

ANEXOS

UMA TRADUÇÃO COMENTADA
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SILENTLY THE TRAIN FOR BOULOGNE DREW OUT OF THE Gare de l'Est.

This was surprising. One had expected an excruciating din, a series of spastic propulsions, to be thrown from one's feet. The Reverend Bill Goodyear, of West Kirby, Cheshire, England, threw his suitcase on the rack and sat down behind *L'Oeuvre*. But there was nothing comprehensible in *The Work* so he looked out of the window.

Advertisements swam past, for Oxygénée, for Pernod Fils, for Jean Cocteau's *Machine Infernale*, at the Theatre des Champs Elysées, for Charles Boyer in *La Bataille*, playing at the Rex.

He gazed out beyond the hoardings, perforated to counter-set wind pressure, over the leaden acres of rooftops with their aerials and lines of washing dancing in the sun, to see if he could catch sight of his favorite church, at Alesia. But obviously, it was too far away. He returned to his paper in which he tried to follow an article devoted to the Stavisky case. He did not understand it at all. And what were those references to the great riots in the Place de la Concorde, and elsewhere, in February? His dog collar, glimpsed in the window, seemed like

a disguise, so that he felt a bit like Stavisky himself. It appeared that nothing less than another French Revolution had recently taken place without his knowing it. Nor did he quite understand why in order to promote peace it should be necessary for the French inner market to be stimulated by closer contact with the German steel cartels. But his French was bad and perhaps the writer was trying to convey something quite different.

After a while Bill Goodyear realised that he was not reading, so much as hiding himself, behind the paper. Ah, what a nuisance it was always to be so ill at ease in trains, on ships, in drawing rooms! Just as in the pulpit it took him such a long time to reestablish himself, to be aware of a new community. Perhaps it was because, believing passionately in mankind, he was afraid of superficial contacts, of the mere brushing of wings with a fellow creature. He folded his paper and looked out of the window again.

The signals saluted like clockwork, a wooden man in a box marked Paris 5 hauled on a lever and a score of rails rippled away and became one; and as if brushing away trucks bearing old wartime inscriptions, 40 hommes, 8 chevaux, buildings, elevated railways, even the Eiffel Tower itself, from its course, the train, free of the ambiguity of suburbs and junctions, swerved ahead whistling towards Boulogne and England. The black powerful engine, the determination of the thing, pleased him.

Goodyear produced his pipe and some hateful Scarfelati tobacco he had bought in Chartres. But the pipe too might at least conceal his uneasiness, which was now more like panic, a fear that at any moment the summons would come from the dark of things and his little universe be overthrown. Soon he was hidden behind a flood of vile grey air, a smoke-screen between himself and a toppling world.

But the Scarfelati was mere tinder, the pipe grew uncom-

fortably hot and the man opposite him proffered Goodyear his pouch.

In the pouch were little yellow ringlets of aromatic English tobacco.

While Goodyear was relighting his pipe he looked at his companion out of the corner of his eye. He was a short, bronzed man a good deal older than himself, he thought, badly but expensively dressed, with a jutting chin and steady grey eyes. He held one leg out stiffly.

But more than of any physical impression Goodyear was strikingly aware of a feeling of kinship, even in the other's silence. His uneasiness fell away.

"Thanks," he said. "This is a good deal better."

"Name's Firmin. Been in France long?"

"Goodyear. No. I was just visiting a confrère of mine at the American church in Paris. On the Quai d'Orsay."

"I don't like the French," said the other. "Too vindictive. Not enough sincerity."

"I wouldn't like to say that. I like them; a great people."

"Too much bureaucracy."

> The men did not speak again until they reached Amiens, then he said:

"This was a very busy place during the war. You'd scarcely recognize it." He paused. "But you were too young for the war, I suppose."

Goodyear said nothing, ashamed that he had been too young.

"Well, how do you do."

"How do you do."

The two men shook hands. Firmin looked out.

"This is the Somme," he said.

They were silent until they had passed Etaples, when Firmin said:

"There was a lot of fighting here."

The train hurtled swiftly on through peace; fields of campion, or cornflowers. The haystacks stood together in the meekness of love, like loaves. Now a boy and a girl were fishing in a canal.

Goodyear produced a notecase, from which he withdrew a photograph. He handed it to Firmin. In the photograph three children grouped themselves in a garden about a herbaceous border.

"That's Dick, there. He'll be twelve next July."

"Fine looking children. I'll bet you're anxious to see them again."

The man handed back the photograph which Goodyear replaced in his notecase. As he pocketed it he said:

"Ah well, I'm being returned empty anyhow."

Firmin nodded. Not seeming to have noticed the other's last words, he remarked:

"I once thought of marrying. But I smashed my hip to hell in the war. Doesn't interfere with my walking any longer. Still, in my job, I mustn't let it interfere..."

The two men sat smoking, looking out of the window. There were more boys fishing.

"Fishing," Firmin said. "You cast all round the fish. Sometimes after you've followed them a long way you find it's no good."

Goodyear chuckled. "That last goes for the fish too."

"There was a lot of fighting here," repeated Firmin.

Suddenly and embarrassingly Goodyear felt one of the fits of hysteria coming on which had been tormenting him on the voyage home. His lips trembled around the pipe stem. Turning his face further to the window so that Firmin would not see, he forced his eyelids against his quickening tear ducts. With his eyes queerly screwed up he was watching a labourer straightening his back as he gazed up at the roaring passage of the

express. Next Goodyear tried to fix his eyes on the telegraph wires, undulating and diving after the train. This did not succeed either and he was about to give in to his emotion when he saw, among the woods they were passing, a bare-legged boy. He was running furiously and the curious thing about this boy was that he seemed to be keeping up with the train. Goodyear was so astonished that he quite forgot his embarrassment. Now the boy had fallen down. Extraordinary! He turned away and turned his thoughts away from the delusion, only for them to fasten on Firmin. He looked out of the window and there was the boy, but now—could it be? Good Lord no, impossible—there was no mistaking him, the boy *was* Dick.

It was preposterous. They were passing a river and it was Dick and no other who plunged into it joyously. And it was Dick, unmistakably Dick, who was swimming that river. And Dick too who was scrambling up the opposite bank and running on faster than ever.

He did not say anything about it but every time he looked out of the window there was the boy.

"There was a place here called the bullring," Firmin was saying, "All sand—that was why they called it the bullring. You wouldn't think sand gets frozen. But my word, it was cold in winter."

Goodyear only looked out twice more but both times he saw his boy charging along, keeping up with the train.

Villages and war cemeteries plunged past them and were gone. They made conversation but the swaying of the train dragged their sentences apart. The wheels cried out against the iron.

Passing Neufchatel the track became smoother. Firmin said:

"This was a very busy place in the war. You'd scarcely think it now. Whew!"

Goodyear watched the sunset. A solitary street lamp was alight. A far plane flew over high-banked clouds. It looked like rain. Smoke was curling gently from peaked houses. There was a strange sadness about this journey in the train through the sunset, and a longing for comfort.

Now they were getting into Boulogne.

"The train goes right over the main street," said Firmin. As they slowed down the character of their motion altered, the train was becoming the appurtenance of a wharf, of the sea.

"That place was a terrible place over there during the war," said Firmin. "The Café Cristol."

And Goodyear peered out into the rain, which had just started to fall, over towards the once notorious café. Then they were at the wharf.

They were changing elements, but the idea struck him; no, it is more than this, something greater is being changed—

Shortly after the ship was clear of the quays the two Englishmen stood together at the rail looking into the wilderness of clay and rain which was France disappearing.

Presently there was nothing but darkness and the roar of the sea.

"It's desolate, desolate," said Goodyear.

"Ugly, ugly."

"I never felt so desolate. I don't know why," Goodyear laughed.

"Come on and have a drink, man, and cheer yourself up."

"A sound scheme."

Firmin limped before Goodyear down to the bar. It was heavy smelling and warm; the thrum of the engine was loud. They decided on Bass.

"Every time I have a few drinks I imagine I'm getting demobbed again," said Firmin, drinking.

Goodyear drank, then for some reason said a peculiar thing. "So do I!"

This was, by implication, a flat lie and he was astonished at himself.

"What! Were you in the war? Why didn't you tell me? Here I've been talking as though I fought the whole war by myself."

"I don't know. As a matter of fact I had an only brother killed." Goodyear was lying again. "We used to like to think that he's buried in France. His body was never identified and we don't care to speak of it."

Firmin was silent. Goodyear's heart beat with the beating of the engine. He wondered what had made him tell this curious falsehood. Of course he had no brother at all. Could this be himself talking? And had that been himself before who had seen the boy running? And now, coming on top of it, was this stupid lie about an imaginary brother.

He took another drink and saw, in his mind's eye, the boy running again, but now the boy was Firmin. Firmin as he had been some years before the last war, when he was about the same age that Dick was now.

> But Goodyear didn't understand why he had told his untruth. Had he wanted to be this man's comrade; to make up to him somehow, for his wounds, and had thought by his falsehood about the war, to bring himself nearer to him, and so to humanity, towards which was his responsibility, and in whose eyes—and were not these also Firmin's eyes?—his failure would seem the more excusable?

And with another part of his mind Goodyear was uneasily anticipating the questions Firmin might ask. What regiment? what platoon? do you remember Captain so and so? which he would never be able to answer.

But Firmin changed the subject.

"Mean, did I call them, the French? Perhaps I did them an injustice. They had to battle to get the crops out, they say. And for poor prices. A country of hard bargains."

"My American friend at the Quai d'Orsay was talking this morning about his country. All around them is electricity and they can't use it. Wheat fields, but nobody has bread. Clothing everywhere, they can't buy it. A terrible situation."

Through the porthole Goodyear watched the moving sea which close in under the glare of the lights was as green and fluctuant as the landscape from the train window.

"Fruit rotting, can't eat it. What they want they can't have."

"What can they do?"

"What can any of us do?"

After a pause Firmin said, "A ship's bar always reminds me of a play called *Outward Bound*. If I'm not mistaken there was a chap like you in it."

Goodyear checked himself from replying.

"I remember the play very well indeed," Firmin went on. "All the characters were supposed to be dead. It took place in a ship without a crew but it had a bar. Oh yes, it had a *bar*! I even remember the barman's name: Scrubby. The characters were dead, were voyaging out to what you might call their Last Judgement. It wasn't the sort of play you forget in a hurry. Saw it done in Singapore by an amateur company."

"Singapore, did you say?"

"Yes, Singapore."

"Was it in July, 1927?"

"Yes, it would be, July, 1927."

"Then I produced the play," Goodyear said.

"You produced it? That's funny. Seven years ago. Let me see, now, would that be after Lindbergh had flown the Atlantic?"

The two men stood looking at each other. Strange, Goodyear was thinking: the lie had begotten the truth.

"I may have met you then."

"I was doing mission work."

"I was a prospector out there."

"We may have met."

"Well, that's funny. Well, we'd better have another drink on it. No bird ever flew with one wing."

Goodyear ordered another Bass. "This one on me," he said.

"Here's," said Firmin.

"Good health."

"Ah, but the world isn't what it used to be," said Firmin. "Don't you feel something in the air yourself. If you don't mind my saying so, don't you find it difficult to keep your faith? Of course I'm not a religious man myself, but isn't it difficult?"

"I must admit," said Goodyear, "I *have* to admit that the Church has failed in many important respects." He looked helpless, obviously speaking about himself. "But it is difficult to start again."

"Yes, I know it is. Before the war I was training to be an engineer at Bradford Tech. After the war, after I'd got out of the hospital, I found I couldn't work at the Tech any more. In the first place we weren't allowed to smoke. Wasn't that funny? After the trenches—Good God! We complained to the Principal and he said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, I find it damned difficult too.' Then I absolutely broke away from it, became a prospector."

"You're on leave now: didn't you get very homesick? I did."

"That's what you read in books. No. Only the youngsters really felt that way." Firmin covered this by adding, "Anyway, I'll be glad to get back out East again. Can't stand the traffic here. It take me ten minutes to cross a street."

"Only the youngsters, eh? What about me? I'll be glad enough to get home," said Goodyear. He looked at his Bass. "And that is a fact."

"I work for a German company," said Firmin. "I'm going to London first, then to Hamburg for instructions. Then out East again. Yes, prospecting's meat and drink to me. Metal. All sorts of metal, every sort. Well, it's like fishing. You cast all round the place. Sometimes you may find it after you've followed it a long way and it's no good. It may be only a hundred yards. The great thing is you have to sell your dud ground."

From the other's words a sermon was forming itself in Goodyear's mind. "Brethren, aren't we all prospectors in life? You find the vein, you cast all round it. The fishermen among you will know what I mean." He would pause here for *smiling*. . . "Follow me," he said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Still only half aware of what Firmin was saying but catching a familiar word here and there, Goodyear watched the pendulum of the clock over the bar above the bottle of Bass, Worthington, Johnny Walker; the pendulum that swung enormously over the world, that was swinging him back to West Kirby, Cheshire, and Firmin out again to Ambat and Batu, to Changkat and Jelapang, to Kuala Langkat, or to the Klang River. Changkat . . . Jelapang . . . Kampong . . . *Klang*, the engines said. Metal. Metal that streamed through land and sea: metal from the earth, moulded in fire, conqueror of air and water.

"Then of course they salt it," Firmin was concluding. "Three pickle earth. Why sometimes you can go on walking until you're dead. Well, I'm happy. I've been places you can't go without a gun, it isn't safe. And I've shot all sorts of animals. After you've been out there a while, you forget there ever was a place called England. But I daresay you've done all this sort of thing yourself?"

Goodyear watched the pendulum and now he thought of the restless moving finger of God. Systems were formed, were

destroyed. At one moment a creature was set on earth to become self-evolving, at another wars were written of, and wars took place. Here a people were created, there erased.

Was there really a sort of determinism about the fate of nations? Could it be true that, in the end, they got what too they deserved? What had a given people done or not done that they should be obliterated? It struck Goodyear as odd at that moment that while he and Firmin had patronized France, while they had been dismayed over America, while they had "handed" it, sportingly, to the defeated nation, Germany, they had not said one word about England. What about England? They had not asked each other that. Nor had they considered openly that there might be anything wrong with themselves. What is wrong with *us*? They had been virtually silent on that point. And what is wrong with me? He had not asked Firmin that, and even while Goodyear put the question half-heartedly to himself he was being bothered by a sinister contradiction in Firmin's existence. Wasn't it a little ominous that Firmin, badly wounded in the war, should spend the rest of his life searching for the very metals with which Man *might* indeed construct a new world, a stellite paradise of inconceivable strength and delicacy, that would enable him, through vast windows of new alloys, to let the light of the future pour in, but with which, or so *L'Oeuvre* had assured him, Man was doing nothing of the sort, but on the contrary, with diabolical genius, merely using to prepare the subtler weapons of his own destruction? He imagined their quarreling about this obviousness and Firmin's inevitable answer, that religion had been the origin of numerous wars, and that when it was not, in some particular case, the war always masqueraded as a crusade, with God, or the Right, firmly supporting both sides, and so forth—all the wooled, unreal but inescapable facts that by repetition and repetition

and repetition were enough to create a chaos in themselves—and all this while the two men stood facing each other still as death, as though an actual quarrel had taken place between them.

“I stopped for a while at Crete on the way home,” Goodyear said at length, thoughtfully. “A fascinating island! Many thousands of years ago they had a civilization strikingly like our own. A sporting people, but not religious. At Cnossos, which might be compared to London, they’d reached a position where they thought the human intellect, by itself, could solve all their problems. Perhaps Adam made the same mistake! Anyhow, the barbarians came, who really had a God—an evil God but still one which was unanimously worshipped, the God of War that is—who was all their culture rolled into one, and it was all up with the Cretans! But not,” he added earnestly, “with the Cretan spirit, that is, the human spirit, of which one assumes the intellect is only a part. And I believe that when that spirit, in spite of all its setbacks, has reached a point of development in its understanding and humility where the real God, the God of Life, be he ever so patient, doesn’t have to feel sick at the very thought of it, then it will have already largely triumphed over the greater obstacles and we shall have a real world.”

“I don’t believe that bit about the development of the intellect applies to you and me though, eh,” chuckled Firmin. “Eh?”

Goodyear, privately injured by this, said nothing.

The clangor of the engines filled the silence: from down below leverweight and fulcrum jangled their gongs: further away the turbines screamed in a whirlwind as the water was driven violently against the curved vanes of the wheel rims: and a hissing tangle of sound was weaving itself thickly through the low tunnel of the alleyway to the bar.

Metal . . .

“Well, it’s a funny old world,” Firmin said.

The men laughed.

“Have a drink. That’s the best thing. I like to see a clergyman take a drink.”

“Many of them feel like taking to it,” said Goodyear.

The drinks were brought.

“Well,” Goodyear sighed, “once more, I say it. I’m being returned empty. Yes, and you’re right, it seems that there *is* a great change taking place, but you can’t put your finger on it.”

“But you’re only a young man yet.”

“Thirty-four.”

“You wouldn’t think it, but I’m only thirty-nine. Five years can make a difference.”

They drank.

“Seven years ago I thought that a missionary’s was the life for me,” Goodyear said, breathing the hot smells of the ship, that distilled memories of parting, “after two years I went home and married. This time I came out and I’ve only stuck it six months. Did you ever read a story called ‘The Country of the Blind,’ by Wells, I think? It’s about a mountaineer who fell down the crater of a volcano to find himself unhurt but in a country where everyone was blind. The refrain ‘the one eyed man is king in the country of the blind’ sang in his head. He wanted to give the people sight. Then he discovered that they were happy to be blind, and so he climbed up out of the crater again before it was too late. The trouble was, they wanted to blind him too.”

He watched the pendulum.

“Well, here’s how,” said Firmin.

“Yes, how.”

Folkestone was now alongside. They climbed up on deck

into the wild weather. A freighter was passing, outward bound, its siren sounding hoarse and sorrowful. The gangway fell spastically, yawning, then banged into place.

"Clickety click," said Firmin.

Their ship, in turn, had now ceased to be a ship and had become a huge station. The passengers stood in droves, their scarves close over their mouths, passports ready, lining up for their landing cards. It had almost stopped raining, but wild drops still fell. Wet light picked out familiar advertisements; nostalgic: Carter's Little Liver Pills, Players Cigarettes, Bovril: a weeping bull looking, ironically, he thought, into a bottle of meat extract: "Alas, my poor brother!" Built on an incline above them a cinema was showing Chaliapin and George Robey in Pabst's *Don Quixote*; Walt Disney's *Three Little Pigs*.

This time, as Goodyear stepped on to the wharf, he had a curious apprehension—he couldn't say where it came from—that he was not so much changing elements as changing worlds. He passed without difficulty through the customs and then wandered, pipe in mouth, down the platform, where everyone seemed to be reading newspapers. The newsboys were shouting and Goodyear bought a *Star* from a boy who wore this announcement like an apron: *Hitler Atrocities. Germany Under Arms*.

What did all this mean? Was another war really starting already? No. Impossible. And Goodyear was reassured too by the paper, which, in spite of the headlines, merely gave a gentlemanly account of a revolt in this chap Hitler's army, in which a few brownshirts or blackshirts—or were those Mussolini's gang?—had been shot. Poor fellows. Nevertheless, he couldn't rid himself of the feeling that this was only confirmation of what he'd suspected; that a new cycle was beginning, that the face of the world was changing...

The long London boat train lay curved to the platform and already trembling to be gone. A horrible fancy struck Goodyear: the 7:30 to Cnossos—

He met Firmin in the Pullman and they sat down opposite each other.

"They're at it again," Firmin said, opening his paper. "There's something radically wrong somewhere."

"Yes, they're at it again."

"They're forcing another one on us now."

Firmin appeared ill at ease. Doubt and vexation showed in his face as he shook out the newspaper. They had a long wait for the last passengers to get through the customs.

"I never lie about what I've got," Firmin shifted irritably in his seat. "I always declare it."

"War: what price war? What's the prospect now? But I don't really think that this means war," said Goodyear, reading his paper.

"War," said Firmin unpleasantly, "there isn't enough money for war—yet."

"And every prospect pleases."

"There never is enough money, but they always find it," said Firmin.

Goodyear wondered: am I lying to myself as well? Deceiving myself, smuggling myself through the customs when there should be a price on my head, a dutiable metal.

A man passed outside, slowly, testing the wheels; the iron rang out, once, twice, thrice. Base. Metal. Counterfeit. The last passengers hurried into the Pullman. But still the train waited.

At last they started, jerked to a standstill.

"You have to strike back at the cause," said Goodyear, his voice suddenly loud in the carriage.

"What is the cause?"

"Yes, precisely, what?" he lowered his voice. "Ourselves, probably, as much as anything. It's no good meeting evil with evil."

The engine restarted, drowning the true adulterate words, stopped again with a violent, convulsive hissing. Billows of smoke rushed up past the window. Workmen were drilling. Drilling for gas; the terrible hydrocarbons drifting from crevices, expanding, possessing mankind. He peered out through the steaming glass. Poison, he thought. Chaos, change, all was changing: the passengers were changing; a sea change.

Goodyear lay back in his seat. He could feel the change within him, somehow his thoughts were becoming longer: an insidious metallurgy was in practice within him as his ores, his alloys, were isolated. The titanic thunder of the night-shift hammered on his nerves, lacerating them as though it would draw out from him the fine wire of his consciousness.

He knew that he had been altered by the true pattern, the archetype of the events, on the surface so trivial, of the journey. And he sensed that the other passengers, visible for the time being only as that deadly headline *Germany Under Arms*, had also been affected, were even at a crucial point in their lives, turning towards another chaos, a new complexity of melancholy opposites.

Sitting there, for a moment he *was* Firmin, the Firmin who had returned from the war, wounded, to discover only that he had to become somebody else. It was almost as if Goodyear had told the truth to him. And, looking at Firmin, he knew him too to be changed.

Perhaps now, as before, Firmin would have to take a different, unforeseen action.

And an expression of doubt, an hour ago only a shadow on both their faces in an idle conversation, had become part of their features, as years added to them.

Suddenly, cautiously, but with an accelerating motion, the train pulled off once more, slackened for a moment, skidded, and the wheels finding their rhythm, was finally away.

Red and green lights flicked past as the train gathered speed, metal acres stretched and contracted, dilated, narrowed. Folkestone 3 West.

...Metal, true metal, counterfeit, said the train. Changkat, Jelapang, liar and cheat. Manganese, chromium, old counterfeit. Goodyear rubbed a patch of steam from the window, peered into the dark. The train rattled over points. Not enough money, not enough money, not enough money for war. Folkestone 4 Circuit. Circuit Fund. Collection. Silver and copper, silver and gold. Suddenly there was his bare-legged boy again, running, running more furiously, more frenziedly, than ever, red and green lights falling on him, silver and copper lights, running through the metal fields with metal furrows spangled with coins of fire. Run-on-little-ghost-of-the-youth-of-the-next-war-there're-still-ox-eye-daisies-to-pick, said the train, going through a tunnel. Goodyear was weary and closed his eyes. He woke with a start. The passengers sat reading quietly or smoking. A girl was knitting in a corner. Down corridors men swayed, tottering like the blind, hands stretched out to wood or glass, men feeling their way through the world, walking in their sleep, somnambulists...

His eyes returned to the window. A man digging, sharply illumined by a shower of sparks like red blossoms, slowly raised his spade. Davies' words recurred to him: "The man who digs his grave, the girl who knits her shroud." It's never too late, never too late. To start again. You bore in the earth. Silver and copper. Silver and gold. Man makes his cross. With crucible steel. Base metal; counterfeit; manganese; chromium; makes his iron cross; with crucible steel.

The train took a hill. The boy fell in the fire. The knitting

needles flashed like bayonets. Steel wool. The red lights flashed. Green lights. Knit. Socks! Knit. Shroud! Knit. Stab! Iron, steel, said the train. Iron, steel. Steel iron. Iron, tin, iron, tin. Steel and iron steel and iron steel and iron steel and iron *steeeeeeeel!*...

Now they were going at a tremendous pace, but Goodyear and Firmin were fast asleep under the lamp as the express screamed on like a shell, through a metal world.

CHINA

CHINA'S LIKE A MUDDLE TO ME, IT'S JUST LIKE A DREAM, mostly a queer dream. For though I've been there it takes on a quality sometimes that my imagination bestowed on it before I went. But even if I lived there it would still seem to me to be unreal; for the most part I don't think of it and when I do it makes me laugh.

I live down at the docks now in Hoboken, New Jersey, and now and again I wander down there to see a ship that's crossed the Western Ocean. That doesn't make me homesick or stir up in me the old love of the sea or of memories I've got of China. Nor does it make me unhappy when I think I've been there and really have so few memories after all.

I don't believe in China.

You can say I'm like that man you may have read about who spent his life as a sailor on some vessel plying from Liverpool to Lisbon and on retiring was only able to say of Lisbon: The trams go faster there than in Liverpool.

Like Bill Adams I came fresh to sea life from an English public school where I had worn a top hat and carried a silver-topped cane, but there the resemblance ceases. I was a fireman.

There was a terrible war on in China at this time and in this

I did not believe either. Just across the river from where we were moored, China thundered her guns Doom! doom! doom! but the whole thing crashed over our heads without touching us. Not that I would have believed in it any more had we been blown all to hell: we do not associate such dooms with ourselves. But it was as if you were dreaming, as I often have, that you are standing unscathed beneath the tumult of an immense waterfall, Niagara for instance.

We were moored nose on to the English battle-cruiser, *H.M.S. Proteus*. Astern lay a high, brightly-painted Ningpo junk. Apart from this, there was little in our surroundings, before the stevedores arrived, to suggest that we were not at home: even the war, palpable as it seemed to be through the river fog eclipsing the opposite bank, did not dissipate this illusion: much might have happened for good or evil in our absence from England. And this perhaps brings me to my only real point. We are always "here." You've never felt this? Well, with me this was very cogent. In an English paper I could read about the famous city near at hand, divided against herself, tortured not only by the possibility of invasion but with threats of its own ochlocracy, but when the chief engineer forbade us to cross the river to it, I turned over and went to sleep. I didn't believe I was there at all. And when it was proposed by the chief steward that a cricket match take place between the *Arcturion*, which was the name of our ship, and the *H.M.S. Proteus* I was certain I was not. I had seen this coming, however.

They started it in the Indian Ocean.

I was coming off watch at eight bells and when I got to the galley I knew they were starting it.

The seamen were standing round outside their fore-castle winding up strands of heaving line. They were like old maids, holding each other's knitting, I thought. Then I saw that they were making cricket balls. The *Arcturion* carried a spare pro-

pellor which was shackled to the break of the poop and the captain was chalking on this. A wicket!

While I was having my chow I knew they were starting it and when I finally came out, they had begun. From the broom-locker to the spare propellor along the seaman's side of the well-dock was about the length of a cricket pitch and at the far end Hersey was bowling. He took a long run right down the companion ladder and then bowled. At the wicket chalked on the spare propellor trembled Lofty. He milled about in the air with a bat the carpenter had made him. The ball was returned to Hersey. Fieldmen stood round on the hatches, on the steam-piping, among the washing. Now Hersey was bowling again. Lofty had missed. Hersey had the ball once more. One or two were still winding heaving-lines.

When the seamen saw me they started to mince for my benefit. Oh, I say, pass the bally ball, —And so on.

I made up my mind I hated these men and then I wished I could crush them: they would never be anything but underdogs. Unctuousness and servility flowed in their very veins and even now it seems necessary to me to say these things with mere malice. Imitating a workingman's accent, they were even more unpleasant than my own class.

Old bourgeois maidservants with mob cap and broom, that's what English steamboat sailors are.

A few blackened firemen stood around, watching and grinning like niggers. They wouldn't join in. They had solidarity, they had one enemy, the chief steward. The sailors and the others were petty Judases who had to keep in with both sides. They let each other down and they would steal the milk out of your tea. But the firemen were solid. We were prime. And we stood together against the chief steward because of the food.

They had begun by jeering at me: Where is Heton, Hoxford or Cambridge? But in the end they took the attitude, Eton,

Oxford, Cambridge and the fireman's forecastle. At any rate he didn't become a seaman and that's something. That was their attitude.

I was a coal passer and worked on the 12 to 4 or duke's watch, and after a while they accepted me silently as one of them. I worked hard and didn't growl. I respected them but to them that was neither here nor there. But now standing together looking at the sailors with contempt, they gave me a side-long glance as if suspicious that I had gone over to the enemy.

Then the chief steward came out of the galley smoking a cigar, paused imperiously at the top of the companion ladder and descended slowly, puffing.

—Hello boys, give me a knock.

And Lofty handed over the bat to the chief.

Soon he was slogging the balls all over the place; he hit two into the Indian Ocean and it was very clear he fancied himself. Oh it was very clear he thought he had some class.

—Silly sailors, said the firemen in a long drawl.

That night as I was pacing up and down the poop in carpet slippers smoking, the chief steward came up to me.

—Tell me, he began. Surely you play cricket. Now I'm not *just* a chief steward you might say. I've got education. But let me see, you're not *the*—

Suddenly I felt I had to tell him that I was. I told him how I fared in the Eton and Harrow match, how I'd played against the Australians, there was nothing I didn't know about cricket. I also told him to hold his tongue, but I ought to have known better than to trust a sailor.

It was only after he'd gone that I thought of all the things I ought to have said to him.

He kept his promise as long as it suited him, only as long as it suited him. Meantime we were getting nearer and nearer to China.

And the nearer we got the less I believed in it.

What I want to convey to you is that to me it was not China at all but right here, on this wharf. But that's not quite what I wanted to say. What I mean is what it was not was China: somewhere far away. What it was was here, something solid, tactile, impenetrable. But perhaps neither one thing nor the other.

You see, I had worn myself out behind a barrier of sea life, behind a barrier of time, so that when I did get ashore, I only knew it was *here*. Even if I perked up after a few drinks, I always forgot I was in China. I was "here." Do you see that?

The first thing I knew when I got there was the extent of this mistake. I don't mean I was disillusioned, I want to make that clear. I didn't feel with Conrad "that what expected had already gone, had passed unseen in a sigh, in a flash together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions." That sigh, that flash, never happened. There was no moment that crystallized the East for me. This moment did not occur. What happened was different. I had been looking forward to something anxiously and I called this China, yet when I reached China I was still looking forward to it from exactly the same position. Perhaps China wasn't there, didn't exist for me just as I could not exist for China.

And I even began to believe my work was unreal, although there was always one voice that said: you get hold of a firebar and you'll soon enough know how real it is.

Then we were alongside and not long after the captain called for me.

—We've arranged a cricket match with the *H.M.S. Proteus* and we want to show them, he said.

—Sure, said the chief steward. We've arranged a cricket match and we'll show them foxy swaddies what we think of them.

—And you're going to play, said the captain.

—Sure, said the chief. And now you've got to titivate yourself up a bit, make yourself look a bit smart you know. You can't play with an old towel round your neck. What would they think of us?

—That's right, said the captain. The last time you went ashore with a towel round your neck, you were a proper disgrace to the ship.

—You were the only man who went ashore without a tie, said the chief.

—I went to have a swim, I began. But what was the use of talking to these old washerwomen anyway? And I was highly amused to be looking right down once more into the corrupt heart of the life I'd left behind; I thought it extremely funny that my existence had not changed at all and that wherever I was I would be evaluated, smelt out, by my own kind.

A little later the chief steward came down to the forecabin with all sorts of fancy white ducks he'd rooted out and pretty soon I found one hanging on the curtain rail of my bunk. As I changed the firemen grinned.

—Now you'll feel at home, Jimmy.

No other fireman had been selected to play and inwardly I raged.

Outside the chief was saying: —We'll show these swaddies we can make a proper respectable turnout.

Then we strolled along the wharf towards the cricket field which was situated between a slagheap and a coaldump. A river mist was rolling thickly over towards the city, but the atmosphere was clear where we were going save for a thin rain of coal which drizzled in our faces from the tips, speckling our white trousers with dust. Now you could make a fine character study out of this. There was old Lofty and Hersey and Sparks and Tubby and the three mates and the doctor and you could

make a fine description out of each one. But unfortunately I can't discriminate, maybe it's my loss, but they all looked the same to me, those sailors: they were all sons of bitches and now after so long I can only see them at all through the kind of mist there was then. So I won't bother you with that. They just looked damned funny as they straggled down the wharf. And I must have looked the funniest of all straggling along with them, all of us in the fancy white ducks the steward had given us. Some trousers far too short and some far too long, which made us look more like a bunch of Chinese coolies than a proper respectable turnout.

Then the swaddies came out of the *H.M.S. Proteus* and they hadn't bothered about any whites. Some wore khaki shorts, some dungarees, others singlets and khaki trousers. And now after so long I only see them through a kind of mist. I can't even say, Well, there was one fellow like this. Hell, they were just swaddies, misled, exploited, simple, handsome and ugly like the rest of us.

Their captain and the chief steward spun a coin. The chief steward won.

The captain of the *Arcturion*, who was not playing but who was reported to be "keen" on cricket, stood behind a godown and watched the proceedings with a heavily critical air.

—It was my call, I laughed. You should have run.

—I thought you said you could play cricket, the chief grumbled.

—I called. It was up to you to run, I laughed.

—Don't laugh, said the chief.

But I went right on laughing. Then the captain appeared and it seemed that he was damned angry too.

—What are you laughing at? I thought you said you could play cricket, he said. And you've run our best man out and been bowled yourself. Why, I thought you said—

—Firemen don't play cricket, I said shortly and walked away from the wharf.

Once I looked back. Lofty was playing hard with a cross bat, defending the honour of the welldock. Then rain sluiced down and stopped play. It was the monsoon season.

I ran for the *Arcturion* and changed quickly.

At the entrance I watched the others shuffling back mournfully into the seaman's forecastle, their white trousers clinging to them like wet rags. Doom! Doom! Doom!

Other firemen joined me at the entrance and we watched the stevedores unloading our cargo, of scouting planes, a bomber, a fighting plane, machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, 25 pound bombs, ammunition. I did not believe in all this. I was not there.

And here's what I want to ask you again. Haven't you felt this too, that you know yourself so well that the ground you tread on is your ground: it is never China or Siberia or England or anywhere else... It is always you. It is always the earth of you, the wood, the iron of you, the asphalt you step on is the asphalt of you whether it's on Broadway or the Chien Mon.

And you carry your horizon in your pocket wherever you are.

UNDER THE VOLCANO

I

AS THEY WALKED UP THE CALLE NICARAGUA TOWARD the bus stop Hugh and Yvonne turned to watch the marmalade-colored birds trapezing in the vines. But her father, afflicted by their raucous cries, strode on austere through the blue, hot November afternoon.

The bus was not very full at first and soon was rolling like a ship in a heavy sea.

Now out of one window, now out of another, they could see the great mountain, Popocatepetl, round whose base clouds curled like smoke drawn from a train.

They passed tall, hexagonal stands with advertisements for the Morelos Cinema: *Las Manos de Orlac: con Peter Lorre*. Elsewhere, as they clattered through the little town, they noticed posters of the same film, showing a murderer's hands laced with blood.

"Like Paris," Yvonne said to Hugh, pointing to the kiosks, "Kub, Oxygénée, do you remember?"

Hugh nodded, stammering out something, and the careening of the bus made him swallow every syllable.

"...Do you remember Peter Lorre in 'M'?"

But they had to give it up. The patient floor boards were creaking too loudly. They were passing the undertakers: *Inhumaciones*. A parrot, head cocked, eyed them from its perch at the entrance. Quo Vadis? asked a notice above it.

"Marvelous," the Consul said.

At the market they stopped for Indian women with baskets of poultry. They had strong faces, the color of dark earthenware. There was a massiveness in their movements as they settled themselves. Two or three had cigarette stubs behind their ears, another chewed an old pipe. Their good humoured faces of old idols were wrinkled with sun but they did not smile.

Then someone laughed, the faces of the others slowly cracked into mirth, the camion was welding the old women into a community. Two even managed to hold an anxious conversation in spite of the racket.

The Consul, nodding to them politely, wished he too were going home. And he wondered who had suggested making this ghastly trip to the fiesta at Chapultepec when their car was laid up and there were no taxis to be had! The effort of going without a drink for a day, even for the benefit of his daughter and her young man who had arrived that morning from Acapulco, was far greater than he had expected. Perhaps it was not the effort of merely being sober that told so much as that of coping with the legacy of impending doom recent unprecedented bouts had left him. When Yvonne pointed out Popocatepetl to him for the fifth time he smiled wanly. Chimborazo, Coto-paxi—and there it was! To the Consul the volcano had taken on a sinister aspect: like a sort of Moby Dick, it had the air of beckoning them on, as it swung from one side of the horizon to the other, to some disaster, unique and immedicable.

The bus lurched away from the mercado where the clock on the main building sheltering the stalls stood at seven minutes past two—it had just struck eleven, the Consul's watch said a

quarter to four—then bumped down a steep cobbled incline and began to cross a little bridge over a ravine.

Was this the same arras, Yvonne wondered, that cut through her father's garden? The Consul was indicating that it was. The bottom was immensely far below, one looked down at it as from the maintrunk of a sailing ship, though dense foliage and wide leaves partly concealed the real treachery of the drop. Its steep banks were piled with refuse, which even hung on the foliage; from the precipitous slope beyond the bridge, turning round, Yvonne could see a dead dog right down at the bottom, with white bones showing through, nuzzling the refuse.

"How's the rajah hangover, Dad?" she asked, smiling.

"'Taut over chaos,'" the Consul gritted his teeth, "'crammed with serried masks.'"

"Just a little longer."

"No. I shall *never* drink again. Nevermore."

The bus went on. Halfway up the slope, beyond the ravine, outside a gaudily decorated little cantina named the El Amore de los Amores, waited a man in a blue suit, swaying gently and eating a melon.

As they approached, the Consul thought he recognized him as the part owner of the cantina, which was not, however, on his beat: from the interior came the sound of drunken singing.

When the bus stopped, the Consul thirstily caught sight, over the jalousied doors, of a bartender leaning over the bar and talking with intensity to a number of roaring policemen.

The camion throbbed away to itself while the driver went into the cantina. He emerged almost immediately to hurl himself back on his vehicle. Then with an amused glance at the man in the blue suit, whom he apparently knew, he jammed the bus into gear and drove away.

The Consul watched the man, fascinated. The latter was

very drunk indeed, and he felt a queer envy of him, albeit it was perhaps a stir of fellowship. As the bus drew in sight of the brewery, the *Cerveceria de Quahnahuac*, the Consul, his too sober gaze on the other's large, trembling hands, thrust his own hands into his pocket guiltily, but he had found the word wanted to describe him: *pelado*.

Pelados, he thought, the peeled ones, were those who did not have to be rich to prey on the really poor. They were also those half-breed politicians who work like slaves to get into office for one year, just one year, in which year they hope to put by enough to forswear work for the rest of their lives. *Pelado*—it was an ambiguous word, to be sure! The Consul chuckled. A Spaniard whom he despised, used, and filled with—ah—“poisonous” liquor. While to that Indian it might mean the Spaniard, or, employed by either with an amiable contempt, simply anyone who made a show of himself.

But whatever it might or might not mean, the Consul judged, his eyes still fixed on his man with the blue suit, it was fair to consider that the word could have been distilled only from such a venture as the Conquest, suggesting as it did on the one hand exploiter, and on the other, thief: and neither was it difficult to understand why it had come in time to describe the invaders as well as their victims. Interchangeable ever were the terms of abuse with which the aggressor publicly discredited those about to be ravaged!

The *pelado* then, who for a time had been talking thickly to himself, was now sunk in stupor. There was no conductor this trip, fares were paid to the driver on getting off, none bothered him. The dusty blue suit with its coat, tight at the waist but open, the broad trousers, pointed shoes shined that morning and soiled with the saloon's sawdust, indicated a confusion in his mind the Consul well understood: who shall I be today, *Jekyll* or *Hyde*? His purple shirt, open at the neck and showing

a crucifix, had been torn and was partially hanging out over the top of his trousers. For some reason he wore two hats, a kind of cheap *Homburg* fitting neatly over the broad crown of his *sombrero*.

Soon they were passing the *Hotel Casino de la Selva* and they stopped once more. Colts with glossy coats were rolling on a slope. The Consul recognized *Dr. Vigil's* back moving among the trees on the tennis court; it was as if he were dancing a grotesque dance all by himself there.

Presently they were getting out into the country. At first there were rough stone walls on either side: then, after crossing the narrow gauge railway, where the *Pearce* oil tanks were pil- lowed along the embankment against the trees, leafy hedges full of bright wildflowers with deep royal blue bells. Green and white clothing hung on the cornstalks outside the low, grass- roofed houses. Now the bright blue flowers grew right into the trees, already snowy with blooms, and all this beauty the Con- sul noted with horror.

The road became smoother for a time so that it was possible for *Hugh* and *Yvonne* to talk: then, just as *Hugh* was saying something about the “*convolvuli*,” it grew much worse again.

“It's like a *canterbury bell*,” the Consul was trying to say, only the camion bumped over a pothole at that moment and it was as if the jolt had thrown his soul up into his teeth. He steadied himself on the seat and the wood sent a piercing pain through his body. His knees knocked together. With *Popocatepetl* always following or preceding them they jogged into very rough country indeed. The Consul felt that his head had become an open basket swarming with crabs. Now it was the ravine that was haunting him, creeping after them with a gruesome patience, he thought, winding always around the road on one side or the other. The crabs were at the back of his eyes, yet he forced himself to be hearty.

"Where's old Popeye gone to now?" he would exclaim as the volcano slid out of sight past the window to the left, for though he was afraid of it, he felt somehow better when it was there.

"This is like driving over the moon," Hugh tried to whisper to Yvonne, but ended up by shouting.

"Maybe all covered with spinach!" Yvonne was answering her father.

"Right down Archimedes this time! Look out!"

Then for a while they were passing through flat, wooded country with no volcano in sight, nothing to be seen but pines, stones, fircones, black earth. But when they looked more closely they noticed that the stones were volcanic, the earth was parched looking, that everywhere were attestations to Popocatepetl's presence and antiquity.

After, the mountain itself would stride into view again, magnificent, or appearing sad, slate-grey as despair, poised over his sleeping woman, Ixtaccihuatl, now permanently contiguous, which perhaps accounted for it, the Consul decided, feeling that Popo had also an annoying quality of looking as though it knew people expected it to be about to do, or mean, something—as if to be the most beautiful mountain in the world were not enough.

Gazing around the camion, which was somewhat fuller, Hugh took stock of his surroundings. He noticed the drunk, the old women, the men in their white trousers with purple shirts, and now the men in black trousers with their white Sunday shirts—for it was a holiday—and one or two younger women in mourning. He attempted to take an interest in the poultry. The hens and cocks and turkeys imprisoned in their baskets, and those that were still loose, had all alike submitted. With only an occasional flutter to show they were alive they crouched passively under the seats, their emphatic spindly claws bound with cord. Two pullets lay, frightened and quivering, be-

tween the handbrake and the clutch, their wings linked, it seemed, with the levers. Hugh was bored with all this finally. The thought of Yvonne sagged down his mind, shook his brain, permeating the camion, the very day itself, with nervous passion.

He turned away from her nearness and looked out, only to see her clear profile and sleeked fair hair sailing along reflected in the window.

The Consul was suffering more and more intensely. Each object on which his glance fell appeared touched with a cruel, supersensual significance. He knew the very wood of the seat to be capable of hurting his hands. And the words which ran across the entire breadth of the bus over the windscreen: *su salva estará a salvo no escapando en el interior de éste vehículo*: the driver's round mirror, the legend above it, *Cooperación de la Cruz Roja*, beside which hung three postcards of the Virgin Mary and a fire-extinguisher, the two slim vases of marguerites fixed over the dashboard, the dungaree jacket and whiskbroom under the seat opposite where the pelado was sitting, all seemed to him actually to be alive, to be participating, with evil animation, in their journey.

And the pelado? The shaking of the camion was making it difficult for him to remain seated. With his eyes shut, and swaying from side to side, he was trying to tuck his shirt in. Now he was methodically buttoning his coat on the wrong buttons. The Consul smiled, knowing how meticulous one could be when drunk: clothes mysteriously hung up, cars driven by a seventh sense, police eluded by an eighth. Now the pelado had found room to lie down full length on the seat. And all this had been superbly accomplished without once opening his eyes!

Stretched out—a corpse—he still preserved the appearance of being uncannily aware of all that was going on. In spite of his stupor, he was a man on his guard; half a melon slipped out

of his hand, the segments full of seeds like raisins rolled to and fro on the seat, yet with eyeless sight those dead eyes saw it: his crucifix was slipping off, but he was conscious of it: the Homburg fell from his sombrero, slipped to the floor, and though making no attempt to pick it up, he obviously knew it was there. He was guarding himself against theft while gathering strength for more debauchery. In order to get into somebody else's cantina he might have to walk straight. His presence was worthy of admiration.

Yvonne was enjoying herself. For the time being she was freed by the fact of Hugh's presence from the tyranny of thinking exclusively about him. The camion was traveling very much faster, rolling, swaying, jumping; the men were smiling and nodding, two boys, hanging at the back of the bus were whistling; and the bright shirts, the brighter serpentine confetti of tickets, red, yellow, green, blue, dangling from a loop on the ceiling, all contributed a certain sense of gaiety to their trip. They might have been going to a wedding.

But when the boys dropped off some of this gaiety departed. That predominance of purple in the men's shirts gave a disquieting glare to the day. There seemed something brutal to her too about those candelabra cactus swinging by. And about those other cactus, further away, like an army advancing uphill under machine-gun fire. All at once there was nothing to see outside but a ruined church full of pumpkins, caves for doors, windows bearded with grass. The exterior was blackened as by fire and it had an air of being damned. It was as though Hugh had left her again, and the pain of him slid back into her heart, momentarily possessing her.

Buses bobbed by in the other direction: buses to Tetecala, to Jujuta; buses to Xiutepec, to Xochitepec, to Xochitepec—

At a great pace they swerved into a side road. Popocatepetl appeared, off to the right, with one side beautifully curved as a

woman's breast, the other jagged and ferocious. The drifted clouds were massing, high-piled, behind it.

Everyone felt at last that they were really going somewhere: they had become self-enclosed, abandoned to the tumultuous will of the vehicle.

They thundered on, passing little pigs trotting along the road, an Indian screening sand. Advertisements on ruined walls swam by. Atchis! Instantia! Resfria dos Dolores. Cafiaspirina. Rechaches Imitaciones. Las Manos de Orlac: con Peter Lorre.

When there was a bad patch the bus rattled ominously and sometimes they ran off the road. But its determination outweighed these waverings: all were pleased to have transferred their responsibilities to it, and to be lulled into a state from which it would be pain to awaken.

As a partner in this, it was with a freezing, detached calm that the Consul found himself able to think, as they bucked and bounded over an interminable series of teeth-rattling potholes, even of the terrible night which doubtless waited him, of his room shaking with daemonic orchestras, of the snatches of fearful sleep, interrupted by imaginary voices outside which were dogs barking, or by his own name being continually repeated with scorn by imaginary parties arriving.

The camion pitched and rolled on.

They spelt out the word *Desviación* but made the detour too quickly with a yelping of tires and brakes. As they swerved into alignment once more the Consul noticed a man apparently lying fast asleep under the hedge by the right side of the road.

Both Hugh and Yvonne appeared oblivious to this. Nor did it seem likely to the Consul that in this country anyone else was going to think it extraordinary a man should choose to sleep in the sun by the side of the road, or even in the middle of the road.

The Consul looked back again. No mistake. The man,

receding quickly now, lay with his hat over his eyes, his arms stretched out toward a wayside cross. Now they were passing a riderless horse, munching the hedge.

The Consul leaned forward to call out but hesitated. What if it were simply an hallucination? This might prove very embarrassing. However he did call out, tapping the driver on the shoulder; almost at the same moment the bus leaped to a standstill.

Guiding the whining vehicle swiftly, steering an erratic course with one hand, the driver, who was craning right out of his seat watching the corners behind and before with quick yet reluctant turns of the head, reversed along the dusty detour.

There was the friendly, overpowering smell of exhaust gases tempered with the hot smell of tar from the repairs, though no one was at work on the road, everybody having knocked off, and there was nothing to be seen there, just the soft indigo carpet sparkling and sweating by itself. But a little further back, to one side by the hedge, was a stone cross and beneath it were a milk bottle, a funnel, a sock and part of an old suitcase.

Now they could see the man quite plainly, lying with his arms stretched out toward this wayside cross.

II

As the bus jerked to another stop the pelado almost slid from his seat to the floor but, managing to recover himself, not only reached his feet and an equilibrium he contrived remarkably to maintain, but in doing so had arrived half way to the door in one strong movement, crucifix fallen safely into place around his neck, hats in one hand, melon in the other. He nodded gravely and with a look that might have withered at its inception any thought of stealing them, placed the hats carefully on a vacant seat near the door, and with exaggerated care let himself down to the road. His eyes were still only half-open, pre-

serving that dead glaze, yet there could be no doubt he had taken in the whole situation. Throwing away the melon he walked over toward the man in the road. Even though he stepped as if over imaginary obstacles his course was straight and he held himself erect.

Yvonne, Hugh, the Consul, and two of the passengers followed him. None of the old women had moved from their seats.

Half way across the road Yvonne gave a nervous cry, turning on her heel abruptly. Hugh gripped her arm.

“Are you all right?”

“Yes,” she said, freeing herself, “Go on. It’s just that I can’t stand the sight of blood, damn it.”

She was climbing back into the camion as Hugh came up with the Consul and the two passengers.

The pelado was swaying gently over the recumbent man.

Although the latter’s face was covered by his hat it could be seen that he was an Indian of the peon class. There seemed no doubt that he was dying. His chest heaved like a spent swimmer’s, his stomach contracted and dilated rapidly, yet there was no sign of blood. One clenched fist spastically thumped the dust.

The two foreigners stood there helplessly, each waiting for the other to remove the peon’s hat, to expose the wound they all felt must be there, each checked from some such action by a common reluctance; an obscure courtesy. Each knew the other was also thinking it would be, naturally, even better still should the pelado or one of the passengers examine the man. But as nobody made any move Hugh became impatient. He shifted from foot to foot. He looked at the Consul with supplication. The Consul had been here long enough to know what could be done; moreover he was the one among them most nearly representing authority. But the Consul, who was trying to prevent himself saying, “Go ahead, after all, Spain invaded Mexico

first," made no move either. At last Hugh could stand it no longer. Stepping forward impulsively he made to bend over the peon when one of the passengers plucked at his sleeve.

"Mistair, have you throw away your cigarette?"

"What!" Hugh turned around, astonished.

"I don't know," said the Consul. "Forest fires, probably."

"Better throw your cigarette, Señor. They have prohibited it."

Hugh dropped his cigarette and stamped it out, bewildered and irritated. He was about to bend over the man once more when the passenger plucked his sleeve again. Hugh straightened up.

"They have prohibited it, Señor," the other said politely, tapping his nose. He gave an odd little laugh. "Positivamente!"

"I no comprendo, gnadige Señor." Hugh tried desperately to produce some Spanish.

"He means you can't touch this chap because you'd be an accessory after the fact," nodded the Consul, beginning to sweat and wishing profoundly he could get as far away from this scene as possible, if necessary even by means of the peon's horse, to somewhere where great gourds of mescal crouched. "Leave well enough alone is not only the watchword, Hugh, it's the law."

The man's breathing and thumping was like the sea dragging itself down a stone beach.

Then the pelado went down on one knee and whipped off the dying man's hat.

They all peered over, seeing the terrible wound in the side of his head, the blood from which had almost coagulated, and before they stood back, before the pelado replaced the hat and, drawing himself erect, made a hopeless gesture with hands blotched with half dried blood, they caught a glimpse of a sum of money, four or five silver pesos and a handful of centavos,

which had been placed neatly under the man's collar, by which it was partly obscured.

"But we can't let the poor fellow die," Hugh said despairingly, looking after the pelado as he returned to the bus, and then down once more at this life gasping away from them all. "We'll have to get a doctor."

This time from the camion, the pelado again made that gesture of hopelessness, which might have been also a gesture of sympathy.

The Consul was relieved to see that by now their presence had exemplified approach to the extent that two peasants, hitherto unnoticed, had come up to the dying man, while another passenger was also standing beside the body.

"Pobrecito," said one.

"Chingarn," muttered the other.

And gradually the others took up these remarks as a kind of refrain, a quiet seething of futility, of whispers, in which the dust, the heat, the bus with its load of immobile old women and doomed poultry, even the terrible beauty and mystery of the country itself, seemed to be conspiring: while only these two words, the one of tender compassion, the other of fiendish contempt, were audible above the thudding and the gasping, until the driver, as if satisfied that all was now as it should be, began impatiently blowing his horn.

A passenger shouted to him to shut up, but possibly thinking the admonition was in jesting approval, the driver continued to blow, punctuating the seething, which soon developed into a general argument in which suspicions and suggestions cancelled each other out, to a heckling accompaniment of contemptuous blasts.

Was it murder? Was it robbery? Or both? The peon had ridden from the market with more than that four or five pesos, possibly he'd been in possession of mucho dinero, so that a

good way to avoid suspicion of theft was to leave a little of the money, as had been done. Perhaps it was not robbery at all; he had only been thrown from his horse? The horse had kicked him? Possible? Impossible! Had the police been called? An ambulance—the Cruz Roja? Where was the nearest phone? One of them, now, should go for the police? But it was absurd to suppose they were not on their way. How could they be on their way when half of them were on strike? They would be on their way all right, though. An ambulance? But here it was impertinent of a gringo to interfere. Surely the Red Cross were perfectly capable of looking after such a matter themselves? But was there any truth in the rumor that the Servicio de Ambulante had been suspended? It was not a red but a green cross and their business began only when they were informed. Perhaps it was imprudent of a gringo to assume they hadn't been informed? A personal friend, Dr. Vigil, why not call him? He was playing tennis. Call the Casino de la Selva then? There was no phone; oh, there was one once but it had decomposed. Get another doctor, Dr. Gomez. Un hombre noble. Too far, and anyhow, probably he was out; well, perhaps he was back!

At last Hugh and the Consul became aware that they had reached an impasse upon which the driver's horn still made a most adequate comment. Neither could presume, from the appearance of it, that the peon's fate was not being taken care of in some way "by one of his own kind." Well, it certainly didn't look as though his own kind had been any too generous to him! On the contrary, the same person who placed him at the side of the road, who placed the money in the peon's collar, was probably even now going for help!

These sentiments got up and knocked each other down again and although their voices were not raised, although Hugh and the Consul were not quarrelling, it was as if they

were actually knocking each other down physically and getting up again, each time more weary than the last time down, each time with a practical or psychic obstruction toward cooperating or even acting singly, the most potent and final of all of which obstructions being that it was not their business at all but somebody else's.

Yet on looking around them they realized that this too was only what the others were arguing. It is not my business, nor yours, they said as they shook their heads, but someone else's, their answers becoming more and more involved, more and more theoretical, so that finally the discussion began to take a political turn.

To the Consul, time suddenly seemed to be moving at different speeds: the speed at which the peon was dying contrasting oddly with that at which everyone was arriving at the conclusion it was impossible to make up their minds. Aware that the discussion was by no means closed and that the driver, who had stopped blowing his horn, and was conversing with some of the women over his shoulder, would not think of leaving without first taking their fares, the Consul excused himself to Hugh and walked over to the Indian's horse, which, with its bucket saddle and heavy iron sheathes for stirrups, was calmly chewing the "convolvulus" in the hedge, looking as innocent as only one of its species can when suspected even wrongfully of throwing its rider or kicking a man to death. He examined it carefully, without touching it, noticing its wicked, friendly, plausible eyes, the sore on its hipbone, the number seven branded on its rump, as if for some clue to what had happened. Well, what *had* happened? Parable of a too late hour! More important, what was going to happen—to them all? What was going to happen to him was that he was going to have fifty-seven drinks at the earliest opportunity.

The bus was hooting with real finality now that two cars

were held up behind it; and the Consul, observing that Hugh was standing on the step of one of them, walked back shaking his head as the camion came toward him to stop at a wider part of the road. The cars, wild with impatience, thrust past and Hugh dropped off the second one. Bearing tin plates under their numbers with the warning "Diplomático" they disappeared ahead in a cloud of dust.

"It's the diplomatic thing, doubtless," said the Consul, with one foot on the step of the camion. "Come on, Hugh, there's nothing we can do."

The other passengers were getting on board and the Consul stood to one side to talk to Hugh. The periodicity of the honking now had become much slower. There was a bored, almost amused resignation in the sound.

"You'll only be hauled into gaol and entangled in red tape for God knows how long," the Consul persisted. "Come on, Hugh. What do you think you're going to do?"

"If I can't get a doctor here, God damn it, I'll take him to one."

"They won't let you on the bus."

"The hell they won't! Oh—here come the police," he added, as three smiling vigilantes came tramping through the dust at that moment, their holsters slapping their thighs.

"No, they're not," the Consul said unfortunately. "At least, they're just from the policía de seguridad, I think. They can't do anything much either, just tell you to go away or—"

Hugh began to expostulate with them while the Consul watched him from the step of the camion apprehensively. The driver was wearily honking. One of the policemen began to push Hugh toward the bus. Hugh pushed back. The policeman drew back his hand. Hugh raised his fist. The policeman dropped his hand and began to fumble with his holster.

"Come on Hugh, for God's sake," the Consul pleaded,

grasping him again. "Do you want to land us all in the gaol? Yvonne—"

The policeman was still fumbling with his holster when suddenly Hugh's face collapsed like a heap of ashes, he let his hands fall limply to his sides, and with a scornful laugh boarded the bus, which was already moving away.

"Never mind, Hugh," said the Consul, on the step with him, a drop of sweat falling on his toe, "It would have been worse than the windmills."

"What windmills?" Hugh looked about him, startled.

"No, no," the Consul said, "I meant something else, only that Don Quixote wouldn't have hesitated that long."

And he began to laugh.

Hugh stood for a moment cursing under his breath and looking back at the scene, the peon's horse munching the hedge, the police enveloped in the dust, the peon far beyond thumping the road, and now, hovering high above all, what he hadn't noticed before, the obvious cartoon birds, the xopilotes, who wait only for the ratification of death.

III

The bus plunged on.

Yvonne was flaccid with shame and relief. She tried to catch Hugh's eyes but he crammed himself into his seat so furiously she was afraid to speak to him or even to touch him.

She sought some excuse for her own behavior in the thought of the silent, communal decision of the old women to have nothing to do with the whole affair. With what sodality, scenting danger, they had clenched their baskets of poultry to them, or peered around to identify their property! Then they had sat, as now, motionless. It was as if, for them, through the various tragedies of Mexican history, pity, the impulse to approach, and terror, the impulse to escape (as she had learned at college),

had been reconciled finally by prudence, the conviction it is better to stay where you are.

And the other passengers? The men in their purple shirts who had a good look at what was going on but didn't get out either? Who wanted to be arrested as an accomplice, they seemed to be saying to her now. Frijoles for all; Tierra, Libertad, Justicia y Ley. Did all that mean anything? Quién sabe. They were not sure of anything save that it was foolish to get mixed up with the police, who had their own way of looking at the law.

Yvonne clutched Hugh's arm but he did not look at her. The camion rolled and swayed as before, some more boys jumped on the back of the bus; they began to whistle, the bright tickets winked with their bright colors and the men looked at each other with an air as of agreement that the bus was outdoing itself, it had never before gone so fast, which must be because it too knew today was a holiday.

Dust filtered in through the windows, a soft invasion of dissolution, filling the vehicle.

Then they were at Chapultepec.

The driver kept his hand on the screaming emergency brake as they circled down into the town, which was already invested with the Consul's abhorrence because of his past excesses there. Popocatepetl seemed impossibly close to them now, crouching over the jungle, which had begun to draw the evening over its knees.

For a moment there was a sort of twilight calm in the bus. The stars were out now: the Scorpion had come out of its hole and waited low on the horizon.

The Consul leaned forward and nudged Hugh: "Do you see what I see?" he asked him, inclining his head toward the pelado, who had been sitting bolt upright all this time, fidgeting with something on his lap, and wearing much the same

expression as before, though he was evidently somewhat rested and sobered.

As the bus stopped in the square, pitching Hugh to his feet, he saw that the pelado clutched in his fist a sad, blood-stained pile of silver pesos and centavos, the dying man's money—

The passengers began to crowd out. Some of them looked at the pelado, incredulous but always preoccupied. Grinning round at them he perhaps half hoped that some comment would be made. But there was no comment.

The pelado paid his fare with part of the bloodstained money, and the driver accepted it. Then he went on taking the other fares.

The three of them stood in the warm evening in the little zócalo. The old women had disappeared: it was as if they had been sucked down into the earth.

From a street near by the crashing, plangent chords of a guitar sounded. And from further away came the bangs and cries of the fiesta.

Yvonne took Hugh's arm. As they walked away they saw the driver, now ostensibly knocked off for the day, and the pelado, stepping high and with a fatuous smile of triumph on his face, swagger into a pulqueria. The three stared after them and at the name of the saloon, after its doors had swung shut: the Todos-Contentos-y-yo-Tambien.

"Everybody happy," said the Consul, the certainty that he would drink a million tequilas between now and the end of his life stealing over him like a benison and postponing for the moment the necessity for the first one, "Including me."

A bell somewhere compounded sudden wild triphthongs.

They moved in the direction of the fiesta, their shadows falling across the square, bending upward on the door of the Todos-Contentos-y-yo-Tambien, below which the bottom of a crutch had appeared.

They lingered curiously, noticing that the crutch rested for some time where it was, its owner having an argument at the door, or a last drink perhaps.

Presently, the crutch disappeared, as if it had been hoisted away. The door of the Todos-Contentos-y-yo-Tambien, through which they could see the bus driver and the pelado getting their drinks, was propped back; they saw something emerge.

Bent double and groaning with the weight, an old, lame Indian was carrying out another Indian, yet older and more decrepit, on his back, by means of a strap clamped to his forehead. He carried the older man and his crutches—he carried both their burdens—

They all stood in the dusk watching the Indian as he disappeared with the old man around a bend in the road, shuffling through the grey white dust in his poor sandals.

KRISTBJORG'S STORY: IN THE BLACK HILLS

THE GERMAN LIVED IN THE BLACK HILLS AND HE DRANK himself to death. Apparently he wished to obliterate something. This was in 1906. At that time there were three saloons in Deadwood: The Green Front, the Topic, and Lent Morris'. The Green Front was a fancy bar and dance hall and it had a stuffed buffalo in a glass case I remember. The Topic was not so fancy, and Lent Morris' was a bare bar. Calamity Jane used to go to the Topic, a big, mannish woman. I've seen Buffalo Bill there too, but they called him something else. The German used to go to this bare bar.

In those days the bars were open twenty-four hours a day and the bartenders worked in three shifts like miners.

The German didn't seem an average person who came from a rat hole. He was about thirty-five or forty maybe, had a fair moustache, blue eyes—German physique. He would drink a bottle of whiskey in five minutes, then he'd plunk. Sometimes he'd get half through the second bottle before keeling over, and when he did this beside you, if you didn't know him and weren't expecting it, it was a shock.

But it was no shock to Lent Morris. He wouldn't leave him in front of the bar though; they'd drag him away and prop him

STRANGE COMFORT AFFORDED BY THE PROFESSION

SIGBJØRN WILDERNESS, AN AMERICAN WRITER IN ROME on a Guggenheim Fellowship, paused on the steps above the flower stall and wrote, glancing from time to time at the house before him, in a black notebook:

Il poeta inglese Giovanni Keats mente meravigliosa quanto precoce morì in questa casa il 24 Febbraio 1821 nel ventisessimo anno dell'età sua.

Here, in a sudden access of nervousness, glancing now not only at the house, but behind him at the church of Trinità dei Monti, at the woman in the flower stall, the Romans drifting up and down the steps, or passing in the Piazza di Spagna below (for though it was several years after the war he was afraid of being taken for a spy), he drew, as well as he was able, the lyre, similar to the one on the poet's tomb, that appeared on the house between the Italian and its translation:



Then he added swiftly the words below the lyre:

The young English poet, John Keats, died in this house on the 24th of February 1821, aged 26.

This accomplished, he put the notebook and pencil back in his pocket, glanced around him again with a heavier, more penetrating look—that in fact was informed by such a malaise he saw nothing at all but which was intended to say “I have a perfect right to do this,” or “If you saw me do that, very well then, I *am* some sort of detective, perhaps even some kind of a painter”—descended the remaining steps, looked around wildly once more, and entered, with a sigh of relief like a man going to bed, the comforting darkness of Keats's house.

Here, having climbed the narrow staircase, he was almost instantly confronted by a legend in a glass case which said:

Remnants of aromatic gums used by Trelawny when cremating the body of Shelley.

And these words, for his notebook with which he was already rearmed felt ratified in this place, he also copied down, though he failed to comment on the gums themselves, which largely escaped his notice, as indeed did the house itself—there had been those stairs, there was a balcony, it was dark, there were many pictures, and these glass cases, it was a bit like a library—in which he saw no books of his—these made about the sum of Sigbjørn's unrecorded perceptions. From the aromatic gums he moved to the enshrined marriage license of the same poet, and Sigbjørn transcribed this document too, writing rapidly as his eyes became more used to the dim light:

Percy Bysshe Shelley of the Parish of Saint Mildred, Bread Street, London, Widower, and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin of the City of Bath, Spinster, a minor, were

married in this Church by Licence with Consent of William Godwin her father this Thirtieth Day of December in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixteen. By me Mr. Heydon, Curate. This marriage was solemnized between us.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN

In the presence of:

WILLIAM GODWIN

M. J. GODWIN.

Beneath this Sigbjørn added mysteriously:

Nemesis. Marriage of drowned Phoenician sailor. A bit odd here at all. Sad—feel swine to look at such things.

Then he passed on quickly—not so quickly he hadn't time to wonder with a remote twinge why, if there was no reason for any of his own books to be there on the shelves above him, the presence was justified of *In Memoriam*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Green Light*, and the *Field Book of Western Birds*—to another glass case in which appeared a framed and unfinished letter, evidently from Severn, Keats's friend, which Sigbjørn copied down as before:

My dear Sir:

Keats has changed somewhat for the worse—at least his mind has much—very much—yet the blood has ceased to come, his digestion is better and but for a cough he must be improving, that is as respects his body—but the fatal prospect of consumption hangs before his mind yet—and turns everything to despair and wretchedness—

he will not hear a word about living—nay, I seem to lose his confidence by trying to give him this hope [the following lines had been crossed out by Severn but Sigbjørn ruthlessly wrote them down just the same: *for his knowledge of internal anatomy enables him to judge of any change accurately and largely adds to his torture*], he will not think his future prospect favourable—he says the continued stretch of his imagination has already killed him and were he to recover he would not write another line—he will not hear of his good friends in England except for what they have done—and this is another load—but of their high hopes of him—his certain success—his experience—he will not hear a word—then the want of some kind of hope to feed his vivacious imagination—

The letter having broken off here, Sigbjørn, notebook in hand, tiptoed lingeringly to another glass case where, another letter from Severn appearing, he wrote:

My dear Brown—He is gone—he died with the most perfect ease—he seemed to go to sleep. On the 23rd at half past four the approaches of death came on. “Severn—lift me up for I am dying—I shall die easy—don't be frightened, I thank God it has come.” I lifted him upon my arms and the phlegm seemed boiling in his throat. This increased until 11 at night when he gradually sank into death so quiet I still thought he slept—But I cannot say more now. I am broken down beyond my strength. I cannot be left alone. I have not slept for nine days—the days since. On Saturday a gentleman came to cast his hand and foot. On Thursday the body was opened. The lungs were completely gone. The doctors would not—

Much moved, Sigbjørn reread this as it now appeared in his notebook, then added beneath it:

On Saturday a gentleman came to cast his hand and foot—that is the most sinister line to me. Who is this gentleman?

Once outside Keats's house Wilderness did not pause nor look to left or right, not even at the American Express, until he had reached a bar which he entered, however, without stopping to copy down its name. He felt he had progressed in one movement, in one stride, from Keats's house to this bar, partly just because he had wished to avoid signing his own name in the visitor's book. Sigbjørn Wilderness! The very sound of his name was like a bell-buoy—or more euphoniously a light-ship—broken adrift, and washing in from the Atlantic on a reef. Yet how he hated to write it down (loved to see it in print?)—though like so much else with him it had little reality unless he did. Without hesitating to ask himself why, if he was so disturbed by it, he did not choose another name under which to write, such as his second name which was Henry, or his mother's, which was Sanderson-Smith, he selected the most isolated booth he could find in the bar, that was itself an underground grotto, and drank two grappas in quick succession. Over his third he began to experience some of the emotions one might have expected him to undergo in Keats's house. He felt fully the surprise which had barely affected him that some of Shelley's relics were to be found there, if a fact no more astonishing than that Shelley—whose skull moreover had narrowly escaped appropriation by Byron as a drinking goblet, and whose heart, snatched out of the flames by Trelawny, he seemed to recollect from Proust, was interred in England—should have been buried in Rome at all (where the bit of Ariel's

song inscribed on his gravestone might have anyway prepared one for the rich and strange), and he was touched by the chivalry of those Italians who, during the war, it was said, had preserved, at considerable risk to themselves, the contents of that house from the Germans. Moreover he now thought he began to see the house itself more clearly, though no doubt not as it was, and he produced his notebook again with the object of adding to the notes already taken these impressions that came to him in retrospect.

"Mamertine Prison," he read . . . He'd opened it at the wrong place, at some observations made yesterday upon a visit to the historic dungeon, but being gloomily entertained by what he saw, he read on as he did so feeling the clammy confined horror of that underground cell, or other underground cell, not, he suspected, really sensed at the time, rise heavily about him.

MAMERTINE PRISON [ran the heading]

The lower is the true prison

of Mamertine, the state prison of ancient Rome.

The lower cell called Tullianus is probably the most ancient building in Rome. The prison was used to imprison malefactors and enemies of the State. In the lower cell is seen the well where according to tradition St. Peter miraculously made a spring to baptise the gaolers Processus and Martinianus. Victims: politicians. Pontius, King of the Sanniti. Died 290 B.C. Giurgurath (Jugurtha), Aristobulus, Vercingetorix.—The Holy Martyrs, Peter and Paul. Apostles imprisoned in the reign of Nero.—Processus, Abondius, *and many others unknown* were:

decapitato

suppliziato (suffocated)

strangolato
morto per fame.

Vercingetorix, the King of the Gauls, was certainly strangolato 49 B.C. and Jugurtha, King of Numidia, dead by starvation 104 B.C.

The lower is the true prison—why had he underlined that? Sigbjørn wondered. He ordered another grappa and, while awaiting it, turned back to his notebook where, beneath his remarks on the Mamertine prison, and added as he now recalled in the dungeon itself, this memorandum met his eyes:

Find Gogol's house—where wrote part of *Dead Souls*—1838. Where died Vielgorsky? "They do not heed me, nor see me, nor listen to me," wrote Gogol. "What have I done to them? Why do they torture me? What do they want of poor me? What can I give them? I have nothing. My strength is gone. I cannot endure all this." Suppliziato. Strangolato. In wonderful-horrible book of Nabokov's when Gogol was dying—he says—"you could feel his spine through his stomach." Leeches dangling from nose: "Lift them up, keep them away..." Henrik Ibsen, Thomas Mann, ditto brother: Buddenbrooks and Pippo Spano. A—where lived? became sunburned? Perhaps happy here. Prosper Mérimée and Schiller. Suppliziato. Fitzgerald in Forum. Eliot in Colosseum?

And underneath this was written enigmatically:

And many others.

And beneath this:

Perhaps Maxim Gorky too. This is funny. Encounter between Volga Boatman and saintly Fisherman.

What was funny? While Sigbjørn, turning over his pages toward Keats's house again, was wondering what he had meant, beyond the fact that Gorky, like most of those other distinguished individuals, had at one time lived in Rome, if not in the Mamertine prison—though with another part of his mind he knew perfectly well—he realized that the peculiar stichometry of his observations, jotted down as if he imagined he were writing a species of poem, had caused him prematurely to finish the notebook:

On Saturday a gentleman came to cast his hand and foot—that is the most sinister line to me—who is this gentleman?

With these words his notebook concluded.

That didn't mean there was no more space, for his notebooks, he reflected avuncularly, just like his candles, tended to consume themselves at both ends; yes, as he thought, there was some writing at the beginning. Reversing this, for it was upside down, he smiled and forgot about looking for space, since he immediately recognized these notes as having been taken in America two years ago upon a visit to Richmond, Virginia, a pleasant time for him. So, amused, he composed himself to read, delighted also, in an Italian bar, to be thus transported back to the South. He had made nothing of these notes, hadn't even known they were there, and it was not always easy accurately to visualize the scenes they conjured up:

The wonderful slanting square in Richmond and the tragic silhouette of interlaced leafless trees.

On a wall: *dirty stinking Degenerate Bobs was here from Boston, North End, Mass. Warp son of a bitch.*

Sigbjørn chuckled. Now he clearly remembered the biting winter day in Richmond, the dramatic courthouse in the precipitous park, the long climb up to it, and the caustic attestation to solidarity with the North in the (white) men's wash room. Smiling he read on:

In Poe's shrine, strange preserved news clipping:
CAPACITY CROWD HEARS TRIBUTE TO POE'S WORKS.
University student, who ended life, buried at Wytherville.

Yes, yes, and this he remembered too, in Poe's house, or one of Poe's houses, the one with the great dark wing of shadow on it at sunset, where the dear old lady who kept it, who'd showed him the news clipping, had said to him in a whisper: "So you see, *we* think these stories of his drinking can't *all* be true." He continued:

Opposite Craig house, where Poe's Helen lived, these words, upon façade, windows, stoop of the place from which E. A. P.—if I am right—must have watched the lady with the agate lamp: Headache—A.B.C.—Neuralgia: LIC-OFF-PREM—enjoy Pepsi—Drink Royal Crown Cola—Dr. Swell's Root Beer—"Furnish room for rent": did Poe really live here? Must have, could only have spotted Psyche from the regions which are Lic-Off-Prem.—Better than no Lic at all though. Bet Poe does not still live in Lic-Off-Prem. Else might account for "Furnish room for rent"?

Mem: Consult Talking Horse Friday.

—Give me Liberty or give me death [Sigbjørn now

read]. In churchyard, with Patrick Henry's grave; a notice. No smoking within ten feet of the church; then:

Outside Robert E. Lee's house:

Please pull the bell

To make it ring.

—Inside Valentine Museum, with Poe's relics—

Sigbjørn paused. Now he remembered that winter day still more clearly. Robert E. Lee's house was of course far below the courthouse, remote from Patrick Henry and the Craig house and the other Poe shrine, and it would have been a good step hence to the Valentine Museum, even had not Richmond, a city whose Hellenic character was not confined to its architecture, but would have been recognized in its gradients by a Greek mountain goat, been grouped about streets so steep it was painful to think of Poe toiling up them. Sigbjørn's notes were in the wrong order, and it must have been morning then, and not sunset as it was in the other house with the old lady, when he went to the Valentine Museum. He saw Lee's house again, and a faint feeling of the beauty of the whole frostbound city outside came to his mind, then a picture of a Confederate white house, near a gigantic red-brick factory chimney, with far below a glimpse of an old cobbled street, and a lone figure crossing a waste, as between three centuries, from the house toward the railway tracks and this chimney, which belonged to the Bone Dry Fertilizer Company. But in the sequence of his notes "Please pull the bell, to make it ring," on Lee's house, had seemed to provide a certain musical effect of solemnity, yet ushering him instead into the Poe museum which Sigbjørn now in memory re-entered.

Inside Valentine Museum, with Poe's relics [he read once more]

Please

Do not smoke

Do not run

Do not touch walls or exhibits

Observation of these rules will insure your own and others' enjoyment of the museum.

—Blue silk coat and waistcoat, gift of the Misses Boykin, that belonged to one of George Washington's dentists.

Sigbjørn closed his eyes, in his mind Shelley's crematory gums and the gift of the Misses Boykin struggling for a moment helplessly, then he returned to the words that followed. They were Poe's own, and formed part of some letters once presumably written in anguished and private desperation, but which were now to be perused at leisure by anyone whose enjoyment of them would be "insured" so long as they neither smoked nor ran nor touched the glass case in which, like the gums (on the other side of the world), they were preserved. He read:

Excerpt from a letter by Poe—after having been dismissed from West Point—to his foster father. Feb. 21, 1831.

"It will however be the last time I ever trouble any human being—I feel I am on a sick bed from which I shall never get up."

Sigbjørn calculated with a pang that Poe must have written these words almost seven years to the day after Keats's death, then, that far from never having got up from his sick bed, he had risen from it to change, thanks to Baudelaire, the whole course of European literature, yes, and not merely to trouble, but to frighten the wits out of several generations of human beings

with such choice pieces as "King Pest," "The Pit and the Pendulum," and "A Descent into the Maelstrom," not to speak of the effect produced by the compendious and prophetic *Eureka*.

My *ear* has been too shocking for any description—I am wearing away every day, even if my last sickness had not completed it.

Sigbjørn finished his grappa and ordered another. The sensation produced by reading these notes was really very curious. First, he was conscious of himself reading them here in this Roman bar, then of himself in the Valentine Museum in Richmond, Virginia, reading the letters through the glass case and copying fragments from these down, then of poor Poe sitting blackly somewhere writing them. Beyond this was the vision of Poe's foster father likewise reading some of these letters, for all he knew unheedingly, yet solemnly putting them away for what turned out to be posterity, these letters which, whatever they might not be, were certainly—he thought again—intended to be private. But were they indeed? Even here at this extremity Poe must have felt that he was transcribing the story that was E. A. Poe, at this very moment of what he conceived to be his greatest need, his final—however consciously engineered—disgrace, felt a certain reluctance, perhaps, to send what he wrote, as if he were thinking: Damn it, I could use some of that, it may not be so hot, but it is at least too good to waste on my foster father. Some of Keats's own published letters were not different. And yet it was almost bizarre how, among these glass cases, in these museums, to what extent one revolved about, was hemmed in by, this cinereous evidence of anguish. Where was Poe's astrolabe, Keats's tankard of claret, Shelley's "Useful Knots for the Yachtsman"? It was true that Shelley himself might not have been aware of the aromatic gums, but even that

beautiful and irrelevant circumstantiality that was the gift of the Misses Boykin seemed not without its suggestion of suffering, at least for George Washington.

Baltimore, April 12, 1833.

I am perishing—absolutely perishing for want of aid. And yet I am not idle—nor have I committed any offence against society which would render me deserving of so hard a fate. For God's sake pity me and save me from destruction.

E. A. POE

Oh, God, thought Sigbjørn. But Poe had held out another sixteen years. He had died in Baltimore at the age of forty. Sigbjørn himself was nine behind on that game so far, and—with luck—should win easily. Perhaps if Poe had held out a little longer—perhaps if Keats—he turned over the pages of his notebook rapidly, only to be confronted by the letter from Severn:

My dear Sir:

Keats has changed somewhat for the worse—at least his mind has much—very much—yet the blood has ceased to come . . . but the fatal prospect hangs . . . *for his knowledge of internal anatomy. . . largely adds to his torture.*

Suppliziato, strangolato, he thought . . . *The lower is the true prison. And many others.* Nor have I committed any offense against society. Not much you hadn't, brother. Society might pay you the highest honors, even to putting your relics in the company of the waistcoat belonging to George Washington's dentist, but in its heart it cried:—*dirty stinking Degenerate Bobs was here from Boston, North End, Mass. Warp son of a bitch!* . . . "On Saturday a gentleman came to cast his hand and

foot . . ." Had anybody done that, Sigbjørn wondered, tasting his new grappa, and suddenly cognizant of his diminishing Guggenheim, compared, that was, Keats and Poe?—But compare in what sense, Keats, with what, in what sense, with Poe? What was it he wanted to compare? Not the aesthetic of the two poets, nor the breakdown of *Hyperion*, in relation to Poe's conception of the short poem, nor yet the philosophic ambition of the one, with the philosophic achievement of the other. Or could that more properly be discerned as negative capability, as opposed to negative achievement? Or did he merely wish to relate their melancholias? potations? hangovers? Their sheer guts—which commentators so obligingly forgot!—character, in a high sense of that word, the sense in which Conrad sometimes understood it, for were they not in their souls like hapless shipmasters, determined to drive their leaky commands full of valuable treasure at all costs, somehow, into port, and always against time, yet through all but interminable tempest, typhoons that so rarely abated? Or merely what seemed funereally analogous within the mutuality of their shrines? Or he could even speculate, starting with Baudelaire again, upon what the French movie director Epstein who had made *La Chute de la Maison Usher* in a way that would have delighted Poe himself, might have done with *The Eve of St. Agnes: And they are gone!* . . . "For God's sake pity me and save me from destruction!"

Ah ha, now he thought he had it: did not the preservation of such relics betoken—beyond the filing cabinet of the malicious foster father who wanted to catch one out—less an obscure revenge for the poet's nonconformity, than for his magical monopoly, his possession of words? On the one hand he could write his translunar "Ulalume," his enchanted "To a Nightingale" (which might account for the *Field Book of Western Birds*), on the other was capable of saying, simply, "I am perishing . . . For God's sake pity me . . ." You see, after all, he's just like

folks... What's this?... Conversely, there might appear almost a tragic condescension in remarks such as Flaubert's often quoted "Ils sont dans le vrai" perpetuated by Kafka—Kaf—and others, and addressed to child-bearing rosy-cheeked and jolly humanity at large. Condescension, nay, inverse self-approval, something downright unnecessary. And Flaub—Why should they be dans le vrai any more than the artist was dans le vrai? All people and poets are much the same but some poets are more the same than others, as George Orwell might have said. George Or—And yet, what modern poet would be caught dead (though they'd do their best to catch him all right) with his "For Christ's sake send aid," unrepossessed, unincinerated, to be put in a glass case? It was a truism to say that poets not only were, but looked like folks these days. Far from ostensible non-conformists, as the daily papers, the very writers themselves—more shame to them—took every opportunity triumphantly to point out, they dressed like, and as often as not were bank clerks, or, marvelous paradox, engaged in advertising. It was true. He, Sigbjørn, dressed like a bank clerk himself—how else should he have courage to go into a bank? It was questionable whether poets especially, in uttermost private, any longer allowed themselves to say things like "For God's sake pity me!" Yes, they had become more like folks even than folks. And the despair in the glass case, all private correspondence carefully destroyed, yet destined to become ten thousand times more public than ever, viewed through the great glass case of art, was now transmuted into hieroglyphics, masterly compressions, obscurities to be deciphered by experts—yes, and poets—like Sigbjørn Wilderness. Wil—

And many others. Probably there was a good idea somewhere, lurking among these arrant self-contradictions; pity could not keep him from using it, nor a certain sense of horror that he felt all over again that these mummified and naked cries

of agony should lie thus exposed to human view in permanent incorruption, as if embalmed evermore in their separate eternal funeral parlors: separate, yet not separate, for was it not as if Poe's cry from Baltimore, in a mysterious manner, in the manner that the octet of a sonnet, say, is answered by its sestet, had already been answered, seven years before, by Keats's cry from Rome; so that according to the special reality of Sigbjørn's notebook at least, Poe's own death appeared like something extraformal, almost extraprofessional, an afterthought. Yet inerrably it was part of the same poem, the same story. "And yet the fatal prospect hangs..." "Severn, lift me up, for I am dying." "Lift them up, keep them away." Dr. Swell's Root Beer.

Good idea or not, there was no more room to implement his thoughts within this notebook (the notes on Poe and Richmond ran, through Fredericksburg, into his remarks upon Rome, the Mamertine Prison, and Keats's house, and vice versa), so Sigbjørn brought out another one from his trousers pocket.

This was a bigger notebook altogether, its paper stiffer and stronger, showing it dated from before the war, and he had brought it from America at the last minute, fearing that such might be hard to come by abroad.

In those days he had almost given up taking notes: every new notebook bought represented an impulse, soon to be overlaid, to write afresh; as a consequence he had accumulated a number of notebooks like this one at home, yet which were almost empty, which he had never taken with him on his more recent travels since the war, else a given trip would have seemed to start off with a destructive stoop, from the past, in its soul: this one had looked an exception so he'd packed it.

Just the same, he saw, it was not innocent of writing: several pages at the beginning were covered with his handwriting, so shaky and hysterical of appearance, that Sigbjørn had to put on his spectacles to read it. Seattle, he made out. July? 1939.

Seattle! Sigbjørn swallowed some grappa hastily. Lo, death hath reared himself a throne in a strange city lying alone far down within the dim west, where the good and the bad and the best and the rest, have gone to their eternal worst! The lower is the true Seattle... Sigbjørn felt he could be excused for not fully appreciating Seattle, its mountain graces, in those days. For these were not notes he had found but the draft of a letter, written in the notebook because it was that type of letter possible for him to write only in a bar. A bar? Well, one might have called it a bar. For in those days, in Seattle, in the state of Washington, they still did not sell hard liquor in bars—as, for that matter, to this day they did not, in Richmond, in the state of Virginia—which was half the gruesome and pointless point of his having been in the state of Washington. LIC-OFF-PREM, he thought. No, no, go not to Virginia Dare... Neither twist Pepso—tight-rooted!—for its poisonous bane. The letter dated—no question of his recognition of it, though whether he'd made another version and posted it he had forgotten—from absolutely the lowest ebb of those low tides of his life, a time marked by the baleful circumstance that the small legacy on which he then lived had been suddenly put in charge of a Los Angeles lawyer, to whom this letter indeed was written, his family, who considered him incompetent, having refused to have anything further to do with him, as, in effect, did the lawyer, who had sent him to a religious minded family of Buchmanite tendencies in Seattle on the understanding he be entrusted with not more than 25¢ a day.

Dear Mr. Van Bosch:

It is, psychologically, apart from anything else, of extreme urgency that I leave Seattle and come to Los Angeles to see you. I fear a complete mental collapse else. I have cooperated far beyond what I thought was the best

of my ability here in the matter of liquor and I have also tried to work hard, so far, alas, without selling anything. I cannot say either that my ways have been as circumscribed exactly as I thought they would be by the Mackorkindales, who at least have seen my point of view on some matters, and if they pray for guidance on the very few occasions when they do see fit to exceed the stipulated 25¢ a day, they are at least sympathetic with my wishes to return. This may be because the elder Mackorkindale is literally and physically worn out following me through Seattle, or because you have failed to supply sufficient means for my board, but this is certainly as far as the sympathy goes. In short, they sympathize, but cannot honestly agree; nor will they advise you I should return. And in anything that applies to my writing—and this I find almost the hardest to bear—I am met with the opinion that I “should put all that behind me.” If they merely claimed to be abetting yourself or my parents in this it would be understandable, but this judgment is presented to me independently, somewhat blasphemously in my view—though without question they believe it—as coming directly from God, who stoops daily from on high to inform the Mackorkindales, if not in so many words, that as a serious writer I am lousy. Scenting some hidden truth about this, things being what they are, I would find it discouraging enough if it stopped there, and were not beyond that the hope held out, miraculously congruent also with that of my parents and yourself, that I could instead turn myself into a successful writer of advertisements. Since I cannot but feel, I repeat, and feel respectfully, that they are sincere in their beliefs, all I can say is that in this daily rapprochement with their Almighty in Seattle I hope some prayer that has slipped in by mistake

to let the dreadful man for heaven's sake return to Los Angeles may eventually be answered. For I find it impossible to describe my spiritual isolation in this place, nor the gloom into which I have sunk. I enjoyed of course the seaside—the Mackorkindales doubtless reported to you that the Group were having a small rally in Bellingham (I wish you could go to Bellingham one day)—but I have completely exhausted any therapeutic value in my stay. God knows I ought to know, I shall never recover in this place, isolated as I am from Primrose who, whatever you may say, I want with all my heart to make my wife. It was with the greatest of anguish that I discovered that her letters to me were being opened, finally, even having to hear lectures on her moral character by those who had read these letters, which I had thus been prevented from replying to, causing such pain to her as I cannot think of. This separation from her would be an unendurable agony, without anything else, but as things stand I can only say I would be better off in a prison, in the worst dungeon that could be imagined, than to be incarcerated in this damnable place with the highest suicide rate in the Union. Literally I am dying in this macabre hole and I appeal to you to send me, out of the money that is after all mine, enough that I may return. Surely I am not the only writer, there have been others in history whose ways have been misconstrued and who have failed...who have won through...success...publicans and sinners...I have no intention—

Sigbjørn broke off reading, and resisting an impulse to tear the letter out of the notebook, for that would loosen the pages, began meticulously to cross it out, line by line.

And now this was half done he began to be sorry. For now,

damn it, he wouldn't be able to use it. Even when he'd written it he must have thought it a bit too good for poor old Van Bosch, though one admitted that wasn't saying much. Wherever or however he could have used it. And yet, what if they had found this letter—whoever "they" were—and put it, glass-encased, in a museum among *his* relics? Not much—still, you never knew!—Well, they wouldn't do it now. Anyhow, perhaps he would remember enough of it... "I am dying, absolutely perishing." "What have I done to them?" "My dear Sir." "The worst dungeon." And many others: and *dirty stinking Degenerate Bobs was here from Boston, North End, Mass. Warp son—!*

Sigbjørn finished his fifth unregenerate grappa and suddenly gave a loud laugh, a laugh which, as if it had realized itself it should become something more respectable, turned immediately into a prolonged—though on the whole relatively pleasurable—fit of coughing....