-fashioned enough to think such a close relative should attend the wedding.

SHEN TE: Oh, Sun, is it the three hundred silver dollars?
YANG SUN (not looking her in the eye): Are you deaf? Mother says she's old-fashioned. And I say I'm considerate. We'll wait

another fifteen minutes.

HUSBAND: Another fifteen minutes.

MRS. YANG (addressing the company): Now you all know, don't you, that my son is getting a job as a mail pilot?

SISTER-IN-LAW: In Peking, too, isn't it?

MRS. YANG: In Peking, too! The two of us are moving to Peking!

SHEN TE: Sun, tell your mother Peking is out of the question won't be a hired one!

SHEN TE: But when the bride's dress will still get rained on sometimes!

YANG SUN: To everything we ever wished for!

SHEN TE: May all our dreams come true!

They drink.

YANG SUN (with loud conviviality): And now, friends, before the wedding gets under way, I have to ask the bride a few questions. I've no idea what kind of wife she'll make, and it worries me. (Wheeling on SHEN TE.) For example, can you make five cups of tea with three tea leaves?
SHEN TE: No.

YANG SUN: So I won't be getting very much tea. Can you sleep on a straw mattress the size of that book? (He points to the large volume the PRIEST is reading.)

SHEN TE: The two of us? YANG SUN: The one of you. SHEN TE: In that case, no.
YANG SUN: What a wife! I'm shocked!

While the audience is laughing, his MOTHER returns. With a shrug of her shoulders, she tells YANG SUN now.

YANG SUN: Your cousin'll tell her. If he agrees. I don't agree.

SHEN TE (amazed, and dismayed): Sun!

YANG SUN: I hate this godforsaken Setzuan. What people! Know what they look like when I half close my eyes? Horses! Whining, fretting, stamping, screwing their necks up! (Loudly.) And what is it the thunder says? They are superfluous! (He hammers out the syllables.) They've run their last race! They can go trample themselves to death! (Pause.) I've got to get out of here.

SHEN TE: But I've promised the money to the old couple.

YANG SUN: And since you always do the wrong thing, it's lucky your cousin's coming. Have another drink.

SHEN TE (quietly): My cousin can't be coming.

YANG SUN: How d'you mean?

SHEN TE: My cousin can't be where I am.

YANG SUN: Quite a conundrum!

SHEN TE (desperately): Sun, I'm the one that loves you. Not my cousin. He was thinking of the job in Peking when he promised you the old couple's money-

YANG SUN: Right. And that's why he's bringing the three hundred silver dollars. Here-to my wedding.
SHEN TE: He is not bringing the three hundred silver dollars.

YANG SUN: Huh? What makes you think that?
SHEN TE (looking into his eyes): He says you only bought one ticket to Peking.

Short pause.

YANG SUN: That was yesterday. (He pulls two tickets part way out of his inside pocket, making her look under his coat.) Two tickets. I don't want Mother to know. She'll get left behind. I sold her furniture to buy these tickets, so you see…

SHEN TE: But what's to become of the old couple?

YANG SUN: What's to become of me? Have another drink. Or do you believe in moderation? If I drink, I fly again. And if you drink, you may learn to understand me.

SHEN TE: You want to fly. But I can't help you.

YANG SUN: "Here's a plane, my darling-but it's only got one wing!"

The WAITER enters.

WAITER: Mrs. Yang!

MRS. YANG: Yes?

WAITER: Another pitcher of wine, ma'am?

MRS. YANG: We have enough, thanks. Drinking makes me sweat.

WAITER: Would you mind paying, ma'am?

MRS. YANG (to everyone): Just be patient a few moments longer, everyone, Mr. Shui Ta is on his way over! (To the WAITER:) Don't be a spoilsport.
WAITER: I can't let you leave till you've paid your bill, ma'am.

MRS. YANG: But they know me here!

WAITER: That's just it.

PRIEST (ponderously getting up): I humbly take my leave. (And he does.)

MRS. YANG (to the others, desperately): Stay where you are,

everybody! The priest says he'll be back in two minutes!

YANG SUN: It's no good, Mamma. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Shui Ta still hasn't arrived and the priest has gone home. We won't detain you any longer.

They are leaving now.

GRANDFATHER (in the doorway, having forgotten to put his glass down): To the bride! (He drinks, puts down the glass, and follows the others.)

Pause.

SHEN TE: Shall I go too?
YANG SUN: You? Aren't you the bride? Isn't this your wedding? (He drags her across the room, tearing her wedding dress.) If we can wait, you can wait. Mother calls me her falcon. She wants to see me in the clouds.
But I think it may be St. Nevercome's Day before she'll go to the door and see my plane thunder by. (Pause. He pretends the guests are still present.) Why such a lull in the conversation, ladies and gentlemen? Don't you like it here? The ceremony is only slightly postponed-because an important guest is expected at any moment. Also because the bride doesn't know what love is. While we're waiting, the bridegroom will sing a little song. (He does so.)
THE SONG OF ST. NEVERCOME'S DA Y
On a certain day, as is generally known,
One and all will be shouting: Hooray, hooray! For the beggar maid's son has a solid-gold throne
And the day is St. Nevercome's Day
On St. Nevercome's, Nevercome's, Nevercome's Day He'll sit on his solid-gold throne
Oh, hooray, hooray! That day goodness will pay!
That day badness will cost you your head!
And merit and money will smile and be funny While exchanging salt and bread
On St. Nevercome's, Nevercome's, Nevercome's Day While exchanging salt and bread
And the grass, oh, the grass will look down at the sky and the pebbles will roll up the stream
And all men will be good without batting an eye They will make of our earth a dream
On St. Nevercome's, Nevercome's, Nevercome's Day They will make of our earth a dream
And as for me, that's the day I shall be A flyer and one of the best
Unemployed man, you will l have work to do Washerwoman, you'll get your rest
On St. Nevercome's, Nevercome's, Nevercome's Day
Washerwoman, you'll get your rest
MRS. YANG: It looks like he's not coming.

The three of them sit looking at the door.

6a

Wong's den. The sewer pipe is again transparent and again the GODS appear to WONG in a dream.

WONG: I'm so glad you've come, illustrious ones. It's Shen

Te. She's in great trouble from following the rule about loving thy neighbor. Perhaps she's too good for this world!

FIRST GOD: Nonsense! You are eaten up by lice and doubts!

WONG: Forgive me, illustrious one, I only meant you might deign to intervene.

FIRST GOD: Out of the question! My colleague here intervened in some squabble or other only yesterday. (He points to the THIRD GOD who has a black eye.) The results are before us!

WONG: She had to call on her cousin again. But not even he could help. I'm afraid the shop is done for.

THIRD GOD (a little concerned): Perhaps we should help after all?

FIRST GOD: The gods help those that help themselves.
WONG: What if we can't help ourselves, illustrious ones?

Slight pause.

SECOND GOD: Try, anyway! Suffering ennobles!

FIRST GOD: Our faith in Shen Te is unshaken!

THIRD GOD: We certainly haven't found any other good people. You can see where we spend our nights from the straw on our clothes.

WONG: You might help her find her way by
FIRST GOD: The good man finds his own way here below!

SECOND GOD: The good woman too.

FIRST GOD: The heavier the burden, the greater her strength!

THIRD GOD: We're only onlookers, you know.

FIRST GOD: And everything will be all right in the end, ye of little faith!

They are gradually disappearing through these last lines.

7

The yard behind Shen Te's shop. A few articles of furniture on a cart. SHEN TE and MRS. SHIN are taking the washing off the line.

MRS. SHIN: If you ask me, you should fight tooth and nail to keep the shop.

SHEN TE: How can I? I have to sell the tobacco to pay back the two hundred silver dollars today.

MRS. SHIN: No husband, no tobacco, no house and home! What are you going to live on?

SHEN TE: I can work. I can sort tobacco.

MRS. SHIN: Hey, look, Mr. Shui Ta's trousers! He must have left here stark naked!

SHEN TE: Oh, he may have another pair, Mrs. Shin.
MRS. SHIN: But if he's gone for good as your s ay, why has he left his p ants behind?

SHEN TE: Maybe he's thrown them away.

MRS. SHIN: Can I take them?

SHEN TE: Oh, no.

Enter MR. SHU FU, running.

SHU FU: Not a word! Total silence! I know all. You have sacrificed your own love and happiness so as not to hurt a dear old couple who had put their trust in you! Not in vain does this district-for all its malevolent tongues-call you the Angel of the Slums! That young man couldn't rise to your level, so you left him. And now, when I see you closing up the little shop, that veritable haven of rest for the multitude, well, I can not, I cannot let it pass. Morning after morning I have stood watching in the doorway not unmoved-while you graciously handed out rice to the wretched. Is that never to happen again? Is the good woman of Setzuan to disappear? If only you would allow me to assist you! Now don't say anything! No assurances, no exclamations of gratitude! (He has taken out his checkbook.) Here! A blank check. (He places it on the cart.) Just my signature. Fil it out as you wish. Any sum in the world. I herewith retire from the scene, quietly, unobtrusively, making no claims, on tiptoe, full of veneration, absolutely selflessly. (He has gone.)

MRS. SHIN: Well! You're saved. There's always some idiot of a man. . .. Now hurry! Put down a thousand silver dollars and let me fly to the bank before he comes to his senses.

SHEN TE: I can pay you for the washing without any check.

MRS. SHIN: What? You're not going to cash it just because you might have to marry him? Are you crazy? Men like him want to be led by the nose! Are you still thinking of that flyer? All Yellow Street knows how he treated you!

SHEN TE:
When I heard his cunning laugh, I was afraid
But when I saw the holes in his shoes, I loved him dearly.

MRS. SHIN: Defending that good-for-nothing after all that's happened!

SHEN TE (staggering as she holds some of the washing):
Oh!

MRS. SHIN (taking the washing from her, dryly): So you feel dizzy when you stretch and bend? There couldn't be a little visitor on the way? If that's it, you can for get Mr. Shu Fu's blank check: it wasn't meant for a christening present!

She goes to the back with a basket. SHEN TE's eyes follow MRS. SHIN for a moment. Then she looks down at her own body, feels her stomach, and a great joy comes into her eyes.

SHEN TE: O joy! A new human being is on the way. The world awaits him. In the cities the people say: he's got to be reckoned with, this new human being! (She imagines a little boy to be present, and introduces him to the audience.) This is my son, the well-known flyer!
Say: Welcome
To the conqueror of unknown mountains and unreachable regions
Who brings us our mail across the impassable deserts!
She leads him up and down by the hand.
Take a look at the world, my son. That's a tree. Tree, yes. Say: "Hello, tree!" And bow. Like this. (She bows.) Now you know each other. And, look, here comes the water seller. He's a friend, give him your hand. A cup of fresh water for my little son, please. Yes, it is a warm day. (Handing the cup.) Oh dear, a policeman, we'll have to make a circle round him. Perhaps we can pick a few cherries over there in the rich Mr. Pang's garden. But we mustn't be seen. You want cherries? Just like children with fathers. No, no, you can't go straight at them like that. Don't pull. We must learn to be reasonable. Well, have it your own way. (She has let him make for the cherries.) Can you reach? Where to put them? Your mouth is the best place. (She tries one herself.) Mm, they're good. But the policeman, we must run! (They run.) Yes, back to the street. Calm now, so no one will notice us. (Walking the street with her child, she sings.)

Once a plum-'twas in Japan Made a conquest of a man
But the man's turn soon did come for he gobbled up the plum

Enter WONG, with a CHILD by the hand. He coughs.

SHEN TE: Wong!

WONG: It's about the carpenter, Shen Te. He's lost his shop, and he's been drinking. His children are on the streets. This is one. Can you help?

SHEN TE (to the CHILD): Come here, little man. (Takes him down to the footlights. To the audience:)
You there! A man is asking you for shelter!
A man of tomorrow says: what about today? His friend the conqueror, whom you know, Is his advocate!
(To WONG:) He can live in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins. I may have to go there myself. I'm going to have a baby. That's a secret--don't tell Yang Sun-we'd only be in his way. Can you find the carpenter for me?

WONG: I knew you'd think of something. (To the CHILD:) Good-bye, son, I'm going for your father.
SHEN TE: What about your hand, Wong? I wanted to help, but my cousin . . .

WONG: Oh, I can get along with one hand, don't worry. (He shows how he can handle his pole with his left hand alone.)

SHEN TE: But your right hand! Look, take this cart, sell

everything that's on it, and go to the doctor with the money . . .

WONG: She's still good. But first I'll bring the carpenter. I'll pick up the cart when I get back. (Exit WONG.)

SHEN TE (to the CHILD): Sit down over here, son, till your father comes.

The CHILD sits cross-legged on the ground. Enter the HUSBAND and WIFE, each dragging a large, full sack.

WIFE (*furtively*): You're alone, Shen Te, dear?
SHEN TE nods. The WIFE beckons to the NEPHEW off stage. He comes on with another sack.

WIFE: Your cousin's away? (SHEN TE nods.) He's not coming back?

SHEN TE: No. I'm giving up the shop.
WIFE: That's why we're here. We want to know if we can leave these things in your new home. Will you do us this favor?

SHEN TE: Why, yes, I'd be glad to.

HUSBAND (cryptically): And if anyone asks about them, say they're yours.

SHEN TE: Would anyone ask?

WIFE (with a glance back at her husband): Oh, someone might. The police, for instance. They don't seem to like us. Where can we put it?

SHEN TE: Well, I'd rather not get in any more trouble
WIFE: Listen to her! The good woman of Setzuan!

SHEN TE is silent.

HUSBAND: There's enough tobacco in those sacks to give us a new start in life. We could have our own tobacco factory!
SHEN TE (slowly): You'll have to put them in the back room.

The sacks are taken off-stage, while the CHILD is alone. Shyly glancing about him, he goes to the garbage can, starts playing with the contents, and eating some of the scraps. The others return.

WIFE: We're counting on you, Shen Te!

SHEN TE: Yes. (She sees the CHILD and is shocked.)

HUSBAND: We'll see you in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins.

NEPHEW: The day after tomorrow.

SHEN TE: Yes. Now, go. Go! I'm not feeling well.

Exeunt all three, virtually pushed off.
He is eating the refuse in the garbage can! Only look at his little gray mouth!
Pause. Music.
As this is the world my son will enter

I will study to defend him.
To be good to you, my son,
I shall be a tigress to all others
If I have to.
And I shall have to.

She starts to go.
One more time, then. I hope really the last.

Exit SHEN TE, taking Shui Ta's trousers. MRS. SHIN enters and watches her with marked interest. Enter the SISTER-IN-LAW and the GRANDFATHER.

SISTER-IN-LAW: So it's true, the shop has closed down. And the furniture's in the back yard. It's the end of the road!

MRS. SHIN (pompously): The fruit of high living, selfish ness, and sensuality! Down the primrose path to Mr. Shu Fu's cabins-with you!

SISTER-IN-LAW: Cabins? Rat holes! He gave them to us because his soap supplies only went moldy there!

Enter the UNEMPLOYED MAN.
UNEMPLOYED MAN: Shen Te is moving?

SISTER-IN-LAW: Yes. She was sneaking away.

MRS. SHIN: She's ashamed of herself, and no wonder!

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Tell her to call Mr. Shui Ta or she's done for this time!

SISTER-IN-LAW: Tell her to call Mr. Shui Ta or we're done for this time.

Enter WONG and CARPENTER, the latter with a CHILD on each hand.

CARPENTER: So we'll have a roof over our heads for a change!

MRS. SHIN: Roof? Whose roof?

CARPENTER: Mr. Shu Fu's cabins. And we have little Feng to thank for it. (FENG, we find, is the name of the CHILD already there; his FATHER now takes him. To the other two:) Bow to your little brother, you two!

The CARPENTER and the two new arrivals bow to FENG. Enter SHUI TA.
UNEMPLOYED MAN: Tsst! Mr. Shui Ta!
Pause.

SHUI TA: And what is this crowd here for, may I ask?
WONG: How do you do, Mr. Shui Ta. This is the carpenter. Miss Shen Te promised him space in Mr. Shu Fu's cabins.

SHUI TA: That will not be possible.

CARPENTER: We can't go there after all?

SHUI TA: Al the space is needed for other purposes.

SISTER-IN-LAW: You mean we have to get out? But we've got nowhere to go.

SHUI TA: Miss Shen Te finds it possible to provide employment. If the proposition interests you, you may stay in the cabins.

SISTER-IN-LAW (with distaste): You mean work? Work for Miss Shen Te?

SHUI TA: Making tobacco, yes. There are three bales here already. Would you like to get them?

SISTER-IN-LAW (trying to bluster): We have our own tobacco! We were in the tobacco business before you were born!

SHUI TA (to the CARPENTER and the UNEMP LOYED MAN):
You don't have your own tobacco. What about you?

The CARPENTER and the UNEMP LOYED MAN get the point, and go for the sacks. Enter MRS. MI TZU.

MRS. MI Tzu: Mr. Shui Ta? I've brought you your three hundred silver dollars.

SHUI TA: I'll sign your lease instead. I've decided not to sell.

MRS. MI TZU: What? You don't need the money for that flyer?
SHUI TA: No.

MRS. MI Tzu: And you can pay six months' rent?

SHUI TA (takes the barber's blank check from the cart and fills it out): Here is a check for ten thousand silver dollars. On Mr. Shu Fu's account. Look! (He shows her the signature on the check.) Your six months' rent will be in your hands by seven this evening. And now, if you'll excuse me.

MRS. MI TZU: So it's Mr. Shu Fu now. The: flyer has been given his walking papers. These modem girls! In my day they'd have said she was: flighty. That poor, deserted Mr. Yang Sun!

Exit MRS. MI TZU. The CARPENTER and the UNEMPLOYED MAN drag the three sacks back on the stage.

CARPENTER (to SHUI TA): I don't know why I'm doing this for you.

SHUI TA: Perhaps your children want to eat, Mr. Carpenter.

SISTER-IN-LAW (catching sight of the sacks): Was my brother-in-law here?

MRS. SHIN: Yes, he was.
SISTER-IN-LAW: I thought as much. I know those sacks! That's our tobacco!

SHUI TA: Really? I thought it came from my back room! Shall we consult the police on the point?
SISTER-IN-LAW (defeated): No.
SHUI TA: Perhaps you will show me the way to Mr. Shu Fu's cabins?

Taking FENG by the hand, SHUI TA goes off, followed by the CARPENTER and his two older children, the SISTER-IN-LAW, the GRANDFATHER, and the UNEMPLOYED MAN. Each of the last three drags a sack. Enter OLD MAN and OLD WOMAN.

MRS. SHIN: A pair of pants-missing from the clothesline one minute-and next minute on the honorable back side of Mr. Shui Ta.

OLD WOMAN: We thought Miss Shen Te was here.

MRS. SHIN (preoccupied): Well, she's not.

OLD MAN: There was something she was going to give us.

WONG: She was going to help me too. (Looking at his hand.) It'll be too late soon. But she'll be back. This cousin has never stayed long.
MRS. SHIN (approaching a conclusion): No, be hasn't, has he?

7a
The Sewer Pipe: WONG asleep. In his dream, he tells the GODS his fears. The GODS seem tired from all their travels. They stop for a moment and look over their shoulders at the water seller.

WONG: illustrious ones. I've been having a bad dream. Our beloved Shen Te was in great distress in the rushes down by the river-the spot where the bodies of suicides are washed up. She kept staggering and holding her head down as if she was carrying something and it was dragging her down into the mud. When I called out to her, she said she bad to take your Book of Rules to the other side, and not get it wet, or the ink would all come off. You bad talked to her about the virtues, you know, the time she gave you shelter in Setzuan.
THIRD GOD: Well, but what do you suggest, my dear Wong?

WONG: Maybe a little relaxation of the rules, Benevolent One, in view of the bad times.

THIRD GOD: As for instance?

WONG: Well, um, good will, for instance, might do instead of love?

TIDRD GOD: I'm afraid that would create new problems.

WONG: Or, instead of justice, good sportsmanship?

THIRD GOD: That would only mean more work.
WONG: Instead of honor, outward propriety?

THIRD GOD: Still more work! No, no! The rules will have to stand, my dear Wong!
Wearily shaking their heads, all three journey on.

Shui Ta's tobacco factory in Shu Fu's cabins. Huddled together behind bars, several families, mostly women and children. Among these people the SISTER-IN-LAW, the GRANDFATHER, the CARPENTER, and his THREE CHILDREN.
Enter MRS. YANG followed by YANG SUN.

MRS. YANG (to the audience): There's something I just have to tell you: strength and wisdom are wonderful things. The strong and wise Mr. Shui Ta has trans formed my son from a dissipated good-for-nothing into a model citizen. As you may have heard, Mr. Shui Ta opened a small tobacco factory near the cattle runs. It flourished. Three months Ago-I shall never forget It-I asked for an appointment, and Mr. Shui Ta agreed to see us-me and my son. I can see him now as he came through the door to meet us.

Enter SHUI TA from a door.

SHUI TA: What can I do for you, Mrs. Yang?

MRS. YANG: This morning the police came to the house. We find you've brought an action for breach of promise of marriage. In the name of Shen Te. You also claim that Sun came by two hundred silver dollars by improper means.

SHUI TA: That is correct.

MRS. YANG: Mr. Shui Ta, the money' s all gone. When the Peking job didn't materialize, he ran through it all in

three days. I know he's a good-for-nothing. He sold my furniture. He was moving to Peking without me. Miss Shen Te thought highly of him at one time.
SHUI TA: What do you say, Mr. Yang Sun?

YANG SUN: The money's gone.

SHUI TA (to MRS. YANG): Mrs. Yang, in consideration of my cousin's incomprehensible weakness for your son, I am prepared to give him another chance. He can have a job-here. The two hundred silver dollars will be taken out of his wages.

YANG SUN: So it's the factory or jail?

SHUI TA: Take your choice.

YANG SUN: May I speak with Shen Te?

SHUI TA: You may not.
Pause.
YANG SUN (sullenly): Show me where to go.

MRS. YANG: Mr. Shui Ta, you are kindness itself: the gods will reward you! (To YANG SUN:) And honest work will make a man of you, my boy. (YANG SUN follows SHUI TA into the factory. MRS, YANG comes down again to the footlights.) Actually, honest work didn't agree with him-at first. And he got no opportunity to distinguish himself till in the third week-when the wages were being paid.

SHUI TA has a bag of money. Standing next to his foreman -the former UNEMPLOYED MAN - he counts out the wages. It is YANG SUN's turn.
UNEMPL OYED MAN (reading): Carpenter, six silver dollars. Yang Sun, six silver dollars.

YANG SUN (quietly): Excuse me, sir. I don't think it can be more than five. May I see? (He takes the foreman's list.) It says six working days. But that's a mistake, sir. I took a day off for court business. And I won't take what I haven't earned, however miserable the pay is!

UNEMPLOYED MAN: Yang Sun. Five silver dollars. (To SHUI TA:) A rare case, Mr. Shui Tal

SHUI TA: How is it the book says six when it should say five?

UNEMPLOYED MAN: I must've made a mistake, Mr. Shui Ta. (With a look at YANG SUN.) It won't happen again.

SHUI TA (taking YAN G SUN aside): You don't hold back, do you? You give your all to the firm. You're even honest. Do the foreman's mistakes always favor the workers?

YANG SUN: He does have. friends.
SHUI TA: Thank you. May I offer you any little recompense?

YANG SUN: Give me a trial period of one week, and I'll prove my intelligence is worth more to you than my strength.

MRS. YANG (still down at the footlights): Fighting words, fighting words! That evening, I said to Sun: "If you're a flyer, then fly, my falcon! Rise in the world!" And

he got to be foreman. Yes, in Mr. Shui Ta's tobacco factory, he worked real miracles.

We see YANG SUN with his legs apart standing behind the workers who are handing along a basket of raw tobacco above their heads.

YANG SUN: Faster! Faster! You, there, d'you think you can just stand around, now you're not foreman anymore? It'll be your job to lead us in song. Sing!

UNEMPLOYED MAN starts singing. The others join in the refrain.

SONG OF THE EIGHTH ELEPHANT
Chang had seven elephants-all much the same but then there was Little Brother
The seven, they were wild, Little Brother, he was tame
And to guard them Chang chose Little Brother Run faster!
Mr. Chang has a forest park
Which must be cleared before tonight
And already it's growing dark!
When the seven elephants cleared that forest park Mr. Chang rode high on Little Brother
While the seven toiled and moiled till dark
On his big behind sat Little Brother Dig faster!
Mr. Chang has a forest park

Which must be cleared before tonight
And already it's growing dark!
And the seven elephants worked many an hour
Till none of them could work another
Old Chang, he looked sour, on the seven he did glower
But gave a pound of rice to Little Brother

What was that?
Mr. Chang has a forest park
Which must be cleared before tonight and already it's growing dark!
And the seven elephants hadn't any tusks
The one that had the tusks was Little Brother Seven are no match for one, if the one has a gun!
How old Chang did laugh at Little Brother!
Keep on digging!
Mr. Chang has a forest park
Which must be cleared before tonight and already it's growing dark!

Smoking a cigar, SHUI TA strolls by. YANG SUN, laughing, has joined in the refrain of the third stanza and speeded up the tempo of the last stanza by clapping his hands.

MRS. YANG: And that's why I say: strength and wisdom are wonderful things. It took the strong and wise Mr. Shui Ta to bring out the best in Yang Sun. A real superior man is like a bell. If you ring it, it rings, and if you don't, it doesn't, as the saying is.

Shen Te's shop, now an office with club chairs and fine carpets. It is raining. SHUI TA, now fat, is just dismissing the OLD MAN and OLD WOMAN. MRS. SHIN, in obviously new clothes, looks on, smirking.
SHUI TA: No! I can NOT tell you when we expect her back.
OLD WOMAN: The two hundred silver dollars came today. In an envelope. There was no letter, but it must be from Shen Te. We want to write and thank her. May we have her address?

SHUI TA: I'm afraid I haven't got it.
OLD MAN (pulling OLD WOMAN's sleeve): Let's be going.

OLD WOMAN: She's got to come back some time!

They move off, uncertainly, worried. SHUI TA bows.

MRS. SHIN: They lost the carpet shop because they couldn't pay their taxes. The money arrived too late.
SHUI TA: They could have come to me.
MRS. SHIN: People don't like coming to you.

SHUI TA (sits suddenly, one hand to his head): I'm dizzy.

MRS. SHIN: After all, you are in your seventh month. But old Mrs. Shin will be there in your hour of trial! (She cackles feebly.)
SHUI TA (in a stifled voice): Can I count on that?
MRS. SHIN: We all have our price, and mine won't be too high for the great Mr. Shui Ta! (She opens SHUI TA's collar.)

SHUI TA: It's for the child's face. All of this.

MRS. SHIN: "All for the child," of course.

SHUI TA: I'm so fat. People must notice.

MRS. SHIN: Oh no, they think it's cause you're rich.
SHUI TA (more feelingly): What will happen to the child?

MRS. SHIN: You ask that nine times a day. Why, it'll have the best that money can buy!

SHUI TA: He must never see Shui Ta.

MRS. SHIN: Oh, no. Always Shen Te.

SHUI TA: What about the neighbors? There are rumors, aren't there?

MRS. SHIN: As long as Mr. Shu Fu doesn't find out, there's nothing to worry about. Drink this.

Enter YANG SUN in a smart business suit, and carrying a businessman's briefcase. SHUI TA is more or less in MRS. SHIN's arms.

YANG SUN (surprised): I guess I'm in the way.

SHUI TA (ignoring this, rises with an effort): Till tomorrow, Mrs. Shin.

MRS. SHIN leaves with a smile, putting her new gloves on.

YANG SUN: Gloves now! She couldn't be fleecing you? And since when did you have a private life? (Taking a paper from the briefcase.) You haven't been at your desk lately, and things are getting out of hand. The police want to close us down. They say that at the most they can only permit twice the lawful number of workers.

SHUI TA (evasively): The cabins are quite good enough.
YANG SUN: For the workers maybe, not for the tobacco. They're too damp. We must take over some of Mrs. MI Tzu's buildings.

SHUI TA: Her price is double what I can pay.

YANG SUN: Not unconditionally. If she has me to stroke her knees she'll come down.

SHUI TA: I'll never agree to that.

YANG SUN: What's wrong? Is it the rain? You get so irritable whenever it rains.

SHUI TA: Never! I will never
YANG SUN: Mrs. MI Tzu will be here in five minutes. You fix it. And Shu Fu will be with her. … What's all that noise?
During the above dialogue, WONG is heard off-stage, calling: "The good Shen Te, where is she? Which of you has seen Shen Te, good people? Where is Shen Te?"
A knock. Enter WONG.

WONG: Mr. Shui Ta, I've come to ask when Miss Shen Te will

l be back, it's six months now. There are rumors. People say something's happened to her.
SHUI TA: I'm busy. Come back next week.

WONG (excited): In the morning there was always rice on her doorstep for the needy. It's been there again lately!

SHUI TA: And what do people conclude from this?

WONG: That Shen Te is still in Setzuan She's been… (He breaks off.)

SHUI TA: She's been what? Mr. Wong, if you're Shen Te's friend, talk a little less about her, that's my advice to you.

WONG: I don't want your advice! Before she disappeared, Miss Shen Te told me something very important she's pregnant!

YANG SUN: What? What was that?

SHUI TA (quickly): The man is lying.

WONG: A good woman isn't so easily forgotten, Mr. Shui Ta.

He leaves. SHUI TA goes quickly into the back room.
YANG SUN (to the audience): Shen Te pregnant? So that's why. Her cousin sent her away, so I wouldn't get wind of it. I have a son, a Yang appears on the scene, and
what happens? Mother and child vanish into thin air! That scoundrel, that unspeakable. (The sound of sobbing is heard from the back room.) What was that? Someone sobbing? Who was it? Mr. Shui Ta the Tobacco King doesn't weep his heart out. And where does the rice come from that's on the doorstep in the morning? (SHUI TA returns. He goes to the door and looks out into the rain.) Where is she?

SHUI TA: Sh! It's nine o'clock. But the rain's so heavy, you can't hear a thing.

YANG SUN: What do you want to hear?

SHUI TA: The mail plane.

YANG SUN: What?!

SHUI TA: I've been told you wanted to fly at one time. Is that all forgotten?

YANG SUN: Flying mail is night work. I prefer the daytime. And the firm is very dear to me-after al it belongs to my ex-fiancée, even if she's not around. And she's not, is she?

SHUI TA: What do you mean by that?

YANG SUN: Oh, well, let's s ay I haven't altogether-lost interest.
SHUI TA: My cousin might like to know that.

YANG SUN: I might not be indifferent - if I found she was being kept under lock and key.

SHU! TA: By whom?

YANG SUN: By you.
SHUI TA: What could you do about it?

YANG SUN: I could submit for discussion-my position in the firm.

SHUI TA: You are now my manager. In return for a more . . . appropriate position, you might agree to drop the inquiry into your ex-fiancée's whereabouts?

YANG SUN: I might.

SHUI TA: What position would be more appropriate?

YANG SUN: The one at the top.

SHUI TA: My own? (Silence.) And if I preferred to throw you out on your neck?

YANG SUN: I'd come back on my feet. With suitable escort.

SHUI TA: The police?

YANG SUN: The police.

SHUI TA: And when the police found no one?

YANG SUN: I might ask them not to overlook the back room. (Ending the pretense.) In short, Mr. Shui Ta, my interest in this young woman has not been officially terminated. I should like to see more of her. (Into SHUI TA's face :) Besides, she's pregnant and needs a friend. (He moves to the door.) I shall talk about it with the water seller.

Exit. SHUI TA is rigid for a moment, then he quickly goes into the

back room. He returns with Shen Te's belongings: underwear, etc. He takes a long look at the shawl of the previous scene. He then wraps the things in a bundle, which, upon hearing a noise, he hides under the table. Enter MRS. MI TZU and MR. SHU FU. They put away their umbrellas and galoshes.

MRS. MI Tzu: I thought your manager was here, Mr. Shui Ta. He combines charm with business in a way that can only be to the advantage of all of us.

SHU FU: You sent for us, Mr. Shui Ta?

SHUI TA: The factory is in trouble.

SHU FU: It always is.

SHUI TA : The police are threatening to close us down unless I can show that the extension of our facilities is imminent.

SHU FU: Shui Ta, I'm sick and tired of your constantly expanding projects. I place cabins at your cousin's disposal; you make a factory of them. I hand your cousin a check; you

present it. Your cousin disappears; you find the cabins too small and start talking of yet more-

SHUI TA: Mr. Shu Fu, I'm authorized to inform you that Miss Shen Te's return is now imminent.

SHU FU: Imminent? It's becoming his favorite word.

MRS. MI TZU: Yes, what does it mean?
SHUI TA: Mrs. MI Tzu, I can pay you exactly half what you asked for your buildings. Are you ready to inform the police that I am taking them over?
MRS MI TZU: Certainly, if I can take over your manager.

SHU FU: What?

MRS. MI TZU: He's SO efficient.

SHUI TA: I'm afraid I need Mr. Yang Sun.

MRS. MI TZU: So do I.

SHUI TA: He will call on you tomorrow.

SHU FU: So much the better. With Shen Te likely to turn up at any moment, the presence of that young man is hardly in good taste.

SHUI TA: So we have reached a settlement. In what was once the good Shen Te's little shop we are laying the foundations for the great Mr. Shui Ta's twelve magnificent super tobacco markets. You will bear in mind that though they call me the Tobacco King of Setzuan, it is my cousin's interests that have been served . . .

VOICES (off): The police, the police! Going to the tobacco shop! Something must have happened!
Enter YANG SUN, WONG and the POLICEMAN.
POLICE MAN: Quiet there, quiet, quiet! (They quiet down.) I'm sorry, Mr. Shui Ta, but there's a report that you've been depriving Miss Shen Te of her freedom. Not that I believe all I hear, but the whole city's in an uproar.

SHUI TA: That's a lie.

POLICEMAN: Mr. Yang Sun has testified that he heard someone sobbing in the back room.
SHU FU: Mrs. MI Tzu and myself will testify that no one here has been sobbing.

MRS. MI Tzu: We have been quietly smoking our cigars.

POLICE MAN: Mr. Shui Ta, I'm afraid I shall have to take a look at that room. (He does so. The room is empty.) No one there, of course, sir.
YANG SUN: But I heard sobbing. What's that? (He finds the clothes.)
WONG: Those are Shen Te's things. (To crowd:) Shen Te's clothes are here!

VOICES (off, in sequence):

-Shen Te's clothes!
-They've been found under the table!
-Body of murdered girl still missing!
-Tobacco King suspected!

POLICEMAN: Mr. Shui Ta, unless you can tell us where the girl is, I'll have to ask you to come along.
SHUI TA: I do not know.

POLICEMAN: I can't say how sorry I am, Mr. Shui Ta. (He shows him the door.)

SHUI TA: Everything will be cleared up in no time. There are still judges in Setzuan?

YANG SUN: I heard sobbing!

9a
Wong's den. For the last time, the GODS appear to the water seller in his dream. They have changed and show signs of a long journey, extreme fatigue, and plenty of mishaps. The FIRST no longer has a hat; the THIRD has lost a leg; all three are barefoot.

WONG: Illustrious ones, at last you're here. Shen Te's been gone for months and today her cousin's been arrested. They think he murdered her to get the shop. But I had a dream and in this dream Shen Te said her cousin was keeping her prisoner. You must find her for us, illustrious ones!

FIRST GOD: We've found very few good people anywhere, and even they didn't keep it up. Shen Te is still the only one that stayed good.

SECOND GOD: If she has stayed good.

WONG: Certainly she has. But she's vanished.

FIRST GOD: That's the last straw. All is lost!

SECOND GOD: A little moderation, dear colleague!

FIRST GOD (plaintively): What's the good of moderation now? If she can't be found, we'll have to resign! The world is a terrible place! Nothing but misery, vulgarity, and waste! Even the countryside isn't what it used to be. The trees are getting their heads chopped off by telephone wires, and there's such a noise from all the gunfire, and I can't stand those heavy clouds of smoke, and-

THIRD GOD: The place is absolutely unlivable! Good intentions bring people to the brink of the abyss, and good deeds push them over the edge. I'm afraid our book of rules is destined for the scrap heap-

SECOND GOD: It's people! They're a worthless lot!

THIRD GOD: The world is too cold!

SECOND GOD: It's people! They're too weak!

FIRST GOD: Dignity, dear colleagues, dignity! Never despair!

As for this world, didn't we agree that we only have to find one human being who can stand the place? Well, we found her. True, we lost her again. We must find her again, that's all! And at once!

They disappear.

10

Courtroom. Groups: SHU FU and MRS. MI TZU; YANG SUN and MRS. YANG; WONG, the CARPENTER, the GRAND FATHER, the NIE CE, the OLD MAN, the OLD WOMAN; MRS. SHIN, the POLICE MAN; the UNEMP LOYED MAN, the SISTER IN-LAW.

OLD MAN: So much power isn't good for one man.

UNEMP LOYED MAN: And he's going to open twelve super tobacco markets!
WIFE: One of the judges is a friend of Mr. Shu Fu's.
SISTER-IN-LAW: Another one accepted a present from Mr. Shui Ta only last night. A great fat goose.
OLD WOMAN (to WONG): And Shen Te is nowhere to be found.

WONG: Only the gods will ever know the truth.
POLICEMAN: Order in the court! My lords the judges!

Enter the THREE GODS in judges' robes. We overhear their conversation as they pass along the footlights to their bench.

THIRD GOD: We'll never get away with it; our certificates were so badly forged.
SECOND GOD: My predecessor's "sudden indigestion" will certainly cause comment.

FIRST GOD: But he had just e Aten a whole goose.
UNEMPLOYED MAN: Look at that! New judges. WONG: New judges. And what good ones!
The THIRD GOD hears this, and turns to smile at WONG. The GODS sit. The FIRST GOD beats on the bench with his gavel. The POLICEMAN brings in SHUI TA who walks with lordly steps. He is whistled at.
POLICEMAN (to SHUI TA): Be prepared for a surprise. The judges have been changed.

SHUI TA turns quickly round, looks at them, and staggers.

NIECE: What's the matter now?

WIFE: The great Tobacco King nearly fainted. HUSBAND: Yes, as soon as he saw the new judges. WONG: Does he know who they are?
SHUI TA picks himself up, and the proceedings open.

FIRST GOD: Defendant Shui Ta, you are accused of doing away with your cousin Shen Te in order to take possession of her business. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?
SHUI TA: Not guilty, my lord.

FIRST GOD (thumbing through the documents of the case): The first witness is the policeman. I shall ask him to tell us something of the respective reputations of Miss

Shen Te and Mr. Shui Ta.

POLICEMAN: Miss Shen Te was a young lady who aimed to please, my lord. She liked to live and let live, as the saying goes. Mr. Shui Ta, on the other hand, is a man of principle. Though the generosity of Miss Shen Te forced him at times to abandon half measures, un like the girl he was always on the side of the law, my lord. One time, he even unmasked a gang of thieves to whom his too trustful cousin had given shelter. The evidence, in short, my lord, proves that Mr. Shui Ta was incapable of the crime of which he stands accused!

FIRST GOD: I see. And are there others who could testify along, shall we say, the same lines?

SHU FU rises.

POLICEMAN (whispering to GODS): Mr. Shu Fu-a very important person.

FIRST GOD (inviting him to speak): Mr. Shu Fu!

SHU FU: Mr. Shui Ta is a businessman, my lord. Need I say more?
FIRST GOD: Yes.

SHU FU: Very well, I will l. He is Vice President of the Council of Commerce and is about to be elected a Justice of the Peace. (He returns to his seat.)

MRS. MI TZU rises.

WONG: Elected! He gave him the job!

With a gesture the FIRST GOD asks who MRS. MI TZU is.

POLICEMAN: Another very important person. Mrs. MI Tzu.

MRS. MI TZU: My lord, as Chairman of the Committee on Social Work, I wish to call attention to just a couple of eloquent facts: Mr. Shui Ta not only has erected a model factory with model housing in our city, he is a regular contributor to our home for the disabled. (She returns to her seat.)

POLICE MAN (whispering): And she's a great friend of the judge that ate the goose!

FIRST GOD (to the POLICEMAN): Oh, thank you. What next? (To the Court, genially:) Oh, yes. We should find out if any of the evidence is less favorable to the defendant.

WONG, the CARPENTER, the OLD MAN, the OLD WOMAN,
the UNEMPLOYED MAN, the SISTER-IN-LAW, and the NIECE come forward.

POLICEMAN (whispering): Just the riffraff, my lord.

FIRST GOD (addressing the "riffraff). Well, um, riffraff do you know anything of the defendant, Mr. Shui Ta?

WONG: Too much, my lord.

UNEMPLOYED MAN: What don't We know, my lord.

CARPENTER: He ruined US. SISTER-IN-LAW: He's a cheat.
NIECE: Liar.
WIFE: Thief.

BOY: Blackmailer.
BROTHER: Murderer.

FIRST GOD: Thank you. We should now let the defendant state his point of view.
SHUI TA: I only came on the scene when Shen Te was in danger of losing what I had understood was a gift from the gods. Because I did the filthy jobs which someone had to do, they hate me. My activities were restricted to the minimum my lord.

SISTER-IN-LAW: He had US arrested!

SHUI TA: Certainly. You stole from the bakery!

SISTER-IN-LAW: Such concern for the bakery! You didn't want the shop for yourself, I suppose!

SHUI TA: I didn't want the shop overrun with parasites.

SISTER-IN-LAW: We had nowhere else to go.

SHUI TA: There were too many of you.

WONG: What about this old couple: Were they parasites?

OLD MAN: We lost our shop because of you!

OLD WOMAN: And we gave your cousin money!

SHUI TA: My cousin's fiancé was a flyer. The money had to go to him.

WONG: Did you care whether he flew or not? Did you care whether she married him or not? You wanted her to marry someone else! (He points at SHU FU.)
SHUI TA: The flyer unexpectedly turned out to be a scoundrel.

YANG SUN (jumping up): Which was the reason you made him your manager?
SHUI TA: Later on he improved.

WONG: And when he improved, you sold him to her? (He points out MRS. MI TZU.)

SHU! TA: She wouldn't let me have her premises unless
she had him to stroke her knees!

MRS. MI Tzu: What? The man's a pathological liar. (To him:) Don't mention my property to me as long as you live! Murderer! (She rustles off, in high dudgeon.)

YANG SUN (pushing in): My lord, I wish to speak for the defendant.

SISTER-IN-LAW: Naturally. He's your employer.

UNEMP LOYED MAN: And the worst slave driver in the country.

MRS. YANG: That's a lie! My lord, Mr. Shui Ta is a great man. He . . .

YANG SUN: He's this and he's that, but he is not a murderer, my lord. Just fifteen minutes before his arrest I heard Shen Te's voice in his own back room.
FIRST GOD: Oh? Tell us more!

YANG SUN: I heard sobbing, my lord!

FIRST GOD: But lots of women sob, we've been finding.

YANG SUN: Could I fail to recognize her voice?

SHU FU: No, you made her sob so often yourself, young man!

YANG SUN: Yes. But I also made her happy. Till he (pointing at SHUI TA) decided to sell her to you!

SHUI TA: Because you didn't love her.

WONG: Oh, no: it was for the money, my lord!

SHUI TA: And what was the money for, my lord? For the poor! And for Shen Te so she could go on being good!

WONG: For the poor? That he sent to his sweatshops? And why didn't you let Shen Te be good when you signed the big check?

SHUI TA: For the child's sake, my lord.

CARPENTER: What about my children? What did he do about them?

SHUI TA is silent.

WONG: The shop was to be a fountain of goodness. That was the gods' idea. You came and spoiled it!

SHUI TA: If I hadn't, it would have run dry!

MRS. SHIN: There's a lot in that, my lord.
WONG: What have you done with the good Shen Te, bad man? She was good, my lords, she was, I swear it!
(He raises his hand in an oath.)

THIRD GOD: What's happened to your hand, water seller?

WONG (pointing to SHUI TA): It's all his fault, my lord, she was going to send me to a doctor- (To SHUI TA:) You were her worst enemy!

SHUI TA: I was her only friend!
WONG: Where is she then? Tell us where your good friend is!
The excitement of this exchange has run through the whole crowd.

ALL: Yes, where is she? Where is Shen Te? (Etc.)

SHUI TA: Shen Te... had to go.

WONG: Where? Where to?

SHUI TA: I cannot tell you! I cannot tell you!

ALL: Why? Why did she have to go away? (Etc.)
WONG (into the din with the first words, but talking on beyond the others): Why not, why not? Why did she have to go away?

SHUI TA (shouting): Because you'd all have tom her to shreds, that's why! My lords, I have a request. Clear the court! When only the judges remain, I will make a confession.

ALL (except WONG, who is silent, struck by the new turn of events): So he's guilty? He's confessing! (Etc.)
FIRST GOD (using the gavel): Clear the court!

POLICEMAN: Clear the court!

WONG: Mr. Shui Ta has met his match this time.

MRS. SHIN (with a gesture toward the judges): You're in for a little surprise.

The court is cleared. Silence.

SHUI TA: illustrious ones!

The GODS look at each other, not quite believing their ears.

SHUI TA: Yes, I recognize you!

SECOND GOD (taking matters in hand, sternly): What have you done with our good woman of Setzuan?

SHUI TA: I have a terrible confession to make: I am she! (He takes off his mask, and tears away his clothes. SHEN TE stands there.)

SECOND GOD: Shen Te

SHEN TE: Shen Te, yes. Shui Ta and Shen Te. Both.
Your injunction
To be good and yet to live Was a thunderbolt:
It has tom me in two
I can't tell how it was but to be good to others
And myself at the same time
I could not do it
Your world is not an easy one, illustrious ones!
When we extend our hand to a beggar, he tears it off for us
When we help the lost, we are lost ourselves

And so
Since not to eat is to die
Who can long refuse to be bad?
As I lay prostrate beneath the weight of good intentions
Ruin stared me · in the face
It was when I was unjust that I ate good meat and hobnobbed with the mighty
Why?
Why are bad deeds rewarded? Good ones punished?
I enjoyed giving
I truly wished to be the Angel of the Slums
But washed by a foster mother in the water of the gutter
I developed a sharp eye
The time came when pity was a thorn in my side and, later, when kind words turned to ashes in me mouth
And anger took over
I became a wolf
Find me guilty, then, illustrious ones,
But know:
All that I have done I did
To help my neighbor to love my lover
And to keep my little one from w ant
For your great, godly deeds, I was too poor, too small.
Pause.
FIRST GOD (shocked): Don' t go on making yourself miser able, Shen Tel We're overjoyed to have found you!
SHEN TE: I'm telling you I'm the bad man who committed all those crimes!

FIRST GOD (using-or failing to use-his ear trumpet): The good woman who did all those good deeds?

SHEN TE: Yes, but the bad man too!

FIRST GOD (as if something had dawned): Unfortunate coincidences! Heartless neighbors!

THIRD GOD (shouting in his ear): But how is she to continue?

FIRST GOD: Continue? Well, she's a strong, healthy girl.

SECOND GOD: You didn't hear what she said!

FIRST GOD: I heard every word! She is confused, that's all (He begins to bluster.) And what about this bool of rules-we can't renounce our rules, can we? (More quietly.) Should the world be changed? How? By whom? The world should not be changed! (At a sign from him, the lights turn pink, and music plays.) * [2]
And now the hour of parting is at hand. Dost thou behold, Shen Te, yon fleecy cloud?
It is our chariot. At a sign from me
'Twil come and take us back from whence we came Above the azure vault and silver stars.
SHEN TE: No! Don't go, illustrious ones!

[2] * The rest of this scene has been adapted for the many American theatres that do not have "fly-space" to lower things from ropes.

FIRST GOD:
Our cloud has landed now in yonder field
From which it will l transport us back to heaven. Farewell,
Shen Te, let not thy courage fail thee.

Exeunt GODS.

SHEN TE: What about the old couple? They've lost their shop! What about the water seller and his hand? And I've got to defend myself against the barber, because I don't love him! And against Sun, because I do love him! How? How?

SHEN TE's eyes follow the GODS as they are imagined to step into a cloud which rises and moves forward over the orchestra and up beyond the balcony.

FIRST GOD (from on high): We have faith in you, Shen Te!

SHEN TE: There'll be a child. And he'll have to be fed. I can't stay here. Where shall I go?
FIRST GOD: Continue to be good, good woman of Setzuan!
SHEN TE: I need my bad cousin!

FIRST GOD: But not very often!

SHEN TE: Once a week at least!

FIRST GOD: Once a month will be quite enough!

SHEN TE (shrieking): No, no! Help!

But the cloud continues to recede as the GODS sing.
VALEDICTORY HYMN
What rapture, oh, it is to know
A good thing when you see it
And having seen a good thing, oh, what rapture 'tis to flee it
Be good, sweet maid of Setzuan Let Shui Ta be clever
Departing, we forget the man Remember your endeavor
Because through all the length of days Her goodness failed never
Sing hallelujah! Make Shen Te's Good name live on forever!

SHEN TE: Help!
EPILOGUE

You're thinking, aren't you, that this is no right Conclusion to the play you've seen tonight? *[3] After a tale, exotic, fabulous,
A nasty ending was slipped up on us.
We feel deflated too. We too are nettled
To see the curtain down and nothing settled.
How could a better ending be arranged?
Could one change people? Can the world be changed? Would new gods do the trick? will atheism?
Moral rearmament? Materialism?

[3] * At afternoon performances: We quite agree, our play this afternoon collapsed upon us like a pricked balloon. When I first received the German manuscript of Good Woman from Brecht in 1945 it had no Epilogue. He wrote it a little later, influenced by misunderstandings of the ending in the press on the occasion of the Viennese premiere of the play. I believe that the Epilogue has sometimes been spoken by the actress playing Shen Te, but the actor playing Wong might be a shrewder choice, since the audience has already accepted him as a kind of chorus. On the other hand, it is not Wong who should deliver the Epilogue: whichever actor delivers it should drop the character he has been playing.

It is for you to find a way, my friends, to help good men arrive at happy ends. You write the happy ending to the play!
There must, there must, there's got to be a way!

ALTERNATE ENDING FOR GERMAN PRODUCTION

FIRST GOD:

And now… (He makes a sign and music is heard.
Rosy light.) let us return.
This little world has much engaged us.
Its joy and its sorrow have refreshed and pained us. Up there, however, beyond the stars, we shall gladly think of you, Shen Te, the good woman Who bears witness to our spirit down below, Who, in cold darkness, cares a little lamp! Good-bye! Do it well!

He makes a sign and the ceiling opens. A pink cloud comes down. On it the THREE GODS rise, very slowly.

SHEN TE: Oh, don't, illustrious ones! Don't go away! Don't leave me! How can I face the good old couple who've lost their store and the water seller with his still hand? And how can I defend myself from the barber whom I do not love and from Sun whom I do love? And I am with child. Soon there'll be a little son who'll
want to eat. I can't stay here! (She turns with a hunted look toward the door which will l let her tormentors in.)

FIRST GOD: You can do it. Just be good and everything will turn out well!

Enter the witnesses. They look with surprise at the judges floating on their pink cloud.

WONG: Show respect! The gods have appeared among us! Three of the highest gods have come to Setzuan to find a good human being. They had found one already, but…

FIRST GOD: No "but"! Here she is!

ALL: Shen Te!

FIRST GOD: She has not perished. She was only hidden. She Will stay with you. A good human being!

SHEN TE: But I need my cousin!

FIRST GOD: Not too often!

SHEN TE: At least once a week!

FIRST GOD: Once a month. That's enough!

SHEN TE: Oh, don't go away, illustrious ones! I haven't told you everything! I need you desperately!

The GODS sing.

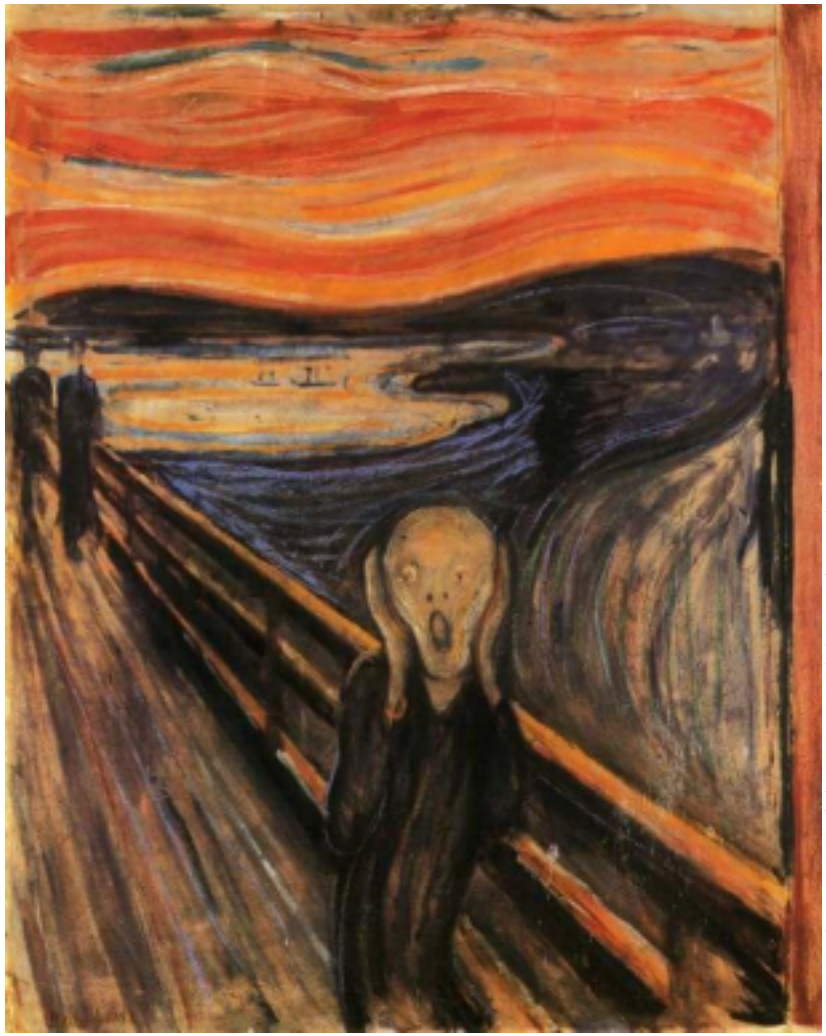
THE TRIO OF THE VANISHING GODS ON THE CLOUD
Unhappily we cannot stay More than a fleeting year.
If we watch our find too long

It will disappear.
Here the golden light of truth
With shadow is alloyed
Therefore, now we ask your leave
To go back to our void.

SHEN TE: Help! (Her cries continue through the song.)
Since our search is over now
Let us fast ascend!
The good woman of Setzuan
Praise we at the end!

As SHEN TE stretches out her arms to them in desperation, they disappear above, smiling and waving.

The Scream, 1893



Edvard Munch's **The Scream** is an icon of modern art, the Mona Lisa for our time. As Leonardo da Vinci evoked a Renaissance ideal of serenity and self-control, Munch defined how we see our own age - wracked with anxiety and uncertainty.

Essentially **The Scream** is autobiographical, an expressionistic construction based on Munch's actual experience of a scream piercing through nature while on a walk, after his two companions, seen in the background, had left him. Fitting the fact that the sound must have been heard at a time when his mind was in an abnormal state, Munch renders it in a style which if pushed to extremes can destroy human integrity. As previously noted, the flowing curves of art nouveau represent a subjective linear fusion imposed upon nature, whereby the multiplicity of particulars is unified into a totality of organic suggestion with feminine overtones. But man is part of nature, and absorption into such a totality liquidates the individual. Beginning at this time Munch included art nouveau elements in many pictures but usually

only in a limited or modified way. Here, however, in depicting his own morbid experience, he has let go, and allowed the foreground figure to become distorted by the subjectivized flow of nature; the scream could be interpreted as expressing the agony of the obliteration of human personality by this unifying force. Significantly, although it was Munch himself who underwent the experience depicted, the protagonist bears no resemblance to him or anyone else. The creature in the foreground has been depersonalized and crushed into sexlessness or, if anything, stamped with a trace of the femininity of the world that has come close to assimilating it.

Several facts indicate Munch was aware of the danger of art of this sort for a neurotic humanist like himself. He soon abandoned the style and rarely if ever again subjected a foreground figure to this kind of radical and systematic distortion. At the top of another version of the subject (National Gallery, Oslo) he wrote: 'Can only have been painted by a madman.' He certainly had a horror of insanity, which had afflicted his sister Laura. Within the picture, he has set up a defense, in the form of the plunging perspective of the roadway and its fence, which preserves a rational world of three dimensions, holding at bay the swell of art nouveau curves. Safe in this rational world, the two men in the distance remain unequivocally masculine. In the foreground unified nature has come close to crossing the fence, close enough to distort the form and personality of the protagonist. But the fence still protects it from total absorption into subjective madness.

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