New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY VOLUME 16 NUMBER 2/$9.00

New Orleans Review

Summer 1989

The *New Orleans Review* is published by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States.
Critical essays relating to film or literature of up to ten thousand words should be prepared to conform with the new MLA guidelines. All essays, fiction, poetry, photography, or related artwork should be sent to the *New Orleans Review*, together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The address is *New Orleans Review*, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.
Reasonable care is taken in the handling of material, but no responsibility is assumed for the loss of unsolicited material. Accepted manuscripts are the property of the *NOR*. Rejected manuscripts without stamped, self-addressed envelopes will not be returned.
The *New Orleans Review* is published in February, May, August, and November. Annual Subscription Rate: Institutions $30.00, Individuals $25.00, Foreign Subscribers $35.00. Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography and the Index of American Periodical Verse.
US ISSN 0028-6400

NEW ORLEANS REVIEW

SUMMER 1989 VOLUME 16 NUMBER 2

CONTENTS

Ryszard Bugajski

INTERROGATION

Translated by Michael Szporer

> *No work of art can be created if its author concludes for one reason or another that the life in which his characters are immersed is a masquerade, since he will then be unable to understand either their passions, or why they may be prepared to sell their souls to the devil, or heights to which they can rise. The most he will produce is a puppet show, a deft shuffling of clichés, a vapid exercise in plot-making.*
>
> *—Andrzej Wajda, "The Artist's Responsibility," Gdańsk, 1980*

No film produced in the socialist bloc is a more human appraisal of contemporary realities than Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation*, now also a novel. It probably would not have seen the light of day were it not for Solidarity and the brief spell of unprecedented artistic freedom which the mass movement brought about in Poland in 1980-81. Initially the screenplay by the promising young director of several telefilms and a collaboration (with Janusz Dymek), *A Woman is a Woman* (1980), was rejected out of hand by the Ministry of Culture and Art. The film was eventually produced by Andrzej Wajda's Film Unit X when the film cooperative was allowed to make its own decisions without the usual necessary approval from the Ministry. The screenplay originally appeared in *Dialog*, a magazine of the performing arts. Bugajski completed *Interrogation* after martial law was declared on December 13, 1981, and civil liberties were suspended. The film was submitted to the deputy minister for review by the so-called "colaudation" commission and subsequently shelved. (For a transcript of the censorship hearings see *The New Criterion* Oct. 1982). In 1982, *Interrogation* was named "Film of the Year" by the Solidarity underground, and the novel was published simultaneously by NOWA free press underground and by Kultura/Institut Littéraire, an emigré publisher in Paris.

Interrogation is the only feature film from the Solidarity era still banned in Poland. It has not been released in spite of its having been seen by over two million viewers underground on video NOWA 1 which is available in thousands of copies; the figure exceeds box office receipts for most officially released films. (According to an estimate published in *Trybuna Ludu* in January 1987, there are 500,000 to 700,000 video recorders in Poland and some two million cassettes.) Even though *Interrogation* could not be shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 1982, because of the Ministry's refusal to release it, in 1987 it was voted "Best Film" at the Rotterdam Film Festival. While the power of the censor has been circumvented, the fact that the film has not been publicly released for so long and the wide popular appeal it has amassed at underground showings speaks to the currency of its message. It was not the only film outrightly banned or withdrawn from circulation after December 13, 1981. The long list included much of the new wave of Polish films, the so-called "cinema of moral anxiety," which anticipated the 1980-81 crisis: several Wajda films, including the very popular *Man of Iron*; films by Agnieszka Holland, *Lonely Woman* and *Fever*; and Wojciech Marczewski's reflection on the Stalin years, *Shivers*, among others; even the merits of classics like *Ashes and Diamonds* were questioned. Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Incident*, also invited to Cannes in 1982, and Janusz Zaorski's adaptation of the Kazimierz Brandys novel, *Mother of Kings*, were not released until 1987.

Still, it is worth noting that less than a month after the lifting of martial law, Andrzej Barański's *Let Go of Your Illusions*, a film that among other things deals with Stalinism and makes indirect references to the contemporary crisis, opened in an out-of-the-way theater in Warsaw, and within a year or two, several controversial films produced at the time of Solidarity were released. Evidently the authorities were hard-pressed for new films because of the boycott which crippled the entertainment industry and reduced film and TV production to a fifth of its normal yearly output—and they had to keep up the image that everything was getting back to normal. Film censorship

is as expensive as the production of films which the public rejects—and censorship in Poland has come to mean almost the assurance of success. A number of internationally acclaimed films have been censored at one time or another. As the director of *Witnesses*, a documentary about a pogrom instigated by the party in Kielce in 1946, Marcel Łoziński summed it up: "We make realistic films using public funds which reject propaganda, expecting them to be shelved and then allowed to surface at a politically appropriate moment."

Interrogation is a "bastard history of the Stalin era," a growing genre which includes several quality Polish and Hungarian films, notably Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble*, Wojciech Marczewski's *Shivers*, Janusz Zaorski's *Mother of Kings*, Pal Gabor's *Angi Vera*, the Yugoslav Cannes Festival winner, *My Father Is Away on Business* by Emir Kusturnica, and the Soviet *perestroika* film *Repentance*, by the Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze. Reexamination of past errors brings up the problem of current injustices. Such films are politically risqué because they question the legitimacy of the system by taking account of its history and lay open those who hold power without public consent to public scrutiny. However, *Interrogation* goes far beyond breaking silence on a sensitive issue. It is a direct assault on a political system that terrorizes its citizens. For what characterized the Stalin years was the relative freedom of action of the security police apparatus which became the instrument of fear more powerful than the party or the politbureau, answerable only to the party secretary—and in Poland, on more than one occassion, with a direct line to Laverentin Beria and Joseph Stalin himself. Basing himself on what happened to Tonia Lechman, a friend of the secretary to Władysław Gomułka, and other actual accounts by political prisoners, Bugajski's portrayal is highly documentary. In no sense does it glamourize Stalinism by straying into symbolism or sentimental reflections about "the painful period." It shows Stalinist terror for what it was—a raping of the human spirit.

What must have been hair-raising to the censor was the implication of continuity—the contemporaneity of history suggested by *Interrogation*—that was only exacerbated by the declaration of martial law. For how legitimate is a government that has to rely on troops to quell the aspirations of its people, to intimidate them with mass arrests, loyalty oaths, identity checks, police searches, and wiretapping in order to keep them in line? Even the initial objections to the screenplay were not primarily to its daring and graphic depiction of security police abuses. Not many people in Poland, not even those in power, admire "the UBeks" (security police) except perhaps the UBeks themselves. The Ministry of National Security was officially dissolved on December 7, 1954, and security police was purged and reorganized already before the period of liberalization following the "Polish October" of 1956. The party leadership since then has tried to distance itself from Stalinism, portraying itself as reformist or legally-constituted. What the censors disliked in Bugajski's scenario was the parallel contemporary theme, which was filmed but was cut from the final version for artistic reasons.

The film, in contrast to the novel, is a historical broadside against the regime, more direct, perhaps even more blatantly "documentary," in its black and white colors on underground video. The film is primarily Tonia's story, remarkably portrayed by Krystyna Janda (noted for her performances in Wajda's *Man of Marble, The Orchestra Conductor*, and *Man of Iron*, as well as in *Mephisto*, by the Hungarian director Istvan Szabo), whose "woman of marble" screen image in a sense incarnates the new Polish woman. This strengthens the central motif, more developed in the novel, of the evolving feminist awareness. An agitprop theater actress with a lot of spunk but little political sense, Tonia is snatched off the street by UBeks and spends the next five years in political prison. A victim of physical and mental tortures, she tries to maintain her dignity and self-respect. The novel frames Tonia's story. It makes a more personal appeal as a diary that Tonia leaves to her Solidarity-activist daughter, Małgorzata, who discovers that she is a bastard child of the Stalin years. As she buries her mother, Małgorzata gains greater personal and social awareness. She learns the gruesome details of Tonia's prison nightmare and also about her biological father, Tadeusz Moravski, her mother's jailer. An UBek, ironically himself a surviver of Auschwitz, and a believer in the communist system, Tadeusz ends up killing himself when the ideology fails him shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. No belief system can serve as an apologia for the gulag. The novel provides us with a sense of a contemporary crisis—dingy, freezing hospital rooms, lack of proper care, shortages, duplicity and red tape in public places, general societal degeneration and lack of concern for others, a husband who is a political prisoner, a father who is a political sellout, voices of protest, and so on. The novel also leaves us to wonder about the fate of little Magda, Małgorzata's daughter, and her future in socialist Poland.

Interrogation is not really about political people detained for political reasons. Tonia's arrest probably had something to do with her association—as it turns out a one-night stand—with colonel Olcha, one of the imaginary enemies of the people's republic accused of espionage, presumably implicated in the General Tatar affair in the summer of 1951 (see note p. 27). But whether she "confessed" to her "crime" or not had very little to do with the inevitable outcome of the case—Olcha was executed. Tonia's only real crime was her resistance, her refusal to be broken as a human being, since she had no beans to spill; or perhaps she was arrested by mistake but, since people's justice does not make mistakes—particularly at a critical moment in history when its very survival is on the line—the

mistake can only be rectified by keeping her in prison. Comrade Vitkovska, Tonia's cellmate implicated in the Noel Field spy affair, is a loyal communist who toes the line, having adopted her thinking and conscience to accept the prevailing party dogma—if the party says I am a spy then I am a spy "objectively" (see note p. 38). Subjective opinion is irrelevant. Vitkovska has learned to substitute political and social slogans for thought and genuine feelings. But her blind obedience is hardly politically motivated. She has learned simply "how to swim" or never had any subjectivity to speak of.

The interrogating UBeks are also human beings who basically demonstrate that human nature cannot hide from itself for long. In many ways Zavada is a textbook case of duplicity of the authoritarian personality type, holding traditional views about the role of women and sexual morality, and, at the same time, possessed by uncontrollable outbursts of violence and a sexually perverse imagination. On the one hand, he seems to have no moral conscience, simply doing his job with no ideological illusions about it—which is probably why he is not losing sleep over it. On the other hand, he seems rather ordinary, a family man, quite capable of expressing compassion for others so long as it has nothing to do with his job. In contrast, Moravski is a man of principle, a communist intellectual representing the new cadres. Yet he is really no different or better in what he does than the morally reprehensible Zavada. Moravski is the one who sabotages all that Tonia seems to care about, who disrupts her friendship with Mira, who breaks up her marriage to Kostek, and who, in a moment of weakness, imposes himself upon her feelings—when she has nothing left but him. An ambivalent figure, haunted by his concentration camp experiences of total degeneration of humanity, and struggling to maintain a belief system in the face of nothingness, Moravski is also capable of genuine feelings. In the end, he seems to be more concerned about moral approbation than about politics. The blood of innocent people is on his hands, and the only human way out for him is suicide.

Bugajski is mainly concerned about deep-seated moral questions and particularly about holding one's own and remaining true to oneself under impossible circumstances. Hence it is difficult to understand why the negative reactions to the film at the censorship hearings were so virulent, especially if the matter was out of the Ministry's hands. The critics called it "a banner, a poster film pushing the struggle [taking place today] onto the screen in a very open, impudent manner"; "an anti-socialist film made solely for propagandistic reasons"; "it is a premediated lie" that misrepresents the workings of the security apparatus and does not present a balanced view of the fifties, and so on. The discussion did not deal with substance but degenerated into civic-sounding phrases and genuflecting ideological postures. Some critics, clearly personally threatened by the political tensions in the country, made frenzied emotional appeals, drawing analogies to "a monstrous blow up" of "cancerous tissue which should have been rejected" and to Nazi pathological literature filled with pornography and sadism.

Why did these critics feel that they had to resort to the protective colors of language in order to distance themselves from the moral outrage against the system that Bugajski's work expresses? *Interrogation* does not advocate any one prevailing ideology. Actually, Bugajski was careful not to overpoliticize history, for example, making only one, very oblique allusion to any Soviet involvement in the operations of the security police apparatus during the Stalinist period. (One of Tonia's guards wears Soviet and Polish medals on his chest.) Yet, in his interview with Teresa Torańska, the former party secretary Edward Ochab frankly admitted that "the Soviet advisors were more often than not the ones who had the final say in several ministries and especially in organs of Ministry of National Security." If any thing, *Interrogation* seems to view any belief system, any master plot, with some suspicion, whether it be political, religious, intellectual, or otherwise.

That *Interrogation* is a factual account of police terror was acknowledged by its critics—their references to Agnieszka Holland (who plays Vitkovska) and her father, a communist activist who fell out of his apartment window during a police search, or to the well-known case of Anna Duracz, the secretary to Jakub Berman, who was imprisoned in connection with the Noel Field spy affair, actually deepen its historical significance (see note p. 53). By the same token, the observation made in defense of the film that it is only anti-socialist "if we regard those practices shown in the film as an integral element of socialism," already in some respects indicates either the moral bankruptcy of the ideology or a certain complicity on the part of the censors in the illegitimate methods of political terror. It is another way of asking whether socialism still has any meaning. In a way, the censorship hearings serve as an addendum to *Interrogation* underscoring its currency. Tonia's story epitomizes the moral degeneration of the fifties. It exposes the seedy underside of the great men of marble, the larger than life, positive vision of a better and brighter "socialist" future. It shows the suffering and the brutality, the price paid for something that never was to be: The Lie. While Tonia's diary is a moral dismemberment of the standard bearers of socialist realism, what it bestows on Małgorzata is a new moral awareness, no longer black and white, but the grey of an ordinary woman's experience unencumbered by ideology.

I am Antonina Dzivish, nee Yablonovska, born April 1, 1926, in Lvov. . . . My father, Henryk, worked as a salesman at a wholesale fuel outlet, my mother, Jadviga, nee Kuna, a homemaker. . . . On my father's side, my grandfather, Jan Yablonovski, was a moulder (a metal worker, mostly tinkering about the house). . . . On my mother's side, Michael Kuna was apparently an impoverished landowner, although nothing is certain. I know miserably little about my background—no documents remain, no photos. And from what I can remember, at home little was made of family history. I studied in Lvov at the Teofilia Zamienievska finishing school for girls; afterwards I would presumably go into sales like my father and my older brother. School work didn't interest me much. Instead, I absorbed stacks of forbidden novels at night, chain-smoked cigarettes, and cut classes to go to the movies. I dreamed only of becoming a grande dame when I grew up. So they kicked me out and reinstated me only after my mother's humiliating pleading. Just before the war broke out, my father sent me away to Warsaw, to a boarding school, and asked some old acquaintances of his to take me under their wing. My two younger sisters, my brother, my parents, as well as an uncle and aunt, along with their children, were sent off into the depths of Asia, all lost without a trace. I heard rumors that they died of typhoid en route to India. I survived, I was lucky. . . . And what's odd, I was sent away from Lvov as punishment. . . . Even at that time, as I recall, I was not overly concerned about the lot of my family. I matured; I was more wrapped up in myself and in the lives of my peers. My parents' friends lavished a lot of their sympathy on me which annoyed me deeply—I would have preferred to have lived through it by myself, in my own way, without the melodrama of tears and exclamation marks. Instead of letting me go to underground classes where many of my friends from better homes congregated, they told me to get myself a job. The only thing I knew how to do well at the time was whistling with my fingers. I began as a baker's aide in a shop on our block. I hated the job, I hated my guardians, I hated my boss—a malicious, extremely demanding half-wit. For slaving all night in the dust and the damn heat, he paid me peanuts, and on top of it, I had to put up with his hollering, his nagging me about how I dressed, how I wore my hair, how I polished my fingernails. At times I wished that they would all drop dead, or that some drunken Kraut would beat them to a bloody pulp.

Ever since I was a child, I sang well, I wasn't a bad dancer—I had a good ear—but my parents didn't have the money for music lessons. I picked up how to piddle on the piano on my own—I even composed a tango once. Just before the end of the war, I found myself in Pruszków, on the outskirts of Warsaw. Entirely by chance, with help from some lady officer, I joined the ranks of the entertainment troupe of the newly formed First People's Army—went even with them as far as Berlin—then came back to Łódź; from Łódź I moved to Warsaw and started performing at a music-hall. I lived almost like royalty, a happy-go-lucky existence, with a bunch of friends who served as an ample substitute for a family. This period I recall as the happiest, the best, moments of my life: a chain of highs and hangovers, of getting drunk and sobering up, of mad escapades. Mostly it was in the spirit of the times under the German occupation: better ignore the menace surrounding you, better die drunk—you suffer less then. But at the time, nothing threatened us—that was simply our style. The snapshots taken during this period show a laughing girl beaming full of life, grinning straight white rows of teeth, in the company of friends, with soldiers, at tables full of vodka, or someplace out in the sticks on tour under the banner "We Are Bringing Culture to the Countryside," or during the cleanup of Warsaw ruins, or in the arms of an old boyfriend. I lived then for the moment, tenuously, feverishly, never worrying about tomorrow. Whatever happened afterwards, and it struck like lightening out of the blue, seems like an inevitable necessity of fate, like a logical balancing-out of my carefree existence, even though it must have happened by chance. Of course, it has absolutely nothing to do with atoning for one's sins out of divine dispensation, with the heavens descending in judgment. In the first place, I don't believe in it; and, secondly, I feel that I did not deserve such a fate under the circumstances. On the contrary, I had been honest and innocent, as only an ordinary person can be honest and innocent. But when you don't realize what's going on around you, the more painful the disenchantment becomes, the more brutal the transgression of reality on the unreal world.

It happened in December 1951, just before Christmas. But before I tell you the story, I have to come back to the time I met Kostek. Kostek wore the name Dzivish ludicrously and was a poet.* It didn't take us long to start living together

in a spacious, dilapidated flat, but with a grand piano, located in a ruined apartment house near Widok Street. Broken windowpanes were covered over with sheet metal and boards—evidently the previous tenants used the floor parquet for firewood; the bathroom was a storage bin for coal and old bicycles. Dziunia, a friend of mine from the theater, made these living arrangements for us; in any case, she lived in the adjoining servant's quarters. Before the war, Kostek attended the seminary; during the occupation, he studied theology underground and sold coal and lime stolen off the trains; after the liberation, he considered taking holy vows, but he met me. Even though he wasn't all that handsome, his manliness had a deep effect on me. Whenever he touched my body, even through clothing, I instantly trembled. Whether we were together then in the theater, on the road, in the street, we rushed to find an out-of-the-way corner, a stairwell. We would lock ourselves in the toilet of the flat where we were visiting and we got on with such fervor—as if the survival of our dying species depended on that very moment. Evenings, entire nights, were filled with tender caresses, kisses, ecstatic exclamations, assurances of love. I would fall asleep half-alive in his embrace and wake up in the middle of my second coming. We used to spend entire days not getting out of bed, living as if in prison. Only Dziunia would occasionally slip milk, rolls, some deli meat, through the crack in the door.

And if Kostek was a bit touched, he was also capable of remembering one of my whims for months. In this way, I became the proud owner of a huge red-haired tomcat, because only then—when I was already dreaming about a dachshund—his search brought results. We called him "Balls," which offended some people we knew. I wasn't religious much, well, let's just say, just shacking up with a guy didn't bother me one bit. But when it came to marriage, Kostek held traditional views. He insisted on a wedding, and what's more, a church wedding. For, according to him, the Catholic formula for remaining faithful until death do us part and the rule that what God joined together let no man put asunder, were more fitting for our great and truly unique love affair than the civil exchange of vows at City Hall which demanded far less responsibility. The wedding reception was a big hoopla for one hundred guests. For lack of a place, it was held at the theater between the props for "The Gypsy Princess" and the huge portraits of the leaders of our nation used on various formal occasions. The menu consisted of herring and gallons upon gallons of homemade booze distilled under the stage by our business manager, Jan Garlicki.

The arrival of Colonel Olcha leading two noncoms carrying a cauldron of hot dogs and a pot full of mustard from The Polonia Hotel was cheered with enthusiasm. The colonel was a very popular figure with the theater crowd. For under the auspices of the Chief Political Headquarters of the Polish Army, he would organize performances at officers' clubs, at military bases, and out on the firing range. At times, out of the goodness of his heart, he would offer the theater a bus or a truck to move a stage set. Through wide personal connections, he could also take care of problems "impossible to take care of." He was still young, quite handsome, and not at all lacking in intelligence—a one-of-a-kind sort of guy, and a cynic. At the request of the ladies, he might be persuaded to swallow a glass; and if he was particularly predisposed, he would chase it down with a razor blade for laughs. He was respected by the actors because at his bashes, the hootch poured in streams, and the tables sagged under the weight of the hams, the sausages and the headcheeses. He was particularly fond of me. Once, in my honor, he ate a hurricane lamp (the glass parts only, of course).

But I want to tell you what happened in December 1951. The theater traveled frequently to the countryside, to different showings at the village community centers, barns, abandoned palaces, or just out in the open. This meant not only "the fulfillment of the mass propaganda and educational objectives," but also hours of being battered about in back of a truck or a wagon, at times on foot, over cobble stones, dirt roads, in the mud, and in the cold—the banners proudly waving above our heads, and the placards with slogans like: "The City Joins the Country!" "Down with Warmongers!" or "Socialist Culture for the Working Class!"—later facing overworked, dozing audiences, and, sometimes, drunk hecklers . . . the village mutts barking at us non-stop, old hags spitting at the sight of us, shutting the eyes of their children, stations, ice-cold waiting rooms, huffing and puffing smoke-blowing choo-choos, tiny flea bag hotels. . . But our spirits were high—we were young, fired up. We treated it all like some fabulous romantic adventure. We really believed that we carried the

*Dzivish in Polish implies being unusual or odd. In other words, Kostek was quite conventional in his ways.

torch of enlightenment high above our heads, that our generation was fulfilling some grand historical mission, that we were the pioneers of new ideas, that we were building a new way of life. At times we raised laughter and tears in the faces of our spectators, and it made all the inconvenience and the aggravation worthwhile. Because of the difficulties of transporting props, we went on the road with an entire repertoire: bits and pieces from operettas and familiar cabaret songs to warm up the audiences, and afterwards, some popular folk lyrics, and revolutionary poetry. I loved to recite this kind of stuff:

So wide, so wide our world, the reason's
fleeting moment makes its sweep
so widespread, so wretched the world's
prisons
and prison loneliness is deep

already the deadened feet swelling
already the scurvied gum's worn
and spitting lungs the end foretelling
but these eyes are wide open and burn.*

I probably recited it well. Nearly always I felt the spectators visibly moved, and the applause was long and loud. And now, I can't even tell whether I became attached to the poem because they applauded me so feverishly for it or they applauded me because I liked the poem and put my heart into it. . . .

This time they didn't take us far—to the Praga suburb, to Lochowska Street, a factory producing wire and nails.** We performed a satirical cabaret—"Trumanillo." As was usually the case, everybody got loaded before the show—a little because of the freezing cold, a little to get our courage up and to do it in style. That day the audience was especially pleased and lively. The jokes really flew; the whole crowd roared with laughter: Fat Tito swinging a bloodied axe on stage, Churchill losing his pants, Chiang Kai-shek yelping on Uncle Sam's leash; the actor who played the premier of the London government-in-exile got a genuine case of the hiccups—that didn't bother the audience any, just aroused them into absolute euphoria. I played "American Poverty," which is to say, my two shredded strips of cloth barely covered this and that (to make the allegory very explicit, I wore an appropriate slogan front and back). People in the audience were wearing coats and hats, while I developed goose pimples and had great difficulty keeping my teeth from chattering. When the last number came on in which I wasn't included, I ran to the dressing room, set up in the office of the director of the factory, to throw something over myself. In the office, the usual "treat" was about to take place under the portraits of Stalin and Bierut.* The red-labeled liter bottles already waited, the plates filled with meats, and other delicacies. . .

When they saw me, these two young guys jumped from their seats. They seemed visibly shaken up. Stealthily they put away their shot glasses—one had a slice of ham hanging out of his side pocket. . . . "What're you guy's staring at?" I ask them, already a bit under the weather. "Can't you tell that American Poverty is freezing to death? Pour me something." The taller of the two, blonde-haired, wearing homespun tweeds, pulled a bottle out quick and neat from underneath the table and poured it. We had a few together. The taller one seemed like my kind of guy. "Turn around, I have to get dressed," I say to them, but I'm thinking about how to get away. The director, a slimy, foul-mouthed egghead, already tried to put the make on me even before the show. After the vodka, no doubt his sperm will squirt all over his brain. "Do you know 'Kameralna'?" I ask. "If you know the bar, you can take me there." And they: "Sure, a good idea, we wanted to cut out too. No sense in lounging around here." All of a sudden they are in a hurry. They pass me my fur—an ordinary shedding rabbit fur—my handbag, my hat. "Plenty of time later for the make-up, Miss. Let's go." I thought about letting Dziunia know that I wasn't staying for the banquet, but I shrugged it off—after all I'm old enough and don't have to answer to anyone. Nobody from the troupe saw us leave. I found out later that they looked for me in all the nooks and

*Władysław Broniewski, "Elegy About the Death of Ludwik Waryński." Broniewski was a romantic revolutionary poet.

**Praga is a borough of Warsaw on the east side of the Vistula river.

*Bolesław Bierut (1892-1956), first president and general leader of the Polish People's Republic. An agent of Soviet secret police (NKVD, later KGB) and Comintern functionary before the war, he firmly followed the Soviet model and was a loyal Stalinist. In 1948, he replaced Władysław Gomułka as the general secretary of the party proceeding with the program of the collectivization of the countryside. He died of pneumonia while attending the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at which Joseph Stalin's crimes were repudiated by Nikita S. Khrushchev. The reason why Tonia's agitprop theater was not always welcome in the villages is because "Bringing Culture to the Countryside" also meant collectivization.

crannies of the factory, thinking I fell snoozing in drunkard's dreamland in some corner behind a machine.

We walked out into the street; it was already getting dark. I staggered a little, so I grabbed one of them around the neck. "What's your name?" he says. "Me—Antonina. Friends call me Tonia." On Kaweczyńska Street, we grabbed a gypsy cab, a black Citroën, which came out of nowhere. Finally, they loosened up a bit, began telling jokes, and started complimenting me, saying that I was so brave with two perfect strangers, that's rare now days, etc. The Kameralna Bar at this time was already overcrowded, but Mr. Stefan recognized me through the glass, and we got in. The taller one—Andy—couldn't dance at all, unfortunately; but Stan—his face reminded me of a turkey—put on some incredible moves. He confessed to me during a tango that he was always asked to serve as the dance master at weddings in his village. We left in an embrace and singing to all of Foksal Street, warmed up by the partying and the vodka. The black Citroën waited; we got inside. "You boys are really something else," I said, kissing Andy on the cheek. "I don't live far from here: Widok 6, second floor." I put my head on his shoulder and went out like a light.

I woke up as they were pulling me out of the limo in some dark courtyard. I asked, "Where are we? I don't live here." They led me up three steps, through a glass door, a hallway, to some room. I thought: What difference does it make? I'll sleep it off a little then go home. Kostek shouldn't find me in this condition. . . .

I heard a thick voice, "Last name, first, place of residence."

I looked the place over. I stood in a smallish room with a military type behind a desk. "Andy! Where are you? What do you want from me? Where are the guys who brought me in here?"

"Last name, first, place of residence."

"Wait a second, hold it. Do I know you? A gentleman introduces himself to a lady first."

The military guy burst out shouting—that he would turn me into a pile of living s---, started calling me every name in the book, beginning with a Nazi whore, and so on and so forth. But since I really didn't have to be ashamed of my name, I gave it to him. He pressed a button. An amazon in uniform appeared, six feet or so, three hundred pounds of living flesh, a cow face, and behind her, a slight elderly fellow with a briefcase, like a bookkeeper. They ordered me to strip to bare bone. "What's this, a cabaret?" I asked. "You need girls for the ballet? You can take my word for it, I have the looks, no scars anywhere on my body which might turn off the crowd, no skin rash either. . . ."

Here I ought to pause for a moment. I have been wondering at what point it finally dawned on me that I was arrested. The full blow came to me quite late—for now it was still playing a game of cops and robbers, which is not to say that I hadn't noticed the suspicious behavior of my two admirers, the black limo that appeared again out of nowhere in front of the Kameralna Bar, the decidedly one-track mind of the officer on duty, and the humongous dyke. That sauced I wasn't. On the way to the restaurant, I presumed it was some kind of a put on—that it was all part of the show where I still played "American Poverty," just a girl they were trying to pick up, and so maybe already feeling a bit like an animal trapped in a snare. Under my skin I felt that I could perform different roles but that I no longer had any control over the outcome. So I acted for myself and for others for as long as I could—just like being drunk at the time of the German occupation. You suffer less when you don't know you're finished—or when you pretend that you don't know.

They ordered me to strip for the so-called body search. Detainees are able to withstand different kinds of indignities without a single word of protest—often the officials who are going through your things make fun of you, for example, reading your love letters while you're going through the ordeal—but it hasn't been clear to me why making a person strip in the presence of strangers, especially of opposite sex, has been seen as the worst possible form of humiliation. Some people protest abruptly, citing various statutes, complaining about the temperature of the surroundings . . . they cry, which makes the unavoidable ordeal even worse. They feel put down, defenseless in front of others buttoned up to their last button—if they only knew that this ordeal is nothing compared with what awaits them afterwards. . . .

I peeled everything. The dyke brushed her fingers through my hair, checked my mouth, ears and nostrils, then told me to spread on top of the desk. The bookkeeper drew a speculum out of his briefcase and shoved it between my legs. He also fingered my rectum—a strange OBGYN's office in an official paramilitary setting.

The police matron ordered me to get dressed—in the course of the medical exam she checked my clothes—and to follow her. We descended to the

basement. She unlocked some door and shoved me in—shoved me in, since it would have been impossible to step inside otherwise. The eight-by-twelve cell was jam packed—twenty people inside, twenty women of various ages and weights. We'd change places, lying down or standing, unable to do the same thing at the same time. The hell hole reeked with the stench of sweat, urine and menstrual fluids.

There is no need for me to describe my entire stay in this vestibule—descriptions of "the arrest syndrome" abound. I spent my first night either standing or crouching, then the next day, and another night. Impressions of these days blur into a single nightmare: the hollering of the prison guards, the clinking of aluminum bowls, the moaning of the sick, the stench of feces from the p--- pot, and my inability to move an inch in this tiny cubicle. For a person thrown in here without any warning, it was an incomprehensible, horrible dream. For the first dozen or so hours, I felt numb—still basically under the influence. Finally it hit me loud and clear: the act is over. I am arrested, locked up, separated from my friends and loved ones. I flashed back across all the moments of my past life that possibly could have been responsible for putting me in here, and I couldn't find any. Sure I stiffed some restaurants, leaving without paying some expensive bill. At some time or another I have been caught without a ticket on the train. But, even if that's what it was about, I wouldn't be sitting in the can at Public Security, but in some ordinary police station.

A terrifying thought struck me: for sure Kostek is running around and looking for me all over town, in all the joints. If I could only let him know that I'm here. . . . Surely he wouldn't get some weird notion into his head that I wanted to leave him. He can be as sure of me as I am of him. Maybe he already knows. In that case he will do everything in his power to get me out of here. He would sell the shirt off his back, even his dearly beloved Continental typewriter; he would give his right arm if necessary. But it shouldn't have to be. Clearly I am innocent; I've done no harm to anyone. Surely the authorities aren't a bunch of bungling fools who lock up innocent bystanders—it's their business to know who's been up to what. The colossal state security apparatus operates solely for the purpose of separating out the criminal element from honest citizenry. Why lock up innocent people? What for?

At some point a weird notion popped into my head—but the only plausible logical explanation that made any sense: the whole thing didn't really happen; it's just a horrible nightmare. I'm lying in my bed in Kostek's embrace; I'm spellbound, for some reason incapable of waking up. "Wake up," someone shook me by the arm. "Wake up! Get up! —Maybe she's dead? Out cold, no pulse at all. . . ." They carried my stiff body through the corridors. "No question about it, stone dead," a deep baritone announced. "Rigor mortis has set in." We have to get her out of here. She will start disintegrating and pollute the air. All we need in here is for some goddamn plague to break out." I was tossed out with a heave on something soft. A rat scuttled across my breasts, and I opened my eyes. I was lying on top of a pile of garbage: darkness. Cats meow in some corners. A bus pulls up. I lift myself up with difficulty and hop on. "Tickets please," the conductor asks. I'm trying to reach into my pocket but can't—my hands are nailed shut with handcuffs. "Would you please take the change out for me?" I ask. "Here in the right side pocket." I turn toward him. He takes the entire zloty coin—without giving me change—double checks the ticket, and stuffs it between my teeth. He looks me over suspiciously. I get off at Chmielna Street, run across—making the gate, the staircase, the fragrance of bedsheets and cologne, the tapping of the typewriter, in a moment, he'll embrace me shyly. . . . Andy and Stan leap out of the easy chairs at the sight of me. "We waited for you. . . ." They stuff me into the black sedan. "So where are we off to now, comrade colonel? To "Koszyki"?* Kostek turns towards us from behind the steering wheel. . . .

On and off I woke up squatting against the wall. I gave up my spot to the others; I calmly took the p--- pot to empty out into the toilet. When my turn came, I ate the crumbling cornbread without a fuss—along with the watery ammonia-smelling soup. I was certain Kostek had already intervened on my behalf, that any day now the whole thing would be cleared up and I would be released. Surely it had to be a mistake. A person knows when her conscience is clear. My cellmates took it a lot worse. Some used to luxury, or the elderly, or the ailing, could neither eat nor sleep—they wept and wailed, or moaned, sinking into the doldrums. One of them in her mid-fifties, slight and grey like a dove, refused to get up off the floor one morning. When another, next in line for the spot, tugged at her lightly, at

*Koszyki (from Koszykowa Street) is Warsaw slang for the Ministry of National Security which was located there.

first she was punched in the face, and later bitten and scratched. All of us tried to calm the grey one down, but some incredible force took hold of her, and soon the floor whirled with flying feet, twisting and turning, and throwing a-fist-at-anybody-who-got-in-their-way, women. The doors opened ajar, and we were doused with ice-cold buckets of water.

On Christmas Eve, I started singing carols under my breath. Others joined in. The guard rattled the door ordering silence. We paused, but when he walked away, we began again, more quietly this time, and only in a trio. He rattled the door again. The other two kept quiet; only I continued. Finally he unlocked the door and let loose a string of obscenities off the top of his head. He threatened to put all twenty of us in solitary confinement. I wasn't about to give in, but I saw fear in their eyes. I stopped my singing.

Christmas holidays passed and the new year, 1952, began. Half the women were taken away somewhere, which made it roomier, but soon enough new arrivals came to take their places.

One day—it was probably at the end of January or maybe already February—the prison guard opened the door and muttered under his breath for people whose name begins with D to step forward. Two women came over to him and gave him their names, speaking in a low voice so that no one other than the guard would hear. But that wasn't it.

"Starting with letter D," he repeated impatiently. "Name?" he asked the woman nearest to him.

"Soyka, Leokadia."

"And you?" he turned toward me.

"Me?"

"Yes, you! Last name!" he hollered.

"Dzivish!" I hollered back at the top of my lungs so that it echoed in the hallway.

"Follow me." I stepped outside. "Don't you know, you dumb bitch, that it's forbidden to shout your name here out loud?" His knuckles dug into my jaw, and I fell, not expecting the blow. "Get up. Move it, in front of me."

I was led to the same room they took me in the beginning. They returned my bag, my belt, and other odds and ends. They are letting me go! Kostek intervened!

A silent type wearing a trench coat took me out into the courtyard where a black sedan waited. Where are they taking me now? Surely not home traveling in style, sorry about having made an incredible mistake?

But the limo turned from Koszykowa, not in the direction of downtown, but toward Mokotów—Szucha Boulevard, Plac Unii, to Rakowiecka. Then it finally dawned on me—I wasn't so naive anymore . . . detention pending trial. . . . So it wasn't all a mistake, at least not according to them. . . .

Not much has changed even to this day—the same corridors, stairwells, doors, cells—only the color of the walls, beige replacing gray. Of course in the cells, porcelain toilets without seats took the place of the metal p--- pots. It's now a world full of comfort. Before, when a woman needed to pee, she had to squat above a disgusting metal bucket, trying to avoid with her bare flesh the sharp rim rusted by urine. Even though the opening was wide enough, it would happen occasionally that she would miss, and, so that it wouldn't stink, one was obliged to wipe the floor with a rag, but then the rag stank. . . . And what if she had a period? No one delivered cotton pads. The prisoners sacrificed their clothing, tearing it to shreds. Daily washing was not possible. The place would always stink, a never-ending stench. It was easier for a man, as is always the case in anything. . . .

I crossed the labyrinth of corridors, staircases, bars, and doors that opened as I passed. I heard them slam shut behind my back. I felt as if I plunged deeper and deeper into the entrails of some monstrosity—far, far away, from Kostek and all that was dear to me . . . into the lowest circles of hell. . . . I was brought into a room illuminated with only a desk lamp—even though outside was still daylight. Once my vision readjusted to the darkness, I noticed the desk—on top, a ruddy hand with a smoking cigarette, in the background the window walled-up with bricks . . . on the wall, a portrait—of Dzerzhinsky?* The guard announced the arrival of the prisoner and left. The man behind the desk wore civilian clothing. He was about fifty, with black grizzly hair, a beer belly, a disinterested squinting gaze, and a meaty, porous nose. His name was Franciszek Zavada, but the prisoners called him "the towel boy." I'll explain why later.

"Sit down," he muttered, pointing to a small stool leaning against the opposite wall. I wanted to move closer to the desk, but it didn't budge—it was screwed into the floor. He began with the usual introductory formalities: first name, last, education, membership in organizations,

*Feliks Dzerzhinsky (1887-1927), Polish Bolshevik and founder of the Soviet secret police, Cheka, later OGPU, then NKVD and now KGB.

profession, and so forth. I spun him a tale of my adventures during the Warsaw Uprising and in the course of my artistic career. He jotted down everything in brief sentences on a large sheet of paper. Then visibly bored with the whole thing, he lit a fresh cigarette and made some remarks about this year's winter weather. Trying to be polite, I added this and that. So we established a rapport of tranquil familiarity. It even started to get dull.

"OK. Enough of that," he broke in finally. "Now confide in me; tell me all about yourself."

"Why I already told you all that there is."

"This isn't all."

"All—meaning what?"

"Oh, just everything. We're interested in everything."

"Do you really want to hear about how I used to make-out with the boys on my block?"

"Why not? We might be able to use it. Tell us."

"What's there to say?"

"Well, the making-out: you can begin with that."

"But that's my private affair."

"You started talking about it yourself."

"But this is nonsense."

"You're not the one to decide what makes sense and what doesn't. I'm all ears."

"Mister, you'd better tell me right off the bat why I've been arrested. What's going on? I demand a full explanation. It's just a waste of my time talking about foolishness."

"In due time, all in due time. And don't worry about time, Dzivish. You've got plenty."

"I'm innocent! I didn't commit any crime!"

"Calm down and tell me all, one thing at a time—like to a priest during confession."

It might go quicker if I don't argue with him, if I tell him about all that foolishness, I thought. "Well, if you're so willing to hear," I shrugged. "He had red hair and a very large nose."

"Who?"

"That fellow I first kissed."

"You him or he you?"

"What difference does it make?"

"How old were you?"

"I don't remember, maybe ten, eleven. . ."

"Rather early. And when did you lose your innocence?"

"Innocence?" I grinned sarcastically. "To sleep with some guy amounts to the loss of one's innocence according to you, sir? To a complete moral downfall? And your wife, sir, is she a fallen woman?"

"Cut the wise cracks, Dzivish. I'm asking you, when did you lose your virginity?"

"What business is it of yours? But I've got nothing to hide. I can tell you if you really want to know: I was two and I punctured it with a nail on a swing."

"I'm asking you seriously."

"Why sir, if you don't believe me, you can call my gynecologist."

"Who was it?"

"Who? My first? A resistance fighter during the Uprising."

"A nationalist from AK?"*

"If he fought on the barricade, then I suppose he was a nationalist." He scribbled it down.

"Still alive?"

"No."

"Dead?"

"Dead of poisoned booze the Krauts threw our way."

"Did you willingly give yourself to him, or did he rape you?"

"Why rape me?"

He looked me over very carefully and for a long time. "So you like it?"

"And you don't?"

"Answer the questions!" he slammed his hand on top of the desk. "And without the snide remarks! Do I make myself clear? I see, Dzivish, that you would like to get acquainted with our showers here?"

I kept my mouth shut.

"Do you understand?" he screamed.

"Yes, but these are actually my private . . ."

"Nothing's yours, nothing's private! Knock that out of your head! To all the questions that I ask you, I must receive an honest and sincere response? Do I make myself clear?"

The conversation took an eerie turn. Why is he so interested in such things? Surely they didn't arrest me for necking with the guys at school? What's he driving at? What's all this about? I thought it over: in the end there's no reason to be so obstinate. Why be shy? After all, you tell the doctor your most intimate matters, and he is also a stranger. Maybe if I answer his questions honestly, he will let me go sooner. I had nothing

*A.K. or Armia Krajowa (Home Army) was the main underground military force in Poland during the Second World War. Loyal to the government-in-exile in London, it numbered over 300,000 members. Led by general Tadeusz "Bór" Komorowski, A.K. attempted to liberate Warsaw in 1944 in what was the largest partisan battle of the war. The nationalists were persecuted after the war by the communist minority government because they represented a legitimate threat to its authority.

on my conscience—I could say anything about myself.

"List all the men with whom you've slept."

"I don't know all the names. You know yourself how it was during the war and immediately after the liberation. . . . No one used last names. . . .

"Try to remember. What was the name of your resistance fighter?"

"He had a pseudonym—'Wild Boar.' I don't know anything else."

He wrote it down. "And?"

"After the fall of the Uprising, they drove us out to Pruszków. . . . I've told you that already. I lived in the attic of a safe house. There was this guy there—his name was Marian Waso, Woso, maybe Wiso? He kept pigeons in the attic. . . ."

He wrote down some more. "How did it happen?"

"The usual. He took some eggs out of the nests one day, I came over and . . ."

"And! Did he throw himself on you?"

"What for? I went over to him."

"And?"

"Surely you can guess the rest, sir."

"Go on! When you finally moved out from Pruszków."

"After the liberation, I came back from Berlin to Łódź."

"Just one moment, hold on. And in the army, nothing? With so many men around."

"It wasn't on my mind."

"You're beating around the bush, Dzivish. All the army women slept with whomever came their way, and you're telling me that you didn't?"

"I didn't."

"Let's go on with it. What about Łódź?"

"I had a lover, Janusz Tarasini, really Gorko, but we all knew him as Tarasini. He was teaching me to sing."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He married my girlfriend, and they left for the Recovered Territories."*

"You provoked him during the lessons, low cut, see-through blouses, snapping garters, yes?"

"I was in uniform at the time."

"OK, next one?"

"My husband, Konstanty Dzivish, but that should be obvious. . . ."

"And afterwards? Were you ever unfaithful to him?"

"What business is it of yours, sir?"

"I'm the one doing the asking."

"No."

"You were galavanting around different joints with a wild bunch. We know all about it. Now Vitold Lemański, you know?"

"Vitold Lemański?" I stammered. He caught me off guard with that name. Vitus was a familiar face at the Kameralna, a bon vivant, and a womanizer. They suspected him of dealing in hard currency. At that time you could go to jail for possession of foreign money. The law saw dealing in dollars or gold as a capital offense. To admit knowing him could be dangerous. But I thought it over: I don't have to tell him everything on the spot. "Yes, I know him."

"And? Haven't you slept with him?"

"No."

"He testifies to the contrary."

"Why all the questions, sir, if you know better?"

"None of your business. Answer—yes or no?"

"Haven't you heard of macho types who go around boasting right and left about how they have been to bed with half of Warsaw? On the whole they are a bunch of fags."

"Did you buy foreign currency from him?"

"Why would I need foreign currency?"

"We found a twenty dollar bill in your apartment."

"I have no idea where it came from." So it's about hard cash. Well, at least it makes sense.

"Were you ever in Lemański's apartment?"

"I was."

"He could have put it into your purse when you went to the bathroom."

"I would have found it afterwards."

"What were you there for?"

"He invited me for a cup of coffee."

"And not crème de menthe and Pomianowski doughnuts?"

It was true. We drank crème de menthe and ate doughnuts. Where did he get such details? "Yes. How did you know?" I suspect a silly expression came over my face.

"We know everything, every minute detail."

"So why the interrogation?"

"I just wanted to make sure you're honest with

*Recovered Territories is a euphemism for Silesia and Pomorenia, or former German territories that became Polish after World War II. Poland actually lost about 12% of its territory to the Soviet Union as a result of the war settlement. The justification for current borders and repatriation of German population is that the borders more or less resemble the territory held by the Piast dynasty when Poland was initially formed as a state. The pre-war borders, which included large portions of the Ukraine and Lithuania, reflected the borders of the country as it emerged historically. Tonia came originally from Lvov, which is currently in the Soviet Union.

me. Go on. What next, after you finished drinking that liquor? Who started undressing whom? He you or you him?"

"Nobody undressed anybody. Afterwards I left because I was in a hurry for an appointment with my hairdresser."

"Your excuses aren't very smart. And your husband believes you?"

"What do you care?" I burst out screaming, enraged by his sarcasm. "Even if something did happen, it's no crime! Why don't you just drop it and leave me alone! Do you understand?!"

He strolled around the office, then came out with it in the course of a loud yawn. "And Colonel Kaz Olcha, you also know?"

"I know him."

"Well?"

"So so."

"Go on. What can you tell me about him?"

"Nothing special. I know him as well as all my colleagues in the theater."

"Well, I doubt that Olcha ended up in bed with your colleagues. Unless, of course, he's also a fag, as you call them."

Does he know or is he just guessing? I wondered. I was totally bluffing about Vitus Lemański. It is true that I slept with him once, entirely by accident, an absolute idiocy, and the towel boy evidently bought what I said. Such precise information about me he did not have. "I didn't go with him either," I responded disdainfully.

"That's interesting. Before me I have the sworn testimony of Corporal Sokolovko, Bogdan"—he took a sheet of paper out of his desk—"which says that the Corporal found you in the act. Should I read it?"

There was no way out of it. But I had to save face. I said: "I didn't go to bed with him; grass and bed aren't one and the same."

"Save your humor. Do you admit to having intimate relations with Colonel Kazimierz Olcha?"

"A one-night stand isn't an intimate relationship."

"But you confirm the Corporal's testimony?"

"It's no secret. The entire company of soldiers found us out."

"So you were unfaithful to your husband?"

I felt as if I was dumped into a pigsty. I noticed Zavada taking a sigh of relief. He seemed satisfied with himself: he had caught me lying; I admitted going out on Kostek, and women, especially married women, do not like to boast about such things. From here on, I didn't know what he was driving at. It seems as if he had forgotten about the dollars. He generously offered a pack of Belvederes, and he was charming in lighting a match for me.

The door opened. A young, rather stocky man with wavy hair entered. He was dressed in grey fil-à-fil. His face was broad—a worker's; his eyes, however, were beady, piercing, steel-grey. From afar he generated an air of self-confidence. He looked me over with a brisk appraising glance, then whispered a few words in Zavada's ear. The other nodded. This was Lieutenant Tadeusz Moravski, a very significant—under close scrutiny, perhaps even the key—presence in this story. But at first, involved in smoking my first God-knows-since-when cigarette, I paid no attention to him. My head was spinning from the nicotine. It felt so good that I thought: it was worth it in spite of the humiliation. But suddenly another thought struck me: I am weak, easily bought; for a shot of vodka, I would let myself be dumped—not just into hogwash, but into s---.

"So, it's over for today. Sign it." The towel boy pushed a fountain pen and a sheet of paper in my direction. "A lot of things are unclear in your testimony. Tomorrow I will go over it with you. You should try to recall even the most minute details."

My knees sinking, I approached the desk, I picked up the pen. The towel boy prepared to leave. Moravski stood calmly smoking a cigarette. He looked at me as if I wasn't there.

"If I catch you lying ever again," the towel boy said, "I'll knock your teeth in so you'll remember me for the rest of your life."

My hand hung limply over the paper. I dropped the pen aside and stepped a few paces back. "I won't sign anything."

"What's the meaning of this? Why won't you sign?" He was caught completely off guard. He already assumed I was easy. He glanced at Moravski.

"I won't sign anything."

"But this is your testimony . . ." He ruffled the sheets in front of my nose. I didn't react. He retreated behind his desk. "Lieutenant, would you be kind enough to begin once again, from the very beginning, the entire biography." He grabbed his briefcase and left.

I jumped to my feet and quickly scribbled my signature. "Let me go now please." I looked at Moravski with hope.

He bent over toward me. "If it were up to me," he said calmly, not showing any emotion, "I

would put your sort against the nearest wall and blow your brains out."

Afterwards, I marched down the corridor—the doors, the bars, the high iron staircase surrounded by the banisters, a row of cell doors. I experienced absolute helplessness. Tomorrow more of the same. For how long? A week? A month? Five years? To describe a fragment of one's life in all its detail might take a person more than a lifetime—and no help from any counsel, not even common courtesy. I didn't care anymore what this was all about.

I found myself in an empty room—three bunk beds or "cribs," three stools, one table. Everything was screwed into the floor and the walls. A john, of course. A blanket in a bundle unrolled toward my feet, an aluminum bowl and a spoon fell out with a clank. The doors slammed shut, the metal lock grated. I stood in the middle of the cell for a long time. They weren't about to let me go. From behind the window, a scream—like a woman giving birth or being tortured—then another. I climbed on top of the stool to look out, but the crate covering the window outside was down showing only a bright scrap of the sky. The screaming repeated. Full of anger, I pulled on the grating that covered the window pane, and the bars behind it. I retreated to the door and kicked it several times. Almost instantly in the peephole (which the prisoners popularly called "the looksee") an impersonal eye appeared. So the bull on duty kept his eye peeled on me when I was in. I hid behind the bend of the wall near the toilet where I couldn't be seen. Dead silence reigned throughout the entire building. Only that wolf-like howl repeated itself at regular intervals. Holding my body upright against the wall, inadvertently I found myself banging the back of my head against the wall—not paying much attention to the pain. From the neighboring sides of the cell, a spurt of tapping like a telegraph responded—the alphabet of the prison. Someone wanted to communicate with me. After a few chaotic taps, my neighbors went mute.

I came to at the grating of the lock. "Did you finish peeing? Get out of the corner," the guard on duty said. The left side of his chest was completely covered with medals—Polish, Soviet.

A petite young girl stood in the doorway. She held a bundle of clothes under her arms, a blanket, an aluminum bowl, a spoon, a cup. She stepped forward, then to the side, then retreated tripping over the p--- pot. The cup fell out of her hands, and she tried to pick it up, then her bowl fell. She had huge hazel eyes, a slight nose with thin nostrils, a very white, almost transparent complexion full of freckles, and red wavy hair. She raised her dimpled chin high and pressed her thin red lips as if to say: I know everything's falling out of my hands. So what?

"What's your name? Mine's Tonia."

For a long time she looked me over, undoubtedly mulling over whether to spit in my face or hang onto my neck. Finally she responded with a measure of defiance, "Mira Scheinert"—but it was so feeble, so pitiful. The worst psychologist could have guessed that she wanted to appear impudent and unapproachable so as to avoid abuse.

"What did they lock you up for?"

"How about you, Miss?"

"Me? Because I was making out with my boyfriend at school. No seriously, I really have no idea."

She sat down helplessly on the stool, dropping the blanket from her hands. She looked frazzled as if she had gone through hell.

"Have you been here long?" I asked.

"A year and a half."

Shivers ran down my spine. She just did not look like a criminal. Another scream from the window outside—this time it reminded me of a whining, beaten dog.

"What the hell's going on behind that window?" I screamed. I couldn't stand it anymore.

"A hospital."

"Do they put them under the knife without an anesthetic, for crying out loud?"

Again the door opened, and a tall shapely woman energetically stepped into the cell. She could have been twenty-five or thirty-five. Her cheeks were soft and plump, rosy and pale, covered with light moss like a peach. Even though her palms were broad, a working woman's, she resembled a crisply baked roll right out of the oven—ready to crunch. She praised the Lord and pulled out the grub. She invited us to join in. "Eat heartily my dears, God bless you." Without waiting to be asked, she began to describe to us how hogs were slaughtered where she came from, somewhere near Chotomow. Her descriptions were graphic, punctuated with expressive gestures. She pointed to the artery on her neck which had to be punctured with a long sharp knife when slaughtering a pig; and then be sure to let the blood out into a bowl for blood sausage. After she ate, she lifted her skirt—she wore no panties—and loosely and loudly emptied herself into the pot. The redhead, who throughout the entire time didn't utter a sound and wouldn't take a single bite of the excellent garlic sausage, suddenly threw up. I took out a rag and started wiping the floor.

"Please leave it," she said. She looked even paler than imaginable. "I'm sorry, please, let me . . ."

I kicked the door. An eye appeared in the peephole. "We need some hot tea. This lady's ill." The peephole was shut. Silence. I took the metal cover off the p--- pot and started banging on the door monotonously.

"Please stop. I feel better already," Mira tried to calm me down.

The door opened as widely as possible. "Silence!" the screw on duty barked. "If you don't, you'll spend two days in Zakopane!"* He slammed the door shut.

"You s---, you goddamn bully, you stinking f---, you goose-legged p----!" I hollered until I ran out of breath.

"You shouldn't irritate him, ma'am; that makes no sense. It won't accomplish anything, and only turns out to be a hassle."

"Why shouldn't I be hassling him? Should I make his life here nice and easy? Should I be the one on guard? Let him earn his keep."

"You don't know what Zakopane is?" They make you stand stark naked with the windows open . . .

I shrugged. "After the Uprising, I lived half a year in the attic. The roof was riddled with holes. When I woke up, I had to shake the snow off me." But seeing that my behavior bothered her, I put the cover back in its place—the stench was hard to take.

After the roll call, we stripped down to our underwear; we had to arrange our clothes in squares—both women gave me the instructions—and put them out in the hallway. Lights were on around the clock in the cells of the prisoners in detention. I couldn't go to sleep. I lay there with my eyes open, like a stiff, staring at the brightly illuminated light bulb behind the grating—the light began to pulsate, became cov-

*Zakopane is a Tatra mountain winter resort—here prison slang for a form of torture.

ered over with fog, retreated far away from me along with the walls; it finally died way in the distance.

I got up quietly and knocked on the door. "This Scheinert woman has the shakes," I whispered. "She's maybe on her last breath." The bull entered the cell. I bashed his head in with the p--- pot cover with all my might. He fell without making a sound. Quickly I put on his uniform, pulling the cap over my eyes. Passing the guard stations, I only saluted. Once beyond the gates, I ran—already from far away I could discern the tapping of the typewriter and the music on the record player, the stairs, the door. In the parlor, I bump into Kostek carrying a tea kettle full of boiling water.

"Watch out!" he yells, the water spilling over. "Do you want me to burn myself?"

"Sorry, I was hurrying back to you. . . ."

"Where were you all this time?" he glances at my uniform with some apprehension. "How did you get here? You should have called first that you're planning to come over, not just show up unannounced."

"I was in Cracow, at my aunt's; I ran."

In the door to our bedroom, Dziunia appears in a pink lace nightie. She staggers, must have been drinking, gives me the eye. . .

I look inside—there is a bottle of vodka beside the unmade bed with some snacks stowed away in the crumpled bed sheets, some herring, and some bread crumbs. A record spins on the record player. "Ah, how sweet it is to rock on the waves" an absurd tenor sings. Kostek, wearing only a shirt, no underwear, rushes to zip up his pants. Both eye me in disbelief . . . must be the uniform?

Don't mind this," I tell them. "It's just a costume from a new play. . . . I'm starving." On the electric burner, a pan full of eggs sizzles. I take in the intoxicating smell of frying bacon. I reach for it. . .

Kostek knocks the fork out of my hand. "Don't give me that about spending some time with your aunt; don't BS. You've got no aunt in Cracow; you told me yourself the Soviets transported your entire family to Siberia." He helps himself to the steaming yellow mush and licks it off the plate zestfully. His teeth dig deeply into the crisp roll smeared with butter. He tells me with his mouthful—You bull s---, you aways bowshoot and yow keep right own bowshooting. Ay gant boweve you . . .

I'm down on my knees. "Yes, beat me: you have the right. I lied. I was in prison. I killed a guard. I escaped, they are on my heels, hide me somewhere. I'm hungry, give me something to eat. . .

As if I were an obtrusive puppy yelping under his feet, Kostek leisurely turns me away from him with his soft felt slipper. He takes his time smearing a piece of roll. He covers it with a pink slice of moist, sweet-smelling ham. On top, he places a sour brown pickle and a mushroom marinated in vinegar. "An honest person does not run, and what's more, does not murder a guard. If they did arrest you, no doubt they had their reasons. Our just people's republic made no mistake about the nature of your guilt."

"But I didn't do anything bad!"

"Everyone has done something in his life of which he's ashamed. I for instance didn't take the priestly vows. I'll never forgive myself."

"Not me! I am as clean as a teardrop!"

"But don't you remember last year when you stole a cigarette ashtray from the Crystal Restaurant? Did you forget?"

"Yes, it's true. I admit my guilt. But no one knows about it!"

"No one? How about me? Theft must be stamped out."

"So it was you? You gave me away, Kostek?" In despair something grips me by the throat.

Suddenly Dziunia explodes in tears: "Kostek, we're a bunch of hogs! We've wronged her! Tonia's not guilty! I know that! How can she be guilty when she makes such delicious potato pancakes? She can't be guilty for sure! They are super! As for that ashtray—I stole it and made it seem as if it was her!" She rushes toward me with open arms, hugs me, kisses me, cries on my shoulder; I am all tears also. "Do you remember, Tonia, those Italian ices which we had in Sopot? Do you remember? How delicious they were!" — Shyly I free one of my arms from her embrace and reach for the plate with the ham. I get slapped across my fingers. Kostek smiles and scolds me with his forefinger. "Oh God how sweet it was in Sopot rocking on the waves!" Dziunia yells, "When water trails, trails, when the boat sails. La! La! La!" She hits higher and higher octaves, starts trilling, and we are already singing together: "Oh how sweet it is to rock on the waves. . ." We are dancing on the chairs, on the table. We hop on the grand piano, pushing off the books and carboys filled with home brew, while Kostek calmly dials the number with a loud rattling noise. (Wait, how did the telephone get here? No doubt they installed one in my absence.) "Yes, she's here," his voice descends to a whisper.

"You can come and get her. I'll try to keep her here."

"Tonia!" he calls me. "Play something on the piano for us, something nice." And in a mood for a party, I begin to pound on the keyboard with my fists. "Oh how sweet it is, how sweet it is. . ."

"Not that, not that! Something nice."

I don't stop. He pulls me away from the piano and shoves me into the corner. The needle scratches the end of the record. In front of the house, I hear the screeching tires of a car coming to a halt. The stairs drum with running feet. I swipe a piece of a roll, but Kostek angrily pulls it out of my grip: "Leave it alone! How often do I have to tell you!"

Stan enters, and Andy, the blonde one. At first they busy themselves stuffing the vodka, the snacks, the alarm clock, the silverware, into their pockets. Kostek feels the need of having to justify himself. "What do you think? So much time had passed, so me and Dziunia got engaged. I can't have two women at once on my conscience."

"Hey you, let's go," Stan elbows me and clicks the handcuffs across my wrists. Andy throws a heavy rope around my neck and pulls me along. Dziunia with Kostek embracing in bed, bid me farewell, waving chicken drumsticks.

* * * * *

Scratched white hospital beds lined both sides of the corridor. The patients lying in them were wrapped in sweaters, blankets, coats—some wore caps over their heads, gloves on their hands. By every bed scattered packages with gooseberry current jams, unwashed dishes, bottles of medicines. . .

The nurses, also wearing winter coats, could be distinguished only by their caps. Greasy plumbers boring through the wall near the radiator with a percussion drill were unscrewing the pipes. Brown water mixed with tile trickled underneath the beds.

Małgorzata made her way between the beds, the wheelchairs, the people waiting in chairs, to check the numbers on the doors. She walked into the office of the attending doctor. "Good morning, my name is Świerszczyńska. . . . I'm not sure whether I spoke with you, doctor."

A young man in a sheepskin jacket thrown over his white coat quickly swallowed a piece of roll, hiding the leftovers in his desk drawer. "Would you excuse me, please. I had no time to eat my breakfast. . . . So, ma'am, you probably want now to . . ."

"Yes."

"Would you please take the elevator down to the ground floor, that is if it works. . . . I will alert them by phone in the meantime."

She paused at the doorstep. "Would you please tell me, doctor . . . whether, whether she suffered much?"

"I wasn't there when it happened. Not my rounds. But I suspect not. When the kidneys give, the patient usually swoons into a coma . . . loses all sense of the world around him."

"I talked to her only yesterday. She was conscious."

"How old was your mother?"

"Fifty-four."

"I imagined her older—a physically abused body. It happens fast, just like that."

"No other complications? We hear about the shortages of basic medicines, instruments . . . perhaps some error . . ."

"We're not butchers. We do what we can."

"Well, there's nothing to say then, thank you." She wanted to leave, but it was his turn to stop her.

"Excuse me, please, are you related in anyway to Mirosław Świerszczyński?

"My husband."

"Please convey to him my deep respect and admiration. My name is Krzysztof Vitkovski."

"Do you know Mirek?"

"But no, how? I've never even laid my eyes on him. But I know what he does. I read this and that. . ."

"Thank you. I'll do that." She smiled briefly.

A crowd of people hovered about in the hallway. She appraised herself in the mirror by the cloak room, straightening her short blonde hair with her fingers. It's about time I should start taking better care of myself, she pondered. I look like a slut. Nervously she took out the powder and the mascara, making herself up just a touch. It didn't help much.

"Who is waiting to see me?" an elderly man in a grimy apron called out.

Several people rose from the benches, following him towards the stairwell, going down. They proceeded down the long grim corridor. Along the ceiling ran a network of pipes, along the walls thick electric cables. They turned the corner. First the man unlocked one door, then another. A bright fluorescent light flashed.

In a sizable compartment on metal beds, the sheets took on human form. The newcomers followed the line of the carts, reading in muffled voices the nametags pinned to the feet of the

corpses. "Please don't touch it, this isn't yours—an abrasive old woman tugged Małgorzata, dragging her away. One of the women broke out in hysterical weeping: "Ziggy, Ziggy . . ."

Hesitating a bit, Małgorzata slowly pulled down the top half of the sheet. Biting her lip, she examined the face of an elderly woman with a yellowy, wax-like complexion. Her mother's eyes were closed, her chin bandaged. A broad white ribbon gathered on top of her head as if on a young girl.

"We have to leave, ladies and gentlemen," the mortician announced.

"A minute. Give me a minute alone," Małgorzata said.

"You're not alone here, ma'am. . . . Other people would like to also."

"I think I have a right . . ."

"You won't see any more than you already have, and there's an entire procession of people waiting. I have to go."

She touched the cold forehead, the eyes, the cheeks of her mother with her finger, then pulled up the sheet.

In the hospital office, the receptionist laid out before her a skirt, sweater, underwear, watch, bracelet, a pair of old worn-out shoes. "Is this all? Would you please check, ma'am."

"Yes, I suppose that's it."

"No claims on the deceased will be permitted afterwards."

"There was nothing else."

"Please sign here." She handed her a paper. "The permission to do the autopsy you have given already?"

"I won't allow it."

"The students must have something to train on so that they can learn to heal," observed an interested party standing behind her, undoubtedly in a similar situation.

She pretended not to hear.

"These people don't seem to understand anything," observed the man, "and afterwards they demand of the doctors God only knows what. I'll donate my body to science. Let someone else get at least some use out of me."

"Here is the death certificate. When are you going to come and claim the body, ma'am?"

"I haven't decided yet."

She walked out in front of the hospital with the bag full of clothes. The trams were running, the cars, the people going to and fro. The world seemed as if nothing had happened.

A long line at the funeral home. Women dressed in black and clenching rolls of money, consoled by grief-stricken silent men, discussed in muted voices the intricacies of funeral arrangements and burial proceedings with receptionists in colorful sweaters.

"Next in line, please." Małgorzata placed the death certificate in front of a fleshy, peroxide blonde. "Do you have a place in the family vault, Madame?"

"No."

"Where would you like us to bury her, Madame. . . your mother, yes?"

"I don't know."

"The grave ought to be masonry, maybe several vaults at once. In the end, it comes out cheaper."

"How much?"

"Here you are," she gave her a laminated price list. "Will you pay in full now, Madame, or leave a deposit?"

"I haven't got any money."

"That won't do. The initial formalities we can take care of now, but, by tomorrow at the very latest, you will have to pay at least half of the balance. The casket . . .with a cross or without?"

"I don't know, I don't know. . ."

"Was your mother religious?"

"Let it be with a cross."

* * * * *

Wake up call, making the bunk beds, cleaning up in the sink, peeing . . . It's not easy to take a leak in the presence of someone else dropping in. . . . Breakfast. When a con on kitchen duty poured me some coffee, I said to him: "Enough, thank you. . . ." He looked at me. "Bitte?" A German here? Later on I found out that many Nazi war criminals worked in the kitchen and in the supply room. They are conscientious, disciplined, polite—nothing like the Polish pigs. . . After breakfast, the screws would ordinarily open the door and pour buckets of water on our cell floor. And we had to wipe down the one inch thick layer with rags. The cleanup took most of the early morning. Practically every day I was called in for the interrogation. They took me back to my cell before lunch. They called in Mira only briefly in the afternoons. What they asked her about . . . she didn't want to say. The peasant woman was called generally in the evenings. She would return surprisingly worn-out and flushed in the face. Out of the blue, she would burst out laughing. I noticed that after every such outing she had an assortment of cigarettes—which she didn't smoke—chocolate,

Not being able to do anything was killing me. Walks for prisoners under observation, especially the political ones, were explicitly forbidden. Pacing from wall to wall, like condemned lifers, seemed to me utterly idiotic and demeaning. We had no access to books, no newspapers—all questions in this regard the guards simply ignored with silence. Lying or even sitting down on the bunk was forbidden. From time to time the peephole opened, the eye checking if everything was in order. You couldn't doze off sitting up; you couldn't sit with your back to the door—the prisoner had to be constantly under observation. The peasant woman seemed to be able to stick it out all day in the corner without moving an inch, eyes fixed on one spot. What must have gone through her head? I began to suspect she found a way of sleeping with the eyes wide open. She was in for murder. One of them city slicker secretaries of theirs came around, wanting to know how much land she had, some land reform he said, asking about the kulaks—so she drove him out. The next day he brought with him some goons with machine guns. She laid in wait for him at the committee office one fine evening, and with an ordinary meat cleaver, to mash cutlets with, she cut him down. There was so much madness in her, she chopped him up into little pieces—all separate—head, arms, legs. And why shouldn't she have—when he took her land away, her father's land from God knows how long, when he tossed her out of her own house into some pigsty? What did he think she was—some pig who'd take the s---?

Mira Scheinert did not say much. You could talk to her for hours, and she would respond at the very most only in syllables. The company I kept was not particularly stimulating.

The following line of questioning blurs what I can remember into one prolonged nightmare of absurd questions and equally absurd answers.

"Who enlisted you into the acting troupe of the First Army?"

"I already told you. Some woman. I don't remember her name."

"You've testified before that it was an officer, Dzivish."

"It was a woman officer."

"Where did you meet her?"

"In a line to the john in some dive."

"Did you find her attractive?"

"She was pleasant enough."

"I'm not talking about that. Women from time to time like with other women to . . ."

"To what? Why don't you say what you mean, sir?"

"Don't play stupid with me. You know damn well what I mean."

"Well if you know what I know, then why beat around the bush? You seem to be playing coy with me like some cherry. You're asking if I'm a lesbian, yes or no?"

"Well, let's just say. . ."

"Well, OK, let's just say. . ."

"Well, let's just say what?"

"That I am."

"Often?"

"Did I ever say "yes"? I said only "let's just say."

"I'm warning you, Dzivish. Your answers better be clear and to the point. And cut the wise a-- crap or I'll put you through showers you'll remember till your dying day."

"How can I be clear and to the point when I don't know what the point is? Absurd questions, sir, lead to equally absurd answers!"

"What's absurd and what isn't is up to me to decide!"

"Why did you arrest me? Why am I in here for so long? I didn't do anything wrong! Why can't I even get pencil and paper to write my husband? Why am I not receiving any letters or parcels from him?"

"I have no idea why. It's not my fault that he dumped you."

"That's a lie!" I wiped my nose with my hand. I didn't give a damn what he thought of me.

"Listen. You're either going to be a good girl and do what you're told, or you'll rot in jail, and not a soul will ever find out about it. Which is it going to be?"

I said nothing. My situation was hopeless. The towel boy took a sheet of paper out of the drawer and examined it carefully as if to remember what it was about. "So from what you have been telling me, Dzivish, in your affairs with men, you were always the active and interested party. Yes?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"That you made the advances."

"Rubbish. We both always had the same thing on our minds."

"Lemański testifies that he was not at all interested, that you started to unbutton his shirt, then his pants."

"He's making it up. It was the other way around. First he intentionally got me drunk with that dreadful liquor, then, when I could move neither hand nor foot, he tore off my dress and panties. I had no strength left in me to fight him off."

sweets, breads . . .

"Before you claimed that nothing passed between you." The towel boy reacted with an obvious grin.

What a fool I am! I thought. So easily taken in! But it was already too late for denials.

"Which is to say, you lied. You're constantly lying. I'm warning you that I'll squeeze everything out of you. But if I catch you lying ever again, even once, I'll refashion your face so that even your own loving hubby won't recognize it! Do I make myself clear? OK then, let's begin from the beginning. Last name, first, date of birth, occupation!"

"I lied only about Lemański really! The rest is the truth!" The prospect of having to go through everything again from the beginning terrified me. I feared boredom and monotony the most.

"Last name, first, date of birth, occupation! Didn't you hear me?"

"Please, sir, you must believe me. Why do we have to begin this all over again? Only because of this one thing?"

"One? Are you sure? And how was it with Olcha?"

"I already said."

"Not enough."

"You have the deposition of other witnesses, sir."

"I want to hear it from you."

"I don't know if I can tell you the same thing they did. They could have made up all kind of nonsense. . . ."

"In this case, tell all in detail. We will corroborate later."

"May I smoke?" My hands were shaking, blood throbbed in my temples. Without saying a word, he passed me the pack, gave me the light. The electricity put my entire body at ease. "It happened this way: we were performing for the troops near Siedlce," I began in a low whisper with my throat in a knot. "It was summer, sizzling heat. The troupe was quartered in tents. I couldn't sleep, I was suffocating in there, so I went out for a breath of fresh air. I noticed an illuminated cigarette. I went over for a light. It was Olcha. He proposed that we go for a swim in the river—a little river flowing nearby

there. . . . We had no bathing suits, but it was dark, so we skinny-dipped. Later we found ourselves in a truck covered over with canvas. We forgot about everything. The bumps woke us up—the truck was going someplace—and our uniforms remained on the edge of the river. . . ."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Before you said that you did it in the grass."

"What difference does it make?"

"There is a difference. Which is the truth? Decide."

"The truth is what I told you now."

"So why did you lie before?"

"I didn't lie. I don't remember such details."

"He suggested, and you went for it?"

"It was hot."

"Didn't you know what it might lead to?"

"Not all baths end this way."

"When you undressed in the presence of a stranger weren't you a bit shy?"

"It was dark, I told you."

"So how did you find the river?"

"By moonlight."

"Which is to say one could see. Why did you get in back of the truck?"

"Someone was around; we wanted to hide."

"What happened in the truck? When did you start having sex?"

"Why all the details? Why are you dwelling on the intimate moments of my private life?"

"It's important."

"Well, you know yourself how it happens, sir, the usual . . ."

"You said that we should be explicit, calling it like it was. Well, then, now's your chance."

I didn't respond.

"When did you decide to go with him, in the truck or earlier?"

I kept quiet.

"Well, then, I'll tell you. In the first place it wasn't he who proposed the swim to you but you to him. I had time to get to know how your mind works; I know what your attitude is toward men. You planned everything to the minutest detail. You waited for him there. Why? What was your intention? You're married; you get enough. Unless, of course, your husband's a fag who doesn't give it to you."

"You'd best leave my husband out of it!"

"So why did you sleep with Olcha? If not out of a simple yen, then why? Did you have some other business with him? Did you need something done?"

I was still not reacting.

"So, you see, you've been putting on a show for me of such a modern, uncompromising girl without any inhibitions. But you're just a lying, petit bourgeois cheat. Bravery, honesty, yes, but only within certain limits. What value would it have? Unless . . . unless you're hiding something from me . . . unless there's something else covered up here. . . Well, enough, go back to your cell. Sign here"—he struck a sheet of paper with his pen.

I walked over to the desk. I wanted to say something, to explain something, but what was there to explain? I got caught in a labyrinth of lies, a little out of fear, a little out of a false sense of pride, and I came out looking like a complete idiot. I cursed myself deep down. Why am I behaving so stupidly? Why can't I bring myself to stand up to him? Why do I let this bastard lead me on by the nose? He made me over into a slut, and really, I let him. But how can a person talk about feelings to a stranger? Without them, every kiss, every physical encounter seems like something vulgar.

Back in the cell, I sat down straight on the stool and begun staring at the wall—just like the peasant woman. From behind the window, again the wailing of some nut could be heard or perhaps it was someone alive under the knife. Time came to interrogate the peasant woman. Only two of us remained in the cell.

"You shouldn't be like that." I felt a hand on my shoulder.

For the first time I detected something come alive in Mira's eyes. She started paying attention to me only after I sank in silence.

"You cannot let them break you," she said quietly.

"How do you know I broke?"

"I can see. Don't you understand that all they care about is to break us, to humiliate us, so that we begin behaving like a bunch of animals, no longer like people. That's their goal."

For a long time I kept to myself.

"And you?" I asked. "Why do you keep quiet for days?"

"Me, that's something else. Remember all that's on the outside doesn't count at all, especially not here. You have to hide it deep inside yourself. You must hang on to something, to some sense of value. That gives you strength."

"I'm hanging on," I grumbled without much conviction.

"What to?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm hanging on."

"You can die if you choose, sometimes you

even must die, but remember, only if there's something to live for."

"I don't like sermons."

"I want to help you."

"How can you help me?" I shrugged my shoulders.

"Do you know what you live for?"

"Leave me alone!" I pulled her grip angrily off my shoulder. Maybe I was a fool but not fool enough to listen to this crap. I get enough Christian compassion and sheltering in church—as if I needed a good samaritan!

"A year ago I behaved in exactly the same way," I responded.

To this day the fatal trait of automatically and entirely obliviously pushing away a helping hand stayed with me. I don't like looking for sympathy; pity makes me gag. I remember my guardians during the war chewing a piece of sausage at one moment and mulling over the fate of poor starving Jewish children rummaging in the gutter at another. I have a deeply rooted conviction—probably already from childhood—that only I have the right to shower others with pity. No doubt there is a measure of arrogance in this which comes from lack of self-assurance and from seeing myself as somehow less than others. I cannot be any more smarter, any more brilliant than I already am, however, I can easily dispense with and mete out generosity. When I am capable of it, I feel superior: it diminishes my lack of self-assurance and my fear of those stronger than me. Someone feeling compassion for me, I take as an act belittling me, as a threat to my sense of feeling superior. I know this is foolish, but what can I do? Chances for my growing wiser are slim.

Mira's words nonetheless did have an effect on me. For the first time in a long while, someone unselfishly paid attention to my affairs and expressed concern about my circumstances. When—after the roll call—we were already in our bunks, and when you could hear the sighing and whistling of sleeping in the cell, I got up and gently walked over to her. I bent down and kissed her on the cheek. I wanted to go away—suddenly I felt her grip on my wrist. I felt frightened—at first I misconstrued the gesture. She pulled me over. We hugged one another. We held on for a long time until the footsteps of a guard came near in the corridor.

"I didn't explain something very important," I began when they brought me in for my next interrogation—it was already the fourth or fifth time. "I wanted to clarify something."

"But of course. I'm all ears."

I crossed my legs energetically. "From what I said, it may seem that I sleep around with men when, well, when it suits me. But this isn't true. Every one of them meant something to me. I allowed you to drag me into details, but I forgot to say what's most important—feelings."

"Meaning what, love?" he smiled ironically.

"Let's suppose so. Yes." I was proud of myself to be able to come up with an answer. I felt on the attack.

"You were in love with this resistance fighter?"

"The first time, girls usually do it out of love."

"What was his pseudonym? Wild?"

"Wild Boar."

"Before you said just 'Wild.'"

"Some said 'Wild,' others 'Wild Boar.'"

"Again you're beating around the bush. And that other one—the one with the pigeons?"

"To a certain extent also." I tried to be calm and respond with dignity. "He was very good to me."

"Tarasini, that singer—I can believe it. He impressed you. As for Lemański? Did you love him also?"

"That was an accident, I already said. He got me so high, I didn't know what was going on."

"And in that state you went to your hairdresser?"

"I didn't go. I BSed."

"On and on, first you say this, then you say that."

"Now I'm telling you the truth."

"How am I to know? You've changed your mind so many times. Establish finally one version but for real."

"This is the real version."

"And Olcha? You also loved him, I suppose?"

"Truly I loved only my husband."

"And you can sleep around with others even though you love your husband?"

"Evidently I can." Again I felt like I was falling into quicksand.

"But why? For what reason?"

"Such things happen."

"So your husband is s--- in bed?"

"I never said that."

"So you had to have some specific reason to sleep with Olcha. What did you have to gain from him? Well, tell me?"

"I didn't want anything from him! What do you want from me, sir? I slept with him because he was pleasant, jovial, happy-go-lucky! And that's all!"

"And you propositioned him?"

"I already said that I didn't have to proposition him for anything!"

"Maybe he had some special business with you that he needed you for. You're not a raving beauty, after all."

"I don't know. He liked me."

"Well, OK. You said that you slept only with people who meant a lot to you. How much did Olcha mean to you? What would you do for him?"

"Could we stop this, OK? Why don't you get to the point, sir?"

"I'm coming to that. You must know what full extent of the law means in capital crime cases, surely you must?"

"Let's say I do."

"In other words, 'the hangman's noose.' Shhhhhhh!" His forefinger went across his neck. "If you had to choose—him or a bullet in the back of the head—which would you prefer?"

"I don't have to choose."

"Imagine then what if."

"Why the question?"

"Because I want to know!" he slammed his fist on the desk.

"I'd prefer to live," I shrugged my shoulders.

"Excellent. Which is to say that he doesn't mean all that much to you. You wouldn't die for him. Look, there's no reason to beat around the bush here. You seem bright." He sat back in his chair and drummed with his fingers on the table top. "If you'll help us, we'll help you. We could for example ask the court to lower the sentence or even ask for clemency."

"The sentence? What for? I didn't do anything."

"Is this what you think? Tell me everything you know about Olcha—who did he meet, what did he talk about with other officers and so on."

"I don't know. I wasn't listening in on the conversation."

"And what did you talk with him about?"

"Mostly foolishness."

"Concretely."

"About our private matters."

"Well then tell me about these private matters."

"I'm telling you, it wasn't anything worth mentioning."

"So it may seem to you. He was a soldier; you were also once in the army. Some names must have been dropped—troop numbers, official ranks."

"I don't recall."

"Try to recall. We find everything interesting, even the smallest detail."

"Since I'm telling you that we talked about private matters, I can't tell you," I said with some resistance.

"Enough of this BS! I repeat myself: we decide what's private and what's not! What are these things that you can't discuss? Maybe you know about some crime, and you're covering it up. You know, I think the law . . . that covering up a crime is punishable for up to five years."

"You don't seem to understand me, sir. I have no idea about any crime. But private means private. I cannot talk about these things to just anyone because I'll lose all sense of my privacy. And you, sir, are a stranger."

"And about f---ing with whomever came along, about that you could talk about? Huh? I'm asking?"

"That was something else. In the first place, in the beginning, I was a fool for letting you loosen my tongue, and now you are using it against me, sir. Secondly, it's normal for people to have sex. Talking about it harms no one. At the very most, it might cause hassles in a marriage. But to repeat what someone tells you in confidence is pure s---. You can really do someone in."

"How do you know that what you know about Olcha can do him in?"

"I don't know how you'll use it, sir."

"It will remain between us. Your husband won't find out.

"That's not the point."

"OK, I'll confide in you. I'll give you the whole picture—but honesty for honesty."

"I may have BSed a bit; that's a fact. But how do I know that you're not lying to me now, sir?"

"I give you my word, I'll tell all."

"If all, then OK."

"And you'll give me your word?"

"Everything for everything."

"In that case, listen. Our Bureau of Public Security exposed Olcha. He is guilty of the highest crime: treason against the fatherland, spying for the Western powers, and sabotage. Now do you understand?"

"Why that's impossible."

"He has been arrested. Why should I be lying? You'll see him soon—you'll have to face each other. Did you think that we were concerned about you? We're not interested in such tripe."

What he said came both as a shock as well as a letdown. It's true that I heard about a purge in the army—I vaguely caught the trials of Generals Tatar and Kirchmayer—but it didn't even faze me that some small time finagler could have been involved in anything important.* Even if he is not guilty, they are treating him as if he were—a

death sentence in any case. I understood finally that the whole thing with Vitold—the dollars, and all that other nonsense—was only a smoke screen. How many more times will I allow myself to be taken in like some idiot? And maybe this version is nothing more than a smoke screen for some other, even deeper plot. Very likely . . . he will never tell me the truth. That's now obvious. I observed him from the corner of my eye like a poker player eyeing an opponent: from how he looked, I had to figure out if he had another ace up his sleeve.

I sat there for a long time without saying a word. I got up and mechanically reached for a cigarette lying on the desk. At first, the towel boy wanted to say something, but he decided against it. He wore the appearance of the owner of a casino who will always come out ahead.

"I don't know if he was a spy," I finally said. "How do I know that you're telling me the truth?"

"Because I'm telling you! Do you dare to doubt my words? We have proof, testimony of witnesses!"

"Not to me, not to anyone that I know has he ever done any ill. I'm certain of that."

"What do you really know? The point of view of an ant looking at an elephant! He's done harm to the state, to all of us, do you understand? He sold state secrets for dollars. He wanted to destroy our country, to stir up a new world war, to sell us into slavery of American imperialism!"

"I know nothing about politics. I know only that he was my friend."

"Your friend!" The towel boy broke out in fake laughter. He was a lousy actor. "You must have a few screws loose in your brain! Wonderful friend! A spy and a saboteur! Control yourself you dumb broad! You're tightening the noose around your neck with your own hand. For you some s----faced friend is more important than the lives of millions? Everything that we have painstakingly rebuilt has to be destroyed by that louse—all in ruins? And you call him your friend? Congratulations on the company you keep! What's most important to you? Hurry up, answer!"

"Loyalty is most important."

"I'll give you a chance. Our people's republic has no pity for traitors, but it can appreciate the virtue of repentance and aid in gaining information leading to the arrest of partners in crime."

"I am nobody's partner in crime."

"Do you think that any court in the world will believe you? You were a lover of a spy and a traitor. We have here your sworn testimony signed with your own hand"—he struck the top of the desk. "Unless, of course, we can persuade the court to give you a lighter sentence—but only under the condition that you'll cooperate with us."

"I can't help you against him, sir. He's a friend; as for you, I don't even know your name."

He leaped from behind the desk and looked down on me. "Are you some sort of moron or just pretending to be one? This concerns treason of state! This isn't a joke. This is a capital crime, and you're giving me crap. You know where you can shove your loyalty? Olcha was a spy; he's done harm to Poland, to our common fatherland! We have to expose him completely. This is also your sacred duty to the nation that gives you your daily bread."

Since I kept quiet, he sat down and started writing something. When he finished, he nodded his head in my direction. "Sign it."

I came over to him, I picked up the pen, I put down the first letter. I hesitated.

"Go on."

"I'd like to read it."

"No doubt you remember what you said."

"Not very well." I noticed a strange sentence. "What's that?"

"What you've testified."

"He had a sexual affair with me, wanting to engage me in his treasonable activities against the fatherland and to enlist me in his spy ring . . . ," I read. "I didn't say that."

"Don't mince words. I had to condense it."

"I would like to see my previous testimonies."

"You've already signed them."

"In that case I won't sign this one."

"Sign it!"

"No."

"You'll be sorry!"

"I'm never sorry about anything I do."

He pranced vigorously around the room and stopped in front of me. I felt his breath on my face. "I held you in greater esteem than you're worth. You're just a dumb broad. But you ought to have time to think this over. I'll give you until tomorrow. Only remember that with a bunch of goddamn whores like you, the people's justice

*Brigadier General Stanisław Tatar, together with Jerzy Kirchmayer and other officers of the Home Army (see note p. 14), were arrested on trumped up charges of espionage in 1949; they were released and rehabilitated in 1956. Nineteen Home Army officers were executed in related cases.

will deal swiftly. If you're going to be a hassle, you'll sit in the showers for two days straight; then you won't need anything more. You'll be begging us on your knees to let you sign, but then it will be too late." He pressed the bell button. Immediately another cop appeared. "Take her back."

Slowly I walked over to the door. It seemed like the threats took their toll on me. I stopped at the threshold. "I would like to say something . . ."

"Yes!" he looked up with a glimmer of hope.

I walked over to the desk, crushing the butt of a dead cigarette in his ashtray. "You know these Belvederes taste like s---." I did an about-face on my heel and walked out. I hadn't felt this good in a long time.

* * * * *

She stood on the porch of an old, wooden house surrounded by a thick, neglected garden. An enormous wolf sniffed her shoes and shook his tail. "Well enough, Poppy, enough. Go away," she patted his head. She rang the bell three long, three short beeps. "Who's there?" a voice responded after a while. "It's me, Małgorzata." Grinding locks and bolts, then the door opened insignificantly and Sergiusz's bearded face showed itself in the narrow slit.

"Finally." He unlatched the chain and let her inside. "What happened to you? Did anyone follow you here?"

Without a word, she headed downstairs into the basement from where sounds of disco music emerged. They passed a pile of coal and another one of potatoes. Rows of preserves lined the shelves. They entered a spacious brick room brightly illuminated with iridescent light. On shelves made of natural wood, stacks of paper mounted. With his face smudged, Janusz nodded without stopping the mixing of the ink in a pail. On the floor, a girl with black curly hair kneeled collating the copies. Małgorzata pulled a stack of ditto masters out of a large bag.

"We worried that something happened to you," Sergiusz said. "Is this all? The entire issue?"

"Viktor is suppose to bring the review of TJ's chapbook."

"Did you see Olechovski about Mirek's case?"

"I had no time. I have to borrow some bread—twenty, thirty thousand."

"I don't have it. And how's your mother? Better? Oh . . . ," he broke off. "I'm sorry."

She sat down in the chair and picked up a printed page without thinking. Sergiusz turned off the stereo, and the room fell silent.

"Watch it, they're still wet," the dark girl said. "We have here about ten thousand, don't we, Sergiusz? But it's for the paper. . . . The guy's coming over with the supplies. . . ."

"Did you see Jacek? Only he might be able to have it. Best thing for you is to go see him right away."

"Sure, sure . . ."

"You want some tea?"

"No thanks."

"Maybe a shot of something stronger? I know you don't drink, but . . ."

"Don't worry about it. I'll handle it myself. I just want to sit and calm myself down for a moment. I'll leave soon. I've got a lot to do."

They started up the mimeo machine again. Janusz put on the ditto master and poured in the ink. She sat with her head leaning against the brick wall. She moved her lips in near silence: "Mommy, Mommy . . ."

"Did you say something?"

"No, no."

"It's silly to try to console you in this situation. But think also—she's not suffering anymore. You said yourself that she was constantly on dialysis, having transfusions—that's hell. It might be better for her this way."

"Maybe. . . . Her life was so absurd, so totally absurd. She lived fifty-four years, and nothing's left after her. . . . Interesting whether my daughter will say the same after I'm gone?"

"Nothing but mute metal junk will remain after we're gone jeered by future generations. . . ." Is that it? But surely something more remained after their generation. Borowski troubled himself apparently for no reason.* And you shouldn't either."

"And what will remain of us?"

"As if you didn't have enough headaches. It

*Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951), final lines of "Song" from his first volume, *Whenever There Is Earth*. An ambivalent figure in Polish literature whose personality provides an inspiration for the character of Tadeusz Moravski in the novel. A survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau, Borowski became a social activist after his return to Poland from the West and was apparently recruited by the secret services. He committed suicide at 29, three days after his estranged wife bore him a daughter and after his friend was arrested by security agents. Borowski is best known for his dispassionate images of concentration camp experience, as in "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." He sees the concentration camp as the logical outgrowth of civilization and the extermination of mankind as a real possibility.

will probably be something different than we imagine. As it was with them."

"Are you so sure?"

"No one is."

"She maintained that I was sending her to an early grave with what I was doing. In '68 in March, I was still in school. The order came down from the Board of Education office that parents had to pick up their children after school in person. Children! I was sixteen. I cut gym and ran to the University. I remember the streets, Nowy Świat, Krakowskie Przedmieście, were practically empty, and in the middle, slowly rolling police cruisers with grating covering the windshield, and people sneaking past underneath the walls. On the steps of the Church of the Holy Cross, the crowd was chanting: "Ges-ta-po-ges-ta-po . . ." And suddenly, a piercing scream: Małgosia! Małgosia!" I looked and, on the other side of the street, there stands my mom without a shawl, a total mess, half-dead out of breath. She ran all the way from school as soon as she saw that I wasn't there. . . ."

"Apparently that didn't help," Sergiusz humored her gently.

"I felt so guilty then . . ."

"Don't worry about it now. Everyone has such guilt feelings."

It became quiet. The machine rustled in a monotone spitting out printed pages. On the table the stack of the title page of *The Pulse* kept on growing.*

* * * * *

They didn't send for me for the interrogation the next day, or the following—apparently the towel boy thought that time worked to his advantage, and that my resistance would crumble after hours of waiting on the edge. But he couldn't foresee what transpired between me and Mira. We didn't talk about that night, but from then on an invisible bond formed between us, a special kind of code—it merely required one seemingly insignificant word, a nod, a wink, a facial expression or a subtle gesture with a hand, to immediately know what we were up to. My being in prison now made sense—I am here because Mira is here. Even if they wanted to let me go now, I wouldn't be able to leave her. This affinity penetrated the very core of my being. Again I felt I was myself, maybe not the same as before I was arrested, but once more identifying myself with the way I saw things. Everywhere we were surrounded by hostile forces, at best, by total neglect. We provided for each other that which, being isolated from the outside world, we needed most: faith that justice was on our side, faith that some day this nightmare will end. In point of fact, I really didn't know who Mira was. I assumed that if she said nothing about herself, she had a good reason not to. What she did for me was enough.

Our code came out of necessity: it became obvious that the peasant woman got the goodies and the cigarettes from the guards for sexual favors. In the evening, when all was quiet, they called her in under the pretext of questioning but really did it with her in the toilet or in the guard room. They screwed her on the desk or on the floor for an hour or two and then sent her back to the cell, hot and heavy and weak at the knees, with a chocolate bar or whatever they had lying around. She told us as much herself: "You've got to eat to keep up the strength. And I ain't gonna lose anything by it." One look at Mira was enough to know that she thought what I thought. From that time on, we kept our distance from her, even though, one had to admit, she generously shared her loot with us—still there was no telling whether she could be trusted with what was said in the cell.

Total silent treatment was impossible. I tried not to talk openly about serious things; to kill time, I told jokes—little anecdotes of life in the theater—or I sang various songs. For instance, I told the story of when our theater group went to perform for the company stationed at Ostroda. After the show we had a blast. Late into the night, the rowdy group went out on the range, climbing on top of tanks and anti-aircraft guns, yodeling and bellowing. The guards on duty tried to chase us away, but Olcha, who was also heavily under the weather, first stood them at attention, and then offered them some Camels, telling them he would take the responsibility on himself. Everyone knew who Olcha was, that the commanding officer of the garrison, Colonel Krysiak, was his old buddy from the days of the Spanish Civil War. So Olcha took command of the artists. He allowed a few ladies, myself included, into the tank. Someone pushed something, moved a lever, loaded the gun; I don't know much about it—the fact was, the gun went off. What's more, the shot rammed into the company latrine—luckily empty at that hour.

*Puls (*The Pulse*), along with *Zapis*, the first independent literary journal that emerged after 1976. It mainly publishes younger writers.

This caused a lot of commotion, sounded general alert—sleepy soldiers wandered about in the dead of night. Sure enough they were convinced that American imperialism finally showed its teeth and the Third World War was about to start. I recalled afterwards myself, two other dancing girls scared out of their wits and barely holding themselves on their legs, and Olcha in some office, with Krysiak shaking his fist and hollering a bunch of "whores," with red, white and blue striped pajamas sticking out of his pants leg. It ended on one more bottle of vodka which the shrewd Olcha just so happened to bring along with him. We drank it in a more solemn atmosphere like a bunch of squares.

My story made Mira burst out laughing. She laughed, and that was for me the biggest compliment. So, a bit of theatrical knack I still had in me.

After a week or so, the head screw stood in the open door calling out: "Beginning with D." He led me in another direction than the usual. I heard his medals rhythmically jingling on his chest. In order to avoid any potential contact with other prisoners, the jailers usually struck the banister of the staircase or the walls with their key chains or whistled. "Face the wall," my screw barked. However, I was able to notice a tall young man in handcuffs. "Up against the wall, you f---ing whore!" He rammed me against it, peeved as hell. My forehead struck concrete, and my legs gave way. Somewhat startled, the head guard scrambled towards me. Before he realized, I was back on my feet. "Hello," I said to the prisoner who was just passing me. "You probably need dames, and we dream about a man. See you!" The two bulls, flaming mad, jerked us apart in the opposite directions. Mine was teed off for being so taken in. He shoved his knee into my spine. "I'll make sure you'll remember me for the rest of your life," he hissed. "Better-looking than you have tried without any luck," I retorted.

He led me underground. He said to wait by the door while he knocked loudly. All of a sudden, from the other end of the corridor, three shots rumbled, one after the another. Chills ran down my spine. The cellar had acquired a grim reputation: presumably here they carried out sentences on political prisoners; . . . perhaps they finished off that fellow in handcuffs.

"Enter!" a voice rattled from behind the door.

I found myself in a small room which resembled a cell, but without the bunks. The towel boy stood in the middle of the floor. "Sit down," he commanded. There was no stool, so I had to sit on the john. The torture chamber? The thought ran through my head. "What's this?" he noticed the black and blue mark on my forehead.

"It's nothing. I tripped and fell on the stairs. . . ."

"A guard didn't strike you by any chance?"

"Not a chance. He is such a charming fellow."

Afterwards he began threatening me with the firing squad, the hanging; he was relishing in the description of my death in the torture chamber. I held my own repeating a single phrase: "Personal matters I discuss only with my friends." Let them murder me if they will, but I won't spill the beans for no apparent reason or because of threats. Again I would come out looking like an idiot. After an hour or so, sweat poured down his forehead. Still, I held up well. The whole time a thought stuck in my head: Did they really shoot that fellow? They didn't try to hide it from me in any way. Maybe that meeting on the stairs wasn't by chance.

He called in the guard, but I wasn't taken back to my cell. He ordered me to wait outside in the hallway. What will happen now? What am I going to listen to now? My mouth felt dry. In the still of the basement, I heard the clank of the john cover, then a splashing squirt.

The door opened. "Inside," he grunted. Without feeling at all embarrassed, he was still buttoning his fly. "Are you finally going to start talking?"

"I also have to go."

"Maybe you'd like a bath."

"It would help. Better stop trying to sniff me out, sir."

"Maybe you'd like a few 'curls'?"

"What curls?"

"This kind." He pulled a strand of my hair around his forefinger very painfully. "Well? How do you like it?"

Tears filled my eyes of their own accord. I mustered some strength. "Thanks. I begged them to find a hairdresser."

A smack, my eyes saw stars, I felt my face burn. I slid off the john trying to scale it again. My nose was bleeding. "Now let's try the other side so they'll curl evenly. . . ."

"You goddamn whore! You piece of s---! Peel your rags! Strip naked! I'll teach you!"

The speed with which I disrobed threw him a little off balance. If I protested, pleaded, making me do it, screaming, he would feel comfortable in his role. Without my uniform, I stopped being an unruly prisoner. I became simply a woman. He, dressed, could no longer ask me, nude, about

having an affair with another man. It would be too complicated by double entendres. I simply stood there, loosely. Only the blood dripping down my nose made me feel a little uncomfortable—I had to wipe it off from time to time. So I was naked, so what? He had to humiliate me more. "Kneel," he commanded. I kneeled, arching my belly. "Pull your stomach in! On all fours!" I got down on all fours, my breasts swinging loose. It made him boiling mad. "Get up! Lift up one foot! Spread your arms out!" That was really uncomfortable. Even Greta Garbo would not look enticing in such a position. That's what he wanted. "Stand straight! Don't support yourself!"

Moravski came in suddenly. He stopped in the doorway, a bit puzzled—it was obvious he lacked the experience. He started explaining something to the towel boy. The other nodded his head, leafing through the papers brought in, and both acted as if a naked woman just wasn't there, but it must have made them feel ill-at-ease. At some point, Moravski looked at me. Immediately, I blew him a kiss in the air. He turned around, saying nothing. In that, he became my unwilling accomplice. Abruptly, he collected the papers, and wanted to leave, but by this time, the towel boy preferred his company to mine.

One day I came to know "the coop"—solitary confinement. That is, they decided to give us a bath. For us it was a festive occasion. Only criminal prisoners could aspire to cleanliness, since the no contact rule was not as stringently enforced in their case—the politicals under investigation simply had to stink. Perhaps this time the authorities were concerned about an outbreak of an epidemic or lice. . . . A small, dark and wet hole in wall. Along the ceiling pipes with slits, no sprinklers, so the water squirted in all directions except on you. The shower was very refreshing. Is this what the towel boy threatened me with constantly? I saw nothing bad in it.

You had to cross the courtyard to get to our block. So I finally saw the hospital—shaved heads looked out of barred windows—men or women? Some sad creature allowed inarticulate grunts to escape and waved her hand. I considered my companions—they didn't seem much better. They marched with their heads bowed, indifferently shuffling their feet—an absolute down. "Hey, girls?!" I yelled. "Gym class! Phys. Ed.! Do you want to look like these guys? Come on, hop, two, three! Once around the block, ready, get set, go!" Offering myself as an example, I started with knee bends, doing jumping jacks, jogging in circles. No one reacted other than the screws. I began running away—I'll get punished all the same, so I might as well be breathing fresh air outside for as long as possible. I haven't played tag since I was a child. Their klutzy lack of agility made me laugh . . . the looks they gave me when I was beyond their grasp! In the end, the whole bunch of them cornered me—still laughing—and tied me down. The head screw, who pushed me into the wall, now twisted my arm. "This time you'll really get it!" he exclaimed with a good deal of personal satisfaction.

They brought me back into the now familiar cellar, and then squeezed me through a narrow doorway—for dwarfs probably—into a dark hole. Grating of the lock, total darkness, I felt all around myself . . . no room to move an inch in any direction. The hole in the wall was empty, not even a john. I crouched trying to sleep. I shivered from the cold. I sat in feces of others who were here before me. By the morning I sat in my own. It's easy to say time flies, but when you can't even move, when you can't sleep or eat, when it's cold and dark, when it stinks, that seemingly easy torture is tough to bear. I preferred the "curls" or the "spread eagle."

As soon as I heard steps in the hallway, I got to my feet as fast as I could—I knew already what turning into a log feels like.

"Get out of there!" A beefy woman guard with several medals on her chest opened the door.

"Al-ready?" I expressed my astonishment. "Too bad, I was beginning to like this place."

Without a word, she yanked me out—her paw, squeezing me like a pair of pliers—into the hallway; then, with an enormous blow, she punched me in the stomach. Briefly, I fainted. "Move!" She shook me by the shoulder. "Let's go!"

She led me into some office. "The prisoner Antonina Dzivish, present and ready for interrogation, sir!" I shivered from the cold and lack of sleep. My stomach still felt the blow.

"Good morning, won't you please sit down." Tadeusz Moravski, in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Public Security Armed Forces, elegantly made a seat for me in his upholstered chair. After the tiny stool of the towel boy, I felt as if I sat on a throne. On the desk, a ready breakfast waited at my side—cheese, ham, butter, eggs, honey, fresh rolls. A scent of real coffee filled the air. "Please help yourself. It's for you."

My hand almost automatically jerked forward, but I held back.

"I won't eat."

"Why not?"

"Simply because I won't."

"Surely you have no objection to the food."

"I'm not hungry."

"I'm going to make my ears freeze just to spite Mommy, is that it? You have to eat, Dzivish. You already don't look all that well. Surely you want to stay healthy.

"I'm not so sure who will outlive whom."

"I understand dignity and honor, but you are not acting wisely—even from your own point of view. You'll lose your strength sooner. What good will it do you? It will be easier to break you and force you to sign the confession."

"Of course you're right." I thought it over, feeling a little more at ease. With my shaking hands, I started shelling the egg and buttering the roll. My mouth filled with saliva.

He looked me over as if I were a caged animal, not especially threatening, but certainly disgusting. I wondered whether they terrified him when he was a child. Undoubtedly, he fears bats, rats and frogs. "You must understand that this is a serious case of treason involving breach in national security," he began calmly, like a psychiatrist addressing a raving lunatic. "Why are you so stubborn, Dzivish. You are young. Your entire life is still before you. Do you want to leave here only to land in a hospital or end up in a morgue? Why do you even care about this Olcha fellow? You told us in your testimonies that you slept with him only once. He is someone you don't even know. And besides, he is a scoundrel and a sell-out. Is he worth the pain? He would sell you out without any gumption in a minute. And you, Dzivish, you, for no apparent reason, are losing your health and wasting your life over him."

"Excellent rolls, which bakery? Officer's mess?" I asked with my mouth full. The food really tasted good. I forgot that freshly baked goods even existed in the world.

"You are an enemy of the communist system, am I not right?"

"I haven't given it much thought."

"But you don't really like communists?"

"If they are handsome fellows, why not?"

"Olcha is a communist, or so he says. What do you care about some commie? One more, one less, it doesn't make any difference to you. . . ."

"If there should be one less, why not you, pal."

"I'm not your pal, Dzivish! Give me more respect!"

"It's too bad that the eggs are hard-boiled. I would have preferred them Viennese style in a glass. And besides a posh establishment normally serves salt and pepper. Also you don't provide any napkins."

"Listen to me, Dzivish. I want to be frank and straightforward with you, on an equal footing. Don't make it tough on me."

"My mama always told me not to engage in a serious conversation over breakfast. It's unhealthy. It could cause indigestion."

"Are you aware of your situation? If you don't sign your testimonies, Dzivish, you'll become a mental and physical wreck. It's only a matter of time. You will not be able to last it out. Nobody can. On the other hand, if you will cooperate with us, and demonstrate your good will, you will be treated with kindness."

"Oh, will I get a cookie for being good?"

"I'm serious."

"Me, too. I fall heads over heels for sweets. Will I get some?"

"You would be permitted to sign out packages from home, to take daily walks, or even to use the library."

"And what's your library like? Do you have the *Wild Woman*? It's my favorite novel."

"Well, then, is it a deal?"

"Well, I'm really not so sure . . . if you don't have the *Wild Woman*, well, then . . . And you, pal, what's in it for you? Another star?"

He leaped to his feet. He was absolutely furious—the entire time barely keeping his cool and not wanting to explode. "I am speaking to you like a human being from the bottom of my heart, and you just make small talk, stringing wise cracks one after another! If you don't appreciate kindness then why don't you have a chat with Major Zavada? He will deal with you in a proper manner!"

"Sure, I prefer him. At least he's got guts, at least he's a man, not some goddamn f--t without any balls, like you, pal."

His face turned bloody red. No doubt he pondered the thought of sinking his teeth into my neck, but he held that back for later. Abruptly, he stormed out of there, pushing the door open and smacking the towel boy—listening in on the conversation—in the head. He straightened himself out at attention: "Comrade Major, I'm reporting the prisoner's readiness for the interrogation!" He kicked his heels together.

Clasping his forehead, his face squirming, trying to pretend it was nothing, Zavada entered the office. In a broad sweep, he threw the briefcase on the desk. "You're free to leave! Damn

it, go already!" Moravski kicked his heels together, did an about-face by the book, and left the room. I smiled inwardly. I had my own little satisfaction.

"Well how is it going to be? Are you ready to behave yourself and testify like a human being, Dzivish?"

"Pertaining to what?"

"Don't play dumb with me. A crime was perpetrated. Every citizen has the obligation to aid the authorities in pursuit of the crime."

"If there was a crime, then certainly I am willing to help!"

"So you have come to your senses, Dzivish. Better late than never."

"Putting a knife blade to it will make it feel better, sir," I said, noting that he was poking his growing black and blue mark.

"Don't distract me."

"Or a coin—seriously—a guaranteed remedy."

He looked at me with some distrust, but checked inside his briefcase and found a small pocketknife. He opened the blade, placing it on his forehead. "Your testimony, Dzivish, can be a decisive factor in the outcome of the case. Thanks to you, we can uncover this dangerous right-wing nationalist conspiracy."

"Olcha did not take part in any conspiracy."

"How do you know? Have you any proof?"

"Have you any proof, sir?"

"Well, let me make it easier for you, Dzivish. A conspiracy may involve three people talking in a room, a fourth person enters, and they stop talking. In that case, that threesome belongs to a conspiracy. Is this clear?"

"Interesting. Is there more?"

"Well, you must have overheard how he conspired with Colonel Wrona or Krysiak. They were his best friends. Tell me about that, Dzivish."

"When I came into the room, they never stopped the conversation."

"Because you also belonged to the conspiracy."

"Me! I didn't know anything. Should I start telling jokes?"

"Why jokes? I am asking you seriously."

"They horsed around all the time telling jokes. Would you like to hear them, sir? For example, an old lady walks into the hospital and says, 'Doctor, doctor, I have an itch between my toes.' 'Please take off your shoe.' And she takes off both. 'Why are you taking off your shoes, Madame?' 'Because, doctor, I have an itch between the big toe of my left foot and the big toe of my right.' Funny, isn't it?"

He eyed me like a cat eyeing a mouse. He pressed the bell. A guard entered. "Take her to the showers. We make pork out of pigs like you and sell it by the pound! We'll grind you up into blood sausage or make meatballs out of you, you f---ing whore! No more kidding around!"

The showers dripped lazily from the pipes onto the concrete floor. The door slammed shut. Suddenly water poured out of the ceiling. I jumped, keeping close to the wall to avoid getting drenched. It poured and poured with no end in sight. The drain clogged up, and the water level rose slowly but steadily. It was up to five inches. Shivering from the cold and from lack of sleep, I stood pressed into a slick wet corner, but water drops reached me anyway. My teeth chattered. It poured and poured in dull jabbering squirts. Time stopped, it stretched into eternity, was lost. An hour passed, maybe two, maybe five? I fell into a trance. My legs, my thighs swelling, stiffening, hurting. Now I learned what a soggy log must feel like. Maybe it's better to lie down in that water," I thought. But then pneumonia for sure. . . . Voices in the hall . . . a man's voice, very familiar . . . Why it's Kostek! They've arrested him as well! He must know that I'm here only a step away. "Kostek! Kostek! I'm in here!" I was yelling with all my might. Across the curtain of pouring streams of water, I saw the door open, and a tall figure standing there. "Kostek!" I yelled once more. "Are you there?" "Well have you thought it over?" I tried to launch in his direction, but my foot got stuck in the wooden grill. The door closed. I made a strong effort tearing my foot out of the grill. Suddenly I fell, water splashing, sobering up a little. I rose with difficulty, dripping with water. . . . Wait a minute. Was someone here a moment ago? Kostek? The towel boy? Maybe nobody came in? Water level reached my navel. My wet skirt felt like heavy armour. Again I heard Kostek's voice. Maybe! I'm in here! I wanted to shout, but I only gurgled hoarsely without anybody hearing me. Water reached up to my breasts . . .

Suddenly the door opened. The big surge of water amassed in the place tossed the three guards off their feet. They fell, unable to hold themselves up in the teeming waterfall, splashing about helplessly. "What the hell! Close the valve! The drain must be clogged up with something!"

I walked out into the hallway which turned into a swiftly running river. Near me some guy in civilian clothing waded in the water with his pants rolled up to his knees and holding his shoes in his hand. "What imbecile flooded the entire

floor? Where's the plumber?" he hollered. "A plumber in the middle of the night?" Nobody seemed to take any interest in me. I walked up the stairs by myself, collapsing on the landing.

"Hey!" someone shook my shoulder. "Let's go."

It was daylight. "Will you sign this, Dzivish?" I heard. I could barely hold myself on my legs. My eyes were shut. I felt as if I were on the deck of an ocean liner. "Did you hear me, Dzivish? Sign here." He led me to the desk, pushed over a chair, and put a pen into my hand. "When you sign, you'll be able to return to your cell."

I opened my eyelids with great difficulty . . . some sort of dull light spots. Only after a while was I capable of recognizing the polished spats, the corner of the portrait on the wall, the homespun material made of heavy weave—this took a lot of effort on my part. The towel boy seemed refreshed, rested, perfumed. On his lips he had the remains of his scrambled eggs.

"Sign it. Breakfast is ready."

"What is it?"

"I'm telling you, sign it."

"First let me sleep."

"Later."

"First."

"Will you sign?"

"Later yes."

"So now you'll sign the promissory note."

"With what?"

"The pen is in your hand."

"What brand? It has to be a Waterman. I don't use anything else." I felt barely alive, but the BS came easily. Of course I had no idea to what it might lead. At the time I didn't know whether I would do it or not. I wanted to postpone the final moment. Maybe in the meantime something will happen. Maybe the towel boy will have a heart attack or the jail will crumble in ruins.

"Would you like another shower? Didn't you have enough?"

"First they have to unclog the drain. You flooded the entire prison, sir."

"Cut the wise remarks. Are you going to sign or not?"

I felt awful. I was shivering; my head palpitated. I dreamt of ending this as soon as possible. Evidently the towel boy was as healthy as they come, and the prison had a solid foundation. Let it be what will be. Too bad. I'll sign! I touched the paper with the nib—not even a scratch—"Out of ink. . . .

"It's there. It dried up. Keep writing."

I tried writing, but nothing doing. Pure chance was on my side. Curbing his anger, the towel boy started rummaging through his desk—one drawer, another, still another . . . "No more, damn it . . . ." In the end he found it. "Dip and sign it now, Dzivish."

I dipped the pen in the bottle. At this point, my nose itched. I sneezed with such might that everything on the desk ended up on the floor. The ink splattered.

"You filthy c---! What the hell you think you're doing?"

Again I sneezed. And again. He picked up the pen off the floor, dipped it in the puddle and shoved it into my hand. "Here. Sign it now!"

"The nib broke," I said. And in fact the forked tip reminded me of a mustache on a beetle.

"What a monster you are?" He looked like a madman who had lost his marbles. "Why are you doing everything to spite me? Stop persecuting me, or I'll kill you!"

"Try making even a letter with it, sir."

"It doesn't matter how you do it, just do it! Sign!"

"It won't look good. . . ."

"I'll give you three minutes and no more!" He was on the edge, incapable of standing it any longer. He took off his wrist watch and laid it out in front of me. I observed the ink oozing closer to the watch. "Two and a half minutes!" My head dropped, and I instantly fell asleep.

"Get up!" he woke me up with a tug. I got up with great difficulty. My sinking knees stopped obeying orders. "You won't sign it?" I said nothing. "You have fifteen more seconds!" He took a gun out of the drawer, checked if it was loaded, then uncocked it. "If you don't sign, I'll shoot you like some bitch foaming at the mouth! Turn around."

I stood facing the wall. I felt cold steel on my neck. "I'm warning you. Five, four, three, two, . . ." I waited all wound up, uncertain to the end . . . My eyes went blank, my knees gave way, I sank to the floor. "You goddamn whore! You clown!" he spat it out, no longer able to control himself. "You fascist pig, you c---, you whore! So that's how you're going to be? We'll take care of you tomorrow! You'll sit in the showers until you start singing!"

My appearance must have shocked Mira, since she cried out, "What have they done to you? Where were you for so long?"

"I was taking a shower. I'm as clean as a teardrop," I answered, collapsing on the floor. I didn't even notice the new heavyset woman in the cell, who was in her thirties, with sharp facial

features and wearing glasses.

"Get up, because the guard will raise hell."

At the time, I could care less whether anyone would throw a fit. Nonetheless Mira lifted me off the floor; mustering up all her strength, she pulled off my wet clothing, wrapped me in her sweater, and sat me down on a stool. "Listen, love, eat something," the peasant woman passed me some bread and bacon as well as a cup of mud coffee. "When a person don't eat, they loses their strength. And you've gotta be very strong."

I slept sitting up. The screw pounded on the door. "No sleeping in there!" he hollered. My eyes kept on shutting themselves. This repeated several times. Mira stood next to the peephole to warn me. "She's got temperature," I overheard someone whispering. "Maybe we should call the doctor." "Oh, he won't show up. They come only when a person is practically dead." "She's nearly there. She'll end up in her grave soon enough," the new woman said. "What do you know, missy, you quack and quack. She's young, she's healthy. She just got to eat well. If a person's got reserves, they can withstand anything. . . ."

"I'm freezing. . . ."

I felt someone wrap me in another blanket. I looked around—the new woman slept on a mattress laid out on the floor. Kostek kneeled next to me, laying his head on my breasts.

"I'm afraid . . ."

"Don't be, don't be . . ."

"I'm afraid. Take me away from here."

"We don't have to go anywhere. We're safe," he caressed my cheek. "We're safe here because we're together. You're safe with me, and I'm safe with you. That's the best defense—there's no better. They'll find you out anywhere but never here inside. I won't let them inside, and you make sure that you won't let them inside either. But don't tell anyone because they'll try to break in."

"You know, I have the impression that everything is just a dream. So many times I imagined myself escaping, rushing inside the house, you waiting for me, the tapping of the typewriter . . .," I said. Kostek was lying next to me on our old narrow sofa. Instead of a leg—bricks. His face near mine. Near his nose, a pimple appeared—"and I woke up in jail. So now perhaps also . . . Last time I dreamt that you and Dziunia were cheating on me. To get rid of me, you called the Bureau. But you wouldn't do that really, would you? It was just a dream . . . And now I'm afraid that I'll wake up, that everything—you, me, our home—will blow away, and that I will find myself again between these horrible walls, that I will again hear the grating of a key inside the lock, the rumble of the pot, the yelling of that man . . ."

"Maybe you're ill."

"No, no . . ."

"Understand that it was just a dream; it isn't here. You won't wake up because now you're not asleep. . . ."

"And what if I'll wake up?"

"This isn't a dream," he repeated, smiling. "You know I'm next to you. Can't you feel me? Is it true that you feel me?"

"Oh yes, I feel you. I feel you inside, very deeply, so very delicately as no one before. . . . You're hidden inside me under my heart. I won't allow anyone inside, not even if he would be the most magnificent or the most handsome, because I love only you. . . . I'll always love you, even if you cheat on me or abandon me altogether. . . ."

"I'll never cheat on you, and I'll never leave you. . . ."

We were nearing climax. . . . Suddenly Kostek stiffened. "What happened?"

"It's over—the end."

"What end?"

"The end . . ."

"Go on, I'm so close . . ."

"Wait." Wrapped in a blanket, he got out of bed and sat down at the typewriter. After a minute or two, he pulled out the paper. "Do you want to hear it?"

"The snow piling up so warm, so white
The night is frozen, bells, sapphire—
and the sapphires, the bells swirling bright
and the moon making itself over into a lyre
and the wandering cat on this lyre gently
*with his tail strikes up a tune to his cat desire."**

When he finished, applause resounded from the dark corner of the room. A man wearing a hat with a large rim was sitting in an easy chair. His entire face lost in the shadows bore a striking resemblance to Moravski. "Bravo," he said. "Excellent. I still would polish it up here and there. He rose, took off his jacket and tie, pulled down his pants. Instantly he was in only a meshed T-shirt and wearing his hat. He lay down next to me covering himself with the bedspread.

"So what in particular would you change?"

*Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński (1905-1953), "Lovers' Ball." Gałczyński was an innovative poet intent on rehabilitating what is lyrically banal, often introducing non-poetic content in poetry to force the limits of meaning.

Kostek asked.

"Don't play coy with me," the man said. "You ought to know. You're the poet."

"Kostek," I pleaded, gathering the sheets toward me. "Kostek . . ."

He sat brooding over the manuscript. The man embraced me. I tried to fight him off, but he pinned me down firmly. He put his hand over my mouth. "Stop interrupting me. Can't you see I'm working?"

"Kostek, please . . ."

He lay me down easy on my back, climbed on top of me, and unlocked my legs with his knee. I bent my head looking at Kostek; he smiled and waved, "Wait a minute, I'm coming . . ."

I bit my lips. The man started grinding away, faster and faster . . . From under the bed, the brick came out. . . Everything collapsed with a loud crash. . . .

* * * * *

She wandered about the crowded halls for a long time—everywhere, near every door, on the landings, in every chair, old people waited wearing winter coats, with canes or on crutches, women in black, brooding youths . . . A child was crying. An obese female—who, sitting in a chair, could not reach down to the floor with her feet—unwrapped a sandwich, cut off an uneven piece with a small knife, and began stuffing it into her mouth, chewing it slowly.

After an hour of waiting in line, she finally reached the window. She had to bend way down in order to look into the round hole in the glass. She shoved a piece of paper inside. "My mother died. I would like an advance to pay for the funeral."

"Was she on social security?"

"Yes. She had disability insurance."

"We cannot give you an advance, Madame. Only after we have the receipts will we be able to return the costs. But not everything. Only a portion within a certain price range."

"But I don't have any money."

"Why don't you get a loan from someone?"

"I don't have anyone to get a loan from."

"Well, your mother didn't have any friends or family? Please don't give me that."

"That's the truth."

"Why don't you get an advance from your job. There are special supplements in the event of death of a close relative."

"I'm unemployed."

"Well, then why doesn't your husband get one."

"He cannot."

"So how can I help you, Madame?"

"Please, Madame!" a voice rose from the line. "Hurry up! Everyone has troubles. I've been waiting for over an hour."

Then another office. She was given a run-around from room to room. Finally she reached "Kindergarten Administration." "My mother once taught rhythmic exercises in kindergarten on Pilicka Street. She just died, and I need some help."

The two women clerks eyed their desks. It seemed as if they hadn't heard anything. "When did your mother teach rhythmic exercises? Was it long ago?" One of them reacted after awhile, shuffling documents from left to right. She seemed to be suffering from a toothache.

"During the sixties."

"When did she retire?"

"She retired for health reasons. I don't remember, in '71 or '72 . . ."

"If she was still our employee, that's another story. This is a Social Security problem. You should go and see them, Madame."

"I was already at Social Security. I need an advance for the funeral. I will pay back the money afterwards. Or more precisely Social Security will."

"You really are in the wrong department, Madame."

"Where's your supervisor?" She turned to the door furiously.

"Room 115. But he will tell you the same thing."

She charged into the office. "Is the supervisor in?"

"He's busy."

Ignoring the protestations of the secretary, she stormed into the office. A young, elegantly dressed man, lounging in a cushioned chair, talked on the phone. "I'll call you later. Bye, I love you too," he put away the receiver.

"How can I help you, Madame."

"My mother died. She worked here for many years. And no one wants to help me—not Social Security and not your office. And I don't have any money for the funeral. I don't have anyone who will lend me the money. What am I to do? Where am I to get it from? Please, sir, tell me!"

"Please sit down, Madame."

"I won't sit down! When someone retires, or worse, dies, you could care less. I don't know; maybe that's according to the regulations, but it doesn't make it right. Does it?"

"We can't break the rules."

"But is it right?"

"I agree with you that there are unusual circumstances, when . . ."

"Well then, break the rules! What's more important: some regulations or a human being?"

"We both know perfectly well what kind of country we live in; neither you nor I can change it."

"But what are you personally doing to make it better, sir?"

"How about you?"

"Me?" she wavered. "At least I demand more humane rules and regulations."

"And so? Does it ever bear any fruit?" He smiled.

"It all depends with whom I'm dealing."

She rang the neighbor's doorbell. "I came to pick up Magda. I'm sorry that I'm so late, but you can imagine why . . ."

"No problem. They played real nicely with Adam. Magda! Your mom's here to pick you up!"

"Let me come in for a minute. There's something else . . ."

"Come in. I need to talk to you too about something."

"What's up?"

"I know that you have a lot of expenses now, but can you lend us about five thousand?"

"Five thousand?"

"Chris is waiting for the dough from his contract work. We'll give it back to you in about a week or so. And what do you want?"

"Forget it. Really I don't have it. Sorry. Let's go, Magda," she hugged the little four-year-old blonde close to her leg. "Thanks for taking care of her."

She was walking up the staircase of the same building.

"Mommy, when are we going to visit Grandma?" the child asked.

"There's no more Grandma."

"What do you mean?"

"She once was, and now she's no more. You saw what happens to snow. First it's there, and then it goes away."

"But water remains after it goes away."

"Don't be a pest."

She entered a tiny apartment filled with books from top to bottom. On the kitchen table, a typewriter by the bread, an open can and a bag of flour. Małgorzata pushed the food aside and inserted a ditto master into the machine. "Well, Magda. Go to the bathroom and then right to sleep. It's late, and I have to work."

"Mommy, I don't feel like it," she climbed on her knee.

"I have a lot of work. I have to get it done by tomorrow."

"You haven't done chacha with me for such a long time. . . ."

"Magda, dear, please . . ."

But after awhile both were giggling from the tickling.

* * * * *

"Get up. Roll call."

"Eat . . ."

"I said she's young, strong," the peasant woman said. "If you're hungry, you're healthy. Eat, dearie, as much as you can to have reserves." She laid out bread and a piece of sausage in front of me. Rummaging through her bunk, she pulled out an onion. But already the neighboring door was opening.

After the roll call, the new woman introduced herself to me. "My name is Vitkovska. I heard a bit about your case. Who is questioning you? Major Zavada? They call him the towel boy."

"Him, I guess."

"Did you admit to anything, comrade?"

"I was not at a party meeting."

"Please excuse the comrade—old habits. Did you admit to anything?"

"Don't bother her, dearie. First she ought to eat. She can talk later," the peasant woman said.

"What was I supposed to admit to? I didn't do anything wrong."

"But, Madame, did you sign any testimony?"

"I told you, I'm innocent."

"That doesn't mean anything—guilty or not guilty. But sign you must."

"But after all . . ." Her obtuseness surprised me. "Why should I legitimize some made-up BS. Why? I didn't do anything wrong!"

"You can't leave here without any guilt. That no one can do."

"I will. I'm here by mistake. . . ."

"What do you mean by mistake?" her brows wrinkled.

"Simply they must have confused me with somebody else. They seem totally out of it, but sooner or later they'll realize who I am."

"The people's government never makes mistakes," she said severely. "That's impossible. Listen to my advice; admit to everything while there's still time, comrade."

"For Christ's sake, why should I?" I exclaimed.

"Otherwise they'll finish you off, as they did

Colonel Wereszyński, who refused to testify—and they simply told the family that he died of a heart attack."

That scenario also entered my head several times, but what other way out did I have? "I don't have anything to admit to. . . ."

"In that case you'll have to invent something."

"But why should I be making things up? Why should I lie? Who needs false testimony?"

"That's not up to you to know." Vitkovska looked me over sternly like my Latin teacher when I couldn't properly conjugate my verbs. "You must take the advice and proceed on the assumption that the people's government knows what it's doing, comrade. You have to understand that a powerful class struggle is taking place now, and that the enemy is lurking everywhere, even in places where no one expects. This is why we have to be on our guard, comrade. We must carefully analyze everything that happens. And every means at our disposal in our struggle, if it leads to victory, is just—every one. That's what you really have to understand. . . ."

"No, no . . . but . . ." I couldn't keep my mouth shut; I interrupted her sharply. "I'm sitting in this jail for no apparent reason. I'm innocent. What do I care about all that? Some class struggle! What do I care?"

"Listen, comrade," she placed her hand on my shoulder—"it won't always be like this. In five, ten years, when we will triumph over all our enemies, our methods will change. Then it will be entirely different. Surely you would like your children to live in a different, just and safe world. But that cannot be achieved without sacrifice; it simply cannot . . ."

I looked at her with horror. "Jesus . . . and you, Madame, did you allow yourself to be such a sacrificial lamb, to innocently suffer in prison so that at some future date . . ."

She turned away from me and paused by the window. She fell silent for a while. Later she said quietly, "I am an American spy."

I felt a chill rush down my spine, my breasts in turn becoming hot.

I walked over to her carefully. "A real spy?" I asked in a whisper.

She looked at me. I expected tears, a depression. This time Vitkovska looked at me calmly, clearly, almost proud. "Not subjectively," she admitted flatly. "All my life, so long as I can remember, I have been a communist. And I still am. Objectively speaking, I'm a spy. And this has been proven to me anyway. I admitted immediately . . ."

"But I don't understand. . . . What do you mean by not subjectively . . ."

"I'll explain. It happened like this. My comrades from the Central Committee gave me orders to host some American by showing him around Poland. His name was Noel Field, and he was regarded by the Communist International as a devoted, trustworthy comrade.* He fought in Spain; during the war he aided communist refugees in Switzerland . . . . I showed him everything: rising mines, steel works, airports. I showed him whatever he wanted to see. It turned out that this was only a cover—that he transmitted all the details to Washington—that he had worked for the CIA for years. And I helped him . . ."

"But you, you didn't do that knowingly! You didn't know he was spying!" I exclaimed.

"As I was saying," she patiently explained, "subjectively, I'm not a spy, but objectively, I aided and abetted the enemy, and for that I must be punished."

She turned to face the window and did not appear to wish to pursue the conversation further. I also turned away, crouching down in the corner. I deeply mulled over what I heard. Not everything was clear to me. Almost instinctively I decided to stay clear of Vitkovska from now on. I was sure she was a plant, spying for the towel boy. Their views didn't differ much. . . . Once she placed a cup on my stool. I felt like sitting down. Without saying a word, I dumped it on the floor.

"Excuse me," she said.

One day Mira came back from the questioning looking green, and shaken up. Lately they called her more often. Feebly, like a mannequin, she sat down. She didn't want to eat or drink. "Let's leave her be for a while," Vitkovska said. Mira sat all day without a word; all night she just lay there, her eyes wide open.

"Mira," I whispered. "Say something. What

*Noel Field, American "fellow traveler" sympathetic to the communist cause, was connected with the OSS during the war. In 1949, he was arrested on charges of conspiracy and espionage when he went to Prague and was later imprisoned in Budapest. Field was forced to admit that he had worked for American intelligence, and the testimony of "the number one American spy in Eastern Europe" was used in the show trials of a number of prominent communists. Several members of the Field family were arrested and imprisoned when they attempted to get Noel out from behind the Iron Curtain. All were freed in 1954 as a result of Lieutenant-Colonel Świato's Radio Free Europe exposés of the operations of secret police in the Soviet bloc.

happened?"

"Leave me alone," she turned facing the wall.

I got up, crouching next to her. "Mira, tell me. It will make it easier." I placed my hand on her shoulder. "What did they ask you about?"

She pushed me away with such force that I swerved, falling against the opposite wall. I returned to my bunk. So that's how it is? I tell her all but she won't say anything? Is that friendship? After a while, I felt her standing behind me. I turned around. She was crying. She grabbed my hand and kissed it. "What's wrong with you? Are you crazy?" I exclaimed, so that only she could hear—not Vitkovska, not the peasant woman. Mira pressed me against her bosom. I took hold of her neck bringing her close to me. She caressed my hair and face. Her hand found my breast, fondled me under the blanket down lower, my belly, between my legs . . . I got hot all over. She felt me slowly and sensually. All of a sudden I tightened in a sudden shudder and curled up. I bit my lip so as not to cry out. Ecstasy left me slowly; I returned to myself. Mira snuggled close, touching my cheek. It was absolutely quiet—except for the barely perceptible snoring of the other sleepers.

One time I entered the towel boy's office, I saw Jan Garlicki, the director of my theater group, crouching on the stool in front of the desk. Why is he here? I noticed that he was all nerves. His movements lacked confidence, he avoided looking me in the eye, he wiped his sweaty palms on his pants. He hadn't shaved. . . . His shirt was soiled, his shoes had no laces, he wasn't wearing a tie. So they arrested him as well? What for? For embezzlement? For making moonshine under the stage? For spying for Western theaters?

"Read your testimony out loud, Garlicki," the towel boy handed him a sheet of paper."

"Is it necessary, comrade Major?"

"I told you to read it."

Garlicki became hoarse; after a moment, he began reading in a quiet, unsure tone:

"I testify to the following: I met Dzivish, Antonina, in 1945 in Berlin . . ." It seemed to me he didn't want me to hear any of it.

"Louder," the towel boy murmured.

"In 1945 . . . She was still Yablonovska, her maiden name. She was recruited by the theater troupe of the First Polish Army and put in charge of costumes and requisitions. Already at that time, I noticed that she was trying to establish contact with Polish and Soviet officers of higher rank. She often discussed with them the numbers and the location of military units and their battle readiness. . ."

Further it appeared from the testimony that I gathered military intelligence for the operatives of Western spy networks, and so on and so forth . . . lies and more lies. I didn't believe my ears. Should I burst out laughing or cry? Should I punch him? Who would believe him? I didn't expect this even in my wildest fantasies. After all, Garlicki was an ordinary, honest fellow. I never had any run-ins with him; I even liked the man, and it seemed to me he liked me as well.

He stopped reading and dropped the paper as if it made him burn. It got quiet—a prolonged silence. The towel boy lit a "Belvedere," offered one to Garlicki, who took the cigarette with his shaking hand—I don't ever remember him smoking before. He sat there crushing it between his fingers since the towel boy didn't offer him a light, and he was afraid to ask for one. "So how do you appear now, Dzivish?" the towel boy turned to me. "Everyone around you is crystal clear, all white, and you're constantly hush hush in the dark. Why go against the grain. You're young; you have your whole life before you."

"Please, comrade Major, let me. Tonia listen. This is the only way out. Admit it. I'm begging you as your close friend." Garlicki tried to wink at me, but it turned into a tick. "The punishment will not be heavy, couple of years at most. That's what comrade Major promised. Time flies. You're young. You've got your whole life before you."

"Why did you do it? Did you believe them?"

"I had to, for your own good. Really, forgive me."

"What's all this f---ing around?" the towel boy hollered, pounding the desk with his fist; this was his favorite expression, I noticed. "What do you mean, Garlicki, that you were forced to for her own good? In other words, you don't believe your own testimony. Is that it? You've lied to us? Why don't we clear it for the record. What role did you play in the plot?"

"But no, comrade Major," Garlicki curled up into a ball and pretended not to exist. "I am very sorry for your misunderstanding me. I wasn't forced into anything; everything I said was of my own free will. . . . I would be willing to give up my right hand if . . ."

The major rang the bell, and a guard appeared. "Take him away to the showers! Give him forty-eight hours!" They took Garlicki out. I saw his gaze as the doors slammed behind them. My friends deserted me, I thought. The bastards! You can't concern yourself with that. Undoubtedly they were not true friends. There's always Mira.

And there's Kostek, of course. He loves me; he is waiting for me for sure! Only two—but they are sure . . .

"Let's talk seriously for once without your wise-a-- remarks. You can see we can do anything we want with you, Dzivish. This testimony"—he shook Garlicki's paper—"will easily land you in a hangman's noose. Any court will sentence you. And no one will care. No one. Even your best friend and confidante is now on our side. Do you want to fight against the whole world? You can't win. I'm telling you this for your own good as a man with some experience. What did your resistance get you? If you signed the testimony as a witness a long time ago, all the screaming would be over. And now we have to dig up more facts to directly implicate you, Dzivish. But I will give you your last chance: either you sign the testimony concerning Olcha or we will take care of you. Which do you choose?"

"You made a fool out of me several times, sir. But this time I won't let you. If the court has not lost its marbles, it won't sentence me on the basis of such flimsy drivel of a former cabaret clerk! Where is the evidence?"

"The evidence? If you would like, I can bring in over a hundred witnesses who will swear under oath that you participated in a criminal attempt to destroy the garrison at Ostroda using tanks and artillery."

"What garrison?" I was unable to hold back my surprise. "How did you find out about that, sir?"

"We know everything. You can't deny that."

Now it came to me. "Ah, I told fairy tales, you know, just for laughs, to pass the time, and that peasant fool took me at my word. And you did also, sir."

"Sanitary equipment of a military unit was destroyed. We have the evidence; we have the reports."

"Oh, yes. A pit hole full of s--- went up in the air. Big deal."

"There's nothing funny about that. A latrine is as necessary for the army as guns or airplanes. You sabotaged the defense potential of our fatherland. In other words, you acted in cahoots with Western imperialism. People have gone to the gallows for less. So which is it going to be? What's your choice, Dzivish? You will not leave here unless you make the decision, even if it takes all week." He turned away from me in the chair, his fingers tapping on the deak. "So here, please. . . ," he passed me the previously prepared testimony, still spotted with ink.

I said nothing. He dialed a number. Seemingly unconcerned, he discussed the decent pickle soup with dumplings which Jeannie prepared last night . . . he then asked whether little Dickie still wets his bed. . . . He listened, nodded, expressed surprise. Later on he complained about an upset stomach and the lack of quality shoes on the market.

Time passed. I fidgeted on my stool while he took care of official business and private matters. He would leave—then the guard stood in the open door. After dinner he belched a few times and picked teeth with his fingers, he chirped, he yawned reading the paper. "Who will fill in the pothole?" I was able to decipher the front page headline of *The Evening Express*. Occasionally the other officers came in for a chat, five or six in a group. They stood in a circle around the window covered over with bricks, blowing clouds of thick cigarette smoke; they would throw out incomprehensible half-words in my direction, and suddenly explode in laughter. The towel boy pulled out a bottle of vodka and filled the shot glasses. One of the officers, rather large-bellied and father-like in appearance, detached himself from the group, came over and examined me with some interest, but from a distance, undoubtedly fearful that he might get dirty. "She looks OK," he murmured to himself, "and such a stinking c---. I would make her . . ."

"Her ears stand out a bit much," another near the window added. "That indicates innate dumbness."

"Her t--- are also outstanding. What does that mean?" The entire group burst out laughing.

"Hey, baby, show us your t---!"

"Make her strip."

"Show us your p----!"

"Leave her be; it probably stinks like a s---- house!"

"Cause it was f---ed by American fascists, isn't that the truth? Hahaha . . ."

"Let her have a drink with us!"

"Why waste good booze."

"Waste what? Waste what?" A bald Public Security Armed Forces lieutenant emptied the contents of his shot glass into a cuspidor and pushed it over to me. "Here, baby, have a little drink. Come on!"

I moved away. The rest smelled a good time. Laughing and howling in ecstasy, they twisted my hands back and held my legs firmly in place. The bald one clamped my cheeks with his paw and poured the contents of the spittoon into my throat to the accompaniment of cheering and jeering. I choked and threw up all over their

uniforms. "What a bitch! Puke! Don't touch her . . . Damn . . ." I felt a heavy blow to the head. . . .

I came to lying on the floor out in the hall. The noncom on duty placed a full bowl next to my face. "Eat!" he commanded. No knife, no spoon, the mush was too thick to drink and too soupy to eat with your hands. But I was starving and ready for dog meat. In spite of everything, after eating, I looked messier than a pig. They took me to the toilet. The amazon wearing medals stood in the hall and forbade me to lock the door. She observed me without batting an eye. Apparently suicides occured in prison toilets. But how can you commit suicide, I thought, with not a single movable part in sight.

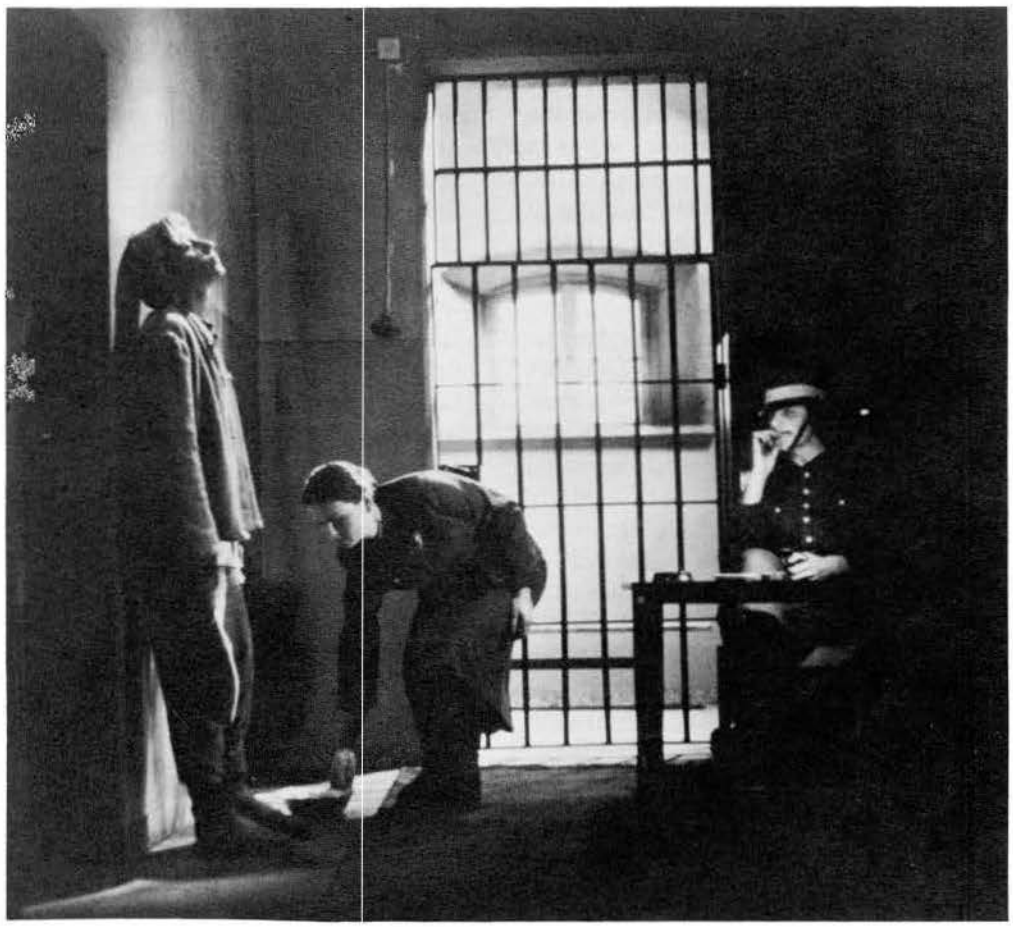
When I returned to the office, Moravski sat behind the desk. It must have been evening already.

"Well, I see they pulled you in for the bump on the Major's forehead," I greeted him. "Before opening the door next time, make sure no one's listening in on you. A tried-and-true rule of military intelligence."

"You puzzle me, Dzivish. You seem to be an intelligent, grown-up woman. And you're behaving like a spoiled brat. I'm totally at a loss why you take your life so lightly," he said after a pause. "If you'd only realize what threatens you, you'd have signed the confession a long time ago."

"Oh, I see. So now, pal, you're practicing to be a priest with all this sermonizing?"

"Stop getting personal with me. Don't call me pal! I forbid you! I see we have not dealt with you properly, Dzivish! But you will sign soon enough!



Everyone here admits to what is demanded of them. It's just a question of the methods applied."

"What kinds of methods you reckon you've got, you low-down piece of s---? You've got no imagination to force me to do anything."

"Shut up! Shut up!" he slammed the desk with the briefcase, spilling the papers. He collected them quickly and hid them inside. "If we didn't use appropriate methods with you, it is only because we have been humane!"

"I'm really glad you've informed me because

it's hard to see. I thought you were Gestapo."

He struck me across the face. I slid off the stool. "You vulgar, dumb bitch! You're too goddamn primitive to understand the basics! You're lounging here as if in a palace, making wise remarks and being cynical! Do you know what Gestapo is! Do you know what imperialism is? What do you know of our class enemy with whom we are locked in a life and death struggle? You have no idea! You don't give a damn! All you care about is that your mouth gets fed and that you get enough sleep! That's your way of life! And also getting laid! And what are you? Nothing, a total nothing! A bimbo singer from some third-rate cabaret for social parasites! You can't be forced to do anything? Do you really know what a human being is capable of, what the breaking point is? Do you know what a concentration camp is, a bunker, a post, pouring freezing water over your head in the middle of winter, death in a gas chamber? Do you know what real hunger is? Did you ever taste human brains?"

He threw all this up abruptly and chaotically. I kept my mouth shut, taken aback by his outburst. Without knowing, probably I struck some sensitive nerve. He took out a cigarette and lit it. After thinking it over, he offered me one. I took it.

"You have to understand, Dzivish. Your testimony is necessary to avoid a great crime, so that people would no longer have to live like animals," he said in a softer voice. "It is to purge our ranks of all the elements which want to begin a new world war. This is the ante for which the game is played now. And here you come out with your petty petit bourgeois principles, Dzivish.

"I'm sleepy."

"You won't sleep until you undertake decisive action."

"OK, so I won't." I got up and walked over to the window.

"Sit down, Dzivish."

"I can't sit anymore."

"Sit down, Dzivish!"

I came back to my stool. My body stiffened, my feet were all puffed up, I had pain in my back and underneath my arms.

"You can walk around, but no more than five minutes." He opened a thermos. Steam and the fragrance of black coffee filled the room. He poured two glasses and passed one over to me. "You will sign it sooner or later, Dzivish, because you no longer have any reason to defend yourself. Of course it's better to do it sooner because then you save yourself a lot of grief. There's nothing backing you up to give you strength, no big deal. You're doing it only because of some foolish female thickheadedness, to spite us. Undoubtedly you imagine yourself a hero. A heroic act is not mindless or by chance, but the result of some grand ideal which a person defends. As for you, what ideals do you have? What ideological or political belief system do you represent? Do you want to die? Well then what for? For whom? For some puny sellout and cheap womanizer? What are you fighting for? For nothing. Absolutely nothing. Then why fight? Only those who have some grand ideals on their side triumph. Those who go against the current of history shall perish, and no one shall ever remember them; earth will cover over their graves. We are raising the nation out of ruin, building a new order, constructing a new man and a new morality. Who is not with us is against us—this is our motto. Our enemies only prey on our weaknesses and our mistakes. If it is possible for them to find a wrinkle, a crack in the present state of affairs, when our system is still young and not yet molded, this could turn out to be the fatal blow. We cannot allow it to happen. And you are precisely our weak point, a throwback to the past. Like a speeding car bent on a turn, you jerk it slightly, the wrong way, and you're dead. Therefore we have to act in unison. Let no one jerk or hesitate—this is our deadly turn. Don't you understand this, Dzivish?"

At eight in the morning the screw came. I had hoped he would take me back to my cell. I dreamt about my lovely, my dear, my cozy—like-a-home—cell. Mira is there waiting for me; she is worried. But, no. I was taken to the toilet—the woman guard stood in the open door. Later breakfast on the floor. I was surprised they were still feeding me. What mattered however was to maintain the body but break the spirit. Without food, the subject under questioning loses consciousness quickly and is of no use.

In the office I found the towel boy rested and thoroughly rejuvenated. Again the threats, the pleadings, the "curls" (or "windmills," whichever you prefer), the jabs again. He must have made a bet that this time he would break me because he never eased up. His voice grew hoarse from hollering, so he had to drink some tea. Sweat streaked his forehead. He fanned himself with the newspaper. He took a break, eating a ham sandwich—which his wife must have prepared for him—right before my eyes without having any scruples. And I felt worse and worse.

I couldn't keep myself from falling asleep, at times sliding off the stool. He woke me hollering, shaking me by the shoulder. When he thought I was "ripe," he would hand me the document to sign. "Sign and you can go to sleep," he hissed in my ear like Lucifer.

I started singing folk songs: *"a bird flew into the cranberries . . ."*

He tried to ignore it, but it seemed that he wasn't fond of music and the singing visibly grated on his nerves. Again, he started phoning. He discussed the neat Czech shoes he saw in the Gallux department store—a certain tailor who took him for five hundred złoty but made him a quite decent summer suit. He worried about little Dickie who had to go into the hospital. Visia had a toothache, the poor little darling couldn't even bat an eye . . .

"My lovely land, my dear land
My lovely towns and villages
My lovely land, my dear land
My lovely, our only Polish . . ."

"What are you saying? I can't hear you!" he shouted into the receiver, giving me hell with his gaze.

"Still water tears the shore
You never know where or what for . . ."

I sang as loudly as I could.

"Stop the singing! Do you hear me? Stop it or I'll bust this phone over your skull!" But my voice boomed and my repertoire of songs was rich. "I'll call you back later." He put down the receiver. When he started hollering at me hysterically, and shaking his fist, I collected myself and sang at the top of my voice:

"Because no one knows the way to stop the water's gentle sway . . ."

His fist struck my head—I fell to the floor but kept on singing. I imagined that if I stopped, I'd do anything he would ask me at that moment, and afterwards, just roll over and die. I sang as if my life depended on it. Near my face, I noticed several pairs of legs. I felt being dragged by strong arms, two, maybe three pairs of hands . . . the doorstep, the corridor . . . the bars, the grating of the locks . . . The cell? No muffled sounds—the showers. . . . Suddenly something crushed into me, pulling me off my feet. I fell on the concrete floor. An icy whip of water curled my body like a hot wire. I lifted my hand to cover my eyes—water poured into my nostrils, ears, mouth. I lost consciousness from sharp blows and instantly regained it. The water made me gag, I thought I would drown . . . "I'll sign, I'll sign!" I screamed, but my voice just would not come out, "I'll sign . . ."

Suddenly everything became quiet. The water stopped squirting . . . except for the drain gurgling beneath the grating. Several voices out in the hall, steps . . . Someone picked me up by my feet. "You idiot, you imbecile!" I heard Moravski's voice. The corridor, the staircase, the office again—he dragged me like a rag doll. I couldn't stay on the stool, so he left me on the floor. Water was dripping from my clothes . . .

The towel boy came into the room. "What was all this about, comrade? There was no call for me."

"I'm sure there was. They probably hung up the receiver."

"What is this c--- doing here? Why did you drag her back? She needs a little lesson."

"She wouldn't say anything now anyway. She's out like a light. We have to make her . . . and begin all over again."

"In that case, you take care of it, comrade. I have to leave. Maybe I can yet make the movies at eight; I promised my wife. Only remember comrade: hit hard and no excuses. And with her, you know, don't forget to . . .," he lowered his voice, whispered for a moment, then cleared his throat. "You understand, because only then . . ."

"Yes sir, comrade Major."

Steps, slamming doors, silence. After a moment I heard Moravski's voice near me. "You can't remain in these clothes. You'll catch pneumonia." I couldn't make the smallest move, so turning me over like a baby, he pulled off my drenched sweater, my blouse, my bra, my skirt . . . He stripped me bare and covered me with a heavy military coat. . . .

When I awoke, he slept in his chair behind the desk with his head bent backwards and his mouth open. Some fly had the nagging desire to land inside his throat. Maybe I ought to twist his unprotected neck . . . clobber him over the head with something, change into his uniform, pass by the guards, hiding my face in the shadow of the rim of his cap, and afterwards, beyond the gate, run, and hop into a bus . . .

"What time is it?" I asked.

He jerked, straightened out in his chair, looked at the watch. "Five. Were you up for long?"

"Five in the morning or five at night?"

"Five in the morning." He opened the door out into the hall, looked out, closed the door, calming

down a little.

I had slept for seven hours. My entire body ached from lying on the hard floor, but the sleep gave me strength. I got up—the coat fell off my shoulders. Only then I noticed I was naked. All by themselves, my hands jerked to cover my breasts and the triangle between my legs. Hanging on the radiator, my clothes were perfectly dry. Even though he had seen me naked once, I got dressed by turning my back to him. I felt a common human shyness of a woman in front of a man. Even though he was my tormentor . . . This feeling surprised me and made me nervous. I had to snap out of it. Without asking, I reached for his cigarettes. "I'll tell the Major that you let me sleep. What will you do then?"

"He will find someone instead of me who won't let you." He poured some coffee out of his thermos and passed it to me.

"And what will happen to you?"

"It's none of your business."

"I don't understand you at all."

"You don't understand a lot of things, Madame Dzivish. Forcing a testimony out of someone or conniving makes no sense. I want you to admit your guilt consciously, with full conviction, so that you understand the reason for your guilt."

"What guilt?"

"Your egotism could be construed as guilt. Private interests ought to be sacrificed from time to time for the public good. Loyalty to an individual amounts to nothing. That's a bourgeois value."

"Maybe for you. For me and for my friends, it's exactly in reverse."

"For Mira Scheinert as well?"

"For Mira? Why mention her?"

"Think about it."

"I don't . . . Mira?" I suddenly felt hot, and my heart weakened. "She told you about that . . . that latrine?"

"What do you think?"

"I already know your tricks. I won't be taken in again."

"Why should I lie? I have nothing to gain from it."

"Sure you do, pal. Because you know she's my friend! You would not give a real stool pigeon away! She is sure! You want to convince me that I'm surrounded by pigs, that everyone betrayed me so that I'll betray others! And this just isn't true! There are people who never betray others! Never! And Mira is one of them! Even if they burned her at the stake. You don't know my husband."

"I pity you, Madame. You're very naive. You believe that all your friends are noble and have no ulterior motives. This is why you must lose."

"And you think everybody is a scoundrel! You judge others by how you picture yourself!"

"You don't have to be a scoundrel in order to do something like this. That woman Scheinert has a father in here. He was a diplomat in Italy at one time. He has a heart condition. The Major simply told her that if she'll inform him about all your conversations, the cardiologist her father saw before his arrest will be able to visit him in jail. As you can see, it's not all that simple."

"I wouldn't act like that."

"She felt that she's done something very noble, that she sacrificed herself to save her father."

"I would never do that," I said this time without conviction. At that moment for the first time since I had been arrested, I doubted my own ability to hold out. I felt very abandoned. I probably wouldn't be able to take on the whole world since everyone was against me. . . . The Major was right . . . Vitkovska, Garlicki, Mira . . . All of them made things crystal clear, all white, and I'm constantly hush hush in the dark. . . . I must be color-blind. Is there anyone who will say I'm right? Maybe only somebody who is on the other side of the wall, who is free, who is not subjected to this horrible pressure which makes you dumbfounded? Kostek, yes, he alone, surely he would not believe in all this nonsense, surely he'd acknowledge my spiritual right. But he's too far . . . I felt enormously tired, desperate . . .

"There's no such thing as absolute honesty, you must understand, Madame Dzivish. What is honest for one is deceit for another. All people behave a lot worse than you imagine!" He walked over to the window and stared at the red bricks behind the glass. "Under certain circumstances, you would have done the same. Those who write about concentration camps notice only suffering, bravery, pangs of the spirit. About that other side of humanity, they prefer not to say anything because it does not fit neatly into their theories. But a human being is that also, yes, also that at the same time. You have to come to terms with that as well. What do you know about human debasement? To survive, a human being will take all and do all—but existence that's only the sum total of the energy which leads to self-preservation. In the face of death, a human being discovers absolute freedom—loses all morality. Once there, nothing means what it should have meant. There was no solidarity with others, no

empathy for others, no rebellion. There was no room for it, for rebellion was punishable by death. Hope! To live through it, you had to adopt, you had to forget about everything, except a few ironclad rules, and all hope turned to hopelessness. The person who suffered was no hero, was not anything positive—he was simply a fool, an unlucky fool. Everyone wanted to survive. Everyone. And in order to survive, you had to give up your friends, your family, your humanity. You could only preserve them on the way to sainthood or surrender—in either case you had to pay the price with your very existence." He fell silent and lit a cigarette. "Yes, people gave up their humanity because they wanted to survive. Can you blame someone for trying to survive? That's a fundamental human principle. And in wanting to survive, you have no option to choose the good—you simply choose between lesser and greater evil . . ."

"Were you scared?" I asked after a long pause.

"Sure I was scared," he responded quietly.

"Well so am I."

"Of dying?"

"No."

"What then? What else is there to fear?"

I didn't respond. I knew very well what I was afraid of, but I didn't want him to find out.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked.

"Yes . . . No . . . I'm not sure . . ."

"So what in hell is motivating you to stand it all?"

"You know, I was never good at school . . . I always argued with my teachers. To punish me, my parents sent me to Warsaw, to live away at a boarding school. When the Russians entered Lvov, my entire family was shipped out someplace without any trace. I survived . . . I survived because of punishment. . . . Later, at the time of the Uprising, I fell in love with this kid—he would wear shiny officer's boots, a German automatic around his neck . . . He made a real impression on me. I used to work at a bakery in the same building in which I lived. One night, I skipped work and ran to him on the barricade. He took me to some abandoned apartment and, on a sofa covered with rubble, made a woman out of me. It felt wonderful from the beginning. . . . I came back home out of my wits, terrified that my boss would throw a fit. I felt guilty that I was playing around while others were slaving away. I looked, and no house . . . Just a pile of ruins . . . My knees sank. I could have died had I stayed. For the second time, I realized that you have to be foolish, that you must have whims, while obedience and hard work were not always rewarded. And maybe I believe only in that."

During the towel boy's rounds, I felt awful. Several hours of sleep and the coffee just weren't enough. I felt stiff, I cared less, I was practically beyond feeling any pain. The Major's voice didn't even get to me. I heard screaming from far away; I saw a cloudy, glistening face, which I met with total indifference. A lot of traffic that day—Moravski in and out, the other officers, the guards. The doors stood wide open. In the hall, several people passed. I heard someone calling, screaming. I heard words coming down from the ceiling, coming out of the floor, or from someplace inside me: you bitch, a bullet right through your head, the sentencing, this is the end, I'll finish you off here and now . . . I knew this was really the end, that I wouldn't be able to last any longer—that soon I would conk out and just die, or I would sign everything they'd shove in front of my face. But surprise, surprise—they didn't give me anything. Either it didn't dawn on the towel boy or the moment finally arrived which he had foreseen: "You will beg us on your knees to allow you to testify, but then it may be too late." It seemed to me a pretentious lie at the time, but seriously now, I was close to begging him to let me have something to sign or to shoot me to make this nightmare go away . . .

I was about to tell him as much, when someone shook my shoulder. I marched down the hallway . . . Lines of people . . . Someone waved to me . . . I knew his face, but who was that? Naked women with their faces to the wall . . . One of them, a redhead, turning around. "Forgive me," she said as I passed her. . . . Another put a piece of bread in my hand, saying her goodbyes and making the sign of the cross . . . "Go on! Move!" The screaming guards and the clatter of feet on the iron staircase . . . I passed swarms of naked people in the cellar . . . the guards shoving them into corners, turning on the huge valves near the entrance. A hissing sound and steamy clouds filled the room. . . . I was shoved into the brilliant white hole. Water poured down my face, making me collapse on the floor. I got up, I held on to the wall, I fell again, swallowing water. The current was pulling me away someplace, rain was pouring out of the sky . . . "Hold on, hold on, or you'll die!" someone screamed. He pulled me out of the streams of freezing needles, he pulled me out into the crowded hallway and made his way towards the exit. . . . "I'm afraid! I'm afraid . . .," I repeated.

The stairs full of bodies, cascades of water falling, bursting steam, a non-stop howling of a thousand lungs, and a rushing, totally befuddled crowd, rushing towards us. The doors bursting, and behind them, a teeming green wave of water explodes, toppling us off our feet; the current carries us, exhausting itself down the stairwell, down the drain . . . "I must be dreaming, this must be a dream . . ." "It's no dream!" he screamed in my ear. "Wake up, wake up . . ."

I saw the face of the woman guard bending over me. "Get up!"

I tried to get up, but I couldn't. She lifted me over her shoulder like a sack of potatoes and pulled me out into an empty quiet hallway.

"Where are the others? What happened to them?"

"Get up!" she pushed me against the wall. Gently she slapped my face. "Wake up!"

Water drained out of me in streams. Centuries passed. On the stairs a ruckus exploded and more screaming. Two guards dragged a twisting and squirming man wearing a shirt and long johns . . . The face looked familiar . . . He screamed: "Don't kill me! I beg you, don't kill me . . ." His formidable wide face was wet with sweat . . . or tears perhaps? They took him into the showers. An officer walked inside there wearing the uniform with the belt of his cap officially clamped under the chin. After a few seconds, two shots were fired. I felt the two bullets pierce my body. That makes two . . .

The door opened, and the officer walked out with the revolver in his hand.

"Move it!" the woman guard hollered and pushed me in. A man was lying on the concrete floor in a pool of blood. A stream oozed out of his head towards the grated drain . . . . The officer reloaded the gun and pointed at my head. This is the end, I thought. This is the end of it all. So they weren't kidding around. They really kill people underground in the cellar. Finally the nightmare ends. And maybe it's the end of the dream. This one is a dream for sure—I'll wake up as soon as the gun will fire, I thought quickly, as if under a spell. I saw next to my face the steel blue eyes with large feminine eyelashes of the young officer—his finger drawing the trigger . . . When will he finally decide? When will I finally wake up? Let it be now . . .

"You have your last chance," the towel boy's voice emerged from behind his shoulders. "If you won't decide here and now, Dzivish, the sentence will be carried out."

"I-I-I-d-don't real-ly know," I moaned, "what I-I-I'm to d-d-decide."

"You'll confess that Olcha was a spy?"

"I-I-I wa-as the s-s-spy, h-he wa-as n-n-n-ot g-g-uilty," my teeth came out—ringing.

Suddenly Moravski leaped over to me, shaking me by the shoulders. "Do you confess? Do you confess? Answer!"

"Wh-wh-what?"

"Do you admit your guilt? Do you feel guilty?"

Not being able to come out with it, I nodded my head.

"Don't lie! I know that you think otherwise!"

"H-h-he is not guilty. . . ."

"You're lying! Tell the truth!"

"What should I say?!"

"The truth!"

"I told you . . ."

"That's not the truth!"

"W-w-w-what then?"

"Say only what you really think."

"I don't know . . ."

"Do you feel guilty?"

"Yes . . ."

"You're making it up!"

"I'm not making it up . . ."

"You're making it up!" he screamed directly into my face.

"Y-y-yes I am . . .," I finally said.

He dropped his hand in a gesture of resignation. He understood that he wouldn't get the truth out of me, that I would simply repeat what he told me. In his way he tried to save me, to save my soul—sincere belief in my own guilt and an outright confession could have prevented me from the eternal damnation by history. The punishment which the guilty party bears with regret is a waste of time—it isn't even punishment but revenge. He was bothered that there was no way out of the predicament. Even contemporary Marxist psychology could not come to grips with that: to conclude whether the guilty party was persuaded that she was wrong, or whether she just pretended only to be left alone. If in the depth of her soul, she held her own, even at the risk of dying, her conviction must have a solid foundation. This was a logical conclusion, but Moravski could not entertain such a notion—that someone other than himself or similar to himself was predisposed to an equally strong belief in the righteousness of her deeds. What values other than the ones with which he was familiar and which practiced throughout his life were worthy of such desperate defense? Perhaps, for a second, he believed me honestly innocent—even according

to his criteria—but he quickly abandoned such a thought as involving too much risk. He no longer understood anything, feeling himself hopelessly at a loss.

I suddenly burst out laughing—in that situation it must have been incredible. They probably thought that I went berserk. They looked at me in absolute horror, and later at what I was looking: the corpse moved! The actor apparently felt cold and uncomfortable lying in the same position—the discussion over his "dead body" became lengthy, so he turned around. The towel boy jumped on him, and started kicking him wherever he could. "Hey, you bastard, you f---ing pig, I'll teach you . . ." The corpse squeeled but, after a few blows to the head and the stomach, fell quiet and stopped moving. Real blood oozed out of him, now mingling with the fake. Maybe the same thing happened with that fellow whom I passed on the stairs once: a bluff to scare me. I laughed louder and louder and couldn't stop—I fell on the floor next to him, and twisting and squirming, I wailed hysterically and squeeled like a piglet being slaughtered. The bulls dragged me upstairs.

The cell was empty—all the things which were not mine vanished. When I came to, I began pounding on the door: "Where is Mira? Where is Mira? Mira! Mira! Mira!" It seemed to me that I'll go nuts without her. I needed her painfully. But no one answered. My pounding grew weaker, my screaming fainter, until I slid to the floor by the door, close to death.

* * * * *

Several rings and no answer. She took Magda by the hand, and they began descending the stairs. Through the window of the stairwell, she saw a cab pull up to a stop. A man in a light trench coat came out of it. He paid the cab driver and grabbed the two large suitcases.

They met on the stairs. "Małgosia," Kostek exclaimed. "Look! How lucky you are! I just now flew in," he kissed her and the little one. "Come in, come in, I have something for you . . ."

They entered a large, comfortable apartment—shining floors, rugs, antique furniture, knick-

knacks, paintings on the walls, solid oak and crystal glass bookcases everywhere. On the dark, carved desk, a smiling photo of Tonia in a cylinder hat . . . with a signature across: "To my dearest Kostek—Tonia." Another photo in a silver frame: Kostek still young—with Woroszylski, Kurczkowski and Ważyk at some literary conference . . .*

"It was hot there, I'm telling you." He entered the living room, already without his coat, with his jacket off, with his tie loosened, and began unpacking his bags. "In Bombay I nearly died. That's not a climate for me; I'm too old. You're constantly sweating; it's humid, there's no air to breathe. That's for Magda," he gave the child an elephant out of colorful rags adorned with sequins. "Maybe you'll have something to drink?"

"No thank you, Dad . . ."

"Why are you standing like this? How's your mom?" he immediately became worried. "Something's wrong?"

"She's dead."

"How can this be? When I left, they were ready to send her home . . ."

He sat down helplessly on the sofa in the middle of colorful wrapping paper and clothes. "She's dead. . . . When did it happen?"

"Day before yesterday."

"And I had to leave!" He jumped abruptly, opened the bar, and poured himself a shot of vodka, downing it in one gulp. "Do you want one maybe?"

"No."

Magda ran out of the room embracing the elephant. A rumble echoed in the depths of the apartment, something fell over.

"When is the funeral?"

"I don't know. I don't have any money. And I was unable to borrow it from anybody."

"Mirek's still locked up?"

"That's irrelevant."

"What are you living on? I often wonder."

"It's not your problem."

"Surely I have the right to know what you're living on."

"You have no rights when it comes to me."

"Why are you so brusque and acting up with me? Can't we talk normally with one another for once?"

"I don't have the desire. I only came for the money. If I had my own, I would never have come to you. I need about thirty thousand."

"You don't want to talk, but you will take the money?"

"It's not for me."

"I can take care of it. Just tell me where to go."

"When she died, you weren't around."

He took out an enormous feathered fan in colors of the rainbow out of the suitcase. "Look, I brought it for her . . . and now . . ." He dropped the fan to the floor and didn't pick it up. "It's absurd, it's totally absurd!" He kicked the suitcase. "You want some?" He filled the shot glass again.

"Will I get the money?"

"It's about time that we come to some sort of an understanding. Let's not argue, especially at a moment like this."

"We'll never be able to see eye to eye."

"A little goodwill from one another . . . Why not?"

"It doesn't depend on goodwill."

"But on what?"

"You're a bastard. A common bastard. That's why."

"Małgosia, Małgosia, you haven't wised up at all. . . . Always the same: black and white, black and white . . . As usual, you make everything so simple. Life is more complicated than it seems. Don't think that you hold a monopoly on truth and honesty."

"I have a clear conscience."

"Conscience! But of course! That's the most important thing—having a clear conscience! As for the world, it can crumble to dust . . ."

"Let's just say I don't like the methods which you're using to save it."

"And what do you really know about me? What do you really know about your mother? You care only about yourself and what you are doing."

"I know something about you because I read your mag from time to time. You print some light weights, some would-be writers and opportunists. Why not publish Brandys, Barańczak, Konwicki? Are you afraid?"*

"Where is all this extremism coming from all of a sudden? Why are you playing a rabble-rouser?"

"So that your kind can look like a bunch of

*All three writers were proponents of socialist realism: Wiktor Woroszylski (1927-), a poet initially noted for declarative, ideological poems who later turned to brooding melancholy; Leon Kurczkowski (1900-1962), a playwright and a socialist activist whose work advocated a new morality and a social vision by making his characters take sides; Adam Ważyk (1905-1982), a poet exploring the breakdown of psychic coherence of the individual reconstituted through reflections on social reality.

moderate liberals."

"One more wasted life. Then your Magda, then her daughter, then her granddaughter, and so on without end . . .," he shook his head in desperation.

"Maybe . . ."

"But is it worth it?"

"I don't know."

He walked over to the desk and wrote out a check. "Cash it at PKO Savings on Plac Unii; I have an account there. They will give you the entire sum on the spot. Wait, I forgot . . . Once I overheard that you wanted something like this"—he pulled a snakeskin bag out of the suitcase.

She felt embarrassed. "No thanks, I can't . . ."

"I looked for one like it especially."

"It's really wonderful," she was wavering. "But . . ."

"Take it, take it," he practically had to force it under her arm.

She kissed him. "Thanks. I'll have something to carry underground releases in. Magda, we're going."

He gently smiled. Slapped her on the cheek. "You'll let me know when the funeral is. Take care of yourself."

"Can I look in there for a moment?" Not waiting for an answer, she went into the apartment. She opened the door to a small room—naked light gray walls, a narrow bed, a small table with her photograph, with Magda and Kostek, one stool—and that was it . . . a prison cell.

* * * * *

Weeks of peace arrived. Nothing disturbed my solitude. I weakened, lost a lot of weight. In the months that passed, my body lost the reserve fat which I had brought with me to jail. I noticed my hair falling out by the fistful, hives popping out on my face and my breasts, my gums bleeding. When they arrested me, I had only a small sum of money with me, and therefore, I couldn't buy anything in the prison store "on credit." I did not receive packages then. At six a.m., they brought bread. It resembled crumbling clay. I divided it up into three portions with a spoon so I would have some at noon and in the evening. But I lacked strong will—by noon I ate it all. In the evening I felt pain in the pit of my empty stomach. I sucked my thumb like a child. Most my days I spent bewildered, staring at the scrap of the sky that filtered through the crate covering the window. It must have been the end of the summer or perhaps the beginning of winter. My measure of time was not the position of the sun but its intensity and the color of light—the blue cell turned white, yellow, reddened, and again turned dark blue. From the hospital across the way, I still could hear the moaning tearing my insides, but I got used to it. New shift changed in prison at six in the afternoon. There must have been a bench near my window. You could hear the cheerful voices of the guards and the young women working in the kitchen felt up by them. I was envious of their contact with men. I dreamed of Kostek's caresses. As I've already mentioned before, they did not turn off the lights in the cell, and the prisoners had to sleep with their hands over the blankets. From time to time, the head screw checked up on us through the peephole to see if all was okay. When he noticed a prisoner covered over, he would wake her. I learned to put my hands between my legs in between his two rounds and bring myself up to a brief, unsatisfying shudder. I did it every night—then I would fall asleep immediately.

After a very long time—it seemed to me years had passed—I was called upstairs. Moravski ordered me to sit down, offering me some coffee and a cigarette. He looked me over as if unsure whether to bother beginning the interrogation.

"How do you feel?" he asked, not particularly concerned.

"Good."

"Probably not all that good."

"What do you care, pal?"

"I wanted to inform you that I will be completely in charge of your case." I shrugged my shoulders. "It doesn't make any difference to you? Read this," he passed some official paper over to me.

"They removed the towel boy to punish him for having failed with me? A summons?" I looked at the paper held up to me. I did not understand what Franciszek Zavada had to do with a summons. "What summons? What's this about?"

---

*Kazimierz Brandys (1916-), a novelist who explores individual complexities in socio-political contexts; his heroes are often broken by ideology and dogma. Stanisław Barańczak (1946-), a poet who writes about loss of hope and moral possibility in the face of ideology. Tadeusz Konwicki (1926-) is perhaps Poland's greatest living writer; his novels and self-reflective journals explore the limits of individual consciousness and human potential immersed in history which seems incomprehensible and out of control. All three writers are sympathetic to dissident causes and publish in the underground press. Barańczak currently resides in the United States.

"Your husband has filed for divorce."

"That's nonsense."

"Did you read it?"

"This is a forgery. I know your tricks."

Moravski busied himself shifting his pen from one pocket to another and wiping his nose.

"I suspected that you wouldn't believe us, so I brought him here. He can tell you himself eye to eye. You don't have to see him at all if you don't want to," he quickly added, seeing me stiffen.

This I didn't understand at all. Kostek here!? Here, only a few yards away from me? After so many months of not having seen him? "Why that's impossible. He would not have done it of his own free will. You pressured him just as you pressured Garlicki."

He rang, and after a minute, the screw led me downstairs. We proceeded into another building through an underground passage. I found myself in a large room called "the tram." Behind the thick mesh a guard paraded. A bit further, behind a second mesh stood . . . Kostek!

We gazed at one another. I suddenly realized how terrible I looked: straight hair, unwashed for a long time, face covered with hives, dingy complexion, soiled, torn clothing . . . He was wearing a light, near white, dust coat, beaming with the odour of cologne, alcohol, and cleanliness—the scent of freedom . . . These last days I had thought so much about him so vividly, and so often I had dreamt about him, that now, standing there, real, in the flesh, he seemed like a mirage. I was afraid to move so as not to make him vanish, so that he would not fade away like a dream. On the other hand, if what Moravski said was true, I wished it was a dream. . . .

My appearance must have horrified him, because he jerked back uneasily. He was alive; he was here no more than six feet away from me! Now when my wish had been realized, I didn't feel anything, not any overpowering emotion, not any trembling of the body or the soul. "Tonia, Tonia. How is everything with you; how do you feel?" He spoke briskly and foolishly. "Are you in good health? Is everything alright?" He could barely recognize me. I was not the happy-go-lucky girl full of ironic chatter he used to know, whom not so long ago he had married. "Tonia, what's going on?" I stood there with fallen arms and the expression of a blithering idiot, like a mannequin bent out of shape. Nervously he took out a cigarette and lit it. "Did you lose your voice?"

"No."

He looked at the guard marching between us. "So you see, that's how it is . . . At first I did not know what happened to you, where you were," he began explaining. "I thought: an accident, a mishap . . . You can't imagine what I lived through then. I went nearly mad. All of a sudden, one day a house search. They turned everything upside down and left without saying a word. Mister Stephan from the Kameralna Bar remembered that, on the day you vanished, he saw you with two fellows wearing leather coats, that you got into a black Citroën. Everything became crystal clear. I spent numerous hours waiting at the doors of various dignitaries, prosecutors, at the Bureau of Public Security, but no one wanted to tell me anything. They didn't want to accept a letter for you or a package—they insisted they didn't have such a name on their rolls. I tried to move heaven and earth, and came up with nothing. Finally I was called to the Ministry of National Security on Koszykowa Street. Some young officer explained to me that you were arrested on suspicion of espionage. You a spy? A saboteur? That sounded like some nightmarish fairy tale for dim wits," Kostek lowered his voice, glancing at the guard. "Because I persisted in not believing what I was hearing, he showed me your testimony signed with your own hand. Of course it didn't amount to anything—at least not in my opinion—but it opened my eyes to a lot of other things. What a fool I was! You lied to me for so long! You had an affair with Olcha, and you slept with that bozo, that a--hole, Vit Lemański . . . And I'm not even talking about your earlier escapades about which I knew nothing. Can't you see what a blow it was to me? My wife having affairs with some low lives! How could you? How could you make me look like that in front of others? I couldn't bring myself to look that officer in the eye. I thought you loved me, that you were happy with me. And you screw around with every Tom, Dick and Harry! Soberly, cynically, like a whore, you left me to look for others, and still hot from them, you came into my bed . . . That's disgusting! Awful! You ought to know one thing. I'll never forgive you for so thoughtlessly sabotaging our marriage. Never. I don't even want to know you. And really, I came here only to let you know, to tell you this, face to face, because divorce I can get one way or the other by default without your consent. That's all . . ."

The heel of his boot stifled the butt of his cigarette; he lit a new one. However, he didn't leave, as if he had something more to say or as if

he counted on me to miraculously show him black on white that it was all a fairy tale.

"Well, answer," he screamed impatiently. "Say something, damn it!"

I felt paralyzed. "Kostek," I said quietly, "Kostek . . ." Nothing other than that came into my head. Surely he would understand. These words contained everything. But he didn't want to understand. He waited, waited, flinged the cigarette on the floor, and ran out.

Suddenly Moravski appeared. He didn't need to ask what had happened. I stared at the smoking butt like a frog hypnotized by a snake, shuffling from one foot to the other and cracking my knuckles. I was shivering as if doused with icy water. "You see," he said after a moment, "life's like that. There are no ideals in this world. Go back to your cell and think it over." His voice expressed neither sympathy nor satisfaction. He seemed absolutely disinterested and matter-of-fact. Or at least so he behaved. "Oh yes, I almost forgot. Bring this in here, comrade," he said to the screw standing in the doorway. The guard walked out and, after a while, came back with a sizable package. This is from your husband."

I had to bend under its weight—but not because the package was heavy. Once back in the cell, I threw it just anywhere—sausages, bacon, bread, fruit fell out, egg yolk was oozing out . . . I cast a careful eye on my belongings—the table, the pan, the bed, the blanket . . . I took the blanket and started tearing it into strips. It was difficult—over the many months, I had lost a lot of strength. I tried to tie them together to make a rope, but only a bundle came out of it with the knots getting loose when I pulled it out. Glass. But glass was covered over by the mesh—even if I could break it with something, to get a piece through the grating would be impossible. I took the aluminum spoon in my hand. I went into the corner near the toilet and started sharpening it against the wall. The spoon was sharper by only a hair, but it already made a hole in the plaster. So I started sharpening it against the toilet. Sweat poured down my back in long streaks. Maybe in the end I would have succeeded but the door opened suddenly, and two women guards came in. They told me to strip naked and performed another "gynecological" shakedown. They checked my clothing, my bed—they looked in every hole. From some hideaway, they pulled out a small knife sharp as a razor. And I didn't even know that such a thing existed in my cell . . . apparently a former resident forgot to take it with her . . . In the end, they left. The window in the peephole stayed open, and an eye followed my every move. Apparently Moravski guessed my intentions . . .

I felt weaker with each minute, as if Kostek's visit had sapped the remaining strength out of me. I had constant chills. My knees no longer obeyed me. Wanting to pick up something, I had to feel around as if I were going blind. If I had had that knife, I doubt I would have been able to use it. I lay down on the floor. The screw told me to get up, but I did not react. Finally he gave up.

In the morning he came into the cell—for the first time he did something which didn't go by the book—on the table untouched supper, on the floor scattered goodies from the package . . . my eyes in a glaze, feverish, my lips burning, my breathing loud . . . After a while, Moravski appeared with another man. That other took my pulse and rolled up my eyelid. I felt being pulled off the bed onto something else—that they carried me down the corridors, down the stairs . . . Fresh air enveloped my face, I heard the grating of locks far away and unfamiliar sounds, someone at my side moaned in a monotone like a pumped tire. I felt my arm punctured.

"I don't want to be here," I moved my lips, but no one heard me.

"It looks to me like meningitis," the doctor told Moravski. "Mostly she has no will to live. That's why she'll die."

"She is too important a witness to die. Your head will roll, comrade."

"Mine? Head?" the doctor shrugged his shoulders. "I lost my head a long time ago."

"Please do everything possible."

"Sir, you know yourself that we don't have proper care here." "I have been asking for morphine for at least half a year. That's why they howl."

"Please provide me with the list of what's needed. I'll deliver all that's absolutely essential by the end of the day."

I was out for several weeks—ending up with pneumonia, to boot. When I opened my eyes, I saw myself in a room with about twenty beds. On some two people were lying in the nude. Sheets—we had sheets!—had a dull grey color, the walls were brown-green with peeling oil paint; there were water marks on the ceiling from which, swarming with flies, a single lightbulb hung. A bald personage in a torn, junky shirt was inspecting me. "Ohhh!" She displayed a black gap and two yellowy incisors in a broad grin. "So you are alive! And everybody was saying that

you'd keel over. You're tough. The devil won't bother taking sinners," she burst out laughing. Someone moaned. "Shut up in there! Keep quiet . . ." Sunbeams fell across the grated windows without the crate shutters. Specks of dust sailed about lazily.

"Where am I?"

"In the hospital, queenie, in the hospital."

"In what kind of hospital?"

"You were sick . . ."

"And where is this hospital?"

"What are you—stupid? In Warsaw."

"Am I still in . . . in . . . in jail?" I asked, hoping that she would laugh in my face.

"Where else? Sure; you think you belong someplace else?"

"What time is it?"

"After dinner."

"What day, month?"

"It's just about Christmas."

"What year?

"What? What year?

"Is it '52?"

"It makes no difference to me. I'm doing life anyway," she started laughing. Someone by the window hoarsely followed suit, then started coughing, hacking and moaning.

"How do I look?" I touched my face, then hair. "Would you have a mirror, ma'am?"

"Think, queenie, a mirror? To slash your wrists?"

"I wanted to look at myself."

"You sure, but the others are just waiting for the chance to slash themselves. You have nothing to look forward to. You're three quarters dead and gone."

After two days, I got up, and, on my own, holding on to the beds and the wall, I made my way to the toilet. I poured water into the bowl and washed my face. Instead of doors, only bars opened and closed. I looked out into the hallway. It just so happened that the old prisoner doctor passed by. He looked at me. "Ah, Madame Dzivish . . . You shouldn't be out and about yet. Too early." "I'll be alright, nothing will happen," I attempted a smile. On the other side of the corridor, the door to the operating room was open. A couch, a screen, a medicine chest . . . My head started to spin. Holding on to the beds, I dragged myself in the direction of the sunlight. A dishevelled slender woman sat frozen on a stool by the window. She had red hair, "Mira! My God! Mira!" I shouted. If I could have, I would have hurled myself upon her like lightening. She didn't move. I limped along as fast as I could, shuffling my feet like an old lady. I embraced her in my arms.

"Mira, love, what happened to you?"

"Please be kind enough to keep your hands to yourself."

"I thought about you all the time, I really missed you . . ."

"Please be kind enough to keep your hands to yourself," she repeated calmly.

"Why Mira, it's me!"

"I'm well aware of you being you." She stared past me into space, as if I were air.

"How do you feel? Are you ill?"

"I'm well. Nothing hurts. I feel okay. Now I'm ready to go to sleep," she said automatically, and turned on her side.

"Please, love, take a good look at me. It's me, Tonia. I have changed a bit, but surely you must recognize me?"

"Yes. I'm going to sleep now."

"Talk to me. Surely you have nothing against me? I'm certainly not holding any grudges. I know they made you talk . . ."

"When I wake up, I'll have something to eat," she lay on the bed in a fetal position. There was no way to get through to her. She treated me as if I were a stranger. I touched her forehead with the tip of my fingers. "Please be kind enough to keep your hands to yourself," she repeated like a broken record.

As I was leaving, I took hold of the doctor by the elbow. "Please, what's wrong with this girl, Mira Scheinert? She seems in horrible condition."

"Do you know her, Madame?"

"We shared the same cell."

"Deep depression. That's about all I can say."

"You're not allowed?"

"I'm a radiologist not a psychiatrist."

"Did she say anything? Do you know what happened to her, sir?"

"They brought her in here about a month ago in a state of shock. She mumbled some gibberish which made no sense at all; she wanted to jump out the window. She seems better now."

"Will she snap out of it?"

"I don't know. A lot depends on her surroundings. But here—need I say more . . ."

Deeply shaken and physically exhausted, I collapsed on the bed, hiding my face in the pillow. The baldie nudged me in confidence. "Here, but don't show it to anyone." She crammed something into my hand so no one else could see. It was a mirror.

The next day Mira did not recognize me either. That is to say she uttered simple and coherent

sentences, and, once in a while, I had the feeling that there was nothing wrong with her. But all of a sudden, she would say something totally off-the-wall. Besides that, she ate and slept normally. She held the same position on the stool as before. She just stared into space, not fixing her eyes on anything in particular. I would tell her various anecdotes, and recall the good time we shared—or so it now seemed—in our cell. She seemed to react but with some almost imperceptible shifting of gears: no longer the same smile, not at the right moment. It seemed to me that she was still using our intimate code but in a different key. Once when the nurse tried to give her an injection, she said: "Please be kind enough to keep your hands to yourself, don't touch . . ." But because she was touched, she became hysterical, jumping on top of the nurse and on me when I tried to stop her. She scratched and bit me. An animal scream came out of her throat resounding throughout the entire prison. It required three people to hold her down. The next day, she didn't remember anything.

"Beginning with letter D!" the nurse called out. I had a lump in my throat. It's beginning all over again. . . . I went into the operating room. Moravski jumped to his feet. "How are you, Tonia?" he smiled. "You're looking much better, your eyes sparkle . . . I brought you something to read." He put the worn volumes on top of the desk.

"*Wild Woman*? You had it here?" I looked surprised.

"There are other libraries."

We faced each other in silence.

"What did you do to Mira? Why is she in this condition?"

"I don't know. I never interrogated her."

"But you know what others do."

"It's difficult to determine precisely the cause of a psychological disorder. Surely you must know that yourself."

"Your methods put her in this state. You're the cause."

"You know very well that I was always against the methods of Major Zavada. . . ."

"What difference does it make—him or you . . ."

"I was completely against his way of conducting the interrogation."

"But what did you do to prevent it?"

He sighed and lit a cigarette. "I began working at the Bureau of Public Security only a few months before you came here," I detected an apologetic ring in his voice. "One could say that our stay here is nearly the same," his attempted smile turned sour. "When I stood before Zavada for the first time—he was supposed to be my immediate superior—I knew immediately that I did not make a good impression on him. I must have been too "intellectual" and too refined for his taste, even though, like my father, I was a carpenter until I was arrested by the Gestapo. He did not like the fact that I had spent time in Auschwitz—he felt he couldn't trust that type. It's true that many camp prisoners collaborated as kapos or plants informing on camp plots. After the war some became CIA agents, but not all. I came to work here on the recommendation of the party committee at the university and was supported by comrade Berman himself.* They trusted me then, and they continue to trust me now."

"And do you them?"

"People are different, good and bad."

"You probably represent the good, and I the bad."

"I only wanted to bring you these books," he said quickly, a little nervous that the conversation might be getting off on the wrong track. "I did not want to see you on the patient's ward. Too many wandering eyes."

"And what about my case? Will you guys ever let me out?"

"For now I have no new instructions with regard to your case. But you should be patient. Take care of yourself." He waved and vanished behind the door.

I waited for a while in the empty operating room. So that's how it is! He didn't treat me like a common prisoner or like an important witness in a case for which he expected to get another star. . . . Finally his words and deeds started making sense: the coffee from the thermos, his allowing me to sleep during the grilling period, his getting me out of the showers with an excuse that there was a call for the towel boy, and now the books . . . Was it only, as he said, his aversion to wringing testimony out of people by force? Was it only because he wanted to make me see things of my own free will and then volunteer to confess my guilt? His gaze when I did spread

*Jakub Berman (1901-1984), along with Bolesław Bierut and Hilary Minc, governed Poland during the Stalinist years. Berman was broadly responsible for ideological and educational matters but also foreign affairs and national security. He resigned from the politbureau after 1956 and was removed from the party. Berman's brother Adolf, a Zionist activist, emigrated to Israel in 1950 where he joined the Mapam and served as a member of the Knesset.

eagle against the wall in the cellar . . . On the other hand, he must have thought I represented the expendable, indeed dangerous, element for the new socialist world order. I was therefore his enemy; we stood on opposite sides of the barricade—who is not with us is against us, as he said himself. Both positions were equally sincere. Inside him I felt something crack and grow larger with each day. . . . He struggled with something deep inside himself. . . . Who was this man in the end? Did he have a wife, a family, children?

He began calling on me nearly every day under the pretext of bringing me more books. His visits were the brighter moments in what was otherwise a horrible atmosphere of the hospital. I looked forward to his visits, and when he didn't come for several days, I got worried. I was afraid of it, of what was happening to me—my tormentor, my persecutor was slowly becoming my most intimate friend! I had nobody in the world besides him. I tried to fight it, I tried to recall his screams and curses, his striking me in the face. I imagined the kind of bastard he must have been, how he prostrated himself in front of the likes of the towel boy, but in spite of it all, he was the only one who cared about me.

I had no comfort from Mira—and she surely had none from me. I would read her books which Moravski brought, but it seemed that it made no difference to her whether I or someone else was near her—she was happy or rather unhappy either way. I could no longer stand that absent gaze, that wearisome flat tone of her voice. I observed her at times from afar sitting frozen and staring out the window. The patient's ward was also hard to stand: the constant moaning, the mumbling conversations, the reeking stench. I would cover my head with the blanket and absorb a lot of books. As soon as I read a bunch, I received more. Never in my life did I read so much.

One evening as I was reading *Father Goriot*, the screw called out: "Beginning with letter D." He took me into the operating room. Standing in the middle of the floor, Moravski had a puzzling look on his face. He held one hand behind his back, came up close to me, and suddenly pulled out a branch of a green pine right under my nose. The intense fragrance of the forest, of the holidays . . . Then I understood, Christmas Eve!!!

"Have a merry and best wishes for what you miss the most . . . Freedom . . .," he said. He placed the twig in a jar and from his pocket he pulled out a star made from silver wrapping paper and fixed it on top. Afterwards he gave me a tiny present. I unwrapped it—lipstick!

So that's how it was! If he had a family, someone close, he would be with them now. Automatically, out of sincere gratitude, and sadness that I did not think of giving him a present, I took him by the hand. For a moment, we remained in this awkward situation. He could have withdrawn his hand, but he didn't. Slowly I lifted his hand to my face. I didn't even realize I was in tears—streaks of water poured down my face—I forgot how to cry having gone without it for over a year . . . I felt enormous relief—the prison vanished, everything became different, again acquiring human dimensions. In unison, we sat down on the soiled oilcloth couch, our lips touching. The hot bubble in my breast burst suddenly and spread all over my body. I hugged him abruptly, pulling him close to me. He also snuggled close tight, like a cramp, so desperate. Afterwards everything happened of its own accord, naturally, as if in a dream . . .

* * * * *

The church was modern, stark, recently built. Its pillars were rough concrete. The electric organ thundered and the altar spat out—no other word would describe it—the coffin through the low opening which moved to the middle of the aisle on its own as if alive.

After the service, the coffin rested on the electrically-operated Melex cart in front of the church. The place seemed desolate—no trees, no bushes—only a forest of terrazzo crosses as far as the eye could see. Kostek waited at the entrance with a bouquet of perhaps a hundred red roses. In the flap of his jacket, he donned a black ribbon. The procession formed itself: the deacon at the head with the cross, followed by the priest with a parasol, behind the coffin on the Melex, Małgorzata with Magda, Kostek and a dozen or so people.

They came up to the crossing. By an open ditch, two men waited leaning on their shovels. The priest mumbled a prayer in an inflected voice, sprinkled holy water on all present, threw a clump of earth on the lid, and, accompanied by the deacon, left quickly because it had started to drizzle. Following his lead, a few others separated themselves from the group of mourners. The gravediggers placed strips of burlap under the coffin and began lowering it. The edge got stuck on something—perhaps a root?—and one of the gravediggers had to get down into the grave to fasten something down

or pull it out. But even afterwards, something got in the way. The gravediggers cursed under their breath, the rain became heavy. Finally the coffin found its way to the bottom. Kostek threw his enormous red bouquet inside. Simultaneously, clumps of earth started falling with a rumble, and the flowers quickly disappeared.

Małgorzata felt tears turn in her eyes. Her father held her tightly. Involuntarily, she leaned her head on his shoulder. Magda hid under the flap of her raincoat. The gravediggers finally patted down the earth, forming a small mound with their shovels, and stuck a small black marker in it—"In Memorium, Antonina Dzivish, 54, may she rest in peace"—arranged the flowers and the wreaths, tidied up the ribbons—"to dearest mother and grandmother . . ."—and came over to collect their pay. Kostek and Małgorzata became aware of their uncomfortable position. They moved apart from one another. They were alone—on the neighboring gravestones, three old ladies squatted like hungry birds eyeing everything with great interest. Kostek took out a wallet, and having paid them, the gravediggers left. It drizzled monotonously.

"But I have an umbrella," it hit him all of a sudden, and he opened it quickly. They were totally soaked anyway. "Are we leaving?"

"One minute . . ."

"Oh I just remembered. I have something for you," he took a fat sealed envelope out of his briefcase.

"What is it?"

"You'll see. Mom said to give you this in the event that something would happen to her . . . Let's go or we will get completely wet."

She tore open the envelope. Inside she found a bound notebook sprinkled with fine uneven handwriting. "I am Antonina Dzivish, nee Yablonovska, born April 1, 1926, in Lvov. My father, Henryk . . .," she read out loud. "An autobiography?" . . ."I know miserably little about my background—no documents, no photos remain . . ." "Is this for me? Have you read it?"

He nodded. "Of course I have. Come, I'll take you. I have a car."

"No thanks, Dad. I'd rather be alone right now."

"But you'll get drenched. Magda will catch a cold. How will you get home? You won't be able to get a ride in this desolate place."

"I'll manage." She had no desire to get into any kind of conversation with him.

He stood there for a while undecided. Finally he hugged her, and kissed her gently on the forehead. "Take this at least." He gave her the umbrella and ran towards the gate.

* * * * *

It was 1953 already. I returned to my cell. It wasn't the same cell as before. If not for the regular meals, it could be said that everyone forgot about me. And it suited me just fine. I didn't wish freedom anymore. I didn't have anyone to come home to, no place to go. I completely entered the world of Peter Korchagin, Cezary Baryka and Anna Karenina.* Reality all around me lost its meaning; it seemed to have vanished.

Two other women shared the cell besides me. One of them, flat in front and in back, with a face of a pigeon, prayed night and day. She would put an ikon on the stool, kneel in front as if before an altar, and murmur in a monotone. I had no place to store my books and other things because the stool became a holy shrine. I complained.

"Throw away the books!" She pointed to them with the authority of archangel Gabriel, who with his sword chased Adam and Eve out of paradise. "There's no truth in them. The only truth is in the Lord!"

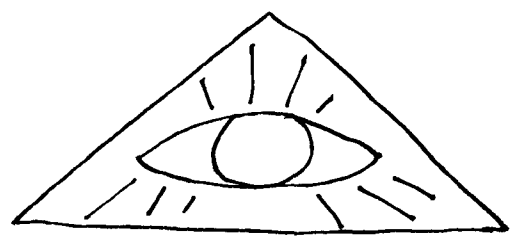
"Perhaps," I had the longing desire to irk her a bit. "But a human being does not live by truth alone. We need some lying, some cheating. It makes life more interesting."

She crossed herself quickly. "Beware of Satan!"

"In what way is he any different from God?"

"Don't blaspheme! Everyone knows the difference between good and evil, between God and Satan!"

"Is it so easy?" I picked up a piece of broken plaster and, on the door, around the peephole, I drew rays of light and a triangle. I knocked, and, in the center, an eye appeared. It looked like this:



*Fictional characters: Peter Korchagin from Alexander Tolstoy's socialist realist novel *How the Steel Was Wrought;* Cezary Baryka from Stefan Żeromski's *Early Spring;* Anna Karenina from the Lev Tolstoy classic.

One day, for no apparent reason, I threw up. At first I thought it was the spoiled food. I did not want to entertain the thought, but, in time, it became clear beyond any shadow of doubt—I was pregnant! The awareness that I carried inside me a child of a stranger, of my tormentor—irrespective of what he did for me of late—startled me and brought me to the brink of despair. For a while, I hid it from the women with whom I lived, but for how long would I be able to? What would happen now? Should I commit suicide? It wasn't all that easy, as I realized before—or at least there was no sure method. I saw some women in the hospital who swallowed spoons, bobby pins, or who severed their veins on the rusted edge of the piss pot. I no longer wanted to suffer, and for nothing. Killing oneself was one thing—but the child was not at fault.

I called the screw and told him that I had to see Lieutenant Moravski immediately—I want to give important testimony.

"You mean Captain Moravski?" he murmured. So he did get his star after all! Was it for getting rid of the towel boy? He was a worse bastard than I had imagined.

After a few days, they called me into an office in which I had not been before. A young man sat with a sheet of paper and a pen behind the table in the corner.

"Give him your personal data, Dzivish." Moravski greeted me, "Last name, first, and so on . . ."

"I have to talk with you, sir, in private, face-to-face."

"We are face-to-face now, but first the personal data."

"Without him," I nodded in the direction of the stenographer.

"We have to record your testimony, Dzivish."

Clearly he did not want to be with me one on one. Perhaps he was worried that I might use what transpired between us to my advantage to plead with him for some favors which he would not be able to grant, maybe I would ask to be released. Or maybe he feared that he might again become unglued.

"But this is very urgent."

"You may speak openly about all urgent matters, Dzivish."

"Not about all."

"I assure you, you may. I'm listening." He still did not imagine that I could be so brash.

"You might regret it, friend . . ."

He practically murdered me with his look but had no way out. He nodded to the stenographer.

"What do you think this place is?" he snapped at me in a muffled tone of voice once we were alone, and he made sure that nobody was listening in on our conversation. "You're taking too many liberties with me! What has happened between us doesn't amount to anything! You best get that out of your head!"

"I would, but I can't. I'm pregnant."

The sentence struck him like thunder out of the blue. He performed several useless, uncoordinated motions, as if some change of mood occurred inside of him. Again he checked outside the door to see if the corridor was empty. He could have expected it, but it looked as if he didn't anticipate anything.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"What are you planning to do?"

"If I were free, I would get an abortion even though I regard it as a crime. I don't want a child with you."

That must have burst his bubble. "Surely I'm no worse than your other lovers."

"And what do you plan to do?"

"F---! Why did this have to happen?" I looked at him with contempt. He looked pitiful, like most men who find themselves in a similar situation. "Surely there must be some homey female remedy," he said with a sudden glimmer of hope.

"Here it would be hard to keep it quiet. Too much bleeding . . ."

"That's right; they'll ask questions: how did it happen, who's the father . . ." Only now did the impossibility of solving the problem hit him.

"If that's all you care about, I'll give you my word. I won't tell anyone it's yours."

"They'll force it out of you."

"You're scared, huh?" For the moment I was toying with his trivial fears. "You weren't able to get me to betray Olcha, so I'll keep this quiet too."

That reminded him of something. He looked at me like a man who had lost everything on the stock market. "Olcha was executed by the firing squad, also Protakiewicz, also Krysiak, all of them . . .," he added nearly inaudibly.

"When?"

"In December when you were sick . . ."

I bit my lips until they bled. The sparrows out on the window chirped cheerfully. Which is to say all was for nothing . . . All . . . What was the point of my resistance? "My God, you're a sonofabitch . . .," I said quietly, without any anger or hate. What's the worth of my hate, my resistance, my humility, my love, or my bravery? "You have the blood of innocent people on your

hands . . ."

"I had nothing to do with it."

I did not respond. Nothing mattered now. Not even death . . .

"I didn't even know it would come to this," he continued carefully, gently, as if afraid that I would suddenly lose my head and become hysterical. He wanted very much to persuade me, but most of all, he wanted to persuade himself. "In many instances to arouse fear, they passed out death sentences which were commuted afterwards to life or fifteen years. I thought it was going to be the same with them. Really. How was I to know?"

"My God, and I'm to have your child . . .," I got up and went over to the door. Leave, run away, die!

"Tonia, wait a minute," he touched my shoulder. "I really don't want you to think that way. Believe me, please believe me."

"Let me go."

"You're wrong, you're very wrong if you think that . . ."

I tried to break out of his grasp, we struggled. I managed to push the bell on top of the desk. Tadeusz pulled away from me quickly. The guard entered. I returned to my cell.

My condition soon became obvious. When my belly started growing, it aroused the attention of those around me. I was called in to see the warden of the prison. On his wall, a portrait of Joseph Stalin hung, tied with a black sash across.

"What—Stalin dead?" I exclaimed surprised, believing that the leader of the progressive world truly had to be immortal.

"Yes. Comrade Stalin is dead. His name be praised. Others will continue his great deeds." He reflected for a moment, then turned his eyes to my growing belly. "And how did this come about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know, Dzivish?"

"I was lying unconscious in the hospital for a very long time. Probably someone raped me then."

"Raped," he nodded his head. He probably wasn't in his best mood that day. "There's a package for you here, Dzivish, and a letter."

"From whom? I don't have any family."

The envelope with a typed address, a stamp postmarked in Warsaw . . . abruptly I tore open the envelope, pulling out the letter—also typed . . .

"You can read it later. Take all this with you," he said melancholily.

". . . hours pass, days, months, everyday the sun rises and falls; I eat my breakfast, lunch, supper. I go to work, come home. That's it. My entire life. And everyday I feel that I fall, sinking deeper into the shifting sands . . .," I read, already sitting back in my cell. "Each one of us has his own private struggles about big things and little things, and at times, it seems to me, we should have left the field of battle before, before we compromised ourselves. At times I look at myself with some surprise—so this is me? I look around—this is what we call love, this hate, and that there is alienation. But you know afterwards, when you look at your entire life in retrospect, you see some sense and continuity, some enduring worth. And that worth is—well, you know yourself . . . It's the gift of Satan to man that he understands his actions only after he makes them . . ." It was signed only with the letter "T."

The birth occurred at the end of September 1953, in the prison hospital on the patient's ward full of loonies and prostitutes, who were rotting from syphilis, as well as unsuccessful suicides. Tadeusz stood out in the hall and listened to my screaming. Afterwards, from across the bars, he watched the bloody tiny girl and was visibly shaken—he could not accept the fact that he was a father. Tears streaked his face.

"Let's call her Małgorzata, OK?" He barely got it out of his throat, all choked up. "That name brings luck, it's my mother's name . . ."

"Please get the hell out of here, sir!" the nurse, bearing a striking resemblance to a butcher, hollered.

Soon they transfered me to the cell reserved for mothers—for women who either gave birth in prison or who were arrested immediately after giving birth. They were mostly criminals. But a few were politicals also. The conditions were horrible, but they did provide some milk for the children. I constantly received packages—from Tadeusz, of course. There was so much, that I had to share with others. And letters came also. Almost everyday I received a letter from him.

The child's birthday was for Tadeusz a deeply moving event. From that time on, he started behaving very oddly, nearly neglecting to keep up appearances. After the death of Stalin, everything was shaken up, everything became uncertain. Not without significance, especially for his branch of service, were the revelations of Colonel Józef Światło from the Bureau of Public Security, who went over to West Berlin and who

disclosed on Radio Free Europe his, and not only his, secret service experience.* Very aptly he pointed out the abuses of the prison regime. There were showers; there were walks. Nobody got into his head to worry about such foolishness as the love of an officer of the Bureau of Public Security for a prisoner at the time when a big storm was brewing on the horizon. That is to say his career was over, he could have even been arrested, as I understand, but he did not concern himself with it. Maybe the news of his transgression did not have a chance to get beyond the walls of the hospital ward. Tadeusz was a very solitary man—his entire family had died during the war—and suddenly I—that person from the other side of the barricade—and his accidental child became his intimate confidants.

On the evening of September 5th, he came to visit me rather unexpectedly. It seemed as if he didn't care about anything anymore. He kissed Małgosia, hugged her, laughed when she did something which seemed funny to him. Nonetheless I noticed that he was under a lot of strain, like a string strung out to its limit.

"What specificially happened?" I asked.

"Nothing specific."

"They want to arrest you? They know already?"

"I don't know. Maybe. It doesn't matter anymore."

"And what matters?"

"You, her . . .," he pointed to the child.

"Everything will turn out OK in the end," I tried to make him feel more at ease. Nothing more brilliant entered my head. Truly I didn't really know what was happening to him, what he was thinking.

"Not everything can be taken back . . . I know now that it's my own fault. I was not honest enough with myself. I wrestled with something which pulled me in a completely different direction—until I conquered it. Now I see—what for? I no longer know what I really am—which is the authentic me, and which is someone else, forced and falsified. I am like pulp," he spread and crushed his palm. "A nothing, neither here nor there . . ." He got up. He looked at me a little queerly, as before when it happened between us.

"What's eating you?"

He turned around and left quickly as if he was afraid to stay any longer.

September 6th in the morning a woman, who cleaned up his modest apartment, opened the door with her own set of keys and found him in an easy chair with a revolver in his hand and his skull badly smashed. He'd shot himself through the mouth. He left no note.

I was released in the spring of 1956. When the moment about which I dreamed for so many years finally arrived, I felt no resounding joy. It didn't seem to faze me. I fantasized that as soon as I crossed the gate, a man in a leather coat would walk over to me and tell me to go back inside, or that I'd wake up back in my crib. Reality was less realistic than a dream: everyone somehow oddly dressed . . . flowed lightly practically on air . . . bright colors, a different scent . . . young people full of laughter . . .

I really didn't have anywhere to go. I walked straight down Marszałkowska Boulevard, crossing the white Plac Konstytucji which glistened with its new finish . . . the ruins had disappeared . . . the day was warm and beautiful. I wore my worn-out rabbit fur; the child was wrapped in some old sweaters and rags donated by the women from the cell who took pity on me. People in summer coats, some even without them, turned around looking at us and tapped themselves on their foreheads in absolute bewilderment. I reached the newly erected Palace of Culture and Science and sat down on the edge of the fountain. Water rose way up and fell with a loud splash into the pool. Małgosia was looking around wide-eyed—everything must have seemed even stranger for her than for me. People stared at us. Some anxious doberman straddled behind us. It barked and barked; it tried to bite us, but I chased him away. A crowd gathered. Some guy eyed me obstinately: he moved in circles looking from one side then the other.

"Tonia!" he exclaimed.

"Lech!" Now even I recognized him. Earlier he hadn't worn glasses or have a beard.

He kept talking all the way home: "Really, we broke up. You know, new times. Just read *Po Prostu* and you'll understand.* A lot happened. Dziunia is singing with the Bydgoszcz cabaret; she got married to some officer, or maybe he's a cop. Jan Garlicki died in prison. And me, I still dabble in theater, but in a different way—you'll

*Lieutenant-Colonel Józef Światło was responsible for weeding out enemies within the party, apparently with a direct line to Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's chief of public security. Światło defected in 1953 to West Berlin and exposed the operations of Polish secret police on Radio Free Europe. His revelations were collected into a pamphlet in 1955 and dropped into Poland on balloons. The pamphlet was reprinted by *Nowa* underground press in 1979.

see.

We entered a modest apartment on the fifth floor, filled with props, posters, abstract paintings, strange items. A tall woman—resembling a water sprite—with long hair and wearing a black sweater and black pants, appeared from behind the high buffet which partitioned the room into two halves. "Existence exists, oh, my dear listeners. There's no doubt about it. If, however, existence did not exist, then non-existence would. Whatever exists must be part of existence, and that's that," she recited loudly, gesticulating and making faces.

"You ought to get to know one another. This is Ora, our actress, scenographer, sister-in-law of logic, embroiderer of intellect, if you will . . . And this is Tonia, also an actress, a singer and a dancer . . . Tonia just came out, well, you know . . .," he added in a normal tone of voice.

Ora looked me over. "Greetings," she offered me her hand. Squeezing it, I jumped back disgusted—it was the hand of a rubber mannequin. They broke out laughing carelessly like children. "Welcome to the Wild West Theater."* "Please excuse me, but I have to paint the stilts." She vanished into the bathroom.

"What kind of plays are you putting on?" I finally asked in order to say something.

"We're writing our own material together with Szymon, you'll meet him later. We perform ourselves, we do our own props . . ."

"And where do you perform? Do you have some spot in town?"

"Here," he led me into the room.

The room had a sizeable niche with an elevation—a stage.

"We pack them in tight as you might imagine. Whole Warsaw is pounding on our doors and windows. People sit just anywhere, on the table, on the dresser, they lie about . . . Wait a minute, perhaps you're hungry?" he reflected.

"Me, no, but maybe the little one will drink something. Małgosia, do you want a drink?" Totally baffled, the child amused herself crawling about plaster skeletons and paper-mâché masks.

"I'll get it," Lech ran out into the kitchen. I relaxed in a worn easy chair. Theater! Again theater . . . "I meant to ask you, Tonia, whose child?" Lech shouted someplace from the depths of the apartment.

"Mine!"

"That much I know! And who else? After all . . ."

I went into the kitchen. In a terrible mess, Lech was fixing tea. "Have you got any vodka?"

"But, of course! Why didn't I think of it before?" He dropped everything and ran out. I noticed a loaf of fresh bread. Almost automatically, I went for it and began gnawing on it like a starved animal. I turned around—Lech stood in the doorway with a bottle, watching me with fascination. I felt like a fool. Quickly I tried to gulp it down. He poured two shots. "Well, bottoms up, to good common sense! Down with the absurdities of logic, long live abstract art!"

Afterwards I appeared in several shows of the Wild West Theater, but already then I sensed that I wasn't going over well.

"Don't put so much emotion into it," Lech would tell me during practice session. "Don't act! This is not the theater of Stanislavski."

"I don't know how to."

"It's easy. Don't think anything. Don't interpret."

"So what am I to do?"

"Recite. Speak mechanically like an automaton. Just so: Can the little self ever understand the big self? It doesn't and can't understand neither the little nor the big . . . Is it clear?"

"I'm not good at it . . ."

"Sure, you're good; anyone can do it. Let's try it once more."

After one of the performances in which I played the Unreflexive Pronoun Self, I made my way through the crowd curling in the hallway to check on the sleeping Małgosia. Suddenly someone grabbed me by the shoulder. "Tonia?" I looked up. "Vitkovska! In fashionable black with a pony tail . . ."

"I didn't recognize you, Madame, in that role, only now after you took off the mask . . ." From the shape of the body and the face, it was true that I did not resemble a human being. "My

*Po Prostu (Simply), a student journal identified with the October 1956 crisis in Poland. Began in 1955, it popularized reforms and the need for greater freedom and democracy. It often raised very politically risqué issues, such as the rehabilitation of the A.K., and was instrumental in the establishment of discussion circles which maintained the spirit of liberalization. With the circulation of 150,000, it rapidly became the most popular journal in Poland. It was closed by Gomułka after Khrushchev complained that it represented revisionism and anti-Soviet propaganda.

*Reference to Miron Białoszewski's theater which performed in Lech Emfazy Stefański's apartment on Tarczyńska Street in Warsaw in 1955.

husband," she introduced a heavyset male. "Let's go somewhere and talk, if you have some time. But not about the old times," she warned with a smile—"it's better to forget the past. Are you acting here? This is a fantastic piece! I didn't expect that existentialism and the theater of the absurd would become so deeply rooted and so quickly in our country."

"I'm trying a little. You know that Mira is very ill?"

"No, I didn't. What's wrong?"

"When I was leaving, she was in deep depression. For two years now it's impossible to communicate with her. She doesn't recognize anyone."

"The poor girl. She was so sweet. That's really terrible. But we weren't going to speak about it. Let's assume that the past is past, that it no longer exists. It's better this way. New and better days are coming. You ought to believe me, Madame. The party will never again make the same mistakes. No one will be arrested on the basis of absurdly trumped-up charges. What we had to go through will never repeat itself. Let's look forward, not backwards."

"Are you so certain?" I shrugged my shoulders.

"Well, why not? Have you not heard about comrade Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress? That should be enough . . ."

"I didn't hear . . . all the same . . . but . . ."

"Oh, all you people just have no faith . . .," she puckered her lips. "And what can anyone accomplish without faith? Please, tell me, Madame. Nothing, absolutely nothing."

"Please excuse me, my child is crying. I have to take care of her . . ."

"A child? When did you have time to manage a child? That shows how easily we can adapt! See, Henryk?"

I didn't listen anymore; I lost myself in the crowd. Even if Małgosia had not cried out, I would have found another pretext. Really—pure absurdity, but not only on the stage—among us.

I realized more and more that I just had no ear for all these new ideas which fascinated people around me, and that sooner or later I would have to find some ordinary, steady employment.

Lech couldn't make both ends meet—everything he had, he poured into the theater; as for the earnings from ticket sales, they barely paid for the tea. And Małgosia grew out of her clothes faster and faster.

With the release document from prison, I went to the state employment office. "What did you do for the past year?" the woman social worker asked.

"I was in the theater."

"Your documents aren't stamped."

"Because it was a private theater."

"Private? Do we still have private theaters? I thought they all had been dissolved after the war. . ." She gave me a note to a traveling show—they needed choral singers and dancers. I waited for a long time by the door of the director's office. Finally the telephone rang, and the secretary spoke into the receiver: "Madame Dzivish to see you, sir . . . The director asks you to please come in," she pointed to the door.

I entered, and from behind the desk the towel boy came over to greet me. Within a split second, my entire past passed before my eyes, and like an enormous wave of water overpowered me—I fainted.

The ambulance took me home. With Małgosia, Ora helped a little, Lech a little, so did other strange guests who wandered into the apartment. I know I was a burden on them, but the thought of getting up on my two feet and going outside, of having to speak to people, aroused both disgust and fear in me. Finally, one day, in the door leading to the kitchen of the apartment which I occupied with Małgosia, Kostek appeared . . .

As for what happened afterwards, Małgosia, let him tell you himself . . .

* * * * *

Magda played on the rug near the desk with the Hindu rag elephant; Małgorzata sat in the easy chair next to Kostek . . . the cocktail table, coffee cups, shots of cognac. News on the color TV: the supply of goods in stores is steadily improving, government program is gaining popular support . . .

"Let's turn it off, OK?" she said, brushing the remote control dial with her finger. "You didn't finish telling me. Did you get married the second time?"

"No need. Our church wedding was still valid. That's all we cared about."

"Who told you she was there—that Lech fellow?"

"I knew myself. I even attended one of their performances, but she didn't notice me—I was lost in the crowd. I wasn't ready to meet her."

"I still don't understand why she allowed you to come back, after what you had done."

"Look, Małgosia, life is really far more

complicated than you imagine. Believe me."

"Where is my father buried?" she asked after a while.

"I don't know. I don't even know if she knew . . ."

Magda pulled some books off the shelves, shaking things out of them. She threw them on the floor and then she dumped the papers out of the drawers of the desk. "Magda! Enough!" she screamed at her. "Put everything back in its place!"

"Leave her alone; let her play. This place's a mess anyway. I tell myself I'll clean it, and I never get around to it. For whom?"

"What are you doing? We're not at home," she started putting the books back.

"Mommy, I'm pretending this is a police house search . . ."

Kostek looked at both of them, lost in thought. "She resembles you . . ."

"Unfortunately."

"You're staying for supper, yes?"

"No, we have to go."

"Maybe you will? A friend returned from Moscow, brought me some caviar. I have a bottle of good wine . . . It doesn't taste all that good alone."

"Unfortunately, Magda is ready for bed."

"Put her up here."

"She can only go to sleep with her teddy bear. If I knew, I would have brought it along . . ."

"That's too bad. Come back in any case . . . when you have the time and the inclination, of course."

"Okay, Dad. Goodbye."

He closed the door behind them with three enormous locks and a chain. He returned to the living room, putting back the shot glasses and the cups on a tray. Crossing the foyer, he paused for a moment. In the beam of light on the table in Tonia's room, his photograph stood: smiling, young, hands in the pockets of a light jacket . . . And the dedication: "To Tonia—Kostek." A glass fell off the tray, bursting into pieces.

Małgorzata put Magda to bed. The child hugged her teddy and her Hindu elephant close to her chest.

"Tell me a fairy tale, Mommy . . ."

"I don't know any new ones. I told you all of them."

"So tell me the most beautiful one."

"Which one is the most beautiful?"

"All of them."

She seated herself next to her daughter. "Well, then listen . . . Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, so long that no one really remembers when, beyond the seven mountains and seven rivers, on a high rocky cliff, stood an enormous castle, and in it lived a young, beautiful princess . . .

Małgorzata kneeled, wrapped her in a blanket, turned off the light, but didn't leave. She stared for a long time at the peaceful face of the child.

"My God," she whispered. "Please, don't do this to me . . ."□

Pablo Neruda

ODE TO A PANTHERESS

Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden

Thirty-one years ago
in Singapore
—I still remember—
blood-warm
rain
was falling
on ancient
white walls
pocked and pitted
by humid, leprous kisses.
Suddenly, a flash
of teeth,
or eyes
would light
the dark multitude;
and overhead
a leaden sun cast down
its inexorable spear.
I wandered teeming alleyways:
betel, the red nut,
couched on beds of
fragrant leaves;
through the sweltering siesta
the *dorian* fruit
decayed.
Two eyes stopped me,
a stare, a gaze,
a cage
in the middle of the street;
two icy
circles,
two magnets,
twin points
of hostile electricity;
two piercing eyes
transfixed me,
nailed me to the ground
before the leprous wall.
Then
I saw
undulating muscle,

velvet shadow,
flexed perfection,
incarnate night.
Blinking in that black pelt,
dusting it with iridescence,
either—I never knew for sure—
two topaz lozenges
or hexagons of gold
that glittered
as
the
lissome
presence
stirred.
A
pensive,
pulsating
pantheress;
a
savage
queen
caged
in the middle
of the miserable
street.
Of the lost jungle
where she knew deceit,
of her freedom, lost forever,
of the acrid, sweetish odor
of human creatures
and their dusty dwellings,
only
mineral
eyes
revealed
her scorn,
her
scathing rage,
two
jewel-like seals
that closed
until eternity
a savage
door.

She moved like fire,
and when she closed her eyes,
like smoke, she disappeared,
invisible, elusive night.

BETWEEN ARLT AND BORGES: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICARDO PIGLIA

Conducted by Marina Kaplan

INTRODUCTION

The Argentine novelist, short-story writer and essayist Ricardo Piglia discusses here certain elements of his country's literary tradition as they relate to his novel, *Respiración artificial*.[1] The novel was written and published during the repressive years of military rule in Argentina (1976-83). Appropriately, the text narrates the efforts of a historian to unravel and, above all, to salvage an archive, thus emplotting in metaphoric form the country's struggle for cultural survival.

Piglia's academic training is in history, and he has taught in history and literature departments both in Argentina and in the U.S.A. In addition to *Respiración artificial*, he has published two collections of stories, *La invasión* and *Nombre falso*, as well as several works of criticism. He was editor of *Serie Negra*, a collection devoted to international detective fiction.

The interview was held at Tulane University in the Spring of 1987.

In your novel, key characters, exiled from their societies, are linked to each other by a web of letters in whose decoding the reader participates. I want to address some of these topics later. My first question, though, deals with a less obvious element: treason. I wonder if treason is the primal scene of our twentieth-century Imaginary, if it is a substitute for the motif of murder that was popular in nineteenth-century fiction. What is the meaning of treason in your work?

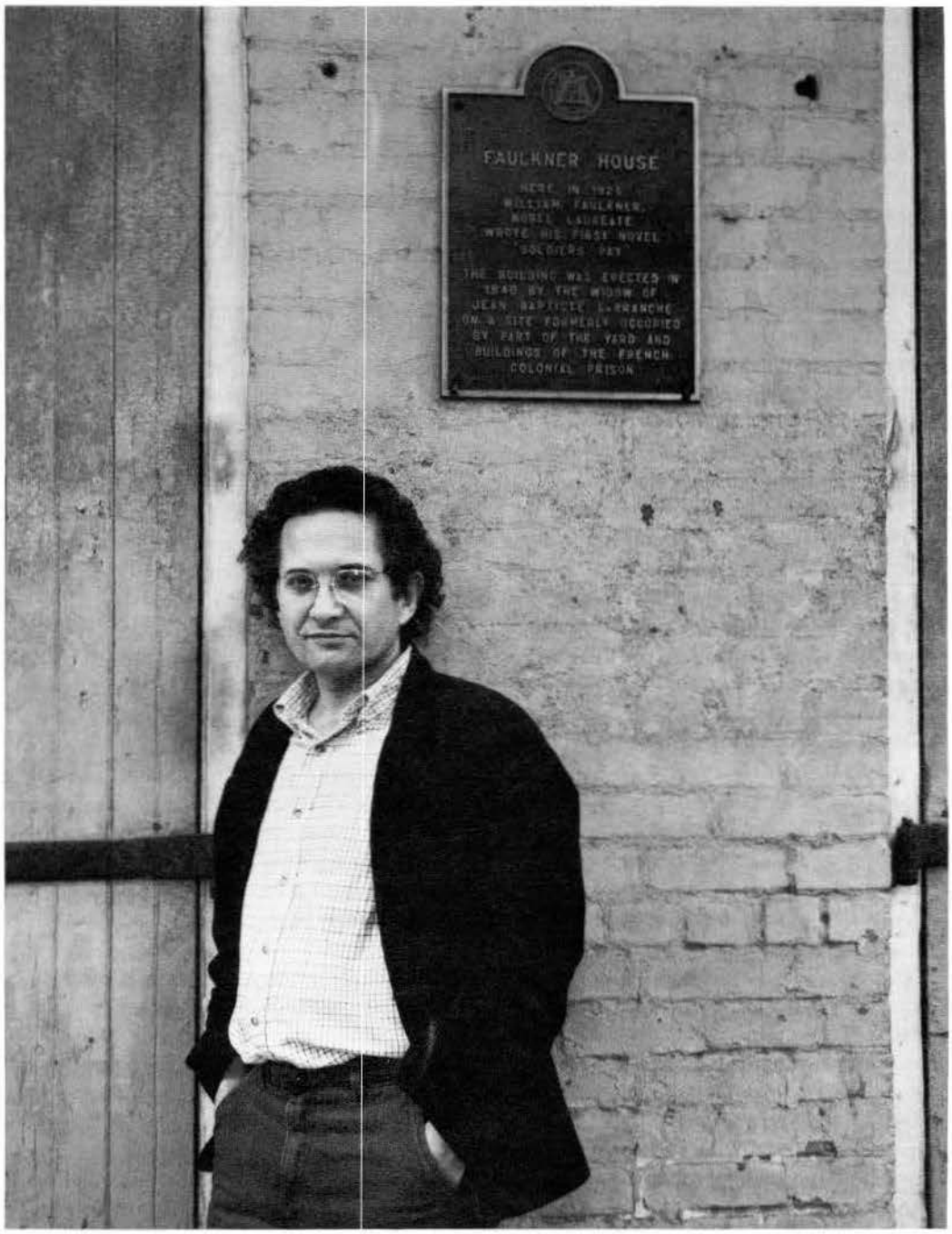
We can think of Argentine history as a history of crimes. But if we think more specifically of the history of Argentine fiction, undoubtedly we could imagine an origin, or, let us say, a myth of origin of our national literature, that would have to do with "El matadero" and with a general situation of, indeed, crime and violence.[2] This could be considered the founding/foundational moment of Argentine literature. But it is also true, as you propose, that treason has an important function in much of twentieth-century Argentine literature, and not just in my novel: think of the key role of betrayal in the works of Arlt and of Borges.

As for me, what fascinates me about treason from a narrative point of view is this: a traitor is someone who operates with two codes, two legalities; he is astride two different forms of understanding the law, or morality. So he is a fascinating narrative character. In a sense, my novel is the story of a traitor—although it is not clear to what extent he is a traitor, or to what.

That, on the one hand. On the other is the issue that you also referred to: the letters. What appeals to me is not only the process of the letter as a condensed narrative with an absent interlocutor, in other words, the fact that it is an eminently narrative situation, but another, historical aspect: the stolen letter. This was a classic occurrence in nineteenth-century Argentina—and suggests a sort of hypothesis on the development of fiction there. When someone sent a letter to someone else, speaking about a third person, it was very common for the recipient of the letter to forward it to the person discussed, or else for the letter to be intercepted. An example would be the case of Sarmiento's *Facundo*: one could imagine *Facundo*'s origin in a letter of 1832 that Sarmiento sent to a friend, in which he criticized Facundo Quiroga.[3] The letter reached Quiroga, who as a result insulted Sarmiento's mother. This, in fact, is

[1]Buenos Aires: Editorial Pomaire, 1980.

[2]This is generally considered the first Argentine, and probably Latin American, short story. Esteban Echeverría wrote it around 1838 as an attack against the Buenos Aires dictator Juan Manuel Rosas, and the work was published posthumously in 1874.



recounted by Sarmiento in his *Recuerdos de provincia*. From this initial factual basis, we could then imagine the *Facundo* as a reply to that insult, right? And we could also imagine what it was that Sarmiento had said in that first letter, which could be conceived as his first text. So that treason and letters are fictional work elements in *Respiración artificial*, but at the same time they are rooted in a sort of tradition, of movement in Argentine literature and history.

The very common occurrence of the stolen letter resulted in a system that fictionalized the letters themselves, because a private letter which is suddenly read by someone else is recontextualized by that reading, producing very strange effects. The result is a different meaning.

In all this, in the crime-treason-letter series that

[3]Another attack against Rosas, Domingo F. Sarmiento's *Facundo, or Civilization and Barbarism in Argentina* (1845) transcended its immediate purpose and became a classic that defined Latin America for years to come, probably until the 1930s.

you alluded to, I found narrative nuclei.

I want to insist on treason and then proceed with the letters. You said that the traitor works with two codes, and that is true. But in the twentieth century he manipulates them consciously . . .

Because one could think of involuntary traitors. There are involuntary treasons.

. . . and believes in neither. Treason . . .

. . . is more deliberate, perhaps. It is the double life, the secret life, the conspiracy: a whole narrative world that characterizes much of the twentieth-century novel. One finds the idea of a conspiracy in Macedonio Fernández, in Marechal, in Arlt, and in Borges himself—it is in his story "Tlön." It is the building of a conspiracy as the construction of the narrative material. And it is as if there, in that narrative structure, fiction articulated what is silenced about Argentine politics. Probably the Argentine novel says about politics what occurs in Argentine politics but is not mentioned in history. If you look at Argentine history you can understand it as a history of successive conspiracies. All the presidents, from the May Revolution of 1810 on, up to Alfonsín, who spoke of a secret pact between the military and the trade unions, have made reference to great conspiracies. But that does not appear in history. Nobody has ever written a history of Argentina from that point of view, even though the idea of a plot is a very powerful strain in Argentine history. I would even say that it is the mark of the constitution of power.

I think this is the way in which the Argentine novel speaks about history. It has taken that paranoid nucleus of its society and has turned it into a constant of narrative matter. Because, I'm telling you, one could write a history of the Argentine novel as the history of the conspiracy. And the form of the conspiracy is the form of fiction and of the novel. A novelist is a conspirator who manipulates secret elements so that the reader will never totally know which are the author's alliances and strategies. This is the way in which I see the link between fiction and politics, or fiction and history, and it is the way in which I myself work when I construct fictions.

How can we relate treason to the praise given at the end of the novel to Marcelo [a traitor?]? He is called a great representative of humanity.

Let me give you the context, which was not a deliberate one in the writing of the book. I wanted to write a novel that had the form of an archive, because that idea appealed to me. In order to have an archive, I needed an historian: thus, Marcelo Maggi appeared. The novel took shape around that nucleus of constructing a history of an archive (the archive of Ossorio's life). In the process of writing, Maggi became politicized in a coded way and his story became, in fact, the secret history of one of the people who disappeared. Therefore Maggi began to acquire, in the very dialectics of the construction of the novel, a position more and more antagonistic with respect to horror. He was simply someone who lived according to certain principles, that was all: he was not a hero but was faithful to certain principles. Just by virtue of that gesture of his, of being faithful to a certain line of thought, of not giving up, he became a representative of humanity in a country where principles had been absolutely destroyed. The idea that he upholds humanity, although perhaps excessive, can be understood within that context: Tardewski sees him in this way simply because he sees him as someone who has been capable of carrying his way of thinking to the end—and to the end means being capable of risking one's life for an idea, for an ethical way of understanding things. In that sense, Maggi functions as the historical conscience in the text. So that there, starting with Maggi, is an element of coding in the text. I have tried not to be explicit.

This way of writing in code, did it have anything to do with the environment of censorship?

No. That idea has been discussed in relation to my novel and concerning Argentine literature of the time of the military dictatorship. There are two aspects to this: one is the topic of self-censorship among Argentine writers, and the other is that of exile and internal exile. First: how far was there self-censorship? I don't believe that an author should consciously censor what he writes. An author writes whatever he wants and later, at worst, he refrains from publishing.

But perhaps he codes his writing.

I believe that coding is the work of fiction in any context. I don't believe that the ellipsis of political material performed by fiction depends on authoritarian situations. Perhaps the type of coding is different in the latter cases, and that would be interesting to research: whether there

are different types of coding according to the different contexts within which the novelist works. But I believe that fiction always codes and constructs hieroglyphs out of social reality. Literature is never direct—a little bit what I said last night about the difference from journalism. Fiction works otherwise; it is an art of ellipsis. What I do believe is that political contexts define ways of reading. More and more I think that authoritarian contexts generate allegorical readings, that allegory perhaps . . .

That was going to be my next question, but not regarding the reader. After all, why would only reading be subordinated to the political context and not writing? Why presume an autonomy of the writer's imagination and deny it to the reader's? My question was going to aim precisely at the strongly allegorical elements in your novel, specifically the first half of your novel. Is that in any way also determined by the political circumstance?

I believe so. Of course, it stems from the force of the context, from what living in that situation presupposed for me. Perhaps one could think in terms of a tension between political pressure and allegorical fictional resolution, as if allegory were the great formal answer of literature to authoritarian worlds.

Did you choose the names of Emilio and Marcelo for any particular reason?

I'll tell you what I thought of at the time—which never matters very much. Emilio is my middle name and Renzi is my second surname. My name is Ricardo Emilio, and Renzi is my mother's surname. So Emilio Renzi has been a character in all the things I've written—there have even been some essays signed by him. He is a sort of ironic double who bears that secret name, if you wish. So that the name Emilio circulates through the things I write. As for Marcelo, I was thinking, this sounds laughable, of Marcel Proust, of course.

That is what I was wondering. In Emilio's case too.

Right, one could think of Rousseau.

But it is not adequate for this character.

In Marcelo's case, yes, I had in mind a Proustian historian, the contradiction involved in a Proustian historian. What is the relationship between Proustian memory and the reconstruction of the past by a novelist, on the one hand, and its equivalent performed by a historian? That is where Marcelo's name had significance, but it is nearly a private joke, right?

How do they differ?

Well, you see, Maggi says that there is no Proustian among historians because historians try to erase their subjectivity. There would be no lost time to recover, since the historian is not dealing with his personal time; instead, there is a movement within history of which he attempts to recover certain traces, that's all. Well, there is a tension between Maggi and Renzi that was quite important for me at the time I was writing the novel. It is a tension between history and literature, which is quite clear in the book. Renzi aestheticizes everything. Renzi is like that part of me which I control. I would like to operate freely in a world of literary references and quotes. There are times when I think that all that matters is style, or literature, and the rest is unimportant. Then, in order to control my temptation to see everything in terms of literature, and to think that ultimately the only important thing in life is style, which is my natural tendency, I put all that in Renzi, a sort of young aesthete à la Dedalus or Quentin Compson. In this way, that spontaneous tendency of mine, the aesthetic approach, is balanced by something else that is also very important to me, the historical glance. So that what in me functions as a contradiction appears fictionalized in the novel in the figures of Maggi and Renzi, as a struggle between a historical conception and an aesthetic interpretation. That tension, which is the Kafka-Hitler tension, served as an impetus for writing. Now, those things resolved themselves—that is how writing functions; they found their own forms of expression.

The encounter between Kafka and Hitler, those talks they supposedly had at the Arcos Kafe, in Prague, in 1908-1910, link literature and history in a hallucinatory way. That is a remarkable part of your novel. Concerning the historiographic aspect of the book, why the interest in Argentina of the 1850s?

That has to do with my background as a historian. I studied history. So my relationship with history is quite fluent. I discovered a historical character, named Enrique Lafuente, and it is on his life that I based those elements of a man who is close to our first literary society, so to speak, and who

then goes off to California to search for gold. I took those elements of Lafuente's life and condensed them with some things of [Juan Bautista] Alberdi. So that history in my novel is to a large extent defined by that character. I was not thinking of something I don't believe in, namely, a symmetrical relationship between Rosas' times [1829-52] and the years of the military. Not that.

Nevertheless, Marcelo, in our times, ends up identifying with Ossorio, the nineteenth-century character that Marcelo is studying, as if there were an equation between both of them and, consequently, between their times.

Yes, but I think that what happened there, and which I discovered after reading the novel, after I had finished it and taken some distance in order to read it—if one can ever do that when one writes—is that I saw that this is a novel about exile. All the characters are in exile; all are out of place. It even seems that was affected by my own tension with regards to exile, whether I should leave or not. I believe that the source of the identification between Marcelo and Ossorio lies in that element, dying in exile. What is the place an individual has in our country during very violent situations? Internal exile, exile abroad? That problem is what links the two characters, it seems to me.

You have mentioned that the epistolary novel is anachronistic. Why are there so many letters in your novel? I supposed they are related to the censor's obsession with decyphering. But letters are also a way of carrying on a monologue with an imaginary reader, in which the dialogue, the interruption, the surprise, are avoided. There is thus less dialogism, to use Bakhtin's term, and more monologism to define a character.

I don't know how far one can follow Bakhtin in that clear-cut split he makes. I don't know how successful Bakhtin is when he detects dialogism, but he is not successful in detecting monologism. I don't believe Tolstoy is monologic. If one follows Bakhtin's ideas consistently, there is no monologism. Why is there no monologism in the letter? In that the other to whom I write has a determining role in the style I use. To quote Lacan, if I may, style is the man . . . who is being addressed. A good expression. So then, one writes a letter to someone and writes it differently according to who the interlocutor is. But this is a whole other issue. Now, going back to your question, if you perceived those letters as encapsulated, isolated discourses, perhaps yes, that yes, . . .

But I didn't say it as a criticism.

No, not at all. Imagine, the use of letters is a technical resolution. It is true, though, that perhaps they produce the effect of a choir of isolated voices, lost people who speak of very fragmentary situations . . . .[4]

And attempting to hear each other.

Of course. And always attempting it with someone who is not the right person—here would be a transposition of that idea of the changed recipient of a letter.

Uncle and nephew?

Not only that, but Arocena: the censor who gets himself in the middle, which is somehow that idea of the nineteenth-century fellow who gets in the middle between two correspondents—as well as the paranoiac situation of eavesdropping. In a more general sense, this censor secretly reading the characters' personal correspondence alludes to that sort of false privacy that circulates in modern society, where you never know if what you are saying and writing is truly addressed to one person or if there is someone in the middle interrupting—a very Argentine topic, obviously (bugged telephones, etc.).

It is curious how narrative ideas appear. I was writing the book, and suddenly the idea of Arocena crept up, the idea of a censor that surveyed the letters. And because I had that idea of a censor I had to write the letters that he censored and thus . . . let us say that the process of writing was the reverse of the fictional outcome: the letters were a result of the prior existence of this idea of someone like the police who reads the correspondence. At one point I thought that perhaps the whole novel could be that, that is, at a certain point during my work on the book—the whole writing process took me three years, and during that time there were possibilities that I discarded—I thought of putting

[4]In this respect, and in spite of the fundamental differences between the two, one is here reminded of the Mexican classic of twentieth-century fiction, *Pedro Páramo*. Juan Rulfo's novel, published in 1955, was originally titled "The Murmurs."

the whole novel, even the Maggi-Renzi correspondence, all in Arocena's hands.

That one was a possible novel, but I preferred to fracture it, to use that approach for a while and then abandon it. The narrative technique that I like is to fracture stories and never develop them fully. Nevertheless, I would say that the mark of the Argentine political situation is there: the most powerful contextual mark is in the existence of that censor, very paranoid, who reads and deciphers all. So the letters came later to respond to that technical need.

This perhaps allows me to ask a more general question. Someone once said that the Latin American novel differs from its traditional, realistic European counterpart in that it tends to be an allegory or a romance.[5] *The mimetic novel requires a* Weltanschauung *that can be taken for granted, assumed to be shared by writer and readers, and which can be used as a tacit substratum on which to rest character development. It is the absence of such a homogeneous worldview that, according to this hypothesis, explains the allegorical tendencies of Latin American fiction. In the specific case of your novel, you said that censorship determined, to some extent at least, the allegorical traits of the first half. Beyond Argentine circumstances, could there be some general elements in the Latin American context to account for the less important role of novels constructed in the traditional bourgeois mold?*

The hypothesis is interesting. We could also say that realistic novels do exist but that they are not representative of what we think is Latin American fiction.

Blest Gana, for example.

I was thinking of Argentina, of Gálvez, for example. But the novel in Argentina is a Macedonio Fernández, not a Gálvez. Gálvez is a possibility, a potential tradition that does not develop. That hypothesis is interesting. My feeling with regard to Argentine novels, though, is that the author works with contexts and a consensus that are very strong, so that allegory or romance is the result of an excess of context, precisely as if everything could be taken for granted.

The opposite of what that critic proposed.

Yes. Because think of Macedonio Fernández, for example: everything is presented on the basis of what can be presumed to be taken for granted. This often makes his novels hermetic and allegorizes them, infusing them with allusions, references. Or think of Borges: it's not that there is not a shared context but rather that such a context is too present and therefore tacit. In my case it is evident that I was working with a reader that was very close to me.

Perhaps then there is a shared consensus, but among small groups.

Later the novel's effect showed me, so to speak, that one never knows to what extent one's own contexts are truly social. Because I had responses, first, in terms of sale, and although this may not be very significant, it does indicate that the book reached a much broader readership than I had anticipated. Also, I had responses from readers that impressed me very much: a letter from someone in jail, or from people who said they were not frequent readers of fiction, or people from outside the country. I received very good readings from people who were not part of the imaginary frame of reference I had had while writing the novel. So that is a very interesting problem: when, where do contexts become broader? Even if people did not understand certain allusions or cultural references, they did understand the general sense of the reference.

Of course, but perhaps it is the allegorical form itself that makes possible that understanding.

Maybe so. Because, let us take the reference to Wittgenstein as an example: it is a certain type of reader who knows who he was. But the reader who doesn't know and thinks that I invented a guy called Wittgenstein who says that there are things of which we cannot speak, that reader will understand it all in another key which functions too: the text will suggest to him that I invented a German philosopher who asks how one is going

[5]The suggestion is made in Fernando Ainsa's "La espiral abierta de la novela latinoamericana (Notas para la construcción de un sistema novelesco)," in *Novelistas hispanoamericanos de hoy*, ed. Juan Loveluck, El Escritor y la Crítica (Madrid: Taurus, 1976) 17-46. After conducting this interview, I read Fredric Jameson's stimulating and relevant article, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (*Social Text* 15 [Fall 1986]: 65-88), in which he proposes that Third-World novels are, properly speaking, national allegories. Should Jameson's thesis appear as too sweeping a generalization, the reader may find solace in Aijaz Ahmad's vehement rebuttal of Jameson (*Social Text* 17 [Fall 1987]: 3-25). As is obvious from my questions to Piglia, I agree with Jameson.

to speak out in Argentina if it is better to remain silent. So that the relations between references are thus reformulated. What you say is interesting: the allegory, a system of secret references—hermetic—perhaps has also a broader meaning.

Talking about writing and literature, why does Marconi betray the woman writer?

You are referring to the woman that writes so well. And Marconi, a provincial poet, gets these letters from her and. . .

That is so brutal—how he lies to her and makes her believe that her writing is no good. Why?

It's terrible. I don't know.

In this connection, I wanted to ask you about the women in the text.

There were arguments about that with my feminist friends. This can be interpreted in different ways. We can think that writing, true writing, is feminine, and that we men have to keep silent, or that feminine writing is censored because if it is allowed to exist then men will not be able to write. Aside from all this, Marconi nurtures an image of himself as a poète maudit, à la Baudelaire; he is a provincial poète maudit that plays at being evil, with a private sort of satanism. So that his action was part of the construction of the character.

True, but what surprised me is that the two women who appear in the novel—the third one, Coca, never appears—Esperancita and the woman writer, are both betrayed. Of course they don't elicit comparable sympathy in the reader, but they both share certain traits: they are in the background of the text, they both represent something (i.e., the high bourgeoisie in one case, poetry in the other), they hardly speak at all, and they are both betrayed.

It's true. And in those things one obviously works full of contradictions. But at the same time I defend a certain element, namely, that the political center of the book is built around a fourth woman, that young woman that is imprisoned. Angela allows us to turn the novel upside down and understand what happens with Maggi. There is a letter from a sister to her brother in which she tells him that a certain Angela has been interned—the Argentine police term for disappeared—and that woman is a disciple of Maggi. In her there is a very important character for the construction of the novel.

Coca, the third woman, is another important character, even if she does not speak. I had written a version in which Renzi spoke with her. In that version, which I kept until the final draft, she told Renzi that she knew what had happened to Maggi, and then told Marcelo Maggi's story in a different way. I eliminated all that because I thought it was too explicit and would destructure the whole thing. To narrate is to make decisions, and one never knows if they were the right decisions. So I chose to end with the conversation between Tardewski and Renzi. To what extent those elements or considerations which I thought were structural were really ideological, I cannot say. Why didn't I allow that woman to have her say? All I can do is say that those decisions appeared to me as structural problems . . . which, of course, is the way in which ideological problems present themselves. Another thing: why is the woman poet physically deformed? That stirred a lot of debate.

And she is so vulnerable.

Because she is an artist. She is the artist of the novel, passing through the text like a shadow, and that is why she is so vulnerable. Obviously what you are hinting at is a different reading, and one would have to explore where it leads.

I thought that your text was in some way a reelaboration of Borges' "Deutsches Requiem." Is that possible?

I like that work very much, and even though I did not have it in mind at the time, that's a good idea. It is a story that is politicized in a masterful way, a lesson for engagé writers of how to include everything in a text that is simultaneously very beautiful. Since I find that text fascinating, it is possible it permeated what I wrote. I had never thought of it, but I can see it now in the senator's monologue, where the subject speaks as if he himself were history—which is what happens in "Deutsches Requiem."

What would you like to say about other novels or novelists?

I can tell you how I see the situation of the Argentine novel of the military years, although I do not usually establish such a direct relationship

between historical time and fiction. Many critics, assuming that novels published at a particular time deal with that time, focus on a thematic search and in the process ignore an important element. They overlook the variable of which of those texts were written in exile and which inside the country. Even if there are traits that can be read as allegorical in my novel, the fact is that the true allegories were written by writers in exile. If you think of Martini's *La vida entera* (ruffians and criminals that stand for Argentina itself), Moyano's *Libro de navíos y borrascas*, Soriano's *Cuarteles de invierno* (an army boxer wrestling the people), or Constantini's *De dioses, hombrecitos y policías*, I can say, in relation to your question, that the allegories were written by writers who did not have the problem of immediate censorship, because they were publishing outside of Argentina. Paradoxically, and aside from any value judgment, it is in their works that you find allegorical elements, more than in my novel, or in those of Asís. In my novel, for example, there are more direct references: the censor, for instance, is a real character, who works for the Argentine police. The story begins with Maggi, in 1976, feeling that he is being hunted, and so he tries to have someone rescue his archive.

I think that, in Argentina, it was in the daily life of the writers that the effect of the dictatorship was felt. The same fears affected all of society. Whereas concerning literature the situation was very different from, say, that of Spain, because in our country there was no committee of censorship charged with reviewing novels. I don't know what I would have done in that case; perhaps I would have published it abroad. The way censorship functioned was primarily and directly geared toward the mass media: newspapers, T.V. and movies. Literature, which has an erratic circulation and consequently does not produce immediate effects, was censored indirectly. The government intimidated publishers by not telling them what the censorship criteria were, so that it was the poor publishers who ended up doing the censoring, because they were always afraid that they might publish something and bring the government's wrath upon themselves. The authorities even went so far as to threaten to repress the printers. Consequently, a devious system of censorship was implemented, in which at times the printers themselves would refuse to print because they were afraid that might cost them their business. Nobody said: "This book is not authorized for publication." So one had to find a publisher sufficiently willing to go through with the whole thing.

Novels written abroad by important writers who were vocal against the dictatorship were not allowed into the country—the case of Viñas, of Cortázar—not only because of the content of their books, but also because of what those intellectuals with great civic courage represented. Those writers combating the government from abroad were perceived as possible points of reference for the public. But the bans were not directly related to the contents of their books. Where there was direct censorship of content, as has always been the situation in Argentina, was in the case of sexual "transgressions." Puritanism, let us say, runs through both democratic and military governments. There are censorship committees for that, Mothers' Leagues, etc.

Is that why Puig's novels were not sold there?

In Puig's case there was also the connection homosexuality-guerrilla, . . .

The novels of Medina, . . .

Or those of Gusman. In the case of Puig I suspect the real issue was homosexuality . . . in addition to the fact that in his novel (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) politics was presented in a straightforward way: the character was a tortured guerrilla. But there is more than that, because Puig's first censored novel was *The Buenos Aires Affair*. I suppose they censored it because there was a woman in it who masturbated. I don't know. Some such foolishness must have triggered their reaction and made them decide that it was unfit to be read by the wives of the military, I guess.

There are two distinct styles in your novel. In the first half there is the kind of intellectual control and construction that in Argentina we associate with Borges, or with the old Florida group, as our literary histories would say, and in the second half we have the intensity and the spontaneity of street talk, the nonchalance that subverts Argentine stiffness, all those traits which for us are represented by Arlt or by the Boedo group. In the first half there are certain aphoristic statements that I think are characteristic of other Latin American writers as well. If what I say is true, why that tendency to write in conclusive or epigrammatic terms, why the statements that sound profound, regardless of whether they really are?

You mean something such as "Exile . . .

"Exile constitutes utopia," yes. It sounds profound, but one says . . .

. . . it may or may not be so, of course. Or "Exile is insomnia." Yes, I'll tell you what I think.

When in fiction you work with conceptual conclusions, or definitions, you emphasize the epigrammatic closure of the phrase precisely because fiction works with an uncertain relationship with truth and there is no way to convey that what one says is really so. Fiction differs in this from other discourses where truth is clearer. So then this uncertainty within a novel, whereby things may or may not be a certain way, and what you say may or may not be accepted by the reader, is compensated for, it seems to me, by that epigrammatic tendency. However that may be, these are not things that I worked consciously. I could tell you something that you would understand at once; I could say (avoiding your question): "The characters spoke in that way. It is they who spoke like that, not me."

May I risk another interpretation? I ask myself if that tendency, which I have also seen in Carlos Fuentes . . .

Or Borges too, for example, his "Reality likes symmetries."

Yes, except that he questions and undermines such statements. In the case of the example you just mentioned, "Reality likes symmetries" is a mockery and a judgment of, among other things, Nazism. Whereas when Fuentes writes, in Where the Air is Clear, *"In Mexico there is no tragedy; everything becomes an affront," the tone and the context propose this as something profound, but the reader is troubled, at least I am troubled, by a faulty antithesis. Sometimes those aphorisms are expressions of a mannerist way of thinking. I wonder if such epigrams are not the stylistic translation of authoritarianism.*

I don't agree. I think that word is abused and misapplied. In Argentina there have been semantic displacements that constitute an important ideological operation, and that allow one to say, for example, that all Argentines are authoritarian. Now, between an authoritarian individual and the torturer Señor Videla, let us say, there is an immeasurable distance. You cannot establish an equation simply because they both have a certain authoritarian trait in common. Otherwise, how far are we going to push such comparisons? The type of inevitable, or fatal, authoritarianism that one exercises when writing a book, because one controls the plot and the discursive strategies, can be seen in that light, but I wouldn't transpose it to the broader sense of authoritarianism without first finding mediations. After all, the authoritarianism that may exist in Roa Bastos' *I, the Supreme* cannot be assimilated to the authoritarianism of a Stroessner. They are two different qualities. The use of one common word to define two types of discursive strategies—one on paper, the other acting on bodies, on flesh—has to do with a current situation of theory, which I see linked to the neoconservative wave, and which, in brief, is the theory of the total fictionalization of the world, the theory that everything is discourse. I see this as the theoretical realization of the political context in which we move in these times, in which there is no utopia and everybody is a bit skeptical and nurtures a certain conformist nihilism. That leads to a perception of reality as pure fiction: it is all discourse, it's all the same, what a writer says and what a military man says. An order to execute a person is the same as a conclusive statement in a novel. . . .[6]

That has broad circulation today as a theoretical hypothesis. I think novelists and literary critics must take part in this discussion, because we can speak about fiction, since that is our field. I believe that Argentine history is crisscrossed by fictions but it is not a fiction. We Argentines know very well that it is not a fiction. We know that reality is discursive but not only discursive: it is built upon the dominance of bodies and upon real repressions. So then, that somewhat snobbish gesture of seeing parodies and pastiches and fictions, which is the current tone of theory, seems to me to be the theoretical resolution of a more general skeptical, conformist position. If reality is pure fiction, then everything is the same; there is an egalitarian leveling of all issues, so that

[6] I had simply asked myself if such epigrammatic statements that "decree" truths might not be defensive, even paranoid mannerisms mimicking a reality in which the authoritarian mode predominates. As I explained to Piglia after our interview, my question aimed at showing a possible historicity of style, and thus at historicizing fiction, not at its opposite of fictionalizing politics. Another approach to the aphoristic tendency in question might be suggested by Barthes' observations on the maxims of La Rochefoucauld: "This relation of equivalence is of a rather archaic type: to define things (with the help of a motionless relation) is always more or less to make them sacred, and the maxim does not fail to do so, despite its rationalistic project" (*New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard [N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1980] 8).

wars in a text are the same as wars among real people. That is my answer to your question about the relationship between authoritarian literary aphorisms and the dangerous authoritarianism of reality.

But your perception seems nevertheless extremely interesting as a topic to explore. Really. Why do writers use that epigrammatic style? I once made an attempt to cull out from Borges' texts what I called the separable ideological definitions—for example, "Reality likes symmetries." I made a list of all those phrases, and there was a Borgesian ideological dictionary. They were all maxims that one could extrapolate from the text: not that the text remained exactly the same without them, but from the point of view of the narrative process they had no function.

I made a list of those expressions, and it was quite interesting. Anyway, one must take into account that those are not to be read as Borges' own opinions. At most they are the narrator's opinions. The speaker is not the writer while, inversely, the writer is a fictional voice in his story.

Going back to the topic, why the use of such a strategy? I get very irritated when I find that type of sentence in Argentine essays about the national identity, the sort of empty metaphysics of a Martínez Estrada, for example. "The center of the Argentine problem is sadness." Sadness or joy or masturbation or whatever you wish, it is a prescientific type of enunciation, which, in addition, is marked by aesthetization. Currently you can find it in one of the two signs of that crisis of theory that we are undergoing: one is the fragment as form, and the other is the essay in that aestheticizing sense, written by a more or less refined subject—Octavio Paz, for example. His poetic authority allows him to express his opinions, generally superficial—I am not talking about political rubbish, not his political positions, but rather I am referring to the fact that he is like a *Time* magazine reporter, with the modern, brilliant style of a knowledgeable man who can discuss Buddhism, structuralism or varied cultures with equal ease. In my opinion, such writing is a form of aestheticizing that has to do with our current situation. Ideology has collapsed, firm opinions have collapsed, truths are relative, and, therefore, what counts now are certain subjects' perceptions about reality, which are all equally valid. That is what I find in essays, and it relates to what you were saying. So then an individual can say anything: he can say that Argentina is defined by sadness or by the clearest air, etc.

In the second part of your novel, perhaps because it takes place in our time, those aphorisms don't appear.

I like that second part better.

I do too. It seems to me that it shares the lucidity, the strength and the spontaneity of what constitutes the best antidote for Argentine pomposity. Since you just mentioned Paz, I was reminded that, in his Children of the Mire, *he states that all modern poetry has been against rationalism. In your novel there also is, I think, a criticism of rationalism as represented by a line extending from Descartes to* Mein Kampf. *I am troubled by this. What is the opposite of rationalism?*

I suppose there's more than one opposite. One can pit rationalism against a perception of reality that includes the unconscious. I do not propose the scheme rational-irrational, in which the irrational would be a type of magical knowledge of the secret essences of life, etc. Of course when Tardewski makes those statements about the issue, he is close to Wittgenstein, who says that there are things that we can know, namely, those that we can understand, and then there are others that have to do with what we cannot rationalize. The school of Frankfurt has some bearing on these things too. But in my case I will tell you how this came about, and what happens when one is writing. I am fascinated by Valéry's conception of *The Discourse of Method* as the first modern novel. I think it is a brilliant idea, in the sense that, as Valéry says, Descartes' text does not relate the passion of a life, but the passion of an idea. And he reads that text as a monologue. For me, then, it was very simple to take that idea and add Hitler's text as a sort of counter-monologue to Descartes'. First there was a subject who wanted to construct the rational discourse, and then there was a subject closing the story, as it were—"Deutsches Requiem," if you wish, or the question of the enigma of Nazism in the land of philosophy and music.

Of course, in my book there are contradictory things. I am very fond, for example, of the eighteenth-century rationalists; I think they are extraordinary. Abstract constructions fascinate me. But it is also true that the crisis of reason is a sign of our times, and that it is approached from different angles: anthropology, as you said earlier, and the study of non-Socratic reason, or the unconscious, or Nietzsche's truth as a

strategy of power and war, or Marx, whose ideas on the subject were formidable—a society's system of distributing goods defining the way of thinking. All these ideas have to do with the limits, the frames and the determinants of reason. Now it's also true that in everyday life, attacks on reason come from people we don't like.

Are you writing something at present?

I am finishing a novel that I should already have turned in. It is a novel on which I have been working for four years, called *La fortaleza vacía* (*The Empty Fortress*), of which I have a very advanced draft. But I have trouble with the ending. The same thing happened to me with *Respiración artificial*. My idea was to finish it here in the U.S., in Princeton, but I don't know if I will be able to do it. At the time of publication of this novel, a reprint of *Respiración artificial* will also come out, as well as a new edition, in a single volume, of my collections of short stories that will include other stories that were published in anthologies or magazines. And I am also putting together a collection of the essays that I wrote in the past fifteen years, which will come out in a book entitled *Entre Arlt y Borges, ensayos sobre literatura argentina* (*Between Arlt and Borges: Essays on Argentine Literature*). That is somewhat the movement of my own writing: between Arlt and Borges. These are the projects I am working on now.

Respiración artificial *is about to come out in French, isn't it?*

It is probably being released right now, published by one of those interesting new, small French publishing houses that are changing the map of literature. It is called Editions W.□

Marina Kaplan *teaches Latin American Literature at Smith College.*

Ricardo Piglia

ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION

Translated by Daniel Balderston

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
and approach to the meaning restores the experience.
—Eliot

I

Is there a story? If there is a story it begins three years ago. In April 1976, when my first book is published, he writes me a letter. The letter comes together with a photo in which he is holding me in his arms: naked, smiling, I am three months old and look like a frog. He, however, looks good in that picture: a serge suit, a narrow-brimmed hat, a good-humored smile, a thirty-year-old man who looks at the world head on. In the background, blurred and almost out of focus, is my mother, so young that at first it was hard for me to recognize her.

The photo is from 1941; on the back he had written the date and then, as if trying to guide me, copied the two lines from an English poem that now serve as epigraph to this tale.

There was no other tragedy in the history of my family, no other hero worth remembering. Several versions circulated in secret, confused, conjectural. Married to a wealthy woman with the incredible name Esperancita, of whom they said that she had a weak heart, always slept with a light on, and that in her hours of melancholy she prayed aloud so that God could hear her, my mother's brother had disappeared six months after his wedding, taking with him all of his wife's money, to go off and live with a cabaret dancer nicknamed Coca. With perfect calm, without losing her icy courtesy, Esperancita reported the robbery, pulled strings, until she was able to force the police to find him, some months later, living in luxury under an assumed name in a hotel in Rio Hondo.

I remember the newspaper clippings having to do with the case, hidden in a more or less secret closet drawer, the same place in which my father kept *Physiology of the Passions and Sexual Mechanics*, by Professor T. E. Van de Velde (also the author of *The Perfect Marriage*), and Engels' book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, together with various letters, papers and documents, including my birth certificate. After complicated stratagems which filled up the siesta periods of my childhood, I would open the drawer and spy in secret on the secrets of that man of whom everyone in the house spoke in hushed tones. CONVICTED AND CONFESSED read (I remember) one of the headlines, a headline which always moved me, as if it alluded to heroic and somewhat desperate acts. "Convicted and confessed": I repeated it over and over and got excited because I did not understand the meaning of the words properly and thought that convicted meant invincible.

My mother's brother was in prison for almost three years. From then on little is known of him: the conjectures, the imagined and sad stories about his destiny and his extravagant life begin at that moment. It seems that he no longer wanted to have anything to do with the family; he refused to see anyone, as if he were avenging himself for some wrong done him. One afternoon, however, Coca had come to our house. Proud and remote, she came to bring part of the money and the promise that it would all be returned. I know the interpretations, the tales of the meeting, and I know that Esperancita said "My child" to that woman who could almost be her mother, and that Coca used a perfume which my father could never forget. "All of you," they say she said before leaving, "will never know what kind of a man Marcelo is," and when the story reached that point, inevitably and almost

without realizing it, I remembered the historic phrase uttered by Hipolito Yrigoyen about Alvear after the military coup in 1930, a strange association of ideas motivated, also, by the fact that Esperancita was related to General Uriburu.*

From then on, over a period of three years, Esperancita received a check every two months until the debt was paid up. From that period come my first memories of her or rather an image that I have always thought is my first memory: a very beautiful, fragile woman, with an expression of arrogance and reluctance in her face when she leaned toward me while my mother said, "Now Emilio, what do you say to Aunt Esperancita?" One said "Thanks" to her more than to anyone else. An emblem of the family's remorse, she was like a rare and overly refined object which made us all feel uncomfortable and clumsy. I remember that each time she came my mother took out the china dishes and used starched tablecloths that crackled as if they were made of stiff paper. And she maintained the habit of coming to the house for a visit, one or twice a month, usually on Sunday or Thursday, until she died.

My mother's brother did not find out that she had died. Vanished without a trace, some versions had it that he was still in jail and others that he was living in Colombia with Coca. The truth is that he did not find out that she had died, never learned that when Esperancita died they found a letter addressed to him in which she confessed that it was all a lie, that she had never been robbed, and talked about justice and punishment but also about love, which was strange considering what she was like.

I could not but be attracted by the Faulknerian air of that story: the young man with a brilliant future, recently accepted into the bar, who leaves everything and disappears; the hatred of the woman who pretends she has been robbed and has him sent to prison without his defending himself or taking the trouble to clear up the hoax. In short, I wrote a novel using that story, using the tone of *The Wild Palms*, or rather, using the tone Faulkner acquires when translated by Borges, by which means the tale sounded more or less like a parody of Onetti. *"None of those of us present the night the secret of that old revenge finally got out, in the sad twilight after the funeral, could but think he was witness to the most perfect form of love a man can inspire in a woman: of that love unimaginable in character but not in intention, unknowable in the depths of the wounds it causes but not in the hoped for bliss."* That is how the novel began, and it continued like that for two hundred pages. To avoid the tendency toward an interest in the picturesque and in local color, and the tendency toward an oral style, both of which ravaged Argentine letters, I (so to speak) had gone to hell. Some copies of the novel are still found on the remainder tables of the bookstores on Corrientes, and now the only thing I like about that book is the title (*The Prolixity of the Real*) and the effect it produced in the man to whom it was unintentionally dedicated.

A strange effect, it must be said. The novel appeared in April. Some time later I received the first letter.

First corrections, practical lessons (the letter said). Nobody ever made good literature out of family stories. A golden rule for beginning writers: if the imagination fails one must be true to the details. The details: the idiocy of my first wife, the frown on her little mouth, the veins visible under her translucent skin. A bad sign: transparent skin, a woman of glass, as I realized too late. Something else: who told all of you about my trip to Colombia? I have my suspicions. With regard to me: I have lost all scruples about my life, but I suppose that more instructive subjects must exist. For example: the English invasions; Pophan, an Irish gentleman in the Queen's service. "Let not the land once proud of him insult him now." Commodore Pophan, bewitched by the silver of Bolivia, or by the terrified farmers fleeing their plots in Pedriel. The first defeat of the country's armed forces. The history of defeat needs to be written. Nobody should lie at the moment of death. It is all apocryphal, my son. I made off with all the Bolivian silver, and if she says I didn't, it is because she is trying to deprive me of the only worthy act in my life. Only those who have money look down on it or confuse it with bad feelings. They were a million six hundred thousand odd pesos printed in 1942, the product of various inheritances and of the sale of some lands in Bolivar (lands which I made her sell with a particular purpose in mind, as she reproaches me for quite properly, though it was not I who made the relatives she inherited from die off). I tried to start a nightclub at Cangallo and Rodriguez Peña, but they found me first. (Where did they get the business about Rio Hondo?) I returned the money with interest: it is true that Coca went to see your family and almost gave

*Yrigoyen said, "Hay que rodear a Marcelo" ["Surround Marcelo (Alvear)"].

your mother a heart attack. They do not recount what she said: "I s--- on your soul," the first time that Esperancita said "My child" to her, and that they had to give her smelling salts. If I went to prison and the case was in the papers it was because I am a Radical, a follower of Amadeo Sabattini, and at that time they wanted to finish us all off because the 1943 elections were approaching—later they stopped them with Rawson's coup (they didn't tell you that story either?). We Radicals were disoriented, lacking the energy of the heroic times when we fought in defense of the national honor and let ourselves be killed for the Cause. So she forgives me in her will? You can tell she's crazy; she always shat standing up, I assure you, because someone told her it was more elegant. Before dying she says that I did not rob her. How mysterious is the oligarchy and such are the daughters it engenders! Slender, illusory, inevitably defeated. They should not be allowed to change our past. "Let not the land once proud of him insult him now," Pophan said. Coca set herself up on her own in Uruguay, in the Salto district. Sometimes I hear news of her, and if I came to this place to live it was to be near that woman, to have her on the other side of the river. She does not deign to see me because she is proud and silly, because she is old. I get up at dawn; at that hour you can still see the light of the streetlamps on the other bank. I teach Argentine history at the High School and at night I go to play chess at the Social Club. There is a Pole who is an ace, used to playing with Prince Alekhine and James Joyce in Zurich, and one of the ardent desires in my life here is to stalemate him in one game. When he is drunk he sings and talks in Polish; he notes down his thoughts in a notebook and claims to have been student of Wittgenstein. I gave him your novel to read; he read it attentively without suspecting that I am the guy about whom the dirty fantasies are told. He promised to write a review in *The Telegraph*, the local paper. He already published several notes about chess and also some extracts from the notebook where he jots down his ideas. His fantasy is to write a book entirely made up of quotations. Your novel is not much different, since it is written on the basis of family stories; sometimes it seems to me that I can hear the voice of your mother; that you have known how to disguise it with that emphatic style does not fail to be a sign of delicacy. The distortions, in any case, derive from there. I should ask you, in another regard, for utmost discretion with respect to my present situation. *Utmost discretion*. I have my suspicions: in that regard I am like everyone else. In any case, as I have already said, I do not have a private life at the present time. I am a former lawyer who teaches Argentine history to incredulous young people, the sons of local merchants and farmers. This job is healthy: there is nothing like being in contact with youth to learn how to grow old. One must avoid introspection, I tell my young students, and I teach them what I have called the *historical perspective*. We are but a leaf floating on that river and one must know how to look at what comes as if it had already happened. There will never be a Proust among the historians, and that comforts me and should serve you as a lesson. You can write to me, for the moment, at the Social Club, Concordia, Province of Entre Rios. Greetings: Professor Marcelo Maggi Pophan. Educator. Sabattinist Radical. Irish gentlemen in the service of the Queen. The man who loved Parnell all his life, did you read the biography? He was a worthless man but spoke twelve languages. He posed a single problem: how to narrate real events?

P.S. Of course we have to talk. There are other versions you will have to learn. I hope you come see me. I almost never move; I have gotten too fat. History is the only place where I can get relief from this nightmare from which I am trying to wake up.

That was the first letter and with it this story really starts.

Almost a year later I was on my way to see him, dead tired in the shabby car of a train which was on its way to Paraguay. Some fellows who were playing cards on top of a cardboard suitcase offered me some gin. For me it was like moving forward into the past, and at the end of that trip I understood to what extent Maggi had foreseen it all. But that happened later, when it all ended; first I received the letter and the photo and we began to write to one another.

II

Someone, a Russian critic, the Russian critic Yuri Tynianov, declares that literature evolves from uncle to nephew (and not from fathers to sons)—an enigmatic expression that should be useful to us for the moment, since it is the best summary of your letter that I know.

For my part, no interest in politics. What interests me about Yrigoyen is his *style:* the radical baroque. Why hasn't anybody understood that the writing of Macedonio Fernández is born out

of his speeches? Nor do I share your passion for history. Since the discovery of America nothing has happened in these parts that merits the slightest attention. Births, obituaries and military parades: that's all. Argentine history is the hallucinatory, endless monologue of Sergeant Cabral at the moment of his death, as transcribed by Roberto Arlt.

Well then, shall we compose the great family saga in duo? Shall we tell one another the whole story over again? For the moment I attach the following summary of what was said about you:

1. That you had wooed Esperancita Ossorio on learning that she was the great-granddaughter of Enrique Ossorio because you were interested in a trunk where the family papers were kept.

2. That in truth those papers were what really interested you, but that you couldn't get the one without the other.

3. That for years you have been working on a biography (or something like that) of that forgotten patriot who was Rosas' private secretary and a spy in the service of Lavalle.

4. That you became a follower of Yrigoyen in the 30s, at the wrong time as always, and that that is linked mysteriously with your flight with Coca.

5. That if you live in Concordia, a border town, it is because you devote yourself to smuggling.

Of course other versions exist and various ones were made up, to tell the truth, during the wake for Esperancita, who looked like a china doll, covered with veils and orange blossoms. Nobody cried for her, poor woman, and some say that before she died they heard her repeat twice, "Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires," just like José Hernández at the moment of his death in the arms of his brother Rafael. As you can see, I write to Maggi, she did not die with your name on her lips.

The only one who mentioned you was Don Luciano Ossorio, the father of the deceased, who is past ninety and goes around in a wheelchair. When he saw me come into the wake he crossed the room, the rubber wheels creaking on the parquet floor. You, he told me, I write to Maggi, resemble Marcelo. A plaid blanket covered his legs and he raised his vulture-like face to ask me: Do you see Marcelo? Hasn't he asked after me?

So you have seen Don Luciano? Crippled and all, he is the only worthwhile person in that whole band of nitwits. I don't know if you know the story. In 1931, in a ball court where May 25th was being celebrated, someone who was half-drunk shot him. The old man was on the stand giving a speech and the drunk said, "Make that drunkard shut up," and took out the revolver they had given to him to shoot a salute in honor of the British ambassador who had travelled to Bolivar especially invited by the old man, who was the owner of almost the whole district, and shot him. After the clamor died down the old man grew pale but kept on speaking just the same, holding onto the rail of the flag-draped stand, and nobody would have realized anything, if it hadn't been that he began to slip curses into his speech, until suddenly he was heard to say, very clearly, into the microphone: They shat on me. They shat on me, he said. It was those from the radical Klan, the old man said, and fell to the ground. The guy who had wounded him was an ex-jockey who earned a living in the illegal horse races in the area, and they beat him so hard that he ended up half-crazy and the truth of the matter never came out. The only thing the jockey managed to say before they began beating him was that they had told him that the revolver was loaded with blanks. The shot entered the old man in his side and grazed his spinal column and left him an invalid for the rest of his life. And to think, he would say to me, that the only things that really interest me in the world, apart from politics, are f---ing and horseback riding. On seeing him one had a tendency to be metaphorical and he himself reflected metaphorically. I am paralyzed, the same as this country, he would say. I am Argentina, s---, the old man would say while raving under the influence of the morphine they gave him to relieve his pain. He began identifying the nation with his life, a temptation which is latent in anyone who has more than a thousand acres of land in the humid pampa. He was given shots all the time, which gave him a strange lucidity and gradually changed his way of thinking, as shown for example by the fact that later on he wanted to give the land to the peasants. He had bought half of the Bolivar district in 1902 for eight pesos an acre in a judicial sale fixed by Ataliva Roca's gang. From time to time he spoke about that and remorse kept him from sleeping. The soldiers put all the foreigners in a freight train, he recounted, and sent them to hell, somewhere around the Caruhé salt marshes. What has happened to those poor people? the old man said, who at bottom had started thinking that he deserved the shot in the back. I know better than anyone how savage one must be in this country to get anywhere, the old man said.

His children had him confined to a wing of the house and gave him all the morphine he wanted provided that he would stop being a pest. I love that man, Maggi wrote to me, and if he confused you with me it is because I was your age when I started hanging around him. I always got along better with him than with his daughter, Esperancita, may she rest in peace. Sometimes I took him out in the sun and fresh air and the old man was talking as calm as could be and all of a sudden he would turn around, his face livid, and say: Never accept an invitation to give a speech on a grandstand even if it is May 25th. Do you hear me, Marcelo? Even if it is May 25th and the British ambassador is there with all his relations, don't accept because that's when they slip in to put a bullet in your spinal column. The truth is that I started visiting him on an assignment from the party: we knew he was changing and wanted to see if he would sign a document against the electoral fraud, because the old man had been among the founders of the Conservative Union in the period of the rupture between Roca and Pellegrini and later had been a senator and had a lot of prestige. The old man signed just like that, and you know he was a first cousin of General Uriburu. But with these little pieces of paper we're not getting anywhere, he said. No matter how many secret ballots and dead children. The people must be armed! The people must be armed, the old man said, don't you realize that? Those f---ing cowards have to be run off at gunpoint. The people, the old man said, which side are they on? That was how I started visiting him and that's how I met Esperancita. It was the old man, on the other hand, who first told me about Enrique Ossorio, who was his grandfather, and let me see the trunk with the family papers. The reading of those papers and the romance with the daughter happened at the same time. I don't know how my feelings worked at that time, but she seemed very sweet to me and was very young. The truth is that at first I went to the house to talk to the old man and he soon started digging up the story of the suicide, the traitor, the gold-miner. But that is another part of the story, I'll tell you about it, because who knows, maybe you'll be able to help me with that, Maggi wrote to me. What is certain is that I have been working on those papers for years and sometimes I think that Don Luciano has not died because he is waiting for me to finish and does not want to feel disappointed. Of course everybody thinks the old man is crazy, but everybody thought the same of Enrique Ossorio and even of me, to stray no farther.

So I devote myself to smuggling? Why not? When all is said and done this country owes its independence to smuggling. Everyone here is dedicated to that pursuit, and so what; but I, as you will see, traffic in other illusions.

Last night, for example, I stayed until dawn discussing certain changes which could be made in the game of chess with Tardewski, my Polish friend. A game must be invented, he tells me, in which the positions do not always remain the same, in which the function of the men changes after they stay a while in the same spot; then they will become more effective or weaker. Under the present rules, he tells me, Maggi writes, the game does not develop, but remains always identical to itself. Only what changes and is transformed, Tardewski says, has meaning.

In these figurative debates we pass the idle provincial hours; because in the provinces, as is well known, life is monotonous. Greetings. Yours ever, Professor Marcelo Maggi.

III

We began writing to one another and kept on for months. It does not make sense for me to reproduce all of those letters. I have reread them all again, and I do not find the slightest clear evidence there that could have made me foresee what happened. At first it was all like a game: he stressed his professorial air and enjoyed himself. He recounted his provincial life in a slow, ironic way, described his conversations with Tardewski in some detail, asked, unenthusiastically, for information about my existence and situation, and carried on a sort of peaceful polemic with my tendency to second-guess his life. Your letters amuse me, he wrote to me, too many questions, as if there were a secret. There is a secret, but it is of no importance. At my age I have learned that I do not need to hide anything; I have learned, I mean, Maggi wrote to me, what I already knew, that I do not need to justify myself. I do not write to you, then, Maggi wrote to me, because I am trying to rescue something in the middle of this wasteland; I write to you because the years have been depositing memories in me like a crust and for me the past has turned into an old cripple. Perhaps for that reason I need a witness, someone, in short, who will listen to me attentively and at a distance. As you can see I try to be sincere, Maggi wrote to me from Concordia, Province of Entre Rios.

On the other hand he devoted himself, with

less and less enthusiasm, to disproving or correcting some of the facts I handled about his past. Where did you get that version about Coca? he wrote to me once, for example. She enjoyed the night wholeheartedly, but she was not at all perverse. At most she had that quota of perversion which is necessary to make life bearable, but no more. She was happy as she was: she never wanted to have a child, never repented of anything she had done. He who does not face up to his desires, Coca would say, is one whom the world can call a coward. I met her in 1933 because I was hidden for a while in a nightclub in Rosario which was run by a fellow Radical who had been police chief. Coca worked there and I seemed like a strange creature to her; the truth is that I had the involuntary air of a conspirator in Dostoevsky; she thought I was an anarchist, a sort of mystic or nihilist, and I suppose that is why she noticed me. I spent two months hidden in a little room in the attic of the cabaret, reading Sommariva's *The History of the Federal Interventions* and doing crossword puzzles. At dawn, when she had gotten out from under all of the customers, Coca would see me to drink yerba mate and I would talk to her about Leandro Alem.

Sometimes he included some references to his Radical past, but less and less and seemingly without enthusiasm. Nobody can imagine what 1945 was like for us Radicals. To make matters worse I spent most of the soirée in jail, so you can imagine. I got out in 1946 and the country was so different that I seemed like an eccentric, a sort of 1880's dandy just disembarked from the time machine. The fellows met at the Plaza Hotel and we listened to Chino Balbin who recommended that we "Dig deep in the furrow of Argentine hope" (that man always liked agrarian images). When I began to understand a little it was all over already and we were involved in another circus with the fall and exile of Peron, the "Fugitive Tyrant" and all of that.

He was always elusive, and if one had to look for a place where it could be said that he wanted to anticipate what happened, one would only find this sort of fragile appearance. I am convinced that nothing ever happens to us that we have not foreseen, nothing for which we are not prepared. It has been our luck to live at a bad time, like all men, and one must learn to live without illusions. The friend of a friend once had an accident: a fellow who was half-crazy attacked him with a razor and held him hostage in the bathroom of a bar for almost three hours. He wanted them to give him a car and a passport and to be allowed to cross into Brazil, otherwise he was going to kill him (my friend's friend). The madman trembled like one possessed and put the razor to his throat and at a given moment made him kneel and say the Our Father. The thing was getting worse and worse, when all of a sudden the madman recovered from his fit and dropped the weapon and started asking for everyone's forgiveness. A moment of nerves like anybody can have, he said. My friend's friend came out of the bathroom walking as if in his sleep and leaned against a wall and said: Finally something has happened to me. Finally something has happened to me, isn't that sensational? Maggi wrote to me.

In truth, beyond those bits of news, beyond the parody of polemics we started from time to time, what ended up turning into the focus of Maggi's correspondence with me was his work on Enrique Ossorio. He had been writing that book for a long time and the problems that appeared began to crop up in his letters. I am like someone lost in his memory, he wrote to me, lost in a forest where I try to find a way to reconstruct the traces of that life among the proliferation of remains and testimonies and notes, the apparatus of oblivion. I suffer the classic misfortune of historians, Maggi wrote to me, although I am no more than an amateur historian. I suffer that classic misfortune: to have wanted to take possession of those documents in order to decipher the truth of a life in them, only to discover that the documents have ended up taking possession of me and imposing their rhythms and their chronology and their particular truth on me. I dream about that man, he writes to me. I see him according to the lithography of the period: magnanimous, desperate, the feverish glow in his eyes which carried him to his death. He became more and more stubborn about the suicidal obsession which contained, nevertheless, the whole truth of his period. They say that he was a traitor: there are men destined by history to commit treason and he was one of them. But he always knew it, Maggi wrote to me; he knew it from the beginning and up until the end, as if he had understood that that was his destiny, his way of struggling for the country.

In fact, the story of Enrique Ossorio began to become manifest to me, little by little, fragmentarily, jumbled in Marcelo's letters. Because he never told me explicitly: I want to acquaint you with this story, I want you to know what meaning it has for me and what I intend to

do with it. He never told me directly but he made me know it, as if in a sense he had already named me his heir, as if he foresaw what was going to happen or feared it. What is sure is that I gradually reconstructed fragments of the life of Enrique Ossorio.

Son of a colonel in the wars of Independence, Ossorio is one of the founders of the Literary Salon. He studies law and is accepted into the bar at the same time as Alberdi, Vicente F. López, Frías, and Carlos Tejedón. While he attends the university he becomes interested in philosophy and takes private courses on Vico and Hegel with Pedro de Angelis. His abilities are so outstanding that de Angelis persuades him to continue his studies in Paris and recommends him personally in a letter to his friend Jules Michelet. At the last moment and for obscure reasons Ossorio decides not to make the trip and remains in Buenos Aires. Toward the end of 1837 he is encharged with a job in the private office of Rosas and becomes one of the men in the dictator's confidence. In mid-1838 he links himself with Maza's clandestine group which is preparing a conspiracy against Rosas. From his office, Ossorio maintains a correspondence in code with Felix Frias, exiled in Montevideo, to whom he sends secret information and documents. When the plot is discovered no one suspects him and he remains close to Rosas for a time until he decides, although his life is not really in danger, to flee, and takes refuge in the house of his cousin, Amparo Escalada. He lives hidden in the cellar of her house for some six months. The woman will have a child by him, whom Ossorio will never know. In 1842 he crosses to Montevideo. The exiles are fearful; they think he is a double agent. Isolated and disillusioned with politics, he goes to Brazil and settles in Rio Grande do Sul where he lives with a black woman slave and dedicates himself to writing poems and contracting syphilis. The woman dies of an attack of malaria and Ossorio, sick, embarks for Chile. In Santiago he offers to give private classes and has printed on his personal cards: *Enrique Ossorio. Maître de philosophie*. His only student is a Jesuit priest who works for Rosas informing on the activity of the exiles. At the same time Ossorio prepares the project of an *Encyclopedia of American Ideas* in the writing of which he tries to interest Sarmiento, Alberdi, Echeverría, Juan María Gutiérrez. The project fails and Ossorio devotes himself to journalism. In 1848 he embarks for California, attracted by the gold fever. He walks around San Francisco and around the uninhabited Sierra Nevada in the company of tramps, adventurers and prostitutes, German and Chilean miners. In less than six months he manages to amass a fortune and leaves California to make his way to Boston, where he frequents the company of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who has married a sister of Mary Mann, Sarmiento's friend. Later he settles in New York, prepared to devote himself to literature. He passes whole nights shut in a room on the East River writing various texts (among them a Utopian novel); at the same time he undertakes an abundant correspondence addressed to Rosas, de Angelis, Sarmiento, Alberdi, and Urquiza (whom he sees as the axis of national unity in the future). He has begun to show signs of the delirium which will lead him to madness. One night, terribly drunk, he provokes a disturbance in a house of prostitution in Harlem in which a woman ends up dead. Even though he cannot be proved responsible for that crime, he is deported and sent to Chile. He lives for two months in Copiapó, isolated, alone, consumed by insomnia and hallucinations, in the midst of feverish activity, rewriting his papers and organizing his personal archive. One afternoon, after walking around the port until dusk, he goes to the cemetery; lying down on the tomb of a famous actress, he smokes a cigar and watches the night fall. Later he shoots himself in the head. Two weeks later Rosas is defeated by Urquiza at Caseros.

Maggi had at hand the unpublished documents preserved by the Ossorio family for almost a hundred years. These are the papers Esperancita's father puts in his hands: texts, letters, reports, and a *Diary* written by Ossorio in the United States. They had kept the trunk shut since the 1870s, Maggi writes to me. The papers arrived from Copiapó together with the gold Ossorio had gathered in California. The history of the family, we might say, forks there. On the one hand is the fortune with which (according to Ossorio's own calculations) it was possible to free five thousand black slaves, as if it were to occur to anyone to use that wealth to buy the freedom of five thousand black slaves. On the other hand, the trunk, the papers, the memories of the disgrace. Amparo, the cousin, received both things at the same time. Disconsolate because of the news of the suicide, she kept herself in a state of perpetual widowhood and never married. She walked around the house, they say, like a ghost, and from time to time shut herself up in the

basement where she had been seduced and made love to forevermore by Enrique Ossorio; she shut herself in to read what he had written during the years of exile. In truth it was she who encharged herself with preserving those documents, because she was more interested in the dead man's words than in all the gold in California. She read those papers as if they were the signs which would allow her to understand the misfortune that was her life and there, sheltered in those letters, she could see the outlines of the barely remembered but always longed for body of the suicide. As for the son, that is, Don Luciano's father, he became the real heir and what he did was to invest that fortune well, to invest it well and at the right moment, taking advantage of that period in the country's history in which, with gold in hand and good contacts, one could buy all the land one cared to imagine. So that in 1862 Esperancita's grandfather was already one of the most powerful landowners in the group of men who supported the candidacy of General Mitre for president. If he had had his way his father's papers would have been burnt. And if he did not do that it was because his mother survived him to prevent it. In any case, before dying that man made the whole family swear upon the trunk itself that no one would let those documents be publicly known until at least a hundred years had passed. And that, Maggi wrote to me, was how they survived and I could receive them. In truth, Maggi wrote to me, I try to use those materials that are like the other side of history and to be faithful to the facts, but at the same time I would like to reveal the exemplary character of the life of that sort of Rimbaud, who went off into the byways of history in order to render better witness to it. I face difficulties of various kinds. First and foremost, it is clear that it is not my intention to write what is called, in the classic sense, a Biography. I am trying rather to show the historic movement that is contained in that essentially *eccentric* life. For example: Doesn't Ossorio exhibit in a dramatic way a tendency that is latent in the newly acquired autonomy of the intelligentsia in Argentina during the time of Rosas? Aren't his writings the other side of Sarmiento's? Besides, there are various unknowns: Was he really a traitor? That is to say, did he always keep in contact with Rosas? I have various working hypotheses that at the same time are different ways of organizing the material and ordering the discussion. It is necessary, above all, to reproduce the *evolution* which defines Ossorio's existence, that sense which is so hard to capture. Opposed in *appearance* to the movement of history. There is something like an excess, a Utopian trace in his life. But, as Ossorio himself wrote (Maggi writes to me), what is exile but a form of Utopia? The exile is the Utopian man *par excellence*, Ossorio wrote, Maggi writes to me; he lives in a constant feeling of homesickness for the future.

I am sure, on the other hand, that the only way of capturing the sense that defines his destiny is to alter the chronology, to go from the final madness to the moment in which Ossorio participates, with the rest of the generation of Romantics, in the foundation of the principles and bases of what we call the national culture. In that way, perhaps, by means of that inversion, it will be possible to capture what that man's *misfortunes* express. Thus, that life (Maggi seemed to be recommending to me) might be written starting with the suicide, and at the beginning of the book should be these lines that Ossorio wrote before killing himself. *Listen, my dear Alberdi: for with death in me I have special knowledge. A hateful, very dangerous road, that of solitude. To all of my countrymen or compatriots: I did not act except from conviction in this struggle. Must we always remain far from the native land? Even the echoes of my mother tongue are dying out in me. Exile is like a long wakefulness. I know that aside from myself nobody in the world will believe in me. Many disloyalties will yet be discovered. Ah, scoundrels! Goodbye, brother. I want to be buried in the city of Buenos Aires: this is what I most desire that you see to: I beg it by the Sun of the May Revolution. May you all remain passionate because passion is the only link we have with truth. Treat my writings with respect: they have been properly put in order, and I call them my Annals. Who will write this history? No matter how much shame covers me, I would not give up either my despair or my decency. I like and have always liked your way of signing a letter, so allow me to copy you: Fatherland and Freedom. And I must call you by your first name this once, with your permission, Juan Bautista. Yours, Your comrade, Enrique Ossorio, the one who is going to die.*

IV

I passed the night almost without sleeping, because of the heat, and now I am sitting facing the fresh air from the open window: the light of dawn quivers, as if fragile, and you can see the river go by among the willows; the water sometimes rises, carries everything away. People, here, learn to live on the edge of misfortune. The tourists call this misery local color. Border towns, apparently, are picturesque.

Tardewski says that nature does not exist except in dreams. Nature only makes itself manifest, he says, in the form of catastrophes or in lyric poetry. Everything that surrounds us, he says, is artificial: it bears the mark of man. And what other landscape deserves to be admired? I was thinking about this just now, before I started writing to you. Various complications, difficult to explain in a letter, make me believe that for a time you will not have news of me. Correspondence is, at bottom, an anachronistic genre, a sort of tardy inheritance from the eighteenth century: those who lived in that period still believed in the pure truth of the written word. And we? Times have changed, words are lost with ever greater facility, you can see them float on the water of history, sink, come up again, mixed in the current with the water hyacinths. We will have to find a way of meeting one another soon.

Some setbacks have made me change my plans. In any case I would like you to come see me at some point. I will let you know how and when. In the meantime would you do me the favor of visiting Don Luciano Ossorio and giving him my regards? I don't know if I will be able to write to him. I have told you more than once, doubtless in an overly emphatic or comic way, that for me history is what puts together these plots. On the other hand, we should not distrust the strength and opacity of what is real. The dove who feels the resistance of the air, my friend Tardewski says quoting Kant: The dove who feels the resistance of the air thinks that it could fly better in the void.

Our misfortunes are woven on the loom of those false illusions. Warmest regards. Marcelo Maggi.

I received your letter a while ago. First point: of course I will come see you whenever you want. Second point: what is the meaning of the *warning* that for a while I am not going to have news of you? I want to make clear that you have no obligation to write to me at a particular time, no obligation to answer me by the next mail or anything like that. It doesn't seem to me that it is a matter of playing one card right after another as in a game of *truco*. It doesn't seem to me that letter-writing needs to be confused with a debt to a bank, even if it is true that they are somewhat related: letters are like scrip, received and owed. One always has a feeling of some remorse towards a friend to whom one *owes* a letter and the joy of receiving them does not always make up for the obligation to answer them. On the other hand correspondence is a perverse genre: it needs distance and absence to prosper. People only write to one another when they are close by in epistolary novels, in which they even send letters instead of talking to one another while living under the same roof, forced by the rhetoric of the genre, of which it must be said in passing that the telephone wiped it (the epistolary genre) out, making it totally anachronistic (it could be said that with Hemingway we pass from the epistolary to the telephonic genre: not because the characters talk a lot on the phone in his stories, but because the conversations, even when the characters are sitting face to face, for example in a bar or in bed, always have the dry, choppy style of telephone conversations, that way of establishing the relation between the speakers that the linguist Roman Jakobson—to use my academic knowledge and confront, in passing, the imperial science of our time with the anachronistic handicraft of the discipline you practice and which lingers in twilight after the splendor which sustained it in the nineteenth century, when it turned, with Hegel, into the lay substitute for religion; the dashes bring to a close this digression on linguistics and history—calls the phatic function of language and which could be represented, in the case of Hemingway, in more or less the following form: Are you all right? Yes, fine. You? Fine, just fine. A beer? Why not, a beer. Cold? What? Your beer—cold? Yes, cold, etc., etc.). So the epistolary genre has aged, and nevertheless I confess that one of the fantasies of my life is sometime to write a novel composed of letters. In truth, now that I think about it, there are no epistolary novels in Argentine literature, which is of course due (to confirm one of the theories hinted at in the rather melancholy letter I received from you recently) to the fact that in Argentina we had no eighteenth century. In any case, beyond that fantasy of sometime writing a story made up of letters, apart from that, sometimes at night, when the humidity of Buenos Aires is what keeps *me* from falling asleep, I start thinking about all the letters I have written in my lifetime, loaded as they must be, if one could read them all over again at one time, with projects, fantasies, various bits of news of that other self I was during those years I wrote them. What autobiography could be imagined better than the set of letters one has written and sent to various addresses, women, relatives, old friends, in different situations and moods? But in any case, one could think, what would one find in all of those letters? Or at least what would I

find? Changes in my handwriting, above all; but also changes in my style, the history of certain changes in style and in the way of using the written language. And what is the biography of a writer finally but the history of the transformations of his style? What else, besides these modulations, could one find after following this trajectory? I do not believe, for instance, that one could find experiences that are worth the trouble in those letters. Doubtless in them one could find or remember events, petty facts, even passions of one's life that have been forgotten, details, the story, perhaps, of those events written while they were being experienced, but nothing more. At bottom, as was said so well by that friend of yours whom the madman with the knife held hostage, at bottom nothing extraordinary can happen to us, nothing worth the trouble of telling. I mean, in fact, that it is true nothing ever happens to us. All the events one can tell about oneself are no more than fancies. Because at most what can one *have* in one's life but two or three experiences? Two or three experiences, no more (sometimes, not even that). There are no experiences any more (were there in the nineteenth century?); there only are fantasies. All of us make up various stories for ourselves (which at bottom are all the same) to imagine that something has happened to us in our lives, a story or a series of stories which ultimately are all that we really have lived, stories one tells oneself so as to imagine that one has experiences or that something meaningful has happened to one. But who can guarantee that the story's order is that of life? We are made of those illusions, dear master, as you know better than I. For instance, I always remember with nostalgia the period when I was a student. I lived alone, in a boarding house, in La Plata, alone for the first time in my life; I was eighteen and had the feeling that adventures happened one after another. Adventures (at least I thought they were adventures) happened to me one after another at that time. Not only with women, although during that period things started to go very well for me (for no particular reason, no special result of my ability at seduction: in the School of Humanities there were more or less 38 women for every man, so that, if one didn't pick anyone up there, one suffered from a particular kind of leprosy which only women perceived). Not only with women, as I said, but rather that things happened. I was free and *available*: that's what the fascinating feeling of living in the middle of an adventure consisted of. I could get up in the middle of the night or go out at dawn, get on a train and get off anywhere at all, go into an unknown town, pass the night in a hotel, dine among strangers, traveling salesmen, murderers, walk through empty streets, without a history, an unknown, a stranger who observes or imagines the adventures that develop around him. That, for me, at that time, was the fascinating possibility of adventure. Now I realize that, as soon as mama's boys leave home, reality instantly turns for them into a kind of figurative representation of what for example hunting whales in the white sea was for Herman Melville. The bars are our whaling ports, which cannot but be at once comic and pathetic. To cap it all off, at that time I was convinced that I was going to be a great writer. Sooner or later, I thought, I am going to turn into a great writer; but first, I thought, I should have adventures. And I thought that everything that was happening to me, any idiocy whatsoever, was a way of accumulating that depth of experience on which I assumed great writers built their great works. At that time, at eighteen or nineteen, I thought that when I reached thirty-five I would have exhausted all of the experience and at the same time would have a finished body of work, work so diverse and of such high quality that I would be able to go to Paris for four or five months of the easy life (that was for me the most spectacular model of triumph, I suppose). To arrive in Paris at thirty-five, saturated with experiences and with a whole body of written work, to then walk around the boulevards like a real man about town, one who already has done everything, so one imagines him walking around the boulevards of Paris. I dreamed of that at eighteen and look at me, I am past thirty, I wrote a book which I like less and less, and that would not matter, if it weren't for the fact that for a year now I cannot write, I mean, everything that I write seems like s--- to me. That exasperates me, to be frank. My personal life, to complement the tone of your last letter, seems fairly ridiculous to me when, all of a sudden, almost without wanting to, I think about it. I go to the paper to write bulls--- (to make matters worse, bulls--- about literature), and then I come here and shut myself in to write, but after a while find myself drawing lines, circles, figures, little pictures that seem to be the map of my soul, or if not I write things that the next day I cannot even touch with my fingertips without getting sick.

Today, as you can see, instead of that I have been sitting here for more than two hours, to write you this letter which seems like it will never

end, as if this were my way of responding to (or compensating for) that sort of enigmatic farewell that was your last letter. So I am writing these interminable pages for you, *mon oncle* Marcel, who have come from so far, from such an ancient place, from such a remote period of my life that your epistolary reappearance has been, in the last few months, the purest triumph of the fiction that I can show (not to say the only one). To sum up, I am advancing with a dizzying slowness in that sort of novel I am trying to write. I hear a tune and I cannot play it, said Coleman Hawkins I think it was. I hear a tune and I cannot play it: I don't know a better summing-up of the state I'm in. I know well enough what it's about, we can say that in a sense, at times, I hear that tune, but when I start to write, what comes out is the same old muck without the promise of music. Yesterday, when things had gotten really bad, in the early morning, I went out on the street and stood there for a while watching some guys from the Water Works (or the State Gas Company) digging a tunnel in the middle of the night; the guys were toiling digging that tunnel and I crossed the street to the Ramos Bar and ordered a beer and a double shot of gin because that mixture is the remedy Dickens advised for those at the edge of suicide. Not because I had decided to commit suicide or anything like that, but because I liked the idea: to think I was a suicide who walks (or rather slips along) through the city in the early morning while some guys dig a tunnel in the darkness, lit up by the yellow light of the street lamps; all that seemed like an adventure to me (the same as when I was eighteen). Wasn't that an adventure, one of those adventures I had had, without looking for them, when I was eighteen? My adventures had been reduced to this wretchedness? Then I went into the Ramos Bar, which was empty at that hour, except for one table where some guys who were pretty drunk had joined some low-class nightclub dancers. It was a sort of celebration or private event and they proceeded with all due solemnity. Above all, one of them, dressed in a checkered suit and a *lavallière* tie, his hair dyed a mouse-color, who, standing and swaying slightly, forced to hold onto the back of a chair in an attempt to maintain his dignity, raised his glass to make a speech and a toast to one of the ladies present (Miss Giselle) who apparently was celebrating her birthday or some similar anniversary that night. "I raise my cup and toast," said the sot, "the flower who graces this *petit fête*, the lovely Miss Giselle, because in her the springtimes have come one after another through the years, because in her the springtimes have come together, one after another, the springtimes come together in her" (he spoke half in verse) "until turning the fragrant years of her life into a bouquet of roses. I drink to her," the drunkard said, "and not to us or to me, for whom the years are like a death notice, like the sword of Themistocles which hangs over our hearts" (he said the sword of Themistocles, isn't that wonderful?). After which all the drunks and the ladies applauded and Miss Giselle, dressed in satin, leaned across the table to embrace him and said, "Thanks, Marquitos. Thanks, my dear, I am so moved, you are the artist we girls will always love." And she gave him a kiss and everybody was very touched and Giselle sat back down, but Marquitos stayed standing, holding on with utmost dignity to the edge of the chair so as not to sway in too obvious a way, and then he started the same speech all over again. "I want to toast and raise my cup once more," he said. "I want to toast again and raise this cup because I too am deeply moved on this unforgettable night," and he wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, "deeply moved, and I toast," said Marquitos, "the ladies and the friends here present and especially," he said, and he stopped for a moment, "especially." "It would be especially good if you finished; finish the toast, Marquitos," one of the guys said, and Marcos turned around very slowly until he faced Miss Giselle, greeted her with a slight nod and then sat down very carefully at the table once more, he too like a misunderstood artist who hears a tune and cannot play it, while I was finishing drinking the beer mixed with gin that Charles Dickens advised and, at that moment, with the guys outside still digging the tunnel under the yellow light, I began thinking about the painting by Franz Hals: *If I myself were the dark winter*. And so I keep writing to you until dawn, a letter which lasted the whole night to keep myself company, a letter which lasted until dawn in order to be able to go out then on the street and see if Marquitos is still at the Ramos Bar toasting Miss Giselle despite the fact that the threat of the terrible sword of Themistocles hangs over his heart. Warmest regards, Marcelo, and hoping to hear from you soon.

Emilio

P.S. I will try, of course, to see Luciano Ossorio. I will write to you about that and about my trip to Concordia (as soon as you let me know the manner and means of meeting you).□

Pablo Neruda

ODE TO A SHIP IN A BOTTLE

Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden

No one ever
sailed
as your ship sails;
transparent
day
never saw
a vessel
like that
tiny
petal
of glass
imprisoned
in your clasp
of dew,
bottle,
your winds
fill
its sails,
bottle,
yes,
substance of
sea voyage,
essence
of trajectory,
capsule
of love upon the waves,
work
of sirens!

I know that
through your delicate
throat
passed
wee
carpenters
on the backs
of bees, that flies
hauled in
tools,

nails, boards,
the finest strands
of rope;
and thus, within a bottle,
the perfect ship
took form:
the hull was the kernel of its beauty,
the masts rose thin as pins.

Then
to
their
in-
fini-
tes-
imal
islands
the shipbuilders returned,
and to sail the ship
inside the bottle
came,
singing,
a miniature crew
in blue.

And so, bottle,
within
your
sea and sky
was raised
a ship,
tiny, no,
minuscule
compared to the enormous waiting sea.

But the truth is,
no one
built it,
and only in dreams will it sail.

Silvina Ocampo

THE HOUSE OF SUGAR

Translated by Daniel Balderston

Superstitions kept Cristina from living. A coin with a blurry face, a spot of ink, the moon seen through two panes of glass, the initials of her name carved by chance on the trunk of a cedar: all these would make her mad with fear. The day we met she was wearing a green dress; she kept wearing it until it fell apart, since she said it brought her luck and that as soon as she wore another, a blue one which fit her better, we would no longer see each other. I tried to combat these absurd manias. I made her take note that she had a broken mirror in her room, yet she insisted on keeping it, no matter how I insisted that it was better to throw broken mirrors into water some moonlit night to get rid of the bad luck. She was never afraid if the light in the house went out all of a sudden; despite the fact that it was a definite omen of death, she would light any number of candles without thinking twice. She always left her hat on the bed, a mistake nobody else made. Her fears were more individual. She inflicted real privations on herself; for instance, she could not eat strawberries in the summertime, or hear certain pieces of music, or adorn her house with goldfish, which she liked so much. There were certain streets we could not cross, certain persons we could not see, certain movie theatres we could not frequent. At the beginning of our relationship, these superstitions seemed charming to me, but later they began to annoy and even seriously worry me. When we got engaged we had to look for a brand-new apartment because, according to her beliefs, the fate of the previous occupants would influence her life. (She at no point mentioned my life, as if the danger threatened only hers and our lives were not joined by love.) We visited all of the neighbourhoods in the city; we went even to the most distant suburbs in search of an apartment where no one had ever lived, but they had all been rented or sold. Finally I found a little house on Montes de Oca Street that looked like it was made of sugar. Its whiteness gleamed with extraordinary brilliance. It had a phone and a tiny garden in front. I thought that house was newly built, but found out that a family had occupied it in 1930 and that later, in order to rent it, the owner had remodeled it. I had to make Cristina believe no one had lived in the house and that it was the ideal place, the house of our dreams. When Cristina saw it, she cried out: "How different it is from the apartments we have seen! Here it smells clean. Nobody will be able to influence our lives or dirty them with thoughts that corrupt the air."

A few days later we got married and moved in there. My in-laws gave us the bedroom set, and my parents the dining-room set. We would furnish the rest of the house little by little. I was afraid Cristina would find out about my lie from the neighbours, but luckily she did her shopping outside the neighbourhood and never talked to them. We were happy, so happy that it sometimes frightened me. It seemed our tranquility would never be broken in that house of sugar, until a phone call destroyed my illusion. Luckily Cristina did not answer the phone that time, but she might answer it on some similar occasion. The person who called asked for Mrs. Violeta: she was no doubt the previous tenant. If Cristina found out that I had deceived her, our happiness would surely come to an end. She wouldn't ever speak to me again, would ask for a divorce, and even in the best possible outcome we would have to leave the house and go live, perhaps, in Villa Urquiza, perhaps in Quilmes, as tenants in one of the houses where they promised to give us some space to build a bedroom and a kitchen. With what? (With junk, for our money was not enough to buy better building material.) At night I was careful to take the phone off the hook, so that no inopportune call would awaken us. I put a mailbox by the gate on the street; I was the only possessor of the key, the distributor of the letters.

Early one morning there was a knock on the door and someone left a package. From my room I heard my wife protesting, then I heard the

sound of paper being ripped. I went downstairs and found Cristina with a velvet dress in her arms.

"They just brought me this dress," she said with enthusiasm.

She went running upstairs and put on the dress, which was very tight-fitting.

"When did you order it?"

"Some time ago. Does it fit well? I should wear it when we have to go to the theatre, don't you think?"

"How did you pay for it?"

"Mother gave me a few pesos."

It seemed strange to me, but I didn't say anything, so as not to offend her.

We loved each other madly. But my uneasiness began to bother me, even when I embraced Cristina at night. I noted that her character had changed: her happiness had turned to sadness, her communicativeness to reserve, her calm to nervousness. She lost her appetite. She no longer made those rich, rather heavy desserts out of whipped cream and chocolate that I so enjoyed, nor did she adorn the house from time to time with nylon ruffles, covering the toilet seat or the shelves in the dining room or the chests of drawers or other places in the house, as had been her custom. She would no longer wait for me at tea time with vanilla wafers, or feel like going to the theatre or the movies at night, not even when we were sent free tickets. One afternoon a dog entered the garden and lay down, howling, on the front doorstep. Cristina gave him meat and something to drink; after a bath which changed the colour of his fur, she announced that she would keep him and name him LOVE, because he had come to our house at a moment of real love. The dog had a black mouth, a sign of good pedigree.

Another afternoon I arrived home unexpectedly. I stopped at the gate because I saw a bicycle lying in the yard. I entered without making any noise, then hid behind a door and heard Cristina's voice.

"What do you want?" she repeated twice.

"I've come to get my dog," a girl's voice said. "He passed by this house so many times that he's become fond of it. This house looks as if it's made of sugar. Since they painted it, all of the passersby have noticed it. But I liked it better before, when it was the romantic pink colour of old houses. This house seemed very mysterious to me. I liked everything about it: the bird bath where the little birds came to drink, the vines with flowers like yellow trumpets, the orange tree. Ever since I was eight years old I have wanted to meet you, ever since that day we talked on the phone, do you remember? You promised you would give me a kite."

"Kites are for boys."

"Toys are sexless. I liked kites because they were like huge birds; I imagined flying on their wings. For you it was just a game promising me that kite; I didn't sleep all night. We met in the bakery, but you were facing the other direction and I didn't see your face. Ever since that day I've thought of nothing but you, of what your face looked like, your soul, your lying gestures. You never gave me that kite. The trees told me of your lies. Then we went to live in Moron with my parents. Now I've been back here only a week."

"I've lived in this house for just three months, and before that I never visited this neighbourhood. You must be mistaken."

"I imagined you exactly the way you are. I imagined you so many times! By some strange coincidence, my husband used to be engaged to you."

"I was never engaged to anyone except my husband. What's this dog's name?"

"Bruto."

"Take him away, please, before I get fond of him."

"Violeta, listen. If I take the dog to my house, he'll die. I can't take care of him. We live in a very tiny apartment. My husband and I both work, and there isn't anyone to take him out for a walk."

"My name isn't Violeta. How old is he?"

"Bruto? Two years old. Do you want to keep him? I'll visit him from time to time, for I'm very fond of him."

"My husband doesn't like strangers in his house, or for me to accept a dog as a present."

"Don't tell him, then. I'll wait for you every Monday at seven in the evening in Colombia Square. Do you know where it is? In front of Santa Felicitas Church, or if you prefer I can wait for you wherever and whenever you like: for instance, on the bridge by Constitution Station or in Lezama Park. I'll be happy just to see Bruto's eyes. Will you do me the favour of keeping him?"

"All right. I'll keep him."

"Thank you, Violeta."

"My name isn't Violeta."

"Did you change your name? For us you'll always be Violeta. Always the same mysterious Violeta."

I heard the dull sound of the door and Cristina's steps as she went up the stairs. I waited

a little before coming out of my hiding place and pretending I had just come in. Despite the fact that I had witnessed the innocence of the dialogue, I don't know why, but a muffled suspicion began gnawing at me. It seemed to me that I had watched a theatrical rehearsal and that the reality of the situation was something else. I did not confess I had witnessed the girl's visit to Cristina. I awaited further developments, always afraid that Cristina would discover my lie and lament that we had moved to this neighbourhood. Every afternoon I passed the square in front of Santa Felicitas Church to see whether Cristina had kept the appointment. Cristina seemed not to notice my uneasiness. Sometimes I even came to believe that I had dreamed it all. Hugging the dog, one day Cristina asked me: "Would you like my name to be Violeta?"

"I don't like flower names."

"But Violeta is pretty. It's a colour."

"I like your name better."

One Saturday, at sunset, I ran into her on the bridge by Constitution Station, leaning over the iron railing. I went up to her and she showed no sign of surprise.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just looking around. I like looking at the tracks from above."

"It's a very gloomy place, and I don't like your wandering around alone."

"It doesn't seem so gloomy to me. And why shouldn't I wander around alone?"

"Do you like the black smoke of the locomotives?"

"I like transportation. Dreaming about trips. Leaving without ever leaving. 'Going and staying and by staying leaving.'"

We returned home. Mad with jealousy (jealousy of what? of everything), I barely spoke to her along the way.

"Perhaps we could buy some little house in San Isidro or Olivos; this neighbourhood is so unpleasant," I said, pretending that I had the means to buy a house in one of those places.

"You're mistaken. We have Lezama Park very nearby here."

"It's desolate. The statues are broken, the fountains empty, the trees diseased. Beggars, old men and cripples go there with sacks, to throw out garbage or pick it up."

"I don't notice such things."

"Before, you didn't even like sitting on a bench where someone had eaten tangerines or bread."

"I've changed a lot."

"No matter how much you've changed, you can't like a park like that one. Yes, I know it has a museum with marble lions guarding the entrance and that you played there when you were a girl, but all of that doesn't mean anything."

"I don't understand you," Cristina answered me. And I felt she disliked me, with a dislike that could easily turn to hatred.

For days that seemed like years I watched her, trying to hide my anxiety. Every afternoon I passed the square by the church and on Saturdays went by the horrible black bridge at Constitution Station. One day I ventured to say to Cristina: "If we were to discover that this house was once inhabited by other people, what would you do, Cristina? Would you move away?"

"If other people lived in this house, they must have been like those sugar figurines on desserts or birthday cakes: sweet as sugar. This house makes me feel secure: is it the little garden by the entrance that makes me feel so calm? I don't know! I wouldn't leave here for all the money in the world. Besides, we don't have anywhere to go. You yourself said that some time ago."

I didn't insist, because it was hopeless. To reconcile myself to the idea, I thought about how time would put things back the way they were.

One morning the doorbell rang. I was shaving and could hear Cristina's voice. When I finished shaving, my wife was talking to the intruder. I spied on them through the crack in the door. The stranger had a deep voice and such enormous feet that I burst out laughing.

"If you see Daniel again you'll pay dearly for it, Violeta."

"I don't know who Daniel is and my name isn't Violeta," my wife answered.

"You're lying."

"I don't lie. I don't have anything to do with Daniel."

"I want you to know how things stand."

"I don't want to listen to you."

Cristina covered her ears with her hands. I went into the room and told the intruder to get out. I observed her feet, hands and neck from close up. Then I realized it was a man dressed as a woman. I didn't have time to think what I should do; like a flash of lightning, he disappeared, leaving the door half-open behind him.

Cristina and I never commented on the episode, why I'll never know; it was as if our lips were sealed except for nervous, frustrated kisses or useless words.

It was about that time, such an unhappy time for me, that Cristina suddenly started feeling like singing. Her voice was pleasant, but it exasperated me, because it formed part of that secret world that drew her away from me. Why, if she had never sung before, did she now sing day and night, as she dressed or bathed or cooked or closed the blinds?

One day I heard Cristina say the enigmatic words: "I suspect I am inheriting someone's life, her joys and sorrows, mistakes and successes. I'm bewitched." I pretended not to have heard that tormenting phrase. Nonetheless, I began, God knows why, to learn what I could in the neighbourhood about who Violeta was, where she was, all the details of her life.

Half a block from our house there was a shop where they sold postcards, paper, notebooks, pencils, erasers, and toys. For the purpose of my inquiries the clerk at that shop seemed like the best person: she was talkative, curious, and susceptible to flattery. Under the pretext of buying a notebook and some pencils, I went to talk to her one afternoon. I praised her eyes, hands, hair. I did not venture to pronounce the word Violeta. I explained that we were neighbours. I finally asked her who had lived in our house. I shyly said: "Didn't someone named Violeta live there?"

She answered vaguely, which made me even more uneasy. The next day I tried to find out some other details at the grocery store. They told me that Violeta was in a mental hospital and gave me the address.

"I sing with a voice that is not my own," Cristina told me, mysterious once more. "Before, it would have upset me, but now I enjoy it. I'm someone else, perhaps someone happier than I."

Once again I pretended not to have heard her. I was reading the newspaper.

I confess I did not pay much attention to Cristina, since I spent so much time and energy finding out details about Violeta's life.

I went to the mental hospital, which was located in Flores. There I asked after Violeta, and they gave me the address of Arsenia Lopez, her voice teacher.

I had to take the train from Retiro Station to Olivos. On the way some dirt got in my eye, so that at the moment I arrived at Arsenia Lopez's house tears were pouring from my eyes as if I were crying. From the front door I could hear women's voices gargling the scales, accompanied by a piano that sounded more like an organ.

Tall, thin, terrifying, Arsenia appeared at the end of a hallway, pencil in hand. I told her timidly that I had come in search of news of Violeta.

"You're the husband?"

"No, a relative," I answered, wiping my tears with a handkerchief.

"You must be one of her countless admirers," she told me, half-closing her eyes and taking my hand. "You must have come to find out what they all want to know: what were Violeta's last days like? Sit down. There's no reason to imagine that a dead person was necessarily pure, faithful, good."

"You want to console me," I told her.

She, pressing my hand with her moist hand, answered: "Yes. I want to console you. Violeta was not only my pupil, she was also my best friend. If she got angry at me, it was perhaps because she had confided in me too much and could no longer deceive me. The last days I saw her she complained bitterly about her fate. She died of envy. She constantly repeated: 'Someone has stolen my life from me, but she'll pay for it. I will no longer have my velvet dress; she'll have it. Bruto will be hers; men will no longer disguise themselves as women to enter my house but her house instead; I'll lose my voice, and it will pass to that unworthy throat; Daniel and I will no longer embrace on the bridge by Constitution Station, imagining an impossible love, leaning as we used to over the iron railing, watching the trains go away.'"

Arsenia Lopez looked me in the eye and said: "Don't worry. You'll meet many other women who are more loyal. We both know she was beautiful, but is beauty the only good thing in the world?"

Speechless, horrified, I left that house, without revealing my name to Arsenia Lopez; when she said goodbye, she tried to hug me, to show her sympathy for me.

That day Cristina turned into Violeta, at least for me. I tried following her day and night to find her in the arms of her lovers. I became so estranged from her that I came to view her as a stranger. One winter night she fled. I searched for her until dawn.

I don't know who was the victim of whom, in that house of sugar, which now stands empty.□

Anghel Dumbrăveanu

ONLY THE BLANK PAGE

Translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Irina Grigorescu

I am left with only the blank page
Of an endless wasteland
Where the wind from the tropics inscribes
Signs which cannot be understood.
How we flee from sorrow,
How we search for the undefined moment.
Footsteps can be heard at the edge of the world.
Could it be the woman who can no longer come here?
Could it be the night which awaits me?
I am left with only the blank page
Of an ocean shore
Where a frightened, dreamlike
Apparition passed by.

Ana María Matute

THE CONSCIENCE

Translated by Michael Scott Doyle

She could not bear it any longer. She was certain that she would no longer be able to endure the presence of that loathsome vagabond. She had decided to put an end to it, to finish it once and for all, no matter what the outcome, rather than put up with his tyranny.

She had been wrestling with it for nearly fifteen days. What she could not understand was Antonio's tolerance of that man. No: it truly was strange.

The tramp had asked for a night's hospitality: precisely the night of Ash Wednesday, when the wind was kicking up a blackish dust, whirling, which lashed the windowpanes with a parched crackling. Then the wind stopped. A strange calm came, and she thought, while closing and adjusting the shutters:

"I don't like this calm."

In effect, she had not even bolted the door when that man arrived. She heard him call from out back, at the small door to the kitchen:

"Landlady . . ."

Mariana gave a start. The man, old and tattered, was there, hat in hand, with a beggar's attitude.

"God be with you . . .," she began to say. But the vagabond's little eyes were looking at her oddly, in such a way that she was cut short.

Many men just like him had asked for the favor of her roof on winter nights. But there was something about that man which terrified her for no reason.

The tramp began to sing his song: "For just one night, would they let him sleep in the stable; a piece of bread and the stable: nothing more. A storm was brewing . . ."

In effect, Mariana heard the rain drumming outside against the wooden door. A mute rain, thick, announcing the coming storm.

"I'm alone," she said drily. "What I mean to say . . . when my husband is on the road I don't want strangers in the house. Move along, and God be with you."

But the tramp stood still, staring at her. Slowly he put his hat on, and said:

"I'm a poor old man, Landlady. I've never done anyone any harm. I'm not asking for much: a piece of bread . . ."

At that moment the two maids, Marcelina and Salomé, entered running. They were coming from the garden, with their aprons over their heads, shouting and laughing. Mariana felt a strange relief upon seeing them.

"All right," she said. "All right . . . but just for tonight. I'd better not find you still here when I wake up tomorrow . . ."

The old man bowed, smiling, and recited a strange ballad of gratitude.

Mariana went upstairs and went to bed. During the night the storm lashed against the bedroom windows and she slept poorly.

The next morning, upon going down to the kitchen, the clock on the dresser struck eight. On entering she was surprised and irritated. Seated at the table, calm and well rested, the tramp was feasting on a sumptuous breakfast: fried eggs, a large chunk of soft bread, wine . . . Mariana felt a wave of anger, perhaps mixed with fear, and she confronted Salomé, who was working quietly in the kitchen:

"Salomé!" she commanded, her voice sounding harsh, hard. "Who told you to give this man . . . and why didn't he leave at dawn?"

Her words were cut short, they became muddled, because of the rage sweeping over her. Salomé stood widemouthed, holding her skimmer on high, which was dripping on the floor.

"But I . . .," she began. "He told me . . ."

The tramp had risen to his feet and was slowly wiping his lips on his sleeve.

"Madam," he said, "Madam, you do not remember . . . last night you said: 'Give the poor old man a bed in the attic, and give him whatever he wants to eat.' Didn't Madam Landlady say that last night? I heard it very clearly . . . . Or does she regret it today?"

Mariana wanted to say something, but her voice had suddenly frozen. The old man was staring at her intensely with his black and

penetrating little eyes. She turned away and anxiously went out through the kitchen door, toward the garden.

The day had dawned gray, but the rain had stopped. Mariana shivered from the cold. The grass was soaked, and in the distance the road was being erased by a subtle mist. She heard the old man's voice behind her, and, without wanting, she pressed her hands together.

"I would like to have a word with you, Madam Landlady . . . . Nothing important."

Mariana remained still, looking toward the road.

"I'm an old tramp . . . but sometimes old tramps find out about things. Yes: I was *there. I saw it all,* Madam Landlady. *I saw it, with these very eyes . . .*"

Mariana opened her mouth. But she was unable to say anything.

"What are you talking about, old dog?" she said. "I'm warning you that my husband will arrive with the wagon at ten, and he doesn't put up with this kind of nonsense from anybody!"

"I know, I know he doesn't take any nonsense from anybody!" replied the tramp. "That's why you won't want him to know about anything . . . anything *I saw* that day. Isn't that right?"

Mariana turned away quickly. Her fury had vanished. Her heart was pounding, confusedly. "What's he talking about? What does he know . . .? What did he see?" But she held her tongue. She just looked at him, full of hatred and fear. The old man was smiling with his bare, ugly gums.

"I'll stay here for a while, my good Landlady: yes, for just a while, to regain my strength, until the sun comes out again. Because I'm old now, and my legs are very tired. Very tired . . ."

Mariana began to run. The fine wind hit her in the face. When she reached the edge of the well she stopped. She felt like her heart was leaping out of her chest.

That was the first day. Then Antonio arrived with the wagon. Every week he brought goods up from Palomar. Besides having the inn, they owned the only business in the village. Their house, large and wide, surrounded by the garden, stood at the entrance to town. They lived comfortably, and the townsfolk thought Antonio was wealthy. "Wealthy," thought Mariana, annoyed. Ever since the arrival of the loathsome vagabond she had been pale, lethargic. "And if he weren't, would I have ever married him?" No. It was not hard to understand why she had married that brutal man, fourteen years her senior, a sullen and feared man, solitary. She was pretty. Yes: the whole town recognized this fact, and said as much—even Constantino, who was in love with her. But Constantino was a simple sharecropper, like her. And she was tired of being hungry, of working, of grief, yes, fed up with it. So she married Antonio.

Mariana felt a strange trembling. The old man had taken up residence nearly fifteen days ago. He slept, he ate, and he brazenly deloused himself in the sun, when it was shining, by the garden gate. On the first day Antonio asked:

"What's he doing here?"

"I felt sorry for him," she said, pressing the fringes of her shawl between her fingers. "He's so old . . . and the weather's so bad . . ."

Antonio did not say anthing. It looked to her like he was going over to the old man to throw him out. She ran up the stairs. She was afraid. Yes: she was very much afraid . . . . "What if the old man saw Constantino climbing the chestnut tree, under my window? What if he saw him jumping into my room, on those nights when Antonio was away with the wagon, on the road . . .? What could he be talking about, if not that, when he says *I saw it all, yes, I saw it with these very eyes*?"

She could no longer bear it. No: she had reached her limit. The old man was not just living in her house. Now he was asking for money. He had begun to ask for money, too. And the strange thing was that Antonio did not speak of him again. He simply ignored him. Only, from time to time, he would look at her. Mariana could feel his large eyes fixed on her, black and shining, and she would begin to tremble.

That afternoon Antonio was going to Palomar. He was yoking the mules to the wagon, and she could hear the voice of the stable boy mingling with that of Salomé, who was giving him a hand. Mariana felt cold. "I can't bear it any longer. I simply cannot. Going on like this is impossible. I'll tell him to leave, he must leave. I can't go on living under this threat." She felt ill: sick with fear. The thing with Constantino, because of her fright, had stopped. She could no longer see him. The very idea made her teeth chatter. She knew Antonio would kill her. She was sure he would kill her. She knew what he was like.

When she saw the wagon vanishing from view on the road, she went down to the kitchen. The old man was dozing by the fire. She looked at him and said to herself: "If I had the courage, I would kill him." She saw the iron tongs, within easy reach. But she would not do it. She knew she

could not bring herself to do it. "I'm a coward. I'm a big coward and I love life." This was her weakness: "This love for life . . ."

"Old man!" she exclaimed. Although she spoke in a low tone, the vagabond opened one of his sly little eyes. "He wasn't asleep," Mariana thought. "He wasn't sleeping, the crafty old fox."

"Follow me," she told him. "I have to talk to you."

The old man followed her to the well. There Mariana turned to look at him.

"You can do whatever you like, you old dog. Tell my husband everything, if you want. But you are getting out. You are leaving this house immediately . . . ."

The old man was silent for several seconds. Then he smiled.

"When does Master Landlord return home?"

Mariana was white. The old man observed her beautiful face, the dark rings around her eyes. She had lost weight.

"Get out!" she told him. "Leave here at once."

She had made up her mind. Yes: the vagabond could read it in her eyes. She was determined and desperate. He was experienced, and he knew those eyes. "There's nothing can be done," he said to himself philosophically. "That's it for the sunny weather. There go the nourishing meals, the mattress, my shelter. Let's go, old dog, let's get a move on. Time to hit the road."

"Okay," he said. "I'm leaving. But he will know about everything . . ."

Mariana remained silent. Perhaps she was a bit more pale. Suddenly the old man felt a slight tremor: "This one is capable of doing something bad. Yes: she's the kind to hang herself from a tree or something like that." He felt pity. She was still young and beautiful.

"Okeydoke," he said. "Madam Landlady wins. I'm going . . . what else can I do? To tell you the truth, I never really had high hopes . . . Of course, I enjoyed myself here. I won't forget the stews prepared by Salomé nor the wine of Master Landlord . . . I won't forget. I'm on my way."

"Right now," she said quickly. "This very moment, leave . . . . And you can start running if you want to catch him! You can start running, old dog, with your filthy tales . . ."

The vagabond smiled sweetly. He picked up his walking stick and his leather shepherd's pouch. He was on his way out when, from the palisade, he turned to say:

"Naturally, Madam Landlady, *I never saw anything*. I mean, I don't even know if there was something to see. But I've been on the road many a long year, so many years on the road! Nobody in this world has a pure conscience, not even children. No: not even children, my lovely Landlady. Look a child in the eye and say to him: "I know all about it! Be careful . . ." And the child will begin to tremble. He will shake just like you, lovely Landlady."

Mariana felt something strange, like a crackling in her heart. She did not know whether it was bitter or full of a violent joy. She could not tell. She moved her lips and wanted to say something. But the old man closed the palisade gate behind him, and turned to look at her. His smile was malignant as he said:

"A bit of advice, Landlady: watch out for your Antonio. Yes: Master Landlord also has his reasons for allowing the idleness of old beggars under his roof, excellent reasons, I would swear, by the way he looked at me!"

The fog on the road grew thicker, and it was sinking low. Mariana watched him leave, until he was lost in the distance.□

Anghel Dumbrăveanu

RUNES

Translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Irina Grigorescu

The women have fled from my autumn, I am alone.
Desolation dawns in my empty dreams. I can hear
The wind driving strange ice horses.
Now winter birds will start coming from the north.
I'll learn the syllables of cold, my shadow
Will creep more deeply into the earth;
Long nights will come and noiselessly tell me
The runes of silence, never to be solved.
Late at night, trees will shake phosphorescent bones
Against the black windows, without ever knowing
That man's seasons do not come back.

Silvina Ocampo

THE GUESTS

Translated by Daniel Balderston

For winter vacation, Lucio's parents had planned a trip to Brazil. They wanted to show Lucio the Corcovado, the Sugarloaf, and Tijuca, and to admire the sights afresh through their child's eyes.

Lucio fell ill with German measles: that's not too serious, but "with his face and arms looking like grits," as his mother said, he couldn't travel.

They decided to leave him in the care of an old servant, a very fine woman. Before their departure they recommended that she buy a cake with candles for the child's birthday, which was coming up, even if his little friends wouldn't be able to come and share in it: they wouldn't be coming to the party because of the inevitable fear of contagion.

Joyfully, Lucio said goodbye to his parents: he thought that farewell would bring him nearer his birthday, which was so important for him. To comfort him, even though there was no need to comfort him, his parents promised to bring him a painting of the Corcovado made of butterfly wings, a wooden knife with a view of the Sugarloaf painted on the handle, and a telescope through which one could see the most important sights of Rio de Janeiro, with its palm trees, or of Brasilia, with its red earth.

The day consecrated to happiness, in Lucio's hopes, was slow in coming. Vast zones of sadness impeded its arrival, but one morning, so different for him from other mornings, the cake with six candles (which the servant had bought, obeying the instructions of the lady of the house) finally sparkled on the table in Lucio's room. Also, by the front door, a new bicycle gleamed, painted yellow, a present left by his parents.

There's nothing so infuriating as unnecessary waiting: that was why the servant tried to celebrate the birthday, light the candles, and enjoy the cake at lunch time, but Lucio protested, saying that his guests would come in the afternoon.

"In the afternoon, cake seems heavier on the digestion, just as an orange in the morning is of gold, in the afternoon of silver and at night is deadly. The guests won't come," the servant added. "Their mothers won't let them come, for fear of contagion. They already told your mother."

Lucio refused to listen to reason. After the squabble, the servant and the child did not speak until tea time.

She took a nap and he looked out the window, waiting.

At five o'clock there was knocking at the door. The servant went to open it, thinking it was a delivery boy or a messenger. But Lucio knew who was knocking. It could not be anyone but his guests. He smoothed his hair while looking at himself in the mirror, then changed his shoes and washed his hands. A group of impatient girls was waiting with their mothers.

"No boys amongst the guests. How strange!" the servant exclaimed. "What's your name?" she asked one of the girls, who looked nicer than the others.

"My name is Livia."

The others said their names all at once and came in.

"Ladies, please come in and sit down," the servant told the women, who obeyed right away.

Lucio paused by the door to his room. He already looked more grown up! One by one, looking them in the eye, looking at their hands and feet, taking a step backward to be able to see them better, he greeted the girls.

Alicia was wearing a tight-fitting wool dress, and a knit cap, the old kind that's back in fashion. She looked like an old woman and smelled of camphor. When she took out her handkerchief, mothballs fell out of her pockets, but she gathered them up and put them back in. She was no doubt precocious, since the expression on her face showed a profound preoccupation with everything that was happening around her. She was worried about the other girls pulling on her hair ribbons, and about a package she grasped tightly under her arm and refused to put down

anywhere. This package contained the birthday present, a present that poor Lucio would never receive.

Livia was exuberant. Her glance seemed to catch on fire and then go out like that of those dolls that run on batteries. As exuberant as she was affectionate, she hugged Lucio and took him into a corner, to tell him a secret: the present she was bringing him. She did not need any words to speak: that detail, unpleasant for everyone but Lucio, seemed a jest played on the others. In a tiny box, which she unwrapped herself, since she couldn't stand the slowness with which Lucio unwrapped it, there were two crude magnetized dolls, who could not resist kissing, mouth to mouth, their necks straining, whenever they got within a certain distance of each other. For a long while the little girl showed Lucio how to play with the dolls in such a way that their postures would be more perfect or more strange. Inside the same little box there was a partridge that whistled and a green crocodile. The presents—or the girl's charms—totally captivated Lucio's attention. He neglected the rest of the delegation, and hid in a corner of the house with the dolls and Livia.

Irma, her hands forming fists, her lips pursed, her skirt torn, and her knees scraped, infuriated by Lucio's reception, by his preference for the presents of the exuberant girl who was whispering in the corner, hit Lucio in the face with the force of a boy, and, not satisfied with this, kicked the partridge and the crocodile, which had been left on the floor, to pieces, while the girls' mothers, a bunch of hypocrites, according to the servant, lamented the disaster that had occurred on such an important day.

The servant lit the candles on the cake and closed the curtains so that the mysterious light of the flames would shine more brightly. A brief silence brought life to the ritual. But Lucio did not cut the cake or blow out the candles as custom required him to do. A scandal occurred: Milona stuck in the knife and Elvira blew out the candles.

Angela, who was dressed in a suit of organdy adorned with lace inserts and hems, was distant and cold: she refused to try even a tiny piece of the icing for the cake, or even look at it; at her house, according to her, the birthday cake contained surprises. She refused to drink a cup of hot chocolate because it had some scum on it, and when they brought her the strainer she got offended and, saying she was no baby, threw it all on the floor. She didn't notice, or pretended not to notice, the struggle between Lucio and the two girls who had crushes on him (she was stronger than Irma, or so she said), nor did she take note of the fuss provoked by Milona and Elvira, because, as she said, only idiots go to silly parties, and she preferred to think about other, happier birthdays.

"Why do these girls come to parties if they don't want to talk to anybody, if they sit by themselves, if they look down on the dishes that have been prepared with such love? Even as little girls they're party poopers," the offended servant complained to Alicia's mother.

"Don't get upset," the lady answered; "they're all the same."

"Why shouldn't I get upset! They have a lot of nerve: they blow out the candles and cut the cake without even being the birthday child."

Milona was very pink.

"I don't have any trouble making her eat," her mother said, licking her lips. "Don't even try giving her dolls or books because she won't look at them. She asks for candies and pastries. Even ordinary quince jam drives her mad with pleasure. Her favourite game is having snacks."

Elvira was very ugly. Oily black hair covered her eyes. She never looked straight at anything. A green colour like that of olives covered her cheeks; no doubt she had a bad liver. When she saw the only present that was still on the table, she let out a shrill laugh.

"Girls who give ugly things for presents should be punished. Isn't that right, Mommy?" she said to her mother.

When she went by the table, with her long tangled hair she managed to sweep the two dolls off onto the floor, where they kept on kissing one another.

"Teresa, Teresa," the guests called out.

Teresa did not answer. She was as indifferent as Angela, but did not sit up as straight, and barely opened her eyes. Her mother said she was sleepy; she had sleeping sickness. She pretends to be asleep.

"She even sleeps when she's having fun. It's nice because she leaves me in peace," she added.

Teresa was not completely ugly; at times she even seemed friendly, but she was monstrous if one compared her with the other girls. She had heavy eyelids and a double chin not in keeping with her age. At times she seemed very good, but then one was disabused of that idea: when one of the girls fell on the floor, she didn't come to her aid, but stayed stretched out in her chair, groaning, looking at the ceiling, saying she was tired.

"What a birthday party," the servant thought after it was over. "Only one guest brought a present. Let's not mention the rest of it. One ate almost the whole cake; another broke the toys and hurt Lucio; another went off with the present she brought; another said unpleasant things, of the kind that only adults say, and with a dough-like face didn't say goodbye to me when she left; another stayed sitting in a corner like a poultice, without any blood in her veins; and another one (God help me! I think it was the one named Elvira) had a viper-like face that looks like it must bring bad luck; but I think Lucio fell in love with one of them, the one with the present, just out of self-interest. She knew how to win him over even without being pretty. Women are worse than men. It's hopeless."

When Lucio's parents came back from their trip, they never found out who the girls were who had visited him on his birthday, and they thought their son had secret relations, which was, and probably still is, true.

But by then Lucio was a little man.□

FEATURED ARTISTS

Daniel Balderston teaches Spanish and Latin American Studies at Tulane University. He is the author of *El precursor velado: R. L. Stevenson en la obra de Borges* (Sudamericana, 1985) and *The Literary Universe of Jorge Luis Borges* (Greenwood, 1986).

Michael Scott Doyle teaches Spanish language and contemporary literature at the University of New Orleans; his translations have appeared in *The Blue Ridge Review* and *The Malahat Review*.

Anghel Dumbrăveanu, the distinguished Romanian poet, was born in 1933. His first book of verse appeared in 1961; since then he has published over twenty books of poetry, fiction, essays, and translations. A member of the important writers' group *Steaua* and a winner of the Poetry Award of the Romanian Writers' Union, he lives in Timisoara, where he is co-editor of the cultural weekly *Orizont*.

Irina Grigorescu is a poet, novelist, critic, and essayist. Formerly on the faculty of the University of Bucharest, she currently teaches at Monash University in Australia.

Ana María Matute, a native of Barcelona, has published twenty-six books and has won such prestigious Spanish literary awards as the Nadal, the Planeta, the Fastenrath, and the Nacional de Literatura; her work has been translated into more than twenty-three languages.

Lucía Maya, born in Avalon, Santa Catalina Island, has exhibited her work throughout Mexico and the United States. "Diástole" is one of the twenty-nine works comprising *Diálogos con Frida*, a series of drawings depicting the artist Frida Kahlo. Lucía Maya is represented by the Carmen Llewellyn Gallery in New Orleans.

Pablo Neruda, Chilean Nobel laureate, published three collections of *Elemental Odes*. They will be published for the first time in English by the University of California Press.

Silvina Ocampo, born in Buenos Aires in 1906, is the author of numerous books of short stories and poems. Her most recent collections of stories are *Y asi sucesivamente* (1987) and *Cornelia frente al espejo* (1988).

Margaret Sayers Peden has translated Spanish American novels, essays and poetry. Her most recent publication is Isabel Allende's *Of Love and Shadows*.

Adam J. Sorkin is Associate Professor of English at Penn State University. His joint translations with Irina Grigorescu have appeared in *Translation, Mundus Artium, Concerning Poetry, Prism International, The Literary Review,* and *Orbis* (U.K.). His critical essays have appeared in *American Literature, Modern Fiction Studies, Contemporary Literature, Journal of American Culture*, and elsewhere.

Michael Szporer is on the faculty at Ohio State University in Mansfield. He is currently at work on translations of Polish and Yugoslav poets.